Complete Project Gutenberg Works of George Meredith eBook

Complete Project Gutenberg Works of George Meredith by George Meredith

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Complete Project Gutenberg Works of George Meredith eBook....1

Contents....2

Page 1....197

Page 2....199

Page 3....201

Page 4....203

Page 5....204

Page 6....205

Page 7....207

Page 8....209

Page 9....211

Page 10....213

Page 11....215

Page 12....217

Page 13....219

Page 14....221

Page 15....223

Page 16....225

Page 17....227

Page 18....229

Page 19....230

Page 20....231

Page 21....233

Page 22....234

Page 23....235

Page 24.....236
Page 25.....238
Page 26.....240
Page 27.....241
Page 28.....242
Page 29.....243
Page 30.....245
Page 31.....247
Page 32.....249
Page 33.....251
Page 34.....253
Page 35.....255
Page 36.....257
Page 37.....259
Page 38.....261
Page 39.....263
Page 40.....265
Page 41.....267
Page 42.....269
Page 43.....271
Page 44.....273
Page 45.....275
Page 46.....277
Page 47.....279
Page 48.....281
Page 49.....283

Page 50.....285
Page 51.....287
Page 52.....289
Page 53.....290
Page 54.....291
Page 55.....292
Page 56.....293
Page 57.....295
Page 58.....297
Page 59.....299
Page 60.....301
Page 61.....303
Page 62.....305
Page 63.....306
Page 64.....308
Page 65.....310
Page 66.....312
Page 67.....314
Page 68.....316
Page 69.....318
Page 70.....319
Page 71.....321
Page 72.....323
Page 73.....324
Page 74.....325
Page 75.....327

Page 76.....328
Page 77.....330
Page 78.....332
Page 79.....334
Page 80.....336
Page 81.....337
Page 82.....339
Page 83.....341
Page 84.....343
Page 85.....344
Page 86.....345
Page 87.....347
Page 88.....349
Page 89.....350
Page 90.....352
Page 91.....354
Page 92.....356
Page 93.....357
Page 94.....359
Page 95.....360
Page 96.....362
Page 97.....363
Page 98.....364
Page 99.....365
Page 100.....366
Page 101.....368

Page 102.....370
Page 103.....372
Page 104.....374
Page 105.....375
Page 106.....377
Page 107.....378
Page 108.....379
Page 109.....381
Page 110.....383
Page 111.....385
Page 112.....386
Page 113.....388
Page 114.....390
Page 115.....391
Page 116.....393
Page 117.....394
Page 118.....396
Page 119.....397
Page 120.....398
Page 121.....400
Page 122.....402
Page 123.....403
Page 124.....404
Page 125.....405
Page 126.....406
Page 127.....407

Page 128.....408
Page 129.....409
Page 130.....410
Page 131.....412
Page 132.....413
Page 133.....414
Page 134.....415
Page 135.....416
Page 136.....418
Page 137.....420
Page 138.....422
Page 139.....424
Page 140.....426
Page 141.....428
Page 142.....430
Page 143.....432
Page 144.....434
Page 145.....435
Page 146.....437
Page 147.....438
Page 148.....439
Page 149.....441
Page 150.....442
Page 151.....444
Page 152.....446
Page 153.....448

Page 154.....449
Page 155.....450
Page 156.....451
Page 157.....452
Page 158.....454
Page 159.....455
Page 160.....456
Page 161.....457
Page 162.....459
Page 163.....460
Page 164.....461
Page 165.....462
Page 166.....463
Page 167.....464
Page 168.....466
Page 169.....468
Page 170.....470

Page 171.....472
Page 172.....473
Page 173.....474
Page 174.....476
Page 175.....477
Page 176.....479
Page 177.....481
Page 178.....483
Page 179.....485

Page 180.....487
Page 181.....489
Page 182.....490
Page 183.....492
Page 184.....494
Page 185.....495
Page 186.....497
Page 187.....498
Page 188.....499
Page 189.....501
Page 190.....502
Page 191.....504
Page 192.....506
Page 193.....508
Page 194.....509
Page 195.....511
Page 196.....513
Page 197.....515
Page 198.....517
Page 199.....518
Page 200.....520
Page 201.....522
Page 202.....524
Page 203.....526
Page 204.....528
Page 205.....529

Page 206.....531
Page 207.....532
Page 208.....534
Page 209.....536
Page 210.....538
Page 211.....539
Page 212.....541
Page 213.....543
Page 214.....545
Page 215.....546
Page 216.....548
Page 217.....550
Page 218.....552
Page 219.....554
Page 220.....555
Page 221.....556
Page 222.....557
Page 223.....558
Page 224.....559
Page 225.....561
Page 226.....563
Page 227.....564
Page 228.....565
Page 229.....566
Page 230.....568
Page 231.....570

Page 232.....572
Page 233.....573
Page 234.....575
Page 235.....577
Page 236.....579
Page 237.....580
Page 238.....582
Page 239.....584
Page 240.....585
Page 241.....586
Page 242.....588
Page 243.....590
Page 244.....592
Page 245.....594
Page 246.....596
Page 247.....597
Page 248.....599
Page 249.....601
Page 250.....603
Page 251.....605
Page 252.....607
Page 253.....609
Page 254.....611
Page 255.....613
Page 256.....615
Page 257.....617

Page 258.....619
Page 259.....621
Page 260.....623
Page 261.....625
Page 262.....627
Page 263.....629
Page 264.....630
Page 265.....632
Page 266.....634
Page 267.....636
Page 268.....638
Page 269.....640
Page 270.....642
Page 271.....644
Page 272.....646
Page 273.....648
Page 274.....650
Page 275.....652
Page 276.....654
Page 277.....656
Page 278.....658
Page 279.....660
Page 280.....661
Page 281.....662
Page 282.....663
Page 283.....664

Page 284.....666
Page 285.....668
Page 286.....669
Page 287.....671
Page 288.....673
Page 289.....675
Page 290.....677
Page 291.....679
Page 292.....681
Page 293.....683
Page 294.....685
Page 295.....686
Page 296.....688
Page 297.....689
Page 298.....690
Page 299.....692
Page 300.....693
Page 301.....694
Page 302.....696
Page 303.....698
Page 304.....700
Page 305.....702
Page 306.....704
Page 307.....706
Page 308.....708
Page 309.....709

Page 310.....711
Page 311.....713
Page 312.....714
Page 313.....715
Page 314.....717
Page 315.....719
Page 316.....721
Page 317.....723
Page 318.....724
Page 319.....726
Page 320.....728
Page 321.....730
Page 322.....732
Page 323.....734
Page 324.....736
Page 325.....738
Page 326.....740
Page 327.....742
Page 328.....744
Page 329.....746
Page 330.....747
Page 331.....748
Page 332.....749
Page 333.....750
Page 334.....751
Page 335.....752

Page 336.....753
Page 337.....755
Page 338.....757
Page 339.....759
Page 340.....761
Page 341.....763
Page 342.....764
Page 343.....766
Page 344.....768
Page 345.....770
Page 346.....772
Page 347.....774
Page 348.....775
Page 349.....777
Page 350.....779
Page 351.....781
Page 352.....783
Page 353.....785
Page 354.....787
Page 355.....789
Page 356.....790
Page 357.....792
Page 358.....794
Page 359.....796
Page 360.....798
Page 361.....800

Page 362.....802
Page 363.....804
Page 364.....806
Page 365.....808
Page 366.....809
Page 367.....810
Page 368.....812
Page 369.....814
Page 370.....816
Page 371.....818
Page 372.....820
Page 373.....822
Page 374.....824
Page 375.....825
Page 376.....827
Page 377.....829
Page 378.....831
Page 379.....833
Page 380.....835
Page 381.....837
Page 382.....839
Page 383.....841
Page 384.....843
Page 385.....845
Page 386.....847
Page 387.....848

Page 388.....849
Page 389.....851
Page 390.....852
Page 391.....853
Page 392.....855
Page 393.....856
Page 394.....858
Page 395.....860
Page 396.....862
Page 397.....864
Page 398.....865
Page 399.....867
Page 400.....869
Page 401.....871
Page 402.....873
Page 403.....875
Page 404.....877
Page 405.....879
Page 406.....881
Page 407.....882
Page 408.....884
Page 409.....886
Page 410.....888
Page 411.....889
Page 412.....890
Page 413.....892

Page 414.....893
Page 415.....895
Page 416.....896
Page 417.....898
Page 418.....900
Page 419.....901
Page 420.....902
Page 421.....903
Page 422.....905
Page 423.....907
Page 424.....909
Page 425.....911
Page 426.....913
Page 427.....915
Page 428.....916
Page 429.....918
Page 430.....920
Page 431.....922
Page 432.....924
Page 433.....926
Page 434.....928
Page 435.....930
Page 436.....931
Page 437.....933
Page 438.....935
Page 439.....937

Page 440.....939
Page 441.....941
Page 442.....943
Page 443.....945
Page 444.....947
Page 445.....949
Page 446.....950
Page 447.....952
Page 448.....954
Page 449.....955
Page 450.....957
Page 451.....959
Page 452.....961
Page 453.....963
Page 454.....965
Page 455.....967
Page 456.....969
Page 457.....971
Page 458.....973
Page 459.....975
Page 460.....977
Page 461.....979
Page 462.....981
Page 463.....983
Page 464.....985
Page 465.....987

Page 466.....989
Page 467.....991
Page 468.....992
Page 469.....993
Page 470.....995
Page 471.....996
Page 472.....997
Page 473.....999
Page 474.....1001
Page 475.....1002
Page 476.....1003
Page 477.....1005
Page 478.....1007
Page 479.....1009
Page 480.....1011
Page 481.....1013
Page 482.....1015
Page 483.....1016
Page 484.....1018
Page 485.....1020
Page 486.....1022
Page 487.....1024
Page 488.....1026
Page 489.....1028
Page 490.....1029
Page 491.....1030

Page 492.....1031

Page 493.....1033

Page 494.....1035

Page 495.....1037

Page 496.....1039

Page 497.....1040

Page 498.....1041

Page 499.....1042

Page 500.....1043

Page 501.....1044

Page 502.....1045

Page 503.....1047

Page 504.....1049

Page 505.....1051

Page 506.....1053

Page 507.....1055

Page 508.....1057

Page 509.....1059

Page 510.....1061

Page 511.....1063

Page 512.....1065

Page 513.....1067

Page 514.....1069

Page 515.....1070

Page 516.....1072

Page 517.....1073

Page 518.....1075
Page 519.....1076
Page 520.....1077
Page 521.....1079
Page 522.....1081
Page 523.....1082
Page 524.....1083
Page 525.....1084
Page 526.....1085
Page 527.....1087
Page 528.....1089
Page 529.....1090
Page 530.....1091
Page 531.....1092
Page 532.....1094
Page 533.....1096
Page 534.....1098
Page 535.....1100
Page 536.....1102
Page 537.....1104
Page 538.....1106
Page 539.....1108
Page 540.....1109
Page 541.....1110
Page 542.....1111
Page 543.....1113

Page 544.....1115
Page 545.....1117
Page 546.....1119
Page 547.....1121
Page 548.....1122
Page 549.....1123
Page 550.....1125
Page 551.....1126
Page 552.....1127
Page 553.....1129
Page 554.....1131
Page 555.....1133
Page 556.....1135
Page 557.....1137
Page 558.....1139
Page 559.....1141
Page 560.....1143
Page 561.....1144
Page 562.....1145
Page 563.....1147
Page 564.....1148
Page 565.....1150
Page 566.....1152
Page 567.....1154
Page 568.....1156
Page 569.....1158

Page 570.....1160
Page 571.....1162
Page 572.....1164
Page 573.....1165
Page 574.....1167
Page 575.....1168
Page 576.....1170
Page 577.....1171
Page 578.....1173
Page 579.....1175
Page 580.....1177
Page 581.....1179
Page 582.....1181
Page 583.....1183
Page 584.....1185
Page 585.....1187
Page 586.....1188
Page 587.....1189
Page 588.....1191
Page 589.....1193
Page 590.....1194
Page 591.....1196
Page 592.....1198
Page 593.....1200
Page 594.....1201
Page 595.....1203

Page 596.....1205
Page 597.....1207
Page 598.....1208
Page 599.....1210
Page 600.....1212
Page 601.....1214
Page 602.....1216
Page 603.....1218
Page 604.....1220
Page 605.....1222
Page 606.....1224
Page 607.....1226
Page 608.....1228
Page 609.....1230
Page 610.....1232
Page 611.....1234
Page 612.....1236
Page 613.....1238
Page 614.....1240
Page 615.....1242
Page 616.....1244
Page 617.....1245
Page 618.....1247
Page 619.....1249
Page 620.....1250
Page 621.....1252

Page 622.....1253
Page 623.....1255
Page 624.....1257
Page 625.....1259
Page 626.....1261
Page 627.....1263
Page 628.....1265
Page 629.....1267
Page 630.....1268
Page 631.....1270
Page 632.....1272
Page 633.....1274
Page 634.....1276
Page 635.....1278
Page 636.....1280
Page 637.....1282
Page 638.....1284
Page 639.....1286
Page 640.....1288
Page 641.....1290
Page 642.....1291
Page 643.....1293
Page 644.....1295
Page 645.....1297
Page 646.....1299
Page 647.....1301

Page 648.....1303
Page 649.....1305
Page 650.....1307
Page 651.....1309
Page 652.....1311
Page 653.....1312
Page 654.....1313
Page 655.....1314
Page 656.....1315
Page 657.....1316
Page 658.....1318
Page 659.....1320
Page 660.....1322
Page 661.....1324
Page 662.....1326
Page 663.....1328
Page 664.....1330
Page 665.....1332
Page 666.....1334
Page 667.....1336
Page 668.....1337
Page 669.....1339
Page 670.....1340
Page 671.....1342
Page 672.....1343
Page 673.....1344

Page 674.....1346
Page 675.....1348
Page 676.....1350
Page 677.....1352
Page 678.....1353
Page 679.....1355
Page 680.....1357
Page 681.....1359
Page 682.....1361
Page 683.....1363
Page 684.....1365
Page 685.....1367
Page 686.....1369
Page 687.....1370
Page 688.....1372
Page 689.....1374
Page 690.....1376
Page 691.....1378
Page 692.....1380
Page 693.....1382
Page 694.....1384
Page 695.....1386
Page 696.....1388
Page 697.....1389
Page 698.....1391
Page 699.....1392

Page 700.....1393
Page 701.....1394
Page 702.....1395
Page 703.....1396
Page 704.....1397
Page 705.....1398
Page 706.....1399
Page 707.....1401
Page 708.....1403
Page 709.....1404
Page 710.....1406
Page 711.....1408
Page 712.....1410
Page 713.....1411
Page 714.....1413
Page 715.....1415
Page 716.....1417
Page 717.....1419
Page 718.....1421
Page 719.....1423
Page 720.....1425
Page 721.....1427
Page 722.....1429
Page 723.....1431
Page 724.....1432
Page 725.....1433

Page 726.....1435
Page 727.....1436
Page 728.....1437
Page 729.....1438
Page 730.....1440
Page 731.....1442
Page 732.....1444
Page 733.....1445
Page 734.....1446
Page 735.....1447
Page 736.....1449
Page 737.....1451
Page 738.....1452
Page 739.....1454
Page 740.....1456
Page 741.....1458
Page 742.....1460
Page 743.....1462
Page 744.....1464
Page 745.....1466
Page 746.....1468
Page 747.....1469
Page 748.....1471
Page 749.....1473
Page 750.....1474
Page 751.....1475

Page 752.....1476
Page 753.....1477
Page 754.....1478
Page 755.....1479
Page 756.....1481
Page 757.....1483
Page 758.....1485
Page 759.....1486
Page 760.....1487
Page 761.....1489
Page 762.....1491
Page 763.....1492
Page 764.....1493
Page 765.....1494
Page 766.....1496
Page 767.....1497
Page 768.....1499
Page 769.....1500
Page 770.....1501
Page 771.....1502
Page 772.....1503
Page 773.....1504
Page 774.....1505
Page 775.....1507
Page 776.....1508
Page 777.....1509

Page 778.....1511
Page 779.....1513
Page 780.....1514
Page 781.....1515
Page 782.....1517
Page 783.....1519
Page 784.....1521
Page 785.....1523
Page 786.....1525
Page 787.....1527
Page 788.....1529
Page 789.....1531
Page 790.....1533
Page 791.....1535
Page 792.....1537
Page 793.....1539
Page 794.....1541
Page 795.....1543
Page 796.....1544
Page 797.....1546
Page 798.....1548
Page 799.....1549
Page 800.....1551
Page 801.....1553
Page 802.....1555
Page 803.....1556

Page 804.....1558
Page 805.....1560
Page 806.....1562
Page 807.....1564
Page 808.....1565
Page 809.....1566
Page 810.....1568
Page 811.....1570
Page 812.....1571
Page 813.....1572
Page 814.....1574
Page 815.....1576
Page 816.....1578
Page 817.....1579
Page 818.....1580
Page 819.....1581
Page 820.....1582
Page 821.....1583
Page 822.....1584
Page 823.....1585
Page 824.....1586
Page 825.....1588
Page 826.....1589
Page 827.....1590
Page 828.....1592
Page 829.....1594

Page 830.....1596
Page 831.....1597
Page 832.....1598
Page 833.....1599
Page 834.....1601
Page 835.....1603
Page 836.....1605
Page 837.....1607
Page 838.....1609
Page 839.....1610
Page 840.....1612
Page 841.....1614
Page 842.....1615
Page 843.....1616
Page 844.....1617
Page 845.....1618
Page 846.....1619
Page 847.....1620
Page 848.....1621
Page 849.....1623
Page 850.....1625
Page 851.....1627
Page 852.....1628
Page 853.....1629
Page 854.....1630
Page 855.....1631

Page 856.....1632
Page 857.....1633
Page 858.....1634
Page 859.....1635
Page 860.....1637
Page 861.....1639
Page 862.....1641
Page 863.....1643
Page 864.....1645
Page 865.....1647
Page 866.....1648
Page 867.....1650
Page 868.....1652
Page 869.....1654
Page 870.....1655
Page 871.....1657
Page 872.....1658
Page 873.....1660
Page 874.....1662
Page 875.....1664
Page 876.....1665
Page 877.....1666
Page 878.....1667
Page 879.....1668
Page 880.....1670
Page 881.....1672

Page 882.....1674
Page 883.....1676
Page 884.....1678
Page 885.....1680
Page 886.....1681
Page 887.....1683
Page 888.....1685
Page 889.....1687
Page 890.....1689
Page 891.....1691
Page 892.....1693
Page 893.....1695
Page 894.....1697
Page 895.....1699
Page 896.....1701
Page 897.....1703
Page 898.....1705
Page 899.....1707
Page 900.....1709
Page 901.....1711
Page 902.....1712
Page 903.....1714
Page 904.....1716
Page 905.....1718
Page 906.....1720
Page 907.....1722

Page 908.....1724
Page 909.....1726
Page 910.....1728
Page 911.....1730
Page 912.....1732
Page 913.....1734
Page 914.....1736
Page 915.....1738
Page 916.....1740
Page 917.....1742
Page 918.....1744
Page 919.....1746
Page 920.....1748
Page 921.....1750
Page 922.....1752
Page 923.....1754
Page 924.....1756
Page 925.....1758
Page 926.....1759
Page 927.....1761
Page 928.....1763
Page 929.....1765
Page 930.....1767
Page 931.....1769
Page 932.....1771
Page 933.....1773

Page 934.....1775
Page 935.....1777
Page 936.....1778
Page 937.....1779
Page 938.....1780
Page 939.....1782
Page 940.....1784
Page 941.....1786
Page 942.....1788
Page 943.....1790
Page 944.....1792
Page 945.....1794
Page 946.....1795
Page 947.....1796
Page 948.....1797
Page 949.....1798
Page 950.....1800
Page 951.....1802
Page 952.....1804
Page 953.....1806
Page 954.....1808
Page 955.....1809
Page 956.....1811
Page 957.....1813
Page 958.....1815
Page 959.....1817

Page 960.....1819
Page 961.....1821
Page 962.....1823
Page 963.....1825
Page 964.....1827
Page 965.....1828
Page 966.....1830
Page 967.....1832
Page 968.....1834
Page 969.....1835
Page 970.....1837
Page 971.....1839
Page 972.....1841
Page 973.....1843
Page 974.....1844
Page 975.....1845
Page 976.....1847
Page 977.....1849
Page 978.....1851
Page 979.....1853
Page 980.....1855
Page 981.....1857
Page 982.....1859
Page 983.....1861
Page 984.....1863
Page 985.....1865

Page 986.....1866
Page 987.....1868
Page 988.....1870
Page 989.....1872
Page 990.....1874
Page 991.....1876
Page 992.....1878
Page 993.....1880
Page 994.....1882
Page 995.....1884
Page 996.....1886
Page 997.....1888
Page 998.....1890
Page 999.....1892
Page 1000.....1894
Page 1001.....1896
Page 1002.....1898
Page 1003.....1900
Page 1004.....1902
Page 1005.....1904
Page 1006.....1906
Page 1007.....1908
Page 1008.....1910
Page 1009.....1912
Page 1010.....1914
Page 1011.....1916

Page 1012.....1918
Page 1013.....1920
Page 1014.....1922
Page 1015.....1923
Page 1016.....1925
Page 1017.....1927
Page 1018.....1929
Page 1019.....1930
Page 1020.....1931
Page 1021.....1933
Page 1022.....1935
Page 1023.....1937
Page 1024.....1939
Page 1025.....1941
Page 1026.....1943
Page 1027.....1945
Page 1028.....1947
Page 1029.....1949
Page 1030.....1951
Page 1031.....1953
Page 1032.....1955
Page 1033.....1957
Page 1034.....1959
Page 1035.....1961
Page 1036.....1963
Page 1037.....1964

Page 1038.....1966
Page 1039.....1968
Page 1040.....1970
Page 1041.....1972
Page 1042.....1974
Page 1043.....1975
Page 1044.....1977
Page 1045.....1979
Page 1046.....1981
Page 1047.....1983
Page 1048.....1985
Page 1049.....1987
Page 1050.....1989
Page 1051.....1991
Page 1052.....1993
Page 1053.....1995
Page 1054.....1996
Page 1055.....1998
Page 1056.....2000
Page 1057.....2002
Page 1058.....2004
Page 1059.....2006
Page 1060.....2008
Page 1061.....2010
Page 1062.....2012
Page 1063.....2014

Page 1064.....2016
Page 1065.....2018
Page 1066.....2020
Page 1067.....2022
Page 1068.....2023
Page 1069.....2025
Page 1070.....2026
Page 1071.....2028
Page 1072.....2030
Page 1073.....2032
Page 1074.....2034
Page 1075.....2036
Page 1076.....2037
Page 1077.....2039
Page 1078.....2041
Page 1079.....2043
Page 1080.....2045
Page 1081.....2047
Page 1082.....2048
Page 1083.....2050
Page 1084.....2052
Page 1085.....2054
Page 1086.....2056
Page 1087.....2058
Page 1088.....2060
Page 1089.....2062

Page 1090.....2064
Page 1091.....2065
Page 1092.....2066
Page 1093.....2068
Page 1094.....2070
Page 1095.....2072
Page 1096.....2074
Page 1097.....2076
Page 1098.....2078
Page 1099.....2080
Page 1100.....2081
Page 1101.....2082
Page 1102.....2084
Page 1103.....2086
Page 1104.....2088
Page 1105.....2089
Page 1106.....2090
Page 1107.....2091
Page 1108.....2093
Page 1109.....2095
Page 1110.....2097
Page 1111.....2099
Page 1112.....2101
Page 1113.....2103
Page 1114.....2105
Page 1115.....2106

Page 1116.....2107
Page 1117.....2109
Page 1118.....2111
Page 1119.....2113
Page 1120.....2115
Page 1121.....2116
Page 1122.....2118
Page 1123.....2120
Page 1124.....2122
Page 1125.....2124
Page 1126.....2126
Page 1127.....2128
Page 1128.....2130
Page 1129.....2131
Page 1130.....2133
Page 1131.....2135
Page 1132.....2136
Page 1133.....2138
Page 1134.....2140
Page 1135.....2142
Page 1136.....2144
Page 1137.....2146
Page 1138.....2148
Page 1139.....2150
Page 1140.....2152
Page 1141.....2154

Page 1142.....2156
Page 1143.....2158
Page 1144.....2159
Page 1145.....2160
Page 1146.....2161
Page 1147.....2163
Page 1148.....2165
Page 1149.....2167
Page 1150.....2168
Page 1151.....2169
Page 1152.....2170
Page 1153.....2172
Page 1154.....2173
Page 1155.....2174
Page 1156.....2176
Page 1157.....2178
Page 1158.....2180
Page 1159.....2182
Page 1160.....2184
Page 1161.....2186
Page 1162.....2188
Page 1163.....2190
Page 1164.....2192
Page 1165.....2194
Page 1166.....2196
Page 1167.....2198

Page 1168.....2199
Page 1169.....2200
Page 1170.....2202
Page 1171.....2204
Page 1172.....2205
Page 1173.....2206
Page 1174.....2208
Page 1175.....2210
Page 1176.....2212
Page 1177.....2214
Page 1178.....2216
Page 1179.....2217
Page 1180.....2218
Page 1181.....2220
Page 1182.....2222
Page 1183.....2224
Page 1184.....2225
Page 1185.....2227
Page 1186.....2229
Page 1187.....2231
Page 1188.....2233
Page 1189.....2235
Page 1190.....2237
Page 1191.....2238
Page 1192.....2240
Page 1193.....2242

Page 1194.....2244
Page 1195.....2246
Page 1196.....2248
Page 1197.....2250
Page 1198.....2252
Page 1199.....2254
Page 1200.....2255
Page 1201.....2256
Page 1202.....2258
Page 1203.....2260
Page 1204.....2262
Page 1205.....2264
Page 1206.....2266
Page 1207.....2267
Page 1208.....2269
Page 1209.....2271
Page 1210.....2273
Page 1211.....2275
Page 1212.....2277
Page 1213.....2278
Page 1214.....2279
Page 1215.....2281
Page 1216.....2282
Page 1217.....2284
Page 1218.....2286
Page 1219.....2288

Page 1220.....2290
Page 1221.....2292
Page 1222.....2294
Page 1223.....2296
Page 1224.....2298
Page 1225.....2300
Page 1226.....2302
Page 1227.....2304
Page 1228.....2306
Page 1229.....2308
Page 1230.....2309
Page 1231.....2311
Page 1232.....2312
Page 1233.....2313
Page 1234.....2315
Page 1235.....2317
Page 1236.....2319
Page 1237.....2321
Page 1238.....2323
Page 1239.....2325
Page 1240.....2326
Page 1241.....2328
Page 1242.....2329
Page 1243.....2330
Page 1244.....2331
Page 1245.....2332

Page 1246.....2333
Page 1247.....2335
Page 1248.....2337
Page 1249.....2339
Page 1250.....2341
Page 1251.....2343
Page 1252.....2345
Page 1253.....2347
Page 1254.....2349
Page 1255.....2350
Page 1256.....2351
Page 1257.....2352
Page 1258.....2354
Page 1259.....2356
Page 1260.....2358
Page 1261.....2360
Page 1262.....2362
Page 1263.....2364
Page 1264.....2366
Page 1265.....2368
Page 1266.....2370
Page 1267.....2372
Page 1268.....2374
Page 1269.....2376
Page 1270.....2378
Page 1271.....2380

Page 1272.....2382
Page 1273.....2384
Page 1274.....2386
Page 1275.....2388
Page 1276.....2389
Page 1277.....2391
Page 1278.....2393
Page 1279.....2395
Page 1280.....2397
Page 1281.....2398
Page 1282.....2400
Page 1283.....2401
Page 1284.....2402
Page 1285.....2404
Page 1286.....2406
Page 1287.....2407
Page 1288.....2409
Page 1289.....2411
Page 1290.....2413
Page 1291.....2415
Page 1292.....2417
Page 1293.....2419
Page 1294.....2421
Page 1295.....2423
Page 1296.....2425
Page 1297.....2427

Page 1298.....2429
Page 1299.....2431
Page 1300.....2433
Page 1301.....2435
Page 1302.....2437
Page 1303.....2439
Page 1304.....2441
Page 1305.....2442
Page 1306.....2443
Page 1307.....2444
Page 1308.....2446
Page 1309.....2448
Page 1310.....2450
Page 1311.....2452
Page 1312.....2454
Page 1313.....2456
Page 1314.....2458
Page 1315.....2459
Page 1316.....2461
Page 1317.....2462
Page 1318.....2463
Page 1319.....2465
Page 1320.....2467
Page 1321.....2469
Page 1322.....2471
Page 1323.....2472

Page 1324.....2474
Page 1325.....2476
Page 1326.....2478
Page 1327.....2480
Page 1328.....2482
Page 1329.....2484
Page 1330.....2486
Page 1331.....2488
Page 1332.....2490
Page 1333.....2492
Page 1334.....2494
Page 1335.....2496
Page 1336.....2498
Page 1337.....2500
Page 1338.....2502
Page 1339.....2504
Page 1340.....2506
Page 1341.....2508
Page 1342.....2510
Page 1343.....2512
Page 1344.....2513
Page 1345.....2515
Page 1346.....2517
Page 1347.....2519
Page 1348.....2521
Page 1349.....2523

Page 1350.....2525
Page 1351.....2526
Page 1352.....2528
Page 1353.....2530
Page 1354.....2532
Page 1355.....2533
Page 1356.....2535
Page 1357.....2537
Page 1358.....2539
Page 1359.....2541
Page 1360.....2543
Page 1361.....2544
Page 1362.....2545
Page 1363.....2547
Page 1364.....2549
Page 1365.....2550
Page 1366.....2552
Page 1367.....2554
Page 1368.....2556
Page 1369.....2558
Page 1370.....2559
Page 1371.....2561
Page 1372.....2562
Page 1373.....2563
Page 1374.....2565
Page 1375.....2567

Page 1376.....2568
Page 1377.....2569
Page 1378.....2571
Page 1379.....2573
Page 1380.....2575
Page 1381.....2577
Page 1382.....2579
Page 1383.....2581
Page 1384.....2583
Page 1385.....2585
Page 1386.....2587
Page 1387.....2589
Page 1388.....2591
Page 1389.....2593
Page 1390.....2595
Page 1391.....2597
Page 1392.....2598
Page 1393.....2600
Page 1394.....2602
Page 1395.....2604
Page 1396.....2606
Page 1397.....2608
Page 1398.....2610
Page 1399.....2612
Page 1400.....2614
Page 1401.....2616

Page 1402.....2618
Page 1403.....2620
Page 1404.....2622
Page 1405.....2624
Page 1406.....2625
Page 1407.....2627
Page 1408.....2628
Page 1409.....2630
Page 1410.....2632
Page 1411.....2634
Page 1412.....2636
Page 1413.....2638
Page 1414.....2640
Page 1415.....2642
Page 1416.....2644
Page 1417.....2646
Page 1418.....2648
Page 1419.....2649
Page 1420.....2651
Page 1421.....2653
Page 1422.....2655
Page 1423.....2656
Page 1424.....2658
Page 1425.....2660
Page 1426.....2662
Page 1427.....2664

Page 1428.....2666
Page 1429.....2668
Page 1430.....2670
Page 1431.....2672
Page 1432.....2674
Page 1433.....2676
Page 1434.....2678
Page 1435.....2680
Page 1436.....2682
Page 1437.....2684
Page 1438.....2686
Page 1439.....2688
Page 1440.....2689
Page 1441.....2690
Page 1442.....2691
Page 1443.....2692
Page 1444.....2694
Page 1445.....2696
Page 1446.....2698
Page 1447.....2700
Page 1448.....2701
Page 1449.....2703
Page 1450.....2705
Page 1451.....2707
Page 1452.....2709
Page 1453.....2711

Page 1454.....2713
Page 1455.....2715
Page 1456.....2717
Page 1457.....2719
Page 1458.....2721
Page 1459.....2723
Page 1460.....2725
Page 1461.....2727
Page 1462.....2729
Page 1463.....2731
Page 1464.....2733
Page 1465.....2735
Page 1466.....2737
Page 1467.....2739
Page 1468.....2741
Page 1469.....2743
Page 1470.....2745
Page 1471.....2746
Page 1472.....2748
Page 1473.....2750

Page 1474.....2752
Page 1475.....2754
Page 1476.....2756
Page 1477.....2757
Page 1478.....2758
Page 1479.....2759

Page 1480.....2761
Page 1481.....2763
Page 1482.....2764
Page 1483.....2765
Page 1484.....2767
Page 1485.....2768
Page 1486.....2770
Page 1487.....2772
Page 1488.....2774
Page 1489.....2776
Page 1490.....2777
Page 1491.....2778
Page 1492.....2780
Page 1493.....2781
Page 1494.....2783
Page 1495.....2785
Page 1496.....2787
Page 1497.....2789
Page 1498.....2791
Page 1499.....2793
Page 1500.....2795
Page 1501.....2797
Page 1502.....2799
Page 1503.....2800
Page 1504.....2801
Page 1505.....2802

Page 1506.....2803
Page 1507.....2804
Page 1508.....2806
Page 1509.....2808
Page 1510.....2809
Page 1511.....2811
Page 1512.....2812
Page 1513.....2814
Page 1514.....2816
Page 1515.....2817
Page 1516.....2818
Page 1517.....2820
Page 1518.....2821
Page 1519.....2822
Page 1520.....2823
Page 1521.....2824
Page 1522.....2825
Page 1523.....2826
Page 1524.....2828
Page 1525.....2829
Page 1526.....2830
Page 1527.....2831
Page 1528.....2832
Page 1529.....2833
Page 1530.....2835
Page 1531.....2837

Page 1532.....2838
Page 1533.....2839
Page 1534.....2840
Page 1535.....2841
Page 1536.....2842
Page 1537.....2844
Page 1538.....2846
Page 1539.....2848
Page 1540.....2850
Page 1541.....2852
Page 1542.....2854
Page 1543.....2856
Page 1544.....2858
Page 1545.....2859
Page 1546.....2860
Page 1547.....2861
Page 1548.....2862
Page 1549.....2864
Page 1550.....2866
Page 1551.....2868
Page 1552.....2870
Page 1553.....2872
Page 1554.....2874
Page 1555.....2876
Page 1556.....2878
Page 1557.....2880

Page 1558.....2882
Page 1559.....2884
Page 1560.....2886
Page 1561.....2887
Page 1562.....2888
Page 1563.....2889
Page 1564.....2890
Page 1565.....2891
Page 1566.....2892
Page 1567.....2894
Page 1568.....2896
Page 1569.....2898
Page 1570.....2900
Page 1571.....2902
Page 1572.....2903
Page 1573.....2905
Page 1574.....2907
Page 1575.....2909
Page 1576.....2910
Page 1577.....2911
Page 1578.....2913
Page 1579.....2915
Page 1580.....2916
Page 1581.....2917
Page 1582.....2919
Page 1583.....2921

Page 1584.....2923
Page 1585.....2924
Page 1586.....2926
Page 1587.....2927
Page 1588.....2928
Page 1589.....2930
Page 1590.....2932
Page 1591.....2934
Page 1592.....2936
Page 1593.....2938
Page 1594.....2940
Page 1595.....2942
Page 1596.....2943
Page 1597.....2945
Page 1598.....2946
Page 1599.....2948
Page 1600.....2949
Page 1601.....2950
Page 1602.....2951
Page 1603.....2953
Page 1604.....2955
Page 1605.....2957
Page 1606.....2958
Page 1607.....2960
Page 1608.....2962
Page 1609.....2963

Page 1610.....2964
Page 1611.....2966
Page 1612.....2967
Page 1613.....2969
Page 1614.....2970
Page 1615.....2971
Page 1616.....2972
Page 1617.....2974
Page 1618.....2975
Page 1619.....2977
Page 1620.....2979
Page 1621.....2981
Page 1622.....2983
Page 1623.....2986
Page 1624.....2988
Page 1625.....2990
Page 1626.....2992
Page 1627.....2994
Page 1628.....2996
Page 1629.....2998
Page 1630.....3000
Page 1631.....3001
Page 1632.....3002
Page 1633.....3004
Page 1634.....3006
Page 1635.....3008

Page 1636.....3009
Page 1637.....3011
Page 1638.....3013
Page 1639.....3015
Page 1640.....3017
Page 1641.....3019
Page 1642.....3020
Page 1643.....3022
Page 1644.....3023
Page 1645.....3025
Page 1646.....3026
Page 1647.....3028
Page 1648.....3029
Page 1649.....3031
Page 1650.....3033
Page 1651.....3035
Page 1652.....3037
Page 1653.....3039
Page 1654.....3041
Page 1655.....3042
Page 1656.....3044
Page 1657.....3045
Page 1658.....3047
Page 1659.....3049
Page 1660.....3051
Page 1661.....3053

Page 1662.....3054
Page 1663.....3056
Page 1664.....3057
Page 1665.....3059
Page 1666.....3061
Page 1667.....3063
Page 1668.....3064
Page 1669.....3066
Page 1670.....3067
Page 1671.....3069
Page 1672.....3071
Page 1673.....3073
Page 1674.....3074
Page 1675.....3075
Page 1676.....3077
Page 1677.....3079
Page 1678.....3081
Page 1679.....3082
Page 1680.....3084
Page 1681.....3085
Page 1682.....3087
Page 1683.....3088
Page 1684.....3090
Page 1685.....3092
Page 1686.....3093
Page 1687.....3095

Page 1688.....3097
Page 1689.....3099
Page 1690.....3101
Page 1691.....3103
Page 1692.....3104
Page 1693.....3106
Page 1694.....3108
Page 1695.....3110
Page 1696.....3112
Page 1697.....3114
Page 1698.....3116
Page 1699.....3117
Page 1700.....3118
Page 1701.....3120
Page 1702.....3122
Page 1703.....3123
Page 1704.....3125
Page 1705.....3126
Page 1706.....3127
Page 1707.....3128
Page 1708.....3129
Page 1709.....3131
Page 1710.....3133
Page 1711.....3135
Page 1712.....3137
Page 1713.....3139

Page 1714.....3141
Page 1715.....3143
Page 1716.....3144
Page 1717.....3146
Page 1718.....3147
Page 1719.....3149
Page 1720.....3151
Page 1721.....3153
Page 1722.....3154
Page 1723.....3155
Page 1724.....3156
Page 1725.....3157
Page 1726.....3158
Page 1727.....3159
Page 1728.....3161
Page 1729.....3163
Page 1730.....3164
Page 1731.....3166
Page 1732.....3168
Page 1733.....3170
Page 1734.....3171
Page 1735.....3173
Page 1736.....3175
Page 1737.....3177
Page 1738.....3178
Page 1739.....3179

Page 1740.....3180
Page 1741.....3182
Page 1742.....3184
Page 1743.....3185
Page 1744.....3186
Page 1745.....3188
Page 1746.....3190
Page 1747.....3192
Page 1748.....3193
Page 1749.....3194
Page 1750.....3195
Page 1751.....3196
Page 1752.....3197
Page 1753.....3198
Page 1754.....3199
Page 1755.....3201
Page 1756.....3203
Page 1757.....3204
Page 1758.....3206
Page 1759.....3207
Page 1760.....3209
Page 1761.....3211
Page 1762.....3212
Page 1763.....3214
Page 1764.....3216
Page 1765.....3218

Page 1766.....3220
Page 1767.....3222
Page 1768.....3224
Page 1769.....3226
Page 1770.....3228
Page 1771.....3230
Page 1772.....3232
Page 1773.....3234
Page 1774.....3236
Page 1775.....3238
Page 1776.....3240
Page 1777.....3242
Page 1778.....3244
Page 1779.....3245
Page 1780.....3246
Page 1781.....3247
Page 1782.....3249
Page 1783.....3251
Page 1784.....3252
Page 1785.....3254
Page 1786.....3256
Page 1787.....3258
Page 1788.....3260
Page 1789.....3262
Page 1790.....3264
Page 1791.....3266

Page 1792.....3267
Page 1793.....3268
Page 1794.....3270
Page 1795.....3272
Page 1796.....3273
Page 1797.....3274
Page 1798.....3275
Page 1799.....3276
Page 1800.....3277
Page 1801.....3278
Page 1802.....3279
Page 1803.....3281
Page 1804.....3283
Page 1805.....3284
Page 1806.....3286
Page 1807.....3288
Page 1808.....3289
Page 1809.....3291
Page 1810.....3292
Page 1811.....3294
Page 1812.....3296
Page 1813.....3297
Page 1814.....3299
Page 1815.....3300
Page 1816.....3302
Page 1817.....3304

Page 1818.....3306
Page 1819.....3308
Page 1820.....3309
Page 1821.....3311
Page 1822.....3312
Page 1823.....3313
Page 1824.....3315
Page 1825.....3317
Page 1826.....3319
Page 1827.....3321
Page 1828.....3323
Page 1829.....3324
Page 1830.....3325
Page 1831.....3326
Page 1832.....3328
Page 1833.....3330
Page 1834.....3332
Page 1835.....3333
Page 1836.....3335
Page 1837.....3337
Page 1838.....3338
Page 1839.....3340
Page 1840.....3342
Page 1841.....3343
Page 1842.....3344
Page 1843.....3345

Page 1844.....3347
Page 1845.....3348
Page 1846.....3349
Page 1847.....3350
Page 1848.....3351

Page 1849.....3353
Page 1850.....3355
Page 1851.....3356
Page 1852.....3358
Page 1853.....3360
Page 1854.....3362
Page 1855.....3364
Page 1856.....3366
Page 1857.....3368
Page 1858.....3370
Page 1859.....3372
Page 1860.....3373
Page 1861.....3374
Page 1862.....3375
Page 1863.....3376
Page 1864.....3377
Page 1865.....3378
Page 1866.....3380
Page 1867.....3381
Page 1868.....3383
Page 1869.....3384

Page 1870.....3385
Page 1871.....3386
Page 1872.....3387
Page 1873.....3389
Page 1874.....3390
Page 1875.....3391
Page 1876.....3392
Page 1877.....3393
Page 1878.....3394
Page 1879.....3395
Page 1880.....3397
Page 1881.....3398
Page 1882.....3399
Page 1883.....3401
Page 1884.....3403
Page 1885.....3405
Page 1886.....3407
Page 1887.....3409
Page 1888.....3410
Page 1889.....3412
Page 1890.....3414
Page 1891.....3416
Page 1892.....3418
Page 1893.....3419
Page 1894.....3421
Page 1895.....3422

Page 1896.....3423
Page 1897.....3425
Page 1898.....3427
Page 1899.....3429
Page 1900.....3431
Page 1901.....3433
Page 1902.....3434
Page 1903.....3435
Page 1904.....3436
Page 1905.....3438
Page 1906.....3439
Page 1907.....3441
Page 1908.....3443
Page 1909.....3444
Page 1910.....3445
Page 1911.....3447
Page 1912.....3449
Page 1913.....3450
Page 1914.....3452
Page 1915.....3454
Page 1916.....3456
Page 1917.....3458
Page 1918.....3460
Page 1919.....3462
Page 1920.....3463
Page 1921.....3465

Page 1922.....3466
Page 1923.....3468
Page 1924.....3470
Page 1925.....3472
Page 1926.....3474
Page 1927.....3476
Page 1928.....3477
Page 1929.....3478
Page 1930.....3479
Page 1931.....3481
Page 1932.....3482
Page 1933.....3484
Page 1934.....3486
Page 1935.....3487
Page 1936.....3488
Page 1937.....3490
Page 1938.....3492
Page 1939.....3494
Page 1940.....3496
Page 1941.....3498
Page 1942.....3500
Page 1943.....3502
Page 1944.....3503
Page 1945.....3504
Page 1946.....3505
Page 1947.....3507

Page 1948.....3509
Page 1949.....3511
Page 1950.....3513
Page 1951.....3515
Page 1952.....3517
Page 1953.....3518
Page 1954.....3519
Page 1955.....3520
Page 1956.....3521
Page 1957.....3523
Page 1958.....3524
Page 1959.....3526
Page 1960.....3528
Page 1961.....3530
Page 1962.....3532
Page 1963.....3534
Page 1964.....3535
Page 1965.....3537
Page 1966.....3539
Page 1967.....3541
Page 1968.....3543
Page 1969.....3544
Page 1970.....3546
Page 1971.....3548
Page 1972.....3549
Page 1973.....3551

Page 1974.....3552
Page 1975.....3553
Page 1976.....3555
Page 1977.....3556
Page 1978.....3558
Page 1979.....3560
Page 1980.....3562
Page 1981.....3563
Page 1982.....3565
Page 1983.....3567
Page 1984.....3569
Page 1985.....3570
Page 1986.....3571
Page 1987.....3572
Page 1988.....3573
Page 1989.....3575
Page 1990.....3577
Page 1991.....3579
Page 1992.....3581
Page 1993.....3583
Page 1994.....3585
Page 1995.....3587
Page 1996.....3589
Page 1997.....3590
Page 1998.....3592
Page 1999.....3593

Page 2000.....3594
Page 2001.....3595
Page 2002.....3596
Page 2003.....3598
Page 2004.....3599
Page 2005.....3601
Page 2006.....3603
Page 2007.....3605
Page 2008.....3606
Page 2009.....3608
Page 2010.....3610
Page 2011.....3612
Page 2012.....3614
Page 2013.....3616
Page 2014.....3618
Page 2015.....3620
Page 2016.....3621
Page 2017.....3622
Page 2018.....3624
Page 2019.....3625
Page 2020.....3627
Page 2021.....3629
Page 2022.....3631
Page 2023.....3633
Page 2024.....3635
Page 2025.....3637

Page 2026.....3639
Page 2027.....3640
Page 2028.....3642
Page 2029.....3644
Page 2030.....3646
Page 2031.....3648
Page 2032.....3650
Page 2033.....3652
Page 2034.....3654
Page 2035.....3656
Page 2036.....3658
Page 2037.....3660
Page 2038.....3662
Page 2039.....3663
Page 2040.....3665
Page 2041.....3666
Page 2042.....3668
Page 2043.....3670
Page 2044.....3672
Page 2045.....3674
Page 2046.....3675
Page 2047.....3677
Page 2048.....3679
Page 2049.....3680
Page 2050.....3681
Page 2051.....3682

Page 2052.....3683
Page 2053.....3685
Page 2054.....3686
Page 2055.....3687
Page 2056.....3689
Page 2057.....3691
Page 2058.....3693
Page 2059.....3695
Page 2060.....3697
Page 2061.....3699
Page 2062.....3701
Page 2063.....3703
Page 2064.....3705
Page 2065.....3706
Page 2066.....3708
Page 2067.....3710
Page 2068.....3712
Page 2069.....3713
Page 2070.....3714
Page 2071.....3715
Page 2072.....3716
Page 2073.....3718
Page 2074.....3720
Page 2075.....3722
Page 2076.....3724
Page 2077.....3726

Page 2078.....3728
Page 2079.....3730
Page 2080.....3732
Page 2081.....3733
Page 2082.....3734
Page 2083.....3735
Page 2084.....3737
Page 2085.....3738
Page 2086.....3739
Page 2087.....3741
Page 2088.....3743
Page 2089.....3744
Page 2090.....3745
Page 2091.....3747
Page 2092.....3748
Page 2093.....3749
Page 2094.....3750
Page 2095.....3751
Page 2096.....3753
Page 2097.....3754
Page 2098.....3756
Page 2099.....3757
Page 2100.....3759
Page 2101.....3761
Page 2102.....3763
Page 2103.....3764

Page 2104.....3766
Page 2105.....3768
Page 2106.....3769
Page 2107.....3771
Page 2108.....3772
Page 2109.....3773
Page 2110.....3775
Page 2111.....3776
Page 2112.....3778
Page 2113.....3779
Page 2114.....3780
Page 2115.....3782
Page 2116.....3784
Page 2117.....3786
Page 2118.....3788
Page 2119.....3789
Page 2120.....3791
Page 2121.....3792
Page 2122.....3793
Page 2123.....3795
Page 2124.....3797
Page 2125.....3799
Page 2126.....3800
Page 2127.....3802
Page 2128.....3803
Page 2129.....3804

Page 2130.....3806
Page 2131.....3808
Page 2132.....3810
Page 2133.....3812
Page 2134.....3813
Page 2135.....3814
Page 2136.....3815
Page 2137.....3816
Page 2138.....3817
Page 2139.....3818
Page 2140.....3820
Page 2141.....3822
Page 2142.....3823
Page 2143.....3825
Page 2144.....3826
Page 2145.....3827
Page 2146.....3828
Page 2147.....3830
Page 2148.....3831
Page 2149.....3832
Page 2150.....3834
Page 2151.....3835
Page 2152.....3836
Page 2153.....3837
Page 2154.....3838
Page 2155.....3840

Page 2156.....3841
Page 2157.....3843
Page 2158.....3844
Page 2159.....3846
Page 2160.....3847
Page 2161.....3848
Page 2162.....3849
Page 2163.....3850
Page 2164.....3852
Page 2165.....3854
Page 2166.....3855
Page 2167.....3856
Page 2168.....3858
Page 2169.....3860
Page 2170.....3861
Page 2171.....3862
Page 2172.....3863
Page 2173.....3864
Page 2174.....3865
Page 2175.....3866
Page 2176.....3867
Page 2177.....3869
Page 2178.....3871
Page 2179.....3873
Page 2180.....3874
Page 2181.....3876

Page 2182.....3878
Page 2183.....3880
Page 2184.....3882
Page 2185.....3883
Page 2186.....3885
Page 2187.....3887
Page 2188.....3889
Page 2189.....3891
Page 2190.....3893
Page 2191.....3894
Page 2192.....3896
Page 2193.....3898
Page 2194.....3899
Page 2195.....3900
Page 2196.....3902
Page 2197.....3904
Page 2198.....3906
Page 2199.....3908
Page 2200.....3910
Page 2201.....3912
Page 2202.....3914
Page 2203.....3915
Page 2204.....3917
Page 2205.....3919
Page 2206.....3921
Page 2207.....3923

Page 2208.....3925
Page 2209.....3927
Page 2210.....3929
Page 2211.....3931
Page 2212.....3933
Page 2213.....3935
Page 2214.....3937
Page 2215.....3939
Page 2216.....3941
Page 2217.....3943
Page 2218.....3945
Page 2219.....3947
Page 2220.....3948
Page 2221.....3950
Page 2222.....3952
Page 2223.....3954
Page 2224.....3956
Page 2225.....3957
Page 2226.....3958
Page 2227.....3960
Page 2228.....3962
Page 2229.....3964
Page 2230.....3966
Page 2231.....3968
Page 2232.....3970
Page 2233.....3972

Page 2234.....3974
Page 2235.....3975
Page 2236.....3976
Page 2237.....3978
Page 2238.....3980
Page 2239.....3981
Page 2240.....3982
Page 2241.....3983
Page 2242.....3984
Page 2243.....3985
Page 2244.....3987
Page 2245.....3988
Page 2246.....3989
Page 2247.....3990
Page 2248.....3991
Page 2249.....3992
Page 2250.....3994
Page 2251.....3996
Page 2252.....3998
Page 2253.....3999
Page 2254.....4000
Page 2255.....4002
Page 2256.....4004
Page 2257.....4006
Page 2258.....4007
Page 2259.....4008

Page 2260.....4009
Page 2261.....4010
Page 2262.....4011
Page 2263.....4012
Page 2264.....4014
Page 2265.....4016
Page 2266.....4017
Page 2267.....4019
Page 2268.....4020
Page 2269.....4021
Page 2270.....4022
Page 2271.....4023
Page 2272.....4024
Page 2273.....4026
Page 2274.....4027
Page 2275.....4028
Page 2276.....4029
Page 2277.....4031
Page 2278.....4032
Page 2279.....4033
Page 2280.....4035
Page 2281.....4036
Page 2282.....4037
Page 2283.....4038
Page 2284.....4039
Page 2285.....4040

Page 2286.....4041
Page 2287.....4043
Page 2288.....4044
Page 2289.....4045
Page 2290.....4047
Page 2291.....4049
Page 2292.....4051
Page 2293.....4053
Page 2294.....4054
Page 2295.....4056
Page 2296.....4058
Page 2297.....4060
Page 2298.....4062
Page 2299.....4063
Page 2300.....4065
Page 2301.....4067
Page 2302.....4069
Page 2303.....4070
Page 2304.....4072
Page 2305.....4073
Page 2306.....4075
Page 2307.....4077
Page 2308.....4079
Page 2309.....4081
Page 2310.....4083
Page 2311.....4085

Page 2312.....4087
Page 2313.....4089
Page 2314.....4090
Page 2315.....4091
Page 2316.....4092
Page 2317.....4093
Page 2318.....4094
Page 2319.....4095
Page 2320.....4096
Page 2321.....4097
Page 2322.....4099
Page 2323.....4101
Page 2324.....4103
Page 2325.....4105
Page 2326.....4107
Page 2327.....4109
Page 2328.....4110
Page 2329.....4112
Page 2330.....4113
Page 2331.....4114
Page 2332.....4115
Page 2333.....4117
Page 2334.....4119
Page 2335.....4120
Page 2336.....4121
Page 2337.....4122

Page 2338.....4123
Page 2339.....4124
Page 2340.....4125
Page 2341.....4126
Page 2342.....4128
Page 2343.....4130
Page 2344.....4132
Page 2345.....4134
Page 2346.....4136
Page 2347.....4138
Page 2348.....4140
Page 2349.....4142
Page 2350.....4144
Page 2351.....4145
Page 2352.....4147
Page 2353.....4149
Page 2354.....4151
Page 2355.....4153
Page 2356.....4155
Page 2357.....4157
Page 2358.....4159
Page 2359.....4161
Page 2360.....4163
Page 2361.....4165
Page 2362.....4166
Page 2363.....4168

Page 2364.....4170
Page 2365.....4172
Page 2366.....4173
Page 2367.....4174
Page 2368.....4175
Page 2369.....4177
Page 2370.....4178
Page 2371.....4180
Page 2372.....4182
Page 2373.....4184
Page 2374.....4186
Page 2375.....4188
Page 2376.....4190
Page 2377.....4192
Page 2378.....4194
Page 2379.....4196
Page 2380.....4197
Page 2381.....4199
Page 2382.....4201
Page 2383.....4203
Page 2384.....4205
Page 2385.....4207
Page 2386.....4209
Page 2387.....4211
Page 2388.....4213
Page 2389.....4215

Page 2390.....4217
Page 2391.....4219
Page 2392.....4221
Page 2393.....4223
Page 2394.....4225
Page 2395.....4227
Page 2396.....4229
Page 2397.....4231
Page 2398.....4233
Page 2399.....4235
Page 2400.....4236
Page 2401.....4238
Page 2402.....4240
Page 2403.....4242
Page 2404.....4244
Page 2405.....4245
Page 2406.....4246
Page 2407.....4247
Page 2408.....4249
Page 2409.....4251
Page 2410.....4253
Page 2411.....4255
Page 2412.....4257
Page 2413.....4259
Page 2414.....4260
Page 2415.....4262

Page 2416.....4264
Page 2417.....4265
Page 2418.....4267
Page 2419.....4269
Page 2420.....4271
Page 2421.....4273
Page 2422.....4274
Page 2423.....4275
Page 2424.....4276
Page 2425.....4277
Page 2426.....4278
Page 2427.....4280
Page 2428.....4282
Page 2429.....4283
Page 2430.....4285
Page 2431.....4286
Page 2432.....4287
Page 2433.....4288
Page 2434.....4290
Page 2435.....4291
Page 2436.....4293
Page 2437.....4294
Page 2438.....4295
Page 2439.....4297
Page 2440.....4299
Page 2441.....4300

Page 2442.....4302
Page 2443.....4304
Page 2444.....4306
Page 2445.....4307
Page 2446.....4308
Page 2447.....4309
Page 2448.....4310
Page 2449.....4311
Page 2450.....4312
Page 2451.....4313
Page 2452.....4315
Page 2453.....4317
Page 2454.....4319
Page 2455.....4321
Page 2456.....4322
Page 2457.....4323
Page 2458.....4324
Page 2459.....4326
Page 2460.....4328
Page 2461.....4330
Page 2462.....4332
Page 2463.....4333
Page 2464.....4334
Page 2465.....4336
Page 2466.....4338
Page 2467.....4340

Page 2468.....4342
Page 2469.....4344
Page 2470.....4346
Page 2471.....4348
Page 2472.....4350
Page 2473.....4352
Page 2474.....4353
Page 2475.....4355
Page 2476.....4356
Page 2477.....4357
Page 2478.....4359
Page 2479.....4361
Page 2480.....4363
Page 2481.....4365
Page 2482.....4367
Page 2483.....4369
Page 2484.....4371
Page 2485.....4373
Page 2486.....4374
Page 2487.....4375
Page 2488.....4377
Page 2489.....4379
Page 2490.....4380
Page 2491.....4381
Page 2492.....4383
Page 2493.....4385

Page 2494.....4387
Page 2495.....4388
Page 2496.....4390
Page 2497.....4392
Page 2498.....4394
Page 2499.....4396
Page 2500.....4398
Page 2501.....4400
Page 2502.....4402
Page 2503.....4403
Page 2504.....4405
Page 2505.....4407
Page 2506.....4409
Page 2507.....4411
Page 2508.....4413
Page 2509.....4415
Page 2510.....4416
Page 2511.....4417
Page 2512.....4418
Page 2513.....4419
Page 2514.....4420
Page 2515.....4422
Page 2516.....4423
Page 2517.....4424
Page 2518.....4425
Page 2519.....4426

Page 2520.....4428
Page 2521.....4429
Page 2522.....4431
Page 2523.....4433
Page 2524.....4435
Page 2525.....4437
Page 2526.....4438
Page 2527.....4440
Page 2528.....4442
Page 2529.....4443
Page 2530.....4445
Page 2531.....4447
Page 2532.....4449
Page 2533.....4451
Page 2534.....4452
Page 2535.....4453
Page 2536.....4455
Page 2537.....4456
Page 2538.....4458
Page 2539.....4459
Page 2540.....4461
Page 2541.....4463
Page 2542.....4465
Page 2543.....4467
Page 2544.....4469
Page 2545.....4471

Page 2546.....4473
Page 2547.....4475
Page 2548.....4477
Page 2549.....4478
Page 2550.....4479
Page 2551.....4481
Page 2552.....4483
Page 2553.....4484
Page 2554.....4485
Page 2555.....4486
Page 2556.....4487
Page 2557.....4489
Page 2558.....4491
Page 2559.....4493
Page 2560.....4495
Page 2561.....4497
Page 2562.....4499
Page 2563.....4501
Page 2564.....4503
Page 2565.....4505
Page 2566.....4507
Page 2567.....4508
Page 2568.....4510
Page 2569.....4512
Page 2570.....4514
Page 2571.....4515

Page 2572.....4516
Page 2573.....4518
Page 2574.....4520
Page 2575.....4522
Page 2576.....4524
Page 2577.....4526
Page 2578.....4528
Page 2579.....4530
Page 2580.....4532
Page 2581.....4533
Page 2582.....4534
Page 2583.....4535
Page 2584.....4537
Page 2585.....4538
Page 2586.....4539
Page 2587.....4541
Page 2588.....4542
Page 2589.....4544
Page 2590.....4546
Page 2591.....4548
Page 2592.....4550
Page 2593.....4552
Page 2594.....4553
Page 2595.....4555
Page 2596.....4557
Page 2597.....4559

Page 2598.....4561
Page 2599.....4563
Page 2600.....4565
Page 2601.....4566
Page 2602.....4568
Page 2603.....4570
Page 2604.....4572
Page 2605.....4574
Page 2606.....4576
Page 2607.....4578
Page 2608.....4580
Page 2609.....4582
Page 2610.....4584
Page 2611.....4586
Page 2612.....4588
Page 2613.....4589
Page 2614.....4590
Page 2615.....4592
Page 2616.....4594
Page 2617.....4596
Page 2618.....4598
Page 2619.....4599
Page 2620.....4600
Page 2621.....4602
Page 2622.....4603
Page 2623.....4604

Page 2624.....4605
Page 2625.....4607
Page 2626.....4609
Page 2627.....4611
Page 2628.....4612
Page 2629.....4613
Page 2630.....4615
Page 2631.....4617
Page 2632.....4619
Page 2633.....4621
Page 2634.....4623
Page 2635.....4625
Page 2636.....4626
Page 2637.....4627
Page 2638.....4628
Page 2639.....4629
Page 2640.....4630
Page 2641.....4631
Page 2642.....4632
Page 2643.....4633
Page 2644.....4634
Page 2645.....4636
Page 2646.....4637
Page 2647.....4638

Page 2648.....4639
Page 2649.....4640
Page 2650.....4641
Page 2651.....4642
Page 2652.....4643
Page 2653.....4645
Page 2654.....4646
Page 2655.....4647
Page 2656.....4648
Page 2657.....4650
Page 2658.....4651
Page 2659.....4653
Page 2660.....4655
Page 2661.....4656
Page 2662.....4657
Page 2663.....4658
Page 2664.....4659
Page 2665.....4661
Page 2666.....4663
Page 2667.....4664
Page 2668.....4665
Page 2669.....4667
Page 2670.....4669
Page 2671.....4671
Page 2672.....4672
Page 2673.....4674

Page 2674.....4675
Page 2675.....4677
Page 2676.....4679
Page 2677.....4681
Page 2678.....4683
Page 2679.....4685
Page 2680.....4687
Page 2681.....4689
Page 2682.....4691
Page 2683.....4693
Page 2684.....4695
Page 2685.....4697
Page 2686.....4699
Page 2687.....4701
Page 2688.....4703
Page 2689.....4705
Page 2690.....4707
Page 2691.....4709
Page 2692.....4710
Page 2693.....4712
Page 2694.....4713
Page 2695.....4715
Page 2696.....4716
Page 2697.....4718
Page 2698.....4720
Page 2699.....4722

Page 2700.....4723
Page 2701.....4724
Page 2702.....4726
Page 2703.....4728
Page 2704.....4729
Page 2705.....4731
Page 2706.....4732
Page 2707.....4734
Page 2708.....4736
Page 2709.....4737
Page 2710.....4739
Page 2711.....4741
Page 2712.....4742
Page 2713.....4743
Page 2714.....4745
Page 2715.....4747
Page 2716.....4749
Page 2717.....4751
Page 2718.....4753
Page 2719.....4755
Page 2720.....4756
Page 2721.....4757
Page 2722.....4759
Page 2723.....4761
Page 2724.....4762
Page 2725.....4764

Page 2726.....4766
Page 2727.....4768
Page 2728.....4770
Page 2729.....4771
Page 2730.....4773
Page 2731.....4774
Page 2732.....4776
Page 2733.....4778
Page 2734.....4780
Page 2735.....4782
Page 2736.....4783
Page 2737.....4785
Page 2738.....4787
Page 2739.....4789
Page 2740.....4791
Page 2741.....4793
Page 2742.....4795
Page 2743.....4797
Page 2744.....4799
Page 2745.....4801
Page 2746.....4803
Page 2747.....4805
Page 2748.....4806
Page 2749.....4808
Page 2750.....4810
Page 2751.....4812

Page 2752.....4814
Page 2753.....4815
Page 2754.....4817
Page 2755.....4819
Page 2756.....4821
Page 2757.....4823
Page 2758.....4825
Page 2759.....4827
Page 2760.....4829
Page 2761.....4831
Page 2762.....4832
Page 2763.....4834
Page 2764.....4836
Page 2765.....4838
Page 2766.....4840
Page 2767.....4842
Page 2768.....4844
Page 2769.....4846
Page 2770.....4848
Page 2771.....4850
Page 2772.....4852
Page 2773.....4854
Page 2774.....4856
Page 2775.....4857
Page 2776.....4858
Page 2777.....4859

Page 2778.....4860
Page 2779.....4861
Page 2780.....4863
Page 2781.....4865
Page 2782.....4867
Page 2783.....4869
Page 2784.....4871
Page 2785.....4873
Page 2786.....4874
Page 2787.....4876
Page 2788.....4878
Page 2789.....4880
Page 2790.....4882
Page 2791.....4884
Page 2792.....4885
Page 2793.....4887
Page 2794.....4889
Page 2795.....4891
Page 2796.....4892
Page 2797.....4893
Page 2798.....4894
Page 2799.....4896
Page 2800.....4898
Page 2801.....4899
Page 2802.....4900
Page 2803.....4902

Page 2804.....4904
Page 2805.....4906
Page 2806.....4908
Page 2807.....4910
Page 2808.....4912
Page 2809.....4913
Page 2810.....4915
Page 2811.....4917
Page 2812.....4919
Page 2813.....4921
Page 2814.....4923
Page 2815.....4925
Page 2816.....4927
Page 2817.....4929
Page 2818.....4931
Page 2819.....4933
Page 2820.....4934
Page 2821.....4936
Page 2822.....4938
Page 2823.....4940
Page 2824.....4942
Page 2825.....4944
Page 2826.....4946
Page 2827.....4948
Page 2828.....4950
Page 2829.....4952

Page 2830.....4954
Page 2831.....4956
Page 2832.....4958
Page 2833.....4960
Page 2834.....4962
Page 2835.....4964
Page 2836.....4966
Page 2837.....4967
Page 2838.....4969
Page 2839.....4971
Page 2840.....4973
Page 2841.....4975
Page 2842.....4976
Page 2843.....4977
Page 2844.....4978
Page 2845.....4980
Page 2846.....4982
Page 2847.....4984
Page 2848.....4985
Page 2849.....4987
Page 2850.....4989
Page 2851.....4991
Page 2852.....4993
Page 2853.....4995
Page 2854.....4997
Page 2855.....4999

Page 2856.....5000
Page 2857.....5002
Page 2858.....5004
Page 2859.....5006
Page 2860.....5007
Page 2861.....5009
Page 2862.....5011
Page 2863.....5013
Page 2864.....5015
Page 2865.....5017
Page 2866.....5018
Page 2867.....5019
Page 2868.....5021
Page 2869.....5023
Page 2870.....5025
Page 2871.....5027
Page 2872.....5029
Page 2873.....5031
Page 2874.....5033
Page 2875.....5035
Page 2876.....5037
Page 2877.....5039
Page 2878.....5041
Page 2879.....5043
Page 2880.....5045
Page 2881.....5047

Page 2882.....5048
Page 2883.....5050
Page 2884.....5052
Page 2885.....5054
Page 2886.....5056
Page 2887.....5058
Page 2888.....5060
Page 2889.....5061
Page 2890.....5063
Page 2891.....5065
Page 2892.....5067
Page 2893.....5069
Page 2894.....5071
Page 2895.....5073
Page 2896.....5075
Page 2897.....5077
Page 2898.....5079
Page 2899.....5081
Page 2900.....5083
Page 2901.....5085
Page 2902.....5087
Page 2903.....5089
Page 2904.....5091
Page 2905.....5093
Page 2906.....5095
Page 2907.....5097

Page 2908.....5099
Page 2909.....5101
Page 2910.....5103
Page 2911.....5105
Page 2912.....5106
Page 2913.....5107
Page 2914.....5108
Page 2915.....5109
Page 2916.....5110
Page 2917.....5111
Page 2918.....5113
Page 2919.....5115
Page 2920.....5117
Page 2921.....5119
Page 2922.....5120
Page 2923.....5122
Page 2924.....5124
Page 2925.....5125
Page 2926.....5127
Page 2927.....5129
Page 2928.....5131
Page 2929.....5133
Page 2930.....5135
Page 2931.....5137
Page 2932.....5138
Page 2933.....5140

Page 2934.....5142
Page 2935.....5143
Page 2936.....5145
Page 2937.....5147
Page 2938.....5149
Page 2939.....5151
Page 2940.....5153
Page 2941.....5155
Page 2942.....5157
Page 2943.....5159
Page 2944.....5161
Page 2945.....5163
Page 2946.....5165
Page 2947.....5167
Page 2948.....5169
Page 2949.....5171
Page 2950.....5173
Page 2951.....5175
Page 2952.....5177
Page 2953.....5179
Page 2954.....5181
Page 2955.....5183
Page 2956.....5185
Page 2957.....5187
Page 2958.....5189
Page 2959.....5191

Page 2960.....5193
Page 2961.....5195
Page 2962.....5197
Page 2963.....5199
Page 2964.....5201
Page 2965.....5203
Page 2966.....5205
Page 2967.....5207
Page 2968.....5208
Page 2969.....5209
Page 2970.....5211
Page 2971.....5213
Page 2972.....5215
Page 2973.....5217
Page 2974.....5219
Page 2975.....5221
Page 2976.....5223
Page 2977.....5225
Page 2978.....5226
Page 2979.....5228
Page 2980.....5230
Page 2981.....5232
Page 2982.....5233
Page 2983.....5235
Page 2984.....5237
Page 2985.....5239

Page 2986.....5241
Page 2987.....5244
Page 2988.....5246
Page 2989.....5248
Page 2990.....5250
Page 2991.....5252
Page 2992.....5254
Page 2993.....5256
Page 2994.....5258
Page 2995.....5260
Page 2996.....5262
Page 2997.....5264
Page 2998.....5266
Page 2999.....5268
Page 3000.....5269
Page 3001.....5270
Page 3002.....5271
Page 3003.....5272
Page 3004.....5273
Page 3005.....5275
Page 3006.....5277
Page 3007.....5278
Page 3008.....5279
Page 3009.....5280
Page 3010.....5282
Page 3011.....5283

Page 3012.....5285
Page 3013.....5287
Page 3014.....5288
Page 3015.....5290
Page 3016.....5291
Page 3017.....5292
Page 3018.....5294
Page 3019.....5295
Page 3020.....5296
Page 3021.....5297
Page 3022.....5299
Page 3023.....5301
Page 3024.....5303
Page 3025.....5304
Page 3026.....5305
Page 3027.....5307
Page 3028.....5308
Page 3029.....5310
Page 3030.....5312
Page 3031.....5313
Page 3032.....5314
Page 3033.....5316
Page 3034.....5317
Page 3035.....5319
Page 3036.....5321
Page 3037.....5322

Page 3038.....5324
Page 3039.....5326
Page 3040.....5328
Page 3041.....5329
Page 3042.....5331
Page 3043.....5332
Page 3044.....5333
Page 3045.....5334
Page 3046.....5335
Page 3047.....5337
Page 3048.....5338
Page 3049.....5340
Page 3050.....5342
Page 3051.....5344
Page 3052.....5346
Page 3053.....5348
Page 3054.....5350
Page 3055.....5351
Page 3056.....5352
Page 3057.....5353
Page 3058.....5355
Page 3059.....5357
Page 3060.....5358
Page 3061.....5359
Page 3062.....5360
Page 3063.....5361

Page 3064.....5363
Page 3065.....5364
Page 3066.....5365
Page 3067.....5366
Page 3068.....5367
Page 3069.....5368
Page 3070.....5369
Page 3071.....5370
Page 3072.....5372
Page 3073.....5373
Page 3074.....5374
Page 3075.....5375
Page 3076.....5376
Page 3077.....5377
Page 3078.....5378
Page 3079.....5379
Page 3080.....5380
Page 3081.....5381
Page 3082.....5382
Page 3083.....5383
Page 3084.....5384
Page 3085.....5386
Page 3086.....5388
Page 3087.....5389
Page 3088.....5391
Page 3089.....5392

Page 3090.....5394
Page 3091.....5396
Page 3092.....5397
Page 3093.....5398
Page 3094.....5399
Page 3095.....5400
Page 3096.....5401
Page 3097.....5402
Page 3098.....5403
Page 3099.....5404
Page 3100.....5405
Page 3101.....5407
Page 3102.....5409
Page 3103.....5411
Page 3104.....5412
Page 3105.....5413
Page 3106.....5414
Page 3107.....5416
Page 3108.....5417
Page 3109.....5419
Page 3110.....5420
Page 3111.....5421
Page 3112.....5422

Page 3113.....5424
Page 3114.....5426
Page 3115.....5427

Page 3116.....5428
Page 3117.....5429
Page 3118.....5430
Page 3119.....5431
Page 3120.....5432
Page 3121.....5434
Page 3122.....5435
Page 3123.....5436
Page 3124.....5437
Page 3125.....5438
Page 3126.....5439
Page 3127.....5440
Page 3128.....5441
Page 3129.....5443
Page 3130.....5445
Page 3131.....5447
Page 3132.....5449
Page 3133.....5451
Page 3134.....5453
Page 3135.....5455
Page 3136.....5457
Page 3137.....5458
Page 3138.....5460
Page 3139.....5462
Page 3140.....5464
Page 3141.....5466

Page 3142.....5467
Page 3143.....5468
Page 3144.....5469
Page 3145.....5470
Page 3146.....5471
Page 3147.....5472
Page 3148.....5473
Page 3149.....5474
Page 3150.....5476
Page 3151.....5478
Page 3152.....5480
Page 3153.....5482
Page 3154.....5483
Page 3155.....5484
Page 3156.....5485
Page 3157.....5486
Page 3158.....5487
Page 3159.....5488
Page 3160.....5489
Page 3161.....5490
Page 3162.....5492
Page 3163.....5493
Page 3164.....5495
Page 3165.....5496
Page 3166.....5497
Page 3167.....5498

Page 3168.....5499
Page 3169.....5500
Page 3170.....5502
Page 3171.....5503
Page 3172.....5504
Page 3173.....5505
Page 3174.....5507
Page 3175.....5508
Page 3176.....5510
Page 3177.....5512
Page 3178.....5514
Page 3179.....5516
Page 3180.....5518
Page 3181.....5520
Page 3182.....5522
Page 3183.....5524
Page 3184.....5525
Page 3185.....5526
Page 3186.....5528
Page 3187.....5529
Page 3188.....5531
Page 3189.....5533
Page 3190.....5535
Page 3191.....5537
Page 3192.....5539
Page 3193.....5541

Page 3194.....5543
Page 3195.....5545
Page 3196.....5547
Page 3197.....5549
Page 3198.....5551
Page 3199.....5552
Page 3200.....5553
Page 3201.....5554
Page 3202.....5555
Page 3203.....5556
Page 3204.....5557
Page 3205.....5558
Page 3206.....5560
Page 3207.....5561
Page 3208.....5562
Page 3209.....5563
Page 3210.....5564
Page 3211.....5566
Page 3212.....5567
Page 3213.....5568
Page 3214.....5569
Page 3215.....5570
Page 3216.....5571
Page 3217.....5572
Page 3218.....5573
Page 3219.....5574

Page 3220.....5575
Page 3221.....5576
Page 3222.....5578
Page 3223.....5579
Page 3224.....5581
Page 3225.....5583
Page 3226.....5585
Page 3227.....5586
Page 3228.....5588
Page 3229.....5590
Page 3230.....5591
Page 3231.....5592
Page 3232.....5593
Page 3233.....5594
Page 3234.....5596
Page 3235.....5597
Page 3236.....5599
Page 3237.....5600
Page 3238.....5601
Page 3239.....5603
Page 3240.....5605
Page 3241.....5607
Page 3242.....5609
Page 3243.....5611
Page 3244.....5613
Page 3245.....5614

Page 3246.....5615
Page 3247.....5616
Page 3248.....5617
Page 3249.....5619
Page 3250.....5621
Page 3251.....5623
Page 3252.....5625
Page 3253.....5627
Page 3254.....5629
Page 3255.....5630
Page 3256.....5631
Page 3257.....5632
Page 3258.....5634
Page 3259.....5636
Page 3260.....5638
Page 3261.....5639
Page 3262.....5640
Page 3263.....5642
Page 3264.....5644
Page 3265.....5646
Page 3266.....5648
Page 3267.....5650
Page 3268.....5651
Page 3269.....5653
Page 3270.....5654
Page 3271.....5655

Page 3272.....5656
Page 3273.....5657
Page 3274.....5659
Page 3275.....5661
Page 3276.....5663
Page 3277.....5664
Page 3278.....5666
Page 3279.....5668
Page 3280.....5670
Page 3281.....5672
Page 3282.....5674
Page 3283.....5676
Page 3284.....5678
Page 3285.....5680
Page 3286.....5682
Page 3287.....5683
Page 3288.....5684
Page 3289.....5685
Page 3290.....5687
Page 3291.....5688
Page 3292.....5690
Page 3293.....5692
Page 3294.....5694
Page 3295.....5696
Page 3296.....5698
Page 3297.....5700

Page 3298.....5702
Page 3299.....5704
Page 3300.....5706
Page 3301.....5707
Page 3302.....5708
Page 3303.....5710
Page 3304.....5712
Page 3305.....5714
Page 3306.....5716
Page 3307.....5718
Page 3308.....5720
Page 3309.....5722
Page 3310.....5724
Page 3311.....5726
Page 3312.....5727
Page 3313.....5728
Page 3314.....5730
Page 3315.....5731
Page 3316.....5733
Page 3317.....5735
Page 3318.....5737
Page 3319.....5738
Page 3320.....5739
Page 3321.....5741
Page 3322.....5742
Page 3323.....5744

Page 3324.....5745
Page 3325.....5747
Page 3326.....5748
Page 3327.....5750
Page 3328.....5752
Page 3329.....5754
Page 3330.....5756
Page 3331.....5758
Page 3332.....5760
Page 3333.....5762
Page 3334.....5764
Page 3335.....5766
Page 3336.....5768
Page 3337.....5770
Page 3338.....5771
Page 3339.....5772
Page 3340.....5774
Page 3341.....5776
Page 3342.....5778
Page 3343.....5780
Page 3344.....5782
Page 3345.....5784
Page 3346.....5786
Page 3347.....5788
Page 3348.....5789
Page 3349.....5791

Page 3350.....5793
Page 3351.....5795
Page 3352.....5796
Page 3353.....5797
Page 3354.....5798
Page 3355.....5800
Page 3356.....5801
Page 3357.....5803
Page 3358.....5805
Page 3359.....5807
Page 3360.....5809
Page 3361.....5811
Page 3362.....5813
Page 3363.....5815
Page 3364.....5816
Page 3365.....5817
Page 3366.....5819
Page 3367.....5821
Page 3368.....5823
Page 3369.....5825
Page 3370.....5827
Page 3371.....5829
Page 3372.....5830
Page 3373.....5831
Page 3374.....5832
Page 3375.....5834

Page 3376.....5836
Page 3377.....5837
Page 3378.....5838
Page 3379.....5839
Page 3380.....5841
Page 3381.....5843
Page 3382.....5844
Page 3383.....5846
Page 3384.....5847
Page 3385.....5848
Page 3386.....5850
Page 3387.....5851
Page 3388.....5852
Page 3389.....5854
Page 3390.....5856
Page 3391.....5858
Page 3392.....5860
Page 3393.....5862
Page 3394.....5863
Page 3395.....5865
Page 3396.....5867
Page 3397.....5868
Page 3398.....5870
Page 3399.....5871
Page 3400.....5873
Page 3401.....5875

Page 3402.....5877
Page 3403.....5878
Page 3404.....5880
Page 3405.....5881
Page 3406.....5883
Page 3407.....5884

Page 3408.....5886
Page 3409.....5888

Page 3410.....5890
Page 3411.....5892
Page 3412.....5894
Page 3413.....5895
Page 3414.....5897
Page 3415.....5899
Page 3416.....5900
Page 3417.....5901
Page 3418.....5903
Page 3419.....5905
Page 3420.....5906
Page 3421.....5908
Page 3422.....5910
Page 3423.....5911
Page 3424.....5913
Page 3425.....5915
Page 3426.....5917

Page 3427.....5919
Page 3428.....5921
Page 3429.....5923
Page 3430.....5925
Page 3431.....5927
Page 3432.....5929
Page 3433.....5931
Page 3434.....5932
Page 3435.....5933
Page 3436.....5934
Page 3437.....5935
Page 3438.....5936
Page 3439.....5938
Page 3440.....5939
Page 3441.....5941
Page 3442.....5943
Page 3443.....5945
Page 3444.....5946
Page 3445.....5948
Page 3446.....5950
Page 3447.....5952
Page 3448.....5954
Page 3449.....5956
Page 3450.....5958
Page 3451.....5960
Page 3452.....5962

Page 3453.....5964
Page 3454.....5966
Page 3455.....5968
Page 3456.....5969
Page 3457.....5970
Page 3458.....5971
Page 3459.....5972
Page 3460.....5973
Page 3461.....5975
Page 3462.....5976
Page 3463.....5977
Page 3464.....5978
Page 3465.....5979
Page 3466.....5981
Page 3467.....5983
Page 3468.....5985
Page 3469.....5986
Page 3470.....5988
Page 3471.....5990
Page 3472.....5992
Page 3473.....5994
Page 3474.....5995
Page 3475.....5996
Page 3476.....5998
Page 3477.....6000
Page 3478.....6001

Page 3479.....6002
Page 3480.....6004
Page 3481.....6006
Page 3482.....6008
Page 3483.....6009
Page 3484.....6010
Page 3485.....6011
Page 3486.....6013
Page 3487.....6014
Page 3488.....6015
Page 3489.....6016
Page 3490.....6017
Page 3491.....6019
Page 3492.....6021
Page 3493.....6023
Page 3494.....6025
Page 3495.....6026
Page 3496.....6027
Page 3497.....6028
Page 3498.....6030
Page 3499.....6032
Page 3500.....6033
Page 3501.....6034
Page 3502.....6035
Page 3503.....6036
Page 3504.....6037

Page 3505.....6039
Page 3506.....6040
Page 3507.....6042
Page 3508.....6044
Page 3509.....6046
Page 3510.....6047
Page 3511.....6048
Page 3512.....6050
Page 3513.....6051
Page 3514.....6053
Page 3515.....6055
Page 3516.....6057
Page 3517.....6058
Page 3518.....6060
Page 3519.....6062
Page 3520.....6064
Page 3521.....6065
Page 3522.....6066
Page 3523.....6068
Page 3524.....6069
Page 3525.....6070
Page 3526.....6072
Page 3527.....6074
Page 3528.....6076
Page 3529.....6077
Page 3530.....6079

Page 3531.....6081
Page 3532.....6082
Page 3533.....6083
Page 3534.....6084
Page 3535.....6085
Page 3536.....6086
Page 3537.....6087
Page 3538.....6088
Page 3539.....6089
Page 3540.....6090
Page 3541.....6092
Page 3542.....6093
Page 3543.....6094
Page 3544.....6095
Page 3545.....6096
Page 3546.....6097
Page 3547.....6098
Page 3548.....6100
Page 3549.....6102
Page 3550.....6104
Page 3551.....6105
Page 3552.....6106
Page 3553.....6107
Page 3554.....6108
Page 3555.....6109
Page 3556.....6110

Page 3557.....6111
Page 3558.....6112
Page 3559.....6113
Page 3560.....6115
Page 3561.....6117
Page 3562.....6118
Page 3563.....6120
Page 3564.....6122
Page 3565.....6124
Page 3566.....6126
Page 3567.....6128
Page 3568.....6129
Page 3569.....6131
Page 3570.....6133
Page 3571.....6134
Page 3572.....6135
Page 3573.....6137
Page 3574.....6138
Page 3575.....6140
Page 3576.....6142
Page 3577.....6143
Page 3578.....6144
Page 3579.....6145
Page 3580.....6146
Page 3581.....6148
Page 3582.....6149

Page 3583.....6151
Page 3584.....6153
Page 3585.....6155
Page 3586.....6157
Page 3587.....6159
Page 3588.....6160
Page 3589.....6161
Page 3590.....6163
Page 3591.....6164
Page 3592.....6165
Page 3593.....6166
Page 3594.....6167
Page 3595.....6169
Page 3596.....6171
Page 3597.....6173
Page 3598.....6175
Page 3599.....6177
Page 3600.....6178
Page 3601.....6179
Page 3602.....6180
Page 3603.....6182
Page 3604.....6184
Page 3605.....6186
Page 3606.....6187
Page 3607.....6189
Page 3608.....6191

Page 3609.....6193
Page 3610.....6194
Page 3611.....6196
Page 3612.....6198
Page 3613.....6200
Page 3614.....6201
Page 3615.....6203
Page 3616.....6205
Page 3617.....6207
Page 3618.....6208
Page 3619.....6209
Page 3620.....6211
Page 3621.....6212
Page 3622.....6214
Page 3623.....6216
Page 3624.....6217
Page 3625.....6218
Page 3626.....6220
Page 3627.....6221
Page 3628.....6222
Page 3629.....6224
Page 3630.....6226
Page 3631.....6227
Page 3632.....6228
Page 3633.....6230
Page 3634.....6232

Page 3635.....6234
Page 3636.....6235
Page 3637.....6236
Page 3638.....6238
Page 3639.....6239
Page 3640.....6241
Page 3641.....6243
Page 3642.....6245
Page 3643.....6247
Page 3644.....6249
Page 3645.....6251
Page 3646.....6253
Page 3647.....6255
Page 3648.....6257
Page 3649.....6258
Page 3650.....6260
Page 3651.....6262
Page 3652.....6263
Page 3653.....6265
Page 3654.....6267
Page 3655.....6268
Page 3656.....6270
Page 3657.....6271
Page 3658.....6273
Page 3659.....6275
Page 3660.....6277

Page 3661.....6278
Page 3662.....6279
Page 3663.....6280
Page 3664.....6281
Page 3665.....6282
Page 3666.....6283
Page 3667.....6284
Page 3668.....6286
Page 3669.....6287
Page 3670.....6288
Page 3671.....6290
Page 3672.....6291
Page 3673.....6293
Page 3674.....6294
Page 3675.....6295
Page 3676.....6297
Page 3677.....6299
Page 3678.....6301
Page 3679.....6302
Page 3680.....6304
Page 3681.....6305
Page 3682.....6307
Page 3683.....6309
Page 3684.....6311
Page 3685.....6313
Page 3686.....6315

Page 3687.....6317
Page 3688.....6319
Page 3689.....6321
Page 3690.....6323
Page 3691.....6325
Page 3692.....6327
Page 3693.....6329
Page 3694.....6331
Page 3695.....6332
Page 3696.....6334
Page 3697.....6336
Page 3698.....6338
Page 3699.....6340
Page 3700.....6342
Page 3701.....6344
Page 3702.....6345
Page 3703.....6346
Page 3704.....6348
Page 3705.....6350
Page 3706.....6352
Page 3707.....6354
Page 3708.....6356
Page 3709.....6357
Page 3710.....6359
Page 3711.....6360
Page 3712.....6361

Page 3713.....6363
Page 3714.....6364
Page 3715.....6366
Page 3716.....6367
Page 3717.....6369
Page 3718.....6371
Page 3719.....6373
Page 3720.....6375
Page 3721.....6376
Page 3722.....6377
Page 3723.....6378
Page 3724.....6380
Page 3725.....6382
Page 3726.....6384
Page 3727.....6386
Page 3728.....6388
Page 3729.....6389
Page 3730.....6390
Page 3731.....6391
Page 3732.....6393
Page 3733.....6395
Page 3734.....6396
Page 3735.....6397
Page 3736.....6398
Page 3737.....6399
Page 3738.....6401

Page 3739.....6403
Page 3740.....6404
Page 3741.....6405
Page 3742.....6407
Page 3743.....6409
Page 3744.....6410
Page 3745.....6411
Page 3746.....6413
Page 3747.....6414
Page 3748.....6416
Page 3749.....6418
Page 3750.....6420
Page 3751.....6422
Page 3752.....6424
Page 3753.....6425
Page 3754.....6427
Page 3755.....6429
Page 3756.....6431
Page 3757.....6432
Page 3758.....6433
Page 3759.....6434
Page 3760.....6436
Page 3761.....6438
Page 3762.....6440
Page 3763.....6442
Page 3764.....6444

Page 3765.....6446
Page 3766.....6448
Page 3767.....6450
Page 3768.....6452
Page 3769.....6453
Page 3770.....6454
Page 3771.....6455
Page 3772.....6456
Page 3773.....6458
Page 3774.....6459
Page 3775.....6461
Page 3776.....6463
Page 3777.....6464
Page 3778.....6465
Page 3779.....6467
Page 3780.....6468
Page 3781.....6469
Page 3782.....6470
Page 3783.....6472
Page 3784.....6474
Page 3785.....6475
Page 3786.....6476
Page 3787.....6478
Page 3788.....6479
Page 3789.....6481
Page 3790.....6483

Page 3791.....6485
Page 3792.....6486
Page 3793.....6487
Page 3794.....6488
Page 3795.....6489
Page 3796.....6491
Page 3797.....6493
Page 3798.....6495
Page 3799.....6497
Page 3800.....6499
Page 3801.....6500
Page 3802.....6502
Page 3803.....6504
Page 3804.....6506
Page 3805.....6507
Page 3806.....6509
Page 3807.....6511
Page 3808.....6513
Page 3809.....6515
Page 3810.....6517
Page 3811.....6519
Page 3812.....6521
Page 3813.....6522
Page 3814.....6524
Page 3815.....6526
Page 3816.....6528

Page 3817.....6530
Page 3818.....6531
Page 3819.....6533
Page 3820.....6535
Page 3821.....6536
Page 3822.....6537
Page 3823.....6538
Page 3824.....6540
Page 3825.....6542
Page 3826.....6544
Page 3827.....6546
Page 3828.....6548
Page 3829.....6550
Page 3830.....6551
Page 3831.....6552
Page 3832.....6553
Page 3833.....6554
Page 3834.....6555
Page 3835.....6556
Page 3836.....6558
Page 3837.....6560
Page 3838.....6561
Page 3839.....6563
Page 3840.....6564
Page 3841.....6566
Page 3842.....6567

Page 3843.....6568
Page 3844.....6570
Page 3845.....6572
Page 3846.....6574
Page 3847.....6576
Page 3848.....6577
Page 3849.....6579
Page 3850.....6580
Page 3851.....6581
Page 3852.....6583
Page 3853.....6585
Page 3854.....6587
Page 3855.....6589
Page 3856.....6590
Page 3857.....6592
Page 3858.....6594
Page 3859.....6595
Page 3860.....6597
Page 3861.....6599
Page 3862.....6601
Page 3863.....6603
Page 3864.....6604
Page 3865.....6606
Page 3866.....6608
Page 3867.....6609
Page 3868.....6611

Page 3869.....6612
Page 3870.....6614
Page 3871.....6616
Page 3872.....6617
Page 3873.....6619
Page 3874.....6621
Page 3875.....6622
Page 3876.....6623
Page 3877.....6625
Page 3878.....6627
Page 3879.....6629
Page 3880.....6631
Page 3881.....6633
Page 3882.....6635
Page 3883.....6637
Page 3884.....6639
Page 3885.....6641
Page 3886.....6643
Page 3887.....6644
Page 3888.....6645
Page 3889.....6646
Page 3890.....6648
Page 3891.....6650
Page 3892.....6652
Page 3893.....6654
Page 3894.....6656

Page 3895.....6658
Page 3896.....6659
Page 3897.....6661
Page 3898.....6662
Page 3899.....6663
Page 3900.....6665
Page 3901.....6667
Page 3902.....6669
Page 3903.....6671
Page 3904.....6673
Page 3905.....6675
Page 3906.....6676
Page 3907.....6678
Page 3908.....6680
Page 3909.....6681
Page 3910.....6682
Page 3911.....6684
Page 3912.....6686
Page 3913.....6688
Page 3914.....6690
Page 3915.....6691
Page 3916.....6693
Page 3917.....6695
Page 3918.....6697
Page 3919.....6699
Page 3920.....6701

Page 3921.....6703
Page 3922.....6705
Page 3923.....6706
Page 3924.....6707
Page 3925.....6708
Page 3926.....6709
Page 3927.....6710
Page 3928.....6711
Page 3929.....6713
Page 3930.....6715
Page 3931.....6717

Page 3932.....6719
Page 3933.....6721
Page 3934.....6722
Page 3935.....6723
Page 3936.....6725
Page 3937.....6726
Page 3938.....6728
Page 3939.....6729
Page 3940.....6731
Page 3941.....6733
Page 3942.....6735
Page 3943.....6736
Page 3944.....6738
Page 3945.....6740
Page 3946.....6741

Page 3947.....6742
Page 3948.....6743
Page 3949.....6745
Page 3950.....6746
Page 3951.....6747
Page 3952.....6748
Page 3953.....6749
Page 3954.....6750
Page 3955.....6752
Page 3956.....6754
Page 3957.....6756
Page 3958.....6758
Page 3959.....6760
Page 3960.....6761
Page 3961.....6763
Page 3962.....6765
Page 3963.....6767
Page 3964.....6769
Page 3965.....6771
Page 3966.....6773
Page 3967.....6775
Page 3968.....6776
Page 3969.....6778
Page 3970.....6780
Page 3971.....6782
Page 3972.....6784

Page 3973.....6786
Page 3974.....6788
Page 3975.....6789
Page 3976.....6791
Page 3977.....6792
Page 3978.....6793
Page 3979.....6795
Page 3980.....6797
Page 3981.....6798
Page 3982.....6799
Page 3983.....6801
Page 3984.....6803
Page 3985.....6804
Page 3986.....6805
Page 3987.....6807
Page 3988.....6809
Page 3989.....6810
Page 3990.....6812
Page 3991.....6813
Page 3992.....6815
Page 3993.....6817
Page 3994.....6819
Page 3995.....6820
Page 3996.....6822
Page 3997.....6824
Page 3998.....6825

Page 3999.....6826
Page 4000.....6828
Page 4001.....6830
Page 4002.....6832
Page 4003.....6833
Page 4004.....6834
Page 4005.....6836
Page 4006.....6837
Page 4007.....6839
Page 4008.....6841
Page 4009.....6843
Page 4010.....6845
Page 4011.....6847
Page 4012.....6849
Page 4013.....6850
Page 4014.....6851
Page 4015.....6852
Page 4016.....6853
Page 4017.....6854
Page 4018.....6855
Page 4019.....6857
Page 4020.....6859
Page 4021.....6861
Page 4022.....6862
Page 4023.....6863
Page 4024.....6865

Page 4025.....6867
Page 4026.....6869
Page 4027.....6871
Page 4028.....6873
Page 4029.....6875
Page 4030.....6877
Page 4031.....6879
Page 4032.....6881
Page 4033.....6883
Page 4034.....6885
Page 4035.....6887
Page 4036.....6889
Page 4037.....6891
Page 4038.....6892
Page 4039.....6894
Page 4040.....6895
Page 4041.....6897
Page 4042.....6898
Page 4043.....6900
Page 4044.....6902
Page 4045.....6903
Page 4046.....6905
Page 4047.....6906
Page 4048.....6908
Page 4049.....6910
Page 4050.....6912

Page 4051.....6914
Page 4052.....6915
Page 4053.....6916
Page 4054.....6917
Page 4055.....6919
Page 4056.....6920
Page 4057.....6922
Page 4058.....6924
Page 4059.....6926
Page 4060.....6927
Page 4061.....6929
Page 4062.....6931
Page 4063.....6932
Page 4064.....6934
Page 4065.....6936
Page 4066.....6938
Page 4067.....6940
Page 4068.....6942
Page 4069.....6943
Page 4070.....6944
Page 4071.....6945
Page 4072.....6946
Page 4073.....6947
Page 4074.....6949
Page 4075.....6950
Page 4076.....6951

Page 4077.....6952
Page 4078.....6954
Page 4079.....6955
Page 4080.....6957
Page 4081.....6959
Page 4082.....6961
Page 4083.....6963
Page 4084.....6965
Page 4085.....6967
Page 4086.....6969
Page 4087.....6971
Page 4088.....6972
Page 4089.....6974
Page 4090.....6975
Page 4091.....6976
Page 4092.....6978
Page 4093.....6980
Page 4094.....6982
Page 4095.....6984
Page 4096.....6986
Page 4097.....6988
Page 4098.....6990
Page 4099.....6992
Page 4100.....6994
Page 4101.....6995
Page 4102.....6996

Page 4103.....6998
Page 4104.....7000
Page 4105.....7002
Page 4106.....7003
Page 4107.....7004
Page 4108.....7005
Page 4109.....7007
Page 4110.....7009
Page 4111.....7011
Page 4112.....7013
Page 4113.....7015
Page 4114.....7016
Page 4115.....7018
Page 4116.....7020
Page 4117.....7022
Page 4118.....7024
Page 4119.....7026
Page 4120.....7027
Page 4121.....7029
Page 4122.....7031
Page 4123.....7033
Page 4124.....7035
Page 4125.....7037
Page 4126.....7039
Page 4127.....7041
Page 4128.....7043

Page 4129.....7045
Page 4130.....7047
Page 4131.....7049
Page 4132.....7051
Page 4133.....7053
Page 4134.....7055
Page 4135.....7057
Page 4136.....7058
Page 4137.....7059
Page 4138.....7060
Page 4139.....7062
Page 4140.....7063
Page 4141.....7064
Page 4142.....7066
Page 4143.....7067
Page 4144.....7068
Page 4145.....7069
Page 4146.....7070
Page 4147.....7071
Page 4148.....7072
Page 4149.....7073
Page 4150.....7075
Page 4151.....7077
Page 4152.....7078
Page 4153.....7080
Page 4154.....7082

Page 4155.....7084
Page 4156.....7086
Page 4157.....7088
Page 4158.....7090
Page 4159.....7092
Page 4160.....7093
Page 4161.....7094
Page 4162.....7095
Page 4163.....7096
Page 4164.....7097
Page 4165.....7098
Page 4166.....7100
Page 4167.....7102
Page 4168.....7103
Page 4169.....7104
Page 4170.....7105
Page 4171.....7106
Page 4172.....7108
Page 4173.....7109
Page 4174.....7111
Page 4175.....7112
Page 4176.....7114
Page 4177.....7116
Page 4178.....7118
Page 4179.....7120
Page 4180.....7122

Page 4181.....7124
Page 4182.....7125
Page 4183.....7126
Page 4184.....7127
Page 4185.....7129
Page 4186.....7131
Page 4187.....7132
Page 4188.....7134
Page 4189.....7136
Page 4190.....7137
Page 4191.....7138
Page 4192.....7140
Page 4193.....7142
Page 4194.....7144
Page 4195.....7146
Page 4196.....7147
Page 4197.....7148
Page 4198.....7149
Page 4199.....7151
Page 4200.....7153
Page 4201.....7155
Page 4202.....7157
Page 4203.....7159
Page 4204.....7160
Page 4205.....7161
Page 4206.....7162

Page 4207.....7163
Page 4208.....7164
Page 4209.....7165
Page 4210.....7167
Page 4211.....7169
Page 4212.....7170
Page 4213.....7172
Page 4214.....7174
Page 4215.....7175
Page 4216.....7176
Page 4217.....7177
Page 4218.....7178
Page 4219.....7179
Page 4220.....7180
Page 4221.....7181
Page 4222.....7183
Page 4223.....7184
Page 4224.....7185
Page 4225.....7186
Page 4226.....7187
Page 4227.....7189
Page 4228.....7190
Page 4229.....7191
Page 4230.....7192
Page 4231.....7193

Page 4232.....7195

Page 4233.....7197
Page 4234.....7199
Page 4235.....7200
Page 4236.....7201
Page 4237.....7202
Page 4238.....7204
Page 4239.....7206
Page 4240.....7208
Page 4241.....7210
Page 4242.....7211
Page 4243.....7212
Page 4244.....7213
Page 4245.....7214
Page 4246.....7216
Page 4247.....7218
Page 4248.....7220
Page 4249.....7222
Page 4250.....7224
Page 4251.....7225
Page 4252.....7227
Page 4253.....7229
Page 4254.....7230
Page 4255.....7231
Page 4256.....7232
Page 4257.....7234
Page 4258.....7235

Page 4259.....7237
Page 4260.....7238
Page 4261.....7240
Page 4262.....7241
Page 4263.....7242
Page 4264.....7243
Page 4265.....7245
Page 4266.....7246
Page 4267.....7247
Page 4268.....7249
Page 4269.....7251
Page 4270.....7252
Page 4271.....7253
Page 4272.....7254
Page 4273.....7256
Page 4274.....7258
Page 4275.....7260
Page 4276.....7262
Page 4277.....7263
Page 4278.....7264
Page 4279.....7265
Page 4280.....7266
Page 4281.....7268
Page 4282.....7270
Page 4283.....7271
Page 4284.....7273

Page 4285.....7275
Page 4286.....7277
Page 4287.....7279
Page 4288.....7281
Page 4289.....7283
Page 4290.....7285
Page 4291.....7287
Page 4292.....7289
Page 4293.....7290
Page 4294.....7291
Page 4295.....7293
Page 4296.....7295
Page 4297.....7297
Page 4298.....7299
Page 4299.....7300
Page 4300.....7302
Page 4301.....7304
Page 4302.....7306
Page 4303.....7308
Page 4304.....7309
Page 4305.....7311
Page 4306.....7313
Page 4307.....7315
Page 4308.....7317
Page 4309.....7318
Page 4310.....7320

Page 4311.....7322
Page 4312.....7324
Page 4313.....7325
Page 4314.....7327
Page 4315.....7328
Page 4316.....7329
Page 4317.....7330
Page 4318.....7331
Page 4319.....7332
Page 4320.....7333
Page 4321.....7334
Page 4322.....7335
Page 4323.....7336
Page 4324.....7337
Page 4325.....7338
Page 4326.....7340
Page 4327.....7342
Page 4328.....7343
Page 4329.....7344
Page 4330.....7345
Page 4331.....7346
Page 4332.....7347
Page 4333.....7348
Page 4334.....7349
Page 4335.....7350
Page 4336.....7351

Page 4337.....7352
Page 4338.....7353
Page 4339.....7354
Page 4340.....7356
Page 4341.....7358
Page 4342.....7359
Page 4343.....7360
Page 4344.....7362
Page 4345.....7364
Page 4346.....7366
Page 4347.....7368
Page 4348.....7369
Page 4349.....7370
Page 4350.....7372
Page 4351.....7373
Page 4352.....7375
Page 4353.....7377
Page 4354.....7379
Page 4355.....7381
Page 4356.....7383
Page 4357.....7385
Page 4358.....7387
Page 4359.....7389
Page 4360.....7390
Page 4361.....7391
Page 4362.....7393

Page 4363.....7395
Page 4364.....7396
Page 4365.....7398
Page 4366.....7400
Page 4367.....7402
Page 4368.....7404
Page 4369.....7406
Page 4370.....7408
Page 4371.....7410
Page 4372.....7412
Page 4373.....7414
Page 4374.....7416
Page 4375.....7418
Page 4376.....7420
Page 4377.....7422
Page 4378.....7424
Page 4379.....7426
Page 4380.....7428
Page 4381.....7430
Page 4382.....7432
Page 4383.....7434
Page 4384.....7436
Page 4385.....7438
Page 4386.....7440
Page 4387.....7442
Page 4388.....7444

Page 4389.....7446
Page 4390.....7448
Page 4391.....7449
Page 4392.....7451
Page 4393.....7453
Page 4394.....7454
Page 4395.....7456
Page 4396.....7457
Page 4397.....7459
Page 4398.....7461
Page 4399.....7463
Page 4400.....7465
Page 4401.....7467
Page 4402.....7469
Page 4403.....7471
Page 4404.....7473
Page 4405.....7475
Page 4406.....7477
Page 4407.....7479
Page 4408.....7481
Page 4409.....7483
Page 4410.....7485
Page 4411.....7487
Page 4412.....7489
Page 4413.....7491
Page 4414.....7493

Page 4415.....7495
Page 4416.....7497
Page 4417.....7498
Page 4418.....7500
Page 4419.....7502
Page 4420.....7503
Page 4421.....7505
Page 4422.....7507
Page 4423.....7509
Page 4424.....7511
Page 4425.....7513
Page 4426.....7515
Page 4427.....7517
Page 4428.....7519
Page 4429.....7521

Page 4430.....7523
Page 4431.....7525
Page 4432.....7526
Page 4433.....7527
Page 4434.....7528
Page 4435.....7530
Page 4436.....7532
Page 4437.....7534
Page 4438.....7535
Page 4439.....7537
Page 4440.....7539

Page 4441.....7541
Page 4442.....7543
Page 4443.....7545
Page 4444.....7547
Page 4445.....7549
Page 4446.....7551
Page 4447.....7553
Page 4448.....7555
Page 4449.....7557
Page 4450.....7559
Page 4451.....7561
Page 4452.....7563
Page 4453.....7564
Page 4454.....7566
Page 4455.....7568
Page 4456.....7570
Page 4457.....7572
Page 4458.....7574
Page 4459.....7576
Page 4460.....7578
Page 4461.....7580
Page 4462.....7581
Page 4463.....7582
Page 4464.....7584
Page 4465.....7586
Page 4466.....7588

Page 4467.....7590
Page 4468.....7592
Page 4469.....7594
Page 4470.....7596
Page 4471.....7598
Page 4472.....7600
Page 4473.....7602
Page 4474.....7604
Page 4475.....7605
Page 4476.....7607
Page 4477.....7609
Page 4478.....7611
Page 4479.....7613
Page 4480.....7615
Page 4481.....7617
Page 4482.....7618
Page 4483.....7619
Page 4484.....7620
Page 4485.....7621
Page 4486.....7622
Page 4487.....7624
Page 4488.....7626
Page 4489.....7628
Page 4490.....7630
Page 4491.....7632
Page 4492.....7634

Page 4493.....7636
Page 4494.....7638
Page 4495.....7640
Page 4496.....7642
Page 4497.....7644
Page 4498.....7645
Page 4499.....7647
Page 4500.....7649
Page 4501.....7651
Page 4502.....7653
Page 4503.....7655
Page 4504.....7656
Page 4505.....7657
Page 4506.....7659
Page 4507.....7661
Page 4508.....7663
Page 4509.....7664
Page 4510.....7665
Page 4511.....7667
Page 4512.....7669
Page 4513.....7671
Page 4514.....7672
Page 4515.....7673
Page 4516.....7674
Page 4517.....7675
Page 4518.....7677

Page 4519.....7679
Page 4520.....7681
Page 4521.....7683
Page 4522.....7685
Page 4523.....7687
Page 4524.....7688
Page 4525.....7689
Page 4526.....7691
Page 4527.....7693
Page 4528.....7695
Page 4529.....7697
Page 4530.....7698
Page 4531.....7700
Page 4532.....7702
Page 4533.....7704
Page 4534.....7706
Page 4535.....7708
Page 4536.....7710
Page 4537.....7711
Page 4538.....7713
Page 4539.....7715
Page 4540.....7716
Page 4541.....7718
Page 4542.....7720
Page 4543.....7722
Page 4544.....7724

Page 4545.....7726
Page 4546.....7728
Page 4547.....7730
Page 4548.....7732
Page 4549.....7734
Page 4550.....7736
Page 4551.....7738
Page 4552.....7740
Page 4553.....7742
Page 4554.....7744
Page 4555.....7746
Page 4556.....7748
Page 4557.....7750
Page 4558.....7752
Page 4559.....7754
Page 4560.....7756
Page 4561.....7758
Page 4562.....7760
Page 4563.....7762
Page 4564.....7764
Page 4565.....7766
Page 4566.....7768
Page 4567.....7770
Page 4568.....7772
Page 4569.....7774
Page 4570.....7776

Page 4571.....7778
Page 4572.....7780
Page 4573.....7782
Page 4574.....7784
Page 4575.....7786
Page 4576.....7788
Page 4577.....7790
Page 4578.....7791
Page 4579.....7793
Page 4580.....7794
Page 4581.....7795
Page 4582.....7797
Page 4583.....7798
Page 4584.....7799
Page 4585.....7800
Page 4586.....7802
Page 4587.....7804
Page 4588.....7805
Page 4589.....7806
Page 4590.....7807
Page 4591.....7809
Page 4592.....7811
Page 4593.....7813
Page 4594.....7814
Page 4595.....7816
Page 4596.....7817

Page 4597.....7818
Page 4598.....7819
Page 4599.....7820
Page 4600.....7822
Page 4601.....7824
Page 4602.....7826
Page 4603.....7828
Page 4604.....7830
Page 4605.....7832
Page 4606.....7834
Page 4607.....7836
Page 4608.....7838
Page 4609.....7840
Page 4610.....7842
Page 4611.....7844
Page 4612.....7846

Page 4613.....7848
Page 4614.....7850
Page 4615.....7852
Page 4616.....7854
Page 4617.....7855
Page 4618.....7856
Page 4619.....7857
Page 4620.....7858
Page 4621.....7859
Page 4622.....7860

Page 4623.....7861
Page 4624.....7862
Page 4625.....7863
Page 4626.....7864
Page 4627.....7865
Page 4628.....7866
Page 4629.....7867
Page 4630.....7868
Page 4631.....7869
Page 4632.....7870
Page 4633.....7871
Page 4634.....7872
Page 4635.....7873
Page 4636.....7874
Page 4637.....7875
Page 4638.....7876
Page 4639.....7877
Page 4640.....7878
Page 4641.....7879
Page 4642.....7880
Page 4643.....7881
Page 4644.....7882
Page 4645.....7883
Page 4646.....7884
Page 4647.....7885
Page 4648.....7886

Page 4649.....7887
Page 4650.....7888
Page 4651.....7889
Page 4652.....7890
Page 4653.....7891
Page 4654.....7892
Page 4655.....7894
Page 4656.....7896
Page 4657.....7897
Page 4658.....7898
Page 4659.....7899
Page 4660.....7900
Page 4661.....7901
Page 4662.....7902
Page 4663.....7903
Page 4664.....7904
Page 4665.....7906
Page 4666.....7908
Page 4667.....7910
Page 4668.....7911
Page 4669.....7912
Page 4670.....7913
Page 4671.....7914
Page 4672.....7915
Page 4673.....7916
Page 4674.....7918

Page 4675.....7919
Page 4676.....7920
Page 4677.....7921
Page 4678.....7923
Page 4679.....7925
Page 4680.....7926
Page 4681.....7928
Page 4682.....7929
Page 4683.....7930
Page 4684.....7931
Page 4685.....7932
Page 4686.....7933
Page 4687.....7935
Page 4688.....7937
Page 4689.....7939
Page 4690.....7941
Page 4691.....7943
Page 4692.....7945
Page 4693.....7947
Page 4694.....7949
Page 4695.....7951
Page 4696.....7953
Page 4697.....7955
Page 4698.....7957
Page 4699.....7959
Page 4700.....7961

Page 4701.....7963

Page 4702.....7965

Page 4703.....7967

Page 4704.....7969

Page 4705.....7971

Page 4706.....7973

Page 4707.....7975

Page 4708.....7977

Page 4709.....7979

Page 4710.....7981

Page 4711.....7983

Page 4712.....7985

Page 4713.....7987

Page 4714.....7988

Page 4715.....7990

Page 4716.....7992

Page 4717.....7994

Page 4718.....7995

Page 4719.....7997

Page 4720.....7999

Page 4721.....8001

Page 4722.....8003

Page 4723.....8005

Page 4724.....8007

Page 4725.....8009

Page 4726.....8011

Page 4727.....8013

Page 4728.....8015

Page 4729.....8017

Page 4730.....8019

Page 4731.....8021

Page 4732.....8023

Page 4733.....8026

Page 4734.....8028

Page 4735.....8030

Page 4736.....8032

Page 4737.....8034

Page 4738.....8036

Page 4739.....8038

Page 4740.....8040

Page 4741.....8042

Page 4742.....8044

Page 4743.....8046

Page 4744.....8048

Page 4745.....8050

Page 4746.....8052

Page 4747.....8054

Page 4748.....8056
Page 4749.....8057
Page 4750.....8059
Page 4751.....8061
Page 4752.....8063
Page 4753.....8065
Page 4754.....8067
Page 4755.....8069

Page 4756.....8071
Page 4757.....8073

Page 4758.....8075
Page 4759.....8077
Page 4760.....8079
Page 4761.....8081
Page 4762.....8083

Page 4763.....8085

Page 4764.....8088
Page 4765.....8090
Page 4766.....8092
Page 4767.....8094
Page 4768.....8096
Page 4769.....8098
Page 4770.....8100
Page 4771.....8102

Page 4772.....8105
Page 4773.....8107
Page 4774.....8109

Page 4775.....8111
Page 4776.....8114
Page 4777.....8117
Page 4778.....8119
Page 4779.....8121
Page 4780.....8123
Page 4781.....8125
Page 4782.....8127
Page 4783.....8129
Page 4784.....8131
Page 4785.....8133
Page 4786.....8135
Page 4787.....8137

Page 4788.....8139
Page 4789.....8141
Page 4790.....8143
Page 4791.....8145

Page 4792.....8147
Page 4793.....8149

Page 4794.....8151
Page 4795.....8153

Page 4796.....8155
Page 4797.....8157
Page 4798.....8159
Page 4799.....8161
Page 4800.....8163
Page 4801.....8165
Page 4802.....8167
Page 4803.....8170
Page 4804.....8172
Page 4805.....8174
Page 4806.....8176
Page 4807.....8178
Page 4808.....8180
Page 4809.....8182

Page 4810.....8184
Page 4811.....8186
Page 4812.....8188
Page 4813.....8190

Page 4814.....8192
Page 4815.....8195
Page 4816.....8198
Page 4817.....8201
Page 4818.....8203
Page 4819.....8205
Page 4820.....8207

Page 4821.....8209
Page 4822.....8211
Page 4823.....8213
Page 4824.....8216
Page 4825.....8219

Page 4826.....8221
Page 4827.....8223
Page 4828.....8225
Page 4829.....8227

Page 4830.....8229
Page 4831.....8231
Page 4832.....8233
Page 4833.....8235
Page 4834.....8237
Page 4835.....8239

Page 4836.....8241
Page 4837.....8243
Page 4838.....8245

Page 4839.....8247
Page 4840.....8249
Page 4841.....8251

Page 4842.....8253
Page 4843.....8255

Page 4844.....8257
Page 4845.....8259
Page 4846.....8261
Page 4847.....8263
Page 4848.....8265
Page 4849.....8267
Page 4850.....8269
Page 4851.....8271
Page 4852.....8273
Page 4853.....8275
Page 4854.....8278
Page 4855.....8281
Page 4856.....8283
Page 4857.....8285
Page 4858.....8287
Page 4859.....8289
Page 4860.....8291
Page 4861.....8294
Page 4862.....8297
Page 4863.....8300
Page 4864.....8303
Page 4865.....8306
Page 4866.....8309
Page 4867.....8312
Page 4868.....8315
Page 4869.....8318

Page 4870.....8321
Page 4871.....8324
Page 4872.....8327
Page 4873.....8330
Page 4874.....8332
Page 4875.....8334
Page 4876.....8336
Page 4877.....8338
Page 4878.....8340
Page 4879.....8342
Page 4880.....8344
Page 4881.....8346
Page 4882.....8348
Page 4883.....8350
Page 4884.....8353
Page 4885.....8356
Page 4886.....8358
Page 4887.....8360
Page 4888.....8362
Page 4889.....8364
Page 4890.....8365
Page 4891.....8366
Page 4892.....8368
Page 4893.....8370

Page 4894.....8372
Page 4895.....8374

Page 4896.....8376
Page 4897.....8378
Page 4898.....8380
Page 4899.....8382
Page 4900.....8384
Page 4901.....8386
Page 4902.....8388
Page 4903.....8391

Page 4904.....8394
Page 4905.....8396
Page 4906.....8398
Page 4907.....8400
Page 4908.....8402
Page 4909.....8404

Page 4910.....8406
Page 4911.....8408
Page 4912.....8410
Page 4913.....8412
Page 4914.....8414
Page 4915.....8416
Page 4916.....8418

Page 4917.....8420
Page 4918.....8422
Page 4919.....8424

Page 4920.....8427
Page 4921.....8429
Page 4922.....8431
Page 4923.....8434
Page 4924.....8436
Page 4925.....8438
Page 4926.....8440
Page 4927.....8442
Page 4928.....8444
Page 4929.....8446
Page 4930.....8448
Page 4931.....8450
Page 4932.....8452
Page 4933.....8454
Page 4934.....8456
Page 4935.....8458
Page 4936.....8460
Page 4937.....8462
Page 4938.....8464
Page 4939.....8466
Page 4940.....8468
Page 4941.....8470
Page 4942.....8472
Page 4943.....8474

Page 4944.....8476

Page 4945.....8478

Page 4946.....8480

Page 4947.....8482

Page 4948.....8484

Page 4949.....8486

Page 4950.....8488

Page 4951.....8490

Page 4952.....8492

Page 4953.....8494

Page 4954.....8496

Page 4955.....8498

Page 4956.....8500

Page 4957.....8502

Page 4958.....8504

Page 4959.....8506

Page 4960.....8507

Page 4961.....8508

Page 4962.....8510

Page 4963.....8512

Page 4964.....8514

Page 4965.....8516

Page 4966.....8518

Page 4967.....8520

Page 4968.....8522

Page 4969.....8524

Page 4970.....8526

Page 4971.....8528

Page 4972.....8530

Page 4973.....8532

Page 4974.....8534

Page 4975.....8536

Page 4976.....8538

Page 4977.....8540

Page 4978.....8542

Page 4979.....8544

Page 4980.....8546

Page 4981.....8548

Page 4982.....8550

Page 4983.....8552

Page 4984.....8554

Page 4985.....8556

Page 4986.....8558

Page 4987.....8560

Page 4988.....8562
Page 4989.....8564
Page 4990.....8566
Page 4991.....8568

Page 4992.....8570
Page 4993.....8572

Page 4994.....8574
Page 4995.....8576
Page 4996.....8578
Page 4997.....8580

Page 4998.....8582
Page 4999.....8584
Page 5000.....8586
Page 5001.....8588
Page 5002.....8590
Page 5003.....8592
Page 5004.....8594
Page 5005.....8596

Page 5006.....8598
Page 5007.....8600
Page 5008.....8602

Page 5009.....8604
Page 5010.....8606

Page 5011.....8608

Page 5012.....8610

Page 5013.....8612

Page 5014.....8614

Page 5015.....8616

Page 5016.....8618

Page 5017.....8620

Page 5018.....8622

Page 5019.....8623

Page 5020.....8625

Page 5021.....8627

Page 5022.....8629

Page 5023.....8631

Page 5024.....8633

Page 5025.....8635

Page 5026.....8637

Page 5027.....8639

Page 5028.....8641

Page 5029.....8643

Page 5030.....8645

Page 5031.....8647

Page 1

THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

By George Meredith

AN ARABIAN ENTERTAINMENT

1898/1909

CONTENTS:

The thwackings
the story of Bhanavar the beautiful
the betrothal
punishment of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil, the builder
the genie Karaz
the well of Paravid
the horse Garraveen
the talking hawk
Goorelka of Oolb
the lily of the enchanted sea
story of Noorna bin Noorka, the genie Karaz, and the princess of Oolb
the wiles of Rabesqurat
the palace of Aklis
the sons of Aklis
the sword of Aklis
Koorookh
the veiled figure
the bosom of Noorna
the revival
the plot
the dish of pomegranate grain
the burning of the identical
the flashes of the blade
conclusion

THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

BOOK I.

The thwackings
the story of Bhanavar the beautiful

THE THWACKINGS

It was ordained that Shibli Bagarag, nephew to the renowned Baba Mustapha, chief barber to the Court of Persia, should shave Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor, the son of Shoolpi, the son of Shullum; and they had been clothiers for generations, even to the time of Shagpat, the illustrious.

Now, the story of Shibli Bagarag, and of the ball he followed, and of the subterranean kingdom he came to, and of the enchanted palace he entered, and of the sleeping king he shaved, and of the two princesses he released, and of the Afrite held in subjection by the arts of one and bottled by her, is it not known as 'twere written on the finger-nails of men and traced in their corner-robes? As the poet says:

> Ripe with oft telling and old is the tale,
> But 'tis of the sort that can never grow stale.

Now, things were in that condition with Shibli Bagarag, that on a certain day he was hungry and abject, and the city of Shagpat the clothier was before him; so he made toward it, deliberating as to how he should procure a meal, for he had not a dirhem in his girdle, and the remembrance of great dishes and savoury ingredients were to him as the illusion of rivers sheening on the sands to travellers gasping with thirst.

And he considered his case, crying, 'Surely this comes of wandering, and 'tis the curse of the inquiring spirit! for in Shiraz, where my craft is in favour, I should be sitting now with my uncle, Baba Mustapha, the loquacious one, cross-legged, partaking of seasoned sweet dishes, dipping my fingers in them, rejoicing my soul with scandal of the Court!'

Page 2

Now, he came to a knoll of sand under a palm, from which the yellow domes and mosques of the city of Shagpat, and its black cypresses, and marble palace fronts, and shining pillars, and lofty carven arches that spanned half-circles of the hot grey sky, were plainly visible. Then gazed he awhile despondingly on the city of Shagpat, and groaned in contemplation of his evil plight, as is said by the poet:

> The curse of sorrow is comparison!
> As the sun casteth shade, night showeth star,
> We, measuring what we were by what we are,
> Behold the depth to which we are undone.

Wherefore he counselleth:

> Look neither too much up, nor down at all,
> But, forward stepping, strive no more to fall.

And the advice is excellent; but, as is again said:

> The preacher preacheth, and the hearer heareth,
> But comfort first each function requireth.

And ‘wisdom to a hungry stomach is thin pottage,’ saith the shrewd reader of men. Little comfort was there with Shibli Bagarag, as he looked on the city of Shagpat the clothier! He cried aloud that his evil chance had got the better of him, and rolled his body in the sand, beating his breast, and conjuring up images of the profusion of dainties and the abundance of provision in Shiraz, exclaiming, ’Well-a-way and woe’s me! this it is to be selected for the diversion of him that plotteth against man.’ Truly is it written:

> On different heads misfortunes come:
> One bears them firm, another faints,
> While this one hangs them like a drum
> Whereon to batter loud complaints.

And of the three kinds, they who bang the drum outnumber the silent ones as do the billows of the sea the ships that swim, or the grains of sand the trees that grow; a noisy multitude.

Now, he was in the pits of despondency, even as one that yieldeth without further struggle to the waves of tempest at midnight, when he was ware of one standing over him,—a woman, old, wrinkled, a very crone, with but room for the drawing of a thread between her nose and her chin; she was, as is cited of them who betray the doings of Time,

> Wrinkled at the rind, and overripe at the core,

and every part of her nodded and shook like a tree sapped by the waters, and her joints were sharp as the hind-legs of a grasshopper; she was indeed one close-wrecked upon the rocks of Time.

Now, when the old woman had scanned Shibli Bagarag, she called to him, ’O thou! what is it with thee, that thou rollest as one reft of his wits?’

He answered her, ’I bewail my condition, which is beggary, and the lack of that which filleth with pleasantness.’

So the old woman said, ‘Tell me thy case.’

Page 3

He answered her, 'O old woman, surely it was written at my birth that I should take ruin from the readers of planets. Now, they proclaimed that I was one day destined for great things, if I stood by my tackle, I, a barber. Know then, that I have had many offers and bribes, seductive ones, from the rich and the exalted in rank; and I heeded them not, mindful of what was foretold of me. I stood by my tackle as a warrior standeth by his arms, flourishing them. Now, when I found great things came not to me, and 'twas the continuance of sameness and satiety with Baba Mustapha, my uncle, in Shiraz,—the tongue-wagger, the endless tattler,—surely I was advised by the words of the poet to go forth in search of what was wanting, and he says:

"Thou that dreamest an Event,
While Circumstance is but a waste of sand,
Arise, take up thy fortunes in thy hand,
And daily forward pitch thy tent."

Now, I passed from city to city, proclaiming my science, holding aloft my tackle. Wullahy! many adventures were mine, and if there's some day propitiousness in fortune, O old woman, I'll tell thee of what befell me in the kingdom of Shah Shamshureen: 'tis wondrous, a matter to draw down the lower jaw with amazement! Now, so it was, that in the eyes of one city I was honoured and in request, by reason of my calling, and I fared sumptuously, even as a great officer of state surrounded by slaves, lounging upon clouds of silk stuffs, circled by attentive ears: in another city there was no beast so base as I. Wah! I was one hunted of men and an abomination; no housing for me, nought to operate upon. I was the lean dog that lieth in wait for offal. It seemeth certain, O old woman, that a curse hath fallen on barbercraft in these days, because of the Identical, whose might I know not. Everywhere it is growing in disrepute; 'tis languishing! Nevertheless till now I have preserved my tackle, and I would descend on yonder city to exercise it, even for a livelihood, forgetting awhile great things, but that I dread men may have changed there also,—and there's no stability in them, I call Allah (whose name be praised!) to witness; so should I be a thing unsightly, subject to hateful castigation; wherefore is it that I am in that state described by the poet, when,

"Dreading retreat, dreading advance to make,
Round we revolve, like to the wounded snake."

Is not my case now a piteous one, one that toucheth the tender corner in man and woman?'

When she that listened had heard him to an end, she shook her garments, crying, 'O youth, son of my uncle, be comforted! for, if it is as I think, the readers of planets were right, and thou art thus early within reach of great things—nigh grasping them.'

Then she fell to mumbling and reciting jigs of verse, quaint measures; and she pored along the sand to where a line had been drawn, and saw that the footprints of the youth

were traced along it. Lo, at that sight she clapped her hands joyfully, and ran up to the youth, and peered in his face, exclaiming, 'Great things indeed! and praise thou the readers of planets, O nephew of the barber, they that sent thee searching the Event thou art to master. Wullahy! have I not half a mind to call thee already Master of the Event?'

Page 4

Then she abated somewhat in her liveliness, and said to him, 'Know that the city thou seest is the city of Shagpat, the clothier, and there's no one living on the face of earth, nor a soul that requireth thy craft more than he. Go therefore thou, bold of heart, brisk, full of the sprightliness of the barber, and enter to him. Lo, thou'lt see him lolling in his shop-front to be admired of this people—marvelled at. Oh! no mistaking of Shagpat, and the mole might discern Shagpat among myriads of our kind; and enter thou to him gaily, as to perform a friendly office, one meriting thanks and gratulations, saying, ''I will preserve thee the Identical!'' Now he'll at first feign not to understand thee, dense of wit that he is! but mince not matters with him, perform well thy operation, and thou wilt come to great things. What say I? 'tis certain that when thou hast shaved Shagpat thou wilt have achieved the greatest of things, and be most noteworthy of thy race, thou, Shibli Bagarag, even thou! and thou wilt be Master of the Event, so named in anecdotes and histories and records, to all succeeding generations.'

At her words the breast of Shibli Bagarag took in a great wind, and he hung his head a moment to ponder them; and he thought, 'There's provokingness in the speech of this old woman, and she's one that instigateth keenly. She called me by my name! Heard I that? 'Tis a mystery!' And he thought, 'Peradventure she is a Genie, one of an ill tribe, and she's luring me to my perdition in this city! How if that be so?' And again he thought, 'It cannot be! She's probably the Genie that presided over my birth, and promised me dower of great things through the mouths of the readers of planets.'

Now, when Shibli Bagarag had so deliberated, he lifted his sight, and lo, the old woman was no longer before him! He stared, and rubbed his eyes, but she was clean gone. Then ran he to the knolls and eminences that were scattered about, to command a view, but she was nowhere visible. So he thought, ''Twas a dream!' and he was composing himself to despair upon the scant herbage of one of those knolls, when as he chanced to gaze down the city below, he saw there a commotion and a crowd of people flocking one way; he thought, ''Twas surely no dream? come not Genii, and go they not, in the fashion of that old woman? I'll even descend on yonder city, and try my tackle on Shagpat, inquiring for him, and if he is there, I shall know I have had to do with a potent spirit. Allah protect me!'

So, having shut together the clasps of resolve, he arose and made for the gates of the city, and entered it by the principal entrance. It was a fair city, the fairest and chief of that country; prosperous, powerful; a mart for numerous commodities, handicrafts, wares; round it a wild country and a waste of sand, ruled by the lion in his wrath, and in it the tiger, the camelopard, the antelope, and other animals. Hither, in caravans, came the people of Oolb and the

Page 5

people of Damascus, and the people of Vatz, and they of Bagdad, and the Ringheez, great traders, and others, trading; and there was constant flow of intercourse between them and the city of Shagpat. Now as Shibli Bagarag paced up one of the streets of the city, he beheld a multitude in procession following one that was crowned after the manner of kings, with a glittering crown, clad in the yellow girdled robes, and he sporting a fine profusion of hair, unequalled by all around him, save by one that was a little behind, shadowed by his presence. So Shibli Bagarag thought, 'Is one of this twain Shagpat? for never till now have I seen such rare growths, and 'twere indeed a bliss to slip the blade between them and those masses of darkness that hang from them.' Then he stepped before the King, and made himself prominent in his path, humbling himself; and it was as he anticipated, the King prevented his removal by the slaves that would have dragged him away, and desired a hearing as to his business, and what brought him to the city, a stranger.

Thereupon Shibli Bagarag prostrated himself and cried, 'O great King, Sovereign of the Time! surely I am one to be looked on with the eye of grace; and I am nephew to Baba Mustapha, renowned in Shiraz, a barber;—I a barber, and it is my prayer, O King of the Age, that thou take me under thy protection and the shield of thy fair will, while I perform good work in this city by operating on the unshorn.'

When he had spoken, the King made a point of his eyebrows, and exclaimed, 'Shiraz? So they hold out against Shagpat yet, aha? Shiraz! that nest of them! that reptile's nest!' Then he turned to his Vizier beside him, and said, 'What shall be done with this fellow?'

So the Vizier replied, ''Twere well, O King, he be summoned to a sense of the loathsomeness of his craft by the agency of fifty stripes.'

The King said, ''Tis commanded!'

Then he passed forward in his majesty, and Shibli Bagarag was ware of the power of five slaves upon him, and he was hurried at a quick pace through the streets and before the eyes of the people, even to the common receptacle of felons, and there received from each slave severally ten thwacks with a thong: 'tis certain that at every thwack the thong took an airing before it descended upon him. Then loosed they him, to wander whither he listed; and disgust was strong in him by reason of the disgrace and the severity of the administration of the blows. He strayed along the streets in wretchedness, and hunger increased on him, assailing him first as a wolf in his vitals, then as it had been a chasm yawning betwixt his trunk and his lower members. And he thought, 'I have been long in chase of great things, and the hope of attaining them is great; yet, wullahy! would I barter all for one refreshing meal, and the sense of fulness. 'Tis so, and sad is it!' And he was mindful of the poet's words,—

Page 6

Who seeks the shadow to the substance sinneth,
And daily craving what is not, he thinneth:
  His lean ambition how shall he attain?
For with this constant foolishness he doeth,
He, waxing liker to what he pursueth,
  Himself becometh what he chased in vain!

And again:

Of honour half my fellows boast,—
  A thing that scorns and kills us:
Methinks that honours us the most
  Which nourishes and fills us.

So he thought he would of a surety fling far away his tackle, discard barbercraft, and be as other men, a mortal, forgotten with his generation. And he cried aloud, 'O thou old woman! thou deceiver! what halt thou obtained for me by thy deceits? and why put I faith in thee to the purchase of a thwacking? Woe's me! I would thou hadst been but a dream, thou crone! thou guileful parcel of belabouring bones!'

Now, while he lounged and strolled, and was abusing the old woman, he looked before him, and lo, one lolling in his shop-front, and people standing outside the shop, marking him with admiration and reverence, and pointing him out to each other with approving gestures. He who lolled there was indeed a miracle of hairiness, black with hair as he had been muzzled with it, and his head as it were a berry in a bush by reason of it. Then thought Shibli Bagarag, ''Tis Shagpat! If the mole could swear to him, surely can I.' So he regarded the clothier, and there was naught seen on earth like the gravity of Shagpat as he lolled before those people, that failed not to assemble in groups and gaze at him. He was as a sleepy lion cased in his mane; as an owl drowsy in the daylight. Now would he close an eye, or move two fingers, but of other motion made he none, yet the people gazed at him with eagerness. Shibli Bagarag was astonished at them, thinking, 'Hair! hair! There is might in hair; but there is greater might in the barber! Nevertheless here the barber is scorned, the grower of crops held in amazing reverence.' Then thought he, ''Tis truly wondrous the crop he groweth; not even King Shamshureen, after a thousand years, sported such mighty profusion! Him I sheared: it was a high task!—why not this Shagpat?'

Now, long gazing on Shagpat awoke in Shibli Bagarag fierce desire to shear him, and it was scarce in his power to restrain himself from flying at the clothier, he saying, 'What obstacle now? what protecteth him? Nay, why not trust to the old woman? Said she not I should first essay on Shagpat? and 'twas my folly in appealing to the King that brought on me that thwacking. 'Tis well! I'll trust to her words. Wullahy! will it not lead me to great things?'

So it was, that as he thought this he continued to keep eye on Shagpat, and the hunger that was in him passed, and became a ravenous vulture that flew from him and singled forth Shagpat as prey; and there was no help for it but in he must go and state his case to Shagpat, and essay shearing him.

Page 7

Now, when he was in the presence, he exclaimed, ’Peace, O vendor of apparel, unto thee and unto thine!’

Shagpat answered, ‘That with thee!’

Said Shibli Bagarag, ’I have heard of thee, O thou wonder! Wullahy! I am here to render homage to that I behold.’

Shagpat answered, ‘’Tis well!’

Then said Shibli Bagarag, ’Praise my discretion! I have even this day entered the city, and it is to thee I offer the first shave, O tangle of glory!’

At these words Shagpat darkened, saying gruffly, ’Thy jest is offensive, and it is unseasonable for staleness and lack of holiness.’

But Shibli Bagarag cried, ’No jest, O purveyor to the outward of us! but a very excellent earnest.’

Thereat the face of Shagpat was as an exceeding red berry in a bush, and he said angrily, ’Have done! no more of it! or haply my spleen will be awakened, and that of them who see with more eyes than two.’

Nevertheless Shibli Bagarag urged him, and he winked, and gesticulated, and pointed to his head, crying, ’Fall not, O man of the nicety of measure, into the trap of error; for ’tis I that am a barber, and a rarity in this city, even Shibli Bagarag of Shiraz! Know me nephew of the renowned Baba Mustapha, chief barber to the Court of Persia. Languishest thou not for my art? Lo! with three sweeps I’ll give thee a clean poll, all save the Identical! and I can discern and save it; fear me not, nor distrust my skill and the cunning that is mine.’

When he had heard Shibli Bagarag to a close, the countenance of Shagpat waxed fiery, as it had been flame kindled by travellers at night in a thorny bramble-bush, and he ruffled, and heaved, and was as when dense jungle-growths are stirred violently by the near approach of a wild animal in his fury, shouting in short breaths, ’A barber! a barber! Is’t so? can it be? To me? A barber! O thou, thou reptile! filthy thing! A barber! O dog! A barber? What? when I bid fair for the highest honours known? O sacrilegious wretch! monster! How? are the Afrites jealous, that they send thee to jibe me?’

Thereupon he set up a cry for his wife, and that woman rushed to him from an inner room, and fell upon Shibli Bagarag, belabouring him.

So, when she was weary of this, she said, ’O light of my eyes! O golden crop and adorable man! what hath he done to thee?’

Shagpat answered, ''Tis a barber! and he hath sworn to shave me, and leave me not save shorn!'

Hardly had Shagpat spoken this, when she became limp with the hearing of it. Then Shibli Bagarag slunk from the shop; but without the crowd had increased, seeing an altercation, and as he took to his heels they followed him, and there was uproar in the streets of the city and in the air above them, as of raging Genii, he like a started quarry doubling this way and that, and at the corners of streets and open places, speeding on till there was no breath in his body, the cry still after him that he had bearded Shagpat. At last they came up with him, and belaboured him each and all; it was a storm of thwacks that fell on the back of Shibli Bagarag. When they had wearied themselves in this fashion, they took him as had he been a stray bundle or a damaged bale, and hurled him from the gates of the city into the wilderness once more.

Page 8

Now, when he was alone, he staggered awhile and then flung himself to the earth, looking neither to the right nor to the left, nor above. All he could think was, ‘O accursed old woman!’ and this he kept repeating to himself for solace; as the poet says:

’Tis sure the special privilege of hate,
To curse the authors of our evil state.

As he was thus complaining, behold the very old woman before him! And she wheezed, and croaked, and coughed, and shook herself, and screwed her face into a pleasing pucker, and assumed womanish airs, and swayed herself, like as do the full moons of the harem when the eye of the master is upon them. Having made an end of these prettinesses, she said, in a tone of soft insinuation, ’O youth, nephew of the barber, look upon me.’

Shibli Bagarag knew her voice, and he would not look, thinking, ’Oh, what a dreadful old woman is this! just calling on her name in detestation maketh her present to us.’ So the old woman, seeing him resolute to shun her, leaned to him, and put one hand to her dress, and squatted beside him, and said, ‘O youth, thou hast been thwacked!’

He groaned, lifting not his face, nor saying aught. Then said she, ’Art thou truly in search of great things, O youth?’

Still he groaned, answering no syllable. And she continued, ’’Tis surely in sweet friendliness I ask. Art thou not a fair youth, one to entice a damsel to perfect friendliness?’

Louder yet did he groan at her words, thinking, ‘A damsel, verily!’ So the old woman said, ’I wot thou art angry with me; but now look up, O nephew of the barber! no time for vexation. What says the poet?—

“Cares the warrior for his wounds
When the steed in battle bounds?”

Moreover:

“Let him who grasps the crown strip not for shame,
Lest he expose what gain’d it blow and maim!”

So be it with thee and thy thwacking, O foolish youth! Hide it from thyself, thou silly one! What! thou hast been thwacked, and refusest the fruit of it—which is resoluteness, strength of mind, sternness in pursuit of the object!’

Then she softened her tone to persuasiveness, saying, ’’Twas written I should be the head of thy fortune, O Shibli Bagarag! and thou’lt be enviable among men by my aid, so

look upon me, and (for I know thee famished) thou shah presently be supplied with viands and bright wines and sweetmeats, delicacies to cheer thee.'

Now, the promise of food and provision was powerful with Shibli Bagarag, and he looked up gloomily. And the old woman smiled archly at him, and wriggled in her seat like a dusty worm, and said, 'Dost thou find me charming, thou fair youth?'

He was nigh laughing in her face, but restrained himself to reply, 'Thou art that thou art!'

Said she, 'Not so, but that I shall be.' Then she said, 'O youth, pay me now a compliment!'

Shibli Bagarag was at a loss what further to say to the old woman, for his heart cursed her for her persecutions, and ridiculed her for her vanities. At last he bethought himself of the saying of the poet, truly the offspring of fine wit, where he says:

Page 9

Expect no flatteries from me,
While I am empty of good things;
I'll call thee fair, and I'll agree
Thou boldest Love in silken strings,
When thou bast primed me from thy plenteous store!
But, oh! till then a clod am I:
No seed within to throw up flowers:
All's drouthy to the fountain dry:
To empty stomachs Nature lowers:
The lake was full where heaven look'd fair of yore!

So, when he had spoken that, the old woman laughed and exclaimed, 'Thou art apt! it is well said! Surely I excuse thee till that time! Now listen! 'Tis written we work together, and I know it by divination. Have I not known thee wandering, and on thy way to this city of Shagpat, where thou'lt some day sit throned? Now I propose to thee this—and 'tis an excellent proposal—that I lead thee to great things, and make thee glorious, a sitter in high seats, Master of an Event?'

Cried he, 'A proposal honourable to thee, and pleasant in the ear.'

She added, 'Provided thou marry me in sweet marriage.'

Thereat he stared on vacancy with a serious eye, and he could scarce credit her earnestness, but she repeated the same. So presently he thought, 'This old hag appeareth deep in the fountain of events, and she will be a right arm to me in the mastering of one, a torch in darkness, seeing there is wisdom in her as well as wickedness. The thwackings?—sad was their taste, but they're in the road leading to greatness, and I cannot say she put me out of that road in putting me where they were. Her age?—shall I complain of that when it is a sign she goeth shortly altogether?'

As he was thus debating he regarded the old woman stealthily, and she was in agitation, so that her joints creaked like forest branches in a wind, and the puckers of her visage moved as do billows of the sea to and fro, and the anticipations of a fair young bride are not more eager than what was visible in the old woman. Wheedlingly she looked at him, and shaped her mouth like a bird's bill to soften it; and she drew together her dress, to give herself the look of slimness, using all fascinations. He thought, ''Tis a wondrous old woman! Marriage would seem a thing of moment to her, yet is the profit with me, and I'll agree to it.' So he said, ''Tis a pact between us, O old woman!'

Now, the eyes of the old woman brightened when she heard him, and were as the eyes of a falcon that eyeth game, hungry with red fire, and she looked brisk with impatience, laughing a low laugh and saying, 'O youth, I must claim of thee, as is usual in such cases, the kiss of contract.'

So Shibli Bagarag was mindful of what is written,

> If thou wouldst take the great leap, be ready for the little jump,

and he stretched out his mouth to the forehead of the old woman. When he had done so, it was as though she had been illuminated, as when light is put in the hollow of a pumpkin. Then said she, 'This is well! this is a fair beginning! Now look, for thy fortune will of a surety follow. Call me now sweet bride, and knocker at the threshold of hearts!'

Page 10

So Shibli Bagarag sighed, and called her this, and he said, 'Forget not my condition, O old woman, and that I am nigh famished.'

Upon that she nodded gravely, and arose and shook her garments together, and beckoned for Shibli Bagarag to follow her; and the two passed through the gates of the city, and held on together through divers streets and thoroughfares till they came before the doors of a palace with a pillared entrance; and the old woman passed through the doors of the palace as one familiar to them, and lo! they were in a lofty court, built all of marble, and in the middle of it a fountain playing, splashing silvery. Shibli Bagarag would have halted here to breathe the cool refreshingness of the air, but the old woman would not; and she hurried on even to the opening of a spacious Hall, and in it slaves in circle round a raised seat, where sat one that was their lord, and it was the Chief Vizier of the King.

Then the old woman turned round sharply to Shibli Bagarag, and said, 'How of thy tackle, O my betrothed?'

He answered, 'The edge is keen, the hand ready.'

Then said she, ''Tis well.'

So the old woman put her two hands on the shoulders of Shibli Bagarag, saying, 'Make thy reverence to him on the raised seat; have faith in thy tackle and in me. Renounce not either, whatsoever ensueth. Be not abashed, O my bridegroom to be!'

Thereupon she thrust him in; and Shibli Bagarag was abashed, and played foolishly with his fingers, knowing not what to do. So when the Chief Vizier saw him he cried out, 'Who art thou, and what wantest thou?'

Now, the back of Shibli Bagarag tingled when he heard the Vizier's voice, and he said, 'I am, O man of exalted condition, he whom men know as Shibli Bagarag, nephew to Baba Mustapha, the renowned of Shiraz; myself barber likewise, proud of my art, prepared to exercise it.'

Then said the Chief Vizier, 'This even to our faces! Wonderful is the audacity of impudence! Know, O nephew of the barber, thou art among them that honour not thy art. Is it not written, For one thing thou shaft be crowned here, for that thing be thwacked there? So also it is written, The tongue of the insolent one is a lash and a perpetual castigation to him. And it is written, O Shibli Bagarag, that I reap honour from thee, and there is no help but that thou be made an example of.'

So the Chief Vizier uttered command, and Shibli Bagarag was ware of the power of five slaves upon him; and they seized him familiarly, and placed him in position, and made ready his clothing for the reception of fifty other thwacks with a thong, each several

thwack coming down on him with a hiss, as it were a serpent, and with a smack, as it were the mouth of satisfaction; and the people assembled extolled the Chief Vizier, saying, 'Well and valiantly done, O stay of the State! and such-like to the accursed race of barbers.'

Now, when they had passed before the Chief Vizier and departed, lo! he fell to laughing violently, so that his hair was agitated and was as a sand-cloud over him, and his countenance behind it was as the sun of the desert reflected ripplingly on the waters of a bubbling spring, for it had the aspect of merriness; and the Chief Vizier exclaimed, 'O Shibli Bagarag, have I not made fair show?'

Page 11

And Shibli Bagarag said, ‘Excellent fair show, O mighty one!’ Yet knew he not in what, but he was abject by reason of the thwacks.

So the Vizier said, ’Thou lookest lean, even as one to whom Fortune oweth a long debt. Tell me now of thy barbercraft: perchance thy gain will be great thereby?’

And Shibli Bagarag answered, ’My gain has been great, O eminent in rank, but of evil quality, and I am content not to increase it.’ And he broke forth into lamentations, crying in excellent verse:—

Why am I thus the sport of all—
A thing Fate knocketh like a ball
From point to point of evil chance,
Even as the sneer of Circumstance?
While thirsting for the highest fame,
 I hunger like the lowest beast:
To be the first of men I aim
 And find myself the least.

Now, the Vizier delayed not when he heard this to have a fair supply set before Shibli Bagarag, and meats dressed in divers fashions, spiced, and coloured, and with herbs, and wines in golden goblets, and slaves in attendance. So Shibli Bagarag ate and drank, and presently his soul arose from its prostration, and he cried, ’Wullahy! the head cook of King Shamshureen could have worked no better as regards the restorative process.’

Then said the Chief Vizier, ‘O Shibli Bagarag, where now is thy tackle?’

And Shibli Bagarag winked and nodded and turned his head in the manner of the knowing ones, and he recited the verse:

’Tis well that we are sometimes circumspect,
 And hold ourselves in witless ways deterred:
One thwacking made me seriously reflect;
 A *second* turned the cream of love to curd:
Most surely that profession I reject
 Before the fear of a prospective *third*.

So the Vizier said, ‘’Tis well, thou turnest verse neatly’ And he exclaimed extemporaneously:

If thou wouldst have thy achievement as high

As the wings of Ambition can fly:
If thou the clear summit of hope wouldst attain,

And not have thy labour in vain;
Be steadfast in that which impell'd, for the peace
Of earth he who leaves must have trust:
He is safe while he soars, but when faith shall cease,
Desponding he drops to the dust.

Then said he, 'Fear no further thwacking, but honour and prosperity in the place of it. What says the poet?—

"We faint, when for the fire
There needs one spark;
We droop, when our desire
Is near its mark."

Page 12

How near to it art thou, O Shibli Bagarag! Know, then, that among this people there is great reverence for the growing of hair, and he that is hairiest is honoured most, wherefore are barbers creatures of especial abhorrence, and of a surety flourish not. And so it is that I owe my station to the esteem I profess for the cultivation of hair, and to my persecution of the clippers of it. And in this kingdom is no one that beareth such a crop as I, saving one, a clothier, an accursed one!—and may a blight fall upon him for his vanity and his affectation of solemn priestliness, and his lolling in his shop-front to be admired and marvelled at by the people. So this fellow I would disgrace and bring to scorn,—this Shagpat! for he is mine enemy, and the eye of the King my master is on him. Now I conceive thy assistance in this matter, Shibli Bagarag,—thou, a barber.'

When Shibli Bagarag heard mention of Shagpat, and the desire for vengeance in the Vizier, he was as a new man, and he smelt the sweetness of his own revenge as a vulture smelleth the carrion from afar, and he said, 'I am thy servant, thy slave, O Vizier!' Then smiled he as to his own soul, and he exclaimed, 'On my head be it!'

And it was to him as when sudden gusts of perfume from garden roses of the valley meet the traveller's nostril on the hill that overlooketh the valley, filling him with ecstasy and newness of life, delicate visions. And he cried, 'Wullahy! this is fair; this is well! I am he that was appointed to do thy work, O man in office! What says the poet?—

> "The destined hand doth strike the fated blow:
> Surely the arrow's fitted to the bow!"

And he says:

> "The feathered seed for the wind delayeth,
> The wind above the garden swayeth,
> The garden of its burden knoweth,
> The burden falleth, sinketh, soweth."'

So the Vizier chuckled and nodded, saying, 'Right, right! aptly spoken, O youth of favour! 'Tis even so, and there is wisdom in what is written:

> "Chance is a poor knave;
> Its own sad slave;
> Two meet that were to meet:
> Life 's no cheat."'

Upon that he cried, 'First let us have with us the Eclipser of Reason, and take counsel with her, as is my custom.'

Now, the Vizier made signal to a slave in attendance, and the slave departed from the Hall, and the Vizier led Shibli Bagarag into a closer chamber, which had a smooth floor

of inlaid silver and silken hangings, the windows looking forth on the gardens of the palace and its fountains and cool recesses of shade and temperate sweetness. While they sat there conversing in this metre and that, measuring quotations, lo! the old woman, the affianced of Shibli Bagarag—and she sumptuously arrayed, in perfect queenliness, her head bound in a circlet of gems and gold, her figure lustrous with a full robe of flowing crimson silk;

Page 13

and she wore slippers embroidered with golden traceries, and round her waist a girdle flashing with jewels, so that to look on she was as a long falling water in the last bright slant of the sun. Her hair hung disarranged, and spread in a scattered fashion off her shoulders; and she was younger by many moons, her brow smooth where Shibli Bagarag had given the kiss of contract, her hand soft and white where he had taken it. Shibli Bagarag was smitten with astonishment at sight of her, and he thought, 'Surely the aspect of this old woman would realise the story of Bhanavar the Beautiful; and it is a story marvellous to think of; yet how great is the likeness between Bhanavar and this old woman that groweth younger!'

And he thought again, 'What if the story of Bhanavar be a true one; this old woman such as she—no other?'

So, while he considered her, the Vizier exclaimed, 'Is she not fair—my daughter?'

And the youth answered, 'She is, O Vizier, that she is!'

But the Vizier cried, 'Nay, by Allah! she is that she will be.' And the Vizier said, ''Tis she that is my daughter; tell me thy thought of her, as thou thinkest it.'

And Shibli Bagarag replied, 'O Vizier, my thought of her is, she seemeth indeed as Bhanavar the Beautiful—no other.'

Then the Vizier and the Eclipser of Reason exclaimed together, 'How of Bhanavar and her story, O youth? We listen!'

So Shibli Bagarag leaned slightly on a cushion of a couch, and narrated as followeth.

AND THIS IS THE STORY OF BHANAVAR THE BEAUTIFUL

Know that at the foot of a lofty mountain of the Caucasus there lieth a deep blue lake; near to this lake a nest of serpents, wise and ancient. Now, it was the habit of a damsel to pass by the lake early at morn, on her way from the tents of her tribe to the pastures of the flocks. As she pressed the white arch of her feet on the soft green-mossed grasses by the shore of the lake she would let loose her hair, looking over into the water, and bind the braid again round her temples and behind her ears, as it had been in a lucent mirror: so doing she would laugh. Her laughter was like the falls of water at moonrise; her loveliness like the very moonrise; and she was stately as a palm-tree standing before the moon.

This was Bhanavar the Beautiful.

Now, the damsel was betrothed to the son of a neighbouring Emir, a youth comely, well-fashioned, skilled with the bow, apt in all exercises; one that sat his mare firm as the trained falcon that fixeth on the plunging bull of the plains; fair and terrible in combat as the lightning that strideth the rolling storm; and it is sung by the poet:

When on his desert mare I see
  My prince of men,
  I think him then
As high above humanity
As he shines radiant over me.

Lo! like a torrent he doth bound,
  Breasting the shock
  From rock to rock:
A pillar of storm, he shakes the ground,

Page 14

His turban on his temples wound.

Match me for worth to be adored
A youth like him
In heart and limb!
Swift as his anger is his sword;
Softer than woman his true word.

Now, the love of this youth for the damsel Bhanavar was a consuming passion, and the father of the damsel and the father of the youth looked fairly on the prospect of their union, which was near, and was plighted as the union of the two tribes. So they met, and there was no voice against their meeting, and all the love that was in them they were free to pour forth far from the hearing of men, even where they would. Before the rising of the sun, and ere his setting, the youth rode swiftly from the green tents of the Emir his father, to waylay her by the waters of the lake; and Bhanavar was there, bending over the lake, her image in the lake glowing like the fair fulness of the moon; and the youth leaned to her from his steed, and sang to her verses of her great loveliness ere she was wistful of him. Then she turned to him, and laughed lightly a welcome of sweetness, and shook the falls of her hair across the blushes of her face and her bosom; and he folded her to him, and those two would fondle together in the fashion of the betrothed ones (the blessing of Allah be on them all!), gazing on each other till their eyes swam with tears, and they were nigh swooning with the fulness of their bliss. Surely 'twas an innocent and tender dalliance, and their prattle was that of lovers till the time of parting, he showing her how she looked best—she him; and they were forgetful of all else that is, in their sweet interchange of flatteries; and the world was a wilderness to them both when the youth parted with Bhanavar by the brook which bounded the tents of her tribe.

It was on a night when they were so together, the damsel leaning on his arm, her eyes toward the lake, and lo! what seemed the reflection of a large star in the water; and there was darkness in the sky above it, thick clouds, and no sight of the heavens; so she held her face to him sideways and said, 'What meaneth this, O my betrothed? for there is reflected in yonder lake a light as of a star, and there is no star visible this night.'

The youth trembled as one in trouble of spirit, and exclaimed, 'Look not on it, O my soul! It is of evil omen.'

But Bhanavar kept her gaze constantly on the light, and the light increased in lustre; and the light became, from a pale sad splendour, dazzling in its brilliancy. Listening, they heard presently a gurgling noise as of one deeply drinking. Then the youth sighed a heavy sigh and said, 'This is the Serpent of the Lake drinking of its waters, as is her wont once every moon, and whoso heareth her drink by the sheening of that light is under a destiny dark and imminent; so know I my days are numbered, and it was foretold of me, this!' Now the youth sought to dissuade Bhanavar from gazing on the

light, and he flung his whole body before her eyes, and clasped her head upon his breast, and clung about her, caressing her; yet she slipped from him, and she cried, ’Tell me of this serpent, and of this light.’

Page 15

So he said, ‘Seek not to hear of it, O my betrothed!’

Then she gazed at the light a moment more intently, and turned her fair shape toward him, and put up her long white fingers to his chin, and smoothed him with their softness, whispering, ‘Tell me of it, my life!’

And so it was that her winningness melted him, and he said, ’Bhanavar! the serpent is the Serpent of the Lake; old, wise, powerful; of the brood of the sacred mountain, that lifteth by day a peak of gold, and by night a point of solitary silver. In her head, upon her forehead, between her eyes, there is a Jewel, and it is this light.’

Then she said, ‘How came the Jewel there, in such a place?’

He answered, ’’Tis the growth of one thousand years in the head of the serpent.’

She cried, ‘Surely precious?’

He answered, ‘Beyond price!’

As he spake the tears streamed from him, and he was shaken with grief, but she noted nought of this, and watched the wonder of the light, and its increasing, and quivering, and lengthening; and the light was as an arrow of beams and as a globe of radiance. Desire for the Jewel waxed in her, and she had no sight but for it alone, crying, ’’Tis a Jewel exceeding in preciousness all jewels that are, and for the possessing it would I forfeit all that is.’

So he said sorrowfully, ’Our love, O Bhanavar? and our hopes of espousal?’

But she cried, ’No question of that! Prove now thy passion for me, O warrior! and win for me that Jewel.’

Then he pleaded with her, and exclaimed, ’Urge not this! The winning of the Jewel is worth my life; and my life, O Bhanavar—surely its breath is but the love of thee.’

So she said, ‘Thou fearest a risk?’

And he replied, ’Little fear I; my life is thine to cast away. This Jewel it is evil to have, and evil followeth the soul that hath it.’

Upon that she cried, ’A trick to cheat me of the Jewel! thy love is wanting at the proof.’

And she taunted the youth her betrothed, and turned from him, and hardened at his tenderness, and made her sweet shape as a thorn to his caressing, and his heart was charged with anguish for her. So at the last, when he had wept a space in silence, he cried, ’Thou hast willed it; the Jewel shall be thine, O my soul!’

Then said he, 'Thou hast willed it, O Bhanavar! and my life is as a grain of sand weighed against thy wishes; Allah is my witness! Meet me therefore here, O my beloved, at the end of one quarter-moon, even beneath the shadow of this palm-tree, by the lake, and at this hour, and I will deliver into thy hands the Jewel. So farewell! Wind me once about with thine arms, that I may take comfort from thee.'

When their kiss was over the youth led her silently to the brook of their parting—the clear, cold, bubbling brook—and passed from her sight; and the damsel was exulting, and leapt and made circles in her glee, and she danced and rioted and sang, and clapped her hands, crying, 'If I am now Bhanavar the Beautiful how shall I be when that Jewel is upon me, the bright light which beameth in the darkness, and needeth to light it no other light? Surely there will be envy among the maidens and the widows, and my name and the odour of my beauty will travel to the courts of far kings.'

Page 16

So was she jubilant; and her sisters that met her marvelled at her and the deep glow that was upon her, even as the glow of the Great Desert when the sun has fallen; and they said among themselves, 'She is covered all over with the blush of one that is a bride, and the bridegroom's kiss yet burneth upon Bhanavar!'

So they undressed her and she lay among them, and was all night even as a bursting rose in a vase filled with drooping lilies; and one of the maidens that put her hand on the left breast of Bhanavar felt it full, and the heart beneath it panting and beating swifter than the ground is struck by hooves of the chosen steed sent by the Chieftain to the city of his people with news of victory and the summons for rejoicing.

Now, the nights and the days of Bhanavar were even as this night, and she was as an unquiet soul till the appointed time for the meeting with her lover had come. Then when the sun was lighting with slant beam the green grass slope by the blue brook before her, Bhanavar arrayed herself and went forth gaily, as a martial queen to certain conquest; and of all the flowers that nodded to the setting,—yea, the crimson, purple, pure white, streaked-yellow, azure, and saffron, there was no flower fairer in its hues than Bhanavar, nor bird of the heavens freer in its glittering plumage, nor shape of loveliness such as hers. Truly, when she had taken her place under the palm by the waters of the lake, that was no exaggeration of the poet, where he says:

> Snows of the mountain-peaks were mirror'd there
> Beneath her feet, not whiter than they were;
> Not rosier in the white, that falling flush
> Broad on the wave, than in her cheek the blush.

And again:

She draws the heavens down to her,
So rare she is, so fair she is;
They flutter with a crown to her,
And lighten only where she is.

And he exclaims, in verse that applieth to her:

Exquisite slenderness!
Sleek little antelope!
Serpent of sweetness!
Eagle that soaringly
Wins me adoringly!
Teach me thy fleetness,
Vision of loveliness;
Turn to my tenderness!

Now, when the sun was lost to earth, and all was darkness, Bhanavar fixed her eyes upon an opening arch of foliage in the glade through which the youth her lover should come to her, and clasped both hands across her bosom, so shaken was she with eager longing and expectation. In her hunger for his approach, she would at whiles pluck up the herbage about her by the roots, and toss handfuls this way and that, chiding the peaceful song of the nightbird in the leaves above her head; and she was sinking with fretfulness, when lo! from the opening arch of the glade a sudden light, and Bhanavar knew it for the Jewel in the fingers of her betrothed, by the strength of its effulgence. Then she called to him joyfully a cry of welcome, and quickened his coming with her calls, and the youth alighted from

Page 17

his mare and left it to pasture, and advanced to her, holding aloft the Jewel. And the Jewel was of great size and purity, round, and all-luminous, throwing rays and beams everywhere about it, a miracle to behold,—the light in it shining, and as the very life of the blood, a sweet crimson, a ruby, a softer rose, an amethyst of tender hues: it was a full globe of splendours, showing like a very kingdom of the Blest; and blessed was the eye beholding it! So when he was within reach of her arm, the damsel sprang to him and caught from his hand the Jewel, and held it before her eyes, and danced with it, and pressed it on her bosom, and was as a creature giddy with great joy in possessing it. And she put the Jewel in her bosom, and looked on the youth to thank him for the Jewel with all her beauty; for the passion of a mighty pride in him who had won for her the Jewel exalted Bhanavar, and she said sweetly, 'Now hast thou proved to me thy love of me, and I am thine, O my betrothed,—wholly thine. Kiss me, then, and cease not kissing me, for bliss is in me.'

But the youth eyed her sorrowfully, even as one that hath great yearning, and no power to move or speak.

So she said again, in the low melody of deep love-tones, 'Kiss me, O my lover! for I desire thy kiss.'

Still he spake not, and was as a pillar of stone.

And she started, and cried, 'Thou art whole? without a hurt?' Then sought she to coax him to her with all the softness of her half-closed eyes and budded lips, saying, ''Twas an idle fear! and I have thee, and thou art mine, and I am thine; so speak to me, my lover! for there is no music like the music of thy voice, and the absence of it is the absence of all sweetness, and there is no pleasure in life without it.'

So the tenderness of her fondling melted the silence in him, and presently his tongue was loosed, and he breathed in pain of spirit, and his words were the words of the proverb:

> He that fighteth with poison is no match for the prick of a thorn.

And he said, 'Surely, O Bhanavar, my love for thee surpasseth what is told of others that have loved before us, and I count no loss a loss that is for thy sake.' And he sighed, and sang:

> Sadder than is the moon's lost light,
> Lost ere the kindling of dawn,
> To travellers journeying on,

The shutting of thy fair face from my sight.
Might I look on thee in death,
With bliss I would yield my breath.

Oh! what warrior dies
With heaven in his eyes?
O Bhanavar! too rich a prize!
The life of my nostrils art thou,
The balm-dew on my brow;

Thou art the perfume I meet as I speed o'er the plains,
The strength of my arms, the blood of my veins.

Then said he, 'I make nothing matter of complaint, Allah witnesseth! not even the long parting from her I love. What will be, will be: so was it written! 'Tis but a scratch, O my soul! yet am I of the dead and them that are passed away. 'Tis hard; but I smile in the face of bitterness.'

Page 18

Now, at his words the damsel clutched him with both her hands, and the blood went from her, and she was as a block of white marble, even as one of those we meet in the desert, leaning together, marking the wrath of the All-powerful on forgotten cities. And the tongue of the damsel was dry, and she was without speech, gazing at him with wide-open eyes, like one in trance. Then she started as a dreamer wakeneth, and flung herself quickly on the breast of the youth, and put up the sleeve from his arm, and beheld by the beams of the quarter-crescent that had risen through the leaves, a small bite on the arm of the youth her betrothed, spotted with seven spots of blood in a crescent; so she knew that the poison of the serpent had entered by that bite; and she loosened herself to the violence of her anguish, shrieking the shrieks of despair, so that the voice of her lamentation was multiplied about and made many voices in the night. Her spirit returned not to her till the crescent of the moon was yellow to its fall; and lo! the youth was sighing heavy sighs and leaning to the ground on one elbow, and she flung herself by him on the ground, seeking for herbs that were antidotes to the poison of the serpent, grovelling among the grasses and strewn leaves of the wood, peering at them tearfully by the pale beams, and startling the insects as she moved. When she had gathered some, she pressed them and bruised them, and laid them along his lips, that were white as the ball of an eye; and she made him drink drops of the juices of the herbs, wailing and swaying her body across him, as one that seeketh vainly to give brightness again to the flames of a dying fire. But now his time was drawing nigh, and he was weak, and took her hand in his and gazed on her face, sighing, and said, 'There is nothing shall keep me by thee now, O my betrothed, my beautiful! Weep not, for it is the doing of fate, and not thy doing. So ere I go, and the grave-cloth separates thy heart from my heart, listen to me. Lo, that Jewel! it is the giver of years and of powers, and of loveliness beyond mortal, yet the wearing of it availeth not in the pursuit of happiness. Now art thou Queen over the serpents of this lake: it was the Queen-serpent I slew, and her vengeance is on me here. Now art thou mighty, O Bhanavar! and look to do well by thy tribe, and that from which I spring, recompensing my father for his loss, pouring ointment on his affliction, for great is the grief of the old man, and he loveth me, and is childless.'

Then the youth fell back and was still; and Bhanavar put her ear to his mouth, and heard what seemed an inner voice murmuring in him, and it was of his infancy and his boyhood, and of his father the Emir's first gift to him, his horse Zoora, in old times. Presently the youth revived somewhat, and looked upon her; but his sight was glazed with a film, and she sang her name to him ere he knew her, and the sad sweetness of her name filled his soul, and he replied to her

Page 19

with it weakly, like a far echo that groweth fainter, ‘Bhanavar! Bhanavar! Bhanavar!’ Then a change came over him, and the pain of the poison and the passion of the death-throe, and he was wistful of her no more; but she lay by him, embracing him, and in the last violence of his anguish he hugged her to his breast. Then it was over, and he sank. And the twain were as a great wave heaving upon the shore; lo, part is wasted where it falleth; part draweth back into the waters. So was it!

Now the chill of dawn breathed blue on the lake and was astir among the dewy leaves of the wood, when Bhanavar arose from the body of the youth, and as she rose she saw that his mare Zoora, his father’s first gift, was snuffing at the ear of her dead master, and pawing him. At that sight the tears poured from her eyelids, and she sobbed out to the mare, ’O Zoora! never mare bore nobler burden on her back than thou in Zurvan my betrothed. Zoora! thou weepest, for death is first known to thee in the dearest thing that was thine; as to me, in the dearest that was mine! And O Zoora, steed of Zurvan my betrothed, there’s no loveliness for us in life, for the loveliest is gone; and let us die, Zoora, mare of Zurvan my betrothed, for what is dying to us, O Zoora, who cherish beyond all that which death has taken?’

So spake she to Zoora the mare, kissing her, and running her fingers through the long white mane of the mare. Then she stooped to the body of her betrothed, and toiled with it to lift it across the crimson saddle-cloth that was on the back of Zoora; and the mare knelt to her, that she might lay on her back the body of Zurvan; when that was done, Bhanavar paced beside Zoora the mare, weeping and caressing her, reminding her of the deeds of Zurvan, and the battles she had borne him to, and his greatness and his gentleness. And the mare went without leading. It was broad light when they had passed the glade and the covert of the wood. Before them, between great mountains, glimmered a space of rolling grass fed to deep greenness by many brooks. The shadow of a mountain was over it, and one slant of the rising sun, down a glade of the mountain, touched the green tent of the Emir, where it stood a little apart from the others of his tribe. Goats and asses of the tribe were pasturing in the quiet, but save them nothing moved among the tents, and it was deep peacefulness. Bhanavar led Zoora slowly before the tent of the Emir, and disburdened Zoora of the helpless weight, and spread the long fair limbs of the youth lengthwise across the threshold of the Emir’s tent, sitting away from it with clasped hands, regarding it. Ere long the Emir came forth, and his foot was on the body of his son, and he knew death on the chin and the eyes of Zurvan, his sole son. Now the Emir was old, and with the shock of that sight the world darkened before him, and he gave forth a groan and stumbled over the sunken breast of Zurvan, and stretched over him as one without life. When Bhanavar saw that

Page 20

old man stretched over the body of his son, she sickened, and her ear was filled with the wailings of grief that would arise, and she stood up and stole away from the habitations of the tribe, stricken with her guilt, and wandered beyond the mountains, knowing not whither she went, looking on no living thing, for the sight of a thing that moved was hateful to her, and all sounds were sounds of lamentation for a great loss.

Now, she had wandered on alone two days and two nights, and nigh morn she was seized with a swoon of weariness, and fell forward with her face to the earth, and lay there prostrate, even as one that is adoring the shrine; and it was on the sands of the desert she was lying. It chanced that the Chieftain of a desert tribe passed at midday by the spot, and seeing the figure of a damsel unshaded' by any shade of tree or herb or tent-covering, and prostrate on the sands, he reined his steed and leaned forward to her, and called to her. Then as she answered nothing he dismounted, and thrust his arm softly beneath her and lifted her gently; and her swoon had the whiteness of death, so that he thought her dead verily, and the marvel of her great loveliness in death smote the heart on his ribs as with a blow, and the powers of life went from him a moment as he looked on her and the long dark wet lashes that clung to her colourless face, as at night in groves where the betrothed ones wander, the slender leaves of the acacia spread darkly over the full moon. And he cried, ''Tis a loveliness that maketh the soul yearn to the cold bosom of death, so lovely, exceeding all that liveth, is she!'

After he had contemplated her longwhile, he snatched his sight from her, and swung her swiftly on the back of his mare, and leaned her on one arm, and sped westward over the sands of the desert, halting not till he was in the hum of many tents, and the sun of that day hung a red half-circle across the sand. He alighted before the tent of his mother, and sent women in to her. When his mother came forth to the greetings of her son, he said no word, but pointed to the damsel where he had leaned her at the threshold of her tent. His mother kissed him on the forehead, and turned her shoulder to peer upon the damsel. But when she had close view of Bhanavar, she spat, and scattered her hair, and stamped, and cried aloud, 'Away with her! this slut of darkness! there's poison on her very skirts, and evil in the look of her.'

Then said he, 'O Rukrooth, my mother! art thou lost to charity and the uses of kindliness and the laws of hospitality, that thou talkest this of the damsel, a stranger? Take her now in, and if she be past help, as I fear; be it thy care to give her decent burial; and if she live, O my mother, tend her for the love of thy son, and for the love of him be gentle with her.'

While he spake, Rukrooth his mother knelt over the damsel, as a cat that sniffeth the suspected dish; and she flashed her eyes back on him, exclaiming scornfully, 'So art thou befooled, and the poison is already in thee! But I will not have her, O my son! and thou, Ruark, my son, neither shalt thou have her. What! will I not die to save thee from a harm? Surely thy frown is little to me, my son, if I save thee from a harm; and the

damsel here is—I shudder to think what; but never lay shadow across my threshold dark as this!’

Page 21

Now, Ruark gazed upon his mother, and upon Bhanavar, and the face of Bhanavar was as a babe in sleep, and his soul melted to the parted sweetness of her soft little curved red lips and her closed eyelids, and her innocent open hands, where she lay at the threshold of the tent, unconscious of hardness and the sayings of the unjust. So he cried fiercely, 'No paltering, O Rukrooth, my mother: and if not to thy tent, then to mine!'

When she heard him say that in the voice of his anger, Rukrooth fixed her eyes on him sorrowfully, and sighed, and went up to him and drew his head once against her heart, and retreated into the tent, bidding the women that were there bring in the body of the damsel.

It was the morning of another day when Bhanavar awoke; and she awoke in a dream of Zoora, the mare of Zurvan her betrothed, that was dead, and the name of Zoora was on her tongue as she started up. She was on a couch of silk and leopard-skins; at her feet a fair young girl with a fan of pheasant feathers. She stared at the hangings of the tent, which were richer than those of her own tribe; the cloths, and the cushions, and the embroideries; and the strangeness of all was pain to her, she knew not why. Then wept she bitterly, and with her tears the memory of what had been came back to her, and she opened her arms to take into them the little girl that fanned her, that she might love something and be beloved awhile; and the child sobbed with her. After a time Bhanavar said, 'Where am I, and amongst whom, my child, my sister?'

And the child answered her, 'Surely in the tent of the mother of Ruark, the chief, even chief of the Beni-Asser, and he found thee in the desert, nigh dead. 'Tis so; and this morning will Ruark be gone to meet the challenge of Ebn Asrac, and they will fight at the foot of the Snow Mountains, and the shadow of yonder date-palm will be over our tent here at the hour they fight, and I shall sing for Ruark, and kneel here in the darkness of the shadow.'

While the child was speaking there entered to them a tall aged woman, with one swathe of a turban across her long level brows; and she had hard black eyes, and close lips and a square chin; and it was the mother of Ruark. She strode forward toward Bhanavar to greet her, and folded her legs before the damsel. Presently she said, 'Tell me thy story, and of thy coming into the hands of Ruark my son.'

Bhanavar shuddered. So Rukrooth dismissed the little maiden from the chamber of the tent, and laid her left hand on one arm of Bhanavar, and said, 'I would know whence comest thou, that we may deal well by thee and thy people that have lost thee.'

Page 22

The touch of a hand was as the touch of a corpse to Bhanavar, and the damsel was constrained to speak by a power she knew not of, and she told all to Rukrooth of what had been, the great misery, and the wickedness that was hers. Then Ruark's mother took hold of Bhanavar a strong grasp, and eyed her long, piteously, and with reproach, and rocked forward and back, and kept rocking to and fro, crying at intervals, 'O Ruark! my son! my son! this feared I, and thou art not the first! and I saw it, I saw it! Well-away! why came she in thy way, why, Ruark, my son, my fire-eye? Canst thou be saved by me, fated that thou art, thou fair-face? And wilt thou be saved by me, my son, ere thy story be told in tears as this one, that is as thine to me? And thou wilt seize a jewel, Ruark, O thou soul of wrath, my son, my dazzling Chief, and seize it to wear it, and think it bliss, this lovely jewel; but 'tis an anguish endless and for ever, my son! Woe's me! an anguish is she without end.'

Rukrooth continued moaning, and the thought that was in the mother of Ruark struck Bhanavar like a light in the land of despair that darkly illumineth the dreaded gulfs and abysses of the land, and she knew herself black in evil; and the scourge of her guilt was upon her, and she cursed herself before Rukrooth, and fawned before her, abasing her body. So Rukrooth was drawn to the damsel by the violence of her self-accusing and her abandonment to grief, and lifted her, and comforted her, and after awhile they had gentle speech together, and the two women opened their hearts and wept. Then it was agreed between them that Bhanavar should depart from the encampment of the tribe before the return of Ruark, and seek shelter among her own people again, and aid them and the tribe of Zurvan, her betrothed, by the might of the Jewel which was hers, fulfilling the desire of Zurvan. The mind of the damsel was lowly, and her soul yearned for the blessing of Rukrooth.

Darkness hung over the tent from the shadow of the date-palm when Bhanavar departed, and the blessing of Rukrooth was on her head. She went forth fairly mounted on a fresh steed; beside her two warriors of them that were left to guard the encampment of the tribe of Ruark in his absence; and Rukrooth watched at the threshold of her tent for the coming of Ruark.

When it was middle night, and the splendour of the moon was beaming on the edge of the desert, Bhanavar alighted to rest by the twigs of a tamarisk that stood singly on the sands. The two warriors tied the fetlocks of their steeds, and spread shawls for her, and watched over her while she slept. And the damsel dreamed, and the roaring of the lion was hoarse in her dream, and it was to her as were she the red whirlwind of the desert before whom all bowed in terror, the Arab, the wild horsemen, and the caravans of pilgrimage; and none could stay her, neither could she stay herself, for the curse of Allah was on men by reason of her

Page 23

guilt; and she went swinging great folds of darkness across kingdoms and empires of earth where joy was and peace of spirit; and in her track amazement and calamity, and the whitened bones of noble youths, valorous chieftains. In that horror of her dream she stood up suddenly, and thrust forth her hands as to avert an evil, and advanced a step; and with the act her dream was cloven and she awoke, and lo! it was sunrise; and where had been two warriors of the Beni-Asser, were now five, and besides her own steed five others, one the steed of Ruark, and Ruark with them that watched over her: pale was the visage of the Chief. Ruark eyed Bhanavar, and signalled to his followers, and they, when they had lifted the damsel to her steed and placed her in their front, mounted likewise, and flourished their lances with cries, and jerked their heels to the flanks of their steeds, and stretched forward till their beards were mixed with the tossing manes, and the dust rose after them crimson in the sun. So they coursed away, speeding behind their Chief and Bhanavar; sweet were the desert herbs under their crushing hooves! Ere the shadow of the acacia measured less than its height they came upon a spring of silver water, and Ruark leaped from his steed, and Bhanavar from hers, and they performed their ablutions by that spring, and ate and drank, and watered their steeds. While they were there Bhanavar lifted her eyes to Ruark, and said, ‘Whither takest thou me, O my Chief?’

His brow was stern, and he answered, ’Surely to the dwelling of thy tribe.’

Then she wept, and pulled her veil close, murmuring, ‘’Tis well!’

They spake no further, and pursued their journey toward the mountains and across the desert that was as a sea asleep in the blazing heat, and the sun till his setting threw no shade upon the sands bigger than what was broad above them. By the beams of the growing moon they entered the first gorge of the mountains. Here they relaxed the swiftness of their pace, picking their way over broken rocks and stunted shrubs, and the mesh of spotted creeping plants; all around them in shadow a freshness of noisy rivulets and cool scents of flowers, asphodel and rose blooming in plots from the crevices of the crags. These, as the troop advanced, wound and widened, gradually receding, and their summits, which were silver in the moonlight, took in the distance a robe of purple, and the sides of the mountains were rounded away in purple beyond a space of emerald pasture. Now, Ruark beheld the heaviness of Bhanavar, and that she drooped in her seat, and he halted her by a cave at the foot of the mountains, browed with white broom. Before it, over grass and cresses, ran a rill, a branch from others, larger ones, that went hurrying from the heights to feed the meadows below, and Bhanavar dipped her hand in the rill, and thought, ’I am no more as thou, rill of the mountain, but a desert thing! Thy way is forward, thy end before thee; but I go

Page 24

this way and that; my end is dark to me; not a life is mine that will have its close kissing the cold cheeks of the saffron-crocus. Cold art thou, and I—flames! They that lean to thee are refreshed, they that touch me perish.' Then she looked forth on the stars that were above the purple heights, and the blushes of inner heaven that streamed up the sky, and a fear of meeting the eyes of her kindred possessed her, and she cried out to Ruark, 'O Chief of the Beni-Asser, must this be? and is there no help for it, but that I return among them that look on me basely?'

Ruark stooped to her and said, 'Tell me thy name.'

She answered, 'Bhanavar is my name with that people.'

And he whispered, 'Surely when they speak of thee they say not Bhanavar solely, but Bhanavar the Beautiful?'

She started and sought the eye of the Chief, and it was fixed on her face in a softened light, as if his soul had said that thing. Then she sighed, and exclaimed, 'Unhappy are the beautiful! born to misery! Allah dressed them in his grace and favour for their certain wretchedness! Lo, their countenances are as the sun, their existence as the desert; barren are they in fruits and waters, a snare to themselves and to others!'

Now, the Chief leaned to her yet nearer, saying, 'Show me the Jewel.'

Bhanavar caught up her hands and clenched them, and she cried bitterly, ''Tis known to thee! She told thee, and there be none that know it not!'

Arising, she thrust her hand into her bosom, and held forth the Jewel in the palm of her white hand. When Ruark beheld the marvel of the Jewel, and the redness moving in it as of a panting heart, and the flashing eye of fire that it was, and all its glory, he cried, 'It was indeed a Jewel for queens to covet from the Serpent, and a prize the noblest might risk all to win as a gift for thee.'

Then she said, 'Thy voice is friendly with me, O Ruark! and thou scornest not the creature that I am. Counsel me as to my dealing with the Jewel.'

Surely the eyes of the Chief met the eyes of Bhanavar as when the brightest stars of midnight are doubled in a clear dark lake, and he sang in measured music:

'Shall I counsel the moon in her ascending?
Stay under that tall palm-tree through the night;
Rest on the mountain-slope
By the couching antelope,
O thou enthroned supremacy of light!
And for ever the lustre thou art lending,
Lean on the fair long brook that leaps and leaps,—

Silvery leaps and falls.
Hang by the mountain walls,
Moon! and arise no more to crown the steeps,
For a danger and dolour is thy wending!

And, O Bhanavar, Bhanavar the Beautiful! shall I counsel thee, moon of loveliness,—-bright, full, perfect moon!—counsel thee not to ascend and be seen and worshipped of men, sitting above them in majesty, thou that art thyself the Jewel beyond price? Wah! What if thou cast it from thee?—thy beauty remaineth!'

Page 25

And Bhanavar smote her palms in the moonlight, and exclaimed, ’How then shall I escape this in me, which is a curse to them that approach me?’

And he replied:

Long we the less for the pearl of the sea
Because in its depths there ’s the death we flee?
Long we the less, the less, woe’s me!
Because thou art deathly,—the less for thee?

She sang aloud among the rocks and the caves and the illumined waters:

Destiny! Destiny! why am I so dark?
I that have beauty and love to be fair.
Destiny! Destiny! am I but a spark
Track’d under heaven in flames and despair?
Destiny! Destiny! why am I desired
Thus like a poisonous fruit, deadly sweet?
Destiny! Destiny! lo, my soul is tired,
Make me thy plaything no more, I entreat!

Ruark laughed low, and said, ’What is this dread of Rukrooth my mother which weigheth on thee but silliness! For she saw thee willing to do well by her; and thou with thy Jewel, O Bhanavar, do thou but well by thyself, and there will be no woman such as thou in power and excellence of endowments, as there is nowhere one such as thou in beauty.’ Then he sighed to her, ‘Dare I look up to thee, O my Queen of Serpents?’ And he breathed as one that is losing breath, and the words came from him, ’My soul is thine!’

When she heard him say this, great trouble was on the damsel, for his voice was not the voice of Zurvan her betrothed; and she remembered the sorrow of Rukrooth. She would have fled from him, but a dread of the displeasure of the Chief restrained her, knowing Ruark a soul of wrath. Her eyelids dropped and the Chief gazed on her eagerly, and sang in a passion of praises of her; the fires of his love had a tongue, his speech was a torrent of flame at the feet of the damsel. And Bhanavar exclaimed, ’Oh, what am I, what am I, who have slain my love, my lover!—that one should love me and call on me for love? My life is a long weeping for him! Death is my wooer!’

Ruark still pleaded with her, and she said in fair gentleness, ’Speak not of it now in the freshness of my grief! Other times and seasons are there. My soul is but newly widowed!’

Fierce was the eye of the Chief, and he sprang up, crying, ’By the life of my head, I know thy wiles and the reading of these delays: but I’ll never leave thee, nor lose sight

of thee, Bhanavar! And think not to fly from me, thou subtle, brilliant Serpent! for thy track is my track, and thy condition my condition, and thy fate my fate. By Allah! this is so.'

Then he strode from her swiftly, and called to his Arabs. They had kindled a fire to roast the flesh of a buffalo, slaughtered by them from among a herd, and were laughing and singing beside the flames of the fire. So by the direction of their Chief the Arabs brought slices of sweet buffalo-flesh to Bhanavar, with cakes of grain: and Bhanavar ate alone, and drank from the waters before her. Then they laid for her a couch within the cave, and the aching of her spirit was lulled, and she slept there a dreamless sleep till morning.

Page 26

By the morning light Bhanavar looked abroad for the Chief, and he was nowhere by. A pang of violent hope struck through her, and she pressed her bosom, praying he might have left her, and climbed the clefts and ledges of the mountain to search over the fair expanse of pasture beyond, for a trace of him departing. The sun was on the heads of the heavy flowers, and a flood of gold down the gorges, and a delicate rose hue on the distant peaks and upper dells of snow, which were as a crown to the scene she surveyed; but no sight of Ruark had she. And now she was beginning to rejoice, but on a sudden her eye caught far to east a glimpse of something in motion across an even slope of the lower hills leaning to the valley; and it was a herd that rushed forward, like a black torrent of the mountains flinging foam this way and that, and after the herd and at the sides of the herd she distinguished the white cloaks and scarfs and glittering steel of the Arabs of Ruark. Presently she saw a horseman break from the rest, and race in a line toward her. She knew this one for Ruark, and sighed and descended slowly to meet him. The greeting of the Chief was sharp, his manner wild, and he said little ere he said, 'I will see thee under the light of the Jewel, so tie it in a band and set it on thy brow, Bhanavar!'

Her mouth was open to intercede with his desire, but his forehead became black as night, and he shouted in the thunder of his lion-voice, 'Do this!'

She took the Jewel from its warm bed in her bosom, and held it, and got together a band of green weeds, and set it in the middle of the band, and tied the band on her brow, and lifted her countenance to the Chief. Ruark stood back from her and gazed on her; and he would have veiled his sight from her, but his hand fell. Then the might of her loveliness seized Bhanavar likewise, and the full orbs of her eyes glowed on the Chief as on a mirror, and she moved her serpent figure scornfully, and smiled, saying, 'Is it well?'

And he, when he could speak, replied, ''Tis well! I have seen thee! for now can I die this day, if it be that I am to die. And well it is! for now know I there is truly no place but the tomb can hold me from thee!'

Bhanavar put the Jewel from her brow into her bosom, and questioned him, 'What is thy dread this day, O my Chief?'

He answered her gravely, 'I have seen Rukrooth my mother while I slept; and she was weeping, weeping by a stream, yea, a stream of blood; and it was a stream that flowed in a hundred gushes from her own veins. The sun of this dawn now, seest thou not? 'tis overcrimson; the vulture hangeth low down yonder valley.' And he cried to her, 'Haste! mount with me; for I have told Rukrooth a thing; and I know that woman crafty in the thwarting of schemes; such a fox is she where aught accordeth not with her forecastings, and the judgment of her love for me! By Allah! 'twere well we clash not; for that I will do I do, and that she will do doth she.'

Page 27

So the twain mounted their steeds, and Ruark gathered his Arabs and placed them, some in advance, some on either side of Bhanavar; and they rode forward to the head of the valley, and across the meadows, through the blushing crowds of flowers, baths of freshest scents, cool breezes that awoke in the nostrils of the mares neighings of delight; and these pranced and curvetted and swung their tails, and gave expression to their joy in many graceful fashions; but a gloom was on Ruark, and a quick fire in his falcon-eye, and he rode with heels alert on the flanks of his mare, dashing onward to right and left, as do they that beat the jungle for the crouching tiger. Once, when he was well-nigh half a league in front, he wheeled his mare, and raced back full on Bhanavar, grasping her bridle, and hissing between his teeth, 'Not a soul shall have thee save I: by the tomb of my fathers, never, while life is with us!'

And he taunted her with bitter names, and was as one in the madness of intoxication, drunken with the aspect of her matchless beauty and with exceeding love for her. And Bhanavar knew that the dread of a mishap was on the mind of the Chief.

Now, the space of pasture was behind them a broad lake of gold and jasper, and they entered a region of hills, heights, and fastnesses, robed in forests that rose in rounded swells of leafage, each over each—above all points of snow that were as flickering silver flames in the farthest blue. This was the country of Bhanavar, and she gazed mournfully on the glades of golden green and the glens of iron blackness, and the wild flowers, wild blossoms, and weeds well known to her that would not let her memory rest, and were wistful of what had been. And she thought, 'My sisters tend the flocks, my mother spinneth with the maidens of the tribe, my father hunteth; how shall I come among them but strange? Coldly will they regard me; I shall feel them shudder when they take me to their bosoms.'

She looked on Ruark to speak with him, but the mouth of the Chief was set and white; and even while she looked, cries of treason and battle arose from the Arabs that were ahead, hidden by a branching wind of the way round a mountain slant. Then the eyes of the Chief reddened, his nostrils grew wide, and the darkness of his face was as flame mixed with smoke, and he seized Bhanavar and hastened onward, and lo! yonder were his men overmatched, and warriors of the mountains bursting on them from an ambush on all sides. Ruark leapt in his seat, and the light of combat was on him, and he dug his knees into his mare, and shouted the war-cry of his tribe, lifting his hands as it were to draw down wrath from the very heavens, and rushed to the encounter. Says the poet:

> Hast thou seen the wild herd by the jungle galloping close?
> With a thunder of hooves they trample what heads may oppose:
> Terribly, crushingly, tempest-like, onward they sweep:
> But a spring from the reeds, and the panther is sprawling in air,
> And with muzzle to dust and black beards foam-lash'd, here and there,
> Scatter'd they fly, crimson-eyed, track'd with blood to the deep.

Page 28

Such was the onset of Ruark, his stroke the stroke of death; and ere the echoes had ceased rolling from that cry of his, the mountain-warriors were scattered before him on the narrow way, hurled down the scrub of the mountain, even as dead leaves and loosened stones; so like an arm of lightning was the Chief!

Now Ruark pursued them, and was lost to Bhanavar round a slope of the mountain. She quickened her pace to mark him in the glory of the battle, and behold! a sudden darkness enveloped her, and she felt herself in the swathe of tightened folds, clasped in an arm, and borne rapidly she knew not whither, for she could hear and see nothing. It was to her as were she speeding constantly downward in darkness to the lower realms of the Genii of the Caucasus, and every sense, and even that of fear, was stunned in her. How long an interval had elapsed she knew not, when the folds were unwound; but it was light of day, and the faces of men, and they were warriors that were about her, warriors of the mountain; but of Ruark and his Arabs no voice. So she said to them, 'What do ye with me?'

And one among them, that was a youth of dignity and grace, and a countenance like morning on the mountains, answered, 'The will of Rukrooth, O lady! and it is the plight of him we bow to with Rukrooth, mother of the Desert-Chief.'

She cried, 'Is he here, the Prince, that I may speak with him?'

The same young warrior made answer, 'Not so; forewarned was he, and well for him!'

Bhanavar drew her robe about her and was mute. Ere the setting of the moon they journeyed on with her; and continued so three days and nights through the defiles and ravines and matted growths of the mountains. On the fourth dawn they were on the summit of a lofty mountain-rise; below them the sun, shooting a current of gold across leagues of sea. Then he that had spoken with Bhanavar said, 'A sail will come,' and a sail came from under the sun. Scarce had the ship grated shore when the warriors lifted Bhanavar, and waded through the water with her, and placed her unwetted in the ship, and one, the fair youth among the warriors, sprang on board with her, remaining by her. So the captain pushed off, and the wind filled the sails, and Bhanavar was borne over the lustre of the sea, that was as a changing opal in its lustre, even as a melted jewel flowing from the fingers of the maker, the Almighty One. The ship ceased not sailing till they came to a narrow strait, where the sea was but a river between fair sloping hills alight with towers and palaces, opening a way to a great city that was in its radiance over the waters of the sea as the aspect of myriad sheeny white doves breasting the wave. Hitherto the young warrior had held aloof in coldness of courtesy from Bhanavar; but now he sat by her, and said, 'The bond between my prince and Rukrooth is accomplished, and it was to snatch thee from the Chief of the Beni-Asser and bring thee even to this city.'

Page 29

Bhanavar exclaimed, ’Allah be praised in all things, and his will be done!’

The youth continued, ’Thou art alone here, O lady, exposed to the perils of loneliness; surely it were well if I linger with thee awhile, and see to thy welfare in this city, even as a brother with a sister; and I will deal honourably by thee.’

Bhanavar looked on the young warrior and blushed at his exceeding sweetness with her; the soft freshness of his voice was to her as the blossom-laden breeze in the valleys of the mountains, and she breathed low the words of her gratitude, saying, ’If I am not a burden, let this be so.’

Then said he, ’Know me by my name, which is Almeryl; and that we seem indeed of one kin, make known unto me thine.’

She replied, ‘Ill-omened is it, this name of Bhanavar!’

The youth among warriors gazed on her a moment with the fluttering eye of bashfulness, and said, ’Can they that have marked thee call thee other than Bhanavar the Beautiful?’

She remembered that Ruark had spoken in like manner, and the curse of her beauty smote her, and she thought, ’This fair youth, he hath not a mother to watch over him and ward off souls of evil. I dread there will come a mishap to him through me; Allah shield him from it!’ And she sought to dissuade him from resting by her, but he cried, ’’Tis but a choice to dwell with thee or with the dogs in the street outside thy door, O Bhanavar!’

Now, the ship sailed close up to the quay, and cast anchor there in the midst of other ships of merchandise. Almeryl then threw a robe over his mountain dress and spoke with the captain apart, and he and Bhanavar took leave of the captain, and landed on the quay among the porters, and of these one stepped forward to them and shouted cheerily, ’Where be the burdens and the bales, O ye, fair couple fashioned in the eye of elegant proportions? Ye twin palm-trees, male and female! Wullahy! broad is the back of your servant.’

Almeryl beckoned to him that he should follow them, and he followed them, blessing the wind that had brought them to that city and the day. So they passed through the streets and lanes of the city, and the porter pointed out this house and that house wanting an occupant, and Almeryl fixed on one in an open thoroughfare that had before it a grass-plot, and behind a garden with fountains and flowers, and grass-knolls shaded by trees; and he paid down the half of its price, and had it furnished before nightfall sumptuously, and women in it to wait on Bhanavar, and stuffs and goods, and scents for the bath,—all luxuries whatsoever that tradesmen and merchants there could give in exchange for gold. Then Almeryl dismissed the porter in Allah’s name, and gladdened his spirit with a

gift over the due of his hire that exalted him in the eyes of the porter, and the porter went from him, exclaiming, ‘In extremity Ukleet is thy slave!’ and he sang:

Shouldst thou see a slim youth with a damsel arriving,
Be sure ’tis the hour when thy fortune is thriving;
A generous fee makes the members so supple
That over the world they could carry this couple.

Page 30

Now so it was that the youth Almeryl and the damsel Bhanavar abode in the city they had come to weeks and months, and life to either of them as the flowing of a gentle stream, even as brother and sister lived they, chastely, and with temperate feasting. Surely the youth loved her with a great love, and the heart of Bhanavar turned not from him, and was won utterly by his gentleness and nobleness and devotion; and they relied on each other's presence for any joy, and were desolate in absence, as the poet says:

> When we must part, love,
> Such is my smart, love,
> Sweetness is savourless,
> Fairness is favourless!
> But when in sight, love,
> We two unite, love,
> Earth has no sour to me;
> Life is a flower to me!

And with the increase of every day their passion increased, and the revealing light in their eyes brightened and was humid, as is sung by him that luted to the rage of hearts:

Evens star yonder
Comes like a crown on us,
Larger and fonder
Grows its orb down on us;
So, love, my love for thee
Blossoms increasingly;
So sinks it in the sea,
Waxing unceasingly.

On a night, when the singing-girls had left them, the youth could contain himself no more, and caught the two hands of Bhanavar in his, saying, 'This that is in my soul for thee thou knowest, O Bhanavar! and 'tis spoken when I move and when I breathe, O my loved one! Tell me then the cause of thy shunning me whenever I would speak of it, and be plain with thee.'

For a moment Bhanavar sought to release herself from his hold, but the love in his eyes entangled her soul as in a net, and she sank forward to him, and sighed under his chin, ''Twas indeed my very love of thee that made me.'

The twain embraced and kissed a long kiss, and leaned sideways together, and Bhanavar said, 'Hear me, what I am.'

Then she related the story of the Serpent and the Jewel, and of the death of her betrothed. When it was ended, Almeryl cried, 'And was this all?—this that severed us?' And he said, 'Hear what I am.'

So he told Bhanavar how Rukrooth, the mother of Ruark, had sent messengers to the Prince his father, warning him of the passage of Ruark through the mountains with one a Queen of Serpents, a sorceress, that had bewitched him and enthralled him in a mighty love for her, to the ruin of Ruark; and how the Chief was on his way with her to demand her in marriage at the hands of her parents; and the words of Rukrooth were, ’By the service that was between thee and my husband, and by the death he died, O Prince, rescue the Chief my son from this damsel, and entrap her from him, and have her sent even to the city of the inland sea, for no less a distance than that keepeth Ruark from her.’

Page 31

And Almeryl continued, 'I questioned the messengers myself, and they told me the marvel of thy loveliness and the peril to him that looked on it, so I swore there was no power should keep me from a sight of thee, O my loved one! my prize! my life! my sleek antelope of the hills! Surely when my father appointed the warriors to lie in wait for thy coming, I slipped among them, so that they thought it ordered by him I should head them. The rest is known to thee, O my fountain of blissfulness! but the treachery to Ruark was the treachery of Ebn Asrac, not of such warriors as we; and I would have fallen on Ebn Asrac, had not Ruark so routed that man without faith. 'Twas all as I have said, blessed be Allah and his decrees!'

Bhanavar gazed on her beloved, and the bridal dew overflowed her underlids, and she loosed her hair to let it flow, part over her shoulders, part over his, and in sighs that were the measure of music she sang:

I thought not to love again!
But now I love as I loved not before;
I love not; I adore!
O my beloved, kiss, kiss me! waste thy kisses like a rain.
Are not thy red lips fain?
Oh, and so softly they greet!
Am I not sweet?
Sweet must I be for thee, or sweet in vain:
Sweet to thee only, my dear love!
The lamps and censers sink, but cannot cheat
These eyes of thine that shoot above
Trembling lustres of the dove!
A darkness drowns all lustres: still I see
Thee, my love, thee!
Thee, my glory of gold, from head to feet!
Oh, how the lids of the world close quite when our lips meet!

Almeryl strained her to him, and responded:

My life was midnight on the mountain side;
Cold stars were on the heights:
There, in my darkness, I had lived and died,
Content with nameless lights.
Sudden I saw the heavens flush with a beam,
And I ascended soon,
And evermore over mankind supreme,
Stood silver in the moon.

And he fell playfully into a new metre, singing:

Who will paint my beloved
 In musical word or colour?
Earth with an envy is moved:
 Sea-shells and roses she brings,
 Gems from the green ocean-springs,
 Fruits with the fairy bloom-dews,
 Feathers of Paradise hues,
 Waters with jewel-bright falls,
 Ore from the Genii-halls:
All in their splendour approved;
All; but, match'd with my beloved,
 Darker, and denser, and duller.

Then she kissed him for that song, and sang:

Once to be beautiful was my pride,
 And I blush'd in love with my own bright brow:
Once, when a wooer was by my side,
 I worshipp'd the object that had his vow:
Different, different, different now,
 Different now is my beauty to me:
Different, different, different now!
 For I prize it alone because prized by thee.

Page 32

Almeryl stretched his arm to the lattice, and drew it open, letting in the soft night wind, and the sound of the fountain and the bulbul and the beam of the stars, and versed to her in the languor of deep love:

Whether we die or we live,
 Matters it now no more:
Life has nought further to give:
 Love is its crown and its core.
Come to us either, we're rife,—
 Death or life!

Death can take not away,
 Darkness and light are the same:
We are beyond the pale ray,
 Wrapt in a rosier flame:
Welcome which will to our breath;
 Life or death!

So did these two lovers lute and sing in the stillness of the night, pouring into each other's ears melodies from the new sea of fancy and feeling that flowed through them.

Ere they ceased their sweet interchange of tenderness, which was but one speech from one soul, a glow of light ran up the sky, and the edge of a cloud was fired; and in the blooming of dawn Almeryl hung over Bhanavar, and his heart ached to see the freshness of her wondrous loveliness; and he sang, looking on her:

The rose is living in her cheeks,
 The lily in her rounded chin;
She speaks but when her whole soul speaks,
 And then the two flow out and in,
And mix their red and white to make
 The hue for which I'd Paradise forsake.

Her brow from her black falling hair
 Ascends like morn: her nose is clear
As morning hills, and finely fair
 With pearly nostrils curving near
The red bow of her upper lip;
 Her bosom's the white wave beneath the ship.

The fair full earth, the enraptured skies,
 She images in constant play:
Night and the stars are in her eyes,
 But her sweet face is beaming day,

A bounteous interblush of flowers:
A dewy brilliance in a dale of bowers.

Then he said, ’And this morning shall our contract of marriage be written and witnessed?’

She answered, ‘As my lord willeth; I am his.’

Said he, ‘And it is thy desire?’

She nestled to him and dinted his bare arm with the pearls of her mouth for a reply.

So that morning their contract of marriage was written, and witnessed by the legal number of witnesses in the presence of the Cadi, with his license on it endorsed; and Bhanavar was the bride of Almeryl, he her husband. Never was youth blessed in a bride like that youth!

Now, the twain lived together the circle of a full year of delightful marriage, and love lessened not in them, but was as the love of the first day. Little cared they, having each other, for the loneliness of their dwelling in that city, where they knew none save the porter Ukleet, who went about their commissions. Sometimes to amuse themselves with his drolleries, they sent for him, and were bountiful with him, and made him drink with them on the lawn of their garden leaning to an inlet of the sea; and then he would entertain them with all the scandal and gossip of the city, and its little folk and great. When he was outrageously extravagant in these stories of his, Bhanavar exclaimed, ’Are such things, now? can it be true?’

Page 33

And he nodded in his conceit, and replied loftily, ”Tis certain, O my Prince and Princess! ye be from the mountains, unused to the follies and dissipations of men where they herd; and ye know them not, men!’

The lamps being lit in the garden to the edges of the water, where they lay one evening, Ukleet, who had been in his briskest mood, became grave, and put his forefinger to the side of his nose and began, ’Hear ye aught of the great tidings? Wullahy! no other than the departure of the wife of Boolp, the broker, into darkness. ’Tis of Boolp ye hire this house, and had ye a hundred houses in this city ye might have had them from Boolp the broker, he that’s rich; and glory to them whom Allah prospereth, say I! And I mention this matter, for ’tis certain now Boolp will take another wife to him to comfort him, for there be two things beloved of Boolp, and therein manifesteth he taste and the discernment of excellence, and what is approved; and of these two things let the love of his hoards of the yellow-skinned treasure go first, and after that attachment to the silver-skinned of creation, the fair, the rapturous; even to them! So by this see ye not Boolp will yearn in his soul for another spouse? Now, O ye well-matched pair! what a chance were this, knew ye but a damsel of the mountains, exquisite in symmetry, a moon to enrapture the imagination of Boolp, and in the nature of things herit his possessions! for Boolp is an old man, even very old.’

They laughed, and cried, ’We know not of such a damsel, and the broker must go unmarried for us.’

When next Ukleet sat before them, Almeryl took occasion to speak of Boolp again, and said, ‘This broker, O Ukleet, is he also a lender of money?’

Ukleet replied, ’O my Prince, he is or he is not: ’tis of the maybes. I wot truly Boolp is one that baiteth the hook of an emergency.’

The brows of the Prince were downcast, and he said no more; but on the following morning he left Bhanavar early under a pretext, and sallied forth from the house of their abode alone.

Since their union in that city they had not been once apart, and Bhanavar grieved and thought, ‘Waneth his love for me?’ and she called her women to her, and dressed in this dress and that dress, and was satisfied with none. The dews of the bath stood cold upon her, and she trembled, and fled from mirror to mirror, and in each she was the same surpassing vision of loveliness. Then her women held a glass to her, and she examined herself closely, if there might be a fleck upon her anywhere, and all was as the snow of the mountains on her round limbs sloping in the curves of harmony, and the faint rose of the dawn on slants of snow was their hue. Twining her fingers and sighing, she thought, ’It is not that! he cannot but think me beautiful.’ She smiled a melancholy smile at her image in the glass, exclaiming, ’What availeth it, thy beauty? for he is away

and looketh not on thee, thou vain thing! And what of thy loveliness if the light illumine it not, for he is the light to thee, and it is darkness when he's away.'

Page 34

Suddenly she thought, 'What's that which needeth to light it no other light? I had well-nigh forgotten it in my bliss, the Jewel!' Then she went to a case of ebony-wood, where she kept the Jewel, and drew it forth, and shone in the beam of a pleasant imagination, thinking, ''Twill surprise him!' And she robed herself in a robe of saffron, and set lesser gems of the diamond and the emerald in the braid of her hair, and knotted the Serpent Jewel firmly in a band of gold-threaded tissue, and had it woven in her hair among the braids. In this array she awaited his coming, and pleased her mind with picturing his astonishment and the joy that would be his. Mute were the women who waited on her, for in their lives they had seen no such sight as Bhanavar beneath the beams of the Jewel, and the whole chamber was aglow with her.

Now, in her anxiety she sent them one and one repeatedly to look forth at the window for the coming of the Prince. So, when he came not she went herself to look forth, and stretched her white neck beyond the casement. While her head was exposed, she heard a cry of some one from the house in the street opposite, and Bhanavar beheld in the house of the broker an old wrinkled fellow that gesticulated to her in a frenzy. She snatched her veil down and drew in her head in anger at him, calling to her maids, 'What is yonder hideous old dotard?'

And they answered, laughing, ''Tis indeed Boolp the broker, O fair mistress and mighty!'

To divert herself she made them tell her of Boolp, and they told her a thousand anecdotes of the broker, and verses of him, and the constancy of his amorous condition, and his greediness. And Bhanavar was beguiled of her impatience till it was evening, and the Prince returned to her. So they embraced, and she greeted him as usual, waiting what he would say, searching his countenance for a token of wonderment; but the youth knew not that aught was added to her beauty, for he looked nowhere save in her eyes. Bhanavar was nigh weeping with vexation, and pushed him from her, and chid him with lack of love and weariness of her; and the eye of the Prince rose to her brow to read it, and he saw the Jewel. Almeryl clapped his hands, crying, 'Wondrous! And this thy surprise for me, my fond one? beloved of mine!' Then he gazed on her a space, and said, 'Knowest thou, thou art terrible in thy beauty, Bhanavar, and hast the face of lightning under that Jewel of the Serpent?'

She kissed him, whispering, 'Not lightning to thee! Yet lovest thou Bhanavar?'

He replied, 'Surely so; and all save Bhanavar in this world is the darkness of oblivion to me.'

When it was the next morning, Almeryl rose to go forth again. Ere he had passed the curtain of the chamber Bhanavar caught him by the arm, and she was trembling violently. Her visage was a wild inquiry: 'Thou goest?—and again? There is something hidden from me!'

Almeryl took her to his heart, and caressed her with fond flatteries, saying, ’Ask but what is beating under these two pomegranates, and thou learnest all of me.’

Page 35

But she stamped her foot, crying, 'No! no! I will hear it! There's a mystery.'

So he said, 'Well, then, it is this only; small matter enough. I have a business with the captain of the vessel that brought us hither, and I must see him ere he setteth sail; no other than that, thou jealous, watchful star! Pierce me with thine eyes; it is no other than that.'

She levelled her lids at him till her lustrous black eyelashes were as arrows, and mimicked him softly, 'No other than that?'

And he replied, 'Even so.'

Then she clung to him like a hungry creature, repeating, 'Even so,' and let him go. Alone, she summoned a slave, a black, and bade him fetch to her without delay Ukleet the porter, and the porter was presently ushered in to her, protesting service and devotion. So, she questioned him of Almeryl, and the Prince's business abroad, what he knew of it. Ukleet commenced reciting verses on the ills of jealousy, but Bhanavar checked him with an eye that Ukleet had seen never before in woman or in man, and he gaped at her helplessly, as one that has swallowed a bone. She laughed, crying, 'Learn, O thou fellow, to answer my like by the letter.'

Now, what she heard from Ukleet when he had recovered his wits, was that the Prince had a business with none save the lenders of money. So she spake to Ukleet in a kindly tone, 'Thou art mine, to serve me?'

He was as one fascinated, and delivered himself, 'Yea, O my mistress! with tongue-service, toe-service, back-service, brain-service, whatso pleaseth thy sweet presence.'

Said she, 'Hie over to the broker opposite, and bring him hither to me.'

Ukleet departed, saying, 'To hear is to obey.'

She sat gazing on the Jewel and its counterchanging splendours in her hand, and the thought of Almeryl and his necessity was her only thought. Not ten minutes of the hour had passed before the women waiting on her announced Ukleet and the broker Boolp. Bhanavar gave little heed to the old fellow's grimaces, and the compliments he addressed her, but handed him the Jewel and desired his valuation of its worth. The face of Boolp was a keen edge when he regarded Bhanavar, but the sight of the Jewel sharpened it tenfold, and he tossed his arms, exclaiming, 'A jewel, this!'

So Bhanavar cried to him, 'Fix a price for it, O thou broker!'

And Boolp, the old miser, debated, and began prating,

’O lady! the soul of thy slave is abashed by a double beam, this the jewel of jewels, thou truly of thy sex; and saving thee there’s no jewel of worth like this one, and together ye be—wullahy! never felt I aught like this since my espousal of Soolka that ’s gone, and ’twas nothing like it then! Now, O my Princess, confess it freely—this is but a pretext, this valuation of the Jewel, and Ukleet our go-between; and leave the rewarding of him to me. Wullahy! I can be generous, and my days of favour with fair ladies be not yet over. Blessed be Allah for this day! And thinkest thou those eyes fell on me with discriminating observation ere my sense of perception was struck by thee? Not so, for I had noted thee, O moon of hearts, from my window yonder.’

Page 36

In this fashion Boolp the broker went on prating, and bowing, and screwing the corners of his little acid eyes to wink the wink of common accord between himself and Bhanavar. Meantime she had spoken aside to one of her women, and a second black slave entered the chamber, bearing in his hand a twisted scourge, and that slave laid it on the back of Boolp the broker, and by this means he was brought quickly to the valuation of the Jewel. Then he named a sum that was a great sum, but not the value of the Jewel to the fiftieth part, nay nor the five-hundredth part, of its value; and Ukleet remonstrated with him, but he was resolute, saying, ‘Even that sum leaves me a beggar.’

So Bhanavar said, ’My desire is for immediate payment of the money, and the Jewel is thine for that sum.’

Now the broker went to fetch the money, and returned with it in bags of gold one-half the amount, and bags of silver one-third, and the remainder in writing made due at a certain period for payment. And he groaned and handed her the money, and took the Jewel in his hands; ejaculating, ’In the name of Allah!’

That evening, when it was dark and the lamps lit in the chamber, and the wine set and the nosegay, Almeryl asked of Bhanavar to see her under the light of the Jewel. She warded him with an excuse, but he was earnest with her. So she feigned that he teased her, saying, ’’Tis that thou art no longer content with me as I am, O my husband!’ Then she said, ’Wert thou successful in thy dealings this day?’

His arm slackened round her, and he answered nothing. So she cried, ’Fie on thee, thou foolish one! and what is thy need of running over this city? Know I not thy case and thine occasion, O my beloved? Surely I am Queen of Serpents, a mistress of enchantments, a diviner of things hidden, and I know thee. Here, then, is what thou requirest, and conceal not from me thy necessity another time, my husband!’

Upon that she pointed his eye to the money-bags of gold and of silver. Almeryl was amazed, and asked her, ’How came these? for I was at the last extremity, without coin of any kind.’

She answered, ‘How, but by the Serpents!’

And he exclaimed, ’Would that I might work as that porter worketh, rather than this!’

Now, seeing he bewailed her use of the powers of the Jewel, Bhanavar fell between his arms, and related to him her discovery of his condition, and how she disposed of the Jewel to the broker, and of the scourging of Boolp; and he praised her, and clave to her, and they laughed and delighted their souls in plenteousness, and bliss was their portion; as the poet says,

Bliss that is born of mutual esteem
And tried companionship, I truly deem
A well-based palace, wherein fountains rise
From springs that have their sources in the skies.

So were they for awhile. It happened that one day, that was the last day of the year since her wearing of the Jewel, Ukleet said to them, 'Be wary! the Vizier Aswarak hath his eye on you, and it is no cool one. I say nothing: the wise are discreet in their tellings of the great. 'Tis certain the broker Boolp forgetteth not his treatment here.'

Page 37

They smiled, turning to each other, and said, 'We live innocently, we harm no one, what should we fear?'

During the night of that day Bhanavar awoke and kissed the Prince; and lo! he shuddered in his sleep as with the grave-cold. A second time she was awakened on the breast of Almeryl by a dream of the Serpents of the Lake Karatis—the lake of the Jewel; and she stood up, and there was in the street a hum of voices, and she saw there before the house armed men with naked steel in their hands. Scarce had she called Almeryl to her, when the outer door of their house was forced, and she shrieked to him, ''Tis thou they come for: fly, O my Prince, my husband! the way of the garden is clear.'

But he said sadly, 'Nay, what am I? it is thou they would win from me. I'll leave thee not in this life.'

So she cried, 'O my soul, then together!—but I shall hinder thee, and be a burden to thy flight.'

And she called on the All-powerful for aid, and ran with him into the garden of the house, and lo! by the water side at the end of the garden a boat full of armed soldiers with scimitars. So these fell upon them, and bound them, and haled them into the house again, where was the dark Vizier Aswarak, and certain officers of the night watch with a force. The Vizier cried when he saw them, 'I accuse thee, Prince Almeryl, of being here in the city of our lord the King, to conspire against him and his authority.'

Almeryl faced the Vizier firmly, and replied, 'I knew not in my life I had made an enemy; but there is one here who telleth that of me.'

The Vizier frowned, saying, 'Thou deniest this? And thou here, and thy father at war with the sovereignty of our lord the King!'

Almeryl beheld his danger, and he said, 'Is this so?'

Then cried the Vizier, 'Hear him! is not that a fair simulation?' So he called to the guard, 'Shackle him!' When that was done, he ordered the house to be sacked, and the women and the slaves he divided for a spoil, but he reserved Bhanavar to himself: and lo! twice she burst away from them that held her to hang upon the lips of Almeryl, and twice was she torn from him as a grape-bunch is torn from the streaming vine, and the third time she swooned and the anguish of life left her.

Now, Bhanavar was borne to the harem of the Vizier, and for days she suffered no morsel of food to enter her mouth, and was dying, had not the Vizier in the cunning of his dissimulation fed her with distant glimpses of Almeryl, to show her he yet lived. Then she thought, 'While my beloved liveth, life is due to me'; and she ate and drank and reassumed her fair fulness and the queenliness that was hers; but the Vizier had no

love of her, and respected her, considering in his mind, 'Time will exhaust the fury of this tigress, and she is a fruit worth the waiting for. Wullahy! I shall have possessed her ere the days of over-ripening.'

Page 38

There was in the harem of the Vizier a mountain-girl that had been brought there in her childhood, and trained to play upon the lute and accompany her voice with the instrument. To this little damsel Bhanavar gave her heart, and would listen all day, as in a trance, to her luting, till the desire to escape from that bondage and gather tidings of Almeryl mastered her, and she persuaded one of the blacks of the harem with a bribe to procure her an interview with the porter Ukleet. So at a certain hour of the night Ukleet was introduced into the garden of the harem, and he was in the darkness of that garden a white-faced porter with knees that knocked the dread-march together; but Bhanavar strengthened his soul, and he said to her, ''Twas the doing of Boolp the broker: and he whispered the Vizier of thee and thy beauty, O my mistress! Surely thy punishment and this ruin is but part payment to Boolp of the price of the Jewel, the great Jewel that's in the hands of the Vizier.'

Then she questioned him: 'And Almeryl, the Prince, my husband, what of him?'

Ukleet was dumb, and Bhanavar asked to hear no more. Surely she was at the gates of pale spirits within an hour of her interview with Ukleet, and there was no blessedness for her save in death, the stiffer of ills, the drug that is infallible. As is said:

> Dark is that last stage of sorrow
> Which from Death alone can borrow
> Comfort:—

Bhanavar would have died then, but in a certain pause of her fever the Vizier stood by her. She looked at him long as she lay, and the life in her large eyes was ebbing away slowly; but there seemed presently a check, as an eddy comes in the stream, and the light of intelligence flowed like a reviving fire into her eyes, and her heart quickened with desire of life while she looked on the Vizier. So she passed the pitch of that fever, and bloomed anew in her beauty, and cherished it, for she had a purpose.

Now, there was rejoicing in the harem of the Vizier Aswarak when Bhanavar arose from the couch; and the Vizier exulted, thinking, 'I have tamed this wild beauty, or she had reached death in that extremity.' So he allowed Bhanavar greater freedom and indulgences, and Bhanavar feigned to give her soul to the pleasures women delight in, and the Vizier buried her in gems and trinkets and costly raiment, robes of exquisite silks, the choicest of Samarcand and China; and he permitted her to make purchases among certain of the warehouses of the city and the shops of the tradesmen, jewellers and others, so that she went about as she would, but for the slaves that attended her and the overseer of the harem. This continued, and Aswarak became urgent with her, and to remove suspicion from him she named a day from that period when she would be his. Meantime she contrived to see Ukleet the porter frequently, and within a week of her engagement with the Vizier she gazed from a lattice-window of the harem, and beheld in the garden, by the beams of the moon, Ukleet, and he was looking as on the watch for her. So she sent to him the little mountain-girl she loved, but Ukleet would tell

her nothing; then went she herself, greeting him graciously, for his service was other than that of self-seeking.

Page 39

Ukleet said, ’O Lady, mistress of hearts, moon of the tides of will! ’tis certain I was thy slave from the hour I beheld thee first, and of the Prince, thy husband; Allah rest his soul! Now these be my tidings. Wullahy! the King is one maddened with the reports I’ve spread about of thy beauty, yea! raging. And I have a friend in his palace, even an under-cook, acute in the interpreting of wishes. There was he always gabbling of thy case, O my Princess, till the head-cook seized hold on it, and so it went to the chamberlain, thence to the chief of the eunuchs, and from him in a natural course, to the King. Now from the King the tracking of this tale went to the under-cook down again, and from him to me. So was I summoned to the King, and the King discoursed with me —I with him, in fair fluency; he in ejaculations of desire to have sight of thee, I in expatiation on that he would see when he had his desire. Now in this have I not done thee a service, O sovereign of fancies?’

Bhanavar mused and said, ’On the after-morrow I pass through the city to make a selection of goods, and I shall pass at noon by the great mosque, on my way to the shop of Ebn Roulchook, the King’s jeweller, beyond the meat-market. Of a surety, I know not how my lord the King may see me.’

Said the porter, ‘’Tis enough! on my head be it.’ And he went from her, singing the song:

How little a thing serves Fortune’s turn
When she’s intent on doing!
How easily the world may burn
When kings come out a-wooing!

Now, ere she set forth on the after-morrow to make her purchases, Bhanavar sent word to the Vizier Aswarak that she would see him, and he came to her drunken with alacrity, for he augured favourably that her reluctance was melting toward him: so she said, ’O my master, my time of mourning is at an end, and I would look well before thee, even as one worthy of being thy bride; so bestow on me, I pray thee, for my wearing that day, the jewels that be in thy treasury, the brightest and clearest of them, and the largest.’

The Vizier Aswarak replied, and he was one in great satisfaction of soul, ’All that I have are thine. Wullahy! and one, a marvel, that I bought of Boolp the broker, that had it from an African merchant.’ So he commanded the box wherein he had deposited the Jewel to be brought to him there in the chamber of Bhanavar, and took forth the Serpent Jewel between his forefinger and thumb, and laughed at the eager eyes of Bhanavar when she beheld it, saying, ‘’Tis thine! thy bridal gift the day I possess thee.’

Bhanavar trembled at the sight of the Jewel, and its redness was to her as the blood of Zurvan and Almeryl. She stretched her hand out for it and cried, ‘This day, O my lord, make it mine.’

So the Vizier said, ’Nay, what I have spoken will I keep to; it has cost me much.’

Bhanavar looked at him, and uttered in a soft tone, ’Truly it has cost thee much.’

Page 40

Then she exclaimed, as in play, ‘See me, how I look by its beam.’ And in her guile she snatched the Jewel from him, and held it to her brow. Then Aswarak started from her and feared her, for the red light of the Jewel glowed, and darkened the chamber with its beam, darkening all save the lustre that was on the visage of Bhanavar. He shouted, ’What’s this! Art thou a sorceress?’

She removed the Jewel, and ceased glaring on him, and said, ’Nothing but thy poor slave!’

Then he coaxed her to give him the Jewel, and she would not; he commanded her peremptorily, and she hesitated; so he grasped her tightened hand, and his face loured with wrath; yet she withheld the Jewel from him laughing; and he was stirred to extreme wrath, and drew from his girdle the naked scimitar, and menaced her with it. And he looked mighty; but she dreaded him little, and stood her full height before him, daring him, and she was as the tigress defending a cub from a wilder beast. Now when he was about to call in the armed slaves of the palace, she said, ’I warn thee, Vizier Aswarak! tempt me not to match them that serve me with them that serve thee.’

He ground his teeth in fury, crying, ’A conspiracy! and in the harem! Now, thou traitress! the logic of the lash shall be tried upon thee.’ And he roared, ‘Ho! ye without there! ho!’

But ere the slaves had entered Bhanavar rubbed the Jewel on her bosom, muttering, ’I have forborne till now! Now will I have a sacrifice, though I be it.’ And rubbing the Jewel, she sang,

Hither! hither!
Come to your Queen;
Come through the grey wall,
Come through the green!

There was heard a noise like the noise of a wind coming down a narrow gorge above falling waters, a hissing and a rushing of wings, and behold! Bhanavar was circled by rings and rings of serpent-folds that glowed round her, twisted each in each, with the fierceness of fire, she like a flame rising up white in the midst of them. The black slaves, when they had lifted the curtain of the harem-chamber, shrieked to see her, and Aswarak crouched at her feet with the aspect of an angry beast carved in stone. Then Bhanavar loosed on either of the slaves a serpent, saying, ‘What these have seen they shall not say.’ And while the sweat dropped heavily from the forehead of Aswarak, she stepped out of the circle of serpents, singing,

Over! over!
Hie to the lake!
Sleep with the left eye,
Keep the right awake.

Then the serpents spread with a great whirr, and flew through the high window and the walls as they had come, and she said to the Vizier, 'What now? Fearest thou? I have spared thee, thou that madest me desolate! and thy slaves are a sacrifice for thee. Now this I ask: Where lies my beloved, the Prince my husband? Speak nothing of him, save the place of his burial!'

So he told her, 'In the burial-ground of the great prison.'

Page 41

She rolled her eyes on the Vizier darkly, exclaiming, 'Even where the felons lie entombed, he lieth!' And she began to pant, pale with what she had done, and leaned to the floor, and called,

Yellow stripe, with freckle red,
Coil and curl, and watch by my head.

And a serpent with yellow stripes and red freckles came like a javelin down to her, and coiled and curled round her head, and she slept an hour. When she arose the Vizier was yet there, sitting with folded knees. So she sped the serpent to the Lake Karatis, and called her women to her, and went to an inner room, and drew an outer robe and a vest over that she had on, and passed the Vizier, and said, 'Art thou not rejoiced in thy bride, O Aswarak? 'Twas a wondrous clemency, hers! Now but four more days and thou claimest her. Say nothing of what thou hast seen, or thou wilt shortly see nothing further to say, my master.'

So she left the Vizier sitting still in that chamber, and mounted a mule, attended by slaves on foot before and behind her, and passed through the streets till she came to the shop of Ebn Roulchook. The King was in disguise at the extremity of the shop, and while she examined this and that of the precious stones, Bhanavar for a moment made bare the beauty, of her face, and love's fires took fast hold of the King, and he cried, 'I marvel not at the eloquence of the porter.'

Now, she made Ebn Roulchook bring to her a circlet of gold, with a hollow in the frontal centre, and fit into that hollow the Serpent Jewel. So, while she laughed and chatted with her women Bhanavar lifted the circlet, and made her countenance wholly bare even to the neck and the beginning slope of the bosom, and fixed the circlet to her head with the Jewel burning on her brow. Then when he beheld the glory of excelling loveliness that she was, and the splendour in her eyes under the Jewel, the King shouted and parted with his disguise, and Ebn Roulchook and the women and slaves with Bhanavar fled to the courtyard that was behind the shop, leaving Bhanavar alone with the King. Surely Bhanavar returned not to the dwelling of the Vizier.

Now, the King Mashalleed espoused Bhanavar, and she became his queen and ruled him, and her word was the dictate of the land. Then caused she the body of Almeryl, with the severed head of the Prince, to be disinterred, and entombed secretly in the palace; and she had lamps lit in the vault, and the pall spread, and the readers of the Koran to read by the tomb; and then she stole to the tomb hourly, in the day and in the night, wailing of him and her utter misery, repeating verses at the side of the tomb, and they were,

Take me to thee!
Like the deep-rooted tree,
My life is half in earth, and draws

Thence all sweetness; oh may my being pause
Soon beside thee!

Welcome me soon!
As to the queenly moon,
Man’s homage to my beauty sets;
Yet am I a rose-shrub budding regrets:
Welcome me soon.

Page 42

Soul of my soul!
Have me not half, but whole.
Dear dust, thou art my eyes, my breath!
Draw me to thee down the dark sea of death,
Soul of my soul!

And she sang:

Sad are they who drink life's cup
Till they have come to the bitter-sweet:
Better at once to toss it up,
And trample it beneath the feet;
For venom-charged as serpents' eggs
'Tis then, and knows not other change.
Early, early, early, have I reached the dregs
Of life, and loathe and love the bittersweet, revenge!

Then turned she aside, and sang musingly:

I came to his arms like the flower of the spring,
And he was my bird of the radiant wing:
He flutter'd above me a moment, and won
The bliss of my breast as a beam of the sun,
Untouch'd and untasted till then—

The voice in her throat was like a drowning creature, and she rose up, and chanted wildly:

I weep again?

What play is this? for the thing is dead in me long since:
Will all the reviving rain
Of heaven bring me back my Prince?
But I, when I weep, when I weep,
Blood will I weep!
And when I weep,
Sons for fathers shall weep;
Mothers for sons shall weep;
Wives for husbands shall weep!
Earth shall complain of floods red and deep,
When I weep!

Upon that she ran up a secret passage to her chamber and rubbed the Jewel, and called the serpents, to delight her soul with the sight of her power, and rolled and

sported madly among them, clutching them by the necks till their thin little red tongues hung out, and their eyes were as discoloured blisters of venom. Then she arose, and her arms and neck and lips were glazed with the slime of the serpents, and she flung off her robes to the close-fitting silken inner vest looped across her bosom with pearls, and whirled in a mazy dance-measure among them, and sang melancholy melodies, making them delirious, fascinating them; and they followed her round and round, in twines and twists and curves, with arched heads and stiffened tails; and the chamber swam like an undulating sea of shifting sapphire lit by the moon of midnight. Not before the moon of midnight was in the sky ceased Bhanavar sporting with the serpents, and she sank to sleep exhausted in their midst.

Such was the occupation of the Queen of Mashalleed when he came not to her. The women and slaves of the palace dreaded her, and the King himself was her very slave.

Page 43

Meanwhile the plot of her unforgivingness against Aswarak ripened: and the Vizier beholding the bride he had lost Queen of Mashalleed his master, it was as she conceived, that his heart was eaten with jealousy and fierce rage. Bhanavar as she came across him spake mildly, and gave him gentle looks, sad glances, suffering not his fires to abate, the torment of his love to cool. Each night he awoke with a serpent in his bed; the beam of her beauty was as the constant bite of a serpent, poisoning his blood, and he deluded his soul with the belief that Bhanavar loved him notwithstanding, and that she was seized forcibly from him by the King. 'Otherwise,' thought he, 'why loosed she not a serpent from the host to strangle me even as yonder black slaves?' Bhanavar knew the mind of Aswarak, and considered, 'The King is cunning and weak, a slave to his desires, and in the bondage of the jewel, my beauty. The Vizier is unscrupulous, a hatcher of intrigues; but that he dreads me and hopes a favour of me, he would have wrought against me ere now. 'Tis then a combat 'twixt him and me. O my soul, art thou dreaming of a fair youth that was the bliss of thy bosom night and day, night and day? The Vizier shall die!'

One morning, and it was a year from the day she had become Queen of Mashalleed, Bhanavar sprang up quickly from the side of the King; and he was gazing on her in amazement and loathing. She flew to her chamber, chasing forth her women, and ran to a mirror. Therein she saw three lines that were on her brow, lines of age, and at the corners of her mouth and about her throat a slackness of skin, the skin no longer its soft rosy white, but withered brown as leaves of the forest. She shrieked, and fell back in a swoon of horror. When she recovered, she ran to the mirror again, and it was the same sight. And she rose from swooning a third time, and still she beheld the visage of a hag; nothing of beauty there save the hair and the brilliant eyes. Then summoned she the serpents in a circle, and the number of them was that of the days in the year: and she bared her wrist and seized one, a gray-silver with sapphire spots, and hissed at him till he hissed, and foam whitened the lips of each. Thereupon she cried:

> Treble-tongue and throat of hell,
> What is come upon me, tell!

And the Serpent replied,

> Jewel Queen! beauty's price!
> 'Tis the time for sacrifice!

She grasped another, one of leaden colour, with yellow bars and silver crescents, and cried:

> Treble-tongue and throat of fire,
> Name the creature ye require!

And the Serpent replied:

Ruby lip! poison tooth!
We are hungry for a youth.

She grasped another that writhed in her fingers like liquid emerald, and cried:

Treble-tongue and throat of glue!
How to know the one that’s due?

Page 44

And the Serpent replied:

> Breast of snow! baleful bliss!
> He that wooing wins a kiss.

She clutched one at her elbow, a hairy serpent with yellow languid eyes in flame-sockets and livid-lustrous length—a disease to look on, and cried:

> Treble-tongue and throat of gall!
> There's a youth beneath the pall.

And the Serpent replied:

> Brilliant eye! bloody tear!
> He has fed us for a year.

She squeezed that hairy serpent till her finger-points whitened in his neck, and he dropped lifelessly, crying:

Treble-tongues and things of mud!
Sprang my beauty from his blood?

And the Serpents rose erect, replying:

Yearly one of us must die;
Yearly for us dieth one;
Else the Queen an ugly lie
Lives till all our lives be done!

Bhanavar stood up, and hurried them to Karatis. When she was alone she fell toward the floor, repeating, ''Tis the Curse!' Suddenly she thought, 'Yet another year my beauty shall be nourished by my vengeance, yet another! And, O Vizier, the kiss shall be thine, the kiss of doom; for I have doomed thee ere now. Thou, thou shalt restore me to my beauty: that only love I now my Prince is lost.'

So she veiled her face in the close veil of the virtuous, and despatched Ukleet, whom she exalted in the palace of the King, to the Vizier; and Ukleet stood before Aswarak, and said, 'O Vizier, my mistress truly is longing for you with excessive longing, and in what she now undergoeth is forgotten an evil done by you to her; and she bids you come and concert with her a scheme deliberately as to the getting rid of this tyrant who is an affliction to her, and her life is lessened by him.'

The Vizier was deceived by his passion, and he chuckled and exclaimed, 'My very dream! and to mind me of her, then, she sent the serpents! Wullahy, in the matter of women, wait! For, as the poet declareth:

’Tis vanity our souls for such to vex;
Patience is a harvest of the sex.’’

And they fret themselves not overlong for husbands that are gone, these young beauties. I know them. Tell the Queen of Serpents I am even hers to the sole of my foot.’

So it was understood between them that the Vizier should be at the gate of the garden of the palace that night, disguised; and the Vizier rejoiced, thinking, ’If she have not the Jewel with her, it shall go ill with me, and I foiled this time!’

Ukleet then proceeded to the house of Boolp the broker, fronting the gutted ruins where Bhanavar had been happy in her innocence with Almeryl, the mountain prince, her husband. Boolp was engaged haggling with a slave-merchant the price of a fair slave, and Ukleet said to him,’Yet awhile delay, O Boolp, ere you expend a fraction of treasure, for truly a mighty bargain of jewels is waiting for you at the palace of my lord the King. So come thither with all your money-bags of gold and silver, and your securities, and your bonds and dues in writing, for ’tis the favourite of the King requireth you to complete a bargain with her, and the price of her jewels is the price of a kingdom.’

Page 45

Said Boolp, ‘Hearing is compliance in such a case.’

And Ukleet continued, ’What a fortune is yours, O Boolp! truly the tide of fortune setteth into your lap. Fail not, wullahy! to come with all you possess, or if you have not enough when she requireth it to complete the bargain, my mistress will break off with you. I know not if she intend even other game for you, O lucky one!’

Boolp hitched his girdle and shrugged, saying, ’’Tis she will fail, I wot,—she, in having therewith to complete the bargain between us. Wa! wa!—there! I’ve done this before now. Wullahy! if she have not enough of her rubies and pearls to outweigh me and my gold, go to, Boolp will school her! What says the poet?—

’’Earth and ocean search, East, West, and North, to the South,
None will match the bright rubies and pearls of her mouth.’’

’Aha! what? O Ukleet! And he says:

’’The lovely ones a bargain made
With me, and I renounced my trade,
Half-ruined; ‘Ah!’ said they, ’return and win!
To even scales ourselves we will throw in!’’’

How so? But let discreetness reign and security flourisheth!’

Ukleet nodded at him, and repeated the distich:

Men of worth and men of wits
Shoot with two arrows, and make two hits.

So he arranged with Boolp the same appointment as with the Vizier, and returned to Queen Bhanavar.

Now, in the dark of night Aswarak stood within the gate of the palace-garden of Mashalleed that was ajar, and a hand from a veiled figure reached to him, and he caught it, in the fulness of his delusion, crying, ‘Thou, my Queen?’ But the hand signified silence, and drew him past the tank of the garden and through a court of the palace into a passage lit with lamps, and on into a close-curtained chamber, and beyond a heavy curtain into another, a circular passage descending between black hangings, and at the bottom a square vault draped with black, and in it precious woods burning, oils in censers, and the odour of ambergris and myrrh and musk floating in clouds, and the sight of the Vizier was for a time obscured by the thickness of the incenses floating. As he became familiar with the place, he saw marked therein a board spread at one end with viands and wines, and the nosegay in a water-vase, and cups of gold and a service of gold,—every preparation for feasting mightily. So the soul of Aswarak leapt, and he cried, ’Now unveil thyself, O moon of our meeting, my mistress!’

The voice of Bhanavar answered him, ’Not till we have feasted and drunken, and it seemeth little in our eyes. Surely the chamber is secure: could I have chosen one better for our meeting, O Aswarak?’

Upon that he entreated her to sit with him to the feast, but she cried, ‘Nay! delay till the other is come.’

Cried he, ‘Another?’

Page 46

But she exclaimed, ‘Hush!’ and saying thus went forward to the foot of the passage, and Boolp was there, following Ukleet, both of them under a weight of bags and boxes. So she welcomed the broker, and led him to the feast, he coughing and wheezing and blinking, unwitting the vexation of the Vizier, nor that one other than himself was there. When Boolp heard the voice of the Vizier, in astonishment, addressing him, he started back and fell upon his bags, and the task of coaxing him to the board was as that of haling a distempered beast to the water. Then they sat and feasted together, and Ukleet with them; and if Aswarak or Boolp waxed impatient of each other’s presence, he whispered to them, ’Only wait! see what she reserveth for you.’ And Bhanavar mused with herself, ’Truly that reserved shall be not long coming!’ So they drank, and wine got the mastery of Aswarak, so that he made no secret of his passion, and began to lean to her and verse extemporaneously in her ear; and she stinted not in her replies, answering to his urgency in girlish guise, sighing behind the veil, as if under love’s influence. And the Vizier pressed close, and sang:

’Tis said that love brings beauty to the cheeks
Of them that love and meet, but mine are pale;
For merciless disdain on me she wreaks,
And hides her visage from my passionate tale:
I have her only, only when she speaks.
Bhanavar, unveil!

I have thee, and I have thee not! Like one
Lifted by spirits to a shining dale
In Paradise, who seeks to leap and run
And clasp the beauty, but his foot doth fail,
For he is blind: ah! then more woful none!
Bhanavar, unveil!

He thrust the wine-cup to her, and she lifted it under her veil, and then sang, in answer to him:

My beauty! for thy worth
Thank the Vizier!

He gives thee second birth:
Thank the Vizier!

His blooming form without a fault:
Thank the Vizier!

Is at thy foot in this blest vault:
Thank the Vizier!

He knoweth not he telleth such a truth,
Thank the Vizier!

That thou, thro' him, spring'st fresh in blushing youth:
Thank the Vizier!

He knoweth little now, but he shall soon be wise:
Thank the Vizier!

This meeting bringeth bloom to cheeks and lips and eyes:
Thank the Vizier!

O my beloved in this blest vault, if I love thee for aye,
Thank the Vizier!

Thine am I, thine! and learns his soul what it has taught—to die,
Thank the Vizier!

Now, Aswarak divined not her meaning, and was enraptured with her, and cried, 'Wullahy! so and such thy love! Thine am I, thine! And what a music is thy voice, O my mistress! 'Twere a bliss to Eblis in his torment could he hear it. Life of my head! and is thy beauty increased by me? Nay, thou flatterer!' Then he said to her, 'Away with these importunate dogs! 'tis the very hour of tenderness! Wullahy! they offend my nostril: stung am I at the sight of them.'

Page 47

She rejoined,—

O Aswarak! star of the morn!
Thou that wakenest my beauty from night and scorn,
Thy time is near, and when 'tis come,
Long will a jackal howl that this thy request had been dumb.
O Aswarak! star of the morn!

So the Vizier imaged in his mind the neglect of Mashalleed from these words, and said, 'Leave the King to my care, O Queen of Serpents, and expend no portion of thy power on him; but hasten now the going of these fellows; my heart is straitened by them, and I, wullahy! would gladly see a serpent round the necks of either.'

She continued,—

O Aswarak! star of the morn!
Lo! the star must die when splendider light is born;
In stronger floods the beam will drown:
Shrink, thou puny orb, and dread to bring me my crown,
O Aswarak! star of the morn!

Then said she, 'Hark awhile at those two! There's a disputation between them.'

So they hearkened, and Ukleet was pledging Boolp, and passing the cup to him; but a sullenness had seized the broker, and he refused it, and Ukleet shouted, 'Out, boon-fellow! and what a company art thou, that thou refusest the pledge of friendliness? Plague on all sulkers!'

And the broker, the old miser, obstinate as are the half-fuddled, began to mumble, 'I came not here to drink, O Ukleet, but to make a bargain; and my bags be here, and I like not yonder veil, nor the presence of yonder Vizier, nor the secresy of this. Now, by the Prophet and that interdict of his, I'll drink no further.'

And Ukleet said, 'Let her not mark your want of fellowship, or 'twill go ill with you. Here be fine wines, spirited wines! choice flavours! and you drink not! Where's the soul in you, O Boolp, and where's the life in you, that you yield her to the Vizier utterly? Surely she waiteth a gallant sign from you, so challenge her cheerily.'

Quoth Boolp, 'I care not. Shall I leave my wealth and all I possess void of eyes? and she so that I recognise her not behind the veil?'

Ukleet pushed the old miser jeeringly: 'You not recognise her? Oh, Boolp, a pretty dissimulation! Pledge her now a cup to the snatching of the veil, and bethink you of a fitting verse, a seemly compliment,—something sugary.'

Then Boolp smoothed his head, and was bothered; and tapped it, and commenced repeating to Bhanavar:

I saw the moon behind a cloud,
And I was cold as one that's in his shroud:
And I cried, Moon!—

Ukleet chorused him, 'Moon!' and Boolp was deranged in what he had to say, and gasped,—

Moon! I cried, Moon!—and I cried, Moon!

Then the Vizier and Ukleet laughed till they fell on their backs; so Bhanavar took up his verse where he left it, singing,—

And to the cry

Moon did make fair the following reply:
'Dotard, be still! for thy desire
Is to embrace consuming fire.'

Page 48

Then said Boolp, 'O my mistress, the laws of conviviality have till now restrained me; but my coming here was on business, and with me my bags, in good faith. So let us transact this matter of the jewels, and after that the song of—

''Thou and I
A cup will try,''

even as thou wilt.'

Bhanavar threw aside her outer robe and veil, and appeared in a dress of sumptuous blue, spotted with gold bees; her face veiled with a veil of gauzy silver, and she was as the moon in summer heavens, and strode mar jestically forward, saying, 'The jewels? 'tis but one. Behold!'

The lamps were extinguished, and in her hand was the glory of the Serpent Jewel, no other light save it in the vaulted chamber.

So the old miser perked his chin and brows, and cried wondering, 'I know it, this Jewel, O my mistress.'

She turned to the Vizier, and said, lifting the red gloom of the Jewel on him, 'And thou?'

Aswarak ate his under-lip.

Then she cried, 'There's much ye know in common, ye two.'

Thereupon Bhanavar passed from the feast on to the centre of the vault, and stood before the tomb of Almeryl, and drew the cloth from it; and they saw by the glow of the Jewel that it was a tomb. When she had mounted some steps at the side of the tomb, she beckoned them to come, crying, in a voice of sobs, 'This which is here, likewise ye may know.'

So they came with the coldness of a mystery in their blood, and looked as she looked intently over a tomb. The lid was of glass, and through the glass of the lid the Jewel flung a dark rosy ray on the body of Almeryl lying beneath it.

Now, the miser was perplexed at the sight; but Aswarak stepped backward in defiance, bellowing, ''Twas for this I was tricked to come here! Is 't fooling me a second time? By Allah! look to it; not a second time will Aswarak be fooled.'

Then she ran to him, and exclaimed, 'Fooled? For what cam'st thou to me?'

And he, foaming and grinding his breath, 'Thou woman of wiles! thou serpent! but I'll be gone from here.'

So she faltered in sweetness, knowing him doomed, and loving to dally with him in her wickedness, ‘Indeed if thou cam’st not for my kiss—’

Then said the Vizier, ’Yet a further guile! Was’t not an outrage to bring me here?’

She faltered again, leaning the fair length of her limbs on a couch, ’’Tis ill that we are not alone, else could these lips convince thee well: else indeed!’

And the Vizier cried, ’Chase then these intruders from us, O thou sorceress, and above all serpents in power! for thou poisonest with a touch; and the eye and the ear alike take in thy poisons greedily. Thou overcomest the senses, the reason, the judgment; yea, vindictiveness, wrath, suspicions; leading the soul captive with a breath of thine, as ‘twere a breeze from the gardens of bliss.’

Bhanavar changed her manner a little, lisping, ’And why that starting from the tomb of a dead harmless youth? And that abuse of me?’

Page 49

He peered at her inquiringly, echoing ‘Why?’

And she repeated, as a child might repeat it, ‘Why that?’

Then the Vizier smote his forehead in the madness of utter perplexity, changing his eye from Bhanavar to the tomb of Almeryl, doubting her truth, yet dreading to disbelieve it. So she saw him fast enmeshed in her subtleties, and clapped her hands crying, ’Come again with me to the tomb, and note if there be aught I am to blame in, O Aswarak, and plight thyself to me beside it.’

He did nothing save to widen his eye at her somewhat; and she said, ’The two are yonside the tomb, and they hear us not, and see us not by this light of the Jewel; so come up to it boldly with me; free thy mind of its doubt, and for a reconcilement kiss me on the way.’

Aswarak moved not forward; but as Bhanavar laid the Jewel in her bosom he tore the veil from her darkened head, and caught her to him and kissed her. Then Bhanavar laughed and shouted, ’How is it with thee, Vizier Aswarak?’

He was tottering, and muttered, ’’Tis a death-chill hath struck me even to my marrow.’

So she drew the Jewel forth once more, and rubbed it ablaze, and the noise of the Serpents neared; and they streamed into the vault and under it in fiery jets, surrounding Bhanavar, and whizzing about her till in their velocity they were indivisible; and she stood as a fountain of fire clothed in flashes of the underworld, the new loveliness of her face growing vivid violet like an incessant lightning above them. Then stretched she her two hands, and sang to the Serpents:—

> Hither, hither, to the feast!
> Hither to the sacrifice!
> Virtue for my sake hath ceased:
> Now to make an end of Vice!
>
> Twisted-tail and treble-tongue,
> Swelling length and greedy maw!
> I have had a horrid wrong;
> Retribution is the law!
>
> Ye that suck’d my youthful lord,
> Now shall make another meal:
> Seize the black Vizier abhorr’d;
> Seize him! seize him throat and heel!
>
> Set your serpent wits to find
> Tortures of a new device:

Have him! have him heart and mind!
Hither to the sacrifice’

Then she whirled with them round and round as a tempest whirls; and when she had wound them to a fury, lo, she burst from the hissing circle and dragged Ukleet from the vault into the passage, and blocked the entrance to the vault. So was Queen Bhanavar avenged.

Now, she said to Ukleet, ’Ransom presently the broker,—him they will not harm,’ and hastened to the King that he might see her in her beauty. The King reclined on cushions in the harem with a fair slave-girl, newly from the mountains, toying with the pearls in her locks. Then thought Bhanavar, ‘Let him not slight me!’ So she drew a rose-coloured veil over her face and sat beside Mashalleed. The King continued his fondling with the girl, saying to her, ’Was there no destiny foretold of thy coming to the palace of the King to rule it, O Nashta, starbeam in the waters! and hadst thou no dream of it?’

Page 50

Bhanavar struck the King's arm, but he noticed her not, and Nashta laughed. Then Bhanavar controlled her trembling and said, 'A word, O King! and vouchsafe me a hearing.'

The King replied languidly, still looking on Nashta, ''Tis a command that the voice of none that are crabbed and hideous be heard in the harem, and I find comfort in it, O Nashta! but speak thou, my fountain of sweet-dropping lute-notes!'

Bhanavar caught the King's hand and said, 'I have to speak with thee; 'tis the Queen. Chase from us this little wax puppet a space.'

The King disengaged his hand and leaned it over to Nashta, who began playing with it, and fitting on it a ring, giggling. Then, as he answered nothing, Bhanavar came nearer and slapped him on the cheek. Mashalleed started to his feet, and his hand grasped his girdle; but that wrathfulness was stayed when he beheld the veil slide from her visage. So he cried, 'My Queen! my soul!'

She pointed to Nashta, and the King chid the girl, and sent her forth lean with his shifted displeasure, as a kitten slinks wet from a fish-pond where it had thought to catch a great fish. Then Bhanavar exclaimed, 'There was a change in thy manner to me before that creature.'

He sought to dissimulate with her, but at last he confessed, 'I was truly this morning the victim of a sorcery.'

Thereupon she cried, 'And thou went angered to find me not by thee on the couch, but one in my place, a hag of ugliness. Hear then the case, O Mashalleed! Surely that old crone had a dream, and it was that if she slept one night by the King she would arise fresh in health from her ills, and with powers lasting a year to heal others of all maladies with a touch. So she came to me, petitioning me to bring this about. O my lord the King, did I well in being privy to her desire?'

The King could not doubt this story of Bhanavar, seeing her constant loveliness, and the arch of her flashing brow, and the oval of her cheek and chin smooth as milk. So he said, 'O my Queen! I had thought to go, as I must, gladly; but how shall I go, knowing thy truth, thy beauty unchanged; thee faithful, a follower of the injunctions of the Prophet in charitable deeds?'

Cried she, 'And whither goeth my lord, and on what errand?'

He answered, 'The people of a province southward have raised the standard of revolt and mocked my authority; they have been joined by certain of the Arab chiefs subject to my dominion, and have defeated my armies. 'Tis to subdue them I go; yea, to crush

them. Yet, wallaby! I know not. Care I if kingdoms fall away, and nations, so that I have thee? Nay, let all pass, so that thou remain by me.'

Bhanavar paced from him to a mirror, and frowned at the reflection of her fairness, thinking, 'Such had he spoken to the girl Nashta, or another, this King!' And she thought, 'I have been beloved by the noblest three on earth; I will ask no more of love; vengeance I have had. 'Tis time that I demand of my beauty nothing save power, and I will make this King my stepping-stone to power, rejoicing my soul with the shock of armies.'

Page 51

Now, she persuaded Mashalleed to take her with him on his expedition against the Arabs; and they set forth, heading a great assemblage of warriors, southward to the land bordering the Desert. The King credited the suggestions of Bhanavar, that Aswarak had disappeared to join the rebels, and pressed forward in his eagerness to inflict a chastisement signal in swiftness upon them and that traitor; so eagerly Mashalleed journeyed to his army in advance, that the main body, with Bhanavar, was left by him long behind. She had encouraged him, saying, 'I shall love thee much if thou art speedy in winning success.' The Queen was housed on an elephant, harnessed with gold, and with silken purple trappings; from the rose-hued curtains of her palanquin she looked on a mighty march of warriors, filling the extent of the plains; all day she fed her sight on them. Surely the story of her beauty became noised among the guards of her person that rode and ran beneath the royal elephant, till the soldiers of Mashalleed spake but of the beauty of the Queen, and Bhanavar was as a moon shining over that sea of men.

Now, they had passed the cultivated fields, and were halting by the ford of a river bordering the Desert, when lo! a warrior on the yonside, riding in a cloud of dust, and his shout was, 'The King Mashalleed is defeated, and flying.' Then the Captains of the host witnessed to the greatness of Allah, and were troubled with a dread, fearing to advance; but Bhanavar commanded a horse to be saddled for her, and mounted it, and plunged through the ford singly; so they followed her, and all day she rode forward on horseback, touching neither food nor drink. By night she was a league beyond the foremost of them, and fell upon the King encamped in the Desert, with the loose remnant of his forces. Mashalleed, when he had looked on her, forgot his affliction, and stood up to embrace her, but Bhanavar spurned him, crying, 'A time for this in the time of disgrace?' Then she said, 'How came it?'

He answered, 'There was a Chief among the enemy, an Arab, before the terror of whom my people fled.'

Cried she, 'Conquer him on the morrow, and till then I eat not, drink not, sleep not.'

On the morrow Mashalleed again encountered the rebels, and Bhanavar, seated on her elephant, from a sand-hillock under a palm, beheld the prowess of the Arab Chief and the tempest of battle that he was. She thought, 'I have seen but one mighty in combat like that one, Ruark, the Chief of the Beni-Asser.' Thereupon she coursed toward the King, even where the arrows gloomed like locusts, thick and dark in the air aloof, and said, 'The victory is with yonder Chief! Hurl on him three of thy sons of valour.'

The three were selected, and made onslaught on this Chief, and perished under his arm.

Bhanavar saw them fall, and exclaimed, 'Another attack on him, and with thrice three!'

Her will was the mandate of Mashalleed, and these likewise were ordered forth, and closed on the Chief, but he darted from their toils and wheeled about them, spearing them one by one till the nine were in the dust. Bhanavar compressed her dry lips and muttered to the King, 'Head thou a body against him.'

Page 52

Mashalleed gathered round his standard the chosen of his warriors, and smoothed his beard, and headed them. Then the Chief struck his lance behind him, and stretched rapidly a half-circle across the sand, and halted on a knoll. When they neared him he retreated in a further half-circle, and continued this wise, wasting the fury of Mashalleed, till he stood among his followers. There, as the King hesitated and prepared to retreat, he and the others of the tribe levelled their lances and hung upon his rear, fretting them, slaughtering captains of the troop. When Mashalleed turned to face his pursuer, the Chief was alone, immovable on his mare, fronting the ranks. Then Bhanavar taunted the King, and he essayed the capture of that Chief a second time and a third, and it was each time as the first. Bhanavar looked about her with rapid eyes, murmuring, 'Oh, what a Chief is he! Oh that a cloud would fall, a smoke arise, to blind these hosts, that I might sling my serpents on him unseen, for I will not be vanquished, though it be by Ruark!' So she drew to the King, and the altercation between them was fierce in the fury of the battle, he saying, ''Tis a feint of the Chief, this challenge; and I must succour the left of my army by the well, that he is overmatching with numbers'; and she, 'If thou head them not, then will I, and thou shalt behold a woman do what thou durst not, and lose her love and win her scorn.' While they spake the Arabs they looked on seemed to flutter and waver, and the Chief was backing to them, calling to them as 'twere words of shame to rally them. Seeing this, Mashalleed charged against the Chief once more, and lo! the Arabs opened to receive him, closing on his band of warriors like waters whitened by the storm on a fleet of swift-scudding vessels: and there was a dust and a tumult visible, such as is seen in the darkness when a vessel struck by the lightning-bolt is sinking—flashes of steel, lifting of hands, rolling of horsemen and horses. Then Bhanavar groaned aloud, 'They are lost! Shame to us! only one hope is left-that 'tis Ruark, this Chief!' Now, the view of the plain cleared, and with it she beheld the army of Mashalleed broken, the King borne down by a dust of Arabs; so she unveiled her face and rode on the host with the horsemen that guarded her, glorious with a crown of gold and the glowing Jewel on her brow. When she was a javelin's flight from them the Arabs shouted and paused in terror, for the light of her head was as the sun setting between clouds of thunder; but that Chief dashed forward like a flame beaten level by the wind, crying, 'Bhanavar; Bhanavar!' and she knew the features of Ruark; so she said, 'Even I!' And he cried again, 'Bhanavar! Bhanavar!' and was as one stricken by a shaft. Then Bhanavar threw on him certain of the horsemen with her, and he suffered them without a sign to surround him and grasp his mare by the bridle-rein, and bring him, disarmed, before the Queen. At sight of Ruark a captive the Arabs fell into confusion, and lost heart, and were speedily chased and scattered from the scene like a loose spray before the wind; but Mashalleed the King rejoiced mightily and praised Bhanavar, and the whole army of the King praised her, magnifying her.

Page 53

Now, with Ruark she interchanged no syllable, and said not farewell to him when she departed with Mashalleed, to encounter other tribes; and the Chief was bound and conducted a prisoner to the city of the inland sea, and cast into prison, in expectation of Death the releaser, and continued there wellnigh a year, eating the bitter bread of captivity. In the evening of every seventh day there came to him a little mountain girl, that sat by him and leaned a lute to her bosom, singing of the mountain and the desert, but he turned his face from her to the wall. One day she sang of Death the releaser, and Ruark thought, ''Tis come! she warneth me! Merciful is Allah!' On the morning that followed Ukleet entered the cell, and with him three slaves, blacks, armed with scimitars. So Ruark stood up and bore witness to his faith, saying, 'Swift with the stroke!' but Ukleet exclaimed, 'Fear not! the end is not yet.'

Then said he, 'Peace with thee! These slaves, O Chief, excelling in martial qualities! surely they're my retinue, and the retinue of them of my rank in the palace; and where I go they go; for the exalted have more shadows than one! yea, three have they in my case, even very grimly black shadows, whereon the idle expend not laughter, and whoso joketh in their hearing, 'tis, wullahy! the last joke of that person. In such-wise are the powerful known among men, they that stand very prominent in the beams of prosperity! Now this of myself; but for thee—of a surety the Queen Bhanavar, my mistress, will be here by the time of the rising of the moon. In the name of Allah!' Saying that he departed in his greatness, and Ruark watched for her that rose in his soul as the moon in the heavens.

Meanwhile Bhanavar had mused, ''Tis this day, the day when the Serpents desire their due, and the King Mashalleed they shall have; for what is life to him but a treachery and a dalliance, and what is my hold on him but this Jewel of the Serpents? He has had the profit of beauty, and he shall yield the penalty: my kiss is for him, my serpent-kiss. And I will release Ruark, and espouse him, and war with kings, sultans, emperors, infidels, subduing them till they worship me.'

She flashed her figure in the glass, and was lovely therein as one in the light of Paradise; but ere she reached the King Mashalleed, lo! the hour of the Serpents had struck, and her beauty melted from her as snow melts from off the rock; and she was suddenly haggard in utter uncomeliness, and knew it not, but marched, smiling a grand smile, on to the King. Now as Mashalleed lifted his eyes to her he started amazed, crying, 'The hag again!' and she said, 'What of the hag, O my lord the King?' Thereat he was yet more amazed, and exclaimed, 'The hag of ugliness with the voice of Bhanavar! Has then the Queen lent that loathsomeness her voice also?'

Page 54

Bhanavar chilled a moment, and looked on the faces of the women present, and they were staring at her, the younger ones tittering, and among them Nashta, whom she hated. So she cried, ‘Away with ye!’ But the King commanded them, ‘Stay!’ Then the Queen leaned to him, saying, ’I will speak with my lord alone’; whereat he shrank from her, and spat. Ice and flame shivered through the blood of Bhanavar, yet such was her eagerness to give the kiss to Mashalleed, that she leaned to him, still wooing him to her with smiles. Then the King seized her violently, and flung her over the marble floor to the very basin of the fountain, and the crown that was on her brow fell and rolled to the feet of Nashta. The girl lifted it, laughing, and was in the act of fitting it to her fair head amid the chuckles of her companions, when a slap from the hand of Bhanavar spun her twice round, and she dropped to the marble insensible. The King bellowed in wrath, and ran to Nashta, crying to the Queen, ‘Surrender that crown to her, foul hag!’ But Bhanavar had bent over the basin of the fountain, and beheld the image of her change therein, and was hurrying from the hall and down the corridors of the palace to the private chamber. So he made bare the steel by his side, and followed her with a number of the harem guard, menacing her, and commanding her to surrender the crown with the Jewel. Ere she could lay hand on a veil, he was beside her, and she was encompassed. In that extremity Bhanavar plucked the Jewel from her crown, and rubbed it, calling the Serpents to her. One came, one only, and that one would not move from her to sling himself about the neck of Mashalleed, but whirled round her, hissing:

> Every hour a serpent dies,
> Till we have the sacrifice:
> Sweeten, sweeten, with thy kiss,
> Quick! a soul for Karatis.

Surely the King bit his breath, marvelling, and his fury became an awful fear, and he fell back from her, molesting her no further. Then she squeezed the serpent till his body writhed in knots, and veiled herself, and sprang down a secret passage to the garden, and it was the time of the rising of the moon. Coolness and soothingness dropped on her as a balm from the great light, and she gazed on it murmuring, as in a memory:

> Shall I counsel the moon in her ascending?
> Stay under that dark palm-tree through the night,
> Rest on the mountain slope,
> By the couching antelope,
> O thou enthroned supremacy of light!
> And for ever the lustre thou art lending
> Lean on the fair long brook that leaps and leaps,
> Silvery leaps and falls:
> Hang by the mountain-walls,
> Moon! and arise no more to crown the steeps,
> For a danger and dolour is thy wending!

Page 55

And she panted and sighed, and wept, crying, 'Who, who will kiss me or have my kiss now, that I may indeed be as yonder beam? Who, that I may be avenged on this King? And who sang that song of the ascending of the moon, that comes to me as a part of me from old times?' As she gazed on the circled radiance swimming under a plume of palm leaves, she exclaimed, 'Ruark! Ruark the Chief!' So she clasped her hands to her bosom, and crouched under the shadows of the garden, and fled through the garden gates and the streets of the city, heavily veiled, to the prison where Ruark awaited her within the walls and Ukleet without. The Governor of the prison had been warned by Ukleet of her coming, and the doors and bars opened before her unchallenged, till she stood in the cell of Ruark; her eyes, that were alone unveiled, scanned the countenance of the Chief, the fevered lustre-jet of his looks, and by the little moonlight in the cell she saw with a glance the straw-heap and the fetters, and the black-bread and water untasted on the bench—signs of his misery and desire for her coming. So she greeted him with the word of peace, and he replied with the name of the All-Merciful. Then said she, 'O Ruark, of Rukrooth thy mother tell me somewhat.'

He answered, 'I know nought of her since that day. Allah have her in his keeping!'

So she cried, 'How? What say'st thou, Ruark? 'tis a riddle.'

Then he, 'The oath of Ruark is no rope of sand! He swore to see her not till he had set eyes on Bhanavar.'

She knelt by the Chief, saying in a soft voice, 'Very greatly the Chief of the Beni-Asser loved Bhanavar.' And she thought, 'Yea! greatly and verily love I him; and he shall be no victim of the Serpents, for I defy them and give them other prey.' So she said in deeper notes, 'Ruark! the Queen is come hither to release thee. O my Chief! O thou soul of wrath! Ruark, my fire-eye! my eagle of the desert! where is one on earth beloved as thou art by Bhanavar?' The dark light in his eyes kindled as light in the eyes of a lion, and she continued, 'Ruark, what a yoke is hers who weareth this crown! He that is my lord, how am I mated to him save in loathing? O my Chief, my lion! hadst thou no dream of Bhanavar, that she would come hither to unbind thee and lift thee beside her, and live with thee in love and veilless loveliness,—thine? Yea! and in power over lands and nations and armies, lording the infidel, taming them to submission, exulting in defiance and assaults and victories and magnanimities—thou and she?' Then while his breast heaved like a broad wave, the Queen started to her feet, crying, 'Lo, she is here! and this she offereth thee, Ruark!'

Page 56

A shrill cry parted from her lips, and to the clapping of her hands slaves entered the cell with lamps, and instruments to strike off the fetters from the Chief; and they released him, and Ruark leaned on their shoulders to bear the weight of a limb, so was he weakened by captivity; but Bhanavar thrust them from the Chief, and took the pressure of his elbow on her own shoulder, and walked with him thus to the door of the cell, he sighing as one in a dream that dreameth the bliss of bliss. Now they had gone three paces onward, and were in the light of many lamps, when behold! the veil of Bhanavar caught in the sleeve of Ruark as he lifted it, and her visage became bare. She shrieked, and caught up her two hands to her brow, but the slaves had a glimpse of her, and said among themselves, 'This is not the Queen.' And they murmured, '"Tis an impostor! one in league with the Chief.' Bhanavar heard them say, 'Arrest her with him at the Governor's gate,' and summoned her soul, thinking, 'He loveth me, the Chief! he will look into my eyes and mark not the change. What need I then to dread his scorn when I ask of him the kiss: now must it be given, or we are lost, both of us!' and she raised her head on Ruark, and said to him, 'my Chief, ere we leave these walls and join our fates, wilt thou plight thyself to me with a kiss?'

Ruark leapt to her like the bounding leopard, and gave her the kiss, as were it his whole soul he gave. Then in a moment Bhanavar felt the blush of beauty burn over her, and drew the veil down on her face, and suffered the slaves to arrest her with Ruark, and bring her before the Governor, and from the Governor to the King in his council-chamber, with the Chief of the Beni-Asser.

Now, the King Mashalleed called to her, 'Thou traitress! thou sorceress! thou serpent!'

And she answered under the veil, 'What, O my lord the King! and wherefore these evil names of me?'

Cried he, 'Thou thing of guile! and thou hast pleaded with me for the life of the Chief thus long to visit him in secret! Life of my head I but Mashalleed is not one to be fooled.'

So she said, '"Tis Bhanavar! hast thou forgotten her?'

Then he waxed white with rage, exclaiming, 'Yea, 'tis she! a serpent in the slough! and Ukleet in the torture hath told of thee what is known to him. Unveil! unveil!'

She threw the veil from her figure, and smiled, for Mashalleed was mute, the torrent of invective frozen on his mouth when he beheld the miracle of beauty that she was, the splendid jewel of throbbing loveliness. So to scourge him with the bitter lash of jealousy, Bhanavar turned her eyes on Ruark, and said sweetly, 'Yet shalt thou live to taste again the bliss of the Desert. Pleasant was our time in it, O my Chief!' The King glared and choked, and she said again, 'Nor he conquered thee, but I; and I that

conquered thee, little will it be for me to conquer him: his threats are the winds of idleness.’

Page 57

Surely the world darkened before the eyes of Mashalleed, and he arose and called to his guard hoarsely, ‘Have off their heads!’ They hesitated, dreading the Queen, and he roared, ‘Slay them!’

Bhanavar beheld the winking of the steel, but ere the scimitars descended, she seized Ruark, and they stood in a whizzing ring of serpents, the sound of whom was as the hum of a thousand wires struck by storm-winds. Then she glowed, towering over them with the Chief clasped to her, and crying:

> King of vileness! match thy slaves
> With my creatures of the caves.

And she sang to the Serpents:

> Seize upon him! sting him thro’!
> Thrice this day shall pay your due.

But they, instead of obeying her injunction, made narrower their circle round Bhanavar and the Chief. She yellowed, and took hold of the nearest Serpent horribly, crying:

> Dare against me to rebel,
> Ye, the bitter brood of hell?

And the Serpent gasped in reply:

> One the kiss to us secures:
> Give us ours, and we are yours.

Thereupon another of the Serpents swung on, the feet of Ruark, winding his length upward round the body of the Chief; so she tugged at that one, tearing it from him violently, and crying:

> Him ye shall not have, I swear!
> Seize the King that’s crouching there.

And that Serpent hissed:

> This is he the kiss ensures:
> Give us ours, and we are yours.

Another and another Serpent she flung from the Chief, and they began to swarm venomously, answering her no more. Then Ruark bore witness to his faith, and folded his arms with the grave smile she had known in the desert; and Bhanavar struggled and tussled with the Serpents in fierceness, strangling and tossing them to right and left. ’Great is Allah!’ cried all present, and the King trembled, for never was sight like that

seen, the hall flashing with the Serpents, and a woman-serpent, their Queen, raging to save one from their fury, shrieking at intervals:

> Never, never shall ye fold,
> Save with me the man I hold.

But now the hiss and scream of the Serpents and the noise of their circling was quickened to a slurred savage sound and they closed on Ruark, and she felt him stifling and that they were relentless. So in the height of the tempest Bhanavar seized the Jewel in the gold circlet on her brow and cast it from her. Lo! the Serpents instantly abated their frenzy, and flew all of them to pluck the Jewel, chasing the one that had it in his fangs through the casement, and the hall breathed empty of them. Then in the silence that was, Bhanavar veiled her face and said to the Chief, 'Pass from the hall while they yet dread me. No longer am I Queen of Serpents.'

But he replied, 'Nay! said I not my soul is thine?'

She cried to him, 'Seest thou not the change in me? I was bound to those Serpents for my beauty, and 'tis gone! Now am I powerless, hateful to look on, O Ruark my Chief!'

Page 58

He remained still, saying, ‘What thou hast been thou art.’

She exclaimed, ’O true soul, the light is hateful to me as I to the light; but I will yet save thee to comfort Rukrooth, thy mother.’

So she drew him with her swiftly from the hall of the King ere the King had recovered his voice of command; but now the wrath of the All-powerful was upon her and him! Surely within an hour from the flight of the Serpents, the slaves and soldiers of Mashalleed laid at his feet two heads that were the heads of Ruark and Bhanavar; and they said, ’O great King, we tracked them to her chamber and through to a passage and a vault hung with black, wherein were two corpses, one in a tomb and one unburied, and we slew them there, clasping each other, O King of the age!’

Mashalleed gazed upon the head of Bhanavar and sighed, for death had made the head again fair with a wondrous beauty, a loveliness never before seen on earth.

THE BETROTHAL

Now, when Shibli Bagarag had ceased speaking, the Vizier smiled gravely, and shook his beard with satisfaction, and said to the Eclipser of Reason, ’What opinest thou of this nephew of the barber, O Noorna bin Noorka?’

She answered, “O Feshnavat, my father, truly I am content with the bargain of my betrothal. He, Wullahy, is a fair youth of flowing speech.’ Then she said, ’Ask thou him what he opineth of me, his betrothed?”

So the Vizier put that interrogation to Shibli Bagarag, and the youth was in perplexity; thinking, ’Is it possible to be joyful in the embrace of one that hath brought thwackings upon us, serious blows?’ Thinking, ’Yet hath she, when the mood cometh, kindly looks; and I marked her eye dwelling on me admiringly!’ And he thought, ’Mayhap she that groweth younger and counteth nature backwards, hath a history that would affect me; or, it may be, my kisses—wah! I like not to give them, and it is said,

> “Love is wither’d by the withered lip”;

and that,

> “On bones become too prominent he’ll trip.”

Yet put the case, that my kisses—I shower them not, Allah the All-seeing is my witness! and they be given daintily as ’twere to the leaf of a nettle, or over-hot pilau. Yet haply kisses repeated might restore her to a bloom, and it is certain youth is somehow stolen from her, if the Vizier Feshnavat went before her, and his blood be her blood; and he is

powerful, she wise. I'll decide to act the part of a rejoicer, and express of her opinions honeyed to the soul of that sex.'

Now, while he was thus debating he hung his head, and the Vizier awaited his response, knitting his brows angrily at the delay, and at the last he cried, 'What! no answer? how 's this? Shall thy like dare hold debate when questioned of my like? And is my daughter Noorna bin Noorka, thinkest thou, a slave-girl in the market,—thou haggling at her price, O thou nephew of the barber?'

Page 59

So Shibli Bagarag exclaimed, ’O exalted one, bestower of the bride! surely I debated with myself but for appropriate terms; and I delayed to select the metre of the verse fitting my thoughts of her, and my wondrous good fortune, and the honour done me.’

Then the Vizier, ‘Let us hear: we listen.’

And Shibli Bagarag was advised to deal with illustrations in his dilemma, by-ways of expression, and spake in extemporaneous verse, and with a full voice:

The pupils of the Sage for living Beauty sought;
And one a Vision clasped, and one a Model wrought.
‘I have it!’ each exclaimed, and rivalry arose:
‘Paint me thy Maid of air!’ ‘Thy Grace of clay disclose.’
‘What! limbs that cannot move!’ ‘What! lips that melt away!’
‘Keep thou thy Maid of air!’ ‘Shroud up thy Grace of clay!’
’Twas thus, contending hot, they went before the Sage,
And knelt at the wise wells of cold ascetic age.
‘The fairest of the twain, O father, thou record’:

He answered, ‘Fairest she who’s likest to her lord.’

Said they, ‘What fairer thing matched with them might prevail?’

The Sage austerely smiled, and said, ‘Yon monkey’s tail.’

’Tis left for after-time his wisdom to declare:
That’s loveliest we best love, and to ourselves compare.
Yet lovelier than all hands shape or fancies build,
The meanest thing of earth God with his fire hath filled.

Now, when Shibli Bagarag ceased, Noorna bin Noorka cried, ’Enough, O wondrous turner of verse, thou that art honest!’ And she laughed loudly, rustling like a bag of shavings, and rolling in her laughter.

Then said she, ’O my betrothed, is not the thing thou wouldst say no other than—

“Each to his mind doth the fairest enfold,
For broken long since was Beauty’s mould”;

and, “Thou that art old, withered, I cannot flatter thee, as I can in no way pay compliments to the monkey’s tail of high design; nevertheless the Sage would do thee honour”? So read I thy illustration, O keen of wit! and thou art forgiven its boldness, my betrothed,—Wullahy! utterly so.’

Now, the youth was abashed at her discernment, and the kindliness of her manner won him to say:

> There's many a flower of sweetness, there's many a gem of earth
> Would thrill with bliss our being, could we perceive its worth.
> O beauteous is creation, in fashion and device!
> If I have fail'd to think thee fair, 'tis blindness is my vice.

And she answered him:

> I've proved thy wit and power of verse,
> That is at will diffuse and terse:
> Lest thou commence to lie—be dumb!
> I am content: the time will come!

Then she said to the Vizier Feshnavat, 'O my father, there is all in this youth, the nephew of the barber, that's desirable for the undertaking; and his feet will be on a level with the task we propose for him, he the height of man above it. 'Tis clear that vanity will trip him, but honesty is a strong upholder; and he is one that hath the spirit of enterprise and the mask of dissimulation: gratitude I observe in him; and it is as I thought when I came upon him on the sand-hill outside the city, that his star is clearly in a web with our star, he destined for the Shaving of Shagpat.'

Page 60

So the Vizier replied, 'He hath had thwackings, yet is he not deterred from making further attempt on Shagpat. I think well of him, and I augur hopefully. Wullahy! the Cadi shall be sent for; I can sleep in his secresy; and he shall perform the ceremonies of betrothal, even now and where we sit, and it shall be for him to write the terms of contract: so shall we bind the youth firmly to us, and he will be one of us as we are, devoted to the undertaking by three bonds—the bond of vengeance, the bond of ambition, and that of love.'

Now, so it was that the Vizier despatched a summons for the attendance of the Cadi, and he came and performed between Shibli Bagarag and Noorna bin Noorka ceremonies of betrothal, and wrote terms of contract; and they were witnessed duly by the legal number of witnesses, and so worded that he had no claim on her as wife till such time as the Event to which he bound himself was mastered. Then the fees being paid, and compliments interchanged, the Vizier exclaimed, 'Be ye happy! and let the weak cling to the strong; and be ye two to one in this world, and no split halves that betray division and stick not together when the gum is heated.' Then he made a sign to the Cadi and them that had witnessed the contract to follow him, leaving the betrothed ones to their own company.

So when they were alone Noorna gazed on the youth wistfully, and said in a soft tone, 'Thou art dazed with the adventure, O youth! Surely there is one kiss owing me: art thou willing? Am I reduced to beg it of thee? Or dream'st thou?'

He lifted his head and replied, 'Even so.'

Thereat he stood up languidly, and went to her and kissed her. And she smiled and said, 'I wot it will be otherwise, and thou wilt learn swiftness of limb, brightness of eye, and the longing for earthly beatitude, when next I ask thee, O my betrothed!'

Lo! while she spake, new light seemed in her; and it was as if a splendid jewel were struggling to cast its beams through the sides of a crystal vase smeared with dust and old dirt and spinnings of the damp spider. He was amazed, and cried, 'How's this? What change is passing in thee?'

She said, 'Joy in thy kiss, and that I have 'scaped Shagpat.'

Then he: 'Shagpat? How? had that wretch claim over thee ere I came?'

But she looked fearfully at the corners of the room and exclaimed, 'Hush, my betrothed! speak not of him in that fashion, 'tis dangerous; and my power cannot keep off his emissaries at all times.' Then she said, 'O my betrothed, know me a sorceress ensorcelled; not that I seem, but that I shall be! Wait thou for the time and it will reward thee. What! thou think'st to have plucked a wrinkled o'erripe fruit,—a mouldy pomegranate under the branches, a sour tamarind? 'Tis well! I say nought, save that

time will come, and be thou content. It is truly as I said, that I have thee between me and Shagpat; and that honoured one of this city thought fit in his presumption to demand me in marriage at the hands of my father, knowing me wise, and knowing the thing that transformed me to this, the abominable fellow! Surely my father entertained not his proposal save with scorn; but the King looked favourably on it, and it is even now matter of reproach to Feshnavat, my father, that he withholdeth me from Shagpat.'

Page 61

Quoth Shibli Bagarag, 'A clothier, O Noorna, control the Vizier! and demand of him his daughter in marriage! and a clothier influence the King against his Vizier!'—tis, wullahy! a riddle.'

She replied, ''Tis even so, eyes of mine, my betrothed! but thou know'st not Shagpat, and that he is. Lo! the King, and all of this city save we three, are held in enchantment by him, and made foolish by one hair that's in his head.'

Shibli Bagarag started in his seat like one that shineth with a discovery, and cried, 'The Identical!'

Then she, sighing, ''Tis that indeed! but the Identical of Identicals, the chief and head of them, and I, woe's me! I, the planter of it.'

So he said, 'How so?'

But she cried, 'I'll tell thee not here, nor aught of myself and him, and the Genie held in bondage by me, till thou art proved by adventure, and we float peacefully on the sea of the Bright Lily: there shalt thou see me as I am, and hear my story, and marvel at it; for 'tis wondrous, and a manifestation of the Power that dwelleth unseen.'

So Shibli Bagarag pondered awhile on the strange nature of the things she hinted, and laughter seized him as he reflected on Shagpat, and the whole city enchanted by one hair in his head; and he exclaimed, 'O Noorna, knoweth he, Shagpat, of the might in him?'

She answered, 'Enough for his vain soul that homage is paid to him, and he careth not for the wherefore!'

Shibli Bagarag fixed his eyes on the deep-flowered carpets of the floor, as if reading there a matter quaintly written, and smiled, saying, 'What boldness was mine—the making offer to shear Shagpat, the lion in his lair, he that holdeth a whole city in enchantment! Wah! 'twas an instance of daring!'

And Noorna said, 'Not only an entire city, but other cities affected by him, as witness Oolb, whither thou wilt go; and there be governments and states, and conditions of men remote, that hang upon him, Shagpat. 'Tis even so; I swell not his size. When thou hast mastered the Event, and sent him forth shivering from thy blade like the shorn lamb, 'twill be known how great a thing has been achieved, and a record for the generations to come; choice is that historian destined to record it!'

Quoth he, looking eagerly at her, 'O Noorna, what is it in thy speech affecteth me? Surely it infuseth the vigour of wine, old wine; and I shiver with desire to shave Shagpat, and spin threads for the historian to weave in order. I, wullahy! had but dry visions of the greatness destined for me till now, my betrothed! Shall I master an Event in shaving

him, and be told of to future ages? By Allah and his Prophet (praise be to that name!), this is greatness! Say, Noorna, hadst thou foreknowledge of me and my coming to this city?'

Page 62

So she said, ’I was on the roofs one night among the stars ere moonrise, O my betrothed, and ’twas close on the rise of this very month’s moon. The star of our enemy, Shagpat, was large and red, mine as it were menaced by its proximity, nigh swallowed in its haughty beams and the steady overbearings of its effulgence. ’Twas so as it had long been, when suddenly, lo! a star from the upper heaven that shot down between them wildly, and my star took lustre from it; and the star of Shagpat trembled like a ring on a tightened rope, and waved and flickered, and seemed to come forward and to retire; and ’twas presently as a comet in the sky, bright,—a tadpole, with large head and lengthy tail, in the assembly of the planets. This I saw: and that the stranger star was stationed by my star, shielding it, and that it drew nearer to my star, and entered its circle, and that the two stars seemed mixing the splendour that was theirs. Now, that sight amazed me, and my heart in its beating quickened with the expectation of things approaching. Surely I rendered praise, and pressed both hands on my bosom, and watched, and behold! the comet, the illumined tadpole, was becoming restless beneath the joint rays of the twain that were dominating him; and he diminished, and lashed his tail uneasily, half madly, darting as do captured beasts from the fetters that constrain them. Then went there from thy star—for I know now ’twas thine—a momentary flash across the head of the tadpole, and again another and another, rapidly, pertinaciously. And from thy star there passed repeated flashes across the head of the tadpole, till his brilliance was as ’twere severed from him, and he, like drossy silver, a dead shape in the conspicuous heavens. And he became yellow as the rolling eyes of sick wretches in pain, and shrank in his place like pale parchment at the touch of flame; dull was he as an animal fascinated by fear, and deprived of all power to make head against the foe, darkness, that now beset him, and usurped part of his yet lively tail, and settled on his head, and coated part of his body. So when this tadpole, that was once terrible to me, became turbaned, shoed, and shawled with darkness, and there was little of him remaining visible, lo! a concluding flash shot from thy star, and he fell heavily down the sky and below the hills, into the sea, that is the Enchanted Sea, whose Queen is Rabesqurat, Mistress of Illusions. Now when my soul recovered from amazement at the marvels seen, I arose and went from the starry roofs to consult my books of magic, and ’twas revealed to me that one was wandering to a junction with my destiny, and that by his means the great aim would of a surety be accomplished—-Shagpat Shaved! So my purpose was to discover him; and I made calculations, and summoned them that serve me to search for such a youth as thou art; fairly, O my betrothed, did I preconceive thee. And so it was that I traced a magic line from the sand-hills to the city, and

Page 63

from the outer hills to the sand-hills; and whoso approached by that line I knew was he marked out as my champion, my betrothed,—a youth destined for great things. Was I right? The egg hatcheth. Thou art already proved by thwackings, seasoned to the undertaking, and I doubt not thou art he that will finish with that tadpole Shagpat, and sit in the high seat, thy name an odour in distant lands, a joy to the historian, the Compiler of Events, thou Master of the Event, the greatest which time will witness for ages to come.'

When she had spoken Shibli Bagarag considered her words, and the knowledge that he was selected by destiny as Master of the Event inflated him; and he was a hawk in eagerness, a peacock in pride, an ostrich in fulness of chest, crying, 'O Noorna bin Noorka! is't really so? Truly it must be, for the readers of planets were also busy with me at the time of my birth, interpreting of me in excessive agitation; and the thing they foretold is as thou foretellest. I am, wullahy! marked: I walk manifest in the eye of Providence.'

Thereupon he exulted, and his mind strutted through the future of his days, and down the ladder of all time, exacting homage from men, his brethren; and 'twas beyond the art of Noorna to fix him to the present duties of the enterprise: he was as feathered seed before the breath of vanity.

Now, while the twain discoursed, she of the preparations for shaving Shagpat, he of his completion of the deed, and the honours due to him as Master of the Event, Feshnavat the Vizier returned to them from his entertainment of the Cadi; and he had bribed him to silence with a mighty bribe. So he called to them—

'Ho! be ye ready to commence the work? and have ye advised together as to the beginning? True is that triplet:

> "Whatever enterprize man hath,
> For waking love or curbing wrath,
> 'Tis the first step that makes a path."

And how have ye determined as to that first step?'

Noorna replied, 'O my father! we have not decided, and there hath been yet no deliberation between us as to that.'

Then he said, 'All this while have ye talked, and no deliberation as to that! Lo, I have drawn the Cadi to our plot, and bribed him with a mighty bribe; and I have prepared possible disguises for this nephew of the barber; and I have had the witnesses of thy betrothal despatched to foreign parts, far kingdoms in the land of Roum, to prevent tattling and gabbling; and ye that were left alone for debating as to the great deed, ye have not yet deliberated as to that! Is't known to ye, O gabblers, aught of the

punishment inflicted by Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil, the Builder?—a punishment that, by Allah!'

Shibli Bagarag said, 'How of that punishment, O Vizier?'

And the Vizier narrated as followeth.

AND THIS IS THE PUNISHMENT OF SHAHPESH, THE PERSIAN, ON KHIPIL, THE BUILDER

Page 64

They relate that Shahpesh, the Persian, commanded the building of a palace, and Khipil was his builder. The work lingered from the first year of the reign of Shahpesh even to his fourth. One day Shahpesh went to the riverside where it stood, to inspect it. Khipil was sitting on a marble slab among the stones and blocks; round him stretched lazily the masons and stonecutters and slaves of burden; and they with the curve of humorous enjoyment on their lips, for he was reciting to them adventures, interspersed with anecdotes and recitations and poetic instances, as was his wont. They were like pleased flocks whom the shepherd hath led to a pasture freshened with brooks, there to feed indolently; he, the shepherd, in the midst.

Now, the King said to him, 'O Khipil, show me my palace where it standeth, for I desire to gratify my sight with its fairness.'

Khipil abased himself before Shahpesh, and answered, ''Tis even here, O King of the age, where thou delightest the earth with thy foot and the ear of thy slave with sweetness. Surely a site of vantage, one that dominateth earth, air, and water, which is the builder's first and chief requisition for a noble palace, a palace to fill foreign kings and sultans with the distraction of envy; and it is, O Sovereign of the time, a site, this site I have chosen, to occupy the tongues of travellers and awaken the flights of poets!'

Shahpesh smiled and said, 'The site is good! I laud the site! Likewise I laud the wisdom of Ebn Busrac, where he exclaims:

> "Be sure, where Virtue faileth to appear,
> For her a gorgeous mansion men will rear;
> And day and night her praises will be heard,
> Where never yet she spake a single word."'

Then said he, 'O Khipil, my builder, there was once a farm servant that, having neglected in the seed-time to sow, took to singing the richness of his soil when it was harvest, in proof of which he displayed the abundance of weeds that coloured the land everywhere. Discover to me now the completeness of my halls and apartments, I pray thee, O Khipil, and be the excellence of thy construction made visible to me!'

Quoth Khipil, 'To hear is to obey.'

He conducted Shahpesh among the unfinished saloons and imperfect courts and roofless rooms, and by half erected obelisks, and columns pierced and chipped, of the palace of his building. And he was bewildered at the words spoken by Shahpesh; but now the King exalted him, and admired the perfection of his craft, the greatness of his labour, the speediness of his construction, his assiduity; feigning not to behold his negligence.

Presently they went up winding balusters to a marble terrace, and the King said, ’Such is thy devotion and constancy in toil, Khipil, that thou shaft walk before me here.’

He then commanded Khipil to precede him, and Khipil was heightened with the honour. When Khipil had paraded a short space he stopped quickly, and said to Shahpesh, ’Here is, as it chanceth, a gap, O King! and we can go no further this way.’

Page 65

Shahpesh said, ’All is perfect, and it is my will thou delay not to advance.’

Khipil cried, ’The gap is wide, O mighty King, and manifest, and it is an incomplete part of thy palace.’

Then said Shahpesh, ’O Khipil, I see no distinction between one part and another; excellent are all parts in beauty and proportion, and there can be no part incomplete in this palace that occupieth the builder four years in its building: so advance, do my bidding.’

Khipil yet hesitated, for the gap was of many strides, and at the bottom of the gap was a deep water, and he one that knew not the motion of swimming. But Shahpesh ordered his guard to point their arrows in the direction of Khipil, and Khipil stepped forward hurriedly, and fell in the gap, and was swallowed by the water below. When he rose the second time, succour reached him, and he was drawn to land trembling, his teeth chattering. And Shahpesh praised him, and said, ’This is an apt contrivance for a bath, Khipil O my builder! well conceived; one that taketh by surprise; and it shall be thy reward daily when much talking hath fatigued thee.’

Then he bade Khipil lead him to the hall of state. And when they were there Shahpesh said, ’For a privilege, and as a mark of my approbation, I give thee permission to sit in the marble chair of yonder throne, even in my presence, O Khipil.’

Khipil said, ‘Surely, O King, the chair is not yet executed.’

And Shahpesh exclaimed, ’If this be so, thou art but the length of thy measure on the ground, O talkative one!’

Khipil said, ’Nay, ’tis not so, O King of splendours! blind that I am! yonder’s indeed the chair.’

And Khipil feared the King, and went to the place where the chair should be, and bent his body in a sitting posture, eyeing the King, and made pretence to sit in the chair of Shahpesh, as in conspiracy to amuse his master.

Then said Shahpesh, ’For a token that I approve thy execution of the chair, thou shalt be honoured by remaining seated in it up to the hour of noon; but move thou to the right or to the left, showing thy soul insensible of the honour done thee, transfixed thou shah be with twenty arrows and five.’

The King then left him with a guard of twenty-five of his body-guard; and they stood around him with bent bows, so that Khipil dared not move from his sitting posture. And the masons and the people crowded to see Khipil sitting on his master’s chair, for it became rumoured about. When they beheld him sitting upon nothing, and he trembling to stir for fear of the loosening of the arrows, they laughed so that they rolled upon the

floor of the hall, and the echoes of laughter were a thousand-fold. Surely the arrows of the guards swayed with the laughter that shook them.

Now, when the time had expired for his sitting in the chair, Shahpesh returned to him, and he was cramped, pitiable to see; and Shahpesh said, ’Thou hast been exalted above men, O Khipil! for that thou didst execute for thy master has been found fitting for thee.’

Page 66

Then he bade Khipil lead the way to the noble gardens of dalliance and pleasure that he had planted and contrived. And Khipil went in that state described by the poet, when we go draggingly, with remonstrating members,

Knowing a dreadful strength behind,
And a dark fate before.

They came to the gardens, and behold, these were full of weeds and nettles, the fountains dry, no tree to be seen—a desert. And Shahpesh cried, 'This is indeed of admirable design, O Khipil! Feelest thou not the coolness of the fountains?—their refreshingness? Truly I am grateful to thee! And these flowers, pluck me now a handful, and tell me of their perfume.'

Khipil plucked a handful of the nettles that were there in the place of flowers, and put his nose to them before Shahpesh, till his nose was reddened; and desire to rub it waxed in him, and possessed him, and became a passion, so that he could scarce refrain from rubbing it even in the King's presence. And the King encouraged him to sniff and enjoy their fragrance, repeating the poet's words:

Methinks I am a lover and a child,
A little child and happy lover, both!
When by the breath of flowers I am beguiled
From sense of pain, and lulled in odorous sloth.
So I adore them, that no mistress sweet
Seems worthier of the love which they awake:
In innocence and beauty more complete,
Was never maiden cheek in morning lake.
Oh, while I live, surround me with fresh flowers!
Oh, when I die, then bury me in their bowers!

And the King said, 'What sayest thou, O my builder? that is a fair quotation, applicable to thy feelings, one that expresseth them?'

Khipil answered, ''Tis eloquent, O great King! comprehensiveness would be its portion, but that it alludeth not to the delight of chafing.'

Then Shahpesh laughed, and cried, 'Chafe not! it is an ill thing and a hideous! This nosegay, O Khipil, it is for thee to present to thy mistress. Truly she will receive thee well after its presentation! I will have it now sent in thy name, with word that thou followest quickly. And for thy nettled nose, surely if the whim seize thee that thou desirest its chafing, to thy neighbour is permitted what to thy hand is refused.'

The King set a guard upon Khipil to see that his orders were executed, and appointed a time for him to return to the gardens.

At the hour indicated Khipil stood before Shahpesh again. He was pale, saddened; his tongue drooped like the tongue of a heavy bell, that when it soundeth giveth forth mournful sounds only: he had also the look of one battered with many beatings. So the King said, 'How of the presentation of the flowers of thy culture, O Khipil?'

He answered, 'Surely, O King, she received me with wrath, and I am shamed by her.'

And the King said, 'How of my clemency in the matter of the chafing?'

Page 67

Khipil answered, 'O King of splendours! I made petition to my neighbours whom I met, accosting them civilly and with imploring, for I ached to chafe, and it was the very raging thirst of desire to chafe that was mine, devouring eagerness for solace of chafing. And they chafed me, O King; yet not in those parts which throbbed for the chafing, but in those which abhorred it.'

Then Shahpesh smiled and said, "Tis certain that the magnanimity of monarchs is as the rain that falleth, the sun that shineth: and in this spot it fertilizeth richness; in that encourageth rankness. So art thou but a weed, O Khipil! and my grace is thy chastisement.'

Now, the King ceased not persecuting Khipil, under pretence of doing him honour and heaping favours on him. Three days and three nights was Khipil gasping without water, compelled to drink of the drought of the fountain, as an honour at the hands of the King. And he was seven days and seven nights made to stand with stretched arms, as they were the branches of a tree, in each hand a pomegranate. And Shahpesh brought the people of his court to regard the wondrous pomegranate shoot planted by Khipil, very wondrous, and a new sort, worthy the gardens of a King. So the wisdom of the King was applauded, and men wotted he knew how to punish offences in coin, by the punishment inflicted on Khipil the builder. Before that time his affairs had languished, and the currents of business instead of flowing had become stagnant pools. It was the fashion to do as did Khipil, and fancy the tongue a constructor rather than a commentator; and there is a doom upon that people and that man which runneth to seed in gabble, as the poet says in his wisdom:

> If thou wouldst be famous, and rich in splendid fruits,
> Leave to bloom the flower of things, and dig among the roots.

Truly after Khipil's punishment there were few in the dominions of Shahpesh who sought to win the honours bestowed by him on gabblers and idlers: as again the poet:

> When to loquacious fools with patience rare
> I listen, I have thoughts of Khipil's chair:
> His bath, his nosegay, and his fount I see,—
> Himself stretch'd out as a pomegranate-tree.
> And that I am not Shahpesh I regret,
> So to inmesh the babbler in his net.
> Well is that wisdom worthy to be sung,
> Which raised the Palace of the Wagging Tongue!

And whoso is punished after the fashion of Shahpesh, the Persian, on Khipil the Builder, is said to be one 'in the Palace of the Wagging Tongue' to this time.

THE GENIE KARAZ

Now, when the voice of the Vizier had ceased, Shibli Bagarag exclaimed, ’O Vizier, this night, no later, I’ll surprise Shagpat, and shave him while he sleepeth: and he shall wake shorn beside his spouse. Wullahy! I’ll delay no longer, I, Shibli Bagarag.’

Said the Vizier, ‘Thou?’

Page 68

And he replied, ‘Surely, O Vizier! thou knowest little of my dexterity.’

So the Vizier laughed, and Noorna bin Noorka laughed, and he was at a loss to interpret the cause of their laughter. Then said Noorna, ’O my betrothed, there’s not a doubt among us of thy dexterity, nor question of thy willingness; but this shaving of Shagpat, wullahy! ’tis longer work than what thou makest of it.’

And he cried, ’How? because of the Chief of Identicals planted by thee in his head?’

She answered, ’Because of that; but ‘tis the smallest opposer, that.’

Then the Vizier said, ‘Let us consult.’

So Shibli Bagarag gave ear, and the Vizier continued, ’There’s first, the Chief of Identicals planted by thee in the head of that presumptuous fellow, O my daughter! By what means shall that be overcome?’

She said, ’I rank not that first, O Feshnavat, my father; surely I rank first the illusions with which Rabesqurat hath surrounded him, and made it difficult to know him from his semblances, whenever real danger threateneth him.’

The Vizier assented, saying, ‘Second, then, the Chief of Identicals?’

She answered, ’Nay, O my father; second, the weakness that’s in man, and the little probability of his finishing with Shagpat at one effort; and there is but a sole chance for whoso attempteth, and if he faileth, ’tis forever he faileth.’

So the Vizier said, ’Even I knew not ’twas so grave! Third, then, the Chief of Identicals?’

She replied, ’Third! which showeth the difficulty of the task. Read ye not, first, how the barber must come upon Shagpat and fix him for his operation; second, how the barber must be possessed of more than mortal strength to master him in so many strokes; third, how the barber must have a blade like no other blade in this world in sharpness, in temper, in velocity of sweep, that he may reap this crop which flourisheth on Shagpat, and with it the magic hair which defieth edge of mortal blades?’

Now, the Vizier sighed at the words, saying, ’Powerful is Shagpat. I knew not the thing I undertook. I fear his mastery of us, and we shall be contemned—objects for the red finger of scorn.’

Noorna turned to Shibli Bagarag and asked, ’Do the three bonds of enterprise—-vengeance, ambition, and love—shrink in thee from this great contest?’

Shibli Bagarag said, ‘’Tis terrible! on my head be it!’

She gazed at him a moment tenderly, and said, ’Thou art worthy of what is in store for thee, O my betrothed! and I think little of the dangers, in contemplation of the courage in thee. Lo, if vengeance and ambition spur thee so, how will not love when added to the two?’

Then said she, ’As to the enchantments and spells that shall overreach him, and as to the blade wherewith to shear him?’

Feshnavat exclaimed, ’Yonder ’s indeed where we stumble and are tripped at starting.’

Page 69

But she cried, 'What if I know of a sword that nought on earth or under resisteth, and before the keen edge of which all Illusions and Identicals are as summer grass to the scythe?'

They both shouted, 'The whereabout of that sword, O Noorna!'

So she said, ''Tis in Aklis, in the mountains of the Koosh; and the seven sons of Aklis sharpen it day and night till the adventurer cometh to claim it for his occasion. Whoso succeedeth in coming to them they know to have power over the sword, and 'tis then holiday for them. Many are the impediments, and they are as holes where the fox haunteth. So they deliver to his hand the sword till his object is attained, his Event mastered, smitten through with it; and 'tis called the Sword of Events. Surely, with it the father of the Seven vanquished the mighty Roc, Kroojis, that threatened mankind with ruin, and a stain of the Roc's blood is yet on the hilt of the sword. How sayest thou, O Feshnavat,—shall we devote ourselves to get possession of that Sword?'

So the Vizier brightened at her words, and said, 'O excellent in wisdom and star of counsel! speak further, and as to the means.'

Noorna bin Noorka continued, 'Thou knowest, O my father, I am proficient in the arts of magic, and I am what I am, and what I shall be, by its uses. 'Tis known to thee also that I hold a Genie in bondage, and can utter ten spells and one spell in a breath. Surely my services to the youth in his attainment of the Sword will be beyond price! Now to reach Aklis and the Sword there are three things needed—charms: and one is a phial full of the waters of Paravid from the wells in the mountain yon-side the desert; and one, certain hairs that grow in the tail of the horse Garraveen, he that roameth wild in the meadows of Melistan; and one, that the youth gather and bear to Aklis, for the white antelope Gulrevaz, the Lily of the Lovely Light that groweth in the hollow of the crags over the Enchanted Sea: with these spells he will command the Sword of Aklis, and nothing can bar him passage. Moreover I will expend in his aid all my subtleties, my transformations, the stores of my wisdom. Many seek this Sword, and people the realms of Rabesqurat, or are beasts in Aklis, or crowned Apes, or go to feed the Roc, Kroojis, in the abyss beneath the Roc's-egg bridge; but there's virtue in Shibli Bagarag: wullahy! I am wistful in him of the hand of Destiny, and he will succeed in this undertaking if he dareth it.'

Shibli Bagarag cried, 'At thy bidding, O Noorna! Care I for dangers? I'm on fire to wield the Sword, and master the Event.'

Page 70

Thereupon, Noorna bin Noorka arose instantly, and took him by the cheeks a tender pinch, and praised him. Then drew she round him a circle with her forefinger that left a mark like the shimmering of evanescent green flame, saying, ‘White was the day I set eyes on thee!’ Round the Vizier, her father, she drew a like circle; and she took an unguent, and traced with it characters on the two circles, and letters of strange form, arrowy, lance-like, like leaning sheaves, and crouching baboons, and kicking jackasses, and cocks a-crow, and lutes slack-strung; and she knelt and mumbled over and over words of magic, like the drone of a bee to hear, and as a roll of water, nothing distinguishable. After that she sought for an unguent of a red colour, and smeared it on a part of the floor by the corner of the room, and wrote on it in silver fluid a word that was the word ‘Eblis,’ and over that likewise she droned awhile. Presently she arose with a white-heated face, the sweat on her brow, and said to Shibli Bagarag and Feshnavat hurriedly and in a harsh tone, ’How? have ye fear?’

They answered, ‘Our faith is in Allah, our confidence in thee.’

Said she then, ’I summon the Genie I hold in bondage. He will be wrathful; but ye are secure from him. He’s this moment in the farthest region of earth, doing ill, as is his wont, and the wont of the stock of Eblis.’

So the Vizier said, ’He’ll be no true helper, this Genie, and I care not for his company.’

She answered, ’O my father! leave thou that to me. What says the poet?—

> “It is the sapiency of fools,
> To shrink from handling evil tools.'"

Now, while she was speaking, she suddenly inclined her ear as to a distant noise; but they heard nothing. Then, after again listening, she cried in a sharp voice, ’Ho! muffle your mouths with both hands, and stir not from the ring of the circles, as ye value life and its blessings.’

So they did as she bade them, and watched her curiously. Lo! she swathed the upper and lower part of her face in linen, leaving the lips and eyes exposed; and she took water from an ewer, and sprinkled it on her head, and on her arms and her feet, muttering incantations. Then she listened a third time, and stooped to the floor, and put her lips to it, and called the name, ‘Karaz!’ And she called this name seven times loudly, sneezing between whiles. Then, as it were in answer to her summons, there was a deep growl of thunder, and the palace rocked, tottering; and the air became smoky and full of curling vapours. Presently they were aware of the cry of a Cat, and its miaulings; and the patch of red unguent on the floor parted and they beheld a tawny Cat with an arched back. So Noorna bin Noorka frowned fiercely at the Cat, and cried, ’This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! for it serves not the purpose.’

The Cat changed, and was a Leopard with glowing yellow eyes, crouched for the spring. So Noorna bin Noorka stamped, and cried again, ’This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! for it serves not the purpose.’

Page 71

And the Leopard changed, and was a Serpent with many folds, sleek, curled, venomous, hissing.

Noorna bin Noorka cried in wrath, 'This is thy shape, O Karaz; change! or thou'lt be no other till Eblis is accepted in Paradise.'

And the Serpent vanished. Lo! in its place a Genie of terrible aspect, black as a solitary tree seared by lightning; his forehead ridged and cloven with red streaks; his hair and ears reddened; his eyes like two hollow pits dug by the shepherd for the wolf, and the wolf in them. He shouted, 'What work is it now, thou accursed traitress?'

Noorna replied, 'I've need of thee!'

He said, 'What shape?'

She answered, 'The shape of an Ass that will carry two on its back, thou Perversity!'

Upon that, he cried, 'O faithless woman, how long shall I be the slave of thy plotting? Now, but for that hair of my head, plucked by thy hand while I slept, I were free, no doer of thy tasks. Say, who be these that mark us?'

She answered, 'One, the Vizier Feshnavat; and one, Shibli Bagarag of Shiraz, he that's destined to shave Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor, the son of Shoolpi, the son of Shullum; and the youth is my betrothed.'

Now, at her words the whole Genie became as live coal with anger, and he panted black and bright, and made a stride toward Shibli Bagarag, and stretched his arm out to seize him; but Noorna, blew quickly on the circles she had drawn, and the circles rose up in a white flame high as the heads of those present, and the Genie shrank hastily back from the flame, and was seized with fits of sneezing. Then she said in scorn, 'Easily, O Karaz, is a woman outwitted! Surely I could not guess what would be thy action! and I was wanting in foresight and insight! and I am a woman bearing the weight of my power as a woodman staggereth under the logs he hath felled!'

So she taunted him, and he still sneezing and bent double with the might of the sneeze. Then said Noorna in a stern voice, 'No more altercation between us! Wait thou here till I reappear, Karaz!'

Thereupon, she went from them; and the two, Feshnavat and Shibli Bagarag, feared greatly being left with the Genie, for he became all colours, and loured on them each time that he ceased sneezing. He was clearly menacing them when Noorna returned, and in her hand a saddle made of hide, traced over with mystic characters and gold stripes.

So she cried, ‘Take this!’ Then, seeing he hesitated, she unclosed from her left palm a powder, and scattered

it over him; and he grew meek, and the bending knee of obedience was his, and he took the saddle. So she said, ’’Tis well! Go now, and wait outside the city in the shape of an Ass, with this saddle on thy back.’

The Genie groaned, and said, ‘To hear is to obey!’ And he departed with those words, for she held him in bondage. Then she calmed down the white flames of the circles that enclosed Shibli Bagarag and the Vizier Feshnavat, and they stepped forth, marvelling at the greatness of her sorceries that held such a Genie in bondage.

Page 72

THE WELL OF PARAVID

Now, there was haste in the movements of Noorna bin Noorka, and she arrayed herself and clutched Shibli Bagarag by the arm, and the twain departed from Feshnavat the Vizier, and came to the outside of the city, and lo! there was the Genie by a well under a palm, and he standing in the shape of an Ass, saddled. So they mounted him, and in a moment they were in the midst of the desert, and naught round them save the hot glimmer of the sands and the grey of the sky. Surely, the Ass went at such a pace as never Ass went before in this world, resting not by the rivulets, nor under the palms, nor beside the date-boughs; it was as if the Ass scurried without motion of his legs, so swiftly went he. At last the desert gave signs of a border on the low line of the distance, and this grew rapidly higher as they advanced, revealing a country of hills and rocks, and at the base of these the Ass rested.

So Noorna, said, 'This desert that we have passed, O my betrothed, many are they that perish in it, and reach not the well; but give thanks to Allah that it is passed.'

Then said she, 'Dismount, and be wary of moving to the front or to the rear of this Ass, and measure thy distance from the lash of his tail.'

So Shibli Bagarag dismounted, and followed her up the hills and the rocks, through ravines and gorges of the rocks, and by tumbling torrents, among hanging woods, over perilous precipices, where no sun hath pierced, and the bones of travellers whiten in loneliness; and they continued mounting upward by winding paths, now closed in by coverts, now upon open heights having great views, and presently a mountain was disclosed to them, green at the sides high up it; and Noorna bin Noorka said to Shibli Bagarag, 'Mount here, for the cunning of this Ass can furnish him no excuse further for making thee food for the birds of prey.'

So Shibli Bagarag mounted, and they ceased not to ascend the green slopes till the grass became scanty and darkness fell, and they were in a region of snow and cold. Then Noorna bin Noorka tethered the Ass to a stump of a tree and breathed in his ear, and the Ass became as a creature carved in stone; and she drew from her bosom two bags of silk, and blew in one and entered it, bidding Shibli Bagarag do likewise with the other bag; and he obeyed her, drawing it up to his neck, and the delightfulness of warmth came over him. Then said she, 'To-morrow, at noon, we shall reach near the summit of the mountain and the Well of Paravid, if my power last over this Ass; and from that time thou wilt be on the high road to greatness, so fail not to remember what I have done for thee, and be not guilty of ingratitude when thy hand is the stronger.'

Page 73

He promised her, and they lay and slept. When he awoke the sun was half-risen, and he looked at Noorna bin Noorka in the silken bag, and she was yet in the peacefulness of pleasant dreams; but for the Ass, surely his eyes rolled, and his head and fore legs were endued with life, while his latter half seemed of stone. And the youth called to Noorna bin Noorka, and pointed to her the strangeness of the condition of the Ass. As she cast eyes on him she cried out, and rushed to him, and took him by the ears and blew up his nostrils, and the animal was quiet. Then she and Shibli Bagarag mounted him again, and she said to him, 'It is well thou wert more vigilant than I, and that the sun rose not on this Ass while I slept, or my enchantment would have thawed on him, and he would have 'scaped us.'

She gave her heel to the Ass, and the Ass hung his tail in sullenness and drooped his head; and she laughed, crying, 'Karaz, silly fellow! do thy work willingly, and take wisely thine outwitting.'

She jeered him as they journeyed, and made the soul of Shibli Bagarag merry, so that he jerked in his seat upon the Ass. Now, as they ascended the mountain they came to the opening of a cavern, and Noorna bin Noorka halted the Ass, and said to Shibli Bagarag, 'We part here, and I wait for thee in this place. Take this phial, and fill it with the waters of the well, after thy bath. The way is before thee—speed on it.'

He climbed the sides of the mountain, and was soon hidden in the clefts and beyond the perches of the vulture. She kept her eyes on the rocky point when he disappeared, awaiting his return; and the sun went over her head and sank on the yon-side of the mountain, and it was by the beams of the moon that she beheld Shibli Bagarag dropping from the crags and ledges of rock, sliding and steadying himself downward till he reached her with the phial in his hand, filled; and he was radiant, as it were divine with freshness, so that Noorna, before she spoke welcome to him, was lost in contemplating the warm shine of his visage, calling to mind the poet's words:

> The wealth of light in sun and moon,
> All nature's wealth,
> Hath mortal beauty for a boon
> When match'd with health.

Then said she, 'O Shibli Bagarag, 'tis achieved, this first of thy tasks; for mutely on the fresh red of thy mouth, my betrothed, speaketh the honey of persuasiveness, and the children of Aklis will not resist thee.' So she took the phial from him and led forth the Ass, and the twain mounted the Ass and descended the slopes of the mountain in moonlight; and Shibli Bagarag said, 'Lo! I have marked wonders, and lived a life since our parting; and this well, 'tis a miracle to dip in it, and by it sit many maidens weeping and old men babbling, and youths that were idle youths striking bubbles from the surface of the water. The well is rounded with marble, and the sky is clear in it, cool in it, the whole earth imaged therein.'

Page 74

Then Noorna said, 'Hadst thou a difficulty in obtaining the waters of the well?'

He answered, 'Surely all was made smooth for me by thy aid. Now when I came to the well I marked not them by it, but plunged, and the depth of that well seemed to me the very depth of the earth itself, so went I ever downward; and when I was near the bottom of the well I had forgotten life above, and lo! no sooner had I touched the bottom of the well when my head emerged from the surface: 'twas wondrous! But for a sign that touched the bottom of the well, see, O Noorna bin Noorka, the Jewel, the one of myriads that glitter at the bottom, and I plucked it for a gift to thee.'

So Noorna took the Jewel from his hand that was torn and crimson, and she cried, 'Thou fair youth, thou bleedest with the plucking of it, and it was written, no hand shall pluck a jewel at the bottom of that well without letting of blood. Even so it is! Worthy art thou, and I was not mistaken in thee.'

At her words Shibli Bagarag burst forth into praises of her, and he sang:

'What is my worthiness
Match'd with thy worth?
Darkness and earthiness,
Dust and dearth!

O Noorna, thou art wise above women: great and glorious over them.'

In this fashion the youth lauded her that was his betrothed, but she exclaimed, 'Hush! or the jealousy of this Ass will be aroused, and of a surety he'll spill us.'

Then he laughed and she laughed till the tail of Karaz trembled.

THE HORSE GARRAVEEN

Now, they descended leisurely the slopes of the mountain, and when they were again in the green of its base, Noorna called to the Ass, 'Ho! Karaz! Sniff now the breezes, for the end of our journey by night is the meadows of Melistan. Forward in thy might, and bray not when we are in them, for thy comfort's sake!'

The Ass sniffed, turning to the four quarters, and chose a certain direction, and bore them swiftly over hills and streams eddying in silver; over huge mounds of sand, where the tents of Bedouins stood in white clusters; over lakes smooth as the cheeks of sleeping loveliness; by walls of cities, mosques, and palaces; under towers that rose as an armed man with the steel on his brows and the frown of battle; by the shores of the pale foaming sea it bore them, going at a pace that the Arab on his steed outstrippeth not. So when the sun was red and the dews were blushing with new light, they struggled from a wilderness of barren broken ground, and saw beneath them, in the

warm beams, green, peaceful, deep, the meadows of Melistan. They were meadows dancing with flowers, as it had been fresh damsels of the mountain, fair with variety of colours that were so many gleams of changing light as the breezes of the morn swept over them; lavish of hues, of sweetness, of pleasantness, fir for the souls of the blest.

Page 75

Then, after they had gazed awhile, Noorna bin Noorka said, 'In these meadows the Horse Garraveen roameth at will. Heroes of bliss bestride him on great days. He is black to look on; speed quivers in his flanks like the lightning; his nostrils are wide with flame; there is that in his eye which is settled fire, and that in his hoofs which is ready thunder; when he paws the earth kingdoms quake: no animal liveth with blood like the Horse Garraveen. He is under a curse, for that he bore on his back one who defied the Prophet. Now, to make him come to thee thou must blow the call of battle, and to catch him thou must contrive to strike him on the fetlock as he runs with this musk-ball which I give thee; and to tame him thou must trace between his eyes a figure or the crescent with thy forenail. When that is done, bring him to me here, where I await thee, and I will advise thee further.'

So she said, 'Go!' and Shibli Bagarag showed her the breadth of his shoulders, and stepped briskly toward the meadows, and was soon brushing among the flowers and soft mosses of the meadows, lifting his nostrils to the joyful smells, looking about him with the broad eye of one that hungereth for a coming thing. The birds went up above him, and the trees shook and sparkled, and the waters of brooks and broad rivers flashed like waving mirrors waved by the slave-girls in sport when the beauties of the harem riot and dip their gleaming shoulders in the bath. He wandered on, lost in the gladness that lived, till the loud neigh of a steed startled him, and by the banks of a river before him he beheld the Horse Garraveen stooping to drink of the river; glorious was the look of the creature,—silver-hoofed, fashioned in the curves of beauty and swiftness. So Shibli Bagarag put up his two hands and blew the call of battle, and the Horse Garraveen arched his neck at the call, and swung upon his haunches, and sought the call, answering it, and tossing his mane as he advanced swiftly. Then, as he neared, Shibli Bagarag held the musk-ball in his fingers, and aimed at the fetlock of the Horse Garraveen, and flung it, and struck him so that he stumbled and fell. He snorted fiercely as he bent to the grass, but Shibli Bagarag ran to him, and grasped strongly the tuft of hair hanging forward between his ears, and traced between his fine eyes a figure of the crescent with his forenail, and the Horse ceased plunging, and was gentle as a colt by its mother's side, and suffered Shibli Bagarag to bestride him, and spurn him with his heel to speed, and bore him fleetly across the fair length of the golden meadows to where Noorna bin Noorka sat awaiting him. She uttered a cry of welcome, saying, 'This is achieved with diligence and skill, O my betrothed! and on thy right wrist I mark strength like a sleeping leopard, and the children of Aklis will not resist thee.'

So she bade him alight from the Horse, but he said, 'Nay.' And she called to him again to alight, but he cried, 'I will not alight from him! By Allah! such a bounding wave of bliss have I never yet had beneath me, and I will give him rein once again; as the poet says:

Page 76

"Divinely rings the rushing air
When I am on my mettled mare:
When fast along the plains we fly,
A creature of the heavens am I."

Then she levelled her brows at him, and said gravely, 'This is the temptation thou art falling into, as have thousands before thy time. Give him the rein a second time, and he will bear thee to the red pit, and halt upon the brink, and pitch thee into it among bleeding masses and skeletons of thy kind, where they lie who were men like to thee, and were borne away by the Horse Garraveen.'

He gave no heed to her words, taunting her, and making the animal prance up and prove its spirit.

And she cried reproachfully, 'O fool! is it thus our great aim will be defeated by thy silly conceit? Lo, now, the greatness and the happiness thou art losing for this idle vanity is to be as a dunghill cock matched with an ostrich; and think not to escape the calamities thou bringest on thyself, for as is said,

No runner can outstrip his fate;

and it will overtake thee, though thou part like an arrow from the bow.'

He still made a jest of her remonstrance, trying the temper of the animal, and rejoicing in its dark flushes of ireful vigour.

And she cried out furiously, 'How! art thou past counsel? then will we match strength with strength ere 'tis too late, though it weaken both.'

Upon that, she turned quickly to the Ass and stroked it from one extremity to the other, crying, 'Karaz! Karaz!' shouting, 'Come forth in thy power!' And the Ass vanished, and the Genie stood in his place, tall, dark, terrible as a pillar of storm to travellers ranging the desert. He exclaimed, 'What is it, O woman? Charge me with thy command!'

And she said, 'Wrestle with him thou seest on the Horse Garraveen, and fling him from his seat.'

Then he yelled a glad yell, and stooped to Shibli Bagarag on the horse and enveloped him, and seized him, and plucked him from the Horse, and whirled him round, and flung him off. The youth went circling in the air, high in it, and descended, circling, at a distance in the deep meadow-waters. When he crept up the banks he saw the Genie astride the Horse Garraveen, with a black flame round his head; and the Genie urged him to speed and put him to the gallop, and was soon lost to sight, as he had been a thunderbeam passing over a still lake at midnight. And Shibli Bagarag was smitten with the wrong and the folly of his act, and sought to hide his sight from Noorna; but she

called to him, 'Look up, O youth! and face the calamity. Lo, we have now lost the service of Karaz! for though I utter ten spells and one spell in a breath, the Horse Garraveen will ere that have stretched beyond the circle of my magic, and the Genie will be free to do his ill deeds and plot against us. Sad is it! but profit thou by a knowledge of thy weakness.'

Then said she, 'See, I have not failed to possess myself of the three hairs of Garraveen, and there is that to rejoice in.'

Page 77

She displayed them, and they were sapphire hairs, and had a flickering light; and they seemed to live, wriggling their lengths, and were as snakes with sapphire skins. Then she said, 'Thy right wrist, O my betrothed!'

He gave her his right wrist, and she tied round it the three hairs of Garraveen, exclaiming, 'Thus do skilful carpenters make stronger what has broken and indicated disaster. Surely, I confide in thy star? I have faith in my foresight?'

And she cried, 'Eyes of mine, what sayest thou to me? Lo, we must part awhile: it is written.'

Said he, 'Leave me not, my betrothed: what am I without thy counsel? And go not from me, or this adventure will come to miserable issue.'

So she said, 'Thou beginnest to feel my worth?'

He answered, 'O Noorna! was woman like thee before in this world? Surely 'tis a mask I mark thee under; yet art thou perforce of sheer wisdom and sweet manners lovely in my sight; and I have a thirst to hear thee and look on thee.'

While he spake, a beam of struggling splendour burst from her, and she said, 'O thou dear youth, yes! I must even go. But I go glad of heart, knowing thee prepared to love me. I must go to counteract the machinations of Karaz, for he's at once busy, vindictive, and cunning, and there's no time for us to lose; so farewell, my betrothed, and make thy wits keen to know me when we next meet.'

So he said, 'And I—whither go I?'

She answered, 'To the City of Oolb straightway.'

Then he, 'But I know not its bearing from this spot: how reach it?'

She answered, 'What! thou with the phial of Paravid in thy vest, that endoweth, a single drop of it, the flowers, the herbage, the very stones and desert sands, with a tongue to articulate intelligible talk?'

Said he, 'Is it so?'

She answered, 'Even so.'

Ere Slubli Bagarag could question her further she embraced him, and blew upon his eyes, and he was blinded by her breath, and saw not her departure, groping for a seat on the rocks, and thinking her still by him. Sight returned not to him till long after weariness had brought the balm of sleep upon his eyelids.

THE TALKING HAWK

Now, when he awoke he found himself alone in that place, the moon shining over the low meadows and flower-cups fair with night-dew. Odours of night-flowers were abroad, filling the cool air with deliciousness, and he heard in the gardens below songs of the bulbul: it was like a dream to his soul, and he lay somewhile contemplating the rich loveliness of the scene, that showed no moving thing. Then rose he and bethought him of the words of Noorna, and of the City of Oolb, and the phial of the waters of Paravid in his vest; and he drew it forth, and dropped a drop of it on the rock where he had reclined. A deep harmony seemed suddenly to awake inside the rock, and to his interrogation as to the direction of Oolb, he heard, ‘The path of the shadows of the moon.’

Page 78

Thereupon he advanced to a prominent part of the rocks above the meadows, and beheld the shadows of the moon thrown forward into dimness across a waste of sand. And he stepped downward to the level of sand, and went the way of the shadows till it was dawn. Then dropped he a drop of the waters of the phial on a spike of lavender, and there was a voice said to him in reply to what he questioned, ‘The path of the shadows of the sun.’

The shadows of the sun were thrown forward across the same waste of sand, and he turned and pursued his way, resting at noon beneath a date-tree, and refreshing himself at a clear spring beside it. Surely he was joyful as he went, and elated with high prospects, singing:

Sun and moon with their bright fingers
Point the hero’s path;

If in his great work he lingers,
Well may they be wroth.

Now, the extent of the duration of his travel was four days and an equal number of nights; and it was on the fifth morn that he entered the gates of a city by the sea, even at that hour when the inhabitants were rising from sleep: fair was the sea beyond it, and the harbour was crowded with vessels, ships stored with merchandise—silks, dates, diamonds, Damascus steel, huge bales piled on the decks for the land of Roum and other lands. Shibli Bagarag thought, ’There’s scarce a doubt but that one of those sails will set for Oolb shortly. Wullahy! if I knew which, I’d board her and win a berth in her.’ Presently he thought, ’I’ll go to the public fountain and question it with the speech-winning waters.’ Thereupon he passed down the streets of the city and came to an open space, where stood the fountain, and sprinkled it with Paravid; and the fountain spake, saying, ‘Where men are, question not dumb things.’

Cried he, ’Faileth Paravid in its power? Have I done aught to baffle myself?’

Then he thought, ’’Twere nevertheless well to do as the fountain directeth, and question men while I see them.’ And he walked about among the people, and came to the quays of the harbour where the ships lay close in, many of them an easy leap from shore, and considered whom to address. So, as he loitered about the quays, meditating on the means at the disposal of the All-Wise, and marking the vessels wistfully, behold, there advanced to him one at a quick pace, in the garb of a sailor. He observed Shibli Bagarag attentively a moment, and exclaimed as it were in the plenitude of respect and with the manner of one that is abashed, ’Surely, thou art Shibli Bagarag, the nephew of the barber, him we watch for.’

So Shibli Bagarag marvelled at this recognition, and answered, ’Am I then already famous to that extent?’

And he that accosted him said, ’’Tis certain the trumpet was blown before thy steps, and there is not a man in this city but knoweth of thy destination to the City of Oolb, and that thou art upon the track of great things, one chosen to bring about imminent changes.’

Page 79

Then said Shibli Bagarag, 'For this I praise Noorna bin Noorka, daughter of Feshnavat, Vizier of the King that ruleth in the city of Shagpat! She saw me, that I was marked for greatness. Wullahy, the eagle knoweth me from afar, and proclaimeth me; the antelope of the hills scenteth the coming of one not as other men, and telleth his tidings; the wind of the desert shapeth its gust to a meaning, so that the stranger may wot Shibli Bagarag is at hand!'

He puffed his chest, and straightened his legs like the cock, and was as a man upon whom the Sultan has bestowed a dress of honour, even as the plumed peacock. Then the other said:

'Know that I am captain of yonder vessel, that stands farthest out from the harbour with her sails slackened; and she is laden with figs and fruits which I exchange for silks, spices, and other merchandise, with the people of Oolb. Now, what says the poet?—

"Delay in thine undertaking
Is disaster of thy own making";

and he says also:

"Greatness is solely for them that succeed;
'Tis a rotten applause that gives earlier meed."

Therefore it is advisable for thee to follow me on board without loss of time, and we will sail this very night for the City of Oolb.'

Now, Shibli Bagarag was ruled by the words of the captain albeit he desired to stay awhile and receive the homage of the people of that city. So he followed him into a boat that was by, and the twain were rowed by sailors to the ship. Then, when they were aboard the captain set sail, and they were soon in the hollows of deep waters. There was a berth in the ship set apart for Shibli Bagarag, and one for the captain. Shibli Bagarag, when he entered his berth, beheld at the head of his couch a hawk; its eyes red as rubies, its beak sharp as the curve of a scimitar. So he called out to the captain, and the captain came to him; but when he saw the hawk, he plucked his turban from his head, and dashed it at the hawk, and afterward ran to it, trying to catch it; and the hawk flitted from corner to corner of the berth, he after it with open arms. Then he took a sword, but the hawk flew past him, and fixed on the back part of his head, tearing up his hair by the talons, and pecking over his forehead at his eyes. And Shibli Bagarag heard the hawk scream the name 'Karaz,' and he looked closely at the Captain of the vessel, and knew him for the Genie Karaz. Then trembled he with exceeding terror, cursing his credulities, for he saw himself in the hands of the Genie, and nothing but this hawk friendly to him on the fearful waters. When the hawk had torn up a certain hair, the Genie stiffened, and glowed like copper in the furnace, the whole length of him; and he descended heavily through the bottom of the ship, and sank into the waters beneath,

which hissed and smoked as at a bar of heated iron. Then Shibli Bagarag gave thanks to the Prophet, and

Page 80

praised the hawk, but the hawk darted out of the cabin, and he followed it on deck, and, lo! the vessel was in flames, and the hawk in a circle of the flames; and the flames soared with it, and left it no outlet. Now, as Shibli Bagarag watched the hawk, the flames stretched out towards him and took hold of his vestments. So he delayed not to commend his soul to the All-merciful, and bore witness to his faith, and plunged into the sea headlong. When he rose, the ship had vanished, and all was darkness where it had been; so he buffeted with the billows, thinking his last hour had come, and there was no help for him in this world; and the spray shaken from the billows blinded him, the great walls of water crumbled over him; strength failed him, and his memory ceased to picture images of the old time—his heart to beat with ambition; and to keep the weight of his head above the surface was becoming a thing worth the ransom of kings. As he was sinking and turning his eyes upward, he heard a flutter as of fledgling's wings, and the two red ruby eyes of the hawk were visible above him, like steady fires in the gloom. And the hawk perched on him, and buried itself among the wet hairs of his head, and presently taking the Identical in its beak, the hawk lifted him half out of water, and bore him a distance, and dropped him. This the hawk did many times, and at the last, Shibli Bagarag felt land beneath him, and could wade through the surges to the shore. He gave thanks to the Supreme Disposer, kneeling prostrate on the shore, and fell into a sleep deep in peacefulness as a fathomless well, unruffled by a breath.

Now, when it was dawn Shibli Bagarag awoke and looked inland, and saw plainly the minarets of a city shining in the first beams, and the front of yellow mountains, and people moving about the walls and on the towers and among the pastures round the city; so he made toward them, and inquired of them the name of their city. And they stared at him, crying, 'What! know'st thou not the City of Oolb? the hawk on thy shoulder could tell thee that much.' He looked and saw that the hawk was on his shoulder; and its left wing was scorched, the plumage blackened. So he said to the hawk, 'Is it profitable, O preserving bird, to ask of thee questions?'

The hawk shook its wings and closed an eye.

So he said, 'Do I well in entering this city?'

The hawk shook its wings again and closed an eye.

So he said, 'To what house shall I direct my steps in this strange city for the attainment of the purpose I have?'

The hawk flew, and soared, and alighted on the topmost of the towers of Oolb. So when it returned he said, 'O bird! rare bird! my counsellor! it is an indication, this alighting on the highest tower, that thou advisest me to go straight to the palace of the King?'

Page 81

The hawk flapped its wings and winked both eyes; so Shibli Bagarag took forth the phial from his breast, remembering the virtues of the waters of the Well of Paravid, and touched his lips with them, that he might be endowed with flowing speech before the King of Oolb. As he did this the phial was open, and the hawk leaned to it and dipped its beak into the water; and he entered the city and passed through the long streets towards the palace of the King, and craved audience of him as one that had a thing marvellous to tell. So the King commanded that Shibli Bagarag should be brought before him, for he was a lover of marvels. As he went into the presence of the King, Shibli Bagarag listened to the hawk, for the hawk spake his language, and it said, 'Proclaim to the King a new wonder—"the talking hawk."'

So when he had bent his body to the King, he proclaimed the new wonder; and the King seemed not to observe the hawk, and said, 'From what city art thou?'

He answered, 'Native, O King, to Shiraz; newly from the City of Shagpat.'

And the King asked, 'How is it with that hairy wonder?'

He answered, 'The dark forest flourisheth about him.'

And the King said, 'That is well! We of the City of Oolb take our fashions from them of the City of Shagpat, and it is but yesterday that I bastinadoed a barber that strayed among us.'

Shibli Bagarag sighed when he heard the King, and thought to himself, 'How unfortunate is the race of barbers, once honourable and in esteem! Surely it will not be otherwise till Shagpat is shaved!' And the King called out to him for the cause of his sighing; so he said, 'I sigh, O King of the age, considering how like may be the case of the barber bastinadoed but yesterday, in his worth and value, to that of Roomdroom, the reader of planets, that was a barber.'

And he related the story of Roomdroom for the edification of the King and the exaltation of barbercraft, delivering himself neatly and winningly and pointedly, so that the story should apply, which was its merit and its origin.

GOORELKA OF OOLB

When Shibli Bagarag had finished his narration of the case of Roomdroom the barber, the King of Oolb said, 'O thou, native of Shiraz, there is persuasion and sweetness and fascination on thy tongue, and I am touched with compassion for the soles of Baba Mustapha, that I bastinadoed but yesterday, and he was from Shiraz likewise.'

Now, the heart of Shibli Bagarag leapt when he heard mention of Baba Mustapha; and he knew him for his uncle that was searching him. He would have cried aloud his

relationship, but the hawk whispered in his ear. Then the hawk said to him, ’There is danger in the King’s muteness respecting me, for I am visible to him. Proclaim the spirit of prophecy.’

So he proclaimed that spirit, and the King said, ’Prophesy to me of barbercraft.’

Page 82

And he cried, ’O King of the age, the barber is abased, trodden underfoot, given over to the sneers and the gibes of them that flatter the powerful ones; he is as the winter worm, as the crocodile in the slime of his sleep by the bank, as the sick eagle before moulting. But I say, O King, that he will come forth like the serpent in a new skin, shaming the old one; he slept a caterpillar, and will come forth a butterfly; he sank a star, and lo! he riseth a constellation.’

Now, while he was speaking in the fervour of his soul, the King said something to one of the court officers surrounding him, and there was brought to the King a basin, a soap-bowl, and barber’s tackle. When Shibli Bagarag saw these, the uses of the barber rushed upon his mind, and desire to sway the tackle pushed him forward and agitated him, so that he could not keep his hands from them.

Then the King exclaimed, ’It is as I thought. Our passions betray themselves, and our habits; so is it written. By Allah! I swear thou art thyself none other than a barber, O youth.’

Shibli Bagwrag was nigh fainting with terror at this discovery of the King, but the hawk said in his ear, ‘Proclaim speech in the tackle.’ So he proclaimed speech in the tackle; and the King smiled doubtfully, and said, ‘If this be a cheat, Shiraz will not see thy face more.’

Then the hawk whispered in his ear, ’Drop on the tackle secretly a drop from the phial.’ This he did, spreading his garments, and commanded the tackle to speak. And the tackle spake, each portion of it, confusedly as the noise of Babel. So the King marvelled greatly, and said, ’’Tis a greater wonder than the talking hawk, the talking tackle. Wullahy! it ennobleth barbercraft! Yet it were well to comprehend the saying of the tackle.’

Then the hawk flew to the tackle and fluttered about it, and lo! the blade and the brush stood up and said in a shrill tone, ’It is ordained that Shagpat shall be shaved, and that Shibli Bagarag shall shave him.’

The King bit the forefinger of amazement, and said, ’What then ensueth, O talking tackle?’

And the brush and the blade stood up, and said in a shrill tone, ’Honour to Shibli Bagarag and barbers! Shame unto Shagpat and his fellows!’

Upon that, the King cried, ’Enough, O talking tackle; I will forestall the coming thing. I will be shaved! wullahy, that will I!’

Then the hawk whispered to Shibli Bagarag, ‘Forward and shear him!’ So he stepped forth and seized the tackle, and addressed himself keenly to the shaving of the King of

Oolb, lathering him and performing his task with perfect skill. And the courtiers crowded to follow the example of the King, and Shibli Bagarag shaved them, all of them. Now, when they were shaved, fear smote them, the fear of ridicule, and each laughed at the change that was in the other; but the King cried, 'See that order is issued for the people of Oolb to be as we before to-morrow's sun. So is laughter taken in reverse.' And the King said aside to Shibli Bagarag, 'Say now, what may be thy price for yonder hawk?'

Page 83

And the hawk bade him say, ‘The loan of thy cockleshell.’

The King mused, and said, ’That is much to ask, for it is that which beareth the Princess my daughter to the Lily of the Enchanted Sea, which she nourisheth; and if ’tis harmed, she will be stricken with ugliness, as was the daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, who tended it before her. Yet is this hawk a bird of price. What be its qualities, besides the gift of speech?’

Shibli Bagarag answered, ’To counsel in extremity; to forewarn; to counteract enchantments and foul magic.’

Upon that the King said, ‘Follow me!’

And the King led the way from the hall, through many spacious chambers fair with mirrors and silks and precious woods, and smooth marble floors, down into a vault lit by a lamp that was shaped like an eye. Round the vault were hung helm-pieces, and swords, and rich-studded housings; and there were silken dresses, and costly shawls, and tall vases and jars of China, tapestries, and gold services. And the King said, ’Take thy choice of these in exchange for the hawk.’

But Shibli Bagarag said, ‘Nought save a loan of the cockle-shell, King!’

Then the King threatened him, saying, ’There is a virtue in each of the things thou seest: the China jar is brimmed with wine, and remaineth so though a thousand drink of it; the dress of Samarcand rendereth the wearer invisible; yet thou refusest to exchange them for thy hawk!’

And the King swore by the beard of his father he would seize perforce the hawk and shut up Shibli Bagarag in the vault, if he fell not into his bargain. Shibli Bagarag was advised by the hawk to accept the China jar and the dress of Samarcand, and handed the hawk to the King in exchange for these things. So the King took the hawk upon his wrist and departed with it to the apartments of his daughter, and Shibli Bagarag went to the chamber prepared for him in the palace.

Now, when it was night, Shibli Bagarag heard a noise at his lattice, and he arose and peered through it, and lo! the hawk was fluttering without; so he let it in, and caressed it, and the hawk bade him put on his silken dress and carry forth his China jar, and go the round of the palace, and offer drink to the sentinels and the slaves. So he did as the hawk directed, and the sentinels and slaves were aware of a China jar brimmed with wine that was lifted to their lips, but him that lifted it they saw not: surely, they drank deep of the draught of astonishment.

Then the hawk flew before him, and he followed it to a chamber lit with golden lamps, gorgeously hung, and full of a dusky splendour and the faint sparkle of gems, ruby,

amethyst, topaz, and beryl; in it there was the hush of sleep, and the heart of Shibli Bagarag told him that one beautiful was near. So he approached on tiptoe a couch of blue silk, bordered with gold-wire, and inwoven with stars of blue turquoise stones, as it had been the heavens of midnight. On the couch lay one, a woman, pure in loveliness; the dark fringes of her closed lids like living flashes of darkness, her mouth like an unstrung bow and as a double rosebud, even as two isles of coral between which in the clear transparent watery beds the pearls shine freshly.

Page 84

And the hawk said to Shibli Bagarag, 'This is the Princess Goorelka, the daughter of the King of Oolb, a sorceress, the Guardian of the Lily of the Enchanted Sea. Beneath her pillow is the cockle-shell; grasp it, but gaze not upon her.'

He approached and slid his arm beneath the pillow of the Princess, and grasped the cockle-shell; but ere he drew it forth he gazed upon her, and the lustre of her countenance transfixed him as with a javelin, so that he could not stir, nor move his eyes from the contemplation of her sweetness of feature. The hawk darted at him fiercely, and pecked at him to draw his attention from her, and he stepped back, yet he continued taking fatal draughts from the magic cup of her beauty. Then the hawk screamed a loud scream of anguish, and the Princess awoke, and started half-way from the couch, and stared about her, and saw the bird in agitation. As she looked at the bird a shudder passed over her, and she snatched a veil and drew it over her face, murmuring, 'I dream, or I am under the eye of a man.' Then she felt beneath the pillow, and knew that the cockle-shell had been touched; and in a moment she leapt from her couch, and ran to a mirror and saw herself as she was, a full-moon made to snare the wariest and sit singly high on a throne in the hearts of men. At the sight of her beauty she smiled and seemed at peace, murmuring still, 'I am under the eye of a man, or I dream.' Now, while she so murmured she arrayed herself, and took the cockle-shell, and passed through the ante-room among her women sleeping; and Shibli Bagarag tracked her till she came to the vault; and she entered it and walked to the corner from which had hung the dress of Samarcand. When she saw it gone her face waxed pale, and she gazed slowly at all points, muttering, 'There is no further doubt but that I am under the eye of a man!' Thereupon she ran hastily from the vault, and passed between the sentinels of the palace, and saw them where they lay drowsy with intoxication: so she knew that the China jar and the dress of Samarcand had been used that night, and for no purpose friendly to her wishes. Then she passed down the palace steps, and through the gates of the palace and the city, till she came to the shore of the sea; there she launched the cockle-shell and took the wind in her garments, and sat in it, filling it to overflowing, yet it floated. And Shibli Bagarag waded to the cockle-shell and took hold of it, and was drawn along by its motion swiftly through the waters, so that a foam swept after him; and Goorelka marked the foam. Now, they had passage over the billows smoothly, and soon the length of the sea was darkened with two high rocks, and between them there was a narrow channel of the sea, roughened with moonlight. So they sped between the rocks, and came upon a purple sea, dark-blue overhead, with large stars leaning to the waves. There was a soft whisperingness in the breath of the breezes that swung there, and many sails of charmed ships were seen in momentary gleams, flapping the mast idly far away. Warm as new milk from the full udders were the waters of that sea, and figures of fair women stretched lengthwise with the current, and lifted a head as they rushed rolling by. Truly it was enchanted even to the very bed!

Page 85

THE LILY OF THE ENCHANTED SEA

Now, after the cockle-shell had skimmed calmly awhile, it began to pitch and grew unquiet, and came upon a surging foam, pale, and with scintillating bubbles. The surges increased in volume, and boiled, hissing as with anger, like savage animals. Presently, the cockle-shell rose upon one very lofty swell, and Shibli Bagarag lost hold of it, and lo! it was overturned and engulfed in the descent of the great mountain of water, and the Princess Goorelka was immersed in the depths. She would have sunk, but Shibli Bagarag caught hold of her, and supported her to the shore by the strength of his right arm. The shore was one of sand and shells, their wet cheeks sparkling in the moonlight; over it hung a promontory, a huge jut of black rock. Now, the Princess when she landed, seeing not him that supported her, delayed not to run beneath the rock, and ascended by steps cut from the base of the rock. And Shibli Bagarag followed her by winding paths round the rock, till she came to the highest peak commanding the circle of the Enchanted Sea, and glimpses of enthralled vessels, and mariners bewitched on board; long paths of starlight rippled into the distant gloom, and the reflection of the moon opposite was as a wide nuptial sheet of silver on the waters: islands, green and white, and with soft music floating from their foliage, sailed slowly to and fro. Surely, to dwell reclining among the slopes of those islands a man would forfeit Paradise! Now, the Princess, as she stood upon the peak, knew that she was not alone, and pretended to slip from her footing, and Shibli Bagarag called out and ran to her; but she turned in the direction of his voice and laughed, and he knew he was outwitted. Then, to deceive her, he dropped from the phial twenty drops round her on the rock, and those twenty drops became twenty voices, so that she was bewildered with their calls, and stopped her ears, and ran from them, and descended from the eminence nimbly, slipping over ledges and leaping the abysses. And Shibli Bagarag followed her, clutching at the trailers and tearing them with him, letting loose a torrent of stones and earth, till on a sudden they stood together above a greenswarded basin of the rock opening to the sea; and in the middle of the basin, lo! in stature like a maiden of the mountains, and one that droopeth her head pensively thinking of her absent lover, the Enchanted Lily. Wonder knocked at the breast of Shibli Bagarag when he saw that queenly flower waving its illumined head to the breeze: he could not retain a cry of rapture. As he did this the Princess stretched her hand to where he was and groped a moment, and caught him by the silken dress and tore in it a great rent, and by the rent he stood revealed to her. Then said she, 'O youth, thou halt done ill to follow me here, and the danger of it is past computing; surely, the motive was a deep one, nought other than the love of me.'

Page 86

She spoke winningly, sweet words to a luted voice, and the youth fell upon his knees before her, smitten by her beauty; and he said, 'I followed thee here as I would follow such loveliness to the gates of doom, O Princess of Oolb.'

She smiled and said playfully, 'I will read by thy hand whether thou be one faithful in love.'

She took his hand and sprinkled on it earth and gravel, and commenced scanning it curiously. As she scanned it her forehead wrinkled up, and a shot like black lightning travelled across her countenance, withering its beauty: she cried in a forced voice, 'Aha! it is well, O youth, for thee and for me that thou lovest me, and art faithful in love.'

The look of the Princess of Oolb and her voice affrighted the soul of Shibli Bagarag, and he would have turned from her; but she held him, and went to the Lily, and emptied into the palm of her hand the dew that was in the Lily, and raised it to the lips of Shibli Bagarag, bidding him drink as a pledge for her sake and her love, and to appease his thirst. As he was about to drink, there fell into the palm of the Princess from above what seemed a bolt of storm scattering the dew; and after he had blinked with the suddenness of the action he looked and beheld the hawk, its red eyes inflamed with wrath. And the hawk screamed into the ear of Shibli Bagarag, 'Pluck up the Lily ere it is too late, O fool!—the dew was poison! Pluck it by the root with thy right hand!'

So thereat he strode to the Lily, and grasped it, and pulled with his strength; and the Lily was loosened, and yielded, and came forth streaming with blood from the bulb of the root; surely the bulb of the root was a palpitating heart, yet warm, even as that we have within our bosoms.

Now, from the terror of that sight the Princess hid her eyes, and shrank away. And the lines of malice, avarice, and envy seemed ageing her at every breath. Then the hawk pecked at her three pecks, and perched on a corner of rock, and called shrilly the name 'Karaz!' And the Genie Karaz came slanting down the night air, like a preying bird, and stood among them. So the hawk cried, 'See, O Karaz, the freshness of thy Princess of Oolb'; and the Genie regarded her till loathing curled his lip, for she grew in ghastliness to the colour of a frog, and a frog's face was hers, a camel's back, a pelican's throat, the legs of a peacock.

Then the hawk cried, 'Is this how ye meet, ye lovers,—ye that will be wedded?' And the hawk made his tongue as a thorn to them. At the last it exclaimed, 'Now let us fight our battle, Karaz!'

But the Genie said, 'Nay, there will come a time for that, traitress!'

The hawk cried, 'Thou delayest, till the phial of Paravid, the hairs of Garraveen, and this Lily, my three helps, are expended, thinking Aklis, for which we barter them, striketh but

a single blow? That is well! Go, then, and take thy Princess, and obtain permission of the King of Oolb, her father, to wed her, O Karaz!'

Page 87

The hawk whistled with laughter, and the Genie was stung with its mockeries, and clutched the Princess of Oolb in a bunch, and arose from the ground with her, slanting up the night-air like fire, till he was seen high up even as an angry star reddening the seas beneath.

When he was lost to the eye, Shibli Bagarag drew a long breath and cried aloud, 'The likeness of that Princess of Oolb in her ugliness to Noorna, my betrothed, is a thing marvellous, if it be not she herself.' And he reflected, 'Yet she seemed not to recognize and claim me'; and thought, 'I am bound to her by gratitude, and I should have rescued her from Karaz, but I know not if it be she. Wullahy! I am bewildered; I will ask counsel of the hawk.' He looked to the corner of the rock where the hawk had perched, but the hawk was gone; as he searched for it, his eyes fell upon the bed of earth where the Lily stood ere he plucked it, and lo! in the place of the Lily, there was a damsel dressed in white shining silks, fairer than the enchanted flower, straighter than the stalk of it; her head slightly drooping, like the moon on a border of the night; her bosom like the swell of the sea in moonlight; her eyes dark, under a low arch of darker lashes, like stars on the skirts of storm; and she was the very dream of loveliness, formed to freeze with awe, and to inflame with passion. So Shibli Bagarag gazed at her with adoration, his hands stretched half-way to her as if to clasp her, fearing she was a vision and would fade; and the damsel smiled a sweet smile, and lifted her antelope eyes, and said, 'Who am I, and to whom might I be likened, O youth?'

And he answered, 'Who thou art, O young perfection, I know not, if not a Houri of Paradise; but thou art like the Princess of Oolb, yet lovelier, oh lovelier! And thy voice is the voice of Noorna, my betrothed; yet purer, sweeter, younger.'

So the damsel laughed a laugh like a sudden sweeping of wild chords of music, and said, 'O youth, saw'st thou not the ascent of Noorna, thy betrothed, gathered in a bunch by Karaz?'

And he answered, 'I saw her; but I knew not, O damsel of beauty; surely I was bewildered, amazed, without power to contend with the Genie.'

Then she said, 'Wouldst thou release her? So kiss me on the lips, on the eyes, and on the forehead, three kisses each time; and with the first say, "By the well of Paravid"; and with the second, "By the strength of Garraveen!" and with the third, "By the Lily of the Sea!"'

Now, the heart of the youth bounded at her words, and he went to her, and trembling kissed her all bashfully on the lips, on the eyes, and on the forehead, saying each time as she directed. Then she took him by the hand, and stepped from the bed of earth, crying joyfully, 'Thanks be to Allah and the Prophet! Noorna, is released from the sorceries that held her, and powerful.'

So, while he was wondering, she said, ’Knowest thou not the woman, thy betrothed?’

Page 88

He answered, ’O damsel of beauty, I am charged with many feelings; doubts and hopes are mixed in me. Say first who thou art, and fill my two ears with bliss.’

And she said, ’I will leave my name to other lips; surely I am the daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, betrothed to a wandering youth,—a barber, who sickened at the betrothal, and consoled himself with a proverb when he gave me the kiss of contract, and knew not how with truth to pay me a compliment.’

Now, Shibli Bagarag saw this was indeed Noorna bin Noorka, his betrothed, and he fell before her in love and astonishment; but she lifted him to her neck, and embraced him, saying, ’Said I not truly when I said “I am that I shall be”? My youth is not as that of Bhanavar the Beautiful, gained at another’s cost, but my own, and stolen from me by wicked sorceries.’ And he cried, ’Tell me, O Noorna, my betrothed, how this matter came to pass?’

She said, ‘On our way to Aklis.’

She bade him grasp the Lily, and follow her; and he followed her down the rock and over the bright shells upon the sand, admiring her stateliness, her willowy lightness, her slimness as of the palm-tree. Then she waded in the water, and began to strike out with her arms, and swim boldly,—he likewise; and presently they came to a current that hurried them off in its course, and carried them as weeds, streaming rapidly. He was bearing witness to his faith as a man that has lost hope of life, when a strong eddy stayed him, and whirled him from the current into the calm water. So he looked for Noorna, and saw her safe beside him flinging back the wet tresses from her face, that was like the full moon growing radiant behind a dispersing cloud. And she said, ’Ask not for the interpretation of wonders in this sea, for they cluster like dates on a date branch. Surely, to be with me is enough?’

And she bewitched him in the midst of the waters, making him oblivious of all save her, so that he hugged the golden net of her smiles and fair flatteries, and swam with an exulting stroke, giving his breast broadly to the low billows, and shouting verses of love and delight to her. And while they swam sweetly, behold, there was seen a pearly shell of flashing crimson, amethyst, and emerald, that came scudding over the waves toward them, raised to the wind, fan-shaped, and in its front two silver seats. When she saw it, Noorna cried, ’She has sent me this, Rabesqurat! Perchance is she favourable to my wishes, and this were well!’

Then she swayed in the water sideways, and drew the shell to her, and the twain climbed into it, and sat each on one of the silver seats, folded together. In its lightness it was as a foam-bubble before the wind on the blue water, and bore them onward airily. At his feet Shibli Bagarag beheld a stool of carved topaz, and above his head the arch of the shell was inlaid with wreaths of gems: never was vessel fairer than that.

Page 89

Now, while they were speeding over the water, Noorna said, 'The end of this fair sea is Aklis, and beyond it is the Koosh. So while the wind is our helmsman, and we go circled by the quiet of this sea, I'll tell thee of myself, if thou carest to hear.'

And he cried with the ardour of love, 'Surely, I would hear of nought save thyself, Noorna, and the music of the happy garden compareth not in sweetness with it. I long for the freshness of thy voice, as the desert camel for the green spring, O my betrothed!'

So she said, 'And now give ear to the following':—

AND THIS IS THE STORY OF NOORNA BIN NOORKA, THE GENIE KARAZ, AND THE PRINCESS OF OOLB

Know, that when I was a babe, I lay on my mother's bosom in the wilderness, and it was the bosom of death. Surely, I slept and smiled, and dreamed the infant's dream, and knew not the coldness of the thing I touched. So were we even as two dead creatures lying there; but life was in me, and I awoke with hunger at the time of feeding, and turned to my mother, and put up my little mouth to her for nourishment, and sucked her, but nothing came. I cried, and commenced chiding her, and after a while it was as decreed, that certain horsemen of a troop passing through the wilderness beheld me, and seeing my distress and the helpless being I was, their hearts were stirred, and they were mindful of what the poet says concerning succour given to the poor, helpless, and innocent of this world, and took me up, and mixed for me camel's milk and water from the bags, and comforted me, and bore me with them, after they had paid funeral rites to the body of my mother.

Now, the rose-bud showeth if the rose-tree be of the wilds or of the garden, and the chief of that troop seeing me born to the uses of gentleness, carried me in his arms with him to his wife, and persuaded her that was childless to make me the child of their adoption. So I abode with them during the period of infancy and childhood, caressed and cared for, as is said:

> The flower a stranger's hand may gather,
> Strikes root into the stranger's breast;
> Affection is our mother, father,
> Friend, and of cherishers the best.

And I loved them as their own child, witting not but that I was their child, till on a day while I played among some children of my years, the daughter of the King of Oolb passed by us on a mule, with her slaves and drawn swords, and called to me, 'Thou little castaway!' and had me brought to her, and peered upon my face in a manner that frightened me, for I was young. Then she put me down from the neck of her mule where she had seated me, saying, 'Child of a dead mother and a runaway father, what need I fear from thy like, and the dreams of a love-sick Genie?' So she departed, but I

forgot not her words, and dwelt upon them, and grew fevered with them, and drooped. Now, when he saw my bloom of health gone, heaviness on my feet, the light hollowed from my eyes, my benefactor, Ravaloke—he that I had thought my father—took me between his knees, and asked me what it was and the cause of my ailing; and I told him.

Page 90

Then said he, 'This is so: thou art not my child; but I love thee as mine, O my little Desert-flower; and why the Princess should fancy fear of thee I like not to think; but fear thou her, for she is a mask of wiles and a vine trailing over pitfalls; such a sorceress the world knoweth not as Goorelka of Oolb.'

Now, I was penetrated by what he said, and ceased to be a companion to them that loved childish games and romps, and meditated by myself in gardens and closets, feigning sleep when the elder ones discoursed, that I might learn something of this mystery, and all that was spoken perplexed me more, as the sage declareth:

> Who in a labyrinth wandereth without clue,
> More that he wandereth doth himself undo.

Though I was quick as the quick-eyed falcon, I discovered nought, flying ever at false game,—

> A follower of misleading beams,
> A cheated soul, the mock of dreams.

At times I thought that it was the King of Oolb was my father, and plotted to come in his path; and there were kings and princes of far countries whom I sought to encounter, that they might claim me; but none claimed me. O my betrothed, few gave me love beside Ravaloke, and when the wife that he cherished died, he solely, for I was lost in waywardness and the slave of moody imaginings. 'Tis said:

> If thou the love of the world for thyself wouldst gain,
> mould thy breast
> Liker the world to become, for its like the world loveth best;

and this was not I then.

Now, the sons and daughters of men are used to celebrate the days of their birth with gifts and rejoicings, but I could only celebrate that day which delivered me from death into the hands of Ravaloke, as none knew my birth-hour. When it was the twelfth return of this event, Ravaloke, my heart's father, called me to him and pressed in my hand a glittering coin, telling me to buy with it in the bazaars what I would. So I went forth, attended by a black slave, after the mid-noon, for I was eager to expend my store, and cared not for the great heat. Scarcely had we passed the cheese-market and were hurrying on to shops of the goldsmiths and jewellers, when I saw an old man, a beggar, in a dirty yellow turban and pieced particoloured cloth-stuff, and linen in rags his other gear. So lean was he, and looked so weak that I wondered he did other than lay his length on the ground; and as he asked me for alms his voice had a piteousness that made me to weep, and I punished my slave for seeking to drive him away, and gave my one piece of gold into his hand. Then he asked me what I required of him in exchange,

and I said, ’What can a poor old man that is a beggar give?’ He laughed, and asked me then what I had intended to buy with that piece of money. So, beginning to regret the power that was gone from me of commanding with my gold piece this and that fine thing, I mused, and said, ’Truly, a blue dress embroidered with gold, and a gold crown, and gold bracelets set with turquoise stones,—these, and toys; but could I buy in this city a book of magic, that were my purchase.’

Page 91

The old fellow smiled, and said to my black slave, 'And thou, hadst thou this coin, what were thy purchase therewith?'

He, scoffing the old beggar, answered, 'A plaister for sores as broad as my back, and a camel's hump, O thou old villain!'

The old man grunted in his chest, and said, 'Thou art but a camel thyself, to hinder a true Mussulman from passing in peace down a street of Oolb; so 'twere a good purchase and a fitting: know'st thou what is said of the blessing given by them that receive a charity?

"'Tis the fertilizing dew that streameth after the sun,
Strong as the breath of Allah to bless life well begun."

So is my blessing on the little damsel, and she shall have her wish, wullahy, thou black face! and thou thine.'

This spake the old man, and hobbled off while my slave was jeering him. So I strolled through the bazaars and thought no more of the old man's words, and longed to purchase a hundred fineries, and came to the confectioner's, and smelt the smell of his musk-scented sweetmeats and lemon sweets and sugared pistachios that are delicious to crunch between the teeth. My mouth watered, and I said to my slave, 'O Kadrab, a coin, though 'twere small, would give us privilege in yonder shop to select, and feast, and approve the skill of the confectioner.'

He grinned, and displayed in his black fist a petty coin of exchange, but would not let me have it till I had sworn to give no more away to beggars. So even as we were hurrying into the shop, another old beggar wretcheder than the first fronted me, and I was moved, and forgot my promise to Kadrab, and gave him the money. Then was Kadrab wroth, and kicked the old beggar with his fore-foot, lifting him high in air, and lo! he did not alight, but rose over the roofs of the houses and beyond the city, till he was but a speck in the blue of the sky above. So Kadrab bit his forefinger amazed, and glanced at his foot, and at what was visible of the old beggarman, and again at his foot, thinking but of what he had done with it, and the might manifested in that kick, fool that he was! All the way homeward he kept scanning the sky and lifting his foot aloft, and I saw him bewildered with a strange conceit, as the poet has exclaimed in his scorn:

Oh, world diseased! oh, race empirical!
Where fools are the fathers of every miracle!

Now, when I was in my chamber, what saw I there but a dress of very costly blue raiment with gold-work broidery and a lovely circlet of gold, and gold bracelets set with stones of turquoise, and a basket of gold woven wire, wherein were toys, wondrous ones—soldiers that cut off each other's heads and put them on again, springing

antelopes, palm-trees that turned to fountains, and others; and lo! a book in red binding, with figures on it and clasps of gold, a great book! So I clapped my hands joyfully, crying, ‘The old beggar has done it!’ and robed myself in

Page 92

the dress, and ran forth to tell Ravaloke. As I ran by a window looking on the inner court, I saw below a crowd of all the slaves of Ravaloke round one that was seeking to escape from them, and 'twas Kadrab with a camel's hump on his back, and a broad brown plaister over it, the wretch howling, peering across his shoulder, and trying to bolt from his burden, as a horse that would run from his rider. Then I saw that Kadrab also had his wish, his camel's hump, and thought, 'The old beggar, what was he but a Genie?' Surely Ravaloke caressed me when he heard of the adventure, and what had befallen Kadrab was the jest of the city; but for me I spared little time away from that book, and studied in it incessantly the ways and windings of magic, till I could hold communication with Genii, and wield charms to summon them, and utter spells that subdue them, discovering the haunts of talismans that enthral Afrites and are powerful among men. There was that Kadrab coming to me daily to call out in the air for the old beggarman to rid him of his hump; and he would waste hours looking up into the sky moodily for him, and cursing the five toes of his foot, for he doubted not the two beggars were one, and that he was punished for the kick, and lamented it direly, saying in the thick of his whimperings, 'I'd give the foot that did it to be released from my hump, O my fair mistress.' So I pitied him, and made a powder and a spell, and my first experiment in magic was to relieve Kadrab of his hump, and I succeeded in loosening it, and it came away from him, and sank into the ground of the garden where we stood. So I told Kadrab to say nothing of this, but the idle-pated fellow blabbed it over the city, and it came to the ears of Goorelka. Then she sent for me to visit her, and by the advice of Ravaloke I went, and she fondled me, and sought to get at the depth of my knowledge by a spell that tieth every faculty save the tongue, and it is the spell of vain longing. Now, because I baffled her arts she knew me more cunning than I seemed, and as night advanced she affected to be possessed with pleasure in me, and took me in her arms and sought to fascinate me, and I heard her mutter once, 'Shall I doubt the warning of Karaz?' So presently she said, 'Come with me'; and I went with her under the curtain of that apartment into another, a long saloon, wherein were couches round a fountain, and beyond it an aviary lit with lamps: when we were there she whistled, and immediately there was a concert of birds, a wondrous accord of exquisite piping, and she leaned on a couch and took me by her to listen; sweet and passionate was the harmony of the birds; but I let not my faculties lull, and observed that round the throat of every bird was a ringed mark of gold and stamps of divers gems similar in colour to a ring on the forefinger of her right hand, which she dazzled my sight with as she flashed it. When we had listened a long hour to this music, the Princess gazed on me as if to mark the effect of a charm, and

Page 93

I saw disappointment on her lovely face, and she bit her lip and looked spiteful, saying, 'Thou art far gone in the use of magic, and wary, O girl!' Then she laughed unnaturally, and called slaves to bring in sweet drinks to us, and I drank with her, and became less wary, and she fondled me more, calling me tender names, heaping endearments on me; and as the hour of the middle-night approached I was losing all suspicion in deep languor, and sighed at the song of the birds, the long love-song, and dozed awake with eyes half shut. I felt her steal from me, and continued still motionless without alarm: so was I mastered. What hour it was or what time had passed I cannot say, when a bird that was chained on a perch before me—a very quaint bird, with a topknot awry, and black, heavy bill, and ragged gorgeousness of plumage—the only object between my lids and darkness, suddenly, in the midst of the singing, let loose a hoarse laugh that was followed by peals of laughter from the other birds. Thereat I started up, and beheld the Princess standing over a brazier, and she seized a slipper from her foot and flung it at the bird that had first laughed, and struck him off his perch, and went to him and seized him and shook him, crying, 'Dare to laugh again!' and he kept clearing his throat and trying to catch the tune he had lost, pitching a high note and a low note; but the marvel of this laughter of the bird wakened me thoroughly, and I thanked the bird in my soul, and said to Goorelka, 'More wondrous than their singing, this laughter, O Princess!'

She would not speak till she had beaten every bird in the aviary, and then said in the words of the poet:

> Shall they that deal in magic match degrees of wonder?
> From the bosom of one cloud comes the lightning and the thunder.

Then said she, 'O Noorna! I'll tell thee truly my intent, which was to enchant thee; but I find thee wise, so let us join our powers, and thou shah become mighty as a sorceress.'

Now, Ravaloke had said to me, 'Her friendship is fire, her enmity frost; so be cold to the former, to the latter hot,' and I dissembled and replied, 'Teach me, O Princess!'

So she asked me what I could do. Could I plant a mountain in the sea and people it? could I anchor a purple cloud under the sun and live there a year with them I delighted in? could I fix the eyes of the world upon one head and make the nations bow to it; change men to birds, fishes to men; and so on—a hundred sorceries that I had never attempted and dreamed not of my betrothed! I had never offended Allah by a misuse of my powers. When I told her, she cried, 'Thou art then of a surety she that's fitted for the custody of the Lily of the Light, so come with me.'

Now, I had heard of the Lily, even this thou holdest may its influence be unwithering!—-and desired to see it. So she led me from the palace to the shore of the sea, and flung a cockleshell on the waters, and seated herself in it with me in her lap; and we scudded over the waters, and entered this Enchanted Sea, and stood by the Lily. Then, I that

loved flowers undertook the custody of this one, knowing not the consequences and the depth of her wiles. 'Tis truly said:

Page 94

The overwise themselves hoodwink,
For simple eyesight is a modest thing:
They on the black abysm's brink
Smile, and but when they fall bitterly think,
What difference 'twixt the fool and me, Creation's King?

Nevertheless for awhile nothing evil resulted, and I had great joy in the flower, and tended it with exceeding watchfulness, and loved it, so that I was brought in my heart to thank the Princess and think well of her.

Now, one summer eve as Ravaloke rested under the shade of his garden palm, and I studied beside him great volumes of magic, it happened that after I had read certain pages I closed one of the books marked on the cover 'Alif,' and shut the clasp louder than I intended, so that he who was dozing started up, and his head was in the sloped sun in an instant, and I observed the shadow of his head lengthen out along the grass-plot towards the mossed wall, and it shot up the wall, darkening it—then drawing back and lessening, then darting forth like a beast of darkness irritable for prey. I was troubled, for whatso is seen while the volume Alif is in use hath a portent; but the discovery of what this might be baffled me. So I determined to watch events, and it was not many days ere Ravaloke, who was the leader of the armies of the King of Oolb, was called forth to subdue certain revolted tributaries of the King, and at my entreaty took me with him, and I saw battles and encounters lasting a day's length. Once we were encamped in a fruitful country by a brook running with a bright eye between green banks, and I that had freedom and the password of the camp wandered down to it, and refreshed my forehead with its coolness. So, as I looked under the falling drops, lo! on the opposite bank the old beggar that had given me such fair return for my alms and Kadrab his hump! I heard him call, 'This night is the key to the mystery,' and he was gone. Every incantation I uttered was insufficient to bring him back. Surely, I hurried to the tents and took no sleep, watching zealously by the tent of Ravaloke, crouched in its shadow. About the time of the setting of the moon I heard footsteps approach the tent within the circle of the guard, and it was a youth that held in his hand naked steel. When he was by the threshold of the tent, I rose before him and beheld the favourite of Ravaloke, even the youth he had destined to espouse me; so I reproached him, and he wept, denying not the intention he had to assassinate Ravaloke, and when his soul was softened he confessed to me, ''Twas that I might win the Princess Goorelka, and she urged me to it, promising the King would promote me to the vacant post of Ravaloke.'

Then I said to him, 'Lov'st thou Goorelka?'

And he answered, 'Yea, though I know my doom in loving her; and that it will be the doom of them now piping to her pleasure and denied the privilege of laughter.'

Page 95

So I thought, ‘Oh, cruel sorceress! the birds are men!’ And as I mused, my breast melted with pity at their desire to laugh, and the little restraint they had upon themselves notwithstanding her harshness; for could they think of their changed condition and folly without laughter? and the folly that sent them fresh mates in misery was indeed matter for laughter, fed to fulness by constant meditation on the perch. Meantime, I uncharmed the youth and bade him retire quickly; but as he was going, he said, ‘Beware of the Genie Karaz!’ Then I held him back, and after a parley he told me what he had heard the Princess say, and it was that Karaz had seen me and sworn to possess me for my beauty. ’Strangely smiled Goorelka when she spake that,’ said he.

Now, the City of Oolb fronts the sea, and behind it is a mountain and a wood, where the King met Ravaloke on his return victorious over the rebels. So, to escape the eye of the King I parted with Ravaloke, and sought to enter the city by a circuitous way; but the paths wound about and zigzagged, and my slaves suffered nightfall to surprise us in the entanglements of the wood. I sent them in different directions to strike into the main path, retaining Kadrab at the bridle of my mule; but that creature now began to address me in a familiar tone, and he said something of love for me that enraged me, so that I hit him a blow. Then came from him sounds like the neighing of mares, and lo! he seized me and rose with me in the air, and I thought the very heavens were opening to that black beast, when on a sudden he paused, and shot down with me from heights of the stars to the mouth of a cavern by the Putrid Sea, and dragged me into a cavern greatly illuminated, hung like a palace chamber, and supported on pillars of shining jasper. Then I fell upon the floor in a swoon, and awaking saw Kadrab no longer, but in his place a Genie. O my soul, thou halt seen him!—I thought at once, ‘’tis Karaz!’ and when he said to me, ’This is thy abode, O lady! and I he that have sworn to possess thee from the hour I saw thee in the chamber of Goorelka,’ then was I certain ’twas Karaz. So, collecting the strength of my soul, I said, in the words of the poet:

’Woo not a heart preoccupied!
What thorn is like a loathing bride?
Mark ye the shrubs how they turn from the sea,
  The sea’s rough whispers shun?
But like the sun of heaven be,
And every flower will open wide.
Woo with the shining patience we
  Beheld in heaven’s sun.’

Then he sang:

Exquisite lady! name the smart
  That fills thy heart.
Thou art the foot and I the worm:
  Prescribe the Term.

Finding him compliant, I said, ’O great Genie, truly the search of my life has been to discover him that is, my father, and how I was left in the wilderness. There ’s no peace for me, nor understanding the word of love, till I hear by whom I was left a babe on the bosom of a dead mother.’

Page 96

He exclaimed, and his eyes twinkled, ’’Tis that? that shalt thou know in a span of time. O my mistress, hast thou seen the birds of Goorelka? Thy father Feshnavat is among them, perched like a bird.’

So I cried, ‘And tell me how he may be disenchanted.’

He said, ‘Swear first to be mine unreluctantly.’

Then I said, ‘What is thy oath?’

He answered, ‘I swear, when I swear, by the Identical.’

Thereupon I questioned him concerning the Identical, what it was; and he, not suspecting, revealed to me the mighty hair in his head now in the head of Shagpat, even that. So I swore by that to give myself to the possessor of the Identical, and flattered him. Then said he, ’O lovely damsel, I am truly one of the most powerful of the Genii; yet am I in bondage to that sorceress Goorelka by reason of a ring she holdeth; and could I get that ring from her and be slave to nothing mortal an hour, I could light creation as a torch, and broil the inhabitants of earth at one fire.’

I thought, ‘That ring is known to me!’ And he continued, ’Surely I cannot assist thee in this work other than by revealing the means of disenchantment, and it is to keep the birds laughing uninterruptedly an hour; then are they men again, and take the forms of men that are laughers—I know not why.’

So I cried, ‘’Tis well! carry me back to Oolb.’

Then the Genie lifted me into the air, and ceased not speeding rapidly through it, till I was on the roof of the house of Ravaloke. O sweet youth! moon of my soul! from that time to the disenchantment of Feshnavat, I pored over my books, trying experiments in magic, dreadful ones, hunting for talismans to countervail Goorelka; but her power was great, and ’twas not in me to get her away from the birds one hour to free them. On a certain occasion I had stolen to them, and kept them laughing with stories of man to within an instant of the hour; and they were laughing exultingly with the easy happy laugh of them that perceive deliverance sure, when she burst in and beat them even to the door of death. I saw too in her eyes, that glowed like the eyes of wild cats in the dark, she suspected me, and I called Allah to aid the just cause against the sinful, and prepared to war with her.

Now, my desire, which was to liberate my father and his fellows in tribulation, I knew pure, and had no fear of the sequel, as is declared:

> Fear nought so much as Fear itself; for arm’d with Fear the Foe
> Finds passage to the vital part, and strikes a double blow.

Page 97

So one day as I leaned from my casement looking on the garden seaward, I saw a strange red and yellow-feathered bird that flew to the branch of a citron-tree opposite, with a ring in its beak; and the bird was singing, and with every note the ring dropped from its bill, and it descended swiftly in an arrowy slant downward, and seized it ere it reached the ground, and commenced singing afresh. When I had marked this to happen many times, I thought, 'How like is this bird to an innocent soul possessed of magic and using its powers! Lo, it seeketh still to sing as one of the careless, and cannot relinquish the ring and be as the careless, and between the two there is neither peace for it nor pleasure.' Now, while my eyes were on the pretty bird, dwelling on it, I saw it struck suddenly by an arrow beneath the left wing, and the bird fluttered to my bosom and dropped in it the ring from its beak. Then it sprang weakly, and sought to fly and soar, and fluttered; but a blue film lodged over its eyes, and its panting was quickly ended. So I looked at the ring and knew it for that one I had noted on the finger of Goorelka. Red blushed my bliss, and 'twas revealed to me that the bird was of the birds of the Princess that had escaped from her with the ring. I buried the bird, weeping for it, and flew to my books, and as I read a glow stole over me. O my betrothed, eyes of my soul! I read that the possessor of that ring was mistress of the marvellous hair which is a magnet to the homage of men, so that they crowd and crush and hunger to adore it, even the Identical! This was the power that peopled the aviary of Goorelka, and had well-nigh conquered all the resistance of my craft.

Now, while I read there arose a hubbub and noise in the outer court, and shrieks of slaves. The noise approached with rapid strides, and before I could close my books Goorelka burst in upon me, crying, 'Noorna! Noorna!' Wild and haggard was her head, and she rushed to my books and saw them open at the sign of the ring: then began our combat. She menaced me as never mortal was menaced. Rapid lightning-flashes were her transformations, and she was a serpent, a scorpion, a lizard, a lioness in succession, but I leapt perpetually into fresh rings of fire and of witched water; and at the fiftieth transformation, she fell on the floor exhausted, a shuddering heap. Seeing that, I ran from her to the aviary in her palace, and hurried over a story of men to the birds, that rocked them on their perches with chestquakes of irresistible laughter. Then flew I back to the Princess, and she still puffing on the floor, commenced wheedling and begging the ring of me, stinting no promises. At last she cried, 'Girl! what is this ring to thee without beauty? Thy beauty is in my keeping.'

And I exclaimed, 'How? how?' smitten to the soul.

She answered, 'Yea; and I can wear it as my own, adding it to my own, when thou'rt a hag!'

Page 98

My betrothed! I was on the verge of giving her the ring for this secret, when a violent remote laughter filled the inner hollow of my ears, and it increased, till the Princess heard it; and now the light of my casement was darkened with birds, the birds of Goorelka, laughing as on a wind of laughter. So I opened to them, and they darted in, laughing all of them, till I could hold out no longer, and the infection of laughter seized me, and I rolled with it; and the Princess, she too laughed a hyaena-laugh under a cat's grin, and we all of us remained in this wise some minutes, laughing the breath out of our bodies, as if death would take us. Whoso in the City of Oolb heard us, the slaves, the people, and the King, laughed, knowing not the cause. This day is still remembered in Oolb as the day of laughter. Now, at a stroke of the hour the laughter ceased, and I saw in the chamber a crowd of youths and elders of various ranks; but their visages were become long and solemn as that of them that have seen a dark experience. 'Tis certain they laughed little in their lives from that time, and the muscles of their cheeks had rest. So I caught down my veil, and cried to the Princess, 'My father is among these; point him out to me.'

Ere she replied one stepped forth, even Feshnavat, my father, and called me by name, and knew me by a spot on the left arm, and made himself known to me, and told me the story of my dead mother, how she had missed her way from the caravan in the desert, and he searching her was set upon by robbers, and borne on their expeditions. Nothing said he of the sorceries of Goorelka, and I, not wishing to provoke the Princess, suffered his dread to exist. So I kissed him, and bowed my head to him, and she fled from the sight of innocent happiness. Then took I the ring, and summoned Karaz, and ordered him to reinstate all those princes and chiefs and officers in their possessions and powers, on what part of earth soever that might be. Never till I stood as the Lily and thy voice sweetened the name of love in my ears, heard I aught of delicate delightfulness, like the sound of their gratitude. Many wooed me to let them stay by me and guard me, and do service all their lives to me; but this I would not allow, and though they were fair as moons, some of them, I responded not to their soft glances, speaking calmly the word of farewell, for I was burdened with other thoughts.

Now, when the Genie had done my bidding, he returned to me joyfully. My soul sickened to think myself his by a promise; but I revolved the words of my promise, and saw in them a loophole of escape. So, when he claimed me, I said, 'Ay! ay! lay thy head in my lap,' as if my mind treasured it. Then he lay there, and revealed to me his plans for the destruction of men. 'Or,' said he, 'they shall be our slaves and burden-beasts, for there 's now no restraint on me, now thou art mistress of the ring, and mine.' Thereupon his imagination swelled, and he saw his evil will enthroned, and the hopes of men beneath his heel, crying, 'And the more I crush them the thicker they crowd, for the Identical compelleth their very souls to adore in spite of distaste.'

Page 99

Then said I, ’Tell me, O Genie! is the Identical subservient to me in another head save thine?’

He answered, ’Nay I in another head ’tis a counteraction to the power of the Ring, the Ring powerless over it.’

And I said, ‘Must it live in a head, the Identical?’

Cried he, ‘Woe to what else holdeth it!’

I whispered in his hairy pointed red ear, ‘Sleep! sleep!’ and lulled him with a song, and he slept, being weary with my commissioning. Then I bade Feshnavat, my father, fetch me one of my books of magic, and read in it of the discovery of the Identical by means of the Ring; and I took the Ring and hung it on a hair of my own head over the head of the Genie, and saw one of the thin lengths begin to twist and dart and writhe, and shift lustres as a creature in anguish. So I put the Ring on my forefinger, and turned the hair round and round it, and tugged. Lo, with a noise that stunned me, the hair came out! O my betrothed, what shrieks and roars were those: with which the Genie awoke, finding himself bare of the Identical! Oolb heard them, and the sea foamed like the mouth of madness, as the Genie sped thunder-like over it, following me in mid-air. Such a flight was that! Now, I found it not possible to hold the Identical, for it twisted and stung, and was nigh slipping from me while I flew. I saw white on a corner of the Desert, a city, and I descended on it by the shop of a clothier that sat quietly by his goods and stuffs, thinking of fate less than of kabobs and stews and rare seasonings. That city hath now his name. Wullahy, had I not then sown in his head that hair which he weareth yet, how had I escaped Karaz, and met thee? Wondrous are the decrees of Providence! Praise be to Allah for them! So the Genie, when he found himself baffled by me, and Shagpat with the mighty hair in his head, the Identical, he yelled, and fetched Shagpat a slap that sent him into the middle of the street; but Kadza screamed after him, and there was immediately such lamentation in the city about Shagpat, and such tearing of hair about him, that I perceived at once the virtue that was in the Identical. As for Karaz, finding his claim as possessor of the Identical no more valid, he vanished, and has been my rebellious slave since, till thou, O my betrothed, mad’st me spend him in curing thy folly on the horse Garraveen, and he escaped from my circles beyond the dominion of the Ring; yet had he his revenge, for I that was keeper of the Lily, had, I now learned ruefully, a bond of beauty with it, and whatever was a stain to one withered the other. Then that sorceress Goorelka stole my beauty from me by sprinkling a blight on the petals of the fair flower, and I became as thou first saw’st me. But what am I as I now am? Blissful! blissful! Surely I grew humble with the loss of beauty, and by humility wise, so that I assisted Feshnavat to become Vizier by the Ring, and watched for thy coming to shave Shagpat, as a star watcheth; for ’tis written, ’A barber alone shall be shearer of the Identical’; and he only, my betrothed, hath power to plant it in Aklis, where it groweth as a pillar, bringing due reverence to Aklis.

Page 100

THE WILES OF RABESQURAT

Now, when Noorna bin Noorka had made an end of her narration, she folded her hands and was mute awhile; and to the ear of Shibli Bagarag it seemed as if a sweet instrument had on a sudden ceased luting. So, as he leaned, listening for her voice to recommence, she said quickly, 'See yonder fire on the mountain's height!'

He looked and saw a great light on the summit of a lofty mountain before them.

Then said she, 'That is Aklis! and it is ablaze, knowing a visitant near. Tighten now the hairs of Garraveen about thy wrist; touch thy lips with the waters of Paravid; hold before thee the Lily, and make ready to enter the mountain. Lo, my betrothed, thou art in possession of the three means that melt opposition, and the fault is thine if thou fail.'

He did as she directed; and they were taken on a tide and advanced rapidly to the mountain, so that the waters smacked and crackled beneath the shell, covering it with silver showering arches of glittering spray. Then the fair beams of the moon became obscured, and the twain reddened with the reflection of the fire, and the billows waxed like riotous flames; and presently the shell rose upon the peak of many waves swollen to one, and looking below, they saw in the scarlet abyss of waters at their feet a monstrous fish, with open jaws and one baleful eye; and the fish was lengthy as a caravan winding through the desert, and covered with fiery scales. Shibli Bagarag heard the voice of Noorna shriek affrightedly, 'Karaz!' and as they were sliding on the down slope, she stood upright in the shell, pronouncing rapidly some words in magic; and the shell closed upon them both, pressing them together, and writing darkness on their very eyeballs. So, while they were thus, they felt themselves gulped in, and borne forward with terrible swiftness, they knew not where, like one that hath a dream of sinking; and outside the shell a rushing, gurgling noise, and a noise as of shouting multitudes, and muffled multitudes muttering complaints and yells and querulous cries, told them they were yet speeding through the body of the depths in the belly of the fish. Then there came a shock, and the shell was struck with light, and they were sensible of stillness without motion. Then a blow on the shell shivered it to fragments, and they were blinded with seas of brilliancy on all sides from lamps and tapers and crystals, cornelians and gems of fiery lustre, liquid lights and flashing mirrors, and eyes of crowding damsels, bright ones. So, when they had risen, and could bear to gaze on the insufferable splendour, they saw sitting on a throne of coral and surrounded by slaves with scimitars, a fair Queen, with black eyes, kindlers of storms, torches in the tempest, and with floating tresses, crowned with a circlet of green-spiked precious stones and masses of crimson weed with flaps of pearl; and she was robed with a robe of amber, and had saffron sandals, loose silvery-silken trousers tied in at the ankle, the ankle white as silver; wonderful was the quivering of rays from the jewels upon her when she but moved a finger! Now, as they stood with their hands across their brows, she cried

out, ’O ye traversers of my sea! how is this, that I am made to thank Karaz for a sight of ye?’

Page 101

And Noorna bin Noorka answered, ’Surely, O Queen Rabesqurat, the haven of our voyage was Aklis, and we feared delay, seeing the fire of the mountain ablaze with expectations of us.’

Then the Queen cried angrily, ’’Tis well thou hadst wit to close the shell, O Noorna, or there would have been delay indeed. Say, is not the road to Aklis through my palace? And it is the road thousands travel.’

So Noorna bin Noorka said, ’O Queen, this do they; but are they of them that reach Aklis?’

And the Queen cried violently, purpling with passion, ’This to me! when I helped ye to the plucking of the Lily?’

Now, the Queen muttered an imprecation, and called the name ‘Abarak!’ and lo, a door opened in one of the pillars of jasper leading from the throne, and there came forth a little man, humped, with legs like bows, and arms reaching to his feet; in his hand a net weighted with leaden weights. So the Queen levelled her finger at Noorna, and he spun the net above her head, and dropped it on her shoulder, and dragged her with him to the pillar. When Shibli Bagarag saw that, the world darkened to him, and he rushed upon Abarak; but Noorna called swiftly in his ear, ’Wait! wait! Thou by thy spells art stronger than all here save Abarak. Be true! Remember the seventh pillar!’ Then, with a spurn from the hand of Abarak, the youth fell back senseless at the feet of the Queen.

Now, with the return of consciousness his hearing was bewitched with strange delicious melodies, the touch of stringed instruments, and others breathed into softly as by the breath of love, delicate, tender, alive with enamoured bashfulness. Surely, the soul that heard them dissolved like a sweet in the goblet, mingling with so much ecstasy of sound; and those melodies filling the white cave of the ear were even at once to drown the soul in delightfulness and buoy it with bliss, as a heavy-leaved flower is withered and refreshed by sun and dews. Surely, the youth ceased not to listen, and oblivion of cares and aught other in this life, save that hidden luting and piping, pillowed his drowsy head. At last there was a pause, and it seemed every maze of music had been wandered through. Opening his eyes hurriedly, as with the loss of the music his own breath had gone likewise, he beheld a garden golden with the light of lamps hung profusely from branches and twigs of trees by the glowing cheeks of fruits, apple and grape, pomegranate and quince; and he was reclining on a bank piled with purple cushions, his limbs clad in the richest figured silks, fringed like the ends of clouds round the sun, with amber fringes. He started up, striving to recall the confused memory of his adventures and what evil had befallen him, and he would have struggled with the vision of these glories, but it mastered him with the strength of a potent drug, so that the very name of his betrothed was forgotten by him, and he knew not whither he would, or the thing he wished for. Now, when he had risen from the soft green bank that was his couch, lo, at his feet a damsel weeping! So he lifted her by the hand, and she arose

and looked at him, and began plaining of love and its tyrannies, softening him, already softened. Then said she, 'What I suffer there is another, lovelier than I, suffering; thou the cause of it, O cruel youth!'

Page 102

He said, ’How, O damsel? what of my cruelty? Surely, I know nothing of it.’

But she exclaimed, ‘Ah, worse to feign forgetfulness!’

Now, he was bewildered at the words of the damsel, and followed her leading till they entered a dell in the garden canopied with foliage, and beyond it a green rise, and on the rise a throne. So he looked earnestly, and beheld thereon Queen Rabesqurat, she sobbing, her dark hair pouring in streams from the crown of her head. Seeing him, she cleared her eyes, and advanced to meet him timidly and with hesitating steps; but he shrank from her, and the Queen shrieked with grief, crying, ’Is there in this cold heart no relenting?’

Then she said to him winningly, and in a low voice, ’O youth, my husband, to whom I am a bride!’

He marvelled, saying, ’This is a game, for indeed I am no husband, neither have I a bride . . . yet have I confused memory of some betrothal . . .’

Thereupon she cried, ‘Said I not so? and I the betrothed.’

Still he exclaimed, ‘I cannot think it! Wullahy, it were a wonder!’

So she said, ’Consider how a poor youth of excellent proportions came to a flourishing Court before one, a widowed Queen, and she cast eyes of love on him, and gave him rule over her and all that was hers when he had achieved a task, and they were wedded. Oh, the bliss of it! Knit together with bond and a writing; and these were the dominions, I the Queen, woe’s me!—thou the youth!’

Now, he was roiled by the enchantments of the Queen, caught in the snare of her beguilings; and he let her lead him to a seat beside her on the throne, and sat there awhile in the midst of feastings, mazed, thinking, ‘What life have I lived before this, if the matter be as I behold?’ thinking, ’’Tis true I have had visions of a widowed queen, and I a poor youth that came to her court, and espoused her, sitting in the vacant seat beside her, ruling a realm; but it was a dream, a dream,—yet, wah! here is she, here am I, yonder my dominions!’ Then he thought, ’I will solve it!’ So, on a sudden he said to her beside him, ’O Queen, sovereign of hearts! enlighten me as to a perplexity.’

She answered, ‘The voice of my lord is music in the ear of the bride.’

Then said he, in the tone of one doubting realities, ’O fair Queen, is there truly now such a one as Shagpat in the world?’

She laughed at his speech and the puzzled appearance of his visage, replying, ’Surely there liveth one, Shagpat by name in the world; strange is the history of him, his friends, and enemies; and it would bear recital.’

Then he said, ’And one, the daughter of a Vizier, Vizier to the King in the City of Shagpat?’

Thereat, she shook her head, saying, ‘I know nought of that one.’

Now, Shibli Bagarag was mindful of his thwackings; and in this the wisdom of Noorna, is manifest, that the sting of them yet chased away doubts of illusion regarding their having been, as the poet says,

Page 103

If thou wouldst fix remembrance—thwack!
'Tis that oblivion controls;
I care not if't be on the back,
Or on the soles.

He thought, 'Wah! yet feel I the thong, and the hiss of it as of the serpent in the descent, and the smack of it as the mouth of satisfaction in its contact with tender regions. This, wullahy! was no dream.' Nevertheless, he was ashamed to allude thereto before the Queen, and he said, 'O my mistress, another question, one only! This Shagpat—is he shaved?'

She said, 'Clean shorn!'

Quoth he, astonished, grief-stricken, with drawn lips, 'By which hand, chosen above men?'

And she exclaimed, 'O thou witty one that feignest not to know! Wullahy! by this hand of thine, O my lord and king, daring that it is; dexterous! surely so! And the shaving of Shagpat was the task achieved,—I the dower of it, and the rich reward.'

Now, he was meshed yet deeper in the net of her subtleties, and by her calling him 'lord and king'; and she gave a signal for fresh entertainments, exhausting the resources of her art, the mines of her wealth, to fascinate him. Ravishments of design and taste were on every side, and he was in the lap of abundance, beguiled by magic, caressed by beauty and a Queen. Marvel not that he was dazzled, and imagined himself already come to the great things foretold of him by the readers of planets and the casters of nativities in Shiraz. He assisted in beguiling himself, trusting wilfully to the two witnesses of things visible; as is declared by him of wise sayings:

There is in every wizard-net a hole,
So the entangler first must blind the soul.

And it is again said by that same teacher:

Ye that the inner spirit's sight would seal,
Nought credit but what outward orbs reveal.

And the soul of Shibli Bagarag was blinded by Rabesqurat in the depths of the Enchanted Sea. She sang to him, luting deliriously; and he was intoxicated with the blissfulness of his fortune, and took a lute and sang to her love-verses in praise of her, rhyming his rapture. Then they handed the goblet to each other, and drank till they were on fire with the joy of things, and life blushed beauteousness. Surely, Rabesqurat was becoming forgetful of her arts through the strength of those draughts, till her eye

marked the Lily by his side, which he grasped constantly, the bright flower, and she started and said, ’One grant, O my King, my husband!’

So he said courteously, ’All grants are granted to the lovely, the fascinating; and their grief will be lack of aught to ask for?’

Then said she, ’O my husband, my King, I am jealous of that silly flower: laugh at my weakness, but fling it from thee.’

Now, he was about to cast it from him, when a vanity possessed his mind, and he exclaimed, ‘See first the thing I will do, a wonder.’

She cried, ‘No wonders, my life! I am sated with them.’

Page 104

And he said, ’I am oblivious, O Queen, of how I came by this flower and this phial; but thou shalt hear a thing beyond the power of common magic, and see that I am something.’

Now, she plucked at him to abstain from his action, but he held the phial to the flower. She signed imperiously to some slaves to stay his right wrist, and they seized on it; but not all of them together could withhold him from dropping a drop into the petals of the flower, and lo, the Lily spake, a voice from it like the voice of Noorna, saying, ’Remember the Seventh Pillar.’ Thereat, he lifted his eyes to his brows and frowned back memory to his aid, and the scene of Karaz, Rabesqurat, Abarak, and his betrothed was present to him. So perceiving that, the Queen delayed not while he grasped the phial to take in her hands some water from a basin near, and flung it over him, crying, ‘Oblivion!’ And while his mind was straining to bring back images of what had happened, he fell forward once more at the feet of Rabesqurat, senseless as a stone falls; such was the force of her enchantments.

Now, when he awoke the second time he was in the bosom of darkness, and the Lily gone from his hand; so he lifted the phial to make certain of that, and groped about till he came to what seemed an urn to the touch, and into this he dropped a drop, and asked for the Lily; and a voice said, ‘I caught a light from it in passing.’ And he came in the darkness to a tree, and a bejewelled bank, and other urns, and swinging lamps without light, and a running water, and a grassy bank, and flowers, and a silver seat, sprinkling each; and they said all in answer to his question of the Lily, ‘I caught a light from it in passing.’ At the last he stumbled upon the steps of a palace, and ascended them, endowing the steps with speech as he went, and they said, ’The light of it went over us.’ He groped at the porch of the palace, and gave the door a voice, and it opened on jasper hinges, shrieking, ‘The light of it went through me.’ Then he entered a spacious hall, scattering drops, and voices exclaimed, ‘We glow with the light of it.’ He passed, groping his way through other halls and dusk chambers, scattering drops, and as he advanced the voices increased in the fervour of their replies, saying sequently: ’We blush with the light of it; We beam with the light of it; We burn with the light of it.’ So, presently he found himself in a long low room, sombrely lit, roofed with crystals; and in a corner of the room, lo! a damsel on a couch of purple, she white as silver, spreading radiance. Of such lustrous beauty was she that beside her, the Princess Goorelka as Shibli Bagarag first beheld her, would have paled like a morning moon; even Noorna had waned as Both a flower in fierce heat; and the Queen of Enchantments was but the sun behind a sand-storm, in comparison with that effulgent damsel on the length of the purple couch. Well for him he wilt of the magic which floated through that palace; as is said,

Page 105

Tempted by extremes,
The soul is most secure;
Too vivid loveliness blinds with its beams,
And eyes turned inward perceive the lure.

Pulling down his turban hastily, he stepped on tiptoe to within arm's reach of her, and, looking another way, inclined over her soft vermeil mouth the phial slowly till it brimmed the neck, and dropped a drop of Paravid between the bow of those sweet lips. Still not daring to gaze on her, he said then, 'My question is of the Lily, the Lily of the Sea, and where is it, O marvel?'

And he heard a voice answer in the tones of a silver bell, clear as a wind in strung wires, 'Where I lie, lies the Lily, the Lily of the Sea; I with it, it with me.'

Said he, 'O breather of music, tell me how I may lay hand on the flower of beauty to bear it forth.'

And he heard the voice, 'An equal space betwixt my right side and my left, and from the shoulder one span and half a span downward.'

Still without power to eye her, he measured the space and the spans, his hand beneath the coverlids of the couch, and at a spot of the bosom his hand sank in, and he felt a fluttering thing, fluttering like a frighted bird in the midst of the fire. And the voice said, 'Quick, seize it, and draw it out, and tie it to my feet by the twines of red silk about it.'

He seized it and drew it out, and it was a heart—a heart of blood-streaming with crimson, palpitating. Tears flashed on his sight beholding it, and pity took the seat of fear, and he turned his eyes full on her, crying, 'O sad fair thing! O creature of anguish! O painful beauty! Oh, what have I done to thee?'

But she panted, and gasped short and shorter gasps, pointing with one finger to her feet. Then he took the warm living heart while it yet leapt and quivered and sobbed; and he held it with a trembling hand, and tied it by the red twines of silk about it to her feet, staining their whiteness. When that was done, his whole soul melted with pity and swelled with sorrow, and ere he could meet her eyes a swoon overcame him. Surely, when the world dawned to him a third time in those regions the damsel was no longer there, but in her place the Lily of Light. He thought, 'It was a vision, that damsel! a terrible one; one to terrify and bewilder! a bitter sweetness! Oh, the heart, the heart!' Reflecting on the heart brought to his lids an overcharging of tears, and he wept violently awhile. Then was he warned by the thought of his betrothed to take the Lily and speed with it from the realms of Rabesqurat; and he stole along the halls of the palace, and by the plashing fountains, and across the magic courts, passing chambers of sleepers, fair dreamers, and through ante-rooms crowded with thick-lipped slaves. Lo, as he held the Lily to light him on, and the light of the Lily fell on them that were

asleep, they paled and shrank, and were such as the death-chill maketh of us. So he called upon his head the protection

Page 106

of Allah, and went swifter, to chase from his limbs the shudder of awe; and there were some that slept not, but stared at him with fixed eyes, eyes frozen by the light of the Lily, and he shunned those, for they were like spectres, haunting spirits. After he had coursed the length of the palace, he came to a steep place outside it, a rock with steps cut in stairs, and up these he went till he came to a small door in the rock, and lying by it a bar; so he seized the bar and smote the door, and the door shivered, for on his right wrist were the hairs of Garraveen. Bending his body, he slipped through the opening, and behold, an orchard dropping blossoms and ripe golden fruits, streams flowing through it over sands, and brooks bounding above glittering gems, and long dewy grasses, profusion of scented flowers, shade and sweetness. So he let himself down to the ground, which was an easy leap from the aperture, and walked through the garden, holding the Lily behind him, for here it darkened all, and the glowing orchard was a desert by its light. Presently, his eye fell on a couch swinging between two almond trees, and advancing to it he beheld the black-eyed Queen gathered up, folded temptingly, like a swaying fruit; she with the gold circlet on her head, and she was fair as blossom of the almond in a breeze of the wafted rose-leaf. Sweetly was she gathered up, folded temptingly, and Shibli Bagarag refrained from using the Lily, thinking, ''Tis like the great things foretold of me, this having of Queens within the very grasp, swinging to and fro as if to taunt backwardness!' Then he thought, ''Tis an enchantress! I will yet try her.' So he made a motion of flourishing the Lily once or twice, but forbore, fascinated, for she had on her fair face the softness of sleep, her lips closed in dimples, and the wicked fire shut from beneath her lids. Mastering his mind, the youth at last held the Lily to her, and saw a sight to blacken the world and all bright things with its hideousness. Scarce had he time to thrust the Lily in his robes, when the Queen started up and clapped her hands, crying hurriedly, 'Abarak! Abarak!' and the little man appeared in a moment at the door by which Shibli Bagarag had entered the orchard. So, she cried still, 'Abarak!' and he moved toward her. Then she said, 'How came this youth here, prying in my private walks, my bowers? Speak!'

He answered, 'By the aid of Garraveen only, O Queen! and there is no force resisteth the bar so wielded.'

Rabesqurat looked under her brows at Shibli Bagarag and saw the horror on his face, and she cried out to Abarak in an agony, 'Fetch me the mirror!' Then Abarak ran, and returned ere the Queen had drawn seven impatient breaths, and in one hand he bore a sack, in the other a tray: so he emptied the contents of the sack on the surface of the tray; surely they were human eyes! and the Queen flung aside her tresses, and stood over them. The youth saw her smile at them, and assume tender and taunting manners

Page 107

before them, and imperious manners, killing glances, till in each of the eyes there was a sparkle. Then she flung back her head as one that feedeth on a mighty triumph, exclaiming, 'Yet am I Rabesqurat! wide is my sovereignty.' Sideways then she regarded Shibli Bagarag, and it seemed she was urging Abarak to do a deed beyond his powers, he frowning and pointing to the right wrist of the youth. So she clenched her hands an instant with that feeling which knocketh a nail in the coffin of a desire not dead, and controlled herself, and went to the youth, breaking into beams of beauty; and an enchanting sumptuousness breathed round her, so that in spite of himself he suffered her to take him by the hand and lead him from that orchard through the shivered door and into the palace and the hall of the jasper pillars. Strange thrills went up his arm from the touch of that Queen, and they were as little snakes twisting and darting up, biting poison-bites of irritating blissfulness.

Now, the hall was spread for a feast, and it was hung with lamps of silver, strewn with great golden goblets, and viands, coloured meats, and ordered fruits on shining platters. Then said she to Shibli Bagarag, 'O youth! there shall be no deceit, no guile between us. Thou art but my guest, I no bride to thee, so take the place of the guest beside me.'

He took his seat beside her, Abarak standing by, and she helped the youth to this dish and that dish, from the serving of slaves, caressing him with flattering looks to starve aversion and nourish tender fellowship. And he was like one that slideth down a hill and can arrest his descent with a foot, yet faileth that freewill. When he had eaten and drunk with her, the Queen said, 'O youth, no other than my guest! art thou not a prince in the country thou comest from?'

In a moment the pride of the barber forsook him, and he equivocated, saying, 'O Queen! there is among the stars somewhere, as was divined by the readers of planets, a crown hanging for me, and I search a point of earth to intercept its fall.'

She marked him beguiled by vanity, and put sweetmeats to his mouth, exclaiming, 'Thy manners be those of a prince!' Then she sang to him of the loneliness of her life, and of one with whom she wished to share her state,—such as he. And at her signal came troops of damsels that stood in rings and luted sweetly on the same theme—the Queen's loneliness, her love. And he said to the Queen, 'Is this so?'

She answered, 'Too truly so!'

Now, he thought, 'She shall at least speak the thing that is, if she look it not.' So he took the goblet, and contrived to drop a drop from the phial of Paravid therein without her observing him; and he handed her the goblet, she him; and they drank. Surely, the change that came over the Queen was an enchantment, and her eyes shot lustre, her tongue was loosed, and she laughed like one intoxicated, lolling in her seat, lost to majesty and the sway

Page 108

of her magic, crying, 'O Abarak! Abarak! little man, long my slave and my tool; ugly little man! And O Shibli Bagarag! nephew of the barber! weak youth! small prince of the tackle! have I not nigh fascinated thee? And thou wilt forfeit those two silly eyes of thine to the sack. And, O Abarak, Abarak! little man, have I flattered thee? So fetter I the strong with my allurements! and I stay the arrow in its flight! and I blunt the barb of high intents! Wah! I have drunk a potent stuff; I talk! Wullahy! I know there is a danger menacing Shagpat, and the eyes of all Genii are fixed on him. And if he be shaved, what changes will follow! But 'tis in me to delude the barber, wullahy! and I will avert the calamity. I will save Shagpat!'

While the Queen Rabesqurat prated in this wise with flushed face, Shibli Bagarag was smitten with the greatness of his task, and reproached his soul with neglect of it. And he thought, 'I am powerful by spells as none before me have been, and 'twas by my weakness the Queen sought to tangle me. I will clasp the Seventh Pillar and make an end of it, by Allah and his Prophet (praised be the name!), and I will reach Aklis by a short path and shave Shagpat with the sword.'

So he looked up, and Abarak was before him, the lifted nostrils of the little man wide with the flame of anger. And Abarak said, 'O youth, regard me with the eyes of judgement! Now, is it not frightful to rate me little?—an instigation of the evil one to repute me ugly?'

The promptings of wisdom counselled Shibli Bagarag to say, 'Frightful beyond contemplation, O Abarak! one to shame our species! Surely, there is a moon between thy legs, a pear upon thy shoulders, and the cock that croweth is no match for thee in measure.'

Abarak cried, 'We be aggrieved, we two! O youth, son of my uncle, I will give thee means of vengeance; give thou me means.'

Shibli Bagarag felt scorn at the Queen, and her hollowness, and he said, ''Tis well; take this Lily and hold it to her.'

Now, the Queen jeered Abarak, and as he approached her she shouted, 'What! thou small of build! mite of creation! sour mixture! thou puppet of mine! thou! comest thou to seek a second kiss against the compact, knowing that I give not the well-favoured of mortals beyond one, a second.

Little delayed Abarak at this to put her to the test of the Lily, and he held the flower to her, and saw the sight, and staggered back like one stricken with a shaft. When he could get a breath he uttered such a howl that Rabesqurat in her drunkenness was fain to save her ears, and the hall echoed as with the bellows of a thousand beasts of the forest. Then, to glut his revenge he ran for the sack, and emptied the contents of it, the Queen's mirror, before her; and the sackful of eyes, they saw the sight, and sickened,

rolling their whites. That done, Abarak gave Shibli Bagarag the bar of iron, and bade him smite the pillars, all save the seventh; and he smote them strengthily, crumbling them at a blow, and bringing down the great hall and its groves, and glasses and gems, lamps, traceries, devices, a heap of ruin, the seventh pillar alone standing. Then, while he pumped back breath into his body, Abarak said, 'There's no delaying in this place now, O youth! Say, halt thou spells for the entering of Aklis?'

Page 109

He answered, ‘Three!’

Then said Abarak, ’’Tis well! Surely now, if thou takest me in thy service, I’ll help thee to master the Event, and serve thee faithfully, requiring nought from thee save a sight of the Event, and ’tis I that myself missed one, wiled by Rabesqurat.’

Quoth Shibli Bagarag, ‘Thou?’

He answered, ‘No word of it now. Is’t agreed?’

So Shibli Bagarag cried, ‘Even so.’

Thereupon, the twain entered the pillar, leaving Rabesqurat prone, and the waves of the sea bounding toward her where she lay. Now, they descended and ascended flights of slippery steps, and sped together along murky passages, in which light never was, and under arches of caves with hanging crystals, groping and tumbling on hurriedly, till they came to an obstruction, and felt an iron door, frosty to the touch. Then Abarak said to Shibli Bagarag, ‘Smite!’ And the youth lifted the bar to his right shoulder, and smote; and the door obeyed the blow, and discovered an opening into a strange dusky land, as it seemed a valley, on one side of which was a ragged copper sun setting low, large as a warrior’s battered shield, giving deep red lights to a brook that fell, and over a flat stream a red reflection, and to the sides of the hills a dark red glow. The sky was a brown colour; the earth a deeper brown, like the skins of tawny lions. Trees with reddened stems stood about the valley, scattered and in groups, showing between their leaves the cheeks of melancholy fruits swarthily tinged, and toward the centre of the valley a shining palace was visible, supported by massive columns of marble reddened by that copper sun. Shibli Bagarag was awed at the stillness that hung everywhere, and said to Abarak, ’Where am I, O Abarak? the look of this place is fearful!’

And the little man answered, ’Where, but beneath the mountains in Aklis? Wullahy! I should know it, I that keep the passage of the seventh pillar!’

Then the thought of his betrothed Noorna, and her beauty, and the words, ‘Remember the seventh pillar,’ struck the heart of Shibli Bagarag, and he exclaimed passionately, ’Is she in safety? Noorna, my companion, my betrothed, netted by thee, O Abarak!’

Abarak answered sharply, ’Speak not of betrothals in this place, or the sword of Aklis will move without a hand!’

But Shibli Bagarag waxed the colour of the sun that was over them, and cried, ’By Allah! I will smite thee with the bar, if thou swear not to her safety, and point not out to me where she now is.’

Then said Abarak, ’Thou wilt make a better use of the bar by lifting it to my shoulder, and poising it, and peering through it.’

Shibli Bagarag lifted the bar to the shoulder of Abarak, and poised it, and peered through the length of it, and lo! there was a sea tossing in tumult, and one pillar standing erect in the midst of the sea; and on the pillar, above the washing waves, with hair blown back, and flapping raiment, pale but smiling still, Noorna, his betrothed!

Page 110

Now, when he saw her, he made a rush to the door of the passage; but Abarak blocked the way, crying, 'Fool! a step backward in Aklis is death!'

And when he had wrestled with him and reined him, Abarak said, 'Haste to reach the Sword from the sons of Aklis, if thou wouldst save her.'

He drew him to the brink of the stream, and whistled a parrot's whistle; and Shibli Bagarag beheld a boat draped with drooping white lotuses that floated slowly toward them; and when it was near, he and Abarak entered it, and saw one, a veiled figure, sitting in the stern, who neither moved to them nor spake, but steered the boat to a certain point of land across the stream, where stood an elephant ready girt for travellers to mount him; and the elephant kneeled among the reeds as they approached, that they might mount him, and when they had each taken a seat, moved off, waving his trunk. Presently the elephant came to a halt, and went upon his knees again, and the two slid off his back, and were among black slaves that bowed to the ground before them, and led them to the shining gates of the palace in silence. Now, on the first marble step of the palace there sat an old white-headed man dressed like a dervish, who held out at arm's length a branch of gold with golden singing-birds between its leaves, saying, 'This for the strongest of ye!'

Abarak exclaimed, 'I am that one'; and he held forth his hand for the branch.

But Shibli Bagarag cried, 'Nay, 'tis mine. Wullahy, what has not the strength of this hand overthrown?'

Then the brows of Abarak twisted; his limbs twitched, and he bawled, 'To the proof!' waking all the echoes of Aklis. Shibli Bagarag was tempted in his desire for the golden branch to lift the iron bar upon Abarak, when lo! the phial of Paravid fell from his vest, and he took it, and sprinkled a portion of the waters over the singing birds, and in a moment they burst into a sweet union of voices, singing, in the words of the poet:

> When for one serpent were two asses match?
> How shall one foe but with wiles master double?
> So let the strong keep for ever good watch,
> Lest their strength prove a snare, and themselves a mere bubble;
> For vanity maketh the strongest most weak,
> As lions and men totter after the struggle.
> Ye heroes, be modest! while combats ye seek,
> The cunning one trippeth ye both with a juggle.

Now, at this verse of the birds Shibli Bagarag fixed his eye on the old man, and the beard of the old man shrivelled; he waxed in size, and flew up in a blaze and with a baffled shout bearing the branch; surely, his features were those of Karaz, and Shibli Bagarag knew him by the length of his limbs, his stiff ears, and copper skin. Then he

laughed a loud laugh, but Abarak sobbed, saying, ’By this know I that I never should have seized the Sword, even though I had vanquished the illusions of Rabesqurat, which held me fast half-way.’

Page 111

So Shibli Bagarag stared at him, and said, 'Wert thou also a searcher, O Abarak?'

But Abarak cried, 'Rouse not the talkative tongue of the past, O youth! Wullahy! relinquish the bar that is my bar, won by me, for the Sword is within thy grip, and they await thee up yonder steps. Go! go! and look for me here on thy return.'

THE PALACE OF AKLIS

Now, Shibli Bagarag assured himself of his three spells, and made his heart resolute, and hastened up the reddened marble steps of the Palace; and when he was on the topmost step, lo! one with a man's body and the head of a buffalo, that prostrated himself, and prayed the youth obsequiously to enter the palace with the title of King. So Shibli Bagarag held his head erect, and followed him with the footing of a Sultan, and passed into a great hall, with fountains in it that were fountains of gems, pearls, chrysolites, thousand-hued jewels, and by the margin of the fountains were shapes of men with the heads of beasts-wolves, foxes, lions, bears, oxen, sheep, serpents, asses, that stretched their hands to the falls, and loaded their vestments with brilliants, loading them without cessation, so that from the vestments of each there was another pouring of the liquid lights. Then he with the buffalo's head bade Shibli Bagarag help himself from the falls; but Shibli Bagarag refused, for his soul was with Noorna, his betrothed; and he saw her pale on that solitary pillar in the tumult of the sea, and knew her safety depended on his faithfulness.

He cried, 'The Sword of Aklis! nought save the Sword!'

Now, at these words the fox-heads and the sheep-heads and the ass-heads and the other heads of beasts were lifted up, and lo! they put their hands to their ears, and tapped their foreheads with the finger of reflection, as creatures seeking to bring to mind a serious matter. Then the fountains rose higher, and flung jets of radiant jewels, and a drenching spray of gems upon them, and new thirst aroused them to renew their gulping of the falls, and a look of eagerness was even in the eyes of the ass-heads and the silly sheep-heads; surely, Shibli Bagarag laughed to see them! Now, when he had pressed his lips to recover his sight from the dazzling of those wondrous fountains, he heard himself again addressed by the title of King, and there was before him a lofty cock with a man's head. So he resumed the majesty of his march, and followed the fine-stepping cock into another hall, spacious, and clouded with heavy scents and perfumes burning in censers and urns, musk, myrrh, ambergris, and livelier odours, gladdening the nostril like wine, making the soul reel as with a draught of the forbidden drink. Here, before a feast that would prick the dead with appetite, were shapes of beasts with heads of men, asses, elephants, bulls, horses, swine, foxes, river-horses, dromedaries; and they ate and drank as do the famished with munch and gurgle, clacking

Page 112

their lips joyfully. Shibli Bagarag remembered the condition of his frame when first he looked upon the City of Shagpat, and was incited to eat and accede to the invitation of the cock with the man's head, and sit among these merry feeders and pickers of mouth-watering morsels, when, with the City of Shagpat, lo! he had a vision of Shagpat, hairier than at their interview, arrogant in hairiness; his head remote in contemptuous waves and curls and frizzes, and bushy protuberances of hair, lost in it, like an idolatrous temple in impenetrable thickets. Then the yearning of the Barber seized Shibli Bagarag, and desire to shear Shagpat was as a mighty overwhelming wave in his bosom, and he shouted, 'The Sword of Aklis! nought save the Sword!'

Now, at these words the beasts with men's heads wagged their tails, all of them, from right to left, and kept their jaws from motion, staring stupidly at the dishes; but the dishes began to send forth stealthy steams, insidious whispers to the nose, silver intimations of savouriness, so that they on a sudden set up a howl, and Shibli Bagarag puckered his garments from them as from devouring dogs, and hastened from that hall to a third, where at the entrance a damsel stood that smiled to him, and led him into a vast marbled chamber, forty cubits high, hung with draperies, and in it a hundred doors; and he was in the midst of a very rose-garden of young beauties, such as the Blest behold in Paradise, robed in the colours of the rising and setting sun; plump, with long, black, languishing, almond-shaped eyes, and undulating figures. So they cried to him, 'What greeting, O our King?'

Now, he counted twenty and seven of them, and, fitting his gallantry to verse, answered:

> Poor are the heavens that have not ye
> To swell their glowing plenty;
> Up there but one bright moon I see,
> Here mark I seven-and-twenty.

The damsels laughed and flung back their locks at his flattery, sporting with him; and he thought, 'These be sweet maidens! I will know if they be illusions like Rabesqurat'; so, as they were romping, he slung his right arm round one, and held the Lily to her, but there was no change in her save that she winked somewhat and her eyes watered; and it was so with the others, for when they saw him hold the Lily to one they made him do so to them likewise. Then he took the phial, and touched their lips with the waters, and lo! they commenced luting and laughing, and singing verses, and prattling, laughing betweenwhiles at each other; and one, a noisy one, with long, black, unquiet tresses, and a curved foot and roguish ankle, sang as she twirled:

> My heart is another's, I cannot be tender;
> Yet if thou storm it, I fain must surrender.

And another, a fresh-cheeked, fair-haired, full-eyed damsel, strong upon her instep and stately in the bearing of her shoulders, sang shrilly:

> I’m of the mountains, and he that comes to me
> Like eagle must win, and like hurricane woo me.

Page 113

And another, reclining on a couch buried in dusky silks, like a butterfly under the leaves, a soft ball of beauty, sang moaningly:

Here like a fruit on the branch am I swaying;
Snatch ere I fall, love! there's death in delaying.

And another, light as an antelope on the hills, with antelope eyes edged with kohl, and timid, graceful movements, and small, white, rounded ears, sang clearly:

Swiftness is mine, and I fly from the sordid;
Follow me, follow! and you'll be rewarded.

And another, with large limbs and massive mould, that stepped like a cow leisurely cropping the pasture, and shook with jewels amid her black hair and above her brown eyes, and round her white neck and her wrists, and on her waist, even to her ankle, sang as with a kiss upon every word:

Sweet 'tis in stillness and bliss to be basking!
He who would have me, may have for the asking.

And another, with eyebrows like a bow, and arrows of fire in her eyes, and two rosebuds her full moist parted pouting lips, sang, clasping her hands, and voiced like the tremulous passionate bulbul in the shadows of the moon:

Love is my life, and with love I live only;
Give me life, lover, and leave me not lonely.

And a seventh, a very beam of beauty, and the perfection of all that is imagined in fairness and ample grace of expression and proportion, lo! she came straight to Shibli Bagarag, and took him by the hand and pierced him with lightning glances, singing:

Were we not destined to meet by one planet?
Can a fate sever us?—can it, ah! can it?

And she sang tender songs to him, mazing him with blandishments, so that the aim of existence and the summit of ambition now seemed to him the life of a king in that palace among the damsels; and he thought, 'Wah! these be no illusions, and they speak the thing that is in them. Wullahy, loveliness is their portion; they call me King.'

Then she that had sung to him said, 'Surely we have been waiting thee long to crown thee our King! Thou hast been in some way delayed, O glorious one!'

And he answered, 'O fair ones, transcending in affability, I have stumbled upon obstructions in my journey hither, and I have met with adventures, but of this crowning that was to follow them I knew nought. Wullahy, thrice have I been saluted King; I

whom fate selecteth for the shaving of Shagpat, and till now it was a beguilement, all emptiness.'

They marked his bewildered state, and some knelt before him, some held their arms out adoringly, some leaned to him with glistening looks, and he was fast falling a slave to their flatteries, succumbing to them; imagination fired him with the splendours due to one that was a king, and the thought of wearing a crown again took possession of his soul, and he cried, 'Crown me, O my handmaidens, and delay not to crown me; for, as the poet says:

Page 114

"The king without his crown
Hath a forehead like the clown";

and the circle of my head itcheth for the symbols of majesty.'

At these words of Shibli Bagarag they arose quickly and clapped their hands, and danced with the nimble step of gladness, exclaiming, 'O our King! pleasant will be the time with him!' And one smoothed his head and poured oil upon it; one brought him garments of gold and silk inwoven; one fetched him slippers like the sun's beam in brightness; others stood together in clusters, and with lutes and wood-instruments, low-toned, singing odes to him; and lo! one took a needle and threaded it, and gave the thread into the hands of Shibli Bagarag, and with the point of the needle she pricked certain letters on his right wrist, and afterwards pricked the same letters on a door in the wall. Then she said to him, 'Is it in thy power to make those letters speak?'

He answered, 'We will prove how that may be.'

So he flung some drops from the phial over the letters, and they glowed the colour of blood and flashed with a report, and it was as if a fiery forked-tongue had darted before them and spake the words written, and they were, 'This is the crown of him who bath achieved his aim and resteth here.' Thereupon, she stuck the needle in the door, and he pulled the thread, and the door drew apart, and lo! a small chamber, and on a raised cushion of blue satin a glittering crown, thick with jewels as a frost, such as Ambition pineth to wear, and the knees of men weaken and bend beholding, and it lanced lights about it like a living sun. Beside the cushion was a vacant throne, radiant as morning in the East, ablaze with devices in gold and gems, a seat to fill the meanest soul with sensations of majesty and tempt dervishes to the sitting posture. Shibli Bagarag was intoxicated at the sight, and he thought, 'Wah! but if I sit on this throne and am a king, with that crown I can command men and things! and I have but to say, Fetch Noorna, my betrothed, from yonder pillar in the midst of the uproarious sea!—Let the hairy Shagpat be shaved! and behold, slaves, thousands of them, do my bidding! Wullahy, this is greatness!' Now, he made a rush to the throne, but the damsels held him back, crying, 'Not for thy life till we have crowned thee, our master and lord!'

Then they took the crown and crowned him with it; and he sat upon the throne calmly, serenely, like a Sultan of the great race accustomed to sovereignty, tempering the awfulness of his brows with benignant glances. So, while he sat the damsels hid their faces and started some paces from him, as unable to bear the splendour of his presence, and in a moment, lo! the door closed between him and them, and he was in darkness. Then he heard a voice of the damsels cry in the hall, 'The ninety and ninth! Peace now for us and blissfulness with our lords, for now all are filled save the door of the Sword, which maketh the hundredth.' After that he heard the same voice say, 'Leave them, O my sisters!'

Page 115

So he listened to the noise of their departing, and knew he had been duped. Surely his soul cursed him as he sat crowned and throned in that darkness! He seized the crown to dash it to the earth, but the crown was fixed on his forehead and would not come off; neither had he force to rise from the throne. Now, the thought of Noorna, his betrothed, where she rested waiting for him to deliver her, filled Shibli Bagarag with the extremes of anguish; and he lifted his right arm and dashed it above his head in the violence of his grief, striking in the motion a hidden gong that gave forth a burst of thunder and a roll of bellowings, and lo! the door opened before him, and the throne as he sat on it moved out of the chamber into the hall where he had seen the damsels that duped him, and on every side of the hall doors opened; and he marvelled to see men, old and young, beardless and venerable, sitting upon thrones and crowned with crowns, motionless, with eyes like stones in the recesses. He thought, 'These be other dupes! Wallaby! a drop of the waters of Paravid upon their lips might reveal mysteries, and guide me to the Sword of my seeking.' So, as he considered how to get at them from the seat of his throne, his gaze fell on a mirror, and he beheld the crown on his forehead what it was, bejewelled asses' ears stiffened upright, and skulls of monkeys grinning with gems! The sight of that crowning his head convulsed Shibli Bagarag with laughter, and, as he laughed, his seat upon the throne was loosened, and he pitched from it, but the crown stuck to him and was tenacious of its hold as the lion that pounceth upon a victim. He bowed to the burden of necessity, and took the phial, and touched the lips of one that sat crowned on a throne with the waters in the phial; and it was a man of exceeding age, whitened with time, and in the long sweep of his beard like a mountain clad with snow from the peak that is in the sky to the base that slopeth to the valley. Then he addressed the old man on his throne, saying, 'Tell me, O King! how camest thou here? and in search of what?'

The old man's lips moved, and he muttered in deep tones, 'When cometh he of the ninety-and-ninth door?'

So Shibli Bagarag cried, 'Surely he is before thee, in Aklis.'

And the old man said, 'Let him ask no secrets; but when he hath reached the Sword forget not to flash it in this hall, for the sake of brotherhood in adventure.'

After that he would answer no word to any questioning.

THE SONS OF AKLIS

Now, Shibli Bagarag thought, 'The poet is right in Aklis as elsewhere, in his words:

> "The cunning of our oft-neglected wit
> Doth best the keyhole of occasion fit";

and whoso looketh for help from others looketh the wrong way in an undertaking. Wah! I will be bold and batter at the hundredth door, which is the door of the Sword.' So he advanced straightway to the door, which was one of solid silver, charactered with silver letters, and knocked against it three knocks; and a voice within said, 'What spells?'

Page 116

He answered, ‘Paravid; Garraveen; and the Lily of the Sea!’

Upon that the voice said, ‘Enter by virtue of the spells!’ and the silver door swung open, discovering a deep pit, lightened by a torch, and across it, bridging it, a string of enormous eggs, rocs’ eggs, hollowed, and so large that a man might walk through them without stooping. At the side of each egg three lamps were suspended from a claw, and the shell passage was illumined with them from end to end. Shibli Bagarag thought, ’These eggs are of a surety the eggs of the Roc mastered by Aklis with his sword!’ Now, as the sight of Shibli Bagarag grew familiar to the place, he beheld at the bottom of the pit a fluttering mass of blackness and two sickly eyes that glittered below.

Then thought he, ’Wah! if that be the Roc, and it not dead, will the bird suffer one to defile its eggs with other than the sole of the foot, naked?’ He undid his sandals and kicked off the slippers given him by the damsels that had duped him, and went into the first egg over the abyss, and into the second, and into the third, and into the fourth, and into the fifth. Surely the eggs swung with him, and bent; and the fear of their breaking and he falling into the maw of the terrible bird made him walk unevenly. When he had come to the seventh egg, which was the last, it shook and swung violently, and he heard underneath the flapping of the wings of the Roc, as with eagerness expecting a victim to prey upon. He sustained his soul with the firmness of resolve and darted himself lengthwise to the landing, clutching a hold with his right hand; as he did so, the bridge of eggs broke, and he heard the feathers of the bird in agitation, and the bird screaming a scream of disappointment as he scrambled up the sides of the pit.

Now, Shibli Bagarag failed not to perform two prostrations to Allah, and raised the song of gratitude for his preservation when he found himself in safety. Then he looked up, and lo! behind a curtain, steps leading to an anteroom, and beyond that a chamber like the chamber of kings where they sit in state dispensing judgements, like the sun at noon in splendour; and in the chamber seven youths, tall and comely young men, calm as princes in their port, each one dressed in flowing robes, and with a large glowing pearl in the front of their turbans. They advanced to meet him, saying, ’Welcome to Aklis, thou that art proved worthy! ’Tis holiday now with us’; and they took him by the hand and led him with them in silence past fountain-jets and porphyry pillars to where a service with refreshments was spread, meats, fowls with rice, sweetmeats, preserves, palateable mixtures, and monuments of the cook’s art, goblets of wine like liquid rubies. Then one of the youths said to Shibli Bagarag, ’Thou hast come to us crowned, O our guest! Now, it is not our custom to pay homage, but thou shalt presently behold them that will, so let not thy kingliness droop with us, but feast royally.’

Page 117

And Shibli Bagarag said, ’O my princes, surely it is a silly matter to crown a mouse! Humility hath depressed my stature! Wullahy, I have had warning in the sticking of this crown to my brows, and it sticketh like an abomination.’

They laughed at him, saying, ’It was the heaviness of that crown which overweighted thee in the bridge of the abyss, and few be they that bear it and go not to feed the Roc.’

Now, they feasted together, interchanging civilities, offering to each other choice morsels, dainties. And the anecdotes of Shibli Bagarag, his simplicity and his honesty, and his vanity and his airiness, and the betraying tongue of the barber, diverted the youths; and they plied him with old wine till his stores of merriment broke forth and were as a river swollen by torrents of the mountain; and the seven youths laughed at him, spluttering with laughter, lurching with it. Surely, he described to them the loquacity of Baba Mustapha his uncle, and they laughed so that their chins were uppermost; but at his mention of Shagpat greater gravity was theirs, and they smoothed their faces solemnly, and the sun of their merriment was darkened for awhile. Then they took to flinging about pellets of a sugared preparation, and reciting verses in praise of jovial living, challenging to drink this one and that one, passing the cup with a stanza. Shibli Bagarag thought, ’What a life is this led by these youths! a fair one! ’Tis they that be the sons of Aklis who sharpen the Sword of Events; yet live they in jollity, skimming from the profusion of abundance that which floateth!’

Now, marking him contemplative, one of the youths shouted, ’The King lacketh homage!’

And another called, ‘Admittance for his people!’

Then the seven arose and placed Shibli Bagarag on an elevation in the midst of them, and lo! a troop of black slaves leading by the collar, asses, and by a string, monkeys. Now, for the asses they brayed to the Evil One, and the monkeys were prankish, pulling against the string, till they caught sight of Shibli Bagarag. Then was it as if they had been awestricken; and they came forward to him with docile steps, eyeing the crown on his head, and prostrated themselves, the asses and the monkeys, like creatures in whom glowed the lamp of reason and the gift of intelligence. So Shibli Bagarag drooped his jaw and was ashamed, and he cried, ‘my princes! am I a King of these?’

They answered, ‘A King in mightiness! Sultan of a race!’

So he said, ’It is certain I shall need physic to support such a sovereignty! And I must be excused liberal allowances of old wine to sit in state among them. Wullahy! they were best gone for awhile. Send them from me, O my princes! I sicken.’

And he called to the animals, ‘Away! begone!’ frowning.

Then said the youths, ’Well commanded! and like a King! See, they troop from thy presence obediently.’

Now the animals fled from before the brows of Shibli Bagarag, and when the chamber was empty of them the seven young men said, ’Of a surety thou wert flattered to observe the aspect of these animals at beholding thee.’

Page 118

But he cried, 'Not so, O my princes; there is nought flattering in the homage of asses and monkeys.'

Then they said, 'O Sultan of asses, ruler of monkeys, better that than thyself an ass and an ape! As was said by Shah Kasirwan, "I prefer being king of beasts worshipped by beasts, rather than a crowned beast worshipped by men"; and it was well said. Wullahy! the kings of Roum quote it.'

Now Shibli Bagarag was not rendered oblivious of the Sword of his quest by the humour of these youths, or the wine-bibbings, and he exclaimed while they were turning up the heels of their cups, 'O ye sons of Aklis, know that I have come hither for the Sword sharpened by your hands, for the releasing of my betrothed, Noorna bin Noorka, daughter of the Vizier Feshnavat, and for the shaving of Shagpat.'

While he was proceeding to recount the story of his search for the Sword, they said, 'Enough, O potentate of the braying class and of the scratching tribe! we have seen thee through the eye of Aklis since the time of thy first thwacking. What says the poet?

> "A day for toil and a day for rest
> Gives labour zeal, and pleasure zest."

So, of thy seeking let us hear to-morrow; but now drink with us, and make merry, and touch the springs of memory; spout forth verses, quaint ones, suitable to the hour and the entertainment. Wullahy! drink with us! taste life! Let the humours flow.'

Then they made a motion to some slaves, and presently a clattering of anklets struck the ear of Shibli Bagarag: and he beheld dancing-girls, moons of beauty and elegance, and they danced wild dances, and dances graceful and leopard-like and serpent-like in movement; and the youths flung flowers at them, applauding them. Then came other sets of dancers even lovelier, more languishing; and again others with tambourines and musical instruments, that sang ravishingly. So the senses of Shibli Bagarag were all taken with what he saw and heard, and ate and drank; and by degrees a mist came before his eyes, and the sweet sounds and voices of the girls grew distant, and it was with difficulty he kept his back from the length of the cushions that were about him. Then he thought of Noorna, and that she sang to him and danced, and when he rose to embrace her she was Rabesqurat by the light of the Lily! And he thought of Shagpat, and that in shaving him the blade was checked in its rapid sweep, and blunted by a stumpy twine of hair that waxed in size and became the head of Karaz that gulped at him a wide devouring gulp, and took him in, and flew up with him, leaving Shagpat half sheared. Then he thought himself struggling halfway down the throat of the monstrous Roc, and that, when he was wholly inside the Roc, he was in a wide-arched passage crowded with lamps, and at the end of the passage Noorna in the clutch of Karaz, she shouting, 'The Sword, the Sword!'

Page 119

Now, while he felt for the Sword wherewith to release her from the Genie, his eyes opened, and he saw day through a casement, and that he had reposed on an embroidered couch in the corner of a stately room ornamented with carvings of blue and gold. So while he wondered and yawned, gaping, slaves started up from the floor and led him to a bath of coloured marble, and bathed him in perfumed waters, and dressed him in a dress of yellow silk, rich and ample. Then they paraded before him through lesser apartments and across terraces, till they came to a great hall; loftier and more spacious than any he had yet beheld, with fountains at the two ends, and in the centre a tree with golden spreading branches and leaves of gold; among the leaves gold-feathered birds, and fruits of all seasons and every description—the drooping grape and the pleasant-smelling quince, and the blood-red pomegranate, and the apricot, and the green and rosy apple, and the gummy date, and the oily pistachio-nut, and peaches, and citrons, and oranges, and the plum, and the fig. Surely, they were countless in number, melting with ripeness, soft, full to bursting; and the birds darted among them like sun-flashes. Now, Shibli Bagarag thought, 'This is a wondrous tree! Wullahy! there is nought like it save the tree in the hall of the Prophet in Paradise, feeding the faithful!' As he regarded it he heard his name spoken in the hall, and turning he beheld seven youths in royal garments, that were like the youths he had feasted with, and yet unlike them, pale, and stern in their manners, their courtesy as the courtesy of kings. They said, 'Sit with us and eat the morning's meal, O our guest!'

So he sat with them under the low branches of the tree; and they whistled the tune of one bird and of another bird, and of another, and lo! those different birds flew down with golden baskets hanging from their bills, and in the baskets fruits and viands and sweetmeats, and cool drinks. And Shibli Bagarag ate from the baskets of the birds, watching the action of the seven youths and the difference that was in them. He sought to make them recognise him and acknowledge their carouse of the evening that was past, but they stared at him strangely and seemed offended at the allusion, neither would they hear mention of the Sword of his seeking. Presently, one of the youths stood upon his feet and cried, "The time for kings to sit in judgement!"

And the youths arose and led Shibli Bagarag to a hall of ebony, and seated him on the upper seat, themselves standing about him; and lo! asses and monkeys came before him, complaining of the injustice of men and their fellows, in brays and bellows and hoots. Now, at the sight of them again Shibli Bagarag was enraged, and he said to the youths, 'How! do ye not mock me, O masters of Aklis!'

But they said only, 'The burden of his crown is for the King.'

Page 120

He cooled, thinking, ‘I will use a spell.’ So he touched the lips of an animal with the waters of Paravid, and the animal prated volubly in our language of the kick this ass had given him, and the jibe of that monkey, and of his desire of litigation with such and such a beast for pasture; and the others when they spake had the same complaints to make. Shibli Bagarag listened to them gravely, and it was revealed to him that he who ruleth over men hath a labour and duties of hearing and judging and dispensing judgement similar to those of him who ruleth over apes and asses. Then said he, ’O youths, my princes! methinks the sitting in this seat giveth a key to secret sources of wisdom; and I see what it is, the glory and the exaltation coveted by men.’ Now, he took from the asses and the monkeys one, and said to it, ‘Be my chief Vizier,’ and to another, ‘Be my Chamberlain!’ and to another, ‘Be my Treasurer!’ and so on, till a dispute arose between the animals, and jealousy of each other was visible in their glances, and they appealed to him clamorously. So he said, ’What am I to ye?’

They answered, ‘Our King!’

And he said, ‘How so?’

They answered, ‘By the crowning of the brides of Aklis.’

Then he said, ‘What be ye, O my subjects?’

They answered, ’Men that were searchers of the Sword and plunged into the tank of temptation.’

And he said, ‘How that?’

They answered, ’By the lures of vanity, the blinding of ambition, and tasting the gall of the Roc.’

So Shibli Bagarag leaned to the seven youths, saying, ’O my princes, but for not tasting the gall of the Roc I might be as one of these. Wullahy! I the King am warned by base creatures.’ Then he said to the animals, ‘Have ye still a longing for the crown?’

And they cried, all of them, ’O light of the astonished earth, we care for nought other than it.’

So he said, ’And is it known to ye how to dispossess the wearer of his burden?’

They answered, ‘By a touch of the gall of the Roc on his forehead.’

Then he lifted his arms, crying, ’Hie out of my presence! and whoso of ye fetcheth a drop of the gall, with that one will I exchange the crown.’

At these words some moved hastily, but the most faltered, as doubting and incredulous that he would propose such an exchange; and one, an old monkey, sat down and crossed his legs, and made a study of Shibli Bagarag, as of a sovereign that held forth a deceiving bargain. But he cried again, 'Hie and haste! as my head is now cased I think it not the honoured part.'

Then the old monkey arose with a puzzled look, half scornful, and made for the door slowly, turning his head toward Shibli Bagarag betweenwhiles as he went, and scratching his lower limbs with the mute reflectiveness of age and extreme caution.

Page 121

Now, when they were gone, Shibli Bagarag looked in the eyes of the seven youths, and saw they were content with him, and his countenance was brightened with approval. So he descended from his seat, and went with them from the hall of ebony to a court where horses were waiting saddled, and slaves with hawks on their wrists stood in readiness; and they mounted each a horse, but he loitered. The seven youths divined his feeling, and cried impatiently, 'Come! no lingering in Aklis!' So he mounted likewise, and they emerged from the palace, and entered the hills that glowed under the copper sun, and started a milk-white antelope with ruby spots, and chased it from its cover over the sand-hills, a hawk being let loose to worry it and distress its timid beaming eyes. When the creature was quite overcome, one of the youths struck his heel into his horse's side and flung a noose over the head of the quarry, and drew it with them, gently petting it the way home to the palace. At the gates of the palace it was released, and lo! it went up the steps, and passed through the halls as one familiar with them. Now, when they were all assembled in the anteroom of the hall, where Shibli Bagarag had first seen the seven youths, sons of Aklis, in their jollity, one of them said to the Antelope, 'We have need of thee to speak a word with Aklis, O our sister!'

So the same youth requested the use of the phial of Paravid, and Shibli Bagarag applied it carefully, tenderly, to the mouth of the Antelope. Then the Antelope spake in a silver-ringing voice, saying, 'What is it, O my brothers?'

They answered, 'Thou knowest we dare not attempt interchange of speech with Aklis, seeing that we disobeyed him in visiting the kingdoms of the earth: so it is for thee to question him as to the object of this youth, and it is the Shaving of Shagpat.'

So she said, ''Tis well; I wot of it.'

Then she advanced to the curtain concealing the abyss of the Roc and the bridge of its eggs, and went behind it. There was a pause, and they heard her say presently in a grave voice, toned with reverence, 'How is it, O our father? is it a good thing that thy Sword be in use at this season?'

And they heard the Voice answer from a depth, ''Twere well it rust not!'

They heard her say, 'O our father Aklis, and we wish to know if be held in favour by thee, and thou sanction it with thy Sword.'

And they heard the Voice answer, 'The Shaving of Shagpat is my Sword alone equal to, and he that shaveth him performeth a service to mankind ranking next my vanquishing of the Roc.'

Then they heard her say, 'And it is thy will we teach him the mysteries of the Sword, and that which may be done with it?'

And they heard the Voice answer, ‘Even so!’

Page 122

After that the Voice was still, and soon the Antelope returned from behind the curtain, and the youths caressed her with brotherly caresses, and took a circle of hands about her, and so moved to the great Hall of the gorgeous Tree, and fed her from the branches. Now, while they were there, Shibli Bagarag advanced to the Antelope, and knelt at her feet, and said, 'O Princess of Aklis, surely I am betrothed to one constant as a fixed star, and brighter; a mistress of magic, and innocent as the bleating lamb; and she is now on a pillar, chained there, in the midst of the white wrathful sea, wailing for me to deliver her with this Sword of my seeking. So, now, I pray thee help me to the Sword swiftly, that I may deliver her.'

The youths, her brothers, clamoured and interposed, saying, 'Take thy shape ere that, O Gulrevaz, our sister!'

But she cried, 'He is betrothed! not till he graspeth the Sword. Tell him, the youth, our conditions, and for what exchange the Sword is yielded.'

And they said, 'The conditions are, thou part with thy spells, all of them, O youth!'

And he said, 'There is no condition harsh that exchangeth the Sword; O ye Seven, I agree!'

Then she said, ''Tis well! nobility is in the soul of this youth. Go before us now to the Cave of Chrysolites, O my brothers.'

So these departed before, and she in her antelope form followed footing gracefully, and made Shibli Bagarag repeat the story of his betrothal as they went.

THE SWORD OF AKLIS

Now, when they had made the passage of many halls, built of different woods, filled with divers wonders, they descended a sloping vault, and came to a narrow way in the earth, hung with black, at the end of it a stedfast blaze like a sun, that grew larger as they advanced, and they heard the sea above them. The noise of it, and its plunging and weltering and its pitilessness, struck on the heart of Shibli Bagarag as with a blow, and he cried, 'Haste, haste, O Princess! perchance she is even now calling to me with her tongue, and I not aiding her; delayed by the temptation of this crown and the guile of the Brides.'

She checked him, and said, 'In Aklis no haste!' Then she said, 'Look!' And lo, fronting them the single blaze became two fires; and drawing nigh, Shibli Bagarag beheld them what they were, angry eyes in the head of a great lion, a model of majesty, and passion was in his mane and power was in his forepaws; so while he lashed his tail as a tempest whippeth the tawny billows at night, and was lifting himself for a roar, she said, 'A hair of Garraveen, and touch him with it!'

Page 123

Shibli Bagarag pushed up his sleeve and broke one of the three sapphire hairs and stepped forward to the lion, holding in his right hand the hair of vivid light. The lion crouched, and was in the vigour of the spring when that hair touched him, and he trembled, tumbling on his knees and letting the twain pass. So they advanced beyond him, and lo! the Cave of Chrysolites irradiate with beams, breaks of brilliance, confluences of lively hues, restless rays, meeting, vanishing, flooding splendours, now scattered in dazzling joints and spars, now uniting in momentary disks of radiance. In the centre of the cave glowed a furnace, and round it he distinguished the seven youths, swarthier and sterner than before, dark sweat standing on the brows of each. Their words were brief, and they wore each a terrible frown, saying to him, without further salutation, ‘Thrust in the flame of this furnace thy right wrist.’

At the same moment, the Antelope said in his ear, ’Do thou their bidding, and be not backward! In Aklis fear is ruin, and hesitation a destroyer.’

He fixed his mind on the devotedness of Noorna, and held his nether lip tightly between his teeth, and thrust his right wrist in the flame of the furnace. The wrist reddened, and became transparent with heat, but he felt no pain, only that his whole arm was thrice its natural weight. Then the flame of the furnace fell, and the seven youths made him kneel by a brook of golden waters and dip his forehead up to his eyes in the waters. Then they took him to the other side of the cave, and his sight was strengthened to mark the glory of the Sword, where it hung in slings, a little way from the wall, outshining the lights of the cave, and throwing them back with its superior force and stedfastness of lustre. Lo! the length of it was as the length of crimson across the sea when the sun is sideways on the wave, and it seemed full a mile long, the whole blade sheening like an arrested lightning from the end to the hilt; the hilt two large live serpents twined together, with eyes like sombre jewels, and sparkling spotted skins, points of fire in their folds, and reflections of the emerald and topaz and ruby stones, studded in the blood-stained haft. Then the seven young men, sons of Aklis, said to Shibli Bagarag, ‘Surrender the Lily!’ And when he had given into their hands the Lily, they said, ‘Grasp the handle of the Sword!’

Now, he beheld the Sword and the ripples of violet heat that were breathing down it, and those two venomous serpents twined together, and the size of it, its ponderousness; and to essay lifting it appeared to him a madness, but he concealed his thought, and, setting his soul on the safety of Noorna, went forward to it boldly, and piercing his right arm between the twists of the serpents, grasped the jewelled haft. Surely, the Sword moved from the slings as if a giant had swayed it! But what amazed him was the marvel of the blade, for its sharpness was such that nothing

Page 124

stood in its way, and it slipped through everything as we pass through still water, the stone columns, blocks of granite by the walls, the walls of earth, and the thick solidity of the ground beneath his feet. They bade him say to the Sword, ‘Sleep!’ and it was no longer than a knife in the girdle. Likewise, they bade him hiss on the heads of the serpents, and say, ‘Wake!’ and while he held it lengthwise it shot lengthening out. Then they bade him hold in one hand the sapphire hair that conquered the lion, and with the edge of the Sword touch one point of it. So he did that, and it split in half, and the two halves he also split; and he split those four, and those eight, till the hairs were thin as light and not distinguishable from it. When Shibli Bagarag saw the power of the Sword, he exulted and cried, ’Praise be to the science of them that forecast events and the haps of life!’ Now, in the meantime he marked the youths take those hairs of Garraveen that he had split, and tie them round the neck of the Antelope, and empty the contents of the phial down her throat; and they put the bulb of the Lily, that was a heart, in her mouth, and she swallowed it till the flower covered her face. Then they took each a handful of the golden waters of the brook flowing through the cave, and flung the waters over her, exclaiming, ’By the three spells that have power in Aklis, and by which these waters are a blessing!’

In the passing of a flash she took her shape, and was a damsel taller than the tallest of them that descend from the mountains, a vision of loveliness, with queenly brows, closed red lips, and large full black eyes; her hair black, and on it a net of amber strung with pearls. To look upon her was to feel the tyranny of love, love’s pangs of alarm and hope and anguish; and she was dressed in a dress of white silk, threaded with gold and sapphire, showing in shadowy beams her rounded figure and the stateliness that was hers. So she ran to her brothers and embraced them, calling them by their names, catching their hands, caressing them as one that had been long parted from them. Then, seeing Shibli Bagarag as he stood transfixed with the javelins of loveliness that flew from her on all sides, she cried: ’What, O Master of the Event! halt thou nought for the Sword but to gaze before thee in silliness?’

Then he said, ’O rare in beauty! marvel of Aklis and the world! surely the paradise of eyes is thy figure and the glory of thy face!’

But she shouted, ’To work with the Sword! Shame on thee! is there not one, a bright one, a miracle in faithfulness, that awaiteth thy rescue on the pillar?’

And she repeated the praises he had spoken of Noorna bin Noorka, his betrothed. Then he grasped the Sword firmly, remembering the love of Noorna, and crying, ’Lead me from this, O ye sons of Aklis, and thou, Princess Gulrevaz, lead me, that I may come to her.’

So they said, ‘Follow us!’ and he sheathed the Sword in his girdle with the word ‘Sleep!’ and followed them, his heart beating violently.

Page 125

KOOROOKH

Now, they sped from the Cave of Chrysolites by another passage than that by which they entered it, and nothing but the light of the Sword to guide them. By that light Shibli Bagarag could distinguish glimmering shapes, silent and statue-like, to the right and the left of them, their visages hidden in a veil of heavy webs; and he saw what seemed in the dusk broad halls, halls of council, and again black pools and black groves, and columns of crowded porticoes,—all signs of an underground kingdom. They came to some steps and mounted these severally, coming to a platform, in the middle of which leapt a fountain, the top spray of it touched with a beam of earth and the air breathed by men. Here he heard the youths dabble with the dark waters, and he discerned Gulrevaz tossing it in her two hands, calling, 'Koorookh! Koorookh!' Then they said to him, 'Stir this fountain with the Sword, O Master of the Event!' So he stirred the fountain, and the whole body of it took a leap toward the light that was like the shoot of a long lance of silver in the moon's rays, and lo! in its place the ruffled feathers of a bird. Then the seven youths and the Princess and Shibli Bagarag got up under its feathers like a brood of water-fowl; and the bird winged straight up as doth a blinded bee, ascending, and passing in the ascent a widening succession of winding terraces, till he observed the copper sun of Aklis and the red lands below it. Thrice, in the exuberance of his gladness, he waved the Sword, and the sun lost that dulness on its disk and took a bright flame, and threw golden arrows everywhere; and the pastures were green, the streams clear, the sands sparkling. The bird flew, and circled, and hung poised a moment, presently descending on the roof of the palace. Now, there was here a piece of solid glass, propped on two crossed bars of gold, and it was shaped like an eye, and might have been taken for one of the eyes inhabiting the head of some monstrous Genie. Shibli Bagarag ran to it when he was afoot, and peered through it. Surely, it was the first object of his heart that he beheld—Noorna, his betrothed, pale on the pillar; she with her head between her hands and her hair scattered by the storm, as one despairing. Still he looked, and he save swimming round the pillar that monstrous fish, with its sole baleful eye, which had gulped them both in the closed shell of magic pearl; and he knew the fish for Karaz, the Genie, their enemy. Then he turned to the Princess, with an imploring voice for counsel how to reach her and bring her rescue; but she said, 'The Sword is in thy hands, none of us dare wield it'; and the seven youths answered likewise. So, left to himself, he drew the Sword from his girdle, and hissed on the heads of the serpents, at the same time holding it so that it might lengthen out inimitably. Then he leaned it over the eye of the glass, in the direction of the pillar besieged by the billows, and

Page 126

lo! with one cut, even at that distance, he divided the fishy monster, and with another severed the chains that had fettered Noorna; and she arose and smiled blissfully to the sky, and stood upright, and signalled him to lay the point of the blade on the pillar. When he had done this, knowing her wisdom, she put a foot boldly upon the blade and ran up it toward him, and she was half-way up the blade, when suddenly a kite darted down upon her, pecking at her eyes, to confuse her. She waxed unsteady and swayed this way and that, balancing with one arm and defending herself from the attacks of the kite with another. It seemed to Shibli Bagarag she must fall and be lost; and the sweat started on his forehead in great drops big as nuts. Seeing that and the agitation of his limbs, Gulrevaz cried, ‘O Master of the Event, let us hear it!’

But he shrieked, ’The kite! the kite! she is running up the blade, and the kite is at her eyes! and she swaying, swaying! falling, falling!’

So the Princess exclaimed, ‘A kite! Koorookh is match for a kite!’

Then she smoothed the throat of Koorookh, and clasped round it a collar of bright steel, roughened with secret characters; and she took a hoop of gold, and passed the bird through it, urging it all the while with one strange syllable; and the bird went up with a strong whirr of the wing till he was over the sea, and caught sight of Noorna tottering beneath him on the blade, and the kite pecking fiercely at her. Thereat he fluttered eagerly a twinkle of time, and the next was down with his beak in the neck of the kite, crimsoned in it. Now, by the shouts and exclamations of Shibli Bagarag, the Princess and the seven youths, her brothers, knew that the bird had performed well his task, and that the fight was between Koorookh and the kite. Then he cried gladly to them, ’Joy for us, and Allah be praised! The kite is dropping, and she leaneth on one wing of Koorookh!’

And he cried in anguish, ’What see I? The kite is become a white ball, rolling down the blade toward her; and it will of a surety destroy her.’ And he called to her, thinking vainly his voice might reach her. So the Princess said, ’A white ball? ‘tis I that am match for a white ball!’

Now, she seized from the corner of the palace-roof a bow and an arrow, and her brothers lifted her to a level with the hilt of the Sword, leaning on the eye of glass. Then she planted one foot on the shoulder of Shibli Bagarag as he bent peering through the eye, and fitted the arrow to a level of the Sword, slanting its slant, and let it fly, doubling the bow. Shibli Bagarag saw the ball roll to within a foot of Noorna, when it was as if stricken by a gleam of light, and burst, and was a black cloud veined with fire, swathing her in folds. He lost all sight of Noorna; and where she had been were vivid flashes, and then a great flame, and in the midst a red serpent and a green serpent twisted as in the death-struggle. So he cried, ‘A red serpent and a green serpent!’

Page 127

And the sons of Aklis exclaimed, 'A red serpent? 'Tis we that are match for a red serpent!'

Thereupon they descended steps through the palace roof, and while the fight between those two serpents was rageing, Shibli Bagarag beheld seven small bright birds, bee-catchers, that entered the flame, bearing in their bills slips of a herb, and hovering about the heal of the red serpent, distracting it. Then he saw the red serpent hiss and snap at one, darting out its tongue, and lo! on the fork of its tongue the little bird let fall the slip of herb in its bill, and in an instant the serpent changed from red to yellow and from yellow to pale-spotted blue, and from that to a speckled indigo-colour, writhing at every change, and hissing fire from its open jaws. Meantime the green serpent was released and was making circles round the flame, seeking to complete some enchantment, when suddenly the whole scene vanished, and Shibli Bagarag again beheld Noorna steadying her steps on the blade, and leaning on one wing of Koorookh. She advanced up the blade, coming nearer and nearer; and he thought her close, and breathed quick and ceased looking through the glass. When he gazed abroad, lo! she was with Koorookh, on a far hill beyond the stream in outer Aklis. So he said to the Princess Gulrevaz, 'O Princess, comes she not to me here in the palace?'

But the Princess shook her head, and said, 'She hath not a spell! She waiteth for thee yonder with Koorookh. Now, look through the glass once more.'

He looked through the glass, and there on a plain, as he had first seen it when Noorna appeared to him, was the City of Shagpat, and in the streets of the city a vast assembly, and a procession passing on, its front banner surmounted by the Crescent, and bands with curled and curved instruments playing, and slaves scattering gold and clashing cymbals, every demonstration and evidence of a great day and a high occasion in the City of Shagpat! So he peered yet keenlier through the glass, and behold, the Vizier Feshnavat, father of Noorna, walking in fetters, subject to the jibes and evil-speaking of the crowds of people, his turban off, and he in a robe of drab-coloured stuff, in the scorned condition of an unbeliever. Shibli Bagarag peered yet more earnestly through the glass eye, and in the centre of the procession, clad gorgeously in silks and stuffs, woven with gold and gems, a crown upon his head, and the appanages of supremacy and majesty about him, was Shagpat. He paced upon a yellow flooring that was unrolled before him from a mighty roll; and there were slaves that swarmed on all sides of him, supporting upon gold pans and platters the masses of hair that spread bushily before and behind, and to the right and left of him. Truly the gravity of his demeanour exceeded that which is attained by Sheiks and Dervishes after much drinking of the waters of wisdom, and fasting, and abnegation of the pleasures that betray us to folly in this world! Now, when he saw Shagpat, the soul of Shibli Bagarag was quickened to do his appointed work upon him, shear him, and release the Vizier Feshnavat. Desire to shave Shagpat was as a salt thirst rageing in him, as the dream of munching to one that starveth; even as the impelling of violent tempests to skiffs on the sea; and he hungered to be at him, crying, as he peered, ''Tis he! even he, Shagpat!'

Page 128

Then he turned to the Princess Gulrevaz, and said, ’’Tis Shagpat, exalted, clothed with majesty, O thou morning star of Aklis!’

She said, ’Koorookh is given thee, and waiteth to carry ye both; and for me I will watch that this glass send forth a beam to light ye to that city; so farewell, O thou that art loved! And delay in nothing to finish the work in hand.’

Now, when he had set his face from the Princess he descended through the roof of the palace, and met the seven youths returning, and they accompanied him through the halls of the palace to that hall where the damsels had duped him. He was mindful of his promise to the old man crowned, and flashed the Sword a strong flash, so that he who looked on it would be seared in the eyelashes. Then the doors of the recesses flew apart, eight-and-ninety in number, and he beheld divers sitters on thrones, with the diadem of asses’ ears stiffened upright, and monkeys’ skulls grinning with gems; they having on each countenance the look of sovereigns and the serenity of high estate. Shibli Bagarag laughed at them, and he thought, ’Wullahy! was I one of these? I, the beloved of Noorna, destined Master of the Event!’ and he thought, ’Of a surety, if these sitters could but laugh at themselves, there would be a release for them, and the crown would topple off which getteth the homage of asses and monkeys!’ He would have spoken to them, but the sons of Aklis said, ’They have seen the flashing of the Sword, and ’twere well they wake not.’ As they went from the hall the seven youths said, ’Reflect upon the age of these sitters, that have been sitting in the chairs from three to eleven generations back! And they were searchers of the Sword like thee, but were duped! In like manner, the hen sitteth in complacency, but she bringeth forth and may cackle; ’tis owing to the aids of Noorna that thou art not one of these sitters, O Master of the Event!’ Now, they paced through the hall of dainty provender, and through the hall of the jewel-fountains, coming to the palace steps, where stood Abarak leaning on his bar. As they advanced to Abarak, there was a clamour in the halls behind, that gathered in noise like a torrent, and approached, and presently the Master was ware of a sharp stroke on his forehead with a hairy finger, and then a burn, and the Crown that had clung to him toppled off; surely it fell upon the head of the old monkey, the cautious and wise one, he that had made a study of Shibli Bagarag. Thereupon that monkey stalked scornfully from them; and Abarak cried, ’O Master of the Event! it was better for me to keep the passage of the Seventh Pillar, than be an ape of this order. Wah! the flashing of the Sword scorcheth them, and they scamper.’

THE VEILED FIGURE

Page 129

Verily there was lightning in Aklis as Shibli Bagarag flashed the Sword over the clamouring beasts: the shape of the great palace stood forth vividly, and a wide illumination struck up the streams, and gilded the large hanging leaves, and drew the hills glimmeringly together, and scattered fires on the flat faces of the rocks. Then the seven youths said quickly, 'Away! out of Aklis, O Master of the Event! from city to city of earth this light is visible, and men will know that Fate is in travail, and an Event preparing for them, and Shagpat will be warned by the portent; wherefore lose not the happy point of time on which thy star is manifest.' And they cried again, 'Away! out of Aklis!' with gestures of impatience, urging his departure.

Then said he, 'O youths, Sons of Aklis, it is written that gratitude is the poor man's mine of wealth, and the rich man's flower of beauty; and I have but that to give ye for all this aid and friendliness of yours.'

But they exclaimed, 'No aid or friendliness in Aklis! By the gall of the Roc! it is well for thee thou camest armed with potent spells, and hadst one to advise and inspirit thee, or thou wouldst have stayed here to people Aklis, and grazed in a strange shape.'

Now, the seven waxed in impatience, and he laid their hands upon his head and moved from them with Abarak, to where in the dusk the elephant that had brought them stood. Then the elephant kneeled and took the twain upon his back, and bore them across the dark land to that reach of the river where the boat was moored in readiness. They entered the boat silently among its drapery of lotuses, and the Veiled Figure ferried them over the stream that rippled not with their motion. As they were crossing, desire to know that Veiled Figure counselled Shibli Bagarag evilly to draw the Sword again, and flash it, so that the veil became transparent. Then, when Abarak turned to him for the reason of the flashing of the Sword, he beheld the eyes of the youth fixed in horror, glaring as at sights beyond the tomb. He said nought, but as the boat's-head whispered among the reeds and long flowers of the opposite marge, he took Shibli Bagarag by the shoulders and pushed him out of the boat, and leaped out likewise, leading him from the marge forcibly, hurrying him forward from it, he at the heels of the youth propelling him; and crying in out-of-breath voice at intervals, 'What sight? what sight?' But the youth was powerless of speech, and when at last he opened his lips, the little man shrank from him, for he laughed as do the insane, a peal of laughter ended by gasps; then a louder peal, presently softer; then a peal that started all the echoes in Aklis. After awhile, as Abarak still cried in his ear, 'What sight?' he looked at him with a large eye, saying querulously, 'Is it written I shall be pushed by the shoulder through life? And is it in the pursuit of further thwackings?'

Abarak heeded him not, crying still, 'What sight?' and Shibli Bagarag lowered his tone, and jerked his body, pronouncing the name 'Rabesqurat!' Then Abarak exclaimed, ''Tis as I weened. Oh, fool! to flash the Sword and peer through the veil! Truly, there be few wits will bear that sight!' On a sudden he cried, 'No cure but one, and that a sleep in the bosom of the betrothed!'

Page 130

Thereupon he hurried the youth yet faster across the dark lawns of Aklis toward the passage of the Seventh Pillar, by which the twain had entered that kingdom. And Shibli Bagarag saw as in a dream the shattered door, shattered by the bar, remembering dimly as a thing distant in years the netting of the Queen, and Noorna chained upon the pillar; he remembered Shagpat even vacantly in his mind, as one sheaf of barley amid other sheaves of the bearded field, so was he overcome by the awfulness of that sight behind the veil of the Veiled Figure!

As they advanced to the passage, he was aware of an impediment to its entrance, as it had been a wall of stone there; and seeing Abarak enter the passage without let, he kicked hard in front at the invisible obstruction, but there was no coming by. Abarak returned to him, and took his right arm, and raised the sleeve from his wrist, and lo, the two remaining hairs of Garraveen twisted round it in sapphire winds. Cried he, 'Oh, the generosity of Gulrevaz! she has left these two hairs that he may accomplish swiftly the destiny marked for him! but now, since his gazing through that veil, he must part with them to get out of Aklis.' And he muttered, 'His star is a strange one! one that leadeth him to fortune by the path of frowns! to greatness by the aid of thwackings! Truly the ways of Allah are wonderful!' Shibli Bagarag resisted him in nothing, and Abarak loosed the two bright hairs from his wrist, and those two hairs swelled and took glittering scales, and were sapphire snakes with wings of intense emerald; and they rose in the air spirally together, each over each, so that to see them one would fancy in the darkness a fountain of sapphire waters flashed with the sheen of emerald. When they had reached a height loftier than the topmost palace-towers of Aklis, they descended like javelins into the earth, and in a moment re-appeared, in the shape of Genii when they are charitably disposed to them they visit; not much above the mortal size, nor overbright, save for a certain fire in their eyes when they turned them; and they were clothed each from head to foot in an armour of sapphire plates shot with steely emerald. Surely the dragon-fly that darteth all day in the blaze over pools is like what they were. Abarak bit his forefinger and said, 'Who be ye, O sons of brilliance?'

They answered, 'Karavejis and Veejravoosh, slaves of the Sword.'

Then he said, 'Come with us now, O slaves of the Sword, and help us to the mountain of outer Aklis.'

They answered, 'O thou, there be but two means for us of quitting Aklis: on the wrist of the Master, or down the blade of the Sword! and from the wrist of the Master we have been loosed, and no one of thy race can tie us to it again.'

Abarak said, 'How then shall the Master leave Aklis?'

They answered, 'By Allah in Aklis! he can carve a way whither he will with the Sword.'

But Abarak cried, ’O Karavejis and Veejravoosh! he bath peered through the veil of the Ferrying Figure.’

Page 131

Now, when they heard his words, the visages of the Genii darkened, and they exclaimed sorrowfully, ‘Serve we such a one?’

And they looked at Shibli Bagarag a look of anger, so that he, whose wits were in past occurrences, imagined them his enemy and the foe of Noorna split in two, crying, ’How? Is Karaz a couple? and do I multiply him with strokes of the Sword?’

Thereupon he drew the Sword from his girdle in wrath, flourishing it; and Karavejis and Veejravoosh felt the might of the Sword, and prostrated themselves to the ground at his feet. And Abarak said, ’Arise, and bring us swiftly to the mountain of outer Aklis.’

Then said they, ’Seek a passage down yonder brook in the moonbeams; and it is the sole passage for him now.’

Abarak went with them to the brook that was making watery music to itself between banks of splintered rock and over broad slabs of marble, bubbling here and there about the roots of large-leaved water-flowers, and catching the mirrored moon of Aklis in whirls, breaking it in lances. Then they waded into the water knee-deep, and the two Genii seized hold of a great slab of marble in the middle of the water, and under was a hollow brimmed with the brook, that the brook partly filled and flowed over. Then the Genii said to Abarak, ‘Plunge!’ and they said the same to Shibli Bagarag. The swayer of the Sword replied, as it had been a simple occasion, a common matter, and a thing for the exercise of civility, ‘With pleasure and all willingness!’ Thereupon he tightened his girth, and arrowing his two hands, flung up his heels and disappeared in the depths, Abarak following. Surely, those two went diving downward till it seemed to each there was no bottom in the depth, and they would not cease to feel the rushing of the water in their ears till the time anticipated by mortals.

THE BOSOM OF NOORNA

Now, while a thousand sparks of fire were bursting on the sight of the two divers, and they speeded heels uppermost to the destiny marked out for them by the premeditations of the All-Wise, lo! Noorna was on the mountain in outer Aklis with Koorookh, waiting for the appearance of her betrothed, Sword in hand. She saw beams from the blazing eye of Aklis, and knew by the redness of it that one, a mortal, was peering on the earth and certain of created things. So she waited awhile in patience for the return of her betrothed, with the head of Koorookh in her lap, caressing the bird, and teaching it words of our language; and the bird fashioned its bill to the pronouncing of names, such as ‘Noorna’ and ‘Feshnavat,’ and ‘Goorelka’; and it said ‘Karaz,’ and stuck not at the name ‘Shagpat,’ and it learnt to say even ’Shagpat shall be shaved! Shagpat shall be shaved!’ but no effort of Noorna could teach it to say, ‘Shibli Bagarag,’ the bird calling instead, ’Shiparack, Shiplabarack, Shibblisharack.’ And Noorna chid it with her forefinger, crying, ’O Koorookh! wilt thou speak all names but that one of my betrothed?’

Page 132

So she said again, ‘Shibli Bagarag.’ And the bird answered, imitating its best, ‘Shibberacavarack.’ Noorna was wroth with it, crying, ’Oh naughty bird! is the name of my beloved hateful to thee?’

And she chid Koorookh angrily, he with a heavy eye sulking, and keeping the sullen feathers close upon his poll. Now, she thought, ’There is in this a meaning and I will fathom it.’ So she counted the letters in the name of her betrothed, that were thirteen, and spelt them backwards, afterwards multiplying them by an equal number, and fashioning words from the selection of every third and seventh letter. Then took she the leaf from a tree and bade Koorookh fly with her to the base of the mountain sloping from Aklis to the sea, and there wrote with a pin’s point on the leaf the words fashioned, dipping the leaf in the salt ripple by the beach, till they were distinctly traced. And it was revealed to her that Shibli Bagarag bore now a name that might be uttered by none, for that the bearer of it had peered through the veil of the ferrying figure in Aklis. When she knew that, her grief was heavy, and she sat on the cold stones of the beach and among the bright shells, weeping in anguish, loosing her hair, scattering it wildly, exclaiming, ’Awahy! woe on me! Was ever man more tired than he before entering Aklis, he that was in turns abased and beloved and exalted! yet his weakness clingeth to him, even in Aklis and with the Wondrous Sword in his grasp.’

Then she thought, ’Still he had strength to wield the Sword, for I marked the flashing of it, and ’twas he that leaned forward the blade to me; and he possesses the qualities that bring one gloriously to the fruits of enterprise!’ And she thought, ’Of a surety, if Abarak be with him, and a single of the three slaves of the Sword that I released from the tail of Garraveen, Ravejoura, Karavejis, and Veejravoosh, he will yet come through, and I may revive him in my bosom for the task.’ So, thinking upon that, the sweet crimson surprised her cheeks, and she arose and drew Koorookh with her along the beach till they came to some rocks piled ruggedly and the waves breaking over them. She mounted these, and stepped across them to the entrance of a cavern, where flowed a full water swiftly to the sea, rolling smooth bulks over and over, and with a translucent light in each, showing precious pebbles in the bed of the water below; agates of size, limpid cornelians, plates of polished jet, rubies, diamonds innumerable that were smitten into sheen by slant rays of the level sun, the sun just losing its circle behind lustrous billows of that Enchanted Sea. She turned to Koorookh a moment, saying, with a coax of smiles, ‘Will my bird wait here for me, even at this point?’ Koorookh clapped both his wings, and she said again, petting him, ’He will keep watch to pluck me from the force of water as I roll past, that I be not carried to the sea, and lost?’

Page 133

Koorookh still clapped his wings, and she entered under the arch of the cavern. It was roofed with crystals, a sight of glory, with golden lamps at intervals, still centres of a thousand beams. Taking the sandal from her left foot and tucking up the folds of her trousers to the bend of her clear white knee, she advanced, half wading, up the winds of the cavern, and holding by the juts of granite here and there, till she came to a long straight lane in the cavern, and at the end of it, far down, a solid pillar of many-coloured water that fell into the current, as it had been one block of gleaming marble from the roof, without ceasing. Now, she made toward it, and fixed her eye warily wide on it, and it was bright, flawless in brilliancy; but while she gazed a sudden blot was visible, and she observed in the body of the fall two dark objects plumping downward one after the other, like bolts, and they splashed in the current and were carried off by the violence of its full sweep, shooting by her where she stood, rapidly; but she, knotting her garments round the waist to give her limbs freedom and swiftness, ran a space, and then bent and plunged, catching, as she rose, the foremost to her bosom, and whirled away under the flashing crystals like a fish scaled with splendours that hath darted and seized upon a prey, and is bearing it greedily to some secure corner of the deeps to swallow the quivering repast at leisure. Surely, the heart of Noorna was wise of what she bore against her bosom; and it beat exulting strokes in the midst of the rush and roar and gurgle of the torrent, and the gulping sounds and multitudinous outcries of the headlong water. That verse of the poet would apply to her where he says:

> Lead me to the precipice,
> And bid me leap the dark abyss:
> I care not what the danger be,
> So my beloved, my beauteous vision,
> Be but the prize I bear with me,
> For she to Paradise can turn Perdition.

Praise be to him that planteth love, the worker of this marvel, within us! Now, she sped in the manner narrated through the mazes of the cavern, coming suddenly to the point at the entrance where perched Koorookh gravely upon one leg, like a bird with an angling beak: he caught at her as she was hurling toward the sea, and drew her to the bank of rock, that burden on her bosom; and it was Shibli Bagarag, her betrothed, his eyes closed, his whole countenance colourless. Behind him like a shadow streamed Abarak, and Noorna kneeled by the waterside and fetched the little man from it likewise; he was without a change, as if drawn from a familiar element; and when he had prostrated himself thrice and called on the Prophet's name in the form of thanksgiving, he wrung his beard of the wet, and had wit to bless the action of Noorna, that saved him. Then the two raised Shibli Bagarag from the rock, and reclined him lengthwise under the wings of Koorookh, and Noorna stretched herself there beside him with one arm about

Page 134

his neck, the fair head of the youth on her bosom. And she said to Abarak, 'He hath dreamed many dreams, my betrothed, but never one so sweet as that I give him. Already, see, the hue returneth to his cheek and the dimples of pleasure.' So was it; and she said, 'Mount, O thou of the net and the bar! and stride Koorookh across the neck, for it is nigh the setting of the moon, and by dawn we must be in our middle flight, seen of men, a cloud over them.'

Said Abarak, 'To hear is to obey!'

He bestrode the neck of Koorookh and sat with dangling feet, till she cried, 'Rise!' and the bird spread its wings and flapped them wide, rising high in the silver rays, and flying rapidly forward with the three on him from the mountain in front of Aklis, and the white sea with its enchanted isles and wonders; flying and soaring till the earth was as what might be held in the hollow of the hand, and the kingdoms of the earth a mingled heap of shining dust in the midst.

THE REVIVAL

Now, the feathers of Koorookh in his flight were ruffled by a chill breeze, and they were speeding through a light glow of cold rose-colour. Then said Noorna, ''Tis the messenger of morning, the blush. Oh, what changes will date from this day!'

The glow of rose became golden, and they beheld underneath them, on one side, the rim of the rising red sun, and rays streaming over the earth and its waters. And Noorna said, 'I must warn Feshnavat, my father, and prepare him for our coming.'

So she plucked a feather from Koorookh and laid the quill downward, letting it drop. Then said she, 'Now for the awakening of my betrothed!'

Thereupon she hugged his head a moment, and kissed him on the eyelids, the cheeks, and the lips, crying, 'By this means only!' Crying that, she pushed him, sliding, from the back of the bird, and he parted from them, falling headforemost in the air like a stricken eagle. Then she called to Koorookh, 'Seize him!' and the bird slanted his beak and closed his wings, the two, Abarak and Noorna, clinging to him tightly; and he was down like an arrow between Shibli Bagarag and the ground, spreading beneath him like a tent, and Noorna caught the youth gently to her lap; then she pushed him off again, intercepting his descent once more, till they were on a level with one of the mountains of the earth, from which the City of Shagpat is visible among the yellow sands like a white spot in the yolk of an egg. So by this time the eyes of the youth gave symptoms of a desire to look upon the things that be, peeping faintly beneath the lashes, and she exclaimed joyfully, raising her white hands above her head, 'One plunge in the lake, and life will be his again!'

Page 135

Below them was a green lake, tinted by the dawn with crimson and yellow, deep, and with high banks. As they crossed it to the middle, she slipped off the youth from Koorookh, and he with a great plunge was received into the stillness of the lake. Meanwhile Koorookh quivered his wings and seized him when he arose, bearing him to an end of the lake, where stood one dressed like a Dervish, and it was the Vizier Feshnavat, the father of Noorna. So when he saw them, he shouted the shout of congratulation, catching Noorna to his breast, and Shibli Bagarag stretched as doth a heavy sleeper in his last doze, saying, in a yawning voice, 'What trouble? I wot there is nought more for us now that Shagpat is shaved! Oh, I have had a dream, a dream! He that is among Houris in Paradise dreameth not a dream like that. And I dreamed—'tis gone!'

Then said he, staring at them, 'Who be ye? What is this?'

Noorna, took him again to her bosom, and held him there; and she plucked a herb, and squeezed it till a drop from it fell on either of his lids, applying to them likewise a dew from the serpents of the Sword, and he awoke to the reality of things. Surely, then he prostrated himself and repeated the articles of his faith, taking one hand of his betrothed and kissing her; and he embraced Abarak and Feshnavat, saying to the father of Noorna, 'I know, O Feshnavat, that by my folly and through my weakness I have lost time in this undertaking, but it shall be short work now with Shagpat. This thy daughter, the Eclipser of Reason, was ever such a prize as she? I will deserve her. Wullahy! I am now a new man, sprung like fire from ashes. Lo, I am revived by her for the great work.'

Said Abarak: 'O Master of the Event, secure now without delay the two slaves of the Sword, and lean the blade toward Aklis.'

Upon that, he ran up rapidly to the summit of the mountain and drew the Sword from his girdle, and leaned it toward Aklis, and it lengthened out over lands, the blade of it a beam of solid brilliance. Presently, from forth the invisible remoteness they saw the two Genii, Karavejis and Veejravoosh, and they were footing the blade swiftly, like stars, speeding up till they were within reach of the serpents of the hilt, when they dropped to the earth, bowing their heads; so he commanded them to rise, crying, 'Search ye the earth and its confines, and bring hither tidings of the Genie Karaz.'

They said, 'To hear is to obey.'

Then they began to circle each round the other, circling more and more sharply till beyond the stretch of sight, and Shibli Bagarag said to Feshnavat, 'Am I not awake, O Feshnavat? I will know where is Karaz ere I seek to operate on Shagpat, for it is well spoken of the poet:

“Obstructions first remove
Ere thou thy cunning prove”;

and I will encounter this Karaz that was our Ass, ere I try the great shave.’

Then said he, turning quickly, ’Yonder is the light from Aklis striking on the city, and I mark Shagpat, even he, illumined by it, singled out, where he sitteth on the roof of the palace by the market-place.’

Page 136

So they looked, and it was as he had spoken, that Shagpat was singled out in the midst of the city by the wondrous beams of the eye of Aklis, and made prominent in effulgence.

Said Abarak, climbing to the level of observation, 'He hath a redness like the inside of a halved pomegranate.'

Feshnavat stroked his chin, exclaiming, 'He may be likened to a mountain goat in the midst of a forest roaring with conflagration.'

Said Shibli Bagarag, 'Now is he the red-maned lion, the bristling boar, the uncombed buffalo, the plumaged cock, but soon will he be like nothing else save the wrinkled kernel of a shaggy fruit. Lo, now, the Sword! it leapeth to be at him, and 'twill be as the keen icicle of winter to that perishing foliage, that doomed crop! So doth the destined minute destroy with a flash the hoarded arrogance of ages; and the destined hand doeth what creation failed to perform; and 'tis by order, destiny, and preordainment, that the works of this world come to pass. This know I, and I witness thereto that am of a surety ordained to the Shaving of Shagpat!'

Then he stood apart and gazed from Shagpat to the city that now began to move with the morning; elephants and coursers saddled by the gates of the King's palace were visible, and camels blocking the narrow streets, and the markets bustling. Surely, though the sun illumined that city, it was as a darkness behind Shagpat singled by the beams of Aklis.

THE PLOT

Now, while Shibli Bagarag gazed on Shagpat kindled by the beams of Aklis, lo, the Genii Karavejis and Veejravoosh circling each other in swift circles like two sapphire rings toward him, and they whirled to a point above his head, and fell and prostrated themselves at his feet: so he cried, 'O ye slaves of the Sword, my servitors! how of the whereabout of Karaz?'

They answered, 'O Master of the Event, we found him after many circlings far off, and 'twas by the borders of the Putrid Sea. We came not close on him, for he is stronger than we without the Sword, but it seemed he was distilling drops of an oil from certain substances, large thickened drops that dropped into a phial.'

Then Shibli Bagarag said, 'The season of weakness with me is over, and they that confide in my strength, my cunning, my watchfulness, my wielding of the Sword, have nought to fear for themselves. Now, this is my plot, O Feshnavat,—that part of it in which thou art to have a share. 'Tis that thou depart forthwith to the City yonder, and enter thy palace by a back entrance, and I will see that thou art joined within an hour of

thy arrival there by Baba Mustapha, my uncle, the gabbler. He is there, as I guess by signs; I have had warnings of him. Discover him speedily. Thy task is then to induce him to make an attempt on the head of Shagpat in all wiliness, as he and thou think well to devise. He will fail, as I know, but what is that saying of the poet?

Page 137

"Persist, if thou wouldst truly reach thine ends,
For failures oft are but advising friends."

And he says:

"Every failure is a step advanced,
To him who will consider how it chanced."

Wherefore, will I that this attempt be made, keeping the counsel that is mine. Thou must tell Baba Mustapha I wait without the city to reward him by my powers of reward with all that he best loveth. So, when he has failed in his attempt on Shagpat, and blows fall plenteously upon him, and he is regaled with the accustomed thwacking, as I have tasted it in this undertaking, do thou waste no further word on him, for his part is over, and as is said:

"Waste not a word in enterprise!
Against—or for—the minute flies."

'Tis then for thee, O Feshnavat, to speed to the presence of the King in his majesty, and thou wilt find means of coming to him by a disguise. Once in the Hall of Council, challenge the tongue of contradiction to affirm Shagpat other than a bald-pate bewigged. This is for thee to do.'

Quoth Feshnavat plaintively, after thought, 'And what becometh of me, O thou Master of the Event?'

Shibli Bagarag said, 'The clutch of the executioner will be upon thee, O Feshnavat, and a clamouring multitude around; short breathing-time given thee, O father of Noorna, ere the time of breathing is commanded to cease. Now, in that respite the thing that will occur, 'tis for thee to see and mark; sure, never will reverse of things be more complete, and the other side of the picture more rapidly exhibited, if all go as I conceive and plot, and the trap be not premature nor too perfect for the trappers; as the poet has declared:

"Ye that intrigue, to thy slaves proper portions adapt;
Perfectest plots burst too often, for all are not apt."

And I witness likewise to the excellence of his saying:

"To master an Event,
Study men!
The minutes are well spent
Only then."

Also 'tis he that says:

“The man of men who knoweth men, the Man of men is he!
His army is the human race, and every foe must flee.”

So have I apportioned to thee thy work, to Baba Mustapha his; reserving to myself the work that is mine!’

Thereat Feshnavat exclaimed, ’O Master of the Event, may I be thy sacrifice! on my head be it! and for thee to command is for me to obey! but surely, this Sword of thine that is in thy girdle, the marvellous blade—’tis alone equal to the project and the shave; and the matter might be consummated, the great thing done, even from this point whence we behold Shagpat visible, as ’twere brought forward toward us by the beams! And this Sword swayed by thee, and with thy skill and strength and the hardihood of hand that is thine, wullahy! ’twould shear him now, this moment, taking the light of Aklis for a lather.’

Page 138

Shibli Bagarag knotted the brows of impatience, crying, 'Hast thou forgotten Karaz in thy calculations? I know of a surety what this Sword will do, and I wot the oil he distilleth strengtheneth Shagpat but against common blades. Yet shall it not be spoken of me, Shibli Bagarag, that I was tripped by my own conceit; the poet counselleth:

"When for any mighty end thou hast the aid of heaven,
Mount until thy strength shall match those great means which are given":

nor that I was overthrown in despising mine enemy, forgetful of the saying of the sage:

"Read the features of thy foe, wherever he may find thee,
Small he is, seen face to face, but thrice his size behind thee."

Wullahy! this Karaz is a Genie of craft and resources, one of a mighty stock, and I must close with Shagpat to be sure of him; and that I am not deceived by semblances, opposing guile with guile, and guile deeper than his, for that he awaiteth it not, thinking I have leaped in fancy beyond the Event, and am puffed by the after-breaths of adulation, I!—thinking I pluck the blossoms in my hunger for the fruit, that I eat the chick of the yet unlaid egg, O Feshnavat. As is said, and the warrior beareth witness to the wisdom of it:

"His weapon I'll study; my own conceal;
So with two arms to his one shall I deal."

The same also testifieth:

"'Tis folly of the hero, though resistless in the field,
To stake the victory on his steel, and fling away the shield."

And likewise:

"Examine thine armour in every joint,
For slain was the Giant, and by a pin's point."

Wah! 'tis certain there will need subtlety in this undertaking, and a plot plotted, so do thou my bidding, and fail not in the part assigned to thee.'

Now, Feshnavat was persuaded by his words, and cried, 'In diligence, discretion, and the virtues which characterize subordinates, I go, and I delay not! I will perform the thing required of me, O Master of the Event.' And he repeated in verse:

With danger beset, be the path crooked or narrow,
Thou art the bow, and I the arrow.

Then embraced he his daughter, kissing her on the forehead and the eyes, and tightening the girdle of his robe, departed, with the name of Allah on his lips, in the direction of the City.

So Shibli Bagarag called to him the two Genii, and his command was, ’Soar, ye slaves of the Sword, till the range of earth and its mountains and seas and deserts are a cluster in the orb of the eye, Shiraz conspicuous as a rose among garlands, and the ruby consorted with other gems in a setting. In Shiraz or the country adjoining ye will come upon one Baba Mustapha by name; and, if he be alone, ye may recognize him by his forlorn look and the hang of his cheeks, his vacancy as of utter abandonment; if in company, ’twill be the only talker that’s he; seize on him, give him a taste of thin air, and deposit him without speech on the roof of a palace, where ye will see Feshnavat in yonder city: this do ere the shadows of the palm-tree by the well in the plain move up the mounds that enclose the fortified parts.’

Page 139

Cried Karavejis and Veejravoosh, ‘To hear is to obey.’

Up into the sky, like two bright balls tossed by jugglers, the two Genii shot; and, watching them, Noorna bin Noorka said, ’My life, there is a third wanting, Ravejoura; and with aid of the three, earth could have planted no obstruction to thy stroke; but thou wert tempted by the third temptation in Aklis, and left not the Hall in triumph, the Hall of the Duping Brides!’

He answered, ’That is so, my soul; and the penalty is mine, by which I am made to employ deceits ere I strike.’

And she said, ’’Tis to the generosity of Gulrevaz thou owest Karavejis and Veejravoosh; and I think she was generous, seeing thee true to me in love, she that hath sorrows!’

So he said, ‘What of the sorrows of Gulrevaz? Tell me of them.’

But she said, ’Nay, O my betrothed! wouldst thou have this tongue blistered, and a consuming spark shot against this bosom?’

Then he: ‘Make it clear to me.’

She put her mouth to his ear, saying, ’There is a curse on whoso telleth of things in Aklis, and to tattle of the Seven and their sister forerunneth wretchedness.’

Surely, he stooped to that fair creature, and folded her to his heart, his whole soul heaving to her; and he cried again and again, ’Shall harm hap to thee through me? by Allah, no!’

And he closed the privileged arm of the bridegroom round her waist, that had the yieldingness of the willow-branchlet, the flowingness of the summer sea-wave, and seemed as ’twere melting honey-like at the first gentle pressure; she leaning her head shyly on his shoulder, yet confiding in his faithfulness; it was that she was shy of the great bliss in her bosom, and was made timid by the fervour of her affection; as is sung:

> Deeper than the source of blushes
> Is the power that makes them start;
> Up in floods the red stream rushes,
> At one whisper of the heart.

And it is sung in words present to the youth as he surveyed her:

> O beauty of the bride! O beauty of the bride!
> Her bashful joys like serpents sting her tenderness to
> tears:
> Her hopes are sleeping eagles in the shining of the spheres;

O beauty of the bride! O beauty of the bride!
And she’s a lapping antelope that from her image flees;
And she’s a dove caught in two hands, to pant as she shall
please;
O beauty of the bride! O beauty of the bride!
Like torrents over Paradise her lengthy tresses roll:
She moves as doth a swaying rose, and chides her hasty soul;
The thing she will, that will she not, yet can no will control
O beauty, beauty, beauty of the bride!

They were thus together, Abarak leaning under one wing of Koorookh for shade up the slope of the hill, and Shibli Bagarag called to him, ’Ho, Abarak! look if there be aught impending over the City.’

Page 140

So he arose and looked, crying, 'One with plunging legs, high up in air over the City, between two bright bodies.' Shibli Bagarag exclaimed, ''Tis well! The second chapter of the Event is opened; so call it, thou that tellest of the Shaving of Shagpat. It will be the shortest.'

Then he said, 'The shadow of yonder palm is now a slanted spear up the looped wall of the City. Now, the time of Shagpat's triumph, and his greatest majesty, will be when yonder walls chase the shadow of the palm up this hill; and then will Baba Mustapha be joining the chorus of creatures that shriek toward even ere they snooze. There's not an ape in the woods, nor hyaena in the forest, nor birds on the branches, nor frogs in the marsh that will outnoise Baba Mustapha under the thong! Wullahy, 'twill grieve his soul in aftertime when he sitteth secure in honours, courted, with a thousand ears at his bidding, that so much breath 'scaped him without toll of the tongue! But as the poet says truly:

> "The chariot of Events lifteth many dusty heels,
> And many, high and of renown, it crusheth with its wheels."

Wah! I have had my share of the thong, and am I, Master of the Event, to be squeamish in attaining an end by its means? Nay, by this Sword!'

Thereat, he strode once again to the summit of the hill, and in a moment the Genii fronted him like two shot arrows quivering from the flight. So he cried, 'It is done?'

They answered, 'In faithfulness.'

So he beckoned to Noorna, and she came forward swiftly to him, exclaiming, 'I read the plot, and the thing required of me; so say nought, but embrace me ere I leave thee, my betrothed, my master!'

He embraced her, and led her to where the Genii stood. Then said he to the Genii, 'Convey her to the City, O ye slaves of the Sword, and watch over her there. If ye let but an evil wind ruffle the hair of her head, lo! I sever ye with a stroke that shaketh the under worlds. Remain by her till the shrieks of Baba Mustapha greet ye, and then will follow commotion among the crowd, and cries for Shagpat to show himself to the people, cries also of death to Feshnavat; and there will be an assembly in the King's Hall of Justice; thither lead ye my betrothed, and watch over her.' And he said to Noorna, 'Thou knowest my design?'

So she said, 'When condemnation is passed on Feshnavat, that I appear in the hall as bride of Shagpat, and so rescue him that is my father.' And she cried, 'Oh, fair delightful time that is coming! my happiness and thy honour on earth dateth from it. Farewell, O my betrothed, beloved youth! Eyes of mine! these Genii will be by, and there's no cause

for fear or sorrow, and ’tis for thee to look like morning that speeds the march of light. Thou, my betrothed, art thou not all that enslaveth the heart of woman?’

Cried Shibli Bagarag, ’And thou, O Noorna, all that enraptureth the soul of man! Allah keep thee, my life!’

Page 141

Lo! while they were wasting the rich love in their hearts, the Genii rose up with Noorna, and she, waving her hand to him, was soon distant and as the white breast of a bird turned to the sun. Then went he to where Abarak was leaning, and summoned Koorookh, and the twain mounted him, and rose up high over the City of Shagpat to watch the ripening of the Event, as a vulture watcheth over the desert.

THE DISH OF POMEGRANATE GRAIN

Now, in the City of Shagpat, Kadza, spouse of Shagpat, she that had belaboured Shibli Bagarag, had a dream while these things were doing; and it was a dream of danger and portent to the glory of her eyes, Shagpat. So, at the hour when he was revealed to Shibli Bagarag, made luminous by the beams of Aklis, Kadza went to an inner chamber, and greased her hands and her eyelids, and drank of a phial, and commenced tugging at a brass ring fixed in the floor, and it yielded and displayed an opening, over which she stooped the upper half of her leanness, and pitching her note high, called ‘Karaz!’ After that, she rose and retreated from the hole hastily, and in the winking of an eye it was filled, as ’twere a pillar of black smoke, by the body of the Genie, he breathing hard with mighty travel. So he cried to her between his pantings and puffings, ’Speak! where am I wanted, and for what?’

Now, Kadza was affrighted at the terribleness of his manner, and the great smell of the Genie was an intoxication in her nostril, so that she reeled and could just falter out, ‘Danger to the Identical!’

Then he, in a voice like claps of thunder, ‘Out with it!’

She answered beseechingly, ’’Tis a dream I had, O Genie; a dream of danger to him.’

While she spake, the Genie clenched his fists and stamped so that the palace shook and the earth under it, exclaiming, ’O abominable Kadza! a dream is it? another dream? Wilt thou cease dreaming awhile, thou silly woman? Know I not he that’s powerful against us is in Aklis, crowned ape, and that his spells are gone? And I was distilling drops to defy the Sword and strengthen Shagpat from assault, yet bringest thou me from my labour by the Putrid Sea with thy accursed dream!’ Thereat, he frowned and shot fire at her from his eyes, so that she singed, and the room thickened with a horrible smell of burning. She feared greatly and trembled, but he cooled himself against the air, crying presently in a diminished voice, ’Let’s hear this dream, thou foolish Kadza! ’Tis as well to hear it. Probably Rabesqurat hath sent thee some sign from Aklis, where she ferryeth a term. What’s that saying:

“A woman’s at the core of every plot man plotteth,
And like an ill-reared fruit, first at the core it rotteth.”

So, out with it, thou Kadza!’

Page 142

Now, the urgency of that she had dreamed overcame fear in Kadza, and she said, 'O great Genie and terrible, my dream was this. Lo! I saw an assemblage of the beasts of the forests and them that inhabit wild places. And there was the elephant and the rhinoceros and the hippopotamus, and the camel and the camelopard, and the serpent and the striped tiger; also the antelope, the hyena, the jackal, and above them, eminent in majesty, the lion. Surely, he sat as 'twere on a high seat, and they like suppliants thronging the presence: this I saw, the heart on my ribs beating for Shagpat. And there appeared among the beasts a monkey all ajoint with tricks, jerking with malice, he looking as 'twere hungry for the doing of things detestable; and the lion scorned him, and I marked him ridicule the lion: 'twas so. And the lion began to scowl, and the other beasts marked the displeasure of the lion. Then chased they that monkey from the presence, and for awhile he was absent, and the lion sat in his place gravely, with calm, receiving homage of the other beasts; and down to his feet came the eagle that's lord of air, and before him kneeled the great elephant, and the subtle serpent eyed him with awe. But soon did that monkey, the wretched animal! reappear, and there was no peace for the lion, he worrying till close within stretch of the lion's paw! Wah! the lion might have crushed him, but that he's magnanimous. And so it was that as the monkey advanced the lion roared to him, "Begone!"

'And the monkey cried, "Who commandeth?"

'So the lion roared, "The King of beasts and thy King!"

'Then that monkey cried, "Homage to the King of beasts and my King! Allah keep him in his seat, and I would he were visible."

'So the lion roared, "He sitteth here acknowledged, thou graceless animal! and he's before thee apparent."

'Then the monkey affected eagerness, and gazed about him, and peered on this beast and on that, exclaiming like one that's injured and under slight, "What's this I've done, and wherein have I offended, that he should be hidden from me when pointed out?"

'So the lion roared, "'Tis I where I sit, thou offensive monkey!"

'Then that monkey in the upper pitch of amazement, "Thou! Is it for created thing to acknowledge a king without a tail? And, O beasts of the forest and the wilderness, how say ye? Am I to blame that I bow not to one that hath it not?"

'Upon that, the lion rose, and roared in the extreme of wrath; but the word he was about to utter was checked in him, for 'twas manifest that where he would have lashed a tail he shook a stump, wagging it as the dog doth. Lo! when the lion saw that, the majesty melted from him, and in a moment the plumpness of content and prosperity forsook him,

so that his tawny skin hung flabbily and his jaw drooped, and shame deprived him of stateliness; abashed was he! Now, seeing the lion shamed in this manner,

Page 143

my heart beat violently for Shagpat, so that I awoke with the strength of its beating, and 'twas hidden from me whether the monkey was punished by the lion, or exalted by the other beasts in his place, or how came it that the lion's tail was lost, witched from him by that villain of mischief, the monkey; but, O great Genie, I knew there was a lion among men, reverenced, and with enemies; that lion, he that espoused me and my glory, Shagpat! 'Twas enough to know that and tremble at the omen of my dream, O Genie. Wherefore I thought it well to summon thee here, that thou mightest set a guard over Shagpat, and shield him from the treacheries that beset him.'

When Kadza had ceased speaking, the Genie glowered at her awhile in silence. Then said he, 'What creature is that, Kadza, which tormenteth like the tongue of a woman, is small as her pretensions to virtue, and which showeth how the chapters of her history should be read by the holy ones, even in its manner of movement?'

Cried Kadza, 'The flea that hoppeth!'

So he said, ''Tis well! Hast thou strength to carry one of my weight, O Kadza?'

She answered in squeamishness, 'I, wullahy! I'm but a woman, Genie, though the wife of Shagpat: and to carry thee is for the camel and the elephant and the horse.'

Then he, 'Tighten thy girdle, and when tightened, let a loose loop hang from it.'

She did that, and he gave her a dark powder in her hand, saying, 'Swallow the half of this, and what remaineth mix with water, and sprinkle over thee.'

That did she, and thereupon he exclaimed, 'Now go, and thy part is to move round Shagpat; and a wind will strike thee from one quarter, and from which quarter it striketh is the one of menace and danger to Shagpat.'

So Kadza was diligent in doing what the Genie commanded, and sought for Shagpat, and moved round him many times; but no wind struck her. She went back to the Genie, and told him of this, and the Genie cried, 'What? no wind? not one from Aklis? Then will Shagpat of a surety triumph, and we with him.'

Now, there was joy on the features of Kadza and Karaz, till suddenly he said, 'Halt in thy song! How if there be danger and menace above? and 'tis the thing that may be.'

Then he seized Kadza, and slung her by him, and went into the air, and up it till the roofs of the City of Shagpat were beneath their feet, all on them visible. And under an awning, on the roof of a palace, there was the Vizier Feshnavat and Baba Mustapha, they ear to lip in consultation, and Baba Mustapha brightening with the matter revealed to him, and bobbing his head, and breaking on the speech of the Vizier. Now, when he saw them the Genie blew from his nostrils a double stream of darkness which curled in

a thick body round and round him, and Kadza slung at his side was enveloped in it, as with folds of a huge serpent. Then the Genie hung still, and lo! two radiant figures

Page 144

swept toward the roof he watched, and between them Noorna bin Noorka, her long dark hair borne far backward, and her robe of silken stuff fluttering and straining on the pearl buttons as she flew. There was that in her beauty and the silver clearness of her temples and her eyes, and her cheeks, and her neck, and chin and ankles, that made the Genie shudder with love of her, and he was nigh dropping Kadza to the ground, forgetful of all save Noorna. When he recovered, and it was by tightening his muscles till he was all over hard knots, Noorna was seated on a cushion, and descending he heard her speak his name. Then sniffed he the air, and said to Kadza, 'O spouse of Shagpat, a plot breweth, and the odour of it is in my nostril. Fearest thou a scorching for his sake thou adorest, the miracle of men?'

She answered, 'On my head be it, and my eyes!'

He said, 'I shall alight thee behind the pole of awning on yonder roof, where are the two bright figures and the dingy one, and the Vizier Feshnavat and Noorna bin Noorka. A flame will spring up severing thee from them; but thou'rt secure from it by reason of the powder I gave thee, all save the hair that's on thee. Thou'lt have another shape than that which is thine, even that of a slave of Noorna bin Noorka, and say to her when she asketh thy business with her, "O my mistress, let the storm gather-in the storm-bird when it would surprise men." Do this, and thy part's done, O Kadza!'

Thereupon he swung a circle, and alighted her behind the pole of awning on the roof, and vanished, and the circle of flame rose up, and Kadza passed through it slightly scorched, and answered to the question of Noorna, 'O my mistress, let the storm gather-in the storm-bird when it would surprise men.' Now, when Noorna beheld her, and heard her voice, she pierced the disguise, and was ware of the wife of Shagpat, and glanced her large eyes over Kadza from head to sole till they rested on the loose loop in her girdle. Seeing that, she rose up, and stretched her arms, and spread open the palm of her hand, and slapped Kadza on the cheek and ear a hard slap, so that she heard bells; and ere she ceased to hear them, another, so that Kadza staggered back and screamed, and Feshnavat was moved to exclaim, 'What has the girl, thy favourite, offended in, O my daughter?'

So Noorna continued slapping Kadza, and cried, 'Is she not sluttish? and where's the point of decency established in her, this Luloo? Shall her like appear before thee and me with loose girdle!'

Then she pointed to the girdle, and Kadza tightened the loose loop, and fell upon the ground to avoid the slaps, and Noorna knelt by her, and clutched at a portion of her dress and examined it, peering intently; and she caught up another part, and knotted it as if to crush a living creature, hunting over her, and grasping at her; and so it was that while she tore strips from the garments of Kadza, Feshnavat jumped suddenly in wrath, and pinched over his garments, crying, 'Tis unbearable! 'Tis I know not what other than a flea that persecuteth me:'

Page 145

Upon that, Noorna ran to him, and while they searched together for the flea, Baba Mustapha fidgeted and worried in his seat, lurching to the right and to the left, muttering curses; and it was evident he too was persecuted, and there was no peace on the roof of that palace, but pinching and howling and stretching of limbs, and curses snarled in the throat and imprecations on the head of the tormenting flea. Surely, the soul of Kadza rejoiced, for she knew the flea was Karaz, whom she had brought with her in the loose loop of her girdle through the circle of flame which was a barrier against him. She glistened at the triumph of the flea, but Noorna strode to her, and took her to the side of the roof, and pitched her down it, and closed the passage to her. Then ran she to Karavejis and Veejravoosh, whispering in the ear of each, 'No word of the Sword?' and afterward aloud, 'What think ye will be the term of the staying of my betrothed in Aklis, crowned ape?'

They answered, 'O pearl of the morn, crowned ape till such time as Shagpat be shaved.'

So she beat her breast, crying, 'Oh, utter stagnation, till Shagpat be shaved! and oh, stoppage in the tide of business, dense cloud upon the face of beauty, and frost on the river of events, till Shagpat be shaved! And oh! my betrothed, crowned ape in Aklis till Shagpat be shaved!'

Then she lifted her hands and arms, and said, 'To him where he is, ye Genii! and away, for he needeth comfort.'

Thereat the glittering spirits dissolved and thinned, and were as taper gleams of curved light across the water in their ascent of the heavens. When they were gone Noorna, exclaimed, 'Now for the dish of pomegrante grain, O Baba Mustapha, and let nothing delay us further.'

Quoth Baba Mustapha, ''Tis ordered, O my princess and fair mistress, from the confectioner's; and with it the sleepy drug from the seller of medicaments—accursed flea!'

Now, she laughed, and said, 'What am I, O Baba Mustapha?'

So he said, 'Not thou, O bright shooter of beams, but I, wullahy! I'm but a bundle of points through the pertinacity of this flea! a house of irritabilities! a mere mass of fretfulness! and I've no thought but for the chasing of this unlucky flea: was never flea like it in the world before this flea; and 'tis a flea to anger the holy ones, and make the saintly Dervish swear at such a flea.' He wriggled and curled where he sat, and Noorna cried, 'What! shall we be defeated by a flea, we that would shave Shagpat, and release this city and the world from bondage?' And she looked up to the sky that was then without a cloud, blazing with the sun on his mid seat, and exclaimed, 'O star of Shagpat!

wilt thou constantly be in the ascendant, and defeat us, the liberators of men, with a flea?’

Page 146

Now, whenever one of the twain, Baba Mustapha and the Vizier Feshnavat, commenced speaking of the dish of pomegranate grain, the torment of the flea took all tongue from him, and was destruction to the gravity of council and deliberation. The dish of pomegranate grain was brought to them by slaves, and the drug to induce sleep, yet neither could say aught concerning it, they were as jointy grasshoppers through the action of the flea, and the torment of the flea became a madness, they shrieking, ’’Tis now with thee! ‘Tis now with me! Fires of the damned on this flea!’ In their extremity, they called to Allah for help, but no help came, save when they abandoned all speech concerning the dish of pomegranate grain, then were they for a moment eased of the flea. So Noorna recognized the presence of her enemy Karaz, and his malicious working; and she went and fetched a jar brimmed with water for the bath, and stirred it with her forefinger, and drew on it a flame from the rays of the sun till there rose up from the jar a white thick smoke. She rustled her raiment, making the wind of it collect round Baba Mustapha and Feshnavat, and did this till the sweat streamed from their brows and bodies, and they were sensible of peace and the absence of the flea. Then she whisked away the smoke, and they were attended by slaves with fresh robes, and were as new men, and sat together over the dish of pomegranate grain, praising the wisdom of Noorna and her power. Then Baba Mustapha revived in briskness, and cried, ’Here the dish! and ’tis in my hands an instrument, an instrument of vengeance! and one to endow the skilful wielder of it with glory. And ’tis as I designed it,—sweet, seasoned, savoury,—a flattery to the eye and no deceiver to the palate. Wah! and such an instrument in the hands of the discerning and the dexterous, and the discreet and the judicious, and them gifted with determination, is’t not such as sufficeth for the overturning of empires and systems, O my mistress, fair one, sapphire of this city? And is’t not written that I shall beguile Shagpat by its means, and master the Event, and shame the King of Oolb and his Court? And I shall then sit in state among men, and surround myself with adornments and with slaves, mute, that speak not save at the signal, and are as statues round the cushions of their lord—that’s myself. And I shall surround myself with the flatteries of wealth, and walk bewildered in silks and stuffs and perfumeries; and sweet young beauties shall I have about me, antelopes of grace, as I like them, and select them, long-eyed, lazy, fond of listening, and with bashful looks that timidly admire the dignity that’s in man.’

Page 147

While he was prating Noorna took the dish in her lap, and folded her silvery feet beneath her, and commenced whipping into it the drug: and she whipped it dexterously and with equal division among the grain, whipping it and the flea with it, but she feigned not to mark the flea and whipped harder. Then took she colour and coloured it saffron, and laid over it gold-leaf, so that it glittered and was an enticing sight; and the dish was of gold, crusted over with devices and patterns, and heads of golden monsters, a ravishment of skill in him that executed it, cumbrous with ornate golden workmanship; likewise there were places round the dish for sticks of perfume and cups carved for the storing of perfumed pellets, and into these Noorna put myrrh and ambergris and rich incenses, aloes, sandalwood, prepared essences, divers keen and sweet scents. Then when all was in readiness, she put the dish upon the knee of Baba Mustapha, and awoke him from his babbling reverie with a shout, and said, 'An instrument verily, O Baba Mustapha! and art thou a cat to shave Shagpat with that tongue of thine?'

Now, he arose and made the sign of obedience and said, ''Tis well, O lady of grace and bright wit! and now for the cap of Shiraz and the Persian robe, and my twenty slaves and seven to follow me to the mansion of Shagpat. I'll do: I'll act.'

So she motioned to a slave to bring the cap of Shiraz and the Persian robe, and in these Baba Mustapha arrayed himself. Then called he for the twenty-and-seven slaves, and they were ranged, some to go before, some to follow him. And he was exalted, and made the cap of Shiraz nod in his conceit, crying, 'Am I not leader in this complot? Wullahy! all bow to me and acknowledge it.' Then, to check himself, he called out sternly to the slaves, 'Ho ye! forward to the mansion of Shagpat; and pass at a slow pace through the streets of the city—solemnly, gravely, as before a potentate; then will the people inquire of ye, Who't is ye marshal, and what mighty one? and ye will answer, He's from the court of Shiraz, nothing less than a Vizier—bearing homage to Shagpat, even this dish of pomegranate grain.'

So they said, 'To hear is to obey.'

Upon that he waved his hand and stalked majestically, and they descended from the roof into the street, criers running in front to clear the way. When Baba Mustapha was hidden from view by a corner of the street, Noorna shrank in her white shoulders and laughed, and was like a flashing pearl as she swayed and dimpled with laughter. And she cried, 'True are those words of the poet, and I testify to them in the instance of Baba Mustapha:

"With feathers of the cock, I'll fashion a vain creature;
With feathers of the owl, I'll make a judge in feature";

Is not the barber elate and lofty? He goeth forth to the mastery of this Event as go many, armed with nought other than their own conceit: and 'tis written:

Page 148

"Fools from their fate seek not to urge:
The coxcomb carrieth his scourge."'

So Feshnavat smoothed his face, and said, 'Is't not also written?—

"Oft may the fall of fools make wise men moan!
Too often hangs the house on one loose stone!"

'Tis so, O Noorna, my daughter, and I am as a reed shaken by the wind of apprehensiveness, and doubt in me is a deep root as to the issue of this undertaking, for the wrath of the King will be terrible, and the clamour of the people soundeth in my ears already. If Shibli Bagarag fail in one stroke, where be we? 'Tis certain I knew not the might in Shagpat when I strove with him, and he's powerful beyond the measure of man's subtlety; and yonder flies a rook without fellow—an omen; and all's ominous, and ominous of ill: and I marked among the troop of slaves that preceded Baba Mustapha one that squinted, and that's an omen; and, O my daughter, I counsel that thou by thy magic speed us to some remote point in the Caucasus, where we may abide the unravelling of this web securely, one way or the other way. 'Tis my counsel, O Noorna.'

Then she, 'Abandon my betrothed? and betray him on the very stroke of the Sword? and diminish him by a withdrawal of that faith in his right wrist which strengtheneth it more than Karavejis and Veejravoosh wound round it in coils?' And she leaned her head, and cried, 'Hark! hear'st thou? there's shouting in the streets of Shiraz and of Shagpat! Shall we merit the punishment of Shahpesh the Persian on Khipil the builder, while the Event is mastering? I'll mark this interview between Baba Mustapha and Shagpat; and do thou, O my father, rest here on this roof till the King's guard of horsemen and soldiers of the law come hither for thee, and go with them sedately, fearing nought, for I shall be by thee in the garb of an old woman; and preserve thy composure in the presence of the King and Shagpat exalted, and allow not the thing that happeneth let fly from thee the shaft of speech, but remain a slackened bow till the strength of my betrothed is testified, fearing nought, for fear is that which defeateth men, and 'tis declared in a distich,—

"The strongest weapon one can see
In mortal hands is constancy."

And for us to flee now would rank us with that King described by the poet:

"A king of Ind there was who fought a fight
From the first gleam of morn till fall of night;
But when the royal tent his generals sought,
Proclaiming victory, fled was he who fought.
Despair possessed them, till they chanced to spy
A Dervish that paced on with downward eye;

> They questioned of the King; he answer’d slow,
> ‘Ye fought but one, the King a double, foe.'"’

And, O my father, they interpreted of this that the King had been vanquished, he that was victor, by the phantom army of his fears.’

Page 149

Now, the Vizier cried, ‘Be the will of Allah achieved and consummated!’ and he was silenced by her wisdom and urgency, and sat where he was, diverting not the arch on his brow from its settled furrow. He was as one that thirsteth, and whose eye hath marked a snake of swift poison by the water, so thirsted he for the Event, yet hung with dread from advancing; but Noorna bin Noorka busied herself about the roof, drawing circles to witness the track of an enemy, and she clapped her hands and cried, ‘Luloo!’ and lo, a fair slave-girl that came to her and stood by with bent head, like a white lily by a milk-white antelope; so Noorna clouded her brow a moment, as when the moon darkeneth behind a scud, and cried, ‘Speak! art thou in league with Karaz, girl?’

Luloo strained her hands to her temples, exclaiming, ’With the terrible Genie?—I?—in league with him? my mistress, surely the charms I wear, and the amulets, I wear them as a protection from that Genie, and a safeguard, he that carrieth off the maidens and the young sucklings, walking under the curse of mothers.’

Said Noorna, ‘O Luloo, have I boxed those little ears of thine this day?’

The fair slave-girl smiled a smile of submissive tenderness, and answered, ’Not this day, nor once since Luloo was rescued from the wicked old merchant by thy overbidding, and was taken to the arms of a wise kind sister, wiser and kinder than any she had been stolen from, she that is thy slave for ever.’

She said this weeping, and Noorna mused, ’’Twas as I divined, that wretched Kadza: her grief ‘s to come!’ Then spake she aloud as to herself, ‘Knew I, or could one know, I should this day be a bride?’ And, hearing that, Luloo shrieked, ’Thou a bride, and torn from me, and we two parted? and I, a poor drooping tendril, left to wither? for my life is round thee and worthless away from thee, O cherisher of the fallen flower.’

And she sobbed out wailful verses and words, broken and without a meaning; but Noorna caught her by the arm and swung her, and bade her fetch on the instant a robe of blue, and pile in her chamber robes of amber and saffron and grey, bridal-robes of many-lighted silks, plum-coloured, peach-coloured, of the colour of musk mixed with pale gold, together with bridal ornaments and veils of the bride, and a jewelled circlet for the brow. When this was done, Noorna went with Luloo to her chamber, attended by slave-girls, and arrayed herself in the first dress of blue, and swayed herself before the mirror, and rattled the gold pieces in her hair and on her neck with laughter. And Luloo was bewildered, and forgot her tears to watch the gaiety of her mistress; and lo! Noorna, made her women take off one set of ornaments with every dress, and with every dress she put on another set; and after she had gone the round of the different dresses, she went to the bathroom with Luloo, and at her bidding Luloo entered the bath beside Noorna, and the twain dipped and shouldered in the blue water, and were as when a single star is by the full moon on a bright midnight pouring lustre about. And Noorna splashed Luloo, and said, ’This night we shall not sleep together, O Luloo, nor lie close, thy bosom on mine.’

Page 150

Thereat, Luloo wept afresh, and cried, ’Ah, cruel! and ’tis a sweet thought for thee, and thou’lt have no mind for me, tossing on my hateful lonely couch.’

Tenderly Noorna eyed Luloo, and the sprinkles of the bath fell with the tears of both, and they clung together, and were like the lily and its bud on one stalk in a shower. Then, when Noorna had spent her affection, she said, ’O thou of the long downward lashes, thy love was constant when I stood under a curse and was an old woman—a hag! Carest thou so little to learn the name of him that claimeth me?’

Luloo replied, ’I thought of no one save myself and my loss, O my lost pearl; happy is he, a youth of favour. Oh, how I shall hate him that taketh thee from me. Tell me now his name, O sovereign of hearts!’

So Noorna smoothed the curves and corners of her mouth and calmed her countenance, crying in a deep tone and a voice as of reverence, ‘Shagpat!’

Now, at that name Luloo drank in her breath and was awed, and sank in herself, and had just words to ask, ’Hath he demanded thee again in marriage, O my mistress?’

Said Noorna, ‘Even so.’

Luloo muttered, ‘Great is the Dispenser of our fates!’

And she spake no further, but sighed and took napkins and summoned the slave-girls, and arrayed Noorna silently in the robe of blue and bridal ornaments. Then Noorna said to them that thronged about her, ’Put on, each of ye, a robe of white, ye that are maidens, and a fillet of blue, and a sash of saffron, and abide my coming.’

And she said to Luloo, ’Array thyself in a robe of blue, even as mine, and let trinkets lurk in thy tresses, and abide my coming.’

Then went she forth from them, and veiled her head and swathed her figure in raiment of a coarse white stuff, and was as the moon going behind a hill of dusky snow; and she left the house, and passed along the streets and by the palaces, till she came to the palace of her father, now filled by Shagpat. Before the palace grouped a great concourse and a multitude of all ages and either sex in that city, despite the blaze and the heat. Like roaring of a sea beyond the mountains was the noise that issued from them, and their eyes were a fire of beams against the portal of the palace. Now, she saw in the crowd one Shafrac, a shoemaker, and addressed him, saying, ’O Shafrac, the shoemaker, what’s this assembly and how got together? for the poet says:

> “Ye string not such assemblies in the street,
> Save when some high Event should be complete."’

He answered, ’’Tis an Event complete. Wullahy! the deputation from Shiraz to Shagpat, and the submission of that vain city to the might of Shagpat.’ And he asked her, jestingly, ’Art thou a witch, to guess that, O veiled and virtuous one?’

Quoth she, ’I read the thing that cometh ere ’tis come, and I read danger to Shagpat in this deputation from Shiraz, and this dish of pomegranate grain.’

Page 151

So Shafrac cried, ’By the beard of my fathers and that of Shagpat! let’s speak of this to Zeel, the garlic-seller.’

He broadened to one that was by him, and said, ’O Zeel, what’s thy mind? Here’s a woman, a wise woman, a witch, and she sees danger to Shagpat in this deputation from Shiraz and this dish of pomegranate grain.’

Now, Zeel screwed his visage and gazed up into his forehead, and said, ‘’Twere best to consult with Bootlbac, the drum-beater.’

The two then called to Bootlbac, the drum-beater, and told him the matter, and Bootlbac pondered, and tapped his brow and beat on his stomach, and said, ’Krooz el Krazawik, the carrier, is good in such a case.’

Now, from Krooz el Krazawik, the carrier, they went to Dob, the confectioner; and from Dob, the confectioner, to Azawool, the builder; and from Azawool, the builder, to Tcheik, the collector of taxes; and each referred to some other, till perplexity triumphed and was a cloud over them, and the words, ‘Danger to Shagpat,’ went about like bees, and were canvassing, when suddenly a shrill voice rose from the midst, dominating other voices, and it was that of Kadza, and she cried, ’Who talks here of danger to Shagpat, and what wretch is it?’

Now, Tcheik pointed out Azawool, and Azawool Dob, and Dob Krooz el Krazawik, and he Bootlbac, and the drum-beater shrugged his shoulder at Zeel, and Zeel stood away from Shafrac, and Shafrac seized Noorna and shouted, ‘’Tis she, this woman, the witch!’

Kadza fronted Noorna, and called to her, ’O thing of infamy, what’s this talk of thine concerning danger to our glory, Shagpat?’

Then Noorna replied, ’I say it, O Kadza! and I say it; there’s danger threateneth him, and from that deputation and that dish of pomegranate grain.’

Now, Kadza laughed a loose laugh, and jeered at Noorna, crying, ’Danger to Shagpat! he that’s attended by Genii, and watched over by the greatest of them, day and night incessantly?’

And Noorna said, ’I ask pardon of the Power that seeth, and of thee, if I be wrong. Wah! am I not also of them that watch over Shagpat? So then let thou and I go into the palace and examine the doings of this deputation and this dish of pomegranate grain.’

Now, Kadza remembered the scene on the roofs of the Vizier Feshnavat, and relaxed in her look of suspicion, and said, ‘’Tis well! Let’s in to them.’

Thereupon the twain threaded through the crowd and locked at the portals of the palace, and it was opened to them and they entered, and lo! the hand that opened the

portals was the hand of a slave of the Sword, and against corners of the Court leaned slaves silly with slumber. So Kadza went up to them, and beat them, and shook them, and they yawned and mumbled, ‘Excellent grain! good grain! the grain of Shiraz!’ And she beat them with what might was hers, till some fell sideways and some forward, still mumbling, ‘Excellent pomegranate grain!’ Kadza was beside herself with anger and vexation at them, tearing them and cuffing them; but Noorna cried, ’O Kadza! what said I? there’s danger to Shagpat in this dish of pomegranate grain! and what’s that saying:

Page 152

"'Tis much against the Master's wish
That slaves too greatly praise his dish."

Wullahy! I like not this talk of the grain of Shiraz.'

Now, while Noorna spake, the eyes of Kadza became like those of the starved wild-cat, and she sprang off and along the marble of the Court, and clawed a passage through the air and past the marble pillars of the palace toward the first room of reception, Noorna following her. And in the first room were slaves leaning and lolling like them about the Court, and in the second room and in the third room, silent all of them and senseless. So at this sight the spark of suspicion became a mighty flame in the bosom of Kadza, and horror burst out at all ends of her, and she shuddered, and cried, 'What for us, and where's our hope if Shagpat be shorn, and he lopped of the Identical, shamed like the lion of my dream!'

And Noorna clasped her hands, and said, ''Tis that I fear! Seek for him, O Kadza!'

So Kadza ran to a window and looked forth over the garden of the palace, and it was a fair garden with the gleam of a fountain and watered plants and cool arches of shade, thick bowers, fragrant alleys, long sheltered terraces, and beyond the garden a summer-house of marble fanned by the broad leaves of a palm. Now, when Kadza had gazed a moment, she shrieked, 'He's there! Shagpat! giveth he not the light of a jewel to the house that holdeth him? Awahy! and he's witched there for an ill purpose.'

Then tore she from that room like a mad wild thing after its stolen cubs, and sped along corridors of the palace, and down the great flight of steps into the garden and across the garden, knocking over the ablution-pots in her haste; and Noorna had just strength to withhold her from dashing through the doors of the summer-house to come upon Shagpat, she straining and crying, 'He's there, I say, O wise woman! Shagpat! let's into him.'

But Noorna clung to her, and spake in her ear, 'Wilt thou blow the fire that menaces him, O Kadza? and what are two women against the assailants of such a mighty one as he?' Then said she, 'Watch, rather, and avail thyself of yonder window by the blue-painted pillar.'

So Kadza crept up to the blue-painted pillar which was on the right side of the porch, and the twain peered through the window. Noorna beheld the Dish of Pomegranate Grain; and it was on the floor, empty of the grain, and Baba Mustapha was by it alone making a lather, and he was twitching his mouth and his legs, and flinging about his arms, and Noorna heard him mutter wrathfully, 'O accursed flea! art thou at me again?' And she heard him mutter as in anguish, 'No peace for thee, O pertinacious flea! and my steadiness of hand will be gone, now when I have him safe as the hawk his prey, mine enemy, this Shagpat that abused me: thou abominable flea! And, O thou flea, wilt

thou, vile thing! hinder me from mastering the Event, and releasing this people and the world from enchantment and bondage? And shall I fail to become famous to the ages and the times because of such as thee, flea?'

Page 153

So Kadza whispered to Noorna, 'What's that he's muttering? Is't of Shagpat? for I mark him not here, nor the light by which he's girt.'

She answered, 'Listen with the ear and the eye and all the senses.'

Now, presently they heard Baba Mustapha say in a louder tone, like one that is secure from interruption, 'Two lathers, and this the third! a potent lather! and I wot there's not a hair in this world resisteth the sweep of my blade over such a lather as—Ah! flea of iniquity and abomination! what! am I doomed to thy torments?—so let's spread! Lo! this lather, is't not the pride of Shiraz? and the polish and smoothness it sheddeth, is't not roseate? my invention! as the poet says,—O accursed flea! now the knee-joint, now the knee-cap, and 'tis but a hop for thee to the arm-pit. Fires of the pit without bottom seize thee! is no place sacred from thee, and art thou a restless soul, infernal flea? So then, peace awhile, and here's for the third lather.'

While he was speaking Baba Mustapha advanced to a large white object that sat motionless, upright like a snow-mound on a throne of cushions, and commenced lathering. When she saw that, Kadza tossed up her head and her throat, and a shriek was coming from her, for she was ware of Shagpat; but Noorna stifled the shriek, and clutched her fast, whispering, 'He's safe if thou have but patience, thou silly Kadza! and the flea will defeat this fellow if thou spoil it not.'

So Kadza said, looking up, 'Is 't seen of Allah, and be the Genii still in their depths?' but she constrained herself, peering and perking out her chin, and lifting one foot and the other foot, as on furnaces of fire in the excess of the fury she smothered. And lo, Baba Mustapha worked diligently, and Shagpat was behind an exulting lather, even as one pelted with wheaten flour-balls or balls of powdery perfume, and his hairiness was as branches of the forest foliage bent under a sudden fall of overwhelming snow that filleth the pits and sharpeneth the wolves with hunger, and teacheth new cunning to the fox. A fox was Baba Mustapha in his stratagems, and a wolf in the fierceness of his setting upon Shagpat. Surely he drew forth the blade that was to shear Shagpat, and made with it in the air a preparatory sweep and flourish; and the blade frolicked and sent forth a light, and seemed eager for Shagpat. So Baba Mustapha addressed his arm to the shearing, and inclined gently the edge of the blade, and they marked him let it slide twice to a level with the head of Shagpat, and at the third time it touched, and Kadza howled, but from Baba Mustapha there burst a howl to madden the beasts; and he flung up his blade, and wrenched open his robe, crying, 'A flea was it to bite in that fashion? Now, I swear by the Merciful, a fang like that's common to tigers and hyaenas and ferocious animals.'

Then looked he for the mark of the bite, plaining of its pang, and he could find the mark nowhere. So, as he caressed himself, eyeing Shagpat sheepishly and with gathering awe, Noorna said hurriedly to Kadza, 'Away now, and call them in, the crowd about the palace, that they may behold the triumph of Shagpat, for 'tis ripe, O Kadza!'

Page 154

And Kadza replied, 'Thou'rt a wise woman, and I'll have thee richly rewarded. Lo, I'm as a camel lightened of fifty loads, and the glory of Shagpat see I as a new sun rising in the desert. Wullahy! thou'rt wise, and I'll do thy bidding.'

Now, she went flying back to the palace, and called shrill calls to the crowd, and collected them in the palace, and headed them through the garden, and it was when Baba Mustapha had summoned courage for a second essay, and was in the act of standing over Shagpat to operate on him, that the crowd burst the doors, and he was quickly seized by them, and tugged at and hauled at and pummelled, and torn and vituperated, and as a wrecked vessel on stormy waters, plunging up and down with tattered sails, when the crew fling overboard freight and ballast and provision. Surely his time would have been short with that mob, but Noorna made Kadza see the use of examining him before the King, and there were in that mob sheikhs and fakirs, holy men who listened to the words of Kadza, and exerted themselves to rescue Baba Mustapha, and quieted the rage that was prevailing, and bore Baba Mustapha with them to the great palace of the King, which was in the centre of that City. Now, when the King heard of the attempt on Shagpat, and the affair of the Pomegranate Grain, he gave orders for the admission of the people, as many of them as could be contained in the Hall of Justice: and he set a guard over Baba Mustapha, and commanded that Shagpat should be brought to the palace even as he then was, and with the lather on him. So the regal mandate went forth, and Shagpat was brought in state on cushions, and the potency of the drug preserved his sedateness through all this, and he remained motionless in sleep, folded in the centre of calm and satisfaction, while this tumult was rageing and the City shook with uproar. But the people, when they saw him whitened behind a lather, wrath at Baba Mustapha's polluting touch and the audacity of barbercraft wrestled in them with the outpouring of reverence for Shagpat, and a clamour arose for the instant sacrifice of Baba Mustapha at the foot of their idol Shagpat. And the whole of the City of Shagpat, men, women, and children, and the sheikhs and the dervishes and crafts of the City besieged the King's palace in that middle hour of the noon, clamouring for the sacrifice of Baba Mustapha at the feet of their idol Shagpat.

THE BURNING OF THE IDENTICAL

Now, the Great Hall for the dispensing of justice in the palace of the King was one on which the architect and the artificers had lavished all their arts and subtleties of design and taste and their conceptions of uniformity and grandeur, so that none entered it without a sense of abasement, and the soul acknowledged awfulness and power in him that ruled and sat eminent on the throne of that Hall. For, lo! the throne was of solid weighty gold, overhung with rich silks

Page 155

and purples; and the hall was lofty, with massive pillars, fifty on either side, ranging in stateliness down toward the blaze of the throne; and the pillars were pillars of porphyry and of jasper and precious marble, carven over all of them with sentences of the cunningest wisdom, distichs of excellence, odes of the poet, stanzas sharp with the incisiveness of wit, and that solve knotty points with but one stroke; and these pillars were each the gift of a mighty potentate of earth or of a Genie.

In the centre of the Hall a fountain set up a glittering jet, and spread abroad the breath of freshness, leaping a height of sixty feet, and shimmering there in a wide bright canopy with dropping silver sides. It was rumoured of the waters of this fountain that they were fed underground from the waters of the Sacred River, brought there in the reign of El Rasoon, a former sovereign in the City of Shagpat, by the labours of Zak,—a Genie subject to the magic of Azrooka, the Queen of El Rasoon; but, of a surety, none of earth were like to them in silveriness and sweet coolingness, and they were as wine to the weary.

Now, the King sat on his throne in the Hall, and around him his ministers, and Emirs, and chamberlains, and officers of state, and black slaves, and the soldiers of his guard armed with naked scimitars. And the King was as a sun in splendour, severely grave, and a frown on his forehead to darken kingdoms, for the attempt on Shagpat had stirred his kingly wrath, and awakened zeal for the punishment of all conspirators and offenders. So when Shagpat was borne in to the King upon his throne of cushions where he sat upright, smiling and inanimate, the King commanded that he should be placed at his side, the place of honour; and Shagpat was as a moon behind the whiteness of the lathers; even as we behold moon and sun together in the heavens, was Shagpat by the King.

There was great hubbub in the Hall at the entrance of Shagpat, and a hum of rage and muttered vehemence passed among the assembled people that filled the hall like a cavern of the sea, the sea roaring outside; but presently the King spake, and all hushed. Then said he, 'O people! thought I to see a day that would shame Shagpat? he that has brought honour and renown upon me and all of this city, so that we shine a constellation and place of pilgrimage to men in remote islands and corners of the earth? Yea! and to Afrites and Genii? Have I not castigated barbers, and brought barbercraft to degradation, so that no youth is taught to exercise it? And through me the tackle of the barber, is't not a rusty and abominated weapon, and as a sword thrown by and broken, for that it dishonoured us? Surely, too, I have esteemed Shagpat precious.'

Page 156

While he spake, the King gazed on Shagpat, and was checked by passion at beholding him under the lather, so that the people praised Shagpat and the King. Then said he, 'O people, who shall forecast disasters and triumphs? Lo, I had this day at dawn intelligence from recreant Oolb, and its King and Court, and of their return to do honour to Shagpat! And I had this day at dawn tidings, O people, from Shiraz, and of the adhesion of that vain city and its provinces to the might of Shagpat! So commenced the day, yet is he, the object of the world's homage, within a few hours defiled by a lather and the hand of an impious one!'

At these words of the King there rose a shout of vindictiveness and fury; but he cried, 'Punishment on the offenders in season, O people! Probably we have not abased ourselves for the honour that has befallen us in Shagpat, and the distinction among nations and tribes and races, and creeds and sects, that we enjoy because of Shagpat. Behold! in abasement voluntarily undertaken there is exceeding brightness and exaltation; for how is the sun a sun save that daily he dippeth in darkness, to rise again freshly majestic? So then, be mine the example, O people of the City of Shagpat!'

Thereupon lo, the King descended from his throne, and stripped to the loins, flinging away his glittering crown and his robes, and abased himself to the dust with loud cries and importunities and howls, and penitential ejaculations and sobbings; and it was in that Hall as when the sun goeth down in storm. Likewise the ministers of the King, and the Viziers and Emirs and officers of state, and slaves, and soldiers of the guard, bared their limbs, and fell beside the King with violent outcries and wailings; and the whole of the people in the Hall prostrated their bodies with wailings and lamentations. And Baba Mustapha feigned to bewail himself, and Noorna bin Noorka knelt beside Kadza, and shrieked loudest, striking her breast and scattering her hair; and that Hall was as a pit full of serpents writhing, and of tigers and lions and wild beasts howling, each pitching his howl a note above his neighbours, so that the tone rose and sank, and there was no one soul erect in that Hall save Shagpat, he on his throne of cushions smiling behind the lathers, inanimate, serene as they that sin not. After an hour's lapse there came a pause, and the people hearkened for the voice of the King; but in the intervals a louder moan would strike their ears, and they whispered among themselves, "Tis that of the fakir, El Zoop!' and the moaning and howling prevailed again. And again they heard another moan, a deep one, as of the earth in its throes, and said among themselves, ''Tis that of Bootlbac, the drumbeater!' and this led off to the howl of Areep, the dervish; and this was followed by the shriek of Zeel, the garlic-seller; and the waul of Krooz el Krazawik, the carrier; and the complainings of Dob, the confectioner; and the groan of Sallap, the broker; and the yell of Azawool,

Page 157

the builder. There would have been no end to it known; but the King rose and commenced plucking his beard and his hair,—they likewise in silence. When he had performed this ceremony a space, the King called, and a basin of water was brought to him, and handed round by slaves, and all dipped in it their hands, and renewed their countenances and re-arranged their limbs; and the Hall brightened with the eye of the King, and he cried, 'O people, lo, the plot is revealed to me, and 'tis a deep one; but, by this beard, we'll strike at the root of it, and a blow of deadliness. Surely we have humiliated ourselves, and vengeance is ours! How say ye?'

A noise like the first sullen growl of a vexed wild beast which telleth that fury is fast travelling and the teeth will flash, followed these words; and the King called to his soldiers of the guard, 'Ho! forth with this wretch that dared defile Shagpat, the holy one! and on your heads be it to fetch hither Feshnavat, the son of Feil, that was my Vizier, he that was envious of Shagpat, and whom we spared in our clemency.'

Some of the guard went from the Hall to fulfil the King's injunction on Feshnavat, others thrust forth Baba Mustapha in the eyes of the King. Baba Mustapha was quaking as a frog quaketh for water, and he trembled and was a tongueless creature deserted of his lower limbs, and with eyeballs goggling, through exceeding terror. Now, when the King saw him, he contracted his brows as one that peereth on a small and minute object, crying, 'How! is't such as he, this monster of audaciousness and horrible presumption? Truly 'tis said:

> "For ruin and the deeds preluding change,
> Fear not great Beasts, nor Eagles when they range:
> But dread the crawling worm or pismire mean,
> Satan selects them, for they are unseen."

And this wretch is even of that sort, the select of Satan! Off with the top of the reptile, and away with him!'

Now, at the issue of the mandate Baba Mustapha choked, and horror blocked the throat of confession in him, so that he did nought save stagger imploringly; but the prompting of Noorna sent Kadza to the foot of the throne, and Kadza bent her body and exclaimed, 'O King of the age! 'tis Kadza, the espoused of Shagpat thy servant, that speaketh; and lo! a wise woman has said in my ear, "How if this emissary and instrument of the Evil One, this barber, this filthy fellow, be made to essay on Shagpat before the people his science and his malice? for 'tis certain that Shagpat is surrounded where he sitteth by Genii invisible, defended by them, and no harm can hap to him, but an illumination of glory and triumph manifest": and for this barber, his punishment can afterwards be looked to, O great King!'

The King mused awhile and sank in his beard. Then said he to them that had hold of Baba Mustapha watching for the signal, 'I have thought over it, and the means of

bringing double honour on the head of Shagpat. So release this fellow, and put in his hands the tackle taken from him.’

Page 158

This was done, and the people applauded the wisdom of the King, and crowded forward with sharpness of expectation; but Baba Mustapha, when he felt in his hands the tackle, the familiar instruments, strength and wit returned to him in petty measures, and he thought, 'Perchance there'll yet be time for my nephew to strike, if he fail me not; fool that I was to look for glory, and not leave the work to him, for this Shagpat is a mighty one, powerful in fleas, and it needeth something other than tackle to combat such as he. A mighty one, said I? by Allah, he's awful in his mightiness!'

So Baba Mustapha kept delaying, and feigned to sharpen the blade, and the King called to him, 'Haste! to the work! is it for thee, vile wretch, to make preparation for the accursed thing in our presence?' And the people murmured and waxed impatient, and the King called again, 'Thou'lt essay this, thou wretch, without a head, let but another minute pass.' So when Baba Mustapha could delay no longer, he sighed heavily and his trembling returned, and the power of Shagpat smote him with an invisible hand, so that he could scarce move; but dread pricked him against dread, and he advanced upon Shagpat to shear him, and assumed the briskness of the barber, and was in the act of bending over him to bring the blade into play, when, behold, one of the chamberlains of the King stood up in the presence and spake a word that troubled him, and the King rose and hurried to a balcony looking forth on the Desert, and on three sides of the Desert three separate clouds of dust were visible, and from these clouds presently emerged horsemen with spears and pennons and plumes; and he could discern the flashing of their helms and the glistening of steel-plates and armour of gold and silver. Seeing this, the colour went from the cheeks of the King and his face became as a pinched pomegranate, and he cried aloud, 'What visitation's this? Awahy! we are beset, and here's abasement brought on us without self-abasing!' Meantime these horsemen detached themselves from the main bodies and advanced at a gallop, wheeling and circling round each other, toward the walls of the city, and when they were close they lowered their arms and made signs of amity, and proclaimed their mission and the name of him they served. So tidings were brought to the King that the Lords of three cities, with vast retinues, were come, by reason of a warning, to pay homage to Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor; and these three cities were the cities of Oolb, and of Gaf, and of Shiraz, even these!

Now, when the King heard of it, he rejoiced with an exceeding joy, and arrayed himself in glory, and mounted a charger, the pride of his stables, and rode out to meet the Lords of the three cities surrounded by the horsemen of his guard. And it was within half-a-mile of the city walls that the four sovereigns met, and dismounted and saluted and embraced, and bestowed on one another kingly flatteries, and the titles of

Page 159

Cousin and Brother. So when the unctions of Royalty were over, these three Kings rode back to the city with the King that was their host, and the horsemen of the three kingdoms pitched their tents and camped outside the walls, making cheer. Then the King of the City of Shagpat related to the three Kings the story of Shagpat and the attempt that had been made on him; and in the great Hall of Justice he ordained the erecting of thrones for them whereon to sit; and they, when they had paid homage to Shagpat, sat by him there on either side. Then the King cried, 'This likewise owe we to Shagpat, our glory! See, now, how the might that's in him shall defeat the machinations of evil, O my cousins of Oolb, and of Gaf, and of Shiraz.' Thereupon he called, 'Bring forth the barber!'

So Baba Mustapha was thrust forth by the soldiers of the guard; and the King of Shiraz, who was no other than the great King Shahpushan, exclaimed, when he beheld Baba Mustapha, 'He? why, it is the prince of barbers and talkative ones! Hath he not operated on my head, the head of me in old time? Truly now, if it be in man to shave Shagpat, the hand of this barber will do it!'

And the King of Oolb peered on Baba Mustapha, crying, 'Even this fellow I bastinadoed!'

And the King of Gaf, that was Kresnuk, famous in the annals of the time, said aloud, 'I'm amazed at the pertinacity of this barber! To my court he came, searching some silly nephew, and would have shaved us all in spite of our noses; yea, talked my chief Vizier into a dead sleep, and so thinned him. And there was no safety from him save in thongs and stripes and lashes!'

Now, upon that the King of the City cried, 'Be the will of Allah achieved, and the inviolacy of Shagpat made manifest! Thou barber, thou! do thy worst to contaminate him, and take the punishment in store for thee. And if it is written thou succeed, then keep thy filthy life: small chance of that!'

Baba Mustapha remembered the poet's words:

> The abyss is worth a leap, however wide,
> When life, sweet life, is on the other side.

And he controlled himself to the mastery of his members, and stepped forward to essay once more the Shaving of Shagpat. Lo, the great Hall was breathless, nought heard save the splashing of the fountain in its fall, and the rustle of the robe of Baba Mustapha as he aired his right arm, hovering round Shagpat like a bird about the nest; and he was buzzing as a bee ere it entereth the flower, and quivered like a butterfly when 'tis fluttering over a blossom; and Baba Mustapha sniffed at Shagpat within arm's reach, fearing him, so that the people began to hum with a great rapture, and the King Shahpushan cried, 'Aha! mark him! this monkey knoweth the fire!'

Page 160

But the King of the City of Shagpat was wroth, and commanded his guards to flourish their scimitars, and the keen light cut the chords of indecision in Baba Mustapha, and drove him upon Shagpat with a dash of desperation; and lo! he stretched his hand and brought down the blade upon the head of Shagpat. Then was the might of Shagpat made manifest, for suddenly in his head the Identical rose up straight, even to a level with the roof of that hall, burning as it had been an angry flame of many fiery colours, and Baba Mustapha was hurled from him a great space like a ball that reboundeth, and he was twisting after the fashion of envenomed serpents, sprawling and spurning, and uttering cries of horror. Surely, to see that sight the four Kings and the people bit their forefingers, and winked till the water stood in their eyes, and Kadza, turning about, exclaimed, 'This owe we to the wise woman! where lurketh she?' So she called about the hall, 'wise woman! wise woman!'

Now, when she could find Noorna bin Noorka nowhere in that crowd, she shrieked exultingly, ''Twas a Genie! Wullahy! all Afrites, male and female, are in the service of Shagpat, my light, my eyes, my sun! I his moon!'

Meantime the King of the City called to Baba Mustapha, 'Hast thou had enough of barbering, O vile one? Ho! a second essay on the head of Shagpat! so shall the might that's in him be indisputable, bruited abroad, and a great load upon the four winds.'

Now, Baba Mustapha was persuaded by the scimitars of the guard to a second essay on the head of Shagpat, and the second time he was shot away from Shagpat through the crowd and great assemblage to the extreme end of the hall, where he lay writhing about, abandoned in loathliness; and he in his despondency, and despite of protestation and the slackness of his limbs, was pricked again by the scimitars of the guard to a third essay on the head of Shagpat, the people jeering at him, for they were joyous, light of heart; and lo! the third time he was shot off violently, and whirled away like a stone from a sling, even into the outer air and beyond the city walls, into the distance of waste places. And now a great cry rose from the people, as it were a song of triumph, for the Identical stood up wrathfully from the head of Shagpat, burning in brilliance, blinding to look on, he sitting inanimate beneath it; and it waxed in size and pierced through the roof of the hall, and was a sight to the streets of the city; and the horsemen camped without the walls beheld it, and marvelled, and it was as a pillar of fire to the solitudes of the Desert afar, and the wild Arab and wandering Bedouins and caravans of pilgrimage. Distant cities asked the reason of that appearance, and the cunning fakir interpreted it, and the fervent dervish expounded from it, and messengers flew from gate to gate and from land to land in exultation, and barbers hid their heads, and were friendly with the fox in his earth, because of that light.

Page 161

So the Identical burned on the head of Shagpat as in wrath, and with exceeding splendour of attraction, three nights and three days; and the fishes of the sea shoaled to the sea's surface and stared at it, and the fowls of the air congregated about the fury of the light with screams and mad flutters, till the streets and mosques and minarets and bright domes and roofs and cupolas of the City of Shagpat were blackened with scorched feathers of the vulture and the eagle and the rook and the raven and the hawk, and other birds, sacred and obscene; so was the triumph of Shagpat made manifest to men and the end of the world by the burning of the Identical three days and three nights.

THE FLASHES OF THE BLADE

Now, it was the morning of the fourth day, and lo! at the first leap of the sun of that day the flame of the Identical abated in its fierceness, and it dwindled and darkened, and tapered and flickered feebly, descending from its altitude in the heavens and through the ceiling of the Hall, and lay down to sleep among the intricate lengths and frizzled convolutions and undulating weights flowing from Shagpat, an undistinguished hair, even as the common hairs of his head. So, upon that, the four fasting Kings breathed, and from the people of the City there went up a mighty shout of gladness and congratulation at the glory they had witnessed; and they took the air deeply into their chests, and were as divers that have been long fathoms-deep under water, and ascend and puff hard and press the water from their eyes, that yet refuse to acknowledge with a recognition the things that be and the sights above, so mazed are they with those unmentionable marvels and treasures and profusion of jewels, and splendid lazy growths and lavish filmy illuminations, and multitudinous pearls and sheering shells, that lie heaped in the beds of the ocean. As the poet has said:

After too strong a beam,
Too bright a glory,
We ask, Is this a dream
Or magic story?

And he says:

When I've had rapturous visions such as make
The sun turn pale, and suddenly awake,
Long must I pull at memory in this beard,
Ere I remember men and things revered.

So was it with the people of the City, and they stood in the Hall and winked staringly at one another, shouting and dancing at intervals, capering with mad gravity, exclaiming on the greatness of that they had witnessed. And Zeel the garlic-seller fell upon Mob the confectioner, and cried, 'Was this so, O Dob? Wullahy! this glory, was it verily?' And

Dob peered dimly upon Zeel, whispering solemnly, ’Say, now, art thou of a surety that Zeel the garlic-seller known to me, my boon-fellow?’ And the twain turned to Sallap the broker, and exchanged interjections with him, and with Azawool the builder, and with Krooz el Krazawik the carrier; and they accosted Bootlbac the drum-beater, where he stood apart, drumming the

Page 162

air as to a march of triumph, and no word would he utter, neither to Zeel, nor to Sallap, nor to Krooz el Krazawik, nor to Azawool his neighbour, nor to any present, but continued drumming on the air rapidly as in answer, increasing in the swiftness of his drumming till it was a rage to mark him, and the excitement about Bootlbac became as a mad eddy in the midst of a mighty stream, he drumming the air with exceeding swiftness to various measures, beating before him as on the tightened skin, lost to all presences save the Identical and Shagpat. So they edged away from Bootlbac in awe, saying, 'He's inspired, Bootlbac! 'tis the triumph of Shagpat he drummeth.' They feigned to listen to him till their ears deceived them, and they rejoiced in the velocity of the soundless tune of Bootlbac the drum-beater, and were stirred by it, excited to a forgetfulness of their fasting. Such was the force of the inspiration of Bootlbac the drum-beater, caused by the burning of the Identical.

Now, the four Kings, when they had mastered their wits, gazed in silence on Shagpat, and sighed and shook their heads, and were as they that have swallowed a potent draught and ponder sagely over the gulp. Surely, the visages of the Kings of Shiraz and of Gaf and of Oolb betokened dread of Shagpat and amazement at him; but the King of the City exulted, and the shining of content was on his countenance, and he cried, 'Wondrous!' and again, 'Wullahy, wondrous!' and 'Oh, glory!' And he laughed and clucked and chuckled, and the triumph of Shagpat was to him as a new jewel in his crown outshining all others, and he was for awhile as the cock smitten with the pride of his comb, the peacock magnified by admiration of his tail. Then he cried, 'For this, praise we Allah and the Prophet. Wullahy, 'twas wondrous!' and he went off again into a roll of cluckings and chucklings and exclamations of delight, crying, 'Need they further proof of the power in Shagpat now? Has he not manifested it? So true is that saying—

> "The friend that flattereth weakeneth at length;
> It is the foe that calleth forth our strength."

Wondrous! and never knew earth a thing to equal it in the range of marvels!'

Now, ere the last word was spoken by the King, there passed through the sky a mighty flash. Those in the Hall saw it, and the horsemen of the three cities encamped without the walls were nigh blinded by the keenness of its blaze. So they looked into the height, and saw straight over the City a speck of cloud, but no thunder came from it; and the King cried, 'These be Genii! the issue of this miracle is yet to come! look for it, and exult.' Then he turned to the other Kings, but they were leaning to right and left in their seats, as do the intoxicated, without strength to answer his questioning. So he exclaimed, 'A curse on my head! have I forgotten the laws of hospitality? my cousins are famished!' He was giving orders for the spreading of a sumptuous

Page 163

banquet when there passed through the sky another mighty flash. They awaited the thunder this time confidently, yet none came. Suddenly the King exclaimed, ''Tis the wrath of Shagpat that his assailants remain uncastigated!' Then cried he to the eunuchs of the guard, 'Hither with Feshnavat, the son of Feil!' And the King said to Feshnavat, 'Thou plotter! envious of Shagpat!' Here the King, Kresnuk, fell forward at the feet of Shagpat from sheer inanition, and the King of the City ordered instantly wines and viands to be brought into the Hall, and commenced saying to Feshnavat, in the words of the wise entablature:

'"Of reckless mercy thus the Sage declared:
More culpable the sparer than the spared;
For he that breaks one law, breaks one alone:
But who thwarts Justice flouts Law's sovereign throne."

And have I not been over-merciful in thy case?'

As the King was haranguing Feshnavat, his nostril took in the steam of the viands and the fresh odours of the wines, and he could delay no longer to satisfy his craving, but caught up the goblet, and drank from it till his visage streamed the tears of contentment. Lo, while he put forth his hand tremblingly, as to continue the words of his condemnation of the Vizier, the heavens were severed by a third flash, one exceeding in fierceness the other flashes; and now the Great Hall rocked, and the pillars and thrones trembled, and the eyes of Shagpat opened. He made no motion, but sat like a wonder of stone, looking before him. Surely, Kadza shrieked, and rushed forward to him from the crowd, yet he said nothing, and was as one frozen. So the King cried, 'He waketh! the flashes preceded his wakening! Now shall he see the vengeance of kings on his enemies.' Thereupon he made a signal, and the scimitars of the guard were in air over the head of Feshnavat, when darkness as of the dropping of night fell upon all, and the darkness spake, saying, 'I am Abarak of the Bar, preceder of the Event!'

Then it was light, but the ears of every soul present were pierced with the wailing of wild animals, and on all sides from the Desert hundreds of them were seen making toward the City, some swiftly, others at a heavy pace; and when they were come near they crouched and fawned, and dropped their dry tongues as in awe. There was the serpent, meek as before the days of sin, and the leopard slinking to get among the legs of men, and the lion came trundling along in utter flabbiness, raising not his head. Soon the streets were thronged with elephants and lions and sullen tigers, and wild cats and wolves, not a tail erect among them: great was the marvel! So the King cried, 'We 're in the thick of wonders; banquet we lightly while they increase upon us! What's yonder little man?' This was Abarak that stood before the King, and exclaimed, 'I am the darkness that announceth the mastery of the Event, as a shadow before the sun's approach, and it is the Shaving of Shagpat!' The world

Page 164

darkened before the eyes of the King when he heard this, and in a moment Abarak was clutched by the soldiers of the guard, and dragged beside Feshnavat to await the final blow; and this would have parted two heads from two bodies at one stroke, but now Noorna bin Noorka entered the hall, veiled and in the bright garb of a bride, with veiled attendants about her, and the people opened to give her passage to the throne of the King. So she said, 'Delay the stroke yet awhile, O Head of the Magnanimous! I am she claimed by Shagpat; surely, I am bride of him that is Master of the Event, and the hour of bridals is the hour of clemency.'

The King looked at Shagpat, perplexed; but the eye of Shagpat gazed as into the distance of another world. Then said he, 'We shall hear nought from the mouth of Shagpat till he is avenged, and till then he is silent with exceeding wrath.' Hearing this, Noorna ran quickly to a window of the Hall, and let loose a white dove from her bosom.

Then came there that flash which is recorded in old traditions as the fourth of the flashes of thunderless lightnings, after the passing of which, hundreds of fakirs that had been awaiting it saw nothing further on this earth. Down through the Hall it swept; and lo! when the Kings and the people recovered their sight to regard Shagpat, he was, one side of him, clean shorn, the shaven side shining as the very moon!

Surely from that moment there was no longer aught mortal in the combat that ensued. For now, while amazement and horror palsied all present, the Genie Karaz, uttering a howl of fury, shot down the length of the Hall like a black storm-bolt, and caught up Shagpat, and whirled off with him into the air; and they beheld him dive and dodge the lightnings that beset him from upper heaven, catching Shagpat from them, now by the heels, now by the hair remaining one side his head. This lasted a full hour, when the Genie paused a second, and made a sheer descent into the earth. Then saw they the wings of Koorookh, each a league in length, overshadow the entire land, and on the neck of the bird sat Shibli Bagarag cleaving through the earth with his blade, and he sat on Koorookh as the moon sits on the midnight. There was no light save the light shed abroad by the flashes of the blade, and in these they beheld the air suffocated with Afrites and Genii in a red and brown and white heat, followers of Karaz. Strokes of the blade clove them, and their blood was fire that flowed over the feathers of Koorookh, lighting him in a conflagration; but the bird flew constantly to a fountain of earth below and extinguished it. Then the battle recommenced, and the solid earth yawned at the gashes made by the mighty blade, and its depths revealed how Karaz was flying with Shagpat from circle to circle of the under-regions, hurrying with him downward to the lowest circle, that was flaming to points, like the hair of vast heads. Presently they saw a wondrous quivering flash divide the Genie, and his heels and head fell together in the abysses, leaving Shagpat prone on great brasiers of penal flame. Then the blade made another hissing sweep over Shagpat, leaving little of the wondrous growths on him save a topknot.

Page 165

But now was the hour struck when Rabesqurat could be held no longer serving the ferry in Aklis; and the terrible Queen streamed in the sky, like a red disastrous comet, and dived, eagle-like, into the depths, re-ascending with Shagpat in her arms, cherishing him; and lo, there were suddenly a thousand Shagpats multiplied about, and the hand of Shibli Bagarag became exhausted with hewing at them. The scornful laugh of the Queen was heard throughout earth as she triumphed over Shibli Bagarag with hundreds of Shagpats, Illusions; and he knew not where to strike at the Shagpat, and was losing all sleight of hand, dexterity, and cunning. Noorna shrieked, thinking him lost; but Abarak seized his bar, and leaning it in the direction of Aklis, blew a pellet from it that struck on the eye of Aklis, and this sent out a stretching finger of beams, and singled forth very Shagpat from the myriads of semblances, so that he glowed and was ruddy, the rest cowering pale, and dissolving like salt-grains in water.

Then saw earth and its inhabitants how the Genie Karaz re-ascended in the shape of a vulture with a fire beak, pecking at the eyes of him that wielded the Sword, so that he was bewildered and shook this way and that over the neck of Koorookh, striking wildly, languidly cleaving towers and palaces, and monuments of earth underneath him. Now, Shibli Bagarag discerned his danger, and considered, 'The power of the Sword is to sever brains and thoughts. Great is Allah! I'll seek my advantage in that.'

So he whirled Koorookh thrice in the crimson smoke of the atmosphere, and put the blade between the first and second thought in the head of Rabesqurat, whereby the sense of the combat became immediately confused in her mind, and she used her powers as the fool does, equally against all, for the sake of mischief solely—no longer mistress of her own Illusions; and she began doubling and trebling Shibli Bagarag on the neck of monstrous birds, speeding in draggled flightiness from one point of the sky to another. Even in the terror of the combat, Shibli Bagarag was fair to burst into a fit of violent laughter at the sight of the Queen wagging her neck loosely, perking it like a mad raven; and he took heart, and swept the blade rapidly over Shagpat as she dandled him, leaving Shagpat but one hair remaining on him; yet was that the Identical; and it arose, and was a serpent in his head, and from its jaws issued a river of fiery serpents: these and a host of Afrites besieged Shibli Bagarag; and now, to defend himself, he unloosed the twin Genii, Karavejis and Veejravoosh, from the wrist of that hand which wielded the Sword of Aklis, and these alternately interwound before and about him, and were even as a glittering armour of emerald plates, warding from him the assaults of the host; and lo! he flew, and the battle followed him over blazing cities and lands on fire with the slanting hail of sparkles.

Page 166

By this time every soul in the City of Shagpat, kings and people, all save Abarak and Noorna bin Noorka, were overcome and prostrate with their faces to the ground; but Noorna watched the conflict eagerly, and saw the head of Shagpat sprouting incessant fresh crops of hair, despite the pertinacious shearing of her betrothed. Then she smote her hands, and cried, 'Yea! though I lose my beauty and the love of my betrothed, I must join in this, or he'll be lost.' So, saying to Abarak, 'Watch over me,' she went into the air, and, as she passed Rabesqurat, was multiplied into twenty damsels of loveliness. Then Abarak beheld a scorpion following the twenty in mid-air, and darting stings among them. Noorna tossed a ring, and it fell in a circle of flame round the scorpion. So, while the scorpion was shooting in squares to escape from the circle, the fire-beaked vulture flew to it, and fluttered a dense rain which swallowed the flame, and the scorpion and vulture assailed Noorna, that was changed to a golden hawk in the midst of nineteen other golden hawks. Now, as Rabesqurat came scudding by, and saw the encounter, she made the twenty hawks a hundred. The Genie Karaz howled at her, and pinioned her to a pillar below in the Desert, with Shagpat in her arms. But, as he soared aloft to renew the fight with Noorna, Shibli Bagarag loosed to her aid the Slaves of the Sword, and Abarak marked him slope to a distant corner of earth, and reascend in a cloud, which drew swiftly over the land toward the Great Hall. Lo, Shibli Bagarag stepped from it through a casement of the Hall, and with him Shagpat, a slack weight, mated out of all power of motion. Koorookh swooped low, on his back Baba Mustapha, and Shibli Bagarag flung Abarak beside him on the bird. Then Koorookh whirred off with them; and while the heavens raged, Shibli Bagarag prepared a rapid lather, and dashed it over Shagpat, and commenced shearing him with lightning sweeps of the blade. 'Twas as a racing wheel of fire to see him! Suddenly he desisted, and wiped the sweat from his face. Then calling on the name of Allah, he gave a last keen cunning sweep with the blade, and following that, the earth awfully quaked and groaned, as if speaking in the abysmal tongue the Mastery of the Event to all men. Aklis was revealed in burning beams as of a sun, and the trouble of the air ceased, vapours slowly curling to the four quarters. Shibli Bagarag had smitten clean through the Identical! Terribly had Noorna and those that aided her been oppressed by the multitude of their enemies; but, in a moment these melted away, and Karaz, together with the scorpion that was Goorelka, vanished. Day was on the baldness of Shagpat.

CONCLUSION

So was shaved Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor, the son of Shoolpi, the son of Shullum, by Shibli Bagarag, of Shiraz, according to preordainment.

The chronicles relate, that no sooner had he mastered the Event, than men on the instant perceived what illusion had beguiled them, and, in the words of the poet,—

Page 167

The blush with which their folly they confess
Is the first prize of his supreme success.

Even Bootlbac, the drum-beater, drummed in homage to him, and the four Kings were they that were loudest in their revilings of the spouse of Kadza, and most obsequious in praises of the Master. The King of the City was fain to propitiate his people by a voluntary resignation of his throne to Shibli Bagarag, and that King took well to heart the wisdom of the sage, when he says:

Power, on Illusion based, o'ertoppeth all;
The more disastrous is its certain fall!

Surely Shibli Bagarag returned the Sword to the Sons of Aklis, flashing it in midnight air, and they, with the others, did reverence to his achievement. They were now released from the toil of sharpening the Sword a half-cycle of years, to wander in delight on the fair surface of the flowery earth, breathing its roses, wooing its brides; for the mastery of an Event lasteth among men the space of one cycle of years, and after that a fresh Illusion springeth to befool mankind, and the Seven must expend the concluding half-cycle in preparing the edge of the Sword for a new mastery. As the poet declareth in his scorn:

Some doubt Eternity: from life begun,
Has folly ceased within them, sire to son?
So, ever fresh Illusions will arise
And lord creation, until men are wise.

And he adds:

That is a distant period; so prepare
To fight the false, O youths, and never spare!
For who would live in chronicles renowned
Must combat folly, or as fool be crowned.

Now, for the Kings of Shiraz and of Gaf, Shibli Bagarag entertained them in honour; but the King of Oolb he disgraced and stripped of his robes, to invest Baba Mustapha in those royal emblems—a punishment to the treachery of the King of Oolb, as is said by Aboo Eznol:

When nations with opposing forces, rash,
Shatter each other, thou that wouldst have stood
Apart to profit by the monstrous feud,
Thou art the surest victim of the crash.

Take colours of whichever side thou wilt,
And stedfastly thyself in battle range;
Yet, having taken, shouldst thou dare to change,
Suspicion hunts thee as a thing of guilt.

Baba Mustapha, was pronounced Sovereign of Oolb, amid the acclamations of the guard encamped under the command of Ravaloke, without the walls.

No less did Shibli Bagarag honour the benefactor of Noorna, making him chief of his armies; and he, with his own hand, bestowed on the good old warrior the dress of honour presented to him by the Seven Sons, charactered with all the mysteries of Aklis, a marvel lost to men in the failure to master the Illusion now dominating earth.

Page 168

So, then, of all that had worshipped Shagpat, only Kadza clung to him, and she departed with him into the realms of Rabesqurat, who reigned there, divided against herself by the stroke of the Sword. The Queen is no longer mighty, for the widening of her power has weakened it, she being now the mistress of the single-thoughted, and them that follow one idea to the exclusion of a second. The failure in the unveiling of her last-cherished Illusion was in the succumbing frailty of him that undertook the task, the world and its wise men having come to the belief that in thwackings there was ignominy to the soul of man, and a tarnish on the lustre of heroes. On that score, hear the words of the poet, a vain protest:

Ye that nourish hopes of fame!
Ye who would be known in song!
Ponder old history, and duly frame
Your souls to meek acceptance of the thong.

Lo! of hundreds who aspire,
Eighties perish-nineties tire!
They who bear up, in spite of wrecks and wracks,
Were season ’d by celestial hail of thwacks.

Fortune in this mortal race
Builds on thwackings for its base;
Thus the All-Wise doth make a flail a staff,
And separates his heavenly corn from chaff.

Think ye, had he never known
Noorna a belabouring crone,
Shibli Bagarag would have shaved Shagpat
The unthwack’d lives in chronicle a rat!

’Tis the thwacking in this den
Maketh lions of true men!
So are we nerved to break the clinging mesh
Which tames the noblest efforts of poor flesh.

Feshnavat became the Master’s Vizier, and Abarak remained at the right hand of Shibli Bagarag, his slave in great adventure. No other condition than bondage gave peace to Abarak. He was of the class enumerated by the sage:

Who, with the strength of giants, are but tools,
The weighty hands which serve selected fools.

Now, this was how it was in the case of Baba Mustapha, and the four Kings, and Feshnavat, and Abarak, and Ravaloke, and Kadza, together with Shagpat; but, in the

case of Noorna bin Noorka, surely she was withering from a sting of the scorpion shot against her bosom, but the Seven Sons of Aklis gave her a pass into Aklis on the wings of Koorookh, and Gulrevaz, the daughter of Aklis, tended her, she that was alone capable of restoring her, and counteracting the malice of the scorpion by the hand of purity. So Noorna, prospered; but Shibli Bagarag drooped in uncertainty of her state, and was as a reaper in a field of harvest, around whom lie the yellow sheaves, and the brown beam of autumn on his head, the blaze of plenty; yet is he joyless and stands musing, for one is away who should be there, and without whom the goblet of Success giveth an unsweetened draught, and there is nothing pleasant in life, and the flower on the summit of achievement is blighted. At last, as he was listlessly dispensing justice in the Great Hall, seven days after the mastery of the Event, lo, Noorna, in air, borne by Gulrevaz, she fair and fresh in the revival of health and beauty, and the light of constant love. Of her entry into the Great Hall, to the embrace of her betrothed, the poet exclaims, picturing her in a rapture:

Page 169

Her march is music, and my soul obeys
 Each motion, as a lute to cunning fingers
I see the earth throb for her as she sways
 Wave-like in air, and like a great flower lingers
Heavily over all, as loath to leave
What loves her so, and for her loss would grieve.

But oh, what other hand than heaven's can paint
 Her eyes, and that black bow from which their lightning
Pierces afar! long lustrous eyes, that faint
 In languor, or with stormy passion brightening:
Within them world in world lights up from sleep,
And gives a glimpse of the eternal deep.

Sigh round her, odorous winds; and, envious rose,
 So vainly envious, with such blushes gifted,
Bow to her; die, strangled with jealous throes,
 O Bulbul! when she sings with brow uplifted;
Gather her, happy youth, and for thy gain
Thank Him who could such loveliness ordain.

Surely the Master of the Event advanced to her in the glory of a Sultan, and seated her beside him in majesty, and their contract of marriage was read aloud in the Hall, and witnessed, and sealed: joyful was he! Then commenced that festival which lasted forty days, and is termed the Festival of the honours of hospitality to the Sons of Aldis, wherein the head-cook of the palace, Uruish, performed wonders in his science, and menaced the renown of Zrmack, the head-cook of King Shamshureen. Even so the confectioner, Dob, excelled himself in devices and inventions, and his genius urged him to depict in sugars and pastes the entire adventures of Shibli Bagarag in search of the Sword. Honour we Uruish and Do-b! as the poet sayeth:

> Divide not this fraternal twain;
> One are they, and one should for ever remain:
> As to sweet close in fine music we look,
> So the Confectioner follows the Cook.

And one of the Sons of Aklis, Zaragal, beholding this masterpiece of Dob, which was served to the guests in the Great Hall on the fortieth evening, was fair to exclaim in extemporaneous verse:

> Have I been wafted to a rise
> Of banquet spread in Paradise,
> Dower'd with consuming powers divine;—
> That I, who have not fail'd to dine,

And greatly,
Fall thus upon the cater and wine
Sedately?

So there was feasting in the Hall, and in the City, and over Earth; great pledging the Sovereign of Barbers, who had mastered an Event, and become the benefactor of his craft and of his kind. 'Tis certain the race of the Bagarags endured for many centuries, and his seed were the rulers of men, and the seal of their empire stamped on mighty wax the Tackle of Barbers.

Page 170

Now, of the promise made by the Sons of Aklis to visit Shibli Bagarag before their compulsory return to the labour of the Sword, and recount to him the marvel of their antecedent adventures; and of the love and grief nourished in the souls of men by the beauty and sorrowful eyes of Gulrevaz, that was mined the Bleeding Lily, and of her engagement to tell her story, on condition of receiving the first-born of Noorna to nurse for a season in Aklis; and of Shibli Bagarag's restoration of towns and monuments destroyed by his battle with Karaz; and of the constancy of passion of Shibli Bagarag for Noorna, and his esteem for her sweetness, and his reverence for her wisdom; and of the glory of his reign, and of the Songs and Sentences of Noorna, and of his Laws for the protection and upholding of women, in honour of Noorna, concerning which the Sage has said:

> Were men once clad in them, we should create
> A race not following, but commanding, fate:

—of all these records, and of the reign of Baba Mustapha in Oolb, surely the chronicles give them in fulness; and they that have searched say of them, there is matter therein for the amusement of generations.

Etext editor's bookmarks

A woman's at the core of every plot man plotteth
Arm'd with Fear the Foe finds passage to the vital part
Delay in thine undertaking Is disaster of thy own making
Every failure is a step advanced
Failures oft are but advising friends
Fear nought so much as Fear itself
How little a thing serves Fortune's turn
If thou wouldst fix remembrance—thwack!
Lest thou commence to lie—be dumb!
Like an ill-reared fruit, first at the core it rotteth
More culpable the sparer than the spared
No runner can outstrip his fate
Nought credit but what outward orbs reveal
Persist, if thou wouldst truly reach thine ends
Ripe with oft telling and old is the tale
The curse of sorrow is comparison!
The king without his crown hath a forehead like the clown
The overwise themselves hoodwink
'Tis the first step that makes a path
Too often hangs the house on one loose stone
Vanity maketh the strongest most weak
When to loquacious fools with patience rare I listen

Where fools are the fathers of every miracle
Who in a labyrinth wandereth without clue

THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

By George Meredith

1905

Contents

I. *The inmates of Raynham abbey*
ii. *Fates selected the fourteenth birthday to try the strength*
III. *The Magian conflict*
iv. *Arson*

Page 171

V. *Adrian plies his hook*
vi. *Juvenile stratagems*
VII. *Daphne's bower*
viii. *The bitter cup*
IX. A *fine distinction*
X. *Richard passes through his preliminary ordeal*
xi. *The last act of the Bakewell comedy is closed in* A *letter*
XII. *The blossoming season*
XIII. *The magnetic age*
xiv. *An attraction*
XV. *Ferdinand and Miranda*
XVI. UNMASKING *of master Ripton Thompson*
xvii. *Good wine and good blood*
XVIII. *The system encounters the wild oats special plea*
XIX. A *diversion played on* A *penny whistle*
XX. *Celebrates the time-honoured treatment of* A *dragon by the hero*
XXI. *Richard is summoned to town to hear* A *sermon*
XXII. *Indicates the approaches of fever*
XXIII. *Crisis in the apple-disease*
XXIV. *Of the spring primrose and the autumnal*
XXV. *In which the hero takes* A *step*
XXVI. *Records the rapid development of the hero*
XXVII. *Contains an intercession for the heroine*
XXVIII. *Preparations for action were conducted under the April of lovers*
XIX. *The last act of the comedy takes the place of the first*
XXX. *Celebrates the breakfast*
XXXI. *The philosopher appears in person*
XXXII. *Procession of the cake*
XXXIII. *Nursing the devil*
XXXIV. *Conquest of an epicure*
XXXV. *Clare's marriage*
XXXVI. A *dinner-party at Richmond*
XXXVII. *Mrs*. *Berry on matrimony*
XXXVIII. *An enchantress*
XXXIX. *The little bird and the falcon*: A *berry to the rescue*!
XL. *Clare's diary*
XLI. *Austin returns*
XLII. *Nature speaks*
XLIII. *Again the Magian conflict*
XLIV. *The last scene*
XLV. *Lady blandish to Austin Wentworth*

Page 172

CHAPTER I

Some years ago a book was published under the title of “The Pilgrim’s Scrip.” It consisted of a selection of original aphorisms by an anonymous gentleman, who in this bashful manner gave a bruised heart to the world.

He made no pretension to novelty. “Our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms,” he wrote; by which avowal it may be seen that youth had manifestly gone from him, since he had ceased to be jealous of the ancients. There was a half-sigh floating through his pages for those days of intellectual coxcombry, when ideas come to us affecting the embraces of virgins, and swear to us they are ours alone, and no one else have they ever visited: and we believe them.

For an example of his ideas of the sex he said:

“I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man.”

Some excitement was produced in the bosoms of ladies by so monstrous a scorn of them.

One adventurous person betook herself to the Heralds’ College, and there ascertained that a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves, which stood on the title-page of the book, formed the crest of Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, Baronet, of Raynham Abbey, in a certain Western county folding Thames: a man of wealth and honour, and a somewhat lamentable history.

The outline of the baronet’s story was by no means new. He had a wife, and he had a friend. His marriage was for love; his wife was a beauty; his friend was a sort of poet. His wife had his whole heart, and his friend all his confidence. When he selected Denzil Somers from among his college chums, it was not on account of any similarity of disposition between them, but from his intense worship of genius, which made him overlook the absence of principle in his associate for the sake of such brilliant promise. Denzil had a small patrimony to lead off with, and that he dissipated before he left college; thenceforth he was dependent upon his admirer, with whom he lived, filling a nominal post of bailiff to the estates, and launching forth verse of some satiric and sentimental quality; for being inclined to vice, and occasionally, and in a quiet way, practising it, he was of course a sentimentalist and a satirist, entitled to lash the Age and complain of human nature. His earlier poems, published under the pseudonym of Diaper Sandoe, were so pure and bloodless in their love passages, and at the same time so biting in their moral tone, that his reputation was great among the virtuous, who form the larger portion of the English book-buying public. Election-seasons called him to ballad-poetry on behalf of the Tory party. Dialer possessed undoubted fluency, but did tittle, though Sir Austin was ever expecting much of him.

Page 173

A languishing, inexperienced woman, whose husband in mental and in moral stature is more than the ordinary height above her, and who, now that her first romantic admiration of his lofty bearing has worn off, and her fretful little refinements of taste and sentiment are not instinctively responded to, is thrown into no wholesome household collision with a fluent man, fluent in prose and rhyme. Lady Feverel, when she first entered on her duties at Raynham, was jealous of her husband's friend. By degrees she tolerated him. In time he touched his guitar in her chamber, and they played Rizzio and Mary together.

> "For I am not the first who found
> The name of Mary fatal!"

says a subsequent sentimental alliterative love-poem of Diaper's.

Such was the outline of the story. But the baronet could fill it up. He had opened his soul to these two. He had been noble Love to the one, and to the other perfect Friendship. He had bid them be brother and sister whom he loved, and live a Golden Age with him at Raynham. In fact, he had been prodigal of the excellences of his nature, which it is not good to be, and, like Timon, he became bankrupt, and fell upon bitterness.

The faithless lady was of no particular family; an orphan daughter of an admiral who educated her on his half-pay, and her conduct struck but at the man whose name she bore.

After five years of marriage, and twelve of friendship, Sir Austin was left to his loneliness with nothing to ease his heart of love upon save a little baby boy in a cradle. He forgave the man: he put him aside as poor for his wrath. The woman he could not forgive; she had sinned every way. Simple ingratitude to a benefactor was a pardonable transgression, for he was not one to recount and crush the culprit under the heap of his good deeds. But her he had raised to be his equal, and he judged her as his equal. She had blackened the world's fair aspect for him.

In the presence of that world, so different to him now, he preserved his wonted demeanor, and made his features a flexible mask. Mrs. Doria Forey, his widowed sister, said that Austin might have retired from his Parliamentary career for a time, and given up gaieties and that kind of thing; her opinion, founded on observation of him in public and private, was, that the light thing who had taken flight was but a feather on her brother's Feverel-heart, and his ordinary course of life would be resumed. There are times when common men cannot bear the weight of just so much. Hippias Feverel, one of his brothers, thought him immensely improved by his misfortune, if the loss of such a person could be so designated; and seeing that Hippias received in consequence free quarters at Raynham, and possession of the wing of the Abbey she had inhabited, it is profitable to know his thoughts. If the baronet had given two or three blazing dinners in

the great hall he would have deceived people generally, as he did his relatives and intimates. He was too sick for that: fit only for passive acting.

Page 174

The nursemaid waking in the night beheld a solitary figure darkening a lamp above her little sleeping charge, and became so used to the sight as never to wake with a start. One night she was strangely aroused by a sound of sobbing. The baronet stood beside the cot in his long black cloak and travelling cap. His fingers shaded a lamp, and reddened against the fitful darkness that ever and anon went leaping up the wall. She could hardly believe her senses to see the austere gentleman, dead silent, dropping tear upon tear before her eyes. She lay stone-still in a trance of terror and mournfulness, mechanically counting the tears as they fell, one by one. The hidden face, the fall and flash of those heavy drops in the light of the lamp he held, the upright, awful figure, agitated at regular intervals like a piece of clockwork by the low murderous catch of his breath: it was so piteous to her poor human nature that her heart began wildly palpitating. Involuntarily the poor girl cried out to him, “Oh, sir!” and fell a-weeping. Sir Austin turned the lamp on her pillow, and harshly bade her go to sleep, striding from the room forthwith. He dismissed her with a purse the next day.

Once, when he was seven years old, the little fellow woke up at night to see a lady bending over him. He talked of this the neat day, but it was treated as a dream; until in the course of the day his uncle Algernon was driven home from Lobourne cricket-ground with a broken leg. Then it was recollected that there was a family ghost; and, though no member of the family believed in the ghost, none would have given up a circumstance that testified to its existence; for to possess a ghost is a distinction above titles.

Algernon Feverel lost his leg, and ceased to be a gentleman in the Guards. Of the other uncles of young Richard, Cuthbert, the sailor, perished in a spirited boat expedition against a slaving negro chief up the Niger. Some of the gallant lieutenant’s trophies of war decorated the little boy’s play-shed at Raynham, and he bequeathed his sword to Richard, whose hero he was. The diplomatist and beau, Vivian, ended his flutterings from flower to flower by making an improper marriage, as is the fate of many a beau, and was struck out of the list of visitors. Algernon generally occupied the baronet’s disused town-house, a wretched being, dividing his time between horse and card exercise: possessed, it was said, of the absurd notion that a man who has lost his balance by losing his leg may regain it by sticking to the bottle. At least, whenever he and his brother Hippias got together, they never failed to try whether one leg, or two, stood the bottle best. Much of a puritan as Sir Austin was in his habits, he was too good a host, and too thorough a gentleman, to impose them upon his guests. The brothers, and other relatives, might do as they would while they did not disgrace the name, and then it was final: they must depart to behold his countenance no more.

Page 175

Algernon Feverel was a simple man, who felt, subsequent to his misfortune, as he had perhaps dimly fancied it before, that his career lay in his legs, and was now irrevocably cut short. He taught the boy boxing, and shooting, and the arts of fence, and superintended the direction of his animal vigour with a melancholy vivacity. The remaining energies of Algernon's mind were devoted to animadversions on swift bowling. He preached it over the county, struggling through laborious literary compositions, addressed to sporting newspapers, on the Decline of Cricket. It was Algernon who witnessed and chronicled young Richard's first fight, which was with young Tom Blaize of Belthorpe Farm, three years the boy's senior.

Hippias Feverel was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach; and, as one is not altogether fit for the battle of life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner, Hippias forsook his prospects at the Bar, and, in the embraces of dyspepsia, compiled his ponderous work on the Fairy Mythology of Europe. He had little to do with the Hope of Raynham beyond what he endured from his juvenile tricks.

A venerable lady, known as Great-Aunt Grantley, who had money to bequeath to the heir, occupied with Hippias the background of the house and shared her candles with him. These two were seldom seen till the dinner hour, for which they were all day preparing, and probably all night remembering, for the Eighteenth Century was an admirable trencherman, and cast age aside while there was a dish on the table.

Mrs. Doris Foray was the eldest of the three sisters of the baronet, a florid affable woman, with fine teeth, exceedingly fine light wavy hair, a Norman nose, and a reputation for understanding men; and that, with these practical creatures, always means the art of managing them. She had married an expectant younger son of a good family, who deceased before the fulfilment of his prospects; and, casting about in her mind the future chances of her little daughter and sole child, Clare, she marked down a probability. The far sight, the deep determination, the resolute perseverance of her sex, where a daughter is to be provided for and a man to be overthrown, instigated her to invite herself to Raynham, where, with that daughter, she fixed herself.

The other two Feverel ladies were the wife of Colonel Wentworth and the widow of Mr. Justice Harley: and the only thing remarkable about them was that they were mothers of sons of some distinction.

Austin Wentworth's story was of that wretched character which to be comprehended, that justice should be dealt him, must be told out and openly; which no one dares now do.

For a fault in early youth, redeemed by him nobly, according to his light, he was condemned to undergo the world's harsh judgment: not for the fault—for its atonement.

“—Married his mother’s housemaid,” whispered Mrs. Doria, with a ghastly look, and a shudder at young men of republican sentiments, which he was reputed to entertain. “‘The compensation for Injustice,’ says the ‘Pilgrim’s Scrip,’ is, that in that dark Ordeal we gather the worthiest around us.”

Page 176

And the baronet's fair friend, Lady Blandish, and some few true men and women, held Austin Wentworth high.

He did not live with his wife; and Sir Austin, whose mind was bent on the future of our species, reproached him with being barren to posterity, while knaves were propagating.

The principal characteristic of the second nephew, Adrian Harley, was his sagacity. He was essentially the wise youth, both in counsel and in action.

"In action," the "Pilgrim's Scrip" observes, "Wisdom goes by majorities."

Adrian had an instinct for the majority, and, as the world invariably found him enlisted in its ranks, his appellation of wise youth was acquiesced in without irony.

The wise youth, then, had the world with him, but no friends. Nor did he wish for those troublesome appendages of success. He caused himself to be required by people who could serve him; feared by such as could injure. Not that he went out of the way to secure his end, or risked the expense of a plot. He did the work as easily as he ate his daily bread. Adrian was an epicurean; one whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his garden, certainly: an epicurean of our modern notions. To satisfy his appetites without rashly staking his character, was the wise youth's problem for life. He had no intimates except Gibbon and Horace, and the society of these fine aristocrats of literature helped him to accept humanity as it had been, and was; a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of Gods in the background. Why not laughter of mortals also? Adrian had his laugh in his comfortable corner. He possessed peculiar attributes of a heathen God. He was a disposer of men: he was polished, luxurious, and happy—at their cost. He lived in eminent self-content, as one lying on soft cloud, lapt in sunshine. Nor Jove, nor Apollo, cast eye upon the maids of earth with cooler fire of selection, or pursued them in the covert with more sacred impunity. And he enjoyed his reputation for virtue as something additional. Stolen fruits are said to be sweet; undeserved rewards are exquisite.

The best of it was, that Adrian made no pretences. He did not solicit the favourable judgment of the world. Nature and he attempted no other concealment than the ordinary mask men wear. And yet the world would proclaim him moral, as well as wise, and the pleasing converse every way of his disgraced cousin Austin.

In a word, Adrian Harley had mastered his philosophy at the early age of one-and-twenty. Many would be glad to say the same at that age twice-told: they carry in their breasts a burden with which Adrian's was not loaded. Mrs. Doria was nearly right about his heart. A singular mishap (at his birth, possibly, or before it) had unseated that organ, and shaken it down to his stomach, where it was a much lighter, nay, an inspiring weight, and encouraged him merrily onward. Throned there it looked on little that did not arrive to gratify it. Already that region was a trifle prominent in the person of the

wise youth, and carried, as it were, the flag of his philosophical tenets in front of him. He was charming after dinner, with men or with women: delightfully sarcastic: perhaps a little too unscrupulous in his moral tone, but that his moral reputation belied him, and it must be set down to generosity of disposition.

Page 177

Such was Adrian Harley, another of Sir Austin's intellectual favourites, chosen from mankind to superintend the education of his son at Raynham. Adrian had been destined for the Church. He did not enter into Orders. He and the baronet had a conference together one day, and from that time Adrian became a fixture in the Abbey. His father died in his promising son's college term, bequeathing him nothing but his legal complexion, and Adrian became stipendiary officer in his uncle's household.

A playfellow of Richard's occasionally, and the only comrade of his age that he ever saw, was Master Ripton Thompson, the son of Sir Austin's solicitor, a boy without a character.

A comrade of some description was necessary, for Richard was neither to go to school nor to college. Sir Austin considered that the schools were corrupt, and maintained that young lads might by parental vigilance be kept pretty secure from the Serpent until Eve sided with him: a period that might be deferred, he said. He had a system of education for his son. How it worked we shall see.

CHAPTER II

October, shone royally on Richard's fourteenth birthday. The brown beechwoods and golden birches glowed to a brilliant sun. Banks of moveless cloud hung about the horizon, mounded to the west, where slept the wind. Promise of a great day for Raynham, as it proved to be, though not in the manner marked out.

Already archery-booths and cricketing-tents were rising on the lower grounds towards the river, whither the lads of Bursley and Lobourne, in boats and in carts, shouting for a day of ale and honour, jogged merrily to match themselves anew, and pluck at the lining laurel from each other's brows, line manly Britons. The whole park was beginning to be astir and resound with holiday cries. Sir Austin Feverel, a thorough good Tory, was no game-preserver, and could be popular whenever he chose, which Sir Males Papworth, on the other side of the river, a fast-handed Whig and terror to poachers, never could be. Half the village of Lobourne was seen trooping through the avenues of the park. Fiddlers and gipsies clamoured at the gates for admission: white smocks, and slate, surmounted by hats of serious brim, and now and then a scarlet cloak, smacking of the old country, dotted the grassy sweeps to the levels.

And all the time the star of these festivities was receding further and further, and eclipsing himself with his reluctant serf Ripton, who kept asking what they were to do and where they were going, and how late it was in the day, and suggesting that the lads of Lobourne would be calling out for them, and Sir Austin requiring their presence, without getting any attention paid to his misery or remonstrances. For Richard had been requested by his father to submit to medical examination like a boor enlisting for a soldier, and he was in great wrath.

He was flying as though he would have flown from the shameful thought of what had been asked of him. By-and-by he communicated his sentiments to Ripton, who said they were those of a girl: an offensive remark, remembering which, Richard, after they had borrowed a couple of guns at the bailiff's farm, and Ripton had fired badly, called his friend a fool.

Page 178

Feeling that circumstances were making him look wonderfully like one, Ripton lifted his head and retorted defiantly, “I’m not!”

This angry contradiction, so very uncalled for, annoyed Richard, who was still smarting at the loss of the birds, owing to Ripton’s bad shot, and was really the injured party. He, therefore bestowed the abusive epithet on Ripton anew, and with increase of emphasis.

“You shan’t call me so, then, whether I am or not,” says Ripton, and sucks his lips.

This was becoming personal. Richard sent up his brows, and stared at his defier an instant. He then informed him that he certainly should call him so, and would not object to call him so twenty times.

“Do it, and see!” returns Ripton, rocking on his feet, and breathing quick.

With a gravity of which only boys and other barbarians are capable, Richard went through the entire number, stressing the epithet to increase the defiance and avoid monotony, as he progressed, while Ripton bobbed his head every time in assent, as it were, to his comrade’s accuracy, and as a record for his profound humiliation. The dog they had with them gazed at the extraordinary performance with interrogating wags of the tail.

Twenty times, duly and deliberately, Richard repeated the obnoxious word.

At the twentieth solemn iteration of Ripton’s capital shortcoming, Ripton delivered a smart back-hander on Richard’s mouth, and squared precipitately; perhaps sorry when the deed was done, for he was a kind-hearted lad, and as Richard simply bowed in acknowledgment of the blow he thought he had gone too far. He did not know the young gentleman he was dealing with. Richard was extremely cool.

“Shall we fight here?” he said.

“Anywhere you like,” replied Ripton.

“A little more into the wood, I think. We may be interrupted.” And Richard led the way with a courteous reserve that somewhat chilled Ripton’s ardour for the contest. On the skirts of the wood, Richard threw off his jacket and waistcoat, and, quite collected, waited for Ripton to do the same. The latter boy was flushed and restless; older and broader, but not so tight-limbed and well-set. The Gods, sole witnesses of their battle, betted dead against him. Richard had mounted the white cockade of the Feverels, and there was a look in him that asked for tough work to extinguish. His brows, slightly lined upward at the temples, converging to a knot about the well-set straight nose; his full grey eyes, open nostrils, and planted feet, and a gentlemanly air of calm and alertness, formed a spirited picture of a young combatant. As for Ripton, he was all abroad, and fought in school-boy style—that is, he rushed at the foe head foremost, and struck like a

windmill. He was a lumpy boy. When he did hit, he made himself felt; but he was at the mercy of science. To see him come dashing in, blinking and puffing and whirling his arms abroad

Page 179

while the felling blow went straight between them, you perceived that he was fighting a fight of desperation, and knew it. For the dreaded alternative glared him in the face that, if he yielded, he must look like what he had been twenty times calumniously called; and he would die rather than yield, and swing his windmill till he dropped. Poor boy! he dropped frequently. The gallant fellow fought for appearances, and down he went. The Gods favour one of two parties. Prince Turnus was a noble youth; but he had not Pallas at his elbow. Ripton was a capital boy; he had no science. He could not prove he was not a fool! When one comes to think of it, Ripton did choose the only possible way, and we should all of us have considerable difficulty in proving the negative by any other. Ripton came on the unerring fist again and again; and if it was true, as he said in short colloquial gasps, that he required as much beating as an egg to be beaten thoroughly, a fortunate interruption alone saved our friend from resembling that substance. The boys heard summoning voices, and beheld Mr. Morton of Poer Hall and Austin Wentworth stepping towards them.

A truce was sounded, jackets were caught up, guns shouldered, and off they trotted in concert through the depths of the wood, not stopping till that and half-a-dozen fields and a larch plantation were well behind them.

When they halted to take breath, there was a mutual study of faces. Ripton's was much discoloured, and looked fiercer with its natural war-paint than the boy felt. Nevertheless, he squared up dauntlessly on the new ground, and Richard, whose wrath was appeased, could not refrain from asking him whether he had not really had enough.

"Never!" shouts the noble enemy.

"Well, look here," said Richard, appealing to common sense, "I'm tired of knocking you down. I'll say you're not a fool, if you'll give me your hand."

Ripton demurred an instant to consult with honour, who bade him catch at his chance.

He held out his hand. "There!" and the boys grasped hands and were fast friends. Ripton had gained his point, and Richard decidedly had the best of it. So, they were on equal ground. Both, could claim a victory, which was all the better for their friendship.

Ripton washed his face and comforted his nose at a brook, and was now ready to follow his friend wherever he chose to lead. They continued to beat about for birds. The birds on the Raynham estates were found singularly cunning, and repeatedly eluded the aim of these prime shots, so they pushed their expedition into the lands of their neighbors, in search of a stupider race, happily oblivious of the laws and conditions of trespass; unconscious, too, that they were poaching on the demesne of the notorious Farmer Blaize, the free-trade farmer under the shield of the Papworths, no worshipper of the Griffin between two Wheatsheaves; destined to be much allied with Richard's fortunes from beginning to end. Farmer Blaize hated poachers, and, especially young chaps

poaching, who did it mostly from impudence. He heard the audacious shots popping right and left, and going forth to have a glimpse at the intruders, and observing their size, swore he would teach my gentlemen a thing, lords or no lords.

Page 180

Richard had brought down a beautiful cock-pheasant, and was exulting over it, when the farmer's portentous figure burst upon them, cracking an avenging horsewhip. His salute was ironical.

"Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?"

"Just bagged a splendid bird!" radiant Richard informed him.

"Oh!" Farmer Blaize gave an admonitory flick of the whip.

"Just let me clap eye on't, then."

"Say, please," interposed Ripton, who was not blind to doubtful aspects.

Farmer Blaize threw up his chin, and grinned grimly.

"Please to you, sir? Why, my chap, you looks as if ye didn't much mind what come t'yer nose, I reckon. You looks an old poacher, you do. Tall ye what 'tis'!" He changed his banter to business, "That bird's mine! Now you jest hand him over, and sheer off, you dam young scoundrels! I know ye!" And he became exceedingly opprobrious, and uttered contempt of the name of Feverel.

Richard opened his eyes.

"If you wants to be horsewhipped, you'll stay where y'are!" continued the farmer. "Giles Blaize never stands nonsense!"

"Then we'll stay," quoth Richard.

"Good! so be't! If you will have't, have't, my men!"

As a preparatory measure, Farmer Blaize seized a wing of the bird, on which both boys flung themselves desperately, and secured it minus the pinion.

"That's your game," cried the farmer. "Here's a taste of horsewhip for ye. I never stands nonsense!" and sweetch went the mighty whip, well swayed. The boys tried to close with him. He kept his distance and lashed without mercy. Black blood was made by Farmer Blaize that day! The boys wriggled, in spite of themselves. It was like a relentless serpent coiling, and biting, and stinging their young veins to madness. Probably they felt the disgrace of the contortions they were made to go through more than the pain, but the pain was fierce, for the farmer laid about from a practised arm, and did not consider that he had done enough till he was well breathed and his ruddy jowl inflamed. He paused, to receive the remainder of the cock-pheasant in his face.

"Take your beastly bird," cried Richard.

“Money, my lads, and interest,” roared the farmer, lashing out again.

Shameful as it was to retreat, there was but that course open to them. They decided to surrender the field.

“Look! you big brute,” Richard shook his gun, hoarse with passion, “I’d have shot you, if I’d been loaded. Mind if I come across you when I’m loaded, you coward, I’ll fire!” The un-English nature of this threat exasperated Farmer Blaize, and he pressed the pursuit in time to bestow a few farewell stripes as they were escaping tight-breeched into neutral territory. At the hedge they parleyed a minute, the farmer to inquire if they had had a mortal good tanning and were satisfied, for when they wanted a further instalment of the same they were to come for it to Belthorpe Farm, and there it was in pickle: the boys meantime exploding in menaces and threats of vengeance, on which the farmer contemptuously turned his back. Ripton had already stocked an armful of flints for the enjoyment of a little skirmishing. Richard, however, knocked them all out, saying, “No! Gentlemen don’t fling stones; leave that to the blackguards.”

Page 181

“Just one shy at him!” pleaded Ripton, with his eye on Farmer Blaize’s broad mark, and his whole mind drunken with a sudden revelation of the advantages of light troops in opposition to heavies.

“No,” said Richard, imperatively, “no stones,” and marched briskly away. Ripton followed with a sigh. His leader’s magnanimity was wholly beyond him. A good spanking mark at the farmer would have relieved Master Ripton; it would have done nothing to console Richard Feverel for the ignominy he had been compelled to submit to. Ripton was familiar with the rod, a monster much despoiled of his terrors by intimacy. Birch-fever was past with this boy. The horrible sense of shame, self-loathing, universal hatred, impotent vengeance, as if the spirit were steeped in abysmal blackness, which comes upon a courageous and sensitive youth condemned for the first time to taste this piece of fleshly bitterness, and suffer what he feels is a defilement, Ripton had weathered and forgotten. He was seasoned wood, and took the world pretty wisely; not reckless of castigation, as some boys become, nor oversensitive as to dishonour, as his friend and comrade beside him was.

Richard’s blood was poisoned. He had the fever on him severely. He would not allow stone-flinging, because it was a habit of his to discountenance it. Mere gentlemanly considerations has scarce shielded Farmer Blaize, and certain very ungentlemanly schemes were coming to ghastly heads in the tumult of his brain; rejected solely from their glaring impracticability even to his young intelligence. A sweeping and consummate vengeance for the indignity alone should satisfy him. Something tremendous must be done; and done without delay. At one moment he thought of killing all the farmer’s cattle; next of killing him; challenging him to single combat with the arms, and according to the fashion of gentlemen. But the farmer was a coward; he would refuse. Then he, Richard Feverel, would stand by the farmer’s bedside, and rouse him; rouse him to fight with powder and ball in his own chamber, in the cowardly midnight, where he might tremble, but dare not refuse.

“Lord!” cried simple Ripton, while these hopeful plots were raging in his comrade’s brain, now sparkling for immediate execution, and anon lapsing disdainfully dark in their chances of fulfilment, “how I wish you’d have let me notch him, Ricky! I’m a safe shot. I never miss. I should feel quite jolly if I’d spanked him once. We should have had the beat of him at that game. I say!” and a sharp thought drew Ripton’s ideas nearer home, “I wonder whether my nose is as bad as he says! Where can I see myself?”

To these exclamations Richard was deaf, and he trudged steadily forward, facing but one object.

Page 182

After tearing through innumerable hedges, leaping fences, jumping dykes, penetrating brambly copses, and getting dirty, ragged, and tired, Ripton awoke from his dream of Farmer Blaize and a blue nose to the vivid consciousness of hunger; and this grew with the rapidity of light upon him, till in the course of another minute he was enduring the extremes of famine, and ventured to question his leader whither he was being conducted. Raynham was out of sight. They were a long way down the valley, miles from Lobourne, in a country of sour pools, yellow brooks, rank pasturage, desolate heath. Solitary cows were seen; the smoke of a mud cottage; a cart piled with peat; a donkey grazing at leisure, oblivious of an unkind world; geese by a horse-pond, gabbling as in the first loneliness of creation; uncooked things that a famishing boy cannot possibly care for, and must despise. Ripton was in despair.

“Where are you going to?” he inquired with a voice of the last time of asking, and halted resolutely.

Richard now broke his silence to reply, “Anywhere.”

“Anywhere!” Ripton took up the moody word. “But ain’t you awfully hungry?” he gasped vehemently, in a way that showed the total emptiness of his stomach.

“No,” was Richard’s brief response.

“Not hungry!” Ripton’s amazement lent him increased vehemence. “Why, you haven’t had anything to eat since breakfast! Not hungry? I declare I’m starving. I feel such a gnawing I could eat dry bread and cheese!”

Richard sneered: not for reasons that would have actuated a similar demonstration of the philosopher.

“Come,” cried Ripton, “at all events, tell us where you’re going to stop.”

Richard faced about to make a querulous retort. The injured and hapless visage that met his eye disarmed him. The lad’s nose, though not exactly of the dreaded hue, was really becoming discoloured. To upbraid him would be cruel. Richard lifted his head, surveyed the position, and exclaiming “Here!” dropped down on a withered bank, leaving Ripton to contemplate him as a puzzle whose every new move was a worse perplexity.

CHAPTER III

Among boys there are laws of honour and chivalrous codes, not written or formally taught, but intuitively understood by all, and invariably acted upon by the loyal and the true. The race is not nearly civilized, we must remember. Thus, not to follow your leader whithersoever he may think proper to lead; to back out of an expedition because

the end of it frowns dubious, and the present fruit of it is discomfort; to quit a comrade on the road, and return home without him: these are tricks which no boy of spirit would be guilty of, let him come to any description of mortal grief in consequence. Better so than have his own conscience denouncing him sneak. Some boys who behave boldly enough are not troubled by this conscience, and the eyes and the lips of their

Page 183

fellows have to supply the deficiency. They do it with just as haunting, and even more horrible pertinacity, than the inner voice, and the result, if the probation be not very severe and searching, is the same. The leader can rely on the faithfulness of his host: the comrade is sworn to serve. Master Ripton Thompson was naturally loyal. The idea of turning off and forsaking his friend never once crossed his mind, though his condition was desperate, and his friend's behaviour that of a Bedlamite. He announced several times impatiently that they would be too late for dinner. His friend did not budge. Dinner seemed nothing to him. There he lay plucking grass, and patting the old dog's nose, as if incapable of conceiving what a thing hunger was. Ripton took half-a-dozen turns up and down, and at last flung himself down beside the taciturn boy, accepting his fate.

Now, the chance that works for certain purposes sent a smart shower from the sinking sun, and the wet sent two strangers for shelter in the lane behind the hedge where the boys reclined. One was a travelling tinker, who lit a pipe and spread a tawny umbrella. The other was a burly young countryman, pipeless and tentless. They saluted with a nod, and began recounting for each other's benefit the daylong-doings of the weather, as it had affected their individual experience and followed their prophecies. Both had anticipated and foretold a bit of rain before night, and therefore both welcomed the wet with satisfaction. A monotonous betweenwhiles kind of talk they kept droning, in harmony with the still hum of the air. From the weather theme they fell upon the blessings of tobacco; how it was the poor man's friend, his company, his consolation, his comfort, his refuge at night, his first thought in the morning.

"Better than a wife!" chuckled the tinker. "No curtain-lecturin' with a pipe. Your pipe an't a shrew."

"That be it!" the other chimed in. "Your pipe doan't mak' ye out wi' all the cash Saturday evenin'."

"Take one," said the tinker, in the enthusiasm of the moment, handing a grimy short clay. Speed-the-Plough filled from the tinker's pouch, and continued his praises.

"Penny a day, and there y'are, primed! Better than a wife? Ha, ha!"

"And you can get rid of it, if ye wants for to, and when ye wants," added tinker.

"So ye can!" Speed-the-Plough took him up. "And ye doan't want for to. Leastways, t'other case. I means pipe."

"And," continued tinker, comprehending him perfectly, it don't bring repentance after it."

"Not nohow, master, it doan't! And"—Speed-the-Plough cocked his eye—"it doan't eat up half the victuals, your pipe doan't."

Here the honest yeoman gesticulated his keen sense of a clincher, which the tinker acknowledged; and having, so to speak, sealed up the subject by saying the best thing that could be said, the two smoked for some time in silence to the drip and patter of the shower.

Page 184

Ripton solaced his wretchedness by watching them through the briar hedge. He saw the tinker stroking a white cat, and appealing to her, every now and then, as his missus, for an opinion or a confirmation; and he thought that a curious sight. Speed-the-Plough was stretched at full length, with his boots in the rain, and his head amidst the tinker's pots, smoking, profoundly contemplative. The minutes seemed to be taken up alternately by the grey puffs from their mouths.

It was the tinker who renewed the colloquy. Said he, "Times is bad!"

His companion assented, "Sure-ly!"

"But it somehow comes round right," resumed the tinker. "Why, look here. Where's the good o' moping? I sees it all come round right and tight. Now I travels about. I've got my beat. 'Casion calls me t'other day to Newcastle!—Eh?"

"Coals!" ejaculated Speed-the-Plough sonorously.

"Coals!" echoed the tinker. "You ask what I goes there for, mayhap? Never you mind. One sees a mort o' life in my trade. Not for coals it isn't. And I don't carry 'em there, neither. Anyhow, I comes back. London's my mark. Says I, I'll see a bit o' the sea, and steps aboard a collier. We were as nigh wrecked as the prophet Paul."

"—A—who's him?" the other wished to know.

"Read your Bible," said the tinker. "We pitched and tossed—'tain't that game at sea 'tis on land, I can tell ye! I thinks, down we're a-going—say your prayers, Bob Tiles! That was a night, to be sure! But God's above the devil, and here I am, ye see." Speed-the-Plough lurched round on his elbow and regarded him indifferently. "D'ye call that doctrin'? He bean't al'ays, or I shoo'n't be scrapin' my heels wi' nothin' to do, and, what's warse, nothin' to eat. Why, look heer. Luck's luck, and bad luck's the con-trary. Varmer Bollop, t'other day, has's rick burnt down. Next night his gran'ry's burnt. What do he tak' and go and do? He takes and goes and hangs unsel', and turns us out of his employ. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks, or I can't make out the reckonin'."

The tinker cleared his throat, and said it was a bad case.

"And a darn'd bad case. I'll tak' my oath on't!" cried Speed-the-Plough. "Well, look heer! Heer's another darn'd bad case. I threshed for Varmer Blaize Blaize o' Beltharpe afore I goes to Varmer Bollop. Varmer Blaize misses pilkins. He swears our chaps steals pilkins. 'Twarn't me steals 'em. What do he tak' and go and do? He takes and tarns us off, me and another, neck and crop, to scuffle about and starve, for all he keers. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks. Not nohow, as I can see!"

The tinker shook his head, and said that was a bad case also.

Page 185

“And you can’t mend it,” added Speed-the-Plough. “It’s bad, and there it be. But I’ll tell ye what, master. Bad wants payin’ for.” He nodded and winked mysteriously. “Bad has its wages as well’s honest work, I’m thinkin’. Varmer Bollop I don’t owe no grudge to: Varmer Blaize I do. And I shud like to stick a Lucifer in his rick some dry windy night.” Speed-the-Plough screwed up an eye villainously. “He wants hittin’ in the wind,—jest where the pocket is, master, do Varmer Blaize, and he’ll cry out ‘O Lor’!’ Varmer Blaize will. You won’t get the better o’ Varmer Blaize by no means, as I makes out, if ye doan’t hit into him jest there.”

The tinker sent a rapid succession of white clouds from his mouth, and said that would be taking the devil’s side of a bad case. Speed-the-Plough observed energetically that, if Farmer Blaize was on the other, he should be on that side.

There was a young gentleman close by, who thought with him. The hope of Raynham had lent a careless half-compelled attention to the foregoing dialogue, wherein a common labourer and a travelling tinker had propounded and discussed one of the most ancient theories of transmundane dominion and influence on mundane affairs. He now started to his feet, and came tearing through the briar hedge, calling out for one of them to direct them the nearest road to Bursley. The tinker was kindling preparations for his tea, under the tawny umbrella. A loaf was set forth, oh which Ripton’s eyes, stuck in the edge, fastened ravenously. Speed-the-Plough volunteered information that Bursley was a good three mile from where they stood, and a good eight mile from Lobourne.

“I’ll give you half-a-crown for that loaf, my good fellow,” said Richard to the tinker.

“It’s a bargain;” quoth the tinker, “eh, missus?”

His cat replied by humping her back at the dog.

The half-crown was tossed down, and Ripton, who had just succeeded in freeing his limbs from the briar, prickly as a hedgehog, collared the loaf.

“Those young squires be sharp-set, and no mistake,” said the tinker to his companion. “Come! we’ll to Bursley after ’em, and talk it out over a pot o’ beer.” Speed-the-Plough was nothing loath, and in a short time they were following the two lads on the road to Bursley, while a horizontal blaze shot across the autumn and from the Western edge of the rain-cloud.

CHAPTER IV

Search for the missing boys had been made everywhere over Raynham, and Sir Austin was in grievous discontent. None had seen them save Austin Wentworth and Mr. Morton. The baronet sat construing their account of the flight of the lads when they were hailed, and resolved it into an act of rebellion on the part of his son. At dinner he

drank the young heir's health in ominous silence. Adrian Harley stood up in his place to propose the health. His speech was a fine piece of rhetoric. He warmed in it till,

Page 186

after the Ciceronic model, inanimate objects were personified, and Richard's table-napkin and vacant chair were invoked to follow the steps of a peerless father, and uphold with his dignity the honour of the Feverels. Austin Wentworth, whom a soldier's death compelled to take his father's place in support of the toast, was tame after such magniloquence. But the reply, the thanks which young Richard should have delivered in person were not forthcoming. Adrian's oratory had given but a momentary life to napkin and chair. The company of honoured friends, and aunts and uncles, remotest cousins, were glad to disperse and seek amusement in music and tea. Sir Austin did his utmost to be hospitable cheerful, and requested them to dance. If he had desired them to laugh he would have been obeyed, and in as hearty a manner.

"How triste!" said Mrs. Doria Forey to Lobourne's curate, as that most enamoured automaton went through his paces beside her with professional stiffness.

"One who does not suffer can hardly assent," the curate answered, basking in her beams.

"Ah, you are good!" exclaimed the lady. "Look at my Clare. She will not dance on her cousin's birthday with anyone but him. What are we to do to enliven these people?"

"Alas, madam! you cannot do for all what you do for one," the curate sighed, and wherever she wandered in discourse, drew her back with silken strings to gaze on his enamoured soul.

He was the only gratified stranger present. The others had designs on the young heir. Lady Attenbury of Longford House had brought her highly-polished specimen of market-ware, the Lady Juliana Jaye, for a first introduction to him, thinking he had arrived at an age to estimate and pine for her black eyes and pretty pert mouth. The Lady Juliana had to pair off with a dapper Papworth, and her mama was subjected to the gallantries of Sir Miles, who talked land and steam-engines to her till she was sick, and had to be impertinent in self-defence. Lady Blandish, the delightful widow, sat apart with Adrian, and enjoyed his sarcasms on the company. By ten at night the poor show ended, and the rooms were dark, dark as the prognostics multitudinously hinted by the disappointed and chilled guests concerning the probable future of the hope of Raynham. Little Clare kissed her mama, curtsied to the lingering curate, and went to bed like a very good girl. Immediately the maid had departed, little Clare deliberately exchanged night, attire for that of day. She was noted as an obedient child. Her light was allowed to burn in her room for half-an-hour, to counteract her fears of the dark. She took the light, and stole on tiptoe to Richard's room. No Richard was there. She peeped in further and further. A trifling agitation of the curtains shot her back through the door and along the passage to her own bedchamber with extreme expedition. She was not much alarmed, but feeling guilty she was on her guard. In a

Page 187

short time she was prowling about the passages again. Richard had slighted and offended the little lady, and was to be asked whether he did not repent such conduct toward his cousin; not to be asked whether he had forgotten to receive his birthday kiss from her; for, if he did not choose to remember that, Miss Clare would never remind him of it, and to-night should be his last chance of a reconciliation. Thus she meditated, sitting on a stair, and presently heard Richard's voice below in the hall, shouting for supper.

"Master Richard has returned," old Benson the butler tolled out intelligence to Sir Austin.

"Well?" said the baronet.

"He complains of being hungry," the butler hesitated, with a look of solemn disgust.

"Let him eat."

Heavy Benson hesitated still more as he announced that the boy had called for wine. It was an unprecedented thing. Sir Austin's brows were portending an arch, but Adrian suggested that he wanted possibly to drink his birthday, and claret was conceded.

The boys were in the vortex of a partridge-pie when Adrian strolled in to them. They had now changed characters. Richard was uproarious. He drank a health with every glass; his cheeks were flushed and his eyes brilliant. Ripton looked very much like a rogue on the tremble of detection, but his honest hunger and the partridge-pie shielded him awhile from Adrian's scrutinizing glance. Adrian saw there was matter for study, if it were only on Master Ripton's betraying nose, and sat down to hear and mark.

"Good sport, gentlemen, I trust to hear?" he began his quiet banter, and provoked a loud peal of laughter from Richard.

"Ha, ha! I say, Rip: 'Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?' You remember the farmer! Your health, parson! We haven't had our sport yet. We're going to have some first-rate sport. Oh, well! we haven't much show of birds. We shot for pleasure, and returned them to the proprietors. You're fond of game, parson! Ripton is a dead shot in what Cousin Austin calls the Kingdom of 'would-have-done' and 'might-have-been.' Up went the birds, and cries Rip, 'I've forgotten to load!' Oh, ho!—Rip! some more claret.—Do just leave that nose of yours alone.—Your health, Ripton Thompson! The birds hadn't the decency to wait for him, and so, parson, it's their fault, and not Rip's, you haven't a dozen brace at your feet. What have you been doing at home, Cousin Rady?"

"Playing Hamlet, in the absence of the Prince of Denmark. The day without you, my dear boy, must be dull, you know."

"'He speaks: can I trust what he says is sincere?
There's an edge to his smile that cuts much like a sneer.'

Page 188

“Sandoe’s poems! You know the couplet, Mr. Rady. Why shouldn’t I quote Sandoe? You know you like him, Rady. But, if you’ve missed me, I’m sorry. Rip and I have had a beautiful day. We’ve made new acquaintances. We’ve seen the world. I’m the monkey that has seen the world, and I’m going to tell you all about it. First, there’s a gentleman who takes a rifle for a fowling-piece. Next, there’s a farmer who warns everybody, gentleman and beggar, off his premises. Next, there’s a tinker and a ploughman, who think that God is always fighting with the devil which shall command the kingdoms of the earth. The tinker’s for God, and the ploughman”—

“I’ll drink your health, Ricky,” said Adrian, interrupting.

“Oh, I forgot, parson;—I mean no harm, Adrian. I’m only telling what I’ve heard.”

“No harm, my dear boy,” returned Adrian. “I’m perfectly aware that Zoroaster is not dead. You have been listening to a common creed. Drink the Fire-worshippers, if you will.”

“Here’s to Zoroaster, then!” cried Richard. “I say, Rippy! we’ll drink the Fire-worshippers to-night won’t we?”

A fearful conspiratorial frown, that would not have disgraced Guido Fawkes, was darted back from the, plastic features of Master Ripton.

Richard gave his lungs loud play.

“Why, what did you say about Blaizes, Rippy? Didn’t you say it was fun?”

Another hideous and silencing frown was Ripton’s answer. Adrian matched the innocent youths, and knew that there was talking under the table. “See,” thought he, “this boy has tasted his first scraggy morsel of life today, and already he talks like an old stager, and has, if I mistake not, been acting too. My respected chief,” he apostrophized Sir Austin, “combustibles are only the more dangerous for compression. This boy will be ravenous for Earth when he is let loose, and very soon make his share of it look as foolish as yonder game-pie!”—a prophecy Adrian kept to himself.

Uncle Algernon shambled in to see his nephew before the supper was finished, and his more genial presence brought out a little of the plot.

“Look here, uncle!” said Richard. “Would you let a churlish old brute of a farmer strike you without making him suffer for it?”

“I fancy I should return the compliment, my lad,” replied his uncle.

“Of course you would! So would I. And he shall suffer for it.” The boy looked savage, and his uncle patted him down.

“I’ve boxed his son; I’ll box him,” said Richard, shouting for more wine.

“What, boy! Is it old Blaize has been putting you up!”

“Never mind, uncle!” The boy nodded mysteriously.

‘Look there!’ Adrian read on Ripton’s face, he says ‘never mind,’ and lets it out!

“Did we beat to-day, uncle?”

“Yes, boy; and we’d beat them any day they bowl fair. I’d beat them on one leg. There’s only Watkins and Featherdene among them worth a farthing.”

Page 189

“We beat!” cries Richard. “Then we’ll have some more wine, and drink their healths.”

The bell was rung; wine ordered. Presently comes in heavy Benson, to say supplies are cut off. One bottle, and no more. The Captain whistled: Adrian shrugged.

The bottle, however, was procured by Adrian subsequently. He liked studying intoxicated urchins.

One subject was at Richard’s heart, about which he was reserved in the midst of his riot. Too proud to inquire how his father had taken his absence, he burned to hear whether he was in disgrace. He led to it repeatedly, and it was constantly evaded by Algernon and Adrian. At last, when the boy declared a desire to wish his father good-night, Adrian had to tell him that he was to go straight to bed from the supper-table. Young Richard’s face fell at that, and his gaiety forsook him. He marched to his room without another word.

Adrian gave Sir Austin an able version of his son’s behaviour and adventures; dwelling upon this sudden taciturnity when he heard of his father’s resolution not to see him. The wise youth saw that his chief was mollified behind his moveless mask, and went to bed, and Horace, leaving Sir Austin in his study. Long hours the baronet sat alone. The house had not its usual influx of Feverels that day. Austin Wentworth was staying at Poer Hall, and had only come over for an hour. At midnight the house breathed sleep. Sir Austin put on his cloak and cap, and took the lamp to make his rounds. He apprehended nothing special, but with a mind never at rest he constituted himself the sentinel of Raynham. He passed the chamber where the Great-Aunt Grantley lay, who was to swell Richard’s fortune, and so perform her chief business on earth. By her door he murmured, “Good creature! you sleep with a sense of duty done,” and paced on, reflecting, “She has not made money a demon of discord,” and blessed her. He had his thoughts at Hippias’s somnolent door, and to them the world might have subscribed.

A monomaniac at large, watching over sane people in slumber! thinks Adrian Harley, as he hears Sir Austin’s footfall, and truly that was a strange object to see.—Where is the fortress that has not one weak gate? where the man who is sound at each particular angle? Ay, meditates the recumbent cynic, more or less mad is not every mother’s son? Favourable circumstances—good air, good company, two or three good rules rigidly adhered to—keep the world out of Bedlam. But, let the world fly into a passion, and is not Bedlam the safest abode for it?

Sir Austin ascended the stairs, and bent his steps leisurely toward the chamber where his son was lying in the left wing of the Abbey. At the end of the gallery which led to it he discovered a dim light. Doubting it an illusion, Sir Austin accelerated his pace. This wing had aforetime a bad character. Notwithstanding what years had done to polish it into fair repute, the Raynham kitchen stuck to tradition,

Page 190

and preserved certain stories of ghosts seen there, that effectually blackened it in the susceptible minds of new house-maids and under-crooks, whose fears would not allow the sinner to wash his sins. Sir Austin had heard of the tales circulated by his domestics underground. He cherished his own belief, but discouraged theirs, and it was treason at Raynham to be caught traducing the left wing. As the baronet advanced, the fact of a light burning was clear to him. A slight descent brought him into the passage, and he beheld a poor human candle standing outside his son's chamber. At the same moment a door closed hastily. He entered Richard's room. The boy was absent. The bed was unpressed: no clothes about: nothing to show that he had been there that night. Sir Austin felt vaguely apprehensive. Has he gone to my room to await me? thought the father's heart. Something like a tear quivered in his arid eyes as he meditated and hoped this might be so. His own sleeping-room faced that of his son. He strode to it with a quick heart. It was empty. Alarm dislodged anger from his jealous heart, and dread of evil put a thousand questions to him that were answered in air. After pacing up and down his room he determined to go and ask the boy Thompson, as he called Ripton, what was known to him.

The chamber assigned to Master Ripton Thompson was at the northern extremity of the passage, and overlooked Lobourne and the valley to the West. The bed stood between the window and the door. Six Austin found the door ajar, and the interior dark. To his surprise, the boy Thompson's couch, as revealed by the rays of his lamp, was likewise vacant. He was turning back when he fancied he heard the sibilation of a whispering in the room. Sir Austin cloaked the lamp and trod silently toward the window. The heads of his son Richard and the boy Thompson were seen crouched against the glass, holding excited converse together. Sir Austin listened, but he listened to a language of which he possessed not the key. Their talk was of fire, and of delay: of expected agrarian astonishment: of a farmer's huge wrath: of violence exercised upon gentlemen, and of vengeance: talk that the boys jerked out by fits, and that came as broken links of a chain impossible to connect. But they awake curiosity. The baronet condescended to play the spy upon his son.

Over Lobourne and the valley lay black night and innumerable stars.

"How jolly I feel!" exclaimed Ripton, inspired by claret; and then, after a luxurious pause —"I think that fellow has pocketed his guinea, and cut his lucky."

Richard allowed a long minute to pass, during which the baronet waited anxiously for his voice, hardly recognizing it when he heard its altered tones.

"If he has, I'll go; and I'll do it myself."

"You would?" returned Master Ripton. "Well, I'm hanged!—I say, if you went to school, wouldn't you get into rows! Perhaps he hasn't found the place where the box was stuck in. I think he funks it. I almost wish you hadn't done it, upon my honour—eh? Look

there! what was that? That looked like something.—I say! do you think we shall ever be found out?”

Page 191

Master Ripton intoned this abrupt interrogation verb seriously.

“I don’t think about it,” said Richard, all his faculties bent on signs from Lobourne.

“Well, but,” Ripton persisted, “suppose we are found out?”

“If we are, I must pay for it.”

Sir Austin breathed the better for this reply. He was beginning to gather a clue to the dialogue. His son was engaged in a plot, and was, moreover, the leader of the plot. He listened for further enlightenment.

“What was the fellow’s name?” inquired Ripton.

His companion answered, “Tom Bakewell.”

“I’ll tell you what,” continued Ripton. “You let it all clean out to your cousin and uncle at supper.—How capital claret is with partridge-pie! What a lot I ate!—Didn’t you see me frown?”

The young sensualist was in an ecstasy of gratitude to his late refection, and the slightest word recalled him to it. Richard answered him:

“Yes; and felt your kick. It doesn’t matter. Rady’s safe, and uncle never blabs.”

“Well, my plan is to keep it close. You’re never safe if you don’t.—I never drank much claret before,” Ripton was off again. “Won’t I now, though! claret’s my wine. You know, it may come out any day, and then we’re done for,” he rather incongruously appended.

Richard only took up the business-thread of his friend’s rambling chatter, and answered:

“You’ve got nothing to do with it, if we are.”

“Haven’t I, though! I didn’t stick-in the box but I’m an accomplice, that’s clear. Besides,” added Ripton, “do you think I should leave you to bear it all on your shoulders? I ain’t that sort of chap, Ricky, I can tell you.”

Sir Austin thought more highly of the boy Thompson. Still it looked a detestable conspiracy, and the altered manner of his son impressed him strangely. He was not the boy of yesterday. To Sir Austin it seemed as if a gulf had suddenly opened between them. The boy had embarked, and was on the waters of life in his own vessel. It was as vain to call him back as to attempt to erase what Time has written with the Judgment Blood! This child, for whom he had prayed nightly in such a fervour and humbleness to God, the dangers were about him, the temptations thick on him, and the devil on board

piloting. If a day had done so much, what would years do? Were prayers and all the watchfulness he had expended of no avail?

A sensation of infinite melancholy overcame the poor gentleman—a thought that he was fighting with a fate in this beloved boy.

He was half disposed to arrest the two conspirators on the spot, and make them confess, and absolve themselves; but it seemed to him better to keep an unseen eye over his son: Sir Austin's old system prevailed.

Adrian characterized this system well, in saying that Sir Austin wished to be Providence to his son.

If immeasurable love were perfect wisdom, one human being might almost impersonate Providence to another. Alas! love, divine as it is, can do no more than lighten the house it inhabits—must take its shape, sometimes intensify its narrowness—can spiritualize, but not expel, the old lifelong lodgers above-stairs and below.

Page 192

Sir Austin decided to continue quiescent.

The valley still lay black beneath the large autumnal stars, and the exclamations of the boys were becoming fevered and impatient. By-and-by one insisted that he had seen a twinkle. The direction he gave was out of their anticipations. Again the twinkle was announced. Both boys started to their feet. It was a twinkle in the right direction now.

“He’s done it!” cried Richard, in great heat. “Now you may say old Blaize’ll soon be old Blazes, Rip. I hope he’s asleep.”

“I’m sure he’s snoring!—Look there! He’s alight fast enough. He’s dry. He’ll burn.—I say,” Ripton re-assumed the serious intonation, “do you think they’ll ever suspect us?”

“What if they do? We must brunt it.”

“Of course we will. But, I say! I wish you hadn’t given them the scent, though. I like to look innocent. I can’t when I know people suspect me. Lord! look there! Isn’t it just beginning to flare up!”

The farmer’s grounds were indeed gradually standing out in sombre shadows.

“I’ll fetch my telescope,” said Richard. Ripton, somehow not liking to be left alone, caught hold of him.

“No; don’t go and lose the best of it. Here, I’ll throw open the window, and we can see.”

The window was flung open, and the boys instantly stretched half their bodies out of it; Ripton appearing to devour the rising flames with his mouth: Richard with his eyes.

Opaque and statuesque stood the figure of the baronet behind them. The wind was low. Dense masses of smoke hung amid the darting snakes of fire, and a red malign light was on the neighbouring leafage. No figures could be seen. Apparently the flames had nothing to contend against, for they were making terrible strides into the darkness.

“Oh!” shouted Richard, overcome by excitement, “if I had my telescope! We must have it! Let me go and fetch it! I Will!”

The boys struggled together, and Sir Austin stepped back. As he did so, a cry was heard in the passage. He hurried out, closed the chamber, and came upon little Clare lying senseless along the door.

CHAPTER V

In the morning that followed this night, great gossip was interchanged between Raynham and Lobourne. The village told how Farmer Blaize, of Belthorpe Farm, had his Pick feloniously set fire to; his stables had caught fire, himself had been all but roasted alive in the attempt to rescue his cattle, of which numbers had perished in the flames. Raynham counterbalanced arson with an authentic ghost seen by Miss Clare in the left wing of the Abbey—the ghost of a lady, dressed in deep mourning, a scar on her forehead and a bloody handkerchief at her breast, frightful to behold! and no wonder the child was frightened out of her wits, and lay in a desperate state awaiting the arrival of the London doctors. It was added that the servants had all threatened to leave in a body, and that Sir Austin to appease them had promised to pull down the entire left wing, like a gentleman; for no decent creature, said Lobourne, could consent to live in a haunted house.

Page 193

Rumour for the nonce had a stronger spice of truth than usual. Poor little Clare lay ill, and the calamity that had befallen Farmer Blaize, as regards his rick, was not much exaggerated. Sir Austin caused an account of it be given him at breakfast, and appeared so scrupulously anxious to hear the exact extent of injury sustained by the farmer that heavy Benson went down to inspect the scene. Mr. Benson returned, and, acting under Adrian's malicious advice, framed a formal report of the catastrophe, in which the farmer's breeches figured, and certain cooling applications to a part of the farmer's person. Sir Austin perused it without a smile. He took occasion to have it read out before the two boys, who listened very demurely, as to ordinary newspaper incident; only when the report particularized the garments damaged, and the unwonted distressing position Farmer Blaize was reduced to in his bed, indecorous fit of sneezing laid hold of Master Ripton Thompson, and Richard bit his lip and burst into loud laughter, Ripton joining him, lost to consequences.

"I trust you feel for this poor man," said Sir Austin to his son, somewhat sternly. He saw no sign of feeling.

It was a difficult task for Sir Austin to keep his old countenance toward the hope of Raynham, knowing him the accomplice-incendiary, and believing the deed to have been unprovoked and wanton. But he must do so, he knew, to let the boy have a fair trial against himself. Be it said, moreover, that the baronet's possession of his son's secret flattered him. It allowed him to act, and in a measure to feel, like Providence; enabled him to observe and provide for the movements of creatures in the dark. He therefore treated the boy as he commonly did, and Richard saw no change in his father to make him think he was suspected.

The youngster's game was not so easy against Adrian. Adrian did not shoot or fish. Voluntarily he did nothing to work off the destructive nervous fluid, or whatever it may be, which is in man's nature; so that two culprit boys once in his power were not likely to taste the gentle hand of mercy; and Richard and Ripton paid for many a trout and partridge spared. At every minute of the day Ripton was thrown into sweats of suspicion that discovery was imminent, by some stray remark or message from Adrian. He was as a fish with the hook in his gills, mysteriously caught without having nibbled; and dive into what depths he would he was sensible of a summoning force that compelled him perpetually towards the gasping surface, which he seemed inevitably approaching when the dinner-bell sounded. There the talk was all of Farmer Blaize. If it dropped, Adrian revived it, and his caressing way with Ripton was just such as a keen sportsman feels toward the creature that had owned his skill, and is making its appearance for the world to acknowledge the same. Sir Austin saw the manoeuvres, and admired Adrian's shrewdness. But he had

Page 194

to check the young natural lawyer, for the effect of so much masked examination upon Richard was growing baneful. This fish also felt the hook in his gills, but this fish was more of a pike, and lay in different waters, where there were old stumps and black roots to wind about, and defy alike strong pulling and delicate handling. In other words, Richard showed symptoms of a disposition to take refuge in lies.

“You know the grounds, my dear boy,” Adrian observed to him. “Tell me; do you think it easy to get to the rick unperceived? I hear they suspect one of the farmer’s turned-off hands.”

“I tell you I don’t know the grounds,” Richard sullenly replied.

“Not?” Adrian counterfeited courteous astonishment. “I thought Mr. Thompson said you were over there yesterday?”

Ripton, glad to speak the truth, hurriedly assured Adrian that it was not he had said so.

“Not? You had good sport, gentlemen, hadn’t you?”

“Oh, yes!” mumbled the wretched victims, reddening as they remembered, in Adrian’s slightly drawled rusticity of tone, Farmer Blaize’s first address to them.

“I suppose you were among the Fire-worshippers last night, too?” persisted Adrian. “In some countries, I hear, they manage their best sport at night-time, and beat up for game with torches. It must be a fine sight. After all, the country would be dull if we hadn’t a rip here and there to treat us to a little conflagration.”

“A rip!” laughed Richard, to his friend’s disgust and alarm at his daring. “You don’t mean this Rip, do you?”

“Mr. Thompson fire a rick? I should as soon suspect you, my dear boy.—You are aware, young gentlemen, that it is rather a serious thing eh? In this country, you know, the landlord has always been the pet of the Laws. By the way,” Adrian continued, as if diverging to another topic, “you met two gentlemen of the road in your explorations yesterday, Magians. Now, if I were a magistrate of the county, like Sir Miles Papworth, my suspicions would light upon those gentlemen. A tinker and a ploughman, I think you said, Mr. Thompson. Not? Well, say two ploughmen.”

“More likely two tinkers,” said Richard.

“Oh! if you wish to exclude the ploughman—was he out of employ?”

Ripton, with Adrian’s eyes inveterately fixed on him, stammered an affirmative.

“The tinker, or the ploughman?”

“The ploughm—” Ingenuous Ripton looking about, as if to aid himself whenever he was able to speak the truth, beheld Richard’s face blackening at him, and swallowed back half the word.

“The ploughman!” Adrian took him up cheerily. “Then we have here a ploughman out of employ. Given a ploughman out of employ, and a rick burnt. The burning of a rick is an act of vengeance, and a ploughman out of employ is a vengeful animal. The rick and the ploughman are advancing to a juxtaposition. Motive being established, we have only to prove their proximity at a certain hour, and our ploughman voyages beyond seas.”

Page 195

“Is it transportation for rick-burning?” inquired Ripton aghast.

Adrian spoke solemnly: “They shave your head. You are manacled. Your diet is sour bread and cheese-parings. You work in strings of twenties and thirties. *Arson* is branded on your backs in an enormous A. Theological works are the sole literary recreation of the well-conducted and deserving. Consider the fate of this poor fellow, and what an act of vengeance brings him to! Do you know his name?”

“How should I know his name?” said Richard, with an assumption of innocence painful to see.

Sir Austin remarked that no doubt it would soon be known, and Adrian perceived that he was to quiet his line, marvelling a little at the baronet’s blindness to what was so clear. He would not tell, for that would ruin his influence with Richard; still he wanted some present credit for his discernment and devotion. The boys got away from dinner, and, after deep consultation, agreed upon a course of conduct, which was to commiserate with Farmer Blaize loudly, and make themselves look as much like the public as it was possible for two young malefactors to look, one of whom already felt Adrian’s enormous A devouring his back with the fierceness of the Promethean eagle, and isolating him forever from mankind. Adrian relished their novel tactics sharply, and led them to lengths of lamentation for Farmer Blaize. Do what they might, the hook was in their gills. The farmer’s whip had reduced them to bodily contortions; these were decorous compared with the spiritual writhings they had to perform under Adrian’s manipulation. Ripton was fast becoming a coward, and Richard a liar, when next morning Austin Wentworth came over from Poer Hall bringing news that one Mr. Thomas Bakewell, yeoman, had been arrested on suspicion of the crime of Arson and lodged in jail, awaiting the magisterial pleasure of Sir Miles Papworth. Austin’s eye rested on Richard as he spoke these terrible tidings. The hope of Raynham returned his look, perfectly calm, and had, moreover, the presence of mind not to look at Ripton.

CHAPTER VI

As soon as they could escape, the boys got together into an obscure corner of the park, and there took counsel of their extremity.

“Whatever shall we do now?” asked Ripton of his leader.

Scorpion girt with fire was never in a more terrible prison-house than poor Ripton, around whom the raging element he had assisted to create seemed to be drawing momently narrower circles.

“There’s only one chance,” said Richard, coming to a dead halt, and folding his arms resolutely.

His comrade inquired with the utmost eagerness what that chance might be.

Richard fixed his eyes on a flint, and replied: “We must rescue that fellow from jail.”

Ripton gazed at his leader, and fell back with astonishment. “My dear Ricky! but how are we to do it?”

Page 196

Richard, still perusing his flint, replied: "We must manage to get a file in to him and a rope. It can be done, I tell you. I don't care what I pay. I don't care what I do. He must be got out."

"Bother that old Blaize!" exclaimed Ripton, taking off his cap to wipe his frenzied forehead, and brought down his friend's reproof.

"Never mind old Blaize now. Talk about letting it out! Look at you. I'm ashamed of you. You talk about Robin Hood and King Richard! Why, you haven't an atom of courage. Why, you let it out every second of the day. Whenever Rady begins speaking you start; I can see the perspiration rolling down you. Are you afraid?—And then you contradict yourself. You never keep to one story. Now, follow me. We must risk everything to get him out. Mind that! And keep out of Adrian's way as much as you can. And keep to one story."

With these sage directions the young leader marched his companion-culprit down to inspect the jail where Tom Bakewell lay groaning over the results of the super-mundane conflict, and the victim of it that he was.

In Lobourne Austin Wentworth had the reputation of the poor man's friend; a title he earned more largely ere he went to the reward God alone can give to that supreme virtue. Dame Bakewell, the mother of Tom, on hearing of her son's arrest, had run to comfort him and render him what help she could; but this was only sighs and tears, and, oh deary me! which only perplexed poor Tom, who bade her leave an unlucky chap to his fate, and not make himself a thundering villain. Whereat the dame begged him to take heart, and he should have a true comforter. "And though it's a gentleman that's coming to you, Tom—for he never refuses a poor body," said Mrs. Bakewell, "it's a true Christian, Tom! and the Lord knows if the sight of him mayn't be the saving of you, for he's light to look on, and a sermon to listen to, he is!"

Tom was not prepossessed by the prospect of a sermon, and looked a sullen dog enough when Austin entered his cell. He was surprised at the end of half-an-hour to find himself engaged in man-to-man conversation with a gentleman and a Christian. When Austin rose to go Tom begged permission to shake his hand.

"Take and tell young master up at the Abbey that I an't the chap to peach. He'll know. He's a young gentleman as'll make any man do as he wants 'em! He's a mortal wild young gentleman! And I'm a Ass! That's where 'tis. But I an't a blackguard. Tell him that, sir!"

This was how it came that Austin eyed young Richard seriously while he told the news at Raynham. The boy was shy of Austin more than of Adrian. Why, he did not know; but he made it a hard task for Austin to catch him alone, and turned sulky that instant. Austin was not clever like Adrian: he seldom divined other people's ideas, and always

went the direct road to his object; so instead of beating about and setting the boy on the alert at all points, crammed to the muzzle with lies, he just said, “Tom Bakewell told me to let you know he does not intend to peach on you,” and left him.

Page 197

Richard repeated the intelligence to Ripton, who cried aloud that Tom was a brick.

“He shan’t suffer for it,” said Richard, and pondered on a thicker rope and sharper file.

“But will your cousin tell?” was Ripton’s reflection.

“He!” Richard’s lip expressed contempt. “A ploughman refuses to peach, and you ask if one of our family will?”

Ripton stood for the twentieth time reproved on this point.

The boys had examined the outer walls of the jail, and arrived at the conclusion that Tom’s escape might be managed if Tom had spirit, and the rope and file could be anyway reached to him. But to do this, somebody must gain admittance to his cell, and who was to be taken into their confidence?

“Try your cousin,” Ripton suggested, after much debate.

Richard, smiling, wished to know if he meant Adrian.

“No, no!” Ripton hurriedly reassured him. “Austin.”

The same idea was knocking at Richard’s head.

“Let’s get the rope and file first,” said he, and to Bursley they went for those implements to defeat the law, Ripton procuring the file at one shop and Richard the rope at another, with such masterly cunning did they lay their measures for the avoidance of every possible chance of detection. And better to assure this, in a wood outside Bursley Richard stripped to his shirt and wound the rope round his body, tasting the tortures of anchorites and penitential friars, that nothing should be risked to make Tom’s escape a certainty. Sir Austin saw the marks at night as his son lay asleep, through the half-opened folds of his bed-gown.

It was a severe stroke when, after all their stratagems and trouble, Austin Wentworth refused the office the boys had zealously designed for him. Time pressed. In a few days poor Tom would have to face the redoubtable Sir Miles, and get committed, for rumours of overwhelming evidence to convict him were rife about Lobourne, and Farmer Blaize’s wrath was unappeasable. Again and again young Richard begged his cousin not to see him disgraced, and to help him in this extremity. Austin smiled on him.

“My dear Ricky,” said he, “there are two ways of getting out of a scrape: a long way and a short way. When you’ve tried the roundabout method, and failed, come to me, and I’ll show you the straight route.”

Richard was too entirely bent upon the roundabout method to consider this advice more than empty words, and only ground his teeth at Austin’s unkind refusal.

He imparted to Ripton, at the eleventh hour, that they must do it themselves, to which Ripton heavily assented.

Page 198

On the day preceding poor Tom's doomed appearance before the magistrate, Dame Bakewell had an interview with Austin, who went to Raynham immediately, and sought Adrian's counsel upon what was to be done. Homeric laughter and nothing else could be got out of Adrian when he heard of the doings of these desperate boys: how they had entered Dame Bakewell's smallest of retail shops, and purchased tea, sugar, candles, and comfits of every description, till the shop was clear of customers: how they had then hurried her into her little back-parlour, where Richard had torn open his shirt and revealed the coils of rope, and Ripton displayed the point of a file from a serpentine recess in his jacket: how they had then told the astonished woman that the rope she saw and the file she saw were instruments for the liberation of her son; that there existed no other means on earth to save him, they, the boys, having unsuccessfully attempted all: how upon that Richard had tried with the utmost earnestness to persuade her to disrobe and wind the rope round her own person: and Ripton had aired his eloquence to induce her to secrete the file: how, when she resolutely objected to the rope, both boys began backing the file, and in an evil hour, she feared, said Dame Bakewell, she had rewarded the gracious permission given her by Sir Miles Papworth to visit her son, by tempting Tom to file the Law. Though, thanks be to the Lord! Dame Bakewell added, Tom had turned up his nose at the file, and so she had told young Master Richard, who swore very bad for a young gentleman.

"Boys are like monkeys," remarked Adrian, at the close of his explosions, "the gravest actors of farcical nonsense that the world possesses. May I never be where there are no boys! A couple of boys left to themselves will furnish richer fun than any troop of trained comedians. No: no Art arrives at the artlessness of nature in matters of comedy. You can't simulate the ape. Your antics are dull. They haven't the charming inconsequence of the natural animal. Lack at these two! Think of the shifts they are put to all day long! They know I know all about it, and yet their serenity of innocence is all but unruffled in my presence. You're sorry to think about the end of the business, Austin? So am I! I dread the idea of the curtain going down. Besides, it will do Ricky a world of good. A practical lesson is the best lesson."

"Sinks deepest," said Austin, "but whether he learns good or evil from it is the question at stake."

Adrian stretched his length at ease.

"This will be his first nibble at experience, old Time's fruit, hateful to the palate of youth! for which season only hath it any nourishment! Experience! You know Coleridge's capital simile?—Mournful you call it? Well! all wisdom is mournful. 'Tis therefore, coz, that the wise do love the Comic Muse. Their own high food would kill them. You shall find great poets, rare philosophers, night after night

Page 199

on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? Because all's dark at home. The stage is the pastime of great minds. That's how it comes that the stage is now down. An age of rampant little minds, my dear Austin! How I hate that cant of yours about an Age of Work—you, and your Mortons, and your parsons Brawnley, rank radicals all of you, base materialists! What does Diaper Sandoe sing of your Age of Work? Listen!

'An Age of betty tit for tat,
An Age of busy gabble:
An Age that's like a brewer's vat,
Fermenting for the rabble!

'An Age that's chaste in Love, but lax
To virtuous abuses:
Whose gentlemen and ladies wax
Too dainty for their uses.

'An Age that drives an Iron Horse,
Of Time and Space defiant;
Exulting in a Giant's Force,
And trembling at the Giant.

'An Age of Quaker hue and cut,
By Mammon misbegotten;
See the mad Hamlet mouth and strut!
And mark the Kings of Cotton!

'From this unrest, lo, early wreck'd,
A Future staggers crazy,
Ophelia of the Ages, deck'd
With woeful weed and daisy!'"

Murmuring, "Get your parson Brawnley to answer that!" Adrian changed the resting-place of a leg, and smiled. The Age was an old battle-field between him and Austin.

"My parson Brawnley, as you call him, has answered it," said Austin, "not by hoping his best, which would probably leave the Age to go mad to your satisfaction, but by doing it. And he has and will answer your Diaper Sandoe in better verse, as he confutes him in a better life."

"You don't see Sandoe's depth," Adrian replied. "Consider that phrase, 'Ophelia of the Ages'! Is not Brawnley, like a dozen other leading spirits—I think that's your term just the metaphysical Hamlet to drive her mad? She, poor maid! asks for marriage and

smiling babes, while my lord lover stands questioning the Infinite, and rants to the Impalpable."

Austin laughed. "Marriage and smiling babes she would have in abundance, if Brawnley legislated. Wait till you know him. He will be over at Poer Hall shortly, and you will see what a Man of the Age means. But now, pray, consult with me about these boys."

"Oh, those boys!" Adrian tossed a hand. "Are there boys of the Age as well as men? Not? Then boys are better than men: boys are for all Ages. What do you think, Austin? They've been studying Latude's Escape. I found the book open in Ricky's room, on the top of Jonathan Wild. Jonathan preserved the secrets of his profession, and taught them nothing. So they're going to make a Latude of Mr. Tom Bakewell. He's to be Bastille Bakewell, whether he will or no. Let them. Let the wild colt run free! We can't help them. We can only look on. We should spoil the play."

Adrian always made a point of feeding the fretful beast Impatience with pleasantries—a not congenial diet; and Austin, the most patient of human beings, began to lose his self-control.

Page 200

“You talk as if Time belonged to you, Adrian. We have but a few hours left us. Work first, and joke afterwards. The boy’s fate is being decided now.”

“So is everybody’s, my dear Austin!” yawned the epicurean.

“Yes, but this boy is at present under our guardianship—under yours especially.”

“Not yet! not yet!” Adrian interjected languidly. “No getting into scrapes when I have him. The leash, young hound! the collar, young colt! I’m perfectly irresponsible at present.”

“You may have something different to deal with when you are responsible, if you think that.”

“I take my young prince as I find him, coz: a Julian, or a Caracalla: a Constantine, or a Nero. Then, if he will play the fiddle to a conflagration, he shall play it well: if he must be a disputatious apostate, at any rate he shall understand logic and men, and have the habit of saying his prayers.”

“Then you leave me to act alone?” said Austin, rising.

“Without a single curb!” Adrian gesticulated an acquiesced withdrawal. “I’m sure you would not, still more certain you cannot, do harm. And be mindful of my prophetic words: Whatever’s done, old Blaize will have to be bought off. There’s the affair settled at once. I suppose I must go to the chief to-night and settle it myself. We can’t see this poor devil condemned, though it’s nonsense to talk of a boy being the prime instigator.”

Austin cast an eye at the complacent languor of the wise youth, his cousin, and the little that he knew of his fellows told him he might talk forever here, and not be comprehended. The wise youth’s two ears were stuffed with his own wisdom. One evil only Adrian dreaded, it was clear—the action of the law.

As he was moving away, Adrian called out to him, “Stop, Austin! There! don’t be anxious! You invariably take the glum side. I’ve done something. Never mind what. If you go down to Belthorpe, be civil, but not obsequious. You remember the tactics of Scipio Africanus against the Punic elephants? Well, don’t say a word—in thine ear, coz: I’ve turned Master Blaize’s elephants. If they charge, ’twill bye a feint, and back to the destruction of his serried ranks! You understand. Not? Well, ’tis as well. Only, let none say that I sleep. If I must see him to-night, I go down knowing he has not got us in his power.” The wise youth yawned, and stretched out a hand for any book that might be within his reach. Austin left him to look about the grounds for Richard.

CHAPTER VII

A little laurel-shaded temple of white marble looked out on the river from a knoll bordering the Raynham beechwoods, and was dubbed by Adrian Daphne's Bower. To this spot Richard had retired, and there Austin found him with his head buried in his hands, a picture of desperation, whose last shift has been defeated. He allowed Austin to greet him and sit by him without lifting his head. Perhaps his eyes were not presentable.

Page 201

“Where’s your friend?” Austin began.

“Gone!” was the answer, sounding cavernous from behind hair and fingers. An explanation presently followed, that a summons had come for him in the morning from Mr. Thompson; and that Mr. Ripton had departed against his will.

In fact, Ripton had protested that he would defy his parent and remain by his friend in the hour of adversity and at the post of danger. Sir Austin signified his opinion that a boy should obey his parent, by giving orders to Benson for Ripton’s box to be packed and ready before noon; and Ripton’s alacrity in taking the baronet’s view of filial duty was as little feigned as his offer to Richard to throw filial duty to the winds. He rejoiced that the Fates had agreed to remove him from the very hot neighbourhood of Lobourne, while he grieved, like an honest lad, to see his comrade left to face calamity alone. The boys parted amicably, as they could hardly fail to do, when Ripton had sworn fealty to the Feverals with a warmth that made him declare himself bond, and due to appear at any stated hour and at any stated place to fight all the farmers in England, on a mandate from the heir of the house.

“So you’re left alone,” said Austin, contemplating the boy’s shapely head. “I’m glad of it. We never know what’s in us till we stand by ourselves.”

There appeared to be no answer forthcoming. Vanity, however, replied at last, “He wasn’t much support.”

“Remember his good points now he’s gone, Ricky.”

“Oh! he was staunch,” the boy grumbled.

“And a staunch friend is not always to be found. Now, have you tried your own way of rectifying this business, Ricky?”

“I have done everything.”

“And failed!”

There was a pause, and then the deep-toned evasion—

“Tom Bakewell’s a coward!”

“I suppose, poor fellow,” said Austin, in his kind way, “he doesn’t want to get into a deeper mess. I don’t think he’s a coward.”

“He is a coward,” cried Richard. “Do you think if I had a file I would stay in prison? I’d be out the first night! And he might have had the rope, too—a rope thick enough for a couple of men his size and weight. Ripton and I and Ned Markham swung on it for an

hour, and it didn't give way. He's a coward, and deserves his fate. I've no compassion for a coward."

"Nor I much," said Austin.

Richard had raised his head in the heat of his denunciation of poor Tom. He would have hidden it had he known the thought in Austin's clear eyes while he faced them.

"I never met a coward myself," Austin continued. "I have heard of one or two. One let an innocent man die for him."

"How base!" exclaimed the boy.

"Yes, it was bad," Austin acquiesced.

"Bad!" Richard scorned the poor contempt. "How I would have spurned him! He was a coward!"

"I believe he pleaded the feelings of his family in his excuse, and tried every means to get the man off. I have read also in the confessions of a celebrated philosopher, that in his youth he committed some act of pilfering, and accused a young servant-girl of his own theft, who was condemned and dismissed for it, pardoning her guilty accuser."

Page 202

“What a coward!” shouted Richard. “And he confessed it publicly?”

“You may read it yourself.”

“He actually wrote it down, and printed it?”

“You have the book in your father’s library. Would you have done so much?”

Richard faltered. No! he admitted that he never could have told people.

“Then who is to call that man a coward?” said Austin. “He expiated his cowardice as all who give way in moments of weakness, and are not cowards, must do. The coward chooses to think ‘God does not see.’ I shall escape.’ He who is not a coward, and has succumbed, knows that God has seen all, and it is not so hard a task for him to make his heart bare to the world. Worse, I should fancy it, to know myself an impostor when men praised me.”

Young Richard’s eyes were wandering on Austin’s gravely cheerful face. A keen intentness suddenly fixed them, and he dropped his head.

“So I think you’re wrong, Ricky, in calling this poor Tom a coward because he refuses to try your means of escape,” Austin resumed. “A coward hardly objects to drag in his accomplice. And, where the person involved belongs to a great family, it seems to me that for a poor plough-lad to volunteer not to do so speaks him anything but a coward.”

Richard was dumb. Altogether to surrender his rope and file was a fearful sacrifice, after all the time, trepidation, and study he had spent on those two saving instruments. If he avowed Tom’s manly behaviour, Richard Feverel was in a totally new position. Whereas, by keeping Tom a coward, Richard Feverel was the injured one, and to seem injured is always a luxury; sometimes a necessity, whether among boys or men.

In Austin the Magian conflict would not have lasted long. He had but a blind notion of the fierceness with which it raged in young Richard. Happily for the boy, Austin was not a preacher. A single instance, a cant phrase, a fatherly manner, might have wrecked him, by arousing ancient or latent opposition. The born preacher we feel instinctively to be our foe. He may do some good to the wretches that have been struck down and lie gasping on the battlefield: he rouses antagonism in the strong. Richard’s nature, left to itself, wanted little more than an indication of the proper track, and when he said, “Tell me what I can do, Austin?” he had fought the best half of the battle. His voice was subdued. Austin put his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“You must go down to Farmer Blaize.”

“Well!” said Richard, sullenly divining the deed of penance.

“You’ll know what to say to him when you’re there.”

The boy bit his lip and frowned. “Ask a favour of that big brute, Austin? I can’t!”

“Just tell him the whole case, and that you don’t intend to stand by and let the poor fellow suffer without a friend to help him out of his scrape.”

“But, Austin,” the boy pleaded, “I shall have to ask him to help off Tom Bakewell! How can I ask him, when I hate him?”

Page 203

Austin bade him go, and think nothing of the consequences till he got there.

Richard groaned in soul.

“You’ve no pride, Austin.”

“Perhaps not.”

“You don’t know what it is to ask a favour of a brute you hate.”

Richard stuck to that view of the case, and stuck to it the faster the more imperatively the urgency of a movement dawned upon him.

“Why,” continued the boy, “I shall hardly be able to keep my fists off him!”

“Surely you’ve punished him enough, boy?” said Austin.

“He struck me!” Richard’s lip quivered. “He dared not come at me with his hands. He struck me with a whip. He’ll be telling everybody that he horsewhipped me, and that I went down and begged his pardon. Begged his pardon! A Feverel beg his pardon! Oh, if I had my will!”

“The man earns his bread, Ricky. You poached on his grounds. He turned you off, and you fired his rick.”

“And I’ll pay him for his loss. And I won’t do any more.”

“Because you won’t ask a favour of him?”

“No! I will not ask a favour of him.”

Austin looked at the boy steadily. “You prefer to receive a favour from poor Tom Bakewell?”

At Austin’s enunciation of this obverse view of the matter Richard raised his brow. Dimly a new light broke in upon him. “Favour from Tom Bakewell, the ploughman? How do you mean, Austin?”

“To save yourself an unpleasantness you permit a country lad to sacrifice himself for you? I confess I should not have so much pride.”

“Pride!” shouted Richard, stung by the taunt, and set his sight hard at the blue ridges of the hills.

Not knowing for the moment what else to do, Austin drew a picture of Tom in prison, and repeated Tom’s volunteer statement. The picture, though his intentions were far from

designing it so, had to Richard, whose perception of humour was infinitely keener, a horrible chaw-bacon smack about it. Visions of a grinning lout, open from ear to ear, unkempt, coarse, splay-footed, rose before him and afflicted him with the strangest sensations of disgust and comicality, mixed up with pity and remorse—a sort of twisted pathos. There lay Tom; hobnail Tom! a bacon-munching, reckless, beer-swilling animal! and yet a man; a dear brave human heart notwithstanding; capable of devotion and unselfishness. The boy's better spirit was touched, and it kindled his imagination to realize the abject figure of poor clodpole Tom, and surround it with a halo of mournful light. His soul was alive. Feelings he had never known streamed in upon him as from an ethereal casement, an unwonted tenderness, an embracing humour, a consciousness of some ineffable glory, an irradiation of the features of humanity. All this was in the bosom of the boy, and through it all the vision of an actual hob-nail Tom, coarse, unkempt, open from ear to ear; whose presence was a finger of shame to him and an oppression

Page 204

of clodpole; yet toward whom he felt just then a loving-kindness beyond what he felt for any living creature. He laughed at him, and wept over him. He prized him, while he shrank from him. It was a genial strife of the angel in him with constituents less divine; but the angel was uppermost and led the van—extinguished loathing, humanized laughter, transfigured pride—pride that would persistently contemplate the corduroys of gaping Tom, and cry to Richard, in the very tone of Adrian's ironic voice, "Behold your benefactor!"

Austin sat by the boy, unaware of the sublimer tumult he had stirred. Little of it was perceptible in Richard's countenance. The lines of his mouth were slightly drawn; his eyes hard set into the distance. He remained thus many minutes. Finally he jumped to his legs, saying, "I'll go at once to old Blaize and tell him."

Austin grasped his hand, and together they issued out of Daphne's Bower, in the direction of Lobourne.

CHAPTER VIII

Farmer Blaize was not so astonished at the visit of Richard Feverel as that young gentleman expected him to be. The farmer, seated in his easy-chair in the little low-roofed parlour of an old-fashioned farm-house, with a long clay pipe on the table at his elbow, and a veteran pointer at his feet, had already given audience to three distinguished members of the Feverel blood, who had come separately, according to their accustomed secretiveness, and with one object. In the morning it was Sir Austin himself. Shortly after his departure, arrived Austin Wentworth; close on his heels, Algernon, known about Lobourne as the Captain, popular wherever he was known. Farmer Blaize reclined in considerable elation. He had brought these great people to a pretty low pitch. He had welcomed them hospitably, as a British yeoman should; but not budged a foot in his demands: not to the baronet: not to the Captain: not to good young Mr. Wentworth. For Farmer Blaize was a solid Englishman; and, on hearing from the baronet a frank confession of the hold he had on the family, he determined to tighten his hold, and only relax it in exchange for tangible advantages—compensation to his pocket, his wounded person, and his still more wounded sentiments: the total indemnity being, in round figures, three hundred pounds, and a spoken apology from the prime offender, young Mister Richard. Even then there was a reservation. Provided, the farmer said, nobody had been tampering with any of his witnesses. In that ease Farmer Blaize declared the money might go, and he would transport Tom Bakewell, as he had sworn he would. And it goes hard, too, with an accomplice, by law, added the farmer, knocking the ashes leisurely out of his pipe. He had no wish to bring any disgrace anywhere; he respected the inmates of Raynham Abbey, as in duty bound; he should be sorry to see them in trouble. Only no tampering with his witnesses. He was a man for Law. Rank was much: money was much: but Law was more. In this country Law was above the sovereign. To tamper with the Law was treason to the realm.

Page 205

“I come to you direct,” the baronet explained. “I tell you candidly what way I discovered my son to be mixed up in this miserable affair. I promise you indemnity for your loss, and an apology that shall, I trust, satisfy your feelings, assuring you that to tamper with witnesses is not the province of a Feverel. All I ask of you in return is, not to press the prosecution. At present it rests with you. I am bound to do all that lies in my power for this imprisoned man. How and wherefore my son was prompted to suggest, or assist in, such an act, I cannot explain, for I do not know.”

“Hum!” said the farmer. “I think I do.”

“You know the cause?” Sir Austin stared. “I beg you to confide it to me.”

“’Least, I can pretty nigh neighbour it with a gues,” said the farmer. “We an’t good friends, Sir Austin, me and your son, just now—not to say cordial. I, ye see, Sir Austin, I’m a man as don’t like young gentlemen a-poachin’ on his grounds without his permission,—in special when birds is plentiful on their own. It appear he do like it. Consequently I has to flick this whip—as them fellers at the races: All in this ’ere Ring’s mine! as much as to say; and who’s been hit, he’s had fair warnin’. I’m sorry for’t, but that’s just the case.”

Sir Austin retired to communicate with his son, when he should find him.

Algernon’s interview passed off in ale and promises. He also assured Farmer Blaize that no Feverel could be affected by his proviso.

No less did Austin Wentworth. The farmer was satisfied.

“Money’s safe, I know,” said he; “now for the ’pology!” and Farmer Blaize thrust his legs further out, and his head further back.

The farmer naturally reflected that the three separate visits had been conspired together. Still the baronet’s frankness, and the baronet’s not having reserved himself for the third and final charge, puzzled him. He was considering whether they were a deep, or a shallow lot, when young Richard was announced.

A pretty little girl with the roses of thirteen springs in her cheeks, and abundant beautiful bright tresses, tripped before the boy, and loitered shyly by the farmer’s arm-chair to steal a look at the handsome new-comer. She was introduced to Richard as the farmer’s niece, Lucy Desborough, the daughter of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and, what was better, though the farmer did not pronounce it so loudly, a real good girl.

Neither the excellence of her character, nor her rank in life, tempted Richard to inspect the little lady. He made an awkward bow, and sat down.

The farmer’s eyes twinkled. “Her father,” he continued, “fought and fell for his coontry. A man as fights for’s coontry’s a right to hould up his head—ay! with any in the land. Desb’roughs o’ Dorset! d’ye know that family, Master Feverel?”

Richard did not know them, and, by his air, did not desire to become acquainted with any offshoot of that family.

Page 206

“She can make puddens and pies,” the farmer went on, regardless of his auditor’s gloom. “She’s a lady, as good as the best of ’em. I don’t care about their being Catholics—the Desb’roughs o’ Dorset are gentlemen. And she’s good for the pianer, too! She strums to me of evenin’s. I’m for the old tunes: she’s for the new. Gal-like! While she’s with me she shall be taught things use’l. She can parley-voo a good ’un and foot it, as it goes; been in France a couple of year. I prefer the singin’ of ’t to the talkin’ of ’t. Come, Luce! toon up—eh?—Ye wun’t? That song abort the Viffendeer—a female”—Farmer Blaize volunteered the translation of the title—“who wears the—you guess what! and marches along with the French sojers: a pretty brazen bit o’ goods, I sh’d fancy.”

Mademoiselle Lucy corrected her uncle’s French, but objected to do more. The handsome cross boy had almost taken away her voice for speech, as it was, and sing in his company she could not; so she stood, a hand on her uncle’s chair to stay herself from falling, while she wriggled a dozen various shapes of refusal, and shook her head at the farmer with fixed eyes.

“Aha!” laughed the farmer, dismissing her, “they soon learn the difference ’twixt the young ’un and the old ’un. Go along, Luce! and learn yer lessons for to-morrow.”

Reluctantly the daughter of the Royal Navy glided away. Her uncle’s head followed her to the door, where she dallied to catch a last impression of the young stranger’s lowering face, and darted through.

Farmer Blaize laughed and chuckled. “She an’t so fond of her uncle as that, every day! Not that she an’t a good nurse—the kindest little soul you’d meet of a winter’s walk! She’ll read t’ ye, and make drinks, and sing, too, if ye likes it, and she won’t be tired. A obstinate good ’un, she be! Bless her!”

The farmer may have designed, by these eulogies of his niece, to give his visitor time to recover his composure, and establish a common topic. His diversion only irritated and confused our shame-eaten youth. Richard’s intention had been to come to the farmer’s threshold: to summon the farmer thither, and in a loud and haughty tone then and there to take upon himself the whole burden of the charge against Tom Bakewell. He had strayed, during his passage to Belthorpe, somewhat back to his old nature; and his being compelled to enter the house of his enemy, sit in his chair, and endure an introduction to his family, was more than he bargained for. He commenced blinking hard in preparation for the horrible dose to which delay and the farmer’s cordiality added inconceivable bitters. Farmer Blaize was quite at his ease; nowise in a hurry. He spoke of the weather and the harvest: of recent doings up at the Abbey: glanced over that year’s cricketing; hoped that no future Feverel would lose a leg to the game. Richard saw and heard Arson in it all. He blinked harder as he neared the cup. In a moment of silence, he seized it with a gasp.

Page 207

“Mr. Blaize! I have come to tell you that I am the person who set fire to your rick the other night.”

An odd consternation formed about the farmer’s mouth. He changed his posture, and said, “Ay? that’s what ye’re come to tell me sir?”

“Yes!” said Richard, firmly.

“And that be all?”

“Yes!” Richard reiterated.

The farmer again changed his posture. “Then, my lad, ye’ve come to tell me a lie!”

Farmer Blaize looked straight at the boy, undismayed by the dark flush of ire he had kindled.

“You dare to call me a liar!” cried Richard, starting up.

“I say,” the farmer renewed his first emphasis, and smacked his thigh thereto, “that’s a lie!”

Richard held out his clenched fist. “You have twice insulted me. You have struck me: you have dared to call me a liar. I would have apologized—I would have asked your pardon, to have got off that fellow in prison. Yes! I would have degraded myself that another man should not suffer for my deed”—

“Quite proper!” interposed the farmer.

“And you take this opportunity of insulting me afresh. You’re a coward, sir! nobody but a coward would have insulted me in his own house.”

“Sit ye down, sit ye down, young master,” said the farmer, indicating the chair and cooling the outburst with his hand. “Sit ye down. Don’t ye be hasty. If ye hadn’t been hasty t’other day, we sh’d a been friends yet. Sit ye down, sir. I sh’d be sorry to reckon you out a liar, Mr. Feverel, or anybody o’ your name. I respects yer father though we’re opp’site politics. I’m willin’ to think well o’ you. What I say is, that as you say an’t the trewth. Mind! I don’t like you none the worse for’t. But it an’t what is. That’s all! You knows it as well’s I!”

Richard, disdaining to show signs of being pacified, angrily reseated himself. The farmer spoke sense, and the boy, after his late interview with Austin, had become capable of perceiving vaguely that a towering passion is hardly the justification for a wrong course of conduct.

“Come,” continued the farmer, not unkindly, “what else have you to say?”

Here was the same bitter cup he had already once drained brimming at Richard’s lips again! Alas, poor human nature! that empties to the dregs a dozen of these evil drinks, to evade the single one which Destiny, less cruel, had insisted upon.

The boy blinked and tossed it off.

“I came to say that I regretted the revenge I had taken on you for your striking me.”

Farmer Blaize nodded.

“And now ye’ve done, young gentleman?”

Still another cupful!

Page 208

“I should be very much obliged,” Richard formally began, but his stomach was turned; he could but sip and sip, and gather a distaste which threatened to make the penitential act impossible. “Very much obliged,” he repeated: “much obliged, if you would be so kind,” and it struck him that had he spoken this at first he would have given it a wording more persuasive with the farmer and more worthy of his own pride: more honest, in fact: for a sense of the dishonesty of what he was saying caused him to cringe and simulate humility to deceive the farmer, and the more he said the less he felt his words, and, feeling them less, he inflated them more. “So kind,” he stammered, “so kind” (fancy a Feverel asking this big brute to be so kind!) “as to do me the favour” (me the favour!) “to exert yourself” (it’s all to please Austin) “to endeavour to—hem! to” (there’s no saying it!)—

The cup was full as ever. Richard dashed at it again.

“What I came to ask is, whether you would have the kindness to try what you could do” (what an infamous shame to have to beg like this!) “do to save—do to ensure—whether you would have the kindness” It seemed out of all human power to gulp it down. The draught grew more and more abhorrent. To proclaim one’s iniquity, to apologize for one’s wrongdoing; thus much could be done; but to beg a favour of the offended party —that was beyond the self-abasement any Feverel could consent to. Pride, however, whose inevitable battle is against itself, drew aside the curtains of poor Tom’s prison, crying a second time, “Behold your Benefactor!” and, with the words burning in his ears, Richard swallowed the dose:

“Well, then, I want you, Mr. Blaize,—if you don’t mind—will you help me to get this man Bakewell off his punishment?”

To do Farmer Blaize justice, he waited very patiently for the boy, though he could not quite see why he did not take the gate at the first offer.

“Oh!” said he, when he heard and had pondered on the request. “Hum! ha! we’ll see about it t’morrow. But if he’s innocent, you know, we shan’t mak’n guilty.”

“It was I did it!” Richard declared.

The farmer’s half-amused expression sharpened a bit.

“So, young gentleman! and you’re sorry for the night’s work?”

“I shall see that you are paid the full extent of your losses.”

“Thank’ee,” said the farmer drily.

“And, if this poor man is released to-morrow, I don’t care what the amount is.”

Farmer Blaize deflected his head twice in silence. “Bribery,” one motion expressed: “Corruption,” the other.

“Now,” said he, leaning forward, and fixing his elbows on his knees, while he counted the case at his fingers’ ends, “excuse the liberty, but wishin’ to know where this ’ere money’s to come from, I sh’d like jest t’ask if so be Sir Austin know o’ this?”

“My father knows nothing of it,” replied Richard.

Page 209

The farmer flung back in his chair. “Lie number Two,” said his shoulders, soured by the British aversion to being plotted at, and not dealt with openly.

“And ye’ve the money ready, young gentleman?”

“I shall ask my father for it.”

“And he’ll hand’t out?”

“Certainly he will!”

Richard had not the slightest intention of ever letting his father into his counsels.

“A good three hundred pounds, ye know?” the farmer suggested.

No consideration of the extent of damages, and the size of the sum, affected young Richard, who said boldly, “He will not object when I tell him I want that sum.”

It was natural Farmer Blaize should be a trifle suspicious that a youth’s guarantee would hardly be given for his father’s readiness to disburse such a thumping bill, unless he had previously received his father’s sanction and authority.

“Hum!” said he, “why not ’a told him before?”

The farmer threw an objectionable shrewdness into his query, that caused Richard to compress his mouth and glance high.

Farmer Blaize was positive ’twas a lie.

“Hum! Ye still hold to’t you fired the rick?” he asked.

“The blame is mine!” quoth Richard, with the loftiness of a patriot of old Rome.

“Na, na!” the straightforward Briton put him aside. “Ye did’t, or ye didn’t do’t. Did ye do’t, or no?”

Thrust in a corner, Richard said, “I did it.”

Farmer Blaize reached his hand to the bell. It was answered in an instant by little Lucy, who received orders to fetch in a dependent at Belthorpe going by the name of the Bantam, and made her exit as she had entered, with her eyes on the young stranger.

“Now,” said the farmer, “these be my principles. I’m a plain man, Mr. Feverel. Above board with me, and you’ll find me handsome. Try to circumvent me, and I’m a ugly customer. I’ll show you I’ve no animosity. Your father pays—you apologize. That’s enough for me! Let Tom Bakewell fight’t out with the Law, and I’ll look on. The Law

wasn’t on the spot, I suppose? so the Law ain’t much witness. But I am. Leastwise the Bantam is. I tell you, young gentleman, the Bantam saw’t! It’s no moral use whatever your denyin’ that ev’dence. And where’s the good, sir, I ask? What comes of ’t? Whether it be you, or whether it be Tom Bakewell—ain’t all one? If I holds back, ain’t it sim’lar? It’s the trewth I want! And here’t comes,” added the farmer, as Miss Lucy ushered in the Bantam, who presented a curious figure for that rare divinity to enliven.

CHAPTER IX

Page 210

In build of body, gait and stature, Giles Jinkson, the Bantam, was a tolerably fair representative of the Punic elephant, whose part, with diverse anticipations, the generals of the Blaize and Feverel forces, from opposing ranks, expected him to play. Giles, surnamed the Bantam, on account of some forgotten sally of his youth or infancy, moved and looked elephantine. It sufficed that Giles was well fed to assure that Giles was faithful—if uncorrupted. The farm which supplied to him ungrudging provender had all his vast capacity for work in willing exercise: the farmer who held the farm his instinct reverenced as the fountain source of beef and bacon, to say nothing of beer, which was plentiful at Belthorpe, and good. This Farmer Blaize well knew, and he reckoned consequently that here was an animal always to be relied on—a sort of human composition out of dog, horse, and bull, a cut above each of these quadrupeds in usefulness, and costing proportionately more, but on the whole worth the money, and therefore invaluable, as everything worth its money must be to a wise man. When the stealing of grain had been made known at Belthorpe, the Bantam, a fellow-thresher with Tom Bakewell, had shared with him the shadow of the guilt. Farmer Blaize, if he hesitated which to suspect, did not debate a second as to which he would discard; and, when the Bantam said he had seen Tom secreting pilkins in a sack, Farmer Blaize chose to believe him, and off went poor Tom, told to rejoice in the clemency that spared his appearance at Sessions.

The Bantam's small sleepy orbits saw many things, and just at the right moment, it seemed. He was certainly the first to give the clue at Belthorpe on the night of the conflagration, and he may, therefore, have seen poor Tom retreating stealthily from the scene, as he averred he did. Lobourne had its say on the subject. Rustic Lobourne hinted broadly at a young woman in the case, and, moreover, told a tale of how these fellow-threshers had, in noble rivalry, one day turned upon each other to see which of the two threshed the best; whereof the Bantam still bore marks, and malice, it was said. However, there he stood, and tugged his forelocks to the company, and if Truth really had concealed herself in him she must have been hard set to find her unlikeliest hiding-place.

"Now," said the farmer, marshalling forth his elephant with the confidence of one who delivers his ace of trumps, "tell this young gentleman what ye saw on the night of the fire, Bantam!"

The Bantam jerked a bit of a bow to his patron, and then swung round, fully obscuring him from Richard.

Richard fixed his eyes on the floor, while the Bantam in rudest Doric commenced his narrative. Knowing what was to come, and thoroughly nerved to confute the main incident, Richard barely listened to his barbarous locution: but when the recital arrived at the point where the Bantam affirmed he had seen "T'm Baak'll wi's owen hoies," Richard faced him, and was amazed to find himself being mutely addressed by a series of intensely significant grimaces, signs, and winks.

Page 211

“What do you mean? Why are you making those faces at me?” cried the boy indignantly.

Farmer Blaize leaned round the Bantam to have a look at him, and beheld the stolidest mask ever given to man.

“Bain’t makin’ no faces at nobody,” growled the sulky elephant.

The farmer commanded him to face about and finish.

“A see T’m Baak’ll,” the Bantam recommenced, and again the contortions of a horrible wink were directed at Richard. The boy might well believe this churl was lying, and he did, and was emboldened to exclaim—

“You never saw Tom Bakewell set fire to that rick!”

The Bantam swore to it, grimacing an accompaniment.

“I tell you,” said Richard, “I put the lucifers there myself!”

The suborned elephant was staggered. He meant to telegraph to the young gentleman that he was loyal and true to certain gold pieces that had been given him, and that in the right place and at the right time he should prove so. Why was he thus suspected? Why was he not understood?

“A thowt I see ’un, then,” muttered the Bantam, trying a middle course.

This brought down on him the farmer, who roared, “Thought! Ye thought! What d’ye mean? Speak out, and don’t be thinkin’. Thought? What the devil’s that?”

“How could he see who it was on a pitch-dark night?” Richard put in.

“Thought!” the farmer bellowed louder. “Thought—Devil take ye, when ye took ye oath on’t. Hulloa! What are ye screwin’ yer eye at Mr. Feverel for?—I say, young gentleman, have you spoke to this chap before now?”

“I?” replied Richard. “I have not seen him before.”

Farmer Blaize grasped the two arms of the chair he sat on, and glared his doubts.

“Come,” said he to the Bantam, “speak out, and ha’ done wi’t. Say what ye saw, and none o’ yer thoughts. Damn yer thoughts! Ye saw Tom Bakewell fire that there rick!” The farmer pointed at some musk-pots in the window. “What business ha’ you to be a-thinkin’? You’re a witness? Thinkin’ an’t ev’dence. What’ll ye say to morrow before magistrate! Mind! what you says today, you’ll stick by to-morrow.”

Thus adjured, the Bantam hitched his breech. What on earth the young gentleman meant he was at a loss to speculate. He could not believe that the young gentleman wanted to be transported, but if he had been paid to help that, why, he would. And considering that this day's evidence rather bound him down to the morrow's, he determined, after much ploughing and harrowing through obstinate shocks of hair, to be not altogether positive as to the person. It is possible that he became thereby more a mansion of truth than he previously had been; for the night, as he said, was so dark that you could not see your hand before your face; and though, as he expressed it, you might be mortal sure of a man, you could not identify him upon oath, and the party he had taken for Tom Bakewell, and could have sworn to, might have been the young gentleman present, especially as he was ready to swear it upon oath.

Page 212

So ended the Bantam.

No sooner had he ceased, than Farmer Blaize jumped up from his chair, and made a fine effort to lift him out of the room from the point of his toe. He failed, and sank back groaning with the pain of the exertion and disappointment.

“They’re liars, every one!” he cried. “Liars, perj’rers, bribers, and c’rrupters!—Stop!” to the Bantam, who was slinking away. “You’ve done for yerself already! You swore to it!”

“A din’t!” said the Bantam, doggedly.

“You swore to’t!” the farmer vociferated afresh.

The Bantam played a tune upon the handle of the door, and still affirmed that he did not; a double contradiction at which the farmer absolutely raged in his chair, and was hoarse, as he called out a third time that the Bantam had sworn to it.

“Noa!” said the Bantam, ducking his poll. “Noa!” he repeated in a lower note; and then, while a sombre grin betokening idiotic enjoyment of his profound casuistical quibble worked at his jaw:

“Not up’n o-ath!” he added, with a twitch of the shoulder and an angular jerk of the elbow.

Farmer Blaize looked vacantly at Richard, as if to ask him what he thought of England’s peasantry after the sample they had there. Richard would have preferred not to laugh, but his dignity gave way to his sense of the ludicrous, and he let fly a shout. The farmer was in no laughing mood. He turned a wide eye back to the door, “Lucky for’m,” he exclaimed, seeing the Bantam had vanished, for his fingers itched to break that stubborn head. He grew very puffy, and addressed Richard solemnly:

“Now, look ye here, Mr. Feverel! You’ve been a-tampering with my witness. It’s no use denyin’! I say y’ ’ave, sir! You, or some of ye. I don’t care about no Feverel! My witness there has been bribed. The Bantam’s been bribed,” and he shivered his pipe with an energetic thump on the table—“bribed! I knows it! I could swear to’t!”—

“Upon oath?” Richard inquired, with a grave face.

“Ay, upon oath!” said the farmer, not observing the impertinence.

“I’d take my Bible oath on’t! He’s been corrupted, my principal witness! Oh! it’s dam cunnin’, but it won’t do the trick. I’ll transport Tom Bakewell, sure as a gun. He shall travel, that man shall. Sorry for you, Mr. Feverel—sorry you haven’t seen how to treat me proper—you, or yours. Money won’t do everything—no! it won’t. It’ll c’rrupt a witness, but it won’t clear a felon. I’d ha’ ’soused you, sir! You’re a boy and’ll learn

better. I asked no more than payment and apology; and that I'd ha' taken content—-always provided my witnesses weren't tampered with. Now you must stand yer luck, all o' ye."

Richard stood up and replied, "Very well, Mr. Blaize."

"And if," continued the farmer, "Tom Bakewell don't drag you into't after 'm, why, you're safe, as I hope ye'll be, sincere!"

"It was not in consideration of my own safety that I sought this interview with you," said Richard, head erect.

Page 213

“Grant ye that,” the farmer responded. “Grant ye that! Yer bold enough, young gentleman—comes of the blood that should be! If y’ had only ha’ spoke trewth!—I believe yer father—believe every word he said. I do wish I could ha’ said as much for Sir Austin’s son and heir.”

“What!” cried Richard, with an astonishment hardly to be feigned, “you have seen my father?”

But Farmer Blaize had now such a scent for lies that he could detect them where they did not exist, and mumbled gruffly,

“Ay, we knows all about that!”

The boy’s perplexity saved him from being irritated. Who could have told his father? An old fear of his father came upon him, and a touch of an old inclination to revolt.

“My father knows of this?” said he, very loudly, and staring, as he spoke, right through the farmer. “Who has played me false? Who would betray me to him? It was Austin! No one knew it but Austin. Yes, and it was Austin who persuaded me to come here and submit to these indignities. Why couldn’t he be open with me? I shall never trust him again!”

“And why not you with me, young gentleman?” said the farmer. “I sh’d trust you if ye had.”

Richard did not see the analogy. He bowed stiffly and bade him good afternoon.

Farmer Blaize pulled the bell. “Company the young gentleman out, Lucy,” he waved to the little damsel in the doorway. “Do the honours. And, Mr. Richard, ye might ha’ made a friend o’ me, sir, and it’s not too late so to do. I’m not cruel, but I hate lies. I whipped my boy Tom, bigger than you, for not bein’ above board, only yesterday,—ay! made ’un stand within swing o’ this chair, and take’s measure. Now, if ye’ll come down to me, and speak trewth before the trial—if it’s only five minutes before’t; or if Sir Austin, who’s a gentleman, ’ll say there’s been no tamperin’ with any o’ my witnesses, his word for’t—-well and good! I’ll do my best to help off Tom Bakewell. And I’m glad, young gentleman, you’ve got a conscience about a poor man, though he’s a villain. Good afternoon, sir.”

Richard marched hastily out of the room, and through the garden, never so much as deigning a glance at his wistful little guide, who hung at the garden gate to watch him up the lane, wondering a world of fancies about the handsome proud boy.

CHAPTER X

To have determined upon an act something akin to heroism in its way, and to have fulfilled it by lying heartily, and so subverting the whole structure built by good resolution, seems a sad downfall if we forget what human nature, in its green weedy spring, is composed of. Young Richard had quitted his cousin Austin fully resolved to do his penance and drink the bitter cup; and he had drunk it; drained many cups to the dregs; and it was to no purpose. Still they floated before him, brimmed, trebly bitter. Away from Austin's influence, he was almost the same boy

Page 214

who had slipped the guinea into Tom Bakewell's hand, and the lucifers into Farmer Blaize's rick. For good seed is long ripening; a good boy is not made in a minute. Enough that the seed was in him. He chafed on his road to Raynham at the scene he had just endured, and the figure of Belthorpe's fat tenant burnt like hot copper on the tablet of his brain, insufferably condescending, and, what was worse, in the right. Richard, obscured as his mind's eye was by wounded pride, saw that clearly, and hated his enemy for it the more.

Heavy Benson's tongue was knelling dinner as Richard arrived at the Abbey. He hurried up to his room to dress. Accident, or design, had laid the book of Sir Austin's aphorisms open on the dressing-table. Hastily combing his hair, Richard glanced down and read —

"The Dog returneth to his vomit: the Liar must eat his Lie."

Underneath was interjected in pencil: "The Devil's mouthful!"

Young Richard ran downstairs feeling that his father had struck him in the face.

Sir Austin marked the scarlet stain on his son's cheekbones. He sought the youth's eye, but Richard would not look, and sat conning his plate, an abject copy of Adrian's succulent air at that employment. How could he pretend to the relish of an epicure when he was painfully endeavouring to masticate The Devil's mouthful?

Heavy Benson sat upon the wretched dinner. Hippias usually the silent member, as if awakened by the unnatural stillness, became sprightly, like the goatsucker owl at night and spoke much of his book, his digestion, and his dreams, and was spared both by Algernon and Adrian. One inconsequent dream he related, about fancying himself quite young and rich, and finding himself suddenly in a field cropping razors around him, when, just as he had, by steps dainty as those of a French dancing-master, reached the middle, he to his dismay beheld a path clear of the blood, thirsty steel-crop, which he might have taken at first had he looked narrowly; and there he was.

Hippias's brethren regarded him with eyes that plainly said they wished he had remained there. Sir Austin, however, drew forth his note-book, and jotted down a reflection. A composer of aphorisms can pluck blossoms even from a razor-prop. Was not Hippias's dream the very counterpart of Richard's position? He, had he looked narrowly, might have taken the clear path: he, too, had been making dainty steps till he was surrounded by the grinning blades. And from that text Sir Austin preached to his son when they were alone. Little Clare was still too unwell to be permitted to attend the dessert, and father and son were soon closeted together.

Page 215

It was a strange meeting. They seemed to have been separated so long. The father took his son's hand; they sat without a word passing between them. Silence said most. The boy did not understand his father: his father frequently thwarted him: at times he thought his father foolish: but that paternal pressure of his hand was eloquent to him of how warmly he was beloved. He tried once or twice to steal his hand away, conscious it was melting him. The spirit of his pride, and old rebellion, whispered him to be hard, unbending, resolute. Hard he had entered his father's study: hard he had met his father's eyes. He could not meet them now. His father sat beside him gently; with a manner that was almost meekness, so he loved this boy. The poor gentleman's lips moved. He was praying internally to God for him.

By degrees an emotion awoke in the boy's bosom. Love is that blessed wand which wins the waters from the hardness of the heart. Richard fought against it, for the dignity of old rebellion. The tears would come; hot and struggling over the dams of pride. Shamefully fast they began to fall. He could no longer conceal them, or check the sobs. Sir Austin drew him nearer and nearer, till the beloved head was on his breast.

An hour afterwards, Adrian Harley, Austin Wentworth, and Algernon Feverel were summoned to the baronet's study.

Adrian came last. There was a style of affable omnipotence about the wise youth as he slung himself into a chair, and made an arch of the points of his fingers, through which to gaze on his blundering kinsmen. Careless as one may be whose sagacity has foreseen, and whose benevolent efforts have forestalled, the point of danger at the threshold, Adrian crossed his legs, and only intruded on their introductory remarks so far as to hum half audibly at intervals,

> "Ripton and Richard were two pretty men,"

in parody of the old ballad. Young Richard's red eyes, and the baronet's ruffled demeanour, told him that an explanation had taken place, and a reconciliation. That was well. The baronet would now pay cheerfully. Adrian summed and considered these matters, and barely listened when the baronet called attention to what he had to say: which was elaborately to inform all present, what all present very well knew, that a rick had been fired, that his son was implicated as an accessory to the fact, that the perpetrator was now imprisoned, and that Richard's family were, as it seemed to him, bound in honour to do their utmost to effect the man's release.

Then the baronet stated that he had himself been down to Belthorpe, his son likewise: and that he had found every disposition in Blaize to meet his wishes.

The lamp which ultimately was sure to be lifted up to illumine the acts of this secretive race began slowly to dispread its rays; and, as statement followed statement, they saw that all had known of the business: that all had been down to Belthorpe: all save the

wise youth Adrian, who, with due deference and a sarcastic shrug, objected to the proceeding, as putting them in the hands of the man Blaize. His wisdom shone forth in an oration so persuasive and aphoristic that had it not been based on a plea against honour, it would have made Sir Austin waver. But its basis was expediency, and the baronet had a better aphorism of his own to confute him with.

Page 216

“Expediency is man’s wisdom, Adrian Harley. Doing right is God’s.”

Adrian curbed his desire to ask Sir Austin whether an attempt to counteract the just working of the law was doing right. The direct application of an aphorism was unpopular at Raynham.

“I am to understand then,” said he, “that Blaize consents not to press the prosecution.”

“Of course he won’t,” Algernon remarked. “Confound him! he’ll have his money, and what does he want besides?”

“These agricultural gentlemen are delicate customers to deal with. However, if he really consents”—

“I have his promise,” said the baronet, fondling his son.

Young Richard looked up to his father, as if he wished to speak. He said nothing, and Sir Austin took it as a mute reply to his caresses; and caressed him the more. Adrian perceived a reserve in the boy’s manner, and as he was not quite satisfied that his chief should suppose him to have been the only idle, and not the most acute and vigilant member of the family, he commenced a cross-examination of him by asking who had last spoken with the tenant of Belthorpe?

“I think I saw him last,” murmured Richard, and relinquished his father’s hand.

Adrian fastened on his prey. “And left him with a distinct and satisfactory assurance of his amicable intentions?”

“No,” said Richard.

“Not?” the Feverels joined in astounded chorus.

Richard sidled away from his father, and repeated a shamefaced “No.”

“Was he hostile?” inquired Adrian, smoothing his palms, and smiling.

“Yes,” the boy confessed.

Here was quite another view of their position. Adrian, generally patient of results, triumphed strongly at having evoked it, and turned upon Austin Wentworth, reproving him for inducing the boy to go down to Belthorpe. Austin looked grieved. He feared that Richard had faded in his good resolve.

“I thought it his duty to go,” he observed.

“It was!” said the baronet, emphatically.

“And you see what comes of it, sir,” Adrian struck in. “These agricultural gentlemen, I repeat, are delicate customers to deal with. For my part I would prefer being in the hands of a policeman. We are decidedly collared by Blaize. What were his words, Ricky? Give it in his own Doric.”

“He said he would transport Tom Bakewell.”

Adrian smoothed his palms, and smiled again. Then they could afford to defy Mr. Blaize, he informed them significantly, and made once more a mysterious allusion to the Punic elephant, bidding his relatives be at peace. They were attaching, in his opinion, too much importance to Richard’s complicity. The man was a fool, and a very extraordinary arsonite, to have an accomplice at all. It was a thing unknown in the annals of rick-burning. But one would be severer than law itself to say that a boy of fourteen had instigated to crime a full-grown man. At that rate the boy was ‘father of the man’ with a vengeance, and one might hear next that ‘the baby was father of the boy.’ They would find common sense a more benevolent ruler than poetical metaphysics.

Page 217

When he had done, Austin, with his customary directness, asked him what he meant.

“I confess, Adrian,” said the baronet, hearing him expostulate with Austin’s stupidity, “I for one am at a loss. I have heard that this man, Bakewell, chooses voluntarily not to inculpate my son. Seldom have I heard anything that so gratified me. It is a view of innate nobleness in the rustic’s character which many a gentleman might take example from. We are bound to do our utmost for the man.” And, saying that he should pay a second visit to Belthorpe, to inquire into the reasons for the farmer’s sudden exposition of vindictiveness, Sir Austin rose.

Before he left the room, Algernon asked Richard if the farmer had vouchsafed any reasons, and the boy then spoke of the tampering with the witnesses, and the Bantam’s “Not upon oath!” which caused Adrian to choke with laughter. Even the baronet smiled at so cunning a distinction as that involved in swearing a thing, and not swearing it upon oath.

“How little,” he exclaimed, “does one yeoman know another! To elevate a distinction into a difference is the natural action of their minds. I will point that out to Blaize. He shall see that the idea is native born.”

Richard saw his father go forth. Adrian, too, was ill at ease.

“This trotting down to Belthorpe spoils all,” said he. “The affair would pass over to-morrow—Blaize has no witnesses. The old rascal is only standing out for more money.”

“No, he isn’t,” Richard corrected him. “It’s not that. I’m sure he believes his witnesses have been tampered with, as he calls it.”

“What if they have, boy?” Adrian put it boldly. “The ground is cut from under his feet.”

“Blaize told me that if my father would give his word there had been nothing of the sort, he would take it. My father will give his word.”

“Then,” said Adrian, “you had better stop him from going down.”

Austin looked at Adrian keenly, and questioned him whether he thought the farmer was justified in his suspicions. The wise youth was not to be entrapped. He had only been given to understand that the witnesses were tolerably unstable, and, like the Bantam, ready to swear lustily, but not upon the Book. How given to understand, he chose not to explain, but he reiterated that the chief should not be allowed to go down to Belthorpe.

Sir Austin was in the lane leading to the farm when he heard steps of some one running behind him. It was dark, and he shook off the hand that laid hold of his cloak, roughly, not recognizing his son.

“It’s I, sir,” said Richard panting. “Pardon me. You mustn’t go in there.”

“Why not?” said the baronet, putting his arm about him.

“Not now,” continued the boy. “I will tell you all to-night. I must see the farmer myself. It was my fault, sir. I-I lied to him—the Liar must eat his Lie. Oh, forgive me for disgracing you, sir. I did it—I hope I did it to save Tom Bakewell. Let me go in alone, and speak the truth.”

Page 218

“Go, and I will wait for you here,” said his father.

The wind that bowed the old elms, and shivered the dead leaves in the air, had a voice and a meaning for the baronet during that half-hour’s lonely pacing up and down under the darkness, awaiting his boy’s return. The solemn gladness of his heart gave nature a tongue. Through the desolation flying overhead—the wailing of the Mother of Plenty across the bare-swept land—he caught intelligible signs of the beneficent order of the universe, from a heart newly confirmed in its grasp of the principle of human goodness, as manifested in the dear child who had just left him; confirmed in its belief in the ultimate victory of good within us, without which nature has neither music nor meaning, and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more.

In the dark, the dead leaves beating on his face, he had a word for his note-book: “There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness: from that uppermost pinnacle of wisdom, whence we see that this world is well designed.”

CHAPTER XI

Of all the chief actors in the Bakewell Comedy, Master Ripton Thompson awaited the fearful morning which was to decide Tom’s fate, in dolefullest mood, and suffered the gravest mental terrors. Adrian, on parting with him, had taken casual occasion to speak of the position of the criminal in modern Europe, assuring him that International Treaty now did what Universal Empire had aforetime done, and that among Atlantic barbarians now, as among the Scythians of old, an offender would find precarious refuge and an emissary haunting him.

In the paternal home, under the roofs of Law, and removed from the influence of his conscienceless young chief, the staggering nature of the act he had put his hand to, its awful felonious aspect, overwhelmed Ripton. He saw it now for the first time. “Why, it’s next to murder!” he cried out to his amazed soul, and wandered about the house with a prickly skin. Thoughts of America, and commencing life afresh as an innocent gentleman, had crossed his disordered brain. He wrote to his friend Richard, proposing to collect disposable funds, and embark, in case of Tom’s breaking his word, or of accidental discovery. He dared not confide the secret to his family, as his leader had sternly enjoined him to avoid any weakness of that kind; and, being by nature honest and communicative, the restriction was painful, and melancholy fell upon the boy. Mama Thompson attributed it to love.

The daughters of parchment rallied him concerning Miss Clare Forey. His hourly letters to Raynham, and silence as to everything and everybody there, his nervousness, and unwonted propensity to sudden inflammation of the cheeks, were set down for sure signs of the passion. Miss Letitia Thompson, the pretty and least parchmenty one,

destined by her Papa for the heir of Raynham, and perfectly aware of her brilliant future, up to which she had, since

Page 219

Ripton's departure, dressed and grimaced, and studied cadences (the latter with such success, though not yet fifteen, that she languished to her maid, and melted the small factotum footman)—Miss Letty, whose insatiable thirst for intimations about the young heir Ripton could not satisfy, tormented him daily in revenge, and once, quite unconsciously, gave the lad a fearful turn; for after dinner, when Mr. Thompson read the paper by the fire, preparatory to sleeping at his accustomed post, and Mama Thompson and her submissive female brood sat tasking the swift intricacies of the needle, and emulating them with the tongue, Miss Letty stole behind Ripton's chair, and introduced between him and his book the Latin initial letter, large and illuminated, of the theme she supposed to be absorbing him, as it did herself. The unexpected vision of this accusing Captain of the Alphabet, this resplendent and haunting A. fronting him bodily, threw Ripton straight back in his chair, while Guilt, with her ancient indecision what colours to assume on detection, flew from red to white, from white to red, across his fallen chaps. Letty laughed triumphantly. Amor, the word she had in mind, certainly has a connection with Arson.

But the delivery of a letter into Master Ripton's hands, furnished her with other and likelier appearances to study. For scarce had Ripton plunged his head into the missive than he gave way to violent transports, such as the healthy-minded little damsel, for all her languishing cadences, deemed she really could express were a downright declaration to be made to her. The boy did not stop at table. Quickly recollecting the presence of his family, he rushed to his own room. And now the girl's ingenuity was taxed to gain possession of that letter. She succeeded, of course, she being a huntress with few scruples and the game unguarded. With the eyes of amazement she read this foreign matter:

"Dear Ripton,—If Tom had been committed I would have shot old Blaize. Do you know my father was behind us that night when Clare saw the ghost and heard all we said before the fire burst out. It is no use trying to conceal anything from him. Well as you are in an awful state I will tell you all about it. After you left Ripton I had a conversation with Austin and he persuaded me to go down to old Blaize and ask him to help off Tom. I went for I would have done anything for Tom after what he said to Austin and I defied the old churl to do his worst. Then he said if my father paid the money and nobody had tampered with his witnesses he would not mind if Tom did get off and he had his chief witness in called the Bantam very like his master I think and the Bantam began winking at me tremendously as you say, and said he had sworn he saw Tom Bakewell but not upon oath. He meant not on the Bible. He could swear to it but not on the Bible. I burst out laughing and you should have seen the rage old Blaize was in. It was splendid fun. Then we had a consultation at home

Page 220

Austin Rady my father Uncle Algernon who has come down to us again and your friend in prosperity and adversity R.D.F. My father said he would go down to old Blaize and give him the word of a gentleman we had not tampered with his witnesses and when he was gone we were all talking and Rady says he must not see the farmer. I am as certain as I live that it was Rady bribed the Bantam. Well I ran and caught up my father and told him not to go in to old Blaize but I would and eat my words and tell him the truth. He waited for me in the lane. Never mind what passed between me and old Blaize. He made me beg and pray of him not to press it against Tom and then to complete it he brought in a little girl a niece of his and says to me, she's your best friend after all and told me to thank her. A little girl twelve years of age. What business had she to mix herself up in my matters. Depend upon it Ripton, wherever there is mischief there are girls I think. She had the insolence to notice my face, and ask me not to be unhappy. I was polite of course but I would not look at her. Well the morning came and Tom was had up before Sir Miles Papworth. It was Sir Miles gout gave us the time or Tom would have been had up before we could do anything. Adrian did not want me to go but my father said I should accompany him and held my hand all the time. I shall be careful about getting into these scrapes again. When you have done anything honourable you do not mind but getting among policemen and magistrates makes you ashamed of yourself. Sir Miles was very attentive to my father and me and dead against Tom. We sat beside him and Tom was brought in, Sir Miles told my father that if there was one thing that showed a low villain it was rick-burning. What do you think of that. I looked him straight in the face and he said to me he was doing me a service in getting Tom committed and clearing the country of such fellows and Rady began laughing. I hate Rady. My father said his son was not in haste to inherit and have estates of his own to watch and Sir Miles laughed too. I thought we were discovered at first. Then they began the examination of Tom. The Tinker was the first witness and he proved that Tom had spoken against old Blaize and said something about burning his rick. I wished I had stood in the lane to Bursley with him alone. Our country lawyer we engaged for Tom cross-questioned him and then he said he was not ready to swear to the exact words that had passed between him and Tom. I should think not. Then came another who swore he had seen Tom lurking about the farmer's grounds that night. Then came the Bantam and I saw him look at Rady. I was tremendously excited and my father kept pressing my hand. Just fancy my being brought to feel that a word from that fellow would make me miserable for life and he must perjure himself to help me. That comes of giving way to passion. My father says when we do that we are calling in the devil as doctor. Well the Bantam was told to state what

Page 221

he had seen and the moment he began Rady who was close by me began to shake and he was laughing I knew though his face was as grave as Sir Miles. You never heard such a rigmarole but I could not laugh. He said he thought he was certain he had seen somebody by the rick and it was Tom Bakewell who was the only man he knew who had a grudge against Farmer Blaize and if the object had been a little bigger he would not mind swearing to Tom and would swear to him for he was dead certain it was Tom only what he saw looked smaller and it was pitch-dark at the time. He was asked what time it was he saw the person steal away from the rick and then he began to scratch his head and said supper-time. Then they asked what time he had supper and he said nine o'clock by the clock and we proved that at nine o'clock Tom was drinking in the ale-house with the Tinker at Bursley and Sir Miles swore and said he was afraid he could not commit Tom and when he heard that Tom looked up at me and I say he is a noble fellow and no one shall sneer at Tom while I live. Mind that. Well Sir Miles asked us to dine with him and Tom was safe and I am to have him and educate him if I like for my servant and I will. And I will give money to his mother and make her rich and he shall never repent he knew me. I say Rip. The Bantam must have seen me. It was when I went to stick in the lucifers. As we were all going home from Sir Miles's at night he has lots of red-faced daughters but I did not dance with them though they had music and were full of fun and I did not care to I was so delighted and almost let it out. When we left and rode home Rady said to my father the Bantam was not such a fool as he was thought and my father said one must be in a state of great personal exaltation to apply that epithet to any man and Rady shut his mouth and I gave my pony a clap of the heel for joy. I think my father suspects what Rady did and does not approve of it. And he need not have done it after all and might have spoilt it. I have been obliged to order him not to call me Ricky for he stops short at Rick so that everybody knows what he means. My dear Austin is going to South America. My pony is in capital condition. My father is the cleverest and best man in the world. Clare is a little better. I am quite happy. I hope we shall meet soon my dear Old Rip and we will not get into any more tremendous scrapes will we.—I remain,

Your sworn friend,

"*Richard Doria Feverel*."

"P.S. I am to have a nice River Yacht. Good-bye, Rip. Mind you learn to box. Mind you are not to show this to any of your friends on pain of my displeasure.

"N.B. Lady B. was so angry when I told her that I had not come to her before. She would do anything in the world for me. I like her next best to my father and Austin. Good-bye old Rip."

Poor little Letitia, after three perusals of this ingenuous epistle, where the laws of punctuation were so disregarded, resigned it to one of the pockets of her brother Ripton's best jacket, deeply smitten with the careless composer. And so ended the last act of the Bakewell Comedy, in which the curtain closes with Sir Austin's pointing out to his friends the beneficial action of the System in it from beginning to end.

Page 222

CHAPTER XII

Laying of ghosts is a public duty, and, as the mystery of the apparition that had frightened little Clare was never solved on the stage of events at Raynham, where dread walked the Abbey, let us go behind the scenes a moment. Morally superstitious as the baronet was, the character of his mind was opposed to anything like spiritual agency in the affairs of men, and, when the matter was made clear to him, it shook off a weight of weakness and restored his mental balance; so that from this time he went about more like the man he had once been, grasping more thoroughly the great truth, that This World is well designed. Nay, he could laugh on hearing Adrian, in reminiscence of the ill luck of one of the family members at its first manifestation, call the uneasy spirit, Algernon's Leg.

Mrs. Doria was outraged. She maintained that her child had seen —— Not to believe in it was almost to rob her of her personal property. After satisfactorily studying his old state of mind in her, Sir Austin, moved by pity, took her aside one day and showed her that her Ghost could write words in the flesh. It was a letter from the unhappy lady who had given Richard birth,—brief cold lines, simply telling him his house would be disturbed by her no more. Cold lines, but penned by what heart-broken abnegation, and underlying them with what anguish of soul! Like most who dealt with him, Lady Feverel thought her husband a man fatally stern and implacable, and she acted as silly creatures will act when they fancy they see a fate against them: she neither petitioned for her right nor claimed it: she tried to ease her heart's yearning by stealth, and, now she renounced all. Mrs. Doria, not wanting in the family tenderness and softness, shuddered at him for accepting the sacrifice so composedly: but he bade her to think how distracting to this boy would be the sight of such relations between mother and father. A few years, and as man he should know, and judge, and love her. "Let this be her penance, not inflicted by me!" Mrs. Doria bowed to the System for another, not opining when it would be her turn to bow for herself.

Further behind the scenes we observe Rizzio and Mary grown older, much disenchanted: she discrowned, dishevelled,—he with gouty fingers on a greasy guitar. The Diaper Sandoe of promise lends his pen for small hires. His fame has sunk; his bodily girth has sensibly increased. What he can do, and will do, is still his theme; meantime the juice of the juniper is in requisition, and it seems that those small hires cannot be performed without it. Returning from her wretched journey to her wretcheder home, the lady had to listen to a mild reproof from easy-going Diaper,—a reproof so mild that he couched it in blank verse: for, seldom writing metrically now, he took to talking it. With a fluent sympathetic tear, he explained to her that she was damaging her interests by these proceedings;

Page 223

nor did he shrink from undertaking to elucidate wherefore. Pluming a smile upon his succulent mouth, he told her that the poverty she lived in was utterly unbefitting her gentle nurture, and that he had reason to believe—could assure her—that an annuity was on the point of being granted her by her husband. And Diaper broke his bud of a smile into full flower as he delivered this information. She learnt that he had applied to her husband for money. It is hard to have one's prop of self-respect cut away just when we are suffering a martyr's agony at the stake. There was a five minutes' tragic colloquy in the recesses behind the scenes,—totally tragic to Diaper, who had fondly hoped to bask in the warm sun of that annuity, and re-emerge from his state of grub. The lady then wrote the letter Sir Austin held open to his sister. The atmosphere behind the scenes is not wholesome, so, having laid the Ghost, we will return and face the curtain.

That infinitesimal dose of The World which Master Ripton Thompson had furnished to the System with such instantaneous and surprising effect was considered by Sir Austin to have worked well, and to be for the time quite sufficient, so that Ripton did not receive a second invitation to Raynham, and Richard had no special intimate of his own age to rub his excessive vitality against, and wanted none. His hands were full enough with Tom Bakewell. Moreover, his father and he were heart in heart. The boy's mind was opening, and turned to his father affectionately reverent. At this period, when the young savage grows into higher influences, the faculty of worship is foremost in him. At this period Jesuits will stamp the future of their chargeling flocks; and all who bring up youth by a System, and watch it, know that it is the malleable moment. Boys possessing any mental or moral force to give them a tendency, then predestinate their careers; or, if under supervision, take the impress that is given them: not often to cast it off, and seldom to cast it off altogether.

In Sir Austin's Note-book was written: "Between Simple Boyhood and Adolescence—-The Blossoming Season—on the threshold of Puberty, there is one Unselfish Hour—-say, Spiritual Seed-time."

He took care that good seed should be planted in Richard, and that the most fruitful seed for a youth, namely, Example, should be of a kind to germinate in him the love of every form of nobleness.

"I am only striving to make my son a Christian," he said, answering them who persisted in expostulating with the System. And to these instructions he gave an aim: "First be virtuous," he told his son, "and then serve your country with heart and soul." The youth was instructed to cherish an ambition for statesmanship, and he and his father read history and the speeches of British orators to some purpose; for one day Sir Austin found him leaning cross-legged, and with his hand to his chin, against a pedestal supporting the bust of Chatham, contemplating the hero of our Parliament, his eyes streaming with tears.

Page 224

People said the baronet carried the principle of Example so far that he only retained his boozing dyspeptic brother Hippias at Raynham in order to exhibit to his son the woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgence; poor Hippias having now become a walking complaint. This was unjust, but there is no doubt he made use of every illustration to disgust or encourage his son that his neighbourhood afforded him, and did not spare his brother, for whom Richard entertained a contempt in proportion to his admiration of his father, and was for flying into penitential extremes which Sir Austin had to soften.

The boy prayed with his father morning and night.

“How is it, sir,” he said one night, “I can’t get Tom Bakewell to pray?”

“Does he refuse?” Sir Austin asked.

“He seems to be ashamed to,” Richard replied. “He wants to know what is the good? and I don’t know what to tell him.”

“I’m afraid it has gone too far with him,” said Sir Austin, “and until he has had some deep sorrows he will not find the divine want of Prayer. Strive, my son, when you represent the people, to provide for their education. He feels everything now through a dull impenetrable rind. Culture is half-way to heaven. Tell him, my son, should he ever be brought to ask how he may know the efficacy of Prayer, and that his prayer will be answered, tell him (he quoted The Pilgrim’s Scrip):

“‘Who rises from Prayer a better man, his prayer is answered.’”

“I will, sir,” said Richard, and went to sleep happy.

Happy in his father and in himself, the youth now lived. Conscience was beginning to inhabit him, and he carried some of the freightage known to men; though in so crude a form that it overweighed him, now on this side, now on that.

The wise youth Adrian observed these further progressionary developments in his pupil, soberly cynical. He was under Sir Austin’s interdict not to banter him, and eased his acrid humours inspired by the sight of a felonious young rick-burner turning saint, by grave affectations of sympathy and extreme accuracy in marking the not widely-distant dates of his various changes. The Bread-and-water phase lasted a fortnight: the Vegetarian (an imitation of his cousin Austin), little better than a month: the religious, somewhat longer: the religious-propagandist (when he was for converting the heathen of Lobourne and Burnley, and the domestics of the Abbey, including Tom Bakewell), longer still, and hard to bear;—he tried to convert Adrian! All the while Tom was being exercised like a raw recruit. Richard had a drill-sergeant from the nearest barracks down for him, to give him a proper pride in himself, and marched him to and fro with

immense satisfaction, and nearly broke his heart trying to get the round-shouldered rustic to take in the rudiments of letters: for the boy had unbounded hopes for Tom, as a hero in grain.

Richard's pride also was cast aside. He affected to be, and really thought he was, humble. Whereupon Adrian, as by accident, imparted to him the fact that men were animals, and he an animal with the rest of them.

Page 225

“I an animal!” cries Richard in scorn, and for weeks he was as troubled by this rudiment of self-knowledge as Tom by his letters. Sir Austin had him instructed in the wonders of anatomy, to restore his self-respect.

Seed-Time passed thus smoothly, and adolescence came on, and his cousin Clare felt what it was to be of an opposite sex to him. She too was growing, but nobody cared how she grew. Outwardly even her mother seemed absorbed in the sprouting of the green off-shoot of the Feverel tree, and Clare was his handmaiden, little marked by him.

Lady Blandish honestly loved the boy. She would tell him: “If I had been a girl, I would have had you for my husband.” And he with the frankness of his years would reply: “And how do you know I would have had you?” causing her to laugh and call him a silly boy, for had he not heard her say she would have had him? Terrible words, he knew not then the meaning of!

“You don’t read your father’s Book,” she said. Her own copy was bound in purple velvet, gilt-edged, as decorative ladies like to have holier books, and she carried it about with her, and quoted it, and (Adrian remarked to Mrs. Doria) hunted a noble quarry, and deliberately aimed at him therewith, which Mrs. Doria chose to believe, and regretted her brother would not be on his guard.

“See here,” said Lady Blandish, pressing an almondy finger-nail to one of the Aphorisms, which instanced how age and adversity must clay-enclose us ere we can effectually resist the magnetism of any human creature in our path. “Can you understand it, child?”

Richard informed her that when she read he could.

“Well, then, my squire,” she touched his cheek and ran her fingers through his hair, “learn as quick as you can not to be all hither and yon with a hundred different attractions, as I was before I met a wise man to guide me.”

“Is my father very wise?” Richard asked.

“I think so,” the lady emphasized her individual judgment.

“Do you—” Richard broke forth, and was stopped by a beating of his heart.

“Do I—what?” she calmly queried.

“I was going to say, do you—I mean, I love him so much.”

Lady Blandish smiled and slightly coloured.

They frequently approached this theme, and always retreated from it; always with the same beating of heart to Richard, accompanied by the sense of a growing mystery, which, however, did not as yet generally disturb him.

Life was made very pleasant to him at Raynham, as it was part of Sir Austin's principle of education that his boy should be thoroughly joyous and happy; and whenever Adrian sent in a satisfactory report of his pupil's advancement, which he did pretty liberally, diversions were planned, just as prizes are given to diligent school-boys, and Richard was supposed to have all his desires gratified while he attended to his studies. The System flourished.

Page 226

Tall, strong, bloomingly healthy, he took the lead of his companions on land and water, and had more than one bondsman in his service besides Ripton Thompson—the boy without a Destiny! Perhaps the boy with a Destiny was growing up a trifle too conscious of it. His generosity to his occasional companions was princely, but was exercised something too much in the manner of a prince; and, notwithstanding his contempt for baseness, he would overlook that more easily than an offence to his pride, which demanded an utter servility when it had once been rendered susceptible. If Richard had his followers he had also his feuds. The Papworths were as subservient as Ripton, but young Ralph Morton, the nephew of Mr. Morton, and a match for Richard in numerous promising qualities, comprising the noble science of fisticuffs, this youth spoke his mind too openly, and moreover would not be snubbed. There was no middle course for Richard's comrades between high friendship or absolute slavery. He was deficient in those cosmopolite habits and feelings which enable boys and men to hold together without caring much for each other; and, like every insulated mortal, he attributed the deficiency, of which he was quite aware, to the fact of his possessing a superior nature. Young Ralph was a lively talker: therefore, argued Richard's vanity, he had no intellect. He was affable: therefore he was frivolous. The women liked him: therefore he was a butterfly. In fine, young Ralph was popular, and our superb prince, denied the privilege of despising, ended by detesting him.

Early in the days of their contention for leadership, Richard saw the absurdity of affecting to scorn his rival. Ralph was an Eton boy, and hence, being robust, a swimmer and a cricketer. A swimmer and a cricketer is nowhere to be scorned in youth's republic. Finding that manoeuvre would not do, Richard was prompted once or twice to entrench himself behind his greater wealth and his position; but he soon abandoned that also, partly because his chilliness to ridicule told him he was exposing himself, and chiefly that his heart was too chivalrous. And so he was dragged into the lists by Ralph, and experienced the luck of champions. For cricket, and for diving, Ralph bore away the belt: Richard's middle-stump tottered before his ball, and he could seldom pick up more than three eggs underwater to Ralph's half-dozen. He was beaten, too, in jumping and running. Why will silly mortals strive to the painful pinnacles of championship? Or why, once having reached them, not have the magnanimity and circumspection to retire into private life immediately? Stung by his defeats, Richard sent one of his dependent Papworths to Poer Hall, with a challenge to Ralph Barthrop Morton; matching himself to swim across the Thames and back, once, trice, or thrice, within a less time than he, Ralph Barthrop Morton, would require for the undertaking. It was accepted, and a reply returned, equally formal in the trumpeting of Christian

Page 227

names, wherein Ralph Barthrop Morton acknowledged the challenge of Richard Doria Feverel, and was his man. The match came off on a midsummer morning, under the direction of Captain Algernon. Sir Austin was a spectator from the cover of a plantation by the river-side, unknown to his son, and, to the scandal of her sex, Lady Blandish accompanied the baronet. He had invited her attendance, and she, obeying her frank nature, and knowing what The Pilgrim's Scrip said about prudes, at once agreed to view the match, pleasing him mightily. For was not here a woman worthy the Golden Ages of the world? one who could look upon man as a creature divinely made, and look with a mind neither tempted, nor taunted, by the Serpent! Such a woman was rare. Sir Austin did not discompose her by uttering his praises. She was conscious of his approval only in an increased gentleness of manner, and something in his voice and communications, as if he were speaking to a familiar, a very high compliment from him. While the lads were standing ready for the signal to plunge from the steep decline of greensward into the shining waters, Sir Austin called upon her to admire their beauty, and she did, and even advanced her head above his shoulder delicately. In so doing, and just as the start was given, a bonnet became visible to Richard. Young Ralph was heels in air before he moved, and then he dropped like lead. He was beaten by several lengths.

The result of the match was unaccountable to all present, and Richard's friends unanimously pressed him to plead a false start. But though the youth, with full confidence in his better style and equal strength, had backed himself heavily against his rival, and had lost his little river-yacht to Ralph, he would do nothing of the sort. It was the Bonnet had beaten him, not Ralph. The Bonnet, typical of the mystery that caused his heart those violent palpitations, was his dear, detestable enemy.

And now, as he progressed from mood to mood, his ambition turned towards a field where Ralph could not rival him, and where the Bonnet was etherealized, and reigned glorious mistress. A cheek to the pride of a boy will frequently divert him to the path where lie his subtlest powers. Richard gave up his companions, servile or antagonistic: he relinquished the material world to young Ralph, and retired into himself, where he was growing to be lord of kingdoms where Beauty was his handmaid, and History his minister and Time his ancient harper, and sweet Romance his bride; where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been. For there is no princely wealth, and no loftiest heritage, to equal this early one that is made bountifully common to so many, when the ripening blood has put a spark to the imagination, and the earth is seen through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires; panting for bliss and taking it as it comes; making of any sight or sound, perforce of the enchantment they carry with them, a key to infinite, because innocent, pleasure. The passions then are gambolling cubs; not the ravaging gluttons they grow to. They have their teeth and their talons, but they neither tear nor bite. They are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain. The whole sweet system moves to music.

Page 228

Something akin to the indications of a change in the spirit of his son, which were now seen, Sir Austin had marked down to be expected, as due to his plan. The blushes of the youth, his long vigils, his clinging to solitude, his abstraction, and downcast but not melancholy air, were matters for rejoicing to the prescient gentleman. “For it comes,” said he to Dr. Clifford of Lobourne, after consulting him medically on the youth’s behalf and being assured of his soundness, “it comes of a thoroughly sane condition. The blood is healthy, the mind virtuous: neither instigates the other to evil, and both are perfecting toward the flower of manhood. If he reach that pure—in the untainted fulness and perfection of his natural powers—I am indeed a happy father! But one thing he will owe to me: that at one period of his life he knew paradise, and could read God’s handwriting on the earth! Now those abominations whom you call precocious boys—-your little pet monsters, doctor!—and who can wonder that the world is what it is? when it is full of them—as they will have no divine time to look back upon in their own lives, how can they believe in innocence and goodness, or be other than sons of selfishness and the Devil? But my boy,” and the baronet dropped his voice to a key that was touching to hear, “my boy, if he fall, will fall from an actual region of purity. He dare not be a sceptic as to that. Whatever his darkness, he will have the guiding light of a memory behind him. So much is secure.”

To talk nonsense, or poetry, or the dash between the two, in a tone of profound sincerity, and to enunciate solemn discordances with received opinion so seriously as to convey the impression of a spiritual insight, is the peculiar gift by which monomaniacs, having first persuaded themselves, contrive to influence their neighbours, and through them to make conquest of a good half of the world, for good or for ill. Sir Austin had this gift. He spoke as if he saw the truth, and, persisting in it so long, he was accredited by those who did not understand him, and silenced them that did.

“We shall see,” was all the argument left to Dr. Clifford, and other unbelievers.

So far certainly the experiment had succeeded. A comelier, bracer, better boy was nowhere to be met. His promise was undeniable. The vessel, too, though it lay now in harbour and had not yet been proved by the buffets of the elements on the great ocean, had made a good trial trip, and got well through stormy weather, as the records of the Bakewell Comedy witnessed to at Raynham. No augury could be hopefuller. The Fates must indeed be hard, the Ordeal severe, the Destiny dark, that could destroy so bright a Spring! But, bright as it was, the baronet relaxed nothing of his vigilant supervision. He said to his intimates: “Every act, every fostered inclination, almost every thought, in this Blossoming Season, bears its seed for the Future. The living Tree now requires

Page 229

incessant watchfulness." And, acting up to his light, Sir Austin did watch. The youth submitted to an examination every night before he sought his bed; professedly to give an account of his studies, but really to recapitulate his moral experiences of the day. He could do so, for he was pure. Any wildness in him that his father noted, any remoteness or richness of fancy in his expressions, was set down as incidental to the Blossoming Season. There is nothing like a theory for binding the wise. Sir Austin, despite his rigid watch and ward, knew less of his son than the servant of his household. And he was deaf, as well as blind. Adrian thought it his duty to tell him that the youth was consuming paper. Lady Blandish likewise hinted at his mooning propensities. Sir Austin from his lofty watch-tower of the System had foreseen it, he said. But when he came to hear that the youth was writing poetry, his wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed.

"Surely," said Lady Blandish, "you knew he scribbled?"

"A very different thing from writing poetry," said the baronet. "No Feverel has ever written poetry."

"I don't think it's a sign of degeneracy," the lady remarked. "He rhymes very prettily to me."

A London phrenologist, and a friendly Oxford Professor of poetry, quieted Sir Austin's fears.

The phrenologist said he was totally deficient in the imitative faculty; and the Professor, that he was equally so in the rhythmic, and instanced several consoling false quantities in the few effusions submitted to him. Added to this, Sir Austin told Lady Blandish that Richard had, at his best, done what no poet had ever been known to be capable of doing: he had, with his own hands, and in cold blood, committed his virgin manuscript to the flames: which made Lady Blandish sigh forth, "Poor boy!"

Killing one's darling child is a painful imposition. For a youth in his Blossoming Season, who fancies himself a poet, to be requested to destroy his first-born, without a reason (though to pretend a reason cogent enough to justify the request were a mockery), is a piece of abhorrent despotism, and Richard's blossoms withered under it. A strange man had been introduced to him, who traversed and bisected his skull with sagacious stiff fingers, and crushed his soul while, in an infallible voice, declaring him the animal he was making him feel such an animal! Not only his blossoms withered, his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs. And when, coupled thereunto (the strange man having departed, his work done), his father, in his tenderest manner, stated that it would give him pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless, scribblings among the cinders, the last remaining mental blossoms spontaneously fell away. Richard's spirit stood bare. He protested not. Enough that it could be wished! He would not delay a minute in doing it. Desiring his father to follow him, he went to a drawer in his

room, and from a clean-linen recess, never suspected by Sir Austin, the secretive youth drew out bundle after bundle: each neatly tied, named, and numbered: and pitched them into flames. And so Farewell my young Ambition! and with it farewell all true confidence between Father and Son.

Page 230

CHAPTER XIII

It was now, as Sir Austin had written it down, The Magnetic Age: the Age of violent attractions, when to hear mention of love is dangerous, and to see it, a communication of the disease. People at Raynham were put on their guard by the baronet, and his reputation for wisdom was severely criticized in consequence of the injunctions he thought fit to issue through butler and housekeeper down to the lower household, for the preservation of his son from any visible symptom of the passion. A footman and two housemaids are believed to have been dismissed on the report of heavy Benson that they were in or inclining to the state; upon which an undercook and a dairymaid voluntarily threw up their places, averring that “they did not want no young men, but to have their sex spied after by an old wretch like that,” indicating the ponderous butler, “was a little too much for a Christian woman,” and then they were ungenerous enough to glance at Benson’s well-known marital calamity, hinting that some men met their deserts. So intolerable did heavy Benson’s espionage become, that Raynham would have grown depopulated of its womankind had not Adrian interfered, who pointed out to the baronet what a fearful arm his butler was wielding. Sir Austin acknowledged it despondently. “It only shows,” said he, with a fine spirit of justice, “how all but impossible it is to legislate where there are women!”

“I do not object,” he added; “I hope I am too just to object to the exercise of their natural inclinations. All I ask from them is discreetness.”

“Ay,” said Adrian, whose discreetness was a marvel.

“No gadding about in couples,” continued the baronet, “no kissing in public. Such occurrences no boy should witness. Whenever people of both sexes are thrown together, they will be silly; and where they are high-fed, uneducated, and barely occupied, it must be looked for as a matter of course. Let it be known that I only require discreetness.”

Discreetness, therefore, was instructed to reign at the Abbey. Under Adrian’s able tuition the fairest of its domestics acquired that virtue.

Discreetness, too, was enjoined to the upper household. Sir Austin, who had not previously appeared to notice the case of Lobourne’s hopeless curate, now desired Mrs. Doria to interdict, or at least discourage, his visits, for the appearance of the man was that of an embodied sigh and groan.

“Really, Austin!” said Mrs. Doria, astonished to find her brother more awake than she had supposed, “I have never allowed him to hope.”

“Let him see it, then,” replied the baronet; “let him see it.”

“The man amuses me,” said Mrs. Doria. “You know, we have few amusements here, we inferior creatures. I confess I should like a barrel-organ better; that reminds one of town and the opera; and besides, it plays more than one tune. However, since you think my society bad for him, let him stop away.”

Page 231

With the self-devotion of a woman she grew patient and sweet the moment her daughter Clare was spoken of, and the business of her life in view. Mrs. Doria's maternal heart had betrothed the two cousins, Richard and Clare; had already beheld them espoused and fruitful. For this she yielded the pleasures of town; for this she immured herself at Raynham; for this she bore with a thousand follies, exactions, inconveniences, things abhorrent to her, and heaven knows what forms of torture and self-denial, which are smilingly endured by that greatest of voluntary martyrs—a mother with a daughter to marry. Mrs. Doria, an amiable widow, had surely married but for her daughter Clare. The lady's hair no woman could possess without feeling it her pride. It was the daily theme of her lady's-maid,—a natural aureole to her head. She was gay, witty, still physically youthful enough to claim a destiny; and she sacrificed it to accomplish her daughter's! sacrificed, as with heroic scissors, hair, wit, gaiety—let us not attempt to enumerate how much! more than may be said. And she was only one of thousands; thousands who have no portion of the hero's reward; for he may reckon on applause, and condolence, and sympathy, and honour; they, poor slaves! must look for nothing but the opposition of their own sex and the sneers of ours. O, Sir Austin! had you not been so blinded, what an Aphorism might have sprung from this point of observation! Mrs. Doria was coolly told, between sister and brother, that during the Magnetic Age her daughter's presence at Raynham was undesirable. Instead of nursing offence, her sole thought was the mountain of prejudice she had to contend against. She bowed, and said, Clare wanted sea-air—she had never quite recovered the shock of that dreadful night. How long, Mrs. Doria wished to know, might the Peculiar Period be expected to last?

"That," said Sir Austin, "depends. A year, perhaps. He is entering on it. I shall be most grieved to lose you, Helen. Clare is now—how old?"

"Seventeen."

"She is marriageable."

"Marriageable, Austin! at seventeen! don't name such a thing. My child shall not be robbed of her youth."

"Our women marry early, Helen."

"My child shall not!"

The baronet reflected a moment. He did not wish to lose his sister.

"As you are of that opinion, Helen," said he, "perhaps we may still make arrangements to retain you with us. Would you think it advisable to send Clare—she should know discipline—to some establishment for a few months?"

“To an asylum, Austin?” cried Mrs. Doria, controlling her indignation as well as she could.

“To some select superior seminary, Helen. There are such to be found.”

“Austin!” Mrs. Doria exclaimed, and had to fight with a moisture in her eyes. “Unjust! absurd!” she murmured. The baronet thought it a natural proposition that Clare should be a bride or a schoolgirl.

Page 232

“I cannot leave my child.” Mrs. Doria trembled. “Where she goes, I go. I am aware that she is only one of our sex, and therefore of no value to the world, but she is my child. I will see, poor dear, that you have no cause to complain of her.”

“I thought,” Sir Austin remarked, “that you acquiesced in my views with regard to my son.”

“Yes—generally,” said Mrs. Doria, and felt culpable that she had not before, and could not then, tell her brother that he had set up an Idol in his house—an Idol of flesh! more retributive and abominable than wood or brass or gold. But she had bowed to the Idol too long—she had too entirely bound herself to gain her project by subserviency. She had, and she dimly perceived it, committed a greater fault in tactics, in teaching her daughter to bow to the Idol also. Love of that kind Richard took for tribute. He was indifferent to Clare’s soft eyes. The parting kiss he gave her was ready and cold as his father could desire. Sir Austin now grew eloquent to him in laudation of manly pursuits: but Richard thought his eloquence barren, his attempts at companionship awkward, and all manly pursuits and aims, life itself, vain and worthless. To what end? sighed the blossomless youth, and cried aloud, as soon as he was relieved of his father’s society, what was the good of anything? Whatever he did—whichever path he selected, led back to Raynham. And whatever he did, however wretched and wayward he showed himself, only confirmed Sir Austin more and more in the truth of his previsions. Tom Bakewell, now the youth’s groom, had to give the baronet a report of his young master’s proceedings, in common with Adrian, and while there was no harm to tell, Tom spoke out. “He do ride like fire every day to Pig’s Snout,” naming the highest hill in the neighbourhood, “and stand there and stare, never movin’, like a mad ’un. And then hoam agin all slack as if he’d been beaten in a race by somebody.”

“There is no woman in that!” mused the baronet. “He would have ridden back as hard as he went,” reflected this profound scientific humanist, “had there been a woman in it. He would shun vast expanses, and seek shade, concealment, solitude. The desire for distances betokens emptiness and undirected hunger: when the heart is possessed by an image we fly to wood and forest, like the guilty.”

Adrian’s report accused his pupil of an extraordinary access of cynicism.

“Exactly,” said the baronet. “As I foresaw. At this period an insatiate appetite is accompanied by a fastidious palate. Nothing but the quintessences of existence, and those in exhaustless supplies, will satisfy this craving, which is not to be satisfied! Hence his bitterness. Life can furnish no food fitting for him. The strength and purity of his energies have reached to an almost divine height, and roam through the Inane. Poetry, love, and such-like, are the drugs earth has to offer to high natures, as she offers to low ones debauchery. ’Tis a sign, this sourness, that he is subject to none of the empiricisms that are afloat. Now to keep him clear of them!”

Page 233

The Titans had an easier task in storming Olympus. As yet, however, it could not be said that Sir Austin's System had failed. On the contrary, it had reared a youth, handsome, intelligent, well-bred, and, observed the ladies, with acute emphasis, innocent. Where, they asked, was such another young man to be found?

"Oh!" said Lady Blandish to Sir Austin, "if men could give their hands to women unsoiled—how different would many a marriage be! She will be a happy girl who calls Richard husband."

"Happy, indeed!" was the baronet's caustic ejaculation. "But where shall I meet one equal to him, and his match?"

"I was innocent when I was a girl," said the lady.

Sir Austin bowed a reserved opinion.

"Do you think no girls innocent?"

Sir Austin gallantly thought them all so.

"No, that you know they are not," said the lady, stamping. "But they are more innocent than boys, I am sure."

"Because of their education, madam. You see now what a youth can be. Perhaps, when my System is published, or rather—to speak more humbly—when it is practised, the balance may be restored, and we shall have virtuous young men."

"It's too late for poor me to hope for a husband from one of them," said the lady, pouting and laughing.

"It is never too late for beauty to waken love," returned the baronet, and they trifled a little. They were approaching Daphne's Bower, which they entered, and sat there to taste the coolness of a descending midsummer day.

The baronet seemed in a humour for dignified fooling; the lady for serious converse.

"I shall believe again in Arthur's knights," she said. "When I was a girl I dreamed of one."

"And he was in quest of the San Greal?"

"If you like."

"And showed his good taste by turning aside for the more tangible San Blandish?"

“Of course you consider it would have been so,” sighed the lady, ruffling.

“I can only judge by our generation,” said Sir Austin, with a bend of homage.

The lady gathered her mouth. “Either we are very mighty or you are very weak.”

“Both, madam.”

“But whatever we are, and if we are bad, bad! we love virtue, and truth, and lofty souls, in men: and, when we meet those qualities in them, we are constant, and would die for them—die for them. Ah! you know men but not women.”

“The knights possessing such distinctions must be young, I presume?” said Sir Austin.

“Old, or young!”

“But if old, they are scarce capable of enterprise?”

“They are loved for themselves, not for their deeds.”

“Ah!”

“Yes—ah!” said the lady. “Intellect may subdue women—make slaves of them; and they worship beauty perhaps as much as you do. But they only love for ever and are mated when they meet a noble nature.”

Sir Austin looked at her wistfully.

Page 234

“And did you encounter the knight of your dream?”

“Not then.” She lowered her eyelids. It was prettily done.

“And how did you bear the disappointment?”

“My dream was in the nursery. The day my frock was lengthened to a gown I stood at the altar. I am not the only girl that has been made a woman in a day, and given to an ogre instead of a true knight.”

“Good God!” exclaimed Sir Austin, “women have much to bear.”

Here the couple changed characters. The lady became gay as the baronet grew earnest.

“You know it is our lot,” she said. “And we are allowed many amusements. If we fulfil our duty in producing children, that, like our virtue, is its own reward. Then, as a widow, I have wonderful privileges.”

“To preserve which, you remain a widow?”

“Certainly,” she responded. “I have no trouble now in patching and piecing that rag the world calls—a character. I can sit at your feet every day unquestioned. To be sure, others do the same, but they are female eccentrics, and have cast off the rag altogether.”

Sir Austin drew nearer to her. “You would have made an admirable mother, madam.”

This from Sir Austin was very like positive wooing.

“It is,” he continued, “ten thousand pities that you are not one.”

“Do you think so?” She spoke with humility.

“I would,” he went on, “that heaven had given you a daughter.”

“Would you have thought her worthy of Richard?”

“Our blood, madam, should have been one!”

The lady tapped her toe with her parasol. “But I am a mother,” she said. “Richard is my son. Yes! Richard is my boy,” she reiterated.

Sir Austin most graciously appended, “Call him ours, madam,” and held his head as if to catch the word from her lips, which, however, she chose to refuse, or defer. They made the coloured West a common point for their eyes, and then Sir Austin said:

“As you will not say ‘ours,’ let me. And, as you have therefore an equal claim on the boy, I will confide to you a project I have lately conceived.”

The announcement of a project hardly savoured of a coming proposal, but for Sir Austin to confide one to a woman was almost tantamount to a declaration. So Lady Blandish thought, and so said her soft, deep-eyed smile, as she perused the ground while listening to the project. It concerned Richard’s nuptials. He was now nearly eighteen. He was to marry when he was five-and-twenty. Meantime a young lady, some years his junior, was to be sought for in the homes of England, who would be every way fitted by education, instincts, and blood—on each of which qualifications Sir Austin unreservedly enlarged—to espouse so perfect a youth and accept the honourable duty of assisting in the perpetuation of the Feverels. The baronet went on to say that he proposed to set forth immediately, and devote a couple of months, to the first essay in his Coelebite search.

Page 235

“I fear,” said Lady Blandish, when the project had been fully unfolded, “you have laid down for yourself a difficult task. You must not be too exacting.”

“I know it.” The baronet’s shake of the head was piteous.

“Even in England she will be rare. But I confine myself to no class. If I ask for blood it is for untainted, not what you call high blood. I believe many of the middle classes are frequently more careful—more pure-blooded—than our aristocracy. Show me among them a God-fearing family who educate their children—I should prefer a girl without brothers and sisters—as a Christian damsel should be educated—say, on the model of my son, and she may be penniless, I will pledge her to Richard Feverel.”

Lady Blandish bit her lip. “And what do you do with Richard while you are absent on this expedition?”

“Oh!” said the baronet, “he accompanies his father.”

“Then give it up. His future bride is now pinafored and bread-and-buttery. She romps, she cries, she dreams of play and pudding. How can he care for her? He thinks more at his age of old women like me. He will be certain to kick against her, and destroy your plan, believe me, Sir Austin.”

“Ay? ay? do you think that?” said the baronet.

Lady Blandish gave him a multitude of reasons.

“Ay! true,” he muttered. “Adrian said the same. He must not see her. How could I think of it! The child is naked woman. He would despise her. Naturally!”

“Naturally!” echoed the lady.

“Then, madam,” and the baronet rose, “there is one thing for me to determine upon. I must, for the first time in his life, leave him.”

“Will you, indeed?” said the lady.

“It is my duty, having thus brought him up, to see that he is properly mated,—not wrecked upon the quicksands of marriage, as a youth so delicately trained might be; more easily than another! Betrothed, he will be safe from a thousand snares. I may, I think, leave him for a term. My precautions have saved him from the temptations of his season.”

“And under whose charge will you leave him?” Lady Blandish inquired.

She had emerged from the temple, and stood beside Sir Austin on the upper steps, under a clear summer twilight.

“Madam!” he took her hand, and his voice was gallant and tender, “under whose but yours?”

As the baronet said this, he bent above her hand, and raised it to his lips.

Lady Blandish felt that she had been wooed and asked in wedlock. She did not withdraw her hand. The baronet’s salute was flatteringly reverent. He deliberated over it, as one going through a grave ceremony. And he, the scorner of women, had chosen her for his homage! Lady Blandish forgot that she had taken some trouble to arrive at it. She received the exquisite compliment in all its unique honey-sweet: for in love we must deserve nothing or the fine bloom of fruition is gone.

Page 236

The lady's hand was still in durance, and the baronet had not recovered from his profound inclination, when a noise from the neighbouring beechwood startled the two actors in this courtly pantomime. They turned their heads, and beheld the hope of Raynham on horseback surveying the scene. The next moment he had galloped away.

CHAPTER XIV

All night Richard tossed on his bed with his heart in a rapid canter, and his brain bestriding it, traversing the rich untasted world, and the great Realm of Mystery, from which he was now restrained no longer. Months he had wandered about the gates of the Bonnet, wondering, sighing, knocking at them, and getting neither admittance nor answer. He had the key now. His own father had given it to him. His heart was a lightning steed, and bore him on and on over limitless regions bathed in superhuman beauty and strangeness, where cavaliers and ladies leaned whispering upon close green swards, and knights and ladies cast a splendour upon savage forests, and tilts and tourneys were held in golden courts lit to a glorious day by ladies' eyes, one pair of which, dimly visioned, constantly distinguishable, followed him through the boskage and dwelt upon him in the press, beaming while he bent above a hand glittering white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a May night.

Awhile the heart would pause and flutter to a shock: he was in the act of consummating all earthly bliss by pressing his lips to the small white hand. Only to do that, and die! cried the Magnetic Youth: to fling the Jewel of Life into that one cup and drink it off! He was intoxicated by anticipation. For that he was born. There was, then, some end in existence, something to live for! to kiss a woman's hand, and die! He would leap from the couch, and rush to pen and paper to relieve his swarming sensations. Scarce was he seated when the pen was dashed aside, the paper sent flying with the exclamation, "Have I not sworn I would never write again?" Sir Austin had shut that safety-valve. The nonsense that was in the youth might have poured harmlessly out, and its urgency for ebullition was so great that he was repeatedly oblivious of his oath, and found himself seated under the lamp in the act of composition before pride could speak a word. Possibly the pride even of Richard Feverel had been swamped if the act of composition were easy at such a time, and a single idea could stand clearly foremost; but myriads were demanding the first place; chaotic hosts, like ranks of stormy billows, pressed impetuously for expression, and despair of reducing them to form, quite as much as pride, to which it pleased him to refer his incapacity, threw down the powerless pen, and sent him panting to his outstretched length and another headlong career through the rosy-girdled land.

Toward morning the madness of the fever abated somewhat, and he went forth into the air. A lamp was still burning in his father's room, and Richard thought, as he looked up, that he saw the ever-vigilant head on the watch. Instantly the lamp was extinguished, the window stood cold against the hues of dawn.

Page 237

Strong pulling is an excellent medical remedy for certain classes of fever. Richard took to it instinctively. The clear fresh water, burnished with sunrise, sparkled against his arrowy prow; the soft deep shadows curled smiling away from his gliding keel. Overhead solitary morning unfolded itself, from blossom to bud, from bud to flower; still, delicious changes of light and colour, to whose influences he was heedless as he shot under willows and aspens, and across sheets of river-reaches, pure mirrors to the upper glory, himself the sole tenant of the stream. Somewhere at the founts of the world lay the land he was rowing toward; something of its shadowed lights might be discerned here and there. It was not a dream, now he knew. There was a secret abroad. The woods were full of it; the waters rolled with it, and the winds. Oh, why could not one in these days do some high knightly deed which should draw down ladies' eyes from their heaven, as in the days of Arthur! To such a meaning breathed the unconscious sighs of the youth, when he had pulled through his first feverish energy.

He was off Bursley, and had lapsed a little into that musing quietude which follows strenuous exercise, when he heard a hail and his own name called. It was no lady, no fairy, but young Ralph Morton, an irruption of miserable masculine prose. Heartily wishing him abed with the rest of mankind, Richard rowed in and jumped ashore. Ralph immediately seized his arm, saying that he desired earnestly to have a talk with him, and dragged the Magnetic Youth from his water-dreams, up and down the wet mown grass. That he had to say seemed to be difficult of utterance, and Richard, though he barely listened, soon had enough of his old rival's gladness at seeing him, and exhibited signs of impatience; whereat Ralph, as one who branches into matter somewhat foreign to his mind, but of great human interest and importance, put the question to him:

"I say, what woman's name do you like best?"

"I don't know any," quoth Richard, indifferently. "Why are you out so early?"

In answer to this, Ralph suggested that the name of Mary might be considered a pretty name.

Richard agreed that it might be; the housekeeper at Raynham, half the women cooks, and all the housemaids enjoyed that name; the name of Mary was equivalent for women at home.

"Yes, I know," said Ralph. "We have lots of Marys. It's so common. Oh! I don't like Mary best. What do you think?"

Richard thought it just like another.

"Do you know," Ralph continued, throwing off the mask and plunging into the subject, "I'd do anything on earth for some names—one or two. It's not Mary, nor Lucy.

Clarinda's pretty, but it's like a novel. Claribel, I like. Names beginning with 'Cl' I prefer. The 'Cl's' are always gentle and lovely girls you would die for! Don't you think so?"

Page 238

Richard had never been acquainted with any of them to inspire that emotion. Indeed these urgent appeals to his fancy in feminine names at five o'clock in the morning slightly surprised him, though he was but half awake to the outer world. By degrees he perceived that Ralph was changed. Instead of the lusty boisterous boy, his rival in manly sciences, who spoke straightforwardly and acted up to his speech, here was an abashed and blush-persecuted youth, who sued piteously for a friendly ear wherein to pour the one idea possessing him. Gradually, too, Richard apprehended that Ralph likewise was on the frontiers of the Realm of Mystery, perhaps further toward it than he himself was; and then, as by a sympathetic stroke, was revealed to him the wonderful beauty and depth of meaning in feminine names. The theme appeared novel and delicious, fitted to the season and the hour. But the hardship was, that Richard could choose none from the number; all were the same to him; he loved them all.

"Don't you really prefer the 'Cl's'?" said Ralph, persuasively.

"Not better than the names ending in 'a' and 'y,' Richard replied, wishing he could, for Ralph was evidently ahead of him.

"Come under these trees," said Ralph. And under the trees Ralph unbosomed. His name was down for the army: Eton was quitted for ever. In a few months he would have to join his regiment, and before he left he must say goodbye to his friends.... Would Richard tell him Mrs. Forey's address? he had heard she was somewhere by the sea. Richard did not remember the address, but said he would willingly take charge of any letter and forward it.

Ralph dived his hand into his pocket. "Here it is. But don't let anybody see it."

"My aunt's name is not Clare," said Richard, perusing what was composed of the exterior formula. "You've addressed it to Clare herself."

That was plain to see.

"Emmeline Clementina Matilda Laura, Countess Blandish," Richard continued in a low tone, transferring the names, and playing on the musical strings they were to him. Then he said: "Names of ladies! How they sweeten their names!"

He fixed his eyes on Ralph. If he discovered anything further he said nothing, but bade the good fellow good-bye, jumped into his boat, and pulled down the tide. The moment Ralph was hidden by an abutment of the banks, Richard perused the address. For the first time it struck him that his cousin Clare was a very charming creature: he remembered the look of her eyes, and especially the last reproachful glance she gave him at parting. What business had Ralph to write to her? Did she not belong to Richard Feverel? He read the words again and again: Clare Doria Forey. Why, Clare was the name he liked best—nay, he loved it. Doria, too—she shared his own name with him.

Away went his heart, not at a canter now, at a gallop, as one who sights the quarry. He felt too weak to pull. Clare Doria Forey—oh, perfect melody! Sliding with the tide, he heard it fluting in the bosom of the hills.

Page 239

When nature has made us ripe for love, it seldom occurs that the Fates are behindhand in furnishing a temple for the flame.

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread-and-butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam. And so it was with the damsel who knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

Page 240

CHAPTER XV

He had landed on an island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him: Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of this white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle. Hark, how Ariel sang overhead! What splendour in the heavens! What marvels of beauty about his enchanted brows! And, O you wonder! Fair Flame! by whose light the glories of being are now first seen....Radiant Miranda! Prince Ferdinand is at your feet.

Or is it Adam, his rib taken from his side in sleep, and thus transformed, to make him behold his Paradise, and lose it?...

The youth looked on her with as glowing an eye. It was the First Woman to him.

And she—mankind was all Caliban to her, saving this one princely youth.

So to each other said their changing eyes in the moment they stood together; he pale, and she blushing.

She was indeed sweetly fair, and would have been held fair among rival damsels. On a magic shore, and to a youth educated by a System, strung like an arrow drawn to the head, he, it might be guessed, could fly fast and far with her. The soft rose in her cheeks, the clearness of her eyes, bore witness to the body's virtue; and health and happy blood were in her bearing. Had she stood before Sir Austin among rival damsels, that Scientific Humanist, for the consummation of his System, would have thrown her the handkerchief for his son. The wide summer-hat, nodding over her forehead to her brows, seemed to flow with the flowing heavy curls, and those fire-threaded mellow curls, only half-curls, waves of hair call them, rippling at the ends, went like a sunny red-veined torrent down her back almost to her waist: a glorious vision to the youth, who embraced it as a flower of beauty, and read not a feature. There were curious features of colour in her face for him to have read. Her brows, thick and brownish against a soft skin showing the action of the blood, met in the bend of a bow, extending to the temples long and level: you saw that she was fashioned to peruse the sights of earth, and by the pliability of her brows that the wonderful creature used her faculty, and was not going to be a statue to the gazer. Under the dark thick brows an arch of lashes shot out, giving a wealth of darkness to the full frank blue eyes, a mystery of meaning—more than brain was ever meant to fathom: richer, henceforth, than all mortal wisdom to Prince Ferdinand. For when nature turns artist, and produces contrasts of colour on a fair face, where is the Sage, or what the Oracle, shall match the depth of its lightest look?

Page 241

Prince Ferdinand was also fair. In his slim boating-attire his figure looked heroic. His hair, rising from the parting to the right of his forehead, in what his admiring Lady Blandish called his plume, fell away slanting silkily to the temples across the nearly imperceptible upward curve of his brows there—felt more than seen, so slight it was—-and gave to his profile a bold beauty, to which his bashful, breathless air was a flattering charm. An arrow drawn to the head, capable of flying fast and far with her! He leaned a little forward, drinking her in with all his eyes, and young Love has a thousand. Then truly the System triumphed, just ere it was to fall; and could Sir Austin have been content to draw the arrow to the head, and let it fly, when it would fly, he might have pointed to his son again, and said to the world, “Match him!” Such keen bliss as the youth had in the sight of her, an innocent youth alone has powers of soul in him to experience.

“O Women!” says The Pilgrim’s Scrip, in one of its solitary outbursts, “Women, who like, and will have for hero, a rake! how soon are you not to learn that you have taken bankrupts to your bosoms, and that the putrescent gold that attracted you is the slime of the Lake of Sin!”

If these two were Ferdinand and Miranda, Sir Austin was not Prospero, and was not present, or their fates might have been different.

So they stood a moment, changing eyes, and then Miranda spoke, and they came down to earth, feeling no less in heaven.

She spoke to thank him for his aid. She used quite common simple words; and used them, no doubt, to express a common simple meaning: but to him she was uttering magic, casting spells, and the effect they had on him was manifested in the incoherence of his replies, which were too foolish to be chronicled.

The couple were again mute. Suddenly Miranda, with an exclamation of anguish, and innumerable lights and shadows playing over her lovely face, clapped her hands, crying aloud, “My book! my book!” and ran to the bank.

Prince Ferdinand was at her side. “What have you lost?” he said.

“My book!” she answered, her delicious curls swinging across her shoulders to the stream. Then turning to him, “Oh, no, no! let me entreat you not to,” she said; “I do not so very much mind losing it.” And in her eagerness to restrain him she unconsciously laid her gentle hand upon his arm, and took the force of motion out of him.

“Indeed, I do not really care for the silly book,” she continued, withdrawing her hand quickly, and reddening. “Pray, do not!”

The young gentleman had kicked off his shoes. No sooner was the spell of contact broken than he jumped in. The water was still troubled and discoloured by his introductory adventure, and, though he ducked his head with the spirit of a dabchick, the book was missing. A scrap of paper floating from the bramble just above the water, and looking as if fire had caught its edges and it had flown from one adverse element to the other, was all he could lay hold of; and he returned to land disconsolately, to hear Miranda’s murmured mixing of thanks and pretty expostulations.

Page 242

“Let me try again,” he said.

“No, indeed!” she replied, and used the awful threat: “I will run away if you do,” which effectually restrained him.

Her eye fell on the fire-stained scrap of paper, and brightened, as she cried, “There, there! you have what I want. It is that. I do not care for the book. No, please! You are not to look at it. Give it me.”

Before her playfully imperative injunction was fairly spoken, Richard had glanced at the document and discovered a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves: his crest in silver: and below—O wonderment immense! his own handwriting!

He handed it to her. She took it, and put it in her bosom.

Who would have thought, that, where all else perished, Odes, Idyls, Lines, Stanzas, this one Sonnet to the stars should be miraculously reserved for such a starry fate—passing beatitude!

As they walked silently across the meadow, Richard strove to remember the hour and the mood of mind in which he had composed the notable production. The stars were invoked, as seeing and foreseeing all, to tell him where then his love reclined, and so forth; Hesper was complacent enough to do so, and described her in a couplet—

> “Through sunset’s amber see me shining fair,
> As her blue eyes shine through her golden hair.”

And surely no words could be more prophetic. Here were two blue eyes and golden hair; and by some strange chance, that appeared like the working of a divine finger, she had become the possessor of the prophecy, she that was to fulfil it! The youth was too charged with emotion to speak. Doubtless the damsel had less to think of, or had some trifling burden on her conscience, for she seemed to grow embarrassed. At last she drew up her chin to look at her companion under the nodding brim of her hat (and the action gave her a charmingly freakish air), crying, “But where are you going to? You are wet through. Let me thank you again; and, pray, leave me, and go home and change instantly.”

“Wet?” replied the magnetic muser, with a voice of tender interest; “not more than one foot, I hope. I will leave you while you dry your stockings in the sun.”

At this she could not withhold a shy laugh.

“Not I, but you. You would try to get that silly book for me, and you are dripping wet. Are you not very uncomfortable?”

In all sincerity he assured her that he was not.

“And you really do not feel that you are wet?”

He really did not: and it was a fact that he spoke truth.

She pursed her dewberry mouth in the most comical way, and her blue eyes lightened laughter out of the half-closed lids.

“I cannot help it,” she said, her mouth opening, and sounding harmonious bells of laughter in his ears. “Pardon me, won’t you?”

His face took the same soft smiling curves in admiration of her.

“Not to feel that you have been in the water, the very moment after!” she musically interjected, seeing she was excused.

Page 243

“It’s true,” he said; and his own gravity then touched him to join a duet with her, which made them no longer feel strangers, and did the work of a month of intimacy. Better than sentiment, laughter opens the breast to love; opens the whole breast to his full quiver, instead of a corner here and there for a solitary arrow. Hail the occasion propitious, O British young! and laugh and treat love as an honest God, and dabble not with the sentimental rouge. These two laughed, and the souls of each cried out to other, “It is I it is I.”

They laughed and forgot the cause of their laughter, and the sun dried his light river clothing, and they strolled toward the blackbird’s copse, and stood near a stile in sight of the foam of the weir and the many-coloured rings of eddies streaming forth from it.

Richard’s boat, meanwhile, had contrived to shoot the weir, and was swinging, bottom upward, broadside with the current down the rapid backwater.

“Will you let it go?” said the damsel, eying it curiously.

“It can’t be stopped,” he replied, and could have added: “What do I care for it now!”

His old life was whirled away with it, dead, drowned. His new life was with her, alive, divine.

She flapped low the brim of her hat. “You must really not come any farther,” she softly said.

“And will you go, and not tell me who you are?” he asked, growing bold as the fears of losing her came across him. “And will you not tell me before you go”—his face burned —“how you came by that—that paper?”

She chose to select the easier question for answer: “You ought to know me; we have been introduced.” Sweet was her winning off-hand affability.

“Then who, in heaven’s name, are you? Tell me! I never could have forgotten you.”

“You have, I think,” she said.

“Impossible that we could ever have met, and I forget you!”

She looked up at him.

“Do you remember Belthorpe?”

“Belthorpe! Belthorpe!” quoth Richard, as if he had to touch his brain to recollect there was such a place. “Do you mean old Blaize’s farm?”

“Then I am old Blaize’s niece.” She tripped him a soft curtsey.

The magnetized youth gazed at her. By what magic was it that this divine sweet creature could be allied with that old churl!

“Then what—what is your name?” said his mouth, while his eyes added, “O wonderful creature! How came you to enrich the earth?”

“Have you forgot the Desboroughs of Dorset, too?” she peered at him from a side-bend of the flapping brim.

“The Desboroughs of Dorset?” A light broke in on him. “And have you grown to this? That little girl I saw there!”

He drew close to her to read the nearest features of the vision. She could no more laugh off the piercing fervour of his eyes. Her volubility fluttered under his deeply wistful look, and now neither voice was high, and they were mutually constrained.

Page 244

“You see,” she murmured, “we are old acquaintances.”

Richard, with his eyes still intently fixed on her, returned, “You are very beautiful!”

The words slipped out. Perfect simplicity is unconsciously audacious. Her overpowering beauty struck his heart, and, like an instrument that is touched and answers to the touch, he spoke.

Miss Desborough made an effort to trifle with this terrible directness; but his eyes would not be gainsaid, and checked her lips. She turned away from them, her bosom a little rebellious. Praise so passionately spoken, and by one who has been a damsel’s first dream, dreamed of nightly many long nights, and clothed in the virgin silver of her thoughts in bud, praise from him is coin the heart cannot reject, if it would. She quickened her steps.

“I have offended you!” said a mortally wounded voice across her shoulder.

That he should think so were too dreadful.

“Oh no, no! you would never offend me.” She gave him her whole sweet face.

“Then why—why do you leave me?”

“Because,” she hesitated, “I must go.”

“No. You must not go. Why must you go? Do not go.”

“Indeed I must,” she said, pulling at the obnoxious broad brim of her hat; and, interpreting a pause he made for his assent to her rational resolve, shyly looking at him, she held her hand out, and said, “Good-bye,” as if it were a natural thing to say.

The hand was pure white—white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a Maynight. It was the hand whose shadow, cast before, he had last night bent his head reverentially above, and kissed—resigning himself thereupon over to execution for payment of the penalty of such daring—by such bliss well rewarded.

He took the hand, and held it, gazing between her eyes.

“Good-bye,” she said again, as frankly as she could, and at the same time slightly compressing her fingers on his in token of adieu. It was a signal for his to close firmly upon hers.

“You will not go?”

“Pray, let me,” she pleaded, her sweet brows suing in wrinkles.

“You will not go?” Mechanically he drew the white hand nearer his thumping heart.

“I must,” she faltered piteously.

“You will not go?”

“Oh yes! yes!”

“Tell me. Do you wish to go?”

The question was a subtle one. A moment or two she did not answer, and then forswore herself, and said, Yes.

“Do you—you wish to go?” He looked with quivering eyelids under hers.

A fainter Yes responded.

“You wish—wish to leave me?” His breath went with the words.

“Indeed I must.”

Her hand became a closer prisoner.

All at once an alarming delicious shudder went through her frame. From him to her it coursed, and back from her to him. Forward and back love’s electric messenger rushed from heart to heart, knocking at each, till it surged tumultuously against the bars of its prison, crying out for its mate. They stood trembling in unison, a lovely couple under these fair heavens of the morning.

Page 245

When he could get his voice it said, “Will you go?”

But she had none to reply with, and could only mutely bend upward her gentle wrist.

“Then, farewell!” he said, and, dropping his lips to the soft fair hand, kissed it, and hung his head, swinging away from her, ready for death.

Strange, that now she was released she should linger by him. Strange, that his audacity, instead of the executioner, brought blushes and timid tenderness to his side, and the sweet words, “You are not angry with me?”

“With you, O Beloved!” cried his soul. “And you forgive me, fair charity!”

“I think it was rude of me to go without thanking you again,” she said, and again proffered her hand.

The sweet heaven-bird shivered out his song above him. The gracious glory of heaven fell upon his soul. He touched her hand, not moving his eyes from her, nor speaking, and she, with a soft word of farewell, passed across the stile, and up the pathway through the dewy shades of the copse, and out of the arch of the light, away from his eyes.

And away with her went the wild enchantment. He looked on barren air. But it was no more the world of yesterday. The marvellous splendours had sown seeds in him, ready to spring up and bloom at her gaze; and in his bosom now the vivid conjuration of her tones, her face, her shape, makes them leap and illumine him like fitful summer lightnings ghosts of the vanished sun.

There was nothing to tell him that he had been making love and declaring it with extraordinary rapidity; nor did he know it. Soft flushed cheeks! sweet mouth! strange sweet brows! eyes of softest fire! how could his ripe eyes behold you, and not plead to keep you? Nay, how could he let you go? And he seriously asked himself that question.

To-morrow this place will have a memory—the river and the meadow, and the white falling weir: his heart will build a temple here; and the skylark will be its high-priest, and the old blackbird its glossy-gowned chorister, and there will be a sacred repast of dewberries. To-day the grass is grass: his heart is chased by phantoms and finds rest nowhere. Only when the most tender freshness of his flower comes across him does he taste a moment’s calm; and no sooner does it come than it gives place to keen pangs of fear that she may not be his for ever.

Erelong he learns that her name is Lucy. Erelong he meets Ralph, and discovers that in a day he has distanced him by a sphere. He and Ralph and the curate of Lobourne join in their walks, and raise classical discussions on ladies’ hair, fingering a thousand

delicious locks, from those of Cleopatra to the Borgia's. "Fair! fair! all of them fair!" sighs the melancholy curate, "as are those women formed for our perdition! I think we have in this country what will match the Italian or the Greek." His mind flutters to Mrs. Doria, Richard blushes before the vision of Lucy, and Ralph, whose heroine's hair is a dark luxuriance, dissents, and claims a noble share in the slaughter of men for dark-haired Wonders. They have no mutual confidences, but they are singularly kind to each other, these three children of instinct.

Page 246

CHAPTER XVI

Lady Blandish, and others who professed an interest in the fortunes and future of the systematized youth, had occasionally mentioned names of families whose alliance according to apparent calculations, would not degrade his blood: and over these names, secretly preserved on an open leaf of the note-book, Sir Austin, as he neared the metropolis, distantly dropped his eye. There were names historic and names mushroomic; names that the Conqueror might have called in his muster-roll; names that had been, clearly, tossed into the upper stratum of civilized lifer by a millwheel or a merchant-stool. Against them the baronet had written M. or Po. or Pr.—signifying, Money, Position, Principles, favouring the latter with special brackets. The wisdom of a worldly man, which he could now and then adopt, determined him, before he commenced his round of visits, to consult and sound his solicitor and his physician thereanent; lawyers and doctors being the rats who know best the merits of a house, and on what sort of foundation it may be standing.

Sir Austin entered the great city with a sad mind. The memory of his misfortune came upon him vividly, as if no years had intervened, and it were but yesterday that he found the letter telling him that he had no wife and his son no mother. He wandered on foot through the streets the first night of his arrival, looking strangely at the shops and shows and bustle of the world from which he had divorced himself; feeling as destitute as the poorest vagrant. He had almost forgotten how to find his way about, and came across his old mansion in his efforts to regain his hotel. The windows were alight—signs of merry life within. He stared at it from the shadow of the opposite side. It seemed to him he was a ghost gazing upon his living past. And then the phantom which had stood there mocking while he felt as other men—the phantom, now flesh and blood reality, seized and convulsed his heart, and filled its unforgiving crevices with bitter ironic venom. He remembered by the time reflection returned to him that it was Algernon, who had the house at his disposal, probably giving a card-party, or something of the sort. In the morning, too, he remembered that he had divorced the world to wed a System, and must be faithful to that exacting Spouse, who, now alone of things on earth, could fortify and recompense him.

Mr. Thompson received his client with the dignity and emotion due to such a rent-roll and the unexpectedness of the honour. He was a thin stately man of law, garbed as one who gave audience to acred bishops, and carrying on his countenance the stamp of paternity to the parchment skins, and of a virtuous attachment to Port wine sufficient to increase his respectability in the eyes of moral Britain. After congratulating Sir Austin on the fortunate issue of two or three suits, and being assured that the baronet’s business in town had no concern therewith, Mr. Thompson ventured to hope that the young heir was all his father could desire him to be, and heard with satisfaction that he was a pattern to the youth of the Age.

Page 247

“A difficult time of life, Sir Austin!” said the old lawyer, shaking his head. “We must keep our eyes on them—keep awake! The mischief is done in a minute.”

“We must take care to have seen where we planted, and that the root was sound, or the mischief will do itself in site of, or under the very spectacles of, supervision,” said the baronet.

His legal adviser murmured “Exactly,” as if that were his own idea, adding, “It is my plan with Ripton, who has had the honour of an introduction to you, and a very pleasant time he spent with my young friend, whom he does not forget. Ripton follows the Law. He is articled to me, and will, I trust, succeed me worthily in your confidence. I bring him into town in the morning; I take him back at night. I think I may say that I am quite content with him.”

“Do you think,” said Sir Austin, fixing his brows, “that you can trace every act of his to its motive?”

The old lawyer bent forward and humbly requested that this might be repeated.

“Do you”—Sir Austin held the same searching expression—“do you establish yourself in a radiating centre of intuition: do you base your watchfulness on so thorough an acquaintance with his character, so perfect a knowledge of the instrument, that all its movements—even the eccentric ones—are anticipated by you, and provided for?”

The explanation was a little too long for the old lawyer to entreat another repetition. Winking with the painful deprecation of a deaf man, Mr. Thompson smiled urbanely, coughed conciliatingly, and said he was afraid he could not affirm that much, though he was happily enabled to say that Ripton had borne an extremely good character at school.

“I find,” Sir Austin remarked, as sardonically he relaxed his inspecting pose and mien, “there are fathers who are content to be simply obeyed. Now I require not only that my son should obey; I would have him guiltless of the impulse to gainsay my wishes—-feeling me in him stronger than his undeveloped nature, up to a certain period, where my responsibility ends and his commences. Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young, he is an organism ripening to the set mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform"...

Mr. Thompson agitated his eyebrows dreadfully. He was utterly lost. He respected Sir Austin’s estates too much to believe for a moment he was listening to downright folly. Yet how otherwise explain the fact of his excellent client being incomprehensible to

him? For a middle-aged gentleman, and one who has been in the habit of advising and managing, will rarely have a notion of accusing his understanding; and Mr. Thompson had not the slightest notion of accusing his. But the baronet's condescension in coming thus to him, and speaking on the subject nearest his heart, might well affect him, and he quickly settled the case in favour of both parties, pronouncing mentally that his honoured client had a meaning, and so deep it was, so subtle, that no wonder he experienced difficulty in giving it fitly significant words.

Page 248

Sir Austin elaborated his theory of the Organism and the Mechanism, for his lawyer's edification. At a recurrence of the word "healthy" Mr. Thompson caught him up:

"I apprehended you! Oh, I agree with you, Sir Austin! entirely! Allow me to ring for my son Ripton. I think, if you condescend to examine him, you will say that regular habits, and a diet of nothing but law-reading—for other forms of literature I strictly interdict—-have made him all that you instance."

Mr. Thompson's hand was on the bell. Sir Austin arrested him.

"Permit me to see the lad at his occupation," said he.

Our old friend Ripton sat in a room apart with the confidential clerk, Mr. Beazley, a veteran of law, now little better than a document, looking already signed and sealed, and shortly to be delivered, who enjoined nothing from his pupil and companion save absolute silence, and sounded his praises to his father at the close of days when it had been rigidly observed—not caring, or considering, the finished dry old document that he was, under what kind of spell a turbulent commonplace youth could be charmed into stillness for six hours of the day. Ripton was supposed to be devoted to the study of Blackstone. A tome of the classic legal commentator lay extended outside his desk, under the partially lifted lid of which nestled the assiduous student's head—law being thus brought into direct contact with his brain-pan. The office-door opened, and he heard not; his name was called, and he remained equally moveless. His method of taking in Blackstone seemed absorbing as it was novel.

"Comparing notes, I daresay," whispered Mr. Thompson to Sir Austin. "I call that study!"

The confidential clerk rose, and bowed obsequious senility.

"Is it like this every day, Beazley?" Mr. Thompson asked with parental pride.

"Ahem!" the old clerk replied, "he is like this every day, sir. I could not ask more of a mouse."

Sir Austin stepped forward to the desk. His proximity roused one of Ripton's senses, which blew a pall to the others. Down went the lid of the desk. Dismay, and the ardours of study, flashed together in Ripton's face. He slouched from his perch with the air of one who means rather to defend his position than welcome a superior, the right hand in his waistcoat pocket fumbling a key, the left catching at his vacant stool.

Sir Austin put two fingers on the youth's shoulder, and said, leaning his head a little on one side, in a way habitual to him, "I am glad to find my son's old comrade thus profitably occupied. I know what study is myself. But beware of prosecuting it too excitedly! Come! you must not be offended at our interruption; you will soon take up the thread again. Besides, you know, you must get accustomed to the visits of your client."

So condescending and kindly did this speech sound to Mr. Thompson, that, seeing Ripton still preserve his appearance of disorder and sneaking defiance, he thought fit to nod and frown at the youth, and desired him to inform the baronet what particular part of Blackstone he was absorbed in mastering at that moment.

Page 249

Ripton hesitated an instant, and blundered out, with dubious articulation, “The Law of Gravelkind.”

“What Law?” said Sir Austin, perplexed.

“Gravelkind,” again rumbled Ripton’s voice.

Sir Austin turned to Mr. Thompson for an explanation. The old lawyer was shaking his law-box.

“Singular!” he exclaimed. “He will make that mistake! What law, sir?”

Ripton read his error in the sternly painful expression of his father’s face, and corrected himself. “Gavelkind, sir.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Thompson, with a sigh of relief. “Gravelkind, indeed! Gavelkind! An old Kentish”—He was going to expound, but Sir Austin assured him he knew it, and a very absurd law it was, adding, “I should like to look at your son’s notes, or remarks on the judiciousness of that family arrangement, if he had any.”

“You were making notes, or referring to them, as we entered,” said Mr. Thompson to the sucking lawyer; “a very good plan, which I have always enjoined on you. Were you not?”

Ripton stammered that he was afraid he hid not any notes to show, worth seeing.

“What were you doing then, sir?”

“Making notes,” muttered Ripton, looking incarnate subterfuge.

“Exhibit!”

Ripton glanced at his desk and then at his father; at Sir Austin, and at the confidential clerk. He took out his key. It would not fit the hole.

“Exhibit!” was peremptorily called again.

In his praiseworthy efforts to accommodate the keyhole, Ripton discovered that the desk was already unlocked. Mr. Thompson marched to it, and held the lid aloft. A book was lying open within, which Ripton immediately hustled among a mass of papers and tossed into a dark corner, not before the glimpse of a coloured frontispiece was caught by Sir Austin’s eye.

The baronet smiled, and said, “You study Heraldry, too? Are you fond of the science?”

Ripton replied that he was very fond of it—extremely attached, and threw a further pile of papers into the dark corner.

The notes had been less conspicuously placed, and the search for them was tedious and vain. Papers, not legal, or the fruits of study, were found, that made Mr. Thompson more intimate with the condition of his son's exchequer; nothing in the shape of a remark on the Law of Gavelkind.

Mr. Thompson suggested to his son that they might be among those scraps he had thrown carelessly into the dark corner. Ripton, though he consented to inspect them, was positive they were not there.

"What have we here?" said Mr. Thompson, seizing a neatly folded paper addressed to the Editor of a law publication, as Ripton brought them forth, one by one. Forthwith Mr. Thompson fixed his spectacles and read aloud:

> "To the Editor of the 'Jurist.'

"Sir,—In your recent observations on the great case of Crim"—

Mr. Thompson hem'd! and stopped short, like a man who comes unexpectedly upon a snake in his path. Mr. Beazley's feet shuffled. Sir Austin changed the position of an arm.

Page 250

“It’s on the other side, I think,” gasped Ripton.

Mr. Thompson confidently turned over, and intoned with emphasis.

“To Absalom, the son of David, the little Jew usurer of Bond Court, Whitecross Gutters, for his introduction to Venus, I O U Five pounds, when I can pay.

“Signed: *Ripton Thompson*.”

Underneath this fictitious legal instrument was discreetly appended:

“(Mem. Document not binding.)”

There was a pause: an awful under-breath of sanctified wonderment and reproach passed round the office. Sir Austin assumed an attitude. Mr. Thompson shed a glance of severity on his confidential clerk, who parried by throwing up his hands.

Ripton, now fairly bewildered, stuffed another paper under his father’s nose, hoping the outside perhaps would satisfy him: it was marked “Legal Considerations.” Mr. Thompson had no idea of sparing or shielding his son. In fact, like many men whose self-love is wounded by their offspring, he felt vindictive, and was ready to sacrifice him up to a certain point, for the good of both. He therefore opened the paper, expecting something worse than what he had hitherto seen, despite its formal heading, and he was not disappointed.

The “Legal Considerations” related to the Case regarding, which Ripton had conceived it imperative upon him to address a letter to the Editor of the “Jurist,” and was indeed a great case, and an ancient; revived apparently for the special purpose of displaying the forensic abilities of the Junior Counsel for the Plaintiff, Mr. Ripton Thompson, whose assistance the Attorney-General, in his opening statement, congratulated himself on securing; a rather unusual thing, due probably to the eminence and renown of that youthful gentleman at the Bar of his country. So much was seen from the copy of a report purporting to be extracted from a newspaper, and prefixed to the Junior Counsel’s remarks, or Legal Considerations, on the conduct of the Case, the admissibility and non-admissibility of certain evidence, and the ultimate decision of the judges.

Mr. Thompson, senior, lifted the paper high, with the spirit of one prepared to do execution on the criminal, and in the voice of a town-crier, varied by a bitter accentuation and satiric sing-song tone, deliberately read:

> “*Vulcan*v. *Mars*.

“The Attorney-General, assisted by Mr. Ripton Thompson, appeared on behalf of the Plaintiff. Mr. Serjeant Cupid, Q.C., and Mr. Capital Opportunity, for the Defendant.”

“Oh!” snapped Mr. Thompson, senior, peering venom at the unfortunate Ripton over his spectacles, “your notes are on that issue, sir! Thus you employ your time, sir!”

With another side-shot at the confidential clerk, who retired immediately behind a strong entrenchment of shrugs, Mr. Thompson was pushed by the devil of his rancour to continue reading:

Page 251

“This Case is too well known to require more than a partial summary of particulars"...

“Ahem! we will skip the particulars, however partial,” said Mr. Thompson. “Ah!—what do you mean here, sir,—but enough! I think we may be excused your Legal Considerations on such a Case. This is how you employ your law-studies, sir! You put them to this purpose? Mr. Beazley! you will henceforward sit alone. I must have this young man under my own eye. Sir Austin! permit me to apologize to you for subjecting you to a scene so disagreeable. It was a father’s duty not to spare him.”

Mr. Thompson wiped his forehead, as Brutes might have done after passing judgment on the scion of his house.

“These papers,” he went on, fluttering Ripton’s precious lucubrations in a waving judicial hand, “I shall retain. The day will come when he will regard them with shame. And it shall be his penance, his punishment, to do so! Stop!” he cried, as Ripton was noiselessly shutting his desk, “have you more of them, sir; of a similar description? Rout them out! Let us know you at your worst. What have you there—in that corner?”

Ripton was understood to say he devoted that corner to old briefs on important cases.

Mr. Thompson thrust his trembling fingers among the old briefs, and turned over the volume Sir Austin had observed, but without much remarking it, for his suspicions had not risen to print.

“A Manual of Heraldry?” the baronet politely, and it may be ironically, inquired, before it could well escape.

“I like it very much,” said Ripton, clutching the book in dreadful torment.

“Allow me to see that you have our arms and crest correct.” The baronet proffered a hand for the book.

“A Griffin between two Wheatsheaves,” cried Ripton, still clutching it nervously.

Mr. Thompson, without any notion of what he was doing, drew the book from Ripton’s hold; whereupon the two seniors laid their grey heads together over the title-page. It set forth in attractive characters beside a coloured frontispiece, which embodied the promise displayed there, the entrancing adventures of Miss Random, a strange young lady.

Had there been a Black Hole within the area of those law regions to consign Ripton to there and then, or an Iron Rod handy to mortify his sinful flesh, Mr. Thompson would have used them. As it was, he contented himself by looking Black Holes and Iron Rods at the detected youth, who sat on his perch insensible to what might happen next, collapsed.

Mr. Thompson cast the wicked creature down with a “Pah!” He, however, took her up again, and strode away with her. Sir Austin gave Ripton a forefinger, and kindly touched his head, saying, “Good-bye, boy! At some future date Richard will be happy to see you at Raynham.”

Undoubtedly this was a great triumph to the System!

CHAPTER XVII

Page 252

The conversation between solicitor and client was resumed.

“Is it possible,” quoth Mr. Thompson, the moment he had ushered his client into his private room, “that you will consent, Sir Austin, to see him and receive him again?”

“Certainly,” the baronet replied. “Why not? This by no means astonishes me. When there is no longer danger to my son he will be welcome as he was before. He is a schoolboy. I knew it. I expected it. The results of your principle, Thompson!”

“One of the very worst books of that abominable class!” exclaimed the old lawyer, opening at the coloured frontispiece, from which brazen Miss Random smiled bewitchingly out, as if she had no doubt of captivating Time and all his veterans on a fair field. “Pah!” he shut her to with the energy he would have given to the office of publicly slapping her face; “from this day I diet him on bread and water—rescind his pocket-money!—How he could have got hold of such a book! How he—! And what ideas! Concealing them from me as he has done so cunningly! He trifles with vice! His mind is in a putrid state! I might have believed—I did believe—I might have gone on believing—my son Ripton to be a moral young man!” The old lawyer interjected on the delusion of fathers, and sat down in a lamentable abstraction.

“The lad has come out!” said Sir Austin. “His adoption of the legal form is amusing. He trifles with vice, true: people newly initiated are as hardy as its intimates, and a young sinner’s amusements will resemble those of a confirmed debauchee. The satiated, and the insatiate, appetite alike appeal to extremes. You are astonished at this revelation of your son’s condition. I expected it; though assuredly, believe me, not this sudden and indisputable proof of it. But I knew that the seed was in him, and therefore I have not latterly invited him to Raynham. School, and the corruption there, will bear its fruits sooner or later. I could advise you, Thompson, what to do with him: it would be my plan.”

Mr. Thompson murmured, like a true courtier, that he should esteem it an honour to be favoured with Sir Austin Feverel’s advice: secretly resolute, like a true Briton, to follow his own.

“Let him, then,” continued the baronet, “see vice in its nakedness. While he has yet some innocence, nauseate him! Vice, taken little by little, usurps gradually the whole creature. My counsel to you, Thompson, would be, to drag him through the sinks of town.”

Mr. Thompson began to blink again.

“Oh, I shall punish him, Sir Austin! Do not fear me, air. I have no tenderness for vice.”

“That is not what is wanted, Thompson. You mistake me. He should be dealt with gently. Heavens! do you hope to make him hate vice by making him a martyr for its sake? You must descend from the pedestal of age to become his Mentor: cause him to see how certainly and pitilessly vice itself punishes: accompany him into its haunts”—

Page 253

“Over town?” broke forth Mr. Thompson.

“Over town,” said the baronet.

“And depend upon it,” he added, “that, until fathers act thoroughly up to their duty, we shall see the sights we see in great cities, and hear the tales we hear in little villages, with death and calamity in our homes, and a legacy of sorrow and shame to the generations to come. I do aver,” he exclaimed, becoming excited, “that, if it were not for the duty to my son, and the hope I cherish in him, I, seeing the accumulation of misery we are handing down to an innocent posterity—to whom, through our sin, the fresh breath of life will be foul—I—yes! I would hide my name! For whither are we tending? What home is pure absolutely? What cannot our doctors and lawyers tell us?”

Mr. Thompson acquiesced significantly.

“And what is to come of this?” Sir Austin continued. “When the sins of the fathers are multiplied by the sons, is not perdition the final sum of things? And is not life, the boon of heaven, growing to be the devil’s game utterly? But for my son, I would hide my name. I would not bequeath it to be cursed by them that walk above my grave!”

This was indeed a terrible view of existence. Mr. Thompson felt uneasy. There was a dignity in his client, an impressiveness in his speech, that silenced remonstrating reason and the cry of long years of comfortable respectability. Mr. Thompson went to church regularly; paid his rates and dues without overmuch, or at least more than common, grumbling. On the surface he was a good citizen, fond of his children, faithful to his wife, devoutly marching to a fair seat in heaven on a path paved by something better than a thousand a year. But here was a man sighting him from below the surface, and though it was an unfair, unaccustomed, not to say un-English, method of regarding one’s fellow-man, Mr. Thompson was troubled by it. What though his client exaggerated? Facts were at the bottom of what he said. And he was acute—he had unmasked Ripton! Since Ripton’s exposure he winced at a personal application in the text his client preached from. Possibly this was the secret source of part of his anger against that peccant youth.

Mr. Thompson shook his head, and, with dolefully puckered visage and a pitiable contraction of his shoulders, rose slowly up from his chair. Apparently he was about to speak, but he straightway turned and went meditatively to a side-recess in the room, whereof he opened a door, drew forth a tray and a decanter labelled Port, filled a glass for his client, deferentially invited him to partake of it; filled another glass for himself, and drank.

That was his reply.

Sir Austin never took wine before dinner. Thompson had looked as if he meant to speak: he waited for Thompson's words.

Mr. Thompson saw that, as his client did not join him in his glass, the eloquence of that Porty reply was lost on his client.

Page 254

Having slowly ingurgitated and meditated upon this precious draught, and turned its flavour over and over with an aspect of potent Judicial wisdom (one might have thought that he was weighing mankind m the balance), the old lawyer heaved, and said, sharpening his lips over the admirable vintage, “The world is in a very sad state, I fear, Sir Austin!”

His client gazed at him queerly.

“But that,” Mr. Thompson added immediately, ill-concealing by his gaze the glowing intestinal congratulations going on within him, “that is, I think you would say, Sir Austin—if I could but prevail upon you—a tolerably good character wine!”

“There’s virtue somewhere, I see, Thompson!” Sir Austin murmured, without disturbing his legal adviser’s dimples.

The old lawyer sat down to finish his glass, saying, that such a wine was not to be had everywhere.

They were then outwardly silent for a apace. Inwardly one of them was full of riot and jubilant uproar: as if the solemn fields of law were suddenly to be invaded and possessed by troops of Bacchanals: and to preserve a decently wretched physiognomy over it, and keep on terms with his companion, he had to grimace like a melancholy clown in a pantomime.

Mr. Thompson brushed back his hair. The baronet was still expectant. Mr. Thompson sighed deeply, and emptied his glass. He combated the change that had come over him. He tried not to see Ruby. He tried to feel miserable, and it was not in him. He spoke, drawing what appropriate inspirations he could from his client’s countenance, to show that they had views in common: “Degenerating sadly, I fear!”

The baronet nodded.

“According to what my wine-merchants say,” continued Mr. Thompson, “there can be no doubt about it.”

Sir Austin stared.

“It’s the grape, or the ground, or something,” Mr. Thompson went on. “All I can say is, our youngsters will have a bad look-out! In my opinion Government should be compelled to send out a Commission to inquire into the cause. To Englishmen it would be a public calamity. It surprises me—I hear men sit and talk despondently of this extraordinary disease of the vine, and not one of them seems to think it incumbent on him to act, and do his best to stop it.” He fronted his client like a man who accuses an enormous public delinquency. “Nobody makes a stir! The apathy of Englishmen will become proverbial. Pray, try it, Sir Austin! Pray, allow me. Such a wine cannot

disagree at any hour. Do! I am allowanced two glasses three hours before dinner. Stomachic. I find it agree with me surprisingly: quite a new man. I suppose it will last our time. It must! What should we do? There's no Law possible without it. Not a lawyer of us could live. Ours is an occupation which dries the blood."

The scene with Ripton had unnerved him, the wine had renovated, and gratitude to the wine inspired his tongue. He thought that his client, of the whimsical mind, though undoubtedly correct moral views, had need of a glass.

Page 255

“Now that very wine—Sir Austin—I think I do not err in saying, that very wine your respected father, Sir Pylcher Feverel, used to taste whenever he came to consult my father, when I was a boy. And I remember one day being called in, and Sir Pylcher himself poured me out a glass. I wish I could call in Ripton now, and do the same. No! Leniency in such a case as that!—The wine would not hurt him—I doubt if there be much left for him to welcome his guests with. Ha! ha! Now if I could persuade you, Sir Austin, as you do not take wine before dinner, some day to favour me with your company at my little country cottage I have a wine there—the fellow to that—I think you would, I do think you would”—Mr. Thompson meant to say, he thought his client would arrive at something of a similar jocund contemplation of his fellows in their degeneracy that inspirited lawyers after potation, but condensed the sensual promise into “highly approve.”

Sir Austin speculated on his legal adviser with a sour mouth comically compressed.

It stood clear to him that Thompson before his Port, and Thompson after, were two different men. To indoctrinate him now was too late: it was perhaps the time to make the positive use of him he wanted.

He pencilled on a handy slip of paper: “Two prongs of a fork; the World stuck between them—Port and the Palate: ’Tis one which fails first—Down goes World;” and again the hieroglyph—“Port-spectacles.” He said, “I shall gladly accompany you this evening, Thompson,” words that transfigured the delighted lawyer, and ensigned the skeleton of a great Aphorism to his pocket, there to gather flesh and form, with numberless others in a like condition.

“I came to visit my lawyer,” he said to himself. “I think I have been dealing with The World in epitome!”

CHAPTER XVIII

The rumour circulated that Sir Austin Feverel, the recluse of Raynham, the rank misogynist, the rich baronet, was in town, looking out a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir. Doctor Benjamin Bairam was the excellent authority. Doctor Bairam had safely delivered Mrs. Deborah Gossip of this interesting bantling, which was forthwith dandled in dozens of feminine laps. Doctor Bairam could boast the first interview with the famous recluse. He had it from his own lips that the object of the baronet was to look out a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir; “and,” added the doctor, “she’ll be lucky who gets him.” Which was interpreted to mean, that he would be a catch; the doctor probably intending to allude to certain extraordinary difficulties in the way of a choice.

A demand was made on the publisher of The Pilgrim's Scrip for all his outstanding copies. Conventionalities were defied. A summer-shower of cards fell on the baronet's table.

He had few male friends. He shunned the Clubs as nests of scandal. The cards he contemplated were mostly those of the sex, with the husband, if there was a husband, evidently dragged in for propriety's sake. He perused the cards and smiled. He knew their purpose. What terrible light Thompson and Bairam had thrown on some of them! Heavens! in what a state was the blood of this Empire.

Page 256

Before commencing his campaign he called on two ancient intimates, Lord Heddon, and his distant cousin Darley Absworthy, both Members of Parliament, useful men, though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so, seeing that they did not fancy themselves the worse for it. He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters. "So much," he wrote in the Note-book, "for the Wild Oats theory!"

Darley was proud of his daughters' white and pink skins. "Beautiful complexions," he called them. The eldest was in the market, immensely admired. Sir Austin was introduced to her. She talked fluently and sweetly. A youth not on his guard, a simple school-boy youth, or even a man, might have fallen in love with her, she was so affable and fair. There was something poetic about her. And she was quite well, she said, the baronet frequently questioning her on that point. She intimated that she was robust; but towards the close of their conversation her hand would now and then travel to her side, and she breathed painfully an instant, saying, "Isn't it odd? Dora, Adela, and myself, we all feel the same queer sensation—about the heart, I think it is—after talking much."

Sir Austin nodded and blinked sadly, exclaiming to his soul, "Wild oats! wild oats!"

He did not ask permission to see Dora and Adela.

Lord Heddon vehemently preached wild oats.

"It's all nonsense, Feverel," he said, "about bringing up a lad out of the common way. He's all the better for a little racketing when he's green—feels his bone and muscle learns to know the world. He'll never be a man if he hasn't played at the old game one time in his life, and the earlier the better. I've always found the best fellows were wildish once. I don't care what he does when he's a green-horn; besides, he's got an excuse for it then. You can't expect to have a man, if he doesn't take a man's food. You'll have a milksop. And, depend upon it, when he does break out he'll go to the devil, and nobody pities him. Look what those fellows the grocers, do when they get hold of a young—what d'ye call 'em?—apprentice. They know the scoundrel was born with a sweet tooth. Well! they give him the run of the shop, and in a very short time he soberly deals out the goods, a devilish deal too wise to abstract a morsel even for the pleasure of stealing. I know you have contrary theories. You hold that the young grocer should have a soul above sugar. It won't do! Take my word for it, Feverel, it's a dangerous experiment, that of bringing up flesh and blood in harness. No colt will bear it, or he's a tame beast. And look you: take it on medical grounds. Early excesses the frame will recover from: late ones break the constitution. There's the case in a nutshell. How's your son?"

"Sound and well!" replied Sir Austin. "And yours?"

“Oh, Lipscombe’s always the same!” Lord Heddon sighed peevishly. “He’s quiet—that’s one good thing; but there’s no getting the country to take him, so I must give up hopes of that.”

Page 257

Lord Lipscombe entering the room just then, Sir Austin surveyed him, and was not astonished at the refusal of the country to take him.

“Wild oats!” he thought, as he contemplated the headless, degenerate, weedy issue and result.

Both Darley Absworthy and Lord Heddon spoke of the marriage of their offspring as a matter of course. “And if I were not a coward,” Sir Austin confessed to himself, “I should stand forth and forbid the banns! This universal ignorance of the inevitable consequence of sin is frightful! The wild oats plea is a torpedo that seems to have struck the world, and rendered it morally insensible.” However, they silenced him. He was obliged to spare their feelings on a subject to him so deeply sacred. The healthful image of his noble boy rose before him, a triumphant living rejoinder to any hostile argument.

He was content to remark to his doctor, that he thought the third generation of wild oats would be a pretty thin crop!

Families against whom neither Thompson lawyer nor Bairam physician could recollect a progenitorial blot, either on the male or female side, were not numerous. “Only,” said the doctors “you really must not be too exacting in these days, my dear Sir Austin. It is impossible to contest your principle, and you are doing mankind incalculable service in calling its attention to this the gravest of its duties: but as the stream of civilization progresses we must be a little taken in the lump, as it were. The world is, I can assure you—and I do not look only above the surface, you can believe—the world is awakening to the vital importance of the question.”

“Doctor,” replied Sir Austin, “if you had a pure-blood Arab barb would you cross him with a screw?”

“Decidedly not,” said the doctor.

“Then permit me to say, I shall employ every care to match my son according to his merits,” Sir Austin returned. “I trust the world is awakening, as you observe. I have been to my publisher, since my arrival in town, with a manuscript ’Proposal for a New System of Education of our British Youth,’ which may come in opportunely. I think I am entitled to speak on that subject.”

“Certainly,” said the doctor. “You will admit, Sir Austin, that, compared with continental nations—our neighbours, for instance—we shine to advantage, in morals, as in everything else. I hope you admit that?”

“I find no consolation in shining by comparison with a lower standard,” said the baronet. “If I compare the enlightenment of your views—for you admit my principle—with the

obstinate incredulity of a country doctor's, who sees nothing of the world, you are hardly flattered, I presume?"

Doctor Bairam would hardly be flattered at such a comparison, assuredly, he interjected.

"Besides," added the baronet, "the French make no pretences, and thereby escape one of the main penalties of hypocrisy. Whereas we!—but I am not their advocate, credit me. It is better, perhaps, to pay our homage to virtue. At least it delays the spread of entire corruptness."

Page 258

Doctor Bairam wished the baronet success, and diligently endeavoured to assist his search for a mate worthy of the pure-blood barb, by putting several mamas, whom he visited, on the alert.

CHAPTER XIX

Away with Systems! Away with a corrupt World! Let us breathe the air of the Enchanted Island.

Golden lie the meadows: golden run the streams; red gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth, and walks the fields and the waters.

The sun is coming down to earth, and the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him, and touch the leaves of oaks and planes and beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold; leaving brightest footprints upon thickly-weeded banks, where the foxglove's last upper-bells incline, and bramble-shoots wander amid moist rich herbage. The plumes of the woodland are alight; and beyond them, over the open, 'tis a race with the long-thrown shadows; a race across the heaths and up the hills, till, at the farthest bourne of mounted eastern cloud, the heralds of the sun lay rosy fingers and rest.

Sweet are the shy recesses of the woodland. The ray treads softly there. A film athwart the pathway quivers many-hued against purple shade fragrant with warm pines, deep moss-beds, feathery ferns. The little brown squirrel drops tail, and leaps; the inmost bird is startled to a chance tuneless note. From silence into silence things move.

Peeps of the revelling splendour above and around enliven the conscious full heart within. The flaming West, the crimson heights, shower their glories through voluminous leafage. But these are bowers where deep bliss dwells, imperial joy, that owes no fealty to yonder glories, in which the young lamb gambols and the spirits of men are glad. Descend, great Radiance! embrace creation with beneficent fire, and pass from us! You and the vice-regal light that succeeds to you, and all heavenly pageants, are the ministers and the slaves of the throbbing content within.

For this is the home of the enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet: here like darkling nightingales they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls.

Roll on, grinding wheels of the world: cries of ships going down in a calm, groans of a System which will not know its rightful hour of exultation, complain to the universe. You are not heard here.

He calls her by her name, Lucy: and she, blushing at her great boldness, has called him by his, Richard. Those two names are the key-notes of the wonderful harmonies the angels sing aloft.

“Lucy! my beloved!”

“O Richard!”

Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, a sheep-boy pipes to meditative eve on a penny-whistle.

Love’s musical instrument is as old, and as poor: it has but two stops; and yet, you see, the cunning musician does thus much with it!

Page 259

Other speech they have little; light foam playing upon waves of feeling, and of feeling compact, that bursts only when the sweeping volume is too wild, and is no more than their sigh of tenderness spoken.

Perhaps love played his tune so well because their natures had unblunted edges, and were keen for bliss, confiding in it as natural food. To gentlemen and ladies he fine-draws upon the viol, ravishingly; or blows into the mellow bassoon; or rouses the heroic ardours of the trumpet; or, it may be, commands the whole Orchestra for them. And they are pleased. He is still the cunning musician. They languish, and taste ecstasy: but it is, however sonorous, an earthly concert. For them the spheres move not to two notes. They have lost, or forfeited and never known, the first super-sensual spring of the ripe senses into passion; when they carry the soul with them, and have the privileges of spirits to walk disembodied, boundlessly to feel. Or one has it, and the other is a dead body. Ambrosia let them eat, and drink the nectar: here sit a couple to whom Love's simple bread and water is a finer feast.

Pipe, happy sheep-bop, Love! Irradiated angels, unfold your wings and lift your voices!

They have out-flown philosophy. Their instinct has shot beyond the ken of science. They were made for their Eden.

"And this divine gift was in store for me!"

So runs the internal outcry of each, clasping each: it is their recurring refrain to the harmonies. How it illumined the years gone by and suffused the living Future!

"You for me: I for you!"

"We are born for each other!"

They believe that the angels have been busy about them from their cradles. The celestial hosts have worthily striven to bring them together. And, O victory! O wonder! after toil and pain, and difficulties exceeding, the celestial hosts have succeeded!

"Here we two sit who are written above as one!"

Pipe, happy Love! pipe on to these dear innocents!

The tide of colour has ebbed from the upper sky. In the West the sea of sunken fire draws back; and the stars leap forth, and tremble, and retire before the advancing moon, who slips the silver train of cloud from her shoulders, and, with her foot upon the pine-tops, surveys heaven.

"Lucy, did you never dream of meeting me?"

“O Richard! yes; for I remembered you.”

“Lucy! and did you pray that we might meet?”

“I did!”

Young as when she looked upon the lovers in Paradise, the fair Immortal journeys onward. Fronting her, it is not night but veiled day. Full half the sky is flushed. Not darkness, not day, but the nuptials of the two.

“My own! my own for ever! You are pledged to me? Whisper!”

He hears the delicious music.

“And you are mine?”

A soft beam travels to the fern-covert under the pinewood where they sit, and for answer he has her eyes turned to him an instant, timidly fluttering over the depths of his, and then downcast; for through her eyes her soul is naked to him.

Page 260

“Lucy! my bride! my life!”

The night-jar spins his dark monotony on the branch of the pine. The soft beam travels round them, and listens to their hearts. Their lips are locked.

Pipe no more, Love, for a time! Pipe as you will you cannot express their first kiss; nothing of its sweetness, and of the sacredness of it nothing. St. Cecilia up aloft, before the silver organ-pipes of Paradise, pressing fingers upon all the notes of which Love is but one, from her you may hear it.

So Love is silent. Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, the self-satisfied sheep-boy delivers a last complacent squint down the length of his penny-whistle, and, with a flourish correspondingly awry, he also marches into silence, hailed by supper. The woods are still. There is heard but the night-jar spinning on the pine-branch, circled by moonlight.

CHAPTER XX

Enchanted Islands have not yet rooted out their old brood of dragons. Wherever there is romance, these monsters come by inimical attraction. Because the heavens are certainly propitious to true lovers, the beasts of the abysses are banded to destroy them, stimulated by innumerable sad victories; and every love-tale is an Epic Par of the upper and lower powers. I wish good fairies were a little more active. They seem to be cajoled into security by the happiness of their favourites; whereas the wicked are always alert, and circumspect. They let the little ones shut their eyes to fancy they are not seen, and then commence.

These appointments and meetings, involving a start from the dinner-table at the hour of contemplative digestion and prime claret; the hour when the wise youth Adrian delighted to talk at his ease—to recline in dreamy consciousness that a work of good was going on inside him; these abstractions from his studies, excesses of gaiety, and glumness, heavings of the chest, and other odd signs, but mainly the disgusting behaviour of his pupil at the dinner-table, taught Adrian to understand, though the young gentleman was clever in excuses, that he had somehow learnt there was another half to the divided Apple of Creation, and had embarked upon the great voyage of discovery of the difference between the two halves. With his usual coolness Adrian debated whether he might be in the observatory or the practical stage of the voyage. For himself, as a man and a philosopher, Adrian had no objection to its being either; and he had only to consider which was temporarily most threatening to the ridiculous System he had to support. Richard’s absence annoyed him. The youth was vivacious, and his enthusiasm good fun; and besides, when he left table, Adrian had to sit alone with Hippias and the Eighteenth Century, from both of whom he had extracted all the

amusement that could be got, and he saw his digestion menaced by the society of two ruined stomachs, who bored him just when he loved himself most.

Page 261

Poor Hippias was now so reduced that he had profoundly to calculate whether a particular dish, or an extra-glass of wine, would have a bitter effect on him and be felt through the remainder of his years. He was in the habit of uttering his calculations half aloud, wherein the prophetic doubts of experience, and the succulent insinuations of appetite, contended hotly. It was horrible to hear him, so let us pardon Adrian for tempting him to a decision in favour of the moment.

“Happy to take wine with you,” Adrian would say, and Hippias would regard the decanter with a pained forehead, and put up the doctor.

“Drink, nephew Hippy, and think of the doctor to-morrow!” the Eighteenth Century cheerily ruffles her cap at him, and recommends her own practice.

“It’s this literary work!” interjects Hippias, handling his glass of remorse. “I don’t know what else it can be. You have no idea how anxious I feel. I have frightful dreams. I’m perpetually anxious.”

“No wonder,” says Adrian, who enjoys the childish simplicity to which an absorbed study of his sensational existence has brought poor Hippias. “No wonder. Ten years of Fairy Mythology! Could anyone hope to sleep in peace after that? As to your digestion, no one has a digestion who is in the doctor’s hands. They prescribe from dogmas, and don’t count on the system. They have cut you down from two bottles to two glasses. It’s absurd. You can’t sleep, because your system is crying out for what it’s accustomed to.”

Hippias sips his Madeira with a niggerdly confidence, but assures Adrian that he really should not like to venture on a bottle now: it would be rank madness to venture on a bottle now, he thinks. Last night only, after partaking, under protest, of that rich French dish, or was it the duck?—Adrian advised him to throw the blame on that vulgar bird.—-Say the duck, then. Last night, he was no sooner stretched in bed, than he seemed to be of an enormous size all his limbs—his nose, his mouth, his toes—were elephantine! An elephant was a pigmy to him. And his hugeousness seemed to increase the instant he shut his eyes. He turned on this side; he turned on that. He lay on his back; he tried putting his face to the pillow; and he continued to swell. He wondered the room could hold him—he thought he must burst it—and absolutely lit a candle, and went to the looking-glass to see whether he was bearable.

By this time Adrian and Richard were laughing uncontrollably. He had, however, a genial auditor in the Eighteenth Century, who declared it to be a new disease, not known in her day, and deserving investigation. She was happy to compare sensations with him, but hers were not of the complex order, and a potion soon righted her. In fact, her system appeared to be a debatable ground for aliment and medicine, on which the battle was fought, and, when over, she was none the worse, as she joyfully told Hippias. Never looked ploughman on prince, or village belle on Court Beauty, with half

the envy poor nineteenth-century Hippias expended in his gaze on the Eighteenth. He was too serious to note much the laughter of the young men.

Page 262

This ‘Tragedy of a Cooking-Apparatus,’ as Adrian designated the malady of Hippias, was repeated regularly ever evening. It was natural for any youth to escape as quick as he could from such a table of stomachs.

Adrian bore with his conduct considerately, until a letter from the baronet, describing the house and maternal System of a Mrs. Caroline Grandison, and the rough grain of hopefulness in her youngest daughter, spurred him to think of his duties, and see what was going on. He gave Richard half-an-hour’s start, and then put on his hat to follow his own keen scent, leaving Hippias and the Eighteenth Century to piquet.

In the lane near Belthorpe he met a maid of the farm not unknown to him, one Molly Davenport by name, a buxom lass, who, on seeing him, invoked her Good Gracious, the generic maid’s familiar, and was instructed by reminiscences vivid, if ancient, to giggle.

“Are you looking for your young gentleman?” Molly presently asked.

Adrian glanced about the lane like a cool brigand, to see if the coast was clear, and replied to her, “I am, miss. I want you to tell me about him.”

“Dear!” said the buxom lass, “was you coming for me to-night to know?”

Adrian rebuked her: for her bad grammar, apparently.

“’Cause I can’t stop out long to-night,” Molly explained, taking the rebuke to refer altogether to her bad grammar.

“You may go in when you please, miss. Is that any one coming? Come here in the shade.”

“Now, get along!” said Miss Molly.

Adrian spoke with resolution. “Listen to me, Molly Davenport!” He put a coin in her hand, which had a medical effect in calming her to attention. “I want to know whether you have seen him at all?”

“Who? Your young gentleman? I sh’d think I did. I seen him to-night only. Ain’t he grooved handsome. He’s al’ays about Beltharp now. It ain’t to fire no more ricks. He’s afire ’unself. Ain’t you seen ’em together? He’s after the missis”—

Adrian requested Miss Davenport to be respectful, and confine herself to particulars. This buxom lass then told him that her young missis and Adrian’s young gentleman were a pretty couple, and met one another every night. The girl swore for their innocence.

“As for Miss Lucy, she haven’t a bit of art in her, nor have he.”

“They’re all nature, I suppose,” said Adrian. “How is it I don’t see her at church?”

“She’s Catholic, or some think,” said Molly. “Her father was, and a leftenant. She’ve a Cross in her bedroom. She don’t go to church. I see you there last Sunday a-lookin’ so solemn,” and Molly stroked her hand down her chin to give it length.

Page 263

Adrian insisted on her keeping to facts. It was dark, and in the dark he was indifferent to the striking contrasts suggested by the lass, but he wanted to hear facts, and he again bribed her to impart nothing but facts. Upon which she told him further, that her young lady was an innocent artless creature who had been to school upwards of three years with the nuns, and had a little money of her own, and was beautiful enough to be a lord's lady, and had been in love with Master Richard ever since she was a little girl. Molly had got from a friend of hers up at the Abbey, Mary Garner, the housemaid who cleaned Master Richard's room, a bit of paper once with the young gentleman's handwriting, and had given it to her Miss Lucy, and Miss Lucy had given her a gold sovereign for it—just for his handwriting! Miss Lucy did not seem happy at the farm, because of that young Tom, who was always leering at her, and to be sure she was quite a lady, and could play, and sing, and dress with the best.

"She looks like angels in her nightgown!" Molly wound up.

The next moment she ran up close, and speaking for the first time as if there were a distinction of position between them, petitioned: "Mr. Harley! you won't go for doin' any harm to 'em 'cause of what I said, will you now? Do say you won't now, Mr. Harley! She is good, though she's a Catholic. She was kind to me when I was ill, and I wouldn't have her crossed—I'd rather be showed up myself, I would!"

The wise youth gave no positive promise to Molly, and she had to read his consent in a relaxation of his austerity. The noise of a lumbering foot plodding down the lane caused her to be abruptly dismissed. Molly took to flight, the lumbering foot accelerated its pace, and the pastoral appeal to her flying skirts was heard—"Moll! you theyre! It be I —Bantam!" But the sprightly Silvia would not stop to his wooing, and Adrian turned away laughing at these Arcadians.

Adrian was a lazy dragon. All he did for the present was to hint and tease. "It's the Inevitable!" he said, and asked himself why he should seek to arrest it. He had no faith in the System. Heavy Benson had. Benson of the slow thick-lidded antediluvian eye and loose-crumpled skin; Benson, the Saurian, the woman-hater; Benson was wide awake. A sort of rivalry existed between the wise youth and heavy Benson. The fidelity of the latter dependant had moved the baronet to commit to him a portion of the management of the Raynham estate, and this Adrian did not like. No one who aspires to the honourable office of leading another by the nose can tolerate a party in his ambition. Benson's surly instinct told him he was in the wise youth's way, and he resolved to give his master a striking proof of his superior faithfulness. For some weeks the Saurian eye had been on the two secret creatures. Heavy Benson saw letters come and go in the day, and now the young gentleman was off and out every night, and seemed to be on wings.

Page 264

Benson knew whither he went, and the object he went for. It was a woman—that was enough. The Saurian eye had actually seen the sinful thing lure the hope of Raynham into the shades. He composed several epistles of warning to the baronet of the work that was going on; but before sending one he wished to record a little of their guilty conversation; and for this purpose the faithful fellow trotted over the dews to eavesdrop, and thereby aroused the good fairy, in the person of Tom Bakewell, the sole confidant of Richard's state.

Tom said to his young master, "Do you know what, sir? You be watched!"

Richard, in a fury, bade him name the wretch, and Tom hung his arms, and aped the respectable protrusion of the butler's head.

"It's he, is it?" cried Richard. "He shall rue it, Tom. If I find him near me when we're together he shall never forget it."

"Don't hit too hard, sir," Tom suggested. "You hit mortal hard when you're in earnest, you know."

Richard averred he would forgive anything but that, and told Tom to be within hail to-morrow night—he knew where. By the hour of the appointment it was out of the lover's mind.

Lady Blandish dined that evening at Raynham, by Adrian's pointed invitation. According to custom, Richard started up and off, with few excuses. The lady exhibited no surprise. She and Adrian likewise strolled forth to enjoy the air of the Summer night. They had no intention of spying. Still they may have thought, by meeting Richard and his inamorata, there was a chance of laying a foundation of ridicule to sap the passion. They may have thought so—they were on no spoken understanding.

"I have seen the little girl," said Lady Blandish. "She is pretty—she would be telling if she were well set up. She speaks well. How absurd it is of that class to educate their women above their station! The child is really too good for a farmer. I noticed her before I knew of this; she has enviable hair. I suppose she doesn't paint her eyelids. Just the sort of person to take a young man. I thought there was something wrong. I received, the day before yesterday, an impassioned poem evidently not intended for me. My hair was gold. My meeting him was foretold. My eyes were homes of light fringed with night. I sent it back, correcting the colours."

"Which was death to the rhymes," said Adrian. "I saw her this morning. The boy hasn't bad taste. As you say, she is too good for a farmer. Such a spark would explode any System. She slightly affected mine. The Huron is stark mad about her."

"But we must positively write and tell his father," said Lady Blandish.

The wise youth did not see why they should exaggerate a trifle. The lady said she would have an interview with Richard, and then write, as it was her duty to do. Adrian shrugged, and was for going into the scientific explanation of Richard's conduct, in which the lady had to discourage him.

Page 265

“Poor boy!” she sighed. “I am really sorry for him. I hope he will not feel it too strongly. They feel strongly, father and son.”

“And select wisely,” Adrian added.

“That’s another thing,” said Lady Blandish.

Their talk was then of the dulness of neighbouring county people, about whom, it seemed, there was little or no scandal afloat: of the lady’s loss of the season in town, which she professed not to regret, though she complained of her general weariness: of whether Mr. Morton of Poer Hall would propose to Mrs. Doria, and of the probable despair of the hapless curate of Lobourne; and other gossip, partly in French.

They rounded the lake, and got upon the road through the park to Lobourne. The moon had risen. The atmosphere was warm and pleasant.

“Quite a lover’s night,” said Lady Blandish.

“And I, who have none to love pity me!” The wise youth attempted a sigh.

“And never will have,” said Lady Blandish, curtly. “You buy your loves.”

Adrian protested. However, he did not plead verbally against the impeachment, though the lady’s decisive insight astonished him. He began to respect her, relishing her exquisite contempt, and he reflected that widows could be terrible creatures.

He had hoped to be a little sentimental with Lady Blandish, knowing her romantic. This mixture of the harshest common sense and an air of “I know you men,” with romance and refined temperament, subdued the wise youth more than a positive accusation supported by witnesses would have done. He looked at the lady. Her face was raised to the moon. She knew nothing—she had simply spoken from the fulness of her human knowledge, and had forgotten her words. Perhaps, after all, her admiration, or whatever feeling it was, for the baronet, was sincere, and really the longing for a virtuous man. Perhaps she had tried the opposite set pretty much. Adrian shrugged. Whenever the wise youth encountered a mental difficulty he instinctively lifted his shoulders to equal altitudes, to show that he had no doubt there was a balance in the case—plenty to be said on both sides, which was the same to him as a definite solution.

At their tryst in the wood, abutting on Raynham Park, wrapped in themselves, piped to by tireless Love, Richard and Lucy sat, toying with eternal moments. How they seem as if they would never end! What mere sparks they are when they have died out! And how in the distance of time they revive, and extend, and glow, and make us think them full the half, and the best of the fire, of our lives!

With the onward flow of intimacy, the two happy lovers ceased to be so shy of common themes, and their speech did not reject all as dross that was not pure gold of emotion.

Lucy was very inquisitive about everything and everybody at Raynham. Whoever had been about Richard since his birth, she must know the history of, and he for a kiss will do her bidding.

Page 266

Thus goes the tender duet:

“You should know my cousin Austin, Lucy.—Darling! Beloved!”

“My own! Richard!”

“You should know my cousin Austin. You shall know him. He would take to you best of them all, and you to him. He is in the tropics now, looking out a place—it’s a secret—for poor English working-men to emigrate to and found a colony in that part of the world:—-my white angel!”

“Dear love!”

“He is such a noble fellow! Nobody here understands him but me. Isn’t it strange? Since I met you I love him better! That’s because I love all that’s good and noble better now—Beautiful! I love—I love you!”

“My Richard!”

“What do you think I’ve determined, Lucy? If my father—but no! my father does love me.—No! he will not; and we will be happy together here. And I will win my way with you. And whatever I win will be yours; for it will be owing to you. I feel as if I had no strength but yours—none! and you make me—O Lucy!”

His voice ebbs. Presently Lucy murmurs—

“Your father, Richard.”

“Yes, my father?”

“Dearest Richard! I feel so afraid of him.”

“He loves me, and will love you, Lucy.”

“But I am so poor and humble, Richard.”

“No one I have ever seen is like you, Lucy.”

“You think so, because you”—

“What?”

“Love me,” comes the blushing whisper, and the duet gives place to dumb variations, performed equally in concert.

It is resumed.

“You are fond of the knights, Lucy. Austin is as brave as any of them.—My own bride! Oh, how I adore you! When you are gone, I could fall upon the grass you tread upon, and kiss it. My breast feels empty of my heart—Lucy! if we lived in those days, I should have been a knight, and have won honour and glory for you. Oh! one can do nothing now. My lady-love! My lady-love!—A tear?—Lucy?”

“Dearest! Ah, Richard! I am not a lady.”

“Who dares say that? Not a lady—the angel I love!”

“Think, Richard, who I am.”

“My beautiful! I think that God made you, and has given you to me.”

Her eyes fill with tears, and, as she lifts them heavenward to thank her God, the light of heaven strikes on them, and she is so radiant in her pure beauty that the limbs of the young man tremble.

“Lucy! O heavenly spirit! Lucy!”

Tenderly her lips part—“I do not weep for sorrow,”

The big bright drops lighten, and roll down, imaged in his soul.

They lean together—shadows of ineffable tenderness playing on their thrilled cheeks and brows.

He lifts her hand, and presses his mouth to it. She has seen little of mankind, but her soul tells her this one is different from others, and at the thought, in her great joy, tears must come fast, or her heart will break—tears of boundless thanksgiving. And he, gazing on those soft, ray-illumined, dark-edged eyes, and the grace of her loose falling tresses, feels a scarce-sufferable holy fire streaming through his members.

Page 267

It is long ere they speak in open tones.

“O happy day when we met!”

What says the voice of one, the soul of the other echoes.

“O glorious heaven looking down on us!”

Their souls are joined, are made one for evermore beneath that bending benediction.

“O eternity of bliss!”

Then the diviner mood passes, and they drop to earth.

“Lucy! come with me to-night, and look at the place where you are some day to live. Come, and I will row you on the lake. You remember what you said in your letter that you dreamt?—that we were floating over the shadow of the Abbey to the nuns at work by torchlight felling the cypress, and they handed us each a sprig. Why, darling, it was the best omen in the world, their felling the old trees. And you write such lovely letters. So pure and sweet they are. I love the nuns for having taught you.”

“Ah, Richard! See! we forget! Ah!” she lifts up her face pleadingly, as to plead against herself, “even if your father forgives my birth, he will not my religion. And, dearest, though I would die for you I cannot change it. It would seem that I was denying God; and—oh! it would make me ashamed of my love.”

“Fear nothing!” He winds her about with his arm. “Come! He will love us both, and love you the more for being faithful to your father’s creed. You don’t know him, Lucy. He seems harsh and stern—he is full of kindness and love. He isn’t at all a bigot. And besides, when he hears what the nuns have done for you, won’t he thank them, as I do? And—oh! I must speak to him soon, and you must be prepared to see him soon, for I cannot bear your remaining at Belthorpe, like a jewel in a sty. Mind! I’m not saying a word against your uncle. I declare I love everybody and everything that sees you and touches you. Stay! it is a wonder how you could have grown there. But you were not born there, and your father had good blood. Desborough!—here was a Colonel Desborough—never mind! Come!”

She dreads to. She begs not to. She is drawn away.

The woods are silent, and then—

“What think you of that for a pretty pastoral?” says a very different voice.

Adrian reclined against a pine overlooking the fern-covert. Lady Blandish was recumbent upon the brown pine-droppings, gazing through a vista of the lower

greenwood which opened out upon the moon-lighted valley, her hands clasped round one knee, her features almost stern in their set hard expression.

They had heard, by involuntarily overhearing about as much as may be heard in such positions, a luminous word or two.

The lady did not answer. A movement among the ferns attracted Adrian, and he stepped down the decline across the pine-roots to behold heavy Benson below; shaking fern-seed and spidery substances off his crumpled skin.

“Is that you, Mr. Hadrian?” called Benson, starting, as he puffed, and exercised his handkerchief.

Page 268

“Is it you, Benson, who have had the audacity to spy upon these Mysteries?” Adrian called back, and coming close to him, added, “You look as if you had just been well thrashed.”

“Isn’t it dreadful, sir?” snuffled Benson. “And his father in ignorance, Mr. Hadrian!”

“He shall know, Benson! He shall know how, you have endangered your valuable skin in his service. If Mr. Richard had found you there just now I wouldn’t answer for the consequences.”

“Ha!” Benson spitefully retorted. “This won’t go on; Mr. Hadrian. It shan’t, sir. It will be put a stop to tomorrow, sir. I call it corruption of a young gentleman like him, and harlotry, sir, I call it. I’d have every jade flogged that made a young innocent gentleman go on like that, sir.”

“Then, why didn’t you stop it yourself, Benson? Ah, I see! you waited—what? This is not the first time you have been attendant on Apollo and Miss Dryope? You have written to headquarters?”

“I did my duty, Mr. Hadrian.”

The wise youth returned to Lady Blandish, and informed her of Benson’s zeal. The lady’s eyes flashed. “I hope Richard will treat him as he deserves,” she said.

“Shall we home?” Adrian inquired.

“Do me a favour;” the lady replied. “Get my carriage sent round to meet me at the park-gates.”

“Won’t you?”—

“I want to be alone.”

Adrian bowed and left her. She was still sitting with her hands clasped round one knee, gazing towards the dim ray-strewn valley.

“An odd creature!” muttered the wise youth. “She’s as odd as any of them. She ought to be a Feverel. I suppose she’s graduating for it. Hang that confounded old ass of a Benson! He has had the impudence to steal a march on me!”

The shadow of the cypress was lessening on the lake. The moon was climbing high. As Richard rowed the boat, Lucy, sang to him softly. She sang first a fresh little French song, reminding him of a day when she had been asked to sing to him before, and he did not care to hear. “Did I live?” he thinks. Then she sang to him a bit of one of those majestic old Gregorian chants, that, wherever you may hear them, seem to build up

cathedral walls about you. The young man dropped the sculls. The strange solemn notes gave a religions tone to his love, and wafted him into the knightly ages and the reverential heart of chivalry.

Hanging between two heavens on the lake: floating to her voice: the moon stepping over and through white shoal's of soft high clouds above and below: floating to her void —no other breath abroad! His soul went out of his body as he listened.

They must part. He rows her gently shoreward.

"I never was so happy as to-night," she murmurs.

"Look, my Lucy. The lights of the old place are on the lake. Look where you are to live."

"Which is your room, Richard?"

He points it out to her.

Page 269

“O Richard! that I were one of the women who wait on you! I should ask nothing more. How happy she must be!”

“My darling angel-love. You shall be happy; but all shall wait on you, and I foremost, Lucy.”

“Dearest! may I hope for a letter?”

“By eleven to-morrow. And I?”

“Oh! you will have mine, Richard.”

“Tom shall wait far it. A long one, mind! Did you like my last song?”

She pats her hand quietly against her bosom, and he knows where it rests. O love! O heaven!

They are aroused by the harsh grating of the bow of the boat against the shingle. He jumps out, and lifts her ashore.

“See!” she says, as the blush of his embrace subsides—“See!” and prettily she mimics awe and feels it a little, “the cypress does point towards us. O Richard! it does!”

And he, looking at her rather than at the cypress, delighting in her arch grave ways—

“Why, there’s hardly any shadow at all, Lucy. She mustn’t dream, my darling! or dream only of me.”

“Dearest! but I do.”

“To-morrow, Lucy! The letter in the morning, and you at night. O happy to-morrow!”

“You will be sure to be there, Richard?”

“If I am not dead, Lucy.”

“O Richard! pray, pray do not speak of that. I shall not survive you.”

“Let us pray, Lucy, to die together, when we are to die. Death or life, with you! Who is it yonder? I see some one—is it Tom? It’s Adrian!”

“Is it Mr. Harley?” The fair girl shivered.

“How dares he come here!” cried Richard.

The figure of Adrian, instead of advancing, discreetly circled the lake. They were stealing away when he called. His call was repeated. Lucy entreated Richard to go to him; but the young man preferred to summon his attendant, Tom, from within hail, and send him to know what was wanted.

“Will he have seen me? Will he have known me?” whispered Lucy, tremulously.

“And if he does, love?” said Richard.

“Oh! if he does, dearest—I don’t know, but I feel such a presentiment. You have not spoken of him to-night, Richard. Is he good?”

“Good?” Richard clutched her hand for the innocent maiden phrase. “He’s very fond of eating; that’s all I know of Adrian.”

Her hand was at his lips when Tom returned.

“Well, Tom?”

“Mr. Adrian wishes particular to speak to you, sir,” said Tom.

“Do go to him, dearest! Do go!” Lucy begs him.

“Oh, how I hate Adrian!” The young man grinds his teeth.

“Do go!” Lucy urges him. “Tom—good Tom—will see me home. To-morrow, dear love! To-morrow!”

“You wish to part from me?”

“Oh, unkind! but you must not come with me now. It may be news of importance, dearest. Think, Richard!”

“Tom! go back!”

At the imperious command the well-drilled Tom strides off a dozen paces, and sees nothing. Then the precious charge is confided to him. A heart is cut in twain.

Page 270

Richard made his way to Adrian. “What is it you want with me, Adrian?”

“Are we seconds, or principals, O fiery one?” was Adrian’s answer. “I want nothing with you, except to know whether you have seen Benson.”

“Where should I see Benson? What do I know of Benson’s doings?”

“Of course not—such a secret old fist as he is! I want some one to tell him to order Lady Blandish’s carriage to be sent round to the park-gates. I thought he might be round your way over there—I came upon him accidentally just now in Abbey-wood. What’s the matter, boy?”

“You saw him there?”

“Hunting Diana, I suppose. He thinks she’s not so chaste as they say,” continued Adrian. “Are you going to knock down that tree?”

Richard had turned to the cypress, and was tugging at the tough wood. He left it and went to an ash.

“You’ll spoil that weeper,” Adrian cried. “Down she comes! But good-night, Ricky. If you see Benson mind you tell him.”

Doomed Benson following his burly shadow hove in sight on the white road while Adrian spoke. The wise youth chuckled and strolled round the lake, glancing over his shoulder every now and then.

It was not long before he heard a bellow for help—the roar of a dragon in his throes. Adrian placidly sat down on the grass, and fixed his eyes on the water. There, as the roar was being repeated amid horrid resounding echoes, the wise youth mused in this wise—

“‘The Fates are Jews with us when they delay a punishment,’ says The Pilgrim’s Scrip, or words to that effect. The heavens evidently love Benson, seeing that he gets his punishment on the spot. Master Ricky is a peppery young man. He gets it from the apt Gruffudh. I rather believe in race. What a noise that old ruffian makes! He’ll require poulticing with The Pilgrim’s Scrip. We shall have a message to-morrow, and a hubbub, and perhaps all go to town, which won’t be bad for one who’s been a prey to all the desires born of dulness. Benson howls: there’s life in the old dog yet! He bays the moon. Look at her. She doesn’t care. It’s the same to her whether we coo like turtle-doves or roar like twenty lions. How complacent she looks! And yet she has dust as much sympathy for Benson as for Cupid. She would smile on if both were being birched. Was that a raven or Benson? He howls no more. It sounds guttural: frog-like—something between the brek-kek-kek and the hoarse raven’s croak. The fellow’ll be

killing him. It's time to go to the rescue. A deliverer gets more honour by coming in at the last gasp than if he forestalled catastrophe.—Ho, there, what's the matter?"

So saying, the wise youth rose, and leisurely trotted to the scene of battle, where stood St. George puffing over the prostrate Dragon.

"Holloa, Ricky! is it you?" said Adrian. "What's this? Whom have we here?—Benson, as I live!"

"Make this beast get up," Richard returned, breathing hard, and shaking his great ash-branch.

Page 271

“He seems incapable, my dear boy. What have you been up to?—Benson! Benson!—I say, Ricky, this looks bad.”

“He’s shamming!” Richard clamoured like a savage. “Spy upon me, will he? I tell you, he’s shamming. He hasn’t had half enough. Nothing’s too bad for a spy. Let him getup!”

“Insatiate youth! do throw away that enormous weapon.”

“He has written to my father,” Richard shouted. “The miserable spy! Let him get up!”

“Ooogh? I won’t!” huskily groaned Benson. “Mr. Hadrian, you’re a witness—he’s my back!”—Cavernous noises took up the tale of his maltreatment.

“I daresay you love your back better than any part of your body now,” Adrian muttered. “Come, Benson! be a man. Mr. Richard has thrown away the stick. Come, and get off home, and let’s see the extent of the damage.”

“Ooogh! he’s a devil! Mr. Hadrian, sir, he’s a devil!” groaned Benson, turning half over in the road to ease his aches.

Adrian caught hold of Benson’s collar and lifted him to a sitting posture. He then had a glimpse of what his hopeful pupil’s hand could do in wrath. The wretched butler’s coat was slit and welted; his hat knocked in; his flabby spirit so broken that he started and trembled if his pitiless executioner stirred a foot. Richard stood over him, grasping his great stick; no dawn of mercy for Benson in any corner of his features.

Benson screwed his neck round to look up at him, and immediately gasped, “I won’t get up! I won’t! He’s ready to murder me again!—Mr. Hadrian! if you stand by and see it, you’re liable to the law, sir—I won’t get up while he’s near.” No persuasion could induce Benson to try his legs while his executioner stood by.

Adrian took Richard aside: “You’ve almost killed the poor devil, Ricky. You must be satisfied with that. Look at his face.”

“The coward bobbed while I struck” said Richard. “I marked his back. He ducked. I told him he was getting it worse.”

At so civilized piece of savagery, Adrian opened his mouth wide.

“Did you really? I admire that. You told him he was getting it worse?”

Adrian opened his mouth again to shake another roll of laughter out.

“Come,” he said, “Excalibur has done his word. Pitch him into the lake. And see—here comes the Blandish. You can’t be at it again before a woman. Go and meet her, and tell her the noise was an ox being slaughtered. Or say Argus.”

With a whirr that made all Benson’s bruises moan and quiver, the great ash-branch shot aloft, and Richard swung off to intercept Lady Blandish.

Adrian got Benson on his feet. The heavy butler was disposed to summon all the commiseration he could feel for his bruised flesh. Every half-step he attempted was like a dislocation. His groans and grunts were frightful.

“How much did that hat cost, Benson?” said Adrian, as he put it on his head.

Page 272

“A five-and-twenty shilling beaver, Mr. Hadrian!” Benson caressed its injuries.

“The cheapest policy of insurance I remember to have heard of!” said Adrian.

Benson staggered, moaning at intervals to his cruel comforter.

“He’s a devil, Mr. Hadrian! He’s a devil, sir, I do believe, sir. Ooogh! he’s a devil!—I can’t move, Mr. Hadrian. I must be fetched. And Dr. Clifford must be sent for, sir. I shall never be fit for work again. I haven’t a sound bone in my body, Mr. Hadrian.”

“You see, Benson, this comes of your declaring war upon Venus. I hope the maids will nurse you properly. Let me see: you are friends with the housekeeper, aren’t you? All depends upon that.”

“I’m only a faithful servant, Mr. Hadrian,” the miserable butler snarled.

“Then you’ve got no friend but your bed. Get to it as quick as possible, Benson.”

“I can’t move.” Benson made a resolute halt. “I must be fetched,” he whinnied. “It’s a shame to ask me to move, Mr. Hadrian.”

“You will admit that you are heavy, Benson,” said Adrian, “so I can’t carry you. However, I see Mr. Richard is very kindly returning to help me.”

At these words heavy Benson instantly found his legs, and shambled on.

Lady Blandish met Richard in dismay.

“I have been horribly frightened,” she said. “Tell me, what was the meaning of those cries I heard?”

“Only some one doing justice on a spy,” said Richard, and the lady smiled, and looked on him fondly, and put her hand through his hair.

“Was that all? I should have done it myself if I had been a man. Kiss me.”

CHAPTER XXI

By twelve o’clock at noon next day the inhabitants of Raynham Abbey knew that Berry, the baronet’s man, had arrived post-haste from town, with orders to conduct Mr. Richard thither, and that Mr. Richard had refused to go, had sworn he would not, defied his father, and despatched Berry to the Shades. Berry was all that Benson was not. Whereas Benson hated woman, Berry admired her warmly. Second to his own stately person, woman occupied his reflections, and commanded his homage. Berry was of

majestic port, and used dictionary words. Among the maids of Raynham his conscious calves produced all the discord and the frenzy those adornments seem destined to create in tender bosoms. He had, moreover, the reputation of having suffered for the sex; which assisted his object in inducing the sex to suffer for him. What with his calves, and his dictionary words, and the attractive halo of the mysterious vindictiveness of Venus surrounding him, this Adonis of the lower household was a mighty man below, and he moved as one.

On hearing the tumult that followed Berry's arrival, Adrian sent for him, and was informed of the nature of his mission, and its result.

"You should come to me first," said Adrian. "I should have imagined you were shrewd enough for that, Berry?"

Page 273

“Pardon me, Mr. Adrian,” Berry doubled his elbow to explain. “Pardon me, sir. Acting recipient of special injunctions I was not a free agent.”

“Go to Mr. Richard again, Berry. There will be a little confusion if he holds back. Perhaps you had better throw out a hint or so of apoplexy. A slight hint will do. And here—Berry! when you return to town, you had better not mention anything—to quote Johnson—of Benson’s spiflication.”

“Certainly not, sir.”

The wise youth’s hint had the desired effect on Richard.

He dashed off a hasty letter by Tom to Belthorpe, and, mounting his horse, galloped to the Bellingham station.

Sir Austin was sitting down to a quiet early dinner at his hotel, when the Hope of Raynham burst into his room.

The baronet was not angry with his son. On the contrary, for he was singularly just and self-accusing while pride was not up in arms, he had been thinking all day after the receipt of Benson’s letter that he was deficient in cordiality, and did not, by reason of his excessive anxiety, make himself sufficiently his son’s companion: was not enough, as he strove to be, mother and father to him; preceptor and friend; previsor and associate. He had not to ask his conscience where he had lately been to blame towards the System. He had slunk away from Raynham in the very crisis of the Magnetic Age, and this young woman of the parish (as Benson had termed sweet Lucy in his letter) was the consequence.

Yes! pride and sensitiveness were his chief foes, and he would trample on them. To begin, he embraced his son: hard upon an Englishman at any time—doubly so to one so shamefaced at emotion in cool blood, as it were. It gave him a strange pleasure, nevertheless. And the youth seemed to answer to it; he was excited. Was his love, then, beginning to correspond with his father’s as in those intimate days before the Blossoming Season?

But when Richard, inarticulate at first in his haste, cried out, “My dear, dear father! You are safe! I feared—You are better, sir? Thank God!” Sir Austin stood away from him.

“Safe?” he said. “What has alarmed you?”

Instead of replying, Richard dropped into a chair, and seized his hand and kissed it.

Sir Austin took a seat, and waited for his son to explain.

“Those doctors are such fools!” Richard broke out. “I was sure they were wrong. They don’t know headache from apoplexy. It’s worth the ride, sir, to see you. You left Raynham so suddenly.—But you are well! It was not an attack of real apoplexy?”

His father’s brows contorted, and he said, No, it was not. Richard pursued:

“If you were ill, I couldn’t come too soon, though, if coroners’ inquests sat on horses, those doctors would be found guilty of mare-slaughter. Cassandra’ll be knocked up. I was too early for the train at Bellingham, and I wouldn’t wait. She did the distance in four hours and three-quarters. Pretty good, sir, wasn’t it?”

Page 274

“It has given you appetite for dinner, I hope,” said the baronet, not so well pleased to find that it was not simple obedience that had brought the youth to him in such haste.

“I’m ready,” replied Richard. “I shall be in time to return by the last train to-night. I will leave Cassandra in your charge for a rest.”

His father quietly helped him to soup, which he commenced gobbling with an eagerness that might pass for appetite.

“All well at Raynham?” said the baronet.

“Quite, sir.”

“Nothing new?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“The same as when I left?”

“No change whatever!”

“I shall be glad to get back to the old place,” said the baronet. “My stay in town has certainly been profitable. I have made some pleasant acquaintances who may probably favour us with a visit there in the late autumn—people you may be pleased to know. They are very anxious to see Raynham.”

“I love the old place,” cried Richard. “I never wish to leave it.”

“Why, boy, before I left you were constantly begging to see town.”

“Was I, sir? How odd! Well! I don’t want to remain here. I’ve seen enough of it.”

“How did you find your way to me?”

Richard laughed, and related his bewilderment at the miles of brick, and the noise, and the troops of people, concluding, “There’s no place like home!”

The baronet watched his symptomatic brilliant eyes, and favoured him with a double-dealing sentence—

“To anchor the heart by any object ere we have half traversed the world, is youth’s foolishness, my son. Reverence time! A better maxim that than your Horatian.”

“He knows all!” thought Richard, and instantly drew away leagues from his father, and threw up fortifications round his love and himself.

Dinner over, Richard looked hurriedly at his watch, and said, with much briskness, “I shall just be in time, sir, if we walk. Will you come with me to the station?”

The baronet did not answer.

Richard was going to repeat the question, but found his father’s eyes fixed on him so meaningly that he wavered, and played with his empty glass.

“I think we will have a little more claret,” said the baronet.

Claret was brought, and they were left alone.

The baronet then drew within arm’s-reach of his son, and began:

“I am not aware what you may have thought of me, Richard, during the years we have lived together; and indeed I have never been in a hurry to be known to you; and, if I had died before my work was done, I should not have complained at losing half my reward, in hearing you thank me. Perhaps, as it is, I never may. Everything, save selfishness, has its recompense. I shall be content if you prosper.”

He fetched a breath and continued: “You had in your infancy a great loss.” Father and son coloured simultaneously. “To make that good to you I chose to isolate myself from the world, and devote myself entirely to your welfare; and I think it is not vanity that tells me now that the son I have reared is one of the most hopeful of God’s creatures. But for that very reason you are open to be tempted the most, and to sink the deepest. It was the first of the angels who made the road to hell.”

Page 275

He paused again. Richard fingered at his watch.

“In our House, my son, there is peculiar blood. We go to wreck very easily. It sounds like superstition; I cannot but think we are tried as most men are not. I see it in us all. And you, my son, are compounded of two races. Your passions are violent. You have had a taste of revenge. You have seen, in a small way, that the pound of flesh draws rivers of blood. But there is now in you another power. You are mounting to the table-land of life, where mimic battles are changed to real ones. And you come upon it laden equally with force to create and to destroy.” He deliberated to announce the intelligence, with deep meaning: “There are women in the world, my son!”

The young man’s heart galloped back to Raynham.

“It is when you encounter them that you are thoroughly on trial. It is when you know them that life is either a mockery to you, or, as some find it, a gift of blessedness. They are our ordeal. Love of any human object is the soul’s ordeal; and they are ours, loving them, or not.”

The young man heard the whistle of the train. He saw the moon-lighted wood, and the vision of his beloved. He could barely hold himself down and listen.

“I believe,” the baronet spoke with little of the cheerfulness of belief, “good women exist.”

Oh, if he knew Lucy!

“But,” and he gazed on Richard intently, “it is given to very few to meet them on the threshold—I may say, to none. We find them after hard buffeting, and usually, when we find the one fitted for us, our madness has misshaped our destiny, our lot is cast. For women are not the end, but the means, of life. In youth we think them the former, and thousands, who have not even the excuse of youth, select a mate—or worse—with that sole view. I believe women punish us for so perverting their uses. They punish Society.”

The baronet put his hand to his brow as his mind travelled into consequences.

‘Our most diligent pupil learns not so much as an earnest teacher,’ says The Pilgrim’s Scrip; and Sir Austin, in schooling himself to speak with moderation of women, was beginning to get a glimpse of their side of the case.

Cold Blood now touched on love to Hot Blood.

Cold Blood said, “It is a passion coming in the order of nature, the ripe fruit of our animal being.”

Hot Blood felt: “It is a divinity! All that is worth living for in the world.”

Cold Blood said: “It is a fever which tests our strength, and too often leads to perdition.”

Hot Blood felt: “Lead whither it will, I follow it.”

Cold Blood said: “It is a name men and women are much in the habit of employing to sanctify their appetites.”

Hot Blood felt: “It is worship; religion; life!”

And so the two parallel lines ran on.

The baronet became more personal:

Page 276

“You know my love for you, my son. The extent of it you cannot know; but you must know that it is something very deep, and—I do not wish to speak of it—but a father must sometimes petition for gratitude, since the only true expression of it is his son’s moral good. If you care for my love, or love me in return, aid me with all your energies to keep you what I have made you, and guard you from the snares besetting you. It was in my hands once. It is ceasing to be so. Remember, my son, what my love is. It is different, I fear, with most fathers: but I am bound up in your welfare: what you do affects me vitally. You will take no step that is not intimate with my happiness, or my misery. And I have had great disappointments, my son.”

So far it was well. Richard loved his father, and even in his frenzied state he could not without emotion hear him thus speak.

Unhappily, the baronet, who by some fatality never could see when he was winning the battle, thought proper in his wisdom to water the dryness of his sermon with a little jocoseness, on the subject of young men fancying themselves in love, and, when they were raw and green, absolutely wanting to be—that most awful thing, which the wisest and strongest of men undertake in hesitation and after self-mortification and penance—-married! He sketched the Foolish Young Fellow—the object of general ridicule and covert contempt. He sketched the Woman—the strange thing made in our image, and with all our faculties—passing to the rule of one who in taking her proved that he could not rule himself, and had no knowledge of her save as a choice morsel which he would burn the whole world, and himself in the bargain, to possess. He harped upon the Foolish Young Fellow, till the foolish young fellow felt his skin tingle and was half suffocated with shame and rage.

After this, the baronet might be as wise as he pleased: he had quite undone his work. He might analyze Love and anatomize Woman. He might accord to her her due position, and paint her fair: he might be shrewd, jocose, gentle, pathetic, wonderfully wise: he spoke to deaf ears.

Closing his sermon with the question, softly uttered: “Have you anything to tell me, Richard?” and hoping for a confession, and a thorough re-establishment of confidence, the callous answer struck him cold: “I have not.”

The baronet relapsed in his chair, and made diagrams of his fingers.

Richard turned his back on further dialogue by going to the window. In the section of sky over the street twinkled two or three stars; shining faintly, feeling the moon. The moon was rising: the woods were lifting up to her: his star of the woods would be there. A bed of moss set about flowers in a basket under him breathed to his nostril of the woodland keenly, and filled him with delirious longing.

A succession of hard sighs brought his father’s hand on his shoulder.

“You have nothing you could say to me, my son? Tell me, Richard! Remember, there is no home for the soul where dwells a shadow of untruth!”

Page 277

“Nothing at all, sir,” the young man replied, meeting him with the full orbs of his eyes.

The baronet withdrew his hand, and paced the room.

At last it grew impossible for Richard to control his impatience, and he said: “Do you intend me to stay here, sir? Am I not to return to Raynham at all to-night?”

His father was again falsely jocular:

“What? and catch the train after giving it ten minutes’ start?”

“Cassandra will take me,” said the young man earnestly. “I needn’t ride her hard, sir. Or perhaps you would lend me your Winkelried? I should be down with him in little better than three hours.”

“Even then, you know, the park-gates would be locked.”

“Well, I could stable him in the village. Dowling knows the horse, and would treat him properly. May I have him, sir?”

The cloud cleared off Richard’s face as he asked. At least, if he missed his love that night he would be near her, breathing the same air, marking what star was above her bedchamber, hearing the hushed night-talk of the trees about her dwelling: looking on the distances that were like hope half fulfilled and a bodily presence bright as Hesper, since he knew her. There were two swallows under the eaves shadowing Lucy’s chamber-windows: two swallows, mates in one nest, blissful birds, who twittered and cheep-cheeped to the sole-lying beauty in her bed. Around these birds the lover’s heart revolved, he knew not why. He associated them with all his close-veiled dreams of happiness. Seldom a morning passed when he did not watch them leave the nest on their breakfast-flight, busy in the happy stillness of dawn. It seemed to him now that if he could be at Raynham to see them in to-morrow’s dawn he would be compensated for his incalculable loss of to-night: he would forgive and love his father, London, the life, the world. Just to see those purple backs and white breasts flash out into the quiet morning air! He wanted no more.

The baronet’s trifling had placed this enormous boon within the young man’s visionary grasp.

He still went on trying the boy’s temper.

“You know there would be nobody ready for you at Raynham. It is unfair to disturb the maids.”

Richard overrode every objection.

“Well, then, my son,” said the baronet, preserving his half-jocular air, “I must tell you that it is my wish to have you in town.”

“Then you have not been ill at all, sir!” cried Richard, as in his despair he seized the whole plot.

“I have been as well as you could have desired me to be,” said his father.

“Why did they lie to me?” the young man wrathfully exclaimed.

“I think, Richard, you can best answer that,” rejoined Sir Austin, kindly severe.

Dread of being signalized as the Foolish Young Fellow prevented Richard from expostulating further. Sir Austin saw him grinding his passion into powder for future explosion, and thought it best to leave him for awhile.

Page 278

CHAPTER XXII

For three weeks Richard had to remain in town and endure the teachings of the System in a new atmosphere. He had to sit and listen to men of science who came to renew their intimacy with his father, and whom of all men his father wished him to respect and study; practically scientific men being, in the baronet's estimation, the only minds thoroughly mated and enviable. He had to endure an introduction to the Grandisons, and meet the eyes of his kind, haunted as he was by the Foolish Young Fellow. The idea that he might by any chance be identified with him held the poor youth in silent subjection. And it was horrible. For it was a continued outrage on the fair image he had in his heart. The notion of the world laughing at him because he loved sweet Lucy stung him to momentary frenzies, and developed premature misanthropy in his spirit. Also the System desired to show him whither young women of the parish lead us, and he was dragged about at nighttime to see the sons and daughters of darkness, after the fashion prescribed to Mr. Thompson; how they danced and ogled down the high road to perdition. But from this sight possibly the teacher learnt more than his pupil, since we find him seriously asking his meditative hours, in the Note-book: "Wherefore Wild Oats are only of one gender?" a question certainly not suggested to him at Raynham; and again—"Whether men might not be attaching too rigid an importance?"...to a subject with a dotted tail apparently, for he gives it no other in the Note-book. But, as I apprehend, he had come to plead in behalf of women here, and had deduced something from positive observation. To Richard the scenes he witnessed were strange wild pictures, likely if anything to have increased his misanthropy, but for his love.

Certain sweet little notes from Lucy sustained the lover during the first two weeks of exile. They ceased; and now Richard fell into such despondency that his father in alarm had to take measures to hasten their return to Raynham. At the close of the third week Berry laid a pair of letters, bearing the Raynham post-mark, on the breakfast-table, and, after reading one attentively, the baronet asked his son if he was inclined to quit the metropolis.

"For Raynham, air?" cried Richard, and relapsed, saying, "As you will!" aware that he had given a glimpse of the Foolish Young Fellow.

Berry accordingly received orders to make arrangements for their instant return to Raynham.

The letter Sir Austin lifted his head from to bespeak his son's wishes was a composition of the wise youth Adrian's, and ran thus:

"Benson is doggedly recovering. He requires great indemnities. Happy when a faithful fool is the main sufferer in a household! I quite agree with you that our faithful fool is the best servant of great schemes. Benson is now a piece of history. I tell him that this is

indemnity enough, and that the sweet Muse usually insists upon gentlemen being half-flayed before she will condescend to notice them; but Benson, I regret to say, rejects the comfort so fine a reflection should offer, and had rather keep his skin and live opaque. Heroism seems partly a matter of training. Faithful folly is Benson's nature: the rest has been thrust upon.

Page 279

“The young person has resigned the neighbourhood. I had an interview with the fair Papist myself, and also with the man Blaize. They were both sensible, though one swore and the other sighed. She is pretty. I hope she does not paint. I can affirm that her legs are strong, for she walks to Bellingham twice a week to take her Scarlet bath, when, having confessed and been made clean by the Romish unction, she walks back the brisker, of which my Protestant muscular systems is yet aware. It was on the road to Bellingham I engaged her. She is well in the matter of hair. Madam Godiva might challenge her, it would be a fair match. Has it never struck you that Woman is nearer the vegetable than Man?—Mr. Blaize intends her for his son a junction that every lover of fairy mythology must desire to see consummated. Young Tom is heir to all the agremens of the Beast. The maids of Lobourne say (I hear) that he is a very Proculus among them. Possibly the envious men say it for the maids. Beauty does not speak bad grammar—and altogether she is better out of the way.”

The other letter was from Lady Blandish, a lady’s letter, and said:

“I have fulfilled your commission to the best of my ability, and heartily sad it has made me. She is indeed very much above her station—pity that it is so! She is almost beautiful—quite beautiful at times, and not in any way what you have been led to fancy. The poor child had no story to tell. I have again seen her, and talked with her for an hour as kindly as I could. I could gather nothing more than we know. It is just a woman’s history as it invariably commences. Richard is the god of her idolatry. She will renounce him, and sacrifice herself for his sake. Are we so bad? She asked me what she was to do. She would do whatever was imposed upon her—all but pretend to love another, and that she never would, and, I believe, never will. You know I am sentimental, and I confess we dropped a few tears together. Her uncle has sent her for the Winter to the institution where it appears she was educated, and where they are very fond of her and want to keep her, which it would be a good thing if they were to do. The man is a good sort of man. She was entrusted to him by her father, and he never interferes with her religion, and is very scrupulous about all that pertains to it, though, as he says, he is a Christian himself. In the Spring (but the poor child does not know this) she is to come back, and be married to his lout of a son. I am determined to prevent that. May I not reckon on your promise to aid me? When you see her, I am sure you will. It would be sacrilege to look on and permit such a thing. You know, they are cousins. She asked me, where in the world there was one like Richard? What could I answer? They were your own words, and spoken with a depth of conviction! I hope he is really calm. I shudder to think of him when he comes, and discovers what I have been doing.

Page 280

I hope I have been really doing right! A good deed, you say, never dies; but we cannot always know—I must rely on you. Yes, it is; I should think, easy to suffer martyrdom when one is sure of one's cause! but then one must be sure of it. I have done nothing lately but to repeat to myself that saying of yours, No. 54, C. 7, P.S.; and it has consoled me, I cannot say why, except that all wisdom consoles, whether it applies directly or not:

"'For this reason so many fall from God, who have attained to Him; that they cling to Him with their Weakness, not with their Strength.'

"I like to know of what you are thinking when you composed this or that saying—what suggested it. May not one be admitted to inspect the machinery of wisdom? I feel curious to know how thoughts—real thoughts—are born. Not that I hope to win the secret. Here is the beginning of one (but we poor women can never put together even two of the three ideas which you say go to form a thought): 'When a wise man makes a false step, will he not go farther than a fool?' It has just flitted through me.

"I cannot get on with Gibbon, so wait your return to recommence the readings. I dislike the sneering essence of his writings. I keep referring to his face, until the dislike seems to become personal. How different is it with Wordsworth! And yet I cannot escape from the thought that he is always solemnly thinking of himself (but I do reverence him). But this is curious; Byron was a greater egoist, and yet I do not feel the same with him. He reminds me of a beast of the desert, savage and beautiful; and the former is what one would imagine a superior donkey reclaimed from the heathen to be—a very superior donkey, I mean, with great power of speech and great natural complacency, and whose stubbornness you must admire as part of his mission. The worst is that no one will imagine anything sublime in a superior donkey, so my simile is unfair and false. Is it not strange? I love Wordsworth best, and yet Byron has the greater power over me. How is that?"

("Because," Sir Austin wrote beside the query in pencil, "women are cowards, and succumb to Irony and Passion, rather than yield their hearts to Excellence and Nature's Inspiration.")

The letter pursued:

"I have finished Boiardo and have taken up Berni. The latter offends me. I suppose we women do not really care for humour. You are right in saying we have none ourselves, and 'cackle' instead of laugh. It is true (of me, at least) that 'Falstaff is only to us an incorrigible fat man.' I want to know what he illustrates. And Don Quixote—what end can be served in making a noble mind ridiculous?—I hear you say—practical. So it is. We are very narrow, I know. But we like wit—practical again! Or in your words (when I really think they generally come to my aid—perhaps it is that it is often all your thought); we 'prefer the rapier thrust, to the broad embrace, of Intelligence.'"

Page 281

He trifled with the letter for some time, re-reading chosen passages as he walked about the room, and considering he scarce knew what. There are ideas language is too gross for, and shape too arbitrary, which come to us and have a definite influence upon us, and yet we cannot fasten on the filmy things and make them visible and distinct to ourselves, much less to others. Why did he twice throw a look into the glass in the act of passing it? He stood for a moment with head erect facing it. His eyes for the nonce seemed little to peruse his outer features; the grey gathered brows, and the wrinkles much action of them had traced over the circles half up his high straight forehead; the iron-grey hair that rose over his forehead and fell away in the fashion of Richard's plume. His general appearance showed the tints of years; but none of their weight, and nothing of the dignity of his youth, was gone. It was so far satisfactory, but his eyes were wide, as one who looks at his essential self through the mask we wear.

Perhaps he was speculating as he looked on the sort of aspect he presented to the lady's discriminative regard. Of her feelings he had not a suspicion. But he knew with what extraordinary lucidity women can, when it pleases them, and when their feelings are not quite boiling under the noonday sun, seize all the sides of a character, and put their fingers on its weak point. He was cognizant of the total absence of the humorous in himself (the want that most shut him out from his fellows), and perhaps the clear-thoughted, intensely self-examining gentleman filmily conceived, Me also, in common with the poet, she gazes on as one of the superior—grey beasts!

He may have so conceived the case; he was capable of that great-mindedness, and could snatch at times very luminous glances at the broad reflector which the world of fact lying outside our narrow compass holds up for us to see ourselves in when we will. Unhappily, the faculty of laughter, which is due to this gift, was denied him; and having seen, he, like the companion of friend Balsam, could go no farther. For a good wind of laughter had relieved him of much of the blight of self-deception, and oddness, and extravagance; had given a healthier view of our atmosphere of life; but he had it not.

Journeying back to Bellingham in the train, with the heated brain and brilliant eye of his son beside him, Sir Austin tried hard to feel infallible, as a man with a System should feel; and because he could not do so, after much mental conflict, he descended to entertain a personal antagonism to the young woman who had stepped in between his experiment and success. He did not think kindly of her. Lady Blandish's encomiums of her behaviour and her beauty annoyed him. Forgetful that he had in a measure forfeited his rights to it, he took the common ground of fathers, and demanded, "Why he was not justified in doing all that lay in his power to prevent his son from

Page 282

casting himself away upon the first creature with a pretty face he encountered?" Deliberating thus, he lost the tenderness he should have had for his experiment—the living, burning youth at his elbow, and his excessive love for him took a rigorous tone. It appeared to him politic, reasonable, and just, that the uncle of this young woman, who had so long nursed the prudent scheme of marrying her to his son, should not only not be thwarted in his object but encouraged and even assisted. At least, not thwarted. Sir Austin had no glass before him while these ideas hardened in his mind, and he had rather forgotten the letter of Lady Blandish.

Father and son were alone in the railway carriage. Both were too preoccupied to speak. As they neared Bellingham the dark was filling the hollows of the country. Over the pine-hills beyond the station a last rosy streak lingered across a green sky. Richard eyed it while they flew along. It caught him forward: it seemed full of the spirit of his love, and brought tears of mournful longing to his eyelids. The sad beauty of that one spot in the heavens seemed to call out to his soul to swear to his Lucy's truth to him: was like the sorrowful visage of his fleur-de-luce as he called her, appealing to him for faith. That tremulous tender way she had of half-closing and catching light on the nether-lids, when sometimes she looked up in her lover's face—as look so mystic-sweet that it had grown to be the fountain of his dreams: he saw it yonder, and his blood thrilled.

Know you those wand-like touches of I know not what, before which our grosser being melts; and we, much as we hope to be in the Awaking, stand etherealized, trembling with new joy? They come but rarely; rarely even in love, when we fondly think them revelations. Mere sensations they are, doubtless: and we rank for them no higher in the spiritual scale than so many translucent glorious polypi that quiver on the shores, the hues of heaven running through them. Yet in the harvest of our days it is something for the animal to have had such mere fleshly polypian experiences to look back upon, and they give him an horizon—pale seas of luring splendour. One who has had them (when they do not bound him) may find the Isles of Bliss sooner than another. Sensual faith in the upper glories is something. "Let us remember," says The Pilgrim's Scrip, "that Nature, though heathenish, reaches at her best to the footstool of the Highest. She is not all dust, but a living portion of the spheres. In aspiration it is our error to despise her, forgetting that through Nature only can we ascend. Cherished, trained, and purified, she is then partly worthy the divine mate who is to make her wholly so. St. Simeon saw the Hog in Nature, and took Nature for the Hog."

It was one of these strange bodily exaltations which thrilled the young man, he knew not how it was, for sadness and his forebodings vanished. The soft wand touched him. At that moment, had Sir Austin spoken openly, Richard might have fallen upon his heart. He could not.

Page 283

He chose to feel injured on the common ground of fathers, and to pursue his System by plotting. Lady Blandish had revived his jealousy of the creature who menaced it, and jealousy of a System is unreflecting and vindictive as jealousy of woman.

Heath-roots and pines breathed sharp in the cool autumn evening about the Bellingham station. Richard stood a moment as he stepped from the train, and drew the country air into his lungs with large heaves of the chest. Leaving his father to the felicitations of the station-master, he went into the Lobourne road to look for his faithful Tom, who had received private orders through Berry to be in attendance with his young master's mare, Cassandra, and was lurking in a plantation of firs unenclosed on the borders of the road, where Richard, knowing his retainer's zest for conspiracy too well to seek him anywhere but in the part most favoured with shelter and concealment, found him furtively whiffing tobacco.

"What news, Tom? Is there an illness?"

Tom sent his undress cap on one side to scratch at dilemma, an old agricultural habit to which he was still a slave in moments of abstract thought or sudden difficulty.

"No, I don't want the rake, Mr. Richard," he whinnied with a false grin, as he beheld his master's eye vacantly following the action.

"Speak out!" he was commanded. "I haven't had a letter for a week!"

Richard learnt the news. He took it with surprising outward calm, only getting a little closer to Cassandra's neck, and looking very hard at Tom without seeing a speck of him, which had the effect on Tom of making him sincerely wish his master would punch his head at once rather than fix him in that owl-like way.

"Go on!" said Richard, huskily. "Yes? She's gone! Well?"

Tom was brought to understand he must make the most of trifles, and recited how he had heard from a female domestic at Belthorpe of the name of Davenport, formerly known to him, that the young lady never slept a wink from the hour she knew she was going, but sat up in her bed till morning crying most pitifully, though she never complained. Hereat the tears unconsciously streamed down Richard's cheeks. Tom said he had tried to see her, but Mr. Adrian kept him at work, ciphering at a terrible sum —that and nothing else all day! saying, it was to please his young master on his return. "Likewise something in Lat'n," added Tom. "Nom'tive Mouser!—'nough to make ye mad, sir!" he exclaimed with pathos. The wretch had been put to acquire a Latin declension.

Tom saw her on the morning she went away, he said: she was very sorrowful-looking, and nodded kindly to him as she passed in the fly along with young Tom Blaize. "She

have got uncommon kind eyes, sir," said Tom, "and cryin' don't spoil them." For which his hand was wrenched.

Tom had no more to tell, save that, in rounding the road, the young lady had hung out her hand, and seemed to move it forward and back, as much as to sap, Good-bye, Tom! "And though she couldn't see me," said Tom, "I took off my hat. I did take it so kind of her to think of a chap like me." He was at high-pressure sentiment—what with his education for a hero and his master's love-stricken state.

Page 284

“You saw no more of her, Tom?”

“No, sir. That was the last!”

“That was the last you saw of her, Tom?”

“Well, sir, I saw nothin’ more.”

“And so she went out of sight!”

“Clean gone, that she were, sir.”

“Why did they take her away? what have they done with her? where have they taken her to?”

These red-hot questionings were addressed to the universal heaven rather than to Tom.

“Why didn’t she write?” they were resumed. “Why did she leave? She’s mine. She belongs to me! Who dared take her away? Why did she leave without writing?—Tom!”

“Yes, sir,” said the well-drilled recruit, dressing himself up to the word of command. He expected a variation of the theme from the change of tone with which his name had been pronounced, but it was again, “Where have they taken her to?” and this was even more perplexing to Tom than his hard sum in arithmetic had been. He could only draw down the corners of his mouth hard, and glance up queerly.

“She had been crying—you saw that, Tom?”

“No mistake about that, Mr. Richard. Cryin’ all night and all day, I sh’d say.”

“And she was crying when you saw her?”

“She look’d as if she’d just done for a moment, sir.”

“But her face was white?”

“White as a sheet.”

Richard paused to discover whether his instinct had caught a new view from these facts. He was in a cage, always knocking against the same bars, fly as he might. Her tears were the stars in his black night. He clung to them as golden orbs. Inexplicable as they were, they were at least pledges of love.

The hues of sunset had left the West. No light was there but the steadfast pale eye of twilight. Thither he was drawn. He mounted Cassandra, saying: “Tell them something, Tom. I shan’t be home to dinner,” and rode off toward the forsaken home of light over

Belthorpe, whereat he saw the wan hand of his Lucy, waving farewell, receding as he advanced. His jewel was stolen,—he must gaze upon the empty box.

CHAPTER XXIII

Night had come on as Richard entered the old elm-shaded, grass-bordered lane leading down from Raynham to Belthorpe. The pale eye of twilight was shut. The wind had tossed up the bank of Western cloud, which was now flying broad and unlighted across the sky, broad and balmy—the charioted South-west at full charge behind his panting coursers. As he neared the farm his heart fluttered and leapt up. He was sure she must be there. She must have returned. Why should she have left for good without writing? He caught suspicion by the throat, making it voiceless, if it lived: he silenced reason. Her not writing was now a proof that she had returned. He listened to nothing but his imperious passion, and murmured sweet words for her, as if she were by: tender cherishing epithet's of love in the nest.

Page 285

She was there—she moved somewhere about like a silver flame in the dear old house, doing her sweet household duties. His blood began to sing: O happy those within, to see her, and be about her! By some extraordinary process he contrived to cast a sort of glory round the burly person of Farmer Blaize himself. And oh! to have companionship with a seraph one must know a seraph's bliss, and was not young Tom to be envied? The smell of late clematis brought on the wind enwrapped him, and went to his brain, and threw a light over the old red-brick house, for he remembered where it grew, and the winter rose-tree, and the jessamine, and the passion-flower: the garden in front with the standard roses tended by her hands; the long wall to the left striped by the branches of the cherry, the peep of a further garden through the wall, and then the orchard, and the fields beyond—the happy circle of her dwelling! it flashed before his eyes while he looked on the darkness. And yet it was the reverse of hope which kindled this light and inspired the momentary calm he experienced: it was despair exaggerating delusion, wilfully building up on a groundless basis. "For the tenacity of true passion is terrible," says The Pilgrim's Scrip: "it will stand against the hosts of heaven, God's great array of Facts, rather than surrender its aim, and must be crushed before it will succumb—sent to the lowest pit!" He knew she was not there; she was gone. But the power of a will strained to madness fought at it, kept it down, conjured forth her ghost, and would have it as he dictated. Poor youth! the great array of facts was in due order of march.

He had breathed her name many times, and once over-loud; almost a cry for her escaped him. He had not noticed the opening of a door and the noise of a foot along the gravel walk. He was leaning over Cassandra's uneasy neck watching the one window intently, when a voice addressed him out of the darkness.

"Be that you, young gentleman?—Mr. Fev'rel?"

Richard's trance was broken. "Mr. Blaize!" he said; recognizing the farmer's voice.

"Good even'n t' you, sir," returned the farmer. "I knew the mare though I didn't know you. Rather bluff to-night it be. Will ye step in, Mr. Fev'rel? it's beginning' to spit,—-going to be a wildish night, I reckon."

Richard dismounted. The farmer called one of his men to hold the mare, and ushered the young man in. Once there, Richard's conjurations ceased. There was a deadness about the rooms and passages that told of her absence. The walls he touched—these were the vacant shells of her. He had never been in the house since he knew her, and now what strange sweetness, and what pangs!

Young Tom Blaize was in the parlour, squared over the table in open-mouthed examination of an ancient book of the fashions for a summer month which had elapsed during his mother's minority. Young Tom was respectfully studying the aspects of the radiant beauties of the polite work. He also was a thrall of woman, newly enrolled, and full of wonder.

Page 286

“What, Tom!” the farmer sang out as soon as he had opened the door; “there ye be! at yer Folly agin, are ye? What good’ll them fashens do to you, I’d like t’know? Come, shut up, and go and see to Mr. Fev’rel’s mare. He’s al’ays at that ther’ Folly now. I say there never were a better name for a book than that ther’ Folly! Talk about attitudes!”

The farmer laughed his fat sides into a chair, and motioned his visitor to do likewise.

“It’s a comfort they’re most on ’em females,” he pursued, sounding a thwack on his knee as he settled himself agreeably in his seat. “It don’t matter much what they does, except pinchin’ in—waspin’ it at the waist. Give me nature, I say—woman as she’s made! eh, young gentleman?”

“You seem very lonely here,” said Richard, glancing round, and at the ceiling.

“Lonely?” quoth the farmer. “Well, for the matter o’ that, we be!—jest now, so’t happens; I’ve got my pipe, and Tom’ve got his Folly. He’s on one side the table, and I’m on t’other. He gapes, and I gazes. We are a bit lonesome. But there—it’s for the best!”

Richard resumed, “I hardly expected to see you to-night, Mr. Blaize.”

“Y’acted like a man in coming, young gentleman, and I does ye honour for it!” said Farmer Blaize with sudden energy and directness.

The thing implied by the farmer’s words caused Richard to take a quick breath. They looked at each other, and looked away, the farmer thrumming on the arm of his chair.

Above the mantel-piece, surrounded by tarnished indifferent miniatures of high-collared, well-to-do yeomen of the anterior generation, trying their best not to grin, and high-waisted old ladies smiling an encouraging smile through plentiful cap-puckers, there hung a passably executed half-figure of a naval officer in uniform, grasping a telescope under his left arm, who stood forth clearly as not of their kith and kin. His eyes were blue, his hair light, his bearing that of a man who knows how to carry his head and shoulders. The artist, while giving him an epaulette to indicate his rank, had also recorded the juvenility which a lieutenant in the naval service can retain after arriving at that position, by painting him with smooth cheeks and fresh ruddy lips. To this portrait Richard’s eyes were directed. Farmer Blaize observed it, and said—

“Her father, sir!”

Richard moderated his voice to praise the likeness.

“Yes,” said the farmer, “pretty well. Next best to havin’ her, though it’s a long way off that!”

“An old family, Mr. Blaize—is it not?” Richard asked in as careless a tone as he could assume.

“Gentlefolks—what’s left of ’em,” replied the farmer with an equally affected indifference.

“And that’s her father?” said Richard, growing bolder to speak of her.

“That’s her father, young gentleman!”

“Mr. Blaize,” Richard turned to face him, and burst out, “where is she?”

Page 287

“Gone, sir! packed off!—Can’t have her here now.” The farmer thrummed a step brisker, and eyed the young man’s wild face resolutely.

“Mr. Blaize,” Richard leaned forward to get closer to him. He was stunned, and hardly aware of what he was saying or doing: “Where has she gone? Why did she leave?”

“You needn’t to ask, sir—ye know,” said the farmer, with a side shot of his head.

“But she did not—it was not her wish to go?”

“No! I think she likes the place. Mayhap she likes’t too well!”

“Why did you send her away to make her unhappy, Mr. Blaize?”

The farmer bluntly denied it was he was the party who made her unhappy. “Nobody can’t accuse me. Tell ye what, sir. I wunt have the busybodies set to work about her, and there’s all the matter. So let you and I come to an understandin’.”

A blind inclination to take offence made Richard sit upright. He forgot it the next minute, and said humbly: “Am I the cause of her going?”

“Well!” returned the farmer, “to speak straight—ye be!”

“What can I do, Mr. Blaize, that she may come back again” the young hypocrite asked.

“Now,” said the farmer, “you’re coming to business. Glad to hear ye talk in that sensible way, Mr. Feverel. You may guess I wants her bad enough. The house ain’t itself now she’s away, and I ain’t myself. Well, sir! This ye can do. If you gives me your promise not to meddle with her at all—I can’t mak’ out how you come to be acquainted; not to try to get her to be meetin’ you—and if you’d ’a seen her when she left, you would—when did ye meet?—last grass, wasn’t it?—your word as a gentleman not to be writing letters, and spyin’ after her—I’ll have her back at once. Back she shall come!”

“Give her up!” cried Richard.

“Ay, that’s it!” said the farmer. “Give her up.”

The young man checked the annihilation of time that was on his mouth.

“You sent her away to protect her from me, then?” he said savagely.

“That’s not quite it, but that’ll do,” rejoined the farmer.

“Do you think I shall harm her, sir?”

“People seem to think she’ll harm you, young gentleman,” the farmer said with some irony.

“Harm me—she? What people?”

“People pretty intimate with you, sir.”

“What people? Who spoke of us?” Richard began to scent a plot, and would not be balked.

“Well, sir, look here,” said the farmer. “It ain’t no secret, and if it be, I don’t see why I’m to keep it. It appears your education’s peculiar!” The farmer drawled out the word as if he were describing the figure of a snake. “You ain’t to be as other young gentlemen. All the better! You’re a fine bold young gentleman, and your father’s a right to be proud of ye. Well, sir—I’m sure I thank him for’t he comes to hear of you and Luce, and of course he don’t want nothin’ o’ that—more do I. I meets him there!

Page 288

What's more I won't have nothin' of it. She be my gal. She were left to my protection. And she's a lady, sir. Let me tell ye, ye won't find many on 'em so well looked to as she be—my Luce! Well, Mr. Fev'rel, it's you, or it's her—one of ye must be out o' the way. So we're told. And Luce—I do believe she's just as anxious about yer education as yer father she says she'll go, and wouldn't write, and'd break it off for the sake o' your education. And she've kep' her word, haven't she?—She's a true'n. What she says she'll do!—True blue she be, my Luce! So now, sir, you do the same, and I'll thank ye."

Any one who has tossed a sheet of paper into the fire, and seen it gradually brown with heat, and strike to flame, may conceive the mind of the lover as he listened to this speech.

His anger did not evaporate in words, but condensed and sank deep. "Mr. Blaize," he said, "this is very kind of the people you allude to, but I am of an age now to think and act for myself—I love her, sir!" His whole countenance changed, and the muscles of his face quivered.

"Well!" said the farmer, appeasingly, "we all do at your age—somebody or other. It's natural!"

"I love her!" the young man thundered afresh, too much possessed by his passion to have a sense of shame in the confession. "Farmer!" his voice fell to supplication, "will you bring her back?"

Farmer Blaize made a queer face. He asked—what for? and where was the promise required?—But was not the lover's argument conclusive? He said he loved her! and he could not see why her uncle should not in consequence immediately send for her, that they might be together. All very well, quoth the farmer, but what's to come of it?—What was to come of it? Why, love, and more love! And a bit too much! the farmer added grimly.

"Then you refuse me, farmer," said Richard. "I must look to you for keeping her away from me, not to—to—these people. You will not have her back, though I tell you I love her better than my life?"

Farmer Blaize now had to answer him plainly, he had a reason and an objection of his own. And it was, that her character was at stake, and God knew whether she herself might not be in danger. He spoke with a kindly candour, not without dignity. He complimented Richard personally, but young people were young people; baronets' sons were not in the habit of marrying farmers' nieces.

At first the son of a System did not comprehend him. When he did, he said: "Farmer! if I give you my word of honour, as I hope for heaven, to marry her when I am of age, will you have her back?"

He was so fervid that, to quiet him, the farmer only shook his head doubtfully at the bars of the grate, and let his chest fall slowly. Richard caught what seemed to him a glimpse of encouragement in these signs, and observed: “It’s not because you object to me, Mr. Blaize?”

The farmer signified it was not that.

Page 289

“It’s because my father is against me,” Richard went on, and undertook to show that love was so sacred a matter that no father could entirely and for ever resist his son’s inclinations. Argument being a cool field where the farmer could meet and match him, the young man got on the tramroad of his passion, and went ahead. He drew pictures of Lucy, of her truth, and his own. He took leaps from life to death, from death to life, mixing imprecations and prayers in a torrent. Perhaps he did move the stolid old Englishman a little, he was so vehement, and made so visible a sacrifice of his pride.

Farmer Blaize tried to pacify him, but it was useless. His jewel he must have.

The farmer stretched out his hand for the pipe that allayeth botheration. “May smoke heer now,” he said. “Not when—somebody’s present. Smoke in the kitchen then. Don’t mind smell?”

Richard nodded, and watched the operations while the farmer filled, and lighted, and began to puff, as if his fate hung on them.

“Who’d a’ thought, when you sat over there once, of its comin’ to this?” ejaculated the farmer, drawing ease and reflection from tobacco. “You didn’t think much of her that day, young gentleman! I introduced ye. Well! things comes about. Can’t you wait till she returns in due course, now?”

This suggestion, the work of the pipe, did but bring on him another torrent.

“It’s queer,” said the farmer, putting the mouth of the pipe to his wrinkled-up temples.

Richard waited for him, and then he laid down the pipe altogether, as no aid in perplexity, and said, after leaning his arm on the table and staring at Richard an instant:

“Look, young gentleman! My word’s gone. I’ve spoke it. I’ve given ’em the ’surance she shan’t be back till the Spring, and then I’ll have her, and then—well! I do hope, for more reasons than one, ye’ll both be wiser—I’ve got my own notions about her. But I an’t the man to force a gal to marry ’gainst her inclines. Depend upon it I’m not your enemy, Mr. Fev’rel. You’re jest the one to mak’ a young gal proud. So wait,—and see. That’s my ‘dvice. Jest tak’ and wait. I’ve no more to say.”

Richard’s impetuosity had made him really afraid of speaking his notions concerning the projected felicity of young Tom, if indeed they were serious.

The farmer repeated that he had no more to say; and Richard, with “Wait till the Spring! Wait till the Spring!” dinning despair in his ears, stood up to depart. Farmer Blaize shook his slack hand in a friendly way, and called out at the door for young Tom, who, dreading allusions to his Folly, did not appear. A maid rushed by Richard in the passage, and slipped something into his grasp, which fixed on it without further consciousness than that of touch. The mare was led forth by the Bantam. A light rain

was falling down strong warm gusts, and the trees were noisy in the night. Farmer Blaize requested Richard at the gate to give him his hand, and say all was well. He liked the young man for his earnestness and honest outspeaking. Richard could not say all was well, but he gave his hand, and knitted it to the farmer's in a sharp squeeze, when he got upon Cassandra, and rode into the tumult.

Page 290

A calm, clear dawn succeeded the roaring West, and threw its glowing grey image on the waters of the Abbey-lake. Before sunrise Tom Bakewell was abroad, and met the missing youth, his master, jogging Cassandra leisurely along the Lobourne park-road, a sorry couple to look at. Cassandra's flanks were caked with mud, her head drooped: all that was in her had been taken out by that wild night. On what heaths and heavy fallows had she not spent her noble strength, recklessly fretting through the darkness!

"Take the mare," said Richard, dismounting and patting her between the eyes. "She's done up, poor old gal! Look to her, Tom, and then come to me in my room."

Tom asked no questions.

Three days would bring the anniversary of Richard's birth, and though Tom was close, the condition of the mare, and the young gentleman's strange freak in riding her out all night becoming known, prepared everybody at Raynham for the usual bad-luck birthday, the prophets of which were full of sad gratification. Sir Austin had an unpleasant office to require of his son; no other than that of humbly begging Benson's pardon, and washing out the undue blood he had spilt in taking his Pound of Flesh. Heavy Benson was told to anticipate the demand for pardon, and practised in his mind the most melancholy Christian deportment he could assume on the occasion. But while his son was in this state, Sir Austin considered that he would hardly be brought to see the virtues of the act, and did not make the requisition of him, and heavy Benson remained drawn up solemnly expectant at doorways, and at the foot of the staircase, a Saurian Caryatid, wherever he could get a step in advance of the young man, while Richard heedlessly passed him, as he passed everybody else, his head bent to the ground, and his legs bearing him like random instruments of whose service he was unconscious. It was a shock to Benson's implicit belief in his patron; and he was not consoled by the philosophic explanation, "That Good in a strong many-compounded nature is of slower growth than any other mortal thing, and must not be forced." Damnatory doctrines best pleased Benson. He was ready to pardon, as a Christian should, but he did want his enemy before him on his knees. And now, though the Saurian Eye saw more than all the other eyes in the house, and saw that there was matter in hand between Tom and his master to breed exceeding discomposure to the System, Benson, as he had not received his indemnity, and did not wish to encounter fresh perils for nothing, held his peace.

Sir Austin partly divined what was going on in the breast of his son, without conceiving the depths of distrust his son cherished or quite measuring the intensity of the passion that consumed him. He was very kind and tender with him. Like a cunning physician who has, nevertheless, overlooked the change in the disease superinduced by one false dose, he meditated his prescriptions carefully and confidently, sure that he knew the case, and was a match for it. He decreed that Richard's erratic behaviour should pass unnoticed. Two days before the birthday, he asked him whether he would object to

having company? To which Richard said: “Have whom you will, sir.” The preparation for festivity commenced accordingly.

Page 291

On the birthday eve he dined with the rest. Lady Blandish was there, and sat penitently at his right. Hippias prognosticated certain indigestion for himself on the morrow. The Eighteenth Century wondered whether she should live to see another birthday. Adrian drank the two-years' distant term of his tutorship, and Algernon went over the list of the Lobourne men who would cope with Bursley on the morrow. Sir Austin gave ear and a word to all, keeping his mental eye for his son. To please Lady Blandish also, Adrian ventured to make trifling jokes about London's Mrs. Grandison; jokes delicately not decent, but so delicately so, that it was not decent to perceive it.

After dinner Richard left them. Nothing more than commonly peculiar was observed about him, beyond the excessive glitter of his eyes, but the baronet said, "Yes, yes! that will pass." He and Adrian, and Lady Blandish, took tea in the library, and sat till a late hour discussing casuistries relating mostly to the Apple-disease. Converse very amusing to the wise youth, who could suggest to the two chaste minds situations of the shadiest character, with the air of a seeker after truth, and lead them, unsuspecting, where they dared not look about them. The Aphorist had elated the heart of his constant fair worshipper with a newly rounded if not newly conceived sentence, when they became aware that they were four. Heavy Benson stood among them. He said he had knocked, but received no answer. There was, however, a vestige of surprise and dissatisfaction on his face beholding Adrian of the company, which had not quite worn away, and gave place, when it did vanish, to an aspect of flabby severity.

"Well, Benson? well?" said the baronet.

The unmoving man replied: "If you please, Sir Austin—Mr. Richard!"

"Well!"

"He's out!"

"Well?"

"With Bakewell!"

"Well?"

"And a carpet-bag!"

The carpet-bag might be supposed to contain that funny thing called a young hero's romance in the making.

Out Richard was, and with a carpet-bag, which Tom Bakewell carried. He was on the road to Bellingham, under heavy rain, hasting like an escaped captive, wild with joy, while Tom shook his skin, and grunted at his discomforts. The mail train was to be caught at Bellingham. He knew where to find her now, through the intervention of Miss

Davenport, and thither he was flying, an arrow loosed from the bow: thither, in spite of fathers and friends and plotters, to claim her, and take her, and stand with her against the world.

They were both thoroughly wet when they entered Bellingham, and Tom's visions were of hot drinks. He hinted the necessity for inward consolation to his master, who could answer nothing but "Tom! Tom! I shall see her tomorrow!" It was bad—travelling in the wet, Tom hinted again, to provoke the same insane outcry, and have his arm seized and furiously shaken into the bargain. Passing the principal inn of the place, Tom spoke plainly for brandy.

Page 292

“No!” cried Richard, “there’s not a moment to be lost!” and as he said it, he reeled, and fell against Tom, muttering indistinctly of faintness, and that there was no time to lose. Tom lifted him in his arms, and got admission to the inn. Brandy, the country’s specific, was advised by host and hostess, and forced into his mouth, reviving him sufficiently to cry out, “Tom! the bell’s ringing: we shall be late,” after which he fell back insensible on the sofa where they had stretched him. Excitement of blood and brain had done its work upon him. The youth suffered them to undress him and put him to bed, and there he lay, forgetful even of love; a drowned weed borne onward by the tide of the hours. There his father found him.

Was the Scientific Humanist remorseful? He had looked forward to such a crisis as that point in the disease his son was the victim of, when the body would fail and give the spirit calm to conquer the malady, knowing very well that the seeds of the evil were not of the spirit. Moreover, to see him and have him was a repose after the alarm Benson had sounded. “Mark!” he said to Lady Blandish, “when he recovers he will not care for her.”

The lady had accompanied him to the Bellingham inn on first hearing of Richard’s seizure.

“What an iron man you can be,” she exclaimed, smothering her intuitions. She was for giving the boy his bauble; promising it him, at least, if he would only get well and be the bright flower of promise he once was.

“Can you look on him,” she pleaded, “can you look on him and persevere?”

It was a hard sight for this man who loved his son so deeply. The youth lay in his strange bed, straight and motionless, with fever on his cheeks, and altered eyes.

Old Dr. Clifford of Lobourne was the medical attendant, who, with head-shaking, and gathering of lips, and reminiscences of ancient arguments, guaranteed to do all that leech could do in the matter. The old doctor did admit that Richard’s constitution was admirable, and answered to his prescriptions like a piano to the musician. “But,” he said at a family consultation, for Sir Austin had told him how it stood with the young man, “drugs are not much in cases of this sort. Change! That’s what’s wanted, and as soon as may be. Distraction! He ought to see the world, and know what he is made of. It’s no use my talking, I know,” added the doctor.

“On the contrary,” said Sir Austin, “I am quite of your persuasion. And the world he shall see—now.”

“We have dipped him in Styx, you know, doctor,” Adrian remarked.

“But, doctor,” said Lady Blandish, “have you known a case of this sort before.”

“Never, my lady,” said the doctor, “they’re not common in these parts. Country people are tolerably healthy-minded.”

“But people—and country people—have died for love, doctor?”

The doctor had not met any of them.

Page 293

“Men, or women?” inquired the baronet.

Lady Blandish believed mostly women.

“Ask the doctor whether they were healthy-minded women,” said the baronet. “No! you are both looking at the wrong end. Between a highly-cultured being, and an emotionless animal, there is all the difference in the world. But of the two, the doctor is nearer the truth. The healthy nature is pretty safe. If he allowed for organization he would be right altogether. To feel, but not to feel to excess, that is the problem.”

> “If I can’t have the one I chose,
> To some fresh maid I will propose,”

Adrian hummed a country ballad.

CHAPTER XXIV

When the young Experiment again knew the hours that rolled him onward, he was in his own room at Raynham. Nothing had changed: only a strong fist had knocked him down and stunned him, and he opened his eyes to a grey world: he had forgotten what he lived for. He was weak and thin, and with a pale memory of things. His functions were the same, everything surrounding him was the same: he looked upon the old blue hills, the far-lying fallows, the river, and the woods: he knew them, they seemed to have lost recollection of him. Nor could he find in familiar human faces the secret of intimacy of heretofore. They were the same faces: they nodded and smiled to him. What was lost he could not tell. Something had been knocked out of him! He was sensible of his father’s sweetness of manner, and he was grieved that he could not reply to it, for every sense of shame and reproach had strangely gone. He felt very useless. In place of the fiery love for one, he now bore about a cold charity to all.

Thus in the heart of the young man died the Spring Primrose, and while it died another heart was pushing forth the Primrose of Autumn.

The wonderful change in Richard, and the wisdom of her admirer, now positively proved, were exciting matters to Lady Blandish. She was rebuked for certain little rebellious fancies concerning him that had come across her enslaved mind from time to time. For was he not almost a prophet? It distressed the sentimental lady that a love like Richard’s could pass off in mere smoke, and words such as she had heard him speak in Abbey-wood resolve to emptiness. Nay, it humiliated her personally, and the baronet’s shrewd prognostication humiliated her. For how should he know, and dare to say, that love was a thing of the dust that could be trodden out under the heel of science? But he had said so; and he had proved himself right. She heard with wonderment that Richard of his own accord had spoken to his father of the folly he had

been guilty of, and had begged his pardon. The baronet told her this, adding that the youth had done it in a cold unwavering way, without a movement of his features: had evidently done it to throw off the burden of the duty, he had conceived. He had thought himself bound to acknowledge that he had been the Foolish Young Fellow, wishing, possibly, to abjure the fact by an set of penance. He had also given satisfaction to Benson, and was become a renovated peaceful spirit, whose main object appeared to be to get up his physical strength by exercise and no expenditure of speech.

Page 294

In her company he was composed and courteous; even when they were alone together, he did not exhibit a trace of melancholy. Sober he seemed, as one who has recovered from a drunkenness and has determined to drink no more. The idea struck her that he might be playing a part, but Tom Bakewell, in a private conversation they had, informed her that he had received an order from his young master, one day while boxing with him, not to mention the young lady's name to him as long as he lived; and Tom could only suppose that she had offended him. Theoretically wise Lady Blandish had always thought the baronet; she was unprepared to find him thus practically sagacious. She fell many degrees; she wanted something to cling to; so she clung to the man who struck her low. Love, then, was earthly; its depth could be probed by science! A man lived who could measure it from end to end; foretell its term; handle the young cherub as were he a shot owl! We who have flown into cousinship with the empyrean, and disported among immortal hosts, our base birth as a child of Time is made bare to us! —our wings are cut! Oh, then, if science is this victorious enemy of love, let us love science! was the logic of the lady's heart; and secretly cherishing the assurance that she should confute him yet, and prove him utterly wrong, she gave him the fruits of present success, as it is a habit of women to do; involuntarily partly. The fires took hold of her. She felt soft emotions such as a girl feels, and they flattered her. It was like youth coming back. Pure women have a second youth. The Autumn primrose flourished.

We are advised by The Pilgrim's Scrip that—

"The ways of women, which are Involution, and their practices, which are Opposition, are generally best hit upon by guess work, and a bold word;"—it being impossible to track them and hunt them down in the ordinary style.

So that we may not ourselves become involved and opposed, let us each of us venture a guess and say a bold word as to how it came that the lady, who trusted love to be eternal, grovelled to him that shattered her tender faith, and loved him.

Hitherto it had been simply a sentimental dalliance, and gossips had maligned the lady. Just when the gossips grew tired of their slander, and inclined to look upon her charitably, she set about to deserve every word they had said of her; which may instruct us, if you please, that gossips have only to persist in lying to be crowned with verity, or that one has only to endure evil mouths for a period to gain impunity. She was always at the Abbey now. She was much closeted with the baronet. It seemed to be understood that she had taken Mrs. Doria's place. Benson in his misogynic soul perceived that she was taking Lady Feverel's: but any report circulated by Benson was sure to meet discredit, and drew the gossips upon himself; which made his meditations tragic. No sooner was one woman defeated than another took the field! The object of the System was no sooner safe than its great author was in danger!

Page 295

“I can’t think what has come to Benson” he said to Adrian.

“He seems to have received a fresh legacy of several pounds of lead,” returned the wise youth, and imitating Dr. Clifford’s manner. “Change is what he wants! distraction! send him to Wales for a month, sir, and let Richard go with him. The two victims of woman may do each other good.”

“Unfortunately I can’t do without him,” said the baronet.

“Then we must continue to have him on our shoulders all day, and on our chests all night!” Adrian ejaculated.

“I think while he preserves this aspect we won’t have him at the dinner-table,” said the baronet.

Adrian thought that would be a relief to their digestions; and added: “You know, sir, what he says?”

Receiving a negative, Adrian delicately explained to him that Benson’s excessive ponderosity of demeanour was caused by anxiety for the safety of his master.

“You must pardon a faithful fool, sir,” he continued, for the baronet became red, and exclaimed:

“His stupidity is past belief! I have absolutely to bolt my study-door against him.”

Adrian at once beheld a charming scene in the interior of the study, not unlike one that Benson had visually witnessed. For, like a wary prophet, Benson, that he might have warrant for what he foretold of the future, had a care to spy upon the present: warned haply by The Pilgrim’s Scrip, of which he was a diligent reader, and which says, rather emphatically: “Could we see Time’s full face, we were wise of him.” Now to see Time’s full face, it is sometimes necessary to look through keyholes, the veteran having a trick of smiling peace to you on one cheek and grimacing confusion on the other behind the curtain. Decency and a sense of honour restrain most of us from being thus wise and miserable for ever. Benson’s excuse was that he believed in his master, who was menaced. And moreover, notwithstanding his previous tribulation, to spy upon Cupid was sweet to him. So he peeped, and he saw a sight. He saw Time’s full face; or, in other words, he saw the wiles of woman and the weakness of man: which is our history, as Benson would have written it, and a great many poets and philosophers have written it.

Yet it was but the plucking of the Autumn primrose that Benson had seen: a somewhat different operation from the plucking of the Spring one: very innocent! Our staid elderly sister has paler blood, and has, or thinks she has, a reason or two about the roots. She is not all instinct. “For this high cause, and for that I know men, and know him to be the

flower of men, I give myself to him!" She makes that lofty inward exclamation while the hand is detaching her from the roots. Even so strong a self-justification she requires. She has not that blind glory in excess which her younger sister can gild the longest leap with. And if, moth-like, she desires the star, she is nervously cautious of

Page 296

candles. Hence her circles about the dangerous human flame are wide and shy. She must be drawn nearer and nearer by a fresh reason. She loves to sentimentalize. Lady Blandish had been sentimentalizing for ten years. She would have preferred to pursue the game. The dark-eyed dame was pleased with her smooth life and the soft excitement that did not ruffle it. Not willingly did she let herself be won.

“Sentimentalists,” says The Pilgrim’s Scrip, “are they who seek to enjoy without incurring the Immense Debtorship for a thing done.”

“It is,” the writer says of Sentimentalism elsewhere, “a happy pastime and an important science to the timid, the idle, and the heartless; but a damning one to them who have anything to forfeit.”

However, one who could set down the dying for love, as a sentimentalism, can hardly be accepted as a clear authority. Assuredly he was not one to avoid the incurring of the immense debtorship in any way: but he was a bondsman still to the woman who had forsaken him, and a spoken word would have made it seem his duty to face that public scandal which was the last evil to him. What had so horrified the virtuous Benson, Richard had already beheld in Daphne’s Bower; a simple kissing of the fair white hand! Doubtless the keyhole somehow added to Benson’s horror. The two similar performances, so very innocent, had wondrous opposite consequences. The first kindled Richard to adore Woman; the second destroyed Benson’s faith in Man. But Lady Blandish knew the difference between the two. She understood why the baronet did not speak; excused, and respected him for it. She was content, since she must love, to love humbly, and she had, besides, her pity for his sorrows to comfort her. A hundred fresh reasons for loving him arose and multiplied every day. He read to her the secret book in his own handwriting, composed for Richard’s Marriage Guide: containing Advice and Directions to a Young Husband, full of the most tender wisdom and delicacy; so she thought; nay, not wanting in poetry, though neither rhymed nor measured. He expounded to her the distinctive character of the divers ages of love, giving the palm to the flower she put forth, over that of Spring, or the Summer rose. And while they sat and talked; “My wound has healed,” he said. “How?” she asked. “At the fountain of your eyes,” he replied, and drew the joy of new life from her blushes, without incurring further debtor ship for a thing done.

CHAPTER XXV

Let it be some apology for the damage caused by the careering hero, and a consolation to the quiet wretches, dragged along with him at his chariot-wheels, that he is generally the last to know when he has made an actual start; such a mere creature is he, like the rest of us, albeit the head of our fates. By this you perceive the true hero, whether he be a prince or a pot-boy, that he does not plot; Fortune does all for him. He may be compared to one to whom, in an electric circle, it is given to carry the battery.

Page 297

We caper and grimace at his will; yet not his the will, not his the power. 'Tis all Fortune's, whose puppet he is. She deals her dispensations through him. Yea, though our capers be never so comical, he laughs not. Intent upon his own business, the true hero asks little services of us here and there; thinks it quite natural that they should be acceded to, and sees nothing ridiculous in the lamentable contortions we must go through to fulfil them. Probably he is the elect of Fortune, because of that notable faculty of being intent upon his own business: "Which is," says The Pilgrim's Scrip, "with men to be valued equal to that force which in water makes a stream." This prelude was necessary to the present chapter of Richard's history.

It happened that in the turn of the year, and while old earth was busy with her flowers, the fresh wind blew, the little bird sang, and Hippias Feverel, the Dyspepsy, amazed, felt the Spring move within him. He communicated his delightful new sensations to the baronet, his brother, whose constant exclamation with regard to him, was: "Poor Hippias! All his machinery is bare!" and had no hope that he would ever be in a condition to defend it from view. Nevertheless Hippias had that hope, and so he told his brother, making great exposure of his machinery to effect the explanation. He spoke of all his physical experiences exultingly, and with wonder. The achievement of common efforts, not usually blazoned, he celebrated as triumphs, and, of course, had Adrian on his back very quickly. But he could bear him, or anything, now. It was such ineffable relief to find himself looking out upon the world of mortals instead of into the black phantasmal abysses of his own complicated frightful structure. "My mind doesn't so much seem to haunt itself, now," said Hippias, nodding shortly and peering out of intense puckers to convey a glimpse of what hellish sufferings his had been: "I feel as if I had come aboveground."

A poor Dyspepsy may talk as he will, but he is the one who never gets sympathy, or experiences compassion: and it is he whose groaning petitions for charity do at last rout that Christian virtue. Lady Blandish, a charitable soul, could not listen to Hippias, though she had a heart for little mice and flies, and Sir Austin had also small patience with his brother's gleam of health, which was just enough to make his disease visible. He remembered his early follies and excesses, and bent his ear to him as one man does to another who complains of having to pay a debt legally incurred.

"I think," said Adrian, seeing how the communications of Hippias were received, "that when our Nemesis takes lodgings in the stomach, it's best to act the Spartan, smile hard, and be silent."

Page 298

Richard alone was decently kind to Hippias; whether from opposition, or real affection, could not be said, as the young man was mysterious. He advised his uncle to take exercise, walked with him, cultivated cheerful impressions in him, and pointed out innocent pursuits. He made Hippias visit with him some of the poor old folk of the village, who bewailed the loss of his cousin Austin Wentworth, and did his best to waken him up, and give the outer world a stronger hold on him. He succeeded in nothing but in winning his uncle's gratitude. The season bloomed scarce longer than a week for Hippias, and then began to languish. The poor Dyspepsy's eager grasp at beatification relaxed: he went underground again. He announced that he felt "spongy things"—one of the more constant throes of his malady. His bitter face recurred: he chewed the cud of horrid hallucinations. He told Richard he must give up going about with him: people telling of their ailments made him so uncomfortable—the birds were so noisy, pairing—-the rude bare soil sickened him.

Richard treated him with a gravity equal to his father's. He asked what the doctors said.

"Oh! the doctors!" cried Hippias with vehement scepticism. "No man of sense believes in medicine for chronic disorder. Do you happen to have heard of any new remedy then, Richard? No? They advertise a great many cures for indigestion, I assure you, my dear boy. I wonder whether one can rely upon the authenticity of those signatures? I see no reason why there should be no cure for such a disease?—Eh? And it's just one of the things a quack, as they call them, would hit upon sooner than one who is in the beaten track. Do you know, Richard, my dear boy, I've often thought that if we could by any means appropriate to our use some of the extraordinary digestive power that a boa constrictor has in his gastric juices, there is really no manner of reason why we should not comfortably dispose of as much of an ox as our stomachs will hold, and one might eat French dishes without the wretchedness of thinking what's to follow. And this makes me think that those fellows may, after all, have got some truth in them: some secret that, of course, they require to be paid for. We distrust each other in this world too much, Richard. I've felt inclined once or twice—but it's absurd!—If it only alleviated a few of my sufferings I should be satisfied. I've no hesitation in saying that I should be quite satisfied if it only did away with one or two, and left me free to eat and drink as other people do. Not that I mean to try them. It's only a fancy—Eh? What a thing health is, my dear boy! Ah! if I were like you! I was in love once!"

"Were you!" said Richard, coolly regarding him.

"I've forgotten what I felt!" Hippias sighed. "You've very much improved, my dear boy."

"So people say," quoth Richard.

Hippias looked at him anxiously: "If I go to town and get the doctor's opinion about trying a new course—Eh, Richard? will you come with me? I should like your company.

We could see London together, you know. Enjoy ourselves," and Hippias rubbed his hands.

Page 299

Richard smiled at the feeble glimmer of enjoyment promised by his uncle's eyes, and said he thought it better they should stay where they were—an answer that might mean anything. Hippias immediately became possessed by the beguiling project. He went to the baronet, and put the matter before him, instancing doctors as the object of his journey, not quacks, of course; and requesting leave to take Richard. Sir Austin was getting uneasy about his son's manner. It was not natural. His heart seemed to be frozen: he had no confidences: he appeared to have no ambition—to have lost the virtues of youth with the poison that had passed out of him. He was disposed to try what effect a little travelling might have on him, and had himself once or twice hinted to Richard that it would be good for him to move about, the young man quietly replying that he did not wish to quit Raynham at all, which was too strict a fulfilment of his father's original views in educating him there entirely. On the day that Hippias made his proposal, Adrian, seconded by Lady Blandish, also made one. The sweet Spring season stirred in Adrian as well as in others: not to pastoral measures: to the joys of the operatic world and bravura glories. He also suggested that it would be advisable to carry Richard to town for a term, and let him know his position, and some freedom. Sir Austin weighed the two proposals. He was pretty certain that Richard's passion was consumed, and that the youth was now only under the burden of its ashes. He had found against his heart, at the Bellingham inn: a great lock of golden hair. He had taken it, and the lover, after feeling about for it with faint hands, never asked for it. This precious lock (Miss Davenport had thrust it into his hand at Belthorpe as Lucy's last gift), what sighs and tears it had weathered! The baronet laid it in Richard's sight one day, and beheld him take it up, turn it over, and drop it down again calmly, as if he were handling any common curiosity. It pacified him on that score. The young man's love was dead. Dr. Clifford said rightly: he wanted distractions. The baronet determined that Richard should go. Hippias and Adrian then pressed their several suits as to which should have him. Hippias, when he could forget himself, did not lack sense. He observed that Adrian was not at present a proper companion for Richard, and would teach him to look on life from the false point.

"You don't understand a young philosopher," said the baronet.

"A young philosopher's an old fool!" returned Hippias, not thinking that his growl had begotten a phrase.

His brother smiled with gratification, and applauded him loudly: "Excellent! worthy of your best days! You're wrong, though, in applying it to Adrian. He has never been precocious. All he has done has been to bring sound common sense to bear upon what he hears and sees. I think, however," the baronet added, "he may want faith in the better qualities of men." And this reflection inclined him not to let his son be alone with Adrian. He gave Richard his choice, who saw which way his father's wishes tended, and decided so to please him. Naturally it annoyed Adrian extremely. He said to his chief:

Page 300

“I suppose you know what you are doing, sir. I don’t see that we derive any advantage from the family name being made notorious for twenty years of obscene suffering, and becoming a byword for our constitutional tendency to stomachic distension before we fortunately encountered Quackem’s Pill. My uncle’s tortures have been huge, but I would rather society were not intimate with them under their several headings.” Adrian enumerated some of the most abhorrent. “You know him, sir. If he conceives a duty, he will do it in the face of every decency—all the more obstinate because the conception is rare. If he feels a little brisk the morning after the pill, he sends the letter that makes us famous! We go down to posterity with heightened characteristics, to say nothing of a contemporary celebrity nothing less than our being turned inside-out to the rabble. I confess I don’t desire to have my machinery made bare to them.”

Sir Austin assured the wise youth that Hippias had arranged to go to Dr. Bairam. He softened Adrian’s chagrin by telling him that in about two weeks they would follow to London: hinting also at a prospective Summer campaign. The day was fixed for Richard to depart, and the day came. Madame the Eighteenth Century called him to her chamber and put into his hand a fifty-pound note, as her contribution toward his pocket-expenses. He did not want it, he said, but she told him he was a young man, and would soon make that fly when he stood on his own feet. The old lady did not at all approve of the System in her heart, and she gave her grandnephew to understand that, should he require more, he knew where to apply, and secrets would be kept. His father presented him with a hundred pounds—which also Richard said he did not want—he did not care for money. “Spend it or not,” said the baronet, perfectly secure in him.

Hippias had few injunctions to observe. They were to take up quarters at the hotel, Algernon’s general run of company at the house not being altogether wholesome. The baronet particularly forewarned Hippias of the imprudence of attempting to restrict the young man’s movements, and letting him imagine he was under surveillance. Richard having been, as it were, pollarded by despotism, was now to grow up straight, and bloom again, in complete independence, as far as he could feel. So did the sage decree; and we may pause a moment to reflect how wise were his previsions, and how successful they must have been, had not Fortune, the great foe to human cleverness, turned against him, or he against himself.

The departure took place on a fine March morning. The bird of Winter sang from the budding tree; in the blue sky sang the bird of Summer. Adrian rode between Richard and Hippias to the Bellingham station, and vented his disgust on them after his own humorous fashion, because it did not rain and damp their ardour. In the rear came Lady Blandish and the baronet, conversing on the calm summit of success.

Page 301

“You have shaped him exactly to resemble yourself,” she said, pointing with her riding-whip to the grave stately figure of the young man.

“Outwardly, perhaps,” he answered, and led to a discussion on Purity and Strength, the lady saying that she preferred Purity.

“But you do not,” said the baronet. “And there I admire the always true instinct of women, that they all worship Strength in whatever form, and seem to know it to be the child of heaven; whereas Purity is but a characteristic, a garment, and can be spotted—how soon! For there are questions in this life with which we must grapple or be lost, and when, hunted by that cold eye of intense inner-consciousness, the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox, if it have not courage to stand and do battle. Strength indicates a boundless nature—like the Maker. Strength is a God to you—Purity a toy. A pretty one, and you seem to be fond of playing with it,” he added, with unaccustomed slyness.

The lady listened, pleased at the sportive malice which showed that the constraint on his mind had left him. It was for women to fight their fight now; she only took part in it for amusement. This is how the ranks of our enemies are thinned; no sooner do poor women put up a champion in their midst than she betrays them.

“I see,” she said archly, “we are the lovelier vessels; you claim the more direct descent. Men are seedlings: Women—slips! Nay, you have said so,” she cried out at his gestured protestation, laughing.

“But I never printed it.”

“Oh! what you speak answers for print with me.”

Exquisite Blandish! He could not choose but love her.

“Tell me what are your plans?” she asked. “May a woman know?”

He replied, “I have none or you would share them. I shall study him in the world. This indifference must wear off. I shall mark his inclinations now, and he shall be what he inclines to. Occupation will be his prime safety. His cousin Austin’s plan of life appears most to his taste, and he can serve the people that way as well as in Parliament, should he have no stronger ambition. The clear duty of a man of any wealth is to serve the people as he best can. He shall go among Austin’s set, if he wishes it, though personally I find no pleasure in rash imaginations, and undigested schemes built upon the mere instinct of principles.”

“Look at him now,” said the lady. “He seems to care for nothing; not even for the beauty of the day.”

“Or Adrian’s jokes,” added the baronet.

Adrian could be seen to be trying zealously to torment a laugh, or a confession of irritation, out of his hearers, stretching out his chin to one, and to the other, with audible asides. Richard he treated as a new instrument of destruction about to be let loose on the slumbering metropolis; Hippias as one in an interesting condition; and he got so much fun out of the notion of these two journeying together, and the mishaps that might occur to them, that he esteemed it almost a personal insult for his hearers not to laugh. The wise youth's dull life at Raynham had afflicted him with many peculiarities of the professional joker.

Page 302

“Oh! the Spring! the Spring!” he cried, as in scorn of his sallies they exchanged their unmeaning remarks on the sweet weather across him. “You seem both to be uncommonly excited by the operations of turtles, rooks, and daws. Why can’t you let them alone?”

’Wind bloweth,
Cock croweth,
Doodle-doo;
Hippy verteth,
Ricky sterteth,
Sing Cuckoo!’

There’s an old native pastoral!—Why don’t you write a Spring sonnet, Ricky? The asparagus-beds are full of promise, I hear, and eke the strawberry. Berries I fancy your Pegasus has a taste for. What kind of berry was that I saw some verses of yours about once?—amatory verses to some kind of berry—yewberry, blueberry, glueberry! Pretty verses, decidedly warm. Lips, eyes, bosom, legs—legs? I don’t think you gave her any legs. No legs and no nose. That appears to be the poetic taste of the day. It shall be admitted that you create the very beauties for a chaste people.

‘O might I lie where leans her lute!’

and offend no moral community. That’s not a bad image of yours, my dear boy:

’Her shape is like an antelope
Upon the Eastern hills.’

But as a candid critic, I would ask you if the likeness can be considered correct when you give her no legs? You will see at the ballet that you are in error about women at present, Richard. That admirable institution which our venerable elders have imported from Gallia for the instruction of our gaping youth, will edify and astonish you. I assure you I used, from reading The Pilgrim’s Scrip, to imagine all sorts of things about them, till I was taken there, and learnt that they are very like us after all, and then they ceased to trouble me. Mystery is the great danger to youth, my son! Mystery is woman’s redoubtable weapon, O Richard of the Ordeal! I’m aware that you’ve had your lessons in anatomy, but nothing will persuade you that an anatomical figure means flesh and blood. You can’t realize the fact. Do you intend to publish when you’re in town? It’ll be better not to put your name. Having one’s name to a volume of poems is as bad as to an advertising pill.”

“I will send you an early copy, Adrian, when I publish,” quoth Richard. “Hark at that old blackbird, uncle.”

“Yes!” Hippias quavered; looking up from the usual subject of his contemplation, and trying to take an interest in him, “fine old fellow!”

“What a chuckle he gives out before he flies! Not unlike July nightingales. You know that bird I told you of—the blackbird that had its mate shot, and used to come to sing to old Dame Bakewell’s bird from the tree opposite. A rascal knocked it over the day before yesterday, and the dame says her bird hasn’t sung a note since.”

“Extraordinary!” Hippias muttered abstractedly. “I remember the verses.”

“But where’s your moral?” interposed the wrathful Adrian. “Where’s constancy rewarded?

Page 303

’The ouzel-cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill;
The rascal with his aim so true;
The Poet’s little quill!’

“Where’s the moral of that? except that all’s game to the poet! Certainly we have a noble example of the devotedness of the female, who for three entire days refuses to make herself heard, on account of a defunct male. I suppose that’s what Ricky dwells on.”

“As you please, my dear Adrian,” says Richard, and points out larch-buds to his uncle, as they ride by the young green wood.

The wise youth was driven to extremity. Such a lapse from his pupil’s heroics to this last verge of Arcadian coolness, Adrian could not believe in. “Hark at this old blackbird!” he cried, in his turn, and pretending to interpret his fits of song:

“Oh, what a pretty comedy!—Don’t we wear the mask well, my Fiesco?—Genoa will be our own to-morrow!—Only wait until the train has started—jolly! jolly! jolly! We’ll be winners yet!

“Not a bad verse—eh, Ricky? my Lucius Junius!”

“You do the blackbird well,” said Richard, and looked at him in a manner mildly affable.

Adrian shrugged. “You’re a young man of wonderful powers,” he emphatically observed; meaning to say that Richard quite beat him; for which opinion Richard gravely thanked him, and with this they rode into Bellingham.

There was young Tom Blaize at the station, in his Sunday beaver and gala waistcoat and neckcloth, coming the lord over Tom Bakewell, who had preceded his master in charge of the baggage. He likewise was bound for London. Richard, as he was dismounting, heard Adrian say to the baronet: “The Beast, sir, appears to be going to fetch Beauty;” but he paid no heed to the words. Whether young Tom heard them or not, Adrian’s look took the lord out of him, and he shrunk away into obscurity, where the nearest approach to the fashions which the tailors of Bellingham could supply to him, sat upon him more easily, and he was not stiffened by the eyes of the superiors whom he sought to rival. The baronet, Lady Blandish, and Adrian remained on horseback, and received Richard’s adieux across the palings. He shook hands with each of them in the same kindly cold way, elicitating from Adrian a marked encomium on his style of doing it. The train came up, and Richard stepped after his uncle into one of the carriages.

Now surely there will come an age when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates, will be deemed the true epic of modern life; and the aspect of a scientific

humanist who, by dint of incessant watchfulness, has maintained a System against those active forties, cannot be reckoned less than sublime, even though at the moment he but sit upon his horse, on a fine March morning such as this, and smile wistfully to behold the son of his heart, his System incarnate, wave a serene adieu to tutelage, neither too eager

Page 304

nor morbidly unwilling to try his luck alone for a term of two weeks. At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of that small one.

Such an audience, then, will participate in the baronet's gratification at his son's demeanour, wherein he noted the calm bearing of experience not gained in the usual wanton way: and will not be without some excited apprehension at his twinge of astonishment, when, just as the train went sliding into swiftness, he beheld the grave, cold, self-possessed young man throw himself back in the carriage violently laughing. Science was at a loss to account for that. Sir Austin checked his mind from inquiring, that he might keep suspicion at a distance, but he thought it odd, and the jarring sensation that ran along his nerves at the sight, remained with him as he rode home.

Lady Blandish's tender womanly intuition bade her say: "You see it was the very thing he wanted. He has got his natural spirits already."

"It was," Adrian put in his word, "the exact thing he wanted. His spirits have returned miraculously."

"Something amused him," said the baronet, with an eye on the puffing train.

"Probably something his uncle said or did," Lady Blandish suggested, and led off at a gallop.

Her conjecture chanced to be quite correct. The cause for Richard's laughter was simple enough. Hippias, on finding the carriage-door closed on him, became all at once aware of the bright-haired hope which dwells in Change; for one who does not woo her too frequently; and to express his sudden relief from mental despondency at the amorous prospect, the Dyspepsy bent and gave his hands a sharp rub between his legs: which unlucky action brought Adrian's pastoral,

> "Hippy verteth,
> Sing cuckoo!"

in such comic colours before Richard, that a demon of laughter seized him.

“Hippy verteth!”

Every time he glanced at his uncle the song sprang up, and he laughed so immoderately that it looked like madness come upon him.

“Why, why, why, what are you laughing at, my dear boy,” said Hippias, and was provoked by the contagious exercise to a modest “ha! ha!”

Page 305

“Why, what are you laughing at, uncle?” cried Richard.

“I really don’t know,” Hippias chuckled.

“Nor I, uncle! Sing, cuckoo!”

They laughed themselves into the pleasantest mood imaginable. Hippias not only came aboveground, he flew about in the very skies, verting like any blithe creature of the season. He remembered old legal jokes, and anecdotes of Circuit; and Richard laughed at them all, but more at him—he was so genial, and childishly fresh, and innocently joyful at his own transformation, while a lurking doubt in the bottom of his eyes, now and then, that it might not last, and that he must go underground again, lent him a look of pathos and humour which tickled his youthful companion irresistibly, and made his heart warm to him.

“I tell you what, uncle,” said Richard, “I think travelling’s a capital thing.”

“The best thing in the world, my dear boy,” Hippias returned. “It makes me wish I had given up that Work of mine, and tried it before, instead of chaining myself to a task. We’re quite different beings in a minute. I am. Hem! what shall we have for dinner?”

“Leave that to me, uncle. I shall order for you. You know, I intend to make you well. How gloriously we go along! I should like to ride on a railway every day.”

Hippias remarked: “They say it rather injures the digestion.”

“Nonsense! see how you’ll digest to-night and to-morrow.”

“Perhaps I shall do something yet,” sighed Hippias, alluding to the vast literary fame he had aforetime dreamed of. “I hope I shall have a good night to-night.”

“Of course you will! What! after laughing like that?”

“Ugh!” Hippias grunted, “I daresay, Richard, you sleep the moment you get into bed!”

“The instant my head’s on my pillow, and up the moment I wake. Health’s everything!”

“Health’s everything!” echoed Hippias, from his immense distance.

“And if you’ll put yourself in my hands,” Richard continued, “you shall do just as I do. You shall be well and strong, and sing ‘Jolly!’ like Adrian’s blackbird. You shall, upon my honour, uncle!”

He specified the hours of devotion to his uncle's recovery—no less than twelve a day—-that he intended to expend, and his cheery robustness almost won his uncle to leap up recklessly and clutch health as his own.

"Mind," quoth Hippias, with a half-seduced smile, "mind your dishes are not too savoury!"

"Light food and claret! Regular meals and amusement! Lend your heart to all, but give it to none!" exclaims young Wisdom, and Hippias mutters, "Yes! yes!" and intimates that the origin of his malady lay in his not following that maxim earlier.

"Love ruins us, my dear boy," he said, thinking to preach Richard a lesson, and Richard boisterously broke out:

> "The love of Monsieur Francatelli,
> It was the ruin of—et coetera."

Page 306

Hippias blinked, exclaiming, “Really, my dear boy! I never saw you so excited.”

“It’s the railway! It’s the fun, uncle!”

“Ah!” Hippias wagged a melancholy head, “you’ve got the Golden Bride! Keep her if you can. That’s a pretty fable of your father’s. I gave him the idea, though. Austin filches a great many of my ideas!”

“Here’s the idea in verse, uncle:

> ’O sunless walkers by the tide!
> O have you seen the Golden Bride!
> They say that she is fair beyond
> All women; faithful, and more fond!

“You know, the young inquirer comes to a group of penitent sinners by the brink of a stream. They howl, and answer:

> Faithful she is, but she forsakes:
> And fond, yet endless woe she makes:
> And fair! but with this curse she’s cross’d;
> To know her not till she is lost!’

“Then the doleful party march off in single file solemnly, and the fabulist pursues:

> ’She hath a palace in the West:
> Bright Hesper lights her to her rest:
> And him the Morning Star awakes
> Whom to her charmed arms she takes.
>
> So lives he till he sees, alas!
> The maids of baser metal pass.’

“And prodigal of the happiness she lends him, he asks to share it with one of them. There is the Silver Maid, and the Copper, and the Brassy Maid, and others of them. First, you know, he tries Argentine, and finds her only twenty to the pound, and has a worse experience with Copperina, till he descends to the scullery; and the lower he goes, the less obscure become the features of his Bride of Gold, and all her radiance shines forth, my uncle.”

“Verse rather blunts the point. Well, keep to her, now you’ve got her,” says Hippias.

“We will, uncle!—Look how the farms fly past! Look at the cattle in the fields! And how the lines duck, and swim up!

’She claims the whole, and not the part—
The coin of an unused heart!
To gain his Golden Bride again,
He hunts with melancholy men,’

—and is waked no longer by the Morning Star!”

“Not if he doesn’t sleep till an hour before it rises!” Hippias interjected. “You don’t rhyme badly. But stick to prose. Poetry’s a Base-metal maid. I’m not sure that any writing’s good for the digestion. I’m afraid it has spoilt mine.”

“Fear nothing, uncle!” laughed Richard. “You shall ride in the park with me every day to get an appetite. You and I and the Golden Bride. You know that little poem of Sandoe’s?

’She rides in the park on a prancing bay,
She and her squires together;
Her dark locks gleam from a bonnet of grey,
And toss with the tossing feather.

’Too calmly proud for a glance of pride
Is the beautiful face as it passes;
The cockneys nod to each other aside,
The coxcombs lift their glasses.

Page 307

’And throng to her, sigh to her, you that can breach
The ice-wall that guards her securely;
You have not such bliss, though she smile on you each,
As the heart that can image her purely.’

“Wasn’t Sandoe once a friend of my father’s? I suppose they quarrelled. He understands the heart. What does he make his ‘Humble Lover’ say?

’True, Madam, you may think to part
Conditions by a glacier-ridge,
But Beauty’s for the largest heart,
And all abysses Love can bridge!

“Hippias now laughed; grimly, as men laugh at the emptiness of words.”

“Largest heart!” he sneered. “What’s a ‘glacier-ridge’? I’ve never seen one. I can’t deny it rhymes with ‘bridge.’ But don’t go parading your admiration of that person, Richard. Your father will speak to you on the subject when he thinks fit.”

“I thought they had quarrelled,” said Richard. “What a pity!” and he murmured to a pleased ear:

“Beauty’s for the largest heart!”

The flow of their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of passengers at a station. Richard examined their faces with pleasure. All faces pleased him. Human nature sat tributary at the feet of him and his Golden Bride. As he could not well talk his thoughts before them, he looked out at the windows, and enjoyed the changing landscape, projecting all sorts of delights for his old friend Ripton, and musing hazily on the wondrous things he was to do in the world; of the great service he was to be to his fellow-creatures. In the midst of his reveries he was landed in London. Tom Bakewell stood at the carriage door. A glance told Richard that his squire had something curious on his mind; and he gave Tom the word to speak out. Tom edged his master out of hearing, and began sputtering a laugh.

“Dash’d if I can help it, sir!” he said. “That young Tom! He’ve come to town dressed that spicy! and he don’t know his way about no more than a stag. He’s come to fetch somebody from another rail, and he don’t know how to get there, and he ain’t sure about which rail ’tis. Look at him, Mr. Richard! There he goes.”

Young Tom appeared to have the weight of all London on his beaver.

“Who has he come for?” Richard asked.

“Don’t you know, sir? You don’t like me to mention the name,” mumbled Tom, bursting to be perfectly intelligible.

“Is it for her, Tom?”

“Miss Lucy, sir.”

Richard turned away, and was seized by Hippias, who begged him to get out of the noise and pother, and caught hold of his slack arm to bear him into a conveyance; but Richard, by wheeling half to the right, or left, always got his face round to the point where young Tom was manoeuvring to appear at his ease. Even when they were seated in the conveyance, Hippias could not persuade him to drive off. He made the excuse that he did not wish to start till there was a clear road. At last young Tom cast anchor by a policeman, and, doubtless at the official’s suggestion, bashfully took seat in a cab, and was shot into the whirlpool of London. Richard then angrily asked his driver what he was waiting for.

Page 308

“Are you ill, my boy?” said Hippias. “Where’s your colour?”

He laughed oddly, and made a random answer that he hoped the fellow would drive fast.

“I hate slow motion after being in the railway,” he said.

Hippias assured him there was something the matter with him.

“Nothing, uncle! nothing!” said Richard, looking fiercely candid.

They say, that when the skill and care of men rescue a drowned wretch from extinction, and warm the flickering spirit into steady flame, such pain it is, the blood forcing its way along the dry channels, and the heavily-ticking nerves, and the sullen heart—the struggle of life and death in him—grim death relaxing his gripe; such pain it is, he cries out no thanks to them that pull him by inches from the depths of the dead river. And he who has thought a love extinct, and is surprised by the old fires, and the old tyranny, he rebels, and strives to fight clear of the cloud of forgotten sensations that settle on him; such pain it is, the old sweet music reviving through his frame, and the charm of his passion filing him afresh. Still was fair Lucy the one woman to Richard. He had forbidden her name but from an instinct of self-defence. Must the maids of baser metal dominate him anew, it is in Lucy’s shape. Thinking of her now so near him—his darling! all her graces, her sweetness, her truth; for, despite his bitter blame of her, he knew her true—swam in a thousand visions before his eyes; visions pathetic, and full of glory, that now wrung his heart, and now elated it. As well might a ship attempt to calm the sea, as this young man the violent emotion that began to rage in his breast. “I shall not see her!” he said to himself exultingly, and at the same instant thought, how black was every corner of the earth but that one spot where Lucy stood! how utterly cheerless the place he was going to! Then he determined to bear it; to live in darkness; there was a refuge in the idea of a voluntary martyrdom. “For if I chose I could see her—this day within an hour!—I could see her, and touch her hand, and, oh, heaven!—But I do not choose.” And a great wave swelled through him, and was crushed down only to swell again more stormily.

Then Tom Bakewell’s words recurred to him that young Tom Blaize was uncertain where to go for her, and that she might be thrown on this Babylon alone. And flying from point to point, it struck him that they had known at Raynham of her return, and had sent him to town to be out of the way—they had been miserably plotting against him once more. “They shall see what right they have to fear me. I’ll shame them!” was the first turn taken by his wrathful feelings, as he resolved to go, and see her safe, and calmly return to his uncle, whom he sincerely believed not to be one of the conspirators. Nevertheless, after forming that resolve, he sat still, as if there were something fatal in the wheels that bore him away from it—perhaps

Page 309

because he knew, as some do when passion is lord, that his intelligence juggled with him; though none the less keenly did he feel his wrongs and suspicions. His Golden Bride was waning fast. But when Hippias ejaculated to cheer him: “We shall soon be there!” the spell broke. Richard stopped the cab, saying he wanted to speak to Tom, and would ride with him the rest of the journey. He knew well enough which line of railway his Lucy must come by. He had studied every town and station on the line. Before his uncle could express more than a mute remonstrance, he jumped out and hailed Tom Bakewell, who came behind with the boxes and baggage in a companion cab, his head a yard beyond the window to make sure of his ark of safety, the vehicle preceding.

“What an extraordinary, impetuous boy it is,” said Hippias. “We’re in the very street!”

Within a minute the stalwart Berry, despatched by the baronet to arrange everything for their comfort, had opened the door, and made his bow.

“Mr. Richard, sir?—evaporated?” was Berry’s modulated inquiry.

“Behind—among the boxes, fool!” Hippias growled, as he received Berry’s muscular assistance to alight. “Lunch ready—eh!”

“Luncheon was ordered precise at two o’clock, sir—been in attendance one quarter of an hour. Heah!” Berry sang out to the second cab, which, with its pyramid of luggage, remained stationary some thirty paces distant. At his voice the majestic pile deliberately turned its back on them, and went off in a contrary direction.

CHAPTER XXVI

On the stroke of the hour when Ripton Thompson was accustomed to consult his gold watch for practical purposes, and sniff freedom and the forthcoming dinner, a burglarious foot entered the clerk’s office where he sat, and a man of a scowling countenance, who looked a villain, and whom he was afraid he knew, slid a letter into his hands, nodding that it would be prudent for him to read, and be silent. Ripton obeyed in alarm. Apparently the contents of the letter relieved his conscience; for he reached down his hat, and told Mr. Beazley to inform his father that he had business of pressing importance in the West, and should meet him at the station. Mr. Beazley zealously waited upon the paternal Thompson without delay, and together making their observations from the window, they beheld a cab of many boxes, into which Ripton darted and was followed by one in groom’s dress. It was Saturday, the day when Ripton gave up his law-readings, magnanimously to bestow himself upon his family, and Mr. Thompson liked to have his son’s arm as he walked down to the station; but that third glass of Port which always stood for his second, and the groom’s suggestion of

aristocratic acquaintances, prevented Mr. Thompson from interfering: so Ripton was permitted to depart.

In the cab Ripton made a study of the letter he held. It had the preciseness of an imperial mandate.

Page 310

Dear Ripton,—You are to get lodgings for a lady immediately. Not a word to a soul. Then come along with Tom. R.D.F."

"Lodgings for a lady!" Ripton meditated aloud: "What sort of lodgings? Where am I to get lodgings? Who's the lady?—I say!" he addressed the mysterious messenger. "So you're Tom Bakewell, are you, Tom?"

Tom grinned his identity.

"Do you remember the rick, Tom? Ha! ha! We got out of that neatly. We might all have been transported, though. I could have convicted you, Tom, safe! It's no use coming across a practised lawyer. Now tell me." Ripton having flourished his powers, commenced his examination: "Who's this lady?"

"Better wait till you see Mr. Richard, sir," Tom resumed his scowl to reply.

"Ah!" Ripton acquiesced. "Is she young, Tom?"

Tom said she was not old.

"Handsome, Tom?"

"Some might think one thing, some another," Tom said.

"And where does she come from now?" asked Ripton, with the friendly cheerfulness of a baffled counsellor.

"Comes from the country, sir."

"A friend of the family, I suppose? a relation?"

Ripton left this insinuating query to be answered by a look. Tom's face was a dead blank.

"Ah!" Ripton took a breath, and eyed the mask opposite him. "Why, you're quite a scholar, Tom! Mr. Richard is well. All right at home?"

"Come to town this mornin' with his uncle," said Tom. "All well, thank ye, sir."

"Ha!" cried Ripton, more than ever puzzled, "now I see. You all came to town to-day, and these are your boxes outside. So, so! But Mr. Richard writes for me to get lodgings for a lady. There must be some mistake—he wrote in a hurry. He wants lodgings for you all—eh?"

"'M sure I d'n know what he wants," said Tom. "You'd better go by the letter, sir."

Ripton re-consulted that document. "'Lodgings for a lady, and then come along with Tom. Not a word to a soul.' I say! that looks like—but he never cared for them. You don't mean to say, Tom, he's been running away with anybody?"

Tom fell back upon his first reply: "Better wait till ye see Mr. Richard, sir," and Ripton exclaimed: "Hanged if you ain't the tightest witness I ever saw! I shouldn't like to have you in a box. Some of you country fellows beat any number of cockneys. You do!"

Tom received the compliment stubbornly on his guard, and Ripton, as nothing was to be got out of him, set about considering how to perform his friend's injunctions; deciding firstly, that a lady fresh from the country ought to lodge near the parks, in which direction he told the cabman to drive. Thus, unaware of his high destiny, Ripton joined the hero, and accepted his character in the New Comedy.

Page 311

It is, nevertheless, true that certain favoured people do have beneficent omens to prepare them for their parts when the hero is in full career, so that they really may be nerved to meet him; ay, and to check him in his course, had they that signal courage. For instance, Mrs. Elizabeth Berry, a ripe and wholesome landlady of advertised lodgings, on the borders of Kensington, noted, as she sat rocking her contemplative person before the parlour fire this very March afternoon, a supernatural tendency in that fire to burn all on one side: which signifies that a wedding approaches the house. Why—who shall say? Omens are as impassable as heroes. It may be because in these affairs the fire is thought to be all on one side. Enough that the omen exists, and spoke its solemn warning to the devout woman. Mrs. Berry, in her circle, was known as a certificated lecturer against the snares of matrimony. Still that was no reason why she should not like a wedding. Expectant, therefore, she watched the one glowing cheek of Hymen, and with pleasing tremours beheld a cab of many boxes draw up by her bit of garden, and a gentleman emerge from it in the set of consulting an advertisement paper. The gentleman required lodgings for a lady. Lodgings for a lady Mrs. Berry could produce, and a very roseate smile for a gentleman; so much so that Ripton forgot to ask about the terms, which made the landlady in Mrs. Berry leap up to embrace him as the happy man. But her experienced woman's eye checked her enthusiasm. He had not the air of a bridegroom: he did not seem to have a weight on his chest, or an itch to twiddle everything with his fingers. At any rate, he was not the bridegroom for whom omens fly abroad. Promising to have all ready for the lady within an hour, Mrs. Berry fortified him with her card, curtsied him back to his cab, and floated him off on her smiles.

The remarkable vehicle which had woven this thread of intrigue through London streets, now proceeded sedately to finish its operations. Ripton was landed at a hotel in Westminster. Ere he was halfway up the stairs, a door opened, and his old comrade in adventure rushed down. Richard allowed no time for salutations. "Have you done it?" was all he asked. For answer Ripton handed him Mrs. Berry's card. Richard took it, and left him standing there. Five minutes elapsed, and then Ripton heard the gracious rustle of feminine garments above. Richard came a little in advance, leading and half-supporting a figure in a black-silk mantle and small black straw bonnet; young—that was certain, though she held her veil so close he could hardly catch the outlines of her face; girlishly slender, and sweet and simple in appearance. The hush that came with her, and her soft manner of moving, stirred the silly youth to some of those ardours that awaken the Knight of Dames in our bosoms. He felt that he would have given considerable sums for her to lift her veil. He could see that she was trembling—perhaps

Page 312

weeping. It was the master of her fate she clung to. They passed him without speaking. As she went by, her head passively bent, Ripton had a glimpse of noble tresses and a lovely neck; great golden curls hung loosely behind, pouring from under her bonnet. She looked a captive borne to the sacrifice. What Ripton, after a sight of those curls, would have given for her just to lift her veil an instant and strike him blind with beauty, was, fortunately for his exchequer, never demanded of him. And he had absolutely been composing speeches as he came along in the cab! gallant speeches for the lady, and sly congratulatory ones for his friend, to be delivered as occasion should serve, that both might know him a man of the world, and be at their ease. He forgot the smirking immoralities he had revelled in. This was clearly serious. Ripton did not require to be told that his friend was in love, and meant that life and death business called marriage, parents and guardians consenting or not.

Presently Richard returned to him, and said hurriedly, “I want you now to go to my uncle at our hotel. Keep him quiet till I come. Say I had to see you—say anything. I shall be there by the dinner hour. Rip! I must talk to you alone after dinner.”

Ripton feebly attempted to reply that he was due at home. He was very curious to hear the plot of the New Comedy; and besides, there was Richard’s face questioning him sternly and confidently for signs of unhesitating obedience. He finished his grimaces by asking the name and direction of the hotel. Richard pressed his hand. It is much to obtain even that recognition of our devotion from the hero.

Tom Bakewell also received his priming, and, to judge by his chuckles and grins, rather appeared to enjoy the work cut out for him. In a few minutes they had driven to their separate destinations; Ripton was left to the unusual exercise of his fancy. Such is the nature of youth and its thirst for romance, that only to act as a subordinate is pleasant. When one unfurls the standard of defiance to parents and guardians, he may be sure of raising a lawless troop of adolescent ruffians, born rebels, to any amount. The beardless crew know that they have not a chance of pay; but what of that when the rosy prospect of thwarting their elders is in view? Though it is to see another eat the Forbidden Fruit, they will run all his risks with him. Gaily Ripton took rank as lieutenant in the enterprise, and the moment his heart had sworn the oaths, he was rewarded by an exquisite sense of the charms of existence. London streets wore a sly laugh to him. He walked with a dandified heel. The generous youth ogled aristocratic carriages, and glanced intimately at the ladies, overflowingly happy. The crossing-sweepers blessed him. He hummed lively tunes, he turned over old jokes in his mouth unctuously, he hugged himself, he had a mind to dance down Piccadilly, and all because a friend of his was running away with a pretty girl, and he was in the secret.

Page 313

It was only when he stood on the doorstep of Richard's hotel, that his jocund mood was a little dashed by remembering that he had then to commence the duties of his office, and must fabricate a plausible story to account for what he knew nothing about—a part that the greatest of sages would find it difficult to perform. The young, however, whom sages well may envy, seldom fail in lifting their inventive faculties to the level of their spirits, and two minutes of Hippias's angry complaints against the friend he serenely inquired for, gave Ripton his cue.

"We're in the very street—within a stone's-throw of the house, and he jumps like a harlequin out of my cab into another; he must be mad—that boy's got madness in him! —and carries off all the boxes—my dinner-pills, too! and keeps away the whole of the day, though he promised to go to the doctor, and had a dozen engagements with me," said Hippias, venting an enraged snarl to sum up his grievances.

Ripton at once told him that the doctor was not at home.

"Why, you don't mean to say he's been to the doctor?" Hippias cried out.

"He has called on him twice, sir," said Ripton, expressively. "On leaving me he was going a third time. I shouldn't wonder that's what detains him—he's so determined."

By fine degrees Ripton ventured to grow circumstantial, saying that Richard's case was urgent and required immediate medical advice; and that both he and his father were of opinion Richard should not lose an hour in obtaining it.

"He's alarmed about himself," said Ripton, and tapped his chest.

Hippias protested he had never heard a word from his nephew of any physical affliction.

"He was afraid of making you anxious, I think, sir."

Algernon Feverel and Richard came in while he was hammering at the alphabet to recollect the first letter of the doctor's name. They had met in the hall below, and were laughing heartily as they entered the room. Ripton jumped up to get the initiative.

"Have you seen the doctor?" he asked, significantly plucking at Richard's fingers.

Richard was all abroad at the question.

Algernon clapped him on the back. "What the deuce do you want with doctor, boy?"

The solid thump awakened him to see matters as they were. "Oh, ay! the doctor!" he said, smiling frankly at his lieutenant. "Why, he tells me he'd back me to do Milo's trick in a week from the present day.—Uncle," he came forward to Hippias, "I hope you'll excuse me for running off as I did. I was in a hurry. I left something at the railway. This

stupid Rip thinks I went to the doctor about myself. The fact was, I wanted to fetch the doctor to see you here—so that you might have no trouble, you know. You can't bear the sight of his instruments and skeletons—I've heard you say so. You said it set all your marrow in revolt—'fried your marrow,' I think were the words, and made you see twenty thousand different ways of sliding down to the chambers of the Grim King. Don't you remember?"

Page 314

Hippias emphatically did not remember, and he did not believe the story. Irritation at the mad ravishment of his pill-box rendered him incredulous. As he had no means of confuting his nephew, all he could do safely to express his disbelief in him, was to utter petulant remarks on his powerlessness to appear at the dinner-table that day: upon which—Berry just then trumpeting dinner—Algernon seized one arm of the Dyspepsy, and Richard another, and the laughing couple bore him into the room where dinner was laid, Ripton sniggering in the rear, the really happy man of the party.

They had fun at the dinner-table. Richard would have it; and his gaiety, his by-play, his princely superiority to truth and heroic promise of overriding all our laws, his handsome face, the lord and possessor of beauty that he looked, as it were a star shining on his forehead, gained the old complete mastery over Ripton, who had been, mentally at least, half patronizing him till then, because he knew more of London and life, and was aware that his friend now depended upon him almost entirely.

After a second circle of the claret, the hero caught his lieutenant's eye across the table, and said:

"We must go out and talk over that law-business, Rip, before you go. Do you think the old lady has any chance?"

"Not a bit!" said Ripton, authoritatively.

"But it's worth fighting—eh, Rip?"

"Oh, certainly!" was Ripton's mature opinion.

Richard observed that Ripton's father seemed doubtful. Ripton cited his father's habitual caution. Richard made a playful remark on the necessity of sometimes acting in opposition to fathers. Ripton agreed to it—in certain cases.

"Yes, yes! in certain cases," said Richard.

"Pretty legal morality, gentlemen!" Algernon interjected; Hippias adding: "And lay, too!"

The pair of uncles listened further to the fictitious dialogue, well kept up on both sides, and in the end desired a statement of the old lady's garrulous case; Hippias offering to decide what her chances were in law, and Algernon to give a common-sense judgment.

"Rip will tell you," said Richard, deferentially signalling the lawyer. "I'm a bad hand at these matters. Tell them how it stands, Rip."

Ripton disguised his excessive uneasiness under endeavours to right his position on his chair, and, inwardly praying speed to the claret jug to come and strengthen his wits, began with a careless aspect: "Oh, nothing! She very curious old character! She—a

—wears a wig. She—a—very curious old character indeed! She—a—quite the old style. There's no doing anything with her!" and Ripton took a long breath to relieve himself after his elaborate fiction.

"So it appears," Hippias commented, and Algernon asked: "Well? and about her wig? Somebody stole it?" while Richard, whose features were grim with suppressed laughter, bade the narrator continue.

Page 315

Ripton lunged for the claret jug. He had got an old lady like an oppressive bundle on his brain, and he was as helpless as she was. In the pangs of ineffectual authorship his ideas shot at her wig, and then at her one characteristic of extreme obstinacy, and tore back again at her wig, but she would not be animated. The obstinate old thing would remain a bundle. Law studies seemed light in comparison with this tremendous task of changing an old lady from a doll to a human creature. He flung off some claret, perspired freely, and, with a mental tribute to the cleverness of those author fellows, recommenced: "Oh, nothing! She—Richard knows her better than I do—an old lady—somewhere down in Suffolk. I think we had better advise her not to proceed. The expenses of litigation are enormous! She—I think we had better advise her to stop short, and not make any scandal."

"And not make any scandal!" Algernon took him up. "Come, come! there's something more than a wig, then?"

Ripton was commanded to proceed, whether she did or no. The luckless fictionist looked straight at his pitiless leader, and blurted out dubiously, "She—there's a daughter."

"Born with effort!" ejaculated Hippias. "Must give her pause after that! and I'll take the opportunity to stretch my length on the sofa. Heigho! that's true what Austin says: 'The general prayer should be for a full stomach, and the individual for one that works well; for on that basis only are we a match for temporal matters, and able to contemplate eternal.' Sententious, but true. I gave him the idea, though! Take care of your stomachs, boys! and if ever you hear of a monument proposed to a scientific cook or gastronomic doctor, send in your subscriptions. Or say to him while he lives, Go forth, and be a Knight! Ha! They have a good cook at this house. He suits me better than ours at Raynham. I almost wish I had brought my manuscript to town, I feel so much better. Aha! I didn't expect to digest at all without my regular incentive. I think I shall give it up.—What do you say to the theatre to-night, boys!"

Richard shouted, "Bravo, uncle!"

"Let Mr. Thompson finish first," said Algernon. "I want to hear the conclusion of the story. The old girl has a wig and a daughter. I'll swear somebody runs away with one of the two! Fill your glass, Mr. Thompson, and forward!"

"So somebody does," Ripton received his impetus. "And they're found in town together," he made a fresh jerk. "She—a—that is, the old lady—found them in company."

"She finds him with her wig on in company!" said Algernon. "Capital! Here's matter for the lawyers!"

“And you advise her not to proceed, under such circumstances of aggravation?” Hippias observed, humorously twinkling with his stomachic contentment.

“It’s the daughter,” Ripton sighed, and surrendering to pressure, hurried on recklessly, “A runaway match—beautiful girl!—the only son of a baronet—married by special licence. A—the point is,” he now brightened and spoke from his own element, “the point is whether the marriage can be annulled, as she’s of the Catholic persuasion and he’s a Protestant, and they’re both married under age. That’s the point.”

Page 316

Having come to the point he breathed extreme relief, and saw things more distinctly; not a little amazed at his leader's horrified face.

The two elders were making various absurd inquiries, when Richard sent his chair to the floor, crying, "What a muddle you're in, Rip! You're mixing half-a-dozen stories together. The old lady I told you about was old Dame Bakewell, and the dispute was concerning a neighbour of hers who encroached on her garden, and I said I'd pay the money to see her righted!"

"Ah," said Ripton, humbly, "I was thinking of the other. Her garden! Cabbages don't interest me"—

"Here, come along," Richard beckoned to him savagely. "I'll be back in five minutes, uncle," he nodded coolly to either.

The young men left the room. In the hall-passage they met Berry, dressed to return to Raynham. Richard dropped a helper to the intelligence into his hand, and warned him not to gossip much of London. Berry bowed perfect discreetness.

"What on earth induced you to talk about Protestants and Catholics marrying, Rip?" said Richard, as soon as they were in the street.

"Why," Ripton answered, "I was so hard pushed for it, 'pon my honour, I didn't know what to say. I ain't an author, you know; I can't make a story. I was trying to invent a point, and I couldn't think of any other, and I thought that was just the point likely to make a jolly good dispute. Capital dinners they give at those crack hotels. Why did you throw it all upon me? I didn't begin on the old lady."

The hero mused, "It's odd! It's impossible you could have known! I'll tell you why, Rip! I wanted to try you. You fib well at long range, but you don't do at close quarters and single combat. You're good behind walls, but not worth a shot in the open. I just see what you're fit for. You're staunch—that I am certain of. You always were. Lead the way to one of the parks—down in that direction. You know?—where she is!"

Ripton led the way. His dinner had prepared this young Englishman to defy the whole artillery of established morals. With the muffled roar of London around them, alone in a dark slope of green, the hero, leaning on his henchman, and speaking in a harsh clear undertone, delivered his explanations. Doubtless the true heroic insignia and point of view will be discerned, albeit in common private's uniform.

"They've been plotting against me for a year, Rip! When you see her, you'll know what it was to have such a creature taken away from you. It nearly killed me. Never mind what she is. She's the most perfect and noble creature God ever made! It's not only her beauty—I don't care so much about that!—but when you've once seen her, she

seems to draw music from all the nerves of your body; but she's such an angel. I worship her. And her mind's like her face. She's pure gold. There, you'll see her to-night.

Page 317

“Well,” he pursued, after inflating Ripton with this rapturous prospect, “they got her away, and I recovered. It was Mister Adrian’s work. What’s my father’s objection to her? Because of her birth? She’s educated; her manners are beautiful—full of refinement—quick and soft! Can they show me one of their ladies like her?—she’s the daughter of a naval lieutenant! Because she’s a Catholic? What has religion to do with”—he pronounced “Love!” a little modestly—as it were a blush in his voice.

“Well, when I recovered I thought I did not care for her. It shows how we know ourselves! And I cared for nothing. I felt as if I had no blood. I tried to imitate my dear Austin. I wish to God he were here. I love Austin. He would understand her. He’s coming back this year, and then—but it’ll be too late then.—Well, my father’s always scheming to make me perfect—he has never spoken to me a word about her, but I can see her in his eyes—he wanted to give me a change, he said, and asked me to come to town with my uncle Hippy, and I consented. It was another plot to get me out of the way! As I live, I had no more idea of meeting her than of flying to heaven!”

He lifted his face. “Look at those old elm branches! How they seem to mix among the stars!—glittering fruits of Winter!”

Ripton tipped his comical nose upward, and was in duty bound to say, Yes! though he observed no connection between them and the narrative.

“Well,” the hero went on, “I came to town. There I heard she was coming, too—coming home. It must have been fate, Ripton! Heaven forgive me! I was angry with her, and I thought I should like to see her once—only once—and reproach her for being false—for she never wrote to me. And, oh, the dear angel! what she must have suffered!—I gave my uncle the slip, and got to the railway she was coming by. There was a fellow going to meet her—a farmer’s son—and, good God! they were going to try and make her marry him! I remembered it all then. A servant of the farm had told me. That fellow went to the wrong station, I suppose, for we saw nothing of him. There she was—not changed a bit!—looking lovelier than ever! And when she saw me, I knew in a minute that she must love me till death!—You don’t know what it is yet, Rip!—Will you believe, it?—Though I was as sure she loved me and had been true as steel, as that I shall see her to-night, I spoke bitterly to her. And she bore it meekly—she looked like a saint. I told her there was but one hope of life for me—she must prove she was true, and as I give up all, so must she. I don’t know what I said. The thought of losing her made me mad. She tried to plead with me to wait—it was for my sake, I know. I pretended, like a miserable hypocrite, that she did not love me at all. I think I said shameful things. Oh what noble creatures women are! She hardly had strength to move. I took her to that place where you found us, Rip! she went down

Page 318

on her knees to me, I never dreamed of anything in life so lovely as she looked then. Her eyes were thrown up, bright with a crowd of tears—her dark brows bent together, like Pain and Beauty meeting in one; and her glorious golden hair swept off her shoulders as she hung forward to my hands.—Could I lose such a prize.—If anything could have persuaded me, would not that?—I thought of Dante's Madonna—Guido's Magdalen.—Is there sin in it? I see none! And if there is, it's all mine! I swear she's spotless of a thought of sin. I see her very soul? Cease to love her? Who dares ask me? Cease to love her? Why, I live on her!—To see her little chin straining up from her throat, as she knelt to me!—there was one curl that fell across her throat"....

Ripton listened for more. Richard had gone off in a muse at the picture.

"Well?" said Ripton, "and how about that young farmer fellow?"

The hero's head was again contemplating the starry branches. His lieutenant's question came to him after an interval.

"Young Tom? Why, it's young Torn Blaize—son of our old enemy, Rip! I like the old man now. Oh! I saw nothing of the fellow."

"Lord!" cried Ripton, "are we going to get into a mess with Blaizes again? I don't like that!"

His commander quietly passed his likes or dislikes.

"But when he goes to the train, and finds she's not there?" Ripton suggested.

"I've provided for that. The fool went to the South-east instead of the South-west. All warmth, all sweetness, comes with the South-west!—I've provided for that, friend Rip. My trusty Tom awaits him there, as if by accident. He tells him he has not seen her, and advises him to remain in town, and go for her there to-morrow, and the day following. Tom has money for the work. Young Tom ought to see London, you know, Rip!—like you. We shall gain some good clear days. And when old Blaize hears of it—what then? I have her! she's mine!—Besides, he won't hear for a week. This Tom beats that Tom in cunning, I'll wager. Ha! ha!" the hero burst out at a recollection. "What do you think, Rip? My father has some sort of System with me, it appears, and when I came to town the time before, he took me to some people—the Grandisons—and what do you think? one of the daughters is a little girl—a nice little thing enough very funny—and he wants me to wait for her! He hasn't said so, but I know it. I know what he means. Nobody understands him but me. I know he loves me, and is one of the best of men—-but just consider!—a little girl who just comes up to my elbow. Isn't it ridiculous? Did you ever hear such nonsense?"

Ripton emphasized his opinion that it certainly was foolish.

“No, no! The die’s cast!” said Richard. “They’ve been plotting for a year up to this day, and this is what comes of it! If my father loves me, he will love her. And if he loves me, he’ll forgive my acting against his wishes, and see it was the only thing to be done. Come! step out! what a time we’ve been!” and away he went, compelling Ripton to the sort of strides a drummer-boy has to take beside a column of grenadiers.

Page 319

Ripton began to wish himself in love, seeing that it endowed a man with wind so that he could breathe great sighs, while going at a tremendous pace, and experience no sensation of fatigue. The hero was communing with the elements, his familiars, and allowed him to pant as he pleased. Some keen-eyed Kensington urchins, noticing the discrepancy between the pedestrian powers of the two, aimed their wit at Mr. Thompson junior's expense. The pace, and nothing but the pace, induced Ripton to proclaim that they had gone too far, when they discovered that they had over shot the mark by half a mile. In the street over which stood love's star, the hero thundered his presence at a door, and evoked a flying housemaid, who knew not Mrs. Berry. The hero attached significance to the fact that his instincts should have betrayed him, for he could have sworn to that house. The door being shut he stood in dead silence.

"Haven't you got her card?" Ripton inquired, and heard that it was in the custody of the cabman. Neither of them could positively bring to mind the number of the house.

"You ought to have chalked it, like that fellow in the Forty Thieves," Ripton hazarded a pleasantry which met with no response.

Betrayed by his instincts, the magic slaves of Love! The hero heavily descended the steps.

Ripton murmured that they were done for. His commander turned on him, and said: "Take all the houses on the opposite side, one after another. I'll take these." With a wry face Ripton crossed the road, altogether subdued by Richard's native superiority to adverse circumstances.

Then were families aroused. Then did mortals dimly guess that something portentous was abroad. Then were labourers all day in the vineyard, harshly wakened from their evening's nap. Hope and Fear stalked the street, as again and again the loud companion summonses resounded. Finally Ripton sang out cheerfully. He had Mrs. Berry before him, profuse of mellow curtsies.

Richard ran to her and caught her hands: "She's well?—upstairs?"

"Oh, quite well! only a trifle tired with her journey, and fluttering-like," Mrs. Berry replied to Ripton alone. The lover had flown aloft.

The wise woman sagely ushered Ripton into her own private parlour, there to wait till he was wanted.

CHAPTER XXVII

"In all cases where two have joined to commit an offence, punish one of the two lightly," is the dictum of The Pilgrim's's Scrip.

It is possible for young heads to conceive proper plans of action, and occasionally, by sheer force of will, to check the wild horses that are ever fretting to gallop off with them. But when they have given the reins and the whip to another, what are they to do? They may go down on their knees, and beg and pray the furious charioteer to stop, or moderate his pace. Alas! each fresh thing they do redoubles

Page 320

his ardour: There is a power in their troubled beauty women learn the use of, and what wonder? They have seen it kindle Ilium to flames so often! But ere they grow matronly in the house of Menelaus, they weep, and implore, and do not, in truth, know how terribly two-edged is their gift of loveliness. They resign themselves to an incomprehensible frenzy; pleasant to them, because they attribute it to excessive love. And so the very sensible things which they can and do say, are vain.

I reckon it absurd to ask them to be quite in earnest. Are not those their own horses in yonder team? Certainly, if they were quite in earnest, they might soon have my gentleman as sober as a carter. A hundred different ways of disenchanting him exist, and Adrian will point you out one or two that shall be instantly efficacious. For Love, the charioteer, is easily tripped, while honest jog-trot Love keeps his legs to the end. Granted dear women are not quite in earnest, still the mere words they utter should be put to their good account. They do mean them, though their hearts are set the wrong way. 'Tis a despairing, pathetic homage to the judgment of the majority, in whose faces they are flying. Punish Helen, very young, lightly. After a certain age you may select her for special chastisement. An innocent with Theseus, with Paris she is an advanced incendiary.

The fair young girl was sitting as her lover had left her; trying to recall her stunned senses. Her bonnet was un-removed, her hands clasped on her knees; dry tears in her eyes. Like a dutiful slave, she rose to him. And first he claimed her mouth. There was a speech, made up of all the pretty wisdom her wild situation and true love could gather, awaiting him there; but his kiss scattered it to fragments. She dropped to her seat weeping, and hiding her shamed cheeks.

By his silence she divined his thoughts, and took his hand and drew it to her lips.

He bent beside her, bidding her look at him.

“Keep your eyes so.”

She could not.

“Do you fear me, Lucy?”

A throbbing pressure answered him.

“Do you love me, darling?”

She trembled from head to foot.

“Then why do you turn from me?”

She wept: “O Richard, take me home! take me home!”

“Look at me, Lucy!”

Her head shrank timidly round.

“Keep your eyes on me, darling! Now speak!”

But she could not look and speak too. The lover knew his mastery when he had her eyes.

“You wish me to take you home?”

She faltered: “O Richard? it is not too late.”

“You regret what you have done for me?”

“Dearest! it is ruin.”

“You weep because you have consented to be mine?”

“Not for me! O Richard!”

“For me you weep? Look at me! For me?”

“How will it end! O Richard!”

“You weep for me?”

Page 321

“Dearest! I would die for you!”

“Would you see me indifferent to everything in the world? Would you have me lost? Do you think I will live another day in England without you? I have staked all I have on you, Lucy. You have nearly killed me once. A second time, and the earth will not be troubled by me. You ask me to wait, when they are plotting against us on all sides? Darling Lucy! look on me. Fix—your fond eyes on me. You ask me to wait when here you are given to me when you have proved my faith—when we know we love as none have loved. Give me your eyes! Let them tell me I have your heart!”

Where was her wise little speech? How could she match such mighty eloquence? She sought to collect a few more of the scattered fragments.

“Dearest! your father may be brought to consent by and by, and then—oh! if you take me home now”—

The lover stood up. “He who has been arranging that fine scheme to disgrace and martyrize you? True, as I live! that’s the reason of their having you back. Your old servant heard him and your uncle discussing it. He!—Lucy! he’s a good man, but he must not step in between you and me. I say God has given you to me.”

He was down by her side again, his arms enfolding her.

She had hoped to fight a better battle than in the morning, and she was weaker and softer.

Ah! why should she doubt that his great love was the first law to her? Why should she not believe that she would wreck him by resisting? And if she suffered, oh sweet to think it was for his sake! Sweet to shut out wisdom; accept total blindness, and be led by him!

The hag Wisdom annoyed them little further. She rustled her garments ominously, and vanished.

“Oh, my own Richard!” the fair girl just breathed.

He whispered, “Call me that name.”

She blushed deeply.

“Call me that name,” he repeated. “You said it once today.”

“Dearest!”

Not that.”

“O darling!”

“Not that.”

“Husband!”

She was won. The rosy gate from which the word had issued was closed with a seal.

Ripton did not enjoy his introduction to the caged bird of beauty that night. He received a lesson in the art of pumping from the worthy landlady below, up to an hour when she yawned, and he blinked, and their common candle wore with dignity the brigand’s hat of midnight, and cocked a drunken eye at them from under it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Beauty, of course, is for the hero. Nevertheless, it is not always he on whom beauty works its most conquering influence. It is the dull commonplace man into whose slow brain she drops like a celestial light, and burns lastingly. The poet, for instance, is a connoisseur of beauty: to the artist she is a model. These gentlemen by much contemplation of her charms wax critical. The days when they

Page 322

had hearts being gone, they are haply divided between the blonde and the brunette; the aquiline nose and the Proserpine; this shaped eye and that. But go about among simple unprofessional fellows, boors, dunderheads, and here and there you shall find some barbarous intelligence which has had just strength enough to conceive, and has taken Beauty as its Goddess, and knows but one form to worship, in its poor stupid fashion, and would perish for her. Nay, more: the man would devote all his days to her, though he is dumb as a dog. And, indeed, he is Beauty's Dog. Almost every Beauty has her Dog. The hero possesses her; the poet proclaims her; the painter puts her upon canvas; and the faithful Old Dog follows her: and the end of it all is that the faithful Old Dog is her single attendant. Sir Hero is revelling in the wars, or in Armida's bowers; Mr. Poet has spied a wrinkle; the brush is for the rose in its season. She turns to her Old Dog then. She hugs him; and he, who has subsisted on a bone and a pat till there he squats decrepit, he turns his grateful old eyes up to her, and has not a notion that she is hugging sad memories in him: Hero, Poet, Painter, in one scrubby one! Then is she buried, and the village hears languid howls, and there is a paragraph in the newspapers concerning the extraordinary fidelity of an Old Dog.

Excited by suggestive recollections of Nooredeen and the Fair Persian, and the change in the obscure monotony of his life by his having quarters in a crack hotel, and living familiarly with West-End people—living on the fat of the land (which forms a stout portion of an honest youth's romance), Ripton Thompson breakfasted next morning with his chief at half-past eight. The meal had been fixed overnight for seven, but Ripton slept a great deal more than the nightingale, and (to chronicle his exact state) even half-past eight rather afflicted his new aristocratic senses and reminded him too keenly of law and bondage. He had preferred to breakfast at Algernon's hour, who had left word for eleven. Him, however, it was Richard's object to avoid, so they fell to, and Ripton no longer envied Hippias in bed. Breakfast done, they bequeathed the consoling information for Algernon that they were off to hear a popular preacher, and departed.

"How happy everybody looks!" said Richard, in the quiet Sunday streets.

"Yes—jolly!" said Ripton.

"When I'm—when this is over, I'll see that they are, too—as many as I can make happy," said the hero; adding softly: "Her blind was down at a quarter to six. I think she slept well!"

"You've been there this morning?" Ripton exclaimed; and an idea of what love was dawned upon his dull brain.

"Will she see me, Ricky?"

"Yes. She'll see you to-day. She was tired last night."

“Positively?”

Richard assured him that the privilege would be his.

“Here,” he said, coming under some trees in the park, “here’s where I talked to you last night. What a time it seems! How I hate the night!”

Page 323

On the way, that Richard might have an exalted opinion of him, Ripton hinted decorously at a somewhat intimate and mysterious acquaintance with the sex. Headings of certain random adventures he gave.

“Well!” said his chief, “why not marry her?”

Then was Ripton shocked, and cried, “Oh!” and had a taste of the feeling of superiority, destined that day to be crushed utterly.

He was again deposited in Mrs. Berry’s charge for a term that caused him dismal fears that the Fair Persian still refused to show her face, but Richard called out to him, and up Ripton went, unaware of the transformation he was to undergo. Hero and Beauty stood together to receive him. From the bottom of the stairs he had his vivaciously agreeable smile ready for them, and by the time he entered the room his cheeks were painfully stiff, and his eyes had strained beyond their exact meaning. Lucy, with one hand anchored to her lover, welcomed him kindly. He relieved her shyness by looking so extremely silly. They sat down, and tried to commence a conversation, but Ripton was as little master of his tongue as he was of his eyes. After an interval, the Fair Persian having done duty by showing herself, was glad to quit the room. Her lord and possessor then turned inquiringly to Ripton.

“You don’t wonder now, Rip?” he said.

“No, Richard!” Ripton waited to reply with sufficient solemnity, “indeed I don’t!”

He spoke differently; he looked differently. He had the Old Dog’s eyes in his head. They watched the door she had passed through; they listened for her, as dogs’ eyes do. When she came in, bonneted for a walk, his agitation was dog-like. When she hung on her lover timidly, and went forth, he followed without an idea of envy, or anything save the secret raptures the sight of her gave him, which are the Old Dog’s own. For beneficent Nature requites him: His sensations cannot be heroic, but they have a fulness and a wagging delight as good in their way. And this capacity for humble unaspiring worship has its peculiar guerdon. When Ripton comes to think of Miss Random now, what will he think of himself? Let no one despise the Old Dog. Through him doth Beauty vindicate her sex.

It did not please Ripton that others should have the bliss of beholding her, and as, to his perceptions, everybody did, and observed her offensively, and stared, and turned their heads back, and interchanged comments on her, and became in a minute madly in love with her, he had to smother low growls. They strolled about the pleasant gardens of Kensington all the morning, under the young chestnut buds, and round the windless waters, talking, and soothing the wild excitement of their hearts. If Lucy spoke, Ripton pricked up his ears. She, too, made the remark that everybody seemed to look happy, and he heard it with thrills of joy. “So everybody is, where you are!” he would have

wished to say, if he dared, but was restrained by fears that his burning eloquence would commit him. Ripton knew the people he met twice. It would have been difficult to persuade him they were the creatures of accident.

Page 324

From the Gardens, in contempt of Ripton's frowned protest, Richard boldly struck into the park, where solitary carriages were beginning to perform the circuit. Here Ripton had some justification for his jealous pangs. The young girl's golden locks of hair; her sweet, now dreamily sad, face; her gentle graceful figure in the black straight dress she wore; a sort of half-conventual air she had—a mark of something not of class, that was partly beauty's, partly maiden innocence growing conscious, partly remorse at her weakness and dim fear of the future it was sowing—did attract the eye-glasses. Ripton had to learn that eyes are bearable, but eye-glasses an abomination. They fixed a spell upon his courage; for somehow the youth had always ranked them as emblems of our nobility, and hearing two exquisite eye-glasses, who had been to front and rear several times, drawl in gibberish generally imputed to lords, that his heroine was a charming little creature, just the size, but had no style,—he was abashed; he did not fly at them and tear them. He became dejected. Beauty's dog is affected by the eye-glass in a manner not unlike the common animal's terror of the human eye.

Richard appeared to hear nothing, or it was homage that he heard. He repeated to Lucy Diaper Sandoe's verses—

> "The cockneys nod to each other aside,
> The coxcombs lift their glasses,"

and projected hiring a horse for her to ride every day in the park, and shine among the highest.

They had turned to the West, against the sky glittering through the bare trees across the water, and the bright-edged rack. The lover, his imagination just then occupied in clothing earthly glories in celestial, felt where his senses were sharpest the hand of his darling falter, and instinctively looked ahead. His uncle Algernon was leisurely jolting towards them on his one sound leg. The dismembered Guardsman talked to a friend whose arm supported him, and speculated from time to time on the fair ladies driving by. The two white faces passed him unobserved. Unfortunately Ripton, coming behind, went plump upon the Captain's live toe—or so he pretended, crying, "Confound it, Mr. Thompson! you might have chosen the other."

The horrible apparition did confound Ripton, who stammered that it was extraordinary.

"Not at all," said Algernon. "Everybody makes up to that fellow. Instinct, I suppose!"

He had not to ask for his nephew. Richard turned to face the matter.

"Sorry I couldn't wait for you this morning, uncle," he said, with the coolness of relationship. "I thought you never walked so far."

His voice was in perfect tone—the heroic mask admirable.

Algernon examined the downcast visage at his side, and contrived to allude to the popular preacher. He was instantly introduced to Ripton's sister, Miss Thompson.

The Captain bowed, smiling melancholy approval of his nephew's choice of a minister. After a few stray remarks, and an affable salute to Miss Thompson, he hobbled away, and then the three sealed volcanoes breathed, and Lucy's arm ceased to be squeezed quite so much up to the heroic pitch.

Page 325

This incident quickened their steps homeward to the sheltering wings of Mrs. Berry. All that passed between them on the subject comprised a stammered excuse from Ripton for his conduct, and a good-humoured rejoinder from Richard, that he had gained a sister by it: at which Ripton ventured to wish aloud Miss Desborough would only think so, and a faint smile twitched poor Lucy's lips to please him. She hardly had strength to reach her cage. She had none to eat of Mrs. Berry's nice little dinner. To be alone, that she might cry and ease her heart of its accusing weight of tears, was all she prayed for. Kind Mrs. Berry, slipping into her bedroom to take off her things, found the fair body in a fevered shudder, and finished by undressing her completely and putting her to bed.

"Just an hour's sleep, or so," the mellifluous woman explained the case to the two anxious gentlemen. "A quiet sleep and a cup of warm tea goes for more than twenty doctors, it do—when there's the flutters," she pursued. "I know it by myself. And a good cry beforehand's better than the best of medicine."

She nursed them into a make-believe of eating, and retired to her softer charge and sweeter babe, reflecting, "Lord! Lord! the three of 'em don't make fifty! I'm as old as two and a half of 'em, to say the least." Mrs. Berry used her apron, and by virtue of their tender years took them all three into her heart.

Left alone, neither of the young men could swallow a morsel.

"Did you see the change come over her?" Richard whispered.

Ripton fiercely accused his prodigious stupidity.

The lover flung down his knife and fork: "What could I do? If I had said nothing, we should have been suspected. I was obliged to speak. And she hates a lie! See! it has struck her down. God forgive me!"

Ripton affected a serene mind: "It was a fright, Richard," he said. "That's what Mrs. Berry means by flutters. Those old women talk in that way. You heard what she said. And these old women know. I'll tell you what it is. It's this, Richard!—it's because you've got a fool for your friend!"

"She regrets it," muttered the lover. "Good God! I think she fears me." He dropped his face in his hands.

Ripton went to the window, repeating energetically for his comfort: "It's because you've got a fool for your friend!"

Sombre grew the street they had last night aroused. The sun was buried alive in cloud. Ripton saw himself no more in the opposite window. He watched the deplorable objects passing on the pavement. His aristocratic visions had gone like his breakfast. Beauty had been struck down by his egregious folly, and there he stood—a wretch!

Richard came to him: “Don’t mumble on like that, Rip!” he said. “Nobody blames you.”

“Ah! you’re very kind, Richard,” interposed the wretch, moved at the face of misery he beheld.

“Listen to me, Rip! I shall take her home to-night. Yes! If she’s happier away from me!—do you think me a brute, Ripton? Rather than have her shed a tear, I’d!—I’ll take her home to-night!”

Page 326

Ripton suggested that it was sudden; adding from his larger experience, people perhaps might talk.

The lover could not understand what they should talk about, but he said: "If I give him who came for her yesterday the clue? If no one sees or hears of me, what can they say? O Rip! I'll give her up. I'm wrecked for ever! What of that? Yes—let them take her! The world in arms should never have torn her from me, but when she cries—Yes! all's over. I'll find him at once."

He searched in out-of-the-way corners for the hat of resolve. Ripton looked on, wretcheder than ever.

The idea struck him:—"Suppose, Richard, she doesn't want to go?"

It was a moment when, perhaps, one who sided with parents and guardians and the old wise world, might have inclined them to pursue their righteous wretched course, and have given small Cupid a smack and sent him home to his naughty Mother. Alas!(it is The Pilgrim's Scrip interjecting) women are the born accomplices of mischief! In bustles Mrs. Berry to clear away the refection, and finds the two knights helmed, and sees, though 'tis dusk, that they wear doubtful brows, and guesses bad things for her dear God Hymen in a twinkling.

"Dear! dear!" she exclaimed, "and neither of you eaten a scrap! And there's my dear young lady off into the prettiest sleep you ever see!"

"Ha?" cried the lover, illuminated.

"Soft as a baby!" Mrs. Berry averred. "I went to look at her this very moment, and there's not a bit of trouble in her breath. It come and it go like the sweetest regular instrument ever made. The Black Ox haven't trod on her foot yet! Most like it was the air of London. But only fancy, if you had called in a doctor! Why, I shouldn't have let her take any of his quackery. Now, there!"

Ripton attentively observed his chief, and saw him doff his hat with a curious caution, and peer into its recess, from which, during Mrs. Berry's speech, he drew forth a little glove—dropped there by some freak of chance.

"Keep me, keep me, now you have me!" sang the little glove, and amused the lover with a thousand conceits.

"When will she wake, do you think, Mrs. Berry?" he asked.

"Oh! we mustn't go for disturbing her," said the guileful good creature. "Bless ye! let her sleep it out. And if you young gentlemen was to take my advice, and go and take a walk for to get a appetite—everybody should eat! it's their sacred duty, no matter what their

feelings be! and I say it who'm no chicken!—I'll frickashee this—which is a chicken—-against your return. I'm a cook, I can assure ye!"

The lover seized her two hands. "You're the best old soul in the world!" he cried. Mrs. Berry appeared willing to kiss him. "We won't disturb her. Let her sleep. Keep her in bed, Mrs. Berry. Will you? And we'll call to inquire after her this evening, and come and see her to-morrow. I'm sure you'll be kind to her. There! there!" Mrs. Berry was preparing to whimper. "I trust her to you, you see. Good-bye, you dear old soul."

Page 327

He smuggled a handful of gold into her keeping, and went to dine with his uncles, happy and hungry.

Before they reached the hotel, they had agreed to draw Mrs. Berry into their confidence, telling her (with embellishments) all save their names, so that they might enjoy the counsel and assistance of that trump of a woman, and yet have nothing to fear from her. Lucy was to receive the name of Letitia, Ripton's youngest and best-looking sister. The heartless fellow proposed it in cruel mockery of an old weakness of hers.

"Letitia!" mused Richard. "I like the name. Both begin with L. There's something soft—-womanlike—in the L.'s."

Material Ripton remarked that they looked like pounds on paper. The lover roamed through his golden groves. "Lucy Feverel! that sounds better! I wonder where Ralph is. I should like to help him. He's in love with my cousin Clare. He'll never do anything till he marries. No man can. I'm going to do a hundred things when it's over. We shall travel first. I want to see the Alps. One doesn't know what the earth is till one has seen the Alps. What a delight it will be to her! I fancy I see her eyes gazing up at them.

'And oh, your dear blue eyes, that heavenward glance
With kindred beauty, banished humbleness,
Past weeping for mortality's distress—
Yet from your soul a tear hangs there in trance.
And fills, but does not fall;
Softly I hear it call
At heaven's gate, till Sister Seraphs press
To look on you their old love from the skies:
Those are the eyes of Seraphs bright on your blue eyes!

"Beautiful! These lines, Rip, were written by a man who was once a friend of my father's. I intend to find him and make them friends again. You don't care for poetry. It's no use your trying to swallow it, Rip!"

"It sounds very nice," said Ripton, modestly shutting his mouth.

"The Alps! Italy! Rome! and then I shall go to the East," the hero continued. "She's ready to go anywhere with me, the dear brave heart! Oh, the glorious golden East! I dream of the desert. I dream I'm chief of an Arab tribe, and we fly all white in the moonlight on our mares, and hurry to the rescue of my darling! And we push the spears, and we scatter them, and I come to the tent where she crouches, and catch her to my saddle, and away!—Rip! what a life!"

Ripton strove to imagine he could enjoy it.

“And then we shall come home, and I shall lead Austin’s life, with her to help me. First be virtuous, Rip! and then serve your country heart and soul. A wise man told me that. I think I shall do something.”

Sunshine and cloud, cloud and sunshine, passed over the lover. Now life was a narrow ring; now the distances extended, were winged, flew illimitably. An hour ago and food was hateful. Now he manfully refreshed his nature, and joined in Algernon’s encomiums on Miss Letitia Thompson.

Page 328

Meantime Beauty slept, watched by the veteran volunteer of the hero's band. Lucy awoke from dreams which seemed reality, to the reality which was a dream. She awoke calling for some friend, "Margaret!" and heard one say, "My name is Bessy Berry, my love! not Margaret." Then she asked piteously where she was, and where was Margaret, her dear friend, and Mrs. Berry whispered, "Sure you've got a dearer!"

"Ah!" sighed Lucy, sinking on her pillow, overwhelmed by the strangeness of her state.

Mrs. Berry closed the frill of her nightgown and adjusted the bedclothes quietly.

Her name was breathed.

"Yes, my love?" she said.

"Is he here?"

"He's gone, my dear."

"Gone?—Oh, where?" The young girl started up in disorder.

"Gone, to be back, my love! Ah! that young gentleman!" Mrs. Berry chanted: "Not a morsel have he eat; not a drop have he drunk!"

"O Mrs. Berry! why did you not make him?" Lucy wept for the famine-struck hero, who was just then feeding mightily.

Mrs. Berry explained that to make one eat who thought the darling of his heart like to die, was a sheer impossibility for the cleverest of women; and on this deep truth Lucy reflected, with her eyes wide at the candle. She wanted one to pour her feelings out to. She slid her hand from under the bedclothes, and took Mrs. Berry's, and kissed it. The good creature required no further avowal of her secret, but forthwith leaned her consummate bosom to the pillow, and petitioned heaven to bless them both!—Then the little bride was alarmed, and wondered how Mrs. Berry could have guessed it.

"Why," said Mrs. Berry, "your love is out of your eyes, and out of everything ye do." And the little bride wondered more. She thought she had been so very cautious not to betray it. The common woman in them made cheer together after their own April fashion. Following which Mrs. Berry probed for the sweet particulars of this beautiful love-match; but the little bride's lips were locked. She only said her lover was above her in station.

"And you're a Catholic, my dear!"

"Yes, Mrs. Berry!"

“And him a Protestant.”

“Yes, Mrs. Berry!”

“Dear, dear!—And why shouldn’t ye be?” she ejaculated, seeing sadness return to the bridal babe. “So as you was born, so shall ye be! But you’ll have to make your arrangements about the children. The girls to worship with yet, the boys with him. It’s the same God, my dear! You mustn’t blush at it, though you do look so pretty. If my young gentleman could see you now!”

“Please, Mrs. Berry!” Lucy murmured.

“Why, he will, you know, my dear!”

“Oh, please, Mrs. Berry!”

“And you that can’t bear the thoughts of it! Well, I do wish there was fathers and mothers on both sides and dock-ments signed, and bridesmaids, and a breakfast! but love is love, and ever will be, in spite of them.”

Page 329

She made other and deeper dives into the little heart, but though she drew up pearls, they were not of the kind she searched for. The one fact that hung as a fruit upon her tree of Love, Lucy had given her; she would not, in fealty to her lover, reveal its growth and history, however sadly she yearned to pour out all to this dear old Mother Confessor.

Her conduct drove Mrs. Berry from the rosy to the autumnal view of matrimony, generally heralded by the announcement that it is a lottery.

“And when you see your ticket,” said Mrs. Berry, “you shan’t know whether it’s a prize or a blank. And, Lord knows! some go on thinking it’s a prize when it turns on ’em and tears ’em. I’m one of the blanks, my dear! I drew a blank in Berry. He was a black Berry to me, my dear! Smile away! he truly was, and I a-prizin’ him as proud as you can conceive! My dear!” Mrs. Berry pressed her hands flat on her apron. “We hadn’t been a three months man and wife, when that man—it wasn’t the honeymoon, which some can’t say—that man—Yes! he kicked me. His wedded wife he kicked! Ah!” she sighed to Lucy’s large eyes, “I could have borne that. A blow don’t touch the heart,” the poor creature tapped her sensitive side. “I went on loving of him, for I’m a soft one. Tall as a Grenadier he is, and when out of service grows his moustache. I used to call him my body-guardsman like a Queen! I flattered him like the fools we women are. For, take my word for it, my dear, there’s nothing here below so vain as a man! That I know. But I didn’t deserve it.... I’m a superior cook .... I did not deserve that noways.” Mrs. Berry thumped her knee, and accentuated up her climax: “I mended his linen. I saw to his adornments—he called his clothes, the bad man! I was a servant to him, my dear! and there—it was nine months—nine months from the day he swear to protect and cherish and that—nine calendar months, and my gentleman is off with another woman! Bone of his bone!—pish!” exclaimed Mrs. Berry, reckoning her wrongs over vividly. “Here’s my ring. A pretty ornament! What do it mean? I’m for tearin’ it off my finger a dozen times in the day. It’s a symbol? I call it a tomfoolery for the dead-alive to wear it, that’s a widow and not a widow, and haven’t got a name for what she is in any Dixonary, I’ve looked, my dear, and”—she spread out her arms—“Johnson haven’t got a name for me!”

At this impressive woe Mrs. Berry’s voice quavered into sobs. Lucy spoke gentle words to the poor outcast from Johnson. The sorrows of Autumn have no warning for April. The little bride, for all her tender pity, felt happier when she had heard her landlady’s moving tale of the wickedness of man, which cast in bright relief the glory of that one hero who was hers. Then from a short flight of inconceivable bliss, she fell, shot by one of her hundred Argus-eyed fears.

“O Mrs. Berry! I’m so young! Think of me—only just seventeen!”

Page 330

Mrs. Berry immediately dried her eyes to radiance. “Young, my dear! Nonsense! There’s no so much harm in being young, here and there. I knew an Irish lady was married at fourteen. Her daughter married close over fourteen. She was a grandmother by thirty! When any strange man began, she used to ask him what pattern caps grandmothers wore. They’d stare! Bless you! the grandmother could have married over and over again. It was her daughter’s fault, not hers, you know.”

“She was three years younger,” mused Lucy.

“She married beneath her, my dear. Ran off with her father’s bailiff’s son. ‘Ah, Berry!’ she’d say, ’if I hadn’t been foolish, I should be my lady now—not Granny!’ Her father never forgave her—left all his estates out of the family.”

“Did her husband always love her?” Lucy preferred to know.

“In his way, my dear, he did,” said Mrs. Berry, coming upon her matrimonial wisdom. “He couldn’t help himself. If he left off, he began again. She was so clever, and did make him so comfortable. Cook! there wasn’t such another cook out of a Alderman’s kitchen; no, indeed! And she a born lady! That tells ye it’s the duty of all women! She had her saying ‘When the parlour fire gets low, put coals on the ketchen fire!’ and a good saying it is to treasure. Such is man! no use in havin’ their hearts if ye don’t have their stomachs.”

Perceiving that she grew abstruse, Mrs. Berry added briskly: “You know nothing about that yet, my dear. Only mind me and mark me: don’t neglect your cookery. Kissing don’t last: cookery do!”

Here, with an aphorism worthy a place in The Pilgrim’S Scrip, she broke off to go posseting for her dear invalid. Lucy was quite well; very eager to be allowed to rise and be ready when the knock should come. Mrs. Berry, in her loving considerateness for the little bride, positively commanded her to lie down, and be quiet, and submit to be nursed and cherished. For Mrs. Berry well knew that ten minutes alone with the hero could only be had while the little bride was in that unattainable position.

Thanks to her strategy, as she thought, her object was gained. The night did not pass before she learnt, from the hero’s own mouth, that Mr. Richards, the father of the hero, and a stern lawyer, was adverse to his union with this young lady he loved, because of a ward of his, heiress to an immense property, whom he desired his son to espouse; and because his darling Letitia was a Catholic—Letitia, the sole daughter of a brave naval officer deceased, and in the hands of a savage uncle, who wanted to sacrifice this beauty to a brute of a son. Mrs. Berry listened credulously to the emphatic narrative, and spoke to the effect that the wickedness of old people formed the excuse for the wildness of young ones. The ceremonious administration of oaths of secrecy and devotion over, she was enrolled in the hero’s band, which now numbered three, and

Page 331

entered upon the duties with feminine energy, for there are no conspirators like women. Ripton's lieutenancy became a sinecure, his rank merely titular. He had never been married—he knew nothing about licences, except that they must be obtained, and were not difficult—he had not an idea that so many days' warning must be given to the clergyman of the parish where one of the parties was resident. How should he? All his forethought was comprised in the ring, and whenever the discussion of arrangements for the great event grew particularly hot and important, he would say, with a shrewd nod: "We mustn't forget the ring, you know, Mrs. Berry!" and the new member was only prevented by natural complacence from shouting: "Oh, drat ye! and your ring too." Mrs. Berry had acted conspicuously in fifteen marriages, by banns, and by licence, and to have such an obvious requisite dinned in her ears was exasperating. They could not have contracted alliance with an auxiliary more invaluable, an authority so profound; and they acknowledged it to themselves. The hero marched like an automaton at her bidding; Lieutenant Thompson was rejoiced to perform services as errand-boy in the enterprise.

"It's in hopes you'll be happier than me, I do it," said the devout and charitable Berry. "Marriages is made in heaven, they say; and if that's the case, I say they don't take much account of us below!"

Her own woeful experiences had been given to the hero in exchange for his story of cruel parents.

Richard vowed to her that he would henceforth hold it a duty to hunt out the wanderer from wedded bonds, and bring him back bound and suppliant.

"Oh, he'll come!" said Mrs. Berry, pursing prophetic wrinkles: "he'll come of his own accord. Never anywhere will he meet such a cook as Bessy Berry! And he know her value in his heart of hearts. And I do believe, when he do come, I shall be opening these arms to him again, and not slapping his impidence in the face—I'm that soft! I always was—in matrimony, Mr. Richards!"

As when nations are secretly preparing for war, the docks and arsenals hammer night and day, and busy contractors measure time by inches, and the air hums around: for leagues as it were myriads of bees, so the house and neighbourhood of the matrimonial soft one resounded in the heroic style, and knew little of the changes of light decreed by Creation. Mrs. Berry was the general of the hour. Down to Doctors' Commons she expedited the hero, instructing him how boldly to face the Law, and fib: for that the Law never could mist a fib and a bold face. Down the hero went, and proclaimed his presence. And lo! the Law danced to him its sedatest lovely bear's-dance. Think ye the Lawless susceptible to him than flesh and blood? With a beautiful confidence it put the few familiar questions to him, and nodded to his replies: then stamped the bond, and took the fee. It must be an old vagabond at heart that

Page 332

can permit the irrevocable to go so cheap, even to a hero. For only mark him when he is petitioned by heroes and heroines to undo what he does so easily! That small archway of Doctors' Commons seems the eye of a needle, through which the lean purse has a way, somehow, of slipping more readily than the portly; but once through, all are camels alike, the lean purse an especially big camel. Dispensing tremendous marriage as it does, the Law can have no conscience.

"I hadn't the slightest difficulty," said the exulting hero.

"Of course not!" returns Mrs. Berry. "It's as easy, if ye're in earnest, as buying a plum bun."

Likewise the ambassador of the hero went to claim the promise of the Church to be in attendance on a certain spot, on a certain day, and there hear oath of eternal fealty, and gird him about with all its forces: which the Church, receiving a wink from the Law, obsequiously engaged to do, for less than the price of a plum-cake.

Meantime, while craftsmen and skilled women, directed by Mrs. Berry, were toiling to deck the day at hand, Raynham and Belthorpe slept,—the former soundly; and one day was as another to them. Regularly every morning a letter arrived from Richard to his father, containing observations on the phenomena of London; remarks (mainly cynical) on the speeches and acts of Parliament; and reasons for not having yet been able to call on the Grandisons. They were certainly rather monotonous and spiritless. The baronet did not complain. That cold dutiful tone assured him there was no internal trouble or distraction. "The letters of a healthful physique!" he said to Lady Blandish, with sure insight. Complacently he sat and smiled, little witting that his son's ordeal was imminent, and that his son's ordeal was to be his own. Hippias wrote that his nephew was killing him by making appointments which he never kept, and altogether neglecting him in the most shameless way, so that his ganglionic centre was in a ten times worse state than when he left Raynham. He wrote very bitterly, but it was hard to feel compassion for his offended stomach.

On the other hand, young Tom Blaize was not forthcoming, and had despatched no tidings whatever. Farmer Blaize smoked his pipe evening after evening, vastly disturbed. London was a large place—young Tom might be lost in it, he thought; and young Tom had his weaknesses. A wolf at Belthorpe, he was likely to be a sheep in London, as yokels have proved. But what had become of Lucy? This consideration almost sent Farmer Blaize off to London direct, and he would have gone had not his pipe enlightened him. A young fellow might play truant and get into a scrape, but a young man and a young woman were sure to be heard of, unless they were acting in complicity. Why, of course, young Tom had behaved like a man, the rascal! and married her outright there, while he had the chance. It was a long guess. Still it was the only reasonable

Page 333

way of accounting for his extraordinary silence, and therefore the farmer held to it that he had done the deed. He argued as modern men do who think the hero, the upsetter of ordinary calculations, is gone from us. So, after despatching a letter to a friend in town to be on the outlook for son Tom, he continued awhile to smoke his pipe, rather elated than not, and mused on the shrewd manner he should adopt when Master Honeymoon did appear.

Toward the middle of the second week of Richard's absence, Tom Bakewell came to Raynham for Cassandra, and privately handed a letter to the Eighteenth Century, containing a request for money, and a round sum. The Eighteenth Century was as good as her word, and gave Tom a letter in return, enclosing a cheque on her bankers, amply providing to keep the heroic engine in motion at a moderate pace. Tom went back, and Raynham and Lobourne slept and dreamed not of the morrow. The System, wedded to Time, slept, and knew not how he had been outraged—anticipated by seven pregnant seasons. For Time had heard the hero swear to that legalizing instrument, and had also registered an oath. Ah me! venerable Hebrew Time! he is unforgiving. Half the confusion and fever of the world comes of this vendetta he declares against the hapless innocents who have once done him a wrong. They cannot escape him. They will never outlive it. The father of jokes, he is himself no joke; which it seems the business of men to discover.

The days roll round. He is their servant now. Mrs. Berry has a new satin gown, a beautiful bonnet, a gold brooch, and sweet gloves, presented to her by the hero, wherein to stand by his bride at the altar to-morrow; and, instead of being an old wary hen, she is as much a chicken as any of the party, such has been the magic of these articles. Fathers she sees accepting the facts produced for them by their children; a world content to be carved out as it pleases the hero.

At last Time brings the bridal eve, and is blest as a benefactor. The final arrangements are made; the bridegroom does depart; and Mrs. Berry lights the little bride to her bed. Lucy stops on the landing where there is an old clock eccentrically correct that night. 'Tis the palpitating pause before the gates of her transfiguration. Mrs. Berry sees her put her rosy finger on the One about to strike, and touch all the hours successively till she comes to the Twelve that shall sound "Wife" in her ears on the morrow, moving her lips the while, and looking round archly solemn when she has done; and that sight so catches at Mrs. Berry's heart that, not guessing Time to be the poor child's enemy, she endangers her candle by folding Lucy warmly in her arms, whimpering; "Bless you for a darling! you innocent lamb! You shall be happy! You shall!"

Old Time gazes grimly ahead.

CHAPTER XXIX

Page 334

Although it blew hard when Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the passage of that river is commonly calm; calm as Acheron. So long as he gets his fare, the ferryman does not need to be told whom he carries: he pulls with a will, and heroes may be over in half-an-hour. Only when they stand on the opposite bank, do they see what a leap they have taken. The shores they have relinquished shrink to an infinite remoteness. There they have dreamed: here they must act. There lie youth and irresolution: here manhood and purpose. They are veritably in another land: a moral Acheron divides their life. Their memories scarce seem their own! The Philosophical Geography (about to be published) observes that each man has, one time or other, a little Rubicon—a clear or a foul water to cross. It is asked him: "Wilt thou wed this Fate, and give up all behind thee?" And "I will," firmly pronounced, speeds him over. The above-named manuscript authority informs us, that by far the greater number of caresses rolled by this heroic flood to its sister stream below, are those of fellows who have repented their pledge, and have tried to swim back to the bank they have blotted out. For though every man of us may be a hero for one fatal minute, very few remain so after a day's march even: and who wonders that Madam Fate is indignant, and wears the features of the terrible Universal Fate to him? Fail before her, either in heart or in act, and lo, how the alluring loves in her visage wither and sicken to what it is modelled on! Be your Rubicon big or small, clear or foul, it is the same: you shall not return. On—or to Acheron!—I subscribe to that saying of The Pilgrim's Scrip:

"The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable: but beware the little knowledge of one's self!"

Richard Feverel was now crossing the River of his Ordeal. Already the mists were stealing over the land he had left: his life was cut in two, and he breathed but the air that met his nostrils. His father, his father's love, his boyhood and ambition, were shadowy. His poetic dreams had taken a living attainable shape. He had a distincter impression of the Autumnal Berry and her household than of anything at Raynham. And yet the young man loved his father, loved his home: and I daresay Caesar loved Rome: but whether he did or no, Caesar when he killed the Republic was quite bald, and the hero we are dealing with is scarce beginning to feel his despotic moustache. Did he know what he was made of? Doubtless, nothing at all. But honest passion has an instinct that can be safer than conscious wisdom. He was an arrow drawn to the head, flying from the bow. His audacious mendacities and subterfuges did not strike him as in any way criminal; for he was perfectly sure that the winning and securing of Lucy would in the end be boisterously approved of, and in that case, were not the means justified? Not that he took trouble to argue thus, as older heroes and self-convicting villains are in the habit of doing; to deduce a clear conscience. Conscience and Lucy went together.

Page 335

It was a soft fair day. The Rubicon sparkled in the morning sun. One of those days when London embraces the prospect of summer, and troops forth all its babies. The pavement, the squares, the parks, were early alive with the cries of young Britain. Violet and primrose girls, and organ boys with military monkeys, and systematic bands very determined in tone if not in tune, filled the atmosphere, and crowned the blazing procession of omnibuses, freighted with business men, Cityward, where a column of reddish brown smoke,—blown aloft by the South-west, marked the scene of conflict to which these persistent warriors repaired. Richard had seen much of early London that morning. His plans were laid. He had taken care to ensure his personal liberty against accidents, by leaving his hotel and his injured uncle Hippias at sunrise. To-day or to-morrow his father was to arrive. Farmer Blaize, Tom Bakewell reported to him, was raging in town. Another day and she might be torn from him: but to-day this miracle of creation would be his, and then from those glittering banks yonder, let them summon him to surrender her who dared! The position of things looked so propitious that he naturally thought the powers waiting on love conspired in his behalf. And she, too—-since she must cross this river, she had sworn to him to be brave, and do him honour, and wear the true gladness of her heart in her face. Without a suspicion of folly in his acts, or fear of results, Richard strolled into Kensington Gardens, breakfasting on the foreshadow of his great joy, now with a vision of his bride, now of the new life opening to him. Mountain masses of clouds, rounded in sunlight, swung up the blue. The flowering chestnut pavilions overhead rustled and hummed. A sound in his ears as of a banner unfolding in the joyful distance lulled him.

He was to meet his bride at the church at a quarter past eleven. His watch said a quarter to ten. He strolled on beneath the long-stemmed trees toward the well dedicated to a saint obscure. Some people were drinking at the well. A florid lady stood by a younger one, who had a little silver mug half-way to her mouth, and evinced undisguised dislike to the liquor of the salutary saint.

“Drink, child!” said the maturer lady. “That is only your second mug. I insist upon your drinking three full ones every morning we’re in town. Your constitution positively requires iron!”

“But, mama,” the other expostulated, “it’s so nasty. I shall be sick.”

“Drink!” was the harsh injunction. “Nothing to the German waters, my dear. Here, let me taste.” She took the mug and gave it a flying kiss. “I declare I think it almost nice—-not at all objectionable. Pray, taste it,” she said to a gentleman standing below them to act as cup-bearer.

An unmistakable cis-Rubicon voice replied: “Certainly, if it’s good fellowship; though I confess I don’t think mutual sickness a very engaging ceremony.”

Page 336

Can one never escape from one's relatives? Richard ejaculated inwardly.

Without a doubt those people were Mrs. Doria, Clare, and Adrian. He had them under his eyes.

Clare, peeping up from her constitutional dose to make sure no man was near to see the possible consequence of it, was the first to perceive him. Her hand dropped.

"Now, pray, drink, and do not fuss!" said Mrs. Doria.

"Mama!" Clare gasped.

Richard came forward and capitulated honourably, since retreat was out of the question. Mrs. Doria swam to meet him: "My own boy! My dear Richard!" profuse of exclamations. Clare shyly greeted him. Adrian kept in the background.

"Why, we were coming for you to-day, Richard," said Mrs. Doria, smiling effusion; and rattled on, "We want another cavalier. This is delightful! My dear nephew! You have grown from a boy to a man. And there's down on his lip! And what brings you here at such an hour in the morning? Poetry, I suppose! Here, take my, arm, child.—Clare! finish that mug and thank your cousin for sparing you the third. I always bring her, when we are by a chalybeate, to take the waters before breakfast. We have to get up at unearthly hours. Think, my dear boy! Mothers are sacrifices! And so you've been alone a fortnight with your agreeable uncle! A charming time of it you must have had! Poor Hippias! what may be his last nostrum?"

"Nephew!" Adrian stretched his head round to the couple. "Doses of nephew taken morning and night fourteen days! And he guarantees that it shall destroy an iron constitution in a month."

Richard mechanically shook Adrian's hand as he spoke.

"Quite well, Ricky?"

"Yes: well enough," Richard answered.

"Well?" resumed his vigorous aunt, walking on with him, while Clare and Adrian followed. "I really never saw you looking so handsome. There's something about your face—look at me—you needn't blush. You've grown to an Apollo. That blue buttoned-up frock coat becomes you admirably—and those gloves, and that easy neck-tie. Your style is irreproachable, quite a style of your own! And nothing eccentric. You have the instinct of dress. Dress shows blood, my dear boy, as much as anything else. Boy!—-you see, I can't forget old habits. You were a boy when I left, and now!—Do you see any change in him, Clare?" she turned half round to her daughter.

“Richard is looking very well, mama,” said Clare, glancing at him under her eyelids.

“I wish I could say the same of you, my dear.—Take my arm, Richard. Are you afraid of your aunt? I want to get used to you. Won’t it be pleasant, our being all in town together in the season? How fresh the Opera will be to you! Austin, I hear, takes stalls. You can come to the Forey’s box when you like. We are staying with the Foreys close by here. I think it’s a little too far out, you know; but they like the neighbourhood. This is what I have always said: Give him more liberty! Austin has seen it at last. How do you think Clare looking?”

Page 337

The question had to be repeated. Richard surveyed his cousin hastily, and praised her looks.

“Pale!” Mrs. Doria sighed.

“Rather pale, aunt.”

“Grown very much—don’t you think, Richard?”

“Very tall girl indeed, aunt.”

“If she had but a little more colour, my dear Richard! I’m sure I give her all the iron she can swallow, but that pallor still continues. I think she does not prosper away from her old companion. She was accustomed to look up to you, Richard”—

“Did you get Ralph’s letter, aunt?” Richard interrupted her.

“Absurd!” Mrs. Doria pressed his arm. “The nonsense of a boy! Why did you undertake to forward such stuff?”

“I’m certain he loves her,” said Richard, in a serious way.

The maternal eyes narrowed on him. “Life, my dear Richard, is a game of cross-purposes,” she observed, dropping her fluency, and was rather angered to hear him laugh. He excused himself by saying that she spoke so like his father.

“You breakfast with us,” she freshened off again. “The Foreys wish to see you; the girls are dying to know you. Do you know, you have a reputation on account of that”—she crushed an intruding adjective—“System you were brought up on. You mustn’t mind it. For my part, I think you look a credit to it. Don’t be bashful with young women, mind! As much as you please with the old ones. You know how to behave among men. There you have your Drawing-room Guide! I’m sure I shall be proud of you. Am I not?”

Mrs. Doria addressed his eyes coaxingly.

A benevolent idea struck Richard, that he might employ the minutes to spare, in pleading the case of poor Ralph; and, as he was drawn along, he pulled out his watch to note the precise number of minutes he could dedicate to this charitable office.

“Pardon me,” said Mrs. Doria. “You want manners, my dear boy. I think it never happened to me before that a man consulted his watch in my presence.”

Richard mildly replied that he had an engagement at a particular hour, up to which he was her servant.

“Fiddlededee!” the vivacious lady sang. “Now I’ve got you, I mean to keep you. Oh! I’ve heard all about you. This ridiculous indifference that your father makes so much of! Why, of course, you wanted to see the world! A strong healthy young man shut up all his life in a lonely house—no friends, no society, no amusements but those of rustics! Of course you were indifferent! Your intelligence and superior mind alone saved you from becoming a dissipated country boor.—Where are the others?”

Clare and Adrian came up at a quick pace.

“My damozel dropped something,” Adrian explained.

Her mother asked what it was.

“Nothing, mama,” said Clare, demurely, and they proceeded as before.

Overborne by his aunt’s fluency of tongue, and occupied in acute calculation of the flying minutes, Richard let many pass before he edged in a word for Ralph. When he did, Mrs. Doria stopped him immediately.

Page 338

“I must tell you, child, that I refuse to listen to such rank idiotcy.”

“It’s nothing of the kind, aunt.”

“The fancy of a boy.”

“He’s not a boy. He’s half-a-year older than I am!”

“You silly child! The moment you fall in love, you all think yourselves men.”

“On my honour, aunt! I believe he loves her thoroughly.”

“Did he tell you so, child?”

“Men don’t speak openly of those things,” said Richard.

“Boys do,” said Mrs. Doria.

“But listen to me in earnest, aunt. I want you to be kind to Ralph. Don’t drive him to—-You maybe sorry for it. Let him—do let him write to her, and see her. I believe women are as cruel as men in these things.”

“I never encourage absurdity, Richard.”

“What objection have you to Ralph, aunt?”

“Oh, they’re both good families. It’s not that absurdity, Richard. It will be to his credit to remember that his first fancy wasn’t a dairymaid.” Mrs. Doria pitched her accent tellingly. It did not touch her nephew.

“Don’t you want Clare ever to marry?” He put the last point of reason to her.

Mrs. Doria laughed. “I hope so, child. We must find some comfortable old gentleman for her.”

“What infamy!” mutters Richard.

“And I engage Ralph shall be ready to dance at her wedding, or eat a hearty breakfast —We don’t dance at weddings now, and very properly. It’s a horrid sad business, not to be treated with levity.—Is that his regiment?” she said, as they passed out of the hussar-sentinelled gardens. “Tush, tush, child! Master Ralph will recover, as—hem! others have done. A little headache—you call it heartache—and up you rise again, looking better than ever. No doubt, to have a grain of sense forced into your brains, you poor dear children! must be painful.. Girls suffer as much as boys, I assure you. More,

for their heads are weaker, and their appetites less constant. Do I talk like your father now? Whatever makes the boy fidget at his watch so?"

Richard stopped short. Time spoke urgently.

"I must go," he said.

His face did not seem good for trifling. Mrs. Doria would trifle in spite.

"Listen, Clare! Richard is going. He says he has an engagement. What possible engagement can a young man have at eleven o'clock in the morning?—unless it's to be married!" Mrs. Doria laughed at the ingenuity of her suggestion.

"Is the church handy, Ricky?" said Adrian. "You can still give us half-an-hour if it is. The celibate hours strike at Twelve." And he also laughed in his fashion.

"Won't you stay with us, Richard?" Clare asked. She blushed timidly, and her voice shook.

Something indefinite—a sharp-edged thrill in the tones made the burning bridegroom speak gently to her.

"Indeed, I would, Clare; I should like to please you, but I have a most imperative appointment—that is, I promised—I must go. I shall see you again"—

Page 339

Mrs. Doria, took forcible possession of him. “Now, do come, and don’t waste words. I insist upon your having some breakfast first, and then, if you really must go, you shall. Look! there’s the house. At least you will accompany your aunt to the door.”

Richard conceded this. She little imagined what she required of him. Two of his golden minutes melted into nothingness. They were growing to be jewels of price, one by one more and more precious as they ran, and now so costly-rare—rich as his blood! not to kindest relations, dearest friends, could he give another. The die is cast! Ferryman! push off.

“Good-bye!” he cried, nodding bluffly at the three as one, and fled.

They watched his abrupt muscular stride through the grounds of the house. He looked like resolution on the march. Mrs. Doria, as usual with her out of her brother’s hearing, began rating the System.

“See what becomes of that nonsensical education! The boy really does not know how to behave like a common mortal. He has some paltry appointment, or is mad after some ridiculous idea of his own, and everything must be sacrificed to it! That’s what Austin calls concentration of the faculties. I think it’s more likely to lead to downright insanity than to greatness of any kind. And so I shall tell Austin. It’s time he should be spoken to seriously about him.”

“He’s an engine, my dear aunt,” said Adrian. “He isn’t a boy, or a man, but an engine. And he appears to have been at high pressure since he came to town—out all day and half the night.”

“He’s mad!” Mrs. Doria interjected.

“Not at all. Extremely shrewd is Master Ricky, and carries as open an eye ahead of him as the ships before Troy. He’s more than a match for any of us. He is for me, I confess.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Doria, “he does astonish me!”

Adrian begged her to retain her astonishment till the right season, which would not be long arriving.

Their common wisdom counselled them not to tell the Foreys of their hopeful relative’s ungracious behaviour. Clare had left them. When Mrs. Doria went to her room her daughter was there, gazing down at something in her hand, which she guiltily closed.

In answer to an inquiry why she had not gone to take off her things, Clare said she was not hungry. Mrs. Doria lamented the obstinacy of a constitution that no quantity of iron

could affect, and eclipsed the looking-glass, saying: “Take them off here, child, and learn to assist yourself.”

She disentangled her bonnet from the array of her spreading hair, talking of Richard, and his handsome appearance, and extraordinary conduct. Clare kept opening and shutting her hand, in an attitude half-pensive, half-listless. She did not stir to undress. A joyless dimple hung in one pale cheek, and she drew long even breaths.

Mrs. Doria, assured by the glass that she was ready to show, came to her daughter.

Page 340

“Now, really,” she said, “you are too helpless, my dear. You cannot do a thing without a dozen women at your elbow. What will become of you? You will have to marry a millionaire.—What’s the matter with you, child?”

Clare undid her tight-shut fingers, as if to some attraction of her eyes, and displayed a small gold hoop on the palm of a green glove.

“A wedding-ring!” exclaimed Mrs. Doria, inspecting the curiosity most daintily.

There on Clare’s pale green glove lay a wedding-ring!

Rapid questions as to where, when, how, it was found, beset Clare, who replied: “In the Gardens, mama. This morning. When I was walking behind Richard.”

“Are you sure he did not give it you, Clare?”

“Oh no, mama! he did not give it me.”

“Of course not! only he does such absurd things! I thought, perhaps—these boys are so exceedingly ridiculous! Mrs. Doria had an idea that it might have been concerted between the two young gentlemen, Richard and Ralph, that the former should present this token of hymeneal devotion from the latter to the young lady of his love; but a moment’s reflection exonerated boys even from such preposterous behaviour.

“Now, I wonder,” she speculated on Clare’s cold face, “I do wonder whether it’s lucky to find a wedding-ring. What very quick eyes you have, my darling!” Mrs. Doria kissed her. She thought it must be lucky, and the circumstance made her feel tender to her child. Her child did not move to the kiss.

“Let’s see whether it fits,” said Mrs. Doria, almost infantine with surprise and pleasure.

Clare suffered her glove to be drawn off. The ring slid down her long thin finger, and settled comfortably.

“It does!” Mrs. Doria whispered. To find a wedding ring is open to any woman; but to find a wedding-ring that fits may well cause a superstitious emotion. Moreover, that it should be found while walking in the neighbourhood of the identical youth whom a mother has destined for her daughter, gives significance to the gentle perturbation of ideas consequent on such a hint from Fortune.

“It really fits!” she pursued. “Now I never pay any attention to the nonsense of omens and that kind of thing” (had the ring been a horseshoe Mrs. Doria would have pinked it up and dragged it obediently home), “but this, I must say, is odd—to find a ring that fits! —singular! It never happened to me. Sixpence is the most I ever discovered, and I

have it now. Mind you keep it, Clare—this ring: And," she laughed, "offer it to Richard when he comes; say, you think he must have dropped it."

The dimple in Clare's cheek quivered.

Page 341

Mother and daughter had never spoken explicitly of Richard. Mrs. Doria, by exquisite management, had contrived to be sure that on one side there would be no obstacle to her project of general happiness, without, as she thought, compromising her daughter's feelings unnecessarily. It could do no harm to an obedient young girl to hear that there was no youth in the world like a certain youth. He the prince of his generation, she might softly consent, when requested, to be his princess; and if never requested (for Mrs. Doria envisaged failure), she might easily transfer her softness to squires of lower degree. Clare had always been blindly obedient to her mother (Adrian called them Mrs. Doria Battledoria and the fair Shuttlecockiana), and her mother accepted in this blind obedience the text of her entire character. It is difficult for those who think very earnestly for their children to know when their children are thinking on their own account. The exercise of their volition we construe as revolt. Our love does not like to be invalided and deposed from its command, and here I think yonder old thrush on the lawn who has just kicked the last of her lank offspring out of the nest to go shift for itself, much the kinder of the two, though sentimental people do shrug their shoulders at these unsentimental acts of the creatures who never wander from nature. Now, excess of obedience is, to one who manages most exquisitely, as bad as insurrection. Happily Mrs. Doria saw nothing in her daughter's manner save a want of iron. Her pallor, her lassitude, the tremulous nerves in her face, exhibited an imperious requirement of the mineral.

"The reason why men and women are mysterious to us, and prove disappointing," we learn from The Pilgrim's Scrip, "is, that we will read them from our own book; just as we are perplexed by reading ourselves from theirs."

Mrs. Doria read her daughter from her own book, and she was gay; she laughed with Adrian at the breakfast-table, and mock-seriously joined in his jocose assertion that Clare was positively and by all hymeneal auspices betrothed to the owner of that ring, be he who he may, and must, whenever he should choose to come and claim her, give her hand to him (for everybody agreed the owner must be masculine, as no woman would drop a wedding-ring), and follow him whither he listed all the world over. Amiable giggling Forey girls called Clare, The Betrothed. Dark man, or fair? was mooted. Adrian threw off the first strophe of Clare's fortune in burlesque rhymes, with an insinuating gipsy twang. Her aunt Forey warned her to have her dresses in readiness. Her grandpapa Forey pretended to grumble at bridal presents being expected from grandpapas.

This one smelt orange-flower, another spoke solemnly of an old shoe. The finding of a wedding-ring was celebrated through all the palpitating accessories and rosy ceremonies involved by that famous instrument. In the midst of the general hilarity, Clare showed her deplorable want of iron by bursting into tears.

Page 342

Did the poor mocked-at heart divine what might be then enacting? Perhaps, dimly, as we say: that is, without eyes.

At an altar stand two fair young creatures, ready with their oaths. They are asked to fix all time to the moment, and they do so. If there is hesitation at the immense undertaking, it is but maidenly. She conceives as little mental doubt of the sanity of the act as he. Over them hangs a cool young curate in his raiment of office. Behind are two apparently lucid people, distinguished from each other by sex and age: the foremost a bunch of simmering black satin; under her shadow a cock-robin in the dress of a gentleman, big joy swelling out his chest, and pert satisfaction cocking his head. These be they who stand here in place of parents to the young couple. All is well. The service proceeds.

Firmly the bridegroom tells forth his words. This hour of the complacent giant at least is his, and that he means to hold him bound through the eternities, men may hear. Clearly, and with brave modesty, speaks she: no less firmly, though her body trembles: her voice just vibrating while the tone travels on, like a smitten vase.

Time hears sentence pronounced on him: the frail hands bind his huge limbs and lock the chains. He is used to it: he lets them do as they will.

Then comes that period when they are to give their troth to each other. The Man with his right hand takes the Woman by her right hand: the Woman with her right hand takes the Man by his right hand.—Devils dare not laugh at whom Angels crowd to contemplate.

Their hands are joined; their blood flows as one stream. Adam and fair Eve front the generations. Are they not lovely? Purer fountains of life were never in two bosoms.

And then they loose their hands, and the cool curate doth bid the Man to put a ring on the Woman’s fourth finger, counting thumb. And the Man thrusts his hand into one pocket, and into another, forward and back many times into all his pockets. He remembers that he felt for it, and felt it in his waistcoat pocket, when in the Gardens. And his hand comes forth empty. And the Man is ghastly to look at!

Yet, though Angels smile, shall not Devils laugh! The curate deliberates. The black satin bunch ceases to simmer. He in her shadow changes from a beaming cock-robin to an inquisitive sparrow. Eyes multiply questions: lips have no reply. Time ominously shakes his chain, and in the pause a sound of mockery stings their ears.

Think ye a hero is one to be defeated in his first battle? Look at the clock! there are but seven minutes to the stroke of the celibate hours: the veteran is surely lifting his two hands to deliver fire, and his shot will sunder them in twain so nearly united. All the

jewellers of London speeding down with sacks full of the nuptial circlet cannot save them!

Page 343

The battle must be won on the field, and what does the hero now? It is an inspiration! For who else would dream of such a reserve in the rear? None see what he does; only that the black-satin bunch is remonstratingly agitated, stormily shaken, and subdued: and as though the menacing cloud had opened, and dropped the dear token from the skies at his demand, he produces the symbol of their consent, and the service proceeds: "With this ring I thee wed."

They are prayed over and blest. For good, or for ill, this deed is done. The names are registered; fees fly right and left: they thank, and salute, the curate, whose official coolness melts into a smile of monastic gallantry: the beadle on the steps waves off a gaping world as they issue forth bridegroom and bridesman recklessly scatter gold on him: carriage doors are banged to: the coachmen drive off, and the scene closes, everybody happy.

CHAPTER XXX

And the next moment the bride is weeping as if she would dissolve to one of Dian's Virgin Fountains from the clasp of the Sun-God. She has nobly preserved the mask imposed by comedies, till the curtain has fallen, and now she weeps, streams with tears. Have patience, O impetuous young man! It is your profession to be a hero. This poor heart is new to it, and her duties involve such wild acts, such brigandage, such terrors and tasks, she is quite unnerved. She did you honour till now. Bear with her now. She does not cry the cry of ordinary maidens in like cases. While the struggle went on her tender face was brave; but, alas! Omens are against her: she holds an ever-present dreadful one on that fatal fourth finger of hers, which has coiled itself round her dream of delight, and takes her in its clutch like a horrid serpent. And yet she must love it. She dares not part from it. She must love and hug it, and feed on its strange honey, and all the bliss it gives her casts all the deeper shadow on what is to come.

Say: Is it not enough to cause feminine apprehension, for a woman to be married in another woman's ring?

You are amazons, ladies, at Saragossa, and a thousand citadels—wherever there is strife, and Time is to be taken by the throat. Then shall few men match your sublime fury. But what if you see a vulture, visible only to yourselves, hovering over the house you are gaily led by the torch to inhabit? Will you not crouch and be cowards?

As for the hero, in the hour of victory he pays no heed to omens. He does his best to win his darling to confidence by caresses. Is she not his? Is he not hers? And why, when the battle is won, does she weep? Does she regret what she has done?

Oh, never! never! her soft blue eyes assure him, steadfast love seen swimming on clear depths of faith in them, through the shower.

He is silenced by her exceeding beauty, and sits perplexed waiting for the shower to pass.

Page 344

Alone with Mrs. Berry, in her bedroom, Lucy gave tongue to her distress, and a second character in the comedy changed her face.

“O Mrs. Berry! Mrs. Berry! what has happened! what has happened!”

“My darlin’ child!” The bridal Berry gazed at the finger of doleful joy. “I’d forgot all about it! And that’s what’ve made me feel so queer ever since, then! I’ve been seemin’ as if I wasn’t myself somehow, without my ring. Dear! dear! what a wilful young gentleman! We ain’t a match for men in that state—Lord help us!”

Mrs. Berry sat on the edge of a chair: Lucy on the edge of the bed.

“What do you think of it, Mrs. Berry? Is it not terrible?”

“I can’t say I should ’a liked it myself, my dear,” Mrs. Berry candidly responded.

“Oh! why, why, why did it happen!” the young bride bent to a flood of fresh tears, murmuring that she felt already old—forsaken.

“Haven’t you got a comfort in your religion for all accidents?” Mrs. Berry inquired.

“None for this. I know it’s wrong to cry when I am so happy. I hope he will forgive me.”

Mrs. Berry vowed her bride was the sweetest, softest, beautifulest thing in life.

“I’ll cry no more,” said Lucy. “Leave me, Mrs. Berry, and come back when I ring.”

She drew forth a little silver cross, and fell upon her knees to the bed. Mrs. Berry left the room tiptoe.

When she was called to return, Lucy was calm and tearless, and smiled kindly to her.

“It’s over now,” she said.

Mrs. Berry sedately looked for her ring to follow.

“He does not wish me to go in to the breakfast you have prepared, Mrs. Berry. I begged to be excused. I cannot eat.”

Mrs. Berry very much deplored it, as she had laid out a superior nuptial breakfast, but with her mind on her ring she nodded assentingly.

“We shall not have much packing to do, Mrs. Berry.”

“No, my dear. It’s pretty well all done.”

“We are going to the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Berry.”

“And a very suitable spot ye’ve chose, my dear!”

“He loves the sea. He wishes to be near it.”

“Don’t ye cross to-night, if it’s anyways rough, my dear. It isn’t advisable.” Mrs. Berry sank her voice to say, “Don’t ye be soft and give way to him there, or you’ll both be repenting it.”

Lucy had only been staving off the unpleasantness she had to speak. She saw Mrs. Berry’s eyes pursuing her ring, and screwed up her courage at last.

“Mrs. Berry.”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Mrs. Berry, you shall have another ring.”

“Another, my dear?” Berry did not comprehend. “One’s quite enough for the objeck,” she remarked.

“I mean,” Lucy touched her fourth finger, “I cannot part with this.” She looked straight at Mrs. Berry.

That bewildered creature gazed at her, and at the ring, till she had thoroughly exhausted the meaning of the words, and then exclaimed, horror-struck: “Deary me, now! you don’t say that? You’re to be married again in your own religion.”

Page 345

The young wife repeated: “I can never part with it.”

“But, my dear!” the wretched Berry wrung her hands, divided between compassion and a sense of injury. “My dear!” she kept expostulating like a mute.

“I know all that you would say, Mrs. Berry. I am very grieved to pain you. It is mine now, and must be mine. I cannot give it back.”

There she sat, suddenly developed to the most inflexible little heroine in the three Kingdoms.

From her first perception of the meaning of the young bride’s words, Mrs. Berry, a shrewd physiognomist, knew that her case was hopeless, unless she treated her as she herself had been treated, and seized the ring by force of arms; and that she had not heart for.

“What!” she gasped faintly, “one’s own lawful wedding-ring you wouldn’t give back to a body?”

“Because it is mine, Mrs. Berry. It was yours, but it is mine now. You shall have whatever you ask for but that. Pray, forgive me! It must be so.”

Mrs. Berry rocked on her chair, and sounded her hands together. It amazed her that this soft little creature could be thus firm. She tried argument.

“Don’t ye know, my dear, it’s the fatalest thing you’re inflictin’ upon me, reelly! Don’t ye know that bein’ bereft of one’s own lawful wedding-ring’s the fatalest thing in life, and there’s no prosperity after it! For what stands in place o’ that, when that’s gone, my dear? And what could ye give me to compensate a body for the loss o’ that? Don’t ye know—Oh, deary me!” The little bride’s face was so set that poor Berry wailed off in despair.

“I know it,” said Lucy. “I know it all. I know what I do to you. Dear, dear Mrs. Berry! forgive me! If I parted with my ring I know it would be fatal.”

So this fair young freebooter took possession of her argument as well as her ring.

Berry racked her distracted wits for a further appeal.

“But, my child,” she counter-argued, “you don’t understand. It ain’t as you think. It ain’t a hurt to you now. Not a bit, it ain’t. It makes no difference now! Any ring does while the wearer’s a maid. And your Mr. Richard will find the very ring he intended for ye. And, of course, that’s the one you’ll wear as his wife. It’s all the same now, my dear. It’s no shame to a maid. Now do—now do—there’s a darlin’!”

Wheedling availed as little as argument.

“Mrs. Berry,” said Lucy, “you know what my—he spoke: ’With this ring I thee wed.’ It was with this ring. Then how could it be with another?”

Berry was constrained despondently to acknowledge that was logic.

She hit upon an artful conjecture:

“Won’t it be unlucky your wearin’ of the ring which served me so? Think o’ that!”

“It may! it may! it may!” cried Lucy.

“And arn’t you rushin’ into it, my dear?”

“Mrs. Berry,” Lucy said again, “it was this ring. It cannot—it never can be another. It was this. What it brings me I must bear. I shall wear it till I die!”

Page 346

“Then what am I to do?” the ill-used woman groaned. “What shall I tell my husband when he come back to me, and see I’ve got a new ring waitin’ for him? Won’t that be a welcome?”

Quoth Lucy: “How can he know it is not the same; in a plain gold ring?”

“You never see so keen a eyed man in joolry as my Berry!” returned his solitary spouse. “Not know, my dear? Why, any one would know that’ve got eyes in his head. There’s as much difference in wedding-rings as there’s in wedding people! Now, do pray be reasonable, my own sweet!”

“Pray, do not ask me,” pleads Lucy.

“Pray, do think better of it,” urges Berry.

“Pray, pray, Mrs. Berry!” pleads Lucy.

“—And not leave your old Berry all forlorn just when you’re so happy!”

“Indeed I would not, you dear, kind old creature!” Lucy faltered.

Mrs. Berry thought she had her.

“Just when you’re going to be the happiest wife on earth—all you want yours!” she pursued the tender strain. “A handsome young gentleman! Love and Fortune smilin’ on ye!”—

Lucy rose up.

“Mrs. Berry,” she said, “I think we must not lose time in getting ready, or he will be impatient.”

Poor Berry surveyed her in abject wonder from the edge of her chair. Dignity and resolve were in the ductile form she had hitherto folded under her wing. In an hour the heroine had risen to the measure of the hero. Without being exactly aware what creature she was dealing with, Berry acknowledged to herself it was not one of the common run, and sighed, and submitted.

“It’s like a divorce, that it is!” she sobbed.

After putting the corners of her apron to her eyes, Berry bustled humbly about the packing. Then Lucy, whose heart was full to her, came and kissed her, and Berry bumped down and regularly cried. This over, she had recourse to fatalism.

“I suppose it was to be, my dear! It’s my punishment for meddlin’ wi’ such matters. No, I’m not sorry. Bless ye both. Who’d ’a thought you was so wilful?—you that any one might have taken for one of the silly-softs! You’re a pair, my dear! indeed you are! You was made to meet! But we mustn’t show him we’ve been crying.—Men don’t like it when they’re happy. Let’s wash our faces and try to bear our lot.”

So saying the black-satin bunch careened to a renewed deluge. She deserved some sympathy, for if it is sad to be married in another person’s ring, how much sadder to have one’s own old accustomed lawful ring violently torn off one’s finger and eternally severed from one! But where you have heroes and heroines, these terrible complications ensue.

They had now both fought their battle of the ring, and with equal honour and success.

In the chamber of banquet Richard was giving Ripton his last directions. Though it was a private wedding, Mrs. Berry had prepared a sumptuous breakfast. Chickens offered their breasts: pies hinted savoury secrets: things mystic, in a mash, with Gallic appellatives, jellies, creams, fruits, strewed the table: as a tower in the midst, the cake colossal: the priestly vesture of its nuptial white relieved by hymeneal splendours.

Page 347

Many hours, much labour and anxiety of mind, Mrs. Berry had expended upon this breakfast, and why? There is one who comes to all feasts that have their basis in Folly, whom criminals of trained instinct are careful to provide against: who will speak, and whose hateful voice must somehow be silenced while the feast is going on. This personage is The Philosopher. Mrs. Berry knew him. She knew that he would come. She provided against him in the manner she thought most efficacious: that is, by cheating her eyes and intoxicating her conscience with the due and proper glories incident to weddings where fathers dilate, mothers collapse, and marriage settlements are flourished on high by the family lawyer: and had there been no show of the kind to greet her on her return from the church, she would, and she foresaw she would, have stared at squalor and emptiness, and repented her work. The Philosopher would have laid hold of her by the ear, and called her bad names. Entrenched behind a breakfast-table so legitimately adorned, Mrs. Berry defied him. In the presence of that cake he dared not speak above a whisper. And there were wines to drown him in, should he still think of protesting; fiery wines, and cool: claret sent purposely by the bridegroom for the delectation of his friend.

For one good hour, therefore, the labour of many hours kept him dumb. Ripton was fortifying himself so as to forget him altogether, and the world as well, till the next morning. Ripton was excited, overdone with delight. He had already finished one bottle, and listened, pleasantly flushed, to his emphatic and more abstemious chief. He had nothing to do but to listen, and to drink. The hero would not allow him to shout Victory! or hear a word of toasts; and as, from the quantity of oil poured on it, his eloquence was becoming a natural force in his bosom, the poor fellow was afflicted with a sort of elephantiasis of suppressed emotion. At times he half-rose from his chair, and fell vacuously into it again; or he chuckled in the face of weighty, severely-worded instructions; tapped his chest, stretched his arms, yawned, and in short behaved so singularly that Richard observed it, and said: “On my soul, I don’t think you know a word I’m saying.”

“Every word, Ricky!” Ripton spirted through the opening. “I’m going down to your governor, and tell him: Sir Austin! Here’s your only chance of being a happy father—-no, no!—Oh! don’t you fear me, Ricky! I shall talk the old gentleman over.”

His chief said:

“Look here. You had better not go down to-night. Go down the first thing to-morrow, by the six o’clock train. Give him my letter. Listen to me—give him my letter, and don’t speak a word till he speaks. His eyebrows will go up and down, he won’t say much. I know him. If he asks you about her, don’t be a fool, but say what you think of her sensibly”—

No cork could hold in Ripton when she was alluded to. He shouted: “She’s an angel!”

Page 348

Richard checked him: “Speak sensibly, I say—quietly. You can say how gentle and good she is—my fleur-de-luce! And say, this was not her doing. If any one’s to blame, it’s I. I made her marry me. Then go to Lady Blandish, if you don’t find her at the house. You may say whatever you please to her. Give her my letter, and tell her I want to hear from her immediately. She has seen Lucy, and I know what she thinks of her. You will then go to Farmer Blaize. I told you Lucy happens to be his niece—she has not lived long there. She lived with her aunt Desborough in France while she was a child, and can hardly be called a relative to the farmer—there’s not a point of likeness between them. Poor darling! she never knew her mother. Go to Mr. Blaize, and tell him. You will treat him just as you would treat any other gentleman. If you are civil, he is sure to be. And if he abuses me, for my sake and hers you will still treat him with respect. You hear? And then write me a full account of all that has been said and done. You will have my address the day after to-morrow. By the way, Tom will be here this afternoon. Write out for him where to call on you the day after to-morrow, in case you have heard anything in the morning you think I ought to know at once, as Tom will join me that night. Don’t mention to anybody about my losing the ring, Ripton. I wouldn’t have Adrian get hold of that for a thousand pounds. How on earth I came to lose it! How well she bore it, Rip! How beautifully she behaved!”

Ripton again shouted: “An angel!” Throwing up the heels of his second bottle, he said:

“You may trust your friend, Richard. Aha! when you pulled at old Mrs. Berry I didn’t know what was up. I do wish you’d let me drink her health?”

“Here’s to Penelope!” said Richard, just wetting his mouth. The carriage was at the door: a couple of dire organs, each grinding the same tune, and a vulture-scented itinerant band (from which not the secretest veiled wedding can escape) worked harmoniously without in the production of discord, and the noise acting on his nervous state made him begin to fume and send in messages for his bride by the maid.

By and by the lovely young bride presented herself dressed for her journey, and smiling from stained eyes.

Mrs. Berry was requested to drink some wine, which Ripton poured out for her, enabling Mrs. Berry thereby to measure his condition.

The bride now kissed Mrs. Berry, and Mrs. Berry kissed the bridegroom, on the plea of her softness. Lucy gave Ripton her hand, with a musical “Good-bye, Mr. Thompson,” and her extreme graciousness made him just sensible enough to sit down before he murmured his fervent hopes for her happiness.

“I shall take good care of him,” said Mrs. Berry, focussing her eyes to the comprehension of the company.

“Farewell, Penelope!” cried Richard. “I shall tell the police everywhere to look out for your lord.”

Page 349

“Oh my dears! good-bye, and Heaven bless ye both!”

Berry quavered, touched with compunction at the thoughts of approaching loneliness. Ripton, his mouth drawn like a bow to his ears, brought up the rear to the carriage, receiving a fair slap on the cheek from an old shoe precipitated by Mrs. Berry’s enthusiastic female domestic.

White handkerchiefs were waved, the adieux had fallen to signs: they were off. Then did a thought of such urgency illumine Mrs. Berry, that she telegraphed, hand in air; awakening Ripton’s lungs, for the coachman to stop, and ran back to the house. Richard chafed to be gone, but at his bride’s intercession he consented to wait. Presently they beheld the old black-satin bunch stream through the street-door, down the bit of garden, and up the astonished street; halting, panting, capless at the carriage door, a book in her hand,—a much-used, dog-leaved, steamy, greasy book, which; at the same time calling out in breathless jerks, “There! never ye mind looks! I ain’t got a new one. Read it, and don’t ye forget it!” she discharged into Lucy’s lap, and retreated to the railings, a signal for the coachman to drive away for good.

How Richard laughed at the Berry’s bridal gift! Lucy, too, lost the omen at her heart as she glanced at the title of the volume. It was Dr. Kitchener on Domestic Cookery!

CHAPTER XXXI

General withdrawing of heads from street-windows, emigration of organs and bands, and a relaxed atmosphere in the circle of Mrs. Berry’s abode, proved that Dan Cupid had veritably flown to suck the life of fresh regions. With a pensive mind she grasped Ripton’s arm to regulate his steps, and returned to the room where her creditor awaited her. In the interval he had stormed her undefended fortress, the cake, from which altitude he shook a dolorous head at the guilty woman. She smoothed her excited apron, sighing. Let no one imagine that she regretted her complicity. She was ready to cry torrents, but there must be absolute castigation before this criminal shall conceive the sense of regret; and probably then she will cling to her wickedness the more—such is the born Pagan’s tenacity! Mrs. Berry sighed, and gave him back his shake of the head. O you wanton, improvident creature! said he. O you very wise old gentleman! said she. He asked her the thing she had been doing. She enlightened him with the fatalist’s reply. He sounded a bogey’s alarm of contingent grave results. She retreated to the entrenched camp of the fact she had helped to make.

“It’s done!” she exclaimed. How could she regret what she felt comfort to know was done? Convinced that events alone could stamp a mark on such stubborn flesh, he determined to wait for them, and crouched silent on the cake, with one finger downwards at Ripton’s incision there, showing a crumbling chasm and gloomy rich recess.

The eloquent indication was understood. “Dear! dear!” cried Mrs. Berry, “what a heap o’ cake, and no one to send it to!”

Page 350

Ripton had resumed his seat by the table and his embrace of the claret. Clear ideas of satisfaction had left him and resolved to a boiling geysir of indistinguishable transports. He bubbled, and waggled, and nodded amicably to nothing, and successfully, though not without effort, preserved his uppermost member from the seductions of the nymph, Gravitation, who was on the look-out for his whole length shortly.

“Ha! ha!” he shouted, about a minute after Mrs. Berry had spoken, and almost abandoned himself to the nymph on the spot. Mrs. Berry’s words had just reached his wits.

“Why do you laugh, young man?” she inquired, familiar and motherly on account of his condition.

Ripton laughed louder, and caught his chest on the edge of the table and his nose on a chicken. “That’s goo’!” he said, recovering, and rocking under Mrs. Berry’s eyes. “No friend!”

“I did not say, no friend,” she remarked. “I said, no one; meanin’, I know not where for to send it to.”

Ripton’s response to this was: You put a Griffin on that cake. Wheatsheaves each side.”

“His crest?” Mrs. Berry said sweetly.

“Oldest baronetcy ’n England!” waved Ripton.

“Yes?” Mrs. Berry encouraged him on.

“You think he’s Richards. We’re oblige’ be very close. And she’s the most lovely!—If I hear man say thing ’gainst her.”

“You needn’t for to cry over her, young man,” said Mrs. Berry. “I wanted for to drink their right healths by their right names, and then go about my day’s work, and I do hope you won’t keep me.”

Ripton stood bolt upright at her words.

“You do?” he said, and filling a bumper he with cheerfully vinous articulation and glibness of tongue proposed the health of Richard and Lucy Feverel, of Raynham Abbey! and that mankind should not require an expeditious example of the way to accept the inspiring toast, he drained his bumper at a gulp. It finished him. The farthing rushlight of his reason leapt and expired. He tumbled to the sofa and there stretched.

Some minutes subsequent to Ripton's signalization of his devotion to the bridal pair, Mrs. Berry's maid entered the room to say that a gentleman was inquiring below after the young gentleman who had departed, and found her mistress with a tottering wineglass in her hand, exhibiting every symptom of unconsoled hysterics. Her mouth gaped, as if the fell creditor had her by the swallow. She ejaculated with horrible exultation that she had been and done it, as her disastrous aspect seemed to testify, and her evident, but inexplicable, access of misery induced the sympathetic maid to tender those caressing words that were all Mrs. Berry wanted to go off into the self-caressing fit without delay; and she had already given the preluding demoniac ironic outburst, when the maid called heaven to witness that the gentleman would hear her; upon which Mrs. Berry violently controlled her bosom, and ordered that he should be shown upstairs instantly to see her the wretch she was. She repeated the injunction.

Page 351

The maid did as she was told, and Mrs. Berry, wishing first to see herself as she was, mutely accosted the looking-glass, and tried to look a very little better. She dropped a shawl on Ripton and was settled, smoothing her agitation when her visitor was announced.

The gentleman was Adrian Harley. An interview with Tom Bakewell had put him on the track, and now a momentary survey of the table, and its white-vestured cake, made him whistle.

Mrs. Berry plaintively begged him to do her the favour to be seated.

“A fine morning, ma’am,” said Adrian.

“It have been!” Mrs. Berry answered, glancing over her shoulder at the window, and gulping as if to get her heart down from her mouth.

“A very fine Spring,” pursued Adrian, calmly anatomizing her countenance.

Mrs. Berry smothered an adjective to “weather” on a deep sigh. Her wretchedness was palpable. In proportion to it, Adrian waned cheerful and brisk. He divined enough of the business to see that there was some strange intelligence to be fished out of the culprit who sat compressing hysterics before him; and as he was never more in his element than when he had a sinner, and a repentant prostrate abject sinner in hand, his affable countenance might well deceive poor Berry.

“I presume these are Mr. Thompson’s lodgings?” he remarked, with a look at the table.

Mrs. Berry’s head and the whites of her eyes informed him that they were not Mr. Thompson’s lodgings.

“No?” said Adrian, and threw a carelessly inquisitive eye about him. “Mr. Feverel is out, I suppose?”

A convulsive start at the name, and two corroborating hands dropped on her knees, formed Mrs. Berry’s reply.

“Mr. Feverel’s man,” continued Adrian, “told me I should be certain to find him here. I thought he would be with his friend, Mr. Thompson. I’m too late, I perceive. Their entertainment is over. I fancy you have been having a party of them here, ma’am?—a bachelors’ breakfast!”

In the presence of that cake this observation seemed to mask an irony so shrewd that Mrs. Berry could barely contain herself. She felt she must speak. Making her face as deplorably propitiating as she could, she began:

“Sir, may I beg for to know your name?”

Mr. Harley accorded her request.

Groaning in the clutch of a pitiless truth, she continued:

“And you are Mr. Harley, that was—oh! and you’ve come for Mr.?”—

Mr. Richard Feverel was the gentleman Mr. Harley had come for.

“Oh! and it’s no mistake, and he’s of Raynham Abbey?” Mrs. Berry inquired.

Adrian, very much amused, assured her that he was born and bred there.

“His father’s Sir Austin?” wailed the black-satin bunch from behind her handkerchief.

Adrian verified Richard’s descent.

“Oh, then, what have I been and done!” she cried, and stared blankly at her visitor. “I been and married my baby! I been and married the bread out of my own mouth. O Mr. Harley! Mr. Harley! I knew you when you was a boy that big, and wore jackets; and all of you. And it’s my softness that’s my ruin, for I never can resist a man’s asking. Look at that cake, Mr. Harley!”

Page 352

Adrian followed her directions quite coolly. “Wedding-cake, ma’am!” he said.

“Bride-cake it is, Mr. Harley!”

“Did you make it yourself, ma’am?”

The quiet ease of the question overwhelmed Mrs. Berry and upset that train of symbolic representations by which she was seeking to make him guess the catastrophe and spare her the furnace of confession.

“I did not make it myself, Mr. Harley,” she replied. “It’s a bought cake, and I’m a lost woman. Little I dreamed when I had him in my arms a baby that I should some day be marrying him out of my own house! I little dreamed that! Oh, why did he come to me! Don’t you remember his old nurse, when he was a baby in arms, that went away so sudden, and no fault of hers, Mr. Harley! The very mornin’ after the night you got into Mr. Benson’s cellar, and got so tipsy on his Madeary—I remember it as clear as yesterday!—and Mr. Benson was that angry he threatened to use the whip to you, and I helped put you to bed. I’m that very woman.”

Adrian smiled placidly at these reminiscences of his guileless youthful life.

“Well, ma’am! well?” he said. He would bring her to the furnace.

“Won’t you see it all, kind sir?” Mrs. Berry appealed to him in pathetic dumb show.

Doubtless by this time Adrian did see it all, and was mentally cursing at Folly, and reckoning the immediate consequences, but he looked uninstructed, his peculiar dimple-smile was undisturbed, his comfortable full-bodied posture was the same. “Well, ma’am?” he spurred her on.

Mrs. Berry burst forth: “It were done this mornin’, Mr. Harley, in the church, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to, by licence.”

Adrian was now obliged to comprehend a case of matrimony. “Oh!” he said, like one who is as hard as facts, and as little to be moved: “Somebody was married this morning; was it Mr. Thompson, or Mr. Feverel?”

Mrs. Berry shuffled up to Ripton, and removed the shawl from him, saying: “Do he look like a new married bridegroom, Mr. Harley?”

Adrian inspected the oblivious Ripton with philosophic gravity.

“This young gentleman was at church this morning?” he asked.

“Oh! quite reasonable and proper then,” Mrs. Berry begged him to understand.

“Of course, ma’am.” Adrian lifted and let fall the stupid inanimate limbs of the gone wretch, puckering his mouth queerly. “You were all reasonable and proper, ma’am. The principal male performer, then, is my cousin, Mr. Feverel? He was married by you, this morning, by licence at your parish church, and came here, and ate a hearty breakfast, and left intoxicated.”

Mrs. Berry flew out. “He never drink a drop, sir. A more moderate young gentleman you never see. Oh! don’t ye think that now, Mr. Harley. He was as upright and master of his mind as you be.”

“Ay!” the wise youth nodded thanks to her for the comparison, “I mean the other form of intoxication.”

Page 353

Mrs. Berry sighed. She could say nothing on that score.

Adrian desired her to sit down, and compose herself, and tell him circumstantially what had been done.

She obeyed, in utter perplexity at his perfectly composed demeanour.

Mrs. Berry, as her recital declared, was no other than that identical woman who once in old days had dared to behold the baronet behind his mask, and had ever since lived in exile from the Raynham world on a little pension regularly paid to her as an indemnity. She was that woman, and the thought of it made her almost accuse Providence for the betraying excess of softness it had endowed her with. How was she to recognize her baby grown a man? He came in a feigned name; not a word of the family was mentioned. He came like an ordinary mortal, though she felt something more than ordinary to him—she knew she did. He came bringing a beautiful young lady, and on what grounds could she turn her back on them? Why, seeing that all was chaste and legal, why should she interfere to make them unhappy—so few the chances of happiness in this world! Mrs. Berry related the seizure of her ring.

“One wrench,” said the sobbing culprit, “one, and my ring was off!”

She had no suspicions, and the task of writing her name in the vestry-book had been too enacting for a thought upon the other signatures.

“I daresay you were exceedingly sorry for what you had done,” said Adrian.

“Indeed, sir,” moaned Berry, “I were, and am.”

“And would do your best to rectify the mischief—eh, ma’am?”

“Indeed, and indeed, sir, I would,” she protested solemnly.

“—As, of course, you should—knowing the family. Where may these lunatics have gone to spend the Moon?”

Mrs. Berry swimmingly replied: “To the Isle—I don’t quite know, sir!” she snapped the indication short, and jumped out of the pit she had fallen into. Repentant as she might be, those dears should not be pursued and cruelly balked of their young bliss! “To-morrow, if you please, Mr. Harley: not to-day!”

“A pleasant spot,” Adrian observed, smiling at his easy prey.

By a measurement of dates he discovered that the bridegroom had brought his bride to the house on the day he had quitted Raynham, and this was enough to satisfy Adrian’s

mind that there had been concoction and chicanery. Chance, probably, had brought him to the old woman: chance certainly had not brought him to the young one.

“Very well, ma’am,” he said, in answer to her petitions for his favourable offices with Sir Austin in behalf of her little pension and the bridal pair, “I will tell him you were only a blind agent in the affair, being naturally soft, and that you trust he will bless the consummation. He will be in town to-morrow morning; but one of you two must see him to-night. An emetic kindly administered will set our friend here on his legs. A bath and a clean shirt, and he might go. I don’t see why your name should appear at all. Brush him up, and send him to Bellingham by the seven o’clock train. He will find his way to Raynham; he knows the neighbourhood best in the dark. Let him go and state the case. Remember, one of you must go.”

Page 354

With this fair prospect of leaving a choice of a perdition between the couple of unfortunates, for them to fight and lose all their virtues over, Adrian said, “Good morning.”

Mrs. Berry touchingly arrested him. “You won’t refuse a piece of his cake, Mr. Harley?”

“Oh, dear, no, ma’am,” Adrian turned to the cake with alacrity. “I shall claim a very large piece. Richard has a great many friends who will rejoice to eat his wedding-cake. Cut me a fair quarter, Mrs. Berry. Put it in paper, if you please. I shall be delighted to carry it to them, and apportion it equitably according to their several degrees of relationship.”

Mrs. Berry cut the cake. Somehow, as she sliced through it, the sweetness and hapless innocence of the bride was presented to her, and she launched into eulogies of Lucy, and clearly showed how little she regretted her conduct. She vowed that they seemed made for each other; that both, were beautiful; both had spirit; both were innocent; and to part them, or make them unhappy, would be, Mrs. Berry wrought herself to cry aloud, oh, such a pity!

Adrian listened to it as the expression of a matter-of-fact opinion. He took the huge quarter of cake, nodded multitudinous promises, and left Mrs. Berry to bless his good heart.

“So dies the System!” was Adrian’s comment in the street. “And now let prophets roar! He dies respectably in a marriage-bed, which is more than I should have foretold of the monster. Meantime,” he gave the cake a dramatic tap, “I’ll go sow nightmares.”

CHAPTER XXXII

Adrian really bore the news he had heard with creditable disinterestedness, and admirable repression of anything beneath the dignity of a philosopher. When one has attained that felicitous point of wisdom from which one sees all mankind to be fools, the diminutive objects may make what new moves they please, one does not marvel at them: their sedateness is as comical as their frolic, and their frenzies more comical still. On this intellectual eminence the wise youth had built his castle, and he had lived in it from an early period. Astonishment never shook the foundations, nor did envy of greater heights tempt him to relinquish the security of his stronghold, for he saw none. Jugglers he saw running up ladders that overtopped him, and air-balloons scaling the empyrean; but the former came precipitately down again, and the latter were at the mercy of the winds; while he remained tranquil on his solid unambitious ground, fitting his morality to the laws, his conscience to his morality, his comfort to his conscience. Not that voluntarily he cut himself off from his fellows: on the contrary, his sole amusement was their society. Alone he was rather dull, as a man who beholds but one

thing must naturally be. Study of the animated varieties of that one thing excited him sufficiently to think life a pleasant play; and the faculties he had forfeited

Page 355

to hold his elevated position he could serenely enjoy by contemplation of them in others. Thus:—wonder at Master Richard's madness: though he himself did not experience it, he was eager to mark the effect on his beloved relatives. As he carried along his vindictive hunch of cake, he shaped out their different attitudes of amaze, bewilderment, horror; passing by some personal chagrin in the prospect. For his patron had projected a journey, commencing with Paris, culminating on the Alps, and lapsing in Rome: a delightful journey to show Richard the highways of History and tear him from the risk of further ignoble fascinations, that his spirit might be altogether bathed in freshness and revived. This had been planned during Richard's absence to surprise him.

Now the dream of travel was to Adrian what the love of woman is to the race of young men. It supplanted that foolishness. It was his Romance, as we say; that buoyant anticipation on which in youth we ride the airs, and which, as we wax older and too heavy for our atmosphere, hardens to the Hobby, which, if an obstinate animal, is a safer horse, and conducts man at a slower pace to the sexton. Adrian had never travelled. He was aware that his romance was earthly and had discomforts only to be evaded by the one potent talisman possessed by his patron. His Alp would hardly be grand to him without an obsequious landlord in the foreground: he must recline on Mammon's imperial cushions in order to moralize becomingly on the ancient world. The search for pleasure at the expense of discomfort, as frantic lovers woo their mistresses to partake the shelter of a but and batten on a crust, Adrian deemed the bitterness of beggarliness. Let his sweet mistress be given him in the pomp and splendour due to his superior emotions, or not at all. Consequently the wise youth had long nursed an ineffectual passion, and it argued a great nature in him, that at the moment when his wishes were to be crowned, he should look with such slight touches of spleen at the gorgeous composite fabric of Parisian cookery and Roman antiquities crumbling into unsubstantial mockery. Assuredly very few even of the philosophers would have turned away uncomplainingly to meaner delights the moment after.

Hippias received the first portion of the cake.

He was sitting by the window in his hotel, reading. He had fought down his breakfast with more than usual success, and was looking forward to his dinner at the Foreys' with less than usual timidity.

"Ah! glad you've come, Adrian," he said, and expanded his chest. "I was afraid I should have to ride down. This is kind of you. We'll walk down together through the park. It's absolutely dangerous to walk alone in these streets. My opinion is, that orange-peel lasts all through the year now, and will till legislation puts a stop to it. I give you my word I slipped on a piece of orange-peel yesterday afternoon in Piccadilly, and I thought I was down! I saved myself by a miracle."

Page 356

“You have an appetite, I hope?” asked Adrian.

“I think I shall get one, after a bit of a walk,” chirped Hippias. “Yes. I think I feel hungry now.”

“Charmed to hear it,” said Adrian, and began unpinning his parcel on his knees. “How should you define Folly?” he checked the process to inquire.

“Hm!” Hippias meditated; he prided himself on being oracular when such questions were addressed to him. “I think I should define it to be a slide.”

“Very good definition. In other words, a piece of orange-peel; once on it, your life and limbs are in danger, and you are saved by a miracle. You must present that to the Pilgrim. And the monument of folly, what would that be?”

Hippias meditated anew. “All the human race on one another’s shoulders.” He chuckled at the sweeping sourness of the instance.

“Very good,” Adrian applauded, “or in default of that, some symbol of the thing, say; such as this of which I have here brought you a chip.”

Adrian displayed the quarter of the cake.

“This is the monument made portable—eh?”

“Cake!” cried Hippias, retreating to his chair to dramatize his intense disgust. “You’re right of them that eat it. If I—if I don’t mistake,” he peered at it, “the noxious composition bedizened in that way is what they call wedding-cake. It’s arrant poison! Who is it you want to kill? What are you carrying such stuff about for?”

Adrian rang the bell for a knife. “To present you with your due and proper portion. You will have friends and relatives, and can’t be saved from them, not even by miracle. It is a habit which exhibits, perhaps, the unconscious inherent cynicism of the human mind, for people who consider that they have reached the acme of mundane felicity, to distribute this token of esteem to their friends, with the object probably” (he took the knife from a waiter and went to the table to slice the cake) “of enabling those friends (these edifices require very delicate incision—each particular currant and subtle condiment hangs to its neighbour—a wedding-cake is evidently the most highly civilized of cakes, and partakes of the evils as well as the advantages of civilization!)—I was saying, they send us these love-tokens, no doubt (we shall have to weigh out the crumbs, if each is to have his fair share) that we may the better estimate their state of bliss by passing some hours in purgatory. This, as far as I can apportion it without weights and scales, is your share, my uncle!”

He pushed the corner of the table bearing the cake towards Hippias.

“Get away!” Hippias vehemently motioned, and started from his chair. “I’ll have none of it, I tell you! It’s death! It’s fifty times worse than that beastly compound Christmas pudding! What fool has been doing this, then? Who dares send me cake? Me! It’s an insult.”

Page 357

“You are not compelled to eat any before dinner,” said Adrian, pointing the corner of the table after him, “but your share you must take, and appear to consume. One who has done so much to bring about the marriage cannot in conscience refuse his allotment of the fruits. Maidens, I hear, first cook it under their pillows, and extract nuptial dreams therefrom—said to be of a lighter class, taken that way. It’s a capital cake, and, upon my honour, you have helped to make it—you have indeed! So here it is.”

The table again went at Hippias. He ran nimbly round it, and flung himself on a sofa exhausted, crying: “There!... My appetite’s gone for to-day!”

“Then shall I tell Richard that you won’t touch a morsel of his cake?” said Adrian, leaning on his two hands over the table and looking at his uncle.

“Richard?”

“Yes, your nephew: my cousin: Richard! Your companion since you’ve been in town. He’s married, you know. Married this morning at Kensington parish church, by licence, at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to. Married, and gone to spend his honeymoon in the Isle of Wight, a very delectable place for a month’s residence. I have to announce to you that, thanks to your assistance, the experiment is launched, sir!”

“Richard married!”

There was something to think and to say in objection to it, but the wits of poor Hippias were softened by the shock. His hand travelled half-way to his forehead, spread out to smooth the surface of that seat of reason, and then fell.

“Surely you knew all about it? you were so anxious to have him in town under your charge....”

“Married?” Hippias jumped up—he had it. “Why, he’s under age! he’s an infant.”

“So he is. But the infant is not the less married. Fib like a man and pay your fee—what does it matter? Any one who is breeched can obtain a licence in our noble country. And the interests of morality demand that it should not be difficult. Is it true—can you persuade anybody that you have known nothing about it?”

“Ha! infamous joke! I wish, sir, you would play your pranks on somebody else,” said Hippias, sternly, as he sank back on the sofa. “You’ve done me up for the day, I can assure you.”

Adrian sat down to instil belief by gentle degrees, and put an artistic finish to the work. He had the gratification of passing his uncle through varied contortions, and at last Hippias perspired in conviction, and exclaimed, “This accounts for his conduct to me.

That boy must have a cunning nothing short of infernal! I feel...I feel it just here, he drew a hand along his midriff.

“I’m not equal to this world of fools,” he added faintly, and shut his eyes. “No, I can’t dine. Eat? ha!...no. Go without me!”

Shortly after, Hippias went to bed, saying to himself, as he undressed, “See what comes of our fine schemes! Poor Austin!” and as the pillow swelled over his ears, “I’m not sure that a day’s fast won’t do me good.” The Dyspepsy had bought his philosophy at a heavy price; he had a right to use it.

Page 358

Adrian resumed the procession of the cake.

He sighted his melancholy uncle Algernon hunting an appetite in the Row, and looking as if the hope ahead of him were also one-legged. The Captain did not pass with out querying the ungainly parcel.

“I hope I carry it ostentatiously enough?” said Adrian.

“Enclosed is wherewithal to quiet the alarm of the land. Now may the maids and wives of Merry England sleep secure. I had half a mind to fix it on a pole, and engage a band to parade it. This is our dear Richard’s wedding-cake. Married at half-past eleven this morning, by licence, at the Kensington parish church; his own ring being lost he employed the ring of his beautiful bride’s lachrymose land-lady, she standing adjacent by the altar. His farewell to you as a bachelor, and hers as a maid, you can claim on the spot if you think proper, and digest according to your powers.”

Algernon let off steam in a whistle. “Thompson, the solicitor’s daughter!” he said. “I met them the other day, somewhere about here. He introduced me to her. A pretty little baggage.

“No.” Adrian set him right. “’Tis a Miss Desborough, a Roman Catholic dairymaid. Reminds one of pastoral England in the time of the Plantagenets! He’s quite equal to introducing her as Thompson’s daughter, and himself as Beelzebub’s son. However, the wild animal is in Hymen’s chains, and the cake is cut. Will you have your morsel?”

“Oh, by all means!—not now.” Algernon had an unwonted air of reflection.—“Father know it?”

“Not yet. He will to-night by nine o’clock.”

“Then I must see him by seven. Don’t say you met me.” He nodded, and pricked his horse.

“Wants money!” said Adrian, putting the combustible he carried once more in motion.

The women were the crowning joy of his contemplative mind. He had reserved them for his final discharge. Dear demonstrative creatures! Dyspepsia would not weaken their poignant outcries, or self-interest check their fainting fits. On the generic woman one could calculate. Well might The Pilgrim’s Scrip say of her that, “She is always at Nature’s breast”; not intending it as a compliment. Each woman is Eve throughout the ages; whereas the Pilgrim would have us believe that the Adam in men has become warier, if not wiser; and weak as he is, has learnt a lesson from time. Probably the Pilgrim’s meaning may be taken to be, that Man grows, and Woman does not.

At any rate, Adrian hoped for such natural choruses as you hear in the nursery when a bauble is lost. He was awake to Mrs. Doria's maternal predestinations, and guessed that Clare stood ready with the best form of filial obedience. They were only a poor couple to gratify his Mephistophelian humour, to be sure, but Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty, and they would proclaim the diverse ways with which maidenhood and womanhood took disappointment, while the surrounding Forey girls and other females of the family assembly were expected to develop the finer shades and tapering edges of an agitation to which no woman could be cold.

Page 359

All went well. He managed cleverly to leave the cake unchallenged in a conspicuous part of the drawing-room, and stepped gaily down to dinner. Much of the conversation adverted to Richard. Mrs. Doria asked him if he had seen the youth, or heard of him.

“Seen him? no! Heard of him? yes!” said Adrian. “I have heard of him. I heard that he was sublimely happy, and had eaten such a breakfast that dinner was impossible; claret and cold chicken, cake and”—

“Cake at breakfast!” they all interjected.

“That seems to be his fancy just now.”

“What an extraordinary taste!”

“You know, he is educated on a System.”

One fast young male Forey allied the System and the cake in a miserable pun. Adrian, a hater of puns, looked at him, and held the table silent, as if he were going to speak; but he said nothing, and the young gentleman vanished from the conversation in a blush, extinguished by his own spark.

Mrs. Doria peevishly exclaimed, “Oh! fish-cake, I suppose! I wish he understood a little better the obligations of relationship.”

“Whether he understands them, I can’t say,” observed Adrian, “but I assure you he is very energetic in extending them.”

The wise youth talked innuendoes whenever he had an opportunity, that his dear relative might be rendered sufficiently inflammable by and by at the aspect of the cake; but he was not thought more than commonly mysterious and deep.

“Was his appointment at the house of those Grandison people?” Mrs. Doria asked, with a hostile upper-lip.

Adrian warmed the blindfolded parties by replying, “Do they keep a beadle at the door?”

Mrs. Doria’s animosity to Mrs. Grandison made her treat this as a piece of satirical ingenuousness. “I daresay they do,” she said.

“And a curate on hand?”

“Oh, I should think a dozen!”

Old Mr. Forey advised his punning grandson Clarence to give that house a wide berth, where he might be disposed of and dished-up at a moment's notice, and the scent ran off at a jest.

The Foreys gave good dinners, and with the old gentleman the excellent old fashion remained in permanence of trooping off the ladies as soon as they had taken their sustenance and just exchanged a smile with the flowers and the dessert, when they rose to fade with a beautiful accord, and the gallant males breathed under easier waistcoats, and settled to the business of the table, sure that an hour for unbosoming and imbibing was their own. Adrian took a chair by Brandon Forey, a barrister of standing.

"I want to ask you," he said, "whether an infant in law can legally bind himself."

"If he's old enough to affix his signature to an instrument, I suppose he can," yawned Brandon.

"Is he responsible for his acts?"

"I've no doubt we could hang him."

"Then what he could do for himself, you could do for him?"

Page 360

“Not quite so much; pretty near.”

“For instance, he can marry?”

“That’s not a criminal case, you know.”

“And the marriage is valid?”

“You can dispute it.”

“Yes, and the Greeks and the Trojans can fight. It holds then?”

“Both water and fire!”

The patriarch of the table sang out to Adrian that he stopped the vigorous circulation of the claret.

“Dear me, sir!” said Adrian, “I beg pardon. The circumstances must excuse me. The fact is, my cousin Richard got married to a dairymaid this morning, and I wanted to know whether it held in law.”

It was amusing to watch the manly coolness with which the announcement was taken. Nothing was heard more energetic than, “Deuce he has!” and, “A dairymaid!”

“I thought it better to let the ladies dine in peace,” Adrian continued. “I wanted to be able to console my aunt”—

“Well, but—well, but,” the old gentleman, much the most excited, puffed—“eh, Brandon? He’s a boy, this young ass! Do you mean to tell me a boy can go and marry when he pleases, and any troll he pleases, and the marriage is good? If I thought that I’d turn every woman off my premises. I would! from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. I’d have no woman near him till—till”—

“Till the young greenhorn was grey, sir?” suggested Brandon.

“Till he knew what women are made of, sir!” the old gentleman finished his sentence vehemently. “What, d’ye think, will Feverel say to it, Mr. Adrian?”

“He has been trying the very System you have proposed sir—one that does not reckon on the powerful action of curiosity on the juvenile intelligence. I’m afraid it’s the very worst way of solving the problem.”

“Of course it is,” said Clarence. “None but a fool!”—

“At your age,” Adrian relieved his embarrassment, “it is natural, my dear Clarence, that you should consider the idea of an isolated or imprisoned manhood something monstrous, and we do not expect you to see what amount of wisdom it contains. You follow one extreme, and we the other. I don’t say that a middle course exists. The history of mankind shows our painful efforts to find one, but they have invariably resolved themselves into asceticism, or laxity, acting and reacting. The moral question is, if a naughty little man, by reason of his naughtiness, releases himself from foolishness, does a foolish little man, by reason of his foolishness, save himself from naughtiness?”

A discussion, peculiar to men of the world, succeeded the laugh at Mr. Clarence. Then coffee was handed round and the footman informed Adrian, in a low voice, that Mrs. Doria Forey particularly wished to speak with him. Adrian preferred not to go in alone. “Very well,” he said, and sipped his coffee. They talked on, sounding the depths of law in Brandon Forey, and receiving nought but hollow echoes from that profound cavity. He would not affirm that the marriage was invalid: he would not affirm that it could not be annulled. He thought not: still he thought it would be worth trying. A consummated and a non-consummated union were two different things....

Page 361

“Dear me!” said Adrian, “does the Law recognize that? Why, that’s almost human!”

Another message was brought to Adrian that Mrs. Doria Forey very particularly wished to speak with him.

“What can be the matter?” he exclaimed, pleased to have his faith in woman strengthened. The cake had exploded, no doubt.

So it proved, when the gentlemen joined the fair society. All the younger ladies stood about the table, whereon the cake stood displayed, gaps being left for those sitting to feast their vision, and intrude the comments and speculations continually arising from fresh shocks of wonder at the unaccountable apparition. Entering with the half-guilty air of men who know they have come from a grosser atmosphere, the gallant males also ranged themselves round the common object of curiosity.

“Here! Adrian!” Mrs. Doria cried. “Where is Adrian? Pray, come here. Tell me! Where did this cake come from? Whose is it? What does it do here? You know all about it, for you brought it. Clare saw you bring it into the room. What does it mean? I insist upon a direct answer. Now do not make me impatient, Adrian.”

Certainly Mrs. Doria was equal to twenty. By her concentrated rapidity and volcanic complexion it was evident that suspicion had kindled.

“I was really bound to bring it,” Adrian protested.

“Answer me!”

The wise youth bowed: “Categorically. This cake came from the house of a person, a female, of the name of Berry. It belongs to you partly, partly to me, partly to Clare, and to the rest of our family, on the principle of equal division for which purpose it is present....”

“Yes! Speak!”

“It means, my dear aunt, what that kind of cake usually does mean.”

“This, then, is the Breakfast! And the ring! Adrian! where is Richard?”

Mrs. Doria still clung to unbelief in the monstrous horror.

But when Adrian told her that Richard had left town, her struggling hope sank. “The wretched boy has ruined himself!” she said, and sat down trembling.

Oh! that System! The delicate vituperations gentle ladies use instead of oaths, Mrs. Doria showered on that System. She hesitated not to say that her brother had got what

he deserved. Opinionated, morbid, weak, justice had overtaken him. Now he would see! but at what a price! at what a sacrifice!

Mrs. Doria, commanded Adrian to confirm her fears.

Sadly the wise youth recapitulated Berry's words. "He was married this morning at half-past eleven of the clock, or twenty to twelve, by licence, at the Kensington parish church."

"Then that was his appointment!" Mrs. Doria murmured.

"That was the cake for breakfast!" breathed a second of her sex.

"And it was his ring!" exclaimed a third.

The men were silent, and made long faces.

Clare stood cold and sedate. She and her mother avoided each other's eyes.

Page 362

“Is it that abominable country person, Adrian?”

“The happy damsel is, I regret to say, the Papist dairymaid,” said Adrian, in sorrowful but deliberate accents.

Then arose a feminine hum, in the midst of which Mrs. Doria cried, “Brandon!” She was a woman of energy. Her thoughts resolved to action spontaneously.

“Brandon,” she drew the barrister a little aside, “can they not be followed, and separated? I want your advice. Cannot we separate them? A boy! it is really shameful if he should be allowed to fall into the toils of a designing creature to ruin himself irrevocably. Can we not, Brandon?”

The worthy barrister felt inclined to laugh, but he answered her entreaties: “From what I hear of the young groom I should imagine the office perilous.”

“I’m speaking of law, Brandon. Can we not obtain an order from one of your Courts to pursue them and separate them instantly?”

“This evening?”

“Yes!”

Brandon was sorry to say she decidedly could not.

“You might call on one of your Judges, Brandon.”

Brandon assured her that the Judges were a hard-worked race, and to a man slept heavily after dinner.

“Will you do so to-morrow, the first thing in the morning? Will you promise me to do so, Brandon?—Or a magistrate! A magistrate would send a policeman after them. My dear Brandon! I beg—I beg you to assist us in this dreadful extremity. It will be the death of my poor brother. I believe he would forgive anything but this. You have no idea what his notions are of blood.”

Brandon tipped Adrian a significant nod to step in and aid.

“What is it, aunt?” asked the wise youth. “You want them followed and torn asunder by wild policemen?”

“To-morrow!” Brandon queerly interposed.

“Won’t that be—just too late?” Adrian suggested.

Mrs. Doria, sighed out her last spark of hope.

“You see,” said Adrian....

“Yes! yes!” Mrs. Doria did not require any of his elucidations. “Pray be quiet, Adrian, and let me speak. Brandon! it cannot be! it’s quite impossible! Can you stand there and tell me that boy is legally married? I never will believe it! The law cannot be so shamefully bad as to permit a boy—a mere child—to do such absurd things. Grandpapa!” she beckoned to the old gentleman. “Grandpapa! pray do make Brandon speak. These lawyers never will. He might stop it, if he would. If I were a man, do you think I would stand here?”

“Well, my dear,” the old gentleman toddled to compose her, “I’m quite of your opinion. I believe he knows no more than you or I. My belief is they none of them know anything till they join issue and go into Court. I want to see a few female lawyers.”

“To encourage the bankrupt perruquier, sir?” said Adrian. “They would have to keep a large supply of wigs on hand.”

Page 363

“And you can jest, Adrian!” his aunt reproached him. “But I will not be beaten. I know—I am firmly convinced that no law would ever allow a boy to disgrace his family and ruin himself like that, and nothing shall persuade me that it is so. Now, tell me, Brandon, and pray do speak in answer to my questions, and please to forget you are dealing with a woman. Can my nephew be rescued from the consequences of his folly? Is what he has done legitimate? Is he bound for life by what he has done while a boy?

“Well—a,” Brandon breathed through his teeth. “A—hm! the matter’s so very delicate, you see, Helen.”

“You’re to forget that,” Adrian remarked.

“A—hm! well!” pursued Brandon. “Perhaps if you could arrest and divide them before nightfall, and make affidavit of certain facts"...

“Yes?” the eager woman hastened his lagging mouth.

“Well...hm! a...in that case...a... Or if a lunatic, you could prove him to have been of unsound mind."...

“Oh! there’s no doubt of his madness on my mind, Brandon.”

“Yes! well! in that case... Or if of different religious persuasions"...

“She is a Catholic!” Mrs. Doria joyfully interjected.

“Yes! well! in that case...objections might be taken to the form of the marriage... Might be proved fictitious... Or if he’s under, say, eighteen years"...

“He can’t be much more,” cried Mrs. Doria. “I think,” she appeared to reflect, and then faltered imploringly to Adrian, “What is Richard’s age?”

The kind wise youth could not find it in his heart to strike away the phantom straw she caught at.

“Oh! about that, I should fancy,” he muttered; and found it necessary at the same time to duck and turn his head for concealment. Mrs. Doria surpassed his expectations.

“Yes I well, then...” Brandon was resuming with a shrug, which was meant to say he still pledged himself to nothing, when Clare’s voice was heard from out the buzzing circle of her cousins: “Richard is nineteen years and six months old to-day, mama.”

“Nonsense, child.”

“He is, mama.” Clare’s voice was very steadfast.

“Nonsense, I tell you. How can you know?”

“Richard is one year and nine months older than me, mama.”

Mrs. Doria fought the fact by years and finally by months. Clare was too strong for her.

“Singular child!” she mentally apostrophized the girl who scornfully rejected straws while drowning.

“But there’s the religion still!” she comforted herself, and sat down to cogitate.

The men smiled and looked vacuous.

Page 364

Music was proposed. There are times when soft music hath not charms; when it is put to as base uses as Imperial Caesar's dust and is taken to fill horrid pauses. Angelica Forey thumped the piano, and sang: "I'm a laughing Gitana, ha-ha! ha-ha!" Matilda Forey and her cousin Mary Branksburne wedded their voices, and songfully incited all young people to Haste to the bower that love has built, and defy the wise ones of the world; but the wise ones of the world were in a majority there, and very few places of assembly will be found where they are not; so the glowing appeal of the British ballad-monger passed into the bosom of the emptiness he addressed. Clare was asked to entertain the company. The singular child calmly marched to the instrument, and turned over the appropriate illustrations to the ballad-monger's repertory.

Clare sang a little Irish air. Her duty done, she marched from the piano. Mothers are rarely deceived by their daughters in these matters; but Clare deceived her mother; and Mrs. Doria only persisted in feeling an agony of pity for her child, that she might the more warrantably pity herself—a not uncommon form of the emotion, for there is no juggler like that heart the ballad-monger puts into our mouths so boldly. Remember that she saw years of self-denial, years of a ripening scheme, rendered fruitless in a minute, and by the System which had almost reduced her to the condition of constitutional hypocrite. She had enough of bitterness to brood over, and some excuse for self-pity.

Still, even when she was cooler, Mrs. Doria's energetic nature prevented her from giving up. Straws were straws, and the frailer they were the harder she clutched them.

She rose from her chair, and left the room, calling to Adrian to follow her.

"Adrian," she said, turning upon him in the passage, "you mentioned a house where this horrible cake...where he was this morning. I desire you to take me to that woman immediately."

The wise youth had not bargained for personal servitude. He had hoped he should be in time for the last act of the opera that night, after enjoying the comedy of real life.

"My dear aunt"...he was beginning to insinuate.

"Order a cab to be sent for, and get your hat," said Mrs. Doria.

There was nothing for it but to obey. He stamped his assent to the Pilgrim's dictum, that Women are practical creatures, and now reflected on his own account, that relationship to a young fool may be a vexation and a nuisance. However, Mrs. Doria compensated him.

What Mrs. Doria intended to do, the practical creature did not plainly know; but her energy positively demanded to be used in some way or other, and her instinct directed her to the offender on whom she could use it in wrath. She wanted somebody to be

angry with, somebody to abuse. She dared not abuse her brother to his face: him she would have to console. Adrian was a fellow-hypocrite to the System, and would, she was aware, bring her into painfully delicate, albeit highly philosophic, ground by a discussion of the case. So she drove to Bessy Berry simply to inquire whither her nephew had flown.

Page 365

When a soft woman, and that soft woman a sinner, is matched with a woman of energy, she does not show much fight, and she meets no mercy. Bessy Berry's creditor came to her in female form that night. She then beheld it in all its terrors. Hitherto it had appeared to her as a male, a disembodied spirit of her imagination possessing male attributes, and the peculiar male characteristic of being moved, and ultimately silenced, by tears. As female, her creditor was terrible indeed. Still, had it not been a late hour, Bessy Berry would have died rather than speak openly that her babes had sped to make their nest in the Isle of Wight. They had a long start, they were out of the reach of pursuers, they were safe, and she told what she had to tell. She told more than was wise of her to tell. She made mention of her early service in the family, and of her little pension. Alas! her little pension! Her creditor had come expecting no payment—come; as creditors are wont in such moods, just to take it out of her—to employ the familiar term. At once Mrs. Doria pounced upon the pension.

"That, of course, you know is at an end," she said in the calmest manner, and Berry did not plead for the little bit of bread to her. She only asked a little consideration for her feelings.

True admirers of women had better stand aside from the scene. Undoubtedly it was very sad for Adrian to be compelled to witness it. Mrs. Doria was not generous. The Pilgrim may be wrong about the sex not growing; but its fashion of conducting warfare we must allow to be barbarous, and according to what is deemed the pristine, or wild cat, method. Ruin, nothing short of it, accompanied poor Berry to her bed that night, and her character bled till morning on her pillow.

The scene over, Adrian reconducted Mrs. Doria to her home. Mice had been at the cake during her absence apparently. The ladies and gentlemen present put it on the greedy mice, who were accused of having gorged and gone to bed.

"I'm sure they're quite welcome," said Mrs. Doria. "It's a farce, this marriage, and Adrian has quite come to my way of thinking. I would not touch an atom of it. Why, they were married in a married woman's ring! Can that be legal, as you call it? Oh, I'm convinced! Don't tell me. Austin will be in town to-morrow, and if he is true to his principles, he will instantly adopt measures to rescue his son from infamy. I want no legal advice. I go upon common sense, common decency. This marriage is false."

Mrs. Doria's fine scheme had become so much a part of her life, that she could not give it up. She took Clare to her bed, and caressed and wept over her, as she would not have done had she known the singular child, saying, "Poor Richard! my dear poor boy! we must save him, Clare! we must save him!" Of the two the mother showed the greater want of iron on this occasion. Clare lay in her arms rigid and emotionless, with one of her hands tight-locked. All she said was: "I knew it in the morning, mama." She slept clasping Richard's nuptial ring.

Page 366

By this time all specially concerned in the System knew it. The honeymoon was shoring placidly above them. Is not happiness like another circulating medium? When we have a very great deal of it, some poor hearts are aching for what is taken away from them. When we have gone out and seized it on the highways, certain inscrutable laws are sure to be at work to bring us to the criminal bar, sooner or later. Who knows the honeymoon that did not steal somebody's sweetness? Richard Turpin went forth, singing "Money or life" to the world: Richard Feverel has done the same, substituting "Happiness" for "Money," frequently synonyms. The coin he wanted he would have, and was just as much a highway robber as his fellow Dick, so that those who have failed to recognize him as a hero before, may now regard him in that light. Meanwhile the world he has squeezed looks exceedingly patient and beautiful. His coin chinks delicious music to him. Nature and the order of things on earth have no warmer admirer than a jolly brigand or a young man made happy by the Jews.

CHAPTER XXXIII

And now the author of the System was on trial under the eyes of the lady who loved him. What so kind as they? Yet are they very rigorous, those soft watchful woman's eyes. If you are below the measure they have made of you, you will feel it in the fulness of time. She cannot but show you that she took you for a giant, and has had to come down a bit. You feel yourself strangely diminishing in those sweet mirrors, till at last they drop on you complacently level. But, oh beware, vain man, of ever waxing enamoured of that wonderful elongation of a male creature you saw reflected in her adoring upcast orbs! Beware of assisting to delude her! A woman who is not quite a fool will forgive your being but a man, if you are surely that: she will haply learn to acknowledge that no mortal tailor could have fitted that figure she made of you respectably, and that practically (though she sighs to think it) her ideal of you was on the pattern of an overgrown charity-boy in the regulation jacket and breech. For this she first scorns the narrow capacities of the tailor, and then smiles at herself. But shouldst thou, when the hour says plainly, Be thyself, and the woman is willing to take thee as thou art, shouldst thou still aspire to be that thing of shanks and wrests, wilt thou not seem contemptible as well as ridiculous? And when the fall comes, will it not be flat on thy face, instead of to the common height of men? You may fall miles below her measure of you, and be safe: nothing is damaged save an overgrown charity-boy; but if you fall below the common height of men, you must make up your mind to see her rustle her gown, spy at the looking-glass, and transfer her allegiance. The moral of which is, that if we pretend to be what we are not, woman, for whose amusement the farce is performed, will find us out and punish us for it. And it is usually the end of a sentimental dalliance.

Page 367

Had Sir Austin given vent to the pain and wrath it was natural he should feel, he might have gone to unphilosophic excesses, and, however much he lowered his reputation as a sage, Lady Blandish would have excused him: she would not have loved him less for seeing him closer. But the poor gentleman tasked his soul and stretched his muscles to act up to her conception of him. He, a man of science in life, who was bound to be surprised by nothing in nature, it was not for him to do more than lift his eyebrows and draw in his lips at the news delivered by Ripton Thompson, that ill bird at Raynham.

All he said, after Ripton had handed the letters and carried his penitential headache to bed, was: “You see, Emmeline, it is useless to base any system on a human being.”

A very philosophical remark for one who has been busily at work building for nearly twenty years. Too philosophical to seem genuine. It revealed where the blow struck sharpest. Richard was no longer the Richard of his creation—his pride and his joy—but simply a human being with the rest. The bright star had sunk among the mass.

And yet, what had the young man done? And in what had the System failed?

The lady could not but ask herself this, while she condoled with the offended father.

“My friend,” she said, tenderly taking his hand before she retired, “I know how deeply you must be grieved. I know what your disappointment must be. I do not beg of you to forgive him now. You cannot doubt his love for this young person, and according to his light, has he not behaved honourably, and as you would have wished, rather than bring her to shame? You will think of that. It has been an accident—a misfortune—a terrible misfortune"...

“The God of this world is in the machine—not out of it,” Sir Austin interrupted her, and pressed her hand to get the good-night over.

At any other time her mind would have been arrested to admire the phrase; now it seemed perverse, vain, false, and she was tempted to turn the meaning that was in it against himself, much as she pitied him.

“You know, Emmeline,” he added, “I believe very little in the fortune, or misfortune, to which men attribute their successes and reverses. They are useful impersonations to novelists; but my opinion is sufficiently high of flesh and blood to believe that we make our own history without intervention. Accidents?—Terrible misfortunes?—What are they?—Good-night.”

“Good-night,” she said, looking sad and troubled. “When I said, ‘misfortune,’ I meant, of course, that he is to blame; but—shall I leave you his letter to me?”

“I think I have enough to meditate upon,” he replied, coldly bowing.

“God bless you,” she whispered. “And—may I say it? do not shut your heart.”

He assured her that he hoped not to do so and the moment she was gone he set about shutting it as tight as he could.

Page 368

If, instead of saying, Base no system on a human being, he had said, Never experimentalize with one, he would have been nearer the truth of his own case. He had experimented on humanity in the person of the son he loved as his life, and at once, when the experiment appeared to have failed, all humanity's failings fell on the shoulders of his son. Richard's parting laugh in the train—it was explicable now: it sounded in his ears like the mockery of this base nature of ours at every endeavour to exalt and chasten it. The young man had plotted this. From step to step Sir Austin traced the plot. The curious mask he had worn since his illness; the selection of his incapable uncle Hippias for a companion in preference to Adrian; it was an evident, well-perfected plot. That hideous laugh would not be silenced: Base, like the rest, treacherous, a creature of passions using his abilities solely to gratify them—never surely had humanity such chances as in him! A Manichaean tendency, from which the sententious eulogist of nature had been struggling for years (and which was partly at the bottom of the System), now began to cloud and usurp dominion of his mind. As he sat alone in the forlorn dead-hush of his library, he saw the devil.

How are we to know when we are at the head and fountain of the fates of them we love?

There by the springs of Richard's future, his father sat: and the devil said to him: "Only be quiet: do nothing: resolutely do nothing: your object now is to keep a brave face to the world, so that all may know you superior to this human nature that has deceived you. For it is the shameless deception, not the marriage, that has wounded you."

"Ay!" answered the baronet, "the shameless deception, not the marriage: wicked and ruinous as it must be; a destroyer of my tenderest hopes! my dearest schemes! Not the marriage—the shameless deception!" and he crumpled up his son's letter to him, and tossed it into the fire.

How are we to distinguish the dark chief of the Manichaeans when he talks our own thoughts to us?

Further he whispered, "And your System:—if you would be brave to the world, have courage to cast the dream of it out of you: relinquish an impossible project; see it as it is—dead: too good for men!"

"Ay!" muttered the baronet: "all who would save them perish on the Cross!"

And so he sat nursing the devil.

By and by he took his lamp, and put on the old cloak and cap, and went to gaze at Ripton. That exhausted debauchee and youth without a destiny slept a dead sleep. A handkerchief was bound about his forehead, and his helpless sunken chin and snoring nose projected up the pillow, made him look absurdly piteous. The baronet

remembered how often he had compared his boy with this one: his own bright boy! And where was the difference between them?

“Mere outward gilding!” said his familiar.

“Yes,” he responded, “I daresay this one never positively plotted to deceive his father: he followed his appetites unchecked, and is internally the sounder of the two.”

Page 369

Ripton, with his sunken chin and snoring nose under the light of the lamp, stood for human nature, honest, however abject.

“Miss Random, I fear very much, is a necessary establishment!” whispered the monitor.

“Does the evil in us demand its natural food, or it corrupts the whole?” ejaculated Sir Austin. “And is no angel of avail till that is drawn off? And is that our conflict—to see whether we can escape the contagion of its embrace, and come uncorrupted out of that?”

“The world is wise in its way,” said the voice.

“Though it look on itself through Port wine?” he suggested, remembering his lawyer Thompson.

“Wise in not seeking to be too wise,” said the voice.

“And getting intoxicated on its drug of comfort!”

“Human nature is weak.”

“And Miss Random is an establishment, and Wild Oats an institution!”

“It always has been so.”

“And always will be?”

“So I fear! in spite of your very noble efforts.”

“And leads—whither? And ends—where?”

Richard’s laugh, taken up by horrid reverberations, as it were through the lengths of the Lower Halls, replied.

This colloquy of two voices in a brain was concluded by Sir Austin asking again if there were no actual difference between the flower of his hopes and yonder drunken weed, and receiving for answer that there was a decided dissimilarity in the smell of the couple; becoming cognizant of which he retreated.

Sir Austin did not battle with the tempter. He took him into his bosom at once, as if he had been ripe for him, and received his suggestions and bowed to his dictates. Because he suffered, and decreed that he would suffer silently, and be the only sufferer, it seemed to him that he was great-minded in his calamity. He had stood against the world. The world had beaten him. What then? He must shut his heart and mask his face; that was all. To be far in advance of the mass, is as fruitless to mankind, he

reflected, as straggling in the rear. For how do we know that they move behind us at all, or move in our track? What we win for them is lost; and where we are overthrown we lie!

It was thus that a fine mind and a fine heart at the bounds of a nature not great, chose to colour his retrogression and countenance his shortcoming; and it was thus that he set about ruining the work he had done. He might well say, as he once did, that there are hours when the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox. For a grief that was private and peculiar, he unhesitatingly cast the blame upon humanity; just as he had accused it in the period of what he termed his own ordeal. How had he borne that? By masking his face. And he prepared the ordeal for his son by doing the same. This was by no means his idea of a man’s duty in tribulation, about which he could be strenuously eloquent.

Page 370

But it was his instinct so to act, and in times of trial great natures alone are not at the mercy of their instincts. Moreover it would cost him pain to mask his face; pain worse than that he endured when there still remained an object for him to open his heart to in proportion; and he always reposed upon the Spartan comfort of bearing pain and being passive. “Do nothing,” said the devil he nursed; which meant in his case, “Take me into you and don’t cast me out.” Excellent and sane is the outburst of wrath to men, when it stops short of slaughter. For who that locks it up to eat in solitary, can say that it is consumed? Sir Austin had as weak a digestion for wrath, as poor Hippias for a green duckling. Instead of eating it, it ate him. The wild beast in him was not the less deadly because it did not roar, and the devil in him not the less active because he resolved to do nothing.

He sat at the springs of Richard’s future, in the forlorn dead-hush of his library there, hearing the cinders click in the extinguished fire, and that humming stillness in which one may fancy one hears the midnight Fates busily stirring their embryos. The lamp glowed mildly on the bust of Chatham.

Toward morning a gentle knock fell at his door. Lady Blandish glided in. With hasty step she came straight to him, and took both his hands.

“My friend,” she said, speaking tearfully, and trembling, “I feared I should find you here. I could not sleep. How is it with you?”

“Well! Emmeline, well!” he replied, torturing his brows to fix the mask.

He wished it had been Adrian who had come to him. He had an extraordinary longing for Adrian’s society. He knew that the wise youth would divine how to treat him, and he mentally confessed to just enough weakness to demand a certain kind of management. Besides, Adrian, he had not a doubt, would accept him entirely as he seemed, and not pester him in any way by trying to unlock his heart; whereas a woman, he feared, would be waxing too womanly, and swelling from tears and supplications to a scene, of all things abhorred by him the most. So he rapped the floor with his foot, and gave the lady no very welcome face when he said it was well with him.

She sat down by his side, still holding one hand firmly, and softly detaining the other.

“Oh, my friend! may I believe you? May I speak to you?” She leaned close to him. “You know my heart. I have no better ambition than to be your friend. Surely I divide your grief, and may I not claim your confidence? Who has wept more over your great and dreadful sorrows? I would not have come to you, but I do believe that sorrow shared relieves the burden, and it is now that you may feel a woman’s aid, and something of what a woman could be to you....”

“Be assured,” he gravely said, “I thank you, Emmeline, for your intentions.”

“No, no! not for my intentions! And do not thank me. Think of him...think of your dear boy... Our Richard, as we have called him.—Oh! do not think it a foolish superstition of mine, but I have had a thought this night that has kept me in torment till I rose to speak to you... Tell me first you have forgiven him.”

Page 371

“A father bears no malice to his son, Emmeline.”

“Your heart has forgiven him?”

My heart has taken what he gave.”

“And quite forgiven him?”

“You will hear no complaints of mine.”

The lady paused despondingly, and looked at him in a wistful manner, saying with a sigh, “Yes! I know how noble you are, and different from others!”

He drew one of his hands from her relaxed hold.

“You ought to be in bed, Emmeline.”

“I cannot sleep.”

“Go, and talk to me another time.”

“No, it must be now. You have helped me when I struggled to rise into a clearer world, and I think, humble as I am, I can help you now. I have had a thought this night that if you do not pray for him and bless him...it will end miserably. My friend, have you done so?”

He was stung and offended, and could hardly help showing it in spite of his mask.

“Have you done so, Austin?”

“This is assuredly a new way of committing fathers to the follies of their sons, Emmeline!”

“No, not that. But will you pray for your boy, and bless him, before the day comes?”

He restrained himself to pronounce his words calmly:—“And I must do this, or it will end in misery? How else can it end? Can I save him from the seed he has sown? Consider, Emmeline, what you say. He has repeated his cousin’s sin. You see the end of that.”

“Oh, so different! This young person is not, is not of the class poor Austin Wentworth allied himself to. Indeed it is different. And he—be just and admit his nobleness. I fancied you did. This young person has great beauty, she has the elements of good breeding, she—indeed I think, had she been in another position, you would not have looked upon her unfavourably.”

“She may be too good for my son!” The baronet spoke with sublime bitterness.

“No woman is too good for Richard, and you know it.”

“Pass her.”

“Yes, I will speak only of him. He met her by a fatal accident. We thought his love dead, and so did he till he saw her again. He met her, he thought we were plotting against him, he thought he should lose her for ever, and is the madness of an hour he did this....”

“My Emmeline pleads bravely for clandestine matches.”

“Ah! do not trifle, my friend. Say: would you have had him act as young men in his position generally do to young women beneath them?”

Sir Austin did not like the question. It probed him very severely.

“You mean,” he said, “that fathers must fold their arms, and either submit to infamous marriages, or have these creatures ruined.”

“I do not mean that,” exclaimed the lady, striving for what she did mean, and how to express it. “I mean that he loved her. Is it not a madness at his age? But what I chiefly mean is—save him from the consequences. No, you shall not withdraw your hand. Think of his pride, his sensitiveness, his great wild nature—wild when he is set wrong: think how intense it is, set upon love; think, my friend, do not forget his love for you.”

Page 372

Sir Austin smiled an admirable smile of pity.

“That I should save him, or any one, from consequences, is asking more than the order of things will allow to you, Emmeline, and is not in the disposition of this world. I cannot. Consequences are the natural offspring of acts. My child, you are talking sentiment, which is the distraction of our modern age in everything—a phantasmal vapour distorting the image of the life we live. You ask me to give him a golden age in spite of himself. All that could be done, by keeping him in the paths of virtue and truth, I did. He is become a man, and as a man he must reap his own sowing.”

The baffled lady sighed. He sat so rigid: he spoke so securely, as if wisdom were to him more than the love of his son. And yet he did love his son. Feeling sure that he loved his son while he spoke so loftily, she reverenced him still, baffled as she was, and sensible that she had been quibbled with.

“All I ask of you is to open your heart to him,” she said.

He kept silent.

“Call him a man,—he is, and must ever be the child of your education, my friend.”

“You would console me, Emmeline, with the prospect that, if he ruins himself, he spares the world of young women. Yes, that is something!”

Closely she scanned the mask. It was impenetrable. He could meet her eyes, and respond to the pressure of her hand, and smile, and not show what he felt. Nor did he deem it hypocritical to seek to maintain his elevation in her soft soul, by simulating supreme philosophy over offended love. Nor did he know that he had an angel with him then: a blind angel, and a weak one, but one who struck upon his chance.

“Am I pardoned for coming to you?” she said, after a pause.

“Surely I can read my Emmeline’s intentions,” he gently replied.

“Very poor ones. I feel my weakness. I cannot utter half I have been thinking. Oh, if I could!”

“You speak very well, Emmeline.”

“At least, I am pardoned!”

“Surely so.”

“And before I leave you, dear friend, shall I be forgiven?—may I beg it?—will you bless him?”

He was again silent.

“Pray for him, Austin! pray for him ere the night is over.”

As she spoke she slid down to his feet and pressed his hand to her bosom.

The baronet was startled. In very dread of the soft fit that wooed him, he pushed back his chair, and rose, and went to the window.

“It’s day already!” he said with assumed vivacity, throwing open the shutters, and displaying the young light on the lawn.

Page 373

Lady Blandish dried her tears as she knelt, and then joined him, and glanced up silently at Richard's moon standing in wane toward the West. She hoped it was because of her having been premature in pleading so earnestly, that she had failed to move him, and she accused herself more than the baronet. But in acting as she had done, she had treated him as no common man, and she was compelled to perceive that his heart was at present hardly superior to the hearts of ordinary men, however composed his face might be, and apparently serene his wisdom. From that moment she grew critical of him, and began to study her idol—a process dangerous to idols. He, now that she seemed to have relinquished the painful subject, drew to her, and as one who wished to smooth a foregone roughness, murmured: "God's rarest blessing is, after all, a good woman! My Emmeline bears her sleepless night well. She does not shame the day." He gazed down on her with a fondling tenderness.

"I could bear many, many!" she replied, meeting his eyes, "and you would see me look better and better, if...if only..." but she had no encouragement to end the sentence.

Perhaps he wanted some mute form of consolation; perhaps the handsome placid features of the dark-eyed dame touched him: at any rate their Platonism was advanced by his putting an arm about her. She felt the arm and talked of the morning.

Thus proximate, they by and by both heard something very like a groan behind them, and looking round, beheld the Saurian eye. Lady Blandish smiled, but the baronet's discomposure was not to be concealed. By a strange fatality every stage of their innocent loves was certain to have a human beholder.

"Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon," Benson mumbled, arresting his head in a melancholy pendulosity. He was ordered out of the room.

"And I think I shall follow him, and try to get forty winks," said Lady Blandish. They parted with a quiet squeeze of hands.

The baronet then called in Benson.

"Get me my breakfast as soon as you can," he said, regardless of the aspect of injured conscience Benson sombrely presented to him. "I am going to town early. And, Benson," he added, "you will also go to town this afternoon, or to-morrow, if it suits you, and take your book with you to Mr. Thompson. You will not return here. A provision will be made for you. You can go."

The heavy butler essayed to speak, but the tremendous blow and the baronet's gesture choked him. At the door he made another effort which shook the rolls of his loose skin pitiably. An impatient signal sent him out dumb,—and Raynham was quit of the one believer in the Great Shaddock dogma.

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was the month of July. The Solent ran up green waves before a full-blowing South-wester. Gay little yachts bounded out like foam, and flashed their sails, light as sea-nymphs. A crown of deep Summer blue topped the flying mountains of cloud.

Page 374

By an open window that looked on the brine through nodding roses, our young bridal pair were at breakfast, regaling worthily, both of them. Had the Scientific Humanist observed them, he could not have contested the fact, that as a couple who had set up to be father and mother of Britons, they were doing their duty. Files of egg-cups with disintegrated shells bore witness to it, and they were still at work, hardly talking from rapidity of exercise. Both were dressed for an expedition. She had her bonnet on, and he his yachting-hat. His sleeves were turned over at the wrists, and her gown showed its lining on her lap. At times a chance word might spring a laugh, but eating was the business of the hour, as I would have you to know it always will be where Cupid is in earnest. Tribute flowed in to them from the subject land. Neglected lies Love's penny-whistle on which they played so prettily and charmed the spheres to hear them. What do they care for the spheres, who have one another? Come, eggs! come, bread and butter! come, tea with sugar in it and milk! and welcome, the jolly hours. That is a fair interpretation of the music in them just now. Yonder instrument was good only for the overture. After all, what finer aspiration can lovers have, than to be free man and woman in the heart of plenty? And is it not a glorious level to have attained? Ah, wretched Scientific Humanist! not to be by and mark the admirable sight of these young creatures feeding. It would have been a spell to exorcise the Manichee, methinks.

The mighty performance came to an end, and then, with a flourish of his table-napkin, husband stood over wife, who met him on the confident budding of her mouth. The poetry of mortals is their daily prose. Is it not a glorious level to have attained? A short, quick-blooded kiss, radiant, fresh, and honest as Aurora, and then Richard says without lack of cheer, "No letter to-day, my Lucy!" whereat her sweet eyes dwell on him a little seriously, but he cries, "Never mind! he'll be coming down himself some morning. He has only to know her, and all's well! eh?" and so saying he puts a hand beneath her chin, and seems to frame her fair face in fancy, she smiling up to be looked at.

"But one thing I do want to ask my darling," says Lucy, and dropped into his bosom with hands of petition. "Take me on board his yacht with him to-day—not leave me with those people! Will he? I'm a good sailor, he knows!"

"The best afloat!" laughs Richard, hugging her, "but, you know, you darling bit of a sailor, they don't allow more than a certain number on board for the race, and if they hear you've been with me, there'll be cries of foul play! Besides, there's Lady Judith to talk to you about Austin, and Lord Mountfalcon's compliments for you to listen to, and Mr. Morton to take care of you."

Lucy's eyes fixed sideways an instant.

"I hope I don't frown and blush as I did?" she said, screwing her pliable brows up to him winningly, and he bent his cheek against hers, and murmured something delicious.

Page 375

“And we shall be separated for—how many hours? one, two, three hours!” she pouted to his flatteries.

“And then I shall come on board to receive my bride’s congratulations.”

“And then my husband will talk all the time to Lady Judith.”

“And then I shall see my wife frowning and blushing at Lord Mountfalcon.”

“Am I so foolish, Richard?” she forgot her trifling to ask in an earnest way, and had another Aurorean kiss, just brushing the dew on her lips, for answer.

After hiding a month in shyest shade, the pair of happy sinners had wandered forth one day to look on men and marvel at them, and had chanced to meet Mr. Morton of Poer Hall, Austin Wentworth’s friend, and Ralph’s uncle. Mr. Morton had once been intimate with the baronet, but had given him up for many years as impracticable and hopeless, for which reason he was the more inclined to regard Richard’s misdemeanour charitably, and to lay the faults of the son on the father; and thinking society to be the one thing requisite to the young man, he had introduced him to the people he knew in the island; among others to the Lady Judith Felle, a fair young dame, who introduced him to Lord Mountfalcon, a puissant nobleman; who introduced him to the yachtsmen beginning to congregate; so that in a few weeks he found himself in the centre of a brilliant company, and for the first time in his life tasted what it was to have free intercourse with his fellow-creatures of both sews. The son of a System was, therefore, launched; not only through the surf, but in deep waters.

Now the baronet had so far compromised between the recurrence of his softer feelings and the suggestions of his new familiar, that he had determined to act toward Richard with justness. The world called it magnanimity, and even Lady Blandish had some thoughts of the same kind when she heard that he had decreed to Richard a handsome allowance, and had scouted Mrs. Doria’s proposal for him to contest the legality of the marriage; but Sir Austin knew well he was simply just in not withholding money from a youth so situated. And here again the world deceived him by embellishing his conduct. For what is it to be just to whom we love! He knew it was not magnanimous, but the cry of the world somehow fortified him in the conceit that in dealing perfect justice to his son he was doing all that was possible, because so much more than common fathers would have done. He had shut his heart.

Consequently Richard did not want money. What he wanted more, and did not get, was a word from his father, and though he said nothing to sadden his young bride, she felt how much it preyed upon him to be at variance with the man whom, now that he had offended him and gone against him, he would have fallen on his knees to; the man who was as no other man to him. She heard him of nights when she lay by his side, and the

darkness, and the broken mutterings, of those nights clothed the figure of the strange stern man

Page 376

in her mind. Not that it affected the appetites of the pretty pair. We must not expect that of Cupid enthroned and in condition; under the influence of sea-air, too. The files of egg-cups laugh at such an idea. Still the worm did gnaw them. Judge, then, of their delight when, on this pleasant morning, as they were issuing from the garden of their cottage to go down to the sea, they caught sight of Tom Bakewell rushing up the road with a portmanteau on his shoulders, and, some distance behind him, discerned Adrian.

“It’s all right!” shouted Richard, and ran off to meet him, and never left his hand till he had hauled him up, firing questions at him all the way, to where Lucy stood.

“Lucy! this is Adrian, my cousin.”—“Isn’t he an angel?” his eyes seemed to add; while Lucy’s clearly answered, “That he is!”

The full-bodied angel ceremoniously bowed to her, and acted with reserved unction the benefactor he saw in their greetings. “I think we are not strangers,” he was good enough to remark, and very quickly let them know he had not breakfasted; on hearing which they hurried him into the house, and Lucy put herself in motion to have him served.

“Dear old Rady,” said Richard, tugging at his hand again, “how glad I am you’ve come! I don’t mind telling you we’ve been horridly wretched.”

“Six, seven, eight, nine eggs,” was Adrian’s comment on a survey of the breakfast-table.

“Why wouldn’t he write? Why didn’t he answer one of my letters? But here you are, so I don’t mind now. He wants to see us, does he? We’ll go up to-night. I’ve a match on at eleven; my little yacht—I’ve called her the ’Blandish’—against Fred Cuirie’s ‘Begum.’ I shall beat, but whether I do or not, we’ll go up to-night. What’s the news? What are they all doing?”

“My dear boy!” Adrian returned, sitting comfortably down, “let me put myself a little more on an equal footing with you before I undertake to reply. Half that number of eggs will be sufficient for an unmarried man, and then we’ll talk. They’re all very well, as well as I can recollect after the shaking my total vacuity has had this morning. I came over by the first boat, and the sea, the sea has made me love mother earth, and desire of her fruits.”

Richard fretted restlessly opposite his cool relative.

“Adrian! what did he say when he heard of it? I want to know exactly what words he said.”

“Well says the sage, my son! ‘Speech is the small change of Silence.’ He said less than I do.”

“That’s how he took it!” cried Richard, and plunged in meditation.

Soon the table was cleared, and laid out afresh, and Lucy preceded the maid bearing eggs on the tray, and sat down unbonneted, and like a thorough-bred housewife, to pour out the tea for him.

“Now we’ll commence,” said Adrian, tapping his egg with meditative cheerfulness; but his expression soon changed to one of pain, all the more alarming for his benevolent efforts to conceal it. Could it be possible the egg was bad? oh, horror! Lucy watched him, and waited in trepidation.

Page 377

“This egg has boiled three minutes and three-quarters,” he observed, ceasing to contemplate it.

“Dear, dear!” said Lucy, “I boiled them myself exactly that time. Richard likes them so. And you like them hard, Mr. Harley?”

“On the contrary, I like them soft. Two minutes and a half, or three-quarters at the outside. An egg should never rashly verge upon hardness—never. Three minutes is the excess of temerity.”

“If Richard had told me! If I had only known!” the lovely little hostess interjected ruefully, biting her lip.

“We mustn’t expect him to pay attention to such matters,” said Adrian, trying to smile.

“Hang it! there are more eggs in the house,” cried Richard, and pulled savagely at the bell.

Lucy jumped up, saying, “Oh, yes! I will go and boil some exactly the time you like. Pray let me go, Mr. Harley.”

Adrian restrained her departure with a motion of his hand. “No,” he said, “I will be ruled by Richard’s tastes, and heaven grant me his digestion!”

Lucy threw a sad look at Richard, who stretched on a sofa, and left the burden of the entertainment entirely to her. The eggs were a melancholy beginning, but her ardour to please Adrian would not be damped, and she deeply admired his resignation. If she failed in pleasing this glorious herald of peace, no matter by what small misadventure, she apprehended calamity; so there sat this fair dove with brows at work above her serious smiling blue eyes, covertly studying every aspect of the plump-faced epicure, that she might learn to propitiate him. “He shall not think me timid and stupid,” thought this brave girl, and indeed Adrian was astonished to find that she could both chat and be useful, as well as look ornamental. When he had finished one egg, behold, two fresh ones came in, boiled according to his prescription. She had quietly given her orders to the maid, and he had them without fuss. Possibly his look of dismay at the offending eggs had not been altogether involuntary, and her woman’s instinct, inexperienced as she was, may have told her that he had come prepared to be not very well satisfied with anything in Love’s cottage. There was mental faculty in those pliable brows to see through, and combat, an unwitting wise youth.

How much she had achieved already she partly divined when Adrian said: “I think now I’m in case to answer your questions, my dear boy—thanks to Mrs. Richard,” and he bowed to her his first direct acknowledgment of her position. Lucy thrilled with pleasure.

“Ah!” cried Richard, and settled easily on his back.

“To begin, the Pilgrim has lost his Note-book, and has been persuaded to offer a reward which shall maintain the happy finder thereof in an asylum for life. Benson—superlative Benson—has turned his shoulders upon Raynham. None know whither he has departed. It is believed that the sole surviving member of the sect of the Shaddock-Dogmatists is under a total eclipse of Woman.”

Page 378

“Benson gone?” Richard exclaimed. “What a tremendous time it seems since I left Raynham!”

“So it is, my dear boy. The honeymoon is Mahomet’s minute; or say, the Persian King’s water-pail that you read of in the story: You dip your head in it, and when you draw it out, you discover that you have lived a life. To resume your uncle Algernon still roams in pursuit of the lost one—I should say, hops. Your uncle Hippias has a new and most perplexing symptom; a determination of bride-cake to the nose. Ever since your generous present to him, though he declares he never consumed a morsel of it, he has been under the distressing illusion that his nose is enormous, and I assure you he exhibits quite a maidenly timidity in following it—through a doorway, for instance. He complains of its terrible weight. I have conceived that Benson invisible might be sitting on it. His hand, and the doctor’s, are in hourly consultation with it, but I fear it will not grow smaller. The Pilgrim has begotten upon it a new Aphorism: that Size is a matter of opinion.”

“Poor uncle Hippy!” said Richard, “I wonder he doesn’t believe in magic. There’s nothing supernatural to rival the wonderful sensations he does believe in. Good God! fancy coming to that!”

“I’m sure I’m very sorry,” Lucy protested, “but I can’t help laughing.”

Charming to the wise youth her pretty laughter sounded.

“The Pilgrim has your notion, Richard. Whom does he not forestall? ‘Confirmed dyspepsia is the apparatus of illusions,’ and he accuses the Ages that put faith in sorcery, of universal indigestion, which may have been the case, owing to their infamous cookery. He says again, if you remember, that our own Age is travelling back to darkness and ignorance through dyspepsia. He lays the seat of wisdom in the centre of our system, Mrs. Richard: for which reason you will understand how sensible I am of the vast obligation I am under to you at the present moment, for your especial care of mine.”

Richard looked on at Lucy’s little triumph, attributing Adrian’s subjugation to her beauty and sweetness. She had latterly received a great many compliments on that score, which she did not care to hear, and Adrian’s homage to a practical quality was far pleasanter to the young wife, who shrewdly guessed that her beauty would not help her much in the struggle she had now to maintain. Adrian continuing to lecture on the excelling virtues of wise cookery, a thought struck her: Where, where had she tossed Mrs. Berry’s book?

“So that’s all about the home-people?” said Richard.

“All!” replied Adrian. “Or stay: you know Clare’s going to be married? Not? Your Aunt Helen”—

“Oh, bother my Aunt Helen! What do you think she had the impertinence to write—but never mind! Is it to Ralph?”

“Your Aunt Helen, I was going to say, my dear boy, is an extraordinary woman. It was from her originally that the Pilgrim first learnt to call the female the practical animal. He studies us all, you know. The Pilgrim’s Scrip is the abstract portraiture of his surrounding relatives. Well, your Aunt Helen”—

Page 379

“Mrs. Doria Battledoria!” laughed Richard.

“—being foiled in a little pet scheme of her own—call it a System if you like—of some ten or fifteen years’ standing, with regard to Miss Clare!”—

The fair Shuttlecockiana!”

“—instead of fretting like a man, and questioning Providence, and turning herself and everybody else inside out, and seeing the world upside down, what does the practical animal do? She wanted to marry her to somebody she couldn’t marry her to, so she resolved instantly to marry her to somebody she could marry her to: and as old gentlemen enter into these transactions with the practical animal the most readily, she fixed upon an old gentleman; an unmarried old gentleman, a rich old gentleman, and now a captive old gentleman. The ceremony takes place in about a week from the present time. No doubt you will receive your invitation in a day or two.”

“And that cold, icy, wretched Clare has consented to marry an old man!” groaned Richard. “I’ll put a stop to that when I go to town.”

Richard got up and strode about the room. Then he bethought him it was time to go on board and make preparations.

“I’m off,” he said. “Adrian, you’ll take her. She goes in the Empress, Mountfalcon’s vessel. He starts us. A little schooner-yacht—such a beauty! I’ll have one like her some day. Good-bye, darling!” he whispered to Lucy, and his hand and eyes lingered on her, and hers on him, seeking to make up for the priceless kiss they were debarred from. But she quickly looked away from him as he held her:—Adrian stood silent: his brows were up, and his mouth dubiously contracted. He spoke at last.

“Go on the water?”

“Yes. It’s only to St. Helen’s. Short and sharp.”

“Do you grudge me the nourishment my poor system has just received, my son?”

“Oh, bother your system! Put on your hat, and come along. I’ll put you on board in my boat.”

“Richard! I have already paid the penalty of them who are condemned to come to an island. I will go with you to the edge of the sea, and I will meet you there when you return, and take up the Tale of the Tritons: but, though I forfeit the pleasure of Mrs. Richard’s company, I refuse to quit the land.”

“Yes, oh, Mr. Harley!” Lucy broke from her husband, “and I will stay with you, if you please. I don’t want to go among those people, and we can see it all from the shore.

“Dearest! I don’t want to go. You don’t mind? Of course, I will go if you wish, but I would so much rather stay;” and she lengthened her plea in her attitude and look to melt the discontent she saw gathering.

Adrian protested that she had much better go; that he could amuse himself very well till their return, and so forth; but she had schemes in her pretty head, and held to it to be allowed to stay in spite of Lord Mountfalcon’s disappointment, cited by Richard, and at the great risk of vexing her darling, as she saw. Richard pished, and glanced contemptuously at Adrian. He gave way ungraciously.

Page 380

“There, do as you like. Get your things ready to leave this evening. No, I’m not angry.”—Who could be? he seemed as he looked up from her modest fondling to ask Adrian, and seized the indemnity of a kiss on her forehead, which, however, did not immediately disperse the shade of annoyance he felt.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “Such a day as this, and a fellow refuses to come on the water! Well, come along to the edge of the sea.” Adrian’s angelic quality had quite worn off to him. He never thought of devoting himself to make the most of the material there was: but somebody else did, and that fair somebody succeeded wonderfully in a few short hours. She induced Adrian to reflect that the baronet had only to see her, and the family muddle would be smoothed at once. He came to it by degrees; still the gradations were rapid. Her manner he liked; she was certainly a nice picture: best of all, she was sensible. He forgot the farmer’s niece in her, she was so very sensible. She appeared really to understand that it was a woman’s duty to know how to cook.

But the difficulty was, by what means the baronet could be brought to consent to see her. He had not yet consented to see his son, and Adrian, spurred by Lady Blandish, had ventured something in coming down. He was not inclined to venture more. The small debate in his mind ended by his throwing the burden on time. Time would bring the matter about. Christians as well as Pagans are in the habit of phrasing this excuse for folding their arms; “forgetful,” says The Pilgrim’s Scrip, “that the devil’s imps enter into no such armistice.”

As she loitered along the shore with her amusing companion, Lucy had many things to think of. There was her darling’s match. The yachts were started by pistol-shot by Lord Mountfalcon on board the Empress, and her little heart beat after Richard’s straining sails. Then there was the strangeness of walking with a relative of Richard’s, one who had lived by his side so long. And the thought that perhaps this night she would have to appear before the dreaded father of her husband.

“O Mr. Harley!” she said, “is it true—are we to go tonight? And me,” she faltered, “will he see me?”

“Ah! that is what I wanted to talk to you about,” said Adrian. “I made some reply to our dear boy which he has slightly misinterpreted. Our second person plural is liable to misconstruction by an ardent mind. I said ‘see you,’ and he supposed—now, Mrs. Richard, I am sure you will understand me. Just at present perhaps it would be advisable—when the father and son have settled their accounts, the daughter-in-law can’t be a debtor."...

Lucy threw up her blue eyes. A half-cowardly delight at the chance of a respite from the awful interview made her quickly apprehensive.

“O Mr. Harley! you think he should go alone first?”

“Well, that is my notion. But the fact is, he is such an excellent husband that I fancy it will require more than a man’s power of persuasion to get him to go.”

Page 381

“But I will persuade him, Mr. Harley.” “Perhaps, if you would...”

“There is nothing I would not do for his happiness,” murmured Lucy.

The wise youth pressed her hand with lymphatic approbation. They walked on till the yachts had rounded the point.

“Is it to-night, Mr. Harley?” she asked with some trouble in her voice now that her darling was out of sight.

“I don’t imagine your eloquence even will get him to leave you to-night,” Adrian replied gallantly. “Besides, I must speak for myself. To achieve the passage to an island is enough for one day. No necessity exists for any hurry, except in the brain of that impetuous boy. You must correct it, Mrs. Richard. Men are made to be managed, and women are born managers. Now, if you were to let him know that you don’t want to go to-night, and let him guess, after a day or two, that you would very much rather... you might affect a peculiar repugnance. By taking it on yourself, you see, this wild young man will not require such frightful efforts of persuasion. Both his father and he are exceedingly delicate subjects, and his father unfortunately is not in a position to be managed directly. It’s a strange office to propose to you, but it appears to devolve upon you to manage the father through the son. Prodigal having made his peace, you, who have done all the work from a distance, naturally come into the circle of the paternal smile, knowing it due to you. I see no other way. If Richard suspects that his father objects for the present to welcome his daughter-in-law, hostilities will be continued, the breach will be widened, bad will grow to worse, and I see no end to it.”

Adrian looked in her face, as much as to say: Now are you capable of this piece of heroism? And it did seem hard to her that she should have to tell Richard she shrank from any trial. But the proposition chimed in with her fears and her wishes: she thought the wise youth very wise: the poor child was not insensible to his flattery, and the subtler flattery of making herself in some measure a sacrifice to the home she had disturbed. She agreed to simulate as Adrian had suggested.

Victory is the commonest heritage of the hero, and when Richard came on shore proclaiming that the Blandish had beaten the Begum by seven minutes and three-quarters, he was hastily kissed and congratulated by his bride with her fingers among the leaves of Dr. Kitchener, and anxiously questioned about wine.

“Dearest! Mr. Harley wants to stay with us a little, and he thinks we ought not to go immediately—that is, before he has had some letters, and I feel... I would so much rather...”

“Ah! that’s it, you coward!” said Richard. “Well, then, to-morrow. We had a splendid race. Did you see us?”

“Oh, yes! I saw you and was sure my darling would win.” And again she threw on him the cold water of that solicitude about wine. “Mr. Harley must have the best, you know, and we never drink it, and I’m so silly, I don’t know good wine, and if you would send Tom where he can get good wine. I have seen to the dinner.”

Page 382

“So that’s why you didn’t come to meet me?”

“Pardon me, darling.”

Well, I do, but Mountfalcon doesn’t, and Lady Judith thinks you ought to have been there.”

“Ah, but my heart was with you!”

Richard put his hand to feel for the little heart: her eyelids softened, and she ran away.

It is to say much of the dinner that Adrian found no fault with it, and was in perfect good-humour at the conclusion of the service. He did not abuse the wine they were able to procure for him, which was also much. The coffee, too, had the honour of passing without comment. These were sound first steps toward the conquest of an epicure, and as yet Cupid did not grumble.

After coffee they strolled out to see the sun set from Lady Judith’s grounds. The wind had dropped. The clouds had rolled from the zenith, and ranged in amphitheatre with distant flushed bodies over sea and land: Titanic crimson head and chest rising from the wave faced Hyperion falling. There hung Briareus with deep-indented trunk and ravined brows, stretching all his hands up to unattainable blue summits. North-west the range had a rich white glow, as if shining to the moon, and westward, streams of amber, melting into upper rose, shot out from the dipping disk.

“What Sandoe calls the passion-flower of heaven,” said Richard under his breath to Adrian, who was serenely chanting Greek hexameters, and answered, in the swing of the caesura, “He might as well have said cauliflower.”

Lady Judith, with a black lace veil tied over her head, met them in the walk. She was tall and dark; dark-haired, dark-eyed, sweet and persuasive in her accent and manner. “A second edition of the Blandish,” thinks Adrian. She welcomed him as one who had claims on her affability. She kissed Lucy protectingly, and remarking on the wonders of the evening, appropriated her husband. Adrian and Lucy found themselves walking behind them.

The sun was under. All the spaces of the sky were alight, and Richard’s fancy flamed.

“So you’re not intoxicated with your immense triumph this morning?” said Lady Judith.

“Don’t laugh at me. When it’s over I feel ashamed of the trouble I’ve taken. Look at that glory!—I’m sure you despise me for it.”

“Was I not there to applaud you? I only think such energies should be turned into some definitely useful channel. But you must not go into the Army.”

“What else can I do?”

“You are fit for so much that is better.”

“I never can be anything like Austin.”

“But I think you can do more.”

“Well, I thank you for thinking it, Lady Judith. Something I will do. A man must deserve to live, as you say.

“Sauces,” Adrian was heard to articulate distinctly in the rear, “Sauces are the top tree of this science. A woman who has mastered sauces sits on the apex of civilization.”

Page 383

Briareus reddened duskily seaward. The West was all a burning rose.

“How can men see such sights as those, and live idle?” Richard resumed. “I feel ashamed of asking my men to work for me.—Or I feel so now.”

“Not when you’re racing the Begum, I think. There’s no necessity for you to turn democrat like Austin. Do you write now?”

“No. What is writing like mine? It doesn’t deceive me. I know it’s only the excuse I’m making to myself for remaining idle. I haven’t written a line since—lately.”

“Because you are so happy.”

“No, not because of that. Of course I’m very happy...” He did not finish.

Vague, shapeless ambition had replaced love in yonder skies. No Scientific Humanist was by to study the natural development, and guide him. This lady would hardly be deemed a very proper guide to the undirected energies of the youth, yet they had established relations of that nature. She was five years older than he, and a woman, which may explain her serene presumption.

The cloud-giants had broken up: a brawny shoulder smouldered over the sea.

“We’ll work together in town, at all events,” said Richard,

“Why can’t we go about together at night and find out people who want help?”

Lady Judith smiled, and only corrected his nonsense by saying, “I think we mustn’t be too romantic. You will become a knight-errant, I suppose. You have the characteristics of one.”

“Especially at breakfast,” Adrian’s unnecessarily emphatic gastronomical lessons to the young wife here came in.

“You must be our champion,” continued Lady Judith: “the rescuer and succourer of distressed dames and damsels. We want one badly.”

“You do,” said Richard, earnestly: “from what I hear: from what I know!” His thoughts flew off with him as knight-errant hailed shrilly at exceeding critical moment by distressed dames and damsels. Images of airy towers hung around. His fancy performed miraculous feats. The towers crumbled. The stars grew larger, seemed to throb with lustre. His fancy crumbled with the towers of the air, his heart gave a leap, he turned to Lucy.

“My darling! what have you been doing?” And as if to compensate her for his little knight-errant infidelity, he pressed very tenderly to her.

“We have been engaged in a charming conversation on domestic cookery,” interposed Adrian.

“Cookery! such an evening as this?” His face was a handsome likeness of Hippias at the presentation of bridecake.

“Dearest! you know it’s very useful,” Lucy mirthfully pleaded.

“Indeed I quite agree with you, child,” said Lady Judith, and I think you have the laugh of us. I certainly will learn to cook some day.”

“Woman’s mission, in so many words,” ejaculated Adrian.

“And pray, what is man’s?”

“To taste thereof, and pronounce thereupon.”

Page 384

“Let us give it up to them,” said Lady Judith to Richard. “You and I never will make so delightful and beautifully balanced a world of it.”

Richard appeared to have grown perfectly willing to give everything up to the fair face, his bridal Hesper.

Neat day Lucy had to act the coward anew, and, as she did so, her heart sank to see how painfully it affected him that she should hesitate to go with him to his father. He was patient, gentle; he sat down by her side to appeal to her reason, and used all the arguments he could think of to persuade her.

“If we go together and make him see us both: if he sees he has nothing to be ashamed of in you—rather everything to be proud of; if you are only near him, you will not have to speak a word, and I’m certain—as certain as that I live—that in a week we shall be settled happily at Raynham. I know my father so well, Lucy. Nobody knows him but I.”

Lucy asked whether Mr. Harley did not.

“Adrian? Not a bit. Adrian only knows a part of people, Lucy; and not the best part.”

Lucy was disposed to think more highly of the object of her conquest.

“Is it he that has been frightening you, Lucy?”

“No, no, Richard; oh, dear no!” she cried, and looked at him more tenderly because she was not quite truthful.

“He doesn’t know my father at all,” said Richard. But Lucy had another opinion of the wise youth, and secretly maintained it. She could not be won to imagine the baronet a man of human mould, generous, forgiving, full of passionate love at heart, as Richard tried to picture him, and thought him, now that he beheld him again through Adrian’s embassy. To her he was that awful figure, shrouded by the midnight. “Why are you so harsh?” she had heard Richard cry more than once. She was sure that Adrian must be right.

“Well, I tell you I won’t go without you,” said Richard, and Lucy begged for a little more time.

Cupid now began to grumble, and with cause. Adrian positively refused to go on the water unless that element were smooth as a plate. The South-west still joked boisterously at any comparison of the sort; the days were magnificent; Richard had yachting engagements; and Lucy always petitioned to stay to keep Adrian company, concerning it her duty as hostess. Arguing with Adrian was an absurd idea. If Richard hinted at his retaining Lucy, the wise youth would remark: “It’s a wholesome interlude to your extremely Cupidinous behaviour, my dear boy.”

Richard asked his wife what they could possibly find to talk about.

“All manner of things,” said Lucy; “not only cookery. He is so amusing, though he does make fun of The Pilgrim’s Scrip, and I think he ought not. And then, do you know, darling—you won’t think me vain?—I think he is beginning to like me a little.”

Richard laughed at the humble mind of his Beauty.

“Doesn’t everybody like you, admire you? Doesn’t Lord Mountfalcon, and Mr. Morton, and Lady Judith?”

Page 385

“But he is one of your family, Richard.”

“And they all will, if she isn’t a coward.”

“Ah, no!” she sighs, and is chidden.

The conquest of an epicure, or any young wife’s conquest beyond her husband, however loyally devised for their mutual happiness, may be costly to her. Richard in his hours of excitement was thrown very much with Lady Judith. He consulted her regarding what he termed Lucy’s cowardice. Lady Judith said: “I think she’s wrong, but you must learn to humour little women.”

“Then would you advise me to go up alone?” he asked, with a cloudy forehead.

“What else can you do? Be reconciled yourself as quickly as you can. You can’t drag her like a captive, you know?”

It is not pleasant for a young husband, fancying his bride the peerless flower of Creation, to learn that he must humour a little woman in her. It was revolting to Richard.

“What I fear,” he said, “is, that my father will make it smooth with me, and not acknowledge her: so that whenever I go to him, I shall have to leave her, and tit for tat—an abominable existence, like a ball on a billiard-table. I won’t bear that ignominy. And this I know, I know! she might prevent it at once, if she would only be brave, and face it. You, you, Lady Judith, you wouldn’t be a coward?”

“Where my old lord tells me to go, I go,” the lady coldly replied. “There’s not much merit in that. Pray, don’t cite me. Women are born cowards, you know.”

“But I love the women who are not cowards.”

“The little thing—your wife has not refused to go?”

“No—but tears! Who can stand tears?”

Lucy had come to drop them. Unaccustomed to have his will thwarted, and urgent where he saw the thing to do so clearly, the young husband had spoken strong words: and she, who knew that she would have given her life by inches for him; who knew that she was playing a part for his happiness, and hiding for his sake the nature that was worthy his esteem; the poor little martyr had been weak a moment.

She had Adrian’s support. The wise youth was very comfortable. He liked the air of the Island, and he liked being petted. “A nice little woman! a very nice little woman!” Tom Bakewell heard him murmur to himself according to a habit he had; and his air of rather succulent patronage as he walked or sat beside the innocent Beauty, with his head

thrown back and a smile that seemed always to be in secret communion with his marked abdominal prominence, showed that she was gaining part of what she played for. Wise youths who buy their loves, are not unwilling, when opportunity offers, to try and obtain the commodity for nothing. Examinations of her hand, as for some occult purpose, and unctuous pattings of the same, were not infrequent. Adrian waxed now and then Anacreontic in his compliments. Lucy would say: "That's worse than Lord Mountfalcon."

"Better English than the noble lord deigns to employ—allow that?" quoth Adrian.

Page 386

“He is very kind,” said Lucy.

“To all, save to our noble vernacular,” added Adrian. “He seems to scent a rival to his dignity there.”

It may be that Adrian scented a rival to his lymphatic emotions.

“We are at our ease here in excellent society,” he wrote to Lady Blandish. “I am bound to confess that the Huron has a happy fortune, or a superlative instinct. Blindfold he has seized upon a suitable mate. She can look at a lord, and cook for an epicure. Besides Dr. Kitchener, she reads and comments on The Pilgrim’s Scrip. The `Love’ chapter, of course, takes her fancy. That picture of Woman, `Drawn by Reverence and coloured by Love,’ she thinks beautiful, and repeats it, tossing up pretty eyes. Also the lover’s petition: ’Give me purity to be worthy the good in her, and grant her patience to reach the good in me.’ ’Tis quite taking to hear her lisp it. Be sure that I am repeating the petition! I make her read me her choice passages. She has not a bad voice.

“The Lady Judith I spoke of is Austin’s Miss Menteith, married to the incapable old Lord Felle, or Fellow, as the wits here call him. Lord Mountfalcon is his cousin, and her—-what? She has been trying to find out, but they have both got over their perplexity, and act respectively the bad man reproved and the chaste counsellor; a position in which our young couple found them, and haply diverted its perils. They had quite taken them in hand. Lady Judith undertakes to cure the fair Papist of a pretty, modest trick of frowning and blushing when addressed, and his lordship directs the exuberant energies of the original man. ’Tis thus we fulfil our destinies, and are content. Sometimes they change pupils; my lord educates the little dame, and my lady the hope of Raynham. Joy and blessings unto all! as the German poet sings. Lady Judith accepted the hand of her decrepit lord that she might be of potent service to her fellow-creatures. Austin, you know, had great hopes of her.

“I have for the first time in my career a field of lords to study. I think it is not without meaning that I am introduced to it by a yeoman’s niece. The language of the two social extremes is similar. I find it to consist in an instinctively lavish use of vowels and adjectives. My lord and Farmer Blaize speak the same tongue, only my lord’s has lost its backbone, and is limp, though fluent. Their pursuits are identical; but that one has money, or, as the Pilgrim terms it, vantage, and the other has not. Their ideas seem to have a special relationship in the peculiarity of stopping where they have begun. Young Tom Blaize with vantage would be Lord Mountfalcon. Even in the character of their parasites I see a resemblance, though I am bound to confess that the Hon. Peter Brayder, who is my lord’s parasite, is by no means noxious.

Page 387

“This sounds dreadfully democrat. Pray, don’t be alarmed. The discovery of the affinity between the two extremes of the Royal British Oak has made me thrice conservative. I see now that the national love of a lord is less subservience than a form of self-love; putting a gold-lace hat on one’s image, as it were, to bow to it. I see, too, the admirable wisdom of our system:—could there be a finer balance of power than in a community where men intellectually nil, have lawful vantage and a gold-lace hat on? How soothing it is to intellect—that noble rebel, as the Pilgrim has it—to stand, and bow, and know itself superior! This exquisite compensation maintains the balance: whereas that period anticipated by the Pilgrim, when science shall have produced an intellectual aristocracy, is indeed horrible to contemplate. For what despotism is so black as one the mind cannot challenge? ’Twill be an iron Age. Wherefore, madam, I cry, and shall continue to cry, ’Vive Lord Mountfalcon! long may he sip his Burgundy! long may the bacon-fed carry him on their shoulders!’

“Mr. Morton (who does me the honour to call me Young Mephisto, and Socrates missed) leaves to-morrow to get Master Ralph out of a scrape. Our Richard has just been elected member of a Club for the promotion of nausea. Is he happy? you ask. As much so as one who has had the misfortune to obtain what he wanted can be. Speed is his passion. He races from point to point. In emulation of Leander and Don Juan, he swam, I hear, to the opposite shores the other day, or some world-shaking feat of the sort: himself the Hero whom he went to meet: or, as they who pun say, his Hero was a Bet. A pretty little domestic episode occurred this morning. He finds her abstracted in the fire of his caresses: she turns shy and seeks solitude: green jealousy takes hold of him: he lies in wait, and discovers her with his new rival—a veteran edition of the culinary Doctor! Blind to the Doctor’s great national services, deaf to her wild music, he grasps the intruder, dismembers him, and performs upon him the treatment he has recommended for dressed cucumber. Tears and shrieks accompany the descent of the gastronome. Down she rushes to secure the cherished fragments: he follows: they find him, true to his character, alighted and straggling over a bed of blooming flowers. Yet ere a fairer flower can gather him, a heel black as Pluto stamps him into earth, flowers and all:—happy burial! Pathetic tribute to his merit is watering his grave, when by saunters my Lord Mountfalcon. ’What’s the mattah?’ says his lordship, soothing his moustache. They break apart, and ’tis left to me to explain from the window. My lord looks shocked, Richard is angry with her for having to be ashamed of himself, Beauty dries her eyes, and after a pause of general foolishness, the business of life is resumed. I may add that the Doctor has just been dug up, and we are busy, in the enemy’s absence, renewing old Aeson with enchanted threads. By the way, a Papist priest has blest them.”

Page 388

A month had passed when Adrian wrote this letter. He was very comfortable; so of course he thought Time was doing his duty. Not a word did he say of Richard's return, and for some reason or other neither Richard nor Lucy spoke of it now.

Lady Blandish wrote back: "His father thinks he has refused to come to him. By your utter silence on the subject, I fear that it must be so. Make him come. Bring him by force. Insist on his coming. Is he mad? He must come at once."

To this Adrian replied, after a contemplative comfortable lapse of a day or two, which might be laid to his efforts to adopt the lady's advice, "The point is that the half man declines to come without the whole man. The terrible question of sex is our obstruction."

Lady Blandish was in despair. She had no positive assurance that the baronet would see his son; the mask put them all in the dark; but she thought she saw in Sir Austin irritation that the offender, at least when the opening to come and make his peace seemed to be before him, should let days and weeks go by. She saw through the mask sufficiently not to have any hope of his consenting to receive the couple at present; she was sure that his equanimity was fictitious; but she pierced no farther, or she might have started and asked herself, Is this the heart of a woman?

The lady at last wrote to Richard. She said: "Come instantly, and come alone." Then Richard, against his judgment, gave way. "My father is not the man I thought him!" he exclaimed sadly, and Lucy felt his eyes saying to her: "And you, too, are not the woman I thought you." Nothing could the poor little heart reply but strain to his bosom and sleeplessly pray in his arms all the night.

CHAPTER XXXV

Three weeks after Richard arrived in town, his cousin Clare was married, under the blessings of her energetic mother, and with the approbation of her kinsfolk, to the husband that had been expeditiously chosen for her. The gentleman, though something more than twice the age of his bride, had no idea of approaching senility for many long connubial years to come. Backed by his tailor and his hairdresser, he presented no such bad figure at the altar, and none would have thought that he was an ancient admirer of his bride's mama, as certainly none knew he had lately proposed for Mrs. Doria before there was any question of her daughter. These things were secrets; and the elastic and happy appearance of Mr. John Todhunter did not betray them at the altar. Perhaps he would rather have married the mother. He was a man of property, well born, tolerably well educated, and had, when Mrs. Doria rejected him for the first time, the reputation of being a fool—which a wealthy man may have in his youth; but as he lived on, and did not squander his money—amassed it, on the contrary, and did not seek to go into Parliament, and did other negative wise things, the world's opinion, as

usual, veered completely round, and John Todhunter was esteemed a shrewd, sensible man—only not brilliant; that he was brilliant could not be said of him. In fact, the man could hardly talk, and it was a fortunate provision that no impromptu deliveries were required of him in the marriage-service.

Page 389

Mrs. Doria had her own reasons for being in a hurry. She had discovered something of the strange impassive nature of her child; not from any confession of Clare's, but from signs a mother can read when, her eyes are not resolutely shut. She saw with alarm and anguish that Clare had fallen into the pit she had been digging for her so laboriously. In vain she entreated the baronet to break the disgraceful, and, as she said, illegal alliance his son had contracted. Sir Austin would not even stop the little pension to poor Berry. "At least you will do that, Austin," she begged pathetically. "You will show your sense of that horrid woman's conduct?" He refused to offer up any victim to console her. Then Mrs. Doria told him her thoughts,—and when an outraged energetic lady is finally brought to exhibit these painfully hoarded treasures, she does not use half words as a medium. His System, and his conduct generally were denounced to him, without analysis. She let him understand that the world laughed at him; and he heard this from her at a time when his mask was still soft and liable to be acted on by his nerves. "You are weak, Austin! weak, I tell you!" she said, and, like all angry and self-interested people, prophecy came easy to her. In her heart she accused him of her own fault, in imputing to him the wreck of her project. The baronet allowed her to revel in the proclamation of a dire future, and quietly counselled her to keep apart from him, which his sister assured him she would do.

But to be passive in calamity is the province of no woman. Mark the race at any hour. "What revolution and hubbub does not that little instrument, the needle, avert from us!" says The Pilgrim's Scrip. Alas, that in calamity women cannot stitch! Now that she saw Clare wanted other than iron, it struck her she must have a husband, and be made secure as a woman and a wife. This seemed the thing to do: and, as she had forced the iron down Clare's throat, so she forced the husband, and Clare gulped at the latter as she had at the former. On the very day that Mrs. Doria had this new track shaped out before her, John Todhunter called at the Foreys'. "Old John!" sang out Mrs. Doria, "show him up to me. I want to see him particularly." He sat with her alone. He was a man multitudes of women would have married—whom will they not?—and who would have married any presentable woman: but women do want asking, and John never had the word. The rape of such men is left to the practical animal. So John sat alone with his old flame. He had become resigned to her perpetual lamentation and living Suttee for his defunct rival. But, ha! what meant those soft glances now—addressed to him? His tailor and his hairdresser gave youth to John, but they had not the art to bestow upon him distinction, and an undistinguished man what woman looks at? John was an indistinguishable man. For that reason he was dry wood to a soft glance.

And now she said: "It is time you should marry; and you are the man to be the guide and helper of a young woman, John. You are well preserved—younger than most of the young men of our day. You are eminently domestic, a good son, and will be a good husband and good father. Some one you must marry.—What do you think of Clare for a wife for you?"

Page 390

At first John Todhunter thought it would be very much like his marrying a baby. However, he listened to it, and that was enough for Mrs. Doria.

She went down to John's mother, and consulted with her on the propriety of the scheme of wedding her daughter to John in accordance with his proposition. Mrs. Todhunter's jealousy of any disturbing force in the influence she held over her son Mrs. Doria knew to be one of the causes of John's remaining constant to the impression she had afore-time produced on him. She spoke so kindly of John, and laid so much stress on the ingrained obedience and passive disposition of her daughter, that Mrs. Todhunter was led to admit she did think it almost time John should be seeking a mate, and that he—all things considered—would hardly find a fitter one. And this, John Todhunter—old John no more—heard to his amazement when, a day or two subsequently, he instanced the probable disapproval of his mother.

The match was arranged. Mrs. Doria did the wooing. It consisted in telling Clare that she had come to years when marriage was desirable, and that she had fallen into habits of moping which might have the worse effect on her future life, as it had on her present health and appearance, and which a husband would cure. Richard was told by Mrs. Doria that Clare had instantaneously consented to accept Mr. John Todhunter as lord of her days, and with more than obedience—with alacrity. At all events, when Richard spoke to Clare, the strange passive creature did not admit constraint on her inclinations. Mrs. Doria allowed Richard to speak to her. She laughed at his futile endeavours to undo her work, and the boyish sentiments he uttered on the subject. "Let us see, child," she said, "let us see which turns out the best; a marriage of passion, or a marriage of common sense."

Heroic efforts were not wanting to arrest the union. Richard made repeated journeys to Hounslow, where Ralph was quartered, and if Ralph could have been persuaded to carry off a young lady who did not love him, from the bridegroom her mother averred she did love, Mrs. Doria might have been defeated. But Ralph in his cavalry quarters was cooler than Ralph in the Bursley meadows. "Women are oddities, Dick," he remarked, running a finger right and left along his upper lip. "Best leave them to their own freaks. She's a dear girl, though she doesn't talk: I like her for that. If she cared for me I'd go the race. She never did. It's no use asking a girl twice. She knows whether she cares a fig for a fellow."

The hero quitted him with some contempt, As Ralph Morton was a young man, and he had determined that John Todhunter was an old man, he sought another private interview with Clare, and getting her alone, said: "Clare, I've come to you for the last time. Will you marry Ralph Morton?"

To which Clare replied, "I cannot marry two husbands, Richard."

"Will you refuse to marry this old man?"

Page 391

“I must do as mama wishes.”

“Then you’re going to marry an old man—a man you don’t love, and can’t love! Oh, good God! do you know what you’re doing?” He flung about in a fury. “Do you know what it is? Clare!” he caught her two hands violently, “have you any idea of the horror you’re going to commit?”

She shrank a little at his vehemence, but neither blushed nor stammered: answering: “I see nothing wrong in doing what mama thinks right, Richard.”

“Your mother! I tell you it’s an infamy, Clare! It’s a miserable sin! I tell you, if I had done such a thing I would not live an hour after it. And coldly to prepare for it! to be busy about your dresses! They told me when I came in that you were with the milliner. To be smiling over the horrible outrage! decorating yourself!"...

“Dear Richard,” said Clare, “you will make me very unhappy.”

“That one of my blood should be so debased!” he cried, brushing angrily at his face. “Unhappy! I beg you to feel for yourself, Clare. But I suppose,” and he said it scornfully, “girls don’t feel this sort of shame.”

She grew a trifle paler.

“Next to mama, I would wish to please you, dear Richard.”

“Have you no will of your own?” he exclaimed.

She looked at him softly; a look he interpreted for the meekness he detested in her.

“No, I believe you have none!” he added. “And what can I do? I can’t step forward and stop this accursed marriage. If you would but say a word I would save you; but you tie my hands. And they expect me to stand by and see it done!”

“Will you not be there, Richard?” said Clare, following the question with her soft eyes. It was the same voice that had so thrilled him on his marriage morn.

“Oh, my darling Clare!” he cried in the kindest way he had ever used to her, “if you knew how I feel this!” and now as he wept she wept, and came insensibly into his arms.

“My darling Clare!” he repeated.

She said nothing, but seemed to shudder, weeping.

“You will do it, Clare? You will be sacrificed? So lovely as you are, too!... Clare! you cannot be quite blind. If I dared speak to you, and tell you all.... Look up. Can you still consent?”

“I must not disobey mama,” Clare murmured, without looking up from the nest her cheek had made on his bosom.

“Then kiss me for the last time,” said Richard. “I’ll never kiss you after it, Clare.”

He bent his head to meet her mouth, and she threw her arms wildly round him, and kissed him convulsively, and clung to his lips, shutting her eyes, her face suffused with a burning red.

Then he left her, unaware of the meaning of those passionate kisses.

Argument with Mrs. Doria was like firing paper-pellets against a stone wall. To her indeed the young married hero spoke almost indecorously, and that which his delicacy withheld him from speaking to Clare. He could provoke nothing more responsive from the practical animal than “Pooh-pooh! Tush, tush! and Fiddledeedee!”

Page 392

“Really,” Mrs. Doria said to her intimates, “that boy’s education acts like a disease on him. He cannot regard anything sensibly. He is for ever in some mad excess of his fancy, and what he will come to at last heaven only knows! I sincerely pray that Austin will be able to bear it.”

Threats of prayer, however, that harp upon their sincerity, are not very well worth having. Mrs. Doria had embarked in a practical controversy, as it were, with her brother. Doubtless she did trust he would be able to bear his sorrows to come, but one who has uttered prophecy can barely help hoping to see it fulfilled: she had prophecied much grief to the baronet.

Poor John Todhunter, who would rather have married the mother, and had none of your heroic notions about the sacred necessity for love in marriage, moved as one guiltless of offence, and deserving his happiness. Mrs. Doria shielded him from the hero. To see him smile at Clare’s obedient figure, and try not to look paternal, was touching.

Meantime Clare’s marriage served one purpose. It completely occupied Richard’s mind, and prevented him from chafing at the vexation of not finding his father ready to meet him when he came to town. A letter had awaited Adrian at the hotel, which said, “Detain him till you hear further from me. Take him about with you into every form of society.” No more than that. Adrian had to extemporize, that the baronet had gone down to Wales on pressing business, and would be back in a week or so. For ulterior inventions and devices wherewith to keep the young gentleman in town, he applied to Mrs. Doria. “Leave him to me,” said Mrs. Doria, “I’ll manage him.” And she did.

“Who can say,” asks The Pilgrim’s Scrip, “when he is not walking a puppet to some woman?”

Mrs. Doria would hear no good of Lucy. “I believe,” she observed, as Adrian ventured a shrugging protest in her behalf,—“it is my firm opinion, that a scullery-maid would turn any of you men round her little finger—only give her time and opportunity.” By dwelling on the arts of women, she reconciled it to her conscience to do her best to divide the young husband from his wife till it pleased his father they should live their unhallowed union again. Without compunction, or a sense of incongruity, she abused her brother and assisted the fulfilment of his behests.

So the puppets were marshalled by Mrs. Doria, happy, or sad, or indifferent. Quite against his set resolve and the tide of his feelings, Richard found himself standing behind Clare in the church—the very edifice that had witnessed his own marriage, and heard, “I, Clare Doria, take thee John Pemberton,” clearly pronounced. He stood with black brows dissecting the arts of the tailor and hairdresser on unconscious John. The back, and much of the middle, of Mr. Todhunter’s head was bald; the back shone like an egg-shell, but across the middle the artist had drawn two long dabs of hair from the sides, and

Page 393

plastered them cunningly, so that all save wilful eyes would have acknowledged the head to be covered. The man's only pretension was to a respectable juvenility. He had a good chest, stout limbs, a face inclined to be jolly. Mrs. Doria had no cause to be put out of countenance at all by the exterior of her son-in-law: nor was she. Her splendid hair and gratified smile made a light in the church. Playing puppets must be an immense pleasure to the practical animal. The Forey bridesmaids, five in number, and one Miss Doria, their cousin, stood as girls do stand at these sacrifices, whether happy, sad, or indifferent; a smile on their lips and tears in attendance. Old Mrs. Todhunter, an exceedingly small ancient woman, was also there. "I can't have my boy John married without seeing it done," she said, and throughout the ceremony she was muttering audible encomiums on her John's manly behaviour.

The ring was affixed to Clare's finger; there was no ring lost in this common-sense marriage. The instant the clergyman bade him employ it, John drew the ring out, and dropped it on the finger of the cold passive hand in a businesslike way, as one who had studied the matter. Mrs. Doria glanced aside at Richard. Richard observed Clare spread out her fingers that the operation might be the more easily effected.

He did duty in the vestry a few minutes, and then said to his aunt:

"Now I'll go."

"You'll come to the breakfast, child? The Foreys"—

He cut her short. "I've stood for the family, and I'll do no more. I won't pretend to eat and make merry over it."

"Richard!"

"Good-bye."

She had attained her object and she wisely gave way.

"Well. Go and kiss Clare, and shake his hand. Pray, pray be civil."

She turned to Adrian, and said: "He is going. You must go with him, and find some means of keeping him, or he'll be running off to that woman. Now, no words—go!"

Richard bade Clare farewell. She put up her mouth to him humbly, but he kissed her on the forehead.

"Do not cease to love me," she said in a quavering whisper in his ear.

Mr. Todhunter stood beaming and endangering the art of the hairdresser with his pocket-handkerchief. Now he positively was married, he thought he would rather have

the daughter than the mother, which is a reverse of the order of human thankfulness at a gift of the Gods.

“Richard, my boy!” he said heartily, “congratulate me.”

“I should be happy to, if I could,” sedately replied the hero, to the consternation of those around. Nodding to the bridesmaids and bowing to the old lady, he passed out.

Adrian, who had been behind him, deputed to watch for a possible unpleasantness, just hinted to John: “You know, poor fellow, he has got into a mess with his marriage.”

“Oh! ah! yes!” kindly said John, “poor fellow!”

All the puppets then rolled off to the breakfast.

Page 394

Adrian hurried after Richard in an extremely discontented state of mind. Not to be at the breakfast and see the best of the fun, disgusted him. However, he remembered that he was a philosopher, and the strong disgust he felt was only expressed in concentrated cynicism on every earthly matter engendered by the conversation. They walked side by side into Kensington Gardens. The hero was mouthing away to himself, talking by fits.

Presently he faced Adrian, crying: “And I might have stopped it! I see it now! I might have stopped it by going straight to him, and asking him if he dared marry a girl who did not love him. And I never thought of it. Good heaven! I feel this miserable affair on my conscience.”

“Ah!” groaned Adrian. “An unpleasant cargo for the conscience, that! I would rather carry anything on mine than a married couple. Do you purpose going to him now?”

The hero soliloquized: “He’s not a bad sort of man."...

“Well, he’s not a Cavalier,” said Adrian, “and that’s why you wonder your aunt selected him, no doubt? He’s decidedly of the Roundhead type, with the Puritan extracted, or inoffensive, if latent.”

“There’s the double infamy!” cried Richard, “that a man you can’t call bad, should do this damned thing!”

“Well, it’s hard we can’t find a villain.”

“He would have listened to me, I’m sure.”

“Go to him now, Richard, my son. Go to him now. It’s not yet too late. Who knows? If he really has a noble elevated superior mind—though not a Cavalier in person, he may be one at heart—he might, to please you, and since you put such stress upon it, abstain...perhaps with some loss of dignity, but never mind. And the request might be singular, or seem so, but everything has happened before in this world, you know, my dear boy. And what an infinite consolation it is for the eccentric, that reflection!”

The hero was impervious to the wise youth. He stared at him as if he were but a speck in the universe he visioned.

It was provoking that Richard should be Adrian’s best subject for cynical pastime, in the extraordinary heterodoxies he started, and his worst in the way he took it; and the wise youth, against his will, had to feel as conscious of the young man’s imaginative mental armour, as he was of his muscular physical.

“The same sort of day!” mused Richard, looking up. “I suppose my father’s right. We make our own fates, and nature has nothing to do with it.”

Adrian yawned.

“Some difference in the trees, though,” Richard continued abstractedly.

“Growing bald at the top,” said Adrian.

“Will you believe that my aunt Helen compared the conduct of that wretched slave Clare to Lucy’s, who, she had the cruel insolence to say, entangled me into marriage?” the hero broke out loudly and rapidly. “You know—I told you, Adrian—how I had to threaten and insist, and how she pleaded, and implored me to wait.”

Page 395

“Ah! hum!” mumbled Adrian.

“You remember my telling you?” Richard was earnest to hear her exonerated.

“Pleaded and implored, my dear boy? Oh, no doubt she did. Where’s the lass that doesn’t.”

“Call my wife by another name, if you please.”

“The generic title can’t be cancelled because of your having married one of the body, my son.”

“She did all she could to persuade me to wait!” emphasized Richard.

Adrian shook his head with a deplorable smile.

“Come, come, my good Ricky; not all! not all!”

Richard bellowed: “What more could she have done?”

“She could have shaved her head, for instance.”

This happy shaft did stick. With a furious exclamation Richard shot in front, Adrian following him; and asking him (merely to have his assumption verified), whether he did not think she might have shaved her head? and, presuming her to have done so, whether, in candour, he did not think he would have waited—at least till she looked less of a rank lunatic?

After a minute or so, the wise youth was but a fly buzzing about Richard’s head. Three weeks of separation from Lucy, and an excitement deceased, caused him to have soft yearnings for the dear lovely home-face. He told Adrian it was his intention to go down that night. Adrian immediately became serious. He was at a loss what to invent to detain him, beyond the stale fiction that his father was coming to-morrow. He rendered homage to the genius of woman in these straits. “My aunt,” he thought, “would have the lie ready; and not only that, but she would take care it did its work.”

At this juncture the voice of a cavalier in the Row hailed them, proving to be the Honourable Peter Brayder, Lord Mountfalcon’s parasite. He greeted them very cordially; and Richard, remembering some fun they had in the Island, asked him to dine with them; postponing his return till the next day. Lucy was his. It was even sweet to dally with the delight of seeing her.

The Hon. Peter was one who did honour to the body he belonged to. Though not so tall as a west of London footman, he was as shapely; and he had a power of making his voice insinuating, or arrogant, as it suited the exigencies of his profession. He had not a

rap of money in the world; yet he rode a horse, lived high, expended largely. The world said that the Hon. Peter was salaried by his Lordship, and that, in common with that of Parasite, he exercised the ancient companion profession. This the world said, and still smiled at the Hon. Peter; for he was an engaging fellow, and where he went not Lord Mountfalcon would not go.

Page 396

They had a quiet little hotel dinner, ordered by Adrian, and made a square at the table, Ripton Thompson being the fourth. Richard sent down to his office to fetch him, and the two friends shook hands for the first time since the great deed had been executed. Deep was the Old Dog's delight to hear the praises of his Beauty sounded by such aristocratic lips as the Hon. Peter Brayder's. All through the dinner he was throwing out hints and small queries to get a fuller account of her; and when the claret had circulated, he spoke a word or two himself, and heard the Hon. Peter eulogize his taste, and wish him a bride as beautiful; at which Ripton blushed, and said, he had no hope of that, and the Hon. Peter assured him marriage did not break the mould.

After the wine this gentleman took his cigar on the balcony, and found occasion to get some conversation with Adrian alone.

"Our young friend here—made it all right with the governor?" he asked carelessly.

"Oh yes!" said Adrian. But it struck him that Brayder might be of assistance in showing Richard a little of the `society in every form' required by his chief's prescript. "That is," he continued, "we are not yet permitted an interview with the august author of our being, and I have rather a difficult post. 'Tis mine both to keep him here, and also to find him the opportunity to measure himself with his fellow-man. In other words, his father wants him to see something of life before he enters upon housekeeping. Now I am proud to confess that I'm hardly equal to the task. The demi, or damnedmonde—if it's that lie wants him to observe—is one that I leave not got the walk to."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Brayder. "You do the keeping, I offer to parade the demi. I must say, though, it's a queer notion of the old gentleman."

"It's the continuation of a philosophic plan," said Adrian.

Brayder followed the curvings of the whiff of his cigar with his eyes, and ejaculated, "Infernally philosophic!"

"Has Lord Mountfalcon left the island?" Adrian inquired.

"Mount? to tell the truth I don't know where he is. Chasing some light craft, I suppose. That's poor Mount's weakness. It's his ruin, poor fellow! He's so confoundedly in earnest at the game."

"He ought to know it by this time, if fame speaks true," remarked Adrian.

"He's a baby about women, and always will be," said Brayder. "He's been once or twice wanting to marry them. Now there's a woman—you've heard of Mrs. Mount? All the world knows her.—If that woman hadn't scandalized."—The young man joined them, and checked the communication. Brayder winked to Adrian, and pitifully indicated the presence of an innocent.

“A married man, you know,” said Adrian.

“Yes, yes!—we won’t shock him,” Brayder observed. He appeared to study the young man while they talked.

Next morning Richard was surprised by a visit from his aunt. Mrs. Doria took a seat by his side and spoke as follows:

Page 397

“My dear nephew. Now you know I have always loved you, and thought of your welfare as if you had been my own child. More than that, I fear. Well, now, you are thinking of returning to—to that place—are you not? Yes. It is as I thought. Very well now, let me speak to you. You are in a much more dangerous position than you imagine. I don’t deny your father’s affection for you. It would be absurd to deny it. But you are of an age now to appreciate his character. Whatever you may do he will always give you money. That you are sure of; that you know. Very well. But you are one to want more than money: you want his love. Richard, I am convinced you will never be happy, whatever base pleasures you may be led into, if he should withhold his love from you. Now, child, you know you have grievously offended him. I wish not to animadvert on your conduct.—You fancied yourself in love, and so on, and you were rash. The less said of it the better now. But you must now—it is your duty now to do something—to do everything that lies in your power to show him you repent. No interruptions! Listen to me. You must consider him. Austin is not like other men. Austin requires the most delicate management. You must—whether you feel it or no—present an appearance of contrition. I counsel it for the good of all. He is just like a woman, and where his feelings are offended he wants utter subservience. He has you in town, and he does not see you:—now you know that he and I are not in communication: we have likewise our differences:—Well, he has you in town, and he holds aloof:—he is trying you, my dear Richard. No: he is not at Raynham: I do not know where he is. He is trying you, child, and you must be patient. You must convince him that you do not care utterly for your own gratification. If this person—I wish to speak of her with respect, for your sake—well, if she loves you at all—if, I say, she loves you one atom, she will repeat my solicitations for you to stay and patiently wait here till he consents to see you. I tell you candidly, it’s your only chance of ever getting him to receive her. That you should know. And now, Richard, I may add that there is something else you should know. You should know that it depends entirely upon your conduct now, whether you are to see your father’s heart for ever divided from you, and a new family at Raynham. You do not understand? I will explain. Brothers and sisters are excellent things for young people, but a new brood of them can hardly be acceptable to a young man. In fact, they are, and must be, aliens. I only tell you what I have heard on good authority. Don’t you understand now? Foolish boy! if you do not humour him, he will marry her. Oh! I am sure of it. I know it. And this you will drive him to. I do not warn you on the score of your prospects, but of your feelings. I should regard such a contingency, Richard, as a final division between you. Think of the scandal! but alas, that is the least of the evils.”

Page 398

It was Mrs. Doria's object to produce an impression, and avoid an argument. She therefore left him as soon as she had, as she supposed, made her mark on the young man. Richard was very silent during the speech, and save for an exclamation or so, had listened attentively. He pondered on what his aunt said. He loved Lady Blandish, and yet he did not wish to see her Lady Feverel. Mrs. Doria laid painful stress on the scandal, and though he did not give his mind to this, he thought of it. He thought of his mother. Where was she? But most his thoughts recurred to his father, and something akin to jealousy slowly awakened his heart to him. He had given him up, and had not latterly felt extremely filial; but he could not bear the idea of a division in the love of which he had ever been the idol and sole object. And such a man, too! so good! so generous! If it was jealousy that roused the young man's heart to his father, the better part of love was also revived in it. He thought of old days: of his father's forbearance, his own wilfulness. He looked on himself, and what he had done, with the eyes of such a man. He determined to do all he could to regain his favour.

Mrs. Doria learnt from Adrian in the evening that her nephew intended waiting in town another week.

"That will do," smiled Mrs. Doria. "He will be more patient at the end of a week."

"Oh! does patience beget patience?" said Adrian. "I was not aware it was a propagating virtue. I surrender him to you. I shan't be able to hold him in after one week more. I assure you, my dear aunt, he's already"...

"Thank you, no explanation," Mrs. Doria begged.

When Richard saw her nest, he was informed that she had received a most satisfactory letter from Mrs. John Todhunter: quite a glowing account of John's behaviour: but on Richard's desiring to know the words Clare had written, Mrs. Doria objected to be explicit, and shot into worldly gossip.

"Clare seldom glows," said Richard.

"No, I mean for her," his aunt remarked. "Don't look like your father, child."

"I should like to have seen the letter," said Richard.

Mrs. Doria did not propose to show it.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A Lady driving a pair of greys was noticed by Richard in his rides and walks. She passed him rather obviously and often. She was very handsome; a bold beauty, with shining black hair, red lips, and eyes not afraid of men. The hair was brushed from her

temples, leaving one of those fine reckless outlines which the action of driving, and the pace, admirably set off. She took his fancy. He liked the air of petulant gallantry about her, and mused upon the picture, rare to him, of a glorious dashing woman. He thought, too, she looked at him. He was not at the time inclined to be vain, or he might have been sure she did. Once it struck him she nodded slightly.

Page 399

He asked Adrian one day in the park—who she was.

“I don’t know her,” said Adrian. “Probably a superior priestess of Paphos.”

“Now that’s my idea of Bellona,” Richard exclaimed. “Not the fury they paint, but a spirited, dauntless, eager-looking creature like that.”

“Bellona?” returned the wise youth. “I don’t think her hair was black. Red, wasn’t it? I shouldn’t compare her to Bellona; though, no doubt, she’s as ready to spill blood. Look at her! She does seem to scent carnage. I see your idea. No; I should liken her to Diana emerged from the tutorship of Master Endymion, and at nice play among the gods. Depend upon it—they tell us nothing of the matter—Olympus shrouds the story—but you may be certain that when she left the pretty shepherd she had greater vogue than Venus up aloft.”

Brayder joined them.

“See Mrs. Mount go by?” he said.

“Oh, that’s Mrs. Mount!” cried Adrian.

“Who’s Mrs. Mount?” Richard inquired.

“A sister to Miss Random, my dear boy.”

“Like to know her?” drawled the Hon. Peter.

Richard replied indifferently, “No,” and Mrs. Mount passed out of sight and out of the conversation.

The young man wrote submissive letters to his father. “I have remained here waiting to see you now five weeks,” he wrote. “I have written to you three letters, and you do not reply to them. Let me tell you again how sincerely I desire and pray that you will come, or permit me to come to you and throw myself at your feet, and beg my forgiveness, and hers. She as earnestly implores it. Indeed, I am very wretched, sir. Believe me, there is nothing I would not do to regain your esteem and the love I fear I have unhappily forfeited. I will remain another week in the hope of hearing from you, or seeing you. I beg of you, sir, not to drive me mad. Whatever you ask of me I will consent to.”

“Nothing he would not do!” the baronet commented as he read. “There is nothing he would not do! He will remain another week and give me that final chance! And it is I who drive him mad! Already he is beginning to cast his retribution on my shoulders.”

Sir Austin had really gone down to Wales to be out of the way. A Shaddock-Dogmatist does not meet misfortune without hearing of it, and the author of The Pilgrim’S Scrip in

trouble found London too hot for him. He quitted London to take refuge among the mountains; living there in solitary commune with a virgin Note-book.

Some indefinite scheme was in his head in this treatment of his son. Had he construed it, it would have looked ugly; and it settled to a vague principle that the young man should be tried and tested.

“Let him learn to deny himself something. Let him live with his equals for a term. If he loves me he will read my wishes.” Thus he explained his principle to Lady Blandish.

The lady wrote: “You speak of a term. Till when? May I name one to him? It is the dreadful uncertainty that reduces him to despair. That, and nothing else. Pray be explicit.”

Page 400

In return, he distantly indicated Richard's majority.

How could Lady Blandish go and ask the young man to wait a year away from his wife? Her instinct began to open a wide eye on the idol she worshipped.

When people do not themselves know what they mean, they succeed in deceiving and imposing upon others. Not only was Lady Blandish mystified; Mrs. Doria, who pierced into the recesses of everybody's mind, and had always been in the habit of reading off her brother from infancy, and had never known herself to be once wrong about him, she confessed she was quite at a loss to comprehend Austin's principle. "For principle he has," said Mrs. Doria; "he never acts without one. But what it is, I cannot at present perceive. If he would write, and command the boy to await his return, all would be clear. He allows us to go and fetch him, and then leaves us all in a quandary. It must be some woman's influence. That is the only way to account for it."

"Singular!" interjected Adrian, "what pride women have in their sex! Well, I have to tell you, my dear aunt, that the day after to-morrow I hand my charge over to your keeping. I can't hold him in an hour longer. I've had to leash him with lies till my invention's exhausted. I petition to have them put down to the chief's account, but when the stream runs dry I can do no more. The last was, that I had heard from him desiring me to have the South-west bedroom ready for him on Tuesday proximate. 'So!' says my son, 'I'll wait till then,' and from the gigantic effort he exhibited in coming to it, I doubt any human power's getting him to wait longer."

"We must, we must detain him," said Mrs. Doria. "If we do not, I am convinced Austin will do something rash that he will for ever repent. He will marry that woman, Adrian. Mark my words. Now with any other young man!... But Richard's education! that ridiculous System!... Has he no distraction? nothing to amuse him?"

"Poor boy! I suppose he wants his own particular playfellow."

The wise youth had to bow to a reproof.

"I tell you, Adrian, he will marry that woman."

"My dear aunt! Can a chaste man do aught more commendable?"

"Has the boy no object we can induce him to follow?—If he had but a profession!"

"What say you to the regeneration of the streets of London, and the profession of moral-scavenger, aunt? I assure you I have served a month's apprenticeship with him. We sally forth on the tenth hour of the night. A female passes. I hear him groan. 'Is she one of them, Adrian?' I am compelled to admit she is not the saint he deems it the portion of every creature wearing petticoats to be. Another groan; an evident internal, 'It cannot be—and yet!'...that we hear on the stage. Rollings of eyes: impious

questionings of the Creator of the universe; savage mutterings against brutal males; and then we meet a second young person, and repeat the performance—of which I am rather tired. It would be all very well, but he turns upon me, and lectures me because I don't hire a house, and furnish it for all the women one meets to live in in purity. Now that's too much to ask of a quiet man. Master Thompson has latterly relieved me, I'm happy to say."

Page 401

Mrs. Doria thought her thoughts.

“Has Austin written to you since you were in town?”

“Not an Aphorism!” returned Adrian.

“I must see Richard to-morrow morning,” Mrs. Doria ended the colloquy by saying.

The result of her interview with her nephew was, that Richard made no allusion to a departure on the Tuesday; and for many days afterward he appeared to have an absorbing business on his hands: but what it was Adrian did not then learn, and his admiration of Mrs. Doria’s genius for management rose to a very high pitch.

On a morning in October they had an early visitor in the person of the Hon. Peter, whom they had not seen for a week or more.

“Gentlemen,” he said, flourishing his cane in his most affable manner, “I’ve come to propose to you to join us in a little dinner-party at Richmond. Nobody’s in town, you know. London’s as dead as a stock-fish. Nothing but the scrapings to offer you. But the weather’s fine: I flatter myself you’ll find the company agreeable, What says my friend Feverel?”

Richard begged to be excused.

“No, no: positively you must come,” said the Hon. Peter. “I’ve had some trouble to get them together to relieve the dulness of your incarceration. Richmond’s within the rules of your prison. You can be back by night. Moonlight on the water—lovely woman. We’ve engaged a city-barge to pull us back. Eight oars—I’m not sure it isn’t sixteen. Come—the word!”

Adrian was for going. Richard said he had an appointment with Ripton.

“You’re in for another rick, you two,” said Adrian. “Arrange that we go. You haven’t seen the cockney’s Paradise. Abjure Blazes, and taste of peace, my son.”

After some persuasion, Richard yawned wearily, and got up, and threw aside the care that was on him, saying, “Very well. Just as you like. We’ll take old Rip with us.”

Adrian consulted Brayder’s eye at this. The Hon. Peter briskly declared he should be delighted to have Feverel’s friend, and offered to take them all down in his drag.

“If you don’t get a match on to swim there with the tide—eh, Feverel, my boy?”

Richard replied that he had given up that sort of thing, at which Brayder communicated a queer glance to Adrian, and applauded the youth.

Richmond was under a still October sun. The pleasant landscape, bathed in Autumn, stretched from the foot of the hill to a red horizon haze. The day was like none that Richard vividly remembered. It touched no link in the chain of his recollection. It was quiet, and belonged to the spirit of the season.

Adrian had divined the character of the scrapings they were to meet. Brayder introduced them to one or two of the men, hastily and in rather an undervoice, as a thing to get over. They made their bow to the first knot of ladies they encountered. Propriety was observed strictly, even to severity. The general talk was of the weather. Here and there a lady would seize a button-hole or any little bit of the habiliments, of the man she was addressing; and if it came to her to chide him, she did it with more than a forefinger. This, however, was only here and there, and a privilege of intimacy.

Page 402

Where ladies are gathered together, the Queen of the assemblage may be known by her Court of males. The Queen of the present gathering leaned against a corner of the open window, surrounded by a stalwart Court, in whom a practised eye would have discerned guardsmen, and Ripton, with a sinking of the heart, apprehended lords. They were fine men, offering inanimate homage. The trim of their whiskerage, the cut of their coats, the high-bred indolence in their aspect, eclipsed Ripton's sense of self-esteem. But they kindly looked over him. Occasionally one committed a momentary outrage on him with an eye-glass, seeming to cry out in a voice of scathing scorn, "Who's this?" and Ripton got closer to his hero to justify his humble pretensions to existence and an identity in the shadow of him. Richard gazed about. Heroes do not always know what to say or do; and the cold bath before dinner in strange company is one of the instances. He had recognized his superb Bellona in the lady by the garden window. For Brayder the men had nods and yokes, the ladies a pretty playfulness. He was very busy, passing between the groups, chatting, laughing, taking the feminine taps he received, and sometimes returning them in sly whispers. Adrian sat down and crossed his legs, looking amused and benignant.

"Whose dinner is it?" Ripton heard a mignonne beauty ask of a cavalier.

"Mount's, I suppose," was the answer.

"Where is he? Why don't he come?"

"An affaire, I fancy."

"There he is again! How shamefully he treats Mrs. Mount!"

"She don't seem to cry over it."

Mrs. Mount was flashing her teeth and eyes with laughter at one of her Court, who appeared to be Fool.

Dinner was announced. The ladies proclaimed extravagant appetites. Brayder posted his three friends. Ripton found himself under the lee of a dame with a bosom. On the other aide of him was the mignonne. Adrian was at the lower end of the table. Ladies were in profusion, and he had his share. Brayder drew Richard from seat to seat. A happy man had established himself next to Mrs. Mount. Him Brayder hailed to take the head of the table. The happy man objected, Brayder continued urgent, the lady tenderly insisted, the happy man grimaced, dropped into the post of honour, strove to look placable. Richard usurped his chair, and was not badly welcomed by his neighbour.

Then the dinner commenced, and had all the attention of the company, till the flying of the first champagne-cork gave the signal, and a hum began to spread. Sparkling wine, that looseneth the tongue, and displayeth the verity, hath also the quality of colouring it.

The ladies laughed high; Richard only thought them gay and natural. They flung back in their chairs and laughed to tears; Ripton thought only of the pleasure he had in their society. The champagne-corks continued a regular file-firing.

“Where have you been lately? I haven’t seen you in the park,” said Mrs. Mount to Richard.

Page 403

“No,” he replied, “I’ve not been there.” The question seemed odd: she spoke so simply that it did not impress him. He emptied his glass, and had it filled again.

The Hon. Peter did most of the open talking, which related to horses, yachting, opera, and sport generally: who was ruined; by what horse, or by what woman. He told one or two of Richard’s feats. Fair smiles rewarded the hero.

“Do you bet?” said Mrs. Mount.

“Only on myself,” returned Richard.

“Bravo!” cried his Bellona, and her eye sent a lingering delirious sparkle across her brimming glass at him.

“I’m sure you’re a safe one to back,” she added, and seemed to scan his points approvingly.

Richard’s cheeks mounted bloom.

“Don’t you adore champagne?” quoth the dame with a bosom to Ripton.

“Oh, yes!” answered Ripton, with more candour than accuracy, “I always drink it.”

“Do you indeed?” said the enraptured bosom, ogling him. “You would be a friend, now! I hope you don’t object to a lady joining you now and then. Champagne’s my folly.”

A laugh was circling among the ladies of whom Adrian was the centre; first low, and as he continued some narration, peals resounded, till those excluded from the fun demanded the cue, and ladies leaned behind gentlemen to take it up, and formed an electric chain of laughter. Each one, as her ear received it, caught up her handkerchief, and laughed, and looked shocked afterwards, or looked shocked and then spouted laughter. The anecdote might have been communicated to the bewildered cavaliers, but coming to a lady of a demurer cast, she looked shocked without laughing, and reproved the female table, in whose breasts it was consigned to burial: but here and there a man’s head was seen bent, and a lady’s mouth moved, though her face was not turned toward him, and a man’s broad laugh was presently heard, while the lady gazed unconsciously before her, and preserved her gravity if she could escape any other lady’s eyes; failing in which, handkerchiefs were simultaneously seized, and a second chime arose, till the tickling force subsided to a few chance bursts.

What nonsense it is that my father writes about women! thought Richard. He says they can’t laugh, and don’t understand humour. It comes, he reflected, of his shutting himself from the world. And the idea that he was seeing the world, and feeling wiser, flattered him. He talked fluently to his dangerous Bellona. He gave her some reminiscences of Adrian’s whimsies.

“Oh!” said she, “that’s your tutor, is it!” She eyed the young man as if she thought he must go far and fast.

Ripton felt a push. “Look at that,” said the bosom, fuming utter disgust. He was directed to see a manly arm round the waist of the mignonne. “Now that’s what I don’t like in company,” the bosom inflated to observe with sufficient emphasis. “She always will allow it with everybody. Give her a nudge.”

Page 404

Ripton protested that he dared not; upon which she said, “Then I will”; and inclined her sumptuous bust across his lap, breathing wine in his face, and gave the nudge. The mignonne turned an inquiring eye on Ripton; a mischievous spark shot from it. She laughed, and said; “Aren’t you satisfied with the old girl?”

“Impudence!” muttered the bosom, growing grander and redder.

“Do, do fill her glass, and keep her quiet—she drinks port when there’s no more champagne,” said the mignonne.

The bosom revenged herself by whispering to Ripton scandal of the mignonne, and between them he was enabled to form a correcter estimate of the company, and quite recovered from his original awe: so much so as to feel a touch of jealousy at seeing his lively little neighbour still held in absolute possession.

Mrs. Mount did not come out much; but there was a deferential manner in the bearing of the men toward her, which those haughty creatures accord not save to clever women; and she contrived to hold the talk with three or four at the head of the table while she still had passages aside with Richard.

The port and claret went very well after the champagne. The ladies here did not ignominiously surrender the field to the gentlemen; they maintained their position with honour. Silver was seen far out on Thames. The wine ebbed, and the laughter. Sentiment and cigars took up the wondrous tale.

“Oh, what a lovely night!” said the ladies, looking above.

“Charming,” said the gentlemen, looking below.

The faint-smelling cool Autumn air was pleasant after the feast. Fragrant weeds burned bright about the garden.

“We are split into couples,” said Adrian to Richard, who was standing alone, eying the landscape. “Tis the influence of the moon! Apparently we are in Cyprus. How has my son enjoyed himself? How likes he the society of Aspasia? I feel like a wise Greek to-night.”

Adrian was jolly, and rolled comfortably as he talked. Ripton had been carried off by the sentimental bosom. He came up to them and whispered: “By Jove, Ricky! do you know what sort of women these are?”

Richard said he thought them a nice sort.

“Puritan!” exclaimed Adrian, slapping Ripton on the back. “Why didn’t you get tipsy, sir? Don’t you ever intoxicate yourself except at lawful marriages? Reveal to us what you have done with the portly dame?”

Ripton endured his bantering that he might hang about Richard, and watch over him. He was jealous of his innocent Beauty’s husband being in proximity with such women. Murmuring couples passed them to and fro.

“By Jove, Ricky!” Ripton favoured his friend with another hard whisper, “there’s a woman smoking!”

“And why not, O Riptonus?” said Adrian. “Art unaware that woman cosmopolitan is woman consummate? and dost grumble to pay the small price for the splendid gem?”

Page 405

“Well, I don’t like women to smoke,” said plain Ripton.

“Why mayn’t they do what men do?” the hero cried impetuously. “I hate that contemptible narrow-mindedness. It’s that makes the ruin and horrors I see. Why mayn’t they do what men do? I like the women who are brave enough not to be hypocrites. By heaven! if these women are bad, I like them better than a set of hypocritical creatures who are all show, and deceive you in the end.”

“Bravo!” shouted Adrian. “There speaks the regenerator.”

Ripton, as usual, was crushed by his leader. He had no argument. He still thought women ought not to smoke; and he thought of one far away, lonely by the sea, who was perfect without being cosmopolitan.

The Pilgrim’s Scrip remarks that: “Young men take joy in nothing so much as the thinking women Angels: and nothing sours men of experience more than knowing that all are not quite so.”

The Aphorist would have pardoned Ripton Thompson his first Random extravagance, had he perceived the simple warm-hearted worship of feminine goodness Richard’s young bride had inspired in the breast of the youth. It might possibly have taught him to put deeper trust in our nature.

Ripton thought of her, and had a feeling of sadness. He wandered about the grounds by himself, went through an open postern, and threw himself down among some bushes on the slope of the hill. Lying there, and meditating, he became aware of voices conversing.

“What does he want?” said a woman’s voice. “It’s another of his villanies, I know. Upon my honour, Brayder, when I think of what I have to reproach him for, I think I must go mad, or kill him.”

“Tragic!” said the Hon. Peter. “Haven’t you revenged yourself, Bella, pretty often? Best deal openly. This is a commercial transaction. You ask for money, and you are to have it—on the conditions: double the sum, and debts paid.”

“He applies to me!”

“You know, my dear Bella, it has long been all up between you. I think Mount has behaved very well, considering all he knows. He’s not easily hoodwinked, you know. He resigns himself to his fate and follows other game.”

“Then the condition is, that I am to seduce this young man?”

“My dear Bella! you strike your bird like a hawk. I didn’t say seduce. Hold him in—play with him. Amuse him.”

“I don’t understand half-measures.”

“Women seldom do.”

“How I hate you, Brayder!”

“I thank your ladyship.”

The two walked farther. Ripton had heard some little of the colloquy. He left the spot in a serious mood, apprehensive of something dark to the people he loved, though he had no idea of what the Hon. Peter’s stipulation involved.

Page 406

On the voyage back to town, Richard was again selected to sit by Mrs. Mount. Brayder and Adrian started the jokes. The pair of parasites got on extremely well together. Soft fell the plash of the oars; softly the moonlight curled around them; softly the banks glided by. The ladies were in a state of high sentiment. They sang without request. All deemed the British ballad-monger an appropriate interpreter of their emotions. After good wine, and plenty thereof, fair throats will make men of taste swallow that remarkable composer. Eyes, lips, hearts; darts and smarts and sighs; beauty, duty; bosom, blossom; false one, farewell! To this pathetic strain they melted. Mrs. Mount, though strongly requested, declined to sing. She preserved her state. Under the tall aspens of Brentford-ait, and on they swept, the white moon in their wake. Richard's hand lay open by his side. Mrs. Mount's little white hand by misadventure fell into it. It was not pressed, or soothed for its fall, or made intimate with eloquent fingers. It lay there like a bit of snow on the cold ground. A yellow leaf wavering down from the aspens struck Richard's cheek, and he drew away the very hand to throw back his hair and smooth his face, and then folded his arms, unconscious of offence. He was thinking ambitiously of his life: his blood was untroubled, his brain calmly working.

"Which is the more perilous?" is a problem put by the Pilgrim: "To meet the temptings of Eve, or to pique her?"

Mrs. Mount stared at the young man as at a curiosity, and turned to flirt with one of her Court. The Guardsmen were mostly sentimental. One or two rattled, and one was such a good-humoured fellow that Adrian could not make him ridiculous. The others seemed to give themselves up to a silent waxing in length of limb. However far they sat removed, everybody was entangled in their legs. Pursuing his studies, Adrian came to the conclusion, that the same close intellectual and moral affinity which he had discovered to exist between our nobility and our yeomanry, is to be observed between the Guardsman class, and that of the corps de ballet: they both live by the strength of their legs, where also their wits, if they do not altogether reside there, are principally developed: both are volage; wine, tobacco, and the moon, influence both alike; and admitting the one marked difference that does exist, it is, after all, pretty nearly the same thing to be coquetting and sinning on two legs as on the point of a toe.

A long Guardsman with a deep bass voice sang a doleful song about the twining tendrils of the heart ruthlessly torn, but required urgent persuasions and heavy trumpeting of his lungs to get to the end: before he had accomplished it, Adrian had contrived to raise a laugh in his neighbourhood, so that the company was divided, and the camp split: jollity returned to one-half, while sentiment held the other. Ripton, blotted behind the bosom, was only lucky in securing a higher degree of heat than was possible for the rest. "Are you cold?" she would ask, smiling charitably.

Page 407

“I am,” said the mignonne, as if to excuse her conduct.

“You always appear to be,” the fat one sniffed and snapped.

“Won’t you warm two, Mrs. Mortimer?” said the naughty little woman.

Disdain prevented any further notice of her. Those familiar with the ladies enjoyed their sparring, which was frequent. The mignonne was heard to whisper: “That poor fellow will certainly be stewed.”

Very prettily the ladies took and gave warmth, for the air on the water was chill and misty. Adrian had beside him the demure one who had stopped the circulation of his anecdote. She in nowise objected to the fair exchange, but said “Hush!” betweenwhiles.

Past Kew and Hammersmith, on the cool smooth water; across Putney reach; through Battersea bridge; and the City grew around them, and the shadows of great mill-factories slept athwart the moonlight.

All the ladies prattled sweetly of a charming day when they alighted on land. Several cavaliers crushed for the honour of conducting Mrs. Mount to her home.

“My brougham’s here; I shall go alone,” said Mrs. Mount. “Some one arrange my shawl.”

She turned her back to Richard, who had a view of a delicate neck as he manipulated with the bearing of a mailed knight.

“Which way are you going?” she asked carelessly, and, to his reply as to the direction, said: “Then I can give you a lift,” and she took his arm with a matter-of-course air, and walked up the stairs with him.

Ripton saw what had happened. He was going to follow: the portly dame retained him, and desired him to get her a cab.

“Oh, you happy fellow!” said the bright-eyed mignonne, passing by.

Ripton procured the cab, and stuffed it full without having to get into it himself.

“Try and let him come in too?” said the persecuting creature, again passing.

“Take liberties with pour men—you shan’t with me,” retorted the angry bosom, and drove off.

“So she’s been and gone and run away and left him after all his trouble!” cried the pert little thing, peering into Ripton’s eyes. “Now you’ll never be so foolish as to pin your faith to fat women again. There! he shall be made happy another time.” She gave his nose a comical tap, and tripped away with her possessor.

Ripton rather forgot his friend for some minutes: Random thoughts laid hold of him. Cabs and carriages rattled past. He was sure he had been among members of the nobility that day, though when they went by him now they only recognized him with an effort of the eyelids. He began to think of the day with exultation, as an event. Recollections of the mignonne were captivating. “Blue eyes—just what I like! And such a little impudent nose, and red lips, pouting—the very thing I like! And her hair? darkish, I think—say brown. And so saucy, and light on her feet. And kind she is, or she wouldn’t have talked to me like that.” Thus, with a groaning soul, he pictured her. His reason voluntarily consigned her to the aristocracy as a natural appanage: but he did amorously wish that Fortune had made a lord of him.

Page 408

Then his mind reverted to Mrs. Mount, and the strange bits of the conversation he had heard on the hill. He was not one to suspect anybody positively. He was timid of fixing a suspicion. It hovered indefinitely, and clouded people, without stirring him to any resolve. Still the attentions of the lady toward Richard were queer. He endeavoured to imagine they were in the nature of things, because Richard was so handsome that any woman must take to him. "But he's married," said Ripton, "and he mustn't go near these people if he's married." Not a high morality, perhaps better than none at all: better for the world were it practised more. He thought of Richard along with that sparkling dame, alone with her. The adorable beauty of his dear bride, her pure heavenly face, swam before him. Thinking of her, he lost sight of the mignonne who had made him giddy.

He walked to Richard's hotel, and up and down the street there, hoping every minute to hear his step; sometimes fancying he might have returned and gone to bed. Two o'clock struck. Ripton could not go away. He was sure he should not sleep if he did. At last the cold sent him homeward, and leaving the street, on the moonlight side of Piccadilly he met his friend patrolling with his head up and that swing of the feet proper to men who are chanting verses.

"Old Rip!" cried Richard, cheerily. "What on earth are you doing here at this hour of the morning?"

Ripton muttered of his pleasure at meeting him. "I wanted to shake your hand before I went home."

Richard smiled on him in an amused kindly way. "That all? You may shake my hand any day, like a true man as you are, old Rip! I've been speaking about you. Do you know, that—Mrs. Mount—never saw you all the time at Richmond, or in the boat!"

"Oh!" Ripton said, well assured that he was a dwarf "you saw her safe home?"

"Yes. I've been there for the last couple of hours—talking. She talks capitally: she's wonderfully clever. She's very like a man, only much nicer. I like her."

"But, Richard, excuse me—I'm sure I don't mean to offend you—but now you're married...perhaps you couldn't help seeing her home, but I think you really indeed oughtn't to have gone upstairs."

Ripton delivered this opinion with a modest impressiveness.

"What do you mean?" said Richard. "You don't suppose I care for any woman but my little darling down there." He laughed.

"No; of course not. That's absurd. What I mean is, that people perhaps will—you know, they do—they say all manner of things, and that makes unhappiness; and I do wish you

were going home to-morrow, Ricky. I mean, to your dear wife." Ripton blushed and looked away as he spoke.

The hero gave one of his scornful glances. "So you're anxious about my reputation. I hate that way of looking on women. Because they have been once misled—look how much weaker they are!—because the world has given them an ill fame, you would treat them as contagious and keep away from them for the sake of your character!

Page 409

“It would be different with me,” quoth Ripton.

“How?” asked the hero.

“Because I’m worse than you,” was all the logical explanation Ripton was capable of.

“I do hope you will go home soon,” he added.

“Yes,” said Richard, “and I, so do I hope so. But I’ve work to do now. I dare not, I cannot, leave it. Lucy would be the last to ask me;—you saw her letter yesterday. Now listen to me, Rip. I want to make you be just to women.”

Then he read Ripton a lecture on erring women, speaking of them as if he had known them and studied them for years. Clever, beautiful, but betrayed by love, it was the first duty of all true men to cherish and redeem them. “We turn them into curses, Rip; these divine creatures.” And the world suffered for it. That—that was the root of all the evil in the world!

“I don’t feel anger or horror at these poor women, Rip! It’s strange. I knew what they were when we came home in the boat. But I do—it tears my heart to see a young girl given over to an old man—a man she doesn’t love. That’s shame!—Don’t speak of it.”

Forgetting to contest the premiss, that all betrayed women are betrayed by love, Ripton was quite silenced. He, like most young men, had pondered somewhat on this matter, and was inclined to be sentimental when he was not hungry. They walked in the moonlight by the railings of the park. Richard harangued at leisure, while Ripton’s teeth chattered. Chivalry might be dead, but still there was something to do, went the strain. The lady of the day had not been thrown in the hero’s path without an object, he said; and he was sadly right there. He did not express the thing clearly; nevertheless Ripton understood him to mean, he intended to rescue that lady from further transgressions, and show a certain scorn of the world. That lady, and then other ladies unknown, were to be rescued. Ripton was to help. He and Ripton were to be the knights of this enterprise. When appealed to, Ripton acquiesced, and shivered. Not only were they to be knights, they would have to be Titans, for the powers of the world, the spurious ruling Social Gods, would have to be defied and overthrown. And Titan number one flung up his handsome bold face as if to challenge base Jove on the spot; and Titan number two strained the upper button of his coat to meet across his pocket-handkerchief on his chest, and warmed his fingers under his coat-tails. The moon had fallen from her high seat and was in the mists of the West, when he was allowed to seek his blankets, and the cold acting on his friend’s eloquence made Ripton’s flesh very contrite. The poor fellow had thinner blood than the hero; but his heart was good. By the time he had got a little warmth about him, his heart gratefully strove to encourage him in the conception of becoming a knight and a Titan; and so striving Ripton fell asleep and dreamed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Page 410

Behold the hero embarked in the redemption of an erring beautiful woman.

“Alas!” writes the Pilgrim at this very time to Lady Blandish, “I cannot get that legend of the Serpent from me, the more I think. Has he not caught you, and ranked you foremost in his legions? For see: till you were fashioned, the fruits hung immobile on the boughs. They swayed before us, glistening and cold. The hand must be eager that plucked them. They did not come down to us, and smile, and speak our language, and read our thoughts, and know when to fly, when to follow! how surely to have us!

“Do but mark one of you standing openly in the track of the Serpent. What shall be done with her? I fear the world is wiser than its judges! Turn from her, says the world. By day the sons of the world do. It darkens, and they dance together downward. Then comes there one of the world’s elect who deems old counsel devilish; indifference to the end of evil worse than its pursuit. He comes to reclaim her. From deepest bane will he bring her back to highest blessing. Is not that a bait already? Poor fish! ’tis wondrous flattering. The Serpent has slimed her so to secure him! With slow weary steps he draws her into light: she clings to him; she is human; part of his work, and he loves it. As they mount upward, he looks on her more, while she, it may be, looks above. What has touched him? What has passed out of her, and into him? The Serpent laughs below. At the gateways of the Sun they fall together!”

This alliterative production was written without any sense of the peril that makes prophecy.

It suited Sir Austin to write thus. It was a channel to his acrimony moderated through his philosophy. The letter was a reply to a vehement entreaty from Lady Blandish for him to come up to Richard and forgive him thoroughly: Richard’s name was not mentioned in it.

“He tries to be more than he is,” thought the lady: and she began insensibly to conceive him less than he was.

The baronet was conscious of a certain false gratification in his son’s apparent obedience to his wishes and complete submission; a gratification he chose to accept as his due, without dissecting or accounting for it. The intelligence reiterating that Richard waited, and still waited; Richard’s letters, and more his dumb abiding and practical penitence; vindicated humanity sufficiently to stop the course of virulent aphorisms. He could speak, we have seen, in sorrow for this frail nature of ours, that he had once stood forth to champion. “But how long will this last?” he demanded, with the air of Hippias. He did not reflect how long it had lasted. Indeed, his indigestion of wrath had made of him a moral Dyspepsy.

Page 411

It was not mere obedience that held Richard from the aims of his young wife: nor was it this new knightly enterprise he had presumed to undertake. Hero as he was, a youth, open to the insane promptings of hot blood, he was not a fool. There had been talk between him and Mrs. Doria of his mother. Now that he had broken from his father, his heart spoke for her. She lived, he knew: he knew no more. Words painfully hovering along the borders of plain speech had been communicated to him, filling him with moody imaginings. If he thought of her, the red was on his face, though he could not have said why. But now, after canvassing the conduct of his father, and throwing him aside as a terrible riddle, he asked Mrs. Doria to tell him of his other parent. As softly as she could she told the story. To her the shame was past: she could weep for the poor lady. Richard dropped no tears. Disgrace of this kind is always present to a son, and, educated as he had been, these tidings were a vivid fire in his brain. He resolved to hunt her out, and take her from the man. Here was work set to his hand. All her dear husband did was right to Lucy. She encouraged him to stay for that purpose, thinking it also served another. There was Tom Bakewell to watch over Lucy: there was work for him to do. Whether it would please his father he did not stop to consider. As to the justice of the act, let us say nothing.

On Ripton devolved the humbler task of grubbing for Sandoe's place of residence; and as he was unacquainted with the name by which the poet now went in private, his endeavours were not immediately successful. The friends met in the evening at Lady Blandish's town-house, or at the Foreys', where Mrs. Doria procured the reverer of the Royal Martyr, and staunch conservative, a favourable reception. Pity, deep pity for Richard's conduct Ripton saw breathing out of Mrs. Doria. Algernon Feverel treated his nephew with a sort of rough commiseration, as a young fellow who had run off the road.

Pity was in Lady Blandish's eyes, though for a different cause. She doubted if she did well in seconding his father's unwise scheme—supposing him to have a scheme. She saw the young husband encompassed by dangers at a critical time. Not a word of Mrs. Mount had been breathed to her, but the lady had some knowledge of life. She touched on delicate verges to the baronet in her letters, and he understood her well enough. "If he loves this person to whom he has bound himself, what fear for him? Or are you coming to think it something that bears the name of love because we have to veil the rightful appellation?" So he responded, remote among the mountains. She tried very hard to speak plainly. Finally he came to say that he denied himself the pleasure of seeing his son specially, that he for a time might be put to the test the lady seemed to dread. This was almost too much for Lady Blandish. Love's charity boy so loftily serene now that she saw him half denuded—a thing of shanks and wrists—was a trial for her true heart.

Page 412

Going home at night Richard would laugh at the faces made about his marriage. “We’ll carry the day, Rip, my Lucy and I! or I’ll do it alone—what there is to do.” He slightly adverted to a natural want of courage in women, which Ripton took to indicate that his Beauty was deficient in that quality. Up leapt the Old Dog; “I’m sure there never was a braver creature upon earth, Richard! She’s as brave as she’s lovely, I’ll swear she is! Look how she behaved that day! How her voice sounded! She was trembling... Brave? She’d follow you into battle, Richard!”

And Richard rejoined: “Talk on, dear old Rip! She’s my darling love, whatever she is! And she is gloriously lovely. No eyes are like hers. I’ll go down to-morrow morning the first thing.”

Ripton only wondered the husband of such a treasure could remain apart from it. So thought Richard for a space.

“But if I go, Rip,” he said despondently, “if I go for a day even I shall have undone all my work with my father. She says it herself—you saw it in her last letter.”

“Yes,” Ripton assented, and the words “Please remember me to dear Mr. Thompson,” fluttered about the Old Dog’s heart.

It came to pass that Mrs. Berry, having certain business that led her through Kensington Gardens, spied a figure that she had once dandled in long clothes, and helped make a man of, if ever woman did. He was walking under the trees beside a lady, talking to her, not indifferently. The gentleman was her bridegroom and her babe. “I know his back,” said Mrs. Berry, as if she had branded a mark on it in infancy. But the lady was not her bride. Mrs. Berry diverged from the path, and got before them on the left flank; she stared, retreated, and came round upon the right. There was that in the lady’s face which Mrs. Berry did not like. Her innermost question was, why he was not walking with his own wife? She stopped in front of them. They broke, and passed about her. The lady made a laughing remark to him, whereat he turned to look, and Mrs. Berry bobbed. She had to bob a second time, and then he remembered the worthy creature, and hailed her Penelope, shaking her hand so that he put her in countenance again. Mrs. Berry was extremely agitated. He dismissed her, promising to call upon her in the evening. She heard the lady slip out something from a side of her lip, and they both laughed as she toddled off to a sheltering tree to wipe a corner of each eye. “I don’t like the looks of that woman,” she said, and repeated it resolutely.

“Why doesn’t he walk arm-in-arm with her?” was her neat inquiry. “Where’s his wife?” succeeded it. After many interrogations of the sort, she arrived at naming the lady a bold-faced thing; adding subsequently, brazen. The lady had apparently shown Mrs. Berry that she wished to get rid of her, and had checked the outpouring of her emotions on the breast of her babe. “I know a lady when I see one,” said Mrs. Berry. “I haven’t

lived with ’em for nothing; and if she’s a lady bred and born, I wasn’t married in the church alive.”

Page 413

Then, if not a lady, what was she? Mrs. Berry desired to know: “She’s imitation lady, I’m sure she is!” Berry vowed. “I say she don’t look proper.”

Establishing the lady to be a spurious article, however, what was one to think of a married man in company with such? “Oh no! it ain’t that!” Mrs. Berry returned immediately on the charitable tack. “Belike it’s some one of his acquaintance ’ve married her for her looks, and he’ve just met her.... Why it’d be as bad as my Berry!” the relinquished spouse of Berry ejaculated, in horror at the idea of a second man being so monstrous in wickedness. “Just coupled, too!” Mrs. Berry groaned on the suspicious side of the debate. “And such a sweet young thing for his wife! But no, I’ll never believe it. Not if he tell me so himself! And men don’t do that,” she whimpered.

Women are swift at coming to conclusions in these matters; soft women exceedingly swift: and soft women who have been betrayed are rapid beyond measure. Mrs. Berry had not cogitated long ere she pronounced distinctly and without a shadow of dubiosity: “My opinion is—married or not married, and wheresomever he pick her up—she’s nothin’ more nor less than a Bella Donna!” as which poisonous plant she forthwith registered the lady in the botanical note-book of her brain. It would have astonished Mrs. Mount to have heard her person so accurately hit off at a glance.

In the evening Richard made good his promise, accompanied by Ripton. Mrs. Berry opened the door to them. She could not wait to get him into the parlour. “You’re my own blessed babe; and I’m as good as your mother, though I didn’t suck ye, bein’ a maid!” she cried, falling into his arms, while Richard did his best to support the unexpected burden. Then reproaching him tenderly for his guile—at mention of which Ripton chuckled, deeming it his own most honourable portion of the plot—Mrs. Berry led them into the parlour, and revealed to Richard who she was, and how she had tossed him, and hugged him, and kissed him all over, when he was only that big—showing him her stumpy fat arm. “I kissed ye from head to tail, I did,” said Mrs. Berry, “and you needn’t be ashamed of it. It’s be hoped you’ll never have nothin’ worse come t’ye, my dear!”

Richard assured her he was not a bit ashamed, but warned her that she must not do it now, Mrs. Berry admitting it was out of the question now, and now that he had a wife, moreover. The young men laughed, and Ripton laughing over-loudly drew on himself Mrs. Berry’s attention: “But that Mr. Thompson there—however he can look me in the face after his inn’cence! helping blindfold an old woman! though I ain’t sorry for what I did—that I’m free for to say, and its’ over, and blessed be all! Amen! So now where is she and how is she, Mr. Richard, my dear—it’s only cuttin’ off the ‘s’ and you are as you was.—Why didn’t ye bring her with ye to see her old Berry?”

Richard hurriedly explained that Lucy was still in the Isle of Wight.

Page 414

“Oh! and you’ve left her for a day or two?” said Mrs. Berry.

“Good God! I wish it had been a day or two,” cried Richard.

“Ah! and how long have it been?” asked Mrs. Berry, her heart beginning to beat at his manner of speaking.

“Don’t talk about it,” said Richard.

“Oh! you never been dudgeonin’ already? Oh! you haven’t been peckin’ at one another yet?” Mrs. Berry exclaimed.

Ripton interposed to tell her such fears were unfounded.

“Then how long ha’ you been divided?”

In a guilty voice Ripton stammered “since September.”

“September!” breathed Mrs. Berry, counting on her fingers, “September, October, Nov—two months and more! nigh three! A young married husband away from the wife of his bosom nigh three months! Oh my! Oh my! what do that mean?”

“My father sent for me—I’m waiting to see him,” said Richard. A few more words helped Mrs. Berry to comprehend the condition of affairs. Then Mrs. Berry spread her lap, flattened out her hands, fixed her eyes, and spoke.

“My dear young gentleman!—I’d like to call ye my darlin’ babe! I’m going to speak as a mother to ye, whether ye likes it or no; and what old Berry says, you won’t mind, for she’s had ye when there was no conventionals about ye, and she has the feelin’s of a mother to you, though humble her state. If there’s one that know matrimony it’s me, my dear, though Berry did give me no more but nine months of it and I’ve known the worst of matrimony, which, if you wants to be woeful wise, there it is for ye. For what have been my gain? That man gave me nothin’ but his name; and Bessy Andrews was as good as Bessy Berry, though both is ‘Bs,’ and says he, you was ‘A,’ and now you’s ‘B,’ so you’re my A B, he says, write yourself down that, he says, the bad man, with his jokes!—Berry went to service.” Mrs. Berry’s softness came upon her. “So I tell ye, Berry went to service. He left the wife of his bosom forlorn and he went to service; because he were allays an ambitious man, and wasn’t, so to speak, happy out of his uniform—which was his livery—not even in my arms: and he let me know it. He got among them kitchen sluts, which was my mournin’ ready made, and worse than a widow’s cap to me, which is no shame to wear, and some say becoming. There’s no man as ever lived known better than my Berry how to show his legs to advantage, and gals look at ’em. I don’t wonder now that Berry was prostrated. His temptations was strong, and his flesh was weak. Then what I say is, that for a young married man—be he whomsoever he may be—to be separated from the wife of his bosom—a young

sweet thing, and he an innocent young gentleman!—so to sunder, in their state, and be kep' from each other, I say it's as bad as bad can be! For what is matrimony, my dears? We're told it's a holy Ordnance. And why are ye so comfortable in matrimony? For that ye are not a sinnin'! And they that severs ye

Page 415

they tempts ye to stray: and you learn too late the meanin' o' them blessin's of the priest—as it was ordained. Separate—what comes? Fust it's like the circulation of your blood a-stoppin'—all goes wrong. Then there's misunderstandings—ye've both lost the key. Then, behold ye, there's birds o' prey hoverin' over each on ye, and it's which'll be snapped up fust. Then—Oh, dear! Oh, dear! it be like the devil come into the world again." Mrs. Berry struck her hands and moaned. "A day I'll give ye: I'll go so far as a week: but there's the outside. Three months dwellin' apart! That's not matrimony, it's divorcin'! what can it be to her but widowhood? widowhood with no cap to show for it! And what can it be to you, my dear? Think! you been a bachelor three months! and a bachelor man," Mrs. Berry shook her head most dolefully, "he ain't widow woman. I don't go to compare you to Berry, my dear young gentleman. Some men's hearts is vagabonds born—they must go astray—it's their natur' to. But all men are men, and I know the foundation of 'em, by reason of my woe."

Mrs. Berry paused. Richard was humorously respectful to the sermon. The truth in the good creature's address was not to be disputed, or despised, notwithstanding the inclination to laugh provoked by her quaint way of putting it. Ripton nodded encouragingly at every sentence, for he saw her drift, and wished to second it.

Seeking for an illustration of her meaning, Mrs. Berry solemnly continued: "We all know what checked prespiration is." But neither of the young gentlemen could resist this. Out they burst in a roar of laughter.

"Laugh away," said Mrs. Berry. "I don't mind ye. I say again, we all do know what checked prespiration is. It fly to the lungs, it gives ye mortal inflammation, and it carries ye off. Then I say checked matrimony is as bad. It fly to the heart, and it carries off the virtue that's in ye, and you might as well be dead! Them that is joined it's their salvation not to separate! It don't so much matter before it. That Mr. Thompson there—if he go astray, it ain't from the blessed fold. He hurt himself alone—not double, and belike treble, for who can say now what may be? There's time for it. I'm for holding back young people so that they knows their minds, howsomever they rattles about their hearts. I ain't a speeder of matrimony, and good's my reason! but where it's been done—where they're lawfully joined, and their bodies made one, I do say this, that to put division between 'em then, it's to make wanderin' comets of 'em—creatures without a objeck, and no soul can say what they's good for but to rush about!"

Mrs. Berry here took a heavy breath, as one who has said her utmost for the time being.

"My dear old girl," Richard went up to her and, applauding her on the shoulder, "you're a very wise old woman. But you mustn't speak to me as if I wanted to stop here. I'm compelled to. I do it for her good chiefly."

Page 416

“It’s your father that’s doin’ it, my dear?”

“Well, I’m waiting his pleasure.”

“A pretty pleasure! puttin’ a snake in the nest of young turtle-doves! And why don’t she come up to you?”

“Well, that you must ask her. The fact is, she’s a little timid girl—she wants me to see him first, and when I’ve made all right, then she’ll come.”

“A little timid girl!” cried Mrs. Berry. “Oh, lor’, how she must ha’ deceived ye to make ye think that! Look at that ring,” she held out her finger, “he’s a stranger: he’s not my lawful! You know what ye did to me, my dear. Could I get my own wedding-ring back from her? ‘No!’ says she, firm as a rock, ’he said, with this ring I thee wed’—I think I see her now, with her pretty eyes and lovesome locks—a darlin’!—And that ring she’d keep to, come life, came death. And she must ha’ been a rock for me to give in to her in that. For what’s the consequence? Here am I,” Mrs. Berry smoothed down the back of her hand mournfully, “here am I in a strange ring, that’s like a strange man holdin’ of me, and me a-wearin’ of it just to seem decent, and feelin’ all over no better than a b—a big—that nasty came I can’t abide!—I tell you, my dear, she ain’t soft, no!—except to the man of her heart; and the best of women’s too soft there—mores our sorrow!”

“Well, well!” said Richard, who thought he knew.

“I agree with you, Mrs. Berry,” Ripton struck in, “Mrs. Richard would do anything in the world her husband asked her, I’m quite sure.”

“Bless you for your good opinion, Mr. Thompson! Why, see her! she ain’t frail on her feet; she looks ye straight in the eyes; she ain’t one of your hang-down misses. Look how she behaved at the ceremony!”

“Ah!” sighed Ripton.

“And if you’d ha’ seen her when she spoke to me about my ring! Depend upon it, my dear Mr. Richard, if she blinded you about the nerve she’ve got, it was somethin’ she thought she ought to do for your sake, and I wish I’d been by to counsel her, poor blessed babe!—And how much longer, now, can ye stay divided from that darlin’?”

Richard paced up and down.

“A father’s will,” urged Mrs. Berry, “that’s a son’s law; but he mustn’t go again’ the laws of his nature to do it.”

“Just be quiet at present—talk of other things, there’s a good woman,” said Richard.

Mrs. Berry meekly folded her arms.

“How strange, now, our meetin’ like this! meetin’ at all, too!” she remarked contemplatively. “It’s them advertisements! They brings people together from the ends of the earth, for good or for bad. I often say, there’s more lucky accidents, or unlucky ones, since advertisements was the rule, than ever there was before. They make a number of romances, depend upon it! Do you walk much in the Gardens, my dear?”

“Now and then,” said Richard.

“Very pleasant it is there with the fine folks and flowers and titled people,” continued Mrs. Berry. “That was a handsome woman you was a-walkin’ beside, this mornin’.”

Page 417

“Very,” said Richard.

“She was a handsome woman! or I should say, is, for her day ain’t past, and she know it. I thought at first—by her back—it might ha’ been your aunt, Mrs. Forey; for she do step out well and hold up her shoulders: straight as a dart she be! But when I come to see her face—Oh, dear me! says I, this ain’t one of the family. They none of ’em got such bold faces—nor no lady as I know have. But she’s a fine woman—that nobody can gainsay.”

Mrs. Berry talked further of the fine woman. It was a liberty she took to speak in this disrespectful tone of her, and Mrs. Berry was quite aware that she was laying herself open to rebuke. She had her end in view. No rebuke was uttered, and during her talk she observed intercourse passing between the eyes of the young men.

“Look here, Penelope,” Richard stopped her at last. “Will it make you comfortable if I tell you I’ll obey the laws of my nature and go down at the end of the week?”

“I’ll thank the Lord of heaven if you do!” she exclaimed.

“Very well, then—be happy—I will. Now listen. I want you to keep your rooms for me—those she had. I expect, in a day or two, to bring a lady here”—

“A lady?” faltered Mrs. Berry.

“Yes. A lady.”

“May I make so bold as to ask what lady?”

“You may not. Not now. Of course you will know.”

Mrs. Berry’s short neck made the best imitation it could of an offended swan’s action. She was very angry. She said she did not like so many ladies, which natural objection Richard met by saying that there was only one lady.

“And Mrs. Berry,” he added, dropping his voice. “You will treat her as you did my dear girl, for she will require not only shelter but kindness. I would rather leave her with you than with any one. She has been very unfortunate.”

His serious air and habitual tone of command fascinated the softness of Berry, and it was not until he had gone that she spoke out. “Unfort’nate! He’s going to bring me an unfort’nate female! Oh! not from my babe can I bear that! Never will I have her here! I see it. It’s that bold-faced woman he’s got mixed up in, and she’ve been and made the young man think he’ll go for to reform her. It’s one o’ their arts—that is; and he’s too innocent a young man to mean anythin’ else. But I ain’t a house of Magdalens no! and sooner than have her here I’d have the roof fall over me, I would.”

She sat down to eat her supper on the sublime resolve.

In love, Mrs. Berry's charity was all on the side of the law, and this is the case with many of her sisters. The Pilgrim sneers at them for it, and would have us credit that it is their admirable instinct which, at the expense of every virtue save one, preserves the artificial barrier simply to impose upon us. Men, I presume, are hardly fair judges, and should stand aside and mark.

Early next day Mrs. Berry bundled off to Richard's hotel to let him know her determination. She did not find him there. Returning homeward through the park, she beheld him on horseback riding by the side of the identical lady.

Page 418

The sight of this public exposure shocked her more than the secret walk under the trees... “You don’t look near your reform yet,” Mrs. Berry apostrophized her. “You don’t look to me one that’d come the Fair Penitent till you’ve left off bein’ fair—if then you do, which some of ye don’t. Laugh away and show yet airs! Spite o’ your hat and feather, and your ridin’ habit, you’re a Belle Donna.” Setting her down again absolutely for such, whatever it might signify, Mrs. Berry had a virtuous glow.

In the evening she heard the noise of wheels stopping at the door. “Never!” she rose from her chair to exclaim. “He ain’t rided her out in the mornin’, and been and made a Magdalen of her afore dark?”

A lady veiled was brought into the house by Richard. Mrs. Berry feebly tried to bar his progress in the passage. He pushed past her, and conducted the lady into the parlour without speaking. Mrs. Berry did not follow. She heard him murmur a few sentences within. Then he came out. All her crest stood up, as she whispered vigorously, “Mr. Richard! if that woman stay here, I go forth. My house ain’t a penitentiary for unfort’nate females, sir”—

He frowned at her curiously; but as she was on the point of renewing her indignant protest, he clapped his hand across her mouth, and spoke words in her ear that had awful import to her. She trembled, breathing low: “My God, forgive, me!

“Richard?” And her virtue was humbled. “Lady Feverel is it? Your mother, Mr. Richard?” And her virtue was humbled.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

One may suppose that a prematurely aged, oily little man; a poet in bad circumstances; a decrepit butterfly chained to a disappointed inkstand, will not put out strenuous energies to retain his ancient paramour when a robust young man comes imperatively to demand his mother of him in her person. The colloquy was short between Diaper Sandoe and Richard. The question was referred to the poor spiritless lady, who, seeing that her son made no question of it, cast herself on his hands. Small loss to her was Diaper; but he was the loss of habit, and that is something to a woman who has lived. The blood of her son had been running so long alien from her that the sense of her motherhood smote he now with strangeness, and Richard’s stern gentleness seemed like dreadful justice come upon her. Her heart had almost forgotten its maternal functions. She called him Sir, till he bade her remember he was her son. Her voice sounded to him like that of a broken-throated lamb, so painful and weak it was, with the plaintive stop in the utterance. When he kissed her, her skin was cold. Her thin hand fell out of his when his grasp related. “Can sin hunt one like this?” he asked, bitterly reproaching himself for the shame she had caused him to endure, and a deep compassion filled his breast.

Page 419

Poetic justice had been dealt to Diaper the poet. He thought of all he had sacrificed for this woman—the comfortable quarters, the friend, the happy flights. He could not but accuse her of unfaithfulness in leaving him in his old age. Habit had legalized his union with her. He wrote as pathetically of the break of habit as men feel at the death of love, and when we are old and have no fair hope tossing golden locks before us, a wound to this our second nature is quite as sad. I know not even if it be not actually sadder.

Day by day Richard visited his mother. Lady Blandish and Ripton alone were in the secret. Adrian let him do as he pleased. He thought proper to tell him that the public recognition he accorded to a particular lady was, in the present state of the world, scarcely prudent.

"'Tis a proof to me of your moral rectitude, my son, but the world will not think so. No one character is sufficient to cover two—in a Protestant country especially. The divinity that doth hedge a Bishop would have no chance, in contact with your Madam Danae. Drop the woman, my son. Or permit me to speak what you would have her hear."

Richard listened to him with disgust. "Well, you've had my doctorial warning," said Adrian; and plunged back into his book.

When Lady Feverel had revived to take part in the consultations Mrs. Berry perpetually opened on the subject of Richard's matrimonial duty, another chain was cast about him. "Do not, oh, do not offend your father!" was her one repeated supplication. Sir Austin had grown to be a vindictive phantom in her mind. She never wept but when she said this.

So Mrs. Berry, to whom Richard had once made mention of Lady Blandish as the only friend he had among women, bundled off in her black-satin dress to obtain an interview with her, and an ally. After coming to an understanding on the matter of the visit, and reiterating many of her views concerning young married people, Mrs. Berry said: "My lady, if I may speak so bold, I'd say the sin that's bein' done is the sin o' the lookers-on. And when everybody appear frightened by that young gentleman's father, I'll say—-hopin' your pardon—they no cause be frighted at all. For though it's nigh twenty year since I knew him, and I knew him then just sixteen months—no more—I'll say his heart's as soft as a woman's, which I've cause for to know. And that's it. That's where everybody's deceived by him, and I was. It's because he keeps his face, and makes ye think you're dealin' with a man of iron, and all the while there's a woman underneath. And a man that's like a woman he's the puzzle o' life! We can see through ourselves, my lady, and we can see through men, but one o' that sort—he's like somethin' out of nature. Then I say—hopin' be excused—what's to do is for to treat him like a woman, and not for to let him have his own way—which he don't know himself, and is why nobody else do. Let that sweet young

Page 420

couple come together, and be wholesome in spite of him, I say; and then give him time to come round, just like a woman; and round he'll come, and give 'em his blessin', and we shall know we've made him comfortable. He's angry because matrimony have come between him and his son, and he, woman-like, he's wantin' to treat what is as if it isn't. But matrimony's a holier than him. It began long long before him, and it's be hoped will endoor longs the time after, if the world's not coming to rack—wishin' him no harm."

Now Mrs. Berry only put Lady Blandish's thoughts in bad English. The lady took upon herself seriously to advise Richard to send for his wife. He wrote, bidding her come. Lucy, however, had wits, and inexperienced wits are as a little knowledge. In pursuance of her sage plan to make the family feel her worth, and to conquer the members of it one by one, she had got up a correspondence with Adrian, whom it tickled. Adrian constantly assured her all was going well: time would heal the wound if both the offenders had the fortitude to be patient: he fancied he saw signs of the baronet's relenting: they must do nothing to arrest those favourable symptoms. Indeed the wise youth was languidly seeking to produce them. He wrote, and felt, as Lucy's benefactor. So Lucy replied to her husband a cheerful rigmarole he could make nothing of, save that she was happy in hope, and still had fears. Then Mrs. Berry trained her fist to indite a letter to her bride. Her bride answered it by saying she trusted to time. "You poor marter" Mrs. Berry wrote back, "I know what your sufferin's be. They is the only kind a wife should never hide from her husband. He thinks all sorts of things if she can abide being away. And you trusting to time, why it's like trusting not to catch cold out of your natural clothes." There was no shaking Lucy's firmness.

Richard gave it up. He began to think that the life lying behind him was the life of a fool. What had he done in it? He had burnt a rick and got married! He associated the two acts of his existence. Where was the hero he was to have carved out of Tom Bakewell!—a wretch he had taught to lie and chicane: and for what? Great heavens! how ignoble did a flash from the light of his aspirations make his marriage appear! The young man sought amusement. He allowed his aunt to drag him into society, and sick of that he made late evening calls on Mrs. Mount, oblivious of the purpose he had in visiting her at all. Her man-like conversation, which he took for honesty, was a refreshing change on fair lips.

"Call me Bella: I'll call you Dick," said she. And it came to be Bella and Dick between them. No mention of Bella occurred in Richard's letters to Lucy.

Mrs. Mount spoke quite openly of herself. "I pretend to be no better than I am," she said, "and I know I'm no worse than many a woman who holds her head high." To back this she told him stories of blooming dames of good repute, and poured a little social sewerage into his ears.

Page 421

Also she understood him. “What you want, my dear Dick, is something to do. You went and got married like a—hum!—friends must be respectful. Go into the Army. Try the turf. I can put you up to a trick or two—friends should make themselves useful.”

She told him what she liked in him. “You’re the only man I was ever alone with who don’t talk to me of love and make me feel sick. I hate men who can’t speak to a woman sensibly.—Just wait a minute.” She left him and presently returned with, “Ah, Dick! old fellow! how are you?”—arrayed like a cavalier, one arm stuck in her side, her hat jauntily cocked, and a pretty oath on her lips to give reality to the costume. “What do you think of me? Wasn’t it a shame to make a woman of me when I was born to be a man?”

“I don’t know that,” said Richard, for the contrast in her attire to those shooting eyes and lips, aired her sex bewitchingly.

“What! you think I don’t do it well?”

“Charming! but I can’t forget...”

“Now that is too bad!” she pouted.

Then she proposed that they should go out into the midnight streets arm-in-arm, and out they went and had great fits of laughter at her impertinent manner of using her eyeglass, and outrageous affectation of the supreme dandy.

“They take up men, Dick, for going about in women’s clothes, and vice versaw, I suppose. You’ll bail me, old fellaa, if I have to make my bow to the beak, won’t you? Say it’s becas I’m an honest woman and don’t care to hide the—a—unmentionables when I wear them—as the t’others do,” sprinkled with the dandy’s famous invocations.

He began to conceive romance in that sort of fun.

“You’re a wopper, my brave Dick! won’t let any peeler take me? by Jove!”

And he with many assurances guaranteed to stand by her, while she bent her thin fingers trying the muscle of his arm; and reposed upon it more. There was delicacy in her dandyism. She was a graceful cavalier.

“Sir Julius,” as they named the dandy’s attire, was frequently called for on his evening visits to Mrs. Mount. When he beheld Sir Julius he thought of the lady, and “vice versaw,” as Sir Julius was fond of exclaiming.

Was ever hero in this fashion wooed?

The woman now and then would peep through Sir Julius. Or she would sit, and talk, and altogether forget she was impersonating that worthy fop.

She never uttered an idea or a reflection, but Richard thought her the cleverest woman he had ever met.

All kinds of problematic notions beset him. She was cold as ice, she hated talk about love, and she was branded by the world.

A rumour spread that reached Mrs. Doria's ears. She rushed to Adrian first. The wise youth believed there was nothing in it. She sailed down upon Richard. "Is this true? that you have been seen going publicly about with an infamous woman, Richard? Tell me! pray, relieve me!"

Page 422

Richard knew of no person answering to his aunt's description in whose company he could have been seen.

"Tell me, I say! Don't quibble. Do you know any woman of bad character?"

The acquaintance of a lady very much misjudged and ill-used by the world, Richard admitted to.

Urgent grave advice Mrs. Doria tendered her nephew, both from the moral and the worldly point of view, mentally ejaculating all the while: "That ridiculous System! That disgraceful marriage!" Sir Austin in his mountain solitude was furnished with serious stuff to brood over.

The rumour came to Lady Blandish. She likewise lectured Richard, and with her he condescended to argue. But he found himself obliged to instance something he had quite neglected. "Instead of her doing me harm, it's I that will do her good."

Lady Blandish shook her head and held up her finger. "This person must be very clever to have given you that delusion, dear."

"She is clever. And the world treats her shamefully."

"She complains of her position to you?"

"Not a word. But I will stand by her. She has no friend but me."

"My poor boy! has she made you think that?"

"How unjust you all are!" cried Richard.

"How mad and wicked is the man who can let him be tempted so!" thought Lady Blandish.

He would pronounce no promise not to visit her, not to address her publicly. The world that condemned her and cast her out was no better—worse for its miserable hypocrisy. He knew the world now, the young man said.

"My child! the world may be very bad. I am not going to defend it. But you have some one else to think of. Have you forgotten you have a wife, Richard?"

"Ay! you all speak of her now. There's my aunt: 'Remember you have a wife!' Do you think I love any one but Lucy? poor little thing! Because I am married am I to give up the society of women?"

"Of women!"

“Isn’t she a woman?”

“Too much so!” sighed the defender of her sex.

Adrian became more emphatic in his warnings. Richard laughed at him. The wise youth sneered at Mrs. Mount. The hero then favoured him with a warning equal to his own in emphasis, and surpassing it in sincerity.

“We won’t quarrel, my dear boy,” said Adrian. “I’m a man of peace. Besides, we are not fairly proportioned for a combat. Ride your steed to virtue’s goal! All I say is, that I think he’ll upset you, and it’s better to go at a slow pace and in companionship with the children of the sun. You have a very nice little woman for a wife—well, good-bye!”

To have his wife and the world thrown at his face, was unendurable to Richard; he associated them somewhat after the manner of the rick and the marriage. Charming Sir Julius, always gay, always honest, dispersed his black moods.

“Why, you’re taller,” Richard made the discovery.

Page 423

“Of course I am. Don’t you remember you said I was such a little thing when I came out of my woman’s shell?”

“And how have you done it?”

“Grown to please you.”

“Now, if you can do that, you can do anything.”

“And so I would do anything.”

“You would?”

“Honour!”

“Then"...his project recurred to him. But the incongruity of speaking seriously to Sir Julius struck him dumb.

“Then what?” asked she.

“Then you’re a gallant fellow.”

“That all?”

“Isn’t it enough?”

“Not quite. You were going to say something. I saw it in your eyes.”

“You saw that I admired you.”

“Yes, but a man mustn’t admire a man.”

“I suppose I had an idea you were a woman.”

“What! when I had the heels of my boots raised half an inch,” Sir Julius turned one heel, and volleyed out silver laughter.

“I don’t come much above your shoulder even now,” she said, and proceeded to measure her height beside him with arch up-glances.

“You must grow more.”

“’Fraid I can’t, Dick! Bootmakers can’t do it.”

“I’ll show you how,” and he lifted Sir Julius lightly, and bore the fair gentleman to the looking-glass, holding him there exactly on a level with his head. “Will that do?”

“Yes! Oh but I can’t stay here.”

“Why can’t you?”

“Why can’t I?”

He should have known then—it was thundered at a closed door in him, that he played with fire. But the door being closed, he thought himself internally secure.

Their eyes met. He put her down instantly.

Sir Julius, charming as he was, lost his vogue. Seeing that, the wily woman resumed her shell. The memory, of Sir Julius breathing about her still, doubled the feminine attraction.

“I ought to have been an actress,” she said.

Richard told her he found all natural women had a similar wish.

“Yes! Ah! then! if I had been!” sighed Mrs. Mount, gazing on the pattern of the carpet.

He took her hand, and pressed it.

“You are not happy as you are?”

“No.”

“May I speak to you?”

“Yes.”

Her nearest eye, setting a dimple of her cheek in motion, slid to the corner toward her ear, as she sat with her head sideways to him, listening. When he had gone, she said to herself: “Old hypocrites talk in that way; but I never heard of a young man doing it, and not making love at the same time.”

Their next meeting displayed her quieter: subdued as one who had been set thinking. He lauded her fair looks.

“Don’t make me thrice ashamed,” she petitioned.

But it was not only that mood with her. Dauntless defiance, that splendidly befitted her gallant outline and gave a wildness to her bright bold eyes, when she would call out: “Happy? who dares say I’m not happy? D’you think if the world whips me I’ll wince? D’you think I care for what they say or do? Let them kill me! they shall never get one cry out of me!” and flashing on the young man as if he were the congregated enemy, add: “There! now you know me!”—that was a mood that well became her, and helped the work. She ought to have been an actress.

Page 424

“This must not go on,” said Lady Blandish and Mrs. Doria in unison. A common object brought them together. They confined their talk to it, and did not disagree. Mrs. Doria engaged to go down to the baronet. Both ladies knew it was a dangerous, likely to turn out a disastrous, expedition. They agreed to it because it was something to do, and doing anything is better than doing nothing. “Do it,” said the wise youth, when they made him a third, “do it, if you want him to be a hermit for life. You will bring back nothing but his dead body, ladies—a Hellenic, rather than a Roman, triumph. He will listen to you—he will accompany you to the station—he will hand you into the carriage—and when you point to his seat he will bow profoundly, and retire into his congenial mists.”

Adrian spoke their thoughts. They fretted; they relapsed.

“Speak to him, you, Adrian,” said Mrs. Doria. “Speak to the boy solemnly. It would be almost better he should go back to that little thing he has married.”

“Almost?” Lady Blandish opened her eyes. “I have been advising it for the last month and more.”

“A choice of evils,” said Mrs. Doria’s sour-sweet face and shake of the head.

Each lady saw a point of dissension, and mutually agreed, with heroic effort, to avoid it by shutting their mouths. What was more, they preserved the peace in spite of Adrian’s artifices.

“Well, I’ll talk to him again,” he said. “I’ll try to get the Engine on the conventional line.”

“Command him!” exclaimed Mrs. Doria.

“Gentle means are, I think, the only means with Richard,” said Lady Blandish.

Throwing banter aside, as much as he could, Adrian spoke to Richard. “You want to reform this woman. Her manner is open—fair and free—the traditional characteristic. We won’t stop to canvass how that particular honesty of deportment that wins your approbation has been gained. In her college it is not uncommon. Girls, you know, are not like boys. At a certain age they can’t be quite natural. It’s a bad sign if they don’t blush, and fib, and affect this and that. It wears off when they’re women. But a woman who speaks like a man, and has all those excellent virtues you admire—where has she learned the trick? She tells you. You don’t surely approve of the school? Well, what is there in it, then? Reform her, of course. The task is worthy of your energies. But, if you are appointed to do it, don’t do it publicly, and don’t attempt it just now. May I ask you whether your wife participates in this undertaking?”

Richard walked away from the interrogation. The wise youth, who hated long unrelieved speeches and had healed his conscience, said no more.

Dear tender Lucy! Poor darling! Richard's eyes moistened. Her letters seemed sadder latterly. Yet she never called to him to come, or he would have gone. His heart leapt up to her. He announced to Adrian that he should wait no longer for his father. Adrian placidly nodded.

Page 425

The enchantress observed that her knight had a clouded brow and an absent voice.

“Richard—I can’t call you Dick now, I really don’t know why”—she said, “I want to beg a favour of you.”

“Name it. I can still call you Bella, I suppose?”

“If you care to. What I want to say is this: when you meet me out—to cut it short—-please not to recognize me.”

“And why?”

“Do you ask to be told that?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Then look: I won’t compromise you.”

“I see no harm, Bella.”

“No,” she caressed his hand, “and there is none. I know that. But,” modest eyelids were drooped, “other people do,” struggling eyes were raised.

“What do we care for other people?”

“Nothing. I don’t. Not that!” snapping her finger, “I care for you, though.” A prolonged look followed the declaration.

“You’re foolish, Bella.”

“Not quite so giddy—that’s all.”

He did not combat it with his usual impetuosity. Adrian’s abrupt inquiry had sunk in his mind, as the wise youth intended it should. He had instinctively refrained from speaking to Lucy of this lady. But what a noble creature the woman was!

So they met in the park; Mrs. Mount whipped past him; and secresy added a new sense to their intimacy.

Adrian was gratified at the result produced by his eloquence.

Though this lady never expressed an idea, Richard was not mistaken in her cleverness. She could make evenings pass gaily, and one was not the fellow to the other. She could make you forget she was a woman, and then bring the fact startlingly home to you. She could read men with one quiver of her half-closed eye-lashes. She could catch the coming mood in a man, and fit herself to it. What does a woman want with

ideas, who can do thus much? Keenness of perception, conformity, delicacy of handling, these be all the qualities necessary to parasites.

Love would have scared the youth: she banished it from her tongue. It may also have been true that it sickened her. She played on his higher nature. She understood spontaneously what would be most strange and taking to him in a woman. Various as the Serpent of old Nile, she acted fallen beauty, humorous indifference, reckless daring, arrogance in ruin. And acting thus, what think you?—She did it so well because she was growing half in earnest.

“Richard! I am not what I was since I knew you. You will not give me up quite?”

“Never, Bella.”

“I am not so bad as I’m painted!”

“You are only unfortunate.”

“Now that I know you I think so, and yet I am happier.”

She told him her history when this soft horizon of repentance seemed to throw heaven’s twilight across it. A woman’s history, you know: certain chapters expunged. It was dark enough to Richard.

“Did you love the man?” he asked. “You say you love no one now.”

Page 426

“Did I love him? He was a nobleman and I a tradesman’s daughter. No. I did not love him. I have lived to learn it. And now I should hate him, if I did not despise him.”

“Can you be deceived in love?” said Richard, more to himself than to her.

“Yes. When we’re young we can be very easily deceived. If there is such a thing as love, we discover it after we have tossed about and roughed it. Then we find the man, or the woman, that suits us:—and then it’s too late! we can’t have him.”

“Singular!” murmured Richard, “she says just what my father said.”

He spoke aloud: “I could forgive you if you had loved him.”

“Don’t be harsh, grave judge! How is a girl to distinguish?”

“You had some affection for him? He was the first?”

She chose to admit that. “Yes. And the first who talks of love to a girl must be a fool if he doesn’t blind her.”

“That makes what is called first love nonsense.”

“Isn’t it?”

He repelled the insinuation. “Because I know it is not, Bella.”

Nevertheless she had opened a wider view of the world to him, and a colder. He thought poorly of girls. A woman a sensible, brave, beautiful woman seemed, on comparison, infinitely nobler than those weak creatures.

She was best in her character of lovely rebel accusing foul injustice. “What am I to do? You tell me to be different. How can I? What am I to do? Will virtuous people let me earn my bread? I could not get a housemaid’s place! They wouldn’t have me—I see their noses smelling! Yes I can go to the hospital and sing behind a screen! Do you expect me to bury myself alive? Why, man, I have blood: I can’t become a stone. You say I am honest, and I will be. Then let me till you that I have been used to luxuries, and I can’t do without them. I might have married men—lots would have had me. But who marries one like me but a fool? and I could not marry a fool. The man I marry I must respect. He could not respect me—I should know him to be a fools and I should be worse off than I am now. As I am now, they may look as pious as they like—I laugh at them!”

And so forth: direr things. Imputations upon wives: horrible exultation at the universal peccancy of husbands. This lovely outcast almost made him think she had the right on

her side, so keenly her Parthian arrows pierced the holy centres of society, and exposed its rottenness.

Mrs. Mount's house was discreetly conducted: nothing ever occurred to shock him there. The young man would ask himself where the difference was between her and the Women of society? How base, too, was the army of banded hypocrites! He was ready to declare war against them on her behalf. His casus beli, accurately worded, would have read curiously. Because the world refused to lure the lady to virtue with the offer of a housemaid's place, our knight threw down his challenge. But

Page 427

the lady had scornfully rebutted this prospect of a return to chastity. Then the form of the challenge must be: Because the world declined to support the lady in luxury for nothing! But what did that mean? In other words: she was to receive the devil's wages without rendering him her services. Such an arrangement appears hardly fair on the world or on the devil. Heroes will have to conquer both before they will get them to subscribe to it.

Heroes, however, are not in the habit of wording their declarations of war at all. Lance in rest they challenge and they charge. Like women they trust to instinct, and graft on it the muscle of men. Wide fly the leisurely-remonstrating hosts: institutions are scattered, they know not wherefore, heads are broken that have not the balm of a reason why. 'Tis instinct strikes! Surely there is something divine in instinct.

Still, war declared, where were these hosts? The hero could not charge down on the ladies and gentlemen in a ballroom, and spoil the quadrille. He had sufficient reticence to avoid sounding his challenge in the Law Courts; nor could he well go into the Houses of Parliament with a trumpet, though to come to a tussle with the nation's direct representatives did seem the likelier method. It was likewise out of the question that he should enter every house and shop, and battle with its master in the cause of Mrs. Mount. Where, then, was his enemy? Everybody was his enemy, and everybody was nowhere! Shall he convoke multitudes on Wimbledon Common? Blue Policemen, and a distant dread of ridicule, bar all his projects. Alas for the hero in our day!

Nothing teaches a strong arm its impotence so much as knocking at empty air.

"What can I do for this poor woman?" cried Richard, after fighting his phantom enemy till he was worn out.

"O Rip! old Rip!" he addressed his friend, "I'm distracted. I wish I was dead! What good am I for? Miserable! selfish! What have I done but make every soul I know wretched about me? I follow my own inclinations—I make people help me by lying as hard as they can—and I'm a liar. And when I've got it I'm ashamed of myself. And now when I do see something unselfish for me to do, I come upon grins—I don't know where to turn —how to act—and I laugh at myself like a devil!"

It was only friend Ripton's ear that was required, so his words went for little: but Ripton did say he thought there was small matter to be ashamed of in winning and wearing the Beauty of Earth. Richard added his customary comment of "Poor little thing!"

He fought his duello with empty air till he was exhausted. A last letter written to his father procured him no reply. Then, said he, I have tried my utmost. I have tried to be dutiful—my father won't listen to me. One thing I can do—I can go down to my dear girl, and make her happy, and save her at least from some of the consequences of my rashness.

Page 428

“There’s nothing better for me!” he groaned. His great ambition must be covered by a house-top: he and the cat must warm themselves on the domestic hearth! The hero was not aware that his heart moved him to this. His heart was not now in open communion with his mind.

Mrs. Mount heard that her friend was going—would go. She knew he was going to his wife. Far from discouraging him, she said nobly: “Go—I believe I have kept you. Let us have an evening together, and then go: for good, if you like. If not, then to meet again another time. Forget me. I shan’t forget you. You’re the best fellow I ever knew, Richard. You are, on my honour! I swear I would not step in between you and your wife to cause either of you a moment’s unhappiness. When I can be another woman I will, and I shall think of you then.”

Lady Blandish heard from Adrian that Richard was positively going to his wife. The wise youth modestly veiled his own merit in bringing it about by saying: “I couldn’t see that poor little woman left alone down there any longer.”

“Well! Yes!” said Mrs. Doria, to whom the modest speech was repeated, “I suppose, poor boy, it’s the best he can do now.”

Richard bade them adieu, and went to spend his last evening with Mrs. Mount.

The enchantress received him in state.

“Do you know this dress? No? It’s the dress I wore when I first met you—not when I first saw you. I think I remarked you, sir, before you deigned to cast an eye upon humble me. When we first met we drank champagne together, and I intend to celebrate our parting in the same liquor. Will you liquor with me, old boy?”

She was gay. She revived Sir Julius occasionally. He, dispirited, left the talking all to her.

Mrs. Mount kept a footman. At a late hour the man of calves dressed the table for supper. It was a point of honour for Richard to sit down to it and try to eat. Drinking, thanks to the kindly mother nature, who loves to see her children made fools of, is always an easier matter. The footman was diligent; the champagne corks feebly recalled the file-firing at Richmond.

“We’ll drink to what we might have been, Dick,” said the enchantress.

Oh, the glorious wreck she looked.

His heart choked as he gulped the buzzing wine.

“What! down, my boy?” she cried. “They shall never see me hoist signals of distress. We must all die, and the secret of the thing is to die game, by Jove! Did you ever hear of Laura Fern? a superb girl! handsomer than your humble servant—if you’ll believe it —a ‘Miss’ in the bargain, and as a consequence, I suppose, a much greater rake. She was in the hunting-field. Her horse threw her, and she fell plump on a stake. It went into her left breast. All the fellows crowded round her, and one young man, who was in love with her—he sits in the House of Peers now—we used to call him `Duck’ because

Page 429

he was such a dear—he dropped from his horse to his knees: 'Laura! Laura! my darling! speak a word to me!—the last!' She turned over all white and bloody! 'I—I shan't be in at the death!' and gave up the ghost! Wasn't that dying game? Here's to the example of Laura Fenn! Why, what's the matter? See! it makes a man turn pale to hear how a woman can die. Fill the glasses, John. Why, you're as bad!"

"It's give me a turn, my lady," pleaded John, and the man's hand was unsteady as he poured out the wine.

"You ought not to listen. Go, and, drink some brandy."

John footman went from the room.

"My brave Dick! Richard! what a face you've got!"

He showed a deep frown on a colourless face.

"Can't you bear to hear of blood? You know, it was only one naughty woman out of the world. The clergyman of the parish didn't refuse to give her decent burial. We Christians! Hurrah!"

She cheered, and laughed. A lurid splendour glanced about her like lights from the pit.

"Pledge me, Dick! Drink, and recover yourself. Who minds? We must all die—the good and the bad. Ashes to ashes—dust to dust—and wine for living lips! That's poetry—almost. Sentiment: `May we never say die till we've drunk our fill! Not bad—eh? A little vulgar, perhaps, by Jove! Do you think me horrid?"

"Where's the wine?" Richard shouted. He drank a couple of glasses in succession, and stared about. Was he in hell, with a lost soul raving to him?

"Nobly spoken! and nobly acted upon, my brave Dick! Now we'll be companions." She wished that heaven had made her such a man. "Ah! Dick! Dick! too late! too late!"

Softly fell her voice. Her eyes threw slanting beams.

"Do you see this?"

She pointed to a symbolic golden anchor studded with gems and coiled with a rope of hair in her bosom. It was a gift of his.

"Do you know when I stole the lock? Foolish Dick! you gave me an anchor without a rope. Come and see."

She rose from the table, and threw herself on the sofa.

“Don’t you recognize your own hair! I should know a thread of mine among a million.”

Something of the strength of Samson went out of him as he inspected his hair on the bosom of Delilah.

“And you knew nothing of it! You hardly know it now you see it! What couldn’t a woman steal from you? But you’re not vain, and that’s a protection. You’re a miracle, Dick: a man that’s not vain! Sit here.” She curled up her feet to give him place on the sofa. “Now let us talk like friends that part to meet no more. You found a ship with fever on board, and you weren’t afraid to come alongside and keep her company. The fever isn’t catching, you see. Let us mingle our tears together. Ha! ha! a man said that once to me. The hypocrite wanted to catch the fever, but he was too old. How old are you, Dick?”

Page 430

Richard pushed a few months forward.

“Twenty-one? You just look it, you blooming boy. Now tell me my age, Adonis!—Twenty—what?”

Richard had given the lady twenty-five years.

She laughed violently. “You don’t pay compliments, Dick. Best to be honest; guess again. You don’t like to? Not twenty-five, or twenty-four, or twenty-three, or see how he begins to stare!—twenty-two. Just twenty-one, my dear. I think my birthday’s somewhere in next month. Why, look at me, close—closer. Have I a wrinkle?”

“And when, in heaven’s name!"...he stopped short.

“I understand you. When did I commence for to live? At the ripe age of sixteen I saw a nobleman in despair because of my beauty. He vowed he’d die. I didn’t want him to do that. So to save the poor man for his family, I ran away with him, and I dare say they didn’t appreciate the sacrifice, and he soon forgot to, if he ever did. It’s the way of the world!”

Richard seized some dead champagne, emptied the bottle into a tumbler, and drank it off.

John footman entered to clear the table, and they were left without further interruption.

“Bella! Bella!” Richard uttered in a deep sad voice, as he walked the room.

She leaned on her arm, her hair crushed against a reddened cheek, her eyes half-shut and dreamy.

“Bella!” he dropped beside her. “You are unhappy.”

She blinked and yawned, as one who is awakened suddenly. “I think you spoke,” said she.

“You are unhappy, Bella. You can’t conceal it. Your laugh sounds like madness. You must be unhappy. So young, too! Only twenty-one!”

“What does it matter? Who cares for me?”

The mighty pity falling from his eyes took in her whole shape. She did not mistake it for tenderness, as another would have done.

“Who cares for you, Bella? I do. What makes my misery now, but to see you there, and know of no way of helping you? Father of mercy! it seems too much to have to stand by powerless while such ruin is going on!”

Her hand was shaken in his by the passion of torment with which his frame quaked.

Involuntarily a tear started between her eyelids. She glanced up at him quickly, then looked down, drew her hand from his, and smoothed it, eying it.

“Bella! you have a father alive!”

“A linendraper, dear. He wears a white neck-cloth.”

This article of apparel instantaneously changed the tone of the conversation, for he, rising abruptly, nearly squashed the lady’s lap-dog, whose squeaks and howls were piteous, and demanded the most fervent caresses of its mistress. It was: “Oh, my poor pet Mumpsy, and he didn’t like a nasty great big ugly heavy foot an his poor soft silky—-mum—mum—back, he didn’t, and he soodn’t that he—mum—mum —soodn’t; and he cried out and knew the place to come to, and was oh so sorry for what had happened to him—mum—mum—mum—and now he was going to be made happy, his mistress make him happy—mum—mum—mum—moo-o-o-o.”

Page 431

“Yes!” said Richard, savagely, from the other end of the room, “you care for the happiness of your dog.”

“A course se does,” Mumpsy was simperingly assured in the thick of his silky flanks.

Richard looked for his hat. Mumpsy was deposited on the sofa in a twinkling.

“Now,” said the lady, “you must come and beg Mumpsy’s pardon, whether you meant to do it or no, because little doggies can’t tell that—how should they? And there’s poor Mumpsy thinking you’re a great terrible rival that tries to squash him all flat to nothing, on purpose, pretending you didn’t see; and he’s trembling, poor dear wee pet! And I may love my dog, sir, if I like; and I do; and I won’t have him ill-treated, for he’s never been jealous of you, and he is a darling, ten times truer than men, and I love him fifty times better. So come to him with me.”

First a smile changed Richard’s face; then laughing a melancholy laugh, he surrendered to her humour, and went through the form of begging Mumpsy’s pardon.

“The dear dog! I do believe he saw we were getting dull,” said she.

“And immolated himself intentionally? Noble animal!”

“Well, we’ll act as if we thought so. Let us be gay, Richard, and not part like ancient fogies. Where’s your fun? You can rattle; why don’t you? You haven’t seen me in one of my characters—not Sir Julius: wait a couple of minutes.” She ran out.

A white visage reappeared behind a spring of flame. Her black hair was scattered over her shoulders and fell half across her brows. She moved slowly, and came up to him, fastening weird eyes on him, pointing a finger at the region of witches. Sepulchral cadences accompanied the representation. He did not listen, for he was thinking what a deadly charming and exquisitely horrid witch she was. Something in the way her underlids worked seemed to remind him of a forgotten picture; but a veil hung on the picture. There could be no analogy, for this was beautiful and devilish, and that, if he remembered rightly, had the beauty of seraphs.

His reflections and her performance were stayed by a shriek. The spirits of wine had run over the plate she held to the floor. She had the coolness to put the plate down on the table, while he stamped out the flame on the carpet. Again she shrieked: she thought she was on fire. He fell on his knees and clasped her skirts all round, drawing his arms down them several times.

Still kneeling, he looked up, and asked, “Do you feel safe now?”

She bent her face glaring down till the ends of her hair touched his cheek.

Said she, “Do you?”

Was she a witch verily? There was sorcery in her breath; sorcery in her hair: the ends of it stung him like little snakes.

“How do I do it, Dick?” she flung back, laughing.

“Like you do everything, Bella,” he said, and took breath.

“There! I won’t be a witch; I won’t be a witch: they may burn me to a cinder, but I won’t be a witch!”

Page 432

She sang, throwing her hair about, and stamping her feet.

“I suppose I look a figure. I must go and tidy myself.”

“No, don’t change. I like to see you so.” He gazed at her with a mixture of wonder and admiration. “I can’t think you the same person—not even when you laugh.”

“Richard,” her tone was serious, “you were going to speak to me of my parents.”

“How wild and awful you looked, Bella!”

“My father, Richard, was a very respectable man.”

“Bella, you’ll haunt me like a ghost.”

“My mother died in my infancy, Richard.”

“Don’t put up your hair, Bella.”

“I was an only child!”

Her head shook sorrowfully at the glistening fire-irons. He followed the abstracted intentness of her look, and came upon her words.

“Ah, yes! speak of your father, Bella. Speak of him.”

“Shall I haunt you, and come to your bedside, and cry, ’`Tis time’?”

“Dear Bella! if you will tell me where he lives, I will go to him. He shall receive you. He shall not refuse—he shall forgive you.”

“If I haunt you, you can’t forget me, Richard.”

“Let me go to your father, Bella let me go to him to-morrow. I’ll give you my time. It’s all I can give. O Bella! let me save you.”

“So you like me best dishevelled, do you, you naughty boy! Ha! ha!” and away she burst from him, and up flew her hair, as she danced across the room, and fell at full length on the sofa.

He felt giddy: bewitched.

“We’ll talk of everyday things, Dick,” she called to him from the sofa. “It’s our last evening. Our last? Heigho! It makes me sentimental. How’s that Mr. Ripson, Pipson, Nipson?—it’s not complimentary, but I can’t remember names of that sort. Why do you have friends of that sort? He’s not a gentleman. Better is he? Well, he’s rather too

insignificant for me. Why do you sit off there? Come to me instantly. There—I'll sit up, and be proper, and you'll have plenty of room. Talk, Dick!"

He was reflecting on the fact that her eyes were brown. They had a haughty sparkle when she pleased, and when she pleased a soft languor circled them. Excitement had dyed her cheeks deep red. He was a youth, and she an enchantress. He a hero; she a female will-o'-the-wisp.

The eyes were languid now, set in rosy colour.

"You will not leave me yet, Richard? not yet?"

He had no thought of departing:

"It's our last night—I suppose it's our last hour together in this world—and I don't want to meet you in the next, for poor Dick will have to come to such a very, very disagreeable place to make the visit."

He grasped her hand at this.

"Yes, he will! too true! can't be helped: they say I'm handsome."

"You're lovely, Bella."

She drank in his homage.

"Well, we'll admit it. His Highness below likes lovely women, I hear say.
A gentleman of taste! You don't know all my accomplishments yet,
Richard."

Page 433

“I shan’t be astonished at anything new, Bella.”

“Then hear, and wonder.” Her voice trolled out some lively roulades. “Don’t you think he’ll make me his prima donna below? It’s nonsense to tell me there’s no singing there. And the atmosphere will be favourable to the voice. No damp, you know. You saw the piano—why didn’t you ask me to sing before? I can sing Italian. I had a master—who made love to me. I forgave him because of the music-stool—men can’t help it on a music-stool, poor dears!”

She went to the piano, struck the notes, and sang—

“’My heart, my heart—I think ‘twill break.’

“Because I’m such a rake. I don’t know any other reason. No; I hate sentimental songs. Won’t sing that. Ta-tiddy-tiddy-iddy—a...e! How ridiculous those women were, coming home from Richmond!

’Once the sweet romance of story
Clad thy moving form with grace;
Once the world and all its glory
Was but framework to thy face.
Ah, too fair!—what I remember
Might my soul recall—but no!
To the winds this wretched ember
Of a fire that falls so low!’

“Hum! don’t much like that. Tum-te-tum-tum—accanto al fuoco—heigho! I don’t want to show off, Dick—or to break down—so I won’t try that.

’Oh! but for thee, oh! but for thee,
I might have been a happy wife,
And nursed a baby on my knee,
And never blushed to give it life.’

“I used to sing that when I was a girl, sweet Richard, and didn’t know at all, at all, what it meant. Mustn’t sing that sort of song in company. We’re oh! so proper—even we!

’If I had a husband, what think you I’d do?
I’d make it my business to keep him a lover;
For when a young gentleman ceases to woo,
Some other amusement he’ll quickly discover.’

“For such are young gentlemen made of—made of: such are young gentlemen made of!”

After this trifling she sang a Spanish ballad sweetly. He was in the mood when imagination intensely vivifies everything. Mere suggestions of music sufficed. The lady in the ballad had been wronged. Lo! it was the lady before him; and soft horns blew; he smelt the languid night-flowers; he saw the stars crowd large and close above the arid plain this lady leaning at her window desolate, pouring out her abandoned heart.

Heroes know little what they owe to champagne.

The lady wandered to Venice. Thither he followed her at a leap. In Venice she was not happy. He was prepared for the misery of any woman anywhere. But, oh! to be with her! To glide with phantom-motion through throbbing street; past houses muffled in shadow and gloomy legends; under storied bridges; past palaces charged with full life in dead quietness; past grand old towers, colossal squares, gleaming quays, and out, and on with her, on into the silver infinity shaking over seas!

Page 434

Was it the champagne? the music? or the poetry? Something of the two former, perhaps: but most the enchantress playing upon him. How many instruments cannot clever women play upon at the same moment! And this enchantress was not too clever, or he might have felt her touch. She was no longer absolutely bent on winning him, or he might have seen a manoeuvre. She liked him—liked none better. She wished him well. Her pique was satisfied. Still he was handsome, and he was going. What she liked him for, she rather—very slightly—wished to do away with, or see if it could be done away with: just as one wishes to catch a pretty butterfly, without hurting its patterned wings. No harm intended to the innocent insect, only one wants to inspect it thoroughly, and enjoy the marvel of it, in one's tender possession, and have the felicity of thinking one could crush it, if one would.

He knew her what she was, this lady. In Seville, or in Venice, the spot was on her. Sailing the pathways of the moon it was not celestial light that illumined her beauty. Her sin was there: but in dreaming to save, he was soft to her sin—drowned it in deep mournfulness.

Silence, and the rustle of her dress, awoke him from his musing. She swam wave-like to the sofa. She was at his feet.

"I have been light and careless to-night, Richard. Of course I meant it. I must be happy with my best friend going to leave me."

Those witch underlids were working brightly.

"You will not forget me? and I shall try...try..."

Her lips twitched. She thought him such a very handsome fellow.

"If I change—if I can change... Oh! if you could know what a net I'm in, Richard!"

Now at those words, as he looked down on her haggard loveliness, not divine sorrow but a devouring jealousy sprang like fire in his breast, and set him rocking with horrid pain. He bent closer to her pale beseeching face. Her eyes still drew him down.

"Bella! No! no! promise me! swear it!"

"Lost, Richard! lost for ever! give me up!"

He cried: "I never will!" and strained her in his arms, and kissed her passionately on the lips.

She was not acting now as she sidled and slunk her half-averted head with a kind of maiden shame under his arm, sighing heavily, weeping, clinging to him. It was wicked truth.

Not a word of love between them!

Was ever hero in this fashion won?

CHAPTER XXXIX

At a season when the pleasant South-western Island has few attractions to other than invalids and hermits enamoured of wind and rain, the potent nobleman, Lord Mountfalcon, still lingered there to the disgust of his friends and special parasite. “Mount’s in for it again,” they said among themselves. “Hang the women!” was a natural sequence. For, don’t you see, what a shame it was of the women to be always kindling such a very inflammable

Page 435

subject! All understood that Cupid had twanged his bow, and transfixed a peer of Britain for the fiftieth time: but none would perceive, though he vouched for it with his most eloquent oaths, that this was a totally different case from the antecedent ones. So it had been sworn to them too frequently before. He was as a man with mighty tidings, and no language: intensely communicative, but inarticulate. Good round oaths had formerly compassed and expounded his noble emotions. They were now quite beyond the comprehension of blasphemy, even when emphasized, and by this the poor lord divinely felt the case was different. There is something impressive in a great human hulk writhing under the unutterable torments of a mastery he cannot contend with, or account for, or explain by means of intelligible words. At first he took refuge in the depths of his contempt for women. Cupid gave him line. When he had come to vent his worst of them, the fair face now stamped on his brain beamed the more triumphantly: so the harpooned whale rose to the surface, and after a few convulsions, surrendered his huge length. My lord was in love with Richard's young wife. He gave proofs of it by burying himself beside her. To her, could she have seen it, he gave further proofs of a real devotion, in affecting, and in her presence feeling, nothing beyond a lively interest in her well-being. This wonder, that when near her he should be cool and composed, and when away from her wrapped in a tempest of desires, was matter for what powers of cogitation the heavy nobleman possessed.

The Hon. Peter, tired of his journeys to and fro, urged him to press the business. Lord Mountfalcon was wiser, or more scrupulous, than his parasite. Almost every evening he saw Lucy. The inexperienced little wife apprehended no harm in his visits. Moreover, Richard had commended her to the care of Lord Mountfalcon, and Lady Judith. Lady Judith had left the Island for London: Lord Mountfalcon remained. There could be no harm. If she had ever thought so, she no longer did. Secretly, perhaps, she was flattered. Lord Mountfalcon was as well educated as it is the fortune of the run of titled elder sons to be: he could talk and instruct: he was a lord: and he let her understand that he was wicked, very wicked, and that she improved him. The heroine, in common with the hero, has her ambition to be of use in the world—to do some good: and the task of reclaiming a bad man is extremely seductive to good women. Dear to their tender bosoms as old china is a bad man they are mending! Lord Mountfalcon had none of the arts of a libertine: his gold, his title, and his person had hitherto preserved him from having long to sigh in vain, or sigh at all, possibly: the Hon. Peter did his villanies for him. No alarm was given to Lucy's pure instinct, as might have been the case had my lord been over-adept. It was nice in her martyrdom to have a true friend to support her, and really to be able to do something for that friend. Too simple-minded to think much of his lordship's position, she was yet a woman. "He, a great nobleman, does not scorn to acknowledge me, and think something of me," may have been one of the half-thoughts passing through her now and then, as she reflected in self-defence on the proud family she had married into.

Page 436

January was watering and freezing old earth by turns, when the Hon. Peter travelled down to the sun of his purse with great news. He had no sooner broached his lordship's immediate weakness, than Mountfalcon began to plunge like a heavy dragoon in difficulties. He swore by this and that he had come across an angel for his sins, and would do her no hurt. The next moment he swore she must be his, though she cursed like a cat. His lordship's illustrations were not choice. "I haven't advanced an inch," he groaned. "Brayder! upon my soul, that little woman could do anything with me. By heaven! I'd marry her to-morrow. Here I am, seeing her every day in the week out or in, and what do you think she gets me to talk about?—history! Isn't it enough to make a fellow mad? and there am I lecturing like a prig, and by heaven! while I'm at it I feel a pleasure in it; and when I leave the house I should feel an immense gratification in shooting somebody. What do they say in town?"

"Not much," said Brayder, significantly.

"When's that fellow—her husband—coming down?"

"I rather hope we've settled him for life, Mount."

Nobleman and parasite exchanged looks.

"How d'ye mean?"

Brayder hummed an air, and broke it to say, "He's in for Don Juan at a gallop, that's all."

"The deuce! Has Bella got him?" Mountfalcon asked with eagerness.

Brayder handed my lord a letter. It was dated from the Sussex coast, signed "Richard," and was worded thus:

"My beautiful Devil!—

"Since we're both devils together, and have found each other out, come to me at once, or I shall be going somewhere in a hurry. Come, my bright hell-star! I ran away from you, and now I ask you to come to me! You have taught me how devils love, and I can't do without you. Come an hour after you receive this."

Mountfalcon turned over the letter to see if there was any more. "Complimentary love-epistle!" he remarked, and rising from his chair and striding about, muttered, "The dog! how infamously he treats his wife!"

"Very bad," said Brayder.

"How did you get hold of this?"

“Strolled into Belle’s dressing-room, waiting for her turned over her pincushion hap-hazard. You know her trick.”

“By Jove! I think that girl does it on purpose. Thank heaven, I haven’t written her any letters for an age. Is she going to him?”

“Not she! But it’s odd, Mount!—did you ever know her refuse money before? She tore up the cheque in style, and presented me the fragments with two or three of the delicacies of language she learnt at your Academy. I rather like to hear a woman swear. It embellishes her!”

Mountfalcon took counsel of his parasite as to the end the letter could be made to serve. Both conscientiously agreed that Richard’s behaviour to his wife was infamous, and that he at least deserved no mercy. “But,” said his lordship, “it won’t do to show the letter. At first she’ll be swearing it’s false, and then she’ll stick to him closer. I know the sluts.”

Page 437

“The rule of contrary,” said Brayder, carelessly. “She must see the trahison with her eyes. They believe their eyes. There’s your chance, Mount. You step in: you give her revenge and consolation—two birds at one shot. That’s what they like.”

“You’re an ass, Brayder,” the nobleman exclaimed. “You’re an infernal blackguard. You talk of this little woman as if she and other women were all of a piece. I don’t see anything I gain by this confounded letter. Her husband’s a brute—that’s clear.”

“Will you leave it to me, Mount?”

“Be damned before I do!” muttered my lord.

“Thank you. Now see how this will end: You’re too soft, Mount. You’ll be made a fool of.”

“I tell you, Brayder, there’s nothing to be done. If I carry her off—I’ve been on the point of doing it every day—what’ll come of that? She’ll look—I can’t stand her eyes—I shall be a fool—worse off with her than I am now.”

Mountfalcon yawned despondently. “And what do you think?” he pursued. “Isn’t it enough to make a fellow gnash his teeth? She’s"...he mentioned something in an underbreath, and turned red as he said it.

“Hm!” Brayder put up his mouth and rapped the handle of his cane on his chin. “That’s disagreeable, Mount. You don’t exactly want to act in that character. You haven’t got a diploma. Bother!”

“Do you think I love her a bit less?” broke out my lord in a frenzy. “By heaven! I’d read to her by her bedside, and talk that infernal history to her, if it pleased her, all day and all night.”

“You’re evidently graduating for a midwife, Mount.”

The nobleman appeared silently to accept the imputation.

“What do they say in town?” he asked again.

Brayder said the sole question was, whether it was maid, wife, or widow.

“I’ll go to her this evening,” Mountfalcon resumed, after—to judge by the cast of his face—reflecting deeply. “I’ll go to her this evening. She shall know what infernal torment she makes me suffer.”

“Do you mean to say she don’t know it?”

“Hasn’t an idea—thinks me a friend. And so, by heaven! I’ll be to her.”

“A—hm!” went the Honourable Peter. “This way to the sign of the Green Man, ladies!”

“Do you want to be pitched out of the window, Brayder?”

“Once was enough, Mount. The Salvage Man is strong. I may have forgotten the trick of alighting on my feet. There—there! I’ll be sworn she’s excessively innocent, and thinks you a disinterested friend.”

“I’ll go to her this evening,” Mountfalcon repeated. “She shall know what damned misery it is to see her in such a position. I can’t hold out any longer. Deceit’s horrible to such a girl as that. I’d rather have her cursing me than speaking and looking as she does. Dear little girl!—she’s only a child. You haven’t an idea how sensible that little woman is.”

Page 438

“Have you?” inquired the cunning one.

“My belief is, Brayder, that there are angels among women,” said Mountfalcon, evading his parasite’s eye as he spoke.

To the world, Lord Mountfalcon was the thoroughly wicked man; his parasite simply ingeniously dissipated. Full many a man of God had thought it the easier task to reclaim the Hon. Peter.

Lucy received her noble friend by firelight that evening, and sat much in the shade. She offered to have the candles brought in. He begged her to allow the room to remain as it was. “I have something to say to you,” he observed with a certain solemnity.

“Yes—to me?” said Lucy, quickly.

Lord Mountfalcon knew he had a great deal to say, but how to say it, and what it exactly was, he did not know.’

“You conceal it admirably,” he began, “but you must be very lonely here—I fear, unhappy.”

“I should have been lonely, but for your kindness, my lord,” said Lucy. “I am not unhappy.” Her face was in shade and could not belie her.

“Is there any help that one who would really be your friend might give you, Mrs. Feverel?”

“None indeed that I know of,” Lucy replied. “Who can help us to pay for our sins?”

“At least you may permit me to endeavour to pay my debts, since you have helped me to wash out some of any sins.”

“Ah, my lord!” said Lucy, not displeased. It is sweet for a woman to believe she has drawn the serpent’s teeth.

“I tell you the truth,” Lord Mountfalcon went on. “What object could I have in deceiving you? I know you quite above flattery—so different from other women!”

“Oh, pray, do not say that,” interposed Lucy.

“According to my experience, then.”

“But you say you have met such—such very bad women.”

“I have. And now that I meet a good one, it is my misfortune.”

“Your misfortune, Lord Mountfalcon?”

“Yes, and I might say more.”

His lordship held impressively mute.

“How strange men are!” thought Lucy. “He had some unhappy secret.”

Tom Bakewell, who had a habit of coming into the room on various pretences during the nobleman’s visits, put a stop to the revelation, if his lordship intended to make any.

When they were alone again, Lucy said, smiling: “Do you know, I am always ashamed to ask you to begin to read.”

Mountfalcon stared. “To read?—oh! ha! yes!” he remembered his evening duties. “Very happy, I’m sure. Let me see. Where were we?”

“The life of the Emperor Julian. But indeed I feel quite ashamed to ask you to read, my lord. It’s new to me; like a new world—hearing about Emperors, and armies, and things that really have been on the earth we walk upon. It fills my mind. But it must have ceased to interest you, and I was thinking that I would not tease you any more.”

“Your pleasure is mine, Mrs. Feverel. ’Pon my honour, I’d read till I was hoarse, to hear your remarks.”

Page 439

“Are you laughing at me?”

“Do I look so?”

Lord Mountfalcon had fine full eyes, and by merely dropping the lids he could appear to endow them with mental expression.

“No, you are not,” said Lucy. “I must thank you for your forbearance.”

The nobleman went on his honour loudly.

Now it was an object of Lucy’s to have him reading; for his sake, for her sake, and for somebody else’s sake; which somebody else was probably considered first in the matter. When he was reading to her, he seemed to be legitimizing his presence there; and though she had no doubts or suspicions whatever, she was easier in her heart while she had him employed in that office. So she rose to fetch the book, laid it open on the table at his lordship’s elbow, and quietly waited to ring for candles when he should be willing to commence.

That evening Lord Mountfalcon could not get himself up to the farce, and he felt a pity for the strangely innocent unprotected child with anguish hanging over her, that withheld the words he wanted to speak, or insinuate. He sat silent and did nothing.

“What I do not like him for,” said Lucy, meditatively, “is his changing his religion. He would have been such a hero, but for that. I could have loved him.”

“Who is it you could have loved, Mrs. Feverel?” Lord Mountfalcon asked.

“The Emperor Julian.”

“Oh! the Emperor Julian! Well, he was an apostate but then, you know, he meant what he was about. He didn’t even do it for a woman.”

“For a woman!” cried Lucy. “What man would for a woman?”

“I would.”

“You, Lord Mountfalcon?”

“Yes. I’d turn Catholic to-morrow.”

“You make me very unhappy if you say that, my lord.”

“Then I’ll unsay it.”

Lucy slightly shuddered. She put her hand upon the bell to ring for lights.

“Do you reject a convert, Mrs. Feverel?” said the nobleman.

“Oh yes! yes! I do. One who does not give his conscience I would not have.”

“If he gives his heart and body, can he give more?”

Lucy’s hand pressed the bell. She did not like the doubtful light with one who was so unscrupulous. Lord Mountfalcon had never spoken in this way before. He spoke better, too. She missed the aristocratic twang in his voice, and the hesitation for words, and the fluid lordliness with which he rolled over difficulties in speech.

Simultaneously with the sounding of the bell the door opened, and presented Tom Bakewell. There was a double knock at the same instant at the street door. Lucy delayed to give orders.

“Can it be a letter, Tom!—so late?” she said, changing colour. “Pray run and see.”

“That an’t powst” Tom remarked, as he obeyed his mistress.

“Are you very anxious for a letter, Mrs. Feverel?” Lord Mountfalcon inquired.

“Oh, no!—yes, I am, very.” said Lucy. Her quick ear caught the tones of a voice she remembered. “That dear old thing has come to see me,” she cried, starting up.

Page 440

Tom ushered a bunch of black satin into the room.

“Mrs. Berry!” said Lucy, running up to her and kissing her.

“Me, my darlin’!” Mrs. Berry, breathless and rosy with her journey, returned the salute. “Me truly it is, in fault of a better, for I ain’t one to stand by and give the devil his licence—roamin’! and the salt sure enough have spilte my bride-gown at the beginnin’, which ain’t the best sign. Bless ye!—Oh, here he is.” She beheld a male figure in a chair by the half light, and swung around to address him. “You bad man!” she held aloft one of her fat fingers, “I’ve come on ye like a bolt, I have, and goin’ to make ye do your duty, naughty boy! But your my darlin’ babe,” she melted, as was her custom, “and I’ll never meet you and not give to ye the kiss of a mother.”

Before Lord Mountfalcon could find time to expostulate the soft woman had him by the neck, and was down among his luxurious whiskers.

“Ha!” She gave a smothered shriek, and fell back. “What hair’s that?”

Tom Bakewell just then illumined the transaction.

“Oh, my gracious!” Mrs. Berry breathed with horror, “I been and kiss a strange man!”

Lucy, half-laughing, but in dreadful concern, begged the noble lord to excuse the woful mistake.

“Extremely flattered, highly favoured, I’m sure;” said his lordship, re-arranging his disconcerted moustache; “may I beg the pleasure of an introduction?”

“My husband’s dear old nurse—Mrs. Berry,” said Lucy, taking her hand to lend her countenance. “Lord Mountfalcon, Mrs. Berry.”

Mrs. Berry sought grace while she performed a series of apologetic bobs, and wiped the perspiration from her forehead.

Lucy put her into a chair: Lord Mountfalcon asked for an account of her passage over to the Island; receiving distressingly full particulars, by which it was revealed that the softness of her heart was only equalled by the weakness of her stomach. The recital calmed Mrs. Berry down.

“Well, and where’s my—where’s Mr. Richard? yer husband, my dear?” Mrs. Berry turned from her tale to question.

“Did you expect to see him here?” said Lucy, in a broken voice.

“And where else, my love? since he haven’t been seen in London a whole fortnight.”

Lucy did not speak.

“We will dismiss the Emperor Julian till to-morrow, I think,” said Lord Mountfalcon, rising and bowing.

Lucy gave him her hand with mute thanks. He touched it distantly, embraced Mrs. Berry in a farewell bow, and was shown out of the house by Tom Bakewell.

The moment he was gone, Mrs. Berry threw up her arms. “Did ye ever know sich a horrid thing to go and happen to a virtuous woman!” she exclaimed. “I could cry at it, I could! To be goin’ and kissin’ a strange hairy man! Oh dear me! what’s cornin’ next, I wonder? Whiskers! thinks I—for I know the touch o’ whiskers—’t ain’t like other hair—-what! have he growed a crop that sudden, I says to myself; and it flashed on me I been and made a awful mistake! and the lights come in, and I see that great hairy man—-beggin’ his pardon—nobleman, and if I could ’a dropped through the floor out o’ sight o’ men, drat ’em! they’re al’ays in the way, that they are!”—

Page 441

“Mrs. Berry,” Lucy checked her, “did you expect to find him here?”

“Askin’ that solemn?” retorted Berry. “What him? your husband? O’ course I did! and you got him—somewheres hid.”

“I have not heard from my husband for fifteen days,” said Lucy, and her tears rolled heavily off her cheeks.

“Not heer from him!—fifteen days!” Berry echoed.

“O Mrs. Berry! dear kind Mrs. Berry! have you no news? nothing to tell me! I’ve borne it so long. They’re cruel to me, Mrs. Berry. Oh, do you know if I have offended him—my husband? While he wrote I did not complain. I could live on his letters for years. But not to hear from him! To think I have ruined him, and that he repents! Do they want to take him from me? Do they want me dead? O Mrs. Berry! I’ve had no one to speak out my heart to all this time, and I cannot, cannot help crying, Mrs. Berry!”

Mrs. Berry was inclined to be miserable at what she heard from Lucy’s lips, and she was herself full of dire apprehension; but it was never this excellent creature’s system to be miserable in company. The sight of a sorrow that was not positive, and could not refer to proof, set her resolutely the other way.

“Fiddle-faddle,” she said. “I’d like to see him repent! He won’t find anywheres a beauty like his own dear little wife, and he know it. Now, look you here, my dear—you blessed weepin’ pet—the man that could see ye with that hair of yours there in ruins, and he backed by the law, and not rush into your arms and hold ye squeezed for life, he ain’t got much man in him, I say; and no one can say that of my babe! I was sayin’, look here, to comfort ye—oh, why, to be sure he’ve got some surprise for ye. And so’ve I, my lamb! Hark, now! His father’ve come to town, like a good reasonable man at last, to u-nite ye both, and bring your bodies together, as your hearts is, for everlastin’. Now ain’t that news?”

“Oh!” cried Lucy, “that takes my last hope away. I thought he had gone to his father.” She burst into fresh tears.

Mrs. Berry paused, disturbed.

“Belike he’s travellin’ after him,” she suggested.

“Fifteen days, Mrs. Berry!”

“Ah, fifteen weeks, my dear, after sieh a man as that. He’s a regular meteor, is Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey. Well, so hark you here. I says to myself, that knows him—for I did think my babe was in his natural nest—I says, the bar’net’ll never write for you both to come up and beg forgiveness, so down I’ll go and fetch you up. For there

was your mistake, my dear, ever to leave your husband to go away from ye one hour in a young marriage. It's dangerous, it's mad, it's wrong, and it's only to be righted by your obeyin' of me, as I commands it: for I has my fits, though I am a soft 'un. Obey me, and ye'll be happy tomorrow—or the next to it."

Lucy was willing to see comfort. She was weary of her self-inflicted martyrdom, and glad to give herself up to somebody else's guidance utterly.

Page 442

“But why does he not write to me, Mrs. Berry?”

“’Cause, ’cause—who can tell the why of men, my dear? But that he love ye faithful, I’ll swear. Haven’t he groaned in my arms that he couldn’t come to ye?—weak wretch! Hasn’t he swore how he loved ye to me, poor young man! But this is your fault, my sweet. Yes, it be. You should ’a followed my ‘dvice at the fust—’stead o’ going into your ’eroics about this and t’other.” Here Mrs. Berry poured forth fresh sentences on matrimony, pointed especially at young couples. “I should ’a been a fool if I hadn’t suffered myself,” she confessed, “so I’ll thank my Berry if I makes you wise in season.”

Lucy smoothed her ruddy plump cheeks, and gazed up affectionately into the soft woman’s kind brown eyes. Endearing phrases passed from mouth to mouth. And as she gazed Lucy blushed, as one who has something very secret to tell, very sweet, very strange, but cannot quite bring herself to speak it.

“Well! these’s three men in my life I kissed,” said Mrs. Berry, too much absorbed in her extraordinary adventure to notice the young wife’s struggling bosom, “three men, and one a nobleman! He’ve got more whisker than my Berry, I wonder what the man thought. Ten to one he’ll think, now, I was glad o’ my chance—they’re that vain, whether they’s lords or commons. How was I to know? I nat’ral thinks none but her husband’d sit in that chair. Ha! and in the dark? and alone with ye?” Mrs. Berry hardened her eyes, “and your husband away? What do this mean? Tell to me, child, what it mean his bein’ here alone without ere a candle?”

“Lord Mountfalcon is the only friend I have here,” said Lucy. “He is very kind. He comes almost every evening.”

“Lord Montfalcon—that his name!” Mrs. Berry exclaimed. “I been that flurried by the man, I didn’t mind it at first. He come every evenin’, and your husband out o’ sight! My goodness me! it’s gettin’ worse and worse. And what do he come for, now, ma’am? Now tell me candid what ye do together here in the dark of an evenin’.”

Mrs. Berry glanced severely.

“O Mrs. Berry! please not to speak in that way—I don’t like it,” said Lucy, pouting.

“What do he come for, I ask?”

“Because he is kind, Mrs. Berry. He sees me very lonely, and wishes to amuse me. And he tells me of things I know nothing about and”—

“And wants to be a-teachin’ some of his things, mayhap,” Mrs. Berry interrupted with a ruffled breast.

“You are a very ungenerous, suspicious, naughty old woman,” said Lucy, chiding her.

“And you’re a silly, unsuspectin’ little bird,” Mrs. Berry retorted, as she returned her taps on the cheek. “You haven’t told me what ye do together, and what’s his excuse for comin’.”

“Well, then, Mrs. Berry, almost every evening that he comes we read History, and he explains the battles, and talks to me about the great men. And he says I’m not silly, Mrs. Berry.”

Page 443

“That’s one bit o’ lime on your wings, my bird. History, indeed! History to a young married lovely woman alone in the dark! a pretty History! Why, I know that man’s name, my dear. He’s a notorious living rake, that Lord Montfalcon. No woman’s safe with him.”

“Ah, but he hasn’t deceived me, Mrs. Berry. He has not pretended he was good.”

“More’s his art,” quoth the experienced dame. “So you read History together in the dark; my dear!”

“I was unwell to-night, Mrs. Berry. I wanted him not to see my face. Look! there’s the book open ready for him when the candles come in. And now, you dear kind darling old thing, let me kiss you for coming to me. I do love you. Talk of other things.”

“So we will,” said Mrs. Berry softening to Lucy’s caresses. “So let us. A nobleman, indeed, alone with a young wife in the dark, and she sich a beauty! I say this shall be put a stop to now and henceforth, on the spot it shall! He won’t meneuvele Bessy Berry with his arts. There! I drop him. I’m dyin’ for a cup o’ tea, my dear.”

Lucy got up to ring the bell, and as Mrs. Berry, incapable of quite dropping him, was continuing to say: “Let him go and boast I kiss him; he ain’t nothin’ to be ’shamed of in a chaste woman’s kiss—unawares—which men don’t get too often in their lives, I can assure ’em;”—her eye surveyed Lucy’s figure.

Lo, when Lucy returned to her, Mrs. Berry surrounded her with her arms, and drew her into feminine depths. “Oh, you blessed!” she cried in most meaning tone, “you good, lovin’, proper little wife, you!”

“What is it, Mrs. Berry!” lisps Lucy, opening the most innocent blue eyes.

“As if I couldn’t see, you pet! It was my flurry blinded me, or I’d ’a marked ye the fast shock. Thinkin’ to deceive me!”

Mrs. Berry’s eyes spoke generations. Lucy’s wavered; she coloured all over, and hid her face on the bounteous breast that mounted to her.

“You’re a sweet one,” murmured the soft woman, patting her back, and rocking her. “You’re a rose, you are! and a bud on your stalk. Haven’t told a word to your husband, my dear?” she asked quickly.

Lucy shook her head, looking sly and shy.

“That’s right. We’ll give him a surprise; let it come all at once on him, and thinks he—-losin’ breath ‘I’m a father!’ Nor a hint even you haven’t give him?”

Lucy kissed her, to indicate it was quite a secret.

“Oh! you are a sweet one,” said Bessy Berry, and rocked her more closely and lovingly.

Then these two had a whispered conversation, from which let all of male persuasion retire a space nothing under one mile.

Page 444

Returning, after a due interval, we see Mrs. Berry counting on her fingers' ends. Concluding the sum, she cries prophetically: "Now this right everything—a baby in the balance! Now I say this angel-infant come from on high. It's God's messenger, my love! and it's not wrong to say so. He thinks you worthy, or you wouldn't 'a had one—-not for all the tryin' in the world, you wouldn't, and some tries hard enough, poor creatures! Now let us rejice and make merry! I'm for cryin' and laughin', one and the same. This is the blessed seal of matrimony, which Berry never stamp on me. It's be hoped it's a boy. Make that man a grandfather, and his grandchild a son, and you got him safe. Oh! this is what I call happiness, and I'll have my tea a little stronger in consequence. I declare I could get tipsy to know this joyful news."

So Mrs. Berry carolled. She had her tea a little stronger. She ate and she drank; she rejoiced and made merry. The bliss of the chaste was hers.

Says Lucy demurely: "Now you know why I read History, and that sort of books."

"Do I?" replies Berry. "Belike I do. Since what you done's so good, my darlin', I'm agreeable to anything. A fig for all the lords! They can't come anigh a baby. You may read Voyages and Travels, my dear, and Romances, and Tales of Love and War. You cut the riddle in your own dear way, and that's all I cares for."

"No, but you don't understand," persists Lucy. "I only read sensible books, and talk of serious things, because I'm sure... because I have heard say...dear Mrs. Berry! don't you understand now?"

Mrs. Berry smacked her knees. "Only to think of her bein' that thoughtful! and she a Catholic, too! Never tell me that people of one religion ain't as good as another, after that. Why, you want to make him a historian, to be sure! And that rake of a lord who've been comin' here playin' at wolf, you been and made him—unbeknown to himself—sort o' tutor to the unborn blessed! Ha! ha! say that little women ain't got art ekal to the cunningest of 'em. Oh! I understand. Why, to be sure, didn't I know a lady, a widow of a clergyman: he was a postermost child, and afore his birth that women read nothin' but Blair's 'Grave' over and over again, from the end to the beginnin';—that's a serious book!—very hard readin'!—and at four years of age that child that come of it reelly was the piousest infant!—he was like a little curate. His eyes was up; he talked so solemn." Mrs. Berry imitated the little curate's appearance and manner of speaking. "So she got her wish, for one!"

But at this lady Lucy laughed.

They chattered on happily till bedtime. Lucy arranged for Mrs. Berry to sleep with her. "If it's not dreadful to ye, my sweet, sleepin' beside a woman," said Mrs. Berry. "I know it were to me shortly after my Berry, and I felt it. It don't somehow seem nat'ral after

matrimony—a woman in your bed! I was obliged to have somebody, for the cold sheets do give ye the creeps when you've been used to that that's different."

Page 445

Upstairs they went together, Lucy not sharing these objections. Then Lucy opened certain drawers, and exhibited pretty caps, and laced linen, all adapted for a very small body, all the work of her own hands: and Mrs. Berry praised them and her. “You been guessing a boy—woman-like,” she said. Then they cooed, and kissed, and undressed by the fire, and knelt at the bedside, with their arms about each other, praying; both praying for the unborn child; and Mrs. Berry pressed Lucy’s waist the moment she was about to breathe the petition to heaven to shield and bless that coming life; and thereat Lucy closed to her, and felt a strong love for her. Then Lucy got into bed first, leaving Berry to put out the light, and before she did so, Berry leaned over her, and eyed her roguishly, saying, “I never see ye like this, but I’m half in love with ye myself, you blushin’ beauty! Sweet’s your eyes, and your hair do take one so—lyin’ back. I’d never forgive my father if he kep me away from ye four-and-twenty hours just. Husband o’ that!” Berry pointed at the young wife’s loveliness. “Ye look so ripe with kisses, and there they are a-languishin’!—... You never look so but in your bed, ye beauty!—just as it ought to be.” Lucy had to pretend to rise to put out the light before Berry would give up her amorous chaste soliloquy. Then they lay in bed, and Mrs. Berry fondled her, and arranged for their departure to-morrow, and reviewed Richard’s emotions when he came to hear he was going to be made a father by her, and hinted at Lucy’s delicious shivers when Richard was again in his rightful place, which she, Bessy Berry, now usurped; and all sorts of amorous sweet things; enough to make one fancy the adage subverted, that stolen fruits are sweetest; she drew such glowing pictures of bliss within the law and the limits of the conscience, till at last, worn out, Lucy murmured “Peepy, dear Berry,” and the soft woman gradually ceased her chirp.

Bessy Berry did not sleep. She lay thinking of the sweet brave heart beside her, and listening to Lucy’s breath as it came and went; squeezing the fair sleeper’s hand now and then, to ease her love as her reflections warmed. A storm of wind came howling over the Hampshire hills, and sprang white foam on the water, and shook the bare trees. It passed, leaving a thin cloth of snow on the wintry land. The moon shone brilliantly. Berry heard the house-dog bark. His bark was savage and persistent. She was roused by the noise. By and by she fancied she heard a movement in the house; then it seemed to her that the house-door opened. She cocked her ears, and could almost make out voices in the midnight stillness. She slipped from the bed, locked and bolted the door of the room, assured herself of Lucy’s unconsciousness, and went on tiptoe to the window. The trees all stood white to the north; the ground glittered; the cold was keen. Berry wrapped her fat arms across her bosom, and peeped as close over into the garden as the situation of

Page 446

the window permitted. Berry was a soft, not a timid, woman: and it happened this night that her thoughts were above the fears of the dark. She was sure of the voices; curiosity without a shade of alarm held her on the watch; and gathering bundles of her day-apparel round her neck and shoulders, she silenced the chattering of her teeth as well as she could, and remained stationary. The low hum of the voices came to a break; something was said in a louder tone; the house-door quietly shut; a man walked out of the garden into the road. He paused opposite her window, and Berry let the blind go back to its place, and peeped from behind an edge of it. He was in the shadow of the house, so that it was impossible to discern much of his figure. After some minutes he walked rapidly away, and Berry returned to the bed an icicle, from which Lucy's limbs sensitively shrank.

Next morning Mrs. Berry asked Tom Bakewell if he had been disturbed in the night. Tom, the mysterious, said he had slept like a top. Mrs. Berry went into the garden. The snow was partially melted; all save one spot, just under the portal, and there she saw the print of a man's foot. By some strange guidance it occurred to her to go and find one of Richard's boots. She did so, and, unperceived, she measured the sole of the boot in that solitary footmark. There could be no doubt that it fitted. She tried it from heel to toe a dozen times.

CHAPTER XL

Sir Austin Feverel had come to town with the serenity of a philosopher who says, 'Tis now time; and the satisfaction of a man who has not arrived thereat without a struggle. He had almost forgiven his son. His deep love for him had well-nigh shaken loose from wounded pride and more tenacious vanity. Stirrings of a remote sympathy for the creature who had robbed him of his son and hewed at his System, were in his heart of hearts. This he knew; and in his own mind he took credit for his softness. But the world must not suppose him soft; the world must think he was still acting on his System. Otherwise what would his long absence signify?—Something highly unphilosophical. So, though love was strong, and was moving him to a straightforward course, the last tug of vanity drew him still aslant.

The Aphorist read himself so well, that to juggle with himself was a necessity. As he wished the world to see him, he beheld himself: one who entirely put aside mere personal feelings: one in whom parental duty, based on the science of life, was paramount: a Scientific Humanist, in short.

He was, therefore, rather surprised at a coldness in Lady Blandish's manner when he did appear. "At last!" said the lady, in a sad way that sounded reproachfully. Now the Scientific Humanist had, of course, nothing to reproach himself with.

But where was Richard?

Adrian positively averred he was not with his wife.

Page 447

“If he had gone,” said the baronet, “he would have anticipated me by a few hours.”

This, when repeated to Lady Blandish, should have propitiated her, and shown his great forgiveness. She, however, sighed, and looked at him wistfully.

Their converse was not happy and deeply intimate. Philosophy did not seem to catch her mind; and fine phrases encountered a rueful assent, more flattering to their grandeur than to their influence.

Days went by. Richard did not present himself. Sir Austin’s pitch of self-command was to await the youth without signs of impatience.

Seeing this, the lady told him her fears for Richard, and mentioned the rumour of him that was about.

“If,” said the baronet, “this person, his wife, is what you paint her, I do not share your fears for him. I think too well of him. If she is one to inspire the sacredness of that union, I think too well of him. It is impossible.”

The lady saw one thing to be done.

“Call her to you,” she said. “Have her with you at Raynham. Recognize her. It is the disunion and doubt that so confuses him and drives him wild. I confess to you I hoped he had gone to her. It seems not. If she is with you his way will be clear. Will you do that?”

Science is notoriously of slow movement. Lady Blandish’s proposition was far too hasty for Sir Austin. Women, rapid by nature, have no idea of science.

“We shall see her there in time, Emmeline. At present let it be between me and my son.”

He spoke loftily. In truth it offended him to be asked to do anything, when he had just brought himself to do so much.

A month elapsed, and Richard appeared on the scene.

The meeting between him and his father was not what his father had expected and had crooned over in the Welsh mountains. Richard shook his hand respectfully, and inquired after his health with the common social solicitude. He then said: “During your absence, sir, I have taken the liberty, without consulting you, to do something in which you are more deeply concerned than myself. I have taken upon myself to find out my mother and place her under my care. I trust you will not think I have done wrong. I acted as I thought best.”

Sir Austin replied: “You are of an age, Richard, to judge for yourself in such a case. I would have you simply beware of deceiving yourself in imagining that you considered any one but yourself in acting as you did.”

“I have not deceived myself, sir,” said Richard, and the interview was over. Both hated an exposure of the feelings, and in that both were satisfied: but the baronet, as one who loves, hoped and looked for tones indicative of trouble and delight in the deep heart; and Richard gave him none of those. The young man did not even face him as he spoke: if their eyes met by chance, Richard’s were defiantly cold. His whole bearing was changed.

Page 448

“This rash marriage has altered him,” said the very just man of science in life: and that meant: “it has debased him.”

He pursued his reflections. “I see in him the desperate maturity of a suddenly-ripened nature: and but for my faith that good work is never lost, what should I think of the toil of my years? Lost, perhaps to me! lost to him! It may show itself in his children.”

The Philosopher, we may conceive, has contentment in benefiting embryos: but it was a somewhat bitter prospect to Sir Austin. Bitterly he felt the injury to himself.

One little incident spoke well of Richard. A poor woman called at the hotel while he was missing. The baronet saw her, and she told him a tale that threw Christian light on one part of Richard’s nature. But this might gratify the father in Sir Austin; it did not touch the man of science. A Feverel, his son, would not do less, he thought. He sat down deliberately to study his son.

No definite observations enlightened him. Richard ate and drank; joked and laughed. He was generally before Adrian in calling for a fresh bottle. He talked easily of current topics; his gaiety did not sound forced. In all he did, nevertheless, there was not the air of a youth who sees a future before him. Sir Austin put that down. It might be carelessness, and wanton blood, for no one could say he had much on his mind. The man of science was not reckoning that Richard also might have learned to act and wear a mask. Dead subjects—this is to say, people not on their guard—he could penetrate and dissect. It is by a rare chance, as scientific men well know, that one has an opportunity of examining the structure of the living.

However, that rare chance was granted to Sir Austin. They were engaged to dine with Mrs. Doria at the Foreys’, and walked down to her in the afternoon, father and son arm-in-arm, Adrian beside them. Previously the offended father had condescended to inform his son that it would shortly be time for him to return to his wife, indicating that arrangements would ultimately be ordered to receive her at Raynham. Richard had replied nothing; which might mean excess of gratitude, or hypocrisy in concealing his pleasure, or any one of the thousand shifts by which gratified human nature expresses itself when all is made to run smooth with it. Now Mrs. Berry had her surprise ready charged for the young husband. She had Lucy in her own house waiting for him. Every day she expected him to call and be overcome by the rapturous surprise, and every day, knowing his habit of frequenting the park, she marched Lucy thither, under the plea that Master Richard, whom she had already christened, should have an airing.

Page 449

The round of the red winter sun was behind the bare Kensington chestnuts, when these two parties met. Happily for Lucy and the hope she bore in her bosom, she was perversely admiring a fair horsewoman galloping by at the moment. Mrs. Berry plucked at her gown once or twice, to prepare her eyes for the shock, but Lucy's head was still half averted, and thinks Mrs. Berry, "Twon't hurt her if she go into his arms head foremost." They were close; Mrs. Berry performed the bob preliminary. Richard held her silent with a terrible face; he grasped her arm, and put her behind him. Other people intervened. Lucy saw nothing to account for Berry's excessive flutter. Berry threw it on the air and some breakfast bacon, which, she said, she knew in the morning while she ate it, was bad for the bile, and which probably was the cause of her bursting into tears, much to Lucy's astonishment.

"What you ate makes you cry, Mrs. Berry?"

"It's all—" Mrs. Berry pressed at her heart and leaned sideways, "it's all stomach, my dear. Don't ye mind," and becoming aware of her unfashionable behaviour, she trailed off to the shelter of the elms.

"You have a singular manner with old ladies," said Sir Austin to his son, after Berry had been swept aside.

Scarcely courteous. She behaved like a mad woman, certainly."—Are you ill, my son?"

Richard was death-pale, his strong form smitten through with weakness. The baronet sought Adrian's eye. Adrian had seen Lucy as they passed, and he had a glimpse of Richard's countenance while disposing of Berry. Had Lucy recognized them, he would have gone to her unhesitatingly. As she did not, he thought it well, under the circumstances, to leave matters as they were. He answered the baronet's look with a shrug.

"Are you ill, Richard?" Sir Austin again asked his son.

"Come on, sir! come on!" cried Richard.

His father's further meditations, as they stepped briskly to the Foreys', gave poor ferry a character which one who lectures on matrimony, and has kissed but three men in her life, shrieks to hear the very title of.

"Richard will go to his wife to-morrow," Sir Austin said to Adrian some time before they went in to dinner.

Adrian asked him if he had chanced to see a young fair-haired lady by the side of the old one Richard had treated so peculiarly; and to the baronet's acknowledgment that he remembered to have observed such a person, Adrian said: "That was his wife, sir."

Sir Austin could not dissect the living subject. As if a bullet had torn open the young man's skull, and some blast of battle laid his palpitating organization bare, he watched every motion of his brain and his heart; and with the grief and terror of one whose mental habit was ever to pierce to extremes. Not altogether conscious that he had hitherto played with life, he felt that he was suddenly plunged into the stormful reality of it. He projected to speak plainly to his son on all points that night.

Page 450

“Richard is very gay,” Mrs. Doris, whispered her brother.

“All will be right with him to-morrow,” he replied; for the game had been in his hands so long, so long had he been the God of the machine, that having once resolved to speak plainly and to act, he was to a certain extent secure, bad as the thing to mend might be.

“I notice he has rather a wild laugh—I don’t exactly like his eyes,” said Mrs. Doria.

“You will see a change in him to-morrow,” the man of science remarked.

It was reserved for Mrs. Doria herself to experience that change. In the middle of the dinner a telegraphic message from her son-in-law, worthy John Todhunter, reached the house, stating that Clare was alarmingly ill, bidding her come instantly. She cast about for some one to accompany her, and fixed on Richard. Before he would give his consent for Richard to go, Sir Austin desired to speak with him apart, and in that interview he said to his son: “My dear Richard! it was my intention that we should come to an understanding together this night. But the time is short—poor Helen cannot spare many minutes. Let me then say that you deceived me, and that I forgive you. We fix our seal on the past. You will bring your wife to me when you return.” And very cheerfully the baronet looked down on the generous future he thus founded.

“Will you have her at Raynham at once, sir?” said Richard.

“Yes, my son, when you bring her.”

“Are you mocking me, sir?”

“Pray, what do you mean?”

“I ask you to receive her at once.”

“Well! the delay cannot be long. I do not apprehend that you will be kept from your happiness many days.”

“I think it will be some time, sir!” said Richard, sighing deeply.

“And what mental freak is this that can induce you to postpone it and play with your first duty?”

“What is my first duty, sir?”

“Since you are married, to be with your wife.”

“I have heard that from an old woman called Berry!” said Richard to himself, not intending irony.

“Will you receive her at once?” he asked resolutely.

The baronet was clouded by his son’s reception of his graciousness. His grateful prospect had formerly been Richard’s marriage—the culmination of his System. Richard had destroyed his participation in that. He now looked for a pretty scene in recompense:—Richard leading up his wife to him, and both being welcomed by him paternally, and so held one ostentatious minute in his embrace.

He said: “Before you return, I demur to receiving her.”

“Very well, sir,” replied his son, and stood as if he had spoken all.

“Really you tempt me to fancy you already regret your rash proceeding!” the baronet exclaimed; and the next moment it pained him he had uttered the words, Richard’s eyes were so sorrowfully fierce. It pained him, but he divined in that look a history, and he could not refrain from glancing acutely and asking: “Do you?”

Page 451

“Regret it, sir?” The question aroused one of those struggles in the young man’s breast which a passionate storm of tears may still, and which sink like leaden death into the soul when tears come not. Richard’s eyes had the light of the desert.

“Do you?” his father repeated. “You tempt me—I almost fear you do.” At the thought—-for he expressed his mind—the pity that he had for Richard was not pure gold.

“Ask me what I think of her, sir! Ask me what she is! Ask me what it is to have taken one of God’s precious angels and chained her to misery! Ask me what it is to have plunged a sword into her heart, and to stand over her and see such a creature bleeding! Do I regret that? Why, yes, I do! Would you?”

His eyes flew hard at his father under the ridge of his eyebrows.

Sir Austin winced and reddened. Did he understand? There is ever in the mind’s eye a certain wilfulness. We see and understand; we see and won’t understand.

“Tell me why you passed by her as you did this afternoon,” he said gravely: and in the same voice Richard answered: “I passed her because I could not do otherwise.”

“Your wife, Richard?”

“Yes! my wife!”

“If she had seen you, Richard?”

“God spared her that!”

Mrs. Doria, bustling in practical haste, and bearing Richard’s hat and greatcoat in her energetic hands, came between them at this juncture. Dimples of commiseration were in her cheeks while she kissed her brother’s perplexed forehead. She forgot her trouble about Clare, deploring his fatuity.

Sir Austin was forced to let his son depart. As of old, he took counsel with Adrian, and the wise youth was soothing. “Somebody has kissed him, sir, and the chaste boy can’t get over it.” This absurd suggestion did more to appease the baronet than if Adrian had given a veritable reasonable key to Richard’s conduct. It set him thinking that it might be a prudish strain in the young man’s mind, due to the System in difficulties.

“I may have been wrong in one thing,” he said, with an air of the utmost doubt of it. “I, perhaps, was wrong in allowing him so much liberty during his probation.”

Adrian pointed out to him that he had distinctly commanded it.

“Yes, yes; that is on me.”

His was an order of mind that would accept the most burdensome charges, and by some species of moral usury make a profit out of them.

Clare was little talked of. Adrian attributed the employment of the telegraph to John Todhunter's uxorious distress at a toothache, or possibly the first symptoms of an heir to his house.

"That child's mind has disease in it... She is not sound," said the baronet.

On the door-step of the hotel, when they returned, stood Mrs. Berry. Her wish to speak a few words with the baronet reverentially communicated, she was ushered upstairs into his room.

Page 452

Mrs. Berry compressed her person in the chair she was beckoned to occupy.

“Well’ ma’am, you have something to say,” observed the baronet, for she seemed loth to commence.

“Wishin’ I hadn’t—” Mrs. Berry took him up, and mindful of the good rule to begin at the beginning, pursued: “I dare say, Sir Austin, you don’t remember me, and I little thought when last we parted our meeting ’d be like this. Twenty year don’t go over one without showin’ it, no more than twenty ox. It’s a might o’ time,—twenty year! Leastways not quite twenty, it ain’t.”

“Round figures are best,” Adrian remarked.

“In them round figures a be-loved son have growed up, and got himself married!” said Mrs. Berry, diving straight into the case.

Sir Austin then learnt that he had before him the culprit who had assisted his son in that venture. It was a stretch of his patience to hear himself addressed on a family matter; but he was naturally courteous.

“He came to my house, Sir Austin, a stranger! If twenty year alters us as have knowed each other on the earth, how must they alter they that we parted with just come from heaven! And a heavenly babe he were! so sweet! so strong! so fat!”

Adrian laughed aloud.

Mrs. Berry bumped a curtsey to him in her chair, continuing: “I wished afore I spoke to say how thankful am I bound to be for my pension not cut short, as have offended so, but that I know Sir Austin Feverel, Raynham Abbey, ain’t one o’ them that likes to hear their good deeds pumlished. And a pension to me now, it’s something more than it were. For a pension and pretty rosy cheeks in a maid, which I was—that’s a bait many a man’ll bite, that won’t so a forsaken wife!”

“If you will speak to the point, ma’am, I will listen to you,” the baronet interrupted her.

“It’s the beginnin’ that’s the worst, and that’s over, thank the Lord! So I’ll speak, Sir Austin, and say my say:—Lord speed me! Believin’ our idees o’ matrimony to be sim’lar, then, I’ll say, once married—married for life! Yes! I don’t even like widows. For I can’t stop at the grave. Not at the tomb I can’t stop. My husband’s my husband, and if I’m a body at the Resurrection, I say, speaking humbly, my Berry is the husband o’ my body; and to think of two claimin’ of me then—it makes me hot all over. Such is my notion of that state ‘tween man and woman. No givin’ in marriage, o’ course I know; and if so I’m single.”

The baronet suppressed a smile. “Really, my good woman, you wander very much.”

“Beggin’ pardon, Sir Austin; but I has my point before me all the same, and I’m comin’ to it. Ac-knowledgin’ our error, it’d done, and bein’ done, it’s writ aloft. Oh! if you ony knew what a sweet young creature she be! Indeed; ’taint all of humble birth that’s unworthy, Sir Austin. And she got her idees, too: She reads History! She talk that sensible as would surprise ye. But for all that she’s

Page 453

a prey to the artful o' men—unpertected. And it's a young marriage—but there's no fear for her, as far as she go. The fear's t'other way. There's that in a man—at the commencement—which make of him Lord knows what if you any way interferes: whereas a woman bides quiet! It's consolation catch her, which is what we mean by seduein'. Whereas a man—he's a savage!"

Sir Austin turned his face to Adrian, who was listening with huge delight.

"Well, ma'am, I see you have something in your mind, if you would only come to it quickly."

"Then here's my point, Sir Austin. I say you bred him so as there ain't another young gentleman like him in England, and proud he make me. And as for her, I'll risk sayin'—it's done, and no harm—you might search England through, and nowhere will ye find a maid that's his match like his own wife. Then there they be. Are they together as should be? O Lord no! Months they been divided. Then she all lonely and exposed, I went, and fetched her out of seducers' ways—which they may say what they like, but the inn'cent is most open to when they're healthy and confidin'—I fetch her, and—the liberty—boxed her safe in my own house. So much for that sweet! That you may do with women. But it's him—Mr. Richard—I am bold, I know, but there—I'm in for it, and the Lord'll help me! It's him, Sir Austin, in this great metropolis, warm from a young marriage. It's him, and—I say nothin' of her, and how sweet she bears it, and it's eating her at a time when Natur' should have no other trouble but the one that's goin' on it's him, and I ask—so bold—shall there—and a Christian gentlemen his father—shall there be a tug 'tween him as a son and him as a husband—soon to be somethin' else? I speak bold out—I'd have sons obey their fathers, but a priest's words spoke over them, which they're now in my ears, I say I ain't a doubt on earth—I'm sure there ain't one in heaven—which dooty's the holier of the two."

Sir Austin heard her to an end. Their views on the junction of the sexes were undoubtedly akin. To be lectured on his prime subject, however, was slightly disagreeable, and to be obliged mentally to assent to this old lady's doctrine was rather humiliating, when it could not be averred that he had latterly followed it out. He sat cross-legged and silent, a finger to his temple.

"One gets so addle-gated thinkin' many things," said Mrs. Berry, simply. "That's why we see wonder clever people goin' wrong—to my mind. I think it's al'ays the plan in a dielemmer to pray God and walk forward."

The keen-witted soft woman was tracking the baronet's thoughts, and she had absolutely run him down and taken an explanation out of his mouth, by which Mrs. Berry was to have been informed that he had acted from a principle of his own, and devolved a wisdom she could not be expected to comprehend.

Of course he became advised immediately that it would be waste of time to direct such an explanation to her inferior capacity.

Page 454

He gave her his hand, saying, “My son has gone out of town to see his cousin, who is ill. He will return in two or three days, and then they will both come to me at Raynham.”

Mrs. Berry took the tips of his fingers, and went half-way to the floor perpendicularly. “He pass her like a stranger in the park this evenin’,” she faltered.

“Ah?” said the baronet. “Yes, well! they will be at Raynham before the week is over.”

Mrs. Berry was not quite satisfied. “Not of his own accord he pass that sweet young wife of his like a stranger this day, Sir Austin!”

“I must beg you not to intrude further, ma’am.”

Mrs. Berry bobbed her bunch of a body out of the room.

“All’s well that ends well,” she said to herself. “It’s just bad inquirin’ too close among men. We must take ’em somethin’ like Providence—as they come. Thank heaven! I kep’ back the baby.”

In Mrs. Berry’s eyes the baby was the victorious reserve.

Adrian asked his chief what he thought of that specimen of woman.

“I think I have not met a better in my life,” said the baronet, mingling praise and sarcasm.

Clare lies in her bed as placid as in the days when she breathed; her white hands stretched their length along the sheets, at peace from head to feet. She needs iron no more. Richard is face to face with death for the first time. He sees the sculpture of clay—the spark gone.

Clare gave her mother the welcome of the dead. This child would have spoken nothing but kind commonplaces had she been alive. She was dead, and none knew her malady. On her fourth finger were two wedding-rings.

When hours of weeping had silenced the mother’s anguish, she, for some comfort she saw in it, pointed out that strange thing to Richard, speaking low in the chamber of the dead; and then he learnt that it was his own lost ring Clare wore in the two worlds. He learnt from her husband that Clare’s last request had been that neither of the rings should be removed. She had written it; she would not speak it.

“I beg of my husband, and all kind people who may have the care of me between this and the grave, to bury me with my hands untouched.”

The tracing of the words showed the bodily torment she was suffering, as she wrote them on a scrap of paper found beside her pillow.

In wonder, as the dim idea grew from the waving of Clare's dead hand, Richard paced the house, and hung about the awful room; dreading to enter it, reluctant to quit it. The secret Clare had buried while she lived, arose with her death. He saw it play like flame across her marble features. The memory of her voice was like a knife at his nerves. His coldness to her started up accusingly: her meekness was bitter blame.

On the evening of the fourth day, her mother came to him in his bedroom, with a face so white that he asked himself if aught worse could happen to a mother than the loss of her child. Choking she said to him, "Read this," and thrust a leather-bound pocket-book trembling in his hand. She would not breathe to him what it was. She entreated him not to open it before her.

Page 455

“Tell me,” she said, “tell me what you think. John must not hear of it. I have nobody to consult but you O Richard!”

“My Diary” was written in the round hand of Clare’s childhood on the first page. The first name his eye encountered was his own.

“Richard’s fourteenth birthday. I have worked him a purse and put it under his pillow, because he is going to have plenty of money. He does not notice me now because he has a friend now, and he is ugly, but Richard is not, and never will be.”

The occurrences of that day were subsequently recorded, and a childish prayer to God for him set down. Step by step he saw her growing mind in his history. As she advanced in years she began to look back, and made much of little trivial remembrances, all bearing upon him.

“We went into the fields and gathered cowslips together, and pelted each other, and I told him he used to call them ‘coals-sleeps’ when he was a baby, and he was angry at my telling him, for he does not like to be told he was ever a baby.”

He remembered the incident, and remembered his stupid scorn of her meek affection. Little Clare! how she lived before him in her white dress and pink ribbons, and soft dark eyes! Upstairs she was lying dead. He read on:

“Mama says there is no one in the world like Richard, and I am sure there is not, not in the whole world. He says he is going to be a great General and going to the wars. If he does I shall dress myself as a boy and go after him, and he will not know me till I am wounded. Oh I pray he will never, never be wounded. I wonder what I should feel if Richard was ever to die.”

Upstairs Clare was lying dead.

“Lady Blandish said there was a likeness between Richard and me. Richard said I hope I do not hang down my head as she does. He is angry with me because I do not look people in the face and speak out, but I know I am not looking after earthworms.”

Yes. He had told her that. A shiver seized him at the recollection.

Then it came to a period when the words: “Richard kissed me,” stood by themselves, and marked a day in her life.

Afterwards it was solemnly discovered that Richard wrote poetry. He read one of his old forgotten compositions penned when he had that ambition.

“Thy truth to me is truer
Than horse, or dog, or blade;

Thy vows to me are fewer
Than ever maiden made.

Thou steppest from thy splendour
To make my life a song:
My bosom shall be tender
As thine has risen strong."

All the verses were transcribed. "It is he who is the humble knight," Clare explained at the close, "and his lady, is a Queen. Any Queen would throw her crown away for him."

It came to that period when Clare left Raynham with her mother.

Page 456

“Richard was not sorry to lose me. He only loves boys and men. Something tells me I shall never see Raynham again. He was dressed in blue. He said Good-bye, Clare, and kissed me on the cheek. Richard never kisses me on the mouth. He did not know I went to his bed and kissed him while he was asleep. He sleeps with one arm under his head, and the other out on the bed. I moved away a bit of his hair that was over his eyes. I wanted to cut it. I have one piece. I do not let anybody see I am unhappy, not even mama. She says I want iron. I am sure I do not. I like to write my name. Clare Doria Forey. Richard’s is Richard Doria Feverel.”

His breast rose convulsively. Clare Doria Forey! He knew the music of that name. He had heard it somewhere. It sounded faint and mellow now behind the hills of death.

He could not read for tears. It was midnight. The hour seemed to belong to her. The awful stillness and the darkness were Clare’s. Clare’s voice clear and cold from the grave possessed it.

Painfully, with blinded eyes, he looked over the breathless pages. She spoke of his marriage, and her finding the ring.

“I knew it was his. I knew he was going to be married that morning. I saw him stand by the altar when they laughed at breakfast. His wife must be so beautiful! Richard’s wife! Perhaps he will love me better now he is married. Mama says they must be separated. That is shameful. If I can help him I will. I pray so that he may be happy. I hope God hears poor sinners’ prayers. I am very sinful. Nobody knows it as I do. They say I am good, but I know. When I look on the ground I am not looking after earthworms, as he said. Oh, do forgive me, God!”

Then she spoke of her own marriage, and that it was her duty to obey her mother. A blank in the Diary ensued.

“I have seen Richard. Richard despises me,” was the next entry.

But now as he read his eyes were fixed, and the delicate feminine handwriting like a black thread drew on his soul to one terrible conclusion.

“I cannot live. Richard despises me. I cannot bear the touch of my fingers or the sight of my face. Oh! I understand him now. He should not have kissed me so that last time. I wished to die while his mouth was on mine.”

Further: “I have no escape. Richard said he would die rather than endure it. I know he would. Why should I be afraid to do what he would do? I think if my husband whipped me I could bear it better. He is so kind, and tries to make me cheerful. He will soon be very unhappy. I pray to God half the night. I seem to be losing sight of my God the more I pray.”

Richard laid the book open on the table. Phantom surges seemed to be mounting and travelling for his brain. Had Clare taken his wild words in earnest? Did she lie there dead—he shrouded the thought.

He wrapped the thoughts in shrouds, but he was again reading.

Page 457

“A quarter to one o’clock. I shall not be alive this time to-morrow. I shall never see Richard now. I dreamed last night we were in the fields together, and he walked with his arm round my waist. We were children, but I thought we were married, and I showed him I wore his ring, and he said—if you always wear it, Clare, you are as good as my wife. Then I made a vow to wear it for ever and ever... It is not mama’s fault. She does not think as Richard and I do of these things. He is not a coward, nor am I. He hates cowards.

“I have written to his father to make him happy. Perhaps when I am dead he will hear what I say.

“I heard just now Richard call distinctly—Clare, come out to me. Surely he has not gone. I am going I know not where. I cannot think. I am very cold.”

The words were written larger, and staggered towards the close, as if her hand had lost mastery over the pen.

“I can only remember Richard now a boy. A little boy and a big boy. I am not sure now of his voice. I can only remember certain words. ‘Clari,’ and ‘Don Ricardo,’ and his laugh. He used to be full of fun. Once we laughed all day together tumbling in the hay. Then he had a friend, and began to write poetry, and be proud. If I had married a young man he would have forgiven me, but I should not have been happier. I must have died. God never looks on me.

“It is past two o’clock. The sheep are bleating outside. It must be very cold in the ground. Good-bye, Richard.”

With his name it began and ended. Even to herself Clare was not over-communicative. The book was slender, yet her nineteen years of existence left half the number of pages white.

Those last words drew him irresistibly to gaze on her. There she lay, the same impassive Clare. For a moment he wondered she had not moved—to him she had become so different. She who had just filled his ears with strange tidings—it was not possible to think her dead! She seemed to have been speaking to him all through his life. His image was on that still heart.

He dismissed the night-watchers from the room, and remained with her alone, till the sense of death oppressed him, and then the shock sent him to the window to look for sky and stars. Behind a low broad pine, hung with frosty mist, he heard a bell-wether of the flock in the silent fold. Death in life it sounded.

The mother found him praying at the foot of Clare's bed. She knelt by his side, and they prayed, and their joint sobs shook their bodies, but neither of them shed many tears. They held a dark unspoken secret in common. They prayed God to forgive her.

Clare was buried in the family vault of the Todhunters. Her mother breathed no wish to have her lying at Lobourne.

After the funeral, what they alone upon earth knew brought them together.

"Richard," she said, "the worst is over for me. I have no one to love but you, dear. We have all been fighting against God, and this... Richard! you will come with me, and be united to your wife, and spare my brother what I suffer."

Page 458

He answered the broken spirit: “I have killed one. She sees me as I am. I cannot go with you to my wife, because I am not worthy to touch her hand, and were I to go, I should do this to silence my self-contempt. Go you to her, and when she asks of me, say I have a death upon my head that—No! say that I am abroad, seeking for that which shall cleanse me. If I find it I shall come to claim her. If not, God help us all!”

She had no strength to contest his solemn words, or stay him, and he went forth.

CHAPTER XLI

A man with a beard saluted the wise youth Adrian in the full blaze of Piccadilly with a clap on the shoulder. Adrian glanced leisurely behind.

“Do you want to try my nerves, my dear fellow? I’m not a man of fashion, happily, or you would have struck the seat of them. How are you?”

That was his welcome to Austin Wentworth after his long absence.

Austin took his arm, and asked for news, with the hunger of one who had been in the wilderness five years.

“The Whigs have given up the ghost, my dear Austin. The free Briton is to receive Liberty’s pearl, the Ballot. The Aristocracy has had a cycle’s notice to quit. The Monarchy and old Madeira are going out; Demos and Cape wines are coming in. They call it Reform. So, you see, your absence has worked wonders. Depart for another five years, and you will return to ruined stomachs, cracked sconces, general upset, an equality made perfect by universal prostration.”

Austin indulged him in a laugh. “I want to hear about ourselves. How is old Ricky?”

“You know of his—what do they call it when greenhorns are licensed to jump into the milkpails of dairymaids?—a very charming little woman she makes, by the way—-presentable! quite old Anacreon’s rose in milk. Well! everybody thought the System must die of it. Not a bit. It continued to flourish in spite. It’s in a consumption now, though—emaciated, lean, raw, spectral! I’ve this morning escaped from Raynham to avoid the sight of it. I have brought our genial uncle Hippias to town—a delightful companion! I said to him: ‘We’ve had a fine Spring.’ ‘Ugh!’ he answers, ‘there’s a time when you come to think the Spring old.’ You should have heard how he trained out the ‘old.’ I felt something like decay in my sap just to hear him. In the prize-fight of life, my dear Austin, our uncle Hippias has been unfairly hit below the belt. Let’s guard ourselves there, and go and order dinner.”

“But where’s Ricky now, and what is he doing?” said Austin.

“Ask what he has done. The miraculous boy has gone and got a baby!”

“A child? Richard has one?” Austin’s clear eyes shone with pleasure.

“I suppose it’s not common among your tropical savages. He has one: one as big as two. That has been the death-blow to the System. It bore the marriage—the baby was too much for it. Could it swallow the baby, ’twould live. She, the wonderful woman, has produced a large boy. I assure you it’s quite amusing to see the System opening its mouth every hour of the day, trying to gulp him down, aware that it would be a consummate cure, or a happy release.”

Page 459

By degrees Austin learnt the baronet's proceedings, and smiled sadly.

"How has Ricky turned out?" he asked. "What sort of a character has he?"

"The poor boy is ruined by his excessive anxiety about it. Character? he has the character of a bullet with a treble charge of powder behind it. Enthusiasm is the powder. That boy could get up an enthusiasm for the maiden days of Ops! He was going to reform the world, after your fashion, Austin,—you have something to answer for. Unfortunately he began with the feminine side of it. Cupid proud of Phoebus newly slain, or Pluto wishing to people his kingdom, if you like, put it into the soft head of one of the guileless grateful creatures to kiss him for his good work. Oh, horror! he never expected that. Conceive the System in the flesh, and you have our Richard. The consequence is, that this male Peri refuses to enter his Paradise, though the gates are open for him, the trumpets blow, and the fair unspotted one awaits him fruitful within. We heard of him last that he was trying the German waters—preparatory to his undertaking the release of Italy from the subjugation of the Teuton. Let's hope they'll wash him. He is in the company of Lady Judith Felle—your old friend, the ardent female Radical who married the decrepit to carry out her principles. They always marry English lords, or foreign princes: I admire their tactics."

"Judith is bad for him in such a state. I like her, but she was always too sentimental," said Austin.

"Sentiment made her marry the old lord, I suppose? I like her for her sentiment, Austin. Sentimental people are sure to live long and die fat. Feeling, that's the slayer, coz. Sentiment! 'tis the cajolery of existence: the soft bloom which whoso weareth, he or she is enviable. Would that I had more!"

"You're not much changed, Adrian."

"I'm not a Radical, Austin."

Further inquiries, responded to in Adrian's figurative speech, instructed Austin that the baronet was waiting for his son, in a posture of statuesque offended paternity, before he would receive his daughter-in-law and grandson. That was what Adrian meant by the efforts of the System to swallow the baby.

"We're in a tangle," said the wise youth. "Time will extricate us, I presume, or what is the venerable signor good for?"

Austin mused some minutes, and asked for Lucy's place of residence.

"We'll go to her by and by," said Adrian.

"I shall go and see her now," said Austin.

“Well, we’ll go and order the dinner first, coz.”

“Give me her address.”

“Really, Austin, you carry matters with too long a beard,” Adrian objected. “Don’t you care what you eat?” he roared hoarsely, looking humorously hurt. “I daresay not. A slice out of him that’s handy—sauce du ciel! Go, batten on the baby, cannibal. Dinner at seven.”

Adrian gave him his own address, and Lucy’s, and strolled off to do the better thing.

Page 460

Overnight Mrs. Berry had observed a long stranger in her tea-cup. Posting him on her fingers and starting him with a smack, he had vaulted lightly and thereby indicated that he was positively coming the next day. She forgot him in the bustle of her duties and the absorption of her faculties in thoughts of the incomparable stranger Lucy had presented to the world, till a knock at the street-door reminded her. “There he is!” she cried, as she ran to open to him. “There’s my stranger come!” Never was a woman’s faith in omens so justified. The stranger desired to see Mrs. Richard Feverel. He said his name was Mr. Austin Wentworth. Mrs. Berry clasped her hands, exclaiming, “Come at last!” and ran bolt out of the house to look up and down the street. Presently she returned with many excuses for her rudeness, saying: “I expected to see her comin’ home, Mr. Wentworth. Every day twice a day she go out to give her blessed angel an airing. No leavin’ the child with nursemaids for her! She is a mother! and good milk, too, thank the Lord! though her heart’s so low.”

Indoors Mrs. Berry stated who she was, related the history of the young couple and her participation in it, and admired the beard. “Although I’d swear you don’t wear it for ornament, now!” she said, having in the first impulse designed a stroke at man’s vanity.

Ultimately Mrs. Berry spoke of the family complication, and with dejected head and joined hands threw out dark hints about Richard.

While Austin was giving his cheerfuller views of the case, Lucy came in preceding the baby.

“I am Austin Wentworth,” he said, taking her hand. They read each other’s faces, these two, and smiled kinship.

“Your name is Lucy?”

She affirmed it softly.

“And mine is Austin, as you know.”

Mrs. Berry allowed time for Lucy’s charms to subdue him, and presented Richard’s representative, who, seeing a new face, suffered himself to be contemplated before he commenced crying aloud and knocking at the doors of Nature for something that was due to him.

“Ain’t he a lusty darlin’?” says Mrs. Berry. “Ain’t he like his own father? There can’t be no doubt about zoo, zoo pitty pet. Look at his fists. Ain’t he got passion? Ain’t he a splendid roarer? Oh!” and she went off rapturously into baby-language.

A fine boy, certainly. Mrs. Berry exhibited his legs for further proof, desiring Austin’s confirmation as to their being dumplings.

Lucy murmured a word of excuse, and bore the splendid roarer out of the room.

“She might a done it here,” said Mrs. Berry. “There’s no prettier sight, I say. If her dear husband could but see that! He’s off in his heroics—he want to be doin’ all sorts o’ things: I say he’ll never do anything grander than that baby. You should ’a seen her uncle over that baby—he came here, for I said, you shall see your own family, my dear, and so she thinks. He come, and he laughed

Page 461

over that baby in the joy of his heart, poor man! he cried, he did. You should see that Mr. Thompson, Mr. Wentworth—a friend o' Mr. Richard's, and a very modest-minded young gentleman—he worships her in his innocence. It's a sight to see him with that baby. My belief is he's unhappy 'cause he can't anyways be nurse-maid to him. O Mr. Wentworth! what do you think of her, sir?"

Austin's reply was as satisfactory as a man's poor speech could make it. He heard that Lady Feverel was in the house, and Mrs. Berry prepared the way for him to pay his respects to her. Then Mrs. Berry ran to Lucy, and the house buzzed with new life. The simple creatures felt in Austin's presence something good among them. "He don't speak much," said Mrs. Berry, "but I see by his eye he mean a deal. He ain't one o' yer long-word gentry, who's all gay deceivers, every one of 'em."

Lucy pressed the hearty suckling into her breast. "I wonder what he thinks of me, Mrs. Berry? I could not speak to him. I loved him before I saw him. I knew what his face was like."

"He looks proper even with a beard, and that's a trial for a virtuous man," said Mrs. Berry. "One sees straight through the hair with him. Think! he'll think what any man'd think—you a-suckin spite o' all your sorrow, my sweet,—and my Berry talkin' of his Roman matrons!—here's a English wife'll match 'em all! that's what he thinks. And now that leetle dark under yer eye'll clear, my darlin', now he've come."

Mrs. Berry looked to no more than that; Lucy to no more than the peace she had in being near Richard's best friend. When she sat down to tea it was with a sense that the little room that held her was her home perhaps for many a day.

A chop procured and cooked by Mrs. Berry formed Austin's dinner. During the meal he entertained them with anecdotes of his travels. Poor Lucy had no temptation to try to conquer Austin. That heroic weakness of hers was gone.

Mrs. Berry had said: "Three cups—I goes no further," and Lucy had rejected the proffer of more tea, when Austin, who was in the thick of a Brazilian forest, asked her if she was a good traveller.

"I mean, can you start at a minute's notice?"

Lucy hesitated, and then said; "Yes," decisively, to which Mrs. Berry added, that she was not a "luggage-woman"

"There used to be a train at seven o'clock," Austin remarked, consulting his watch.

The two women were silent.

"Could you get ready to come with me to Raynham in ten minutes?"

Austin looked as if he had asked a commonplace question.

Lucy's lips parted to speak. She could not answer.

Loud rattled the teaboard to Mrs. Berry's dropping hands.

"Joy and deliverance!" she exclaimed with a foundering voice.

"Will you come?" Austin kindly asked again.

Lucy tried to stop her beating heart, as she answered, "Yes." Mrs. Berry cunningly pretended to interpret the irresolution in her tones with a mighty whisper: "She's thinking what's to be done with baby."

Page 462

“He must learn to travel,” said Austin.

“Oh!” cried Mrs. Berry, “and I’ll be his nuss, and bear him, a sweet! Oh! and think of it! me nurse-maid once more at Raynham Abbey! but it’s nurse-woman now, you must say. Let us be goin’ on the spot.”

She started up and away in hot haste, fearing delay would cool the heaven-sent resolve. Austin smiled, eying his watch and Lucy alternately. She was wishing to ask a multitude of questions. His face reassured her, and saying: “I will be dressed instantly,” she also left the room. Talking, bustling, preparing, wrapping up my lord, and looking to their neatnesses, they were nevertheless ready within the time prescribed by Austin, and Mrs. Berry stood humming over the baby. “He’ll sleep it through,” she said. “He’s had enough for an alderman, and goes to sleep sound after his dinner, he do, a duck!” Before they departed, Lucy ran up to Lady Feverel. She returned for, the small one.

“One moment, Mr. Wentworth?”

“Just two,” said Austin.

Master Richard was taken up, and when Lucy came back her eyes were full of tears.

“She thinks she is never to see him again, Mr. Wentworth.”

“She shall,” Austin said simply.

Off they went, and with Austin near her, Lucy forgot to dwell at all upon the great act of courage she was performing.

“I do hope baby will not wake,” was her chief solicitude.

“He!” cries nurse-woman Berry, from the rear, “his little tum-tum’s as tight as he can hold, a pet! a lamb! a bird! a beauty! and ye may take yer oath he never wakes till that’s slack. He’ve got character of his own, a blessed!”

There are some tremendous citadels that only want to be taken by storm. The baronet sat alone in his library, sick of resistance, and rejoicing in the pride of no surrender; a terror to his friends and to himself. Hearing Austin’s name sonorously pronounced by the man of calves, he looked up from his book, and held out his hand. “Glad to see you, Austin.” His appearance betokened complete security. The next minute he found himself escaladed.

It was a cry from Mrs. Berry that told him others were in the room besides Austin. Lucy stood a little behind the lamp: Mrs. Berry close to the door. The door was half open, and passing through it might be seen the petrified figure of a fine man. The baronet glancing over the lamp rose at Mrs. Berry’s signification of a woman’s personality.

Austin stepped back and led Lucy to him by the hand. “I have brought Richard’s wife, sir,” he said with a pleased, perfectly uncalculating, countenance, that was disarming. Very pale and trembling Lucy bowed. She felt her two hands taken, and heard a kind voice. Could it be possible it belonged to the dreadful father of her husband? She lifted her eyes nervously: her hands were still detained. The baronet contemplated Richard’s choice. Had he ever had a rivalry with those pure eyes? He saw the pain of her position shooting across her brows, and, uttering-gentle inquiries as to her health, placed her in a seat. Mrs. Berry had already fallen into a chair.

Page 463

“What aspect do you like for your bedroom?—East?” said the baronet.

Lucy was asking herself wonderingly: “Am I to stay?”

“Perhaps you had better take to Richard’s room at once,” he pursued. “You have the Lobourne valley there and a good morning air, and will feel more at home.”

Lucy’s colour mounted. Mrs. Berry gave a short cough, as one who should say, “The day is ours!” Undoubtedly—strange as it was to think it—the fortress was carried.

“Lucy is rather tired,” said Austin, and to hear her Christian name thus bravely spoken brought grateful dew to her eyes.

The baronet was about to touch the bell. “But have you come alone?” he asked.

At this Mrs. Berry came forward. Not immediately: it seemed to require effort for her to move, and when she was within the region of the lamp, her agitation could not escape notice. The blissful bundle shook in her arms.

“By the way, what is he to me?” Austin inquired generally as he went and unveiled the younger hope of Raynham. “My relationship is not so defined as yours, sir.”

An observer might have supposed that the baronet peeped at his grandson with the courteous indifference of one who merely wished to compliment the mother of anybody’s child.

“I really think he’s like Richard,” Austin laughed. Lucy looked: I am sure he is!

“As like as one to one,” Mrs. Berry murmured feebly; but Grandpapa not speaking she thought it incumbent on her to pluck up. “And he’s as healthy as his father was, Sir Austin—spite o’ the might ’a beens. Reg’lar as the clock! We never want a clock since he come. We knows the hour o’ the day, and of the night.”

“You nurse him yourself, of course?” the baronet spoke to Lucy, and was satisfied on that point.

Mrs. Berry was going to display his prodigious legs. Lucy, fearing the consequent effect on the prodigious lungs, begged her not to wake him. “’T’d take a deal to do that,” said Mrs. Berry, and harped on Master Richard’s health and the small wonder it was that he enjoyed it, considering the superior quality of his diet, and the lavish attentions of his mother, and then suddenly fell silent on a deep sigh.

“He looks healthy,” said the baronet, “but I am not a judge of babies.”

Thus, having capitulated, Raynham chose to acknowledge its new commandant, who was now borne away, under the directions of the housekeeper, to occupy the room Richard had slept in when an infant.

Austin cast no thought on his success. The baronet said: “She is extremely well-looking.” He replied: “A person you take to at once.” There it ended.

But a much more animated colloquy was taking place aloft, where Lucy and Mrs. Berry sat alone. Lucy expected her to talk about the reception they had met with, and the house, and the peculiarities of the rooms, and the solid happiness that seemed in store. Mrs. Berry all the while would persist in consulting the looking-glass. Her first distinct answer was, “My dear! tell me candid, how do I look?”

Page 464

“Very nice indeed, Mrs. Berry; but could you have believed he would be so kind, so considerate?”

“I am sure I looked a frump,” returned Mrs. Berry. “Oh dear! two birds at a shot. What do you think, now?”

“I never saw so wonderful a likeness,” says Lucy.

“Likeness! look at me.” Mrs. Berry was trembling and hot in the palms.

“You’re very feverish, dear Berry. What can it be?”

“Ain’t it like the love-flutters of a young gal, my dear.”

“Go to bed, Berry, dear,” says Lucy, pouting in her soft caressing way. “I will undress you, and see to you, dear heart! You’ve had so much excitement.”

“Ha! ha!” Berry laughed hysterically; “she thinks it’s about this business of hers. Why, it’s child’s-play, my darlin’. But I didn’t look for tragedy to-night. Sleep in this house I can’t, my love!”

Lucy was astonished. “Not sleep here, Mrs. Berry?—Oh! why, you silly old thing? I know.”

“Do ye!” said Mrs. Berry, with a sceptical nose.

“You’re afraid of ghosts.”

“Belike I am when they’re six foot two in their shoes, and bellows when you stick a pin into their calves. I seen my Berry!”

“Your husband?”

“Large as life!”

Lucy meditated on optical delusions, but Mrs. Berry described him as the Colossus who had marched them into the library, and vowed that he had recognized her and quaked. “Time ain’t aged him,” said Mrs. Berry, “whereas me! he’ve got his excuse now. I know I look a frump.”

Lucy kissed her: “You look the nicest, dearest old thing.”

“You may say an old thing, my dear.”

“And your husband is really here?”

“Berry’s below!”

Profoundly uttered as this was, it chased every vestige of incredulity.

“What will you do, Mrs. Berry?”

“Go, my dear. Leave him to be happy in his own way. It’s over atween us, I see that. When I entered the house I felt there was something comin’ over me, and lo and behold ye! no sooner was we in the hall-passage—if it hadn’t been for that blessed infant I should ’a dropped. I must ’a known his step, for my heart began thumpin’, and I knew I hadn’t got my hair straight—that Mr. Wentworth was in such a hurry—nor my best gown. I knew he’d scorn me. He hates frumps.”

“Scorn you!” cried Lucy, angrily. “He who has behaved so wickedly!”

Mrs. Berry attempted to rise. “I may as well go at once,” she whimpered. “If I see him I shall only be disgracin’ of myself. I feel it all on my side already. Did ye mark him, my dear? I know I was vexin’ to him at times, I was. Those big men are so touchy about their dignity—nat’ral. Hark at me! I’m goin’ all soft in a minute. Let me leave the house, my dear. I daresay it was good half my fault. Young women don’t understand men sufficient—not altogether—and I was a young woman then; and then what they goes and does they ain’t quite answerable for: they, feels, I daresay, pushed from behind. Yes. I’ll go. I’m a frump. I’ll go. ’Tain’t in natur’ for me to sleep in the same house.”

Page 465

Lucy laid her hands on Mrs. Berry's shoulders, and forcibly fixed her in her seat. "Leave baby, naughty woman? I tell you he shall come to you, and fall on his knees to you and beg your forgiveness."

"Berry on his knees!"

"Yes. And he shall beg and pray you to forgive him."

"If you get more from Martin Berry than breath-away words, great'll be my wonder!" said Mrs. Berry.

"We will see," said Lucy, thoroughly determined to do something for the good creature that had befriended her.

Mrs. Berry examined her gown. "Won't it seem we're runnin' after him?" she murmured faintly.

"He is your husband, Mrs. Berry. He may be wanting to come to you now."

"Oh! Where is all I was goin' to say to that man when we met." Mrs. Berry ejaculated. Lucy had left the room.

On the landing outside the door Lucy met a lady dressed in black, who stopped her and asked if she was Richard's wife, and kissed her, passing from her immediately. Lucy despatched a message for Austin, and related the Berry history. Austin sent for the great man and said: "Do you know your wife is here?" Before Berry had time to draw himself up to enunciate his longest, he was requested to step upstairs, and as his young mistress at once led the way, Berry could not refuse to put his legs in motion and carry the stately edifice aloft.

Of the interview Mrs. Berry gave Lucy a slight sketch that night. "He began in the old way, my dear, and says I, a true heart and plain words, Martin Berry. So there he cuts himself and his Johnson short, and down he goes—down on his knees. I never could 'a believed it. I kep my dignity as a woman till I see that sight, but that done for me. I was a ripe apple in his arms 'fore I knew where I was. There's something about a fine man on his knees that's too much for us women. And it reely was the penitent on his two knees, not the lover on his one. If he mean it! But ah! what do you think he begs of me, my dear?—not to make it known in the house just yet! I can't, I can't say that look well."

Lucy attributed it to his sense of shame at his conduct, and Mrs. Berry did her best to look on it in that light.

"Did the bar'net kiss ye when you wished him goodnight?" she asked. Lucy said he had not. "Then bide awake as long as ye can," was Mrs. Berry's rejoinder. "And now let us

pray blessings on that simple-speaking gentleman who does so much ’cause he says so little.”

Like many other natural people, Mrs. Berry was only silly where her own soft heart was concerned. As she secretly anticipated, the baronet came into her room when all was quiet. She saw him go and bend over Richard the Second, and remain earnestly watching him. He then went to the half-opened door of the room where Lucy slept, leaned his ear a moment, knocked gently, and entered. Mrs. Berry heard low words interchanging within. She could not catch a syllable, yet she would have sworn to the context. “He’ve called her his daughter, promised her happiness, and given a father’s kiss to her.” When Sir Austin passed out she was in a deep sleep.

Page 466

CHAPTER XLII

Briareus reddening angrily over the sea—what is that vaporous Titan? And Hesper set in his rosy garland—why looks he so implacably sweet? It is that one has left that bright home to go forth and do cloudy work, and he has got a stain with which he dare not return. Far in the West fair Lucy beckons him to come. Ah, heaven! if he might! How strong and fierce the temptation is! how subtle the sleepless desire! it drugs his reason, his honour. For he loves her; she is still the first and only woman to him. Otherwise would this black spot be hell to him? otherwise would his limbs be chained while her arms are spread open to him. And if he loves her, why then what is one fall in the pit, or a thousand? Is not love the password to that beckoning bliss? So may we say; but here is one whose body has been made a temple to him, and it is desecrated.

A temple, and desecrated! For what is it fit for but for a dance of devils? His education has thus wrought him to think.

He can blame nothing but his own baseness. But to feel base and accept the bliss that beckons—he has not fallen so low as that.

Ah, happy English home! sweet wife! what mad miserable Wisp of the Fancy led him away from you, high in his conceit? Poor wretch! that thought to be he of the hundred hands, and war against the absolute Gods. Jove whispered a light commission to the Laughing Dame; she met him; and how did he shake Olympus? with laughter?

Sure it were better to be Orestes, the Furies howling in his ears, than one called to by a heavenly soul from whom he is for ever outcast. He has not the oblivion of madness. Clothed in the lights of his first passion, robed in the splendour of old skies, she meets him everywhere; morning, evening, night, she shines above him; waylays him suddenly in forest depths; drops palpably on his heart. At moments he forgets; he rushes to embrace her; calls her his beloved, and lo, her innocent kiss brings agony of shame to his face.

Daily the struggle endured. His father wrote to him, begging him by the love he had for him to return. From that hour Richard burnt unread all the letters he received. He knew too well how easily he could persuade himself: words from without might tempt him and quite extinguish the spark of honourable feeling that tortured him, and that he clung to in desperate self-vindication.

To arrest young gentlemen on the downward slope is both a dangerous and thankless office. It is, nevertheless, one that fair women greatly prize, and certain of them professionally follow. Lady Judith, as far as her sex would permit, was also of the Titans in their battle against the absolute Gods; for which purpose, mark you, she had married

a lord incapable in all save his acres. Her achievements she kept to her own mind: she did not look happy over them. She met Richard accidentally in Paris; she

Page 467

saw his state; she let him learn that she alone on earth understood him. The consequence was that he was forthwith enrolled in her train. It soothed him to be near a woman. Did she venture her guess as to the cause of his conduct, she blotted it out with a facility women have, and cast on it a melancholy hue he was taught to participate in. She spoke of sorrows, personal sorrows, much as he might speak of his—vaguely, and with self-blame. And she understood him. How the dark unfathomed wealth within us gleams to a woman's eye! We are at compound interest immediately: so much richer than we knew!—almost as rich as we dreamed! But then the instant we are away from her we find ourselves bankrupt, beggared. How is that? We do not ask. We hurry to her and bask hungrily in her orbs. The eye must be feminine to be thus creative: I cannot say why. Lady Judith understood Richard, and he feeling infinitely vile, somehow held to her more feverishly, as one who dreaded the worst in missing her. The spirit must rest; he was weak with what he suffered.

Austin found them among the hills of Nassau in Rhineland: Titans, male and female, who had not displaced Jove, and were now adrift, prone on floods of sentiment. The blue-flocked peasant swinging behind his oxen of a morning, the gaily-kerchiefed fruit-woman, the jackass-driver, even the doctor of those regions, have done more for their fellows. Horrible reflection! Lady Judith is serene above it, but it frets at Richard when he is out of her shadow. Often wretchedly he watches the young men of his own age trooping to their work. Not cloud-work theirs! Work solid, unambitious, fruitful!

Lady Judith had a nobler in prospect for the hero. He gaped blindfolded for anything, and she gave him the map of Europe in tatters. He swallowed it comfortably. It was an intoxicating cordial. Himself on horseback overriding wrecks of Empires! Well might common sense cower with the meaner animals at the picture. Tacitly they agreed to recast the civilized globe. The quality of vapour is to melt and shape itself anew; but it is never the quality of vapour to reassume the same shapes. Briareus of the hundred unoccupied hands may turn to a monstrous donkey with his hind legs aloft, or twenty thousand jabbering apes. The phantasmic groupings of the young brain are very like those we see in the skies, and equally the sport of the wind. Lady Judith blew. There was plenty of vapour in him, and it always resolved into some shape or other. You that mark those clouds of eventide, and know youth, will see the similitude: it will not be strange, it will barely seem foolish to you, that a young man of Richard's age, Richard's education and position, should be in this wild state. Had he not been nursed to believe he was born for great things? Did she not say she was sure of it? And to feel base, yet born for better, is enough to make one grasp at anything cloudy. Suppose the hero with a game

Page 468

leg. How intense is his faith to quacks! with what a passion of longing is he not seized to break somebody's head! They spoke of Italy in low voices. "The time will come," said she. "And I shall be ready," said he. What rank was he to take in the liberating army? Captain, colonel, general in chief, or simple private? Here, as became him, he was much more positive and specific than she was: Simple private, he said. Yet he save himself caracoling on horseback. Private in the cavalry, then, of course. Private in the cavalry over-riding wrecks of Empires. She looked forth under her brows with mournful indistinctness at that object in the distance. They read Petrarch to get up the necessary fires. Italia mia! Vain indeed was this speaking to those thick and mortal wounds in her fair body, but their sighs went with the Tiber, the Arno, and the Po, and their hands joined. Who has not wept for Italy? I see the aspirations of a world arise for her, thick and frequent as the puffs of smoke from cigars of Pannonian sentries!

So when Austin came Richard said he could not leave Lady Judith, Lady Judith said she could not part with him. For his sake, mind! This Richard verified. Perhaps he had reason to be grateful. The high road of Folly may have led him from one that terminates worse. Ho is foolish, God knows; but for my part I will not laugh at the hero because he has not got his occasion. Meet him when he is, as it were, anointed by his occasion, and he is no laughing matter.

Richard felt his safety in this which, to please the world, we must term folly. Exhalation of vapours was a wholesome process to him, and somebody who gave them shape and hue a beneficent Iris. He told Austin plainly he could not leave her, and did not anticipate the day when he could.

"Why can't you go to your wife, Richard?"

"For a reason you would be the first to approve, Austin."

He welcomed Austin with every show of manly tenderness, and sadness at heart. Austin he had always associated with his Lucy in that Hesperian palace of the West. Austin waited patiently. Lady Judith's old lord played on all the baths in Nassau without evoking the tune of health. Whithersoever he listed she changed her abode. So admirable a wife was to be pardoned for espousing an old man. She was an enthusiast even in her connubial duties. She had the brows of an enthusiast. With occasion she might have been a Charlotte Corday. So let her also be shielded from the ban of ridicule. Nonsense of enthusiasts is very different from nonsense of ninnies. She was truly a high-minded person, of that order who always do what they see to be right, and always have confidence in their optics. She was not unworthy of a young man's admiration, if she was unfit to be his guide. She resumed her ancient intimacy with Austin easily, while she preserved her new footing with Richard. She and Austin were not unlike, only Austin never dreamed, and had not married an old lord.

Page 469

The three were walking on the bridge at Limburg on the Lahn, where the shadow of a stone bishop is thrown by the moonlight on the water brawling over slabs of slate. A woman passed them bearing in her arms a baby, whose mighty size drew their attention.

“What a wopper!” Richard laughed.

“Well, that is a fine fellow,” said Austin, “but I don’t think he’s much bigger than your boy.”

“He’ll do for a nineteenth-century Arminius,” Richard was saying. Then he looked at Austin.

“What was that you said?” Lady Judith asked of Austin.

“What have I said that deserves to be repeated?” Austin counterqueried quite innocently.

“Richard has a son?”

“You didn’t know it?”

“His modesty goes very far,” said Lady Judith, sweeping the shadow of a curtsey to Richard’s paternity.

Richard’s heart throbbed with violence. He looked again in Austin’s face. Austin took it so much as a matter of course that he said nothing more on the subject.

“Well!” murmured Lady Judith.

When the two men were alone, Richard said in a quick voice: “Austin! you were in earnest?”

“You didn’t know it, Richard?”

“No.”

“Why, they all wrote to you. Lucy wrote to you: your father, your aunt. I believe Adrian wrote too.”

“I tore up their letters,” said Richard.

“He’s a noble fellow, I can tell you. You’ve nothing to be ashamed of. He’ll soon be coming to ask about you. I made sure you knew.”

“No, I never knew.” Richard walked away, and then said: “What is he like?”

“Well, he really is like you, but he has his mother’s eyes.”

“And she’s—”

“Yes. I think the child has kept her well.”

“They’re both at Raynham?”

“Both.”

Hence fantastic vapours! What are ye to this! Where are the dreams of the hero when he learns he has a child? Nature is taking him to her bosom. She will speak presently. Every domesticated boor in these hills can boast the same, yet marvels the hero at none of his visioned prodigies as he does when he comes to hear of this most common performance. A father? Richard fixed his eyes as if he were trying to make out the lineaments of his child.

Telling Austin he would be back in a few minutes, he sallied into the air, and walked on and on. “A father!” he kept repeating to himself: “a child!” And though he knew it not, he was striking the keynotes of Nature. But he did know of a singular harmony that suddenly burst over his whole being.

The moon was surpassingly bright: the summer air heavy and still. He left the high road and pierced into the forest. His walk was rapid: the leaves on the trees brushed his cheeks; the dead leaves heaped in the dells noised to his feet. Something of a religious joy—a strange sacred pleasure—was in him. By degrees it wore; he remembered himself: and now he was possessed

Page 470

by a proportionate anguish. A father! he dared never see his child. And he had no longer his phantasies to fall upon. He was utterly bare to his sin. In his troubled mind it seemed to him that Clare looked down on him—Clare who saw him as he was; and that to her eyes it would be infamy for him to go and print his kiss upon his child. Then came stern efforts to command his misery and make the nerves of his face iron.

By the log of an ancient tree half buried in dead leaves of past summers, beside a brook, he halted as one who had reached his journey's end. There he discovered he had a companion in Lady Judith's little dog. He gave the friendly animal a pat of recognition, and both were silent in the forest-silence.

It was impossible for Richard to return; his heart was surcharged. He must advance, and on he footed, the little dog following.

An oppressive slumber hung about the forest-branches. In the dells and on the heights was the same dead heat. Here where the brook tinkled it was no cool-lipped sound, but metallic, and without the spirit of water. Yonder in a space of moonlight on lush grass, the beams were as white fire to sight and feeling. No haze spread around. The valleys were clear, defined to the shadows of their verges, the distances sharply distinct, and with the colours of day but slightly softened. Richard beheld a roe moving across a slope of sward far out of rifle-mark. The breathless silence was significant, yet the moon shone in a broad blue heaven. Tongue out of mouth trotted the little dog after him; crouched panting when he stopped an instant; rose weariedly when he started afresh. Now and then a large white night-moth flitted through the dusk of the forest.

On a barren corner of the wooded highland looking inland stood grey topless ruins set in nettles and rank grass-blades. Richard mechanically sat down on the crumbling flints to rest, and listened to the panting of the dog. Sprinkled at his feet were emerald lights: hundreds of glow-worms studded the dark dry ground.

He sat and eyed them, thinking not at all. His energies were expended in action. He sat as a part of the ruins, and the moon turned his shadow Westward from the South. Overhead, as she declined, long ripples of silver cloud were imperceptibly stealing toward her. They were the van of a tempest. He did not observe them or the leaves beginning to chatter. When he again pursued his course with his face to the Rhine, a huge mountain appeared to rise sheer over him, and he had it in his mind to scale it. He got no nearer to the base of it for all his vigorous outstepping. The ground began to dip; he lost sight of the sky. Then heavy, thunder-drops streak his cheek, the leaves were singing, the earth breathed, it was black before him, and behind. All at once the thunder spoke. The mountain he had marked was bursting over him.

Page 471

Up startled the whole forest in violet fire. He saw the country at the foot of the hills to the bounding Rhine gleam, quiver, extinguished. Then there were pauses; and the lightning seemed as the eye of heaven, and the thunder as the tongue of heaven, each alternately addressing him; filling him with awful rapture. Alone there—sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm—he felt the representative of his kind, and his spirit rose, and marched, and exulted, let it be glory, let it be ruin! Lower down the lightened abysses of air rolled the wrathful crash; then white thrusts of light were darted from the sky, and great curving ferns, seen steadfast in pallor a second, were supernaturally agitated, and vanished. Then a shrill song roused in the leaves and the herbage. Prolonged and louder it sounded, as deeper and heavier the deluge pressed. A mighty force of water satisfied the desire of the earth. Even in this, drenched as he was by the first outpouring, Richard had a savage pleasure. Keeping in motion, he was scarcely conscious of the wet, and the grateful breath of the weeds was refreshing. Suddenly he stopped short, lifting a curious nostril. He fancied he smelt meadow-sweet. He had never seen the flower in Rhineland—never thought of it; and it would hardly be met with in a forest. He was sure he smelt it fresh in dews. His little companion wagged a miserable wet tail some way in advance. He went an slowly, thinking indistinctly. After two or three steps he stooped and stretched out his hand to feel for the flower, having, he knew not why, a strong wish to verify its growth there. Groping about, his hand encountered something warm that started at his touch, and he, with the instinct we have, seized it, and lifted it to look at it. The creature was very small, evidently quite young. Richard's eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, were able to discern it for what it was, a tiny leveret, and ha supposed that the dog had probably frightened its dam just before he found it. He put the little thing on one hand in his breast, and stepped out rapidly as before.

The rain was now steady; from every tree a fountain poured. So cool and easy had his mind become that he was speculating on what kind of shelter the birds could find, and how the butterflies and moths saved their coloured wings from washing. Folded close they might hang under a leaf, he thought. Lovingly he looked into the dripping darkness of the coverts on each side, as one of their children. He was next musing on a strange sensation he experienced. It ran up one arm with an indescribable thrill, but communicated nothing to his heart. It was purely physical, ceased for a time, and recommenced, till he had it all through his blood, wonderfully thrilling. He grew aware that the little thing he carried in his breast was licking his hand there. The small rough tongue going over and over the palm of his hand produced the strange sensation he felt. Now that he knew the cause, the marvel ended; but now that he knew the cause, his heart was touched and made more of it. The gentle scraping continued without intermission as on he walked. What did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much just then.

Page 472

A pale grey light on the skirts of the flying tempest displayed the dawn. Richard was walking hurriedly. The green drenched weeds lay all about in his path, bent thick, and the forest drooped glimmeringly. Impelled as a man who feels a revelation mounting obscurely to his brain, Richard was passing one of those little forest-chapels, hung with votive wreaths, where the peasant halts to kneel and pray. Cold, still, in the twilight it stood, rain-drops pattering round it. He looked within, and saw the Virgin holding her Child. He moved by. But not many steps had he gone ere his strength went out of him, and he shuddered. What was it? He asked not. He was in other hands. Vivid as lightning the Spirit of Life illumined him. He felt in his heart the cry of his child, his darling's touch. With shut eyes he saw them both. They drew him from the depths; they led him a blind and tottering man. And as they led him he had a sense of purification so sweet he shuddered again and again.

When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped: warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills. He was on the edge of the forest, entering a plain clothed with ripe corn under a spacious morning sky.

CHAPTER XLIII

They heard at Raynham that Richard was coming. Lucy had the news first in a letter from Ripton Thompson, who met him at Bonn. Ripton did not say that he had employed his vacation holiday on purpose to use his efforts to induce his dear friend to return to his wife; and finding Richard already on his way, of course Ripton said nothing to him, but affected to be travelling for his pleasure like any cockney. Richard also wrote to her. In case she should have gone to the sea he directed her to send word to his hotel that he might not lose an hour. His letter was sedate in tone, very sweet to her. Assisted by the faithful female Berry, she was conquering an Aphorist.

"Woman's reason is in the milk of her breasts," was one of his rough notes, due to an observation of Lucy's maternal cares. Let us remember, therefore, we men who have drunk of it largely there, that she has it.

Mrs. Berry zealously apprised him how early Master Richard's education had commenced, and the great future historian he must consequently be. This trait in Lucy was of itself sufficient to win Sir Austin.

"Here my plan with Richard was false," he reflected: "in presuming that anything save blind fortuity would bring him such a mate as he should have." He came to add: "And has got!"

He could admit now that instinct had so far beaten science; for as Richard was coming, as all were to be happy, his wisdom embraced them all paternally as the author of their happiness. Between him and Lucy a tender intimacy grew.

“I told you she could talk, sir,” said Adrian.

“She thinks!” said the baronet.

Page 473

The delicate question how she was to treat her uncle, he settled generously. Farmer Blaize should come up to Raynham when he would: Lucy must visit him at least three times a week. He had Farmer Blaize and Mrs. Berry to study, and really excellent Aphorisms sprang from the plain human bases this natural couple presented.

“It will do us no harm,” he thought, “some of the honest blood of the soil in our veins.” And he was content in musing on the parentage of the little cradled boy. A common sight for those who had the entry to the library was the baronet cherishing the hand of his daughter-in-law.

So Richard was crossing the sea, and hearts at Raynham were beating quicker measures as the minutes progressed. That night he would be with them. Sir Austin gave Lucy a longer, warmer salute when she came down to breakfast in the morning. Mrs. Berry waxed thrice amorous. “It’s your second bridals, ye sweet livin’ widow!” she said. “Thanks be the Lord! it’s the same man too! and a baby over the bed-post,” she appended seriously.

“Strange,” Berry declared it to be, “strange I feel none o’ this to my Berry now. All my feelin’s o’ love seem t’ave gone into you two sweet chicks.”

In fact, the faithless male Berry complained of being treated badly, and affected a superb jealousy of the baby; but the good dame told him that if he suffered at all he suffered his due. Berry’s position was decidedly uncomfortable. It could not be concealed from the lower household that he had a wife in the establishment, and for the complications this gave rise to, his wife would not legitimately console him. Lucy did intercede, but Mrs. Berry, was obdurate. She averred she would not give up the child till he was weaned. “Then, perhaps,” she said prospectively. “You see I ain’t so soft as you thought for.”

“You’re a very unkind, vindictive old woman,” said Lucy.

“Belike I am,” Mrs. Berry was proud to agree. We like a new character, now and then. Berry had delayed too long.

Were it not notorious that the straightlaced prudish dare not listen to, the natural chaste, certain things Mrs. Berry thought it advisable to impart to the young wife with regard to Berry’s infidelity, and the charity women should have toward sinful men, might here be reproduced. Enough that she thought proper to broach the matter, and cite her own Christian sentiments, now that she was indifferent in some degree.

Oily calm is on the sea. At Raynham they look up at the sky and speculate that Richard is approaching fairly speeded. He comes to throw himself on his darling’s mercy. Lucy irradiated over forest and sea, tempest and peace—to her the hero comes humbly. Great is that day when we see our folly! Ripton and he were the friends of old. Richard

encouraged him to talk of the two he could be eloquent on, and Ripton, whose secret vanity was in his powers of speech, never tired of enumerating Lucy's virtues, and the peculiar attributes of the baby.

Page 474

“She did not say a word against me, Rip?”

“Against you, Richard! The moment she knew she was to be a mother, she thought of nothing but her duty to the child. She’s one who can’t think of herself.”

“You’ve seen her at Raynham, Rip?”

“Yes, once. They asked me down. And your father’s so fond of her—I’m sure he thinks no woman like her, and he’s right. She is so lovely, and so good.”

Richard was too full of blame of himself to blame his father: too British to expose his emotions. Ripton divined how deep and changed they were by his manner. He had cast aside the hero, and however Ripton had obeyed him and looked up to him in the heroic time, he loved him tenfold now. He told his friend how much Lucy’s mere womanly sweetness and excellence had done for him, and Richard contrasted his own profitless extravagance with the patient beauty of his dear home angel. He was not one to take her on the easy terms that offered. There was that to do which made his cheek burn as he thought of it, but he was going to do it, even though it lost her to him. Just to see her and kneel to her was joy sufficient to sustain him, and warm his blood in the prospect. They marked the white cliffs growing over the water. Nearer, the sun made them lustrous. Houses and people seemed to welcome the wild youth to common sense, simplicity, and home.

They were in town by mid-day. Richard had a momentary idea of not driving to his hotel for letters. After a short debate he determined to go there. The porter said he had two letters for Mr. Richard Feverel—one had been waiting some time. He went to the box and fetched them. The first Richard opened was from Lucy, and as he read it, Ripton observed the colour deepen on his face, while a quivering smile played about his mouth. He opened the other indifferently. It began without any form of address. Richard’s forehead darkened at the signature. This letter was in a sloping feminine hand, and flourished with light strokes all over, like a field of the bearded barley. Thus it ran:

“I know you are in a rage with me because I would not consent to ruin you, you foolish fellow. What do you call it? Going to that unpleasant place together. Thank you, my milliner is not ready yet, and I want to make a good appearance when I do go. I suppose I shall have to some day. Your health, Sir Richard. Now let me speak to you seriously. Go home to your wife at once. But I know the sort of fellow you are, and I must be plain with you. Did I ever say I loved you? You may hate me as much as you please, but I will save you from being a fool.

Page 475

“Now listen to me. You know my relations with Mount. That beast Brayder offered to pay all my debts and set me afloat, if I would keep you in town. I declare on my honour I had no idea why, and I did not agree to it. But you were such a handsome fellow—I noticed you in the park before I heard a word of you. But then you fought shy—you were just as tempting as a girl. You stung me. Do you know what that is? I would make you care for me, and we know how it ended, without any intention of mine, I swear. I’d have cut off my hand rather than do you any harm, upon my honour. Circumstances! Then I saw it was all up between us. Brayder came and began to chaff about you. I dealt the animal a stroke on the face with my riding-whip—I shut him up pretty quick. Do you think I would let a man speak about you?—I was going to swear. You see I remember Dick’s lessons. O my God! I do feel unhappy.—Brayder offered me money. Go and think I took it, if you like. What do I care what anybody thinks! Something that black-guard said made me suspicious. I went down to the Isle of Wight where Mount was, and your wife was just gone with an old lady who came and took her away. I should so have liked to see her. You said, you remember, she would take me as a sister, and treat me—I laughed at it then. My God! how I could cry now, if water did any good to a devil, as you politely call poor me. I called at your house and saw your man-servant, who said Mount had just been there. In a minute it struck me. I was sure Mount was after a woman, but it never struck me that woman was your wife. Then I saw why they wanted me to keep you away. I went to Brayder. You know how I hate him. I made love to the man to get it out of him. Richard! my word of honour, they have planned to carry her off, if Mount finds he cannot seduce her. Talk of devils! He’s one; but he is not so bad as Brayder. I cannot forgive a mean dog his villany.

“Now after this, I am quite sure you are too much of a man to stop away from her another moment. I have no more to say. I suppose we shall not see each other again, so good-bye, Dick! I fancy I hear you cursing me. Why can’t you feel like other men on the subject? But if you were like the rest of them I should not have cared for you a farthing. I have not worn lilac since I saw you last. I’ll be buried in your colour, Dick. That will not offend you—will it?

“You are not going to believe I took the money? If I thought you thought that—it makes me feel like a devil only to fancy you think it.

“The first time you meet Brayder, cane him publicly.

“Adieu! Say it’s because you don’t like his face. I suppose devils must not say Adieu. Here’s plain old good-bye, then, between you and me. Good-bye, dear Dick! You won’t think that of me?

“May I eat dry bread to the day of my death if I took or ever will touch a scrap of their money. *Bella*.”

Page 476

Richard folded up the letter silently.

“Jump into the cab,” he said to Ripton.

“Anything the matter, Richard?”

“No.”

The driver received directions. Richard sat without speaking. His friend knew that face. He asked whether there was bad news in the letter. For answer, he had the lie circumstancial. He ventured to remark that they were going the wrong way.

“It’d the right way,” cried Richard, and his jaws were hard and square, and his eyes looked heavy and full.

Ripton said no more, but thought.

The cabman pulled up at a Club. A gentleman, in whom Ripton recognized the Hon. Peter Brayder, was just then swinging a leg over his horse, with one foot in the stirrup. Hearing his name called, the Hon. Peter turned about, and stretched an affable hand.

“Is Mountfalcon in town?” said Richard taking the horse’s reins instead of the gentlemanly hand. His voice and aspect were quite friendly.

“Mount?” Brayder replied, curiously watching the action; “yes. He’s off this evening.”

“He is in town?” Richard released his horse. “I want to see him. Where is he?”

The young man looked pleasant: that which might have aroused Brayder’s suspicions was an old affair in parasitical register by this time. “Want to see him? What about?” he said carelessly, and gave the address.

“By the way,” he sang out, “we thought of putting your name down, Feverel.” He indicated the lofty structure. “What do you say?”

Richard nodded back at him, crying, “Hurry.” Brayder returned the nod, and those who promenaded the district soon beheld his body in elegant motion to the stepping of his well-earned horse.

“What do you want to see Lord Mountfalcon for, Richard?” said Ripton.

“I just want to see him,” Richard replied.

Ripton was left in the cab at the door of my lord’s residence. He had to wait there a space of about ten minutes, when Richard returned with a clearer visage, though

somewhat heated. He stood outside the cab, and Ripton was conscious of being examined by those strong grey eyes. As clear as speech he understood them to say to him, “You won’t do,” but which of the many things on earth he would not do for he was at a loss to think.

“Go down to Raynham, Ripton. Say I shall be there tonight certainly. Don’t bother me with questions. Drive off at once. Or wait. Get another cab. I’ll take this.”

Ripton was ejected, and found himself standing alone in the street. As he was on the point of rushing after the galloping cab-horse to get a word of elucidation, he heard some one speak behind him.

“You are Feverel’s friend?”

Ripton had an eye for lords. An ambrosial footman, standing at the open door of Lord Mountfalcon’s house, and a gentleman standing on the doorstep, told him that he was addressed by that nobleman. He was requested to step into the house. When they were alone, Lord Mountfalcon, slightly ruffled, said: “Feverel has insulted me grossly. I must meet him, of course. It’s a piece of infernal folly!—I suppose he is not quite mad?”

Page 477

Ripton's only definite answer was, a gasping iteration of "My lord."

My lord resumed: "I am perfectly guiltless of offending him, as far as I know. In fact, I had a friendship for him. Is he liable to fits of this sort of thing?"

Not yet at conversation-point, Ripton stammered: "Fits, my lord?"

"Ah!" went the other, eying Ripton in lordly cognizant style. "You know nothing of this business, perhaps?"

Ripton said he did not.

"Have you any influence with him?"

"Not much, my lord. Only now and then—a little."

"You are not in the Army?"

The question was quite unnecessary. Ripton confessed to the law, and my lord did not look surprised.

"I will not detain you," he said, distantly bowing.

Ripton gave him a commoner's obeisance; but getting to the door, the sense of the matter enlightened him.

"It's a duel, my lord?"

"No help for it, if his friends don't shut him up in Bedlam between this and to-morrow morning."

Of all horrible things a duel was the worst in Ripton's imagination. He stood holding the handle of the door, revolving this last chapter of calamity suddenly opened where happiness had promised.

"A duel! but he won't, my lord,—he mustn't fight, my lord."

"He must come on the ground," said my lord, positively.

Ripton ejaculated unintelligible stuff. Finally Lord Mountfalcon said: "I went out of my way, sir, in speaking to you. I saw you from the window. Your friend is mad. Deuced methodical, I admit, but mad. I have particular reasons to wish not to injure the young man, and if an apology is to be got out of him when we're on the ground, I'll take it, and we'll stop the damned scandal, if possible. You understand? I'm the insulted party, and I shall only require of him to use formal words of excuse to come to an amicable

settlement. Let him just say he regrets it. Now, sir," the nobleman spoke with considerable earnestness, "should anything happen—I have the honour to be known to Mrs. Feverel—and I beg you will tell her. I very particularly desire you to let her know that I was not to blame."

Mountfalcon rang the bell, and bowed him out. With this on his mind Ripton hurried down to those who were waiting in joyful trust at Raynham.

CHAPTER XLIV

The watch consulted by Hippias alternately with his pulse, in occult calculation hideous to mark, said half-past eleven on the midnight. Adrian, wearing a composedly amused expression on his dimpled plump face,—held slightly sideways, aloof from paper and pen,—sat writing at the library table. Round the baronet's chair, in a semi-circle, were Lucy, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, and Ripton, that very ill bird at Raynham. They were silent as those who question the flying minutes. Ripton had said that Richard was sure to come; but the feminine eyes reading him ever and anon, had gathered matter for disquietude, which increased as time sped. Sir Austin persisted in his habitual air of speculative repose.

Page 478

Remote as he appeared from vulgar anxiety, he was the first to speak and betray his state.

“Pray, put up that watch. Impatience serves nothing,” he said, half-turning hastily to his brother behind him.

Hippias relinquished his pulse and mildly groaned: “It’s no nightmare, this!”

His remark was unheard, and the bearing of it remained obscure. Adrian’s pen made a louder flourish on his manuscript; whether in commiseration or infernal glee, none might say.

“What are you writing?” the baronet inquired testily of Adrian, after a pause; twitched, it may be, by a sort of jealousy of the wise youth’s coolness.

“Do I disturb you, sir?” rejoined Adrian. “I am engaged on a portion of a Proposal for uniting the Empires and Kingdoms of Europe under one Paternal Head, on the model of the ever-to-be-admired and lamented Holy Roman. This treats of the management of Youths and Maids, and of certain magisterial functions connected therewith. ’It is decreed that these officers be all and every men of science,’ *etc*.” And Adrian cheerily drove his pen afresh.

Mrs. Doria took Lucy’s hand, mutely addressing encouragement to her, and Lucy brought as much of a smile as she could command to reply with.

“I fear we must give him up to-night,” observed Lady Blandish.

“If he said he would come, he will come,” Sir Austin interjected. Between him and the lady there was something of a contest secretly going on. He was conscious that nothing save perfect success would now hold this self-emancipating mind. She had seen him through.

“He declared to me he would be certain to come,” said Ripton; but he could look at none of them as he said it, for he was growing aware that Richard might have deceived him, and was feeling like a black conspirator against their happiness. He determined to tell the baronet what he knew, if Richard did not come by twelve.

“What is the time?” he asked Hippias in a modest voice.

“Time for me to be in bed,” growled Hippias, as if everybody present had been treating him badly.

Mrs. Berry came in to apprise Lucy that she was wanted above. She quietly rose. Sir Austin kissed her on the forehead, saying: “You had better not come down again, my

child." She kept her eyes on him. "Oblige me by retiring for the night," he added. Lucy shook their hands, and went out, accompanied by Mrs. Doria.

"This agitation will be bad for the child," he said, speaking to himself aloud.

Lady Blandish remarked: "I think she might just as well have returned. She will not sleep."

"She will control herself for the child's sake."

"You ask too much of her."

"Of her, not," he emphasized.

It was twelve o'clock when Hippies shut his watch, and said with vehemence: "I'm convinced my circulation gradually and steadily decreases!"

"Going back to the pre-Harvey period!" murmured Adrian as he wrote.

Page 479

Sir Austin and Lady Blandish knew well that any comment would introduce them to the interior of his machinery, the eternal view of which was sufficiently harrowing; so they maintained a discreet reserve. Taking it for acquiescence in his deplorable condition, Hippies resumed despairingly: "It's a fact. I've brought you to see that. No one can be more moderate than I am, and yet I get worse. My system is organically sound—I believe: I do every possible thing, and yet I get worse. Nature never forgives! I'll go to bed."

The Dyspepsy departed unconsoled.

Sir Austin took up his brother's thought: "I suppose nothing short of a miracle helps us when we have offended her."

"Nothing short of a quack satisfies us," said Adrian, applying wax to an envelope of official dimensions.

Ripton sat accusing his soul of cowardice while they talked; haunted by Lucy's last look at him. He got up his courage presently and went round to Adrian, who, after a few whispered words, deliberately rose and accompanied him out of the room, shrugging. When they had gone, Lady Blandish said to the baronet: "He is not coming."

"To-morrow, then, if not tonight," he replied. "But I say he will come to-night."

"You do really wish to see him united to his wife?"

The question made the baronet raise his brows with some displeasure.

"Can you ask me?"

"I mean," said, the ungenerous woman, "your System will require no further sacrifices from either of them?"

When he did answer, it was to say: "I think her altogether a superior person. I confess I should scarcely have hoped to find one like her."

"Admit that your science does not accomplish everything."

"No: it was presumptuous—beyond a certain point," said the baronet, meaning deep things.

Lady Blandish eyed him. "Ah me!" she sighed, "if we would always be true to our own wisdom!"

"You are very singular to-night, Emmeline." Sir Austin stopped his walk in front of her.

In truth, was she not unjust? Here was an offending son freely forgiven. Here was a young woman of humble birth, freely accepted into his family and permitted to stand upon her qualities. Who would have done more—or as much? This lady, for instance, had the case been hers, would have fought it. All the people of position that he was acquainted with would have fought it, and that without feeling it so peculiarly. But while the baronet thought this, he did not think of the exceptional education his son had received. He, took the common ground of fathers, forgetting his System when it was absolutely on trial. False to his son it could not be said that he had been false to his System he was. Others saw it plainly, but he had to learn his lesson by and by.

Lady Blandish gave him her face; then stretched her hand to the table, saying, “Well! well!” She fingered a half-opened parcel lying there, and drew forth a little book she recognized. “Ha! what is this?” she said.

Page 480

“Benson returned it this morning,” he informed her. “The stupid fellow took it away with him—by mischance, I am bound to believe.”

It was nothing other than the old Note-book. Lady Blandish turned over the leaves, and came upon the later jottings.

She read: “A maker of Proverbs—what is he but a narrow mind with the mouthpiece of narrower?”

“I do not agree with that,” she observed. He was in no humour for argument.

“Was your humility feigned when you wrote it?”

He merely said: “Consider the sort of minds influenced by set sayings. A proverb is the half-way-house to an Idea, I conceive; and the majority rest there content: can the keeper of such a house be flattered by his company?”

She felt her feminine intelligence swaying under him again. There must be greatness in a man who could thus speak of his own special and admirable aptitude.

Further she read, “Which is the coward among us?—He who sneers at the failings of Humanity!”

“Oh! that is true! How much I admire that!” cried the dark-eyed dame as she beamed intellectual raptures.

Another Aphorism seemed closely to apply to him: “There is no more grievous sight, as there is no greater perversion, than a wise man at the mercy of his feelings.”

“He must have written it,” she thought, “when he had himself for an example—strange man that he is!”

Lady Blandish was still inclined to submission, though decidedly insubordinate. She had once been fairly conquered: but if what she reverenced as a great mind could conquer her, it must be a great man that should hold her captive. The Autumn Primrose blooms for the loftiest manhood; is a vindictive flower in lesser hands. Nevertheless Sir Austin had only to be successful, and this lady’s allegiance was his for ever. The trial was at hand.

She said again: “He is not coming to-night,” and the baronet, on whose visage a contemplative pleased look had been rising for a minute past, quietly added: “He is come.”

Richard’s voice was heard in the hall.

There was commotion all over the house at the return of the young heir. Berry, seizing every possible occasion to approach his Bessy now that her involuntary coldness had enhanced her value—“Such is men!” as the soft woman reflected—Berry ascended to her and delivered the news in pompous tones and wheedling gestures. “The best word you’ve spoke for many a day,” says she, and leaves him unfee’d, in an attitude, to hurry and pour bliss into Lucy’s ears.

“Lord be praised!” she entered the adjoining room exclaiming, “we’re got to be happy at last. They men have come to their senses. I could cry to your Virgin and kiss your Cross, you sweet!”

“Hush!” Lucy admonished her, and crooned over the child on her knees. The tiny open hands, full of sleep, clutched; the large blue eyes started awake; and his mother, all trembling and palpitating, knowing, but thirsting to hear it, covered him with her tresses, and tried to still her frame, and rocked, and sang low, interdicting even a whisper from bursting Mrs. Berry.

Page 481

Richard had come. He was under his father's roof, in the old home that had so soon grown foreign to him. He stood close to his wife and child. He might embrace them both: and now the fulness of his anguish and the madness of the thing he had done smote the young man: now first he tasted hard earthly misery.

Had not God spoken to him in the tempest? Had not the finger of heaven directed him homeward? And he had come: here he stood: congratulations were thick in his ears: the cup of happiness was held to him, and he was invited to drink of it. Which was the dream? his work for the morrow, or this? But for a leaden load that he felt like a bullet in his breast, he might have thought the morrow with death sitting on it was the dream. Yes; he was awake. Now first the cloud of phantasms cleared away: he beheld his real life, and the colours of true human joy: and on the morrow perhaps he was to close his eyes on them. That leaden bullet dispersed all unrealities.

They stood about him in the hall, his father, Lady Blandish, Mrs. Doria, Adrian, Ripton; people who had known him long. They shook his hand: they gave him greetings he had never before understood the worth of or the meaning. Now that he did they mocked him. There was Mrs. Berry in the background bobbing, there was Martin Berry bowing, there was Tom Bakewell grinning. Somehow he loved the sight of these better.

"Ah, my old Penelope!" he said, breaking through the circle of his relatives to go to her. "Tom! how are you?"

"Bless ye, my Mr, Richard," whimpered Mrs. Berry, and whispered, rosily, "all's agreeable now. She's waiting up in bed for ye, like a new-born."

The person who betrayed most agitation was, Mrs. Doria. She held close to him, and eagerly studied his face and every movement, as one accustomed to masks. "You are pale, Richard?" He pleaded exhaustion. "What detained you, dear?" "Business," he said. She drew him imperiously apart from the others. "Richard! is it over?" He asked what she meant. "The dreadful duel, Richard." He looked darkly. "Is it over? is it done, Richard?" Getting no immediate answer, she continued—and such was her agitation that the words were shaken by pieces from her mouth: "Don't pretend not to understand me, Richard! Is it over? Are you going to die the death of my child—Clare's death? Is not one in a family enough? Think of your dear young wife—we love her so! —your child!—your father! Will you kill us all?"

Mrs. Doria had chanced to overhear a trifle of Ripton's communication to Adrian, and had built thereon with the dark forces of a stricken soul.

Wondering how this woman could have divined it, Richard calmly said: "It's arranged—-the matter you allude to."

"Indeed!—truly, dear?"

“Yes.”

“Tell me”—but he broke away from her, saying: “You shall hear the particulars to-morrow,” and she, not alive to double meaning just then, allowed him to leave her.

Page 482

He had eaten nothing for twelve hours, and called for food, but he would take only dry bread and claret, which was served on a tray in the library. He said, without any show of feeling, that he must eat before he saw the young hope of Raynham: so there he sat, breaking bread, and eating great mouthfuls, and washing them down with wine, talking of what they would. His father's studious mind felt itself years behind him, he was so completely altered. He had the precision of speech, the bearing of a man of thirty. Indeed he had all that the necessity for cloaking an infinite misery gives. But let things be as they might, he was, there. For one night in his life Sir Austin's perspective of the future was bounded by the night.

"Will your go to your wife now?" he had asked and Richard had replied with a strange indifference. The baronet thought it better that their meeting should be private, and sent word for Lucy to wait upstairs. The others perceived that father and son should now be left alone. Adrian went up to him, and said: "I can no longer witness this painful sight, so Good-night, Sir Famish! You may cheat yourself into the belief that you've made a meal, but depend upon it your progeny—and it threatens to be numerous—will cry aloud and rue the day. Nature never forgives! A lost dinner can never be replaced! Good-night, my dear boy. And here—oblige me by taking this," he handed Richard the enormous envelope containing what he had written that evening. "Credentials!" he exclaimed humorously, slapping Richard on the shoulder. Ripton heard also the words "propagator—species," but had no idea of their import. The wise youth looked: You see we've made matters all right for you here, and quitted the room on that unusual gleam of earnestness.

Richard shook his hand, and Ripton's. Then Lady Blandish said her good-night, praising Lucy, and promising to pray for their mutual happiness. The two men who knew what was hanging over him, spoke together outside. Ripton was for getting a positive assurance that the duel would not be fought, but Adrian said: "Time enough tomorrow. He's safe enough while he's here. I'll stop it to-morrow:" ending with banter of Ripton and allusions to his adventures with Miss Random, which must, Adrian said, have led him into many affairs of the sort. Certainly Richard was there, and while he was there he must be safe. So thought Ripton, and went to his bed. Mrs. Doria deliberated likewise, and likewise thought him safe while he was there. For once in her life she thought it better not to trust to her instinct, for fear of useless disturbance where peace should be. So she said not a syllable of it to her brother. She only looked more deeply into Richard's eyes, as she kissed him, praising Lucy. "I have found a second daughter in her, dear. Oh! may you both be happy!"

They all praised Lucy, now. His father commenced the moment they were alone. "Poor Helen! Your wife has been a great comfort to her, Richard. I think Helen must have sunk without her. So lovely a young person, possessing mental faculty, and a conscience for her duties, I have never before met."

Page 483

He wished to gratify his son by these eulogies of Lucy, and some hours back he would have succeeded. Now it had the contrary effect.

“You compliment me on my choice, sir?”

Richard spoke sedately, but the irony was perceptible and he could speak no other way, his bitterness was so intense.

“I think you very fortunate,” said his father.

Sensitive to tone and manner as he was, his ebullition of paternal feeling was frozen. Richard did not approach him. He leaned against the chimney-piece, glancing at the floor, and lifting his eyes only when he spoke. Fortunate! very fortunate! As he revolved his later history, and remembered how clearly he had seen that his father must love Lucy if he but knew her, and remembered his efforts to persuade her to come with him, a sting of miserable rage blackened his brain. But could he blame that gentle soul? Whom could he blame? Himself? Not utterly. His father? Yes, and no. The blame was here, the blame was there: it was everywhere and nowhere, and the young man cast it on the Fates, and looked angrily at heaven, and grew reckless.

“Richard,” said his father, coming close to him, “it is late to-night. I do not wish Lucy to remain in expectation longer, or I should have explained myself to you thoroughly, and I think—or at least hope—you would have justified me. I had cause to believe that you had not only violated my confidence, but grossly deceived me. It was not so, I now know. I was mistaken. Much of our misunderstanding has resulted from that mistake. But you were married—a boy: you knew nothing of the world, little of yourself. To save you in after-life—for there is a period when mature men and women who have married young are more impelled to temptation than in youth,—though not so exposed to it,—to save you, I say, I decreed that you should experience self-denial and learn something of your fellows of both sexes, before settling into a state that must have been otherwise precarious, however excellent the woman who is your mate. My System with you would have been otherwise imperfect, and you would have felt the effects of it. It is over now. You are a man. The dangers to which your nature was open are, I trust, at an end. I wish you to be happy, and I give you both my blessing, and pray God to conduct and strengthen you both.”

Sir Austin’s mind was unconscious of not having spoken devoutly. True or not, his words were idle to his son: his talk of dangers over, and happiness, mockery.

Richard coldly took his father’s extended hand.

“We will go to her,” said the baronet. “I will leave you at her door.”

Not moving: looking fixedly at his father with a hard face on which the colour rushed, Richard said: “A husband who has been unfaithful to his wife may go to her there, sir?”

It was horrible, it was cruel: Richard knew that. He wanted no advice on such a matter, having fully resolved what to do. Yesterday he would have listened to his father, and blamed himself alone, and done what was to be done humbly before God and her: now in the recklessness of his misery he had as little pity for any other soul as for his own. Sir Austin’s brows were deep drawn down.

Page 484

“What did you say, Richard?”

Clearly his intelligence had taken it, but this—the worst he could hear—this that he had dreaded once and doubted, and smoothed over, and cast aside—could it be?

Richard said: “I told you all but the very words when we last parted. What else do you think would have kept me from her?”

Angered at his callous aspect, his father cried: “What brings you to her now?”

“That will be between us two,” was the reply.

Sir Austin fell into his chair. Meditation was impossible. He spoke from a wrathful heart: “You will not dare to take her without”—

“No, sir,” Richard interrupted him, “I shall not. Have no fear.”

“Then you did not love your wife?”

“Did I not?” A smile passed faintly over Richard’s face.

“Did you care so much for this—this other person?”

“So much? If you ask me whether I had affection for her, I can say I had none.”

O base human nature! Then how? then why? A thousand questions rose in the baronet’s mind. Bessy Berry could have answered them every one.

“Poor child! poor child!” he apostrophized Lucy, pacing the room. Thinking of her, knowing her deep love for his son—her true forgiving heart—it seemed she should be spared this misery.

He proposed to Richard to spare her. Vast is the distinction between women and men in this one sin, he said, and supported it with physical and moral citations. His argument carried him so far, that to hear him one would have imagined he thought the sin in men small indeed. His words were idle.

“She must know it,” said Richard, sternly. “I will go to her now, sir, if you please.”

Sir Austin detained him, expostulated, contradicted himself, confounded his principles, made nonsense of all his theories. He could not induce his son to waver in his resolve. Ultimately, their good-night being interchanged, he understood that the happiness of Raynham depended on Lucy’s mercy. He had no fears of her sweet heart, but it was a strange thing to have come to. On which should the accusation fall—on science, or on human nature?

He remained in the library pondering over the question, at times breathing contempt for his son, and again seized with unwonted suspicion of his own wisdom: troubled, much to be pitied, even if he deserved that blow from his son which had plunged him into wretchedness. Richard went straight to Tom Bakewell, roused the heavy sleeper, and told him to have his mare saddled and waiting at the park gates East within an hour. Tom's nearest approach to a hero was to be a faithful slave to his master, and in doing this he acted to his conception of that high and glorious character. He got up and heroically dashed his head into cold water. "She shall be ready, sir," he nodded.

"Tom! if you don't see me back here at Raynham, your money will go on being paid to you."

Page 485

“Rather see you than the money, Mr. Richard,” said Tom.

“And you will always watch and see no harm comes to her, Tom.”

“Mrs. Richard, sir?” Tom stared. “God bless me, Mr. Richard”—

“No questions. You’ll do what I say.”

“Ay, sir; that I will. Did’n Isle o’ Wight.”

The very name of the Island shocked Richard’s blood; and he had to walk up and down before he could knock at Lucy’s door. That infamous conspiracy to which he owed his degradation and misery scarce left him the feelings of a man when he thought of it.

The soft beloved voice responded to his knock. He opened the door, and stood before her. Lucy was half-way toward him. In the moment that passed ere she was in his arms, he had time to observe the change in her. He had left her a girl: he beheld a woman—a blooming woman: for pale at first, no sooner did she see him than the colour was rich and deep on her face and neck and bosom half shown through the loose dressing-robe, and the sense of her exceeding beauty made his heart thump and his eyes swim.

“My darling!” each cried, and they clung together, and her mouth was fastened on his.

They spoke no more. His soul was drowned in her kiss. Supporting her, whose strength was gone, he, almost as weak as she, hung over her, and clasped her closer, closer, till they were as one body, and in the oblivion her lips put upon him he was free to the bliss of her embrace. Heaven granted him that. He placed her in a chair and knelt at her feet with both arms around her. Her bosom heaved; her eyes never quitted him: their light as the light on a rolling wave. This young creature, commonly so frank and straightforward, was broken with bashfulness in her husband’s arms—womanly bashfulness on the torrent of womanly love; tenfold more seductive than the bashfulness of girlhood. Terrible tenfold the loss of her seemed now, as distantly—far on the horizon of memory—the fatal truth returned to him.

Lose her? lose this? He looked up as if to ask God to confirm it.

The same sweet blue eyes! the eyes that he had often seen in the dying glories of evening; on him they dwelt, shifting, and fluttering, and glittering, but constant: the light of them as the light on a rolling wave.

And true to him! true, good, glorious, as the angels of heaven! And his she was! a woman—his wife! The temptation to take her, and be dumb, was all powerful: the wish to die against her bosom so strong as to be the prayer of his vital forces. Again he strained her to him, but this time it was as a robber grasps priceless treasure—with

exultation and defiance. One instant of this. Lucy, whose pure tenderness had now surmounted the first wild passion of their meeting, bent back her head from her surrendered body, and said almost voicelessly, her underlids wistfully quivering: “Come and see him—baby;” and then in great hope of the happiness she was going to give her husband, and share with him, and in tremour and doubt of what his feelings would be, she blushed, and her brows worked: she tried to throw off the strangeness of a year of separation, misunderstanding, and uncertainty.

Page 486

“Darling! come and see him. He is here.” She spoke more clearly, though no louder.

Richard had released her, and she took his hand, and he suffered himself to be led to the other side of the bed. His heart began rapidly throbbing at the sight of a little rosy-curtained cot covered with lace like milky summer cloud.

It seemed to him he would lose his manhood if he looked on that child’s face.

“Stop!” he cried suddenly.

Lucy turned first to him, and then to her infant, fearing it should have been disturbed.

“Lucy, come back.”

“What is it, darling?” said she, in alarm at his voice and the grip he had unwittingly given her hand.

O God! what an Ordeal was this! that to-morrow he must face death, perhaps die and be torn from his darling—his wife and his child; and that ere he went forth, ere he could dare to see his child and lean his head reproachfully on his young wife’s breast—for the last time, it might be—he must stab her to the heart, shatter the image she held of him.

“Lucy!” She saw him wrenched with agony, and her own face took the whiteness of his —she bending forward to him, all her faculties strung to hearing.

He held her two hands that she might look on him and not spare the horrible wound he was going to lay open to her eyes.

“Lucy. Do you know why I came to you to-night?”

She moved her lips repeating his words.

“Lucy. Have you guessed why I did not come before?”

Her head shook widened eyes.

“Lucy. I did not come because I was not worthy of my wife! Do you understand?”

“Darling,” she faltered plaintively, and hung crouching under him, “what have I done to make you angry with me?”

“O beloved!” cried he, the tears bursting out of his eyes. “O beloved!” was all he could say, kissing her hands passionately.

She waited, reassured, but in terror.

“Lucy. I stayed away from you—I could not come to you, because... I dared not come to you, my wife, my beloved! I could not come because I was a coward: because—-hear me—this was the reason: I have broken my marriage oath.”

Again her lips moved. She caught at a dim fleshless meaning in them. “But you love me? Richard! My husband! you love me?”

“Yes. I have never loved, I never shall love, woman but you.”

“Darling! Kiss me.”

“Have you understood what I have told you?”

“Kiss me,” she said.

He did not join lips. “I have come to you to-night to ask your forgiveness.”

Her answer was: “Kiss me.”

“Can you forgive a man so base?”

“But you love me, Richard?”

“Yes: that I can say before God. I love you, and I have betrayed you, and am unworthy of you—not worthy to touch your hand, to kneel at your feet, to breathe the same air with you.”

Her eyes shone brilliantly. “You love me! you love me, darling!” And as one who has sailed through dark fears into daylight, she said: “My husband! my darling! you will never leave me? We never shall be parted again?”

Page 487

He drew his breath painfully. To smooth her face growing rigid with fresh fears at his silence, he met her mouth. That kiss in which she spoke what her soul had to say, calmed her, and she smiled happily from it, and in her manner reminded him of his first vision of her on the summer morning in the field of the meadow-sweet. He held her to him, and thought then of a holier picture: of Mother and Child: of the sweet wonders of life she had made real to him.

Had he not absolved his conscience? At least the pangs to come made him think so. He now followed her leading hand. Lucy whispered: “You mustn’t disturb him—mustn’t touch him, dear!” and with dainty fingers drew off the covering to the little shoulder. One arm of the child was out along the pillow; the small hand open. His baby-mouth was pouted full; the dark lashes of his eyes seemed to lie on his plump cheeks. Richard stooped lower down to him, hungering for some movement as a sign that he lived. Lucy whispered. “He sleeps like you, Richard—one arm under his head.” Great wonder, and the stir of a grasping tenderness was in Richard. He breathed quick and soft, bending lower, till Lucy’s curls, as she nestled and bent with him, rolled on the crimson quilt of the cot. A smile went up the plump cheeks: forthwith the bud of a mouth was in rapid motion. The young mother whispered, blushing: “He’s dreaming of me,” and the simple words did more than Richard’s eyes to make him see what was. Then Lucy began to hum and buzz sweet baby-language, and some of the tiny fingers stirred, and he made as if to change his cosy position, but reconsidered, and deferred it, with a peaceful little sigh. Lucy whispered: “He is such a big fellow. Oh! when you see him awake he is so like you, Richard.”

He did not hear her immediately: it seemed a bit of heaven dropped there in his likeness: the more human the fact of the child grew the more heavenly it seemed. His son! his child! should he ever see him awake? At the thought, he took the words that had been spoken, and started from the dream he had been in. “Will he wake soon, Lucy?”

“Oh no! not yet, dear: not for hours. I would have kept him awake for you, but he was so sleepy.”

Richard stood back from the cot. He thought that if he saw the eyes of his boy, and had him once on his heart, he never should have force to leave him. Then he looked down on him, again struggled to tear himself away. Two natures warred in his bosom, or it may have been the Magian Conflict still going on. He had come to see his child once and to make peace with his wife before it should be too late. Might he not stop with them? Might he not relinquish that devilish pledge? Was not divine happiness here offered to him?—If foolish Ripton had not delayed to tell him of his interview with Mountfalcon all might have been well. But pride said it was impossible. And then injury spoke. For why was he thus base and spotted to the darling of his love? A mad pleasure in the prospect of wreaking vengeance on the villain who had laid the trap for

him, once more blackened his brain. If he would stay he could not. So he resolved, throwing the burden on Fate. The struggle was over, but oh, the pain!

Page 488

Lucy beheld the tears streaming hot from his face on the child's cot. She marvelled at such excess of emotion. But when his chest heaved, and the extremity of mortal anguish appeared to have seized him, her heart sank, and she tried to get him in her arms. He turned away from her and went to the window. A half-moon was over the lake.

"Look!" he said, "do you remember our rowing there one night, and we saw the shadow of the cypress? I wish I could have come early to-night that we might have had another row, and I have heard you sing there!"

"Darling!" said she, "will it make you happier if I go with you now? I will."

"No, Lucy. Lucy, you are brave!"

"Oh, no! that I'm not. I thought so once. I know I am not now."

"Yes! to have lived—the child on your heart—and never to have uttered a complaint!—-you are brave. O my Lucy! my wife! you that have made me man! I called you a coward. I remember it. I was the coward—I the wretched vain fool! Darling! I am going to leave you now. You are brave, and you will bear it. Listen: in two days, or three, I may be back—back for good, if you will accept me. Promise me to go to bed quietly. Kiss the child for me, and tell him his father has seen him. He will learn to speak soon. Will he soon speak, Lucy?"

Dreadful suspicion kept her speechless; she could only clutch one arm of his with both her hands.

"Going?" she presently gasped.

"For two or three days. No more—I hope."

"To-night?"

"Yes. Now."

"Going now? my husband!" her faculties abandoned her.

"You will be brave, my Lucy!"

"Richard! my darling husband! Going? What is it takes you from me?" But questioning no further, she fell on her knees, and cried piteously to him to stay—not to leave them. Then she dragged him to the little sleeper, and urged him to pray by his side, and he did, but rose abruptly from his prayer when he had muttered a few broken words—she praying on with tight-strung nerves, in the faith that what she said to the interceding

Mother above would be stronger than human hands on him. Nor could he go while she knelt there.

And he wavered. He had not reckoned on her terrible suffering. She came to him, quiet. “I knew you would remain.” And taking his hand, innocently fondling it: “Am I so changed from her he loved? You will not leave me, dear?” But dread returned, and the words quavered as she spoke them.

He was almost vanquished by the loveliness of her womanhood. She drew his hand to her heart, and strained it there under one breast. “Come: lie on my heart,” she murmured with a smile of holy sweetness.

He wavered more, and drooped to her, but summoning the powers of hell, kissed her suddenly, cried the words of parting, and hurried to the door. It was over in an instant. She cried out his name, clinging to him wildly, and was adjured to be brave, for he would be dishonoured if he did not go. Then she was shaken off.

Page 489

Mrs. Berry was aroused by an unusual prolonged wailing of the child, which showed that no one was comforting it, and failing to get any answer to her applications for admittance, she made bold to enter. There she saw Lucy, the child in her lap, sitting on the floor senseless:—she had taken it from its sleep and tried to follow her husband with it as her strongest appeal to him, and had fainted.

“Oh my! oh my!” Mrs. Berry moaned, “and I just now thinkin’ they was so happy!”

Warming and caressing the poor infant, she managed by degrees to revive Lucy, and heard what had brought her to that situation.

“Go to his father,” said Mrs. Berry. “Ta-te-tiddle-te-heighty-O! Go, my love, and every horse in Raynham shall be out after ’m. This is what men brings us to! Heighty-oighty-iddlety-Ah! Or you take blessed baby, and I’ll go.”

The baronet himself knocked at the door. “What is this?” he said. “I heard a noise and a step descend.”

“It’s Mr. Richard have gone, Sir Austin! have gone from his wife and babe! Rum-te-um-te-iddledy—Oh, my goodness! what sorrow’s come on us!” and Mrs. Berry wept, and sang to baby, and baby cried vehemently, and Lucy, sobbing, took him and danced him and sang to him with drawn lips and tears dropping over him. And if the Scientific Humanist to the day of his death forgets the sight of those two poor true women jigging on their wretched hearts to calm the child, he must have very little of the human in him.

There was no more sleep for Raynham that night.

CHAPTER XLV

“His ordeal is over. I have just come from his room and seen him bear the worst that could be. Return at once—he has asked for you. I can hardly write intelligibly, but I will tell you what we know.

“Two days after the dreadful night when he left us, his father heard from Ralph Morton. Richard had fought a duel in France with Lord Mountfalcon, and was lying wounded at a hamlet on the coast. His father started immediately with his poor wife, and I followed in company with his aunt and his child. The wound was not dangerous. He was shot in the side somewhere, but the ball injured no vital part. We thought all would be well. Oh! how sick I am of theories, and Systems, and the pretensions of men! There was his son lying all but dead, and the man was still unconvinced of the folly he had been guilty of. I could hardly bear the sight of his composure. I shall hate the name of Science till the day I die. Give me nothing but commonplace unpretending people!

Page 490

“They were at a wretched French cabaret, smelling vilely, where we still remain, and the people try as much as they can do to compensate for our discomforts by their kindness. The French poor people are very considerate where they see suffering. I will say that for them. The doctors had not allowed his poor Lucy to go near him. She sat outside his door, and none of us dared disturb her. That was a sight for Science. His father and myself, and Mrs. Berry, were the only ones permitted to wait on him, and whenever we came out, there she sat, not speaking a word—for she had been told it would endanger his life—but she looked such awful eagerness. She had the sort of eye I fancy mad persons have. I was sure her reason was going. We did everything we could think of to comfort her. A bed was made up for her and her meals were brought to her there. Of course there was no getting her to eat. What do you suppose his alarm was fixed on? He absolutely said to me—but I have not patience to repeat his words. He thought her to blame for not commanding herself for the sake of her maternal duties. He had absolutely an idea of insisting that she should make an effort to suckle the child. I shall love that Mrs. Berry to the end of my days. I really believe she has twice the sense of any of us—Science and all. She asked him plainly if he wished to poison the child, and then he gave way, but with a bad grace.

“Poor man! perhaps I am hard on him. I remember that you said Richard had done wrong. Yes; well, that may be. But his father eclipsed his wrong in a greater wrong—a crime, or quite as bad; for if he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously in separating husband and wife, and exposing his son as he did, I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit crimes. No doubt Science will benefit by it. They kill little animals for the sake of Science.

“We have with us Doctor Bairam, and a French physician from Dieppe, a very skilful man. It was he who told us where the real danger lay. We thought all would be well. A week had passed, and no fever supervened. We told Richard that his wife was coming to him, and he could bear to hear it. I went to her and began to circumlocute, thinking she listened—she had the same eager look. When I told her she might go in with me to see her dear husband, her features did not change. M. Despres, who held her pulse at the time, told me, in a whisper, it was cerebral fever—brain fever coming on. We have talked of her since. I noticed that though she did not seem to understand me, her bosom heaved, and she appeared to be trying to repress it, and choke something. I am sure now, from what I know of her character, that she—even in the approaches of delirium—was preventing herself from crying out. Her last hold of reason was a thought for Richard. It was against a creature like this that we plotted! I have the comfort of knowing that I did my share in helping to destroy her. Had she seen her husband a day or two before—but no! there was a new System to interdict that! Or had she not so violently controlled her nature as she did, I believe she might have been saved.

Page 491

“He said once of a man, that his conscience was a coxcomb. Will you believe that when he saw his son’s wife—poor victim! lying delirious, he could not even then see his error. You said he wished to take Providence out of God’s hands. His mad self-deceit would not leave him. I am positive, that while he was standing over her, he was blaming her for not having considered the child. Indeed he made a remark to me that it was unfortunate ‘disastrous,’ I think he said—that the child should have to be fed by hand. I dare say it is. All I pray is that this young child may be saved from him. I cannot bear to see him look on it. He does not spare himself bodily fatigue—but what is that? that is the vulgarest form of love. I know what you will say. You will say I have lost all charity, and I have. But I should not feel so, Austin, if I could be quite sure that he is an altered man even now the blow has struck him. He is reserved and simple in his speech, and his grief is evident, but I have doubts. He heard her while she was senseless call him cruel and harsh, and cry that she had suffered, and I saw then his mouth contract as if he had been touched. Perhaps, when he thinks, his mind will be clearer, but what he has done cannot be undone. I do not imagine he will abuse women any more. The doctor called her a ‘forte et belle jeune femme:’ and he said she was as noble a soul as ever God moulded clay upon. A noble soul ’forte et belle!’ She lies upstairs. If he can look on her and not see his sin, I almost fear God will never enlighten him.”

She died five days after she had been removed. The shock had utterly deranged her. I was with her. She died very quietly, breathing her last breath without pain—asking for no one—a death I should like to die.

“Her cries at one time were dreadfully loud. She screamed that she was ‘drowning in fire,’ and that her husband would not come to her to save her. We deadened the sound as much as we could, but it was impossible to prevent Richard from hearing. He knew her voice, and it produced an effect like fever on him. Whenever she called he answered. You could not hear them without weeping. Mrs. Berry sat with her, and I sat with him, and his father moved from one to the other.

“But the trial for us came when she was gone. How to communicate it to Richard—or whether to do so at all! His father consulted with us. We were quite decided that it would be madness to breathe it while he was in that state. I can admit now—as things have turned out—we were wrong. His father left us—I believe he spent the time in prayer—and then leaning on me, he went to Richard, and said in so many words, that his Lucy was no more. I thought it must kill him. He listened, and smiled. I never saw a smile so sweet and so sad. He said he had seen her die, as if he had passed through his suffering a long time ago. He shut his eyes. I could see by the motion of his eyeballs up that he was straining his sight to some inner heaven.—I cannot go on.

Page 492

“I think Richard is safe. Had we postponed the tidings, till he came to his clear senses, it must have killed him. His father was right for once, then. But if he has saved his son’s body, he has given the death-blow to his heart. Richard will never be what he promised.

“A letter found on his clothes tells us the origin of the quarrel. I have had an interview with Lord M. this morning. I cannot say I think him exactly to blame: Richard forced him to fight. At least I do not select him the foremost for blame. He was deeply and sincerely affected by the calamity he has caused. Alas! he was only an instrument. Your poor aunt is utterly prostrate and talks strange things of her daughter’s death. She is only happy in drudging. Dr. Bairam says we must under any circumstances keep her employed. Whilst she is doing something, she can chat freely, but the moment her hands are not occupied she gives me an idea that she is going into a fit.

“We expect the dear child’s uncle to-day. Mr. Thompson is here. I have taken him upstairs to look at her. That poor young man has a true heart.

“Come at once. You will not be in time to see her. She will lie at Raynham. If you could you would see an angel. He sits by her side for hours. I can give you no description of her beauty.

“You will not delay, I know, dear Austin, and I want you, for your presence will make me more charitable than I find it possible to be. Have you noticed the expression in the eyes of blind men? That is just how Richard looks, as he lies there silent in his bed—-striving to image her on his brain.”

THE END

Etext editor’s bookmarks

A woman who has mastered sauces sits on the apex of civilization
A style of affable omnipotence about the wise youth
A maker of Proverbs—what is he but a narrow mind wit
A young philosopher’s an old fool!
After five years of marriage, and twelve of friendship
Although it blew hard when Caesar crossed the Rubicon
Among boys there are laws of honour and chivalrous codes
An edge to his smile that cuts much like a sneer
And so Farewell my young Ambition! and with it farewell all true
And to these instructions he gave an aim: “First be virtuous”
As when nations are secretly preparing for war
Behold the hero embarked in the redemption of an erring beauty
Cold charity to all

Come prepared to be not very well satisfied with anything
Complacent languor of the wise youth
Feeling, nothing beyond a lively interest in her well-being
Further she read, “Which is the coward among us?”
Gentleman who does so much ’cause he says so little
Habit had legalized his union with her
Hermits enamoured of wind and rain
Hero embarked in the redemption of an erring beautiful woman

Page 493

Heroine, in common with the hero, has her ambition to be of use
His equanimity was fictitious
His fancy performed miraculous feats
How many instruments cannot clever women play upon
Huntress with few scruples and the game unguarded
I rather like to hear a woman swear. It embellishes her!
I beg of my husband, and all kind people who may have the care
I ain’t a speeder of matrimony
I cannot get on with Gibbon
In our House, my son, there is peculiar blood. We go to wreck!
In Sir Austin’s Note-book was written: “Between Simple Boyhood...”
Intensely communicative, but inarticulate
It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach
It is no use trying to conceal anything from him
It was now, as Sir Austin had written it down, The Magnetic Age
January was watering and freezing old earth by turns
Just bad inquirin’ too close among men
Laying of ghosts is a public duty
Minutes taken up by the grey puffs from their mouths
No! Gentlemen don’t fling stones; leave that to the blackguards
On the threshold of Puberty, there is one Unselfish Hour
Opened a wider view of the world to him, and a colder
Our most diligent pupil learns not so much as an earnest teacher
Rogue on the tremble of detection
Rumour for the nonce had a stronger spice of truth than usual
Seed-Time passed thus smoothly, and adolescence came on
Serene presumption
She can make puddens and pies
South-western Island has few attractions to other than invalids
Take ’em somethin’ like Providence—as they come
Task of reclaiming a bad man is extremely seductive to good women
The Pilgrim’s Scrip remarks that: Young men take joy in nothing
The world is wise in its way
The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable
The born preacher we feel instinctively to be our foe
There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness
They believe that the angels have been busy about them
This was a totally different case from the antecedent ones
Those days of intellectual coxcombry
Threats of prayer, however, that harp upon their sincerity
To be passive in calamity is the province of no woman

Troublesome appendages of success
Unaccustomed to have his will thwarted
Who rises from Prayer a better man, his prayer is answered
Wise in not seeking to be too wise
Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man
Women are swift at coming to conclusions in these matters
Yet, though Angels smile, shall not Devils laugh
You've got no friend but your bed
Young as when she looked upon the lovers in Paradise

SANDRA BELLONI

By George Meredith

Page 494

CONTENTS

Book 1
I. *The poles prelude*
ii. *The expedition by moonlight*
III. *Wilfrid's diplomacy*
iv. *Emilia's first trial in public*
V. *Emilia plays on the cornet*
vi. *Emilia supplies the key to herself and continues her performance on the cornet*
VII. *Threats of* A *crisis in the government of Brookfield*: *And of the virtue resident in* A *tail-coat*
viii. *In which* A *big drum speeds the march of Emilia's history*
IX. *The rival clubs*
X. *The ladies of Brookfield at school*

Book 2
xi. *In which we see the magnanimity that is in beer*.
XII. *Showing how sentiment and passion take the disease of love*
XIII. *Contains* A *short discourse on puppets*
xiv. *The Besworth question*
XV. *Wilfrid's exhibition of treachery*
XVI. *How the ladies of Brookfield came to their resolve*
xvii. *In the woods*

Book 3
XVIII. *Return of the sentimentalist into bondage*
XIX. *Life at Brookfield*.
XX. *By Wilming weir*
XXI. *Return of Mr*. *Pericles*
XXII. *The pitfall of sentiment*
XXIII. *Wilfrid diplomatizes*
XXIV. *Emilia makes* A *move*
XXV. A *farce within* A *farce*

Book 4
XXVI. *Suggests that the comic mask has some kinship with* A *skull*
XXVII. *Small life at Brookfield*
XXVIII. *Georgiana ford*
XXIX. *First scourging of the fine shades*
XXX. *Of the double-man in us*, *and the great fight when these are full-grown*

XXXI. *Besworth lawn*
XXXII. *The supper*
XXXIII. *Defeat and flight of Mrs. Chump*

Page 495

Book 5
XXXIV. *Indicates the degradation of Brookfield*, *together with certain proceedings of the yacht*
XXXV. *Mrs*. *Chump's epistle*
XXXVI. *Another pitfall of sentiment*
XXXVII. *Emilia's flight*.
XXXVIII. *She clings to her voice*
XXXIX. *Her voice fails*

Book 6
XL. *She tastes despair*
XLI. *She is found*
XLII. *Defection of Mr*. *Pericles from the Brookfield circle*
XLIII. *In which we see Wilfrid kindling*
XLIV. *On the hippogriff in air*: *In which the philosopher has* A *short spell*.
XLV. *On the hippogriff on earth*.
XLVI. *Rape of the black-briony wreath*
XLVII. *The call to action*
XLVIII. *Contains* A *further view of sentiment*
XLIX. *Between Emilia and Georgiana*

Book 7
L. *Emilia begins to feel Merthyr's power*
LI. A *chapter interrupted by the philosopher*
LII. A *fresh duett between Wilfrid and Emilia*
LIII. *Alderman's bouquet*
Liiv. *The explosion at Brookfield*
LV. *The tragedy of sentiment*
LVI. *An advance and* A *check*.
LVII. *Contains* A *further anatomy of Wilfrid*
LVIII. *Frost on the may night*.
LVIX. *Emilia's good-bye*

SANDRA BELLONI

[*Originally Emilia in England*]

CHAPTER I

We are to make acquaintance with some serious damsels, as this English generation knows them, and at a season verging upon May. The ladies of Brookfield, Arabella,

Cornelia, and Adela Pole, daughters of a flourishing City-of-London merchant, had been told of a singular thing: that in the neighbouring fir-wood a voice was to be heard by night, so wonderfully sweet and richly toned, that it required their strong sense to correct strange imaginings concerning it. Adela was herself the chief witness to its unearthly sweetness, and her testimony was confirmed by Edward Buxley,

Page 496

whose ear had likewise taken in the notes, though not on the same night, as the pair publicly proved by dates. Both declared that the voice belonged to an opera-singer or a spirit. The ladies of Brookfield, declining the alternative, perceived that this was a surprise furnished for their amusement by the latest celebrity of their circle, Mr. Pericles, their father's business ally and fellow-speculator; Mr. Pericles, the Greek, the man who held millions of money as dust compared to a human voice. Fortified by this exquisite supposition, their strong sense at once dismissed with scorn the idea of anything unearthly, however divine, being heard at night, in the nineteenth century, within sixteen miles of London City. They agreed that Mr. Pericles had hired some charming cantatrice to draw them into the woods and delightfully bewilder them. It was to be expected of his princely nature, they said. The Tinleys, of Bloxholme, worshipped him for his wealth; the ladies of Brookfield assured their friends that the fact of his being a money-maker was redeemed in their sight by his devotion to music. Music was now the Art in the ascendant at Brookfield. The ladies (for it is as well to know at once that they were not of that poor order of women who yield their admiration to a thing for its abstract virtue only)—the ladies were scaling society by the help of the Arts. To this laudable end sacrifices were now made to Euterpe to assist them. As mere daughters of a merchant, they were compelled to make their house not simply attractive, but enticing; and, seeing that they liked music, it seemed a very agreeable device. The Tinleys of Bloxholme still kept to dancing, and had effectually driven away Mr. Pericles from their gatherings. For Mr. Pericles said: "If that they will go 'so,' I will be amused." He presented a top-like triangular appearance for one staggering second. The Tinleys did not go `so' at all, and consequently they lost the satirical man, and were called 'the ballet-dancers' by Adela which thorny scoff her sisters permitted to pass about for a single day, and no more. The Tinleys were their match at epithets, and any low contention of this kind obscured for them the social summit they hoped to attain; the dream whereof was their prime nourishment.

That the Tinleys really were their match, they acknowledged, upon the admission of the despicable nature of the game. The Tinleys had winged a dreadful shaft at them; not in itself to be dreaded, but that it struck a weak point; it was a common shot that exploded a magazine; and for a time it quite upset their social policy, causing them to act like simple young ladies who feel things and resent them. The ladies of Brookfield had let it be known that, in their privacy together, they were Pole, Polar, and North Pole. Pole, Polar, and North Pole were designations of the three shades of distance which they could convey in a bow: a form of salute they cherished as peculiarly their own; being a method they had invented to rebuke

Page 497

the intrusiveness of the outer world, and hold away all strangers until approved worthy. Even friends had occasionally to submit to it in a softened form. Arabella, the eldest, and Adela, the youngest, alternated Pole and Polar; but North Pole was shared by Cornelia with none. She was the fairest of the three; a nobly-built person; her eyes not vacant of tenderness when she put off her armour. In her war-panoply before unhappy strangers, she was a Britomart. They bowed to an iceberg, which replied to them with the freezing indifference of the floating colossus, when the Winter sun despatches a feeble greeting messenger-beam from his miserable Arctic wallet. The simile must be accepted in its might, for no lesser one will express the scornfulness toward men displayed by this strikingly well-favoured, formal lady, whose heart of hearts demanded for her as spouse, a lord, a philosopher, and a Christian, in one: and he must be a member of Parliament. Hence her isolated air.

Now, when the ladies of Brookfield heard that their Pole, Polar, and North Pole, the splendid image of themselves, had been transformed by the Tinleys, and defiled by them to Pole, Polony, and Maypole, they should have laughed contemptuously; but the terrible nerve of ridicule quivered in witness against them, and was not to be stilled. They could not understand why so coarse a thing should affect them. It stuck in their flesh. It gave them the idea that they saw their features hideous, but real, in a magnifying mirror.

There was therefore a feud between the Tinleys and the Poles; and when Mr. Pericles entirely gave up the former, the latter rewarded him by spreading abroad every possible kind interpretation of his atrocious bad manners. He was a Greek, of Parisian gilding, whose Parisian hat flew off at a moment's notice, and whose savage snarl was heard at the slightest vexation. His talk of renowned prime-donne by their Christian names, and the way that he would catalogue emperors, statesmen, and noblemen known to him, with familiar indifference, as things below the musical Art, gave a distinguishing tone to Brookfield, from which his French accentuation of our tongue did not detract.

Mr. Pericles grimaced bitterly at any claim to excellence being set up for the mysterious voice in the woods. Tapping one forefinger on the uplifted point of the other, he observed that to sing abroad in the night air of an English Spring month was conclusive of imbecility; and that no imbecile sang at all. Because, to sing, involved the highest accomplishment of which the human spirit could boast. Did the ladies see? he asked. They thought they saw that he carried on a deception admirably. In return, they inquired whether he would come with them and hunt the voice, saying that they would catch it for him. "I shall catch a cold for myself," said Mr. Pericles, from the elevation of a shrug, feeling that he was doomed to go forth. He acted reluctance so well that the ladies affected a pretty imperiousness; and when at last he consented to join the party, they thanked him with a nicely simulated warmth, believing that they had pleased him thoroughly.

Page 498

Their brother Wilfrid was at Brookfield. Six months earlier he had returned from India, an invalided cornet of light cavalry, with a reputation for military dash and the prospect of a medal. Then he was their heroic brother he was now their guard. They love him tenderly, and admired him when it was necessary; but they had exhausted their own sensations concerning his deeds of arms, and fancied that he had served their purpose. And besides, valour is not an intellectual quality, they said. They were ladies so aspiring, these daughters of the merchant Samuel Bolton Pole, that, if Napoleon had been their brother, their imaginations would have overtopped him after his six months' inaction in the Tuileries. They would by that time have made a stepping-stone of the emperor. 'Mounting' was the title given to this proceeding. They went on perpetually mounting. It is still a good way from the head of the tallest of men to the stars; so they had their work before them; but, as they observed, they were young. To be brief, they were very ambitious damsels, aiming at they knew not exactly what, save that it was something so wide that it had not a name, and so high in the air that no one could see it. They knew assuredly that their circle did not please them. So, therefore, they were constantly extending and refining it: extending it perhaps for the purpose of refining it. Their susceptibilities demanded that they should escape from a city circle. Having no mother, they ruled their father's house and him, and were at least commanders of whatsoever forces they could summon for the task.

It may be seen that they were sentimentalists. That is to say, they supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings, and exclusively comprehended the Fine Shades. Whereof more will be said; but in the meantime it will explain their propensity to mount; it will account for their irritation at the material obstructions surrounding them; and possibly the philosopher will now have his eye on the source of that extraordinary sense of superiority to mankind which was the crown of their complacent brows. Eclipsed as they may be in the gross appreciation of the world by other people, who excel in this and that accomplishment, persons that nourish Nice Feelings and are intimate with the Fine Shades carry their own test of intrinsic value.

Nor let the philosopher venture hastily to despise them as pipers to dilettante life. Such persons come to us in the order of civilization. In their way they help to civilize us. Sentimentalists are a perfectly natural growth of a fat soil. Wealthy communities must engender them. If with attentive minds we mark the origin of classes, we shall discern that the Nice Feelings and the Fine Shades play a principal part in our human development and social history. I dare not say that civilized man is to be studied with the eye of a naturalist; but my vulgar meaning might almost be twisted to convey:

Page 499

that our sentimentalists are a variety owing their existence to a certain prolonged term of comfortable feeding. The pig, it will be retorted, passes likewise through this training. He does. But in him it is not combined with an indigestion of high German romances. Here is so notable a difference, that he cannot possibly be said to be of the family. And I maintain it against him, who have nevertheless listened attentively to the eulogies pronounced by the vendors of prize bacon.

After thus stating to you the vast pretensions of the ladies of Brookfield, it would be unfair to sketch their portraits. Nothing but comedy bordering on burlesque could issue from the contrast, though they graced a drawing-room or a pew, and had properly elegant habits and taste in dress, and were all fair to the sight. Moreover, Adela had not long quitted school. Outwardly they were not unlike other young ladies with wits alert. They were at the commencement of their labours on this night of the expedition when they were fated to meet something greatly confusing them.

CHAPTER II

Half of a rosy mounting full moon was on the verge of the East as the ladies, with attendant cavaliers, passed, humming softly, through the garden-gates. Arabella had, by right of birth, made claim to Mr. Pericles: not without an unwontedly fretful remonstrance from Cornelia, who said, “My dear, you must allow that I have some talent for drawing men out.”

And Arabella replied: “Certainly, dear, you have; and I think I have some too.”

The gentle altercation lasted half-an-hour, but they got no farther than this. Mr. Pericles was either hopeless of protecting himself from such shrewd assailants, or indifferent to their attacks, for all his defensive measures were against the cold. He was muffled in a superbly mounted bearskin, which came up so closely about his ears that Arabella had to repeat to him all her questions, and as it were force a way for her voice through the hide. This was provoking, since it not only stemmed the natural flow of conversation, but prevented her imagination from decorating the reminiscence of it subsequently (which was her profound secret pleasure), besides letting in the outer world upon her. Take it as an axiom, when you utter a sentimentalism, that more than one pair of ears makes a cynical critic. A sentimentalism requires secresy. I can enjoy it, and shall treat it respectfully if you will confide it to me alone; but I and my friends must laugh at it outright.

“Does there not seem a soul in the moonlight?” for instance. Arabella, after a rapturous glance at the rosy orb, put it to Mr. Pericles, in subdued impressive tones. She had to repeat her phrase; Mr. Pericles then echoing, with provoking monotony of tone, “Sol?”—whereupon “Soul!” was reiterated, somewhat sharply: and Mr. Pericles, peering over the collar of the bear, with half an

Page 500

eye, continued the sentence, in the manner of one sent thereby farther from its meaning: “Ze moonlight?” Despairing and exasperated, Arabella commenced afresh: “I said, there seems a soul in it”; and Mr. Pericles assented bluntly: “In ze light!”—which sounded so little satisfactory that Arabella explained, “I mean the aspect;” and having said three times distinctly what she meant, in answer to a terrific glare from the unsubmerged whites of the eyes of Mr. Pericles, this was his comment, almost roared forth:

“Sol! you say so-whole—in ze moonlight—Luna? Hein? Ze aspect is of Sol!—Yez.”

And Mr. Pericles sank into his bear again, while Wilfrid Pole, who was swinging his long cavalry legs to rearward, shouted; and Mr. Sumner, a rising young barrister, walking beside Cornelia, smiled a smile of extreme rigidity. Arabella was punished for claiming rights of birth. She heard the murmuring course of the dialogue between Cornelia and Mr. Sumner, sufficiently clear to tell her it was not fictitious and was well sustained, while her heart was kept thirsting for the key to it. In advance were Adela and Edward Buxley, who was only a rich alderman’s only son, but had the virtue of an extraordinary power of drawing caricatures, and was therefore useful in exaggerating the features of disagreeable people, and showing how odious they were: besides endearing pleasant ones exhibiting how comic they could be. Gossips averred that before Mr. Pole had been worried by his daughters into giving that mighty sum for Brookfield, Arabella had accepted Edward as her suitor; but for some reason or other he had apparently fallen from his high estate. To tell the truth, Arabella conceived that he had simply obeyed her wishes, while he knew he was naughtily following his own; and Adela, without introspection at all, was making her virgin effort at the caricaturing of our sex in his person: an art for which she promised well.

Out of the long black shadows of the solitary trees of the park, and through low yellow moonlight, they passed suddenly into the muffed ways of the wood. Mr. Pericles was ineffably provoking. He had come for gallantry’s sake, and was not to be rallied, and would echo every question in a roar, and there was no drawing of the man out at all. He knocked against branches, and tripped over stumps, and ejaculated with energy; but though he gave no heed or help to his fair associate, she thought not the worse of him, so heroic can women be toward any creature that will permit himself to be clothed by a mystery. At times the party hung still, fancying the voice aloft, and then, after listening to the unrelieved stillness, they laughed, and trod the stiff dry ferns and soft mosses once more. At last they came to a decided halt, when the proposition to return caused Adela to come up to Mr. Pericles and say to him, “Now, you must confess! You have prohibited her from singing to-night so that we may continue to be mystified. I call this quite shameful of you!”

Page 501

And even as Mr. Pericles was protesting that he was the most mystified of the company, his neck lengthened, and his head went round, and his ear was turned to the sky, while he breathed an elaborate “Ah!” And sure enough that was the voice of the woods, cleaving the night air, not distant. A sleepy fire of early moonlight hung through the dusky fir-branches. The voice had the woods to itself, and seemed to fill them and soar over them, it was so full and rich, so light and sweet. And now, to add to the marvel, they heard a harp accompaniment, the strings being faintly touched, but with firm fingers. A woman’s voice: on that could be no dispute. Tell me, what opens heaven more flamingly to heart and mind, than the voice of a woman, pouring clear accordant notes to the blue night sky, that grows light blue to the moon? There was no flourish in her singing. All the notes were firm, and rounded, and sovereignly distinct. She seemed to have caught the ear of Night, and sang confident of her charm. It was a grand old Italian air, requiring severity of tone and power. Now into great mournful hollows the voice sank steadfastly. One soft sweep of the strings succeeded a deep final note, and the hearers breathed freely.

“Stradella!” said the Greek, folding his arms.

The ladies were too deeply impressed to pursue their play with him. Real emotions at once set aside the semi-credence they had given to their own suggestions.

“Hush! she will sing again,” whispered Adela. “It is the most delicious contralto.” Murmurs of objection to the voice being characterized at all by any technical word, or even for a human quality, were heard.

“Let me find zis woman!” cried the prose enthusiast Mr. Pericles, imperiously, with his bearskin thrown back on his shoulders, and forth they stepped, following him.

In the middle of the wood there was a sandy mound, rising half the height of the lesser firs, bounded by a green-grown vallum, where once an old woman, hopelessly a witch, had squatted, and defied the authorities to make her budge: nor could they accomplish the task before her witch-soul had taken wing in the form of a black night-bird, often to be heard jarring above the spot. Lank dry weeds and nettles, and great lumps of green and gray moss, now stood on the poor old creature’s place of habitation, and the moon, slanting through the fir-clumps, was scattered on the blossoms of twisted orchard-trees, gone wild again. Amid this desolation, a dwarfed pine, whose roots were partially bared as they grasped the broken bank that was its perch, threw far out a cedar-like hand. In the shadow of it sat the fair singer. A musing touch of her harp-strings drew the intruders to the charmed circle, though they could discern nothing save the glimmer of the instrument and one set of fingers caressing it. How she viewed their rather impertinent advance toward her, till they had ranged in a half-circle nearer and nearer, could not be guessed. She did not seem abashed in any way, for, having preluded, she threw herself into another song.

Page 502

The charm was now more human, though scarcely less powerful. This was a different song from the last: it was not the sculptured music of the old school, but had the richness and fulness of passionate blood that marks the modern Italian, where there is much dallying with beauty in the thick of sweet anguish. Here, at a certain passage of the song, she gathered herself up and pitched a nervous note, so shrewdly triumphing, that, as her voice sank to rest, her hearers could not restrain a deep murmur of admiration.

Then came an awkward moment. The ladies did not wish to go, and they were not justified in stopping. They were anxious to speak, and they could not choose the word to utter. Mr. Pericles relieved them by moving forward and doffing his hat, at the same time begging excuse for the rudeness they were guilty of.

The fair singer answered, with the quickness that showed a girl: "Oh, stay; do stay, if I please you!" A singular form of speech, it was thought by the ladies.

She added: "I feel that I sing better when I have people to listen to me."

"You find it more sympathetic, do you not?" remarked Cornelia.

"I don't know," responded the unknown, with a very honest smile. "I like it."

She was evidently uneducated. "A professional?" whispered Adela to Arabella. She wanted little invitation to exhibit her skill, at all events, for, at a word, the clear, bold, but finely nervous voice, was pealing to a brisker measure, that would have been joyous but for one fall it had, coming unexpectedly, without harshness, and winding up the song in a ringing melancholy.

After a few bars had been sung, Mr. Pericles was seen tapping his forehead perplexedly. The moment it ended, he cried out, in a tone of vexed apology for strange ignorance: "But I know not it? It is Italian—yes, I swear it is Italian! But—who then? It is superbe! But I know not it!"

"It is mine," said the young person.

"Your music, miss?"

"I mean, I composed it."

"Permit me to say, Brava!"

The ladies instantly petitioned to have it sung to them again; and whether or not they thought more of it, or less, now that the authorship was known to them, they were louder in their applause, which seemed to make the little person very happy.

“You are sure it pleases you?” she exclaimed.

They were very sure it pleased them. Somehow the ladies were growing gracious toward her, from having previously felt too humble, it may be. She was girlish in her manner, and not imposing in her figure. She would be a sweet mystery to talk about, they thought: but she had ceased to be quite the same mystery to them.

“I would go on singing to you,” she said; “I could sing all night long: but my people at the farm will not keep supper for me, when it’s late, and I shall have to go hungry to bed, if I wait.”

“Have you far to go?” ventured Adela.

Page 503

“Only to Wilson’s farm; about ten minutes’ walk through the wood,” she answered unhesitatingly.

Arabella wished to know whether she came frequently to this lovely spot.

“When it does not rain, every evening,” was the reply.

“You feel that the place inspires you?” said Cornelia.

“I am obliged to come,” she explained. “The good old dame at the farm is ill, and she says that music all day is enough for her, and I must come here, or I should get no chance of playing at all at night.”

“But surely you feel an inspiration in the place, do you not?” Cornelia persisted.

She looked at this lady as if she had got a hard word given her to crack, and muttered: “I feel it quite warm here. And I do begin to love the place.”

The stately Cornelia fell back a step.

The moon was now a silver ball on the edge of the circle of grey blue above the ring of firs, and by the light falling on the strange little person, as she stood out of the shadow to muffle up her harp, it could be seen that she was simply clad, and that her bonnet was not of the newest fashion. The sisters remarked a boot-lace hanging loose. The peculiar black lustre of her hair, and thickness of her long black eyebrows, struck them likewise. Her harp being now comfortably mantled, Cornet Wilfrid Pole, who had been watching her and balancing repeatedly on his forward foot, made a stride, and “really could not allow her to carry it herself,” and begged her permission that he might assist her. “It’s very heavy, you know,” he added.

“Too heavy for me,” she said, favouring him with a thankful smile. “I have some one who does that. Where is Jim?”

She called for Jim, and from the back of the sandy hillock, where he had been reclining, a broad-shouldered rustic came lurching round to them.

“Now, take my harp, if you please, and be as careful as possible of branches, and don’t stumble.” She uttered this as if she were giving Jim his evening lesson: and then with a sudden cry she laughed out: “Oh! but I haven’t played you your tune, and you must have your tune!”

Forthwith she stript the harp half bare, and throwing a propitiatory bright glance at her audience on the other side of her, she commenced thrumming a kind of Giles Scroggins, native British, beer-begotten air, while Jim smeared his mouth and grinned,

as one who sees his love dragged into public view, and is not the man to be ashamed of her, though he hopes you will hardly put him to the trial.

“This is his favourite tune, that he taught me,” she emphasized to the company. “I play to him every night, for a finish; and then he takes care not to knock my poor harp to pieces and tumble about.”

The gentlemen were amused by the Giles Scroggins air, which she had delivered with a sufficient sense of its lumping fun and leg-for-leg jollity, and they laughed and applauded; but the ladies were silent after the performance, until the moment came to thank her for the entertainment she had afforded them: and then they broke into gentle smiles, and trusted they might have the pleasure of hearing her another night.

Page 504

“Oh! just as often and as much as you like,” she said, and first held her hand to Arabella, next to Cornelia, and then to Adela. She seemed to be hesitating before the gentlemen, and when Wilfrid raised his hat, she was put to some confusion, and bowed rather awkwardly, and retired.

“Good night, miss!” called Mr. Pericles.

“Good night, sir!” she answered from a little distance, and they could see that she was there emboldened to drop a proper curtsey in accompaniment.

Then the ladies stood together and talked of her, not with absolute enthusiasm. For, “Was it not divine?” said Adela; and Cornelia asked her if she meant the last piece; and, “Oh, gracious! not that!” Adela exclaimed. And then it was discovered how their common observation had fastened on the boot-lace; and this vagrant article became the key to certain speculations on her condition and character.

“I wish I’d had a dozen bouquets, that’s all!” cried Wilfrid. “she deserved them.”

“Has she sentiment for what she sings? or is it only faculty?” Cornelia put it to Mr. Sumner.

That gentleman faintly defended the stranger for the intrusion of the bumpkin tune. “She did it so well!” he said.

“I complain that she did it too well,” uttered Cornelia, whose use of emphasis customarily implied that the argument remained with her.

Talking in this manner, and leisurely marching homeward, they were startled to hear Mr. Pericles, who had wrapped himself impenetrably in the bear, burst from his cogitation suddenly to cry out, in his harshest foreign accent: “Yeaz!” And thereupon he threw open the folds, and laid out a forefinger, and delivered himself: “I am made my mind! I send her abroad to ze Academie for one, two, tree year. She shall be instructed as was not before. Zen a noise at La Scala. No—Paris! No—London! She shall astonish London fairst.—Yez! if I take a theatre! Yez! if I buy a newspaper! Yez! if I pay feefty-sossand pound!”

His singular outlandish vehemence, and the sweeping grandeur of a determination that lightly assumed the corruptibility of our Press, sent a smile circling among the ladies and gentlemen. The youth who had wished to throw the fair unknown a dozen bouquets, caught himself frowning at this brilliant prospect for her, which was to give him his opportunity.

CHAPTER III

The next morning there were many “tra-las” and “tum-te-turns” over the family breakfast-table; a constant humming and crying, “I have it”; and after two or three bars, baffled pauses and confusion of mind. Mr. Pericles was almost abusive at the impotent efforts of the sisters to revive in his memory that particular delicious melody, the composition of the fair singer herself. At last he grew so impatient as to arrest their opening notes, and even to interrupt their unmusical consultations, with “No: it is no use; it is no use: no, no, I say!”

Page 505

But instantly he would plunge his forehead into the palm of his hand, and rub it red, and work his eyebrows frightfully, until tender humanity led the sisters to resume. Adela's, "I'm sure it began low down—tum!" Cornelia's: "The key-note, I am positive, was B flat—ta!" and Arabella's putting of these two assertions together, and promise to combine them at the piano when breakfast was at an end, though it was Sunday morning, were exasperating to the exquisite lover of music. Mr. Pericles was really suffering torments. Do you know what it is to pursue the sylph, and touch her flying skirts, think you have caught her, and are sure of her—that she is yours, the rapturous evanescent darling! when some well-meaning earthly wretch interposes and trips you, and off she flies and leaves you floundering? A lovely melody nearly grasped and lost in this fashion, tries the temper. Apollo chasing Daphne could have been barely polite to the wood-nymphs in his path, and Mr. Pericles was rude to the daughters of his host. Smoothing his clean square chin and thick moustache hastily, with outspread thumb and fingers, he implored them to spare his nerves. Smiling rigidly, he trusted they would be merciful to a sensitive ear. Mr. Pole—who, as an Englishman, could not understand anyone being so serious in the pursuit of a tune—laughed, and asked questions, and almost drove Mr. Pericles mad. On a sudden the Greek's sallow visage lightened. "It is to you! it is to you!" he cried, stretching his finger at Wilfrid. The young officer, having apparently waited till he had finished with his knife and fork, was leaning his cheek on his fist, looking at nobody, and quietly humming a part of the air. Mr. Pericles complimented and thanked him.

"But you have ear for music extraordinaire!" he said.

Adela patted her brother fondly, remarking—"Yes, when his feelings are concerned."

"Will you repeat zat?" asked the Greek. "'To-to-ri:' hein? I lose it. 'To-to-ru:' bah! I lose it; 'To-ri:—to—ru—ri ro:' it is no use: I lose it."

Neither his persuasions, nor his sneer, "Because it is Sunday, perhaps!" would induce Wilfrid to be guilty of another attempt. The ladies tried sisterly cajoleries on him fruitlessly, until Mr. Pole, seeing the desperation of his guest, said: "Why not have her up here, toon and all, some week-day? Sunday birds won't suit us, you know. We've got a piano for her that's good enough for the first of 'em, if money means anything."

The ladies murmured meekly: "Yes, papa."

"I shall find her for you while you go to your charch," said Mr. Pericles. And here Wilfrid was seized with a yawn, and rose, and asked his eldest sister if she meant to attend the service that morning.

"Undoubtedly," she answered; and Mr. Pole took it up: "That's our discipline, my boy. Must set an example: do our duty. All the house goes to worship in the country."

“Why, in ze country?” queried Mr. Pericles.

Page 506

“Because”—Cornelia came to the rescue of her sire; but her impetuosity was either unsupported by a reason, or she stooped to fit one to the comprehension of the interrogator: “Oh, because—do you know, we have very select music at our church?”

“We have a highly-paid organist,” added Arabella.

“Recently elected,” said Adela.

“Ah! mon Dieu!” Mr. Pericles ejaculated. “Some music sound well at afar—mellow, you say. I prefer your charch music mellow.”

“Won’t you come?” cried Wilfrid, with wonderful briskness.

“No. Mellow for me!”

The Greek’s grinders flashed, and Wilfrid turned off from him sulkily. He saw in fancy the robber-Greek prowling about Wilson’s farm, setting snares for the marvellous night-bird, and it was with more than his customary inattention to his sisters’ refined conversation that he formed part of their male escort to the place of worship.

Mr. Pericles met the church-goers on their return in one of the green bowery lanes leading up to Brookfield. Cold as he was to English scenes and sentiments, his alien ideas were not unimpressed by the picture of those daintily-clad young women demurely stepping homeward, while the air held a revel of skylarks, and the scented hedgeways quickened with sunshine.

“You have missed a treat!” Arabella greeted him.

“A sermon?” said he.

The ladies would not tell him, until his complacent cynicism at the notion of his having missed a sermon, spurred them to reveal that the organ had been handled in a masterly manner; and that the voluntary played at the close of the service was most exquisite.

“Even papa was in raptures.”

“Very good indeed,” said Mr. Pole. “I’m no judge; but you might listen to that sort of playing after dinner.”

Mr. Pericles seemed to think that was scarcely a critical period, but he merely grimaced, and inquired: “Did you see ze player?”

“Oh, no: they are hidden,” Arabella explained to him, “behind a curtain.”

“But, what!” shouted the impetuous Greek: “have you no curiosity? A woman! And zen, you saw not her?”

“No,” remarked Cornelia, in the same aggravating sing-song voice of utter indifference: “we don’t know whether it was not a man. Our usual organist is a man, I believe.”

The eyes of the Greek whitened savagely, and he relapsed into frigid politeness.

Wilfrid was not present to point their apprehensions. He had loitered behind; but when he joined them in the house subsequently, he was cheerful, and had a look of triumph about him which made his sisters say, “So, you have been with the Copleys:” and he allowed them to suppose it, if they pleased; the Copleys being young ladies of position in the neighbourhood, of much higher standing than the Tinleys, who, though very wealthy, could not have given their brother such an air, the sisters imagined.

Page 507

At lunch, Wilfrid remarked carelessly: “By the way, I met that little girl we saw last night.”

“The singer! where?” asked his sisters, with one voice.

“Coming out of church.”

“She goes to church, then!”

This exclamation showed the heathen they took her to be.

“Why, she played the organ,” said Wilfrid.

“And how does she look by day? How does she dress?”

“Oh! very jolly little woman! Dresses quiet enough.”

“She played the organ! It was she, then! An organist! Is there anything approaching to gentility in her appearance?”

“I—really I’m no judge,” said Wilfrid. “You had better ask Laura Tinley. She was talking to her when I went up.”

The sisters exchanged looks. Presently they stood together in consultation. Then they spoke with their aunt, Mrs. Lupin, and went to their papa. The rapacity of those Tinleys for anything extraordinary was known to them, but they would not have conceived that their own discovery, their own treasure, could have been caught up so quickly. If the Tinleys got possession of her, the defection of Mr. Pericles might be counted on, and the display of a phenomenon would be lost to them. They decided to go down to Wilson’s farm that very day, and forestall their rivals by having her up to Brookfield. The idea of doing this had been in a corner of their minds all the morning: it seemed now the most sensible plan in the world. It was patronage, in its right sense. And they might be of great service to her, by giving a proper elevation and tone to her genius; while she might amuse them, and their guests, and be let off, in fact, as a firework for the nonce. Among the queenly cases of women who are designing to become the heads of a circle (if I may use the term), an accurate admeasurement of reciprocal advantages can scarcely be expected to rank; but the knowledge that an act, depending upon us for execution, is capable of benefiting both sides, will make the proceeding appear so unselfish, that its wisdom is overlooked as well as its motives. The sisters felt they were the patronesses of the little obscure genius whom they longed for to illumine their household, before they knew her name. Cornet Wilfrid Pole must have chuckled mightily to see them depart on their mission. These ladies, who managed everybody, had themselves been very cleverly managed. It is doubtful whether the scheme to surprise and delight Mr. Pericles would have actuated the step they took, but for the dread of seeing the rapacious Tinleys snatch up their lawful prey. The Tinleys were

known to be quite capable of doing so. They had, on a particular occasion, made transparent overtures to a celebrity belonging to the Poles, whom they had first met at Brookfield: could never have hoped to have seen had they not met him at Brookfield; and girls who behaved in this way would do anything. The resolution was taken to steal a march on them; nor did it seem at all odd to people naturally so hospitable as the denizens of Brookfield, that the stranger of yesterday should be the guest of to-day. Kindness of heart, combined with a great scheme in the brain, easily put aside conventional rules.

Page 508

“But we don’t know her name,” they said, when they had taken the advice of the gentlemen on what they had already decided to do: all excepting Mr. Pericles, for whom the surprise was in store.

“Belloni—Miss Belloni,” said Wilfrid.

“Are you sure? How do you know—?”

“She told Laura Tinley.”

Within five minutes of the receipt of this intelligence the ladies were on their way to Wilson’s farm.

CHAPTER IV

The circle which the ladies of Brookfield were designing to establish just now, was of this receipt:—Celebrities, London residents, and County notables, all in their severally due proportions, were to meet, mix, and revolve: the Celebrities to shine; the Metropolitans to act as satellites; the County ignoramuses to feel flattered in knowing that all stood forth for their amusement: they being the butts of the quick-witted Metropolitans, whom they despised, while the sons of renown were encouraged to be conscious of their magnanimous superiority over both sets, for whose entertainment they were ticketed.

This is a pudding indeed! And the contemplation of the skill and energy required to get together and compound such a Brookfield Pudding, well-nigh leads one to think the work that is done out of doors a very inferior business, and, as it were, mere gathering of fuel for the fire inside. It was known in the neighbourhood that the ladies were preparing one; and moreover that they had a new kind of plum; in other words, that they intended to exhibit a prodigy of genius, who would flow upon the world from Brookfield. To announce her with the invitations, rejecting the idea of a surprise in the assembly, had been necessary, because there was no other way of securing Lady Gosstre, who led the society of the district. The great lady gave her promise to attend: “though,” as she said to Arabella, “you must know I abominate musical parties, and think them the most absurd of entertainments possible; but if you have anything to show, that’s another matter.”

Two or three chosen friends were invited down beforehand to inspect the strange girl, and say what they thought of her; for the ladies themselves were perplexed. They had found her to be commonplace: a creature without ideas and with a decided appetite. So when Tracy Runningbrook, who had also been a plum in his day, and was still a poet, said that she was exquisitely comic, they were induced to take the humorous view of the inexplicable side in the character of Miss Belloni, and tried to laugh at her

eccentricities. Seeing that Mr. Pericles approved of her voice as a singer, and Tracy Runningbrook let pass her behaviour as a girl, they conceived that on the whole they were safe in sounding a trumpet loudly. These gentlemen were connoisseurs, each in his walk.

Page 509

Concerning her position and parentage, nothing was known. She had met Adela's delicately-searching touches in that direction with a marked reserve. It was impossible to ask her point-blank, after probing her with a dozen suggestions, for the ingenuousness of an indifferent inquiry could not then be assumed, so that Adela was constantly baked and felt that she must some day be excessively 'fond with her,' which was annoying. The girl lit up at any sign of affection. A kind look gave Summer depths to her dark eyes. Otherwise she maintained a simple discretion and walked in her own path, content to look quietly pleased on everybody, as one who had plenty to think of and a voice in her ear.

Apparently she was not to be taught to understand 'limits': which must be explained as a sort of magnetic submissiveness to the variations of Polar caprice; so that she should move about with ease, be cheerful, friendly, and, at a signal, affectionate; still not failing to recognize the particular nooks where the family chalk had traced a line. As the day of exhibition approached, Adela thought she would give her a lesson in limits. She ventured to bestow a small caress on the girl, after a compliment; thinking that the compliment would be a check: but the compliment was passed, and the caress instantly replied to with two arms and a tender mouth. At which, Adela took fright and was glad to slip away.

At last the pudding flowed into the bag.

Emilia was posted by the ladies in a corner of the room. Receiving her assurance that she was not hungry, they felt satisfied that she wanted nothing. Wilfrid came up to her to console her for her loneliness, until Mr. Pericles had stationed himself at the back of her chair, and then Wilfrid nodded languidly and attended to his graver duties. Who would have imagined that she had hurt him? But she certainly looked with greater animation on Mr. Pericles; and when Tracy Runningbrook sat down by her, a perfect little carol of chatter sprang up between them. These two presented such a noticeable contrast, side by side, that the ladies had to send a message to separate them. She was perhaps a little the taller of the two; with smoothed hair that had the gloss of black briony leaves, and eyes like burning brands in a cave; while Tracy's hair was red as blown flame, with eyes of a grey-green hue, that may be seen glistening over wet sunset. People, who knew him, asked: "Who is she?" and it was not in the design of the ladies to have her noted just yet.

Lady Gosstre's exclamation on entering the room was presently heard. "Well! and where's our extraordinary genius? Pray, let me see her immediately."

Thereat Laura Tinley, with gross ill-breeding, rushed up to Arabella, who was receiving her ladyship, and touching her arm, as if privileges were permitted her, cried: "I'm dying to see her. Has she come?"

Arabella embraced the offensive girl in a hostess’s smile, and talked flowingly to the great lady.

Page 510

Laura Tinley was punished by being requested to lead off with a favourite song in a buzz. She acceded, quite aware of the honour intended, and sat at the piano, taming as much as possible her pantomime of one that would be audible. Lady Gosstre scanned the room, while Adela, following her ladyship's eyeglass, named the guests.

"You get together a quaint set of men," said Lady Gosstre.

"Women!" was on Adela's tongue's tip. She had really thought well of her men. Her heart sank.

"In the country!" she began.

"Yes, yes!" went my lady.

These were the lessons that made the ladies of Brookfield put a check upon youth's tendency to feel delightful satisfaction with its immediate work, and speedily conceive a discontented suspicion of anything whatsoever that served them.

Two other sacrifices were offered at the piano after Laura Tinley. Poor victims of ambition, they arranged their dresses, smiled at the leaves, and deliberately gave utterance to the dreadful nonsense of the laureates of our drawing-rooms. Mr. Pericles and Emilia exchanged scientific glances during the performance. She was merciless to indifferent music. Wilfrid saw the glances pass. So, now, when Emilia was beckoned to the piano, she passed by Wilfrid, and had a cold look in return for beaming eyes.

According to directions, Emilia sang a simple Neapolitan air. The singer was unknown, and was generally taken for another sacrifice.

"Come; that's rather pretty," Lady Gosstre hailed the close.

"It is of ze people—such as zat," assented Mr. Pericles.

Adela heard my lady ask for the singer's name. She made her way to her sisters. Adela was ordinarily the promoter, Cornelia the sifter, and Arabella the director, of schemes in this management. The ladies had a moment for counsel over a music-book, for Arabella was about to do duty at the piano. During a pause, Mr. Pole lifting his white waistcoat with the effort, sent a word abroad, loudly and heartily, regardless of its guardian aspirate, like a bold-faced hoyden flying from her chaperon. They had dreaded it. They loved their father, but declined to think his grammar parental. Hushing together, they agreed that it had been a false move to invite Lady Gosstre, who did not care a bit for music, until the success of their Genius was assured by persons who did. To suppose that she would recognize a Genius, failing a special introduction, was absurd. The ladies could turn upon aristocracy too, when it suited them.

Arabella had now to go through a quartett. The fever of ill-luck had seized the violin. He would not tune. Then his string broke; and while he was arranging it the footman came up to Arabella. Misfortunes, we know, are the most united family on earth. The news brought to her was that a lady of the name of Mrs. Chump was below. Holding her features rigidly bound, not to betray perturbation, Arabella confided the fact to Cornelia, who, with a similar mental and muscular compression, said instantly, “Manoeuvre her.” Adela remarked, “If you tell her the company is grand, she will come, and her Irish once heard here will destroy us. The very name of Chump!”

Page 511

Mrs. Chump was the wealthy Irish widow of an alderman, whose unaccountable bad taste in going to Ireland for a wife, yet filled the ladies with astonishment. She pretended to be in difficulties with her lawyers; for which reason she strove to be perpetually in consultation with her old flame and present trustee Mr. Pole. The ladies had fought against her in London, and since their installation at Brookfield they had announced to their father that she was not to be endured there. Mr. Pole had plaintively attempted to dilate on the virtues of Martha Chump. "In her place," said the ladies, and illustrated to him that amid a nosegay of flowers there was no fit room for an exuberant vegetable. The old man had sighed and seemed to surrender. One thing was certain: Mrs. Chump had never been seen at Brookfield. "She never shall be, save by the servants," said the ladies.

Emilia, not unmarked of Mr. Pericles, had gone over to Wilfrid once or twice, to ask him if haply he disapproved of anything she had done. Mr. Pericles shrugged, and went "Ah!" as who should say, "This must be stopped." Adela now came to her and caught her hand, showering sweet whispers on her, and bidding her go to her harp and do her best. "We love you; we all love you!" was her parting instigation.

The quartett was abandoned. Arabella had departed with a firm countenance to combat Mrs. Chump.

Emilia sat by her harp. The saloon was critically still; so still that Adela fancied she heard a faint Irish protest from the parlour. Wilfrid was perhaps the most critical auditor present: for he doubted whether she could renew that singular charm of her singing in the pale lighted woods. The first smooth contralto notes took him captive. He scarcely believed that this could be the raw girl whom his sisters delicately pitied.

A murmur of plaudits, the low thunder of gathering acclamation, went round. Lady Gosstre looked a satisfied, "This will do." Wilfrid saw Emilia's eyes appeal hopefully to Mr. Pericles. The connoisseur shrugged. A pain lodged visibly on her black eyebrows. She gripped her harp, and her eyelids appeared to quiver as she took the notes. Again, and still singing, she turned her head to him. The eyes of Mr. Pericles were white, as if upraised to intercede for her with the Powers of Harmony. Her voice grew unnerved. On a sudden she excited herself to pitch and give volume to that note which had been the enchantment of the night in the woods. It quavered. One might have thought her caught by the throat.

Emilia gazed at no one now. She rose, without a word or an apology, keeping her eyes down.

"Fiasco!" cruelly cried Mr. Pericles.

That was better to her than the silly kindness of the people who deemed it well to encourage her with applause. Emilia could not bear the clapping of hands, and fled.

CHAPTER V

Page 512

The night was warm under a slowly-floating moon. Full of compassion for the poor girl, who had moved him if she had failed in winning the assembly, Wilfrid stepped into the garden, where he expected to find her, and to be the first to pet and console her. Threading the scented shrubs, he came upon a turn in one of the alleys, from which point he had a view of her figure, as she stood near a Portugal laurel on the lawn. Mr. Pericles was by her side. Wilfrid's intention was to join them. A loud sob from Emilia checked his foot.

"You are cruel," he heard her say.

"If it is good, I tell it you; if it is bad; abominable, I tell it you, juste ze same," responded Mr. Pericles.

"The others did not think it very bad."

"Ah! bah!" Mr. Pericles cut her short.

Had they been talking of matters secret and too sweet, Wilfrid would have retired, like a man of honour. As it was, he continued to listen. The tears of his poor little friend, moreover, seemed to hold him there in the hope that he might afford some help.

"Yes; I do not care for the others," she resumed. "You praised me the night I first saw you."

"It is perhaps zat you can sing to z' moon," returned Mr. Pericles. "But, what! a singer, she must sing in a house. To-night it is warm, to-morrow it is cold. If you sing through a cold, what noise do we hear? It is a nose, not a voice. It is a trompet."

Emilia, with a whimpering firmness, replied: "You said I am lazy. I am not."

"Not lazy," Mr. Pericles assented.

"Do I care for praise from people who do not understand music? It is not true. I only like to please them."

"Be a street-organ," Mr. Pericles retorted.

"I must like to see them pleased when I sing," said Emilia desperately.

"And you like ze clap of ze hands. Yez. It is quite natural. Yess. You are a good child, it is clear. But, look. You are a voice uncultivated, sauvage. You go wrong: I hear you: and dese claps of zese noodels send you into squeaks and shrills, and false! false away you go. It is a gallop ze wrong way."

Here Mr. Pericles attempted the most horrible reproduction of Emilia's failure. She cried out as if she had been bitten.

"What am I to do?" she asked sadly.

"Not now," Mr. Pericles answered. "You live in London?—at where?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Certainly, you must tell me."

"But, I am not going there; I mean, not yet."

"You are going to sing to z' moon through z' nose. Yez. For how long?"

"These ladies have asked me to stay with them. They make me so happy. When I leave them—then!"

Emilia sighed.

"And zen?" quoth Mr. Pericles.

"Then, while my money lasts, I shall stay in the country."

"How much money?"

"How much money have I?" Emilia frankly and accurately summed up the condition of her treasury. "Four pounds and nineteen shillings."

Page 513

“Hom! it is spent, and you go to your father again?”

“Yes.”

“To ze old Belloni?”

“My father.”

“No!” cried Mr. Pericles, upon Emilia’s melancholy utterance. He bent to her ear and rapidly spoke, in an undertone, what seemed to be a vivid sketch of a new course of fortune for her. Emilia gave one joyful outcry; and now Wilfrid retreated, questioning within himself whether he should have remained so long. But, as he argued, if he was convinced that the rascally Greek fellow meant mischief to her, was he not bound to employ every stratagem to be her safeguard? The influence of Mr. Pericles already exercised over her was immense and mysterious. Within ten minutes she was singing triumphantly indoors. Wilfrid could hear that her voice was firm and assured. She was singing the song of the woods. He found to his surprise that his heart dropped under some burden, as if he had no longer force to sustain it.

By-and-by some of the members of the company issued forth. Carriages were heard on the gravel, and young men in couples, preparing to light the ensign of happy release from the ladies (or of indemnification for their absence, if you please), strolled about the grounds.

“Did you see that little passage between Laura Tinley and Bella Pole?” said one, and forthwith mimicked them: “Laura commencing:-’We must have her over to us.’ ’I fear we have pre-engaged her.’—’Oh, but you, dear, will do us the favour to come, too?’ ’I fear, dear, our immediate engagements will preclude the possibility.’—’Surely, dear Miss Pole, we may hope that you have not abandoned us?’—’That, my dear Miss Tinley, is out of the question.’—’May we not name a day?’—’If it depends upon us, frankly, we cannot bid you do so.’”

The other joined him in laughter, adding: “‘Frankly’ ’s capital! What absurd creatures women are! How the deuce did you manage to remember it all?”

“My sister was at my elbow. She repeated it, word for word.”

“Pon my honour, women are wonderful creatures!”

The two young men continued their remarks, with a sense of perfect consistency.

Lady Gosstre, as she was being conducted to her carriage, had pronounced aloud that Emilia was decidedly worth hearing.

“She’s better worth knowing,” said Tracy Runningbrook. “I see you are all bent on spoiling her. If you were to sit and talk with her, you would perceive that she’s meant for more than to make a machine of her throat. What a throat it is! She has the most comical notion of things. I fancy I’m looking at the budding of my own brain. She’s a born artist, but I’m afraid everybody’s conspiring to ruin her.”

“Surely,” said Adela, “we shall not do that, if we encourage her in her Art.”

“He means another kind of art,” said Lady Gosstre. “The term ‘artist,’ applied to our sex, signifies ‘Frenchwoman’ with him. He does not allow us to be anything but women. As artists then we are largely privileged, I assure you.”

Page 514

“Are we placed under a professor to learn the art?” Adela inquired, pleased with the subject under such high patronage.

“Each new experience is your accomplished professor,” said Tracy. “One I’ll call Cleopatra a professor: she’s but an illustrious example.”

“Imp! you are corrupt.” With which my lady tapped farewell on his shoulder. Leaning from the carriage window, she said: “I suppose I shall see you at Richford? Merthyr Powys is coming this week. And that reminds me: he would be the man to appreciate your ‘born artist.’ Bring her to me. We will have a dinner. I will despatch a formal invitation to-morrow. The season’s bad out of town for getting decent people to meet you. I will do my best.”

She bowed to Adela and Tracy. Mr. Pole, who had hovered around the unfamiliar dialogue to attend the great lady to the door, here came in for a recognition, and bowed obsequiously to the back of the carriage.

Arabella did not tell her sisters what weapons she had employed to effect the rout of Mrs. Chump. She gravely remarked that the woman had consented to go, and her sisters thanked her. They were mystified by Laura’s non-recognition of Emilia, and only suspected Wilfrid so faintly that they were able to think they did not suspect him at all. On the whole, the evening had been a success. It justified the ladies in repeating a well-known Brookfield phrase: “We may be wrong in many things, but never in our judgement of the merits of any given person.” In the case of Tracy Runningbrook, they had furnished a signal instance of their discernment. Him they had met at the house of a friend of the Tinleys (a Colonel’s wife distantly connected with great houses). The Tinleys laughed at his flaming head and him, but the ladies of Brookfield had ears and eyes for a certain tone and style about him, before they learnt that he was of the blood of dukes, and would be a famous poet. When this was mentioned, after his departure, they had made him theirs, and the Tinleys had no chance. Through Tracy, they achieved their introduction to Lady Gosstre. And now they were to dine with her. They did not say that this was through Emilia. In fact, they felt a little that they had this evening been a sort of background to their prodigy: which was not in the design. Having observed, “She sang deliciously,” they dismissed her, and referred to dresses, gaucheries of members of the company, pretensions here and there, Lady Gosstre’s walk, the way to shuffle men and women, how to start themes for them to converse upon, and so forth. Not Juno and her Court surveying our mortal requirements in divine independence of fatigue, could have been more considerate for the shortcomings of humanity. And while they were legislating this and that for others, they still accepted hints for their own improvement, as those who have Perfection in view may do. Lady Gosstre’s carriage of her shoulders, and general manner, were admitted to be worthy of study.

Page 515

“And did you notice when Laura Tinley interrupted her conversation with Tracy Runningbrook, how quietly she replied to the fact and nothing else, so that Laura had not another word?”—“And did you observe her deference to papa, as host?”—“And did you not see, on more than one occasion, with what consummate ease she would turn a current of dialogue when it had gone far enough?” They had all noticed, seen, and observed. They agreed that there was a quality beyond art, beyond genius, beyond any special cleverness; and that was, the great social quality of taking, as by nature, without assumption, a queenly position in a circle, and making harmony of all the instruments to be found in it. High praise of Lady Gosstre ensued. The ladies of Brookfield allowed themselves to bow to her with the greater humility, owing to the secret sense they nursed of overtopping her still in that ineffable Something which they alone possessed: a casket little people will be wise in not hurrying our Father Time to open for them, if they would continue to enjoy the jewel they suppose it to contain. Finally, these energetic young ladies said their prayers by the morning twitter of the birds, and went to their beds, less from a desire for rest than because custom demanded it.

Three days later Emilia was a resident in the house, receiving lessons in demeanour from Cornelia, and in horsemanship from Wilfrid. She expressed no gratitude for kindnesses or wonder at the change in her fortune, save that pleasure sat like an inextinguishable light on her face. A splendid new harp arrived one day, ticketed, “For Miss Emilia Belloni.”

“He does not know I have a second Christian name,” was her first remark, after an examination of the instrument.

“‘He?’” quoth Adela. “May it not have been a lady’s gift?”

Emilia clearly thought not.

“And to whom do you ascribe it?”

“Who sent it to me? Mr. Pericles, of course.”

She touched the strings immediately, and sighed.

“Are you discontented with the tone, child?” asked Adela.

“No. I—I’ll guess what it cost!”

Surely the ladies had reason to think her commonplace!

She explained herself better to Wilfrid, when he returned to Brookfield after a short absence. Showing the harp, “See what Mr. Pericles thinks me worth!” she said.

“Not more than that?” was his gallant rejoinder. “Does it suit you?”

“Yes; in every way.”

This was all she said about it.

In the morning after breakfast, she sat at harp or piano, and then ran out to gather wild flowers and learn the names of trees and birds. On almost all occasions Wilfrid was her companion. He laughed at the little sisterly revelations the ladies confided concerning her too heartily for them to have any fear that she was other than a toy to him. Few women are aware with how much ease sentimental men can laugh outwardly at what is internal torment. They had

Page 516

apprised him of their wish to know what her origin was, and of her peculiar reserve on that topic: whereat he assured them that she would have no secrets from him. His conduct of affairs was so open that none could have supposed the gallant cornet entangled in a maze of sentiment. For, veritably, this girl was the last sort of girl to please his fancy; and he saw not a little of fair ladies: by virtue of his heroic antecedents, he was himself well seen of them. The gallant cornet adored delicacy and a gilded refinement. The female flower could not be too exquisitely cultivated to satisfy him. And here he was, running after a little unformed girl, who had no care to conceal the fact that she was an animal, nor any notion of the necessity for doing so! He had good reason to laugh when his sisters talked of her. It was not a pleasant note which came from the gallant cornet then. But, in the meadows, or kindly conducting Emilia's horse, he yielded pretty music. Emilia wore Arabella's riding-habit, Adela's hat, and Cornelia's gloves. Politic as the ladies of Brookfield were, they were full of natural kindness; and Wilfrid, albeit a diplomatist, was not yet mature enough to control and guide a very sentimental heart. There was an element of dim imagination in all the family: and it was this that consciously elevated them over the world in prospect, and made them unconsciously subject to what I must call the spell of the poetic power.

Wilfrid in his soul wished that Emilia should date from the day she had entered Brookfield. But at times it seemed to him that a knowledge of her antecedents might relieve him from his ridiculous perplexity of feeling. Besides though her voice struck emotion, she herself was unimpressionable. "Cold by nature," he said; looking at the unkindled fire. She shook hands like a boy. If her fingers were touched and retained, they continued to be fingers for as long as you pleased. Murmurs and whispers passed by her like the breeze. She appeared also to have no enthusiasm for her Art, so that not even there could Wilfrid find common ground. Italy, however, he discovered to be the subject that made her light up. Of Italy he would speak frequently, and with much simulated fervour.

"Mr. Pericles is going to take me there," said Emilia. "He told me to keep it secret. I have no secrets from my friends. I am to learn in the academy at Milan."

"Would you not rather let me take you?"

"Not quite." She shook her head. "No; because you do not understand music as he does. And are you as rich? I cost a great deal of money even for eating alone. But you will be glad when you hear me when I come back. Do you hear that nightingale? It must be a nightingale."

She listened. "What things he makes us feel!"

Bending her head, she walked on silently. Wilfrid, he knew not why, had got a sudden hunger for all the days of her life. He caught her hand and, drawing her to a garden seat, said: "Come; now tell me all about yourself before I knew you. Do you mind?"

Page 517

“I’ll tell you anything you want to hear,” said Emilia.

He enjoined her to begin from the beginning.

“Everything about myself?” she asked.

“Everything. I have your permission to smoke?”

Emilia smiled. “I wish I had some Italian cigars to give you. My father sometimes has plenty given to him.”

Wilfrid did not contemplate his havannah with less favour.

“Now,” said Emilia, taking a last sniff of the flowers before surrendering her nostril to the invading smoke. She looked at the scene fronting her under a blue sky with slow flocks of clouds: “How I like this!” she exclaimed. “I almost forget that I long for Italy, here.”

Beyond a plot of flowers, a gold-green meadow dipped to a ridge of gorse bordered by dark firs and the tips of greenest larches.

CHAPTER VI

“My father is one of the most wonderful men in the whole world!”

Wilfrid lifted an eyelid.

“He is one of the first-violins at the Italian Opera!”

The gallant cornet’s critical appreciation of this impressive announcement was expressed in a spiral ebullition of smoke from his mouth.

“He is such a proud man! And I don’t wonder at that: he has reason to be proud.”

Again Wilfrid lifted an eyelid, and there is no knowing but that ideas of a connection with foreign Counts, Cardinals, and Princes passed hopefully through him.

“Would you believe that he is really the own nephew of Andronizetti!”

“Deuce he is!” said Wilfrid, in a mist. “Which one?”

“The composer!”

Wilfrid emitted more smoke.

“Who composed—how I love him!—that lovely “la, la, la, la,” and the “te-de, ta-da, te-dio,” that pleases you, out of “Il Maladetto.” And I am descended from him! Let me hope I shall not be unworthy of him. You will never tell it till people think as much of me, or nearly. My father says I shall never be so great, because I am half English. It’s not my fault. My mother was English. But I feel that I am much more Italian than English. How I long for Italy—like a thing underground! My father did something against the Austrians, when he was a young man. Would not I have done it? I am sure I would—I don’t know what. Whenever I think of Italy, night or day, pant-pant goes my heart. The name of Italy is my nightingale: I feel that somebody lives that I love, and is ill-treated shamefully, crying out to me for help. My father had to run away to save his life. He was fifteen days lying in the rice-fields to escape from the soldiers—which makes me hate a white coat. There was my father; and at night he used to steal out to one of the villages, where was a good, true woman—so they are, most, in Italy! She gave him food; maize-bread and wine, sometimes meat; sometimes a bottle of good wine. When my father thinks of it he cries, if

Page 518

there is gin smelling near him. At last my father had to stop there day and night. Then that good woman's daughter came to him to keep him from starving; she risked being stripped naked and beaten with rods, to keep my father from starving. When my father speaks of Sandra now, it makes my mother—she does not like it. I am named after her: Emilia Alessandra Belloni. 'Sandra' is short for it. She did not know why I was christened that, and will never call me anything but Emilia, though my father says Sandra, always. My father never speaks of that dear Sandra herself, except when he is tipsy. Once I used to wish him to be tipsy; for then I used to sit at my piano while he talked, and I made all his words go into music. One night I did it so well, my father jumped right up from his chair, shouting "Italia!" and he caught his wig off his head, and threw it into the fire, and rushed out into the street quite bald, and people thought him mad.

"It was the beginning of all our misfortunes! My father was taken and locked up in a place as a tipsy man. That he has never forgiven the English for! It has made me and my mother miserable ever since. My mother is sure it is all since that night. Do you know, I remember, though I was so young, that I felt the music—oh! like a devil in my bosom? Perhaps it was, and it passed out of me into him. Do you think it was?"

Wilfrid answered: "Well, no! I shouldn't think you had anything to do with the devil." Indeed, he was beginning to think her one of the smallest of frocked female essences.

"I lost my piano through it," she went on. "I could not practise. I was the most miserable creature in all the world till I fell in love with my harp. My father would not play to get money. He sat in his chair, and only spoke to ask about meal-time, and we had no money for food, except by selling everything we had. Then my piano went. So then I said to my mother, I will advertize to give lessons, as other people do, and make money for us all, myself. So we paid money for a brass-plate, and our landlady's kind son put it up on the door for nothing, and we waited for pupils to come. I used to pray to the Virgin that she would blessedly send me pupils, for my poor mother's complaints were so shrill and out of tune it's impossible to tell you what I suffered. But by-and-by my father saw the brass-plate. He fell into one of his dreadful passions. We had to buy him another wig. His passions were so expensive: my mother used to say, "There goes our poor dinner out of the window!" But, well! he went to get employment now. He can, always, when he pleases; for such a touch on the violin as my father has, you never heard. You feel yourself from top to toe, when my father plays. I feel as if I breathed music like air. One day came news from Italy, all in the newspaper, of my father's friends and old companions shot and murdered by the Austrians. He read it in the evening, after we had a quiet day.

Page 519

I thought he did not mind it much, for he read it out to us quite quietly; and then he made me sit on his knee and read it out. I cried with rage, and he called to me, 'Sandra! Peace!' and began walking up and down the room, while my mother got the bread and cheese and spread it on the table, for we were beginning to be richer. I saw my father take out his violin. He put it on the cloth and looked at it. Then he took it up, and laid his chin on it like a man full of love, and drew the bow across just once. He whirled away the bow, and knocked down our candle, and in the darkness I heard something snap and break with a hollow sound. When I could see, he had broken it, the neck from the body—the dear old violin! I could cry still. I—I was too late to save it. I saw it broken, and the empty belly, and the loose strings! It was murdering a spirit—-that was! My father sat in a corner one whole week, moping like such an old man! I was nearly dead with my mother's voice. By-and-by we were all silent, for there was nothing to eat. So I said to my mother, "I will earn money." My mother cried. I proposed to take a lodging for myself, all by myself; go there in the morning and return at night, and give lessons, and get money for them. My landlady's good son gave me the brass-plate again. Emilia Alessandra Belloni! I was glad to see my name. I got two pupils very quickly one, an old lady, and one, a young one. The old lady—I mean, she was not grey—wanted a gentleman to marry her, and the landlady told me—I mean my pupil—it makes me laugh—asked him what he thought of her voice: for I had been singing. I earned a great deal of money: two pounds ten shillings a week. I could afford to pay for lessons myself, I thought. What an expense! I had to pay ten shillings for one lesson! Some have to pay twenty; but I would pay it to learn from the best masters;—and I had to make my father and mother live on potatoes, and myself too, of course. If you buy potatoes carefully, they are extremely cheap things to live upon, and make you forget your hunger more than anything else.

"I suppose," added Emilia, "you have never lived upon potatoes entirely? Oh, no!"

Wilfrid gave a quiet negative.

"But I was pining to learn, and was obliged to keep them low. I could pitch any notes, and I was clear but I was always ornamenting, and what I want is to be an accurate singer. My music-master was a German—not an Austrian—oh, no!—I'm sure he was not. At least, I don't think so, for I liked him. He was harsh with me, but sometimes he did stretch his fingers on my head, and turn it round, and say words that I pretended not to think of, though they sent me home burning. I began to compose, and this gentleman tore up the whole sheet in a rage, when I showed it him; but he gave me a dinner, and left off charging me ten shillings—only seven, and then five—and he gave me more time than he gave others. He also did something which I don't know yet whether

Page 520

I can thank him for. He made me know the music of the great German. I used to listen: I could not believe such music could come from a German. He followed me about, telling me I was his slave. For some time I could not sleep. I laughed at myself for composing. He was not an Austrian: but when he was alive he lived in Vienna, the capital of Austria. He ate Austrian bread, and why God gave him such a soul of music I never can think!—Well, by-and-by my father wanted to know what I did in the day, and why they never had anything but potatoes for dinner. My mother came to me, and I told her to say, I took walks. My father said I was an idle girl, and like my mother—who was a slave to work. People are often unjust! So my father said he would watch me. I had to cross the park to give a lesson to a lady who had a husband, and she wanted to sing to him to keep him at home in the evening. I used to pray he might not have much ear for music. One day a gentleman came behind me in the park. He showed me a handkerchief, and asked me if it was mine. I felt for my own and found it in my pocket. He was certain I had dropped it. He looked in the corners for the name, I told him my name—Emilia Alessandra Belloni. He found A.F.G. there. It was a beautiful cambric handkerchief, white and smooth. I told him it must be a gentleman's, as it was so large; but he said he had picked it up close by me, and he could not take it, and I must; and I was obliged to keep it, though I would much rather not. Near the end of the park he left me."

At this point Wilfrid roused up. "You met him the next day near the same place?" he remarked.

She turned to him with astonishment on her features. "How did you know that? How could you know?"

"Sort of thing that generally happens," said Wilfrid.

"Yes; he was there," Emilia slowly pursued, controlling her inclination to question further. "He had forgotten about the handkerchief, for when I saw him, I fancied he might have found the owner. We talked together. He told me he was in the Army, and I spoke of my father's playing and my singing. He was so fond of music that I promised him he should hear us both. He used to examine my hand, and said they were sensitive fingers for playing. I knew that. He had great hopes of me. He said he would give me a box at the Opera, now and then. I was mad with joy; and so delighted to have made a friend. I had never before made a rich friend. I sang to him in the park. His eyes looked beautiful with pleasure. I know I enchanted him."

"How old were you then?" inquired Wilfrid.

"Sixteen. I can sing better now, I know; but I had voice then, and he felt that I had. I forgot where we were, till people stood round us, and he hurried me away from them, and said I must sing to him in some quiet place. I promised to, and he promised he

would have dinner for me at Richmond Hill, in the country, and he would bring friends to hear me."

Page 521

“Go on,” said Wilfrid, rather sharply.

She sighed. “I only saw him once after that. It was such a miserable day! It rained. It was Saturday. I did not expect to find him in the rain; but there he stood, exactly where he had given me the handkerchief. He smiled kindly, as I came up. I dislike gloomy people! His face was always fresh and nice. His moustache reminded me of Italy. I used to think of him under a great warm sky, with olives and vine-trees and mulberries like my father used to speak of. I could have flung my arms about his neck.”

“Did you?” The cornet gave a strangled note.

“Oh, no!” said Emilia seriously. “But I told him how happy the thought of going into the country made me, and that it was almost like going to Italy. He told me he would take me to Italy, if I liked. I could have knelt at his feet. Unfortunately his friends could not come. Still, I was to go, and dine, and float on the water, plucking flowers. I determined to fancy myself in Venice, which is the place my husband must take me to, when I am married to him. I will give him my whole body and soul for his love, when I am there!”

Here the cornet was capable of articulate music for a moment, but it resolved itself into: “Well, well! Yes, go on!”

“I took his arm this time. It gave me my first timid feeling that I remember, and he laughed at me, and drove it quite away, telling me his name: Augustus Frederick what was it? Augustus Frederick—it began with G something. O me! have I really forgotten? Christian names are always easier to remember. A captain he was—a riding one; just like you. I think you are all kind!”

“Extremely,” muttered the ironical cornet. “A.F.G.;—those are the initials on the handkerchief!”

“They are!” cried Emilia. “It must have been his own handkerchief!”

“You have achieved the discovery,” quoth Wilfrid. “He dropped it there overnight, and found it just as you were passing in the morning.”

“That must be impossible,” said Emilia, and dismissed the subject forthwith, in a feminine power of resolve to be blind to it.

“I am afraid,” she took up her narrative, “my father is sometimes really almost mad. He does such things! I had walked under this gentleman’s umbrella to the bridge between the park and the gardens with the sheep, and beautiful flowers in beds. In an instant my father came up right in our faces. He caught hold of my left hand. I thought he wanted to shake it, for he imitates English ways at times, even with us at home, and shakes our hands when he comes in. But he swung me round. He stood looking angrily at this gentleman, and cried ‘Yes! yes!’ to every word he spoke. The gentleman bowed to me,

and asked me to take his umbrella; but I was afraid to; and my father came to me,—oh, Madonna, think of what he did! I saw that his pockets were very big. He snatched out potatoes, and began throwing them as hard as he could throw

Page 522

them at the gentleman, and struck him with some of them. He threw nine large potatoes! I begged him to think of our dinner; but he cried “Yes! it is our dinner we give to your head, vagabond!” in his English. I could not help running up to the gentleman to beg for his pardon. He told me not to cry, and put some potatoes he had been picking up all into my hand. They were muddy, but he wiped them first; and he said it was not the first time he had stood fire, and then said good-bye; and I slipped the potatoes into my pocket immediately, thankful that they were not wasted. My father pulled me away roughly from the laughing and staring people on the bridge. But I knew the potatoes were only bruised. Even three potatoes will prevent you from starving. They were very fine ones, for I always took care to buy them good. When I reached home—”

Wilfrid had risen, and was yawning with a desperate grimace. He bade her continue, and pitched back heavily into his seat.

“When I reached home and could be alone with my mother, she told me my father had been out watching me the day before, and that he had filled his pockets that morning. She thought he was going to walk out in the country and get people on the road to cook them for him. That is what he has done when he was miserable,—to make himself quite miserable, I think, for he loves streets best. Guess my surprise! My mother was making my head ache with her complaints, when, as I drew out the potatoes to show her we had some food, there was a purse at the bottom of my pocket,—a beautiful green purse! O that kind gentleman! He must have put it in my hand with the potatoes that my father flung at him! How I have cried to think that I may never sing to him my best to please him! My mother and I opened the purse eagerly. It had ten pounds in paper money, and five sovereigns, and silver,—I think four shillings. We determined to keep it a secret; and then we thought of the best way of spending it, and decided not to spend it all, but to keep some for when we wanted it dreadfully, and for a lesson or two for me now and then, and a music-score, and perhaps a good violin for my father, and new strings for him and me, and meat dinners now and then, and perhaps a day in the country: for that was always one of my dreams as I watched the clouds flying over London. They seemed to be always coming from happy places and going to happy places, never stopping where I was! I cannot be sorrowful long. You know that song of mine that you like so much—my own composing? It was a song about that kind gentleman. I got words to suit it as well as I could, from a penny paper, but they don’t mean anything that I mean, and they are only words.”

She did not appear to hear the gallant cornet’s denial that he cared particularly for that song.

“What I meant was,—that gentleman speaks—I have fought for Italy; I am an English hero and have fought for Italy, because of an Italian child; but now I am wounded and a prisoner. When you shoot me, cruel Austrians, I shall hear her voice and think of nothing else, so you cannot hurt me.”

Page 523

Emilia turned spitefully on herself at this close. “How I spoil it! My words are always stupid, when I feel.—Well, now my mother and I were quite peaceful, and my father was better fed. One night he brought home a Jew gentleman, beautifully dressed, with diamonds all over him. He sparkled like the Christmas cakes in pastry-cooks” windows. I sang to him, and he made quite a noise about me. But the man made me so uncomfortable, touching my shoulders, and I could not bear his hands, even when he was praising me. I sang to him till the landlady made me leave off, because of the other lodgers who wanted to sleep. He came every evening; and then said I should sing at a concert. It turned out to be a public-house, and my father would not let me go; but I was sorry; for in public the man could not touch me as he did. It damped the voice!”

“I should like to know where that fellow lives,” cried the cornet.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” she said. “He lends money. Do you want any? I heard your sisters say something, one day. You can always have all that I have, you know.”

A quick spirit of pity and honest kindness went through Wilfrid’s veins and threatened to play the woman with his eyes, for a moment. He took her hand and pressed it. She put her lips to his fingers.

“Once,” she continued, “when the Jew gentleman had left, I spoke to my father of his way with me, and then my father took me on his knee, and the things he told me of what that man felt for me made my mother come and tear me away to bed. I was obliged to submit to the Jew gentleman patting and touching me always. He used to crush my dreams afterwards! I know my voice was going. My father was so eager for me to please him, I did my best; but I felt dull, and used to sit and shake my head at my harp, crying; or else I felt like an angry animal, and could have torn the strings.

“Think how astonished I was when my mother came to me to say my father had money in his pockets!—one pound, seventeen shillings, she counted: and he had not been playing! Then he brought home a new violin, and he said to me, ’I shall go; I shall play; I am Orphee, and dinners shall rise!’ I was glad, and kissed him; and he said, ’This is Sandra’s gift to me,’ showing the violin. I only knew what that meant two days afterwards. Is a girl not seventeen fit to be married?”

With this abrupt and singular question she had taken an indignant figure, and her eyes were fiery: so that Wilfrid thought her much fitter than a minute before.

“Married!” she exclaimed. “My mother told me about that. You do not belong to yourself: you are tied down. You are a slave, a drudge; mustn’t dream, mustn’t think! I hate it. By-and-by, I suppose it will happen. Not yet! And yet that man offered to take me to Italy. It was the Jew gentleman. He said I should make money, if he took me, and grow as rich as princesses. He brought a friend to

Page 524

hear me, another Jew gentleman; and he was delighted, and he met me near our door the very next morning, and offered me a ring with blue stones, and he proposed to marry me also, and take me to Italy, if I would give up his friend and choose him instead. This man did not touch me, and, do you know, for some time I really thought I almost, very nearly, might,—if it had not been for his face! It was impossible to go to Italy—yes, to go to heaven! through that face of his! That face of his was just like the pictures of dancing men with animals' hairy legs and hoofs in an old thick poetry book belonging to my mother. Just fancy a nose that seemed to be pecking at great fat red lips! He met me and pressed me to go continually, till all of a sudden up came the first Jew gentleman, and he cried out quite loud in the street that he was being robbed by the other; and they stood and made a noise in the street, and I ran away. But then I heard that my father had borrowed money from the one who came first, and that his violin came from that man; and my father told me the violin would be taken from him, and he would have to go to prison, if I did not marry that man. I went and cried in my mother's arms. I shall never forget her kindness; for though she could never see anybody crying without crying herself, she did not, and was quiet as a mouse, because she knew how her voice hurt me. There's a large print-shop in one of the great streets of London, with coloured views of Italy. I used to go there once, and stand there for I don't know how long, looking at them, and trying to get those Jew gentlemen—"

"Call them Jews—they're not gentlemen," interposed Wilfrid.

"Jews," she obeyed the dictate, "out of my mind. When I saw the views of Italy they danced and grinned up and down the pictures. Oh, horrible! There was no singing for me then. My music died. At last that oldish lady gave up her lessons, and said to me, 'You little rogue! you will do what I do, some day;' for she was going to be married to that young man who thought her voice so much improved; and she paid me three pounds, and gave me one pound more, and some ribbons and gloves. I went at once to my mother, and made her give me five pounds out of the gentleman's purse. I took my harp and music-scores. I did not know where I was going, but only that I could not stop. My mother cried: but she helped to pack my things. If she disobeys me I act my father, and tower over her, and frown, and make her mild. She was such a poor good slave to me that day! but I trusted her no farther than the door. There I kissed her, full of love, and reached the railway. They asked me where I was going, and named places to me: I did not know one. I shut my eyes, and prayed to be directed, and chose Hillford. In the train I was full of music in a moment. There I met farmer Wilson, of the farm near us—where your sisters found me; and he was kind, and asked me about myself; and I mentioned lodgings, and that I longed for woods and meadows. Just as we were getting out of the train, he said I was to come with him; and I did, very gladly. Then I met you; and I am here. All because I prayed to be directed—I do think that!"

Page 525

Emilia clasped her hands, and looked pensively at the horizon sky, with a face of calm gratefulness.

The cornet was on his legs. “So!” he said. “And you never saw anything more of that fellow you kissed in the park?”

“Kissed?—that gentleman?” returned Emilia. “I have not kissed him. He did not want it. Men kiss us when we are happy, and we kiss them when they are unhappy.”

Wilfrid was perhaps incompetent to test the truth of this profound aphoristic remark, delivered with the simplicity of natural conviction. The narrative had, to his thinking, quite released from him his temporary subjection to this little lady’s sway. All that he felt for her personally now was pity. It speaks something for the strength of the sentiment with which he had first conceived her, that it was not pelted to death, and turned to infinite disgust, by her potatoes. For sentiment is a dainty, delicate thing, incapable of bearing much: revengeful, too, when it is outraged. Bruised and disfigured, it stood up still, and fought against them. They were very fine ones, as Emilia said, and they hit him hard. However, he pitied her, and that protected him like a shield. He told his sisters a tale of his own concerning the strange damsel, humorously enough to make them see that he enjoyed her presence as that of no common oddity.

CHAPTER VII

While Emilia was giving Wilfrid her history in the garden, the ladies of Brookfield were holding consultation over a matter which was well calculated to perplex and irritate them excessively. Mr. Pole had received a curious short epistle from Mrs. Chump, informing him of the atrocious treatment she had met with at the hands of his daughter; and instead of reviewing the orthography, incoherence, and deliberate vulgarity of the said piece of writing with the contempt it deserved, he had taken the unwonted course of telling Arabella that she had done a thing she must necessarily repent of, or in any case make apology for. An Eastern Queen, thus addressed by her Minister of the treasury, could not have felt greater indignation. Arabella had never seen her father show such perturbation of mind. He spoke violently and imperiously. The apology was ordered to be despatched by that night’s post, after having been submitted to his inspection. Mr. Pole had uttered mysterious phrases: “You don’t know what you’ve been doing:—You think the ship’ll go on sailing without wind: You’ll drive the horse till he drops,” and such like; together with mutterings. The words were of no import whatsoever to the ladies. They were writings on the wall; untranslateable. But, as when the earth quakes our noble edifices totter, their Palace of the Fine Shades and the Nice Feelings groaned and creaked, and for a moment they thought: “Where are we?” Very soon they concluded, that the speech Arabella had heard was due to their darling papa’s defective education.

Page 526

In the Council of Three, with reference to the letter of apology to Mrs. Chump, Adela proposed, if it pleased Arabella, to fight the battle of the Republic. She was young, and wished both to fight and to lead, as Arabella knew. She was checked. “It must be left to me,” said Arabella.

“Of course you resist, dear?” Cornelia carelessly questioned.

“Assuredly I do.”

“Better humiliation! better anything! better marriage! than to submit in such a case,” cried Adela.

For, so united were the ladies of Brookfield, and so bent on their grand hazy object, that they looked upon married life unfavourably: and they had besides an idea that Wedlock, until ‘late in life’ (the age of thirty, say), was the burial alive of woman intellectual.

Toward midday the ladies put on their garden hats and went into the grounds together, for no particular purpose. Near the West copse they beheld Mr. Pole with Wilfrid and Emilia talking to a strange gentleman. Assuming a proper dignity, they advanced, when, to their horror, Emilia ran up to them crying: “This is Mr. Purcell Barrett, the gentleman who plays the organ at church. I met him in the woods before I knew you. I played for him the other Sunday, and I want you to know him.”

She had hold of Arabella’s hand and was drawing her on. There was no opportunity for retreat. Wilfrid looked as if he had already swallowed the dose. Almost precipitated into the arms of the ladies, Mr. Barrett bowed. He was a tolerably youthful man, as decently attired as old black cloth could help him to be. A sharp inspection satisfied the ladies that his hat and boots were inoffensive: whereupon they gave him the three shades of distance, tempered so as not to wound his susceptible poverty.

The superlative Polar degree appeared to invigorate Mr. Barrett. He devoted his remarks mainly to Cornelia, and cheerfully received her frozen monosyllables in exchange. The ladies talked of Organs and Art, Emilia and Opera. He knew this and that great organ, and all the operas; but he amazed the ladies by talking as if he knew great people likewise. This brought out Mr. Pole, who, since he had purchased Brookfield, had been extinguished by them and had not once thoroughly enjoyed his money’s worth. A courtly poor man was a real pleasure to him.

Giving a semicircular sweep of his arm: “Here you see my little estate, sir,” he said. “You’ve seen plenty bigger in Germany, and England too. We can’t get more than this handful in our tight little island. Unless born to it, of course. Well! we must be grateful that all our nobility don’t go to the dogs. We must preserve our great names. I speak against my own interest.”

He lifted Adela's chin on his forefinger. She kept her eyes demurely downward, and then gazed at her sisters with gravity. These ladies took a view of Mr. Barrett. His features wore an admirable expression of simple interest. "Well, sir; suppose you dine with us to-day?" Mr. Pole bounced out. "Neighbours should be neighbourly."

Page 527

This abrupt invitation was decorously accepted.

“Plain dinner, you know. Nothing like what you get at the tables of those Erzhogs, as you call ’em, over in Germany. Simple fare; sound wine! At all events, it won’t hurt you. You’ll come?”

Mr. Barrett bowed, murmuring thanks. This was the very man Mr. Pole wanted to have at his board occasionally: one who had known great people, and would be thankful for a dinner. He could depreciate himself as a mere wealthy British merchant imposingly before such a man. His daughters had completely cut him off from his cronies; and the sense of restriction, and compression, and that his own house was fast becoming alien territory to him, made him pounce upon the gentlemanly organist. His daughters wondered why he should, in the presence of this stranger, exaggerate his peculiar style of speech. But the worthy merchant’s consciousness of his identity was vanishing under the iron social rule of the ladies. His perishing individuality prompted the inexplicable invitation, and the form of it.

After Mr. Barrett had departed, the ladies ventured to remonstrate with their papa. He at once replied by asking whether the letter to Mrs. Chump had been written; and hearing that it had not, he desired that Arabella should go into the house and compose it straightway. The ladies coloured. To Adela’s astonishment, she found that Arabella had turned. Joining her, she said, “Dearest, what a moment you have lost! We could have stood firm, continually changing the theme from Chump to Barrett, Barrett to Chump, till papa’s head would have twirled. He would have begun to think Mr. Barrett the Irish widow, and Mrs. Chump the organist.”

Arabella rejoined: “Your wit misleads you, darling. I know what I am about. I decline a wordy contest. To approach to a quarrel, or, say dispute, with one’s parent apropos of such a person, is something worse than evil policy, don’t you think?”

So strongly did the sisters admire this delicate way of masking a piece of rank cowardice, that they forgave her. The craven feeling was common to them all, which made it still more difficult to forgive her.

“Of course, we resist?” said Cornelia.

“Undoubtedly.”

“We retire and retire,” Adela remarked. “We waste the royal forces. But, dear me, that makes us insurgents!”

She laughed, being slightly frivolous. Her elders had the proper sentimental worship of youth and its supposed quality of innocence, and caressed her.

At the ringing of the second dinner-bell, Mr. Pole ran to the foot of the stairs and shouted for Arabella, who returned no answer, and was late in her appearance at table. Grace concluded, Mr. Pole said, “Letter gone? I wanted to see it, you know.”

“It was as well not, papa,” Arabella replied.

Page 528

Mr. Pole shook his head seriously. The ladies were thankful for the presence of Mr. Barrett. And lo! this man was in perfect evening uniform. He looked as gentlemanly a visitor as one might wish to see. There was no trace of the poor organist. Poverty seemed rather a gold-edge to his tail-coat than a rebuke to it; just as, contrariwise, great wealth is, to the imagination, really set off by a careless costume. One need not explain how the mind acts in such cases: the fact, as I have put it, is indisputable. And let the young men of our generation mark the present chapter, that they may know the virtue residing in a tail-coat, and cling to it, whether buffeted by the waves, or burnt out by the fire, of evil angry fortune. His tail-coat safe, the youthful Briton is always ready for any change in the mind of the moody Goddess. And it is an almost certain thing that, presuming her to have a damsel of condition in view for him as a compensation for the slaps he has received, he must lose her, he cannot enter a mutual path with her, if he shall have failed to retain this article of a black tail, his social passport. I mean of course that he retain respect for the article in question. Respect for it firmly seated in his mind, the tail may be said to be always handy. It is fortune's uniform in Britain: the candlestick, if I may dare to say so, to the candle; nor need any young islander despair of getting to himself her best gifts, while he has her uniform at command, as glossy as may be.

The ladies of Brookfield were really stormed by Mr. Barrett's elegant tail. When, the first glass of wine nodded over, Mr. Pole continued the discourse of the morning, with allusions to French cooks, and his cook, their sympathies were taken captive by Mr. Barrett's tact: the door to their sympathies having been opened to him as it were by his attire. They could not guess what necessity urged Mr. Pole to assert his locked-up self so vehemently; but it certainly made the stranger shine with a beautiful mild lustre. Their spirits partly succumbed to him by a process too lengthened to explain here. Indeed, I dare do no more than hint at these mysteries of feminine emotion. I beg you to believe that when we are dealing with that wonder, the human heart female, the part played by a tail-coat and a composed demeanour is not insignificant. No doubt the ladies of Brookfield would have rebutted the idea of a tail-coat influencing them in any way as monstrous. But why was it, when Mr. Pole again harped on his cook, in almost similar words, that they were drawn to meet the eyes of the stranger, on whom they printed one of the most fabulously faint fleeting looks imaginable, with a proportionately big meaning for him that might read it? It must have been that this uniform of a tail had laid a basis of equality for the hour, otherwise they never would have done so; nor would he have enjoyed the chance of showing them that he could respond to the remotest mystic indications, with a muffled adroitness equal to their own, and so encouraged them to commence a language leading to intimacy with a rapidity that may well appear magical to the uninitiated. In short, the man really had the language of the very elect of polite society. If you are not versed in this alphabet of mute intelligence, you are in the ranks with waiters and linen-drapers, and are, as far as ladies are concerned, tail-coated to no purpose.

Page 529

Mr. Pole's fresh allusion to his cook: "I hope you don't think I keep a man! No; no; not in the country. Wouldn't do. Plays the deuce, you know. My opinion is, Mrs. Mallow's as clever as any man-cook going. I'd back her:" and Mr. Barrett's speech: "She is an excellent person!" delivered briefly, with no obtrusion of weariness, confirmed the triumph of the latter; a triumph all the greater, that he seemed unconscious of it. They leaped at one bound to the conclusion that there was a romance attached to him. Do not be startled. An attested tail-coat, clearly out of its element, must contain a story: that story must be interesting; until its secret is divulged, the subtle essence of it spreads an aureole around the tail. The ladies declared, in their subsequent midnight conference, that Mr. Barrett was fit for any society. They had visions of a great family reduced; of a proud son choosing to earn his bread honourably and humbly, by turning an exquisite taste to account. Many visions of him they had, and were pleased.

Patronage of those beneath, much more than the courting of those above them, delighted the ladies of Brookfield. They allowed Emilia to give Mr. Barrett invitations, and he became a frequent visitor; always neat, pathetically well-brushed, and a pleasanter pet than Emilia, because he never shocked their niceties. He was an excellent talker, and was very soon engaged in regular contests with the argumentative Cornelia. Their political views were not always the same, as Cornelia sometimes had read the paper before he arrived. Happily, on questions of religion, they coincided. Theories of education occupied them mainly. In these contests Mr. Barrett did not fail to acknowledge his errors, when convicted, and his acknowledgment was hearty and ample. She had many clear triumphs. Still, he could be positive; a very great charm in him. Women cannot repose on a man who is not positive; nor have they much gratification in confounding him. Wouldst thou, man, amorously inclining! attract to thee superior women, be positive. Be stupidly positive, rather than dubious at all. Face fearful questions with a vizor of brass. Array thyself in dogmas. Show thy decisive judgement on the side of established power, or thy enthusiasm in the rebel ranks, if it must be so; but be firm. Waver not. If women could tolerate waverings and weakness, and did not rush to the adoration of decision of mind, we should not behold them turning contemptuously from philosophers in their agony, to find refuge in the arms of smirking orthodoxy. I do not say that Mr. Barrett ventured to play the intelligent Cornelia like a fish; but such a fish was best secured by the method he adopted: that of giving her signal victory in trifles, while on vital matters he held his own.

Page 530

Very pleasant evenings now passed at Brookfield, which were not at all disturbed by the wonder expressed from time to time by Mr. Pole, that he had not heard from Martha, meaning Mrs. Chump. "You have Emilia," the ladies said; this being equivalent to "She is one of that sort;" and Mr. Pole understood it so, and fastened Emilia in one arm, with "Now, a kiss, my dear, and then a toon." Emilia readily gave both. As often as he heard instances of her want of ladylike training, he would say, "Keep her here; we'll better her." Mr. Barrett assisted the ladies to see that there was more in Emilia than even Mr. Pericles had perceived. Her story had become partially known to them; and with two friendly dependents of the household, one a gentleman and the other a genius, they felt that they had really attained a certain eminence, which is a thing to be felt only when we have something under our feet. Flying about with a desperate grip on the extreme skirts of aristocracy, the ladies knew to be the elevation of dependency, not true eminence; and though they admired the kite, they by no means wished to form a part of its tail. They had brains. A circle was what they wanted, and they had not to learn that this is to be found or made only in the liberally-educated class, into the atmosphere of which they pressed like dungeoned plants. The parasite completes the animal, and a dependent assures us of our position. The ladies of Brookfield, therefore, let Emilia cling to them, remarking, that it seemed to be their papa's settled wish that she should reside among them for a time. Consequently, if the indulgence had ever to be regretted, they would not be to blame. In their hearts they were aware that it was Emilia who had obtained for them their first invitation to Lady Gosstre's. Gratitude was not a part of their policy, but when it assisted a recognition of material facts they did not repress it. "And if," they said, "we can succeed in polishing her and toning her, she may have something to thank us for, in the event of her ultimately making a name." That event being of course necessary for the development of so proper a sentiment. Thus the rides with Wilfrid continued, and the sweet quiet evenings when she sang.

CHAPTER VIII

The windows of Brookfield were thrown open to the air of May, and bees wandered into the rooms, gold spots of sunshine danced along the floors. The garden-walks were dazzling, and the ladies went from flower-bed to flower-bed in broad garden hats that were, as an occasional light glance flung at a window-pane assured Adela, becoming. Sunshine had burst on them suddenly, and there was no hat to be found for Emilia, so Wilfrid placed his gold-laced foraging-cap on her head, and the ladies, after a moment's misgiving, allowed her to wear it, and turned to observe her now and then. There was never pertness in Emilia's look, which on the contrary was singularly large and calm when it reposed: perhaps her dramatic instinct prompted her half-jaunty manner of leaning against the sunny corner of the house where the Chinese honeysuckle climbed. She was talking to Wilfrid. Her laughter seemed careless and easy, and in keeping with the Southern litheness of her attitude.

Page 531

“To suit the cap; it’s all to suit the cap,” said Adela, the keen of eye. Yet, critical as was this lady, she acknowledged that it was no mere acting effort to suit the cap.

The philosopher (I would keep him back if I could) bids us mark that the crown and flower of the nervous system, the head, is necessarily sensitive, and to that degree that whatsoever we place on it, does, for a certain period, change and shape us. Of course the instant we call up the forces of the brain, much of the impression departs but what remains is powerful, and fine-nerved. Woman is especially subject to it. A girl may put on her brother’s boots, and they will not affect her spirit strongly; but as soon as she puts on her brother’s hat, she gives him a manly nod. The same philosopher who fathers his dulness on me, asserts that the modern vice or fastness (’Trotting on the Epicene Border,’ he has it) is bred by apparently harmless practices of this description. He offers to turn the current of a Republican’s brain, by resting a coronet on his forehead for just five seconds.

Howsoever these things be, it was true that Emilia’s feet presently crossed, and she was soon to be seen with her right elbow doubled against her head as she leaned to the wall, and the little left fist stuck at her belt. And I maintain that she had no sense at all of acting Spanish prince disguised as page. Nor had she an idea that she was making her friend Wilfrid’s heart perform to her lightest words and actions, like any trained milk-white steed in a circus. Sunlight, as well as Wilfrid’s braided cap, had some magical influence on her. He assured her that she looked a charming boy, and she said, “Do I?” just lifting her chin.

A gardener was shaving the lawn.

“Please, spare those daisies,” cried Emilia. “Why do you cut away daisies?”

The gardener objected that he really must make the lawn smooth. Emilia called to Adela, who came, and hearing the case, said: “Now this is nice of you. I like you to love daisies and wish to protect them. They disfigure a lawn, you know.” And Adela stooped, and picked one, and called it a pet name, and dropped it.

She returned to her sisters in the conservatory, and meeting Mr. Barren at the door, made the incident a topic. “You know how greatly our Emilia rejoices us when she shows sentiment, and our thirst is to direct her to appreciate Nature in its humility as well as its grandeur.”

“One expects her to have all poetical feelings,” said Mr. Barrett, while they walked forth to the lawn sloping to the tufted park grass.

Cornelia said: “You have read Mr. Runningbrook’s story?”

“Yes.”

But the man had not brought it back, and her name was in it, written with her own hand.

“Are you of my opinion in the matter?”

“In the matter of the style? I am and I am not. Your condemnation may be correct in itself; but you say, ‘He coins words’; and he certainly forces the phrase here and there, I must admit. The point to be considered is, whether friction demands a perfectly smooth surface. Undoubtedly a scientific work does, and a philosophical treatise should. When we ask for facts simply, we feel the intrusion of a style. Of fiction it is part. In the one case the classical robe, in the other any mediaeval phantasy of clothing.”

Page 532

“Yes; true;” said Cornelia, hesitating over her argument. “Well, I must conclude that I am not imaginative.”

“On the contrary, permit me to say that you are. But your imagination is unpractised, and asks to be fed with a spoon. We English are more imaginative than most nations.”

“Then, why is it not manifested?”

“We are still fighting against the Puritan element, in literature as elsewhere.”

“Your old bugbear, Mr. Barrett!”

“And more than this: our language is not rich in subtleties for prose. A writer who is not servile and has insight, must coin from his own mint. In poetry we are rich enough; but in prose also we owe everything to the licence our poets have taken in the teeth of critics. Shall I give you examples? It is not necessary. Our simplest prose style is nearer to poetry with us, for this reason, that the poets have made it. Read French poetry. With the first couplet the sails are full, and you have left the shores of prose far behind. Mr. Runningbrook coins words and risks expressions because an imaginative Englishman, pen in hand, is the cadet and vagabond of the family—an exploring adventurer; whereas to a Frenchman it all comes inherited like a well filled purse. The audacity of the French mind, and the French habit of quick social intercourse, have made them nationally far richer in language. Let me add, individually as much poorer. Read their stereotyped descriptions. They all say the same things. They have one big Gallic trumpet. Wonderfully eloquent: we feel that: but the person does not speak. And now, you will be surprised to learn that, notwithstanding what I have said, I should still side with Mr. Runningbrook’s fair critic, rather than with him. The reason is, that the necessity to write as he does is so great that a strong barrier—a chevaux-de-frise of pen points—must be raised against every newly minted word and hazardous coiner, or we shall be inundated. If he can leap the barrier he and his goods must be admitted. So it has been with our greatest, so it must be with the rest of them, or we shall have a Transatlantic literature. By no means desirable, I think. Yet, see: when a piece of Transatlantic slang happens to be tellingly true—something coined from an absolute experience; from a fight with the elements—we cannot resist it: it invades us. In the same way poetic rashness of the right quality enriches the language. I would make it prove its quality.”

Cornelia walked on gravely. His excuse for dilating on the theme, prompted her to say: “You give me new views”: while all her reflections sounded from the depths: “And yet, the man who talks thus is a hired organ-player!”

This recurring thought, more than the cogency of the new views, kept her from combating certain fallacies in them which had struck her.

“Why do you not write yourself, Mr. Barrett?”

“I have not the habit.”

Page 533

“The habit!”

“I have not heard the call.”

“Should it not come from within?”

“And how are we to know it?”

“If it calls to you loudly!”

“Then I know it to be vanity.”

“But the wish to make a name is not vanity.”

“The wish to conceal a name may exist.”

Cornelia took one of those little sly glances at his features which print them on the brain. The melancholy of his words threw a somber hue about him, and she began to think with mournfulness of those firm thin lips fronting misfortune: those sunken blue eyes under its shadow.

They walked up to Mr. Pole, who was standing with Wilfrid and Emilia on the lawn; giving ear to a noise in the distance.

A big drum sounded on the confines of the Brookfield estate. Soon it was seen entering the precincts at one of the principal gates, followed by trombone, and horn, and fife. In the rear trooped a regiment of Sunday-garmented villagers, with a rambling tail of loose-minded boys and girls. Blue and yellow ribands dangled from broad beaver hats, and there were rosettes of the true-blue mingled with yellow at buttonholes; and there was fun on the line of march. Jokes plumped deep into the ribs, and were answered with intelligent vivacity in the shape of hearty thwacks, delivered wherever a surface was favourable: a mode of repartee worthy of general adoption, inasmuch as it can be passed on, and so with certainty made to strike your neighbour as forcibly as yourself: of which felicity of propagation verbal wit cannot always boast. In the line of procession, the hat of a member of the corps shot sheer into the sky from the compressed energy of his brain; for he and all his comrades vociferously denied having cast it up, and no other solution was possible. This mysterious incident may tell you that beer was thus early in the morning abroad. In fact, it was the procession day of a provincial Club-feast or celebration of the nuptials of Beef and Beer; whereof later you shall behold the illustrious offspring.

All the Brookfield household were now upon the lawn, awaiting the attack. Mr. Pole would have liked to impound the impouring host, drum and all, for the audacity of the trespass, and then to have fed them liberally, as a return for the compliment. Aware that

he was being treated to the honours of a great man of the neighbourhood, he determined to take it cheerfully.

“Come; no laughing!” he said, directing a glance at the maids who were ranged behind their mistresses. “’Hem! we must look pleased: we mustn’t mind their music, if they mean well.”

Emilia, whose face was dismally screwed up at the nerve-searching discord, said: “Why do they try to play anything but a drum?”

“In the country, in the country;” Mr. Pole emphasized. “We put up with this kind of thing in the country. Different in town; but we—a—say nothing in the country. We must encourage respect for the gentry, in the country. One of the penalties of a country life. Not much harm in it. New duties in the country.”

Page 534

He continued to speak to himself. In proportion as he grew aware of the unnecessary nervous agitation into which the drum was throwing him, he assumed an air of repose, and said to Wilfrid: “Read the paper to-day?” and to Arabella, “Quiet family dinner, I suppose?”

“Yes, sir,” he remarked to Mr. Barrett, as if resuming an old conversation: “I dare say, you’ve seen better marching in foreign parts. Right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! And not so bad, not so bad, I call it! with their right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! You’ve seen better. No need to tell me that. But, in England, we look to the meaning of things. We’re a practical people. What’s more, we’re volunteers. Volunteers in everything. We can’t make a regiment of ploughmen march like clock-work in a minute; and we don’t want to. But, give me the choice; I’ll back a body of volunteers any day.”

“I would rather be backed by them, sir,” said Mr. Barrett.

“Very good. I mean that. Honest intelligent industry backing rank and wealth! That makes a nation strong. Look at England!”

Mr. Barrett observed him stand out largely, as if filled by the spirit of the big drum.

That instrument now gave a final flourish and bang whereat Sound, as if knocked on the head, died languishingly.

And behold, a spokesman was seen in relief upon a background of grins, that were oddly intermixed with countenances of extraordinary solemnity.

The same commenced his propitiatory remarks by assuring the proprietor of Brookfield that he, the spokesman, and every man present, knew they had taken a liberty in coming upon Squire Pole’s grounds without leave or warning. They knew likewise that Squire Pole excused them.

Chorus of shouts from the divining brethren.

Right glad they were to have such a gentleman as Squire Pole among them: and if nobody gave him a welcome last year, that was not the fault of the Yellow-and-Blues. Eh, my boys?

Groans and cheers.

Right sure was spokesman that Squire Pole was the friend of the poor man, and liked nothing better than to see him enjoy his holiday. As why shouldn’t he enjoy his holiday now and then, and have a bit of relaxation as well as other men?

Acquiescent token on the part of the new dignitary, Squire Pole.

Spokesman was hereby encouraged to put it boldly, whether a man was not a man all the world over.

“For a’ that!” was sung out by some rare bookworm to rearward: but no Scot being present, no frenzy followed the quotation.

It was announced that the Club had come to do homage to Squire Pole and ladies: the Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford. What did Junction mean? Junction meant Harmony. Harmonious they were, to be sure: so they joined to good purpose.

Mr. Barrett sought Emilia’s eyes smilingly, but she was intent on the proceedings.

Page 535

A cry of “Bundle o’ sticks, Tom Breeks. Don’t let slip ‘bout bundle o’ sticks,” pulled spokesman up short. He turned hurriedly to say, “All right,” and inflated his chest to do justice to the illustration of the faggots of Aesop: but Mr. Tom Breeks had either taken in too much air, or the ale that had hitherto successfully prompted him was antipathetic to the nice delicacy of an apologue; for now his arm began to work and his forehead had to be mopped, and he lashed the words “Union and Harmony” right and left, until, coming on a sentence that sounded in his ears like the close of his speech, he stared ahead, with a dim idea that he had missed a point. “Bundle o’ sticks,” lustily shouted, revived his apprehension; but the sole effect was to make him look on the ground and lift his hat on the point of a perplexed finger. He could not conceive how the bundle of sticks was to be brought in now; or what to say concerning them. Union and Harmony:—what more could be said? Mr. Tom Breeks tried a remonstrance with his backers. He declared to them that he had finished, and had brought in the Bundle. They replied that they had not heard it; that the Bundle was the foundation—sentiment of the Club; the first toast, after the Crown; and that he must go on until the Bundle had been brought in. Hereat, the unhappy man faced Squire Pole again. It was too abject a position for an Englishman to endure. Tom Breeks cast his hat to earth. “I’m dashed if I can bring in the bundle!”

There was no telling how conduct like this might have been received by the Yellow-and-Blues if Mr. Barrett had not spoken. “You mean everything when you say “Union,” and you’re quite right not to be tautological. You can’t give such a blow with your fingers as you can with your fists, can you?”

Up went a score of fists. “We’ve the fists: we’ve the fists,” was shouted.

Cornelia, smiling on Mr. Barrett, asked him why he had confused the poor people with the long word “tautological.”

“I threw it as a bone,” said he. “I think you will observe that they are already quieter. They are reflecting on what it signifies, and will by-and-by quarrel as to the spelling of it. At any rate it occupies them.”

Cornelia laughed inwardly, and marked with pain that his own humour gave him no merriment.

At the subsiding of the echoes that coupled Squire Pole and the Junction Club together, Squire Pole replied. He wished them well. He was glad to see them, and sorry he had not ale enough on the premises to regale every man of them. Clubs were great institutions. One fist was stronger than a thousand fingers—“as my friend here said just now.” Hereat the eyelids of Cornelia shed another queenly smile on the happy originator of the remark.

Squire Pole then descended to business. He named the amount of his donation. At this practical sign of his support, heaven heard the gratitude of the good fellows. The drum awoke from its torpor, and summoned its brethren of the band to give their various versions of the National Anthem.

Page 536

“Can’t they be stopped?” Emilia murmured, clenching her little hands.

The patriotic melody, delivered in sturdy democratic fashion, had to be endured. It died hard, but did come to an end, piecemeal. Tom Breeks then retired from the front, and became a unit once more. There were flourishes that indicated a termination of the proceedings, when another fellow was propelled in advance, and he, shuffling and ducking his head, to the cries of “Out wi’ it, Jim!” and, “Where’s your stomach?” came still further forward, and showed a most obsequious grin.

“Why, it’s Jim!” exclaimed Emilia, on whom Jim’s eyes were fastened. Stepping nearer, she said, “Do you want to speak to me?”

Jim had this to say: which, divested of his petition for pardon on the strength of his perfect knowledge that he took a liberty, was, that the young lady had promised, while staying at Wilson’s farm, that she would sing to the Club-fellows on the night of their feast.

“I towl’d ’em they’d have a rare treat, miss,” mumbled Jim, “and they’re all right mad for ’t, that they be—bain’t ye, boys?”

That they were! with not a few of the gesticulations of madness too.

Emilia said: “I promised I would sing to them. I remember it quite well. Of course I will keep my promise.”

A tumult of acclamation welcomed her words, and Jim looked immensely delighted.

She was informed by several voices that they were the Yellow-and-Blues, and not the Blues: that she must not go to the wrong set: and that their booth was on Ipley Common: and that they, the Junction Club, only would honour her rightly for the honour she was going to do them: all of which Emilia said she would bear in mind.

Jim then retired hastily, having done something that stout morning ale would alone have qualified him to perform. The drum, in the noble belief that it was leading, announced the return march, and with three cheers for Squire Pole, and a crowning one for the ladies, away trooped the procession.

CHAPTER IX

Hardly had the last sound of the drum passed out of hearing, when the elastic thunder of a fresh one claimed attention. The truth being, that the Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford, whose colours were yellow and blue, was a seceder from the old-established Hillford Club, on which it had this day shamefully stolen a march by parading everywhere in the place of it, and disputing not only its pasture-grounds but its identity.

There is no instrument the sound of which proclaims such a vast internal satisfaction as the drum. I know not whether it be that the sense we have of the corpulency of this instrument predisposes us to imagine it supremely content: as when an alderman is heard snoring the world is assured that it listens to the voice of its own exceeding gratulation. A light heart in a fat body ravishes not only the

Page 537

world but the philosopher. If monotonous, the one note of the drum is very correct. Like the speaking of great Nature, what it means is implied by the measure. When the drum beats to the measure of a common human pulsation it has a conquering power: inspiring us neither to dance nor to trail the members, but to march as life does, regularly, and in hearty good order, and with a not exhaustive jollity. It is a sacred instrument.

Now the drum which is heard to play in this cheerful fashion, while at the same time we know that discomfiture is cruelly harrying it: that its inmost feelings are wounded, and that worse is in store for it, affects the contemplative mind with an inexpressibly grotesque commiseration. Do but listen to this one, which is the joint corporate voice of the men of Hillford. Outgeneraled, plundered, turned to ridicule, it thumps with unabated briskness. Here indeed might Sentimentalism shed a fertile tear!

Anticipating that it will eventually be hung up among our national symbols, I proceed. The drum of Hillford entered the Brookfield grounds as Ipley had done, and with a similar body of decorated Clubmen; sounding along until it faced the astonished proprietor, who held up his hand and requested to know the purpose of the visit. One sentence of explanation sufficed.

“What!” cried Mr. Pole, “do you think you can milk a cow twice in ten minutes?”

Several of the Hillford men acknowledged that it would be rather sharp work.

Their case was stated: whereupon Mr. Pole told them that he had just been ‘milked,’ and regretted it, but requested them to see that he could not possibly be equal to any second proceeding of the sort. On their turning to consult together, he advised them to bear it with fortitude. “All right, sir!” they said: and a voice from the ranks informed him that their word was ‘Jolly.’ Then a signal was given, and these indomitable fellows cheered the lord of Brookfield as lustily as if they had accomplished the feat of milking him twice in an hour. Their lively hurrahs set him blinking in extreme discomposure of spirit, and he was fumbling at his pocket, when the drum a little precipitately thumped: the ranks fell into order, and the departure was led by the tune of the ’King of the Cannibal islands:’ a tune that is certain to create a chorus on the march. On this occasion, the line:—

“Oh! didn’t you know you were done, sir?”

became general at the winding up of the tune. Boys with their elders frisked as they chimed it, casting an emphasis of infinite relish on the declaration ‘done’; as if they delighted in applying it to Mr. Pole, though at their own expense.

Soon a verse grew up:—

> “We march’d and call’d on Mister Pole,
> Who hadn’t a penny, upon his soul,
> For Ipley came and took the whole,
> And didn’t you know you were done, sir!”

I need not point out to the sagacious that Hillford and not Mr. Pole had been ‘done;’ but this was the genius of the men who transferred the opprobrium to him. Nevertheless, though their manner of welcoming misfortune was such, I, knowing that there was not a deadlier animal than a ‘done’ Briton, have shudders for Ipley.

Page 538

We relinquished the stream of an epic in turning away from these mighty drums.

Mr. Pole stood questioning all who surrounded him: “What could I do? I couldn’t subscribe to both. They don’t expect that of a lord, and I’m a commoner. If these fellows quarrel and split, are we to suffer for it? They can’t agree, and want us to pay double fines. This is how they serve us.”

Mr. Barrett, rather at a loss to account for his excitement, said, that it must be admitted they had borne the trick played upon them, with remarkable good humour.

“Yes, but,” Mr. Pole fumed, “I don’t. They put me in the wrong, between them. They make me uncomfortable. I’ve a good mind to withdraw my subscription to those rascals who came first, and have nothing to do with any of them. Then, you see, down I go for a niggardly fellow. That’s the reputation I get. Nothing of this in London! you make your money, pay your rates, and nobody bothers a man.”

“You should have done as our darling here did, papa,” said Adela. “You should have hinted something that might be construed a promise or not, as we please to read it.”

“If I promise I perform,” returned Mr. Pole.

“Our Hillford people have cause for complaint,” Mr. Barrett observed. And to Emilia: “You will hardly favour one party more than another, will you?”

“I am for that poor man Jim,” said Emilia, “He carried my harp evening after evening, and would not even take sixpence for the trouble.”

“Are you really going to sing there?”

“Didn’t you hear? I promised.”

“To-night?”

“Yes; certainly.”

“Do you know what it is you have promised?”

“To sing.”

Adela glided to her sisters near at hand, and these ladies presently hemmed Emilia in. They had a method of treating matters they did not countenance, as if nature had never conceived them, and such were the monstrous issue of diseased imaginations. It was hard for Emilia to hear that what she designed to do was “utterly out of the question and not to be for one moment thought of.” She reiterated, with the same interpreting stress, that she had given her promise.

“Do you know, I praised you for putting them off so cleverly,” said Adela in tones of gentle reproach that bewildered Emilia.

“Must we remind you, then, that you are bound by a previous promise?” Cornelia made a counter-demonstration with the word. “Have you not promised to dine with us at Lady Gosstre’s to-night?”

“Oh, of course I shall keep that,” replied Emilia. “I intend to. I will sing there, and then I will go and sing to those poor people, who never hear anything but dreadful music—not music at all, but something that seems to tear your flesh!”

“Never mind our flesh,” said Adela pettishly: melodiously remonstrating the next instant: “I really thought you could not be in earnest.”

“But,” said Arabella, “can you find pleasure in wasting your voice and really great capabilities on such people?”

Page 539

Emilia caught her up—“This poor man? But he loves music: he really knows the good from the bad. He never looks proud but when I sing to him.”

The situation was one that Cornelia particularly enjoyed. Here was a low form of intellect to be instructed as to the precise meaning of a word, the nature of a pledge. “There can be no harm that I see, in your singing to this man,” she commenced. “You can bid him come to one of the out-houses here, if you desire, and sing to him. In the evening, after his labour, will be the fit time. But, as your friends, we cannot permit you to demean yourself by going from our house to a public booth, where vulgar men are smoking and drinking beer. I wonder you have the courage to contemplate such an act! You have pledged your word. But if you had pledged your word, child, to swing upon that tree, suspended by your arms, for an hour, could you keep it? I think not; and to recognize an impossibility economizes time and is one of the virtues of a clear understanding. It is incompatible that you should dine with Lady Gosstre, and then run away to a drinking booth. Society will never tolerate one who is familiar with boors. If you are to succeed in life, as we, your friends, can conscientiously say that we most earnestly hope and trust you will do, you must be on good terms with Society. You must! You pledge your word to a piece of folly. Emancipate yourself from it as quickly as possible. Do you see? This is foolish: it, therefore, cannot be. Decide, as a sensible creature.”

At the close of this harangue, Cornelia, who had stooped slightly to deliver it, regained her stately posture, beautified in Mr. Barrett’s sight by the flush which an unwonted exercise in speech had thrown upon her cheeks.

Emilia stood blinking like one sensible of having been chidden in a strange tongue.

“Does it offend you—my going?” she faltered.

“Offend!—our concern is entirely for you,” observed Cornelia.

The explanation drew out a happy sparkle from Emilia’s eyes. She seized her hand, kissed it, and cried: “I do thank you. I know I promised, but indeed I am quite pleased to go!”

Mr. Barrett swung hurriedly round and walked some paces away with his head downward. The ladies remained in a tolerant attitude for a minute or so, silent. They then wheeled with one accord, and Emilia was left to herself.

CHAPTER X

Richford was an easy drive from Brookfield, through lanes of elm and white hawthorn.

Page 540

The ladies never acted so well as when they were in the presence of a fact which they acknowledged, but did not recognize. Albeit constrained to admit that this was the first occasion of their ever being on their way to the dinner-table of a person of quality, they could refuse to look the admission in the face. A peculiar lightness of heart beset them; for brooding ambition is richer in that first realizing step it takes, insignificant though it seem, than in any subsequent achievement. I fear to say that the hearts of the ladies boiled, because visages so sedate, and voices so monotonously indifferent, would witness decidedly against me. The common avoidance of any allusion to Richford testified to the direction of their thoughts; and the absence of a sign of exultation may be accepted as a proof of the magnitude of that happiness of which they might not exhibit a feature. The effort to repress it must have cost them horrible pain. Adela, the youngest of the three, transferred her inward joy to the cottage children, whose staring faces from garden porch and gate flashed by the carriage windows. “How delighted they look!” she exclaimed more than once, and informed her sisters that a country life was surely the next thing to Paradise. “Those children do look so happy!” Thus did the weak one cunningly relieve herself. Arabella occupied her mind by giving Emilia leading hints for conduct in the great house. “On the whole, though there is no harm in your praising particular dishes, as you do at home, it is better in society to say nothing on those subjects until your opinion is asked: and when you speak, it should be as one who passes the subject by. Appreciate flavours, but no dwelling on them! The degrees of an expression of approbation, naturally enough, vary with age. Did my instinct prompt me to the discussion of these themes, I should be allowed greater licence than you.” And here Arabella was unable to resist a little bit of the indulgence Adela had taken: “You are sure to pass a most agreeable evening, and one that you will remember.”

North Pole sat high above such petty consolation; seldom speaking, save just to show that her ideas ranged at liberty, and could be spontaneously sympathetic on selected topics.

Their ceremonious entrance to the state-room of Richford accomplished, the ladies received the greeting of the affable hostess; quietly perturbed, but not enough so to disorder their artistic contemplation of her open actions, choice of phrase, and by-play. Without communication or pre-arrangement, each knew that the other would not let slip the opportunity, and, after the first five minutes of languid general converse; they were mentally at work comparing notes with one another’s imaginary conversations, while they said “Yes,” and “Indeed,” and “I think so,” and appeared to belong to the world about them.

Page 541

“Merthyr, I do you the honour to hand this young lady to your charge,” said Lady Gosstre, putting on equal terms with Emilia a gentleman of perhaps five-and-thirty years; who reminded her of Mr. Barrett, but was unclouded by that look of firm sadness which characterized the poor organist. Mr. Powys was a travelled Welsh squire, Lady Gosstre’s best talker, on whom, as Brookfield learnt to see, she could perfectly rely to preserve the child from any little drawing-room sins or dinner-table misadventures. This gentleman had made sacrifices for the cause of Italy, in money, and, it was said, in blood. He knew the country and loved the people. Brookfield remarked that there was just a foreign tinge in his manner; and that his smile, though social to a degree unknown to the run of English faces, did not give him all to you, and at a second glance seemed plainly to say that he reserved much.

Adela fell to the lot of a hussar-captain: a celebrated beauty, not too foolish. She thought it proper to punish him for his good looks till propitiated by his good temper.

Nobody at Brookfield could remember afterwards who took Arabella down to dinner; she declaring that she had forgotten. Her sisters, not unwilling to see insignificance banished to annihilation, said that it must have been nobody in person, and that he was a very useful guest when ladies were engaged. Cornelia had a different lot. She leaned on the right arm of the Member for Hillford, the statistical debate, Sir Twickenham Pryme, who had twice before, as he ventured to remind her, enjoyed the honour of conversing, if not of dining, with her. Nay, more, he revived their topics. “And I have come round to your way of thinking as regards hustings addresses,” he said. “In nine cases out of ten—at least, nineteen-twentieths of the House will furnish instances—one can only, as you justly observed, appeal to the comprehension of the mob by pledging oneself either to their appetites or passions, and it is better plainly to state the case and put it to them in figures.” Whether the Baronet knew what he was saying is one matter: he knew what he meant.

Wilfrid was cavalier to Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, of Stornley, about ten miles distant from Hillford; ninth daughter of a nobleman who passed current as the Poor Marquis; he having been ruined when almost a boy in Paris, by the late illustrious Lord Dartford. Her sisters had married captains in the army and navy, lawyers, and parsons, impartially. Lady Charlotte was nine-and-twenty years of age; with clear and telling stone-blue eyes, firm but not unsweet lips, slightly hollowed cheeks, and a jaw that certainly tended to be square. Her colour was healthy. Walking or standing her figure was firmly poised. Her chief attraction was a bell-toned laugh, fresh as a meadow spring. She had met Wilfrid once in the hunting-field, so they soon had common ground to run on.

Mr. Powys made Emilia happy by talking to her of Italy, in the intervals of table anecdotes.

Page 542

“Why did you leave it?” she said.

“I found I had more shadows than the one allotted me by nature; and as I was accustomed to a black one, and not half a dozen white, I was fairly frightened out of the country.”

“You mean, Austrians.”

“I do.”

“Do you hate them?”

“Not at all.”

“Then, how can you love the Italians?”

“They themselves have taught me to do both; to love them and not to hate their enemies. Your Italians are the least vindictive of all races of men.”

“Merthyr, Merthyr!” went Lady Gosstre; Lady Charlotte murmuring aloud: “And in the third chapter of the Book of Paradox you will find these words.”

“We afford a practical example and forgive them, do we not?” Mr. Powys smiled at Emilia.

She looked round her, and reddened a little.

“So long as you do not write that Christian word with the point of a stiletto!” said Lady Charlotte.

“You are not mad about the Italians?” Wilfrid addressed her.

“Not mad about anything, I hope. If I am to choose, I prefer the Austrians. A very gentlemanly set of men! At least, so I find them always. Capital horsemen!”

“I will explain to you how it must be,” said Mr. Powys to Emilia. “An artistic people cannot hate long. Hotly for the time, but the oppression gone, and even in the dream of its going, they are too human to be revengeful.”

“Do we understand such very deep things?” said Lady Gosstre, who was near enough to hear clearly.

“Yes: for if I ask her whether she can hate when her mind is given to music, she knows that she cannot. She can love.”

“Yet I think I have heard some Italian operatic spitfires, and of some!” said Lady Charlotte.

“What opinion do you pronounce in this controversy?” Cornelia made appeal to Sir Twickenham.

“There are multitudes of cases,” he began: and took up another end of his statement: “It has been computed that five-and-twenty murders per month to a population...to a population of ninety thousand souls, is a fair reckoning in a Southern latitude.”

“Then we must allow for the latitude?”

“I think so.”

“And also for the space into which the ninety thousand souls are packed,” quoth Tracy Runningbrook.

“Well! well!” went Sir Twickenham.

“The knife is the law to an Italian of the South,” said Mr. Powys. “He distrusts any other, because he never gets it. Where law is established, or tolerably secure, the knife is not used. Duels are rare. There is too much bonhomie for the point of honour.”

“I should like to believe that all men are as just to their mistresses,” Lady Charlotte sighed, mock-earnestly.

Presently Emilia touched the arm of Mr. Powys. She looked agitated. “I want to be told the name of that gentleman.” His eyes were led to rest on the handsome hussar-captain.

Page 543

“Do you know him?”

“But his name!”

“Do me the favour to look at me. Captain Gambier.”

“It is!”

Captain Gambier’s face was resolutely kept in profile to her.

“I hear a rumour,” said Lady Gosstre to Arabella, “that you think of bidding for the Besworth estate. Are you tired of Brookfield?”

“Not tired; but Brookfield is modern, and I confess that Besworth has won my heart.”

“I shall congratulate myself on having you nearer neighbours. Have you many, or any rivals?”

“There is some talk of the Tinleys wishing to purchase it. I cannot see why.”

“What people are they?” asked Lady Charlotte. “Do they hunt?”

“Oh, dear, no! They are to society what Dissenters are to religion. I can’t describe them otherwise.”

“They pass before me in that description,” said Lady Gosstre.

“Besworth’s an excellent centre for hunting,” Lady Charlotte remarked to Wilfrid. “I’ve always had an affection for that place. The house is on gravel; the river has trout; there’s a splendid sweep of grass for the horses to exercise. I think there must be sixteen spare beds. At all events, I know that number can be made up; so that if you’re too poor to live much in London, you can always have your set about you.”

The eyes of the fair economist sparkled as she dwelt on these particular advantages of Besworth.

Richford boasted a show of flowers that might tempt its guests to parade the grounds on balmy evenings. Wilfrid kept by the side of Lady Charlotte. She did not win his taste a bit. Had she been younger, less decided in tone, and without a title, it is very possible that she would have offended his native, secret, and dominating fastidiousness as much as did Emilia. Then, what made him subject at all to her influence, as he felt himself beginning to be? She supplied a deficiency in the youth. He was growing and uncertain: she was set and decisive. In his soul he adored the extreme refinement of woman; even up to the thin edge of inanity (which neighbours what the philosopher could tell him if he would, and would, if it were permitted to him). Nothing was too white,

too saintly, or too misty, for his conception of abstract woman. But the practical wants of our nature guide us best. Conversation with Lady Charlotte seemed to strengthen and ripen him. He blushed with pleasure when she said: "I remember reading your name in the account of that last cavalry charge on the Dewan. You slew a chief, I think. That was creditable, for they are swordmen. Cavalry in Europe can't win much honour—not individual honour, I mean. I suppose being part of a victorious machine is exhilarating. I confess I should not think much of wearing that sort of feather. It's right to do one's duty, comforting to trample down opposition, and agreeable to shed blood, but when you have matched yourself man to man, and beaten—why, then, I dub you knight."

Page 544

Wilfrid bowed, half-laughing, in a luxurious abandonment to his sensations. Possibly because of their rule over him then, the change in him was so instant from flattered delight to vexed perplexity. Rounding one of the rhododendron banks, just as he lifted his head from that acknowledgment of the lady's commendation, he had sight of Emilia with her hand in the hand of Captain Gambier. What could it mean? what right had he to hold her hand? Even if he knew her, what right?

The words between Emilia and Captain Gambier were few.

"Why did I not look at you during dinner?" said he. "Was it not better to wait till we could meet?"

"Then you will walk with me and talk to me all the evening?"

"No: but I will try and come down here next week and meet you again."

"Are you going to-night?"

"Yes."

"To-night? To-night before it strikes a quarter to ten, I am going to leave here alone. If you would come with me! I want a companion. I know they will not hurt me, but I don't like being alone. I have given my promise to sing to some poor people. My friends say I must not go. I must go. I can't break a promise to poor people. And you have never heard me really sing my best. Come with me, and I will."

Captain Gambier required certain explanations. He saw that a companion and protection would be needed by his curious little friend, and as she was resolved not to break her word, he engaged to take her in the carriage that was to drive him to the station.

"You make me give up an appointment in town," he said.

"Ah, but you will hear me sing," returned Emilia. "We will drive to Brookfield and get my harp, and then to Ipley Common. I am to be sure you will be ready with the carriage at just a quarter to ten?"

The Captain gave her his assurance, and they separated; he to seek out Adela, she to wander about, the calmest of conspirators against the serenity of a household.

Meeting Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte, Emilia was asked by him, who it was she had quitted so abruptly.

"That is the gentleman I told you of. Now I know his name. It is Captain Gambier."

She was allowed to pass on.

“What is this she says?” Lady Charlotte asked.

“It appears...something about a meeting somewhere accidentally, in the park, in London, I think; I really don’t know. She had forgotten his name.”

Lady Charlotte spurred him with an interrogative “Yes?”

“She wanted to remember his name. That’s all. He was kind to her.”

“But, after all,” remonstrated Lady Charlotte, “that’s only a characteristic of young men, is it not? no special distinction. You are all kind to girls, to women, to anything!”

Captain Gambier and Adela crossed their path. He spoke a passing word, Lady Charlotte returned no answer, and was silent to her companion for some minutes. Then she said, “If you feel any responsibility about this little person, take my advice, and don’t let her have appointments and meetings. They’re bad in any case, and for a girl who has no brother—has she? no:—well then, you should make the best provision you can against the cowardice of men. Most men are cowards.”

Page 545

Emilia sang in the drawing-room. Brookfield knew perfectly why she looked indifferent to the plaudits, and was not dissatisfied at hearing Lady Gosstre say that she was a little below the mark. The kindly lady brought Emilia between herself and Mr. Powys, saying, “I don’t intend to let you be the star of the evening and outshine us all.” After which, conversation commenced, and Brookfield had reason to admire her ladyship’s practised play upon the social instrument, surely the grandest of all, the chords being men and women. Consider what an accomplishment this is!

Albeit Brookfield knew itself a student at Richford, Adela was of too impatient a wit to refrain from little ventures toward independence, if not rivalry. “What we do,” she uttered distinctively once or twice. Among other things she spoke of “our discovery,” to attest her declaration that, to wakeful eyes, neither Hillford nor any other place on earth was dull. Cornelia flushed at hearing the name of Mr. Barrett pronounced publicly by her sister.

“An organist an accomplished man!” Lady Gosstre repeated Adela’s words. “Well, I suppose it is possible, but it rather upsets one’s notions, does it not?”

“Yes, but agreeably,” said Adela, with boldness; and related how he had been introduced, and hinted that he was going to be patronized.

“The man cannot maintain himself on the income that sort of office brings him,” Lady Gosstre observed.

“Oh, no,” said Adela. “I fancy he does it simply for some sort of occupation. One cannot help imagining a disguise.”

“Personally I confess to an objection to gentlemen in disguise,” said Lady Gosstre. “Barrett!—do you know the man?”

She addressed Mr. Powys.

“There used to be good quartett evenings given by the Barretts of Bursey,” he said. “Sir Justinian Barrett married a Miss Purcell, who subsequently preferred the musical accomplishments of a foreign professor of the Art.”

“Purcell Barrett is his name,” said Adela. “Our Emilia brought him to us. Where is she? But, where can she be?”

Adela rose.

“She pressed my hand just now,” said Lady Gosstre.

“She was here when Captain Gambler quitted the room,” Arabella remarked.

“Good heaven!”

The exclamation came from Adela.

“Oh, Lady Gosstre! I fear to tell you what I think she has done.”

The scene of the rival Clubs was hurriedly related, together with the preposterous pledge given by Emilia, that she would sing at the Ipley Booth: “Among those dreadful men!”

“They will treat her respectfully,” said Mr. Powys.

“Worship her, I should imagine, Merthyr,” said Lady Gosstre. “For all that, she had better be away. Beer is not a respectful spirit.”

“I trust you will pardon her,” Arabella pleaded. “Everything that explanations of the impropriety of such a thing could do, we have done. We thought that at last we had convinced her. She is quite untamed.”

Page 546

Mr. Powys now asked where this place was that she had hurried to.

The unhappy ladies of Brookfield, quick as they were to read every sign surrounding them, were for the moment too completely thrown off their balance by Emilia's extraordinary exhibition of will, to see that no reflex of her shameful and hideous proceeding had really fallen upon them. Their exclamations were increasing, until Adela, who had been the noisiest, suddenly adopted Lady Gosstre's tone. "If she has gone, I suppose she must be simply fetched away."

"Do you see what has happened?" Lady Charlotte murmured to Wilfrid, between a phrase.

He stumbled over a little piece of gallantry.

"Excellent! But, say those things in French.—Your dark-eyed maid has eloped. She left the room five minutes after Captain Gambier."

Wilfrid sprang to his feet, looking eagerly to the corners of the room.

"Pardon me," he said, and moved up to Lady Gosstre. On the way he questioned himself why his heart should be beating at such a pace. Standing at her ladyship's feet, he could scarcely speak.

"Yes, Wilfrid; go after her," said Adela, divining his object.

"By all means go," added Lady Gosstre. "Now she is there, you may as well let her keep her promise; and then hurry her home. They will saddle you a horse down below, if you care to have one."

Wilfrid thanked her ladyship, and declined the horse. He was soon walking rapidly under a rough sky in the direction of Ipley, with no firm thought that he would find Emilia there.

CHAPTER XI

At half-past nine of the clock on the evening of this memorable day, a body of five-and-twenty stout young fellows, prize-winners, wrestlers, boxers, and topers, of the Hillford Club, set forth on a march to Ipley Common.

Now, a foreigner, hearing of their destination and the provocation they had endured, would have supposed that they were bent upon deeds of vengeance; and it requires knowledge of our countrymen to take it as a fact that the idea and aim of the expedition were simply to furnish the offending Ipley boys a little music. Such were the idea and the aim. Hillford had nothing to do with consequences: no more than our England is

responsible when she sails out among the empires and hemispheres, saying, ‘buy’ and ‘sell,’ and they clamour to be eaten up entire. Foreigners pertinaciously misunderstand us. They have the barbarous habit of judging by results. Let us know ourselves better. It is melancholy to contemplate the intrigues, and vile designs, and vengeances of other nations; and still more so, after we have written so many pages of intelligible history, to see them attributed to us. Will it never be perceived that we do not sow the thing that happens? The source of the flooding stream which drinks up those rich acres of low flat land is not more innocent than we. If,

Page 547

as does seem possible, we are in a sort of alliance with Destiny, we have signed no compact, and accomplish our work as solidly and merrily as a wood-hatchet in the hands of the woodman. This arrangement to give Ipley a little music, was projected as a return for the favours of the morning: nor have I in my time heard anything comparable to it in charity of sentiment, when I consider the detestable outrage Hillford suffered under.

The parading of the drum, the trombone, a horn, two whistles, and a fife, in front of Hillford booth, caught the fancy of the Clubmen, who roared out parting adjurations that the music was not to be spared; and that Tom Breeks was a musical fellow, with a fine empty pate, if any one of the instruments should fail perchance. They were to give Ipley plenty of music: for Ipley wanted to be taught harmony. Harmony was Ipley's weak point. "Gie 'em," said one jolly ruddy Hillford man, "gie 'em whack fol, lol!" And he smacked himself, and set toward an invisible partner. Nor, as recent renowned historians have proved, are observations of this nature beneath the dignity of chronicle. They vindicate, as they localize, the sincerity of Hillford.

Really, to be an islander full of ale, is to be the kindest creature on or off two legs. For that very reason, it may be, his wrath at bad blood is so easily aroused. In our hot moods we would desire things like unto ourselves, and object violently to whatsoever is unlike. And also we desire that the benefits we shed be appreciated. If Ipley understands neither our music nor our intent, haply we must hold a performance on the impenetrable sconce of Ipley.

At the hour named, the expedition, with many a promise that the music should be sweet, departed hilariously: Will Burdock, the left-handed cricketer and hard-hitter, being leader; with Peter Bartholomew, potboy, John Girling, miller's man, and Ned Thewk, gardener's assistant, for lieutenants. On the march, silence was proclaimed, and partially enforced, after two fights against authority. Near the sign of King William's Head, General Burdock called a halt, and betrayed irresolution with reference to the route to be adopted; but as none of his troop could at all share such a condition of mind in the neighbourhood of an inn, he was permitted to debate peacefully with his lieutenants, while the rest burst through the doors and hailed the landlord: a proceeding he was quickly induced to imitate. Thus, when the tail shows strongest decision of purpose, the head must follow.

An accurate oinometer, or method of determining what shall be the condition of the spirit of man according to the degrees of wine or beer in him, were surely of priceless service to us. For now must we, to be certain of our sanity and dignity, abstain, which is to clip, impoverish, imprison the soul: or else, taking wings of wine, we go aloft over capes, and islands, and seas, but are even as balloons that cannot make for any line, and are at the mercy of

Page 548

the winds—without a choice, save to come down by virtue of a collapse. Could we say to ourselves, in the great style, This is the point where desire to embrace humanity is merged in vindictiveness toward individuals: where radiant sweet temper culminates in tremendous wrath: where the treasures of anticipation, waxing riotous, arouse the memory of wrongs: in plain words, could we know positively, and from the hand of science, when we have had enough, we should stop. There is not a doubt that we should stop. It is so true we should stop, that, I am ready to say, ladies have no right to call us horrid names, and complain of us, till they have helped us to some such trustworthy scientific instrument as this which I have called for. In its absence, I am persuaded that the true natural oinometer is the hat. Were the hat always worn during potation; were ladies when they retire to place it on our heads, or, better still, chaplets of flowers; then, like the wise ancients, we should be able to tell to a nicety how far we had advanced in our dithyramb to the theme of fuddle and muddle. Unhappily the hat does not forewarn: it is simply indicative. I believe, nevertheless, that science might set to work upon it forthwith, and found a system. When you mark men drinking who wear their hats, and those hats are seen gradually beginning to hang on the backs of their heads, as from pegs, in the fashion of a fez, the bald projection of forehead looks jolly and frank: distrust that sign: the may-fly of the soul is then about to be gobbled up by the chub of the passions. A hat worn fez-fashion is a dangerous hat. A hat on the brows shows a man who can take more, but thinks he will go home instead, and does so, peaceably. That is his determination. He may look like Macduff, but he is a lamb. The vinous reverses the non-vinous passionate expression of the hat. If I am discredited, I appeal to history, which tells us that the hats of the Hillford five-and-twenty were all exceedingly hind-ward-set when the march was resumed. It followed that Peter Bartholomew, potboy, made irritable objections to that old joke which finished his name as though it were a cat calling, and the offence being repeated, he dealt an impartial swing of his stick at divers heads, and told them to take that, which they assured him they had done by sending him flying into a hedge. Peter, being reprimanded by his commanding officer, acknowledged a hot desire to try his mettle, and the latter responsible person had to be restrained from granting the wish he cherished by John Girling, whom he threw for his trouble and as Burdock was the soundest hitter, numbers cried out against Girling, revolting him with a sense of overwhelming injustice that could be appeased only by his prostrating two stout lads and squaring against a third, who came up from a cross-road. This one knocked him down with the gentleness of a fist that knows how Beer should be treated, and then sang out, in the voice of Wilfrid Pole: “Which is the nearest way to Ipley, you fellows?”

Page 549

“Come along with us, sir, and we’ll show you,” said Burdock.

“Are you going there?”

“Well, that’s pretty clear.”

“Hillford men, are you?”

“We’ve left the women behind.”

“I’m in a hurry, so, good night.”

“And so are we in a hurry, sir. But, you’re a gentleman, and we want to give them chaps at Ipley a little surprise, d’ye see, in the way of a dollop o’ music: and if you won’t go givin’ ’em warning, you may trot; and that road’ll take you.”

“All right,” said Wilfrid, now fairly divided between his jealousy of Gambier and anxiety for Emilia.

Could her artist nature, of which he had heard perplexing talk, excuse her and make her heart absolutely guiltless (what he called ’innocent’), in trusting herself to any man’s honour? I regret to say that the dainty adorers of the sex are even thus grossly suspicious of all women when their sentiment is ever so triflingly offended.

Lights on Ipley Common were seen from a rise of the hilly road. The moon was climbing through drifts of torn black cloud. Hastening his pace, for a double reason now, Wilfrid had the booth within hearing, listened a moment; and then stood fast. His unconscious gasp of the words: “Thank God; there she is!” might have betrayed him to another.

She was sitting near one end of the booth, singing as Wilfrid had never yet heard her sing: her dark eyes flashing. Behind her stood Captain Gambier, keeping guard with all the composure of a gentleman-usher at a royal presentation. Along the tables, men and women were ranged facing her; open-mouthed, some of them but for the most part wearing a predetermined expression of applausive judgement, as who should say, “Queer, but good.” They gave Emilia their faces, which was all she wanted! and silence, save for an intermingling soft snore, here and there, the elfin trumpet of silence. To tell truth, certain heads had bowed low to the majesty of beer, and were down on the table between sprawling doubled arms. No essay on the power of beer could exhibit it more convincingly than, the happy indifference with which they received admonishing blows from quart-pots, salutes from hot pipe-bowls, pricks from pipe-ends, on nose, and cheek, and pate; as if to vindicate for their beloved beverage a right to rank with that old classic drink wherewith the fairest of women vanquished human ills. The majority, however, had been snatched out of this bliss by the intrusion of their wives, who sat beside them like Consciences in petticoats; and it must be said that Emilia was in favour

with the married men, for one reason, because she gave these broad-ribboned ladies a good excuse for allowing their lords to stop where they were so comfortable, a continually-extending five minutes longer.

Page 550

Yet, though the words were foreign and the style of the song and the singer were strange, many of the older fellows' eyes twinkled, and their mouths pursed with a kind of half-protesting pleasure. All were reverent to the compliment paid them by Emilia's presence. The general expression was much like that seen when the popular ear is given to the national anthem. Wilfrid hung at the opening of the booth, a cynical spectator. For what on earth made her throw such energy, and glory of music, into a song before fellows like these? He laughed dolorously, "she hasn't a particle of any sense of ridicule," he said to himself. Forthwith her voice took hold of him, and led him as heroes of old were led unwillingly into enchanted woods. If she had been singing things holy, a hymn, a hallelujah, in this company, it struck him that somehow it would have seemed appropriate; not objectionable; at any rate, not ridiculous. Dr. Watts would have put a girdle about her; but a song of romance sung in this atmosphere of pipes and beer and boozy heads, chagrined Wilfrid in proportion as the softer half of him began to succumb to the deliciousness of her voice.

Emilia may have had some warning sense that admiration is only one ingredient of homage, that to make it fast and true affection must be won. Now, poor people, yokels, clods, cannot love what is incomprehensible to them. An idol must have their attributes: a king must show his face now and then: a song must appeal to their intelligence, to subdue them quite. This, as we know, is not the case in the higher circles. Emilia may have divined it: possibly from the very great respect with which her finale was greeted. Vigorous as the "Brayvos" were, they sounded abashed: they lacked abandonment. In fact, it was gratitude that applauded, and not enthusiasm. "Hillford don't hear stuff like that, do 'em?" which was the main verbal encomium passed, may be taken testificatorily as to this point.

"Dame! dame!" cried Emilia, finding her way quickly to one of the more decently-bonneted women; "am I not glad to see you here! Did I please you? And you, dear Farmer Wilson? I caught sight of you just as I was finishing. I remember the song you like, and I want to sing it. I know the tune, but the words! the words! what are the words? Humming won't do."

"Ah, now!" quoth Farmer Wilson, pointing out the end of his pipe, "that's what they'll swallow down; that's the song to make 'em kick. Sing that, miss. Furrin songs 's all right enough; but 'Ale it is my tipple, and England is my nation!' Let's have something plain and flat on the surface, miss."

Page 551

Dame Wilson jogged her husband's arm, to make him remember that talking was his dangerous pastime, and sent abroad a petition for a song-book; and after a space a very doggy-eared book, resembling a poodle of that genus, was handed to her. Then uprose a shout for this song and that; but Emilia fixed upon the one she had in view, and walked back to her harp, with her head bent, perusing it attentively all the way. There, she gave the book to Captain Gambier, and begged him to hold it open before her, with a passing light of eyes likely to be rather disturbing to a jealous spectator. The Captain seized the book without wincing, and displayed a remarkable equanimity of countenance as he held it out, according to direction. No sooner had Emilia struck a prelude of the well-known air, than the interior of the booth was transfigured; legs began to move, elbows jerked upward, fingers fillipped: the whole body of them were ready to duck and bow, dance, and do her bidding she had fairly caught their hearts. For, besides the pleasure they had in their own familiar tune, it was wonderful to them that Emilia should know what they knew. This was the marvel, this the inspiration. She smiled to see how true she had struck, and seemed to swim on the pleasure she excited. Once, as her voice dropped, she looked up at Captain Gambier, so very archly, with the curving line of her bare throat, that Wilfrid was dragged down from his cynical observatory, and made to feel as a common man among them all.

At the "thrum-thrum" on the harp-strings, which wound up the song, frenzied shouts were raised for a repetition. Emilia was perfectly willing to gratify them; Captain Gambier appeared to be remonstrating with her, but she put up her joined hands, mock-petitioningly, and he with great affability held out the book anew. Wilfrid was thinking of moving to her to take her forcibly away when she recommenced.

At the same instant—but who, knowing that a house of glass is about to be shattered, can refrain from admiring its glitter in the beams?—Ipley crooned a ready accompaniment: the sleepers had been awakened: the women and the men were alive, half-dancing, half-chorusing here a baby was tossed, and there an old fellow's elbow worked mutely, expressive of the rollicking gaiety within him: the whole length of the booth was in a pleasing simmer, ready to overboil with shouts humane and cheerful, while Emilia pitched her note and led; archly, and quite one with them all, and yet in a way that critical Wilfrid could not object to, so plainly did she sing to give happiness.

I cannot delay; but I request you, that are here privileged to soar aloft with the Muse, to fix your minds upon one point in this flight. Let not the heat and dust of the ensuing fray divert your attention from the magnanimity of Beer. It will be vindicated in the end but be worthy of your seat beside the Muse, who alone of us all can take one view of the inevitable two that perplex mortal judgements.

Page 552

For, if Ipley had jumped jovially up, and met the Hillford alarum with laughter,—how then? Why, then I maintain that the magnanimity of Beer would have blazed effulgent on the spot: there would have been louder laughter and fraternal greetings. As it was, the fire on the altar of Wisdom was again kindled by Folly, and the steps to the altar were broken heads, after the antique fashion.

In dismay, Ipley started. The members of the Club stared. Emilia faltered in horror.

A moment her voice swam stemming the execrable concert, but it was overwhelmed. Wilfrid pressed forward to her. They could hear nothing but the din. The booth raged like an insurgent menagerie. Outside it sounded of brazen beasts, and beasts that whistled, beasts that boomed. A whirlwind huddled them, and at last a cry, “We’ve got a visit from Hillford,” told a tale. At once the stoutest hearts pressed to the opening. “My harp!” Emilia made her voice reach Wilfrid’s ear. Unprovided with weapons, Ipley parleyed. Hillford howled in reply. The trombone brayed an interminable note, that would have driven to madness quiescent cats by steaming kettles, and quick, like the springing pulse of battle, the drum thumped and thumped. Blood could not hear it and keep from boiling. The booth shook violently. Wilfrid and Gambier threw over half-a-dozen chairs, forms, and tables, to make a barrier for the protection of the women.

“Come,” Wilfrid said to Emilia, “leave the harp, I will get you another. Come.”

“No, no,” she cried in her nervous fright.

“For God’s sake, come!” he reiterated, she, stamping her foot, as to emphasize “No! no! no!”

“But I will buy you another harp;” he made audible to her through the hubbub.

“This one!” she gasped with her hand on it. “What will he think if he finds that I forsook it?”

Wilfrid knew her to allude to the unknown person who had given it to her.

“There—there,” said he. “I sent it, and I can get you another. So, come. Be good, and come.”

“It was you!”

Emilia looked at him. She seemed to have no senses for the uproar about her.

But now the outer barricade was broken through, and the rout pressed on the second line. Tom Breeks, the orator, and Jim, transformed from a lurching yokel to a lithe dog of battle, kept the retreat of Ipley, challenging any two of Hillford to settle the dispute. Captain Gambier attempted an authoritative parley, in the midst of which a Hillford man

made a long arm and struck Emilia's harp, till the strings jarred loose and horrid. The noise would have been enough to irritate Wilfrid beyond endurance. When he saw the fellow continuing to strike the harp-frame while Emilia clutched it, in a feeble defence, against her bosom, he caught a thick stick from a neighbouring hand and knocked that Hillford man so clean to earth that Hillford murmured at the blow. Wilfrid then joined the front array.

Page 553

“Half-a-dozen hits like that a-piece, sir,” nodded Tom Breeks.

“There goes another!” Jim shouted.

“Not quite, my lad,” interposed Ned Thewk, though Peter Bartholomew was reeling in confirmation.

His blow at Jim missed, but came sharply in the swing on Wilfrid’s cheek-bone.

Maddened at the immediate vision of that feature swollen, purple, even as a plum with an assiduous fly on it, certifying to ripeness:—Says the philosopher, “We are never up to the mark of any position, if we are in a position beneath our own mark;” and it is true that no hero in conflict should think of his face, but Wilfrid was all the while protesting wrathfully against the folly of his having set foot in such a place:—Maddened, I say, Wilfrid, a keen swordman, cleared a space. John Girling fell to him: Ned Thewk fell to him, and the sconce of Will Burdock rang.

“A rascally absurd business!” said Gambier, letting his stick do the part of a damnatory verb on one of the enemy, while he added, “The drunken vagabonds!”

All the Hillford party were now in the booth. Ipley, meantime, was not sleeping. Farmer Wilson and a set of the Ipley men whom age had sagaciously instructed to prefer stratagem to force, had slipped outside, and were labouring as busily as their comrades within: stooping to the tent-pegs, sending emissaries to the tent-poles.

“Drunk!” roared Will Burdock. “Did you happen to say ‘drunk?’” And looking all the while at Gambier, he, with infernal cunning, swung at Wilfrid’s fated cheekbone. The latter rushed furiously into the press of them, and there was a charge from Ipley, and a lock, from which Wilfrid extricated himself to hurry off Emilia. He perceived that bad blood was boiling up.

“Forward!” cried Will Burdock, and Hillford in turn made a tide.

As they came on in numbers too great for Ipley to stand against, an obscuration fell over all. The fight paused. Then a sensation as of some fellows smoothing their polls and their cheeks, and leaning on their shoulders with obtrusive affection, inspirited them to lash about indiscriminately. Whoops and yells arose; then peals of laughter. Homage to the cleverness of Ipley was paid in hurrahs, the moment Hillford understood the stratagem by which its men of valour were lamed and imprisoned. The truth was, that the booth was down on them, and they were struggling entangled in an enormous bag of canvas.

Wilfrid drew Emilia from under the drooping folds of the tent. He was allowed, on inspection of features, to pass. The men of Hillford were captured one by one like wild geese, as with difficulty they emerged, roaring, rolling with laughter, all.

Yea; to such an extent did they laugh that they can scarce be said to have done less than make the joke of the foe their own. And this proves the great and amazing magnanimity of Beer.

CHAPTER XII

Page 554

A pillar of dim silver rain fronted the moon on the hills. Emilia walked hurriedly, with her head bent, like a penitent: now and then peeping up and breathing to the keen scent of the tender ferns. Wilfrid still grasped her hand, and led her across the common, away from the rout.

When the uproar behind them had sunk, he said “You’ll get your feet wet. I’m sorry you should have to walk. How did you come here?”

She answered: “I forget.”

“You must have come here in some conveyance. Did you walk?”

Again she answered: “I forget;” a little querulously; perhaps wilfully.

“Well!” he persisted: “You must have got your harp to this place by some means or other?”

“Yes, my harp!” a sob checked her voice.

Wilfrid tried to soothe her. “Never mind the harp. It’s easily replaced.”

“Not that one!” she moaned.

“We will get you another.”

“I shall never love any but that.”

“Perhaps we may hear good news of it to-morrow.”

“No; for I felt it die in my hands. The third blow was the one that killed it. It’s broken.”

Wilfrid could not reproach her, and he had not any desire to preach. So, as no idea of having done amiss in coming to the booth to sing illumined her, and she yet knew that she was in some way guilty, she accused herself of disregard for that dear harp while it was brilliant and serviceable. “Now I remember what poor music I made of it! I touched it with cold fingers. The sound was thin, as if it had no heart. Tick-tick!—I fancy I touched it with a dead man’s finger-nails.”

She crossed her wrists tight at the clasp of her waist, and letting her chin fall on her throat, shook her body fretfully, much as a pettish little girl might do. Wilfrid grimaced. “Tick-tick” was not a pathetic elegy in his ears.

“The only thing is, not to think about it,” said he. “It’s only an instrument, after all.”

“It’s the second one I’ve seen killed like a living creature,” replied Emilia.

They walked on silently, till Wilfrid remarked, that he wondered where Gambier was. She gave no heed to the name. The little quiet footing and the bowed head by his side, moved him to entreat her not to be unhappy. Her voice had another tone when she answered that she was not unhappy.

“No tears at all?” Wilfrid stooped to get a close view of her face. “I thought I saw one. If it’s about the harp, look!—you shall go into that cottage where the light is, sit there, and wait for me, and I will bring you what remains of it. I dare say we can have it mended.”

Emilia lifted her eyes. “I am not crying for the harp. If you go back I must go with you.”

“That’s out of the question. You must never be found in that sort of place again.”

“Let us leave the harp,” she murmured. “You cannot go without me. Let me sit here for a minute. Sit with me.”

Page 555

She pointed to a place beside herself on the fork of a dry log under flowering hawthorn. A pale shadowy blue centre of light among the clouds told where the moon was. Rain had ceased, and the refreshed earth smelt all of flowers, as if each breeze going by held a nosegay to their nostrils.

Wilfrid was sensible of a sudden marked change in her. His blood was quicker than his brain in feeling it. Her voice now, even in common speaking, had that vibrating richness which in her singing swept his nerves.

“If you cry, there must be a cause, you know,” he said, for the sake of keeping the conversation in a safe channel.

“How brave you are!” was Emilia’s sedate exclamation, in reply.

Her cheeks glowed, as if she had just uttered a great confession, but while the colour mounted to her eyes, they kept their affectionate intentness upon him without a quiver of the lids.

“Do you think me a coward?” she relieved him by asking sharply, like one whom the thought had turned into a darker path. “I am not. I hung my head while you were fighting, because, what could I do? I would not have left you. Girls can only say, ‘I will perish with him.’”

“But,” Wilfrid tried to laugh, “there was no necessity for that sort of devotion. What are you thinking of? It was half in good-humour, all through. Part of their fun!”

Clearly Emilia’s conception of the recent fray was unchangeable.

“And the place for girls is at home; that’s certain,” he added.

“I should always like to be where...” Her voice flowed on with singular gravity to that stop.

Wilfrid’s hand travelled mechanically to his pricking cheek-bone.

Was it possible that a love-scene was coming on as a pendant to that monstrously ridiculous affair of half-an-hour back? To know that she had sufficient sensibility was gratifying, and flattering that it aimed at him. She was really a darling little woman: only too absurd! Had she been on the point of saying that she would always like to be where he, Wilfrid, was? An odd touch of curiosity, peculiar to the languid emotions, made him ask her this: and to her soft “Yes,” he continued briskly, and in the style of condescending fellowship: “Of course we’re not going to part!”

“I wonder,” said Emilia.

There she sat, evidently sounding right through the future with her young brain, to hear what Destiny might have to say.

The ‘I wonder’ rang sweetly in his head. It was as delicate a way of confessing, “I love you with all my soul,” as could be imagined. Extremely refined young ladies could hardly have improved upon it, saving with the angelic shades of sentiment familiar to them.

Convinced that he had now heard enough for his vanity, Wilfrid returned emphatically to the tone of the world’s highroad.

“By the way,” he said, “you mustn’t have any exaggerated idea of this night’s work. Remember, also, I have to share the honours with Captain Gambier.”

Page 556

“I did not see him,” said Emilia.

“Are you not cold?” he asked, for a diversion, though he had one of her hands.

She gave him the other.

He could not quit them abruptly: nor could he hold both without being drawn to her.

“What is it you say?” Wilfrid whispered: “men kiss us when we are happy. Is that right? and are you happy?”

She lifted a clear full face, to which he bent his mouth. Over the flowering hawthorn the moon stood like a windblown white rose of the heavens. The kiss was given and taken. Strange to tell, it was he who drew away from it almost bashfully, and with new feelings.

Quite unaware that he played the feminine part, Wilfrid alluded to her flight from Richford, with the instinct to sting his heart by a revival of his jealous sensations previously experienced, and so taste the luxury of present satisfaction.

“Why did you run away from me?” he said, semi-reproachfully.

“I promised.”

“Would you not break a promise to stay with me?”

“Now I would!”

“You promised Captain Gambier?”

“No: those poor people.”

“You are sorry that you went?”

No: she was happy.

“You have lost your harp by it,” said Wilfrid.

“What do you think of me for not guessing—not knowing who sent it?” she returned. “I feel guilty of something all those days that I touched it, not thinking of you. Wicked, filthy little creature that I was! I despise ungrateful girls.”

“I detest anything that has to do with gratitude,” Wilfrid appended, “pray give me none. Why did you go away with Captain Gambier?”

“I was very fond of him,” she replied unhesitatingly, but speaking as it were with numbed lips. “I wanted to tell him, to thank him and hold his hand. I told him of my promise. He

spoke to me a moment in the garden, you know. He said he was leaving to go to London early, and would wait for me in the carriage: then we might talk. He did not wish to talk to me in the garden."

"And you went with him in the carriage, and told him you were so grateful?"

"Yes; but men do not like us to be grateful."

"So, he said he would do all sorts of things on condition that you were not grateful?"

"He said—yes: I forget: I do forget! How can I tell what he said?" Emilia added piteously. "I feel as if I had been emptied out of a sack!"

Wilfrid was pierced with laughter; and then the plainspoken simile gave him a chilling sensation while he was rising to the jealous pitch.

"Did he talk about taking you to Italy? Put your head into the sack, and think!"

"Yes," she answered blandly, an affirmative that caused him some astonishment, for he had struck at once to the farthest end of his suspicions.

"He feels as I do about the Italian Schools," said Emilia. "He wishes me to owe my learning to him. He says it will make him happy, and I thought so too." She threw in a "then."

Page 557

Wilfrid looked moodily into the opposite hedge.

“Did he name the day for your going?” he asked presently, little anticipating another “Yes”: but it came: and her rather faltering manner showed her to be conscious too that the word was getting to be a black one to him.

“Did you say you would go?”

“I did.”

Question and answer crossed like two rapiers.

Wilfrid jumped up.

“The smell of this tree’s detestable,” he said, glancing at the shadowing hawthorn.

Emilia rose quietly, plucked a flower off the tree, and put it in her bosom.

Their way was down a green lane and across long meadow-paths dim in the moonlight. A nightingale was heard on this side and on that. Overhead they had a great space of sky with broken cloud full of the glory of the moon. The meadows dipped to a brook, slenderly spanned by a plank. Then there was an ascent through a cornfield to a copse. Rounding this they had sight of Brookfield. But while they were yet at the brook, Wilfrid said, “When is it you’re going to Italy?”

In return he had an eager look, so that he was half-ashamed to add, “With Captain Gambier, I mean.” He was suffering, and by being brutal he expected to draw balm on himself; nor was he deceived.

Emilia just then gave him her hand to be led over, and answered, as she neared him, “I am never to leave you.”

“You never shall!” Wilfrid caught her in his arms, quite conquered by her, proud of her. He reflected with a loving rapture that her manner at that moment was equal to any lady’s; and the phantom of her with her hand out, and her frank look, and trustful footing, while she spoke those words, kept on advancing to him all the way to Brookfield, at the same time that the sober reality murmured at his elbow.

Love, with his accustomed cunning, managed thus to lift her out of the mire and array her in his golden dress to idealize her, as we say. Reconciled for the hour were the contesting instincts in the nature of this youth the adoration of feminine refinement and the susceptibility to sensuous impressions. But Emilia walked with a hero: the dream of all her days! one, generous and gentle, as well as brave: who had fought for her, had thought of her tenderly, was with her now, having raised her to his level with a touch! How much might they not accomplish together: he with sword, she with harp? Through

shadowy alleys in the clouds, Emilia saw the bright Italian plains opening out to her: the cities of marble, such as her imagination had fashioned them, porticos of stately palaces, and towers, and statues white among cypresses; and farther, minutely-radiant in the vista as a shining star, Venice of the sea. Fancy made the flying minutes hours. Now they marched with the regiments of Italy, under the folds of her free banner; now she sang to the victorious army, waving the banner over them; and now she floated in a gondola, and turning to him, the dear home of her heart, yet pale with the bleeding of his wound for Italy, said softly, in the tone that had power with him, “Only let me please you!”

Page 558

“When? Where? What with?” came the blunt response from England, with electric speed, and Emilia fell from the clouds.

“I meant my singing; I thought of how I sang to you. Oh, happy time!” she exclaimed, to cut through the mist of vision in her mind.

“To me? down at the booth?” muttered Wilfrid, perplexed.

“Oh, no! I mean, just now—” and languid with the burden of so full a heart, she did not attempt to explain herself further, though he said, invitingly, “I thought I heard you humming?”

Then he was seized with a desire to have the force of her spirit upon him, for Brookfield was in view; and with the sight of Brookfield, the natural fascination waxed a shade fainter, and he feared it might be going. This (he was happily as ignorant as any other youth of the working of his machinery) prompted him to bid her sing before they parted. Emilia checked her steps at once to do as he desired. Her throat filled, but the voice quavered down again, like a fainting creature sick unto death. She made another effort and ended with a sorrowful look at his narrowly-watching eyes.

“I can’t,” she said; and, in fear of his anger, took his hand to beg forgiveness, while her eyelids drooped.

Wilfrid locked her fingers in a strong pressure, and walked on, silent as a man who has faced one of the veiled mysteries of life. It struck a full human blow on his heart, dragging him out of his sentimental pastures precipitately. He felt her fainting voice to be the intensest love-cry that could be uttered. The sound of it coursed through his blood, striking a rare illumination of sparks in his not commonly brilliant brain. In truth, that little episode showed an image of nature weak with the burden of new love. I do not charge the young cavalry officer with the power of perceiving images. He saw no more than that she could not sing because of what was in her heart toward him; but such a physical revelation was a divine love-confession, coming involuntarily from one whose lips had not formed the name of love; and Wilfrid felt it so deeply, that the exquisite flattery was almost lost, in a certain awed sense of his being in the presence of an absolute fact: a thing real, though it was much talked about, and visible, though it did not wear a hat or a petticoat.

It searched him thoroughly enough to keep him from any further pledges in that direction, propitious as the moment was, while the moon slipped over banks of marble into fields of blue, and all the midnight promised silence. They passed quickly through the laurel shrubs, and round the lawn. Lights were in the sleepless ladies’ bed-room windows.

“Do I love her?” thought Wilfrid, as he was about to pull at the bell, and the thought that he should feel pain at being separated from her for half-a-dozen hours, persuaded him that he did. The self-restraint which withheld him from protesting that he did, confirmed it.

Page 559

“To-morrow morning,” he whispered.

“I shall be down by daylight,” answered Emilia.

“You are in the shade—I cannot see you,” said he.

The door opened as Emilia was moving out of the line of shadow.

CHAPTER XIII

On the morrow Wilfrid was gone. No one had seen him go. Emilia, while she touched the keys of a muted piano softly in the morning quiet of the house, had heard the front-door close. At that hour one attributes every noise to the servants. She played on and waited patiently, till the housemaid expelled her into the dewy air.

The report from his bedchamber, telling the ladies of his absence, added that he had taken linen for a lengthened journey.

This curious retreat of my hero belongs to the order of things that are done ‘None know why;’ a curtain which drops conveniently upon either the bewilderment of the showman or the infirmities of the puppet.

I must own (though I need not be told what odium frowns on such a pretension to excess of cleverness) that I do know why. I know why, and, unfortunately for me, I have to tell what I know. If I do not tell, this narrative is so constituted that there will be no moral to it.

One who studies man in puppets (in which purpose lies the chief value of this amusing species), must think that we are degenerating rapidly. The puppet hero, for instance, is a changed being. We know what he was; but now he takes shelter in his wits. His organs affect his destiny. Careless of the fact that the hero’s achievement is to conquer nature, he seems rather to boast of his subservience to her.

Still, up to this day, the fixture of a nose upon the puppet-hero’s frontispiece has not been attempted. Some one does it at last. When the alternative came: “No nose to the hero, no moral to the tale;” could there be hesitation?

And I would warn our sentimentalists to admit the nose among the features proper to heroes, otherwise the race will become extinct. There is already an amount of dropping of the curtain that is positively wearisome, even to extremely refined persons, in order to save him from apparent misconduct. He will have to go altogether, unless we boldly figure him as other men. Manifestly the moment his career as a fairy prince was at end, he was on the high road to a nose. The beneficent Power that discriminated for him having vanished utterly, he was, like a bankrupt gentleman, obliged to do all the work for

himself. This is nothing more than the tendency of the generations downward from the ideal.

The springs that moved Wilfrid upon the present occasion were simple. We will strip him of his heroic trappings for one fleeting instant, and show them.

Page 560

Jumping briskly from a restless bed, his first act was to address his features to the looking-glass: and he saw surely the most glorious sight for a hero of the knightly age that could possibly have been offered. The battle of the previous night was written there in one eloquent big lump, which would have passed him current as hero from end to end of the land in the great days of old. These are the tea-table days. His preference was for the visage of Wilfrid Pole, which he saw not. At the aspect of the fearful mask, this young man stared, and then cursed; and then, by an odd transition, he was reminded, as by the force of a sudden gust, that Emilia's hair was redolent of pipe-smoke.

His remark was, "I can't be seen in this state." His thought (a dim reminiscence of poetical readings): "Ambrosial locks indeed!" A sad irony, which told that much gold-leaf had peeled away from her image in his heart.

Wilfrid was a gallant fellow, with good stuff in him. But, he was young. Ponder on that pregnant word, for you are about to see him grow. He was less a coxcomb than shamefaced and sentimental; and one may have these qualities, and be a coxcomb to boot, and yet be a gallant fellow. One may also be a gallant fellow, and harsh, exacting, double-dealing, and I know not what besides, in youth. The question asked by nature is, "Has he the heart to take and keep an impression?" For, if he has, circumstances will force him on and carve the figure of a brave man out of that mass of contradictions. In return for such benefits, he pays forfeit commonly of the dearest of the things prized by him in this terrestrial life. Whereat, albeit created man by her, he reproaches nature, and the sculptor, circumstance; forgetting that to make him man is their sole duty, and that what betrayed him was the difficulty thrown in their way by his quondam self—the pleasant boonfellow!

He forgets, in fact, that he was formerly led by his nose, and sacrificed his deeper feeling to a low disgust.

When the youth is called upon to look up, he can adore devoutly and ardently; but when it is his chance to look down on a fair head, he is, if not worse, a sentimental despot.

Wilfrid was young, and under the dominion of his senses; which can be, if the sentimentalists will believe me, as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined as when ultra-bestial. He made a good stout effort to resist the pipe-smoke. Emilia's voice, her growing beauty, her simplicity, her peculiar charms of feature, were all conjured up to combat the dismal images suggested by that fatal, dragging-down smell. It was vain. Horrible pipe-smoke pervaded the memory of her. It seemed to his offended dainty fancy that he could never dissociate her from smoking-booths and abominably bad tobacco; and, let us add (for this was part of the secret), that it never could dwell on her without the companionship of a hideous disfigured countenance, claiming to be Wilfrid Pole. He

Page 561

shuddered to think that he had virtually almost engaged himself to this girl. Or, had he? Was his honour bound? Distance appeared to answer the question favourably. There was safety in being distant from her. She possessed an incomprehensible attractiveness. She was at once powerful and pitiable: so that while he feared her, and was running from her spell, he said, from time to time, “Poor little thing!” and deeply hoped she would not be unhappy.

A showman once (a novice in his art, or ambitious beyond the mark), after a successful exhibition of his dolls, handed them to the company, with the observation, “satisfy yourselves, ladies and gentlemen.” The latter, having satisfied themselves that the capacity of the lower limbs was extraordinary, returned them, disenchanted. That showman did ill. But I am not imitating him. I do not wait till after the performance, when it is too late to revive illusion. To avoid having to drop the curtain, I choose to explain an act on which the story hinges, while it is advancing: which is, in truth, an impulse of character. Instead of his being more of a puppet, this hero is less wooden than he was. Certainly I am much more in awe of him.

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Pole was one of those men whose characters are read off at a glance. He was neat, insignificant, and nervously cheerful; with the eyes of a bird, that let you into no interior. His friends knew him thoroughly. His daughters were never in doubt about him. At the period of the purchase of Brookfield he had been excitable and feverish, but that was ascribed to the projected change in his habits, and the stern necessity for an occasional family intercommunication on the subject of money. He had a remarkable shyness of this theme, and reversed its general treatment; for he would pay, but would not talk of it. If it had to be discussed with the ladies, he puffed, and blinked, and looked so much like a culprit that, though they rather admired him for what seemed to them the germ of a sense delicate above his condition, they would have said of any man they had not known so perfectly, that he had painful reasons for wishing to avoid it. Now that they spoke to him of Besworth, assuring him that they were serious in their desire to change their residence, the fit of shyness was manifested, first in outrageous praise of Brookfield, which was speedily and inexplicably followed by a sort of implied assent to the proposition to depart from it. For Besworth displayed numerous advantages over Brookfield, and to contest one was to plunge headlong into the money question. He ventured to ask his daughters what good they expected from the change. They replied that it was simply this: that one might live fifty years at Brookfield and not get such a circle as in two might be established at Besworth. They were restricted. They had gathering friends, and no means of bringing them together. And the beauty of the site of Besworth made them enthusiastic.

Page 562

“Well, but,” said Mr. Pole: “what does it lead to? Is there nothing to come after?”

He explained: “You’re girls, you know. You won’t always stop with me. You may do just as well at Brookfield for yourselves, as over there.”

The ladies blushed demurely.

“You forecast very kindly for us, papa,” said Cornelia. “Our object is entirely different.”

“I wish I could see it,” he returned.

“But, you do see, papa, you do see,” interposed Adela, “that a select life is preferable to that higgledy-piggledy city-square existence so many poor creatures are condemned to!”

“Select!” said Mr. Pole, thinking that he had hit upon a weakness in their argument; “how can it be select when you want to go to a place where you may have a crowd about you?”

“Selection can only be made from a crowd,” remarked Arabella, with terrible placidity. “It is where we see few that we are at the mercy of kind fortune for our acquaintances.”

“Don’t you see, papa, that the difference between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is, that the former choose their sets, and the latter are obliged to take what comes to them?” said Adela.

This was the first domestic discussion upon Besworth. The visit to Richford had produced the usual effect on the ladies, who were now looking to other heights from that level. The ladies said: “We have only to press it with papa, and we shall quit this place.” But at the second discussion they found that they had not advanced. The only change was in the emphasis that their father added to the interrogations already uttered. “What does it lead to? What’s to come after? I see your object. But, am I to go into a new house for the sake of getting you out of it, and then be left there alone? It’s against your interests, too. Never mind how. Leave that to a business man. If your brother had proposed it...but he’s too reasonable.”

The ladies, upon this hint, wrote to Wilfrid to obtain his concurrence and assistance. He laughed when he read the simple sentence: “We hope you will not fancy that we have any peculiar personal interest in view;” and replied to them that he was sure they had none: that he looked upon Besworth with favour, “and I may inform you,” he pursued, “that your taste is heartily applauded by Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, she bids me tell you.” The letter was dated from Stornley, the estate of the marquis, Lady Charlotte’s father. Her ladyship’s brother was a member of Wilfrid’s Club. “He calls Besworth the most habitable place in the county, and promises to be there as many months out of the twelve as you like to have him. I agree with him that Stornley can’t hold a candle to it.

There are three residences in England that might be preferred to it, and, of those, two are ducal.”

Page 563

The letter was a piece of that easy diplomacy which comes from habit. The “of those, two are ducal,” was masterly. It affected the imagination of Brookfield. “Which two?” And could Besworth be brought to rival them? Ultimately, it might be! The neighbourhood to London, too, gave it noble advantages. Rapid relays of guests, and a metropolitan reputation for country attractions, would distinguish Besworth above most English houses. A house where all the chief celebrities might be encountered: a house under suave feminine rule; a house, a home, to a chosen set, and a refreshing fountain to a widening circle!

“We have a dispute,” they wrote playfully to Wilfrid “a dispute we wish you or Lady Charlotte to settle. I, Arabella, know nothing of trout. I, Cornelia, know nothing of river-beds. I, Adela, know nothing of engineering. But, we are persuaded, the latter, that the river running for a mile through Besworth grounds may be deepened: we are persuaded, the intermediate, that the attempt will damage the channel: we are persuaded, the first, that all the fish will go.”

In reply, Wilfrid appeared to have taken them in earnest. “I rode over yesterday with Lady Charlotte,” he said. “We think something might be done, without at all endangering the fish or spoiling the channel. At all events, the idea of making the mile of broad water serviceable for boats is too good to give up in a hurry. How about the dining-hall? I told Lady Charlotte you were sure to insist upon a balcony for musicians. She laughed. You will like her when you know her.”

Thus the ladies of Brookfield were led on to be more serious concerning Besworth than they had thought of being, and began to feel that their honour was pledged to purchase this surpassing family seat. In a household where every want is supplied, and money as a topic utterly banished, it is not surprising that they should have had imperial views.

Adela was Wilfrid’s favoured correspondent. She described to him gaily the struggle with their papa. “But, if you care for Besworth, you may calculate on it.—Or is it only for our sakes, as I sometimes think?—Besworth is won. Nothing but the cost of the place (to be considered you know!) could withhold it from us; and of that papa has not uttered a syllable, though he conjures up every possible objection to a change of abode, and will not (perhaps, poor dear, cannot) see what we intend doing in the world. Now, you know that rich men invariably make the question of the cost their first and loudest outcry. I know that to be the case. They call it their blood. Papa seems indifferent to this part of the affair. He does not even allude to it. Still, we do not progress. It is just possible that the Tinleys have an eye on beautiful Besworth. Their own place is bad enough, but good enough for them. Give them Besworth, and they will sit upon the neighbourhood. We shall be invaded by everything that is mean and low, and a great chance will be gone for us. I think I may say, for the county. The country? Our advice is, that you write to papa one of your cleverest letters. We know, darling, what you can do with the pen as well as the sword. Write word that you have written.”

Page 564

Wilfrid's reply stated that he considered it unadviseable that he should add his voice to the request, for the present.

The ladies submitted to this quietly until they heard from their father one evening at dinner that he had seen Wilfrid in the city.

"He doesn't waste his time like some young people I know," said Mr. Pole, with a wink.

"Papa; is it possible?" cried Adela.

"Everything's possible, my dear."

"Lady Charlotte?"

"There is a Lady Charlotte."

"Who would be Lady Charlotte still, whatever occurred!"

Mr. Pole laughed. "No, no. You get nothing out of me. All I say is, be practical. The sun isn't always shining."

He appeared to be elated with some secret good news.

"Have you been over to Besworth, the last two or three days?" he asked.

The ladies smiled radiantly, acknowledging Wilfrid's wonderful persuasive powers, in their hearts.

"No, papa; we have not been," said Adela. "We are always anxious to go, as I think you know."

The merchant chirped over his glass. "Well, well! There's a way."

"Straight?"

"Over a gate; ha, ha!"

His gaiety would have been perplexing, but for the allusion to Lady Charlotte.

The sisters, in their unfailing midnight consultation, persuaded one another that Wilfrid had become engaged to that lady. They wrote forthwith Fine Shades to him on the subject. His answer was Boeotian, and all about Besworth. "Press it now," he said, "if you really want it. The iron is hot. And above all things, let me beg you not to be inconsiderate to the squire, when he and I are doing all we can for you. I mean, we are bound to consider him, if there should happen to be anything he wishes us to do."

What could the word ‘inconsiderate’ imply? The ladies were unable to summon an idea to solve it. They were sure that no daughters could be more perfectly considerate and ready to sacrifice everything to their father. In the end, they deputed the volunteering Adela to sit with him in the library, and put the question of Besworth decisively, in the name of all. They, meantime, who had a contempt for sleep, waited aloft to hold debate over the result of the interview.

An hour after midnight, Adela came to them, looking pale and uncertain: her curls seeming to drip, and her blue eyes wandering about the room, as if she had seen a thing that kept her in a quiver between belief and doubt.

The two ladies drew near to her, expressing no verbal impatience, from which the habit of government and great views naturally saved them, but singularly curious.

Adela’s first exclamation: “I wish I had not gone,” alarmed them.

“Has any change come to papa?” breathed Arabella.

Cornelia smiled. “Do you not know him too well?”

An acute glance from Adela made her ask whether Besworth was to be surrendered.

Page 565

“Oh, no! my dear. We may have Besworth.”

“Then, surely!”

“But, there are conditions?” said Arabella.

“Yes. Wilfrid’s enigma is explained. Bella, that woman has seen papa.”

“What woman?”

“Mrs. Chump.”

“She has our permission to see him in town, if that is any consolation to her.”

“She has told him,” continued Adela, “that no explanation, or whatever it may be, was received by her.”

“Certainly not, if it was not sent.”

“Papa,” and Adela’s voice trembled, “papa will not think of Besworth,—not a word of it!-until—until we consent to welcome that woman here as our guest.”

Cornelia was the first to break the silence that followed this astounding intelligence. “Then,” she said, “Besworth is not to be thought of. You told him so?”

Adela’s head drooped. “Oh!” she cried, “what shall we do? We shall be a laughing-stock to the neighbourhood. The house will have to be locked up. We shall live like hermits worried by a demon. Her brogue! Do you remember it? It is not simply Irish. It’s Irish steeped in brine. It’s pickled Irish!”

She feigned the bursting into tears of real vexation.

“You speak,” said Cornelia contemptuously, “as if we had very humbly bowed our heads to the infection.”

“Papa making terms with us!” murmured Arabella.

“Pray, repeat his words.”

Adela tossed her curls. “I will, as well as I can. I began by speaking of Besworth cheerfully; saying, that if he really had no strong affection for Brookfield, that would make him regret quitting it, we saw innumerable advantages in the change of residence proposed. Predilection,—not affection—that was what I said. He replied that Besworth was a large place, and I pointed out that therein lay one of its principal merits. I expected what would come. He alluded to the possibility of our changing our condition.

You know that idea haunts him. I told him our opinion of the folly of the thing. I noticed that he grew red in the face, and I said that of course marriage was a thing ordained, but that we objected to being submerged in matrimony until we knew who and what we were. I confess he did not make a bad reply, of its kind. ‘You’re like a youngster playing truant that he may gain knowledge.’ What do you think of it?”

“A smart piece of City-speech,” was Arabella’s remark: Cornelia placidly observing, “Vulgarity never contains more than a minimum of the truth.”

“I said,” Adela went on, “Think as you will, papa, we know we are right.” He looked really angry. He said, that we have the absurdest ideas—you tell me to repeat his words—of any girls that ever existed; and then he put a question: listen: I give it without comment: ’I dare say, you all object to widows marrying again.’ I kept myself quiet. ’Marrying again, papa! If they marry once they might as well marry a dozen

Page 566

times.’ It was the best way to irritate him. I did not intend it; that is all I can say. He jumped from his chair, rubbed his hair, and almost ran up and down the library floor, telling me that I prevaricated. ’You object to a widow marrying at all—that’s my question!’ he cried out loud. Of course I contained my voice all the more. ‘Distinctly, papa.’ When I had spoken, I could scarcely help laughing. He went like a pony that is being broken in, crying, I don’t know how many times, ‘Why? What’s your reason?’ You may suppose, darlings, that I decline to enter upon explanation. If a person is dense upon a matter of pure sentiment, there is no ground between us: he has simply a sense wanting. ’What has all this to do with Besworth?’ I asked. ‘A great deal more than you fancy,’ was his answer. He seemed to speak every word at me in capital letters. Then, as if a little ashamed, he sat down, and reached out his hand to mine, and I saw his eyes were moist. I drew my chair nearer to him. Now, whether I did right or wrong in this, I do not know I leave it entirely to your judgement. If you consider how I was placed, you will at all events excuse me. What I did was—you know, the very farthest suspicion one has of an extreme possibility one does not mind mentioning: I said ’Papa, if it should so happen that money is the objection to Besworth, we will not trouble you.’ At this, I can only say that he behaved like an insane person. He denounced me as wilfully insulting him that I might avoid one subject.”

“And what on earth can that be?” interposed Arabella.

“You may well ask. Could a genie have guessed that Mrs. Chump was at the bottom of it all? The conclusion of the dreadful discussion is this, that papa offers to take the purchase of Besworth into his consideration, if we, as I said before, will receive Mrs. Chump as our honoured guest. I am bound to say, poor dear old man, he spoke kindly, as he always does, and kissed me, and offered to give me anything I might want. I came from him stupefied. I have hardly got my senses about me yet.”

The ladies caressed her, with grave looks; but neither of them showed a perturbation of spirit like that which distressed Adela.

“Wilfrid’s meaning is now explained,” said Cornelia. “He is in league with papa; or has given in his adhesion to papa’s demands, at least. He is another example of the constant tendency in men to be what they call ‘practical’ at the expense of honour and sincerity.”

“I hope not,” said Arabella. “In any case, that need not depress you so seriously, darling.”

She addressed Adela.

“Do you not see?” Adela cried, in response. “What! are you both blind to the real significance of papa’s words? I could not have believed it! Or am I this time too acute? I pray to heaven it may be so!”

Both ladies desired her to be explicit; Arabella, eagerly; Cornelia with distrust.

Page 567

“The question of a widow marrying! What is this woman, whom papa wishes to force on us as our guest? Why should he do that? Why should he evince anxiety with regard to our opinion of the decency of widows contemplating re-union? Remember previous words and hints when we lived in the city!”

“This at least you may spare us,” said Cornelia, ruffling offended.

Adela smiled in tenderness for her beauty.

“But, it is important, if we are following a track, dear. Think over it.”

“No!” cried Arabella. “It cannot be true. We might easily have guessed this, if we ever dreamed of impossibilities.”

“In such cases, when appearances lean in one direction, set principles in the opposite balance,” added Cornelia. “What Adela apprehends may seem to impend, but we know that papa is incapable of doing it. To know that, shuts the gates of suspicion. She has allowed herself to be troubled by a ghastly nightmare.”

Adela believed in her own judgement too completely not to be sure that her sisters were, perhaps unknowingly, disguising a slowness of perception they were ashamed of, by thus partially accusing her of giddiness. She bit her lip.

“Very well; if you have no fears whatever, you need not abandon the idea of Besworth.”

“I abandon nothing,” said Arabella. “If I have to make a choice, I take that which is least objectionable. I am chagrined, most, at the idea that Wilfrid has been treacherous.”

“Practical,” Cornelia suggested. “You are not speaking of one of our sex.”

Questions were then put to Adela, whether Mr. Pole had spoken in the manner of one who was prompted: whether he hesitated as he spoke: whether, in short, Wilfrid was seen behind his tongue. Adela resolved that Wilfrid should have one protectress.

“You are entirely mistaken in ascribing treachery to him,” she said. “It is papa that is changed. You may suppose it to be without any reason, if you please. I would tell you to study him for yourselves, only I am convinced that these special private interviews are anything but good policy, and are strictly to be avoided, unless of course, as in the present instance, we have something directly to do.”

Toward dawn the ladies had decreed that it was policy to be quite passive, and provoke no word of Mrs. Chump by making any allusion to Besworth, and by fencing with the mention of the place.

As they rarely failed to carry out any plan deliberately conceived by them, Mr. Pole was astonished to find that Besworth was altogether dropped. After certain scattered attempts to bring them upon Besworth, he shrugged, and resigned himself, but without looking happy.

Indeed he looked so dismal that the ladies began to think he had a great longing for Besworth. And yet he did not go there, or even praise it to the discredit of Brookfield! They were perplexed.

“Let me ask you how it is,” said Cornelia to Mr. Barrett, “that a person whom we know—-whose actions and motives are as plain to us as though discerned through a glass, should at times produce a completer mystification than any other creature? Or have you not observed it?”

Page 568

“I have had better opportunities of observing it than most people,” Mr. Barren replied, with one of his saddest amused smiles. “I have come to the conclusion that the person we know best is the one whom we never understand.”

“You answer me with a paradox.”

“Is it not the natural attendant on an assumption?”

“What assumption?”

“That you know a person thoroughly.”

“May we not?”

“Do you, when you acknowledge this ’complete mystification’?”

“Yes.” Cornelia smiled when she had said it. “And no.”

Mr. Barrett, with his eyes on her, laughed softly. “Which is paradox at the fountain-head! But, when we say we know any one, we mean commonly that we are accustomed to his ways and habits of mind; or, that we can reckon on the predominant influence of his appetites. Sometimes we can tell which impulse is likely to be the most active, and which principle the least restraining. The only knowledge to be trusted is a grounded or scientific study of the springs that move him, side by side with his method of moving the springs. If you fail to do this, you have two classes under your eyes: you have sane and madman: and it will seem to you that the ranks of the latter are constantly being swollen in an extraordinary manner. The customary impression, as we get older, is that our friends are the maddest people in the world. You see, we have grown accustomed to them; and now, if they bewilder us, our judgement, in self-defence, is compelled to set them down lunatic.”

Cornelia bowed her stately head with gentle approving laughter.

“They must go, or they despatch us thither,” she said, while her fair face dimpled into serenity. The remark was of a lower nature than an intellectual discussion ordinarily drew from her: but could Mr. Barrett have read in her heart, he might have seen that his words were beginning to rob that organ of its native sobriety. So that when he spoke a cogent phrase, she was silenced, and became aware of a strange exultation in her blood that obscured grave thought. Cornelia attributed this display of mental weakness altogether to Mr. Barrett’s mental force. The interposition of a fresh agency was undreamt of by the lady.

Meanwhile, it was evident that Mr. Pole was a victim to one of his fevers of shyness. He would thrum on the table, frowning; and then, as he met the look of one of the ladies, try to disguise the thought in his head with a forced laugh. Occasionally, he would turn

toward them, as if he had just caught a lost idea that was peculiarly precious. The ladies drawing up to attend to the communication, had a most trivial matter imparted to them, and away he went. Several times he said to them “You don’t make friends, as you ought;” and their repudiation of the charge made him repeat: “You don’t make friends—home friends.”

“The house can be as full as we care to have it, papa.”

Page 569

“Yes, acquaintances! All very well, but I mean friends—rich friends.”

“We will think of it, papa,” said Adela, “when we want money.”

“It isn’t that,” he murmured.

Adela had written to Wilfrid a full account of her interview with her father. Wilfrid’s reply was laconic. “If you cannot stand a week of the brogue, give up Besworth, by all means.” He made no further allusion to the place. They engaged an opera-box, for the purpose of holding a consultation with him in town. He wrote evasively, but did not appear, and the ladies, with Emilia between them, listened to every foot-fall by the box-door, and were too much preoccupied to marvel that Emilia was just as inattentive to the music as they were. When the curtain dropped they noticed her dejection.

“What ails you?” they asked.

“Let us go out of London to-night,” she whispered, and it was difficult to persuade her that she would see Brookfield again.

“Remember,” said Adela, “it is you that run away from us, not we from you.”

Soft chidings of this description were the only reproaches for her naughty conduct. She seemed contrite very still and timid, since that night of adventure. The ladies were glad to observe it, seeing that it lent her an air of refinement, and proved her sensible to correction.

At last Mr. Pole broke the silence. He had returned from business, humming and rubbing his hands, like one newly primed with a suggestion that was the key of a knotty problem. Observant Adela said: “Have you seen Wilfrid, papa?”

“Saw him in the morning,” Mr. Pole replied carelessly.

Mr. Barrett was at the table.

“By the way, what do you think of our law of primogeniture?” Mr. Pole addressed him.

He replied with the usual allusion to a basis of aristocracy.

“Well, it’s the English system,” said Mr. Pole. “That’s always in its favour at starting. I’m Englishman enough to think that. There ought to be an entail of every decent bit of property, eh?”

It was observed that Mr. Barrett reddened as he said, “I certainly think that a young man should not be subject to his father’s caprice.”

“Father’s caprice! That isn’t common. But, if you’re founding a family, you must entail.”

“We agree, sir, from my point of view, and from yours.”

“Knits the family bond, don’t you think? I mean, makes the trunk of the tree firm. It makes the girls poor, though!”

Mr. Barrett saw that he had some confused legal ideas in his head, and that possibly there were personal considerations in the background; so he let the subject pass.

When the guest had departed, Mr. Pole grew demonstrative in his paternal caresses. He folded Adela in one arm, and framed her chin in his fingers: marks of affection dear to her before she had outgrown them.

“So!” he said, “you’ve given up Besworth, have you?”

Page 570

At the name, Arabella and Cornelia drew nearer to his chair.

“Given up Besworth, papa? It is not we who have given it up,” said Adela.

“Yes, you have; and quite right too. You say, ’What’s the use of it, for that’s a sort of thing that always goes to the son.’”

“You suppose, papa, that we indulge in ulterior calculations?” came from Cornelia.

“Well, you see, my love!—no, I don’t suppose it at all. But to buy a place and split it up after two or three years—I dare say they wouldn’t insure me for more, that’s nonsense. And it seems unfair to you, as you must think—”

“Darling papa! we are not selfish!” it rejoiced Adela to exclaim.

His face expressed a transparent simple-mindedness that won the confidence of the ladies and awakened their ideal of generosity.

“I know what you mean, papa,” said Arabella. “But, we love Besworth; and if we may enjoy the place for the time that we are all together, I shall think it sufficient. I do not look beyond.”

Her sisters echoed the sentiment, and sincerely. They were as little sordid as creatures could be. If deeply questioned, it would have been found that their notion of the position Providence had placed them in (in other words, their father’s unmentioned wealth), permitted them to be as lavish as they pleased. Mr. Pole had endowed them with a temperament similar to his own; and he had educated it. In feminine earth it flourished wonderfully. Shy as himself, their shyness took other forms, and developed with warm youth. Not only did it shut them up from others (which is the first effect of this disease), but it tyrannized over them internally: so that there were subjects they had no power to bring their minds to consider. Money was in the list. The Besworth question, as at present considered, involved the money question. All of them felt that; father and children. It is not surprising, therefore, that they hurried over it as speedily as they could, and by a most comical exhibition of implied comprehension of meanings and motives.

“Of course, we’re only in the opening stage of the business,” said Mr. Pole. “There’s nothing decided, you know. Lots of things got to be considered. You mean what you say, do you? Very well. And you want me to think of it? So I will. And look, my dears, you know that—” (here his voice grew husky, as was the case with it when touching a shy topic even beneath the veil; but they were above suspicion) “you know that—a—-that we must all give way a little to the other, now and then. Nothing like being kind.”

“Pray, have no fear, papa dear!” rang the clear voice of Arabella.

“Well, then, you’re all for Besworth, even though it isn’t exactly for your own interest? All right.”

The ladies kissed him.

“We’ll each stretch a point,” he continued. “We shall get on better if we do. Much! You’re a little hard on people who’re not up to the mark. There’s an end to that. Even your old father will like you better.”

Page 571

These last remarks were unintelligible to the withdrawing ladies.

On the morning that followed, Mr. Pole expressed a hope that his daughters intended to give him a good dinner that day; and he winked humorously and kindly by which they understood him to be addressing a sort of propitiation to them for the respect he paid to his appetite.

“Papa,” said Adela, “I myself will speak to Cook.”

She added, with a smile thrown to her sisters, without looking at them, “I dare say, she will know who I am.”

Mr. Pole went down to his wine-cellar, and was there busy with bottles till the carriage came for him. A bason was fetched that he might wash off the dust and cobwebs in the passage. Having rubbed his hands briskly with soap, he dipped his head likewise, in an oblivious fit, and then turning round to the ladies, said, “What have I forgotten?” looking woebegone with his dripping vacant face. “Oh, ah! I remember now;” and he chuckled gladly.

He had just for one moment forgotten that he was acting, and a pang of apprehension had caught him when the water covered his face, to the effect that he must forfeit the natural artistic sequence of speech and conduct which disguised him so perfectly. Away he drove, nodding and waving his hand.

“Dear, simple, innocent old man!” was the pitiful thought in the bosoms of the ladies; and if it was accompanied by the mute exclamation, “How singular that we should descend from him!” it would not have been for the first time.

They passed one of their delightful quiet days, in which they paved the future with gold, and, if I may use so bold a figure, lifted parasols against the great sun that was to shine on them. Now they listened to Emilia, and now strolled in the garden; conversed on the social skill of Lady Gosstre, who was nevertheless narrow in her range; and on the capacities of mansions, on the secret of mixing people in society, and what to do with the women! A terrible problem, this latter one. Not terrible (to hostesses) at a mere rout or drum, or at a dance pure and simple, but terrible when you want good talk to circulate for then they are not, as a body, amused; and when they are not amused, you know, they are not inclined to be harmless; and in this state they are vipers; and where is society then? And yet you cannot do without them!—which is the revolting mystery. I need not say that I am not responsible for these critical remarks. Such tenderness to the sex comes only from its sisters.

So went a day rich in fair dreams to the ladies; and at the hour of their father’s return they walked across the parvenu park, in a state of enthusiasm for Besworth, that threw some portion of its decorative light on the, donor of Besworth. When his carriage was

heard on the road, they stood fast, and greeted his appearance with a display of pocket-handkerchiefs in the breeze, a proceeding that should have astonished him, being novel; but seemed not to do so, for it was

Page 572

immediately responded to by the vigorous waving of a pair of pocket-handkerchiefs from the carriage-window! The ladies smiled at this piece of simplicity which prompted him to use both his hands, as if one would not have been enough. Complacently they continued waving. Then Adela looked at her sisters; Cornelia's hand dropped and Arabella, the last to wave, was the first to exclaim: "That must be a woman's arm!"

The carriage stopped at the gate, and it was one in the dress of a woman at least, and of the compass of a big woman, who descended by the aid of Mr. Pole. Safely alighted, she waved her pocket-handkerchief afresh. The ladies of Brookfield did not speak to one another; nor did they move their eyes from the object approaching. A simultaneous furtive extinction of three pocket-handkerchiefs might have been noticed. There was no further sign given.

CHAPTER XV

A letter from Brookfield apprised Wilfrid that Mr. Pole had brought Mrs. Chump to the place as a visitor, and that she was now in the house. Formal as a circular, the idea of it appeared to be that the bare fact would tell him enough and inspire him with proper designs. No reply being sent, a second letter arrived, formal too, but pointing out his duty to succour his afflicted family, and furnishing a few tragic particulars. Thus he learnt, that while Mr. Pole was advancing toward the three grouped ladies, on the day of Mrs. Chump's arrival, he called Arabella by name, and Arabella went forward alone, and was engaged in conversation by Mrs. Chump. Mr. Pole left them to make his way to Adela and Cornelia. "Now, mind, I expect you to keep to your agreement," he said. Gradually they were led on to perceive that this simple-minded man had understood their recent talk of Besworth to signify a consent to the stipulation he had previously mentioned to Adela. "Perfect simplicity is as deceiving as the depth of cunning," Adela despairingly wrote, much to Wilfrid's amusement.

A third letter followed. It was of another tenor, and ran thus, in Adela's handwriting:

"My Darling Wilfrid,

"We have always known that some peculiar assistance would never be wanting in our extremity—aid, or comfort, or whatever you please to call it. At all events, something to show we are not neglected. That old notion of ours must be true. I shall say nothing of our sufferings in the house. They continue. Yesterday, papa came from town, looking important. He had up some of his best wine for dinner. All through the service his eyes were sparkling on Cornelia. I spare you a family picture, while there is this huge blot on it. Naughty brother! But, listen! your place is here, for many reasons, as you will be quick enough to see. After dinner, papa took Cornelia into the library alone, and they were together for ten minutes. She came out very pale. She had been proposed for by Sir Twickenham Pryme, our Member for the borough.

Page 573

I have always been sure that Cornelia was born for Parliament, and he will be lucky if he wins her. We know not yet, of course, what her decision will be. The incident is chiefly remarkable to us as a relief to what I need not recount to you. But I wish to say one thing, dear Wilfrid. You are gazetted to a lieutenancy, and we congratulate you: but what I have to say is apparently much more trifling, and it is, that—will you take it to heart?—it would do Arabella and myself infinite good if we saw a little more of our brother, and just a little less of a very gentlemanly organ-player phenomenon, who talks so exceedingly well. He is a very pleasant man, and appreciates our ideas, and so forth; but it is our duty to love our brother best, and think of him foremost, and we wish him to come and remind us of our duty.

“At our Cornelia’s request, with our concurrence, papa is silent in the house as to the purport of the communication made by Sir T.P.

“By the way, are you at all conscious of a sound-like absurdity in a Christian name of three syllables preceding a surname of one? Sir Twickenham Pryme! Cornelia’s pronunciation of the name first gave me the feeling. The ‘Twickenham’ seems to perform a sort of educated monkey kind of ridiculously decorous pirouette and entrechat before the ‘Pryme.’ I think that Cornelia feels it also. You seem to fancy elastic limbs bending to the measure of a solemn church-organ. Sir Timothy? But Sir Timothy does not jump with the same grave agility as Sir Twickenham! If she rejects him, it will be half attributable to this.

“My own brother! I expect no confidences, but a whisper warns me that you have not been to Stornley twice without experiencing the truth of our old discovery, that the Poles are magnetic? Why should we conceal it from ourselves, if it be so? I think it a folly, and fraught with danger, for people not to know their characteristics. If they attract, they should keep in a circle where they will have no reason to revolt at, or say, repent of what they attract. My argumentative sister does not coincide. If she did, she would lose her argument.

“Adieu! Such is my dulness, I doubt whether I have made my meaning clear.

“Your thrice affectionate

“Adela.

“P.S.—Lady Gosstre has just taken Emilia to Richford for a week. Papa starts for Bidport to-morrow.”

This short and rather blunt exercise in Fine Shades was read impatiently by Wilfrid. “Why doesn’t she write plain to the sense?” he asked, with the usual injustice of men, who demand a statement of facts, forgetting how few there are to feed the post; and

that indication and suggestion are the only language for the multitude of facts unborn and possible. Twilight best shows to the eye what may be.

Page 574

“I suppose I must go down there,” he said to himself, keeping a meditative watch on the postscript, as if it possessed the capability of slipping away and deceiving him. “Does she mean that Cornelia sees too much of this man Barrett? or, what does she mean?” And now he saw meanings in the simple passages, and none at all in the intricate ones; and the double-meanings were monsters that ate one another up till nothing remained of them. In the end, however, he made a wrathful guess and came to a resolution, which brought him to the door of the house next day at noon. He took some pains in noting the exact spot where he had last seen Emilia half in moonlight, and then dismissed her image peremptorily. The house was apparently empty. Gainsford, the footman, gave information that he thought the ladies were upstairs, but did not volunteer to send a maid to them. He stood in deferential footman’s attitude, with the aspect of a dog who would laugh if he could, but being a footman out of his natural element, cannot.

“Here’s a specimen of the new plan of treating servants!” thought Wilfrid, turning away. “To act a farce for their benefit! That fellow will explode when he gets downstairs. I see how it is. This woman, Chump, is making them behave like schoolgirls.”

He conceived the idea sharply, and forthwith, without any preparation, he was ready to treat these high-aspiring ladies like schoolgirls. Nor was there a lack of justification; for when they came down to his shouts in the passage, they hushed, and held a finger aloft, and looked altogether so unlike what they aimed at being, that Wilfrid’s sense of mastery became almost contempt.

“I know perfectly what you have to tell me,” he said. “Mrs. Chump is here, you have quarrelled with her, and she has shut her door, and you have shut yours. It’s quite intelligible and full of dignity. I really can’t smother my voice in consequence.”

He laughed with unnecessary abandonment. The sensitive young women wanted no other schooling to recover themselves. In a moment they were seen leaning back and contemplating him amusedly, as if he had been the comic spectacle, and were laughing for a wager. There are few things so sour as the swallowing of one’s own forced laugh. Wilfrid got it down, and commenced a lecture to fill the awkward pause. His sisters maintained the opera-stall posture of languid attention, contesting his phrases simply with their eyebrows, and smiling. He was no match for them while they chose to be silent: and indeed if the business of life were conducted in dumb show, women would beat men hollow. They posture admirably. In dumb show they are equally good for attack and defence. But this is not the case in speech. So, when Arabella explained that their hope was to see Mrs. Chump go that day, owing to the rigorous exclusion of all amusement and the outer world from the house, Wilfrid regained his superior footing and made his lecture tell. In the middle of it, there rang a cry from the doorway that astonished even him, it was so powerfully Irish.

Page 575

“The lady you have called down is here,” said Arabella’s cold glance, in answer to his.

They sat with folded hands while Wilfrid turned to Mrs. Chump, who advanced, a shock of blue satin to the eye, crying, on a jump: “Is ut Mr. Wilfrud?”

“It’s I, ma’am.” Wilfrid bowed, and the censorious ladies could not deny that, his style was good, if his object was to be familiar. And if that was his object, he was paid for it. A great thick kiss was planted on his cheek, with the motto: “Harm to them that thinks ut.”

Wilfrid bore the salute like a man who presumes that he is flattered.

“And it’s you!” said Mrs. Chump. “I was just off. I’m packed, and bonnutted, and ready for a start; becas, my dear, where there’s none but women, I don’t think it natural to stop. You’re splendud! How a little fella like Pole could go and be father to such a mighty big son, with your bit of moustache and your blue eyes! Are they blue or a bit of grey in ’em?” Mrs. Chump peered closely. “They’re kill’n’, let their colour be annyhow. And I that knew ye when ye were no bigger than my garter! Oh, sir! don’t talk of ut; I’ll be thinkin’, of my coffin. Ye’re glad to see me? Say, yes. Do!”

“Very glad,” quoth Wilfrid.

“Upon your honour, now?”

“Upon my honour!”

“My dears” (Mrs. Chump turned to the ladies), “I’ll stop; and just thank your brother for’t, though you can’t help being garls.”

Reduced once more to demonstrate like schoolgirls by this woman, the ladies rose together, and were retiring, when Mrs. Chump swung round and caught Arabella’s hand. “See heer,” she motioned to Wilfrid. Arabella made a bitter effort to disengage herself. “See, now! It’s jeal’sy of me, Mr. Wilfrud, becas I’m a widde and just an abom’nation to garls, poor darlin’s! And twenty shindies per dime we’ve been havin’, and me such a placable body, if ye’ll onnly let m’ explode. I’m all powder, avery bit! and might ha’ been christened Saltpetre, if born a boy. She hasn’t so much as a shot to kill a goose, says Chump, poor fella! But he went, annyway. I must kiss somebody when I talk of ’m. Mr. Wilfrud, I’ll take the girls, and entitle myself to you.”

Arabella was the first victim. Her remonstrance was inarticulate. Cornelia’s “Madam!” was smothered. Adela behaved better, being more consciously under Wilfrid’s eye; she prepared her pocket-handkerchief, received the salute, and deliberately effaced it.

“There!” said Mrs. Chump; “duty to begin with. And now for you, Mr. Wilfrud.”

The ladies escaped. Their misery could not be conveyed to the mind. The woman was like a demon come among them. They felt chiefly degraded, not by her vulgarity, but by their inability to cope with it, and by the consequent sickening sense of animal inefficiency—the block that was put to all imaginative delight in the golden hazy future they figured for themselves, and which was their wine of

Page 576

life. An intellectual adversary they could have combated; this huge brogue-burring engine quite overwhelmed them. Wilfrid's worse than shameful behaviour was a common rallying-point; and yet, so absolutely critical were they by nature, their blame of him was held mentally in restraint by the superior ease of his manner as contrasted with their own lamentably silly awkwardness. Highly civilized natures do sometimes, and keen wits must always, feel dissatisfied when they are not on the laughing side: their dread of laughter is an instinctive respect for it.

Dinner brought them all together again. Wilfrid took his father's seat, facing his Aunt Lupin, and increased the distress of his sisters by his observance of every duty of a host to the dreadful intruder, whom he thus established among them. He was incomprehensible. His visit to Stornley had wrought in him a total change. He used to like being petted, and would regard everything as right that his sisters did, before he went there; and was a languid, long-legged, indifferent cavalier, representing men to them: things made to be managed, snubbed, admired, but always virtually subservient and in the background. Now, without perceptible gradation, his superiority was suddenly manifest; so that, irritated and apprehensive as they were, they could not, by the aid of any of their intricate mental machinery, look down on him. They tried to; they tried hard to think him despicable as well as treacherous. His style was too good. When he informed Mrs. Chump that he had hired a yacht for the season, and added, after enlarging on the merits of the vessel, "I am under your orders," his sisters were as creatures cut in twain—one half abominating his conduct, the other approving his style. The bow, the smile, were perfect. The ladies had to make an effort to recover their condemnatory judgement.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Chump; "and if you've got a yacht, Mr. Wilfrud, won't ye have a great parcel o' the arr'stocracy on board?"

"You may spy a title by the aid of a telescope," said Wilfrid.

"And I'm to come, I am?"

"Are you not elected captain?"

"Oh, if ye've got lords and real ladies on board, I'll come, be sure of ut! I'll be as sick as a cat, I will. But, I'll come, if it's the rroon of my stomach. I'd say to Chump, 'Oh, if ye'd only been born a lord, or would just get yourself struck a knight on one o' your shoulders,—oh, Chump!' I'd say, 'it wouldn't be necessary to be rememberin' always the words of the cerr'mony about lovin' and honourin' and obeyin' of a little whistle of a fella like you.' Poor lad! he couldn't stop for his luck! Did ye ask me to take wine, Mr. Wilfrud? I'll be cryin', else, as a widde should, ye know!"

Page 577

Frequent administrations of wine arrested the tears of Mrs. Chump, until it is possible that the fulness of many a checked flow caused her to redden and talk slightly at random. At the first mention of their father's name, the ladies went out from the room. It was foolish, for they might have watched the effect of certain vinous innuendoes addressed to Wilfrid's apprehensiveness; but they were weakened and humbled, and everything they did was foolish. From the fact that they offended their keen critical taste, moreover, they were targets to the shaft that wounds more fatally than all. No ridicule knocks the strength out of us so thoroughly as our own.

Whether or not he guessed their condition favourable for his plans, Wilfrid did not give them time to call back their scattered powers. At the hour of eleven he sent for Arabella to come to him in the library. The council upstairs permitted Arabella to go, on the understanding that she was prepared for hostilities, and ready to tear the mask from Wilfrid's face.

He commenced, without a shadow of circumlocution, and in a matter-of-fact way, as if all respect for the peculiar genius of the house of Pole had vanished: "I sent for you to talk a word or two about this woman, who, I see, troubles you a little. I'm sorry she's in the house."

"Indeed!" said Arabella.

"I'm sorry she's in the house, not for my sake, but for yours, since the proximity does not seem to... I needn't explain. It comes of your eternal consultations. You are the eldest. Why not act according to your judgement, which is generally sound? You listen to Adela, young as she is; or a look of Cornelia's leads you. The result is the sort of scene I saw this afternoon. I confess it has changed my opinion of you; it has, I grieve to say it. This woman is your father's guest; you can't hurt her so much as you hurt him, if you misbehave to her. You can't openly object to her and not cast a slur upon him. There is the whole case. He has insisted, and you must submit. You should have fought the battle before she came."

"She is here, owing to a miserable misconception," said Arabella.

"Ah! she is here, however. That is the essential, as your old governess Madame Timpan would have said."

"Nor can a protest against coarseness be sweepingly interpreted as a piece of unfilial behaviour," said Arabella.

"She is coarse," Wilfrid nodded his head. "There are some forms of coarseness which dowagers would call it coarseness to notice.

“Not if you find it locked up in the house with you—not if you suffer under a constant repulsion. Pray, do not use these phrases to me, Wilfrid. An accusation of coarseness cannot touch us.”

“No, certainly,” assented Wilfrid. “And you have a right to protest. I disapprove the form of your protest nothing more. A schoolgirl’s...but you complain of the use of comparisons.”

Page 578

“I complain, Wilfrid, of your want of sympathy.”

“That for two or three weeks you must hear a brogue at your elbow? The poor creature is not so bad; she is good-hearted. It’s hard that you should have to bear with her for that time and receive nothing better than Besworth as your reward.”

“Very; seeing that we endure the evil and decline the sop with it.”

“How?”

“We have renounced Besworth.”

“Have you! And did this renunciation make you all sit on the edge of your chairs, this afternoon, as if Edward Buxley had arranged you? You give up Besworth? I’m afraid it’s too late.”

“Oh, Wilfrid! can you be ignorant that something more is involved in the purchase of Besworth?”

Arabella gazed at him with distressful eagerness, as one who believes in the lingering of a vestige of candour.

“Do you mean that my father may wish to give this woman his name?” said Wilfrid coolly. “You have sense enough to know that if you make his home disagreeable, you are taking the right method to drive him into such a course. Ha! I don’t think it’s to be feared, unless you pursue these consultations. And let me say, for my part, we have gone too far about Besworth, and can’t recede.”

“I have given out everywhere that the place is ours. I did so almost at your instigation. Besworth was nothing to me till you cried it up. And now I won’t detain you. I know I can rely on your sense, if you will rely on it. Good night, Bella.”

As she was going a faint spark of courage revived Arabella’s wits. Seeing that she was now ready to speak, he opened the door wide, and she kissed him and went forth, feeling driven.

But while Arabella was attempting to give a definite version of the interview to her sisters, a message came requesting Adela to descend. The ladies did not allow her to depart until two or three ingenuous exclamations from her made them share her curiosity.

“Ah?” Wilfrid caught her hand as she came in. “No, I don’t intend to let it go. You may be a fine lady, but you’re a rogue, you know, and a charming one, as I hear a friend of mine has been saying. Shall I call him out? Shall I fight him with pistols, or swords, and leave him bleeding on the ground, because he thinks you a pretty rogue?”

Adela struggled against the blandishment of this old familiar style of converse—part fun, part flattery—dismissed since the great idea had governed Brookfield.

“Please tell me what you called me down for, dear?”

“To give you a lesson in sitting on chairs. ’Adela, or the Puritan sister,’ thus: you sit on the extremest edge, and your eyes peruse the ceiling; and...”

“Oh! will you ever forget that perfectly ridiculous scene?” Adela cried in anguish.

She was led by easy stages to talk of Besworth.

“Understand,” said Wilfrid, “that I am indifferent about it. The idea sprang from you—I mean from my pretty sister Adela, who is President of the Council of Three. I hold that young woman responsible for all that they do. Am I wrong? Oh, very well. You suggested Besworth, at all events. And—if we quarrel, I shall cut off one of your curls.”

Page 579

“We never will quarrel, my darling,” quoth Adela softly. “Unless—” she added.

Wilfrid kissed her forehead.

“Unless what?”

“Well, then, you must tell me who it is that talks of me in that objectionable manner; I do not like it.”

“Shall I convey that intimation?”

“I choose to ask, simply that I may defend myself.”

“I choose to keep him buried, then, simply to save his life.”

Adela made a mouth, and Wilfrid went on: “By the way, I want you to know Lady Charlotte; you will take to one another. She likes you, already—says you want dash; but on that point there may be two opinions.”

“If dash,” said Adela, quite beguiled, “—that is, dash!—what does it mean? But, if Lady Charlotte means by dash—am I really wanting in it? I should define it, the quality of being openly natural without vulgarity; and surely...!”

“Then you two differ a little, and must meet and settle your dispute. You don’t differ about Besworth: or, didn’t. I never saw a woman so much in love with a place as she is.”

“A place?” emphasized Adela.

“Don’t be too arch. I comprehend. She won’t take me minus Besworth, you may be sure.”

“Did you, Wilfrid!—but you did not—offer yourself as owner of Besworth?”

Wilfrid kept his eyes slanting on the floor.

“Now I see why you should still wish it,” continued Adela. “Perhaps you don’t know the reason which makes it impossible, or I would say—Bacchus! it must be compassed. You remember your old schoolboy oath which you taught me? We used to swear always, by Bacchus!”

Adela laughed and blushed, like one who petitions pardon for this her utmost sin, that is not regretted as it should be.

“Mrs. Chump again, isn’t it?” said Wilfrid. “Pole would be a preferable name. If she has the ambition, it elevates her. And it would be rather amusing to see the dear old boy in love.”

Adela gave her under-lip a distressful bite.

“Why do you, Wilfrid—why treat such matters with levity?”

“Levity? I am the last to treat ninety thousand pounds with levity.”

“Has she so much?” Adela glanced at him.

“She will be snapped up by some poor nobleman. If I take her down to the yacht, one of Lady Charlotte’s brothers or uncles will bite; to a certainty.”

“It would be an excellent idea to take her!” cried Adela.

“Excellent! and I’ll do it, if you like.”

“Could you bear the reflex of the woman?”

“Don’t you know that I am not in the habit of sitting on the extreme edge...?”

Adela started, breathing piteously: “Wilfrid, dear! you want something of me—what is it?”

“Simply that you should behave civilly to your father’s guest.”

“I had a fear, dear; but I think too well of you to entertain it for a moment. If civility is to win Besworth for you, there is my hand.”

Page 580

“Be civil—that’s all,” said Wilfrid, pressing the hand given. “These consultations of yours and acting in concert—one tongue for three women—are a sort of missish, unripe nonsense, that one sees only in bourgeoise girls—eh? Give it up. Lady Charlotte hit on it at a glance.”

“And I, my chameleon brother, will return her the compliment, some day,” Adela said to herself, as she hurried back to her sisters, bearing a message for Cornelia. This lady required strong persuasion. A word from Adela: “He will think you have some good reason to deny him a private interview,” sent her straight to the stairs.

Wilfrid was walking up and down, with his arms folded and his brows bent. Cornelia stood in the doorway.

“You desire to speak to me, Wilfrid? And in private?”

“I didn’t wish to congratulate you publicly, that’s all. I know it’s rather against your taste. We’ll shut the door, and sit down, if you don’t mind. Yes, I congratulate you with all my heart,” he said, placing a chair for Cornelia.

“May I ask, wherefore?”

“You don’t think marriage a matter for congratulation?”

“Sometimes: as the case may be.”

“Well, it’s not marriage yet. I congratulate you on your offer.”

“I thank you.”

“You accept it, of course.”

“I reject it, certainly.”

After this preliminary passage, Wilfrid remained silent long enough for Cornelia to feel uneasy.

“I want you to congratulate me also,” he recommenced. “We poor fellows don’t have offers, you know. To be frank, I think Lady Charlotte Chillingworth will have me, if—-She’s awfully fond of Besworth, and I need not tell you that as she has position in the world, I ought to show something in return. When you wrote about Besworth, I knew it was as good as decided. I told her so and—Well, I fancy there’s that sort of understanding between us. She will have me when... You know how the poorer members of the aristocracy are situated. Her father’s a peer, and has a little influence. He might push me; but she is one of a large family; she has nothing. I am certain you will not judge of her as common people might. She does me a particular honour.”

“Is she not much older than you, Wilfrid?” said Cornelia.

“Or, in other words,” he added, “is she not a very mercenary person?”

“That, I did not even imply.”

“Honestly, was it not in your head?”

“Now you put it so plainly, I do say, it strikes me disagreeably; I have heard of nothing like it.”

“Do you think it unreasonable that I should marry into a noble family?”

“That is, assuredly, not my meaning.”

“Nevertheless, you are, on the whole, in favour of beggarly alliances.”

“No, Wilfrid.”

“Why do you reject this offer that has been made to you?”

Cornelia flushed and trembled; the traitorous feint had thrown her off her guard. She said, faltering:

Page 581

“Would you have me marry one I do not love?”

“Well, well!” He drew back. “You are going to do your best to stop the purchase of Besworth?”

“No; I am quiescent.”

“Though I tell you how deeply it concerns me!”

“Wilfrid, my own brother!” (Cornelia flung herself before him, catching his hand,) “I wish you to be loved, first of all. Think of the horror of a loveless marriage, however gilded! Does a woman make stipulations ere she gives her hand? Does not love seek to give, to bestow? I wish you to marry well, but chiefly that you should be loved.”

Wilfrid pressed her head in both his hands.

“I never saw you look so handsome,” he said. “You’ve got back your old trick of blushing, too! Why do you tremble? By the way, you seem to have been learning a great deal about that business, lately?”

“What business?”

“Love.”

A river of blood overflowed her fair cheeks.

“How long has this been?” his voice came to her.

There was no escape. She was at his knees, and must look up, or confess guilt.

“This?”

“Come, my dearest girl!” Wilfrid soothed her. “I can help you, and will, if you’ll take advice. I’ve always known your heart was generous and tender, under that ice you wear so well. How long has this been going on?”

“Wilfrid!”

“You want plain speech?”

She wanted that still less.

“We’ll call it ‘this,’” he said. “I have heard of it, guessed it, and now see it. How far have you pledged yourself in ‘this?’”

“How far?”

Wilfrid held silent. Finding that her echo was not accepted as an answer, she moaned his name lovingly. It touched his heart, where a great susceptibility to passion lay. As if the ghost of Emilia were about him, he kissed his sister's hand, and could not go on with his cruel interrogations.

His next question was dew of relief to her.

"Has your Emilia been quite happy, of late?"

"Oh, quite, dear! very. And sings with more fire."

"She's cheerful?"

"She does not romp. Her eyes are full and bright."

"She's satisfied with everything here?"

"How could she be otherwise?"

"Yes, yes! You weren't severe on her for that escapade—I mean, when she ran away from Lady Gosstre's?"

"We scarcely alluded to the subject, or permitted her to."

"Or permitted her to!" Wilfrid echoed, with a grimace. "And she's cheerful now?"

"Quite."

"I mean, she doesn't mope?"

"Why should she?"

Cornelia had been too hard-pressed to have suspicion the questions were an immense relief.

Wilfrid mused gloomily. Cornelia spoke further of Emilia, and her delight in the visits of Mr. Powys, who spent hours with her, like a man fascinated. She flowed on, little aware that she was fast restoring to Wilfrid all his judicial severity.

Page 582

He said, at last: “I suppose there’s no engagement existing?”

“Engagement?”

“You have not, what they call, plighted your troth to the man?”

Cornelia struggled for evasion. She recognized the fruitlessness of the effort, and abandoning it stood up.

“I am engaged to no one.”

“Well, I should hope not,” said Wilfrid. “An engagement might be broken.”

“Not by me.”

“It might, is all that I say. A romantic sentiment is tougher. Now, I have been straightforward with you: will you be with me? I shall not hurt the man, or wound his feelings.”

He paused; but it was to find that no admission of the truth, save what oozed out in absence of speech, was to be expected. She seemed, after the fashion of women, to have got accustomed to the new atmosphere into which he had dragged her, without any conception of a forward movement.

“I see I must explain to you how we are situated,” said Wilfrid. “We are in a serious plight. You should be civil to this woman for several reasons—for your father’s sake and your own. She is very rich.”

“Oh, Wilfrid!”

“Well, I find money well thought of everywhere.”

“Has your late school been good for you?”

“This woman, I repeat, is rich, and we want money. Oh! not the ordinary notion of wanting money, but the more we have the more power we have. Our position depends on it.”

“Yes, if we can be tempted to think so,” flashed Cornelia.

“Our position depends on it. If you posture, and are poor, you provoke ridicule: and to think of scorning money, is a piece of folly no girls of condition are guilty of. Now, you know I am fond of you; so I’ll tell you this: you have a chance; don’t miss it. Something unpleasant is threatening; but you may escape it. It would be madness to throw such a

chance away, and it is your duty to take advantage of it. What is there plainer? You are engaged to no one."

Cornelia came timidly close to him. "Pray, be explicit!"

"Well!—this offer."

"Yes; but what—there is something to escape from."

Wilfrid deliberately replied: "There is no doubt of the Pater's intentions with regard to Mrs. Chump."

"He means...?"

"He means to marry her."

"And you, Wilfrid?"

"Well, of course, he cuts me out. There—there! forgive me: but what can I do?"

"Do you conspire—Wilfrid, is it possible?—are you an accomplice in the degradation of our house?"

Cornelia had regained her courage, perforce of wrath. Wilfrid's singular grey eyes shot an odd look at her. He is to be excused for not perceiving the grandeur of the structure menaced; for it was invisible to all the world, though a real fabric.

"If Mrs. Chump were poor, I should think the Pater demented," he said. "As it is—! well, as it is, there's grist to the mill, wind to the organ. You must be aware" (and he leaned over to her with his most suspicious gentleness of tone) "you are aware that all organs must be fed; but you will make a terrible mistake if you suppose for a moment that the human organ requires the same sort of feeding as the one in Hillford Church."

Page 583

“Good-night,” said Cornelia, closing her lips, as if for good.

Wilfrid pressed her hand. As she was going, the springs of kindness in his heart caused him to say “Forgive me, if I seemed rough.”

“Yes, dear Wilfrid; even brutality, rather than your exultation over the wreck of what was noble in you.”

With which phrase Cornelia swept from the room.

CHAPTER XVI

“Seen Wilfrid?” was Mr. Pole’s first cheery call to his daughters, on his return. An answer on that head did not seem to be required by him, for he went on: “Ah the boy’s improved. That place over there, Stornley, does him as much good as the Army did, as to setting him up, you know; common sense, and a ready way of speaking and thinking. He sees a thing now. Well, Martha, what do you,—eh? what’s your opinion?”

Mrs. Chump was addressed. “Pole,” she said, fanning her cheek with vehement languor, “don’t ask me! my heart’s gone to the young fella.”

In pursuance of a determination to which the ladies of Brookfield had come, Adela, following her sprightly fancy, now gave the lead in affability toward Mrs. Chump.

“Has the conqueror run away with it to bury it?” she laughed.

“Och! won’t he know what it is to be a widde!” cried Mrs. Chump. “A widde’s heart takes aim and flies straight as a bullet; and the hearts o’ you garls, they’re like whiffs o’ tobacca, curlin’ and wrigglin’ and not knowin’ where they’re goin’. Marry ’em, Pole! marry ’em!” Mrs. Chump gesticulated, with two dangling hands. “They’re nice garls; but, lord! they naver see a man, and they’re stuputly contented, and want to remain garls; and, don’t ye see, it was naver meant to be? Says I to Mr. Wilfrud (and he agreed with me), ye might say, nice sour grapes, as well as nice garls, if the creatures think o’ stoppin’ where they are, and what they are. It’s horrud; and, upon my honour, my heart aches for ’m!”

Mr. Pole threw an uneasy side-glance of inquisition at his daughters, to mark how they bore this unaccustomed language, and haply intercede between the unworthy woman and their judgement of her. But the ladies merely smiled. Placidly triumphant in its endurance, the smile said: “We decline even to feel such a martyrdom as this.”

“Well, you know, Martha; I,” he said, “I—no father could wish—eh? if you could manage to persuade them not to be so fond of me. They must think of their future, of course.

They won't always have a home—a father, a father, I mean. God grant they may never want!—eh? the dinner; boh! let's in to dinner. Ma'am!"

He bowed an arm to Mrs. Chump, who took it, with a scared look at him: "Why, if ye haven't got a tear in your eye, Pole?"

"Nonsense, nonsense," quoth he, bowing another arm to Adela.

"Papa, I'm not to be winked at," said she, accepting convoy; and there was some laughter, all about nothing, as they went in to dinner.

Page 584

The ladies were studiously forbearing in their treatment of Mrs. Chump. Women are wonderfully quick scholars under ridicule, though it half-kills them. Wilfrid's theory had impressed the superior grace of civility upon their minds, and, now that they practised it, they were pleased with the contrast they presented. Not the less were they maturing a serious resolve. The suspicion that their father had secret vile designs in relation to Mrs. Chump, they kept in the background. It was enough for them that she was to be a visitor, and would thus destroy the great circle they had projected. To accept her in the circle, they felt, was out of the question. Wilfrid's plain-speaking broke up the air-bubble, which they had so carefully blown, and in which they had embarked all their young hopes. They had as much as given one another a pledge that their home likewise should be broken up.

"Are you not almost too severe a student?" Mr. Barrett happened to say to Cornelia, the day after Wilfrid had worried her.

"Do I show the signs?" she replied.

"By no means. But last night, was it not your light that was not extinguished till morning?"

"We soon have morning now," said Cornelia; and her face was pale as the first hour of the dawn. "Are you not a late foot-farer, I may ask in return?"

"Mere restlessness. I have no appetite for study. I took the liberty to cross the park from the wood, and saw you—at least I guessed it your light, and then I met your brother."

"Yes? you met him?"

Mr. Barrett gestured an affirmative.

"And he—did he speak?"

"He nodded. He was in some haste."

"But, then, you did not go to bed at all that night? It is almost my turn to be lecturer, if I might expect to be listened to."

"Do you not know—or am I constitutionally different from others?" Mr. Barrett resumed: "I can't be alone in feeling that there are certain times and periods when what I would like to call poisonous influences are abroad, that touch my fate in the days to come. I know I am helpless. I can only wander up and down."

"That sounds like a creed of fatalism."

“It is not a creed; it is a matter of nerves. A creed has its ‘kismet.’ The nerves are wild horses.”

“It is something to be fought against,” said Cornelia admonishingly.

“Is it something to be distrusted?”

“I should say, yes.”

“Then I was wrong?”

He stooped eagerly, in his temperate way, to catch sight of her answering face. Cornelia’s quick cheeks took fire. She fenced with a question of two, and stood in a tremble, marvelling at his intuition. For possibly, at that moment when he stood watching her window-light (ah, poor heart!) she was half-pledging her word to her sisters (in a whirl of wrath at Wilfrid, herself, and the world), that she would take the lead in breaking up Brookfield.

Page 585

An event occurred that hurried them on. They received a visit from their mother's brother, John Pierson, a Colonel of Uhlans, in the Imperial-Royal service. He had rarely been in communication with them; his visit was unexpected. His leave of absence from his quarters in Italy was not longer than a month, and he was on his way to Ireland, to settle family business; but he called, as he said, to make acquaintance with his nieces. The ladies soon discovered, in spite of his foreign-cut chin and pronounced military habit of speech and bearing, that he was at heart fervidly British. His age was about fifty: a man of great force of shoulder and potent length of arm, courteous and well-bred in manner, he was altogether what is called a model of a cavalry officer. Colonel Pierson paid very little attention to his brother-in-law, but the ladies were evidently much to his taste; and when he kissed Cornelia's hand, his eyes grew soft, as at a recollection.

"You are what your mother once promised to be," he said. To her he gave that mother's portrait, taking it solemnly from his breast-pocket, and attentively contemplating it before it left his hands. The ladies pressed him for a thousand details of their mama's youthful life; they found it a strange consolation to talk of her and image her like Cornelia. The foreign halo about the Colonel had an effect on them that was almost like what nobility produces; and by degrees they heated their minds to conceive that they were consenting to an outrage on that mother's memory, in countenancing Mrs. Chump's transparent ambition to take her place, as they did by staying in the house with the woman. The colonel's few expressive glances at Mrs. Chump, and Mrs. Chump's behaviour before the colonel, touched them with intense distaste for their present surly aspect of life. Civilized little people are moved to fulfil their destinies and to write their histories as much by distaste as by appetite. This fresh sentimental emotion, which led them to glorify their mother's image in their hearts, heightened and gave an acid edge to their distaste for the think they saw. Nor was it wonderful that Cornelia, said to be so like that mother, should think herself bound to accept the office of taking the initiative in a practical protest against the desecration of the name her mother had borne. At times, I see that sentiment approaches too near the Holy of earthly Holies for us to laugh at it; it has too much truth in it to be denounced—nay, if we are not alert and quick of wit, we shall be deceived by it, and wonder in the end, as the fool does, why heaven struck that final blow; concluding that it was but another whimsy of the Gods. The ladies prayed to their mother. They were indeed suffering vile torture. Ethereal eyes might pardon the unconscious jugglery which made their hearts cry out to her that the step they were about to take was to save her children from seeming to acquiesce in a dishonour to her memory. Some such words Adela's tongue did not shrink from; and as it is a common habit for us to give to the objects we mentally address just as much brain as is wanted for the occasion, she is not to be held singular.

Page 586

Colonel Pierson promised to stay a week on his return from Ireland. “Will that person be here?” he designated Mrs. Chump; who, among other things, had reproached him for fighting with foreign steel and wearing any uniform but the red.

The ladies and Colonel Pierson were soon of one mind in relation to Mrs. Chump. Certain salient quiet remarks dropped by him were cherished after his departure; they were half-willing to think that he had been directed to come to them, bearer of a message from a heavenly world to urge them to action. They had need of a spiritual exaltation, to relieve them from the palpable depression caused by the weight of Mrs. Chump. They encouraged one another with exclamations on the oddness of a visit from their mother’s brother, at such a time of tribulation, indecision, and general darkness.

Mrs. Chump remained on the field. When Adela begged her papa to tell her how long the lady was to stay, he replied: “Eh? By the way, I haven’t asked her;” and retreated from this almost too obvious piece of simplicity, with, “I want you to know her: I want you to like her—want you to get to understand her. Won’t talk about her going just yet.”

If they could have seen a limit to that wholesale slaughter of the Nice Feelings, they might have summoned patience to avoid the desperate step to immediate relief: but they saw none. Their father’s quaint kindness and Wilfrid’s treachery had fixed her there, perhaps for good. The choice was, to let London come and see them dragged through the mire by the monstrous woman, or to seek new homes. London, they contended, could not further be put off, and would come, especially now that the season was dying. After all, their parting from one another was the bitterest thing to bear, and as each seemed content to endure it for the good of all, and as, properly considered, they did not bury their ambition by separating, they said farewell to the young delicious dawn of it. By means of Fine Shades it was understood that Brookfield was to be abandoned. Not one direct word was uttered. There were expressions of regret that the village children of Ipley would miss the supervizing eyes that had watched over them—perchance! at any rate, would lose them. All went on in the household as before, and would have continued so, but that they had a chief among them. This was Adela Pole, who found her powers with the occasion.

Adela thought decisively: “People never move unless they are pushed.” And when you have got them to move ever so little, then propel; but by no means expect that a movement on their part means progression. Without propulsion nothing results. Adela saw what Cornelia meant to do. It was not to fly to Sir Twickenham, but to dismiss Mr. Barrett. Arabella consented to write to Edward Buxley, but would not speak of old days, and barely alluded to a misunderstanding; though if she loved one man, this was he. Adela was disengaged.

Page 587

She had moreover to do penance, for a wrong committed; and just as children will pinch themselves, pleased up to the verge of unendurable pain, so do sentimentalists find a keen relish in performing secret penance for self-accused offences. Thus they become righteous to their own hearts, and evade, as they hope, the public scourge. The wrong committed was (translated out of Fine Shades), that she had made love to her sister's lover. In the original tongue—she had innocently played with the sacred fire of a strange affection; a child in the temple!—Our penitent child took a keen pinching pleasure in dictating words for Arabella to employ toward Edward.

And then, recurring to her interview with Wilfrid, it struck her: "Suppose that, after all, Money!..." Yes, Mammon has acted Hymen before now. Nothing else explained Mrs. Chump; so she thought, in one clear glimpse. Inveterate sentimental habit smeared the picture with two exclamations—"Impossible!" and "Papa!" I desire it to be credited that these simple interjections absolutely obscured her judgement. Little people think either what they are made to think, or what they choose to think; and the education of girls is to make them believe that facts are their enemies-a naughty spying race, upon whom the dogs of Pudeur are to be loosed, if they surprise them without note of warning. Adela silenced her suspicion, easily enough; but this did not prevent her taking a measure to satisfy it. Petting her papa one evening, she suddenly asked him for ninety pounds.

"Ninety!" said Mr. Pole, taking a sharp breath. He was as composed as possible.

"Is that too much, papa, darling?"

"Not if you want it—not if you want it, of course not."

"You seemed astonished."

"The sum! it's an odd sum for a girl to want. Ten, twenty, fifty—a hundred; but you never hear of ninety, never! unless it's to pay a debt; and I have all the bills, or your aunt has them."

"Well, papa, if it excites you, I will do without it. It is for a charity, chiefly."

Mr. Pole fumbled in his pocket, muttering, "No money here—cheque-book in town. I'll give it you," he said aloud, "to-morrow morning—morrow morning, early."

"That will do, papa;" and Adela relieved him immediately by shooting far away from the topic.

The ladies retired early to their hall of council in the bedchamber of Arabella, and some time after midnight Cornelia went to her room; but she could not sleep. She affected, in her restlessness, to think that her spirits required an intellectual sedative, so she went down to the library for a book; where she skimmed many—a fashion that may be

recommended, for assisting us to a sense of sovereign superiority to authors, and also of serene contempt for all mental difficulties. Fortified in this way, Cornelia took a Plutarch and an Encyclopaedia under her arm, to return to her room. But one volume fell, and as she stooped to recover it, her

Page 588

candle shared its fate. She had to find her way back in the dark. On the landing of the stairs, she fancied that she heard a step and a breath. The lady was of unshaken nerves. She moved on steadily, her hand stretched out a little before her. What it touched was long in travelling to her brain; but when her paralyzed heart beat again, she knew that her hand clasped another hand. Her nervous horror calmed as the feeling came to her of the palpable weakness of the hand.

“Who are you?” she asked. Some hoarse answer struck her ear. She asked again, making her voice distincter. The hand now returned her pressure with force. She could feel that the person, whoever it was, stood collecting strength to speak. Then the words came—

“What do you mean by imitating that woman’s brogue?”

“Papa!” said Cornelia.

“Why do you talk Irish in the dark? There, goodnight. I’ve just come up from the library; my candle dropped. I shouldn’t have been frightened, but you talked with such a twang.”

“But I have just come from the library myself,” said Cornelia.

“I mean from the dining-room,” her father corrected himself hastily. “I can’t sit in the library; shall have it altered—full of draughts. Don’t you think so, my dear? Good-night. What’s this in your arm? Books! Ah, you study! I can get a light for myself.”

The dialogue was sustained in the hard-whispered tones prescribed by darkness. Cornelia kissed her father’s forehead, and they parted.

At breakfast in the morning it was the habit of all the ladies to assemble, partly to countenance the decency of matin-prayers, and also to give the head of the household their dutiful society till business called him away. Adela, in earlier days, had maintained that early rising was not fashionable; but she soon grasped the idea that a great rivalry with Fashion, in minor matters (where the support of the satirist might be counted on), was the proper policy of Brookfield. Mrs. Chump was given to be extremely fashionable in her hours, and began her Brookfield career by coming downstairs at ten and eleven o’clock, when she found a desolate table, well stocked indeed, but without any of the exuberant smiles of nourishment which a morning repast should wear.

“You are a Protestant, ma’am, are you not?” Adela mildly questioned, after informing her that she missed family prayer by her late descent. Mrs. Chump assured her that she was a firm Protestant, and liked to see faces at the breakfast-table. The poor woman was reduced to submit to the rigour of the hour, coming down flustered, and endeavouring to look devout, while many uncertainties as to the condition of the hooks

of her attire distracted her mind and fingers. On one occasion, Gainsford, the footman, had been seen with his eye on her; and while Mr. Pole read of sacred things, at a pace composed of slow march and amble, this unhappy man was heard

Page 589

struggling to keep under and extinguish a devil of laughter, by which his human weakness was shaken: He retired from the room with the speed of a voyager about to pay tribute on high seas. Mr. Pole cast a pregnant look at the servants' row as he closed the book; but the expression of his daughters' faces positively signified that no remark was to be made, and he contained himself. Later, the ladies told him that Gainsford had done no worse than any uneducated man would have been guilty of doing. Mrs. Chump had, it appeared, a mother's feeling for one flat curl on her rugged forehead, which was often fondly caressed by her, for the sake of ascertaining its fixity. Doubts of the precision of outline and general welfare of this curl, apparently, caused her to straighten her back and furtively raise her head, with an easy upward motion, as of a cork alighted in water, above the level of the looking-glass on her left hand—an action she repeated, with a solemn aspect, four times; at which point Gainsford gave way. The ladies accorded him every extenuation for the offence. They themselves, but for the heroism of exalted natures, must have succumbed to the gross temptation. "It is difficult, dear papa, to bring one's mind to religious thoughts in her company, even when she is quiescent," they said. Thus, by the prettiest exercise of charity that can be conceived, they pleaded for the man Gainsford, while they struck a blow at Mrs. Chump; and in performing one of the virtues laid down by religion, proved their enemy to be hostile to its influences.

Mrs. Chump was this morning very late. The office of morning reader was new to Mr. Pole, who had undertaken it, when first Squire of Brookfield, at the dictate of the ladies his daughters; so that, waiting with the book before him and his audience expectant, he lacked composure, spoke irritably in an under-breath of 'that woman,' and asked twice whether she was coming or not. At last the clump of her feet was heard approaching. Mr. Pole commenced reading the instant she opened the door. She stood there, with a face like a petrified Irish outcry. An imploring sound of "Pole! Pole!" issued from her. Then she caught up one hand to her mouth, and rolled her head, in evident anguish at the necessitated silence. A convulsion passed along the row of maids, two of whom dipped to their aprons; but the ladies gazed with a sad consciousness of wicked glee at the disgust she was exciting in the bosom of their father.

"Will you shut the door?" Mr. Pole sternly addressed Mrs. Chump, at the conclusion of the first prayer.

"Pole! ye know that money ye gave me in notes? I must speak, Pole!"

"Shut the door."

Page 590

Mrs. Chump let go the door-handle with a moan. The door was closed by Gainsford, now one of the gravest of footmen. A chair was placed for her, and she sat down, desperately watching the reader for the fall of his voice. The period was singularly protracted. The ladies turned to one another, to question with an eyelid why it was that extra allowance was given that morning. Mr. Pole was in a third prayer, stumbling on and picking himself up, apparently unaware that he had passed the limit. This continued until the series of ejaculations which accompanied him waxed hotter—little muffled shrieks of: "Oh!—Deer—Oh, Lard!—When will he stop? Oh, mercy! Och! And me burrstin' to speak!—Oh! what'll I do? I can't keep 't in!—Pole! ye're kill'n me—Oh, deer! I'll be sayin' somethin' to vex the prophets presently. Pole!"

If it was a race that he ran with Mrs. Chump, Mr. Pole was beaten. He came to a sudden stop.

Mrs. Chump had become too deeply absorbed in her impatience to notice the change in his tone; and when he said, "Now then, to breakfast, quick!" she was pursuing her lamentable interjections. At sight of the servants trooping forth, she jumped up and ran to the door.

"Ye don't go.—Pole, they're all here. And I've been robbed, I have. Avery note I had from ye, Pole, all gone. And my purse left behind, like the skin of a thing. Lord forbid I accuse annybody; but when I get up, my first rush is to feel in my pocket. And, ask 'em!—If ye didn't keep me so poor, Pole, they'd know I'm a generous woman, but I cann't bear to be robbed. And pinmoney 's for spendin;' annybody'll tell you that. And I ask ye t' examine 'em, Pole; for last night I counted my notes, wantin' change, and I thought of a salmon I bought on the banks of the Suir to make a present to Chump, which was our onnly visit to Waterford together: for he naver went t' Ireland before or after—dyin' as he did! and it's not his ingrat'tude, with his talk of a Severrn salmon-to the deuce with 'm! that makes me soft-poor fella!—I didn't mean to the deuce;—but since he's gone, his widde's just unfit to bargain for a salmon at all, and averybody robs her, and she's kept poor, and hatud!—D'ye heer, Pole? I've lost my money, my money! and I will speak, and ye shann't interrupt me!"

During the delivery of this charge against the household, Mr. Pole had several times waved to the servants to begone; but as they had always the option to misunderstand authoritative gestures, they preferred remaining, and possibly he perceived that they might claim to do so under accusation.

"How can you bring this charge against the inmates of my house—eh? I guarantee the honesty of all who serve me. Martha! you must be mad, mad!—Money? why, you never have money; you waste it if you do."

“Not money, Pole? Oh! and why? Becas ye keep me low o’ purpose, till I cringe like a slut o’ the scullery, and cry out for halfpence. But, oh! that seventy-five pounds in notes!”

Page 591

Mr. Pole shook his head, as one who deals with a gross delusion: “I remember nothing about it.”

“Not about—?” Mrs. Chump dropped her chin. “Ye don’t remember the givin’ of me just that sum of seventy-five, in eight notes, Pole?”

“Eh? I daresay I have given you the amount, one time or other. Now, let’s be quiet about it.”

“Yesterday mornin’, Pole! And the night I go to bed I count my money, and, says I, I’ll not lock ut up, for I’ll onnly be unlockin’ again to-morrow; and doin’ a thing and undoin’ ut’s a sign of a brain that’s addled—like yours, Pole, if ye say ye didn’t go to give me the notes.”

Mr. Pole frowned at her sagaciously. “Must change your diet, Martha!”

“My dite? And what’s my dite to do with my money?”

“Who went into Mrs. Chump’s bedchamber this morning?” asked Mr. Pole generally.

A pretty little housemaid replied, with an indignant flush, that she was the person. Mrs. Chump acknowledged to being awake when the shutters were opened, and agreed that it was not possible her pockets could have been rifled then.

“So, you see, Martha, you’re talking nonsense,” said Mr. Pole. “Do you know the numbers of those notes?”

“The numbers at the sides, ye mean, Pole?”

“Ay, the numbers at the sides, if you like; the 21593, and so on?”

“The 21593! Oh! I can’t remember such a lot as that, if ever I leave off repeatin’ it.”

“There! you see, you’re not fit to have money in your possession, Martha. Everybody who has bank-notes looks at the numbers. You have a trick of fancying all sorts of sums in your pocket; and when you don’t find them there, of course they’re lost! Now, let’s have some breakfast.”

Arabella told the maids to go out. Mr. Pole turned to the breakfast-table, rubbing his hands. Seeing herself and her case abandoned, Mrs. Chump gave a deplorable shout. “Ye’re crool! and young women that look on at a fellow-woman’s mis’ry. Oh! how can ye do ut! But soft hearts can be the hardest. And all my seventy-five gone, gone! and no law out of annybody. And no frightenin’ of ’em off from doin’ the like another time! Oh, I will, I will have my money!”

“Tush! Come to breakfast, Martha,” said Mr. Pole. “You shall have money, if you want it; you have only to ask. Now, will you promise to be quiet? and I’ll give you this money —the amount you’ve been dreaming about last night. I’ll fetch it. Now, let us have no scenes. Dry your eyes.”

Mr. Pole went to his private room, and returned just as Mrs. Chump had got upon a succession of quieter sobs with each one of which she addressed a pathetic roll of her eyes to the utterly unsympathetic ladies respectively.

“There, Martha; there’s exactly the sum for you—free gift. Say thank you, and eat a good breakfast to show your gratitude. Mind, you take this money on condition that you let the servants know you made a mistake.”

Page 592

Mrs. Chump sighed heavily, crumpling the notes, that the crisp sweet sound might solace her for the hard condition.

“And don’t dream any more—not about money, I mean,” said Mr: Pole.

“Oh! if I dream like that I’ll be living double.” Mrs. Chump put her hand to the notes, and called him kind, and pitied him for being the loser. The sight of a fresh sum in her possession intoxicated her. It was but feebly that she regretted the loss to her Samuel Bolton Pole. “Your memory’s worth more than that!” she said as she filled her purse with the notes. “Anyhow, now I can treat somebody,” and she threw a wink of promise at Adela. Adela’s eyes took refuge with her papa, who leaned over to her, and said: “You won’t mind waiting till you see me again? She’s taken all I had.” Adela nodded blankly, and the next moment, with an angry glance toward Mrs. Chump, “Papa,” said she, “if you wish to see servants in the house on your return, you must yourself speak to them, and tell them that we, their master and mistresses, do not regard them as thieves.” Out of this there came a quarrel as furious as the ladies would permit it to be. For Mrs. Chump, though willing to condone the offence for the sum she had received, stuck infamy upon the whole list of them. “The Celtic nature,” murmured Cornelia. And the ladies maintained that their servants should be respected, at any cost. “You, ma’am,” said Arabella, with a clear look peculiar to her when vindictive—“you may have a stain on your character, and you are not ruined by it. But these poor creatures...”

“Ye dare to compar’ me—!”

“Contrast you, ma’am.”

“It’s just as imp’dent.”

“I say, our servants, ma’am...”

“Oh! to the deuce with your ‘ma’am;’ I hate the word. It’s like fittin’ a cap on me. Ye want to make one a turbaned dow’ger, ye malicious young woman!”

“Those are personages that are, I believe, accepted in society!”

So the contest raged, Mrs. Chump being run clean through the soul twenty times, without touching the consciousness of that sensitive essence. Mr. Pole appeared to take the part of his daughters, and by-and-by Mrs. Chump, having failed to arouse Mrs. Lupin’s involuntary laugh (which always consoled her in such cases), huffed out of the room. Then Mr. Pole, in an abruptly serious way, bashfully entreated the ladies to be civil to Martha, who had the best heart in the world. It sounded as if he were going to say more. After a pause, he added emphatically, “Do!” and went. He was many days absent: nor did he speak to Adela of the money she had asked for when he returned. Adela had not the courage to allude to it.

CHAPTER XVII

Page 593

Emilia sat in her old place under the dwarf pine. Mr. Powys had brought her back to Brookfield, where she heard that Wilfrid had been seen; and now her heart was in contest with an inexplicable puzzle: "He was here, and did not come to me!" Since that night when they had walked home from Ipley Green, she had not suffered a moment of longing. Her senses had lain as under a charm, with heart at anchor and a mind free to work. No one could have guessed that any human spell was on the girl. "Wherever he is, he thinks of me. I find him everywhere. He is safe, for I pray for him and have my arms about him. He will come." So she waited, as some grey lake lies, full and smooth, awaiting the star below the twilight. If she let her thoughts run on to the hour of their meeting, she had to shut her eyes and press at her heart; but as yet she was not out of tune for daily life, and she could imagine how that hour was to be strewn with new songs and hushed surprises. And 'thus' he would look: and 'thus.' "My hero!" breathed Emilia, shuddering a little. But now she was perplexed. Now that he had come and gone, she began to hunger bitterly for the sight of his face, and that which had hitherto nourished her grew a sickly phantom of delight. She wondered how she had forced herself to be patient, and what it was that she had found pleasure in.

None of the ladies were at home when Emilia returned. She went out to the woods, and sat, shadowed by the long bent branch; watching mechanically the slow rounding and yellowing of the beam of sunlight over the thick floor of moss, up against the fir-stems. The chaffinch and the linnet flitted off the grey orchard twigs, singing from new stations; and the bee seemed to come questioning the silence of the woods and droning disappointed away. The first excess of any sad feeling is half voluntary. Emilia could not help smiling, when she lifted her head out of a musing fit, to find that she had composed part of a minuet for the languid dancing motes in the shaft of golden light at her feet. "Can I remember it?" she thought, and forgot the incident with the effort.

Down at her right hand, bordering a water, stood a sallow, a dead tree, channelled inside with the brown trail of a goat-moth. Looking in this direction, she saw Cornelia advancing to the tree. When the lady had reached it, she drew a little book from her bosom, kissed it, and dropped it in the hollow. This done, she passed among the firs. Emilia had perceived that she was agitated: and with that strange instinct of hearts beginning to stir, which makes them divine at once where they will come upon the secret of their own sensations, she ran down to the tree and peered on tiptoe at the embedded volume. On a blank page stood pencilled: "This is the last fruit of the tree. Come not to gather more." There was no meaning for her in that sentimental chord but she must have got some glimpse of a meaning; for now, as in an agony, her lips fashioned the words: "If I forget his face I may as well die;" and she wandered on, striving more and more vainly to call up his features. The—"Does he think of me?" and —"What am I to him?"—such timorous little feather-play of feminine emotion she knew nothing of: in her heart was the strong flood of a passion.

Page 594

She met Edward Buxley and Freshfield Sumner at a cross-path, on their way to Brookfield; and then Adela joined the party, which soon embraced Mr. Barrett, and subsequently Cornelia. All moved on in a humming leisure, chattering by fits. Mr. Sumner was delicately prepared to encounter Mrs. Chump, “whom,” said Adela, “Edward himself finds it impossible to caricature;” and she affected to laugh at the woman.

“Happy the pencil that can reproduce!” Mr. Barrett exclaimed; and, meeting his smile, Cornelia said: “Do you know, my feeling is, and I cannot at all account for it, that if she were a Catholic she would not seem so gross?”

“Some of the poetry of that religion would descend upon her, possibly,” returned Mr. Barrett.

“Do you mean,” Freshfield said quickly, “that she would stand a fair chance of being sainted?”

Out of this arose some polite fencing between the two. Freshfield might have argued to advantage in a Court of law; but he was no match, on such topics and before such an audience, for a refined sentimentalist. More than once he betrayed a disposition to take refuge in his class (he being son to one of the puisne Judges). Cornelia speedily punished him, and to any correction from her he bowed his head.

Adela was this day gifted with an extraordinary insight. Emilia alone of the party was as a blot to her; but the others she saw through, as if they had been walking transparencies. She divined that Edward and Freshfield had both come, in concert, upon amorous business—that it was Freshfield’s object to help Edward to a private interview with her, and, in return, Edward was to perform the same service for him with Cornelia. So that Mr. Barrett was shockingly in the way of both; and the perplexity of these stupid fellows—who would insist upon wondering why the man Barrett and the girl Emilia (musicians both: both as it were, vagrants) did not walk together and talk of quavers and minims—was extremely comic. Passing the withered tree, Mr. Barrett deserved thanks from Freshfield, if he did not obtain them; for he lingered, surrendering his place. And then Adela knew that the weight of Edward Buxley’s remonstrative wrath had fallen on silent Emilia, to whom she clung fondly.

“I have had a letter,” Edward murmured, in the voice that propitiates secresy.

“A letter?” she cried loud; and off flew the man like a rabbit into his hole, the mask of him remaining.

Emilia presently found Mr. Barrett at her elbow. His hand clasped the book Cornelia had placed in the tree.

“It is hers,” said Emilia.

He opened it and pointed to his initials. She looked in his face.

“Are you very ill?”

Adela turned round from Edward’s neighbouring head. “Who is ill?”

Cornelia brought Freshfield to a stop: “Ill?”

Before them all, book in hand, Mr. Barrett had to give assurance that he was hearty, and to appear to think that his words were accepted, in spite of blanched jowl and reddened under-lid. Cornelia threw him one glance: his eyes closed under it. Adela found it necessary to address some such comforting exclamation as ‘Goodness gracious!’ to her observant spirit.

Page 595

In the park-path, leading to the wood, Arabella was seen as they came out the young branches that fringed the firs. She hurried up.

“I have been looking for you. Papa has arrived with Sir Twickenham Pryme, who dines with us.”

Adela unhesitatingly struck a blow.

“Lady Pryme, we make place for you.”

And she crossed to Cornelia. Cornelia kept her eyes fixed on Adela’s mouth, as one looks at a place whence a venomous reptile has darted out. Her eyelids shut, and she stood a white sculpture of pain, pitiable to see. Emilia took her hand, encouraging the tightening fingers with a responsive pressure. The group shuffled awkwardly together, though Adela did her best. She was very angry with Mr. Barrett for wearing that absurdly pale aspect. She was even angry with his miserable bankrupt face for mounting a muscular edition of the smile Cornelia had shown. “His feelings!” she cried internally; and the fact presented itself to her, that feelings were a luxury utterly unfit for poor men, who were to be accused of presumption for indulging in them.

“Now, I suppose you are happy?” she spoke low between Arabella and Edward.

The effect of these words was to colour violently two pair of cheeks. Arabella’s behaviour did not quite satisfy the fair critic. Edward Buxley was simply caught in a trap: He had the folly to imagine that by laughing he released himself.

“Is not that the laugh of an engaged?” said Adela to Freshfield.

He replied: “That would have been my idea under other conditions,” and looked meaningly.

She met the look with: “There are harsh conditions in life, are there not?” and left him sufficiently occupied by his own sensations.

“Mr. Barrett,” she inquired (partly to assist the wretch out of his compromising depression, and also that the question represented a real matter of debate in her mind), “I want your opinion; will you give it me? Apropos of slang, why does it sit well on some people? It certainly does not vulgarize them. After all, in many cases, it is what they call ’racy idiom.’ Perhaps our delicacy is strained?”

Now, it was Mr. Barrett’s established manner to speak in a deliberately ready fashion upon the introduction of a new topic. Habit made him, on this occasion, respond instantly; but the opening of the gates displayed the confusion of ideas within and the rageing tumult.

He said: “In many cases. There are two sorts. If you could call it the language of nature! which anything...I beg your pardon, Slang! Polite society rightly excludes it, because...”

“Yes, yes,” returned Adela; “but do we do rightly in submitting to the absolute tyranny? —I mean, I think, originality flies from us in consequence.”

The pitiable mortal became a trifle more luminous: “The objection is to the repetition of risked phrases. A happy audacity of expression may pass. It is bad taste to repeat it, that is all. Then there is the slang of heavy boorishness, and the slang of impatient wit...”

Page 596

“Is there any fine distinction between the extremes?” said Cornelia, in as clear a tone as she could summon.

“I think,” observed Arabella, “that whatever shows staleness speedily is self-condemned; and that is the case with slang.”

“And yet it’s to avoid some feeling of the sort that people employ it,” was Adela’s remark; and the discussion of this theme dropped lifelessly, and they walked on as before.

Coming to a halt near the garden gate, Adela tapped Emilia’s cheek, addressing her: “How demure she has become!”

“Ah!” went Arabella, “does she know papa has had a letter from Mr. Pericles, who wrote from Milan to say that he has made arrangements for her to enter the Academy there, and will come to fetch her in a few days?”

Emilia’s wrists crossed below her neck, while she gave ear.

“To take me away?” she said.

The tragic attitude and outcry, with the mournful flash of her eyes, might have told Emilia’s tale.

Adela unwillingly shielded her by interpreting the scene. “See! she must be a born actress. They always exaggerate in that style, so that you would really think she had a mighty passion for Brookfield.”

“Or in it,” suggested Freshfield.

“Or in it!” she laughed assentingly.

Mr. Pole was perceived entering the garden, rubbing his hands a little too obsequiously to some remark of the baronet’s, as the critical ladies imagined. Sir Twickenham’s arm spread out in a sweep; Mr. Pole’s head nodded. After the ceremony of the salute, the ladies were informed of Sir Twickenham’s observation: Sir Twickenham Pryme, a statistical member of Parliament, a well-preserved half-century in age, a gentleman in bearing, passably grey-headed, his whiskers brushed out neatly, as if he knew them individually and had the exact amount of them collectively at his fingers’ ends: Sir Twickenham had said of Mr. Pole’s infant park that if devoted to mangold-wurzel it would be productive and would pay: whereas now it was not ornamental and was waste.

“Sir Twickenham calculates,” said Mr. Pole, “that we should have a crop of—eh?”

“The average?” Sir Twickenham asked, on the evident upward mounting of a sum in his brain. And then, with a relaxing look upon Cornelia: “Perhaps you might have fifteen, sixteen, perhaps for the first year; or, say—you see, the exact acreage is unknown to me. Say roughly, ten thousand sacks the first year.”

“Of what?” inquired Cornelia.

“Mangold-wurzel,” said the baronet.

She gazed about her. Mr. Barrett was gone.

“But, no doubt, you take no interest in such reckonings?” Sir Twickenham added.

“On the contrary, I take every interest in practical details.”

Practical men believe this when they hear it from the lips of gentlewomen, and without philosophically analyzing the fact that it is because the practical quality possesses simply the fascination of a form of strength. Sir Twickenham pursued his details. Day closed on Brookfield blankly. Nevertheless, the ladies felt that the situation was now dignified by tragic feeling, and remembering keenly how they had been degraded of late, they had a sad enjoyment of the situation.

Page 597

CHAPTER XVIII

Meantime Wilfrid was leading a town-life and occasionally visiting Stornley. He was certainly not in love with Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, but he was in harness to that lady. In love we have some idea whither we would go: in harness we are simply driven, and the destination may be anywhere. To be reduced to this condition (which will happen now and then in the case of very young men who are growing up to something, and is, if a momentary shame to them, rather a sign of promise than not) the gentle male need not be deeply fascinated. Lady Charlotte was not a fascinating person. She did not lay herself out to attract. Had she done so, she would have failed to catch Wilfrid, whose soul thirsted for poetical refinement and filmy delicacies in a woman. What she had, and what he knew that he wanted, and could only at intervals assume by acting as if he possessed it, was a victorious aplomb, which gave her a sort of gallant glory in his sight. He could act it well before his sisters, and here and there a damsel; and coming fresh from Lady Charlotte's school, he had recently done so with success, and had seen the ladies feel toward him, as he felt under his instructress in the art. Some nature, however, is required for every piece of art. Wilfrid knew that he had been brutal in his representation of the part, and the retrospect of his conduct at Brookfield did not satisfy his remorseless critical judgement. In consequence, when he again saw Lady Charlotte, his admiration of that one prized characteristic of hers paralyzed him. She looked, and moved, and spoke, as if the earth were her own. She was a note of true music, and he felt himself to be an indecisive chord; capable ultimately of a splendid performance, it might be, but at present crying out to be played upon. This is the condition of a man in harness, whom witlings may call what they will. He is subjugated: not won. In this state of subjugation he will joyfully sacrifice as much as a man in love. For, having no consolatory sense of happiness, such as encircles and makes a nest for lovers, he seeks to attain some stature, at least, by excesses of apparent devotion. Lady Charlotte believed herself beloved at last. She was about to strike thirty; and Rumour, stalking with a turban of cloud on her head,—enough that this shocking old celestial dowager, from condemnation had passed to pity of the dashing lady. Beloved at last! After a while there is no question of our loving; but we thirst for love, if we have not had it. The key of Lady Charlotte will come in the course of events. She was at the doubtful hour of her life, a warm-hearted woman, known to be so by few, generally consigned by devout-visaged Scandal (for who save the devout will dare to sit in the chair of judgement?) as a hopeless rebel against conventional laws; and worse than that, far worse,—though what, is not said.

At Stornley the following letter from Emilia hit its mark:—

Page 598

Dear Mr. Wilfrid,

“It is time for me to see you. Come when you have read this letter. I cannot tell you how I am, because my heart feels beating in another body. Pray come; come now. Come on a swift horse. The thought of you galloping to me goes through me like a flame that hums. You will come, I know. It is time. If I write foolishly, do forgive me. I can only make sure of the spelling, and I cannot please you on paper, only when I see you.”

The signature of ‘Emilia Alessandra Belloni’ was given with her wonted proud flourish.

Wilfrid stared at the writing. “What! all this time she has been thinking the same thing!” Her constancy did not swim before him in alluring colours. He regarded it as a species of folly. Disgust had left him. The pool of Memory would have had to be stirred to remind him of the pipe-smoke in her hair. “You are sure to please me when you see me?” he murmured. “You are very confident, young lady!” So much had her charm faded. And then he thought kindly of her, and that a meeting would not be good for her, and that she ought to go to Italy and follow her profession. “If she grows famous,” whispered coxcombry, “why then oneself will take a little of the praises given to her.” And that seemed eminently satisfactory. Men think in this way when you have loved them, ladies. All men? No; only the coxcombs; but it is to these that you give your fresh affection. They are, as it were, the band of the regiment of adorers, marching ahead, while we sober working soldiers follow to their music. “If she grows famous, why then I can bear in mind that her heart was once in my possession: and it may return to its old owner, perchance.” Wilfrid indulged in a pleasant little dream of her singing at the Opera-house, and he, tied to a ferocious, detested wife, how softly and luxuriously would he then be sighing for the old time! It was partly good seed in his nature, and an apprehension of her force of soul, that kept him from a thought of evil to her. Passion does not inspire dark appetite. Dainty innocence does, I am told. Things are tested by the emotions they provoke. Wilfrid knew that there was no trifling with Emilia, so he put the letter by, commenting thus “she’s right, she doesn’t spell badly.” Behind, which, to those who have caught the springs of his character, volumes may be seen.

He put the letter by. Two days later, at noon, the card of Captain Gambier was brought to him in the billiard-room,—on it was written: “Miss Belloni waits on horseback to see you.” Wilfrid thought “Waits!” and the impossibility of escape gave him a notion of her power.

“So, you are letting that go on,” said Lady Charlotte, when she heard that Emilia and the captain were in company.

“There is no fear for her whatever.”

“There is always fear when a man gives every minute of his time to that kind of business,” retorted her ladyship.

Page 599

Wilfrid smiled the smile of the knowing. Rivalry with Gambier (and successful too!) did not make Emilia's admiration so tasteless. Some one cries out: "But, what a weak creature is this young man!" I reply, he was at a critical stage of his career. All of us are weak in the period of growth, and are of small worth before the hour of trial. This fellow had been fattening all his life on prosperity; the very best dish in the world; but it does not prove us. It fattens and strengthens us, just as the sun does. Adversity is the inspector of our constitutions; she simply tries our muscle and powers of endurance, and should be a periodical visitor. But, until she comes, no man is known. Wilfrid was not absolutely engaged to Lady Charlotte (she had taken care of that), and being free, and feeling his heart beat in more lively fashion, he turned almost delightedly to the girl he could not escape from. As when the wriggling eel that has been prodded by the countryman's fork, finds that no amount of wriggling will release it, to it twists in a knot around the imprisoning prong. This simile says more than I mean it to say, but those who understand similes will know the measure due to them.

There sat Emilia on her horse. "Has Gambier been giving her lessons?" thought Wilfrid. She sat up, well-balanced; and, as he approached, began to lean gently forward to him. A greeting 'equal to any lady's,' there was no doubt. This was the point Emilia had to attain, in his severe contemplation. A born lady, on her assured level, stood a chance of becoming a Goddess; but ladyship was Emilia's highest mark. Such is the state of things to the sentimental fancy when girls are at a disadvantage. She smiled, and held out both hands. He gave her one, nodding kindly, but was too confused to be the light-hearted cavalier. Lady Charlotte walked up to her horse's side, after receiving Captain Gambier's salute, and said: "Come, catch hold of my hands and jump."

"No," replied Emilia; "I only came to see him."

"But you will see him, and me in the bargain, if you stay."

"I fancy she has given her word to return early," interposed Wilfrid.

"Then we'll ride back with her," said Lady Charlotte. "Give me five minutes. I'll order a horse out for you."

She smiled, and considerately removed the captain, by despatching him to the stables.

A quivering dimple of tenderness hung for a moment in Emilia's cheeks, as she looked upon Wilfrid. Then she said falteringly, "I think they wish to be as we do."

"Alone?" cried Wilfrid.

"Yes; that is why I brought him over. He will come anywhere with me."

"You must be mistaken."

“No; I know it.”

“Did he tell you so?”

“No; Mr. Powys did.”

“Told you that Lady Charlotte—”

“Yes. Not, is; but, was. And he used that word...there is no word like it,...he said ’her lover’—Oh! mine!” Emilia lifted her arms. Her voice from its deepest fall had risen to a cry.

Page 600

Wilfrid caught her as she slipped from her saddle. His heart was in a tumult; stirred both ways: stirred with wrath and with love. He clasped her tightly.

“Am I?—am I?” he breathed.

“My lover!” Emilia murmured.

He was her slave again.

For, here was something absolutely his own. His own from the roots; from the first growth of sensation. Something with the bloom on it: to which no other finger could point and say: “There is my mark.”

(And, ladies, if you will consent to be likened to a fruit, you must bear with these observations, and really deserve the stigma. If you will smile on men, because they adore you as vegetable products, take what ensues.)

Lady Charlotte did no more than double the time she had asked for. The party were soon at a quiet canter up the lanes; but entering a broad furzy common with bramble-plots and oak-shaws, the Amazon flew ahead. Emilia’s eyes were so taken with her, that she failed to observe a tiny red-flowing runlet in the clay, with yellow-ridged banks almost baked to brick. Over it she was borne, but at the expense of a shaking that caused her to rely on her hold of the reins, ignorant of the notions of a horse outstripped. Wilfrid looked to see that the jump had been accomplished, and was satisfied. Gambier was pressing his hack to keep a respectable second.

Lady Charlotte spun round suddenly, crying, “Catch the mare!” and galloped back to Emilia, who was deposited on a bush of bramble. Dismounting promptly, the lady said: “My child, you’re not hurt?”

“Not a bit.” Emilia blinked.

“Not frightened?”

“Not a bit,” was half whispered.

“That’s brave. Now jump on your feet. Tell me why you rode over to us this morning. Quick. Don’t hesitate.”

“Because I want Wilfrid to see his sister Cornelia,” came the answer, with the required absence of indecision.

Emilia ran straightway to meet Wilfrid approaching; and as both her hands, according to her fashion, were stretched out to him to assure him of her safety and take his clasp, forgetful of the instincts derived from riding-habits, her feet became entangled; she trod

herself down, falling plump forward and looking foolish—perhaps for the first time in her life plainly feeling so.

“Up! little woman,” said Lady Charlotte, supporting her elbow.

“Now, Sir Wilfrid, we part here; and don’t spoil her courage, now she has had a spill, by any ‘assiduous attentions’ and precautions. She’s sure to take as many as are needed. If Captain Gambler thinks I require an escort, he may offer.”

The captain, taken by surprise, bowed, and flowed in ardent commonplace. Wilfrid did not look of a wholesome colour.

“Do you return?” he stammered; not without a certain aspect of righteous reproach.

“Yes. You will ride over to us again, probably, in a day or two? Captain Gambler will see me safe from the savage admirers that crowd this country, if I interpreted him rightly.”

Page 601

Emilia was lifted to her seat. Lady Charlotte sprang unassisted to hers. “Ta-ta!” she waved her fingers from her lips. The pairs then separated; one couple turning into green lanes, the other dipping to blue hills.

CHAPTER XIX

Gossip of course was excited on the subject of the choice of a partner made by the member for the county. Cornelia placed her sisters in one of their most pleasing of difficulties. She had not as yet pledged her word. It was supposed that she considered it due to herself to withhold her word for a term. The rumour in the family was, that Sir Twickenham appreciated her hesitation, and desired that he might be intimately known before he was finally accepted. When the Tinleys called, they heard that Cornelia’s acceptance of the baronet was doubtful. The Copleys, on the other hand, distinctly understood that she had decided in his favour. Owing to the amiable dissension between the Copleys and the Tinleys, each party called again; giving the ladies of Brookfield further opportunity for studying one of the levels from which they had risen. Arabella did almost all the fencing with Laura Tinley, contemptuously as a youth of station returned from college will turn and foil an ill-conditioned villager, whom formerly he has encountered on the green.

“Had they often met, previous to the...the proposal?” inquired Laura; and laughed: “I was going to say ‘popping.’”

“Pray do not check yourself, if a phrase appears to suit you,” returned Arabella.

“But it was in the neighbourhood, was it not?”

“They have met in the neighbourhood.”

“At Richford?”

“Also at Richford.”

“We thought it was sudden, dear; that’s all.”

“Why should it not be?”

“Perhaps the best things are, it is true.”

“You congratulate us upon a benefit?”

“He is to be congratulated seriously. Naturally. When she decides, let me know early, I do entreat you, because...well, I am of a different opinion from some people, who talk of another attachment, or engagement, and I do not believe in it, and have said so.”

Rising to depart, Laura Tinley resumed: “Most singular! You are aware, of course, that poor creature, our organist—I ought to say yours—who looked (it was Mr. Sumner I heard say it—such a good thing!)” as if he had been a gentleman in another world, and was the ghost of one in this:” really one of the cleverest things! but he is clever!—-Barrett’s his name: Barrett and some: musical name before it, like Handel. I mean one that we are used to. Well, the man has totally and unexpectedly thrown up his situation.”

“His appointment,” said Arabella. Permitting no surprise to be visible, she paused: “Yes. I don’t think we shall give our consent to her filling the post.”

Laura let it be seen that her adversary was here a sentence too quick for her.

Page 602

“Ah! you mean your little Miss Belloni?”

“Was it not of her you were thinking?”

“When?” asked Laura, shamefully bewildered.

“When you alluded to Mr. Barrett’s vacant place.”

“Not at the moment.”

“I thought you must be pointing to her advancement.”

“I confess it was not in my mind.”

“In what consisted the singularity, then?”

“The singularity?”

“You prefaced your remarks with the exclamation, ‘Singular!’”

Laura showed that Arabella had passed her guard. She hastened to compliment her on her kindness to Emilia, and so sheathed her weapon for the time, having just enjoyed a casual inspection of Mrs. Chump entering the room, and heard the brogue an instant.

“Irish!” she whispered, smiling, with a sort of astonished discernment of the nationality, and swept through the doorway: thus conveying forcibly to Arabella her knowledge of what the ladies of Brookfield were enduring: a fine Parthian shot.

That Cornelia should hold a notable county man, a baronet and owner of great acres, in a state between acceptance and rejection, was considered high policy by the ladies, whom the idea of it elevated; and they encouraged her to pursue this course, without having a suspicion, shrewd as they were, that it was followed for any other object than the honour of the family. But Mr. Pole was in the utmost perplexity, and spoke of baronets as things almost holy, to be kneeled to, prayed for. He was profane. “I thought, papa,” said Cornelia, “that women conferred the favour when they gave their hands!”

It was a new light to the plain merchant. “How should you say if a Prince came and asked for you?”

“Still that he asked a favour at my hands.”

“Oh!” went Mr. Pole, in the voice of a man whose reason is outraged. The placidity of Cornelia’s reply was not without its effect on him, nevertheless. He had always thought his girls extraordinary girls, and born to be distinguished. “Perhaps she has a lord in

view," he concluded: it being his constant delusion to suppose that high towering female sense has always a practical aim at a material thing. He was no judge of the sex in its youth. "Just speak to her," he said to Wilfrid.

Wilfrid had heard from Emilia that there was a tragic background to this outward placidity; tears on the pillow at night and long vigils. Emilia had surprised her weeping, and though she obtained no confidences, the soft mood was so strong in the stately lady, that she consented to weep on while Emilia clasped her. Petitioning on her behalf to Wilfrid for aid, Emilia had told him the scene; and he, with a man's stupidity, alluded to it, not thinking what his knowledge of it revealed to a woman.

"Why do you vacillate, and keep us all in the dark as to what you mean?" he began.

"I am not prepared," said Cornelia; the voice of humility issuing from a monument.

Page 603

“One of your oracular phrases! Are you prepared to be straightforward in your dealings?”

“I am prepared for any sacrifice, Wilfrid.”

“The marrying of a man in his position is a sacrifice!”

“I cannot leave papa.”

“And why not?”

“He is ill. He does not speak of it, but he is ill. His actions are strange. They are unaccountable.”

“He has an old friend to reside in his house?”

“It is not that. I have noticed him. His mind...he requires watching.”

“And how long is it since you made this discovery?”

“One sees clearer perhaps when one is not quite happy.”

“Not happy! Then it’s for him that you turn the night to tears?”

Cornelia closed her lips. She divined that her betrayer must be close in his confidence. She went shortly after to Emilia, whose secret at once stood out bare to a kindled suspicion. There was no fear that Cornelia would put her finger on it accusingly, or speak of it directly. She had the sentimentalist’s profound respect for the name and notion of love. She addressed Emilia vaguely, bidding her keep guard on her emotions, and telling her there was one test of the truth of masculine protestations; this, Will he marry you? The which, if you are poor, is a passably infallible test. Emilia sucked this in thoughtfully. She heard that lovers were false. Why, then of course they were not like her lover! Cornelia finished what she deemed her duty, and departed, while Emilia thought: “I wonder whether he could be false to me;” and she gave herself shrewd half-delicious jarrings of pain, forcing herself to contemplate the impossible thing.

She was in this state when Mrs. Chump came across her, and with a slight pressure of a sovereign into her hand, said: “There, it’s for you, little Belloni! and I see ye’ve been thinkin’ me one o’ the scrape-hards and close-fists. It’s Pole who keeps me low, on purpose. And I’m a wretch if I haven’t my purse full, so you see I’m all in the dark in the house, and don’t know half so much as the sluts o’ the kitchen. So, ye’ll tell me, little Belloni, is Arr’bella goin’ to marry Mr. Annybody? And is Cornelia goin’ to marry Sir Tickleham? And whether Mr. Wilfrud’s goin’ to marry Lady Charlotte Chill’nworth? Becas, my dear, there’s Arr’bella, who’s sharp, she is, as a North-easter in January, (which Chump ’d cry out for, for the sake of his ships, poor fella—he kneelin’ by ’s

bedside in a long nightgown and lookin' just twice what he was!) she has me like a nail to my vary words, and shows me that nothin' can happen betas o' what I've said. And Cornelia—if ye'll fancy a tall codfish on its tail: 'Mrs. Chump, I beg ye'll not go to believe annything of me.' So I says to her, 'Cornelia! my dear! do ye think, now, it's true that Chump went and marrud his cook, that ye treat me so? becas my father,' I tell her, 'he dealt in porrk in a large way, and I was a fine woman, full of the

Page 604

arr'stocracy, and Chump a little puffed-out bladder of a man.' So then she says: 'Mrs. Chump, I listen to no gossup: listen you to no gossup. 'And Mr. Wilfrud, my dear, he sends me on the flat o' my back, laughin'. And Ad'la she takes and turns me right about, so that I don't see the thing I'm askin' after; and there's nobody but you, little Belloni, to help me, and if ye do, ye shall know what the crumple of paper sounds like."

Mrs. Chump gave a sugary suck with her tongue. Emilia returned the money to her.

"Ye're foolush!" said Mrs. Chump. "A shut fist's good in fight and bad in friendship. Do ye know that? Open your hand."

"Excuse me," persisted Emilia.

"Pooh! take the money, or I'll say ye're in a conspiracy to make me blindman's-buff of the parrty. Take ut."

"I don't want it."

"Maybe, it's not enough?"

"I don't want any, ma'am."

"Ma'am, to the deuce with ye! I'll be callin' ye a forr'ner in a minute, I will."

Emilia walked away from a volley of terrific threats.

For some reason, unfathomed by her, she wanted to be alone with Wilfrid and put a question to him. No other, in sooth, than the infallible test. Not, mind you, that she wished to be married. But something she had heard (she had forgotten what it was) disturbed her, and that recent trifling with pain, in her excess of happiness, laid her open to it. Her heart was weaker, and fluttered, as if with a broken wing. She thought, "if I can be near him to lean against him for one full hour!" it would make her strong again. For, she found that if her heart was rising on a broad breath, suddenly, for no reason that she knew, it seemed to stop in its rise, break, and sink, like a wind-beaten billow. Once or twice, in a quick fear, she thought: "What is this? Is this a malady coming before death?" She walked out gloomily, thinking of the darkness of the world to Wilfrid, if she should die. She plucked flowers, and then reproached herself with plucking them. She tried to sing. "No, not till I have been with him alone;" she said, chiding her voice to silence. A shadow crossed her mind, as a Spring-mist dulls the glory of May. "Suppose all singing has gone from me—will he love wretched me?"

By-and-by she met him in the house. "Come out of doors to-night," she whispered.

Wilfrid's spirit of intrigue was never to be taken by surprise. "In the wood, under the pine, at nine," he replied.

“Not there,” said Emilia, seeing this place mournfully dark from Cornelia’s grief. “It is too still; say, where there’s water falling. One can’t be unhappy by noisy water.”

Wilfrid considered, and named Wilming Weir. “And there we’ll sit and you’ll sing to me. I won’t dine at home, so they won’t susp-a-fancy anything.—Soh! and you want very much to be with me, my bird? What am I?” He bent his head.

“My lover.”

Page 605

He pressed her hand rapturously, half-doubting whether her pronunciation of the word had not a rather too confident twang.

Was it not delightful, he asked her, that they should be thus one to the other, and none know of it. She thought so too, and smiled happily, promising secresy, at his request; for the sake of continuing so felicitous a life.

“You, you know, have an appointment with Captain Gambier, and, I with Lady Charlotte Chillingworth,” said he. “How dare you make appointments with a captain of hussars?” and he bent her knuckles fondlingly.

Emilia smiled as before. He left her with a distinct impression that she did not comprehend that part of her lesson.

Wilfrid had just bled his father of a considerable sum of money; having assured him that he was the accepted suitor of Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, besides making himself pleasant in allusion to Mrs. Chump, so far as to cast some imputation on his sisters’ judgement for not perceiving the virtues of the widow. The sum was improvidently large. Mr. Pole did not hear aright when he heard it named. Even at the repetition, he went: “Eh?” two or three times, vacantly. The amount was distinctly nailed to his ear: whereupon he said, “Ah!—yes! you young fellows want money: must have it, I suppose. Up from the bowels of the earth Up from the—: you’re sure they’re not playing the fool with you, over there?”

Wilfrid understood the indication to Stornley. “I think you need have no fear of that, sir.” And so his father thought, after an examination of the youth, who was of manly shape, and had a fresh, non-fatuous, air.

“Well, if that’s all right...” sighed Mr. Pole. “Of course you’ll always know that money’s money. I wish your sisters wouldn’t lose their time, as they do. Time’s worth more than money. What sum?”

“I told you, sir, I wanted—there’s the yacht, you know, and a lot of tradesmen’s bills, which you don’t like to see standing:-about—perhaps I had better name the round sum. Suppose you write down eight hundred. I shan’t want more for some months. If you fancy it too much...”

Mr. Pole had lifted his head. But he spoke nothing. His lips and brows were rigid in apparent calculation. Wilfrid kept his position for a minute or so; and then, a little piqued, he moved about. He had inherited the antipathy to the discussion of the money question, and fretted to find it unnecessarily prolonged.

“Shall I come to you on this business another time, sir?”

“No, God bless my soul!” cried his father; “are you going to keep this hanging over me for ever? Eight hundred, you said.” He mumbled: “salary of a chief clerk of twenty years’ standing. Eight: twice four:—there you have it exactly.”

“Will you send it me in a letter?” said Wilfrid, out of patience.

“I’ll send it you in a letter,” assented his father. Upon which Wilfrid changed his mind. “I can take a chair, though. I can easily wait for it now.”

Page 606

“Save trouble, if I send it. Eh?”

“Do you wish to see whether you can afford it, sir?”

“I wish to see you show more sense—with your confounded ‘afford.’ Have you any idea of bankers’ books?—bankers’ accounts?” Mr. Pole fished his cheque-book from a drawer and wrote Wilfrid’s name and the sum, tore out the leaf and tossed it to him. “There, I’ve written to-day. Don’t present it for a week.” He rubbed his forehead hastily, touching here and there a paper to put it scrupulously in a line with the others. Wilfrid left him, and thought: “Kind old boy! Of course, he always means kindly, but I think I see a glimpse of avarice as a sort of a sign of age coming on. I hope he’ll live long!”

Wilfrid was walking in the garden, imagining perhaps that he was thinking, as the swarming sensations of little people help them to imagine, when Cornelia ran hurriedly up to him and said: “Come with me to papa. He’s ill: I fear he is going to have a fit.”

“I left him sound and well, just now,” said Wilfrid. “This is your mania.”

“I found him gasping in his chair not two minutes after you quitted him. Dearest, he is in a dangerous state!”

Wilfrid stept back to his father, and was saluted with a ready “Well?” as he entered; but the mask had slipped from half of the old man’s face, and for the first time in his life Wilfrid perceived that he had become an old man.

“Well, sir, you sent for me?” he said.

“Girls always try to persuade you you’re ill—that’s all,” returned Mr. Pole. His voice was subdued; but turning to Cornelia, he fired up: “It’s preposterous to tell a man who carries on a business like mine, you’ve observed for a long while that he’s queer!—-There, my dear child, I know that you mean well. I shall look all right the day you’re married.”

This allusion, and the sudden kindness, drew a storm of tears to Cornelia’s eyelids.

“Papa! if you will but tell me what it is!” she moaned.

A nervous frenzy seemed to take possession of him. He ordered her out of the room.

She was gone, but his arm was still stretched out, and his expression of irritated command did not subside.

Wilfrid took his arm and put it gently down on the chair, saying: “You’re not quite the thing to-day, sir.”

“Are you a fool as well?” Mr. Pole retorted. “What do you know of, to make me ill? I live a regular life. I eat and drink just as you all do; and if I have a headache, I’m stunned with a whole family screaming as hard as they can that I’m going to die. Damned hard! I say, sir, it’s—” He fell into a feebleness.

“A little glass of brandy, I think,” Wilfrid suggested; and when Mr. Pole had gathered his mind he assented, begging his son particularly to take precautions to prevent any one from entering the room until he had tasted the reviving liquor.

CHAPTER XX

Page 607

A half-circle of high-banked greensward, studded with old park-trees, hung round the roar of the water; distant enough from the white-twisting fall to be mirrored on a smooth-heaved surface, while its out-pushing brushwood below drooped under burdens of drowned reed-flags that caught the foam. Keen scent of hay, crossing the dark air, met Emilia as she entered the river-meadow. A little more, and she saw the white weir-piles shining, and the grey roller just beginning to glisten to the moon. Eastward on her left, behind a cedar, the moon had cast off a thick cloud, and shone through the cedar-bars with a yellowish hazy softness, making rosy gold of the first passion of the tide, which, writhing and straining on through many lights, grew wide upon the wonderful velvet darkness underlying the wooded banks. With the full force of a young soul that leaps from beauty seen to unimagined beauty, Emilia stood and watched the picture. Then she sat down, hushed, awaiting her lover.

Wilfrid, as it chanced, was ten minutes late. She did not hear his voice till he had sunk on his knee by her side.

“What a reverie!” he said half jealously. “Isn’t it lovely here?”

Emilia pressed his hand, but without turning her face to him, as her habit was. He took it for shyness, and encouraged her with soft exclamations and expansive tenderness.

“I wish I had not come here!” she murmured.

“Tell me why?” He folded his arm about her waist.

“Why did you let me wait?” said she.

Wilfrid drew out his watch; blamed the accident that had detained him, and remarked that there were not many minutes to witness against him.

She appeared to throw off her moodiness. “You are here at last. Let me hold your hand, and think, and be quite silent.”

“You shall hold my hand, and think, and be quite silent, my own girl! if you will tell me what’s on your mind.”

Emilia thought it enough to look in his face, smiling.

“Has any one annoyed you?” he cried out.

“No one.”

“Then receive the command of your lord, that you kiss him.”

“I will kiss him,” said Emilia; and did so.

The salute might have appeased an imperious lord, but was not so satisfactory to an exacting lover. He perceived, however, that, whether as lover or as lord, he must wait for her now, owing to her having waited for him: so, he sat by her, permitting his hand to be softly squeezed, and trying to get at least in the track of her ideas, while her ear was turned to the weir, and her eyes were on the glowing edges of the cedar-tree.

Finally, on one of many deep breaths, she said: “It’s over. Why were you late? But, never mind now. Never let it be long again when I am expecting you. It’s then I feel so much at his mercy. I mean, if I am where I hear falling water; sometimes thunder.”

Wilfrid masked his complete mystification with a caressing smile; not without a growing respect for the only person who could make him experience the pangs of conscious silliness. You see, he was not a coxcomb.

Page 608

“That German!” Emilia enlightened him.

“Your old music-master?”

“I wish it, I wish it! I should soon be free from him. Don’t you know that dreadful man I told you about, who’s like a black angel to me, because there is no music like his? and he’s a German! I told you how I first dreamed about him, and then regularly every night, after talking with my father about Italy and his black-yellow Tedeschi, this man came over my pillow and made me call him Master, Master. And he is. He seems as if he were the master of my soul, mocking me, making me worship him in spite of my hate. I came here, thinking only of you. I heard the water like a great symphony. I fell into dreaming of my music. That’s when I am at his mercy. There’s no one like him. I must detest music to get free from him. How can I? He is like the God of music.”

Wilfrid now remembered certain of her allusions to this rival, who had hitherto touched him very little. Perhaps it was partly the lovely scene that lifted him to a spiritual jealousy, partly his susceptibility to a sentimental exaggeration, and partly the mysterious new charm in Emilia’s manner, that was as a bordering lustre, showing how the full orb was rising behind her.

“His name?” Wilfrid asked for.

Emilia’s lips broke to the second letter of the alphabet; but she cut short the word. “Why should you hear it? And now that you are here, you drive him away. And the best is,” she laughed, “I am sure you will not remember any of his pieces. I wish I could not—not that it’s the memory; but he seems all round me, up in the air, and when the trees move all together...you chase him away, my lover!”

It was like a break in music, the way that Emilia suddenly closed her sentence; coming with a shock of flattering surprise upon Wilfrid.

Then she pursued: “My English lover! I am like Italy, in chains to that German, and you...but no, no, no! It’s not quite a likeness, for my German is not a brute. I have seen his picture in shop-windows: the wind seemed in his hair, and he seemed to hear with his eyes: his forehead frowning so. Look at me, and see. So!”

Emilia pressed up the hair from her temples and bent her brows.

“It does not increase your beauty,” said Wilfrid.

“There’s the difference!” Emilia sighed mildly. “He sees angels, cherubs, and fairies, and imps, and devils; or he hears them: they come before him from far off, in music. They do to me, now and then. Only now and then, when my head’s on fire.—My lover!”

Wilfrid pressed his mouth to the sweet instrument. She took his kiss fully, and gave her own frankly, in return. Then, sighing a very little, she said: “Do not kiss me much.”

“Why not?”

“No!”

“But, look at me.”

“I will look at you. Only take my hand. See the moon is getting whiter. The water there is like a pool of snakes, and then they struggle out, and roll over and over, and stream on lengthwise. I can see their long flat heads, and their eyes: almost their skins. No, my lover! do not kiss me. I lose my peace.”

Page 609

Wilfrid was not willing to relinquish his advantage, and the tender deep tone of the remonstrance was most musical and catching. What if he pulled her to earth from that rival of his in her soul? She would then be wholly his own. His lover's sentiment had grown rageingly jealous of the lordly German. But Emilia said, "I have you on my heart more when I touch your hand only, and think. If you kiss me, I go into a cloud, and lose your face in my mind."

"Yes, yes;" replied Wilfrid, pleased to sustain the argument for the sake of its fruitful promises. "But you must submit to be kissed, my darling. You will have to."

She gazed inquiringly.

"When you are married, I mean."

"When will you marry me?" she said.

The heir-apparent of the house of Pole blinked probably at that moment more foolishly than most mortal men have done. Taming his astonishment to represent a smile, he remarked: "When? are you thinking about it already?"

She answered, in a quiet voice that conveyed the fact forcibly, "Yes."

"But you're too young yet; and you're going to Italy, to learn in the schools. You wouldn't take a husband there with you, would you? What would the poor devil do?"

"But you are not too young," said she.

Wilfrid supposed not.

"Could you not go to my Italy with me?"

"Impossible! What! as a dangling husband?" Wilfrid laughed scornfully.

"They would love you too," she said. "They are such loving people. Oh, come! Consent to come, my lover! I must learn. If I do not, you will despise me. How can I bring anything to lay at your feet, my dear! my dear! if I do not?"

"Impossible!" Wilfrid reiterated, as one who had found moorings in the word.

"Then I will give up Italy!"

He had not previously acted hypocrite with this amazing girl. Nevertheless, it became difficult not to do so. He could scarcely believe that he had on a sudden, and by strange agency, slipped into an earnest situation. Emilia's attitude and tone awakened

him to see it. Her hands were clenched straight down from the shoulders: all that she conceived herself to be renouncing for his sake was expressed in her face.

“Would you, really?” he murmured.

“I will!”

“And be English altogether?”

“Be yours!”

“Mine?”

“Yes; from this time.”

Now stirred his better nature: though not before had he sceptically touched her lips and found them cold, as if the fire had been taken out of them by what they had uttered. He felt that it was no animal love, but the force of a soul drawn to him; and, forgetting the hypocritical foundation he had laid, he said: “How proud I shall be of you!”

“I shall go with you to battle,” returned Emilia.

“My little darling! You won’t care to see those black fellows killed, will you?”

Page 610

Emilia shuddered. “No; poor things! Why do you hurt them? Kill wicked people, tyrant white-coats! And we will not talk of killing now. Proud of me? If I can make you!”

“You sigh so heavily!”

“Something makes me feel like a little beggar.”

“When I tell you I love you?”

“Yes; but I only feel rich when I am giving; and I seem to have nothing to give now:—-now that I have lost Italy!”

“But you give me your love, don’t you?”

“All of it. But I seem to give it to you in tatters it’s like a beggar; like a day without any sun.”

“Do you think I shall have that idea when I hear you sing to me, and know that this little leaping fountain of music here is mine?”

Dim rays of a thought led Emilia to remark, “Must not men keel to women? I mean, if they are to love them for ever?”

Wilfrid smiled gallantly: “I will kneel to you, if it pleases you.”

“Not now. You should have done so, once, I dreamed only once, just for a moment, in Italy; when all were crying out to me that I had caught their hearts. I fancied standing out like a bright thing in a dark crowd, and then saying “I am his!” pointing to you, and folding my arms, waiting for you to take me.”

The lover’s imagination fired at the picture, and immediately he told a lover’s lie; for the emotion excited by the thought of her glory coloured deliciously that image of her abnegation of all to him. He said: “I would rather have you as you are.”

Emilia leaned to him more, and the pair fixed their eyes on the moon, that had now topped the cedar, and was pure silver: silver on the grass, on the leafage, on the waters. And in the West, facing it, was an arch of twilight and tremulous rose; as if a spirit hung there over the shrouded sun.

“At least,” thought Wilfrid, “heaven, and the beauty of the world, approve my choice.” And he looked up, fancying that he had a courage almost serene to meet his kindred with Emilia on his arm.

She felt his arm dreamily stressing its clasp about her, and said: “Now I know you love me. And you shall take me as I am. I need not be so poor after all. My dear! my dear! I cannot see beyond you.”

“Is that your misery?” said he.

“My delight! my pleasure! One can live a life anywhere. And how can I belong to Italy, if I am yours? Do you know, when we were silent just now, I was thinking that water was the history of the world flowing out before me, all mixed up of kings and queens, and warriors with armour, and shouting armies; battles and numbers of mixed people; and great red sunsets, with women kneeling under them. Do you know those long low sunsets? I love them. They look like blood spilt for love. The noise of the water, and the moist green smell, gave me hundreds of pictures that seemed to hug me. I thought —what could stir music in me more than this? and, am I not just as rich if I stay here with my lover, instead of flying to strange countries, that I shall not care for now? So, you shall take me as I am. I do not feel poor any longer.”

Page 611

With that she gave him both her hands.

“Yes,” said Wilfrid.

As if struck by the ridicule of so feeble a note, falling upon her passionate speech, he followed it up with the “yes!” of a man; adding: “Whatever you are, you are my dear girl; my own love; mine!”

Having said it, he was screwed up to feel it as nearly as possible, such virtue is there in uttered words.

Then he set about resolutely studying to appreciate her in the new character she had assumed to him. It is barely to be supposed that he should understand what in her love for him she sacrificed in giving up Italy, as she phrased it. He had some little notion of the sacrifice; but, as he did not demand any sacrifice of the sort, and as this involved a question perplexing, irritating, absurd, he did not regard it very favourably. As mistress of his fancy, her prospective musical triumphs were the crown of gold hanging over her. As wife of his bosom, they were not to be thought of. But the wife of his bosom must take her place by virtue of some wondrous charm. What was it that Emilia could show, if not music? Beautiful eyebrows: thick rare eyebrows, no doubt couched upon her full eyes, they were a marvel: and her eyes were a marvel. She had a sweet mouth, too, though the upper lip did not boast the aristocratic conventional curve of adorable pride, or the under lip a pretty droop to a petty rounded chin. Her face was like the aftersunset across a rose-garden, with the wings of an eagle poised outspread on the light. Some such coloured, vague, magnified impression Wilfrid took of her. Still, it was not quite enough to make him scorn contempt, should it whisper: nor even quite enough to combat successfully the image of elegant dames in their chosen attitudes—the queenly moments when perhaps they enter an assembly, or pour out tea with an exquisite exhibition of arm, or recline upon a couch, commanding homage of the world of little men. What else had this girl to count upon to make her exclusive? A devoted heart; she had a loyal heart, and perfect frankness: a mind impressible, intelligent, and fresh. She gave promise of fair companionship at all seasons. She could put a spell upon him, moreover. By that power of hers, never wilfully exercised, she came, in spite of the effect left on him by her early awkwardnesses and ‘animalities,’ nearer to his idea of superhuman nature than anything he knew of. But how would she be regarded when the announcement of Mrs. Wilfrid Pole brought scrutinizing eyes and gossiping mouths to bear on her?

It mattered nothing. He kissed her, and the vision of the critical world faded to a blank. Whatever she was, he was her prime luminary, so he determined to think that he cast light upon a precious, an unrivalled land.

“You are my own, are you not, Emilia?”

“Yes; I am,” she answered.

“That water seems to say ‘for ever,’” he murmured; and Emilia’s fingers pressed upon his.

Page 612

Of marriage there was no further word. Her heart was evidently quite at ease; and that it should be so without chaining him to a date, was Wilfrid's peculiar desire. He could pledge himself to eternity, but shrank from being bound to eleven o'clock on the morrow morning.

So, now, the soft Summer hours flew like white doves from off the mounting moon, and the lovers turned to go, all being still: even the noise of the waters still to their ears, as life that is muffled in sleep. They saw the cedar grey-edged under the moon: and Night, that clung like a bat beneath its ancient open palms. The bordering sward about the falls shone silvery. In its shadow was a swan. These scenes are but beckoning hands to the hearts of lovers, waving them on to that Eden which they claim: but when the hour has fled, they know it; and by the palpitating light in it they know that it holds the best of them.

CHAPTER XXI

At this season Mr. Pericles reappeared. He had been, he said, through "Paris, Turin, Milano, Veniss, and by Trieste over the Summering to Vienna on a tour for a voice." And in no part of the Continent, his vehement declaration assured the ladies, had he found a single one. It was one universal croak—ahi! And Mr. Pericles could, affirm that Purgatory would have no pains for him after the torments he had recently endured. "Zey are frogs if zey are not geese," said Mr. Pericles. "I give up. Opera is dead. Hein? for a time;" and he smiled almost graciously, adding: "Where is she?" For Emilia was not present.

The ladies now perceived a greatness of mind in the Greek's devotion to music, and in his non-mercenary travels to assist managers of Opera by discovering genius. His scheme for Emilia fired them with delight. They were about to lay down all the material arrangements at once, but Mrs. Chump, who had heard that there was a new man in the house, now entered the room, prepared to conquer him. As thus, after a short form of introduction: "D'ye do, sir! and ye're Mr. Paricles. Oh! but ye're a Sultan, they say. Not in morr'ls, sir. And vary pleasant to wander on the Cont'nent with a lot o' lacqueys at your heels. It's what a bachelor can do. But I ask ye, sir, is ut fair, ye think, to the poor garls that has to stop at home?"

Hereat the ladies of Brookfield, thus miserably indicated, drew upon their self-command that sprang from the high sense of martyrdom.

Mr. Pericles did not reply to Mrs. Chump at all. He turned to Adela, saying aloud: "What is zis person?"

It might have pleased them to hear any slight put publicly on Mrs. Chump in the first resistance to the woman, but in the present stage their pride defended her. "Our friend,"

was the reply with which Arabella rebuked his rudeness; and her sister approved her. “We can avoid showing that we are weak in our own opinion, whatsoever degrades us,” they had said during a consultation.

Page 613

Simultaneously they felt that Mr. Pericles being simply a millionaire and not In Society, being also a middle-class foreigner (a Greek whose fathers ran with naked heels and long lank hair on the shores of the Aegean), before such a man they might venture to identify this their guest with themselves an undoubted duty, in any case, but not always to be done; at least, not with grace and personal satisfaction. Therefore, the “our friend” dispersed a common gratulatory glow. Very small points, my masters; but how are coral-islands built?

Mrs. Chump fanned her cheek, in complete ignorance of the offence and defence. Chump, deceased, in amorous mood, had praised her management of the fan once, when breath was in him: “‘Martha,’ says he, winkin’ a sort of ‘mavourneen’ at me, ye know—’Martha! with a fan in your hand, if ye’re not a black-eyed beauty of a Spaniard, ye little devil of Seville!’ says he.” This she had occasionally confided to the ladies. The marital eulogy had touched her, and she was not a woman of coldly-flowing blood, she had an excuse for the constant employment of the fan.

“And well, Mr. Paricles! have ye got nothin’ to tell us about foreign countesses and their slips? Because, we can listen, sir, garls or not. Sure, if they understand ye, ye teach ’em nothin’; and if they don’t understand ye, where’s the harm done? D’ye see, sir? It’s clear in favour of talkin’.”

Mr. Pericles administered consolation to his moustache by twisting it into long waxy points. “I do not know; I do not know,” he put her away with, from time to time. In the end Mrs. Chump leaned over to Arabella. “Don’t have ’m, my dear,” she murmured.

“You mean—?” quoth Arabella.

“Here’s the driest stick that aver stood without sap.”

Arabella flushed when she took the implication that she was looking on the man as a husband. Adela heard the remarks, and flushed likewise. Mrs. Chump eyed them both. “It’s for the money o’ the man,” she soliloquized aloud, as her fashion was. Adela jumped up, and with an easy sprightly posture of her fair, commonly studious person, and natural run of notes “Oh!” she cried, “I begin to feel what it is to be like a live fish on the fire, frying, frying, frying! and if he can keep his Christian sentiments under this infliction, what a wonderful hero he must be! What a hot day!”

She moved swiftly to the door, and flung it open. A sight met her eyes at which she lost her self-possession. She started back, uttering a soft cry.

“Ah! aha! oh!” went the bitter ironic drawl of Mr. Pericles, whose sharp glance had caught the scene as well.

Emilia came forward with a face like sunset. Diplomacy, under the form of Wilfrid Pole, kicked its heels behind, and said a word or two in a tone of false cheerfulness.

“Oh! so!” Mr. Pericles frowned, while Emilia held her hand out to him. “Yeas! You are quite well? H’m! You are burnt like a bean—hein? I shall ask you what you have been doing, by and by.”

Page 614

Happily for decency, Mrs. Chump had not participated in the fact presented by ocular demonstration. She turned about comfortably to greet Wilfrid, uttering the inspired remark: "Ye look red from a sly kiss!"

"For one?" said he, sharpening his blunted wits on this dull instrument.

The ladies talked down their talk. Then Wilfrid and Mr. Pericles interchanged quasi bows.

"Oh, if he doesn't show his upper teeth like an angry cat, or a leopard I've seen!" cried Mrs. Chump in Adela's ear, designating Mr. Pericles. "Does he know Mr. Wilfrud's in the British army, and a new lieuten't, gazetted and all?"

Mr. Pericles certainly did not look pleasantly upon Wilfrid: Emilia received his unconcealed wrath and spite.

"Go and sing a note!" he said.

"At the piano?" Emilia quietly asked.

"At piano, harp, what you will—it is ze voice I want."

Emilia pitched her note high from a full chest and with glad bright eyes, which her fair critics thought just one degree brazen, after the revelation in the doorway.

Mr. Pericles listened; wearing an aching expression, as if he were sending one eye to look up into his brain for a judgement disputed in that sovereign seat.

Still she held on, and then gave a tremulous, rich, contralto note.

"Oh! the human voice!" cried Adela, overcome by the transition of tones.

"Like going from the nightingale to the nightjar," said Arabella.

Mrs. Chump remarked: "Ye'll not find a more susceptible woman to musuc than me."

Wilfrid looked away. Pride coursed through his veins in a torrent.

When the voice was still, Mr. Pericles remained in a pondering posture.

"You go to play fool with zat voice in Milano, you are flogged," he cried terribly, shaking his forefinger.

Wilfrid faced round in wrath, but Mr. Pericles would not meet his challenge, continuing: "You hear? you hear?—so!" and Mr. Pericles brought the palms of his hands in collision.

“Marcy, man!” Mrs. Chump leaped from her chair; “d’ye mean that those horrud forr’ners’ll smack a full-grown young woman?—Don’t go to ’m, my dear. Now, take my ’dvice, little Belloni, and don’t go. It isn’t the sting o’ the smack, ye know—”

“Shall I sing anything to you?” Emilia addressed Mr. Pericles. The latter shrugged to express indifference. Nevertheless she sang. She had never sung better. Mr. Pericles clutched his chin in one hand, elbow on knee. The ladies sighed to think of the loss of homage occasioned by the fact of so few being present to hear her. Wilfrid knew himself the fountain of it all, and stood fountain-like, in a shower of secret adulation: a really happy fellow. This: that his beloved should be the centre of eyes, and pronounced exquisite by general approbation, besides subjecting him to a personal spell: this was what he wanted. It was mournful to think that Circumstance had not at the same time created the girl of noble birth, or with an instinct for spiritual elegance. But the world is imperfect.

Page 615

Presently he became aware that she was understood to be singing pointedly to him: upon which he dismissed the council of his sensations, and began to diplomatize cleverly. Leaning over to Adela, he whispered:

“Pericles wants her to go to Italy. My belief is, that she won’t.”

“And why?” returned Adela, archly reproachful.

“Well, we’ve been spoiling her a little, perhaps. I mean, we men, of course. But, I really don’t think that I’m chiefly to blame. You won’t allow Captain Gambier to be in fault, I know.”

“Why not?” said Adela.

“Well, if you will, then he is the principal offender.”

Adela acted disbelief; but, unprepared for her brother’s perfectly feminine audacity of dissimulation, she thought: “He can’t be in earnest about the girl,” and was led to fancy that Gambier might, and to determine to see whether it was so.

By this manoeuvre, Wilfrid prepared for himself a defender when the charge was brought against him.

Mr. Pericles was thunderstruck on hearing Emilia refuse to go to Italy. A scene of tragic denunciation on the one hand, and stubborn decision on the other, ensued.

“I shall not mind zis” (he spoke of Love and the awakening of the female heart) “not when you are trained. It is good, zen, and you have fire from it. But, now! little fool, I say, it is too airly—too airly! How shall you learn—eh? with your brain upon a man? And your voice, little fool, a thing of caprice, zat comes and goes as he will, not you will. Hein? like a barrel-organ, which he turns ze handle.—Mon Dieu! Why did I leave her?” Mr. Pericles struck his brow with his wrist, clutching at the long thin slice of hair that did greasy duty for the departed crop on his poll. “Did I not know it was a woman? And so you are, what you say, in lofe.”

Emilia replied: “I have not said so,” with exasperating coolness.

“You have your eye on a man. And I know him, zat man! When he is tired of you—-whiff, away you go, a puff of smoke! And you zat I should make a Queen of Opera! A Queen? You shall have more rule zan twenty Queens—forty! See” (Mr. Pericles made his hand go like an aspen-leaf from his uplifted wrist); “So you shall set ze hearts of sossands! To dream of you, to adore you! and flowers, flowers everywhere, on your head, at your feet. You choose your lofer from ze world. A husband, if it is your taste. Bose, if you please. Zen, I say, you shall, you shall lofe a man. Let him tease and sting

—ah! it will be magnifique: Aha! ze voice will sharpen, go deep; yeas! to be a tale of blood. Lofe till you could stab yourself:—Brava! But now? Little fool, I say!”

Emilia believed that she was verily forfeiting an empire. Her face wore a soft look of delight. This renunciation of a splendid destiny for Wilfrid’s sake, seemed to make her worthier of him, and as Mr. Pericles unrolled the list of her rejected treasures, her bosom heaved without a regret.

Page 616

“Ha!” Mr. Pericles flung away from her: “go and be a little gutter-girl!”

The musical connoisseur drew on his own disappointment alone for eloquence. Had he been thinking of her, he might have touched cunningly on her love for Italy. Music was the passion of the man; and a millionaire’s passion is something that can make a stir. He knew that in Emilia he had discovered a pearl of song rarely to be found, and his object was to polish and perfect her at all cost: perhaps, as a secondary and far removed consideration, to point to her as a thing belonging to him, for which Emperors might envy him. The thought of losing her drove him into fits of rage. He took the ladies one by one, and treated them each to a horrible scene of gesticulation and outraged English. H accused their brother of conduct which they were obliged to throw (by a process of their own) into the region of Fine Shades, before they dared venture to comprehend him. Gross facts in relationship with the voice, this grievous “machine, not man,”—as they said—stated to them, harshly, impetuously. The ladies felt that he had bored their ears with hot iron pins. Adela tried laughter as a defence from his suggestion against Wilfrid, but had shortly afterwards to fly from the fearful anatomist. She served her brother thoroughly in the Council of Three; so that Mr. Pericles was led by them to trust that there had; been mere fooling in his absence, and that the emotions he looked to as the triumphant reserve in Emilia’s bosom, to be aroused at some crisis when she was before the world, slumbered still. She, on her part, contrasting her own burning sensations with this quaint, innocent devotion to Art and passion for music, felt in a manner guilty; and whenever he stormed with additional violence, she became suppliant, and seemed to bend and have regrets. Mr. Pericles would then say, with mollified irritability: “You will come to Italy to-morrow?—Ze day after?—not at all?” The last was given with a roar, for lack of her immediate response. Emilia would find a tear on her eyelids at times. Surround herself as she might with her illusions, she had no resting-place in Wilfrid’s heart, and knew it. She knew it as the young know that they are to die on a future day, without feeling the sadness of it, but with a dimly prevalent idea that this life is therefore incomplete. And again her blood, as with a wave of rich emotion, washed out the blank spot. She thought: “What can he want but my love?” And thus she satisfied her own hungry questioning by seeming to supply an answer to his.

The ladies of Brookfield by no means encouraged Emilia to refuse the generous offer of Mr. Pericles. They thought, too, that she might—might she? Oh! certainly she might go to Italy under his protection. “Would you let one of your blood?” asked Wilfrid brutally. With some cunning he led them to admit that Emilia’s parents should rightly be consulted in such a case.

Page 617

One day Mr. Pericles said to the ladies: “I shall give a fete: a party monstre. In ze air: on grass. I beg you to invite friends of yours.”

Before the excogitation of this splendid resolve, he had been observed to wear for some period a conspiratorial aspect. When it was delivered, and Arabella had undertaken the management of the “party monstre”—(which was to be on Besworth Lawn, and, as it was not their own party, could be conducted with a sort of quasi-contemptuous superiority to incongruous gatherings)—this being settled, the forehead of Mr. Pericles cleared and he ceased to persecute Emilia.

“I am not one that is wopped,” he said significantly; nodding to his English hearers, as if this piece of shrewd acquaintance with the expressive mysteries of their language placed them upon equal terms.

It was really ‘a providential thing’ (as devout people phrase it) that Laura Tinley and Mabel Copley should call shortly after this, and invite the ladies to a proposed picnic of theirs on Besworth Lawn. On Besworth Lawn, of all places! and they used the word ‘picnic.’

“A word suggestive of gnawed drumstick and ginger-beer bottles.” Adela quoted some scapegoat of her acquaintance, as her way was when she wished to be pungent without incurring the cold sisterly eye of reproof for a vulgarism.

Both Laura and Mabel, when they heard of the mighty entertainment fixed for Besworth Lawn by Mr. Pericles, looked down. They were invited, and looked up. There was the usual amount of fencing with the combative Laura, who gave ground at all points, and as she was separating, said (so sweetly!) “Of course you have heard of the arrest of your—what does one call him?—friend?—or a French word?”

“You mean?” quoth Arabella.

“That poor, neatly brushed, nice creature whom you patronized—who played the organ!” she jerked to Arabella’s dubious eyes.

“And he?” Arabella smiled, complacently.

“Then perhaps you may know that all is arranged for him?” said Laura, interpreting by the look more than the word, after a habit of women.

“Indeed, to tell you the truth, I know nothing,” said Arabella.

“Really?” Laura turned sharply to Cornelia, who met her eyes and did not exhibit one weak dimple.

The story was, that Mr. Chips, the Bookseller of Hillford, objected to the departure of Mr. Barrett, until Mr. Barrett had paid the bill of Mr. Chips: and had signified his objection in the form of a writ. “When, if you know anything of law,” said Laura, “you will see why he remains. For, a writ once served, you are a prisoner. That is, I believe, if it’s above twenty pounds. And Mr. Chips’ bill against Mr. Barrett was, I have heard, twenty-three pounds and odd shillings. Could anything be more preposterous? And Mr. Chips deserves to lose his money!”

Page 618

Ah! to soar out of such a set as this, of which Laura Tinley is a sample, are not some trifling acts of inhumanity and practices in the art of ‘cutting’ permissible? So the ladies had often asked of the Unseen in their onward course, if they did not pointedly put the question now. Surely they had no desire to give pain, but the nature that endowed them with a delicate taste, inspired them to defend it. They listened gravely to Laura, who related that not only English books, but foreign (repeated and emphasized), had been supplied by Mr. Chips to Mr. Barrett.

They were in the library, and Laura’s eyes rested on certain yellow and blue covers of books certainly not designed for the reading of Mr. Pole.

“I think you must be wrong as to Mr. Barrett’s position,” said Adela.

“No, dear; not at all,” Laura was quick to reply. “Unless you know anything. He has stated that he awaits money remittances. He has, in fact, overrun the constable, and my brother Albert says, the constable is very likely to overrun ham, in consequence. Only a joke! But an organist with, at the highest computation—poor absurd thing!—fifty-five pounds per annum: additional for singing lessons, it is true,—but an organist with a bookseller’s bill of twenty-three pounds! Consider!”

“Foreign books, too!” interjected Adela.

“Not so particularly improving to his morals, either!” added Laura.

“You are severe upon the greater part of the human race,” said Arabella.

“So are the preachers, dear,” returned Laura.

“The men of our religion justify you?” asked Arabella.

“Let me see;—where were we?” Laura retreated in an affected mystification.

“You had reached the enlightened belief that books written by any but English hands were necessarily destructive of men’s innocence,” said Arabella; and her sisters thrilled at the neatness of the stroke, for the moment, while they forgot the ignoble object it transfixed. Laura was sufficiently foiled by it to be unable to return to the Chips-Barrett theme. Throughout the interview Cornelia had maintained a triumphant posture, superior to Arabella’s skill in fencing, seeing that it exposed no weak point of the defence by making an attack, and concealed especially the confession implied by a relish for the conflict. Her sisters considerately left her to recover herself, after this mighty exercise of silence.

CHAPTER XXII

Cornelia sat with a clenched hand. “You are rich and he is poor,” was the keynote of her thoughts, repeated from minute to minute. “And it is gold gives you the right in the world’s eye to despise him!” she apostrophized the vanished Laura, clothing gold with all the baseness of that person. Now, when one really hates gold, one is at war with one’s fellows. The tide sets that way. There is no compromise: to hate it is to try to stem the flood. It happens

Page 619

that this is one of the temptations of the sentimentalist, who should reflect, but does not, that the fine feelers by which the iniquities of gold are so keenly discerned, are a growth due to it, nevertheless. Those ‘fine feelers,’ or antennae of the senses, come of sweet ease; that is synonymous with gold in our island-latitude. The sentimentalists are represented by them among the civilized species. It is they that sensitively touch and reject, touch and select; whereby the laws of the polite world are ultimately regulated, and civilization continually advanced, sometimes ridiculously. The sentimentalists are ahead of us, not by weight of brain, but through delicacy of nerve, and, like all creatures in the front, they are open to be victims. I pray you to observe again the shrinking life that afflicts the adventurous horns of the snail, for example. Such are the sentimentalists to us—the fat body of mankind. We owe them much, and though they scorn us, let us pity them.

Especially when they are young they deserve pity, for they suffer cruelly. I for my part prefer to see boys and girls led into the ways of life by nature; but I admit that in many cases, in most cases, our good mother has not (occupied as her hands must be) made them perfectly presentable; by which fact I am warned to have tolerance for the finer beings who labour under these excessive sensual subtleties. I perceive their uses. And they are right good comedy; for which I may say that I almost love them. Man is the laughing animal: and at the end of an infinite search, the philosopher finds himself clinging to laughter as the best of human fruit, purely human, and sane, and comforting. So let us be cordially thankful to those who furnish matter for sound embracing laughter.

Cornelia detested gold—entirely on general grounds and for abstract reasons. Not a word of Mr. Barrett was shaped, even in fancy; but she interjected to herself, with meditative eye and mouth: “The saints were poor!” (the saints of whom he had read, translating from that old Latin book) “St. Francis! how divine was his life!” and so forth, until the figure of Mr. Penniless Barrett walked out in her imagination clad in saintly garments, superior not only to his creditor, Mr. Chips, but to all who bought or sold.

“I have been false,” she said; implying the “to him.” Seeing him on that radiant height above her, she thought “How could I have fallen so!” It was impossible for her mind to recover the delusion which had prompted her signing herself to bondage—pledging her hand to a man she did not love. Could it have been that she was guilty of the immense folly, simply to escape from that piece of coarse earth, Mrs. Chump? Cornelia smiled sadly, saying: “Oh, no! I should not have committed a wickedness for so miserable an object.” Despairing for a solution of the puzzle, she cried out, “I was mad!”, and with a gasp of horror saw herself madly signing her name to perdition.

Page 620

“I was mad!” is a comfortable cloak to our sins in the past. Mournful to think that we have been bereft of reason; but the fit is over, and we are not in Bedlam!

Cornelia next wrestled with the pride of Mr. Barrett. Why had he not come to her once after reading the line pencilled in the book? Was it that he would make her his debtor in everything? He could have reproached her justly; why had he held aloof? She thirsted to be scourged by him, to hang her head ashamed under his glance, and hug the bitter pain he dealt her. Revolving how the worst man on earth would have behaved to a girl partially in his power (hands had been permitted to be pressed, and the gateways of the eyes had stood open: all but vows had been interchanged), she came to regard Mr. Barrett as the best man on the earth. That she alone saw it, did not depreciate the value of her knowledge. A goal gloriously illumined blazed on her from the distance. “Too late!” she put a curb on the hot courses in her brain, and they being checked, turned all at once to tears and came in a flood. How indignant would the fair sentimentalist have been at a whisper of her caring for the thing before it was too late!

Cornelia now daily trod the red pathways under the firs, and really imagined herself to be surprised, even vexed, when she met Mr. Barrett there at last. Emilia was by his side, near a drooping birch. She beckoned to Cornelia, whose North Pole armour was doing its best to keep down a thumping heart.

“We are taking our last walk in the old wood,” said, Mr. Barrett, admirably collected. “That is, I must speak for myself.”

“You leave early?” Cornelia felt her throat rattle hideously.

“In two days, I expect—I hope,” said he.

“Why does he hope?” thought Cornelia, wounded, until a vision of the detaining Chips struck her with pity and remorse.

She turned to Emilia. “Our dear child is also going to leave us.”

“I?” cried Emilia, fierily out of languor.

“Does not your Italy claim you?”

“I am nothing to Italy any more. Have I not said so? I love England now.”

Cornelia smiled complacently. “Let us hope your heart is capacious enough to love both.”

“Then your theory is” (Mr. Barrett addressed Cornelia in the winning old style), “that the love of one thing enlarges the heart for another?”

“Should it not?” She admired his cruel self-possession pitiably, as she contrasted her own husky tones with it.

Emilia looked from one to the other, fancying that they must have her case somewhere in prospect, since none could be unconscious of the vehement struggle going on in her bosom; but they went farther and farther off from her comprehension, and seemed to speak of bloodless matters. “And yet he is her lover,” she thought. “When they meet they talk across a river, and he knows she is going to another man, and does not gripe her wrist and drag her away!”

Page 621

The sense that she had no kinship with such flesh shut her mouth faster than Wilfrid's injunctions (which were ordinarily conveyed in too subtle a manner for her to feel their meaning enough to find them binding). Cornelia, for a mask to her emotions, gave Emilia a gentle, albeit high-worded lecture on the artist's duty toward Art, quoting favourite passages from Mr. Barrett's favourite Art-critic. And her fashion of dropping her voice as she declaimed the more dictatorial sentences (to imply, one might guess, by a show of personal humility that she would have you to know her preaching was vicarious; that she stood humbly in the pulpit, and was but a vessel for the delivery of the burden of the oracle), all this was beautiful to him who could see it. I cannot think it was wholesome for him; nor that Cornelia was unaware of a naughty wish to glitter temporarily in the eyes of the man who made her feel humble. The sorcery she sent through his blood communicated itself to hers. When she had done, Emilia, convincedly vanquished by big words, said, "I cannot talk," and turned heavily from them without bestowing a smile upon either.

Cornelia believed that the girl would turn back as abruptly as she had retreated; and it was not until Emilia was out of sight that she remembered the impropriety of being alone with Mr. Barrett. The Pitfall of Sentiment yawned visible, but this lady's strength had been too little tried for her to lack absolute faith in it. So, out of deep silences, the two leapt to speech and immediately subsided to the depths again: as on a sultry summer's day fishes flash their tails in the sunlight and leave a solitary circle widening on the water.

Then Cornelia knew what was coming. In set phrase, and as one who performs a duty frigidly pleasant, he congratulated her on her rumored union. One hand was in his buttoned coat; the other hung elegantly loose: not a feature betrayed emotion. He might have spoken it in a ballroom. To Cornelia, who exulted in self-compression, after the Roman method, it was more dangerous than a tremulous tone.

"You know me too well to say this, Mr. Barrett."

The words would come. She preserved her steadfast air, when they had escaped, to conceal her shame. Seeing thus much, he took it to mean that it was a time for plain-speaking. To what end, he did not ask.

"You have not to be told that I desire your happiness above all earthly things," he said: and the lady shrank back, and made an effort to recover her footing. Had he not been so careful to obliterate any badge of the Squire of low degree, at his elbows, cuffs, collar, kneecap, and head-piece, she might have achieved it with better success. For cynicism (the younger brother of sentiment and inheritor of the family property) is always on the watch to deal fatal blows through such vital parts as the hat or the H's, or indeed any sign of inferior estate. But Mr. Barrett was armed at all points by a consummate education and a most serviceable clothesbrush.

Page 622

“You know how I love this neighbourhood!” said she.

“And I! above all that I have known!”

They left the pathway and walked on mosses—soft yellow beds, run over with grey lichen, and plots of emerald in the midst.

“You will not fall off with your reading?” he recommenced.

She answered “Yes,” meaning “No”; and corrected the error languidly, thinking one of the weighty monosyllables as good as the other: for what was reading to her now?

“It would be ten thousand pities if you were to do as so many women do, when...when they make these great changes,” he continued.

“Of what avail is the improvement of the mind?” she said, and followed his stumble over the “when,” and dropped on it.

“Of what avail! Is marriage to stop your intellectual growth?”

“Without sympathy,” she faltered, and was shocked at what she said; but it seemed a necessity.

“You must learn to conquer the need for it.”

Alas! his admonition only made her feel the need more cravingly.

“Promise me one thing,” he said. “You will not fall into the rut? Let me keep the ideal you have given me. For the sake of heaven, do not cloud for me the one bright image I hold! Let me know always that you are growing, and that the pure, noble intelligence which distinguishes you advances, and will not be subdued.”

Cornelia smiled faintly. “You have judged me too generously, Mr. Barrett.”

“Too little so! might I tell you!” He stopped short, and she felt the silence like a great wave sweeping over her.

They were nearing the lake, with the stump of the pollard-willow in sight, and toward it they went.

“I shall take the consolation of knowing that I shall hear of you, some day,” she said, having recourse to a look of cheerfulness.

He knew her to allude to certain hopes of fame. “I am getting wiser, I fear—too wise for ambition!”

“That is a fallacy, a sophism.”

He pointed to the hollow tree. “Is there promise of fruit from that?”

“You...you are young, Mr. Barrett.”

“And on a young, forehead it may be written, ‘Come not to gather more.’”

Cornelia put her hand out: “Oh, Mr. Barrett! unsay it!” The nakedness of her spirit stood forth in a stinging tear. “The words were cruel.”

“But, if they live, and are?”

“I feel that you must misjudge me. When I wrote them...you cannot know! The misery of our domestic life was so bitter! And yet, I have no excuse, none! I can only ask for pity.”

“And if you are wretched, must not I be? You pluck from me my last support. This, I petitioned Providence to hear from you—that you would be happy! I can have no comfort but in that.”

“Happy!” Cornelia murmured the word musically, as if to suck an irony from the sweetness of the sound. “Are we made for happiness?”

Page 623

Mr. Barrett quoted the favourite sage, concluding: "But a brilliant home and high social duties bring consolation. I do acknowledge that an eminent station will not only be graced by you, but that you give the impression of being born to occupy it. It is your destiny."

"A miserable destiny!"

It pleased Cornelia to become the wilful child who quarrels with its tutor's teachings, upon this point.

Then Mr. Barrett said quickly: "Your heart is not in this union?"

"Can you ask? I have done my duty."

"Have you, indeed!"

His tone was severe in the deliberation of its accents.

Was it her duty to live an incomplete life? He gave her a definition of personal duty, and shadowed out all her own ideas on the subject; seeming thus to speak terrible, unanswerable truth.

As one who changes the theme, he said: "I have forborne to revert to myself in our interviews; they were too divine for that. You will always remember that I have forborne much."

"Yes!" She was willing at the instant to confess how much.

"And if I speak now, I shall not be misinterpreted?"

"You never would have been, by me."

"Cornelia!"

Though she knew what was behind the door, this flinging of it open with her name startled the lady; and if he had faltered, it would not have been well for him. But, plainly, he claimed the right to call her by her Christian name. She admitted it; and thenceforward they were equals.

It was an odd story that he told of himself. She could not have repeated it to make it comprehensible. She drank at every sentence, getting no more from it than the gratification of her thirst. His father, at least, was a man of title, a baronet. What was meant by estates not entailed? What wild freak of fate put this noble young man in the power of an eccentric parent, who now caressed him, now made him an outcast? She

heard of the sum that was his, coming from his dead mother to support him just one hundred pounds annual! Was ever fate so mournful?

Practically, she understood that if Mr. Barrett would write to his father, pledging himself to conform to his mysterious despotic will in something, he would be pardoned and reinstated.

He concluded: “Hitherto I have preferred poverty. You have taught me at what a cost! Is it too late?”

The fall of his voice, with the repetition of her name, seemed as if awakening her, but not in a land of reason.

“Why...why!” she whispered.

“Beloved?”

“Why did you not tell me this before?”

“Do you upbraid me?”

“Oh, no! Oh, never!” she felt his hand taking hers gently. “My friend,” she said, half in self-defence; and they, who had never kissed as lovers, kissed under the plea of friendship.

CHAPTER XXIII

Page 624

All Wilfrid's diplomacy was now brought into play to baffle Mr. Pericles, inspire Emilia with the spirit of secresy, and carry on his engagement to two women to their common satisfaction. Adela, whose penetration he dreaded most, he had removed by a flattering invitation to Stornley; and that Emilia might be occupied during his absences, and Mr. Pericles thrown on a false scent, he persuaded Tracy Runningbrook to come to Brookfield, and write libretti for Emilia's operas. The two would sit down together for an hour, drawing wonderful precocious noses upon juvenile visages, when Emilia would sigh and say: "I can't work!"—Tracy adding, with resignation: "I never can!" At first Mr. Pericles dogged them assiduously. After a little while he shrugged, remarking: "It is a nonsense."

They were, however, perfectly serious about the production of an opera, Tracy furnishing verse to Emilia's music. He wrote with extraordinary rapidity, but clung to graphic phrases, that were not always supple enough for nuptials with modulated notes. Then Emilia had to hit his sense of humour by giving the words as they came in the run of the song. "You make me crow, or I croak," she said.

"The woman follows the man, and music fits to verse," cried Tracy. "Music's the vine, verse the tree."

Emilia meditated. "Not if they grow up together," she suggested, and broke into a smile at his rapture of amusement; which was succeeded by a dark perplexity, worthy of the present aspect of Mr. Pericles.

"That's what has upset us," he said. "We have been trying to 'grow up together,' like first-cousins, and nature forbids the banns. To-morrow you shall have half a libretto. And then, really, my child, you must adapt yourself to the words."

"I will," Emilia promised; "only, not if they're like iron to the teeth."

"My belief is," said Tracy savagely, "that music's a fashion, and as delusive a growth as Cobbett's potatoes, which will go back to the deadly nightshade, just as music will go back to the tom-tom."

"What have you called out when I sang to you!" Emilia reproached him for this irreverent nonsense.

"Oh! it was you and not the music," he returned half-cajolingly, while he beat the tom-tom on air.

"Hark here!" cried Emilia. She recited a verse. "Doesn't that sound dead? Now hark!" She sang the verse, and looked confidently for Tracy's verdict at the close.

“What a girl that is!” He went about the house, raving of her to everybody, with sundry Gallic interjections; until Mrs. Chump said: “’Deed, sir, ye don’t seem to have much idea of a woman’s feelin’s.”

Tracy produced in a night two sketches of libretti for Emilia to choose from—the Roman Clelia being one, and Camillus the other. Tracy praised either impartially, and was indifferent between them, he told her. Clelia offered the better theme for passionate song, but there was a winning political object and rebuff to be given to Radicalism in Camillus. “Think of Rome!” he said.

Page 625

Emilia gave the vote for Camillus, beginning forthwith to hum, with visions of a long roll of swarthy cavalry, headed by a clear-eyed young chief, sunlight perching on his helm.

“Yes; but you don’t think of the situations in Clelia, and what I can do with her,” snapped Tracy. “I see a song there that would light up all London. Unfortunately, the sentiment’s dead Radical. It wouldn’t so much matter if we were certain to do Camillus as well; because one would act as a counterpoise to the other, you know. Well, follow your own fancy. Camillus is strictly classical. I treat opera there as Alfieri conceived tragedy. Clelia is modern style. Cast the die for Camillus, and let’s take horse. Only, we lose the love-business—exactly where I show my strength. Clelia in the camp of the king: dactyllic chorus-accompaniment, while she, in heavy voluptuous anapaests, confesses her love for the enemy of her country. Remember, this is our romantic opera, where we do what we like with History, and make up our minds for asses telling us to go home and read our ‘student’s Rome.’ Then that scene where she and the king dance the dactyls, and the anapaests go to the chorus. Sublime! Let’s go into the woods and begin. We might give the first song or two to-night. In composition, mind, always strike out your great scene, and work from it—don’t work up to it, or you’ve lost fire when you reach the point. That’s my method.”

They ran into the woods, skipping like schoolboy and schoolgirl. On hearing that Camillus would not be permitted to love other than his ungrateful country, Emilia’s conception of the Roman lord grew pale, and a controversy ensued-she maintaining that a great hero must love a woman; he declaring that a great hero might love a dozen, but that it was beneath the dignity of this drama to allow of a rival to Rome in Camillus’s love.

“He will not do for music,” said Emilia firmly, and was immoveable. In despair, Tracy proposed attaching a lanky barbarian daughter to Brennus, whose deeds of arms should provoke the admiration of the Roman.

“And so we relinquish Alfieri for Florian! There’s a sentimental burlesque at once!” the youth ejaculated, in gloom. “I chose this subject entirely to give you Rome for a theme.”

Emilia took his hand. “I do thank you. If Brennus has a daughter, why not let her be half Roman?”

Tracy fired out: “she’s a bony woman, with a brawny development; mammoth haunches, strong of the skeleton; cheek-bones, flat-forward, as a fish ’s rotting on a beach; long scissor lips-nippers to any wretched rose of a kiss! a pugilist’s nose to the nostrils of a phoca; and eyes!—don’t you see them?—luminaries of pestilence; blotted yellow, like a tallow candle shining through a horny lantern.”

At this horrible forced-poetic portrait, Emilia cried in pain: “You hate her suddenly!”

“I loathe the creature—pah!” went Tracy.

Page 626

“Why do you make her so hideous?” Emilia complained. “I feel myself hating her too. Look at me. Am I such a thing as that?”

“You!” Tracy was melted in a trice, and gave the motion of hugging, as a commentary on his private opinion.

“Can you also be sure that Camillus can love nothing but his country? Would one love stop the other?” she persisted, gazing with an air of steady anxiety for the answer.

“There isn’t a doubt about it,” said Tracy.

Emilia caught her face in her hands, and exclaimed in a stifling voice: “It’s true! it’s true!”

Tracy saw that her figure was shaken with sobs—unmistakeable, hard, sorrowful convulsions.

“Confound historical facts that make her cry!” he murmured to himself, in a fury at the Roman fables. “It’s no use comforting her with Niebuhr now. She’s got a live Camillus in her brain, and there he’ll stick.” Tracy began to mutter the emphatic D.; quite cognizant of her case, as he supposed. This intensity of human emotion about a dry faggot of history by no means surprised him; and he was as tender to the grief of his darling little friend as if he had known the conflict that tore her in two. Subsequently he related the incident, in a tone of tender delight, to Wilfrid, whom it smote. “Am I a brute?” asked the latter of the Intelligences in the seat of his consciousness, and they for the moment gravely affirmed it. I have observed that when young men obtain this mental confirmation of their suspicions, they wax less reluctant to act as brutes than when the doubt restrained them.

He reasoned thus: “I can bring my mind to the idea of losing her, if it must be so.” (Hear, hear! from the unanimous internal Parliament.) “But I can’t make her miserable (cheers)—I can’t go and break her heart” (loud cheers, drowning a faint dissentient hum).—The scene, of which Tracy had told him, gave Wilfrid a kind of dread of the girl. If that was her state of feeling upon a distant subject, how would it be when he applied the knife. Simply, impossible to use the knife at all! Wield it thou, O Circumstance, babe-munching Chronos, whosoever thou art, that jarrest our poor human music effectually from hour to hour!

Colonel Pierson paid his promised visit, on his way back to his quarters at Verona. His stay was shortened by rumours of anticipated troubles in Italy. One day at table he chanced to observe, speaking of the Milanese, that they required another lesson, and that it would save the shedding of blood if, annually, the chief men of the city took a flogging for the community (senseless arrogance that sensible, and even kindly, men will sometimes be tempted to utter, and prompted to act on, in that deteriorating state of

a perpetual repressive force).—Emilia looked at him till she caught his eye: “I hope I shall never meet you there,” she said.

The colonel coloured, and drew his finger along each curve of his moustache. The table was silent. Colonel Pierson was a gentleman, but a false position and the irritating topic deprived him of proper self-command.

Page 627

“What would you do?” he said, not gallantly.

Emilia would have been glad to have been allowed to subside, but the tone stung her.

“I could not do much; I am a woman,” said she.

Whereto the colonel: “It’s only the women who do anything over there.”

“And that is why you flog them!”

The colonel, seeing himself surrounded by ladies, lost the right guidance of his wits, at this point, reddened, and was saved by an Irish outcry of horror from some unpleasant and possibly unmanly retort. “Mr. Paricles said exactly the same. Oh, sir! do ye wear an officer’s uniform to go about behavin’ in that shockin’ way to poor helpless females?”

This was the first time Mrs. Chump had ever been found of service at the Brookfield dining-table. Colonel Pierson joined the current smile, and the matter passed.

He was affectionate with Wilfrid, and invited him to Verona, with the assurance that his (the Austrian) school of cavalry was the best in the world. “You beat us in pace and weight; but you can’t skirmish, you can’t manage squadrons, and you know nothing of outpost duty,” said the colonel. Wilfrid promised to visit him some day: a fact he denied to Emilia, when she charged him with it. Her brain seemed to be set on fire by the presence of an Austrian officer. The miserable belief that she had abandoned her country pressing on her remorsefully, she lost appetite, briskness of eye, and the soft reddish-brown ripe blood-hue that made her cheeks sweet to contemplate. She looked worn, small, wretched: her very walk indicated self-contempt. Wilfrid was keen to see the change for which others might have accused a temporary headache. Now that she appeared under this blight, it seemed easier to give her up; and his magnanimity being thus encouraged (I am not hard on him—remember the constitution of love, in which a heart un-aroused is pure selfishness, and a heart aroused heroic generosity; they being one heart to outer life)—his magnanimity, I say, being under this favourable sun, he said to himself that there should be an end of double-dealing; and, possibly consoled by feeling a martyr, he persuaded himself to act the gentle ruffian. To which end, he was again absent from Brookfield, for a space, and bitterly missed.

Emilia, for the last two Sundays, had taken Mr. Barrett’s place at the organ. She was playing the prelude to one of the evening hymns, when the lover, whose features she dreaded to be once more forgetting, appeared in the curtained enclosure. A stoppage in the tune, and a prolonged squeal of the instrument, gave the congregation below matter to speculate upon. Wilfrid put up his finger and sat reverently down, while Emilia plunged tremblingly at the note that was howling its life away. And as she managed to swim into the stream of the sacred melody again, her head was turned toward her lover

under a new sensation; and the first words she murmured were, “We have never been in church together, before.”

Page 628

“Not in the evening,” he whispered, likewise impressed.

“No,” said Emilia softly; flattered by his greater accuracy.

If Wilfrid could have been sure that he would be perfect master of that sentimental crew known to him under the denomination of his feelings, the place he selected for their parting interview might be held creditable to this young officer’s acknowledged strategical ability. It was a place where any fervid appeals were impossible; where he could contemplate her, listen to her, be near her, alone with her, having nothing to dread from tears, supplications, or passion, as a consequence of the short indulgence of his tenderness. But he had failed to reckon on the chances that he himself might prove weak and be betrayed by the crew for whose comfort he was always providing; and now, as she sat there, her face being sideways to him, the flush of delight faint on her cheek, and her eyelids half raised to the gilded pipes, while full and sonorous harmony rolled out from her touch, it seemed the very chorus of the heavens that she commanded, and a subtle misty glory descended upon her forehead, which he was long in perceiving to be cast from a moisture on his eyelids.

When the sermon commenced, Emilia quitted the organ and took his hand. In very low whispers, they spoke:

“I have wanted to see you so!”

“You see me now, little woman.”

“On Friday week next I am to go away.”

“Nonsense! You shall not.”

“Your sisters say, yes! Mr. Pericles has got my father’s consent, they say, to take me to Italy.”

“Do you think of going?”

Emilia gazed at her nerveless hands lying in her lap.

“You shall not go!” he breathed imperiously in her ear.

“Then you will marry me quite soon?” And Emilia looked as if she would be smiling April, at a word.

“My dear girl!” he had an air of caressing remonstrance.

“Because,” she continued, “if my father finds me out, I must go to Italy, or go to that life of torment in London—seeing those Jew-people—horrible!—or others and the thought

of it is like being under the earth, tasting bitter gravel! I could almost bear it before you kissed me, my lover! It would kill me now. Say! say! Tell me we shall be together. I shudder all day and night, and feel frozen hands catching at me. I faint—my heart falls deep down, in the dark...I think I know what dying is now!"

She stopped on a tearless sob; and, at her fingers' ends, Wilfrid felt the quivering of her frame.

"My darling!" he interjected. He wished to explain the situation to her, as he then conceived it. But he had, in his calculation, failed also to count on a peculiar nervous fretfulness, that the necessity to reiterate an explanation in whispers must superinduce. So, when Emilia looked vacant of the intelligence imparted to her, he began anew, and emphatically; and ere he was half through

Page 629

it, Mr. Marter, from the pulpit underneath, sent forth a significant reprimand to the conscience of a particular culprit of his congregation, in the form of a solemn cough. Emilia had to remain unenlightened, and she proceeded to build on her previous assumption; doing the whispering easily and sweetly; in the prettiest way from her tongue's tip, with her chin lifted up; and sending the vowels on a prolonged hushed breath, that seemed to print them on the hearing far more distinctly than a volume of sound. Wilfrid fell back on monosyllables. He could not bring his mouth to utter flinty negatives, so it appeared that he assented; and then his better nature abused him for deluding her. He grew utterly ashamed of his aimless selfish double-dealing. "Can it be?" he questioned his own mind, and listened greedily to any mental confirmations of surpassing excellence in her, that the world might possibly acknowledge. Having, with great zeal, created a set of circumstances, he cursed them heartily, after the fashion of little people. He grew resigned to abandon Lady Charlotte, and to give his name to this subduing girl; but a comfortable quieting sensation came over him, at the thought that his filial duty stood in the way. His father, he knew, was anxious for him to marry into a noble family—incomprehensibly anxious to have the affair settled; and, as two or three scenes rose in his mind, Wilfrid perceived that the obstacle to his present fancy was his father.

As clearly as he could, with the dread of the preacher's admonishing cough before him, Wilfrid stated the case to Emilia; saying that he loved her with his whole heart; but that the truth was, his father was not in a condition of health to bear contradiction to his wishes, and would, he was sure, be absolutely opposed to their union. He brought on himself another reprimand from Mr. Marter, in seeking to propitiate Emilia's reason to comprehend the position rightly; and could add little more to the fact he had spoken, than that his father had other views, which it would require time to combat.

Emilia listened attentively, replying with a flying glance to the squeeze of his hand. He was astonished to see her so little disconcerted. But now the gradual fall of Mr. Marter's voice gave them warning.

"My lover?" breathed Emilia, hurriedly and eagerly; questioning with eye and tone.

"My darling!" returned Wilfrid.

She sat down to the organ with a smile. He was careful to retreat before the conclusion of the service; somewhat chagrined by his success. That smile of hers was inexplicable to him.

CHAPTER XXIV

Page 630

Mr. Pole was closeted in his City counting-house with Mr. Pericles, before a heap of papers and newly-opened foreign letters; to one of which, bearing a Russian stamp, he referred fretfully at times, as if to verify a monstrous fact. Any one could have seen that he was not in a condition to transact business. His face was unnaturally patched with colour, and his grey-tinged hair hung tumbled over his forehead like waves blown by a changeing wind. Still, he maintained his habitual effort to look collected, and defeat the scrutiny of the sallow-eyed fellow opposite; who quietly glanced, now and then, from the nervous feet to the nervous fingers, and nodded to himself a sardonic outlandish nod.

“Now, listen to me,” said Mr. Pericles. “We shall not burst out about zis Riga man. He is a villain,—very well. Say it. He is a villain,—say so. And stop. Because” (and up went the Greek’s forefinger), “we must not have a scandal, in ze fairst place. We do not want pity, in ze second. Saird, we must seem to trust him, in spite. I say, yeas! What is pity to us of commerce? It is contempt. We trust him on, and we lose what he pocket—a sossand. We burst on him, and we lose twenty, serty, forty; and we lose reputation.”

“I’d have every villain hanged,” cried Mr. Pole. “The scoundrel! I’d hang him with his own hemp. He talks of a factory burnt, and dares to joke about tallow! and in a business letter! and when he is telling one of a loss of money to that amount!”

“Not bad, ze joke,” grinned Mr. Pericles. “It is a lesson of coolness. We learn it. But mind! he say, ‘possible loss.’ It is not positif. Hein! ze man is trying us. So! shall we burst out and make him desperate? We are in his hand at Riga, you see?”

“I see this,” said Mr. Pole, “that he’s a confounded rascal, and I’ll know whether the law can’t reach him.”

“Ha! ze law!” Mr. Pericles sneered. “So you are, you. English. Always, ze law! But, we are men—we are not machine. Law for a machine, not a man! We punish him, perhaps. Well; he is punished. He is imprisoned—forty monz. We pay for him a sossand pound a monz. He is flogged—forty lashes. We pay for him a sossand pound a lash. You can afford zat? It is a luxury like anozer. It is not for me.”

“How long are we to trust the villain?” said Mr. Pole. “If we trust him at all, mind! I don’t say I do, or will.”

“Ze money is locked up for a year, my friend. So soon we get it, so soon he goes, from ze toe off.” Mr. Pericles’ shining toe’s-tip performed an agile circuit, and he smoothed his square clean jaw and venomous moustache reflectively. “Not now,” he resumed. “While he hold us in his hand, we will not drive him to ze devil, or we go too, I believe, or part of ze way. But now, we say, zat money is frozen in ze Nord. We will make it in Australie, and in Greek waters. I have exposed to you my plan.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Pole, “and I’ve told you I’ve no pretensions to be a capitalist. We have no less than three ventures out, already.”

Page 631

“It is like you English! When you have ze world to milk, you go to one point and stick. It fails, and you fail. What is zat word?”—Mr. Pericles tapped his brow—“pluck,—you want pluck. It is your decadence. Greek, and Russian, and Yankee, all zey beat you. For, it is pluck. You make a pin’s head, not a pin. It is in brain and heart you do fail. You have only your position,—an island, and ships, and some favour. You are no match in pluck. We beat you. And we live for pleasure, while you groan and sweat—mon Dieu! it is slavery.”

Mr. Pericles twinkled his white eyes over the blinking merchant, and rose from his chair, humming a bit of opera, and announcing, casually, that a certain prima-donna had obtained a divorce from her husband.

“But,” he added suddenly, “I say to you, if you cannot afford to speculate, run away from it as ze fire. Run away from it, and hold up your coat-tail. Jump ditches, and do not stop till you are safe home—hein? you say ‘cosy?’ I hear my landlady. Run till you are safe cosy. But if you are a man wis a head and a pocket, zen you know that ‘speculate’ means a dozen ventures. So, you come clear. Or, it is ruin. It is ruin, I say: you have been playing.”

“An Englishman,” returned Mr. Pole, disgusted at the shrugs he had witnessed—“an Englishman’s as good as any of you. Look at us—look at our history—look at our wealth. By Jingo! But we like plain-dealing and common sense; and as to afford, what do you mean?”

“No, no,” Mr. Pericles petitioned with uplifted hand; “my English is bad. It is—ah! bad. You shall look it over—my plan. It will strike your sense. Next week I go to Italy. I take ze little Belloni. You will manage all. I have in you, my friend, perfec’ confidence. An Englishman, he is honest. An Englishman and a Greek conjoined, zey beat ze world! It is true, ma foi. For zat, I seek you, and not a countryman. A Frenchman?—oh, no! A German?—not a bit! A Russian?—never! A Yankee?—save me! I am a Greek—I take an Englishman.”

“Well, well, you must leave me to think it over,” said Mr. Pole, pleasantly smoothed down. “As to honesty, that’s a matter of course with us: that’s the mere footing we go upon. We don’t plume ourselves upon what’s general, here. There is, I regret to say, a difference between us and other nations. I believe it’s partly their religion. They swindle us, and pay their priests for absolution with our money. If you’re a double-dyed sinner, you can easily get yourself whitewashed over there. Confound them! When that fellow sent no remittance last month, I told you I suspected him. Who was, the shrewdest then? As for pluck, I never failed in that yet. But, I will see a thing clear. The man who speculates blindfold, is a fowl who walks into market to be plucked. Between being plucked, and having pluck, you’ll see a distinction when you know the language better; but you must make use of your head, or the chances are you won’t be much of a

difference,—eh? I'll think over your scheme. I'm not a man to hesitate, if the calculations are sound. I'll look at the papers here."

Page 632

“My friend, you will decide before zat I go to Italy.” said Mr. Pericles, and presently took his leave.

When he was gone, Mr. Pole turned his chair to the table, and made an attempt to inspect one of the papers deliberately. Having untied it, he retied it with care, put it aside, marked ‘immediate,’ and read the letter from Riga anew. This he tore into shreds, with animadversions on the quality of the rags that had produced it, and opened the important paper once more. He got to the end of a sentence or two, when his fingers moved about for the letter; and then his mind conceived a necessity for turning to the directory, for which he rang the bell. The great red book was brought into his room by a youthful clerk, who waited by, while his master, unaware of his presence, tracked a name with his forefinger. It stopped at Pole, Samuel Bolton; and a lurking smile was on the merchant’s face as he read the name: a smile of curious meaning, neither fresh nor sad; the meditative smile of one who looks upon an afflicted creature from whom he is aloof. After a lengthened contemplation of this name, he said, with a sigh, “Poor Chump! I wonder whether he’s here, too.” A search for the defunct proved that he was out of date. Mr. Pole thrust his hand to the bell that he might behold poor Chump in an old directory that would call up the blotted years.

“I am here, sir,” said his clerk, who had been holding deferential watch at a few steps from the table.

“What do you do here then, sir, all this time?”

“I waited, sir, because—”

“You waste and dawdle away twenty or thirty minutes, when you ought to be doing your work. What do you mean?” Mr. Pole stood up and took an angry stride.

The young man could scarcely believe his master was not stooping to jest with him. He said: “For that matter, sir, it can’t be a minute that I have been wasting.”

“I called you in half an hour ago,” returned Mr. Pole, fumbling at his watch-fob.

“It must have been somebody else, sir.”

“Did you bring in this directory? Look at it! This?”

“This is the book that I brought in, sir.”

“How long since?”

“I think, not a minute and a half, sir.”

Mr. Pole gazed at him, and coughed slowly. “I could have sworn...” he murmured, and commenced blinking.

“I suppose I must be a little queer,” he pursued; and instantly his right hand struck out, quivering. The young clerk grasped it, and drew him to a chair.

“Tush,” said his master, working his feverish fingers across his forehead. “Want of food. I don’t eat like you young fellows. Fetch me a glass of wine and a biscuit. Good wine, mind. Port. Or, no; you can’t trust tavern Port:—brandy. Get it yourself, don’t rely on the porter. And bring it yourself, you understand the importance? What is your name?”

“Braintop,” replied the youth, with the modesty of one whose name has been too frequently subjected to puns.

Page 633

“I think I never heard so singular a name in my life,” Mr. Pole ejaculated seriously. “Braintop! It’ll always make me think of brandy. What are you waiting for now?”

“I took the liberty of waiting before, to say that a lady wished to see you, sir.”

Mr. Pole started from his chair. “A foreign lady?”

“She may be foreign. She speaks English, sir, and her name, I think, was foreign. I’ve forgotten it, I fear.”

“It’s the wife of that fellow from Riga!” cried the merchant. “Show her in. Show her in, immediately. I suspected this. She’s in London, I know. I’m equal to her: show her in. When you fetch the Braintop and biscuit, call me to the door. You understand.”

The youth affected meekly to enjoy this fiery significance given to his name, and said that he understood, without any doubt. He retired, and in a few moments ushered in Emilia Belloni.

Mr. Pole was in the middle of the room, wearing a countenance of marked severity, and watchful to maintain it in his opening bow; but when he perceived his little Brookfield guest standing timidly in the doorway, his eyebrows lifted, and his hands spread out; and “Well, to be sure!” he cried; while Emilia hurried up to him. She had to assure him that everything was right at home, and was next called upon to state what had brought her to town; but his continued exclamation of “Bless my soul!” reprieved her reply, and she sat in a chair panting quickly.

Mr. Pole spoke tenderly of refreshments; wine and cake, or biscuits.

“I cannot eat or drink,” said Emilia.

“Why, what’s come to you, my dear?” returned Mr. Pole in unaffected wonder.

“I am not hungry.”

“You generally are, at home, about this time—eh?”

Emilia sighed, and feigned the sad note to be a breath of fatigue.

“Well, and why are you here, my dear?” Mr. Pole was beginning to step to the right and the left of her uneasily.

“I have come—” she paused, with a curious quick speculating look between her eyes; “I have come to see you.”

“See me, my dear? You saw me this morning.”

“Yes; I wanted to see you alone.”

Emilia was having the first conflict with her simplicity; out of which it was not to issue clear, as in the foregone days. She was thinking of the character of the man she spoke to, studying him, that she might win him to succour the object she had in view. It was a quality going, and a quality coming; nor will we, if you please, lament a law of growth.

“Why, you can see me alone, any day, my dear,” said Mr. Pole; “for many a day, I hope.”

“You are more alone to me here. I cannot speak at Brookfield. Oh!”—and Emilia had to still her heart’s throbbing—“you do not want me to go to Italy, do you?”

“Want you to go? Not a bit. There is some talk of it, isn’t there? I don’t want you to go. Don’t you want to go.”

Page 634

“No! no!” said Emilia, with decisive fervour.

“Don’t want to go?”

“No: to stay! I want to stay!”

“Eh? to stay?”

“To stay with you! Never to leave England, at least! I want to give up all that I may stay.”

“All?” repeated Mr. Pole, evidently marvelling as to what that sounding box might contain; and still more, perplexed to hear Emilia’s vehement—“Yes! all!” as if there were that in the mighty abnegation to make a reasonable listener doubtful.

“No. I really don’t want you to go,” he said. “In fact,” and the merchant’s hospitable nature was at war with something in his mind, “I like you, my dear; I like to have you about me. You’re cheerful; you’re agreeable; I like your smile; your voice, too. You’re a very pleasant companion. Only, you know, we may break up our house. If the girls get married, I must live somewhere in lodgings, and I couldn’t very well ask you to cook for me.”

“I can cook a little,” Emilia smiled. “I went into the kitchen, till Adela objected.”

“Yes, but it wouldn’t do, you know,” pursued Mr. Pole, with the seriousness of a man thrown out of his line of argument. “You can cook, eh? Got an idea of it? I always said you were a useful little woman. Do have a biscuit and some wine:—No? well, where was I?—That confounded boy. Brainty-top, top! that’s it Braintop. Was I talking of him, my dear? Oh no! about your getting married. For if you can cook, why not? Get a husband and then you won’t got to Italy. You ought to get one. Some young fellows don’t look for money.”

“I shall make money come, in time,” said Emilia; in the leaping ardour of whose eyes might be seen that what she had journeyed to speak was hot within her. “I know I shall be worth having. I shall win a name, I think—I do hope it!”

“Well, so Pericles says. He’s got a great notion of you. Perhaps he means it himself. He’s rich. Rash, I admit. But, as the chances go, he’s tremendously rich. He may mean it.”

“What?” asked Emilia.

“Marry you, you know.”

“Ah, what a torture!”

In that heat of her feelings she realized the horror of the words to her, with an intensity that made them seem to quiver like an arrow in her breast.

“You don’t like him?” said Mr. Pole.

“Not love him! not love him!”

“Yes, yes, but that comes after marriage. Often the case. Look here: don’t you go against your interests. You mustn’t be flighty. If Pericles speaks to you, have him. Clap your hands. Dozens of girls would, that I know.”

“But, oh!” interposed Emilia; “if he married me he would kiss me!”

Mr. Pole coughed and blinked. “Well!” he remarked, as one gravely cogitating; and with the native delicacy of a Briton turned it off in a playful, “So shall I now,” adding, “though I ain’t your husband.”

He stooped his head. Emilia put her hands on his shoulders, and submitted her face to him.

Page 635

“There!” went Mr. Pole: “’pon my honour, it does me good:—better than medicine! But you mustn’t give that dose to everybody, my dear. You don’t, of course. All right, all right—I’m quite satisfied. I was only thinking of you going to Italy, among those foreign rascals, who’ve no more respect for a girl than they have for a monkey—their brother. A set of swindlers! I took you for the wife of one when you came in, at first. And now, business is business. Let’s get it over. What have you come about? Glad to see you—understand that.”

Emilia lifted her eyes to his.

“You know I love you, sir.”

“I’m sure you’re a grateful little woman.”

She rose: “Oh! how can I speak it!”

An idea that his daughters had possibly sent her to herald one of the renowned physicians of London, concerning whom he was perpetually being plagued by them, or to lead him to one, flashed through Mr. Pole. He was not in a state to weigh the absolute value of such a suspicion, but it seemed probable; it explained an extraordinary proceeding; and, having conceived, his wrath took it up as a fact, and fought with it.

“Stop! If that’s what you’ve come for, we’ll bring matters to a crisis. You fancy me ill, don’t you, my dear?”

“You do not look well, sir.”

Emilia’s unhesitating reply confirmed his suspicion.

“I am well. I am, I say! And now, understand that, if that’s your business, I won’t go to the fellow, and I won’t see him here. They’ll make me out mad, next. He shall never have a guinea from me while I live. No, nor when I die. Not a farthing! Sit down, my dear, and wait for the biscuits. I wish to heaven they’d come. There’s brandy coming, too. Where’s Braintop?”

He took out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead, and jerked it like a bell-rope.

Emilia, in a singular bewilderment, sat eyeing a beam of sombre city sunlight on the dusty carpet. She could only suppose that the offending “he” was Wilfrid; but, why he should be so, she could not guess: and how to plead for him, divided her mind.

“Don’t blame him; be angry with me, if you are angry,” she began softly. “I know he thinks of you anxiously. I know he would do nothing to hurt you. No one is so kind as he is. Would you deprive him of money, because he offends you?”

“Deprive him of money,” repeated Mr. Pole, with ungrudging accentuation. “Well, I’ve heard about women, but I never knew one so anxious for a doctor to get his fee as you are.”

Emilia wonderingly fixed her sight on him an instant, and, quite unillumined, resumed: “Blame me, sir. But, I know you will be too kind. Oh! I love him. So, I must love you, and I would not give you pain. It is true he loves me. You will not see him, because he loves me?”

“The doctor?” muttered Mr. Pole. “The doctor?” he almost bellowed; and got sharp up from his chair, and looked at himself in the glass, blinking rapidly; and then turned to inspect Emilia.

Page 636

Emilia drew him to her side again.

“Go on,” he said; and there became visible in his face a frightful effort to comprehend her, and get to the sense of her words.

And why it was so frightful as to be tragic, you will know presently.

He thought of the arrival of Braintop, freighted with brandy, as the only light in the mist, and breathing heavily from his nose, almost snorting the air he took in from a widened mouth, he sat and tried to listen to her words as well as for Braintop’s feet.

Emilia was growing too conscious of her halting eloquence, as the imminence of her happiness or misery hung balancing in doubtful scales before her.

“Oh! he loves me, and I love him,” she gasped, and wondered why words should be failing her. “See us together, sir, and hear us. We will make you well.”

The exclamation “Good Lord!” groaned out in a tone as from the lower pits of despair, cut her short.

Tearfully she murmured: “You will not see us, sir?”

“Together?” bawled the merchant.

“Yes, I mean together.”

“If you’re not mad, I am.” And he jumped on his legs and walked to the farther corner of the room. “Which of us is it?” His features twitched in horribly comic fashion. “What do you mean? I can’t understand a word. My brain must have gone;” throwing his hand over his forehead. “I’ve feared so for the last four months. Good God! a lunatic asylum! and the business torn like a piece of old rag! I know that fellow at Riga’s dancing like a cannibal, and there—there ’ll be articles in the papers.—Here, girl! come up to the light. Come here, I say.”

Emilia walked up to him.

“You don’t look mad. I dare say everybody else understands you. Do they?”

The sad-flushed pallor of his face provoked Emilia to say: “You ought to have the doctor here immediately. Let me bring him, sir.”

A gleam as of a lantern through his oppressive mental fog calmed the awful irritability of his nerves somewhat.

“You’ve got him outside?”

“No, sir.”

The merchant’s eagerness faded out. He put his hand to her shoulder, and went along to a chair, sinking into it, and closing his eyelids. So they remained, Emilia at his right hand. She watched him breathing with a weak open mouth, and thought more of the doctor now than of Wilfrid.

CHAPTER XXV

Braintop’s knock at the door had been unheeded for some minutes. At last Emilia let him in. The brandy and biscuits were placed on a table, and Emilia resumed her watch by Mr. Pole. She saw that his lips moved, after a space, and putting her ear down, understood that he desired not to see any one who might come for an interview with him: nor were the clerks to be admitted. The latter direction was given in precise terms. Emilia repeated the orders outside. On her return, the merchant’s eyes were open.

Page 637

“My forehead feels damp,” he said; “and I’m not hot at all. Just take hold of my hands. They’re like wet crumpets. I wonder what makes me so stiff. A man mustn’t sit at business too long at a time. Sure to make people think he’s ill. What was that about a doctor? I seem to remember. I won’t see one.”

Emilia had filled a glass with brandy. She brought it nearer to his hand, while he was speaking. At the touch of the glass, his fingers went round it slowly, and he raised it to his mouth. The liquor revived him. He breathed “ah!” several times, and grimaced, blinking, as if seeking to arouse a proper brightness in his eyes. Then, he held out his empty glass to her, and she filled it, and he sipped deliberately, saying: “I’m warm inside. I keep on perspiring so cold. Can’t make it out. Look at my finger-ends, my dear. They’re whitish, aren’t they?”

Emilia took the hand he presented, and chafed it, and put it against her bosom, half under one arm. The action appeared to give some warmth to his heart, for he petted her, in return.

A third time he held out the glass, and remarked that this stuff was better than medicine.

“You women!” he sneered, as at a reminiscence of their faith in drugs.

“My legs are weak, though!” He had risen and tested the fact. “Very shaky. I wonder what makes ’em—I don’t take much exercise.” Pondering on this problem, he pursued: “It’s the stomach. I’m as empty as an egg-shell. Odd, I’ve got no appetite. But, my spirits are up. I begin to feel myself again. I’ll eat by-and-by, my dear. And, I say; I’ll tell you what:—I’ll take you to the theatre to-night. I want to laugh. A man’s all right when he’s laughing. I wish it was Christmas. Don’t you like to see the old pantaloon tumbled over, my boy?—my girl, I mean. I did, when I was a boy. My father took me. I went in the pit. I can smell oranges, when I think of it. I remember, we supped on German sausage; or ham—one or the other. Those were happy old days!”

He shook his head at them across the misty gulf.

“Perhaps there’s a good farce going on now. If so, we’ll go. Girls ought to learn to laugh as well as boys. I’ll ring for Braintop.”

He rang the bell, and bade Emilia be careful to remind him that he wanted Braintop’s address; for Braintop was useful.

It appeared that there were farces at several of the theatres. Braintop rattled them out, their plot and fun and the merits of the actors, with delightful volubility, as one whose happy subject had been finally discovered. He was forthwith commissioned to start immediately and take a stage-box at one of the places of entertainment, where two great rivals of the Doctor genus promised to laugh dull care out of the spirit of man

triumphantly, and at the description of whose drolleries any one with faith might be half cured. The youth gave his address on paper to Emilia.

Page 638

“Make haste, sir,” said Mr. Pole. “And, stop. You shall go, yourself; go to the pit, and have a supper, and I’ll pay for it. When you’ve ordered the box—do you know the Bedford Hotel? Go there, and see Mrs. Chickley, and tell her I am coming to dine and sleep, and shall bring one of my daughters. Dinner, sittingroom, and two bed-rooms, mind. And tell Mrs. Chickley we’ve got no carpet-bag, and must come upon her wardrobe. All clear to you? Dinner at half-past five going to theatre.”

Braintop bowed comprehendingly.

“Now, that fellow goes off chirping,” said Mr. Pole to Emilia. “It’s just the thing I used to wish to happen to me, when I was his age—my master to call me in and say “There! go and be jolly.” I dare say the rascal’ll order a champagne supper. Poor young chap! let his heart be merry. Ha! ha! heigho!—Too much business is bad for man and boy. I feel better already, if it weren’t for my legs. My feet are so cold. Don’t you think I’m pretty talkative, my dear?”

“I am glad to hear you talk,” said Emilia, striving to look less perplexed than she felt.

He asked her slyly why she had come to London; and she begged that she might speak of it by-and-by; whereat Mr. Pole declared that he intended to laugh them all out of that nonsense. “And what did you say about being in love with him? A doctor in good practice—but you needn’t commence by killing me if you do go and marry the fellow. Eh? what is it?”

Emilia was too much entangled herself to attempt to extricate him; and apparently his wish to be enlightened passed away, for he was the next instant searching among his papers for the letter from Riga. Not finding it, he put on his hat.

“Must give up business to-day. Can’t do business with a petticoat in the room. I wish the Lord Mayor’d stop them all at Temple Bar. Now we’ll go out, and I’ll show you a bit of the City.”

He offered her his arm, and she noticed that in walking through the office, he was erect, and the few words he spoke were delivered in the peremptory elastic tone of a vigorous man.

“My girls,” he said to her in an undertone, “never come here. Well! we don’t expect ladies, you know. Different spheres in this world. They mean to be tip-top in society; and quite right too. My dear, I think we’ll ride. Do you mind being seen in a cab?”

He asked her hesitatingly: and when Emilia said, “Oh, no! let us ride,” he seemed relieved. “I can’t see the harm in a cab. Different tastes, in this world. My girls—but, thank the Lord! they’ve got carriages.”

For an hour the merchant and Emilia drove about the City. He showed her all the great buildings, and dilated on the fabulous piles of wealth they represented, taking evident pleasure in her exclamations of astonishment.

“Yes, yes; they may despise us City fellows. I say, ’Come and see”: that’s all! Now, look up that court. Do you see three dusty windows on the second floor? That man there could buy up any ten princes in Europe—excepting one or two Austrians or Russians. He wears a coat just like mine.”

Page 639

“Does he?” said Emilia, involuntarily examining the one by her side.

“We don’t show our gold-linings, in the City, my dear.”

“But, you are rich, too.”

“Oh! I—as far as that goes. Don’t talk about me. I’m—I’m still cold in the feet. Now, look at that corner house. Three months ago that man was one of our most respected City merchants. Now he’s a bankrupt, and can’t show his head. It was all rotten. A medlar! He tampered with documents; betrayed trusts. What do you think of him?”

“What was it he did?” asked Emilia.

Mr. Pole explained, and excused him; then he explained, and abused him.

“He hadn’t a family, my dear. Where did the money go? He’s called a rascal now, poor devil! Business brings awful temptations. You think, this’ll save me! You catch hold of it and it snaps. That’ll save me; but you’re too heavy, and the roots give way, and down you go lower and lower. Lower and lower! The gates of hell must be very low down if one of our bankrupts don’t reach ’em.” He spoke this in a deep underbreath. “Let’s get out of the City. There’s no air. Look at that cloud. It’s about over Brookfield, I should say.”

“Dear Brookfield!” echoed Emilia, feeling her heart fly forth to sing like a skylark under the cloud.

“And they’re not satisfied with it,” murmured Mr: Pole, with a voice of unwonted bitterness.

At the hotel, he was received very cordially by Mrs. Chickley, and Simon, the old waiter.

“You look as young as ever, ma’am,” Mr. Pole complimented her cheerfully, while he stamped his feet on the floor, and put forward Emilia as one of his girls; but immediately took the landlady aside, to tell her that she was “merely a charge—a ward—something of that sort;” admitting, gladly enough, that she was a very nice young lady. “She’s a genius, ma’am, in music:—going to do wonders. She’s not one of them.” And Mr. Pole informed Mrs. Chickley that when they came to town, they usually slept in one or other of the great squares. He, for his part, preferred old quarters: comfort versus grandeur.

Simon had soon dressed the dinner-table. By the time dinner was ready, Mr. Pole had sunk into such a condition of drowsiness, that it was hard to make him see why he should be aroused, and when he sat down, fronting Emilia, his eyes were glazed, and he complained that she was scarcely visible.

“Some of your old yellow seal, Simon. That’s what I want. I haven’t got better at home.”

The contents of this old yellow seal formed the chief part of the merchant's meal. Emilia was induced to drink two full glasses.

"Doesn't that make your feet warm, my dear?" said Mr. Pole.

"It makes me want to talk," Emilia confessed.

"Ah! we shall have some fun to-night. "To-the-rutte-ta-to!" If you could only sing, "Begone dull care!" I like glees: good, honest, English, manly singing for me! Nothing like glees and madrigals, to my mind. With chops and baked potatoes, and a glass of good stout, they beat all other music."

Page 640

Emilia sang softly to him.

When she had finished, Mr. Pole applauded her mildly.

“Your music, my dear?”

“My music: Mr. Runningbrook’s words. But only look. He will not change a word, and some of the words are so curious, they make me lift my chin and pout. It’s all in my throat. I feel as if I had to do it on tiptoe. Mr. Runningbrook wrote the song in ten minutes.”

“He can afford to—comes of a family,” said Mr. Pole, and struck up a bit of “Celia’s Arbour,” which wandered into “The Soldier Tired,” as he came bendingly, both sets of fingers filliping, toward Emilia, with one of those ancient glee—suspensions, “Taia—haia—haia—haia,” *etc*., which were meant for jolly fellows who could bear anything.

“Eh?” went Mr. Pole, to elicit approbation in return.

Emilia smoothed the wrinkles of her face, and smiled.

“There’s nothing like Port,” said Mr. Pole. “Get little Runningbrook to write a song: “There’s nothing like Port.” You put the music. I’ll sing it.”

“You will,” cried Emilia.

“Yes, upon my honour! now my feet are warmer, I by Jingo! what’s that?” and again he wore that strange calculating look, as if he were being internally sounded, and guessed at his probable depth. “What a twitch! Something wrong with my stomach. But a fellow must be all right when his spirits are up. We’ll be off as quick as we can. Taia—haihaia—hum. If the farce is bad, it’s my last night of theatre-going.”

The delight at being in a theatre kept Emilia dumb when she gazed on the glittering lights. After an inspection of the house, Mr. Pole kindly remarked: “You must marry and get out of this. This’d never do. All very well in the boxes: but on the stage—oh, no! I shouldn’t like you to be there. If my girls don’t approve of the doctor, they shall look out somebody for you. I shouldn’t like you to be painted, and rigged out; and have to squall in this sort of place. Stage won’t do for you. No, no!”

Emilia replied that she had given up the stage; and looked mournfully at the drop-scene, as at a lost kingdom, scarcely repressing her tears.

The orchestra tuned and played a light overture. She followed up the windings of the drop-scene valley, meeting her lover somewhere beneath the castle-ruin, where the river narrowed and the trees intertwined. On from dream to dream the music carried her, and dull fell the first words of the farce. Mr. Pole said, “Now, then!” and began to

chuckle. As the farce proceeded, he grew more serious, repeating to Emilia, quite anxiously: “I wonder whether that boy Braintop’s enjoying it.” Emilia glanced among the sea of heads, and finally eliminated the head of Braintop, who was respectfully devoting his gaze to the box she occupied. When Mr. Pole had been assisted to discover him likewise, his attention alternated between Braintop and the stage, and he expressed annoyance from time to time

Page 641

at the extreme composure of Braintop's countenance. "Why don't the fellow laugh? Does he think he's listening to a sermon?" Poor Braintop, on his part, sat in mortal fear lest his admiration of Emilia was perceived. Divided? between this alarming suspicion, and a doubt that the hair on his forehead was not properly regulated, he became uneasy and fitful in his deportment. His imagination plagued him with a sense of guilt, which his master's watchfulness of him increased. He took an opportunity to furtively to eye himself in a pocket-mirror, and was subsequently haunted by an additional dread that Emilia might have discovered the instrument; and set him down as a vain foolish dog. When he saw her laugh he was sure of it. Instead of responding to Mr. Pole's encouragement, he assumed a taciturn aspect worthy of a youthful anchorite, and continued to be the spectator of a scene to which his soul was dead.

"I believe that fellow's thinking of nothing but his supper," said Mr. Pole.

"I dare say he dined early in the day," returned Emilia, remembering how hungry she used to be in the evenings of the potatoe-days.

"Yes, but he might laugh, all the same." And Mr. Pole gave Emilia the sound advice: "Mind you never marry a fellow who can't laugh."

Braintop saw Emilia smile. Then, in an instant, her face changed its expression to one of wonder and alarm, and her hands clasped together tightly. What on earth was the matter with her? His agitated fancy, centred in himself, now decided that some manifestation of most shocking absurdity had settled on his forehead, or his hair, for he was certain of his neck-tie. Braintop had recourse to his pocket-mirror once more. It afforded him a rapid interchange of glances with a face which he at all events could distinguish from the mass, though we need not.

The youth was in the act of conveying the instrument to its retreat, when conscience sent his eyes toward Emilia, who, to his horror, beckoned to him, and touched Mr. Pole, entreating him to do the same. Mr. Pole gesticulated imperiously, whereat Braintop rose, and requested his neighbour to keep his seat for ten minutes, as he was going into that particular box; and "If I don't come back in ten minutes, I shall stop there," said Braintop, a little grandly, through the confusion of his ideas, as he guessed at the possible reasons for the summons.

Emilia had seen her father in the orchestra. There he sat, under the leader, sullenly fiddling the prelude to the second play, like a man ashamed, and one of the beaten in this world. Flight had been her first thought. She had cause to dread him. The more she lived and the dawning knowledge of what it is to be a woman in the world grew with her, the more she shrank from his guidance, and from reliance on him. Not that she conceived him designedly base; but he outraged her now conscious delicacy, and what she had to endure as a girl seemed unbearable

Page 642

to her now. Besides, she felt a secret shuddering at nameless things, which made her sick of the thought of returning to him and his Jew friends. But, alas! he looked so miserable—a child of harmony among the sons of discord! He kept his head down, fiddling like a machine. The old potatoe-days became pathetically edged with dead light to Emilia. She could not be cruel. "When I am safe," she laid stress on the word in her mind, to awaken blessed images, "I will see him often, and make him happy; but I will let him know that all is well with me now, and that I love him always."

So she said to Mr. Pole, "I know one of those in the orchestra. May I write a word to him on a piece of paper before we go? I wish to."

Mr. Pole reflected, and seeing her earnest in her desire to do this, replied: "Well, yes; if you must—the girls are not here."

Emilia borrowed his pencil-case, and wrote:—

"Sandra is well, and always loves her caro papa, and is improving, and will see him soon. Her heart is full of love for him and for her mama; and if they leave their lodgings they are to leave word where they go. Sandra never forgets Italy, and reads the papers. She has a copy of the score of an unknown opera by our Andronizetti, and studies it, and anatomy, English, French, and pure Italian, and can ride a horse. She has made rich friends, who love her. It will not be long, and you will see her."

The hasty scrawl concluded with numerous little caressing exclamations in Italian diminutives. This done, Emilia thought: "But he will look up and see me!" She resolved not to send it till they were about to quit the theatre. Consequently, Braintop, on his arrival, was told to sit down. "You don't look cheerful in the pit," said Mr. Pole. "You're above it?—eh? You're all alike in that. None of you do what your dads did. Up-up-up? You may get too high, eh?—Gallery?" and Mr. Pole winked knowingly and laughed.

Braintop, thus elevated, tried his best to talk to Emilia, who sat half fascinated with the fear of seeing her father lift his eyes and recognize her suddenly. She sat boldly in the front, as before; not being a young woman to hide her head where there was danger, and having perhaps a certain amount of the fatalism which is often youth's philosophy in the affairs of life. "If this is to be, can I avert it?"

Mr. Pole began to nod at the actors, heavily. He said to Emilia, "If there is any fun going on, give me a nudge." Emilia kept her eyes on her father in the orchestra, full of pity for his deplorable wig, in which she read his later domestic history, and sad tales of the family dinners.

"Do you see one of those"—she pointed him out to Braintop; "he is next to the leader, with his back to us. Are you sure? I want you to give him this note before he goes; when we go. Will you do it? I shall always be thankful to you."

Considering what Braintop was ready to do that he might be remembered for a day and no more, the request was so very moderate as to be painful to him.

Page 643

“You will leave him when you have given it into his hand. You are not to answer any questions,” said Emilia.

With a reassuring glance at the musician’s wig, Braintop bent his head.

“Do see,” she pursued, “how differently he bows from the other men, though it is only dance music. Oh, how his ears are torn by that violoncello! He wants to shriek:—he bears it!”

She threw a piteous glance across the agitated instruments, and Braintop was led to inquire: “Is he anything particular?”

“He can bring out notes that are more like honey—if you can fancy a thread of honey drawn through your heart as if it would never end! He is Italian.”

Braintop modestly surveyed her hair and brows and cheeks, and taking the print of her eyes on his brain to dream over, smelt at a relationship with the wry black wig, which cast a halo about it.

The musicians laid down their instruments, and trooped out, one by one. Emilia perceived a man brush against her father’s elbow. Her father flicked at his offended elbow with the opposite hand, and sat crumpled up till all had passed him: then went out alone. That little action of disgust showed her that he had not lost spirit, albeit condemned to serve amongst an inferior race, promoters of discord.

Just as the third play was opening, some commotion was seen in the pit, rising from near Braintop’s vacated seat; and presently a thing that shone flashing to the lights, came on from hand to hand, each hand signalling subsequently toward Mr. Pole’s box. It approached. Braintop’s eyes were in waiting on Emilia, who looked sadly at the empty orchestra. A gentleman in the stalls, a head beneath her, bowed, and holding up a singular article, gravely said that he had been requested to pass it. She touched Mr. Pole’s shoulder. “Eh? anything funny?” said he, and glanced around. He was in time to see Braintop lean hurriedly over the box, and snatch his pocket-mirror from the gentleman’s hand. “Ha! ha!” he laughed, as if a comic gleam had illumined him. A portion of the pit and stalls laughed too. Emilia smiled merrily. “What was it?” said she; and perceiving many faces beneath her red among handkerchiefs, she was eager to see the thing that the unhappy Braintop had speedily secreted.

“Come, sir, let’s see it!” quoth Mr. Pole, itching for a fresh laugh; and in spite of Braintop’s protest, and in defiance of his burning blush, he compelled the wretched youth to draw it forth, and be manifestly convicted of vanity.

A shout of laughter burst from Mr. Pole. “No wonder these young sparks cut us all out. Lord, what cunning dogs they are! They ain’t satisfied with seeing themselves in their

boots, but they—ha! ha! By George! We've got the best fun in our box. I say, Braintop! you ought to have two, my boy. Then you'd see how you looked behind. Ha-ha-hah! Never enjoyed an evening so much in my life! A looking-glass for their pockets! ha! ha! —hooh!"

Page 644

Luckily the farce demanded laughter, or those parts of the pit which had not known Braintop would have been indignant. Mr. Pole became more and more possessed by the fun, as the contrast of Braintop's abject humiliation with this glaring testimony to his conceit tickled him. He laughed till he complained of hunger. Emilia, though she thought it natural that Braintop should carry a pocket-mirror if he pleased, laughed from sympathy; until Braintop, reduced to the verge of forbearance, stood up and remarked that, to perform the mission entrusted to him, he must depart immediately. Mr. Pole was loth to let him go, but finally commending him to a good supper, he sighed, and declared himself a new man.

"Oh! what a jolly laugh! The very thing I wanted! It's worth hundreds to me. I was queer before: no doubt about that!"

Again the ebbing convulsion of laughter seized him. "I feel as clear as day," he said; and immediately asked Emilia whether she thought he would have strength to get down to the cab. She took his hand, trying to assist him from the seat. He rose, and staggered an instant. "A sort of reddish cloud," he murmured, feeling over his forehead. "Ha! I know what it is. I want a chop. A chop and a song. But, I couldn't take you, and I like you by me. Good little woman!" He patted Emilia's shoulder, preparatory to leaning on it with considerable weight, and so descended to the cab, chuckling ever and anon at the reminiscence of Braintop.

There was a disturbance in the street. A man with a foreign accent was shouting by the door of a neighbouring public-house, that he would not yield his hold of the collar of a struggling gentleman, till the villain had surrendered his child, whom he scandalously concealed from her parents. A scuffle ensued, and the foreign voice was heard again:

"Wat! wat you have de shame, you have de pluck, ah! to tell me you know not where she is, and you bring me a letter? Ho!—you have de cheeks to tell me!"

This highly effective pluralizing of their peculiar slang, brought a roar of applause from the crowd of Britons.

"Only a street row," said Mr. Pole, to calm Emilia.

"Will he be hurt?" she cried.

"I see a couple of policemen handy," said Mr. Pole, and Emilia cowered down and clung to his hand as they drove from the place.

CHAPTER XXVI

It was midnight. Mr. Pole had appeased his imagination with a chop, and was trying to revive the memory of his old after-theatre night carouses by listening to a song which

Emilia sang to him, while he sipped at a smoking mixture, and beat time on the table, rejoiced that he was warm from head to foot at last.

“That’s a pretty song, my dear,” he said. “A very pretty song. It does for an old fellow; and so did my supper: light and wholesome. I’m an old fellow; I ought to know I’ve got a grown-up son and grown-up daughters. I shall be a grandpa, soon, I dare say. It’s not the thing for me to go about hearing glees. I had an idea of it. I’m better here. All I want is to see my children happy, married and settled, and comfortable!”

Page 645

Emilia stole up to him, and dropped on one knee: “You love them?”

“I do. I love my girls and my boy. And my brandy-and-water, do you mean to say, you rogue?”

“And me?” Emilia looked up at him beseechingly.

“Yes, and you. I do. I haven’t known you long, my dear, but I shall be glad to do what I can for you. You shall make my house your home as long as you live; and if I say, make haste and get married, it’s only just this: girls ought to marry young, and not be in an uncertain position.”

“Am I worth having?”

“To be sure you are! I should think so. You haven’t got a penny; but, then, you’re not for spending one. And”—Mr. Pole nodded to right and left like a man who silenced a host of invisible logicians, urging this and that—“you’re a pleasant companion, thrifty, pretty, musical: by Jingo! what more do they want? They’ll have their song and chop at home.”

“Yes; but suppose it depends upon their fathers?”

“Well, if their fathers will be fools, my dear, I can’t help ’em. We needn’t take ’em in a lump: how about the doctor? I’ll see him to-morrow morning, and hear what he has to say. Shall I?”

Mr. Pole winked shrewdly.

“You will not make my heart break?” Emilia’s voice sounded one low chord as she neared the thing she had to say.

“Bless her soul!” the old merchant patted her; “I’m not the sort of man for that.”

“Nor his?”

“His?” Mr. Pole’s nerves became uneasy in a minute, at the scent of a mystification. He dashed his handkerchief over his forehead, repeating: “His? Break a man’s heart! I? What’s the meaning of that? For God’s sake, don’t bother me!”

Emilia was still kneeling before him, eyeing him with a shadowed steadfast air.

“I say his, because his heart is in mine. He has any pain that hurts me.”

“He may be tremendously in love,” observed Mr. Pole; “but he seems a deuced soft sort of a doctor! What’s his name?”

“I love Wilfrid.”

The merchant appeared to be giving ear to her, long after the words had been uttered, while there was silence in the room.

“Wilfrid? my son?” he cried with a start.

“He is my lover.”

“Damned rascal!” Mr. Pole jumped from his chair. “Going and playing with an unprotected girl. I can pardon a young man’s folly, but this is infamous. My dear child,” he turned to Emilia, “if you’ve got any notion about my son Wilfrid, you must root it up as quick as you can. If he’s been behaving like a villain, leave him to me. I detest, I hate, I loathe, I would kick, a young man who deceives a girl. Even if he’s my son!—more’s the reason!”

Mr. Pole was walking up and down the room, fuming as he spoke. Emilia tried to hold his hand, as he was passing, but he said: “There, my child! I’m very sorry for you, and I’m damned angry with him. Let me go.”

Page 646

“Can you, can you be angry with him for loving me?”

“Deceiving you,” returned Mr. Pole; “that’s what it is. And I tell you, I’d rather fifty times the fellow had deceived me. Anything rather than that he should take advantage of a girl.”

“Wilfrid loves me and would die for me,” said Emilia.

“Now, let me tell you the fact,” Mr. Pole came to a halt, fronting her. “My son Wilfrid Pole may be in love, as he says, here and there, but he is engaged to be married to a lady of title. I have his word—his oath. He got near a thousand pounds out of my pocket the other day on that understanding. I don’t speak about the money, but—now—it’s a lump—others would have made a nice row about it—but is he a liar? Is he a seducing, idling, vagabond dog? Is he a contemptible scoundrel?”

“He is my lover,” said Emilia.

She stood without changing a feature; as in a darkness, holding to the one thing she was sure of. Then, with a sudden track of light in her brain: “I know the mistake,” she said. “Pardon him. He feared to offend you, because you are his father, and he thought I might not quite please you. For, he loves me. He has loved me from the first moment he saw me. He cannot be engaged to another. I could bring him from any woman’s side. I have only to say to myself—he must come to me. For he loves me! It is not a thing to doubt.”

Mr. Pole turned and recommenced his pacing with hasty steps. All the indications of a nervous tempest were on him. Interjecting half-formed phrases, and now and then staring at Emilia, as at an incomprehensible object, he worked at his hair till it lent him the look of one in horror at an apparition.

“The fellow’s going to marry Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, I tell you. He has asked my permission. The infernal scamp! he knew it pleased me. He bled me of a thousand pounds only the other day. I tell you, he’s going to marry Lady Charlotte Chillingworth.”

Emilia received this statement with a most perplexing smile. She shook her head. “He cannot.”

“Cannot? I say he shall, and must, and in a couple of months, too!”

The gravely sceptical smile on Emilia’s face changed to a blank pallor.

“Then, you make him, sir—you?”

“He’ll be a beggar, if he don’t.”

“You will keep him without money?”

Mr. Pole felt that he gazed on strange deeps in that girl’s face. Her voice had the wire-like hum of a rising wind. There was no menace in her eyes: the lashes of them drooped almost tenderly, and the lips were but softly closed. The heaving of the bosom, though weighty, was regular: the hands hung straight down, and were open. She looked harmless; but his physical apprehensiveness was sharpened by his nervous condition, and he read power in her: the capacity to concentrate all animal and mental vigour into one feeling—this being the power of the soul.

Page 647

So she stood, breathing quietly, steadily eyeing him.

“No, no;” went on Mr. Pole. “Come, come. We’ll sit down, and see, and talk—see what can be done. You know I always meant kindly by you.”

“Oh, yes!” Emilia musically murmured, and it cost her nothing to smile again.

“Now, tell me how this began.” Mr. Pole settled himself comfortably to listen, all irritation having apparently left him, under the influence of the dominant nature. “You need not be ashamed to talk it over to me.”

“I am not ashamed,” Emilia led off, and told her tale simply, with here and there one of her peculiar illustrations. She had not thought of love till it came to life suddenly, she said; and then all the world looked different. The relation of Wilfrid’s bravery in fighting for her, varied for a single instant the low monotony of her voice. At the close of the confession, Mr. Pole wore an aspect of distress. This creature’s utter unlikeness to the girls he was accustomed to, corroborated his personal view of the case, that Wilfrid certainly could not have been serious, and that she was deluded. But he pitied her, for he had sufficient imagination to prevent him from despising what he did not altogether comprehend. So, to fortify the damsel, he gave her a lecture: first, on young men—-their selfish inconsiderateness, their weakness, the wanton lives they led, their trick of lying for any sugar-plum, and how they laughed at their dupes. Secondly, as to the conduct consequently to be prescribed to girls, who were weaker, frailer, by disposition more confiding, and who must believe nothing but what they heard their elders say.

Emilia gave patient heed to the lecture.

“But I am safe,” she remarked, when he had finished; “for my lover is not as those young men are.”

To speak at all, and arrange his ideas, was a vexation to the poor merchant. He was here like an irritable traveller, who knocks at a gate, which makes as if it opens, without letting him in. Emilia’s naive confidence he read as stupidity. It brought on a fresh access of the nervous fever lurking in him, and he cried, jumping from his seat: “Well, you can’t have him, and there’s an end. You must give up—confound! why! do you expect to have everything you want at starting? There, my child—but, upon my honour! a man loses his temper at having to talk for an hour or so, and no result. You must go to bed; and—do you say your prayers? Well! that’s one way of getting out of it—pray that you may forget all about what’s not good for you. Why, you’re almost like a young man, when you set your mind on a thing. Bad! won’t do! Say your prayers regularly. And, please, pour me out a mouthful of brandy. My hand trembles—I don’t know what’s the matter with it;—just like those rushes on the Thames I used to see when out fishing. No wind, and yet there they shake away. I wish it was daylight on the old river now! It’s night, and no mistake. I feel as if I had a fellow twirling a stick over my head. The

rascal's been at it for the last month. There, stop where you are, my dear. Don't begin to dance!"

Page 648

He pressed at his misty eyes, half under the impression that she was taking a succession of dazzling leaps in air. Terror of an impending blow, which he associated with Emilia's voice, made him entreat her to be silent. After a space, he breathed a long breath of relief, saying: "No, no; you're firm enough on your feet. I don't think I ever saw you dance. My girls have given it up. What led me to think...but, let's to bed, and say our prayers. I want a kiss."

Emilia kissed him on the forehead. The symptoms of illness were strange to her, and passed unheeded. She was too full of her own burning passion to take evidence from her sight. The sun of her world was threatened with extinction. She felt herself already a wanderer in a land of tombs, where none could say whether morning had come or gone. Intensely she looked her misery in the face; and it was as a voice that said, "No sun: never sun any more," to her. But a blue-hued moon slipped from among the clouds, and hung in the black outstretched fingers of the tree of darkness, fronting troubled waters. "This is thy light for ever! thou shalt live in thy dream." So, as in a prison-house, did her soul now recall the blissful hours by Wilming Weir. She sickened but an instant. The blood in her veins was too strong a tide for her to crouch in that imagined corpse-like universe which alternates with an irradiated Eden in the brain of the passionate young.

"Why should I lose him!" The dry sob choked her.

She struggled with the emotion in her throat, and Mr. Pole, who had previously dreaded supplication and appeals for pity, caressed her. Instantly the flood poured out.

"You are not cruel. I knew it. I should have died, if you had come between us. Oh, Wilfrid's father, I love you!—I have never had a very angry word on my mouth. Think! think! if you had made me curse you. For, I could! You would have stopped my life, and Wilfrid's. What would our last thoughts have been? We could not have forgiven you. Take up dead birds killed by frost. You cry: Cruel winter! murdering cold! But I knew better. You are Wilfrid's father, whom I can kneel to. My lover's father! my own father! my friend next to heaven! Oh! bless my love, for him. You have only to know what my love for him is! The thought of losing him goes like perishing cold through my bones;—-my heart jerks, as if it had to pull up my body from the grave every time it beats...."

"God in heaven!" cried the horrified merchant, on whose susceptible nerves these images wrought with such a force that he absolutely had dread of her. He gasped, and felt at his heart, and then at his pulse; rubbed the moisture from his forehead, and throwing a fixedly wild look on her eyes, he jumped up and left her kneeling.

His caress had implied mercy to Emilia: for she could not reconcile it with the rejection of the petition of her soul. She was now a little bewildered to see him trotting the room, frowning and blinking, and feeling at one wrist, at momentary pauses, all his words

being: “Let’s be quiet. Let’s be good. Let’s go to bed, and say our prayers;” mingled with short ejaculations.

Page 649

“I may say,” she intercepted him, “I may tell my dear lover that you bless us both, and that we are to live. Oh, speak! sir! let me hear you!”

“Let’s go to bed,” iterated Mr. Pole. “Come, candles! do light them. In God’s name! light candles. And let’s be off and say our prayers.”

“You consent, sir?”

“What’s that your heart does?” Mr. Pole stopped to enquire; adding: “There, don’t tell me. You’ve played the devil with mine. Who’d ever have made me believe that I should feel more at ease running up and down the room, than seated in my arm-chair! Among the wonders of the world, that!”

Emilia put up her lips to kiss him, as he passed her. There was something deliciously soothing and haven-like to him in the aspect of her calmness.

“Now, you’ll be a good girl,” said he, when he had taken her salute.

“And you,” she rejoined, “will be happier!”

His voice dropped. “If you go on like this, you’ve done for me!”

But she could make no guess at any tragic meaning in his words. “My father—let me call you so!”

“Will you see that you can’t have him?” he stamped the syllables into her ears: and, with a notion of there being a foreign element about her, repeated:—“No!—not have him!—not yours!—somebody else’s!”

This was clear enough.

“Only you can separate us,” said Emilia, with a brow levelled intently.

“Well, and I—” Mr. Pole was pursuing in the gusty energy of his previous explanation. His eyes met Emilia’s, gravely widening. “I—I’m very sorry,” he broke down: “upon my soul, I am!”

The old man went to the mantel-piece and leaned his elbow before the glass.

Emilia’s bosom began to rise again.

She was startled to hear him laugh. A slight melancholy little burst; and then a louder one, followed by a full-toned laughter that fell short and showed the heart was not in it.

“That boy Braintop! What fun it was!” he said, looking all the while into the glass. “Why can’t we live in peace, and without bother! Is your candle alight, my dear?”

Emilia now thought that he was practising evasion.

“I will light it,” she said.

Mr. Pole gave a wearied sigh. His head being still turned to the glass, he listened with a shrouded face for her movements: saying, “Good night; good night; I’ll light my own. There’s a dear!”

A shouting was in his ears, which seemed to syllable distinctly: “If she goes at once, I’m safe.”

The sight of pain at all was intolerable to him; but he had a prophetic physical warning now that to witness pain inflicted by himself would be more than he could endure.

Emilia breathed a low, “Good night.”

“Good night, my love—all right to-morrow!” he replied briskly; and remorse touching his kind heart as the music of her ‘good night’ penetrated to it by thrilling avenues, he added injudiciously: “Don’t fret. We’ll see what we can do. Soon make matters comfortable.”

Page 650

“I love you, and I know you will not stab me,” she answered.

“No; certainly not,” said Mr. Pole, still keeping his back to her.

Struck with a sudden anticipating fear of having to go through this scene on the morrow, he continued: “No misunderstands, mind! Wilfrid’s done with.”

There was a silence. He trusted she might be gone. Turning round, he faced her; the light of the candle throwing her pale visage into ghostly relief.

“Where is sleep for you if you part us?”

Mr. Pole flung up his arms. “I insist upon your going to bed. Why shouldn’t I sleep? Child’s folly!”

Though he spoke so, his brain was in strings to his timorous ticking nerves; and he thought that it would be well to propitiate her and get her to utter some words that would not haunt his pillow.

“My dear girl! it’s not my doing. I like you. I wish you well and happy. Very fond of you; —blame circumstances, not me.” Then he murmured: “Are black spots on the eyelids a bad sign? I see big flakes of soot falling in a dark room.”

Emilia’s mated look fleeted. “You come between us, sir, because I have no money?”

“I tell you it’s the boy’s only chance to make his hit now.” Mr. Pole stamped his foot angrily.

“And you make my Cornelia marry, though she loves another, as Wilfrid loves me, and if they do not obey you they are to be beggars! Is it you who can pray? Can you ever have good dreams? I saved my father from the sin, by leaving him. He wished to sell me. But my poor father had no money at all, and I can pardon him. Money was a bright thing to him: like other things to us. Mr. Pole! What will any one say for you!”

The unhappy merchant had made vehement efforts to perplex his hearing, that her words might be empty and not future dragons round his couch. He was looking forward to a night of sleep as a cure for the evil sensations besetting him—his only chance. The chance was going; and with the knowledge that it was unjustly torn from him—this one gleam of clear reason in his brain undimmed by the irritable storm which plucked him down—he cried out, to clear himself:—

“They are beggars, both, and all, if they don’t marry before two months are out. I’m a beggar then. I’m ruined. I shan’t have a penny. I’m in a workhouse. They are in good homes. They are safe, and thank their old father. Now, then; now. Shall I sleep?”

Emilia caught his staggering arm. The glazed light of his eyes went out. He sank into a chair; white as if life had issued with the secret of his life. Wonderful varying expressions had marked his features and the tones of his voice, while he was uttering that sharp, succinct confession; so that, strange as it sounded, every sentence fixed itself on her with incontrovertible force, and the meaning of the whole flashed through her mind. It struck her too awfully for speech. She held fast to his nerveless hand, and kneeling before him, listened for his long reluctant breathing.

Page 651

The ‘Shall I sleep?’ seemed answered.

CHAPTER XXVII

For days after the foregoing scene, Brookfield was unconscious of what had befallen it. Wilfrid was trying his yacht, the ladies were preparing for the great pleasure-gathering on Besworth lawn, and shaping astute designs to exclude the presence of Mrs. Chump, for which they partly condemned themselves; but, as they said, “Only hear her!” The excitable woman was swelling from conjecture to certainty on a continuous public cry of, “’Pon my hon’r!—d’ye think little Belloni’s gone and marrud Pole?”

Emilia’s supposed flight had deeply grieved the ladies, when alarm and suspicion had subsided. Fear of some wretched male baseness on the part of their brother was happily diverted by a letter, wherein he desired them to come to him speedily. They attributed her conduct to dread of Mr. Pericles. That fervid devotee of Euterpe received the tidings with an obnoxious outburst, which made them seriously ask themselves (individually and in secret) whether he was not a moneyed brute, and nothing more. Nor could they satisfactorily answer the question. He raved: “You let her go. Ha! what creatures you are—hein? But you find not anozer in fifty years, I say; and here you stop, and forty hours pass by, and not a sing in motion. What blood you have! It is water—not blood. Such a voice, a verve, a style, an eye, a devil, zat girl! and all drawn up and out before ze time by a man: she is spoilt!”

He exhibited an anguish that they were not able to commiserate. Certain expressions falling from him led them to guess that he had set some plot in motion, which Emilia’s flight had arrested; but his tragic outcries were all on the higher ground of the loss to Art. They were glad to see him go from the house. Soon he returned to demand Wilfrid’s address. Arabella wrote it out for him with rebuking composure. Then he insisted upon having Captain Gambier’s, whom he described as “ce nonchalant dandy.”

“Him you will have a better opportunity of seeing by waiting here,” said Adela; and the captain came before Mr. Pericles had retreated. “Ce nonchalant” was not quite true to his title, when he heard that Emilia had flown. He did not say much, but iterated “Gone!” with an elegant frown, adding, “She must come back, you know!” and was evidently more than commonly puzzled and vexed, pursuing the strain in a way that satisfied Mr. Pericles more thoroughly than Adela.

“She shall come back as soon as she has a collar,” growled Mr. Pericles, meaning captivity.

“If she’d only come back with her own maiden name,” interjected Mrs. Chump, “I’ll give her a character; but, upon my hon’r—d’ye think ut possible, now...?”

Arabella talked over her, and rescued her father’s name.

Page 652

The noisy sympathy and wild speculations of the Tinleys and Copleys had to be endured. On the whole, the feeling toward Emilia was kind, and the hope that she would come to no harm was fervently expressed by all the ladies; frequently enough, also, to show the opinion that it might easily happen. On such points Mrs. Chump never failed to bring the conversation to a block. Supported as they were by Captain Gambier, Edward Buxley, Freshfield Sumner, and more than once by Sir Twickenham (whom Freshfield, launching angry shafts, now called the semi-betrothed, the statistical cripple, and other strong things that show a developing genius for street-cries and hustings—-epithets in every member of the lists of the great Rejected, or of the jilted who can affect to be philosophical), notwithstanding these aids, the ladies of Brookfield were crushed by Mrs. Chump. Her main offence was, that she revived for them so much of themselves that they had buried. “Oh! the unutterably sordid City life!” It hung about her like a smell of London smoke. As a mere animal, they passed her by, and had almost come to a state of mind to pass her off. It was the phantom, or rather the embodiment of their First Circle, that they hated in the woman. She took heroes from the journals read by servant-maids; she thought highly of the Court of Aldermen; she went on public knees to the aristocracy; she was proud, in fact, of all City appetites. What, though none saw the peculiar sting? They felt it; and one virtue in possessing an ‘ideal’ is that, lodging in you as it does, it insists upon the interior being furnished by your personal satisfaction, and not by the blindness or stupidity of the outer world. Thus, in one direction, an ideal precludes humbug. The ladies might desire to cloak facts, but they had no pleasure in deception. They had the feminine power of extinguishing things disagreeable, so long as nature or the fates did them no violence. When these forces sent an emissary to confound them, as was clearly the case with Mrs. Chump, they fought. The dreadful creature insisted upon shows of maudlin affection that could not be accorded to her, so that she existed in a condition of preternatural sensitiveness. Among ladies pretending to dignity of life, the horror of acrid complaints alternating with public offers of love from a gross woman, may be pictured in the mind’s eye. The absence of Mr. Pole and Wilfrid, which caused Mrs. Chump to chafe at the restraint imposed by the presence of males to whom she might not speak endearingly, and deprived the ladies of proper counsel, and what good may be at times in masculine authority, led to one fierce battle, wherein the great shot was fired on both sides. Mrs. Chump was requested to leave the house: she declined. Interrogated as to whether she remained as an enemy, knowing herself to be so looked upon, she said that she remained to save them from the dangers they invited. Those dangers she named, observing that Mrs. Lupin,

Page 653

their aunt, might know them, but was as liable to be sent to sleep by a fellow with a bag of jokes as a watchdog to be quieted by a bone. The allusion here was to Mrs. Lupin's painful, partially inexcusable, incurable sense of humour, especially when a gleam of it led to the prohibited passages of life. The poor lady was afflicted so keenly that, in instances where one of her sex and position in the social scale is bound to perish rather than let even the shadow of a laugh appear, or any sign of fleshly perception or sympathy peep out, she was seen to be mutely, shockingly, penitentially convulsed: a degrading sight. And albeit repeatedly remonstrated with, she, upon such occasions, invariably turned imploring glances—a sort of frowning entreaty—to the ladies, or to any of her sex present. "Did you not see that? Oh! can you resist it?" she seemed to gasp, as she made those fruitless efforts to drag them to her conscious level. "Sink thou, if thou wilt," was the phrase indicated to her. She had once thought her propensity innocent enough, and enjoyable. Her nieces had almost cured her, by sitting on her, until Mrs. Chump came to make her worst than ever. It is to be feared that Mrs. Chump was beginning to abuse her power over the little colourless lady. We cannot, when we find ourselves possessed of the gift of sending a creature into convulsions, avoid exercising it. Mrs. Lupin was one of the victims of the modern feminine 'ideal.' She was in mind merely a woman; devout and charitable, as her nieces admitted; but radically—-what? They did not like to think, or to say, what;—repugnant, seemed to be the word. A woman who consented to perceive the double-meaning, who acknowledged its suggestions of a violation of decency laughable, and who could not restrain laughter, was, in their judgement, righteously a victim. After signal efforts to lift her up, the verdict was that their Aunt Lupin did no credit to her sex. If we conceive a timorous little body of finely-strung nerves, inclined to be gay, and shrewdly apprehensive, but depending for her opinion of herself upon those about her, we shall see that Mrs. Lupin's life was one of sorrow and scourges in the atmosphere of the 'ideal.' Never did nun of the cloister fight such a fight with the flesh, as this poor little woman, that she might not give offence to the Tribunal of the Nice Feelings which leads us to ask, "Is sentimentalism in our modern days taking the place of monasticism to mortify our poor humanity?" The sufferings of the Three of Brookfield under Mrs. Chump was not comparable to Mrs. Lupin's. The good little woman's soul withered at the self-contempt to which her nieces helped her daily. Laughter, far from expanding her heart and invigorating her frame, was a thing that she felt herself to be nourishing as a traitor in her bosom: and the worst was, that it came upon her like a reckless intoxication at times, possessing her as a devil might; and justifying itself, too, and daring to say, "Am I not Nature?" Mrs. Lupin shrank from the remembrance of those moments.

Page 654

In another age, the scenes between Mrs. Lupin and Mrs. Chump, greatly significant for humanity as they are, will be given without offence on one side or martyrdom on the other. At present, and before our sentimentalists are a concrete, it would be profitless rashness to depict them. When the great shots were fired off (Mrs. Chump being requested to depart, and refusing) Mrs. Lupin fluttered between the belligerents, doing her best to be a medium for the restoration of peace. In repeating Mrs. Chump's remarks, which were rendered purposely strong with Irish spice by that woman, she choked; and when she conveyed to Mrs. Chump the counter-remarks of the ladies, she provoked utterances that almost killed her. A sadder life is not to be imagined. The perpetual irritation of a desire to indulge in her mortal weakness, and listening to the sleepless conscience that kept watch over it; her certainty that it would be better for her to laugh right out, and yet her incapacity to contest the justice of her nieces' rebuke; her struggle to resist Mrs. Chump, which ended in a sensation of secret shameful liking for her—all these warring influences within were seen in her behaviour.

"I have always said," observed Cornelia, "that she labours under a disease." What is more, she had always told Mrs. Lupin as much, and her sisters had echoed her. Three to one in such a case is a severe trial to the reason of solitary one. And Mrs. Lupin's case was peculiar, inasmuch as the more she yielded to Chump-temptation and eased her heart of its load of laughter, the more her heart cried out against her and subscribed to the scorn of her nieces. Mrs. Chump acted a demon's part; she thirsted for Mrs. Lupin that she might worry her. Hitherto she had not known that anything peculiar lodged in her tongue, and with no other person did she think of using it to produce a desired effect; but now the scenes in Brookfield became hideous to the ladies, and not wanting in their trials to the facial muscles of the gentlemen. A significant sign of what the ladies were enduring was, that they ceased to speak of it in their consultations. It is a blank period in the career of young creatures when a fretting wretchedness forces them out of their dreams to action; and it is then that they will do things that, seen from the outside (i.e. in the conduct of others), they would hold to be monstrous, all but impossible. Or how could Cornelia persuade herself, as she certainly persuaded Sir Twickenham and the world about her, that she had a contemplative pleasure in his society? Arabella drew nearer to Edward Buxley, whom she had not treated well, and who, as she might have guessed, had turned his thoughts toward Adela; though clearly without encouragement. Adela indeed said openly to her sisters, with a Gallic ejaculation, "Edward follows me, do you know; and he has adopted a sort of Sicilian-vespers look whenever he meets me with Captain Gambier. I could forgive him if he would draw out a dagger and be quite theatrical; but, behold, we meet, and my bourgeois grunts and stammers, and seems to beg us to believe that he means nothing whatever by his behaviour. Can you convey to his City-intelligence that he is just a trifle ill-bred?"

Page 655

Now, Arabella had always seen Edward as a thing that was her own, which accounts for the treatment to which, he had been subjected. A quick spur of jealousy—a new sensation—was the origin of her leaning toward Edward; and the plea of saving Adela from annoyance excused and covered it. He, for his part, scarcely concealed his irritation, until a little scented twisted note was put in his hand, which said, “You are as anxious as I can be about our sweet lost Emilia! We believe ourselves to be on her traces.” This gave him wonderful comfort. It put Adela in a beautiful fresh light as a devoted benefactress and delicious intriguante. He threw off some of his most telling caricatures at this period. Adela had divined that Captain Gambier suspected his cousin Merthyr Powys of abstracting Emilia, that he might shield her from Mr. Pericles. The Captain confessed it, calmly blushing, and that he was in communication with Miss Georgiana Ford, Mr. Powys’s half-sister; about whom Adela was curious, until the Captain ejaculated, “A saint!”—whereat she was satisfied, knowing by instinct that the preference is for sinners. Their meetings usually referred to Emilia; and it was astonishing how willingly the Captain would talk of her. Adela repeated to herself, “This is our mask,” and thus she made it the Captain’s; for it must be said that the conquering Captain had never felt so full of pity to any girl or woman to whom he fancied he had done damage, as to Emilia. He enjoyed a most thorough belief that she was growing up to perplex him with her love, and he had not consequently attempted to precipitate the measure; but her flight had prematurely perplexed him. In grave debate with the ends of his moustache for a term, he concluded by accusing Merthyr Powys; and with a little feeling of spite not unknown to masculine dignity, he wrote to Merthyr’s half-sister—-“merely to inquire, being aware that whatever he does you have been consulted on, and the friends of this Miss Belloni are distressed by her absence.”

The ladies of Brookfield were accustomed to their father’s occasional unpremeditated absences, and neither of them had felt an apprehension which she could not dismiss, until one morning Mr. Powys sent up his card to Arabella, requesting permission to speak with her alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Georgiana Ford would have had little claim among the fair saints to be accepted by them as one of their order. Her reputation for coldness was derived from the fact of her having stood a siege from Captain Gambier. But she loved a creature of earth too well to put up a hand for saintly honours. The passion of her life centred in devotion to her half-brother. Those who had studied her said, perhaps with a touch of malignity, that her religious instinct had its source in a desire to gain some place of intercession for him. Merthyr had leaned upon it too often to doubt the strength of it, whatever its purity might

Page 656

be. She, when barely more than a child (a girl of sixteen), had followed him over the then luckless Italian fields—sacrificing as much for a cause that she held to be trivial, as he in the ardour of his half-fanatical worship. Her theory was: "These Italians are in bondage, and since heaven permits it, there has been guilt. By endurance they are strengthened, by suffering chastened; so let them endure and suffer." She would cleave to this view with many variations of pity. Merthyr's experience was tolerant to the weaker vessel's young delight in power, which makes her sometimes, though sweet and merciful by nature, enunciate Hebraic severities oracularly. He smiled, and was never weary of pointing out practical refutations. Whereat she said, "Will a thousand instances change the principle?" When the brain, and especially the fine brain of a woman, first begins to act for itself, the work is of heavy labour; she finds herself plunging abroad on infinite seas, and runs speedily into the anchorage of dogmas, obfuscatory saws, and what she calls principles. Here she is safe; but if her thinking was not originally the mere action of lively blood upon that battery of intelligence, she will by-and-by reflect that it is not well for a live thing to be tied to a dead, and that long clinging to safety confesses too much. Merthyr waited for Georgians patiently. On all other points they were heart-in-heart. It was her pride to say that she loved him with no sense of jealousy, and prayed that he might find a woman, in plain words, worthy of him. This woman had not been found; she confessed that she had never seen her.

Georgians received Captain Gambier's communication in Monmouth. Merthyr had now and then written of a Miss Belloni; but he had seemed to refer to a sort of child, and Georgians had looked on her as another Italian pensioner. She was decisive. The moment she awoke to feel herself brooding over the thought of this girl, she started to join Merthyr. Solitude is pasturage for a suspicion. On her way she grew persuaded that her object was bad, and stopped; until the thought came, 'If he is in a dilemma, who shall help him save his sister?' And, with spiritually streaming eyes at a vision of companionship broken (but whether by his taking another adviser, or by Miss Belloni, she did not ask), Georgiana continued her journey.

At the door of Lady Gosstre's town-house she hesitated, and said in her mind, "What am I doing? and what earthliness has come into my love for him?"

Or, turning to the cry, "Will he want me?" stung herself. Conscious that there was some poison in her love, but clinging to it not less, she entered the house, and was soon in Merthyr's arms.

"Why have you come up?" he asked.

"Were you thinking of coming to me quickly?" she murmured in reply.

He did not say yes, but that he had business in London. Nor did he say what.

Georgiana let him go.

Page 657

“How miserable is such a weakness! Is this my love?” she thought again.

Then she went to her bedroom, and knelt, and prayed her Saviour’s pardon for loving a human thing too well. But, if the rays of her mind were dimmed, her heart beat too forcibly for this complacent self-deceit. “No; not too well! I cannot love him too well. I am selfish. When I say that, it is myself I am loving. To love him thrice as dearly as I do would bring me nearer to God. Love I mean, not idolatry—another form of selfishness.”

She prayed to be guided out of the path of snares.

> “*Can you pray*? *Can you put away all props of self*? *This is true worship*, *unto whatsoever power you kneel*.”

This passage out of a favourite book of sentences had virtue to help her now in putting away the ‘props of self.’ It helped her for the time. She could not foresee the contest that was commencing for her.

> “*Love that shrieks at* A *mortal wound*, *and bleeds humanly*, *what is he but* A *pagan god*, *with the passions of* A *pagan god*?”

“Yes,” thought Georgiana, meditating, “as different from the Christian love as a brute from a man!”

She felt that the revolution of the idea of love in her mind (all that consoled her) was becoming a temptation. Quick in her impulses, she dismissed it. “I am like a girl!” she said scornfully. “Like a woman” would not have flattered her. Like what did she strive to be? The picture of another self was before her—a creature calmly strong, unruffled, and a refuge to her beloved. It was a steady light through every wind that blew, save when the heart narrowed; and then it waxed feeble, and the life in her was hungry for she knew not what.

Georgiana’s struggle was to make her great passion eat up all the others. Sure of the intensity and thoroughness of her love for Merthyr, she would forecast for herself tasks in his service impossible save to one sensually dead and therefore spiritually sexless. “My love is pure,” she would say; as if that were the talisman which rendered it superhuman. She was under the delusion that lovers’ love was a reprehensible egoism. Her heart had never had place for it; and thus her nature was unconsummated, and the torment of a haunting insufficiency accompanied her sweetest hours, ready to mislead her in all but very clearest actions.

She saw, or she divined, much of this struggle; but the vision of it was fitful, not consecutive. It frightened and harassed without illuminating her. Now, upon Merthyr’s return, she was moved by it just enough to take his hand and say:—

“We are the same?”

“What can change us?” he replied.

Page 658

“Or who?” and as she smiled up to him, she was ashamed of her smile.

“Yes, who!” he interjected, by this time quite enlightened. All subtle feelings are discerned by Welsh eyes when untroubled by any mental agitation. Brother and sister were Welsh, and I may observe that there is human nature and Welsh nature.

“Forgive me,” she said; “I have been disturbed about you.”

Perceiving that it would be well to save her from any spiritual twists and turns that she might reach what she desired to know, he spoke out fully: “I have not written to you about Miss Belloni lately. I think it must be seven or eight days since I had a letter from her—you shall see it—looking as if it had been written in the dark. She gave the address of a London hotel. I went to her, and her story was that she had come to town to get Mr. Pole’s consent to her marriage with his son; and that when she succeeded in making herself understood by him, the old man fell, smitten with paralysis, crying out that he was ruined, and his children beggars.”

“Ah!” said Georgiana; “then this son is engaged to her?”

“She calls him her lover.”

“Openly?”

“Have I not told you? ‘naked and unashamed.’”

“Of course that has attracted my Merthyr!” Georgians drew to him tenderly, breathing as one who has a burden off her heart.

“But why did she write to you?” the question started up.

For this reason: it appears that Mr. Pole showed such nervous irritation at the idea of his family knowing the state he was in, that the doctor attending him exacted a promise from her not to communicate with one of them. She was alone, in great perplexity, and did what I had requested her to do. She did me the honour to apply to me for any help it was in my power to give.

Georgiana stood eyeing the ground sideways. “What is she like?”

“You shall see to-morrow, if you will come with me.”

“Dark, or fair?”

Merthyr turned her face to the light, laughing softly. Georgiana coloured, with dropped eyelids.

She raised her eyes under their load of shame. “I will come gladly,” she said.

“Early to-morrow, then,” rejoined Merthyr.

On the morrow, as they were driving to the hotel, Georgians wanted to know whether he called ‘this Miss Belloni’ by her Christian name—a question so needless that her over-conscious heart drummed with gratitude when she saw that he purposely spared her from one meaning look. In this mutual knowledge, mutual help, in minute as in great things, as well as in the recognition of a common nobility of mind, the love of the two was fortified.

Page 659

Emilia had not been left by Mr. Powys without the protection of a woman's society in her singular position. Lady Charlotte's natural prompt kindness required no spur from her friend that she should go and brace up the spirits of a little woman, whom she pitied doubly for loving a man who was deceiving her, and not loving one who was good for her. She went frequently to Emilia, and sat with her in the sombre hotel drawing-room. Still, frank as she was and blunt as she affected to be, she could not bring her tongue to speak of Wilfrid. If she had fancied any sensitive shuddering from the name and the subject to exist, she would have struck boldly, being capable of cruelty and, where she was permitted to see a weakness, rather fond of striking deep. A belief in the existence of Emilia's courage touched her to compassion. One day, however, she said, "What is it you take to in Merthyr Powys?" and this brought on plain speaking.

Emilia could give no reason; and it is a peculiarity of people who ask such questions that they think a want of directness in the answer suspicious.

Lady Charlotte said gravely, "Come, come!"

"What do you mean?" asked Emilia. "I like so many things in him."

"You don't like one thing chiefly?"

"I like—what do I like?—his kindness."

"His kindness!" This was the sort of reply to make the lady implacable. She seldom read others shrewdly, and could not know, that near her, Emilia thought of Wilfrid in a way that made the vault of her brain seem to echo with jarred chords. "His kindness! What a picture is the 'grateful girl!' I have seen rows of white-capped charity children giving a bob and a sniffle as the parson went down the ranks promising buns. Well! his kindness! You are right in appreciating as much as you can see. I'll tell you why I like him;—because he is a gentleman. And you haven't got an idea how rare that animal is. Dear me! Should I be plainer to you if I called him a Christian gentleman? It's the cant of a detestable school, my child. It means just this—but why should I disturb your future faith in it? The professors mainly profess to be 'a comfort to young women,' and I suppose you will meet your comfort, and worship them with the 'growing mind;' and I must confess that they bait it rather cunningly; nothing else would bite. They catch almost all the raw boys who have anything in them. But for me, Merthyr himself would have been caught long ago. There's no absolute harm in them, only that they're a sentimental compromise. I deny their honesty; and if it's flatly proved, I deny their intelligence. Well! this you can't understand."

"I have not understood you at all," said Emilia.

"No? It's the tongue that's the natural traitor to a woman, and takes longer runs with every added year. I suppose you know that Mr. Powys wishes to send you to Italy?"

“I do,” said Emilia.

“When are you going?”

Page 660

“I am not going?”

“Why?”

Emilia’s bosom rose. She cried “Dear lady!” on the fall of it, and was scarce audible—-adding, “Do you love Wilfrid?”

“Well, you have brought me to the point quickly,” Lady Charlotte remarked. “I don’t commonly beat the bush long myself. Love him! You might as well ask me my age. The indiscretion would be equal, and the result the same. Love! I have a proper fear of the word. When two play at love they spoil the game. It’s enough that he says he loves me.”

Emilia looked relieved. “Poor lady!” she sighed.

“Poor!” Lady Charlotte echoed, with curious eyes fixed on the puzzle beside her.

“Tell me you will not believe him,” Emilia continued. “He is mine; I shall never give him up. It is useless for you or any one else to love him. I know what love is now. Stop while you can. I can be sorry for you, but I will not let him go from me. He is my lover.”

Emilia closed her lips abruptly. She produced more effect than was visible. Lady Charlotte drew out a letter, saying, “Perhaps this will satisfy you.”

“Nothing!” cried Emilia, jumping to her feet.

“Read it—read it; and, for heaven’s sake, ma fille sauvage, don’t think I’m here to fight for the man! He is not Orpheus; and our modern education teaches us that it’s we who are to be run after. Will you read it?”

“No.”

“Will you read it to please me?”

Emilia changed from a look of quiet opposition to gentleness of feature. “Why will it please you if I read that he has flattered you? I never lie about what I feel; I think men do.” Her voice sank.

“You won’t allow yourself to imagine, then, that he has spoken false to you?”

“Tell me,” retorted Emilia, “are you sure in your heart—as sure as it beats each time—-that he loves you? You are not.”

“It seems that we are dignifying my gentleman remarkably,” said Lady Charlotte. “When two women fight for a man, that is almost a meal for his vanity. Now, listen. I am not,

as they phrase it, in love. I am an experienced person—what is called a woman of the world. I should not make a marriage unless I had come to the conclusion that I could help my husband, or he me. Do me the favour to read this letter."

Emilia took it and opened it slowly. It was a letter in the tone of the gallant paying homage with some fervour. Emilia searched every sentence for the one word. That being absent, she handed back the letter, her eyes lingering on the signature.

"Do you see what he says?" asked Lady Charlotte; "that I can be a right hand to him, as I believe I can."

"He writes like a friend." Emilia uttered this as when we have a contrast in the mind.

"You excuse him for writing to me in that style?"

"Yes; he may write to any woman like that."

"He has latitude! You really fancy that's the sort of letter a friend would write?"

Page 661

“That is how Mr. Powys would write to me,” said Emilia. Lady Charlotte laughed. “My unhappy Merthyr!”

“Only if I could be a great deal older,” Emilia hastened to add; and Lady Charlotte slightly frowned, but rubbed it out with a smile.

Rising, the lady said: “I have spoken to you upon equal terms; and remember, very few women would have done what I have done. You are cared for by Merthyr Powys, and that’s enough. It would do you no harm to fix your eyes upon him. You won’t get him; but it would do you no harm. He has a heart, as they call it; whatever it is, it’s as strong as a cable. He is a knight of the antique. He is specially guarded, however. Well, he insists that you are his friend; so you are mine, and that is why I have come to you and spoken to you. You will be silent about it, I need not say. No one but yourself is aware that Lieutenant Pole does me the honour to liken me to the good old gentleman who accompanied Telemachus in his voyages, and chooses me from among the handmaidens of earth. On this head you will promise to be silent.”

Lady Charlotte held forth her hand. Emilia would not take it before she had replied, “I knew this before you came,” and then she pressed the extended fingers.

Lady Charlotte drew her close. “Has Wilfrid taken you into his confidence so far?”

Emilia explained that she had heard it from his father.

The lady’s face lit up as from a sting of anger. “Very well—very well,” she said; and, presently, “You are right when you speak of the power of lying in men. Observe—Wilfrid told me that not one living creature knew there was question of an engagement between us. What would you do in my case?”

Emilia replied, “Forgive him; and I should think no more of it.”

“Yes. It would be right; and, presuming him to have the vice, I could be of immense service to him, if at least he does not lie habitually. But this is a description of treachery, you know.”

“Oh!” cried Emilia, “what kind of treachery is that, if he only will keep his heart open for me to give all mine to it!”

She stood clutching her hands in the half-sobbing ecstasy which signalises a spiritual exaltation built on disquiet. She had shown small emotion hitherto. The sight of it was like the sight of a mighty hostile power to Lady Charlotte—a power that moved her—that challenged, and irritated, and subdued her. For she saw there something that she had not; and being of a nature leaning to great-mindedness, though not of the first rank, she could not meanly mask her own deficiency by despising it. To do this is the secret evil by which souls of men and women stop their growth.

Lady Charlotte decided now to say good-bye. Her parting was friendly—the form of it consisting of a nod, an extension of the hand, and a kind word or two.

Page 662

When alone, Emilia wondered why she kept taking long breaths, and tried to correct herself: but the heart laboured. Yet she seemed to have no thought in her mind; she had no active sensation of pity or startled self-love. She went to smooth Mr. Pole's pillow, as to a place of forgetfulness. The querulous tyrannies of the invalid relieved her; but the heavy lifting of her chest returned the moment she was alone. She mentioned it to the doctor, who prescribed for liver, informing her that the said organ conducted one of the most important functions of her bodily system.

Emilia listened to the lecturer, and promised to take his medicine, trusting to be perfectly quieted by the nauseous draught; but when Mr. Powys came, she rushed up to him, and fell with a cry upon his breast, murmuring broken words that Georgiana might fairly interpret as her suspicions directed. Nor had she ever seen Merthyr look as he did when their eyes next met.

CHAPTER XXIX

The card of Mr. Powys found Arabella alone in the house. Mrs. Lupin was among village school-children; Mrs. Chump had gone to London to see whether anything was known of Mr. Pole at his office, where she fell upon the youth Braintop, and made him her own for the day. Adela was out in the woods, contemplating nature; and Cornelia was supposed to be walking whither her stately fancy drew her.

"Will you take long solitary walks unprotected?" she was asked.

"I have a parasol," she replied; and could hear, miles distant, the domestic comments being made on her innocence; and the story it would be—"She thinks of no possible danger but from the sun."

A little forcing of her innocence now was necessary as an opiate for her conscience. She was doing what her conscience could only pardon on the plea of her extreme innocence. The sisters, and the fashion at Brookfield, permitted the assumption, and exaggerated it willingly. It chanced, however, that Adela had reason to feel discontented. It was a breach of implied contract, she thought, that Cornelia should, as she did only yesterday, tell her that she had seen Edward Buxley in the woods, and that she was of opinion that the air of the woods was bad for her. Not to see would have been the sisterly obligation, in Adela's idea—especially when seeing embraced things that no loving sister should believe.

Bear in mind that we are sentimentalists. The eye is our servant, not our master; and —so are the senses generally. We are not bound to accept more than we choose from them. Thus we obtain delicacy; and thus, as you will perceive, our civilization, by the aid of the sentimentalists, has achieved an effective varnish. There, certainly, to the vulgar, mind a tail is visible. The outrageous philosopher declares vehemently that no

beast of the field or the forest would own such a tail. (His meaning is, that he discerns the sign of the animal slinking under the garb of the stately polished creature. I have all the difficulty in the world to keep him back and let me pursue my course.) These philosophers are a bad-mannered body. Either in opposition, or in the support of them, I maintain simply that the blinking sentimentalist helps to make civilization what it is, and civilization has a great deal of merit.

Page 663

“Did you not leave your parasol behind you at Ipley?” said Adela, as she met Cornelia in the afternoon.

Cornelia coloured. Her pride supported her, and she violated fine shades painfully in her response: “Mr. Barrett left me there. Is that your meaning?”

Adela was too much shocked to note the courageousness of the reply. “Well! if all we do is to come into broad daylight!” was her horrified mental ejaculation.

The veil of life was about to be lifted for these ladies. They found Arabella in her room, crying like an unchastened school-girl; and their first idea was one of intense condemnation—fresh offences on the part of Mrs. Chump being conjectured. Little by little Arabella sobbed out what she had heard that day from Mr. Powys.

After the first stupor Adela proposed to go to her father instantly, and then suggested that they should all go. She continued talking in random suggestions, and with singular heat, as if she conceived that the sensibility of her sisters required to be aroused. By moving and acting, it seemed to her that the prospect of a vast misery might be expunged, and that she might escape from showing any likeness to Arabella’s shamefully-discoloured face. It was impossible for her to realize grief in her own bosom. She walked the room in a nervous tremour, shedding a note of sympathy to one sister and to the other. At last Arabella got fuller command of her voice. When she had related that her father’s positive wish, furthered by the doctor’s special injunction to obey it scrupulously, was that they were not to go to him in London, and not to breathe a word of his illness, but to remain at Brookfield entertaining friends, Adela stamped her foot, saying that it was more than human nature could bear.

“If we go,” said Arabella, “the London doctor assured Mr. Powys that he would not answer for papa’s life.”

“But, good heavens! are we papa’s enemies? And why may Mr. Powys see him if we, his daughters, cannot? Tell me how Mr. Powys met him and knew of it! Tell me—I am bewildered. I feel that we are cheated in some way. Oh! tell me something clear.”

Arabella said calmingly: “Emilia is with papa. She wrote to Mr. Powys. Whether she did rightly or not we have not now to inquire. I believe that she thought it right.”

“Entertain friends!” interjected Adela. “But papa cannot possibly mean that we are to go through—to—the fete on Besworth Lawn, Bella! It’s in two days from this dreadful day.”

“Papa has mentioned it to Mr. Powys; he desires us not to postpone it. We...” Arabella’s voice broke piteously.

“Oh! but this is torture!” cried Adela, with a deplorable vision of the looking-glass rising before her, as she felt the tears sting her eyelids. “This cannot be! No father

would...not loving us as dear papa does! To be quiet! to sit and be gay! to flaunt at a fete! Oh, mercy! mercy! Tell me—he left us quite well—no one could have guessed. I remember he looked at me from the carriage window. Tell me—it must be some moral shock—what do you attribute it to? Wilfrid cannot be the guilty one. We have been only too compliant to papa's wishes about that woman. Tell me what you think it can be!"

Page 664

A voice said, “Money!”

Which of the sisters had spoken Adela did not know. It was bitter enough that one could be brought to utter the thing, even if her ideas were so base as to suspect it. The tears now came dancing over her under-lids like triumphing imps. “Money!” echoed through her again and again. Curiously, too, she had no occasion to ask how it was that money might be supposed to have operated on her father’s health. Unable to realize to herself the image of her father lying ill and suffering, but just sufficiently touched by what she could conceive of his situation, the bare whisper of money came like a foul insult to overwhelm her in floods of liquid self-love. She wept with that last anguish of a woman who is compelled to weep, but is incapable of finding any enjoyment in her tears. Cornelia and Arabella caught her hands; she was the youngest, and had been their pet. It gratified them that Adela should show a deep and keen feeling. Adela did not check herself from a demonstration that enabled her to look broadly, as it were, on her own tenderness of heart. Following many outbursts, she asked, “And the illness—what is it? not its cause—itself!”

A voice said, “Paralysis!”

Adela’s tears stopped. She gazed on both faces, trying with open mouth to form the word.

CHAPTER XXX

Flying from port to port to effect an exchange of stewards (the endless occupation of a yacht proprietor), Wilfrid had no tidings from Brookfield. The night before the gathering on Besworth Lawn he went to London and dined at his Club—a place where youths may drink largely of the milk of this world’s wisdom. Wilfrid’s romantic sentiment was always corrected by an hour at his Club. After dinner he strolled to a not perfectly regulated theatre, in company with a brother officer; and when they had done duty before the scenes for a space of time, they lounged behind to disenchant themselves, in obedience to that precocious cynicism which is the young man’s extra-Luxury. The first figure that caught Wilfrid’s attention there was Mr. Pericles, in a white overcoat, stretched along a sofa—his eyelids being down, though his eyes were evidently vigilant beneath. A titter of ladies present told of some recent interesting commotion.

“Only a row between that rich Greek fellow who gave the supper, and Marion,” a vivacious dame explained to Wilfrid. “She’s in one of her jealous fits; she’d be jealous if her poodle-dog went on its hind-legs to anybody else.”

“Poodle, by Jove!” said Wilfrid. “Pericles himself looks like an elongated poodle shaved up to his moustache. Look at him. And he plays the tyrant, does he?”

“Oh! she stands that. Some of those absurd women like it, I think. She’s fussing about another girl.”

“You wouldn’t?”

“What man’s worth it?”

“But, would you?”

“It depends upon the ‘him,’ monsieur.

Page 665

“Depends upon his being very handsome!”

“And good.”

“And rich?”

“No!” the lady fired up. “There you don’t know us.”

The colloquy became almost tender, until she said, “Isn’t this gassy, and stifling? I confess I do like a carriage, and Richmond on a Sunday. And then, with two daughters, you know! But what I complain of is her folly in being in love, or something like it, with a rich fellow.”

“Love the poor devil—manage the rich, you mean.”

“Yes, of course; that makes them both happy.”

“It’s a method of being charitable to two.”

A rather fleshy fairy now entered, and walked straight up to the looking-glass to examine her paint—pronouncedly turning her back to the sofa, where Mr. Pericles still lay at provoking full length. Her panting was ominous of a further explosion.

“Innocent child!” in the mockery of a foreign accent, commenced it; while Wilfrid thought how unjustly and coldly critically he had accused his little Emilia of vulgarity, now that he had this feminine display of it swarming about him.

“Innocent child, indeed! Be as deaf as you like, you shall hear. And sofas are not made for men’s dirty boots, in this country. I believe they’re all pigs abroad—the men; and the women—cats! Oh! don’t open your eyes—don’t speak, pray. You’re certain I must go when the bell rings. You’re waiting for that, you unmanly dog!”

“A pig,” Mr. Pericles here ventured to remind her, murmuring as one in a dream.

“A peeg!” she retorted mildly, somewhat mollified by her apparent success. But Mr. Pericles had relapsed into his exasperating composure. The breath of a deliberate and undeserved peacefulness continued to be drawn in by his nostrils.

At the accustomed warning there was an ostentatious rustle of retiring dresses; whereat Mr. Pericles chose to proclaim himself awake. The astute fairy-fury immediately stepped before him.

“Now you can’t go on pretending sleep. You shall hear, and everybody shall hear. You know you’re a villain! You’re a wolf seeking...”

Mr. Pericles waved his hand, and she was caught by the wrist and told that the scene awaited her.

“Let them wait!” she shouted, and, sharpening her cry as she was dragged off, “Dare to take that girl to Italy! I know what that means, with you. An Englishman might mean right—but you! You think you’ve been dealing with a fool! Why, I can stop this in a minute, and I will. It’s you’re the fool! Why, I know her father: he plays in the orchestra. I know her name—Belloni!”

Up sprang the Greek like a galvanized corpse; while two violent jerks from the man hauling her out rattled the laugh of triumph which burst from her. At the same time Wilfrid strove forward, with the frown of one still bent listening, and he and Pericles were face to face. The eyebrows of the latter shot up in a lively arch. He made a motion toward the ceremony of ‘shake-hands;’ but, perceiving no correspondent overture, grinned, “It is warm—ha?”

Page 666

“You feel the heat? Step outside a minute,” said Wilfrid.

“Oh, no!” Mr. Pericles looked pleasantly sagacious. Ze draught—a cold.”

“Will you come?” pursued Wilfrid.

“Many sanks!”

Wilfrid’s hand was rising. At this juncture his brother officer slipped out some languid words in his ear, indicative of his astonishment that he should be championing a termagant, and horror at the idea of such a thing being publicly imagined, tamed Wilfrid quickly. He recovered himself with his usual cleverness. Seeing the signs of hostility vanish, Mr. Pericles said, “You are on a search for your father? You have found him? Hom! I should say a maladie of nerfs will come to him. A pin fall—he start! A storm at night—he is out dancing among his ships of venture! Not a bid of corage!—which is bad. If you shall find Mr. Pole for to-morrow on ze lawn, vary glad.”

With a smile compounded of sniffing dog and Parisian obsequiousness, Mr. Pericles passed, thinking “He has not got her:” for such was his deduction if he saw that a man could flush for a woman’s name.

Wilfrid stood like a machine with a thousand wheels in revolt. Sensations pricked at ideas, and immediately left them to account for their existence as they best could. The ideas committed suicide without a second’s consideration. He felt the great gurgling sea in which they were drowned heave and throb. Then came a fresh set, that poised better on the slack-rope of his understanding. By degrees, a buried dread in his brain threw off its shroud. The thought that there was something wrong with his father stood clearly over him, to be swallowed at once in the less tangible belief that a harm had come to Emilia—not was coming, but had come. Passion thinks wilfully when it thinks at all. That night he lay in a deep anguish, revolving the means by which he might help and protect her. There seemed no way open, save by making her his own; and did he belong to himself? What bound him to Lady Charlotte? She was not lovely or loving. He had not even kissed her hand; yet she held him in a chain.

The two men composing most of us at the outset of actual life began their deadly wrestle within him, both having become awakened. If they wait for circumstance, that steady fire will fuse them into one, who is commonly a person of some strength; but throttling is the custom between them, and we are used to see men of murdered halves. These men have what they fought for: they are unaware of any guilt that may be charged against them, though they know that they do not embrace Life; and so it is that we have vague discontent too universal. Change, O Lawgiver! the length of our minority, and let it not end till this battle is thoroughly fought out in approving daylight. The period of our duality should be one as irresponsible in your eyes as that of our infancy. Is he we call a young man an individual—who is a pair of alternately kicking

scales? Is he educated, when he dreams not that he is divided? He has drunk Latin like a vital air, and can quote what he remembers of Homer; but how has he been fortified for this tremendous conflict of opening manhood, which is to our life here what is the landing of a soul to the life to come?

Page 667

Meantime, it is a bad business when the double-man goes about kneeling at the feet of more than one lady. Society (to give that institution its due) permits him to seek partial invulnerability by dipping himself in a dirty Styx, which corrects, as we hear said, the adolescent tendency to folly. Wilfrid's sentiment had served him (well or ill as it may be), by keeping him from a headlong plunge in the protecting river; and his folly was unchastened. He did not even contemplate an escape from the net at Emilia's expense. The idea came. The idea will come to a young man in such a difficulty. "My mistress! My glorious stolen fruit! My dark angel of love!" He deserves a little credit for seeing that Emilia never could be his mistress, in the debased sense of the term. Union with her meant life-long union, he knew. Ultimate mental subjection he may also have seen in it, unconsciously. For, hazy thoughts of that nature may mix with the belief that an alliance with her degrades us, in this curious hotch-potch of emotions known to the world as youthful man. A wife superior to her husband makes him ridiculous wilfully, if the wretch is to be laughed at; but a mistress thus ill-matched cannot fail to cast the absurdest light on her monstrous dwarf-custodian. Wilfrid had the sagacity to perceive, and the keen apprehension of ridicule to shrink from, the picture. Besides, he was beginning to love Emilia. His struggle now was to pluck his passion from his heart; and such was already his plight that he saw no other way of attempting it than by taking horse and riding furiously in the direction of Besworth.

CHAPTER XXXI

"I am curious to see what you will make of this gathering. I can cook a small company myself. It requires the powers of a giantess to mix a body of people in the open air; and all that is said of commanders of armies shall be said of you, if you succeed."

This was Lady Gosstre's encouragement to the fair presidents of the fete on Besworth Lawn. There had been a time when they would have cried out internally: "We will do it, fail who may." That fallow hour was over. Their sole thought was to get through the day. A little feverish impulse of rivalry with her great pattern may have moved Arabella; but the pressure of grief and dread, and the contrast between her actions and feelings, forcibly restrained a vain display. As a consequence, she did her duty better, and won applause from the great lady's moveable court on eminences of the ground.

"These girls are clever," she said to Lady Charlotte. "They don't bustle too much. They don't make too distinct a difference of tone with the different sets. I shall propose Miss Pole as secretary to our Pin and Needle Relief Society."

"Do," was the reply. "There is also the Polish Dance Committee; and, if she has any energy left, she might be treasurer to the Ladies' General Revolution Ball."

Page 668

“That is an association with which I am not acquainted,” said Lady Gosstre, directing her eye-glass on the field. “Here comes young Pole. He’s gallant, they tell me, and handsome: he studies us too obviously. That’s a mistake to be corrected, Charlotte. One doesn’t like to see a pair of eyes measuring us against a preconception quelconque. Now, there is our Ionian Am...but you have corrected me, Merthyr:—host, if you please. But, see! What is the man doing? Is he smitten with madness?”

Mr. Pericles had made a furious dash at the band in the centre of the lawn, scattered their music, and knocked over the stands. When his gesticulations had been observed for some moments, Freshfield Sumner said: “He has the look of a plucked hen, who remembers that she once clapped wings, and tries to recover the practice.”

“Very good,” said Lady Gosstre. She was not one who could be unkind to the professional wit. “And the music-leaves go for feathers. What has the band done to displease him? I thought the playing was good.”

“The instruments appear to have received a dismissal,” said Lady Charlotte. “I suppose this is a clearing of the stage for coming alarums and excursions. Behold! the ‘female element’ is agitated. There are—can you reckon at this distance, Merthyr?—twelve, fourteen of my sex entreating him in the best tragic fashion. Can he continue stern?”

“They seem to be as violent as the women who tore up Orpheus,” said Lady Gosstre.

Tracy Runningbrook shrieked, in a paroxysm, “Splendid!” from his couch on the sward, and immediately ran off with the idea, bodily.

“Have I stumbled anywhere?” Lady Gosstre leaned to Mr. Powys.

He replied with a satiric sententiousness that told Lady Gosstre what she wanted to know.

“This is the isolated case where a little knowledge is truly dangerous,” said Lady Gosstre. “I prohibit girls from any allusion to the classics until they have taken their degree and are warranted not to open the wrong doors. On the whole, don’t you think, Merthyr, it’s better for women to avoid that pool?”

“And accept what the noble creature chooses to bring to us in buckets,” added Lady Charlotte. “What is your opinion, Georgey? I forget: Merthyr has thought you worthy of instruction.”

“Merthyr taught me in camp,” said Georgians, looking at her brother—her face showing peace and that confirmed calm delight habitual to it. “We found that there are times in war when you can do nothing, and you are feverish to be employed. Then, if you can bring your mind to study, you are sure to learn quickly. I liked nothing better than Latin Grammar.”

“Studying Latin Grammar to the tune of great guns must be a new sensation,” Freshfield Sumner observed.

“The pleasure is in getting rid of all sensation,” said she. “I mean you command it without at all crushing your excitement. You cannot feel a fuller happiness than when you look back on those hours: at least, I speak for myself.”

Page 669

“So,” said Lady Gosstre, “Georgey did not waste her time after all, Charlotte.”

What the latter thought was: “She could not handle a sword or fire a pistol. Would I have consented to be mere camp-baggage?” Yet no woman admired Georgiana Ford so much. Disappointment vitiated many of Lady Charlotte’s first impulses; and not until strong antagonism had thrown her upon her generosity could she do justice to the finer natures about her. There was full life in her veins; and she was hearing the thirty fatal bells that should be music to a woman, if melancholy music; and she had not lived. Time, that sounded in her ears, as it kindled no past, spoke of no future. She was in unceasing rivalry with all of her sex who had a passion, or a fixed affection, or even an employment. A sense that she was wronged by her fate haunted this lady. Rivalry on behalf of a man she would have held mean—she would have plucked it from her bosom at once. She was simply envious of those who in the face of death could say, “I have lived.” Pride, and the absence of any power of self-inspection, kept her blind to her disease. No recollection gave her boy save of the hours in the hunting-field. There she led gallantly; but it was not because of leading that she exulted. There the quick blood struck on her brain like wine, and she seemed for a time to have some one among the crowns of life. An object—who cared how small?—was ahead: a poor old fox trying to save his brush; and Charlotte would have it if the master of cunning did not beat her. “It’s my natural thirst for blood,” she said. She did not laugh as she thought now and then that the old red brush dragging over grey dews toward a yellow yolk in the curdled winter-morning sky, was the single thing that could make her heart throb.

Brookfield was supported in its trial by the discomfiture of the Tinleys. These girls, with their brother, had evidently plotted to ‘draw out’ Mrs. Chump. They had asked concerning her, severally; and hearing that she had not returned from town, had each shown a blank face, or had been doubtful of the next syllable. Of Wilfrid, Emilia, and Mr. Pole, question and answer were interchanged. “Wilfrid will come in a few minutes. Miss Belloni, you know, is preparing for Italy. Papa? Papa, I really do fear will not be able to join us.” Such was Brookfield’s concerted form of reply. The use of it, together with the gaiety of dancing blood, gave Adela (who believed that she ought to be weeping, and could have wept easily) strange twitches of what I would ask permission to call the juvenile ‘shrug-philosophy.’ As thus: ’What creatures we are, but life is so!’ And again, ‘Is not merriment dreadful when a duty!’ She was as miserable as she could be but not knowing that youth furnished a plea available, the girl was ashamed of being cheerful at all. Edward Burley’s sketch of Mr. Pericles scattering his band, sent her into muffled screams of laughter; for which she did internal penance so bitter that, for her to be able to go on at all, the shrug-philosophy was positively necessary; Mr. Pericles himself saw the sketch, and remarked critically, “It is zat I have more hair:” following which, he tapped the signal for an overture to commence, and at the first stroke took a run, with his elbows clapping exactly as the shrewd hand of Edward had drawn him.

Page 670

“See him—zat fellow,” Mr. Pericles said to Laura Tinley, pointing to the leader. “See him pose a maestro! zat leads zis tintamarre. He is a hum-a-bug!”

Laura did the vocal caricaturing, when she had gathered plenty of matter of this kind. Altogether, as host, Mr. Pericles accomplished his duty in furnishing amusement.

Late in the afternoon, Sir Twickenham Pryme and Wilfrid arrived in company. The baronet went straight to Cornelia. Wilfrid beckoned to Adela, from whom he heard of his father’s illness at the hotel in town, and the conditions imposed on them. He nodded, said lightly, “Where’s Emilia?” and nodded again to the answer, “With papa,” and then stopped as he was walking off to one of the groups. “After all, it won’t do for us to listen to the whims of an invalid. I’m going back. You needn’t say you’ve seen me.”

“We have the doctor’s most imperative injunction, dearest,” pleaded Adela, deceived for a moment. “Papa’s illness is mental chiefly. He is able to rise and will be here very soon, if he is not in any way crossed. For heaven’s sake, command yourself as we have done—painfully indeed! Besides, you have been seen.”

“Has she—?” Wilfrid began; and toned an additional carelessness. “She writes, of course?”

“No, not once; and we are angry with her. It looks like ingratitude, or stupidity. She can write.”

“People might say that we are not behaving well,” returned Wilfrid, repeating that he must go to town. But now Edward Burley camp running with a message from the aristocratic heights, and thither Wilfrid walked captive—saying in Adela’s ear, “Don’t be angry with her.”

Adela thought, very justly, “I shall, if you’ve been making a fool of her, naughty boy!”

Wilfrid saluted the ladies, and made his bow of introduction to Georgiana Ford, at whom he looked twice, to confirm an impression that she was the perfect contrast to Emilia; and for this reason he chose not to look at her again. Lady Charlotte dropped him a quick recognition.

If Brookfield could have thrown the burden from its mind, the day was one to feel a pride in. Three Circles were present, and Brookfield denominated two that it had passed through, and patronized all—from Lady Gosstre (aristocracy) to the Tinley set (lucre), and from these to the representative Sumner girls (cultivated poverty). There were also intellectual, scientific, and Art circles to deal with; music, pleasant to hear, albeit condemned by Mr. Pericles; agreeable chatter, courtly flirtation and homage, and no dread of the defection of the letter H from their family.

“I feel more and more convinced,” said Adela, meeting Arabella, “that we can have really no cause for alarm; otherwise papa would not have been cruel to his children.” Arabella kindly reserved her opinion. “So let us try and be happy,” continued Adela, determining to be encouraged by silence. With that she went on tiptoe gracefully and blew a kiss to her sister’s lips. Running to Captain Gambier, she said, “Do you really enjoy this?”

Page 671

“Charming,” replied the ever-affable gentleman. “If I might only venture to say what makes it so infinitely!”

Much to her immediate chagrin at missing a direct compliment, which would have had to be parried, and might have led to ‘vistas,’ the too sprightly young lady found herself running on: “It’s as nice as sin, without the knowledge that you are sinning.”

“Oh! do you think that part of it disagreeable?” said the captain.

“I think the heat terrific:” she retrieved her ground.

“Coquet et coquette,” muttered Lady Charlotte, observing them from a distance; and wondered whether her sex might be strongly represented in this encounter.

It was not in the best taste, nor was it perhaps good policy (if I may quote the Tinley set), for the ladies of Brookfield to subscribe openly to the right of certain people present to be exclusive. Arabella would have answered: “Lady Gosstre and her party cannot associate with you to your mutual pleasure and profit; and do you therefore blame her for not attempting what would fail ludicrously?” With herself, as she was not sorry to show, Lady Gosstre could associate. Cornelia had given up work to become a part of the Court. Adela made flying excursions over the lawn. Laura Tinley had the field below and Mr. Pericles to herself. That anxious gentleman consulted his watch from time to time, as if he expected the birth of an event.

Lady Gosstre grew presently aware that there was more acrimony in Freshfield Sumner’s replies to Sir Twickenham (whom he had seduced into a political argument) than the professional wit need employ; and as Mr. Powys’s talk was getting so attractive that the Court had become crowded, she gave a hint to Georgiana and Lady Charlotte, prompt lieutenants, whose retirement broke the circle.

“I never shall understand how it was done,” Adela said subsequently. It is hoped that everybody sees the importance of understanding such points.

She happened to be standing alone when a messenger came up to her and placed a letter in her hand, addressed to her sister Cornelia. Adela walked slowly up to the heights. She knew Mr. Barrett’s handwriting. “Good heavens!”—her thought may be translated out of Fine Shades—“does C. really in her heart feel so blind to our situation that she can go on playing still?” When she reached the group it was to hear Mr. Powys speaking of Mr. Barrett. Cornelia was very pale, and stood wretchedly in contrast among the faces. Adela beckoned her to step aside. “Here is a letter,” she said: “there’s no postmark. What has been the talk of that man?”

“Do you mean of Mr. Barrett?” Cornelia replied:—“that his father was a baronet, and a madman, who has just disinherited him.”

Page 672

“Just?” cried Adela. She thought of the title. Cornelia had passed on. A bizarre story of Mr. Barrett’s father was related to Adela by Sir Twickenham. She grappled it with her sense, and so got nothing out of it. “Disinherited him because he wrote to his father, who was dying, to say that he had gained a livelihood by playing the organ! He had a hatred of music? It’s incomprehensible! You know, Sir Twickenham, the interest we take in Mr. Barrett.” The masked anguish of Cornelia’s voice hung in her ears. She felt that it was now possible Cornelia might throw over the rich for the penniless baronet, and absolutely for an instant she thought nakedly, “The former ought not to be lost to the family.” Thick clouds obscured the vision. Lady Gosstre had once told her that the point of Sir Twickenham’s private character was his susceptibility to ridicule. Her ladyship had at the same time complimented his discernment in conjunction with Cornelia. “Yes,” Adela now thought; “but if my sister shows that she is not so wise as she looks!” Cornelia’s figure disappeared under the foliage bordering Besworth Lawn.

As usual, Arabella had all the practical labour—a fact that was noticed from the observant heights. “One sees mere de famille written on that young woman,” was the eulogy she won from Lady Gosstre. How much would the great dame have marvelled to behold the ambition beneath the bustling surface! Arabella was feverish, and Freshfield Sumner reported brilliant things uttered by her. He became after a time her attendant, aide, and occasional wit-foil. They had some sharp exchanges: and he could not but reflect on the pleasure her keen zest of appreciation gave him compared with Cornelia’s grave smile, which had often kindled in him profane doubts of the positive brightness, or rapidity of her intelligence.

“Besworth at sunset! What a glorious picture to have living before you every day!” said Lady Charlotte to her companion.

Wilfrid flushed. She read his look; and said, when they were out of hearing, “What a place for old people to sit here near the end of life! The idea of it makes one almost forgive the necessity for getting old—doesn’t it? Tracy Runningbrook might make a poem about silver heads and sunset—something, you know! Very easy cantering then—no hunting! I suppose one wouldn’t have even a desire to go fast—a sort of cock-horse, just as we began with. The stables, let me tell you, are too near the scullery. One is bound to devise measures for the protection of the morals of the household.”

While she was speaking, Wilfrid’s thoughts ran: “My time has come to strike for liberty.”

This too she perceived, and was prepared for him.

He said: “Lady Charlotte, I feel that I must tell you...I fear that I have been calculating rather more hopefully...” Here the pitfall of sentiment yawned before him on a sudden. “I mean” (he struggled to avoid it, but was at the brink in the next sentence) “—I mean, dear lady, that I had hopes...Besworth pleased you... to offer you this...”

Page 673

“With yourself?” she relieved him. A different manner in a protesting male would have charmed her better. She excused him, knowing what stood in his way.

“That I scarcely dared to hope,” said Wilfrid, bewildered to see the loose chain he had striven to cast off gather tightly round him.

“You do hope it?”

“I have.”

“You have hoped that I...” (she was not insolent by nature, and corrected the form) “—to marry me?”

“Yes, Lady Charlotte, I—I had that hope...if I could have offered this place—Besworth. I find that my father will never buy it; I have misunderstood him.”

He fixed his eyes on her, expecting a cool, or an ironical, rejoinder to end the colloquy; —after which, fair freedom! She answered, “We may do very well without it.”

Wilfrid was not equal to a start and the trick of rapturous astonishment. He heard the words like the shooting of dungeon-bolts, thinking, “Oh, heaven! if at the first I had only told the woman I do not love her!” But that sentimental lead had ruined him. And, on second thoughts, how could he have spoken thus to the point, when they had never previously dealt in anything save sentimental implications? The folly was in his speaking at all. The game was now in Lady Charlotte’s hands.

Adela, in another part of the field, had released herself by a consummate use of the same weapon Wilfrid had so clumsily handled. Her object was to put an end to the absurd and compromising sighs of Edward Buxley; and she did so with the amiable contempt of a pupil dismissing a first instructor in an art “We saw from the beginning it could not be, Edward.” The enamoured caricaturist vainly protested that he had not seen it from the beginning, and did not now. He recalled to her that she had said he was ‘her first.’ She admitted the truth, with eyes dwelling on him, until a ringlet got displaced. Her first. To be that, sentimental man would perish in the fires. To have been that will sometimes console him, even when he has lived to see what a thing he was who caught the budding fancy. The unhappy caricaturist groaned between triumph as a leader, and anguish at the prospect of a possible host of successors. King in that pure bosom, the thought would come—King of a mighty line, mayhap! And sentimental man, awakened to this disastrous view of things, endures shrewder pangs of rivalry in the contemplation of his usurping posterity than if, as do they, he looked forward to a tricked, perfumed, pommaded whipster, pirouetting like any Pierrot—the enviable image of the one who realized her first dream, and to whom specially missioned angels first opened the golden gates of her heart.

“I have learnt to see, Edward, that you do not honour me with a love you have diverted from one worthier than I am;” and in answer to the question whether, though having to abjure her love, she loved him: “No, no; it is my Arabella I love. I love, I will love, no one but her”—with sundry caressing ejaculations that spring a thirst for kisses, and a tender ‘putting of the case,’ now and then.

Page 674

So much for Adela's part in the conflict. Edward was unaware that the secret of her mastering him was, that she was now talking common-sense in the tone of sentiment. He, on the contrary, talked sentiment in the tone of common-sense. Of course he was beaten: and O, you young lovers, when you hear the dear lips setting what you call the world's harsh language to this music, know that an hour has struck for you! It is a fatal sound to hear. Edward believed that his pleading had produced an effect when he saw Miss Adela's bosom rise as with a weight on it. The burden of her thoughts was—"How big and heavy Edward's eyes look when he is not amusing!" To get rid of him she said, as with an impassioned coldness, "Go." Her figure, repeating this under closed eyelids, was mysterious, potent. When he exclaimed, "Then I will go," her eyelids lifted wide: she shut them instantly, showing at the same time a slight tightening-in of the upper lip. You beheld a creature tied to the stake of Duty.

But she was exceedingly youthful, and had not reckoned upon man's being a live machine, possessing impulses of his own. A violent seizure of her waist, and enough of kisses to make up the sum popularly known as a 'shower,' stopped her performance. She struggled, and muttered passionately to be released. "We are seen," she hazarded. At the repetition, Edward, accustomed to dread the warning, let her go and fled. Turning hurriedly about, Adela found that she had spoken truth unawares, and never wished so much that she had lied. Sir Twickenham Pryme came forward to her, with his usual stiff courtly step.

"If you could have been a little—a little earlier," she murmured, with an unflurried face, laying a trembling hand in his; and thus shielded herself from a suspicion.

"Could I know that I was wanted?" He pressed her hand.

"I only know that I wish I had not left your side," said she—adding, "Though you must have thought me what, if I were a man, you Members of Parliament would call 'a bore,' for asking perpetual questions."

"Nay, an apposite interrogation is the guarantee of a proper interest in the subject," said the baronet.

Cornelia was very soon reverted to.

"Her intellect is contemplative," said Adela, exhibiting marvellous mental composure. "She would lose her unerring judgement in active life. She cannot weigh things in her mind rapidly. She is safe if her course of action is clear."

Sir Twickenham reserved his opinion of the truth of this. "I wonder whether she can forgive those who offend or insult her, easily?"

A singular pleasure warmed Adela's veins. Her cheeks kindling, she replied, giving him her full face. "No; if they are worthy of punishment. But—" and now he watched a downcast profile—"one must have some forgiveness for fools."

"Indeed, you speak like charity out of the windows of wisdom," said the baronet.

Page 675

“Do you not require in Parliament to be tolerant at times?” Adela pursued.

Ho admitted it, and to her outcry of “Oh, that noble public life!” smiled deprecatingly—-“My dear young lady, if you only knew the burden it brings!”

“It brings its burden,” said Adela, correcting, with a most proper instinct, another enthusiastic burst. “At the same time the honour is above the load. Am I talking too romantically? You are at least occupied.”

“Nine-tenths of us to no very good purpose,” the baronet appended.

She rejoined: “If it were but a fraction, the good done would survive.”

“And be more honourable to do, perhaps,” he ejaculated. “The consolation should be great.”

“And is somehow small,” said she; and they laughed softly.

At this stage, Adela was ‘an exceedingly interesting young person’ in Sir Twickenham’s mental register. He tried her on politics and sociology. She kept her ears open, and followed his lead carefully—venturing here and there to indicate an opinion, and suggesting dissent in a pained interrogation. Finally, “I confess,” she said, “I understand much less than I am willing to think; and so I console myself with the thought that, after all, the drawing-room, and the...the kitchen?—well, an educated ‘female’ must serve her term there, if she would be anything better than a mere ornament, even in the highest walks of life—I mean the household is our sphere. From that we mount to companionship—if we can.”

Amazement of Sir Twickenham, on finding his own thought printed, as it were, on the air before him by these pretty lips!

The conversation progressed, until Adela, by chance, turned her eyes up a cross pathway and perceived her sister Cornelia standing with Mr. Barrett under a beech. The man certainly held one of her hands pressed to his heart; and her attitude struck a doubt whether his other hand was disengaged or her waist free. Adela walked nervously on without looking at the baronet; she knew by his voice presently that his eyes had also witnessed the sight. “Two in a day,” she thought; “what will he imagine us to be!” The baronet was thinking: “For your sister exposed, you display more agitation than for yourself insulted.”

Adela found Arabella in so fresh a mood that she was sure good news had been heard. It proved that Mrs. Chump had sent a few lines in a letter carried by Braintop, to this effect: “My dears all! I found your father on his back in bed, and he discharged me out of the room; and the sight of me put him on his legs, and you will soon see him. Be civil

to Mr. Braintop, who is a faithful young man, of great merit, and show your gratitude to —Martha Chump."

Braintop confirmed the words of the letter: and then Adela said—"You will do us the favour to stay and amuse yourself here. To-night there will be a bed at Brookfield."

"What will he do?" Arabella whispered.

Page 676

“Associate with the Tinleys,” returned Adela.

In accordance with the sentiment here half concealed, Brookfield soon showed that it had risen from the hour of depression when it had simply done its duty. Arabella formed an opposition-Court to the one in which she had studied; but Mr. Pericles defeated her by constantly sending to her for advice concerning the economies of the feast. Nevertheless, she exhibited good pretensions to social queendom, both personal and practical; and if Freshfield Sumner, instead of his crisp waspish comments on people and things, had seconded her by keeping up a two-minutes’ flow of talk from time to time, she might have thought that Lady Gosstre was only luckier than herself—not better endowed.

Below, the Tinleys and their set surrounded Mr. Pericles—prompting him, as was seen, to send up continual messages. One, to wit, “Is there to be dancing to-night?” being answered, “Now, if you please,” provoked sarcastic cheering; and Laura ran up to say, “How kind of you! We appreciate it. Continue to dispense blessings on poor mortals.”

“By the way, though” (Freshfield took his line from the calm closed lips of his mistress), “poor mortals are not in the habit of climbing Olympus to ask favours.”

“I perceived no barrier,” quoth Laura.

“Audacity never does.”

“Pray, how am I to be punished?”

Freshfield paused for a potent stroke. “Not like Semele. She saw the God:—you never will!”

While Laura was hanging on the horrid edge between a false laugh and a starting blush, Arabella said: “That visual excommunication has been pronounced years ago, Freshfield.”

“Ah! then he hasn’t changed his name in heaven?” Laura touched her thus for the familiar use of the gentle-man’s Christian name.

“You must not imagine that very great changes are demanded of those who can be admitted.”

“I really find it hotter than below,” said Laura, flying.

Arabella’s sharp eyes discerned a movement in Lady Gosstre’s circle; and she at once went over to her, and entreated the great lady, who set her off so well, not to go. The sunset fronted Besworth Lawn; the last light of day was danced down to inspiriting music: and now Arabella sent word for Besworth hall-doors and windows to be opened;

and on the company beginning to disperse, there beckoned promise of a brilliant supper-table.

“Admirable!” said Lady Gosstre, and the encomium was general among the crowd surrounding Arabella; for up to this point the feasting had been delicate, and something like plain hunger prevailed. Indeed, Arabella had heard remarks of a bad nature, which she traced to the Tinley set, and bore with, to meet her present reward. Making light of her triumph, she encouraged Freshfield to start a wit-contest, and took part in it herself, with the gaiety of an unoccupied mind. Her sisters had aforetime more than once challenged her supremacy, but they bowed

Page 677

to it now; and Adela especially did when, after a ringing hit to Freshfield (which the Tinleys might also take to their own bosoms), she said in an undertone, “What is there between C. and—?” Surprised by this astonishing vigilance and power of thinking below the surface while she performed above it, Adela incautiously turned her face toward the meditative baronet, and was humiliated by Arabella’s mute indication of contempt for her coming answer. This march across the lawn to the lighted windows of Besworth was the culmination of Brookfield’s joy, and the crown for which it had striven; though for how short a term it was to be worn was little known. Was it not a very queenly sphere of Fine Shades and Nice Feelings that Brookfield had realized?

In Arabella’s conscience lay a certain reproach of herself for permitting the “vice of a lower circle” to cling to her—viz., she had still betrayed a stupid hostility to the Tinleys: she had rejoiced to see them incapable of mixing with any but their own set, and thus be stamped publicly for what they were. She had struggled to repress it, and yet, continually, her wits were in revolt against her judgement. Perhaps one reason was that Albert Tinley had haunted her steps at an early part of the day; and Albert—a sickening City young man, “full of insolence, and half eyeglass,” according to Freshfield—had once ventured to propose for her.

The idea that the Tinleys strove to catch at her skirts made Arabella spiteful. Up to the threshold of Besworth, Freshfield, Mr. Powys, Tracy, and Arabella kept the wheel of a dazzling run of small-talk, throwing intermittent sparks. Laura Tinley would press up, apparently to hear, but in reality (as all who knew her could see) with the object of being a rival representative of her sex in this illustrious rare encounter of divine intelligences. “You are anxious to know?” said Arabella, hesitatingly.

“To know, dear?” echoed Laura.

“There was, I presumed, something you did not hear.” Arabella was half ashamed of the rudeness to which her antagonism to Laura’s vulgarity forced her.

“Oh! I hear everything,” Laura assured her.

“Indeed!” said Arabella. “By the way, who conducts you?” (Laura was on Edward Burley’s arm.) “Oh! will you go to”—such and such an end of the table. “And if, Lady Gosstre, I may beg of you to do me the service to go there also,” was added aloud; and lower, but quite audibly, “Mr. Pericles will have music, so there can be no talking.” This, with the soupcon of a demi-shrug; “You will not suffer much” being implied. Laura said to herself, “I am not a fool.” A moment after, Arabella was admitting in her own mind, as well as Fine Shades could interpret it, that she was. On entering the dining-hall, she beheld two figures seated at the point whither Laura was led by her partner. These were Mrs. Chump and Mr. Pole, with champagne glasses in their hands. Arabella was pushed on by the inexorable crowd of hungry people behind.

Page 678

CHAPTER XXXII

Despite the pouring in of the flood of guests about the tables, Mrs. Chump and Mr. Pole sat apparently unconcerned in their places, and, as if to show their absolute indifference to observation and opinion, went through the ceremony of drinking to one another, upon which they nodded and chuckled: a suspicious eye had the option of divining that they used the shelter of the table cloth for an interchange of squeezes. This would have been further strengthened by Mrs. Chump's arresting exclamation, "Pole! Company!" Mr. Pole looked up. He recognized Lady Gosstre, and made an attempt, in his usual brisk style, to salute her. Mrs. Champ drew him back. "Nothin' but his legs, my lady," she whispered. "There's nothin' sets 'm up like champagne, my dears!" she called out to the Three of Brookfield.

Those ladies were now in the hall, gazing, as mildly as humanity would allow, at their common destiny, thus startlingly displayed. There was no doubt in the bosom of either one of them that exposure was to follow this prelude. Mental resignation was not even demanded of them—merely physical. They did not seek comfort in an interchange of glances, but dropped their eyes, and masked their sight as they best could. Caesar assassinated did a similar thing.

"My dears!" pursued Mrs. Chump, in Irish exaggerated by wine, "I've found 'm for ye! And if ye'd seen 'm this afternoon—the little peaky, shaky fellow that he was! and a doctor, too, feelin' his pulse. 'Is ut slow,' says I, 'doctor?' and draws a bottle of champagne. He could hardly stand before his first glass. 'Pon my hon'r, my lady, ye naver saw s'ch a change in a mortal bein.—Pole, didn't ye go 'ha, ha!' now, and seem to be nut-cracking with your fingers? He did; and if ye aver saw an astonished doctor! 'Why,' says I, 'doctor, ye think ut's maguc! Why, where's the secret? drink with 'm, to be sure! And you go and do that, my lord doctor, my dear Mr. Doctor! Do ut all round, and your patients 'll bless your feet." Why, isn't cheerful society and champagne the vary best of medicines, if onnly the blood 'll go of itself a little? The fault's in his legs; he's all right at top!—if he'd smooth his hair a bit.

Checking her tongue, Mrs. Chump performed this service lightly for him, in the midst of his muttered comments on her Irish.

The fact was manifest to the whole assembly, that they had indeed been drinking champagne to some purpose.

Wilfrid stepped up to two of his sisters, warning them hurriedly not to go to their father: Adela he arrested with a look, but she burst the restraint to fulfil a child's duty. She ran up gracefully, and taking her father's hand, murmured a caressing "Dear papa!"

“There—all right—quite right—quite well,” Mr. Pole repeated. “Glad to see you all: go away.”

He tried to look kindly out of the nervous fit into which a word, in a significant tone, from one of his daughters had instantly plunged him. Mrs. Chump admonished her: “Will ye undo all that I’ve been doin’ this blessed day?”

Page 679

“Glad you haven’t missed the day altogether, sir,” Wilfrid greeted his father in an offhand way.

“Ah, my boy!” went the old man, returning him what was meant for a bluff nod.

Lady Charlotte gave Wilfrid an open look. It meant: “If you can act like that, and know as much as I know, you are worth more than I reckoned.” He talked evenly and simply, and appeared on the surface as composed as any of the guests present. Nor was he visibly disturbed when Mrs. Chump, catching his eye, addressed him aloud:—

“Ye’d have been more grateful to me to have brought little Belloni as well now, I know, Mr. Wilfrid. But I was just obliged to leave her at the hotel; for Pole can’t endure her. He ’bomunates the sight of ’r. If ye aver saw a dog burnt by the fire, Pole’s second to ’m, if onnly ye speak that garl’s name.”

The head of a strange musician, belonging to the band stationed outside, was thrust through one of the window apertures. Mr. Pericles beckoned him imperiously to retire, and perform. He objected, and an altercation in bad English diverted the company. It was changed to Italian. “Mia figlia,” seized Wilfrid’s ear. Mr. Pericles bellowed, “Allegro.” Two minutes after Braintop felt a touch on his shoulder; and Wilfrid, speaking in a tone of friend to friend, begged him to go to town by the last train and remove Miss Belloni to an hotel, which he named. “Certainly,” said Braintop; “but if I meet her father..?” Wilfrid summoned champagne for him; whereupon Mrs. Chump cried out, “Ye’re kind to wait upon the young man, Mr. Wilfrid; and that Mr. Braintop’s an invalu’ble young man. And what do ye want with the hotel, when we’ve left it, Mr. Paricles?”

The Greek raised his head from Mr. Pole, shrugging at her openly. He and Wilfrid then measured eyes a moment. “Some champagne togezer?” said Mr. Pericles. “With all my heart,” was the reply; and their glasses were filled, and they bowed, and drank. Wilfrid took his seat, drew forth his pocket-book; and while talking affably to Lady Charlotte beside him, and affecting once or twice to ponder over her remarks, or to meditate a fitting answer, wrote on a slip of paper under the table:—

“Mine! my angel! You will see me to-morrow.

“*Yourlover*.”

This, being inserted in an envelope, with zig-zag letters of address to form Emilia’s name, he contrived to pass to Braintop’s hands, and resumed his conversation with Lady Charlotte, who said, when there was nothing left to discover, “But what is it you concoct down there?” “I!” cried Wilfrid, lifting his hands, and so betraying himself after the fashion of the very innocent. She despised any reading of acts not on the surface, and nodded to the explanation he gave—to wit: “By the way, do you mean—have you

noticed my habit of touching my fingers' ends as I talk? I count them backwards and forwards."

"Shows nervousness," said Lady Charlotte; "you are a boy!"

Page 680

“Exceedingly a boy.”

“Now I put a finger on his vanity,” said she; and thought indeed that she had played on him.

“Mr. Pole,” (Lady Gosstre addressed that gentleman,) “I must hope that you will leave this dining-hall as it is; there is nothing in the neighbourhood to match it!”

“Delightful!” interposed Laura Tinley; “but is it settled?”

Mr. Pole leaned forward to her ladyship; and suddenly catching the sense of her words, “Ah, why not?” he said, and reached his hand to some champagne, which he raised to his mouth, but drank nothing of. Reflection appeared to tell him that his safety lay in drinking, and he drained the glass at a gulp. Mrs. Chump had it filled immediately, and explained to a wondering neighbour, “It’s that that keeps ’m on his legs.”

“We shall envy you immensely,” said Laura Tinley to Arabella; who replied, “I assure you that no decision has been come to.”

“Ah, you want to surprise us with cards on a sudden from Besworth!”

“That is not the surprise I have in store,” returned Arabella sedately.

“Then you have a surprise? Do tell me.”

“How true to her sex is the lady who seeks to turn ‘what it is’ into ‘what it isn’t!’” said Freshfield, trusty lieutenant.

“I think a little peeping makes surprises sweeter; I’m weak enough to think that,” Lady Charlotte threw in.

“That is so true!” exclaimed Laura.

“Well; and a secret shared is a fact uncommonly well aired—that is also true. But, remember, you do not desire the surprise; you are a destroying force to it;” and Freshfield bowed.

“Curiosity!” sighed some one, relieving Freshfield from a sense of the guilt of heaviness.

“I am a Pandora,” Laura smilingly said.

“To whom?” Tracy Runningbrook’s shout was heard.

“With champagne in the heads of the men, and classics in the heads of the women, we shall come; to something,” remarked Lady Gosstre half to herself and Georgiana near her.

An observer of Mr. Pole might have seen that he was fretting at a restriction on his tongue. Occasionally he would sit forward erect in his chair, shake his coat-collar, frown, and sound a preparatory ’hem; but it ended in his rubbing his hair away on the back of his head. Mrs. Chump, who was herself perceiving new virtues in champagne with every glass, took the movements as indicative of a companion exploration of the spiritual resources of this vintage. She no longer called for it, but lifted a majestic finger (a Siddons or tenth-Muse finger, as Freshfield named it) behind the row of heads; upon which champagne speedily bubbled in the glasses. Laughter at the performance had fairly set in. Arabella glanced nervously round for Mr. Pericles, who looked at his watch and spread the fingers of one hand open thrice—an act that telegraphed fifteen minutes. In fifteen minutes an opera troupe, with three famous chiefs and a renowned prima-donna were to arrive. The fact was known solely to Arabella and Mr. Pericles. It was the Surprise of the evening. But within fifteen minutes, what might not happen, with heads going at champagne-pace?

Page 681

Arabella proposed to Freshfield to rise. “Don’t the ladies go first?” the wit turned sensualist stammered; and incurred that worse than frown, a cold look of half-comprehension, which reduces indefinitely the proportions of the object gazed at. There were probably a dozen very young men in the room waiting to rise with their partners at a signal for dancing; and these could not be calculated upon to take an initiative, or follow one—as ladies, poor slaves! will do when the electric hostess rustles. The men present were non-conductors. Arabella knew that she could carry off the women, but such a proceeding would leave her father at the mercy of the wine; and, moreover, the probability was that Mrs. Chump would remain by him, and, sole in a company of males, explode her sex with ridicule, Brookfield in the bargain. So Arabella, under a prophetic sense of evil, waited; and this came of it. Mr. Pole patted Mrs. Chump’s hand publicly. In spite of the steady hum of small-talk—in spite of Freshfield Sumner’s circulation of a crisp anecdote—in spite of Lady Gosstre’s kind effort to stop him by engaging him in conversation, Mr. Pole forced on for a speech. He said that he had not been the thing lately. It might be his legs, as his dear friend Martha, on his right, insisted; but he had felt it in his head, though as strong as any man present.

“Harrk at ’m!” cried Mrs. Chump, letting her eyes roll fondly away from him into her glass.

“Business, my lady!” Mr. Pole resumed. “Ah, you don’t know what that is. We’ve got to work hard to keep our heads up equal with you. We don’t swim with corks. And my old friend, Ralph Tinley—he sells iron, and has got a mine. That’s simple. But, my God, ma’am, when a man has his eye on the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic, and the Baltic, and the Black Sea, and half-a-dozen colonies at once, he—you—”

“Well, it’s a precious big eye he’s got, Pole,” Mrs. Chump came to his relief.

“—he don’t know whether he’s a ruined dog, or a man to hold up his head in any company.”

“Oh, Lord, Pole, if ye’re going to talk of beggary!” Mrs. Chump threw up her hands. “My lady, I naver could abide the name of ’t. I’m a kind heart, ye know, but I can’t bear a ragged friend. I hate ’m! He seems to give me a pinch.”

Having uttered this, it struck her that it was of a kind to convulse Mrs. Lupin, for whose seizures she could never accurately account; and looking round, she perceived, sure enough, that little forlorn body agitated, with a handkerchief to her mouth.

“As to Besworth,” Mr. Pole had continued, “I might buy twenty Besworths. If—if the cut shows the right card. If—” Sweat started on his forehead, and he lifted his eyebrows, blinking. “But none!” (he smote the table) “none can say I haven’t been a good father! I’ve educated my girls to marry the best the land can show. I bought a house to marry them out of; it was their own idea.” He caught Arabella’s eyes. “I thought so, at all

events; for why should I have paid the money if I hadn’t thought so? when then—yes, that sum...” (was he choking!) “saved me!—saved me!”

Page 682

A piteous desperate outburst marked the last words, that seemed to struggle from a tightened cord.

“Not that there’s anything the matter,” he resumed, with a very brisk wink. “I’m quite sound: heart’s sound, lungs sound, stomach regular. I can see, and smell, and hear. Sense of touch is rather lumpy at times, I know; but the doctor says it’s nothing—-nothing at all; and I should be all right, if I didn’t feel that I was always wearing a great leaden hat.”

“My gracious, Pole, if ye’re not talkin’ pos’tuv nonsense!” exclaimed Mrs. Chump.

“Well, my dear Martha” (Mr. Pole turned to her argumentatively), “how do you account for my legs? I feel it at top. I declare I’ve felt the edge of the brim half a yard out. Now, my lady, a man in that state—sound and strong as the youngest—but I mean a vexed man—worried man bothered man, he doesn’t want a woman to look after him;—I mean, he does—he does! And why won’t young girls—oh! they might, they might—see that? And when she’s no extra expense, but brings him—helps him to face—and no one has said the world’s a jolly world so often as I have. It’s jolly!” He groaned.

Lady Charlotte saw Wilfrid gazing at one spot on the table without a change of countenance. She murmured to him, “What hits you hits me.”

Mr. Pole had recommenced, on the evident instigation of Laura Tinley, though Lady Gosstre and Freshfield Sumner had both sought to check the current. In Chump’s lifetime, it appeared, he (Mr. Pole) had thought of Mrs. Chump with a respectful ardour; and albeit she was no longer what she was when Chump brought her over, a blooming Irish girl—“her hair exactly as now, the black curl half over the cheek, and a bright laugh, and a white neck, fat round arms, and—”

A shout of “Oh, Pole! ye seem to be undressin’ of me before them all,” diverted the neighbours of the Beauty.

“Who would not like such praise?” Laura Tinley, to keep alive the subject, laid herself open to Freshfield by a remark.

“At the same personal peril?” he inquired smoothly.

Mr. Pericles stood up, crying “Enfin!” as the doors were flung open, and a great Signora of operatic fame entered the hall, supported on one side by a charming gentleman (a tenore), who shared her fame and more with her. In the rear were two working baritones; and behind them, outside, Italian heads might be discerned.

The names of the Queen of Song and Prince of Singers flew round the room; and Laura uttered words of real gratitude, for the delightful surprise, to Arabella, as the latter turned from her welcome of them. “She is exactly like Emilia—young,” was uttered. The

thought went with a pang through Wilfrid's breast. When the Signora was asked if she would sup or take champagne, and she replied that she would sup by-and-by, and drink porter now, the likeness to Emilia was established among the Poles.

Page 683

Meantime the unhappy Braintop received an indication that he must depart. As he left the hall he brushed past the chief-clerk of his office, who soon appeared bowing and elbowing among the guests. “What a substitute for me!” thought Braintop bitterly; and in the belief that this old clerk would certainly go back that night, and might undertake his commission, he lingered near the band on the verge of the lawn. A touch at his elbow startled him. In the half-light he discerned Emilia. “Don’t say you have seen me,” were her first words. But when he gave her the letter, she drew him aside, and read it by the aid of lighted matches held in Braintop’s hat drawing in her fervent breath to a “Yes! yes!” at the close, while she pressed the letter to her throat. Presently the singing began in an upper room, that had shortly before flashed with sudden light. Braintop entreated Emilia to go in, and then rejoiced that she had refused. They stood in a clear night-air, under a yellowing crescent, listening to the voice of an imperial woman. Impressed as he was, Braintop had, nevertheless, leisure to look out of his vinous mist and notice, with some misgiving, a parading light at a certain distance—apparently the light of cigarettes being freshly kindled. He was too much elated to feel alarm: but “If her father were to catch me again,” he thought. And with Emilia on his arm!

Mr. Pole’s chief-clerk had brought discomposing news. He was received by an outburst of “No business, Payne; I won’t have business!”

Turning to Mr. Pericles, the old clerk said: “I came rather for you, sir, not expecting to find Mr. Pole.” He was told by Mr. Pericles to speak what he had to say: and then the guests, who had fallen slightly back, heard a cavernous murmur; and some, whose eyes where on Mr. Pole, observed a sharp conflict of white and red in his face.

“There, there, there, there!” went Mr. Pole. “’Hem, Pericles!” His handkerchief was drawn out; and he became engaged, as it were, in wiping a moisture from the palm of his hand. “Pericles, have you got pluck now? Eh?”

Mr. Pericles had leaned down his ear for the whole of the news.

“Ten sossand,” he said, smoothing his waistbands, and then inserting his thumbs into the pits of his waistcoat. “Also a chance of forty. Let us not lose time for ze music.”

He walked away.

“I don’t believe in that d——d coolness, ma’am,” said Mr. Pole, wheeling round on Freshfield Sumner. “It’s put on. That wears a mask; he’s one of those confounded humbugs who wear a mask. Ten-forty! and all for a shrug; it’s not human. I tell you, he does that just out of a sort of jealousy to rival me as an Englishman. Because I’m cool, he must be. Do you think a mother doesn’t feel the loss of her children?”

“I fear that I must grow petticoats before I can answer purely feminine questions,” said Freshfield.

“Of course—of course,” assented Mr. Pole; “and a man feels like a mother to his money. For the moment, he does—for the moment. What are those fellows—Spartans—women who cut off their breasts—?”

Page 684

Freshfield suggested, “Amazons.”

“No; they were women,” Mr. Pole corrected him; “and if anything hurt them, they never cried out. That’s what—ha!—our friend Pericles is trying at. He’s a fool. He won’t sleep to-night. He’ll lie till he gets cold in the feet, and then tuck them up like a Dutch doll, and perspire cold till his heart gives a bound, and he’ll jump up and think his last hour’s come. Wind on the stomach, do ye call it? I say it’s wearing a mask!”

The bird’s-eye of the little merchant shot decisive meaning.

Two young ladies had run from his neighbourhood, making as if to lift hands to ears. The sight of them brought Mrs. Chump to his side. “Pole! Pole!” she said, “is there annything wrong?”

“Wrong, Martha?” He bent to her, attempting Irish—“Arrah, now! and mustn’t all be right if you’re here?”

She smote his cheek fondly. “Ye’re not a bit of an Irish-man, ye deer little fella.”

“Come along and dance,” cried he imperiously.

“A pretty spectacle—two fandangoes, when there’s singing, ye silly!” Mrs. Chump led him upstairs, chafing one of his hands, and remarking loudly on the wonder it was to see his knees constantly ‘give’ as he walked.

On the dark lawn, pressing Wilfrid’s written words for fiery nourishment to her heart, Emilia listened to the singing.

“Why do people make a noise, and not be satisfied to feel?” she said angrily to Braintop, as a great clapping of hands followed a divine aria. Her ideas on this point would have been different in the room.

By degrees a tender delirium took hold of her sense; and then a subtle emotion—which was partly prompted by dim rivalry with the voice that seemed to be speaking so richly to the man she loved—set her bosom rising and falling. She translated it to herself thus: “What a joy it will be to him to hear me now!” And in a pause she sang clear out —

“Prima d’Italia amica;”

and hung on the last note, to be sure that she would be heard by him.

Braintop saw the cigarette dash into sparks on the grass. At the same moment a snarl of critical vituperation told Emilia that she had offended taste and her father. He

shouted her name, and, striding up to her, stumbled over Braintop, whom he caught with one hand, while the other fell firmly on Emilia.

"'Amica—amica-a-a,'" he burlesqued her stress of the luckless note —lowing it at her, and telling her in triumphant Italian that she was found at last. Braintop, after a short struggle, and an effort at speech, which was loosely shaken in his mouth, heard that he stood a prisoner. "Eh! you have not lost your cheeks," insulted his better acquaintance with English slang.

Alternately in this queer tongue and in Italian the pair of victims were addressed.

Page 685

Emilia knew her father's temper. He had a habit of dallying with an evil passion till it boiled over and possessed him. Believing Braintop to be in danger of harm, she beckoned to some of the faces crowding the windows; but the movement was not seen, as none of the circumstances were at all understood. Wilfrid, however, knew well who had sung those three bars, concerning which the 'Prima donna' questioned Mr. Pericles, and would not be put off by hearing that it was a startled jackdaw, or an owl, and an ole nightingale. The Greek rubbed his hands. "Now to recommence," he said; "and we shall not notice a jackdaw again." His eye went sideways watchfully at Wilfrid. "You like zat piece of opera?"

"Immensely," said Wilfrid, half bowing to the Signora—to whom, as to Majesty, Mr. Pericles introduced him, and fixed him.

"Now! To seats!"

Mr. Pericles' mandates was being obeyed, when a cry of "Wilfrid!" from Emilia below, raised a flutter.

Mr. Pole had been dozing in his chair. He rose at the cry, looking hard, with a mechanical jerk of the neck, at two or three successive faces, and calling, "Somebody —somebody" to take his outstretched hand trembling in a paroxysm of nervous terror.

Hearing his son's name again, but more faintly, he raised his voice for Martha. "Don't let that girl come near me! I—I can't get on with foreign girls!"

His eyes went among the curious faces surrounding him. "Wilfrid!" he shouted. To the second summons, "Sir" was replied, in the silence. Neither saw the other as they spoke.

"Are you going out to her, Wilfrid?"

"Someone called me, sir."

"He's got the cunning of hell," said Mr. Pole, baffled by his own agitation.

"Oh! don't talk o' that place," moaned Mrs. Chump.

"Stop!" cried the old man. "Are you going? Stop! you shan't do mischief. I mean—-there—stop! Don't go. You're not to go. I say you're not to go out."

Emphasis and gesticulations gave their weight to the plain words.

But rage at the upset of all sentiments and dignity that day made Wilfrid reckless, and he now felt his love to be all he had. He heard his Emilia being dragged away to misery —perhaps to be sold to shame. Maddened, he was incapable of understanding his

father’s state, or caring for what the world thought. His sisters gathered near him, but were voiceless.

“Is he gone?” Mr. Pole burst forward. “You’re gone, sir? Wilfrid, have you gone to that girl? I ask you whether...(there’s one shot at my heart,” he added in a swift undertone to one of the heads near him, while he caught at his breast with both hands). “Wilfrid, will you stay here?”

“For God’s sake, go to him, Wilfrid,” murmured Adela. “I can’t.”

“Because if you do—if you don’t—I mean, if you go...” The old man gasped at the undertone. “Now I have got it in my throat.”

Page 686

A quick physical fear caught hold of him. In a moment his voice changed to entreaty. “I beg you won’t go, my dear boy. Wilfrid, I tell you, don’t go. Because, you wouldn’t act like a d—d—I’m not angry; but it is like acting like a—Here’s company, Wilfrid; come to me, my boy; do come here. You mayn’t ha—have your poor old father long, now he’s got you u—up in the world. I mean accidents, for I’m sound enough; only a little nervous from brain—Is he gone?”

Wilfrid was then leaving the room.

Lady Gosstre had been speaking to Mr. Powys. She was about to say a word to Lady Charlotte, when the latter walked to the doorway, and. In a manner that smote his heart with a spasm of gratitude, said; “Don’t heed these people. He will bring on a fit if you don’t stop. His nerves are out, and the wine they have given him... Go to him: I will go to Emilia, and do as much for her as you could.”

Wilfrid reached his father in time to see him stagger back into the arms of Mrs. Chump, whose supplication was for the female stimulant known as ‘something.’

CHAPTER XXXIII

On reaching home that night, Arabella surprised herself thinking, in the midst of her anguish: “Whatever is said of us, it cannot be said that there is a house where the servants have been better cared for.” And this reflection continued to burn with an astounding brilliancy through all the revolutions of a mind contemplating the dread of a fallen fortune, the fact of a public exposure, and what was to her an ambition destroyed. Adela had no such thoughts. “I have been walking on a plank,” she gasped from time to time, as she gave startled glances into the abyss of poverty, and hurried to her bedchamber—a faint whisper of self-condemnation in her ears at the ‘I’ being foremost. The sisters were too proud to touch upon one another’s misery in complaints, or to be common by holding debate on it. They had not once let their eyes meet at Besworth, as the Tinleys wonderingly noticed. They said good night to their papa, who was well enough to reply, adding peremptorily, “Downstairs at half-past eight,”—an intimation that he would be at the break-fast table and read prayers as usual. Inexperienced in nervous disease, they were now filled with the idea that he was possibly acting—a notion that had never been kindled in them before; or, otherwise, how came these rapid, almost instantaneous, recoveries?

Cornelia alone sounded near the keynote. Since the night that she had met him in the passage, and the next morning when Mrs. Chump had raised the hubbub about her loss, Cornelia’s thoughts had been troubled by some haunting spectral relationship with money. It had helped to make her reckless in granting interviews to Purcell Barrett. “If we are poor, I am free;” and that she might then give herself to whomever she pleased, was her logical deduction. The exposure at Besworth, and

Page 687

the partial confirmation of her suspicions, were not without their secret comfort to her. In the carriage, coming home, Wilfrid had touched her hand by chance, and pressed it with good heart. She went to the library, imagining that if he wished to see her he would appear, and by exposing his own weakness learn to excuse hers. She was right in her guess; Wilfrid came. He came sauntering into the room with “Ah! you here?” Cornelia consented to play into his hypocrisy. “Yes, I generally think better here,” she replied.

“And what has this pretty head got to do with thinking?”

“Not much, I suppose, my lord,” she replied, affecting nobly to acknowledge the weakness of the female creature.

Wilfrid kissed her with an unaccustomed fervour. This delicate mumming was to his taste. It was yet more so when she spoke playfully to him of his going soon to be a married man. He could answer to that in a smiling negative, playing round the question, until she perceived that he really desired to have his feeling for the odd dark girl who had recently shot across their horizon touched, if only it were led to by the muffled ways of innuendo.

As a dog, that cannot ask you verbally to scratch his head, but wishes it, will again and again thrust his head into your hand, petitioning mutely that affection may divine him, so:—but we deal with a sentimentalist, and the simile is too gross to be exact. For no sooner was Wilfrid’s head scratched, than the operation stuck him as humiliating; in other words, the moment he felt his sisters fingers in the ticklish part, he flew to another theme, then returned, and so backward and forward—mystifying her not slightly, and making her think, “Then he has no heart.” She by no means intended to encourage love for Emilia, but she hoped for his sake, that the sentiment he had indulged was sincere. By-and-by he said, that though he had no particular affection for Lady Charlotte, he should probably marry her.

“Without loving her, Wilfrid? It is unfair to her; it is unfair to yourself.”

Wilfrid understood perfectly who it was for whom she pleaded thus vehemently. He let her continue: and when she had dwelt on the horrors of marriages without love, and the supreme duty of espousing one who has our ‘heart’s loyalty,’ he said, “You may be right. A man must not play with a girl. He must consider that he owes a duty to one who is more dependent;”—implying that a woman s duty was distinct and different in such a case.

Cornelia could not rise and plead for her sex. Had she pushed forth the ‘woman,’ she must have stood for her.

This is the game of Fine Shades and Nice Feelings, under whose empire you see this family, and from which they are to emerge considerably shorn, but purified—examples of One present passage of our civilization.

“At least, dear, if” (Cornelia desperately breathed the name) “—if Emilia were forced to give her hand...loving...you...we should be right in pitying her?”

Page 688

The snare was almost too palpable. Wilfrid fell into it, from the simple passion that the name inspired; and now his hand tightened. “Poor child!” he moaned.

She praised his kind heart: “You cannot be unjust and harsh, I know that. You could not see her—me—any of us miserable. Women feel, dear. Ah! I need not tell you that. Their tears are not the witnesses. When they do not weep, but the hot drops stream inwardly:—and, oh! Wilfrid, let this never happen to me. I shall not disgrace you, because I intend to see you happy with...with her, whoever she is; and I would leave you happy. But I should not survive it. I can look on Death. A marriage without love is dishonour.”

Sentiment enjoys its splendid moods. Wilfrid having had the figure of his beloved given to him under nuptial benediction, cloaked, even as he wished it to be, could afford now to commiserate his sister, and he admired her at the same time. “I’ll take care you are not made a sacrifice of when the event is fixed,” he said—as if it had never been in contemplation.

“Oh! I have not known happiness for years, till this hour,” Cornelia whispered to him bashfully; and set him wondering why she should be happy when she had nothing but his sanction to reject a man.

On the other hand, her problem was to gain lost ground by letting him know that, of the pair, it was not she who would marry beneath her station. She tried it mentally in various ways. In the end she thought it best to give him this positive assurance. “No,” he rejoined, “a woman never should.” There was no admission of equality to be got out of him, so she kissed him. Of their father’s health a few words were said—of Emilia nothing further. She saw that Wilfrid’s mind was resolved upon some part to play, but shrank from asking his confidence, lest facts should be laid bare.

At the breakfast-table Mr. Pole was a little late. He wore some of his false air of briskness on a hazy face, and read prayers—drawing breath between each sentence and rubbing his forehead; but the work was done by a man in ordinary health, if you chose to think so, as Mrs. Chump did. She made favourable remarks on his appearance, begging the ladies to corroborate her. They were silent.

“Now take a chop, Pole, and show your appetite,” she said. “’A Chump-chop, my love?’ my little man used to invite me of a mornin’; and that was the onnly joke he had, so it’s worth rememberin’.”

A chop was placed before Mr. Pole. He turned it in his plate, and wonderingly called to mind that he had once enjoyed chops. At a loss to account for the distressing change, he exclaimed to himself, “Chump! I wish the woman wouldn’t thrust her husband between one’s teeth. An egg!”

The chop was displaced for an egg, which he tapped until Mrs. Chump cried out, “Oh! if ye’re not like a postman, Pole; and d’ye think ye’ve got a letter for a chick inside there?”

Page 689

This allusion scared Mr. Pole from the egg. He quitted the table, muttering, “Business! business!” and went to the library.

When he was gone Mrs. Chump gave a cry to know where Braintop was, but, forgetting him immediately, turned to the ladies and ejaculated, “Broth’m. It’s just brothin’ he wants. Broth, I say, for anny man that won’t eat his chop or his egg. And, my dears, now, what do ye say to me for bringing him home to ye? I expect to be thanked, I do; and then we’ll broth Pole together, till he’s lusty as a prize-ox, and capers like a monkey.”

Wretched woman! that could not see the ruin she had inflicted—that could not imagine how her bitter breath cut against those sensitive skins! During a short pause little Mrs. Lupin trotted to the door, and shot through it, in a paroxysm.

Then Wilfrid’s voice was heard. He leaned against a corner of the window, and spoke without directly looking at Mrs. Chump; so that she was some time in getting to understand the preliminary, “Madam, you must leave this house.” But presently her chin dropped; and after feeble efforts to interpose an exclamation, she sat quiet—overcome by the deliberate gravity of his manner, and motioning despairingly with her head, to relieve the swarm of unborn figure-less ideas suggested by his passing speech. The ladies were ranged like tribunal shapes. It could not be said of souls so afflicted that they felt pleasure in the scene; but to assist in the administration of a rigorous justice is sweet to them that are smarting. They scarcely approved his naked statement of things when he came to Mrs. Chump’s particular aspiration in the household—viz., to take a station and the dignity of their name. The effect he produced satisfied them that the measure was correct. Her back gave a sharp bend, as if an eternal support had snapped. “Oh! ye hit hard,” she moaned.

“I tell you kindly that we (who, you will acknowledge, must count for something here) do not sanction any change that revolutionizes our domestic relations,” said Wilfrid; while Mrs. Chump heaved and rolled on the swell of the big words like an overladen boat. “You have only to understand so much, and this—that if we resist it, as we do, you, by continuing to contemplate it, are provoking a contest which will probably injure neither you nor me, but will be death to ham in his present condition.”

Mrs. Chump was heard to mumble that she alone knew the secret of restoring him to health, and that he was rendered peaky and poky only by people supposing him so.

“An astonishin’ thing!” she burst out. “If I kiss ’m and say ‘Poor Pole!’ he’s poor Pole on the spot. And, if onnly I—”

But Wilfrid’s stern voice flowed over her. “Listen, madam, and let this be finished between us. You know well that when a man has children, he may wish to call another woman wife—a woman not their mother; but the main question is, will his children

consent to let her take that place? We are of one mind, and will allow no one—no one —to assume that position. And now, there's an end. We'll talk like friends. I have only spoken in that tone that you might clearly comprehend me on an important point. I know you entertain a true regard for my father, and it is that belief which makes me—"

Page 690

“Friends!” cried Mrs. Chump, getting courage from the savour of cajolery in these words. “Friends! Oh, ye fox! ye fox!”

And now commenced a curious duett. Wilfrid merely wished to terminate his sentence; Mrs. Chump wantonly sought to prevent him. Each was burdened with serious matter; but they might have struck hands here, had not this petty accidental opposition interposed.

—“Makes me feel confident...” Wilfrid resumed.

“And Pole’s promos, Mr. Wilfrud; ye’re forgettin’ that.”

“Confident, ma’am.”

“He was the firrst to be soft.”

“I say, ma’am, for his sake—”

“An’ it’s for his sake. And weak as he is on ’s legs, poor fells; which marr’ge ‘ll cure, bein’ a certain rem’dy.”

“Mrs. Chump! I beg you to listen.”

“Mr. Wilfrud! and I can see too, and it’s three weeks and ye kissed little Belloni in the passage, outside this vary door, and out in the garden.”

The blow was entirely unexpected, and took Wilfrid’s breath, so that he was not ready for his turn in this singular piece of harmony.

“Ye did!” Mrs. Chump rejoiced to behold how her chance spark kindled flame in his cheeks. “It’s pos’tuv ye did. And ye’re the best blusher of the two, my dear; and no shame to ye, though it is a garl’s business. That little Belloni takes to ’t like milk; but you —”

Wilfrid strode up to her, saying imperiously, “I tell you to listen!”

She succumbed at once to a show of physical ascendency, murmuring, “It’s sure he was seen kissin’ of her twice, and mayhap more; and hearty smacks of the lips, too—likin’ it.”

The ladies rewarded Wilfrid for his service to their cause by absolutely hearing nothing —a feat women can be capable of.

Wilfrid, however, was angered by the absurdity of the charge and the scene, and also by the profane touch on Emilia’s name.

“I must tell you, ma’am, that for my father’s sake I must desire you to quit this—you will see the advisability of quitting this house for a time.”

“Pole’s promus! Pole’s promus!” Mrs. Chump wailed again.

“Will you give me your assurance now that you will go, to be our guest again subsequently?”

“In writin’ and in words, Mr. Wilfrud!”

“Answer me, ma’am.”

“I will, Mr. Wilfrud; and Mr. Braintop’s a witness, knowin’ the nature of an oath. There naver was a more sacrud promus. Says Pole, ‘Martha—’”

Wilfrid changed his tactics. Sitting down by her side, he said: “I am sure you have an affection for my father.”

“I’m the most lovin’ woman, my dear! If it wasn’t for my vartue I don’t know what’d become o’ me. Ye could ask Chump, if he wasn’t in his grave, poor fella! I’ll be cryin’ like a squeezed orr’nge presently. What with Chump and Pole, two’s too many for a melanch’ly woman.”

“You have an affection for my father I know, ma’am. Now, see! he’s ill. If you press him to do what we certainly resist, you endanger his life.”

Page 691

Mrs. Chump started back from the man who bewildered her brain without stifling her sense of justice. She knew that there was another way of putting the case, whereby she was not stuck in the criminal box; but the knowledge groped about blindly, and finding herself there, Mrs. Chump lost all idea of a counter-accusation, and resorted to wriggling and cajolery. “Ah! ye look sweeter when ye’re kissin’ us, Mr. Wilfrud; and I wonder where the little Belloni has got to!”

“Tell me, that there maybe no misunderstanding.” Wilfrid again tried to fix her.

“A rosy rosy fresh bit of a mouth she’s got! and pouts ut!”

Wilfrid took her hand. “Answer me.”

“’Deed, and I’m modust, Mr. Wilfrud.”

“You do him the honour to be very fond of him. I am to believe that? Then you must consent to leave us at the end of a week. You abandon any idea of an impossible ceremony, and of us you make friends and not enemies.”

At the concluding word, Mrs. Chump was no longer sustained by her excursive fancy. She broke down, and wrung her hands, crying, “En’mies! Pole’s children my en’mies! Oh, Lord! that I should live to hear ut! and Pole, that knew me a bride first blushin’!”

She wailed and wept so that the ladies exchanged compassionate looks, and Arabella rose to press her hand and diminish her distress. Wilfrid saw that his work would be undone in a moment, and waved her to her seat. The action was perceived by Mrs. Chump.

“Oh, Mr. Wilfrud! my dear! and a soldier! and you that was my favourut! If half my ‘ffection for Pole wasn’t the seein’ of you so big and handsome! And all my ideas to get ye marrud, avery one so snug in a corner, with a neat little lawful ring on your fingers! And you that go to keep me a lone woman, frightened of the darrk! I’m an awful coward, that’s the truth. And ye know that marr’ge is a holy thing! and it’s such a beaut’ful cer’mony! Oh, Mr. Wilfrud!—Lieuten’t y’ are! and I’d have bought ye a captain, and made the hearts o’ your sisters jump with bonnuts and gowns and jools. Oh, Pole! Pole! why did you keep me so short o’ cash? It’s been the roon of me! What did I care for your brooches and your gifts? I wanted the good will of your daughters, sir—your son, Pole!”

Mrs. Chump stopped her flow of tears. “Dear hearts!” she addressed her silent judges, in mysterious guttural tones, “is it becas ye think there’s a bit of a fear of...?”

The ladies repressed a violent inclination to huddle together, like cattle from the blowing East.

“I assure ye, ’taint poss’ble,” pursued Mrs. Chump. “Why do I ’gree to marry Pole? Just this, now. We sit chirpin’ and chatterin’ of times that’s gone, and live twice over, Pole and myself; and I’m used to ’m; and I was soft to ’m when he was a merry buck, and you cradle lumber in ideas, mind! for my vartue was always un’mpeach’ble. That’s just the reason. So, come, and let’s all be friends, with money in our pockuts; yell find me as much of a garl as army of ye. And, there! my weak time’s after my Porrt, my dears. So, now ye know when I can’t be refusin’ a thing to ye. Are we friends?—say! are we?”

Page 692

Even if the ladies had been disposed to pardon her vulgarity, they could not by any effort summon a charitable sentiment toward one of their sex who degraded it by a public petition for a husband. This was not to be excused; and, moreover, they entertained the sentimentalist's abhorrence of the second marriage of a woman; regarding the act as simply execrable; being treason to the ideal of the sex—treason to Woman's purity—treason to the mysterious sentiment which places Woman so high, that when a woman slips there is no help for it but she must be smashed.

Seeing that each looked as implacable as the other, Mrs. Chump called plaintively, "Arr'bella!"

The lady spoke:—

"We are willing to be your friends, Mrs. Chump, and we request that you will consider us in that light. We simply do not consent to give you a name...."

"But, we'll do without the name, my dear," interposed Mrs. Chump. "Ye'll call me plain Martha, which is almost mother, and not a bit of 't. There—Cornelia, my love! what do ye say?"

"I can only reiterate my sister's words, which demand no elucidation," replied Cornelia.

The forlorn woman turned her lap towards the youngest.

"Ad'la! ye sweet little cajoler! And don't use great cartwheels o' words that leave a body crushed."

Adela was suffering from a tendency to levity, which she knew to be unbefitting the occasion, and likely to defeat its significance. She said: "I am sure, Mrs. Chump, we are very much attached to you as Mrs. Chump; but after a certain period of life, marriage does make people ridiculous, and, as much for your sake as our own, we would advise you to discard a notion that cannot benefit anybody. Believe in our attachment; and we shall see you here now and then, and correspond with you when you are away. And..."

"Oh, ye puss! such an eel as y' are!" Mrs. Chump cried out. "What are ye doin' but sugarin' the same dose, miss! Be qu't! It's a traitor that makes what's nasty taste agree'ble. D'ye think my stomach's a fool? Ye may wheedle the mouth, but not the stomach."

At this offence there fell a dead silence. Wilfrid gazed on them all indifferently, waiting for the moment to strike a final blow.

When she had grasped the fact that Pity did not sit in the assembly, Mrs. Chump rose.

“Oh! if I haven’t been sitting among three owls and a raven,” she exclaimed. Then she fussed at her gown. “I wish ye good day, young ladus, and mayhap ye’d like to be interduced to No. 2 yourselves, some fine mornin’? Prov’dence can wait. There’s a patient hen on the eggs of all of ye! I wouldn’t marry Pole now—not if he was to fall flat and howl for me. Mr. Wilfrud, I wish ye good-bye. Ye’ve done your work. I’ll be out of this house in half-an-hour.”

Page 693

This was not quite what Wilfrid had meant to effect. He proposed to her that she should come to the yacht, and indeed leave Brookfield to go on board. But Mrs. Chump was in that frame of mind when, shamefully wounded by others, we find our comfort in wilfully wounding ourselves. “No,” she said (betraying a meagre mollification at every offer), “I’ll not stop. I won’t go to the yacht—unless I think better of ut. But I won’t stop. Ye’ve hurrt me, and I’ll say good-bye. I hope ye’ll none of ye be widows. It’s a crool thing. And when ye’ve got no children of your own, and feel, all your inside risin’ to another person’s, and they hate ye—hate ye! Oh! Oh!—There, Mr. Wilfrud, ye needn’t touch me elbow. Oh, dear! look at me in the glass! and my hair! Annybody’d swear I’d been drinkin’. I won’t let Pole look at me. That’d cure ’m. And he must let me have money, because I don’t care for ’cumulations. Not now, when there’s no young—no garls and a precious boy, who’d say, when I’m gone, ‘Bless her’ Oh! ’Poor thing! Bless—’ Oh! Augh!” A note of Sorrow’s own was fetched; and the next instant, with a figure of dignity, the afflicted woman observed: “There’s seven bottles of my Porrt, and there’s eleven of champagne, and some comut clar’t I shall write where ut’s to be sent. And, if you please, look to the packing; for bits o’ glass and a red stain’s not like your precious hope when you’re undoin a hamper. And that’s just myself now, and I’m a broken woman; but naver mind, nobody!”

A very formal and stiff “Good-bye,” succeeding a wheezy lamentation, concluded the speech. Casting a look at the glass, Mrs. Chump retired, with her fingers on the ornamental piece of hair.

The door having closed on her, Wilfrid said to his sisters: “I want one of you to come with me to town immediately. Decide which will go.”

His eyes questioned Cornelia. Hers were dropped.

“I have work to do,” pleaded Adela.

“An appointment? You will break it.”

“No, dear, not—”

“Not exactly an appointment. Then there’s nothing to break. Put on your bonnet.”

Adela slipped from the room in a spirit of miserable obedience.

“I could not possibly leave papa,” said Arabella, and Wilfrid nodded his head. His sisters knew quite well what was his business in town, but they felt that they were at his mercy, and dared not remonstrate. Cornelia ventured to say, “I think she should not come back to us till papa is in a better state.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Wilfrid, careless how much he betrayed by his apprehension of the person indicated.

The two returned late that night, and were met by Arabella at the gate.

“Papa has been—don’t be alarmed,” she began. “He is better now. But when he heard that she was not in the house, the blood left his hands and feet. I have had to use a falsehood. I said, ’She left word that she was coming back to-night or to-morrow.’ Then he became simply angry. Who could have believed that the sight of him so would ever have rejoiced me!”

Page 694

Adela, worn with fatigue, sobbed, “Oh! Oh!”

“By the way, Sir Twickenham called, and wished to see you,” said Arabella curiously.

“Oh! so weary!” the fair girl ejaculated, half-dreaming that she saw herself as she threw back her head and gazed at stars and clouds. “We met Captain Gambier in town.” Here she pinched Arabella’s arm.

The latter said, “Where?”

“In a miserable street, where he looked like a peacock in a quagmire.”

Arabella entreated Wilfrid to be careful in his management of their father. “Pray, do not thwart him. He has been anxious to know where you have gone. He—he thinks you have conducted Mrs. Chump, and will bring her back. I did not say it—I merely let him think so.”

She added presently, “He has spoken of money.”

“Yes?” went Adela, in a low breath.

“Cornelia imagines that—that we—he is perhaps in—in want of it. Merchants are, sometimes.”

“Did Sir Twickenham say he would call to-morrow?” asked Adela.

“He said that most probably he would.”

Wilfrid had been silent. As he entered the house, Mr. Pole’s bedroom-bell rang, and word came that he was to go to his father. As soon as the sisters were alone, Adela groaned: “We have been hunting that girl all day in vile neighbourhoods. Wilfrid has not spoken more than a dozen sentences. I have had to dine on buns and hideous soup. I am half-dead with the smell of cabs. Oh! if ever I am poor it will kill me. That damp hay and close musty life are too intolerable! Yes! You see I care for what I eat. I seem to be growing an animal. And Wilfrid is going to drag me over the same course to-morrow, if you don’t prevent him. I would not mind, only it is absolutely necessary that I should see Sir Twickenham.”

She gave a reason why, which appeared to Arabella so cogent that she said at once: “If Cornelia does not take your place I will.”

The kiss of thanks given by Adela was accompanied by a request for tea. Arabella regretted that she had sent the servants to bed.

“To bed!” cried her sister. “But they are the masters, not we! Really, if life were a round of sensual pleasure, I think our servants might congratulate themselves.”

Arabella affected to show that they had their troubles; but her statement made it clear that the servants of Brookfield were peculiarly favoured servants, as it was their mistress’s pride to make them. Eventually Adela consented to drink some sparkling light wine; and being thirsty she drank eagerly, and her tongue was loosed, insomuch that she talked of things as one who had never been a blessed inhabitant of the kingdom of Fine Shades. She spoke of ‘Cornelia’s chances;’ of ’Wilfrid’s headstrong infatuation—or worse;’ and of ‘Papa’s position,’ remarking that she could both laugh and cry.

Arabella, glad to see her refreshed, was pained by her rampant tone; and when Adela, who had fallen into one of her reflective ‘long-shot’ moods, chanced to say, “What a number of different beings there are in the world!” her reply was, “I was just then thinking we are all less unlike than we suppose.”

Page 695

“Oh, my goodness!” cried Adela. “What! am I at all—at all—in the remotest degree—-like that creature we have got rid of?”

The negative was not decisively enunciated or immediate; that is, it did not come with the vehemence and volume that could alone have satisfied Adela’s expectation.

The “We are all of one family” was an offensive truism, of which Adela might justly complain.

That night the ladies received their orders from Wilfrid—they were to express no alarm before their father as to the state of his health, or to treat him ostensibly as an invalid; they were to marvel publicly at Mrs. Chump’s continued absence, and a letter requesting her to return was to be written. At the sign of an expostulation, Wilfrid smote them down by saying that the old man’s life hung on a thread, and it was for them to cut it or not.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Lady Charlotte was too late for Emilia, when she went forth to her to speak for Wilfrid. She found the youth Braintop resting heavily against a tree, muttering to himself that he had no notion where he was, as an excuse for his stationary posture, while the person he presumed he should have detained was being borne away. Near him a scrap of paper lay on the ground, struck out of darkness by long slips of light from the upper windows. Thinking this might be something purposely dropped, she took possession of it; but a glance subsequently showed her that the writing was too fervid for a female hand. “Or does the girl write in that way?” she thought. She soon decided that it was Wilfrid who had undone her work in the line of thirsty love-speech. “How can a little fool read them and not believe any lie that he may tell!” she cried to herself. She chose to say contemptuously: “It’s like a child proclaiming he is hungry.” That it was couched in bad taste she positively conceived—taking the paper up again and again to correct her memory. The termination, “Your lover,” appeared to her, if not laughable, revolting. She was uncertain in her sentiments at this point.

Was it amusing? or simply execrable? Some charity for the unhappy document Lady Charlotte found when she could say: “I suppose this is the general run of the kind of again.” “Was it?” she reflected; and drank at the words again. “No,” she came to think; “men don’t commonly write as he does, whoever wrote this.” She had no doubt that it was Wilfrid. By fits her wrath was directed against him. “It’s villany,” she said. But more and more frequently a crouching abject longing to call the words her own—to have them poured into her heart and brain—desire for the intoxication of the naked speech of love usurped her spirit of pride, until she read with envious tears, half loathing herself, but fascinated and subdued: “Mine! my angel! You will see me to-morrow.—Your Lover.”

Of jealousy she felt very little—her chief thought coming like a wave over her: “Here is a man that can love!”

Page 696

She was a woman of chaste blood, which spoke to her as shyly as a girl's, now that it was in tumult: so indeed that, pressing her heart, she thought youth to have come back, and feasted on the exultation we have when, at an odd hour, we fancy we have cheated time. The sensation of youth and strength seemed to set a seal of lawfulness and naturalness, hitherto wanting, on her feeling for Wilfrid. "I can help him," she thought. "I know where he fails, and what he can do. I can give him position, and be worth as much as any woman can be to a man." Thus she justified the direction taken by the new force in her.

Two days later Wilfrid received a letter from Lady Charlotte, saying that she, with a chaperon, had started to join her brother at the yacht-station, according to appointment. Amazed and utterly discomfited, he looked about for an escape; but his father, whose plea of sickness had kept him from pursuing Emilia, petulantly insisted that he should go down to Lady Charlotte. Adela was ready to go. There were numbers either going or now on the spot, and the net was around him. Cornelia held back, declaring that her place was by her father's side. Fine Shades were still too dominant at Brookfield for anyone to tell her why she stayed.

With anguish so deep that he could not act indifference, Wilfrid went on his miserable expedition—first setting a watch over Mr. Pericles, the which, in connection with the electric telegraph, was to enable him to join that gentleman speedily, whithersoever he might journey. He was not one to be deceived by the Greek's mask in running down daily to Brookfield. A manoeuvre like that was poor; and besides, he had seen the sallow eyes give a twinkle more than once.

Now, on the Besworth night, Georgiana Ford had studied her brother Merthyr's face when Emilia's voice called for Wilfrid. Her heart was touched; and, in the midst of some little invidious wonder at the power of a girl to throw her attraction upon such a man, she thought, as she hoped, that probably it was due to the girl's Italian blood. Merthyr was not unwilling to speak of her, and say what he feared and desired for Emilia's sake; and Georgiana read, by this mark of confidence, how sincerely she was loved and trusted by him. "One never can have more than half of a man's heart," she thought—adding, "It's our duty to deserve that, nevertheless."

She was mystified. Say that Merthyr loved a girl, whom he certainly distinguished with some visible affection, what sort of man must he be that was preferred to Merthyr? And this set Georgiana at work thinking of Wilfrid. "He has at times the air of a student. He is one who trusts his own light too exclusively. Is he godless?" She concluded: "He is a soldier, and an officer with brains—a good class:" Rare also. Altogether, though Emilia did not elevate herself in this lady's mind by choosing Wilfrid when she might have had Merthyr, the rivalry of the two men helped to dignify the one of whom she thought least. Might she have had Merthyr? Georgiana would not believe it—that is to say, she shut the doors and shot the bolts, the knocking outside went on.

Page 697

Her brother had told her the whole circumstances of Emilia's life and position. When he said, "Do what you can for her," she knew that it was not the common empty phrase. Young as she was, simple in habits, clear in mind, open in all practices of daily life, she was no sooner brought into an active course than astuteness and impetuosity combined wonderfully in her. She did not tell Merthyr that she had done anything to discover Emilia, and only betrayed that she was moving at all in a little conversation they had about a meeting at the house of his friend Marini, an Italian exile.

"Possibly Belloni goes there," said Merthyr. "I wonder whether Marini knows anything of him. They have a meeting every other night."

Georgiana replied: "He went there and took his daughter the night after we were at Besworth. He took her to be sworn in."

"Still that old folly of Marini's!" cried Merthyr, almost wrathfully. He had some of the English objection to the mixing-up of women in political matters.

Georgiana instantly addressed herself to it: "He thinks that the country must be saved by its women as well as its men; and if they have not brains and steadfast devotion, he concludes that the country will not be saved. But he gives them their share of the work; and, dearest, has he had reason to repent it?"

"No," Merthyr was forced to admit—taking shelter in his antipathy to the administration of an oath to women. And consider that this is a girl!"

"The oaths of girls are sometimes more binding on them than the oaths of women."

"True, it affects their imaginations vividly; but it seems childish. Does she have to kiss a sword and a book?"

Merthyr made a gesture like a shrug, with a desponding grimace.

"You know," answered Georgiana, smiling, "that I was excused any formula, by special exemption. I have no idea of what is done. Water, salt, white thorns, and other Carbonaro mysteries may be in use or not: I think no worse of the cause, whatever is done."

"I love the cause," said Merthyr. "I dislike this sort of conspiratorial masque Marini and his Chief indulge in. I believe it sustains them, and there's its only use."

"I," said Georgiana, "love the cause only from association with it; but in my opinion Marini is right. He deals with young and fervent minds, that require a ceremony to keep them fast—yes, dear, and women more than others do. After that, they cease to have to rely upon themselves—a reliance their good instinct teaches them is frail. There, now; have I put my sex low enough?"

She slid her head against her brother's shoulder. If he had ever met a man worthy of her, Merthyr would have sighed to feel that all her precious love was his own.

"Is there any likelihood that Belloni will be there tonight?" he asked.

She shook her head. "He has not been there since. He went for that purpose."

Page 698

“Perhaps Marini is right, after all,” said Merthyr, smiling.

Georgiana knew what he meant, and looked at him fondly.

“But I have never bound you to an oath,” he resumed, in the same tone.

“I dare say you consider me a little different from most,” said Georgiana. She had as small reserve with her brother as vanity, and could even tell him what she thought of her own worth without depreciating it after the fashion of chartered hypocrites.

Mr. Powys wrote to Marini to procure him an interview with Belloni as early as possible, and then he and Georgiana went down to Lady Charlotte.

Letters from Adela kept the Brookfield public informed of the doings on board the yacht. Before leaving home, Wilfrid with Arabella’s concurrence certainly—at her instigation, as he thought—had led his father to imagine, on tolerably good grounds, that Mrs. Chump had quitted Brookfield to make purchases for her excursion on lively waters, and was then awaiting him at the appointed station. One of the old man’s intermittent nervous fits had frightened them into the quasi-fabrication of this little innocent tale. The doctor’s words were that Mr. Pole was to be crossed in nothing—“Not even if it should appear to be of imminent necessity that I should see him, and he refuses.” The man of science stated that the malady originated in some long continued pressure of secret apprehension. Both Wilfrid and Arabella conceived that persuasion alone was wanted to send Mrs. Chump flying to the yacht; so they had less compunction in saying, “She is there.”

And here began a terrible trial for the children of Nine Shades. To save a father they had to lie grievously—to continue the lie from day to day—to turn it from a lie extensive and inappreciable to the lie minute and absolute. Then, to get a particle of truth out of this monstrous lie, they had to petition in utter humiliation the woman they had scorned, that she would return among them and consider their house her own. No answer came from Mrs. Chump; and as each day passed, the querulous invalid, still painfully acting the man in health, had to be fed with fresh lies; until at last, writing of one of the scenes in Brookfield, Arabella put down the word in all its unblessed aboriginal bluntness, and did not ask herself whether she shrank from it. “Lies!” she wrote. “What has happened to Bella?” thought Adela, in pure wonder. Salt-air and dazzling society kept all idea of penance from this vivacious young person. It was queer that Sit Twickenham should be at the seaside, instead of at Brookfield, wooing; but a man’s physical condition should be an excuse for any intermission of attentions. “Now that I know him better,” wrote Adela, “I think him the pink of chivalry; and of this I am sure I can convince you, Bella, C. will be blessed indeed; for a delicate nature in a man of the world is a treasure. He has a beautiful little vessel of his own sailing beside us.”

Page 699

Arabella was critic enough to smile at this last. On the whole she was passably content for the moment, in a severe fashion, save to feel herself the dreadful lying engine and fruitlessly abject person that she had become.

We imagine that when souls have had a fall, they immediately look up and contrast their present with their preceding position. This does not occur. The lower their fall, the less, generally, their despair, for despair is a business of the Will, and when they come heavily upon their humanity, they get something of the practical seriousness of nature. If they fall very low, the shock and the sense that they are still on their feet make them singularly earnest to set about the plain plan of existence—getting air for their lungs and elbow-room. Contrast, that mother of melancholy, comes when they are some way advanced upon the upward scale. The Poles did not look up to their lost height, but merely exerted their faculties to go forward; and great as their ambition had been in them, now that it was suddenly blown to pieces, they did not sit and weep, but strove in a stunned way to work ahead. The truth is, that we rarely indulge in melancholy until we can take it as a luxury: little people never do, and they, when we have not put them on their guard, are humankind naked.

The yachting excursions were depicted vividly by Adela, and were addressed as a sort of reproach to the lugubrious letters of her sister. She said pointedly once: “Really, if we are to be miserable, I turn Catholic and go into a convent.” The strange thing was that Arabella imagined her letters to be rather of a cheerful character. She related the daily events at Brookfield:—the change in her father’s soups, and his remarks on them, and which he preferred; his fight with his medicine, and declaration that he was as sound as any man on shore; the health of the servants; Mr. Marter the curate’s call with a Gregorian chant; doubts of his orthodoxy; Cornelia’s lonely walks and singular appetite; the bills, and so forth—ending, “What is to be said further of her?”

In return, Adela’s delight was to date each day from a different port, to which, catching the wind, the party had sailed, and there slept. The ladies were under the protecting wing of the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle, a smooth woman of the world. “You think she must have sinned in her time, but are certain it will never be known,” wrote Adela. “I do confess, kind as she is, she does me much harm; for when she is near me I begin to think that Society is everything. Her tact is prodigious; it is never seen—only felt. I cannot describe her influence; yet it leads to nothing. I cannot absolutely respect her; but I know I shall miss her acutely when we part. What charm does she possess? I call her the Hon. Mrs. Heathen—Captain G., the Hon. Mrs. Balm. I know you hate nicknames. Be merciful to people yachting. What are we to do? I would look through a telescope all day

Page 700

and calculate the number of gulls and gannets we see; but I am not so old as Sir T., and that occupation could not absorb me. I begin to understand Lady Charlotte and her liking for Mr. Powys better. He is ready to play or be serious, as you please; but in either case 'Merthyr is never a buffoon nor a parson'—Lady C. remarked this morning; and that describes him, if it were not for the detestable fling at the clergy, which she never misses. It seems in her blood to think that all priests are hypocrites. What a little boat to be in on a stormy sea, Bella! She appears to have no concern about it. Whether she adores Wilfrid or not I do not pretend to guess. She snubs him—a thing he would bear from nobody but her. I do believe he feels flattered by it. He is chiefly attentive to Miss Ford, whom I like and do not like, and like and do not like—but do like. She is utterly cold, and has not an affection on earth. Sir T.—I have not a dictionary—calls her a fair clictic, I think. (Let even Cornelia read hard, or woe to her in their hours of privacy!—his vocabulary grows distressingly rich the more you know him. I am not uneducated, but he introduces me to words that seem monsters; I must pretend to know them intimately.) Well, whether a clictic or not—and pray, burn this letter, lest I should not have the word correct—she has the air of a pale young princess above any creature I have seen in the world. I know it has struck Wilfred also; my darling and I are ever twins in sentiment. He converses with Miss Ford a great deal. Lady C. is peculiarly civil to Captain G. We scud along, and are becalmed. 'Having no will of our own, we have no knowledge of contrary winds,' as Mr. Powys says.—The word is 'eclictic,' I find. I ventured on it, and it was repeated; and I heard that I had missed a syllable. Ask C. to look it out—I mean, to tell me they mining on a little slip of paper in your next. I would buy a pocket-dictionary at one of the ports, but you are never alone. "Aesthetic," we know. Mr. Barrett used to be of service for this sort of thing. I admit I am inferior to Mrs. Bayruffle, who, if men talk difficult words in her presence, holds her chin above the conversation, and seems to shame them. I love to learn—I love the humility of learning. And there is something divine in the idea of a teacher. I listen to Sir T. on Parliament and parties, and chide myself if my interest flags. His algebra-puzzles, or Euclid-puzzles in figures—sometimes about sheep-boys and sheep, and hurdles or geese, oxen or anything—are delicious: he quite masters the conversation with them. I disagree with Mrs. Bayruffle when she complains that they are posts in the way of speech. There is a use in all men; and though she is an acknowledged tactician materially, she cannot see she has in Sir T. a quality necessary to intellectual conversation, if she knew how to employ it."

Page 701

Remarks of this nature read very oddly to Arabella, insomuch that she would question herself at times, in forced seriousness, whether she had dreamed that an evil had befallen Brookfield, or whether Adela were forgetting that it had, in a dream. One day she enclosed a letter from her father to Mrs. Chump. Adela did not forge a reply; but she had the audacity to give the words of a message from the woman (in which Mrs. Chump was supposed to say that she could not write while she was being tossed about.) “We must carry it on,” Adela told her sister, with horrible bluntness. The message savoured strongly of Mrs. Chump. It was wickedly clever. Arabella resolved to put it by; but morning after morning she saw her father’s anxiety for the reply mounting to a pitch of fever. She consulted with Cornelia, who said, “No; never do such a thing!” and subsequently, with a fainter firmness, repeated the negative monosyllable. Arabella, in her wretchedness, became endued with remorseless discernment. “It means that Cornelia would never do it herself,” she thought; and, comforted haply by reflecting that for their common good she could do it, she did it. She repeated an Irish message. Her father calmed immediately, making her speak it over twice. He smiled, and blinked his bird’s-eyes pleasurably: “Ah! that’s Martha,” he said, and fell into a state of comparative repose. For some hours a sensation of bubbling hot-water remained about the sera of Arabella. Happily Mrs. Chump in person did not write.

A correspondence now commenced between the fictitious Mrs. Chump on sea and Mr. Pole, dyspeptic, in his armchair. Arabella took the doctor aside to ask him, if in a hypothetical instance, it would really be dangerous to thwart or irritate her father. She asked the curate if he deemed it wicked to speak falsely to an invalid for the invalid’s benefit. The spiritual and bodily doctors agreed that occasion altered and necessity justified certain acts. So far there was comfort. But the task of assisting in this correspondence, and yet more, the contemplation of Adela’s growing delight in it (she would now use Irish words, vulgar words, words expressive of physical facts; airing her natural wit in Irish as if she had found a new weapon), became a bitter strain on Arabella’s mind, and she was compelled to make Cornelia take her share of the burden. “But I cannot conceal—I cannot feign,” said Cornelia. Arabella looked at her, whom she knew to be feigning, thinking, “Must I lose my high esteem of both my sisters?” Action alone saved her from denuding herself of this garment.”

“That night!” was now the allusion to the scene at Besworth. It stood for all the misery they suffered; nor could they see that they had since made any of their own.

A letter with the Dover postmark brought exciting news.

Page 702

A debate had been held on board the yacht. Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte gave their votes for the Devon coast. All were ready to be off, when Miss Ford received a telegram from shore, and said, “No; it must be Dover.” Now, Mrs. Chump’s villa was on the Devon coast. Lady Charlotte had talked to Wilfrid about her, and in the simplest language had said that she must be got on board. This was the reason of their deciding for Devon. But Georgiana stood for Dover; thither Merthyr said that he must go, whether be sailed or went on land. By a simultaneous reading of Georgiana’s eyes, both Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte saw what was meant by her decision. Wilfrid at once affected to give way, half-protestingly. “And this,” wrote Adela, “taught me that he was well pleased to abandon the West for the East. Lady C. favoured him with a look such as I could not have believed I should ever behold off the stage. There was a perfect dagger in her eyes. She fought against Dover: do men feel such compliments as these? They are the only true ones! She called the captain to witness that the wind was not for Dover she called the mate: she was really eloquent—yes, and handsome. I think Wilfrid thought so; or the reason far the opposition to Dover impressed my brother. I like him to be made to look foolish, for then he retrieves his character so dashingly—always. His face was red, and he seemed undecided—was—until one taunt (it must have been a taunt), roused him up. They exchanged about six sentences—these two. I cannot remember them, unhappily; but for neatness and irony, never was anything so delicious heard. They came sharp as fencing-thrusts; and you could really believe, if you liked, that they were merely stating grounds for diverse opinions. Of course we sailed East, reaching Dover at ten; and the story is this—I knew Emilia was in it:—Tracy Runningbrook had been stationed at Dover ten days by Miss Ford, to intercept Emilia’s father, if he should be found taking her to the Continent by that route. He waited, and met them at last on the Esplanade. He telegraphed to Miss Ford and a Signor Marini (we were wrong in not adding illustrious exiles to our list), while he invited them to dine, and detained them till the steamboat was starting; and Signor Marini came down by rail in a great hurry, and would not let Emilia be taken away. There was a quarrel; but, by some mysterious power that he possesses, this Signor Marini actually prevented the father from taking his child. Mysterious? But is anything more mysterious than Emilia’s influence? I cannot forget what she was ere we trained her; and when I think that we seem to be all—all who come near her—connected with her fortunes! Explain it if you can. I know it is not her singing; I know it is not her looks. Captivations she does not deal in. Is it the magic of indifference? No; for then some one whom you know and who longs to kiss her bella Bella now would be dangerous! She is very little so, believe me!

Page 703

“Emilia is (am I chronicling a princess?)—she is in London with Signor Marini; and Wilfrid has not seen her. Lady Charlotte managed to get the first boat full, and pushed off as he was about to descend. I pitied his poor trembling hand I went on shore in the second boat with him. We did not find the others for an hour, when we heard that Emilia had gone with Signor M. The next day, whom should we sea but Mr. Pericles. He (I have never seen him so civil)—he shook Wilfrid by the hand almost like an Englishman; and Wilfrid too, though he detests him, was civil to him, and even laughed when he said: ’Here it is dull; ze Continent for a week. I follow Philomela—ze nightingales.’ I was just going to say, ’Well then, you are running away from one.’ Wilfrid pressed my fingers, and taught me to be still; and I did not know why till I reflected. Poor Mr. Pericles, seeing him friendly for the first time, rubbed his hands and it was most painful to me to see him shake hands with Wilfrid again and again, till he was on board the vessel chuckling. Wilfrid suddenly laughed with all his might—a cruel laugh; and Mr. Pericles tried to be as loud, but commenced coughing and tapping his chest, to explain that his intention was good. Bella! the passion of love must be judged by the person who inspires it; and I cannot even go so far as to feel pity for Wilfrid if he has stooped to the humiliation of—there is another way of regarding it, know. Let him be sincere and noble; but not his own victim. He scarcely holds up his head. We are now for Devon. Tracy is with us; and we never did a wiser thing than when we decided to patronize poets. If kept in order—under—they are the aristocracy of light conversationalists. Adieu! We speed for beautiful Devon. ’Me love to Pole, and I’m just,’ *etc*. That will do this time; next, she will speak herself. That I should wish it! But the world is full of change, as I begin to learn. What will ensue?”

CHAPTER XXXV

When Mrs. Chump had turned her back on Brookfield, the feelings of the outcast woman were too deep for much distinctly acrimonious sensation toward the ladies; but their letters soon lifted and revived her, until, being in a proper condition of prickly wrath, she sat down to compose a reply that should bury them under a mountain of shame. The point, however, was to transfer this mountain from her bosom, which laboured heavily beneath it, to their heads. Nothing could appear simpler. Here is the mountain; the heads are yonder. Accordingly, she prepared to commence. In a moment the difficulty yawned monstrous. For the mountain she felt was not a mountain of shame; yet that was the character of mountain she wished to cast. If she crushed them, her reputation as a forgiving soul might suffer: she could not pardon without seeing them abased. Thus shaken at starting, she found herself writing: “I know that your father has been hearing tales told of me, or he would have written, and he has not; so you shall never see me, not if you cried to me from the next world—the hot part.”

Page 704

Perusing this, it was too tremendous. “Oh, that’s awful!” she said, getting her body a little away from the manuscript. “Ye couldn’t curse much louder.”

A fresh trial found her again rounding the fact that Mr. Pole had not written to her, and again flying into consequent angers. She had some dim conception of the sculpture of an offended Goddess. “I look so,” she said before the glass “I’m above ye, and ye can’t hurt me, and don’t come anigh me: but here’s a cheque—and may ye be haunted in your dreams!—but here’s a cheque.”

There was pain in her heart, for she had felt faith in Mr. Pole’s affection for her. “And he said,” she cried out in her lonely room—“he said, ’Martha, ye’ve onnly to come and be known to ’m, and then they’ll take to the ideea.’ And wasn’t I a patient creature! And it’s Pole that’s turned—Pole!”

Varied with the frequent ‘Oh!’ and ‘Augh!’ these dramatic monologues occupied her time while the yacht was sailing for her Devon bay.

At last the thought struck her that she would send for Braintop—telegraphing that expenses would be paid, and that he must come with a good quill. “It goes faster,” she whispered, suggesting the pent-up torrent, as it were, of blackest ink in her breast that there was to pour forth. A very cunning postscript to the telegram brought Braintop almost as quick to her as a return message. It was merely ’Little Belloni.’

She had forgotten this piece of artifice: but when she saw him start at the opening of the door, keeping a sheepish watch in that direction, “By’n-by,” she said, with a nod; and shortly afterward unfolded her object in summoning him from his London labours: “A widde-woman ought to get marrud, Mr. Braintop, if onnly to have a husband to write letters for ’rr. Now, that’s a task! But sup to-night, and mind ye say yer prayers before gettin’ into bed; and no tryin’ to flatter your Maker with your knees cuddled up to your chin under the counterpane. I do ’t myself sometimes, and I know one prayer out of bed’s worrth ten of ’m in. Then I’ll pray too; and mayhap we’ll get permission and help to write our letter to-morrow, though Sunday, as ye say.”

On the morrow Braintop’s spirits were low, he having perceived that the ‘Little Belloni’ postscript had been but an Irish chuckle and nudge in his ribs, by way of sly insinuation or reminder. He looked out on the sea, and sighed to be under certain white sails visible in the offing. Mrs. Chump had received by the morning’s post another letter from Arabella, enclosing one for Wilfrid. A dim sense of approaching mastery, and that she might soon be melted, combined with the continued silence of Mr. Pole to make her feel yet more spiteful. She displayed no commendable cunning when, to sharpen and fortify Braintop’s wits, she plumped him at breakfast with all things tempting to the appetite of man. “I’ll help ye to ’rr,” she said from time to time, finding that no encouragement made him potent in speech.

Page 705

Fronting the sea a desk was laid open. On it were the quills faithfully brought down by Braintop.

“Pole’s own quills,” she said, having fixed Braintop in this official seat, while she took hers at a station half-commanding the young clerk’s face. The mighty breakfast had given Braintop intolerable desire to stretch his limbs by the sounding shore, and enjoy life in semi-oblivion. He cheered himself with the reflection that there was only one letter to write, so he remarked politely that he was at his hostess’s disposal. Thereat Mrs. Chump questioned him closely whether Mr. Pole had spoken her name aloud; and whether he did it somehow, now and then by accident, and whether he had looked worse of late. Braintop answered the latter question first, assuring her that Mr. Pole was improving.

“Then there’s no marcy from me,” said Mrs. Chump; and immediately discharged an exclamatory narrative of her recent troubles, and the breach between herself and Brookfield, at Braintop’s ears. This done, she told him that he was there to write the reply to the letters of the ladies, in her name. “Begin,” she said. “Ye’ve got head enough to guess my feelin’s. I’m invited, and I won’t go—till I’m fetched. But don’t say that. That’s their guess ye know. ’And I don’t care for ye enough to be angry at all, but it’s pity I feel at a parcel of fine garls’—so on, Mr. Braintop.”

The perplexities of epistolary correspondence were assuming the like proportions to the recruited secretary that they had worn to Mrs. Chump. Steadily watching his countenance; she jogged him thus: “As if ye couldn’t help ut, ye know, ye begin. Jest like wakin’ in the mornin’ after dancin’ all night. Ye make the garls seem to hear me seemin’ to say—Oooo! I was so comfortable before your disturbin’ me with your horrud voices. Ye understand, Mr. Braintop? ’I’m in bed, and you’re a cold bath.’ Begin like that, ye know. ’Here’s clover, and you’re nettles.’ D’ye see? Here from my glass o’ good Porrt to your tumbler of horrud acud vin’gar.’ Bless the boy! he don’t begin.”

She stamped her foot. Braintop, in desperation, made a plunge at the paper. Looking over his shoulder in a delighted eagerness, she suddenly gave it a scornful push. “‘Dear!’” she exclaimed. “You’re dearin’ them, absurd young man I’m not the woman to I dear ’em—not at the starrt! I’m indignant—I’m hurrt. I come round to the ‘dear’ by-and-by, after I have whipped each of the proud sluts, and their brother Mr. Wilfrid, just as if by accident. Ye’ll promus to forget avery secret I tell ye; but our way is always to pretend to believe the men can’t help themselves. So the men look like fools, ye sly laughin’ fella! and the women horrud scheming spiders. Now, away, with ye, and no dearin’.”

The Sunday-bells sounded mockingly in Braintop’s ears, appearing to ask him how he liked his holiday; and the white sails on the horizon line have seldom taunted prisoner more. He spread out another sheet of notepaper and wrote “My,” and there he stopped.

Page 706

Mrs. Chump was again at his elbow. “But, they aren’t ‘my,’ she remonstrated, “when I’ve nothin’ to do with ’m. And a ‘my’ has a ‘dear’ to ’t always. Ye’re not awake, Mr. Braintop; try again.”

“Shall I begin formally, ‘Mrs. Chump presents her compliments,’ ma’am?” said Braintop stiffly.

“And I stick myself up on a post, and talk like a parrot, sir! Don’t you see, I’m familiar, and I’m woundud? Go along; try again.”

Braintop’s next effort was, “Ladies.”

“But they don’t behave to me like ladus; and it’s against my conscience to call ’em!” said Mrs. Chump, with resolution.

Braintop wrote down “Women,” in the very irony of disgust.

“And avery one of ’em unmarred garls!” exclaimed Mrs. Chump, throwing up her hands. “Mr. Braintop! Mr. Braintop! ye’re next to an ejut!”

Braintop threw dawn the pen. “I really do not know what to say,” he remarked, rising in distress.

“I naver had such a desire to shake anny man in all my life,” said Mrs. Chump, dropping to her chair.

The posture of affairs was chimed to by the monotonous bell. After listening to it for some minutes, Mrs. Chump was struck with a notion that Braintop’s sinfulness in working on a Sunday, or else the shortness of the prayer he had put up to gain absolution, was the cause of his lack of ready wit. Hearing that he had gloves, she told him to go to church, listen devoutly, and return to luncheon. Braintop departed, with a sensation of relief in the anticipation of a sermon, quite new to him. When he next made his bow to his hostess, he was greeted by a pleasant sparkle of refreshments. Mrs. Chump herself primed him with Sherry, thinking in the cunning of her heart that it might haply help the inspiration derived from his devotional exercise. After this, pen and paper were again produced.

“Well, now, Mr. Braintop, and what have ye thought of?” said Mrs. Chump, encouragingly.

Braintop thought rapidly over what he might possibly have been thinking of; and having put a file of ideas into the past, said, with the air of a man who delicately suggests a subtlety: “It has struck me, ma’am, that perhaps ‘Girls’ might begin very well. To be sure ‘Dear girls’ is the best, if you would consent to it.”

“Take another glass of wine, Mr. Braintop,” Mrs. Chump nodded. “Ye’re nearer to ut now. ‘Garls’ is what they are, at all events. But don’t you see, my dear your man, it isn’t the real thing we want so much as a sort of a proud beginnin’, shorrt of slappin’ their faces. Think of dinner. Furrst soup; that prepares ye for what’s comin’. Then fish, which is on the road to meat, dye see?—we pepper ’em. Then joint, Mr. Braintop—out we burrst: (Oh, and what ins’lent hussies ye’ve been to me, and yell naver see annything of me but my back!) Then the sweets,—But I’m a forgivin’ woman, and a Christian in the bargain, ye ungrateful minxes; and if ye really are sorrowful! And there, Mr. Braintop, ye’ve got it all laid out as flat as a pancake.”

Page 707

Mrs. Chump gave the motion of a lightning scrawl of the pen. Braintop looked at the paper, which now appeared to recede from his eyes, and flourish like a descending kite. The nature of the task he had undertaken became mountainous in his imagination, till at last he fixed his forehead in his thumbs and fingers, and resolutely counted a number of meaningless words one hundred times. As this was the attitude of a severe student, Mrs. Chump remained in expectation. Aware of the fearful confidence he had excited in her, Braintop fell upon a fresh hundred, with variations.

“The truth is, I think better in church,” he said, disclosing at last as ingenuous a face as he could assume. He scarcely ventured to hope for a second dismissal.

To his joy, Mrs. Chump responded with a sigh: “There, go again; and the Lord forgive ye for directin’ your mind to temporal matters when ye’re there! It’s none of my doin’, remember that; and don’t be tryin’ to make me a partic’pator in your wickudness.”

“This is so difficult, ma’am, because you won’t begin with Dear,” he observed snappishly, as he was retiring.

“Of coorse it’s difficult if it bothers me,” retorted Mrs. Chump, divided between that view of the case and contempt of Braintop for being on her own level.

“Do you see, we are not to say ‘Dear’ anything, or ‘Ladies,’ or—in short, really, if you come to think, ma’am!”

“Is that a woman’s business, Mr. Braintop?” said Mrs. Chump, as from a height; and the youth retired in humiliation.

Braintop was not destitute of the ambition of his time of life, and yearned to be what he believed himself—something better than a clerk. If he had put forth no effort to compose Mrs. Chump’s letter, he would not have felt that he was the partner of her stupidity; but he had thoughtlessly attempted the impossible thing, and now, contemplating his utter failure, he was in so low a state of mind that he would have taken pen and written himself down, with ordinary honesty, good-for-nothing. He returned to his task, and found the dinner spread. Mrs. Chump gave him champagne, and drank to him, requesting him to challenge her. “We won’t be beaten,” she said; and at least they dined.

The ‘we’ smote Braintop’s swelling vanity. It signified an alliance, and that they were yoked to a common difficulty.

“Oh! let’s finish it and have it over,” he remarked, with a complacent roll in his chair.

“Naver stop a good impulse,” said Mrs. Chump, herself removing the lamp to light him.

Braintop sat in the chair of torture, and wrote flowingly, while his taskmistress looked over him, “Ladies of Brookfield.” He read it out: “Ladies of Brookfield.”

“I’ll be vary happy to represent ye at the forthcomin’ ’lection,” Mrs. Chump gave a continuation in his tone.

“Why, won’t that do, ma’am?” Braintop asked in wonderment.

“Cap’tal for a circular, Mr. Braintop. And ye’ll allow me to say that I don’t think ye’ve been to church at all.”

Page 708

This accusation containing a partial truth (that is, true if it referred to the afternoon, but not as to the morning), it was necessary for Braintop's self-vindication that he should feel angry. The two were very soon recriminating, much in the manner of boy and girl shut up on a sunny afternoon; after which they, in like manner, made it up—the fact of both having a habit of consulting the glass, and the accident of their doing it at the same time, causing an encounter of glances there that could hardly fail to be succeeded by some affability. For a last effort, Mrs. Chump laid before Braintop a prospect of advancement in his office, if he so contrived as to write a letter that should land her in Brookfield among a scourged, repentant, and forgiven people. That he might understand the position, she went far modestly to reveal her weakness for Mr. Pole. She even consented to let 'Ladies' be the opening apostrophe, provided the word 'Young' went before it: "They'll feel that sting," she said. Braintop stipulated that she should not look till the letter was done; and, observing his pen travelling the lines in quick succession, Mrs. Chump became inspired by a great but uneasy hope. She was only to be restrained from peeping, by Braintop's petulant "Pray, ma'am!" which sent her bouncing back to her chair, with a face upon one occasion too solemn for Braintop's gravity. He had written himself into excellent spirits; and happening to look up as Mrs. Chump retreated from his shoulder, the woman's comic reverence for his occupation—-the prim movement of her lips while she repeated mutely the words she supposed he might be penning—touched him to laughter. At once Mrs. Chump seized on the paper. "Young ladus," she read aloud, "yours of the 2nd, the 14th, and 21st ulto. The 'ffection I bear to your onnly remaining parent."

Her enunciation waxed slower and significantly staccato toward a pause. The composition might undoubtedly have issued from a merchant's office, and would have done no discredit to the establishment. When the pause came, Braintop, half for an opinion, and to encourage progress, said, "Yes, ma'am;" and with "There, sir!" Mrs. Chump crumpled up the paper and flung it at him. "And there, sir!" she tossed a pen. Hearing Braintop mutter, "Lady-like behaviour," Mrs. Chump came out in a fiery bloom. "Ye detestable young fella! Oh, ye young deceiver! Ye cann't do the work of a man! Oh! and here's another woman dis'pointed, and when she thought she'd got a man to write her letters!"

Braintop rose and retorted.

"Ye're false, Mr. Braintop—ye're offensuv, sir!" said Mrs. Chump; and Braintop instantly retired upon an expressive bow. When he was out of the room, Mrs. Chump appealed spitefully to an audience of chairs; but when she heard the front-door shut with a report, she jumped up in terror, crying incredulously, "Is the young man pos'tively one? Oh! and me alone in a rage!—" the contemplated horrors of which position set her

Page 709

shouting vociferously. “Mr. Braintop!” sounded over the stairs, and “Mr. Braintop!” into the street. The maid brought Mrs. Chump her bonnet. Night had fallen; and nothing but the greatest anxiety to recover Braintop would have tempted her from her house. She made half-a-dozen steps, and then stopped to mutter, “Oh! if ye’d onnly come, I’d forgive ye—indeed I would!”

“Well, here I am,” was instantaneously answered; her waist was clasped, and her forehead was kissed.

The madness of Braintop’s libertinism petrified her.

“Ye’ve taken such a liberty, sir ’deed ye’ve forgotten yourself!”

While she was speaking; she grew confused with the thought that Braintop had mightily altered both his voice and shape. When on the doorstep he said; “Come out of the darkness or, upon my honour, I shall behave worse,” she recognized Wilfrid, and understood by his yachting costume in what manner he had come. He gave her no time to think of her dignity or her wrath. “Lady Charlotte is with me. I sleep at the hotel; but you have no objection to receive her, have you?” This set her mind upon her best bedroom, her linen, and the fitness of her roof to receive a title. Then, in a partial fit of gratitude for the honour, and immense thankfulness at being spared the task of the letter, she fell on Wilfrid’s shoulder, beginning to sob—till he, in alarm at his absurd position, suggested that Lady Charlotte awaited a welcome. Mrs. Chump immediately flew to her drawing-room and rang bells, appearing presently with a lamp, which she set on a garden-pillar. Together they stood by the lamp, a spectacle to ocean: but no Lady Charlotte drew near.

CHAPTER, XXXVI

Though Mrs. Chump and Wilfrid, as they stood by the light of the lamp, saw no one, they themselves were seen. Lady Charlotte had arranged to give him a moment in advance to make his peace. She had settled it with that air of practical sense which her title made graceful to him. “I will follow; and I dare say I can complete what you leave unfinished,” she said. Her humorous sense of the aristocratic prestige was conveyed to him in a very taking smile. He scarcely understood why she should have planned so decisively to bring about a reconciliation between Mrs. Chump and his family; still, as it now chimed perfectly with his own views and wishes, he acquiesced in her scheme, giving her at the same time credit for more than common wisdom.

While Lady Charlotte lingered on the beach, she became aware of a figure that hung about her; as she was moving away, a voice of one she knew well enough asked to be directed to the house inhabited by Mrs. Chump. The lady was more startled than it pleased her to admit to herself.

“Don’t you know me?” she said, bluntly.

“You!” went Emilia’s voice.

“Why on earth are you here? What brings you here? Are you alone?” returned the lady.

Page 710

Emilia did not answer.

“What extraordinary expedition are you making? But, tell me one thing: are you here of your own accord, or at somebody else’s bidding?”

Impatient at the prospect of a continuation of silences, Lady Charlotte added, “Come with me.”

Emilia seemed to be refusing.

“The appointment was made at that house, I know,” said the lady; “but if you come with me, you will see him just as readily.”

At this instant, the lamp was placed on the pillar, showing Wilfrid, in his sailor’s hat and overcoat, beside the fluttering Irishwoman.

“Come, I must speak to you first,” said Lady Charlotte hurriedly, thinking that she saw Emilia’s hands stretch out. “Pray, don’t go into attitudes. There he is, as you perceive; and I don’t use witchcraft. Come with me; I will send for him. Haven’t you learnt by this time that there’s nothing he detests so much as a public display of the kind you’re trying to provoke?”

Emilia half comprehended her.

“He changes when he’s away from me,” she said, low toneless voice.

“Less than I fancied,” the lady thought.

Then she told Emilia that there was really no necessity for her to whine and be miserable; she was among friends, and so forth. The simplicity of her manner of speech found its way to Emilia’s reason quicker than her arguments; and, in the belief that Wilfrid was speaking to Mrs. Chump on urgent private matters (she had great awe of the word ’business’), Emilia suffered herself to be led away. She uttered twice a little exclamation, as she looked back, that sounded exceedingly comical to Lady Charlotte’s ears. They were the repressions of a poignant outcry. “Doggies make that noise,” thought the lady, and succeeded in feeling contemptuous.

Wilfrid, when he found that Lady Charlotte was not coming, bestowed a remark upon her sex, and went indoors for his letter. He considered it politic not to read it there, Mrs. Chump having grown so friendly, and even motherly, that she might desire, out of pure affection, to share the contents. He put it by and talked gaily, till Mrs. Chump, partly to account for the defection of the lady, observed that she knew they had a quarrel. She was confirmed in this idea on a note being brought in to him, over which, before opening it, he frowned and flushed. Aware of the treachery of his countenance, he continued doing so after his eyes had taken in the words, though there was no special ground

furnished by them for any such exhibition. Mrs. Chump immediately, with a gaze of mightiest tribulation, burst out: “I’ll help ye; ’pon my honour, I’ll help ye. Oh! the arr’stocracy! Oh, their pride! But if I say, my dear, when I die (which it’s so horrud to think of), you’ll have a share, and the biggest—this vary cottage, and a good parrt o’ the Bank property—she’ll come down at that. And if ye marry a lady of title, I’ll be ’s good as my word, I will.”

Page 711

Wilfrid pressed her fingers. “Can you ever believe that, I have called you a ’simmering pot of Emerald broth’?”

“My dear! annything that’s lots o’ words, Ye may call me,” returned Mrs. Chump, “as long as it’s no name. Ye won’t call me a name, will ye? Lots o’ words—it’s onnly as if ye peppered me, and I sneeze, and that’s all; but a name sticks to yer back like a bit o’ pinned paper. Don’t call me a name,” and she wriggled pathetically.

“Yes,” said Wilfrid, “I shall call you Pole.”

“Oh! ye sweetest of young fellas!”

Mrs. Chump threw out her arms. She was on the point of kissing him, but he fenced with the open letter; and learning that she might read it, she gave a cry of joy.

“Dear W.!” she begins; and it’s twice dear from a lady of title. She’s just a multiplication-table for annything she says and touches. “Dear W.!” and the shorter time a single you the better. I’ll have my joke, Mr. Wilfrud. “Dear W.!” Bless her heart now! I seem to like her next best to the Queen already.—“I have another plan.” Ye’d better keep to the old; but it’s two paths, I suppose, to one point.—“Another plan. Come to me at the Dolphin, where I am alone.” Oh, Lord! ‘Alone,’ with a line under it, Mr. Wilfrud! But there—the arr’stocracy needn’t matter a bit.”

“It’s a very singular proceeding not the less,” said Wilfrid. “Why didn’t she go to the hotel where the others are, if she wouldn’t come here?”

“But the arr’stocracy, Mr. Wilfrud! And alone—alone! d’ye see? which couldn’t be among the others; becas of sweet whisperin’. ‘Alone,’” Mrs. Chump read on; “’and to-morrow I’ll pay my respects to what you call your simmering pot of Emerald broth.’ Oh ye hussy! I’d say, if ye weren’t a borrn lady. And signs ut all, ‘Your faithful Charlotte.’ Mr. Wilfrud, I’d give five pounds for this letter if I didn’t know ye wouldn’t part with it under fifty. And ‘deed I am a simmerin’ pot; for she’ll be a relation, my dear! Go to ’r. I’ll have your bed ready for ye here at the end of an hour; and to-morrrow perhaps, if Lady Charlotte can spare me, I’ll condescend to see Ad’la.”

Wilfrid fanned her cheek with the note, and then dropped it on her neck and left the room. He was soon hurrying on his way to the Dolphin: midway he stopped. “There may be a bad shot in Bella’s letter,” he thought. Shop-lights were ahead: a very luminous chemist sent a green ray into the darkness. Wilfrid fixed himself under it. “Confoundedly appropriate for a man reading that his wife has run away from him!” he muttered, and hard quickly plunged into matter quite as absorbing. When he had finished it he shivered. Thus it ran:

“My beloved brother,

“I bring myself to plain words. Happy those who can trifle with human language! Papa has at last taken us into his confidence. He has not spoken distinctly; he did us the credit to see that it was not necessary. If in our abyss of grief we loss delicacy, what is left?—what!

Page 712

“The step he desired to take, Which We Opposed, he has anticipated, And Must Consummate.

“Oh, Wilfrid! you see it, do you not? You comprehend me I am surf! I should have said ‘had anticipated.’ How to convey to you! (but it would be unjust to him—to ourselves—-were I to say emphatically what I have not yet a right to think). What I have hinted above is, after all; nothing but Cornelia’s conjecture, I wish I could not say confirmed by mine. We sat with Papa two hours before any idea of his meaning dawned upon us. He first scolded us. We both saw from this that more was to come.

“I hope there are not many in this world to whom the thought of honour being tied to money ever appears possible. If it is so there is wide suffering—deep, for it, must be silent. Cornelia suggests one comfort for them that they will think less of poverty.

“Why was Brookfield ever bought? Our old peaceful City-life—the vacant Sundays!—-my ears are haunted by their bells for Evening Service. I said ‘There they go, the dowdy population of heaven!’ I remember it now. It should be almost punishment enough to be certain that of all those people going to church, there cannot be one more miserable than we who stood at the old window ridiculing them. They at least do not feel that everything they hope for in human life is dependent upon one human will—the will of a mortal weather-vane! It is the case, and it must be conciliated. There is no half-measure—no choice. Feel that nothing you have ever dreamed of can be a disgrace if it is undergone to forestall what positively impends, and act immediately. I shall expect to see you in three days. She is to have the South-west bedroom (mine), for which she expressed a preference. Prepare every mind for the ceremony:—an old man’s infatuation—money—we submit. It will take place in town. To have the Tinleys in the church! But this is certainly my experience, that misfortune makes me feel more and more superior to those whom I despise. I have even asked myself—was I so once? And, Apropos of Laura! We hear that their evenings are occupied in performing the scene at Besworth. They are still as distant as ever from Richford. Let me add that Albert Tinley requested my hand in marriage yesterday. I agree with Cornelia that this is the first palpable sign that we have sunk. Consequent upon the natural consequences came the interview with Papa.

“Dearest, dearest Wilfrid! can you, can I, can any one of us settle—that is, involve another life in doubt while doubt exists? Papa insists; his argument is, ‘Now, now, and no delay.’ I accuse nothing but his love. Excessive love is perilous for principle!

“You have understood me, I know, and forgiven me for writing so nakedly. I dare not reperuse it. You must satisfy him that Lady C. has fixed a date. Adela is incomprehensible. One day she sees a friend in Lady C., and again it is an enemy. Papa’s immediate state of health is not alarming. Above all things, do not let the girl come near him. Papa will send the cheque you required.”

Page 713

“When?” Wilfrid burst out upon Arabella’s affectionate signature. “When will he send it? He doesn’t do me the honour to mention the time. And this is his reply to a third application!”

The truth was that Wilfrid was in dire want of tangible cash simply to provision his yacht. The light kindled in him by this unsatisfied need made him keen to comprehend all that Arabella’s attempt at plain writing designed to unfold.

“Good God, my father’s the woman’s trustee!” shaped itself in Wilfrid’s brain.

And next: “If he marries her we may all be as poor as before.” That is to say, “Honour may be saved without ruin being averted.”

His immediate pressing necessity struck like a pulse through all the chords of dismal conjecture. His heart flying about for comfort, dropped at Emilia’s feet.

“Bella’s right,” he said, reverting to the green page in his hand; “we can’t involve others in our scrape, whatever it may be.”

He ceased on the spot to be at war with himself, as he had been for many a day; by which he was taught to imagine that he had achieved a mental indifference to misfortune. This lightened his spirit considerably. “So there’s an end of that,” he emphasized, as the resolve took form to tell Lady Charlotte flatly that his father was ruined, and that the son, therefore, renounced his particular hope and aspiration.

“She will say, in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, ’Oh, very well, that quite alters the case,’” said Wilfrid aloud, with the smallest infusion of bitterness. Then he murmured, “Poor old governor!” and wondered whether Emilia would come to this place according to his desire. Love, that had lain crushed in him for the few recent days, sprang up and gave him the thought, “She may be here now;” but, his eyes not being satiated instantly with a sight of her, the possibility of such happiness faded out.

“Blessed little woman!” he cried openly, ashamed to translate in tenderer terms the soft fresh blossom of love that his fancy conjured forth at the recollection of her. He pictured to himself hopefully, moreover, that she would be shy when they met. A contradictory vision of her eyes lifted hungry for his first words, or the pressure of his arm displeased him slightly. It occurred to him that they would be characterized as a singular couple. To combat this he drew around him all the mysteries of sentiment that had issued from her voice and her eyes. She had made Earth lovely to him and heaven human. She—-what a grief for ever that her origin should be what it was! For this reason:—lovers must live like ordinary people outwardly; and say, ye Fates, how had she been educated to direct a gentlemen’s household?

“I can’t exist on potatoes,” he pronounced humorously.

But when his thoughts began to dwell with fitting seriousness on the woman-of-the-world tone to be expected from Lady Charlotte, he folded the mental image of Emilia closely to his breast, and framed a misty idea of a little lighted cottage wherein she sat singing to herself while he was campaigning. “Two or three fellows—Lumley and Fredericks—shall see her,” he thought. The rest of his brother officers were not even to know that he was married.

Page 714

His yacht was lying in a strip of moonlight near Sir Twickenham's companion yawl. He gave one glance at it as at a history finished, and sent up his name to Lady Charlotte.

"Ah! you haven't brought the good old dame with you?" she said, rising to meet him. "I thought it better not to see her to-night."

He acquiesced, mentioning the lateness of the hour, and adding, "You are alone?"

She stared, and let fall "Certainly," and then laughed. "I had forgotten your regard for the proprieties. I have just sent my maid for Georgiana; she will sleep here. I preferred to come here, because those people at the hotel tire me; and, besides, I said I should sleep at the villa, and I never go back to people who don't expect me."

Wilfrid looked about the room perplexed, and almost suspicious because of his unexplained perplexity. Her (as he deemed it—not much above the level of Mrs. Chump in that respect) aristocratic indifference to opinion and conventional social observances would have pleased him by daylight, but it fretted him now.

Lady Charlotte's maid came in to say that Miss Ford would join her. The maid was dismissed to her bed. "There's nothing to do there," said her mistress, as she was moving to the folding-doors. The window facing seaward was open. He went straight to it and closed it. Next, in an apparent distraction, he went to the folding-doors. He was about to press the handle, when Lady Charlotte's quiet remark, "My bedroom," brought him back to his seat, crying pardon.

"Have you had news?" she inquired. "You thought that a letter might be there. Bad, is it?"

"It is not good," he replied, briefly.

"I am sorry."

"That is—it tells me—" (Wilfrid disciplined his tongue) "that I—we are—a lieutenant on half-pay may say that he is ruined, I suppose, when his other supplies are cut off!..."

"I can excuse him for thinking it," said Lady Charlotte. She exhibited no sign of eagerness for his statement of facts.

Her outward composure and a hard animation of countenance (which, having ceased the talking within himself, he had now leisure to notice) humiliated him. The sting helped him to progress.

"I may try to doubt it as much as I please, to avoid seeing what must follow.... I may shut my eyes in the dark, but when the light stares me in the face...I give you my word that I have not been justified even in imagining such a catastrophe."

“The preamble is awful,” said Lady Charlotte, rising from her recumbent posture.

“Pardon me; I have no right to intrude my feelings. I learn to-day, for the first time, that we are—are ruined.”

She did not lift her eyebrows, or look fixedly; but without any change at all, said, “Is there no doubt about it?”

“None whatever.” This was given emphatically. Resentment at the perfect realization of her anticipated worldly indifference lent him force.

Page 715

“Ruined?” she said.

“Yes.”

“You I’ll be more so than you were a month ago. I mean, you tell me nothing new, I have known it.”

Amid the crush and hurry in his brain, caused by this strange communication, pressed the necessity to vindicate his honour.

“I give you the word of a gentleman, Lady Charlotte, that I came to you the first moment it has been made known to me. I never suspected it before this day.”

“Nothing would prompt me to disbelieve that.” She reached him her hand.

“You have known it!” he broke from a short silence.

“Yes—never mind how. I could not allude to it. Of course I had to wait till you took the initiative.”

The impulse to think the best of what we are on the point of renouncing is spontaneous. If at the same time this object shall exhibit itself in altogether new, undreamt-of, glorious colours, others besides a sentimentalist might waver, and be in some danger of clutching it a little tenderly ere it is cast off.

“My duty was to tell you the very instant it came to my knowledge,” he said, fascinated in his heart by the display of greatness of mind which he now half divined to be approaching, and wished to avoid.

“Well, I suppose that is a duty between friends?” said she.

“Between friends! Shall we still—always be friends?”

“I think I have said more than once that it won’t be my fault if we are not.”

“Because, the greater and happier ambition to which I aspired...” This was what he designed to say, sentimentally propelled, by way of graceful exit, and what was almost printed on a scroll in his head for the tongue to read off fluently. He stopped at ‘the greater,’ beginning to stumble—to flounder; and fearing that he said less than was due as a compliment to the occasion, he said more.

By no means a quick reader of character, Lady Charlotte nevertheless perceived that the man who spoke in this fashion, after what she had confessed, must be sentimentally, if not actually, playing double.

Thus she came to his assistance: “Are you begging permission to break our engagement?”

“At least, whatever I do get I must beg for now!” He took refuge adroitly in a foolish reply, and it served him. That he had in all probability lost his chance by the method he had adopted, and by sentimentalizing at the wrong moment, was becoming evident, notwithstanding. In a sort of despair he attempted comfort by critically examining her features, and trying to suit them to one or other of the numerous models of Love that a young man carries about with him. Her eyes met his, and even as he was deciding against her on almost every point, the force of their frankness held his judgement in suspense.

“The world is rather harsh upon women in these cases,” she said, turning her head a lithe, with a conscious droop of the eyelids. “I will act as if we had an equal burden between us. On my side, what you have to tell me does not alter me. I have known it.... You see that I am just the same to you. For your part, you are free, if you please. That is fair dealing, is it not?”

Page 716

The gentleman's mechanical assent provoked the lady's smile.

But Wilfrid was torn between a profound admiration of her and the galling reflection that until she had named the engagement, none had virtually existed which diplomacy, aided by time and accident, might not have stopped.

"You must be aware that I am portionless," she continued. "I have—let me name the sum—a thousand pounds. It is some credit to me that I have had it five years and not spent it. Some men would think that a quality worth double the amount. Well, you will make up your mind to my bringing you no money;—I have a few jewels. En revanche, my habits are not expensive. I like a horse, but I can do without one. I like a large house, and can live in a small one. I like a French cook, and can dine comfortably off a single dish. Society is very much to my taste; I shall indulge it when I am whipped at home."

Wilfrid took her hand and pressed his lips to the fingers, keeping his face ponderingly down. He was again so divided that the effort to find himself absorbed all his thinking faculties.

At last he muttered: "A lieutenant's pay!"—expecting her to reply, "We can wait," as girls do that find it pleasant to be adored by curates, Then might follow a meditative pause—-a short gaze at her, from which she could have the option of reflecting that to wait is not the privilege of those who have lived to acquire patience. The track he marked out was clever in a poor way; perhaps it was not positively unkind to instigate her to look at her age: but though he read character shrewdly, and knew hers pretty accurately, he was himself too much of a straw at the moment to be capable of leading-moves.

"We can make up our minds, without great difficulty, to regard the lieutenant's pay as nothing at all," was Lady Charlotte's answer. "You will enter the Diplomatic Service. My interest alone could do that. If we are married, there would be plenty to see the necessity for pushing us. I don't know whether you could keep the lieutenancy; you might. I should not like you to quit the Army: an opening might come in it. There's the Indian Staff—the Persian Mission: they like soldiers for those Eastern posts. But we must take what we can get. We should, anyhow, live abroad, where in the matter of money society is more sensible. We should be able to choose our own, and advertize tea, brioche, and conversation in return for the delicacies of the season."

"But you, Charlotte—you could never live that life!" Wilfrid broke in, the contemplation of her plain sincerity diminishing him to himself. "It would drag you down too horribly!"

"Remorse at giving tea in return for dinners and balls?"

"Ah! there are other things to consider."

She blushed unwontedly.

Something, lighted by the blush, struck him as very feminine and noble.

“Then I may flatter myself that you love me?” he whispered.

Page 717

“Do you not see?” she rejoined. “My project is nothing but a whim—a whim.”

The divided man saw himself whole, if not happy in the ranks of Diplomacy, with a resolute, frank, faithful woman (a lady of title) loving him, to back him. Fortune shone ahead, and on the road he saw where his deficiencies would be filled up by her. She was firm and open—he irresolute and self-involved. Animal courage both possessed. Their differences were so extreme that they met where they differed. It struck him specially now that she would be like Day to his spirit in continued intercourse. Young as he was he had wisdom to know the right meaning of the word “helpmate.” It was as if the head had dealt the heart a blow, saying, “See here the lady thou art to serve.” But the heart was a surly rebel. Lady Charlotte was fully justified in retorting upon his last question: “I think I also should ask, do you love me? It is not absolutely imperative for the occasion or for the catastrophe, I merely ask for what is called information.”

And yet, despite her flippancy, which was partly designed to relieve his embarrassment, her hand was moist and her eyes were singularly watchful.

“You who sneer at love!” He gave a musical murmur.

“Not at all. I think it a very useful part of the capital to begin the married business upon.”

“You unsay your own words.”

“Not ‘absolutely imperative,’ I think I said, if I remember rightly.”

“But I take the other view, Charlotte.”

“You imagine that there must be a little bit of love.”

“There should be no marriage without it.”

“On both sides?”

“At least, if not on both sides, one should bring such a love.”

“Enough for two! So, then, we are not to examine your basket?”

Touched by the pretty thing herein implied, he squeezed her hand.

“This is the answer?” said she.

“Can you doubt me?”

She rose from her seat. “Oh! if you talk in that style, I really am tempted to say that I do. Are there men—women and women—men? My dear Wilfrid, have we changed parts to-night?”

His quickness in retrieving a false position, outwardly, came to his aid. He rose likewise, and, while perfecting the minor details of an easy attitude against the mantelpiece, said: “I am so constituted, Charlotte, that I can’t talk of my feelings in a business tone; and I avoid that subject unless... You spoke of a basket just now. Well, I confess I can’t bring mine into the market and bawl out that I have so many pounds’ weight of the required material. Would a man go to the market at all if he had nothing to dispose of? In plain words—since my fault appears to be, according to your reading, in the opposite direction—should I be here if my sentiments could not reply eloquently to your question?”

This very common masterpiece of cunning from a man in a corner, which suggests with so persuasive an air that he has ruled his actions up to the very moment when he faces you, and had almost preconceived the present occasion, rather won Lady Charlotte; or it seemed to, or the scene had been too long for her vigilance.

Page 718

“In the affirmative?” she whispered, coming nearer to him.

She knew that she had only to let her right shoulder slip under his left arm, and he would very soon proclaim himself her lover as ardently as might be wished. Why did she hesitate to touch the blood of the man? It was her fate never to have her great heart read aright. Wilfrid could not know that generosity rather than iciness restrained her from yielding that one unknown kiss which would have given the final spring to passion in his breast. He wanted the justification of his senses, and to run headlong blindly. Had she nothing of a woman’s instinct?

“In the affirmative!” was his serene reply.

“That means ‘Yes.’” Her tone had become pleasantly soft.

“Yes, that means ‘Yes,’” said he.

She shut her eyes, murmuring, “How happy are those who hear that they are loved!” and opening them, all her face being red, “Say it!” she pleaded. Her fingers fell upon his wrist. “I have this weakness, Wilfrid; I wish to hear you say it.”

The flush of her face, and tremour of her fingers, told of an unimagined agitation hardly to be believed, though seen and felt. Yet, still some sign, some shade of a repulsion in her figure, kept him as far from her as any rigid rival might have stipulated for.

The interrogation to the attentive heavens was partially framed in his mind, “How can I tell this woman I love her, without...” without putting his arm about her waist, and demonstrating it satisfactorily to himself as well as to her? In other words, not so framed, “How, without that frenzy which shall make me forget whether it be so or not?”

He remained in his attitude, incapable of moving or speaking, but fancying, that possibly he was again to catch a glimpse of the vanished mountain nymph, sweet Liberty. Her woman’s instinct warmed more and more, until, if she did not quite apprehend his condition, she at least understood that the pause was one preliminary to a man’s feeling himself a fool.

“Dear Wilfrid,” she whispered, “you think you are doubted. I want to be certain that you think you have met the right woman to help you, in me.”

He passed through the loophole here indicated, and breathed.

“Yes, Charlotte, I am sure of that. If I could be only half as worthy! You are full of courage and unselfishness, and, I could swear, faithful as steel.”

“Thank you—not dogs,” she laughed. “I like steel. I hope to be a good sword in your hand, my knight—or shield, or whatever purpose you put me to.”

She went on smiling, and seeming to draw closer to him and throw down defences.

“After all, Wilfrid, the task of loving your good piece of steel won’t be less thoroughly accomplished because you find it difficult. Sir, I do not admit any protestation. Handsome faces, musical voices, sly manners, and methods that I choose not to employ, make the business easy to men.”

Page 719

“Who discover that the lady is not steel,” said Wilfrid. “Need she, in any case, wear so much there?”

He pointed, flittingly as it were, with his little finger to the slope of her neck.

She turned her wrist, touching the spot: “Here? You have seen, then, that it is something worn?”

There followed a delicious interplay of eyes. Who would have thought that hers could be sweet and mean so much?

“It is something worn, then? And thrown aside for me only, Charlotte?”

“For him who loves me,” she said.

“For me!”

“For him who loves me,” she repeated.

“Then it is for me!”

She had moved back, showing a harder figure, or the “I love you, love you!” would have sounded with force. It came, though not so vehemently as might have been, to the appeal of a soft fixed look.

“Yes, I love you, Charlotte; you know that I do.”

“You love me?”

“Yes.”

“Say it.”

“I love you! Dead, inanimate Charlotte, I love you!”

She threw out her hand as one would throw a bone to a dog.

“My living, breathing, noble Charlotte,” he cried, a little bewitched, “I love you with all my heart!”

It surprised him that her features should be gradually expressing less delight.

“With all your heart?”

“Could I give you a part?”

“It is done, sometimes,” she said, mock-sadly. Then, in her original voice: “Good. I never credited that story of you and the girl Emilia. I suppose what people say is a lie?”

Her eyes, in perfect accordance with the tone she had adopted, set a quiet watch on him.

“Who says it?” he thundered, just as she anticipated.

“It’s not true?”

“Not true!—how can it be true?”

“You never loved Emilia Belloni?—don’t love her now?—do not love her now? If you have ever said that you love Emilia Belloni, recant, and you are forgiven; and then go, for I think I hear Georgiana below. Quick! I am not acting. It’s earnest. The word, if you please, as you are a gentleman. Tell me, because I have heard tales. I have been perplexed about you. I am sure you’re a manly fellow, who would never have played tricks with a girl you were bound to protect; but you might have—pardon the slang—-spooned,—who knows? You might have been in love with her downright. No harm, even if a trifle foolish; but in the present case, set my mind at rest. Quick! There are both my hands. Take them, press them, and speak.”

The two hands were taken, but his voice was not so much at command. No image of Emilia rose in his mind to reproach him with the casting over of his heart’s dear mistress, but a blind struggle went on. It seemed that he could do what he dared not utter. The folly of lips more loyal than the spirit touched his lively perception; and as the hot inward struggle, masked behind his softly-playing eyes, had reduced his personal consciousness so that if he spoke from his feeling there was a chance of his figuring feebly, he put on his ever-ready other self:—

Page 720

“Categorically I reply: Have I loved Miss Emilia Belloni?—No. Do I?—No. Do I love Charlotte Chillingworth?—Yes, ten thousand times! And now let Britomart disarm.”

He sought to get his reward by gentle muscular persuasion. Her arms alone yielded: and he judged from the angle of the neck, ultra-sharp though it was, that her averted face might be her form of exhibiting maidenly reluctance, feminine modesty. Suddenly the fingers in his grasp twisted, and not being at once released, she turned round to him.

“For God’s sake, spare the girl!”

Emilia stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A knock at Merthyr’s chamber called him out while he sat writing to Marini on the national business. He heard Georgiana’s voice begging him to come to her quickly. When he saw her face the stain of tears was there.

“Anything the matter with Charlotte?” was his first question.

“No. But, come: I will tell you on the way. Do not look at me.”

“No personal matter of any kind?”

“Oh, no! I can have none;” and she took his hand for a moment.

They passed into the dark windy street smelling of the sea.

“Emilia is here,” said Georgiana. “I want you to persuade her—you will have influence with her. Oh, Merthyr! my darling brother! I thank God I love my brother with all my love! What a dreadful thing it is for a woman to love a man:”

“I suppose it is, while she has nothing else to do,” said Merthyr. “How did she come?—-why?”

“If you had seen Emilia to-night, you would have felt that the difference is absolute.” Georgiana dealt first with the general case, “she came, I think, by some appointment.”

“Also just as absolute between her and her sex,” he rejoined, controlling himself, not to be less cool. “What has happened?”

Georgiana pointed to the hotel whither their steps were bent. “That is where Charlotte sleeps. Her going there was not a freak; she had an object. She wished to cure Emilia

of her love for Mr. Wilfrid Pole. Emilia had come down to see him. Charlotte put her in an adjoining room to hear him say—what I presume they do say when the fit is on them! Was it not singular folly?"

It was a folly that Merthyr could not understand in his friend Charlotte. He said so, and then he gave a kindly sad exclamation of Emilia's name.

"You do pity her still!" cried Georgiana, her heart leaping to hear it expressed so simply.

"Why, what other feeling can I have?" said he unsuspiciously.

"No, dear Merthyr," she replied; and only by her tone he read the guilty little rejoicing in her heart, marvelling at jealousy that could twist so straight a stem as his sister's spirit. This had taught her, who knew nothing of love, that a man loving does not pity in such a ease."

Page 721

“I hope you will find her here:” Georgiana hurried her steps. “Say anything to comfort her. I will have her with me, and try and teach her what self-control means, and how it is to be won. If ever she can act on the stage as she spoke to-night, she will be a great dramatic genius. She was transformed. She uses strange forcible expressions that one does not hear in every-day life. She crushed Charlotte as if she had taken her up in one hand, and without any display at all: no gesture, or spasm. I noticed, as they stood together, that there is such a contrast between animal courage and imaginative fire.”

“Charlotte could meet a great occasion, I should think,” said Merthyr; and, taking his sister by the elbow: “You speak as if you had observed very coolly. Did Emilia leave you so cold? Did she seem to speak from head, not from heart?”

“No; she moved me—poor child! Only, how humiliating to hear her beg for love!—-before us.”

Merthyr smiled: “I thought it must be the woman’s feeling that would interfere to stop a natural emotion. Is it true—or did I not see that certain eyes were red just now?”

“That was for him,” said Georgiana, hastily. “I am sure that no man has stood in such a position as he did. To see a man made publicly ashamed, and bearing it. I have never had to endure so painful a sight.”

“To stand between two women, claimed by both, like Solomon’s babe! A man might as well at once have Solomon’s judgement put into execution upon him. You wept for him! Do you know, Georgey, that charity of your sex, which makes you cry at any ‘affecting situation,’ must have been designed to compensate to us for the severities of Providence.”

“No, Merthyr;” she arrested his raillery. “Do I ever cry? But I thought—if it had been my brother! and almost at the thought I felt the tears rush at my eyelids, as if the shame had been mine.”

“The probability of its not being your brother seemed distant at the moment,” said Merthyr, with his half-melancholy smile. “Tell me—I can conjure up the scene: but tell me whether you saw more passions than one in her face?”

“Emilia’s? No. Her face reminded me of the sombre—that dull glow of a fire that you leave burning in the grate late on winter nights. Was that natural? It struck me that her dramatic instinct was as much alive as her passion.”

“Had she been clumsy, would you not have been less suspicious of her? And if she had only shown the accustomed northern retenue, and merely looked all that she had to say ’preserved her dignity’—our womanly critic would have been completely satisfied.”

“But, Merthyr, to parade her feelings, and then to go on appealing!”

“On the principle that she ought to be ashamed of them, she was wrong.”

“If you had heard her utter abandonment!”

“I can believe that she did not blush.”

“It seems to me to belong to those excesses that prompt—that are in themselves a species of suicide.”

Page 722

“Love is said to be the death of self.”

“No; but I must use cant words, Merthyr; I do wish to see modesty. Yes, I know I must be right.”

“There is very little of it to be had in a tropical storm.”

“You admit, then, that this sort of love is a storm that passes?”

“It passes, I hope.”

“But where is your defence of her now?”

“Have I defended her? I need not try. A man has deceived her, and she doesn’t think it possible; and has said so, I presume. When she sees it, she will be quieter than most. She will not reproach him subsequently. Here is the hotel, and that must be Charlotte’s room, if I may judge by the lights. What pranks will she always be playing! We seem to have brought new elements into the little town. Do you remember Bergamo the rainy night the Austrian trooped out of Milan?—one light that was a thousand in the twinkling of an eye!”

Having arrived, he ran hastily up to the room, expecting to find the three; but Lady Charlotte was alone, sitting in her chair with knotted arms. “Ah, Merthyr!” she said, “I’m sorry you should have been disturbed. I perceive what Georgey’s leaving the room meant. I suppose the hotel people are used to yachting-parties.” And then, not seeing any friendly demonstration on his part, she folded her arms in another knot. Georgiana asked where Emilia was. Lady Charlotte replied that Emilia had gone, and then Wilfrid had followed her, one minute later, to get her into shelter somewhere. Or put penknives out of her way. “I am rather fatigued with a scene, Merthyr. I never had an idea before of what your Southern women were. One plays decidedly second to them while the fit lasts. Of course, you have a notion that I planned the whole of the absurd business. This is the case:—I found the girl on the beach: she follows him everywhere, which is bad for her reputation, because in this climate people suspect, positive reasons for that kind of female devotedness. So, to put an end to it—really for her own sake, quite as much as anything else—am I a monster of insensibility, Merthyr?—I made her swear an oath: one must be a point above wild animals to feel that to be binding, however! I made her swear to listen and remain there silent till I opened the door to set her at liberty. She consented—gave her word solemnly. I calculated that she might faint, and fixed her in an arm-chair. Was that cruel? Merthyr, you have called me Austrian more than once; but, upon my honour, I wanted her to get over her delusion comfortably. I thought she would have kept the oath, I confess; she looked up like a child when she was making it. You have heard the rest from Georgey. I must say the situation was rather hard on Wilfrid. If he blames me it will be excuseable, though what I did plan was

to save him from a situation somewhat worse. So now you know the whole, Merthyr. Commence your lecture. Make me a martyr to the sorrows of Italy once more."

Page 723

Merthyr took her wrist, feeling the quick pulse, and dropped it. She was effectually humbled by this direct method of dealing with her secret heart. After some commonplace remarks had passed, she herself urged him to send out men in search for Emilia. Before he went, she murmured a soft “Forgive me.” The pressure of her fingers was replied to, but the words were not spoken.

“There,” she cried to Georgiana, “I have offended the only man for whose esteem I care one particle! Devote yourself to your friends!”

“How? ‘devote yourself!’” murmured Georgiana, astonished.

“Do you think I should have got into this hobble if I hadn’t wished to serve some one else? You must have seen that Merthyr has a sentimental sort of fondness—call it passion—for this girl. She’s his Italy in the flesh. Is there a more civilized man in the world than Merthyr? So he becomes fascinated by a savage. We all play the game of opposites—or like to, and no woman in his class will ever catch him. I couldn’t have believed that he was touched by a girl, but for two or three recent indications. You must have noticed that he has given up reading others, and he objected the other day to a responsible office which would have thrown him into her neighbourhood alone. These are unmistakeable signs in Merthyr, though he has never been in love, and doesn’t understand his case a bit. Tell me, do you think it impossible?”

Georgiana answered dryly, “You have fallen into a fresh mistake.”

Exactly. Then let me rescue you from a similar fatality, Georgey. If your eyes are bandaged now...”

“Are you going to be devoted to me also, Charlotte?”

“I believe I’m a miracle of devotion,” said the lady, retiring into indifferent topics upon that phrase. She had at any rate partially covered the figure of ridicule presented to her feminine imagination by the aspect of her fair self exposed in public contention with one of her sex—and for a man. It was enough to make her pulse and her brain lively. On second thoughts, too, it had struck her that she might be serving Merthyr in disengaging Emilia; and undoubtedly she served Georgiana by giving her a warning. Through this silliness went the current of a clear mind, nevertheless. The lady’s heart was justified in crying out: “What would I not abandon for my friend in his need?” Meantime her battle in her own behalf looked less pleasing by the light of new advantages. The question recurred: “Shall I care to win at all?” She had to force the idea of a violent love to excuse her proceedings. To get up any flame whatsoever, an occasional blast of jealousy had to be called for. Jealousy was a quality she could not admit as possible to her. So she acted on herself by an agent she repudiated, and there was no help for it. Had Wilfrid loved her the woman’s heart was ready. It was ready with a trembling tenderness, softer and deeper than a girl’s. For Charlotte would

Page 724

have felt: “With this love that I have craved for, you give me life.” And she would have thanked him for both, exultingly, to feel: “I can repay you as no girl could do;” though she had none of the rage of love to give; as it was, she thought conscientiously that she could help him. She liked him: his peculiar suppleness of a growing mind, his shrouded sensibility, in conjunction with his reputation for an evidently quite reliable prompt courage, and the mask he wore, which was to her transparent, pleased her and touched her fancy.

Nor was he so vain of his person as to make him seem like a boy to her. He affected maturity. He could pass a mirror on his right or his left without an abstracted look over either shoulder;—a poor example, but worth something to a judge of young men. Indeed, had she chosen from a crowd, the choice would have been one of his age. She was too set for an older man; but a youth aspiring to be older than he was; whose faults she saw and forgave; whose merits supplied two or three of her own deficiencies; whom her station might help to elevate; to whom she might come as a benefactress; feeling so while she accomplished her own desire;—such a youth was everything to her, as she awoke to discover after having played with him a season. If she lost him, what became of her? Even if she had rejoiced in a mother to plot and play,—to bait and snare for her, her time was slipping, and the choosers among her class were wary. Her spirit, besides, was high and elective. It was gradually stooping to nature, but would never have bowed to a fool, or, save under protest, to one who gave all. On Wilfrid she had fixed her mind: so, therefore, she bore the remembrance of the recent scene without much fretting at her burdens;—the more, that Wilfrid had in no way shamed her; and the more, that the heat of Emilia’s love played round him and illumined him. This borrowing of the passion of another is not uncommon.

At daybreak Mrs. Chump was abroad. She had sat up for Wilfrid almost through the night. “Oh! the arr’stocracy!” she breathed exclamations, as she swept along the esplanade. “I’ll be killed and murdered if I tell a word.” Meeting Captain Gambier, she fell into a great agitation, and explained it as an anxiety she entertained for Wilfrid; when, becoming entangled in the mesh of questions, she told all she knew, and nearly as much as she suspected: which fatal step to retrieve, she entreated his secresy. Adela was now seen fluttering hastily up the walk, fresh as a creature of the sea-wave. Before Mrs. Chump could summon her old wrath of yesterday, she was kissed, and to the arch interrogation as to what she had done with this young lady’s brother, replied by telling the tale of the night again. Mrs. Chump was ostentatiously caressed into a more comfortable opinion of the world’s morality, for the nonce. Invited by them to breakfast at the hotel, she hurried back to her villa for a flounced dress and a lace cap of some pretensions, while they paced the shore.

Page 725

“See what may be said!” Adela’s countenance changed as she muttered it. “Thought, would be enough,” she added, shuddering.

“Yes; if one is off guard—careless,” the captain assented, flowingly.

“Can one in earnest be other than careless? I shall walk on that line up to the end. Who makes me deviate is my enemy!”

The playful little person balanced herself to make one foot follow the other along a piece of washed grey rope on the shingle. Soon she had to stretch out her hand for help, and the captain at full arm’s length conducted her to the final knot.

“Arrived safe!” she said, smiling.

“But not disengaged,” he rejoined, in similar style.

“Please!” She doubled her elbow to give a little tug for her fingers.

“No.” He pressed them tighter.

“Pray?”

“No.”

“Must I speak to somebody else to get me released?”

“Would you?”

“Must I?”

“Thank heaven, he is not yet in existence!”

‘Husband’ being implied. Games of this sweet sort are warranted to carry little people as far as they may go swifter than any other invention of lively Satan.

The yachting party, including Mrs. Chump, were at the breakfast-table, and that dumb guest had done all the blushing for Lady Charlotte, when Wilfrid entered, neat, carefully brushed, and with ready answers, though his face could put on no fresh colours. To Mrs. Chump he bent, passing, and was pushed away and drawn back. “Your eyes!” she whispered.

“My—yeyes!” went Wilfrid, in schoolboy style; and she, who rarely laughed, was struck by his humorous skill, saying to Sir Twickenham, beside her: “He’s as cunnin’ as a lord!”

Sir Twickenham expressed his ignorance of lords having usurped priority in that department. Frightened by his portentous parliamentary phraseology, she remained tolerably demure till the sitting was over: now sidling in her heart to the sins of the great, whom anon she angrily reproached. Her principal idea was, that as the world was discovered to be so wicked, they were all in a boat going to perdition, and it would be as well to jump out immediately: but while so resolving, she hung upon Lady Charlotte's looks and little speeches, altogether seduced by so fresh and frank a sinner. If safe from temptation, here was the soul of a woman in great danger of corruption.

"Among the aristocracy," thought Mrs. Chump, "it's just the male that hangs his head, and the female struts and is sprightly." The contrast between Lady Charlotte and Wilfrid (who when he ceased to set outrageously, sat like a man stricken by a bolt), produced this reflection: and in spite of her disastrous vision of the fate of the boat they were in, Mrs. Chump owned to the intoxication of gliding smoothly—gliding on the rapids.

Page 726

The breakfast was coming to an end, when Braintop's name was sent in to Mrs. Chump. She gave a cry of motherly compassion for Braintop, and began to relate the little deficiencies of his temper, while, as it were, simmering on her seat to go to him. Wilfrid sent out word for him to appear, which he did, unluckily for himself, even as Mrs. Chump wound up the public description of his character by remarking: "He's just the opposite of a lord, now, in everything." Braintop stood bowing like the most faithful confirmation of an opinion ever seen. He looked the victim of fatigue, in the bargain. A light broke on Mrs. Chump.

"I'll never forgive myself, ye poor gentle heart, to throw pens and pen-wipers at ye, that did your best, poor boy! What have ye been doin'? and why didn't ye return, and not go hoppin' about about all night like a young kangaroo, as they say they do? Have ye read the 'Arcana of Nature and Science,' ma'am?"

The Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle, thus abruptly addressed, observed that she had not, and was it an amusing book?

"Becas it'll open your mind," pursued Mrs. Chump; "and there, he's eatin'! and when a man takes to eatin', ye'll never have any fear about his abouts. And if ye read the 'Arcana of Nature and Science,' ma'am, ye'll first feel that ye've gone half mad. For it contains averything in the world; and ye'll read ut ten times all through, and not remember five lines runnin'! Oh, it's a dreadful book: and that's the book to read to your husband when he's got a fit o' the gout. He's got nothin' to do but swallow knolludge then. Now, Mr. Braintop, don't stop, but tell me as ye go on what ye did with yourself all night."

A slight hesitation in Braintop caused her to cross-examine him rigidly, suggesting that he might not dare to tell, and he, exercising some self-command, adopted narrative as the less ignominious form of confession. No one save Mrs. Chump listened to him until he mentioned the name Miss Belloni; and then it was curious to see the steadiness with which certain eyes, feigning abstraction, fixed in his direction. He had met Emilia on the outskirts of the town, and unable to persuade her to take shelter anywhere, had walked on with her in dead silence through the night, to the third station of the railway for London.

"Is this a mad person?" asked the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle.

Adela shrugged. "A genius."

"Don't eat with the tips of your teeth, like a bird, Mr. Braintop, for no company minds your eatin'," cried Mrs. Chump, angrily and encouragingly; "and this little Belloni—my belief is that she came after you; and what have ye done with her?"

Page 727

It was queerly worried out of Braintop, who was trying his best all the time to be obedient to Wilfrid's direct eye, that the two wanderers by night had lost themselves in lanes, refreshed themselves with purloined apples from the tree at dawn, obtained a draught of morning milk, with a handful of damsons apiece, and that nothing would persuade Emilia to turn back from the route to London. Braintop bit daintily at his toast, unwilling to proceed under the discouraging expression of Wilfrid's face, and the meditative silence of two or three others. The discovery was forcibly extracted that Emilia had no money;—that all she had in her possession was sevenpence and a thimble; and that he, Braintop, had but a few shillings, which she would not accept.

"And what has become of her?" was asked.

Braintop stated that she had returned to London, and, blushing, confessed that he had given her his return ticket.

Georgiana here interposed to save him from the awful encomiums of Mrs. Chump, by desiring to know whether Emilia seemed unhappy or distressed. Braintop's spirited reply, "Not at all," was corrected to: "She did not cry;" and further modified: "That is, she called out sharply when I whistled an opera tune."

Lady Charlotte put a stop to the subject by rising pointedly. Watch in hand, she questioned the ladies as to their occupations, and told them what time they had to dispose of. Then Baynes, captain of the yacht, heard to be outside, was summoned in. He pronounced doubtfully about the weather, but admitted that there was plenty of wind, and if the ladies did not mind it a little fresh, he was sure he did not. Wind was favourable for the island head-quarters of the yacht. "We'll see who gets there first," she said to Wilfrid, and the company learnt that Wilfrid was going to other head-quarters on special business, whereupon there followed chatter and exclamations. Wilfrid quickly explained that his father's condition called him away imperiously. To Adela and Mrs. Chump, demanding peculiar personal explanations, he gave reassuring reasons separately, aside. Mrs. Chump understood that this was merely his excuse to get away, that he might see her safe to Brookfield. Adela only required a look and a gesture. Merthyr and Georgiana likewise spoke expected adieux, as did Sir Twickenham, who parted company in his own little yawl. Lady Charlotte, with her head over a map, and one hand arranging an eye-glass, hastily nodded them off, scarcely looking at them. She allowed herself to be diverted from this study for an instant by the unbefitting noise made by Adela for the loss of her brother; not that she objected to the noise particularly (it was modulated and delicate in tone), but that she could not understand it. Seeing Sir Twickenham, however, in a leave-taking attitude, she uttered an easy "Oh!" to herself, and diligently recommenced spying at ports and harbours, and following the walnut thumb of Baynes

Page 728

on the map. All seemed to be perfectly correct in the arrangements. To go to London was Wilfrid's thought; and the rest were almost as much occupied with their own ideas. Captain Gambier received their semi-ironical congratulations and condolences incident to the man who is left alone in the charge of sweet ladies; and the Hon. Mrs. Bayruffle remarked, that she supposed ten hours not a long period of time, though her responsibility was onerous.

"Lady Gosstre is at the island," said Lady Charlotte, to show where it might end, if she pleased. Within an hour the yacht was flying for the island with a full Western breeze: and Mrs. Chump and Wilfrid were speeding to Brookfield, as the latter permitted her to imagine. Braintop realized the fruits of the sacrifice of his return ticket by facing Mrs. Chump in the train. Merthyr had telegraphed to Marini to meet Emilia at the station in London, and instructed Braintop to deliver a letter for her at Marini's house. To Marini he wrote: "Let Giulia guard her as no one but a woman can in such a case. By this time Giulia will know her value. There is dangerous stuff in her now, and my anxiety is very great. Have you seen what a nature it is? You have not alluded to her beyond answers to instructions, but her character cannot have escaped you. I am never mistaken in my estimates of Italian and Cymric blood. Singularly, too, she is part Welsh on the mother's side, to judge by the name. Leave her mind entirely free till it craves openly for some counteraction. Her Italy and her music will not do. Let them be. My fear is that you have seen too clearly what a daughter of Italy I have found for you. But whatever you put up now to distract her, you sacrifice. My good Marini! bear that in mind. It will be a disgust in her memory, and I wish her to love her country and her Art when she recovers. So we treat the disease, dear friend. Let your Italy have no sorrows for her ears till the storm within is tranquil. I am with you speedily."

Marini's reply said: "Among all the things we have to thank our Merthyr for, this treasure, if it is not the greatest he has given to us, makes us grateful the most. We met her at the station. Ah! there was an elbow when she gave her hand. She thought to be alone, and started, and hated, till Giulia smothered her face. And there was dead fire in the eyes, which is powder when you spring it. We go with her to her new lodging, and the track is lost. This is your wish? It is pitching new camps to avoid the enemy. But so! a man takes this disease and his common work at once of a woman—she is all the disease, till it is extinct, or she! What is this disease but a silly, a senseless waste? Giulia—woman that she is!—will not call it so. See her eyes doze and her voice go a soft buzz when she speaks it! As a dove of the woods! That it almost makes it sweet to me! Yes, a daughter of Italy! So Giulia has been:—will be? I know not! So

Page 729

will this your Emilia be in the time that comes to the young people, she has this, as you say, malady very strong—ma, ogni male ha la sua ricetta; I can say it of persons. Of nations to think my heart is as an infidel—very heavy. Ah! till I turn to you—who revive to the thought, as you were an army of deliverance. For you are Hope. You know not Despair. You are Hope. And you love as myself a mother whose son you are not! 'Oh!' is Giulia's cry, 'will our Italy reward him with a daughter?'—the noblest that we have. Yes, for she would be Italian always through you. We pray that you may not get old too soon, before she grows for you and is found, only that you may know in her our love. See! I am brought to talk this language. The woman is in me."

Merthyr said, as he read this, "I could wish no better." His feeling for Emilia waxed toward a self-avowal as she advanced to womanhood; and the last stage of it had struck among trembling strings in the inmost chambers of his heart. That last stage of it —her passionate claiming of Wilfrid before two women, one her rival—slept like a covered furnace within him. "Can you remember none of her words?" he said more than once to Georgiana, who replied: "I would try to give you an idea of what she said, but I might as well try to paint lightning."

"'My lover'?" suggested Merthyr.

"Oh, yes; that she said."

"It sounded oddly to your ears?"

"Very, indeed."

"What more?"

"—did she say, do you mean?"

"Is my poor sister ashamed to repeat it?"

"I would repeat anything that would give you pleasure to hear."

"Sometimes pain, you know, is sweet."

Little by little, and with a contest at each step, Georgiana coasted the conviction that her undivided reign was over. Then she judged Emilia by human nature's hardest standard: the measure of the qualities brought as usurper and successor. Unconsciously she placed herself in the seat of one who had fulfilled all the great things demanded of a woman for Merthyr, and it seemed to her that Emilia exercised some fatal fascination, girl though she was, to hurl her from that happy sovereignty.

But Emilia's worst crime before the arraigning lady was that Wilfrid had cast her off. Female justice, therefore, said: "You must be unworthy of my brother;" and female

delicacy thought: “You have been soiled by a previous history.” She had pitied Wilfrid: now she held him partially blameless: and while love was throbbing in many pulses all round her. The man she had seen besieged by passionate love, touched her cold imagination with a hue of fire, as Winter dawn lies on a frosty field. She almost conceived what this other, not sisterly, love might be; though not as its victim, by any means. She became, as she had never before been, spiritually tormented and restless. The thought framed itself that Charlotte and Wilfrid were not, by any law of

Page 730

selection, to match. What mattered it? Simply that it in some way seemed to increase the merits of one of the two. The task, moreover, of avoiding to tease her brother was made easier to her by flying to this new refuge of mysterious reflection. At times she poured back the whole flood of her heart upon Merthyr, and then in alarm at the host of little passions that grew cravingly alive in her, she turned her thoughts to Wilfrid again; and so, till they turned wittingly to him. That this host of little passions will invariably surround a false great one, she learnt by degrees, by having to quell them and rise out of them. She knew that now she occasionally forced her passion for Merthyr; but what nothing could teach her was, that she did so to eject another's image. On the contrary, her confession would have been: "Voluntarily I dwell upon that other, that my love for Merthyr may avoid excess." To such a state of clearness much self-questioning brought her: but her blood was as yet unwarmed; and that is a condition fostering self-deception as much as when it rages.

Madame Marini wrote to ask whether Emilia might receive the visits of a Sir Purcell Barrett, whom they had met, and whom Emilia called her friend; adding: "The other gentleman has called at our old lodgings three times. The last time our landlady says, he wept. Is it an Englishman, really?"

Merthyr laughed at this, remarking: "Charlotte is not so vigilant, after all."

"He wept." Georgiana thought and remembered the cold self-command that his face had shown when Emilia claimed him, and his sole reply was, "I am engaged to this lady," designating Lady Charlotte. Now, too, some of Emilia's phrases took life in her memory. She studied them, thinking over them, as if a voice of nature had spoken. Less and less it seemed to her that a woman need feel shame to utter them. She interpreted this as her growth of charity for a girl so violently stricken with love. "In such a case, the more she says the more is she to be excused; for nothing but a frenzy of passion could move her to speak so," thought Georgiana. Accepting the words, and sanctioning the passion, the person of him who had inspired it stood magnified in its light. She believed that if he had played with the girl, he repented, and the idea of a man shedding tears burnt to her heart.

Merthyr and Georgiana remained in Devonshire till a letter from Madame Marini one morning told them that Emilia had disappeared.

"You delayed too long to go to her, Merthyr," said his sister, astonishing him. "I understand why; but you may trust to time and scorn chance too much. Let us go now and find her, if it is not too late."

Marini met them at the station in London, and they heard that Wilfrid had discovered Marini's new abode, and had called there that morning. "I had my eye on him. It was not a piece of love-play," said Marini: "and today she should have seen my Chief, which

would have cured her of sis pestilence of a love, to give her sublime thoughts. Do you love her, Miss Ford? Aha! it will be Christian names in Italy again."

Page 731

“I like her very much,” said Georgiana; “but I confess it mystifies me to see you all so excited about her. It must be some attraction possessed by her—what, I cannot say. I like her, certainly.”

“Figlia mia! she is an element—she is fire!” said Marini. “My sought, when our Mertyr brought her, was, it is Italy he sees in her face—her voice—name—anysing! And a day passed, and I could not lose her for my own sake, and felt a somesing, too! She is half man.”

“A singular reason for an attraction.” Georgiana smiled.

“She is not,” Marini put out his fingers like claws to explain, while his eyelashes met over his eyes—“she is not what man has made of your sex; and she is brave of heart.”

“Can you possibly tell what such a child can be?” questioned Georgiana, almost irritably.

Marini did not reply to her.

“A face to find a home in!—eh, Mertyr?”

“Let’s discover where that face has found a home,” said Merthyr. “She is a very plain and unpretending person, if people will not insist upon her being more. This morbid admiration of heroines puts a trifle too much weight upon their shoulders, does it not?”

Georgiana knew that to call Emilia ‘child’ was to wound the most sensitive nerve in Merthyr’s system, if he loved her, and she had determined to try harshly whether he did. Nevertheless, though the expression succeeded, and was designedly cruel, she could not forgive the insincerity of his last speech; craving in truth for confidence as her smallest claim on him now. So, at all the consultations, she acquiesced in any scheme that was proposed; the advertizings and the use of detectives; the communication with Emilia’s mother and father; and the callings at suburban concert-rooms. Sir Purcell Barrett frequently called to assist in the discovery. At first he led them to suspect Mr. Pericles; but a trusty Italian playing spy upon that gentleman soon cleared him, and they were more in the dark than ever. It was only when at last Georgiana heard Merthyr, the picture of polished self-possession, giving way to a burst of disappointment in the room before them all: “Are we sure that she lives?” he cried:—then Georgiana, looking at the firelight over her joined fingers, said:—

“But, have you forgotten the serviceable brigade you have in your organ-boys, Marini? If Emilia sees one, be sure she will speak to him.”

“Have I not said she is a General?” Marini pointed at Georgiana with a gleam of his dark eyes, and Merthyr squeezed his sister’s hand, thanking her; by which he gave her one whole night of remorse, because she had not spoken earlier.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“My voice! I have my voice!”

Page 732

Emilia had cried it out to herself almost aloud, on the journey from Devon to London. The landscape slipping under her eyes, with flashing grey pools and light silver freshets, little glades, little copses, farms, and meadows rounding away to spires of village churches under blue hills, would not let her sink, heavy as was the spirit within her, and dead to everything as she desired to be. Here, a great strange old oak spread out its arms and seemed to hold the hurrying train a minute. When gone by, Emilia thought of it as a friend, and that there, there, was the shelter and thick darkness she had hoped she might be flying to. Or the reach of a stream was seen, and in the middle of it one fair group of clouds, showing distance beyond distance in colour. Emilia shut her sight, and tried painfully to believe that there were no distances for her. This was an easy task when the train stopped. It was surprising to her then why the people moved. The whistle of the engine and rush of the scenery set her imagination anew upon the horror of being motionless.

“My voice! I have my voice!” The exclamation recurred at intervals, as a quick fear, that bubbled up from blind sensation, of her being utterly abandoned, and a stray thing carrying no light, startled her. Darkness she still had her desire for; but not to be dark in the darkness. She looked back on the recent night as a lake of fire, through which she had plunged; and of all the faculties about her, memory had suffered most, so that it could recall no images of what had happened, but lay against its black corner a shuddering bundle of nerves. The varying fields and woods and waters offering themselves to her in the swiftness, were as wine dashed to her lips, which could not be dead to it. The wish to be of some worth began a painful quickening movement. At first she could have sobbed with the keen anguish that instantaneously beset her. For—“If I am of worth, who looks on me?” was her outcry, and the darkness she had previously coveted fell with the strength of a mace on her forehead; but the creature’s heart struggled further, and by-and-by in despite of her the pulses sprang a clear outlook on hope. It struck through her like the first throb of a sword-cut. She tried to blind herself to it; the face of hope was hateful.

This conflict of the baffled spirit of youth with its forceful flood of being continued until it seemed that Emilia was lifted through the fiery circles into daylight; her last cry being as her first: “I have my voice!”

Of that which her voice was to achieve for her she never thought. She had no thought of value, but only an eagerness to feel herself possessor of something. Wilfrid had appeared to her to have taken all from her, until the recollection of her voice made her breathe suddenly quick and deep, as one recovering the taste of life.

Page 733

Despair, I have said before, is a wilful business, common to corrupt blood, and to weak woeful minds: native to the sentimentalist of the better order. The only touch of it that came to Emilia was when she attempted to penetrate to Wilfrid's reason for calling her down to Devon that he might renounce and abandon her. She wanted a reason to make him in harmony with his acts, and she could get none. This made the world look black to her. But, "I have my voice!" she said, exhausted by the passion of the night, tearless, and only sensible to pain when the keen swift wind, and the flying squares of field and meadow prompted her nature mysteriously to press for healthy action.

A man opposite to her ventured a remark: "We're going at a pretty good pace now, miss."

She turned her eyes to him, and the sense of speed was reduced in her at once, she could not comprehend how. Remembering presently that she had not answered him, she said: "It is because you are going home, perhaps, that you think it fast."

"No, miss," he replied, "I'm going to market. They can't put on steam too stiff for me when I'm bound on business."

Emilia found it impossible to fathom the sensations of the man, and their common desire for speed bewildered her more. She was relieved when the train was lightened of him. Soon the skirts of red vapour were visible, and when the guard took poor Braintop's return-ticket from her petulant hand, all of the journey that she bore in mind was the sight of a butcher-boy in blue, with a red cap, mounted on a white horse, who rode gallantly along a broad highroad, and for whom she had struck out some tune to suit the measure of his gallop.

She accepted her capture by the Marinis more calmly than Merthyr had been led to suppose. The butcher-boy's gallop kept her senses in motion for many hours, and that reckless equestrian embodied the idea of the vivifying pace from which she had dropped. He went slower and slower. By degrees the tune grew dull, and jarred; and then Emilia looked out on the cold grey skies of our autumn, the rain and the fogs, and roaring London filled her ears. So had ended a dream, she thought. She would stand at the window listening to street-organs, whose hideous discord and clippings and drawls did not madden her, and whose suggestion of a lovely tune rolled out no golden land to her. That treasure of her voice, to which no one in the house made allusion, became indeed a buried treasure.

In the South-western suburb where the Marinis lived, plots of foliage were to be seen, and there were lanes not so black but that they showed the hues of the season. These led to the parks and to noble gardens. Emilia daily went out to keep the dying colours of the year in view, and walked to get among the trees, where, with Madame attendant on her, she sat counting the leaves as each one curved, and slid, and spun to earth, or on a gust of air hosts went aloft; but it

Page 734

always ended in their coming down; Emilia verified that fact repeatedly. However high they flew, the ground awaited them. Madame entertained her with talk of Italy, and Tuscan wine, and Lombard bread, and Turin chocolate. Marini never alluded to his sufferings for the loss of these cruelly interdicted dainties, never! But Madame knew how his exile affected him. And in England the sums one paid for everything! "One fancies one pays for breath," said Madame, shivering.

One day the ex-organist of Hillford Church passed before them. Emilia let him go. The day following he passed again, but turned at the end of the alley and simulated astonishment at the appearance of Emilia, as he neared her. They shook hands and talked, while Madame zealously eyed any chance person promenading the neighbourhood. She wrote for instructions concerning this gentleman calling himself Sir Purcell Barrett, and receiving them, she permitted Emilia to invite him to their house. "He is an Englishman under a rope, ready for heaven," Madame described him to her husband, who, though more at heart with Englishmen, could not but admit that this one wore a look that appeared as a prognostication of sadness.

Sir Purcell informed Emilia of his accession to title; and in reply to her "Are you not glad?" smiled and said that a mockery could scarcely make him glad; indicating nevertheless how feeble the note of poverty was in his grand scale of sorrow. He came to the house and met them in the gardens frequently. With some perversity he would analyze to herself Emilia's spirit of hope, partly perhaps for the sake of probing to what sort of thing it might be in its nature and defences; and, as against an accomplished disputant she made but a poor battle, he injured what was precious to her without himself gaining any good whatever.

"Why, what do you look forward to?" she said wondering, at the end of one of their arguments, as he courteously termed this play of logical foils with a baby.

"Death," answered the grave gentleman, striding on.

Emilia pitied him, thinking: "I might feel as he does, if I had not my voice." Seeing that calamity very remote, she added: "I should!"

She knew of his position toward Cornelia: that is, she knew as much as he did: for the want of a woman's heart over which to simmer his troubles was urgent within him and Emilia's, though it lacked experience, was a woman's regarding love. And moreover, she did not weep, but practically suggested his favourable chances, which it was a sad satisfaction to him to prove baseless, and to knock utterly over. The grief in which the soul of a human creature is persistently seeking (since it cannot be thrown off) to clothe itself comfortably, finds in tears an irritating expression of sympathy. Hints of a brighter future are its nourishment. Such embryos are not tenacious of existence, and when destroyed they are succulent food for a space to the moody grief I am describing.

Page 735

The melancholy gentleman did Emilia this good, that, never appearing to imagine others to know misery save himself, he gave her full occupation apart from the workings of her own mind. As to her case, he might have offered the excuse that she really had nothing of the aspect of a lovesick young lady, and was not a bit sea-green to view, or lamentable in tone. He was sufficiently humane to have felt for anyone suffering, and the proof of it is, that the only creature he saw under such an influence he pitied so deplorably, as to make melancholy a habit with him. He fretted her because he would do nothing, and this spectacle of a lover beloved, but consenting to be mystified, consentingly paralyzed:—of a lover beloved!—

“Does she love you?” said Emilia, beseechingly.

“If the truth is in her, she does,” he returned.

“She has told you she loves you?—that she loves no one else?”

“Of this I am certain.”

“Then, why are you downcast? my goodness! I would take her by the hand ’Woman; do you know yourself? you belong to me!’—I would say that; and never let go her hand. That would decide everything. She must come to you then, or you know what it is that means to separate you. My goodness! I see it so plain!”

But he declined to look thus low, and stood pitifully smiling:—This spectacle, together with some subtle spur from the talk of love, roused Emilia from her lethargy. The warmth of a new desire struck around her heart. The old belief in her power over Wilfrid joined to a distinct admission that she had for the moment lost him; and she said, “Yes; now, as I am now, he can abandon me:” but how if he should see her and hear her in that hushed hour when she was to stand as a star before men? Emilia flushed and trembled. She lived vividly though her far-projected sensations, until truly pity for Wilfrid was active in her bosom, she feeling how he would yearn for her. The vengeance seemed to her so keen that pity could not fail to come. Thus, to her contemplation, their positions became reversed: it was Wilfrid now who stood in the darkness, unselected. Her fiery fancy, unchained from the despotic heart, illumined her under the golden future.

“Come to us this evening, I will sing to you,” she said, and the ‘Englishman under a rope’ bowed assentingly.

“Sad songs, if you like,” she added.

“I have always thought sadness more musical than mirth,” said he. “Surely there is more grace in sadness!”

Poetry, sculpture, and songs, and all the Arts, were brought forward in mournful array to demonstrate the truth of his theory.

When Emilia understood him, she cited dogs and cats, and birds, and all things of nature that rejoiced and revelled, in support of the opposite view.

“Nay, if animals are to be your illustration!” he protested. He had been perhaps half under the delusion that he spoke with Cornelia, and with a sense of infinite misery, he compressed the apt distinction that he had in his mind; which was to show where humanity and simple nature drew a line, and wherein humanity claimed the loftier seat.

Page 736

“But such talk must be uttered to a soul,” he phrased internally, and Emilia was denied what belonged to Cornelia.

Hitherto Emilia had refused to sing, and Madame Marini, faithful to her instructions, had never allowed her to be pressed to sing. Emilia would brood over notes, thinking: “I can take that; and that; and dwell on such and such a note for any length of time;” but she would not call up her voice; she would not look at her treasure. It seemed more to her, untouched; and went on doubling its worth, until doubtless her idea of capacity greatly relieved her of the burden on her breast, and the reflection that she held a charm for all, and held it from all, flattered one who had been cruelly robbed.

On their way homeward, among the chrysanthemums in the long garden-walk, they met Tracy Runningbrook, between whose shouts of delight and Emilia’s reserve there was so marked a contrast that one would have deemed Tracy an offender in her sight. She had said to him entreatingly, “Do not come,” when he volunteered to call on the Marinis in the evening; and she got away from him as quickly as she could, promising to be pleased if he called the day following. Tracy flew leaping to one of the great houses where he was tame cat. When Sir Purcell as they passed on spoke a contemptuous word of his soft habits and idleness, Emilia said: “He is one of my true friends.”

“And why is he interdicted the visit this evening?”

“Because,” she answered, and grew pale, “he—he does not care for music. I wish I had not met him.”

She recollected how Tracy’s flaming head had sprung up before her—he who had always prophesied that she would be famous for arts unknown to her, and not for song just when she was having a vision of triumph and caressing the idea of her imprisoned voice bursting its captivity, and soaring into its old heavens.

“He does not care for music!” interjected Sir Purcell, with something like a frown. “I have nothing in common with him. But that I might have known. I can have nothing in common with a man who is not to be impressed by music.”

“I love him quite as well,” said Emilia. “He is a quick friend. I am always certain of him.”

“And I imagine also that you are quits with your quick friend,” added Sir Purcell. “You do not care for verse, or he for voices!”

“Poetry?” said Emilia; “no, not much. It seems like talking on tiptoe; like animals in cages, always going to one end and back again....”

“And making the same noise when they get at the end—like the bears!” Sir Purcell slightly laughed. “You don’t approve of the rhymes?”

“Yes, I like the rhymes; but when you use words—I mean, if you are in earnest—how can you count and have stops, and—no, I do not care anything for poetry.”

Sir Purcell’s opinion of Emilia, though he liked her, was, that if a genius, she was an incomplete one; and his positive judgement (which I set down in phrase that would have startled him) ranked both her and Tracy as a pair of partial humbugs, entertaining enough. They were both too real for him.

Page 737

Haply at that moment the girl was intensely susceptible, for she chilled by his side; and when he left her she begged Madame to walk fast. “I wonder whether I have a cold!” she said.

Madame explained all the signs of it with tragic minuteness, deciding that Emilia was free at present, and by miracle, from this English scourge; but Emilia kept her hands at her mouth. Over the hornbeam hedge of the lane that ran through the market-gardens, she could see a murky sunset spreading its deep-coloured lines, that seemed to her really like a great sorrowing over earth. It had never seemed so till now; and, entering the house, the roar of vehicles in a neighbouring road sounded like something implacable in the order of things among us, and clung about her ears pitilessly. Running upstairs, she tried a scale of notes that broke on a cough. “Did I cough purposely?” she asked herself; but she had not the courage to try the notes again. While dressing she hummed a passage, and sought stealthily to pass the barrier of her own watchfulness by dwelling on a deep note, from which she was to rise bursting with full bravura energy, and so forth on a tide of song. But her breath failed. She stared into the glass and forced the note. A panic caught at her heart when she heard the sound that issued. “Am I ill? I must be hungry!” she exclaimed. “It is a cough! But I don’t cough! What is the matter with me?”

Under these auspices she forced her voice again, and subsequently loosened her dress, complaining of the dressmaker’s affection for tightness. “Now,” she said, having fallen upon an attempt at simple “do, re, me, fa,” and laughed at herself. Was it the laugh, that stopping her at “si,” made that “si” so husky, asthmatic, like the wheezing of a crooked old witch? “I am unlucky, to-night,” said Emilia. Or, rather, so said her surface-self. The submerged self—self in the depths—rarely speaks to the occasions, but lies under calamity quietly apprehending all; willing that the talker overhead should deceive others, and herself likewise, if possible. Emilia found her hands acting daintily and critically in the attirement of her person; and then surprised herself murmuring: “I forgot that Tracy won’t be here to-night.” By which she betrayed that she had divined those arts she was to shine in, according to Tracy; and betrayed that she had a terrible fear of a loss of all else. It pained her now that Tracy should not be coming. “Can I send for him?” she thought, as she looked winningly into the glass, trying to feel what sort of a feeling it was to be in love with a face like that one fronting her, so familiar in its aspects, so strange when scrutinized studiously! She drew a chair, and laying her elbow on the toilet-table, gazed hard, until the thought: “What face did Wilfrid see last?” (meaning, “when he saw me last”) drove her away.

Page 738

Not only did she know herself now a face of many faces; but the life within her likewise as a soul of many souls. The one Emilia, so unquestioning, so sure, lay dead; and a dozen new spirits, with but a dim likeness to her, were fighting for possession of her frame, now occupying it alone, now in couples; and each casting grim reflections on the other. Which is only a way of telling you that the great result of mortal suffering—-consciousness—had fully set in; to ripen; perhaps to debase; at any rate, to prove her.

To be of worth was still her fixed idea—all that was clear in the thickening mist. “I cannot be ugly,” she said, and reproved herself for simulating a childish tone. “Why do I talk in that way? I know I am not ugly. But if a fire scorched my face? There is nothing that seems safe!” The love of friends was suggested to her as something to rely on; and the loving them. “But if I have nothing to give!” said Emilia, and opened both her empty hands. She had diverted her mind from the pressure upon it, by this colloquy with a looking-glass, and gave herself a great rapture by running up notes to this theme:—

“No, no, no, no, no!—nothing! nothing!”

Clear, full, sonant notes; the notes of her true voice. She did not attempt them a second time; nor, when Sir Purcell requested her to sing in the course of the evening, did she comply. “The Signora thinks I have a cold,” she said. Madame Marini protested that she hoped not, she even thought not, though none could avoid it at this season in this climate, and she turned to Sir Purcell to petition for any receipts he might have in his possession, specifics for warding off the frightful affliction of households in England.

“I have now twenty,” said Madame, and throwing up her eyes; “I have tried all! oh! so many lozenge!”

Marini and Emilia laughed. While Sir Purcell was maintaining the fact of his total ignorance of the subject against Madame’s incredulity, Emilia left the room. When she came back Madame was pressing her visitor to be explicit with regard to a certain process of cure conducted by an application of cold water. The Neapolitan gave several shudders as she marked him attentively. “Water cold!” she murmured with the deepest pathos, and dropped her face in her hands with narrowed shoulders. Emilia held a letter over to Sir Purcell. He took it, first assuring himself that Marini was in complicity with them. To Marini Emilia addressed a Momus forefinger, and Marini shrugged, smiling. “Water cold!” ejaculated Madame, showing her countenance again. “In winter! Luigi, they are mad!” Marini poked the fire briskly, for his sensations entirely sided with his wife.

The letter Sir Purcell held contained these words:

“Be kind, and meet me to-morrow at ten in the morning, at that place where you first saw me sitting. I want you to take me to one who will help me. I cannot lose time any more. I must work. I have been dead for I cannot say how long. I know you will come.

“I am, for ever,
“Your thankful friend,

Page 739

“Emilia.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

The pride of punctuality brought Sir Purcell to that appointed seat in the gardens about a minute in advance of Emilia. She came hurrying up to him with three fingers over her lips. The morning was cold; frost edged the flat brown chestnut and beech leaves lying about on rimy grass; so at first he made no remark on her evident unwillingness to open her mouth, but a feverish look of her eyes touched him with some kindly alarm for her.

“You should not have come out, if you think you are in any danger,” he said.

“Not if we walk fast,” she replied, in a visibly-controlled excitement. “It will be over in an hour. This way.”

She led the marvelling gentleman toward the row, and across it under the big black elms, begging him to walk faster. To accommodate her, he suggested, that if they had any distance to go, they might ride, and after a short calculating hesitation, she consented, letting him know that she would tell him on what expedition she was bound whilst they were riding. The accompaniment of the wheels, however, necessitated a higher pitch of her voice, which apparently caused her to suffer from a contraction of the throat, for she remained silent, with a discouraged aspect, her full brown eyes showing as in a sombre meditation beneath the thick brows. The direction had been given to the City. On they went with the torrent, and were presently engulfed in fog. The roar grew muffled, phantoms poured along the pavement, yellow beamless lights were in the shop-windows, all the vehicles went at a slow march.

“It looks as if Business were attending its own obsequies,” said Sir Purcell, whose spirits were enlivened by an atmosphere that confirmed his impression of things.

Emilia cried twice: “Oh! what cruel weather!” Her eyelids blinked, either with anger or in misery.

They were set down a little beyond the Bank, and when they turned from the cabman, Sir Purcell was warm in his offer of his arm to her, for he had seen her wistfully touching what money she had in her pocket, and approved her natural good breeding in allowing it to pass unmentioned.

“Now,” he said, “I must know what you want to do.”

“A quiet place! there is no quiet place in this City,” said Emilia fretfully.

A gentleman passing took off his hat, saying, with City politeness, “Pardon me: you are close to a quiet place. Through that door, and the hall, you will find a garden, where you will hear London as if it sounded fifty miles off.”

He bowed and retired, and the two (Emilia thankful, Sir Purcell tending to anger), following his indication, soon found themselves in a most perfect retreat, the solitude of which they had the misfortune, however, of destroying for another, and a scared, couple.

Here Emilia said: “I have determined to go to Italy at once. Mr. Pericles has offered to pay for me. It’s my father’s wish. And—and I cannot wait and feel like a beggar. I must go. I shall always love England—don’t fear that!”

Page 740

Sir Purcell smiled at the simplicity of her pleading look.

“Now, I want to know where to find Mr. Pericles,” she pursued. “And if you will come to him with me! He is sure to be very angry—I thought you might protect me from that. But when he hears that I am really going at last—at once!—he can laugh sometimes! you will see him rub his hands.”

“I must enquire where his chambers are to be found,” said Sir Purcell.

“Oh! anybody in the City must know him, because he is so rich.” Emilia coughed. “This fog kills me. Pray make haste. Dear friend, I trouble you very much, but I want to get away from this. I can hardly breathe. I shall have no heart for my task, if I don’t see him soon.”

“Wait for me, then,” said Sir Purcell; “you cannot wait in a better place. And I must entreat you to be careful.” He half alluded to the adjustment of her shawl, and to anything else, as far as she might choose to apprehend him. Her dexterity in tossing him the letter, unseen by Madame Marini, might have frightened him and given him a dread, that albeit woman, there was germ of wickedness in her.

This pained him acutely, for he never forgot that she had been the means of his introduction to Cornelia, from whom he could not wholly dissociate her: and the idea that any prospective shred of impurity hung about one who had even looked on his beloved, was utter anguish to the keen sentimentalist. “Be very careful,” he would have repeated, but that he had a warning sense of the ludicrous, and Emilia’s large eyes when they fixed calmly on a face were not of a flighty east She stood, too, with the “dignity of sadness,” as he was pleased to phrase it.

“She must be safe here,” he said to himself. And yet, upon reflection, he decided not to leave her, peremptorily informing her to that effect. Emilia took his arm, and as they were passing through the hall of entrance they met the same gentleman who had directed them to the spot of quiet. Both she and Sir Purcell heard him say to a companion: “There she is.” A deep glow covered Emilia’s face. “Do they know you?” asked Sir Purcell. “No,” she said: and then he turned, but the couple had gone on.

“That deserves chastisement,” he muttered. Briefly telling her to wait, he pursued them. Emilia was standing in the gateway, not at all comprehending why she was alone. “Sandra Belloni!” struck her ear. Looking forward she perceived a hand and a head gesticulating from a cab-window. She sprang out into the street, and instantly the hand clenched and the head glared savagely. It was Mr. Pericles himself, in travelling costume.

“I am your fool?” he began, overbearing Emilia’s most irritating “How are you?” and “Are you quite well?

“I am your fool? hein? You send me to Paris! to Geneve! I go over Lago Maggiore, and aha! it is your joke, meess! I juste return. Oh capital! At Milano I wait—I enquire—till a letter from old Belloni, and I learn I am your fool—of you all! Jomp in.”

Page 741

“A gentleman is coming,” said Emilia, by no means intimidated, though the forehead of Mr. Pericles looked portentous. “He was bringing me to you.”

“Zen, jomp in!” cried Mr. Pericles.

Here Sir Purcell came up.

Emilia said softly: “Mr. Pericles.”

There was the form of a bow of moderate recognition between them, but other hats were off to Emilia. The two gentlemen who had offended Sir Purcell had insisted, on learning the nature of their offence, that they had a right to present their regrets to the lady in person, and beg an excuse from her lips. Sir Purcell stood white with a futile effort at self-control, as one of them, preluding “Pardon me,” said: “I had the misfortune to remark to my friend, as I passed you, ‘There she is.’ May I, indeed, ask your pardon? My friend is an artist. I met him after I had first seen you. He, at least, does not think foolish my recommendation to him that he should look on you at all hazards. Let me petition you to overlook the impertinence.”

“I think, gentlemen, you have now made the most of the advantage my folly, in supposing you would regret or apologize fittingly for an impropriety, has given you,” interposed Sir Purcell.

His new and superior tone (for he had previously lost his temper and spoken with a silly vehemence) caused them to hesitate. One begged the word of pardon from Emilia to cover his retreat. She gave it with an air of thorough-bred repose, saying, “I willingly pardon you,” and looking at them no more, whereupon they vanished. Ten minutes later, Emilia and Sir Purcell were in the chambers of Mr. Pericles.

The Greek had done nothing but grin obnoxiously to every word spoken on the way, drawing his hand down across his jaw, to efface the hard pale wrinkles, and eyeing Emilia’s cavalier with his shrewdest suspicious look.

“You will excuse,”—he pointed to the confusion of the room they were in, and the heap of unopened letters,—“I am from ze Continent; I do not expect ze pleasure. A seat?”

Mr. Pericles handed chairs to his visitors.

“It is a climate, is it not,” he resumed.

Emilia said a word, and he snapped at her, immediately adding, “Hein? Ah! so!” with a charming urbanity.

“How lucky that we should meet you,” exclaimed Emilia. “We were just coming to you —to find out, I mean, where you were, and call on you.”

“Ough! do not tell me lies,” said Mr. Pericles, clasping the hollow of his cheeks between thumb and forefinger.

“Allow me to assure you that what Miss Belloni has said is perfectly correct,” Sir Purcell remarked.

Mr. Pericles gave a short bow. “It is ze same; I am much obliged.”

“And you have just come from Italy?” said Emilia.

“Where you did me ze favour to send me, it is true. Sanks!”

“Oh, what a difference between Italy and this!” Emilia turned her face to the mottled yellow windows.

Page 742

“Many sanks,” repeated Mr. Pericles, after which the three continued silent for a time.

At last Emilia said, bluntly, “I have come to ask you to take me to Italy.”

Mr. Pericles made no sign, but Sir Purcell leaned forward to her with a gaze of astonishment, almost of horror.

“Will you take me?” persisted Emilia.

Still the sullen Greek refused either to look at her or to answer.

“Because I am ready to go,” she went on. “I want to go at once; to-day, if you like. I am getting too old to waste an hour.”

Mr. Pericles uncrossed his legs, ejaculating, “What a fog! Ah!” and that was all. He rose, and went to a cupboard.

Sir Purcell murmured hurriedly in Emilia’s ear, “Have you considered what you’ve been saying?”

“Yes, yes. It is only a journey,” Emilia replied, in a like tone.

“A journey!”

“My father wishes it.”

“Your mother?”

“Hush! I intend to make him take the Madre with me.”

She designated Mr. Pericles, who had poured into a small liqueur glass some green Chartreuse, smelling strong of pines. His visitors declined to eject the London fog by this aid of the mountain monks, and Mr. Pericles warmed himself alone.

“You are wiz old Belloni,” he called out.

“I am not staying with my father,” said Emilia.

“Where?” Mr. Pericles shed a baleful glance on Sir Purcell.

“I am staying with Signor Marini.”

“Servente!” Mr. Pericles ducked his head quite low, while his hand swept the floor with an imaginary cap. Malice had lighted up his features, and finding, after the first burst of sarcasm, that it was vain to indulge it toward an absent person, he altered his style. “Look,” he cried to Emilia, “it is Marini stops you and old Belloni—a conspirator, aha! Is

it for an artist to conspire, and be carbonaro, and kiss books, and, mon Dieu! bon! it is Marini plays me zis trick. I mark him. I mark him, I say! He is paid by young Pole. I hold zat family in my hand, I say! So I go to be met by you, and on I go to Italy. I get a letter at Milano,—'Marini stop me at Dover,' signed 'Giuseppe Belloni.' Ze letter have been spied into by ze Austrians. I am watched—I am dogged—I am imprisoned—I am examined. 'You know zis Giuseppe Belloni?' 'Meine Herrn! he was to come. I leave word at Paris for him, at Geneve, at Stresa, to bring his daughter to ze Conservatoire, for which I pay. She has a voice—or she had.'"

"Has!" exclaimed Emilia.

"Had!" Mr. Pericles repeated.

"She has!"

"Zen sing!" with which thunder of command, Mr. Pericles gave up his vindictive narration of the points of his injuries sustained, and, pitching into a chair, pressed his fingers to his temples, frowning attention. His eyes were on the floor. Presently he glanced up, and saw Emilia's chest rising quickly. No voice issued.

Page 743

“It is to commence,” cried Mr. Pericles. “Hein! now sing.”

Emilia laid her hand under her throat. “Not now! Oh, not now! When you have told me what those Austrians did to you. I want to hear; I am very anxious to hear. And what they said of my father. How could he have come to Milan without a passport? He had only a passport to Paris.”

“And at Paris I leave instructions for ze procuration of a passport over Lombardy. Am I not Antonio Pericles Agriolopoulos? Sing, I say!”

“Ah, but what voices you must have heard in Italy,” said Emilia softly. “I am afraid to sing after them. Si: I dare not.”

She panted, little in keeping with the cajolery of her tones, but she had got Mr. Pericles upon a theme serious to his mind.

“Not a voice! not one!” he cried, stamping his foot. “All is French. I go twice wizin six monz, and if I go to a goose-yard I hear better. Oh, yes! it is tune—“ta-ta-ta—ti-ti-ti—to!” and of ze heart—where is zat? Mon Dieu! I despair. I see music go dead. Let me hear you, Sandra.”

His enthusiasm had always affected Emilia, and painfully since her love had given her a consciousness of infidelity to her Art, but now the pathetic appeal to her took away her strength, and tears rose in her eyes at the thought of his faith in her. His repetition of her name—the ‘Sandra’ being uttered with unwonted softness—plunged her into a fit of weeping.

“Ah!” Mr. Pericles shouted. “See what she has come to!” and he walked two or three paces off to turn upon her spitefully, “she will be vapeurs, nerfs, I know not! when it wants a physique of a saint! Sandra Belloni,” he added, gravely, “lift up ze head! Sing, ‘Sempre al tuo santo nome.’”

Emilia checked her tears. His hand being raised to beat time, she could not withstand the signal. “Sempre;”—there came two struggling notes, to which another clung, shuddering like two creatures on the deeps.

She stopped; herself oddly calling out “Stop.”

“Stop who, donc?” Mr. Pericles postured an indignant interrogation.

“I mean, I must stop,” Emilia faltered. “It’s the fog. I cannot sing in this fog. It chokes me.”

Apparently Mr. Pericles was about to say something frightfully savage, which was restrained by the presence of Sir Purcell. He went to the door in answer to a knock,

while Emilia drew breath as calmly as she might; her head moving a little backward with her breathing, in a sad mechanical way painful to witness. Sir Purcell stretched his hand out to her, but she did not take it. She was listening to voices at the door. Was it really Mr. Pole who was there? Quite unaware of the effect the sight of her would produce on him, Emilia rose and walked to the doorway. She heard Mr. Pole abusing Mr. Pericles half banteringly for his absence while business was urgent, saying that they must lay their heads together and consult, otherwise—a significant indication appeared to close the sentence.

Page 744

“But if you’ve just come off your journey, and have got a lady in there, we must postpone, I suppose. Say, this afternoon. I’ll keep up to the mark, if nothing happens....”

Emilia pushed the door from the hand of Mr. Pericles, and was advancing toward the old man on the landing; but no sooner did the latter verify to his startled understanding that he had seen her, than with an exclamation of “All right! good-bye!” he began a rapid descent, of the stairs. A distance below, he bade Mr. Pericles take care of her, and as an excuse for his abrupt retreat, the word “busy” sounded up.

“Does my face frighten him?” Emilia thought. It made her look on herself with a foreign eye. This is a dreadful but instructive piece of contemplation; acting as if the rich warm blood of self should have ceased to hug about us, and we stand forth to be dissected unresistingly. All Emilia’s vital strength now seemed to vanish. At the renewal of Mr. Pericles’ peremptory mandate for her to sing, she could neither appeal to him, nor resist; but, raising her chest, she made her best effort, and then covered her face. This was done less for concealment of her shame-stricken features than to avoid sight of the stupefaction imprinted upon Mr. Pericles.

“Again, zat A flat!” he called sternly.

She tried it.

“Again!”

Again she did her utmost to accomplish the task. If you have seen a girl in a fit of sobs elevate her head, with hard-shut eyelids, while her nostrils convulsively take in a long breath, as if for speech, but it is expended in one quick vacant sigh, you know how Emilia looked. And it requires a humane nature to pardon such an aspect in a person from whom we have expected triumphing glances and strong thrilling tones.

“What is zis?” Mr. Pericles came nearer to her.

He would listen to no charges against the atmosphere. Commanding her to give one simple run of notes, a contralto octave, he stood over her with keenly watchful eyes. Sir Purcell bade him observe her distress.

“I am much obliged,” Mr. Pericles bowed, “she is ruined. I have suspected. Ha! But I ask for a note! One!”

This imperious signal drew her to another attempt. The deplorable sound that came sent Emilia sinking down with a groan.

“Basta, basta! So, it is zis tale,” said Mr. Pericles, after an observation of her huddled shape. “Did I not say—”

His voice was so menacingly loud and harsh that Sir Purcell remarked: “This is not the time to repeat it—pardon me—whatever you said.”

“Ze fool—she play ze fool! Sir, I forget ze Christian—ah! Purcell!—I say she play ze fool, and look at her! Why is it she comes to me now? A dozen times I warn her. To Italy! to Italy! all is ready: you will have a place at ze Conservatorio. No: she refuse. I say ’Go, and you are a queen. You are a Prima at twenty, and Europe is beneas you.’ No: she refuse, and she is ruined. ‘What,’ I say, ’what zat dam silly smile mean?’ Oh, no! I am not lazy!’ ‘But you area fool!’ ‘Oh, no!’ ’And what are you, zen? And what shall you do?’ Nussing! nussing! nussing! And, dam! zere is an end.”

Page 745

Emilia had caught blindly at Sir Purcell's hand, by which she raised herself, and then uncovering her face, looked furtively at the malign furnace-white face of Mr. Pericles.

"It cannot have gone,"—she spoke, as if mentally balancing the possibility.

"It has gone, I say; and you know why, Mademoiselle ze Fool!" Mr. Pericles retorted.

"No, no; it can't be gone. Gone? voices never go!"

The reiteration of the "You know why," from Mr. Pericles, and all the wretchedness of loss it suggested, robbed her of the little spark of nervous fire by which she felt half-reviving in courage and confidence.

"Let me try once more," she appealed to him, in a frenzy.

Mr. Pericles, though fully believing in his heart that it might only be a temporary deprivation of voice, affected to scout the notion of another trial, but finally extended his forefinger: "Well, now; start! 'Sempre al tuo Santo!' Commence: Sem—" and Mr. Pericles hummed the opening bar, not as an unhopeful man would do. The next moment he was laughing horribly. Emilia, to make sure of the thing she dreaded, forced the note, and would not be denied. What voice there was in her came to the summons. It issued, if I may so express it, ragged, as if it had torn through a briar-hedge: then there was a whimper of tones, and the effect was like the lamentation of a hardly-used urchin, lacking a certain music that there is in his undoubted heartfelt earnestness. No single note poised firmly for the instant, but swayed, trembling on its neighbour to right and to left when pressed for articulate sound, it went into a ghastly whisper. The laughter of Mr. Pericles was pleasing discord in comparison.

CHAPTER XL

Emilia stretched out her hand and said, "Good-bye." Seeing that the hardened girl, with her dead eyelids, did not appear to feel herself at his mercy, and also that Sir Purcell's forehead looked threatening, Mr. Pericles stopped his sardonic noise. He went straight to the door, which he opened with alacrity, and mimicking very wretchedly her words of adieu, stood prepared to bow her out. She astonished him by passing without another word. Before he could point a phrase bitter enough for expression, Sir Purcell had likewise passed, and in going had given him a quietly admonishing look.

"Zose Poles are beggars!" Mr. Pericles roared after them over the stairs, and slammed his door for emphasis. Almost immediately there was a knock at it. Mr. Pericles stood bent and cat-like as Sir Purcell reappeared. The latter, avoiding all preliminaries, demanded of the Greek that he should promise not to use the names of his friends publicly in such a manner again.

“I require a promise for the future. An apology will be needless from you.”

“I shall not give it,” said Mr. Pericles, with a sharp lift of his upper lip.

“But you will give me the promise I have returned for.”

Page 746

In answer Mr. Pericles announced that he had spoken what was simply true: that the prosperity of the Poles was fictitious: that he, or any unfavourable chance, could ruin them: and that their friends might do better to protect their interests than by menacing one who had them in his power.

Sir Purcell merely reiterated his demand for the promise, which was ultimately snarled to him; whereupon he retired, joy on his features. For, Cornelia poor, she might be claimed by him fearlessly: that is to say, without the fear of people whispering that the penniless baronet had sued for gold, and without the fear of her father rejecting his suit. At least he might, with this knowledge that he had gained, appoint to meet her now! All the morning Sir Purcell had been combative, owing to that subordinate or secondary post he occupied in a situation of some excitement;—which combativeness is one method whereby men thus placed, imagining that they are acting devotedly for their friends, contrive still to assert themselves. He descended to the foot of the stairs, where he had told Emilia to wait for him, full of kind feelings and ready cheerful counsels; as thus: “Nothing that we possess belongs to us;—All will come round rightly in the end; Be patient, look about for amusement, and improve your mind.” And more of this copper coinage of wisdom in the way of proverbs. But Emilia was nowhere visible to receive the administration of comfort. Outside the house the fog appeared to have swallowed her. With some chagrin on her behalf (partly a sense of duty unfulfilled) Sir Purcell made his way to the residence of the Marinis, to report of her there, if she should not have arrived. The punishment he inflicted on himself in keeping his hand an hour from that letter to be written to Cornelia, was almost pleasing; and he was rewarded by it, for the projected sentences grew mellow and rich, condensed and throbbed eloquently. What wonder, that with such a mental occupation, he should pass Emilia and not notice her? She let him go.

But when he was out of sight, all seemed gone. The dismally-lighted city wore a look of Judgement terrible to see. Her brain was slave to her senses: she fancied she had dropped into an underground kingdom, among a mysterious people. The anguish through which action had just hurried her, now fell with a conscious weight upon her heart. She stood a moment, seeing her desolation stretch outwardly into endless labyrinths; and then it narrowed and took hold of her as a force within: changing thus, almost with each breathing of her body.

The fog had thickened. Up and down the groping city went muffled men, few women. Emilia looked for one of her sex who might have a tender face. Desire to be kissed and loved by a creature strange to her, and to lay her head upon a woman’s bosom, moved her to gaze around with a longing once or twice; but no eyes met hers, and the fancy recurred vividly that she was not in the world she had known.

Page 747

Otherwise, what had robbed her of her voice? She played with her fancy for comfort, long after any real vitality in it had oozed out. Her having strength to play at fancies showed that a spark of hope was alive. In truth, firm of flesh as she was, to believe that all worth had departed from her was impossible, and when she reposed simply on her sensations, very little trouble beset her: only when she looked abroad did the aspect of numerous indifferent faces, and the harsh flowing of the world its own way, tell her she had lost her power. Could it be lost? The prospect of her desolation grew so wide to her that she shut her eyes, abandoning herself to feeling; and this by degrees moved her to turn back and throw herself at the feet of Mr. Pericles. For, if he said, “Wait, my child, and all will come round well,” she was prepared blindly to think so. The projection of the words in her mind made her ready to weep: but as she neared the house of his office the wish to hear him speak that, became passionate; she counted all that depended on it, and discovered the size of the fabric she had built on so thin a plank. After a while, her steps were mechanically swift. Before she reached the chambers of Mr. Pericles she had walked, she knew not why, once round the little quiet enclosed city-garden, and a cold memory of those men who had looked at her face gave her some wonder, to be quickly kindled into fuller comprehension.

Beholding Emilia once more, Mr. Pericles enjoyed a revival of his taste for vengeance; but, unhappily for her, he found it languid, and when he had rubbed his hands, stared, and by sundry sharp utterances brought her to his feet, his satisfaction was less poignant than he had expected. As a consequence, instead of speaking outrageously, according to his habit, in wrath, he was now frigidly considerate, informing Emilia that it would be good for her if she were dead, seeing that she was of no use whatever; but, as she was alive, she had better go to her father and mother, and learn knitting, or some such industrial employment. “Unless zat man for whom you play fool!—” Mr. Pericles shrugged the rest of his meaning.

“But my voice may not be gone,” urged Emilia. “I may sing to you to-morrow—this evening. It must be the fog. Why do you think it lost? It can’t be—”

“Cracked!” cried Mr. Pericles.

“It is not! No; do not think it. I may stay here. Don’t tell me to go yet. The streets make me wish to die. And I feel I may, perhaps, sing presently. Wait. Will you wait?”

A hideous imitation of her lamentable tones burst from Mr. Pericles. “Cracked!” he cried again.

Emilia lifted her eyes, and looked at him steadily. She saw the idea grow in the eyes fronting her that she had a pleasant face, and she at once staked this little bit of newly-conceived worth on an immediate chance. Remember; that she was as near despair as a creature constituted so healthily could go. Speaking no longer in a girlish style, but with the grave pleading manner of a woman, she begged Mr. Pericles to take her to

Italy, and have faith in the recovery of her voice. He, however, far from being softened, as he grew aware of her sweetness of feature, waxed violent and insulting.

Page 748

“Take me,” she said. “My voice will reward you. I feel that you can cure it.”

“For zat man! to go to him again!” Mr. Pericles sneered.

“I never shall do that.” There sprang a glitter as of steel in Emilia’s eyes. “I will make myself yours for life, if you like. Take my hand, and let me swear. I do not break my word. I will swear, that if I recover my voice to become what you expected,—I will marry you whenever you ask me, and then—”

More she was saying, but Mr. Pericles, sputtering a laugh of “Sanks!” presented a postured supplication for silence.

“I am not a man who marries.”

He plainly stated the relations that the woman whom he had distinguished by the honours of selection must hold toward him.

Emilia’s cheeks did not redden; but, without any notion of shame at the words she listened to, she felt herself falling lower and lower the more her spirit clung to Mr. Pericles: yet he alone was her visible personification of hope, and she could not turn from him. If he cast her off, it seemed to her that her voice was condemned. She stood there still, and the cold-eyed Greek formed his opinion.

He was evidently undecided as regards his own course of proceeding, for his chin was pressed by thumb and forefinger hard into his throat, while his eyebrows were wrinkled up to their highest elevation. From this attitude, expressive of the accurate balancing of the claims of an internal debate, he emerged into the posture of a cock crowing, and Emilia heard again his bitter mimicry of her miserable broken tones, followed by Ha! dam! Basta! basta!”

“Sit here,” cried Mr. Pericles. He had thrown himself into a chair, and pointed to his knee.

Emilia remained where she was standing.

He caught at her hand, but she plucked that from him. Mr. Pericles rose, sounding a cynical “Hein!”

“Don’t touch me,” said Emilia.

Nothing exasperates certain natures so much as the effort of the visibly weak to intimidate them.

“I shall not touch you?” Mr. Pericles sneered. “Zen, why are you here?”

“I came to my friend,” was Emilia’s reply.

“Your friend! He is not ze friend of a couac-couac. Once, if you please: but now” (Mr. Pericles shrugged), “now you are like ze rest of women. You are game. Come to me.”

He caught once more at her hand, which she lifted; then at her elbow.

“Will you touch me when I tell you not to?”

There was the soft line of an involuntary frown over her white face, and as he held her arm from the doubled elbow, with her clenched hand aloft, she appeared ready to strike a tragic blow.

Anger and every other sentiment vanished from Mr. Pericles in the rapturous contemplation of her admirable artistic pose.

Page 749

“Mon Dieu! and wiz a voice!” he exclaimed, dashing his fist in a delirium of forgetfulness against the one plastered lock of hair on his shining head. “Little fool! little dam fool!—-zat might have been”—(Mr. Pericles figured in air with his fingers to signify the exaltation she was to have attained)—“Mon Dieu! and look at you! Did I not warn you? non a vero? Did I not say ’Ruin, ruin, if you go so? For a man!—a voice! You will not come to me? Zen, hear! you shall go to old Belloni. I do not want you, my pretty dear. Woman is a trouble, a drug. You shall go to old Belloni; and, crack! if ze voice will come back to a whip,—bravo, old Belloni!”

Mr. Pericles turned to reach down his hat from a peg. At the same instant Emilia quitted the room.

Dusk was deepening the yellow atmosphere, and the crowd was now steadily flowing in one direction. The bereaved creature went with the stream, glad to be surrounded and unseen, till it struck her, at last, that she was moving homeward. She stopped with a pang of grief, turned, and met all those people to whom the fireside was a beacon. For some time she bore against the pressure, but her loneliness overwhelmed her. None seemed to go her way. For a refuge, she turned into one of the city side streets, where she was quite alone. Unhappily, the street was of no length, and she soon came to the end of it. There was the choice of retracing her steps, or entering a strange street; and while she hesitated a troop of sheep went by, that made a piteous noise. She followed them, thinking curiously of the something broken that appeared to be in their throats. By-and-by, the thought flashed in her that they were going to be slaughtered. She held her step, looking at them, but without any tender movement of the heart. They came to a butcher’s yard, and went in.

When she had passed along a certain distance, a shiver seized her, and her instinct pushed her toward the lighted shops, where there were pictures. In one she saw the portrait of that Queen of Song whom she had heard at Besworth. Two young men, glancing as they walked by arm in arm, pronounced the name of the great enchantress, and hummed one of her triumphant airs. The features expressed health, humour, power, every fine animal faculty. Genius was on the forehead and the plastic mouth; the forehead being well projected, fair, and very shapely, showing clear balance, as well as capacity to grasp flame, and fling it. The line reaching to a dimple from the upper lip was saved from scornfulness by the lovely gleam, half-challenging, half-consoling, regal, roguish—what you would—that sat between her dark eyelashes, like white sunlight on the fringed smooth roll of water by a weir. Such a dimple, and such a gleam of eyes, would have been keys to the face of a weakling, and it was the more fascinating from the disregard of any minor charm notable upon this grand visage, which could not suffer a betrayal. You saw, and

Page 750

there was no effort to conceal, that the spirit animating it was intensely human; but it was human of the highest chords of humanity, indifferent to finesse and despising subtleties; gifted to speak, to inspire, and to command all great emotions. In fact, it was the masque of a dramatic artist in repose. Tempered by beauty, the robust frame showed that she possessed a royal nature, and could, as a foremost qualification for Art, feel harmoniously. She might have many of the littlenesses of which women are accused; for Art she promised unspotted excellence; and, adorable as she was by attraction of her sex, she was artist over all.

Emilia found herself on one of the bridges, thinking of this aspect. Beneath her was the stealing river, with its red intervals, and the fog had got a wider circle. She could not disengage that face from her mind. It seemed to say to her, boldly, “I live because success is mine;” and to hint, as with a paler voice, “Death the fruit of failure.” Could she, Emilia, ever be looked on again by her friends? The dread of it gave her shudders. Then, death was certainly easy! But death took no form in her imagination, as it does to one seeking it. She desired to forget and to hide her intolerable losses; to have the impostor she felt herself to be buried. As she walked along she held out her hands, murmuring, “Helpless! useless!” It came upon her as a surprise that one like herself should be allowed to live. “I don’t want to,” she said; and the neat moment, “I wonder what a drowned woman is like?” She hurried back to the streets and the shops. The shops failed now to give her distraction, for a stiff and dripping image floated across all the windows, and she was glad to see the shutters being closed; though, when the streets were dark, some friendliness seemed to have gone. When the streets were quits dark, save for the row of lamps, she walked fast, fearing she knew not what.

A little Italian boy sat doubled over his organ on a doorstep, while a yet smaller girl at his elbow plied him with questions in English. Emilia stopped before them, and the girl complained to her that the perverse little foreigner would not answer. Two or three words in his native tongue soon brought his face to view. Emilia sat down between them, and listened to the prattle of two languages. The girl said that she never had supper, which was also the case with the boy; so Emilia felt for her purse, and sent the girl with sixpence in search of a shop that sold cafes. The girl came back with her apron full. As they were all about to eat, a policeman commanded them to quit the spot, informing them that he knew both them and their dodges. Emilia stood up, and was taking her little people away, when the policeman, having suddenly changed his accurate opinion of her, said, “You’re giving ’em some supper, miss? Oh, they must sit down to their suppers, you know!” and walked away, not to be a witness of this infraction

Page 751

of the law. So, they sat down and ate, and the boy and girl tried to say intelligible things to one another, and laughed. Emilia could not help joining in their laughter. The girl was very anxious to know whether the boy was ever beaten, and hearing that he was, she appeared better satisfied, remarking that she was also, but curious still as to the different forms of chastisement they received. This being partially explained, she wished to know whether he would be beaten that night, Emilia interpreting. A grin, and a rapid whistle and 'cluck,' significant of the application of whips, told the state of his expectations; at which the girl clapped her hands, adding, lamentably, "So shall I, 'cause I am always." Emilia gathered them under each shoulder, when, to her delight and half perplexity, they closed their eyes, leaning against her.

The policeman passed, and for an hour endured this spectacle. At last he felt compelled to explain to Emilia what were the sentiments of gentlefolks with regard to their doorsteps, apart from the law of the matter. He put it to her human nature whether she would like her doorsteps to be blocked, so that no one could enter, and anyone emerging stood a chance of being precipitated, nose foremost, upon the pavement. Then, again, as gentle-folks had good experience of, the young ones in London were twice as cunning as the old. Emilia pleaded for her sleeping pair, that they might not be disturbed. Her voice gave the keeper of the peace notions of her being one of the eccentric young ladies who are occasionally 'missing,' and have advertizing friends. He uttered a stern ahem! preliminary to assent; but the noise wakened the children, who stared, and readily obeyed his gesture, which said, "Be off!" while his words were those of remonstrance. Emilia accompanied them a little way. Both promised eagerly that they would be at the same place the night following and departed—the boy with laughing nods and waving of hands, which the girl imitated. Emilia's feeling of security went with them. She at once feigned a destination in the distance, and set forward to reach it, but the continued exposure of this delusion made it difficult to renew. She fell to counting the hours that were to elapse before she would meet those children, saying to herself, that whatever she did she must keep her engagement to be at the appointed steps. This restriction set her darkly fancying that she wished for her end.

Remembering those men who had looked at her admiringly, "Am I worth looking at?" she said; and it gave her some pleasure to think that she had it still in her power to destroy a thing of value. She was savagely ashamed of going to death empty-handed. By-and-by, great fatigue stiffened her limbs, and she sat down from pure want of rest. The luxury of rest and soothing languor kept hard thoughts away. She felt as if floating, for a space. The fear of the streets left her. But when necessity for

Page 752

rest had gone, she clung to the luxury still, and sitting bent forward, with her hands about her knees, she began to brood over tumbled images of a wrong done to her. She had two distinct visions of herself, constantly alternating and acting like the temptation of two devils. One represented her despicable in feature, and bade her die; the other showed a fair face, feeling which to be her own, Emilia had fits of intolerable rage. This vision prevailed; and this wicked side of her humanity saved her. Active despair is a passion that must be superseded by a passion. Passive despair comes later; it has nothing to do with mental action, and is mainly a corruption or degradation of our blood. The rage in Emilia was blind at first, but it rose like a hawk, and singled its enemy. She fixed her mind to conceive the foolishness of putting out a face that her rival might envy, and of destroying anything that had value. The flattery of beauty came on her like a warm garment. When she opened her eyes, seeing what she was and where, she almost smiled at the silly picture that had given her comfort. Those men had looked on her admiringly, it was true, but would Wilfrid have ceased to love her if she had been beautiful? An extraordinary intuition of Wilfrid's sentiment tormented her now. She saw herself in the light that he would have seen her by, till she stood with the sensations of an exposed criminal in the dark length of the street, and hurried down it, back, as well as she could find her way, to the friendly policeman.

Her question on reaching him, "Are you married?" was prodigiously astonishing, and he administered the rebuff of an affirmative with severity. "Then," said Emilia, "when you go home, let me go with you to your wife. Perhaps she will consent to take care of me for this night." The policeman coughed mildly and replied, "It's plain you know nothing of women—begging your pardon, miss,—for I can see you're a lady." Emilia repeated her petition, and the policeman explained the nature of women. Not to be baffled, Emilia said, "I think your wife must be a good woman." Hereat the policeman laughed, arming "that the best of them knew what bad suspicions was." Ultimately, he consented to take her to his wife, when he was relieved, after the term of so many minutes. Emilia stood at a distance, speculating on the possible choice he would make of a tune to accompany his monotonous walk to and fro, and on the certainty of his wearing any tune to nothing.

She was in a bed, sleeping heavily, a little before dawn.

The day that followed was her day of misery. The blow that had stunned her had become as a loud intrusive pulse in her head. By this new daylight she fathomed the depth, and reckoned the value, of her loss. And her senses had no pleasure in the light, though there was sunshine. The woman who was her hostess was kind, but full of her first surprise at the strange visit, and too openly ready for any

Page 753

information the young lady might be willing to give with regard to her condition, prospects, and wishes. Emilia gave none. She took the woman's hand, asking permission to remain under her protection. The woman by-and-by named a sum of money as a sum for weekly payment, and Emilia transferred all to her that she had. The policeman and his wife thought her, though reasonable, a trifle insane. She sat at a window for hours watching a 'last man' of the fly species walking up and plunging down a pane of glass. On this transparent solitary field for the most objectless enterprise ever undertaken, he buzzed angrily at times, as if he had another meaning in him, which was being wilfully misinterpreted. Then he mounted again at his leisure, to pitch backward as before. Emilia found herself thinking with great seriousness that it was not wonderful for boys to be always teasing and killing flies, whose thin necks and bobbing heads themselves suggested the idea of decapitation. She said to her hostess: "I don't like flies. They seem never to sing but when they are bothered." The woman replied: "Ah, indeed?" very smoothly, and thought: "If you was to bust out now, which of us two would be strongest?" Emilia grew distantly aware that the policeman and his wife talked of her and watched her with combined observation.

When it was night she went to keep her appointment. The girl was there, but the boy came late. He said he had earned only a few pence that day, and would be beaten. He spoke in a whimpering tone which caused the girl to desire a translation of his words. Emilia told her how things were with him, and the girl expressed a wish that she had an organ, as in that case she would be sure to earn more than sixpence a day; such being the amount that procured her nightly a comfortable reception in the arms of her parents. "Do you like music?" said Emilia. The girl replied that she liked organs; but, as if to avoid committing an injustice, cited parrots as foremost in her affections. Holding them both to her breast, Emilia thought that she would rescue them from this beating by giving them the money they had to offer for kindness: but the restlessness of the children suddenly made her a third party to the thought of cakes. She had no money. Her heart bled for the poor little hungry, apprehensive creatures. For a moment she half fancied she had her voice, and looked up at the windows of the pitiless houses with a bold look; but there was a speedy mockery of her thought "You shall listen: you shall open!" She coughed hoarsely, and then fell into fits of crying. Her friend the policeman came by and took her arm with a force that he meant to be persuasive; so lifting her and handing her some steps beyond the limit of his beat, with stern directions for her to proceed home immediately. She obeyed. Next day she asked her hostess to lend her half-a-crown. The woman snapped shortly in answer: "No; the less you have the better." Emilia was obliged to abandon her little people.

Page 754

She was to this extent the creature of mania: that she could not conceive of a way being open by which she might return to her father and mother, or any of her friends. It was to her not a matter for her will to decide upon, but simply a black door shut that nothing could displace. When the week, for which term of shelter she had paid, was ended, her hostess spoke upon this point, saying, more to convince Emilia of the necessity for seeking her friends than from any unkindness: “Me and my husband can’t go on keepin’ you, you know, my dear, however well’s our meaning.” Emilia drew the woman toward her with both her lands, softly shaking her head. She left the house about noon.

It was now her belief that she had probably no more than another day to live, for she was destitute of money. The thought relieved her from that dreadful fear of the street, and she walked at her own pace, even after dark. The rumble and the rattle of wheels; the cries and grinding noises; the hum of motion and talk; all under the lingering smoky red of a London Winter sunset, were not discord to her animated blood. Her unhunted spirit made a music of them. It was not like the music of other days, nor was the exultation it created at all like happiness: but she at least forgot herself. Voices came in her ear, and hung unheard until long after the speaker had passed. Hunger did not assail her. She was not beset by an animal weakness; and having in her mind no image of death, and with her ties to life cut away;—thus devoid of apprehension or regret, she was what her quick blood made her, for the time. She recognized that, for one near extinction, it was useless to love or to hate: so Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte were spared. Emilia thought of them both with a sort of equanimity; not that any clear thought filled her brain through that delirious night. The intoxicating music raged there at one level depression, never rising any scale, never undulating ever so little, scarcely changing its barbarous monotony of notes. She had no power over it. Her critical judgement would at another moment have shrieked at it. She was moved by it as by a mechanical force.

The South-west wind blew, and the hours of the night were not evil to outcasts. Emilia saw many lying about, getting rest where they might. She hurried her eye pityingly over little children, but the devil that had seized her sprang contempt for the others—older beggars, who appeared to succumb to their fate when they should have lifted their heads up bravely. On she passed from square to market, market to park; and presently her mind shot an arrow of desire for morning, which was nothing less than hunger beginning to stir. “When will the shops open?” She tried to cheat herself by replying that she did not care when, but pangs of torment became too rapid for the counterfeit. Her imagination raised the roof from those great rich houses, and laid bare a brilliancy of dish-covers; and if any sharp gust of air touched the nerve in her nostril, it seemed instantaneously charged with the smell of old dinners. “No,” cried Emilia, “I dislike anything but plain food.” She quickly gave way, and admitted a craving for dainty morsels. “One lump of sugar!” she subsequently sighed. But neither sugar nor meat approached her.

Page 755

Her seat was under trees, between a man and a woman who slanted from her with hidden chins. The chilly dry leaves began to waken, and the sky showed its grey. Hunger had become as a leaden ball in Emilia's chest. She could have eaten eagerly still, but she had no ravenous images of food. Nevertheless, she determined to beg for bread at a baker's shop. Coming into the empty streets again, the dread of exposing her solitary wretchedness and the stains of night upon her, kept her back. When she did venture near the baker's shop, her sensation of weariness, want of washing, and general misery, made her feel a contrast to all other women she saw, that robbed her of the necessary effrontery. She preferred to hide her head.

The morning hours went in this conflict. She was between-whiles hungry and desperate, or stricken with shame. Fatigue, bringing the imperious necessity for rest, intervened as a relief. Emilia moaned at the weary length of the light, but when dusk fell and she beheld flame in the lamps, it seemed to be too sudden and she was alarmed. Passive despair had set in. She felt sick, though not weak, and the thought of asking help had gone.

A street urchin, of the true London species, in whom excess of woollen comforter made up for any marked scantiness in the rest of his attire, came trotting the pavement, pouring one of the favourite tunes of his native metropolis through the tube of a penny-whistle, from which it did not issue so disguised but that attentive ears might pronounce it the royal march of the Cannibal Islands. A placarded post beside a lamp met this musician's eye; and, still piping, he bent his knees and read the notification. Emilia thought of the Hillford and Ipley clubmen, the big drum, the speeches, the cheers, and all the wild strength that lay in her that happy morning. She watched the boy piping as if he were reading from a score, and her sense of humour was touched. "You foolish boy!" she said to herself softly. But when, having evidently come to the last printed line, the boy rose and pocketed his penny-whistle, Emilia was nearly laughing. "That's because he cannot turn over the leaf," she said, and stood by the post till long after the boy had disappeared. The slight emotion of fun had restored to her some of her lost human sensations, and she looked about for a place where to indulge them undisturbed. One of the bridges was in sight She yearned for the solitude of the wharf beside it, and hurried to the steps. To descend she had to pass a street-organ and a small figure bent over it. "Sei buon' Italiano?" she said. The answer was a surly "Si." Emilia cried convulsively "Addio!" Her brain had become on a sudden vacant of a thought, and all she knew was that she descended.

CHAPTER XLI

"Sei buon' Italiana?"

Across what chasm did the words come to her?

It seemed but a minutes and again many hours back, that she had asked that question of a little fellow, who, if he had looked up and nodded would have given her great joy, but who kept his face dark from her and with a sullen “Si” extinguished her last feeling of a desire for companionship with life.

Page 756

“Si,” she replied, quite as sullenly, and without looking up.

But when her hand was taken and other words were uttered, she that had crouched there so long between death and life immovable, loving neither, rose possessed of a passion for the darkness and the void, and struggling bitterly with the detaining hand, crying for instant death. No strength was in her to support the fury.

“Merthyr Powys is with you,” said her friend, “and will never leave you.”

“Will never take me up there?” Emilia pointed to the noisy level above them.

“Listen, and I will tell you how I have found you,” replied Merthyr.

“Don’t force me to go up.”

She spoke from the end of her breath. Merthyr feared that it was more than misery, even madness, afflicting her. He sat on the wharf-bench silent till she was reassured. But at his first words, the eager question came: “You will not force me to go up there?”

“No; we can stay and talk here,” said Merthyr. “And this is how I have found you. Do you suppose you have been hidden from us all this time? Perhaps you fancy you do not belong to your friends? Well, I spoke to all of your ‘children,’ as you used to call them. Do you remember? The day before yesterday two had seen you. You said to one, ’From Savoy or Piedmont?’ He said, ‘From Savoy;’ and you shook your head: ’Not looking on Italy!’ you said. This night I roused one of them, and he stretched his finger down the steps, saying that you had gone down there. ’Sei buon’ Italiano?” you said. “And that is how I have found you. Sei buon’ Italiana?”

Emilia let her hand rest in Merthyr’s, wondering to think that there should be no absolute darkness for a creature to escape into while living. A trembling came on her. “Let me look over at the water,” she said; and Merthyr, who trusted her even in that extremity, allowed her to lean forward, and felt her grasp grow moist in his, till she turned back with shudders, giving him both her hands. “A drowned woman looks so dreadful!” Her speech was faint as she begged to be taken away from that place. Merthyr put his hand to her arm-pit, sustaining her steps. As they neared the level where men were, she looked behind her and realized the black terrors she had just been blindly handling. Fright sped her limbs for a second or two, and then her whole weight hung upon Merthyr. He held her in both arms, thinking that she had swooned, but she murmured: “Have you heard that my voice has gone?”

“If you have suffered, I do not wonder,” he said.

“I am useless. My voice is dead.”

“Useless to your friends? Tush, my little Emilia! Sandra mia! Don’t you know that while you love your friends that’s all they want of you?”

“Oh!” she moaned; “the gas-lamp hurts me. What a noise there is!”

“We shall soon get away from the noise.”

“No; I like it; but not the light. Oh, my feet!—why are you walking still? What friends?”

Page 757

“For instance, myself.”

“You knew of my wandering about London! It makes me believe in heaven. I can’t bear to think of being unseen.”

“This morning,” said Merthyr, “I saw the policeman in whose house you have been staying.”

Emilia bowed her head to the mystery by which this friend was endowed to be cognizant of her actions. “I feel that I have not seen the streets for years. If it were not for you I should fall down.—Oh! do you understand that my voice has quite gone?”

Merthyr perceived her anxiety to be that she might not betaken on doubtful terms. “Your hand hasn’t,” he said, pressing it, and so gratified her with a concrete image of something that she could still bestow upon a friend. To this she clung while the noisy wheels bore her through London, till her weak body failed to keep courage in her breast, and she wept and came closer to Merthyr. He who supposed that her recent despair and present tears were for the loss of her lover, gave happily more comfort than he took. “When old gentlemen choose to interest themselves about very young ladies,” he called upon his humorous philosophy to observe internally, as men do to forestall the possible cynic external;—and the rest of the sentence was acted under his eyes by the figures of three persons. But, there she was, lying within his arm, rescued, the creature whom he had found filling his heart, when lost, and whom he thought one of the most hopeful of the women of earth! He thanked God for bare facts. She lay against him with her eyelids softly joined, and as he felt the breathing of her body, he marvelled to think how matter-of-fact they had both been on the brink of a tragedy, and how naturally she had, as it were, argued herself up to the gates of death. For want of what? “My sister may supply it,” thought Merthyr.

“Oh! that river is like a great black snake with a sick eye, and will come round me!” said Emilia, talking as from sleep; then started, with fright in her face: “Oh! my hunger again!”

“Hunger!” said he, horrified.

“It comes worse than ever,” she moaned. “I was half dead just now, and didn’t feel it. There’s—there’s no pain in death. But this—it’s like fire and frost! I feel being eaten up. Give me something.”

Merthyr set his teeth and enveloped her in a tight hug that relieved her from the sharper pangs; and so held her, the tears bursting through his shut eyelids, till at the first hotel they reached he managed to get food for her. She gave a little gasping cry when he put bread through the window of the cab. Bit by bit he handed her the morsels. It was impossible to procure broth. When they drove on, she did not complain of suffering, but

her chest rose and fell many times heavily. She threw him out in the reading of her character, after a space, by excusing herself for having eaten with such eagerness; and it was long before he learnt what Wilfrid's tyrannous sentiment had done to this simple nature. He understood better the fear she expressed of meeting Georgiana. Nevertheless, she exhibited none on entering the house, and returned Georgiana's embrace with what strength was left to her.

Page 758

CHAPTER XLII

Up the centre aisle of Hillford Church, the Tinleys (late as usual) were seen trooping for morning service in midwinter. There was a man in the rear known to be a man by the sound of his boots and measure of his stride, for the ladies of Brookfield, having rejected the absurd pretensions of Albert Tinley, could not permit curiosity to encounter the risk of meeting his gaze by turning their heads. So, with charitable condescension they returned the slight church nod of prim Miss Tinley passing, of the detestable Laura Tinley, of affected Rose Tinley (whose complexion was that of a dust-bin), and of Madeline Tinley (too young for a character beyond what the name bestowed), and then they arranged their prayer-books, and apparently speculated as to the possible text that morning to be given forth from the pulpit. But it seemed to them all that an exceedingly bulky object had passed as guardian of the light-footed damsels preceding him. Though none of the ladies had looked up as he passed, they were conscious of a stature and a circumference which they had deemed to be entirely beyond the reach of the Tinleys, and a scornful notion of the Tinleys having hired a guardsman, made Arabella smile at the stretch of her contempt, that could help her to conceive the ironic possibility. Relieved on the suspicion that Albert was in attendance of his sisters, they let their eyes fall calmly on the Tinley pew. Could two men upon this earthly sphere possess such a bearskin? There towered the shoulders of Mr. Pericles; his head looking diminished by the hugeous collar. Arabella felt a seizure of her hand from Adela's side. She placed her book open before her, and stared at the pulpit. From neither of the three of Brookfield could Laura's observation extract a sign of the utter astonishment she knew they must be experiencing; and had it not been for the ingenuous broad whisper of Mrs. Chump, which sounded toward the verge even of her conception of possibilities, the Tinleys would not have been gratified by the first public display of the prize they had wrested from the Poles.

"Mr. Paricles—oh!" went Mrs. Chump, and a great many pews were set in commotion.

Forthwith she bent over Cornelia's lap, and Cornelia, surveying her placidly, had to murmur, "By-and-by; by-and-by."

"But, did ye see 'm, my dear? and a forr'ner in a Protestant Church! And such a forr'ner as he is, to be sure! And, ye know, ye said he'd naver come with you, and it's them creatures ye don't like. Corrnelia!"

"The service commences," remarked that lady, standing up.

Page 759

Many eyes were on Mr. Pericles, who occasionally inspected the cornices and corbels and stained glass to right and left, or detected a young lady staring at him, or anticipated her going to stare, and put her to confusion by a sharp turn of his head, and then a sniff and smoothing down of his moustache. But he did not once look at the Brookfield pew. By hazard his eye ranged over it, and after the first performance of this trick he would have found the ladies a match for him, even if he had sought to challenge their eyes. They were constrained to admit that Laura Tinley managed him cleverly. She made him hold a book and appear respectably devout. She got him down in good time when seats were taken, and up again, without much transparent persuasion. The first notes of the organ were seen to agitate the bearskin. Laura had difficulty to induce the man to rise for the hymn, and when he had listened to the intoning of a verse, Mr. Pericles suddenly bent, as if he had snapped in two: nor could Laura persuade him to rejoin the present posture of the congregation. Then only did Laura, to cover her failure, turn the subdued light of a merry smile upon the Brookfield pew.

The smile was noticed by Apprehension sitting in the corner of one eye, and it was likewise known that Laura's chagrin at finding that she was not being watched affected her visibly. At the termination of the sermon, the ladies bowed their heads a short space, and placing Mrs. Chump in front drove her out, so that her exclamations of wonderment, and affectedly ostentatious gaspings of sympathy for Brookfield, were heard by few. On they hurried, straight and fast to Brookfield. Mr. Pole was talking to Tracy Runningbrook at the gate. The ladies cut short his needless apology to the young man for not being found in church that day, by asking questions of Tracy. The first related to their brother's whereabouts; the second to Emilia's condition. Tracy had no time to reply. Mrs. Chump had identified herself with Brookfield so warmly that the defection of Mr. Pericles was a fine legitimate excitement to her. "I hate 'm!" she cried. "I pos'tively hate the man! And he to go to church! A pretty figure for an angel—he, now! But, my dears, we cann't let annybody else have 'm. Shorrt of his bein' drowned or killed, we must intrigue to keep the wretch to ourselves."

"Oh, dear!" said Adela impatiently.

"Well, and I didn't say to myself, ye little jealous thing!" retorted Mrs. Chump.

"Indeed, ma'am, you are welcome to him."

"And indeed, miss, I don't want 'm. And, perhaps, ye were flirtin' all the fun out of him on board the yacht, and got tired of 'm; and that's why."

Adela said: "Thank you," with exasperating sedateness, which provoked an intemperate outburst from Mrs. Chump. "Sunday! Sunday!" cried Mr. Pole.

Page 760

“Ain’t I the first to remember ut, Pole? And didn’t I get up airly so as to go to church and have my conscience qui’t, and ’stead of that I come out full of evil passions, all for the sake o’ these ungrateful garls that’s always where ye cann’t find ’em. Why, if they was to be married at the altar, they’d stare and be ’ffendud if ye asked them if they was thinking of their husbands, they would! ’Oh, dear, no! and ye’re mistaken, and we’re thinkin’ o’ the coal-scuttle in the back parlour,’—or somethin’ about souls, if not coals. There’s their answer. What did ye do with Mr. Paricles on board the yacht? Aha!”

“What’s this about Pericles?” said Mr. Pole.

“Oh, nothing, Papa,” returned Adela.

“Nothing, do ye call ut!” said Mrs. Chump. “And, mayhap, good cause too. Didn’t ye tease ’m, now, on board the yacht? Now, did he go on board the yacht at all?”

“I should think you ought to know that as well as Adela,” said Mr. Pole.

Adela interposed, hurriedly: “All this, my dear Papa, is because Mr. Pericles has thought proper to visit the Tinleys’ pew. Who would complain how or where he does it, so long as the duty is fulfilled?”

Mr. Pole stared, muttering: “The Tinleys!”

“She’s botherin’ of ye, Pole, the puss!” said Mrs. Chump, certain that she had hit a weak point in that mention of the yacht. “Ask her what sorrt of behaviour—”

“And he didn’t speak to any of you?” said Mr. Pole.

“No, Papa.”

“He looked the other way?”

“He did us that honour.”

“Ask her, Pole, how she behaved to ’m on board the yacht,” cried Mrs. Chump. “Oh! there was flirtin’, flirtin’! And go and see what the noble poet says of tying up in sacks and plumpin’ of poor bodies of women into forty fathoms by them Turks and Greeks, all because of jeal’sy. So, they make a woman in earnest there, the wretches, ’cause she cann’t have onny of her jokes. Didn’t ye tease Mr. Paricles on board the yacht, Ad’la? Now, was he there?”

“Martha! you’re a fool!” said Mr. Pole, looking the victim of one of his fits of agitation. “Who knows whether he was there better than you? You’ll be forgetting soon that we’ve ever dined together. I hate to see a woman so absurd! There—never mind! Go in: take off bonnet something—anything! only I can’t bear folly! Eh, Mr. Runningbrook?”

“’Deed, Pole, and ye’re mad.” Mrs. Chump crossed her hands to reply with full repose. “I’d like to know how I’m to know what I never said.”

The scene was growing critical. Adela consulted the eyes of her sisters, which plainly said that this was her peculiar scrape. Adela ended it by going up to Mrs. Chump, taking her by the shoulders, and putting a kiss upon her forehead. “Now you will see better,” she said. “Don’t you know Mr. Pericles was not with us? As surely as he was with the Tinleys this morning!”

“And a nice morning it is!” ejaculated Mr. Pole, trotting off hurriedly.

Page 761

“Does Pole think—” Mrs. Chump murmured, with reference to her voyaging on the yacht. The kiss had bewildered her sequent sensations.

“He does think, and will think, and must think,” Adela prattled some persuasive infantine nonsense: her soul all the while in revolt against her sisters, who left her the work to do, and took the position of spectators and critics, condemning an effort they had not courage to attempt.

“By the way, I have to congratulate a friend of mine,” said Tracy, selecting Adela for an ironical bow.

“Then it is Captain Gambier,” cried Mrs. Chump, as if a whole revelation had burst on her. Adela blushed. “Oh! and what was that I heard?” continued the aggravating woman.

Adela flashed her eyes round on her sisters. Even then they left her without aid, their feeling being that she had debased the house by her familiarity with this woman before Tracy.

“Stay! didn’t ye both—” Mrs. Chump was saying.

“Yes?”—Adela passed by her—“only in your ears alone, you know!” At which hint Mrs. Chump gleefully turned and followed her. A rumour was prevalent of some misadventure to Adela and the captain on board the yacht. Arabella saw her depart, thinking, “How singular is her propensity to imitate me!” for the affirmative uttered in the tone of interrogation was quite Arabella’s own; as also occasionally the negative,—the negative, however, suiting the musical indifference of the sound, and its implied calm breast.

“As for Pericles,” said Tracy, “you need not wonder that the fellow prays in other pews than yours. By heaven! he may pray and pray: I’d send him to Hades with an epigram in his heart!”

From Tracy the ladies learnt that Wilfrid had inflicted public chastisement upon Mr. Pericles for saying a false thing of Emilia. He danced the prettiest pas seal that was ever footed by debutant on the hot iron plates of Purgatory. They dared not ask what it was that Mr. Pericles had said, but Tracy was so vehement on the subject of his having met his deserts, that they partly guessed it to bear some relation to their sex’s defencelessness, and they approved their brother’s work.

Sir Twickenham and Captain Gambier dined at Brookfield that day. However astonishing it might be to one who knew his character and triumphs, the captain was a butterfly netted, and was on the highroad to an exhibition of himself pinned, with his wings outspread. During the service of the table Tracy relieved Adela from Mrs.

Chump's inadvertencies and little bits of feminine malice, but he could not help the captain, who blundered like a schoolboy in her rough hands. It was noted that Sir Twickenham reserved the tolerating smile he once had for her. Mr. Pole's nervous fretfulness had increased. He complained in occasional underbreaths, correcting himself immediately with a "No, no!" and blinking briskly.

Page 762

But after dinner came the time when the painfullest scene was daily enacted. Mrs. Chump drank Port freely. To drink it fondly, it was necessary that she should have another rosy wineglass to nod to, and Mr. Pole, whose taste for wine had been weakened, took this post as his duty. The watchful, pinched features of the poor pale little man bloomed unnaturally, and his unintelligible eyes sparkled as he emptied his glass. His daughters knew that he drank, not for his pleasure, but for their benefit; that he might sustain Martha Chump in the delusion that he was a fitting bridegroom, and with her money save them from ruin. Each evening, with remorse that blotted all perception of the tragic comicality of the show, they saw him, in his false strength and his anxiety concerning his pulse's play, act this part. The recurring words, "Now, Martha, here's the Port," sent a cold wave through their blood. They knew what the doctor remarked on the effect of that Port. "Ill!" Mrs. Chump would cry, when she saw him wink after sipping; "you, Pole! what do they say of ye, ye deer!" and she returned the wink, the ladies looking on. Not to drink a proper quantum of Port, when Port was on the table, was, in Mrs. Chump's eyes, mean for a man. Even Chump, she would say, was master of his bottle, and thought nothing of it. "Who does?" cried her present suitor, and the Port ebbed, and his cheeks grew crimson.

This frightful rivalry with the ghost of Alderman Chump continued night after night. The rapturous Martha was incapable of observing that if she drank with a ghost in memory, in reality she drank with nothing better than an animated puppet. The nights ended with Mr. Pole either sleeping in his arm-chair (upon which occasions one daughter watched him and told dreadful tales of his waking), or staggering to bed, debating on the stairs between tea and brandy, complaining of a loss of sensation at his knee-cap, or elbow, or else rubbing his head and laughing hysterically. His bride was not at such moments observant. No wonder Wilfrid kept out of the way, if he had not better occupation elsewhere. The ladies, in their utter anguish, after inveighing against the baneful Port, had begged their father to delay no more to marry the woman. "Why?" said Mr. Pole, sharply; "what do you want me to marry her for?" They were obliged to keep up the delusion, and said, "Because she seems suited to you as a companion." That satisfied him. "Oh! we won't be in a hurry," he said, and named a day within a month; and not liking their unready faces, laughed, and dismissed the idea aloud, as if he had not earnestly been entertaining it.

Page 763

The ladies of Brookfield held no more their happy, energetic midnight consultations. They had begun to crave for sleep and a snatch of forgetfulness, the scourge being daily on their flesh: and they had now no plans to discuss; they had no distant horizon of low vague lights that used ever to be beyond their morrow. They kissed at the bedroom door of one, and separated. Silence was their only protection to the Nice Feelings, now that Fine Shades had become impossible. Adela had almost made herself distinct from her sisters since the yachting expedition. She had grown severely careful of the keys of her writing-desk, and would sometimes slip the bolt of her bedroom door, and answer “Eh?” dubiously in tone, when her sisters had knocked twice, and had said “Open” once. The house of Brookfield showed those divisional rents which an admonitory quaking of the earth will create. Neither sister was satisfied with the other. Cornelia’s treatment of Sir Twickenham was almost openly condemned, but at the same time it seemed to Arabella that the baronet was receiving more than the necessary amount of consolation from the bride of Captain Gambier, and that yacht habits and moralities had been recently imported to Brookfield. Adela, for her part, looked sadly on Arabella, and longed to tell her, as she told Cornelia, that if she continued to play Freshfield Sumner purposely against Edward Buxley, she might lose both. Cornelia quietly measured accusations and judged impartially; her mind being too full to bring any personal observations to bear. She said, perhaps, less than she would have said, had she not known that hourly her own Nice Feelings had to put up a petition for Fine Shades: had she not known, indeed, that her conduct would soon demand from her sisters an absolutely merciful interpretation. For she was now simply attracting Sir Twickenham to Brookfield as a necessary medicine to her Papa. Since Mrs. Chump’s return, however, Mr. Pole had spoken cheerfully of himself, and, by innuendo emphasized, had imparted that his mercantile prospects were brighter. In fact, Cornelia half thought that he must have been pretending bankruptcy to gain his end in getting the consent of his daughters to receive the woman. She, and Adela likewise, began to suspect that the parental transparency was a little mysterious, and that there is, after all, more than we see in something that we see through. They were now in danger of supposing that because the old man had possibly deceived them to some extent, he had deceived them altogether. But was not the after-dinner scene too horribly true? Were not his hands moist and cold while the forehead was crimson? And could a human creature feel at his own pulse, and look into vacancy with that intense apprehensive look, and be but an actor? They could not think so. But his conditions being dependent upon them, the ladies felt in their hearts a spring of absolute rebellion when the call for fresh sacrifices came. Though they did not grasp the image, they had a feeling that he was nourished bit by bit by everything they held dear; and though they loved him, and were generous, they had begun to ask, “What next?”

Page 764

The ladies were at a dead-lock, and that the heart is the father of our histories, I am led to think when I look abroad on families stagnant because of so weak a motion of the heart. There are those who have none at all; the mass of us are moved from the propulsion of the toes of the Fates. But the ladies of Brookfield had hearts lively enough to get them into scrapes. The getting out of them, or getting on at all, was left to Providence. They were at a dead-lock, for Arabella, flattered as she was by Freshfield Sumner's wooing, could not openly throw Edward over, whom indeed she thought that she liked the better of the two, though his letters had not so wide an intellectual range. Her father was irritably anxious that she should close with Edward. Adela could not move: at least, not openly. Cornelia might have taken an initiative; but tenderness for her father's health had hitherto restrained her, and she temporized with Sir Twickenham on the noblest of principles. She was, by the devotion of her conduct, enabled to excuse herself so far that she could even fish up an excuse in the shape of the effort she had made to find him entertaining: as if the said effort should really be re-payment enough to him for his assiduous and most futile suit. One deep grief sat on Cornelia's mind. She had heard from Lady Gosstre that there was something like madness in the Barrett family. She had consented to meet Sir Purcell clandestinely (after debate on his claim to such a sacrifice on her part), and if, on those occasions, her lover's tone was raised, it gave her a tremour. And he had of late appeared to lose his noble calm; he had spoken (it might almost be interpreted) as if he doubted her. Once, when she had mentioned her care for her father, he had cried out upon the name of father with violence, looking unlike himself.

His condemnation of the world, too, was not so Christian as it had been; it betrayed what the vulgar would call spite, and was not all compassed in his peculiar smooth shrug—expressive of a sort of border-land between contempt and charity: which had made him wear in her sight all the superiority which the former implies, with a considerable share of the benign complacency of the latter. This had gone. He had been sarcastic even to her; saying once, and harshly: "Have you a will?" Personally she liked the poor organist better than the poor baronet, though he had less merit. It was unpleasant in her present mood to be told "that we have come into this life to fashion for ourselves souls;" and that "whosoever cannot decide is a soulless wretch fit but to pass into vapour." He appeared to have ceased to make his generous allowances for difficult situations. A senseless notion struck Cornelia, that with the baronetcy he had perhaps inherited some of the madness of his father.

Page 765

The two were in a dramatic tangle of the Nice Feelings worth a glance as we pass on. She wished to say to him, “You are unjust to my perplexities;” and he to her, “You fail in your dilemma through cowardice.” Instead of uttering which, they chid themselves severally for entertaining such coarse ideas of their idol. Doubtless they were silent from consideration for one another: but I must add, out of extreme tenderness for themselves likewise. There are people who can keep the facts that front them absent from their contemplation by not framing them in speech; and much benevolence of the passive order may be traced to a disinclination to inflict pain upon oneself. “My duty to my father,” being cited by Cornelia, Sir Purcell had to contend with it.

“True love excludes no natural duty,” she said.

And he: “Love discerns unerringly what is and what is not duty.”

“In the case of a father, can there be any doubt?” she asked, the answer shining in her confident aspect.

“There are many things that fathers may demand of us!” he interjected bitterly.

She had a fatal glimpse here of the false light in which his resentment coloured the relations between fathers and children; and, deeming him incapable of conducting this argument, she felt quite safe in her opposition, up to a point where feeling stopped her.

“Devotedness to a father I must conceive to be a child’s first duty,” she said.

Sir Purcell nodded: “Yes; a child’s!”

“Does not history give the higher praise to children who sacrifice themselves for their parents?” asked Cornelia.

And he replied: “So, you seek to be fortified in such matters by history!”

Courteous sneers silenced her. Feeling told her she was in the wrong; but the beauty of her sentiment was not to be contested, and therefore she thought that she might distrust feeling: and she went against it somewhat; at first very tentatively, for it caused pain. She marked a line where the light of duty should not encroach on the light of our human desires. “But love for a parent is not merely duty,” thought Cornelia. “It is also love;—-and is it not the least selfish love?”

Step by step Sir Purcell watched the clouding of her mind with false conceits, and knew it to be owing to the heart’s want of vigour. Again and again he was tempted to lay an irreverent hand on the veil his lady walked in, and make her bare to herself. Partly in simple bitterness, he refrained: but the chief reason was that he had no comfort in giving a shock to his own state of deception. He would have had to open a dark closet; to disentangle and bring to light what lay in an undistinguishable heap; to disfigure her

to herself, and share in her changed eyesight; possibly to be, or seem, coarse: so he kept the door of it locked, admitting sadly in his meditation that there was such a place, and saying all the while: “If I were not poor!”

Page 766

He saw her running into the shelter of egregious sophisms, till it became an effort to him to preserve his reverence for her and the sex she represented. Finally he imagined that he perceived an idea coming to growth in her, no other than this: "That in duty to her father she might sacrifice herself, though still loving him to whom she had given her heart; thus ennobling her love for father and for lover." With a wicked ingenuity he tracked her forming notions, encouraged them on, and provoked her enthusiasm by putting an ironical question: "Whether the character of the soul was subdued and shaped by the endurance and the destiny of the perishable?"

"Oh! no, no!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be, or what comfort should we have?"

Few men knew better that when lovers' sentiments stray away from feeling, they are to be suspected of a disloyalty. Yet he admired the tone she took. He had got an 'ideal' of her which it was pleasanter to magnify than to distort. An 'ideal' is so arbitrary, that if you only doubt of its being perfection, it will vanish and never come again. Sir Purcell refused to doubt. He blamed himself for having thought it possible to doubt, and this, when all the time he knew.

Through endless labyrinths of delusion these two unhappy creatures might be traced, were it profitable. Down what a vale of little intricate follies should we be going, lighted by one ghastly conclusion! At times, struggling from the midst of her sophisms, Cornelia prayed her lover would claim her openly, and so nerve her to a pitch of energy that would clinch the ruinous debate. Forgetting that she was an 'ideal'—the accredited mistress of pure wisdom and of the power of deciding rightly—she prayed to be dealt with as a thoughtless person, and one of the herd of women. She felt that Sir Purcell threw too much on her. He expected her to go calmly to her father, and to Sir Twickenham, and tell them individually that her heart was engaged; then with a stately figure to turn, quit the house, and lay her hand in his. He made no allowance for the weakness of her sex, for the difficulties surrounding her, for the consideration due to Sir Twickenham's pride, and to her father's ill-health. She half-protested to herself that he expected from her the mechanical correctness of a machine, and overlooked the fact that she was human. It was a grave comment on her ambition to be an 'ideal.'

So let us leave them, till we come upon the ashy fruit of which this blooming sentimentalism is the seed.

It was past midnight when Mrs. Chump rushed to Arabella's room, and her knock was heard vociferous at the door. The ladies, who were at work upon diaries and letters, allowed her to thump and wonder whether she had come to the wrong door, for a certain period; after which, Arabella placidly unbolted her chamber, and Adela presented herself in the passage to know the meaning of the noise.

"Oh! ye poor darlin's, I've heard ut all, I have."

Page 767

This commencement took the colour from their cheeks. Arabella invited her inside, and sent Adela for Cornelia.

“Oh, and ye poor deers!” cried Mrs. Chump to Arabella, who remarked: “Pray wait till my sisters come;” causing the woman to stare and observe: “If ye’re not as cold as the bottom of a pot that naver felt fire.” She repeated this to Cornelia and Adela as an accusation, and then burst on “My heart’s just breakin’ for ye, and ye shall naver want bread, eh! and roast beef, and my last bottle of Port ye’ll share, though ye’ve no ideea what a lot o’ thoughts o’ poor Chump’s under that cork, and it’ll be a waste on you. Oh! and that monster of a Mr. Paricles that’s got ye in his power and’s goin’ to be the rroon of ye—shame to ’m! Your father’s told me; and, oh! my darlin’ garls, don’t think ut my fault. For, Pole—Pole—”

Mrs. Chump was choked by her grief. The ladies, unbending to some curiosity, eliminated from her gasps and sobs that Mr. Pole had, in the solitude of his library below, accused her of causing the defection of Mr. Pericles, and traced his possible ruin to it, confessing, that in the way of business, he was at Mr. Pericles’ mercy.

“And in such a passion with me!” Mrs. Chump wrung her hands. “What could I do to Mr. Paricles? He isn’t one o’ the men that I can kiss; and Pole shouldn’t wish me. And Pole settin’ down his rroon to me! What’ll I do? My dears! I do feel for ye, for I feel I’d feel myself such a beast, without money, d’ye see? It’s the most horrible thing in the world. It’s like no candle in the darrk. And I, ye know, I know I’d naver forgive annybody that took my money; and what’ll Pole think of me? For oh! ye may call riches temptation, but poverty’s punishment; and I heard a young curate say that from the pulpit, and he was lean enough to know, poor fella!”

Both Cornelia and Arabella breathed more freely when they had heard Mrs. Chump’s tale to an end. They knew perfectly well that she was blameless for the defection of Mr. Pericles, and understood from her exclamatory narrative that their father had reason to feel some grave alarm at the Greek’s absence from their house, and had possibly reasons of his own for accusing Mrs. Chump, as he had done. The ladies administered consolation to her, telling her that for their part they would never blame her; even consenting to be kissed by her, hugged by her, playfully patted, complimented, and again wept over. They little knew what a fervour of secret devotion they created in Mrs. Chump’s bosom by this astounding magnanimity displayed to her, who laboured under the charge of being the source of their ruin; nor could they guess that the little hypocrisy they were practising would lead to any singular and pregnant resolution in the mind of the woman, fraught with explosion to their house, and that quick movement which they awaited.

Mrs. Chump, during the patient strain of a tender hug of Arabella, had mutely resolved in a great heat of gratitude that she would go to Mr. Pericles, and, since he was

necessary to the well-being of Brookfield, bring him back, if she had to bring him back in her arms.

Page 768

CHAPTER XLIII

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

“I have omitted replying to your first letter, not because of the nature of its contents: nor do I write now in answer to your second because of the permission you give me to lay it before my brother. I cannot think that concealment is good, save for very base persons; and since you take the initiative in writing very openly, I will do so likewise.

“It is true that Emilia is with me. Her voice is lost, and she has fallen as low in spirit as one can fall and still give us hope of her recovery. But that hope I have, and I am confident that you will not destroy it. In the summer she goes with us to Italy. We have consulted one doctor, who did not prescribe medicine for her. In the morning she reads with my brother. She seems to forget whatever she reads: the occupation is everything necessary just now. Our sharp Monmouth air provokes her to walk briskly when she is out, and the exercise has once or twice given colour to her cheeks. Yesterday being a day of clear frost, we drove to a point from which we could mount the Buckstone, and here, my brother says, the view appeared to give her something of her lost animation. It was a look that I had never seen, and it soon went: but in the evening she asked me whether I prayed before sleeping, and when she retired to her bedroom, I remained there with her for a time.

“You will pardon me for refusing to let her know that you have written to your relative in the Austrian service to obtain a commission for you. But, on the other hand, I have thought it right to tell her incidentally that you will be married in the Summer of this year. I can only say that she listened quite calmly.

“I beg that you will not blame yourself so vehemently. By what you do, her friends may learn to know that you regret the strange effect produced by certain careless words, or conduct: but I cannot find that self-accusation is ever good at all. In answer to your question, I may add that she has repeated nothing of what she said when we were together in Devon.

“Our chief desire (for, as we love her, we may be directed by our instinct), in the attempt to restore her, is to make her understand that she is anything but worthless. She has recently followed my brother’s lead, and spoken of herself, but with a touch of scorn. This morning, while the clear frosty sky continues, we were to have started for an old castle lying toward Wales; and I think the idea of a castle must have struck her imagination, and forced some internal contrast on her mind. I am repeating my brother’s suggestion—she seemed more than usually impressed with an idea that she was of no value to anybody. She asked why she should go anywhere, and dropped into a chair, begging to be allowed to stay in a darkened room. My brother has some strange intuition of her state of mind. She has lost

Page 769

any power she may have had of grasping abstract ideas. In what I conceived to be play, he told her that many would buy her even now. She appeared to be speculating on this, and then wished to know how much those persons would consider her to be worth, and who they were. Nor did it raise a smile on her face to hear my brother mention Jews, and name an absolute sum of money; but, on the contrary, after evidently thinking over it, she rose up, and said that she was ready to go. I write fully to you, telling you these things, that you may see she is at any rate eager not to despair, and is learning, much as a child might learn it, that it need not be.

“Believe me, that I will in every way help to dispossess your mind of the remorse now weighing upon you, as far as it shall be within my power to do so.

“Mr. Runningbrook has been invited by my brother to come and be her companion. They have a strong affection for one another. He is a true poet, full of reverence for a true woman.”

[Wilfrid to Georgiana Ford:]

“I cannot thank you enough. When I think of her I am unmanned; and if I let my thoughts fall back upon myself, I am such as you saw me that night in Devon—helpless, and no very presentable figure. But you do not picture her to me. I cannot imagine whether her face has changed; and, pardon me, were I writing to you alone, I could have faith that the delicate insight and angelic nature of a woman would not condemn my desire to realize before my eyes the state she has fallen to. I see her now under a black shroud. Have her features changed? I cannot remember one—only at an interval her eyes. Does she look into the faces of people as she used? Or does she stare carelessly away? Softly between the eyes, is what I meant. I mean—but my reason for this particularity is very simple. I would state it to you, and to no other. I cannot have peace till she is restored; and my prayer is, that I may not haunt her to defeat your labour. Does her face appear to show that I am quite absent from her thoughts? Oh! you will understand me. You have seen me stand and betray no suffering when a shot at my forehead would have been mercy. To you I will dare to open my heart. I wish to be certain that I have not injured her—that is all. Perhaps I am more guilty than you think: more even than I can call to mind. If I may fudge by the punishment, my guilt is immeasurable. Tell me—if you will but tell me that the sacrifice of my life to her will restore her, it is hers. Write, and say this, and I will come: Do not delay or spare me. Her dumb voice is like a ghost in my ears. It cries to me that I have killed it. Be actuated by no charitable considerations in refraining to write. Could a miniature of her be sent? You will think the request strange; but I want to be sure she is not haggard—-not the hospital face I fancy now, which accuses me of murder. Does she preserve the glorious freshness she used to wear? She had a look—or did you see her before the change? I only want to know that she is well.”

Page 770

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:]

“You had my promise that I would write and give your conscience a nightcap. I have a splendid one for you. Put it on without any hesitation. I find her quite comfortable. Powys reads Italian with her in the morning. His sister (who might be a woman if she liked, but has an insane preference for celestial neutrality) does the moral inculcation. The effect is comical. I should like you to see Cold Steel leading Tame Fire about, and imagining the taming to be her work! You deserve well of your generation. You just did enough to set this darling girl alight. Knights and squires numberless will thank you. The idea of your reproaching yourself is monstrous. Why, there’s no one thanks you more than she does. You stole her voice, which some may think a pity, but I don’t, seeing that I would rather have her in a salon than before the footlights. Imagine my glory in her!—she has become half cat! She moves softly, as if she loved everything she touched; making you throb to feel the little ball of her foot. Her eyes look steadily, like green jewels before the veil of an Egyptian temple. Positively, her eyes have grown green—or greenish! They were darkish hazel formerly, and talked more of milkmaids and chattering pastorals than a discerning master would have wished. Take credit for the change; and at least I don’t blame you for the tender hollows under the eyes, sloping outward, just hinted... Love’s mark on her, so that men’s hearts may faint to know that love is known to her, and burn to read her history. When she is about to speak, the upper lids droop a very little; or else the under lids quiver upward—I know not which. Take further credit for her manner. She has now a manner of her own. Some of her naturalness has gone, but she has skipped clean over the ‘young lady’ stage; from raw girl she has really got as much of the great manner as a woman can have who is not an ostensibly retired dowager, or a matron on a pedestal shuffling the naked virtues and the decorous vices together. She looks at you with an immense, marvellous gravity, before she replies to you—enveloping you in a velvet light. This, is fact, not fine stuff, my dear fellow. The light of her eyes does absolutely cling about you. Adieu! You are a great master, and know exactly when to make your bow and retire. A little more, and you would have spoilt her. Now she is perfect.”

[Wilfrid to Tracy Runningbrook:]

“I have just come across a review of your last book, and send it, thinking you may wish to see it. I have put a query to one of the passages, which I think misquoted: and there will be no necessity to call your attention to the critic’s English. You can afford to laugh at it, but I confess it puts your friends in a rage. Here are a set of fellows who arm themselves with whips and stand in the public thoroughfare to make any man of real genius run the gauntlet down their ranks till he comes out flayed

Page 771

at the other extremity! What constitutes their right to be there?—By the way, I met Sir Purcell Barrett (the fellow who was at Hillford), and he would like to write an article on you that should act as a sort of rejoinder. You won't mind, of course—it's bread to him, poor devil! I doubt whether I shall see you when you comeback, so write a jolly lot of letters. Colonel Pierson, of the Austrian army, my uncle (did you meet him at Brookfield?), advises me to sell out immediately. He is getting me an Imperial commission—cavalry. I shall give up the English service. And if they want my medal, they can have it, and I'll begin again. I'm sick of everything except a cigar and a good volume of poems. Here's to light one, and now for the other!

"'Large eyes lit up by some imperial sin,'" *etc*.
(Ten lines from Tracy's book are here copied neatly.)

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:]

"Why the deuce do you write me such infernal trash about the opinions of a villanous dog who can't even en a decent sentence? I've been damning you for a white-livered Austrian up and down the house. Let the fellow bark till he froths at the mouth, and scatters the virus of the beast among his filthy friends. I am mad-dog proof. The lines you quote were written in an awful hurry, coming up in the train from Richford one morning. You have hit upon my worst with commendable sagacity. If it will put money in Barren's pocket, let him write. I should prefer to have nothing said. The chances are all in favour of his writing like a fool. If you're going to be an Austrian, we may have a chance of shooting one another some day, so here's my hand before you go and sell your soul; and anything I can do in the meantime—command me."

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

"I do not dare to charge you with a breach of your pledged word. Let me tell you simply that Emilia has become aware of your project to enter the Austrian service, and it has had the effect on her which I foresaw. She could bear to hear of your marriage, but this is too much for her, and it breaks my heart to see her. It is too cruel. She does not betray any emotion, but I can see that every principle she had gained is gone, and that her bosom holds the shadows of a real despair. I foresaw it, and sought to guard her against it. That you, whom she had once called (to me) her lover, should enlist himself as an enemy, of her country!—it comes to her as a fact striking her brain dumb while she questions it, and the poor body has nothing to do but to ache. Surely you could have no object in doing this? I will not suspect it. Mr. Runningbrook is acquainted with your plans, I believe; but he has no remembrance of having mentioned this one to Emilia. He distinctly assures me that he has not done so, and I trust him to speak truth. How can it have happened? But here is the evil done. I see no remedy. I am not skilled in sketching the portraits you desire of her, and yet, if you have ever wished her to know this miserable thing, it would be as well that you should see the different face that has come among us within twenty hours."

Page 772

[Wilfrid to Georgiana Ford:]

“I will confine my reply to a simple denial of having caused this fatal intelligence to reach her ears; for the truth of which, I pledge my honour as a gentleman. A second’s thought would have told me—indeed I at once acquiesced in your view—that she should not know it. How it has happened it is vain to attempt to guess. Can you suppose that I desired her to hate me? Yet this is what the knowledge of the step I am taking will make her do! If I could see—if I might see her for five minutes, I should be able to explain everything, and, I sincerely think (painful as it would be to me), give her something like peace. It is too late even to wish to justify myself; but her I can persuade that she—Do you not see that her mind is still unconvinced of my—I will call it baseness! Is this the self-accusing you despise? A little of it must be heard. If I may see her I will not fail to make her understand my position. She shall see that it is I who am worthless—not she! You know the circumstances under which I last beheld her—when I saw pang upon pang smiting her breast from my silence! But now I may speak. Do not be prepossessed against my proposal! It shall be only for five minutes—no more. Not that it is my desire to come. In truth, it could not be. I have felt that I alone can cure her—I who did the harm. Mark me: she will fret secretly—, but dear and kindest lady, do not smile too critically at the tone I adopt. I cannot tell how I am writing or what saying. Believe me that I am deeply and constantly sensible of your generosity. In case you hesitate, I beg you to consult Mr. Powys.”

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

“I had no occasion to consult my brother to be certain that an interview between yourself and Emilia should not take place. There can be no object, even if the five minutes of the meeting gave her happiness, why the wound of the long parting should be again opened. She is wretched enough now, though her tenderness for us conceals it as far as possible. When some heavenly light shall have penetrated her, she will have a chance of peace. The evil is not of a nature to be driven out by your hands. If you are not going into the Austrian service, she shall know as much immediately. Otherwise, be as dead to her as you may, and your noblest feelings cannot be shown under any form but that.”

[Wilfrid to Tracy Runningbrook:]

“Some fellows whom I know want you to write a prologue to a play they are going to get up. It’s about Shakespeare—at least, the proceeds go to something of that sort. Do, like a good fellow, toss us off twenty lines. Why don’t you write? By the way, I hope there’s no truth in a report that has somehow reached me, that they have the news down in Monmouth of my deserting to the black-yellow squadrons? Of course, such a thing as that should have been kept from them. I hear, too, that your—I suppose I must

Page 773

call her now your—pupil is falling into bad health. Think me as cold and ‘British’ as you like; but the thought of this does really affect me painfully. Upon my honour, it does! ‘And now he yawns!’ you’re saying. You’re wrong. We Army men feel just as you poets do, and for a longer time, I think, though perhaps not so acutely. I send you the ‘Venus’ cameo which you admired. Pray accept it from an old friend. I mayn’t see you again.”

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:] (enclosing lines)

“Here they are. It will require a man who knows something about metre to speak them. Had Shakespeare’s grandmother three Christian names? and did she anticipate feminine posterity in her rank of life by saying habitually, ‘Drat it?’ There is as yet no Society to pursue this investigation, but it should be started. Enormous thanks for the Venus. I wore it this morning at breakfast. Just as we were rising, I leaned forward to her, and she jumped up with her eyes under my chin. ’Isn’t she a beauty?’ I said. ‘It was his,’ she answered, changing eyes of eagle for eyes of dove, and then put out the lights. I had half a mind to offer it, on the spot. May I? That is to say, if the impulse seizes me I take nobody’s advice, and fair Venus certainly is not under my chin at this moment. As to ill health, great mother Nature has given a house of iron to this soul of fire. The windows may blaze, or the windows may be extinguished, but the house stands firm. When you are lightning or earthquake, you may have something to reproach yourself for; as it is, be under no alarm. Do not put words in my mouth that I have not uttered. ‘And now he yawns,’ is what I shall say of you only when I am sure you have just heard a good thing. You really are the best fellow of your set that I have come across, and the only one pretending to brains. Your modesty in estimating your value as a leader of Pandours will be pleasing to them who like that modesty. Good-bye. This little Emilia is a marvel of flying moods. Yesterday she went about as if she said, ’I’ve promised Apollo not to speak till to-morrow.’ To-day, she’s in a feverish gabble—or began the day with a burst of it; and now she’s soft and sensible. If you fancy a girl at her age being able to see, that it’s a woman’s duty to herself and the world to be artistic—to perfect the thing of beauty she is meant to be by nature!—and, seeing, too, that Love is an instrument like any other thing, and that we must play on it with considerate gentleness, and that tearing at it or dashing it to earth, making it howl and quiver, is madness, and not love!—I assure you she begins to see it! She does see it. She is going to wear a wreath of black briony (preserved and set by Miss Ford, a person cunning in these matters). She’s going to the ball at Penarvon Castle, and will look—supply your favourite slang word. A little more experience, and she will have malice. She wants nothing but that to make her consummate.

Page 774

Malice is the barb of beauty. She's just at present a trifle blunt. She will knock over, but not transfix. I am anxious to watch the effect she produces at Penarvon. Poor little woman! I paid a compliment to her eyes. 'I've got nothing else,' said she. Dine as well as you can while you are in England. German cookery is an education for the sentiment of hogs. The play of sour and sweet, and crowning of the whole with fat, shows a people determined to go down in civilization, and try the business backwards. Adieu, curst Croat! On the Wallachian border mayst thou gather philosophy from meditation."

CHAPTER XLIV

Dexterously as Wilfrid has turned Tracy to his uses by means of the foregoing correspondence, in doing so he had exposed himself to the retributive poison administered by that cunning youth. And now the Hippogriff seized him, and mounted with him into mid-air; not as when the idle boy Ganymede was caught up to act as cup-bearer in celestial Courts, but to plunge about on yielding vapours, with nothing near him save the voice of his desire.

The Philosopher here peremptorily demands the pulpit. We are subject, he says, to fantastic moods, and shall dry ready-minted phrases picture them forth? As, for example, can the words 'delirium,' or 'frenzy,' convey an image of Wilfrid's state, when his heart began to covet Emilia again, and his sentiment not only interposed no obstacle, but trumpeted her charms and fawned for her, and he thought her lost, remembered that she had been his own, and was ready to do any madness to obtain her? 'Madness' is the word that hits the mark, but it does not fully embrace the meaning. To be in this state, says the Philosopher, is to be 'On The Hippogriff;' and to this, as he explains, the persons who travel to Love by the road of sentiment will come, if they have any stuff in them, and if the one who kindles them is mighty. He distinguishes being on the Hippogriff from being possessed by passion. Passion, he says, is noble strength on fire, and points to Emilia as a representation of passion. She asks for what she thinks she may have; she claims what she imagines to be her own. She has no shame, and thus, believing in, she never violates, nature, and offends no law, wild as she may seem. Passion does not turn on her and rend her when it is thwarted. She was never carried out of the limit of her own intelligent force, seeing that it directed her always, with the simple mandate to seek that which belonged to her. She was perfectly sane, and constantly just to herself, until the failure of her voice, telling her that she was a beggar in the world, came as a second blow, and partly scared her reason. Constantly just to herself, mind! This is the quality of true passion. Those who make a noise, and are not thus distinguishable, are on Hippogriff.

—By which it is clear to me that my fantastic Philosopher means to indicate the lover mounted in this wise, as a creature bestriding an extraneous power. "The sentimentalist," he says, "goes on accumulating images and hiving sensations, till such

time as (if the stuff be in him) they assume a form of vitality, and hurry him headlong. This is not passion, though it amazes men, and does the madder thing.”

Page 775

In fine, it is Hippogriff. And right loath am I to continue my partnership with a fellow who will not see things on the surface, and is, as a necessary consequence, blind to the fact that the public detest him. I mean, this garrulous, super-subtle, so-called Philosopher, who first set me upon the building of 'The Three Volumes,' it is true, but whose stipulation that he should occupy so large a portion of them has made them rock top-heavy, to the forfeit of their stability. He maintains that a story should not always flow, or, at least, not to a given measure. When we are knapsack on back, he says, we come to eminences where a survey of our journey past and in advance is desireable, as is a distinct pause in any business, here and there. He points proudly to the fact that our people in this comedy move themselves,—are moved from their own impulsion,—and that no arbitrary hand has posted them to bring about any event and heap the catastrophe. In vain I tell him that he is meantime making tatters of the puppets' golden robe illusion: that he is sucking the blood of their warm humanity out of them. He promises that when Emilia is in Italy he will retire altogether; for there is a field of action, of battles and conspiracies, nerve and muscle, where life fights for plain issues, and he can but sum results. Let us, he entreats, be true to time and place. In our fat England, the gardener Time is playing all sorts of delicate freaks in the lines and traceries of the flower of life, and shall we not note them? If we are to understand our species, and mark the progress of civilization at all, we must. Thus the Philosopher. Our partner is our master, and I submit, hopefully looking for release with my Emilia, in the day when Italy reddens the sky with the banners of a land revived.

I hear Wilfrid singing out that he is aloft, burning to rush ahead, while his beast capers in one spot, abominably ludicrous. This trick of Hippogriff is peculiar, *viz*., that when he loses all faith in himself, he sinks—in other words, goes to excesses of absurd humility to regain it. Passion has likewise its panting intervals, but does nothing so preposterous. The wreath of black briony, spoken of by Tracy as the crown of Emilia's forehead, had begun to glow with a furnace-colour in Wilfrid's fancy. It worked a Satanic distraction in him. The girl sat before him swathed in a darkness, with the edges of the briony leaves shining deadly—radiant above—young Hecate! The next instant he was bleeding with pity for her, aching with remorse, and again stung to intense jealousy of all who might behold her (amid a reserve of angry sensations at her present happiness).

Why had she not made allowance for his miserable situation that night in Devon? Why did she not comprehend his difficulties in relation to his father's affairs? Why did she not know that he could not fail to love her for ever?

Interrogations such as these were so many switches of the whip in the flanks of Hippogriff.

Page 776

Another peculiarity of the animal gifted with wings is, that around the height he soars to he can see no barriers nor any of the fences raised by men. And here again he differs from Passion, which may tug against common sense but is never, in a great nature, divorced from it: In air on Hippogriff, desires wax boundless, obstacles are hidden. It seemed nothing to Wilfrid (after several tremendous descents of humility) that he should hurry for Monmouth away, to gaze on Emilia under her fair, infernal, bewitching wreath; nothing that he should put an arm round her; nothing that he should forthwith carry her off, though he died for it. Forming no design beyond that of setting his eyes on her, he turned the head of Hippogriff due Westward.

CHAPTER XLV

Penarvon castle lay over the borders of Monmouthshire. Thither, on a night of frosty moonlight, troops of carriages were hurrying with the usual freightage for a country ball: —the squire who will not make himself happy by seeing that his duty to the softer side of his family must be performed during the comfortable hours when bachelors snooze in arm-chairs, and his nobler dame who, not caring for Port or tobacco, cheerfully accepts the order of things as bequeathed to her: the everlastingly half-satisfied young man, who looks forward to the hour when his cigar-light will shine; and the damsel thrice demure as a cover for her eagerness. Within a certain distance of one of the carriages, a man rode on horseback. The court of the castle was reached, and he turned aside, lingering to see whether he could get a view of the lighted steps. To effect his object, he dismounted and led his horse through the gates, turning from gravel to sward, to keep in the dusk. A very agile middle-aged gentleman was the first to appear under the portico-lamps, and he gave his hand to a girl of fifteen, and then to a most portly lady in a scarlet mantle. The carriage-door slammed and drove off, while a groan issued from the silent spectator. “Good heavens! have I followed these horrible people for five-and-twenty miles!” Carriage after carriage rattled up to the steps, was disburdened of still more ‘horrible people’ to him, and went the way of the others. “I shan’t see her, after all,” he cried hoarsely, and mounting, said to the beast that bore him, “Now go sharp.”

Whether you recognize the rider of Hippogriff or not, this is he; and the poor livery-stable screw stretched madly till wind failed, when he was allowed to choose his pace. Wilfrid had come from London to have sight of Emilia in the black-briony wreath: to see her, himself unseen, and go. But he had not seen her; so he had the full excuse to continue the adventure. He rode into a Welsh town, and engaged a fresh horse for the night.

“She won’t sing, at all events,” thought Wilfrid, to comfort himself, before the memory that she could not, in any case, touched springs of weakness and pitying tenderness. From an eminence to which he walked outside the town, Penarvon was plainly visible with all its lighted windows.

Page 777

“But I will pluck her from you!” he muttered, in a spasm of jealousy; the image of himself as an outcast against the world that held her, striking him with great force at that moment.

“I must give up the Austrian commission, if she takes me.”

And be what? For he had sold out of the English service, and was to receive the money in a couple of days. How long would the money support him? It would not pay half his debts! What, then, did this pursuit of Emilia mean? To blink this question, he had to give the spur to Hippogriff. It meant (upon Hippogriff at a brisk gallop), that he intended to live for her, die for her, if need be, and carve out of the world all that she would require. Everything appears possible, on Hippogriff, when he is going; but it is a bad business to put the spur on so willing a beast. When he does not go of his own will;—-when he sees that there are obstructions, it is best to jump off his back. And we should abandon him then, save that having once tasted what he can do for us, we become enamoured of the habit of going keenly, and defying obstacles. Thus do we begin to corrupt the uses of the gallant beast (for he is a gallant beast, though not of the first order); we spoil his instincts and train him to hurry us to perdition.

“If my sisters could see me now!” thought Wilfrid, half-smitten with a distant notion of a singularity in his position there, the mark for a frosty breeze, while his eyes kept undeviating watch over Penarvon.

After a time he went back to the inn, and got among coachmen and footmen, all battling lustily against the frost with weapons scientifically selected at the bar. They thronged the passages, and lunged hearty punches at one another, drank and talked, and only noticed that a gentleman was in their midst when he moved to get a light. One complained that he had to drive into Monmouth that night, by a road that sent him five miles out of his way, owing to a block—a great stone that had fallen from the hill. “You can’t ask ’em to get out and walk ten steps,” he said; “or there! I’d lead the horses and just tip up the off wheels, and round the place in a twinkle, pop ’m in again, and nobody hurt; but you can’t ask ladies to risk catchin’ colds for the sake of the poor horses.”

Several coachmen spoke upon this, and the shame and marvel it was that the stone had not been moved; and between them the name of Mr. Powys was mentioned, with the remark that he would spare his beasts if he could.

“What’s that block you’re speaking of, just out of Monmouth?” enquired Wilfrid; and it being described to him, together with the exact bearings of the road and situation of the mass of stone, he at once repeated a part of what he had heard in the form of the emphatic interrogation, “What! there?” and flatly told the coachman that the stone had been moved.

“It wasn’t moved this morning, then, sir,” said the latter.

“No; but a great deal can be done in a couple of hours,” said Wilfrid.

Page 778

“Did you see ’em at work, sir?”

“No; but I came that way, and the road was clear.”

“The deuce it was!” ejaculated the coachman, willingly convinced.

“And that’s the way I shall return,” added Wilfrid.

He tossed some money on the bar to aid in warming the assemblage, and received numerous salutes as he passed out. His heart was beating fast. “I shall see her, in the teeth of my curst luck,” he thought, picturing to himself the blessed spot where the mass of stone would lie; and to that point he galloped, concentrating all the light in his mind on this maddest of chances, till it looked sound, and finally certain.

“It’s certain, if that’s not a hired coachman,” he calculated. “If he is, he won’t risk his fee. If he isn’t, he’ll feel on the safe side anyhow. At any rate, it’s my only chance.” And away he flew between glimmering slopes of frost to where a white curtain of mist hung across the wooded hills of the Wye.

CHAPTER XLVI

Emilia was in skilful hands, and against anything less powerful than a lover mounted upon Hippogriff, might have been shielded. What is poison to most girls, Merthyr prescribed for her as medicine. He nourished her fainting spirit upon vanity. In silent astonishment Georgiana heard him address speeches to her such as dowagers who have seen their day can alone of womankind complacently swallow. He encouraged Tracy Runningbrook to praise the face of which she had hitherto thought shyly. Jewels were placed at her disposal, and dresses laid out cunningly suited to her complexion. She had a maid to wait on her, who gabbled at the momentous hours of robing and unrobing: “Oh, miss! of all the dark young ladies I ever see!”—Emilia was the most bewitching. By-and-by, Emilia was led to think of herself; but with a struggle and under protest. How could it be possible that she was so very nice to the eye, and Wilfrid had abandoned her? The healthy spin of young new blood turned the wheels of her brain, and then she thought: “Perhaps I am really growing handsome?” The maid said artfully of her hair: “If gentlemen could only see it down, miss! It’s the longest, and thickest, and blackest, I ever touched!” And so saying, slid her fingers softly through it after the comb, and thrilled the owner of that hair till soft thoughts made her bosom heave, and then self-love began to be sensibly awakened, followed by self-pity, and some further form of what we understand as consciousness. If partially a degradation of her nature, this saved her mind from true despair when it began to stir after the vital shock that had brought her to earth. “To what purpose should I be fair?” was a question that did not yet come to her; but it was sweet to see Merthyr’s eyes gather pleasure from the light of her

own. Sweet, though nothing more than coldly sweet. She compared herself to her father’s old broken

Page 779

violin, that might be mended to please the sight; but would never give the tones again. Sometimes, if hope tormented her, she would strangle it by trying her voice: and such a little piece of self-inflicted anguish speedily undid all Merthyr's work. He was patient as one who tends a flower in the Spring. Georgiana marvelled that the most sensitive and proud of men should be striving to uproot an image from the heart of a simple girl, that he might place his own there. His methods almost led her to think that his estimate of human nature was falling low. Nevertheless, she was constrained to admit that there was no diminution of his love for her, and it chastened her to think so. "Would it be the same with me, if I—?" she half framed the sentence, blushing remorsefully while she denied that anything could change her great love for her brother. She had caught a glimpse of Wilfrid's suppleness and selfishness. Contrasting him with Merthyr, she was singularly smitten with shame, she knew not why.

The anticipation of the ball at Penarvon Castle had kindled very little curiosity in Emilia's bosom. She seemed to herself a machine; "one of the rest;" and looked more to see that she was still coveted by Merthyr's eyes than at the glitter of the humming saloons. A touch of her old gladness made her smile when Captain Gambier unexpectedly appeared and walked across the dancers to sit beside her. She asked him why he had come from London: to which he replied, with a most expressive gaze under her eyelids, that he had come for one object. "To see me?" thought Emilia, wondering, and reddening as she ceased to wonder. She had thought as a child, and the neat instant felt as a woman. He finished Merthyr's work for him. Emilia now thought: "Then I must be worth something." And with "I am," she ended her meditation, glowing. He might have said that she had all beauty ever showered upon woman: she would have been led to believe him at that moment of her revival.

Now, Lady Charlotte had written to Georgiana, telling her that Captain Gambier was soon to be expected in her neighbourhood, and adding that it would be as well if she looked closely after her charge. When Georgiana saw him go over to Emilia she did not remember this warning: but when she perceived the sudden brilliancy and softness in Emilia's face after the first words had fallen on her ears, she grew alarmed, knowing his reputation, and executed some diversions, which separated them. The captain made no effort to perplex her tactics, merely saying that he should call in a day or two. Merthyr took to himself all the credit of the visible bloom that had come upon Emilia, and pacing with her between the dances, said: "Now you will come to Italy, I think."

She paused before answering, "Now?" and feverishly continued: "Yes; at once. I will go. I have almost felt my voice again to-night."

"That's well. I shall write to Marini to-morrow. You will soon find your voice if you will not fret for it. Touch Italy!"

Page 780

“Yes; but you must be near me,” said Emilia.

Georgiana heard this, and could not conceive other than that Emilia was growing to be one of those cormorant creatures who feed alike on the homage of noble and ignoble. She was critical, too, of that very assured pose of Emilia’s head and firm planting of her feet as the girl paraded the room after the dances in which she could not join. Previous to this evening, Georgiana had seen nothing of the sort in her; but, on the contrary, a doubtful droop of the shoulders and an unwilling gaze, as of a soul submerged in internal hesitations. “I earnestly trust that this is a romantic folly of Merthyr’s, and no more,” thought Georgiana, who would have had that view concerning his love for Italy likewise, if recollection of her own share of adventure there had not softly interposed.

Tracy, Georgiana, Merthyr, and Emilia were in the carriage, well muffled up, with one window open to the white mist. Emilia was eager to thank her friend, if only for the physical relief from weariness and sluggishness which she was experiencing. She knew certainly that the dim light of a recovering confidence in herself was owing, all, to him, and burned to thank him. Once on the way their hands touched, and he felt a shy pressure from her fingers as they parted. Presently the carriage stopped abruptly, and listening they heard the coachman indulge his companion outside with the remark that they were a couple of fools, and were now regularly ‘dished.’

“I don’t see why that observation can’t go on wheels,” said Tracy.

Merthyr put out his head, and saw the obstruction of the mass of stone across the road. He alighted, and together with the footman, examined the place to see what the chance was of their getting the carriage past. After a space of waiting, Georgiana clutched the wraps about her throat and head, and impetuously followed her brother, as her habit had always been. Emilia sat upright, saying, “I must go too.” Tracy moaned a petition to her to rest and be comfortable while the Gods were propitious. He checked her with his arm, and tried to pacify her by giving a description of the scene. The coachman remained on his seat. Merthyr, Georgiana, and the footman were on the other side of the rock, measuring the place to see whether, by a partial ascent of the sloping rubble down which it had bowled, the carriage might be got along.

“Go; they have gone round; see whether we can give any help,” said Emilia to Tracy, who cried: “My goodness! what help can we give? This is an express situation where the Fates always appear in person and move us on. We’re sure to be moved, if we show proper faith in them. This is my attitude of invocation.” He curled his legs up on the seat, resting his head on an arm; but seeing Emilia preparing for a jump he started up, and immediately preceded her. Emilia looked out after him. She perceived a figure coming stealthily from the bank. It stopped, and again advanced, and now ran swiftly down. She drew back her head as it approached the open door of the carriage; but the next moment trembled forward, and was caught with a cat-like clutch upon Wilfrid’s breast.

Page 781

“Emilia! my own for ever! I swore to die this night it I did not see you!”

“You love me, Wilfrid? love me?”

“Come with me now!”

“Now?”

“Away! with me! your lover!”

“Then you love me!

“I love you! Come!”

“Now? I cannot move.”

“I am out in the night without you.”

“Oh, my lover! Oh, Wilfrid!”

“Come to me!”

“My feet are dead!”

“It’s too late!”

A sturdy hulloa! sounding from the coachman made Merthyr’s ears alive. When he returned he found Emilia huddled up on the seat, alone, her face in her hands, and the touch of her hands like fire. He had to entreat her to descend, and in helping her to alight bore her whole weight, and supported her in a sad wonder, while the horses were led across the rubble, and the carriage was with difficulty, and some confusions, guided to clear its wheels of the obstructing mass. Emilia persisted in saying that nothing ailed her; and to the coachman, who could have told him something, and was willing to have done so (notwithstanding a gold fee for silence that stuck in his palm), Merthyr put no question.

As they were taking their seats in the carriage again, Georgiana said,
“Where is your wreath, Sandra?”

The black-briony wreath was no longer on her head.

“Then, it wasn’t a dream!” gasped Emilia, feeling at her temples.

Georgiana at once fell into a scrutinizing coldness, and when Merthyr, who fancied the wreath might have fallen as he was lifting Emilia from the carriage, proposed to go and search the place for it, his sister laid her fingers on his arm, remarking, “You will not find

it, dear;" and Emilia cried "Oh! no, no! it is not there;" and, with her hands pressed hard against her bosom, sat fixed and silent.

Out of this mood she issued with looks of such tenderness that one who watched her, speculating on her character as Merthyr did, could see that in some mysterious way she had been, during the few minutes that separated them, illumined upon the matter nearest her heart. Was it her own strength, inspired by some sublime force, that had sprung up suddenly to eject a worthless love? So he hoped in despite of whispering reason, till Georgiana spoke to him.

CHAPTER XLVII

When the force of Wilfrid's embrace had died out from her body, Emilia conceived wilfully that she had seen an apparition, so strange, sudden, and wild had been his coming and going: but her whole body was a song to her. "He is not false: he is true." So dimly, however, was the 'he' now fashioned in her brain, and so like a thing of the air had he descended on her, that she almost conceived the abstract idea, 'Love is true,' and possibly, though her senses did not touch on it to shape it, she had the reflection in her: "After all, power is mine to bring him to my side." Almost it seemed to her that she had brought him from the grave. She sat hugging herself in the carriage, hating to hear words, and seeing a ball of fire away in the white mist. Georgiana looked at her no more; and when Tracy remarked that he had fancied having seen a fellow running up the bank, she said quietly, "Did you?"

Page 782

“Robert must have seen him, too,” added Merthyr, and so the interloper was dismissed.

On reaching home, no sooner were they in the hall than Emilia called for her bedroom candle in a thin, querulous voice that made Tracy shout with laughter and love of her quaintness.

Emilia gave him her hand, and held up her mouth to kiss Georgiana, but no cheek was bent forward for the salute. The girl passed from among them, and then Merthyr said to his sister: “What is the matter?”

“Surely, Merthyr, you should not be at a loss,” she answered, in a somewhat unusual tone, that was half irony.

Merthyr studied her face. Alone with her, he said: “I could almost suppose that she has seen this man.”

Georgiana smiled sadly. “I have not seen him, dear; and she has not told me so.”

“You think it was so?”

“I can imagine it just possible.”

“What! while we were out and had left her! He must be mad!”

“Not necessarily mad, unless to be without principle is to be mad.”

“Mad, or graduating for a Spanish comedie d’intrigue,” said Merthyr. “What on earth can he mean by it? If he must see her, let him come here. But to dog a carriage at midnight, and to prefer to act startling surprises!—one can’t help thinking that he delights in being a stage-hero.”

Georgiana’s: “If he looks on her as a stage-heroine?” was unheeded, and he pursued: “She must leave England at once,” and stated certain arrangements that were immediately to be made.

“You will not give up this task you have imposed on yourself?” she said.

“To do what?”

She could have answered: “To make this unsatisfactory creature love you;” but her words were, “To civilize this little savage.”

Merthyr was bright in a moment: “I don’t give up till I see failure.”

“Is it not possible, dear, to be dangerously blind?” urged Georgiana.

“Keep to the particular case,” he returned; “and don’t tempt me into your woman’s snare of a generalization. It’s possible, of course, to be one-ideaed and obstinate. But I have not yet seen your savage guilty of a deceit. Her heart has been stirred, and her heart, as you may judge, has force enough to be constant, though none can deny that it has been roughly proved.”

“For which you like her better?” said Georgiana, herself brightening.

“For which I like her better,” he replied, and smiled, perfectly armed.

“Oh! is it because I am a woman that I do not understand this sort of friendship?” cried Georgiana. “And from you, Merthyr, to a girl such as she is! Me she satisfies less and less. You speak of force of heart, as if it were manifested in an abandonment of personal will.”

“No, my darling, but in the strong conception of a passion.”

“Yes; if she had discriminated, and fixed upon a worthy object!”

“That,” rejoined Merthyr, “is akin to the doctrine of justification by success.”

Page 783

“You seek to foil me with sophisms,” said Georgiana, warming. “A woman—even a girl—should remember what is due to herself. You are attracted by a passionate nature—I mean, men are.”

“The general instance,” assented Merthyr.

“Then, do you never reflect,” pursued Georgiana, “on the composition and the elements of that sort of nature? I have tried to think the best of it. It seems to me still no, not contemptible at all—but selfishness is the groundwork of it; a brilliant selfishness, I admit. I see that it shows its best feature, but is it the nobler for that? I think, and I must think, that excellence is a point to be reached only by unselfishness, and that usefulness is the test of excellence.”

“Before there has been any trial of her?” asked Merthyr. “Have you not been a little too eager to put the test to her?”

Georgiana reluctantly consented to have her argument attached to a single person. “She is not a child, Merthyr.”

“Ay; but she should bethought one.”

“I confess I am utterly at sea,” Georgiana sighed. “Will you at least allow that sordid selfishness does less mischief than this ‘passion’ you admire so much?”

“I will allow that she may do herself more mischief than if she had the opposite vice of avarice—anything you will, of that complexion.”

“And why should she be regarded as a child?” asked Georgiana piteously.

“Because, if she has outnumbered the years of a child, she is no further advanced than a child, owing to what she has to get rid of. She is overburdened with sensations that set her head on fire. Her solid, firm, and gentle heart keeps her balanced, so long as there is no one playing on it. That a fool should be doing so, is scarcely her fault.”

Georgiana murmured to herself, “He is not a fool.” She said, “I do see a certain truth in what you say, dear Merthyr. But I have been disappointed in her. I have taken her among my poor. She listens to their tales, without sympathy. I took her into a sick-room. She stood by a dying bed like a statue. Her remark when we came into the air was, ’Death seems easy, if it were not so stifling!’ Herself always! herself the centre of what she sees and feels! And again, she has no active desire to do good to any mortal thing. A passive wish that everybody should be happy, I know she has. Few have not. She would give money if she had it. But this is among the mysteries of Providence to me, that one no indifferent to others should be gifted with so inexplicable a power of attraction.”

Merthyr put this case to her: “Suppose you saw any of the poor souls you wait on lying sick with fever, would it be just to describe the character of one so situated as fretful, ungrateful, of rambling tongue, poor in health, and generally of loose condition of mind?”

“There, again, is that foreign doctrine which exults in the meanest triumphs by getting the thesis granted that we are animal—only animals!” Georgiana burst out. You argue that at this season and at that season she is helpless. If she is a human creature, must she not have a mind to cover those conditions?”

Page 784

“And a mind,” Merthyr took her up, “specially experienced, armed, and alert to be a safeguard to her at the most critical period of her life! Oh, yes! Whether she ‘must’ have it is one thing; but no one can content the value of such a jewel to any young person.”

Georgiana stood silenced; and knew later that she had been silenced by a fallacy. For, is youth the most critical period of life? Neither brother nor sister, however, were talking absolutely for the argument. Beneath this dialogue, the current in her mind pressed to elicit some avowal of his personal feeling for the girl, toward whom Georgiana’s disposition was kindlier than her words might lead one to think. He, on the other hand, talked with the distinct object of disguising his feelings under a tone of moderate friendship for Emilia, that was capable of excusing her. A sensitive man of thirty odd years does not loudly proclaim his appreciation of a girl under twenty: moreover, Merthyr wished to spare his sister.

He thought of questioning Robert, the coachman, whether anyone had visited the carriage during his five minutes’ absence from it: but Merthyr’s peculiar Welsh delicacy kept him from doing that, hard as it was to remain in doubt and endure the little poisoned shafts of a suspicion.

In the morning there was a letter from Marini on the breakfast-table. Merthyr glanced down the contents. His countenance flashed with a marvellous light. “Where is she?” he said, looking keenly for Emilia.

Emilia came in from the garden.

“Now, my Sandra!” cried Merthyr, waving the letter to her; “can you pack up, to start in an hour? There’s work coming on for us, and I shall be a boy again, and not the drumstick I am in this country. I have a letter from Marini. All Lombardy is prepared to rise, and this time the business will be done. Marini is off for Genoa. Under the orange-trees, my Sandra! and looking on the bay, singing of Italy free!”

Emilia fell back a step, eyeing him with a grave expression of wonder, as if she beheld another being from the one she had hitherto known. The calm Englishman had given place to a volcanic spirit.

“Isn’t that the sketch we made?” he resumed. “The plot’s perfect. I detest conspiracies, but we must use what weapons we can, and be Old Mole, if they trample us in the earth. Once up, we have Turin to back us. This I know. We shall have nothing but the Tedeschi to manage: and if they beat us in cavalry, it’s certain that they can’t rely on their light horse. The Magyars would break in a charge. We know that they will. As for the rest:—

’Soldati settentrionali,
Come sarebbe Boemi a Croati,’

Page 785

we are a match for them! Artillery we shall get. The Piedmontese are mad for the signal. Come; sit and eat. The air seems dead down in this quiet country; we're out of the stream. I must rush up to London to breathe and then we won't lose a moment. We shall be in Italy in four days. Four days, my Sandra! And Italy going to be free; Georgey, I'm fasting. And you will see all your old friends. All? Good God! No!—not all! Their blood shall nerve us. The Austrian thinks he wastes us by slaughter. With every dead man he doubles the life of the living! Am I talking like a foreigner, Sandra mia? My child, you don't eat! And I, who dreamed last night that I looked out over Novara from the height of the Col di Colma, and saw the plain under a red shadow from a huge eagle!"

Merthyr laughed, swinging round his arm. Emilia continued staring at him as at a man transformed, while Georgiana asked: "May Marini's letter be seen?" Her visage had become firm and set in proportion as her brother's excitement increased.

"Eat, my Sandra! eat!" called Merthyr, who was himself eating with a campaigning appetite.

Georgiana laid down the letter folded under Merthyr's fingers, keeping her hand on it till he grew alive to her meaning, that it should be put away.

"Marini is vague about artillery," she murmured.

"Vague!" echoed Merthyr. "Say prudent. If he said we could lay hands on fifty pieces, then distrust him!"

"God grant that this be not another pit for further fruitless bloodshed!" was the interjection standing in Georgiana's eyes, and then she dropped them pensively, while Merthyr recounted the patient schemes that had led to this hour, the unuttered anxieties and the bursting hopes.

Still Emilia kept her distressfully unenthusiastic looks turned from one to the other, though her Italy was the theme. She did not eat, but had dropped one hand flat on her plate, looking almost idiotic. She heard of Italy as of a distant place, known to her in ancient years. Merthyr's transformation, too, helped some form of illusion in her brain that she was cut off from any kindred feeling with other people.

As soon as he had finished, Merthyr jumped up; and coming round to Emilia, touched her shoulder affectionately, saying: "Now! There won't be much packing to do. We shall be in London to-night in time for your mother to pass the evening with you."

Emilia rose straightway, and her eyes fell vacantly on Georgiana for help, as far as they could express anything.

Georgiana gave no response, save a look well nigh as vacant in the interchange.

“But you haven’t eaten at all!” said Merthyr.

Emilia shook her head. “No.”

“Eat, my Sandra! to please me! You will need all your strength if you would be a match for Georgey anywhere where there’s action.”

“Yes!” Emilia traversed his words with a sudden outcry. “Yes, I will go to London. I am ready to go to London now.”

Page 786

It was clear that a new light had fallen on her intelligence.

Merthyr was satisfied to see her sit down to the table, and he at once went out to issue directions for the first step in the new and momentous expedition.

Emilia put the bread to her mouth, and crumbled it on a dry lip: but it was evident to Georgiana, hostile witness as she was, that Emilia's mind was gradually warming to what Merthyr had said, and that a picture was passing before the girl. She perceived also a thing that no misery of her own had yet drawn from Emilia. It was a tear that fell heavily on the back of her hand. Soon the tears came in quick succession, while the girl tried to eat, and bit at salted morsels. It was a strange sight for Georgiana, this statuesque weeping, that got human bit by bit, till the bosom heaved long sobs: and yet no turn of the head for sympathy; nothing but passionless shedding of big tear-drops!

She went to the girl, and put her hand upon her; kissed her, and then said: "We have no time to lose. My brother never delays when he has come to a resolve."

Emilia tried to articulate: "I am ready."

"But you have not eaten!"

Emilia made a mechanical effort to eat.

"Remember," said Georgiana, "we have a long distance to go. You will want your strength. You would not be a burden to him? Eat, while I get your things ready." And Georgiana left her, secretly elated to feel that in this expedition it was she, and she alone, who was Merthyr's mate. What storm it was, and what conflict, agitated the girl and stupefied her, she cared not to guess, now that she had the suitable designation, 'savage,' confirmed in all her acts, to apply to her.

When Tracy Runningbrook came down at his ordinary hour of noon to breakfast, he found a twisted note from Georgiana, telling him that important matters had summoned Merthyr to London, and that they were all to be seen at Lady Gosstre's town-house.

"I believe, by Jove! Powys manoeuvres to get her away from me," he shouted, and sat down to his breakfast and his book with a comforted mind. It was not Georgiana to whom he alluded; but the appearance of Captain Gambier, and the pronounced discomposure visible in the handsome face of the captain on his hearing of the departure, led Tracy to think that Georgiana's was properly deplored by another, though that other was said to be engaged. 'On revient toujours,' he hummed.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Three days passed as a running dream to Emilia. During that period she might have been hurried off to Italy without uttering a remonstrance. Merthyr's spirited talk of the country she called her own; of its heroic youth banded to rise, and sworn to liberate it or die; of good historic names borne by men, his comrades, in old campaigning adventures; and stories and incidents of those past days—all given with his changed face, and changed ringing voice, almost moved her to plunge forgetfully into this new tumultuous stream while the picture of the beloved land, lying shrouded beneath the perilous star it was about to follow grew in her mind.

Page 787

“Shall I go with the Army?” she asked Georgiana.

“No, my child; you will simply go to school,” was the cold reply.

“To school!” Emilia throbbed, “while they are fighting!”

“To the Academy. My brother’s first thought is to further your progress in Art. When your artistic education is complete, you will choose your own course.”

“He knows, he knows that I have no voice!” Emilia struck her lap with twisted fingers. “My voice is thick in my throat. If I am not to march with him, I can’t go; I will not go. I want to see the fight. You have. Why should I keep away? Could I run up notes, even if I had any voice, while he is in the cannon-smoke?”

“While he is in the cannon-smoke!” Georgiana revolved the line thoughtfully. “You are aware that my brother looks forward to the recovery of your voice,” she said.

“My voice is like a dead serpent in my throat,” rejoined Emilia. “My voice! I have forgotten music. I lived for that, once; now I live for nothing, only to take my chance everywhere with my friend. I want to smell powder. My father says it is like salt, the taste of blood, and is like wine when you smell it. I have heard him shout for it. I will go to Italy, if I may go where my friend Merthyr goes; but nothing can keep me shut up now. My head’s a wilderness when I’m in houses. I can scarcely bear to hear this London noise, without going out and walking till I drop.”

Coming to a knot in her meditation, Georgiana concluded that Emilia’s heart was warming to Merthyr. She was speedily doubtful again.

These two delicate Welsh natures, as exacting as they were delicate, were little pleased with Emilia’s silence concerning her intercourse with Wilfrid. Merthyr, who had expressed in her defence what could be said for her, was unwittingly cherishing what could be thought in her disfavour. Neither of them hit on the true cause, which lay in Georgiana’s coldness to her. One little pressure of her hand, carelessly given, made Merthyr better aware of the nature he was dealing with. He was telling her that a further delay might keep them in London for a week; and that he had sent for her mother to come to her.

“I must see my mother,” she had said, excitedly. The extension of the period named for quitting England made it more imminent m her imagination than when it was a matter of hours. “I must see her.”

“I have sent for her,” said Merthyr, and then pressed Emilia’s hand. But she who, without having brooded on complaints of its absence, thirsted for demonstrative kindness, clung to the hand, drawing it, doubled, against her chin.

“That is not the reason,” she said, raising her full eyes up at him over the unrelinquished hand. “I love the poor Madre; let her come; but I have no heart for her just now. I have seen Wilfrid.”

She took a tighter hold of his fingers, as fearing he might shrink from her. Merthyr hated mysteries, so he said, “I supposed it must have been so—that night of our return from Penarvon?”

Page 788

“Yes,” she murmured, while she read his face for a shadow of a repulsion; “and, my friend, I cannot go to Italy now!”

Merthyr immediately drew a seat beside her. He perceived that there would be no access to her reason, even as he was on the point of addressing it.

“Then all my care and trouble are to be thrown away?” he said, taking the short road to her feelings.

She put the hand that was disengaged softly on his shoulder. “No; not thrown away. Let me be what Merthyr wishes me to be! That is my chief prayer.”

“Why, then, will you not do what Merthyr wishes you to do?”

Emilia’s eyelids shut, while her face still fronted him.

“Oh! I will speak all out to you,” she cried. “Merthyr, my friend, he came to kiss me once, before I have only just understood it! He is going to Austria. He came to touch me for the last time before his hand is red with my blood. Stop him from going! I am ready to follow you:—I can hear of his marrying that woman:—Oh! I cannot live and think of him in that Austrian white coat. Poor thing!—my dear! my dear!” And she turned away her head.

It is not unnatural that Merthyr hearing these soft epithets, should disbelieve in the implied self-conquest of her preceding words. He had no clue to make him guess that these were simply old exclamations of hers brought to her lips by the sorrowful contrast in her mind.

“It will be better that you should see him,” he said, with less of his natural sincerity; so soon are we corrupted by any suspicion that our egoism prompts.

“Here?” And she hung close to him, open-lipped, open-eyed, open-eared, as if (Georgiana would think it, thought Merthyr) her savage senses had laid the trap for this proposal, and now sprung up keen for their prey. “Here, Merthyr? Yes! let me see him. You will! Let me see him, for he cannot resist me. He tries. He thinks he does: but he cannot. I can stretch out my finger—I can put it on the day when, if he has galloped one way he will gallop another. Let him come.”

She held up both her hands in petition, half dropping her eyelids, with a shadowy beauty.

In Merthyr’s present view, the idea of Wilfrid being in ranks opposed to him was so little provocative of intense dissatisfaction, that it was out of his power to believe that Emilia craved to see him simply to dissuade the man from the obnoxious step. “Ah, well! See him; see him, if you must,” he said. “Arrange it with my sister.”

He quitted the room, shrinking from the sound of her thanks, and still more from the consciousness of his torment.

The business that detained him was to get money for Marini. Georgiana placed her fortune at his disposal a second time. There was his own, which he deemed it no excess of chivalry to fling into the gulf. The two sat together, arranging what property should be sold, and how they would share the sacrifice in common. Georgiana pressed him to dispose of a little estate belonging to her, that money might immediately be raised. They talked as they sat over the fire toward the dusk of the winter evening.

Page 789

“You would not have refused me once, Merthyr!”

“When you were a child, and I hardly better than a boy. Now it’s different. Let mine go first, Georgey. You may have a husband, who will not look on these things as we do.”

“How can I love a husband!” was all she said; and Merthyr took her in his arms. His gaiety had gone.

“We can’t go dancing into a pit of this sort,” he sighed, partly to baffle the scrutiny he apprehended in her silence. “The garrison at Milan is doubled, and I hear they are marching troops through Tyrol. Some alerte has been given, and probably some traitors exist. One wouldn’t like to be shot like a dog! You haven’t forgotten poor Tarani? I heard yesterday of the girl who calls herself his widow.”

“They were betrothed, and she is!” exclaimed Georgiana.

“Well, there’s a case of a man who had two loves—a woman and his country; and both true to him!”

“And is he so singular, Merthyr?”

“No, my best! my sweetest! my heart’s rest! no!”

They exchanged tender smiles.

“Tarani’s bride—beloved! you can listen to such matters—she has undertaken her task. Who imposed it? I confess I faint at the thought of things so sad and shameful. But I dare not sit in judgement on a people suffering as they are. Outrage upon outrage they have endured, and that deadens—or rather makes their heroism unscrupulous. Tarani’s bride is one of the few fair girls of Italy. We have a lock of her hair. She shore it close the morning her lover was shot, and wore the thin white skull-cap you remember, until it was whispered to her that her beauty must serve.”

“I have the lock now in my desk,” said Georgiana, beginning to tremble. “Do you wish to look at it?”

“Yes; fetch it, my darling.”

He sat eyeing the firelight till she returned, and then taking the long golden lock in his handy he squeezed it, full of bitter memories and sorrowfulness.

“Giulietta?” breathed his sister.

“I would put my life on the truth of that woman’s love. Well!”

“Yes?”

“She abandons herself to the commandant of the citadel.”

A low outcry burst from Georgiana. She fell at Merthyr’s knees sobbing violently. He let her sob. In the end she struggled to speak.

“Oh! can it be permitted? Oh! can we not save her? Oh, poor soul! my sister! Is she blind to her lover in heaven?”

Georgiana’s face was dyed with shame.

“We must put these things by,” said Merthyr. “Go to Emilia presently, and tell her—settle with her as you think fitting, how she shall see this Wilfrid Pole. I have promised her she shall have her wish.”

Coloured by the emotion she was burning from, these words smote Georgiana with a mournful compassion for Merthyr.

He had risen, and by that she knew that nothing could be said to alter his will.

Page 790

A sentimental pair likewise, if you please; but these were sentimentalists who served an active deity; and not that arbitrary protection of a subtle selfishness which rules the fairer portion of our fat England.

CHAPTER XLIX

“My brother tells me it is your wish to see Mr. Wilfrid Pole.”

Emilia’s “Yes” came faintly in answer to Georgiana’s cold accents.

“Have you considered what you are doing in expressing such a desire?”

Another “Yes” was heard from under an uplifted head:—a culprit affirmative, whereat the just take fire.

“Be honest, Emilia. Seek counsel and guidance to-night, as you have done before with me, and profited, I think. If I write to bid him come, what will it mean?”

“Nothing more,” breathed Emilia.

“To him—for in his way he seems to care for you fitfully—it will mean—stop! hear me. The words you speak will have no part of the meaning, even if you restrain your tongue. To him it will imply that his power over you is unaltered. I suppose that the task of making you perceive the effect it really will have on you is hopeless.”

“I have seen him, and I know,” said Emilia, in a corresponding tone.

“You saw him that night of our return from Penarvon? Judge of him by that. He would not spare you. To gratify I know not what wildness in his nature, he did not hesitate to open your old wound. And to what purpose? A freak of passion!”

“He could not help it. I told him he would come, and he came.”

“This, possibly, you call love; do you not?”

Emilia was about to utter a plain affirmative, but it was checked. The novelty of the idea of its not being love arrested her imagination.

“If he comes to you here,” resumed Georgiana—

“He must come!” cried Emilia.

“My brother has sanctioned it, so his coming or not will rest with him. If he comes, let me know the good that you think will result from an interview? Ah! you have not

weighed that question. Do so;—or you give no heed to it? In any ease, try to look into your own breast. You were not born to live unworthily. You can be, or will be, if you follow your better star, self-denying and noble. Do you not love your country? Judge of this love by that. Your love, if you have this power over him, is merely a madness to him; and his—what has it done for you? If he comes, and this begins again, there will be a similar if not the same destiny for you."

Emilia panted in her reply. "No; it will not begin again." She threw out both arms, shaking her head. "It cannot, I know. What am I now? It is what I was that he loves. He will not know what I am till he sees me. And I know that I have done things that he cannot forgive. You have forgiven it, and Merthyr, because he is my friend; but I am sure Wilfrid will not. He might pardon the poor 'me,' but not his Emilia! I shall have to tell him what I did; so" (and she came closer to Georgiana) "there is some pain for me in seeing him."

Page 791

Georgiana was not proof against this simplicity of speech, backed by a little dying dimple, which seemed a continuation of the plain sadness of Emilia's tone.

She said, "My poor child!" almost fondly, and then Emilia looked in her face, murmuring, "You sometimes doubt me."

"Not your truth, but the accuracy of your perceptions and your knowledge of your real designs. You are certainly deceiving yourself at this instant. In the first place, the relation of that madness—no, poor child, not wickedness—but if you tell it to him, it is a wilful and unnecessary self-abasement. If he is to be your husband, unburden your heart at once. Otherwise, why? why? You are but working up a scene, provoking needless excesses: you are storing misery in retrospect, or wretchedness to be endured. Had you the habit of prayer! By degrees it will give you the thirst for purity, and that makes you a fountain of prayer, in whom these blind deceits cannot hide."

Georgiana paused emphatically; as when, by our unrolling out of our ideas, we have more thoroughly convinced ourselves.

"You pray to heaven," said Emilia, and then faltered, and blushed. "I must be loved!" she cried. "Will you not put your arms round me?"

Georgiana drew her to her bosom, bidding her continue. Emilia lay whispering under her chin. "You pray, and you wish to be seen as you are, do you not? You do. Well, if you knew what love is, you would see it is the same. You wish him to see and know you: you wish to be sure that he loves nothing but exactly you; it must be yourself. You are jealous of his loving an idea of you that is not you. You think, 'He will wake up and find his mistake;' or you think, 'That kiss was not intended for me; not for me as I am.' Those are tortures!"

Her discipline had transformed her, when she could utter such sentiments as these!

Feeling her shudder, and not knowing how imagination forestalls experience in passionate blood, Georgiana said, "You speak like one who has undergone them. But now at least you have thrown off the mask. You love him still, this man! And with as little strength of will! Do you not see impiety in the comparison you have made?"

"Oh! what I see is, that I wish I could say to him, 'Look on me, for I need not be ashamed—I am like Miss Ford!'"

The young lady's cheeks took fire, and the clear path of speech becoming confused in her head she said, "Miss Ford?"

"Georgiana," said Emilia, and feeling that her friend's cold manner had melted; "Georgey! my beloved! my darling in Italy, where will we go! I envy no woman but you

who have seen my dear ones fight. You and I, and Merthyr! Nothing but Austrian shot shall part us."

"And so we make up a pretty dream!" interjected Georgiana. "The Austrian shot, I think, will be fired by one who is now in the Austrian service, or who will soon be."

"Wilfrid?" Emilia called out. "No; that is what I am going to stop. Why did I not tell you so at first? But I never know what I say or do when I am with you, and everything seems chance. I want to see him to prevent him from doing that. I can."

Page 792

“Why should you?” asked Georgiana; and one to whom the faces of the two had been displayed at that moment would have pronounced them a hostile couple.

“Why should I prevent him?” Emilia doled out the question slowly, and gave herself no further thought of replying to it.

Apparently Georgiana understood the significance of this odd silence: she was perhaps touched by it. She said, “You feel that you have a power over him. You wish to exercise it. Never mind wherefore. If you do—if you try, and succeed—if, by the aid of this love presupposed to exist, you win him to what you require of him—do you honestly think the love is then immediately to be dropped?”

Emilia meditated. She caught up her voice hastily. “I think so. Yes. I hope so. I mean it to be.”

“With a noble lover, Emilia. Not with a selfish one. In showing him the belief you have in your power over him, you betray that he has power over you. And it is to no object. His family, his position, his prospects—all tell you that he cannot marry you if he would. And he is, besides, engaged—”

“Let her suffer!” Emilia’s eyes flashed.

“Ah!” and Georgiana thought, “Have I come upon your nature at last?”

However it might be, Emilia was determined to show it.

“She took my lover from me, and I say, let her suffer! I would not hurt her myself—I would not lay my finger on her: but she has eyes like blue stones, and such a mouth! —I think the Austrian executioner has one like it. If she suffers, and goes all dark as I did, she will show a better face. Let her keep my lover. He is not mine, but he was; and she took him from me. That woman cannot feed on him as I did. I know she has no hunger for love. He will look at those blue bits of ice, and think of me. I told him so. Did I not tell him that in Devon? I saw her eyelids move as fast as I spoke. I think I look on Winter when I see her lips. Poor, wretched Wilfrid!”

Emilia half-sobbed this exclamation out. “I don’t wish to hurt either of them,” she added, with a smile of such abrupt opposition to her words that Georgiana was in perplexity. A lady who has assumed the office of lecturer, will, in such a frame of mind, lecture on, if merely to vindicate to herself her own preconceptions. Georgiana laid her finger severely upon Wilfrid’s manifest faults; and, in fine, she spoke a great deal of the common sense that the situation demanded. Nevertheless, Emilia held to her scheme. But, in the meantime, Georgiana had seen more clearly into the girl’s heart; and she had been won, also, by a natural gracefulness that she now perceived in her, and which led her to think, “Is Merthyr again to show me that he never errs in his judgement?” An

unaccountable movement of tenderness to Emilia made her drop a few kisses on her forehead. Emilia shut her eyes, waiting for more. Then she looked up, and said, “Have you felt this love for me very long?” at which the puny flame, scarce visible, sprang up, and warmed to a great heat.

Page 793

“My own Emilia! Sandra! listen to me: promise me not to seek this interview.”

“Will you always love me as much?” Emilia bargained.

“Yes, yes; I never vary. It is my love for you that begs you.”

Emilia fell into a chair and propped her head behind both hands, tapping the floor briskly with her feet. Georgiana watched the conflict going on. To decide it promptly, she said: “And not only shall I love you thrice as well, but my brother Merthyr, whom you call your friend—he will—he cannot love you better; but he will feel you to be worthy the best love he can give. There is a heart, you simple girl! He loves you, and has never shown any of the pain your conduct has given him. When I say he loves you, I tell you his one weakness—the only one I have discovered. And judge whether, he has shown want of self-control while you were dying for another. Did he attempt to thwart you? No; to strengthen you; and never once to turn your attention to himself. That is love. Now, think of what anguish you have made him pass through: and think whether you have ever witnessed an alteration of kindness in his face toward you. Even now, when he had the hope that you were cured of your foolish fruitless affection for a man who merely played with you, and cannot give up the habit, even now he hides what he feels —”

So far Emilia let her speak without interruption; but gradually awakening to the meaning of the words:—

“For me?” she cried.

“Yes; for you.”

“The same sort of love as Wilfrid feels?”

“By no means the same sort; but the love of man for woman.”

“And he saw me when I was that wretched heap? And he knows everything! and loves me. He has never kissed me.”

“Does that miserable test—?” Georgiana was asking.

“Pardon, pardon,” said Emilia penitently; “I know that is almost nothing, now. I am not a child. I spoke from a sudden feeling. For if he loves me, how—! Oh, Merthyr! what a little creature I seem. I cannot understand it. I lose a brother. And he was such a certainty to me. What did he love—what did he love, that night he found me on the pier? I looked like a creature picked off a mud-bank. I felt like a worm, and miserably abandoned, I was a shameful sight. Oh! how can I look on Merthyr’s face again?”

In these interjections Georgiana did not observe the proper humility and abject gratitude of a young person who had heard that she was selected by a prince of the earth. A sort of ‘Eastern handmaid’ prostration, with joined hands, and, above all things, a closed mouth, the lady desired. She half regretted the revelation she had made; and to be sure at once that she had reaped some practical good, she said: “I need scarce ask you whether you have come to a right decision upon that other question.”

“To see Wilfrid?” said Emilia. She appeared to pause musingly, and then turned to Georgiana, showing happy features; “Yes: I shall see him. I must see him. Let him know he is to come immediately.”

Page 794

“That is your decision.”

“Yes.”

“After what I have told you?”

“Oh, yes; yes! Write the letter.”

Georgiana chid at an internal wrath that struggled to win her lips. “Promise me simply that what I have told you of my brother, you will consider yourself bound to keep secret. You will not speak of it to others, nor to him.”

Emilia gave the promise, but with the thought; “To him?—will not he speak of it?”

“So, then, I am to write this letter?” said Georgiana.

“Do, do; at once!” Emilia put on her sweetest look to plead for it.

“Decidedly the wisest of men are fools in this matter,” Georgiana’s reflection swam upon her anger.

“And dearest! my Georgey!” Emilia insisted on being blunt to the outward indications to which she was commonly so sensitive and reflective; “my Georgey! let me be alone this evening in my bedroom. The little Madre comes, and—and I haven’t the habit of being respectful to her. And, I must be alone! Do not send up for me, whoever wishes it.”

Georgiana could not stop her tongue: “Not if Mr. Wilfrid Pole—?”

“Oh, he! I will see him,” said Emilia; and Georgiana went from her straightway.

CHAPTER L

Emilia remained locked up with her mother all that evening. The good little shrill woman, tender-eyed and slatternly, had to help try on dresses, and run about for pins, and express her critical taste in undertones, believing all the while that her daughter had given up music to go mad with vanity. The reflection struck her, notwithstanding, that it was a wiser thing for one of her sex to make friends among rich people than to marry a foreign husband.

The girl looked a brilliant woman in a superb Venetian dress of purple velvet, which she called ‘the Branciani dress,’ and once attired in it, and the rich purges and swelling creases over the shoulders puffed out to her satisfaction, and the run of yellow braid about it properly inspected and flattened, she would not return to her more homely wear, though very soon her mother began to whimper and say that she had lost her so long,

and now that she had found her it hardly seemed the same child. Emilia would listen to no entreaties to put away her sumptuous robe. She silenced her mother with a stamp of her foot, and then sighed: "Ah! Why do I always feel such a tyrant with you?" kissing her.

"This dress," she said, and held up her mother's chin fondlingly between her two hands, "this dress was designed by my friend Merthyr—that is, Mr. Powys—from what he remembered of a dress worn by Countess Branciani, of Venice. He had it made to give to me. It came from Paris. Countess Branciani was one of his dearest friends. I feel that I am twice as much his friend with this on me. Mother, it seems like a deep blush all over me. I feel as if I looked out of a rose."

Page 795

She spread her hands to express the flower magnified.

“Oh! what silly talk,” said her mother: “it does turn your head, this dress does!”

“I wish it would give me my voice, mother. My father has no hope. I wish he would send me news to make me happy about him; or come and run his finger up the strings for hours, as he used to. I have fancied I heard him at times, and I had a longing to follow the notes, and felt sure of my semi-tones. He won’t see me! Mother! he would think something of me if he saw me now!”

Her mother’s lamentations reached that vocal pitch at last which Emilia could not endure, and the little lady was despatched to her home under charge of a servant.

Emilia feasted on the looking-glass when alone. Had Merthyr, in restoring her to health, given her an overdose of the poison?

“Countess Branciani made the Austrian Governor her slave,” she uttered, planting one foot upon a stool to lend herself height. “He told her who were suspected, and who would be imprisoned, and gave her all the State secrets. Beauty can do more than music. I wonder whether Merthyr loved her? He loves me!”

Emilia was smitten with a fear that he would speak of it when she next saw him. “Oh! I hope he will be just the same as he has been,” she sighed; and with much melancholy shook her head at her fair reflection, and began to undress. It had not struck her with surprise that two men should be loving her, until, standing away from the purple folds, she seemed to grow smaller and smaller, as a fire-log robbed of its flame, and felt insufficient and weak. This was a new sensation. She depended no more on her own vital sincerity. It was in her nature, doubtless, to crave constantly for approval, but in the service of personal beauty instead of divine Art, she found herself utterly unwound without it: victim of a sense of most uncomfortable hollowness. She was glad to extinguish the candle and be covered up dark in the circle of her warmth. Then her young blood sang to her again.

An hour before breakfast every morning she read with Merthyr. Now, this morning how was she to appear to him? There would be no reading, of course. How could he think of teaching one to whom he trembled. Emilia trusted that she might see no change in him, and, above all, that he would not speak of his love for her. Nevertheless, she put on her robe of conquest, having first rejected with distaste a plainer garb. She went down the stairs slowly. Merthyr was in the library awaiting her. “You are late,” he said, eyeing the dress as a thing apart from her, and remarking that it was hardly suited for morning wear. “Yellow, if you must have a strong colour, and you wouldn’t exhibit the schwartz-gelb of the Tedeschi willingly. But now!”

This was the signal for the reading to commence.

Page 796

“Wilfrid would not have been so cold to me,” thought Emilia, turning the leaves of Ariosto as a book of ashes. Not a word of love appeared to be in his mind. This she did not regret; but she thirsted for the assuring look. His eyes were quietly friendly. So friendly was he, that he blamed her for inattention, and took her once to task about a melodious accent in which she vulgarized the vowels. All the flattery of the Branciani dress could not keep Emilia from her feeling of smallness. Was it possible that he loved her? She watched him as eagerly as her shyness would permit. Any shadow of a change was spied for. Getting no softness from him, or superadded kindness, no shadow of a change in that direction, she stumbled in her reading purposely, to draw down rebuke; her construing was villanously bad. He told her so, and she replied: “I don’t like poetry.” But seeing him exchange Ariosto for Roman History, she murmured, “I like Dante.” Merthyr plunged her remorselessly into the second Punic war.

But there was worse to follow. She was informed that after breakfast she would be called upon to repeat the principal facts she had been reading of. Emilia groaned audibly.

“Take the book,” said Merthyr.

“It’s so heavy,” she complained.

“Heavy?”

“I mean, to carry about.”

“If you want to ‘carry it about,’ the boy shall follow you with it.”

She understood that she was being laughed at. Languor, coupled with the consciousness of ridicule, overwhelmed her.

“I feel I can’t learn,” she said.

“Feel, that you must,” was replied to her.

“No; don’t take any more trouble with me!”

“Yes; I expect you to distinguish Scipio from Cicero, and not make the mistake of the other evening, when you were talking to Mrs. Cameron.”

Emilia left him, abashed, to dread shrewdly their meeting within five minutes at the breakfast-table; to dread eating under his eyes, with doubts of the character of her acts generally. She was, indeed, his humble scholar, though she seemed so full of weariness and revolt. He, however, when alone, looked fixedly at the door through which she had passed, and said, “She loves that man still. Similar ages, similar tastes, I

suppose! She is dressed to be ready for him. She can't learn: she can do nothing. My work mayn't be lost, but it's lost for me."

Merthyr did not know that Georgiana had betrayed him, but in no case would he have given Emilia the signs she expected: in the first place, because he had self-command; and, secondly, because of those years he counted in advance of her. So she had the full mystery of his loving her to think over, without a spot of the weakness to fasten on.

Page 797

Georgiana's first sight of Emilia in her Branciani dress shut her heart against the girl with iron clasps. She took occasion to remark, "We need not expect visitors so very early;" but the offender was impervious. Breakfast finished, the reading with Merthyr recommenced, when Emilia, having got over her surprise at the sameness of things this day, acquitted herself better, and even declaimed the verses musically. Seeing him look pleased, she spoke them out sonorously. Merthyr applauded. Upon which Emilia said, with odd abruptness and solemnity, "Will he come to-day?" It was beyond Merthyr's power of self-control to consent to be taken into a consultation on this matter, and he attempted to put it aside. "He may or he may not—probably to-morrow."

"No; to-day, in the afternoon," said Emilia, "be near me."

"I have engagements."

"Some word, say, that will seem to be you with me."

"Some flattery, or you won't remember it."

"Yes, I like flattery."

"Well, you look like Countess Branciani when, after thinking her husband the basest of men, she discovered him to be the noblest."

Emilia blushed. "That's not easily forgotten! But she must have looked braver, bolder, not so under a burden as I feel."

"The comparison was meant to suit the moment of your reciting."

"Yes," said Emilia, half-mournfully, "then 'myself' doesn't sit on my shoulders: I don't even care what I am."

"That is what Art does for you."

"Only by fits and starts now. Once I never thought of myself."

There was a knock at the street-door, and she changed countenance. Presently there came a gentle tap at their own door.

"It is that woman," said Emilia.

"I fancy it must be Lady Charlotte. You will not see her?"

Merthyr was anticipating a negative, but Emilia said, "Let her come in."

She gave her hand to the lady, and was the less concerned of the two. Lady Charlotte turned away from her briskly.

“Georgey didn’t say anything of you in her letter, Merthyr; I am going up to her, but I wished to satisfy myself that you were in town, first:—to save half-a-minute, you see I anticipate the philosophic manly sneer. Is it really true that you are going to mix yourself up in this mad Italian business again? Now that you’re a man, my dear Merthyr, it seems almost inexcuseable—for a sensible Englishman!”

Lady Charlotte laughed, giving him her hand at the same time.

“Don’t you know I swore an oath?” Merthyr caught up her tone.

“Yes, but you never succeed. I complain that you never succeed. Of what use on earth are all your efforts if you never succeed?”

Emilia’s voice burst out:—

> “’Piacemi almen che i miei sospir sien quali
> Spera ’l Tevero e ’l Arno,
> E ‘l Po,—’”

Merthyr continued the ode, acting a similar fervour:—

Page 798

"'Ben provvide Natura al nostro stato
Quando dell' Alpi schermo
Pose fra noi e la tedesca rabbis."

"We are merely bondsmen to the re-establishment of the provisions of nature."

"And we know we shall succeed!" said Emilia, permitting her antagonism to pass forth in irritable emphasis.

Lady Charlotte quickly left them, to run up to Georgiana. She was not long in the house. Emilia hung near Merthyr all day, and she was near him when the knock was heard which she could suppose to be Wilfrid's, as it proved. Wilfrid was ushered in to Georgiana. Delicacy had prevented Merthyr from taking special notice to Emilia of Lady Charlotte's visit, and he treated Wilfrid's similarly, saying, "Georgey will send down word."

"Only, don't leave me till she does," Emilia rejoined.

Her agitation laid her open to be misinterpreted. It was increased when she saw him take a book and sit in the armchair between two lighted candles, calmly careless of her. She did not actually define to herself that he should feel jealously, but his indifference was one extreme which provoked her instinct to imagine a necessity for the other. Word came from Georgiana, and Emilia moved to the door. "Remember, we dine half-an-hour earlier to-day, on account of the Cameron party," was all that he uttered. Emilia made an effort to go. She felt herself as a ship sailing into perilous waters, without compass. Why did he not speak tenderly? Before Georgiana had revealed his love for her, she had been strong to see Wilfrid. Now, the idea smote her softened heart that Wilfrid's passion might engulf her if she had no word of sustainment from Merthyr. She turned and flung herself at his feet, murmuring, "Say something to me." Merthyr divined this emotion to be a sort of foresight of remorse on her part: he clasped the interwoven fingers of her hands, letting his eyes dwell upon hers. The marvel of their not wavering or softening meaningly kept her speechless. She rose with a strength not her own: not comforted, and no longer speculating. It was as if she had been eyeing a golden door shut fast, that might some day open, but was in itself precious to behold. She arose with deep humbleness, which awakened new ideas of the nature of worth in her bosom. She felt herself so low before this man who would not be played upon as an obsequious instrument—who would not leap into ardour for her beauty! Before that man upstairs how would she feel? The question did not come to her. She entered the room where he was, without a blush. Her step was firm, and her face expressed a quiet gladness. Georgiana stayed through the first commonplaces: then they were alone.

CHAPTER LI

Page 799

Commonplaces continued to be Wilfrid's refuge, for sentiment was surging mightily within him. The commonplaces concerning father, sisters, health, weather, sickened him when uttered, so much that for a time he was unobservant of Emilia's ready exchange of them. To a compliment on her appearance, she said: "You like this dress? I will tell you the history of it. I call it the Branciani dress. Mr. Powys designed it for me. The Countess Branciani was his friend. She used always to dress in this colour; just in this style. She also was dark. And she imagined that her husband favoured the Austrians. She believed he was an Austrian spy. It was impossible for her not to hate him—"

"Her husband!" quoth Wilfrid. The unexpected richness that had come upon her beauty and the coolness of her prattle at such an interview amazed and mortified him.

"She supposed him to be an Austrian spy!"

"Still he was her husband!"

Emilia gave her features a moment's play, but she had not full command of them, and the spark of scorn they emitted was very slight.

"Ah!" his tone had fallen into a depth, "how I thank you for the honour you have done me in desiring to see me once before you leave England! I know that I have not merited it."

More he said on this theme, blaming himself emphatically, until, startled by the commonplaces he was uttering, he stopped short; and the stopping was effective, if the speech was not. Where was the tongue of his passion? He almost asked it of himself. Where was Hippogriff? He who had burned to see her, he saw her now, fair as a vision, and yet in the flesh! Why was he as good as tongue-tied in her presence when he had such fires to pour forth?

(Presuming that he has not previously explained it, the philosopher here observes that Hippogriff, the foal of Fiery Circumstance out of Sentiment, must be subject to strong sentimental friction before he is capable of a flight: his appetites must fast long in the very eye of provocation ere he shall be eloquent. Let him, the Philosopher, repeat at the same time that souls harmonious to Nature, of whom there are few, do not mount this animal. Those who have true passion are not at the mercy of Hippogriff—otherwise Sur-excited Sentiment. You will mark in them constantly a reverence for the laws of their being, and a natural obedience to common sense. They are subject to storm, as in everything earthly, and they need no lesson of devotion; but they never move to an object in a madness.)

Now this is good teaching: it is indeed my Philosopher's object—his purpose—to work out this distinction; and all I wish is that it were good for my market. What the Philosopher means, is to plant in the reader's path a staring contrast between my pet

Emilia and his puppet Wilfrid. It would be very commendable and serviceable if a novel were what he thinks it: but all attestation favours the critical dictum, that a novel is to give us copious sugar and no cane. I, myself, as a reader, consider concomitant cane an adulteration of the qualities of sugar. My Philosopher's error is to deem the sugar, born of the cane, inseparable from it. The which is naturally resented, and away flies my book back at the heads of the librarians, hitting me behind them a far more grievous blow.

Page 800

Such is the construction of my story, however, that to entirely deny the Philosopher the privilege he stipulated for when with his assistance I conceived it, would render our performance unintelligible to that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities. While my Play goes on, I must permit him to come forward occasionally. We are indeed in a sort of partnership, and it is useless for me to tell him that he is not popular and destroys my chance.

CHAPTER LII

“Don’t blame yourself, my Wilfrid.”

Emilia spoke thus, full of pity for him, and in her adorable, deep-fluted tones, after the effective stop he had come to.

The ‘my Wilfrid’ made the owner of the name quiver with satisfaction. He breathed: “You have forgiven me?”

“That I have. And there was indeed no blame. My voice has gone. Yes, but I do not think it your fault.”

“It was! it is!” groaned Wilfrid. “But, has your voice gone?” He leaned nearer to her, drawing largely on the claim his incredulity had to inspect her sweet features accurately. “You speak just as—more deliciously than ever! I can’t think you have lost it. Ah! forgive me! forgive me!”

Emilia was about to put her hand over to him, but the prompt impulse was checked by a simultaneous feminine warning within. She smiled, saying: “‘I forgive’ seems such a strange thing for me to say;” and to convey any further meaning that might comfort him, better than words could do, she held on her smile. The smile was of the acceptedly feigned, conventional character; a polished Surface: belonging to the passage of the discourse, and not to the emotions. Wilfrid’s swelling passion slipped on it. Sensitively he discerned an ease in its formation and disappearance that shot a first doubt through him, whether he really maintained his empire in her heart. If he did not reign there, why had she sent for him? He attributed the unheated smile to a defect in her manner, that was always chargeable with something, as he remembered. He began systematically to account for his acts: but the man was so constituted that as he laid them out for pardon, he himself condemned them most; and looking back at his weakness and double play, he broke through his phrases to cry without premeditation: “Can you have loved me then?”

Emilia’s cheeks tingled: “Don’t speak of that night in Devon,” she replied.

“Ah!” sighed he. “I did not mean then. Then you must have hated me.”

“No; for, what did I say? I said that you would come to me—nothing more. I hated that woman. You? Oh, no!”

“You loved me, then?”

“Did I not offer to work for you, if you were poor? And—I can’t remember what I said. Please, do not speak of that night.”

“Emilia! as a man of honour, I was bound—”

Page 801

She lifted her hands: “Oh! be silent, and let that night die.”

“I may speak of that night when you drove home from Penarvon Castle, and a robber? You have forgotten him, perhaps! What did he steal? not what he came for, but something dearer to him than anything he possesses. How can I say—? Dear to me? If it were dipped in my heart’s blood!—”

Emilia was far from being carried away by the recollection of the scene; but remembering what her emotion had then been, she wondered at her coolness now.

“I may speak of Wilming Weir?” he insinuated.

Her bosom rose softly and heavily. As if throwing off some cloak of enchantment that clogged her spirit! “I was telling you of this dress,” she said: “I mean, of Countess Branciani. She thought her husband was the Austrian spy who had betrayed them, and she said, ’He is not worthy to live.’ Everybody knew that she had loved him. I have seen his portrait and hers. I never saw faces that looked so fond of life. She had that Italian beauty which is to any other like the difference between velvet and silk.”

“Oh! do I require to be told the difference?” Wilfrid’s heart throbbed.

“She,” pursued Emilia, “she loved him still, I believe, but her country was her religion. There was known to be a great conspiracy, and no one knew the leader of it. All true Italians trusted Countess Branciani, though she visited the Austrian Governor’s house —a General with some name on the teeth. One night she said to him, ’You have a spy who betrays you.’ The General never suspected Countess Branciani. Women are devils of cleverness sometimes.

“But he did suspect it must be her husband—thinking, I suppose, ’How otherwise would she have known he was my spy?’ He gave Count Branciani secret work and high pay. Then he set a watch on him. Count Branciani was to find out who was this unknown leader. He said to the Austrian Governor, ‘You shall know him in ten days.’ This was repeated to Countess Branciani, and she said to herself, ’My husband! you shall perish, though I should have to stab you myself.’”

Emilia’s sympathetic hand twitched. Wilfrid’s seized it, but it proved no soft melting prize. She begged to be allowed to continue. He entreated her to. Thereat she pulled gently for her hand, and persisting, it was grudgingly let go.

“One night Countess Branciani put the Austrians on her husband’s track. He knew that she was true to her country, and had no fear of her, whether she touched the Black-yellow gold or not. But he did not confide any, of his projects to her. And his reason was, that as she went to the Governor’s, she might accidentally, by a word or a sign,

show that she was an accomplice in the conspiracy. He wished to save her from a suspicion. Brave Branciani!”

Emilia had a little shudder of excitement.

Page 802

“Only,” she added, “why will men always think women are so weak? The Count worked with conspirators who were not dreaming they would do anything, but were plotting to do it. The Countess belonged to the other party—men who never thought they were strong enough to see their ideas acting—I mean, not bold enough to take their chance. As if we die more than one death, and the blood we spill for Italy is ever wasted! That night the Austrian spy followed the Count to the meeting-house of the conspirators. It was thought quite natural that the Count should go there. But the spy, not having the password, crouched outside, and heard from two that came out muttering, the next appointment for a meeting. This was told to Countess Branciani, and in the meantime she heard from the Austrian Governor that her husband had given in names of the conspirators. She determined at once. ’Now may Christ and the Virgin help me!’”

Emilia struck her knees, while tears started through her shut eyelids. The exclamation must have been caught from her father, who liked not the priests of his native land well enough to interfere between his English wife and their child in such a matter as religious training.

“What happened?” said Wilfrid, vainly seeking for personal application in this narrative.

“Listen!—Ah!” she fought with her tears, and said, as they rolled down her face: “For a miserable thing one can not help, I find I must cry. This is what she did. She told him she knew of the conspiracy, and asked permission to join it, swearing that she was true to Italy. He said he believed her.—Oh, heaven!—And for some time she had to beg and beg; but to spare her he would not let her join. I cannot tell why—he gave her the password for the neat meeting, and said that an old gold coin must be shown. She must have coaxed it, though he was a strong man, who could resist women. I suppose he felt that he had been unkind.—Were I Queen of Italy he should stand for ever in a statue of gold!—The next appointed night a spy entered among the conspirators, with the password and the coin. Did I tell you the Countess had one child—a girl! She lives now, and I am to know her. She is like her mother. That little girl was playing down the stairs with her nurse when a band of Austrian soldiers entered the hall underneath, and an officer, with his sword drawn, and some men, came marching up in their stiff way—-the machines! This officer stooped to her, and before the nurse could stop her, made her say where her father was. Those Austrians make children betray their parents! They don’t think how we grow up to detest them. Do I? Hate is not the word: it burns so hot and steady with me. The Countess came out on the first landing; she saw what was happening. When her husband was led out, she asked permission to embrace him. The officer consented, but she had to say to him, ‘Move back,’ and then, with her lips to her husband’s cheek, ‘Betray no more of

Page 803

them!' she whispered. Count Branciani started. Now he understood what she had done, and why she had done it. 'Ask for the charge that makes me a prisoner,' he said. Her husband's noble face gave her a chill of alarm. The Austrian spoke. 'He is accused of being the chief of the Sequin Club.' And then the Countess looked at her husband; she sank at his feet. My heart breaks. Wilfrid! Wilfrid! You will not wear that uniform? Say 'Never, never!' You will not go to the Austrian army—Wilfrid? Would you be my enemy? Brutes, knee-deep in blood! with bloody fingers! Ogres! Would you be one of them? To see me turn my head shivering with loathing as you pass? This is why I sent for you, because I loved you, to entreat you, Wilfrid, from my soul, not to blacken the dear happy days when I knew you! Will you hear me? That woman is changeing you —doing all this. Resist her! Think of me in this one thing! Promise it, and I will go at once, and want no more. I will swear never to trouble you. Oh, Wilfrid it's not so much our being enemies, but what you become, I think of. If I say to myself, 'He also, who was once my lover—Oh! paid murderer of my dear people!'"

Emilia threw up both hands to her eyes: but Wilfrid, all on fire with a word, made one of her hands his own, repeating eagerly: "Once? once?"

"Once?" she echoed him.

"'Once my love?'" said he. "Not now?—does it mean, 'not now?' My darling!—pardon me, I must say it. My beloved! you said: 'He who was once my lover:'—you said that. What does it mean? Not that—not—? does it mean, all's over? Why did you bring me here? You know I must love you forever. Speak! 'Once?'"

"'Once?'" Emilia was breathing quick, but her voice was well contained: "Yes, I said 'once.' You were then."

"Till that night in Devon?

"Let it be."

"But you love me still?"

"We won't speak of it."

"I see! You cannot forgive. Good heavens! I think I remember your saying so once—-Once! Yes, then: you said it then, during our 'Once;' when I little thought you would be merciless to me—who loved you from the first! the very first! I love you now! I wake up in the night, thinking I hear your voice. You haunt me. Cruel! cold!—who guards you and watches over you but the man you now hate? You sit there as if you could make yourself stone when you pleased. Did I not chastise that man Pericles publicly because he spoke a single lie of you? And by that act I have made an enemy to our house who

may crush us in ruin. Do I regret it? No. I would do any madness, waste all my blood for you, die for you!”

Emilia’s fingers received a final twist, and were dropped loose. She let them hang, looking sadly downward. Melancholy is the most irritating reply to passion, and Wilfrid’s heart waged fierce at the sight of her, grown beautiful!—grown elegant!—and to reject him! When, after a silence which his pride would not suffer him to break, she spoke to ask what Mr. Pericles had said of her, he was enraged, forgot himself, and answered: “Something disgraceful.”

Page 804

Deep colour came on Emilia. “You struck him, Wilfrid?”

“It was a small punishment for his infamous lie, and, whatever might be the consequences, I would do it again.”

“Wilfrid, I have heard what he has said. Madame Marini has told me. I wish you had not struck him. I cannot think of him apart from the days when I had my voice. I cannot bear to think of your having hurt him. He was not to blame. That is, he did not say: it was not untrue.”

She took a breath to make this last statement, and continued with the same peculiar implicity of distinctness, which a terrific thunder of “What?” from Wilfrid did not overbear: “I was quite mad that day I went to him. I think, in my despair I spoke things that may have led him to fancy the truth of what he has said. On my honour, I do not know. And I cannot remember what happened after for the week I wandered alone about London. Mr. Powys found me on a wharf by the river at night.”

A groan burst from Wilfrid. Emilia’s instinct had divined the antidote that this would be to the poison of revived love in him, and she felt secure, though he had again taken her hand; but it was she who nursed a mere sentiment now, while passion sprang in him, and she was not prepared for the delirium with which he enveloped her. She listened to his raving senselessly, beginning to think herself lost. Her tortured hands were kissed; her eyes gazed into. He interpreted her stupefaction as contrition, her silence as delicacy, her changeing of colour as flying hues of shame: the partial coldness at their meeting he attributed to the burden on her mind, and muttering in a magnanimous sublimity that he forgave her, he claimed her mouth with force.

“Don’t touch me!” cried Emilia, showing terror.

“Are you not mine?”

“You must not kiss me.”

Wilfrid loosened her waist, and became in a minute outwardly most cool and courteous.

“My successor may object. I am bound to consider him. Pardon me. Once!—”

The wretched insult and silly emphasis passed harmlessly from her: but a word had led her thoughts to Merthyr’s face, and what is meant by the phrase ‘keeping oneself pure,’ stood clearly in Emilia’s mind. She had not winced; and therefore Wilfrid judged that his shot had missed because there was no mark. With his eye upon her sideways, showing its circle wide as a parrot’s, he asked her one of those questions that lovers sometimes permit between themselves. “Has another—?” It is here as it was uttered. Eye-speech finished the sentence.

Rapidly a train of thought was started in Emilia, and she came to this conclusion, aloud: “Then I love nobody!” For the had never kissed Merthyr, or wished for his kiss.

“You do not?” said Wilfrid, after a silence. “You are generous in being candid.”

A pressure of intensest sorrow bowed his head. The real feeling in him stole to Emilia like a subtle flame.

Page 805

“Oh! what can I do for you?” she cried.

“Nothing, if you do not love me,” he was replying mournfully, when, “Yes! yes!” rushed to his lips; “marry me: marry me to-morrow. You have loved me. ‘I am never to leave you!’ Can you forget the night when you said it? Emilia! Marry me and you will love me again. You must. This man, whoever he is—Ah! why am I such a brute! Come! be mine! Let me call you my own darling! Emilia!—or say quietly ‘you have nothing to hope for:’ I shall not reproach you, believe me.”

He looked resigned. The abrupt transition had drawn her eyes to his. She faltered: “I cannot be married.” And then: “How could I guess that you felt in this way?”

“Who told me that I should?” said he. “Your words have come true. You predicted that I should fly from ‘that woman,’ as you called her, and come to you. See! here it is exactly as you willed it. You—you are changed. You throw your magic on me, and then you are satisfied, and turn elsewhere.”

Emilia’s conscience smote her with a verification of this charge, and she trembled, half-intoxicated for the moment, by the aspect of her power. This filled her likewise with a dangerous pity for its victim; and now, putting out both hands to him, her chin and shoulders raised entreatingly, she begged the victim to spare her any word of marriage.

“But you go, you run away from me—I don’t know where you are or what you are doing,” said Wilfrid. “And you leave me to that woman. She loves the Austrians, as you know. There! I will ask nothing—only this: I will promise, if I quit the Queen’s service for good, not to wear the white uniform—”

“Oh!” Emilia breathed inward deeply, scarce noticing the ‘if’ that followed; nodding quick assent to the stipulation before she heard the nature of it. It was, that she should continue in England.

“Your word,” said Wilfrid; and she pledged it, and did not think she was granting much in the prospect of what she gained.

“You will, then?” said he.

“Yes, I will.”

“On your honour?”

These reiterated questions were simply pretexts for steps nearer to the answering lips.

“And I may see you?” he went on.

“Yes.”

“Wherever you are staying? And sometimes alone? Alone!—”

“Not if you do not know that I am to be respected,” said Emilia, huddled in the passionate fold of his arms. He released her instantly, and was departing, wounded; but his heart counselled wiser proceedings.

“To know that you are in England, breathing the same air with me, near me! is enough. Since we are to meet on those terms, let it be so. Let me only see you till some lucky shot puts me out of your way.”

This ‘some lucky shot,’ which is commonly pointed at themselves by the sentimental lovers, with the object of hitting the very centre of the hearts of obdurate damsels, glanced off Emilia’s, which was beginning to throb with a comprehension of all that was involved in the word she had given.

Page 806

“I have your promise?” he repeated: and she bent her head.

“Not,” he resumed, taking jealousy to counsel, now that he had advanced a step: “Not that I would detain you against your will! I can’t expect to make such a figure at the end of the piece as your Count Branciani—who, by the way, served his friends oddly, however well he may have served his country.”

“His friends?” She frowned.

“Did he not betray the conspirators? He handed in names, now and then.”

“Oh!” she cried, “you understand us no better than an Austrian. He handed in names—-yes he was obliged to lull suspicion. Two or three of the least implicated volunteered to be betrayed by him; they went and confessed, and put the Government on a wrong track. Count Branciani made a dish of traitors—not true men—to satisfy the Austrian ogre. No one knew the head of the plot till that night of the spy. Do you not see?—he weeded the conspiracy!”

“Poor fellow!” Wilfrid answered, with a contracted mouth: “I pity him for being cut off from his handsome wife.”

“I pity her for having to live,” said Emilia.

And so their duett dropped to a finish. He liked her phrase better than his own, and being denied any privileges, and feeling stupefied by a position which both enticed and stung him, he remarked that he presumed he must not detain her any longer; whereupon she gave him her hand. He clutched the ready hand reproachfully.

“Good-bye,” said she.

“You are the first to say it,” he complained.

“Will you write to that Austrian colonel, your cousin, to say ’Never! never!’ to-morrow, Wilfrid?”

“While you are in England, I shall stay, be sure of that.”

She bade him give her love to all Brookfield.

“Once you had none to give but what I let you take back for the purpose!” he said. “Farewell! I shall see the harp to-night. It stands in the old place. I will not have it moved or touched till you—”

“Ah! how kind you were, Wilfrid!”

“And how lovely you are!”

There was no struggle to preserve the backs of her fingers from his lips, and, as this time his phrase was not palpably obscured by the one it countered, artistic sentiment permitted him to go.

CHAPTER LIII

A minute after his parting with Emilia, Wilfrid swung round in the street and walked back at great strides. “What a fool I was not to see that she was acting indifference!” he cried. “Let me have two seconds with her!” But how that was to be contrived his diplomatic brain refused to say. “And what a stiff, formal fellow I was all the time!” He considered that he had not uttered a sentence in any way pointed to touch her heart. “She must think I am still determined to marry that woman.”

Wilfrid had taken his stand on the opposite side of the street, and beheld a male figure in the dusk, that went up to the house and then stood back scanning the windows. Wounded by his audacious irreverence toward the walls behind which his beloved was sheltered, Wilfrid crossed and stared at the intruder. It proved to be Braintop.

Page 807

“How do you do, sir!—no! that can’t be the house,” stammered Braintop, with a very earnest scrutiny.

“What house? what do you want?” enquired Wilfrid.

“Jenkinson,” was the name that won the honour of rescuing Braintop from this dilemma.

“No; it is Lady Gosstre’s house: Miss Belloni is living there; and stop: you know her. Just wait, and take in two or three words from me, and notice particularly how she is looking, and the dress she wears. You can say—say that Mrs. Chump sent you to enquire after Miss Belloni’s health.”

Wilfrid tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and wrote:

“I can be free to-morrow. One word! I shall expect it, with your name in full.”

But even in the red heat of passion his born diplomacy withheld his own signature. It was not difficult to override Braintop’s scruples about presenting himself, and Wilfrid paced a sentinel measure awaiting the reply. “Free to-morrow,” he repeated, with a glance at his watch under a lamp: and thus he soliloquized: “What a time that fellow is! Yes, I can be free to-morrow if I will. I wonder what the deuce Gambier had to do in Monmouthshire. If he has been playing with my sister’s reputation, he shall have short shrift. That fellow Braintop sees her now—my little Emilia! my bird! She won’t have changed her dress till she has dined. If she changes it before she goes out—by Jove, if she wears it to-night before all those people, that’ll mean ‘Good-bye’ to me: ‘Addio, caro,’ as those olive women say, with their damned cold languor, when they have given you up. She’s not one of them! Good God! she came into the room looking like a little Empress. I’ll swear her hand trembled when I went, though! My sisters shall see her in that dress. She must have a clever lady’s maid to have done that knot to her back hair. She’s getting as full of art as any of them—Oh! lovely little darling! And when she smiles and holds out her hand! What is it—what is it about her? Her upper lip isn’t perfectly cut, there’s some fault with her nose, but I never saw such a mouth, or such a face. ‘Free to-morrow?’ Good God! she’ll think I mean I’m free to take a walk!”

At this view of the ghastly shortcoming of his letter as regards distinctness, and the prosaic misinterpretation it was open to, Wilfrid called his inventive wits to aid, and ran swiftly to the end of the street. He had become—as like unto a lunatic as resemblance can approach identity. Commanding the length of the pavement for an instant, to be sure that no Braintop was in sight, he ran down a lateral street, but the stationer’s shop he was in search of beamed nowhere visible for him, and he returned at the same pace to experience despair at the thought that he might have missed Braintop issuing forth, for whom he scoured the immediate neighbourhood, and overhauled not a few quiet gentlemen of all ages. “An envelope!” That was the object of his

Page 808

desire, and for that he wooed a damsel passing jauntily with a jug in her hand, first telling her that he knew her name was Mary, at which singular piece of divination she betrayed much natural astonishment. But a fine round silver coin and an urgent request for an envelope, told her as plainly as a blank confession that this was a lover. She informed him that she lived three streets off, where there were shops. "Well, then," said Wilfrid, "bring me the envelope here, and you'll have another opportunity of looking down the area."

"Think of yourself," replied she, saucily; but proved a diligent messenger. Then Wilfrid wrote on a fresh slip:

"When I said 'Free,' I meant free in heart and without a single chain to keep me from you. From any moment that you please, I am free. This is written in the dark."

He closed the envelope, and wrote Emilia's name and the address as black as his pencil could achieve it, and with a smart double-knock he deposited the missive in the box. From his station opposite he guessed the instant when it was taken out, and from that judged when she would be reading it. Or perhaps she would not read it till she was alone? "That must be her bedroom," he said, looking for a light in one of the upper windows; but the voice of a fellow who went by with: "I should keep that to myself, if I was you," warned him to be more discreet.

"Well, here I am. I can't leave the street," quoth Wilfrid, to the stock of philosophy at his disposal. He burned with rage to think of how he might be exhibiting himself before Powys and his sister.

It was half-past nine when a carriage drove up to the door. Into this Mr. Powys presently handed Georgiana and Emilia. Braintop followed the ladies, and then the coachman received his instructions and drove away. Forthwith Wilfrid started in pursuit. He calculated that if his wind held till he could jump into a light cab, his legitimate prey Braintop might be caught. For, "they can't be taking him to any party with them!" he chose to think, and it was a fair calculation that they were simply conducting Braintop part of his way home. The run was pretty swift. Wilfrid's blood was fired by the pace, until, forgetting the traitor Braintop, up rose Truth from the bottom of the well in him, and he felt that his sole desire was to see Emilia once more—but once! that night. Running hard, in the midst of obstacles, and with eye and mind fined on one object, disasters befell him. He knocked apples off a stall, and heard vehement hallooing behind: he came into collision with a gentleman of middle age courting digestion as he walked from his trusty dinner at home to his rubber at the Club: finally he rushed full tilt against a pot-boy who was bringing all his pots broadside to the flow of the street. "By Jove! is this what they drink?" he gasped, and dabbed with his handkerchief at the beer-splashes, breathlessly hailing the looked-for cab, and, with hot brow and

Page 809

straightened-out forefinger, telling the driver to keep that carriage in sight. The pot-boy had to be satisfied on his master's account, and then on his own, and away shot Wilfrid, wet with beer from throat to knee—to his chief protesting sense, nothing but an exhalation of beer! "Is this what they drink?" he groaned, thinking lamentably of the tastes of the populace. All idea of going near Emilia was now abandoned. An outward application of beer quenched his frenzy. She seemed as an unattainable star seen from the depths of foul pits. "Stop!" he cried from the window.

"Here we are, sir," said the cabman.

The carriage had drawn up, and a footman's alarum awakened one of the houses. The wretched cabman had likewise drawn up right under the windows of the carriage. Wilfrid could have pulled the trigger of a pistol at his forehead that moment. He saw that Miss Ford had recognized him, and he at once bowed elegantly. She dropped the window, and said, "You are in evening dress, I think; we will take you in with us."

Wilfrid hoped eagerly he might be allowed to hand them to the door, and made three skips across the mire. Emilia had her hands gathered away from the chances of seizure. In wild rage he began protesting that he could not possibly enter, when Georgiana said, "I wish to speak to you," and put feminine pressure upon him. He was almost on the verge of the word "beer," by way of despairing explanation, when the door closed behind him.

"Permit me to say a word to your recent companion. He is my father's clerk. I had to see him on urgent business; that is why I took this liberty," he said, and retreated.

Braintop was still there, quietly posted, performing upon his head with a pocket hair-brush.

Wilfrid put Braintop's back to the light, and said, "Is my shirt soiled?"

After a short inspection, Braintop pronounced that it was, "just a little."

"Do you smell anything?" said Wilfrid, and hung with frightful suspense on the verdict. "A fellow upset beer on me."

"It is beer!" sniffed Braintop.

"What on earth shall I do?" was the rejoinder; and Wilfrid tried to remember whether he had felt any sacred joy in touching Emilia's dress as they went up the steps to the door.

Braintop fumbled in the breast-pocket of his coat. "I happen to have," he said, rather shamefacedly.

"What is it?"

“Mrs. Chump gave it to me to-day. She always makes me accept something: I can’t refuse. It’s this:—the remains of some scent she insisted on my taking, in a bottle.”

Wilfrid plucked at the stopper with a reckless desperation, saturated his handkerchief, and worked at his breast as if he were driving a lusty dagger into it.

“What scent is it?” he asked hurriedly.

“Alderman’s Bouquet, sir.”

Page 810

“Of all the detestable!——” Wilfrid had no time for more, owing to fresh arrivals. He hastened in, with his smiling, wary face, half trusting that there might after all be purification in Alderman’s Bouquet, and promising heaven due gratitude if Emilia’s senses discerned not the curse on him. In the hall a gust from the great opening contention between Alderman’s Bouquet and bad beer, stifled his sickly hope. Frantic, but under perfect self-command outwardly, he glanced to right and left, for the suggestion of a means of escape. They were seven steps up the stairs before his wits prompted him to say to Georgiana, “I have just heard very serious news from home. I fear—”

“What?—or, pardon me: does it call you away?” she asked, and Emilia gave him a steady look.

“I fear I cannot remain here. Will you excuse me?”

His face spoke plainly now of mental torture repressed. Georgiana put her hand out in full sympathy, and Emilia said, in her deep whisper, “Let me hear to-morrow.” Then they bowed. Wilfrid was in the street again.

“Thank God, I’ve seen her!” was his first thought, overhearing “What did she think of me?” as he sighed with relief at his escape. For, lo! the Branciani dress was not on her shoulders, and therefore he might imagine what he pleased:—that she had arrayed herself so during the day to delight his eyes; or that, he having seen her in it, she had determined none others should. Though feeling utterly humiliated, he was yet happy. Driving to the station, he perceived starlight overhead, and blessed it; while his hand waved busily to conduct a current of fresh, oblivious air to his nostrils. The quiet heavens seemed all crowding to look down on the quiet circle of the firs, where Emilia’s harp had first been heard by him, and they took her music, charming his blood with imagined harmonies, as he looked up to them. Thus all the way to Brookfield his fancy soared, plucked at from below by Alderman’s Bouquet.

The Philosopher, up to this point rigidly excluded, rushes forward to the footlights to explain in a note, that Wilfrid, thus setting a perfume to contend with a stench, instead of wasting for time, change of raiment, and the broad lusty airs of heaven to blow him fresh again, symbolizes the vice of Sentimentalism, and what it is always doing. Enough!

CHAPTER LIV

“Let me hear to-morrow.” Wilfrid repeated Emilia’s petition in the tone she had used, and sent a delight through his veins even with that clumsy effort of imitation. He walked from the railway to Brookfield through the circle of firs, thinking of some serious tale of home to invent for her ears to-morrow. Whatever it was, he was able to conclude it—-

“But all’s right now.” He noticed that the dwarf pine, under whose spreading head his darling sat when he saw her first, had been cut down. Its absence gave him an ominous chill.

Page 811

The first sight that saluted him as the door opened, was a pile of Mrs. Chump's boxes: he listened, and her voice resounded from the library. Gainsford's eye expressed a discretion significant that there had been an explosion in the house.

"I sha'nt have to invent much," said Wilfrid to himself, bitterly.

There was a momentary appearance of Adela at the library-door; and over her shoulder came an outcry from Mrs. Chump. Arabella then spoke: Mr. Pole and Cornelia following with a word, to which Mrs. Chump responded shrilly: "Ye shan't talk to 'm, none of ye, till I've had the bloom of his ear, now!" A confused hubbub of English and Irish ensued. The ladies drew their brother into the library.

Doubtless you have seen a favourite sketch of the imaginative youthful artist, who delights to portray scenes on a raft amid the tossing waters, where sweet and satiny ladies, in a pardonable abandonment to the exigencies of the occasion, are exhibiting the full energy and activity of creatures that existed before sentiment was born. The ladies of Brookfield had almost as utterly cast off their garb of lofty reserve and inscrutable superiority. They were begging Mrs. Chump to be, for pity's sake, silent. They were arguing with the woman. They were remonstrating—to such an extent as this, in reply to an infamous outburst: "No, no: indeed, Mrs. Chump, indeed!" They rose, as she rose, and stood about her, motioning a beseeching emphasis with their hands. Not visible for one second was the intense indignation at their fate which Wilfrid, spying keenly into them, perceived. This taught him that the occasion was as grave as could be. In spite of the oily words his father threw from time to time abruptly on the tumult, he guessed what had happened.

Briefly, Mrs. Chump, aided by Braintop, her squire, had at last hunted Mr. Pericles down, and the wrathful Greek had called her a beggar. With devilish malice he had reproached her for speculating in such and such Bonds, and sending ventures to this and that hemisphere, laughing infernally as he watched her growing amazement. "Ye're jokin', Mr. Paricles," she tried to say and think; but the very naming of poverty had given her shivers. She told him how she had come to him because of Mr. Pole's reproach, which accused her of causing the rupture. Mr. Pericles twisted the waxy points of his moustache. "I shall advise you, go home," he said; "go to a lawyer: say, 'I will see my affairs, how zey stand.' Ze man will find Pole is ruined. It may be—I do not know—Pole has left a little of your money; yes, ma'am, it may be."

Page 812

The end of the interview saw Mrs. Chump flying past Mr. Pericles to where Braintop stood awaiting her with a meditative speculation on that official promotion which in his attention to the lady he anticipated. It need scarcely be remarked that he was astonished to receive a scent-bottle on the spot, as the only reward his meritorious service was probably destined ever to meet with. Breathless in her panic, Mrs. Chump assured him she was a howling beggar, and the smell of a scent was like a crool blow to her; above all, the smell of Alderman's Bouquet, which Chump—"tell'n a lie, ye know, Mr. Braintop, said was after him. And I, smell'n at 't over 'n Ireland—a raw garl I was—I just thought 'm a prince, the little sly fella! And oh! I'm a beggar, I am!" With which, she shouted in the street, and put Braintop to such confusion that he hailed a cab recklessly, declaring to her she had no time to lose, if she wished to catch the train. Mrs. Chump requested the cabman that as a man possessed of a feeling heart for the interests of a helpless woman, he would drive fast; and, at the station, disputed his charge on the ground of the knowledge already imparted to him of her precarious financial state. In this frame of mind she fell upon Brookfield, and there was clamour in the house. Wilfrid arrived two hours after Mrs. Chump. For that space the ladies had been saying over and over again empty words to pacify her. The task now devolved on their brother. Mr. Pole, though he had betrayed nothing under the excitement of the sudden shock, had lost the proper control of his mask. Wilfrid commenced by fixedly listening to Mrs. Chump until for the third time her breath had gone. Then, taking on a smile, he said: "Perhaps you are aware that Mr. Pericles has a particular reason for animosity tome. We've disagreed together, that's all. I suppose it's the habit of those fellows to attack a whole family where one member of it offends them." As soon as the meaning of this was made clear to Mrs. Chump, she caught it to her bosom for comfort; and finding it gave less than at the moment she required, she flung it away altogether; and then moaned, a suppliant, for it once more. "The only thing, if you are in a state of alarm about my father's affairs, is for him to show you by his books that his house is firm," said Wilfrid, now that he had so far helped to eject suspicion from her mind.

"Will Pole do ut?" ejaculated Mrs. Chump, half off her seat.

"Of course I will—of course! of course. Haven't I told you so?" said Mr. Pole, blinking mightily from his armchair over the fire. "Sit down, Martha."

"Oh! but how'll I understand ye, Pole?" she cried.

"I'll do my best to assist in explaining," Wilfrid condescended to say.

The ladies were touched when Mrs. Chump replied, with something of a curtsey, "I'll thank ye vary much, sir." She added immediately, "Mr. Wilfrud," as if correcting the 'sir,' for sounding cold.

Page 813

It was so trustful and simple, that it threw alight on the woman under which they had not yet beheld her. Compassion began to stir in their bosoms, and with it an inexplicable sense of shame, which soon threw any power of compassion into the background. They dared not ask themselves whether it was true that their father had risked the poor thing's money in some desperate stake. What hopeful force was left to them they devoted to her property, and Adela determined to pray that night for its safe preservation. The secret feeling in the hearts of the ladies was, that in putting them on their trial with poverty, Celestial Powers would never at the same time think it necessary to add disgrace. Consequently, and as a defence against the darker dread, they now, for the first time, fully believed that monetary ruin had befallen their father. They were civil to Mrs. Chump, and forgiving toward her brogue, and her naked outcries of complaint and suddenly—suggested panic; but their pity, save when some odd turn in her conduct moved them, was reserved dutifully for their father. His wretched sensations at the pouring of a storm of tears from the exhausted creature, caused Arabella to rise and say to Mrs. Chump kindly, "Now let me take you to bed."

But such a novel mark of tender civility caused the woman to exclaim: "Oh, dear! if ye don't sound like wheedlin' to keep me blind."

Even this was borne with. "Come; it will do you good to rest," said Arabella.

"And how'll I sleep?"

"By shutting my eye—'peeps,'—as I used to tell my old nurse," said Adela; and Mrs. Chump, accustomed to an occasional (though not public) bit of wheedling from her, was partially reassured.

"I'll sit with you till you do sleep," said Arabella.

"Suppose," Mrs. Chump moaned, "suppose I'm too poor aver to repay ye? If I'm a bankrup'?—oh!"

Arabella smiled. "Whatever I may do is certainly not done for a remuneration, and such a service as this, at least, you need not speak of."

Mrs. Chump's evident surprise, and doubt of the honesty of the change in her manner, caused Arabella very acutely to feel its dishonesty. She looked at Cornelia with envy. The latter lady was leaning meditatively, her arm on a side of her chair, like a pensive queen, with a ready, mild, embracing look for the company. 'Posture' seemed always to triumph over action.

Before quitting the room, Mrs. Chump asked Mr. Pole whether he would be up early the next morning.

“Very early,—you beat me, if you can,” said he, aware that the question was put as a test to his sincerity.

“Oh, dear! Suppose it’s onnly a false alarrm of the ’bomunable Mr. Paricles—which annybody’d have listened to—ye know that!” said Mrs. Chump, going forth.

She stopped in the doorway, and turned her head round, sniffing, in a very pronounced way. “Oh, it’s you,” she flashed on Wilfrid; “it’s you, my dear, that smell so like poor Chump. Oh! if we’re not rooned, won’t we dine together! Just give me a kiss, please. The smell of ye’s comfortin’.”

Page 814

Wilfrid bent his cheek forward, affecting to laugh, though the subject was tragic to him.

“Oh! perhaps I’ll sleep, and not look in the mornin’ like that beastly tallow, Mr. Paricles says I spent such a lot of money on, speculator—whew, I hate ut!—and hemp too! Me!—Martha Chump! Do I want to hang myself, and burn forty thousand pounds worth o’ candles round my corpse danglin’ there? Now, there, now! Is that sense? And what’d Pole want to buy me all that grease for? And where’d I keep ut, I’ll ask ye? And sure they wouldn’t make me a bankrup’ on such a pretence as that. For, where’s the Judge that’s got the heart?”

Having apparently satisfied her reason with these interrogations, Mrs. Chump departed, shaking her head at Wilfrid: “Ye smile so nice, ye do!” by the way. Cornelia and Adela then rose, and Wilfrid was left alone with his father.

It was natural that he should expect the moment for entire confidence between them to have come. He crossed his legs, leaning over the fireplace, and waited. The old man perceived him, and made certain humming sounds, as of preparation. Wilfrid was half tempted to think he wanted assistance, and signified attention; upon which Mr. Pole became immediately absorbed in profound thought.

“Singular it is, you know,” he said at last, with a candid air, “people who know nothing about business have the oddest ideas—no common sense in ’em!”

After that he fell dead silent.

Wilfrid knew that it would be hard for him to speak. To encourage him, he said: “You mean Mrs. Chump, sir?”

“Oh! silly woman—absurd! No, I mean all of you; every man Jack, as Martha’d say. You seem to think—but, well! there! let’s go to bed.”

“To bed?” cried Wilfrid, frowning.

“Why, when it’s two or three o’clock in the morning, what’s an old fellow to do? My feet are cold, and I’m queer in the back—can’t talk! Light my candle, young gentleman—my candle there, don’t you see it? And you look none of the freshest. A nap on your pillow’ll do you no harm.”

“I wanted to talk to you a little, sir,” said Wilfrid, about as much perplexed as he was irritated.

“Now, no talk of bankers’ books to-night!” rejoined his father. “I can’t and won’t. No cheques written ’tween night and morning. That’s positive. There! there’s two fingers. Shall have three to-morrow morning—a pen in ’em, perhaps.”

With which wretched pleasantry the little merchant nodded to his son, and snatching up his candle, trotted to the door.

“By the way, give a look round my room upstairs, to see all right when you’re going to turn in yourself,” he said, before disappearing.

The two fingers given him by his father to shake at parting, had told Wilfrid more than the words. And yet how small were these troubles around him compared with what he himself was suffering! He looked forward to the bittersweet hour verging upon dawn, when he should be writing to Emilia things to melt the vilest obduracy. The excitement which had greeted him on his arrival at Brookfield was to be thanked for its having made him partially forget his humiliation. He had, of course, sufficient rational feeling to be chagrined by calamity, but his dominant passion sucked sustaining juices from every passing event.

Page 815

In obedience to his father's request, Wilfrid went presently into the old man's bedroom, to see that all was right. The curtains of the bed were drawn close, and the fire in the grate burnt steadily. Calm sleep seemed to fill the chamber. Wilfrid was retiring, with a revived anger at his father's want of natural confidence in him, or cowardly secresy. His name was called, and he stopped short.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

"Door's shut?"

"Shut fast."

The voice, buried in curtains, came after a struggle.

"You've done this, Wilfrid. Now, don't answer:—I can't stand talk. And you must undo it. Pericles can if he likes. That's enough for you to know. He can. He won't see me. You know why. If he breaks with me—it's a common case in any business—I'm... we're involved together." Then followed a deep sigh. The usual crisp brisk way of his speaking was resumed in hollow tones: "You must stop it. Now, don't answer. Go to Pericles to-morrow. You must. Nothing wrong, if you go at once."

"But, Sir! Good heaven!" interposed Wilfrid, horrified by the thought of the penance here indicated.

The bed shook violently.

"If not," was uttered with a sort of muted vehemence, "there's another thing you can do. Go to the undertaker's, and order coffins for us all. There—good night!"

The bed shook again. Wilfrid stood eyeing the mysterious hangings, as if some dark oracle had spoken from behind them. In fear of irritating the old man, and almost as much in fear of bringing on himself a revelation of the frightful crisis that could only be averted by his apologizing personally to the man he had struck, Wilfrid stole from the room.

CHAPTER LV

There is a man among our actors here who may not be known to you. It had become the habit of Sir Purcell Barren's mind to behold himself as under a peculiarly malign shadow. Very young men do the same, if they are much afflicted: but this is because they are still boys enough to have the natural sense to be ashamed of ill-luck, even when they lack courage to struggle against it. The reproaching of Providence by a man of full growth, comes to some extent from his meanness, and chiefly from his pride. He remembers that the old Gods selected great heroes whom to persecute, and it is his

compensation for material losses to conceive himself a distinguished mark for the Powers of air. One who wraps himself in this delusion may have great qualities; he cannot be of a very contemptible nature; and in this place we will discriminate more closely than to call him fool. Had Sir Purcell sunk or bent under the thong that pursued him, he might, after a little healthy moaning, have gone along as others do. Who knows?—though a much persecuted man, he might have become so degraded as to have looked forward with cheerfulness to his daily dinner; still

Page 816

despising, if he pleased, the soul that would invent a sauce. I mean to say, he would, like the larger body of our sentimentalists, have acquiesced in our simple humanity, but without sacrificing a scruple to its grossness, or going arm-in-arm with it by any means. Sir Purcell, however, never sank, and never bent. He was invariably erect before men, and he did not console himself with a murmur in secret. He had lived much alone; eating alone; thinking alone. To complain of a father is, to a delicate mind, a delicate matter, and Sir Purcell was a gentleman to all about him. His chief affliction in his youth, therefore, kept him dumb. A gentleman to all about him, he unhappily forgot what was due to his own nature. Must we not speak under pressure of a grief? Little people should know that they must: but then the primary task is to teach them that they are little people. For, if they repress the outcry of a constant irritation, and the complaint against injustice, they lock up a feeding devil in their hearts, and they must have vast strength to crush him there. Strength they must have to kill him, and freshness of spirit to live without him, after he has once entertained them with his most comforting discourses. Have you listened to him, ever? He does this:—he plays to you your music (it is he who first teaches thousands that they have any music at all, so guess what a dear devil he is!); and when he has played this ravishing melody, he falls to upon a burlesque contrast of hurdy-gurdy and bag-pipe squeal and bellow and drone, which is meant for the music of the world. How far sweeter was yours! This charming devil Sir Purcell had nursed from childhood.

As a child, between a flighty mother and a father verging to insanity from caprice, he had grown up with ideas of filial duty perplexed, and with a fitful love for either, that was not attachment: a baffled natural love, that in teaching us to brood on the hardness of our lot, lays the foundation for a perniciously mystical self-love. He had waged precociously philosophic, when still a junior. His father had kept him by his side, giving him no profession beyond that of the obedient expectant son and heir. His first allusion to the youth’s dependency had provoked their first breach, which had been widened by many an ostentatious forgiveness on the one hand, and a dumbly-protesting submission on the other. His mother died away from her husband’s roof. The old man then sought to obliterate her utterly. She left her boy a little money, and the injunction of his father was, that he was never to touch it. He inherited his taste for music from her, and his father vowed, that if ever he laid hand upon a musical instrument again, he would be disinherited. All these signs of a vehement spiteful antagonism to reason, the young man might have treated more as his father’s misfortune than his own, if he could only have brought himself to acknowledge that such a thing as madness

Page 817

stigmatized his family. But the sentimental mind conceived it as ‘monstrous impiety’ to bring this accusation against a parent who did not break windows, or grin to deformity. He behaved toward him as to a reasonable person, and felt the rebellious rancour instead of the pity. Thus sentiment came in the way of pity. By degrees, Sir Purcell transferred all his father’s madness to the Fates by whom he was persecuted. There was evidently madness somewhere, as his shuddering human nature told him. It did not offend his sentiment to charge this upon the order of the universe.

Against such a wild-hitting madness, or concentrated ire of the superior Powers, Sir Purcell stood up, taking blow upon blow. As organist of Hillford Church, he brushed his garments, and put a polish on his apparel, with an energetic humility that looked like unconquerable patience; as though he had said: “While life is left in me, I will be seen for what I am.” We will vary it—“For what I think myself.” In reality, he fought no battle. He had been dead-beaten from his boyhood. Like the old Spanish Governor, the walls of whose fortress had been thrown down by an earthquake, and who painted streets to deceive the enemy, he was rendered safe enough by his astuteness, except against a traitor from within.

One who goes on doggedly enduring, doggedly doing his best, must subsist on comfort of a kind that is likely to be black comfort. The mere piping of the musical devil shall not suffice. In Sir Purcell’s case, it had long seemed a magnanimity to him that he should hold to a life so vindictively scourged, and his comfort was that he had it at his own disposal. To know so much, to suffer, and still to refrain, flattered his pride. “The term of my misery is in my hand,” he said, softened by the reflection. It is our lowest philosophy.

But, when the heart of a man so fashioned is stirred to love a woman, it has a new vital force, new health, and cannot play these solemn pranks. The flesh, and all its fatality, claims him. When Sir Purcell became acquainted with Cornelia, he found the very woman his heart desired, or certainly a most admirable picture of her. It was, perhaps, still more to the lady’s credit, if she was only striving to be what he was learning to worship. The beneficial change wrought in him, made him enamoured of healthy thinking and doing. Had this, as a result of sharp mental overhauling, sprung from himself, there would have been hope for him. Unhappily, it was dependent on her who inspired it. He resolved that life should be put on a fresh trial in her person; and expecting that naturally to fail, of which he had always entertained a base conception, he was perforce brought to endow her with unexampled virtues, in order to keep any degree of confidence tolerably steadfast in his mind. The lady accepted the decorations thus bestowed on her, with much grace and willingness. She consented, little aware of her heroism, to shine forth as an

Page 818

‘ideal;’ and to this he wantonly pinned his faith. Alas! in our world, where all things must move, it becomes, by-and-by, manifest that an ‘ideal,’ or idol, which you will, has not been gifted with two legs. What is, then, the duty of the worshipper? To make, as I should say, some compromise between his superstitious reverence and his recognition of facts. Cornelia, on her pedestal, could not prefer such a request plainly; but it would have afforded her exceeding gratification, if the man who adored her had quietly taken her up and fixed her in a fresh post, of his own choosing entirely, in the new circles of changeing events. Far from doing that, he appeared to be unaware that they went, with the varying days, through circles, forming and reforming. He walked rather as a man down a lengthened corridor, whose light to which he turns is in one favourite corner, visible till he reaches the end. What Cornelia was, in the first flaming of his imagination around her, she was always, unaffected by circumstance, to remain. It was very hard. The ‘ideal’ did feel the want—if not of legs—of a certain tolerant allowance for human laws on the part of her worshipper; but he was remorselessly reverential, both by instinct and of necessity. Women are never quite so mad in sentimentalism as men.

We have now looked into the hazy interior of their systems—our last halt, I believe, and last examination of machinery, before Emilia quits England.

About the time of the pairing of the birds, and subsequent to the Brookfield explosion, Cornelia received a letter from her lover, bearing the tone of a summons. She was to meet him by the decayed sallow—the ‘fruitless tree,’ as he termed it. Startled by this abruptness, her difficulties made her take counsel of her dignity. “He knows that these clandestine meetings degrade me. He is wanting in faith, to require constant assurances. He will not understand my position!” She remembered the day at Besworth, of which Adela (somewhat needlessly, perhaps) had told her; that it had revealed two of the family, in situations censurable before a gossiping world, however intrinsically blameless. That day had been to the ladies a lesson of deference to opinion. It was true that Cornelia had met her lover since, but she was then unembarrassed. She had now to share in the duties of the household—duties abnormal, hideous, incredible. Her incomprehensible father was absent in town. Daily Wilfrid conducted Adela thither on mysterious business, and then Mrs. Chump was left to Arabella and herself in the lonely house. Numberless things had to be said for the quieting of this creature, who every morning came downstairs with the exclamation that she could no longer endure her state of uncertainty, and was “off to a lawyer.” It was useless to attempt the posture of a reply. Words, and energetic words, the woman demanded, not expostulations—petitions that she would be respectful to the house before the household. Yes, occasionally (so gross was she!) she had to be fed with lies. Arabella and Cornelia heard one another mouthing these dreadful things, with a wretched feeling of contemptuous compassion. The trial was renewed daily, and it was a task, almost a physical task, to hold the woman back from London, till the hour of lunch came. If they kept her away from her bonnet till then they were safe.

Page 819

At this meal they had to drink champagne with her. Diplomatic Wilfrid had issued the order, with the object, first, of dazzling her vision; and secondly, to set the wheels of her brain in swift motion. The effect was marvellous; and, had it not been for her determination never to drink alone, the miserable ladies might have applauded it. Adela, on the rare days when she was fortunate enough to reach Brookfield in time for dinner, was surprised to hear her sisters exclaim, “Oh, the hatefulness of that champagne!” She enjoyed it extremely. She, poor thing, had again to go through a round of cabs and confectioners’ shops in London. “If they had said, ‘Oh, the hatefulness of those buns and cold chickens!’” she thought to herself. Not objecting to champagne at lunch with any particular vehemence, she was the less unwilling to tell her sisters what she had to do for Wilfrid daily.

“Three times a week I go to see Emilia at Lady Gosstre’s town-house. Mr. Powys has gone to Italy, and Miss Ford remains, looking, if I can read her, such a temper. On the other days I am taken by Wilfrid to the arcades, or we hire a brougham to drive round the park,—for nothing but the chance of seeing that girl an instant. Don’t tell me it’s to meet Lady Charlotte! That lovely and obliging person it is certainly not my duty to undeceive. She’s now at Stornley, and speaks of our affairs to everybody, I dare say. Twice a week Wilfrid—oh! quite casually!—calls on Miss Ford, and is gratified, I suppose; for this is the picture:—There sits Emilia, one finger in her cheek, and the thumb under her chin, and she keeps looking down so. Opposite is Miss Ford, doing some work—making lint for patriots, probably. Then Wilfrid, addressing commonplaces to her; and then Emilia’s father—a personage, I assure you! up against the window, with a violin. I feel a bitter edge on my teeth still! What do you think he does to please his daughter for one while hour! He draws his fingers—does nothing else; she won’t let him; she won’t hear a tune-up the strings in the most horrible caterwaul, up and down. It is really like a thousand lunatics questioning and answering, and is enough to make you mad; but there that girl sits, listening. Exactly in this attitude—so. She scarcely ever looks up. My brother talks, and occasionally steals a glance that way. We passed one whole hour as I have described. In the middle of it, I happened to look at Wilfrid’s face, while the violin was wailing down. I fancied I heard the despair of one of those huge masks in a pantomime. I was almost choked.”

When Adela had related thus much, she had to prevent downright revolt, and spoil her own game, by stating that Wilfrid did not leave the house for his special pleasure, and a word, as to the efforts he was making to see Mr. Pericles, convinced the ladies that his situation was as pitiable as their own.

Page 820

Cornelia refused to obey her lover's mandate, and wrote briefly. She would not condescend to allude to the unutterable wretchedness afflicting her, but spoke of her duty to her father being foremost in her prayers for strength. Sir Purcell interpreted this as indicating the beginning of their alienation. He chided her gravely in an otherwise pleasant letter. She was wrong to base her whole reply upon the little sentence of reproach, but self-justification was necessary to her spirit. Indeed, an involuntary comparison of her two suitors was forced on her, and, dry as was Sir Twickenham's mind, she could not but acknowledge that he had behaved with an extraordinary courtesy, amounting to chivalry, in his suit. On two occasions he had declined to let her be pressed to decide. He came to the house, and went, like an ordinary visitor. She was indebted to him for that splendid luxury of indecision, which so few of the maids of earth enjoy for a lengthened term. The rude shakings given her by Sir Purcell, at a time when she needed all her power of dreaming, to support the horror of accumulated facts, was almost resented. "He as much as says he doubts me, when this is what I endure!" she cried to herself, as Mrs. Chump ordered her champagne-glass to be filled, with "Now, Cornelia, my dear; if it's bad luck we're in for, there's nothin' cheats ut like champagne," and she had to put the (to her) nauseous bubbles to her lips. Sir Purcell had not been told of her tribulations, and he had not expressed any doubt of her truth; but sentimentalists can read one another with peculiar accuracy through their bewitching gauzes. She read his unwritten doubt, and therefore expected her unwritten misery to be read.

So it is when you play at Life! When you will not go straight, you get into this twisting maze. Now he wrote coldly, and she had to repress a feeling of resentment at that also. She ascribed the changes of his tone fundamentally to want of faith in her, and absolutely, during the struggle she underwent, she by this means somehow strengthened her idea of her own faithfulness. She would have phrased her projected line of conduct thus: "I owe every appearance of assent to my poor father's scheme, that will spare his health. I owe him everything, save the positive sacrifice of my hand." In fact, she meant to do her duty to her father up to the last moment, and then, on the extreme verge, to remember her duty to her lover. But she could not write it down, and tell her lover as much. She knew instinctively that, facing the eyes, it would not look well. Perhaps, at another season, she would have acted and thought with less folly; but the dull pain of her great uncertainty, and the little stinging whips daily applied to her, exaggerated her tendency to self-deception. "Who has ever had to bear so much?—-what slave?" she would exclaim, as a refuge from the edge of his veiled irony. For a slave has, if not selection of what he will eat and drink, the option of rejecting

Page 821

what is distasteful. Cornelia had not. She had to act a part every day with Mrs. Chump, while all those she loved, and respected, and clung to, were in the same conspiracy. The consolation of hating, or of despising, her tormentress was denied. The thought that the poor helpless creature had been possibly ruined by them, chastened Cornelia's reflections mightily, and taught her to walk very humbly through the duties of the day. Her powers of endurance were stretched to their utmost. A sublime affliction would, as she felt bitterly, have enlarged her soul. This sordid misery narrowed it. Why did not her lover, if his love was passionate, himself cut the knot claim her, and put her to a quick decision? She conceived that were he to bring on a supreme crisis, her heart would declare itself. But he appeared to be wanting in that form of courage. Does it become a beggar to act such valiant parts? perhaps he was even then replying from his stuffy lodgings.

The Spring was putting out primroses,—the first handwriting of the year,—as Sir Purcell wrote to er prettily. Deire for fresh air, and the neighbourhood of his beloved, sent him on a journey down to Hillford. Near the gates of the Hillford station, he passed Wilfrid and Adela, hurrying to catch the up-train, and received no recognition. His face scarcely changed colour, but the birds on a sudden seemed to pipe far away from him. He asked himself, presently, what were those black circular spots which flew chasing along the meadows and the lighted walks. It was with an effort that he got the landscape close about his eyes, and remembered familiar places. He walked all day, making occupation by directing his steps to divers eminences that gave a view of the Brookfield chimneys. After night-fall he found himself in the firwood, approaching the 'fruitless tree.' He had leaned against it musingly, for a time, when he heard voices, as of a couple confident in their privacy.

The footman, Gainsford, was courting a maid of the Tinley's, and here, being midway between the two houses, they met. He had to obtain pardon for tardiness, by saying that dinner at Brookfield had been delayed for the return of Mr. Pole. The damsel's questions showed her far advanced in knowledge of affairs at Brookfield and may account for Laura Tinley's gatherings of latest intelligence concerning those 'odd girls,' as she impudently called the three.

"Oh! don't you listen!" was the comment pronounced on Gainsford's stock of information. But, he told nothing signally new. She wished to hear something new and striking, "because," she said, "when I unpin Miss Laura at night, I'm as likely as not to get a silk dress that ain't been worn more than half-a-dozen times—if I manage. When I told her that Mr. Albert, her brother, had dined at your place last Thursday—demeaning of himself, I do think—there!—I got a pair of silk stockings,—not letting her see I knew what it was for, of coursed and about Mrs. Dump,—Stump;—I can't recollect the woman's name; and her calling of your master a bankrupt, right out, and wanting her money of him,—there! if Miss Laura didn't give me a pair of lavender kid-gloves out of her box!—and I wish you would leave my hands alone, when you know I shouldn't be so silly as to wear them in the dark; and for you, indeed!"

Page 822

But Gainsford persisted, upon which there was fooling. All this was too childish for Sir Purcell to think it necessary to give warning of his presence. They passed, and when they had gone a short way the damsel cried, “Well, that is something,” and stopped. “Married in a month!” she exclaimed. “And you don’t know which one?”

“No,” returned Gainsford; “master said ‘one of you’ as they was at dinner, just as I come into the room. He was in jolly spirits, and kept going so: ‘What’s a month! champagne, Gainsford,’ and you should have sees Mrs.—not Stump, but Chump. She’ll be tipsy to-night, and I shall bust if I have to carry of her upstairs. Well, she is fun!—she don’t mind handin’ you a five-shilling piece when she’s done tender: but I have nearly lost my place two or three time along of that woman. She’d split logs with laughing:—no need of beetle and wedges! ‘Och!’ she sings out, ’by the piper!’—and Miss Cornelia sitting there—and, ’Arrah!’—bother the woman’s Irish,” (thus Gainsford gave up the effort at imitation, with a spirited Briton’s mild contempt for what he could not do) “she pointed out Miss Cornelia and said she was like the tinker’s dog:—there’s the bone he wants himself, and the bone he don’t want anybody else to have. Aha! ain’t it good?”

“Oh! the tinker’s dog! won’t I remember that!” said the damsel, “she can’t be such a fool.”

“Well, I don’t know,” Gainsford meditated critically. “She is; and yet she ain’t, if you understand me. What I feel about her is—hang it! she makes ye laugh.”

Sir Purcell moved from the shadow of the tree as noiselessly as he could, so that this enamoured couple might not be disturbed. He had already heard more than he quite excused himself for hearing in such a manner, and having decided not to arrest the man and make him relate exactly what Mr. Pole had spoken that evening at the Brookfield dinner-table, he hurried on his return to town.

It was not till he had sight of his poor home; the solitary company of chairs; the sofa looking bony and comfortless as an old female house drudge; the table with his desk on it; and, through folding-doors, his cold and narrow bed; not till then did the fact of his great loss stand before him, and accuse him of living. He seated himself methodically and wrote to Cornelia. His fancy pictured her now as sharp to every turn of language and fall of periods: and to satisfy his imagined, rigorous critic, he wrote much in the style of a newspaper leading article. No one would have thought that tragic meaning underlay those choice and sounding phrases. On reperusing the composition, he rejected it, but only to produce one of a similar cast. He could not get to nature in his tone. He spoke aloud a little sentence now and then, that had the ring of a despairing tenderness. Nothing of the sort inhabited his written words, wherein a strained philosophy and ironic resignation went on stilts. “I should desire to see you once

Page 823

before I take a step that some have not considered more than commonly serious," came toward the conclusion; and the idea was toyed with till he signed his name. "A plunge into the deep is of little moment to one who has been stripped of all clothing. Is he not a wretch who stands and shivers still?" This letter, ending with a short and not imperious, or even urgent, request for an interview, on the morrow by the 'fruitless tree,' he sealed for delivery into Cornelia's hands some hours before the time appointed. He then wrote a clear business letter to his lawyer, and one of studied ambiguity to a cousin on his mother's side. His father's brother, Percival Barrett, to whom the estates had gone, had offered him an annuity of five hundred pounds: "though he had, as his nephew was aware, a large family." Sir Purcell had replied: "Let me be the first to consider your family," rejecting the benevolence. He now addressed his cousin, saying: "What would you think of one who accepts such a gift?—of me, were you to hear that I had bowed my head and extended my hand? Think this, if ever you hear of it: that I have acceded for the sake of winning the highest prize humanity can bestow: that I certainly would not have done it for aught less than the highest." After that he went to his narrow bed. His determination was to write to his uncle, swallowing bitter pride, and to live a pensioner, if only Cornelia came to her tryst, "the last he would ask of her," as he told her. Once face to face with his beloved, he had no doubt of his power; and this feeling which he knew her to share, made her reluctance to meet him more darkly suspicious.

As he lay in the little black room, he thought of how she would look when a bride, and of the peerless beauty towering over any shades of earthliness which she would present. His heated fancy conjured up every device and charm of sacredness and adoring rapture about that white veiled shape, until her march to the altar assumed the character of a religious procession—a sight to awe mankind! And where, when she stood before the minister in her saintly humility, grave and white, and tall—where was the man whose heart was now racing for that goal at her right hand? He felt at the troubled heart and touched two fingers on the rib, mock-quietingly, and smiled. Then with great deliberation he rose, lit a candle, unlocked a case of pocket-pistols, and loaded them: but a second idea coming into his head, he drew the bullet out of one, and lay down again with a luxurious speculation on the choice any hand might possibly make of the life-sparing or death-giving of those two weapons. In his neat half-slumber he was twice startled by a report of fire-arms in a church, when a crowd of veiled women and masked men rushed to the opening, and a woman throwing up the veil from her face knelt to a corpse that she lifted without effort, and weeping, laid it in a grave, where it rested and was at peace, though multitudes hurried over it, and new stars came and went, and the winds were strange with new tongues. The sleeper saw the morning upon that corpse when light struck his eyelids, and he awoke like a man who knew no care.

Page 824

His landlady's little female scrubber was working at the grate in his sitting-room. He had endured many a struggle to prevent service of this nature being done for him by one of the sex—at least, to prevent it within his hearing and sight. He called to her to desist; but she replied that she had her mistress's orders. Thereupon he maintained that the grate did not want scrubbing. The girl took this to be a matter of opinion, not a challenge to controversy, and continued her work in silence. Irritated by the noise, but anxious not to seem harsh, he said: "What on earth are you about, when there was no fire there yesterday?"

"There ain't no stuff for afire now, sir," said she.

"I tell you I did not light it."

"It's been and lit itself then," she mumbled.

"Do you mean to say you found the fire burnt out, when you entered the room this morning?"

She answered that she had found it so, and lots of burnt paper lying about.

The symbolism of this fire burnt out, that had warmed and cheered none, oppressed his fancy, and he left the small maid-of-all-work to triumph with black-lead and brushes.

She sang out, when she had done: "If you please, sir, missus have had a hamper up from the country, and would you like a country aig, which is quite fresh, and new lay. And missus say, she can't trust the bloaters about here bein' Yarmouth, but there's a soft roe in one she've squeezed; and am I to stop a water-cress woman, when the last one sold you them, and all the leaves jellied behind 'em, so as no washin' could save you from swallowin' some, missus say?"

Sir Purcell rolled over on his side. "Is this going to be my epitaph?" he groaned; for he was not a man particular in his diet, or exacting in choice of roes, or panting for freshness in an egg. He wondered what his landlady could mean by sending up to him, that morning of all others, to tempt his appetite after her fashion. "I thought I remembered eating nothing but toast in this place;" he observed to himself. A grunting answer had to be given to the little maid, "Toast as usual." She appeared satisfied, but returned again, when he was in his bath, to ask whether he had said "No toast to-day?"

"Toast till the day of my death—tell your mistress that!" he replied; and partly from shame at his unaccountable vehemence, he paused in his sponging, meditated, and chilled. An association of toast with spectral things grew in his mind, when presently the girl's voice was heard: "Please, sir, did say you'd have toast, or not, this morning?" It cost him an effort to answer simply, "Yes."

That she should continue, “Not sir?” appeared like perversity. “No aig?” was maddening.

“Well, no; never mind it this morning,” said he.

“Not this morning,” she repeated.

“Then it will not be till the day of your death, as you said,” she is thinking that, was the idea running in his brain, and he was half ready to cry out “Stop,” and renew his order for toast, that he might seem consecutive. The childishness of the wish made him ask himself what it mattered. “I said ‘Not till the day;’ so, none to-day would mean that I have reached the day.” Shivering with the wet on his pallid skin, he thought this over.

Page 825

His landlady had used her discretion, and there was toast on the table. A beam of Spring's morning sunlight illuminated the toast-rack. He sat, and ate, and munched the doubt whether "not till" included the final day, or stopped short of it. By this the state of his brain may be conceived. A longing for beauty, and a dark sense of an incapacity to thoroughly enjoy it, tormented him. He sent for his landlady's canary, and the ready shrill song of the bird persuaded him that much of the charm of music is wilfully swelled by ourselves, and can be by ourselves withdrawn: that is to say, the great chasm and spell of sweet sounds is assisted by the force of our imaginations. What is that force? —the heat and torrent of the blood. When that exists no more—to one without hope, for instance—what is music or beauty? Intrinsically, they are next to nothing. He argued it out so, and convinced himself of his own delusions, till his hand, being in the sunlight, gave him a pleasant warmth. "That's something we all love," he said, glancing at the blue sky above the roofs. "But there's little enough of it in this climate," he thought, with an eye upon the darker corners of his room. When he had eaten, he sent word to his landlady to make up his week's bill. The week was not at an end, and that good woman appeased before him, astonished, saying: "To be sure, your habits is regular, but there's little items one I'll guess at, and how make out a bill, Sir Purcy, and no items?"

He nodded his head.

"The country again?" she asked smilingly.

"I am going down there," he said.

"And beautiful at this time of the year, it is! though, for market gardening, London beats any country I ever knew; and if you like creature comforts, I always say, stop in London! And then the policemen! who really are the greatest comfort of all to us poor women, and seem sent from above especially to protect our weakness. I do assure you, Sir Purcy, I feel it, and never knew a right-minded woman that did not. And how on earth our grandmothers contrived to get about without them! But there! people who lived before us do seem like the most uncomfortable! When—my goodness! we come to think there was some lived before tea! Why, as I say over almost every cup I drink, it ain't to be realized. It seems almost wicked to say it, Sir Purcy; but it's my opinion there ain't a Christian woman who's not made more of a Christian through her tea. And a man who beats his wife my first question is, 'Do he take his tea regular?' For, depend upon it, that man is not a tea-drinker at all."

He let her talk away, feeling oddly pleased by this mundane chatter, as was she to pour forth her inmost sentiments to a baronet.

Page 826

When she said: “Your fire shall be lighted to-night to welcome you,” the man looked up, and was going to request that the trouble might be spared, but he nodded. His ghost saw the burning fire awaiting him. Or how if it sparkled merrily, and he beheld it with his human eyes that night? His beloved would then have touched him with her hand—yea, brought the dead to life! He jumped to his feet, and dismissed the worthy dame. On both sides of him, ‘Yes,’ and ‘No,’ seemed pressing like two hostile powers that battled for his body. They shrieked in his ears, plucked at his fingers. He heard them hushing deeply as he went to his pistol-case, and drew forth one—he knew not which.

CHAPTER LVI

On a wild April morning, Emilia rose from her bed and called to mind a day of the last year’s Spring when she had watched the cloud streaming up, and felt that it was the curtain of an unknown glory. But now it wore the aspect of her life itself, with nothing hidden behind those stormy folds, save peace. South-westward she gazed, eyeing eagerly the struggle of twisting vapour; long flying edges of silver went by, and mounds of faint crimson, and here and there a closing space of blue, swift as a thought of home to a soldier in action. The heavens were like a battle-field. Emilia shut her lips hard, to check an impulse of prayer for Merthyr fighting in Italy: for he was in Italy, and she once more among the Monmouth hills: he was in Italy fighting, and she chained here to her miserable promise! Three days after she had given the promise to Wilfrid, Merthyr left, shaking her hand like any common friend. Georgiana remained, by his desire, to protect her. Emilia had written to Wilfrid for release, but being no apt letter-writer, and hating the task, she was soon involved by him in a complication of bewildering sentiments, some of which she supposed she was bound to feel, while perhaps one or two she did feel, at the summons. The effect was that she lost the true wording of her blunt petition for release: she could no longer put it bluntly. But her heart revolted the more, and gave her sharp eyes to see into his selfishness. The purgatory of her days with Georgiana, when the latter was kept back from her brother in his peril, spurred Emilia to renew her appeal; but she found that all she said drew her into unexpected traps and pitfalls. There was only one thing she could say plainly: “I want to go.” If she repeated this, Wilfrid was ready with citations from her letters, wherein she had said ‘this,’ and ‘that,’ and many other phrases. His epistolary power and skill in arguing his own case were creditable to him. Affected as Emilia was by other sensations, she could not combat the idea strenuously suggested by him, that he had reason to complain of her behaviour. He admitted his special faults, but, by distinctly tracing them to their origin, he complacently hinted the excuse for them. Moreover, and with artistic

Page 827

ability, he painted such a sentimental halo round the ‘sacredness of her pledged word,’ that Emilia could not resist a superstitious notion about it, and about what the breaking of it would imply. Georgiana had removed her down to Monmouth to be out of his way. A constant flight of letters pursued them both, for Wilfrid was far too clever to allow letters in his hand-writing to come for one alone of two women shut up in a country-house together. He saw how the letterless one would sit speculating shrewdly and spitefully; so he was careful to amuse his mystified Dragon, while he drew nearer and nearer to his gold apple. Another object was, that by getting Georgiana to consent to become in part his confidante, he made it almost a point of honour for her to be secret with Lady Charlotte.

At last a morning came with no Brookfield letter for either of them. The letters stopped from that time. It was almost as if a great buzzing had ceased in Emilia’s ears, and she now heard her own sensations clearly. To Georgiana’s surprise, she manifested no apprehension or regret. “Or else,” the lady thought, “she wears a mask to me;” and certainly it was a pale face that Emilia was beginning to wear. At last came April and its wild morning. No little female hypocrisies passed between them when they met; they shook hands at arm’s length by the breakfast-table. Then Emilia said: “I am ready to go to Italy: I will go at once.”

Georgiana looked straight at her, thinking: “This is a fit of indignation with Wilfrid.” She answered: “Italy! I fancied you had forgotten there was such a country.”

“I don’t forget my country and my friends,” said Emilia,

“At least, I must ask the ground of so unexpected a resolution,” was rejoined.

“Do you remember what Merthyr wrote in his letter from Arona? How long it takes to understand the meaning of some, words! He says that I should not follow an impulse that is not the impulse of all my nature—myself altogether. Yes! I know what that means now. And he tells me that my life is worth more than to be bound to the pledge of a silly moment. It is! He, Georgey, unkind that you are!—he does not distrust me; but always advises and helps me: Merthyr waits for me. I cannot be instantly ready for every meaning in the world. What I want to do, is to see Wilfrid: if not, I will write to him. I will tell him that I intend to break my promise.”

A light of unaffected pride shone from the girl’s face, as she threw down this gauntlet to sentimentalism.

“And if he objects?” said Georgiana.

“If he objects, what can happen? If he objects by letter, I am gone. I shall not write for permission. I shall write what my will is. If I see him, and he objects, I can look into his eyes and say what I think right. Why, I have lived like a frozen thing ever since I gave

him my word. I have felt at times like a snake hissing at my folly. I think I have felt something like men when they swear.”

Page 828

Georgiana's features expressed a slight but perceptible disgust. Emilia continued humbly: "Forgive me. I wish you to know how I hate the word I gave that separates me from Merthyr in my Italy, and makes you dislike your poor Emilia. You do. I have pardoned it, though it was twenty stabs a day."

"But, why, if this promise was so hateful to you, did you not break it before?" asked Georgiana.

"I had not the courage," Emilia stooped her head to confess; "and besides," she added, curiously half-closing her eyelids, as one does to look on a minute object, "I could not see through it before."

"If," suggested Georgiana, "you break your word, you release him from his."

"No! if he cannot see the difference," cried Emilia, wildly, "then let him keep away from me for ever, and he shall not have the name of friend! Is there no difference—I wish you would let me cry out as they do in Shakespeare, Georgey!" Emilia laughed to cover her vehemence. "I want something more than our way of talking, to witness that there is such a difference between us. Am I to live here till all my feelings are burnt out, and my very soul is only a spark in a log of old wood? and to keep him from murdering my countrymen, or flogging the women of Italy! God knows what those Austrians would make him do. He changes. He would easily become an Austrian. I have heard him once or twice, and if I had shut my eyes, I might have declared an Austrian spoke. I wanted to keep him here, but it is not right that I—I should be caged till I scarcely feel my finger-ends, or know that I breathe sensibly as you and others do. I am with Merthyr. That is what I intend to tell him."

She smiled softly up to Georgiana's cold eyes, to get a look of forgiveness for her fiery speaking.

"So, then, you love my brother?" said Georgiana.

Emilia could have retorted, "Cruel that you are!" The pain of having an unripe feeling plucked at without warning, was bitter; but she repressed any exclamation, in her desire to maintain simple and unsensational relations always with those surrounding her.

"He is my friend," she said. "I think of something better than that other word. Oh, that I were a man, to call him my brother-in-arms! What's a girl's love in return for his giving his money, his heart, and offering his life every day for Italy?"

As soon as Georgiana could put faith in her intention to depart, she gave her a friendly hand and embrace.

Two days later they were at Richford, with Lady Gosstre. The journals were full of the Italian uprising. There had been a collision between the Imperial and patriotic forces,

near Brescia, from which the former had retired in some confusion. Great things were expected of Piedmont, though many, who had reason to know him, distrusted her king. All Lombardy awaited the signal from Piedmont. Meanwhile blood was flowing.

In the excitement of her sudden rush from dead monotony to active life, Emilia let some time pass before she wrote to Wilfrid. Her letter was in her hand, when one was brought in to her from him. It ran thus:—

Page 829

“I have just returned home, and what is this I hear? Are you utterly faithless? Can I not rely on you to keep the word you have solemnly pledged! Meet me at once. Name a place. I am surrounded by misery and distraction. I will tell you all when we meet. I have trusted that you were firm. Write instantly. I cannot ask you to come here. The house is broken up. There is no putting to paper what has happened. My father lies helpless. Everything rests on me. I thought that I could rely on you.”

Emilia tore up her first letter, and replied:—

“Come here at once. Or, if you would wish to meet me elsewhere, it shall be where you please: but immediately. If you have heard that I am going to Italy, it is true. I break my promise. I shall hope to have your forgiveness. My heart bleeds for my dear Cornelia, and I am eager to see my sisters, and embrace them, and share their sorrow. If I must not come, tell them I kiss them. Adieu!”

Wilfrid replied:—

“I will be by Richford Park gates to-morrow at a quarter to nine. You speak of your heart. I suppose it is a habit. Be careful to put on a cloak or thick shawl; we have touches of frost. If I cannot amuse you, perhaps the nightingales will. Do you remember those of last year? I wonder whether we shall hear the same?—we shall never hear the same.”

This iteration, whether cunningly devised or not, had a charm for Emilia’s ear. She thought: “I had forgotten all about them.” When she was in her bedroom at night, she threw up her window. April was leaning close upon May, and she had not to wait long before a dusky flutter of low notes, appearing to issue from the great rhododendron bank across the lawn, surprised her. She listened, and another little beginning was heard, timorous, shy, and full of mystery for her. The moon hung over branches, some that showed young buds, some still bare. Presently the long, rich, single notes cut the air, and melted to their glad delicious chuckle. The singer was answered from a farther bough, and again from one. It grew to be a circle of melody round Emilia at the open window. Was it the same as last year’s? The last year’s lay in her memory faint and well-nigh unawakened. There was likewise a momentary sense of unreality in this still piping peacefulness, while Merthyr stood in a bloody-streaked field, fronting death. And yet the song was sweet. Emilia clasped her arms, shut her eyes, and drank it in. Not to think at all, or even to brood on her sensations, but to rest half animate and let those divine sounds find a way through her blood, was medicine to her.

Next day there were numerous visits to the house. Emilia was reserved, and might have been thought sad, but she welcomed Tracy Runningbrook gladly, with “Oh! my old friend!” and a tender squeeze of his hand.

“True, if you like; hot, if you like; but I old?” cried Tracy.

“Yes, because I seem to have got to the other side of you; I mean, I know you, and am always sure of you,” said Emilia. “You don’t care for music; I don’t care for poetry, but we’re friends, and I am quite certain of you, and think you ‘old friend’ always.”

Page 830

“And I,” said Tracy, better up to the mark by this time, “I think of you, you dear little woman, that I ought to be grateful to you, for, by heaven! you give me, every time I see you, the greatest temptation to be a fool and let me prove that I’m not. Altro! altro!”

“A fool!” said Emilia caressingly; showing that his smart insinuation had slipped by her.

The tale of Brookfield was told over again by Tracy, and Emilia shuddered, though Merthyr and her country held her heart and imagination active and in suspense, from moment to moment. It helped mainly to discolour the young world to her eyes. She was under the spell of an excitement too keen and quick to be subdued, by the sombre terrors of a tragedy enacted in a house that she had known. Brookfield was in the talk of all who came to Richford. Emilia got the vision of the wretched family seated in the library as usual, when upon midnight they were about to part, and a knock came at the outer door, and two men entered the hall, bearing a lifeless body with a red spot above the heart. She saw Cornelia fall to it. She saw the pale-faced family that had given her shelter, and moaned for lack of a way of helping them and comforting them. She reproached herself for feeling her own full physical life so warmly, while others whom she had loved were weeping. It was useless to resist the tide of fresh vitality in her veins, and when her thoughts turned to their main attraction, she was rejoicing at the great strength she felt coming to her gradually. Her face was smooth and impassive: this new joy of strength came on her like the flowing of a sea to a, land-locked water. “Poor souls!” she sighed for her friends, while irrepressible exultation filled her spirit.

That afternoon, in the midst of packing and preparations for the journey, at all of which Lady Gosstre smiled with a complacent bewilderment, a card, bearing the name of Miss Laura Tinley, was sent up to Emilia. She had forgotten this person, and asked Lady Gosstre who it was. Arabella’s rival presented herself most winningly. For some time, Emilia listened to her, with wonder that a tongue should be so glib on matters of no earthly interest. At last, Laura said in an undertone: “I am the bearer of a message from Mr. Pericles; do you walk at all in the garden?”

Emilia read her look, and rose. Her thoughts struck back on the creature that she was when she had last seen Mr. Pericles, and again, by contrast, on what she was now. Eager to hear of him, or rather to divine the mystery in her bosom aroused by the unexpected mention of his name, she was soon alone with Laura in the garden.

“Oh, those poor Poles!” Laura began.

“You were going to say something of Mr. Pericles,” said Emilia.

Page 831

“Yes, indeed, my dear; but, of course, you have heard all the details of that dreadful night? It cannot be called a comfort to us that it enables my brother Albert to come forward in the most disinterested—I might venture to say, generous—manner, and prove the chivalry of his soul; still, as things are, we are glad, after such misunderstandings, to prove to that sorely-tried family who are their friends. I—you would little think so from their treatment of me—I was at school with them. I knew them before they became unintelligible, though they always had a turn for it. To dress well, to be refined, to marry well—I understand all that perfectly; but who could understand them? Not they themselves, I am certain! And now penniless! and not only that, but lawyers! You know that Mrs. Chump has commenced an action?—no? Oh, yes! but I shall have to tell you the whole story.”

“What is it?—they want money?” said Emilia.

“I will tell you. Our poor gentlemanly organist, whom you knew, was really a baronet’s son, and inherited the title.”

Emilia interrupted her: “Oh, do let me hear about them!”

“Well, my dear, this unfortunate—I may call him ‘lover,’ for if a man does not stamp the truth of his affection with a pistol, what other means has he? And just a word as to romance. I have been sighing for it—no one would think so—all my life. And who would have thought that these poor Poles should have lived to convince me of the folly! Oh, delicious humdrum!—there is nothing like it. But you are anxious, naturally. Poor Sir Purcell Barren—he may or may not have been mad, but when he was brought to the house at Brookfield—quite by chance—I mean, his body—two labouring men found him by a tree—I don’t know whether you remembered a pollard-willow that stood all white and rotten by the water in the fir-wood:—well, as I said, mad or not, no sooner did poor Cornelia see him than she shrieked that she was the cause of his death. He was laid in the hall—which I have so often trod! and there Cornelia sat by his poor dead body, and accused Wilfrid and her father of every unkindness. They say that the scene was terrible. Wilfrid—but I need not tell you his character. He flutters from flower to flower, but he has feeling Now comes the worst of all—in one sense; that is, looking on it as people of the world; and being in the world, we must take a worldly view occasionally. Mr. Pole—you remember how he behaved once at Besworth: or, no; you were not there, but he used your name. His mania was, as everybody could see, to marry his children grandly. I don’t blame him in any way. Still, he was not justified in living beyond his means to that end, speculating rashly, and concealing his actual circumstances. Well, Mr. Pericles and he were involved together; that is, Mr. Pericles—”

“Is Mr. Pericles near us now?” said Emilia quickly.

Page 832

“We will come to him,” Laura resumed, with the complacency of one who saw a goodly portion of the festival she was enjoying still before her. “I was going to say, Mr. Pericles had poor Mr. Pole in his power; has him, would be the correcter tense. And Wilfrid, as you may have heard, had really grossly insulted him, even to the extent of maltreating him—a poor foreigner—rich foreigner, if you like! but not capable of standing against a strong young man in wrath. However, now there can be little doubt that Wilfrid repents. He had been trying ever since to see Mr. Pericles; and the very morning of that day, I believe, he saw him and humbled himself to make an apology. This had put Mr. Pole in good spirits, and in the evening—he and Mrs. Chump were very fond of their wine after dinner—he was heard that very evening to name a day for his union with her; for that had been quite understood, and he had asked his daughters and got their consent. The sight of Sir Purcell’s corpse, and the cries of Cornelia, must have turned him childish. I cannot conceive a situation so harrowing as that of those poor children hearing their father declare himself an impostor! a beggar! a peculator! He cried, poor unhappy man, real tears! The truth was that his nerves suddenly gave way. For, just before—only just before, he was smiling and talking largely. He wished to go on his knees to every one of them, and kept telling them of his love—the servants all awake and listening! and more gossiping servants than the Poles always, by the most extraordinary inadvertence, managed to get, you never heard of! Nothing would stop him from humiliating himself! No one paid any attention to Mrs. Chump until she started from her chair. They say that some of the servants who were crying outside, positively were compelled to laugh when they heard her first outbursts. And poor Mr. Pole confessed that he had touched her money. He could not tell her how much. Fancy such a scene, with a dead man in the house! Imagination almost refuses to conjure it up! Not to dwell on it too long—for, I have never endured such a shock as it has given me—Mrs. Chump left the house, and the next thing received from her was a lawyer’s letter. Business men say she is not to blame: women may cherish their own opinion. But, oh, Miss Belloni! is it not terrible? You are pale.”

Emilia behind what she felt for her friends, had a dim comprehension of the meaning of their old disgust at Laura, during this narration. But, hearing the word of pity, she did not stop to be critical. “Can you do nothing for them?” she said abruptly.

The thought in Laura’s shocked grey eyes was, “They have done little enough for you,” *i.e.*, toward making you a lady. “Oh!” she cried; “I can you teach me what to do? I must be extremely delicate, and calculate upon what they would accept from me. For—so I hear—they used to—and may still—nourish a—what I called—silly—though not in unkindness—hostility to our family—me. And perhaps now natural delicacy may render it difficult for them to...”

Page 833

In short, to accept an alms from Laura Tinley; so said her pleading look for an interpretation.

“You know Mr. Pericles,” said Emilia, “he can do the mischief—can he not? Stop him.”

Laura laughed. “One might almost say that you do not know him, Miss Belloni. What is my influence? I have neither a voice, nor can I play on any instrument. I would—-indeed I will—do my best my utmost; only, how even to introduce the subject to him? Are not you the person? He speaks of you constantly. He has consulted doctors with regard to your voice, and the only excuse, dear Miss Belloni, for my visit to you to-day, is my desire that any misunderstanding between you may be cleared. Because, I have just heard—Miss Belloni will forgive me!—the origin of it; and tidings coming that you were in the neighbourhood, I thought—hoped that I might be the means of re-uniting two evidently destined to be of essential service to one another. And really, life means that, does it not?”

Emilia was becoming more critical of this tone the more she listened. She declared, her immediate willingness to meet Mr. Pericles. With which, and Emilia’s assurance that she would write, and herself make the appointment, Laura retired, in high glee at the prospect of winning the gratitude of the inscrutable millionaire. It was true that the absence of any rivalry for the possession of the man took much of his sweetness from him. She seemed to be plucking him from the hands of the dead, and half recognized that victory over uncontesting rivals claps the laurel-wreath rather rudely upon our heads.

Emilia lost no time in running straight to Georgiana, who was busy at her writing-desk. She related what she had just heard, ending breathlessly: “Georgey! my dear! will you help them?”

“In what possible way can I do so?” said Georgiana. To-morrow night we shall have left England.”

“But to-day we are here.” Emilia pressed a hand to her bosom: “my heart feels hollow, and my friends cry out in it. I cannot let him suffer.” She looked into Georgiana’s eyes. “Will you not help them?—they want money.”

The lady reddened. “Is it not preposterous to suppose that I can offer them assistance of such a kind?”

“Not you,” returned Emilia, sighing; and in an under-breath, “me—will you lend it to me? Merthyr would. I shall repay it. I cannot tell what fills me with this delight, but I know I am able to repay any sum. Two thousand pounds would help them. I think—I think my voice has come back.”

“Have you tried it?” said Georgiana, to produce a diversion from the other topic.

“No; but believe me when I tell you, it must be. I scarcely feel the floor; no misery touches me. I am only sorry for my friends, not down on the ground with them. Believe me! And I have been studying all this while. I have not lost an hour. I would accept a part, and step on the boards within a week, and be certain to succeed. I am just as willing to go to the Conservatorio and submit to discipline. Only, dear friend, believe me, that I ask for money now, because I am sure I can repay it. I want to send it immediately, and then, good-bye to England.”

Page 834

Georgiana closed her desk. She had been suspicious at first of another sentiment in the background, but was now quite convinced of the simplicity of Emilia's design. She said: "I will tell you exactly how I am placed. I do not know, that under any circumstances, I could have given into your hands so large a sum as this that you ask for. My brother has a fortune; and I have also a little property. When I say my brother has a fortune, he has the remains of one. All that has gone has been devoted to relieve your countrymen, and further the interests he has nearest at heart. What is left to him, I believe, he has now thrown into the gulf. You have heard Lady Charlotte call him a fanatic."

Emilia's lip quivered.

"You must not blame her for that," Georgiana continued. "Lady Gosstre thinks much the same. The world thinks with them. I love him, and prove my love by trusting him, and wish to prove my love by aiding him, and being always at hand to succour, as I should be now, but that I obeyed his dearest wish in resting here to watch over you. I am his other self. I have taught him to feel that; so that in his devotion to this cause he may follow every impulse he has, and still there is his sister to fall back on. My child! see what I have been doing. I have been calculating here." Georgiana took a scroll from her desk, and laid it under Emilia's eyes. "I have reckoned our expenses as far as Turin, and have only consented to take Lady Gosstre's valet for courier, just to please her. I know that he will make the cost double, and I feel like a miser about money. If Merthyr is ruined, he will require every farthing that I have for our common subsistence. Now do you understand? I can hardly put the case more plainly. It is out of my power to do what you ask me to do."

Emilia sighed lightly, and seemed not much cast down by the refusal. She perceived that it was necessarily positive, and like all minds framed to resolve to action, there was an instantaneous change of the current of her thoughts in another direction.

"Then, my darling, my one prayer!" she said. "Postpone our going for a week. I will try to get help for them elsewhere."

Georgiana was pleased by Emilia's manner of taking the rebuff; but it required an altercation before she consented to this postponement; she nodded her head finally in anger.

CHAPTER LVII

By the park-gates that evening, Wilfrid received a letter from the hands of Tracy Runningbrook. It said: "I am not able to see you now. When I tell you that I will see you before I leave England, I insist upon your believing me. I have no head for seeing anybody now. Emilia"—was the simple signature, perused over and over again by this

maddened lover, under the flitting gate-lamp, after Tracy had left him. The coldness of Emilia's name so briefly given, concentrated every fire in his

Page 835

heart. What was it but miserable cowardice, he thought, that prevented him from getting the peace poor Barrett had found? Intolerable anguish weakened his limbs. He flung himself on a wayside bank, grovelling, to rise again calm and quite ready for society, upon the proper application of the clothes-brush. Indeed; he patted his shoulder and elbow to remove the soil of his short contact with earth, and tried a cigar: but the first taste of the smoke sickened his lips. Then he stood for a moment as a man in a new world. This strange sensation of disgust with familiar comforting habits, fixed him in perplexity, till a rushing of wild thoughts and hopes from brain to heart, heart to brain, gave him insight, and he perceived his state, and that for all he held to in our life he was dependent upon another; which is virtually the curse of love.

“And he passed along the road,” adds the Philosopher, “a weaker man, a stronger lover. Not that love should diminish manliness or gains by so doing; but travelling to love by the ways of Sentiment, attaining to the passion bit by bit, does full surely take from us the strength of our nature, as if (which is probable) at every step we paid fee to move forward. Wilfrid had just enough of the coin to pay his footing. He was verily fining himself down. You are tempted to ask what the value of him will be by the time that he turns out pure metal? I reply, something considerable, if by great sacrifice he gets to truth—gets to that oneness of feeling which is the truthful impulse. At last, he will stand high above them that have not suffered. The rejection of his cigar.”

This wages too absurd. At the risk of breaking our partnership for ever, I intervene. My Philosopher’s meaning is plain, and, as usual, good; but not even I, who have less reason to laugh at him than anybody, can gravely accept the juxtaposition of suffering and cigars. And, moreover, there is a little piece of action in store.

Wilfrid had walked half way to Brookfield, when the longing to look upon the Richford chamber-windows stirred so hotly within him that he returned to the gates. He saw Captain Gambier issuing on horseback from under the lamp. The captain remarked that it was a fine night, and prepared to ride off, but Wilfrid requested him to dismount, and his voice had the unmistakeable ring in it by which a man knows that there must be no trifling. The captain leaned forward to look at him before he obeyed the summons, All self-control had abandoned Wilfrid in the rage he felt at Gambier’s having seen Emilia, and the jealous suspicion that she had failed to keep her appointment for the like reason.

“Why do you come here?” he said, hoarsely.

“By Jove! that’s an odd question,” said the captain, at once taking his ground.

“Am I to understand that you’ve been playing with my sister, as you do with every other woman?”

Captain Gambier murmured quietly, “Every other woman?” and smoothed his horse’s neck. “They’re not so easily played with, my dear fellow. You speak like a youngster.”

Page 836

“I am the only protector of my sister’s reputation,” said Wilfrid, “and, by heaven! if you have cast her over to be the common talk, you shall meet me.”

The captain turned to his horse, saying, “Oh! Well!” Being mounted, he observed: “My dear Pole, you might have sung out all you had to say. Go to your sister, and if she complains of my behaviour, I’ll meet you. Oh, yes! I’ll meet you; I have no objection to excitement. You’re in the hands of an infernally clever woman, who does me the honour to wish to see my blood on the carpet, I believe; but if this is her scheme, it’s not worthy of her ability. She began pretty well. She arranged the preliminaries capitally. Why, look here,” he relinquished his ordinary drawl; “I’ll tell you something, which you may put down in my favour or not—just as you like. That woman did her best to compromise your sister with me on board the yacht. I can’t tell you how, and won’t. Of course, I wouldn’t if I could; but I have sense enough to admire a very charming person, and I did the only honourable thing in my power. It’s your sister, my good fellow, who gave me my dismissal. We had a little common sense conversation—in which she shines. I envy the man that marries her, but she denies me such luck. There! if you want to shoot me for my share in that transaction, I’ll give you your chance: and if you do, my dear Pole, either you must be a tremendous fool, or that woman’s ten times cleverer than I thought. You know where to find me. Good night.”

The captain gave heel to his horse, hearing no more.

Adela confirmed to Wilfrid what Gambier had spoken; and that it was she who had given him his dismissal. She called him by his name, “Augustus,” in a kindly tone, remarking, that Lady Charlotte had persecuted him dreadfully. “Poor Augustus! his entire reputation for evil is owing to her black paint-brush. There is no man so easily ‘hooked,’ as Mrs. Bayruffle would say, as he, though he has but eight hundred a year: barely enough to live on. It would have been cruel of me to keep him, for if he is in love, it’s with Emilia.”

Wilfrid here took upon himself to reproach her for a certain negligence of worldly interests. She laughed and blushed with humorous satisfaction; and, on second thoughts, he changed his opinion, telling her that he wished he could win his freedom as she had done.

“Wilfrid,” she said suddenly, “will you persuade Cornelia not to wear black?”

“Yes, if you wish it,” he replied.

“You will, positively? Then listen, dear. I don’t like the prospect of your alliance with Lady Charlotte.”

Wilfrid could not repress a despondent shrug.

“But you can get released,” she cried; and ultimately counselled him: “Mention the name of Lord Eltham before her once, when you are alone. Watch the result. Only, don’t be clumsy. But I need not tell you that.”

Page 837

For hours he cudgelled his brains to know why she desired Cornelia not to wear black, and when the light broke in on him he laughed like a jolly youth for an instant. The reason why was in a web so complicated, that, to have divined what hung on Cornelia's wearing of black, showed a rare sagacity and perception of character on the little lady's part. As thus:—Sir Twickenham Pryme is the most sensitive of men to ridicule and vulgar tattle: he has continued to visit the house, learning by degrees to prefer me, but still too chivalrous to withdraw his claim to Cornelia, notwithstanding that he has seen indications of her not too absolute devotion towards him:—I have let him become aware that I have broken with Captain Gambier (whose income is eight hundred a year merely), for the sake of a higher attachment: now, since the catastrophe, he can with ease make it appear to the world that I was his choice from the first, seeing that Cornelia will assuredly make no manner of objection:—but, if she, with foolish sentimental persistence, assumes the garb of sorrow, then Sir Twickenham's ears will tingle; he will retire altogether; he will not dare to place himself in a position which will lend a colour to the gossip, that jilted by one sister, he flew for consolation to the other; jilted, too, for the mere memory of a dead man! an additional insult!

Exquisite intricacy! Wilfrid worked through all the intervolutions, and nearly forgot his wretchedness in admiration of his sister's mental endowments. He was the more willing to magnify them, inasmuch as he thereby strengthened his hope that liberty would follow the speaking of the talismanic name of Eltham to Lady Charlotte, alone. He had come to look upon her as the real barrier between himself and Emilia.

"I think we have brains," he said softly, on his pillow, upon a review of the beggared aspect of his family; and he went to sleep with a smile on his face.

CHAPTER LVIII

A sharp breath of air had passed along the dews, and all the young green of the fresh season shone in white jewels. The sky, set with very dim distant stars, was in grey light round a small brilliant moon. Every space of earth lifted clear to her; the woodland listened; and in the bright silence the nightingales sang loud.

Emilia and Tracy Runningbrook were threading their way toward a lane over which great oak branches intervolved; thence under larches all with glittering sleeves, and among spiky brambles, with the purple leaf and the crimson frosted. The frost on the edges of the brown-leaved bracken gave a faint colour. Here and there, intense silver dazzled their eyes. As they advanced amid the icy hush, so hard and instant was the ring of the earth under them, their steps sounded as if expected.

"This night seems made for me!" said Emilia.

Tracy had no knowledge of the object of the expedition. He was her squire simply; had pitched on a sudden into an enamoured condition, and walked beside her, caring little whither he was led, so that she left him not.

Page 838

They came upon a clearing in the wood where a tournament of knights might have been held. Ranged on two sides were rows of larches, and forward, fit to plume a dais, a clump of tall firs stood with a flowing silver fir to right and left, and the white stems of the birch-tree shining from among them. This fair woodland court had three broad oaks, as for gateways; and the moon was above it. Moss and the frosted brown fern were its flooring.

Emilia said eagerly, “This way,” and ran under one of the oaks. She turned to Tracy following: “There is no doubt of it.” Her hand was lying softly on her throat.

“Your voice?” Tracy divined her.

She nodded, but frowned lovingly at the shout he raised, and he understood that there was haply some plot to be worked out. The open space was quite luminous in the middle of those three deep walls of shadow. Emilia enjoined him to rest where he was, and wait for her on that spot like a faithful sentinel, whatsoever ensued. Coaxing his promise, she entered the square of white light alone. Presently she stood upon a low mound, so that her whole figure was distinct, while the moon made her features visible.

Expectancy sharpened the stillness to Tracy’s ears. A nightingale began the charm. He was answered by another. Many were soon in song, till even the pauses were sweet with them. Tracy had the thought that they were calling for Emilia to commence; that it was nature preluding the divine human voice, weaving her spell for it. He was seized by a thirst to hear the adorable girl, who stood there patiently, with her face lifted soft in moonlight. And then the blood thrilled along his veins, as if one more than mortal had touched him. It seemed to him long before he knew that Emilia’s voice was in the air.

In such a place, at such a time, there is no wizardry like a woman’s voice. Emilia had gained in force and fulness. She sang with a stately fervour, letting the notes flow from her breast, while both her arms hung loose, and not a gesture escaped her. Tracy’s fiery imagination set him throbbing, as to the voice of the verified spirit of the place. He heard nothing but Emilia, and scarce felt that it was she, or that tears were on his eyelids, till her voice sank richly, deep into the bosom of the woods. Then the stillness, like one folding up a precious jewel, seemed to pant audibly.

“She’s not alone!” This was human speech at his elbow, uttered in some stupefied amazement. In an extremity of wrath, Tracy turned about to curse the intruder, and discerned Wilfrid, eagerly bent forward on the other side of the oak by which he leaned. Advancing toward Emilia, two figures were seen. Mr. Pericles in his bearskin was easily to be distinguished. His companion was Laura Tinley. The Greek moved at rapid strides, and coming near upon Emilia, raised his hands as in exclamation. At once he disencumbered his shoulders of the enormous wrapper, held it aloft imperiously, and by main force extinguished Emilia. Laura’s shrill laugh resounded.

Page 839

“Oh! beastly bathos!” Tracy groaned in his heart. “Here we are down in Avernus in a twinkling!”

There was evidently quick talk going on among the three, after which Emilia, heavily weighted, walked a little apart with Mr. Pericles, who looked lean and lank beside her, and gesticulated in his wildest manner. Tracy glanced about for Wilfrid. The latter was not visible, but, stepping up the bank of sand and moss, appeared a lady in shawl and hat, in whom he recognized Lady Charlotte. He went up to her and saluted.

“Ah! Tracy,” she said. “I saw you leave the drawing room, and expected to find you here. So, the little woman has got her voice again; but why on earth couldn’t she make the display at Richford? It’s very pretty, and I dare say you highly approve of this kind of romantic interlude, Signor Poet, but it strikes me as being rather senseless.”

“But, are you alone? What on earth brings you here?” asked Tracy.

“Oh!” the lady shrugged. “I’ve a guard to the rear. I told her I would come. She said I should hear something to-night, if I did. I fancied naturally the appointment had to do with her voice, and wished to please her. It’s only five minutes from the west-postern of the park. Is she going to sing any more? There’s company apparently. Shall we go and declare ourselves?”

“I’m on duty, and can’t,” replied Tracy, and twisting his body in an ecstasy, added: “Did you hear her?”

Lady Charlotte laughed softly. “You speak as if you had taken a hurt, my dear boy. This sort of scene is dangerous to poets. But, I thought you slighted music.”

“I don’t know whether I’m breathing yet,” Tracy rejoined. She’s a Goddess to me from this moment. Not like music? Am I a dolt? She would raise me from the dead, if she sang over me. Put me in a boat, and let her sing on, and all may end! I could die into colour, hearing her! That’s the voice they hear in heaven.”

“When they are good, I suppose,” the irreverent lady appended. “What’s that?” And she held her head to listen.

Emilia’s mortal tones were calling Wilfrid’s name. The lady became grave, as with keen eyes she watched the open space, and to a second call Wilfrid presented himself in a leisurely way from under cover of the trees; stepping into the square towards the three, as one equal to all occasions, and specially prepared for this. He was observed to bow to Mr. Pericles, and the two men extended hands, Laura Tinley standing decently away from them.

Lady Charlotte could not contain her mystification. “What does it mean?” she said. “Wilfrid was to be in town at the Ambassador’s to-night! He wrote to me at five o’clock

from his Club! Is he insane? Has he lost every sense of self-interest? He can't have made up his mind to miss his opportunity, when all the introductions are there! Run, like a good creature, Tracy, and see if that is Wilfrid, and come back and tell me; but don't sag I am here."

Page 840

“Desert my post?” Tracy hugged his arms tight together. “Not if I freeze here!”

The doubt in Lady Charlotte’s eyes was transient. She dropped her glass. Visible adieux were being waved between Mr. Pericles and Laura Tinley on the one hand, and Wilfrid and Emilia, on the other. After which, and at a quick pace, manifestly shivering, Mr. Pericles drew Laura into the shadows, and Emilia, clad in the immense bearskin, as with a trailing black barbaric robe, walked toward the oaks. Wilfrid’s head was stooped to a level with Emilia’s, into whose face he was looking obliviously, while the hot words sprang from his lips. They neared the oak, and Emilia slanted her direction, so as to avoid the neighbourhood of the tree. Tracy felt a sudden grasp of his arm. It was momentary, coming simultaneously with a burst of Wilfrid’s voice.

“Do I know what I love, you ask? I love your footprints! Everything you have touched is like fire to me. Emilia! Emilia!”

“Then,” came the clear reply, “you do not love Lady Charlotte?”

“Love her!” he shouted scornfully, and subdued his voice to add: “she has a good heart, and whatever scandal is talked of her and Lord Eltham, she is a well-meaning friend. But, love her! You, you I love!”

“Theatrical business,” Lady Charlotte murmured, and imagined she had expected it when she promised Emilia she would step out into the night air, as possibly she had.

The lady walked straight up to them.

“Well, little one!” she addressed Emilia; “I am glad you have recovered your voice. You play the game of tit-for-tat remarkably well. We will now sheath our battledores. There is my hand.”

The unconquerable aplomb in Lady Charlotte, which Wilfrid always artistically admired, and which always mastered him; the sight of her pale face and courageous eyes; and her choice of the moment to come forward and declare her presence;—all fell upon the furnace of Wilfrid’s heart like a quenching flood. In a stupefaction, he confessed to himself that he could say actually nothing. He could hardly look up.

Emilia turned her eyes from the outstretched hand, to the lady’s face.

“What will it mean?” she said.

“That we are quits, I presume; and that we bear no malice. At any rate, that I relinquish the field. I like a hand that can deal a good stroke. I conceived you to be a mere little romantic person, and correct my mistake. You win the prize, you see.”

“You would have made him an Austrian, and he is now safe from that. I win nothing more,” said Emilia.

When Tracy and Emilia stood alone, he cried out in a rapture of praise, “Now I know what a power you have. You may bid me live or die.”

Page 841

The recent scene concerned chiefly the actors who had moved onward: it had touched Emilia but lightly, and him not at all. But, while he magnified the glory of her singing, the imperishable note she had sounded this night, and the power and the triumph that would be hers, Emilia's bosom began to heave, and she checked him with a storm of tears. "Triumph! yes! what is this I have done? Oh, Merthyr, my, true hero! He praises me and knows nothing of how false I have been to you. I am a slave! I have sold myself—sold myself!" She dropped her face in her hands, broken with grief. "He fights," she pursued; "he fights for my country. I feel his blood—it seems to run from my body as it runs from his. Not if he is dying—I dare not go to him if he is dying! I am in chains. I have sworn it for money. See what a different man Merthyr is from any on earth! Would he shoot himself for a woman? Would he grow meaner the more he loved her? My hero! my hero! and Tracy, my friend! what is my grief now? Merthyr is my hero, but I hear him—I hear him speaking it into my ears with his own lips, that I do not love him. And it is true. I never should have sold myself for three weary years away from him, if I had loved him. I know it now it is done. I thought more of my poor friends and Wilfrid, than of Merthyr, who bleeds for my country! And he will not spurn me when we meet. Yes, if he lives, he will come to me gentle as a ghost that has seen God!"

She abandoned herself to weeping. Tracy, in a tender reverence for one who could speak such solemn matter spontaneously, supported her, and felt her tears as a rain of flame on his heart.

The nightingales were mute. Not a sound was heard from bough or brake.

CHAPTER LIX

A wreck from the last Lombard revolt landed upon our shores in June. His right arm was in a sling, and his Italian servant following him, kept close by his side, with a ready hand, as if fearing that at any moment the wounded gentleman's steps might fail. There was no public war going on just then: for which reason he was eyed suspiciously by the rest of the passengers making their way up the beach; who seemed to entertain an impression that he had no business at such a moment to be crippled, and might be put down as one of those foreign fools who stand out for a trifle as targets to fools a little luckier than themselves. Here, within our salt girdle, flourishes common sense. We cherish life; we abhor bloodshed; we have no sympathy with your juvenile points of honour: we are, in short, a civilized people; and seeing that Success has made us what we are, we advise other nations to succeed, or be quiet. Of all of which the gravely-smiling gentleman appeared well aware; for, with an eye that courted none, and a perfectly calm face, he passed through the crowd, only once availing himself of his brown-faced Beppo's spontaneously depressed

Page 842

shoulder when a twinge of pain shooting from his torn foot took his strength away. While he remained in sight, some speculation as to his nationality continued: he had been heard to speak nothing but Italian, and yet the flower of English cultivation was signally manifest in his style and bearing. The purchase of that day's journal, giving information that the Lombard revolt was fully, it was thought finally, crushed out, and the insurgents scattered, hanged, or shot, suggested to a young lady in a group melancholy with luggage, that the wounded gentleman was one who had escaped from the Austrians.

"Only, he is English."

"If he is, he deserves what he's got."

A stout Briton delivered this sentence, and gave in addition a sermon on meddling, short, emphatic, and not uncheerful apparently, if estimated by the hearty laugh that closed it; though a lady remarked, "Oh, dear me! You are very sweeping."

"By George! ma'am," cried the Briton, holding out his newspaper, "here's a leader on the identical subject, with all my views in it! Yes! those Italians are absurd: they never were a people: never agreed. Egad! the only place they're fit for is the stage. Art! if you like. They know all about colouring canvas, and sculpturing. I don't deny 'em their merits, and I don't mind listening to their squalling, now and then: though, I'll tell you what: have you ever noticed the calves of those singers?—I mean, the men. Perhaps not—-for they' ve got none. They're sticks, not legs. Who can think much of fellows with such legs? Now, the next time you go to the Italian Opera, notice 'em. Ha! ha!—well, that would sound queer, told at secondhand; but, just look at their legs, ma'am, and ask yourself whether there's much chance for a country that stands on legs like those! Let them paint, and carve blocks, and sing. They're not fit for much else, as far as I can see."

Thus, in the pride of his manliness, the male Briton. A shrill cry drew the attention of this group once more to the person who had just kindly furnished a topic. He had been met on his way by a lady unmistakeably foreign in her appearance. "Marini!" was the word of the cry; and the lady stood with her head bent and her hands stiffened rigidly.

"Lost her husband, I dare say!" the Briton murmured. "Perhaps he's one of the 'hanged, or shot,' in the list here Hanged! shot! Ask those Austrians to be merciful, and that's their reply. Why, good God! it's like the grunt of a savage beast! Hanged! shot!—count how many for one day's work! Ten at Verona; fifteen at Mantua; five—there, stop! If we enter into another alliance with those infernal ruffians!—if they're not branded in the face of Europe as inhuman butchers! if I—by George! if I were an Italian I'd handle a musket myself, and think great guns the finest music going. Mind, if there's a subscription for the widows of these poor fellows, I put down my name; so shall my wife, so shall my daughters, so we will all, down to the baby!"

Page 843

Merthyr's name was shouted first on his return to England by Mrs. Chump. He was waiting on the platform of the London station for the train to take him to Richford, when, "Oh! Mr. Pow's, Mr. Pow's!" resounded, and Mrs. Chump fluttered before him. She was on her way to Brookfield, she said; and it was, she added, her firm belief that heaven had sent him to her sad, not deeming "that poor creature, Mr. Braintop, there, sufficient for the purpose. For what I've got to go through, among them at Brookfield, Mr. Pow's, it's perf'ctly awful. Mr. Braintop," she turned to the youth, "you may go now. And don't go takin' ship and sailin' for Italy after the little Belloni, for ye haven't a chance—poor fella! though he combs 's hair so careful, Mr. Pow's, and ye might almost laugh and cry together to see how humble he is, and audacious too—all in a lump. For, when little Belloni was in the ship, ye know, and she thinkin', 'not one of my friends near to wave a handkerchief!' behold, there's that boy Braintop just as by maguc, and he wavin' his best, which is a cambric, and a present from myself, and precious wet that night, ye might swear; for the quiet lovers, Mr. Pow's, they cry, they do, buckutsful!"

"And is Miss Belloni gone?" said Merthyr, looking steadily for answer.

"To be sure, sir, she has; but have ye got a squeak of pain? Oh, dear! it makes my blood creep to see a man who's been where there's been firing of shots in a temper. Ye're vary pale, sir."

"She went—on what day?" asked Merthyr.

"Oh! I can't poss'bly tell ye that, Mr. Pow's, havin' affairs of my own most urrgent. But, Mr. Paricles has got her at last. That's certain. Gall'ns of tears has poor Mr. Braintop cried over it, bein' one of the mew-in-a-corner sort of young men, ye know, what never win the garl, but cry enough to float her and the lucky fella too, and off they go, and he left on the shore."

Merthyr looked impatiently out of the window. His wounds throbbed and his forehead was moist.

"With Mr. Pericles?" he queried, while Mrs. Chump was giving him the reasons for the immediate visit to Brookfield.

"They're cap'tal friends again, ye know, Mr. Pow's, Mr. Paricles and Pole; and Pole's quite set up, and yesterday mornin' sends me two thousand pounds—not a penny less! and ye'll believe me, I was in a stiff gape for five minutes when Mr. Braintop shows the money. What a temptation for the young man! But Pole didn't know his love for little Belloni."

"Has she no one with her?" Merthyr seized the opportunity of her name being pronounced to get clear tidings of her, if possible.

Page 844

“Oh, dear, yes, Mr. Paricles is with her,” returned Mrs. Chump. “And, as I was sayin’, sir, two thousand pounds! I ran off to my lawyer; for, it’ll seem odd to ye, now, Mr. Pow’s, that know my ’ffection for the Poles, poor dears, I’d an action against ’em. ‘Stop ut,’ I cries out to the man: if he’d been one o’ them that wears a wig, I couldn’t ha’ spoken so—’Stop ut,’ I cries, not a bit afraid of ’m. I wouldn’t let the man go on, for all I want to know is, that I’m not rrooned. And now I’ve got money, I must have friends; for when I hadn’t, ye know, my friends seemed against me, and now I have, it’s the world that does, where’ll I hide it? Oh, dear! now I’m with you, I don’t mind, though this brown-faced forr’ner servant of yours, he gives me shivers. Can he understand English?—-becas I’ve got ut all in my pockut!”

Merthyr sighed wearily for release. At last the train slackened speed, and the well-known fir-country appeared in sight. Mrs. Chump caught him by the arm as he prepared to alight. “Oh! and are ye goin’ to let me face the Poles without anyone to lean on in that awful moment, and no one to bear witness how kind I’ve spoken of ’em. Mr. Pow’s! will ye prove that you’re a blessed angel, sir, and come, just for five minutes—-which is a short time to do a thing for a woman she’ll never forget.”

“Pray spare me, madam,” Merthyr pleaded. “I have much to learn at Richford.”

“I cann’t spare ye, sir,” cried Mrs. Chump. “I cann’t go before that fam’ly quite alone. They’re a tarr’ble fam’ly. Oh! I’ll be goin’ on my knees to ye, Mr. Pow’s. Weren’t ye sent by heaven now? And you to run away! And if you’re woundud, won’t I have a carr’ge from the station, which’ll be grander to go in, and impose on ’em, ye know. Pray, sir! I entreat ye!”

The tears burst from her eyes, and her hot hand clung to his imploringly.

Merthyr was a witness of the return of Mrs. Chump to Brookfield. In that erewhile abode of Fine Shades, the Nice Feelings had foundered. The circle of a year, beginning so fairly for them, enfolded the ladies and their first great scheme of life. Emilia had been a touchstone to this family. They could not know it in their deep affliction, but in manger they had much improved. Their welcome of Mrs. Chump was an admirable seasoning of stateliness with kindness. Cornelia and Arabella took her hand, listening with an incomparable soft smile to her first protestations, which they quieted, and then led her to Mr. Pole; of whom it may be said, that an accomplished coquette could not in his situation have behaved with a finer skill; so that, albeit received back into the house, Mrs. Chump had yet to discover what her footing there was to be, and trembled like the meanest of culprits. Mr. Pole shook her hand warmly, tenderly, almost tearfully, and said to the melted woman: “You’re right, Martha; it’s much better for us to examine accounts in a friendly way, than to have strangers and lawyers, and what not—people who can’t possibly know the whole history, don’t you see—meddling and making a scandal; and I’m much obliged to you for coming.”

Page 845

Vainly Mrs. Chump employed alternately innuendo and outcry to make him perceive that her coming involved a softer business, and that to money, she having it now, she gave not a thought. He assured her that in future she must; that such was his express desire; that it was her duty to herself and others. And while saying this, which seemed to indicate that widowhood would be her state as far as he was concerned, he pressed her hand with extreme sweetness, and his bird's-eyes twinkled obligingly. It is to be feared that Mr. Pole had passed the age of improvement, save in his peculiar art. After a time Nature stops, and says to us 'thou art now what thou wilt be.'

Cornelia was in black from neck to foot. She joined the conversation as the others did, and indeed more flowingly than Adela, whose visage was soured. It was Cornelia to whom Merthyr explained his temporary subjection to the piteous appeals of Mrs. Chump. She smiled humorously to reassure him of her perfect comprehension of the apology for his visit, and of his welcome: and they talked, argued a little, differed, until the terrible thought that he talked, and even looked like some one else, drew the blood from her lips, and robbed her pulses of their play. She spoke of Emilia, saying plainly and humbly: "All we have is owing to her." Arabella spoke of Emilia likewise, but with a shade of the foregone tone of patronage. "She will always be our dear little sister." Adela continued silent, as with ears awake for the opening of a door. Was it in ever-thwarted anticipation of the coming of Sir Twickenham?

Merthyr's inquiry after Wilfrid produced a momentary hesitation on Cornelia's Part—"He has gone to Verona. We have an uncle in the Austrian service," she said; and Merthyr bowed.

What was this tale of Emilia, that grew more and more perplexing as he heard it bit by bit? The explanation awaited him at Richford. There, when Georgiana had clasped her brother in one last jealous embrace, she gave him the following letter straightway, to save him, haply, from the false shame of that eager demand for one, which she saw ready to leap to words in his eyes. He read it, sitting in the Richford library alone, while the great rhododendron bloomed outside, above the shaven sunny sward, looking like a monstrous tropic bird alighted to brood an hour in full sunlight.

"My Friend!"

"I would say my Beloved! I will not write it, for it would be false. I have read of the defeat. Why was a battle risked at that cruel place! Here are we to be again for so many years before we can win God to be on our side! And I—do you not know? we used to talk of it!—I never can think it the Devil who has got the upper hand. What succeeds, I always think should succeed—was meant to, because the sky looks clear over it. This knocks a blow at my heart and keeps it silent and only just beating. I feel that you are safe. That, I am thankful for. If you were not, God would warn me, and not let me mock him with thanks when I pray. I pray till my eyelids burn, on purpose to get a warning if there is any black messenger to be sent to me. I do not believe it.

Page 846

“For three years I am a prisoner. I go to the Conservatorio in Milan with Mr. Pericles, and my poor little mother, who cries, asking me where she will be among such a people, until I wonder she should be my mother. My voice has returned. Oh, Merthyr! my dear, calm friend! to keep calling you friend, and friend, puts me to sleep softly!—Yes, I have my voice. I felt I had it, like some one in a room with us when we will not open our eyes. There was misery everywhere, and yet I was glad. I kept it secret. I began to feel myself above the world. I dreamed of what I would do for everybody. I thought of you least! I tell you so, and take a scourge and scourge myself, for it is true that in her new joy this miserable creature that I am thought of you least. Now I have the punishment!

“My friend! the Poles were at the mercy of Mr. Pericles: Wilfrid had struck him: Mr. Pericles was angry and full of mischief. Those dear people had been kind to me, and I heard they were poor. I felt money in my breast, in my throat, that only wanted coining. I went to Georgiana, and oh! how truly she proved to me that she loves you better than I do. She refused to part with money that you might soon want. I laid a scheme for Mr. Pericles to hear me sing. He heard me, and my scheme succeeded. If Italy knew as well as I, she would never let her voice be heard till she is sure of it:—Yes! from foot to head, I knew it was impossible to fail. If a country means to be free, the fire must run through it and make it feel that certainty. Then—away the whitecoat! I sang, and the man twisted, as if I had bent him in my hand. He rushed to me, and offered me any terms I pleased, if for three years I would go to the Conservatorio at Milan, and learn submissively. It is a little grief to me that I think this man loves music more deeply than I do. In the two things I love best, the love of others exceeds mine. I named a sum of money—immense! and I desired that Mr. Pericles should assist Mr. Pole in his business. He consented at once to everything. The next day he gave me the money, and I signed my name and pledged my honour to an engagement. My friends were relieved.

“It was then I began to think of you. I had not to study the matter long to learn that I did not love you: and I will not trust my own feelings as they come to me now. I judge myself by my acts, or, Merthyr! I should sink to the ground like a dead body when I think of separation from you for three years. But, what am I? I am a raw girl. I command nothing but raw and flighty hearts of men. Are they worth anything? Let me study three years, without any talk of hearts at all. It commenced too early, and has left nothing to me but a dreadful knowledge of the weakness in most people:—not in you!

Page 847

“If I might call you my Beloved! and so chain myself to you, I think I should have all your firmness and double my strength. I will not; for I will not have what I do not deserve. I think of you reading this, till I try to get to you; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy. By what I have done I know I do not love you. Must we half-despise a man to love him? May no dear woman that I know ever marry the man she first loves! My misery now is gladness, is like rain-drops on rising wings, if I say to myself ‘Free! free, Emilia!’ I am bound for three years, but I smile at such a bondage to my body. Evviva! my soul is free! Three years of freedom, and no sounding of myself—three years of growing, and studying; three years of idle heart!—Merthyr! I throb to think that those three years—true man! my hero, I may call you!—those three years may make me worthy of you. And if you have given all to Italy, that a daughter of Italy should help to return it, seems, my friend, so tenderly sweet—here is the first drop from my eyes!

“I would break what you call a Sentiment: I broke my word to Wilfrid. But this sight of money has a meaning that I cannot conquer. I know you would not wish me to for your own pleasure; and therefore I go. I hope to be growing; I fly like a seed to Italy. Let me drill, and take sharp words, and fret at trifles! I lift my face to that prospect as if I smelt new air. I am changeing—I have no dreams of Italy, no longings, but go to see her like a machine ready to do my work. Whoever speaks to me, I feel that I look at them and know them. I see the faults of my country—Oh, beloved Breseians! not yours, Florentines! nor yours, dear Venice! We will be silent when they speak of the Milanese, till Italy can say to them, ‘That conduct is not Italian, my children.’ I see the faults. Nothing vexes me.

“Addio! My friend, we will speak English in dear England! Tell all that I shall never forget England! My English Merthyr! the blood you have shed is not for a woman. The blood that you have shed, laurels spring from it! For a woman, the blood spilt is sickly and poor, and nourishes nothing. I shudder at the thought of one we knew. He makes Love seem like a yellow light over a plague-spotted city, like a painting I have seen. Goodbye to the name of Love for three years! My engagement to Mr. Pericles is that I am not to write, not to receive letters. To you I say now, trust me for three years! Merthyr’s answer is already in my bosom. Beloved!—let me say it once—when the answer to any noble thing I might ask of you is in my bosom instantly, is not that as much as marriage? But be under no deception. See me as I am. Oh, good-bye! good-bye! Good-bye to you! Good-bye to England!

“I am,

“Most humbly and affectionately,
“Your friend,
“And her daughter by the mother’s side,

“Emilia Alessandra Belloni.”

Page 848

Etext editor's bookmarks

A plunge into the deep is of little moment
A marriage without love is dishonour
Active despair is a passion that must be superseded
Am I ill? I must be hungry!
And, ladies, if you will consent to be likened to a fruit
And he passed along the road, adds the Philosopher
Bear in mind that we are sentimentalists—The eye is our servant
Being heard at night, in the nineteenth century
Beyond a plot of flowers, a gold-green meadow dipped to a ridge
But love for a parent is not merely duty
Depreciating it after the fashion of chartered hypocrites.
Emilia alone of the party was as a blot to her
Fine Shades were still too dominant at Brookfield
Had Shakespeare's grandmother three Christian names?
He thinks that the country must be saved by its women as well
His alien ideas were not unimpressed by the picture
Hushing together, they agreed that it had been a false move
I had to cross the park to give a lesson
I cannot delay; but I request you, that are here privileged
I had to make my father and mother live on potatoes
I detest anything that has to do with gratitude
I know that your father has been hearing tales told of me
I am not ashamed
It was as if she had been eyeing a golden door shut fast
Littlenesses of which women are accused
Love that shrieks at a mortal wound, and bleeds humanly
Love discerns unerringly what is and what is not duty
Love the poor devil
Love, with his accustomed cunning
Man who beats his wife my first question is, 'Do he take his tea?'
My mistress! My glorious stolen fruit! My dark angel of love
My voice! I have my voice! Emilia had cried it out to herself
My engagement to Mr. Pericles is that I am not to write
No nose to the hero, no moral to the tale
Nor can a protest against coarseness be sweepingly interpreted
Oh! beastly bathos
On a wild April morning
Once my love? said he. Not now?—does it mean, not now?
One of those men whose characters are read off at a glance
Our partner is our master
Passion does not inspire dark appetite—Dainty innocence does

Passion, he says, is noble strength on fire
Pleasure sat like an inextinguishable light on her face
Poor mortals are not in the habit of climbing Olympus to ask
Revived for them so much of themselves
She was perhaps a little the taller of the two
She had great awe of the word ‘business’
Silence was their only protection to the Nice Feelings
So it is when you play at Life! When you will not go straight
Solitude is pasturage for a suspicion
The majority, however,

Page 849

had been snatched out of this bliss
The circle which the ladies of Brookfield were designing
The woman follows the man, and music fits to verse,
The sentimentalists are represented by them among the civilized
The dismally-lighted city wore a look of Judgement terrible to see
The sentimentalist goes on accumulating images
The gallant cornet adored delicacy and a gilded refinement
The philosopher (I would keep him back if I could)
Their way was down a green lane and across long meadow-paths
They, meantime, who had a contempt for sleep
They had all noticed, seen, and observed
To know that you are in England, breathing the same air with me
True love excludes no natural duty
Victims of the modern feminine ‘ideal’
We have now looked into the hazy interior of their systems
We are, in short, a civilized people
What was this tale of Emilia, that grew more and more perplexing
Wilfrid perceived that he had become an old man
Women are wonderfully quick scholars under ridicule
You have not to be told that I desire your happiness above all

RHODA FLEMING, complete

By George Meredith

CONTENTS

Book 1.
I. *The Kentish family*
ii. *Queen Anne’s farm*
III. *Suggests the might of the money demon*
iv. *The text from Scripture*
V. *The sisters meet*
vi. *Edward and Algernon*
VII. *Great news from dahlia*
viii. *Introduces Mrs*. *Lovell*
IX. *Robert intervenes*
X. *Dahlia is not visible*
xi. *An indicative duet in* A *minor key*

Book 2.
XII. *At the theatre*.

XIII. *The farmer speaks*
xiv. *Between Rhoda and Robert*
xi. A *visit to Wrexby hall*
XII. *At fairly park*
xvii. A *yeoman of the old breed*
XVIII. *An assembly at the pilot inn*
XIX. *Robert smitten low*
XX. *Mrs*. *Lovell shows* A *tame brute*

Page 850

Book 3.
XXI. *Gives* A *glimpse of what poor villanies the story contains*
XXII. *Edward takes his course*
XXIII. *Major Percy Waring*
XXIV. *Warbeach village church*
XXV. *Of the fearful temptation which came upon Anthony hackbut*, *and of his meeting with dahlia*
XXVI. *In the park*
XXVII. *Contains* A *study of* A *fool in trouble*
XXVIII. *Edward's letter*
XXIX. *Furthermore of the fool*

Book 4.
XXX. *The expiation*
XXXI. *The melting of the thousand*
XXXII. *La question* D'ARGENT
XXXIII. *Edward's return*
XXXIV. *Father and son*
XXXV. *The night before*
XXXVI. *Edward meets his match*
XXXVII. *Edward tries his eloquence*
XXXVIII. *Too late*

Book 5.
XXXIX. *Dahlia goes home*
XL. A *freak of the money-demon*, *that may have been anticipated*
XLI. *Dahlia's frenzy*
XLII. *Anthony in* A *collapse*
XLIII. *Rhoda pledges her hand*
XLIV. *The enemy appears*
XLV. *The farmer is awakened*
XLVI. *When the night is darkest*
XLVII. *Dawn is near*
XLVIII. *Conclusion*

CHAPTER I

Remains of our good yeomanry blood will be found in Kent, developing stiff, solid, unobtrusive men, and very personable women. The distinction survives there between Kentish women and women of Kent, as a true South-eastern dame will let you know, if it is her fortune to belong to that favoured portion of the county where the great battle was fought, in which the gentler sex performed manful work, but on what luckless heads we hear not; and when garrulous tradition is discreet, the severe historic Muse declines to

hazard a guess. Saxon, one would presume, since it is thought something to have broken them.

My plain story is of two Kentish damsels, and runs from a home of flowers into regions where flowers are few and sickly, on to where the flowers which breathe sweet breath have been proved in mortal fire.

Page 851

Mrs. Fleming, of Queen Anne's Farm, was the wife of a yeoman-farmer of the county. Both were of sound Kentish extraction, albeit varieties of the breed. The farm had its name from a tradition, common to many other farmhouses within a circuit of the metropolis, that the ante-Hanoverian lady had used the place in her day as a nursery-hospital for the royal little ones. It was a square three-storied building of red brick, much beaten and stained by the weather, with an ivied side, up which the ivy grew stoutly, topping the roof in triumphant lumps. The house could hardly be termed picturesque. Its aspect had struck many eyes as being very much that of a red-coat sentinel grenadier, battered with service, and standing firmly enough, though not at ease. Surrounding it was a high wall, built partly of flint and partly of brick, and ringed all over with grey lichen and brown spots of bearded moss, that bore witness to the touch of many winds and rains. Tufts of pale grass, and gilliflowers, and travelling stone-crop, hung from the wall, and driblets of ivy ran broadening to the outer ground. The royal Arms were said to have surmounted the great iron gateway; but they had vanished, either with the family, or at the indications of an approaching rust. Rust defiled its bars; but, when you looked through them, the splendour of an unrivalled garden gave vivid signs of youth, and of the taste of an orderly, laborious, and cunning hand.

The garden was under Mrs. Fleming's charge. The joy of her love for it was written on its lustrous beds, as poets write. She had the poetic passion for flowers. Perhaps her taste may now seem questionable. She cherished the old-fashioned delight in tulips; the house was reached on a gravel-path between rows of tulips, rich with one natural blush, or freaked by art. She liked a bulk of colour; and when the dahlia dawned upon our gardens, she gave her heart to dahlias. By good desert, the fervent woman gained a prize at a flower-show for one of her dahlias, and `Dahlia' was the name uttered at the christening of her eldest daughter, at which all Wrexby parish laughed as long as the joke could last. There was laughter also when Mrs. Fleming's second daughter received the name of 'Rhoda;' but it did not endure for so long a space, as it was known that she had taken more to the solitary and reflective reading of her Bible, and to thoughts upon flowers eternal. Country people are not inclined to tolerate the display of a passion for anything. They find it as intrusive and exasperating as is, in the midst of larger congregations, what we call genius. For some years, Mrs. Fleming's proceedings were simply a theme for gossips, and her vanity was openly pardoned, until that delusively prosperous appearance which her labour lent to the house, was worn through by the enforced confession of there being poverty in the household. The ragged elbow was then projected in the face of Wrexby in a manner to preclude it from a sober appreciation of the fairness of the face.

Page 852

Critically, moreover, her admission of great poppy-heads into her garden was objected to. She would squander her care on poppies, and she had been heard to say that, while she lived, her children should be fully fed. The encouragement of flaunting weeds in a decent garden was indicative of a moral twist that the expressed resolution to supply her table with plentiful nourishment, no matter whence it came, or how provided, sufficiently confirmed. The reason with which she was stated to have fortified her stern resolve was of the irritating order, right in the abstract, and utterly unprincipled in the application. She said, `Good bread, and good beef, and enough of both, make good blood; and my children shall be stout.' This is such a thing as maybe announced by foreign princesses and rulers over serfs; but English Wrexby, in cogitative mood, demanded an equivalent for its beef and divers economies consumed by the hungry children of the authoritative woman. Practically it was obedient, for it had got the habit of supplying her. Though payment was long in arrear, the arrears were not treated as lost ones by Mrs. Fleming, who, without knowing it, possessed one main secret for mastering the custodians of credit. She had a considerate remembrance and regard for the most distant of her debts, so that she seemed to be only always a little late, and exceptionally wrongheaded in theory. Wrexby, therefore, acquiesced in helping to build up her children to stoutness, and but for the blindness of all people, save artists, poets, novelists, to the grandeur of their own creations, the inhabitants of this Kentish village might have had an enjoyable pride in the beauty and robust grace of the young girls,—-fair-haired, black-haired girls, a kindred contrast, like fire and smoke, to look upon. In stature, in bearing, and in expression, they were, if I may adopt the eloquent modern manner of eulogy, strikingly above their class. They carried erect shoulders, like creatures not ashamed of showing a merely animal pride, which is never quite apart from the pride of developed beauty. They were as upright as Oriental girls, whose heads are nobly poised from carrying the pitcher to the well. Dark Rhoda might have passed for Rachel, and Dahlia called her Rachel. They tossed one another their mutual compliments, drawn from the chief book of their reading. Queen of Sheba was Dahlia's title. No master of callisthenics could have set them up better than their mother's receipt for making good blood, combined with a certain harmony of their systems, had done; nor could a schoolmistress have taught them correcter speaking. The characteristic of girls having a disposition to rise, is to be cravingly mimetic; and they remembered, and crooned over, till by degrees they adopted the phrases and manner of speech of highly grammatical people, such as the rector and his lady, and of people in story-books, especially of the courtly French fairy-books, wherein the princes talk in periods as sweetly rounded as are their silken calves; nothing less than angelically, so as to be a model to ordinary men.

Page 853

The idea of love upon the lips of ordinary men, provoked Dahlia's irony; and the youths of Wrexby and Fenhurst had no chance against her secret Prince Florizels. Them she endowed with no pastoral qualities; on the contrary, she conceived that such pure young gentlemen were only to be seen, and perhaps met, in the great and mystic City of London. Naturally, the girls dreamed of London. To educate themselves, they copied out whole pages of a book called the `Field of Mars,' which was next to the family Bible in size among the volumes of the farmer's small library. The deeds of the heroes of this book, and the talk of the fairy princes, were assimilated in their minds; and as they looked around them upon millers', farmers', maltsters', and tradesmen's sons, the thought of what manner of youth would propose to marry them became a precocious tribulation. Rhoda, at the age of fifteen, was distracted by it, owing to her sister's habit of masking her own dismal internal forebodings on the subject, under the guise of a settled anxiety concerning her sad chance.

In dress, the wife of the rector of Wrexby was their model. There came once to Squire Blancove's unoccupied pew a dazzling vision of a fair lady. They heard that she was a cousin of his third wife, and a widow, Mrs. Lovell by name. They looked at her all through the service, and the lady certainly looked at them in return; nor could they, with any distinctness, imagine why, but the look dwelt long in their hearts, and often afterward, when Dahlia, upon taking her seat in church, shut her eyes, according to custom, she strove to conjure up the image of herself, as she had appeared to the beautiful woman in the dress of grey-shot silk, with violet mantle and green bonnet, rose-trimmed; and the picture she conceived was the one she knew herself by, for many ensuing years.

Mrs. Fleming fought her battle with a heart worthy of her countrywomen, and with as much success as the burden of a despondent husband would allow to her. William John Fleming was simply a poor farmer, for whom the wheels of the world went too fast: —a big man, appearing to be difficult to kill, though deeply smitten. His cheeks bloomed in spite of lines and stains, and his large, quietly dilated, brown ox-eyes, that never gave out a meaning, seldom showed as if they had taken one from what they saw. Until his wife was lost to him, he believed that he had a mighty grievance against her; but as he was not wordy, and was by nature kind, it was her comfort to die and not to know it. This grievance was rooted in the idea that she was ruinously extravagant. The sight of the plentiful table was sore to him; the hungry mouths, though he grudged to his offspring nothing that he could pay for, were an afflicting prospect. "Plump 'em up, and make 'em dainty," he advanced in contravention of his wife's talk of bread and beef.

Page 854

But he did not complain. If it came to an argument, the farmer sidled into a secure corner of prophecy, and bade his wife to see what would come of having dainty children. He could not deny that bread and beef made blood, and were cheaper than the port-wine which doctors were in the habit of ordering for this and that delicate person in the neighbourhood; so he was compelled to have recourse to secret discontent. The attention, the time, and the trifles of money shed upon the flower garden, were hardships easier to bear. He liked flowers, and he liked to hear the praise of his wife's horticultural skill. The garden was a distinguishing thing to the farm, and when on a Sunday he walked home from church among full June roses, he felt the odour of them to be so like his imagined sensations of prosperity, that the deception was worth its cost. Yet the garden in its bloom revived a cruel blow. His wife had once wounded his vanity. The massed vanity of a silent man, when it does take a wound, desires a giant's vengeance; but as one can scarcely seek to enjoy that monstrous gratification when one's wife is the offender, the farmer escaped from his dilemma by going apart into a turnip-field, and swearing, with his fist outstretched, never to forget it. His wife had asked him, seeing that the garden flourished and the farm decayed, to yield the labour of the farm to the garden; in fact, to turn nurseryman under his wife's direction. The woman could not see that her garden drained the farm already, distracted the farm, and most evidently impoverished him. She could not understand, that in permitting her, while he sweated fruitlessly, to give herself up to the occupation of a lady, he had followed the promptings of his native kindness, and certainly not of his native wisdom. That she should deem herself `best man' of the two, and suggest his stamping his name to such an opinion before the world, was an outrage.

Mrs. Fleming was failing in health. On that plea, with the solemnity suited to the autumn of her allotted days, she persuaded her husband to advertise for an assistant, who would pay a small sum of money to learn sound farming, and hear arguments in favour of the Corn Laws. To please her, he threw seven shillings away upon an advertisement, and laughed when the advertisement was answered, remarking that he doubted much whether good would come of dealings with strangers. A young man, calling himself Robert Armstrong, underwent a presentation to the family. He paid the stipulated sum, and was soon enrolled as one of them. He was of a guardsman's height and a cricketer's suppleness, a drinker of water, and apparently the victim of a dislike of his species; for he spoke of the great night-lighted city with a horror that did not seem to be an estimable point in him, as judged by a pair of damsels for whom the mysterious metropolis flew with fiery fringes through dark space, in their dreams.

In other respects, the stranger was well thought of, as being handsome and sedate. He talked fondly of one friend that he had, an officer in the army, which was considered pardonably vain. He did not reach to the ideal of his sex which had been formed by the sisters; but Mrs. Fleming, trusting to her divination of his sex's character, whispered a mother's word about him to her husband a little while before her death.

Page 855

It was her prayer to heaven that she might save a doctor's bill. She died, without lingering illness, in her own beloved month of June; the roses of her tending at the open window, and a soft breath floating up to her from the garden. On the foregoing May-day, she had sat on the green that fronted the iron gateway, when Dahlia and Rhoda dressed the children of the village in garlands, and crowned the fairest little one queen of May: a sight that revived in Mrs. Fleming's recollection the time of her own eldest and fairest taking homage, shy in her white smock and light thick curls. The gathering was large, and the day was of the old nature of May, before tyrannous Eastwinds had captured it and spoiled its consecration. The mill-stream of the neighbouring mill ran blue among the broad green pastures; the air smelt of cream-bowls and wheaten loaves; the firs on the beacon-ridge, far southward, over Fenhurst and Helm villages, were transported nearer to see the show, and stood like friends anxious to renew acquaintance. Dahlia and Rhoda taught the children to perceive how they resembled bent old beggar-men. The two stone-pines in the miller's grounds were likened by them to Adam and Eve turning away from the blaze of Paradise; and the saying of one receptive child, that they had nothing but hair on, made the illustration undying both to Dahlia and Rhoda.

The magic of the weather brought numerous butterflies afield, and one fiddler, to whose tuning the little women danced; others closer upon womanhood would have danced likewise, if the sisters had taken partners; but Dahlia was restrained by the sudden consciousness that she was under the immediate observation of two manifestly London gentlemen, and she declined to be led forth by Robert Armstrong. The intruders were youths of good countenance, known to be the son and the nephew of Squire Blancove of Wrexby Hall. They remained for some time watching the scene, and destroyed Dahlia's single-mindedness. Like many days of gaiety, the Gods consenting, this one had its human shadow. There appeared on the borders of the festivity a young woman, the daughter of a Wrexby cottager, who had left her home and but lately returned to it, with a spotted name. No one addressed her, and she stood humbly apart. Dahlia, seeing that every one moved away from her, whispering with satisfied noddings, wished to draw her in among the groups. She mentioned the name of Mary Burt to her father, supposing that so kind a man would not fail to sanction her going up to the neglected young woman. To her surprise, her father became violently enraged, and uttered a stern prohibition, speaking a word that stained her cheeks. Rhoda was by her side, and she wilfully, without asking leave, went straight over to Mary, and stood with her under the shadow of the Adam and Eve, until the farmer sent a messenger to say that he was about to enter the house. Her punishment for the act of sinfulness was a week of severe silence; and the farmer would have kept

Page 856

her to it longer, but for her mother's ominously growing weakness. The sisters were strangely overclouded by this incident. They could not fathom the meaning of their father's unkindness, coarseness, and indignation. Why, and why? they asked one another, blankly. The Scriptures were harsh in one part, but was the teaching to continue so after the Atonement? By degrees they came to reflect, and not in a mild spirit, that the kindest of men can be cruel, and will forget their Christianity toward offending and repentant women.

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Fleming had a brother in London, who had run away from his Kentish home when a small boy, and found refuge at a Bank. The position of Anthony Hackbut in that celebrated establishment, and the degree of influence exercised by him there, were things unknown; but he had stuck to the Bank for a great number of years, and he had once confessed to his sister that he was not a beggar. Upon these joint facts the farmer speculated, deducing from them that a man in a London Bank, holding money of his own, must have learnt the ways of turning it over—farming golden ground, as it were; consequently, that amount must now have increased to a very considerable sum. You ask, What amount? But one who sits brooding upon a pair of facts for years, with the imperturbable gravity of creation upon chaos, will be as successful in evoking the concrete from the abstract. The farmer saw round figures among the possessions of the family, and he assisted mentally in this money-turning of Anthony's, counted his gains for him, disposed his risks, and eyed the pile of visionary gold with an interest so remote, that he was almost correct in calling it disinterested. The brothers-in-law had a mutual plea of expense that kept them separate. When Anthony refused, on petition, to advance one hundred pounds to the farmer, there was ill blood to divide them. Queen Anne's Farm missed the flourishing point by one hundred pounds exactly. With that addition to its exchequer, it would have made head against its old enemy, Taxation, and started rejuvenescent. But the Radicals were in power to legislate and crush agriculture, and "I've got a miser for my brother-in-law," said the farmer. Alas! the hundred pounds to back him, he could have sowed what he pleased, and when it pleased him, partially defying the capricious clouds and their treasures, and playing tunefully upon his land, his own land. Instead of which, and while too keenly aware that the one hundred would have made excesses in any direction tributary to his pocket, the poor man groaned at continuous falls of moisture, and when rain was prayed for in church, he had to be down on his knees, praying heartily with the rest of the congregation. It was done, and bitter reproaches were cast upon Anthony for the enforced necessity to do it.

Page 857

On the occasion of his sister's death, Anthony informed his bereaved brother-in-law that he could not come down to follow the hearse as a mourner. "My place is one of great trust;" he said, "and I cannot be spared." He offered, however, voluntarily to pay half the expenses of the funeral, stating the limit of the cost. It is unfair to sound any man's springs of action critically while he is being tried by a sorrow; and the farmer's angry rejection of Anthony's offer of aid must pass. He remarked in his letter of reply, that his wife's funeral should cost no less than he chose to expend on it. He breathed indignant fumes against "interferences." He desired Anthony to know that he also was "not a beggar," and that he would not be treated as one. The letter showed a solid yeoman's fist. Farmer Fleming told his chums, and the shopkeeper of Wrexby, with whom he came into converse, that he would honour his dead wife up to his last penny. Some month or so afterward it was generally conjectured that he had kept his word.

Anthony's rejoinder was characterized by a marked humility. He expressed contrition for the farmer's misunderstanding of his motives. His fathomless conscience had plainly been reached. He wrote again, without waiting for an answer, speaking of the Funds indeed, but only to pronounce them worldly things, and hoping that they all might meet in heaven, where brotherly love, as well as money, was ready made, and not always in the next street. A hint occurred that it would be a gratification to him to be invited down, whether he could come or no; for holidays were expensive, and journeys by rail had to be thought over before they were undertaken; and when you are away from your post, you never knew who maybe supplanting you. He did not promise that he could come, but frankly stated his susceptibility to the friendliness of an invitation. The feeling indulged by Farmer Fleming in refusing to notice Anthony's advance toward a reconciliation, was, on the whole, not creditable to him. Spite is more often fattened than propitiated by penitence. He may have thought besides (policy not being always a vacant space in revengeful acts) that Anthony was capable of something stronger and warmer, now that his humanity had been aroused. The speculation is commonly perilous; but Farmer Fleming had the desperation of a man who has run slightly into debt, and has heard the first din of dunning, which to the unaccustomed imagination is fearful as bankruptcy (shorn of the horror of the word). And, moreover, it was so wonderful to find Anthony displaying humanity at all, that anything might be expected of him. "Let's see what he will do," thought the farmer in an interval of his wrath; and the wrath is very new which has none of these cool intervals. The passions, do but watch them, are all more or less intermittent.

Page 858

As it chanced, he acted sagaciously, for Anthony at last wrote to say that his home in London was cheerless, and that he intended to move into fresh and airier lodgings, where the presence of a discreet young housekeeper, who might wish to see London, and make acquaintance with the world, would be agreeable to him. His project was that one of his nieces should fill this office, and he requested his brother-in-law to reflect on it, and to think of him as of a friend of the family, now and in the time to come. Anthony spoke of the seductions of London quite unctuously. Who could imagine this to be the letter of an old crabbed miser? "Tell her," he said, "there's fruit at stalls at every street-corner all the year through—oysters and whelks, if she likes—winkles, lots of pictures in shops—a sight of muslin and silks, and rides on omnibuses—bands of all sorts, and now and then we can take a walk to see the military on horseback, if she's for soldiers." Indeed, he joked quite comically in speaking of the famous horse-guards—warriors who sit on their horses to be looked at, and do not mind it, because they are trained so thoroughly. "Horse-guards blue, and horse-guards red," he wrote—"the blue only want boiling." There is reason to suppose that his disrespectful joke was not original in him, but it displayed his character in a fresh light. Of course, if either of the girls was to go, Dahlia was the person. The farmer commenced his usual process of sitting upon the idea. That it would be policy to attach one of the family to this chirping old miser, he thought incontestable. On the other hand, he had a dread of London, and Dahlia was surpassingly fair. He put the case to Robert, in remembrance of what his wife had spoken, hoping that Robert would amorously stop his painful efforts to think fast enough for the occasion. Robert, however, had nothing to say, and seemed willing to let Dahlia depart. The only opponents to the plan were Mrs. Sumfit, a kindly, humble relative of the farmer's, widowed out of Sussex, very loving and fat; the cook to the household, whose waist was dimly indicated by her apron-string; and, to aid her outcries, the silently-protesting Master Gammon, an old man with the cast of eye of an antediluvian lizard, the slowest old man of his time—a sort of foreman of the farm before Robert had come to take matters in hand, and thrust both him and his master into the background. Master Gammon remarked emphatically, once and for all, that "he never had much opinion of London." As he had never visited London, his opinion was considered the less weighty, but, as he advanced no further speech, the sins and backslidings of the metropolis were strongly brought to mind by his condemnatory utterance. Policy and Dahlia's entreaties at last prevailed with the farmer, and so the fair girl went up to the great city.

Page 859

After months of a division that was like the division of her living veins, and when the comfort of letters was getting cold, Rhoda, having previously pledged herself to secresy, though she could not guess why it was commanded, received a miniature portrait of Dahlia, so beautiful that her envy of London for holding her sister away from her, melted in gratitude. She had permission to keep the portrait a week; it was impossible to forbear from showing it to Mrs. Sumfit, who peeped in awe, and that emotion subsiding, shed tears abundantly. Why it was to be kept secret, they failed to inquire; the mystery was possibly not without its delights to them. Tears were shed again when the portrait had to be packed up and despatched. Rhoda lived on abashed by the adorable new refinement of Dahlia's features, and her heart yearned to her uncle for so caring to decorate the lovely face.

One day Rhoda was at her bed-room window, on the point of descending to encounter the daily dumpling, which was the principal and the unvarying item of the midday meal of the house, when she beheld a stranger trying to turn the handle of the iron gate. Her heart thumped. She divined correctly that it was her uncle. Dahlia had now been absent for very many months, and Rhoda's growing fretfulness sprang the conviction in her mind that something closer than letters must soon be coming. She ran downstairs, and along the gravel-path. He was a little man, square-built, and looking as if he had worn to toughness; with an evident Sunday suit on: black, and black gloves, though the day was only antecedent to Sunday.

"Let me help you, sir," she said, and her hands came in contact with his, and were squeezed.

"How is my sister?" She had no longer any fear in asking.

"Now, you let me through, first," he replied, imitating an arbitrary juvenile. "You're as tight locked in as if you was in dread of all the thieves of London. You ain't afraid o' me, miss? I'm not the party generally outside of a fortification; I ain't, I can assure you. I'm a defence party, and a reg'lar lion when I've got the law backing me."

He spoke in a queer, wheezy voice, like a cracked flute, combined with the effect of an ill-resined fiddle-bow.

"You are in the garden of Queen Anne's Farm," said Rhoda.

"And you're my pretty little niece, are you? 'the darkie lass,' as your father says. 'Little,' says I; why, you needn't be ashamed to stand beside a grenadier. Trust the country for growing fine gals."

"You are my uncle, then?" said Rhoda. "Tell me how my sister is. Is she well? Is she quite happy?"

“Dahly?” returned old Anthony, slowly.

“Yes, yes; my sister!” Rhoda looked at him with distressful eagerness.

“Now, don’t you be uneasy about your sister Dahly.” Old Anthony, as he spoke, fixed his small brown eyes on the girl, and seemed immediately to have departed far away in speculation. A question recalled him.

Page 860

“Is her health good?”

“Ay; stomach’s good, head’s good, lungs, brain, what not, all good. She’s a bit giddy, that’s all.”

“In her head?”

“Ay; and on her pins. Never you mind. You look a steady one, my dear. I shall take to you, I think.”

“But my sister—” Rhoda was saying, when the farmer came out, and sent a greeting from the threshold,—

“Brother Tony!”

“Here he is, brother William John.”

“Surely, and so he is, at last.” The farmer walked up to him with his hand out.

“And it ain’t too late, I hope. Eh?”

“It’s never too late—to mend,” said the farmer.

“Eh? not my manners, eh?” Anthony struggled to keep up the ball; and in this way they got over the confusion of the meeting after many years and some differences.

“Made acquaintance with Rhoda, I see,” said the farmer, as they turned to go in.

“The ‘darkie lass’ you write of. She’s like a coal nigh a candle. She looks, as you’d say, ‘t’ other side of her sister.’ Yes, we’ve had a talk.”

“Just in time for dinner, brother Tony. We ain’t got much to offer, but what there is, is at your service. Step aside with me.”

The farmer got Anthony out of hearing a moment, questioned, and was answered: after which he looked less anxious, but a trifle perplexed, and nodded his head as Anthony occasionally lifted his, to enforce certain points in some halting explanation. You would have said that a debtor was humbly putting his case in his creditor’s ear, and could only now and then summon courage to meet the censorious eyes. They went in to Mrs. Sumfit’s shout that the dumplings were out of the pot: old Anthony bowed upon the announcement of his name, and all took seats. But it was not the same sort of dinner-hour as that which the inhabitants of the house were accustomed to; there was conversation.

The farmer asked Anthony by what conveyance he had come. Anthony shyly, but not without evident self-approbation, related how, having come by the train, he got into conversation with the driver of a fly at a station, who advised him of a cart that would be passing near Wrexby. For threepennyworth of beer, he had got a friendly introduction to the carman, who took him within two miles of the farm for one shilling, a distance of fifteen miles. That was pretty good!

“Home pork, brother Tony,” said the farmer, approvingly.

“And home-made bread, too, brother William John,” said Anthony, becoming brisk.

“Ay, and the beer, such as it is.” The farmer drank and sighed.

Anthony tried the beer, remarking, “That’s good beer; it don’t cost much.”

“It ain’t adulterated. By what I read of your London beer, this stuff’s not so bad, if you bear in mind it’s pure. Pure’s my motto. ’Pure, though poor!’”

“Up there, you pay for rank poison,” said Anthony. “So, what do I do? I drink water and thank ’em, that’s wise.”

Page 861

“Saves stomach and purse.” The farmer put a little stress on ‘purse.’

“Yes, I calculate I save threepence a day in beer alone,” said Anthony.

“Three times seven’s twenty-one, ain’t it?”

Mr. Fleming said this, and let out his elbow in a small perplexity, as Anthony took him up: “And fifty-two times twenty-one?”

“Well, that’s, that’s—how much is that, Mas’ Gammon?” the farmer asked in a bellow.

Master Gammon was laboriously and steadily engaged in tightening himself with dumpling. He relaxed his exertions sufficiently to take this new burden on his brain, and immediately cast it off.

“Ah never thinks when I feeds—Ah was al’ays a bad hand at ’counts. Gi’es it up.”

“Why, you’re like a horse that never was rode! Try again, old man,” said the farmer.

“If I drags a cart,” Master Gammon replied, “that ain’t no reason why I should leap a gate.”

The farmer felt that he was worsted as regarded the illustration, and with a bit of the boy’s fear of the pedagogue, he fought Anthony off by still pressing the arithmetical problem upon Master Gammon; until the old man, goaded to exasperation, rolled out thunderingly,—

“If I works fer ye, that ain’t no reason why I should think fer ye,” which caused him to be left in peace.

“Eh, Robert?” the farmer transferred the question; “Come! what is it?”

Robert begged a minute’s delay, while Anthony watched him with hawk eyes.

“I tell you what it is—it’s pounds,” said Robert.

This tickled Anthony, who let him escape, crying: “Capital! Pounds it is in your pocket, sir, and you hit that neatly, I will say. Let it be five. You out with your five at interest, compound interest; soon comes another five; treat it the same: in ten years—eh? and then you get into figures; you swim in figures!”

“I should think you did!” said the farmer, winking slyly.

Anthony caught the smile, hesitated and looked shrewd, and then covered his confusion by holding his plate to Mrs. Sumfit for a help. The manifest evasion and mute declaration that dumpling said “mum” on that head, gave the farmer a quiet glow.

“When you are ready to tell me all about my darlin’, sir,” Mrs. Sumfit suggested, coaxingly.

“After dinner, mother—after dinner,” said the farmer.

“And we’re waitin’, are we, till them dumplings is finished?” she exclaimed, piteously, with a glance at Master Gammon’s plate.

“After dinner we’ll have a talk, mother.”

Mrs. Sumfit feared from this delay that there was queer news to be told of Dahlia’s temper; but she longed for the narrative no whit the less, and again cast a sad eye on the leisurely proceedings of Master Gammon. The veteran was still calmly tightening. His fork was on end, with a vast mouthful impaled on the prongs. Master Gammon, a thoughtful eater, was always last at the meal, and a latent, deep-lying irritation at Mrs. Sumfit for her fidgetiness, day after day, toward the finish of the dish, added a relish to his engulfing of the monstrous morsel. He looked at her steadily, like an ox of the fields, and consumed it, and then holding his plate out, in a remorseless way, said, “You make ’em so good, marm.”

Page 862

Mrs. Sumfit, fretted as she was, was not impervious to the sound sense of the remark, as well as to the compliment.

“I don’t want to hurry you, Mas’ Gammon,” she said; “Lord knows, I like to see you and everybody eat his full and be thankful; but, all about my Dahly waitin’,—I feel pricked wi’ a pin all over, I do; and there’s my blessed in London,” she answered, “and we knowin’ nothin’ of her, and one close by to tell me! I never did feel what slow things dumplin’s was, afore now!”

The kettle simmered gently on the hob. Every other knife and fork was silent; so was every tongue. Master Gammon ate and the kettle hummed. Twice Mrs. Sumfit sounded a despairing, “Oh, deary me!” but it was useless. No human power had ever yet driven Master Gammon to a demonstration of haste or to any acceleration of the pace he had chosen for himself. At last, she was not to be restrained from crying out, almost tearfully,—

“When do you think you’ll have done, Mas’ Gammon?”

Thus pointedly addressed, Master Gammon laid down his knife and fork. He half raised his ponderous, curtaining eyelids, and replied,—

“When I feels my buttons, marm.”

After which he deliberately fell to work again.

Mrs. Sumfit dropped back in her chair as from a blow.

But even dumplings, though they resist so doggedly for a space, do ultimately submit to the majestic march of Time, and move. Master Gammon cleared his plate. There stood in the dish still half a dumpling. The farmer and Rhoda, deeming that there had been a show of inhospitality, pressed him to make away with this forlorn remainder.

The vindictive old man, who was as tight as dumpling and buttons could make him, refused it in a drooping tone, and went forth, looking at none. Mrs. Sumfit turned to all parties, and begged them to say what more, to please Master Gammon, she could have done? When Anthony was ready to speak of her Dahlia, she obtruded this question in utter dolefulness. Robert was kindly asked by the farmer to take a pipe among them. Rhoda put a chair for him, but he thanked them both, and said he could not neglect some work to be done in the fields. She thought that he feared pain from hearing Dahlia’s name, and followed him with her eyes commiseratingly.

“Does that young fellow attend to business?” said Anthony.

The farmer praised Robert as a rare hand, but one affected with bees in his nightcap,—-who had ideas of his own about farming, and was obstinate with them; “pays you due

respect, but's got a notion as how his way of thinking's better 'n his seniors. It's the style now with all young folks. Makes a butt of old Mas' Gammon; laughs at the old man. It ain't respectful t' age, I say. Gammon don't understand nothing about new feeds for sheep, and dam nonsense about growing such things as melons, fiddle-faddle, for 'em. Robert's a beginner. What he knows, I taught the young fellow. Then, my question is, where's his ideas come from, if they're contrary to mine? If they're contrary to mine, they're contrary to my teaching. Well, then, what are they worth? He can't see that. He's a good one at work—I'll say so much for him."

Page 863

Old Anthony gave Rhoda a pat on the shoulder.

CHAPTER III

“Pipes in the middle of the day’s regular revelry,” ejaculated Anthony, whose way of holding the curved pipe-stem displayed a mind bent on reckless enjoyment, and said as much as a label issuing from his mouth, like a figure in a comic woodcut of the old style:—“that’s,” he pursued, “that’s if you haven’t got to look up at the clock every two minutes, as if the devil was after you. But, sitting here, you know, the afternoon’s a long evening; nobody’s your master. You can on wi’ your slippers, up wi’ your legs, talk, or go for’ard, counting, twicing, and three-timesing; by George! I should take to drinking beer if I had my afternoons to myself in the city, just for the sake of sitting and doing sums in a tap-room; if it’s a big tap-room, with pew sort o’ places, and dark red curtains, a fire, and a smell of sawdust; ale, and tobacco, and a boy going by outside whistling a tune of the day. Somebody comes in. ‘Ah, there’s an idle old chap,’ he says to himself, (meaning me), and where, I should like to ask him, ’d his head be if he sat there dividing two hundred and fifty thousand by forty-five and a half!”

The farmer nodded encouragingly. He thought it not improbable that a short operation with these numbers would give the sum in Anthony’s possession, the exact calculation of his secret hoard, and he set to work to stamp them on his brain, which rendered him absent in manner, while Mrs. Sumfit mixed liquor with hot water, and pushed at his knee, doubling in her enduring lips, and lengthening her eyes to aim a side-glance of reprehension at Anthony’s wandering loquacity.

Rhoda could bear it no more.

“Now let me hear of my sister, uncle,” she said.

“I’ll tell you what,” Anthony responded, “she hasn’t got such a pretty sort of a sweet blackbirdy voice as you’ve got.”

The girl blushed scarlet.

“Oh, she can mount them colours, too,” said Anthony.

His way of speaking of Dahlia indicated that he and she had enough of one another; but of the peculiar object of his extraordinary visit not even the farmer had received a hint. Mrs. Sumfit ventured to think aloud that his grog was not stiff enough, but he took a gulp under her eyes, and smacked his lips after it in a most convincing manner.

“Ah! that stuff wouldn’t do for me in London, half-holiday or no half-holiday,” said Anthony.

“Why not?” the farmer asked.

“I should be speculating—deep—couldn’t hold myself in: Mexicans, Peroovians, Venzeshoolians, Spaniards, at ’em I should go. I see bonds in all sorts of colours, Spaniards in black and white, Peruvians—orange, Mexicans—red as the British army. Well, it’s just my whim. If I like red, I go at red. I ain’t a bit of reason. What’s more, I never speculate.”

“Why, that’s safest, brother Tony,” said the farmer.

Page 864

“And safe’s my game—always was, always will be! Do you think”—Anthony sucked his grog to the sugar-dregs, till the spoon settled on his nose—“do you think I should hold the position I do hold, be trusted as I am trusted? Ah! you don’t know much about that. Should I have money placed in my hands, do you think—and it’s thousands at a time, gold, and notes, and cheques—if I was a risky chap? I’m known to be thoroughly respectable. Five and forty years I’ve been in Boyne’s Bank, and thank ye, ma’am, grog don’t do no harm down here. And I will take another glass. ’When the heart of a man!’—but I’m no singer.”

Mrs. Sumfit simpered, “Hem; it’s the heart of a woman, too: and she have one, and it’s dying to hear of her darlin’ blessed in town, and of who cuts her hair, and where she gets her gownds, and whose pills—”

The farmer interrupted her irritably.

“Divide a couple o’ hundred thousand and more by forty-five and a half,” he said. “Do wait, mother; all in good time. Forty-five and a-half, brother Tony; that was your sum—-ah!—you mentioned it some time back—half of what? Is that half a fraction, as they call it? I haven’t forgot fractions, and logareems, and practice, and so on to algebrae, where it always seems to me to blow hard, for, whizz goes my head in a jiffy, as soon as I’ve mounted the ladder to look into that country. How ’bout that forty-five and a half, brother Tony, if you don’t mind condescending to explain?”

“Forty-five and a half?” muttered Anthony, mystified.

“Oh, never mind, you know, if you don’t like to say, brother Tony.” The farmer touched him up with his pipe-stem.

“Five and a half,” Anthony speculated. “That’s a fraction you got hold of, brother William John,—I remember the parson calling out those names at your wedding: ‘I, William John, take thee, Susan;’ yes, that’s a fraction, but what’s the good of it?”

“What I mean is, it ain’t forty-five and half of forty-five. Half of one, eh? That’s identical with a fraction. One—a stroke—and two under it.”

“You’ve got it correct,” Anthony assented.

“How many thousand divide it by?”

“Divide what by, brother William John? I’m beat.”

“Ah! out comes the keys: lockup everything; it’s time!” the farmer laughed, rather proud of his brother-in-law’s perfect wakefulness after two stiff tumblers. He saw that Anthony was determined with all due friendly feeling to let no one know the sum in his possession.

“If it’s four o’clock, it is time to lock up,” said Anthony, “and bang to go the doors, and there’s the money for thieves to dream of—they can’t get a-nigh it, let them dream as they like. What’s the hour, ma’am?”

“Not three, it ain’t,” returned Mrs. Sumfit; “and do be good creatures, and begin about my Dahly, and where she got that Bumptious gownd, and the bonnet with blue flowers lyin’ by on the table: now, do!”

Page 865

Rhoda coughed.

“And she wears lavender gloves like a lady,” Mrs. Sumfit was continuing.

Rhoda stamped on her foot.

“Oh! cruel!” the comfortable old woman snapped in pain, as she applied her hand to the inconsolable fat foot, and nursed it. “What’s roused ye, you tiger girl? I shan’t be able to get about, I shan’t, and then who’s to cook for ye all? For you’re as ignorant as a raw kitchen wench, and knows nothing.”

“Come, Dody, you’re careless,” the farmer spoke chidingly through Mrs. Sumfit’s lamentations.

“She stops uncle Anthony when he’s just ready, father,” said Rhoda.

“Do you want to know?” Anthony set his small eyes on her: “do you want to know, my dear?” He paused, fingering his glass, and went on: “I, Susan, take thee, William John, and you’ve come of it. Says I to myself, when I hung sheepish by your mother and by your father, my dear, says I to myself, I ain’t a marrying man: and if these two, says I, if any progeny comes to ’em—to bless them, some people’d say, but I know what life is, and what young ones are—if—where was I? Liquor makes you talk, brother William John, but where’s your ideas? Gone, like hard cash! What I meant was, I felt I might some day come for’ard and help the issue of your wife’s weddin’, and wasn’t such a shady object among you, after all. My pipe’s out.”

Rhoda stood up, and filled the pipe, and lit it in silence. She divined that the old man must be allowed to run on in his own way, and for a long time he rambled, gave a picture of the wedding, and of a robbery of Boyne’s Bank: the firm of Boyne, Burt, Hamble, and Company. At last, he touched on Dahlia.

“What she wants, I can’t make out,” he said; “and what that good lady there, or somebody, made mention of—how she manages to dress as she do! I can understand a little goin’ a great way, if you’re clever in any way; but I’m at my tea”—Anthony laid his hand out as to exhibit a picture. “I ain’t a complaining man, and be young, if you can, I say, and walk about and look at shops; but, I’m at my tea: I come home rather tired there’s the tea-things, sure enough, and tea’s made, and, maybe, there’s a shrimp or two; she attends to your creature comforts. When everything’s locked up and tight and right, I’m gay, and ask for a bit of society: well, I’m at my tea: I hear her foot thumping up and down her bed-room overhead: I know the meaning of that: I’d rather hear nothing: down she runs: I’m at my tea, and in she bursts.”—Here followed a dramatic account of Dahlia’s manner of provocation, which was closed by the extinction of his pipe.

Page 866

The farmer, while his mind still hung about thousands of pounds and a certain incomprehensible division of them to produce a distinct intelligible total, and set before him the sum of Anthony's riches, could see that his elder daughter was behaving flightily and neglecting the true interests of the family, and he was chagrined. But Anthony, before he entered the house, had assured him that Dahlia was well, and that nothing was wrong with her. So he looked at Mrs. Sumfit, who now took upon herself to plead for Dahlia: a young thing, and such a handsome creature! and we were all young some time or other; and would heaven have mercy on us, if we were hard upon the young, do you think? The motto of a truly religious man said, try 'em again. And, maybe, people had been a little hard upon Dahlia, and the girl was apt to take offence. In conclusion, she appealed to Rhoda to speak up for her sister. Rhoda sat in quiet reserve.

She was sure her sister must be justified in all she did but the picture of the old man coming from his work every night to take his tea quite alone made her sad. She found herself unable to speak, and as she did not, Mrs. Sumfit had an acute twinge from her recently trodden foot, and called her some bitter names; which was not an unusual case, for the kind old woman could be querulous, and belonged to the list of those whose hearts are as scales, so that they love not one person devotedly without a corresponding spirit of opposition to another. Rhoda merely smiled.

By-and-by, the women left the two men alone.

Anthony turned and struck the farmer's knee.

"You've got a jewel in that gal, brother William John."

"Eh! she's a good enough lass. Not much of a manager, brother Tony. Too much of a thinker, I reckon. She's got a temper of her own too. I'm a bit hurt, brother Tony, about that other girl. She must leave London, if she don't alter. It's flightiness; that's all. You mustn't think ill of poor Dahly. She was always the pretty one, and when they know it, they act up to it: she was her mother's favourite."

"Ah! poor Susan! an upright woman before the Lord."

"She was," said the farmer, bowing his head.

"And a good wife," Anthony interjected.

"None better—never a better; and I wish she was living to look after her girls."

"I came through the churchyard, hard by," said Anthony; "and I read that writing on her tombstone. It went like a choke in my throat. The first person I saw next was her child, this young gal you call Rhoda; and, thinks I to myself, you might ask me, I'd do anything for ye—that I could, of course."

The farmer’s eye had lit up, but became overshadowed by the characteristic reservation.

“Nobody’d ask you to do more than you could,” he remarked, rather coldly.

“It’ll never be much,” sighed Anthony.

“Well, the world’s nothing, if you come to look at it close,” the farmer adopted a similar tone.

Page 867

“What’s money!” said Anthony.

The farmer immediately resumed his this-worldliness:

“Well, it’s fine to go about asking us poor devils to answer ye that,” he said, and chuckled, conceiving that he had nailed Anthony down to a partial confession of his ownership of some worldly goods.

“What do you call having money?” observed the latter, clearly in the trap. “Fifty thousand?”

“Whew!” went the farmer, as at a big draught of powerful stuff.

“Ten thousand?”

Mr. Fleming took this second gulp almost contemptuously, but still kindly.

“Come,” quoth Anthony, “ten thousand’s not so mean, you know. You’re a gentleman on ten thousand. So, on five. I’ll tell ye, many a gentleman’d be glad to own it. Lor’ bless you! But, you know nothing of the world, brother William John. Some of ’em haven’t one—ain’t so rich as you!”

“Or you, brother Tony?” The farmer made a grasp at his will-o’-the-wisp.

“Oh! me!” Anthony sniggered. “I’m a scraper of odds and ends. I pick up things in the gutter. Mind you, those Jews ain’t such fools, though a curse is on ’em, to wander forth. They know the meaning of the multiplication table. They can turn fractions into whole numbers. No; I’m not to be compared to gentlemen. My property’s my respectability. I said that at the beginning, and I say it now. But, I’ll tell you what, brother William John, it’s an emotion when you’ve got bags of thousands of pounds in your arms.”

Ordinarily, the farmer was a sensible man, as straight on the level of dull intelligence as other men; but so credulous was he in regard to the riches possessed by his wife’s brother, that a very little tempted him to childish exaggeration of the probable amount. Now that Anthony himself furnished the incitement, he was quite lifted from the earth. He had, besides, taken more of the strong mixture than he was ever accustomed to take in the middle of the day; and as it seemed to him that Anthony was really about to be seduced into a particular statement of the extent of the property which formed his respectability (as Anthony had chosen to put it), he got up a little game in his head by guessing how much the amount might positively be, so that he could subsequently compare his shrewd reckoning with the avowed fact. He tamed his wild ideas as much as possible; thought over what his wife used to say of Anthony’s saving ways from boyhood, thought of the dark hints of the Funds, of many bold strokes for money made by sagacious persons; of Anthony’s close style of living, and of the lives of celebrated

misers; this done, he resolved to make a sure guess, and therefore aimed below the mark.

Page 868

Money, when the imagination deals with it thus, has no substantial relation to mortal affairs. It is a tricksy thing, distending and contracting as it dances in the mind, like sunlight on the ceiling cast from a morning tea-cup, if a forced simile will aid the conception. The farmer struck on thirty thousand and some odd hundred pounds—-outlying debts, or so, excluded—as what Anthony's will, in all likelihood, would be sworn under: say, thirty thousand, or, safer, say, twenty thousand. Bequeathed—how? To him and to his children. But to the children in reversion after his decease? Or how? In any case, they might make capital marriages; and the farm estate should go to whichever of the two young husbands he liked the best. Farmer Fleming asked not for any life of ease and splendour, though thirty thousand pounds was a fortune; or even twenty thousand. Noblemen have stooped to marry heiresses owning no more than that! The idea of their having done so actually shot across him, and his heart sent up a warm spring of tenderness toward the patient, good, grubbing old fellow, sitting beside him, who had lived and died to enrich and elevate the family. At the same time, he could not refrain from thinking that Anthony, broad-shouldered as he was, though bent, sound on his legs, and well-coloured for a Londoner, would be accepted by any Life Insurance office, at a moderate rate, considering his age. The farmer thought of his own health, and it was with a pang that he fancied himself being probed by the civil-speaking Life Insurance doctor (a gentleman who seems to issue upon us applicants from out the muffled folding doors of Hades; taps us on the chest, once, twice, and forthwith writes down our fateful dates). Probably, Anthony would not have to pay a higher rate of interest than he.

"Are you insured, brother Tony?" the question escaped him.

"No, I ain't, brother William John;" Anthony went on nodding like an automaton set in motion. "There's two sides to that. I'm a long-lived man. Long-lived men don't insure; that is, unless they're fools. That's how the Offices thrive."

"Case of accident?" the farmer suggested.

"Oh! nothing happens to me," replied Anthony.

The farmer jumped on his legs, and yawned.

"Shall we take a turn in the garden, brother Tony?"

"With all my heart, brother William John."

The farmer had conscience to be ashamed of the fit of irritable vexation which had seized on him; and it was not till Anthony being asked the date of his birth, had declared himself twelve years his senior, that the farmer felt his speculations to be justified. Anthony was nearly a generation ahead. They walked about, and were seen from the windows touching one another on the shoulder in a brotherly way. When they came

back to the women, and tea, the farmer’s mind was cooler, and all his reckonings had gone to mist. He was dejected over his tea.

Page 869

“What is the matter, father?” said Rhoda.

“I’ll tell you, my dear,” Anthony replied for him. “He’s envying me some one I want to ask me that question when I’m at my tea in London.”

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Fleming kept his forehead from his daughter’s good-night kiss until the room was cleared, after supper, and then embracing her very heartily, he informed her that her uncle had offered to pay her expenses on a visit to London, by which he contrived to hint that a golden path had opened to his girl, and at the same time entreated her to think nothing of it; to dismiss all expectations and dreams of impossible sums from her mind, and simply to endeavour to please her uncle, who had a right to his own, and a right to do what he liked with his own, though it were forty, fifty times as much as he possessed—and what that might amount to no one knew. In fact, as is the way with many experienced persons, in his attempt to give advice to another, he was very impressive in lecturing himself, and warned that other not to succumb to a temptation principally by indicating the natural basis of the allurement. Happily for young and for old, the intense insight of the young has much to distract or soften it. Rhoda thanked her father, and chose to think that she had listened to good and wise things.

“Your sister,” he said—“but we won’t speak of her. If I could part with you, my lass, I’d rather she was the one to come back.”

“Dahlia would be killed by our quiet life now,” said Rhoda.

“Ay,” the farmer mused. “If she’d got to pay six men every Saturday night, she wouldn’t complain o’ the quiet. But, there—you neither of you ever took to farming or to housekeeping; but any gentleman might be proud to have one of you for a wife. I said so when you was girls. And if, you’ve been dull, my dear, what’s the good o’ society? Tea-cakes mayn’t seem to cost money, nor a glass o’ grog to neighbours; but once open the door to that sort o’ thing and your reckoning goes. And what I said to your poor mother’s true. I said: Our girls, they’re mayhap not equals of the Hollands, the Nashaws, the Perrets, and the others about here—no; they’re not equals, because the others are not equals o’ them, maybe.”

The yeoman’s pride struggled out in this obscure way to vindicate his unneighbourliness and the seclusion of his daughters from the society of girls of their age and condition; nor was it hard for Rhoda to assure him, as she earnestly did, that he had acted rightly.

Rhoda, assisted by Mrs. Sumfit, was late in the night looking up what poor decorations she possessed wherewith to enter London, and be worthy of her sister’s embrace, so that she might not shock the lady Dahlia had become.

Page 870

“Depend you on it, my dear,” said Mrs. Sumfit, “my Dahly’s grown above him. That’s nettles to your uncle, my dear. He can’t abide it. Don’t you see he can’t? Some men’s like that. Others ’d see you dressed like a princess, and not be satisfied. They vary so, the teasin’ creatures! But one and all, whether they likes it or not, owns a woman’s the better for bein’ dressed in the fashion. What do grieve me to my insidest heart, it is your bonnet. What a bonnet that was lying beside her dear round arm in the po’trait, and her finger up making a dimple in her cheek, as if she was thinking of us in a sorrowful way. That’s the arts o’ being lady-like—look sad-like. How could we get a bonnet for you?”

“My own must do,” said Rhoda.

“Yes, and you to look like lady and servant-gal a-goin’ out for an airin’; and she to feel it! Pretty, that’d be!”

“She won’t be ashamed of me,” Rhoda faltered; and then hummed a little tune, and said firmly—“It’s no use my trying to look like what I’m not.”

“No, truly;” Mrs. Sumfit assented. “But it’s your bein’ behind the fashions what hurt me. As well you might be an old thing like me, for any pleasant looks you’ll git. Now, the country—you’re like in a coalhole for the matter o’ that. While London, my dear, its pavement and gutter, and omnibus traffic; and if you’re not in the fashion, the little wicked boys of the streets themselves ’ll let you know it; they’ve got such eyes for fashions, they have. And I don’t want my Dahly’s sister to be laughed at, and called ‘coal-scuttle,’ as happened to me, my dear, believe it or not—and shoved aside, and said to—’Who are you?’ For she reely is nice-looking. Your uncle Anthony and Mr. Robert agreed upon that.”

Rhoda coloured, and said, after a time, “It would please me if people didn’t speak about my looks.”

The looking-glass probably told her no more than that she was nice to the eye, but a young man who sees anything should not see like a mirror, and a girl’s instinct whispers to her, that her image has not been taken to heart when she is accurately and impartially described by him.

The key to Rhoda at this period was a desire to be made warm with praise of her person. She beheld her face at times, and shivered. The face was so strange with its dark thick eyebrows, and peculiarly straight-gazing brown eyes; the level long red under-lip and curved upper; and the chin and nose, so unlike Dahlia’s, whose nose was, after a little dip from the forehead, one soft line to its extremity, and whose chin seemed shaped to a cup. Rhoda’s outlines were harder. There was a suspicion of a heavenward turn to her nose, and of squareness to her chin. Her face, when studied, inspired in its owner’s mind a doubt of her being even nice to the eye, though she knew that in exercise, and when smitten by a blush, brightness and colour aided her claims.

She knew also that her head was easily poised on her neck; and that her figure was reasonably good; but all this was unconfirmed knowledge, quickly shadowed by the doubt. As the sun is wanted to glorify the right features of a landscape, this girl thirsted for a dose of golden flattery. She felt, without envy of her sister, that Dahlia eclipsed her: and all she prayed for was that she might not be quite so much in the background and obscure.

Page 871

But great, powerful London—the new universe to her spirit—was opening its arms to her. In her half sleep that night she heard the mighty thunder of the city, crashing, tumults of disordered harmonies, and the splendour of the lamp-lighted city appeared to hang up under a dark-blue heaven, removed from earth, like a fresh planet to which she was being beckoned.

At breakfast on the Sunday morning, her departure was necessarily spoken of in public. Robert talked to her exactly as he had talked to Dahlia, on the like occasion. He mentioned, as she remembered in one or two instances, the names of the same streets, and professed a similar anxiety as regarded driving her to the station and catching the train. “That’s a thing which makes a man feel his strength’s nothing,” he said. “You can’t stop it. I fancy I could stop a four-in-hand at full gallop. Mind, I only fancy I could; but when you come to do with iron and steam, I feel like a baby. You can’t stop trains.”

“You can trip ’em,” said Anthony, a remark that called forth general laughter, and increased the impression that he was a man of resources.

Rhoda was vexed by Robert’s devotion to his strength. She was going, and wished to go, but she wished to be regretted as well; and she looked at him more. He, on the contrary, scarcely looked at her at all. He threw verbal turnips, oats, oxen, poultry, and every possible melancholy matter-of-fact thing, about the table, described the farm and his fondness for it and the neighbourhood; said a farmer’s life was best, and gave Rhoda a week in which to be tired of London.

She sneered in her soul, thinking “how little he knows of the constancy in the nature of women!” adding, “when they form attachments.”

Anthony was shown at church, in spite of a feeble intimation he expressed, that it would be agreeable to him to walk about in the March sunshine, and see the grounds and the wild flowers, which never gave trouble, nor cost a penny, and were always pretty, and worth twenty of your artificial contrivances.

“Same as I say to Miss Dahly,” he took occasion to remark; “but no!—no good. I don’t believe women hear ye, when you talk sense of that kind. ‘Look,’ says I, ‘at a violet.’ ‘Look,’ says she, ‘at a rose.’ Well, what can ye say after that? She swears the rose looks best. You swear the violet costs least. Then there you have a battle between what it costs and how it looks.”

Robert pronounced a conventional affirmative, when called on for it by a look from Anthony. Whereupon Rhoda cried out,—

“Dahlia was right—she was right, uncle.”

Page 872

“She was right, my dear, if she was a ten-thousander. She wasn’t right as a farmer’s daughter with poor expectations.—I’d say humble, if humble she were. As a farmer’s daughter, she should choose the violet side. That’s clear as day. One thing’s good, I admit; she tells me she makes her own bonnets, and they’re as good as milliners’, and that’s a proud matter to say of your own niece. And to buy dresses for herself, I suppose, she’s sat down and she made dresses for fine ladies. I’ve found her at it. Save the money for the work, says I. What does she reply—she always has a reply: ’Uncle, I know the value of money better. ’You mean, you spend it,’ I says to her. ‘I buy more than it’s worth,’ says she. And I’ll tell you what, Mr. Robert Armstrong, as I find your name to be, sir; if you beat women at talking, my lord! you’re a clever chap.”

Robert laughed. “I give in at the first mile.”

“Don’t think much of women—is that it, sir?”

“I’m glad to say I don’t think of them at all.”

“Do you think of one woman, now, Mr. Robert Armstrong?”

“I’d much rather think of two.”

“And why, may I ask?”

“It’s safer.”

“Now, I don’t exactly see that,” said Anthony.

“You set one to tear the other,” Robert explained.

“You’re a Grand Turk Mogul in your reasonings of women, Mr. Robert Armstrong. I hope as your morals are sound, sir?”

They were on the road to church, but Robert could not restrain a swinging outburst.

He observed that he hoped likewise that his morals were sound.

“Because,” said Anthony, “do you see, sir, two wives—”

“No, no; one wife,” interposed Robert. “You said ‘think about;’ I’d ‘think about’ any number of women, if I was idle. But the woman you mean to make your wife, you go to at once, and don’t ‘think about’ her or the question either.”

“You make sure of her, do you, sir?”

“No: I try my luck; that is all.”

“Suppose she won’t have ye?”

“Then I wait for her.”

“Suppose she gets married to somebody else?”

“Well, you know, I shouldn’t cast eye on a woman who was a fool.”

“Well, upon my—” Anthony checked his exclamation, returning to the charge with, “Just suppose, for the sake of supposing—supposing she was a fool, and gone and got married, and you thrown back’ard on one leg, starin’ at the other, stupified-like?”

“I don’t mind supposing it,” said Robert. “Say, she’s a fool. Her being a fool argues that I was one in making a fool’s choice. So, she jilts me, and I get a pistol, or I get a neat bit of rope, or I take a clean header with a cannon-ball at my heels, or I go to the chemist’s and ask for stuff to poison rats,—anything a fool’d do under the circumstances, it don’t matter what.”

Old Anthony waited for Rhoda to jump over a stile, and said to her,—

Page 873

“He laughs at the whole lot of ye.”

“Who?” she asked, with betraying cheeks.

“This Mr. Robert Armstrong of yours.”

“Of mine, uncle!”

“He don’t seem to care a snap o’ the finger for any of ye.”

“Then, none of us must care for him, uncle.”

“Now, just the contrary. That always shows a young fellow who’s attending to his business. If he’d seen you boil potatoes, make dumplings, beds, tea, all that, you’d have had a chance. He’d have marched up to ye before you was off to London.”

“Saying, ‘You are the woman.’” Rhoda was too desperately tickled by the idea to refrain from uttering it, though she was angry, and suffering internal discontent. “Or else, ‘You are the cook,’” she muttered, and shut, with the word, steel bars across her heart, calling him, mentally, names not justified by anything he had said or done—such as mercenary, tyrannical, and such like.

Robert was attentive to her in church. Once she caught him with his eyes on her face; but he betrayed no confusion, and looked away at the clergyman. When the text was given out, he found the place in his Bible, and handed it to her pointedly—“There shall be snares and traps unto you;” a line from Joshua. She received the act as a polite pawing civility; but when she was coming out of church, Robert saw that a blush swept over her face, and wondered what thoughts could be rising within her, unaware that girls catch certain meanings late, and suffer a fiery torture when these meanings are clear to them. Rhoda called up the pride of her womanhood that she might despise the man who had dared to distrust her. She kept her poppy colour throughout the day, so sensitive was this pride. But most she was angered, after reflection, by the doubts which Robert appeared to cast on Dahlia, in setting his finger upon that burning line of Scripture. It opened a whole black kingdom to her imagination, and first touched her visionary life with shade. She was sincere in her ignorance that the doubts were her own, but they lay deep in unawakened recesses of the soul; it was by a natural action of her reason that she transferred and forced them upon him who had chanced to make them visible.

CHAPTER V

When young minds are set upon a distant object, they scarcely live for anything about them. The drive to the station and the parting with Robert, the journey to London, which had latterly seemed to her secretly-distressed anticipation like a sunken city—a place of

wonder with the waters over it—all passed by smoothly; and then it became necessary to call a cabman, for whom, as he did her the service to lift her box, Rhoda felt a gracious respect, until a quarrel ensued between him and her uncle concerning sixpence;—a poor sum, as she thought; but representing, as Anthony impressed upon her understanding during the conflict of hard words, a principle. Those who can persuade

Page 874

themselves that they are fighting for a principle, fight strenuously, and maybe reckoned upon to overmatch combatants on behalf of a miserable small coin; so the cabman went away discomfited. He used such bad language that Rhoda had no pity for him, and hearing her uncle style it “the London tongue,” she thought dispiritedly of Dahlia’s having had to listen to it through so long a season. Dahlia was not at home; but Mrs. Wicklow, Anthony’s landlady, undertook to make Rhoda comfortable, which operation she began by praising dark young ladies over fair ones, at the same time shaking Rhoda’s arm that she might not fail to see a compliment was intended. “This is our London way,” she said. But Rhoda was most disconcerted when she heard Mrs. Wicklow relate that her daughter and Dahlia were out together, and say, that she had no doubt they had found some pleasant and attentive gentleman for a companion, if they had not gone purposely to meet one. Her thoughts of her sister were perplexed, and London seemed a gigantic net around them both.

“Yes, that’s the habit with the girls up here,” said Anthony; “that’s what fine bonnets mean.”

Rhoda dropped into a bitter depth of brooding. The savage nature of her virgin pride was such that it gave her great suffering even to suppose that a strange gentleman would dare to address her sister. She half-fashioned the words on her lips that she had dreamed of a false Zion, and was being righteously punished. By-and-by the landlady’s daughter returned home alone, saying, with a dreadful laugh, that Dahlia had sent her for her Bible; but she would give no explanation of the singular mission which had been entrusted to her, and she showed no willingness to attempt to fulfil it, merely repeating, “Her Bible!” with a vulgar exhibition of simulated scorn that caused Rhoda to shrink from her, though she would gladly have poured out a multitude of questions in the ear of one who had last been with her beloved. After a while, Mrs. Wicklow looked at the clock, and instantly became overclouded with an extreme gravity.

“Eleven! and she sent Mary Ann home for her Bible. This looks bad. I call it hypocritical, the idea of mentioning the Bible. Now, if she had said to Mary Ann, go and fetch any other book but a Bible!”

“It was mother’s Bible,” interposed Rhoda.

Mrs. Wicklow replied: “And I wish all young women to be as innocent as you, my dear. You’ll get you to bed. You’re a dear, mild, sweet, good young woman. I’m never deceived in character.”

Vaunting her penetration, she accompanied Rhoda to Dahlia’s chamber, bidding her sleep speedily, or that when her sister came they would be talking till the cock crowed hoarse.

“There’s a poultry-yard close to us?” said Rhoda; feeling less at home when she heard that there was not.

Page 875

The night was quiet and clear. She leaned her head out of the window, and heard the mellow Sunday evening roar of the city as of a sea at ebb. And Dahlia was out on the sea. Rhoda thought of it as she looked at the row of lamps, and listened to the noise remote, until the sight of stars was pleasant as the faces of friends. "People are kind here," she reflected, for her short experience of the landlady was good, and a young gentleman who had hailed a cab for her at the station, had a nice voice. He was fair. "I am dark," came a spontaneous reflection. She undressed, and half dozing over her beating heart in bed, heard the street door open, and leaped to think that her sister approached, jumping up in her bed to give ear to the door and the stairs, that were conducting her joy to her: but she quickly recomposed herself, and feigned sleep, for the delight of revelling in her sister's first wonderment. The door was flung wide, and Rhoda heard her name called by Dahlia's voice, and then there was a delicious silence, and she felt that Dahlia was coming up to her on tiptoe, and waited for her head to be stooped near, that she might fling out her arms, and draw the dear head to her bosom. But Dahlia came only to the bedside, without leaning over, and spoke of her looks, which held the girl quiet.

"How she sleeps! It's a country sleep!" Dahlia murmured. "She's changed, but it's all for the better. She's quite a woman; she's a perfect brunette; and the nose I used to laugh at suits her face and those black, thick eyebrows of hers; my pet! Oh, why is she here? What's meant by it? I knew nothing of her coming. Is she sent on purpose?"

Rhoda did not stir. The tone of Dahlia's speaking, low and almost awful to her, laid a flat hand on her, and kept her still.

"I came for my Bible," she heard Dahlia say. "I promised mother—oh, my poor darling mother! And Dody lying in my bed! Who would have thought of such things? Perhaps heaven does look after us and interfere. What will become of me? Oh, you pretty innocent in your sleep! I lie for hours, and can't sleep. She binds her hair in a knot on the pillow, just as she used to in the old farm days!"

Rhoda knew that her sister was bending over her now, but she was almost frigid, and could not move.

Dahlia went to the looking-glass. "How flushed I am!" she murmured. "No; I'm pale, quite white. I've lost my strength. What can I do? How could I take mother's Bible, and run from my pretty one, who expects me, and dreams she'll wake with me beside her in the morning! I can't—I can't If you love me, Edward, you won't wish it."

She fell into a chair, crying wildly, and muffling her sobs. Rhoda's eyelids grew moist, but wonder and the cold anguish of senseless sympathy held her still frost-bound. All at once she heard the window open. Some one spoke in the street below; some one uttered Dahlia's name. A deep bell swung a note of midnight.

Page 876

“Go!” cried Dahlia.

The window was instantly shut.

The vibration of Dahlia’s voice went through Rhoda like the heavy shaking of the bell after it had struck, and the room seemed to spin and hum. It was to her but another minute before her sister slid softly into the bed, and they were locked together.

CHAPTER VI

Boyne’s bank was of the order of those old and firmly fixed establishments which have taken root with the fortunes of the country—are honourable as England’s name, solid as her prosperity, and even as the flourishing green tree to shareholders: a granite house. Boyne himself had been disembodied for more than a century: Burt and Hamble were still of the flesh; but a greater than Burt or Hamble was Blancove—the Sir William Blancove, Baronet, of city feasts and charities, who, besides being a wealthy merchant, possessed of a very acute head for banking, was a scholarly gentleman, worthy of riches. His brother was Squire Blancove, of Wrexby; but between these two close relatives there existed no stronger feeling than what was expressed by open contempt of a mind dedicated to business on the one side, and quiet contempt of a life devoted to indolence on the other. Nevertheless, Squire Blancove, though everybody knew how deeply he despised his junior for his city-gained title and commercial occupation, sent him his son Algernon, to get the youth into sound discipline, if possible. This was after the elastic Algernon had, on the paternal intimation of his colonel, relinquished his cornetcy and military service. Sir William received the hopeful young fellow much in the spirit with which he listened to the tales of his brother’s comments on his own line of conduct; that is to say, as homage to his intellectual superiority. Mr. Algernon was installed in the Bank, and sat down for a long career of groaning at the desk, with more complacency than was expected from him. Sir William forwarded excellent accounts to his brother of the behaviour of the heir to his estates. It was his way of rebuking the squire, and in return for it the squire, though somewhat comforted, despised his clerkly son, and lived to learn how very unjustly he did so. Adolescents, who have the taste for running into excesses, enjoy the breath of change as another form of excitement: change is a sort of debauch to them. They will delight infinitely in a simple country round of existence, in propriety and church-going, in the sensation of feeling innocent. There is little that does not enrapture them, if you tie them down to nothing, and let them try all. Sir William was deceived by his nephew. He would have taken him into his town-house; but his own son, Edward, who was studying for the Law, had chambers in the Temple, and Algernon, receiving an invitation from Edward, declared a gentle preference for the abode of his cousin. His allowance from his father was properly contracted to keep him from excesses, as the genius of his senior devised, and Sir William saw no objection to the scheme, and made none. The two dined with him about twice in the month.

Page 877

Edward Blancove was three-and-twenty years old, a student by fits, and a young man given to be moody. He had powers of gaiety far eclipsing Algernon's, but he was not the same easy tripping sinner and flippant soul. He was in that yeasty condition of his years when action and reflection alternately usurp the mind; remorse succeeded dissipation, and indulgences offered the soporific to remorse. The friends of the two imagined that Algernon was, or would become, his evil genius. In reality, Edward was the perilous companion. He was composed of better stuff. Algernon was but an airy animal nature, the soul within him being an effervescence lightly let loose. Edward had a fatally serious spirit, and one of some strength. What he gave himself up to, he could believe to be correct, in the teeth of an opposing world, until he tired of it, when he sided as heartily with the world against his quondam self. Algernon might mislead, or point his cousin's passions for a time; yet if they continued their courses together, there was danger that Algernon would degenerate into a reckless subordinate—a minister, a valet, and be tempted unknowingly to do things in earnest, which is nothing less than perdition to this sort of creature.

But the key to young men is the ambition, or, in the place of it, the romantic sentiment nourished by them. Edward aspired to become Attorney-General of these realms, not a judge, you observe; for a judge is to the imagination of youthful minds a stationary being, venerable, but not active; whereas, your Attorney-General is always in the fray, and fights commonly on the winning side,—a point that renders his position attractive to sagacious youth. Algernon had other views. Civilization had tried him, and found him wanting; so he condemned it. Moreover, sitting now all day at a desk, he was civilization's drudge. No wonder, then, that his dream was of prairies, and primeval forests, and Australian wilds. He believed in his heart that he would be a man new made over there, and always looked forward to savage life as to a bath that would cleanse him, so that it did not much matter his being unclean for the present.

The young men had a fair cousin by marriage, a Mrs. Margaret Lovell, a widow. At seventeen she had gone with her husband to India, where Harry Lovell encountered the sword of a Sikh Sirdar, and tried the last of his much-vaunted swordsmanship, which, with his skill at the pistols, had served him better in two antecedent duels, for the vindication of his lovely and terrible young wife. He perished on the field, critically admiring the stroke to which he owed his death. A week after Harry's burial his widow was asked in marriage by his colonel. Captains, and a giddy subaltern likewise, disputed claims to possess her. She, however, decided to arrest further bloodshed by quitting the regiment. She always said that she left India to save her complexion; "and people don't know how very candid I am," she added, for the colonel above-mentioned was wealthy,—a man expectant of a title, and a good match, and she was laughed at when she thus assigned trivial reasons for momentous resolutions. It is a luxury to be candid; and perfect candour can do more for us than a dark disguise.

Page 878

Mrs. Lovell's complexion was worth saving from the ravages of an Indian climate, and the persecution of claimants to her hand. She was golden and white, like an autumnal birch-tree—yellow hair, with warm-toned streaks in it, shading a fabulously fair skin. Then, too, she was tall, of a nervous build, supple and proud in motion, a brilliant horsewoman, and a most distinguished sitter in an easy drawing-room chair, which is, let me impress upon you, no mean quality. After riding out for hours with a sweet comrade, who has thrown the mantle of dignity half-way off her shoulders, it is perplexing, and mixed strangely of humiliation and ecstasy, to come upon her clouded majesty where she reclines as upon rose-hued clouds, in a mystic circle of restriction (she who laughed at your jokes, and capped them, two hours ago) a queen.

Between Margaret Lovell and Edward there was a misunderstanding, of which no one knew the nature, for they spoke in public very respectfully one of the other. It had been supposed that they were lovers once; but when lovers quarrel, they snarl, they bite, they worry; their eyes are indeed unveiled, and their mouths unmuzzled. Now Margaret said of Edward: "He is sure to rise; he has such good principles." Edward said of Margaret: "She only wants a husband who will keep her well in hand." These sentences scarcely carried actual compliments when you knew the speakers; but outraged lovers cannot talk in that style after they have broken apart. It is possible that Margaret and Edward conveyed to one another as sharp a sting as envenomed lovers attempt. Gossip had once betrothed them, but was now at fault. The lady had a small jointure, and lived partly with her uncle, Lord Elling, partly with Squire Blancove, her aunt's husband, and a little by herself, which was when she counted money in her purse, and chose to assert her independence. She had a name in the world. There is a fate attached to some women, from Helen of Troy downward, that blood is to be shed for them. One duel on behalf of a woman is a reputation to her for life; two are notoriety. If she is very young, can they be attributable to her? We charge them naturally to her overpowering beauty. It happened that Mrs. Lovell was beautiful. Under the light of the two duels her beauty shone as from an illumination of black flame. Boys adored Mrs. Lovell. These are moths. But more, the birds of air, nay, grave owls (who stand in this metaphor for whiskered experience) thronged, dashing at the apparition of terrible splendour. Was it her fault that she had a name in the world?

Mrs. Margaret Lovell's portrait hung in Edward's room. It was a photograph exquisitely coloured, and was on the left of a dark Judith, dark with a serenity of sternness. On the right hung another coloured photograph of a young lady, also fair; and it was a point of taste to choose between them. Do you like the hollowed lily's cheeks, or the plump rose's? Do you like a thinnish fall

Page 879

of golden hair, or an abundant cluster of nut-brown? Do you like your blonde with limpid blue eyes, or prefer an endowment of sunny hazel? Finally, are you taken by an air of artistic innocence winding serpentine about your heart's fibres; or is blushing simplicity sweeter to you? Mrs. Lovell's eyebrows were the faintly-marked trace of a perfect arch. The other young person's were thickish, more level; a full brown colour. She looked as if she had not yet attained to any sense of her being a professed beauty: but the fair widow was clearly bent upon winning you, and had a shy, playful intentness of aspect. Her pure white skin was flat on the bone; the lips came forward in a soft curve, and, if they were not artistically stained, were triumphantly fresh. Here, in any case, she beat her rival, whose mouth had the plebeian beauty's fault of being too straight in a line, and was not trained, apparently, to tricks of dainty pouting.

It was morning, and the cousins having sponged in pleasant cold water, arranged themselves for exercise, and came out simultaneously into the sitting-room, slippered, and in flannels. They nodded and went through certain curt greetings, and then Algernon stepped to a cupboard and tossed out the leather gloves. The room was large and they had a tolerable space for the work, when the breakfast-table had been drawn a little on one side. You saw at a glance which was the likelier man of the two, when they stood opposed. Algernon's rounded features, full lips and falling chin, were not a match, though he was quick on his feet, for the wary, prompt eyes, set mouth, and hardness of Edward. Both had stout muscle, but in Edward there was vigour of brain as well, which seemed to knit and inform his shape without which, in fact, a man is as a ship under no command. Both looked their best; as, when sparring, men always do look.

"Now, then," said Algernon, squaring up to his cousin in good style, "now's the time for that unwholesome old boy underneath to commence groaning."

"Step as light as you can," replied Edward, meeting him with the pretty motion of the gloves.

"I'll step as light as a French dancing-master. Let's go to Paris and learn the savate, Ned. It must be a new sensation to stand on one leg and knock a fellow's hat off with the other."

"Stick to your fists."

"Hang it! I wish your fists wouldn't stick to me so."

"You talk too much."

"Gad, I don't get puffy half so soon as you."

"I want country air."

"You said you were going out, old Ned."

“I changed my mind.”

Saying which, Edward shut his teeth, and talked for two or three hot minutes wholly with his fists. The room shook under Algernon’s boundings to right and left till a blow sent him back on the breakfast-table, shattered a cup on the floor, and bespattered his close flannel shirt with a funereal coffee-tinge.

Page 880

“What the deuce I said to bring that on myself, I don’t know,” Algernon remarked as he rose. “Anything connected with the country disagreeable to you, Ned? Come! a bout of quiet scientific boxing, and none of these beastly rushes, as if you were singling me out of a crowd of magsmen. Did you go to church yesterday, Ned? Confound it, you’re on me again, are you?”

And Algernon went on spouting unintelligible talk under a torrent of blows. He lost his temper and fought out at them; but as it speedily became evident to him that the loss laid him open to punishment, he prudently recovered it, sparred, danced about, and contrived to shake the room in a manner that caused Edward to drop his arms, in consideration for the distracted occupant of the chambers below. Algernon accepted the truce, and made it peace by casting off one glove.

“There! that’s a pleasant morning breather,” he said, and sauntered to the window to look at the river. “I always feel the want of it when I don’t get it. I could take a thrashing rather than not on with the gloves to begin the day. Look at those boats! Fancy my having to go down to the city. It makes me feel like my blood circulating the wrong way. My father’ll suffer some day, for keeping me at this low ebb of cash, by jingo!”

He uttered this with a prophetic fierceness.

“I cannot even scrape together enough for entrance money to a Club. It’s sickening! I wonder whether I shall ever get used to banking work? There’s an old clerk in our office who says he should feel ill if he missed a day. And the old porter beats him—bangs him to fits. I believe he’d die off if he didn’t see the house open to the minute. They say that old boy’s got a pretty niece; but he don’t bring her to the office now. Reward of merit!—-Mr. Anthony Hackbut is going to receive ten pounds a year extra. That’s for his honesty. I wonder whether I could earn a reputation for the sake of a prospect of ten extra pounds to my salary. I’ve got a salary! hurrah! But if they keep me to my hundred and fifty per annum, don’t let them trust me every day with the bags, as they do that old fellow. Some of the men say he’s good to lend fifty pounds at a pinch.—Are the chops coming, Ned?”

“The chops are coming,” said Edward, who had thrown on a boating-coat and plunged into a book, and spoke echoing.

“Here’s little Peggy Lovell.” Algernon faced this portrait. “It don’t do her justice. She’s got more life, more change in her, more fire. She’s starting for town, I hear.”

“She is starting for town,” said Edward.

“How do you know that?” Algernon swung about to ask.

Edward looked round to him. “By the fact of your not having fished for a holiday this week. How did you leave her yesterday, Algy? Quite well, I hope.”

The ingenuous face of the young gentleman crimsoned.

“Oh, she was well,” he said. “Ha! I see there can be some attraction in your dark women.”

Page 881

“You mean that Judith? Yes, she’s a good diversion.” Edward gave a two-edged response. “What train did you come up by last night?”

“The last from Wrexby. That reminds me: I saw a young Judith just as I got out. She wanted a cab. I called it for her. She belongs to old Hackbut of the Bank—the old porter, you know. If it wasn’t that there’s always something about dark women which makes me think they’re going to have a moustache, I should take to that girl’s face.”

Edward launched forth an invective against fair women.

“What have they done to you-what have they done?” said Algernon.

“My good fellow, they’re nothing but colour. They’ve no conscience. If they swear a thing to you one moment, they break it the next. They can’t help doing it. You don’t ask a gilt weathercock to keep faith with anything but the wind, do you? It’s an ass that trusts a fair woman at all, or has anything to do with the confounded set. Cleopatra was fair; so was Delilah; so is the Devil’s wife. Reach me that book of Reports.”

“By jingo!” cried Algernon, “my stomach reports that if provision doesn’t soon approach ——why don’t you keep a French cook here, Ned? Let’s give up the women, and take to a French cook.”

Edward yawned horribly. “All in good time. It’s what we come to. It’s philosophy—your French cook! I wish I had it, or him. I’m afraid a fellow can’t anticipate his years—not so lucky!”

“By Jove! we shall have to be philosophers before we breakfast!” Algernon exclaimed. “It’s nine. I’ve to be tied to the stake at ten, chained and muzzled—a leetle-a dawg! I wish I hadn’t had to leave the service. It was a vile conspiracy against me there, Ned. Hang all tradesmen! I sit on a stool, and add up figures. I work harder than a nigger in the office. That’s my life: but I must feed. It’s no use going to the office in a rage.”

“Will you try on the gloves again?” was Edward’s mild suggestion.

Algernon thanked him, and replied that he knew him. Edward hit hard when he was empty.

They now affected patience, as far as silence went to make up an element of that sublime quality. The chops arriving, they disdained the mask. Algernon fired his glove just over the waiter’s head, and Edward put the ease to the man’s conscience; after which they sat and ate, talking little. The difference between them was, that Edward knew the state of Algernon’s mind and what was working within it, while the latter stared at a blank wall as regarded Edward’s.

“Going out after breakfast, Ned?” said Algernon. “We’ll walk to the city together, if you like.”

Edward fixed one of his intent looks upon his cousin. “You’re not going to the city to-day?”

“The deuce, I’m not!”

“You’re going to dance attendance on Mrs. Lovell, whom it’s your pleasure to call Peggy, when you’re some leagues out of her hearing.”

Page 882

Algernon failed to command his countenance. He glanced at one of the portraits, and said, “Who is that girl up there? Tell us her name. Talking of Mrs. Lovell, has she ever seen it?”

“If you’ll put on your coat, my dear Algy, I will talk to you about Mrs. Lovell.” Edward kept his penetrative eyes on Algernon. “Listen to me: you’ll get into a mess there.”

“If I must listen, Ned, I’ll listen in my shirt-sleeves, with all respect to the lady.”

“Very well. The shirt-sleeves help the air of bravado. Now, you know that I’ve what they call ‘knelt at her feet.’ She’s handsome. Don’t cry out. She’s dashing, and as near being a devil as any woman I ever met. Do you know why we broke? I’ll tell you. Plainly, because I refused to believe that one of her men had insulted her. You understand what that means. I declined to be a chief party in a scandal.”

“Declined to fight the fellow?” interposed Algernon. “More shame to you!”

“I think you’re a year younger than I am, Algy. You have the privilege of speaking with that year’s simplicity. Mrs. Lovell will play you as she played me. I acknowledge her power, and I keep out of her way. I don’t bet; I don’t care to waltz; I can’t keep horses; so I don’t lose much by the privation to which I subject myself.”

“I bet, I waltz, and I ride. So,” said Algernon, “I should lose tremendously.”

“You will lose, mark my words.”

“Is the lecture of my year’s senior concluded?” said Algernon.

“Yes; I’ve done,” Edward answered.

“Then I’ll put on my coat, Ned, and I’ll smoke in it. That’ll give you assurance I’m not going near Mrs. Lovell, if anything will.”

“That gives me assurance that Mrs. Lovell tolerates in you what she detests,” said Edward, relentless in his insight; “and, consequently, gives me assurance that she finds you of particular service to her at present.”

Algernon had a lighted match in his hand. He flung it into the fire. “I’m hanged if I don’t think you have the confounded vanity to suppose she sets me as a spy upon you!”

A smile ran along Edward’s lips. “I don’t think you’d know it, if she did.”

“Oh, you’re ten years older; you’re twenty,” bawled Algernon, in an extremity of disgust. “Don’t I know what game you’re following up? Isn’t it clear as day you’ve got another woman in your eye?”

“It’s as clear as day, my good Algy, that you see a portrait hanging in my chambers, and you have heard Mrs. Lovell’s opinion of the fact. So much is perfectly clear. There’s my hand. I don’t blame you. She’s a clever woman, and like many of the sort, shrewd at guessing the worst. Come, take my hand. I tell you, I don’t blame you. I’ve been little dog to her myself, and fetched and carried, and wagged my tail. It’s charming while it lasts. Will you shake it?”

“Your tail, man?” Algernon roared in pretended amazement.

Page 883

Edward eased him back to friendliness by laughing. “No; my hand.”

They shook hands.

“All right,” said Algernon. “You mean well. It’s very well for you to preach virtue to a poor devil; you’ve got loose, or you’re regularly in love.”

“Virtue! by heaven!” Edward cried; “I wish I were entitled to preach it to any man on earth.”

His face flushed. “There, good-bye, old fellow,” he added.

“Go to the city. I’ll dine with you to-night, if you like; come and dine with me at my Club. I shall be disengaged.”

Algernon mumbled a flexible assent to an appointment at Edward’s Club, dressed himself with care, borrowed a sovereign, for which he nodded his acceptance, and left him.

Edward set his brain upon a book of law.

It may have been two hours after he had sat thus in his Cistercian stillness, when a letter was delivered to him by one of the Inn porters. Edward read the superscription, and asked the porter who it was that brought it. Two young ladies, the porter said.

These were the contents:—

“I am not sure that you will ever forgive me. I cannot forgive myself when I think of that one word I was obliged to speak to you in the cold street, and nothing to explain why, and how much I love, you. Oh! how I love you! I cry while I write. I cannot help it. I was a sop of tears all night long, and oh! if you had seen my face in the morning. I am thankful you did not. Mother’s Bible brought me home. It must have been guidance, for in my bed there lay my sister, and I could not leave her, I love her so. I could not have got down stairs again after seeing her there; and I had to say that cold word and shut the window on you. May I call you Edward still? Oh, dear Edward, do make allowance for me. Write kindly to me. Say you forgive me. I feel like a ghost to-day. My life seems quite behind me somewhere, and I hardly feel anything I touch. I declare to you, dearest one, I had no idea my sister was here. I was surprised when I heard her name mentioned by my landlady, and looked on the bed; suddenly my strength was gone, and it changed all that I was thinking. I never knew before that women were so weak, but now I see they are, and I only know I am at my Edward’s mercy, and am stupid! Oh, so wretched and stupid. I shall not touch food till I hear from you. Oh, if, you are angry, write so; but do write. My suspense would make you pity me. I know I deserve your anger. It was not that I do not trust you, Edward. My mother in heaven sees my heart and that I trust, I trust my heart and everything I am and have to you. I would almost

wish and wait to see you to-day in the Gardens, but my crying has made me such a streaked thing to look at. If I had rubbed my face with a scrubbing-brush, I could not look worse, and I cannot risk your seeing me. It would excuse you for hating me. Do you? Does he hate her? She loves you. She would die for you, dear Edward. Oh! I feel that if I was told to-day that I should die for you to-morrow, it would be happiness. I am dying—yes, I am dying till I hear from you.

Page 884

“Believe me,

“Your tender, loving, broken-hearted,

“Dahlia.”

There was a postscript:—

“May I still go to lessons?”

Edward finished the letter with a calmly perusing eye. He had winced triflingly at one or two expressions contained in it; forcible, perhaps, but not such as Mrs. Lovell smiling from the wall yonder would have used.

“The poor child threatens to eat no dinner, if I don’t write to her,” he said; and replied in a kind and magnanimous spirit, concluding—“Go to lessons, by all means.”

Having accomplished this, he stood up, and by hazard fell to comparing the rival portraits; a melancholy and a comic thing to do, as you will find if you put two painted heads side by side, and set their merits contesting, and reflect on the contest, and to what advantages, personal, or of the artist’s, the winner owes the victory. Dahlia had been admirably dealt with by the artist; the charm of pure ingenuousness without rusticity was visible in her face and figure. Hanging there on the wall, she was a match for Mrs. Lovell.

CHAPTER VII

Rhoda returned home the heavier for a secret that she bore with her. All through the first night of her sleeping in London, Dahlia’s sobs, and tender hugs, and self-reproaches, had penetrated her dreams, and when the morning came she had scarcely to learn that Dahlia loved some one. The confession was made; but his name was reserved. Dahlia spoke of him with such sacredness of respect that she seemed lost in him, and like a creature kissing his feet. With tears rolling down her cheeks, and with moans of anguish, she spoke of the deliciousness of loving: of knowing one to whom she abandoned her will and her destiny, until, seeing how beautiful a bloom love threw upon the tearful worn face of her sister, Rhoda was impressed by a mystical veneration for this man, and readily believed him to be above all other men, if not superhuman: for she was of an age and an imagination to conceive a spiritual pre-eminence over the weakness of mortality. She thought that one who could so transform her sister, touch her with awe, and give her gracefulness and humility, must be what Dahlia said he was. She asked shyly for his Christian name; but even so little Dahlia withheld. It was his wish that Dahlia should keep silence concerning him.

“Have you sworn an oath?” said Rhoda, wonderingly.

“No, dear love,” Dahlia replied; “he only mentioned what he desired.”

Rhoda was ashamed of herself for thinking it strange, and she surrendered her judgement to be stamped by the one who knew him well.

Page 885

As regarded her uncle, Dahlia admitted that she had behaved forgetfully and unkindly, and promised amendment. She talked of the Farm as of an old ruin, with nothing but a thin shade of memory threading its walls, and appeared to marvel vaguely that it stood yet. "Father shall not always want money," she said. She was particular in prescribing books for Rhoda to read; good authors, she emphasized, and named books of history, and poets, and quoted their verses. "For my darling will some day have a dear husband, and he must not look down on her." Rhoda shook her head, full sure that she could never be brought to utter such musical words naturally. "Yes, dearest, when you know what love is," said Dahlia, in an underbreath.

Could Robert inspire her with the power? Rhoda looked upon that poor homely young man half-curiously when she returned, and quite dismissed the notion. Besides she had no feeling for herself. Her passion was fixed upon her sister, whose record of emotions in the letters from London placed her beyond dull days and nights. The letters struck many chords. A less subservient reader would have set them down as variations of the language of infatuation; but Rhoda was responsive to every word and change of mood, from the, "I am unworthy, degraded, wretched," to "I am blest above the angels." If one letter said, "We met yesterday," Rhoda's heart beat on to the question, "Shall I see him again to-morrow?" And will she see him?—has she seen him?—agitated her and absorbed her thoughts.

So humbly did she follow her sister, without daring to forecast a prospect for her, or dream of an issue, that when on a summer morning a letter was brought in at the breakfast-table, marked "urgent and private," she opened it, and the first line dazzled her eyes—the surprise was a shock to her brain. She rose from her unfinished meal, and walked out into the wide air, feeling as if she walked on thunder.

The letter ran thus:—

"My Own Innocent!—I am married. We leave England to-day. I must not love you too much, for I have all my love to give to my Edward, my own now, and I am his trustingly for ever. But he will let me give you some of it—and Rhoda is never jealous. She shall have a great deal. Only I am frightened when I think how immense my love is for him, so that anything—everything he thinks right is right to me. I am not afraid to think so. If I were to try, a cloud would come over me—it does, if only I fancy for half a moment I am rash, and a straw. I cannot exist except through him. So I must belong to him, and his will is my law. My prayer at my bedside every night is that I may die for him. We used to think the idea of death so terrible! Do you remember how we used to shudder together at night when we thought of people lying in the grave? And now, when I think that perhaps I may some day die for him, I feel like a crying in my heart with joy.

"I have left a letter—sent it, I mean—enclosed to uncle for father. He will see Edward by-and-by. Oh! may heaven spare him from any grief. Rhoda will comfort him. Tell him how devoted I am. I am like drowned to everybody but one.

Page 886

“We are looking on the sea. In half an hour I shall have forgotten the tread of English earth. I do not know that I breathe. All I know is a fear that I am flying, and my strength will not continue. That is when I am not touching his hand. There is France opposite. I shut my eyes and see the whole country, but it is like what I feel for Edward—all in dark moonlight. Oh! I trust him so! I bleed for him. I could make all my veins bleed out at a sad thought about him. And from France to Switzerland and Italy. The sea sparkles just as if it said ‘Come to the sun;’ and I am going. Edward calls. Shall I be punished for so much happiness? I am too happy, I am too happy.

“God bless my beloved at home! That is my chief prayer now. I shall think of her when I am in the cathedrals.

“Oh, my Father in heaven! bless them all! bless Rhoda! forgive me!

“I can hear the steam of the steamer at the pier. Here is Edward. He says I may send his love to you.

“Address:—

“Mrs. Edward Ayrton,
“Poste Restante,
“Lausanne,
“Switzerland.

“P.S.—Lausanne is where—but another time, and I will always tell you the history of the places to instruct you, poor heart in dull England. Adieu! Good-bye and God bless my innocent at home, my dear sister. I love her. I never can forget her. The day is so lovely. It seems on purpose for us. Be sure you write on thin paper to Lausanne. It is on a blue lake; you see snow mountains, and now there is a bell ringing—kisses from me! we start. I must sign.

“Dahlia.”

By the reading of this letter, Rhoda was caught vividly to the shore, and saw her sister borne away in the boat to the strange countries; she travelled with her, following her with gliding speed through a multiplicity of shifting scenes, opal landscapes, full of fire and dreams, and in all of them a great bell towered. “Oh, my sweet! my own beauty!” she cried in Dahlia’s language. Meeting Mrs. Sumfit, she called her “Mother Dumpling,” as Dahlia did of old, affectionately, and kissed her, and ran on to Master Gammon, who was tramping leisurely on to the oatfield lying on toward the millholms.

“My sister sends you her love,” she said brightly to the old man. Master Gammon responded with no remarkable flash of his eyes, and merely opened his mouth and shut it, as when a duck divides its bill, but fails to emit the customary quack.

“And to you, little pigs; and to you, Mulberry; and you, Dapple; and you, and you, and you.”

Rhoda nodded round to all the citizens of the farmyard; and so eased her heart of its laughing bubbles. After which, she fell to a meditative walk of demurer joy, and had a regret. It was simply that Dahlia’s hurry in signing the letter, had robbed her of the delight of seeing “Dahlia Ayrton” written proudly out, with its wonderful signification of the change in her life.

Page 887

That was a trifling matter; yet Rhoda felt the letter was not complete in the absence of the bridal name. She fancied Dahlia to have meant, perhaps, that she was Dahlia to her as of old, and not a stranger. “Dahlia ever; Dahlia nothing else for you,” she heard her sister say. But how delicious and mournful, how terrible and sweet with meaning would “Dahlia Ayrton,” the new name in the dear handwriting, have looked! “And I have a brother-in-law,” she thought, and her cheeks tingled. The banks of fern and foxglove, and the green young oaks fringing the copse, grew rich in colour, as she reflected that this beloved unknown husband of her sister embraced her and her father as well; even the old bent beggarman on the sandy ridge, though he had a starved frame and carried pitiless faggots, stood illumined in a soft warmth. Rhoda could not go back to the house.

It chanced that the farmer that morning had been smitten with the virtue of his wife’s opinion of Robert, and her parting recommendation concerning him.

“Have you a mind to either one of my two girls?” he put the question bluntly, finding himself alone with Robert.

Robert took a quick breath, and replied, “I have.”

“Then make your choice,” said the farmer, and tried to go about his business, but hung near Robert in the fields till he had asked: “Which one is it, my boy?”

Robert turned a blade of wheat in his mouth.

“I think I shall leave her to tell that,” was his answer.

“Why, don’t ye know which one you prefer to choose, man?” quoth Mr. Fleming.

“I mayn’t know whether she prefers to choose me,” said Robert.

The farmer smiled.

“You never can exactly reckon about them; that’s true.”

He was led to think: “Dahlia’s the lass;” seeing that Robert had not had many opportunities of speaking with her.

“When my girls are wives, they’ll do their work in the house,” he pursued. “They may have a little bit o’ property in land, ye know, and they may have a share in—in gold. That’s not to be reckoned on. We’re an old family, Robert, and I suppose we’ve our pride somewhere down. Anyhow, you can’t look on my girls and not own they’re superior girls. I’ve no notion of forcing them to clean, and dish up, and do dairying, if it’s not to their turn. They’re handy with th’ needle. They dress conformably, and do the millinery themselves. And I know they say their prayers of a night. That I know, if that’s

a comfort to ye, and it should be, Robert. For pray, and you can't go far wrong; and it's particularly good for girls. I'll say no more."

At the dinner-table, Rhoda was not present. Mr. Fleming fidgeted, blamed her and excused her, but as Robert appeared indifferent about her absence, he was confirmed in his idea that Dahlia attracted his fancy.

They had finished dinner, and Master Gammon had risen, when a voice immediately recognized as the voice of Anthony Hackbut was heard in the front part of the house. Mr. Fleming went round to him with a dismayed face.

Page 888

“Lord!” said Mrs. Sumfit, “how I tremble!”

Robert, too, looked grave, and got away from the house. The dread of evil news of Dahlia was common to them all; yet none had mentioned it, Robert conceiving that it would be impertinence on his part to do so; the farmer, that the policy of permitting Dahlia’s continued residence in London concealed the peril; while Mrs. Sumfit flatly defied the threatening of a mischance to one so sweet and fair, and her favourite. It is the insincerity of persons of their class; but one need not lay stress on the wilfulness of uneducated minds. Robert walked across the fields, walking like a man with an object in view. As he dropped into one of the close lanes which led up to Wrexby Hall, he saw Rhoda standing under an oak, her white morning-dress covered with sun-spots. His impulse was to turn back, the problem, how to speak to her, not being settled within him. But the next moment his blood chilled; for he had perceived, though he had not felt simultaneously, that two gentlemen were standing near her, addressing her. And it was likewise manifest that she listened to them. These presently raised their hats and disappeared. Rhoda came on toward Robert.

“You have forgotten your dinner,” he said, with a queer sense of shame at dragging in the mention of that meal.

“I have been too happy to eat,” Rhoda replied.

Robert glanced up the lane, but she gave no heed to this indication, and asked: “Has uncle come?”

“Did you expect him?”

“I thought he would come.”

“What has made you happy?”

“You will hear from uncle.”

“Shall I go and hear what those—”

Robert checked himself, but it would have been better had he spoken out. Rhoda’s face, from a light of interrogation, lowered its look to contempt.

She did not affect the feminine simplicity which can so prettily misunderstand and put by an implied accusation of that nature. Doubtless her sharp instinct served her by telling her that her contempt would hurt him shrewdly now. The foolishness of a man having much to say to a woman, and not knowing how or where the beginning of it might be, was perceptible about him. A shout from her father at the open garden-gate, hurried on Rhoda to meet him. Old Anthony was at Mr. Fleming’s elbow.

“You know it? You have her letter, father?” said Rhoda, gaily, beneath the shadow of his forehead.

“And a Queen of the Egyptians is what you might have been,” said Anthony, with a speculating eye upon Rhoda’s dark bright face.

Rhoda put out her hand to him, but kept her gaze on her father.

William Fleeting relaxed the knot of his brows and lifted the letter.

“Listen all! This is from a daughter to her father.”

And he read, oddly accentuating the first syllables of the sentences:—

Dear Father,—

“My husband will bring me to see you when I return to dear England. I ought to have concealed nothing, I know. Try to forgive me. I hope you will. I shall always think of you. God bless you!

Page 889

“I am,
“Ever with respect,
“Your dearly loving Daughter,

“Dahlia.”

“Dahlia Blank!” said the farmer, turning his look from face to face.

A deep fire of emotion was evidently agitating him, for the letter rustled in his hand, and his voice was uneven. Of this, no sign was given by his inexpressive features. The round brown eyes and the ruddy varnish on his cheeks were a mask upon grief, if not also upon joy.

“Dahlia—what? What’s her name?” he resumed. “Here—’my husband will bring me to see you’—who’s her husband? Has he got a name? And a blank envelope to her uncle here, who’s kept her in comfort for so long! And this is all she writes to me! Will any one spell out the meaning of it?”

“Dahlia was in great haste, father,” said Rhoda.

“Oh, ay, you!—you’re the one, I know,” returned the farmer. “It’s sister and sister, with you.”

“But she was very, very hurried, father. I have a letter from her, and I have only ‘Dahlia’ written at the end—no other name.”

“And you suspect no harm of your sister.”

“Father, how can I imagine any kind of harm?”

“That letter, my girl, sticks to my skull, as though it meant to say, ‘You’ve not understood me yet.’ I’ve read it a matter of twenty times, and I’m no nearer to the truth of it. But, if she’s lying, here in this letter, what’s she walking on? How long are we to wait for to hear? I give you my word, Robert, I’m feeling for you as I am for myself. Or, wasn’t it that one? Is it this one?” He levelled his finger at Rhoda. “In any case, Robert, you’ll feel for me as a father. I’m shut in a dark room with the candle blown out. I’ve heard of a sort of fear you have in that dilemmer, lest you should lay your fingers on edges of sharp knives, and if I think a step—if I go thinking a step, and feel my way, I do cut myself, and I bleed, I do. Robert, just take and say, it wasn’t that one.”

Such a statement would carry with it the confession that it was this one for whom he cared this scornful one, this jilt, this brazen girl who could make appointments with gentlemen, or suffer them to speak to her, and subsequently look at him with innocence and with anger.

“Believe me, Mr. Fleming, I feel for you as much as a man can,” he said, uneasily, swaying half round as he spoke.

“Do you suspect anything bad?” The farmer repeated the question, like one who only wanted a confirmation of his own suspicions to see the fact built up. “Robert, does this look like the letter of a married woman? Is it daughter-like—eh, man? Help another: I can’t think for myself—she ties my hands. Speak out.”

Robert set his eyes on Rhoda. He would have given much to have been able to utter, “I do.” Her face was like an eager flower straining for light; the very beauty of it swelled his jealous passion, and he flattered himself with his incapacity to speak an abject lie to propitiate her.

Page 890

“She says she is married. We’re bound to accept what she says.”

That was his answer.

“Is she married?” thundered the farmer. “Has she been and disgraced her mother in her grave? What am I to think? She’s my flesh and blood. Is she—”

“Oh, hush, father!” Rhoda laid her hand on his arm. “What doubt can there be of Dahlia? You have forgotten that she is always truthful. Come away. It is shameful to stand here and listen to unmanly things.”

She turned a face of ashes upon Robert.

“Come away, father. She is our own. She is my sister. A doubt of her is an insult to us.”

“But Robert don’t doubt her—eh?” The farmer was already half distracted from his suspicions. “Have you any real doubt about the girl, Robert?”

“I don’t trust myself to doubt anybody,” said Robert.

“You don’t cast us off, my boy?”

“I’m a labourer on the farm,” said Robert, and walked away.

“He’s got reason to feel this more ’n the rest of us, poor lad! It’s a blow to him.” With which the farmer struck his hand on Rhoda’s shoulder.

“I wish he’d set his heart on a safer young woman.”

Rhoda’s shudder of revulsion was visible as she put her mouth up to kiss her father’s cheek.

CHAPTER VIII

That is Wrexby Hall, upon the hill between Fenhurst and Wrexby: the white square mansion, with the lower drawing-room windows one full bow of glass against the sunlight, and great single trees spotting the distant green slopes. From Queen Anne’s Farm you could read the hour by the stretching of their shadows. Squire Blancove, who lived there, was an irascible, gouty man, out of humour with his time, and beginning, alas for him! to lose all true faith in his Port, though, to do him justice, he wrestled hard with this great heresy. His friends perceived the decay in his belief sooner than he did himself. He was sour in the evening as in the morning. There was no chirp in him when the bottle went round. He had never one hour of a humane mood to be reckoned on now. The day, indeed, is sad when we see the skeleton of the mistress by whom we

suffer, but cannot abandon her. The squire drank, knowing that the issue would be the terrific, curse-begetting twinge in his foot; but, as he said, he was a man who stuck to his habits. It was over his Port that he had quarrelled with his rector on the subject of hopeful Algernon, and the system he adopted with that young man. This incident has something to do with Rhoda's story, for it was the reason why Mrs. Lovell went to Wrexby Church, the spirit of that lady leading her to follow her own impulses, which were mostly in opposition. So, when perchance she visited the Hall, she chose not to accompany the squire and his subservient guests to Fenhurst, but made a point of going down to the unoccupied Wrexby pew. She was a beauty, and therefore powerful; otherwise her act of nonconformity would have produced bad blood between her and the squire.

Page 891

It was enough to have done so in any case; for now, instead of sitting at home comfortably, and reading off the week's chronicle of sport while he nursed his leg, the unfortunate gentleman had to be up and away to Fenhurst every Sunday morning, or who would have known that the old cause of his general abstention from Sabbath services lay in the detestable doctrine of Wrexby's rector?

Mrs. Lovell was now at the Hall, and it was Sunday morning after breakfast. The lady stood like a rival head among the other guests, listening, gloved and bonneted, to the bells of Wrexby, West of the hills, and of Fenhurst, Northeast. The squire came in to them, groaning over his boots, cross with his fragile wife, and in every mood for satire, except to receive it.

"How difficult it is to be gouty and good!" murmured Mrs. Lovell to the person next her.

"Well," said the squire, singling out his enemy, "you're going to that fellow, I suppose, as usual—eh?"

"Not 'as usual,'" replied Mrs. Lovell, sweetly; "I wish it were!"

"Wish it were, do you?—you find him so entertaining? Has he got to talking of the fashions?"

"He talks properly; I don't ask for more." Mrs. Lovell assumed an air of meekness under persecution.

"I thought you were Low Church."

"Lowly of the Church, I trust you thought," she corrected him. "But, for that matter, any discourse, plainly delivered, will suit me."

"His elocution's perfect," said the squire; "that is, before dinner."

"I have only to do with him before dinner, you know."

"Well, I've ordered a carriage out for you."

"That is very honourable and kind."

"It would be kinder if I contrived to keep you away from the fellow."

"Would it not be kinder to yourself," Mrs. Lovell swam forward to him in all tenderness, taking his hands, and fixing the swimming blue of her soft eyes upon him pathetically, "if you took your paper and your slippers, and awaited our return?"

The squire felt the circulating smile about the room. He rebuked the woman's audacity with a frown; "Tis my duty to set an example," he said, his gouty foot and irritable temper now meeting in a common fire.

"Since you are setting an example," rejoined the exquisite widow, "I have nothing more to say."

The squire looked what he dared not speak. A woman has half, a beauty has all, the world with her when she is self-contained, and holds her place; and it was evident that Mrs. Lovell was not one to abandon her advantages.

He snapped round for a victim, trying his wife first. Then his eyes rested upon Algernon.

"Well, here we are; which of us will you take?" he asked Mrs. Lovell in blank irony.

"I have engaged my cavalier, who is waiting, and will be as devout as possible." Mrs. Lovell gave Algernon a smile.

"I thought I hit upon the man," growled the squire. "You're going in to Wrexby, sir! Oh, go, by all means, and I shan't be astonished at what comes of it. Like teacher, like pupil!"

Page 892

“There!” Mrs. Lovell gave Algernon another smile. “You have to bear the sins of your rector, as well as your own. Can you support it?”

The flimsy fine dialogue was a little above Algernon’s level in the society of ladies; but he muttered, bowing, that he would endeavour to support it, with Mrs. Lovell’s help, and this did well enough; after which, the slight strain on the intellects of the assemblage relaxed, and ordinary topics were discussed. The carriages came round to the door; gloves, parasols, and scent-bottles were securely grasped; whereupon the squire, standing bare-headed on the steps, insisted upon seeing the party of the opposition off first, and waited to hand Mrs. Lovell into her carriage, an ironic gallantry accepted by the lady with serenity befitting the sacred hour.

“Ah! my pencil, to mark the text for you, squire,” she said, taking her seat; and Algernon turned back at her bidding, to get a pencil; and she, presenting a most harmonious aspect in the lovely landscape, reclined in the carriage as if, like the sweet summer air, she too were quieted by those holy bells, while the squire stood, fuming, bareheaded, and with boiling blood, just within the bounds of decorum on the steps. She was more than his match.

She was more than a match for most; and it was not a secret. Algernon knew it as well as Edward, or any one. She was a terror to the soul of the youth, and an attraction. Her smile was the richest flattery he could feel; the richer, perhaps, from his feeling it to be a thing impossible to fix. He had heard tales of her; he remembered Edward’s warning; but he was very humbly sitting with her now, and very happy.

“I’m in for it,” he said to his fair companion; “no cheque for me next quarter, and no chance of an increase. He’ll tell me I’ve got a salary. A salary! Good Lord! what a man comes to! I’ve done for myself with the squire for a year.”

“You must think whether you have compensation,” said the lady, and he received it in a cousinly squeeze of his hand.

He was about to raise the lank white hand to his lips.

“Ah!” she said, “there would be no compensation to me, if that were seen;” and her dainty hand was withdrawn. “Now, tell me,” she changed her tone. “How do the loves prosper?”

Algernon begged her not to call them ‘loves.’ She nodded and smiled.

“Your artistic admirations,” she observed. “I am to see her in church, am I not? Only, my dear Algy, don’t go too far. Rustic beauties are as dangerous as Court Princesses. Where was it you saw her first?”

“At the Bank,” said Algernon.

“Really! at the Bank! So your time there is not absolutely wasted. What brought her to London, I wonder?”

“Well, she has an old uncle, a queer old fellow, and he’s a sort of porter—money porter—in the Bank, awfully honest, or he might half break it some fine day, if he chose to cut and run. She’s got a sister, prettier than this girl, the fellows say; I’ve never seen her. I expect I’ve seen a portrait of her, though.”

Page 893

“Ah!” Mrs. Lovell musically drew him on. “Was she dark, too?”

“No, she’s fair. At least, she is in her portrait.”

“Brown hair; hazel eyes?”

“Oh—oh! You guess, do you?”

“I guess nothing, though it seems profitable. That Yankee betting man ‘guesses,’ and what heaps of money he makes by it!”

“I wish I did,” Algernon sighed. “All my guessing and reckoning goes wrong. I’m safe for next Spring, that’s one comfort. I shall make twenty thousand next Spring.”

“On Templemore?”

“That’s the horse. I’ve got a little on Tenpenny Nail as well. But I’m quite safe on Templemore; unless the Evil Principle comes into the field.”

“Is he so sure to be against you, if he does appear?” said Mrs. Lovell.

“Certain!” ejaculated Algernon, in honest indignation.

“Well, Algy, I don’t like to have him on my side. Perhaps I will take a share in your luck, to make it—? to make it?”—She played prettily as a mistress teasing her lap-dog to jump for a morsel; adding: “Oh! Algy, you are not a Frenchman. To make it divine, sir! you have missed your chance.”

“There’s one chance I shouldn’t like to miss,” said the youth.

“Then, do not mention it,” she counselled him. “And, seriously, I will take a part of your risk. I fear I am lucky, which is ruinous. We will settle that, by-and-by. Do you know, Algy, the most expensive position in the world is a widow’s.”

“You needn’t be one very long,” growled he.

“I’m so wretchedly fastidious, don’t you see? And it’s best not to sigh when we’re talking of business, if you’ll take me for a guide. So, the old man brought this pretty rustic Miss Rhoda to the Bank?”

“Once,” said Algernon. “Just as he did with her sister. He’s proud of his nieces; shows them and then hides them. The fellows at the Bank never saw her again.”

“Her name is—?”

“Dahlia.”

“Ah, yes!—Dahlia. Extremely pretty. There are brown dahlias—dahlias of all colours. And the portrait of this fair creature hangs up in your chambers in town?”

“Don’t call them my chambers,” Algernon protested.

“Your cousin’s, if you like. Probably Edward happened to be at the Bank when fair Dahlia paid her visit. Once seems to have been enough for both of you.”

Algernon was unread in the hearts of women, and imagined that Edward’s defection from Mrs. Lovell’s sway had deprived him of the lady’s sympathy and interest in his fortunes.

“Poor old Ned’s in some scrape, I think,” he said.

“Where is he?” the lady asked, languidly.

“Paris.”

“Paris? How very odd! And out of the season, in this hot weather. It’s enough to lead me to dream that he has gone over—one cannot realize why.”

“Upon my honour!” Algernon thumped on his knee; “by jingo!” he adopted a less compromising interjection; “Ned’s fool enough. My idea is, he’s gone and got married.”

Page 894

Mrs. Lovell was lying back with the neglectful grace of incontestable beauty; not a line to wrinkle her smooth soft features. For one sharp instant her face was all edged and puckered, like the face of a fair witch. She sat upright.

“Married! But how can that be when we none of us have heard a word of it?”

“I daresay you haven’t,” said Algernon; “and not likely to. Ned’s the closest fellow of my acquaintance. He hasn’t taken me into his confidence, you maybe sure; he knows I’m too leaky. There’s no bore like a secret! I’ve come to my conclusion in this affair by putting together a lot of little incidents and adding them up. First, I believe he was at the Bank when that fair girl was seen there. Secondly, from the description the fellows give of her, I should take her to be the original of the portrait. Next, I know that Rhoda has a fair sister who has run for it. And last, Rhoda has had a letter from her sister, to say she’s away to the Continent and is married. Ned’s in Paris. Those are my facts, and I give you my reckoning of them.”

Mrs. Lovell gazed at Algernon for one long meditative moment.

“Impossible,” she exclaimed. “Edward has more brains than heart.” And now the lady’s face was scarlet. “How did this Rhoda, with her absurd name, think of meeting you to tell you such stuff? Indeed, there’s a simplicity in some of these young women—” She said the remainder to herself.

“She’s really very innocent and good,” Algernon defended Rhoda. “she is. There isn’t a particle of nonsense in her. I first met her in town, as I stated, at the Bank; just on the steps, and we remembered I had called a cab for her a little before; and I met her again by accident yesterday.”

“You are only a boy in their hands, my cousin Algy!” said Mrs. Lovell.

Algernon nodded with a self-defensive knowingness. “I fancy there’s no doubt her sister has written to her that she’s married. It’s certain she has. She’s a blunt sort of girl; not one to lie, not even for a sister or a lover, unless she had previously made up her mind to it. In that case, she wouldn’t stick at much.”

“But, do you know,” said Mrs. Lovell—“do you know that Edward’s father would be worse than yours over such an act of folly? He would call it an offence against common sense, and have no mercy for it. He would be vindictive on principle. This story of yours cannot be true. Nothing reconciles it.”

“Oh, Sir Billy will be rusty; that stands to reason,” Algernon assented. “It mayn’t be true. I hope it isn’t. But Ned has a madness for fair women. He’d do anything on earth for them. He loses his head entirely.”

“That he may have been imprudent—” Mrs. Lovell thus blushingly hinted at the lesser sin of his deceiving and ruining the girl.

“Oh, it needn’t be true,” said Algernon; and with meaning, “Who’s to blame if it is?”

Mrs. Lovell again reddened. She touched Algernon’s fingers.

Page 895

“His friends mustn’t forsake him, in any case.”

“By Jove! you are the right sort of woman,” cried Algernon.

It was beyond his faculties to divine that her not forsaking of Edward might haply come to mean something disastrous to him. The touch of Mrs. Lovell’s hand made him forget Rhoda in a twinkling. He detained it, audaciously, even until she frowned with petulance and stamped her foot.

There was over her bosom a large cameo-brooch, representing a tomb under a palm-tree, and the figure of a veiled woman with her head bowed upon the tomb. This brooch was falling, when Algernon caught it. The pin tore his finger, and in the energy of pain he dashed the brooch to her feet, with immediate outcries of violent disgust at himself and exclamations for pardon. He picked up the brooch. It was open. A strange, discoloured, folded substance lay on the floor of the carriage. Mrs. Lovell gazed down at it, and then at him, ghastly pale. He lifted it by one corner, and the diminutive folded squares came out, revealing a strip of red-stained handkerchief.

Mrs. Lovell grasped it, and thrust it out of sight.

She spoke as they approached the church-door: “Mention nothing of this to a soul, or you forfeit my friendship for ever.”

When they alighted, she was smiling in her old affable manner.

CHAPTER IX

Some consideration for Robert, after all, as being the man who loved her, sufficed to give him rank as a more elevated kind of criminal in Rhoda’s sight, and exquisite torture of the highest form was administered to him. Her faith in her sister was so sure that she could half pardon him for the momentary harm he had done to Dahlia with her father; but, judging him by the lofty standard of one who craved to be her husband, she could not pardon his unmanly hesitation and manner of speech. The old and deep grievance in her heart as to what men thought of women, and as to the harshness of men, was stirred constantly by the remembrance of his irresolute looks, and his not having dared to speak nobly for Dahlia, even though he might have had, the knavery to think evil. As the case stood, there was still mischief to counteract. Her father had willingly swallowed a drug, but his suspicions only slumbered, and she could not instil her own vivid hopefulness and trust into him. Letters from Dahlia came regularly. The first, from Lausanne, favoured Rhoda’s conception of her as of a happy spirit resting at celestial stages of her ascent upward through spheres of ecstacy. Dahlia could see the snow-mountains in a flying glimpse; and again, peacefully seated, she could see the snow-mountains reflected in clear blue waters from her window, which, Rhoda thought, must

be like heaven. On these inspired occasions, Robert presented the form of a malignant serpent in her ideas. Then Dahlia made excursions upon glaciers with her beloved, her helpmate, and had

Page 896

slippings and tumblings—little earthly casualties which gave a charming sense of reality to her otherwise miraculous flight. The Alps were crossed: Italy was beheld. A profusion of “Oh’s!” described Dahlia’s impressions of Italy; and “Oh! the heat!” showed her to be mortal, notwithstanding the sublime exclamations. Como received the blissful couple. Dahlia wrote from Como:—

“Tell father that gentlemen in my Edward’s position cannot always immediately proclaim their marriage to the world. There are reasons. I hope he has been very angry with me: then it will be soon over, and we shall be—but I cannot look back. I shall not look back till we reach Venice. At Venice, I know I shall see you all as clear as day; but I cannot even remember the features of my darling here.”

Her Christian name was still her only signature.

The thin blue-and-pink paper, and the foreign postmarks—testifications to Dahlia’s journey not being a fictitious event, had a singular deliciousness for the solitary girl at the Farm. At times, as she turned them over, she was startled by the intoxication of her sentiments, for the wild thought would come, that many, many whose passionate hearts she could feel as her own, were ready to abandon principle and the bondage to the hereafter, for such a long delicious gulp of divine life. Rhoda found herself more than once brooding on the possible case that Dahlia had done this thing.

The fit of languor came on her unawares, probing at her weakness, and blinding her to the laws and duties of earth, until her conscious womanhood checked it, and she sprang from the vision in a spasm of terror, not knowing how far she had fallen.

After such personal experiences, she suffered great longings to be with her sister, that the touch of her hand, the gaze of her eyes, the tone of Dahlia’s voice, might make her sure of her sister’s safety.

Rhoda’s devotions in church were frequently distracted by the occupants of the Blancove pew. Mrs. Lovell had the habit of looking at her with an extraordinary directness, an expressionless dissecting scrutiny, that was bewildering and confusing to the country damsel. Algernon likewise bestowed marked attention on her. Some curious hints had been thrown out to her by this young gentleman on the day when he ventured to speak to her in the lane, which led her to fancy distantly that he had some acquaintance with Dahlia’s husband, or that he had heard of Dahlia.

It was clear to Rhoda that Algernon sought another interview. He appeared in the neighbourhood of the farm on Saturdays, and on Sundays he was present in the church, sometimes with Mrs. Lovell, and sometimes without a companion. His appearance sent her quick wits travelling through many scales of possible conduct: and they struck one ringing note:—she thought that by the aid of this gentleman a lesson

might be given to Robert's mean nature. It was part of Robert's punishment to see that she was not unconscious of Algernon's admiration.

Page 897

The first letter from Venice consisted of a series of interjections in praise of the poetry of gondolas, varied by allusions to the sad smell of the low tide water, and the amazing quality of the heat; and then Dahlia wrote more composedly:—

“Titian the painter lived here, and painted ladies, who sat to him without a bit of garment on, and indeed, my darling, I often think it was more comfortable for the model than for the artist. Even modesty seems too hot a covering for human creatures here. The sun strikes me down. I am ceasing to have a complexion. It is pleasant to know that my Edward is still proud of me. He has made acquaintance with some of the officers here, and seems pleased at the compliments they pay me.

“They have nice manners, and white uniforms that fit them like a kid glove. I am Edward’s ‘resplendent wife.’ A colonel of one of the regiments invited him to dinner (speaking English), ’with your resplendent wife.’ Edward has no mercy for errors of language, and he would not take me. Ah! who knows how strange men are! Never think of being happy unless you can always be blind. I see you all at home—Mother Dumpling and all—as I thought I should when I was to come to Venice.

“Persuade—do persuade father that everything will be well. Some persons are to be trusted. Make him feel it. I know that I am life itself to Edward. He has lived as men do, and he can judge, and he knows that there never was a wife who brought a heart to her husband like mine to him. He wants to think, or he wants to smoke, and he leaves me; but, oh! when he returns, he can scarcely believe that he has me, his joy is so great. He looks like a glad thankful child, and he has the manliest of faces. It is generally thoughtful; you might think it hard, at first sight.

“But you must be beautiful to please some men. You will laugh—I have really got the habit of talking to my face and all myself in the glass. Rhoda would think me cracked. And it is really true that I was never so humble about my good looks. You used to spoil me at home—you and that wicked old Mother Dumpling, and our own dear mother, Rhoda—oh! mother, mother! I wish I had always thought of you looking down on me! You made me so vain—much more vain than I let you see I was. There were times when it is quite true I thought myself a princess. I am not worse-looking now, but I suppose I desire to be so beautiful that nothing satisfies me.

“A spot on my neck gives me a dreadful fright. If my hair comes out much when I comb it, it sets my heart beating; and it is a daily misery to me that my hands are larger than they should be, belonging to Edward’s ‘resplendent wife.’ I thank heaven that you and I always saw the necessity of being careful of our fingernails. My feet are of moderate size, though they are not French feet, as Edward says. No: I shall never dance. He sent me to the dancing-master in London, but it was too late. But I have been complimented on my walking, and that seems to please Edward. He does not dance (or mind dancing) himself, only he does not like me to miss one perfection. It is his love.

Oh! if I have seemed to let you suppose he does not love me as ever, do not think it. He is most tender and true to me. Addio! I am signora, you are signorina.

Page 898

“They have such pretty manners to us over here. Edward says they think less of women: I say they think more. But I feel he must be right. Oh, my dear, cold, loving, innocent sister! put out your arms; I shall feel them round me, and kiss you, kiss you for ever!”

Onward from city to city, like a radiation of light from the old farm-house, where so little of it was, Dahlia continued her journey; and then, without a warning, with only a word to say that she neared Rome, the letters ceased. A chord snapped in Rhoda’s bosom. While she was hearing from her sister almost weekly, her confidence was buoyed on a summer sea. In the silence it fell upon a dread. She had no answer in her mind for her father’s unspoken dissatisfaction, and she had to conceal her cruel anxiety. There was an interval of two months: a blank fell charged with apprehension that was like the humming of a toneless wind before storm; worse than the storm, for any human thing to bear.

Rhoda was unaware that Robert, who rarely looked at her, and never sought to speak a word to her when by chance they met and were alone, studied each change in her face, and read its signs. He was left to his own interpretation of them, but the signs he knew accurately. He knew that her pride had sunk, and that her heart was desolate. He believed that she had discovered her sister’s misery.

One day a letter arrived that gave her no joyful colouring, though it sent colour to her cheeks. She opened it, evidently not knowing the handwriting; her eyes ran down the lines hurriedly. After a time she went upstairs for her bonnet.

At the stile leading into that lane where Robert had previously seen her, she was stopped by him.

“No farther,” was all that he said, and he was one who could have interdicted men from advancing.

“Why may I not go by you?” said Rhoda, with a woman’s affected humbleness.

Robert joined his hands. “You go no farther, Miss Rhoda, unless you take me with you.”

“I shall not do that, Mr. Robert.”

“Then you had better return home.”

“Will you let me know what reasons you have for behaving in this manner to me?”

“I’ll let you know by-and-by,” said Robert. “At present, You’ll let the stronger of the two have his way.”

He had always been so meek and gentle and inoffensive, that her contempt had enjoyed free play, and had never risen to anger; but violent anger now surged against him, and she cried, “Do you dare to touch me?” trying to force her passage by.

Robert caught her softly by the wrist. There stood at the same time a full-statured strength of will in his eyes, under which her own fainted.

“Go back,” he said; and she turned that he might not see her tears of irritation and shame. He was treating her as a child; but it was to herself alone that she could defend herself. She marvelled that when she thought of an outspoken complaint against him, her conscience gave her no support.

Page 899

“Is there no freedom for a woman at all in this world?” Rhoda framed the bitter question.

Rhoda went back as she had come. Algernon Blancove did the same. Between them stood Robert, thinking, “Now I have made that girl hate me for life.”

It was in November that a letter, dated from London, reached the farm, quickening Rhoda’s blood anew. “I am alive,” said Dahlia; and she said little more, except that she was waiting to see her sister, and bade her urgently to travel up alone. Her father consented to her doing so. After a consultation with Robert, however, he determined to accompany her.

“She can’t object to see me too,” said the farmer; and Rhoda answered “No.” But her face was bronze to Robert when they took their departure.

CHAPTER X

Old Anthony was expecting them in London. It was now winter, and the season for theatres; so, to show his brother-in-law the fun of a theatre was one part of his projected hospitality, if Mr. Fleming should haply take the hint that he must pay for himself.

Anthony had laid out money to welcome the farmer, and was shy and fidgety as a girl who anticipates the visit of a promising youth, over his fat goose for next day’s dinner, and his shrimps for this day’s tea, and his red slice of strong cheese, called of Cheshire by the reckless butter-man, for supper.

He knew that both Dahlia and Rhoda must have told the farmer that he was not high up in Boyne’s Bank, and it fretted him to think that the mysterious respect entertained for his wealth by the farmer, which delighted him with a novel emotion, might be dashed by what the farmer would behold.

During his last visit to the farm, Anthony had talked of the Funds more suggestively than usual. He had alluded to his own dealings in them, and to what he would do and would not do under certain contingencies; thus shadowing out, dimly luminous and immense, what he could do, if his sagacity prompted the adventure. The farmer had listened through the buzzing of his uncertain grief, only sighing for answer. “If ever you come up to London, brother William John,” said Anthony, “you mind you go about arm-in-arm with me, or you’ll be judging by appearances, and says you, ‘Lor’, what a thousander fellow this is!’ and ’What a millioner fellow that is!’ You’ll be giving your millions and your thousands to the wrong people, when they haven’t got a penny. All London ’ll be topsy-turvy to you, unless you’ve got a guide, and he’ll show you a shabby-coated, head-in-the-gutter old man ’ll buy up the lot. Everybody that doesn’t know him says—look at him! but they that knows him—hats off, I can tell you. And talk about lords! We don’t

mind their coming into the city, but they know the scent of cash. I've had a lord take off his hat to me. It's a fact, I have."

Page 900

In spite of the caution Anthony had impressed upon his country relative, that he should not judge by appearances, he was nevertheless under an apprehension that the farmer's opinion of him, and the luxurious, almost voluptuous, enjoyment he had of it, were in peril. When he had purchased the well-probed fat goose, the shrimps, and the cheese, he was only half-satisfied. His ideas shot boldly at a bottle of wine, and he employed a summer-lighted evening in going a round of wine-merchants' placards, and looking out for the cheapest bottle he could buy. And he would have bought one—he had sealing-wax of his own and could have stamped it with the office-stamp of Boyne's Bank for that matter, to make it as dignified and costly as the vaunted red seals and green seals of the placards—he would have bought one, had he not, by one of his lucky mental illuminations, recollected that it was within his power to procure an order to taste wine at the Docks, where you may get as much wine as you like out of big sixpenny glasses, and try cask after cask, walking down gas-lit paths between the huge bellies of wine which groan to be tapped and tried, that men may know them. The idea of paying two shillings and sixpence for one miserable bottle vanished at the richly-coloured prospect. "That'll show him something of what London is," thought Anthony; and a companion thought told him in addition that the farmer, with a skinful of wine, would emerge into the open air imagining no small things of the man who could gain admittance into those marvellous caverns. "By George! it's like a boy's story-book," cried Anthony, in his soul, and he chuckled over the vision of the farmer's amazement—acted it with his arms extended, and his hat unseated, and plunged into wheezy fits of laughter.

He met his guests at the station. Mr. Fleming was soberly attired in what, to Anthony's London eye, was a curiosity costume; but the broad brim of the hat, the square cut of the brown coat, and the leggings, struck him as being very respectable, and worthy of a presentation at any Bank in London.

"You stick to a leather purse, brother William John?" he inquired, with an artistic sentiment for things in keeping.

"I do," said the farmer, feeling seriously at the button over it.

"All right; I shan't ask ye to show it in the street," Anthony rejoined, and smote Rhoda's hand as it hung.

"Glad to see your old uncle—are ye?"

Rhoda replied quietly that she was, but had come with the principal object of seeing her sister.

"There!" cried Anthony, "you never get a compliment out of this gal. She gives ye the nut, and you're to crack it, and there maybe, or there mayn't be, a kernel inside—she don't care."

“But there ain’t much in it!” the farmer ejaculated, withdrawing his fingers from the button they had been teasing for security since Anthony’s question about the purse.

Page 901

“Not much—eh! brother William John?” Anthony threw up a puzzled look. “Not much baggage—I see that—” he exclaimed; “and, Lord be thanked! no trunks. Aha, my dear”—he turned to Rhoda—“you remember your lesson, do ye? Now, mark me—I’ll remember you for it. Do you know, my dear,” he said to Rhoda confidentially, “that sixpenn’orth of chaff which I made the cabman pay for—there was the cream of it!—that was better than Peruvian bark to my constitution. It was as good to me as a sniff of sea-breeze and no excursion expenses. I’d like another, just to feel young again, when I’d have backed myself to beat—cabmen? Ah! I’ve stood up, when I was a young ’un, and shut up a Cheap Jack at a fair. Circulation’s the soul o’ chaff. That’s why I don’t mind tackling cabmen—they sit all day, and all they’ve got to say is ‘rat-tat,’ and they’ve done. But I let the boys roar. I know what I was when a boy myself. I’ve got devil in me—never you fear—but it’s all on the side of the law. Now, let’s off, for the gentlemen are starin’ at you, which won’t hurt ye, ye know, but makes me jealous.”

Before the party moved away from the platform, a sharp tussle took place between Anthony and the farmer as to the porterage of the bulky bag; but it being only half-earnest, the farmer did not put out his strength, and Anthony had his way.

“I rather astonished you, brother William John,” he said, when they were in the street.

The farmer admitted that he was stronger than he looked.

“Don’t you judge by appearances, that’s all,” Anthony remarked, setting down the bag to lay his finger on one side of his nose for impressiveness.

“Now, there we leave London Bridge to the right, and we should away to the left, and quiet parts.” He seized the bag anew. “Just listen. That’s the roaring of cataracts of gold you hear, brother William John. It’s a good notion, ain’t it? Hark!—I got that notion from one of your penny papers. You can buy any amount for a penny, now-a-days—-poetry up in a corner, stories, tales o’ temptation—one fellow cut his lucky with his master’s cash, dashed away to Australia, made millions, fit to be a lord, and there he was! liable to the law! and everybody bowing their hats and their heads off to him, and his knees knocking at the sight of a policeman—a man of a red complexion, full habit of body, enjoyed his dinner and his wine, and on account of his turning white so often, they called him—’sealing-wax and Parchment’ was one name; ’Carrots and turnips’ was another; ‘Blumonge and something,’ and so on. Fancy his having to pay half his income in pensions to chaps who could have had him out of his town or country mansion and popped into gaol in a jiffy. And found out at last! Them tales set you thinking. Once I was an idle young scaramouch. But you can buy every idea that’s useful to you for a penny. I tried the halfpenny journals. Cheapness ain’t always profitable. The moral is, Make your money, and you may buy all the rest.”

Page 902

Discoursing thus by the way, and resisting the farmer's occasional efforts to relieve him of the bag, with the observation that appearances were deceiving, and that he intended, please his Maker, to live and turn over a little more interest yet, Anthony brought them to Mrs. Wicklow's house. Mrs. Wicklow promised to put them into the track of the omnibuses running toward Dahlia's abode in the Southwest, and Mary Ann Wicklow, who had a burning desire in her bosom to behold even the outside shell of her friend's new grandeur, undertook very disinterestedly to accompany them. Anthony's strict injunction held them due at a lamp-post outside Boyne's Bank, at half-past three o'clock in the afternoon.

"My love to Dahly," he said. "She was always a head and shoulders over my size. Tell her, when she rolls by in her carriage, not to mind me. I got my own notions of value. And if that Mr. Ayrton of hers 'll bank at Boyne's, I'll behave to him like a customer. This here's the girl for my money." He touched Rhoda's arm, and so disappeared.

The farmer chided her for her cold manner to her uncle, murmuring aside to her: "You heard what he said." Rhoda was frozen with her heart's expectation, and insensible to hints or reproof. The people who entered the omnibus seemed to her stale phantoms bearing a likeness to every one she had known, save to her beloved whom she was about to meet, after long separation.

She marvelled pityingly at the sort of madness which kept the streets so lively for no reasonable purpose. When she was on her feet again, she felt for the first time, that she was nearing the sister for whom she hungered, and the sensation beset her that she had landed in a foreign country. Mary Ann Wicklow chattered all the while to the general ear. It was her pride to be the discoverer of Dahlia's terrace.

"Not for worlds would she enter the house," she said, in a general tone; she knowing better than to present herself where downright entreaty did not invite her.

Rhoda left her to count the numbers along the terrace-walk, and stood out in the road that her heart might select Dahlia's habitation from the other hueless residences. She fixed upon one, but she was wrong, and her heart sank. The fair Mary Ann fought her and beat her by means of a careful reckoning, as she remarked,—

"I keep my eyes open; Number 15 is the corner house, the bow-window, to a certainty."

Gardens were in front of the houses; or, to speak more correctly, strips of garden walks. A cab was drawn up close by the shrub-covered iron gate leading up to No. 15. Mary Ann hurried them on, declaring that they might be too late even now at a couple of dozen paces distant, seeing that London cabs, crawlers as they usually were, could, when required, and paid for it, do their business like lightning. Her observation was illustrated the moment after they had left her in the rear; for a gentleman suddenly sprang across the pavement, jumped into a cab, and was whirled away, with as much

apparent magic to provincial eyes, as if a pantomimic trick had been performed. Rhoda pressed forward a step in advance of her father.

Page 903

“It may have been her husband,” she thought, and trembled. The curtains up in the drawing-room were moved as by a hand; but where was Dahlia’s face? Dahlia knew that they were coming, and she was not on the look-out for them!—a strange conflict of facts, over which Rhoda knitted her black brows, so that she looked menacing to the maid opening the door, whose “Oh, if you please, Miss,” came in contact with “My sister —Mrs.—, she expects me. I mean, Mrs.—” but no other name than “Dahlia” would fit itself to Rhoda’s mouth.

“Ayrton,” said the maid, and recommenced, “Oh, if you please, Miss, and you are the young lady, Mrs. Ayrton is very sorry, and have left word, would you call again to-morrow, as she have made a pressing appointment, and was sure you would excuse her, but her husband was very anxious for her to go, and could not put it off, and was very sorry, but would you call again to-morrow at twelve o’clock? and punctually she would be here.”

The maid smiled as one who had fairly accomplished the recital of her lesson. Rhoda was stunned.

“Is Mrs. Ayrton at home?—Not at home?” she said.

“No: don’t ye hear?” quoth the farmer, sternly.

“She had my letter—do you know?” Rhoda appealed to the maid.

“Oh, yes, Miss. A letter from the country.”

“This morning?”

“Yes, Miss; this morning.”

“And she has gone out? What time did she go out? When will she be in?”

Her father plucked at her dress. “Best not go making the young woman repeat herself. She says, nobody’s at home to ask us in. There’s no more, then, to trouble her for.”

“At twelve o’clock to-morrow?” Rhoda faltered.

“Would you, if you please, call again at twelve o’clock to-morrow, and punctually she would be here,” said the maid.

The farmer hung his head and turned. Rhoda followed him from the garden. She was immediately plied with queries and interjections of wonderment by Miss Wicklow, and it was not until she said: “You saw him go out, didn’t you?—into the cab?” that Rhoda awakened to a meaning in her gabble.

Was it Dahlia's husband whom they had seen? And if so, why was Dahlia away from her husband? She questioned in her heart, but not for an answer, for she allowed no suspicions to live. The farmer led on with his plodding country step, burdened shoulders, and ruddy-fowled, serious face, not speaking to Rhoda, who had no desire to hear a word from him, and let him be. Mary Ann steered him and called from behind the turnings he was to take, while she speculated aloud to Rhoda upon the nature of the business that had torn Dahlia from the house so inopportunely. At last she announced that she knew what it was, but Rhoda failed to express curiosity. Mary Ann was driven to whisper something about strange things in the way of purchases. At that moment the farmer threw up his umbrella, shouting for a cab, and Rhoda ran up to him,—

Page 904

“Oh, father, why do we want to ride?”

“Yes, I tell ye!” said the farmer, chafing against his coat-collar.

“It is an expense, when we can walk, father.”

“What do I care for th’ expense? I shall ride.” He roared again for a cab, and one came that took them in; after which, the farmer, not being spoken to, became gravely placid as before. They were put down at Boyne’s Bank. Anthony was on the look-out, and signalled them to stand away some paces from the door. They were kept about a quarter of an hour waiting between two tides of wayfarers, which hustled them one way and another, when out, at last, came the old, broad, bent figure, with little finicking steps, and hurried past them head foremost, his arms narrowed across a bulgy breast. He stopped to make sure that they were following, beckoned with his chin, and proceeded at a mighty rate. Marvellous was his rounding of corners, his threading of obstructions, his skilful diplomacy with passengers. Presently they lost sight of him, and stood bewildered; but while they were deliberating they heard his voice. He was above them, having issued from two swinging bright doors; and he laughed and nodded, as he ran down the steps, and made signs, by which they were to understand that he was relieved of a weight.

“I’ve done that twenty year of my life, brother William John,” he said. “Eh? Perhaps you didn’t guess I was worth some thousands when I got away from you just now? Let any chap try to stop me! They may just as well try to stop a railway train. Steam’s up, and I’m off.”

He laughed and wiped his forehead. Slightly vexed at the small amount of discoverable astonishment on the farmer’s face, he continued,—

“You don’t think much of it. Why, there ain’t another man but myself Boyne’s Bank would trust. They’ve trusted me thirty year:—why shouldn’t they go on trusting me another thirty year? A good character, brother William John, goes on compound-interesting, just like good coin. Didn’t you feel a sort of heat as I brushed by you—eh? That was a matter of one-two-three-four” Anthony watched the farmer as his voice swelled up on the heightening numbers: “five-six-six thousand pounds, brother William John. People must think something of a man to trust him with that sum pretty near every day of their lives, Sundays excepted—eh? don’t you think so?”

He dwelt upon the immense confidence reposed in him, and the terrible temptation it would be to some men, and how they ought to thank their stars that they were never thrown in the way of such a temptation, of which he really thought nothing at all—-nothing! until the farmer’s countenance was lightened of its air of oppression, for a puzzle was dissolved in his brain. It was now manifest to him that Anthony was trusted in this extraordinary manner because the heads and managers of Boyne’s Bank knew

the old man to be possessed of a certain very respectable sum: in all probability they held it in their coffers for safety and credited him with the amount. Nay, more; it was fair to imagine that the guileless old fellow, who conceived himself to be so deep, had let them get it all into their hands without any suspicion of their prominent object in doing so.

Page 905

Mr. Fleming said, “Ah, yes, surely.”

He almost looked shrewd as he smiled over Anthony’s hat. The healthy exercise of his wits relieved his apprehensive paternal heart; and when he mentioned that Dahlia had not been at home when he called, he at the same time sounded his hearer for excuses to be raised on her behalf, himself clumsily suggesting one or two, as to show that he was willing to swallow a very little for comfort.

“Oh, of course!” said Anthony, jeeringly. “Out? If you catch her in, these next three or four days, you’ll be lucky. Ah, brother William John!”

The farmer, half frightened by Anthony’s dolorous shake of his head, exclaimed: “What’s the matter, man?”

“How proud I should be if only you was in a way to bank at Boyne’s!”

“Ah!” went the farmer in his turn, and he plunged his chin deep in his neckerchief.

“Perhaps some of your family will, some day, brother William John.”

“Happen, some of my family do, brother Anthony!”

“Will is what I said, brother William John; if good gals, and civil, and marry decently—-eh?” and he faced about to Rhoda who was walking with Miss Wicklow. “What does she look so down about, my dear? Never be down. I don’t mind you telling your young man, whoever he is; and I’d like him to be a strapping young six-footer I’ve got in my eye, who farms. What does he farm with to make farming answer now-a-days? Why, he farms with brains. You’ll find that in my last week’s Journal, brother William John, and thinks I, as I conned it—the farmer ought to read that! You may tell any young man you like, my dear, that your old uncle’s fond of ye.”

On their arrival home, Mrs. Wicklow met them with a letter in her hand. It was for Rhoda from Dahlia, saying that Dahlia was grieved to the heart to have missed her dear father and her darling sister. But her husband had insisted upon her going out to make particular purchases, and do a dozen things; and he was extremely sorry to have been obliged to take her away, but she hoped to see her dear sister and her father very, very soon. She wished she were her own mistress that she might run to them, but men when they are husbands require so much waiting on that she could never call five minutes her own. She would entreat them to call tomorrow, only she would then be moving to her new lodgings. “But, oh! my dear, my blessed Rhoda!” the letter concluded, “do keep fast in your heart that I do love you so, and pray that we may meet soon, as I pray it every night and all day long. Beg father to stop till we meet. Things will soon be arranged. They must. Oh! oh, my Rhoda, love! how handsome you have

grown. It is very well to be fair for a time, but the brunettes have the happiest lot. They last, and when we blonde ones cry or grow thin, oh! what objects we become!”

There were some final affectionate words, but no further explanations.

The wrinkles again settled on the farmer’s mild, uncomplaining forehead.

Page 906

Rhoda said: “Let us wait, father.”

When alone, she locked the letter against her heart, as to suck the secret meaning out of it. Thinking over it was useless; except for this one thought: how did her sister know she had grown very handsome? Perhaps the housemaid had prattled.

CHAPTER XI

Dahlia, the perplexity to her sister’s heart, lay stretched at full length upon the sofa of a pleasantly furnished London drawing-room, sobbing to herself, with her handkerchief across her eyes. She had cried passion out, and sobbed now for comfort.

She lay in her rich silken dress like the wreck of a joyful creature, while the large red Winter sun rounded to evening, and threw deep-coloured beams against the wall above her head. They touched the nut-brown hair to vivid threads of fire: but she lay faceless. Utter languor and the dread of looking at her eyelids in the glass kept her prostrate.

So, the darkness closed her about; the sickly gas-lamps of the street showing her as a shrouded body.

A girl came in to spread the cloth for dinner, and went through her duties with the stolidity of the London lodging-house maidservant, poking a clogged fire to perdition, and repressing a songful spirit.

Dahlia knew well what was being done; she would have given much to have saved her nostrils from the smell of dinner; it was a great immediate evil to her sickened senses; but she had no energy to call out, nor will of any kind. The odours floated to her, and passively she combated them.

At first she was nearly vanquished; the meat smelt so acrid, the potatoes so sour; each afflicting vegetable asserted itself peculiarly; and the bread, the salt even, on the wings of her morbid fancy, came steaming about her, subtle, penetrating, thick, and hateful, like the pressure of a cloud out of which disease is shot.

Such it seemed to her, till she could have shrieked; but only a few fresh tears started down her cheeks, and she lay enduring it.

Dead silence and stillness hung over the dinner-service, when the outer door below was opened, and a light foot sprang up the stairs.

There entered a young gentleman in evening dress, with a loose black wrapper drooping from his shoulders.

He looked on the table, and then glancing at the sofa, said:

“Oh, there she is!” and went to the window and whistled.

After a minute of great patience, he turned his face back to the room again, and commenced tapping his foot on the carpet.

“Well?” he said, finding these indications of exemplary self-command unheeded. His voice was equally powerless to provoke a sign of animation. He now displaced his hat, and said, “Dahlia!”

She did not move.

“I am here to very little purpose, then,” he remarked.

A guttering fall of her bosom was perceptible.

Page 907

“For heaven’s sake, take away that handkerchief, my good child! Why have you let your dinner get cold? Here,” he lifted a cover; “here’s roast-beef. You like it—why don’t you eat it? That’s only a small piece of the general inconsistency, I know. And why haven’t they put champagne on the table for you? You lose your spirits without it. If you took it when these moody fits came on—but there’s no advising a woman to do anything for her own good. Dahlia, will you do me the favour to speak two or three words with me before I go? I would have dined here, but I have a man to meet me at the Club. Of what mortal service is it shamming the insensible? You’ve produced the required effect, I am as uncomfortable as I need be. Absolutely!

“Well,” seeing that words were of no avail, he summed up expostulation and reproach in this sigh of resigned philosophy: “I am going. Let me see—I have my Temple keys?—yes! I am afraid that even when you are inclined to be gracious and look at me, I shall not, be visible to you for some days. I start for Lord Elling’s to-morrow morning at five. I meet my father there by appointment. I’m afraid we shall have to stay over Christmas. Good-bye.” He paused. “Good-bye, my dear.”

Two or three steps nearer the door, he said, “By the way, do you want anything? Money?—do you happen to want any money? I will send a blank cheque tomorrow. I have sufficient for both of us. I shall tell the landlady to order your Christmas dinner. How about wine? There is champagne, I know, and bottled ale. Sherry? I’ll drop a letter to my wine-merchant; I think the sherry’s running dry.”

Her sense of hearing was now afflicted in as gross a manner as had been her sense of smell. She could not have spoken, though her vitality had pressed for speech. It would have astonished him to hear that his solicitude concerning provender for her during his absence was not esteemed a kindness; for surely it is a kindly thing to think of it; and for whom but for one for whom he cared would he be counting the bottles to be left at her disposal, insomuch that the paucity of the bottles of sherry in the establishment distressed his mental faculties?

“Well, good-bye,” he said, finally. The door closed.

Had Dahlia’s misery been in any degree simulated, her eyes now, as well as her ears, would have taken positive assurance of his departure. But with the removal of her handkerchief, the loathsome sight of the dinner-table would have saluted her, and it had already caused her suffering enough. She chose to remain as she was, saying to herself, “I am dead;” and softly revelling in that corpse-like sentiment. She scarcely knew that the door had opened again.

“Dahlia!”

She heard her name pronounced, and more entreatingly, and closer to her.

“Dahlia, my poor girl!” Her hand was pressed. It gave her no shudders.

“I am dead,” she mentally repeated, for the touch did not run up to her heart and stir it.

Page 908

“Dahlia, do be reasonable! I can’t leave you like this. We shall be separated for some time. And what a miserable fire you’ve got here! You have agreed with me that we are acting for the best. It’s very hard on me I try what I can to make you comf—happy; and really, to see you leaving your dinner to get cold! Your hands are like ice. The meat won’t be eatable. You know I’m not my own master. Come, Dahly, my darling!”

He gently put his hand to her chin, and then drew away the handkerchief.

Dahlia moaned at the exposure of her tear-stained face, she turned it languidly to the wall.

“Are you ill, my dear?” he asked.

Men are so considerately practical! He begged urgently to be allowed to send for a doctor.

But women, when they choose to be unhappy, will not accept of practical consolations! She moaned a refusal to see the doctor.

Then what can I do for her? he naturally thought, and he naturally uttered it.

“Say good-bye to me,” he whispered. “And my pretty one will write to me. I shall reply so punctually! I don’t like to leave her at Christmas; and she will give me a line of Italian, and a little French—mind her accents, though!—and she needn’t attempt any of the nasty German—kshrra-kouzzra-kratz!—which her pretty lips can’t do, and won’t do; but only French and Italian. Why, she learnt to speak Italian! ’La dolcezza ancor dentro me suona.’ Don’t you remember, and made such fun of it at first? ‘Amo zoo;’ ‘no amo me?’ my sweet!”

This was a specimen of the baby-lover talk, which is charming in its season, and maybe pleasantly cajoling to a loving woman at all times, save when she is in Dahlia’s condition. It will serve even then, or she will pass it forgivingly, as not the food she for a moment requires; but it must be purely simple in its utterance, otherwise she detects the poor chicanery, and resents the meanness of it. She resents it with unutterable sickness of soul, for it is the language of what were to her the holiest hours of her existence, which is thus hypocritically used to blind and rock her in a cradle of deception. If corrupt, she maybe brought to answer to it all the same, and she will do her part of the play, and babble words, and fret and pout deliciously; and the old days will seem to be revived, when both know they are dead; and she will thereby gain any advantage she is seeking.

But Dahlia’s sorrow was deep: her heart was sound. She did not even perceive the opportunity offered to her for a wily performance. She felt the hollowness of his speech, and no more; and she said, “Good-bye, Edward.”

He had been on one knee. Springing cheerfully to his feet, “Good-bye, darling,” he said. “But I must see her sit to table first. Such a wretched dinner for her!” and he mumbled, “By Jove, I suppose I shan’t get any at all myself!” His watch confirmed it to him that any dinner which had been provided for him at the Club would be spoilt.

Page 909

“Never mind,” he said aloud, and examined the roast-beef ruefully, thinking that, doubtless, it being more than an hour behind the appointed dinner-time at the Club, his guest must now be gone.

For a minute or so he gazed at the mournful spectacle. The potatoes looked as if they had committed suicide in their own steam. There were mashed turnips, with a glazed surface, like the bright bottom of a tin pan. One block of bread was by the lonely plate. Neither hot nor cold, the whole aspect of the dinner-table resisted and repelled the gaze, and made no pretensions to allure it.

The thought of partaking of this repast endowed him with a critical appreciation of its character, and a gush of charitable emotion for the poor girl who had such miserable dishes awaiting her, arrested the philosophic reproof which he could have administered to one that knew so little how a dinner of any sort should be treated. He strode to the windows, pulled down the blind he had previously raised, rang the bell, and said,—

“Dahlia, there—I’m going to dine with you, my love. I’ve rung the bell for more candles. The room shivers. That girl will see you, if you don’t take care. Where is the key of the cupboard? We must have some wine out. The champagne, at all events, won’t be flat.”

He commenced humming the song of complacent resignation. Dahlia was still inanimate, but as the door was about to open, she rose quickly and sat in a tremble on the sofa, concealing her face.

An order was given for additional candles, coals, and wood. When the maid had disappeared Dahlia got on her feet, and steadied herself by the wall, tottering away to her chamber.

“Ah, poor thing!” ejaculated the young man, not without an idea that the demonstration was unnecessary. For what is decidedly disagreeable is, in a young man’s calculation concerning women, not necessary at all,—quite the reverse. Are not women the flowers which decorate sublunary life? It is really irritating to discover them to be pieces of machinery, that for want of proper oiling, creak, stick, threaten convulsions, and are tragic and stir us the wrong way. However, champagne does them good: an admirable wine—a sure specific for the sex!

He searched around for the keys to get at a bottle and uncork it forthwith. The keys were on the mantelpiece a bad comment on Dahlia’s housekeeping qualities; but in the hurry of action let it pass. He welcomed the candles gladly, and soon had all the cupboards in the room royally open.

Bustle is instinctively adopted by the human race as the substitute of comfort. He called for more lights, more plates, more knives and forks. He sent for ice the maid observed that it was not to be had save at a distant street: “Jump into a cab—champagne’s

nothing without ice, even in Winter," he said, and rang for her as she was leaving the house, to name a famous fishmonger who was sure to supply the ice.

Page 910

The establishment soon understood that Mr. Ayrton intended dining within those walls. Fresh potatoes were put on to boil. The landlady came up herself to arouse the fire. The maid was for a quarter of an hour hovering between the order to get ice and the execution of immediate commands. One was that she should take a glass of champagne to Mrs. Ayrton in her room. He drank off one himself. Mrs. Ayrton's glass being brought back untouched, he drank that off likewise, and as he became more exhilarated, was more considerate for her, to such a degree, that when she appeared he seized her hands and only jestingly scolded her for her contempt of sound medicine, declaring, in spite of her protestations, that she was looking lovely, and so they sat down to their dinner, she with an anguished glance at the looking-glass as she sank in her chair.

"It's not bad, after all," said he, drenching his tasteless mouthful of half-cold meat with champagne. "The truth is, that Clubs spoil us. This is Spartan fare. Come, drink with me, my dearest. One sip."

She was coaxed by degrees to empty a glass. She had a gentle heart, and could not hold out long against a visible lively kindliness. It pleased him that she should bow to him over fresh bubbles; and they went formally through the ceremony, and she smiled. He joked and laughed and talked, and she eyed him a faint sweetness. He perceived now that she required nothing more than the restoration of her personal pride, and setting bright eyes on her, hazarded a bold compliment.

Dahlia drooped like a yacht with idle sails struck by a sudden blast, that dips them in the salt; but she raised her face with the full bloom of a blush: and all was plain sailing afterward.

"Has my darling seen her sister?" he asked softly.

Dahlia answered, "No," in the same tone.

Both looked away.

"She won't leave town without seeing you?"

"I hope—I don't know. She—she has called at our last lodgings twice."

"Alone?"

"Yes; I think so."

Dahlia kept her head down, replying; and his observation of her wavered uneasily.

"Why not write to her, then?"

“She will bring father.”

The sob thickened in her throat; but, alas for him who had at first, while she was on the sofa, affected to try all measures to revive her, that I must declare him to know well how certain was his mastery over her, when his manner was thoroughly kind. He had not much fear of her relapsing at present.

“You can’t see your father?”

“No.”

“But, do. It’s best.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Not—” she hesitated, and clasped her hands in her lap.

“Yes, yes; I know,” said he; “but still! You could surely see him. You rouse suspicions that need not exist. Try another glass, my dear.”

“No more.”

Page 911

“Well; as I was saying, you force him to think—and there is no necessity for it. He maybe as hard on this point as you say; but now and then a little innocent deception maybe practised. We only require to gain time. You place me in a very hard position. I have a father too. He has his own idea of things. He’s a proud man, as I’ve told you; tremendously ambitious, and he wants to push me, not only at the bar, but in the money market matrimonial. All these notions I have to contend against. Things can’t be done at once. If I give him a shock—well, we’ll drop any consideration of the consequences. Write to your sister to tell her to bring your father. If they make particular inquiries—very unlikely I think—but, if they do, put them at their ease.”

She sighed.

“Why was my poor darling so upset, when I came in?” said he.

There was a difficulty in her speaking. He waited with much patient twiddling of bread crumbs; and at last she said:

“My sister called twice at my—our old lodgings. The second time, she burst into tears. The girl told me so.”

“But women cry so often, and for almost anything, Dahlia.”

“Rhoda cries with her hands closed hard, and her eyelids too.”

“Well, that maybe her way.”

“I have only seen her cry once, and that was when mother was dying, and asked her to fetch a rose from the garden. I met her on the stairs. She was like wood. She hates crying. She loves me so.”

The sympathetic tears rolled down Dahlia’s cheeks.

“So, you quite refuse to see your father?” he asked.

“Not yet!”

“Not yet,” he repeated.

At the touch of scorn in his voice, she exclaimed:

“Oh, Edward! not yet, I cannot. I know I am weak. I can’t meet him now. If my Rhoda had come alone, as I hoped—! but he is with her. Don’t blame me, Edward. I can’t explain. I only know that I really have not the power to see him.”

Edward nodded. “The sentiment some women put into things is inexplicable,” he said. “Your sister and father will return home. They will have formed their ideas. You know how unjust they will be. Since, however, the taste is for being a victim—eh?”

London lodging-house rooms in Winter when the blinds are down, and a cheerless fire is in the grate, or when blinds are up and street-lamps salute the inhabitants with uncordial rays, are not entertaining places of residence for restless spirits. Edward paced about the room. He lit a cigar and puffed at it fretfully.

“Will you come and try one of the theatres for an hour?” he asked.

She rose submissively, afraid to say that she thought she should look ill in the staring lights; but he, with great quickness of perception, rendered her task easier by naming the dress she was to wear, the jewels, and the colour of the opera cloak. Thus prompted, Dahlia went to her chamber, and passively attired herself, thankful to have been spared the pathetic troubles of a selection of garments from her wardrobe. When she came forth, Edward thought her marvellously beautiful.

Page 912

Pity that she had no strength of character whatever, nor any pointed liveliness of mind to match and wrestle with his own, and cheer the domestic hearth! But she was certainly beautiful. Edward kissed her hand in commendation. Though it was practically annoying that she should be sad, the hue and spirit of sadness came home to her aspect. Sorrow visited her tenderly falling eyelids like a sister.

CHAPTER XII

Edward's engagement at his Club had been with his unfortunate cousin Algernon; who not only wanted a dinner but 'five pounds or so' (the hazy margin which may extend illimitably, or miserably contract, at the lender's pleasure, and the necessity for which shows the borrower to be dancing on Fortune's tight-rope above the old abyss).

"Over claret," was to have been the time for the asking; and Algernon waited dinnerless until the healthy-going minutes distended and swelled monstrous and horrible as viper-bitten bodies, and the venerable Signior, Time, became of unhealthy hue. For this was the first dinner which, during the whole course of the young man's career, had ever been failing to him. Reflect upon the mournful gap! He could scarcely believe in his ill-luck. He suggested it to himself with an inane grin, as one of the far-away freaks of circumstances that had struck him—and was it not comical?

He waited from the hour of six till the hour of seven. He compared clocks in the hall and the room. He changed the posture of his legs fifty times. For a while he wrestled right gallantly with the apparent menace of the Fates that he was to get no dinner at all that day; it seemed incredibly derisive, for, as I must repeat, it had never happened to him by any accident before. "You are born—you dine." Such appeared to him to be the positive regulation of affairs, and a most proper one,—of the matters of course following the birth of a young being.

By what frightful mischance, then, does he miss his dinner? By placing the smallest confidence in the gentlemanly feeling of another man! Algernon deduced this reply accurately from his own experience, and whether it can be said by other "undined" mortals, does not matter in the least. But we have nothing to do with the constitutionally luckless: the calamitous history of a simple empty stomach is enough. Here the tragedy is palpable. Indeed, too sadly so, and I dare apply but a flash of the microscope to the rageing dilemmas of this animalcule. Five and twenty minutes had signalled their departure from the hour of seven, when Algernon pronounced his final verdict upon Edward's conduct by leaving the Club. He returned to it a quarter of an hour later, and lingered on in desperate mood till eight.

He had neither watch in his pocket, nor ring on his finger, nor disposable stud in his shirt. The sum of twenty-one pence was in his possession, and, I ask you, as he asked himself, how is a gentleman to dine upon that? He laughed at the notion. The irony of

Providence sent him by a cook’s shop, where the mingled steam of meats and puddings rushed out upon the wayfarer like ambushed bandits, and seized him and dragged him in, or sent him qualmish and humbled on his way.

Page 913

Two little boys had flattened their noses to the whiteness of winkles against the jealously misty windows. Algernon knew himself to be accounted a generous fellow, and remembering his reputation, he, as to hint at what Fortune might do in his case, tossed some coppers to the urchins, who ducked to the pavement and slid before the counter, in a flash, with never a “thank ye” or the thought of it.

Algernon was incapable of appreciating this childish faith in the beneficence of the unseen Powers who feed us, which, I must say for him, he had shared in a very similar manner only two hours ago. He laughed scornfully: “The little beggars!” considering in his soul that of such is humanity composed: as many a dinnerless man has said before, and will again, to point the speech of fools. He continued strolling on, comparing the cramped misty London aspect of things with his visionary free dream of the glorious prairies, where his other life was: the forests, the mountains, the endless expanses; the horses, the flocks, the slipshod ease of language and attire; and the grog-shops. Aha! There could be no mistake about him as a gentleman and a scholar out there! Nor would Nature shut up her pocket and demand innumerable things of him, as civilization did. This he thought in the vengefulness of his outraged mind.

Not only had Algernon never failed to dine every day of his life: he had no recollection of having ever dined without drinking wine. His conception did not embrace the idea of a dinner lacking wine. Possibly he had some embodied understanding that wine did not fall to the lot of every fellow upon earth: he had heard of gullets unrefreshed even by beer: but at any rate he himself was accustomed to better things, and he did not choose to excavate facts from the mass of his knowledge in order to reconcile himself to the miserable chop he saw for his dinner in the distance—a spot of meat in the arctic circle of a plate, not shone upon by any rosy-warming sun of a decanter!

But metaphorical language, though nothing other will convey the extremity of his misery, or the form of his thoughts, must be put aside.

“Egad, and every friend I have is out of town!” he exclaimed, quite willing to think it part of the plot.

He stuck his hands in his pockets, and felt vagabond-like and reckless. The streets were revelling in their winter muck. The carriages rolling by insulted him with their display of wealth.

He had democratic sentiments regarding them. Oh for a horse upon the boundless plains! he sighed to his heart. He remembered bitterly how he had that day ridden his stool at the bank, dreaming of his wilds, where bailiff never ran, nor duns obscured the firmament.

And then there were theatres here—huge extravagant places! Algernon went over to an entrance of one, to amuse his mind, cynically criticizing the bill. A play was going

forward within, that enjoyed great popular esteem, “The Holly Berries.” Seeing that the pit was crammed, Algernon made application to learn the state of the boxes, but hearing that one box was empty, he lost his interest in the performance.

Page 914

As he was strolling forth, his attention was taken by a noise at the pit-doors, which swung open, and out tumbled a tough little old man with a younger one grasping his coat-collar, who proclaimed that he would sicken him of pushing past him at the end of every act.

“You’re precious fond of plays,” sneered the junior.

“I’m fond of everything I pay for, young fellow,” replied the shaken senior; “and that’s a bit of enjoyment you’ve got to learn—ain’t it?”

“Well, don’t you knock by me again, that’s all,” cried the choleric youth.

“You don’t think I’m likely to stop in your company, do you?”

“Whose expense have you been drinking at?”

“My country’s, young fellow; and mind you don’t soon feed at the table. Let me go.”

Algernon’s hunger was appeased by the prospect of some excitement, and seeing a vicious shake administered to the old man by the young one, he cried, “Hands off!” and undertook policeman’s duty; but as he was not in blue, his authoritative mandate obtained no respect until he had interposed his fist.

When he had done so, he recognized the porter at Boyne’s Bank, whose enemy retired upon the threat that there should be no more pushing past him to get back to seats for the next act.

“I paid,” said Anthony; “and you’re a ticketer, and you ticketers sha’ n’t stop me. I’m worth a thousand of you. Holloa, sir,” he cried to Algernon; “I didn’t know you. I’m much obliged. These chaps get tickets given ’m, and grow as cocky in a theatre as men who pay. He never had such wine in him as I’ve got. That I’d swear. Ha! ha! I come out for an airing after every act, and there’s a whole pitfall of ticketers yelling and tearing, and I chaff my way through and back clean as a red-hot poker.”

Anthony laughed, and rolled somewhat as he laughed.

“Come along, sir, into the street,” he said, boring on to the pavement. “It’s after office hours. And, ha! ha! what do you think? There’s old farmer in there, afraid to move off his seat, and the girl with him, sticking to him tight, and a good girl too. She thinks we’ve had too much. We been to the Docks, wine-tasting: Port—Sherry: Sherry—Port! and, ha! ha! ‘what a lot of wine!’ says farmer, never thinking how much he’s taking on board. ‘I guessed it was night,’ says farmer, as we got into the air, and to see him go on blinking, and stumbling, and saying to me, ‘You stand wine, brother Tony!’ I’m blest if I ain’t bottled laughter. So, says I, ’come and see “The Holly Berries,” brother William John; it’s the best play in London, and a suitable winter piece.’ ’Is there a rascal hanged

in the piece?' says he. 'Oh, yes!' I let him fancy there was, and he—ha! ha! old farmer's sticking to his seat, solemn as a judge, waiting for the gallows to come on the stage."

A thought quickened Algernon's spirit. It was a notorious secret among the young gentlemen who assisted in maintaining the prosperity of Boyne's Bank, that the old porter—the "Old Ant," as he was called—possessed money, and had no objection to put out small sums for a certain interest. Algernon mentioned casually that he had left his purse at home; and "by the way," said he, "have you got a few sovereigns in your pocket?"

Page 915

“What! and come through that crush, sir?” Anthony negatived the question decisively with a reference to his general knowingness.

Algernon pressed him; saying at last, “Well, have you got one?”

“I don’t think I’ve been such a fool,” said Anthony, feeling slowly about his person, and muttering as to the changes that might possibly have been produced in him by the Docks.

“Confound it, I haven’t dined!” exclaimed Algernon, to hasten his proceedings; but at this, Anthony eyed him queerly. “What have you been about then, sir?”

“Don’t you see I’m in evening dress? I had an appointment to dine with a friend. He didn’t keep it. I find I’ve left my purse in my other clothes.”

“That’s a bad habit, sir,” was Anthony’s comment. “You don’t care much for your purse.”

“Much for my purse, be hanged!” interjected Algernon.

“You’d have felt it, or you’d have heard it, if there ’d been any weight in it,” Anthony remarked.

“How can you hear paper?”

“Oh, paper’s another thing. You keep paper in your mind, don’t you—eh? Forget pound notes? Leave pound notes in a purse? And you Sir William’s nephew, sir, who’d let you bank with him and put down everything in a book, so that you couldn’t forget, or if you did, he’d remember for you; and you might change your clothes as often as not, and no fear of your losing a penny.”

Algernon shrugged disgustedly, and was giving the old man up as a bad business, when Anthony altered his manner. “Oh! well, sir, I don’t mind letting you have what I’ve got. I’m out for fun. Bother affairs!”

The sum of twenty shillings was handed to Algernon, after he had submitted to the indignity of going into a public-house, and writing his I.O.U. for twenty-three to Anthony Hackbut, which included interest. Algernon remonstrated against so needless a formality; but Anthony put the startling supposition to him, that he might die that night. He signed the document, and was soon feeding and drinking his wine. This being accomplished, he took some hasty puffs of tobacco, and returned to the theatre, in the hope that the dark girl Rhoda was to be seen there; for now that he had dined, Anthony’s communication with regard to the farmer and his daughter became his uppermost thought, and a young man’s uppermost thought is usually the propelling engine to his actions.

By good chance, and the aid of a fee, he obtained a front seat, commanding an excellent side-view of the pit, which sat wrapt in contemplation of a Christmas scene snow, ice, bare twigs, a desolate house, and a woman shivering—one of man's victims.

It is a good public, that of Britain, and will bear anything, so long as villany is punished, of which there was ripe promise in the oracular utterances of a rolling, stout, stage-sailor, whose nose, to say nothing of his frankness on the subject, proclaimed him his own worst enemy, and whose joke, by dint of repetition, had almost become the joke of the audience too; for whenever he appeared, there was agitation in pit and gallery, which subsided only on his jovial thundering of the familiar sentence; whereupon laughter ensued, and a quieting hum of satisfaction.

Page 916

It was a play that had been favoured with a great run. Critics had once objected to it, that it was made to subsist on scenery, a song, and a stupid piece of cockneyism pretending to be a jest, that was really no more than a form of slapping the public on the back. But the public likes to have its back slapped, and critics, frozen by the Medusa-head of Success, were soon taught manners. The office of critic is now, in fact, virtually extinct; the taste for tickling and slapping is universal and imperative; classic appeals to the intellect, and passions not purely domestic, have grown obsolete. There are captains of the legions, but no critics. The mass is lord.

And behold our friend the sailor of the boards, whose walk is even as two meeting billows, appears upon the lonely moor, and salts that uninhabited region with nautical interjections. Loose are his hose in one part, tight in another, and he smacks them. It is cold; so let that be his excuse for showing the bottom of his bottle to the glittering spheres. He takes perhaps a sturdier pull at the liquor than becomes a manifest instrument of Providence, whose services may be immediately required; but he informs us that his ship was never known not to right itself when called upon.

He is alone in the world, he tells us likewise. If his one friend, the uplifted flask, is his enemy, why then he feels bound to treat his enemy as his friend. This, with a pathetic allusion to his interior economy, which was applauded, and the remark “Ain’t that Christian?” which was just a trifle risky; so he secured pit and gallery at a stroke by a surpassingly shrewd blow at the bishops of our Church, who are, it can barely be contested, in foul esteem with the multitude—none can say exactly, for what reason—-and must submit to be occasionally offered up as propitiatory sacrifices.

This good sailor was not always alone in the world. A sweet girl, whom he describes as reaching to his kneecap, and pathetically believes still to be of the same height, once called him brother Jack. To hear that name again from her lips, and a particular song! —he attempts it ludicrously, yet touchingly withal.

Hark! Is it an echo from a spirit in the frigid air?

The song trembled with a silver ring to the remotest corners of the house.

At that moment the breathless hush of the audience was flurried by hearing “Dahlia” called from the pit.

Algernon had been spying among the close-packed faces for a sight of Rhoda. Rhoda was now standing up amid gathering hisses and outcries. Her eyes were bent on a particular box, across which a curtain was hastily being drawn. “My sister!” she sent out a voice of anguish, and remained with clasped hands and twisted eyebrows, looking toward that one spot, as if she would have flown to it. She was wedged in the mass, and could not move.

The exclamation heard had belonged to brother Jack, on the stage, whose burst of fraternal surprise and rapture fell flat after it, to the disgust of numbers keenly awakened for the sentiment of this scene.

Page 917

Roaring accusations that she was drunk; that she had just escaped from Bedlam for an evening; that she should be gagged and turned headlong out, surrounded her; but she stood like a sculptured figure, vital in her eyes alone. The farmer put his arm about his girl's waist. The instant, however, that Anthony's head uprose on the other side of her, the evil reputation he had been gaining for himself all through the evening produced a general clamour, over which the gallery played, miauling, and yelping like dogs that are never to be divorced from a noise. Algernon feared mischief. He quitted his seat, and ran out into the lobby.

Half-a-dozen steps, and he came in contact with some one, and they were mutually drenched with water by the shock. It was his cousin Edward, bearing a glass in his hand.

Algernon's wrath at the sight of this offender was stimulated by the cold bath; but Edward cut him short.

"Go in there;" he pointed to a box-door. "A lady has fainted. Hold her up till I come."

No time was allowed for explanation. Algernon passed into the box, and was alone with an inanimate shape in blue bournous. The uproar in the theatre raged; the whole pit was on its legs and shouting. He lifted the pallid head over one arm, miserably helpless and perplexed, but his anxiety concerning Rhoda's personal safety in that sea of strife prompted him to draw back the curtain a little, and he stood exposed. Rhoda perceived him. She motioned with both her hands in dumb supplication. In a moment the curtain closed between them. Edward's sharp white face cursed him mutely for his folly, while he turned and put the water to Dahlia's lips, and touched her forehead with it.

"What's the matter?" whispered Algernon.

"We must get her out as quick as we can. This is the way with women! Come! she's recovering." Edward nursed her sternly as he spoke.

"If she doesn't, pretty soon, we shall have the pit in upon us," said Algernon. "Is she that girl's sister?"

"Don't ask damned questions."

Dahlia opened her eyes, staring placidly.

"Now you can stand up, my dear. Dahlia! all's well. Try," said Edward.

She sighed, murmuring, "What is the time?" and again, "What noise is it?"

Edward coughed in a vexed attempt at tenderness, using all his force to be gentle with her as he brought her to her feet. The task was difficult amid the threatening storm in

the theatre, and cries of “Show the young woman her sister!” for Rhoda had won a party in the humane public.

“Dahlia, in God’s name give me your help!” Edward called in her ear.

The fair girl’s eyelids blinked wretchedly in protestation of her weakness. She had no will either way, and suffered herself to be led out of the box, supported by the two young men.

“Run for a cab,” said Edward; and Algernon went ahead.

He had one waiting for them as they came out. They placed Dahlia on a seat with care, and Edward, jumping in, drew an arm tightly about her. “I can’t cry,” she moaned.

Page 918

The cab was driving off as a crowd of people burst from the pit-doors, and Algernon heard the voice of Farmer Fleming, very hoarse. He had discretion enough to retire.

CHAPTER XIII

Robert was to drive to the station to meet Rhoda and her father returning from London, on a specified day. He was eager to be asking cheerful questions of Dahlia's health and happiness, so that he might dispel the absurd general belief that he had ever loved the girl, and was now regretting her absence; but one look at Rhoda's face when she stepped from the railway carriage kept him from uttering a word on that subject, and the farmer's heavier droop and acceptance of a helping hand into the cart, were signs of bad import.

Mr. Fleming made no show of grief, like one who nursed it. He took it to all appearance as patiently as an old worn horse would do, although such an outward submissiveness will not always indicate a placid spirit in men. He talked at stale intervals of the weather and the state of the ground along the line of rail down home, and pointed in contempt or approval to a field here and there; but it was as one who no longer had any professional interest in the tilling of the land.

Doubtless he was trained to have no understanding of a good to be derived by his communicating what he felt and getting sympathy. Once, when he was uncertain, and a secret pride in Dahlia's beauty and accomplishments had whispered to him that her flight was possibly the opening of her road to a higher fortune, he made a noise for comfort, believing in his heart that she was still to be forgiven. He knew better now. By holding his peace he locked out the sense of shame which speech would have stirred within him.

"Got on pretty smooth with old Mas' Gammon?" he expressed his hope; and Robert said, "Capitally. We shall make something out of the old man yet, never fear."

Master Gammon was condemned to serve at the ready-set tea-table as a butt for banter; otherwise it was apprehended well that Mrs. Sumfit would have scorched the ears of all present, save the happy veteran of the furrows, with repetitions of Dahlia's name, and wailings about her darling, of whom no one spoke. They suffered from her in spite of every precaution.

"Well, then, if I'm not to hear anything dooring meals—as if I'd swallow it and take it into my stomach!—I'll wait again for what ye've got to tell," she said, and finished her cup at a gulp, smoothing her apron.

The farmer then lifted his head.

“Mother, if you’ve done, you’ll oblige me by going to bed,” he said. “We want the kitchen.”

“A-bed?” cried Mrs. Sumfit, with instantly ruffled lap.

“Upstairs, mother; when you’ve done—not before.”

“Then bad’s the noos! Something have happened, William. You ’m not going to push me out? And my place is by the tea-pot, which I cling to, rememberin’ how I seen her curly head grow by inches up above the table and the cups. Mas’ Gammon,” she appealed to the sturdy feeder, “five cups is your number?”

Page 919

Her hope was reduced to the prolonging of the service of tea, with Master Gammon's kind assistance.

"Four, marm," said her inveterate antagonist, as he finished that amount, and consequently put the spoon in his cup.

Mrs. Sumfit rolled in her chair.

"O Lord, Mas' Gammon! Five, I say; and never a cup less so long as here you've been."

"Four, marm. I don't know," said Master Gammon, with a slow nod of his head, "that ever I took five cups of tea at a stretch. Not runnin'."

"I do know, Mas' Gammon. And ought to: for don't I pour out to ye? It's five you take, and please, your cup, if you'll hand it over."

"Four's my number, marm," Master Gammon reiterated resolutely. He sat like a rock.

"If they was dumplins," moaned Mrs. Sumfit, "not four, no, nor five, 'd do till enough you'd had, and here we might stick to our chairs, but you'd go on and on; you know you would."

"That's eatin', marm;" Master Gammon condescended to explain the nature of his habits. "I'm reg'lar in my drinkin'."

Mrs. Sumfit smote her hands together. "O Lord, Mas' Gammon, the wearisomest old man I ever come across is you. More tea's in the pot, and it ain't watery, and you won't be comfortable. May you get forgiveness from above! is all I say, and I say no more. Mr. Robert, perhaps you'll be so good as let me help you, sir? It's good tea; and my Dody," she added, cajolingly, "my home girl 'll tell us what she saw. I'm pinched and starved to hear."

"By-and-by, mother," interposed the farmer; "tomorrow." He spoke gently, but frowned.

Both Rhoda and Robert perceived that they were peculiarly implicated in the business which was to be discussed without Mrs. Sumfit's assistance. Her father's manner forbade Rhoda from making any proposal for the relief of the forlorn old woman.

"And me not to hear to-night about your play-going!" sighed Mrs. Sumfit. "Oh, it's hard on me. I do call it cruel. And how my sweet was dressed—like as for a Ball."

She saw the farmer move his foot impatiently.

"Then, if nobody drinks this remaining cup, I will," she pursued.

No voice save her own was heard till the cup was emptied, upon which Master Gammon, according to his wont, departed for bed to avoid the seduction of suppers, which he shunned as apoplectic, and Mrs. Sumfit prepared, in a desolate way, to wash the tea-things, but the farmer, saying that it could be done in the morning, went to the door and opened it for her.

She fetched a great sigh and folded her hands resignedly. As she was passing him to make her miserable enforced exit, the heavy severity of his face afflicted her with a deep alarm; she fell on her knees, crying,—

“Oh, William! it ain’t for sake of hearin’ talk; but you, that went to see our Dahly, the blossom, ’ve come back streaky under the eyes, and you make the house feel as if we neighboured Judgement Day. Down to tea you set the first moment, and me alone with none of you, and my love for my girl known well to you. And now to be marched off! How can I go a-bed and sleep, and my heart jumps so? It ain’t Christian to ask me to. I got a heart, dear, I have. Do give a bit of comfort to it. Only a word of my Dahly to me.”

Page 920

The farmer replied: “Mother, let’s have no woman’s nonsense. What we’ve got to bear, let us bear. And you go on your knees to the Lord, and don’t be a heathen woman, I say. Get up. There’s a Bible in your bedroom. Find you out comfort in that.”

“No, William, no!” she sobbed, still kneeling: “there ain’t a dose o’ comfort there when poor souls is in the dark, and haven’t got patience for passages. And me and my Bible! —how can I read it, and not know my ailing, and a’stract one good word, William? It’ll seem only the devil’s shootin’ black lightnings across the page, as poor blessed granny used to say, and she believed witches could do it to you in her time, when they was evil-minded. No! To-night I look on the binding of the Holy Book, and I don’t, and I won’t, I sha’ n’t open it.”

This violent end to her petition was wrought by the farmer grasping her arm to bring her to her feet.

“Go to bed, mother.”

“I shan’t open it,” she repeated, defiantly. “And it ain’t,” she gathered up her comfortable fat person to assist the words “it ain’t good—no, not the best pious ones—I shall, and will say it! as is al’ays ready to smack your face with the Bible.”

“Now, don’t ye be angry,” said the farmer.

She softened instantly.

“William, dear, I got fifty-seven pounds sterling, and odd shillings, in a Savings-bank, and that I meant to go to Dahly, and not to yond’ dark thing sitting there so sullen, and me in my misery; I’d give it to you now for news of my darlin’. Yes, William; and my poor husband’s cottage, in Sussex—seventeen pound per annum. That, if you’ll be goodness itself, and let me hear a word.”

“Take her upstairs,” said the farmer to Rhoda, and Rhoda went by her and took her hands, and by dint of pushing from behind and dragging in front, Mrs. Sumfit, as near on a shriek as one so fat and sleek could be, was ejected. The farmer and Robert heard her struggles and exclamations along the passage, but her resistance subsided very suddenly.

“There’s power in that girl,” said the farmer, standing by the shut door.

Robert thought so, too. It affected his imagination, and his heart began to beat sickeningly.

“Perhaps she promised to speak—what has happened, whatever that may be,” he suggested.

“Not she; not she. She respects my wishes.”

Robert did not ask what had happened.

Mr. Fleming remained by the door, and shut his mouth from a further word till he heard Rhoda’s returning footstep. He closed the door again behind her, and went up to the square deal table, leaned his body forward on the knuckles of his trembling fist, and said, “We’re pretty well broken up, as it is. I’ve lost my taste for life.”

There he paused. Save by the shining of a wet forehead, his face betrayed nothing of the anguish he suffered. He looked at neither of them, but sent his gaze straight away under labouring brows to an arm of the fireside chair, while his shoulders drooped on the wavering support of his hard-shut hands. Rhoda’s eyes, ox-like, as were her father’s, smote full upon Robert’s, as in a pang of apprehension of what was about to be uttered.

Page 921

It was a quick blaze of light, wherein he saw that the girl's spirit was not with him. He would have stopped the farmer at once, but he had not the heart to do it, even had he felt in himself strength to attract an intelligent response from that strange, grave, bovine fixity of look, over which the human misery sat as a thing not yet taken into the dull brain.

"My taste for life," the old man resumed, "that's gone. I didn't bargain at set-out to go on fighting agen the world. It's too much for a man o' my years. Here's the farm. Shall 't go to pieces?—I'm a farmer of thirty year back—thirty year back, and more: I'm about no better'n a farm labourer in our time, which is to-day. I don't cost much. I ask to be fed, and to work for it, and to see my poor bit o' property safe, as handed to me by my father. Not for myself, 't ain't; though perhaps there's a bottom of pride there too, as in most things. Say it's for the name. My father seems to demand of me out loud, 'What ha' ye done with Queen Anne's Farm, William?' and there's a holler echo in my ears. Well; God wasn't merciful to give me a son. He give me daughters."

Mr. Fleming bowed his head as to the very weapon of chastisement.

"Daughters!" He bent lower.

His hearers might have imagined his headless address to them to be also without a distinct termination, for he seemed to have ended as abruptly as he had begun; so long was the pause before, with a wearied lifting of his body, he pursued, in a sterner voice:

"Don't let none interrupt me." His hand was raised as toward where Rhoda stood, but he sent no look with it; the direction was wide of her.

The aspect of the blank blind hand motioning to the wall away from her, smote an awe through her soul that kept her dumb, though his next words were like thrusts of a dagger in her side.

"My first girl—she's brought disgrace on this house. She's got a mother in heaven, and that mother's got to blush for her. My first girl's gone to harlotry in London."

It was Scriptural severity of speech. Robert glanced quick with intense commiseration at Rhoda. He saw her hands travel upward till they fixed in at her temples with crossed fingers, making the pressure of an iron band for her head, while her lips parted, and her teeth, and cheeks, and eyeballs were all of one whiteness. Her tragic, even, in and out breathing, where there was no fall of the breast, but the air was taken and given, as it were the square blade of a sharp-edged sword, was dreadful to see. She had the look of a risen corpse, recalling some one of the bloody ends of life.

The farmer went on,—

“Bury her! Now you here know the worst. There’s my second girl. She’s got no stain on her; if people ’ll take her for what she is herself. She’s idle. But I believe the flesh on her bones she’d wear away for any one that touched her heart. She’s a temper. But she’s clean both in body and in spirit, as I believe, and say before my God. I—what I’d pray for is, to see this girl safe. All I have shall go to her. That is, to the man who will—-won’t be ashamed—marry her, I mean!”

Page 922

The tide of his harshness failed him here, and he began to pick his words, now feeble, now emphatic, but alike wanting in natural expression, for he had reached a point of emotion upon the limits of his nature, and he was now wilfully forcing for misery and humiliation right and left, in part to show what a black star Providence had been over him.

“She’ll be grateful. I shall be gone. What disgrace I bring to their union, as father of the other one also, will, I’m bound to hope, be buried with me in my grave; so that this girl’s husband shan’t have to complain that her character and her working for him ain’t enough to cover any harm he’s like to think o’ the connexion. And he won’t be troubled by relationships after that.

“I used to think Pride a bad thing. I thank God we’ve all got it in our blood—the Flemings. I thank God for that now, I do. We don’t face again them as we offend. Not, that is, with the hand out. We go. We’re seen no more. And she’ll be seen no more. On that, rely.

“I want my girl here not to keep me in the fear of death. For I fear death while she’s not safe in somebody’s hands—kind, if I can get him for her. Somebody—young or old!”

The farmer lifted his head for the first time, and stared vacantly at Robert.

“I’d marry her,” he said, “if I was knowing myself dying now or to-morrow morning, I’d marry her, rather than leave her alone—I’d marry her to that old man, old Gammon.”

The farmer pointed to the ceiling. His sombre seriousness cloaked and carried even that suggestive indication to the possible bridegroom’s age and habits, and all things associated with him, through the gates of ridicule; and there was no laughter, and no thought of it.

“It stands to reason for me to prefer a young man for her husband. He’ll farm the estate, and won’t sell it; so that it goes to our blood, if not to a Fleming. If, I mean, he’s content to farm soberly, and not play Jack o’ Lantern tricks across his own acres. Right in one thing’s right, I grant; but don’t argue right in all. It’s right only in one thing. Young men, when they’ve made a true hit or so, they’re ready to think it’s themselves that’s right.”

This was of course a reminder of the old feud with Robert, and sufficiently showed whom the farmer had in view for a husband to Rhoda, if any doubt existed previously.

Having raised his eyes, his unwonted power of speech abandoned him, and he concluded, wavering in look and in tone,—

“I’d half forgotten her uncle. I’ve reckoned his riches when I cared for riches. I can’t say th’ amount; but, all—I’ve had his word for it—all goes to this—God knows how much!—-

girl. And he don’t hesitate to say she’s worth a young man’s fancying. May be so. It depends upon ideas mainly, that does. All goes to her. And this farm.—I wish ye good-night.”

He gave them no other sign, but walked in his oppressed way quietly to the inner door, and forth, leaving the rest to them.

Page 923

CHAPTER XIV

The two were together, and all preliminary difficulties had been cleared for Robert to say what he had to say, in a manner to make the saying of it well-nigh impossible. And yet silence might be misinterpreted by her. He would have drawn her to his heart at one sign of tenderness. There came none. The girl was frightfully torn with a great wound of shame. She was the first to speak.

“Do you believe what father says of my sister?”

“That she—?” Robert swallowed the words. “No!” and he made a thunder with his fist.

“No!” She drank up the word. “You do not? No! You know that Dahlia is innocent?”

Rhoda was trembling with a look for the asseveration; her pale face eager as a cry for life; but the answer did not come at once hotly as her passion for it demanded. She grew rigid, murmuring faintly: “speak! Do speak!”

His eyes fell away from hers. Sweet love would have wrought in him to think as she thought, but she kept her heart closed from him, and he stood sadly judicial, with a conscience of his own, that would not permit him to declare Dahlia innocent, for he had long been imagining the reverse.

Rhoda pressed her hands convulsively, moaning, “Oh!” down a short deep breath.

“Tell me what has happened?” said Robert, made mad by that reproachful agony of her voice. “I’m in the dark. I’m not equal to you all. If Dahlia’s sister wants one to stand up for her, and defend her, whatever she has done or not done, ask me. Ask me, and I’ll revenge her. Here am I, and I know nothing, and you despise me because—don’t think me rude or unkind. This hand is yours, if you will. Come, Rhoda. Or, let me hear the case, and I’ll satisfy you as best I can. Feel for her? I feel for her as you do. You don’t want me to stand a liar to your question? How can I speak?”

A woman’s instinct at red heat pierces the partial disingenuousness which Robert could only have avoided by declaring the doubts he entertained. Rhoda desired simply to be supported by his conviction of her sister’s innocence, and she had scorn of one who would not chivalrously advance upon the risks of right and wrong, and rank himself prime champion of a woman belied, absent, and so helpless. Besides, there was but one virtue possible in Rhoda’s ideas, as regarded Dahlia: to oppose facts, if necessary, and have her innocent perforce, and fight to the death them that dared cast slander on the beloved head.

Her keen instinct served her so far.

His was alive when she refused to tell him what had taken place during their visit to London.

She felt that a man would judge evil of the circumstances. Her father and her uncle had done so: she felt that Robert would. Love for him would have prompted her to confide in him absolutely. She was not softened by love; there was no fire on her side to melt and make them run in one stream, and they could not meet.

Page 924

“Then, if you will not tell me,” said Robert, “say what you think of your father’s proposal? He meant that I may ask you to be my wife. He used to fancy I cared for your sister. That’s false. I care for her—yes; as my sister too; and here is my hand to do my utmost for her, but I love you, and I’ve loved you for some time. I’d be proud to marry you and help on with the old farm. You don’t love me yet—which is a pretty hard thing for me to see to be certain of. But I love you, and I trust you. I like the stuff you’re made of—and nice stuff I’m talking to a young woman,” he added, wiping his forehead at the idea of the fair and flattering addresses young women expect when they are being wooed.

As it was, Rhoda listened with savage contempt of his idle talk. Her brain was beating at the mystery and misery wherein Dahlia lay engulfed. She had no understanding for Robert’s sentimentality, or her father’s requisition. Some answer had to be given, and she said,—

“I’m not likely to marry a man who supposes he has anything to pardon.”

“I don’t suppose it,” cried Robert.

“You heard what father said.”

“I heard what he said, but I don’t think the same. What has Dahlia to do with you?”

He was proceeding to rectify this unlucky sentence. All her covert hostility burst out on it.

“My sister?—what has my sister to do with me?—you mean!—you mean—you can only mean that we are to be separated and thought of as two people; and we are one, and will be till we die. I feel my sister’s hand in mine, though she’s away and lost. She is my darling for ever and ever. We’re one!”

A spasm of anguish checked the girl.

“I mean,” Robert resumed steadily, “that her conduct, good or bad, doesn’t touch you. If it did, it’d be the same to me. I ask you to take me for your husband. Just reflect on what your father said, Rhoda.”

The horrible utterance her father’s lips had been guilty of flashed through her, filling her with mastering vindictiveness, now that she had a victim.

“Yes! I’m to take a husband to remind me of what he said.”

Robert eyed her sharpened mouth admiringly; her defence of her sister had excited his esteem, wilfully though she rebutted his straightforward earnestness and he had a feeling also for the easy turns of her neck, and the confident poise of her figure.

“Ha! well!” he interjected, with his eyebrows queerly raised, so that she could make nothing of his look. It seemed half maniacal, it was so ridged with bright eagerness.

“By heaven! the task of taming you—that’s the blessing I’d beg for in my prayers! Though you were as wild as a cat of the woods, by heaven! I’d rather have the taming of you than go about with a leash of quiet”—he checked himself—“companions.”

Such was the sudden roll of his tongue, that she was lost in the astounding lead he had taken, and stared.

Page 925

“You’re the beauty to my taste, and devil is what I want in a woman! I can make something out of a girl with a temper like yours. You don’t know me, Miss Rhoda. I’m what you reckon a good young man. Isn’t that it?”

Robert drew up with a very hard smile.

“I would to God I were! Mind, I feel for you about your sister. I like you the better for holding to her through thick and thin. But my sheepishness has gone, and I tell you I’ll have you whether you will or no. I can help you and you can help me. I’ve lived here as if I had no more fire in me than old Gammon snoring on his pillow up aloft; and who kept me to it? Did you see I never touched liquor? What did you guess from that?—that I was a mild sort of fellow? So I am: but I haven’t got that reputation in other parts. Your father ’d like me to marry you, and I’m ready. Who kept me to work, so that I might learn to farm, and be a man, and be able to take a wife? I came here—I’ll tell you how. I was a useless dog. I ran from home and served as a trooper. An old aunt of mine left me a little money, which just woke me up and gave me a lift of what conscience I had, and I bought myself out.

“I chanced to see your father’s advertisement—came, looked at you all, and liked you—brought my traps and settled among you, and lived like a good young man. I like peace and orderliness, I find. I always thought I did, when I was dancing like mad to hell. I know I do now, and you’re the girl to keep me to it. I’ve learnt that much by degrees. With any other, I should have been playing the fool, and going my old ways, long ago. I should have wrecked her, and drunk to forget. You’re my match. By-and-by you’ll know, me yours! You never gave me, or anybody else that I’ve seen, sly sidelooks.

“Come! I’ll speak out now I’m at work. I thought you at some girl’s games in the Summer. You went out one day to meet a young gentleman. Offence or no offence, I speak and you listen. You did go out. I was in love with you then, too. I saw London had been doing its mischief. I was down about it. I felt that he would make nothing of you, but I chose to take the care of you, and you’ve hated me ever since.

“That Mr. Algernon Blancove’s a rascal. Stop! You’ll say as much as you like presently. I give you a warning—the man’s a rascal. I didn’t play spy on your acts, but your looks. I can read a face like yours, and it’s my home, my home!—by heaven, it is. Now, Rhoda, you know a little more of me. Perhaps I’m more of a man than you thought. Marry another, if you will; but I’m the man for you, and I know it, and you’ll go wrong if you don’t too. Come! let your father sleep well. Give me your hand.”

All through this surprising speech of Robert’s, which was a revelation of one who had been previously dark to her, she had steeled her spirit as she felt herself being borne upon unexpected rapids, and she marvelled when she found her hand in his.

Page 926

Dismayed, as if caught in a trap, she said,—

“You know I’ve no love for you at all.”

“None—no doubt,” he answered.

The fit of verbal energy was expended, and he had become listless, though he looked frankly at her and assumed the cheerfulness which was failing within him.

“I wish to remain as I am,” she faltered, surprised again by the equally astonishing recurrence of humility, and more spiritually subdued by it. “I’ve no heart for a change. Father will understand. I am safe.”

She ended with a cry: “Oh! my dear, my own sister! I wish you were safe. Get her here to me and I’ll do what I can, if you’re not hard on her. She’s so beautiful, she can’t do wrong. My Dahlia’s in some trouble. Mr. Robert, you might really be her friend?”

“Drop the Mister,” said Robert.

“Father will listen to you,” she pleaded. “You won’t leave us? Tell him you know I am safe. But I haven’t a feeling of any kind while my sister’s away. I will call you Robert, if you like.” She reached her hand forth.

“That’s right,” he said, taking it with a show of heartiness: “that’s a beginning, I suppose.”

She shrank a little in his sensitive touch, and he added: “Oh never fear. I’ve spoken out, and don’t do the thing too often. Now you know me, that’s enough. I trust you, so trust me. I’ll talk to your father. I’ve got a dad of my own, who isn’t so easily managed. You and I, Rhoda—we’re about the right size for a couple. There—don’t be frightened! I was only thinking—I’ll let go your hand in a minute. If Dahlia’s to be found, I’ll find her. Thank you for that squeeze. You’d wake a dead man to life, if you wanted to. To-morrow I set about the business. That’s settled. Now your hand’s loose. Are you going to say good night? You must give me your hand again for that. What a rough fellow I must seem to you! Different from the man you thought I was? I’m just what you choose to make me, Rhoda; remember that. By heaven! go at once, for you’re an armful—”

She took a candle and started for the door.

“Aha! you can look fearful as a doe. Out! make haste!”

In her hurry at his speeding gestures, the candle dropped; she was going to pick it up, but as he approached, she stood away frightened.

“One kiss, my girl,” he said. “Don’t keep me jealous as fire. One! and I’m a plighted man. One!—or I shall swear you know what kisses are. Why did you go out to meet that fellow? Do you think there’s no danger in it? Doesn’t he go about boasting of it now, and saying—that girl! But kiss me and I’ll forget it; I’ll forgive you. Kiss me only once, and I shall be certain you don’t care for him. That’s the thought maddens me outright. I can’t bear it now I’ve seen you look soft. I’m stronger than you, mind.” He caught her by the waist.

“Yes,” Rhoda gasped, “you are. You are only a brute.”

Page 927

“A brute’s a lucky dog, then, for I’ve got you!”

“Will you touch me?”

“You’re in my power.”

“It’s a miserable thing, Robert.”

“Why don’t you struggle, my girl? I shall kiss you in a minute.”

“You’re never my friend again.”

“I’m not a gentleman, I suppose!”

“Never! after this.”

“It isn’t done. And first you’re like a white rose, and next you’re like a red. Will you submit?”

“Oh! shame!” Rhoda uttered.

“Because I’m not a gentleman?”

“You are not.”

“So, if I could make you a lady—eh? the lips ’d be ready in a trice. You think of being made a lady—a lady!”

His arm relaxed in the clutch of her figure.

She got herself free, and said: “We saw Mr. Blancove at the theatre with Dahlia.”

It was her way of meeting his accusation that she had cherished an ambitious feminine dream.

He, to hide a confusion that had come upon him, was righting the fallen candle.

“Now I know you can be relied on; you can defend yourself,” he said, and handed it to her, lighted. “You keep your kisses for this or that young gentleman. Quite right. You really can defend yourself. That’s all I was up to. So let us hear that you forgive me. The door’s open. You won’t be bothered by me any more; and don’t hate me overmuch.”

“You might have learned to trust me without insulting me, Robert,” she said.

“Do you fancy I’d take such a world of trouble for a kiss of your lips, sweet as they are?”

His blusterous beginning ended in a speculating glance at her mouth.

She saw it would be wise to accept him in his present mood, and go; and with a gentle “Good night,” that might sound like pardon, she passed through the doorway.

CHAPTER XV

Next day, while Squire Blancove was superintending the laying down of lines for a new carriage drive in his park, as he walked slowly up the green slope he perceived Farmer Fleming, supported by a tall young man; and when the pair were nearer, he had the gratification of noting likewise that the worthy yeoman was very much bent, as with an acute attack of his well-known chronic malady of a want of money.

The squire greatly coveted the freehold of Queen Anne’s Farm. He had made offers to purchase it till he was tired, and had gained for himself the credit of being at the bottom of numerous hypothetical cabals to injure and oust the farmer from his possession. But if Naboth came with his vineyard in his hand, not even Wrexby’s rector (his quarrel with whom haunted every turn in his life) could quote Scripture against him for taking it at a proper valuation.

Page 928

The squire had employed his leisure time during service in church to discover a text that might be used against him in the event of the farmer's reduction to a state of distress, and his, the squire's, making the most of it. On the contrary, according to his heathenish reading of some of the patriarchal doings, there was more to be said in his favour than not, if he increased his territorial property: nor could he, throughout the Old Testament, hit on one sentence that looked like a personal foe to his projects, likely to fit into the mouth of the rector of Wrexby.

"Well, farmer," he said, with cheerful familiarity, "winter crops looking well? There's a good show of green in the fields from my windows, as good as that land of yours will allow in heavy seasons."

To this the farmer replied, "I've not heart or will to be round about, squire. If you'll listen to me—here, or where you give command."

"Has it anything to do with pen and paper, Fleming? In that case you'd better be in my study," said the squire.

"I don't know that it have. I don't know that it have." The farmer sought Robert's face.

"Best where there's no chance of interruption," Robert counselled, and lifted his hat to the squire.

"Eh? Well, you see I'm busy." The latter affected a particular indifference, that in such cases, when well acted (as lords of money can do—squires equally with usurers), may be valued at hundreds of pounds in the pocket. "Can't you put it off? Come again to-morrow."

"To-morrow's a day too late," said the farmer, gravely. Whereto replying, "Oh! well, come along in, then," the squire led the way.

"You're two to one, if it's a transaction," he said, nodding to Robert to close the library door. "Take seats. Now then, what is it? And if I make a face, just oblige me by thinking nothing about it, for my gout's beginning to settle in the leg again, and shoots like an electric telegraph from purgatory."

He wheezed and lowered himself into his arm-chair; but the farmer and Robert remained standing, and the farmer spoke:—

"My words are going to be few, squire. I've got a fact to bring to your knowledge, and a question to ask."

Surprise, exaggerated on his face by a pain he had anticipated, made the squire glare hideously.

“Confound it, that’s what they say to a prisoner in the box. Here’s a murder committed: —Are you the guilty person? Fact and question! Well, out with ’em, both together.”

“A father ain’t responsible for the sins of his children,” said the farmer.

“Well, that’s a fact,” the squire emphasized. “I’ve always maintained it; but, if you go to your church, farmer—small blame to you if you don’t; that fellow who preaches there—I forget his name—stands out for just the other way. You are responsible, he swears. Pay your son’s debts, and don’t groan over it:—He spent the money, and you’re the chief debtor; that’s his teaching. Well: go on. What’s your question?”

Page 929

“A father’s not to be held responsible for the sins of his children, squire. My daughter’s left me. She’s away. I saw my daughter at the theatre in London. She saw me, and saw her sister with me. She disappeared. It’s a hard thing for a man to be saying of his own flesh and blood. She disappeared. She went, knowing her father’s arms open to her. She was in company with your son.”

The squire was thrumming on the arm of his chair. He looked up vaguely, as if waiting for the question to follow, but meeting the farmer’s settled eyes, he cried, irritably, “Well, what’s that to me?”

“What’s that to you, squire?”

“Are you going to make me out responsible for my son’s conduct? My son’s a rascal—-everybody knows that. I paid his debts once, and I’ve finished with him. Don’t come to me about the fellow. If there’s a greater curse than the gout, it’s a son.”

“My girl,” said the farmer, “she’s my flesh and blood, and I must find her, and I’m here to ask you to make your son tell me where she’s to be found. Leave me to deal with that young man—leave you me! but I want my girl.”

“But I can’t give her to you,” roared the squire, afflicted by his two great curses at once. “Why do you come to me? I’m not responsible for the doings of the dog. I’m sorry for you, if that’s what you want to know. Do you mean to say that my son took her away from your house?”

“I don’t do so, Mr. Blancove. I’m seeking for my daughter, and I see her in company with your son.”

“Very well, very well,” said the squire; “that shows his habits; I can’t say more. But what has it got to do with me?”

The farmer looked helplessly at Robert.

“No, no,” the squire sung out, “no interlopers, no interpreting here. I listen to you. My son—your daughter. I understand that, so far. It’s between us two. You’ve got a daughter who’s gone wrong somehow: I’m sorry to hear it. I’ve got a son who never went right; and it’s no comfort to me, upon my word. If you were to see the bills and the letters I receive! but I don’t carry my grievances to my neighbours. I should think, Fleming, you’d do best, if it’s advice you’re seeking, to keep it quiet. Don’t make a noise about it. Neighbours’ gossip I find pretty well the worst thing a man has to bear, who’s unfortunate enough to own children.”

The farmer bowed his head with that bitter humbleness which characterized his reception of the dealings of Providence toward him.

“My neighbours ’ll soon be none at all,” he said. “Let ’em talk. I’m not abusing you, Mr. Blancove. I’m a broken man: but I want my poor lost girl, and, by God, responsible for your son or not, you must help me to find her. She may be married, as she says. She mayn’t be. But I must find her.”

The squire hastily seized a scrap of paper on the table and wrote on it.

Page 930

“There!” he handed the paper to the farmer; “that’s my son’s address, ‘Boyne’s Bank, City, London.’ Go to him there, and you’ll find him perched on a stool, and a good drubbing won’t hurt him. You’ve my hearty permission, I can assure you: you may say so. ‘Boyne’s Bank.’ Anybody will show you the place. He’s a rascally clerk in the office, and precious useful, I dare swear. Thrash him, if you think fit.”

“Ay,” said the farmer, “Boyne’s Bank. I’ve been there already. He’s absent from work, on a visit down into Hampshire, one of the young gentlemen informed me; Fairly Park was the name of the place: but I came to you, Mr. Blancove; for you’re his father.”

“Well now, my good Fleming, I hope you think I’m properly punished for that fact.” The squire stood up with horrid contortions.

Robert stepped in advance of the farmer.

“Pardon me, sir,” he said, though the squire met his voice with a prodigious frown; “this would be an ugly business to talk about, as you observe. It would hurt Mr. Fleming in these parts of the country, and he would leave it, if he thought fit; but you can’t separate your name from your son’s—begging you to excuse the liberty I take in mentioning it—-not in public: and your son has the misfortune to be well known in one or two places where he was quartered when in the cavalry. That matter of the jeweller—”

“Hulloa,” the squire exclaimed, in a perturbation.

“Why, sir, I know all about it, because I was a trooper in the regiment your son, Mr. Algernon Blancove, quitted: and his name, if I may take leave to remark so, won’t bear printing. How far he’s guilty before Mr. Fleming we can’t tell as yet; but if Mr. Fleming holds him guilty of an offence, your son ’ll bear the consequences, and what’s done will be done thoroughly. Proper counsel will be taken, as needn’t be said. Mr. Fleming applied to you first, partly for your sake as well as his own. He can find friends, both to advise and to aid him.”

“You mean, sir,” thundered the squire, “that he can find enemies of mine, like that infernal fellow who goes by the title of Reverend, down below there. That’ll do, that will do; there’s some extortion at the bottom of this. You’re putting on a screw.”

“We’re putting on a screw, sir,” said Robert, coolly.

“Not a penny will you get by it.”

Robert flushed with heat of blood.

“You don’t wish you were a young man half so much as I do just now,” he remarked, and immediately they were in collision, for the squire made a rush to the bell-rope, and Robert stopped him. “We’re going,” he said; “we don’t want man-servants to show us

the way out. Now mark me, Mr. Blancove, you've insulted an old man in his misery: you shall suffer for it, and so shall your son, whom I know to be a rascal worthy of transportation. You think Mr. Fleming came to you for money. Look at this old man, whose only fault is that he's too full of kindness;

Page 931

he came to you just for help to find his daughter, with whom your rascal of a son was last seen, and you swear he's come to rob you of money. Don't you know yourself a fattened cur, squire though you be, and called gentleman? England's a good place, but you make England a hell to men of spirit. Sit in your chair, and don't ever you, or any of you cross my path; and speak a word to your servants before we're out of the house, and I stand in the hall and give 'em your son's history, and make Wrexby stink in your nostril, till you're glad enough to fly out of it. Now, Mr. Fleming, there's no more to be done here; the game lies elsewhere."

Robert took the farmer by the arm, and was marching out of the enemy's territory in good order, when the squire, who had presented many changeing aspects of astonishment and rage, arrested them with a call. He began to say that he spoke to Mr. Fleming, and not to the young ruffian of a bully whom the farmer had brought there: and then asked in a very reasonable manner what he could do—what measures he could adopt to aid the farmer in finding his child. Robert hung modestly in the background while the farmer laboured on with a few sentences to explain the case, and finally the squire said, that his foot permitting (it was an almost pathetic reference to the weakness of flesh), he would go down to Fairly on the day following and have a personal interview with his son, and set things right, as far as it lay in his power, though he was by no means answerable for a young man's follies.

He was a little frightened by the farmer's having said that Dahlia, according to her own declaration was married, and therefore himself the more anxious to see Mr. Algernon, and hear the truth from his estimable offspring, whom he again stigmatized as a curse terrible to him as his gouty foot, but nevertheless just as little to be left to his own devices. The farmer bowed to these observations; as also when the squire counselled him, for his own sake, not to talk of his misfortune all over the parish.

"I'm not a likely man for that, squire; but there's no telling where gossips get their crumbs. It's about. It's about."

"About my son?" cried the squire.

"My daughter!"

"Oh, well, good-day," the squire resumed more cheerfully. "I'll go down to Fairly, and you can't ask more than that."

When the farmer was out of the house and out of hearing, he rebuked Robert for the inconsiderate rashness of his behaviour, and pointed out how he, the farmer, by being patient and peaceful, had attained to the object of his visit. Robert laughed without defending himself.

“I shouldn’t ha’ known ye,” the farmer repeated frequently; “I shouldn’t ha’ known ye, Robert.”

“No, I’m a trifle changed, may be,” Robert agreed. “I’m going to claim a holiday of you. I’ve told Rhoda that if Dahlia’s to be found, I’ll find her, and I can’t do it by sticking here. Give me three weeks. The land’s asleep. Old Gammon can hardly turn a furrow the wrong way. There’s nothing to do, which is his busiest occupation, when he’s not interrupted at it.”

Page 932

“Mas’ Gammon’s a rare old man,” said the farmer, emphatically.

“So I say. Else, how would you see so many farms flourishing!”

“Come, Robert: you hit th’ old man hard; you should learn to forgive.”

“So I do, and a telling blow’s a man’s best road to charity. I’d forgive the squire and many another, if I had them within two feet of my fist.”

“Do you forgive my girl Rhoda for putting of you off?”

Robert screwed in his cheek.

“Well, yes, I do,” he said. “Only it makes me feel thirsty, that’s all.”

The farmer remembered this when they had entered the farm.

“Our beer’s so poor, Robert,” he made apology; “but Rhoda shall get you some for you to try, if you like. Rhoda, Robert’s solemn thirsty.”

“Shall I?” said Rhoda, and she stood awaiting his bidding.

“I’m not a thirsty subject,” replied Robert. “You know I’ve avoided drink of any kind since I set foot on this floor. But when I drink,” he pitched his voice to a hard, sparkling heartiness, “I drink a lot, and the stuff must be strong. I’m very much obliged to you, Miss Rhoda, for what you’re so kind as to offer to satisfy my thirst, and you can’t give better, and don’t suppose that I’m complaining; but your father’s right, it is rather weak, and wouldn’t break the tooth of my thirst if I drank at it till Gammon left off thinking about his dinner.”

With that he announced his approaching departure.

The farmer dropped into his fireside chair, dumb and spiritless. A shadow was over the house, and the inhabitants moved about their domestic occupations silent as things that feel the thunder-cloud. Before sunset Robert was gone on his long walk to the station, and Rhoda felt a woman’s great envy of the liberty of a man, who has not, if it pleases him not, to sit and eat grief among familiar images, in a home that furnishes its altar-flame.

CHAPTER XVI

Fairly, Lord Elling’s seat in Hampshire, lay over the Warbeach river; a white mansion among great oaks, in view of the summer sails and winter masts of the yachting squadron. The house was ruled, during the congregation of the Christmas guests, by

charming Mrs. Lovell, who relieved the invalid Lady of the house of the many serious cares attending the reception of visitors, and did it all with ease. Under her sovereignty the place was delightful, and if it was by repute pleasanter to young men than to any other class, it will be admitted that she satisfied those who are loudest in giving tongue to praise.

Page 933

Edward and Algernon journeyed down to Fairly together, after the confidence which the astute young lawyer had been compelled to repose in his cousin. Sir William Blancove was to be at Fairly, and it was at his father's pointed request that Edward had accepted Mrs. Lovell's invitation. Half in doubt as to the lady's disposition toward him, Edward eased his heart with sneers at the soft, sanguinary graciousness they were to expect, and racked mythology for spiteful comparisons; while Algernon vehemently defended her with a battering fire of British adjectives in superlative. He as much as hinted, under instigation, that he was entitled to defend her; and his claim being by-and-by yawningly allowed by Edward, and presuming that he now had Edward in his power and need not fear him, he exhibited his weakness in the guise of a costly gem, that he intended to present to Mrs. Lovell—an opal set in a cross pendant from a necklace; a really fine opal, coquetting with the lights of every gem that is known: it shot succinct red flashes, and green, and yellow; the emerald, the amethyst, the topaz lived in it, and a remote ruby; it was veined with lightning hues, and at times it slept in a milky cloud, innocent of fire, quite maidenlike.

"That will suit her," was Edward's remark.

"I didn't want to get anything common," said Algernon, making the gem play before his eyes.

"A pretty stone," said Edward.

"Do you think so?"

"Very pretty indeed."

"Harlequin pattern."

"To be presented to Columbine!"

"The Harlequin pattern is of the best sort, you know. Perhaps you like the watery ones best? This is fresh from Russia. There's a set I've my eye on. I shall complete it in time. I want Peggy Lovell to wear the jolliest opals in the world. It's rather nice, isn't it?"

"It's a splendid opal," said Edward.

"She likes opals," said Algernon.

"She'll take your meaning at once," said Edward.

"How? I'll be hanged if I know what my meaning is, Ned."

"Don't you know the signification of your gift?"

“Not a bit.”

“Oh! you’ll be Oriental when you present it.”

“The deuce I shall!”

“It means, ‘You’re the prettiest widow in the world.’”

“So she is. I’ll be right there, old boy.”

“And, ’You’re a rank, right-down widow, and no mistake; you’re everything to everybody; not half so innocent as you look: you’re green as jealousy, red as murder, yellow as jaundice, and put on the whiteness of a virgin when you ought to be blushing like a penitent.’ In short, ’You have no heart of your own, and you pretend to possess half a dozen: you’re devoid of one steady beam, and play tricks with every scale of colour: you’re an arrant widow, and that’s what you are.’ An eloquent gift, Algy.”

“Gad, if it means all that, it’ll be rather creditable to me,” said Algernon. “Do opals mean widows?”

Page 934

“Of course,” was the answer.

“Well, she is a widow, and I suppose she’s going to remain one, for she’s had lots of offers. If I marry a girl I shall never like her half as much as Peggy Lovell. She’s done me up for every other woman living. She never lets me feel a fool with her; and she has a way, by Jove, of looking at me, and letting me know she’s up to my thoughts and isn’t angry. What’s the use of my thinking of her at all? She’d never go to the Colonies, and live in a log but and make cheeses, while I tore about on horseback gathering cattle.”

“I don’t think she would,” observed Edward, emphatically; “I don’t think she would.”

“And I shall never have money. Confound stingy parents! It’s a question whether I shall get Wrexby: there’s no entail. I’m heir to the governor’s temper and his gout, I dare say. He’ll do as he likes with the estate. I call it beastly unfair.”

Edward asked how much the opal had cost.

“Oh, nothing,” said Algernon; “that is, I never pay for jewellery.”

Edward was curious to know how he managed to obtain it.

“Why, you see,” Algernon explained, “they, the jewellers—I’ve got two or three in hand—the fellows are acquainted with my position, and they speculate on my expectations. There is no harm in that if they like it. I look at their trinkets, and say, ‘I’ve no money;’ and they say, ’Never mind;’ and I don’t mind much. The understanding is, that I pay them when I inherit.”

“In gout and bad temper?”

“Gad, if I inherit nothing else, they’ll have lots of that for indemnification. It’s a good system, Ned; it enables a young fellow like me to get through the best years of his life—which I take to be his youth—without that squalid poverty bothering him. You can make presents, and wear a pin or a ring, if it takes your eye. You look well, and you make yourself agreeable; and I see nothing to complain of in that.”

“The jewellers, then, have established an institution to correct one of the errors of Providence.”

“Oh! put it in your long-winded way, if you like,” said Algernon; “all I know is, that I should often have wanted a five-pound note, if—that is, if I hadn’t happened to be dressed like a gentleman. With your prospects, Ned, I should propose to charming Peggy tomorrow morning early. We mustn’t let her go out of the family. If I can’t have her, I’d rather you would.”

“You forget the incumbrances on one side,” said Edward, his face darkening.

“Oh! that’s all to be managed,” Algernon rallied him. “Why, Ned, you’ll have twenty thousand a-year, if you have a penny; and you’ll go into Parliament, and give dinners, and a woman like Peggy Lovell ’d intrigue for you like the deuce.”

“A great deal too like,” Edward muttered.

Page 935

“As for that pretty girl,” continued Algernon; but Edward peremptorily stopped all speech regarding Dahlia. His desire was, while he made holiday, to shut the past behind a brazen gate; which being communicated sympathetically to his cousin, the latter chimed to it in boisterous shouts of anticipated careless jollity at Fairly Park, crying out how they would hunt and snap fingers at Jews, and all mortal sorrows, and have a fortnight, or three weeks, perhaps a full month, of the finest life possible to man, with good horses, good dinners, good wines, good society, at command, and a queen of a woman to rule and order everything. Edward affected a disdainful smile at the prospect; but was in reality the weaker of the two in his thirst for it.

They arrived at Fairly in time to dress for dinner, and in the drawing-room Mrs. Lovell sat to receive them. She looked up to Edward’s face an imperceptible half-second longer than the ordinary form of welcome accords—one of the looks which are nothing at all when there is no spiritual apprehension between young people, and are so much when there is. To Algernon, who was gazing opals on her, she simply gave her fingers. At her right hand, was Sir John Capes, her antique devotee; a pure milky-white old gentleman, with sparkling fingers, who played Apollo to his Daphne, and was out of breath. Lord Suckling, a boy with a boisterous constitution, and a guardsman, had his place near her left hand, as if ready to seize it at the first whisper of encouragement or opportunity. A very little lady of seventeen, Miss Adeline Gosling, trembling with shyness under a cover of demureness, fell to Edward’s lot to conduct down to dinner, where he neglected her disgracefully. His father, Sir William, was present at the table, and Lord Elling, with whom he was in repute as a talker and a wit. Quickened with his host’s renowned good wine (and the bare renown of a wine is inspiriting), Edward pressed to be brilliant. He had an epigrammatic turn, and though his mind was prosaic when it ran alone, he could appear inventive and fanciful with the rub of other minds. Now, at a table where good talking is cared for, the triumphs of the excelling tongue are not for a moment to be despised, even by the huge appetite of the monster Vanity. For a year, Edward had abjured this feast. Before the birds appeared and the champagne had ceased to make its circle, he felt that he was now at home again, and that the term of his wandering away from society was one of folly. He felt the joy and vigour of a creature returned to his element. Why had he ever quitted it? Already he looked back upon Dahlia from a prodigious distance. He knew that there was something to be smoothed over; something written in the book of facts which had to be smeared out, and he seemed to do it, while he drank the babbling wine and heard himself talk. Not one man at that table, as he reflected, would consider the bond which held him in any serious degree binding. A lady

Page 936

is one thing, and a girl of the class Dahlia had sprung from altogether another. He could not help imagining the sort of appearance she would make there; and the thought even was a momentary clog upon his tongue. How he used to despise these people! Especially he had despised the young men as brainless cowards in regard to their views of women and conduct toward them. All that was changed. He fancied now that they, on the contrary, would despise him, if only they could be aware of the lingering sense he entertained of his being in bondage under a sacred obligation to a farmer's daughter.

But he had one thing to discover, and that was, why Sir William had made it a peculiar request that he should come to meet him here. Could the desire possibly be to reconcile him with Mrs. Lovell? His common sense rejected the idea at once: Sir William boasted of her wit and tact, and admired her beauty, but Edward remembered his having responded tacitly to his estimate of her character, and Sir William was not the man to court the alliance of his son with a woman like Mrs. Lovell. He perceived that his father and the fair widow frequently took counsel together. Edward laughed at the notion that the grave senior had himself become fascinated, but without utterly scouting it, until he found that the little lady whom he had led to dinner the first day, was an heiress; and from that, and other indications, he exactly divined the nature of his father's provident wishes. But this revelation rendered Mrs. Lovell's behaviour yet more extraordinary. Could it be credited that she was abetting Sir William's schemes with all her woman's craft? "Has she," thought Edward, "become so indifferent to me as to care for my welfare?" He determined to put her to the test. He made love to Adeline Gosling. Nothing that he did disturbed the impenetrable complacency of Mrs. Lovell. She threw them together as she shuffled the guests. She really seemed to him quite indifferent enough to care for his welfare. It was a point in the mysterious ways of women, or of widows, that Edward's experience had not yet come across. All the parties immediately concerned were apparently so desperately acquiescing in his suit, that he soon grew uneasy. Mrs. Lovell not only shuffled him into places with the raw heiress, but with the child's mother; of whom he spoke to Algernon as of one too strongly breathing of matrimony to appease the cravings of an eclectic mind.

"Make the path clear for me, then," said Algernon, "if you don't like the girl. Pitch her tales about me. Say, I've got a lot in me, though I don't let it out. The game's up between you and Peggy Lovell, that's clear. She don't forgive you, my boy."

"Ass!" muttered Edward, seeing by the light of his perception, that he was too thoroughly forgiven.

Page 937

A principal charm of the life at Fairly to him was that there was no one complaining. No one looked reproach at him. If a lady was pale and reserved, she did not seem to accuse him, and to require coaxing. All faces here were as light as the flying moment, and did not carry the shadowy weariness of years, like that burdensome fair face in the London lodging-house, to which the Fates had terribly attached themselves. So, he was gay. He closed, as it were, a black volume, and opened a new and a bright one. Young men easily fancy that they may do this, and that when the black volume is shut the tide is stopped. Saying, “I was a fool,” they believe they have put an end to the foolishness. What father teaches them that a human act once set in motion flows on for ever to the great account? Our deathlessness is in what we do, not in what we are. Comfortable Youth thinks otherwise.

The days at a well-ordered country-house, where a divining lady rules, speed to the measure of a waltz, in harmonious circles, dropping like crystals into the gulfs of Time, and appearing to write nothing in his book. Not a single hinge of existence is heard to creak. There is no after-dinner bill. You are waited on, without being elbowed by the humanity of your attendants. It is a civilized Arcadia. Only, do not desire, that you may not envy. Accept humbly what rights of citizenship are accorded to you upon entering. Discard the passions when you cross the threshold. To breathe and to swallow merely, are the duties which should prescribe your conduct; or, such is the swollen condition of the animal in this enchanted region, that the spirit of man becomes dangerously beset.

Edward breathed and swallowed, and never went beyond the prescription, save by talking. No other junior could enter the library, without encountering the scorn of his elders; so he enjoyed the privilege of hearing all the scandal, and his natural cynicism was plentifully fed. It was more of a school to him than he knew.

These veterans, in their arm-chairs, stripped the bloom from life, and showed it to be bare bones: They took their wisdom for an experience of the past: they were but giving their sensations in the present. Not to perceive this, is Youth’s, error when it hears old gentlemen talking at their ease.

On the third morning of their stay at Fairly, Algernon came into Edward’s room with a letter in his hand.

“There! read that!” he said. “It isn’t ill-luck; it’s infernal persecution! What, on earth!—-why, I took a close cab to the station. You saw me get out of it. I’ll swear no creditor of mine knew I was leaving London. My belief is that the fellows who give credit have spies about at every railway terminus in the kingdom. They won’t give me three days’ peace. It’s enough to disgust any man with civilized life; on my soul, it is!”

Edward glanced at the superscription of the letter. “Not posted,” he remarked.

Page 938

“No; delivered by some confounded bailiff, who’s been hounding me.”

“Bailiffs don’t generally deal in warnings.”

“Will you read it!” Algernon shouted.

The letter ran thus:—

“Mr. Algernon Blancove,—

“The writer of this intends taking the first opportunity of meeting you, and gives you warning, you will have to answer his question with a Yes or a No; and speak from your conscience. The respectfulness of his behaviour to you as a gentleman will depend upon that.”

Algernon followed his cousin’s eye down to the last letter in the page.

“What do you think of it?” he asked eagerly.

Edward’s broad thin-lined brows were drawn down in gloom. Mastering some black meditation in his brain, he answered Algernon’s yells for an opinion,—

“I think—well, I think bailiffs have improved in their manners, and show you they are determined to belong to the social march in an age of universal progress. Nothing can be more comforting.”

“But, suppose this fellow comes across me?”

“Don’t know him.”

“Suppose he insists on knowing me?”

“Don’t know yourself.”

“Yes; but hang it! if he catches hold of me?”

“Shake him off.”

“Suppose he won’t let go?”

“Cut him with your horsewhip.”

“You think it’s about a debt, then?”

“Intimidation, evidently.”

“I shall announce to him that the great Edward Blancove is not to be intimidated. You’ll let me borrow your name, old Ned. I’ve stood by you in my time. As for leaving Fairly, I tell you I can’t. It’s too delightful to be near Peggy Lovell.”

Edward smiled with a peculiar friendliness, and Algernon went off, very well contented with his cousin.

CHAPTER XVII

Within a mile of Fairly Park lay the farm of another yeoman; but he was of another character. The Hampshireman was a farmer of renown in his profession; fifth of a family that had cultivated a small domain of one hundred and seventy acres with sterling profit, and in a style to make Sutton the model of a perfect farm throughout the country. Royal eyes had inspected his pigs approvingly; Royal wits had taken hints from Jonathan Eccles in matters agricultural; and it was his comforting joke that he had taught his Prince good breeding. In return for the service, his Prince had transformed a lusty Radical into a devoted Royalist. Framed on the walls of his parlours were letters from his Prince, thanking him for specimen seeds and worthy counsel: veritable autograph letters of the highest value. The Prince had steamed up the salt river, upon which the Sutton harvests were mirrored, and landed on a spot marked in honour of the event by a broad grey stone; and from that day Jonathan Eccles stood on a pinnacle of pride, enabling him to see horizons of despondency hitherto unknown to him. For he had a son, and the son was a riotous devil, a most wild young fellow, who had no taste for a farmer’s life, and openly declared his determination not to perpetuate the Sutton farm in the hands of the Eccleses, by running off one day and entering the ranks of the British army.

Page 939

Those framed letters became melancholy objects for contemplation, when Jonathan thought that no posterity of his would point them out gloryingly in emulation. Man's aim is to culminate; but it is the saddest thing in the world to feel that we have accomplished it. Mr. Eccles shrugged with all the philosophy he could summon, and transferred his private disappointment to his country, whose agricultural day was, he said, doomed. "We shall be beaten by those Yankees." He gave Old England twenty years of continued pre-eminence (due to the impetus of the present generation of Englishmen), and then, said he, the Yankees will flood the market. No more green pastures in Great Britain; no pretty clean-footed animals; no yellow harvests; but huge chimney pots everywhere; black earth under black vapour, and smoke-begrimed faces. In twenty years' time, sooty England was to be a gigantic manufactory, until the Yankees beat us out of that field as well; beyond which Jonathan Eccles did not care to spread any distinct border of prophecy; merely thanking the Lord that he should then be under grass. The decay of our glory was to be edged with blood; Jonathan admitted that there would be stuff in the fallen race to deliver a sturdy fight before they went to their doom.

For this prodigious curse, England had to thank young Robert, the erratic son of Jonathan.

It was now two years since Robert had inherited a small legacy of money from an aunt, and spent it in waste, as the farmer bitterly supposed. He was looking at some immense seed-melons in his garden, lying about in morning sunshine—a new feed for sheep, of his own invention,—when the call of the wanderer saluted his ears, and he beheld his son Robert at the gate.

"Here I am, sir," Robert sang out from the exterior.

"Stay there, then," was his welcome.

They were alike in their build and in their manner of speech. The accost and the reply sounded like reports from the same pistol. The old man was tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular—a grey edition of the son, upon whose disorderly attire he cast a glance, while speaking, with settled disgust. Robert's necktie streamed loose; his hair was uncombed; a handkerchief dangled from his pocket. He had the look of the prodigal, returned with impudence for his portion instead of repentance.

"I can't see how you are, sir, from this distance," said Robert, boldly assuming his privilege to enter.

"Are you drunk?" Jonathan asked, as Robert marched up to him.

"Give me your hand, sir."

"Give me an answer first. Are you drunk?"

Robert tried to force the complacent aspect of a mind unabashed, but felt that he made a stupid show before that clear-headed, virtuously-living old, man of iron nerves. The alternative to flying into a passion, was the looking like a fool.

“Come, father,” he said, with a miserable snigger, like a yokel’s smile; “here I am at last. I don’t say, kill the fatted calf, and take a lesson from Scripture, but give me your hand. I’ve done no man harm but myself—damned if I’ve done a mean thing anywhere! and there’s no shame to you in shaking your son’s hand after a long absence.”

Page 940

Jonathan Eccles kept both hands firmly in his pockets.

“Are you drunk?” he repeated.

Robert controlled himself to answer, “I’m not.”

“Well, then, just tell me when you were drunk last.”

“This is a pleasant fatherly greeting!” Robert interjected.

“You get no good by fighting shy of a simple question, Mr. Bob,” said Jonathan.

Robert cried querulously, “I don’t want to fight shy of a simple question.”

“Well, then; when were you drunk last? answer me that.”

“Last night.”

Jonathan drew his hand from his pocket to thump his leg.

“I’d have sworn it!”

All Robert’s assurance had vanished in a minute, and he stood like a convicted culprit before his father.

“You know, sir, I don’t tell lies. I was drunk last night. I couldn’t help it.”

“No more could the little boy.”

“I was drunk last night. Say, I’m a beast.”

“I shan’t!” exclaimed Jonathan, making his voice sound as a defence to this vile charge against the brutish character.

“Say, I’m worse than a beast, then,” cried Robert, in exasperation. “Take my word that it hasn’t happened to me to be in that state for a year and more. Last night I was mad. I can’t give you any reasons. I thought I was cured but I’ve trouble in my mind, and a tide swims you over the shallows—so I felt. Come, sir—father, don’t make me mad again.”

“Where did you get the liquor?” inquired Jonathan.

“I drank at ‘The Pilot.’”

“Ha! there’s talk there of ‘that damned old Eccles’ for a month to come—’the unnatural parent.’ How long have you been down here?”

“Eight and twenty hours.”

“Eight and twenty hours. When are you going?”

“I want lodging for a night.”

“What else?”

“The loan of a horse that’ll take a fence.”

“Go on.”

“And twenty pounds.”

“Oh!” said Jonathan. “If farming came as easy to you as face, you’d be a prime agriculturalist. Just what I thought! What’s become of that money your aunt Jane was fool enough to bequeath to you?”

“I’ve spent it.”

“Are you a Deserter?”

For a moment Robert stood as if listening, and then white grew his face, and he swayed and struck his hands together. His recent intoxication had unmanned him.

“Go in—go in,” said his father in some concern, though wrath was predominant.

“Oh, make your mind quiet about me.” Robert dropped his arms. “I’m weakened somehow—damned weak, I am—I feel like a woman when my father asks me if I’ve been guilty of villany. Desert? I wouldn’t desert from the hulks. Hear the worst, and this is the worst: I’ve got no money—I don’t owe a penny, but I haven’t got one.”

“And I won’t give you one,” Jonathan appended; and they stood facing one another in silence.

Page 941

A squeaky voice was heard from the other side of the garden hedge of clipped yew.

“Hi! farmer, is that the missing young man?” and presently a neighbour, by name John Sedgett, came trotting through the gate, and up the garden path.

“I say,” he remarked, “here’s a rumpus. Here’s a bobbery up at Fairly. Oh! Bob Eccles! Bob Eccles! At it again!”

Mr. Sedgett shook his wallet of gossip with an enjoying chuckle. He was a thin-faced creature, rheumy of eye, and drawing his breath as from a well; the ferret of the village for all underlying scandal and tattle, whose sole humanity was what he called pitifully ‘a peakin’ at his chest, and who had retired from his business of grocer in the village upon the fortune brought to him in the energy and capacity of a third wife to conduct affairs, while he wandered up and down and knitted people together—an estimable office in a land where your house is so grievously your castle.

“What the devil have you got in you now?” Jonathan cried out to him.

Mr. Sedgett was seized by his complaint and demanded commiseration, but, recovering, he chuckled again.

“Oh, Bob Eccles! Don’t you never grow older? And the first day down among us again, too. Why, Bob, as a military man, you ought to acknowledge your superiors. Why, Stephen Bilton, the huntsman, says, Bob, you pulled the young gentleman off his horse—you on foot, and him mounted. I’d ha’ given pounds to be there. And ladies present! Lord help us! I’m glad you’re returned, though. These melons of the farmer’s, they’re a wonderful invention; people are speaking of ’em right and left, and says, says they, Farmer Eccles, he’s best farmer going—Hampshire ought to be proud of him—he’s worth two of any others: that they are fine ones! And you’re come back to keep ’em up, eh, Bob? Are ye, though, my man?”

“Well, here I am, Mr. Sedgett,” said Robert, “and talking to my father.”

“Oh! I wouldn’t be here to interrupt ye for the world.” Mr. Sedgett made a show of retiring, but Jonathan insisted upon his disburdening himself of his tale, saying: “Damn your raw beginnings, Sedgett! What’s been up? Nobody can hurt me.”

“That they can’t, neighbour; nor Bob neither, as far as stand up man to man go. I give him three to one—Bob Eccles! He took ’em when a boy. He may, you know, he may have the law agin him, and by George! if he do—why, a man’s no match for the law. No use bein’ a hero to the law. The law masters every man alive; and there’s law in everything, neighbour Eccles; eh, sir? Your friend, the Prince, owns to it, as much as you or me. But, of course, you know what Bob’s been doing. What I dropped in to ask

was, why did ye do it, Bob? Why pull the young gentleman off his horse? I'd ha' given pounds to be there!"

"Pounds o' tallow candles don't amount to much," quoth Robert.

"That's awful bad brandy at 'The Pilot,'" said Mr. Sedgett, venomously.

Page 942

“Were you drunk when you committed this assault?” Jonathan asked his son.

“I drank afterwards,” Robert replied.

“‘Pilot’ brandy’s poor consolation,” remarked Mr. Sedgett.

Jonathan had half a mind to turn his son out of the gate, but the presence of Sedgett advised him that his doings were naked to the world.

“You kicked up a shindy in the hunting-field—what about? Who mounted ye?”

Robert remarked that he had been on foot.

“On foot—eh? on foot!” Jonathan speculated, unable to realize the image of his son as a foot-man in the hunting-field, or to comprehend the insolence of a pedestrian who should dare to attack a mounted huntsman. “You were on foot? The devil you were on foot! Foot? And caught a man out of his saddle?”

Jonathan gave up the puzzle. He laid out his fore finger decisively,—

“If it’s an assault, mind, you stand damages. My land gives and my land takes my money, and no drunken dog lives on the produce. A row in the hunting-field’s un-English, I call it.”

“So it is, sir,” said Robert.

“So it be, neighbour,” said Mr. Sedgett.

Whereupon Robert took his arm, and holding the scraggy wretch forward, commanded him to out with what he knew.

“Oh, I don’t know no more than what I’ve told you.” Mr. Sedgett twisted a feeble remonstrance of his bones, that were chiefly his being, at the gripe; “except that you got hold the horse by the bridle, and wouldn’t let him go, because the young gentleman wouldn’t speak as a gentleman, and—oh! don’t squeeze so hard—”

“Out with it!” cried Robert.

“And you said, Steeve Bilton said, you said, ‘Where is she?’ you said, and he swore, and you swore, and a lady rode up, and you pulled, and she sang out, and off went the gentleman, and Steeve said she said, ’For shame.’”

“And it was the truest word spoken that day!” Robert released him. “You don’t know much, Mr. Sedgett; but it’s enough to make me explain the cause to my father, and, with your leave, I’ll do so.”

Mr. Sedgett remarked: “By all means, do;” and rather preferred that his wits should be accused of want of brightness, than that he should miss a chance of hearing the rich history of the scandal and its origin. Something stronger than a hint sent him off at a trot, hugging in his elbows.

“The postman won’t do his business quicker than Sedgett ’ll tap this tale upon every door in the parish,” said Jonathan.

“I can only say I’m sorry, for your sake;” Robert was expressing his contrition, when his father caught him up,—

“Who can hurt me?—my sake? Have I got the habits of a sot?—what you’d call ‘a beast!’ but I know the ways o’ beasts, and if you did too, you wouldn’t bring them in to bear your beastly sins. Who can hurt me?—You’ve been quarrelling with this young gentleman about a woman—did you damage him?”

Page 943

“If knuckles could do it, I should have brained him, sir,” said Robert.

“You struck him, and you got the best of it?”

“He got the worst of it any way, and will again.”

“Then the devil take you for a fool! why did you go and drink I could understand it if you got licked. Drown your memory, then, if that filthy soaking’s to your taste; but why, when you get the prize, we’ll say, you go off headlong into a manure pond?—There! except that you’re a damned idiot!” Jonathan struck the air, as to observe that it beat him, but for the foregoing elucidation: thundering afresh, “Why did you go and drink?”

“I went, sir, I went—why did I go?” Robert slapped his hand despairingly to his forehead. “What on earth did I go for?—because I’m at sea, I suppose. Nobody cares for me. I’m at sea, and no rudder to steer me. I suppose that’s it. So, I drank. I thought it best to take spirits on board. No; this was the reason—I remember: that lady, whoever she was, said something that stung me. I held the fellow under her eyes, and shook him, though she was begging me to let him off. Says she—but I’ve drunk it clean out of my mind.”

“There, go in and look at yourself in the glass,” said Jonathan.

“Give me your hand first,”—Robert put his own out humbly.

“I’ll be hanged if I do,” said Jonathan firmly. “Bed and board you shall have while I’m alive, and a glass to look at yourself in; but my hand’s for decent beasts. Move one way or t’ other: take your choice.”

Seeing Robert hesitate, he added, “I shall have a damned deal more respect for you if you toddle.” He waved his hand away from the premises.

“I’m sorry you’ve taken so to swearing of late, sir,” said Robert.

“Two flints strike fire, my lad. When you keep distant, I’m quiet enough in my talk to satisfy your aunt Anne.”

“Look here, sir; I want to make use of you, so I’ll go in.”

“Of course you do,” returned Jonathan, not a whit displeased by his son’s bluntness; “what else is a father good for? I let you know the limit, and that’s a brick wall; jump it, if you can. Don’t fancy it’s your aunt Jane you’re going in to meet.”

Robert had never been a favourite with his aunt Anne, who was Jonathan’s housekeeper.

“No, poor old soul! and may God bless her in heaven!” he cried.

“For leaving you what you turned into a thundering lot of liquor to consume—eh?”

“For doing all in her power to make a man of me; and she was close on it—kind, good old darling, that she was! She got me with that money of hers to the best footing I’ve been on yet—bless her heart, or her memory, or whatever a poor devil on earth may bless an angel for! But here I am.”

The fever in Robert blazed out under a pressure of extinguishing tears.

“There, go along in,” said Jonathan, who considered drunkenness to be the main source of water in a man’s eyes. “It’s my belief you’ve been at it already this morning.”

Page 944

Robert passed into the house in advance of his father, whom he quite understood and appreciated. There was plenty of paternal love for him, and a hearty smack of the hand, and the inheritance of the farm, when he turned into the right way. Meantime Jonathan was ready to fulfil his parental responsibility, by sheltering, feeding, and not publicly abusing his offspring, of whose spirit he would have had a higher opinion if Robert had preferred, since he must go to the deuce, to go without troubling any of his relatives; as it was, Jonathan submitted to the infliction gravely. Neither in speech nor in tone did he solicit from the severe maiden, known as Aunt Anne, that snub for the wanderer whom he introduced, which, when two are agreed upon the infamous character of a third, through whom they are suffering, it is always agreeable to hear. He said, “Here, Anne; here’s Robert. He hasn’t breakfasted.”

“He likes his cold bath beforehand,” said Robert, presenting his cheek to the fleshless, semi-transparent woman.

Aunt Anne divided her lips to pronounce a crisp, subdued “Ow!” to Jonathan after inspecting Robert; and she shuddered at sight of Robert, and said “Ow!” repeatedly, by way of an interjectory token of comprehension, to all that was uttered; but it was a horrified “No!” when Robert’s cheek pushed nearer.

“Then, see to getting some breakfast for him,” said Jonathan. “You’re not anyway bound to kiss a drunken—”

“Dog’s the word, sir,” Robert helped him. “Dogs can afford it. I never saw one in that state; so they don’t lose character.”

He spoke lightly, but dejection was in his attitude. When his aunt Anne had left the room, he exclaimed,—

“By jingo! women make you feel it, by some way that they have. She’s a religious creature. She smells the devil in me.”

“More like, the brandy,” his father responded.

“Well! I’m on the road, I’m on the road!” Robert fetched a sigh.

“I didn’t make the road,” said his father.

“No, sir; you didn’t. Work hard: sleep sound that’s happiness. I’ve known it for a year. You’re the man I’d imitate, if I could. The devil came first the brandy’s secondary. I was quiet so long. I thought myself a safe man.”

He sat down and sent his hair distraught with an effort at smoothing it.

“Women brought the devil into the world first. It’s women who raise the devil in us, and why they—”

He thumped the table just as his aunt Anne was preparing to spread the cloth.

“Don’t be frightened, woman,” said Jonathan, seeing her start fearfully back. “You take too many cups of tea, morning and night—hang the stuff!”

“Never, never till now have you abused me, Jonathan,” she whimpered, severely.

“I don’t tell you to love him; but wait on him. That’s all. And I’ll about my business. Land and beasts—they answer to you.”

Robert looked up.

Page 945

“Land and beasts! They sound like blessed things. When next I go to church, I shall know what old Adam felt. Go along, sir. I shall break nothing in the house.”

“You won’t go, Jonathan?” begged the trembling spinster.

“Give him some of your tea, and strong, and as much of it as he can take—he wants bringing down,” was Jonathan’s answer; and casting a glance at one of the framed letters, he strode through the doorway, and Aunt Anne was alone with the flushed face and hurried eyes of her nephew, who was to her little better than a demon in the flesh. But there was a Bible in the room.

An hour later, Robert was mounted and riding to the meet of hounds.

CHAPTER XVIII

A single night at the Pilot Inn had given life and vigour to Robert’s old reputation in Warbeach village, as the stoutest of drinkers and dear rascals throughout a sailor-breeding district, where Dibdin was still thundered in the ale-house, and manhood in a great degree measured by the capacity to take liquor on board, as a ship takes ballast. There was a profound affectation of deploring the sad fact that he drank as hard as ever, among the men, and genuine pity expressed for him by the women of Warbeach; but his fame was fresh again. As the Spring brings back its flowers, Robert’s presence revived his youthful deeds. There had not been a boxer in the neighbourhood like Robert Eccles, nor such a champion in all games, nor, when he set himself to it, such an invincible drinker. It was he who thrashed the brute, Nic Sedgett, for stabbing with his clasp-knife Harry Boulby, son of the landlady of the Pilot Inn; thrashed him publicly, to the comfort of all Warbeach. He had rescued old Dame Garble from her burning cottage, and made his father house the old creature, and worked at farming, though he hated it, to pay for her subsistence. He vindicated the honour of Warbeach by drinking a match against a Yorkshire skipper till four o’clock in the morning, when it was a gallant sight, my boys, to see Hampshire steadying the defeated North-countryman on his astonished zigzag to his flattish-bottomed billyboy, all in the cheery sunrise on the river—yo-ho! ahoy!

Glorious Robert had tried, first the sea, and then soldiering. Now let us hope he’ll settle to farming, and follow his rare old father’s ways, and be back among his own people for good. So chimed the younger ones, and many of the elder.

Danish blood had settled round Warbeach. To be a really popular hero anywhere in Britain, a lad must still, I fear, have something of a Scandinavian gullet; and if, in addition to his being a powerful drinker, he is pleasant in his cups, and can sing, and forgive, be freehanded, and roll out the grand risky phrases of a fired brain, he stamps himself, in the apprehension of his associates, a king.

Page 946

Much of the stuff was required to deal King Robert of Warbeach the capital stroke, and commonly he could hold on till a puff of cold air from the outer door, like an admonitory messenger, reminded him that he was, in the greatness of his soul, a king of swine; after which his way of walking off, without a word to anybody, hoisting his whole stature, while others were staggering, or roaring foul rhymes, or feeling consciously mortal in their sensation of feverishness, became a theme for admiration; ay, and he was fresh as an orchard apple in the morning! there lay his commandership convincingly. What was proved overnight was confirmed at dawn.

Mr. Robert had his contrast in Sedgett's son, Nicodemus Sedgett, whose unlucky Christian name had assisted the wits of Warbeach in bestowing on him a darkly-luminous relationship. Young Nic loved also to steep his spirit in the bowl; but, in addition to his never paying for his luxury, he drank as if in emulation of the colour of his reputed patron, and neighbourhood to Nic Sedgett was not liked when that young man became thoughtful over his glass.

The episode of his stabbing the landlady's son Harry clung to him fatally. The wound was in the thigh, and nothing serious. Harry was up and off to sea before Nic had ceased to show the marks of Robert's vengeance upon him; but blood-shedding, even on a small scale, is so detested by Englishmen, that Nic never got back to his right hue in the eyes of Warbeach. None felt to him as to a countryman, and it may be supposed that his face was seen no more in the house of gathering, the Pilot Inn.

He rented one of the Fairly farms, known as the Three-Tree Farm, subsisting there, men fancied, by the aid of his housekeeper's money. For he was of those evil fellows who disconcert all righteous prophecy, and it was vain for Mrs. Boulby and Warbeach village to declare that no good could come to him, when Fortune manifestly kept him going.

He possessed the rogue's most serviceable art: in spite of a countenance that was not attractive, this fellow could, as was proved by evidence, make himself pleasing to women. "The truth of it is," said Mrs. Boulby, at a loss for any other explanation, and with a woman's love of sharp generalization, "it's because my sex is fools."

He had one day no money to pay his rent, and forthwith (using for the purpose his last five shillings, it was said) advertized for a housekeeper; and before Warbeach had done chuckling over his folly, an agreeable woman of about thirty-five was making purchases in his name; she made tea, and the evening brew for such friends as he could collect, and apparently paid his rent for him, after a time; the distress was not in the house three days. It seemed to Warbeach an erratic proceeding on the part of Providence, that Nic should ever be helped to swim; but our modern prophets have small patience, and summon Destiny to strike without a preparation of her weapons or a warning to the victim.

Page 947

More than Robert's old occasional vice was at the bottom of his popularity, as I need not say. Let those who generalize upon ethnology determine whether the ancient opposition of Saxon and Norman be at an end; but it is certain, to my thinking, that when a hero of the people can be got from the common popular stock, he is doubly dear. A gentleman, however gallant and familiar, will hardly ever be as much beloved, until he dies to inform a legend or a ballad: seeing that death only can remove the peculiar distinctions and distances which the people feel to exist between themselves and the gentleman-class, and which, not to credit them with preternatural discernment, they are carefully taught to feel. Dead Britons are all Britons, but live Britons are not quite brothers.

It was as the son of a yeoman, showing comprehensible accomplishments, that Robert took his lead. He was a very brave, a sweet-hearted, and a handsome young man, and he had very chivalrous views of life, that were understood by a sufficient number under the influence of ale or brandy, and by a few in default of that material aid; and they had a family pride in him. The pride was mixed with fear, which threw over it a tender light, like a mother's dream of her child. The people, I have said, are not so lost in self-contempt as to undervalue their best men, but it must be admitted that they rarely produce young fellows wearing the undeniable chieftain's stamp, and the rarity of one like Robert lent a hue of sadness to him in their thoughts.

Fortune, moreover, the favourer of Nic Sedgett, blew foul whichever the way Robert set his sails. He would not look to his own advantage; and the belief that man should set his little traps for the liberal hand of his God, if he wishes to prosper, rather than strive to be merely honourable in his Maker's eye, is almost as general among poor people as it is with the moneyed classes, who survey them from their height.

When jolly Butcher Billing, who was one of the limited company which had sat with Robert at the Pilot last night, reported that he had quitted the army, he was hearkened to dolefully, and the feeling was universal that glorious Robert had cut himself off from his pension and his hospital.

But when gossip Sedgett went his rounds, telling that Robert was down among them again upon the darkest expedition their minds could conceive, and rode out every morning for the purpose of encountering one of the gentlemen up at Fairly, and had already pulled him off his horse and laid him in the mud, calling him scoundrel and challenging him either to yield his secret or to fight; and that he followed him, and was out after him publicly, and matched himself against that gentleman, who had all the other gentlemen, and the earl, and the law to back him, the little place buzzed with wonder and alarm. Faint hearts declared that Robert was now done for. All felt that he had gone miles beyond the mark. Those were the misty days when fogs rolled up the salt river from the winter sea, and the sun lived but an hour in the clotted sky, extinguished near the noon.

Page 948

Robert was seen riding out, and the tramp of his horse was heard as he returned homeward. He called no more at the Pilot. Darkness and mystery enveloped him. There were nightly meetings under Mrs. Boulby's roof, in the belief that he could not withstand her temptations; nor did she imprudently discourage them; but the woman at last overcame the landlady within her, and she wailed: "He won't come because of the drink. Oh! why was I made to sell liquor, which he says sends him to the devil, poor blessed boy? and I can't help begging him to take one little drop. I did, the first night he was down, forgetting his ways; he looked so desperate, he did, and it went on and went on, till he was primed, and me proud to see him get out of his misery. And now he hates the thought of me."

In her despair she encouraged Sedgett to visit her bar and parlour, and he became everywhere a most important man.

Farmer Eccles's habits of seclusion (his pride, some said), and more especially the dreaded austere Aunt Anne, who ruled that household, kept people distant from the Warbeach farm-house, all excepting Sedgett, who related that every night on his return, she read a chapter from the Bible to Robert, sitting up for him patiently to fulfil her duty; and that the farmer's words to his son had been: "Rest here; eat and drink, and ride my horse; but not a penny of my money do you have."

By the help of Steeve Bilton, the Fairly huntsman, Sedgett was enabled to relate that there was a combination of the gentlemen against Robert, whose behaviour none could absolutely approve, save the landlady and jolly Butcher Billing, who stuck to him with a hearty blind faith.

"Did he ever," asked the latter, "did Bob Eccles ever conduct himself disrespectful to his superiors? Wasn't he always found out at his wildest for to be right—to a sensible man's way of thinking?—though not, I grant ye, to his own interests—there's another tale." And Mr. Billing's staunch adherence to the hero of the village was cried out to his credit when Sedgett stated, on Stephen Bilton's authority, that Robert's errand was the defence of a girl who had been wronged, and whose whereabout, that she might be restored to her parents, was all he wanted to know. This story passed from mouth to mouth, receiving much ornament in the passage. The girl in question became a lady; for it is required of a mere common girl that she should display remarkable character before she can be accepted as the fitting companion of a popular hero. She became a young lady of fortune, in love with Robert, and concealed by the artifice of the offending gentleman whom Robert had challenged. Sedgett told this for truth, being instigated to boldness of invention by pertinacious inquiries, and the dignified sense which the whole story hung upon him.

Mrs. Boulby, who, as a towering woman, despised Sedgett's weak frame, had been willing to listen till she perceived him to be but a man of fiction, and then she gave him a flat contradiction, having no esteem for his custom.

Page 949

“Eh! but, Missis, I can tell you his name—the gentleman’s name,” said Sedgett, placably. “He’s a Mr. Algernon Blancove, and a cousin by marriage, or something, of Mrs. Lovell.”

“I reckon you’re right about that, goodman,” replied Mrs. Boulby, with intuitive discernment of the true from the false, mingled with a desire to show that she was under no obligation for the news. “All t’ other’s a tale of your own, and you know it, and no more true than your rigmaroles about my brandy, which is French; it is, as sure as my blood’s British.”

“Oh! Missis,” quoth Sedgett, maliciously, “as to tales, you’ve got witnesses enough it crassed chann’l. Aha! Don’t bring ’em into the box. Don’t you bring ’em into ne’er a box.”

“You mean to say, Mr. Sedgett, they won’t swear?”

“No, Missis; they’ll swear, fast and safe, if you teach ’em. Dashed if they won’t run the Pilot on a rock with their swearin’. It ain’t a good habit.”

“Well, Mr. Sedgett, the next time you drink my brandy and find the consequences bad, you let me hear of it.”

“And what’ll you do, Missis, may be?”

Listeners were by, and Mrs. Boulby cruelly retorted; “I won’t send you home to your wife;” which created a roar against this hen-pecked man.

“As to consequences, Missis, it’s for your sake I’m looking at them,” Sedgett said, when he had recovered from the blow.

“You say that to the Excise, Mr. Sedgett; it, belike, ’ll make ’em sorry.”

“Brandy’s your weak point, it appears, Missis.”

“A little in you would stiffen your back, Mr. Sedgett.”

“Poor Bob Eccles didn’t want no stiffening when he come down first,” Sedgett interjected.

At which, flushing enraged, Mrs. Boulby cried: “Mention him, indeed! And him and you, and that son of your’n—the shame of your cheeks if people say he’s like his father. Is it your son, Nic Sedgett, thinks to inform against me, as once he swore to, and to get his wage that he may step out of a second bankruptcy? and he a farmer! You let him know that he isn’t feared by me, Sedgett, and there’s one here to give him a second dose, without waiting for him to use clasp-knives on harmless innocents.”

“Pacify yourself, ma’am, pacify yourself,” remarked Sedgett, hardened against words abroad by his endurance of blows at home. “Bob Eccles, he’s got his hands full, and he, maybe, ’ll reach the hulks before my Nic do, yet. And how ’m I answerable for Nic, I ask you?”

“More luck to you not to be, I say; and either, Sedgett, you does woman’s work, gossipin’ about like a cracked bell-clapper, or men’s the biggest gossips of all, which I believe; for there’s no beating you at your work, and one can’t wish ill to you, knowing what you catch.”

Page 950

“In a friendly way, Missis,”—Sedgett fixed on the compliment to his power of propagating news—“in a friendly way. You can’t accuse me of leavin’ out the ‘I’ in your name, now, can you? I make that observation,”—the venomous tattler screwed himself up to the widow insinuatingly, as if her understanding could only be seized at close quarters, “I make that observation, because poor Dick Boulby, your lamented husband —eh! poor Dick! You see, Missis, it ain’t the tough ones last longest: he’d sing, ‘I’m a Sea Booby,’ to the song, ’I’m a green Mermaid:’ poor Dick! ‘a-shinin’ upon the sea-deeps.’ He kept the liquor from his head, but didn’t mean it to stop down in his leg.”

“Have you done, Mr. Sedgett?” said the widow, blandly.

“You ain’t angry, Missis?”

“Not a bit, Mr. Sedgett; and if I knock you over with the flat o’ my hand, don’t you think so.”

Sedgett threw up the wizened skin of his forehead, and retreated from the bar. At a safe distance, he called: “Bad news that about Bob Eccles swallowing a blow yesterday!”

Mrs. Boulby faced him complacently till he retired, and then observed to those of his sex surrounding her, “Don’t ‘woman-and-dog-and-walnut-tree’ me! Some of you men ’d be the better for a drubbing every day of your lives. Sedgett yond’ ’d be as big a villain as his son, only for what he gets at home.”

That was her way of replying to the Parthian arrow; but the barb was poisoned. The village was at fever heat concerning Robert, and this assertion that he had swallowed a blow, produced almost as great a consternation as if a fleet of the enemy had been reported off Sandy Point.

Mrs. Boulby went into her parlour and wrote a letter to Robert, which she despatched by one of the loungers about the bar, who brought back news that three of the gentlemen of Fairly were on horseback, talking to Farmer Eccles at his garden gate. Affairs were waxing hot. The gentlemen had only to threaten Farmer Eccles, to make him side with his son, right or wrong. In the evening, Stephen Bilton, the huntsman, presented himself at the door of the long parlour of the Pilot, and loud cheers were his greeting from a full company.

“Gentlemen all,” said Stephen, with dapper modesty; and acted as if no excitement were current, and he had nothing to tell.

“Well, Steeve?” said one, to encourage him.

“How about Bob, to-day?” said another.

Before Stephen had spoken, it was clear to the apprehension of the whole room that he did not share the popular view of Robert. He declined to understand who was meant by "Bob." He played the questions off; and then shrugged, with, "Oh, let's have a quiet evening."

It ended in his saying, "About Bob Eccles? There, that's summed up pretty quick—he's mad."

"Mad!" shouted Warbeach.

"That's a lie," said Mrs. Boulby, from the doorway.

"Well, mum, I let a lady have her own opinion." Stephen nodded to her. "There ain't a doubt as t' what the doctors 'd bring him in I ain't speaking my ideas alone. It's written like the capital letters in a newspaper. Lunatic's the word! And I'll take a glass of something warm, Mrs. Boulby. We had a stiff run to-day."

Page 951

“Where did ye kill, Steeve?” asked a dispirited voice.

“We didn’t kill at all: he was one of those ‘longshore dog-foxes,’ and got away home on the cliff.” Stephen thumped his knee. “It’s my belief the smell o’ sea gives ’em extra cunning.”

“The beggar seems to have put ye out rether—eh, Steeve?”

So it was generally presumed: and yet the charge of madness was very staggering; madness being, in the first place, indefensible, and everybody’s enemy when at large; and Robert’s behaviour looked extremely like it. It had already been as a black shadow haunting enthusiastic minds in the village, and there fell a short silence, during which Stephen made his preparations for filling and lighting a pipe.

“Come; how do you make out he’s mad?”

Jolly Butcher Billing spoke; but with none of the irony of confidence.

“Oh!” Stephen merely clapped both elbows against his sides.

Several pairs of eyes were studying him. He glanced over them in turn, and commenced leisurely the puff contemplative.

“Don’t happen to have a grudge of e’er a kind against old Bob, Steeve?”

“Not I!”

Mrs. Boulby herself brought his glass to Stephen, and, retreating, left the parlour-door open.

“What causes you for to think him mad, Steeve?”

A second “Oh!” as from the heights dominating argument, sounded from Stephen’s throat, half like a grunt. This time he condescended to add,—

“How do you know when a dog’s gone mad? Well, Robert Eccles, he’s gone in like manner. If you don’t judge a man by his actions, you’ve got no means of reckoning. He comes and attacks gentlemen, and swears he’ll go on doing it.”

“Well, and what does that prove?” said jolly Butcher Billing.

Mr. William Moody, boatbuilder, a liver-complexioned citizen, undertook to reply.

“What does that prove? What does that prove when the midshipmite was found with his head in the mixedpickle jar? It proved that his head was lean, and t’ other part was rounder.”

The illustration appeared forcible, but not direct, and nothing more was understood from it than that Moody, and two or three others who had been struck by the image of the infatuated young naval officer, were going over to the enemy. The stamp of madness upon Robert’s acts certainly saved perplexity, and was the easiest side of the argument. By this time Stephen had finished his glass, and the effect was seen.

“Hang it!” he exclaimed, “I don’t agree he deserves shooting. And he may have had harm done to him. In that case, let him fight. And I say, too, let the gentleman give him satisfaction.”

“Hear! hear!” cried several.

“And if the gentleman refuse to give him satisfaction in a fair stand-up fight, I say he ain’t a gentleman, and deserves to be treated as such. My objection’s personal. I don’t like any man who spoils sport, and ne’er a rascally vulpeci’ spoils sport as he do, since he’s been down in our parts again. I’ll take another brimmer, Mrs. Boulby.”

Page 952

“To be sure you will, Stephen,” said Mrs. Boulby, bending as in a curtsey to the glass; and so soft with him that foolish fellows thought her cowed by the accusation thrown at her favourite.

“There’s two questions about they valpecies, Master Stephen,” said Farmer Wainsby, a farmer with a grievance, fixing his elbow on his knee for serious utterance. “There’s to ask, and t’ ask again. Sport, I grant ye. All in doo season. But,” he performed a circle with his pipe stem, and darted it as from the centre thereof toward Stephen’s breast, with the poser, “do we s’pport thieves at public expense for them to keep thievin’—-black, white, or brown—no matter, eh? Well, then, if the public wunt bear it, dang me if I can see why individles shud bear it. It ent no manner o’ reason, net as I can see; let gentlemen have their opinion, or let ’em not. Foxes be hanged!”

Much slow winking was interchanged. In a general sense, Farmer Wainsby’s remarks were held to be un-English, though he was pardoned for them as one having peculiar interests at stake.

“Ay, ay! we know all about that,” said Stephen, taking succour from the eyes surrounding him.

“And so, may be, do we,” said Wainsby.

“Fox-hunting ’ll go on when your great-grandfather’s your youngest son, farmer; or t’ other way.”

“I reckon it’ll be a stuffed fox your chil’ern ’ll hunt, Mr. Steeve; more straw in ’em than bow’ls.”

“If the country,” Stephen thumped the table, “were what you’d make of it, hang me if my name ’d long be Englishman!”

“Hear, hear, Steeve!” was shouted in support of the Conservative principle enunciated by him.

“What I say is, flesh and blood afore foxes!”

Thus did Farmer Wainsby likewise attempt a rallying-cry; but Stephen’s retort, “Ain’t foxes flesh and blood?” convicted him of clumsiness, and, buoyed on the uproar of cheers, Stephen pursued, “They are; to kill ’em in cold blood’s beast-murder, so it is. What do we do? We give ’em a fair field—a fair field and no favour! We let ’em trust to the instincts Nature, she’s given ’em; and don’t the old woman know best? If they cap, get away, they win the day. All’s open, and honest, and aboveboard. Kill your rats and kill your rabbits, but leave foxes to your betters. Foxes are gentlemen. You don’t understand? Be hanged if they ain’t! I like the old fox, and I don’t like to see him

murdered and exterminated, but die the death of a gentleman, at the hands of gentlemen—”

“And ladies,” sneered the farmer.

All the room was with Stephen, and would have backed him uproariously, had he not reached his sounding period without knowing it, and thus allowed his opponent to slip in that abominable addition.

“Ay, and ladies,” cried the huntsman, keen at recovery. “Why shouldn’t they? I hate a field without a woman in it; don’t you? and you? and you? And you, too, Mrs. Boulby? There you are, and the room looks better for you—don’t it, lads? Hurrah!”

Page 953

The cheering was now aroused, and Stephen had his glass filled again in triumph, while the farmer meditated thickly over the ruin of his argument from that fatal effort at fortifying it by throwing a hint to the discredit of the sex, as many another man has meditated before.

“Eh! poor old Bob!” Stephen sighed and sipped. “I can cry that with any of you. It’s worse for me to see than for you to hear of him. Wasn’t I always a friend of his, and said he was worthy to be a gentleman, many a time? He’s got the manners of a gentleman now; offs with his hat, if there’s a lady present, and such a neat way of speaking. But there, acting’s the thing, and his behaviour’s beastly bad! You can’t call it no other. There’s two Mr. Blancoves up at Fairly, relations of Mrs. Lovell’s—whom I’ll take the liberty of calling My Beauty, and no offence meant: and it’s before her that Bob only yesterday rode up—one of the gentlemen being Mr. Algernon, free of hand and a good seat in the saddle, t’ other’s Mr. Edward; but Mr. Algernon, he’s Robert Eccles’s man—up rides Bob, just as we was tying Mr. Reenard’s brush to the pommel of the lady’s saddle, down in Ditley Marsh; and he bows to the lady. Says he—but he’s mad, stark mad!”

Stephen resumed his pipe amid a din of disappointment that made the walls ring and the glasses leap.

“A little more sugar, Stephen?” said Mrs. Boulby, moving in lightly from the doorway.

“Thank ye, mum; you’re the best hostess that ever breathed.”

“So she be; but how about Bob?” cried her guests—some asking whether he carried a pistol or flourished a stick.

“Ne’er a blessed twig, to save his soul; and there’s the madness written on him;” Stephen roared as loud as any of them. “And me to see him riding in the ring there, and knowing what the gentleman had sworn to do if he came across the hunt; and feeling that he was in the wrong! I haven’t got a oath to swear how mad I was. Fancy yourselves in my place. I love old Bob. I’ve drunk with him; I owe him obligations from since I was a boy up’ard; I don’t know a better than Bob in all England. And there he was: and says to Mr. Algernon, ‘You know what I’m come for.’ I never did behold a gentleman so pale—shot all over his cheeks as he was, and pinkish under the eyes; if you’ve ever noticed a chap laid hands on by detectives in plain clothes. Smack at Bob went Mr. Edward’s whip.”

“Mr. Algernon’s,” Stephen was corrected.

“Mr. Edward’s, I tell ye—the cousin. And right across the face. My Lord! it made my blood tingle.”

A sound like the swish of a whip expressed the sentiments of that assemblage at the Pilot.

“Bob swallowed it?”

Page 954

“What else could he do, the fool? He had nothing to help him but his hand. Says he, ’That’s a poor way of trying to stop me. My business is with this gentleman;’ and Bob set his horse at Mr. Algernon, and Mrs. Lovell rode across him with her hand raised; and just at that moment up jogged the old gentleman, Squire Blancove, of Wrexby: and Robert Eccles says to him, ’You might have saved your son something by keeping your word.’ It appears according to Bob, that the squire had promised to see his son, and settle matters. All Mrs. Lovell could do was hardly enough to hold back Mr. Edward from laying out at Bob. He was like a white devil, and speaking calm and polite all the time. Says Bob, ’I’m willing to take one when I’ve done with the other;’ and the squire began talking to his son, Mrs. Lovell to Mr. Edward, and the rest of the gentlemen all round poor dear old Bob, rather bullying—like for my blood; till Bob couldn’t help being nettled, and cried out, ’Gentlemen, I hold him in my power, and I’m silent so long as there’s a chance of my getting him to behave like a man with human feelings.’ If they’d gone at him then, I don’t think I could have let him stand alone: an opinion’s one thing, but blood’s another, and I’m distantly related to Bob; and a man who’s always thinking of the value of his place, he ain’t worth it. But Mrs. Lovell, she settled the case—a lady, Farmer Wainsby, with your leave. There’s the good of having a lady present on the field. That’s due to a lady!”

“Happen she was at the bottom of it,” the farmer returned Stephen’s nod grumpily.

“How did it end, Stephen, my lad?” said Butcher Billing, indicating a “never mind him.”

“It ended, my boy, it ended like my glass here—hot and strong stuff, with sugar at the bottom. And I don’t see this, so glad as I saw that, my word of honour on it! Boys all!” Stephen drank the dregs.

Mrs. Boulby was still in attendance. The talk over the circumstances was sweeter than the bare facts, and the replenished glass enabled Stephen to add the picturesque bits of the affray, unspurred by a surrounding eagerness of his listeners—too exciting for imaginative effort. In particular, he dwelt on Robert’s dropping the reins and riding with his heels at Algernon, when Mrs. Lovell put her horse in his way, and the pair of horses rose like waves at sea, and both riders showed their horsemanship, and Robert an adroit courtesy, for which the lady thanked him with a bow of her head.

“I got among the hounds, pretending to pacify them, and call ’em together,” said Stephen, “and I heard her say—just before all was over, and he turned off—I heard her say: ‘Trust this to me: I will meet you.’ I’ll swear to them exact words, though there was more, and a ‘where’ in the bargain, and that I didn’t hear. Aha! by George! thinks I, old Bob, you’re a lucky beggar, and be hanged if I wouldn’t go mad too for a minute or so of short, sweet, private talk with a lovely young widow lady as ever the sun did shine upon so boldly—oho!

Page 955

You've seen a yacht upon the sea,
She dances and she dances, O!
As fair is my wild maid to me...

Something about 'prances, O!' on her horse, you know, or you're a hem'd fool if you don't. I never could sing; wish I could! It's the joy of life! It's utterance! Hey for harmony!"

"Eh! brayvo! now you're a man, Steeve! and welcomer and welcomest; yi—yi, O!" jolly Butcher Billing sang out sharp. "Life wants watering. Here's a health to Robert Eccles, wheresoever and whatsoever! and ne'er a man shall say of me I didn't stick by a friend like Bob. Cheers, my lads!"

Robert's health was drunk in a thunder, and praises of the purity of the brandy followed the grand roar. Mrs. Boulby received her compliments on that head.

"'Pends upon the tide, Missis, don't it?" one remarked with a grin broad enough to make the slyness written on it easy reading.

"Ah! first a flow and then a ebb," said another.

"It's many a keg I plant i' the mud,
Coastguardsman, come! and I'll have your blood!"

Instigation cried, "Cut along;" but the defiant smuggler was deficient in memory, and like Steeve Bilton, was reduced to scatter his concluding rhymes in prose, as "something about;" whereat jolly Butcher Billing, a reader of song-books from a literary delight in their contents, scraped his head, and then, as if he had touched a spring, carolled,—

"In spite of all you Gov'ment pack,
I'll land my kegs of the good Cognyac"—

"though," he took occasion to observe when the chorus and a sort of cracker of irrelevant rhymes had ceased to explode; "I'm for none of them games. Honesty!—-there's the sugar o' my grog."

"Ay, but you like to be cock-sure of the stuff you drink, if e'er a man did," said the boatbuilder, whose eye blazed yellow in this frothing season of song and fun.

"Right so, Will Moody!" returned the jolly butcher: "which means—not wrong this time!"

"Then, what's understood by your sticking prongs into your hostess here concerning of her brandy? Here it is—which is enough, except for discontented fellows."

“Eh, Missus?” the jolly butcher appealed to her, and pointed at Moody’s complexion for proof.

It was quite a fiction that kegs of the good cognac were sown at low water, and reaped at high, near the river-gate of the old Pilot Inn garden; but it was greatly to Mrs. Boulby’s interest to encourage the delusion which imaged her brandy thus arising straight from the very source, without villanous contact with excisemen and corrupting dealers; and as, perhaps, in her husband’s time, the thing had happened, and still did, at rare intervals, she complacently gathered the profitable fame of her brandy being the best in the district.

“I’m sure I hope you’re satisfied, Mr. Billing,” she said.

The jolly butcher asked whether Will Moody was satisfied, and Mr. William Moody declaring himself thoroughly satisfied, “then I’m satisfied too!” said the jolly butcher; upon which the boatbuilder heightened the laugh by saying he was not satisfied at all; and to escape from the execrations of the majority, pleaded that it was because his glass was empty: thus making his peace with them. Every glass in the room was filled again.

Page 956

The young fellows now loosened tongue; and Dick Curtis, the promising cricketer of Hampshire, cried, “Mr. Moody, my hearty! that’s your fourth glass, so don’t quarrel with me, now!”

“You!” Moody fired up in a bilious frenzy, and called him a this and that and t’ other young vagabond; for which the company, feeling the ominous truth contained in Dick Curtis’s remark more than its impertinence, fined Mr. Moody in a song. He gave the—

> “So many young Captains have walked o’er my pate,
> It’s no wonder you see me quite bald, sir,”

with emphatic bitterness, and the company thanked him. Seeing him stand up as to depart, however, a storm of contempt was hurled at him; some said he was like old Sedgett, and was afraid of his wife; and some, that he was like Nic Sedgett, and drank blue.

> “You’re a bag of blue devils, oh dear! oh dear!”

sang Dick to the tune of “The Campbells are coming.”

“I ask e’er a man present,” Mr. Moody put out his fist, “is that to be borne? Didn’t you,” he addressed Dick Curtis,—“didn’t you sing into my chorus—”

> ‘It’s no wonder to hear how you squall’d, sir?’

“You did!”

“Don’t he,”—Dick addressed the company, “make Mrs. Boulby’s brandy look ashamed of itself in his face? I ask e’er a gentleman present.”

Accusation and retort were interchanged, in the course of which, Dick called Mr. Moody Nic Sedgett’s friend; and a sort of criminal inquiry was held. It was proved that Moody had been seen with Nic Sedgett; and then three or four began to say that Nic Sedgett was thick with some of the gentlemen up at Fairly;—just like his luck! Stephen let it be known that he could confirm this fact; he having seen Mr. Algernon Blancove stop Nic on the road and talk to him.

“In that case,” said Butcher Billing, “there’s mischief in a state of fermentation. Did ever anybody see Nic and the devil together?”

“I saw Nic and Mr. Moody together,” said Dick Curtis. “Well, I’m only stating a fact,” he exclaimed, as Moody rose, apparently to commence an engagement, for which the company quietly prepared, by putting chairs out of his way: but the recreant took his advantage from the error, and got away to the door, pursued.

“Here’s an example of what we lose in having no President,” sighed the jolly butcher. “There never was a man built for the chair like Bob Eccles I say! Our evening’s broke up, and I, for one, ‘d ha’ made it morning. Hark, outside; By Gearge! they’re snowballing.”

An adjournment to the front door brought them in view of a white and silent earth under keen stars, and Dick Curtis and the bilious boatbuilder, foot to foot, snowball in hand. A bout of the smart exercise made Mr. Moody laugh again, and all parted merrily, delivering final shots as they went their several ways.

“Thanks be to heaven for snowing,” said Mrs. Boulby; “or when I should have got to my bed, Goodness only can tell!” With which, she closed the door upon the empty inn.

Page 957

CHAPTER XIX

The night was warm with the new-fallen snow, though the stars sparkled coldly. A fleet of South-westerly rainclouds had been met in mid-sky by a sharp puff from due North, and the moisture had descended like a woven shroud, covering all the land, the house-tops, and the trees.

Young Harry Boulby was at sea, and this still weather was just what a mother's heart wished for him. The widow looked through her bed-room window and listened, as if the absolute stillness must beget a sudden cry. The thought of her boy made her heart revert to Robert. She was thinking of Robert when the muffled sound of a horse at speed caused her to look up the street, and she saw one coming—a horse without a rider. The next minute he was out of sight.

Mrs. Boulby stood terrified. The silence of the night hanging everywhere seemed to call on her for proof that she had beheld a real earthly spectacle, and the dead thump of the hooves on the snow-floor in passing struck a chill through her as being phantom-like. But she had seen a saddle on the horse, and the stirrups flying, and the horse looked affrighted. The scene was too earthly in its suggestion of a tale of blood. What if the horse were Robert's? She tried to laugh at her womanly fearfulness, and had almost to suppress a scream in doing so. There was no help for it but to believe her brandy as good and efficacious as her guests did, so she went downstairs and took a fortifying draught; after which her blood travelled faster, and the event galloped swiftly into the recesses of time, and she slept.

While the morning was still black, and the streets without a sign of life, she was aroused by a dream of some one knocking at her grave-stone. "Ah, that brandy!" she sighed. "This is what a poor woman has to pay for custom!" Which we may interpret as the remorseful morning confession of a guilt she had been the victim of over night. She knew that good brandy did not give bad dreams, and was self-convicted. Strange were her sensations when the knocking continued; and presently she heard a voice in the naked street below call in a moan, "Mother!"

"My darling!" she answered, divided in her guess at its being Harry or Robert.

A glance from the open window showed Robert leaning in the quaint old porch, with his head bound by a handkerchief; but he had no strength to reply to a question at that distance, and when she let him in he made two steps and dropped forward on the floor.

Lying there, he plucked at her skirts. She was shouting for help, but with her ready apprehension of the pride in his character, she knew what was meant by his broken whisper before she put her ear to his lips, and she was silent, miserable sight as was his feeble efforts to rise on an elbow that would not straighten.

His head was streaming with blood, and the stain was on his neck and chest. He had one helpless arm; his clothes were torn as from a fierce struggle.

Page 958

“I’m quite sensible,” he kept repeating, lest she should relapse into screams.

“Lord love you for your spirit!” exclaimed the widow, and there they remained, he like a winged eagle, striving to raise himself from time to time, and fighting with his desperate weakness. His face was to the ground; after a while he was still. In alarm the widow stooped over him: she feared that he had given up his last breath; but the candle-light showed him shaken by a sob, as it seemed to her, though she could scarce believe it of this manly fellow. Yet it proved true; she saw the very tears. He was crying at his helplessness.

“Oh, my darling boy!” she burst out; “what have they done to ye? the cowards they are! but do now have pity on a woman, and let me get some creature to lift you to a bed, dear. And don’t flap at me with your hand like a bird that’s shot. You’re quite, quite sensible, I know; quite sensible, dear; but for my sake, Robert, my Harry’s good friend, only for my sake, let yourself be a carried to a clean, nice bed, till I get Dr. Bean to you. Do, do.”

Her entreaties brought on a succession of the efforts to rise, and at last, getting round on his back, and being assisted by the widow, he sat up against the wall. The change of posture stupified him with a dizziness. He tried to utter the old phrase, that he was sensible, but his hand beat at his forehead before the words could be shaped.

“What pride is when it’s a man!” the widow thought, as he recommenced the grievous struggle to rise on his feet; now feeling them up to the knee with a questioning hand, and pausing as if in a reflective wonder, and then planting them for a spring that failed wretchedly; groaning and leaning backward, lost in a fit of despair, and again beginning, patient as an insect imprisoned in a circle.

The widow bore with his man’s pride, until her nerves became afflicted by the character of his movements, which, as her sensations conceived them, were like those of a dry door jarring loose. She caught him in her arms: “It’s let my back break, but you shan’t fret to death there, under my eyes, proud or humble, poor dear,” she said, and with a great pull she got him upright. He fell across her shoulder with so stiff a groan that for a moment she thought she had done him mortal injury.

“Good old mother,” he said boyishly, to reassure her.

“Yes; and you’ll behave to me like a son,” she coaxed him.

They talked as by slow degrees the stairs were ascended.

“A crack o’ the head, mother—a crack o’ the head,” said he.

“Was it the horse, my dear?”

“A crack o’ the head, mother.”

“What have they done to my boy Robert?”

“They’ve,”—he swung about humorously, weak as he was and throbbing with pain—-“they’ve let out some of your brandy, mother...got into my head.”

“Who’ve done it, my dear?”

“They’ve done it, mother.”

Page 959

“Oh, take care o’ that nail at your foot; and oh, that beam to your poor poll—poor soul! he’s been and hurt himself again. And did they do it to him? and what was it for?” she resumed in soft cajolery.

“They did it, because—”

“Yes, my dear; the reason for it?”

“Because, mother, they had a turn that way.”

“Thanks be to Above for leaving your cunning in you, my dear,” said the baffled woman, with sincere admiration. “And Lord be thanked, if you’re not hurt bad, that they haven’t spoilt his handsome face,” she added.

In the bedroom, he let her partially undress him, refusing all doctor’s aid, and commanding her to make no noise about him and then he lay down and shut his eyes, for the pain was terrible—galloped him and threw him with a shock—and galloped him and threw him again, whenever his thoughts got free for a moment from the dizzy aching.

“My dear,” she whispered, “I’m going to get a little brandy.”

She hastened away upon this mission.

He was in the same posture when she returned with bottle and glass.

She poured out some, and made much of it as a specific, and of the great things brandy would do; but he motioned his hand from it feebly, till she reproached him tenderly as perverse and unkind.

“Now, my dearest boy, for my sake—only for my sake. Will you? Yes, you will, my Robert!”

“No brandy, mother.”

“Only one small thimbleful?”

“No more brandy for me!”

“See, dear, how seriously you take it, and all because you want the comfort.”

“No brandy,” was all he could say.

She looked at the label on the bottle. Alas! she knew whence it came, and what its quality. She could cheat herself about it when herself only was concerned—but she

wavered at the thought of forcing it upon Robert as trusty medicine, though it had a pleasant taste, and was really, as she conceived, good enough for customers.

She tried him faintly with arguments in its favour; but his resolution was manifested by a deaf ear.

With a perfect faith in it she would, and she was conscious that she could, have raised his head and poured it down his throat. The crucial test of her love for Robert forbade the attempt. She burst into an uncontrollable fit of crying.

“Halloa! mother,” said Robert, opening his eyes to the sad candlelight surrounding them.

“My darling boy! whom I do love so; and not to be able to help you! What shall I do—-what shall I do!”

With a start, he cried, “Where’s the horse!”

“The horse?”

“The old dad ’ll be asking for the horse to-morrow.”

“I saw a horse, my dear, afore I turned to my prayers at my bedside, coming down the street without his rider. He came like a rumble of deafness in my ears. Oh, my boy, I thought, Is it Robert’s horse?—knowing you’ve got enemies, as there’s no brave man has not got ’em—which is our only hope in the God of heaven!”

Page 960

“Mother, punch my ribs.”

He stretched himself flat for the operation, and shut his mouth.

“Hard, mother!—and quick!—I can’t hold out long.”

“Oh! Robert,” moaned the petrified woman “strike you?”

“Straight in the ribs. Shut your fist and do it—quick.”

My dear!—my boy!—I haven’t the heart to do it!”

“Ah!” Robert’s chest dropped in; but tightening his muscles again, he said, “now do it—-do it!”

“Oh! a poke at a poor fire puts it out, dear. And make a murderess of me, you call mother! Oh! as I love the name, I’ll obey you, Robert. But!—there!”

“Harder, mother.”

“There!—goodness forgive me!”

“Hard as you can—all’s right.”

“There!—and there!—oh!—mercy!”

“Press in at my stomach.”

She nerved herself to do his bidding, and, following his orders, took his head in her hands, and felt about it. The anguish of the touch wrung a stifled scream from him, at which she screamed responsive. He laughed, while twisting with the pain.

“You cruel boy, to laugh at your mother,” she said, delighted by the sound of safety in that sweet human laughter. “Hey! don’t ye shake your brain; it ought to lie quiet. And here’s the spot of the wicked blow—and him in love—as I know he is! What would she say if she saw him now? But an old woman’s the best nurse—ne’er a doubt of it.”

She felt him heavy on her arm, and knew that he had fainted. Quelling her first impulse to scream, she dropped him gently on the pillow, and rapped to rouse up her maid.

The two soon produced a fire and hot water, bandages, vinegar in a basin, and every crude appliance that could be thought of, the maid followed her mistress’s directions with a consoling awe, for Mrs. Boulby had told her no more than that a man was hurt.

“I do hope, if it’s anybody, it’s that ther’ Moody,” said the maid.

“A pretty sort of a Christian you think yourself, I dare say,” Mrs. Boulby replied.

“Christian or not, one can’t help longin’ for a choice, mum. We ain’t all hands and knees.”

“Better for you if you was,” said the widow. “It’s tongues, you’re to remember, you’re not to be. Now come you up after me—and you’ll not utter a word. You’ll stand behind the door to do what I tell you. You’re a soldier’s daughter, Susan, and haven’t a claim to be excitable.”

“My mother was given to faints,” Susan protested on behalf of her possible weakness.

“You may peep.” Thus Mrs. Boulby tossed a sop to her frail woman’s nature.

But for her having been appeased by the sagacious accordance of this privilege, the maid would never have endured to hear Robert’s voice in agony, and to think that it was really Robert, the beloved of Warbeach, who had come to harm. Her apprehensions not being so lively as her mistress’s, by reason of her love being smaller, she was more terrified than comforted by Robert’s jokes during the process of washing off the blood, cutting the hair from the wound, bandaging and binding up the head.

Page 961

His levity seemed ghastly; and his refusal upon any persuasion to see a doctor quite heathenish, and a sign of one foredoomed.

She believed that his arm was broken, and smarted with wrath at her mistress for so easily taking his word to the contrary. More than all, his abjuration of brandy now when it would do him good to take it, struck her as an instance of that masculine insanity in the comprehension of which all women must learn to fortify themselves. There was much whispering in the room, inarticulate to her, before Mrs. Boulby came out; enjoining a rigorous silence, and stating that the patient would drink nothing but tea.

“He begged,” she said half to herself, “to have the window blinds up in the morning, if the sun wasn’t strong, for him to look on our river opening down to the ships.”

“That looks as if he meant to live,” Susan remarked.

“He!” cried the widow, “it’s Robert Eccles. He’d stand on his last inch.”

“Would he, now!” ejaculated Susan, marvelling at him, with no question as to what footing that might be.

“Leastways,” the widow hastened to add, “if he thought it was only devils against him. I’ve heard him say, ’It’s a fool that holds out against God, and a coward as gives in to the devil;’ and there’s my Robert painted by his own hand.”

“But don’t that bring him to this so often, Mum?” Susan ruefully inquired, joining teapot and kettle.

“I do believe he’s protected,” said the widow.

With the first morning light Mrs. Boulby was down at Warbeach Farm, and being directed to Farmer Eccles in the stables, she found the sturdy yeoman himself engaged in grooming Robert’s horse.

“Well, Missis,” he said, nodding to her; “you win, you see. I thought you would; I’d have sworn you would. Brandy’s stronger than blood, with some of our young fellows.”

“If you please, Mr. Eccles,” she replied, “Robert’s sending of me was to know if the horse was unhurt and safe.”

“Won’t his legs carry him yet, Missis?”

“His legs have been graciously spared, Mr. Eccles; it’s his head.”

“That’s where the liquor flies, I’m told.”

“Pray, Mr. Eccles, believe me when I declare he hasn’t touched a drop of anything but tea in my house this past night.”

“I’m sorry for that; I’d rather have him go to you. If he takes it, let him take it good; and I’m given to understand that you’ve a reputation that way. Just tell him from me, he’s at liberty to play the devil with himself, but not with my beasts.”

The farmer continued his labour.

“No, you ain’t a hard man, surely,” cried the widow. “Not when I say he was sober, Mr. Eccles; and was thrown, and made insensible?”

“Never knew such a thing to happen to him, Missis, and, what’s more, I don’t believe it. Mayhap you’re come for his things: his Aunt Anne’s indoors, and she’ll give ’em up, and gladly. And my compliments to Robert, and the next time he fancies visiting Warbeach, he’d best forward a letter to that effect.”

Page 962

Mrs. Boulby curtseyed humbly. “You think bad of me, sir, for keeping a public; but I love your son as my own, and if I might presume to say so, Mr. Eccles, you will be proud of him too before you die. I know no more than you how he fell yesterday, but I do know he’d not been drinking, and have got bitter bad enemies.”

“And that’s not astonishing, Missis.”

“No, Mr. Eccles; and a man who’s brave besides being good soon learns that.”

“Well spoken, Missis.”

“Is Robert to hear he’s denied his father’s house?”

“I never said that, Mrs. Boulby. Here’s my principle—My house is open to my blood, so long as he don’t bring downright disgrace on it, and then any one may claim him that likes I won’t give him money, because I know of a better use for it; and he shan’t ride my beasts, because he don’t know how to treat ’em. That’s all.”

“And so you keep within the line of your duty, sir,” the widow summed his speech.

“So I hope to,” said the farmer.

“There’s comfort in that,” she replied.

“As much as there’s needed,” said he.

The widow curtseyed again. “It’s not to trouble you, sir, I called. Robert—thanks be to Above!—is not hurt serious, though severe.”

“Where’s he hurt?” the farmer asked rather hurriedly.

“In the head, it is.”

“What have you come for?”

“First, his best hat.”

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the farmer. “Well, if that ’ll mend his head it’s at his service, I’m sure.”

Sick at his heartlessness, the widow scattered emphasis over her concluding remarks. “First, his best hat, he wants; and his coat and clean shirt; and they mend the looks of a man, Mr. Eccles; and it’s to look well is his object: for he’s not one to make a moan of himself, and doctors may starve before he’d go to any of them. And my begging prayer

to you is, that when you see your son, you'll not tell him I let you know his head or any part of him was hurt. I wish you good morning, Mr. Eccles."

"Good morning to you, Mrs. Boulby. You're a respectable woman."

"Not to be soaped," she murmured to herself in a heat.

The apparently medicinal articles of attire were obtained from Aunt Anne, without a word of speech on the part of that pale spinster. The deferential hostility between the two women acknowledged an intervening chasm. Aunt Anne produced a bundle, and placed the hat on it, upon which she had neatly pinned a tract, "The Drunkard's Awakening!" Mrs. Boulby glanced her eye in wrath across this superscription, thinking to herself, "Oh, you good people! how you make us long in our hearts for trouble with you." She controlled the impulse, and mollified her spirit on her way home by distributing stray leaves of the tract to the outlying heaps of rubbish, and to one inquisitive pig, who was looking up from a badly-smelling sty for what the heavens might send him.

Page 963

She found Robert with his arm doubled over a basin, and Susan sponging cold water on it.

“No bones broken, mother!” he sang out. “I’m sound; all right again. Six hours have done it this time. Is it a thaw? You needn’t tell me what the old dad has been saying. I shall be ready to breakfast in half an hour.”

“Lord, what a big arm it is!” exclaimed the widow. “And no wonder, or how would you be a terror to men? You naughty boy, to think of stirring! Here you’ll lie.”

“Ah, will I?” said Robert: and he gave a spring, and sat upright in the bed, rather white with the effort, which seemed to affect his mind, for he asked dubiously, “What do I look like, mother?”

She brought him the looking-glass, and Susan being dismissed, he examined his features.

“Dear!” said the widow, sitting down on the bed; “it ain’t much for me to guess you’ve got an appointment.”

“At twelve o’clock, mother.”

“With her?” she uttered softly.

“It’s with a lady, mother.”

“And so many enemies prowling about, Robert, my dear! Don’t tell me they didn’t fall upon you last night. I said nothing, but I’d swear it on the Book. Do you think you can go?”

“Why, mother, I go by my feelings, and there’s no need to think at all, or God knows what I should think.”

The widow shook her head. “Nothing ’ll stop you, I suppose?”

“Nothing inside of me will, mother.”

“Doesn’t she but never mind. I’ve no right to ask, Robert; and if I have curiosity, it’s about last night, and why you should let villains escape. But there’s no accounting for a man’s notions; only, this I say, and I do say it, Nic Sedgett, he’s at the bottom of any mischief brewed against you down here. And last night Stephen Bilton, or somebody, declared that Nic Sedgett had been seen up at Fairly.”

“Selling eggs, mother. Why shouldn’t he? We mustn’t complain of his getting an honest livelihood.”

“He’s black-blooded, Robert; and I never can understand why the Lord did not make him a beast in face. I’m told that creature’s found pleasing by the girls.”

“Ugh, mother, I’m not.”

“She won’t have you, Robert?”

He laughed. “We shall see to-day.”

“You deceiving boy!” cried the widow; “and me not know it’s Mrs. Lovell you’re going to meet! and would to heaven she’d see the worth of ye, for it’s a born lady you ought to marry.”

“Just feel in my pockets, mother, and you won’t be so ready with your talk of my marrying. And now I’ll get up. I feel as if my legs had to learn over again how to bear me. The old dad, bless his heart! gave me sound wind and limb to begin upon, so I’m not easily stumped, you see, though I’ve been near on it once or twice in my life.”

Mrs. Boulby murmured, “Ah! are you still going to be at war with those gentlemen, Robert?”

Page 964

He looked at her steadily, while a shrewd smile wrought over his face, and then taking her hand, he said, “I’ll tell you a little; you deserve it, and won’t tattle. My curse is, I’m ashamed to talk about my feelings; but there’s no shame in being fond of a girl, even if she refuses to have anything to say to you, is there? No, there isn’t. I went with my dear old aunt’s money to a farmer in Kent, and learnt farming; clear of the army first, by —But I must stop that burst of swearing. Half the time I’ve been away, I was there. The farmer’s a good, sober, downhearted man—a sort of beaten Englishman, who don’t know it, tough, and always backing. He has two daughters: one went to London, and came to harm, of a kind. The other I’d prick this vein for and bleed to death, singing; and she hates me! I wish she did. She thought me such a good young man! I never drank; went to bed early, was up at work with the birds. Mr. Robert Armstrong! That changeing of my name was like a lead cap on my head. I was never myself with it, felt hang-dog—it was impossible a girl could care for such a fellow as I was. Mother, just listen: she’s dark as a gipsy. She’s the faithfullest, stoutest-hearted creature in the world. She has black hair, large brown eyes; see her once! She’s my mate. I could say to her, ‘Stand there; take guard of a thing;’ and I could be dead certain of her—she’d perish at her post. Is the door locked? Lock the door; I won’t be seen when I speak of her. Well, never mind whether she’s handsome or not. She isn’t a lady; but she’s my lady; she’s the woman I could be proud of. She sends me to the devil! I believe a woman ’d fall in love with her cheeks, they are so round and soft and kindly coloured. Think me a fool; I am. And here am I, away from her, and I feel that any day harm may come to her, and she ’ll melt, and be as if the devils of hell were mocking me. Who’s to keep harm from her when I’m away? What can I do but drink and forget? Only now, when I wake up from it, I’m a crawling wretch at her feet. If I had her feet to kiss! I’ve never kissed her—never! And no man has kissed her. Damn my head! here’s the ache coming on. That’s my last oath, mother. I wish there was a Bible handy, but I’ll try and stick to it without. My God! when I think of her, I fancy everything on earth hangs still and doubts what’s to happen. I’m like a wheel, and go on spinning. Feel my pulse now. Why is it I can’t stop it? But there she is, and I could crack up this old world to know what’s coming. I was mild as milk all those days I was near her. My comfort is, she don’t know me. And that’s my curse too! If she did, she’d know as clear as day I’m her mate, her match, the man for her. I am, by heaven!—that’s an oath permitted. To see the very soul I want, and to miss her! I’m down here, mother; she loves her sister, and I must learn where her sister’s to be found. One of those gentlemen up at Fairly’s the guilty man. I don’t say which; perhaps I don’t know. But oh, what a lot of lightnings I see in the back of my head!”

Page 965

Robert fell back on the pillow. Mrs. Boulby wiped her eyes. Her feelings were overwhelmed with mournful devotion to the passionate young man; and she expressed them practically: “A rump-steak would never digest in his poor stomach!”

He seemed to be of that opinion too, for when, after lying till eleven, he rose and appeared at the breakfast-table, he ate nothing but crumbs of dry bread. It was curious to see his precise attention to the neatness of his hat and coat, and the nervous eye he cast upon the clock, while brushing and accurately fixing these garments. The hat would not sit as he was accustomed to have it, owing to the bruise on his head, and he stood like a woman petulant with her milliner before the glass; now pressing the hat down till the pain was insufferable, and again trying whether it presented him acceptably in the enforced style of his wearing it. He persisted in this, till Mrs. Boulby’s exclamation of wonder admonished him of the ideas received by other eyes than his own. When we appear most incongruous, we are often exposing the key to our characters; and how much his vanity, wounded by Rhoda, had to do with his proceedings down at Warbeach, it were unfair to measure just yet, lest his finer qualities be cast into shade, but to what degree it affected him will be seen.

Mrs. Boulby’s persuasions induced him to take a stout silver-topped walking-stick of her husband’s, a relic shaped from the wood of the Royal George; leaning upon which rather more like a Naval pensioner than he would have cared to know, he went forth to his appointment with the lady.

CHAPTER XX

The park-sward of Fairly, white with snow, rolled down in long sweeps to the salt water: and under the last sloping oak of the park there was a gorse-bushed lane, green in Summer, but now bearing cumbrous blossom—like burdens of the crisp snow-fall. Mrs. Lovell sat on horseback here, and alone, with her gauntleted hand at her waist, charmingly habited in tone with the landscape. She expected a cavalier, and did not perceive the approach of a pedestrian, but bowed quietly when Robert lifted his hat.

“They say you are mad. You see, I trust myself to you.”

“I wish I could thank you for your kindness, madam.”

“Are you ill?”

“I had a fall last night, madam.”

The lady patted her horse’s neck.

“I haven’t time to inquire about it. You understand that I cannot give you more than a minute.”

She glanced at her watch.

“Let us say five exactly. To begin: I can’t affect to be ignorant of the business which brings you down here. I won’t pretend to lecture you about the course you have taken; but, let me distinctly assure you, that the gentleman you have chosen to attack in this extraordinary manner, has done no wrong to you or to any one. It is, therefore, disgracefully unjust to single him out. You know he cannot possibly fight you. I speak plainly.”

Page 966

“Yes, madam,” said Robert. “I’ll answer plainly. He can’t fight a man like me. I know it. I bear him no ill-will. I believe he’s innocent enough in this matter, as far as acts go.”

“That makes your behaviour to him worse!”

Robert looked up into her eyes.

“You are a lady. You won’t be shocked at what I tell you.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs. Lovell, hastily: “I have learnt—I am aware of the tale. Some one has been injured or, you think so. I don’t accuse you of madness, but, good heavens! what means have you been pursuing! Indeed, sir, let your feelings be as deeply engaged as possible, you have gone altogether the wrong way to work.”

“Not if I have got your help by it, madam.”

“Gallantly spoken.”

She smiled with a simple grace. The next moment she consulted her watch.

“Time has gone faster than I anticipated. I must leave you. Let this be our stipulation”

She lowered her voice.

“You shall have the address you require. I will undertake to see her myself, when next I am in London. It will be soon. In return, sir, favour me with your word of honour not to molest this gentleman any further. Will you do that? You may trust me.”

“I do, madam, with all my soul!” said Robert.

“That’s sufficient. I ask no more. Good morning.”

Her parting bow remained with him like a vision. Her voice was like the tinkling of harp-strings about his ears. The colour of her riding-habit this day, harmonious with the snow-faced earth, as well as the gentle mission she had taken upon herself, strengthened his vivid fancy in blessing her as something quite divine.

He thought for the first time in his life bitterly of the great fortune which fell to gentlemen in meeting and holding equal converse with so adorable a creature; and he thought of Rhoda as being harshly earthly; repulsive in her coldness as that black belt of water contrasted against the snow on the shores.

He walked some paces in the track of Mrs. Lovell’s horse, till his doing so seemed too presumptuous, though to turn the other way and retrace his steps was downright hateful: and he stood apparently in profound contemplation of a ship of war and the

trees of the forest behind the masts. Either the fatigue of standing, or emotion, caused his head to throb, so that he heard nothing, not even men's laughter; but looking up suddenly, he beheld, as in a picture, Mrs. Lovell with some gentlemen walking their horses toward him. The lady gazed softly over his head, letting her eyes drop a quiet recognition in passing; one or two of the younger gentlemen stared mockingly.

Edward Blancove was by Mrs. Lovell's side. His eyes fixed upon Robert with steady scrutiny, and Robert gave him a similar inspection, though not knowing why. It was like a child's open look, and he was feeling childish, as if his brain had ceased to act. One of the older gentlemen, with a military aspect, squared his shoulders, and touching an end of his moustache, said, half challengingly,—

Page 967

“You are dismounted to-day?”

“I have only one horse,” Robert simply replied.

Algernon Blancove came last. He neither spoke nor looked at his enemy, but warily clutched his whip. All went by, riding into line some paces distant; and again they laughed as they bent forward to the lady, shouting.

“Odd, to have out the horses on a day like this,” Robert thought, and resumed his musing as before. The lady’s track now led him homeward, for he had no will of his own. Rounding the lane, he was surprised to see Mrs. Boulby by the hedge. She bobbed like a beggar woman, with a rueful face.

“My dear,” she said, in apology for her presence, “I shouldn’t ha’ interfered, if there was fair play. I’m Englishwoman enough for that. I’d have stood by, as if you was a stranger. Gentlemen always give fair play before a woman. That’s why I come, lest this appointment should ha’ proved a pitfall to you. Now you’ll come home, won’t you; and forgive me?”

“I’ll come to the old Pilot now, mother,” said Robert, pressing her hand.

“That’s right; and ain’t angry with me for following of you?”

“Follow your own game, mother.”

“I did, Robert; and nice and vexed I am, if I’m correct in what I heard say, as that lady and her folk passed, never heeding an old woman’s ears. They made a bet of you, dear, they did.”

“I hope the lady won,” said Robert, scarce hearing.

“And it was she who won, dear. She was to get you to meet her, and give up, and be beaten like, as far as I could understand their chatter; gentlefolks laugh so when they talk; and they can afford to laugh, for they has the best of it. But I’m vexed; just as if I’d felt big and had burst. I want you to be peaceful, of course I do; but I don’t like my boy made a bet of.”

“Oh, tush, mother,” said Robert impatiently.

“I heard ’em, my dear; and complimenting the lady they was, as they passed me. If it vexes you my thinking it, I won’t, dear; I reelly won’t. I see it lowers you, for there you are at your hat again. It is lowering, to be made a bet of. I’ve that spirit, that if you was well and sound, I’d rather have you fighting ’em. She’s a pleasant enough lady to look at, not a doubt; small-boned, and slim, and fair.”

Robert asked which way they had gone.

“Back to the stables, my dear; I heard ’em say so, because one gentleman said that the spectacle was over, and the lady had gained the day; and the snow was balling in the horses’ feet; and go they’d better, before my lord saw them out. And another said, you were a wild man she’d tamed; and they said, you ought to wear a collar, with Mrs. Lovell’s, her name, graved on it. But don’t you be vexed; you may guess they’re not my Robert’s friends. And, I do assure you, Robert, your hat’s neat, if you’d only let it be comfortable: such fidgeting worries the brim. You’re best in appearance—and I always said it—when

Page 968

stripped for boxing. Hats are gentlemen's things, and becomes them like as if a title to their heads; though you'd bear being Sir Robert, that you would; and for that matter, your hat is agreeable to behold, and not like the run of our Sunday hats; only you don't seem easy in it. Oh, oh! my tongue's a yard too long. It's the poor head aching, and me to forget it. It's because you never will act invalidy; and I remember how handsome you were one day in the field behind our house, when you boxed a wager with Simon Billet, the waterman; and you was made a bet of then, for my husband betted on you; and that's what made me think of comparisons of you out of your hat and you in it."

Thus did Mrs. Boulby chatter along the way. There was an eminence a little out of the road, overlooking the Fairly stables. Robert left her and went to this point, from whence he beheld the horsemen with the grooms at the horses' heads.

"Thank God, I've only been a fool for five minutes!" he summed up his sensations at the sight. He shut his eyes, praying with all his might never to meet Mrs. Lovell more. It was impossible for him to combat the suggestion that she had befooled him; yet his chivalrous faith in women led him to believe, that as she knew Dahlia's history, she would certainly do her best for the poor girl, and keep her word to him. The throbbing of his head stopped all further thought. It had become violent. He tried to gather his ideas, but the effort was like that of a light dreamer to catch the sequence of a dream, when blackness follows close up, devouring all that is said and done. In despair, he thought with kindness of Mrs. Boulby's brandy.

"Mother," he said, rejoining her, "I've got a notion brandy can't hurt a man when he's in bed. I'll go to bed, and you shall brew me some; and you'll let no one come nigh me; and if I talk light-headed, it's blank paper and scribble, mind that."

The widow promised devoutly to obey all his directions; but he had begun to talk light-headed before he was undressed. He called on the name of a Major Waring, of whom Mrs. Boulby had heard him speak tenderly as a gentleman not ashamed to be his friend; first reproaching him for not being by, and then by the name of Percy, calling to him endearingly, and reproaching himself for not having written to him.

"Two to one, and in the dark!" he kept moaning "and I one to twenty, Percy, all in broad day. Was it fair, I ask?"

Robert's outcries became anything but "blank paper and scribble" to the widow, when he mentioned Nic Sedgett's name, and said: "Look over his right temple he's got my mark a second time."

Hanging by his bedside, Mrs. Boulby strung together, bit by bit, the history of that base midnight attack, which had sent her glorious boy bleeding to her. Nic Sedgett; she could understand, was the accomplice of one of the Fairly gentlemen; but of which one, she could not discover, and consequently set him down as Mr. Algernon Blancove.

Page 969

By diligent inquiry, she heard that Algernon had been seen in company with the infamous Nic, and likewise that the countenance of Nicodemus was reduced to accept the consolation of a poultice, which was confirmation sufficient. By nightfall Robert was in the doctor's hands, unconscious of Mrs. Boulby's breach of agreement. His father and his aunt were informed of his condition, and prepared, both of them, to bow their heads to the close of an ungodly career. It was known over Warbeach, that Robert lay in danger, and believed that he was dying.

CHAPTER XXI

Mrs. Boulby's ears had not deceived her; it had been a bet: and the day would have gone disastrously with Robert, if Mrs. Lovell had not won her bet. What was heroism to Warbeach, appeared very outrageous blackguardism up at Fairly. It was there believed by the gentlemen, though rather against evidence, that the man was a sturdy ruffian, and an infuriated sot. The first suggestion was to drag him before the magistrates; but against this Algernon protested, declaring his readiness to defend himself, with so vehement a magnanimity, that it was clearly seen the man had a claim on him. Lord Elling, however, when he was told of these systematic assaults upon one of his guests, announced his resolve to bring the law into operation. Algernon heard it as the knell to his visit.

He was too happy, to go away willingly; and the great Jew City of London was exceedingly hot for him at that period; but to stay and risk an exposure of his extinct military career, was not possible. In his despair, he took Mrs. Lovell entirely into his confidence; in doing which, he only filled up the outlines of what she already knew concerning Edward. He was too useful to the lady for her to afford to let him go. No other youth called her "angel" for listening complacently to strange stories of men and their dilemmas; no one fetched and carried for her like Algernon; and she was a woman who cherished dog-like adoration, and could not part with it. She had also the will to reward it.

At her intercession, Robert was spared an introduction to the magistrates. She made light of his misdemeanours, assuring everybody that so splendid a horseman deserved to be dealt with differently from other offenders. The gentlemen who waited upon Farmer Eccles went in obedience to her orders.

Then came the scene on Ditley Marsh, described to that assembly at the Pilot, by Stephen Bilton, when she perceived that Robert was manageable in silken trammels, and made a bet that she would show him tamed. She won her bet, and saved the gentlemen from soiling their hands, for which they had conceived a pressing necessity, and they thanked her, and paid their money over to Algernon, whom she constituted her treasurer. She was called "the man-tamer," gracefully acknowledging the compliment.

Colonel Barclay, the moustachioed horseman, who had spoken the few words to Robert in passing, now remarked that there was an end of the military profession.

Page 970

“I surrender my sword,” he said gallantly.

Another declared that ladies would now act in lieu of causing an appeal to arms.

“Similia similibus, &c.,” said Edward. “They can, apparently, cure what they originate.”

“Ah, the poor sex!” Mrs. Lovell sighed. “When we bring the millennium to you, I believe you will still have a word against Eve.”

The whole parade back to the stables was marked by pretty speeches.

“By Jove! but he ought to have gone down on his knees, like a horse when you’ve tamed him,” said Lord Suckling, the young guardsman.

“I would mark a distinction between a horse and a brave man, Lord Suckling,” said the lady; and such was Mrs. Lovell’s dignity when an allusion to Robert was forced on her, and her wit and ease were so admirable, that none of those who rode with her thought of sitting in judgement on her conduct. Women can make for themselves new spheres, new laws, if they will assume their right to be eccentric as an unquestionable thing, and always reserve a season for showing forth like the conventional women of society.

The evening was Mrs. Lovell’s time for this important re-establishment of her position; and many a silly youth who had sailed pleasantly with her all the day, was wrecked when he tried to carry on the topics where she reigned the lady of the drawing-room. Moreover, not being eccentric from vanity, but simply to accommodate what had once been her tastes, and were now her necessities, she avoided slang, and all the insignia of eccentricity.

Thus she mastered the secret of keeping the young men respectfully enthusiastic; so that their irrepressible praises did not (as is usual when these are in acclamation) drag her to their level; and the female world, with which she was perfectly feminine, and as silkenly insipid every evening of her life as was needed to restore her reputation, admitted that she belonged to it, which is everything to an adventurous spirit of that sex: indeed, the sole secure basis of operations.

You are aware that men’s faith in a woman whom her sisters discountenance, and partially repudiate, is uneasy, however deeply they may be charmed. On the other hand, she maybe guilty of prodigious oddities without much disturbing their reverence, while she is in the feminine circle.

But what fatal breath was it coming from Mrs. Lovell that was always inflaming men to mutual animosity? What encouragement had she given to Algernon, that Lord Suckling should be jealous of him? And what to Lord Suckling, that Algernon should loathe the sight of the young lord? And why was each desirous of showing his manhood in combat before an eminent peacemaker?

Edward laughed—“Ah-ha!” and rubbed his hands as at a special confirmation of his prophecy, when Algernon came into his room and said, “I shall fight that fellow Suckling. Hang me if I can stand his impudence! I want to have a shot at a man of my own set, just to let Peggy Lovell see! I know what she thinks.”

Page 971

“Just to let Mrs. Lovell see!” Edward echoed. “She has seen it lots of times, my dear Algy. Come; this looks lively. I was sure she would soon be sick of the water-gruel of peace.”

“I tell you she’s got nothing to do with it, Ned. Don’t be confoundedly unjust. She didn’t tell me to go and seek him. How can she help his whispering to her? And then she looks over at me, and I swear I’m not going to be defended by a woman. She must fancy I haven’t got the pluck of a flea. I know what her idea of young fellows is. Why, she said to me, when Suckling went off from her, the other day, ‘These are our Guards.’ I shall fight him.”

“Do,” said Edward.

“Will you take a challenge?”

“I’m a lawyer, Mr. Mars.”

“You won’t take a challenge for a friend, when he’s insulted?”

“I reply again, I am a lawyer. But this is what I’ll do, if you like. I’ll go to Mrs. Lovely and inform her that it is your desire to gain her esteem by fighting with pistols. That will accomplish the purpose you seek. It will possibly disappoint her, for she will have to stop the affair; but women are born to be disappointed—they want so much.”

“I’ll fight him some way or other,” said Algernon, glowering; and then his face became bright: “I say, didn’t she manage that business beautifully this morning? Not another woman in the world could have done it.”

“Oh, Una and the Lion! Mrs. Valentine and Orson! Did you bet with the rest?” his cousin asked.

“I lost my tenner; but what’s that!”

“There will be an additional five to hand over to the man Sedgett. What’s that!”

“No, hang it!” Algernon shouted.

“You’ve paid your ten for the shadow cheerfully. Pay your five for the substance.”

“Do you mean to say that Sedgett—” Algernon stared.

“Miracles, if you come to examine them, Algy, have generally had a pathway prepared for them; and the miracle of the power of female persuasion exhibited this morning was not quite independent of the preliminary agency of a scoundrel.”

“So that’s why you didn’t bet.” Algernon signified the opening of his intelligence with his eyelids, pronouncing “by jingos” and “by Joves,” to ease the sudden rush of ideas within him. “You might have let me into the secret, Ned. I’d lose any number of tens to Peggy Lovell, but a fellow don’t like to be in the dark.”

“Except, Algy, that when you carry light, you’re a general illuminator. Let the matter drop. Sedgett has saved you from annoyance. Take him his five pounds.”

“Annoyance be hanged, my good Ned!” Algernon was aroused to reply. “I don’t complain, and I’ve done my best to stand in front of you; and as you’ve settled the fellow, I say nothing; but, between us two, who’s the guilty party, and who’s the victim?”

“Didn’t he tell you he had you in his power?”

“I don’t remember that he did.”

Page 972

“Well, I heard him. The sturdy cur refused to be bribed, so there was only one way of quieting him; and you see what a thrashing does for that sort of beast. I, Algy, never abandon a friend; mark that. Take the five pounds to Sedgett.”

Algernon strode about the room. “First of all, you stick me up in a theatre, so that I’m seen with a girl; and then you get behind me, and let me be pelted,” he began grumbling. “And ask a fellow for money, who hasn’t a farthing! I shan’t literally have a farthing till that horse ‘Templemore’ runs; and then, by George! I’ll pay my debts. Jews are awful things!”

“How much do you require at present?” said Edward, provoking his appetite for a loan.

“Oh, fifty—that is, just now. More like a thousand when I get to town. And where it’s to come from! but never mind. ’Pon my soul, I pity the fox I run down here. I feel I’m exactly in his case in London. However, if I can do you any service, Ned—”

Edward laughed. “You might have done me the service of not excusing yourself to the squire when he came here, in such a way as to implicate me.”

“But I was so tremendously badgered, Ned.”

“You had a sort of gratification in letting the squire crow over his brother. And he did crow for a time.”

“On my honour, Ned, as to crowing! he went away cursing at me. Peggy Lovell managed it somehow for you. I was really awfully badgered.”

“Yes; but you know what a man my father is. He hasn’t the squire’s philosophy in those affairs.”

“’Pon my soul, Mr. Ned, I never guessed it before; but I rather fancy you got clear with Sir Billy the banker by washing in my basin—eh, did you?”

Edward looked straight at his cousin, saying, “You deserved worse than that. You were treacherous. You proved you were not to be trusted; and yet, you see, I trust you. Call it my folly. Of course (and I don’t mind telling you) I used my wits to turn the point of the attack. I may be what they call unscrupulous when I’m surprised. I have to look to money as well as you; and if my father thought it went in a—what he considers—wrong direction, the source would be choked by paternal morality. You betrayed me. Listen.”

“I tell you, Ned, I merely said to my governor—”

“Listen to me. You betrayed me. I defended myself; that is, I’ve managed so that I may still be of service to you. It was a near shave; but you now see the value of having a character with one’s father. Just open my writing-desk there, and toss out the cheque-

book. I confess I can't see why you should have objected—but let that pass. How much do you want? Fifty? Say forty-five, and five I'll give you to pay to Sedgett—-making fifty. Eighty before, and fifty—one hundred and thirty. Write that you owe me that sum, on a piece of paper. I can't see why you should wish to appear so uncommonly virtuous."

Page 973

Algernon scribbled the written acknowledgment, which he despised himself for giving, and the receiver for taking, but was always ready to give for the money, and said, as he put the cheque in his purse: “It was this infernal fellow completely upset me. If you were worried by a bull-dog, by Jove, Ned, you’d lose your coolness. He bothered my head off. Ask me now, and I’ll do anything on earth for you. My back’s broad. Sir Billy can’t think worse of me than he does. Do you want to break positively with that pretty rival to Peggy L.? I’ve got a scheme to relieve you, my poor old Ned, and make everybody happy. I’ll lay the foundations of a fresh and brilliant reputation for myself.”

Algernon took a chair. Edward was fathoms deep in his book.

The former continued: “I’d touch on the money-question last, with any other fellow than you; but you always know that money’s the hinge, and nothing else lifts a man out of a scrape. It costs a stiff pull on your banker, and that reminds me, you couldn’t go to Sir Billy for it; you’d have to draw in advance, by degrees anyhow, look here:—There are lots of young farmers who want to emigrate and want wives and money. I know one. It’s no use going into particulars, but it’s worth thinking over. Life is made up of mutual help, Ned. You can help another fellow better than yourself. As for me, when I’m in a hobble, I give you my word of honour, I’m just like a baby, and haven’t an idea at my own disposal. The same with others. You can’t manage without somebody’s assistance. What do you say, old boy?”

Edward raised his head from his book. “Some views of life deduced from your private experience?” he observed; and Algernon cursed at book-worms, who would never take hints, and left him.

But when he was by himself, Edward pitched his book upon the floor and sat reflecting. The sweat started on his forehead. He was compelled to look into his black volume and study it. His desire was to act humanely and generously; but the question inevitably recurred: “How can I utterly dash my prospects in the world?” It would be impossible to bring Dahlia to great houses; and he liked great houses and the charm of mixing among delicately-bred women. On the other hand, lawyers have married beneath them—-married cooks, housemaids, governesses, and so forth. And what has a lawyer to do with a dainty lady, who will constantly distract him with finicking civilities and speculations in unprofitable regions? What he does want is a woman amiable as a surface of parchment, serviceable as his inkstand; one who will be like the wig in which he closes his forensic term, disreputable from overwear, but suited to the purpose.

Page 974

“Ah! if I meant to be nothing but a lawyer!” Edward stopped the flow of this current in Dahlia’s favour. His passion for her was silent. Was it dead? It was certainly silent. Since Robert had come down to play his wild game of persecution at Fairly, the simple idea of Dahlia had been Edward’s fever. He detested brute force, with a finely-witted man’s full loathing; and Dahlia’s obnoxious champion had grown to be associated in his mind with Dahlia. He swept them both from his recollection abhorrently, for in his recollection he could not divorce them. He pretended to suppose that Dahlia, whose only reproach to him was her suffering, participated in the scheme to worry him. He could even forget her beauty—forget all, save the unholy fetters binding him. She seemed to imprison him in bare walls. He meditated on her character. She had no strength. She was timid, comfort-loving, fond of luxury, credulous, preposterously conventional; that is, desirous more than the ordinary run of women of being hedged about and guarded by ceremonies—“mere ceremonies,” said Edward, forgetting the notion he entertained of women not so protected. But it may be, that in playing the part of fool and coward, we cease to be mindful of the absolute necessity for sheltering the weak from that monstrous allied army, the cowards and the fools. He admitted even to himself that he had deceived her, at the same time denouncing her unheard-of capacity of belief, which had placed him in a miserable hobble, and that was the truth.

Now, men confessing themselves in a miserable hobble, and knowing they are guilty of the state of things lamented by them, intend to drown that part of their nature which disturbs them by its outcry. The submission to a tangle that could be cut through instantaneously by any exertion of a noble will, convicts them. They had better not confide, even to their secret hearts, that they are afflicted by their conscience and the generosity of their sentiments, for it will be only to say that these high qualities are on the failing side. Their inclination, under the circumstances, is generally base, and no less a counsellor than uncorrupted common sense, when they are in such a hobble, will sometimes advise them to be base. But, in admitting the plea which common sense puts forward on their behalf, we may fairly ask them to be masculine in their baseness. Or, in other words, since they must be selfish, let them be so without the poltroonery of selfishness. Edward’s wish was to be perfectly just, as far as he could be now—just to himself as well; for how was he to prove of worth and aid to any one depending on him, if he stood crippled? Just, also, to his family; to his possible posterity; and just to Dahlia. His task was to reconcile the variety of justness due upon all sides. The struggle, we will assume, was severe, for he thought so; he thought of going to Dahlia and speaking the word of separation; of going to her family and stating his offence, without personal exculpation; thus masculine in baseness, he was in idea; but poltroonery triumphed, the picture of himself facing his sin and its victims dismayed him, and his struggle ended in his considering as to the fit employment of one thousand pounds in his possession, the remainder of a small legacy, hitherto much cherished.

Page 975

A day later, Mrs. Lovell said to him: "Have you heard of that unfortunate young man? I am told that he lies in great danger from a blow on the back of his head. He looked ill when I saw him, and however mad he may be, I'm sorry harm should have come to one who is really brave. Gentle means are surely best. It is so with horses, it must be so with men. As to women, I don't pretend to unriddle them."

"Gentle means are decidedly best," said Edward, perceiving that her little dog Algy had carried news to her, and that she was setting herself to fathom him. "You gave an eminent example of it yesterday. I was so sure of the result that I didn't bet against you."

"Why not have backed me?"

The hard young legal face withstood the attack of her soft blue eyes, out of which a thousand needles flew, seeking a weak point in the mask.

"The compliment was, to incite you to a superhuman effort."

"Then why not pay the compliment?"

"I never pay compliments to transparent merit; I do not hold candles to lamps."

"True," said she.

"And as gentle means are so admirable, it would be as well to stop incision and imbruing between those two boys."

"Which?" she asked innocently.

"Suckling and Algy."

"Is it possible? They are such boys."

"Exactly of the kind to do it. Don't you know?" and Edward explained elaborately and cruelly the character of the boys who rushed into conflicts. Colour deep as evening red confused her cheeks, and she said, "We must stop them."

"Alas!" he shook his head; "if it's not too late."

"It never is too late."

"Perhaps not, when the embodiment of gentle means is so determined."

"Come; I believe they are in the billiard room now, and you shall see," she said.

The pair were found in the billiard room, even as a pair of terriers that remember a bone. Mrs. Lovell proposed a game, and offered herself for partner to Lord Suckling.

“Till total defeat do us part,” the young nobleman acquiesced; and total defeat befell them. During the play of the balls, Mrs. Lovell threw a jealous intentness of observation upon all the strokes made by Algernon; saying nothing, but just looking at him when he did a successful thing. She winked at some quiet stately betting that went on between him and Lord Suckling.

They were at first preternaturally polite and formal toward one another; by degrees, the influence at work upon them was manifested in a thaw of their stiff demeanour, and they fell into curt dialogues, which Mrs. Lovell gave herself no concern to encourage too early.

Edward saw, and was astonished himself to feel that she had ceased to breathe that fatal inciting breath, which made men vindictively emulous of her favour, and mad to match themselves for a claim to the chief smile. No perceptible change was displayed. She was Mrs. Lovell still; vivacious and soft; flame-coloured, with the arrowy eyelashes; a pleasant companion, who did not play the woman obtrusively among men, and show a thirst for homage. All the difference appeared to be, that there was an absence as of some evil spiritual emanation.

Page 976

And here a thought crossed him—one of the memorable little evanescent thoughts which sway us by our chance weakness; “Does she think me wanting in physical courage?”

Now, though the difference between them had been owing to a scornful remark that she had permitted herself to utter, on his refusal to accept a quarrel with one of her numerous satellites, his knowledge of her worship of brains, and his pride in his possession of the burdensome weight, had quite precluded his guessing that she might haply suppose him to be deficient in personal bravery. He was astounded by the reflection that she had thus misjudged him. It was distracting; sober-thoughted as he was by nature. He watched the fair simplicity of her new manner with a jealous eye. Her management of the two youths was exquisite; but to him, Edward, she had never condescended to show herself thus mediating and amiable. Why? Clearly, because she conceived that he had no virile fire in his composition. Did the detestable little devil think silly duelling a display of valour? Did the fair seraph think him anything less than a man?

How beautifully hung the yellow loop of her hair as she leaned over the board! How gracious she was and like a Goddess with these boys, as he called them! She rallied her partner, not letting him forget that he had the honour of being her partner; while she appeared envious of Algernon’s skill, and talked to both and got them upon common topics, and laughed, and was like a fair English flower of womanhood; nothing deadly.

“There, Algy; you have beaten us. I don’t think I’ll have Lord Suckling for my partner any more,” she said, putting up her wand, and pouting.

“You don’t bear malice?” said Algernon, revived.

“There is my hand. Now you must play a game alone with Lord Suckling, and beat him; mind you beat him, or it will redound to my discredit.”

With which, she and Edward left them.

“Algy was a little crestfallen, and no wonder,” she said. “He is soon set up again. They will be good friends now.”

“Isn’t it odd, that they should be ready to risk their lives for trifles?”

Thus Edward tempted her to discuss the subject which he had in his mind.

She felt intuitively the trap in his voice.

“Ah, yes,” she replied; “it must be because they know their lives are not precious.”

So utterly at her mercy had he fallen, that her pronunciation of that word “precious” carried a severe sting to him, and it was not spoken with peculiar emphasis; on the contrary, she wished to indicate that she was of his way of thinking, as regarded this decayed method of settling disputes. He turned to leave her.

“You go to your Adeline, I presume,” she said.

“Ah! that reminds me. I have never thanked you.”

“For my good services? such as they are. Sir William will be very happy, and it was for him, a little more than for you, that I went out of my way to be a matchmaker.”

Page 977

“It was her character, of course, that struck you as being so eminently suited to mine.”

“Can I tell what is the character of a girl? She is mild and shy, and extremely gentle. In all probability she has a passion for battles and bloodshed. I judged from your father’s point of view. She has money, and you are to have money; and the union of money and money is supposed to be a good thing. And besides, you are variable, and off to-morrow what you are on to-day; is it not so? and heiresses are never jilted. Colonel Barclay is only awaiting your retirement. Le roi est mort; vive le roi! Heiresses may cry it like kingdoms.”

“I thought,” said Edward, meaningly, “the colonel had better taste.”

“Do you not know that my friends are my friends because they are not allowed to dream they will do anything else? If they are taken poorly, I commend them to a sea-voyage —Africa, the North-West Passage, the source of the Nile. Men with their vanity wounded may discover wonders! They return friendly as before, whether they have done the Geographical Society a service or not. That is, they generally do.”

“Then I begin to fancy I must try those latitudes.”

“Oh! you are my relative.”

He scarcely knew that he had uttered “Margaret.”

She replied to it frankly, “Yes, Cousin Ned. You have made the voyage, you see, and have come back friends with me. The variability of opals! Ah! Sir John, you join us in season. We were talking of opals. Is the opal a gem that stands to represent women?”

Sir John Capes smoothed his knuckles with silken palms, and with courteous antique grin, responded, “It is a gem I would never dare to offer to a lady’s acceptance.”

“It is by repute unlucky; so you never can have done so.

“Exquisite!” exclaimed the veteran in smiles, “if what you deign to imply were only true!”

They entered the drawing-room among the ladies.

Edward whispered in Mrs. Lovell’s ear, “He is in need of the voyage.”

“He is very near it,” she answered in the same key, and swam into general conversation.

Her cold wit, Satanic as the gleam of it struck through his mind, gave him a throb of desire to gain possession of her, and crush her.

CHAPTER XXII

The writing of a letter to Dahlia had previously been attempted and abandoned as a sickening task. Like an idle boy with his holiday imposition, Edward shelved it among the nightmares, saying, “How can I sit down and lie to her!” and thinking that silence would prepare her bosom for the coming truth.

Silence is commonly the slow poison used by those who mean to murder love. There is nothing violent about it; no shock is given; Hope is not abruptly strangled, but merely dreams of evil, and fights with gradually stifling shadows. When the last convulsions come they are not terrific; the frame has been weakened for dissolution; love dies like natural decay. It seems the kindest way of doing a cruel thing. But Dahlia wrote, crying out her agony at the torture. Possibly your nervously organized natures require a modification of the method.

Page 978

Edward now found himself able to conduct a correspondence. He despatched the following:—

"My Dear Dahlia,—Of course I cannot expect you to be aware of the bewildering occupations of a country house, where a man has literally not five minutes' time to call his own; so I pass by your reproaches. My father has gone at last. He has manifested an extraordinary liking for my society, and I am to join him elsewhere —perhaps run over to Paris (your city)—but at present for a few days I am my own master, and the first thing I do is to attend to your demands: not to write 'two lines,' but to give you a good long letter.

> "What on earth makes you fancy me unwell? You know I am never unwell. And as to your nursing me—when has there ever been any need for it?

"You must positively learn patience. I have been absent a week or so, and you talk of coming down here and haunting the house! Such ghosts as you meet with strange treatment when they go about unprotected, let me give you warning. You have my full permission to walk out in the Parks for exercise. I think you are bound to do it, for your health's sake.

"Pray discontinue that talk about the alteration in your looks. You must learn that you are no longer a child. Cease to write like a child. If people stare at you, as you say, you are very well aware it is not because you are becoming plain. You do not mean it, I know; but there is a disingenuousness in remarks of this sort that is to me exceedingly distasteful. Avoid the shadow of hypocrisy. Women are subject to it—and it is quite innocent, no doubt. I won't lecture you.

"My cousin Algernon is here with me. He has not spoken of your sister. Your fears in that direction are quite unnecessary. He is attached to a female cousin of ours, a very handsome person, witty, and highly sensible, who dresses as well as the lady you talk about having seen one day in Wrexby Church. Her lady's-maid is a Frenchwoman, which accounts for it. You have not forgotten the boulevards?

"I wish you to go on with your lessons in French. Educate yourself, and you will rise superior to these distressing complaints. I recommend you to read the newspapers daily. Buy nice picture-books, if the papers are too matter-of-fact for you. By looking eternally inward, you teach yourself to fret, and the consequence is, or will be, that you wither. No constitution can stand it. All the ladies here take an interest in Parliamentary affairs. They can talk to men upon men's themes. It is impossible to explain to you how wearisome an everlasting nursery prattle becomes. The idea that men ought never to tire of it is founded on some queer belief that they are not mortal.

“Parliament opens in February. My father wishes me to stand for Selborough. If he or some one will do the talking to the tradesmen,

Page 979

and provide the beer and the bribes, I have no objection. In that case my Law goes to the winds. I'm bound to make a show of obedience, for he has scarcely got over my summer's trip. He holds me a prisoner to him for heaven knows how long—it may be months.

"As for the heiress whom he has here to make a match for me, he and I must have a pitched battle about her by and by. At present my purse insists upon my not offending him. When will old men understand young ones? I burn your letters, and beg you to follow the example. Old letters are the dreariest ghosts in the world, and you cannot keep more treacherous rubbish in your possession. A discovery would exactly ruin me.

> "Your purchase of a black-velvet bonnet with pink ribands, was very suitable. Or did you write 'blue' ribands? But your complexion can bear anything.
>
> "You talk of being annoyed when you walk out. Remember, that no woman who knows at all how to conduct herself need for one moment suffer annoyance.

"What is the 'feeling' you speak of? I cannot conceive any 'feeling' that should make you helpless when you consider that you are insulted. There are women who have natural dignity, and women who have none.

"You ask the names of the gentlemen here:—Lord Carey, Lord Wippern (both leave to-morrow), Sir John Capes, Colonel Barclay, Lord Suckling. The ladies:—Mrs. Gosling, Miss Gosling, Lady Carey. Mrs. Anybody—to any extent.

> "They pluck hen's feathers all day and half the night. I see them out, and make my bow to the next batch of visitors, and then I don't know where I am.

"Read poetry, if it makes up for my absence, as you say. Repeat it aloud, minding the pulsation of feet. Go to the theatre now and then, and take your landlady with you. If she's a cat, fit one of your dresses on the servant-girl, and take her. You only want a companion—a dummy will do. Take a box and sit behind the curtain, back to the audience.

"I wrote to my wine-merchant to send Champagne and Sherry. I hope he did: the Champagne in pints and half-pints; if not, return them instantly. I know how Economy, sitting solitary, poor thing, would not dare to let the froth of a whole pint bottle fly out.

"Be an obedient girl and please me.

"Your stern tutor,

“Edward the First.”

He read this epistle twice over to satisfy himself that it was a warm effusion, and not too tender; and it satisfied him. By a stretch of imagination, he could feel that it represented him to her as in a higher atmosphere, considerate for her, and not so intimate that she could deem her spirit to be sharing it. Another dose of silence succeeded this discreet administration of speech.

Dahlia replied with letter upon letter; blindly impassioned, and again singularly cold; but with no reproaches. She was studying, she said. Her head ached a little; only a little. She walked; she read poetry; she begged him to pardon her for not drinking wine. She was glad that he burnt her letters, which were so foolish that if she could have the courage to look at them after they were written, they would never be sent. He was slightly revolted by one exclamation: “How ambitious you are!”

Page 980

“Because I cannot sit down for life in a London lodging-house!” he thought, and eyed her distantly as a poor good creature who had already accepted her distinctive residence in another sphere than his. From such a perception of her humanity, it was natural that his livelier sense of it should diminish. He felt that he had awakened; and he shook her off.

And now he set to work to subdue Mrs. Lovell. His own subjugation was the first fruit of his effort. It was quite unacknowledged by him: but when two are at this game, the question arises—“Which can live without the other?” and horrid pangs smote him to hear her telling musically of the places she was journeying to, the men she would see, and the chances of their meeting again before he was married to the heiress Adeline.

“I have yet to learn that I am engaged to her,” he said. Mrs. Lovell gave him a fixed look,—

“She has a half-brother.”

He stepped away in a fury.

“Devil!” he muttered, absolutely muttered it, knowing that he fooled and frowned like a stage-hero in stagey heroics. “You think to hound me into this brutal stupidity of fighting, do you? Upon my honour,” he added in his natural manner, “I believe she does, though!”

But the look became his companion. It touched and called up great vanity in his breast, and not till then could he placably confront the look. He tried a course of reading. Every morning he was down in the library, looking old in an arm-chair over his book; an intent abstracted figure.

Mrs. Lovell would enter and eye him carelessly; utter little commonplaces and go forth. The silly words struck on his brain. The book seemed hollow; sounded hollow as he shut it. This woman breathed of active striving life. She was a spur to black energies; a plumed glory; impulsive to chivalry. Everything she said and did held men in scales, and approved or rejected them.

Intoxication followed this new conception of her. He lost altogether his right judgement; even the cooler after-thoughts were lost. What sort of man had Harry been, her first husband? A dashing soldier, a quarrelsome duellist, a dull dog. But, dull to her? She, at least, was reverential to the memory of him.

She lisped now and then of “my husband,” very prettily, and with intense provocation; and yet she worshipped brains. Evidently she thirsted for that rare union of brains and bravery in a man, and would never surrender till she had discovered it. Perhaps she fancied it did not exist. It might be that she took Edward as the type of brains, and

Harry of bravery, and supposed that the two qualities were not to be had actually in conjunction.

Her admiration of his (Edward's) wit, therefore, only strengthened the idea she entertained of his deficiency in that other companion manly virtue.

Edward must have been possessed, for he ground his teeth villanously in supposing himself the victim of this outrageous suspicion. And how to prove it false? How to prove it false in a civilized age, among sober-living men and women, with whom the violent assertion of bravery would certainly imperil his claim to brains? His head was like a stew-pan over the fire, bubbling endlessly.

Page 981

He railed at her to Algernon, and astonished the youth, who thought them in a fair way to make an alliance. “Milk and capsicums,” he called her, and compared her to bloody mustard-haired Saxon Queens of history, and was childishly spiteful. And Mrs. Lovell had it all reported to her, as he was-quite aware.

“The woman seeking for an anomaly wants a master.”

With this pompous aphorism, he finished his reading of the fair Enigma.

Words big in the mouth serve their turn when there is no way of satisfying the intelligence.

To be her master, however, one must not begin by writhing as her slave.

The attempt to read an inscrutable woman allows her to dominate us too commandingly. So the lordly mind takes her in a hard grasp, cracks the shell, and drawing forth the kernel, says, “This was all the puzzle.”

Doubtless it is the fate which women like Mrs. Lovell provoke. The truth was, that she could read a character when it was under her eyes; but its yesterday and to-morrow were a blank. She had no imaginative hold on anything. For which reason she was always requiring tangible signs of virtues that she esteemed.

The thirst for the shows of valour and wit was insane with her; but she asked for nothing that she herself did not give in abundance, and with beauty super-added. Her propensity to bet sprang of her passion for combat; she was not greedy of money, or reckless in using it; but a difference of opinion arising, her instinct forcibly prompted her to back her own. If the stake was the risk of a lover’s life, she was ready to put down the stake, and would have marvelled contemptuously at the lover complaining. “Sheep! sheep!” she thought of those who dared not fight, and had a wavering tendency to affix the epithet to those who simply did not fight.

Withal, Mrs. Lovell was a sensible person; clearheaded and shrewd; logical, too, more than the run of her sex: I may say, profoundly practical. So much so, that she systematically reserved the after-years for enlightenment upon two or three doubts of herself, which struck her in the calm of her spirit, from time to time.

“France,” Edward called her, in one of their colloquies.

It was an illuminating title. She liked the French (though no one was keener for the honour of her own country in opposition to them), she liked their splendid boyishness, their unequalled devotion, their merciless intellects; the oneness of the nation when the sword is bare and pointing to chivalrous enterprise.

She liked their fine varnish of sentiment, which appears so much on the surface that Englishmen suppose it to have nowhere any depth; as if the outer coating must necessarily exhaust the stock, or as if what is at the source of our being can never be made visible.

She had her imagination of them as of a streaming banner in the jaws of storm, with snows among the cloud-rents and lightning in the chasms:—which image may be accounted for by the fact that when a girl she had in adoration kissed the feet of Napoleon, the giant of the later ghosts of history.

Page 982

It was a princely compliment. She received it curtseying, and disarmed the intended irony. In reply, she called him “Great Britain.” I regret to say that he stood less proudly for his nation. Indeed, he flushed. He remembered articles girding at the policy of peace at any price, and half felt that Mrs. Lovell had meant to crown him with a Quaker’s hat. His title fell speedily into disuse; but, “Yes, France,” and “No, France,” continued, his effort being to fix the epithet to frivolous allusions, from which her ingenuity rescued it honourably.

Had she ever been in love? He asked her the question. She stabbed him with so straightforward an affirmative that he could not conceal the wound.

“Have I not been married?” she said.

He began to experience the fretful craving to see the antecedents of the torturing woman spread out before him. He conceived a passion for her girlhood. He begged for portraits of her as a girl. She showed him the portrait of Harry Lovell in a locket. He held the locket between his fingers. Dead Harry was kept very warm. Could brains ever touch her emotions as bravery had done?

“Where are the brains I boast of?” he groaned, in the midst of these sensational extravagances.

The lull of action was soon to be disturbed. A letter was brought to him.

He opened it and read—

“Mr. Edward Blancove,—When you rode by me under Fairly Park, I did not know you. I can give you a medical certificate that since then I have been in the doctor’s hands. I know you now. I call upon you to meet me, with what weapons you like best, to prove that you are not a midnight assassin. The place shall be where you choose to appoint. If you decline I will make you publicly acknowledge what you have done. If you answer, that I am not a gentleman and you are one, I say that you have attacked me in the dark, when I was on horseback, and you are now my equal, if I like to think so. You will not talk about the law after that night. The man you employed I may punish or I may leave, though he struck the blow. But I will meet you. To-morrow, a friend of mine, who is a major in the army, will be down here, and will call on you from me; or on any friend of yours you are pleased to name. I will not let you escape. Whether I shall face a guilty man in you, God knows; but I know I have a right to call upon you to face me.

“I am, Sir,
“Yours truly,

“Robert Eccles.”

Edward’s face grew signally white over the contents of this unprecedented challenge. The letter had been brought in to him at the breakfast table. “Read it, read it,” said Mrs. Lovell, seeing him put it by; and he had read it with her eyes on him.

Page 983

The man seemed to him a man of claws, who clutched like a demon. Would nothing quiet him? Edward thought of bribes for the sake of peace; but a second glance at the letter assured his sagacious mind that bribes were powerless in this man's case; neither bribes nor sticks were of service. Departure from Fairly would avail as little: the tenacious devil would follow him to London; and what was worse, as a hound from Dahlia's family he was now on the right scent, and appeared to know that he was. How was a scandal to be avoided? By leaving Fairly instantly for any place on earth, he could not avoid leaving the man behind; and if the man saw Mrs. Lovell again, her instincts as a woman of her class were not to be trusted. As likely as not she would side with the ruffian; that is, she would think he had been wronged—perhaps think that he ought to have been met. There is the democratic virus secret in every woman; it was predominant in Mrs. Lovell, according to Edward's observation of the lady. The rights of individual manhood were, as he angrily perceived, likely to be recognized by her spirit, if only they were stoutly asserted; and that in defiance of station, of reason, of all the ideas inculcated by education and society.

"I believe she'll expect me to fight him," he exclaimed. At least, he knew she would despise him if he avoided the brutal challenge without some show of dignity.

On rising from the table, he drew Algernon aside. It was an insufferable thought that he was compelled to take his brainless cousin into his confidence, even to the extent of soliciting his counsel, but there was no help for it. In vain Edward asked himself why he had been such an idiot as to stain his hands with the affair at all. He attributed it to his regard for Algernon. Having commonly the sway of his passions, he was in the habit of forgetting that he ever lost control of them; and the fierce black mood, engendered by Robert's audacious persecution, had passed from his memory, though it was now recalled in full force.

"See what a mess you drag a man into," he said.

Algernon read a line of the letter. "Oh, confound this infernal fellow!" he shouted, in sickly wonderment; and snapped sharp, "drag you into the mess? Upon my honour, your coolness, Ned, is the biggest part about you, if it isn't the best."

Edward's grip fixed on him, for they were only just out of earshot of Mrs. Lovell. They went upstairs, and Algernon read the letter through.

"'Midnight assassin,'" he repeated; "by Jove! how beastly that sounds. It's a lie that you attacked him in the dark, Ned—eh?"

"I did not attack him at all," said Edward. "He behaved like a ruffian to you, and deserved shooting like a mad dog."

“Did you, though,” Algernon persisted in questioning, despite his cousin’s manifest shyness of the subject “did you really go out with that man Sedgett, and stop this fellow on horseback? He speaks of a blow. You didn’t strike him, did you, Ned? I mean, not a hit, except in self-defence?”

Page 984

Edward bit his lip, and shot a level reflective side-look, peculiar to him when meditating. He wished his cousin to propose that Mrs. Lovell should see the letter. He felt that by consulting with her, he could bring her to apprehend the common sense of the position, and be so far responsible for what he might do, that she would not dare to let her heart be rebellious toward him subsequently. If he himself went to her it would look too much like pleading for her intercession. The subtle directness of the woman's spirit had to be guarded against at every point.

He replied to Algernon,—

"What I did was on your behalf. Oblige me by not interrogating me. I give you my positive assurance that I encouraged no unmanly assault on him."

"That'll do, that'll do," said Algernon, eager not to hear more, lest there should come an explanation of what he had heard. "Of course, then, this fellow has no right—the devil's in him! If we could only make him murder Sedgett and get hanged for it! He's got a friend who's a major in the army? Oh, come, I say; this is pitching it too stiff. I shall insist upon seeing his commission. Really, Ned, I can't advise. I'll stand by you, that you may be sure of—stand by you; but what the deuce to say to help you! Go before the magistrate.... Get Lord Elling to issue a warrant to prevent a breach of the peace. No; that won't do. This quack of a major in the army's to call to-morrow. I don't mind, if he shows his credentials all clear, amusing him in any manner he likes. I can't see the best scheme. Hang it, Ned, it's very hard upon me to ask me to do the thinking. I always go to Peggy Lovell when I'm bothered. There—Mrs. Lovell! Mistress Lovell! Madame! my Princess Lovell, if you want me to pronounce respectable titles to her name. You're too proud to ask a woman to help you, ain't you, Ned?"

"No," said Edward, mildly. "In some cases their wits are keen enough. One doesn't like to drag her into such a business."

"Hm," went Algernon. "I don't think she's so innocent of it as you fancy."

"She's very clever," said Edward.

"She's awfully clever!" cried Algernon. He paused to give room for more praises of her, and then pursued:

"She's so kind. That's what you don't credit her for. I'll go and consult her, if positively you don't mind. Trust her for keeping it quiet. Come, Ned, she's sure to hit upon the right thing. May I go?"

"It's your affair, more than mine," said Edward.

“Have it so, if you like,” returned the good-natured fellow. “It’s worth while consulting her, just to see how neatly she’ll take it. Bless your heart, she won’t know a bit more than you want her to know. I’m off to her now.” He carried away the letter.

Page 985

Edward's own practical judgement would have advised his instantly sending a short reply to Robert, explaining that he was simply in conversation with the man Sedgett, when Robert, the old enemy of the latter, rode by, and, that while regretting Sedgett's proceedings, he could not be held accountable for them. But it was useless to think of acting in accordance with his reason. Mrs. Lovell was queen, and sat in reason's place. It was absolutely necessary to conciliate her approbation of his conduct in this dilemma, by submitting to the decided unpleasantness of talking with her on a subject that fevered him, and of allowing her to suppose he required the help of her sagacity. Such was the humiliation imposed upon him. Further than this he had nothing to fear, for no woman could fail to be overborne by the masculine force of his brain in an argument. The humiliation was bad enough, and half tempted him to think that his old dream of working as a hard student, with fair and gentle Dahlia ministering to his comforts, and too happy to call herself his, was best. Was it not, after one particular step had been taken, the manliest life he could have shaped out? Or did he imagine it so at this moment, because he was a coward, and because pride, and vanity, and ferocity alternately had to screw him up to meet the consequences of his acts, instead of the great heart?

If a coward, Dahlia was his home, his refuge, his sanctuary. Mrs. Lovell was perdition and its scorching fires to a man with a taint of cowardice in him.

Whatever he was, Edward's vanity would not permit him to acknowledge himself that. Still, he did not call on his heart to play inspiriting music. His ideas turned to subterfuge. His aim was to keep the good opinion of Mrs. Lovell while he quieted Robert; and he entered straightway upon that very perilous course, the attempt, for the sake of winning her, to bewilder and deceive a woman's instincts.

CHAPTER XXIII

Over a fire in one of the upper sitting-rooms of the Pilot Inn, Robert sat with his friend, the beloved friend of whom he used to speak to Dahlia and Rhoda, too proudly not to seem betraying the weaker point of pride. This friend had accepted the title from a private soldier of his regiment; to be capable of doing which, a man must be both officer and gentleman in a sterner and less liberal sense than is expressed by that everlasting phrase in the mouth of the military parrot. Major Percy Waring, the son of a clergyman, was a working soldier, a slayer, if you will, from pure love of the profession of arms, and all the while the sweetest and gentlest of men. I call him a working soldier in opposition to the parading soldier, the, coxcomb in uniform, the hero by accident, and the martial boys of wealth and station, who are of the army of England. He studied war when the trumpet slumbered, and had no place but in the field when it sounded. To him the honour of England

Page 986

was as a babe in his arms: he hugged it like a mother. He knew the military history of every regiment in the service. Disasters even of old date brought groans from him. This enthusiastic face was singularly soft when the large dark eyes were set musing. The cast of it being such, sometimes in speaking of a happy play of artillery upon congregated masses, an odd effect was produced. Ordinarily, the clear features were reflective almost to sadness, in the absence of animation; but an exulting energy for action would now and then light them up. Hilarity of spirit did not belong to him. He was, nevertheless, a cheerful talker, as could be seen in the glad ear given to him by Robert. Between them it was “Robert” and “Percy.” Robert had rescued him from drowning on the East Anglian shore, and the friendship which ensued was one chief reason for Robert’s quitting the post of trooper and buying himself out. It was against Percy’s advice, who wanted to purchase a commission for him; but the humbler man had the sturdy scruples of his rank regarding money, and his romantic illusions being dispersed by an experience of the absolute class-distinctions in the service, Robert; that he might prevent his friend from violating them, made use of his aunt’s legacy to obtain release. Since that date they had not met; but their friendship was fast. Percy had recently paid a visit to Queen Anne’s Farm, where he had seen Rhoda and heard of Robert’s departure. Knowing Robert’s birthplace, he had come on to Warbeach, and had seen Jonathan Eccles, who referred him to Mrs. Boulby, licenced seller of brandy, if he wished to enjoy an interview with Robert Eccles.

“The old man sent up regularly every day to inquire how his son was faring on the road to the next world,” said Robert, laughing. “He’s tough old English oak. I’m just to him what I appear at the time. It’s better having him like that than one of your jerky fathers, who seem to belong to the stage of a theatre. Everybody respects my old dad, and I can laugh at what he thinks of me. I’ve only to let him know I’ve served an apprenticeship in farming, and can make use of some of his ideas—sound! every one of ’em; every one of ’em sound! And that I say of my own father.”

“Why don’t you tell him?” Percy asked.

“I want to forget all about Kent and drown the county,” said Robert. “And I’m going to, as far as my memory’s concerned.”

Percy waited for some seconds. He comprehended perfectly this state of wilfulness in an uneducated sensitive man.

“She has a steadfast look in her face, Robert. She doesn’t look as if she trifled. I’ve really never seen a finer, franker girl in my life, if faces are to be trusted.”

“It’s t’ other way. There’s no trifling in her case. She’s frank. She fires at you point blank.”

“You never mentioned her in your letters to me, Robert.”

“No. I had a suspicion from the first I was going to be a fool about the girl.”

Page 987

Percy struck his hand.

“You didn’t do quite right.”

“Do you say that?”

Robert silenced him with this question, for there was a woman in Percy’s antecedent history.

The subject being dismissed, they talked more freely. Robert related the tale of Dahlia, and of his doings at Fairly.

“Oh! we agree,” he said, noting a curious smile that Percy could not smooth out of sight. “I know it was odd conduct. I do respect my superiors; but, believe me or not, Percy, injury done to a girl makes me mad, and I can’t hold back; and she’s the sister of the girl you saw. By heaven! if it weren’t for my head getting blind now when my blood boils, I’ve the mind to walk straight up to the house and screw the secret out of one of them. What I say is—Is there a God up aloft? Then, he sees all, and society is vapour, and while I feel the spirit in me to do it, I go straight at my aim.”

“If, at the same time, there’s no brandy in you,” said Percy, “which would stop your seeing clear or going straight.”

The suggestion was a cruel shock. Robert nodded. “That’s true. I suppose it’s my bad education that won’t let me keep cool. I’m ashamed of myself after it. I shout and thunder, and the end of it is, I go away and think about the same of Robert Eccles that I’ve frightened other people into thinking. Perhaps you’ll think me to blame in this case? One of those Mr. Blancoves—not the one you’ve heard of—struck me on the field before a lady. I bore it. It was part of what I’d gone out to meet. I was riding home late at night, and he stood at the corner of the lane, with an old enemy of mine, and a sad cur that is! Sedgett’s his name—Nic, the Christian part of it. There’d just come a sharp snowfall from the north, and the moonlight shot over the flying edge of the rear-cloud; and I saw Sedgett with a stick in his hand; but the gentleman had no stick. I’ll give Mr. Edward Blancove credit for not meaning to be active in a dastardly assault.

“But why was he in consultation with my enemy? And he let my enemy—by the way, Percy, you dislike that sort of talk of ‘my enemy,’ I know. You like it put plain and simple: but down in these old parts again, I catch at old habits; and I’m always a worse man when I haven’t seen you for a time. Sedgett, say. Sedgett, as I passed, made a sweep at my horse’s knees, and took them a little over the fetlock. The beast reared. While I was holding on he swung a blow at me, and took me here.”

Robert touched his head. “I dropped like a horse-chestnut from the tree. When I recovered, I was lying in the lane. I think I was there flat, face to the ground, for half an

hour, quite sensible, looking at the pretty colour of my blood on the snow. The horse was gone. I just managed to reel along to this place, where there's always a home for me. Now, will you believe it possible? I went out next day: I saw Mr. Edward Blancove, and I might have seen a baby and felt the same to it. I didn't know him a bit. Yesterday morning your letter was sent up from Sutton farm. Somehow, the moment I'd read it, I remembered his face. I sent him word there was a matter to be settled between us. You think I was wrong?"

Page 988

Major Waring had set a deliberately calculating eye on him.

“I want to hear more,” he said.

“You think I have no claim to challenge a man in his position?”

“Answer me first, Robert. You think this Mr. Blancove helped, or instigated this man Sedgett in his attack upon you?”

“I haven’t a doubt that he did.”

“It’s not plain evidence.”

“It’s good circumstantial evidence.”

“At any rate, you are perhaps justified in thinking him capable of this: though the rule is, to believe nothing against a gentleman until it is flatly proved—when we drum him out of the ranks. But, if you can fancy it true, would you put yourself upon an equal footing with him?”

“I would,” said Robert.

“Then you accept his code of morals.”

“That’s too shrewd for me: but men who preach against duelling, or any kind of man-to-man in hot earnest, always fence in that way.”

“I detest duelling,” Major Waring remarked. “I don’t like a system that permits knaves and fools to exercise a claim to imperil the lives of useful men. Let me observe, that I am not a preacher against it. I think you know my opinions; and they are not quite those of the English magistrate, and other mild persons who are wrathful at the practice upon any pretence. Keep to the other discussion. You challenge a man—you admit him your equal. But why do I argue with you? I know your mind as well as my own. You have some other idea in the background.”

“I feel that he’s the guilty man,” said Robert.

“You feel called upon to punish him.”

“No. Wait: he will not fight; but I have him and I’ll hold him. I feel he’s the man who has injured this girl, by every witness of facts that I can bring together; and as for the other young fellow I led such a dog’s life down here, I could beg his pardon. This one’s eye met mine. I saw it wouldn’t have stopped short of murder—opportunity given. Why? Because I pressed on the right spring. I’m like a woman in seeing some things. He shall repent. By—! Slap me on the face, Percy. I’ve taken to brandy and to swearing.

Damn the girl who made me forget good lessons! Bless her heart, I mean. She saw you, did she? Did she colour when she heard your name?"

"Very much," said Major Waring.

"Was dressed in—?"

"Black, with a crimson ribbon round the collar."

Robert waved the image from his eyes.

"I'm not going to dream of her. Peace, and babies, and farming, and pride in myself with a woman by my side—there! You've seen her—all that's gone. I might as well ask the East wind to blow West. Her face is set the other way. Of course, the nature and value of a man is shown by how he takes this sort of pain; and hark at me! I'm yelling. I thought I was cured. I looked up into the eyes of a lady ten times sweeter—when?—somewhen! I've lost dates. But here's the girl at me again. She cuddles into me—slips her hand into my breast and tugs at strings there. I can't help talking to you about her, now we've got over the first step. I'll soon give it up.

Page 989

“She wore a red ribbon? If it had been Spring, you’d have seen roses. Oh! what a stanch heart that girl has. Where she sets it, mind! Her life where that creature sets her heart! But, for me, not a penny of comfort! Now for a whole week of her, day and night, in that black dress with the coloured ribbon. On she goes: walking to church; sitting at table; looking out of the window!

“Will you believe I thought those thick eyebrows of hers ugly once—a tremendous long time ago. Yes; but what eyes she has under them! And if she looks tender, one corner of her mouth goes quivering; and the eyes are steady, so that it looks like some wonderful bit of mercy.

“I think of that true-hearted creature praying and longing for her sister, and fearing there’s shame—that’s why she hates me. I wouldn’t say I was certain her sister had not fallen into a pit. I couldn’t. I was an idiot. I thought I wouldn’t be a hypocrite. I might have said I believed as she did. There she stood ready to be taken—ready to have given herself to me, if I had only spoken a word! It was a moment of heaven, and God the Father could not give it to me twice The chance has gone.

“Oh! what a miserable mad dog I am to gabble on in this way.—Come in! come in, mother.”

Mrs. Boulby entered, with soft footsteps, bearing a letter.

“From the Park,” she said, and commenced chiding Robert gently, to establish her right to do it with solemnity.

“He will talk, sir. He’s one o’ them that either they talk or they hang silent, and no middle way will they take; and the doctor’s their foe, and health they despise; and since this cruel blow, obstinacy do seem to have been knocked like a nail into his head so fast, persuasion have not a atom o’ power over him.”

“There must be talking when friends meet, ma’am,” said Major Waring.

“Ah!” returned the widow, “if it wouldn’t be all on one side.”

“I’ve done now, mother,” said Robert.

Mrs. Boulby retired, and Robert opened the letter.

It ran thus:—

“Sir, I am glad you have done me the favour of addressing me temperately, so that I am permitted to clear myself of an unjust and most unpleasant imputation. I will, if you please, see you, or your friend; to whom perhaps I shall better be able to certify how unfounded is the charge you bring against me. I will call upon you at the Pilot Inn,

where I hear that you are staying; or, if you prefer it, I will attend to any appointment you may choose to direct elsewhere. But it must be immediate, as the term of my residence in this neighbourhood is limited.

“I am,
“Sir,
“Yours obediently,

“Edward Blancove.”

Major Waning read the lines with a critical attention.

“It seems fair and open,” was his remark.

“Here,” Robert struck his breast, “here’s what answers him. What shall I do? Shall I tell him to come?”

Page 990

“Write to say that your friend will meet him at a stated place.”

Robert saw his prey escaping. “I’m not to see him?”

“No. The decent is the right way in such cases. You must leave it to me. This will be the proper method between gentlemen.”

“It appears to my idea,” said Robert, “that gentlemen are always, somehow, stopped from taking the straight-ahead measure.”

“You,” Percy rejoined, “are like a civilian before a fortress. Either he finds it so easy that he can walk into it, or he gives it up in despair as unassailable. You have followed your own devices, and what have you accomplished?”

“He will lie to you smoothly.”

“Smoothly or not, if I discover that he has spoken falsely, he is answerable to me.”

“To me, Percy.”

“No; to me. He can elude you; and will be acquitted by the general verdict. But when he becomes answerable to me, his honour, in the conventional, which is here the practical, sense, is at stake, and I have him.”

“I see that. Yes; he can refuse to fight me,” Robert sighed. “Hey, Lord! it’s a heavy world when we come to methods. But will you, Percy, will you put it to him at the end of your fist—’Did you deceive the girl, and do you know where the girl now is?’ Why, great heaven! we only ask to know where she is. She may have been murdered. She’s hidden from her family. Let him confess, and let him go.”

Major Waring shook his head. “You see like a woman perhaps, Robert. You certainly talk like a woman. I will state your suspicions. When I have done so, I am bound to accept his reply. If we discover it to have been false, I have my remedy.”

“Won’t you perceive, that it isn’t my object to punish him by and by, but to tear the secret out of him on the spot—now—instantly,” Robert cried.

“I perceive your object, and you have experienced some of the results of your system. It’s the primitive action of an appeal to the god of combats, that is exploded in these days. You have no course but to take his word.”

“She said”—Robert struck his knee—“she said I should have the girl’s address. She said she would see her. She pledged that to me. I’m speaking of the lady up at Fairly. Come! things get clearer. If she knows where Dahlia is, who told her? This Mr. Algernon—not Edward Blancove—was seen with Dahlia in a box at the Playhouse. He

was there with Dahlia, yet I don't think him the guilty man. There's a finger of light upon that other."

"Who is this lady?" Major Waring asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"Mrs. Lovell."

At the name, Major Waring sat stricken.

"Lovell!" he repeated, under his breath. "Lovell! Was she ever in India?"

"I don't know, indeed."

"Is she a widow?"

"Ay; that I've heard."

"Describe her."

Robert entered upon the task with a dozen headlong exclamations, and very justly concluded by saying that he could give no idea of her; but his friend apparently had gleaned sufficient.

Page 991

Major Waring's face was touched by a strange pallor, and his smile had vanished. He ran his fingers through his hair, clutching it in a knot, as he sat eyeing the red chasm in the fire, where the light of old days and wild memories hangs as in a crumbling world.

Robert was aware of there being a sadness in Percy's life, and that he had loved a woman and awakened from his passion. Her name was unknown to him. In that matter, his natural delicacy and his deference to Percy had always checked him from sounding the subject closely. He might be, as he had said, keen as a woman where his own instincts were in action; but they were ineffective in guessing at the cause for Percy's sudden depression.

"She said—this lady, Mrs. Lovell, whoever she may be—she said you should have the girl's address:—gave you that pledge of her word?" Percy spoke, half meditating. "How did this happen? When did you see her?"

Robert related the incident of his meeting with her, and her effort to be a peacemaker, but made no allusion to Mrs. Boulby's tale of the bet.

"A peacemaker!" Percy interjected. "She rides well?"

"Best horsewoman I ever saw in my life," was Robert's ready answer.

Major Waring brushed at his forehead, as in impatience of thought.

"You must write two letters: one to this Mrs. Lovell. Say, you are about to leave the place, and remind her of her promise. It's incomprehensible; but never mind. Write that first. Then to the man. Say that your friend—by the way, this Mrs. Lovell has small hands, has she? I mean, peculiarly small? Did you notice, or not? I may know her. Never mind. Write to the man. Say—don't write down my name—say that I will meet him." Percy spoke on as in a dream. "Appoint any place and hour. To-morrow at ten, down by the river—the bridge. Write briefly. Thank him for his offer to afford you explanations. Don't argue it with me any more. Write both the letters straight off."

His back was to Robert as he uttered the injunction. Robert took pen and paper, and did as he was bidden, with all the punctilious obedience of a man who consents perforce to see a better scheme abandoned.

One effect of the equality existing between these two of diverse rank in life and perfect delicacy of heart, was, that the moment Percy assumed the lead, Robert never disputed it. Muttering simply that he was incapable of writing except when he was in a passion, he managed to produce what, in Percy's eyes, were satisfactory epistles, though Robert had horrible misgivings in regard to his letter to Mrs. Lovell—the wording of it, the cast of the sentences, even down to the character of the handwriting. These missives were despatched immediately.

“You are sure she said that?” Major Waring inquired more than once during the afternoon, and Robert assured him that Mrs. Lovell had given him her word. He grew very positive, and put it on his honour that she had said it.

Page 992

“You may have heard incorrectly.”

“I’ve got the words burning inside me,” said Robert.

They walked together, before dark, to Sutton Farm, but Jonathan Eccles was abroad in his fields, and their welcome was from Mistress Anne, whom Major Waring had not power to melt; the moment he began speaking praise of Robert, she closed her mouth tight and crossed her wrists meekly.

“I see,” said Major Waring, as they left the farm, “your aunt is of the godly who have no forgiveness.”

“I’m afraid so,” cried Robert. “Cold blood never will come to an understanding with hot blood, and the old lady’s is like frozen milk. She’s right in her way, I dare say. I don’t blame her. Her piety’s right enough, take it as you find it.”

Mrs. Boulby had a sagacious notion that gentlemen always dined well every day of their lives, and claimed that much from Providence as their due. She had exerted herself to spread a neat little repast for Major Waring, and waited on the friends herself; grieving considerably to observe that the major failed in his duty as a gentleman, as far as the relish of eating was concerned.

“But,” she said below at her bar, “he smokes the beautifullest—smelling cigars, and drinks coffee made in his own way. He’s very particular.” Which was reckoned to be in Major Waring’s favour.

The hour was near midnight when she came into the room, bearing another letter from the Park. She thumped it on the table, ruffling and making that pretence at the controlling of her bosom which precedes a feminine storm. Her indignation was caused by a communication delivered by Dick Curtis, in the parlour underneath, to the effect that Nicodemus Sedgett was not to be heard of in the neighbourhood.

Robert laughed at her, and called her Hebrew woman—eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth woman.

“Leave real rascals to the Lord above, mother. He’s safe to punish them. They’ve stepped outside the chances. That’s my idea. I wouldn’t go out of my way to kick them—not I! It’s the half-and-half villains we’ve got to dispose of. They’re the mischief, old lady.”

Percy, however, asked some questions about Sedgett, and seemed to think his disappearance singular. He had been examining the handwriting of the superscription to the letter. His face was flushed as he tossed it for Robert to open. Mrs. Boulby dropped her departing curtsey, and Robert read out, with odd pauses and puzzled emphasis:

“Mrs. Lovell has received the letter which Mr. Robert Eccles has addressed to her, and regrets that a misconception should have arisen from anything that was uttered during their interview. The allusions are obscure, and Mrs. Lovell can only remark, that she is pained if she at all misled Mr. Eccles in what she either spoke or promised. She is not aware that she can be of any service to him. Should such an occasion present itself, Mr. Eccles may rest assured that she will not fail

Page 993

to avail herself of it, and do her utmost to redeem a pledge to which he has apparently attached a meaning she can in no way account for or comprehend."

When Robert had finished, "It's like a female lawyer," he said. "That woman speaking, and that woman writing, they're two different creatures—upon my soul, they are! Quick, sharp, to the point, when she speaks; and read this! Can I venture to say of a lady, she's a liar?"

"Perhaps you had better not," said Major Waring, who took the letter in his hand and seemed to study it. After which he transferred it to his pocket.

"To-morrow? To-morrow's Sunday," he observed. "We will go to church to-morrow." His eyes glittered.

"Why, I'm hardly in the mood," Robert protested. "I haven't had the habit latterly."

"Keep up the habit," said Percy. "It's a good thing for men like you."

"But what sort of a fellow am I to be showing myself there among all the people who've been talking about me—and the people up at Fairly!" Robert burst out in horror of the prospect. "I shall be a sight among the people. Percy, upon my honour, I don't think I well can. I'll read the Bible at home if you like."

"No; you'll do penance," said Major Waring.

"Are you meaning it?"

"The penance will be ten times greater on my part, believe me."

Robert fancied him to be referring to some idea of mocking the interposition of religion.

"Then we'll go to Upton Church," he said. "I don't mind it at Upton."

"I intend to go to the church attended by 'The Family,' as we say in our parts; and you must come with me to Warbeach."

Clasping one hand across his forehead, Robert cried, "You couldn't ask me to do a thing I hate so much. Go, and sit, and look sheepish, and sing hymns with the people I've been badgering; and everybody seeing me! How can it be anything to you like what it is to me?"

"You have only to take my word for it that it is, and far more," said Major Waring, sinking his voice. "Come; it won't do you any harm to make an appointment to meet your

conscience now and then. You will never be ruled by reason, and your feelings have to teach you what you learn. At any rate, it's my request."

This terminated the colloquy upon that topic. Robert looked forward to a penitential Sabbath-day.

"She is a widow still," thought Major Waring, as he stood alone in his bed-room, and, drawing aside the curtains of his window, looked up at the white moon.

CHAPTER XXIV

When the sun takes to shining in winter, and the Southwest to blowing, the corners of the earth cannot hide from him—the mornings are like halls full of light. Robert had spent his hopes upon a wet day that would have kept the congregation sparse and the guests at Fairly absent from public devotions.

Page 994

He perceived at once that he was doomed to be under everybody's eyes when he walked down the aisle, for everybody would attend the service on such a morning as this.

Already he had met his conscience, in so far as that he shunned asking Percy again what was the reason for their going to church, and he had not the courage to petition to go in the afternoon instead of the morning.

The question, "Are you ashamed of yourself, then?" sang in his ears as a retort ready made.

There was no help for it; so he set about assisting his ingenuity to make the best appearance possible—brushing his hat and coat with extraordinary care.

Percy got him to point out the spot designated for the meeting, and telling him to wait in the Warbeach churchyard, or within sight of it, strolled off in the direction of the river. His simple neatness and quiet gentlemanly air abashed Robert, and lured him from his intense conception of abstract right and wrong, which had hitherto encouraged and incited him, so that he became more than ever crestfallen at the prospect of meeting the eyes of the church people, and with the trembling sensitiveness of a woman who weighs the merits of a lover when passion is having one of its fatal pauses, he looked at himself, and compared himself with the class of persons he had outraged, and tried to think better of himself, and to justify himself, and sturdily reject comparisons. They would not be beaten back. His enemies had never suggested them, but they were forced on him by the aspect of his friend.

Any man who takes the law into his own hands, and chooses to stand against what is conventionally deemed fitting:—against the world, as we say, is open to these moods of degrading humility. Robert waited for the sound of the bells with the emotions of a common culprit. Could he have been driven to the church and deposited suddenly in his pew, his mind would have been easier.

It was the walking there, the walking down the aisle, the sense of his being the fellow who had matched himself against those well-attired gentlemen, which entirely confused him. And not exactly for his own sake—for Percy's partly. He sickened at the thought of being seen by Major Waring's side. His best suit and his hat were good enough, as far as they went, only he did not feel that he wore them—he could not divine how it was—-with a proper air, an air of signal comfort. In fact, the graceful negligence of an English gentleman's manner had been unexpectedly revealed to him; and it was strange, he reflected, that Percy never appeared to observe how deficient he was, and could still treat him as an equal, call him by his Christian name, and not object to be seen with him in public.

Robert did not think at the same time that illness had impoverished his blood. Your sensational beings must keep a strong and a good flow of blood in their veins to be always on a level with the occasion which they provoke. He remembered wonderingly that he had used to be easy in gait and ready of wit when walking from Queen Anne's Farm to Wrexby village church. Why was he a different creature now? He could not answer the question.

Page 995

Two or three of his Warbeach acquaintances passed him in the lanes. They gave him good day, and spoke kindly, and with pleasant friendly looks.

Their impression when they left him was that he was growing proud.

The jolly butcher of Warbeach, who had a hearty affection for him, insisted upon clapping his hand, and showing him to Mrs. Billing, and showing their two young ones to Robert. With a kiss to the children, and a nod, Robert let them pass.

Here and there, he was hailed by young fellows who wore their hats on one side, and jaunty-fashioned coats—Sunday being their own bright day of exhibition. He took no notice of the greetings.

He tried to feel an interest in the robins and twittering wrens, and called to mind verses about little birds, and kept repeating them, behind a face that chilled every friendly man who knew him.

Moody the boat-builder asked him, with a stare, if he was going to church, and on Robert's replying that perhaps he was, said "I'm dashed!" and it was especially discouraging to one in Robert's condition.

Further to inspirit him, he met Jonathan Eccles, who put the same question to him, and getting the same answer, turned sharp round and walked homeward.

Robert had a great feeling of relief when the bells were silent, and sauntered with a superior composure round the holly and laurel bushes concealing the church. Not once did he ponder on the meeting between Major Waring and Mr. Edward Blancove, until he beheld the former standing alone by the churchyard gate, and then he thought more of the empty churchyard and the absence of carriages, proclaiming the dreadful admonition that he must immediately consider as to the best way of comporting himself before an observant and censorious congregation.

Major Waring remarked, "You are late."

"Have I kept you waiting?" said Robert.

"Not long. They are reading the lessons."

"Is it full inside?"

"I dare say it is."

"You have seen him, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; I have seen him."

Percy was short in his speech, and pale as Robert had never seen him before. He requested hastily to be told the situation of Lord Elling's pew.

"Don't you think of going into the gallery?" said Robert, but received no answer, and with an inward moan of "Good God! they'll think I've come here in a sort of repentance," he found himself walking down the aisle; and presently, to his amazement, settled in front of the Fairly pew, and with his eyes on Mrs. Lovell.

What was the matter with her? Was she ill? Robert forgot his own tribulation in an instant. Her face was like marble, and as she stood with the prayer-book in her hand, her head swayed over it: her lips made a faint effort at smiling, and she sat quietly down, and was concealed. Algernon and Sir John Capes were in the pew beside her, as well as Lady Elling, who, with a backward-turned hand and disregarding countenance, reached out her smelling-bottle.

Page 996

“Is this because she fancies I know of her having made a bet of me?” thought Robert, and it was not his vanity prompted the supposition, though his vanity was awakened by it. “Or is she ashamed of her falsehood?” he thought again, and forgave her at the sight of her sweet pale face. The singing of the hymns made her evident suffering seem holy as a martyr’s. He scarce had the power to conduct himself reverently, so intense was his longing to show her his sympathy.

“That is Mrs. Lovell—did you see her just now?” he whispered.

“Ah?” said Major Waring.

“I’m afraid she has fainted.”

“Possibly.”

But Mrs. Lovell had not fainted. She rose when the time for rising came again, and fixing her eyes with a grave devotional collectedness upon the vicar at his reading-desk, looked quite mistress of herself—but mistress of herself only when she kept them so fixed. When they moved, it was as if they had relinquished some pillar of support, and they wavered; livid shades chased her face, like the rain-clouds on a grey lake-water. Some one fronting her weighed on her eyelids. This was evident. Robert thought her a miracle of beauty. She was in colour like days he had noted thoughtfully: days with purple storm, and with golden horizon edges. She had on a bonnet of black velvet, with a delicate array of white lace, that was not suffered to disturb the contrast to her warm yellow hair. Her little gloved hands were both holding the book; at times she perused it, or, the oppression becoming unendurable, turned her gaze toward the corner of the chancel, and thence once more to her book. Robert rejected all idea of his being in any way the cause of her strange perturbation. He cast a glance at his friend. He had begun to nourish a slight suspicion; but it was too slight to bear up against Percy’s self-possession; for, as he understood the story, Percy had been the sufferer, and the lady had escaped without a wound. How, then, if such were the case, would she be showing emotion thus deep, while he stood before her with perfect self-command?

Robert believed that if he might look upon that adorable face for many days together, he could thrust Rhoda’s from his memory. The sermon was not long enough for him; and he was angry with Percy for rising before there was any movement for departure in the Fairly pew. In the doorway of the church Percy took his arm, and asked him to point out the family tombstone. They stood by it, when Lady Elling and Mrs. Lovell came forth and walked to the carriage, receiving respectful salutes from the people of Warbeach.

“How lovely she is!” said Robert.

“Do you think her handsome?” said Major Waring.

“I can’t understand such a creature dying.” Robert stepped over an open grave.

The expression of Percy’s eyes was bitter.

“I should imagine she thinks it just as impossible.”

The Warbeach villagers waited for Lady Elling’s carriage to roll away, and with a last glance at Robert, they too went off in gossiping groups. Robert’s penance was over, and he could not refrain from asking what good his coming to church had done.

Page 997

“I can’t assist you,” said Percy. “By the way, Mr. Blancove denies everything. He thinks you mad. He promises, now that you have adopted reasonable measures, to speak to his cousin, and help, as far as he can, to discover the address you are in search of.”

“That’s all?” cried Robert.

“That is all.”

“Then where am I a bit farther than when I began?”

“You are only at the head of another road, and a better one.”

“Oh, why do I ever give up trusting to my right hand—” Robert muttered.

But the evening brought a note to him from Algernon Blancove. It contained a dignified condemnation of Robert’s previous insane behaviour, and closed by giving Dahlia’s address in London.

“How on earth was this brought about?” Robert now questioned.

“It’s singular, is it not?” said Major blaring; “but if you want a dog to follow you, you don’t pull it by the collar; and if you want a potato from the earth, you plant the potato before you begin digging. You are a soldier by instinct, my good Robert: your first appeal is to force. I, you see, am a civilian: I invariably try the milder methods. Do you start for London tonight? I remain. I wish to look at the neighbourhood.”

Robert postponed his journey to the morrow, partly in dread of his approaching interview with Dahlia, but chiefly to continue a little longer by the side of him whose gracious friendship gladdened his life. They paid a second visit to Sutton Farm. Robert doggedly refused to let a word be said to his father about his having taken to farming, and Jonathan listened to all Major Waring said of his son like a man deferential to the accomplishment of speaking, but too far off to hear more than a chance word. He talked, in reply, quite cheerfully of the weather and the state of the ground; observed that the soil was a perpetual study, but he knew something of horses and dogs, and Yorkshiremen were like Jews in the trouble they took to over-reach in a bargain. “Walloping men is poor work, if you come to compare it with walloping Nature,” he said, and explained that, according to his opinion, “to best a man at buying and selling was as wholesome an occupation as frowzlin’ along the gutters for parings and strays.” He himself preferred to go to the heart of things: “Nature makes you rich, if your object is to do the same for her. Yorkshire fellows never think except of making theirselves rich by fattening on your blood, like sheep-ticks.” In fine, Jonathan spoke sensibly, and abused Yorkshire, without hesitating to confess that a certain Yorkshireman, against whom he had matched his wits in a purchase of horseflesh, had given him a lively recollection of the encounter.

Percy asked him what he thought of his country. "I'll tell you," said Jonathan; "Englishmen's business is to go to war with the elements, and so long as we fight them, we're in the right academy for learnin' how the game goes. Our vulnerability commences when we think we'll sit down and eat the fruits, and if I don't see signs o' that, set me mole-tunnelling. Self-indulgence is the ruin of our time."

Page 998

This was the closest remark he made to his relations with Robert, who informed him that he was going to London on the following day. Jonathan shook his hand heartily, without troubling himself about any inquiries.

“There’s so much of that old man in me,” said Robert, when Percy praised him, on their return, “that I daren’t call him a Prince of an old boy: and never a spot of rancour in his soul. Have a claim on him—and there’s your seat at his table: take and offend him—-there’s your seat still. Eat and drink, but you don’t get near his heart. I’ll surprise him some day. He fancies he’s past surprises.”

“Well,” said Percy, “you’re younger than I am, and may think the future belongs to you.”

Early next morning they parted. Robert was in town by noon. He lost no time in hurrying to the Western suburb. As he neared the house where he was to believe Dahlia to be residing, he saw a man pass through the leafless black shrubs by the iron gate; and when he came to the gate himself the man was at the door. The door opened and closed on this man. It was Nicodemus Sedgett, or Robert’s eyes did him traitorous service. He knocked at the door violently, and had to knock a second and a third time. Dahlia was denied to him. He was told that Mrs. Ayrton had lived there, but had left, and her present address was unknown. He asked to be allowed to speak a word to the man who had just entered the house. No one had entered for the last two hours, was the reply. Robert had an impulse to rush by the stolid little female liar, but Percy’s recent lesson to him acted as a restraint; though, had it been a brawny woman or a lacquey in his path, he would certainly have followed his natural counsel. He turned away, lingering outside till it was dusk and the bruise on his head gave great throbs, and then he footed desolately farther and farther from the house. To combat with evil in his own country village had seemed a simple thing enough, but it appeared a superhuman task in giant London.

CHAPTER XXV

It requires, happily, many years of an ordinary man’s life to teach him to believe in the exceeding variety and quantity of things money can buy: yet, when ingenuous minds have fully comprehended the potent character of the metal, they are likely enough to suppose that it will buy everything: after which comes the groaning anxiety to possess it.

This stage of experience is a sublime development in the great souls of misers. It is their awakening moment, and it is their first real sense of a harvest being in their hands. They have begun under the influence of the passion for hoarding, which is but a blind passion of the finger-ends. The idea that they have got together, bit by bit, a power, travels slowly up to their heavy brains. Once let it be grasped, however, and they clutch

a god. They feed on everybody's hunger for it. And, let us confess, they have in that a mighty feast.

Page 999

Anthony Hackbut was not a miser. He was merely a saving old man. His vanity was, to be thought a miser, envied as a miser. He lived in daily hearing of the sweet chink of gold, and loved the sound, but with a poetical love, rather than with the sordid desire to amass gold pieces. Though a saving old man, he had his comforts; and if they haunted him and reproached him subsequently, for indulging wayward appetites for herrings and whelks and other sea-dainties that render up no account to you when they have disappeared, he put by copper and silver continually, weekly and monthly, and was master of a sum.

He knew the breadth of this sum with accuracy, and what it would expand to this day come a year, and probably this day come five years. He knew it only too well. The sum took no grand leaps. It increased, but did not seem to multiply. And he was breathing in the heart of the place, of all places in the world, where money did multiply.

He was the possessor of twelve hundred pounds, solid, and in haven; that is, the greater part in the Bank of England, and a portion in Boyne's Bank. He had besides a few skirmishing securities, and some such bits of paper as Algernon had given him in the public-house on that remarkable night of his visit to the theatre.

These, when the borrowers were defaulters in their payments and pleaded for an extension of time, inspired him with sentiments of grandeur that the solid property could not impart. Nevertheless, the anti-poetical tendency within him which warred with the poetical, and set him reducing whatsoever he claimed to plain figures, made it but a fitful hour of satisfaction.

He had only to fix his mind upon Farmer Fleming's conception of his wealth, to feel the miserable smallness of what seemed legitimately his own; and he felt it with so poignant an emotion that at times his fears of death were excited by the knowledge of a dead man's impotence to suggest hazy margins in the final exposure of his property. There it would lie, dead as himself! contracted, coffined, contemptible!

What would the farmer think when he came to hear that his brother Tony's estate was not able to buy up Queen Anne's Farm?—when, in point of fact, he found that he had all along been the richer man of the two!

Anthony's comfort was in the unfaltering strength of his constitution. He permitted his estimate of it to hint at the probability of his outlasting his brother William John, to whom he wished no earthly ill, but only that he should not live with a mitigated veneration for him. He was really nourished by the farmer's gluttonous delight in his supposed piles of wealth. Sometimes, for weeks, he had the gift of thinking himself one of the Bank with which he had been so long connected; and afterward a wretched reaction set in.

It was then that his touch upon Bank money began to intoxicate him strangely. He had at times thousands hugged against his bosom, and his heart swelled to the money-bags

immense. He was a dispirited, but a grateful creature, after he had delivered them up. The delirium came by fits, as if a devil lurked to surprise him.

Page 1000

“With this money,” said the demon, “you might speculate, and in two days make ten times the amount.”

To which Anthony answered: “My character’s worth fifty times the amount.”

Such was his reply, but he did not think it. He was honest, and his honesty had become a habit; but the money was the only thing which acted on his imagination; his character had attained to no sacred halo, and was just worth his annual income and the respect of the law for his person. The money fired his brain!

“Ah! if it was mine!” he sighed. “If I could call it mine for just forty or fifty hours! But it ain’t, and I can’t.”

He fought dogged battles with the tempter, and beat him off again and again. One day he made a truce with him by saying that if ever the farmer should be in town of an afternoon he would steal ten minutes or so, and make an appointment with him somewhere and show him the money-bags without a word: let him weigh and eye them: and then the plan was for Anthony to talk of politics, while the farmer’s mind was in a ferment.

With this arrangement the infernal Power appeared to be content, and Anthony was temporarily relieved of his trouble. In other words, the intermittent fever of a sort of harmless rascality was afflicting this old creature. He never entertained the notion of running clear away with the money entrusted to him.

Whither could an aged man fly? He thought of foreign places as of spots that gave him a shivering sense of its being necessary for him to be born again in nakedness and helplessness, if ever he was to see them and set foot on them.

London was his home, and clothed him about warmly and honourably, and so he said to the demon in their next colloquy.

Anthony had become guilty of the imprudence of admitting him to conferences and arguing with him upon equal terms. They tell us, that this is the imprudence of women under temptation; and perhaps Anthony was pushed to the verge of the abyss from causes somewhat similar to those which imperil them, and employed the same kind of efforts in his resistance.

In consequence of this compromise, the demon by degrees took seat at his breakfast-table, when Mrs. Wicklow, his landlady, could hear Anthony talking in the tone of voice of one who was pushed to his sturdiest arguments. She conceived that the old man’s head was softening.

He was making one of his hurried rushes with the porterage of money on an afternoon in Spring, when a young female plucked at his coat, and his wrath at offenders against the law kindled in a minute into fury.

“Hands off, minx!” he cried. “You shall be given in charge. Where’s a policeman?”

“Uncle!” she said.

“You precious swindler in petticoats!” Anthony fumed.

But he had a queer recollection of her face, and when she repeated piteously: “Uncle!” he peered at her features, saying,—

Page 1001

“No!” in wonderment, several times.

Her hair was cut like a boy’s. She was in common garments, with a close-shaped skull-cap and a black straw bonnet on her head; not gloved, of ill complexion, and with deep dark lines slanting down from the corners of her eyes. Yet the inspection convinced him that he beheld Dahlia, his remembering the niece. He was amazed; but speedily priceless trust in his arms, and the wickedness of the streets, he bade her follow him. She did so with some difficulty, for he ran, and dodged, and treated the world as his enemy, suddenly vanished, and appeared again breathing freely.

“Why, my girl?” he said: “Why, Dahl—Mrs. What’s-your-name? Why, who’d have known you? Is that”—he got his eyes close to her hair; “is that the ladies’ fashion now? ’Cause, if it is, our young street scamps has only got to buy bonnets, and—I say, you don’t look the Pomp. Not as you used to, Miss Ma’am, I mean—no, that you don’t. Well, what’s the news? How’s your husband?”

“Uncle,” said Dahlia; “will you, please, let me speak to you somewhere?”

“Ain’t we standing together?”

“Oh! pray, out of the crowd!”

“Come home with me, if my lodgings ain’t too poor for you,” said Anthony.

“Uncle, I can’t. I have been unwell. I cannot walk far. Will you take me to some quiet place?”

“Will you treat me to a cab?” Anthony sneered vehemently.

“I have left off riding, uncle.”

“What! Hulloa!” Anthony sang out. “Cash is down in the mouth at home, is it? Tell me that, now?”

Dahlia dropped her eyelids, and then entreated him once more to conduct her to a quiet place where they might sit together, away from noise. She was very earnest and very sad, not seeming to have much strength.

“Do you mind taking my arm?” said Anthony.

She leaned her hand on his arm, and he dived across the road with her, among omnibuses and cabs, shouting to them through the roar,—

“We’re the Independence on two legs, warranted sound, and no competition;” and saying to Dahlia: “Lor’ bless you! there’s no retort in ’em, or I’d say something worth

hearing. It's like poking lions in cages with raw meat, afore you get a chaffing-match out o' them. Some of 'em know me. They'd be good at it, those fellows. I've heard of good things said by 'em. But there they sit, and they've got no circulation—ain't ready, except at old women, or when they catch you in a mess, and getting the worst of it. Let me tell you; you'll never get manly chaff out of big bundles o' fellows with ne'er an atom o' circulation. The river's the place for that. I've heard uncommon good things on the river—not of 'em, but heard 'em. T' other's most part invention. And, they tell me, horseback's a prime thing for chaff. Circulation, again. Sharp and lively, I mean; not bawl, and answer over your back—most part impudence, and nothing else—and then

Page 1002

out of hearing. That sort o' chaff's cowardly. Boys are stiff young parties—circulation—-and I don't tackle them pretty often, 'xcept when I'm going like a ball among nine-pins. It's all a matter o' circulation. I say, my dear," Anthony addressed her seriously, "you should never lay hold o' my arm when you see me going my pace of an afternoon. I took you for a thief, and worse—I did. That I did. Had you been waiting to see me?"

"A little," Dahlia replied, breathless.

"You have been ill?"

"A little," she said.

"You've written to the farm? O' course you have!"

"Oh! uncle, wait," moaned Dahlia.

"But, ha' you been sick, and not written home?"

"Wait; please, wait," she entreated him.

"I'll wait," said Anthony; "but that's no improvement to queerness; and 'queer''s your motto. Now we cross London Bridge. There's the Tower that lived in times when no man was safe of keeping his own money, 'cause of grasping kings—all claws and crown. I'm Republican as far as 'none o' them'—goes. There's the ships. The sun rises behind 'em, and sets afore 'em, and you may fancy, if you like, there's always gold in their rigging. Gals o' your sort think I say, come! tell me, if you are a lady?"

"No, uncle, no!" Dahlia cried, and then drawing in her breath, added: "not to you."

"Last time I crossed this bridge with a young woman hanging on my arm, it was your sister; they say she called on you, and you wouldn't see her; and a gal so good and a gal so true ain't to be got for a sister every day in the year! What are you pulling me for?"

Dahlia said nothing, but clung to him with a drooping head, and so they hurried along, until Anthony stopped in front of a shop displaying cups and muffins at the window, and leprous-looking strips of bacon, and sausages that had angled for appetites till they had become pallid sodden things, like washed-out bait.

Into this shop he led her, and they took possession of a compartment, and ordered tea and muffins.

The shop was empty.

“It’s one of the expenses of relationship,” Anthony sighed, after probing Dahlia unsatisfactorily to see whether she intended to pay for both, or at least for herself; and finding that she had no pride at all. “My sister marries your father, and, in consequence —well! a muffin now and then ain’t so very much. We’ll forget it, though it is a breach, mind, in counting up afterwards, and two-pences every day’s equal to a good big cannonball in the castle-wall at the end of the year. Have you written home?”

Dahlia’s face showed the bright anguish of unshed tears.

“Uncle-oh! speak low. I have been near death. I have been ill for so long a time. I have come to you to hear about them—my father and Rhoda. Tell me what they are doing, and do they sleep and eat well, and are not in trouble? I could not write. I was helpless. I could not hold a pen. Be kind, dear uncle, and do not reproach me. Please, tell me that they have not been sorrowful.”

Page 1003

A keenness shot from Anthony's eyes. "Then, where's your husband?" he asked.

She made a sad attempt at smiling. "He is abroad."

"How about his relations? Ain't there one among 'em to write for you when you're ill?"

"He... Yes, he has relatives. I could not ask them. Oh! I am not strong, uncle; if you will only leave following me so with questions; but tell me, tell me what I want to know."

"Well, then, you tell me where your husband banks," returned Anthony.

"Indeed, I cannot say."

"Do you," Anthony stretched out alternative fingers, "do you get money from him to make payments in gold, or, do you get it in paper?"

She stared as in terror of a pit-fall. "Paper," she said at a venture.

"Well, then, name your Bank."

There was no cunning in her eye as she answered: "I don't know any bank, except the Bank of England."

"Why the deuce didn't you say so at once—eh?" cried Anthony. "He gives you bank-notes. Nothing better in the world. And he a'n't been givin' you many lately—is that it? What's his profession, or business?"

"He is...he is no profession."

"Then, what is he? Is he a gentleman?"

"Yes," she breathed plaintively.

"Your husband's a gentleman. Eh?—and lost his money?"

"Yes."

"How did he lose it?"

The poor victim of this pertinacious interrogatory now beat about within herself for succour. "I must not say," she replied.

"You're going to try to keep a secret, are ye?" said Anthony; and she, in her relief at the pause to her torment, said: "I am," with a little infantile, withering half-smile.

“Well, you’ve been and kept yourself pretty secret,” the old man pursued. “I suppose your husband’s proud? He’s proud, ain’t he? He’s of a family, I’ll be bound. Is he of a family? How did he like your dressing up like a mill’ner gal to come down in the City and see me?”

Dahlia’s guile was not ready. “He didn’t mind,” she said.

“He didn’t mind, didn’t he? He don’t mind your cutting of your hair so?—didn’t mind that?”

She shook her head. “No.”

Anthony was down upon her like a hawk.

“Why, he’s abroad!”

“Yes; I mean, he did not see me.”

With which, in a minute, she was out of his grasp; but her heart beat thick, her lips were dry, and her thoughts were in disorder.

“Then, he don’t know you’ve been and got shaved, and a poll like a turnip-head of a thief? That’s something for him to learn, is it?”

The picture of her beauty gone, seared her eyes like heated brass. She caught Anthony’s arm with one firm hand to hold him silent, and with the other hand covered her sight and let the fit of weeping pass.

Page 1004

When the tears had spent themselves, she relinquished her hold of the astonished old man, who leaned over the table to her, and dominated by the spirit of her touch, whispered, like one who had accepted a bond of secresy: “Th’ old farmer’s well. So’s Rhoda—my darkie lass. They’ve taken on a bit. And then they took to religion for comfort. Th’ old farmer attends Methody meetin’s, and quotes Scriptur’ as if he was fixed like a pump to the Book, and couldn’t fetch a breath without quotin’. Rhoda’s oftenest along with your rector’s wife down there, and does works o’ charity, sicknussin’, readin’—old farmer does the preachin’. Old mother Sumfit’s fat as ever, and says her money’s for you. Old Gammon goes on eatin’ of the dumplins. Hey! what a queer old ancient he is. He seems to me to belong to a time afore ever money was. That Mr. Robert’s off...never been down there since he left, ’cause my darkie lass thought herself too good for him. So she is!—too good for anybody. They’re going to leave the farm; sell, and come to London.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Dahlia; “not going to leave the dear old farm, and our lane, and the old oaks, leading up to the heath. Are they? Father will miss it. Rhoda will mourn so. No place will ever be like that to them. I love it better than any place on earth.”

“That’s queer,” said Anthony. “Why do you refuse to go, or won’t let your husband take you down there; if you like the place that raving-like? But ’queer’’s your motto. The truth is this—you just listen. Hear me—hush! I won’t speak in a bawl. You’re a reasonable being, and you don’t—that’s to say, you do understand, the old farmer feels it uncomfortable—”

“But I never helped him when I was there,” said Dahlia, suddenly shrinking in a perceptible tremble of acute divination. “I was no use. I never helped him—not at all. I was no—no use!”

Anthony blinked his eyes, not knowing how it was that he had thus been thrown out of his direct road. He began again, in his circumlocutory delicacy: “Never mind; help or no help, what th’ old farmer feels is—and quite nat’ral. There’s sensations as a father, and sensations as a man; and what th’ old farmer feels is—”

“But Rhoda has always been more to father than I have,” Dahlia cried, now stretching forward with desperate courage to confront her uncle, distract his speech, and avert the saying of the horrible thing she dreaded. “Rhoda was everything to him. Mother perhaps took to me—my mother!”

The line of her long underlie drawn sharp to check her tears, stopped her speaking.

“All very well about Rhoda,” said Anthony. “She’s everything to me, too.”

“Every—everybody loves her!” Dahlia took him up.

“Let ’em, so long as they don’t do no harm to her,” was Anthony’s remark. There was an idea in this that he had said, and the light of it led off his fancy. It was some time before he returned to the attack.

Page 1005

“Neighbours gossip a good deal. O’ course you know that.”

“I never listen to them,” said Dahlia, who now felt bare at any instant for the stab she saw coming.

“No, not in London; but country’s different, and a man hearing of his child ‘it’s very odd!’ and ‘keepin’ away like that!’ and ’what’s become of her?’ and that sort of thing, he gets upset.”

Dahlia swallowed in her throat, as in perfect quietude of spirit, and pretended to see no meaning for herself in Anthony’s words.

But she said, inadvertently, “Dear father!” and it gave Anthony his opening.

“There it is. No doubt you’re fond of him. You’re fond o’ th’ old farmer, who’s your father. Then, why not make a entry into the village, and show ’em? I loves my father, says you. I can or I can’t bring my husband, you seems to say; but I’m come to see my old father. Will you go down to-morrow wi’ me?”

“Oh!” Dahlia recoiled and abandoned all defence in a moan: “I can’t—I can’t!”

“There,” said Anthony, “you can’t. You confess you can’t; and there’s reason for what’s in your father’s mind. And he hearin’ neighbours’ gossip, and it comes to him by a sort of extractin’—’Where’s her husband?’ bein’ the question; and ‘She ain’t got one,’ the answer—it’s nat’ral for him to leave the place. I never can tell him how you went off, or who’s the man, lucky or not. You went off sudden, on a morning, after kissin’ me at breakfast; and no more Dahly visible. And he suspects—he more’n suspects. Farm’s up for sale. Th’ old farmer thinks it’s unbrotherly of me not to go and buy, and I can’t make him see I don’t understand land: it’s about like changeing sovereigns for lumps o’ clay, in my notions; and that ain’t my taste. Long and the short is—people down there at Wrexby and all round say you ain’t married. He ain’t got a answer for ’em; it’s cruel to hear, and crueller to think: he’s got no answer, poor old farmer! and he’s obliged to go inter exile. Farm’s up for sale.”

Anthony thumped with his foot conclusively.

“Say I’m not married!” said Dahlia, and a bad colour flushed her countenance. “They say—I’m not married. I am—I am. It’s false. It’s cruel of father to listen to them—-wicked people! base—base people! I am married, uncle. Tell father so, and don’t let him sell the farm. Tell him, I said I was married. I am. I’m respected. I have only a little trouble, and I’m sure others have too. We all have. Tell father not to leave. It breaks my heart. Oh! uncle, tell him that from me.”

Dahlia gathered her shawl close, and set an irresolute hand upon her bonnet strings, that moved as if it had forgotten its purpose. She could say no more. She could only watch her uncle's face, to mark the effect of what she had said.

Page 1006

Anthony nodded at vacancy. His eyebrows were up, and did not descend from their elevation. “You see, your father wants assurances; he wants facts. They’re easy to give, if give ’em you can. Ah, there’s a weddin’ ring on your finger, sure enough. Plain gold—and, Lord! how bony your fingers ha’ got, Dahly. If you are a sinner, you’re a bony one now, and that don’t seem so bad to me. I don’t accuse you, my dear. Perhaps I’d like to see your husband’s banker’s book. But what your father hears, is—-You’ve gone wrong.”

Dahlia smiled in a consummate simulation of scorn.

“And your father thinks that’s true.”

She smiled with an equal simulation of saddest pity.

“And he says this: ‘Proof,’ he says, ’proof’s what I want, that she’s an honest woman.’ He asks for you to clear yourself. He says, ’It’s hard for an old man’—these are his words ’it’s hard for an old man to hear his daughter called...’”

Anthony smacked his hand tight on his open mouth.

He was guiltless of any intended cruelty, and Dahlia’s first impulse when she had got her breath, was to soothe him. She took his hand. “Dear father! poor father! Dear, dear father!” she kept saying.

“Rhoda don’t think it,” Anthony assured her.

“No?” and Dahlia’s bosom exulted up to higher pain.

“Rhoda declares you are married. To hear that gal fight for you—there’s ne’er a one in Wrexby dares so much as hint a word within a mile of her.”

“My Rhoda! my sister!” Dahlia gasped, and the tears came pouring down her face.

In vain Anthony lifted her tea-cup and the muffin-plate to her for consolation. His hushings and soothings were louder than her weeping. Incapable of resisting such a protest of innocence, he said, “And I don’t think it, neither.”

She pressed his fingers, and begged him to pay the people of the shop: at which sign of her being probably moneyless, Anthony could not help mumbling, “Though I can’t make out about your husband, and why he lets ye be cropped—that he can’t help, may be—but lets ye go about dressed like a mill’ner gal, and not afford cabs. Is he very poor?”

She bowed her head.

“Poor?”

“He is very poor.”

“Is he, or ain’t he, a gentleman?”

Dahlia seemed torn by a new anguish.

“I see,” said Anthony. “He goes and persuades you he is, and you’ve been and found out he’s nothin’ o’ the sort—eh? That’d be a way of accounting for your queerness, more or less. Was it that fellow that Wicklow gal saw ye with?”

Dahlia signified vehemently, “No.”

“Then, I’ve guessed right; he turns out not to be a gentleman—eh, Dahly? Go on noddin’, if ye like. Never mind the shop people; we’re well-conducted, and that’s all they care for. I say, Dahly, he ain’t a gentleman? You speak out or nod your head. You thought you’d caught a gentleman and ’taint the case. Gentlemen ain’t caught so easy. They all of ’em goes to school, and that makes ’em knowin’. Come; he ain’t a gentleman?”

Page 1007

Dahlia's voice issued, from a terrible inward conflict, like a voice of the tombs. "No," she said.

"Then, will you show him to me? Let me have a look at him."

Pushed from misery to misery, she struggled within herself again, and again in the same hollow manner said, "Yes."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Seein's believin'. If you'll show him to me, or me to him..."

"Oh! don't talk of it." Dahlia struck her fingers in a tight lock.

"I only want to set eye on him, my gal. Whereabouts does he live?"

"Down—down a great—very great way in the West."

Anthony stared.

She replied to the look: "In the West of London—a long way down."

"That's where he is?"

"Yes."

"I thought—hum!" went the old man suspiciously. When am I to see him? Some day?"

"Yes; some day."

"Didn't I say, Sunday?"

"Next Sunday?"—Dahlia gave a muffled cry.

"Yes, next Sunday. Day after to-morrow. And I'll write off to-morrow, and ease th' old farmer's heart, and Rhoda 'll be proud for you. She don't care about gentleman—or no gentleman. More do th' old farmer. It's let us, live and die respectable, and not disgrace father nor mother. Old-fashioned's best-fashioned about them things, I think. Come, you bring him—your husband—to me on Sunday, if you object to my callin' on you. Make up your mind to."

"Not next Sunday—the Sunday after," Dahlia pleaded. "He is not here now."

"Where is he?" Anthony asked.

“He’s in the country.”

Anthony pounced on her, as he had done previously.

“You said to me he was abroad.”

“In the country—abroad. Not—not in the great cities. I could not make known your wishes to him.”

She gave this cool explanation with her eyelids fluttering timorously, and rose as she uttered it, but with faint and ill-supporting limbs, for during the past hour she had gone through the sharpest trial of her life, and had decided for the course of her life. Anthony was witless thereof, and was mystified by his incapability of perceiving where and how he had been deluded; but he had eaten all the muffin on the plate, and her rising proclaimed that she had no intention of making him call for another; which was satisfactory. He drank off her cup of tea at a gulp.

The waitress named the sum he was to pay, and receiving a meditative look in return for her air of expectancy after the amount had been laid on the table, at once accelerated their passage from the shop by opening the door.

“If ever I did give pennies, I’d give ’em to you,” said Anthony, when he was out of her hearing. “Women beat men in guessing at a man by his face. Says she—you’re honourable—you’re legal—but prodigal ain’t your portion. That’s what she says, without the words, unless she’s a reader. Now, then, Dahly, my lass, you take my arm. Buckle to. We’ll to the West. Don’t th’ old farmer pronounce like ‘toe’ the West? We’ll ‘toe’ the West. I can afford to laugh at them big houses up there.

Page 1008

“Where’s the foundation, if one of them’s sound? Why, in the City.

“I’ll take you by our governor’s house. You know—you know—don’t ye, Dahly, know we been suspecting his nephew? ’cause we saw him with you at the theatre.

“I didn’t suspect. I knew he found you there by chance, somehow. And I noticed your dress there. No wonder your husband’s poor. He wanted to make you cut a figure as one of the handsomes, and that’s as ruinous as cabs—ha! ha!”

Anthony laughed, but did not reveal what had struck him.

“Sir William Blancove’s house is a first-rater. I’ve been in it. He lives in the library. All the other rooms—enter ’em, and if ’taint like a sort of, a social sepulchre! Dashed if he can get his son to live with him; though they’re friends, and his son’ll get all the money, and go into Parliament, and cut a shine, never fear.

“By the way, I’ve seen Robert, too. He called on me at the Bank. Asked after you.

“‘Seen her?’ says he.

“‘No,’ I says.

“‘Ever see Mr. Edward Blancove here?’ he says.

“I told him, I’d heard say, Mr. Edward was Continentalling. And then Robert goes off. His opinion is you ain’t in England; ’cause a policeman he spoke to can’t find you nowhere.

“’Come,” says I, ’let’s keep our detectives to catch thieves, and not go distracting of ’em about a parcel o’ women.’

“He’s awfully down about Rhoda. She might do worse than take him. I don’t think he’s got a ounce of a chance now Religion’s set in, though he’s the mildest big ’un I ever come across. I forgot to haul him over about what he ’d got to say about Mr. Edward. I did remark, I thought—ain’t I right?—Mr. Algernon’s not the man?—eh? How come you in the theatre with him?”

Dahlia spoke huskily. “He saw me. He had seen me at home. It was an accident.”

“Exactly how I put it to Robert. And he agreed with me. There’s sense in that young man. Your husband wouldn’t let you come to us there—eh? because he...why was that?”

Dahlia had it on her lips to say it “Because he was poorer than I thought;” but in the intensity of her torment, the wretchedness of this lie, revolted her. “Oh! for God’s sake, uncle, give me peace about that.”

The old man murmured: “Ay, ay;” and thought it natural that she should shun an allusion to the circumstance.

They crossed one of the bridges, and Dahlia stopped and said: “Kiss me, uncle.”

“I ain’t ashamed,” said Anthony.

This being over, she insisted on his not accompanying her farther.

Anthony made her pledge her word of honour as a married woman, to bring her husband to the identical spot where they stood at three o’clock in the afternoon of Sunday week. She promised it.

“I’ll write home to th’ old farmer—a penny,” said Anthony, showing that he had considered the outlay and was prepared for it.

Page 1009

“And uncle,” she stipulated in turn, “they are not to see me yet. Very soon; but not yet. Be true to me, and come alone, or it will be your fault—I shall not appear. Now, mind. And beg them not to leave the farm. It will kill father. Can you not,” she said, in the faded sweetness of her speech, “could you not buy it, and let father be your tenant, uncle? He would pay you regularly.”

Anthony turned a rough shoulder on her.

“Good-bye, Dahly. You be a good girl, and all ’ll go right. Old farmer talks about praying. If he didn’t make it look so dark to a chap, I’d be ready to fancy something in that. You try it. You try, Dahly. Say a bit of a prayer to-night.”

“I pray every night,” Dahlia answered.

Her look of meek despair was hauntingly sad with Anthony on his way home.

He tracked her sorrowfulness to the want of money; and another of his terrific vague struggles with the money-demon set in.

CHAPTER XXVI

Sir William Blancove did business at his Bank till the hour of three in the afternoon, when his carriage conveyed him to a mews near the park of Fashion, where he mounted horse and obeyed the bidding of his doctor for a space, by cantering in a pleasant, portly, cock-horsey style, up and down the Row.

It was the day of the great race on Epsom Downs, and elderly gentlemen pricked by the doctors were in the ascendant in all London congregations on horseback.

Like Achilles (if the bilious Shade will permit the impudent comparison), they dragged their enemy, Gout, at their horses’ heels for a term, and vengeance being accomplished went to their dinners and revived him.

Sir William was disturbed by his son’s absence from England. A youth to whom a baronetcy and wealth are to be bequeathed is an important organism; and Sir William, though his faith reposed in his son, was averse to his inexplicably prolonged residence in the French metropolis, which, a school for many things, is not a school for the study of our Parliamentary system, and still less for that connubial career Sir William wished him to commence.

Edward’s delightful cynical wit—the worldly man’s profundity—and his apt quotations of the wit of others, would have continued to exercise their charm, if Sir William had not wanted to have him on the spot that he might answer certain questions pertinaciously put by Mama Gosling on behalf of her daughter.

“There is no engagement,” Edward wrote; “let the maiden wait and discern her choice: let her ripen;” and he quoted Horace up to a point.

Nor could his father help smiling and completing the lines. He laughed, too, as he read the jog of a verse: “Were I to marry the Gosling, pray, which would be the goose?”

He laughed, but with a shade of disappointment in the fancy that he perceived a wearing away of the robust mental energy which had characterized his son: and Sir William knew the danger of wit, and how the sharp blade cuts the shoots of the sapling. He had thought that Edward was veritable tough oak, and had hitherto encouraged his light play with the weapon.

Page 1010

It became a question with him now, whether Wit and Ambition may dwell together harmoniously in a young man: whether they will not give such manifestation of their social habits as two robins shut in a cage will do: of which pretty birds one will presently be discovered with a slightly ruffled bosom amid the feathers of his defunct associate.

Thus painfully revolving matters of fact and feeling, Sir William cantered, and, like a cropped billow blown against by the wind, drew up in front of Mrs. Lovell, and entered into conversation with that lady, for the fine needles of whose brain he had the perfect deference of an experienced senior. She, however, did not give him comfort. She informed him that something was wrong with Edward; she could not tell what. She spoke of him languidly, as if his letters contained wearisome trifling.

“He strains to be Frenchy,” she said. “It may be a good compliment for them to receive: it’s a bad one for him to pay.”

“Alcibiades is not the best of models,” murmured Sir William. “He doesn’t mention Miss Gosling.”

“Oh dear, yes. I have a French acrostic on her name.”

“An acrostic!”

A more contemptible form of mental exercise was not to be found, according to Sir William’s judgement.

“An acrostic!” he made it guttural. “Well!”

“He writes word that he hears Moliere every other night. That can’t harm him. His reading is principally Memoirs, which I think I have heard you call ‘The backstairs of history.’ We are dull here, and I should not imagine it to be a healthy place to dwell in, if the absence of friends and the presence of sunshine conspire to dullness. Algy, of course, is deep in accounts to-day?”

Sir William remarked that he had not seen the young man at the office, and had not looked for him; but the mention of Algernon brought something to his mind, and he said, —

“I hear he is continually sending messengers from the office to you during the day. You rule him with a rod of iron. Make him discontinue that practice. I hear that he despatched our old porter to you yesterday with a letter marked ‘urgent.’”

Mrs. Lovell laughed pleadingly for Algernon.

“No; he shall not do it again. It occurred yesterday, and on no other occasion that I am aware of. He presumes that I am as excited as he is himself about the race—”

The lady bowed to a passing cavalier; a smarting blush dyed her face.

“He bets, does he!” said Sir William. “A young man, whose income, at the extreme limit, is two hundred pounds a year.”

“May not the smallness of the amount in some degree account for the betting?” she asked whimsically. “You know, I bet a little—just a little. If I have but a small sum, I already regard it as a stake; I am tempted to bid it fly.”

“In his case, such conduct puts him on the high road to rascality,” said Sir William severely. “He is doing no good.”

Page 1011

“Then the squire is answerable for such conduct, I think.”

“You presume to say that he is so because he allows his son very little money to squander? How many young men have to contain their expenses within two hundred pounds a year!”

“Not sons of squires and nephews of baronets,” said Mrs. Lovell. “Adieu! I think I see a carrier-pigeon flying overhead, and, as you may suppose, I am all anxiety.”

Sir William nodded to her. He disliked certain of her ways; but they were transparent bits of audacity and restlessness pertaining to a youthful widow, full of natural dash; and she was so sweetly mistress of herself in all she did, that he never supposed her to be needing caution against excesses. Old gentlemen have their pets, and Mrs. Lovell was a pet of Sir William’s.

She was on the present occasion quite mistress of herself, though the stake was large. She was mistress of herself when Lord Suckling, who had driven from the Downs and brushed all save a spot of white dust out of his baby moustache to make himself presentable, rode up to her to say that the horse Templemore was beaten, and that his sagacity in always betting against favourites would, in this last instance, transfer a “pot of money” from alien pockets to his own.

“Algy Blancove’s in for five hundred to me,” he said; adding with energy, “I hope you haven’t lost? No, don’t go and dash my jolly feeling by saying you have. It was a fine heat; neck-and-neck past the Stand. Have you?”

“A little,” she confessed. “It’s a failing of mine to like favourites. I’m sorry for Algy.”

“I’m afraid he’s awfully hit.”

“What makes you think so?”

“He took it so awfully cool.”

“That may mean the reverse.”

“It don’t with him. But, Mrs. Lovell, do tell me you haven’t lost. Not much, is it? Because, I know there’s no guessing, when you are concerned.”

The lady trifled with her bridle-rein.

“I really can’t tell you yet. I may have lost. I haven’t won. I’m not cool-blooded enough to bet against favourites. Addio, son of Fortune! I’m at the Opera to-night.”

As she turned her horse from Lord Suckling, the cavalier who had saluted her when she was with Sir William passed again. She made a signal to her groom, and sent the man flying in pursuit of him, while she turned and cantered. She was soon overtaken.

“Madam, you have done me the honour.”

“I wish to know why it is your pleasure to avoid me, Major Waring?”

“In this place?”

“Wherever we may chance to meet.”

“I must protest.”

“Do not. The thing is evident.”

They rode together silently.

Her face was toward the sunset. The light smote her yellow hair, and struck out her grave and offended look, as in a picture.

“To be condemned without a hearing!” she said. “The most dastardly criminal gets that. Is it imagined that I have no common feelings? Is it manly to follow me with studied insult? I can bear the hatred of fools. Contempt I have not deserved. Dead! I should be dead, if my conscience had once reproached me. I am a mark for slander, and brave men should beware of herding with despicable slanderers.”

Page 1012

She spoke, gazing frontward all the while. The pace she maintained in no degree impeded the concentrated passion of her utterance.

But it was a more difficult task for him, going at that pace, to make explanations, and she was exquisitely fair to behold! The falling beams touched her with a mellow sweetness that kindled bleeding memories.

“If I defend myself?” he said.

“No. All I ask is that you should Accuse me. Let me know what I have done—done, that I have not been bitterly punished for? What is it? what is it? Why do you inflict a torture on me whenever you see me? Not by word, not by look. You are too subtle in your cruelty to give me anything I can grasp. You know how you wound me. And I am alone.”

“That is supposed to account for my behaviour?”

She turned her face to him. “Oh, Major blaring! say nothing unworthy of yourself. That would be a new pain to me.”

He bowed. In spite of a prepossessing anger, some little softness crept through his heart.

“You may conceive that I have dropped my pride,” she said. “That is the case, or my pride is of a better sort.”

“Madam, I fully hope and trust,” said he.

“And believe,” she added, twisting his words to the ironic tongue. “You certainly must believe that my pride has sunk low. Did I ever speak to you in this manner before?”

“Not in this manner, I can attest.”

“Did I speak at all, when I was hurt?” She betrayed that he had planted a fresh sting.

“If my recollection serves me,” said he, “your self-command was remarkable.”

Mrs. Lovell slackened her pace.

“Your recollection serves you too well, Major Waring. I was a girl. You judged the acts of a woman. I was a girl, and you chose to put your own interpretation on whatever I did. You scourged me before the whole army. Was not that enough? I mean, enough for you? For me, perhaps not, for I have suffered since, and may have been set apart to suffer. I saw you in that little church at Warbeach; I met you in the lanes; I met you on the steamer; on the railway platform; at the review. Everywhere you kept up the look of

my judge. You! and I have been ‘Margaret’ to you. Major Waring, how many a woman in my place would attribute your relentless condemnation of her to injured vanity or vengeance? In those days I trifled with everybody. I played with fire. I was ignorant of life. I was true to my husband; and because I was true, and because I was ignorant, I was plunged into tragedies I never suspected. This is to be what you call a coquette. Stamping a name saves thinking. Could I read my husband’s temper? Would not a coquette have played her cards differently? There never was need for me to push my husband to a contest. I never had the power to restrain him. Now I am wiser; and now is too late; and now you sit in judgement on me. Why? It is not fair; it is unkind.”

Page 1013

Tears were in her voice, though not in her eyes.

Major Waring tried to study her with the coolness of a man who has learnt to doubt the truth of women; but he had once yearned in a young man's frenzy of love to take that delicate shape in his arms, and he was not proof against the sedate sweet face and keen sad ring of the voice.

He spoke earnestly.

"You honour me by caring for my opinion. The past is buried. I have some forgiveness to ask. Much, when I think of it—very much. I did you a public wrong. From a man to a woman it was unpardonable. It is a blot on my career. I beg you humbly to believe that I repent it."

The sun was flaming with great wings red among the vapours; and in the recollection of the two, as they rode onward facing it, arose that day of the forlorn charge of English horse in the Indian jungle, the thunder and the dust, the fire and the dense knot of the struggle. And like a ghost sweeping across her eyeballs, Mrs. Lovell beheld, part in his English freshness, part ensanguined, the image of the gallant boy who had ridden to perish at the spur of her mad whim. She forgot all present surroundings.

"Percy!" she said.

"Madam?"

"Percy!"

"Margaret?"

"Oh, what an undying day, Percy!"

And then she was speechless.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Park had been empty, but the opera-house was full; and in the brilliance of the lights and divine soaring of the music, the genius of Champagne luncheons discussed the fate of the horse Templemore; some, as a matter of remote history; some, as another delusion in horse-flesh the greater number, however, with a determination to stand by the beaten favourite, though he had fallen, and proclaim him the best of racers and an animal foully mishandled on the course. There were whispers, and hints, and assertions; now implicating the jockey, now the owner of Templemore. The Manchester party, and the Yorkshire party, and their diverse villanous tricks, came under review. Several offered to back Templemore at double the money they had lost, against the

winner. A favourite on whom money has been staked, not only has friends, but in adversity he is still believed in; nor could it well be otherwise, for the money, no doubt, stands for faith, or it would never have been put up to the risks of a forfeit.

Foremost and wildest among the excited young men who animated the stalls, and rushed about the lobby, was Algernon. He was the genius of Champagne luncheon incarnate. On him devolves, for a time, the movement of this story, and we shall do well to contemplate him, though he may seem possibly to be worthless. What is worthless, if it be well looked at? Nay, the most worthless creatures are most serviceable for examination, when the microscope is applied to them, as a simple study of human mechanism. This youth is one of great Nature's tom-fools: an elegant young gentleman outwardly, of the very large class who are simply the engines of their appetites, and, to the philosophic eye, still run wild in woods, as did the primitive nobleman that made a noise in the earlier world.

Page 1014

Algernon had this day lost ten times more than he could hope to be in a position to pay within ten years, at the least, if his father continued to argue the matter against Providence, and live. He had lost, and might speedily expect to be posted in all good betting circles as something not pleasantly odoriferous for circles where there is no betting. Nevertheless, the youth was surcharged with gaiety. The soul of mingled chicken and wine illumined his cheeks and eyes. He laughed and joked about the horse—his horse, as he called Templemore—and meeting Lord Suckling, won five sovereigns of him by betting that the colours of one of the beaten horses, Benloo, were distinguished by a chocolate bar. The bet was referred to a dignified umpire, who, a Frenchman, drew his right hand down an imperial tuft of hair dependent from his chin, and gave a decision in Algernon's favour. Lord Suckling paid the money on the spot, and Algernon pocketed it exulting. He had the idea that it was the first start in his making head against the flood. The next instant he could have pitched himself upon the floor and bellowed. For, a soul of chicken and wine, lightly elated, is easily dashed; and if he had but said to Lord Suckling that, it might as well be deferred, the thing would have become a precedent, and his own debt might have been held back. He went on saying, as he rushed forward alone: "Never mind, Suckling. Oh, hang it! put it in your pocket;" and the imperative necessity for talking, and fancying what was adverse to fact, enabled him to feel for a time as if he had really acted according to the prompting of his wisdom. It amazed him to see people sitting and listening. The more he tried it, the more unendurable it became. Those sitters and loungers appeared like absurd petrifactions to him. If he abstained from activity for ever so short a term, he was tormented by a sense of emptiness; and, as he said to himself, a man who has eaten a chicken, and part of a game-pie, and drunk thereto Champagne all day, until the popping of the corks has become as familiar as minute-guns, he can hardly be empty. It was peculiar. He stood, just for the sake of investigating the circumstance—it was so extraordinary. The music rose in a triumphant swell. And now he was sure that he was not to be blamed for thinking this form of entertainment detestable. How could people pretend to like it? "Upon my honour!" he said aloud. The hypocritical nonsense of pretending to like opera-music disgusted him.

"Where is it, Algy?" a friend of his and Suckling's asked, with a languid laugh.

"Where's what?"

"Your honour."

"My honour? Do you doubt my honour?" Algernon stared defiantly at the inoffensive little fellow.

"Not in the slightest. Very sorry to, seeing that I have you down in my book."

"Latters? Ah, yes," said Algernon, musically, and letting his under-lip hang that he might restrain the impulse to bite it. "Fifty, or a hundred, is it? I lost my book on the Downs."

Page 1015

“Fifty; but wait till settling-day, my good fellow, and don’t fiddle at your pockets as if I’d been touching you up for the money. Come and sup with me to-night.”

Algernon muttered a queer reply in a good-tempered tone, and escaped him.

He was sobered by that naming of settling-day. He could now listen to the music with attention, if not with satisfaction. As he did so, the head of drowned memory rose slowly up through the wine-bubbles in his brain, and he flung out a far thought for relief: “How, if I were to leave England with that dark girl Rhoda at Wrexby, marry her like a man, and live a wild ramping life in the colonies?” A curtain closed on the prospect, but if memory was resolved that it would not be drowned, he had at any rate dosed it with something fresh to occupy its digestion.

His opera-glass had been scouring the house for a sight of Mrs. Lovell, and at last she appeared in Lord Elling’s box.

“I can give you two minutes, Algy,” she said, as he entered and found her opportunely alone. “We have lost, I hear. No interjection, pray. Let it be, fors l’honneur, with us. Come to me to-morrow. You have tossed trinkets into my lap. They were marks of esteem, my cousin. Take them in the same light back from me. Turn them into money, and pay what is most pressing. Then go to Lord Suckling. He is a good boy, and won’t distress you; but you must speak openly to him at once. Perhaps he will help you. I will do my best, though whether I can, I have yet to learn.”

“Dear Mrs. Lovell!” Algernon burst out, and the corners of his mouth played nervously.

He liked her kindness, and he was wroth at the projected return of his gifts. A man’s gifts are an exhibition of the royalty of his soul, and they are the last things which should be mentioned to him as matters to be blotted out when he is struggling against ruin. The lady had blunt insight just then. She attributed his emotion to gratitude.

“The door may be opened at any minute,” she warned him.

“It’s not about myself,” he said; “it’s you. I believe I tempted you to back the beastly horse. And he would have won—a fair race, and he would have won easy. He was winning. He passed the stand a head ahead. He did win. It’s a scandal to the Turf. There’s an end of racing in England. It’s up. They’ve done for themselves to-day. There’s a gang. It’s in the hands of confederates.”

“Think so, if it consoles you,” said Mrs. Lovell, “don’t mention your thoughts, that is all.”

“I do think so. Why should we submit to a robbery? It’s a sold affair. That Frenchman, Baron Vistocq, says we can’t lift our heads after it.”

“He conducts himself with decency, I hope.”

“Why, he’s won!”

“Imitate him.”

Mrs. Lovell scanned the stalls.

“Always imitate the behaviour of the winners when you lose,” she resumed. “To speak of other things: I have had no letter of late from Edward. He should be anxious to return. I went this morning to see that unhappy girl. She consents.”

Page 1016

“Poor creature,” murmured Algernon; and added “Everybody wants money.”

“She decides wisely; for it is the best she can do. She deserves pity, for she has been basely used.”

“Poor old Ned didn’t mean,” Algernon began pleading on his cousin’s behalf, when Mrs. Lovell’s scornful eye checked the feeble attempt.

“I am a woman, and, in certain cases, I side with my sex.”

“Wasn’t it for you?”

“That he betrayed her? If that were so, I should be sitting in ashes.”

Algernon’s look plainly declared that he thought her a mystery.

The simplicity of his bewilderment made her smile.

“I think your colonies are the right place for you, Algy, if you can get an appointment; which must be managed by-and-by. Call on me to-morrow, as I said.”

Algernon signified positively that he would not, and doggedly refused to explain why.

“Then I will call on you,” said Mrs. Lovell.

He was going to say something angrily, when Mrs. Lovell checked him: “Hush! she is singing.”

Algernon listened to the prima donna in loathing; he had so much to inquire about, and so much to relate: such a desire to torment and be comforted!

Before he could utter a word further, the door opened, and Major Waring appeared, and he beheld Mrs. Lovell blush strangely. Soon after, Lord Elling came in, and spoke the ordinary sentence or two concerning the day’s topic—the horse Templemore. Algernon quitted the box. His ears were surcharged with sound entirely foreign to his emotions, and he strolled out of the house and off to his dingy chambers, now tenanted by himself alone, and there faced the sealed letters addressed to Edward, which had, by order, not been forwarded. No less than six were in Dahlia’s handwriting. He had imagination sufficient to conceive the lamentations they contained, and the reproach they were to his own subserviency in not sending them. He looked at the postmarks. The last one was dated two months back.

“How can she have cared a hang for Ned, if she’s ready to go and marry a yokel, for the sake of a home and respectability?” he thought, rather in scorn; and, having established this contemptuous opinion of one of the sex, he felt justified in despising all. “Just like

women! They—no! Peggy Lovell isn't. She's a trump card, and she's a coquette—-can't help being one. It's in the blood. I never saw her look so confoundedly lovely as when that fellow came into the box. One up, one down. Ned's away, and it's this fellow's turn. Why the deuce does she always think I'm a boy? or else, she pretends to. But I must give my mind to business."

He drew forth the betting-book which his lively fancy had lost on the Downs. Prompted by an afterthought, he went to the letter-box, saying,—

"Who knows? Wait till the day's ended before you curse your luck."

There was a foreign letter in it from Edward, addressed to him, and another addressed to "Mr. Blancuv," that he tore open and read with disgusted laughter. It was signed "N. Sedgett." Algernon read it twice over, for the enjoyment of his critical detection of the vile grammar, with many "Oh! by Joves!" and a concluding, "This is a curiosity!"

Page 1017

It was a countryman's letter, ill-spelt, involved, and of a character to give Algernon a fine scholarly sense of superiority altogether novel. Everybody abused Algernon for his abuse of common Queen's English in his epistles: but here was a letter in comparison with which his own were doctorial, and accordingly he fell upon it with an acrimonious rapture of pedantry known to dull wits that have by extraordinary hazard pounced on a duller.

"You're 'willing to forgeit and forgeive,' are you, you dog!" he exclaimed, half dancing. "You'd forge anything, you rascal, if you could disguise your hand—that, I don't doubt. You 'expeck the thousand pound to be paid down the day of my marriage,' do you, you impudent ruffian! 'acording to agremint.' What a mercenary vagabond this is!"

Algernon reflected a minute. The money was to pass through his hands. He compressed a desire to dispute with Sedgett that latter point about the agreement, and opened Edward's letter.

It contained an order on a firm of attorneys to sell out so much Bank Stock and pay over one thousand pounds to Mr. A. Blancove.

The beautiful concision of style in this document gave Algernon a feeling of profound deference toward the law and its officers.

"Now, that's the way to Write!" he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Accompanying this pleasant, pregnant bit of paper, possessed of such admirable literary excellence, were the following flimsy lines from Edward's self, to Algernon incomprehensible.

As there is a man to be seen behind these lines in the dull unconscious process of transformation from something very like a villain to something by a few degrees more estimable, we may as well look at the letter in full.

It begins with a neat display of consideration for the person addressed, common to letters that are dictated by overpowering egoism:—

"Dear Algy,—I hope you are working and attending regularly to office business. Look to that and to your health at present. Depend upon it, there is nothing like work. Fix your teeth in it. Work is medicine. A truism! Truisms, whether they lie in the depths of thought, or on the surface, are at any rate the pearls of experience.

"I am coming home. Let me know the instant this affair is over. I can't tell why I wait here. I fall into lethargies. I write to no one but to you. Your supposition that I am one

of the hangers-on of the coquette of her time, and that it is for her I am seeking to get free, is conceived with your usual discrimination. For Margaret Lovell? Do you imagine that I desire to be all my life kicking the beam, weighed in capricious scales, appraised to the direct nicety, petulantly taken up, probed for my weakest point, and then flung into the grate like a child's toy? That's the fate of the several asses who put on the long-eared Lovell-livery.

Page 1018

“All women are the same. Know one, know all. Aware of this, and too wise to let us study them successfully, Nature pretty language this is for you, Algy! I can do nothing but write nonsense. I am sick of life. I feel choked. After a month, Paris is sweet biscuit.

> “I have sent you the order for the money. If it were two, or twenty, thousand pounds, it would be the same to me.

“I swear to heaven that my lowest cynical ideas of women, and the loathing with which their simply animal vagaries inspires a thoughtful man, are distanced and made to seem a benevolent criticism, by the actualities of my experience. I say that you cannot put faith in a woman. Even now, I do not—it’s against reason—I do not believe that she—-this Dahlia—means to go through with it. She is trying me. I have told her that she was my wife. Her self-respect—everything that keeps a woman’s head up—must have induced her to think so. Why, she is not a fool! How can she mean to give herself to an ignorant country donkey? She does not: mark me. For her, who is a really—I may say, the most refined nature I have ever met, to affect this, and think of deceiving me, does not do credit to her wits—and she is not without her share.

“I did once mean that she should be honourably allied to me. It’s comforting that the act is not the wife of the intention, or I should now be yoked to a mere thing of the seasons and the hours—a creature whose ‘No’ to-day is the ‘Yes’ of to-morrow. Women of this cast are sure to end comfortably for themselves, they are so obedient to the whips of Providence.

“But I tell you candidly, Algy, I believe she’s pushing me, that she may see how far I will let her go. I do not permit her to play at this game with me.” The difficulty is in teaching women that we are not constituted as they are, and that we are wilfully earnest, while they, who never can be so save under compulsion, carry it on with us, expecting that at a certain crisis a curtain will drop, and we shall take a deep breath, join hands, and exclaim, ’What an exciting play!’—weeping luxuriously. The actualities of life must be branded on their backs—you can’t get their brains to apprehend them.

“Poor things! they need pity. I am ready to confess I did not keep my promise to her. I am very sorry she has been ill. Of course, having no brains—nothing but sensations wherewith to combat every new revolution of fortune, she can’t but fall ill. But I think of her; and I wish to God I did not. She is going to enter her own sphere—though, mark me, it will turn out as I say, that, when it comes to the crisis, there will be shrieks and astonishment that the curtain doesn’t fall and the whole resolve itself to what they call a dream in our language, a farce.

“I am astonished that there should be no letters for me. I can understand her

Page 1019

not writing at first; but apparently she cherishes rancour. It is not like her. I can't help thinking there must be one letter from her, and that you keep it back. I remember that I told you when I left England I desired to have no letter forwarded to me, but I have repeatedly asked you since if there was a letter, and it appears to me that you have shuffled in your answer. I merely wish to know if there is a letter; because I am at present out in my study of her character. It seems monstrous that she should never have written! Don't you view it in that light? To be ready to break with me, without one good-bye!—it's gratifying, but I am astonished; for so gentle and tender a creature, such as I knew her, never existed to compare with her. Ce qui est bien la preuve que je ne la connaissais pas! I thought I did, which was my error. I have a fatal habit of trusting to my observation less than to my divining wit; and La Rochefoucauld is right: 'on est quelquefois un sot avec de l'esprit; mais on ne Pest jamais avec du jugement.' Well! better be deceived in a character than doubt it.

"This will soon be over. Then back to the dear old dusky chambers, with the pick and the axe in the mine of law, till I strike a gold vein, and follow it to the woolsack. I want peace. I begin to hate pleading. I hope to meet Death full-wigged. By my troth, I will look as grimly at him as he at me. Meantime, during a vacation, I will give you holiday (or better, in the February days, if I can spare time and Equity is dispensed without my aid), dine you, and put you in the whirl of Paris. You deserve a holiday. Nunc est bibendum! You shall sing it. Tell me what you think of her behaviour. You are a judge of women. I think I am developing nerves. In fact, work is what I need—a file to bite. And send me also the name of this man who has made the bargain—who is to be her husband. Give me a description of him. It is my duty to see that he has principle; at least we're bound to investigate his character, if it's really to go on. I wonder whether you will ever perceive the comedy of, life. I doubt whether a man is happier when he does perceive it. Perhaps the fact is, that he has by that time lost his power of laughter; except in the case of here and there a very tremendous philosopher.

"I believe that we comic creatures suffer more than your tragic personages. We, do you see, are always looking to be happy and comfortable; but in a tragedy, the doomed wretches are liver-complexioned from the opening act. Their laughter is the owl: their broadest smile is twilight. All the menacing horrors of an eclipse are ours, for we have a sun over us; but they are born in shades, with the tuck of a curtain showing light, and little can be taken from them; so that they find scarce any terrors in the inevitable final stroke. No; the comedy is painfullest. You and I, Algy, old bachelors, will earn the right just to chuckle. We will

Page 1020

take the point of view of science, be the stage carpenters, and let the actors move on and off. By this, we shall learn to take a certain pride in the machinery. To become stage carpenter, is to attain to the highest rank within the reach of intellectual man. But your own machinery must be sound, or you can't look after that of the theatre. Don't over-tax thy stomach, O youth!

"And now, farewell, my worthy ass! You have been thinking me one through a fair half of this my letter, so I hasten to be in advance of you, by calling you one. You are one: I likewise am one. We are all one. The universal language is hee-haw, done in a grievous yawn.

"Yours,

"Edward B.

"P.S.—Don't fail to send a letter by the next post; then, go and see her; write again exactly what she says, and let me know the man's name. You will not lose a minute. Also, don't waste ink in putting Mrs. Lovell's name to paper: I desire not to hear anything of the woman."

Algernon read this letter in a profound mystification, marvelling how it could possibly be that Edward and Mrs. Lovell had quarrelled once more, and without meeting.

They had parted, he knew or supposed that he knew, under an engagement to arrange the preliminaries of an alliance, when Edward should return from France; in other words, when Edward had thrown grave-dust on a naughty portion of his past; severing an unwise connection. Such had certainly been Edward's view of the matter. But Mrs. Lovell had never spoken to Algernon on that subject. She had spoken willingly and in deep sympathy of Dahlia. She had visited her, pitied her, comforted her; and Algernon remembered that she had looked very keen and pinched about the mouth in alluding to Dahlia; but how she and Edward had managed to arrive at another misunderstanding was a prodigious puzzle to him; and why, if their engagement had snapped, each consented to let Dahlia's marriage (which was evidently distasteful to both) go on to the conclusion of the ceremony, he could not comprehend. There were, however, so many things in the world that he could not comprehend, and he had grown so accustomed, after an effort to master a difficulty, to lean his head back upon downy ignorance, that he treated this significant letter of Edward's like a tough lesson, and quietly put it by, together with every recommendation it contained. For all that was practical in it, it might just as well not have been written.

The value of the letter lies in the exhibition it presents of a rather mark-worthy young man, who has passed through the hands of a—(what I must call her; and in doing so, I ask pardon of all the Jack Cades of Letters, who, in the absence of a grammatical king

and a government, sit as lords upon the English tongue) a crucible woman. She may be inexcusable herself; but you for you to be base, for you to be cowardly, even to betray a weakness, though it be on her behalf,—though you can plead that all you have done is for her, yea, was partly instigated by her,—it will cause her to dismiss you with the inexorable contempt of Nature, when she has tried one of her creatures and found him wanting.

Page 1021

Margaret Lovell was of this description: a woman fashioned to do both harm and good, and more of harm than of good; but never to sanction a scheme of evil or blink at it in alliance with another: a woman, in contact with whom you were soon resolved to your component elements. Separated from a certain fascination that there was for her in Edward's acerb wit, she saw that he was doing a dastardly thing in cold blood. We need not examine their correspondence. In a few weeks she had contrived to put a chasm between them as lovers. Had he remained in England, boldly facing his own evil actions, she would have been subjugated, for however keenly she might pierce to the true character of a man, the show of an unflinching courage dominated her; but his departure, leaving all the brutality to be done for him behind his back, filled this woman with a cutting spleen. It is sufficient for some men to know that they are seen through, in order to turn away in loathing from her whom they have desired; and when they do thus turn away, they not uncommonly turn with a rush of old affection to those who have generously trusted them in the days past, and blindly thought them estimable beings.

Algernon was by no means gifted to perceive whether this was the case with his cousin in Paris.

CHAPTER XXIX

So long as the fool has his being in the world, he will be a part of every history, nor can I keep him from his place in a narrative that is made to revolve more or less upon its own wheels. Algernon went to bed, completely forgetting Edward and his own misfortunes, under the influence of the opiate of the order for one thousand pounds, to be delivered to him upon application. The morning found him calmly cheerful, until a little parcel was brought to his door, together with a note from Mrs. Lovell, explaining that the parcel contained those jewels, his precious gifts of what she had insultingly chosen to call "esteem" for her.

Algernon took it in his hand, and thought of flinging it through the window; but as the window happened to be open, he checked the impulse, and sent it with great force into a corner of the room: a perfectly fool-like proceeding, for the fool is, after his fashion, prudent, and will never, if he can help it, do himself thorough damage, that he may learn by it and be wiser.

"I never stand insult," he uttered, self-approvingly, and felt manlier. "No; not even from you, ma'am," he apostrophized Mrs. Lovell's portrait, that had no rival now upon the wall, and that gave him a sharp fight for the preservation of his anger, so bewitching she was to see. Her not sending up word that she wished him to come to her rendered his battle easier.

"It looks rather like a break between us," he said. "If so, you won't find me so obedient to your caprices, Mrs. Margaret L.; though you are a pretty woman, and know it. Smile

away. I prefer a staunch, true sort of a woman, after all. And the colonies it must be, I begin to suspect." This set him conjuring before his eyes the image of Rhoda, until he cried, "I'll be hanged if the girl doesn't haunt me!" and considered the matter with some curiosity.

Page 1022

He was quickly away, and across the square of Lincoln's Inn Fields to the attorney's firm, where apparently his coming was expected, and he was told that the money would be placed in his hands on the following day. He then communicated with Edward, in the brief Caesarian tongue of the telegraph: "All right. Stay. Ceremony arranged." After which, he hailed a skimming cab, and pronouncing the word "Epsom," sank back in it, and felt in his breast-pocket for his cigar-case, without casting one glance of interest at the deep fit of cogitation the cabman had been thrown into by the suddenness of the order.

"Dash'd if it ain't the very thing I went and gone and dreamed last night," said the cabman, as he made his dispositions to commence the journey.

Certain boys advised him to whip it away as hard as he could, and he would come in the winner.

"Where shall I grub, sir?" the cabman asked through the little door above, to get some knowledge of the quality of his fare.

"Eat your 'grub' on the course," said Algernon.

"Ne'er a hamper to take up nowheres, is there, sir?"

"Do you like the sight of one?"

"Well, it ain't what I object to."

"Then go fast, my man, and you will soon see plenty."

"If you took to chaffin' a bit later in the day, it'd impart more confidence to my bosom," said the cabman; but this he said to that bosom alone.

"Ain't no particular colours you'd like me to wear, is there? I'll get a rosette, if you like, sir, and enter in triumph. Gives ye something to stand by. That's always my remark, founded on observation."

"Go to the deuce! Drive on," Algernon sang out. "Red, yellow, and green."

"Lobster, ale, and salad!" said the cabman, flicking his whip; "and good colours too. Tenpenny Nail's the horse. He's the colours I stick to." And off he drove, envied of London urchins, as mortals would have envied a charioteer driving visibly for Olympus.

Algernon crossed his arms, with the frown of one looking all inward.

At school this youth had hated sums. All arithmetical difficulties had confused and sickened him. But now he worked with indefatigable industry on an imaginary slate; put

his postulate, counted probabilities, allowed for chances, added, deducted, multiplied, and unknowingly performed algebraic feats, till his brows were stiff with frowning, and his brain craved for stimulant.

This necessity sent his hand to his purse, for the calling of the cab had not been a premeditated matter. He discovered therein some half-crowns and a sixpence, the latter of which he tossed in contempt at some boys who were cheering the vehicles on their gallant career.

There was something desperately amusing to him in the thought that he had not even money enough to pay the cabman, or provide for a repast. He rollicked in his present poverty. Yesterday he had run down with a party of young guardsmen in a very royal manner; and yesterday he had lost. To-day he journeyed to the course poorer than many of the beggars he would find there; and by a natural deduction, to-day he was to win.

Page 1023

He whistled mad waltzes to the measure of the wheels. He believed that he had a star. He pitched his half-crowns to the turnpike-men, and sought to propitiate Fortune by displaying a signal indifference to small change; in which method of courting her he was perfectly serious. He absolutely rejected coppers. They “crossed his luck.” Nor can we say that he is not an authority on this point: the Goddess certainly does not deal in coppers.

Anxious efforts at recollection perplexed him. He could not remember whether he had “turned his money” on looking at the last new moon. When had he seen the last new moon, and where? A cloud obscured it; he had forgotten. He consoled himself by cursing superstition. Tenpenny Nail was to gain the day in spite of fortune. Algernon said this, and entrenched his fluttering spirit behind common sense, but he found it a cold corner. The longing for Champagne stimulant increased in fervour. Arithmetic languished.

As he was going up the hill, the wheels were still for a moment, and hearing “Tenpenny Nail” shouted, he put forth his head, and asked what the cry was, concerning that horse.

“Gone lame,” was the answer.

It hit the centre of his nerves, without reaching his comprehension, and all Englishmen being equal on Epsom Downs, his stare at the man who had spoken, and his sickly colour, exposed him to pungent remarks.

“Hullos! here’s another Ninepenny—a penny short!” and similar specimens of Epsom wit, encouraged by the winks and retorts of his driver, surrounded him; but it was empty clamour outside. A rage of emotions drowned every idea in his head, and when he got one clear from the mass, it took the form of a bitter sneer at Providence, for cutting off his last chance of reforming his conduct and becoming good. What would he not have accomplished, that was brilliant, and beautiful, and soothing, but for this dead set against him!

It was clear that Providence cared “not a rap,” whether he won or lost—was good or bad. One might just as well be a heathen; why not?

He jumped out of the cab (tearing his coat in the acts minor evil, but “all of a piece,” as he said), and made his way to the Ring. The bee-swarm was thick as ever on the golden bough. Algernon heard no curses, and began to nourish hope again, as he advanced. He began to hope wildly that this rumour about the horse was a falsity, for there was no commotion, no one declaiming.

He pushed to enter the roaring circle, which the demand for an entrance-fee warned him was a privilege, and he stammered, and forgot the gentlemanly coolness commonly distinguishing him, under one of the acuter twinges of his veteran complaint of

impecuniosity. And then the cabman made himself heard: a civil cabman, but without directions, and uncertain of his dinner and his pay, tolerably hot, also, from threading a crowd after a deaf gentleman. His half-injured look restored to Algernon his self-possession.

Page 1024

“Ah! there you are:—scurry away and fetch my purse out of the bottom of the cab. I’ve dropped it.”

On this errand, the confiding cabman retired. Holding to a gentleman’s purse is even securer than holding to a gentleman.

While Algernon was working his forefinger in his waistcoat-pocket reflectively, a man at his elbow said, with a show of familiar deference,—

“If it’s any convenience to you, sir,” and showed the rim of a gold piece ’twixt finger and thumb.

“All right,” Algernon replied readily, and felt that he was known, but tried to keep his eyes from looking at the man’s face; which was a vain effort. He took the money, nodded curtly, and passed in.

Once through the barrier, he had no time to be ashamed. He was in the atmosphere of challenges. He heard voices, and saw men whom not to challenge, or try a result with, was to acknowledge oneself mean, and to abandon the manliness of life. Algernon’s betting-book was soon out and in operation. While thus engaged, he beheld faces passing and repassing that were the promise of luncheon and a loan; and so comfortable was the assurance thereof to him, that he laid the thought of it aside, quite in the background, and went on betting with an easy mind.

Small, senseless bets, they merely occupied him; and winning them was really less satisfactory than losing, which, at all events, had the merit of adding to the bulk of his accusation against the ruling Powers unseen.

Algernon was too savage for betting when the great race was run. He refused both at taunts and cajoleries; but Lord Suckling coming by, said “Name your horse,” and, caught unawares, Algernon named Little John, one of the ruck, at a hazard. Lord Suckling gave him fair odds, asking: “In tens?—fifties?”

“Silver,” shrugged Algernon, implacable toward Fortune; and the kindly young nobleman nodded, and made allowance for his ill-temper and want of spirit, knowing the stake he had laid on the favourite.

Little John startled the field by coming in first at a canter.

“Men have committed suicide for less than this” said Algernon within his lips, and a modest expression of submission to fate settled on his countenance. He stuck to the Ring till he was haggard with fatigue. His whole nature cried out for Champagne, and now he burst away from that devilish circle, looking about for Lord Suckling and a hamper. Food and a frothing drink were all that he asked from Fortune. It seemed to him that the concourse on the downs shifted in a restless way.

“What’s doing, I wonder?” he thought aloud.

“Why, sir, the last race ain’t generally fashionable,” said his cabman, appearing from behind his shoulder. “Don’t you happen to be peckish, sir?—’cause, luck or no luck, that’s my case. I couldn’t see, your purse, nowheres.”

“Confound you! how you hang about me! What do you want?” Algernon cried; and answered his own question, by speeding the cabman to a booth with what money remained to him, and appointing a place of meeting for the return. After which he glanced round furtively to make sure that he was not in view of the man who had lent him the sovereign. It became evident that the Downs were flowing back to London.

Page 1025

He hurried along the lines of carriages, all getting into motion. The ghastly conviction overtook him that he was left friendless, to starve. Wherever he turned, he saw strangers and empty hampers, bottles, straw, waste paper—the ruins of the feast: Fate's irony meantime besetting him with beggars, who swallowed his imprecations as the earnest of coming charity in such places.

At last, he was brought almost to sigh that he might see the man who had lent him the sovereign, and his wish was hardly formed, when Nicodemus Sedgett approached, waving a hat encircled by preposterous wooden figures, a trifle less lightly attired than the ladies of the ballet, and as bold in the matter of leg as the female fashion of the period.

Algernon eyed the lumpy-headed, heavy-browed rascal with what disgust he had left in him, for one who came as an instrument of the Fates to help him to some poor refreshment. Sedgett informed him that he had never had such fun in his life.

"Just 'fore matrimony," he communicated in a dull whisper, "a fellow ought to see a bit o' the world, I says—don't you, sir? and this has been rare sport, that it has! Did ye find your purse, sir? Never mind 'bout that ther' pound. I'll lend you another, if ye like. How sh'll it be? Say the word."

Algernon was meditating, apparently on a remote subject. He nodded sharply.

"Yes. Call at my chambers to-morrow."

Another sovereign was transferred to him: but Sedgett would not be shaken off.

"I just wanted t' have a bit of a talk with you," he spoke low.

"Hang it! I haven't eaten all day," snapped the irritable young gentleman, fearful now of being seen in the rascal's company.

"You come along to the jolliest booth—I'll show it to you," said Sedgett, and lifted one leg in dancing attitude. "Come along, sir: the jolliest booth I ever was in, dang me if it ain't! Ale and music—them's my darlings!" the wretch vented his slang. "And I must have a talk with you. I'll stick to you. I'm social when I'm jolly, that I be: and I don't know a chap on these here downs. Here's the pint: Is all square? Am I t' have the cash in cash counted down, I asks? And is it to be before, or is it to be after, the ceremony? There! bang out! say, yes or no."

Algernon sent him to perdition with infinite heartiness, but he was dry, dispirited, and weak, and he walked on, Sedgett accompanying him. He entered a booth, and partook of ale and ham, feeling that he was in the dregs of calamity. Though the ale did some service in reviving, it did not cheer him, and he had a fit of moral objection to Sedgett's discourse.

Sedgett took his bluntness as a matter to be endured for the honour of hob-a-nobbing with a gentleman. Several times he recurred to the theme which he wanted, as he said, to have a talk upon.

Page 1026

He related how he had courted the young woman, “bashful-like,” and had been so; for she was a splendid young woman; not so handsome now, as she used to be when he had seen her in the winter: but her illness had pulled her down and made her humble: they had cut her hair during the fever, which had taken her pride clean out of her; and when he had put the question to her on the evening of last Sunday, she had gone into a sort of faint, and he walked away with her affirmative locked up in his breast-pocket, and was resolved always to treat her well—which he swore to.

“Married, and got the money, and the lease o’ my farm disposed of, I’m off to Australia and leave old England behind me, and thank ye, mother, thank ye! and we shan’t meet again in a hurry. And what sort o’ song I’m to sing for ’England is my nation, ain’t come across me yet. Australia’s such a precious big world; but that’ll come easy in time. And there’ll I farm, and damn all you gentlemen, if you come anigh me.”

The eyes of the fellow were fierce as he uttered this; they were rendered fierce by a peculiar blackish flush that came on his brows and cheek-bones; otherwise, the yellow about the little brown dot in the centre of the eyeball had not changed; but the look was unmistakably savage, animal, and bad. He closed the lids on them, and gave a sort of churlish smile immediately afterward.

“Harmony’s the game. You act fair, I act fair. I’ve kept to the condition. She don’t know anything of my whereabouts—res’dence, I mean; and thinks I met you in her room for the first time. That’s the truth, Mr. Blancove. And thinks me a sheepish chap, and I’m that, when I’m along wi’ her. She can’t make out how I come to call at her house and know her first. Gives up guessing, I suppose, for she’s quiet about it; and I pitch her tales about Australia, and life out there. I’ve got her to smile, once or twice. She’ll turn her hand to making cheeses, never you fear. Only, this I say. I must have the money. It’s a thousand and a bargain. No thousand, and no wife for me. Not that I don’t stand by the agreement. I’m solid.”

Algernon had no power of encountering a human eye steadily, or he would have shown the man with a look how repulsive he was to a gentleman. His sensations grew remorseful, as if he were guilty of handing a victim to the wretch.

But the woman followed her own inclination, did she not? There was no compulsion: she accepted this man. And if she could do that, pity was wasted on her!

So thought he: and so the world would think of the poor forlorn soul striving to expiate her fault, that her father and sister might be at peace, without shame.

Algernon signified to Sedgett that the agreement was fixed and irrevocable on his part.

Sedgett gulped some ale.

“Hands on it,” he said, and laid his huge hand open across the table.

This was too much.

Page 1027

“My word must satisfy you,” said Algernon, rising.

“So it shall. So it do,” returned Sedgett, rising with him. “Will you give it in writing?”

“I won’t.”

“That’s blunt. Will you come and have a look at a sparring-match in yond’ brown booth, sir?”

“I am going back to London.”

“London and the theayter that’s the fun, now, ain’t it!” Sedgett laughed.

Algernon discerned his cabman and the conveyance ready, and beckoned him.

“Perhaps, sir,” said Sedgett, “if I might make so bold—I don’t want to speak o’ them sovereigns—but I’ve got to get back too, and cash is run low. D’ ye mind, sir? Are you kind-hearted?”

A constitutional habit of servility to his creditor when present before him signalized Algernon. He detested the man, but his feebleness was seized by the latter question, and he fancied he might, on the road to London, convey to Sedgett’s mind that it would be well to split that thousand, as he had previously devised.

“Jump in,” he said.

When Sedgett was seated, Algernon would have been glad to walk the distance to London to escape from the unwholesome proximity. He took the vacant place, in horror of it. The man had hitherto appeared respectful; and in Dahlia’s presence he had seemed a gentle big fellow with a reverent, affectionate heart. Sedgett rallied him.

“You’ve had bad luck—that’s wrote on your hatband. Now, if you was a woman, I’d say, tak’ and go and have a peroose o’ your Bible. That’s what my young woman does; and by George! it’s just like medicine to her—that ‘tis! I’ve read out to her till I could ha’ swallowed two quart o’ beer at a gulp—I was that mortal thirsty. It don’t somehow seem to improve men. It didn’t do me no good. There was I, cursin’ at the bother, down in my boots, like, and she with her hands in a knot, staring the fire out o’ count’nance. They’re weak, poor sort o’ things.”

The intolerable talk of the ruffian prompted Algernon to cry out, for relief,—

“A scoundrel like you must be past any good to be got from reading his Bible.”

Sedgett turned his dull brown eyes on him, the thick and hateful flush of evil blood informing them with detestable malignity.

“Come; you be civil, if you’re going to be my companion,” he said. “I don’t like bad words; they don’t go down my windpipe. ’Scoundrel ’s a name I’ve got a retort for, and if it hadn’t been you, and you a gentleman, you’d have had it spanking hot from the end o’ my fist. Perhaps you don’t know what sort of a arm I’ve got? Just you feel that ther’ muscle.”

He doubled his arm, the knuckles of the fist toward Algernon’s face.

“Down with it, you dog!” cried Algernon, crushing his hat as he started up.

“It’ll come on your nose, if I downs with it, my lord,” said Sedgett. “You’ve what they Londoners calls ‘bonneted yourself.’”

Page 1028

He pulled Algernon by the coat-tail into his seat.

“Stop!” Algernon shouted to the cabman.

“Drive ahead!” roared Sedgett.

This signal of a dissension was heard along the main street of Epsom, and re-awakened the flagging hilarity of the road.

Algernon shrieked his commands; Sedgett thundered his. They tussled, and each having inflicted an unpleasant squeeze on the other, they came apart by mutual consent, and exchanged half-length blows. Overhead, the cabman—not merely a cabman, but an individual—flicked the flanks of his horse, and cocked his eye and head in answer to gesticulations from shop-doors and pavement.

“Let ’em fight it out, I’m impartial,” he remarked; and having lifted his little observing door, and given one glance, parrot-wise, below, he shut away the troubled prospect of those mortals, and drove along benignly.

Epsom permitted it; but Ewell contained a sturdy citizen, who, smoking his pipe under his eaves, contemplative of passers-by, saw strife rushing on like a meteor. He raised the waxed end of his pipe, and with an authoritative motion of his head at the same time, pointed out the case to a man in a donkey-cart, who looked behind, saw pugnacity upon wheels, and manoeuvred a docile and wonderfully pretty-stepping little donkey in such a manner that the cabman was fain to pull up.

The combatants jumped into the road.

“That’s right, gentlemen; I don’t want to spile sport,” said the donkey’s man. “O’ course you ends your Epsom-day with spirit.”

“There’s sunset on their faces,” said the cabman. “Would you try a by-lane, gentlemen?”

But now the donkey’s man had inspected the figures of the antagonistic couple.

“Taint fair play,” he said to Sedgett. “You leave that gentleman alone, you, sir?”

The man with the pipe came up.

“No fighting,” he observed. “We ain’t going to have our roads disgraced. It shan’t be said Englishmen don’t know how to enjoy themselves without getting drunk and disorderly. You drop your fists.”

The separation had to be accomplished by violence, for Algernon’s blood was up.

A crowd was not long in collecting, which caused a stoppage of vehicles of every description.

A gentleman leaned from an open carriage to look at the fray critically, and his companion stretching his neck to do likewise, “Sedgett!” burst from his lips involuntarily.

The pair of original disputants (for there were many by this time) turned their heads simultaneously toward the carriage.

“Will you come on?” Sedgett roared, but whether to Algernon, or to one of the gentlemen, or one of the crowd, was indefinite. None responding, he shook with ox-like wrath, pushed among shoulders, and plunged back to his seat, making the cabman above bound and sway, and the cab-horse to start and antic.

Greatly to the amazement of the spectators, the manifest gentleman (by comparison) who had recently been at a pummelling match with him, and bore the stains of it, hung his head, stepped on the cab, and suffered himself to be driven away.

Page 1029

“Sort of a ‘man-and-wife’ quarrel,” was the donkey’s man’s comment. “There’s something as corks ’em up, and something uncorks ’em; but what that something is, I ain’t, nor you ain’t, man enough to inform the company.”

He rubbed his little donkey’s nose affectionately.

“Any gentleman open to a bet I don’t overtake that ere Hansom within three miles o’ Ewell?” he asked, as he took the rein.

But his little donkey’s quality was famous in the neighbourhood.

“Come on, then,” he said; “and show what you can do, without emilation, Master Tom.”

Away the little donkey trotted.

CHAPTER XXX

Those two in the open carriage, one of whom had called out Sedgett’s name, were Robert and Major Waring. When the cab had flown by, they fell back into their seats, and smoked; the original stipulation for the day having been that no harassing matter should be spoken of till nightfall.

True to this, Robert tried to think hard on the scene of his recent enjoyment. Horses were to him what music is to a poet, and the glory of the Races he had witnessed was still quick in heart, and partly counteracted his astonishment at the sight of his old village enemy in company with Algernon Blancove.

It was not astonishing at all to him that they should have quarrelled and come to blows; for he knew Sedgett well, and the imperative necessity for fighting him, if only to preserve a man’s self-respect and the fair division of peace, when once he had been allowed to get upon terms sufficiently close to assert his black nature; but how had it come about? How was it that a gentleman could consent to appear publicly with such a fellow? He decided that it meant something, and something ominous—but what? Whom could it affect? Was Algernon Blancove such a poor creature that, feeling himself bound by certain dark dealings with Sedgett to keep him quiet, he permitted the bullying dog to hang to his coat-tail? It seemed improbable that any young gentleman should be so weak, but it might be the case; and “if so,” thought Robert, “and I let him know I bear him no ill-will for setting Sedgett upon me, I may be doing him a service.”

He remembered with pain Algernon’s glance of savage humiliation upward, just before he turned to follow Sedgett into the cab; and considered that he ought in kindness to see him and make him comfortable by apologizing, as if he himself had no complaint to make.

He resolved to do it when the opportunity should come. Meantime, what on earth brought them together?

“How white the hedges are!” he said.

“There’s a good deal of dust,” Major Waring replied.

“I wasn’t aware that cabs came to the races.”

“They do, you see.”

Robert perceived that Percy meant to fool him if he attempted a breach of the bond; but he longed so much for Percy’s opinion of the strange alliance between Sedgett and Algernon Blancove, that at any cost he was compelled to say, “I can’t get to the bottom of that.”

Page 1030

“That squabble in the road?” said Percy. “We shall see two or three more before we reach home.”

“No. What’s the meaning of a gentleman consorting with a blackguard?” Robert persisted.

“One or the other has discovered an assimilation, I suppose,” Percy gave answer. “That’s an odd remark on returning from Epsom. Those who jump into the same pond generally come out the same colour.”

Robert spoke low.

“Has it anything to do with the poor girl, do you think?”

“I told you I declined to think till we were home again. Confound it, man, have you no idea of a holiday?”

Robert puffed his tobacco-smoke.

“Let’s talk of Mrs. Lovell,” he said.

“That’s not a holiday for me,” Percy murmured but Robert’s mind was too preoccupied to observe the tone, and he asked,—

“Is she to be trusted to keep her word faithfully this time?”

“Come,” said Percy, “we haven’t betted to-day. I’ll bet you she will, if you like. Will you bet against it?”

“I won’t. I can’t nibble at anything. Betting’s like drinking.”

“But you can take a glass of wine. This sort of bet is much the same. However, don’t; for you would lose.”

“There,” said Robert; “I’ve heard of being angry with women for fickleness, changeableness, and all sorts of other things. She’s a lady I couldn’t understand being downright angry with, and here’s the reason—it ain’t a matter of reason at all—she fascinates me. I do, I declare, clean forget Rhoda; I forget the girl, if only I see Mrs. Lovell at a distance. How’s that? I’m not a fool, with nonsensical fancies of any kind. I know what loving a woman is; and a man in my position might be ass enough to—all sorts of things. It isn’t that; it’s fascination. I’m afraid of her. If she talks to me, I feel something like having gulped a bottle of wine. Some women you have a respect for; some you like or you love; some you despise: with her, I just feel I’m intoxicated.”

Major Waring eyed him steadily. He said: “I’ll unriddle it, if I can, to your comprehension. She admires you for what you are, and she lets you see it; I dare say she’s not unwilling that you should see it. She has a worship for bravery: it’s a deadly passion with her.”

Robert put up a protesting blush of modesty, as became him. “Then why, if she does me the honour to think anything of me, does she turn against me?”

“Ah! now you go deeper. She is giving you what assistance she can; at present: be thankful, if you can be satisfied with her present doings. Perhaps I’ll answer the other question by-and-by. Now we enter London, and our day is over. How did you like it?”

Robert’s imagination rushed back to the downs.

“The race was glorious. I wish we could go at that pace in life; I should have a certainty of winning. How miserably dull the streets look; and the people creep along—they creep, and seem to like it. Horseback’s my element.”

Page 1031

They drove up to Robert's lodgings, where, since the Winter, he had been living austerely and recklessly; exiled by his sensitiveness from his two homes, Warbeach and Wrexby; and seeking over London for Dahlia—a pensioner on his friend's bounty; and therein had lain the degrading misery to a man of his composition. Often had he thought of enlisting again, and getting drafted to a foreign station. Nothing but the consciousness that he was subsisting on money not his own would have kept him from his vice. As it was, he had lived through the months between Winter and Spring, like one threading his way through the tortuous lengths of a cavern; never coming to the light, but coming upon absurd mishaps in his effort to reach it. His adventures in London partook somewhat of the character of those in Warbeach, minus the victim; for whom two or three gentlemen in public thoroughfares had been taken. These misdemeanours, in the face of civil society, Robert made no mention of in his letters to Percy.

But there was light now, though at first it gave but a faint glimmer, in a lady's coloured envelope, lying on the sitting-room table. Robert opened it hurriedly, and read it; seized Dahlia's address, with a brain on fire, and said:

"It's signed 'Margaret Lovell.' This time she calls me 'Dear Sir.'"

"She could hardly do less," Percy remarked.

"I know: but there is a change in her. There's a summer in her writing now. She has kept her word, Percy. She's the dearest lady in the world. I don't ask why she didn't help me before."

"You acknowledge the policy of mild measures," said Major Waring.

"She's the dearest lady in the world," Robert repeated. He checked his enthusiasm. "Lord in heaven! what an evening I shall have."

The thought of his approaching interview with Dahlia kept him dumb.

As they were parting in the street, Major Waring said, "I will be here at twelve. Let me tell you this, Robert: she is going to be married; say nothing to dissuade her; it's the best she can do; take a manly view of it. Good-bye."

Robert was but slightly affected by the intelligence. His thoughts were on Dahlia as he had first seen her, when in her bloom, and the sister of his darling; now miserable; a thing trampled to earth! With him, pity for a victim soon became lost in rage at the author of the wrong, and as he walked along he reflected contemptuously on his feeble efforts to avenge her at Warbeach. She lived in a poor row of cottages, striking off from one of the main South-western suburb roads, not very distant from his own lodgings, at which he marvelled, as at a cruel irony. He could not discern the numbers, and had to

turn up several of the dusky little strips of garden to read the numbers on the doors. A faint smell of lilac recalled the country and old days, and some church bells began ringing. The number of the house where he was to find Dahlia was seven. He was at the door of the house next to it, when he heard voices in the garden beside him.

Page 1032

A man said, “Then I have your answer?”

A woman said, “Yes; yes.”

“You will not trust to my pledged honour?”

“Pardon me; not that. I will not live in disgrace.”

“When I promise, on my soul, that the moment I am free I will set you right before the world?”

“Oh! pardon me.”

“You will?”

“No; no! I cannot.”

“You choose to give yourself to an obscure dog, who’ll ill-treat you, and for whom you don’t care a pin’s-head; and why? that you may be fenced from gossip, and nothing more. I thought you were a woman above that kind of meanness. And this is a common countryman. How will you endure that kind of life? You were made for elegance and happiness: you shall have it. I met you before your illness, when you would not listen to me: I met you after. I knew you at once. Am I changed? I swear to you I have dreamed of you ever since, and love you. Be as faded as you like; be hideous, if you like; but come with me. You know my name, and what I am. Twice I have followed you, and found your name and address; twice I have written to you, and made the same proposal. And you won’t trust to my honour? When I tell you I love you tenderly? When I give you my solemn assurance that you shall not regret it? You have been deceived by one man: why punish me? I know—I feel you are innocent and good. This is the third time that you have permitted me to speak to you: let it be final. Say you will trust yourself to me—trust in my honour. Say it shall be to-morrow. Yes; say the word. To-morrow. My sweet creature—do!”

The man spoke earnestly, but a third person and extraneous hearer could hardly avoid being struck by the bathetic conclusion. At least, in tone it bordered on a fall; but the woman did not feel it so.

She replied: “You mean kindly to me, sir. I thank you indeed, for I am very friendless. Oh! pardon me: I am quite—quite determined. Go—pray, forget me.”

This was Dahlia’s voice.

Robert was unconscious of having previously suspected it. Heartily ashamed of letting his ears be filled with secret talk, he went from the garden and crossed the street.

He knew this to be one of the temptations of young women in London.

Shortly after, the man came through the iron gateway of the garden. He passed under lamplight, and Robert perceived him to be a gentleman in garb.

A light appeared in the windows of the house. Now that he had heard her voice, the terrors of his interview were dispersed, and he had only plain sadness to encounter. He knocked at the door quietly. There was a long delay after he had sent in his name; but finally admission was given.

“If I had loved her!” groaned Robert, before he looked on her; but when he did look on her, affectionate pity washed the selfish man out of him. All these false sensations, peculiar to men, concerning the soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence; the brand of shame upon her, which are commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when occasion suits, and are another side of pruriency, not absolutely foreign to the best of us in our youth—all passed away from him in Dahlia’s presence.

Page 1033

The young man who can look on them we call fallen women with a noble eye, is to my mind he that is most nobly begotten of the race, and likeliest to be the sire of a noble line. Robert was less than he; but Dahlia's aspect helped him to his rightful manliness. He saw that her worth survived.

The creature's soul had put no gloss upon her sin. She had sinned, and her suffering was manifest.

She had chosen to stand up and take the scourge of God; after which the stones cast by men are not painful.

By this I mean that she had voluntarily stripped her spirit bare of evasion, and seen herself for what she was; pleading no excuse. His scourge is the Truth, and she had faced it.

Innumerable fanciful thoughts, few of them definite, beset the mind at interviews such as these; but Robert was distinctly impressed by her look. It was as that of one upon the yonder shore. Though they stood close together, he had the thought of their being separate—a gulf between.

The colourlessness of her features helped to it, and the odd little close-fitting white linen cap which she wore to conceal the stubborn-twisting clipped curls of her shorn head, made her unlike women of our world. She was dressed in black up to the throat. Her eyes were still luminously blue, and she let them dwell on Robert one gentle instant, giving him her hand humbly.

"Dahlia!—my dear sister, I wish I could say; but the luck's against me," Robert began.

She sat, with her fingers locked together in her lap, gazing forward on the floor, her head a little sideways bent.

"I believe," he went on—"I haven't heard, but I believe Rhoda is well."

"She and father are well, I know," said Dahlia.

Robert started: "Are you in communication with them?"

She shook her head. "At the end of some days I shall see them."

"And then perhaps you'll plead my cause, and make me thankful to you for life, Dahlia?"

"Rhoda does not love you."

"That's the fact, if a young woman's to be trusted to know her own mind, in the first place, and to speak it, in the second."

Dahlia, closed her lips. The long-lined underlip was no more very red. Her heart knew that it was not to speak of himself that he had come; but she was poor-witted, through weakness of her blood, and out of her own immediate line of thought could think neither far nor deep. He entertained her with talk of his notions of Rhoda, finishing:

“But at the end of a week you will see her, and I dare say she’ll give you her notions of me. Dahlia! how happy this’ll make them. I do say thank God! from my soul, for this.”

She pressed her hands in her lap, trembling. “If you will, please, not speak of it, Mr. Robert.”

“Say only you do mean it, Dahlia. You mean to let them see you?”

She shivered out a “Yes.”

“That’s right. Because, a father and a sister—haven’t they a claim? Think a while. They’ve had a terrible time. And it’s true that you’ve consented to a husband, Dahlia? I’m glad, if it is; and he’s good and kind. Right soul-glad I am.”

Page 1034

While he was speaking, her eyelids lifted and her eyes became fixed on him in a stony light of terror, like a creature in anguish before her executioner. Then again her eyelids dropped. She had not moved from her still posture.

“You love him?” he asked, in some wonderment.

She gave no answer.

“Don’t you care for him?”

There was no reply.

“Because, Dahlia, if you do not I know I have no right to fancy you do not. How is it? Tell me. Marriage is an awful thing, where there’s no love. And this man, whoever he is—is he in good circumstances? I wouldn’t speak of him; but, you see, I must, as your friend—and I’m that. Come: he loves you? Of course he does. He has said so. I believe it. And he’s a man you can honour and esteem? You wouldn’t consent without, I’m sure. What makes me anxious—I look on you as my sister, whether Rhoda will have it so or not; I’m anxious because—I’m anxious it should be over, for then Rhoda will be proud of the faith she had in you, and it will lighten the old man’s heart.”

Once more the inexplicable frozen look struck over him from her opened eyes, as if one of the minutes of Time had yawned to show him its deep, mute, tragic abyss, and was extinguished.

“When does it take place, Dahlia?”

Her long underlip, white almost as the row of teeth it revealed, hung loose.

“When?” he asked, leaning forward to hear, and the word was “Saturday,” uttered with a feeble harshness, not like the gentle voice of Dahlia.

“This coming Saturday?”

“No.”

“Saturday week?”

She fell into a visible trembling.

“You named the day?”

He pushed for an indication of cheerful consent to the act she was about to commit, or of reluctance.

Possibly she saw this, for now she answered, “I did.” The sound was deep in her throat.

“Saturday week,” said Robert. “I feel to the man as a brother, already. Do you live—-you’ll live in the country?”

“Abroad.”

“Not in Old England? I’m sorry for that. But—well! Things must be as they’re ordered. Heigho! I’ve got to learn it.”

Dahlia smiled kindly.

“Rhoda will love you. She is firm when she loves.”

“When she loves. Where’s the consolation to me?”

“Do you think she loves me as much—as much”

“As much as ever? She loves her sister with all her heart—all, for I haven’t a bit of it.”

“It is because,” said Dahlia slowly, “it is because she thinks I am—”

Here the poor creature’s bosom heaved piteously.

“What has she said of me? I wish her to have blamed me—it is less pain.”

Page 1035

“Listen,” said Robert. “She does not, and couldn’t blame you, for it’s a sort of religion with her to believe no wrong of you. And the reason why she hates me is, that I, knowing something more of the world, suspected, and chose to let her know it—I said it, in fact—that you had been deceived by a—But this isn’t the time to abuse others. She would have had me, if I had thought proper to think as she thinks, or play hypocrite, and pretend to. I’ll tell you openly, Dahlia; your father thinks the worst. Ah! you look the ghost again. It’s hard for you to hear, but you give me a notion of having got strength to hear it. It’s your father’s way to think the worst. Now, when you can show him your husband, my dear, he’ll lift his head. He’s old English. He won’t dream of asking questions. He’ll see a brave and honest young man who must love you, or—he does love you, that’s settled. Your father’ll shake his hand, and as for Rhoda, she’ll triumph. The only person to speak out to, is the man who marries you, and that you’ve done.”

Robert looked the interrogation he did not utter.

“I have,” said Dahlia.

“Good: if I may call him brother, some day, all the better for me. Now, you won’t leave England the day you’re married.”

“Soon. I pray that it may be soon.”

“Yes; well, on that morning, I’ll have your father and Rhoda at my lodgings, not wide from here: if I’d only known it earlier!—and you and your husband shall come there and join us. It’ll be a happy meeting at last.”

Dahlia stopped her breathing.

“Will you see Rhoda?”

“I’ll go to her to-morrow, if you like.”

“If I might see her, just as I am leaving England! not before.”

“That’s not generous,” said Robert.

“Isn’t it?” she asked like a child.

“Fancy!—to see you she’s been longing for, and the ship that takes you off, perhaps everlastingly, as far as this world’s concerned!”

“Mr. Robert, I do not wish to deceive my sister. Father need not be distressed. Rhoda shall know. I will not be guilty of falsehoods any more—no more! Will you go to her? Tell her—tell Rhoda what I am. Say I have been ill. It will save her from a great shock.”

She covered her eyes.

“I said in all my letters that my husband was a gentleman.”

It was her first openly penitential utterance in his presence, and her cheeks were faintly reddened. It may have been this motion of her blood which aroused the sunken humanity within her; her heart leaped, and she cried “I can see her as I am, I can. I thought it impossible. Oh! I can. Will she come to me? My sister is a Christian and forgives. Oh! let me see her. And go to her, dear Mr. Robert, and ask her—tell her all, and ask her if I may be spared, and may work at something—anything, for my livelihood near my sister. It is difficult for women to earn money, but I think I can. I have done so since

Page 1036

my illness. I have been in the hospital with brain fever. He was lodging in the house with me before. He found me at the hospital. When I came out, he walked with me to support me: I was very weak. He read to me, and then asked me to marry him. He asked again. I lay in bed one night, and with my eyes open, I saw the dangers of women, and the trouble of my father and sister; and pits of wickedness. I saw like places full of snakes. I had such a yearning for protection. I gave him my word I would be his wife, if he was not ashamed of a wife like me. I wished to look once in father's face. I had fancied that Rhoda would spurn me, when she discovered my falsehood. She—sweet dear! would she ever? Go to her. Say, I do not love any man. I am heart-dead. I have no heart except for her. I cannot love a husband. He is good, and it is kind: but, oh! let me be spared. His face!—"

She pressed her hands tight into the hollow of her eyes.

"No; it can't be meant. Am I very ungrateful? This does not seem to be what God orders. Only if this must be! only if it must be! If my sister cannot look on me without! He is good, and it is unselfish to take a moneyless, disgraced creature: but, my misery! —If my sister will see me, without my doing this!—Go to her, Mr. Robert. Say, Dahlia was false, and repents, and has worked with her needle to subsist, and can, and will, for her soul strives to be clean. Try to make her understand. If Rhoda could love you, she would know. She is locked up—she is only ideas. My sweet is so proud. I love her for her pride, if she will only let me creep to her feet, kiss her feet. Dear Mr. Robert, help me! help me! I will do anything she says. If she says I am to marry him, I will. Don't mind my tears—they mean nothing now. Tell my dear, I will obey her. I will not be false any more to her. I wish to be quite stripped. And Rhoda may know me, and forgive me, if she can. And—Oh! if she thinks, for father's sake, I ought, I will submit and speak the words; I will; I am ready. I pray for mercy."

Robert sat with his fist at his temples, in a frowning meditation.

Had she declared her reluctance to take the step, in the first moments of their interview, he might have been ready to support her: but a project fairly launched becomes a reality in the brain—a thing once spoken of attracts like a living creature, and does not die voluntarily. Robert now beheld all that was in its favour, and saw nothing but flighty flimsy objections to it. He was hardly moved by her unexpected outburst.

Besides, there was his own position in the case. Rhoda would smile on him, if he brought Dahlia to her, and brought her happy in the world's eye. It will act as a sort of signal for general happiness. But if he had to go and explain matters base and mournful to her, there would be no smile on her face, and not much gratitude in her breast. There would be none for a time, certainly. Proximity to her faded sister made him conceive her attainable, and thrice precious by contrast.

Page 1037

He fixed his gaze on Dahlia, and the perfect refinement of her simplicity caused him to think that she might be aware of an inappropriateness in the contemplated union.

“Is he a clumsy fellow? I mean, do you read straight off that he has no pretension to any manners of a gentleman—nothing near it?”

To this question, put with hesitation by Robert, Dahlia made answer, “I respect him.”

She would not strengthen her prayer by drawing the man’s portrait. Speedily she forgot how the doing so would in any way have strengthened her prayer. The excitement had left her brain dull. She did little more than stare mildly, and absently bend her head, while Robert said that he would go to Rhoda on the morrow, and speak seriously with her.

“But I think I can reckon her ideas will side with mine, that it is to your interest, my dear, to make your feelings come round warm to a man you can respect, and who offers you a clear path,” he said.

Whereat Dahlia quietly blinked her eyes.

When he stood up, she rose likewise.

“Am I to take a kiss to Rhoda?” he said, and seeing her answer, bent his forehead, to which she put her lips.

“And now I must think all night long about the method of transferring it. Good-bye, Dahlia. You shall hear from your sister the morning after to-morrow. Good-bye!”

He pressed her hand, and went to the door.

“There’s nothing I can do for you, Dahlia?”

“Not anything.”

“God bless you, my dear!”

Robert breathed with the pleasant sense of breathing, when he was again in the street. Amazement, that what he had dreaded so much should be so easily over, set him thinking, in his fashion, on the marvels of life, and the naturalness in the aspect of all earthly things when you look at them with your eyes.

But in the depths of his heart there was disquiet.

“It’s the best she can do; she can do no better,” he said; and said it more frequently than it needed by a mind established in the conviction. Gradually he began to feel that

certain things seen with the eyes, natural as they may then appear and little terrible, leave distinct, solid, and grave impressions. Something of what our human tragedy may show before high heaven possessed him. He saw it bare of any sentiment, in the person of the girl Dahlia. He could neither put a halo of imagination about her, nor could he conceive one degraded thought of the creature. She stood a naked sorrow, haunting his brain.

And still he continued saying, “It’s the best she can do: it’s best for all. She can do nothing better.”

He said it, unaware that he said it in self-defence.

The pale nun-like ghostly face hung before him, stronger in outline the farther time widened between him and that suffering flesh.

CHAPTER XXXI

The thousand pounds were in Algernon’s hands at last. He had made his escape from Boyne’s Bank early in the afternoon, that he might obtain the cheque and feel the money in his pocket before that day’s sun was extinguished. There was a note for five hundred; four notes for a hundred severally; and two fifties. And all had come to him through the mere writing down of his name as a recipient of the sum!

Page 1038

It was enough to make one in love with civilization. Money, when it is once in your pocket, seems to have come there easily, even if you have worked for it; but if you have done no labour whatever, and still find it there, your sensations (supposing you to be a butterfly youth—the typical child of a wealthy country) exult marvellously, and soar above the conditions of earth.

He knew the very features of the notes. That gallant old Five Hundred, who might have been a Thousand, but that he had nobly split himself into centurions and skirmishers, stood in his imaginative contemplation like a grand white-headed warrior, clean from the slaughter and in court-ruffles—say, Blucher at the court of the Waterloo Regent. The Hundreds were his Generals; the Fifties his captains; and each one was possessed of unlimited power of splitting himself into serviceable regiments, at the call of his lord, Algernon.

He scarcely liked to make the secret confession that it was the largest sum he had ever as yet carried about; but, as it heightened his pleasure, he did confess it for half an instant. Five Hundred in the bulk he had never attained to. He felt it as a fortification against every mishap in life.

To a young man commonly in difficulties with regard to the paying of his cabman, and latterly the getting of his dinner, the sense of elevation imparted by the sum was intoxicating. But, thinking too much of the Five Hundred waxed dangerous for the fifties; it dwarfed them to such insignificance that it made them lose their self-respect. So, Algernon, pursuing excellent tactics, set his mind upon some stray shillings that he had a remainder of five pounds borrowed from old Anthony, when he endeavoured to obtain repayment of the one pound and interest dating from the night at the theatre. Algernon had stopped his mouth on that point, as well as concerning his acquaintance with Dahlia, by immediately attempting to borrow further, whenever Anthony led the way for a word in private. A one-pound creditor had no particular terrors for him, and he manoeuvred the old man neatly, saying, as previously, “Really, I don’t know the young person you allude to: I happened to meet her, or some one like her, casually,” and dropping his voice, “I’m rather short—what do you think? Could you?—a trifling accommodation?” from which Anthony fled.

But on the day closing the Epsom week he beckoned Anthony secretly to follow him out of the office, and volunteered to give news that he had just heard of Dahlia.

“Oh,” said Anthony, “I’ve seen her.”

“I haven’t,” said Algernon, “upon my honour.”

“Yes, I’ve seen her, sir, and sorry to hear her husband’s fallen a bit low.” Anthony touched his pocket. “What they calls ‘nip’ tides, ain’t it?”

Algernon sprang a compliment under him, which sent the vain old fellow up, whether he would or not, to the effect that Anthony's tides were not subject to lunar influence.

Page 1039

“Now, Mr. Blancove, you must change them notions o’ me. I don’t say I shouldn’t be richer if I’d got what’s owing to me.”

“You’d have to be protected; you’d be Bullion on two legs,” said Algernon, always shrewd in detecting a weakness. “You’d have to go about with sentries on each side, and sleep in an iron safe!”

The end of the interview was a visit to the public-house, and the transferring of another legal instrument from Algernon to Anthony. The latter departed moaning over his five pounds ten shillings in paper; the former rejoicing at his five pounds in gold. That day was Saturday. On Monday, only a few shillings of the five pounds remained; but they were sufficient to command a cab, and, if modesty in dining was among the prescriptions for the day, a dinner. Algernon was driven to the West.

He remembered when he had plunged in the midst of the fashionable whirlpool, having felt reckless there formerly, but he had become remarkably sedate when he stepped along the walks. A certain equipage, or horse, was to his taste, and once he would have said: “That’s the thing for me;” being penniless. Now, on the contrary, he reckoned the possible cost, grudgingly, saying “Eh?” to himself, and responding “No,” faintly, and then more positively, “Won’t do.”

He was by no means acting as one on a footing of equality with the people he beholds. A man who is ready to wager a thousand pounds that no other man present has that amount in his pocket, can hardly feel unequal to his company.

Charming ladies on horseback cantered past. “Let them go,” he thought. Yesterday, the sight of one would have set him dreaming on grand alliances. When you can afford to be a bachelor, the case is otherwise. Presently, who should ride by but Mrs. Lovell! She was talking more earnestly than was becoming, to that easy-mannered dark-eyed fellow; the man who had made him savage by entering the opera-box.

“Poor old Ned!” said Algernon; “I must put him on his guard.” But, even the lifting of a finger—a hint on paper—would bring Edward over from Paris, as he knew; and that was not in his scheme; so he only determined to write to his cousin.

A flood of evening gold lay over the Western park.

“The glory of this place,” Algernon said to himself, “is, that you’re sure of meeting none but gentlemen here;” and he contrasted it with Epsom Downs.

A superstitious horror seized him when, casting his eyes ahead, he perceived Sedgett among the tasteful groups—as discordant a figure as could well be seen, and clumsily aware of it, for he could neither step nor look like a man at ease. Algernon swung round and retraced his way; but Sedgett had long sight.

“I’d heard of London”—Algernon soon had the hated voice in his ears,—“and I’ve bin up to London b’fore; I came here to have a wink at the fash’nables—hang me, if ever I see such a scrumptious lot. It’s worth a walk up and down for a hour or more. D’ you come heer often, sir?”

Page 1040

“Eh? Who are you? Oh!” said Algernon, half mad with rage. “Excuse me;” and he walked faster.

“Fifty times over,” Sedgett responded cheerfully. “I’d pace you for a match up and down this place if you liked. Ain’t the horses a spectacle? I’d rather be heer than there at they Races. As for the ladies, I’ll tell you what: ladies or no ladies, give my young woman time for her hair to grow; and her colour to come, by George! if she wouldn’t shine against e’er a one—smite me stone blind, if she wouldn’t! So she shall! Australia’ll see. I owe you my thanks for interdoocin’ me, and never fear my not remembering.”

Where there was a crowd, Algernon could elude his persecutor by threading his way rapidly; but the open spaces condemned him to merciless exposure, and he flew before eyes that his imagination exaggerated to a stretch of supernatural astonishment. The tips of his fingers, the roots of his hair, pricked with vexation, and still, manoeuvre as he might, Sedgett followed him.

“Call at my chambers,” he said sternly.

“You’re never at home, sir.”

“Call to-morrow morning, at ten.”

“And see a great big black door, and kick at it till my toe comes through my boot. Thank ye.”

“I tell you, I won’t have you annoying me in public; once for all.”

“Why, sir; I thought we parted friends, last time. Didn’t you shake my hand, now, didn’t you shake my hand, sir? I ask you, whether you shook my hand, or whether you didn’t? A plain answer. We had a bit of a scrimmage, coming home. I admit we had; but shaking hands, means ’friends again we are.’ I know you’re a gentleman, and a man like me shouldn’t be so bold as fur to strike his betters. Only, don’t you see, sir, Full-o’-Beer’s a hasty chap, and up in a minute; and he’s sorry for it after.”

Algernon conceived a brilliant notion. Drawing five shillings from his pocket, he held them over to Sedgett, and told him to drive down to his chambers, and await his coming. Sedgett took the money; but it was five shillings lost. He made no exhibition of receiving orders, and it was impossible to address him imperiously without provoking observations of an animated kind from the elegant groups parading and sitting.

Young Harry Latters caught Algernon’s eye; never was youth more joyfully greeted. Harry spoke of the Friday’s race, and the defection of the horse Tenpenny Nail. A man passed with a nod and “How d’ ye do?” for which he received in reply a cool stare.

“Who’s that?” Algernon asked.

“The son of a high dignitary,” said Harry.

“You cut him.”

“I can do the thing, you see, when it’s a public duty.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“Merely a black-leg, a grec, a cheat, swindler, or whatever name you like,” said Harry. “We none of us nod to the professionals in this line; and I won’t exchange salutes with an amateur. I’m peculiar. He chose to be absent on the right day last year; so from that date; I consider him absent in toto; ’none of your rrrrr—m reckonings, let’s have the rrrrr—m toto;’—you remember Suckling’s story of the Yankee fellow? Bye-bye; shall see you the day after to-morrow. You dine with me and Suckling at the club.”

Page 1041

Latters was hailed by other friends. Algernon was forced to let him go. He dipped under the iron rail, and crossed the row at a run; an indecorous proceeding; he could not help it. The hope was that Sedgett would not have the like audacity, or might be stopped, and Algernon's reward for so just a calculation was, that on looking round, he found himself free. He slipped with all haste out of the Park. Sedgett's presence had the deadening power of the torpedo on the thousand pounds.

For the last quarter of an hour, Algernon had not felt a motion of it. A cab, to make his escape certain, was suggested to his mind; and he would have called a cab, had not the novel apparition of economy, which now haunted him, suggested that he had recently tossed five shillings into the gutter. A man might dine on four shillings and sixpence, enjoying a modest half-pint of wine, and he possessed that sum. To pinch himself and deserve well of Providence, he resolved not to drink wine, but beer, that day. He named the beverage; a pint-bottle of ale; and laughed, as a royal economist may, who punishes himself to please himself.

"Mighty jolly, ain't it, sir?" said Sedgett, at his elbow.

Algernon faced about, and swore an oath from his boots upward; so vehement was his disgust, and all-pervading his amazement.

"I'll wallop you at that game," said Sedgett.

"You infernal scoundrel!"

"If you begin swearing," Sedgett warned him.

"What do you want with me?"

"I'll tell you, sir. I don't want to go to ne'er a cock-fight, nor betting hole."

"Here, come up this street," said Algernon, leading the way into a dusky defile from a main parade of fashion. "Now, what's your business, confound you!"

"Well, sir, I ain't goin' to be confounded: that, I'll—I'll swear to. The long and the short is, I must have some money 'fore the week's out."

"You won't have a penny from me."

"That's blunt, though it ain't in my pocket," said Sedgett, grinning. "I say, sir, respectful as you like, I must. I've got to pay for passengerin' over the sea, self and wife; and quick it must be. There's things to buy on both sides. A small advance and you won't be bothered. Say, fifty. Fifty, and you don't see me till Saturday, when, accordin' to agreement, you hand to me the cash, outside the church door; and then we parts to meet no more. Oh! let us be joyful—I'll sing."

Algernon's loathing of the coarseness and profanity of villany increased almost to the depth of a sentiment as he listened to Sedgett.

"I do nothing of the sort," he said. "You shall not have a farthing. Be off. If you follow me, I give you into custody of a policeman."

"You durst n't." Sedgett eyed him warily.

He could spy a physical weakness, by affinity of cowardice, as quickly as Algernon a moral weakness, by the same sort of relationship to it.

Page 1042

“You don’t dare,” Sedgett pursued. “And why should you, sir? there’s ne’er a reason why. I’m civil. I asks for my own: no more ’n my own, it ain’t. I call the bargain good: why sh’d I want fur to break it? I want the money bad. I’m sick o’ this country. I’d like to be off in the first ship that sails. Can’t you let me have ten till to-morrow? then t’ other forty. I’ve got a mortal need for it, that I have. Come, it’s no use your walking at that rate; my legs are’s good as yours.”

Algernon had turned back to the great thoroughfare. He was afraid that ten pounds must be forfeited to this worrying demon in the flesh, and sought the countenance of his well-dressed fellows to encourage him in resisting. He could think of no subterfuge; menace was clearly useless: and yet the idea of changeing one of the notes and for so infamous a creature, caused pangs that helped him further to endure his dogging feet and filthy tongue. This continued until he saw a woman’s hand waving from a cab. Presuming that such a signal, objectionable as it was, must be addressed to himself, he considered whether he should lift his hat, or simply smile as a favoured, but not too deeply flattered, man. The cab drew up, and the woman said, “Sedgett.” She was a well-looking woman, strongly coloured, brown-eyed, and hearty in appearance.

“What a brute you are, Sedgett, not to be at home when you brought me up to London with all the boxes and bedding—my goodness! It’s a Providence I caught you in my eye, or I should have been driving down to the docks, and seeing about the ship. You are a brute. Come in, at once.”

“If you’re up to calling names, I’ve got one or two for you,” Sedgett growled.

Algernon had heard enough. Sure that he had left Sedgett in hands not likely to relinquish him, he passed on with elastic step. Wine was greatly desired, after his torments. Where was credit to be had? True, he looked contemptuously on the blooming land of credit now, but an entry to it by one of the back doors would have been convenient, so that he might be nourished and restored by a benevolent dinner, while he kept his Thousand intact. However, he dismissed the contemplation of credit and its transient charms. “I won’t dine at all,” he said.

A beggar woman stretched out her hand—he dropped a shilling in it.

“Hang me, if I shall be able to,” was his next reflection; and with the remaining three and sixpence, he crossed the threshold of a tobacconist’s shop and bought cigars, to save himself from excesses in charity. After gravely reproaching the tobacconist for the growing costliness of cigars, he came into the air, feeling extraordinarily empty. Of this he soon understood the cause, and it amused him. Accustomed to the smell of tobacco always when he came from his dinner, it seemed, as the fumes of the shop took his nostril, that demands were being made within him by an inquisitive spirit, and dissatisfaction expressed at the vacancy there.

Page 1043

“What’s the use? I can’t dine,” he uttered argumentatively. “I’m not going to change a note, and I won’t dine. I’ve no Club. There’s not a fellow I can see who’ll ask me to dine. I’ll lounge along home. There is some Sherry there.”

But Algernon bore vividly in mind that he did not approve of that Sherry.

“I’ve heard of fellows frying sausages at home, and living on something like two shillings a day,” he remarked in meditation; and then it struck him that Mrs. Lovell’s parcel of returned jewels lay in one of his drawers at home—that is, if the laundress had left the parcel untouched.

In an agony of alarm, he called a cab, and drove hotly to the Temple. Finding the packet safe, he put a couple of rings and the necklace with the opal in his waistcoat pocket. The cabman must be paid, of course; so a jewel must be pawned. Which shall it be? diamond or opal? Change a dozen times and let it be the trinket in the right hand—the opal; let it be the opal. How much would the opal fetch? The pawnbroker can best inform us upon that point. So he drove to the pawnbroker; one whom he knew. The pawnbroker offered him five-and-twenty pounds on the security of the opal.

“What on earth is it that people think disgraceful in your entering a pawnbroker’s shop?” Algernon asked himself when, taking his ticket and the five-and-twenty pounds, he repelled the stare of a man behind a neighbouring partition.

“There are not many of that sort in the kingdom,” he said to the pawnbroker, who was loftily fondling the unlucky opal.

“Well—h’m; perhaps there’s not;” the pawnbroker was ready to admit it, now that the arrangement had been settled.

“I shan’t be able to let you keep it long.”

“As quick back as you like, sir.”

Algernon noticed as he turned away that the man behind the partition, who had more the look of a dapper young shopman than of a needy petitioner for loans or securities, stretched over the counter to look at the opal; and he certainly heard his name pronounced. It enraged him; but policy counselled a quiet behaviour in this place, and no quarrelling with his pawnbroker. Besides, his whole nature cried out for dinner. He dined and had his wine; as good, he ventured to assert, as any man could get for the money; for he knew the hotels with the venerable cellars.

“I should have made a first-rate courier to a millionaire,” he said, with scornful candour, but without abusing the disposition of things which had ordered his being a gentleman. Subsequently, from his having sat so long over his wine without moving a leg, he

indulged in the belief that he had reflected profoundly; out of which depths he started, very much like a man who has dozed, and felt a discomfort in his limbs and head.

“I must forget myself,” he said. Nor was any grave mentor by, to assure him that his tragic state was the issue of an evil digestion of his dinner and wine. “I must forget myself. I’m under some doom. I see it now. Nobody cares for me. I don’t know what happiness is. I was born under a bad star. My fate’s written.” Following his youthful wisdom, this wounded hart dragged his slow limbs toward the halls of brandy and song.

Page 1044

One learns to have compassion for fools, by studying them: and the fool, though Nature is wise, is next door to Nature. He is naked in his simplicity; he can tell us much, and suggest more. My excuse for dwelling upon him is, that he holds the link of my story. Where fools are numerous, one of them must be prominent now and then in a veracious narration. There comes an hour when the veil drops on him, he not being always clean to the discreeter touch.

Algernon was late at the Bank next day, and not cheerful, though he received his customary reprimand with submission. This day was after the pattern of the day preceding, except that he did not visit the Park; the night likewise.

On Wednesday morning, he arose with the conviction that England was no place for him to dwell in. What if Rhoda were to accompany him to one of the colonies? The idea had been gradually taking shape in his mind from the moment that he had possessed the Thousand. Could she not make butter and cheeses capitally, while he rode on horseback through space? She was a strong girl, a loyal girl, and would be a grateful wife.

“I’ll marry her,” he said; and hesitated. “Yes, I’ll marry her.” But it must be done immediately.

He resolved to run down to Wrexby, rejoice her with a declaration of love, astound her with a proposal of marriage, bewilder her little brain with hurrying adjectives, whisk her up to London, and in little more than a week be sailing on the high seas, new born; nothing of civilization about him, save a few last very first-rate cigars which he projected to smoke on the poop of the vessel, and so dream of the world he left behind.

He went down to the Bank in better spirits, and there wrote off a straightforward demand of an interview, to Rhoda, hinting at the purpose of it. While at his work, he thought of Harry Latters and Lord Suckling, and the folly of his dining with men in his present position. Settling-day, it or yesterday might be, but a colonist is not supposed to know anything of those arrangements. One of his fellow-clerks reminded him of a loan he had contracted, and showed him his name written under obligatory initials. He paid it, ostentatiously drawing out one of his fifties. Up came another, with a similar strip of paper. “You don’t want me to change this, do you?” said Algernon; and heard a tale of domestic needs—and a grappling landlady. He groaned inwardly: “Odd that I must pay for his landlady being a vixen!” The note was changed; the debt liquidated. On the door-step, as he was going to lunch, old Anthony waylaid him, and was almost noisily persistent in demanding his one pound three and his five pound ten. Algernon paid the sums, ready to believe that there was a suspicion abroad of his intention to become a colonist.

He employed the luncheon hour in a visit to a colonial shipping office, and nearly ran straight upon Sedgett at the office-door. The woman who had hailed him from the cab,

was in Sedgett's company, but Sedgett saw no one. His head hung and his sullen brows were drawn moodily. Algernon escaped from observation. His first inquiry at the office was as to the business of the preceding couple, and he was satisfied by hearing that Sedgett wanted berths for himself and wife.

Page 1045

“Who’s the woman, I wonder!” Algernon thought, and forgot her.

He obtained some particular information, and returning to the Bank, was called before his uncle, who curtly reckoned up his merits in a contemptuous rebuke, and confirmed him in his resolution to incur this sort of thing no longer. In consequence, he promised Sir William that he would amend his ways, and these were the first hopeful words that Sir William had ever heard from him.

Algernon’s design was to dress, that evening, in the uniform of society, so that, in the event of his meeting Harry Latters, he might assure him he was coming to his Club, and had been compelled to dine elsewhere with his uncle, or anybody. When he reached the door of his chambers, a man was standing there, who said,—

“Mr. Algernon Blancove?”

“Yes,” Algernon prolonged an affirmative, to diminish the confidence it might inspire, if possible.

“May I speak with you, sir?”

Algernon told him to follow in. The man was tall and large-featured, with an immense blank expression of face.

“I’ve come from Mr. Samuels, sir,” he said, deferentially.

Mr. Samuels was Algernon’s chief jeweller.

“Oh,” Algernon remarked. “Well, I don’t want anything; and let me say, I don’t approve of this touting for custom. I thought Mr. Samuels was above it.”

The man bowed. “My business is not that, sir. Ahem! I dare say you remember an opal you had from our house. It was set in a necklace.”

“All right; I remember it, perfectly,” said Algernon; cool, but not of the collected colour.

“The cost of it was fifty-five pounds, sir.”

“Was it? Well, I’ve forgotten.”

“We find that it has been pawned for five-and-twenty.”

“A little less than half,” said Algernon. “Pawnbrokers are simply cheats.”

“They mayn’t be worse than others,” the man observed.

Algernon was exactly in the position where righteous anger is the proper weapon, if not the sole resource. He flushed, but was not sure of his opportunity for the explosion. The man read the flush.

“May I ask you, did you pawn it, sir? I’m obliged to ask the question.”

“I?—I really don’t—I don’t choose to answer impudent questions. What do you mean by coming here?”

“I may as well be open with you, sir, to prevent misunderstandings. One of the young men was present when you pawned it. He saw the thing done.”

“Suppose he did?”

“He would be a witness.”

“Against me? I’ve dealt with Samuels for three-four years.”

“Yes, sir; but you have never yet paid any account; and I believe I am right in saying that this opal is not the first thing coming from our house that has been pledged—I can’t say you did it on the other occasions.”

“You had better not,” rejoined Algernon.

He broke an unpleasant silence by asking, “What further?”

Page 1046

“My master has sent you his bill.”

Algernon glanced at the prodigious figures.

“Five hun—!” he gasped, recoiling; and added, “Well, I can’t pay it on the spot.”

“Let me tell you, you’re liable to proceedings you’d better avoid, sir, for the sake of your relations.”

“You dare to threaten to expose me to my relatives?” Algernon said haughtily, and immediately perceived that indignation at this point was a clever stroke; for the man, while deprecating the idea of doing so, showed his more established belief in the possible virtue of such a threat.

“Not at all, sir; but you know that pledging things not paid for is illegal, and subject to penalties. No tradesman likes it; they can’t allow it. I may as well let you know that Mr. Samuels—”

“There, stop!” cried Algernon, laughing, as he thought, heartily. “Mr. Samuels is a very tolerable Jew; but he doesn’t seem to understand dealing with gentlemen. Pressure comes;” he waved his hand swimmingly; “one wants money, and gets it how one can. Mr. Samuels shall not go to bed thinking he has been defrauded. I will teach Mr. Samuels to think better of us Gentiles. Write me a receipt.”

“For what amount, sir?” said the man, briskly.

“For the value of the opal—that is to say, for the value put upon it by Mr. Samuels. Con! hang! never mind. Write the receipt.”

He cast a fluttering fifty and a fluttering five on the table, and pushed paper to the man for a receipt.

The man reflected, and refused to take them.

“I don’t think, sir,” he said, “that less than two-thirds of the bill will make Mr. Samuels easy. You see, this opal was in a necklace. It wasn’t like a ring you might have taken off your finger. It’s a lady’s ornament; and soon after you obtain it from us; you make use of it by turning it into cash. It’s a case for a criminal prosecution, which, for the sake of your relations, Mr. Samuels wouldn’t willingly bring on. The criminal box is no place for you, sir; but Mr. Samuels must have his own. His mind is not easy. I shouldn’t like, sir, to call a policeman.”

“Hey!” shouted Algernon; “you’d have to get a warrant.”

“It’s out, sir.”

Though inclined toward small villanies, he had not studied law, and judging from his own affrighted sensations, and the man's impassive face, Algernon supposed that warrants were as lightly granted as writs of summons.

He tightened his muscles. In his time he had talked glibly of Perdition; but this was hot experience. He and the man measured the force of their eyes. Algernon let his chest fall.

"Do you mean?" he murmured.

"Why, sir, it's no use doing things by halves. When a tradesman says he must have his money, he takes his precautions."

"Are you in Mr. Samuels' shop?"

"Not exactly, sir."

"You're a detective?"

"I have been in the service, sir."

Page 1047

“Ah! now I understand.” Algernon raised his head with a strain at haughtiness. “If Mr. Samuels had accompanied you, I would have discharged the debt: It’s only fair that I should insist upon having a receipt from him personally, and for the whole amount.”

With this, he drew forth his purse and displayed the notable Five hundred.

His glow of victory was short. The impassive man likewise had something to exhibit.

“I assure you, sir,” he said, “Mr. Samuels does know how to deal with gentlemen. If you will do me the honour, sir, to run up with me to Mr. Samuels’ shop? Or, very well, sir; to save you that annoyance here is his receipt to the bill.”

Algernon mechanically crumpled up his note.

“Samuels?” ejaculated the unhappy fellow. “Why, my mother dealt with Samuels. My aunt dealt with Samuels. All my family have dealt with him for years; and he talks of proceeding against me, because—upon my soul, it’s too absurd! Sending a policeman, too! I’ll tell you what—the exposure would damage Mister Samuels most materially. Of course, my father would have to settle the matter; but Mister—Mister Samuels would not recover so easily. He’d be glad to refund the five hundred—what is it?—and twenty-five—why not, ‘and sixpence three farthings?’ I tell you, I shall let my father pay. Mr. Samuels had better serve me with a common writ. I tell you, I’m not going to denude myself of money altogether. I haven’t examined the bill. Leave it here. You can tear off the receipt. Leave it here.”

The man indulged in a slight demonstration of dissent.

“No, sir, that won’t do.”

“Half the bill,” roared Algernon; “half the bill, I wouldn’t mind paying.”

“About two-thirds, sir, is what Mr. Samuels asked for, and he’ll stop, and go on as before.”

“He’ll stop and he’ll go on, will he? Mr. Samuels is amazingly like one of his own watches,” Algernon sneered vehemently. “Well,” he pursued, in fancied security, “I’ll pay two-thirds.”

“Three hundred, sir.”

“Ay, three hundred. Tell him to send a receipt for the three hundred, and he shall have it. As to my entering his shop again, that I shall have to think over.”

“That’s what gentlemen in Mr. Samuels’ position have to run risk of, sir,” said the man.

Algernon, more in astonishment than trepidation, observed him feeling at his breast-pocket. The action resulted in an exhibition of a second bill, with a legal receipt attached to it, for three hundred pounds.

“Mr. Samuels is anxious to accommodate you in every way, sir. It isn’t the full sum he wants; it’s a portion. He thought you might prefer to discharge a portion.”

After this exhibition of foresight on the part of the jeweller, there was no more fight in Algernon beyond a strenuous “Faugh!” of uttermost disgust.

He examined the bill and receipt in the man’s hand with great apparent scrupulousness; not, in reality, seeing a clear syllable.

Page 1048

“Take it and change it,” he threw his Five hundred down, but recovered it from the enemy’s grasp; and with a “one, two, three,” banged his hundreds on the table: for which he had the loathsome receipt handed to him.

“How,” he asked, chokingly, “did Mr. Samuels know I could—I had money?”

“Why, sir, you see,” the man, as one who throws off a mask, smiled cordially, after buttoning up the notes; “credit ’d soon give up the ghost, if it hadn’t its own dodges,’ as I may say. This is only a feeler on Mr. Samuels’ part. He heard of his things going to pledge. Halloa! he sings out. And tradesmen are human, sir. Between us, I side with gentlemen, in most cases. Hows’-ever, I’m, so to speak, in Mr. Samuels’ pay. A young gentleman in debt, give him a good fright, out comes his money, if he’s got any. Sending of a bill receipted’s a good trying touch. It’s a compliment to him to suppose he can pay. Mr. Samuels, sir, wouldn’t go issuing a warrant: if he could, he wouldn’t. You named a warrant; that set me up to it. I shouldn’t have dreamed of a gentleman supposing it otherwise. Didn’t you notice me show a wall of a face? I shouldn’t ha’ dared to have tried that on an old hand—begging your pardon; I mean a real—a scoundrel. The regular ones must see features: we mustn’t be too cunning with them, else they grow suspicious: they’re keen as animals; they are. Good afternoon to you, sir.”

Algernon heard the door shut. He reeled into a chair, and muffling his head in his two arms on the table, sobbed desperately; seeing himself very distinctly reflected in one of the many facets of folly. Daylight became undesireable to him. He went to bed.

A man who can, in such extremities of despair, go premeditatingly to his pillow, obeys an animal instinct in pursuit of oblivion, that will befriend his nerves. Algernon awoke in deep darkness, with a delicious sensation of hunger. He jumped up. Six hundred and fifty pounds of the money remained intact; and he was joyful. He struck a light to look at his watch: the watch had stopped;—that was a bad sign. He could not forget it. Why had his watch stopped? A chilling thought as to whether predestination did not govern the world, allayed all tumult in his mind. He dressed carefully, and soon heard a great City bell, with horrid gulfs between the strokes, tell him that the hour was eleven toward midnight. “Not late,” he said.

“Who’d have thought it?” cried a voice on the landing of the stairs, as he went forth.

It was Sedgett.

Algernon had one inclination to strangle, and another to mollify the wretch.

“Why, sir, I’ve been lurking heer for your return from your larks. Never guessed you was in.”

“It’s no use,” Algernon began.

Page 1049

“Ay; but it is, though,” said Sedgett, and forced his way into the room. “Now, just listen. I’ve got a young woman I want to pack out o’ the country. I must do it, while I’m a—a bachelor boy. She must go, or we shall be having shindies. You saw how she caught me out of a cab. She’s sure to be in the place where she ain’t wanted. She goes to America. I’ve got to pay her passage, and mine too. Here’s the truth: she thinks I’m off with her. She knows I’m bankrup’ at home. So I am. All the more reason for her thinking me her companion. I get her away by train to the vessel, and on board, and there I give her the slip.

“Ship’s steaming away by this time t’morrow night. I’ve paid for her—and myself too, she thinks. Leave it to me. I’ll manage all that neatly enough. But heer’s the truth: I’m stumped. I must, and I will have fifty; I don’t want to utter ne’er a threat. I want the money, and if you don’t give it, I break off; and you mind this, Mr. Blancove: you don’t come off s’ easy, if I do break off, mind. I know all about your relations, and by—! I’ll let ’em know all about you. Why, you’re as quiet heer, sir, as if you was miles away, in a wood cottage, and ne’er a dog near.”

So Algernon was thinking; and without a light, save the gas lamp in the square, moreover.

They wrangled for an hour. When Algernon went forth a second time, he was by fifty pounds poorer. He consoled himself by thinking that the money had only anticipated its destination as arranged, and it became a partial gratification to him to reflect that he had, at any rate, paid so much of the sum, according to his bond in assuming possession of it.

And what were to be his proceedings? They were so manifestly in the hands of fate, that he declined to be troubled on that head.

Next morning came the usual short impatient scrawl on thin blue paper from Edward, scarce worthy of a passing thought. In a postscript, he asked: “Are there, on your oath, no letters for me? If there are, send them immediately—every one, bills as well. Don’t fail. I must have them.”

Algernon was at last persuaded to pack up Dahlia’s letters, saying: “I suppose they can’t do any harm now.” The expense of the postage afflicted him; but “women always cost a dozen to our one,” he remarked. On his way to the City, he had to decide whether he would go to the Bank, or take the train leading to Wrexby. He chose the latter course, until, feeling that he was about to embark in a serious undertaking, he said to himself, “No! duty first;” and postponed the expedition for the day following.

CHAPTER XXXII

Squire Blancove, having business in town, called on his brother at the Bank, asking whether Sir William was at home, with sarcastic emphasis on the title, which smelt to him of commerce. Sir William invited him to dine and sleep at his house that night.

Page 1050

“You will meet Mrs. Lovell, and a Major Waring, a friend of hers, who knew her and her husband in India,” said the baronet.

“The deuce I shall,” said the squire, and accepted maliciously.

Where the squire dined, he drank, defying ladies and the new-fangled subserviency to those flustering teabodies. This was understood; so, when the Claret and Port had made a few rounds, Major Waring was permitted to follow Mrs. Lovell, and the squire and his brother settled to conversation; beginning upon gout. Sir William had recently had a touch of the family complaint, and spoke of it in terms which gave the squire some fraternal sentiment. From that, they fell to talking politics, and differed. The breach was healed by a divergence to their sons. The squire knew his own to be a scamp.

“You’ll never do anything with him,” he said.

“I don’t think I shall,” Sir William admitted.

“Didn’t I tell you so?”

“You did. But, the point is, what will you do with him?”

“Send him to Jericho to ride wild jackasses. That’s all he’s fit for.”

The superior complacency of Sir William’s smile caught the squire’s attention.

“What do you mean to do with Ned?” he asked.

“I hope,” was the answer, “to have him married before the year is out.”

“To the widow?”

“The widow?” Sir William raised his eyebrows.

“Mrs. Lovell, I mean.”

“What gives you that idea?”

“Why, Ned has made her an offer. Don’t you know that?”

“I know nothing of the sort.”

“And don’t believe it? He has. He’s only waiting now, over there in Paris, to get comfortably out of a scrape—you remember what I told you at Fairly—and then Mrs. Lovell’s going to have him—as he thinks; but, by George, it strikes me this major you’ve got here, knows how to follow petticoats and get in his harvest in the enemy’s absence.”

“I think you’re quite under a delusion, in both respects,” observed Sir William.

“What makes you think that?”

“I have Edward’s word.”

“He lies as naturally as an infant sucks.”

“Pardon me; this is my son you are speaking of.”

“And this is your Port I’m drinking; so I’ll say no more.”

The squire emptied his glass, and Sir William thrummed on the table.

“Now, my dog has got his name,” the squire resumed. “I’m not ambitious about him. You are, about yours; and you ought to know him. He spends or he don’t spend. It’s not the question whether he gets into debt, but whether he does mischief with what he spends. If Algy’s a bad fish, Ned’s a bit of a serpent; damned clever, no doubt. I suppose, you wouldn’t let him marry old Fleming’s daughter, now, if he wanted to?”

“Who is Fleming?” Sir William thundered out.

“Fleming’s the father of the girl. I’m sorry for him. He sells his farm-land which I’ve been looking at for years; so I profit by it; but I don’t like to see a man like that broken up. Algy, I said before, ’s a bad fish. Hang me, if I think he’d have behaved like Ned. If he had, I’d have compelled him to marry her, and shipped them both off, clean out of the country, to try their luck elsewhere.

Page 1051

“You’re proud; I’m practical. I don’t expect you to do the same. I’m up in London now to raise money to buy the farm—Queen’s Anne’s Farm; it’s advertized for sale, I see. Fleeting won’t sell it to me privately, because my name’s Blancove, and I’m the father of my son, and he fancies Algy’s the man. Why? he saw Algy at the theatre in London with this girl of his;—we were all young fellows once!—and the rascal took Ned’s burden on his shoulders. So, I shall have to compete with other buyers, and pay, I dare say, a couple of hundred extra for the property. Do you believe what I tell you now?”

“Not a word of it,” said Sir William blandly.

The squire seized the decanter and drank in a fury.

“I had it from Algy.”

“That would all the less induce me to believe it.”

“H’m!” the squire frowned. “Let me tell you—he’s a dog—but it’s a damned hard thing to hear one’s own flesh and blood abused. Look here: there’s a couple. One of them has made a fool of a girl. It can’t be my rascal—stop a minute—he isn’t the man, because she’d have been sure to have made a fool of him, that’s certain. He’s a soft-hearted dog. He’d aim at a cock-sparrow, and be glad if he missed. There you have him. He was one of your good boys. I used to tell his poor mother, ’When you leave off thinking for him, he’ll go to the first handy villain—and that’s the devil.’ And he’s done it. But, here’s the difference. He goes himself; he don’t send another. I’ll tell you what: if you don’t know about Mr. Ned’s tricks, you ought. And you ought to make him marry the girl, and be off to New Zealand, or any of the upside-down places, where he might begin by farming, and soon, with his abilities, be cock o’ the walk. He would, perhaps, be sending us a letter to say that he preferred to break away from the mother country and establish a republic. He’s got the same political opinions as you. Oh! he’ll do well enough over here; of course he will. He’s the very fellow to do well. Knock at him, he’s hard as nails, and ’ll stick anywhere. You wouldn’t listen to me, when I told you about this at Fairly, where some old sweetheart of the girl mistook that poor devil of a scapegoat, Algy, for him, and went pegging at him like a madman.”

“No,” said Sir William; “No, I would not. Nor do I now. At least,” he struck out his right hand deprecatingly, “I listen.”

“Can you tell me what he was doing when he went to Italy?”

“He went partly at my suggestion.”

“Turns you round his little finger! He went off with this girl: wanted to educate her, or some nonsense of the sort. That was Mr. Ned’s business. Upon my soul, I’m sorry for

old Fleming. I'm told he takes it to heart. It's done him up. Now, if it should turn out to be Ned, would you let him right the girl by marrying her? You wouldn't!"

"The principle of examining your hypothesis before you proceed to decide by it, is probably unknown to you," Sir William observed, after bestowing a considerate smile on his brother, who muffled himself up from the chilling sententiousness, and drank.

Page 1052

Sir William, in the pride of superior intellect, had heard as good as nothing of the charge against his son.

“Well,” said the squire, “think as you like, act as you like; all’s one to me. You’re satisfied; that’s clear; and I’m some hundred of pounds out of pocket. This major’s paying court to the widow, is he?”

“I can’t say that he is.”

“It would be a good thing for her to get married.”

“I should be glad.”

“A good thing for her, I say.”

“A good thing for him, let us hope.”

“If he can pay her debts.”

Sir William was silent, and sipped his wine.

“And if he can keep a tight hand on the reins. That’s wanted,” said the squire.

The gentleman whose road to happiness was thus prescribed stood by Mrs. Lovell’s chair, in the drawing-room. He held a letter in his hand, for which her own was pleadingly extended.

“I know you to be the soul of truth, Percy,” she was saying.

“The question is not that; but whether you can bear the truth.”

“Can I not? Who would live without it?”

“Pardon me; there’s more. You say, you admire this friend of mine; no doubt you do. Mind, I am going to give you the letter. I wish you simply to ask yourself now, whether you are satisfied at my making a confidant of a man in Robert Eccles’s position, and think it natural and just—you do?”

“Quite just,” said Mrs. Lovell; “and natural? Yes, natural; though not common. Eccentric; which only means, hors du commun; and can be natural. It is natural. I was convinced he was a noble fellow, before I knew that you had made a friend of him. I am sure of it now. And did he not save your life, Percy?”

“I have warned you that you are partly the subject of the letter.”

“Do you forget that I am a woman, and want it all the more impatiently?”

Major Waring suffered the letter to be snatched from his hand, and stood like one who is submitting to a test, or watching the effect of a potent drug.

“It is his second letter to you,” Mrs. Lovell murmured. “I see; it is a reply to yours.”

She read a few lines, and glanced up, blushing. “Am I not made to bear more than I deserve?”

“If you can do such mischief, without meaning any, to a man who is in love with another woman—,” said Percy.

“Yes,” she nodded, “I perceive the deduction; but inferences are like shadows on the wall—they are thrown from an object, and are monstrous distortions of it. That is why you misjudge women. You infer one thing from another, and are ruled by the inference.”

He simply bowed. Edward would have answered her in a bright strain, and led her on to say brilliant things, and then have shown her, as by a sudden light, that she had lost herself, and reduced her to feel the strength and safety of his hard intellect. That was the idea in her brain. The next moment her heart ejected it.

Page 1053

“Petty, when I asked permission to look at this letter, I was not aware how great a compliment it would be to me if I was permitted to see it. It betrays your friend.”

“It betrays something more,” said he.

Mrs. Lovell cast down her eyes and read, without further comment.

These were the contents:—

“My Dear Percy,—Now that I see her every day again, I am worse than ever; and I remember thinking once or twice that Mrs. L. had cured me. I am a sort of man who would jump to reach the top of a mountain. I understand how superior Mrs. L. is to every woman in the world I have seen; but Rhoda cures me on that head. Mrs. Lovell makes men mad and happy, and Rhoda makes them sensible and miserable. I have had the talk with Rhoda. It is all over. I have felt like being in a big room with one candle alight ever since. She has not looked at me, and does nothing but get by her father whenever she can, and takes his hand and holds it. I see where the blow has struck her: it has killed her pride; and Rhoda is almost all pride. I suppose she thinks our plan is the best. She has not said she does, and does not mention her sister. She is going to die, or she turns nun, or marries a gentleman. I shall never get her. She will not forgive me for bringing this news to her. I told you how she coloured, the first day I came; which has all gone now. She just opens her lips to me. You remember Corporal Thwaites—you caught his horse, when he had his foot near wrenched off, going through the gate—and his way of breathing through the under-row of his teeth—the poor creature was in such pain—that’s just how she takes her breath. It makes her look sometimes like that woman’s head with the snakes for her hair. This bothers me—how is it you and Mrs. Lovell manage to talk together of such things? Why, two men rather hang their heads a bit. My notion is, that women— ladies, in especial, ought never to hear of sad things of this sort. Of course, I mean, if they do, it cannot harm them. It only upsets me. Why are ladies less particular than girls in Rhoda’s place?”

("Shame being a virtue,” was Mrs. Lovell’s running comment.)

“She comes up to town with her father to-morrow. The farm is ruined. The poor old man had to ask me for a loan to pay the journey. Luckily, Rhoda has saved enough with her pennies and two-pences. Ever since I left the farm, it has been in the hands of an old donkey here, who has worked it his own way. What is in the ground will stop there, and may as well.

“I leave off writing, I write such stuff; and if I go on writing to you, I shall be putting these things ‘—!—!—!’ The way you write about Mrs. Lovell, convinces me you are not in my scrape, or else gentlemen are just as different from their inferiors as ladies are from theirs. That’s the question. What is the meaning of your ’not being able to leave her for a day, for fear she should fall

Page 1054

under other influences'? Then, I copy your words, you say, 'She is all things to everybody, and cannot help it.' In that case, I would seize my opportunity and her waist, and tell her she was locked up from anybody else. Friendship with men—but I cannot understand friendship with women, and watching them to keep them right, which must mean that you do not think much of them."

Mrs. Lovell, at this point, raised her eyes abruptly from the letter and returned it.

"You discuss me very freely with your friend," she said.

Percy drooped to her. "I warned you when you wished to read it."

"But, you see, you have bewildered him. It was scarcely wise to write other than plain facts. Men of that class." She stopped.

"Of that class?" said he.

"Men of any class, then: you yourself: if any one wrote to you such things, what would you think? It is very unfair. I have the honour of seeing you daily, because you cannot trust me out of your sight? What is there inexplicable about me? Do you wonder that I talk openly of women who are betrayed, and do my best to help them?".

"On the contrary; you command my esteem," said Percy.

"But you think me a puppet?"

"Fond of them, perhaps?" his tone of voice queried in a manner that made her smile.

"I hate them," she said, and her face expressed it.

"But you make them."

"How? You torment me."

"How can I explain the magic? Are you not making one of me now, where I stand?"

"Then, sit."

"Or kneel?"

"Oh, Percy! do nothing ridiculous."

Inveterate insight was a characteristic of Major Waring; but he was not the less in Mrs. Lovell's net. He knew it to be a charm that she exercised almost unknowingly. She was simply a sweet instrument for those who could play on it, and therein lay her mighty

fascination. Robert's blunt advice that he should seize the chance, take her and make her his own, was powerful with him. He checked the particular appropriating action suggested by Robert.

"I owe you an explanation," he said. "Margaret, my friend."

"You can think of me as a friend, Percy?"

"If I can call you my friend, what would I not call you besides? I did you a great and shameful wrong when you were younger. Hush! you did not deserve that. Judge of yourself as you will; but I know now what my feelings were then. The sublime executioner was no more than a spiteful man. You give me your pardon, do you not? Your hand?"

She had reached her hand to him, but withdrew it quickly.

"Not your hand, Margaret? But, you must give it to some one. You will be ruined, if you do not."

She looked at him with full eyes. "You know it then?" she said slowly; but the gaze diminished as he went on.

"I know, by what I know of you, that you of all women should owe a direct allegiance. Come; I will assume privileges. Are you free?"

Page 1055

“Would you talk to me so, if you thought otherwise?” she asked.

“I think I would,” said Percy. “A little depends upon the person. Are you pledged at all to Mr. Edward Blancove?”

“Do you suppose me one to pledge myself?”

“He is doing a base thing.”

“Then, Percy, let an assurance of my knowledge of that be my answer.”

“You do not love the man?”

Despise him, say!”

“Is he aware of it?”

“If clear writing can make him.”

“You have told him as much?”

“To his apprehension, certainly.”

“Further, Margaret, I must speak:—did he act with your concurrence, or knowledge of it at all, in acting as he has done?”

“Heavens! Percy, you question me like a husband.”

“It is what I mean to be, if I may.”

The frame of the fair lady quivered as from a blow, and then her eyes rose tenderly.

“I thought you knew me. This is not possible.”

“You will not be mine? Why is it not possible?”

“I think I could say, because I respect you too much.”

“Because you find you have not the courage?”

“For what?”

“To confess that you were under bad influence, and were not the Margaret I can make of you. Put that aside. If you remain as you are, think of the snares. If you marry one you despise, look at the pit. Yes; you will be mine! Half my love of my country and my profession is love of you. Margaret is fire in my blood. I used to pray for opportunities,

that Margaret might hear of me. I knew that gallant actions touched her; I would have fallen gladly; I was sure her heart would leap when she heard of me. Let it beat against mine. Speak!"

"I will," said Mrs. Lovell, and she suppressed the throbs of her bosom. Her voice was harsh and her face bloodless. "How much money have you, Percy?"

This sudden sluicing of cold water on his heat of passion petrified him.

"Money," he said, with a strange frigid scrutiny of her features. As in the flash of a mirror, he beheld her bony, worn, sordid, unacceptable. But he was fain to admit it to be an eminently proper demand for enlightenment.

He said deliberately, "I possess an income of five hundred a year, extraneous, and in addition to my pay as major in Her Majesty's service."

Then he paused, and the silence was like a growing chasm between them.

She broke it by saying, "Have you any expectations?"

This was crueller still, though no longer astonishing. He complained in his heart merely that her voice had become so unpleasant.

With emotionless precision, he replied, "At my mother's death—"

She interposed a soft exclamation.

"At my mother's death there will come to me by reversion, five or six thousand pounds. When my father dies, he may possibly bequeath his property to me. On that I cannot count."

Page 1056

Veritable tears were in her eyes. Was she affecting to weep sympathetically in view of these remote contingencies?

“You will not pretend that you know me now, Percy,” she said, trying to smile; and she had recovered the natural feminine key of her voice. “I am mercenary, you see; not a mercenary friend. So, keep me as a friend—say you will be my friend.”

“Nay, you had a right to know,” he protested.

“It was disgraceful—horrible; but it was necessary for me to know.”

“And now that you do know?”

“Now that I know, I have only to say—be as merciful in your idea of me as you can.”

She dropped her hand in his, and it was with a thrill of dismay that he felt the rush of passion reanimating his frozen veins.

“Be mercenary, but be mine! I will give you something better to live for than this absurd life of fashion. You reckon on what our expenditure will be by that standard. It’s comparative poverty; but—but you can have some luxuries. You can have a carriage, a horse to ride. Active service may come: I may rise. Give yourself to me, and you must love me, and regret nothing.”

“Nothing! I should regret nothing. I don’t want carriages, or horses, or luxuries. I could live with you on a subaltern’s pay. I can’t marry you, Percy, and for the very reason which would make me wish to marry you.”

“Charade?” said he; and the contempt of the utterance brought her head close under his.

“Dearest friend, you have not to learn how to punish me.”

The little reproach, added to the wound to his pride, required a healing medicament; she put her lips to his fingers.

Assuredly the comedy would not have ended there, but it was stopped by an intrusion of the squire, followed by Sir William, who, while the squire—full of wine and vindictive humours—went on humming, “Ah! h’m—m—m! Soh!” said in the doorway to some one behind him: “And if you have lost your key, and Algernon is away, of what use is it to drive down to the Temple for a bed? I make it an especial request that you sleep here tonight. I wish it. I have to speak with you.”

Mrs. Lovell was informed that the baronet had been addressing his son, who was fresh from Paris, and not, in his own modest opinion, presentable before a lady.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Once more Farmer Fleming and Rhoda prepared for their melancholy journey up to London. A light cart was at the gateway, near which Robert stood with the farmer, who, in his stiff brown overcoat, that reached to his ankles, and broad country-hat, kept his posture of dumb expectation like a stalled ox, and nodded to Robert's remarks on the care which the garden had been receiving latterly, the many roses clean in bud, and the trim blue and white and red garden beds. Every word was a blow to him; but he took it, as well as Rhoda's apparent dilatoriness, among the things

Page 1057

to be submitted to by a man cut away by the roots from the home of his labour and old associations. Above his bowed head there was a board proclaiming that Queen Anne's Farm, and all belonging thereunto, was for sale. His prospect in the vague wilderness of the future, was to seek for acceptance as a common labourer on some kind gentleman's property. The phrase "kind gentleman" was adopted by his deliberate irony of the fate which cast him out. Robert was stamping fretfully for Rhoda to come. At times, Mrs. Sumfit showed her head from the window of her bed-room, crying, "D'rectly!" and disappearing.

The still aspect of the house on the shining May afternoon was otherwise undisturbed. Besides Rhoda, Master Gammon was being waited for; on whom would devolve the driving of the cart back from the station. Robert heaped his vexed exclamations upon this old man. The farmer restrained his voice in Master Gammon's defence, thinking of the comparison he could make between him and Robert: for Master Gammon had never run away from the farm and kept absent, leaving it to take care of itself. Gammon, slow as he might be, was faithful, and it was not he who had made it necessary for the farm to be sold. Gammon was obstinate, but it was not he who, after taking a lead, and making the farm dependent on his lead, had absconded with the brains and energy of the establishment. Such reflections passed through the farmer's mind.

Rhoda and Mrs. Sumfit came together down the trim pathway; and Robert now had a clear charge against Master Gammon. He recommended an immediate departure.

"The horse 'll bring himself home quite as well and as fast as Gammon will," he said.

"But for the shakin' and the joltin', which tells o' sovereigns and silver," Mrs. Sumfit was observing to Rhoda, "you might carry the box—and who would have guessed how stout it was, and me to hit it with a poker and not break it, I couldn't, nor get a single one through the slit;—the sight I was, with a poker in my hand! I do declare I felt azactly like a housebreaker;—and no soul to notice what you carries. Where you hear the gold, my dear, go so"—Mrs. Sumfit performed a methodical "Ahem!" and noised the sole of her shoe on the gravel "so, and folks 'll think it's a mistake they made."

"What's that?"—the farmer pointed at a projection under Rhoda's shawl.

"It is a present, father, for my sister," said Rhoda.

"What is it?" the farmer questioned again.

Mrs. Sumfit fawned before him penitently—"Ah! William, she's poor, and she do want a little to spend, or she will be so nipped and like a frost-bitten body, she will. And, perhaps, dear, haven't money in her sight for next day's dinner, which is—oh, such a panic for a young wife! for it ain't her hunger, dear William—her husband, she thinks of.

And her cookery at a stand-still! Thinks she, 'he will charge it on the kitchen;' so unreasonable's men. Yes," she added, in answer to the rigid dejection of his look, "I said true to you. I know I said, 'Not a penny can I get, William,' when you asked me for loans; and how could I get it? I can't get it now. See here, dear!"

Page 1058

She took the box from under Rhoda's shawl, and rattled it with a down turn and an up turn.

"You didn't ask me, dear William, whether I had a money-box. I'd ha' told you so at once, had ye but asked me. And had you said, 'Gi' me your money-box,' it was yours, only for your asking. You do see, you can't get any of it out. So, when you asked for money I was right to say, I'd got none."

The farmer bore with her dreary rattling of the box in demonstration of its retentive capacities. The mere force of the show stopped him from retorting; but when, to excuse Master Gammon for his tardiness, she related that he also had a money-box, and was in search of it, the farmer threw up his head with the vigour of a young man, and thundered for Master Gammon, by name, vehemently wrathful at the combined hypocrisy of the pair. He called twice, and his face was purple and red as he turned toward the cart, saying,—

"We'll go without the old man."

Mrs. Sumfit then intertwisted her fingers, and related how that she and Master Gammon had one day, six years distant, talked on a lonely evening over the mischances which befel poor people when they grew infirm, or met with accident, and what "useless clays" they were; and yet they had their feelings. It was a long and confidential talk on a summer evening; and, at the end of it, Master Gammon walked into Wrexby, and paid a visit to Mr. Hammond, the carpenter, who produced two strong saving-boxes excellently manufactured by his own hand, without a lid to them, or lock and key: so that there would be no getting at the contents until the boxes were full, or a pressing occasion counselled the destruction of the boxes. A constant subject of jest between Mrs. Sumfit and Master Gammon was, as to which first of them would be overpowered by curiosity to know the amount of their respective savings; and their confessions of mutual weakness and futile endeavours to extract one piece of gold from the hoard.

"And now, think it or not," said Mrs. Sumfit, "I got that power over him, from doctorin' him, and cookin' for him, I persuaded him to help my poor Dahly in my blessed's need. I'd like him to do it by halves, but he can't."

Master Gammon appeared round a corner of the house, his box, draped by his handkerchief, under his arm. The farmer and Robert knew, when he was in sight, that gestures and shouts expressing extremities of the need for haste, would fail to accelerate his steps, so they allowed him to come on at his own equal pace, steady as Time, with the peculiar lopping bend of knees which jerked the moveless trunk regularly upward, and the ancient round eyes fixed contemplatively forward. There was an affectingness in this view of the mechanical old man bearing his poor hoard to bestow it.

Robert said out, unawares, "He mustn't be let to part with h'old pennies."

“No;” the farmer took him up; “nor I won’t let him.”

Page 1059

“Yes, father!” Rhoda intercepted his address to Master Gammon. “Yes, father!” she hardened her accent. “It is for my sister. He does a good thing. Let him do it.”

“Mas’ Gammon, what ha’ ye got there?” the farmer sung out.

But Master Gammon knew that he was about his own business. He was a difficult old man when he served the farmer; he was quite unmanageable in his private affairs.

Without replying, he said to Mrs. Sumfit,—

“I’d gummed it.”

The side of the box showed that it had been made adhesive, for the sake of security, to another substance.

“That’s what’s caused ye to be so long, Mas’ Gammon?”

The veteran of the fields responded with a grin, designed to show a lively cunning.

“Deary me, Mas’ Gammon, I’d give a fortnight’s work to know how much you’m saved, now, I would. And, there! Your comfort’s in your heart. And it shall be paid to you. I do pray heaven in mercy to forgive me,” she whimpered, “if ever knowin’ly I hasted you at a meal, or did deceive you when you looked for the pickings of fresh-killed pig. But if you only knew how—to cookit spoils the temper of a woman! I’d a aunt was cook in a gentleman’s fam’ly, and daily he dirtied his thirteen plates—never more nor never less; and one day—was ever a woman punished so! her best black silk dress she greased from the top to the bottom, and he sent down nine clean plates, and no word vouchsafed of explanation. For gentlefolks, they won’t teach themselves how it do hang together with cooks in a kitchen—”

“Jump up, Mas’ Gammon,” cried the farmer, wrathful at having been deceived by two members of his household, who had sworn to him, both, that they had no money, and had disregarded his necessity. Such being human nature!

Mrs. Sumfit confided the termination of her story to Rhoda; or suggested rather, at what distant point it might end; and then, giving Master Gammon’s box to her custody, with directions for Dahlia to take the boxes to a carpenter’s shop—not attempting the power of pokers upon them—and count and make a mental note of the amount of the rival hoards, she sent Dahlia all her messages of smirking reproof, and delighted love, and hoped that they would soon meet and know happiness.

Rhoda, as usual, had no emotion to spare. She took possession of the second box, and thus laden, suffered Robert to lift her into the cart. They drove across the green, past the mill and its flashing waters, and into the road, where the waving of Mrs. Sumfit’s desolate handkerchief was latest seen.

A horseman rode by, whom Rhoda recognized, and she blushed and had a boding shiver. Robert marked him, and the blush as well.

It was Algernon, upon a livery-stable hack. His countenance expressed a mighty disappointment.

The farmer saw no one. The ingratitude and treachery of Robert, and of Mrs. Sumfit and Master Gammon, kept him brooding in sombre disgust of life. He remarked that the cart jolted a good deal.

Page 1060

“If you goes in a cart, wi’ company o’ four, you expects to be jolted,” said Master Gammon.

“You seem to like it,” Robert observed to the latter.

“It don’t disturb my in’ards,” quoth the serenest of mankind.

“Gammon,” the farmer addressed him from the front seat, without turning his head: “you’ll take and look about for a new place.”

Master Gammon digested the recommendation in silence. On its being repeated, with, “D’ ye hear?” he replied that he heard well enough.

“Well, then, look about ye sharp, or maybe, you’ll be out in the cold,” said the farmer.

“Na,” returned Master Gammon, “ah never frets till I’m pinched.”

“I’ve given ye notice,” said the farmer.

“No, you ha’n’t,” said Master Gammon.

“I give ye notice now.”

“No, you don’t.”

“How d’ ye mean?”

“Cause I don’t take ne’er a notice.”

“Then you’ll be kicked out, old man.”

“Hey! there y’ have me,” said Master Gammon. “I growed at the farm, and you don’t go and tell ne’er a tree t’ walk.”

Rhoda laid her fingers in the veteran’s palm.

“You’re a long-lived family, aren’t you, Master Gammon?” said Robert, eyeing Rhoda’s action enviously.

Master Gammon bade him go to a certain churchyard in Sussex, and inspect a particular tombstone, upon which the ages of his ancestry were written. They were more like the ages of oaks than of men.

“It’s the heart kills,” said Robert.

“It’s damned misfortune,” murmured the farmer.

“It is the wickedness in the world,” thought Rhoda.

“It’s a poor stomach, I reckon,” Master Gammon ruminated.

They took leave of him at the station, from which eminence it was a notable thing to see him in the road beneath, making preparations for his return, like a conqueror of the hours. Others might run, and stew, if they liked: Master Gammon had chosen his pace, and was not of a mind to change it for anybody or anything. It was his boast that he had never ridden by railway: “nor ever means to, if I can help it,” he would say. He was very much in harmony with universal nature, if to be that is the secret of human life.

Meantime, Algernon retraced his way to the station in profound chagrin: arriving there just as the train was visible. He caught sight of the cart with Master Gammon in it, and asked him whether all his people were going up to London; but the reply was evidently a mile distant, and had not started; so putting a sovereign in Master Gammon’s hand, together with the reins of his horse, Algernon bade the old man conduct the animal to the White Bear Inn, and thus violently pushing him off the tramways of his intelligence, left him stranded.

He had taken a first-class return-ticket, of course, being a gentleman. In the desperate hope that he might jump into a carriage with Rhoda, he entered one of the second-class compartments; a fact not only foreign to his tastes and his habits, but somewhat disgraceful, as he thought. His trust was, that the ignoble of this earth alone had beheld him: at any rate, his ticket was first class, as the guard would instantly and respectfully perceive, and if he had the discomforts, he had also some of the consolations of virtue.

Page 1061

Once on his way, the hard seat and the contemptible society surrounding him, assured his reflective spirit that he loved: otherwise, was it in reason that he should endure these hardships? "I really love the girl," he said, fidgeting for cushions.

He was hot, and wanted the window up, to which his fellow-travellers assented. Then, the atmosphere becoming loaded with offence to his morbid sense of smell, he wanted the windows down; and again they assented. "By Jove! I must love the girl," ejaculated Algernon inwardly, as cramp, cold, and afflicted nostrils combined to astonish his physical sensations. Nor was it displeasing to him to evince that he was unaccustomed to bare boards.

"We're a rich country," said a man to his neighbour; "but, if you don't pay for it, you must take your luck, and they'll make you as uncomfortable as they can."

"Ay," said the other. "I've travelled on the Continent. The second-class carriages there are fit for anybody to travel in. This is what comes of the worship of money—the individual is not respected. Pounds alone!"

"These," thought Algernon, "are beastly democrats."

Their remarks had been sympathetic with his manifestations, which had probably suggested them. He glowered out of the window in an exceedingly foreign manner. A plainly dressed woman requested that the window should be closed. One of the men immediately proceeded to close it. Algernon stopped him.

"Pardon me, sir," said the man; "it's a lady wants it done;" and he did it.

A lady! Algernon determined that these were the sort of people he should hate for life. "Go among them and then see what they are," he addressed an imaginary assembly of anti-democrats, as from a senatorial chair set in the after days. Cramp, cold, ill-ordered smells, and eternal hatred of his fellow-passengers, convinced him, in their aggregation, that he surmounted not a little for love of Rhoda.

The train arrived in London at dusk. Algernon saw Rhoda step from a carriage near the engine, assisted by Robert; and old Anthony was on the platform to welcome her; and Anthony seized her bag, and the troop of passengers moved away. It may be supposed that Algernon had angry sensations at sight of Robert; and to a certain extent this was the case; but he was a mercurial youth, and one who had satisfactorily proved superior strength enjoyed a portion of his respect. Besides, if Robert perchance should be courting Rhoda, he and Robert would enter into another field of controversy; and Robert might be taught a lesson.

He followed the party on foot until they reached Anthony's dwelling-place, noted the house, and sped to the Temple. There, he found a telegraphic message from Edward, that had been awaiting him since the morning.

"Stop It," were the sole words of the communication brief, and if one preferred to think so, enigmatic.

"What on earth does he mean?" cried Algernon, and affected again and again to see what Edward meant, without success. "Stop it?—stop what?—Stop the train? Stop my watch? Stop the universe? Oh! this is rank humbug." He flung the paper down, and fell to counting the money in his possession. The more it dwindled, the more imperative it became that he should depart from his country.

Page 1062

Behind the figures, he calculated that, in all probability, Rhoda would visit her sister this night. “I can’t stop that,” he said: and hearing a clock strike, “nor that” a knock sounded on the door; “nor that.” The reflection inspired him with fatalistic views.

Sedgett appeared, and was welcome. Algernon had to check the impulse of his hand to stretch out to the fellow, so welcome was he: Sedgett stated that everything stood ready for the morrow. He had accomplished all that had to be done.

“And it’s more than many’d reckon,” he said, and rubbed his hands, and laughed. “I was aboard ship in Liverpool this morning, that I was. That ere young woman’s woke up from her dream”, (he lengthened the word inexpressibly) “by this time, that she is. I had to pay for my passage, though;” at which recollection he swore. “That’s money gone. Never mind: there’s worse gone with it. Ain’t it nasty—don’t you think, sir—to get tired of a young woman you’ve been keepin’ company with, and have to be her companion, whether you will, or whether you won’t? She’s sick enough now. We travelled all night. I got her on board; got her to go to her bed; and, says I, I’ll arrange about the luggage. I packs myself down into a boat, and saw the ship steam away a good’n. Hanged if I didn’t catch myself singin’. And haven’t touched a drop o’ drink, nor will, till tomorrow’s over. Don’t you think ‘Daehli’s’ a very pretty name, sir? I run back to her as hard as rail ’d carry me. She’s had a letter from her sister, recommending o’ her to marry me: ‘a noble man,’ she calls me—ha, ha! that’s good. ‘And what do you think, my dear?’ says I; and, bother me, if I can screw either a compliment or a kiss out of her. She’s got fine lady airs of her own. But I’m fond of her, that I am. Well, sir, at the church door, after the ceremony, you settle our business, honour bright—that’s it, en’t it?”

Algernon nodded. Sedgett’s talk always produced discomfort in his ingenuous bosom.

“By the way, what politics are you?” he asked.

Sedgett replied, staring, that he was a Tory, and Algernon nodded again, but with brows perturbed at the thought of this ruffian being of the same political persuasion as himself.

“Eh?” cried Sedgett; “I don’t want any of your hustings pledges, though. You’ll be at the door tomorrow, or I’ll have a row—mind that. A bargain’s a bargain. I like the young woman, but I must have the money. Why not hand it over now?”

“Not till the deed’s done,” said Algernon, very reasonably.

Sedgett studied his features, and as a result remarked: “You put me up to this: I’ll do it, and trust you so far, but if I’m played on, I throw the young woman over and expose you out and out. But you mean honourable?”

“I do,” Algernon said of his meaning.

Another knock sounded on the door. It proved to be a footman in Sir William's livery, bearing a letter from Edward; an amplification of the telegram:

Page 1063

“Dear Algy, Stop it. I’m back, and have to see my father. I may be down about two, or three, or four, in the morning. No key; so, keep in. I want to see you. My whole life is changed. I must see her. Did you get my telegram? Answer, by messenger; I shall come to you the moment my father has finished his lecture.
“Yours,
“E.B.”

Algernon told Sedgett to wait while he dressed in evening uniform, and gave him a cigar to smoke.

He wrote:—

“Dear Ned, Stop what? Of course, I suppose there’s only one thing, and how can I stop it? What for? You ridiculous old boy! What a changeable old fellow you are!—Off, to see what I can do. After eleven o’clock to-morrow, you’ll feel comfortable.—If the Governor is sweet, speak a word for the Old Brown; and bring two dozen in a cab, if you can. There’s no encouragement to keep at home in this place. Put that to him. I, in your place, could do it. Tell him it’s a matter of markets. If I get better wine at hotels, I go to hotels, and I spend twice—ten times the money. And say, we intend to make the laundress cook our dinners in chambers, as a rule. Old B. an inducement.

“Yours aff.
“A.B.”

This epistle he dispatched by the footman, and groaned to think that if, perchance, the Old Brown Sherry should come, he would, in all probability, barely drink more than half-a-dozen bottles of that prime vintage. He and Sedgett, soon after, were driving down to Dahlia’s poor lodgings in the West. On the way, an idea struck him:

Would not Sedgett be a noisier claimant for the thousand than Edward? If he obeyed Edward’s direction and stopped the marriage, he could hand back a goodly number of hundreds, and leave it to be supposed that he had advanced the remainder to Sedgett. How to do it? Sedgett happened to say: “If you won’t hand the money now, I must have it when I’ve married her. Swear you’ll be in the vestry when we’re signing. I know all about marriages. You swear, or I tell you, if I find I’m cheated, I will throw the young woman over slap.”

Algernon nodded: “I shall be there,” he said, and thought that he certainly would not. The thought cleared an oppression in his head, though it obscured the pretty prospect of a colonial but and horse, with Rhoda cooking for him, far from cares. He did his best to resolve that he would stop the business, if he could. But, if it is permitted to the fool

to create entanglements and set calamity in motion, to arrest its course is the last thing the Gods allow of his doing.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Page 1064

In the shadowy library light, when there was dawn out of doors, Edward sat with his father, and both were silent, for Edward had opened his heart, and his father had breathed some of the dry stock of wisdom on it. Many times Edward rose to go; and Sir William signalled with his finger that he should stay: an impassive motion, not succeeded by speech. And, in truth, the baronet was revolving such a problem as a long career of profitable banking refreshed by classical exercitations does not help us to solve. There sat the son of his trust and his pride, whose sound and equal temperament, whose precocious worldly wit, whose precise and broad intelligence, had been the visionary comfort of his paternal days to come; and his son had told him, reiterating it in language special and exact as that of a Chancery barrister unfolding his case to the presiding judge, that he had deceived and wronged an under-bred girl of the humbler classes; and that, after a term of absence from her, he had discovered her to be a part of his existence, and designed “You would marry her?” Sir William asked, though less forcibly than if he could have put on a moral amazement.

“That is my intention, sir, with your permission,” Edward replied firmly, and his father understood that he had never known this young man, and dealt virtually with a stranger in his son—as shrewd a blow as the vanity which is in paternal nature may have to endure.

He could not fashion the words, “Cerritus fuit,” though he thought the thing in both tenses: Edward’s wits had always been too clearly in order: and of what avail was it to repeat great and honoured prudential maxims to a hard-headed fellow, whose choice was to steer upon the rocks? He did remark, in an undertone,—

“The ‘misce stultitiam’ seems to be a piece of advice you have adopted too literally. I quote what you have observed of some one else.”

“It is possible, sir,” said Edward. “I was not particularly sparing when I sat in the high seat. ’Non eadem est aetas, non mens.” I now think differently.”

“I must take your present conduct as the fruit of your premature sagacity, I suppose. By the same rule, your cousin Algernon may prove to be some comfort to his father, in the end.”

“Let us hope he will, sir. His father will not have deserved it so well as mine.”

“The time is morning,” said Sir William, looking at his watch, and bestowing, in the bitterness of his reflections, a hue of triumph on the sleep of his brother upstairs. “You are your own master, Edward. I will detain you no more.”

Edward shook his limbs, rejoicing.

“You prepare for a life of hard work,” Sir William resumed, not without some instigation to sternness from this display of alacrity. “I counsel you to try the Colonial Bar.”

Edward read in the first sentence, that his income would be restricted; and in the second, that his father’s social sphere was no longer to be his.

Page 1065

“Exactly, sir; I have entertained that notion myself,” he said; and his breast narrowed and his features grew sharp.

“And, if I may suggest such matters to you, I would advise you to see very little company for some years to come.”

“There, sir, you only anticipate my previously formed resolution. With a knavery on my conscience, and a giddy-pated girl on my hands, and the doors of the London world open to me, I should scarcely have been capable of serious work. The precious metal, which is Knowledge, sir, is only to be obtained by mining for it; and that excellent occupation necessarily sends a man out of sight for a number of years. In the meantime, ’mea virtute me involvo.’”

“You need not stop short,” said his father, with a sardonic look for the concluding lines.

“The continuation is becoming in the mouth of a hero; but humbler persons must content themselves not to boast the patent fact, I think.” Edward warmed as he spoke. “I am ready to bear it. I dislike poverty; but, as I say, I am ready to bear it. Come, sir; you did me the honour once to let me talk to you as a friend, with the limits which I have never consciously overstepped; let me explain myself plainly and simply.”

Sir William signified, “Pray speak,” from the arms of his chair! and Edward, standing, went on: “After all, a woman’s devotion is worth having, when one is not asked for the small change every ten minutes. I am aware of the philosophic truth, that we get nothing in life for which we don’t pay. The point is, to appreciate what we desire; and so we reach a level that makes the payment less—” He laughed. Sir William could hardly keep back the lines of an ironical smile from his lips.

“This,” pursued the orator, “is not the language for the Colonial Bar. I wish to show you that I shall understand the character of my vocation there. No, sir; my deeper wish is that you may accept my view of the sole course left to a man whose sense of honour is of accord with the inclination of his heart, and not in hostility to his clearer judgement.”

“Extremely forensic,” said Sir William, not displeased by the promise of the periods.

“Well, sir, I need not remark to you that rhetoric, though it should fail to convey, does not extinguish, or imply the absence of emotion in the speaker; but rather that his imagination is excited by his theme, and that he addresses more presences than such as are visible. It is, like the Roman mask, fashioned for large assemblages.”

“By a parity of reasoning, then,”—Sir William was seduced into colloquy,—“an eternal broad grin is not, in the instance of a dualogue, good comedy.”

“It may hide profound grief.” Edward made his eyes flash. “I find I can laugh; it would be difficult for me to smile. Sir, I pray that you will listen to me seriously, though my

language is not of a kind to make you think me absolutely earnest in what I say, unless you know me."

Page 1066

“Which, I must protest, I certainly do not,” interposed Sir William.

“I will do my best to instruct you, sir. Until recently, I have not known myself. I met this girl. She trusted herself to me. You are aware that I know a little of men and of women; and when I tell you that I respect her now even more than I did at first—much more—so thoroughly, that I would now put my honour in her hands, by the counsel of my experience, as she, prompted by her instinct and her faith in me, confided hers to mine, —perhaps, even if you persist in accusing me of rashness, you will allow that she must be in the possession of singularly feminine and estimable qualities. I deceived her. My object in doing so was to spare you. Those consequences followed which can hardly fail to ensue, when, of two living together, the woman is at a disadvantage, and eats her heart without complaining. I could have borne a shrewish tongue better, possibly because I could have answered it better. It is worse to see a pale sad face with a smile of unalterable tenderness. The very sweetness becomes repugnant.”

“As little boys requiring much medicine have anticipated you by noting in this world,” observed Sir William.

“I thank you for the illustration.” Edward bowed, but he smarted. “A man so situated lives with the ghost of his conscience.”

“A doubtful figure of speech,” Sir William broke in. “I think you should establish the personality before you attempt to give a feature to the essence. But, continue.”

Edward saw that by forfeiting simplicity, in order to catch his father’s peculiar cast of mind, he had left him cold and in doubt as to the existence of the powerful impulse by which he was animated. It is a prime error in the orator not to seize the emotions and subdue the humanity of his hearers first. Edward perceived his mistake. He had, however, done well in making a show of the unabated vigour of his wits. Contempt did not dwell in the baronet’s tone. On the contrary, they talked and fenced, and tripped one another as of old; and, considering the breach he had been compelled to explode between his father and himself, Edward understood that this was a real gain.

He resumed: “All figures of speech must be inadequate—”

“Ah, pardon me,” said Sir William, pertinaciously; “the figure I alluded to was not inadequate. A soap-bubble is not inadequate.”

“Plainly, sir, in God’s name, hear me out,” cried Edward. “She—what shall I call her? my mistress, my sweetheart, if you like—let the name be anything ‘wife’ it should have been, and shall be—I left her, and have left her and have not looked on her for many months. I thought I was tired of her—I was under odd influences—witchcraft, it seems. I could believe in witchcraft now. Brutal selfishness is the phrase for my conduct. I

have found out my villany. I have not done a day's sensible work, or had a single clear thought,

Page 1067

since I parted from her. She has had brain-fever. She has been in the hospital. She is now prostrate with misery. While she suffered, I—I can't look back on myself. If I had to plead before you for more than manly consideration, I could touch you. I am my own master, and am ready to subsist by my own efforts; there is no necessity for me to do more than say I abide by the choice I make, and my own actions. In deciding to marry her, I do a good thing—I do a just thing. I will prove to you that I have done a wise thing.

"Let me call to your recollection what you did me the honour to remark of my letters from Italy. Those were written with her by my side. Every other woman vexed me. This one alone gives me peace, and nerve to work. If I did not desire to work, should I venture to run the chances of an offence to you? Your girls of society are tasteless to me. And they don't makes wives to working barristers. No, nor to working Members.

"They are very ornamental and excellent, and, as I think you would call them, accomplished. All England would leap to arms to defend their incontestible superiority to their mothers and their duties. I have not the wish to stand opposed to my countrymen on any question, although I go to other shores, and may be called upon to make capital out of opposition. They are admirable young persons, no doubt. I do not offer you a drab for your daughter-in-law, sir. If I rise, she will be equal to my station. She has the manners of a lady; a lady, I say; not of the modern young lady; with whom, I am happy to think, she does not come into competition. She has not been sedulously trained to pull her way, when she is to go into harness with a yokefellow.

"But I am laying myself open to the charge of feeling my position weak, seeing that I abuse the contrary one. Think what you will of me, sir, you will know that I have obeyed my best instinct and my soundest judgement in this matter; I need not be taught, that if it is my destiny to leave England I lose the association with him who must ever be my dearest friend. And few young men can say as much of one standing in the relation of father."

With this, Edward finished; not entirely to his satisfaction; for he had spoken with too distinct a sincerity to please his own critical taste, which had been educated to delight in acute antithesis and culminating sentences—the grand Biscayan billows of rhetorical utterance, in comparison wherewith his talk was like the little chopping waves of a wind-blown lake. But he had, as he could see, produced an impression. His father stood up.

"We shall be always friends; I hope," Sir William said. "As regards a provision for you, suitable to your estate, that will be arranged. You must have what comforts you have been taught to look to. At the same time, I claim a personal freedom for my own actions."

"Certainly, sir," said Edward, not conceiving any new development in these.

Page 1068

“You have an esteem for Mrs. Lovell, have you not?”

Edward flushed. “I should have a very perfect esteem for her, if—” he laughed slightly —“you will think I want everybody to be married and in the traces now; she will never be manageable till she is married.”

“I am also of that opinion,” said Sir William. “I will detain you no longer. It is a quarter to five in the morning. You will sleep here, of course.”

“No, I must go to the Temple. By the way, Algy prefers a petition for Sherry. He is beginning to discern good wine from bad, which may be a hopeful augury.”

“I will order Holmes to send some down to him when he has done a week’s real duty at the Bank.”

“Sooner or later, then. Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning.” Sir William shook his son’s hand.

A minute after, Edward had quitted the house. “That’s over!” he said, sniffing the morning air gratefully, and eyeing certain tinted wisps of cloud that were in a line of the fresh blue sky.

CHAPTER XXXV

A shy and humble entreaty had been sent by Dahlia through Robert to Rhoda, saying that she wished not to be seen until the ceremony was at an end; but Rhoda had become mentally stern toward her sister, and as much to uphold her in the cleansing step she was about to take, as in the desire to have the dear lost head upon her bosom, she disregarded Dahlia’s foolish prayer, and found it was well that she had done so; for, to her great amazement, Dahlia, worn, shorn, sickened, and reduced to be a mark for the scorn of the cowardice which is in the world, through the selfishness of a lying man, loved the man still, and wavered, or rather shrank with a pitiful fleshly terror from the noble husband who would wipe the spot of shame from her forehead.

When, after their long separation, the sisters met, Dahlia was mistress of herself, and pronounced Rhoda’s name softly, as she moved up to kiss her. Rhoda could not speak. Oppressed by the strangeness of the white face which had passed through fire, she gave a mute kiss and a single groan, while Dahlia gently caressed her on the shoulder. The frail touch of her hand was harder to bear than the dreary vision had been, and seemed not so real as many a dream of it. Rhoda sat by her, overcome by the awfulness of an actual sorrow, never imagined closely, though she had conjured up vague pictures of Dahlia’s face. She had imagined agony, tears, despair, but not the spectral change, the burnt-out look. It was a face like a crystal lamp in which the flame

has died. The ghastly little skull-cap showed forth its wanness rigidly. Rhoda wondered to hear her talk simply of home and the old life. At each question, the then and the now struck her spirit with a lightning flash of opposing scenes. But the talk deepened. Dahlia's martyrdom was near, and their tongues were hurried into plain converse

Page 1069

of the hour, and then Dahlia faltered and huddled herself up like a creature swept by the torrent; Rhoda learnt that, instead of hate or loathing of the devilish man who had deceived her, love survived. Upon Dahlia's lips it was compassion and forgiveness; but Rhoda, in her contempt for the word, called it love. Dahlia submitted gladly to the torture of interrogation; "Do you, can you care for him still?" and sighed in shame and fear of her sister, not daring to say she thought her harsh, not daring to plead for escape, as she had done with Robert.

"Why is there no place for the unhappy, who do not wish to live, and cannot die?" she moaned.

And Rhoda cruelly fixed her to the marriage, making it seem irrevocable, and barring all the faint lights to the free outer world, by praise of her—passionate praise of her—when she confessed, that half inanimate after her recovery from the fever, and in the hope that she might thereby show herself to her father, she had consented to devote her life to the only creature who was then near her to be kind to her. Rhoda made her relate how this man had seen her first, and how, by untiring diligence, he had followed her up and found her. "He—he must love you," said Rhoda; and in proportion as she grew more conscious of her sister's weakness, and with every access of tenderness toward her, she felt that Dahlia must be thought for very much as if she were a child.

Dahlia tried to float out some fretting words for mercy, on one or other of her heavy breathings; but her brain was under lead. She had a thirst for Rhoda's praise in her desolation; it was sweet, though the price of it was her doing an abhorred thing. Abhorred? She did not realize the consequences of the act, or strength would have come to her to wrestle with the coil: a stir of her blood would have endued her with womanly counsel and womanly frenzy; nor could Rhoda have opposed any real vehemence of distaste to the union on Dahlia's part. But Dahlia's blood was frozen, her brain was under lead. She clung to the poor delight in her sister's praise, and shuddered and thirsted. She caught at the minutes, and saw them slip from her. All the health of her thoughts went to establish a sort of blind belief that God; having punished her enough, would not permit a second great misery to befall her. She expected a sudden intervention, even though at the altar. She argued to herself that misery, which follows sin, cannot surely afflict us further when we are penitent, and seek to do right: her thought being, that perchance if she refrained from striving against the current, and if she suffered her body to be borne along, God would be the more merciful. With the small cunning of an enfeebled spirit, she put on a mute submissiveness, and deceived herself by it sufficiently to let the minutes pass with a lessened horror and alarm.

This was in the first quarter of the night. The dawn was wearing near. Sedgett had been seen by Rhoda; a quiet interview; a few words on either side, attention paid to them by neither. But the girl doated on his ugliness; she took it for plain proof of his worthiness; proof too that her sister must needs have seen the latter very distinctly, or else she could not have submitted.

Page 1070

Dahlia looked at the window-blinds and at the candlelight. The little which had been spoken between her and her sister in such a chasm of time, gave a terrible swiftness to the hours. Half shrieking, she dropped her head in Rhoda's lap. Rhoda, thinking that with this demonstration she renounced the project finally, prepared to say what she had to say, and to yield. But, as was natural after a paroxysm of weakness, Dahlia's frenzy left no courage behind it.

Dahlia said, as she swept her brows, "I am still subject to nervous attacks."

"They will soon leave you," said Rhoda, nursing her hand.

Dahlia contracted her lips. "Is father very unforgiving to women?"

"Poor father!" Rhoda interjected for answer, and Dahlia's frame was taken with a convulsion.

"Where shall I see him to-morrow?" she asked; and, glancing from the beamless candle to the window-blinds "Oh! it's day. Why didn't I sleep! It's day! where am I to see him?"

"At Robert's lodgings. We all go there."

"We all go?—he goes?"

"Your husband will lead you there."

"My heaven! my heaven! I wish you had known what this is, a little—just a little."

"I do know that it is a good and precious thing to do right," said Rhoda.

"If you had only had an affection, dear! Oh I how ungrateful I am to you."

"It is only, darling, that I seem unkind to you," said Rhoda.

"You think I must do this? Must? Why?"

"Why?" Rhoda pressed her fingers. "Why, when you were ill, did you not write to me, that I might have come to you?"

"I was ashamed," said Dahlia.

"You shall not be ashamed any more, my sister."

Dahlia seized the window-blind with her trembling finger-tips, and looked out on the day. As if it had smitten her eyeballs, she covered her face, giving dry sobs.

“Oh! I wish—I wish you had known what this is. Must I do it? His face! Dear, I am very sorry to distress you. Must I do it? The doctor says I am so strong that nothing will break in me, and that I must live, if I am not killed. But, if I might only be a servant in father’s house—I would give all my love to a little bed of flowers.”

“Father has no home now,” said Rhoda.

“I know—I know. I am ready. I will submit, and then father will not be ashamed to remain at the Farm. I am ready. Dear, I am ready. Rhoda, I am ready. It is not much.” She blew the candle out. “See. No one will do that for me. We are not to live for ourselves. I have done wrong, and I am going to be humble; yes, I am. I never was when I was happy, and that proves I had no right to be happy. All I ask is for another night with you. Why did we not lie down together and sleep? We can’t sleep now—it’s day.”

“Come and lie down with me for a few hours, my darling,” said Rhoda.

While she was speaking, Dahlia drew the window-blind aside, to look out once more upon the vacant, inexplicable daylight, and looked, and then her head bent like the first thrust forward of a hawk’s sighting quarry; she spun round, her raised arms making a cramped, clapping motion.

Page 1071

“He is there.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

At once Rhoda perceived that it was time for her to act. The name of him who stood in the street below was written on her sister’s face. She started to her side, got possession of her hands, murmuring,—

“Come with me. You are to come with me. Don’t speak. I know. I will go down. Yes; you are to obey, and do what I tell you.”

Dahlia’s mouth opened, but like a child when it is warned not to cry, she uttered a faint inward wailing, lost her ideas, and was passive in a shuddering fit.

“What am I to do?” she said supplicatingly, as Rhoda led her to her bedroom.

“Rest here. Be perfectly quiet. Trust everything to me. I am your sister.”

Leaving her under the spell of coldly-spoken words, Rhoda locked the door on her. She was herself in great agitation, but nerved by deeper anger there was no faltering in her movements. She went to the glass a minute, as she tied her bonnet-strings under her chin, and pinned her shawl. A night’s vigil had not chased the bloom from her cheek, or the swimming lustre from her dark eyes. Content that her aspect should be seemly, she ran down the stairs, unfastened the bolts, and without hesitation closed the door behind her. At the same instant, a gentleman crossed the road. He asked whether Mrs. Ayrton lived in that house? Rhoda’s vision danced across his features, but she knew him unerringly to be the cruel enemy.

“My sister, Dahlia Fleming, lives there,” she said.

“Then, you are Rhoda?”

“My name is Rhoda.”

“Mine—I fear it will not give you pleasure to hear it—is Edward Blancove. I returned late last night from abroad.”

She walked to a distance, out of hearing and out of sight of the house, and he silently followed. The streets were empty, save for the solitary footing of an early workman going to his labour.

She stopped, and he said, “I hope your sister is well.”

“She is quite well.”

“Thank heaven for that! I heard of some illness.”

“She has quite recovered.”

“Did she—tell me the truth—did she get a letter that I sent two days ago, to her? It was addressed to ‘Miss Fleming, Wrexby, Kent, England.’ Did it reach her?”

“I have not seen it.”

“I wrote,” said Edward.

His scrutiny of her features was not reassuring to him. But he had a side-thought, prompted by admiration of her perfect build of figure, her succinct expression of countenance, and her equable manner of speech: to the effect, that the true English yeomanry can breed consummate women. Perhaps—who knows? even resolute human nature is the stronger for an added knot—it approved the resolution he had formed, or stamped with a justification the series of wild impulses, the remorse, and the returned tenderness and manliness which had brought him to that spot.

Page 1072

“You know me, do you not?” he said.

“Yes,” she answered shortly.

“I wish to see Dahlia.”

“You cannot.”

“Not immediately, of course. But when she has risen later in the morning. If she has received my letter, she will, she must see me.”

“No, not later; not at all,” said Rhoda.

“Not at all? Why not?”

Rhoda controlled the surging of her blood for a vehement reply; saying simply, “You will not see her.”

“My child, I must.”

“I am not a child, and I say what I mean.”

“But why am I not to see her? Do you pretend that it is her wish not to see me? You can’t. I know her perfectly. She is gentleness itself.”

“Yes; you know that,” said Rhoda, with a level flash of her eyes, and confronting him in a way so rarely distinguishing girls of her class, that he began to wonder and to ache with an apprehension.

“She has not changed? Rhoda—for we used to talk of you so often! You will think better of me, by-and-by.

“Naturally enough, you detest me at present. I have been a brute. I can’t explain it, and I don’t excuse myself. I state the fact to you—her sister. My desire is to make up for the past. Will you take a message to her from me?”

“I will not.”

“You are particularly positive.”

Remarks touching herself Rhoda passed by.

“Why are you so decided?” he said more urgently. “I know I have deeply offended and hurt you. I wish, and intend to repair the wrong to the utmost of my power. Surely it’s mere silly vindictiveness on your part to seek to thwart me. Go to her; say I am here. At

all events, let it be her choice not to see me, if I am to be rejected at the door. She can't have had my letter. Will you do that much?"

"She knows that you are here; she has seen you."

"Has seen me?" Edward drew in his breath sharply. "Well? and she sends you out to me?"

Rhoda did not answer. She was strongly tempted to belie Dahlia's frame of mind.

"She does send you to speak to me," Edward insisted.

"She knows that I have come."

"And you will not take one message in?"

"I will take no message from you."

"You hate me, do you not?"

Again she controlled the violent shock of her heart to give him hard speech. He went on:—

"Whether you hate me or not is beside the matter. It lies between Dahlia and me. I will see her. When I determine, I allow of no obstacles, not even of wrong-headed girls. First, let me ask, is your father in London?"

Rhoda threw a masculine meaning into her eyes.

"Do not come before him, I advise you."

"If," said Edward, with almost womanly softness, "you could know what I have passed through in the last eight-and-forty hours, you would understand that I am equal to any meeting; though, to speak truth, I would rather not see him until I have done what I mean to do. Will you be persuaded? Do you suppose that I have ceased to love your sister?"

Page 1073

This, her execrated word, coming from his mouth, vanquished her self-possession.

“Are you cold?” he said, seeing the ripple of a trembling run over her.

“I am not cold. I cannot remain here.” Rhoda tightened her intertwisting fingers across under her bosom. “Don’t try to kill my sister outright. She’s the ghost of what she was. Be so good as to go. She will soon be out of your reach. You will have to kill me first, if you get near her. Never! you never shall. You have lied to her—brought disgrace on her poor head. We poor people read our Bibles, and find nothing that excuses you. You are not punished, because there is no young man in our family. Go.”

Edward gazed at her for some time. “Well, I’ve deserved worse,” he said, not sorry, now that he saw an opponent in her, that she should waste her concentrated antagonism in this fashion, and rejoiced by the testimony it gave him that he was certainly not too late.

“You know, Rhoda, she loves me.”

“If she does, let her pray to God on her knees.”

“My good creature, be reasonable. Why am I here? To harm her? You take me for a kind of monster. You look at me very much, let me say, like a bristling cat. Here are the streets getting full of people, and you ought not to be seen. Go to Dahlia. Tell her I am here. Tell her I am come to claim her for good, and that her troubles are over. This is a moment to use your reason. Will you do what I ask?”

“I would cut my tongue out, if it did you a service,” said Rhoda.

“Citoyenne Corday,” thought Edward, and observed: “Then I will dispense with your assistance.”

He moved in the direction of the house. Rhoda swiftly outstripped him. They reached the gates together. She threw herself in the gateway. He attempted to parley, but she was dumb to it.

“I allow nothing to stand between her and me,” he said, and seized her arm. She glanced hurriedly to right and left. At that moment Robert appeared round a corner of the street. He made his voice heard, and, coming up at double quick, caught Edward Blancove by the collar, swinging him off. Rhoda, with a sign, tempered him to muteness, and the three eyed one another.

“It’s you,” said Robert, and, understanding immediately the tactics desired by Rhoda, requested Edward to move a step or two away in his company.

Edward settled the disposition of his coat-collar, as a formula wherewith to regain composure of mind, and passed along beside Robert, Rhoda following.

“What does this mean?” said Robert sternly.

Edward’s darker nature struggled for ascendancy within him. It was this man’s violence at Fairly which had sickened him, and irritated him against Dahlia, and instigated him, as he remembered well, more than Mrs. Lovell’s witcheries, to the abhorrent scheme to be quit of her, and rid of all botheration, at any cost.

“You’re in some conspiracy to do her mischief, all of you,” he cried.

Page 1074

“If you mean Dahlia Fleming,” said Robert, “it’d be a base creature that would think of doing harm to her now.”

He had a man’s perception that Edward would hardly have been found in Dahlia’s neighbourhood with evil intentions at this moment, though it was a thing impossible to guess. Generous himself, he leaned to the more generous view.

“I think your name is Eccles,” said Edward. “Mr. Eccles, my position here is a very sad one. But first, let me acknowledge that I have done you personally a wrong. I am ready to bear the burden of your reproaches, or what you will. All that I beg is, that you will do me the favour to grant me five minutes in private. It is imperative.”

Rhoda burst in—“No, Robert!” But Robert said, “It is a reasonable request;” and, in spite of her angry eyes, he waved her back, and walked apart with Edward.

She stood watching them, striving to divine their speech by their gestures, and letting her savage mood interpret the possible utterances. It went ill with Robert in her heart that he did not suddenly grapple and trample the man, and so break away from him. She was outraged to see Robert’s listening posture. “Lies! lies!” she said to herself, “and he doesn’t know them to be lies.” The window-blinds in Dahlia’s sitting-room continued undisturbed; but she feared the agency of the servant of the house in helping to release her sister. Time was flowing to dangerous strands. At last Robert turned back singly. Rhoda fortified her soul to resist.

“He has fooled you,” she murmured, inaudibly, before he spoke.

“Perhaps, Rhoda, we ought not to stand in his way. He wishes to do what a man can do in his case. So he tells me, and I’m bound not to disbelieve him. He says he repents—-says the word; and gentlemen seem to mean it when they use it. I respect the word, and them when they’re up to that word. He wrote to her that he could not marry her, and it did the mischief, and may well be repented of; but he wishes to be forgiven and make amends—well, such as he can. He’s been abroad, and only received Dahlia’s letters within the last two or three days. He seems to love her, and to be heartily wretched. Just hear me out; you’ll decide; but pray, pray don’t be rash. He wishes to marry her; says he has spoken to his father this very night; came straight over from France, after he had read her letters. He says—and it seems fair—he only asks to see Dahlia for two minutes. If she bids him go, he goes. He’s not a friend of mine, as I could prove to you; but I do think he ought to see her. He says he looks on her as his wife; always meant her to be his wife, but things were against him when he wrote that letter. Well, he says so; and it’s true that gentlemen are situated—they can’t always, or think they can’t, behave quite like honest men. They’ve got a hundred things to consider for our one. That’s my experience, and I know something of the best among ’em. The question is about this poor young fellow who’s to marry her to-day. Mr.

Blancove talks of giving him a handsome sum—a thousand pounds—and making him comfortable—”

Page 1075

“There!” Rhoda exclaimed, with a lightning face. “You don’t see what he is, after that? Oh!—” She paused, revolted.

“Will you let me run off to the young man, wherever he’s to be found, and put the case to him—that is, from Dahlia? And you know she doesn’t like the marriage overmuch, Rhoda. Perhaps he may think differently when he comes to hear of things. As to Mr. Blancove, men change and change when they’re young. I mean, gentlemen. We must learn to forgive. Either he’s as clever as the devil, or he’s a man in earnest, and deserves pity. If you’d heard him!”

“My poor sister!” sighed Rhoda. The mentioning of money to be paid had sickened and weakened her, as with the very physical taste of degradation.

Hearing the sigh, Robert thought she had become subdued. Then Rhoda said: “We are bound to this young man who loves my sister—bound to him in honour: and Dahlia must esteem him, to have consented. As for the other...” She waved the thought of his claim on her sister aside with a quick shake of her head. “I rely on you to do this:—I will speak to Mr. Blancove myself. He shall not see her there.” She indicated the house. “Go to my sister; and lose no time in taking her to your lodgings. Father will not arrive till twelve. Wait and comfort her till I come, and answer no questions. Robert,” she gave him her hand gently, and, looking sweetly, “if you will do this!”

“If I will!” cried Robert, transported by the hopeful tenderness. The servant girl of the house had just opened the front door, intent on scrubbing, and he passed in. Rhoda walked on to Edward.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A profound belief in the efficacy of his eloquence, when he chose to expend it, was one of the principal supports of Edward’s sense of mastery; a secret sense belonging to certain men in every station of life, and which is the staff of many an otherwise impressible and fluctuating intellect. With this gift, if he trifled, or slid downward in any direction, he could right himself easily, as he satisfactorily conceived. It is a gift that may now and then be the ruin of promising youths, though as a rule they find it helpful enough. Edward had exerted it upon his father, and upon Robert. Seeing Rhoda’s approach, he thought of it as a victorious swordsman thinks of his weapon, and aimed his observation over her possible weak and strong points, studying her curiously even when she was close up to him. With Robert, the representative of force, to aid her, she could no longer be regarded in the light of a despicable hindrance to his wishes. Though inclined strongly to detest, he respected her. She had decision, and a worthy bearing, and a marvellously blooming aspect, and a brain that worked withal. When she spoke, desiring him to walk on by her side, he was pleased by her voice, and recognition of the laws of propriety, and thought it a thousand pities

Page 1076

that she likewise should not become the wife of a gentleman. By degrees, after tentative beginnings, he put his spell upon her ears, for she was attentive, and walked with a demure forward look upon the pavement; in reality taking small note of what things he said, until he quoted, as against himself, sentences from Dahlia's letters; and then she fixed her eyes on him, astonished that he should thus heap condemnation on his own head. They were most pathetic scraps quoted by him, showing the wrestle of love with a petrifying conviction of its hopelessness, and with the stealing on of a malady of the blood. They gave such a picture of Dahlia's reverent love for this man, her long torture, her chastity of soul and simple innocence, and her gathering delirium of anguish, as Rhoda had never taken at all distinctly to her mind. She tried to look out on him from a mist of tears.

"How could you bear to read the letters?" she sobbed.

"Could any human being read them and not break his heart for her?" said he.

"How could you bear to read them and leave her to perish!"

His voice deepened to an impressive hollow: "I read them for the first time yesterday morning, in France, and I am here!"

It was undeniably, in its effect on Rhoda, a fine piece of pleading artifice. It partially excused or accounted for his behaviour, while it filled her with emotions which she felt to be his likewise, and therefore she could not remain as an unsympathetic stranger by his side.

With this, he flung all artifice away. He told her the whole story, saving the one black episode of it—the one incomprehensible act of a desperate baseness that, blindly to get free, he had deliberately permitted, blinked at, and had so been guilty of. He made a mental pause as he was speaking, to consider in amazement how and by what agency he had been reduced to shame his manhood, and he left it a marvel. Otherwise, he in no degree exonerated himself. He dwelt sharply on his vice of ambition, and scorned it as a misleading light. "Yet I have done little since I have been without her!" And then, with a persuasive sincerity, he assured her that he could neither study nor live apart from Dahlia. "She is the dearest soul to me on earth; she is the purest woman. I have lived with her, I have lived apart from her, and I cannot live without her. I love her with a husband's love. Now, do you suppose I will consent to be separated from her? I know that while her heart beats, it's mine. Try to keep her from me—you kill her."

"She did not die," said Rhoda. It confounded his menaces.

"This time she might," he could not refrain from murmuring.

"Ah!" Rhoda drew off from him.

“But I say,” cried he, “that I will see her.”

“We say, that she shall do what is for her good.”

“You have a project? Let me hear it. You are mad, if you have.”

“It is not our doing, Mr. Blancove. It was—it was by her own choice. She will not always be ashamed to look her father in the face. She dare not see him before she is made worthy to see him. I believe her to have been directed right.”

Page 1077

“And what is her choice?”

“She has chosen for herself to marry a good and worthy man.”

Edward called out, “Have you seen him—the man?”

Rhoda, thinking he wished to have the certainty of the stated fact established, replied, “I have.”

“A good and worthy man,” muttered Edward. “Illness, weakness, misery, have bewildered her senses. She thinks him a good and worthy man?”

“I think him so.”

“And you have seen him?”

“I have.”

“Why, what monstrous delusion is this? It can’t be! My good creature, you’re oddly deceived, I imagine. What is the man’s name? I can understand that she has lost her will and distinct sight; but you are clear-sighted, and can estimate. What is the man’s name?”

“I can tell you,” said Rhoda; “his name is Mr. Sedgett.”

“Mister—!” Edward gave one hollow stave of laughter. “And you have seen him, and think him—”

“I know he is not a gentleman,” said Rhoda. “He has been deeply good to my sister, and I thank him, and do respect him.”

“Deeply!” Edward echoed. He was prompted to betray and confess himself: courage failed.

They looked around simultaneously on hearing an advancing footstep.

The very man appeared—in holiday attire, flushed, smiling, and with a nosegay of roses in his hand. He studied the art of pleasing women. His eye struck on Edward, and his smile vanished. Rhoda gave him no word of recognition. As he passed on, he was led to speculate from his having seen Mr. Edward instead of Mr. Algernon, and from the look of the former, that changes were in the air, possibly chicanery, and the proclaiming of himself as neatly diddled by the pair whom, with another, he heartily hoped to dupe.

After he had gone by, Edward and Rhoda changed looks. Both knew the destination of that lovely nosegay. The common knowledge almost kindled an illuminating spark in

her brain; but she was left in the dark, and thought him strangely divining, or only strange. For him, a horror cramped his limbs. He felt that he had raised a devil in that abominable smirking ruffian. It may not, perhaps, be said that he had distinctly known Sedgett to be the man. He had certainly suspected the possibility of his being the man. It is out of the power of most wilful and selfish natures to imagine, so as to see accurately, the deeds they prompt or permit to be done. They do not comprehend them until these black realities stand up before their eyes.

Ejaculating “Great heaven!” Edward strode some steps away, and returned.

“It’s folly, Rhoda!—the uttermost madness ever conceived! I do not believe—I know that Dahlia would never consent—first, to marry any man but myself; secondly, to marry a man who is not a perfect gentleman. Her delicacy distinguishes her among women.”

“Mr. Blancove, my sister is nearly dead, only that she is so strong. The disgrace has overwhelmed her, it has. When she is married, she will thank and honour him, and see nothing but his love and kindness. I will leave you now.”

Page 1078

“I am going to her,” said Edward.

“Do not.”

“There’s an end of talking. I trust no one will come in my path. Where am I?”

He looked up at the name of the street, and shot away from her. Rhoda departed in another direction, firm, since she had seen Sedgett pass, that his nobleness should not meet with an ill reward. She endowed him with fair moral qualities, which she contrasted against Edward Blancove’s evil ones; and it was with a democratic fervour of contempt that she dismissed the superior outward attractions of the gentleman.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

This neighbourhood was unknown to Edward, and, after plunging about in one direction and another, he found that he had missed his way. Down innumerable dusky streets of dwarfed houses, showing soiled silent window-blinds, he hurried and chafed; at one moment in sharp joy that he had got a resolution, and the next dismayed by the singular petty impediments which were tripping him. “My dearest!” his heart cried to Dahlia, “did I wrong you so? I will make all well. It was the work of a fiend.” Now he turned to right, now to left, and the minutes flew. They flew; and in the gathering heat of his brain he magnified things until the sacrifice of herself Dahlia was preparing for smote his imagination as with a blaze of the upper light, and stood sublime before him in the grandeur of old tragedy. “She has blinded her eyes, stifled her senses, eaten her heart. Oh! my beloved! my wife! my poor girl! and all to be free from shame in her father’s sight!” Who could have believed that a girl of Dahlia’s class would at once have felt the shame so keenly, and risen to such pure heights of heroism? The sacrifice flouted conception; it mocked the steady morning. He refused to believe in it, but the short throbs of his blood were wiser.

A whistling urchin became his guide. The little lad was carelessly giving note to a popular opera tune, with happy disregard of concord. It chanced that the tune was one which had taken Dahlia’s ear, and, remembering it and her pretty humming of it in the old days, Edward’s wrestling unbelief with the fatality of the hour sank, so entirely was he under the sovereignty of his sensations. He gave the boy a big fee, desiring superstitiously to feel that one human creature could bless the hour. The house was in view. He knocked, and there came a strange murmur of some denial. “She is here,” he said, menacingly.

“She was taken away, sir, ten minutes gone, by a gentleman,” the servant tied to assure him.

The landlady of the house, coming up the kitchen stairs, confirmed the statement. In pity for his torpid incredulity she begged him to examine her house from top to bottom, and herself conducted him to Dahlia's room.

"That bed has not been slept in," said the lawyer, pointing his finger to it.

"No, sir; poor thing! she didn't sleep last night. She's been wearying for weeks; and last night her sister came, and they hadn't met for very long. Two whole candles they burnt out, or near upon it."

Page 1079

“Where?—” Edward’s articulation choked.

“Where they’re gone to, sir? That I do not know. Of course she will come back.”

The landlady begged him to wait; but to sit and see the minutes—the black emissaries of perdition—fly upon their business, was torture as big as to endure the tearing off of his flesh till the skeleton stood out. Up to this point he had blamed himself; now he accused the just heavens. Yea! is not a sinner their lawful quarry? and do they not slip the hounds with savage glee, and hunt him down from wrong to evil, from evil to infamy, from infamy to death, from death to woe everlasting? And is this their righteousness? —He caught at the rusty garden rails to steady his feet.

Algernon was employed in the comfortable degustation of his breakfast, meditating whether he should transfer a further slice of ham or of Yorkshire pie to his plate, or else have done with feeding and light a cigar, when Edward appeared before him.

“Do you know where that man lives?”

Algernon had a prompting to respond, “Now, really! what man?” But passion stops the breath of fools. He answered, “Yes.”

“Have you the thousand in your pocket?”

Algernon nodded with a sickly grin.

“Jump up! Go to him. Give it up to him! Say, that if he leaves London on the instant, and lets you see him off—say, it shall be doubled. Stay, I’ll write the promise, and put my signature. Tell him he shall, on my word of honour, have another—another thousand pounds—as soon as I can possibly obtain it, if he holds his tongue, and goes with you; and see that he goes. Don’t talk to me on any other subject, or lose one minute.”

Algernon got his limbs slackly together, trying to think of the particular pocket in which he had left his cigar-case. Edward wrote a line on a slip of note-paper, and signed his name beneath. With this and an unsatisfied longing for tobacco Algernon departed, agreeing to meet his cousin in the street where Dahlia dwelt.

“By Jove! two thousand! It’s an expensive thing not to know your own mind,” he thought.

“How am I to get out of this scrape? That girl Rhoda doesn’t care a button for me. No colonies for me. I should feel like a convict if I went alone. What on earth am I to do?”

It seemed preposterous to him that he should take a cab, when he had not settled upon a scheme. The sight of a tobacconist's shop charmed one of his more immediate difficulties to sleep. He was soon enabled to puff consoling smoke.

"Ned's mad," he pursued his soliloquy. "He's a weather-cock. Do I ever act as he does? And I'm the dog that gets the bad name. The idea of giving this fellow two thousand—two thousand pounds! Why, he might live like a gentleman."

And that when your friend proves himself to be distraught, the proper friendly thing to do is to think for him, became eminently clear in Algernon's mind.

Page 1080

“Of course, it’s Ned’s money. I’d give it if I had it, but I haven’t; and the fellow won’t take a farthing less; I know him. However, it’s my duty to try.”

He summoned a vehicle. It was a boast of his proud youth that never in his life had he ridden in a close cab. Flinging his shoulders back, he surveyed the world on foot. “Odd faces one sees,” he meditated. “I suppose they’ve got feelings, like the rest; but a fellow can’t help asking—what’s the use of them? If I inherit all right, as I ought to—why shouldn’t I?—I’ll squat down at old Wrexby, garden and farm, and drink my Port. I hate London. The squire’s not so far wrong, I fancy.”

It struck him that his chance of inheriting was not so very obscure, after all. Why had he ever considered it obscure? It was decidedly next to certain, he being an only son. And the squire’s health was bad!

While speculating in this wise he saw advancing, arm-in-arm, Lord Suckling and Harry Latters. They looked at him, and evidently spoke together, but gave neither nod, nor smile, nor a word, in answer to his flying wave of the hand. Furious, and aghast at this signal of exclusion from the world, just at the moment when he was returning to it almost cheerfully in spirit, he stopped the cab, jumped out, and ran after the pair.

“I suppose I must say Mr. Latters,” Algernon commenced.

Harry deliberated a quiet second or two. “Well, according to our laws of primogeniture, I don’t come first, and therefore miss a better title,” he said.

“How are you?” Algernon nodded to Lord Suckling, who replied, “Very well, I thank you.”

Their legs were swinging forward concordantly. Algernon plucked out his purse. “I have to beg you to excuse me,” he said, hurriedly; “my cousin Ned’s in a mess, and I’ve been helping him as well as I can—bothered—not an hour my own. Fifty, I think?” That amount he tendered to Harry Latters, who took it most coolly.

“A thousand?” he queried of Lord Suckling.

“Divided by two,” replied the young nobleman, and the Blucher of bank-notes was proffered to him. He smiled queerly, hesitating to take it.

“I was looking for you at all the Clubs last night,” said Algernon.

Lord Suckling and Latters had been at theirs, playing whist till past midnight; yet is money, even when paid over in this egregious public manner by a nervous hand, such testimony to the sincerity of a man, that they shouted a simultaneous invitation for him to breakfast with them, in an hour, at the Club, or dine with them there that evening. Algernon affected the nod of haste and acquiescence, and ran, lest they should hear him groan. He told the cabman to drive Northward, instead of to the South-west. The

question of the thousand pounds had been decided for him—“by fate,” he chose to affirm. The consideration that one is pursued by fate, will not fail to impart a sense of dignity even to the meanest. “After

Page 1081

all, if I stop in England," said he, "I can't afford to lose my position in society; anything's better than that an unmitigated low scoundrel like Sedgett should bag the game." Besides, is it not somewhat sceptical to suppose that when Fate decides, she has not weighed the scales, and decided for the best? Meantime, the whole energy of his intellect was set reflecting on the sort of lie which Edward would, by nature and the occasion, be disposed to swallow. He quitted the cab, and walked in the Park, and au diable to him there! the fool has done his work.

It was now half-past ten. Robert, with a most heavy heart, had accomplished Rhoda's commands upon him. He had taken Dahlia to his lodgings, whither, when free from Edward, Rhoda proceeded in a mood of extreme sternness. She neither thanked Robert, nor smiled upon her sister. Dahlia sent one quivering look up at her, and cowered lower in her chair near the window.

"Father comes at twelve?" Rhoda said.

Robert replied: "He does."

After which a silence too irritating for masculine nerves filled the room.

"You will find, I hope, everything here that you may want," said Robert. "My landlady will attend to the bell. She is very civil."

"Thank you; we shall not want anything," said Rhoda. "There is my sister's Bible at her lodgings."

Robert gladly offered to fetch it, and left them with a sense of relief that was almost joy. He waited a minute in the doorway, to hear whether Dahlia addressed him. He waited on the threshold of the house, that he might be sure Dahlia did not call for his assistance. Her cry of appeal would have fortified him to stand against Rhoda; but no cry was heard. He kept expecting it, pausing for it, hoping it would come to solve his intense perplexity. The prolonged stillness terrified him; for, away from the sisters, he had power to read the anguish of Dahlia's heart, her frozen incapacity, and the great and remorseless mastery which lay in Rhoda's inexorable will.

A few doors down the street he met Major blaring, on his way to him. "Here's five minutes' work going to be done, which we may all of us regret till the day of our deaths," Robert said, and related what had passed during the morning hours.

Percy approved Rhoda, saying, "She must rescue her sister at all hazards. The case is too serious for her to listen to feelings, and regrets, and objections. The world against one poor woman is unfair odds, Robert. I come to tell you I leave England in a day or two. Will you join me?"

"How do I know what I shall or can do?" said Robert, mournfully: and they parted.

Page 1082

Rhoda's unflickering determination to carry out, and to an end, this tragic struggle of duty against inclination; on her own sole responsibility forcing it on; acting like a Fate, in contempt of mere emotions,—seemed barely real to his mind: each moment that he conceived it vividly, he became more certain that she must break down. Was it in her power to drag Dahlia to the steps of the altar? And would not her heart melt when at last Dahlia did get her voice? "This marriage can never take place!" he said, and was convinced of its being impossible. He forgot that while he was wasting energy at Fairly, Rhoda had sat hiving bitter strength in the loneliness of the Farm; with one vile epithet clapping on her ears, and nothing but unavailing wounded love for her absent unhappy sister to make music of her pulses.

He found his way to Dahlia's room; he put her Bible under his arm, and looked about him sadly. Time stood at a few minutes past eleven. Flinging himself into a chair, he thought of waiting in that place; but a crowd of undefinable sensations immediately beset him. Seeing Edward Blancove in the street below, he threw up the window compassionately, and Edward, casting a glance to right and left, crossed the road. Robert went down to him.

"I am waiting for my cousin." Edward had his watch in his hand. "I think I am fast. Can you tell me the time exactly?"

"Why, I'm rather slow," said Robert, comparing time with his own watch. "I make it four minutes past the hour."

"I am at fourteen," said Edward. "I fancy I must be fast."

"About ten minutes past, is the time, I think."

"So much as that!"

"It may be a minute or so less."

"I should like," said Edward, "to ascertain positively."

"There's a clock down in the kitchen here, I suppose," said Robert. "Safer, there's a clock at the church, just in sight from here."

"Thank you; I will go and look at that."

Robert bethought himself suddenly that Edward had better not. "I can tell you the time to a second," he said. "It's now twelve minutes past eleven."

Edward held his watch balancing. "Twelve," he repeated; and, behind this mask of common-place dialogue, they watched one another—warily, and still with pity, on Robert's side.

“You can’t place any reliance on watches,” said Edward.

“None, I believe,” Robert remarked.

“If you could see the sun every day in this climate!” Edward looked up.

“Ah, the sun’s the best timepiece, when visible,” Robert acquiesced. “Backwoodsmen in America don’t need watches.”

“Unless it is to astonish the Indians with them.”

“Ah! yes!” hummed Robert.

“Twelve—fifteen—it must be a quarter past. Or, a three quarters to the next hour, as the Germans say.”

“Odd!” Robert ejaculated. “Foreigners have the queerest ways in the world. They mean no harm, but they make you laugh.”

Page 1083

“They think the same of us, and perhaps do the laughing more loudly.”

“Ah! let them,” said Robert, not without contemptuous indignation, though his mind was far from the talk.

The sweat was on Edward’s forehead. “In a few minutes it will be half-past—half-past eleven! I expect a friend; that makes me impatient. Mr. Eccles”—Edward showed his singular, smallish, hard-cut and flashing features, clear as if he had blown off a mist—-“you are too much of a man to bear malice. Where is Dahlia? Tell me at once. Some one seems to be cruelly driving her. Has she lost her senses? She has:—or else she is coerced in an inexplicable and shameful manner.”

“Mr. Blancove,” said Robert, “I bear you not a bit of malice—couldn’t if I would. I’m not sure I could have said guilty to the same sort of things, in order to tell an enemy of mine I was sorry for what I had done, and I respect you for your courage. Dahlia was taken from here by me.”

Edward nodded, as if briefly assenting, while his features sharpened.

“Why?” he asked.

“It was her sister’s wish.”

“Has she no will of her own?”

“Very little, I’m afraid, just now, sir.”

“A remarkable sister! Are they of Puritan origin?”

“Not that I am aware of.”

“And this father?”

“Mr. Blancove, he is one of those sort—he can’t lift up his head if he so much as suspects a reproach to his children.”

Edward brooded. “I desire—as I told you, as I told her sister, as I told my father last night—I desire to make her my wife. What can I do more? Are they mad with some absurd country pride? Half-past eleven!—it will be murder if they force her to it! Where is she? To such a man as that! Poor soul! I can hardly fear it, for I can’t imagine it. Here—the time is going. You know the man yourself.”

“I know the man?” said Robert. “I’ve never set eyes on him—I’ve never set eyes on him, and never liked to ask much about him. I had a sort of feeling. Her sister says he is a good, and kind, honourable young fellow, and he must be.”

“Before it’s too late,” Edward muttered hurriedly—“you know him—his name is Sedgett.”

Robert hung swaying over him with a big voiceless chest.

“That Sedgett?” he breathed huskily, and his look was hard to meet.

Edward frowned, unable to raise his head.

“Lord in heaven! some one has something to answer for!” cried Robert. “Come on; come to the church. That foul dog?—Or you, stay where you are. I’ll go. He to be Dahlia’s husband! They’ve seen him, and can’t see what he is!—cunning with women as that? How did they meet? Do you know?—can’t you guess?”

He flung a lightning at Edward and ran off. Bursting into the aisle, he saw the minister closing the Book at the altar, and three persons moving toward the vestry, of whom the last, and the one he discerned, was Rhoda.

Page 1084

CHAPTER XXXIX

Late into the afternoon, Farmer Fleming was occupying a chair in Robert's lodgings, where he had sat since the hour of twelve, without a movement of his limbs or of his mind, and alone. He showed no sign that he expected the approach of any one. As mute and unremonstrant as a fallen tree, nearly as insensible, his eyes half closed, and his hands lying open, the great figure of the old man kept this attitude as of stiff decay through long sunny hours, and the noise of the London suburb. Although the wedding people were strangely late, it was unnoticed by him. When the door opened and Rhoda stepped into the room, he was unaware that he had been waiting, and only knew that the hours had somehow accumulated to a heavy burden upon him.

"She is coming, father; Robert is bringing her up," Rhoda said.

"Let her come," he answered.

Robert's hold was tight under Dahlia's arm as they passed the doorway, and then the farmer stood. Robert closed the door.

For some few painful moments the farmer could not speak, and his hand was raised rejectingly. The return of human animation to his heart made him look more sternly than he felt; but he had to rid himself of one terrible question before he satisfied his gradual desire to take his daughter to his breast. It came at last like a short roll of drums, the words were heard,—

"Is she an honest woman?"

"She is," said Rhoda.

The farmer was looking on Robert.

Robert said it likewise in a murmur, but with steadfast look.

Bending his eyes now upon Dahlia, a mist of affection grew in them. He threw up his head, and with a choking, infantine cry, uttered, "Come."

Robert placed her against her father's bosom.

He moved to the window beside Rhoda, and whispered, and she answered, and they knew not what they said. The joint moans of father and daughter—the unutterable communion of such a meeting—filled their ears. Grief held aloof as much as joy. Neither joy nor grief were in those two hearts of parent and child; but the senseless contentment of hard, of infinite hard human craving.

The old man released her, and Rhoda undid her hands from him, and led the pale Sacrifice to another room.

“Where’s...?” Mr. Fleming asked.

Robert understood him.

“Her husband will not come.”

It was interpreted by the farmer as her husband’s pride. Or, may be, the man who was her husband now had righted her at last, and then flung her off in spite for what he had been made to do.

“I’m not being deceived, Robert?”

“No, sir; upon my soul!”

“I’ve got that here,” the farmer struck his ribs.

Rhoda came back. “Sister is tired,” she said. “Dahlia is going down home with you, for...I hope, for a long stay.”

“All the better, while home we’ve got. We mayn’t lose time, my girl. Gammon’s on ’s way to the station now. He’ll wait. He’ll wait till midnight. You may always reckon on a slow man like Gammon for waitin’. Robert comes too?”

Page 1085

“Father, we have business to do. Robert gives me his rooms here for a little time; his landlady is a kind woman, and will take care of me. You will trust me to Robert.”

“I’ll bring Rhoda down on Monday evening,” Robert said to the farmer. “You may trust me, Mr. Fleming.”

“That I know. That I’m sure of. That’s a certainty,” said the farmer. “I’d do it for good, if for good was in the girl’s heart, Robert. There seems,” he hesitated; “eh, Robert, there seems a something upon us all. There’s a something to be done, is there? But if I’ve got my flesh and blood, and none can spit on her, why should I be asking ‘whats’ and ‘whys’? I bow my head; and God forgive me, if ever I complained. And you will bring Rhoda to us on Monday?”

“Yes; and try and help to make the farm look up again, if Gammon’ll do the ordering about.”

“Poor old Mas’ Gammon! He’s a rare old man. Is he changed by adversity, Robert? Though he’s awful secret, that old man! Do you consider a bit Gammon’s faithfulness, Robert!”

“Ay, he’s above most men in that,” Robert agreed.

“On with Dahlia’s bonnet—sharp!” the farmer gave command. He felt, now that he was growing accustomed to the common observation of things, that the faces and voices around him were different from such as the day brings in its usual course. “We’re all as slow as Mas’ Gammon, I reckon.”

“Father,” said Rhoda, “she is weak. She has been very unwell. Do not trouble her with any questions. Do not let any questions be asked of her at hone. Any talking fatigues; it may be dangerous to her.”

The farmer stared. “Ay, and about her hair....I’m beginning to remember. She wears a cap, and her hair’s cut off like an oakum-picker’s. That’s more gossip for neighbours!”

“Mad people! will they listen to truth?” Rhoda flamed out in her dark fashion. “We speak truth, nothing but truth. She has had a brain fever. That makes her very weak, and every one must be silent at home. Father, stop the sale of the farm, for Robert will work it into order. He has promised to be our friend, and Dahlia will get her health there, and be near mother’s grave.”

The farmer replied, as from a far thought, “There’s money in my pocket to take down two.”

He continued: “But there’s not money there to feed our family a week on; I leave it to the Lord. I sow; I dig, and I sow, and when bread fails to us the land must go; and let it

go, and no crying about it. I'm astonishing easy at heart, though if I must sell, and do sell, I shan't help thinking of my father, and his father, and the father before him—-mayhap, and in most likelihood, artfuller men 'n me—for what they was born to they made to flourish. They'll cry in their graves. A man's heart sticks to land, Robert; that you'll find, some day. I thought I cared none but about land till that poor, weak, white thing put her arms on my neck."

Page 1086

Rhoda had slipped away from them again.

The farmer stooped to Robert's ear. "Had a bit of a disagreement with her husband, is it?"

Robert cleared his throat. "Ay, that's it," he said.

"Serious, at all?"

"One can't tell, you know."

"And not her fault—not my girl's fault, Robert?"

"No; I can swear to that."

"She's come to the right home, then. She'll be near her mother and me. Let her pray at night, and she'll know she's always near her blessed mother. Perhaps the women 'll want to take refreshment, if we may so far make free with your hospitality; but it must be quick, Robert—or will they? They can't eat, and I can't eat."

Soon afterward Mr. Fleming took his daughter Dahlia from the house and out of London. The deeply-afflicted creature was, as the doctors had said of her, too strong for the ordinary modes of killing. She could walk and still support herself, though the ordeal she had gone through this day was such as few women could have traversed. The terror to follow the deed she had done was yet unseen by her; and for the hour she tasted, if not peace, the pause to suffering which is given by an act accomplished.

Robert and Rhoda sat in different rooms till it was dusk. When she appeared before him in the half light, the ravage of a past storm was visible on her face. She sat down to make tea, and talked with singular self command.

"Mr. Fleming mentioned the gossips down at Wrexby," said Robert: "are they very bad down there?"

"Not worse than in other villages," said Rhoda. "They have not been unkind. They have spoken about us, but not unkindly—I mean, not spitefully."

"And you forgive them?"

"I do: they cannot hurt us now."

Robert was but striving to master some comprehension of her character.

"What are we to resolve, Rhoda?"

“I must get the money promised to this man.”

“When he has flung off his wife at the church door?”

“He married my sister for the money. He said it. Oh! he said it. He shall not say that we have deceived him. I told him he should have it. He married her for money!”

“You should not have told him so, Rhoda.”

“I did, and I will not let my word be broken.”

“Pardon me if I ask you where you will get the money? It’s a large sum.”

“I will get it,” Rhoda said firmly.

“By the sale of the farm?”

“No, not to hurt father.”

“But this man’s a scoundrel. I know him. I’ve known him for years. My fear is that he will be coming to claim his wife. How was it I never insisted on seeing the man before—! I did think of asking, but fancied—a lot of things; that you didn’t wish it and he was shy. Ah, Lord! what miseries happen from our not looking straight at facts! We can’t deny she’s his wife now.”

“Not if we give him the money.”

Page 1087

Rhoda spoke of “the money” as if she had taken heated metal into her mouth.

“All the more likely,” said Robert. “Let him rest. Had you your eyes on him when he saw me in the vestry? For years that man has considered me his deadly enemy, because I punished him once. What a scene! I’d have given a limb, I’d have given my life, to have saved you from that scene, Rhoda.”

She replied: “If my sister could have been spared! I ought to know what wickedness there is in the world. It’s ignorance that leads to the unhappiness of girls.”

“Do you know that I’m a drunkard?”

“No.”

“He called me something like it; and he said something like the truth. There’s the sting. Set me adrift, and I drink hard. He spoke a fact, and I couldn’t answer him.”

“Yes, it’s the truth that gives such pain,” said Rhoda, shivering. “How can girls know what men are? I could not guess that you had any fault. This man was so respectful; he sat modestly in the room when I saw him last night—last night, was it? I thought, ’he has been brought up with sisters and a mother.’ And he has been kind to my dear—and all we thought love for her, was—shameful! shameful!”

She pressed her eyelids, continuing: “He shall have the money—he shall have it. We will not be in debt to such a man. He has saved my sister from one as bad—who offered it to be rid of her. Oh, men!—you heard that?—and now pretends to love her. I think I dream. How could she ever have looked happily on that hateful face?”

“He would be thought handsome,” said Robert, marvelling how it was that Rhoda could have looked on Sedgett for an instant without reading his villanous nature. “I don’t wish you to regret anything you have done or you may do, Rhoda. But this is what made me cry out when I looked on that man, and knew it was he who had come to be Dahlia’s husband. He’ll be torture to her. The man’s temper, his habits—but you may well say you are ignorant of us men. Keep so. What I do with all my soul entreat of you is—to get a hiding-place for your sister. Never let him take her off. There’s such a thing as hell upon earth. If she goes away with him she’ll know it. His black temper won’t last. He will come for her, and claim her.”

“He shall have money.” Rhoda said no more.

On a side-table in the room stood a remarkable pile, under cover of a shawl. Robert lifted the shawl, and beheld the wooden boxes, one upon the other, containing Master Gammon’s and Mrs. Sumfit’s rival savings, which they had presented to Dahlia, in the belief that her husband was under a cloud of monetary misfortune that had kept her

proud heart from her old friends. The farmer had brought the boxes and left them there, forgetting them.

“I fancy,” said Robert, “we might open these.”

“It may be a little help,” said Rhoda.

“A very little,” Robert thought; but, to relieve the oppression of the subject they had been discussing, he forthwith set about procuring tools, with which he split first the box which proved to be Mrs. Sumfit’s, for it contained, amid six gold sovereigns and much silver and pence, a slip of paper, whereon was inscribed, in a handwriting identified by Rhoda as peculiar to the loving woman,—

Page 1088

“And sweetest love to her ever dear.”

Altogether the sum amounted to nine pounds, three shillings, and a farthing.

“Now for Master Gammon—he’s heavy,” said Robert; and he made the savings of that unpretentious veteran bare. Master Gammon had likewise written his word. It was discovered on the blank space of a bit of newspaper, and looked much as if a fat lobworm had plunged himself into a bowl of ink, and in his literary delirium had twisted uneasily to the verge of the paper. With difficulty they deciphered,—

“Complemens.”

Robert sang, “Bravo, Gammon!” and counted the hoard. All was in copper coinage, Lycurgan and severe, and reached the sum of one pound, seventeen shillings. There were a number of farthings of Queen Anne’s reign, and Robert supposed them to be of value. “So that, as yet, we can’t say who’s the winner,” he observed.

Rhoda was in tears.

“Be kind to him, please, when you see him,” she whispered. The smaller gift had touched her heart more tenderly.

“Kind to the old man!” Robert laughed gently, and tied the two hoards in separate papers, which he stowed into one box, and fixed under string. “This amount, put all in one, doesn’t go far, Rhoda.”

“No,” said she: “I hope we may not need it.” She broke out: “Dear, good, humble friends! The poor are God’s own people. Christ has said so. This is good, this is blessed money!” Rhoda’s cheeks flushed to their orange-rounded swarthy red, and her dark eyes had the fervour of an exalted earnestness. “They are my friends for ever. They save me from impiety. They help me, as if God had answered my prayer. Poor pennies! and the old man not knowing where his days may end! He gives all—he must have true faith in Providence. May it come back to him multiplied a thousand fold! While I have strength to work, the bread I earn shall be shared with him. Old man, old man, I love you—how I love you! You drag me out of deep ditches. Oh, good and dear old man, if God takes me first, may I have some power to intercede for you, if you have ever sinned! Everybody in the world is not wicked. There are some who go the ways directed by the Bible. I owe you more than I can ever pay.”

She sobbed, but told Robert it was not for sorrow. He, longing to catch her in his arms, and punctilious not to overstep the duties of his post of guardian, could merely sit by listening, and reflecting on her as a strange Biblical girl, with Hebrew hardness of resolution, and Hebrew exaltation of soul; beautiful, too, as the dark women of the East. He admitted to himself that he never could have taken it on his conscience to subdue a

human creature's struggling will, as Rhoda had not hesitated to do with Dahlia, and to command her actions, and accept all imminent responsibilities; not quailing with any outcry, or abandonment of strength, when the shock of that revelation in the vestry came violently on her. Rhoda, seeing

Page 1089

there that it was a brute, and not a man, into whose hand she had perilously forced her sister's, stood steadying her nerves to act promptly with advantage; less like a woman, Robert thought, than a creature born for battle. And she appeared to be still undaunted, full of her scheme, and could cry without fear of floods. Something of the chivalrous restraint he put upon the motions of his heart, sprang from the shadowy awe which overhung that impressible organ. This feeling likewise led him to place a blind reliance on her sagacity and sense of what was just, and what should be performed.

"You promised this money to him," he said, half thinking it incredible.

"On Monday," said Rhoda.

"You must get a promise from him in return."

She answered: "Why? when he could break it the instant he cared to, and a promise would tempt him to it. He does not love her."

"No; he does not love her," said Robert, meditating whether he could possibly convey an idea of the character of men to her innocent mind.

"He flung her off. Thank heaven for it! I should have been punished too much—too much. He has saved her from the perils of temptation. He shall be paid for it. To see her taken away by such a man! Ah!" She shuddered as at sight of a hideous pit.

But Robert said: "I know him, Rhoda. That was his temper. It'll last just four-and-twenty hours, and then we shall need all our strength and cunning. My dear, it would be the death of Dahlia. You've seen the man as he is. Take it for a warning. She belongs to him. That's the law, human and divine."

"Not when he has flung her off, Robert?" Rhoda cried piteously.

"Let us take advantage of that. He did fling her off, spat at us all, and showed the blackest hellish plot I ever in my life heard of. He's not the worst sinner, scoundrel as he is. Poor girl! poor soul! a hard lot for women in this world! Rhoda, I suppose I may breakfast with you in the morning? I hear Major Waring's knock below. I want a man to talk to."

"Do come, Robert," Rhoda said, and gave him her hand. He strove to comprehend why it was that her hand was merely a hand, and no more to him just then; squeezed the cold fingers, and left her.

CHAPTER XI

So long as we do not know that we are performing any remarkable feat, we may walk upon the narrowest of planks between precipices with perfect security; but when we suffer our minds to eye the chasm underneath, we begin to be in danger, and we are in very great fear of losing our equal balance the moment we admit the insidious reflection that other men, placed as we are, would probably topple headlong over. Anthony Hackbut, of Boyne's Bank, had been giving himself up latterly to this fatal comparison. The hour when gold was entrusted to his charge found him feverish and irritable. He asked himself whether he was

Page 1090

a mere machine to transfer money from spot to spot, and he spurned at the pittance bestowed upon honesty in this life. Where could Boyne's Bank discover again such an honest man as he? And because he was honest he was poor! The consideration that we alone are capable of doing the unparalleled thing may sometimes inspire us with fortitude; but this will depend largely upon the antecedent moral trials of a man. It is a temptation when we look on what we accomplish at all in that light. The temptation being inbred, is commonly a proof of internal corruption. "If I take a step, suppose now, to the right, or to the left," Anthony had got into the habit of saying, while he made his course, and after he had deposited his charge he would wipe his moist forehead, in a state of wretched exultation over his renowned trustworthiness.

He had done the thing for years. And what did the people in the streets know about him? Formerly, he had used to regard the people in the streets, and their opinions, with a voluptuous contempt; but he was no longer wrapped in sweet calculations of his savings, and his chances, and his connection with a mighty Bank. The virtue had gone out of him. Yet he had not the slightest appetite for other men's money; no hunger, nor any definite notion of enjoyment to be derived from money not his own. Imagination misled the old man. There have been spotless reputations gained in the service of virtue before now; and chaste and beautiful persons have walked the narrow plank, envied and admired; and they have ultimately tottered and all but fallen; or they have quite fallen, from no worse an incitement than curiosity. Cold curiosity, as the directors of our human constitution tell us, is, in the colder condition of our blood, a betraying vice, leading to sin at a period when the fruits of sin afford the smallest satisfaction. It is, in fact, our last probation, and one of our latest delusions. If that is passed successfully, we may really be pronounced as of some worth. Anthony wished to give a light indulgence to his curiosity; say, by running away and over London Bridge on one side, and back on the other, hugging the money. For two weeks, he thought of this absurd performance as a comical and agreeable diversion. How would he feel when going in the direction of the Surrey hills? And how, when returning, and when there was a prospect of the Bank, where the money was to be paid in, being shut? Supposing that he was a minute behind his time, would the Bank-doors remain open, in expectation of him? And if the money was not paid in, what would be thought? What would be thought at Boyne's, if, the next day, he was late in making his appearance?

Page 1091

“Holloa! Hackbut, how’s this?”—“I’m a bit late, sir, morning.”—“Late! you were late yesterday evening, weren’t you?”—“Why, sir, the way the clerks at that Bank of Mortimer and Pennycuick’s rush away from business and close the doors after ’em, as if their day began at four p.m., and business was botheration: it’s a disgrace to the City o’ London. And I beg pardon for being late, but never sleeping a wink all night for fear about this money, I am late this morning, I humbly confess. When I got to the Bank, the doors were shut. Our clock’s correct; that I know. My belief, sir, is, the clerks at Mortimer and Pennycuick’s put on the time.”—“Oh! we must have this inquired into.”

Anthony dramatized the farcical scene which he imagined between himself and Mr. Sequin, the head clerk at Boyne’s, with immense relish; and terminated it by establishing his reputation for honesty higher than ever at the Bank, after which violent exercise of his fancy, the old man sank into a dulness during several days. The farmer slept at his lodgings for one night, and talked of money, and of selling his farm; and half hinted that it would be a brotherly proceeding on Anthony’s part to buy it, and hold it, so as to keep it in the family. The farmer’s deep belief in the existence of his hoards always did Anthony peculiar mischief. Anthony grew conscious of a giddiness, and all the next day he was scarcely fit for his work. But the day following that he was calm and attentive. Two bags of gold were placed in his hands, and he walked with caution down the steps of the Bank, turned the corner, and went straight on to the West, never once hesitating, or casting a thought behind upon Mortimer and Pennycuick’s. He had not, in truth, one that was loose to be cast. All his thoughts were boiling in his head, obfuscating him with a prodigious steam, through which he beheld the city surging, and the streets curving like lines in water, and the people mixing and passing into and out of one another in an astonishing manner—no face distinguishable; the whole thick multitude appearing to be stirred like glue in a gallipot. The only distinct thought which he had sprang from a fear that the dishonest ruffians would try to steal his gold, and he hugged it, and groaned to see that villany was abroad. Marvellous, too, that the clocks on the churches, all the way along the Westward thoroughfare, stuck at the hour when Banks are closed to business! It was some time, or a pretence at some time, before the minute-hands surmounted that difficulty. Having done so, they rushed ahead to the ensuing hour with the mad precipitation of pantomimic machinery. The sight of them presently standing on the hour, like a sentinel presenting arms, was startling—-laughable. Anthony could not have flipped with his fingers fifty times in the interval; he was sure of it, “or not much more,” he said. So the City was shut to him behind iron bars.

Up in the West there is not so much to be dreaded from the rapacity of men. You do not hear of such alarming burglaries there every day; every hand is not at another’s throat there, or in another’s pocket; at least, not until after nightfall; and when the dark should come on, Anthony had determined to make for his own quarter with all speed. Darkness is horrible in foreign places, but foreign places are not so accusing to you by daylight.

Page 1092

The Park was vastly pleasant to the old man.

“Ah!” he sniffed, “country air,” and betook himself to a seat. “Extraordinary,” he thought, “what little people they look on their horses and in their carriages! That’s the aristocracy, is it!” The aristocracy appeared oddly diminutive to him. He sneered at the aristocracy, but, beholding a policeman, became stolid of aspect. The policeman was a connecting link with his City life, the true lord of his fearful soul. Though the moneybags were under his arm, beneath his buttoned coat, it required a deep pause before he understood what he had done; and then the Park began to dance and curve like the streets, and there was a singular curtseying between the heavens and the earth. He had to hold his money-bags tight, to keep them from plunging into monstrous gulfs. “I don’t remember that I’ve taken a drink of any sort,” he said, “since I and the old farmer took our turn down in the Docks. How’s this?” He seemed to rock. He was near upon indulging in a fit of terror; but the impolicy of it withheld him from any demonstration, save an involuntary spasmodic ague. When this had passed, his eyesight and sensations grew clearer, and he sat in a mental doze, looking at things with quiet animal observation. His recollection of the state, after a lapse of minutes, was pleasurable. The necessity for motion, however, set him on his feet, and off he went, still Westward, out of the Park, and into streets. He trotted at a good pace. Suddenly came a call of his name in his ear, and he threw up one arm in self-defence.

“Uncle Anthony, don’t you know me?”

“Eh? I do; to be sure I do,” he answered, peering dimly upon Rhoda: “I’m always meeting one of you.”

“I’ve been down in the City, trying to find you all day, uncle. I meet you—I might have missed! It is direction from heaven, for I prayed.”

Anthony muttered, “I’m out for a holiday.”

“This”—Rhoda pointed to a house—“is where I am lodging.”

“Oh!” said Anthony; “and how’s your family?”

Rhoda perceived that he was rather distraught. After great persuasion, she got him to go upstairs with her.

“Only for two seconds,” he stipulated. “I can’t sit.”

“You will have a cup of tea with me, uncle?”

“No; I don’t think I’m equal to tea.”

“Not with Rhoda?”

“It’s a name in Scripture,” said Anthony, and he drew nearer to her. “You’re comfortable and dark here, my dear. How did you come here? What’s happened? You won’t surprise me.”

“I’m only stopping for a day or two in London, uncle.”

“Ah! a wicked place; that it is. No wickeder than other places, I’ll be bound. Well; I must be trotting. I can’t sit, I tell you. You’re as dark here as a gaol.”

“Let me ring for candles, uncle.”

“No; I’m going.”

She tried to touch him, to draw him to a chair. The agile old man bounded away from her, and she had to pacify him submissively before he would consent to be seated. The tea-service was brought, and Rhoda made tea, and filled a cup for him. Anthony began to enjoy the repose of the room. But it made the money-bags’ alien to him, and serpents in his bosom. Fretting—on his chair, he cried: “Well! well! what’s to talk about? We can’t drink tea and not talk!”

Page 1093

Rhoda deliberated, and then said: “Uncle, I think you have always loved me.”

It seemed to him a merit that he should have loved her. He caught at the idea.

“So I have, Rhoda, my dear; I have. I do.”

“You do love me, dear uncle!”

“Now I come to think of it, Rhoda—my Dody, I don’t think ever I’ve loved anybody else. Never loved e’er a young woman in my life. As a young man.”

“Tell me, uncle; are you not very rich?”

“No, I ain’t; not ‘very’; not at all.”

“You must not tell untruths, uncle.”

“I don’t,” said Anthony; only, too doggedly to instil conviction.

“I have always felt, uncle, that you love money too much. What is the value of money, except to give comfort, and help you to be a blessing to others in their trouble? Does not God lend it you for that purpose? It is most true! And if you make a store of it, it will only be unhappiness to yourself. Uncle, you love me. I am in great trouble for money.”

Anthony made a long arm over the projection of his coat, and clasped it securely; sullenly refusing to answer. “Dear uncle; hear me out. I come to you, because I know you are rich. I was on my way to your lodgings when we met; we were thrown together. You have more money than you know what to do with. I am a beggar to you for money. I have never asked before; I never shall ask again. Now I pray for your help. My life, and the life dearer to me than any other, depend on you. Will you help me, Uncle Anthony? Yes!”

“No!” Anthony shouted.

“Yes! yes!”

“Yes, if I can. No, if I can’t. And ‘can’t’ it is. So, it’s ‘No.’”

Rhoda’s bosom sank, but only as a wave in the sea-like energy of her spirit.

“Uncle, you must.”

Anthony was restrained from jumping up and running away forthwith by the peace which was in the room, and the dread of being solitary after he had tasted of companionship.

“You have money, uncle. You are rich. You must help me. Don’t you ever think what it is to be an old man, and no one to love you and be grateful to you? Why do you cross your arms so close?”

Anthony denied that he crossed his arms closely.

Rhoda pointed to his arms in evidence; and he snarled out: “There, now; ’cause I’m supposed to have saved a trifle, I ain’t to sit as I like. It’s downright too bad! It’s shocking!”

But, seeing that he did not uncross his arms, and remained bunched up defiantly, Rhoda silently observed him. She felt that money was in the room.

“Don’t let it be a curse to you,” she said. And her voice was hoarse with agitation.

“What?” Anthony asked. “What’s a curse?”

“That.”

Did she know? Had she guessed? Her finger was laid in a line at the bags. Had she smelt the gold?

“It will be a curse to you, uncle. Death is coming. What’s money then? Uncle, uncross your arms. You are afraid; you dare not. You carry it about; you have no confidence anywhere. It eats your heart. Look at me. I have nothing to conceal. Can you imitate me, and throw your hands out—so? Why, uncle, will you let me be ashamed of you? You have the money there.

Page 1094

“You cannot deny it. Me crying to you for help! What have we talked together?—that we would sit in a country house, and I was to look to the flower-beds, and always have dishes of green peas for you-plenty, in June; and you were to let the village boys know what a tongue you have, if they made a clatter of their sticks along the garden-rails; and you were to drink your tea, looking on a green and the sunset. Uncle! Poor old, good old soul! You mean kindly. You must be kind. A day will make it too late. You have the money there. You get older and older every minute with trying to refuse me. You know that I can make you happy. I have the power, and I have the will. Help me, I say, in my great trouble. That money is a burden. You are forced to carry it about, for fear. You look guilty as you go running in the streets, because you fear everybody. Do good with it. Let it be money with a blessing on it! It will save us from horrid misery! from death! from torture and death! Think, uncle! look, uncle! You with the money—me wanting it. I pray to heaven, and I meet you, and you have it. Will you say that you refuse to give it, when I see—when I show you, you are led to meet me and help me? Open;—put down that arm.”

Against this storm of mingled supplication and shadowy menace, Anthony held out with all outward firmness until, when bidding him to put down his arm, she touched the arm commandingly, and it fell paralyzed.

Rhoda’s eyes were not beautiful as they fixed on the object of her quest. In this they were of the character of her mission. She was dealing with an evil thing, and had chosen to act according to her light, and by the counsel of her combative and forceful temper. At each step new difficulties had to be encountered by fresh contrivances; and money now—money alone had become the specific for present use. There was a limitation of her spiritual vision to aught save to money; and the money being bared to her eyes, a frightful gleam of eagerness shot from them. Her hands met Anthony’s in a common grasp of the money-bags.

“It’s not mine!” Anthony cried, in desperation.

“Whose money is it?” said Rhoda, and caught up her hands as from fire.

“My Lord!” Anthony moaned, “if you don’t speak like a Court o’ Justice. Hear yourself!”

“Is the money yours, uncle?”

“It—is,” and “isn’t” hung in the balance.

“It is not?” Rhoda dressed the question for him in the terror of contemptuous horror.

“It is. I—of course it is; how could it help being mine? My money? Yes. What sort o’ thing’s that to ask—whether what I’ve got’s mine or yours, or somebody else’s? Ha!”

“And you say you are not rich, uncle?”

A charming congratulatory smile was addressed to him, and a shake of the head of tender reproach irresistible to his vanity.

“Rich! with a lot o’ calls on me; everybody wantin’ to borrow—I’m rich! And now you coming to me! You women can’t bring a guess to bear upon the right nature o’ money.”

Page 1095

“Uncle, you will decide to help me, I know.”

She said it with a staggering assurance of manner.

“How do you know?” cried Anthony.

“Why do you carry so much money about with you in bags, uncle?”

“Hear it, my dear.” He simulated miser’s joy.

“Ain’t that music? Talk of operas! Hear that; don’t it talk? don’t it chink? don’t it sing?” He groaned “Oh, Lord!” and fell back.

This transition from a state of intensest rapture to the depths of pain alarmed her.

“Nothing; it’s nothing.” Anthony anticipated her inquiries. “They bags is so heavy.”

“Then why do you carry them about?”

“Perhaps it’s heart disease,” said Anthony, and grinned, for he knew the soundness of his health.

“You are very pale, uncle.”

“Eh? you don’t say that?”

“You are awfully white, dear uncle.”

“I’ll look in the glass,” said Anthony. “No, I won’t.” He sank back in his chair. “Rhoda, we’re all sinners, ain’t we? All—every man and woman of us, and baby, too. That’s a comfort; yes, it is a comfort. It’s a tremendous comfort—shuts mouths. I know what you’re going to say—some bigger sinners than others. If they’re sorry for it, though, what then? They can repent, can’t they?”

“They must undo any harm they may have done. Sinners are not to repent only in words, uncle.”

“I’ve been feeling lately,” he murmured.

Rhoda expected a miser’s confession.

“I’ve been feeling, the last two or three days,” he resumed.

“What, uncle?”

“Sort of taste of a tremendous nice lemon in my mouth, my dear, and liked it, till all of a sudden I swallowed it whole—such a gulp! I felt it just now. I’m all right.”

“No, uncle,” said Rhoda: “you are not all right: this money makes you miserable. It does; I can see that it does. Now, put those bags in my hands. For a minute, try; it will do you good. Attend to me; it will. Or, let me have them. They are poison to you. You don’t want them.”

“I don’t,” cried Anthony. “Upon my soul, I don’t. I don’t want ’em. I’d give—it is true, my dear, I don’t want ’em. They’re poison.”

“They’re poison to you,” said Rhoda; “they’re health, they’re life to me. I said, ’My uncle Anthony will help me. He is not—I know his heart—he is not a miser.’ Are you a miser, uncle?”

Her hand was on one of his bags. It was strenuously withheld: but while she continued speaking, reiterating the word “miser,” the hold relaxed. She caught the heavy bag away, startled by its weight.

He perceived the effect produced on her, and cried; “Aha! and I’ve been carrying two of ’em—two!”

Rhoda panted in her excitement.

“Now, give it up,” said he. She returned it. He got it against his breast joylessly, and then bade her to try the weight of the two. She did try them, and Anthony doated on the wonder of her face.

Page 1096

“Uncle, see what riches do! You fear everybody—you think there is no secure place—-you have more? Do you carry about all your money?”

“No,” he chuckled at her astonishment. “I’ve...Yes. I’ve got more of my own.” Her widened eyes intoxicated him. “More. I’ve saved. I’ve put by. Say, I’m an old sinner. What’d th’ old farmer say now? Do you love your uncle Tony? ‘Old Ant,’ they call me down at—” “The Bank,” he was on the point of uttering; but the vision of the Bank lay terrific in his recollection, and, summoned at last, would not be wiped away. The unbearable picture swam blinking through accumulating clouds; remote and minute as the chief scene of our infancy, but commanding him with the present touch of a mighty arm thrown out. “I’m honest,” he cried. “I always have been honest. I’m known to be honest. I want no man’s money. I’ve got money of my own. I hate sin. I hate sinners. I’m an honest man. Ask them, down at—Rhoda, my dear! I say, don’t you hear me? Rhoda, you think I’ve a turn for misering. It’s a beastly mistake: poor savings, and such a trouble to keep honest when you’re poor; and I’ve done it for years, spite o’ temptation ’t ‘d send lots o’ men to the hulks. Safe into my hand, safe out o’ my hands! Slip once, and there ain’t mercy in men. And you say, ’I had a whirl of my head, and went round, and didn’t know where I was for a minute, and forgot the place I’d to go to, and come away to think in a quiet part.’...” He stopped abruptly in his ravings. “You give me the money, Rhoda!”

She handed him the money-bags.

He seized them, and dashed them to the ground with the force of madness. Kneeling, he drew out his penknife, and slit the sides of the bags, and held them aloft, and let the gold pour out in torrents, insufferable to the sight; and uttering laughter that clamoured fierily in her ears for long minutes afterwards, the old man brandished the empty bags, and sprang out of the room.

She sat dismayed in the centre of a heap of gold.

CHAPTER XLI

On the Monday evening, Master Gammon was at the station with the cart. Robert and Rhoda were a train later, but the old man seemed to be unaware of any delay, and mildly staring, received their apologies, and nodded. They asked him more than once whether all was well at the Farm; to which he replied that all was quite well, and that he was never otherwise. About half-an-hour after, on the road, a gradual dumb chuckle overcame his lower features. He flicked the horse dubitatively, and turned his head, first to Robert, next to Rhoda; and then he chuckled aloud:

“The last o’ they mel’ns rotted yest’day afternoon!”

“Did they?” said Robert. “You’ll have to get fresh seed, that’s all.”

Master Gammon merely showed his spirit to be negative.

“You’ve been playing the fool with the sheep,” Robert accused him.

Page 1097

It hit the old man in a very tender part.

“I play the fool wi’ ne’er a sheep alive, Mr. Robert. Animals likes their ’customed food, and don’t like no other. I never changes my food, nor’d e’er a sheep, nor’d a cow, nor’d a bullock, if animals was masters. I’d as lief give a sheep beer, as offer him, free-handed—of my own will, that’s to say—a mel’n. They rots.”

Robert smiled, though he was angry. The delicious unvexed country-talk soothed Rhoda, and she looked fondly on the old man, believing that he could not talk on in his sedate way, if all were not well at home.

The hills of the beacon-ridge beyond her home, and the line of stunted firs, which she had named “the old bent beggarmen,” were visible in the twilight. Her eyes flew thoughtfully far over them, with the feeling that they had long known what would come to her and to those dear to her, and the intense hope that they knew no more, inasmuch as they bounded her sight.

“If the sheep thrive,” she ventured to remark, so that the comforting old themes might be kept up.

“That’s the particular ‘if!’” said Robert, signifying something that had to be leaped over.

Master Gammon performed the feat with agility.

“Sheep never was heartier,” he pronounced emphatically.

“Lots of applications for melon-seed, Gammon?”

To this the veteran’s tardy answer was: “More fools ’n one about, I reckon”; and Robert allowed him the victory implied by silence.

“And there’s no news in Wrexby? none at all?” said Rhoda.

A direct question inevitably plunged Master Gammon so deep amid the soundings of his reflectiveness, that it was the surest way of precluding a response from him; but on this occasion his honest deliberation bore fruit.

“Squire Blancove, he’s dead.”

The name caused Rhoda to shudder.

“Found dead in ’s bed, Sat’day morning,” Master Gammon added, and, warmed upon the subject, went on: “He’s that stiff, folks say, that stiff he is, he’ll have to get into a rounded coffin: he’s just like half a hoop. He was all of a heap, like. Had a fight with ‘s bolster, and got th’ wust of it. But, be ’t the seizure, or be ’t gout in ’s belly, he’s gone

clean dead. And he wunt buy th' Farm, nether. Shutters is all shut up at the Hall. He'll go burying about Wednesday. Men that drinks don't keep."

Rhoda struck at her brain to think in what way this death could work and show like a punishment of the heavens upon that one wrong-doer; but it was not manifest as a flame of wrath, and she laid herself open to the peace of the fields and the hedgeways stepping by. The farm-house came in sight, and friendly old Adam and Eve turning from the moon. She heard the sound of water. Every sign of peace was around the farm. The cows had been milked long since; the geese were quiet. There was nothing but the white board above the garden-gate to speak of the history lying in her heart.

Page 1098

They found the farmer sitting alone, shading his forehead. Rhoda kissed his cheeks and whispered for tidings of Dahlia.

“Go up to her,” the farmer said.

Rhoda grew very chill. She went upstairs with apprehensive feet, and recognizing Mrs. Sumfit outside the door of Dahlia’s room, embraced her, and heard her say that Dahlia had turned the key, and had been crying from mornings to nights. “It can’t last,” Mrs. Sumfit sobbed: “lonesome hysterics, they’s death to come. She’s falling into the trance. I’ll go, for the sight o’ me shocks her.”

Rhoda knocked, waited patiently till her persistent repetition of her name gained her admission. She beheld her sister indeed, but not the broken Dahlia from whom she had parted. Dahlia was hard to her caress, and crying, “Has he come?” stood at bay, white-eyed, and looking like a thing strung with wires.

“No, dearest; he will not trouble you. Have no fear.”

“Are you full of deceit?” said Dahlia, stamping her foot.

“I hope not, my sister.”

Dahlia let fall a long quivering breath. She went to her bed, upon which her mother’s Bible was lying, and taking it in her two hands, held it under Rhoda’s lips.

“Swear upon that?”

“What am I to swear to, dearest?”

“Swear that he is not in the house.”

“He is not, my own sister; believe me. It is no deceit. He is not. He will not trouble you. See; I kiss the Book, and swear to you, my beloved! I speak truth. Come to me, dear.” Rhoda put her arms up entreatingly, but Dahlia stepped back.

“You are not deceitful? You are not cold? You are not inhuman? Inhuman! You are not? You are not? Oh, my God! Look at her!”

The toneless voice was as bitter for Rhoda to hear as the accusations. She replied, with a poor smile: “I am only not deceitful. Come, and see. You will not be disturbed.”

“What am I tied to?” Dahlia struggled feebly as against a weight of chains. “Oh! what am I tied to? It’s on me, tight like teeth. I can’t escape. I can’t breathe for it. I was like a stone when he asked me—marry him!—loved me! Some one preached—my duty! I am lost, I am lost! Why? you girl!—why?—What did you do? Why did you take my

hand when I was asleep and hurry me so fast? What have I done to you? Why did you push me along?—I couldn't see where. I heard the Church babble. For you—inhuman! inhuman! What have I done to you? What have you to do with punishing sin? It's not sin. Let me be sinful, then. I am. I am sinful. Hear me. I love him; I love my lover, and," she screamed out, "he loves me!"

Rhoda now thought her mad.

She looked once at the rigid figure of her transformed sister, and sitting down, covered her eyes and wept.

To Dahlia, the tears were at first an acrid joy; but being weak, she fell to the bed, and leaned against it, forgetting her frenzy for a time.

Page 1099

“You deceived me,” she murmured; and again, “You deceived me.” Rhoda did not answer. In trying to understand why her sister should imagine it, she began to know that she had in truth deceived Dahlia. The temptation to drive a frail human creature to do the thing which was right, had led her to speak falsely for a good purpose. Was it not righteously executed? Away from the tragic figure in the room, she might have thought so, but the horror in the eyes and voice of this awakened Sacrifice, struck away the support of theoretic justification. Great pity for the poor enmeshed life, helpless there, and in a woman’s worst peril,—looking either to madness, or to death, for an escape—-drowned her reason in a heavy cloud of tears. Long on toward the stroke of the hour, Dahlia heard her weep, and she murmured on, “You deceived me;” but it was no more to reproach; rather, it was an exculpation of her reproaches. “You did deceive me, Rhoda.” Rhoda half lifted her head; the slight tone of a change to tenderness swelled the gulfs of pity, and she wept aloud. Dahlia untwisted her feet, and staggered up to her, fell upon her shoulder, and called her, “My love!—good sister!” For a great mute space they clung together. Their lips met and they kissed convulsively. But when Dahlia had close view of Rhoda’s face, she drew back, saying in an under-breath,—

“Don’t cry. I see my misery when you cry.”

Rhoda promised that she would check her tears, and they sat quietly, side by side, hand in hand. Mrs. Sumfit, outside, had to be dismissed twice with her fresh brews of supplicating tea and toast, and the cakes which, when eaten warm with good country butter and a sprinkle of salt, reanimate (as she did her utmost to assure the sisters through the closed door) humanity’s distressed spirit. At times their hands interchanged a fervent pressure, their eyes were drawn to an equal gaze.

In the middle of the night Dahlia said: “I found a letter from Edward when I came here.”

“Written—Oh, base man that he is!” Rhoda could not control the impulse to cry it out.

“Written before,” said Dahlia, divining her at once. “I read it; did not cry. I have no tears. Will you see it? It is very short-enough; it said enough, and written before—” She crumpled her fingers in Rhoda’s; Rhoda, to please her, saying “Yes,” she went to the pillow of the bed, and drew the letter from underneath.

“I know every word,” she said; “I should die if I repeated it. ’My wife before heaven,’ it begins. So, I was his wife. I must have broken his heart—broken my husband’s.” Dahlia cast a fearful eye about her; her eyelids fluttered as from a savage sudden blow. Hardening her mouth to utter defiant spite: “My lover’s,” she cried. “He is. If he loves me and I love him, he is my lover, my lover, my lover! Nothing shall stop me from saying it—lover! and there is none to claim me but he. Oh, loathsome! What a serpent it is I’ve got round me!

Page 1100

And you tell me God put it. Do you? Answer that; for I want to know, and I don't know where I am. I am lost! I am lost! I want to get to my lover. Tell me, Rhoda, you would curse me if I did. And listen to me. Let him open his arms to me, I go; I follow him as far as my feet will bear me. I would go if it lightened from heaven. If I saw up there the warning, 'You shall not!' I would go. But, look on me!" she smote contempt upon her bosom. "He would not call to such a thing as me. Me, now? My skin is like a toad's to him. I've become like something in the dust. I could hiss like adders. I am quite impenitent. I pray by my bedside, my head on my Bible, but I only say, 'Yes, yes; that's done; that's deserved, if there's no mercy.' Oh, if there is no mercy, that's deserved! I say so now. But this is what I say, Rhoda (I see nothing but blackness when I pray), and I say, 'Permit no worse!' I say, 'Permit no worse, or take the consequences.' He calls me his wife. I am his wife. And if—" Dahlia fell to speechless panting; her mouth was open; she made motion with her hands; horror, as of a blasphemy struggling to her lips, kept her dumb, but the prompting passion was indomitable.... "Read it," said her struggling voice; and Rhoda bent over the letter, reading and losing thought of each sentence as it passed. To Dahlia, the vital words were visible like evanescent blue gravelights. She saw them rolling through her sister's mind; and just upon the conclusion, she gave out, as in a chaunt: "And I who have sinned against my innocent darling, will ask her to pray with me that our future may be one, so that may make good to her what she has suffered, and to the God whom we worship, the offence I have committed."

Rhoda looked up at the pale penetrating eyes.

"Read. Have you read to the last?" said Dahlia. "Speak it. Let me hear you. He writes it.... Yes? you will not? 'Husband,' he says," and then she took up the sentences of the letter backwards to the beginning, pausing upon each one with a short moan, and smiting her bosom. "I found it here, Rhoda. I found his letter here when I came.. I came a dead thing, and it made me spring up alive. Oh, what bliss to be dead! I've felt nothing...nothing, for months." She flung herself on the bed, thrusting her handkerchief to her mouth to deaden the outcry. "I'm punished. I'm punished, because I did not trust to my darling. No, not for one year! Is it that since we parted? I am an impatient creature, and he does not reproach me. I tormented my own, my love, my dear, and he thought I—I was tired of our life together. No; he does not accuse me," Dahlia replied to her sister's unspoken feeling, with the shrewd divination which is passion's breathing space. "He accuses himself. He says it—utters it—speaks it 'I sold my beloved.' There is no guile in him. Oh, be just to us, Rhoda! Dearest," she came to Rhoda's side, "you did deceive me, did you not? You are a deceiver, my love?"

Page 1101

Rhoda trembled, and raising her eyelids, answered, “Yes.”

“You saw him in the street that morning?”

Dahlia smiled a glittering tenderness too evidently deceitful in part, but quite subduing.

“You saw him, my Rhoda, and he said he was true to me, and sorrowful; and you told him, dear one, that I had no heart for him, and wished to go to hell—did you not, good Rhoda? Forgive me; I mean ‘good;’ my true, good Rhoda. Yes, you hate sin; it is dreadful; but you should never speak falsely to sinners, for that does not teach them to repent. Mind you never lie again. Look at me. I am chained, and I have no repentance in me. See me. I am nearer it...the other—sin, I mean. If that man comes...will he?”

“No—no!” Rhoda cried.

“If that man comes—”

“He will not come!”

“He cast me off at the church door, and said he had been cheated. Money! Oh, Edward!”

Dahlia drooped her head.

“He will keep away. You are safe,” said Rhoda.

“Because, if no help comes, I am lost—I am lost for ever!”

“But help will come. I mean peace will come. We will read; we will work in the garden. You have lifted poor father up, my dear.”

“Ah! that old man!” Dahlia sighed.

“He is our father.”

“Yes, poor old man!” and Dahlia whispered: “I have no pity for him. If I am dragged away, I’m afraid I shall curse him. He seems a stony old man. I don’t understand fathers. He would make me go away. He talks the Scriptures when he is excited. I’m afraid he would shut my Bible for me. Those old men know nothing of the hearts of women. Now, darling, go to your room.”

Rhoda begged earnestly for permission to stay with her, but Dahlia said:
“My nights are fevers. I can’t have arms about me.”

They shook hands when they separated, not kissing.

CHAPTER XLII

Three days passed quietly at the Farm, and each morning Dahlia came down to breakfast, and sat with the family at their meals; pale, with the mournful rim about her eyelids, but a patient figure. No questions were asked. The house was guarded from visitors, and on the surface the home was peaceful. On the Wednesday Squire Blancove was buried, when Master Gammon, who seldom claimed a holiday or specified an enjoyment of which he would desire to partake, asked leave to be spared for a couple of hours, that he might attend the ceremonious interment of one to whom a sort of vagrant human sentiment of clanship had made him look up, as to the chief gentleman of the district, and therefore one having claims on his respect. A burial had great interest for the old man.

“I’ll be home for dinner; it’ll gi’e me an appetite,” Master Gammon said solemnly, and he marched away in his serious Sunday hat and careful coat, blither than usual.

Page 1102

After his departure, Mrs. Sumfit sat and discoursed on deaths and burials, the certain end of all: at least, she corrected herself, the deaths were. The burials were not so certain. Consequently, we might take the burials, as they were a favour, to be a blessing, except in the event of persons being buried alive. She tried to make her hearers understand that the idea of this calamity had always seemed intolerable to her, and told of numerous cases which, the coffin having been opened, showed by the convulsed aspect of the corpse, or by spots of blood upon the shroud, that the poor creature had wakened up forlorn, “and not a kick allowed to him, my dears.”

“It happens to women, too, does it not, mother?” said Dahlia.

“They’re most subject to trances, my sweet. From always imitatin’ they imitates their deaths at last; and, oh!” Mrs. Sumfit was taken with nervous chokings of alarm at the thought. “Alone—all dark! and hard wood upon your chest, your elbows, your nose, your toes, and you under heaps o’ gravel! Not a breath for you, though you snap and catch for one—worse than a fish on land.”

“It’s over very soon, mother,” said Dahlia.

“The coldness of you young women! Yes; but it’s the time—you feeling, trying for air; it’s the horrid ‘Oh, dear me!’ You set your mind on it!”

“I do,” said Dahlia. “You see coffin-nails instead of stars. You’d give the world to turn upon one side. You can’t think. You can only hate those who put you there. You see them taking tea, saying prayers, sleeping in bed, putting on bonnets, walking to church, kneading dough, eating—all at once, like the firing of a gun. They’re in one world; you’re in another.”

“Why, my goodness, one’d say she’d gone through it herself,” ejaculated Mrs. Sumfit, terrified.

Dahlia sent her eyes at Rhoda.

“I must go and see that poor man covered.” Mrs. Sumfit succumbed to a fit of resolution much under the pretence that it had long been forming.

“Well, and mother,” said Dahlia, checking her, “promise me. Put a feather on my mouth; put a glass to my face, before you let them carry me out. Will you? Rhoda promises. I have asked her.”

“Oh! the ideas of this girl!” Mrs. Sumfit burst out. “And looking so, as she says it. My love, you didn’t mean to die?”

Dahlia soothed her, and sent her off.

“I am buried alive!” she said. “I feel it all—the stifling! the hopeless cramp! Let us go and garden. Rhoda, have you got laudanum in the house?”

Rhoda shook her head, too sick at heart to speak. They went into the garden, which was Dahlia’s healthfullest place. It seemed to her that her dead mother talked to her there. That was not a figure of speech, when she said she felt buried alive. She was in the state of sensational delusion. There were times when she watched her own power of motion curiously: curiously stretched out her

Page 1103

hands, and touched things, and moved them. The sight was convincing, but the shudder came again. In a frame less robust the brain would have given way. It was the very soundness of the brain which, when her blood was a simple tide of life in her veins, and no vital force, had condemned her to see the wisdom and the righteousness of the act of sacrifice committed by her, and had urged her even up to the altar. Then the sudden throwing off of the mask by that man to whom she had bound herself, and the reading of Edward's letter of penitence and love, thwarted reason, but without blinding or unsettling it. Passion grew dominant; yet against such deadly matters on all sides had passion to strive, that, under a darkened sky, visibly chained, bound down, and hopeless, she felt between-whiles veritably that she was a living body buried. Her senses had become semi-lunatic.

She talked reasonably; and Rhoda, hearing her question and answer at meal-times like a sane woman, was in doubt whether her sister wilfully simulated a partial insanity when they were alone together. Now, in the garden, Dahlia said: "All those flowers, my dear, have roots in mother and me. She can't feel them, for her soul's in heaven. But mine is down there. The pain is the trying to get your soul loose. It's the edge of a knife that won't cut through. Do you know that?"

Rhoda said, as acquiescingly as she could, "Yes."

"Do you?" Dahlia whispered. "It's what they call the 'agony.' Only, to go through it in the dark, when you are all alone! boarded round! you will never know that. And there's an angel brings me one of mother's roses, and I smell it. I see fields of snow; and it's warm there, and no labour for breath. I see great beds of flowers; I pass them like a breeze. I'm shot, and knock on the ground, and they bury me for dead again. Indeed, dearest, it's true."

She meant, true as regarded her sensations. Rhoda could barely give a smile for response; and Dahlia's intelligence being supernaturally active, she read her sister's doubt, and cried out,—

"Then let me talk of him!"

It was the fiery sequence to her foregone speech, signifying that if her passion had liberty to express itself, she could clear understandings. But even a moment's free wing to passion renewed the blinding terror within her. Rhoda steadied her along the walks, praying for the time to come when her friends, the rector and his wife, might help in the task of comforting this poor sister. Detestation of the idea of love made her sympathy almost deficient, and when there was no active work to do in aid, she was nearly valueless, knowing that she also stood guilty of a wrong.

The day was very soft and still. The flowers gave light for light. They heard through the noise of the mill-water the funeral bell sound. It sank in Rhoda like the preaching of an

end that was promise of a beginning, and girdled a distancing land of trouble. The breeze that blew seemed mercy. To live here in forgetfulness with Dahlia was the limit of her desires. Perhaps, if Robert worked among them, she would gratefully give him her hand. That is, if he said not a word of love.

Page 1104

Master Gammon and Mrs. Sumfit were punctual in their return near the dinnerhour; and the business of releasing the dumplings and potatoes, and spreading out the cold meat and lettuces, restrained for some period the narrative of proceedings at the funeral. Chief among the incidents was, that Mrs. Sumfit had really seen, and only wanted, by corroboration of Master Gammon, to be sure she had positively seen, Anthony Hackbut on the skirts of the funeral procession. Master Gammon, however, was no supporter of conjecture. What he had thought he had thought; but that was neither here nor there. He would swear to nothing that he had not touched;—eyes deceived;—he was never a guesser. He left Mrs. Sumfit to pledge herself in perturbation of spirit to an oath that her eyes had seen Anthony Hackbut; and more, which was, that after the close of the funeral service, the young squire had caught sight of Anthony crouching in a corner of the churchyard, and had sent a man to him, and they had disappeared together. Mrs. Sumfit was heartily laughed at and rallied both by Robert and the farmer. “Tony at a funeral! and train expenses!” the farmer interjected. “D’ye think, mother, Tony’d come to Wrexby churchyard ’fore he come Queen Anne’s Farm? And where’s he now, mayhap?”

Mrs. Sumfit appealed in despair to Master Gammon, with entreaties, and a ready dumpling.

“There, Mas’ Gammon; and why you sh’d play at ‘do believe’ and at ’don’t believe,’ after that awesome scene, the solem’est of life’s, when you did declare to me, sayin’, it was a stride for boots out o’ London this morning. Your words, Mas’ Gammon! and ’boots’-=it’s true, if by that alone! For, ‘boots,’ I says to myself—he thinks by ‘boots,’ there being a cord’er in his family on the mother’s side; which you yourself told to me, as you did, Mas’ Gammon, and now holds back, you did, like a bad horse.”

“Hey! does Gammon jib?” said the farmer, with the ghost of old laughter twinkling in his eyes.

“He told me this tale,” Mrs. Sumfit continued, daring her irresponsive enemy to contradict her, with a threatening gaze. “He told me this tale, he did; and my belief’s, his game ’s, he gets me into a corner—there to be laughed at! Mas’ Gammon, if you’re not a sly old man, you said, you did, he was drownded; your mother’s brother’s wife’s brother; and he had a brother, and what he was to you—that brother—” Mrs. Sumfit smote her hands—“Oh, my goodness, my poor head! but you shan’t slip away, Mas’ Gammon; no, try you ever so much. Drownded he was, and eight days in the sea, which you told me over a warm mug of ale by the fire years back. And I do believe them dumplings makes ye obstinate; for worse you get, and that fond of ’em, I sh’ll soon not have enough in our biggest pot. Yes, you said he was eight days in the sea, and as for face, you said, poor thing! he was like a rag of towel dipped in starch, was your own words, and all his likeness wiped out; and Joe, the other brother,

Page 1105

a cord'er—bootmaker, you call 'em—looked down him, as he was stretched out on the shore of the sea, all along, and didn't know him till he come to the boots, and he says, 'It's Abner;' for there was his boots to know him by. Now, will you deny, Mas' Gammon, you said, Mr. Hackbut's boots, and a long stride it was for 'em from London? And I won't be laughed at through arts of any sly old man!"

The circumstantial charge made no impression on Master Gammon, who was heard to mumble, as from the inmost recesses of tight-packed dumpling; but he left the vindication of his case to the farmer's laughter. The mention of her uncle had started a growing agitation in Rhoda, to whom the indication of his eccentric behaviour was a stronger confirmation of his visit to the neighbourhood. And wherefore had he journeyed down? Had he come to haunt her on account of the money he had poured into her lap? Rhoda knew in a moment that she was near a great trial of her strength and truth. She had more than once, I cannot tell you how distantly, conceived that the money had been money upon which the mildest word for "stolen" should be put to express the feeling she had got about it, after she had parted with the bulk of it to the man Sedgett. Not "stolen," not "appropriated," but money that had perhaps been entrusted, and of which Anthony had forgotten the rightful ownership. This idea of hers had burned with no intolerable fire; but, under a weight of all discountenancing appearances, feeble though it was, it had distressed her. The dealing with money, and the necessity for it, had given Rhoda a better comprehension of its nature and value. She had taught herself to think that her suspicion sprang from her uncle's wild demeanour, and the scene of the gold pieces scattered on the floor, as if a heart had burst at her feet.

No sooner did she hear that Anthony had been, by supposition, seen, than the little light of secret dread flamed a panic through her veins. She left the table before Master Gammon had finished, and went out of the house to look about for her uncle. He was nowhere in the fields, nor in the graveyard. She walked over the neighbourhood desolately, until her quickened apprehension was extinguished, and she returned home relieved, thinking it folly to have imagined her uncle was other than a man of hoarded wealth, and that he was here. But, in the interval, she had experienced emotions which warned her of a struggle to come. Who would be friendly to her, and an arm of might? The thought of the storm she had sown upon all sides made her tremble foolishly. When she placed her hand in Robert's, she gave his fingers a confiding pressure, and all but dropped her head upon his bosom, so sick she was with weakness. It would have been a deceit toward him, and that restrained her; perhaps, yet more, she was restrained by the gloomy prospect of having to reply to any words of love, without an idea of what to say, and with a loathing of caresses. She saw herself condemned to stand alone, and at a season when she was not strengthened by pure self-support.

Page 1106

Rhoda had not surrendered the stern belief that she had done well by forcing Dahlia's hand to the marriage, though it had resulted evilly. In reflecting on it, she had still a feeling of the harsh joy peculiar to those who have exercised command with a conscious righteousness upon wilful, sinful, and erring spirits, and have thwarted the wrongdoer. She could only admit that there was sadness in the issue; hitherto, at least, nothing worse than sad disappointment. The man who was her sister's husband could no longer complain that he had been the victim of an imposition. She had bought his promise that he would leave the country, and she had rescued the honour of the family by paying him. At what cost? She asked herself that now, and then her self-support became uneven. Could her uncle have parted with the great sum—have shed it upon her, merely beneficently, and because he loved her? Was it possible that he had the habit of carrying his own riches through the streets of London? She had to silence all questions imperiously, recalling exactly her ideas of him, and the value of money in the moment when money was an object of hunger—when she had seized it like a wolf, and its value was quite unknown, unguessed at.

Rhoda threw up her window before she slept, that she might breathe the cool night air; and, as she leaned out, she heard steps moving away, and knew them to be Robert's, in whom that pressure of her hand had cruelly resuscitated his longing for her. She drew back, wondering at the idleness of men—slaves while they want a woman's love, savages when they have won it. She tried to pity him, but she had not an emotion to spare, save perhaps one of dull exultation, that she, alone of women, was free from that wretched mess called love; and upon it she slept.

It was between the breakfast and dinner hours, at the farm, next day, when the young squire, accompanied by Anthony Hackbut, met farmer Fleming in the lane bordering one of the outermost fields of wheat. Anthony gave little more than a blunt nod to his relative, and slouched on, leaving the farmer in amazement, while the young squire stopped him to speak with him. Anthony made his way on to the house. Shortly after, he was seen passing through the gates of the garden, accompanied by Rhoda. At the dinner-hour, Robert was taken aside by the farmer. Neither Rhoda nor Anthony presented themselves. They did not appear till nightfall. When Anthony came into the room, he took no greetings and gave none. He sat down on the first chair by the door, shaking his head, with vacant eyes. Rhoda took off her bonnet, and sat as strangely silent. In vain Mrs. Sumfit asked her; "Shall it be tea, dear, and a little cold meat?" The two dumb figures were separately interrogated, but they had no answer.

"Come! brother Tony?" the farmer tried to rally him.

Dahlia was knitting some article of feminine gear. Robert stood by the musk-pots at the window, looking at Rhoda fixedly. Of this gaze she became conscious, and glanced from him to the clock.

Page 1107

“It’s late,” she said, rising.

“But you’re empty, my dear. And to think o’ going to bed without a dinner, or your tea, and no supper! You’ll never say prayers, if you do,” said Mrs. Sumfit.

The remark engendered a notion in the farmer’s head, that Anthony promised to be particularly prayerless.

“You’ve been and spent a night at the young squire’s, I hear, brother Tony. All right and well. No complaints on my part, I do assure ye. If you’re mixed up with that family, I won’t bring it in you’re anyways mixed up with this family; not so as to clash, do you see. Only, man, now you are here, a word’d be civil, if you don’t want a doctor.”

“I was right,” murmured Mrs. Sumfit. “At the funeral, he was; and Lord be thanked! I thought my eyes was failin’. Mas’ Gammon, you’d ha’ lost no character by sidin’ wi’ me.”

“Here’s Dahlia, too,” said the farmer. “Brother Tony, don’t you see her? She’s beginning to be recognizable, if her hair’d grow a bit faster. She’s...well, there she is.”

A quavering, tiny voice, that came from Anthony, said: “How d’ ye do—how d’ ye do;” sounding like the first effort of a fife. But Anthony did not cast eye on Dahlia.

“Will you eat, man?—will you smoke a pipe?—won’t you talk a word?—will you go to bed?”

These several questions, coming between pauses, elicited nothing from the staring oldman.

“Is there a matter wrong at the Bank?” the farmer called out, and Anthony jumped in a heap.

“Eh?” persisted the farmer.

Rhoda interposed: “Uncle is tired; he is unwell. Tomorrow he will talk to you.”

“No, but is there anything wrong up there, though?” the farmer asked with eager curiosity, and a fresh smile at the thought that those Banks and city folk were mortal, and could upset, notwithstanding their crashing wheels. “Brother Tony, you speak out; has anybody been and broke? Never mind a blow, so long, o’ course, as they haven’t swallowed your money. How is it? Why, I never saw such a sight as you. You come down from London; you play hide and seek about your relation’s house; and here, when you do condescend to step in—eh? how is it? You ain’t, I hope, ruined, Tony, are ye?”

Rhoda stood over her uncle to conceal him.

“He shall not speak till he has had some rest. And yes, mother, he shall have some warm tea upstairs in bed. Boil some water. Now, uncle, come with me.”

“Anybody broke?” Anthony rolled the words over, as Rhoda raised his arm. “I’m asked such a lot, my dear, I ain’t equal to it. You said here ’d be a quiet place. I don’t know about money. Try my pockets. Yes, mum, if you was forty policemen, I’m empty; you’d find it. And no objection to nod to prayers; but never was taught one of my own. Where am I going, my dear?”

“Upstairs with me, uncle.”

Rhoda had succeeded in getting him on his feet.

Page 1108

The farmer tapped at his forehead, as a signification to the others that Anthony had gone wrong in the head, which reminded him that he had prophesied as much. He stiffened out his legs, and gave a manful spring, crying, “Hulloa, brother Tony! why, man, eh? Look here. What, goin’ to bed? What, you, Tony? I say—I say—dear me!” And during these exclamations intricate visions of tripping by means of gold wires danced before him.

Rhoda hurried Anthony out.

After the door had shut, the farmer said: “That comes of it; sooner or later, there it is! You give your heart to money—you insure in a ship, and as much as say, here’s a ship, and, blow and lighten, I defy you. Whereas we day-by-day people, if it do blow and if it do lighten, and the waves are avilanches, we’ve nothing to lose. Poor old Tony—a smash, to a certainty. There’s been a smash, and he’s gone under the harrow. Any o’ you here might ha’ heard me say, things can’t last for ever. Ha’n’t you, now?”

The persons present meekly acquiesced in his prophetic spirit to this extent. Mrs. Sumfit dolorously said, “Often, William dear,” and accepted the incontestable truth in deep humiliation of mind.

“Save,” the farmer continued, “save and store, only don’t put your heart in the box.”

“It’s true, William;” Mrs. Sumfit acted clerk to the sermon.

Dahlia took her softly by the neck, and kissed her.

“Is it love for the old woman?” Mrs. Sumfit murmured fondly; and Dahlia kissed her again.

The farmer had by this time rounded to the thought of how he personally might be affected by Anthony’s ill-luck, supposing; perchance, that Anthony was suffering from something more than a sentimental attachment to the Bank of his predilection: and such a reflection instantly diverted his tendency to moralize.

“We shall hear to-morrow,” he observed in conclusion; which, as it caused a desire for the morrow to spring within his bosom, sent his eyes at Master Gammon, who was half an hour behind his time for bed, and had dropped asleep in his chair. This unusual display of public somnolence on Master Gammon’s part, together with the veteran’s reputation for slowness, made the farmer fret at him as being in some way an obstruction to the lively progress of the hours.

“Hoy, Gammon!” he sang out, awakeningly to ordinary ears; but Master Gammon was not one who took the ordinary plunge into the gulf of sleep, and it was required to shake him and to bellow at him—to administer at once earthquake and thunder—before his lizard eyelids would lift over the great, old-world eyes; upon which, like a clayey monster

refusing to be informed with heavenly fire, he rolled to the right of his chair and to the left, and pitched forward, and insisted upon being inanimate. Brought at last to a condition of stale consciousness, he looked at his master long, and uttered surprisingly “Farmer, there’s queer things going on in this house,” and then relapsed to a combat with Mrs. Sumfit, regarding the candle; she saying that it was not to be entrusted to him, and he sullenly contending that it was.

Page 1109

“Here, we’ll all go to bed,” said the farmer. “What with one person queer, and another person queer, I shall be in for a headache, if I take to thinking. Gammon’s a man sees in ’s sleep what he misses awake. Did you ever know,” he addressed anybody, “such a thing as Tony Hackbut coming into a relation’s house, and sitting there, and not a word for any of us? It’s, I call it, dumbfoundering. And that’s me: why didn’t I go up and shake his hand, you ask. Well, why not? If he don’t know he’s welcome, without ceremony, he’s no good. Why, I’ve got matters t’ occupy my mind, too, haven’t I? Every man has, and some more’n others, let alone crosses. There’s something wrong with my brother-in-law, Tony, that’s settled. Odd that we country people, who bide, and take the Lord’s gifts—” The farmer did not follow out this reflection, but raising his arms, shepherd-wise, he puffed as if blowing the two women before him to their beds, and then gave a shy look at Robert, and nodded good-night to him. Robert nodded in reply. He knew the cause of the farmer’s uncommon blitheness. Algernon Blancove, the young squire, had proposed for Rhoda’s hand.

CHAPTER XLIII

Anthony had robbed the Bank. The young squire was aware of the fact, and had offered to interpose for him, and to make good the money to the Bank, upon one condition. So much, Rhoda had gathered from her uncle’s babbling interjections throughout the day. The farmer knew only of the young squire’s proposal, which had been made direct to him; and he had left it to Robert to state the case to Rhoda, and plead for himself. She believed fully, when she came downstairs into the room where Robert was awaiting her, that she had but to speak and a mine would be sprung; and shrinking from it, hoping for it, she entered, and tried to fasten her eyes upon Robert distinctly, telling him the tale. Robert listened with a calculating seriousness of manner that quieted her physical dread of his passion. She finished; and he said “It will, perhaps, save your uncle: I’m sure it will please your father.”

She sat down, feeling that a warmth had gone, and that she was very bare.

“Must I consent, then?”

“If you can, I suppose.”

Both being spirits formed for action, a perplexity found them weak as babes. He, moreover, was stung to see her debating at all upon such a question; and he was in despair before complicated events which gave nothing for his hands and heart to do. Stiff endurance seemed to him to be his lesson; and he made a show of having learnt it.

“Were you going out, Robert?”

“I usually make the rounds of the house, to be sure all’s safe.”

His walking about the garden at night was not, then, for the purpose of looking at her window. Rhoda coloured in all her dark crimson with shame for thinking that it had been so.

“I must decide to-morrow morning.”

Page 1110

“They say, the pillow’s the best counsellor.”

A reply that presumed she would sleep appeared to her as bitterly unfriendly.

“Did father wish it?”

“Not by what he spoke.”

“You suppose he does wish it?”

“Where’s the father who wouldn’t? Of course, he wishes it. He’s kind enough, but you may be certain he wishes it.”

“Oh! Dahlia, Dahlia!” Rhoda moaned, under a rush of new sensations, unfilial, akin to those which her sister had distressed her by speaking shamelessly out.

“Ah! poor soul!” added Robert.

“My darling must be brave: she must have great courage. Dahlia cannot be a coward. I begin to see.”

Rhoda threw up her face, and sat awhile as one who was reading old matters by a fresh light.

“I can’t think,” she said, with a start. “Have I been dreadfully cruel? Was I unsisterly? I have such a horror of some things—disgrace. And men are so hard on women; and father—I felt for him. And I hated that base man. It’s his cousin and his name! I could almost fancy this trial is brought round to me for punishment.”

An ironic devil prompted Robert to say, “You can’t let harm come to your uncle.”

The thing implied was the farthest in his idea of any woman’s possible duty.

“Are you of that opinion?” Rhoda questioned with her eyes, but uttered nothing.

Now, he had spoken almost in the ironical tone. She should have noted that. And how could a true-hearted girl suppose him capable of giving such counsel to her whom he loved? It smote him with horror and anger; but he was much too manly to betray these actual sentiments, and continued to dissemble. You see, he had not forgiven her for her indifference to him.

“You are no longer your own mistress,” he said, meaning exactly the reverse.

This—that she was bound in generosity to sacrifice herself—was what Rhoda feared. There was no forceful passion in her bosom to burst through the crowd of weak

reasonings and vanities, to bid her be a woman, not a puppet; and the passion in him, for which she craved, that she might be taken up by it and whirled into forgetfulness, with a seal of betrothal upon her lips, was absent so that she thought herself loved no more by Robert. She was weary of thinking and acting on her own responsibility, and would gladly have abandoned her will; yet her judgement, if she was still to exercise it, told her that the step she was bidden to take was one, the direct consequence and the fruit of her other resolute steps. Pride whispered, “You could compel your sister to do that which she abhorred;” and Pity pleaded for her poor old uncle Anthony. She looked back in imagination at that scene with him in London, amazed at her frenzy of power, and again, from that contemplation, amazed at her present nervelessness.

“I am not fit to be my own mistress,” she said.

“Then, the sooner you decide the better,” observed Robert, and the room became hot and narrow to him.

Page 1111

“Very little time is given me,” she murmured. The sound was like a whimper; exasperating to one who had witnessed her remorseless energy.

“I dare say you won’t find the hardship so great,” said he.

“Because,” she looked up quickly, “I went out one day to meet him? Do you mean that, Robert? I went to hear news of my sister. I had received no letters from her. And he wrote to say that he could tell me about her. My uncle took me once to the Bank. I saw him there first. He spoke of Wrexby, and of my sister. It is pleasant to inexperienced girls to hear themselves praised. Since the day when you told me to turn back I have always respected you.”

Her eyelids lowered softly.

Could she have humbled herself more? But she had, at the same time, touched his old wound: and his rival then was the wooer now, rich, and a gentleman. And this room, Robert thought as he looked about it, was the room in which she had refused him, when he first asked her to be his.

“I think,” he said, “I’ve never begged your pardon for the last occasion of our being alone here together. I’ve had my arm round you. Don’t be frightened. That’s my marriage, and there was my wife. And there’s an end of my likings and my misconduct. Forgive me for calling it to mind.”

“No, no, Robert,” Rhoda lifted her hands, and, startled by the impulse, dropped them, saying: “What forgiveness? Was I ever angry with you?”

A look of tenderness accompanied the words, and grew into a dusky crimson rose under his eyes.

“When you went into the wood, I saw you going: I knew it was for some good object,” he said, and flushed equally.

But, by the recurrence to that scene, he had checked her sensitive developing emotion. She hung a moment in languor, and that oriental warmth of colour ebbed away from her cheeks.

“You are very kind,” said she.

Then he perceived in dimmest fashion that possibly a chance had come to ripeness, withered, and fallen, within the late scoffing seconds of time. Enraged at his blindness, and careful, lest he had wrongly guessed, not to expose his regret (the man was a lover), he remarked, both truthfully and hypocritically: “I’ve always thought you were born to be a lady.” (You had that ambition, young madam.)

She answered: “That’s what I don’t understand.” (Your saying it, O my friend!)

“You will soon take to your new duties.” (You have small objection to them even now.)

“Yes, or my life won’t be worth much.” (Know, that you are driving me to it.)

“And I wish you happiness, Rhoda.” (You are madly imperilling the prospect thereof.)

To each of them the second meaning stood shadowy behind the utterances. And further,—

“Thank you, Robert.” (I shall have to thank you for the issue.)

“Now it’s time to part.” (Do you not see that there’s a danger for me in remaining?)

Page 1112

“Good night.” (Behold, I am submissive.)

“Good night, Rhoda.” (You were the first to give the signal of parting.)

“Good night.” (I am simply submissive.)

“Why not my name? Are you hurt with me?”

Rhoda choked. The indirectness of speech had been a shelter to her, permitting her to hint at more than she dared clothe in words.

Again the delicious dusky rose glowed beneath his eyes.

But he had put his hand out to her, and she had not taken it.

“What have I done to offend you? I really don’t know, Rhoda.”

“Nothing.” The flower had closed.

He determined to believe that she was gladdened at heart by the prospect of a fine marriage, and now began to discourse of Anthony’s delinquency, saying,—

“It was not money taken for money’s sake: any one can see that. It was half clear to me, when you told me about it, that the money was not his to give, but I’ve got the habit of trusting you to be always correct.”

“And I never am,” said Rhoda, vexed at him and at herself.

“Women can’t judge so well about money matters. Has your uncle no account of his own at the Bank? He was thought to be a bit of a miser.”

“What he is, or what he was, I can’t guess. He has not been near the Bank since that day; nor to his home. He has wandered down on his way here, sleeping in cottages. His heart seems broken. I have still a great deal of the money. I kept it, thinking it might be a protection for Dahlia. Oh! my thoughts and what I have done! Of course, I imagined him to be rich. A thousand pounds seemed a great deal to me, and very little for one who was rich. If I had reflected at all, I must have seen that Uncle Anthony would never have carried so much through the streets. I was like a fiend for money. I must have been acting wrongly. Such a craving as that is a sign of evil.”

“What evil there is, you’re going to mend, Rhoda.”

“I sell myself, then.”

“Hardly so bad as that. The money will come from you instead of from your uncle.”

Rhoda bent forward in her chair, with her elbows on her knees, like a man brooding. Perhaps, it was right that the money should come from her. And how could she have hoped to get the money by any other means? Here at least was a positive escape from perplexity. It came at the right moment; was it a help divine? What cowardice had been prompting her to evade it? After all, could it be a dreadful step that she was required to take?

Her eyes met Robert's, and he said startlingly: "Just like a woman!"

"Why?" but she had caught the significance, and blushed with spite.

"He was the first to praise you."

"You are brutal to me, Robert."

"My name at last! You accused me of that sort of thing before, in this room."

Rhoda stood up. "I will wish you good night."

Page 1113

“And now you take my hand.”

“Good night,” they uttered simultaneously; but Robert did not give up the hand he had got in his own. His eyes grew sharp, and he squeezed the fingers.

“I’m bound,” she cried.

“Once!” Robert drew her nearer to him.

“Let me go.”

“Once!” he reiterated. “Rhoda, as I’ve never kissed you—once!”

“No: don’t anger me.”

“No one has ever kissed you?”

“Never.”

“Then, I—” His force was compelling the straightened figure.

Had he said, “Be mine!” she might have softened to his embrace; but there was no fire of divining love in her bosom to perceive her lover’s meaning. She read all his words as a placard on a board, and revolted from the outrage of submitting her lips to one who was not to be her husband. His jealousy demanded that gratification foremost. The “Be mine!” was ready enough to follow.

“Let me go, Robert.”

She was released. The cause for it was the opening of the door. Anthony stood there.

A more astounding resemblance to the phantasm of a dream was never presented. He was clad in a manner to show forth the condition of his wits, in partial night and day attire: one of the farmer’s nightcaps was on his head, surmounted by his hat. A confused recollection of the necessity for trousers, had made him draw on those garments sufficiently to permit of the movement of his short legs, at which point their subserviency to the uses ended. Wrinkled with incongruous clothing from head to foot, and dazed by the light, he peered on them, like a mouse magnified and petrified.

“Dearest uncle!” Rhoda went to him.

Anthony nodded, pointing to the door leading out of the house.

“I just want to go off—go off. Never you mind me. I’m only going off.”

“You must go to your bed, uncle.”

“Oh, Lord! no. I’m going off, my dear. I’ve had sleep enough for forty. I—” he turned his mouth to Rhoda’s ear, “I don’t want t’ see th’ old farmer.” And, as if he had given a conclusive reason for his departure, he bored towards the door, repeating it, and bawling additionally, “in the morning.”

“You have seen him, uncle. You have seen him. It’s over,” said Rhoda.

Anthony whispered: “I don’t want t’ see th’ old farmer.”

“But, you have seen him, uncle.”

“In the morning, my dear. Not in the morning. He’ll be looking and asking, ‘Where away, brother Tony?’ ’Where’s your banker’s book, brother Tony?’ ‘How’s money-market, brother Tony?’ I can’t see th’ old farmer.”

It was impossible to avoid smiling: his imitation of the farmer’s country style was exact.

She took his hands, and used every persuasion she could think of to induce him to return to his bed; nor was he insensible to argument, or superior to explanation.

Page 1114

“Th’ old farmer thinks I’ve got millions, my dear. You can’t satisfy him. He... I don’t want t’ see him in the morning. He thinks I’ve got millions. His mouth’ll go down. I don’t want... You don’t want him to look... And I can’t count now; I can’t count a bit. And every post I see ’s a policeman. I ain’t hiding. Let ’em take the old man. And he was a faithful servant, till one day he got up on a regular whirly-go-round, and ever since...such a little boy! I’m frightened o’ you, Rhoda.”

“I will do everything for you,” said Rhoda, crying wretchedly.

“Because, the young squire says,” Anthony made his voice mysterious.

“Yes, yes,” Rhoda stopped him; “and I consent:” she gave a hurried half-glance behind her. “Come, uncle. Oh! pity! don’t let me think your reason’s gone. I can get you the money, but if you go foolish, I cannot help you.”

Her energy had returned to her with the sense of sacrifice. Anthony eyed her tears. “We’ve sat on a bank and cried together, haven’t we?” he said. “And counted ants, we have. Shall we sit in the sun together to-morrow? Say, we shall. Shall we? A good long day in the sun and nobody looking at me ’s my pleasure.”

Rhoda gave him the assurance, and he turned and went upstairs with her, docile at the prospect of hours to be passed in the sunlight.

Yet, when morning came, he had disappeared. Robert also was absent from the breakfast-table. The farmer made no remarks, save that he reckoned Master Gammon was right—in allusion to the veteran’s somnolent observation overnight; and strange things were acted before his eyes.

There came by the morning delivery of letters one addressed to “Miss Fleming.” He beheld his daughters rise, put their hands out, and claim it, in a breath; and they gazed upon one another like the two women demanding the babe from the justice of the Wise King. The letter was placed in Rhoda’s hand; Dahlia laid hers on it. Their mouths were shut; any one not looking at them would have been unaware that a supreme conflict was going on in the room. It was a strenuous wrestle of their eyeballs, like the “give way” of athletes pausing. But the delirious beat down the constitutional strength. A hard bright smile ridged the hollow of Dahlia’s cheeks. Rhoda’s dark eyes shut; she let go her hold, and Dahlia thrust the letter in against her bosom, snatched it out again, and dipped her face to roses in a jug, and kissing Mrs. Sumfit, ran from the room for a single minute; after which she came back smiling with gravely joyful eyes and showing a sedate readiness to eat and conclude the morning meal.

What did this mean? The farmer could have made allowance for Rhoda’s behaving so, seeing that she notoriously possessed intellect; and he had the habit of charging all freaks and vagaries of manner upon intellect.

Page 1115

But Dahlia was a soft creature, without this apology for extravagance, and what right had she to letters addressed to “Miss Fleming?” The farmer prepared to ask a question, and was further instigated to it by seeing Mrs. Sumfit’s eyes roll sympathetic under a burden of overpowering curiosity and bewilderment. On the point of speaking, he remembered that he had pledged his word to ask no questions; he feared to—that was the secret; he had put his trust in Rhoda’s assurance, and shrank from a spoken suspicion. So, checking himself, he broke out upon Mrs. Sumfit: “Now, then, mother!” which caused her to fluster guiltily, she having likewise given her oath to be totally unquestioning, even as was Master Gammon, whom she watched with a deep envy. Mrs. Sumfit excused the anxious expression of her face by saying that she was thinking of her dairy, whither, followed by the veteran, she retired.

Rhoda stood eyeing Dahlia, nerved to battle against the contents of that letter, though in the first conflict she had been beaten. “Oh, this curse of love!” she thought in her heart; and as Dahlia left the room, flushed, stupefied, and conscienceless, Rhoda the more readily told her father the determination which was the result of her interview with Robert.

No sooner had she done so, than a strange fluttering desire to look on Robert awoke within her bosom. She left the house, believing that she went abroad to seek her uncle, and walked up a small grass-knoll, a little beyond the farm-yard, from which she could see green corn-tracts and the pastures by the river, the river flowing oily under summer light, and the slow-footed cows, with their heads bent to the herbage; far-away sheep, and white hawthorn bushes, and deep hedge-ways bursting out of the trimness of the earlier season; and a nightingale sang among the hazels near by.

This scene of unthrobbing peacefulness was beheld by Rhoda with her first conscious delight in it. She gazed round on the farm, under a quick new impulse of affection for her old home. And whose hand was it that could alone sustain the working of the farm, and had done so, without reward? Her eyes travelled up to Wrexby Hall, perfectly barren of any feeling that she was to enter the place, aware only that it was full of pain for her. She accused herself, but could not accept the charge of her having ever hoped for transforming events that should twist and throw the dear old farm-life long back into the fields of memory. Nor could she understand the reason of her continued coolness to Robert. Enough of accurate reflection was given her to perceive that discontent with her station was the original cause of her discontent now. What she had sown she was reaping:—and wretchedly colourless are these harvests of our dream! The sun has not shone on them. They may have a tragic blood-hue, as with Dahlia’s; but they will never have any warm, and fresh, and nourishing sweetness—the juice which is in a single blade of grass.

Page 1116

A longing came upon Rhoda to go and handle butter. She wished to smell it as Mrs. Sumfit drubbed and patted and flattened and rounded it in the dairy; and she ran down the slope, meeting her father at the gate. He was dressed in his brushed suit, going she knew whither, and when he asked if she had seen her uncle, she gave for answer a plain negative, and longed more keenly to be at work with her hands, and to smell the homely creamy air under the dairy-shed.

CHAPTER XLIV

She watched her father as he went across the field and into the lane. Her breathing was suppressed till he appeared in view at different points, more and more distant, and then she sighed heavily, stopped her breathing, and hoped her unshaped hope again. The last time he was in sight, she found herself calling to him with a voice like that of a burdened sleeper: her thought being, “How can you act so cruelly to Robert!” He passed up Wrexby Heath, and over the black burnt patch where the fire had caught the furzes on a dry Maynight, and sank on the side of the Hall.

When we have looked upon a picture of still green life with a troubled soul, and the blow falls on us, we accuse Nature of our own treachery to her. Rhoda hurried from the dairy-door to shut herself up in her room and darken the light surrounding her. She had turned the lock, and was about systematically to pull down the blind, when the marvel of beholding Dahlia stepping out of the garden made her for a moment less the creature of her sickened senses. Dahlia was dressed for a walk, and she went very fast. The same paralysis of motion afflicted Rhoda as when she was gazing after her father; but her hand stretched out instinctively for her bonnet when Dahlia had crossed the green and the mill-bridge, and was no more visible. Rhoda drew her bonnet on, and caught her black silk mantle in her hand, and without strength to throw it across her shoulders, dropped before her bed, and uttered a strange prayer. “Let her die rather than go back to disgrace, my God! my God!”

She tried to rise, and failed in the effort, and superstitiously renewed her prayer. “Send death to her rather!”—and Rhoda’s vision under her shut eyes conjured up clouds and lightnings, and spheres in conflagration.

There is nothing so indicative of fevered or of bad blood as the tendency to counsel the Almighty how he shall deal with his creatures. The strain of a long uncertainty, and the late feverish weeks had distempered the fine blood of the girl, and her acts and words were becoming remoter exponents of her character.

She bent her head in a blind doze that gave her strength to rise. As swiftly as she could she went in the track of her sister.

That morning, Robert had likewise received a letter. It was from Major Waring, and contained a bank-note, and a summons to London, as also an enclosure from Mrs. Boulby of Warbeach; the nature of which was an advertisement cut out of the county paper, notifying to one Robert Eccles that his aunt Anne had died, and that there was a legacy for him, to be paid over upon application. Robert crossed the fields, laughing madly at the ironical fate which favoured him a little and a little, and never enough, save just to keep him swimming.

Page 1117

The letter from Major Waring said:—

“I must see you immediately. Be quick and come. I begin to be of your opinion—there are some things which we must take into our own hands and deal summarily with.”

“Ay!—ay!” Robert gave tongue in the clear morning air, scenting excitement and eager for it as a hound.

More was written, which he read subsequently

“I wrong,” Percy’s letter continued, “the best of women. She was driven to my door. There is, it seems, some hope that Dahlia will find herself free. At any rate, keep guard over her, and don’t leave her. Mrs. Lovell has herself been moving to make discoveries down at Warbeach. Mr. Blancove has nearly quitted this sphere. She nursed him—I was jealous!—the word’s out. Truth, courage, and suffering touch Margaret’s heart.

“Yours,

“Percy.”

Jumping over a bank, Robert came upon Anthony, who was unsteadily gazing at a donkey that cropped the grass by a gate.

“Here you are,” said Robert, and took his arm.

Anthony struggled, though he knew the grasp was friendly; but he was led along: nor did Robert stop until they reached Greatham, five miles beyond Wrexby, where he entered the principal inn and called for wine.

“You want spirit: you want life,” said Robert.

Anthony knew that he wanted no wine, whatever his needs might be. Yet the tender ecstacy of being paid for was irresistible, and he drank, saying, “Just one glass, then.”

Robert pledged him. They were in a private room, of which, having ordered up three bottles of sherry, Robert locked the door. The devil was in him. He compelled Anthony to drink an equal portion with himself, alternately frightening and cajoling the old man.

“Drink, I tell you. You’ve robbed me, and you shall drink!”

“I haven’t, I haven’t,” Anthony whined.

“Drink, and be silent. You’ve robbed me, and you shall drink! and by heaven! if you resist, I’ll hand you over to bluer imps than you’ve ever dreamed of, old gentleman! You’ve robbed me, Mr. Hackbut. Drink! I tell you.”

Anthony wept into his glass.

“That’s a trick I could never do,” said Robert, eyeing the drip of the trembling old tear pitilessly. “Your health, Mr. Hackbut. You’ve robbed me of my sweetheart. Never mind. Life’s but the pop of a gun. Some of us flash in the pan, and they’re the only ones that do no mischief. You’re not one of them, sir; so you must drink, and let me see you cheerful.”

By degrees, the wine stirred Anthony’s blood, and he chirped feebly, as one who half remembered that he ought to be miserable. Robert listened to his maundering account of his adventure with the Bank money, sternly replenishing his glass. His attention was taken by the sight of Dahlia stepping forth from a chemist’s shop in the street nearly opposite to the inn. “This is my medicine,” said Robert; “and yours too,” he addressed Anthony.

Page 1118

The sun had passed its meridian when they went into the streets again. Robert's head was high as a cock's, and Anthony leaned on his arm; performing short half-circles headlong to the front, until the mighty arm checked and uplifted him. They were soon in the fields leading to Wrexby. Robert saw two female figures far ahead. A man was hastening to join them. The women started and turned suddenly: one threw up her hands, and darkened her face. It was in the pathway of a broad meadow, deep with grass, wherein the red sorrel topped the yellow buttercup, like rust upon the season's gold. Robert hastened on. He scarce at the moment knew the man whose shoulder he seized, but he had recognised Dahlia and Rhoda, and he found himself face to face with Sedgett.

"It's you!"

"Perhaps you'll keep your hands off; before you make sure, another time."

Robert said: "I really beg your pardon. Step aside with me."

"Not while I've a ha'p'orth o' brains in my noddle," replied Sedgett, drawling an imitation of his enemy's courteous tone. "I've come for my wife. I'm just down by train, and a bit out of my way, I reckon. I'm come, and I'm in a hurry. She shall get home, and have on her things—boxes packed, and we go."

Robert waved Dahlia and Rhoda to speed homeward. Anthony had fallen against the roots of a banking elm, and surveyed the scene with philosophic abstractedness. Rhoda moved, taking Dahlia's hand.

"Stop," cried Sedgett. "Do you people here think me a fool? Eccles, you know me better 'n that. That young woman's my wife. I've come for her, I tell ye."

"You've no claim on her," Rhoda burst forth weakly, and quivered, and turned her eyes supplicatingly on Robert. Dahlia was a statue of icy fright.

"You've thrown her off, man, and sold what rights you had," said Robert, spying for the point of his person where he might grasp the wretch and keep him off.

"That don't hold in law," Sedgett nodded. "A man may get in a passion, when he finds he's been cheated, mayn't he?"

"I have your word of honour," said Rhoda; muttering, "Oh! devil come to wrong us!"

"Then, you shouldn't ha' run ferreting down in my part o' the country. You, or Eccles—I don't care who 'tis—you've been at my servants to get at my secrets. Some of you have. You've declared war. You've been trying to undermine me. That's a breach, I call it. Anyhow, I've come for my wife. I'll have her."

“None of us, none of us; no one has been to your house,” said Rhoda, vehemently. “You live in Hampshire, sir, I think; I don’t know any more. I don’t know where. I have not asked my sister. Oh! spare us, and go.”

“No one has been down into your part of the country,” said Robert, with perfect mildness.

To which Sedgett answered bluffly, “There ye lie, Bob Eccles;” and he was immediately felled by a tremendous blow. Robert strode over him, and taking Dahlia by the elbow, walked three paces on, as to set her in motion. “Off!” he cried to Rhoda, whose eyelids cowered under the blaze of his face.

Page 1119

It was best that her sister should be away, and she turned and walked swiftly, hurrying Dahlia, and touching her. “Oh! don’t touch my arm,” Dahlia said, quailing in the fall of her breath. They footed together, speechless; taking the woman’s quickest gliding step. At the last stile of the fields, Rhoda saw that they were not followed. She stopped, panting: her heart and eyes were so full of that flaming creature who was her lover. Dahlia took from her bosom the letter she had won in the morning, and held it open in both hands to read it. The pause was short. Dahlia struck the letter into her bosom again, and her starved features had some of the bloom of life. She kept her right hand in her pocket, and Rhoda presently asked,—

“What have you there?”

“You are my enemy, dear, in some things,” Dahlia replied, a muscular shiver passing over her.

“I think,” said Rhoda, “I could get a little money to send you away. Will you go? I am full of grief for what I have done. God forgive me.”

“Pray, don’t speak so; don’t let us talk,” said Dahlia.

Scorched as she felt both in soul and body, a touch or a word was a wound to her. Yet she was the first to resume: “I think I shall be saved. I can’t quite feel I am lost. I have not been so wicked as that.”

Rhoda gave a loving answer, and again Dahlia shrank from the miserable comfort of words.

As they came upon the green fronting the iron gateway, Rhoda perceived that the board proclaiming the sale of Queen Anne’s Farm had been removed, and now she understood her father’s readiness to go up to Wrexby Hall. “He would sell me to save the farm.” She reproached herself for the thought, but she could not be just; she had the image of her father plodding relentlessly over the burnt heath to the Hall, as conceived by her agonized sensations in the morning, too vividly to be just, though still she knew that her own indecision was to blame.

Master Gammon met them in the garden.

Pointing aloft, over the gateway, “That’s down,” he remarked, and the three green front teeth of his quiet grin were stamped on the impressionable vision of the girls in such a way that they looked at one another with a bare bitter smile. Once it would have been mirth.

“Tell father,” Dahlia said, when they were at the back doorway, and her eyes sparkled piteously, and she bit on her underlip. Rhoda tried to detain her; but Dahlia repeated, “Tell father,” and in strength and in will had become more than a match for her sister.

CHAPTER XLV

Rhoda spoke to her father from the doorway, with her hand upon the lock of the door.

At first he paid little attention to her, and, when he did so, began by saying that he hoped she knew that she was bound to have the young squire, and did not intend to be prankish and wilful; because the young squire was eager to settle affairs, that he might be settled himself. “I don’t deny it’s honour to us, and it’s a comfort,” said the farmer. “This is the first morning I’ve thought easily in my chair for years. I’m sorry about Robert, who’s a twice unlucky ’un; but you aimed at something higher, I suppose.”

Page 1120

Rhoda was prompted to say a word in self-defence, but refrained, and again she told Dahlia's story, wondering that her father showed no excitement of any kind. On the contrary, there was the dimple of one of his voiceless chuckles moving about the hollow of one cheek, indicating some slow contemplative action that was not unpleasant within. He said: "Ah! well, it's very sad;—that is, if 'tis so," and no more, for a time.

She discovered that he was referring to her uncle Anthony, concerning whose fortunate position in the world, he was beginning to entertain some doubts. "Or else," said the farmer, with a tap on his forehead, "he's going here. It 'd be odd after all, if commercially, as he 'd call it, his despised brother-in-law—and I say it in all kindness—should turn out worth, not exactly millions, but worth a trifle."

The farmer nodded with an air of deprecating satisfaction.

Rhoda did not gain his ear until, as by an instinct, she perceived what interest the story of her uncle and the money-bags would have for him. She related it, and he was roused. Then, for the third time, she told him of Dahlia.

Rhoda saw her father's chest grow large, while his eyes quickened with light. He looked on her with quite a strange face. Wrath, and a revived apprehension, and a fixed will were expressed in it, and as he catechized her for each particular of the truth which had been concealed from him, she felt a respectfulness that was new in her personal sensations toward her father, but it was at the expense of her love.

When he had heard and comprehended all, he said, "Send the girl down to me."

But Rhoda pleaded, "She is too worn, she is tottering. She cannot endure a word on this; not even of kindness and help."

"Then, you," said the farmer, "you tell her she's got a duty's her first duty now. Obedience to her husband! Do you hear? Then, let her hear it. Obedience to her husband! And welcome's the man when he calls on me. He's welcome. My doors are open to him. I thank him. I honour him. I bless his name. It's to him I owe—You go up to her and say, her father owes it to the young man who's married her that he can lift up his head. Go aloft. Ay! for years I've been suspecting something of this. I tell ye, girl, I don't understand about church doors and castin' of her off—he's come for her, hasn't he? Then, he shall have her. I tell ye, I don't understand about money: he's married her. Well, then, she's his wife; and how can he bargain not to see her?"

"The base wretch!" cried Rhoda.

"Hasn't he married her?" the farmer retorted. "Hasn't he given the poor creature a name? I'm not for abusing her, but him I do thank, and I say, when he calls, here's my hand for him. Here, it's out and waiting for him."

Page 1121

“Father, if you let me see it—” Rhoda checked the intemperate outburst. “Father, this is a bad—a bad man. He is a very wicked man. We were all deceived by him. Robert knows him. He has known him for years, and knows that he is very wicked. This man married our Dahlia to get—” Rhoda gasped, and could not speak it. “He flung her off with horrible words at the church door. After this, how can he claim her? I paid him all he had to expect with uncle’s money, for his promise by his sacred oath never, never to disturb or come near my sister. After that he can’t, can’t claim her. If he does—”

“He’s her husband,” interrupted the farmer; “when he comes here, he’s welcome. I say he’s welcome. My hand’s out to him:—If it’s alone that he’s saved the name of Fleming from disgrace! I thank him, and my daughter belongs to him. Where is he now? You talk of a scuffle with Robert. I do hope Robert will not forget his proper behaviour. Go you up to your sister, and say from me—All’s forgotten and forgiven; say, It’s all underfoot; but she must learn to be a good girl from this day. And, if she’s at the gate to welcome her husband, so much the better ’ll her father be pleased;—say that. I want to see the man. It’ll gratify me to feel her husband’s flesh and blood. His being out of sight so long’s been a sore at my heart; and when I see him I’ll welcome him, and so must all in my house.”

This was how William Fleming received the confession of his daughter’s unhappy plight.

Rhoda might have pleaded Dahlia’s case better, but that she was too shocked and outraged by the selfishness she saw in her father, and the partial desire to scourge which she was too intuitively keen at the moment not to perceive in the paternal forgiveness, and in the stipulation of the forgiveness.

She went upstairs to Dahlia, simply stating that their father was aware of all the circumstances.

Dahlia looked at her, but dared ask nothing.

So the day passed. Neither Robert nor Anthony appeared. The night came: all doors were locked. The sisters that night slept together, feeling the very pulses of the hours; yet neither of them absolutely hopelessly, although in a great anguish.

Rhoda was dressed by daylight. The old familiar country about the house lay still as if it knew no expectation. She observed Master Gammon tramping forth afield, and presently heard her father’s voice below. All the machinery of the daily life got into motion; but it was evident that Robert and Anthony continued to be absent. A thought struck her that Robert had killed the man. It came with a flash of joy that was speedily terror, and she fell to praying vehemently and vaguely. Dahlia lay exhausted on the bed, but nigh the hour when letters were delivered, she sat up, saying, “There is one for me; get it.”

There was in truth a letter for her below, and it was in her father’s hand and open.

Page 1122

“Come out,” said the farmer, as Rhoda entered to him. When they were in the garden, he commanded her to read and tell him the meaning of it. The letter was addressed to Dahlia Fleming.

“It’s for my sister,” Rhoda murmured, in anger, but more in fear.

She was sternly bidden to read, and she read,—

Dahlia,—There is mercy for us. You are not lost to me.

“Edward.”

After this, was appended in a feminine hand:—

“There is really hope. A few hours will tell us. But keep firm. If he comes near you, keep from him. You are not his. Run, hide, go anywhere, if you have reason to think he is near. I dare not write what it is we expect. Yesterday I told you to hope; to-day I can say, believe that you will be saved. You are not lost. Everything depends on your firmness.

“Margaret L.”

Rhoda lifted up her eyes.

The farmer seized the letter, and laid his finger on the first signature.

“Is that the christian name of my girl’s seducer?”

He did not wait for an answer, but turned and went into the breakfast-table, when he ordered a tray with breakfast for Dahlia to betaken up to her bed-room; and that done, he himself turned the key of the door, and secured her. Mute woe was on Mrs. Sumfit’s face at all these strange doings, but none heeded her, and she smothered her lamentations. The farmer spoke nothing either of Robert or of Anthony. He sat in his chair till the dinner hour, without book or pipe, without occupation for eyes or hands; silent, but acute in his hearing.

The afternoon brought relief to Rhoda’s apprehensions. A messenger ran up to the farm bearing a pencilled note to her from Robert, which said that he, in company with her uncle, was holding Sedgett at a distance by force of arm, and that there was no fear. Rhoda kissed the words, hurrying away to the fields for a few minutes to thank and bless and dream of him who had said that there was no fear. She knew that Dahlia was unconscious of her imprisonment, and had less compunction in counting the minutes of her absence. The sun spread in yellow and fell in red before she thought of returning, so sweet it had become to her to let her mind dwell with Robert; and she was half a stranger to the mournfulness of the house when she set her steps homeward.

But when she lifted the latch of the gate, a sensation, prompted by some unwitting self-accusal, struck her with alarm. She passed into the room, and beheld her father, and Mrs. Sumfit, who was sitting rolling, with her apron over her head.

The man Sedgett was between them.

CHAPTER XLVI

No sooner had Rhoda appeared than her father held up the key of Dahlia’s bed-room, and said, “Unlock your sister, and fetch her down to her husband.”

Mechanically Rhoda took the key.

“And leave our door open,” he added.

Page 1123

She went up to Dahlia, sick with a sudden fright lest evil had come to Robert, seeing that his enemy was here; but that was swept from her by Dahlia's aspect.

"He is in the house," Dahlia said; and asked, "Was there no letter—no letter; none, this morning?"

Rhoda clasped her in her arms, seeking to check the convulsions of her trembling.

"No letter! no letter! none? not any? Oh! no letter for me!"

The strange varying tones of musical interjection and interrogation were pitiful to hear.

"Did you look for a letter?" said Rhoda, despising herself for so speaking.

"He is in the house! Where is my letter?"

"What was it you hoped? what was it you expected, darling?"

Dahlia moaned: "I don't know. I'm blind. I was told to hope. Yesterday I had my letter, and it told me to hope. He is in the house!"

"Oh, my dear, my love!" cried Rhoda; "come down a minute. See him. It is father's wish. Come only for a minute. Come, to gain time, if there is hope."

"But there was no letter for me this morning, Rhoda. I can't hope. I am lost. He is in the house!"

"Dearest, there was a letter," said Rhoda, doubting that she did well in revealing it.

Dahlia put out her hands dumb for the letter.

"Father opened it, and read it, and keeps it," said Rhoda, clinging tight to the stricken form.

"Then, he is against me? Oh, my letter!" Dahlia wrung her hands.

While they were speaking, their father's voice was heard below calling for Dahlia to descend. He came thrice to the foot of the stairs, and shouted for her.

The third time he uttered a threat that sprang an answer from her bosom in shrieks.

Rhoda went out on the landing and said softly, "Come up to her, father."

After a little hesitation, he ascended the stairs.

“Why, girl, I only ask you to come down and see your husband,” he remarked with an attempt at kindliness of tone. “What’s the harm, then? Come and see him; that’s all; come and see him.”

Dahlia was shrinking out of her father’s sight as he stood in the doorway. “Say,” she communicated to Rhoda, “say, I want my letter.”

“Come!” William Fleming grew impatient.

“Let her have her letter, father,” said Rhoda. “You have no right to withhold it.”

“That letter, my girl” (he touched Rhoda’s shoulder as to satisfy her that he was not angry), “that letter’s where it ought to be. I’ve puzzled out the meaning of it. That letter’s in her husband’s possession.”

Dahlia, with her ears stretching for all that might be uttered, heard this. Passing round the door, she fronted her father.

“My letter gone to him!” she cried. “Shameful old man! Can you look on me? Father, could you give it? I’m a dead woman.”

She smote her bosom, stumbling backward upon Rhoda’s arm.

Page 1124

“You have been a wicked girl,” the ordinarily unmoved old man retorted. “Your husband has come for you, and you go with him. Know that, and let me hear no threats. He’s a modest-minded, quiet young man, and a farmer like myself, and needn’t be better than he is. Come you down to him at once. I’ll tell you: he comes to take you away, and his cart’s at the gate. To the gate you go with him. When next I see you—you visiting me or I visiting you—I shall see a respected creature, and not what you have been and want to be. You have racked the household with fear and shame for years. Now come, and carry out what you’ve begun in the contrary direction. You’ve got my word o’ command, dead woman or live woman. Rhoda, take one elbow of your sister. Your aunt’s coming up to pack her box. I say I’m determined, and no one stops me when I say that. Come out, Dahlia, and let our parting be like between parent and child. Here’s the dark falling, and your husband’s anxious to be away. He has business, and ’ll hardly get you to the station for the last train to town. Hark at him below! He’s naturally astonished, he is, and you’re trying his temper, as you’d try any man’s. He wants to be off. Come, and when next we meet I shall see you a happy wife.”

He might as well have spoken to a corpse.

“Speak to her still, father,” said Rhoda, as she drew a chair upon which she leaned her sister’s body, and ran down full of the power of hate and loathing to confront Sedgett; but great as was that power within her, it was overmatched by his brutal resolution to take his wife away. No argument, no irony, no appeals, can long withstand the iteration of a dogged phrase. “I’ve come for my wife,” Sedgett said to all her instances. His voice was waxing loud and insolent, and, as it sounded, Mrs. Sumfit moaned and flapped her apron.

“Then, how could you have married him?”

They heard the farmer’s roar of this unanswerable thing, aloft.

“Yes—how! how!” cried Rhoda below, utterly forgetting the part she had played in the marriage.

“It’s too late to hate a man when you’ve married him, my girl.”

Sedgett went out to the foot of the stairs.

“Mr. Fleming—she’s my wife. I’ll teach her about hating and loving. I’ll behave well to her, I swear. I’m in the midst of enemies; but I say I do love my wife, and I’ve come for her, and have her I will. Now, in two minutes’ time. Mr. Fleming, my cart’s at the gate, and I’ve got business, and she’s my wife.”

The farmer called for Mrs. Sumfit to come up and pack Dahlia's box, and the forlorn woman made her way to the bedroom. All the house was silent. Rhoda closed her sight, and she thought: "Does God totally abandon us?"

She let her father hear: "Father, you know that you are killing your child."

"I hear ye, my lass," said he.

"She will die, father."

"I hear ye, I hear ye."

Page 1125

“She will die, father.”

He stamped furiously, exclaiming: “Who’s got the law of her better and above a husband? Hear reason, and come and help and fetch down your sister. She goes!”

“Father!” Rhoda cried, looking at her open hands, as if she marvelled to see them helpless.

There was for a time that silence which reigns in a sickchamber when the man of medicine takes the patient’s wrist. And in the silence came a blessed sound—the lifting of a latch. Rhoda saw Robert’s face.

“So,” said Robert, as she neared him, “you needn’t tell me what’s happened. Here’s the man, I see. He dodged me cleverly. The hound wants practice; the fox is born with his cunning.”

Few words were required to make him understand the position of things in the house. Rhoda spoke out all without hesitation in Sedgett’s hearing.

But the farmer respected Robert enough to come down to him and explain his views of his duty and his daughter’s duty. By the kitchen firelight he and Robert and Sedgett read one another’s countenances.

“He has a proper claim to take his wife, Robert,” said the farmer. “He’s righted her before the world, and I thank him; and if he asks for her of me he must have her, and he shall.”

“All right, sir,” replied Robert, “and I say too, shall, when I’m stiff as log-wood.”

“Oh! Robert, Robert!” Rhoda cried in great joy.

“Do you mean that you step ’twixt me and my own?” said Mr. Fleming.

“I won’t let you nod at downright murder—that’s all,” said Robert. “She—Dahlia, take the hand of that creature!”

“Why did she marry me?” thundered Sedgett.

“There’s one o’ the wonders!” Robert rejoined. “Except that you’re an amazingly clever hypocrite with women; and she was just half dead and had no will of her own; and some one set you to hunt her down. I tell you, Mr. Fleming, you might as well send your daughter to the hangman as put her in this fellow’s hands.”

“She’s his wife, man.”

“May be,” Robert assented.

“You, Robert Eccles!” said Sedgett hoarsely; “I’ve come for my wife—do you hear?”

“You have, I dare say,” returned Robert. “You dodged me cleverly, that you did. I’d like to know how it was done. I see you’ve got a cart outside and a boy at the horse’s head. The horse steps well, does he? I’m about three hours behind him, I reckon:—not too late, though!”

He let fall a great breath of weariness.

Rhoda went to the cupboard and drew forth a rarely touched bottle of spirits, with which she filled a small glass, and handing the glass to him, said, “Drink.” He smiled kindly and drank it off.

“The man’s in your house, Mr. Fleming,” he said.

“And he’s my guest, and my daughter’s husband, remember that,” said the farmer.

“And mean to wait not half a minute longer till I’ve taken her off—mark that,” Sedgett struck in. “Now, Mr. Fleming, you see you keep good your word to me.”

Page 1126

“I’ll do no less,” said the farmer. He went into the passage shouting for Mrs. Sumfit to bring down the box.

“She begs,” Mrs. Sumfit answered to him—“She begs, William, on’y a short five minutes to pray by herself, which you will grant unto her, dear, you will. Lord! what’s come upon us?”

“Quick, and down with the box, then, mother,” he rejoined.

The box was dragged out, and Dahlia’s door was shut, that she might have her last minutes alone.

Rhoda kissed her sister before leaving her alone: and so cold were Dahlia’s lips, so tight the clutch of her hands, that she said: “Dearest, think of God:” and Dahlia replied: “I do.”

“He will not forsake you,” Rhoda said.

Dahlia nodded, with shut eyes, and Rhoda went forth.

“And now, Robert, you and I’ll see who’s master on these premises,” said the farmer. “Hear, all! I’m bounders under a sacred obligation to the husband of my child, and the Lord’s wrath on him who interferes and lifts his hand against me when I perform my sacred duty as a father. Place there! I’m going to open the door. Rhoda, see to your sister’s bonnet and things. Robert, stand out of my way. There’s no refreshment of any sort you’ll accept of before starting, Mr. Sedgett? None at all! That’s no fault of my hospitality. Stand out of my way, Robert.”

He was obeyed. Robert looked at Rhoda, but had no reply for her gaze of despair.

The farmer threw the door wide open.

There were people in the garden—strangers. His name was inquired for out of the dusk. Then whisperings were heard passing among the ill-discerned forms, and the farmer went out to them. Robert listened keenly, but the touch of Rhoda’s hand upon his own distracted his hearing. “Yet it must be!” he said. “Why does she come here?”

Both he and Rhoda followed the farmer’s steps, drawn forth by the ever-credulous eagerness which arises from an interruption to excited wretchedness. Near and nearer to the group, they heard a quaint old woman exclaim: “Come here to you for a wife, when he has one of his own at home; a poor thing he shipped off to America, thinking himself more cunning than devils or angels: and she got put out at a port, owing to stress of weather, to defeat the man’s wickedness! Can’t I prove it to you, sir, he’s a married man, which none of us in our village knew till the poor tricked thing crawled back penniless to find him;—and there she is now with such a story of his cunning to tell

to anybody as will listen; and why he kept it secret to get her pension paid him still on. It's all such a tale for you to hear by-and-by."

Robert burst into a glorious laugh.

"Why, mother! Mrs. Boulby! haven't you got a word for me?"

Page 1127

“My blessedest Robert!” the good woman cried, as she rushed up to kiss him. “Though it wasn’t to see you I came exactly.” She whispered: “The Major and the good gentleman—they’re behind. I travelled down with them. Dear,—you’d like to know:—-Mrs. Lovell sent her little cunning groom down to Warbeach just two weeks back to make inquiries about that villain; and the groom left me her address, in case, my dear, when the poor creature—his true wife—crawled home, and we knew of her at Three-Tree Farm and knew her story. I wrote word at once, I did, to Mrs. Lovell, and the sweet good lady sent down her groom to fetch me to you to make things clear here. You shall understand them soon. It’s Providence at work. I do believe that now there’s a chance o’ punishing the wicked ones.”

The figure of Rhoda with two lights in her hand was seen in the porch, and by the shadowy rays she beheld old Anthony leaning against the house, and Major Waring with a gentleman beside him close upon the gate.

At the same time a sound of wheels was heard.

Robert rushed back into the great parlour-kitchen, and finding it empty, stamped with vexation. His prey had escaped.

But there was no relapse to give spare thoughts to that pollution of the house. It had passed. Major Waring was talking earnestly to Mr. Fleming, who held his head low, stupefied, and aware only of the fact that it was a gentleman imparting to him strange matters. By degrees all were beneath the farmer’s roof—all, save one, who stood with bowed head by the threshold.

There is a sort of hero, and a sort of villain, to this story: they are but instruments. Hero and villain are combined in the person of Edward, who was now here to abase himself before the old man and the family he had injured, and to kneel penitently at the feet of the woman who had just reason to spurn him. He had sold her as a slave is sold; he had seen her plunged into the blackest pit; yet was she miraculously kept pure for him, and if she could give him her pardon, might still be his. The grief for which he could ask no compassion had at least purified him to meet her embrace. The great agony he had passed through of late had killed his meaner pride. He stood there ready to come forward and ask forgiveness from unfriendly faces, and beg that he might be in Dahlia’s eyes once—that he might see her once.

He had grown to love her with the fullest force of a selfish, though not a common, nature. Or rather he had always loved her, and much of the selfishness had fallen away from his love. It was not the highest form of love, but the love was his highest development. He had heard that Dahlia, lost to him, was free. Something like the mortal yearning to look upon the dead risen to life, made it impossible for him to remain absent and in doubt. He was ready to submit to every humiliation that he might see the rescued features; he was willing to pay all his penalties. Believing, too, that he was

forgiven, he knew that Dahlia’s heart would throb for him to be near her, and he had come.

Page 1128

The miraculous agencies which had brought him and Major Waring and Mrs. Boulby to the farm, that exalted woman was relating to Mrs. Sumfit in another part of the house.

The farmer, and Percy, and Robert were in the family sitting-room, when, after an interval, William Fleming said aloud, “Come in, sir,” and Edward stepped in among them.

Rhoda was above, seeking admittance to her sisters door, and she heard her father utter that welcome. It froze her limbs, for still she hated the evil-doer. Her hatred of him was a passion. She crouched over the stairs, listening to a low and long-toned voice monotonously telling what seemed to be one sole thing over and over, without variation, in the room where the men were. Words were indistinguishable. Thrice, after calling to Dahlia and getting no response, she listened again, and awe took her soul at last, for, abhorred as he was by her, his power was felt: she comprehended something of that earnestness which made the offender speak of his wrongful deeds, and his shame, and his remorse, before his fellow-men, straight out and calmly, like one who has been plunged up to the middle in the fires of the abyss, and is thereafter insensible to meaner pains. The voice ended. She was then aware that it had put a charm upon her ears. The other voices following it sounded dull.

“Has he—can he have confessed in words all his wicked baseness?” she thought, and in her soul the magnitude of his crime threw a gleam of splendour on his courage, even at the bare thought that he might have done this. Feeling that Dahlia was saved, and thenceforth at liberty to despise him and torture him, Rhoda the more readily acknowledged that it might be a true love for her sister animating him. From the height of a possible vengeance it was perceptible.

She turned to her sister’s door and knocked at it, calling to her, “Safe, safe!” but there came no answer; and she was half glad, for she had a fear that in the quick revulsion of her sister’s feelings, mere earthly love would act like heavenly charity, and Edward would find himself forgiven only too instantly and heartily.

In the small musk-scented guest’s parlour, Mrs. Boulby was giving Mrs. Sumfit and poor old sleepy Anthony the account of the miraculous discovery of Sedgett’s wickedness, which had vindicated all one hoped for from Above; as also the narration of the stabbing of her boy, and the heroism and great-heartedness of Robert. Rhoda listened to her for a space, and went to her sister’s door again; but when she stood outside the kitchen she found all voices silent within.

It was, in truth, not only very difficult for William Fleming to change his view of the complexion of circumstances as rapidly as circumstances themselves changed, but it was very bitter for him to look upon Edward, and to see him in the place of Sedgett.

Page 1129

He had been struck dumb by the sudden revolution of affairs in his house; and he had been deferentially convinced by Major Waring's tone that he ought rightly to give his hearing to an unknown young gentleman against whom anger was due. He had listened to Edward without one particle of comprehension, except of the fact that his behaviour was extraordinary. He understood that every admission made by Edward with such grave and strange directness, would justly have condemned him to punishment which the culprit's odd, and upright, and even-toned self-denunciation rendered it impossible to think of inflicting. He knew likewise that a whole history was being narrated to him, and that, although the other two listeners manifestly did not approve it, they expected him to show some tolerance to the speaker.

He said once, "Robert, do me the favour to look about outside for t' other." Robert answered him, that the man was far away by this time.

The farmer suggested that he might be waiting to say his word presently.

"Don't you know you've been dealing with a villain, sir?" cried Robert. "Throw ever so little light upon one of that breed, and they skulk in a hurry. Mr. Fleming, for the sake of your honour, don't mention him again. What you're asked to do now, is to bury the thoughts of him."

"He righted my daughter when there was shame on her," the farmer replied.

That was the idea printed simply on his understanding.

For Edward to hear it was worse than a scourging with rods. He bore it, telling the last vitality of his pride to sleep, and comforting himself with the drowsy sensuous expectation that he was soon to press the hand of his lost one, his beloved, who was in the house, breathing the same air with him; was perhaps in the room above, perhaps sitting impatiently with clasped fingers, waiting for the signal to unlock them and fling them open. He could imagine the damp touch of very expectant fingers; the dying look of life-drinking eyes; and, oh! the helplessness of her limbs as she sat buoying a heart drowned in bliss.

It was unknown to him that the peril of her uttermost misery had been so imminent, and the picture conjured of her in his mind was that of a gentle but troubled face—a soul afflicted, yet hoping because it had been told to hope, and half conscious that a rescue, almost divine in its suddenness and unexpectedness, and its perfect clearing away of all shadows, approached.

Manifestly, by the pallid cast of his visage, he had tasted shrewd and wasting grief of late. Robert's heart melted as he beheld the change in Edward.

“I believe, Mr. Blancove, I’m a little to blame,” he said. “Perhaps when I behaved so badly down at Fairly, you may have thought she sent me, and it set your heart against her for a time. I can just understand how it might.”

Edward thought for a moment, and conscientiously accepted the suggestion; for, standing under that roof, with her whom he loved near him, it was absolutely out of his power for him to comprehend that his wish to break from Dahlia, and the measures he had taken or consented to, had sprung from his own unassisted temporary baseness.

Page 1130

Then Robert spoke to the farmer.

Rhoda could hear Robert's words. Her fear was that Dahlia might hear them too, his pleading for Edward was so hearty. "Yet why should I always think differently from Robert?" she asked herself, and with that excuse for changeing, partially thawed.

She was very anxious for her father's reply; and it was late in coming. She felt that he was unconvinced. But suddenly the door opened, and the farmer called into the darkness,—

"Dahlia down here!"

Previously emotionless, an emotion was started in Rhoda's bosom by the command, and it was gladness. She ran up and knocked, and found herself crying out: "He is here—Edward."

But there came no answer.

"Edward is here. Come, come and see him."

Still not one faint reply.

"Dahlia! Dahlia!"

The call of Dahlia's name seemed to travel endlessly on. Rhoda knelt, and putting her mouth to the door, said,—

"My darling, I know you will reply to me. I know you do not doubt me now. Listen. You are to come down to happiness."

The silence grew heavier; and now a doubt came shrieking through her soul.

"Father!" rang her outcry.

The father came; and then the lover came, and neither to father nor to lover was there any word from Dahlia's voice.

She was found by the side of the bed, inanimate, and pale as a sister of death.

But you who may have cared for her through her many tribulations, have no fear for this gentle heart. It was near the worst; yet not the worst.

CHAPTER XLVII

Up to the black gates, but not beyond them. The dawn following such a night will seem more like a daughter of the night than promise of day. It is day that follows, notwithstanding: The sad fair girl survived, and her flickering life was the sole light of the household; at times burying its members in dusk, to shine on them again more like a prolonged farewell than a gladsome restoration.

She was saved by what we call chance; for it had not been in her design to save herself. The hand was firm to help her to the deadly draught. As far as could be conjectured, she had drunk it between hurried readings from her mother's Bible; the one true companion to which she had often clung, always half-availingly. The Bible was found by her side, as if it had fallen from the chair before which she knelt to read her last quickening verses, and had fallen with her. One arm was about it; one grasped the broken phial with its hideous label.

Page 1131

It was uncomplainingly registered among the few facts very distinctly legible in Master Gammon's memory, that for three entire weeks he had no dumplings for dinner at the farm; and although, upon a computation, articles of that description, amounting probably to sixty-three (if there is any need for our being precise), were due to him, and would necessarily be for evermore due to him, seeing that it is beyond all human and even spiritual agency to make good unto man the dinner he has lost, Master Gammon uttered no word to show that he was sensible of a slight, which was the only indication given by him of his knowledge of a calamity having changed the order of things at the farm. On the day when dumplings reappeared, he remarked, with a glance at the ceiling: "Goin' on better—eh, marm?"

"Oh! Mas' Gammon," Mrs. Sumfit burst out; "if I was only certain you said your prayers faithful every night!" The observation was apparently taken by Master Gammon to express one of the mere emotions within her bosom, for he did not reply to it.

She watched him feeding in his steady way, with the patient bent back, and slowly chopping old grey jaws, and struck by a pathos in the sight, exclaimed,—

"We've all been searched so, Mas' Gammon! I feel I know everything that's in me. I'd say, I couldn't ha' given you dumplin's and tears; but think of our wickedness, when I confess to you I did feel spiteful at you to think that you were wiltin' to eat the dumplin's while all of us mourned and rocked as in a quake, expecting the worst to befall; and that made me refuse them to you. It was cruel of me, and well may you shake your head. If I was only sure you said your prayers!"

The meaning in her aroused heart was, that if she could be sure Master Gammon said his prayers, so as to be searched all through by them, as she was herself, and to feel thereby, as she did, that he knew everything that was within him, she would then, in admiration of his profound equanimity, acknowledge him to be a superior Christian.

Naturally enough, Master Gammon allowed the interjection to pass, regarding it as simply a vagrant action of the engine of speech; while Mrs. Sumfit, with an interjector's consciousness of prodigious things implied which were not in any degree comprehended, left his presence in kindness, and with a shade less of the sense that he was a superior Christian.

Nevertheless, the sight of Master Gammon was like a comforting medicine to all who were in the house. He was Mrs. Sumfit's clock; he was balm and blessedness in Rhoda's eyes; Anthony was jealous of him; the farmer held to him as to a stake in the ground: even Robert, who rallied and tormented, and was vexed by him, admitted that he stood some way between an example and a warning, and was a study. The grand primaeval quality of unchangeableness, as exhibited by this old man, affected them singularly in their recovery from the storm and the wreck of the

Page 1132

hours gone by; so much so that they could not divest themselves of the idea that it was a manifestation of power in Master Gammon to show forth undisturbed while they were feeling their life shaken in them to the depths. I have never had the opportunity of examining the idol-worshipping mind of a savage; but it seems possible that the immutability of aspect of his little wooden God may sometimes touch him with a similar astounded awe;—even when, and indeed especially after, he has thrashed it. Had the old man betrayed his mortality in a sign of curiosity to know why the hubbub of trouble had arisen, and who was to blame, and what was the story, the effect on them would have been diminished. He really seemed granite among the turbulent waves. "Give me Gammon's life!" was Farmer Fleming's prayerful interjection; seeing him come and go, sit at his meals, and sleep and wake in season, all through those tragic hours of suspense, without a question to anybody. Once or twice, when his eye fell upon the doctor, Master Gammon appeared to meditate. He observed that the doctor had never been called in to one of his family, and it was evident that he did not understand the complication of things which rendered the doctor's visit necessary.

"You'll never live so long as that old man," the farmer said to Robert.

"No; but when he goes, all of him's gone," Robert answered.

"But Gammon's got the wisdom to keep himself safe, Robert; there's no one to blame for his wrinkles."

"Gammon's a sheepskin old Time writes his nothings on," said Robert. "He's safe—safe enough. An old hulk doesn't very easily manage to founder in the mud, and Gammon's been lying on the mud all his life."

"Let that be how 't will," returned the farmer; "I've had days o' mortal envy of that old man."

"Well, it's whether you prefer being the fiddle or the fiddle-case," quoth Robert.

Of Anthony the farmer no longer had any envy. In him, though he was as passive as Master Gammon, the farmer beheld merely a stupefied old man, and not a steady machine. He knew that some queer misfortune had befallen Anthony.

"He'll find I'm brotherly," said Mr. Fleming; but Anthony had darkened his golden horizon for him, and was no longer an attractive object to his vision.

Upon an Autumn afternoon; Dahlia, looking like a pale Spring flower, came down among them. She told her sister that it was her wish to see Edward. Rhoda had lost all power of will, even if she had desired to keep them asunder. She mentioned Dahlia's wish to her father, who at once went for his hat, and said: "Dress yourself neat, my lass." She knew what was meant by that remark. Messages daily had been coming down from the

Hall, but the rule of a discerning lady was then established there, and Rhoda had been spared a visit from either Edward or Algernon, though she knew them to be at hand. During Dahlia's convalescence, the farmer had not spoken to Rhoda of her engagement to the young squire. The great misery intervening, seemed in her mind to have cancelled all earthly engagements; and when he said that she must use care in her attire he suddenly revived a dread within her bosom, as if he had plucked her to the verge of a chasm.

Page 1133

But Mrs. Lovell's delicacy was still manifest: Edward came alone, and he and Dahlia were left apart.

There was no need to ask for pardon from those gentle eyes. They joined hands. She was wasted and very weak, but she did not tremble. Passion was extinguished. He refrained from speaking of their union, feeling sure that they were united. It required that he should see her to know fully the sinner he had been. Wasted though she was, he was ready to make her his own, if only for the sake of making amends to this dear fair soul, whose picture of Saint was impressed on him, first as a response to the world wondering at his sacrifice of himself, and next, by degrees, as an absolute visible fleshly fact. She had come out of her martyrdom stamped with the heavenly sign-mark.

"Those are the old trees I used to speak of," she said, pointing to the two pines in the miller's grounds. "They always look like Adam and Eve turning away."

"They do not make you unhappy to see them, Dahlia?"

"I hope to see them till I am gone."

Edward pressed her fingers. He thought that warmer hopes would soon flow into her.

"The neighbours are kind?" he asked.

"Very kind. They, inquire after me daily."

His cheeks reddened; he had spoken at random, and he wondered that Dahlia should feel it pleasurable to be inquired after, she who was so sensitive.

"The clergyman sits with me every day, and knows my heart," she added.

"The clergyman is a comfort to women," said Edward.

Dahlia looked at him gently. The round of her thin eyelids dwelt on him. She wished. She dared not speak her wish to one whose remembered mastery in words forbade her poor speechlessness. But God would hear her prayers for him.

Edward begged that he might come to her often, and she said,—

"Come."

He misinterpreted the readiness of the invitation.

When he had left her, he reflected on the absence of all endearing epithets in her speech, and missed them. Having himself suffered, he required them. For what had she wrestled so sharply with death, if not to fall upon his bosom and be his in a great

outpouring of gladness? In fact he craved the immediate reward for his public acknowledgement of his misdeeds. He walked in this neighbourhood known by what he had done, and his desire was to take his wife away, never more to be seen there. Following so deep a darkness, he wanted at least a cheerful dawn: not one of a penitential grey—not a hooded dawn, as if the paths of life were to be under cloistral arches. And he wanted a rose of womanhood in his hand like that he had parted with, and to recover which he had endured every earthly mortification, even to absolute abasement. The frail bent lily seemed a stranger to him.

Page 1134

Can a man go farther than his nature? Never, when he takes passion on board. By other means his nature may be enlarged and nerved, but passion will find his weakness, and, while urging him on, will constantly betray him at that point. Edward had three interviews with Dahlia; he wrote to her as many times. There was but one answer for him; and when he ceased to charge her with unforgivingness, he came to the strange conclusion that beyond our calling of a woman a Saint for rhetorical purposes, and esteeming her as one for pictorial, it is indeed possible, as he had slightly discerned in this woman's presence, both to think her saintly and to have the sentiments inspired by the overearthly in her person. Her voice, her simple words of writing, her gentle resolve, all issuing of a capacity to suffer evil, and pardon it, conveyed that character to a mind not soft for receiving such impressions.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Major Waring came to Wrexby Hall at the close of the October month. He came to plead his own cause with Mrs. Lovell; but she stopped him by telling him that his friend Robert was in some danger of losing his love.

"She is a woman, Percy; I anticipate your observation. But, more than that, she believes she is obliged to give her hand to my cousin, the squire. It's an intricate story relating to money. She does not care for Algy a bit, which is not a matter that greatly influences him. He has served her in some mysterious way; by relieving an old uncle of hers. Algy has got him the office of village postman for this district, I believe; if it's that; but I think it should be more, to justify her. At all events, she seems to consider that her hand is pledged. You know the kind of girl your friend fancies. Besides, her father insists she is to marry 'the squire,' which is certainly the most natural thing of all. So, don't you think, dear Percy, you had better take your friend on the Continent for some weeks? I never, I confess, exactly understood the intimacy existing between you, but it must be sincere."

"Are you?" said Percy.

"Yes, perfectly; but always in a roundabout way. Why do you ask me in this instance?"

"Because you could stop this silly business in a day."

"I know I could."

"Then, why do you not?"

"Because of a wish to be sincere. Percy, I have been that throughout, if you could read me. I tried to deliver my cousin Edward from what I thought was a wretched entanglement. His selfish falseness offended me, and I let him know that I despised him. When I found that he was a man who had courage, and some heart, he gained my

friendship once more, and I served him as far as I could—happily, as it chanced. I tell you all this, because I don't care to forfeit your esteem, and heaven knows, I may want it in the days to come. I believe I am the best friend in the world—and bad

Page 1135

anything else. No one perfectly pleases me, not even you: you are too studious of character, and, like myself, exacting of perfection in one or two points. But now hear what I have done, and approve it if you think fit. I have flirted—abominable word!—I am compelled to use the language of the Misses—yes, I have flirted with my cousin Algy. I do it too well, I know—by nature! and I hate it. He has this morning sent a letter down to the farm saying, that, as he believes he has failed in securing Rhoda's affections, he renounces all pretensions, *etc*., subject to her wishes, *etc*. The courting, I imagine, can scarcely have been pleasant to him. My delightful manner with him during the last fortnight has been infinitely pleasanter. So, your friend Robert may be made happy by-and-by; that is to say, if his Rhoda is not too like her sex."

"You're an enchantress," exclaimed Percy.

"Stop," said she, and drifted into seriousness. "Before you praise me you must know more. Percy, that duel in India—"

He put out his hand to her.

"Yes, I forgive," she resumed. "You were cruel then. Remember that, and try to be just now. The poor boy would go to his doom. I could have arrested it. I partly caused it. I thought the honour of the army at stake. I was to blame on that day, and I am to blame again, but I feel that I am almost excuseable, if you are not too harsh a judge. No, I am not; I am execrable; but forgive me."

Percy's face lighted up in horrified amazement as Margaret Lovell unfastened the brooch at her neck and took out the dull-red handkerchief.

"It was the bond between us," she pursued, "that I was to return this to you when I no longer remained my own mistress. Count me a miserably heartless woman. I do my best. You brought this handkerchief to me dipped in the blood of the poor boy who was slain. I have worn it. It was a safeguard. Did you mean it to serve as such? Oh, Percy! I felt continually that blood was on my bosom. I felt it fighting with me. It has saved me from much. And now I return it to you."

He could barely articulate "Why?"

"Dear friend, by the reading of the bond you should know. I asked you when I was leaving India, how long I was to keep it by me. You said, 'Till you marry.' Do not be vehement, Percy. This is a thing that could not have been averted."

"Is it possible," Percy cried, "that you carried the play out so far as to promise him to marry him?"

"Your forehead is thunder, Percy. I know that look."

“Margaret, I think I could bear to see our army suffer another defeat rather than you should be contemptible.”

“Your chastisement is not given in half measures, Percy.”

“Speak on,” said he; “there is more to come. You are engaged to marry him?”

“I engaged that I would take the name of Blancove.”

“If he would cease to persecute Rhoda Fleming!”

Page 1136

“The stipulation was exactly in those words.”

“You mean to carry it out?”

“To be sincere? I do, Percy!

“You mean to marry Algernon Blancove?”

“I should be contemptible indeed if I did, Percy!

“You do not?”

“I do not.”

“And you are sincere? By all the powers of earth and heaven, there’s no madness like dealing with an animated enigma! What is it you do mean?”

“As I said—to be sincere. But I was also bound to be of service to your friend. It is easy to be sincere and passive.”

Percy struck his brows. “Can you mean that Edward Blancove is the man?”

“Oh! no. Edward will never marry any one. I do him the justice to say that his vice is not that of unfaithfulness. He had but one love, and her heart is quite dead. There is no marriage for him—she refuses. You may not understand the why of that, but women will. She would marry him if she could bring herself to it;—the truth is, he killed her pride. Her taste for life has gone. She is bent on her sister’s marrying your friend. She has no other thought of marriage, and never will have. I know the state. It is not much unlike mine.”

Waring fixed her eyes. “There is a man?”

“Yes,” she answered bluntly.

“It is somebody, then, whose banker’s account is, I hope, satisfactory.”

“Yes, Percy;” she looked eagerly forward, as thanking him for releasing her from a difficulty. “You still can use the whip, but I do not feel the sting. I marry a banker’s account. Do you bear in mind the day I sent after you in the park? I had just heard that I was ruined. You know my mania for betting. I heard it, and knew when I let my heart warm to you that I could never marry you. That is one reason, perhaps, why I have been an enigma. I am sincere in telling Algy I shall take the name of Blancove. I marry the banker. Now take this old gift of yours.”

Percy grasped the handkerchief, and quitted her presence forthwith, feeling that he had swallowed a dose of the sex to serve him for a lifetime. Yet he lived to reflect on her having decided practically, perhaps wisely for all parties. Her debts expunged, she became an old gentleman's demure young wife, a sweet hostess, and, as ever, a true friend: something of a miracle to one who had inclined to make a heroine of her while imagining himself to accurately estimate her deficiencies. Honourably by this marriage the lady paid for such wild oats as she had sown in youth.

There were joy-bells for Robert and Rhoda, but none for Dahlia and Edward.

Dahlia lived seven years her sister's housemate, nurse of the growing swarm. She had gone through fire, as few women have done in like manner, to leave their hearts among the ashes; but with that human heart she left regrets behind her. The soul of this young creature filled its place. It shone in her eyes and in her work, a lamp to her little neighbourhood; and not less a lamp of cheerful beams for one day being as another to her. In truth, she sat above the clouds. When she died she relinquished nothing. Others knew the loss. Between her and Robert there was deeper community on one subject than she let Rhoda share. Almost her last words to him, spoken calmly, but with the quaver of breath resembling sobs, were: "Help poor girls."

Page 1137

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS FOR THE ENTIRE RHODA FLEMING:

A fleet of South-westerly rainclouds had been met in mid-sky
All women are the same—Know one, know all
Ashamed of letting his ears be filled with secret talk
Borrower to be dancing on Fortune's tight-rope above the old abyss
But you must be beautiful to please some men
But the key to young men is the ambition, or, in the place of it.....
But great, powerful London—the new universe to her spirit
Can a man go farther than his nature?
Childish faith in the beneficence of the unseen Powers who feed us
Cold curiosity
Dahlia, the perplexity to her sister's heart, lay stretched....
Dead Britons are all Britons, but live Britons are not quite brothers
Developing stiff, solid, unobtrusive men, and very personable women
Exceeding variety and quantity of things money can buy
Found by the side of the bed, inanimate, and pale as a sister of death
Full-o'-Beer's a hasty chap
Gravely reproaching the tobacconist for the growing costliness of cigars
He had no recollection of having ever dined without drinking wine
He tried to gather his ideas, but the effort was like that of a light dreamer
He lies as naturally as an infant sucks
He will be a part of every history (the fool)
I haven't got the pluck of a flea
I never pay compliments to transparent merit
I would cut my tongue out, if it did you a service
Inferences are like shadows on the wall
It was her prayer to heaven that she might save a doctor's bill
Land and beasts! They sound like blessed things
Love dies like natural decay
Marriage is an awful thing, where there's no love
Mrs. Fleming, of Queen Anne's Farm, was the wife of a yeoman
My first girl—she's brought disgrace on this house
My plain story is of two Kentish damsels
One learns to have compassion for fools, by studying them
Pleasant companion, who did not play the woman obtrusively among men
Principle of examining your hypothesis before you proceed to decide by it
Rhoda will love you. She is firm when she loves
Silence is commonly the slow poison used by those who mean to murder love
Sinners are not to repent only in words
So long as we do not know that we are performing any remarkable feat

Sort of religion with her to believe no wrong of you
The unhappy, who do not wish to live, and cannot die
The kindest of men can be cruel
The idea of love upon the lips of ordinary men, provoked Dahlia's irony
The backstairs of history (Memoirs)
The woman seeking for an anomaly wants a master
Then, if you will not tell me
There were joy-bells for Robert and Rhoda, but none for Dahlia
To be a really popular hero anywhere in Britain (must be a drinker)
To be her master, however, one must not begin by writhing as her slave
Wait till the day's ended before you curse your luck
William John Fleming was simply a poor farmer
With this money, said the demon, you might speculate
Work is medicine
You who may have cared for her through her many tribulations, have no fear
You choose to give yourself to an obscure dog
You're a rank, right-down widow, and no mistake

Page 1138

EVAN HARRINGTON

By George Meredith

CONTENTS:

Book 1.
I. *Above buttons*
ii. *The heritage or the soy*
III. *The daughters or the shears*
iv. *On board the Jocasta*
V. *The family and the funeral*
vi. *My gentleman on the road*
VII. *Mother and son*

Book 2.
VIII. *Introduces an eccentric*
IX. *The countess in low society*
X. *My gentleman on the road again*
xi. *Doings at an inn*
XII. *In which ale is shown to have one quality of wine*
XIII. *The match of Fallowfield against Beckley*

Book 3.
XIV. *The countess describes the field of action*
XV. A *capture*
XVI. *Leads to* A *small skirmish between rose and Evan*
xvii. *In which Evan writes himself tailor*
XVIII. *In which Evan calls himself gentleman*

Book 4.
XIX. *Second despatch of the countess*
XX. *Break-neck leap*
XXI. *Tribulations and tactics of the countess*
XXII. *In which the daughters of the great Mel have to digest him at dinner*
XXIII. *Treats of* A *handkerchief*
XXIV. *The countess makes herself felt*
XXV. *In which the stream flows muddy and clear*

Book 5.
XXVI. *Mrs*. *Mel makes* A *bed for herself and family*
XXVII. *Exhibits rose's generalship*; *Evan's performance on the second*

fiddle; *and the wretchedness of the countess*
XXVIII. *Tom Cogglesby's proposition*
XXIX. *Prelude to an engagement*
XXX. *The battle of the bull-dogs*. *Part* I.
XXXI. *The battle of the bull-dogs*. *Part ii*.

Page 1139

Book 6.
XXXII. *In which Evan's light begins to twinkle again*
XXXIII. *The hero takes his rank in the orchestra*
XXXIV. A *pagan sacrifice*
XXXV. *Rose wounded*
XXXVI. *Before breakfast*
XXXVII. *The retreat from Beckley*
XXXVIII. *In which we have to see in the dark*

Book 7.
XXXIX. *In the domain of tailordom*
XL. *In which the countess still scents game*
XLI. *Reveals an abominable plot of the brothers Cogglesby*
XLII. *Juliana*
XLIII. *Rose*
XLIV. *Contains* A *warning to all conspirators*
XLV. *In which the shop becomes the centre of attraction*
XLVI. A *lover's parting*
XLVII. A *year later the countess de Saldar de Sancorvo to her sister Caroline*

CHAPTER I

ABOVE BUTTONS

Long after the hours when tradesmen are in the habit of commencing business, the shutters of a certain shop in the town of Lymport-on-the-Sea remained significantly closed, and it became known that death had taken Mr. Melchisedec Harrington, and struck one off the list of living tailors. The demise of a respectable member of this class does not ordinarily create a profound sensation. He dies, and his equals debate who is to be his successor: while the rest of them who have come in contact with him, very probably hear nothing of his great launch and final adieu till the winding up of cash-accounts; on which occasions we may augur that he is not often blessed by one or other of the two great parties who subdivide this universe. In the case of Mr. Melchisedec it was otherwise. This had been a grand man, despite his calling, and in the teeth of opprobrious epithets against his craft. To be both generally blamed, and generally liked, evinces a peculiar construction of mortal. Mr. Melchisedec, whom people in private called the great Mel, had been at once the sad dog of Lymport, and the pride of the town. He was a tailor, and he kept horses; he was a tailor, and he had gallant adventures; he was a tailor, and he shook hands with his customers. Finally, he was a tradesman, and he never was known to have sent in a bill. Such a personage comes but once in a generation, and, when he goes, men miss the man as well as their money.

That he was dead, there could be no doubt. Kilne, the publican opposite, had seen Sally, one of the domestic servants, come out of the house in the early morning and rush up the street to the doctor's, tossing her hands; and she, not disinclined to dilute her grief, had, on her return, related that her master was then at his last gasp, and had refused, in so many words, to swallow the doctor.

Page 1140

'"I won't swallow the doctor!" he says, "I won't swallow the doctor!"' Sally moaned. '"I never touched him," he says, "and I never will."'

Kilne angrily declared, that in his opinion, a man who rejected medicine in extremity, ought to have it forced down his throat: and considering that the invalid was pretty deeply in Kilne's debt, it naturally assumed the form of a dishonest act on his part; but Sally scornfully dared any one to lay hand on her master, even for his own good. 'For,' said she, 'he's got his eyes awake, though he do lie so helpless. He marks ye!'

'Ah! ah!' Kilne sniffed the air. Sally then rushed back to her duties.

'Now, there 's a man!' Kilne stuck his hands in his pockets and began his meditation: which, however, was cut short by the approach of his neighbour Barnes, the butcher, to whom he confided what he had heard, and who ejaculated professionally, 'Obstinate as a pig!' As they stood together they beheld Sally, a figure of telegraph, at one of the windows, implying that all was just over.

'Amen!' said Barnes, as to a matter-of-fact affair.

Some minutes after, the two were joined by Grossby, the confectioner, who listened to the news, and observed:

'Just like him! I'd have sworn he'd never take doctor's stuff'; and, nodding at Kilne, 'liked his medicine best, eh?'

'Had a-hem!—good lot of it,' muttered Kilne, with a suddenly serious brow.

'How does he stand on your books?' asked Barnes.

Kilne shouldered round, crying: 'Who the deuce is to know?'

'I don't,' Grossby sighed. 'In he comes with his "Good morning, Grossby, fine day for the hunt, Grossby," and a ten-pound note. "Have the kindness to put that down in my favour, Grossby." And just as I am going to say, "Look here,—this won't do," he has me by the collar, and there's one of the regiments going to give a supper party, which he's to order; or the Admiral's wife wants the receipt for that pie; or in comes my wife, and there's no talking of business then, though she may have been bothering about his account all the night beforehand. Something or other! and so we run on.'

'What I want to know,' said Barnes, the butcher, 'is where he got his tenners from?'

Kilne shook a sagacious head: 'No knowing!'

'I suppose we shall get something out of the fire?' Barnes suggested.

‘That depends!’ answered the emphatic Kilne.

‘But, you know, if the widow carries on the business,’ said Grossby, ‘there’s no reason why we shouldn’t get it all, eh?’

’There ain’t two that can make clothes for nothing, and make a profit out of it,’ said Kilne.

‘That young chap in Portugal,’ added Barnes, ’he won’t take to tailoring when he comes home. D’ ye think he will?’

Kilne muttered: ‘Can’t say!’ and Grossby, a kindly creature in his way, albeit a creditor, reverting to the first subject of their discourse, ejaculated, ‘But what a one he was!—-eh?’

Page 1141

‘Fine!—to look on,’ Kilne assented.

‘Well, he was like a Marquis,’ said Barnes.

Here the three regarded each other, and laughed, though not loudly. They instantly checked that unseemliness, and Kilne, as one who rises from the depths of a calculation with the sum in his head, spoke quite in a different voice:

’Well, what do you say, gentlemen? shall we adjourn? No use standing here.’

By the invitation to adjourn, it was well understood by the committee Kilne addressed, that they were invited to pass his threshold, and partake of a morning draught. Barnes, the butcher, had no objection whatever, and if Grossby, a man of milder make, entertained any, the occasion and common interests to be discussed, advised him to waive them. In single file these mourners entered the publican’s house, where Kilne, after summoning them from behind the bar, on the important question, what it should be? and receiving, first, perfect acquiescence in his views as to what it should be, and then feeble suggestions of the drink best befitting that early hour and the speaker’s particular constitution, poured out a toothful to each, and one to himself.

‘Here’s to him, poor fellow!’ said Kilne; and was deliberately echoed twice.

‘Now, it wasn’t that,’ Kilne pursued, pointing to the bottle in the midst of a smacking of lips, ’that wasn’t what got him into difficulties. It was expensive luckshries. It was being above his condition. Horses! What’s a tradesman got to do with horses? Unless he’s retired! Then he’s a gentleman, and can do as he likes. It’s no use trying to be a gentleman if you can’t pay for it. It always ends bad. Why, there was he, consorting with gentlefolks—gay as a lark! Who has to pay for it?’

Kilne’s fellow-victims maintained a rather doleful tributary silence.

‘I’m not saying anything against him now,’ the publican further observed. ’It ’s too late. And there! I’m sorry he’s gone, for one. He was as kind a hearted a man as ever breathed. And there! perhaps it was just as much my fault; I couldn’t say “No” to him,—-dash me, if I could!’

Lymport was a prosperous town, and in prosperity the much-despised British tradesman is not a harsh, he is really a well-disposed, easy soul, and requires but management, manner, occasional instalments—just to freshen the account—and a surety that he who debits is on the spot, to be a right royal king of credit. Only the account must never drivel. ‘Stare aut crescere’ appears to be his feeling on that point, and the departed Mr. Melchisedec undoubtedly understood him there; for the running on of the account looked deplorable and extraordinary now that Mr. Melchisedec was no longer in a position to run on with it, and it was precisely his doing so which had prevented it from

being brought to a summary close long before. Both Barnes, the butcher; and Grossby, the confectioner, confessed that they, too, found it hard ever to say ‘No’ to him, and, speaking broadly, never could.

Page 1142

’Except once,’said Barnes, ’when he wanted me to let him have a ox to roast whole out on the common, for the Battle of Waterloo. I stood out against him on that. “No, no,” says I, “I’ll joint him for ye, Mr. Harrington. You shall have him in joints, and eat him at home";-ha! ha!’

‘Just like him!’ said Grossby, with true enjoyment of the princely disposition that had dictated the patriotic order.

‘Oh!—there!’ Kilne emphasized, pushing out his arm across the bar, as much as to say, that in anything of such a kind, the great Mel never had a rival.

‘That “Marquis” affair changed him a bit,’ said Barnes.

‘Perhaps it did, for a time,’ said Kilne. ’What’s in the grain, you know. He couldn’t change. He would be a gentleman, and nothing ‘d stop him.’

’And I shouldn’t wonder but what that young chap out in Portugal ’ll want to be one, too; though he didn’t bid fair to be so fine a man as his father.’

‘More of a scholar,’ remarked Kilne. ’That I call his worst fault—shilly-shallying about that young chap. I mean his.’ Kilne stretched a finger toward the dead man’s house. ’First, the young chap’s to be sent into the Navy; then it’s the Army; then he’s to be a judge, and sit on criminals; then he goes out to his sister in Portugal; and now there’s nothing but a tailor open to him, as I see, if we’re to get our money.’

’Ah! and he hasn’t got too much spirit to work to pay his father’s debts,’ added Barnes. ’There’s a business there to make any man’s fortune-properly directed, I say. But, I suppose, like father like son, he’ll becoming the Marquis, too. He went to a gentleman’s school, and he’s had foreign training. I don’t know what to think about it. His sisters over there—they were fine women.’

’Oh! a fine family, every one of ’em! and married well!’ exclaimed the publican.

‘I never had the exact rights of that “Marquis” affair,’ said Grossby; and, remembering that he had previously laughed knowingly when it was alluded to, pursued: ’Of course I heard of it at the time, but how did he behave when he was blown upon?’

Barnes undertook to explain; but Kilne, who relished the narrative quite as well, and was readier, said: ’Look here! I ’ll tell you. I had it from his own mouth one night when he wasn’t—not quite himself. He was coming down King William Street, where he stabled his horse, you know, and I met him. He’d been dining out-somewhere out over Fallow field, I think it was; and he sings out to me, “Ah! Kilne, my good fellow!” and I, wishing to be equal with him, says, “A fine night, my lord!” and he draws himself up—he smelt of good company—says he, “Kilne! I’m not a lord, as you know, and you have no excuse for mistaking me for one, sir!” So I pretended I had mistaken him, and then he tucked

his arm under mine, and said, “You’re no worse than your betters, Kilne. They took me for one at Squire Uplift’s to-night, but a man who wishes

Page 1143

to pass off for more than he is, Kilne, and impose upon people," he says, "he's contemptible, Kilne! contemptible!" So that, you know, set me thinking about "Bath" and the "Marquis," and I couldn't help smiling to myself, and just let slip a question whether he had enlightened them a bit. "Kilne," said he, "you're an honest man, and a neighbour, and I'll tell you what happened. The Squire," he says, "likes my company, and I like his table. Now the Squire 'd never do a dirty action, but the Squire's nephew, Mr. George Uplift, he can't forget that I earn my money, and once or twice I have had to correct him." And I'll wager Mel did it, too! Well, he goes on: "There was Admiral Sir Jackson Racial and his lady, at dinner, Squire Falco of Bursted, Lady Barrington, Admiral Combleman—our admiral, that was; 'Mr. This and That', I forget their names—-and other ladies and gentlemen whose acquaintance I was not honoured with." You know his way of talking. "And there was a goose on the table," he says; and, looking stern at me, "Don't laugh yet!" says he, like thunder. "Well, he goes on: Mr. George caught my eye across the table, and said, so as not to be heard by his uncle, 'If that bird was rampant, you would see your own arms, Marquis.'" And Mel replied, quietly for him to hear, 'And as that bird is couchant, Mr. George, you had better look to your sauce.' Couchant means squatting, you know. That's heraldry! Well, that wasn't bad sparring of Mel's. But, bless you! he was never taken aback, and the gentlefolks was glad enough to get him to sit down amongst 'em. So, says Mr. George, 'I know you're a fire-eater, Marquis,' and his dander was up, for he began marquising Mel, and doing the mock polite at such a rate, that, by-and-by, one of the ladies who didn't know Mel called him 'my lord' and 'his lordship.' "And," says Mel, "I merely bowed to her, and took no notice." So that passed off: and there sits Mel telling his anecdotes, as grand as a king. And, by and-by, young Mr. George, who hadn't forgiven Mel, and had been pulling at the bottle pretty well, he sings out, "It 's Michaelmas! the death of the goose! and I should like to drink the Marquis's health!" and he drank it solemn. But, as far as I can make out, the women part of the company was a little in the dark. So Mel waited till there was a sort of a pause, and then speaks rather loud to the Admiral, "By the way, Sir Jackson, may I ask you, has the title of Marquis anything to do with tailoring?" Now Mel was a great favourite with the Admiral, and with his lady, too, they say—and the Admiral played into his hands, you see, and, says he, "I 'm not aware that it has, Mr. Harrington." And he begged for to know why he asked the question—called him, "Mister," you understand. So Mel said, and I can see him now, right out from his chest he spoke, with his head up "When I was a younger man, I had the good taste to be fond of good society, and the bad taste to wish to appear different

Page 1144

from what I was in it": that's Mel speaking; everybody was listening; so he goes on: "I was in the habit of going to Bath in the season, and consorting with the gentlemen I met there on terms of equality; and for some reason that I am quite guiltless of," says Mel, "the hotel people gave out that I was a Marquis in disguise; and, upon my honour, ladies and gentlemen—I was young then, and a fool—I could not help imagining I looked the thing. At all events, I took upon myself to act the part, and with some success, and considerable gratification; for, in my opinion," says Mel, "no real Marquis ever enjoyed his title so much as I did. One day I was in my shop—No. 193, Main Street, Lymport—-and a gentleman came in to order his outfit. I received his directions, when suddenly he started back, stared at me, and exclaimed:

'My dear Marquis! I trust you will pardon me for having addressed you with so much familiarity.' I recognized in him one of my Bath acquaintances. That circumstance, ladies and gentlemen, has been a lesson to me. Since that time I have never allowed a false impression with regard to my position to exist. "I desire," says Mel, smiling, "to have my exact measure taken everywhere; and if the Michaelmas bird is to be associated with me, I am sure I have no objection; all I can say is, that I cannot justify it by letters patent of nobility." That's how Mel put it. Do you think they thought worse of him? I warrant you he came out of it in flying colours. Gentlefolks like straight-forwardness in their inferiors—that's what they do. Ah!' said Kilne, meditatively, 'I see him now, walking across the street in the moonlight, after he 'd told me that. A fine figure of a man! and there ain't many Marquises to match him.'

To this Barnes and Grossby, not insensible to the merits of the recital they had just given ear to, agreed. And with a common voice of praise in the mouths of his creditors, the dead man's requiem was sounded.

CHAPTER II

THE HERITAGE OF THE SON

Toward evening, a carriage drove up to the door of the muted house, and the card of Lady Racial, bearing a hurried line in pencil, was handed to the widow.

It was when you looked upon her that you began to comprehend how great was the personal splendour of the husband who could eclipse such a woman. Mrs. Harrington was a tall and a stately dame. Dressed in the high waists of the matrons of that period, with a light shawl drawn close over her shoulders and bosom, she carried her head well; and her pale firm features, with the cast of immediate affliction on them, had much dignity: dignity of an unrelenting physical order, which need not express any remarkable pride of spirit. The family gossips who, on both sides, were vain of this rare couple, and would always descant on their beauty, even when they had occasion to slander their characters, said, to distinguish

Page 1145

them, that Henrietta Maria had a Port, and Melchisedec a Presence: and that the union of a Port and a Presence, and such a Port and such a Presence, was so uncommon, that you might search England through and you would not find another, not even in the highest ranks of society. There lies some subtle distinction here; due to the minute perceptions which compel the gossips of a family to coin phrases that shall express the nicest shades of a domestic difference. By a Port, one may understand them to indicate something unsympathetically impressive; whereas a Presence would seem to be a thing that directs the most affable appeal to our poor human weaknesses. His Majesty King George *iv*., for instance, possessed a Port: Beau Brummel wielded a Presence. Many, it is true, take a Presence to mean no more than a shirt-frill, and interpret a Port as the art of walking erect. But this is to look upon language too narrowly.

On a more intimate acquaintance with the couple, you acknowledge the, aptness of the fine distinction. By birth Mrs. Harrington had claims to rank as a gentlewoman. That is, her father was a lawyer of Lymport. The lawyer, however, since we must descend the genealogical tree, was known to have married his cook, who was the lady's mother. Now Mr. Melchisedec was mysterious concerning his origin; and, in his cups, talked largely and wisely of a great Welsh family, issuing from a line of princes; and it is certain that he knew enough of their history to have instructed them on particular points of it. He never could think that his wife had done him any honour in espousing him; nor was she the woman to tell him so. She had married him for love, rejecting various suitors, Squire Uplift among them, in his favour. Subsequently she had committed the profound connubial error of transferring her affections, or her thoughts, from him to his business, which, indeed, was much in want of a mate; and while he squandered the guineas, she patiently picked up the pence. They had not lived unhappily. He was constantly courteous to her. But to see the Port at that sordid work considerably ruffled the Presence—put, as it were, the peculiar division between them; and to behave toward her as the same woman who had attracted his youthful ardours was a task for his magnificent mind, and may have ranked with him as an indemnity for his general conduct, if his reflections ever stretched so far. The townspeople of Lymport were correct in saying that his wife, and his wife alone, had, as they termed it, kept him together. Nevertheless, now that he was dead, and could no longer be kept together, they entirely forgot their respect for her, in the outburst of their secret admiration for the popular man. Such is the constitution of the inhabitants of this dear Island of Britain, so falsely accused by the Great Napoleon of being a nation of shopkeepers. Here let any one proclaim himself Above Buttons, and act on the assumption, his fellows with one accord hoist him on their heads, and bear him aloft, sweating, and groaning, and cursing, but proud of him! And if he can contrive, or has any good wife at home to help him, to die without going to the dogs, they are, one may say, unanimous in crying out the same eulogistic funeral oration as that commenced by Kilne, the publican, when he was interrupted by Barnes, the butcher, 'Now, there's a man!—'

Page 1146

Mrs. Harrington was sitting in her parlour with one of her married nieces, Mrs. Fiske, and on reading Lady Racial's card she gave word for her to be shown up into the drawing-room. It was customary among Mrs. Harrington's female relatives, who one and all abused and adored the great Mel, to attribute his shortcomings pointedly to the ladies; which was as much as if their jealous generous hearts had said that he was sinful, but that it was not his fault. Mrs. Fiske caught the card from her aunt, read the superscription, and exclaimed: 'The idea! At least she might have had the decency! She never set her foot in the house before—and right enough too! What can she want now? I decidedly would refuse to see her, aunt!'

The widow's reply was simply, 'Don't be a fool, Ann!'

Rising, she said: 'Here, take poor Jacko, and comfort him till I come back.'

Jacko was a middle-sized South American monkey, and had been a pet of her husband's. He was supposed to be mourning now with the rest of the family. Mrs. Fiske received him on a shrinking lap, and had found time to correct one of his indiscretions before she could sigh and say, in the rear of her aunt's retreating figure, 'I certainly never would let myself, down so'; but Mrs. Harrington took her own counsel, and Jacko was of her persuasion, for he quickly released himself from Mrs. Fiske's dispassionate embrace, and was slinging his body up the balusters after his mistress.

'Mrs. Harrington,' said Lady Racial, very sweetly swimming to meet her as she entered the room, 'I have intruded upon you, I fear, in venturing to call upon you at such a time?'

The widow bowed to her, and begged her to be seated.

Lady Racial was an exquisitely silken dame, in whose face a winning smile was cut, and she was still sufficiently youthful not to be accused of wearing a flower too artificial.

'It was so sudden! so sad!' she continued. 'We esteemed him so much. I thought you might be in need of sympathy, and hoped I might—Dear Mrs. Harrington! can you bear to speak of it?'

'I can tell you anything you wish to hear, my lady,' the widow replied. Lady Racial had expected to meet a woman much more like what she conceived a tradesman's wife would be: and the grave reception of her proffer of sympathy slightly confused her. She said:

'I should not have come, at least not so early, but Sir Jackson, my husband, thought, and indeed I imagined—You have a son, Mrs. Harrington? I think his name is—'

'Evan, my lady.'

’Evan. It was of him we have been speaking. I imagined that is, we thought, Sir Jackson might—you will be writing to him, and will let him know we will use our best efforts to assist him in obtaining some position worthy of his—superior to—something that will secure him from the harassing embarrassments of an uncongenial employment.’

The widow listened to this tender allusion to the shears without a smile of gratitude. She replied: ’I hope my son will return in time to bury his father, and he will thank you himself, my lady.’

Page 1147

’He has no taste for—a—for anything in the shape of trade, has he, Mrs. Harrington?’

‘I am afraid not, my lady.’

’Any position—a situation—that of a clerk even—would be so much better for him!’

The widow remained impassive.

’And many young gentlemen I know, who are clerks, and are enabled to live comfortably, and make a modest appearance in society; and your son, Mrs. Harrington, he would find it surely an improvement upon—many would think it a step for him.’

‘I am bound to thank you for the interest you take in my son, my lady.’

‘Does it not quite suit your views, Mrs. Harrington?’ Lady Racial was surprised at the widow’s manner.

‘If my son had only to think of himself, my lady.’

’Oh! but of course,’—the lady understood her now—’of course! You cannot suppose, Mrs. Harrington, but that I should anticipate he would have you to live with him, and behave to you in every way as a dutiful son, surely?

‘A clerk’s income is not very large, my lady.’

’No; but enough, as I have said, and with the management you would bring, Mrs. Harrington, to produce a modest, respectable maintenance. My respect for your husband, Mrs. Harrington, makes me anxious to press my services upon you.’ Lady Racial could not avoid feeling hurt at the widow’s want of common gratitude.

‘A clerk’s income would not be more than L100 a year, my lady.’

‘To begin with—no; certainly not more.’ The lady was growing brief.

’If my son puts by the half of that yearly, he can hardly support himself and his mother, my lady.’

‘Half of that yearly, Mrs. Harrington?’

‘He would have to do so, and be saddled till he dies, my lady.’

‘I really cannot see why.’

Lady Racial had a notion of some excessive niggardly thrift in the widow, which was arousing symptoms of disgust.

Mrs. Harrington quietly said: ’There are his father’s debts to pay, my lady.’

‘His father’s debts!’

‘Under L5000, but above L4000, my lady.’

‘Five thousand pounds! Mrs. Harrington!’ The lady’s delicately gloved hand gently rose and fell. ’And this poor young man—’she pursued.

‘My son will have to pay it, my lady.’

For a moment the lady had not a word to instance. Presently she remarked: ‘But, Mrs. Harrington, he is surely under no legal obligation?’

’He is only under the obligation not to cast disrespect on his father’s memory, my lady; and to be honest, while he can.’

‘But, Mrs. Harrington! surely! what can the poor young man do?’

‘He will pay it, my lady.’

‘But how, Mrs. Harrington?’

‘There is his father’s business, my lady.’

His father’s business! Then must the young man become a tradesman in order to show respect for his father? Preposterous! That was the lady’s natural inward exclamation. She said, rather shrewdly, for one who knew nothing of such things: ’But a business which produces debts so enormous, Mrs. Harrington!’

Page 1148

The widow replied: 'My son will have to conduct it in a different way. It would be a very good business, conducted properly, my lady.'

'But if he has no taste for it, Mrs. Harrington? If he is altogether superior to it?'

For the first time during the interview, the widow's inflexible countenance was mildly moved, though not to any mild expression.

'My son will have not to consult his tastes,' she observed: and seeing the lady, after a short silence, quit her seat, she rose likewise, and touched the fingers of the hand held forth to her, bowing.

'You will pardon the interest I take in your son,' said Lady Racial. 'I hope, indeed, that his relatives and friends will procure him the means of satisfying the demands made upon him.'

'He would still have to pay them, my lady,' was the widow's answer.

'Poor young man! indeed I pity him!' sighed her visitor. 'You have hitherto used no efforts to persuade him to take such a step,—Mrs. Harrington?'

'I have written to Mr. Goren, who was my husband's fellow-apprentice in London, my lady; and he is willing to instruct him in cutting, and measuring, and keeping accounts.'

Certain words in this speech were obnoxious to the fine ear of Lady Racial, and she relinquished the subject.

'Your husband, Mrs. Harrington—I should so much have wished!—he did not pass away in—in pain!'

'He died very calmly, my lady.'

'It is so terrible, so disfiguring, sometimes. One dreads to see!—one can hardly distinguish! I have known cases where death was dreadful! But a peaceful death is very beautiful! There is nothing shocking to the mind. It suggests heaven! It seems a fulfilment of our prayers!'

'Would your ladyship like to look upon him?' said the widow.

Lady Racial betrayed a sudden gleam at having her desire thus intuitively fathomed.

'For one moment, Mrs. Harrington! We esteemed him so much! May I?'

The widow responded by opening the door, and leading her into the chamber where the dead man lay.

At that period, when threats of invasion had formerly stirred up the military fire of us Islanders, the great Mel, as if to show the great Napoleon what character of being a British shopkeeper really was, had, by remarkable favour, obtained a lieutenancy of militia dragoons: in the uniform of which he had revelled, and perhaps, for the only time in his life, felt that circumstances had suited him with a perfect fit. However that may be, his solemn final commands to his wife, Henrietta Maria, on whom he could count for absolute obedience in such matters, had been, that as soon as the breath had left his body, he should be taken from his bed, washed, perfumed, powdered, and in that uniform dressed and laid out; with directions that he should be so buried at the expiration of three days, that havoc in his features might be hidden from

Page 1149

men. In this array Lady Racial beheld him. The curtains of the bed were drawn aside. The beams of evening fell soft through the blinds of the room, and cast a subdued light on the figure of the vanquished warrior. The Presence, dumb now for evermore, was sadly illumined for its last exhibition. But one who looked closely might have seen that Time had somewhat spoiled that perfect fit which had aforetime been his pride; and now that the lofty spirit had departed, there had been extreme difficulty in persuading the sullen excess of clay to conform to the dimensions of those garments. The upper part of the chest alone would bear its buttons, and across one portion of the lower limbs an ancient seam had started; recalling an incident to them who had known him in his brief hour of glory. For one night, as he was riding home from Fallow field, and just entering the gates of the town, a mounted trooper spurred furiously past, and slashing out at him, gashed his thigh. Mrs. Melchisedec found him lying at his door in a not unwonted way; carried him up-stairs in her arms, as she had done many a time before, and did not perceive his condition till she saw the blood on her gown. The cowardly assailant was never discovered; but Mel was both gallant and had, in his military career, the reputation of being a martinet. Hence, divers causes were suspected. The wound failed not to mend, the trousers were repaired: Peace about the same time was made, and the affair passed over.

Looking on the fine head and face, Lady Racial saw nothing of this. She had not looked long before she found covert employment for her handkerchief. The widow standing beside her did not weep, or reply to her whispered excuses at emotion; gazing down on his mortal length with a sort of benignant friendliness; aloof, as one whose duties to that form of flesh were well-nigh done. At the feet of his master, Jacko, the monkey, had jumped up, and was there squatted, with his legs crossed, very like a tailor! The imitative wretch had got a towel, and as often as Lady Racial's handkerchief travelled to her eyes, Jacko's peery face was hidden, and you saw his lithe skinny body doing grief's convulsions till, tired of this amusement, he obtained possession of the warrior's helmet, from a small round table on one side of the bed; a calque of the barbarous military-Georgian form, with a huge knob of horse-hair projecting over the peak; and under this, trying to adapt it to his rogue's head, the tricksy image of Death extinguished himself.

All was very silent in the room. Then the widow quietly disengaged Jacko, and taking him up, went to the door, and deposited him outside. During her momentary absence, Lady Racial had time to touch the dead man's forehead with her lips, unseen.

CHAPTER III

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SHEARS

Page 1150

Three daughters and a son were left to the world by Mr. Melchisedec. Love, well endowed, had already claimed to provide for the daughters: first in the shape of a lean Marine subaltern, whose days of obscuration had now passed, and who had come to be a major of that corps: secondly, presenting his addresses as a brewer of distinction: thirdly, and for a climax, as a Portuguese Count: no other than the Senor Silva Diaz, Conde de Saldar: and this match did seem a far more resplendent one than that of the two elder sisters with Major Strike and Mr. Andrew Cogglesby. But the rays of neither fell visibly on Lymport. These escaped Eurydices never reappeared, after being once fairly caught away from the gloomy realms of Dis, otherwise Trade. All three persons of singular beauty, a certain refinement, some Port, and some Presence, hereditarily combined, they feared the clutch of that fell king, and performed the widest possible circles around him. Not one of them ever approached the house of her parents. They were dutiful and loving children, and wrote frequently; but of course they had to consider their new position, and their husbands, and their husbands' families, and the world, and what it would say, if to it the dreaded rumour should penetrate! Lymport gossips, as numerous as in other parts, declared that the foreign nobleman would rave in an extraordinary manner, and do things after the outlandish fashion of his country: for from him, there was no doubt, the shop had been most successfully veiled, and he knew not of Pluto's close relationship to his lovely spouse.

The marriages had happened in this way. Balls are given in country towns, where the graces of tradesmen's daughters may be witnessed and admired at leisure by other than tradesmen: by occasional country gentlemen of the neighbourhood, with light minds: and also by small officers: subalterns wishing to do tender execution upon man's fair enemy, and to find a distraction for their legs. The classes of our social fabric have, here and there, slight connecting links, and provincial public balls are one of these. They are dangerous, for Cupid is no respecter of class-prejudice; and if you are the son of a retired tea-merchant, or of a village doctor, or of a half-pay captain, or of anything superior, and visit one of them, you are as likely to receive his shot as any shopboy. Even masquerading lords at such places, have been known to be slain outright; and although Society allows to its highest and dearest to save the honour of their families, and heal their anguish, by indecorous compromise, you, if you are a trifle below that mark, must not expect it. You must absolutely give yourself for what you hope to get. Dreadful as it sounds to philosophic ears, you must marry. This, having danced with Caroline Harrington, the gallant Lieutenant Strike determined to do. Nor, when he became aware of her father's occupation, did he shrink from his resolve. After a month's hard courtship,

Page 1151

he married her straight out of her father's house. That he may have all the credit due to him, it must be admitted that he did not once compare, or possibly permit himself to reflect on, the dissimilarity in their respective ranks, and the step he had taken downward, till they were man and wife: and then not in any great degree, before Fortune had given him his majority; an advance the good soldier frankly told his wife he did not owe to her. If we may be permitted to suppose the colonel of a regiment on friendly terms with one of his corporals, we have an estimate of the domestic life of Major and Mrs. Strike. Among the garrison males, his comrades, he passed for a disgustingly jealous brute.

The ladies, in their pretty language, signalized him as a 'finick.'

Now, having achieved so capital a marriage, Caroline, worthy creature, was anxious that her sisters should not be less happy, and would have them to visit her, in spite of her husband's protests.

'There can be no danger,' she said, for she was in fresh quarters, far from the nest of contagion. The lieutenant himself ungrudgingly declared that, looking on the ladies, no one for an instant could suspect; and he saw many young fellows ready to be as great fools as he had been another voluntary confession he made to his wife; for the candour of which she thanked him, and pointed out that it seemed to run in the family; inasmuch as Mr. Andrew Cogglesby, his rich relative, had seen and had proposed for Harriet. The lieutenant flatly said he would never allow it. In fact he had hitherto concealed the non-presentable portion of his folly very satisfactorily from all save the mess-room, and Mr. Andrew's passion was a severe dilemma to him. It need scarcely be told that his wife, fortified by the fervid brewer, defeated him utterly. What was more, she induced him to be an accomplice in deception. For though the lieutenant protested that he washed his hands of it, and that it was a fraud and a snare, he certainly did not avow the condition of his wife's parents to Mr. Andrew, but alluded to them in passing as 'the country people.' He supposed 'the country people' must be asked, he said. The brewer offered to go down to them. But the lieutenant drew an unpleasant picture of the country people, and his wife became so grave at the proposal, that Mr. Andrew said he wanted to marry the lady and not the 'country people,' and if she would have him, there he was. There he was, behaving with a particular and sagacious kindness to the raw lieutenant since Harriet's arrival. If the lieutenant sent her away, Mr. Andrew would infallibly pursue her, and light on a discovery. Twice cursed by Love, twice the victim of tailordom, our excellent Marine gave away Harriet Harrington in marriage to Mr. Andrew Cogglesby.

Thus Joy clapped hands a second time, and Horror deepened its shadows.

Page 1152

From higher ground it was natural that the remaining sister should take a bolder flight. Of the loves of the fair Louisa Harrington and the foreign Count, and how she first encountered him in the brewer's saloons, and how she, being a humorous person, laughed at his 'loaf' for her, and wore the colours that pleased him, and kindled and soothed his jealousy, little is known beyond the fact that she espoused the Count, under the auspices of the affluent brewer, and engaged that her children should be brought up in the faith of the Catholic Church: which Lymport gossips called, paying the Devil for her pride.

The three sisters, gloriously rescued by their own charms, had now to think of their one young brother. How to make him a gentleman! That was their problem.

Preserve him from tailordom—from all contact with trade—they must; otherwise they would be perpetually linked to the horrid thing they hoped to outlive and bury. A cousin of Mr. Melchisedec's had risen to be an Admiral and a knight for valiant action in the old war, when men could rise. Him they besought to take charge of the youth, and make a distinguished seaman of him. He courteously declined. They then attacked the married Marine—Navy or Army being quite indifferent to them as long as they could win for their brother the badge of one Service, 'When he is a gentleman at once!' they said, like those who see the end of their labours. Strike basely pretended to second them. It would have been delightful to him, of course, to have the tailor's son messing at the same table, and claiming him when he pleased with a familiar 'Ah, brother!' and prating of their relationship everywhere. Strike had been a fool: in revenge for it he laid out for himself a masterly career of consequent wisdom. The brewer—uxorious Andrew Cogglesby—might and would have bought the commission. Strike laughed at the idea of giving money for what could be got for nothing. He told them to wait.

In the meantime Evan, a lad of seventeen, spent the hours not devoted to his positive profession—that of gentleman—in the offices of the brewery, toying with big books and balances, which he despised with the combined zeal of the sucking soldier and emancipated tailor.

Two years passed in attendance on the astute brother-in-law, to whom Fortune now beckoned to come to her and gather his laurels from the pig-tails. About the same time the Countess sailed over from Lisbon on a visit to her sister Harriet (in reality, it was whispered in the Cogglesby saloons, on a diplomatic mission from the Court of Lisbon; but that could not be made ostensible). The Countess narrowly examined Evan, whose steady advance in his profession both her sisters praised.

'Yes,' said the Countess, in a languid alien accent. 'He has something of his father's carriage—something. Something of his delivery—his readiness.'

It was a remarkable thing that these ladies thought no man on earth like their father, and always cited him as the example of a perfect gentleman, and yet they buried him with

one mind, and each mounted guard over his sepulchre, to secure his ghost from an airing.

Page 1153

’He can walk, my dears, certainly, and talk—a little. Tete-a-tete, I do not say. I should think there he would be—a stick! All you English are. But what sort of a bow has he got, I ask you? How does he enter a room? And, then his smile! his laugh! He laughs like a horse—absolutely! There’s no music in his smile. Oh! you should see a Portuguese nobleman smile. O mio Deus! honeyed, my dears! But Evan has it not. None of you English have. You go so.’

The Countess pressed a thumb and finger to the sides of her mouth, and set her sisters laughing.

’I assure you, no better! not a bit! I faint in your society. I ask myself—Where am I? Among what boors have I fallen? But Evan is no worse than the rest of you; I acknowledge that. If he knew how to dress his shoulders properly, and to direct his eyes—Oh! the eyes! you should see how a Portuguese nobleman can use his eyes! Soul! my dears, soul! Can any of you look the unutterable without being absurd! You look so.’

And the Countess hung her jaw under heavily vacuous orbits, something as a sheep might yawn.

‘But I acknowledge that Evan is no worse than the rest of you,’ she repeated. ’If he understood at all the management of his eyes and mouth! But that’s what he cannot possibly learn in England—not possibly! As for your poor husband, Harriet! one really has to remember his excellent qualities to forgive him, poor man! And that stiff bandbox of a man of yours, Caroline!’ addressing the wife of the Marine, ’he looks as if he were all angles and sections, and were taken to pieces every night and put together in the morning. He may be a good soldier—good anything you will—but, Diacho! to be married to that! He is not civilized. None of you English are. You have no place in the drawing-room. You are like so many intrusive oxen—absolutely! One of your men trod on my toe the other night, and what do you think the creature did? Jerks back, then the half of him forward—I thought he was going to break in two—then grins, and grunts, “Oh! ’m sure, beg pardon, ’m sure!” I don’t know whether he didn’t say, *marm*!’

The Countess lifted her hands, and fell away in laughing horror. When her humour, or her feelings generally, were a little excited, she spoke her vernacular as her sisters did, but immediately subsided into the deliberate delicately-syllabled drawl.

‘Now that happened to me once at one of our great Balls,’ she pursued. ’I had on one side of me the Duchesse Eugenia de Formosa de Fontandigua; on the other sat the Countess de Pel, a widow. And we were talking of the ices that evening. Eugenia, you must know, my dears, was in love with the Count Belmarana. I was her sole confidante. The Countess de Pel—a horrible creature! Oh! she was the Duchess’s determined enemy-would have stabbed her for Belmarana, one of the most beautiful men! Adored by every woman! So we talked ices, Eugenic and myself,

Page 1154

quite comfortably, and that horrible De Pel had no idea in life! Eugenia had just said, “This ice sickens me! I do not taste the flavour of the vanille.” I answered, “It is here! It must—it cannot but be here! You love the flavour of the vanille?” With her exquisite smile, I see her now saying, “Too well! it is necessary to me! I live on it!”—when up he came. In his eagerness, his foot just effleured my robe. Oh! I never shall forget! In an instant he was down on one knee it was so momentary that none saw it but we three, and done with ineffable grace. “Pardon!” he said, in his sweet Portuguese; “Pardon!” looking up—the handsomest man I ever beheld; and when I think of that odious wretch the other night, with his “Oh! ’m sure, beg pardon, ’m sure! ’pon my honour!” I could have kicked him—I could, indeed!’

Here the Countess laughed out, but relapsed into:

’Alas! that Belmarana should have betrayed that beautiful trusting creature to De Pel. Such scandal! a duel!—the Duke was wounded. For a whole year Eugenia did not dare to appear at Court, but had to remain immured in her country-house, where she heard that Belmarana had married De Pel! It was for her money, of course. Rich as Croesus, and as wicked as the black man below! as dear papa used to say. By the way, weren’t we talking of Evan? Ah,—yes!’

And so forth. The Countess was immensely admired, and though her sisters said that she was ‘foreignized’ overmuch, they clung to her desperately. She seemed so entirely to have eclipsed tailordom, or ‘Demogorgon,’ as the Countess was pleased to call it. Who could suppose this grand-mannered lady, with her coroneted anecdotes and delicious breeding, the daughter of that thing? It was not possible to suppose it. It seemed to defy the fact itself.

They congratulated her on her complete escape from Demogorgon. The Countess smiled on them with a lovely sorrow.

’Safe from the whisper, my dears; the ceaseless dread? If you knew what I have to endure! I sometimes envy you. ’Pon my honour, I sometimes wish I had married a fishmonger! Silva, indeed, is a most excellent husband. Polished! such polish as you know not of in England. He has a way—a wriggle with his shoulders in company—I cannot describe it to you; so slight! so elegant! and he is all that a woman could desire. But who could be safe in any part of the earth, my dears, while papa will go about so, and behave so extraordinarily? I was at dinner at your English embassy a month ago, and there was Admiral Combleman, then on the station off Lisbon, Sir Jackson Racial’s friend, who was the Admiral at Lymport formerly. I knew him at once, and thought, oh! what shall I do! My heart was like a lump of lead. I would have given worlds that we might one of us have smothered the other! I had to sit beside him—it always happens! Thank heaven! he did not identify me. And then he told an anecdote of Papa. It was the dreadful

Page 1155

old “Bath” story. I thought I should have died. I could not but fancy the Admiral suspected. Was it not natural? And what do you think I had the audacity to do? I asked him coolly, whether the Mr. Harrington he mentioned was not the son of Sir Abraham Harrington, of Torquay,—the gentleman who lost his yacht in the Lisbon waters last year? I brought it on myself. ‘Gentleman, ma’am,—*ma’am*!’ says the horrid old creature, laughing, ‘gentleman! he’s a —— I cannot speak it: I choke!’ And then he began praising Papa. Diacho! what I suffered. But, you know, I can keep my countenance, if I perish. I am a Harrington as much as any of us!’

And the Countess looked superb in the pride with which she said she was what she would have given her hand not to be. But few feelings are single on this globe, and junction of sentiments need not imply unity in our yeasty compositions.

‘After it was over—my supplice,’ continued the Countess, ’I was questioned by all the ladies—I mean our ladies—not your English. They wanted to know how I could be so civil to that intolerable man. I gained a deal of credit, my dears. I laid it all on—-Diplomacy.’ The Countess laughed bitterly. ’Diplomacy bears the burden of it all. I pretended that Combleman could be useful to Silva! Oh! what hypocrites we all are, mio Deus!’

The ladies listening could not gainsay this favourite claim of universal brotherhood among the select who wear masks instead of faces.

With regard to Evan, the Countess had far outstripped her sisters in her views. A gentleman she had discovered must have one of two things—a title or money. He might have all the breeding in the world; he might be as good as an angel; but without a title or money he was under eclipse almost total. On a gentleman the sun must shine. Now, Evan had no title, no money. The clouds were thick above the youth. To gain a title he would have to scale aged mountains. There was one break in his firmament through which the radiant luminary might be assisted to cast its beams on him still young. That divine portal was matrimony. If he could but make a rich marriage he would blaze transfigured; all would be well! And why should not Evan marry an heiress, as well as another?

‘I know a young creature who would exactly suit him,’ said the Countess. ’She is related to the embassy, and is in Lisbon now. A charming child—just sixteen! Dios! how the men rave about her! and she isn’t a beauty,—there’s the wonder; and she is a little too gauche too English in her habits and ways of thinking; likes to be admired, of course, but doesn’t know yet how to set about getting it. She rather scandalizes our ladies, but when you know her!—She will have, they say, a hundred ’thousand pounds in her own right! Rose Jocelyn, the daughter of Sir Franks, and that eccentric Lady Jocelyn. She is with her uncle, Melville, the celebrated diplomate though, to tell you the truth, we turn him round our fingers, and spin him as the boys used to do the cockchafers. I cannot forget our old Fallow field school-life, you see, my dears. Well, Rose Jocelyn would just

suit Evan. She is just of an age to receive an impression. And I would take care she did. Instance me a case where I have failed?

Page 1156

’Or there is the Portuguese widow, the Rostral. She’s thirty, certainly; but she possesses millions! Estates all over the kingdom, and the sweetest creature. But, no. Evan would be out of the way there, certainly. But—our women are very nice: they have the dearest, sweetest ways: but I would rather Evan did not marry one of them. And then there ‘s the religion!’

This was a sore of the Countess’s own, and she dropped a tear in coming across it.

‘No, my dears, it shall be Rose Jocelyn!’ she concluded: ’I will take Evan over with me, and see that he has opportunities. It shall be Rose, and then I can call her mine; for in verity I love the child.’

It is not my part to dispute the Countess’s love for Miss Jocelyn; and I have only to add that Evan, unaware of the soft training he was to undergo, and the brilliant chance in store for him, offered no impediment to the proposition that he should journey to Portugal with his sister (whose subtlest flattery was to tell him that she should not be ashamed to own him there); and ultimately, furnished with cash for the trip by the remonstrating brewer, went.

So these Parcae, daughters of the shears, arranged and settled the young man’s fate. His task was to learn the management of his mouth, how to dress his shoulders properly, and to direct his eyes—rare qualities in man or woman, I assure you; the management of the mouth being especially admirable, and correspondingly difficult. These achieved, he was to place his battery in position, and win the heart and hand of an heiress.

Our comedy opens with his return from Portugal, in company with Miss Rose, the heiress; the Honourable Melville Jocelyn, the diplomate; and the Count and Countess de Saldar, refugees out of that explosive little kingdom.

CHAPTER IV

ON BOARD THE JOCASTA

From the Tagus to the Thames the Government sloop-of-war, Jocasta, had made a prosperous voyage, bearing that precious freight, a removed diplomatist and his family; for whose uses let a sufficient vindication be found in the exercise he affords our crews in the science of seamanship. She entered our noble river somewhat early on a fine July morning. Early as it was, two young people, who had nothing to do with the trimming or guiding of the vessel, stood on deck, and watched the double-shore, beginning to embrace them more and more closely as they sailed onward. One, a young lady, very young in manner, wore a black felt hat with a floating scarlet feather, and was clad about the shoulders in a mantle of foreign style and pattern. The other

you might have taken for a wandering Don, were such an object ever known; so simply he assumed the dusky sombrero and dangling cloak, of which one fold was flung across his breast and drooped behind him. The line of an adolescent dark moustache ran along his lip, and only at intervals could you see that his eyes were blue and of the land he was nearing. For the youth was meditative, and held his head much down. The young lady, on the contrary, permitted an open inspection of her countenance, and seemed, for the moment at least, to be neither caring nor thinking of what kind of judgement would be passed on her. Her pretty nose was up, sniffing the still salt breeze with vivacious delight.

Page 1157

‘Oh!’ she cried, clapping her hands, ’there goes a dear old English gull! How I have wished to see him! I haven’t seen one for two years and seven months. When I ’m at home, I ’ll leave my window open all night, just to hear the rooks, when they wake in the morning. There goes another!’

She tossed up her nose again, exclaiming:

’I ’m sure I smell England nearer and nearer! I smell the fields, and the cows in them. I’d have given anything to be a dairy-maid for half an hour! I used to lie and pant in that stifling air among those stupid people, and wonder why anybody ever left England. Aren’t you glad to come back?’

This time the fair speaker lent her eyes to the question, and shut her lips; sweet, cold, chaste lips she had: a mouth that had not yet dreamed of kisses, and most honest eyes.

The young man felt that they were not to be satisfied by his own, and after seeking to fill them with a doleful look, which was immediately succeeded by one of superhuman indifference, he answered:

‘Yes! We shall soon have to part!’ and commenced tapping with his foot the cheerful martyr’s march.

Speech that has to be hauled from the depths usually betrays the effort. Listening an instant to catch the import of this cavernous gasp upon the brink of sound, the girl said:

‘Part? what do you mean?’

Apparently it required a yet vaster effort to pronounce an explanation. The doleful look, the superhuman indifference, were repeated in due order: sound, a little more distinct, uttered the words:

‘We cannot be as we have been, in England!’ and then the cheerful martyr took a few steps farther.

’Why, you don’t mean to say you’re going to give me up, and not be friends with me, because we’ve come back to England?’ cried the girl in a rapid breath, eyeing him seriously.

Most conscientiously he did not mean it! but he replied with the quietest negative.

‘No?’ she mimicked him. ’Why do you say “No” like that? Why are you so mysterious, Evan? Won’t you promise me to come and stop with us for weeks? Haven’t you said we would ride, and hunt, and fish together, and read books, and do all sorts of things?’

He replied with the quietest affirmative.

‘Yes? What does “Yes!” mean?’ She lifted her chest to shake out the dead-alive monosyllable, as he had done. ’Why are you so singular this morning, Evan? Have I offended you? You are so touchy!’

The slur on his reputation for sensitiveness induced the young man to attempt being more explicit.

‘I mean,’ he said, hesitating; ’why, we must part. We shall not see each other every day. Nothing more than that.’ And away went the cheerful martyr in sublimest mood.

‘Oh! and that makes you, sorry?’ A shade of archness was in her voice.

The girl waited as if to collect something in her mind, and was now a patronizing woman.

Page 1158

’Why, you dear sentimental boy! You don’t suppose we could see each other every day for ever?’

It was perhaps the cruelest question that could have been addressed to the sentimental boy from her mouth. But he was a cheerful martyr!

‘You dear Don Doloroso!’ she resumed. ’I declare if you are not just like those young Portugals this morning; and over there you were such a dear English fellow; and that’s why I liked you so much! Do change! Do, please, be lively, and yourself again. Or mind; I’ll call you Don Doloroso, and that shall be your name in England. See there!—-that’s—that’s? what’s the name of that place? Hoy! Mr. Skerne!’ She hailed the boatswain, passing, ‘Do tell me the name of that place.’

Mr. Skerne righted about to satisfy her minutely, and then coming up to Evan, he touched his hat, and said:

’I mayn’t have another opportunity—we shall be busy up there—of thankin’ you again, sir, for what you did for my poor drunken brother Bill, and you may take my word I won’t forget it, sir, if he does; and I suppose he’ll be drowning his memory just as he was near drowning himself.’

Evan muttered something, grimaced civilly, and turned away. The girl’s observant brows were moved to a faintly critical frown, and nodding intelligently to the boatswain’s remark, that the young gentleman did not seem quite himself, now that he was nearing home, she went up to Evan, and said:

’I’m going to give you a lesson in manners, to be quits with you. Listen, sir. Why did you turn away so ungraciously from Mr. Skerne, while he was thanking you for having saved his brother’s life? Now there’s where you’re too English. Can’t you bear to be thanked?’

‘I don’t want to be thanked because I can swim,’ said Evan.

‘But it is not that. Oh, how you trifle!’ she cried. ’There’s nothing vexes me so much as that way you have. Wouldn’t my eyes have sparkled if anybody had come up to me to thank me for such a thing? I would let them know how glad I was to have done such a thing! Doesn’t it make them happier, dear Evan?’

‘My dear Miss Jocelyn!’

‘What?’

The honest grey eyes fixed on him, narrowed their enlarged lids. She gazed before her on the deck, saying:

’I’m sure I can’t understand you. I suppose it’s because I’m a girl, and I never shall till I’m a woman. Heigho!’

A youth who is engaged in the occupation of eating his heart, cannot shine to advantage, and is as much a burden to himself as he is an enigma to others. Evan felt this; but he could do nothing and say nothing; so he retired deeper into the folds of the Don, and remained picturesque and scarcely pleasant.

They were relieved by a summons to breakfast from below.

She brightened and laughed. ’Now, what will you wager me, Evan, that the Countess doesn’t begin:

“Sweet child! how does she this morning? blooming?” when she kisses me?’

Page 1159

Her capital imitation of his sister's manner constrained him to join in her laugh, and he said:

'I'll back against that, I get three fingers from your uncle, and "Morrow, young sir!"'

Down they ran together, laughing; and, sure enough, the identical words of the respective greetings were employed, which they had to enjoy with all the discretion they could muster.

Rose went round the table to her little cousin Alec, aged seven, kissed his reluctant cheek, and sat beside him, announcing a sea appetite and great capabilities, while Evan silently broke bread. The Count de Saldar, a diminutive tawny man, just a head and neck above the tablecloth, sat sipping chocolate and fingering dry toast, which he would now and then dip in jelly, and suck with placidity, in the intervals of a curt exchange of French with the wife of the Hon. Melville, a ringleted English lady, or of Portuguese with the Countess; who likewise sipped chocolate and fingered dry toast, and was mournfully melodious. The Hon. Melville, as became a tall islander, carved beef, and ate of it, like a ruler of men. Beautiful to see was the compassionate sympathy of the Countess's face when Rose offered her plate for a portion of the world-subjugating viand, as who should say: 'Sweet child! thou knowest not yet of sorrows, thou canst ballast thy stomach with beef!' In any other than an heiress, she would probably have thought: 'This is indeed a disgusting little animal, and most unfeminine conduct!'

Rose, unconscious of praise or blame, rivalled her uncle in enjoyment of the fare, and talked of her delight in seeing England again, and anything that belonged to her native land. Mrs. Melville perceived that it pained the refugee Countess, and gave her the glance intelligible; but the Countess never missed glances, or failed to interpret them. She said:

'Let her. I love to hear the sweet child's prattle.'

'It was fortunate' (she addressed the diplomatist) 'that we touched at Southampton and procured fresh provision!'

'Very lucky for *us*!' said he, glaring shrewdly between a mouthful.

The Count heard the word 'Southampton,' and wished to know how it was comprised. A passage of Portuguese ensued, and then the Countess said:

'Silva, you know, desired to relinquish the vessel at Southampton. He does not comprehend the word "expense," but' (she shook a dumb Alas!) 'I must think of that for him now!'

‘Oh! always avoid expense,’ said the Hon. Melville, accustomed to be paid for by his country.

‘At what time shall we arrive, may I ask, do you think?’ the Countess gently inquired.

The watch of a man who had his eye on Time was pulled out, and she was told it might be two hours before dark. Another reckoning, keenly balanced, informed the company that the day’s papers could be expected on board somewhere about three o’clock in the afternoon.

Page 1160

‘And then,’ said the Hon. Melville, nodding general gratulation, ’we shall know how the world wags.’

How it had been wagging the Countess’s straining eyes under closed eyelids were eloquent of.

‘Too late, I fear me, to wait upon Lord Livelyston to-night?’ she suggested.

‘To-night?’ The Hon. Melville gazed blank astonishment at the notion. ’Oh! certainly, too late tonight. A-hum! I think, madam, you had better not be in too great a hurry to see him. Repose a little. Recover your fatigue.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the Countess, with a beam of utter confidence in him, ’I shall be too happy to place myself in your hands—believe me.’

This was scarcely more to the taste of the diplomatist. He put up his mouth, and said, blandly:

’I fear—you know, madam, I must warn you beforehand—I, personally, am but an insignificant unit over here, you know; I, personally, can’t guarantee much assistance to you—not positive. What I can do—of course, very happy!’ And he fell to again upon the beef.

‘Not so very insignificant!’ said the Countess, smiling, as at a softly radiant conception of him.

‘Have to bob and bow like the rest of them over here,’ he added, proof against the flattery.

‘But that you will not forsake Silva, I am convinced,’ said the Countess; and, paying little heed to his brief ‘Oh! what I can do,’ continued: ’For over here, in England, we are almost friendless. My relations—such as are left of them—are not in high place.’ She turned to Mrs. Melville, and renewed the confession with a proud humility. ’Truly, I have not a distant cousin in the Cabinet!’

Mrs. Melville met her sad smile, and returned it, as one who understood its entire import.

’My brother-in-law-my sister, I think, you know—married a—a brewer! He is rich; but, well! such was her taste! My brother-in-law is indeed in Parliament, and he—’

‘Very little use, seeing he votes with the opposite party,’ the diplomatist interrupted her.

‘Ah! but he will not,’ said the Countess, serenely. ’I can trust with confidence that, if it is for Silva’s interest, he will assuredly so dispose of his influence as to suit the

desiderations of his family, and not in any way oppose his opinions to the powers that would willingly stoop to serve us!'

It was impossible for the Hon. Melville to withhold a slight grimace at his beef, when he heard this extremely alienized idea of the nature of a member of the Parliament of Great Britain. He allowed her to enjoy her delusion, as she pursued:

'No. So much we could offer in repayment. It is little! But this, in verity, is a case. Silva's wrongs have only to be known in England, and I am most assured that the English people will not permit it. In the days of his prosperity, Silva was a friend to England, and England should not—should not—forget it now. Had we money! But of that arm our enemies have

Page 1161

deprived us: and, I fear, without it we cannot hope to have the justice of our cause pleaded in the English papers. Mr. Redner, you know, the correspondent in Lisbon, is a sworn foe to Silva. And why but because I would not procure him an invitation to Court! The man was so horridly vulgar; his gloves were never clean; I had to hold a bouquet to my nose when I talked to him. That, you say, was my fault! Truly so. But what woman can be civil to a low-bred, pretentious, offensive man?'

Mrs. Melville, again appealed to, smiled perfect sympathy, and said, to account for his character:

'Yes. He is the son of a small shopkeeper of some kind, in Southampton, I hear.'

'A very good fellow in his way,' said her husband.

'Oh! I can't bear that class of people,' Rose exclaimed. 'I always keep out of their way. You can always tell them.'

The Countess smiled considerate approbation of her exclusiveness and discernment. So sweet a smile!

'You were on deck early, my dear?' she asked Evan, rather abruptly.

Master Alec answered for him: 'Yes, he was, and so was Rose. They made an appointment, just as they used to do under the oranges.'

'Children!' the Countess smiled to Mrs. Melville.

'They always whisper when I'm by,' Alec appended.

'Children!' the Countess's sweetened visage entreated Mrs. Melville to re-echo; but that lady thought it best for the moment to direct Rose to look to her packing, now that she had done breakfast.

'And I will take a walk with my brother on deck,' said the Countess. 'Silva is too harassed for converse.'

The parties were thus divided. The silent Count was left to meditate on his wrongs in the saloon; and the diplomatist, alone with his lady, thought fit to say to her, shortly: 'Perhaps it would be as well to draw away from these people a little. We 've done as much as we could for them, in bringing them over here. They may be trying to compromise us. That woman's absurd. She 's ashamed of the brewer, and yet she wants to sell him—or wants us to buy him. Ha! I think she wants us to send a couple of frigates, and threaten bombardment of the capital, if they don't take her husband back, and receive him with honours.'

‘Perhaps it would be as well,’ said Mrs. Melville. ’Rose’s invitation to him goes for nothing.’

‘Rose? inviting the Count? down to Hampshire?’ The diplomatist’s brows were lifted.

‘No, I mean the other,’ said the diplomatist’s wife.

’Oh! the young fellow! very good young fellow. Gentlemanly. No harm in him.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said the diplomatist’s wife.

’You don’t suppose he expects us to keep him on, or provide for him over here—eh?’

The diplomatist’s wife informed him that such was not her thought, that he did not understand, and that it did not matter; and as soon as the Hon. Melville saw that she was brooding something essentially feminine, and which had no relationship to the great game of public life, curiosity was extinguished in him.

Page 1162

On deck the Countess paced with Evan, and was for a time pleasantly diverted by the admiration she could, without looking, perceive that her sorrow-subdued graces had aroused in the breast of a susceptible naval lieutenant. At last she spoke:

'My dear! remember this. Your last word to Mr. Jocelyn will be: "I will do myself the honour to call upon my benefactor early." To Rose you will say: "Be assured, Miss Jocelyn 'Miss Jocelyn—' I shall not fail in hastening to pay my respects to your family in Hampshire." You will remember to do it, in the exact form I speak it.'

Evan laughed: 'What! call him benefactor to his face? I couldn't do it.'

'Ah! my child!'

'Besides, he isn't a benefactor at all. His private secretary died, and I stepped in to fill the post, because nobody else was handy.'

'And tell me of her who pushed you forward, Evan?'

'My dear sister, I'm sure I'm not ungrateful.'

'No; but headstrong: opinionated. Now these people will endeavour—Oh! I have seen it in a thousand little things—they wish to shake us off. Now, if you will but do as I indicate! Put your faith in an older head, Evan. It is your only chance of society in England. For your brother-in-law—I ask you, what sort of people will you meet at the Cogglesbys? Now and then a nobleman, very much out of his element. In short, you have fed upon a diet which will make you to distinguish, and painfully to know the difference! Indeed! Yes, you are looking about for Rose. It depends upon your behaviour now, whether you are to see her at all in England. Do you forget? You wished once to inform her of your origin. Think of her words at the breakfast this morning!'

The Countess imagined she had produced an impression. Evan said: 'Yes, and I should have liked to have told her this morning that I'm myself nothing more than the son of a—'

'Stop! cried his sister, glancing about in horror. The admiring lieutenant met her eye. Blandishingly she smiled on him: 'Most beautiful weather for a welcome to dear England?' and passed with majesty.

'Boy!' she resumed, 'are you mad?'

'I hate being such a hypocrite, madam.'

'Then you do not love her, Evan?'

This may have been dubious logic, but it resulted from a clear sequence of ideas in the lady's head. Evan did not contest it.

'And assuredly you will lose her, Evan. Think of my troubles! I have to intrigue for Silva; I look to your future; I smile, Oh heaven! how do I not smile when things are spoken that pierce my heart! This morning at the breakfast!'

Evan took her hand, and patted it.

'What is your pity?' she sighed.

'If it had not been for you, my dear sister, I should never have held my tongue.'

'You are not a Harrington! You are a Dawley!' she exclaimed, indignantly.

Evan received the accusation of possessing more of his mother's spirit than his father's in silence.

Page 1163

‘You would not have held your tongue,’ she said, with fervid severity: ’and you would have betrayed yourself! and you would have said you were that! and you in that costume! Why, goodness gracious! could you bear to appear so ridiculous?’

The poor young man involuntarily surveyed his person. The pains of an impostor seized him. The deplorable image of the Don making confession became present to his mind. It was a clever stroke of this female intriguer. She saw him redden grievously, and blink his eyes; and not wishing to probe him so that he would feel intolerable disgust at his imprisonment in the Don, she continued:

’But you have the sense to see your duties, Evan. You have an excellent sense, in the main. No one would dream—to see you. You did not, I must say, you did not make enough of your gallantry. A Portuguese who had saved a man’s life, Evan, would he have been so boorish? You behaved as if it was a matter of course that you should go overboard after anybody, in your clothes, on a dark night. So, then, the Jocelyns took it. I barely heard one compliment to you. And Rose—what an effect it should have had on her! But, owing to your manner, I do believe the girl thinks it nothing but your ordinary business to go overboard after anybody, in your clothes, on a dark night. ’Pon my honour, I believe she expects to see you always dripping!’ The Countess uttered a burst of hysterical humour. ’So you miss your credit. That inebriated sailor should really have been gold to you. Be not so young and thoughtless.’

The Countess then proceeded to tell him how foolishly he had let slip his great opportunity. A Portuguese would have fixed the young lady long before. By tender moonlight, in captivating language, beneath the umbrageous orange-groves, a Portuguese would have accurately calculated the effect of the perfume of the blossom on her sensitive nostrils, and know the exact moment when to kneel, and declare his passion sonorously.

‘Yes,’ said Evan, ‘one of them did. She told me.’

‘She told you? And you—what did you do?’

‘Laughed at him with her, to be sure.’

’Laughed at him! She told you, and you helped her to laugh at love! Have you no perceptions? Why did she tell you?’

‘Because she thought him such a fool, I suppose.’

‘You never will know a woman,’ said the Countess, with contempt.

Much of his worldly sister at a time was more than Evan could bear. Accustomed to the symptoms of restiveness, she finished her discourse, enjoyed a quiet parade up and down under the gaze of the lieutenant, and could find leisure to note whether she at all

struck the inferior seamen, even while her mind was absorbed by the multiform troubles and anxieties for which she took such innocent indemnification.

The appearance of the Hon. Melville Jocelyn on deck, and without his wife, recalled her to business. It is a peculiarity of female diplomatists that they fear none save their own sex. Men they regard as their natural prey: in women they see rival hunters using their own weapons. The Countess smiled a slowly-kindling smile up to him, set her brother adrift, and delicately linked herself to Evan's benefactor.

Page 1164

‘I have been thinking,’ she said, ’knowing your kind and most considerate attentions, that we may compromise you in England.’

He at once assured her he hoped not, he thought not at all.

‘The idea is due to my brother,’ she went on; ’for I—women know so little!—and most guiltlessly should we have done so. My brother perhaps does not think of us foremost; but his argument I can distinguish. I can see, that were you openly to plead Silva’s cause, you might bring yourself into odium, Mr. Jocelyn; and heaven knows I would not that! May I then ask, that in England we may be simply upon the same footing of private friendship?’

The diplomatist looked into her uplifted visage, that had all the sugary sparkles of a crystallized preserved fruit of the Portugal clime, and observed, confidentially, that, with every willingness in the world to serve her, he did think it would possibly be better, for a time, to be upon that footing, apart from political considerations.

‘I was very sure my brother would apprehend your views,’ said the Countess. ’He, poor boy! his career is closed. He must sink into a different sphere. He will greatly miss the intercourse with you and your sweet family.’

Further relieved, the diplomatist delivered a high opinion of the young gentleman, his abilities, and his conduct, and trusted he should see him frequently.

By an apparent sacrifice, the lady thus obtained what she wanted.

Near the hour speculated on by the diplomatist, the papers came on board, and he, unaware how he had been manoeuvred for lack of a wife at his elbow, was quickly engaged in appeasing the great British hunger for news; second only to that for beef, it seems, and equally acceptable salted when it cannot be had fresh.

Leaving the devotee of statecraft with his legs crossed, and his face wearing the cognizant air of one whose head is above the waters of events, to enjoy the mighty meal of fresh and salted at discretion, the Countess dived below.

Meantime the Jocasta, as smoothly as before she was ignorant of how the world wagged, slipped up the river with the tide; and the sun hung red behind the forest of masts, burnishing a broad length of the serpentine haven of the nations of the earth. A young Englishman returning home can hardly look on this scene without some pride of kinship. Evan stood at the fore part of the vessel. Rose, in quiet English attire, had escaped from her aunt to join him, singing in his ears, to spur his senses: ‘Isn’t it beautiful? Isn’t it beautiful? Dear old England!’

‘What do you find so beautiful?’ he asked.

’Oh, you dull fellow! Why the ships, and the houses, and the smoke, to be sure.’

‘The ships? Why, I thought you despised trade, mademoiselle?’

’And so I do. That is, not trade, but tradesmen. Of course, I mean shopkeepers.’

’It’s they who send the ships to and fro, and make the picture that pleases you, nevertheless.’

Page 1165

‘Do they?’ said she, indifferently, and then with a sort of fervour, ’Why do you always grow so cold to me whenever we get on this subject?’

‘I cold?’ Evan responded. The incessant fears of his diplomatic sister had succeeded in making him painfully jealous of this subject. He turned it off. ’Why, our feelings are just the same. Do you know what I was thinking when you came up? I was thinking that I hoped I might never disgrace the name of an Englishman.’

‘Now, that’s noble!’ cried the girl. ’And I’m sure you never will. Of an English gentleman, Evan. I like that better.’

’Would your rather be called a true English lady than a true English woman, Rose?’

‘Don’t think I would, my dear,’ she answered, pertly; ’but “gentleman” always means more than “man” to me.’

‘And what’s a gentleman, mademoiselle?’

‘Can’t tell you, Don Doloroso. Something you are, sir,’ she added, surveying him.

Evan sucked the bitter and the sweet of her explanation. His sister in her anxiety to put him on his guard, had not beguiled him to forget his real state.

His sister, the diplomatist and his lady, the refugee Count, with ladies’ maids, servants, and luggage, were now on the main-deck, and Master Alec, who was as good as a newspaper correspondent for private conversations, put an end to the colloquy of the young people. They were all assembled in a circle when the vessel came to her moorings. The diplomatist glutted with news, and thirsting for confirmations; the Count dumb, courteous, and quick-eyed; the honourable lady complacent in the consciousness of boxes well packed; the Countess breathing mellifluous long-drawn adieux that should provoke invitations. Evan and Rose regarded each other.

The boat to convey them on shore was being lowered, and they were preparing to move forward. Just then the vessel was boarded by a stranger.

’Is that one of the creatures of your Customs? I did imagine we were safe from them,’ exclaimed the Countess.

The diplomatist laughingly requested her to save herself anxiety on that score, while under his wing. But she had drawn attention to the intruder, who was seen addressing one of the midshipmen. He was a man in a long brown coat and loose white neckcloth, spectacles on nose, which he wore considerably below the bridge and peered over, as if their main use were to sight his eye; a beaver hat, with broadish brim, on his head. A man of no station, it was evident to the ladies at once, and they would have taken no

further notice of him had he not been seen stepping toward them in the rear of the young midshipman.

The latter came to Evan, and said: ’A fellow of the name of Goren wants you. Says there’s something the matter at home.’

Evan advanced, and bowed stiffly.

Mr. Goren held out his hand. ’You don’t remember me, young man? I cut out your first suit for you when you were breeched, though! Yes-ah! Your poor father wouldn’t put his hand to it. Goren!’

Page 1166

Embarrassed, and not quite alive to the chapter of facts this name should have opened to him, Evan bowed again.

‘Goren!’ continued the possessor of the name. He had a cracked voice, that when he spoke a word of two syllables, commenced with a lugubrious crow, and ended in what one might have taken for a curious question.

’It is a bad business brings me, young man. I ’m not the best messenger for such tidings. It’s a black suit, young man! It’s your father!’

The diplomatist and his lady gradually edged back but Rose remained beside the Countess, who breathed quick, and seemed to have lost her self-command.

Thinking he was apprehended, Mr. Goren said: ’I ’m going down to-night to take care of the shop. He ’s to be buried in his old uniform. You had better come with me by the night-coach, if you would see the last of him, young man.’

Breaking an odd pause that had fallen, the Countess cried aloud, suddenly:

‘In his uniform!’

Mr. Goren felt his arm seized and his legs hurrying him some paces into isolation. ‘Thanks! thanks!’ was murmured in his ear. ’Not a word more. Evan cannot bear it. Oh! you are good to have come, and we are grateful. My father! my father!’

She had to tighten her hand and wrist against her bosom to keep herself up. She had to reckon in a glance how much Rose had heard, or divined. She had to mark whether the Count had understood a syllable. She had to whisper to Evan to hasten away with the horrible man.

She had to enliven his stunned senses, and calm her own. And with mournful images of her father in her brain, the female Spartan had to turn to Rose, and speculate on the girl’s reflective brows, while she said, as over a distant relative, sadly, but without distraction: ’A death in the family!’ and preserved herself from weeping her heart out, that none might guess the thing who did not positively know it. Evan touched the hand of Rose without meeting her eyes. He was soon cast off in Mr. Goren’s boat. Then the Countess murmured final adieux; twilight under her lids, but yet a smile, stately, affectionate, almost genial. Rose, her sweet Rose, she must kiss. She could have slapped Rose for appearing so reserved and cold. She hugged Rose, as to hug oblivion of the last few minutes into her. The girl leant her cheek, and bore the embrace, looking on her with a kind of wonder.

Only when alone with the Count, in the brewer’s carriage awaiting her on shore, did the lady give a natural course to her grief; well knowing that her Silva would attribute it to the darkness of their common exile. She wept: but in the excess of her misery, two

words of strangely opposite signification, pronounced by Mr. Goren; two words that were at once poison and antidote, sang in her brain; two words that painted her dead father from head to foot, his nature and his fortune: these were the Shop, and the Uniform.

Page 1167

Oh! what would she not have given to have-seen and bestowed on her beloved father one last kiss! Oh! how she hoped that her inspired echo of Uniform, on board the Jocasta, had drowned the memory, eclipsed the meaning, of that fatal utterance of Shop!

CHAPTER V

THE FAMILY AND THE FUNERAL

It was the evening of the second day since the arrival of the black letter in London from Lymport, and the wife of the brewer and the wife of the Major sat dropping tears into one another's laps, in expectation of their sister the Countess. Mr. Andrew Cogglesby had not yet returned from his office. The gallant Major had gone forth to dine with General Sir George Frebuter, the head of the Marines of his time. It would have been difficult for the Major, he informed his wife, to send in an excuse to the General for non-attendance, without entering into particulars; and that he should tell the General he could not dine with him, because of the sudden decease of a tailor, was, as he let his wife understand, and requested her to perceive, quite out of the question. So he dressed himself carefully, and though peremptory with his wife concerning his linen, and requiring natural services from her in the button department, and a casual expression of contentment as to his ultimate make-up, he left her that day without any final injunctions to occupy her mind, and she was at liberty to weep if she pleased, a privilege she did not enjoy undisturbed when he was present; for the warrior hated that weakness, and did not care to hide his contempt for it.

Of the three sisters, the wife of the Major was, oddly enough, the one who was least inveterately solicitous of concealing the fact of her parentage. Reticence, of course, she had to study with the rest; the Major was a walking book of reticence and the observances; he professed, also, in company with herself alone, to have had much trouble in drilling her to mark and properly preserve them. She had no desire to speak of her birthplace. But, for some reason or other, she did not share her hero's rather petulant anxiety to keep the curtain nailed down on that part of her life which preceded her entry into the ranks of the Royal Marines. Some might have thought that those fair large blue eyes of hers wandered now and then in pleasant unambitious walks behind the curtain, and toyed with little flowers of palest memory. Utterly tasteless, totally wanting in discernment, not to say gratitude, the Major could not presume her to be; and yet his wits perceived that her answers and the conduct she shaped in accordance with his repeated protests and long-reaching apprehensions of what he called danger, betrayed acquiescent obedience more than the connubial sympathy due to him. Danger on the field the Major knew not of; he did not scruple to name the word in relation to his wife. For, as he told her, should he, some day, as in the chapter

Page 1168

of accidents might occur, sally into the street a Knight Companion of the Bath and become known to men as Sir Maxwell Strike, it would be decidedly disagreeable for him to be blown upon by a wind from Lymport. Moreover she was the mother of a son. The Major pointed out to her the duty she owed her offspring. Certainly the protecting aegis of his rank and title would be over the lad, but she might depend upon it any indiscretion of hers would damage him in his future career, the Major assured her. Young Maxwell must be considered.

For all this, the mother and wife, when the black letter found them in the morning at breakfast, had burst into a fit of grief, and faltered that she wept for a father. Mrs. Andrew, to whom the letter was addressed, had simply held the letter to her in a trembling hand. The Major compared their behaviour, with marked encomiums of Mrs. Andrew. Now this lady and her husband were in obverse relative positions. The brewer had no will but his Harriet's. His esteem for her combined the constitutional feelings of an insignificantly-built little man for a majestic woman, and those of a worthy soul for the wife of his bosom. Possessing, or possessed by her, the good brewer was perfectly happy. She, it might be thought, under these circumstances, would not have minded much his hearing what he might hear. It happened, however, that she was as jealous of the winds of Lymport as the Major himself; as vigilant in debarring them from access to the brewery as now the Countess could have been. We are not dissecting human nature suffice it, therefore, from a mere glance at the surface, to say, that just as moneyed men are careful of their coin, women who have all the advantages in a conjunction, are miserly in keeping them, and shudder to think that one thing remains hidden, which the world they move in might put down pityingly in favour of their spouse, even though to the little man 'twere naught. She assumed that a revelation would diminish her moral stature; and certainly it would not increase that of her husband. So no good could come of it. Besides, Andrew knew, his whole conduct was a tacit admission, that she had condescended in giving him her hand. The features of their union might not be changed altogether by a revelation, but it would be a shock to her.

Consequently, Harriet tenderly rebuked Caroline, for her outcry at the breakfast-table; and Caroline, the elder sister, who had not since marriage grown in so free an air, excused herself humbly, and the two were weeping when the Countess joined them and related what she had just undergone.

Hearing of Caroline's misdemeanour, however, Louisa's eyes rolled aloft in a paroxysm of tribulation. It was nothing to Caroline; it was comparatively nothing to Harriet; but the Count knew not Louisa had a father: believed that her parents had long ago been wiped out. And the Count was by nature inquisitive: and if he once cherished a suspicion he was restless; he was pointed in his inquiries: he was pertinacious in following out a clue: there never would be peace with him! And then, as they were secure in their privacy, Louisa cried aloud for her father, her beloved father! Harriet wept silently. Caroline alone expressed regret that she had not set eyes on him from the day she became a wife.

Page 1169

‘How could we, dear?’ the Countess pathetically asked, under drowning lids.

‘Papa did not wish it,’ sobbed Mrs. Andrew.

‘I never shall forgive myself!’ said the wife of the Major, drying her cheeks. Perhaps it was not herself whom she felt she never could forgive.

Ah! the man their father was! Incomparable Melchisedec! he might well be called. So generous! so lordly! When the rain of tears would subside for a moment, one would relate an anecdote or childish reminiscence of him, and provoke a more violent outburst.

‘Never, among the nobles of any land, never have I seen one like him!’ exclaimed the Countess, and immediately requested Harriet to tell her how it would be possible to stop Andrew’s tongue in Silva’s presence.

’At present, you know, my dear, they may talk as much as they like—they can’t understand one another one bit.’

Mrs. Cogglesby comforted her by the assurance that Andrew had received an intimation of her wish for silence everywhere and toward everybody; and that he might be reckoned upon to respect it, without demanding a reason for the restriction. In other days Caroline and Louisa had a little looked down on Harriet’s alliance with a dumpy man—a brewer—and had always kind Christian compassion for him if his name were mentioned. They seemed now, by their silence, to have a happier estimate of Andrew’s qualities.

While the three sisters sat mingling their sorrows and alarms, their young brother was making his way to the house. As he knocked at the door he heard his name pronounced behind him, and had no difficulty in recognizing the worthy brewer.

’What, Van, my boy! how are you? Quite a foreigner! By George, what a hat!’

Mr. Andrew bounced back two or three steps to regard the dusky sombrero.

‘How do you do, sir?’ said Evan.

‘Sir to you!’ Mr. Andrew briskly replied. ’Don’t they teach you to give your fist in Portugal, eh? I’ll “sir” you. Wait till I’m Sir Andrew, and then “sir” away. You do speak English still, Van, eh? Quite jolly, my boy?’

Mr. Andrew rubbed his hands to express that state in himself. Suddenly he stopped, blinked queerly at Evan, grew pensive, and said, ’Bless my soul! I forgot.’

The door opened, Mr. Andrew took Evan's arm, murmured a 'hush!' and trod gently along the passage to his library.

'We're safe here,' he said. 'There—there's something the matter up-stairs. The women are upset about something. Harriet—' Mr. Andrew hesitated, and branched off: 'You 've heard we 've got a new baby?'

Evan congratulated him; but another inquiry was in Mr. Andrew's aspect, and Evan's calm, sad manner answered it.

'Yes,'—Mr. Andrew shook his head dolefully—'a splendid little chap! a rare little chap! a we can't help these things, Van! They will happen. Sit down, my boy.'

Mr. Andrew again interrogated Evan with his eyes.

Page 1170

‘My father is dead,’ said Evan.

‘Yes!’ Mr. Andrew nodded, and glanced quickly at the ceiling, as if to make sure that none listened overhead. ’My parliamentary duties will soon be over for the season,’ he added, aloud; pursuing, in an under-breath:

‘Going down to-night, Van?’

‘He is to be buried to-morrow,’ said Evan.

’Then, of course, you go. Yes: quite right. Love your father and mother! always love your father and mother! Old Tom and I never knew ours. Tom’s quite well-same as ever. I’ll,’ he rang the bell, ’have my chop in here with you. You must try and eat a bit, Van. Here we are, and there we go. Old Tom’s wandering for one of his weeks. You’ll see him some day. He ain’t like me. No dinner to-day, I suppose, Charles?’

This was addressed to the footman. He announced:

‘Dinner to-day at half-past six, as usual, sir,’ bowed, and retired.

Mr. Andrew pored on the floor, and rubbed his hair back on his head. ’An odd world!’ was his remark.

Evan lifted up his face to sigh: ’I ‘m almost sick of it!’

‘Damn appearances!’ cried Mr. Andrew, jumping on his legs.

The action cooled him.

’I ‘m sorry I swore,’ he said. ’Bad habit! The Major’s here—you know that?’ and he assumed the Major’s voice, and strutted in imitation of the stalwart marine. ’Major—a—Strike! of the Royal Marines! returned from China! covered with glory!—a hero, Van! We can’t expect him to be much of a mourner. And we shan’t have him to dine with us to-day—that’s something.’ He sank his voice: ’I hope the widow ‘ll bear it.’

‘I hope to God my mother is well!’ Evan groaned.

‘That’ll do,’ said Mr. Andrew. ‘Don’t say any more.’

As he spoke, he clapped Evan kindly on the back.

A message was brought from the ladies, requiring Evan to wait on them. He returned after some minutes.

‘How do you think Harriet’s looking?’ asked Mr. Andrew. And, not waiting for an answer, whispered,

‘Are they going down to the funeral, my boy?’

Evan’s brow was dark, as he replied: ‘They are not decided.’

‘Won’t Harriet go?’

‘She is not going—she thinks not.’

‘And the Countess—Louisa’s upstairs, eh?—will she go?’

‘She cannot leave the Count—she thinks not.’

‘Won’t Caroline go? Caroline can go. She—he—I mean—Caroline can go?’

‘The Major objects. She wishes to.’

Mr. Andrew struck out his arm, and uttered, ’the Major!’—a compromise for a loud anathema. But the compromise was vain, for he sinned again in an explosion against appearances.

’I’m a brewer, Van. Do you think I’m ashamed of it? Not while I brew good beer, my boy!—not while I brew good beer! They don’t think worse of me in the House for it. It isn’t ungentlemanly to brew good beer, Van. But what’s the use of talking?’

Page 1171

Mr. Andrew sat down, and murmured, ‘Poor girl! poor girl!’

The allusion was to his wife; for presently he said: ’I can’t see why Harriet can’t go. What’s to prevent her?’

Evan gazed at him steadily. Death’s levelling influence was in Evan’s mind. He was ready to say why, and fully.

Mr. Andrew arrested him with a sharp ’Never mind! Harriet does as she likes. I’m accustomed to—hem! what she does is best, after all. She doesn’t interfere with my business, nor I with hers. Man and wife.’

Pausing a moment or so, Mr. Andrew intimated that they had better be dressing for dinner. With his hand on the door, which he kept closed, he said, in a businesslike way, ’You know, Van, as for me, I should be very willing—only too happy—to go down and pay all the respect I could.’ He became confused, and shot his head from side to side, looking anywhere but at Evan. ’Happy now and to-morrow, to do anything in my power, if Harriet—follow the funeral—one of the family—anything I could do: but—a—we ‘d better be dressing for dinner.’ And out the enigmatic little man went.

Evan partly divined him then. But at dinner his behaviour was perplexing. He was too cheerful. He pledged the Count. He would have the Portuguese for this and that, and make Anglican efforts to repeat it, and laugh at his failures. He would not see that there was a father dead. At a table of actors, Mr. Andrew overdid his part, and was the worst. His wife could not help thinking him a heartless little man.

The poor show had its term. The ladies fled to the boudoir sacred to grief. Evan was whispered that he was to join them when he might, without seeming mysterious to the Count. Before he reached them, they had talked tearfully over the clothes he should wear at Lymport, agreeing that his present foreign apparel, being black, would be suitable, and would serve almost as disguise, to the inhabitants at large; and as Evan had no English wear, and there was no time to procure any for him, that was well. They arranged exactly how long he should stay at Lymport, whom he should visit, the manner he should adopt toward the different inhabitants. By all means he was to avoid the approach of the gentry. For hours Evan, in a trance, half stupefied, had to listen to the Countess’s directions how he was to comport himself in Lymport.

’Show that you have descended among them, dear Van, but are not of them. Our beautiful noble English poet expresses it so. You have come to pay the last mortal duties, which they will respect, if they are not brutes, and attempt no familiarities. Allow none: gently, but firmly. Imitate Silva. You remember, at Dona Risbonda’s ball? When he met the Comte de Dartigues, and knew he was to be in disgrace with his Court on the morrow? Oh! the exquisite shade of difference in Silva’s behaviour towards the Comte. So finely, delicately perceptible to the Comte, and

Page 1172

not a soul saw it but that wretched Frenchman! He came to me: "Madame," he said, "is a question permitted?" I replied, "As-many as you please, M. le Comte, but no answers promised." He said: "May I ask if the Courier has yet come in?"—"Nay, M. le Comte," I replied, "this is diplomacy. Inquire of me, or better, give me an opinion on the new glace silk from Paris."—"Madame," said he, bowing, "I hope Paris may send me aught so good, or that I shall grace half so well." I smiled, "You shall not be single in your hopes, M. le Comte. The gift would be base that you did not embellish." He lifted his hands, French-fashion: "Madame, it is that I have received the gift."—"Indeed! M. le Comte."—"Even now from the Count de Saldar, your husband." I looked most innocently, "From my husband, M. le Comte?"—"From him, Madame. A portrait. An Ambassador without his coat! The portrait was a finished performance." I said: "And may one beg the permission to inspect it?"—"Mais," said he, laughing: "were it you alone, it would be a privilege to me." I had to check him. "Believe me, M. le Comte, that when I look upon it, my praise of the artist will be extinguished by my pity for the subject." He should have stopped there; but you cannot have the last word with a Frenchman—not even a woman. Fortunately the Queen just then made her entry into the saloon, and his mot on the charity of our sex was lost. We bowed mutually, and were separated.' (The Countess employed her handkerchief.) 'Yes, dear Van! that is how you should behave. Imply things. With dearest Mama, of course, you are the dutiful son. Alas! you must stand for son and daughters. Mama has so much sense! She will understand how sadly we are placed. But in a week I will come to her for a day, and bring you back.'

So much his sister Louisa. His sister Harriet offered him her house for a home in London, thence to project his new career. His sister Caroline sought a word with him in private, but only to weep bitterly in his arms, and utter a faint moan of regret at marriages in general. He loved this beautiful creature the best of his three sisters (partly, it may be, because he despised her superior officer), and tried with a few smothered words to induce her to accompany him: but she only shook her fair locks and moaned afresh. Mr. Andrew, in the farewell squeeze of the hand at the street-door, asked him if he wanted anything. He negatived the requirement of anything whatever, with an air of careless decision, though he was aware that his purse barely contained more than would take him the distance, but the instincts of this amateur gentleman were very fine and sensitive on questions of money. His family had never known him beg for a shilling, or admit his necessity for a penny: nor could he be made to accept money unless it was thrust into his pocket. Somehow his sisters had forgotten this peculiarity of his. Harriet only remembered it when too late.

'But I dare say Andrew has supplied him,' she said.

Page 1173

Andrew being interrogated, informed her what had passed between them.

‘And you think a Harrington would confess he wanted money!’ was her scornful exclamation. ’Evan would walk—he would die rather. It was treating him like a mendicant.’

Andrew had to shrink in his brewer’s skin.

By some fatality all who were doomed to sit and listen to the Countess de Saldar, were sure to be behindhand in an appointment.

When the young man arrived at the coach-office, he was politely informed that the vehicle, in which a seat had been secured for him, was in close alliance with time and tide, and being under the same rigid laws, could not possibly have waited for him, albeit it had stretched a point to the extent of a pair of minutes, at the urgent solicitation of a passenger.

‘A gentleman who speaks so, sir,’ said a volunteer mimic of the office, crowing and questioning from his throat in Goren’s manner. ’Yok! yok! That was how he spoke, sir.’

Evan reddened, for it brought the scene on board the Jocasta vividly to his mind. The heavier business obliterated it. He took counsel with the clerks of the office, and eventually the volunteer mimic conducted him to certain livery stables, where Evan, like one accustomed to command, ordered a chariot to pursue the coach, received a touch of the hat for a lordly fee, and was soon rolling out of London.

CHAPTER VI

MY GENTLEMAN ON THE ROAD

The postillion had every reason to believe that he carried a real gentleman behind him; in other words, a purse long and liberal. He judged by all the points he knew of: a firm voice, a brief commanding style, an apparent indifference to expense, and the inexplicable minor characteristics, such as polished boots, and a striking wristband, and so forth, which will show a creature accustomed to step over the heads of men. He had, therefore, no particular anxiety to part company, and jogged easily on the white highway, beneath a moon that walked high and small over marble clouds.

Evan reclined in the chariot, revolving his sensations. In another mood he would have called, them thoughts, perhaps, and marvelled at their immensity. The theme was Love and Death. One might have supposed, from his occasional mutterings at the pace regulated by the postillion, that he was burning with anxiety to catch the flying coach. He had forgotten it: forgotten that he was giving chase to anything. A pair of wondering feminine eyes pursued him, and made him fret for the miles to throw a thicker veil

between him and them. The serious level brows of Rose haunted the poor youth; and reflecting whither he was tending, and to what sight, he had shadowy touches of the holiness there is in death, from which came a conflict between the imaged phantoms of his father and of Rose, and he sided against his love with some bitterness. His sisters, weeping for

Page 1174

their father and holding aloof from his ashes, Evan swept from his mind. He called up the man his father was: the kindliness, the readiness, the gallant gaiety of the great Mel. Youths are fascinated by the barbarian virtues; and to Evan, under present influences, his father was a pattern of manhood. He asked himself: Was it infamous to earn one's bread? and answered it very strongly in his father's favour. The great Mel's creditors were not by to show him another feature of the case.

Hitherto, in passive obedience to the indoctrination of the Countess, Evan had looked on tailors as the proscribed race of modern society. He had pitied his father as a man superior to his fate; but despite the fitfully honest promptings with Rose (tempting to him because of the wondrous chivalry they argued, and at bottom false probably as the hypocrisy they affected to combat), he had been by no means sorry that the world saw not the spot on himself. Other sensations beset him now. Since such a man was banned by the world, which was to be despised?

The clear result of Evan's solitary musing was to cast a sort of halo over Tailordom. Death stood over the pale dead man, his father, and dared the world to sneer at him. By a singular caprice of fancy, Evan had no sooner grasped this image, than it was suggested that he might as well inspect his purse, and see how much money he was master of.

Are you impatient with this young man? He has little character for the moment. Most youths are like Pope's women; they have no character at all. And indeed a character that does not wait for circumstances to shape it, is of small worth in the race that must be run. To be set too early, is to take the work out of the hands of the Sculptor who fashions men. Happily a youth is always at school, and if he was shut up and without mark two or three hours ago, he will have something to show you now: as I have seen blooming seaflowers and other graduated organisms, when left undisturbed to their own action. Where the Fates have designed that he shall present his figure in a story, this is sure to happen.

To the postillion Evan was indebted for one of his first lessons.

About an hour after midnight pastoral stillness and the moon begat in the postillion desire for a pipe. Daylight prohibits the dream of it to mounted postillions. At night the question is more human, and allows appeal. The moon smiles assentingly, and smokers know that she really lends herself to the enjoyment of tobacco.

The postillion could remember gentlemen who did not object: who had even given him cigars. Turning round to see if haply the present inmate of the chariot might be smoking, he observed a head extended from the window.

'How far are we?' was inquired.

The postillion numbered the milestones passed.

‘Do you see anything of the coach?’

‘Can’t say as I do, sir.’

He was commanded to stop. Evan jumped out.

Page 1175

‘I don’t think I’ll take you any farther,’ he said.

The postillion laughed to scorn the notion of his caring how far he went. With a pipe in his mouth, he insinuatingly remarked, he could jog on all night, and throw sleep to the dogs. Fresh horses at Hillford; fresh at Fallow field: and the gentleman himself would reach Lymport fresh in the morning.

‘No, no; I won’t take you any farther,’ Evan repeated.

‘But what do it matter, sir?’ urged the postillion.

’I’d rather go on as I am. I—a—made no arrangement to take you the whole way.’

‘Oh!’ cried the postillion, ‘don’t you go troublin’ yourself about that, sir. Master knows it ‘s touch-and-go about catchin’ the coach. I’m all right.’

So infatuated was the fellow in the belief that he was dealing with a perfect gentleman —an easy pocket!

Now you would not suppose that one who presumes he has sufficient, would find a difficulty in asking how much he has to pay. With an effort, indifferently masked, Evan blurted:

’By the way, tell me—how much—what is the charge for the distance we’ve come?’

There are gentlemen-screws: there are conscientious gentlemen. They calculate, and remonstrating or not, they pay. The postillion would rather have had to do with the gentleman royal, who is above base computation; but he knew the humanity in the class he served, and with his conception of Evan only partially dimmed, he remarked:

’Oh-h-h! that won’t hurt you, sir. Jump along in,—settle that by-and-by.’

But when my gentleman stood fast, and renewed the demand to know the exact charge for the distance already traversed, the postillion dismounted, glanced him over, and speculated with his fingers tipping up his hat. Meantime Evan drew out his purse, a long one, certainly, but limp. Out of this drowned-looking wretch the last spark of life was taken by the sum the postillion ventured to name; and if paying your utmost farthing without examination of the charge, and cheerfully stepping out to walk fifty miles, penniless, constituted a postillion’s gentleman, Evan would have passed the test. The sight of poverty, however, provokes familiar feelings in poor men, if you have not had occasion to show them you possess particular qualities. The postillion’s eye was more on the purse than on the sum it surrendered.

‘There,’ said Evan, ‘I shall walk. Good night.’ And he flung his cloak to step forward.

‘Stop a bit, sir!’ arrested him.

The postillion rallied up sideways, with an assumption of genial respect. ‘I didn’t calc’late myself in that there amount.’

Were these words, think you, of a character to strike a young man hard on the breast, send the blood to his head, and set up in his heart a derisive chorus? My gentleman could pay his money, and keep his footing gallantly; but to be asked for a penny beyond what he possessed; to be seen beggared, and to be claimed a debtor-aleck! Pride was the one developed faculty of Evan’s nature. The Fates who mould us, always work from the main-spring. I will not say that the postillion stripped off the mask for him, at that instant completely; but he gave him the first true glimpse of his condition. From the vague sense of being an impostor, Evan awoke to the clear fact that he was likewise a fool.

Page 1176

It was impossible for him to deny the man's claim, and he would not have done it, if he could. Acceding tacitly, he squeezed the ends of his purse in his pocket, and with a 'Let me see,' tried his waistcoat. Not too impetuously; for he was careful of betraying the horrid emptiness till he was certain that the powers who wait on gentlemen had utterly forsaken him. They had not. He discovered a small coin, under ordinary circumstances not contemptible; but he did not stay to reflect, and was guilty of the error of offering it to the postillion.

The latter peered at it in the centre of his palm; gazed queerly in the gentleman's face, and then lifting the spit of silver for the disdain of his mistress, the moon, he drew a long breath of regret at the original mistake he had committed, and said:

'That's what you're goin' to give me for my night's work?'

The powers who wait on gentlemen had only helped the pretending youth to try him. A rejection of the demand would have been infinitely wiser and better than this paltry compromise. The postillion would have fought it: he would not have despised his fare.

How much it cost the poor pretender to reply, 'It 's the last farthing I have, my man,' the postillion could not know.

'A scabby sixpence?' The postillion continued his question.

'You heard what I said,' Evan remarked.

The postillion drew another deep breath, and holding out the coin at arm's length:

'Well, sir!' he observed, as one whom mental conflict has brought to the philosophy of the case, 'now, was we to change places, I couldn't a' done it! I couldn't a' done it!' he reiterated, pausing emphatically.

'Take it, sir!' he magnanimously resumed; 'take it! You rides when you can, and you walks when you must. Lord forbid I should rob such a gentleman as you!'

One who feels a death, is for the hour lifted above the satire of postillions. A good genius prompted Evan to avoid the silly squabble that might have ensued and made him ridiculous. He took the money, quietly saying, 'Thank you.'

Not to lose his vantage, the postillion, though a little staggered by the move, rejoined: 'Don't mention it.'

Evan then said: 'Good night, my man. I won't wish, for your sake, that we changed places. You would have to walk fifty miles to be in time for your father's funeral. Good night.'

‘You are it to look at!’ was the postillion’s comment, seeing my gentleman depart with great strides. He did not speak offensively; rather, it seemed, to appease his conscience for the original mistake he had committed, for subsequently came, ’My oath on it, I don’t get took in again by a squash hat in a hurry!’

Page 1177

Unaware of the ban he had, by a sixpenny stamp, put upon an unoffending class, Evan went ahead, hearing the wheels of the chariot still dragging the road in his rear. The postillion was in a dissatisfied state of mind. He had asked and received more than his due. But in the matter of his sweet self, he had been choused, as he termed it. And my gentleman had baffled him, he could not quite tell how; but he had been got the better of; his sarcasms had not stuck, and returned to rankle in the bosom of their author. As a Jew, therefore, may eye an erewhile bondsman who has paid the bill, but stands out against excess of interest on legal grounds, the postillion regarded Evan, of whom he was now abreast, eager for a controversy.

‘Fine night,’ said the postillion, to begin, and was answered by a short assent. ‘Lateish for a poor man to be out—don’t you think sir, eh?’

‘I ought to think so,’ said Evan, mastering the shrewd unpleasantness he felt in the colloquy forced on him.

‘Oh, you! you’re a gentleman!’ the postillion ejaculated.

‘You see I have no money.’

‘Feel it, too, sir.’

‘I am sorry you should be the victim.’

‘Victim!’ the postillion seized on an objectionable word. ’I ain’t no victim, unless you was up to a joke with me, sir, just now. Was that the game?’

Evan informed him that he never played jokes with money, or on men.

‘Cause it looks like it, sir, to go to offer a poor chap sixpence.’ The postillion laughed hollow from the end of his lungs. ’Sixpence for a night’s work! It is a joke, if you don’t mean it for one. Why, do you know, sir, I could go—there, I don’t care where it is!—I could go before any magistrate livin’, and he’d make ye pay. It’s a charge, as custom is, and he’d make ye pay. Or p’rhaps you’re a goin’ on my generosity, and ‘ll say, he gev back that sixpence! Well! I shouldn’t a’ thought a gentleman’d make that his defence before a magistrate. But there, my man! if it makes ye happy, keep it. But you take my advice, sir. When you hires a chariot, see you’ve got the shiners. And don’t you go never again offerin’ a sixpence to a poor man for a night’s work. They don’t like it. It hurts their feelin’s. Don’t you forget that, sir. Lay that up in your mind.’

Now the postillion having thus relieved himself, jeeringly asked permission to smoke a pipe. To which Evan said, ’Pray, smoke, if it pleases you.’ And the postillion, hardly mollified, added, ’The baccy’s paid for,’ and smoked.

As will sometimes happen, the feelings of the man who had spoken out and behaved doubtfully, grew gentle and Christian, whereas those of the man whose bearing under the trial had been irreproachable were much the reverse. The postillion smoked—he was a lord on his horse; he beheld my gentleman trudging in the dust. Awhile he enjoyed the contrast, dividing his attention between the footfarer and moon.

Page 1178

To have had the last word is always a great thing; and to have given my gentleman a lecture, because he shunned a dispute, also counts. And then there was the poor young fellow trudging to his father's funeral! The postillion chose to remember that now. In reality, he allowed, he had not very much to complain of, and my gentleman's courteous avoidance of provocation (the apparent fact that he, the postillion, had humbled him and got the better of him, equally, it may be), acted on his fine English spirit. I should not like to leave out the tobacco in this good change that was wrought in him. However, he presently astonished Evan by pulling up his horses, and crying that he was on his way to Hillford to bait, and saw no reason why he should not take a lift that part of the road, at all events. Evan thanked him briefly, but declined, and paced on with his head bent.

'It won't cost you nothing-not a sixpence!' the postillion sang out, pursuing him. 'Come, sir! be a man! I ain't a hintin' at anything—jump in.'

Evan again declined, and looked out for a side path to escape the fellow, whose bounty was worse to him than his abuse, and whose mention of the sixpence was unlucky.

'Dash it!' cried the postillion, 'you're going down to a funeral—I think you said your father's, sir—you may as well try and get there respectable—as far as I go. It's one to me whether you're in or out; the horses won't feel it, and I do wish you'd take a lift and welcome. It's because you're too much of a gentleman to be beholden to a poor man, I suppose!'

Evan's young pride may have had a little of that base mixture in it, and certainly he would have preferred that the invitation had not been made to him; but he was capable of appreciating what the rejection of a piece of friendliness involved, and as he saw that the man was sincere, he did violence to himself, and said: 'Very well; then I'll jump in.'

The postillion was off his horse in a twinkling, and trotted his bandy legs to undo the door, as to a gentleman who paid. This act of service Evan valued.

'Suppose I were to ask you to take the sixpence now?' he said, turning round, with one foot on the step.

'Well, sir,' the postillion sent his hat aside to answer. 'I don't want it—I'd rather not have it; but there! I'll take it—dash the sixpence! and we'll cry quits.'

Evan, surprised and pleased with him, dropped the bit of money in his hand, saying: 'It will fill a pipe for you. While you 're smoking it, think of me as in your debt. You're the only man I ever owed a penny to.'

The postillion put it in a side pocket apart, and observed: 'A sixpence kindly meant is worth any crown-piece that's grudged—that it is! In you jump, sir. It's a jolly night!'

Page 1179

Thus may one, not a conscious sage, play the right tune on this human nature of ours: by forbearance, put it in the wrong; and then, by not refusing the burden of an obligation, confer something better. The instrument is simpler than we are taught to fancy. But it was doubtless owing to a strong emotion in his soul, as well as to the stuff he was made of, that the youth behaved as he did. We are now and then above our own actions; seldom on a level with them. Evan, I dare say, was long in learning to draw any gratification from the fact that he had achieved without money the unparalleled conquest of a man. Perhaps he never knew what immediate influence on his fortune this episode effected.

At Hillford they went their different ways. The postillion wished him good speed, and Evan shook his hand. He did so rather abruptly, for the postillion was fumbling at his pocket, and evidently rounding about a proposal in his mind.

My gentleman has now the road to himself. Money is the clothing of a gentleman: he may wear it well or ill. Some, you will mark, carry great quantities of it gracefully: some, with a stinted supply, present a decent appearance: very few, I imagine, will bear inspection, who are absolutely stripped of it. All, save the shameless, are toiling to escape that trial. My gentleman, treading the white highway across the solitary heaths, that swell far and wide to the moon, is, by the postillion, who has seen him, pronounced no sham. Nor do I think the opinion of any man worthless, who has had the postillion's authority for speaking. But it is, I am told, a finer test to embellish much gentleman-apparel, than to walk with dignity totally unadorned. This simply tries the soundness of our faculties: that tempts them in erratic directions. It is the difference between active and passive excellence. As there is hardly any situation, however, so interesting to reflect upon as that of a man without a penny in his pocket, and a gizzard full of pride, we will leave Mr. Evan Harrington to what fresh adventures may befall him, walking toward the funeral plumes of the firs, under the soft midsummer flush, westward, where his father lies.

CHAPTER VII

MOTHER AND SON

Rare as epic song is the man who is thorough in what he does. And happily so; for in life he subjugates us, and he makes us bondsmen to his ashes. It was in the order of things that the great Mel should be borne to his final resting-place by a troop of creditors. You have seen (since the occasion demands a pompous simile) clouds that all day cling about the sun, and, in seeking to obscure him, are compelled to blaze in his livery at fall of night they break from him illumined, hang mournfully above him, and wear his natural glories long after he is gone. Thus, then, these worthy fellows, faithful to him to the dust, fulfilled Mel's triumphant passage amongst them, and closed his career.

Page 1180

To regale them when they returned, Mrs. Mel, whose mind was not intent on greatness, was occupied in spreading meat and wine. Mrs. Fiske assisted her, as well as she could, seeing that one hand was entirely engaged by her handkerchief. She had already stumbled, and dropped a glass, which had brought on her sharp condemnation from her aunt, who bade her sit down, or go upstairs to have her cry out, and then return to be serviceable.

'Oh! I can't help it!' sobbed Mrs. Fiske. 'That he should be carried away, and none of his children to see him the last time! I can understand Louisa—and Harriet, too, perhaps? But why could not Caroline? And that they should be too fine ladies to let their brother come and bury his father. Oh! it does seem——'

Mrs. Fiske fell into a chair, and surrendered to grief.

'Where is the cold tongue?' said Mrs. Mel to Sally, the maid, in a brief under-voice.

'Please mum, Jacko——!'

'He must be whipped. You are a careless slut.'

'Please, I can't think of everybody and everything, and poor master——'

Sally plumped on a seat, and took sanctuary under her apron. Mrs. Mel glanced at the pair, continuing her labour.

'Oh, aunt, aunt!' cried Mrs. Fiske, 'why didn't you put it off for another day, to give Evan a chance?'

'Master 'd have kept another two days, he would!' whimpered Sally.

'Oh, aunt! to think!' cried Mrs. Fiske.

'And his coffin not bearin' of his spurs!' whimpered Sally.

Mrs. Mel interrupted them by commanding Sally to go to the drawing-room, and ask a lady there, of the name of Mrs. Wishaw, whether she would like to have some lunch sent up to her. Mrs. Fiske was requested to put towels in Evan's bedroom.

'Yes, aunt, if you're not infatuated!' said Mrs. Fiske, as she prepared to obey; while Sally, seeing that her public exhibition of sorrow and sympathy could be indulged but an instant longer, unwound herself for a violent paroxysm, blurting between stops:

'If he'd ony've gone to his last bed comfortable! . . . If he'd ony 've been that decent as not for to go to his last bed with his clothes on! . . . If he'd ony've had a comfortable

sheet! . . . It makes a woman feel cold to think of him full dressed there, as if he was goin' to be a soldier on the Day o' Judgement!'

To let people speak was a maxim of Mrs. Mel's, and a wise one for any form of society when emotions are very much on the surface. She continued her arrangements quietly, and, having counted the number of plates and glasses, and told off the guests on her fingers, she, sat down to await them.

The first one who entered the room was her son.

'You have come,' said Mrs. Mel, flushing slightly, but otherwise outwardly calm.

'You didn't suppose I should stay away from you, mother?'

Evan kissed her cheek.

'I knew you would not.'

Page 1181

Mrs. Mel examined him with those eyes of hers that compassed objects in a single glance. She drew her finger on each side of her upper lip, and half smiled, saying:

‘That won’t do here.’

‘What?’ asked Evan, and proceeded immediately to make inquiries about her health, which she satisfied with a nod.

‘You saw him lowered, Van?’

‘Yes, mother.’

’Then go and wash yourself, for you are dirty, and then come and take your place at the head of the table.’

‘Must I sit here, mother?’

‘Without a doubt—you must. You know your room. Quick!’

In this manner their first interview passed.

Mrs. Fiske rushed in to exclaim:

’So, you were right, aunt—he has come. I met him on the stairs. Oh! how like dear uncle Mel he looks, in the militia, with that moustache. I just remember him as a child; and, oh, what a gentleman he is!’

At the end of the sentence Mrs. Mel’s face suddenly darkened: she said, in a deep voice:

‘Don’t dare to talk that nonsense before him, Ann.’

Mrs. Fiske looked astonished.

‘What have I done, aunt?’

‘He shan’t be ruined by a parcel of fools,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’There, go! Women have no place here.’

’How the wretches can force themselves to touch a morsel, after this morning!’ Mrs. Fiske exclaimed, glancing at the table.

‘Men must eat,’ said Mrs. Mel.

The mourners were heard gathering outside the door. Mrs. Fiske escaped into the kitchen. Mrs. Mel admitted them into the parlour, bowing much above the level of many of the heads that passed her.

Assembled were Messrs. Barnes, Kilne, and Grossby, whom we know; Mr. Doubleday, the ironmonger; Mr. Joyce, the grocer; Mr. Perkins, commonly called Lawyer Perkins; Mr. Welbeck, the pier-master of Lymport; Bartholomew Fiske; Mr. Coxwell, a Fallow field maltster, brewer, and farmer; creditors of various dimensions, all of them. Mr. Goren coming last, behind his spectacles.

‘My son will be with you directly, to preside,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’Accept my thanks for the respect you have shown my husband. I wish you good morning.’

‘Morning, ma’am,’ answered several voices, and Mrs. Mel retired.

The mourners then set to work to relieve their hats of the appendages of crape. An undertaker’s man took possession of the long black cloaks. The gloves were generally pocketed.

‘That’s my second black pair this year,’ said Joyce.

’They’ll last a time to come. I don’t need to buy gloves while neighbours pop off.’

‘Undertakers’ gloves seem to me as if they’re made for mutton fists,’ remarked Welbeck; upon which Kilne nudged Barnes, the butcher, with a sharp ‘Aha!’ and Barnes observed:

’Oh! I never wear ’em—they does for my boys on Sundays. I smoke a pipe at home.’

The Fallow field farmer held his length of crape aloft and inquired: ‘What shall do with this?’

Page 1182

‘Oh, you keep it,’ said one or two.

Coxwell rubbed his chin. ‘Don’t like to rob the widder.’

‘What’s left goes to the undertaker?’ asked Grossby.

‘To be sure,’ said Barnes; and Kilne added: ‘It’s a job’: Lawyer Perkins ejaculating confidently, ’Perquisites of office, gentlemen; perquisites of office!’ which settled the dispute and appeased every conscience.

A survey of the table ensued. The mourners felt hunger, or else thirst; but had not, it appeared, amalgamated the two appetites as yet. Thirst was the predominant declaration; and Grossby, after an examination of the decanters, unctuously deduced the fact, which he announced, that port and sherry were present.

‘Try the port,’ said Kilne.

‘Good?’ Barnes inquired.

A very intelligent ‘I ought to know,’ with a reserve of regret at the extension of his intimacy with the particular vintage under that roof, was winked by Kilne.

Lawyer Perkins touched the arm of a mourner about to be experimental on Kilne’s port —

’I think we had better wait till young Mr. Harrington takes the table, don’t you see?’

‘Yes,-ah!’ croaked Goren. ‘The head of the family, as the saying goes!’

‘I suppose we shan’t go into business to-day?’ Joyce carelessly observed.

Lawyer Perkins answered:

’No. You can’t expect it. Mr. Harrington has led me to anticipate that he will appoint a day. Don’t you see?’

‘Oh! I see,’ returned Joyce. ‘I ain’t in such a hurry. What’s he doing?’

Doubleday, whose propensities were waggish, suggested ‘shaving,’ but half ashamed of it, since the joke missed, fell to as if he were soaping his face, and had some trouble to contract his jaw.

The delay in Evan’s attendance on the guests of the house was caused by the fact that Mrs. Mel had lain in wait for him descending, to warn him that he must treat them with no supercilious civility, and to tell him partly the reason why. On hearing the potential

relations in which they stood toward the estate of his father, Evan hastily and with the assurance of a son of fortune, said they should be paid.

‘That’s what they would like to hear,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’You may just mention it when they’re going to leave. Say you will fix a day to meet them.’

‘Every farthing!’ pursued Evan, on whom the tidings were beginning to operate. ‘What! debts? my poor father!’

‘And a thumping sum, Van. You will open your eyes wider.’

’But it shall be paid, mother,—it shall be paid. Debts? I hate them. I’d slave night and day to pay them.’

Mrs. Mel spoke in a more positive tense: ‘And so will I, Van. Now, go.’

Page 1183

It mattered little to her what sort of effect on his demeanour her revelation produced, so long as the resolve she sought to bring him to was nailed in his mind; and she was a woman to knock and knock again, till it was firmly fixed there. With a strong purpose, and no plans, there were few who could resist what, in her circle, she willed; not even a youth who would gaily have marched to the scaffold rather than stand behind a counter. A purpose wedded to plans may easily suffer shipwreck; but an unfettered purpose that moulds circumstances as they arise, masters us, and is terrible. Character melts to it, like metal in the steady furnace. The projector of plots is but a miserable gambler and votary of chances. Of a far higher quality is the will that can subdue itself to wait, and lay no petty traps for opportunity. Poets may fable of such a will, that it makes the very heavens conform to it; or, I may add, what is almost equal thereto, one who would be a gentleman, to consent to be a tailor. The only person who ever held in his course against Mrs. Mel, was Mel,—her husband; but, with him, she was under the physical fascination of her youth, and it never left her. In her heart she barely blamed him. What he did, she took among other inevitable matters.

The door closed upon Evan, and waiting at the foot, of the stairs a minute to hear how he was received, Mrs. Mel went to the kitchen and called the name of Dandy, which brought out an ill-built, low-browed, small man, in a baggy suit of black, who hopped up to her with a surly salute. Dandy was a bird Mrs. Mel had herself brought down, and she had for him something of a sportsman's regard for his victim. Dandy was the cleaner of boots and runner of errands in the household of Melchisedec, having originally entered it on a dark night by the cellar. Mrs. Mel, on that occasion, was sleeping in her dressing-gown, to be ready to give the gallant night-hawk, her husband, the service he might require on his return to the nest. Hearing a suspicious noise below, she rose, and deliberately loaded a pair of horse-pistols, weapons Mel had worn in his holsters in the heroic days gone; and with these she stepped downstairs straight to the cellar, carrying a lantern at her girdle. She could not only load, but present and fire. Dandy was foremost in stating that she called him forth steadily, three times, before the pistol was discharged. He admitted that he was frightened, and incapable of speech, at the apparition of the tall, terrific woman. After the third time of asking he had the ball lodged in his leg and fell. Mrs. Mel was in the habit of bearing heavier weights than Dandy. She made no ado about lugging him to a chamber, where, with her own hands (for this woman had some slight knowledge of surgery, and was great in herbs and drugs) she dressed his wound, and put him to bed; crying contempt (ever present in Dandy's memory) at such a poor creature undertaking the work of housebreaker. Taught that he really was a poor creature for the work, Dandy, his nursing over, begged to be allowed to stop and wait on Mrs. Mel; and she who had, like many strong natures, a share of pity for the objects she despised, did not cast him out. A jerk in his gait, owing to the bit of lead Mrs. Mel had dropped into him, and a little, perhaps, to her self-satisfied essay in surgical science on his person, earned him the name he went by.

Page 1184

When her neighbours remonstrated with her for housing a reprobate, Mrs. Mel would say: 'Dandy is well-fed and well-physicked: there's no harm in Dandy'; by which she may have meant that the food won his gratitude, and the physic reduced his humours. She had observed human nature. At any rate, Dandy was her creature; and the great Mel himself rallied her about her squire.

'When were you drunk last?' was Mrs. Mel's address to Dandy, as he stood waiting for orders.

He replied to it in an altogether injured way:

'There, now; you've been and called me away from my dinner to ask me that. Why, when I had the last chance, to be sure.'

'And you were at dinner in your new black suit?'

'Well,' growled Dandy, 'I borrowed Sally's apron. Seems I can't please ye.'

Mrs. Mel neither enjoined nor cared for outward forms of respect, where she was sure of complete subserviency. If Dandy went beyond the limits, she gave him an extra dose. Up to the limits he might talk as he pleased, in accordance with Mrs. Mel's maxim, that it was a necessary relief to all talking creatures.

'Now, take off your apron,' she said, 'and wash your hands, dirty pig, and go and wait at table in there'; she pointed to the parlour-door: 'Come straight to me when everybody has left.'

'Well, there I am with the bottles again,' returned Dandy. 'It 's your fault this time, mind! I'll come as straight as I can.'

Dandy turned away to perform her bidding, and Mrs. Mel ascended to the drawing-room to sit with Mrs. Wishaw, who was, as she told all who chose to hear, an old flame of Mel's, and was besides, what Mrs. Mel thought more of, the wife of Mel's principal creditor, a wholesale dealer in cloth, resident in London.

The conviviality of the mourners did not disturb the house. Still, men who are not accustomed to see the colour of wine every day, will sit and enjoy it, even upon solemn occasions, and the longer they sit the more they forget the matter that has brought them together. Pleading their wives and shops, however, they released Evan from his miserable office late in the afternoon.

His mother came down to him,—and saying, 'I see how you did the journey—you walked it,' told him to follow her.

‘Yes, mother,’ Evan yawned, ’I walked part of the way. I met a fellow in a gig about ten miles out of Fallow field, and he gave me a lift to Flatsham. I just reached Lymport in time, thank Heaven! I wouldn’t have missed that! By the way, I’ve satisfied these men.’

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Mel.

’They wanted—one or two of them—what a penance it is to have to sit among those people an hour!—they wanted to ask me about the business, but I silenced them. I told them to meet me here this day week.’

Mrs. Mel again said ‘Oh!’ and, pushing into one of the upper rooms, ‘Here’s your bedroom, Van, just as you left it.’

Page 1185

‘Ah, so it is,’ muttered Evan, eyeing a print. ’The Douglas and the Percy: “he took the dead man by the hand.” What an age it seems since I last saw that. There’s Sir Hugh Montgomery on horseback—he hasn’t moved. Don’t you remember my father calling it the Battle of Tit-for-Tat? Gallant Percy! I know he wished he had lived in those days of knights and battles.’

‘It does not much signify whom one has to make clothes for,’ observed Mrs. Mel. Her son happily did not mark her.

‘I think we neither of us were made for the days of pence and pounds,’ he continued. ’Now, mother, sit down, and talk to me about him. Did he mention me? Did he give me his blessing? I hope he did not suffer. I’d have given anything to press his hand,’ and looking wistfully at the Percy lifting the hand of Douglas dead, Evan’s eyes filled with big tears.

‘He suffered very little,’ returned Mrs. Mel, ’and his last words were about you.’

‘What were they?’ Evan burst out.

’I will tell you another time. Now undress, and go to bed. When I talk to you, Van, I want a cool head to listen. You do nothing but yawn yard-measures.’

The mouth of the weary youth instinctively snapped short the abhorred emblem.

‘Here, I will help you, Van.’

In spite of his remonstrances and petitions for talk, she took off his coat and waistcoat, contemptuously criticizing the cloth of foreign tailors and their absurd cut.

‘Have you heard from Louisa?’ asked Evan.

‘Yes, yes—about your sisters by-and-by. Now, be good, and go to bed.’

She still treated him like a boy, whom she was going to force to the resolution of a man.

Dandy’s sleeping-room was on the same floor as Evan’s. Thither, when she had quitted her son, she directed her steps. She had heard Dandy tumble up-stairs the moment his duties were over, and knew what to expect when the bottles had been in his way; for drink made Dandy savage, and a terror to himself. It was her command to him that, when he happened to come across liquor, he should immediately seek his bedroom and bolt the door, and Dandy had got the habit of obeying her. On this occasion he was vindictive against her, seeing that she had delivered him over to his enemy with malice prepense. A good deal of knocking, and summoning of Dandy by name, was required before she was admitted, and the sight of her did not delight him, as he testified.

’I ‘m drunk!’ he bawled. ‘Will that do for ye?’

Mrs. Mel stood with her two hands crossed above her apron-string, noting his sullen lurking eye with the calm of a tamer of beasts.

‘You go out of the room; I’m drunk!’ Dandy repeated, and pitched forward on the bed-post, in the middle of an oath.

She understood that it was pure kindness on Dandy’s part to bid her go and be out of his reach; and therefore, on his becoming so abusive as to be menacing, she, without a shade of anger, and in the most unruffled manner, administered to him the remedy she had reserved, in the shape of a smart box on the ear, which sent him flat to the floor. He rose, after two or three efforts, quite subdued.

Page 1186

‘Now, Dandy, sit on the edge of the bed.’

Dandy sat on the extreme edge, and Mrs. Mel pursued:

‘Now, Dandy, tell me what your master said at the table.’

’Talked at ’em like a lord, he did,’ said Dandy, stupidly consoling the boxed ear.

‘What were his words?’

Dandy’s peculiarity was, that he never remembered anything save when drunk, and Mrs. Mel’s dose had rather sobered him. By degrees, scratching at his head haltingly, he gave the context.

“’Gentlemen, I hear for the first time, you’ve claims against my poor father. Nobody shall ever say he died, and any man was the worse for it. I’ll meet you next week, and I’ll bind myself by law. Here’s Lawyer Perkins. No; Mr. Perkins. I’ll pay off every penny. Gentlemen, look upon me as your debtor, and not my father.”’

Delivering this with tolerable steadiness, Dandy asked, ‘Will that do?’

‘That will do,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’I’ll send you up some tea presently. Lie down, Dandy.’

The house was dark and silent when Evan, refreshed by his rest, descended to seek his mother. She was sitting alone in the parlour. With a tenderness which Mrs. Mel permitted rather than encouraged, Evan put his arm round her neck, and kissed her many times. One of the symptoms of heavy sorrow, a longing for the signs of love, made Evan fondle his mother, and bend over her yearningly. Mrs. Mel said once: ’Dear Van; good boy!’ and quietly sat through his caresses.

‘Sitting up for me, mother?’ he whispered.

‘Yes, Van; we may as well have our talk out.’

‘Ah!’ he took a chair close by her side, ’tell me my father’s last words.’

‘He said he hoped you would never be a tailor.’

Evan’s forehead wrinkled up. ‘There’s not much fear of that, then!’

His mother turned her face on him, and examined him with a rigorous placidity; all her features seeming to bear down on him. Evan did not like the look.

‘You object to trade, Van?’

’Yes, decidedly, mother-hate it; but that’s not what I want to talk to you about. Didn’t my father speak of me much?’

’He desired that you should wear his militia sword, if you got a commission.’

‘I have rather given up hope of the Army,’ said Evan.

Mrs. Mel requested him to tell her what a colonel’s full pay amounted to; and again, the number of years it required, on a rough calculation, to attain that grade. In reply to his statement she observed: ’A tailor might realize twice the sum in a quarter of the time.’

‘What if he does-double, or treble?’ cried Evan, impetuously; and to avoid the theme, and cast off the bad impression it produced on him, he rubbed his hands, and said: ’I want to talk to you about my prospects, mother.’

‘What are they?’ Mrs. Mel inquired.

The severity of her mien and sceptical coldness of her speech caused him to inspect them suddenly, as if she had lent him her eyes. He put them by, till the gold should recover its natural shine, saying: ’By the way, mother, I ‘ve written the half of a History of Portugal.’

Page 1187

‘Have you?’ said Mrs. Mel. ‘For Louisa?’

’No, mother, of course not: to sell it. Albuquerque! what a splendid fellow he was!’

Informing him that he knew she abominated foreign names, she said: ’And your prospects are, writing Histories of Portugal?’

’No, mother. I was going to tell you, I expect a Government appointment. Mr. Jocelyn likes my work—I think he likes me. You know, I was his private secretary for ten months.’

‘You write a good hand,’ his mother interposed.

‘And I’m certain I was born for diplomacy.’

’For an easy chair, and an ink-dish before you, and lacqueys behind. What’s to be your income, Van?’

Evan carelessly remarked that he must wait and see.

‘A very proper thing to do,’ said Mrs. Mel; for now that she had fixed him to some explanation of his prospects, she could condescend in her stiff way to banter.

Slightly touched by it, Evan pursued, half laughing, as men do who wish to propitiate common sense on behalf of what seems tolerably absurd: ’It ’s not the immediate income, you know, mother: one thinks of one’s future. In the diplomatic service, as Louisa says, you come to be known to Ministers gradually, I mean. That is, they hear of you; and if you show you have some capacity—Louisa wants me to throw it up in time, and stand for Parliament. Andrew, she thinks, would be glad to help me to his seat. Once in Parliament, and known to Ministers, you—your career is open to you.’

In justice to Mr. Evan Harrington, it must be said, he built up this extraordinary card-castle to dazzle his mother’s mind: he had lost his right grasp of her character for the moment, because of an undefined suspicion of something she intended, and which sent him himself to take refuge in those flimsy structures; while the very altitude he reached beguiled his imagination, and made him hope to impress hers.

Mrs. Mel dealt it one fillip. ’And in the meantime how are you to live, and pay the creditors?’

Though Evan answered cheerfully, ’Oh, they will wait, and I can live on anything,’ he was nevertheless floundering on the ground amid the ruins of the superb edifice; and his mother, upright and rigid, continuing, ’You can live on anything, and they will wait, and call your father a rogue,’ he started, grievously bitten by one of the serpents of earth.

‘Good heaven, mother! what are you saying?’

‘That they will call your father a rogue, and will have a right to,’ said the relentless woman.

‘Not while I live!’ Evan exclaimed.

‘You may stop one mouth with your fist, but you won’t stop a dozen, Van.’

Evan jumped up and walked the room.

‘What am I to do?’ he cried. ’I will pay everything. I will bind myself to pay every farthing. What more can I possibly do?’

‘Make the money,’ said Mrs. Mel’s deep voice.

Evan faced her: ’My dear mother, you are very unjust and inconsiderate. I have been working and doing my best. I promise—what do the debts amount to?’

Page 1188

‘Something like L5000 in all, Van.’

‘Very well.’ Youth is not alarmed by the sound of big sums. ’Very well—I will pay it.’

Evan looked as proud as if he had just clapped down the full amount on the table.

’Out of the History of Portugal, half written, and the prospect of a Government appointment?’

Mrs. Mel raised her eyelids to him.

‘In time-in time, mother!’

’Mention your proposal to the creditors when you meet them this day week,’ she said.

Neither of them spoke for several minutes. Then Evan came close to her, saying:

‘What is it you want of me, mother?’

‘I want nothing, Van—I can support myself.’

‘But what would you have me do, mother?’

‘Be honest; do your duty, and don’t be a fool about it.’

‘I will try,’ he rejoined. ’You tell me to make the money. Where and how can I make it? I am perfectly willing to work.’

‘In this house,’ said Mrs. Mel; and, as this was pretty clear speaking, she stood up to lend her figure to it.

‘Here?’ faltered Evan. ‘What! be a ——’

‘Tailor!’ The word did not sting her tongue.

‘I? Oh, that’s quite impossible!’ said Evan. And visions of leprosy, and Rose shrinking her skirts from contact with him, shadowed out and away in his mind.

‘Understand your choice!’ Mrs. Mel imperiously spoke. ’What are brains given you for? To be played the fool with by idiots and women? You have L5000 to pay to save your father from being called a rogue. You can only make the money in one way, which is open to you. This business might produce a thousand pounds a-year and more. In seven or eight years you may clear your father’s name, and live better all the time than many of your bankrupt gentlemen. You have told the creditors you will pay them. Do you think they’re gaping fools, to be satisfied by a History of Portugal? If you refuse to take the business at once, they will sell me up, and quite right too. Understand your

choice. There's Mr. Goren has promised to have you in London a couple of months, and teach you what he can. He is a kind friend. Would any of your gentlemen acquaintance do the like for you? Understand your choice. You will be a beggar—the son of a rogue—or an honest man who has cleared his father's name!'

During this strenuously uttered allocution, Mrs. Mel, though her chest heaved but faintly against her crossed hands, showed by the dilatation of her eyes, and the light in them, that she felt her words. There is that in the aspect of a fine frame breathing hard facts, which, to a youth who has been tumbled headlong from his card-castles and airy fabrics, is masterful, and like the pressure of a Fate. Evan drooped his head.

'Now,' said Mrs. Mel, 'you shall have some supper.'

Evan told her he could not eat.

'I insist upon your eating,' said Mrs. Mel; 'empty stomachs are foul counsellors.'

Page 1189

‘Mother! do you want to drive me mad?’ cried Evan.

She looked at him to see whether the string she held him by would bear the slight additional strain: decided not to press a small point.

‘Then go to bed and sleep on it,’ she said—sure of him—and gave her cheek for his kiss, for she never performed the operation, but kept her mouth, as she remarked, for food and speech, and not for slobbering mummeries.

Evan returned to his solitary room. He sat on the bed and tried to think, oppressed by horrible sensations of self-contempt, that caused whatever he touched to sicken him.

There were the Douglas and the Percy on the wall. It was a happy and a glorious time, was it not, when men lent each other blows that killed outright; when to be brave and cherish noble feelings brought honour; when strength of arm and steadiness of heart won fortune; when the fair stars of earth—sweet women—wakened and warmed the love of squires of low degree. This legacy of the dead man’s hand! Evan would have paid it with his blood; but to be in bondage all his days to it; through it to lose all that was dear to him; to wear the length of a loathed existence!—we should pardon a young man’s wretchedness at the prospect, for it was in a time before our joyful era of universal equality. Yet he never cast a shade of blame upon his father.

The hours moved on, and he found himself staring at his small candle, which struggled more and more faintly with the morning light, like his own flickering ambition against the facts of life.

CHAPTER VIII

INTRODUCES AN ECCENTRIC

At the Aurora—one of those rare antiquated taverns, smelling of comfortable time and solid English fare, that had sprung up in the great coffee days, when taverns were clubs, and had since subsisted on the attachment of steady bachelor Templars there had been dismay, and even sorrow, for a month. The most constant patron of the establishment—an old gentleman who had dined there for seven-and-twenty years, four days in the week, off dishes dedicated to the particular days, and had grown grey with the landlady, the cook, and the head-waiter—this old gentleman had abruptly withheld his presence. Though his name, his residence, his occupation, were things only to be speculated on at the Aurora, he was very well known there, and as men are best to be known: that is to say, by their habits. Some affection for him also was felt. The landlady looked on him as a part of the house. The cook and the waiter were accustomed to receive acceptable compliments from him monthly. His precise words, his regular ancient jokes, his pint of Madeira and after-pint of Port, his antique bow to

the landlady, passing out and in, his method of spreading his table-napkin on his lap and looking up at the ceiling ere he fell to, and how he talked to himself during the repast, and indulged in short chuckles, and the one look of perfect felicity that played over his features when he had taken his first sip of Port—these were matters it pained them at the Aurora to have to remember.

Page 1190

For three weeks the resolution not to regard him as of the past was general. The Aurora was the old gentleman's home. Men do not play truant from home at sixty years of age. He must, therefore, be seriously indisposed. The kind heart of the landlady fretted to think he might have no soul to nurse and care for him; but she kept his corner near the fire-place vacant, and took care that his pint of Madeira was there. The belief was gaining ground that he had gone, and that nothing but his ghost would ever sit there again. Still the melancholy ceremony continued: for the landlady was not without a secret hope, that in spite of his reserve and the mystery surrounding him, he would have sent her a last word. The cook and head-waiter, interrogated as to their dealings with the old gentleman, testified solemnly to the fact of their having performed their duty by him. They would not go against their interests so much as to forget one of his ways, they said-taking oath, as it were, by their lower nature, in order to be credited: an instinct men have of one another. The landlady could not contradict them, for the old gentleman had made no complaint; but then she called to memory that fifteen years back, in such and such a year, Wednesday's, dish had been, by shameful oversight, furnished him for Tuesday's, and he had eaten it quietly, but refused his Port; which pathetic event had caused alarm and inquiry, when the error was discovered, and apologized for, the old gentleman merely saying, 'Don't let it happen again.' Next day he drank his Port, as usual, and the wheels of the Aurora went smoothly. The landlady was thus justified in averring that something had been done by somebody, albeit unable to point to anything specific. Women, who are almost as deeply bound to habit as old gentlemen, possess more of its spiritual element, and are warned by dreams, omens, creepings of the flesh, unwonted chills, suicide of china, and other shadowing signs, when a break is to be anticipated, or, has occurred. The landlady of the Aurora tavern was visited by none of these, and with that beautiful trust which habit gives, and which boastful love or vainer earthly qualities would fail in effecting, she ordered that the pint of Madeira should stand from six o'clock in the evening till seven—a small monument of confidence in him who was at one instant the 'poor old dear'; at another, the 'naughty old gad-about'; further, the 'faithless old-good-for-nothing'; and again, the 'blessed pet' of the landlady's parlour, alternately and indiscriminately apostrophized by herself, her sister, and daughter.

On the last day of the month a step was heard coming up the long alley which led from the riotous scrambling street to the plentiful cheerful heart of the Aurora. The landlady knew the step. She checked the natural flutterings of her ribbons, toned down the strong simper that was on her lips, rose, pushed aside her daughter, and, as the step approached, curtsied composedly. Old Habit lifted his hat, and passed. With the same touching confidence in the Aurora that the Aurora had in him, he went straight to his corner, expressed no surprise at his welcome by the Madeira, and thereby apparently indicated that his appearance should enjoy a similar immunity.

Page 1191

As of old, he called ‘Jonathan!’ and was not to be disturbed till he did so. Seeing that Jonathan smirked and twiddled his napkin, the old gentleman added, ‘Thursday!’

But Jonathan, a man, had not his mistress’s keen intuition of the deportment necessitated by the case, or was incapable of putting the screw upon weak excited nature, for he continued to smirk, and was remarking how glad he was, he was sure, and something he had dared to think and almost to fear, when the old gentleman called to him, as if he were at the other end of the room, ’Will you order Thursday, or not, sir?’ Whereat Jonathan flew, and two or three cosy diners glanced up from their plates, or the paper, smiled, and pursued their capital occupation.

‘Glad to see me!’ the old gentleman muttered, querulously. ’Of course, glad to see a customer! Why do you tell me that? Talk! tattle! might as well have a woman to wait—-just!’

He wiped his forehead largely with his handkerchief; as one whom Calamity hunted a little too hard in summer weather.

‘No tumbling-room for the wine, too!’

That was his next grievance. He changed the pint of Madeira from his left side to his right, and went under his handkerchief again, feverishly. The world was severe with this old gentleman.

‘Ah! clock wrong now!’

He leaned back like a man who can no longer carry his burdens, informing Jonathan, on his coming up to place the roll of bread and firm butter, that he was forty seconds too fast, as if it were a capital offence, and he deserved to step into Eternity for outstripping Time.

‘But, I daresay, you don’t understand the importance of a minute,’ said the old gentleman, bitterly. ’Not you, or any of you. Better if we had run a little ahead of your minute, perhaps—and the rest of you! Do you think you can cancel the mischief that’s done in the world in that minute, sir, by hurrying ahead like that? Tell me!’

Rather at a loss, Jonathan scanned the clock seriously, and observed that it was not quite a minute too fast.

The old gentleman pulled out his watch. He grunted that a lying clock was hateful to him; subsequently sinking into contemplation of his thumbs,—a sign known to Jonathan as indicative of the old gentleman’s system having resolved, in spite of external outrages, to be fortified with calm to meet the repast.

It is not fair to go behind an eccentric; but the fact was, this old gentleman was slightly ashamed of his month's vagrancy and cruel conduct, and cloaked his behaviour toward the Aurora, in all the charges he could muster against it. He was very human, albeit an odd form of the race.

Happily for his digestion of Thursday, the cook, warned by Jonathan, kept the old gentleman's time, not the Aurora's: and the dinner was correct; the dinner was eaten in peace; he began to address his plate vigorously, poured out his Madeira, and chuckled, as the familiar ideas engendered by good wine were revived in him. Jonathan reported at the bar that the old gentleman was all right again.

Page 1192

One would like here to pause, while our worthy ancient feeds, and indulge in a short essay on Habit, to show what a sacred and admirable thing it is that makes flimsy Time substantial, and consolidates his triple life. It is proof that we have come to the end of dreams and Time's delusions, and are determined to sit down at Life's feast and carve for ourselves. Its day is the child of yesterday, and has a claim on to-morrow. Whereas those who have no such plan of existence and sum of their wisdom to show, the winds blow them as they list. Consider, then, mercifully the wrath of him on whom carelessness or forgetfulness has brought a snap in the links of Habit. You incline to scorn him because, his slippers misplaced, or asparagus not on his table the first day of a particular Spring month, he gazes blankly and sighs as one who saw the End. To you it may appear small. You call to him to be a man. He is: but he is also an immortal, and his confidence in unceasing orderly progression is rudely dashed.

But the old gentleman has finished his dinner and his Madeira, and says: 'Now, Jonathan, "thock" the Port!'—his joke when matters have gone well: meant to express the sound of the uncorking, probably. The habit of making good jokes is rare, as you know: old gentlemen have not yet attained to it: nevertheless Jonathan enjoys this one, which has seen a generation in and out, for he knows its purport to be, 'My heart is open.'

And now is a great time with this old gentleman. He sips, and in his eyes the world grows rosy, and he exchanges mute or monosyllable salutes here and there. His habit is to avoid converse; but he will let a light remark season meditation.

He says to Jonathan: 'The bill for the month.'

'Yes, sir,' Jonathan replies. 'Would you not prefer, sir, to have the items added on to the month ensuing?'

'I asked you for the bill of the month,' said the old gentleman, with an irritated voice and a twinkle in his eye.

Jonathan bowed; but his aspect betrayed perplexity, and that perplexity was soon shared by the landlady for Jonathan said, he was convinced the old gentleman intended to pay for sixteen days, and the landlady could not bring her hand to charge him for more than two. Here was the dilemma foreseen by the old gentleman, and it added vastly to the flavour of the Port.

Pleasantly tickled, he sat gazing at his glass, and let the minutes fly. He knew the part he would act in his little farce. If charged for the whole month, he would peruse the bill deliberately, and perhaps cry out 'Hulloa?' and then snap at Jonathan for the interposition of a remark. But if charged for two days, he would wish to be told whether they were demented, those people outside, and scornfully return the bill to Jonathan.

A slap on the shoulder, and a voice: ‘Found you at last, Tom!’ violently shattered the excellent plot, and made the old gentleman start. He beheld Mr. Andrew Cogglesby.

Page 1193

‘Drinking Port, Tom?’ said Mr. Andrew. ’I ‘ll join you’: and he sat down opposite to him, rubbing his hands and pushing back his hair.

Jonathan entering briskly with the bill, fell back a step, in alarm. The old gentleman, whose inviolacy was thus rudely assailed, sat staring at the intruder, his mouth compressed, and three fingers round his glass, which it’ was doubtful whether he was not going to hurl at him.

‘Waiter!’ Mr. Andrew carelessly hailed, ’a pint of this Port, if you please.’

Jonathan sought the countenance of the old gentleman.

‘Do you hear, sir?’ cried the latter, turning his wrath on him. ’Another pint!’ He added: ‘Take back the bill’; and away went Jonathan to relate fresh marvels to his mistress.

Mr. Andrew then addressed the old gentleman in the most audacious manner.

’Astonished to see me here, Tom? Dare say you are. I knew you came somewhere in this neighbourhood, and, as I wanted to speak to you very particularly, and you wouldn’t be visible till Monday, why, I spied into two or three places, and here I am.’

You might see they were brothers. They had the same bushy eyebrows, the same healthy colour in their cheeks, the same thick shoulders, and brisk way of speaking, and clear, sharp, though kindly, eyes; only Tom was cast in larger proportions than Andrew, and had gotten the grey furniture of Time for his natural wear. Perhaps, too, a cross in early life had a little twisted him, and set his mouth in a rueful bunch, out of which occasionally came biting things. Mr. Andrew carried his head up, and eyed every man living with the benevolence of a patriarch, dashed with the impudence of a London sparrow. Tom had a nagging air, and a trifle of acridity on his broad features. Still, any one at a glance could have sworn they were brothers, and Jonathan unhesitatingly proclaimed it at the Aurora bar.

Mr. Andrew’s hands were working together, and at them, and at his face, the old gentleman continued to look with a firmly interrogating air.

’Want to know what brings me, Tom? I’ll tell you presently. Hot,—isn’t it?’

‘What the deuce are you taking exercise for?’ the old gentleman burst out, and having unlocked his mouth, he began to puff and alter his posture.

‘There you are, thawed in a minute!’ said Mr. Andrew. ’What’s an eccentric? a child grown grey. It isn’t mine; I read it somewhere. Ah, here’s the Port! good, I’ll warrant.’

Jonathan deferentially uncorked, excessive composure on his visage. He arranged the table-cloth to a nicety, fixed the bottle with exactness, and was only sent scudding by

the old gentleman's muttering of: 'Eavesdropping pie!' followed by a short, 'Go!' and even then he must delay to sweep off a particular crumb.

'Good it is!' said Mr. Andrew, rolling the flavour on his lips, as he put down his glass. 'I follow you in Port, Tom. Elder brother!'

Page 1194

The old gentleman also drank, and was mollified enough to reply: 'Shan't follow you in Parliament.'

'Haven't forgiven that yet, Tom?'

'No great harm done when you're silent.'

'Capital Port!' said Mr. Andrew, replenishing the glasses. 'I ought to have inquired where they kept the best Port. I might have known you'd stick by it. By the way, talking of Parliament, there's talk of a new election for Fallow field. You have a vote there. Will you give it to Jocelyn? There's talk of his standing.

'If he'll wear petticoats, I'll give him my vote.'

'There you go, Tom!'

'I hate masquerades. You're penny trumpets of the women. That tattle comes from the bed-curtains. When a petticoat steps forward I give it my vote, or else I button it up in my pocket.'

This was probably one of the longest speeches he had ever delivered at the Aurora. There was extra Port in it. Jonathan, who from his place of observation noted the length of time it occupied, though he was unable to gather the context, glanced at Mr. Andrew with a sly satisfaction. Mr. Andrew, laughing, signalled for another pint.

'So you've come here for my vote, have you?' said Mr. Tom.

'Why, no; not exactly that,' Mr. Andrew answered, blinking and passing it by.

Jonathan brought the fresh pint, and Tom filled for himself, drank, and said emphatically, and with a confounding voice:

'Your women have been setting you on me, sir!'

Andrew protested that he was entirely mistaken.

'You're the puppet of your women!'

'Well, Tom, not in this instance. Here's to the bachelors, and brother Tom at their head!'

It seemed to be Andrew's object to help his companion to carry a certain quantity of Port, as if he knew a virtue it had to subdue him, and to have fixed on a particular measure that he should hold before he addressed him specially. Arrived at this, he said:

’Look here, Tom. I know your ways. I shouldn’t have bothered you here; I never have before; but we couldn’t very well talk it over in business hours; and besides you’re never at the Brewery till Monday, and the matter’s rather urgent.’

‘Why don’t you speak like that in Parliament?’ the old man interposed.

‘Because Parliament isn’t my brother,’ replied Mr. Andrew. ’You know, Tom, you never quite took to my wife’s family.’

‘I’m not a match for fine ladies, Nan.’

’Well, Harriet would have taken to you, Tom, and will now, if you ’ll let her. Of course, it ’s a pity if she ’s ashamed of—hem! You found it out about the Lymport people, Tom, and, you’ve kept the secret and respected her feelings, and I thank you for it. Women are odd in those things, you know. She mustn’t imagine I ’ve heard a whisper. I believe it would kill her.’

The old gentleman shook silently.

’Do you want me to travel over the kingdom, hawking her for the daughter of a marquis?’

Page 1195

’Now, don’t joke, Tom. I’m serious. Are you not a Radical at heart? Why do you make such a set against the poor women? What do we spring from?’

‘I take off my hat, Nan, when I see a cobbler’s stall.’

’And I, Tom, don’t care a rush who knows it. Homo—something; but we never had much schooling. We ’ve thriven, and should help those we can. We’ve got on in the world . . .’

‘Wife come back from Lymport?’ sneered Tom.

Andrew hurriedly, and with some confusion, explained that she had not been able to go, on account of the child.

‘Account of the child!’ his brother repeated, working his chin contemptuously. ‘Sisters gone?’

‘They’re stopping with us,’ said Andrew, reddening.

‘So the tailor was left to the kites and the crows. Ah! hum!’ and Tom chuckled.

‘You’re angry with me, Tom, for coming here,’ said Andrew. ’I see what it is. Thought how it would be! You’re offended, old Tom.’

‘Come where you like,’ returned Tom, ’the place is open. It’s a fool that hopes for peace anywhere. They sent a woman here to wait on me, this day month.’

‘That’s a shame!’ said Mr. Andrew, propitiatingly. ’Well, never mind, Tom: the women are sometimes in the way.—Evan went down to bury his father. He’s there now. You wouldn’t see him when he was at the Brewery, Tom. He’s—upon my honour! he’s a good young fellow.’

‘A fine young gentleman, I’ve no doubt, Nan.’

’A really good lad, Tom. No nonsense. I’ve come here to speak to you about him.’

Mr. Andrew drew a letter from his pocket, pursuing: ’Just throw aside your prejudices, and read this. It’s a letter I had from him this morning. But first I must tell you how the case stands.’

‘Know more than you can tell me, Nan,’ said Tom, turning over the flavour of a gulp of his wine.

’Well, then, just let me repeat it. He has been capitally educated; he has always been used to good society: well, we mustn’t sneer at it: good society’s better than bad, you’ll

allow. He has refined tastes: well, you wouldn't like to live among crossing-sweepers, Tom. He 's clever and accomplished, can speak and write in three languages: I wish I had his abilities. He has good manners: well, Tom, you know you like them as well as anybody. And now—but read for yourself.'

'Yah!' went old Tom. 'The women have been playing the fool with him since he was a baby. I read his rigmarole? No.'

Mr. Andrew shrugged his shoulders, and opened the letter, saying: 'Well, listen'; and then he coughed, and rapidly skimmed the introductory part. 'Excuses himself for addressing me formally—poor boy! Circumstances have altered his position towards the world found his father's affairs in a bad state: only chance of paying off father's debts to undertake management of business, and bind himself to so much a year. But there, Tom, if you won't read it, you miss the poor young fellow's character. He says that he has forgotten his station: fancied he was superior to trade, but hates debt; and will not allow anybody to throw dirt at his father's name, while he can work to clear it; and will sacrifice his pride. Come, Tom, that's manly, isn't it? I call it touching, poor lad!'

Page 1196

Manly it may have been, but the touching part of it was a feature missed in Mr. Andrew's hands. At any rate, it did not appear favourably to impress Tom, whose chin had gathered its ominous puckers, as he inquired:

'What's the trade? he don't say.'

Andrew added, with a wave of the hand: 'Out of a sort of feeling for his sisters—I like him for it. Now what I want to ask you, Tom, is, whether we can't assist him in some way! Why couldn't we take him into our office, and fix him there, eh? If he works well—we're both getting old, and my brats are chicks—we might, by-and-by, give him a share.'

'Make a brewer of him? Ha! there'd be another mighty sacrifice for his pride!'

'Come, come, Tom,' said Andrew, 'he's my wife's brother, and I'm yours; and—there, you know what women are. They like to preserve appearances: we ought to consider them.'

'Preserve appearances!' echoed Tom: 'ha! who'll do that for them better than a tailor?'

Andrew was an impatient little man, fitter for a kind action than to plead a cause. Jeering jarred on him; and from the moment his brother began it, he was of small service to Evan. He flung back against the partition of the compound, rattling it to the disturbance of many a quiet digestion.

'Tom,' he cried, 'I believe you're a screw!'

'Never said I wasn't,' rejoined Tom, as he finished his glass. 'I 'm a bachelor, and a person—you're married, and an object. I won't have the tailor's family at my coat-tails.'

Do you mean to say, Tom, you don't like the young fellow? The Countess says he's half engaged to an heiress; and he has a chance of appointments—of course, nothing may come of them. But do you mean to say, you don't like him for what he has done?'

Tom made his jaw disagreeably prominent. ''Fraid I'm guilty of that crime.'

'And you that swear at people pretending to be above their station!' exclaimed Andrew. 'I shall get in a passion. I can't stand this. Here, waiter! what have I to pay?'

'Go,' cried the time-honoured guest of the Aurora to Jonathan advancing.

Andrew pressed the very roots of his hair back from his red forehead, and sat upright and resolute, glancing at Tom. And now ensued a curious scene of family blood. For no sooner did elderly Tom observe this bantam-like demeanour of his brother, than he

ruffled his feathers likewise, and looked down on him, agitating his wig over a prodigious frown. Whereof came the following sharp colloquy; Andrew beginning:

I ‘ll pay off the debts out of my own pocket.’

‘You can make a greater fool of yourself, then?’

‘He shan’t be a tailor!’

‘He shan’t be a brewer!’

‘I say he shall live like a gentleman!’

‘I say he shall squat like a Turk!’

Bang went Andrew’s hand on the table: ’I ‘ve pledged my word, mind!’

Page 1197

Tom made a counter demonstration: ‘And I’ll have my way!’

‘Hang it! I can be as eccentric as you,’ said Andrew.

‘And I as much a donkey as you, if I try hard,’ said Tom.

Something of the cobbler’s stall followed this; till waxing furious, Tom sung out to Jonathan, hovering around them in watchful timidity, ’More Port!’ and the words immediately fell oily on the wrath of the brothers; both commenced wiping their heads with their handkerchiefs the faces of both emerged and met, with a half-laugh: and, severally determined to keep to what they had spoken, there was a tacit accord between them to drop the subject.

Like sunshine after smart rain, the Port shone on these brothers. Like a voice from the pastures after the bellowing of the thunder, Andrew’s voice asked: ’Got rid of that twinge of the gout, Tom? Did you rub in that ointment?’ while Tom replied: ’Ay. How about that rheumatism of yours? Have you tried that Indy oil?’ receiving a like assurance.

The remainder of the Port ebbed in meditation and chance remarks. The bit of storm had done them both good; and Tom especially—the cynical, carping, grim old gentleman—was much improved by the nearer resemblance of his manner to Andrew’s.

Behind this unaffected fraternal concord, however, the fact that they were pledged to a race in eccentricity, was present. They had been rivals before; and anterior to the date of his marriage, Andrew had done odd eclipsing things. But Andrew required prompting to it; he required to be put upon his mettle. Whereas, it was more nature with Tom: nature and the absence of a wife, gave him advantages over Andrew. Besides, he had his character to maintain. He had said the word: and the first vanity of your born eccentric is, that he shall be taken for infallible.

Presently Andrew ducked his head to mark the evening clouds flushing over the court-yard of the Aurora.

‘Time to be off, Tom,’ he said: ‘wife at home.’

‘Ah!’ Tom answered. ‘Well, I haven’t got to go to bed so early.’

‘What an old rogue you are, Tom!’ Andrew pushed his elbows forward on the table amiably. ’Gad, we haven’t drunk wine together since—by George! we’ll have another pint.’

‘Many as you like,’ said Tom.

Over the succeeding pint, Andrew, in whose veins the Port was merry, favoured his brother with an imitation of Major Strike, and indicated his dislike to that officer. Tom informed him that Major Strike was speculating.

‘The ass eats at my table, and treats me with contempt.’

’Just tell him that you’re putting by the bones for him. He ’ll want ‘em.’

Then Andrew with another glance at the clouds, now violet on a grey sky, said he must really be off. Upon which Tom observed: ’Don’t come here again.’

‘You old rascal, Tom!’ cried Andrew, swinging over the table: ’it’s quite jolly for us to be hob-a-nobbing together once more. ’Gad!—no, we won’t though! I promised—Harriet. Eh? What say, Tom?’

Page 1198

‘Nother pint, Nan?’

Tom shook his head in a roguishly-cosy, irresistible way. Andrew, from a shake of denial and resolve, fell into the same; and there sat the two brothers—a jolly picture.

The hour was ten, when Andrew Cogglesby, comforted by Tom’s remark, that he, Tom, had a wig, and that he, Andrew, would have a wigging, left the Aurora; and he left it singing a song. Tom Cogglesby still sat at his table, holding before him Evan’s letter, of which he had got possession; and knocking it round and round with a stroke of the forefinger, to the tune of, ’Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, ‘pothecary, ploughboy, thief’; each profession being sounded as a corner presented itself to the point of his nail. After indulging in this species of incantation for some length of time, Tom Cogglesby read the letter from beginning to end, and called peremptorily for pen, ink, and paper.

CHAPTER IX

THE COUNTESS IN LOW SOCIETY

By dint of stratagems worthy of a Court intrigue, the Countess de Saldar contrived to traverse the streets of Lymport, and enter the house where she was born, unsuspected and unseen, under cover of a profusion of lace and veil and mantilla, which only her heroic resolve to keep her beauties hidden from the profane townspeople could have rendered endurable beneath the fervid summer sun. Dress in a foreign style she must, as without it she lost that sense of superiority, which was the only comfort to her in her tribulations. The period of her arrival was ten days subsequent to the burial of her father. She had come in the coach, like any common mortal, and the coachman, upon her request, had put her down at the Governor’s house, and the guard had knocked at the door, and the servant had informed her that General Hucklebridge was not the governor of Lymport, nor did Admiral Combleman then reside in the town; which tidings, the coach then being out of sight, it did not disconcert the Countess to hear; and she reached her mother, having, at least, cut off communication with the object of conveyance.

The Countess kissed her mother, kissed Mrs. Fiske, and asked sharply for Evan. Mrs. Fiske let her know that Evan was in the house.

‘Where?’ inquired the Countess. ’I have news of the utmost importance for him. I must see him.’

‘Where is he, aunt?’ said Mrs. Fiske. ’In the shop, I think; I wonder he did not see you passing, Louisa.’

The Countess went bolt down into a chair.

‘Go to him, Jane,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’Tell him Louisa is here, and don’t return.’

Mrs. Fiske departed, and the Countess smiled.

’Thank you, Mama! you know I never could bear that odious, vulgar little woman. Oh, the heat! You talk of Portugal! And, oh! poor dear Papa! what I have suffered!’

Flapping her laces for air, and wiping her eyes for sorrow, the Countess poured a flood of sympathy into her mother’s ears and then said:

Page 1199

’But you have made a great mistake, Mama, in allowing Evan to put his foot into that place. He—beloved of an heiress! Why, if an enemy should hear of it, it would ruin him—positively blast him—for ever. And that she loves him I have proof positive. Yes; with all her frankness, the little thing cannot conceal that from me now. She loves him! And I desire you to guess, Mama, whether rivals will not abound? And what enemy so much to be dreaded as a rival? And what revelation so awful as that he has stood in a—in a—boutique?’

Mrs. Mel maintained her usual attitude for listening. It had occurred to her that it might do no good to tell the grand lady, her daughter; of Evan’s resolution, so she simply said, ‘It is discipline for him,’ and left her to speak a private word with the youth.

Timidly the Countess inspected the furniture of the apartment, taking chills at the dingy articles she saw, in the midst of her heat. That she should have sprung from this! The thought was painful; still she could forgive Providence so much. But should it ever be known she had sprung from this! Alas! she felt she never could pardon such a dire betrayal. She had come in good spirits, but the mention of Evan’s backsliding had troubled her extremely, and though she did not say to herself, What was the benefit resulting from her father’s dying, if Evan would be so base-minded? she thought the thing indefinitely, and was forming the words on her mouth, One Harrington in a shop is equal to all! when Evan appeared alone.

‘Why, goodness gracious! where’s your moustache?’ cried the Countess.

‘Gone the way of hair!’ said Evan, coldly stooping to her forehead.

‘Such a distinction!’ the Countess continued, reproachfully. ’Why, mon Dieu! one could hardly tell you; as you look now, from the very commonest tradesman—if you were not rather handsome and something of a figure. It’s a disguise, Evan—do you know that?’

’And I ’ve parted with it—that ‘s all,’ said Evan. ’No more disguises for me!’

The Countess immediately took his arm, and walked with him to a window. His face was certainly changed. Murmuring that the air of Lymport was bad for him, and that he must leave it instantly, she bade him sit and attend to what she was about to say.

While you have been here, degenerating, Evan, day by day—as you always do out of my sight—degenerating! no less a word!—I have been slaving in your interests. Yes; I have forced the Jocelyns socially to acknowledge us. I have not slept; I have eaten bare morsels. Do abstinence and vigils clear the wits? I know not! but indeed they have enabled me to do more in a week than would suffice for a lifetime. Hark to me. I have discovered Rose’s secret. Si! It is so! Rose loves you. You blush; you blush like a girl. She loves you, and you have let yourself be seen in a shop! Contrast me the two things. Oh! in verity, dreadful as it is, one could almost laugh.

Page 1200

But the moment I lose sight of you, my instructions vanish as quickly as that hair on your superior lip, which took such time to perfect. Alas! you must grow it again immediately. Use any perfumer's contrivance. Rowland! I have great faith in Rowland. Without him, I believe, there would have been many bald women committing suicide! You remember the bottle I gave to the Count de Villa Flor? "Countess," he said to me, "you have saved this egg-shell from a crack by helping to cover it"—for so he called his head—the top, you know, was beginning to shine like an egg. And I do fear me he would have done it. Ah! you do not conceive what the dread of baldness is! To a woman death—death is preferable to baldness! Baldness is death! And a wig—a wig! Oh, horror! total extinction is better than to rise again in a wig! But you are young, and play with hair. But I was saying, I went to see the Jocelyns. I was introduced to Sir Franks and his lady and the wealthy grandmother. And I have an invitation for you, Evan—you unmannered boy, that you do not bow! A gentle incline forward of the shoulders, and the eyes fixed softly, your upper lids drooping triflingly, as if you thanked with gentle sincerity, but were indifferent. Well, well, if you will not! An invitation for you to spend part of the autumn at Beckley Court, the ancestral domain, where there will be company the nobles of the land! Consider that. You say it was bold in me to face them after that horrible man committed us on board the vessel? A Harrington is anything but a coward. I did go and because I am devoted to your interests. That very morning, I saw announced in the paper, just beneath poor Andrew's hand, as he held it up at the breakfast-table, reading it, I saw among the deaths, Sir Abraham Harrington, of Torquay, Baronet, of quinsy! Twice that good man has come to my rescue! Oh! I welcomed him as a piece of Providence! I turned and said to Harriet, "I see they have put poor Papa in the paper." Harriet was staggered. I took the paper from Andrew, and pointed it to her. She has no readiness. She has had no foreign training. She could not comprehend, and Andrew stood on tiptoe, and peeped. He has a bad cough, and coughed himself black in the face. I attribute it to excessive bad manners and his cold feelings. He left the room. I reproached Harriet. But, oh! the singularity of the excellent fortune of such an event at such a time! It showed that our Harrington-luck had not forsaken us. I hurried to the Jocelyns instantly. Of course, it cleared away any suspicions aroused in them by that horrible man on board the vessel. And the tears I wept for Sir Abraham, Evan, in verity they were tears of deep and sincere gratitude! What is your mouth knitting the corners at? Are you laughing?'

Evan hastily composed his visage to the melancholy that was no counterfeit in him just then.

Page 1201

‘Yes,’ continued the Countess, easily reassured, ’I shall ever feel a debt to Sir Abraham Harrington, of Torquay. I dare say we are related to him. At least he has done us more service than many a rich and titled relative. No one supposes he would acknowledge poor Papa. I can forgive him that, Evan!’ The Countess pointed out her finger with mournful and impressive majesty, ’As we look down on that monkey, people of rank and consideration in society look on what poor dear Papa was.’

This was partly true, for Jacko sat on a chair, in his favourite attitude, copied accurately from the workmen of the establishment at their labour with needle and thread. Growing cognizant of the infamy of his posture, the Countess begged Evan to drive him out of her sight, and took a sniff at her smelling-bottle.

She went on: ‘Now, dear Van, you would hear of your sweet Rose?’

‘Not a word!’ Evan hastily answered.

‘Why, what does this indicate? Whims! Then you do love?’

‘I tell you, Louisa, I don’t want to hear a word of any of them,’ said Evan, with an angry gleam in his eyes. ’They are nothing to me, nor I to them. I—my walk in life is not theirs.’

‘Faint heart! faint heart!’ the Countess lifted a proverbial forefinger.

’Thank heaven, I shall have the consolation of not going about, and bowing and smirking like an impostor!’ Evan exclaimed.

There was a wider intelligence in the Countess’s arrested gaze than she chose to fashion into speech.

‘I knew,’ she said, ’I knew how the air of this horrible Lymport would act on you. But while I live, Evan, you shall not sink in the sludge. You, with all the pains I have lavished on you! and with your presence!—for you have a presence, so rare among young men in this England! You, who have been to a Court, and interchanged bows with duchesses, and I know not what besides—nay, I do not accuse you; but if you had not been a mere boy, and an English boy-poor Eugenia herself confessed to me that you had a look—a tender cleaving of the underlids—that made her catch her hand to her heart sometimes: it reminded her so acutely of false Belmarafa. Could you have had a greater compliment than that? You shall not stop here another day!’

‘True,’ said Evan, ‘for I’m going to London to-night.’

‘Not to London,’ the Countess returned, with a conquering glance, ’but to Beckley Court-and with me.’

‘To London, Louisa, with Mr. Goren.’

Again the Countess eyed him largely; but took, as it were, a side-path from her broad thought, saying: ’Yes, fortunes are made in London, if you would they should be rapid.’

She meditated. At that moment Dandy knocked at the door, and called outside: ’Please, master, Mr. Goren says there’s a gentleman in the shop-wants to see you.’

‘Very well,’ replied Evan, moving. He was swung violently round.

The Countess had clutched him by the arm. A fearful expression was on her face.

Page 1202

‘Whither do you go?’ she said.

‘To the shop, Louisa.’

Too late to arrest the villanous word, she pulled at him. ’Are you quite insane? Consent to be seen by a gentleman there? What has come to you? You must be lunatic! Are we all to be utterly ruined—disgraced?’

‘Is my mother to starve?’ said Evan.

’Absurd rejoinder! No! You should have sold everything here before this. She can live with Harriet—she—once out of this horrible element—she would not show it. But, Evan, you are getting away from me: you are not going?—speak!’

‘I am going,’ said Evan.

The Countess clung to him, exclaiming: ’Never, while I have the power to detain you!’ but as he was firm and strong, she had recourse to her woman’s aids, and burst into a storm of sobs on his shoulder—a scene of which Mrs. Mel was, for some seconds, a composed spectator.

’What ‘s the matter now?’ said Mrs. Mel.

Evan impatiently explained the case. Mrs. Mel desired her daughter to avoid being ridiculous, and making two fools in her family; and at the same time that she told Evan there was no occasion for him to go, contrived, with a look, to make the advice a command. He, in that state of mind when one takes bitter delight in doing an abhorred duty, was hardly willing to be submissive; but the despair of the Countess reduced him, and for her sake he consented to forego the sacrifice of his pride which was now his sad, sole pleasure. Feeling him linger, the Countess relaxed her grasp. Hers were tears that dried as soon as they had served their end; and, to give him the full benefit of his conduct, she said: ’I knew Evan would be persuaded by me.’

Evan pitifully pressed her hand, and sighed.

‘Tea is on the table down-stairs,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’I have cooked something for you, Louisa. Do you sleep here to-night?’

‘Can I tell you, Mama?’ murmured the Countess. ’I am dependent on our Evan.’

‘Oh! well, we will eat first,’ said Mrs. Mel, and they went to the table below, the Countess begging her mother to drop titles in designating her to the servants, which caused Mrs. Mel to say:

‘There is but one. I do the cooking’; and the Countess, ever disposed to flatter and be suave, even when stung by a fact or a phrase, added:

‘And a beautiful cook you used to be, dear Mama!’

At the table, awaiting them, sat Mrs. Wishaw, Mrs. Fiske, and Mr. Goren, who soon found themselves enveloped in the Countess’s graciousness. Mr. Goren would talk of trade, and compare Lymport business with London, and the Countess, loftily interested in his remarks, drew him out to disgust her brother. Mrs. Wishaw, in whom the Countess at once discovered a frivolous pretentious woman of the moneyed trading class, she treated as one who was alive to society, and surveyed matters from a station in the world, leading her to think that she tolerated Mr. Goren,

Page 1203

as a lady-Christian of the highest rank should tolerate the insects that toil for us. Mrs. Fiske was not so tractable, for Mrs. Fiske was hostile and armed. Mrs. Fiske adored the great Mel, and she had never loved Louisa. Hence, she scorned Louisa on account of her late behaviour toward her dead parent. The Countess saw through her, and laboured to be friendly with her, while she rendered her disagreeable in the eyes of Mrs. Wishaw, and let Mrs. Wishaw perceive that sympathy was possible between them; manoeuvring a trifle too delicate, perhaps, for the people present, but sufficient to blind its keen-witted author to the something that was being concealed from herself, of which something, nevertheless, her senses apprehensively warned her: and they might have spoken to her wits, but that mortals cannot, unaided, guess, or will not, unless struck in the face by the fact, credit, what is to their minds the last horror.

‘I came down in the coach, quite accidental, with this gentleman,’ said Mrs. Wishaw, fanning a cheek and nodding at Mr. Goren. ’I’m an old flame of dear Mel’s. I knew him when he was an apprentice in London. Now, wasn’t it odd? Your mother—I suppose I must call you “my lady"?’

The Countess breathed a tender ‘Spare me,’ with a smile that added, ‘among friends!’

Mrs. Wishaw resumed: ’Your mother was an old flame of this gentleman’s, I found out. So there were two old flames, and I couldn’t help thinking! But I was so glad to have seen dear Mel once more:

‘Ah!’ sighed the Countess.

’He was always a martial-looking man, and laid out, he was quite imposing. I declare, I cried so, as it reminded me of when I couldn’t have him, for he had nothing but his legs and arms—and I married Wishaw. But it’s a comfort to think I have been of some service to dear, dear Mel! for Wishaw ’s a man of accounts and payments; and I knew Mel had cloth from him, and, the lady suggested bills delayed, with two or three nods, ‘you know! and I’ll do my best for his son.’

‘You are kind,’ said the Countess, smiling internally at the vulgar creature’s misconception of Evan’s requirements.

‘Did he ever talk much about Mary Fence?’ asked Mrs. Wishaw. ’"Polly Fence,” he used to say, “sweet Polly Fence!"’

‘Oh! I think so. Frequently,’ observed the Countess.

Mrs. Fiske primmed her mouth. She had never heard the great Mel allude to the name of Fence.

The Goren-croak was heard

’Painters have painted out “Melchisedec” this afternoon. Yes,—ah! In and out-as the saying goes.’

Here was an opportunity to mortify the Countess.

Mrs. Fiske placidly remarked: ’Have we the other put up in its stead? It ‘s shorter.’

A twinge of weakness had made Evan request that the name of Evan Harrington should not decorate the shopfront till he had turned his back on it, for a time. Mrs. Mel crushed her venomous niece.

Page 1204

’What have you to do with such things? Shine in your own affairs first, Ann, before you meddle with others.’

Relieved at hearing that ‘Melchisedec’ was painted out, and unsuspicious of the announcement that should replace it, the Countess asked Mrs. Wishaw if she thought Evan like her dear Papa.

‘So like,’ returned the lady, ’that I would not be alone with him yet, for worlds. I should expect him to be making love to me: for, you know, my dear—I must be familiar—Mel never could be alone with you, without! It was his nature. I speak of him before marriage. But, if I can trust myself with him, I shall take charge of Mr. Evan, and show him some London society.’

‘That is indeed kind,’ said the Countess, glad of a thick veil for the utterance of her contempt. ’Evan, though—I fear—will be rather engaged. His friends, the Jocelyns of Beckley Court, will—I fear—hardly dispense with him and Lady Splenders—you know her? the Marchioness of Splenders? No?—by repute, at least: a most beautiful and most fascinating woman; report of him alone has induced her to say that Evan must and shall form a part of her autumnal gathering at Splenders Castle. And how he is to get out of it, I cannot tell. But I am sure his multitudinous engagements will not prevent his paying due court to Mistress Wishaw.’

As the Countess intended, Mistress Wishaw’s vanity was reproved, and her ambition excited: a pretty doublestroke, only possible to dexterous players.

The lady rejoined that she hoped so, she was sure; and forthwith (because she suddenly seemed to possess him more than his son), launched upon Mel’s incomparable personal attractions. This caused the Countess to enlarge upon Evan’s vast personal prospects. They talked across each other a little, till the Countess remembered her breeding, allowed Mrs. Wishaw to run to an end in hollow exclamations, and put a finish to the undeclared controversy, by a traverse of speech, as if she were taking up the most important subject of their late colloquy. ’But Evan is not in his own hands—he is in the hands of a lovely young woman, I must tell you. He belongs to her, and not to us. You have heard of Rose Jocelyn, the celebrated heiress?’

‘Engaged?’ Mrs. Wishaw whispered aloud.

The Countess, an adept in the lie implied—practised by her, that she might not subject herself to future punishment (in which she was so devout a believer, that she condemned whole hosts to it)—deeply smiled.

‘Really!’ said Mrs. Wishaw, and was about to inquire why Evan, with these brilliant expectations, could think of trade and tailoring, when the young man, whose forehead had been growing black, jumped up, and quitted them; thus breaking the harmony of the

table; and as the Countess had said enough, she turned the conversation to the always welcome theme of low society. She broached death and corpses; and became extremely interesting, and very sympathetic:

Page 1205

the only difference between the ghostly anecdotes she related, and those of the other ladies, being that her ghosts were all of them titled, and walked mostly under the burden of a coronet. For instance, there was the Portuguese Marquis de Col. He had married a Spanish wife, whose end was mysterious. Undressing, on the night of the anniversary of her death, and on the point of getting into bed, he beheld the dead woman lying on her back before him. All night long he had to sleep with this freezing phantom! Regularly, every fresh anniversary, he had to endure the same penance, no matter where he might be, or in what strange bed. On one occasion, when he took the live for the dead, a curious thing occurred, which the Countess scrupled less to relate than would men to hint at. Ghosts were the one childish enjoyment Mrs. Mel allowed herself, and she listened to her daughter intently, ready to cap any narrative; but Mrs. Fiske stopped the flood.

‘You have improved on Peter Smithers, Louisa,’ she said.

The Countess turned to her mildly.

‘You are certainly thinking of Peter Smithers,’ Mrs. Fiske continued, bracing her shoulders. ’Surely, you remember poor Peter, Louisa? An old flame of your own! He was going to kill himself, but married a Devonshire woman, and they had disagreeables, and *she* died, and he was undressing, and saw her there in the bed, and wouldn’t get into it, and had the mattress, and the curtains, and the counterpanes, and everything burnt. He told us it himself. You must remember it, Louisa?’

The Countess remembered nothing of the sort. No doubt could exist of its having been the Portuguese Marquis de Col, because he had confided to her the whole affair, and indeed come to her, as his habit was, to ask her what he could possibly do, under the circumstances. If Mrs. Fiske’s friend, who married the Devonshire person, had seen the same thing, the coincidence was yet more extraordinary than the case. Mrs. Fiske said it assuredly was, and glanced at her aunt, who, as the Countess now rose, declaring she must speak to Evan, chid Mrs. Fiske, and wished her and Peter Smithers at the bottom of the sea.

‘No, no, Mama,’ said the Countess, laughing, ’that would hardly be proper,’ and before Mrs. Fiske could reply, escaped to complain to Evan of the vulgarity of those women.

She was not prepared for the burst of wrath with which Evan met her. ‘Louisa,’ said he, taking her wrist sternly, ’you have done a thing I can’t forgive. I find it hard to bear disgrace myself: I will not consent to bring it upon others. Why did you dare to couple Miss Jocelyn’s name with mine?’

The Countess gave him out her arm’s length. ‘Speak on, Van,’ she said, admiring him with a bright gaze.

‘Answer me, Louisa; and don’t take me for a fool any more,’ he pursued. ’You have coupled Miss Jocelyn’s name with mine, in company, and I insist now upon your giving me your promise to abstain from doing it anywhere, before anybody.’

Page 1206

‘If she saw you at this instant, Van,’ returned the incorrigible Countess, ’would she desire it, think you? Oh! I must make you angry before her, I see that! You have your father’s frown. You surpass him, for your delivery is more correct, and equally fluent. And if a woman is momentarily melted by softness in a man, she is for ever subdued by boldness and bravery of mien.’

Evan dropped her hand. ’Miss Jocelyn has done me the honour to call me her friend. That was in other days.’ His lip quivered. ’I shall not see Miss Jocelyn again. Yes; I would lay down my life for her; but that’s idle talk. No such chance will ever come to me. But I can save her from being spoken of in alliance with me, and what I am, and I tell you, Louisa, I will not have it.’ Saying which, and while he looked harshly at her, wounded pride bled through his eyes.

She was touched. ’Sit down, dear; I must explain to you, and make you happy against your will,’ she said, in another voice, and an English accent. ’The mischief is done, Van. If you do not want Rose Jocelyn to love you, you must undo it in your own way. I am not easily deceived. On the morning I went to her house in town, she took me aside, and spoke to me. Not a confession in words. The blood in her cheeks, when I mentioned you, did that for her. Everything about you she must know—how you bore your grief, and all. And not in her usual free manner, but timidly, as if she feared a surprise, or feared to be wakened to the secret in her bosom she half suspects—“Tell him!” she said, “I hope he will not forget me."’

The Countess was interrupted by a great sob; for the picture of frank Rose Jocelyn changed, and soft, and, as it were, shadowed under a veil of bashful regard for him, so filled the young man with sorrowful tenderness, that he trembled, and was as a child.

Marking the impression she had produced on him, and having worn off that which he had produced on her, the Countess resumed the art in her style of speech, easier to her than nature.

’So the sweetest of Roses may be yours, dear Van; and you have her in a gold setting, to wear on your heart. Are you not enviable? I will not—no, I will not tell you she is perfect. I must fashion the sweet young creature. Though I am very ready to admit that she is much improved by this—shall I call it, desired consummation?’

Evan could listen no more. Such a struggle was rising in his breast: the effort to quench what the Countess had so shrewdly kindled; passionate desire to look on Rose but for one lightning flash: desire to look on her, and muffled sense of shame twin-born with it: wild love and leaden misery mixed: dead hopelessness and vivid hope. Up to the neck in Purgatory, but his soul saturated with visions of Bliss! The fair orb of Love was all that was wanted to complete his planetary state, and aloft it sprang, showing many faint, fair tracts to him, and piling huge darknesses.

Page 1207

As if in search of something, he suddenly went from the room.

‘I have intoxicated the poor boy,’ said the Countess, and consulted an attitude by the evening light in a mirror. Approving the result, she rang for her mother, and sat with her till dark; telling her she could not and would not leave her dear Mama that night. At the supper-table Evan did not appear, and Mr. Goren, after taking counsel of Mrs. Mel, dispersed the news that Evan was off to London. On the road again, with a purse just as ill-furnished, and in his breast the light that sometimes leads gentlemen, as well as ladies, astray.

CHAPTER X

MY GENTLEMAN ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Near a milestone, under the moonlight, crouched the figure of a woman, huddled with her head against her knees, and careless hair falling to the summer’s dust. Evan came upon this sight within a few miles of Fallowfield. At first he was rather startled, for he had inherited superstitious emotions from his mother, and the road was lone, the moon full. He went up to her and spoke a gentle word, which provoked no reply. He ventured to put his hand on her shoulder, continuing softly to address her. She was flesh and blood. Evan stooped his head to catch a whisper from her mouth, but nothing save a heavier fall of the breath she took, as of one painfully waking, was heard.

A misery beyond our own is a wholesome picture for youth, and though we may not for the moment compare the deep with the lower deep, we, if we have a heart for outer sorrows, can forget ourselves in it. Evan had just been accusing the heavens of conspiracy to disgrace him. Those patient heavens had listened, as is their wont. They had viewed and had not been disordered by his mental frenzies. It is certainly hard that they do not come down to us, and condescend to tell us what they mean, and be dumb-foundered by the perspicuity of our arguments the argument, for instance, that they have not fashioned us for the science of the shears, and do yet impel us to wield them. Nevertheless, they to whom mortal life has ceased to be a long matter perceive that our appeals for conviction are answered, now and then very closely upon the call. When we have cast off the scales of hope and fancy, and surrender our claims on mad chance, it is given us to see that some plan is working out: that the heavens, icy as they are to the pangs of our blood, have been throughout speaking to our souls; and, according to the strength there existing, we learn to comprehend them. But their language is an element of Time, whom primarily we have to know.

Evan Harrington was young. He wished not to clothe the generation. What was to the remainder of the exiled sons of Adam simply the brand of expulsion from Paradise, was to him hell. In his agony, anything less than an angel, soft-voiced in his path, would not

have satisfied the poor boy, and here was this wretched outcast, and instead of being relieved, he was to act the reliever!

Page 1208

Striving to rouse the desolate creature, he shook her slightly. She now raised her head with a slow, gradual motion, like that of a wax-work, showing a white young face, tearless,-dreadfully drawn at the lips. After gazing at him, she turned her head mechanically to her shoulder, as to ask him why he touched her. He withdrew his hand, saying:

‘Why are you here? Pardon me; I want, if possible, to help you.’

A light sprang in her eyes. She jumped from the stone, and ran forward a step or two, with a gasp:

‘Oh, my God! I want to go and drown myself.’

Evan lingered behind her till he saw her body sway, and in a fit of trembling she half fell on his outstretched arm. He led her to the stone, not knowing what on earth to do with her. There was no sign of a house near; they were quite solitary; to all his questions she gave an unintelligible moan. He had not the heart to leave her, so, taking a sharp seat on a heap of flints, thus possibly furnishing future occupation for one of his craftsmen, he waited, and amused himself by marking out diagrams with his stick in the thick dust.

His thoughts were far away, when he heard, faintly uttered:

‘Why do you stop here?’

‘To help you.’

‘Please don’t. Let me be. I can’t be helped.’

‘My good creature,’ said Evan, ’it ’s quite impossible that I should leave you in this state. Tell me where you were going when your illness seized you?’

‘I was going,’ she commenced vacantly, ‘to the sea—the water,’ she added, with a shivering lip.

The foolish youth asked her if she could be cold on such a night.

‘No, I’m not cold,’ she replied, drawing closer over her lap the ends of a shawl which would in that period have been thought rather gaudy for her station.

‘You were going to Lymport?’

‘Yes,—Lymport’s nearest, I think.’

‘And why were you out travelling at this hour?’

She dropped her head, and began rocking to right and left.

While they talked the noise of waggon-wheels was heard approaching. Evan went into the middle of the road, and beheld a covered waggon, and a fellow whom he advanced to meet, plodding a little to the rear of the horses. He proved kindly. He was a farmer's man, he said, and was at that moment employed in removing the furniture of the farmer's son, who had failed as a corn-chandler in Lymport, to Hillford, which he expected to reach about morn. He answered Evan's request that he would afford the young woman conveyance as far as Fallowfield:

'Tak' her in? That I will.

'She won't hurt the harses,' he pursued, pointing his whip at the vehicle: 'there's my mate, Gearge Stoakes, he's in there, snorin' his turn. Can't you hear 'n asnorin' thraugh the wheels? I can; I've been laughin'! He do snore that loud-Gearge do!'

Page 1209

Proceeding to inform Evan how George Stokes had snored in that characteristic manner from boyhood, ever since he and George had slept in a hayloft together; and how he, kept wakeful and driven to distraction by George Stokes' nose, had been occasionally compelled, in sheer self-defence, madly to start up and hold that pertinacious alarum in tight compression between thumb and forefinger; and how George Stokes, thus severely handled, had burst his hold with a tremendous snort, as big as a bull, and had invariably uttered the exclamation, 'Hulloa!—same to you, my lad!' and rolled over to snore as fresh as ever;—all this with singular rustic comparisons, racy of the soil, and in raw Hampshire dialect, the waggoner came to a halt opposite the stone, and, while Evan strode to assist the girl, addressed himself to the great task of arousing the sturdy sleeper and quieting his trumpet, heard by all ears now that the accompaniment of the wheels was at an end.

George, violently awakened, complained that it was before his time, to which he was true; and was for going off again with exalted contentment, though his heels had been tugged, and were dangling some length out of the machine; but his comrade, with a determined blow of the lungs, gave another valiant pull, and George Stokes was on his legs, marvelling at the world and man. Evan had less difficulty with the girl. She rose to meet him, put up her arms for him to clasp her waist, whispering sharply in an inward breath: 'What are you going to do with me?' and indifferent to his verbal response, trustingly yielded her limbs to his guidance. He could see blood on her bitten underlip; as, with the help of the waggoner, he lifted her on the mattress, backed by a portly bundle, which the sagacity of Mr. Stokes had selected for his couch.

The waggoner cracked his whip, laughing at George Stokes, who yawned and settled into a composed ploughswing, without asking questions; apparently resolved to finish his nap on his legs.

'Warn't he like that Myzepper chap, I see at the circus, bound athert gray mare!' chuckled the waggoner. 'So he 'd 'a gone on, had ye 'a let 'n. No wulves waddn't wake Gearge till he 'd slept it out. Then he 'd say, "marnin'!" to 'm. Are ye 'wake now, Gearge?'

The admirable sleeper preferred to be a quiet butt, and the waggoner leisurely exhausted the fun that was to be had out of him; returning to it with a persistency that evinced more concentration than variety in his mind. At last Evan said: 'Your pace is rather slow. They'll be shut up in Fallowfield. I 'll go on ahead. You'll find me at one of the inns-the Green Dragon.'

In return for this speech, the waggoner favoured him with a stare, followed by the exclamation:

'Oh, no! dang that!'

‘Why, what’s the matter?’ quoth Evan.

‘You en’t goin’ to be off, for to leave me and Gearge in the lurch there, with that ther’ young woman, in that ther’ pickle!’ returned the waggoner.

Page 1210

Evan made an appeal to his reason, but finding that impregnable, he pulled out his scanty purse to guarantee his sincerity with an offer of pledgemoney. The waggoner waved it aside. He wanted no money, he said.

‘Look heer,’ he went on; ’if you’re for a start, I tells ye plain, I chucks that ther’ young woman int’ the road.’

Evan bade him not to be a brute.

‘Nark and crop!’ the waggoner doggedly ejaculated.

Very much surprised that a fellow who appeared sound at heart, should threaten to behave so basely, Evan asked an explanation: upon which the waggoner demanded to know what he had eyes for: and as this query failed to enlighten the youth, he let him understand that he was a man of family experience, and that it was easy to tell at a glance that the complaint the young woman laboured under was one common to the daughters of Eve. He added that, should an emergency arise, he, though a family man, would be useless: that he always vacated the premises while those incidental scenes were being enacted at home; and that for him and George Stokes to be left alone with the young woman, why they would be of no more service to her than a couple of babies newborn themselves. He, for his part, he assured Evan, should take to his heels, and relinquish waggon, and horses, and all; while George probably would stand and gape; and the end of it would be, they would all be had up for murder. He diverged from the alarming prospect, by a renewal of the foregoing alternative to the gentleman who had constituted himself the young woman’s protector. If he parted company with them, they would immediately part company with the young woman, whose condition was evident.

‘Why, couldn’t you tall that?’ said the waggoner, as Evan, tingling at the ears, remained silent.

‘I know nothing of such things,’ he answered, hastily, like one hurt.

I have to repeat the statement, that he was a youth, and a modest one. He felt unaccountably, unreasonably, but horridly, ashamed. The thought of his actual position swamped the sickening disgust at tailordom. Worse, then, might happen to us in this extraordinary world! There was something more abhorrent than sitting with one’s legs crossed, publicly stitching, and scoffed at! He called vehemently to the waggoner to whip the horses, and hurry ahead into Fallowfield; but that worthy, whatever might be his dire alarms, had a regular pace, that was conscious of no spur: the reply of ‘All right!’ satisfied him at least; and Evan’s chaste sighs for the appearance of an assistant petticoat round a turn of the road, were offered up duly, to the measure of the waggoner’s steps.

Suddenly the waggoner came to a halt, and said ’Blest if that Gearge bain’t a snorin’ on his pins!’

Evan lingered by him with some curiosity, while the waggoner thumped his thigh to, ‘Yes he be! no he bain’t!’ several times, in eager hesitation.

Page 1211

‘It’s a fellow calling from the downs,’ said Evan.

‘Ay, so!’ responded the waggoner. ’Dang’d if I didn’t think ’twere that Gearge of our’n. Hark awhile.’

At a repetition of the call, the waggoner stopped his team. After a few minutes, a man appeared panting on the bank above them, down which he ran precipitately, knocked against Evan, apologized with the little breath that remained to him, and then held his hand as to entreat a hearing. Evan thought him half-mad; the waggoner was about to imagine him the victim of a midnight assault. He undeceived them by requesting, in rather flowery terms, conveyance on the road and rest for his limbs. It being explained to him that the waggon was already occupied, he comforted himself aloud with the reflection that it was something to be on the road again for one who had been belated, lost, and wandering over the downs for the last six hours.

‘Walcome to git in, when young woman gits out,’ said the waggoner. ’I’ll gi’ ye my sleep on t’ Hillford.’

‘Thanks, worthy friend,’ returned the new comer. ’The state of the case is this—I’m happy to take from humankind whatsoever I can get. If this gentleman will accept of my company, and my legs hold out, all will yet be well.’

Though he did not wear a petticoat, Evan was not sorry to have him. Next to the interposition of the Gods, we pray for human fellowship when we are in a mess. So he mumbled politely, dropped with him a little to the rear, and they all stepped out to the crack of the waggoner’s whip.

‘Rather a slow pace,’ said Evan, feeling bound to converse.

‘Six hours on the downs makes it extremely suitable to me,’ rejoined the stranger,

‘You lost your way?’

’I did, sir. Yes; one does not court those desolate regions wittingly. I am for life and society. The embraces of Diana do not agree with my constitution. If classics there be who differ from me, I beg them to take six hours on the downs alone with the moon, and the last prospect of bread and cheese, and a chaste bed, seemingly utterly extinguished. I am cured of my romance. Of course, when I say bread and cheese, I speak figuratively. Food is implied.’

Evan stole a glance at his companion.

‘Besides,’ the other continued, with an inflexion of grandeur, ’for a man accustomed to his hunters, it is, you will confess, unpleasant—I speak’ hypothetically—to be reduced to his legs to that extent that it strikes him shrewdly he will run them into stumps.’

The stranger laughed.

The fair lady of the night illumined his face, like one who recognized a subject. Evan thought he knew the voice. A curious struggle therein between native facetiousness and an attempt at dignity, appeared to Evan not unfamiliar; and the egregious failure of ambition and triumph of the instinct, helped him to join, the stranger in his mirth.

‘Jack Raikes?’ he said: ‘surely?’

Page 1212

‘The man!’ it was answered to him. ’But you? and near our old school—Viscount Harrington? These marvels occur, you see—we meet again by night.’

Evan, with little gratification at the meeting, fell into their former comradeship; tickled by a recollection of his old schoolfellow’s India-rubber mind.

Mr. Raikes stood about a head under him. He had extremely mobile features; thick, flexible eyebrows; a loose, voluble mouth; a ridiculous figure on a dandified foot. He represented to you one who was rehearsing a part he wished to act before the world, and was not aware that he took the world into his confidence.

How he had come there his elastic tongue explained in tropes and puns and lines of dramatic verse. His patrimony spent, he at once believed himself an actor, and he was hissed off the stage of a provincial theatre.

’Ruined, the last ignominy endured, I fled from the gay vistas of the Bench—for they live who would thither lead me! and determined, the day before the yesterday—what think’st thou? why to go boldly, and offer myself as Adlatus to blessed old Cudford! Yes! a little Latin is all that remains to me, and I resolved, like the man I am, to turn, hic, hac, hoc, into bread and cheese, and beer: Impute nought foreign to me, in the matter of pride.’

‘Usher in our old school—poor old Jack!’ exclaimed Evan.

‘Lieutenant in the Cudford Academy!’ the latter rejoined. ’I walked the distance from London. I had my interview with the respected principal. He gave me of mutton nearest the bone, which, they say, is sweetest; and on sweet things you should not regale in excess. Endymion watched the sheep that bred that mutton! He gave me the thin beer of our boyhood, that I might the more soberly state my mission. That beer, my friend, was brewed by one who wished to form a study for pantomimic masks. He listened with the gravity which is all his own to the recital of my career; he pleasantly compared me to Phaethon, congratulated the river Thames at my not setting it on fire in my rapid descent, and extended to me the three fingers of affectionate farewell. “You an usher, a rearer of youth, Mr. Raikes? Oh, no! Oh, no!” That was all I could get out of him. ’Gad! he might have seen that I didn’t joke with the mutton-bone. If I winced at the beer it was imperceptible. Now a man who can do that is what I call a man in earnest.’

‘You’ve just come from Cudford?’ said Evan.

’Short is the tale, though long the way, friend Harrington. From Bodley is ten miles to Beckley. I walked them. From Beckley is fifteen miles to Fallowfield. Them I was traversing, when, lo! near sweet eventide a fair horsewoman riding with her groom at her horse’s heels. “Lady,” says I, addressing her, as much out of the style of the needy as possible, “will you condescend to direct me to Fallowfield?”—“Are you going to the match?” says she. I answered boldly that I was. “Beckley’s in,”

Page 1213

says she, “and you’ll be in time to see them out, if you cut across the downs there.” I lifted my hat—a desperate measure, for the brim won’t bear much—but honour to women though we perish. She bowed: I cut across the downs. In fine, Harrington, old boy, I’ve been wandering among those downs for the last seven or eight hours. I was on the point of turning my back on the road for the twentieth time, I believe when I heard your welcome vehicular music, and hailed you; and I ask you, isn’t it luck for a fellow who hasn’t got a penny in his pocket, and is as hungry as five hundred hunters, to drop on an old friend like this?’

Evan answered with the question:

‘Where was it you said you met the young lady?’

’In the first place, O Amadis! I never said she was young. You’re on the scent, I see.’

Nursing the fresh image of his darling in his heart’s recesses, Evan, as they entered Fallowfield, laid the state of his purse before Jack, and earned anew the epithet of Amadis, when it came to be told that the occupant of the waggon was likewise one of its pensioners.

Sleep had long held its reign in Fallowfield. Nevertheless, Mr. Raikes, though blind windows alone looked on him, and nought foreign was to be imputed to him in the matter of pride, had become exceedingly solicitous concerning his presentation to the inhabitants of that quiet little country town; and while Evan and—the waggoner consulted the former with regard to the chances of procuring beds and supper, the latter as to his prospect of beer and a comfortable riddance of the feminine burden weighing on them all—Mr. Raikes was engaged in persuading his hat to assume something of the gentlemanly polish of its youth, and might have been observed now and then furtively catching up a leg to be dusted. Ere the wheels of the waggon stopped he had gained that ease of mind which the knowledge that you have done all a man may do and circumstances warrant, establishes. Capacities conscious of their limits may repose even proudly when they reach them; and, if Mr. Raikes had not quite the air of one come out of a bandbox, he at least proved to the discerning intelligence that he knew what sort of manner befitted that happy occasion, and was enabled by the pains he had taken to glance with a challenge at the sign of the hostelry, under which they were now ranked, and from which, though the hour was late, and Fallowfield a singularly somnolent little town, there issued signs of life approaching to festivity.

CHAPTER XI

DOINGS AT AN INN

Page 1214

What every traveller sighs to find, was palatably furnished by the Green Dragon of Fallowfield—a famous inn, and a constellation for wandering coachmen. There pleasant smiles seasoned plenty, and the bill was gilded in a manner unknown to our days. Whoso drank of the ale of the Green Dragon kept in his memory a place apart for it. The secret, that to give a warm welcome is the breath of life to an inn, was one the Green Dragon boasted, even then, not to share with many Red Lions, or Cocks of the Morning, or Kings' Heads, or other fabulous monsters; and as if to show that when you are in the right track you are sure to be seconded, there was a friend of the Green Dragon, who, on a particular night of the year, caused its renown to enlarge to the dimensions of a miracle. But that, for the moment, is my secret.

Evan and Jack were met in the passage by a chambermaid. Before either of them could speak, she had turned and fled, with the words:

'More coming!' which, with the addition of 'My goodness me!' were echoed by the hostess in her recess. Hurried directions seemed to be consequent, and then the hostess sallied out, and said, with a curtsey:

'Please to step in, gentlemen. This is the room, tonight.'

Evan lifted his hat; and bowing, requested to know whether they could have a supper and beds.

'Beds, Sir!' cried the hostess. 'What am I to do for beds! Yes, beds indeed you may have, but bed-rooms—if you ask for them, it really is more than I can supply you with. I have given up my own. I sleep with my maid Jane to-night.'

'Anything will do for us, madam,' replied Evan, renewing his foreign courtesy. 'But there is a poor young woman outside.'

'Another!' The hostess instantly smiled down her inhospitable outcry.

'She,' said Evan, 'must have a room to herself. She is ill.'

'Must is must, sir,' returned the gracious hostess. 'But I really haven't the means.'

'You have bed-rooms, madam?'

'Every one of them engaged, sir.'

'By ladies, madam?'

'Lord forbid, Sir!' she exclaimed with the honest energy of a woman who knew her sex.

Evan bade Jack go and assist the waggoner to bring in the girl. Jack, who had been all the time pulling at his wristbands, and settling his coat-collar by the dim reflection of a window of the bar, departed, after, on his own authority, assuring the hostess that fever was not the young woman's malady, as she protested against admitting fever into her house, seeing that she had to consider her guests.

'We're open to all the world to-night, except fever,' said the hostess. 'Yes,' she rejoined to Evan's order that the waggoner and his mate should be supplied with ale, 'they shall have as much as they can drink,' which is not a speech usual at inns, when one man gives an order for others, but Evan passed it by, and politely begged to be shown in to one of the gentlemen who had engaged bedrooms.

Page 1215

‘Oh! if you can persuade any of them, sir, I’m sure I’ve nothing to say,’ observed the hostess. ’Pray, don’t ask me to stand by and back it, that’s all.’

Had Evan been familiar with the Green Dragon, he would have noticed that the landlady, its presiding genius, was stiffer than usual; the rosy smile was more constrained, as if a great host had to be embraced, and were trying it to the utmost stretch. There was, however, no asperity about her, and when she had led him to the door he was to enter to prefer his suit, and she had asked whether the young woman was quite common, and he had replied that he had picked her up on the road, and that she was certainly poor, the hostess said:

’I ’m sure you’re a very good gentleman, sir, and if I could spare your asking at all, I would.’

With that she went back to encounter Mr. Raikes and his charge, and prime the waggoner and his mate.

A noise of laughter and talk was stilled gradually, as Evan made his bow into a spacious room, wherein, as the tops of pines are seen swimming on the morning mist, about a couple of dozen guests of divers conditions sat partially revealed through wavy clouds of tobacco-smoke. By their postures, which Evan’s appearance by no means disconcerted, you read in a glance men who had been at ease for so many hours that they had no troubles in the world save the two ultimate perplexities of the British Sybarite, whose bed of roses is harassed by the pair of problems: first, what to do with his legs; secondly, how to imbibe liquor with the slightest possible derangement of those members subordinate to his upper structure. Of old the Sybarite complained. Not so our self-helpful islanders. Since they could not, now that work was done and jollity the game, take off their legs, they got away from them as far as they might, in fashions original or imitative: some by thrusting them out at full length; some by cramping them under their chairs: while some, taking refuge in a mental effort, forgot them, a process to be recommended if it did not involve occasional pangs of consciousness to the legs of their neighbours. We see in our cousins West of the great water, who are said to exaggerate our peculiarities, beings labouring under the same difficulty, and intent on its solution. As to the second problem: that of drinking without discomposure to the subservient limbs: the company present worked out this republican principle ingeniously, but in a manner beneath the attention of the Muse. Let Clio record that mugs and glasses, tobacco and pipes, were strewn upon the table. But if the guests had arrived at that stage when to reach the arm, or arrange the person, for a sip of good stuff, causes moral debates, and presents to the mind impediments equal to what would be raised in active men by the prospect of a great excursion, it is not to be wondered at that the presence of a stranger produced no immediate commotion. Two or three heads were half turned; such as faced him imperceptibly lifted their eyelids.

Page 1216

‘Good evening, sir,’ said one who sat as chairman, with a decisive nod.

‘Good night, ain’t it?’ a jolly-looking old fellow queried of the speaker, in an under-voice.

‘Gad, you don’t expect me to be wishing the gentleman good-bye, do you?’ retorted the former.

‘Ha! ha! No, to be sure,’ answered the old boy; and the remark was variously uttered, that ‘Good night,’ by a caprice of our language, did sound like it.

‘Good evening’s “How d’ ye do?”—“How are ye?” Good night’s “Be off, and be blowed to you,"’ observed an interpreter with a positive mind; and another, whose intelligence was not so clear, but whose perceptions had seized the point, exclaimed: ’I never says it when I hails a chap; but, dash my buttons, if I mightn’t ‘a done, one day or another! Queer!’

The chairman, warmed by his joke, added, with a sharp wink: ’Ay; it would be queer, if you hailed “Good night” in the middle of the day!’ and this among a company soaked in ripe ale, could not fail to run the electric circle, and persuaded several to change their positions; in the rumble of which, Evan’s reply, if he had made any, was lost. Few, however, were there who could think of him, and ponder on that glimpse of fun, at the same time; and he would have been passed over, had not the chairman said: ‘Take a seat, sir; make yourself comfortable.’

‘Before I have that pleasure,’ replied Evan, ‘I—’

’I see where ‘tis,’ burst out the old boy who had previously superinduced a diversion: ‘he’s going to ax if he can’t have a bed!’

A roar of laughter, and ‘Don’t you remember this day last year?’ followed the cunning guess. For awhile explication was impossible; and Evan coloured, and smiled, and waited for them.

‘I was going to ask—’

‘Said so!’ shouted the old boy, gleefully.

’—one of the gentlemen who has engaged a bed-room to do me the extreme favour to step aside with me, and allow me a moment’s speech with him.’

Long faces were drawn, and odd stares were directed toward him, in reply.

’I see where ‘tis’; the old boy thumped his knee. ’Ain’t it now? Speak up, sir! There’s a lady in the case?’

‘I may tell you thus much,’ answered Evan, ’that it is an unfortunate young woman, very ill, who needs rest and quiet.’

‘Didn’t I say so?’ shouted the old boy.

But this time, though his jolly red jowl turned all round to demand a confirmation, it was not generally considered that he had divined so correctly. Between a lady and an unfortunate young woman, there seemed to be a strong distinction, in the minds of the company.

The chairman was the most affected by the communication. His bushy eyebrows frowned at Evan, and he began tugging at the brass buttons of his coat, like one preparing to arm for a conflict.

‘Speak out, sir, if you please,’ he said. ’Above board—no asides—no taking advantages. You want me to give up my bed-room for the use of your young woman, sir?’

Page 1217

Evan replied quietly: 'She is a stranger to me; and if you could see her, sir, and know her situation, I think she would move your pity.'

'I don't doubt it, sir—I don't doubt it,' returned the chairman. 'They all move our pity. That's how they get over us. She has diddled you, and she would diddle me, and diddle us all-diddle the devil, I dare say, when her time comes. I don't doubt it, sir.'

To confront a vehement old gentleman, sitting as president in an assembly of satellites, requires command of countenance, and Evan was not browbeaten: he held him, and the whole room, from where he stood, under a serene and serious eye, for his feelings were too deeply stirred on behalf of the girl to let him think of himself. That question of hers, 'What are you going to do with me?' implying such helplessness and trust, was still sharp on his nerves.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I humbly beg your pardon for disturbing you as I do.'

But with a sudden idea that a general address on behalf of a particular demand must necessarily fail, he let his eyes rest on one there, whose face was neither stupid nor repellent, and who, though he did not look up, had an attentive, thoughtful cast about the mouth.

'May I entreat a word apart with you, sir?'

Evan was not mistaken in the index he had perused. The gentleman seemed to feel that he was selected from the company, and slightly raising his head, carelessly replied: 'My bed is entirely at your disposal,' resuming his contemplative pose.

On the point of thanking him, Evan advanced a step, when up started the irascible chairman.

'I don't permit it! I won't allow it!' And before Evan could ask his reasons, he had rung the bell, muttering: 'They follow us to our inns, now, the baggages! They must harry us at our inns! We can't have peace and quiet at our inns!—'

In a state of combustion, he cried out to the waiter:

'Here, Mark, this gentleman has brought in a dirty wench: pack her up to my bed-room, and lock her in lock her in, and bring down the key.'

Agreeably deceived in the old gentleman's intentions, Evan could not refrain from joining the murmured hilarity created by the conclusion of his order. The latter glared at him, and added: 'Now, sir, you've done your worst. Sit down, and be merry.'

Replying that he had a friend outside, and would not fail to accept the invitation, Evan retired. He was met by the hostess with the reproachful declaration on her lips, that she

was a widow woman, wise in appearances, and that he had brought into her house that night work she did not expect, or bargain for. Rather (since I must speak truth of my gentleman) to silence her on the subject, and save his ears, than to propitiate her favour towards the girl, Evan drew out his constitutionally lean purse, and dropped it in her hand, praying her to put every expense incurred to his charge. She exclaimed:

Page 1218

‘If Dr. Pillie has his full sleep this night, I shall be astonished’; and Evan hastily led Jack into the passage to impart to him, that the extent of his resources was reduced to the smallest of sums in shillings.

‘I can beat my friend at that reckoning,’ said Mr. Raikes; and they entered the room.

Eyes were on him. This had ever the effect of causing him to swell to monstrous proportions in the histrionic line. Asking the waiter carelessly for some light supper dish, he suggested the various French, with ‘not that?’ and the affable naming of another. ’Nor that? Dear me, we shall have to sup on chops, I believe!’

Evan saw the chairman scrutinizing Raikes, much as he himself might have done, and he said: ‘Bread and cheese for me.’

Raikes exclaimed: ’Really? Well, my lord, you lead, and your taste is mine!’

A second waiter scudded past, and stopped before the chairman to say: ’If you please, sir, the gentlemen upstairs send their compliments, and will be happy to accept.’

‘Ha!’ was the answer. ’Thought better of it, have they! Lay for three more, then. Five more, I guess.’ He glanced at the pair of intruders.

Among a portion of the guests there had been a return to common talk, and one had observed that he could not get that ‘Good Evening,’ and ’Good Night,’ out of his head which had caused a friend to explain the meaning of these terms of salutation to him: while another, of a philosophic turn, pursued the theme: ’You see, when we meets, we makes a night of it. So, when we parts, it’s Good Night—natural! ain’t it?’ A proposition assented to, and considerably dilated on; but whether he was laughing at that, or what had aroused the fit, the chairman did not say.

Gentle chuckles had succeeded his laughter by the time the bread and cheese appeared.

In the rear of the provision came three young gentlemen, of whom the foremost lumped in, singing to one behind him, ’And you shall have little Rosey!’

They were clad in cricketing costume, and exhibited the health and manners of youthful Englishmen of station. Frolicsome young bulls bursting on an assemblage of sheep, they might be compared to. The chairman welcomed them a trifle snubbingly. The colour mounted to the cheeks of Mr. Raikes as he made incision in the cheese, under their eyes, knitting his brows fearfully, as if at hard work.

The chairman entreated Evan to desist from the cheese; and, pulling out his watch, thundered: ‘Time!’

The company generally jumped on their legs; and, in the midst of a hum of talk and laughter, he informed Evan and Jack, that he invited them cordially to a supper up-stairs, and would be pleased if they would partake of it, and in a great rage if they would not.

Raikes was for condescending to accept.

Evan sprang up and cried: ‘Gladly, sir,’ and gladly would he have cast his cockney schoolmate to the winds, in the presence of these young cricketers; for he had a prognostication.

Page 1219

The door was open, and the company of jolly yeomen, tradesmen, farmers, and the like, had become intent on observing all the ceremonies of precedence: not one would broaden his back on the other; and there was bowing, and scraping, and grimacing, till Farmer Broadmead was hailed aloud, and the old boy stepped forth, and was summarily pushed through: the chairman calling from the rear, 'Hulloa! no names to-night!' to which was answered lustily: 'All right, Mr. Tom!' and the speaker was reproved with, 'There you go! at it again!' and out and up they hustled.

The chairman said quietly to Evan, as they were ascending the stairs: 'We don't have names to-night; may as well drop titles.' Which presented no peculiar meaning to Evan's mind, and he smiled the usual smile.

To Raikes, at the door of the supper-room, the chairman repeated the same; and with extreme affability and alacrity of abnegation, the other rejoined, 'Oh, certainly!'

No wonder that he rubbed his hands with more delight than aristocrats and people with gentlemanly connections are in the habit of betraying at the prospect of refection, for the release from bread and cheese was rendered overpoweringly glorious, in his eyes, by the bountiful contrast exhibited on the board before him.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH ALE IS SHOWN TO HAVE ONE QUALITY OF WINE

To proclaim that yon ribs of beef and yonder ruddy Britons have met, is to furnish matter for an hour's comfortable meditation.

Digest the fact. Here the Fates have put their seal to something Nature clearly devised. It was intended; and it has come to pass. A thing has come to pass which we feel to be right! The machinery of the world, then, is not entirely dislocated: there is harmony, on one point, among the mysterious powers who have to do with us.

Apart from its eloquent and consoling philosophy, the picture is pleasant. You see two rows of shoulders resolutely set for action: heads in divers degrees of proximity to their plates: eyes variously twinkling, or hypocritically composed: chaps in vigorous exercise. Now leans a fellow right back with his whole face to the firmament: Ale is his adoration. He sighs not till he sees the end of the mug. Now from one a laugh is sprung; but, as if too early tapped, he turns off the cock, and primes himself anew. Occupied by their own requirements, these Britons allow that their neighbours have rights: no cursing at waste of time is heard when plates have to be passed: disagreeable, it is still duty. Field-Marshal Duty, the Briton's chief star, shines here. If one usurps more than his allowance of elbow-room, bring your charge against them that fashioned him: work away to arrive at some compass yourself.

Now the mustard ceases to travel, and the salt: the guests have leisure to contemplate their achievements. Laughs are more prolonged, and come from the depths.

Page 1220

Now Ale, which is to Beef what Eve was to Adam, threatens to take possession of the field. Happy they who, following Nature's direction, admitted not bright ale into their Paradise till their manhood was strengthened with beef. Some, impatient, had thirsted; had satisfied their thirst; and the ale, the light though lovely spirit, with nothing to hold it down, had mounted to their heads; just as Eve will do when Adam is not mature: just as she did—Alas!

Now, the ruins of the feast being removed, and a clear course left for the flow of ale, Farmer Broadmead, facing the chairman, rises. He stands in an attitude of midway. He speaks:

'Gentlemen! 'Taint fust time you and I be met here, to salbrate this here occasion. I say, not fust time, not by many a time, 'taint. Well, gentlemen, I ain't much of a speaker, gentlemen, as you know. Howsever, here I be. No denyin' that. I'm on my legs. This here's a strange enough world, and a man 's a gentleman, I say, we ought for to be glad when we got 'm. You know: I'm coming to it shortly. I ain't much of a speaker, and if you wants somethin' new, you must ax elsewhere: but what I say is—Bang it! here's good health and long life to Mr. Tom, up there!'

'No names!' shouts the chairman, in the midst of a tremendous clatter.

Farmer Broadmead moderately disengages his breadth from the seat. He humbly axes pardon, which is accorded him with a blunt nod.

Ale (to Beef what Eve was to Adam) circulates beneath a dazzling foam, fair as the first woman.

Mr. Tom (for the breach of the rules in mentioning whose name on a night when identities are merged, we offer sincere apologies every other minute), Mr. Tom is toasted. His parents, who selected that day sixty years ago, for his bow to be made to the world, are alluded to with encomiums, and float down to posterity on floods of liquid amber.

But to see all the subtle merits that now begin to bud out from Mr. Tom, the chairman and giver of the feast; and also rightly to appreciate the speeches, we require to be enormously charged with Ale. Mr. Raikes did his best to keep his head above the surface of the rapid flood. He conceived the chairman in brilliant colours, and probably owing to the energy called for by his brain, the legs of the young man failed him twice, as he tried them. Attention was demanded. Mr. Raikes addressed the meeting.

The three young gentlemen-cricketers had hitherto behaved with a certain propriety. It did not offend Mr. Raikes to see them conduct themselves as if they were at a play, and the rest of the company paid actors. He had likewise taken a position, and had been the first to laugh aloud at a particular slip of grammar; while his shrugs at the aspirates

transposed and the pronunciation prevalent, had almost established a free-masonry between him and one of the three young gentlemen-cricketers-a fair-haired youth, with a handsome, reckless face, who leaned on the table, humorously eyeing the several speakers, and exchanging by-words and laughs with his friends on each side of him.

Page 1221

But Mr. Raikes had the disadvantage of having come to the table empty in stomach—-thirsty exceedingly; and, I repeat, that as, without experience, you are the victim of divinely given Eve, so, with no foundation to receive it upon, are you the victim of good sound Ale. He very soon lost his head. He would otherwise have seen that he must produce a wonderfully-telling speech if he was to keep the position he had taken, and had better not attempt one. The three young cricketers were hostile from the beginning. All of them leant forward, calling attention loudly laughing for the fun to come.

‘Gentlemen!’ he said: and said it twice. The gap was wide, and he said, ‘Gentlemen!’ again.

This commencement of a speech proves that you have made the plunge, but not that you can swim. At a repetition of ‘Gentlemen!’ expectancy resolved into cynicism.

‘Gie’n a help,’ sang out a son of the plough to a neighbour of the orator.

‘Hang it!’ murmured another, ‘we ain’t such gentlemen as that comes to.’

Mr. Raikes was politely requested to ‘tune his pipe.’

With a gloomy curiosity as to the results of Jack’s adventurous undertaking, and a touch of anger at the three whose bearing throughout had displeased him, Evan regarded his friend. He, too, had drunk, and upon emptiness. Bright ale had mounted to his brain. A hero should be held as sacred as the Grand Llama: so let no more be said than that he drank still, nor marked the replenishing of his glass.

Raikes cleared his throat for a final assault: he had got an image, and was dashing off; but, unhappily, as if to make the start seem fair, he was guilty of his reiteration, ‘Gentlemen.’

Everybody knew that it was a real start this time, and indeed he had made an advance, and had run straight through half a sentence. It was therefore manifestly unfair, inimical, contemptuous, overbearing, and base, for one of the three young cricketers at this period to fling back weariedly and exclaim: ‘By the Lord; too many gentlemen here!’

Evan heard him across the table. Lacking the key of the speaker’s previous conduct, the words might have passed. As it was, they, to the ale-invaded head of a young hero, feeling himself the world’s equal, and condemned nevertheless to bear through life the insignia of Tailordom, not unnaturally struck with peculiar offence. There was arrogance, too, in the young man who had interposed. He was long in the body, and, when he was not refreshing his sight by a careless contemplation of his finger-nails, looked down on his company at table, as one may do who comes from loftier studies. He had what is popularly known as the nose of our aristocracy: a nose that much

culture of the external graces, and affectation of suavity, are required to soften. Thereto were joined thin lips and arched brows. Birth it was possible he could boast, hardly brains. He sat to the right of the fair-haired youth, who, with his

Page 1222

remaining comrade, a quiet smiling fellow, appeared to be better liked by the guests, and had been hailed once or twice, under correction of the chairman, as Mr. Harry. The three had distinguished one there by a few friendly passages; and this was he who had offered his bed to Evan for the service of the girl. The recognition they extended to him did not affect him deeply. He was called Drummond, and had his place near the chairmen, whose humours he seemed to relish.

The ears of Mr. Raikes were less keen at the moment than Evan's, but his openness to ridicule was that of a man on his legs solus, amid a company sitting, and his sense of the same—when he saw himself the victim of it—acute. His face was rather comic, and, under the shadow of embarrassment, twitching and working for ideas—might excuse a want of steadiness and absolute gravity in the countenances of others.

The chairman's neighbour, Drummond, whispered him 'Laxley will get up a row with that fellow.'

'It 's young Jocelyn egging him on,' said the chairman.

'Um!' added Drummond: 'it's the friend of that talkative rascal that 's dangerous, if it comes to anything.'

Mr. Raikes perceived that his host desired him to conclude. So, lifting his voice and swinging his arm, he ended: 'Allow me to propose to you the Fly in Amber. In other words, our excellent host embalmed in brilliant ale! Drink him! and so let him live in our memories for ever!'

He sat down very well contented with himself, very little comprehended, and applauded loudly.

'The Flyin' Number!' echoed Farmer Broadmead, confidently and with clamour; adding to a friend, when both had drunk the toast to the dregs, 'But what number that be, or how many 'tis of 'em, dishes me! But that 's ne'ther here nor there.'

The chairman and host of the evening stood up to reply, welcomed by thunders—'There ye be, Mr. Tom! glad I lives to see ye!' and 'No names!' and 'Long life to him!'

This having subsided, the chairman spoke, first nodding. 'You don't want many words, and if you do, you won't get 'em from me.'

Cries of 'Got something better!' took up the blunt address.

'You've been true to it, most of you. I like men not to forget a custom.'

'Good reason so to be,' and 'A jolly good custom,' replied to both sentences.

’As to the beef, I hope you didn’t find it tough: as to the ale—I know all about *that*!’

‘Aha! good!’ rang the verdict.

’All I can say is, that this day next year it will be on the table, and I hope that every one of you will meet Tom—will meet me here punctually. I’m not a Parliament man, so that ‘ll do.’

The chairman’s breach of his own rules drowned the termination of his speech in an uproar.

Re-seating himself, he lifted his glass, and proposed: ’The Antediluvians!’

Farmer Broadmead echoed: ‘The Antediloovians!’ appending, as a private sentiment, ‘And dam rum chaps they were!’

Page 1223

The Antediluvians, undoubtedly the toast of the evening, were enthusiastically drunk, and in an ale of treble brew.

When they had quite gone down, Mr. Raikes ventured to ask for the reason of their receiving such honour from a posterity they had so little to do with. He put the question mildly, but was impetuously snapped at by the chairman.

'You respect men for their luck, sir, don't you? Don't be a hypocrite, and say you don't —you do. Very well: so do I. That's why I drink "The Antediluvians"!'

'Our worthy host here' (Drummond, gravely smiling, undertook to elucidate the case) 'has a theory that the constitutions of the Postdiluvians have been deranged, and their lives shortened, by the miasmas of the Deluge. I believe he carries it so far as to say that Noah, in the light of a progenitor, is inferior to Adam, owing to the shaking he had to endure in the ark, and which he conceives to have damaged the patriarch and the nervous systems of his sons. It's a theory, you know.'

'They lived close on a thousand years, hale, hearty—and no water!' said the chairman.

'Well!' exclaimed one, some way down the table, a young farmer, red as a cock's comb: 'no fools they, eh, master? Where there's ale, would you drink water, my hearty?' and back he leaned to enjoy the tribute to his wit; a wit not remarkable, but nevertheless sufficient in the noise it created to excite the envy of Mr. Raikes, who, inveterately silly when not engaged in a contest, now began to play on the names of the sons of Noah.

The chairman lanced a keen light at him from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

Before long he had again to call two parties to order. To Raikes, Laxley was a puppy: to Laxley, Mr. Raikes was a snob. The antagonism was natural: ale did but put the match to the magazine. But previous to an explosion, Laxley, who had observed Evan's disgust at Jack's exhibition of himself, and had been led to think, by his conduct and clothes in conjunction, that Evan was his own equal; a gentleman condescending to the society of a low-born acquaintance;—had sought with sundry propitiations, intelligent glances, light shrugs, and such like, to divide Evan from Jack. He did this, doubtless, because he partly sympathized with Evan, and to assure him that he took a separate view of him. Probably Evan was already offended, or he held to Jack, as a comrade should, or else it was that Tailordom and the pride of his accepted humiliation bellowed in his ears, every fresh minute: 'Nothing assume!' I incline to think that the more ale he drank the fiercer rebel he grew against conventional ideas of rank, and those class-barriers which we scorn so vehemently when we find ourselves kicking at them. Whatsoever the reason that prompted him, he did not respond to Laxley's advances; and Laxley, disregarding him, dealt with Raikes alone.

In a tone plainly directed at him, he said: ’Well, Harry, tired of this? The agriculturals are good fun, but I can’t stand much of the small cockney. A blackguard who tries to make jokes out of the Scriptures ought to be kicked!’

Page 1224

Harry rejoined, with wet lips: 'Wopping stuff, this ale! Who's that you want to kick?'

'Somebody who objects to his bray, I suppose,' Mr. Raikes struck in, across the table, negligently thrusting out his elbow to support his head.

'Did you allude to me, sir?' Laxley inquired.

'I alluded to a donkey, sir.' Raikes lifted his eyelids to the same level as Laxley's: 'a passing remark on that interesting animal.'

His friend Harry now came into the ring to try a fall.

'Are you an usher in a school?' he asked, meaning by his looks what men of science in fisticuffs call business.

Mr. Raikes started in amazement. He recovered as quickly.

'No, sir, not quite; but I have no doubt I should be able to instruct you upon a point or two.'

'Good manners, for instance?' remarked the third young cricketer, without disturbing his habitual smile.

'Or what comes from not observing them,' said Evan, unwilling to have Jack over-matched.

'Perhaps you'll give me a lesson now?' Harry indicated a readiness to rise for either of them.

At this juncture the chairman interposed.

'Harmony, my lads!—harmony to-night.'

Farmer Broadmead, imagining it to be the signal for a song, returned:

'All right, Mr.—— Mr. Chair! but we an't got pipes in yet. Pipes before harmony, you know, to-night.'

The pipes were summoned forthwith. System appeared to regulate the proceedings of this particular night at the Green Dragon. The pipes charged, and those of the guests who smoked, well fixed behind them, celestial Harmony was invoked through the slowly curling clouds. In Britain the Goddess is coy. She demands pressure to appear, and great gulps of ale. Vastly does she swell the chests of her island children, but with the modesty of a maid at the commencement. Precedence again disturbed the minds of the company. At last the red-faced young farmer led off with 'The Rose and the Thorn.'

In that day Chloe still lived; nor were the amorous transports of Strephon quenched. Mountainous inflation—mouse-like issue characterized the young farmer's first verse. Encouraged by manifest approbation he now told Chloe that he 'by Heaven! never would plant in that bosom a thorn,' with such a volume of sound as did indeed show how a lover's oath should be uttered in the ear of a British damsel to subdue her.

'Good!' cried Mr. Raikes, anxious to be convivial.

Subsiding into impertinence, he asked Laxley, 'Could you tip us a Strephonade, sir? Rejoiced to listen to you, I'm sure! Promise you my applause beforehand.'

Harry replied hotly: 'Will you step out of the room with me a minute?'

'Have you a confession to make?' quoth Jack, unmoved. 'Have you planted a thorn in the feminine flower-garden? Make a clean breast of it at the table. Confess openly and be absolved.'

Page 1225

While Evan spoke a word of angry reproof to Raikes, Harry had to be restrained by his two friends. The rest of the company looked on with curiosity; the mouth of the chairman was bunched. Drummond had his eyes on Evan, who was gazing steadily at the three. Suddenly 'The fellow isn't a gentleman!' struck the attention of Mr. Raikes with alarming force.

Raikes—and it may be because he knew he could do more than Evan in this respect—vociferated: 'I'm the son of a gentleman!'

Drummond, from the head of the table, saw that a diversion was imperative. He leaned forward, and with a look of great interest said:

'Are you? Pray, never disgrace your origin, then.'

'If the choice were offered me, I think I would rather have known his father,' said the smiling fellow, yawning, and rocking on his chair.

'You would, possibly, have been exceedingly intimate—with his right foot,' said Raikes.

The other merely remarked: 'Oh! that is the language of the son of a gentleman.'

The tumult of irony, abuse, and retort, went on despite the efforts of Drummond and the chairman. It was odd; for at Farmer Broadmead's end of the table, friendship had grown maudlin: two were seen in a drowsy embrace, with crossed pipes; and others were vowing deep amity, and offering to fight the man that might desire it.

'Are ye a friend? or are ye a foe?' was heard repeatedly, and consequences to the career of the respondent, on his choice of affirmatives to either of these two interrogations, emphatically detailed.

It was likewise asked, in reference to the row at the gentlemen's end: 'Why doan' they stand up and have 't out?'

'They talks, they speechifies—why doan' they fight for 't, and then be friendly?'

'Where's the yarmony, Mr. Chair, I axes—so please ye?' sang out Farmer Broadmead.

'Ay, ay! Silence!' the chairman called.

Mr. Raikes begged permission to pronounce his excuses, but lapsed into a lamentation for the squandering of property bequeathed to him by his respected uncle, and for which—as far as he was intelligible—he persisted in calling the three offensive young cricketers opposite to account.

Before he could desist, Harmony, no longer coy, burst on the assembly from three different sources. ‘A Man who is given to Liquor,’ soared aloft with ‘The Maid of sweet Seventeen,’ who participated in the adventures of ‘Young Molly and the Kicking Cow’; while the guests selected the chorus of the song that first demanded it.

Evan probably thought that Harmony was herself only when she came single, or he was wearied of his fellows, and wished to gaze a moment on the skies whose arms were over and around his young beloved. He went to the window and threw it up, and feasted his sight on the moon standing on the downs. He could have wept at the bitter ignominy that severed him from Rose. And again he gathered his pride as a cloak, and defied the world, and gloried in the sacrifice that degraded him. The beauty of the night touched him, and mixed these feelings with mournfulness. He quite forgot the bellow and clatter behind. The beauty of the night, and heaven knows what treacherous hope in the depths of his soul, coloured existence warmly.

Page 1226

He was roused from his reverie by an altercation unmistakeably fierce.

Raikes had been touched on a tender point. In reply to a bantering remark of his, Laxley had hummed over bits of his oration, amid the chuckles of his comrades. Unfortunately at a loss for a biting retort, Raikes was reduced to that plain confession of a lack of wit; he offered combat.

'I 'll tell you what,' said Laxley, 'I never soil my hands with a blackguard; and a fellow who tries to make fun of Scripture, in my opinion is one. A blackguard—do you hear? But, if you'll give me satisfactory proofs that you really are what I have some difficulty in believing the son of a gentleman—I 'll meet you when and where you please.'

'Fight him, anyhow,' said Harry. 'I 'll take him myself after we finish the match to-morrow.'

Laxley rejoined that Mr. Raikes must be left to him.

'Then I'll take the other,' said Harry. 'Where is he?'

Evan walked round to his place.

'I am here,' he answered, 'and at your service.'

'Will you fight?' cried Harry.

There was a disdainful smile on Evan's mouth, as he replied: 'I must first enlighten you. I have no pretensions to your blue blood, or yellow. If, sir, you will deign to challenge a man who is not the son of a gentleman, and consider the expression of his thorough contempt for your conduct sufficient to enable you to overlook that fact, you may dispose of me. My friend here has, it seems, reason to be proud of his connections. That you may not subsequently bring the charge against me of having led you to "soil your hands"—as your friend there terms it—I, with all the willingness in the world to chastise you or him for your impertinence, must first give you a fair chance of escape, by telling you that my father was a tailor.'

The countenance of Mr. Raikes at the conclusion of this speech was a painful picture. He knocked the table passionately, exclaiming:

'Who'd have thought it?'

Yet he had known it. But he could not have thought it possible for a man to own it publicly.

Indeed, Evan could not have mentioned it, but for hot fury and the ale. It was the ale in him expelling truth; and certainly, to look at him, none would have thought it.

‘That will do,’ said Laxley, lacking the magnanimity to despise the advantage given him, ’you have chosen the very best means of saving your skins.’

’We ‘ll come to you when our supply of clothes runs short,’ added Harry. ‘A snip!’

‘Pardon me!’ said Evan, with his eyes slightly widening, ’but if you come to me, I shall no longer give you a choice of behaviour. I wish you good-night, gentlemen. I shall be in this house, and am to be found here, till ten o’clock to-morrow morning. Sir,’ he addressed the chairman, ’I must apologize to you for this interruption to your kindness, for which I thank you very sincerely. It ‘s “good-night,” now, sir,’ he pursued, bowing, and holding out his hand, with a smile.

Page 1227

The chairman grasped it: ’You’re a hot-headed young fool, sir: you’re an ill-tempered ferocious young ass. Can’t you see another young donkey without joining company in kicks-eh? Sit down, and don’t dare to spoil the fun any more. You a tailor! Who’ll believe it? You’re a nobleman in disguise. Didn’t your friend say so?—ha! ha! Sit down.’ He pulled out his watch, and proclaiming that he was born into this world at the hour about to strike, called for a bumper all round.

While such of the company as had yet legs and eyes unvanquished by the potency of the ale, stood up to drink and cheer, Mark, the waiter, scurried into the room, and, to the immense stupefaction of the chairman, and amusement of his guests, spread the news of the immediate birth of a little stranger on the premises, who was declared by Dr. Pillie to be a lusty boy, and for whom the kindly landlady solicited good luck to be drunk.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MATCH OF FALLOW FIELD AGAINST BECKLEY

The dramatic proportions to which ale will exalt the sentiments within us, and our delivery of them, are apt to dwindle and shrink even below the natural elevation when we look back on them from the hither shore of the river of sleep—in other words, wake in the morning: and it was with no very self-satisfied emotions that Evan, dressing by the full light of day, reviewed his share in the events of the preceding night. Why, since he had accepted his fate, should he pretend to judge the conduct of people his superiors in rank? And where was the necessity for him to thrust the fact of his being that abhorred social pariah down the throats of an assembly of worthy good fellows? The answer was, that he had not accepted his fate: that he considered himself as good a gentleman as any man living, and was in absolute hostility with the prejudices of society. That was the state of the case: but the evaporation of ale in his brain caused him to view his actions from the humble extreme of that delightful liquor, of which the spirit had flown and the corpse remained.

Having revived his system with soda-water, and finding no sign of his antagonist below, Mr. Raikes, to disperse the sceptical dimples on his friend’s face, alluded during breakfast to a determination he had formed to go forth and show on the cricket-field.

‘For, you know,’ he observed, ’they can’t have any objection to fight one.’

Evan, slightly colouring, answered: ’Why, you said up-stairs, you thought fighting duels disgraceful folly.’

‘So it is, so it is; everybody knows that,’ returned Jack; ’but what can a gentleman do?’

‘Be a disgraceful fool, I suppose,’ said Evan: and Raikes went on with his breakfast, as if to be such occasionally was the distinguished fate of a gentleman, of which others, not so happy in their birth, might well be envious.

Page 1228

He could not help betraying that he bore in mind the main incidents of the festival over-night; for when he had inquired who it might be that had reduced his friend to wear mourning, and heard that it was his father (spoken by Evan with a quiet sigh), Mr. Raikes tapped an egg, and his flexible brows exhibited a whole Bar of contending arguments within. More than for the love of pleasure, he had spent his money to be taken for a gentleman. He naturally thought highly of the position, having bought it. But Raikes appreciated a capital fellow, and felt warmly to Evan, who, moreover, was feeding him.

If not born a gentleman, this Harrington had the look of one, and was pleasing in female eyes, as the landlady, now present, bore witness, wishing them good morning, and hoping they had slept well. She handed to Evan his purse, telling him she had taken it last night, thinking it safer for the time being in her pocket; and that the chairman of the feast paid for all in the Green Dragon up to twelve that day, he having been born between the hours, and liking to make certain: and that every year he did the same; and was a seemingly rough old gentleman, but as soft-hearted as a chicken. His name must positively not be inquired, she said; to be thankful to him was to depart, asking no questions.

‘And with a dart in the bosom from those eyes—those eyes!’ cried Jack, shaking his head at the landlady’s resistless charms.

’I hope you was not one of the gentlemen who came and disturbed us last night, Sir?’ she turned on him sharply.

Jack dallied with the imputation, but denied his guilt.

‘No; it wasn’t your voice,’ continued the landlady. ’A parcel of young puppies calling themselves gentlemen! I know him. It’s that young Mr. Laxley: and he the nephew of a Bishop, and one of the Honourables! and then the poor gals get the blame. I call it a shame, I do. There’s that poor young creature up-stairs-somebody’s victim she is: and nobody’s to suffer but herself, the little fool!’

‘Yes,’ said Raikes. ‘Ah! we regret these things in after life!’ and he looked as if he had many gentlemanly burdens of the kind on his conscience.

’It ‘s a wonder, to my mind,’ remarked the landlady, when she had placidly surveyed Mr. Raikes, ’how young gals can let some of you men-folk mislead ’em.’

She turned from him huffily, and addressed Evan:

’The old gentleman is gone, sir. He slept on a chair, breakfasted, and was off before eight. He left word, as the child was born on his birthright, he’d provide for it, and pay the mother’s bill, unless you claimed the right. I’m afraid he suspected—what I never,

never-no! but by what I've seen of you—never will believe. For you, I'd say, must be a gentleman, whatever your company. She asks one favour of you, sir:—for you to go and let her speak to you once before you go away for good. She's asleep now, and mustn't be disturbed. Will you do it, by-and-by? Please to comfort the poor creature, sir.'

Page 1229

Evan consented. I am afraid also it was the landlady's flattering speech made him, without reckoning his means, add that the young mother and her child must be considered under his care, and their expenses charged to him. The landlady was obliged to think him a wealthy as well as a noble youth, and admiringly curtsied.

Mr. John Raikes and Mr. Evan Harrington then strolled into the air, and through a long courtyard, with brewhouse and dairy on each side, and a pleasant smell of baking bread, and dogs winking in the sun, cats at the corners of doors, satisfied with life, and turkeys parading, and fowls, strutting cocks, that overset the dignity of Mr. Raikes by awakening his imitative propensities. Certain white-capped women, who were washing in a tub, laughed, and one observed: 'He's for all the world like the little bantam cock stickin' 'self up in a crow against the Spaniar'.' And this, and the landlady's marked deference to Evan, induced Mr. Raikes contemptuously to glance at our national blindness to the true diamond, and worship of the mere plumes in which a person is dressed.

They passed a pretty flower-garden, and entering a smooth-shorn meadow, beheld the downs beautifully clear under sunlight and slowly-sailing images of cloud. At the foot of the downs, on a plain of grass, stood a white booth topped by a flag, which signalled that on that spot Fallow field and Beckley were contending.

'A singular old gentleman! A very singular old gentleman, that!' Raikes observed, following an idea that had been occupying him. 'We did wrong to miss him. We ought to have waylaid him in the morning. Never miss a chance, Harrington.'

'What chance?' Evan inquired.

'Those old gentlemen are very odd,' Jack pursued, 'very strange. He wouldn't have judged me by my attire. Admetus' flocks I guard, yet am a God! Dress is nothing to those old cocks. He's an eccentric. I know it; I can see it. He 's a corrective of Cudford, who is abhorrent to my soul. To give you an instance, now, of what those old boys will do—I remember my father taking me, when I was quite a youngster, to a tavern he frequented, and we met one night just such an old fellow as this; and the waiter told us afterwards that he noticed me particularly. He thought me a very remarkable boy—predicted great things. For some reason or other my father never took me there again. I remember our having a Welsh rarebit there for supper, and when the waiter last night mentioned a rarebit, 'gad he started up before me. I gave chase into my early youth. However, my father never took me to meet the old fellow again. I believe it lost me a fortune.'

Evan's thoughts were leaping to the cricket-field, or he would have condoled with Mr. Raikes for a loss that evidently afflicted him still.

Page 1230

Now, it must be told that the lady's-maid of Mrs. Andrew Cogglesby, borrowed temporarily by the Countess de Saldar for service at Beckley Court, had slept in charge of the Countess's boxes at the Green Dragon: the Countess having told her, with the candour of high-born dames to their attendants, that it would save expense; and that, besides, Admiral Combleman, whom she was going to see, or Sir Perkins Ripley (her father's old friend), whom she should visit if Admiral Combleman was not at his mansion-both were likely to have full houses, and she could not take them by storm. An arrangement which left her upwards of twelve hours' liberty, seemed highly proper to Maria Conning, this lady's-maid, a very demure young person. She was at her bed-room window, as Evan passed up the courtyard of the inn, and recognized him immediately. 'Can it be him they mean that's the low tradesman?' was Maria's mysterious exclamation. She examined the pair, and added: 'Oh, no. It must be the tall one they mistook for the small one. But Mr. Harrington ought not to demean himself by keeping company with such, and my lady should know of it.'

My lady, alighting from the Lymport coach, did know of it, within a few minutes after Evan had quitted the Green Dragon, and turned pale, as high-born dames naturally do when they hear of a relative's disregard of the company he keeps.

'A tailor, my lady!' said scornful Maria; and the Countess jumped and complained of a pin.

'How did you hear of this, Conning?' she presently asked with composure.

'Oh, my lady, he was tipsy last night, and kept swearing out loud he was a gentleman.'

'Tipsy!' the Countess murmured in terror. She had heard of inaccessible truths brought to light by the magic wand of alcohol. Was Evan intoxicated, and his dreadful secret unlocked last night?

'And who may have told you of this, Conning?' she asked.

Maria plunged into one of the boxes, and was understood to say that nobody in particular had told her, but that among other flying matters it had come to her ears.

'My brother is Charity itself,' sighed the Countess. 'He welcomes high or low.'

'Yes, but, my lady, a, tailor!' Maria repeated, and the Countess, agreeing with her scorn as she did, could have killed her. At least she would have liked to run a bodkin into her, and make her scream. In her position she could not always be Charity itself: nor is this the required character for a high-born dame: so she rarely affected it.

'Order a fly: discover the direction Mr. Harrington has taken; spare me further remarks,' she said; and Maria humbly flitted from her presence.

When she was gone, the Countess covered her face with her hands. 'Even this creature would despise us!' she exclaimed.

Page 1231

The young lady encountered by Mr. Raikes on the road to Fallow field, was wrong in saying that Beckley would be seen out before the shades of evening caught up the ball. Not one, but two men of Beckley—the last two—carried out their bats, cheered handsomely by both parties. The wickets pitched in the morning, they carried them in again, and plaudits renewed proved that their fame had not slumbered. To stand before a field, thoroughly aware that every successful stroke you make is adding to the hoards of applause in store for you is a joy to your friends, an exasperation to your foes; I call this an exciting situation, and one as proud as a man may desire. Then, again, the two last men of an eleven are twins: they hold one life between them; so that he who dies extinguishes the other. Your faculties are stirred to their depths. You become engaged in the noblest of rivalries: in defending your own, you fight for your comrade's existence. You are assured that the dread of shame, if not emulation, is making him equally wary and alert.

Behold, then, the two bold men of Beckley fighting to preserve one life. Under the shadow of the downs they stand, beneath a glorious day, and before a gallant company. For there are ladies in carriages here, there are cavaliers; good county names may be pointed out. The sons of first-rate families are in the two elevens, mingled with the yeomen and whoever can best do the business. Fallow field and Beckley, without regard to rank, have drawn upon their muscle and science. One of the bold men of Beckley at the wickets is Nick Frim, son of the gamekeeper at Beckley Court; the other is young Tom Copping, son of Squire Copping, of Dox Hall, in the parish of Beckley. Last year, you must know, Fallow field beat. That is why Nick Frim, a renowned out-hitter, good to finish a score brilliantly with a pair of threes, has taken to blocking, and Mr. Tom cuts with caution, though he loves to steal his runs, and is usually dismissed by his remarkable cunning.

The field was ringing at a stroke of Nick Frim's, who had lashed out in his old familiar style at last, and the heavens heard of it, when Evan came into the circle of spectators. Nick and Tom were stretching from post to post, might and main. A splendid four was scored. The field took breath with the heroes; and presume not to doubt that heroes they are. It is good to win glory for your country; it is also good to win glory for your village. A Member of Parliament, Sir George Lowton, notes this emphatically, from the statesman's eminence, to a group of gentlemen on horseback round a carriage wherein a couple of fair ladies reclined.

'They didn't shout more at the news of the Battle of Waterloo. Now this is our peculiarity, this absence of extreme centralization. It must be encouraged. Local jealousies, local rivalries, local triumphs—these are the strength of the kingdom.'

'If you mean to say that cricket's a ——' the old squire speaking (Squire Uplift of Fallow field) remembered the saving presences, and coughed—'good thing, I'm one with ye, Sir George. Encouraged, egad! They don't want much of that here. Give some of your lean London straws a strip o' clean grass and a bit o' liberty, and you'll do 'em a service.'

Page 1232

‘What a beautiful hit!’ exclaimed one of the ladies, languidly watching the ascent of the ball.

‘Beautiful, d’ ye call it?’ muttered the squire.

The ball, indeed, was dropping straight into the hands of the long-hit-off. Instantly a thunder rolled. But it was Beckley that took the joyful treble—Fallow field the deeply—-cursing bass. The long-hit-off, he who never was known to miss a catch-butter-fingered beast!—he has let the ball slip through his fingers.

Are there Gods in the air? Fred Linnington, the unfortunate of Fallow field, with a whole year of unhappy recollection haunting him in prospect, ere he can retrieve his character —Fred, if he does not accuse the powers of the sky, protests that he cannot understand it, which means the same.

Fallow field’s defeat—should such be the result of the contest—he knows now will be laid at his door. Five men who have bowled at the indomitable Beckleyans think the same. Albeit they are Britons, it abashes them. They are not the men they were. Their bowling is as the bowling of babies; and see! Nick, who gave the catch, and pretends he did it out of commiseration for Fallow field, the ball has flown from his bat sheer over the booth. If they don’t add six to the score, it will be the fault of their legs. But no: they rest content with a fiver and cherish their wind.

Yet more they mean to do, Success does not turn the heads of these Britons, as it would of your frivolous foreigners.

And now small boys (who represent the Press here) spread out from the marking-booth, announcing foremost, and in larger type, as it were, quite in Press style, their opinion—-which is, that Fallow field will get a jolly good hiding; and vociferating that Beckley is seventy-nine ahead, and that Nick Frim, the favourite of the field, has scored fifty-one to his own cheek. The boys are boys of both villages: but they are British boys—they adore prowess. The Fallow field boys wish that Nick Frim would come and live on their side; the boys of Beckley rejoice in possessing him. Nick is the wicketkeeper of the Beckley eleven; long-limbed, wiry, keen of eye. His fault as a batsman is, that he will be a slashing hitter. He is too sensible of the joys of a grand spanking hit. A short life and a merry one, has hitherto been his motto.

But there were reasons for Nick’s rare display of skill. That woman may have the credit due to her (and, as there never was a contest of which she did not sit at the springs, so is she the source of all superhuman efforts exhibited by men), be it told that Polly Wheedle is on the field; Polly, one of the upper housemaids of Beckley Court; Polly, eagerly courted by Fred Linnington, humbly desired by Nick Frim—a pert and blooming maiden—who, while her suitors combat hotly for an undivided smile, improves her holiday by instilling similar unselfish aspirations into the breasts of others.

Page 1233

Between his enjoyment of society and the melancholy it engendered in his mind by reflecting on him the age and decrepitude of his hat, Mr. John Raikes was doubtful of his happiness for some time. But as his taste for happiness was sharp, he, with a great instinct amounting almost to genius in its pursuit, resolved to extinguish his suspicion by acting the perfectly happy man. To do this, it was necessary that he should have listeners: Evan was not enough, and was besides unsympathetic; he had not responded to Jack's cordial assurances of his friendship 'in spite of anything,' uttered before they came into the field.

Heat and lustre were now poured from the sky, on whose soft blue a fleet of clouds sailed heavily. Nick Frim was very wonderful, no doubt. He deserved that the Gods should recline on those gold-edged cushions above, and lean over to observe him. Nevertheless, the ladies were beginning to ask when Nick Frim would be out. The small boys alone preserved their enthusiasm for Nick. As usual, the men took a middle position. Theirs was the pleasure of critics, which, being founded on the judgement, lasts long, and is without disappointment at the close. It was sufficient that the ladies should lend the inspiration of their bonnets to this fine match. Their presence on the field is another beautiful instance of the generous yielding of the sex simply to grace our amusement, and their acute perception of the part they have to play.

Mr. Raikes was rather shy of them at first. But his acting rarely failing to deceive himself, he began to feel himself the perfectly happy man he impersonated, and where there were ladies he went, and talked of days when he had creditably handled a bat, and of a renown in the annals of Cricket cut short by mysterious calamity. The foolish fellow did not know that they care not a straw for cricketing fame. His gaiety presently forsook him as quickly as it had come. Instead of remonstrating at Evan's restlessness, it was he who now dragged Evan from spot to spot. He spoke low and nervously.

'We're watched!'

There was indeed a man lurking near and moving as they moved, with a speculative air. Writs were out against Raikes. He slipped from his friend, saying:

'Never mind me. That old amphitryon's birthday hangs on till the meridian; you understand. His table invites. He is not unlikely to enjoy my conversation. What mayn't that lead to? Seek me there.'

Evan strolled on, relieved by the voluntary departure of the weariful funny friend he would not shake off, but could not well link with.

A long success is better when seen at a distance of time, and Nick Frim was beginning to suffer from the monotony of his luck. Fallow field could do nothing with him. He no longer blocked. He lashed out at every ball, and far flew every ball that was bowled. The critics saw, in this return to his old practices, promise of Nick's approaching

extinction. The ladies were growing hot and weary. The little boys gasped on the grass, but like cunning circulators of excitement, spread a report to keep it up, that Nick, on going to his wickets the previous day, had sworn an oath that he would not lay down his bat till he had scored a hundred.

Page 1234

So they had still matter to agitate their youthful breasts, and Nick's gradual building up of tens, and prophecies and speculations as to his chances of completing the hundred, were still vehemently confided to the field, amid a general mopping of faces.

Evan did become aware that a man was following him. The man had not the look of a dreaded official. His countenance was sun-burnt and open, and he was dressed in a countryman's holiday suit. When Evan met his eyes, they showed perplexity. Evan felt he was being examined from head to heel, but by one unaccustomed to his part, and without the courage to decide what he ought consequently to do while a doubt remained, though his inspection was verging towards a certainty in his mind.

At last, somewhat annoyed that the man should continue to dog him wherever he moved, he turned on him and asked him what he wanted?

'Be you a Muster Eav'n Harrington, Esquire?' the man drawled out in the rustic music of inquiry.

'That is my name,' said Evan.

'Ay,' returned the man, 'it's somebody lookin' like a lord, and has a small friend wi' shockin' old hat, and I see ye come out o' the Green Drag'n this mornin'—I don't reck'n there's e'er a mistaak, but I likes to make cock sure. Be you been to Poortigal, sir?'

'Yes,' answered Evan, 'I have been to Poortigal.'

'What's the name o' the capital o' Portugal, sir?' The man looked immensely shrewd, and nodding his consent at the laughing reply, added:

'And there you was born, sir? You'll excuse my boldness, but I only does what's necessary.'

Evan said he was not born there.

'No, not born there. That's good. Now, sir, did you happen to be born anywheres within smell o' salt water?'

'Yes,' answered Evan, 'I was born by the sea.'

'Not far beyond fifty mile from Fall'field here, sir?'

'Something less.'

'All right. Now I'm cock sure,' said the man. 'Now, if you'll have the kindness just to oblige me by—'he sped the words and the instrument jointly at Evan, takin' that there letter, I'll say good-bye, sir, and my work's done for the day.'

Saying which, he left Evan with the letter in his hands. Evan turned it over curiously. It was addressed to 'Evan Harrington, Esquire, T—— of Lymport.'

A voice paralyzed his fingers: the clear ringing voice of a young horsewoman, accompanied by a little maid on a pony, who galloped up to the carriage upon which Squire Uplift, Sir George Lowton, Hamilton Jocelyn, and other cavaliers, were in attendance.

'Here I am at last, and Beckley's in still! How d' ye do, Lady Racial? How d' ye do, Sir George. How d' ye do, everybody. Your servant, Squire! We shall beat you. Harry says we shall soon be a hundred a-head of you. Fancy those boys! they would sleep at Fallow field last night. How I wish you had made a bet with me, Squire.'

Page 1235

‘Well, my lass, it’s not too late,’ said the Squire, detaining her hand.

’Oh, but it wouldn’t be fair now. And I’m not going to be kissed on the field, if you please, Squire. Here, Dorry will do instead. Dorry! come and be kissed by the Squire.’

It was Rose, living and glowing; Rose, who was the brilliant young Amazon, smoothing the neck of a mettlesome gray cob. Evan’s heart bounded up to her, but his limbs were motionless.

The Squire caught her smaller companion in his arms, and sounded a kiss upon both her cheeks; then settled her in the saddle, and she went to answer some questions of the ladies. She had the same lively eyes as Rose; quick saucy lips, red, and open for prattle. Rolls of auburn hair fell down her back, for being a child she was allowed privileges. To talk as her thoughts came, as well as to wear her hair as it grew, was a special privilege of this young person, on horseback or elsewhere.

’Now, I know what you want to ask me, Aunt Shorne. Isn’t it about my Papa? He’s not come, and he won’t be able to come for a week.—Glad to be with Cousin Rosey? I should think I am! She’s the nicest girl I ever could suppose. She isn’t a bit spoiled by Portugal; only browned; and she doesn’t care for that; no more do I. I rather like the sun when it doesn’t freckle you. I can’t bear freckles, and I don’t believe in milk for them. People who have them are such a figure. Drummond Forth has them, but he’s a man, and it doesn’t matter for a man to have freckles. How’s my uncle Mel? Oh, he’s quite well. I mean he has the gout in one of his fingers, and it’s swollen so, it’s just like a great fat fir cone! He can’t write a bit, and rests his hand on a table. He wants to have me made to write with my left hand as well as my right. As if I was ever going to have the gout in one of my fingers!’

Sir George Lowton observed to Hamilton Jocelyn, that Melville must take to his tongue now.

‘I fancy he will,’ said Hamilton. ’My father won’t give up his nominee; so I fancy he’ll try Fallow field. Of course, we go in for the agricultural interest; but there’s a cantankerous old ruffian down here—a brewer, or something—he’s got half the votes at his bidding. We shall see.’

‘Dorothy, my dear child, are you not tired?’ said Lady Racial. ’You are very hot.’

’Yes, that’s because Rose would tear along the road to get here in time, after we had left those tiresome Copping people, where she had to make a call. “What a slow little beast your pony is, Dorry!”—she said that at least twenty times.’

‘Oh, you naughty puss!’ cried Rose. ’Wasn’t it, “Rosey, Rosey, I’m sure we shall be too late, and shan’t see a thing: do come along as hard as you can"?’

’I ‘m sure it was not,’ Miss Dorothy retorted, with the large eyes of innocence. ’You said you wanted to see Nick Frim keeping the wicket, and Ferdinand Laxley bowl. And, oh! you know something you said about Drummond Forth.’

Page 1236

‘Now, shall I tell upon you?’ said Rose.

‘No, don’t!’ hastily replied the little woman, blushing. And the cavaliers laughed out, and the ladies smiled, and Dorothy added: ’It isn’t much, after all.’

‘Then, come; let’s have it, or I shall be jealous,’ said the Squire.

‘Shall I tell?’ Rose asked slily.

’It ‘s unfair to betray one of your sex, Rose,’ remarked the sweetly-smiling lady.

‘Yes, Lady Racial—mayn’t a woman have secrets?’ Dorothy put it with great natural earnestness, and they all laughed aloud. ’But I know a secret of Rosey’s,’ continued Miss Dorothy, ’and if she tells upon me, I shall tell upon her.’

‘They’re out!’ cried Rose, pointing her whip at the wickets. ’Good night to Beckley! Tom Copping ‘s run out.’

Questions as to how it was done passed from mouth to mouth. Questions as to whether it was fair sprang from Tom’s friends, and that a doubt existed was certain: the whole field was seen converging toward the two umpires.

Farmer Broadmead for Fallow field, Master Nat Hodges for Beckley.

It really is a mercy there’s some change in the game,’ said Mrs. Shorne, waving her parasol. ’It ’s a charming game, but it wants variety a little. When do you return, Rose?’

‘Not for some time,’ said Rose, primly. ’I like variety very well, but I don’t seek it by running away the moment I’ve come.’

‘No, but, my dear,’ Mrs. Shorne negligently fanned her face, ’you will have to come with us, I fear, when we go. Your uncle accompanies us. I really think the Squire will, too; and Mr. Forth is no chaperon. Even you understand that.’

’Oh, I can get an old man—don’t be afraid, said Rose. ’Or must I have and old woman, aunt?’

The lady raised her eyelids slowly on Rose, and thought: ’If you were soundly whipped, my little madam, what a good thing it would be for you.’ And that good thing Mrs. Shorne was willing to do for Rose. She turned aside, and received the salute of an unmistakable curate on foot.

‘Ah, Mr. Parsley, you lend your countenance to the game, then?’

The curate observed that sound Churchmen unanimously supported the game.

‘Bravo!’ cried Rose. ’How I like to hear you talk like that, Mr. Parsley. I didn’t think you had so much sense. You and I will have a game together—single wicket. We must play for something—what shall it be?’

‘Oh—for nothing,’ the curate vacuously remarked.

‘That’s for love, you rogue!’ exclaimed the Squire. ‘Come, come, none o’ that, sir—ha! ha!’

‘Oh, very well; we’ll play for love,’ said Rose.

‘And I’ll hold the stakes, my dear—eh?’

‘You dear old naughty Squire!—what do you mean?’

Rose laughed. But she had all the men surrounding her, and Mrs. Shorne talked of departing.

Page 1237

Why did not Evan bravely march away? Why, he asked himself, had he come on this cricket-field to be made thus miserable? What right had such as he to look on Rose? Consider, however, the young man's excuses. He could not possibly imagine that a damsel who rode one day to a match, would return on the following day to see it finished: or absolutely know that unseen damsel to be Rose Jocelyn. And if he waited, it was only to hear her sweet voice once again, and go for ever. As far as he could fathom his hopes, they were that Rose would not see him: but the hopes of youth are deep.

Just then a toddling small rustic stopped in front of Evan, and set up a howl for his 'fayther.' Evan lifted him high to look over people's heads, and discover his wandering parent. The urchin, when he had settled to his novel position, surveyed the field, and shouting, 'Fayther, fayther! here I bes on top of a gentleman!' made lusty signs, which attracted not his father alone. Rose sang out, 'Who can lend me a penny?' Instantly the curate and the squire had a race in their pockets. The curate was first, but Rose favoured the squire, took his money with a nod and a smile, and rode at the little lad, to whom she was saying: 'Here, bonny boy, this will buy you—'

She stopped and coloured.

'Evan!'

The child descended rapidly to the ground.

A bow and a few murmured words replied to her.

'Isn't this just like you, my dear Evan? Shouldn't I know that whenever I met you, you would be doing something kind? How did you come here? You were on your way to Beckley!'

'To London,' said Evan.

'To London! and not coming over to see me—us?'

Here the little fellow's father intervened to claim his offspring, and thank the lady and the gentleman: and, with his penny firmly grasped, he who had brought the lady and the gentleman together, was borne off a wealthy human creature.

Before much further could be said between them, the Countess de Saldar drove up.

'My dearest Rose!' and 'My dear Countess!' and 'Not Louisa, then?' and, 'I am very glad to see you!' without attempting the endearing 'Louisa'—passed.

The Countess de Saldar then admitted the presence of her brother.

‘Think!’ said Rose. ‘He talks of going on straight from here to London.’

‘That pretty pout will alone suffice to make him deviate, then,’ said the Countess, with her sweetest open slyness. ’I am now on the point of accepting your most kind invitation. Our foreign habits allow us to visit thus early! He will come with me.’

Evan tried to look firm, and speak as he was trying to look. Rose fell to entreaty, and from entreaty rose to command; and in both was utterly fascinating to the poor youth. Luxuriously—while he hesitated and dwelt on this and that faint objection—his spirit drank the delicious changes of her face. To have her face before him but one day seemed so rich a boon to deny himself, that he was beginning to wonder at his constancy in refusal; and now that she spoke to him so pressingly, devoting her guileless eyes to him alone, he forgot a certain envious feeling that had possessed him while she was rattling among the other males—a doubt whether she ever cast a thought on Mr. Evan Harrington.

Page 1238

‘Yes; he will come,’ cried Rose; ’and he shall ride home with me and my friend Drummond; and he shall have my groom’s horse, if he doesn’t mind. Bob can ride home in the cart with Polly, my maid; and he’ll like that, because Polly’s always good fun—when they’re not in love with her. Then, of course, she torments them.’

‘Naturally,’ said the Countess.

Mr. Evan Harrington’s final objection, based on his not having clothes, and so forth, was met by his foreseeing sister.

’I have your portmanteau packed, in with me, my dear brother; Conning has her feet on it. I divined that I should overtake you.’

Evan felt he was in the toils. After a struggle or two he yielded; and, having yielded, did it with grace. In a moment, and with a power of self-compression equal to that of the adept Countess, he threw off his moodiness as easily as if it had been his Spanish mantle, and assumed a gaiety that made the Countess’s eyes beam rapturously upon him, and was pleasing to Rose, apart from the lead in admiration the Countess had given her—not for the first time. We mortals, the best of us, may be silly sheep in our likes and dislikes: where there is no premeditated or instinctive antagonism, we can be led into warm acknowledgement of merits we have not sounded. This the Countess de Saldar knew right well.

Rose now intimated her wish to perform the ceremony of introduction between her aunt and uncle present, and the visitors to Beckley Court. The Countess smiled, and in the few paces that separated the two groups, whispered to her brother: ‘Miss Jocelyn, my dear.’

The eye-glasses of the Beckley group were dropped with one accord. The ceremony was gone through. The softly-shadowed differences of a grand manner addressed to ladies, and to males, were exquisitely accomplished by the Countess de Saldar.

‘Harrington? Harrington?’ her quick ear caught on the mouth of Squire Uplift, scanning Evan.

Her accent was very foreign, as she said aloud: ’We are entirely strangers to your game—your creecket. My brother and myself are scarcely English. Nothing save diplomacy are we adepts in!’

‘You must be excessively dangerous, madam,’ said Sir George, hat in air.

’Even in that, I fear, we are babes and sucklings, and might take many a lesson from you. Will you instruct me in your creecket? What are they doing now? It seems very unintelligible—indistinct—is it not?’

Inasmuch as Farmer Broadmead and Master Nat Hodges were surrounded by a clamorous mob, shouting both sides of the case, as if the loudest and longest-winded were sure to wrest a favourable judgement from those two infallible authorities on the laws of cricket, the noble game was certainly in a state of indistinctness.

The squire came forward to explain, piteously entreated not to expect too much from a woman's inapprehensive wits, which he plainly promised (under eyes that had melted harder men) he would not. His forbearance and bucolic gallantry were needed, for he had the Countess's radiant full visage alone. Her senses were dancing in her right ear, which had heard the name of Lady Racial pronounced, and a voice respond to it from the carriage.

Page 1239

Into what a pit had she suddenly plunged! You ask why she did not drive away as fast as the horses would carry her, and fly the veiled head of Demogorgon obscuring valley and hill and the shining firmament, and threatening to glare destruction on her? You do not know an intriguer. She relinquishes the joys of life for the joys of intrigue. This is her element. The Countess did feel that the heavens were hard on her. She resolved none the less to fight her way to her object; for where so much had conspired to favour her—the decease of the generous Sir Abraham Harrington, of Torquay, and the invitation to Beckley Court—could she believe the heavens in league against her? Did she not nightly pray to them, in all humbleness of body, for the safe issue of her cherished schemes? And in this, how unlike she was to the rest of mankind! She thought so; she relied on her devout observances; they gave her sweet confidence, and the sense of being specially shielded even when specially menaced. Moreover, tell a woman to put back, when she is once clearly launched! Timid as she may be, her light bark bounds to meet the tempest. I speak of women who do launch: they are not numerous, but, to the wise, the minorities are the representatives.

‘Indeed, it is an intricate game!’ said the Countess, at the conclusion of the squire’s explanation, and leaned over to Mrs. Shorne to ask her if she thoroughly understood it.

‘Yes, I suppose I do,’ was the reply; ’it—rather than the amusement they find in it.’ This lady had recovered Mr. Parsley from Rose, but had only succeeded in making the curate unhappy, without satisfying herself.

The Countess gave her the shrug of secret sympathy.

‘We must not say so,’ she observed aloud—most artlessly, and fixed the squire with a bewitching smile, under which her heart beat thickly. As her eyes travelled from Mrs. Shorne to the squire, she had marked Lady Racial looking singularly at Evan, who was mounting the horse of Bob the groom.

‘Fine young fellow, that,’ said the squire to Lady Racial, as Evan rode off with Rose.

‘An extremely handsome, well-bred young man,’ she answered. Her eyes met the Countess’s, and the Countess, after resting on their surface with an ephemeral pause, murmured: ‘I must not praise my brother,’ and smiled a smile which was meant to mean: ’I think with you, and thank you, and love you for admiring him.’

Had Lady Racial joined the smile and spoken with animation afterwards, the Countess would have shuddered and had chills of dread. As it was, she was passably content. Lady Racial slightly dimpled her cheek, for courtesy’s sake, and then looked gravely on the ground. This was no promise; it was even an indication (as the Countess read her), of something beyond suspicion in the lady’s mind; but it was a sign of delicacy, and a sign that her feelings had been touched, from which a truce might be reckoned on, and no betrayal feared.

Page 1240

She heard it said that the match was for honour and glory. A match of two days' duration under a broiling sun, all for honour and glory! Was it not enough to make her despise the games of men? For something better she played. Her game was for one hundred thousand pounds, the happiness of her brother, and the concealment of a horror. To win a game like that was worth the trouble. Whether she would have continued her efforts, had she known that the name of Evan Harrington was then blazing on a shop-front in Lymport, I cannot tell. The possessor of the name was in love, and did not reflect.

Smiling adieu to the ladies, bowing to the gentlemen, and apprehending all the homage they would pour out to her condescending beauty when she had left them, the Countess's graceful hand gave the signal for Beckley.

She stopped the coachman ere the wheels had rolled off the muffling turf, to enjoy one glimpse of Evan and Rose riding together, with the little maid on her pony in the rear. How suitable they seemed! how happy! She had brought them together after many difficulties—might it not be? It was surely a thing to be hoped for!

Rose, galloping freshly, was saying to Evan: 'Why did you cut off your moustache?'

He, neck and neck with her, replied: 'You complained of it in Portugal.'

And she: 'Portugal's old times now to me—and I always love old times. I'm sorry! And, oh, Evan! did you really do it for me?'

And really, just then, flying through the air, close to the darling of his heart, he had not the courage to spoil that delicious question, but dallying with the lie, he looked in her eyes lingeringly.

This picture the Countess contemplated. Close to her carriage two young gentlemen-cricketers were strolling, while Fallow field gained breath to decide which men to send in first to the wickets.

One of these stood suddenly on tiptoe, and pointing to the pair on horseback, cried, with the vivacity of astonishment:

'Look there! do you see that? What the deuce is little Rosey doing with the tailor-fellow?'

The Countess, though her cheeks were blanched, gazed calmly in Demogorgon's face, took a mental impression of the speaker, and again signalled for Beckley.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUNTESS DESCRIBES THE FIELD OF ACTION

Now, to clear up a point or two: You may think the Comic Muse is straining human nature rather toughly in making the Countess de Saldar rush open-eyed into the jaws of Demogorgon, dreadful to her. She has seen her brother pointed out unmistakeably as the tailor-fellow. There is yet time to cast him off or fly with him. Is it her extraordinary heroism impelling her onward, or infatuated rashness? or is it her mere animal love of conflict?

The Countess de Saldar, like other adventurers, has her star. They who possess nothing on earth, have a right to claim a portion of the heavens. In resolute hands, much may be done with a star. As it has empires in its gift, so may it have heiresses. The Countess's star had not blinked balefully at her. That was one reason why she went straight on to Beckley.

Page 1241

Again: the Countess was a born general. With her star above, with certain advantages secured, with battalions of lies disciplined and zealous, and with one clear prize in view, besides other undeveloped benefits dimly shadowing forth, the Countess threw herself headlong into the enemy's country.

But, that you may not think too highly of this lady, I must add that the trivial reason was the exciting cause—as in many great enterprises. This was nothing more than the simple desire to be located, if but for a day or two, on the footing of her present rank, in the English country-house of an offshoot of our aristocracy. She who had moved in the first society of a foreign capital—who had married a Count, a minister of his sovereign, had enjoyed delicious high-bred badinage with refulgent ambassadors, could boast the friendship of duchesses, and had been the amiable receptacle of their pardonable follies; she who, moreover, heartily despised things English:—this lady experienced thrills of proud pleasure at the prospect of being welcomed at a third-rate English mansion. But then, that mansion was Beckley Court. We return to our first ambitions, as to our first loves not that they are dearer to us,—quit that delusion: our ripened loves and mature ambitions are probably closest to our hearts, as they deserve to be—but we return to them because our youth has a hold on us which it asserts whenever a disappointment knocks us down. Our old loves (with the bad natures I know in them) are always lurking to avenge themselves on the new by tempting us to a little retrograde infidelity. A schoolgirl in Fallow field, the tailor's daughter, had sighed for the bliss of Beckley Court. Beckley Court was her Elysium ere the ardent feminine brain conceived a loftier summit. Fallen from that attained eminence, she sighed anew for Beckley Court. Nor was this mere spiritual longing; it had its material side. At Beckley Court she could feel her foreign rank. Moving with our nobility as an equal, she could feel that the short dazzling glitter of her career was not illusory, and had left her something solid; not coin of the realm exactly, but yet gold. She could not feel this in the Cogglesby saloons, among pitiable bourgeoises—middle-class people daily soiled by the touch of tradesmen. They dragged her down. Their very homage was a mockery.

Let the Countess have due credit for still allowing Evan to visit Beckley Court to follow up his chance. If Demogorgon betrayed her there, the Count was her protector: a woman rises to her husband. But a man is what he is, and must stand upon that. She was positive Evan had committed himself in some manner. As it did not suit her to think so, she at once encouraged an imaginary conversation, in which she took the argument that it was quite impossible Evan could have been so mad, and others instanced his youth, his wrongheaded perversity, his ungenerous disregard for his devoted sister, and his known weakness: she replying, that undoubtedly they were right so far: but that he could not have said he himself was that horrible thing, because he was nothing of the sort: which faith in Evan's stedfast adherence to facts, ultimately silenced the phantom opposition, and gained the day.

Page 1242

With admiration let us behold the Countess de Saldar alighting on the gravel sweep of Beckley Court, the footman and butler of the enemy bowing obsequious welcome to the most potent visitor Beckley Court has ever yet embraced.

The despatches of a general being usually acknowledged to be the safest sources from which the historian of a campaign can draw, I proceed to set forth a letter of the Countess de Saldar, forwarded to her sister, Harriet Cogglesby, three mornings after her arrival at Beckley Court; and which, if it should prove false in a few particulars, does nevertheless let us into the state of the Countess's mind, and gives the result of that general's first inspection of the field of action. The Countess's epistolary English does small credit to her Fallow field education; but it is feminine, and flows more than her ordinary speech. Besides, leaders of men have always notoriously been above the honours of grammar. '*My dearest Harriet*,

'Your note awaited me. No sooner my name announced, than servitors in yellow livery, with powder and buckles started before me, and bowing one presented it on a salver. A venerable butler—most impressive! led the way. In future, my dear, let it be de Saldar de Sancorvo. That is our title by rights, and it may as well be so in England. English Countess is certainly best. Always put the de. But let us be systematic, as my poor Silva says. He would be in the way here, and had better not come till I see something he can do. Silva has great reliance upon me. The farther he is from Lymport, my dear! —and imagine me, Harriet, driving through Fallow field to Beckley Court! I gave one peep at Dubbins's, as I passed. The school still goes on. I saw three little girls skipping, and the old swing-pole. *Seminary for young ladies* as bright as ever! I should have liked to have kissed the children and given them bonbons and a holiday.

'How sparing you English are of your crests and arms! I fully expected to see the Jocelyns' over my bed; but no—four posts totally without ornament! Sleep, indeed, must be the result of dire fatigue in such a bed. The Jocelyn crest is a hawk in jesses. The Elburne arms are, Or, three falcons on a field, vert. How heraldry reminds me of poor Papa! the evenings we used to spend with him, when he stayed at home, studying it so diligently under his directions! We never shall again! Sir Franks Jocelyn is the third son of Lord Elburne, made a Baronet for his patriotic support of the Ministry in a time of great trouble. The people are sometimes grateful, my dear. Lord Elburne is the fourteenth of his line—originally simple country squires. They talk of the Roses, but we need not go so very far back as that. I do not quite understand why a Lord's son should condescend to a Baronetcy. Precedence of some sort for his lady, I suppose. I have yet to learn whether she ranks by his birth, or his present title. If so, a young Baronetcy cannot possibly be a gain. One thing is certain. She cares very little about it. She is most eccentric. But remember what I have told you. It will be serviceable when you are speaking of the family.

Page 1243

’The dinner-hour, six. It would no doubt be full seven in Town. I am convinced you are half-an-hour too early. I had the post of honour to the right of Sir Franks. Evan to the right of Lady Jocelyn. Most fortunately he was in the best of spirits—quite brilliant. I saw the eyes of that sweet Rose glisten. On the other side of me sat my pet diplomatist, and I gave him one or two political secrets which astonished him. Of course, my dear, I was wheedled out of them. His contempt for our weak intellects is ineffable. But a woman must now and then ingratiate herself at the expense of her sex. This is perfectly legitimate. Tory policy at the table. The Opposition, as Andrew says, not represented. So to show that we were human beings, we differed among ourselves, and it soon became clear to me that Lady Jocelyn is the rankest of Radicals. My secret suspicion is, that she is a person of no birth whatever, wherever her money came from. A fine woman—yes; still to be admired, I suppose, by some kind of men; but totally wanting in the essentially feminine attractions.

’There was no party, so to say. I will describe the people present, beginning with the insignifacants.

’First, Mr. Parsley, the curate of Beckley. He eats everything at table, and agrees with everything. A most excellent orthodox young clergyman. Except that he was nearly choked by a fish-bone, and could not quite conceal his distress—and really Rose should have repressed her desire to laugh till the time for our retirement—he made no sensation. I saw her eyes watering, and she is not clever in turning it off. In that nobody ever equalled dear Papa. I attribute the attack almost entirely to the tightness of the white neck-cloths the young clergymen of the Established Church wear. But, my dear, I have lived too long away from them to wish for an instant the slightest change in anything they think, say, or do. The mere sight of this young man was most refreshing to my spirit. He may be the shepherd of a flock, this poor Mr. Parsley, but he is a sheep to one young person.

’Mr. Drummond Forth. A great favourite of Lady Jocelyn’s; an old friend. He went with them to the East. Nothing improper. She is too cold for that. He is fair, with regular features, very self-possessed, and ready—your English notions of gentlemanly. But none of your men treat a woman as a woman. We are either angels, or good fellows, or heaven knows what that is bad. No exquisite delicacy, no insinuating softness, mixed with respect, none of that hovering over the border, as Papa used to say, none of that happy indefiniteness of manner which seems to declare “I would love you if I might,” or “I do, but I dare not tell,” even when engaged in the most trivial attentions—handing a footstool, remarking on the soup, *etc*. You none of you know how to meet a woman’s smile, or to engage her eyes without boldness—to slide off them, as it were, gracefully. Evan alone can look between the eyelids of a woman. I have had to correct him, for to me he quite exposes the state of his heart towards dearest Rose. She listens to Mr. Forth with evident esteem. In Portugal we do not understand young ladies having male friends.

Page 1244

’Hamilton Jocelyn—all politics. The stiff Englishman. Not a shade of manners. He invited me to drink wine. Before I had finished my bow his glass was empty—the man was telling an anecdote of Lord Livelyston! You may be sure, my dear, I did not say I had seen his lordship.

’Seymour Jocelyn, Colonel of Hussars. He did nothing but sigh for the cold weather, and hunting. All I envied him was his moustache for Evan. Will you believe that the ridiculous boy has shaved!

’Then there is Melville, my dear diplomatist; and here is another instance of our Harrington luck. He has the gout in his right hand; he can only just hold knife and fork, and is interdicted Port-wine and penmanship. The dinner was not concluded before I had arranged that Evan should resume (gratuitously, you know) his post of secretary to him. So here is Evan fixed at Beckley Court as long as Melville stays. Talking of him, I am horrified suddenly. They call him the great Mel! ’Sir Franks is most estimable, I am sure, as a man, and redolent of excellent qualities—a beautiful disposition, very handsome. He has just as much and no more of the English polish one ordinarily meets. When he has given me soup or fish, bowed to me over wine, and asked a conventional question, he has done with me. I should imagine his opinions to be extremely good, for they are not a multitude.

’Then his lady-but I have not grappled with her yet. Now for the women, for I quite class her with the opposite sex.

’You must know that before I retired for the night, I induced Conning to think she had a bad head-ache, and Rose lent me her lady’s-maid—they call the creature Polly. A terrible talker. She would tell all about the family. Rose has been speaking of Evan. It would have looked better had she been quiet—but then she is so English!’

Here the Countess breaks off to say, that from where she is writing, she can see Rose and Evan walking out to the cypress avenue, and that no eyes are on them; great praise being given to the absence of suspicion in the Jocelyn nature.

The communication is resumed the night of the same day.

’Two days at Beckley Court are over, and that strange sensation I had of being an intruder escaped from Dubbins’s, and expecting every instant the old schoolmistress to call for me, and expose me, and take me to the dark room, is quite vanished, and I feel quite at home, quite happy. Evan is behaving well. Quite the young nobleman. With the women I had no fear of him; he is really admirable with the men—easy, and talks of sport and politics, and makes the proper use of Portugal. He has quite won the heart of his sister. Heaven smiles on us, dearest Harriet!

Page 1245

’We must be favoured, my dear, for Evan is very troublesome—distressingly inconsiderate! I left him for a day-remaining to comfort poor Mama—and on the road he picked up an object he had known at school, and this creature, in shameful garments, is seen in the field where Rose and Evan are riding—in a dreadful hat—Rose might well laugh at it!—he is seen running away from an old apple woman, whose fruit he had consumed without means to liquidate; but, of course, he rushes bolt up to Evan before all his grand company, and claims acquaintance, and Evan was base enough to acknowledge him! He disengaged himself so far well by tossing his purse to the wretch, but if he knows not how to—cut, I assure him it will be his ruin. Resolutely he must cast the dust off his shoes, or he will be dragged down to their level. By the way, as to hands and feet, comparing him with the Jocelyn men, he has every mark of better blood. Not a question about it. As Papa would say—We have Nature’s proof.

’Looking out on a beautiful lawn, and the moon, and all sorts of trees, I must now tell you about the ladies here.

’Conning undid me to-night. While Conning remains unattached, Conning is likely to be serviceable. If Evan, would only give her a crumb, she would be his most faithful dog. I fear he cannot be induced, and Conning will be snapped up by somebody else. You know how susceptible she is behind her primness—she will be of no use on earth, and I shall find excuse to send her back immediately. After all, her appearance here was all that was wanted.

’Mrs. Melville and her dreadful juvenile are here, as you may imagine—the complete Englishwoman. I smile on her, but I could laugh. To see the crow’s-feet under her eyes on her white skin, and those ringlets, is really too ridiculous. Then there is a Miss Carrington, Lady Jocelyn’s cousin, aged thirty-two—if she has not tampered with the register of her birth. I should think her equal to it. Between dark and fair. Always in love with some man, Conning tells me she hears. Rose’s maid, Polly, hinted the same. She has a little money.

’But my sympathies have been excited by a little cripple—a niece of Lady Jocelyn’s and the favourite grand-daughter of the rich old Mrs. Bonner—also here—Juliana Bonner. Her age must be twenty. You would take her for ten. In spite of her immense expectations, the Jocelyns hate her. They can hardly be civil to her. It is the poor child’s temper. She has already begun to watch dear Evan—certainly the handsomest of the men here as yet, though I grant you, they are well-grown men, these Jocelyns, for an untravelled Englishwoman. I fear, dear Harriet, we have been dreadfully deceived about Rose. The poor child has not, in her own right, much more than a tenth part of what we supposed, I fear. It was that Mrs. Melville. I have had occasion to notice her quiet boasts here. She said this morning, “when Mel is in the Ministry”—he is not yet in Parliament! I feel quite angry with the woman, and she is not so cordial as she might be. I have her profile very frequently while I am conversing with her.

Page 1246

’With Grandmama Bonner I am excellent good friends,—venerable silver hair, high caps, *etc*. More of this most interesting Juliana Bonner by-and-by. It is clear to me that Rose’s fortune is calculated upon the dear invalid’s death! Is not that harrowing? It shocks me to think of it.

’Then there is Mrs. Shorne. She is a Jocelyn—and such a history! She married a wealthy manufacturer—bartered her blood for his money, and he failed, and here she resides, a bankrupt widow, petitioning any man that may be willing for his love *and* a decent home. *And*—I say in charity.

’Mrs. Shorne comes here to-morrow. She is at present with—guess, my dear!—with Lady Racial. Do not be alarmed. I have met Lady Racial. She heard Evan’s name, and by that and the likeness I saw she knew at once, and I saw a truce in her eyes. She gave me a tacit assurance of it—she was engaged to dine here yesterday, and put it off—probably to grant us time for composure. If she comes I do not fear her. Besides, has she not reasons? Providence may have designed her for a staunch ally —I will not say, confederate.

’Would that Providence had fixed this beautiful mansion five hundred miles from L-----, though it were in a desolate region! And that reminds me of the Madre. She is in health. She always will be overbearingly robust till the day we are bereft of her. There was some secret in the house when I was there, which I did not trouble to penetrate. That little Jane F——was there—not improved.

’Pray, be firm about Torquay. Estates mortgaged, but hopes of saving a remnant of the property. Third son! Don’t commit yourself there. We dare not baronetize him. You need not speak it—imply. More can be done that way.

’And remember, dear Harriet, that you must manage Andrew so that we may positively promise his vote to the Ministry on all questions when Parliament next assembles. I understood from Lord Livelyston, that Andrew’s vote would be thought much of. A most amusing nobleman! He pledged himself to nothing! But we are above such a thing as a commercial transaction. He must countenance Silva. Women, my dear, have sent out armies—why not fleets? Do not spare me your utmost aid in my extremity, my dearest sister.

’As for Strike, I refuse to speak of him. He is insufferable and next to useless. How can one talk with any confidence of relationship with a Major of Marines? When I reflect on what he is, and his conduct to Caroline, I have inscrutable longings to slap his face. Tell dear Carry her husband’s friend—the chairman or something of that wonderful company of Strike’s—you know—the Duke of Belfield is coming here. He is a blood-relation of

the Elburnes, therefore of the Jocelyns. It will not matter at all. Breweries, I find, are quite in esteem in your England. It was highly commendable in his Grace to visit you. Did he come to see the Major of Marines? Caroline is certainly the loveliest woman I ever beheld, and I forgive her now the pangs of jealousy she used to make me feel.

Page 1247

’Andrew, I hope, has received the most kind invitations of the Jocelyns. He must come. Melville must talk with him about the votes of his abominable brother in Fallow field. We must elect Melville and have the family indebted to us. But pray be careful that Andrew speaks not a word to his odious brother about our location here. It would set him dead against these hospitable Jocelyns. It will perhaps be as well, dear Harriet, if you do not accompany Andrew. You would not be able to account for him quite thoroughly. Do as you like—I do but advise, and you know I may be trusted—for our sakes, dear one! I am working for Carry to come with Andrew. Beautiful women always welcome. A prodigy!—if they wish to astonish the Duke. Adieu! Heaven bless your babes!’

The night passes, and the Countess pursues:

’Awakened by your fresh note from a dream of Evan on horseback, and a multitude hailing him Count Jocelyn for Fallow field! A morning dream. They might desire that he should change his name; but “Count” is preposterous, though it may conceal something.

’You say Andrew will come, and talk of his bringing Caroline. Anything to give our poor darling a respite from her brute. You deserve great credit for your managing of that dear little good-natured piece of obstinate man. I will at once see to prepare dear Caroline’s welcome, and trust her stay may be prolonged in the interest of common humanity. They have her story here already.

’Conning has come in, and says that young Mr. Harry Jocelyn will be here this morning from Fallow field, where he has been cricketing. The family have not spoken of him in my hearing. He is not, I think, in good odour at home—a scapegrace. Rose’s maid, Polly, quite flew out when I happened to mention him, and broke one of my laces. These English maids are domesticated savage animals.

’My chocolate is sent up, exquisitely concocted, in plate of the purest quality—lovely little silver cups! I have already quite set the fashion for the ladies to have chocolate in bed. The men, I hear, complain that there is no lady at the breakfast-table. They have Miss Carrington to superintend. I read, in the subdued satisfaction of her eyes (completely without colour), how much she thanks me and the institution of chocolate in bed. Poor Miss Carrington is no match for her opportunities. One may give them to her without dread.

’It is ten on the Sabbath morn. The sweet churchbells are ringing. It seems like a dream. There is nothing but the religion attaches me to England; but that—is not that everything? How I used to sigh on Sundays to hear them in Portugal!

’I have an idea of instituting toilette-receptions. They will not please Miss Carrington so well.

’Now to the peaceful village church, and divine worship. Adieu, my dear. I kiss my fingers to Silva. Make no effort to amuse him. He is always occupied. Bread!—he asks no more. Adieu! Carry will be invited with your little man .... You unhappily unable .... She, the sister I pine to see, to show her worthy of my praises. Expectation and excitement! Adieu!’

Page 1248

Filled with pleasing emotions at the thought of the service in the quiet village church, and worshipping in the principal pew, under the blazonry of the Jocelyn arms, the Countess sealed her letter and addressed it, and then examined the name of Cogglesby; which plebeian name, it struck her, would not sound well to the menials of Beckley Court. While she was deliberating what to do to conceal it, she heard, through her open window, the voices of some young men laughing. She beheld her brother pass these young men, and bow to them. She beheld them stare at him without at all returning his salute, and then one of them—the same who had filled her ears with venom at Fallow field—turned to the others and laughed outrageously, crying—

‘By Jove! this comes it strong. Fancy the snipocracy here—eh?’

What the others said the Countess did not wait to hear. She put on her bonnet hastily, tried the effect of a peculiar smile in the mirror, and lightly ran down-stairs.

CHAPTER XV

A CAPTURE

The three youths were standing in the portico when the Countess appeared among them. She singled out him who was specially obnoxious to her, and sweetly inquired the direction to the village post. With the renowned gallantry of his nation, he offered to accompany her, but presently, with a different exhibition of the same, proposed that they should spare themselves the trouble by dropping the letter she held prominently, in the bag.

‘Thanks,’ murmured the Countess, ‘I will go.’ Upon which his eager air subsided, and he fell into an awkward silent march at her side, looking so like the victim he was to be, that the Countess could have emulated his power of laughter.

‘And you are Mr. Harry Jocelyn, the very famous cricketer?’

He answered, glancing back at his friends, that he was, but did not know about the ‘famous.’

’Oh! but I saw you—I saw you hit the ball most beautifully, and dearly wished my brother had an equal ability. Brought up in the Court of Portugal, he is barely English. There they have no manly sports. You saw him pass you?’

‘Him! Who?’ asked Harry.

’My brother, on the lawn, this moment. Your sweet sister’s friend. Your uncle Melville’s secretary.’

‘What’s his name?’ said Harry, in blunt perplexity.

The Countess repeated his name, which in her pronunciation was ‘Hawington,’ adding, ’That was my brother. I am his sister. Have you heard of the Countess de Saldar?’

‘Countess!’ muttered Harry. ‘Dash it! here’s a mistake.’

She continued, with elegant fan-like motion of her gloved fingers: ’They say there is a likeness between us. The dear Queen of Portugal often remarked it, and in her it was a compliment to me, for she thought my brother a model! You I should have known from your extreme resemblance to your lovely young sister.’

Page 1249

Coarse food, but then Harry was a youthful Englishman; and the Countess dieted the vanity according to the nationality. With good wine to wash it down, one can swallow anything. The Countess lent him her eyes for that purpose; eyes that had a liquid glow under the dove—like drooping lids. It was a principle of hers, pampering our poor sex with swinish solids or the lightest ambrosia, never to let the accompanying cordial be other than of the finest quality. She knew that clowns, even more than aristocrats, are flattered by the inebriation of delicate celestial liquors.

‘Now,’ she said, after Harry had gulped as much of the dose as she chose to administer direct from the founts, ’you must accord me the favour to tell me all about yourself, for I have heard much of you, Mr. Harry Jocelyn, and you have excited my woman’s interest. Of me you know nothing.’

‘Haven’t I?’ cried Harry, speaking to the pitch of his new warmth. ’My uncle Melville goes on about you tremendously—makes his wife as jealous as fire. How could I tell that was your brother?’

‘Your uncle has deigned to allude to me?’ said the Countess, meditatively. ‘But not of him—of you, Mr. Harry! What does he say?’

‘Says you’re so clever you ought to be a man.’

‘Ah! generous!’ exclaimed the Countess. ’The idea, I think, is novel to him. Is it not?’

’Well, I believe, from what I hear, he didn’t back you for much over in Lisbon,’ said veracious Harry.

’I fear he is deceived in me now. I fear I am but a woman—I am not to be “backed.” But you are not talking of yourself.’

‘Oh! never mind me,’ was Harry’s modest answer.

’But I do. Try to imagine me as clever as a man, and talk to me of your doings. Indeed I will endeavour to comprehend you.’

Thus humble, the Countess bade him give her his arm. He stuck it out with abrupt eagerness.

‘Not against my cheek.’ She laughed forgivingly. ’And you need not start back half-a-mile,’ she pursued with plain humour: ’and please do not look irresolute and awkward —It is not necessary,’ she added. ‘There!’; and she settled her fingers on him, ’I am glad I can find one or two things to instruct you in. Begin. You are a great cricketer. What else?’

Ay! what else? Harry might well say he had no wish to talk of himself. He did not know even how to give his arm to a lady! The first flattery and the subsequent chiding clashed in his elated soul, and caused him to deem himself one of the blest suddenly overhauled by an inspecting angel and found wanting: or, in his own more accurate style of reflection, 'What a rattling fine woman this is, and what a deuce of a fool she must think me!'

The Countess leaned on his arm with dainty languor.

'You walk well,' she said.

Harry's backbone straightened immediately.

Page 1250

’No, no; I do not want you to be a drill-sergeant. Can you not be told you are perfect without seeking to improve, vain boy? You can cricket, and you can walk, and will very soon learn how to give your arm to a lady. I have hopes of you. Of your friends, from whom I have ruthlessly dragged you, I have not much. Am I personally offensive to them, Mr. Harry? I saw them let my brother pass without returning his bow, and they in no way acknowledged my presence as I passed. Are they gentlemen?’

‘Yes,’ said Harry, stupefied by the question. ’One ’s Ferdinand Laxley, Lord Laxley’s son, heir to the title; the other’s William Harvey, son of the Chief Justice—both friends of mine.’

‘But not of your manners,’ interposed the Countess. ’I have not so much compunction as I ought to have in divorcing you from your associates for a few minutes. I think I shall make a scholar of you in one or two essentials. You do want polish. Have I not a right to take you in hand? I have defended you already.’

‘Me?’ cried Harry.

’None other than Mr. Harry Jocelyn. Will he vouchsafe to me his pardon? It has been whispered in my ears that his ambition is to be the Don Juan of a country district, and I have said for him, that however grovelling his undirected tastes, he is too truly noble to plume himself upon the reputation they have procured him. Why did I defend you? Women, you know, do not shrink from Don Juans—even provincial Don Juans—as they should, perhaps, for their own sakes! You are all of you dangerous, if a woman is not strictly on her guard. But you will respect your champion, will you not?’

Harry was about to reply with wonderful briskness. He stopped, and murmured boorishly that he was sure he was very much obliged.

Command of countenance the Countess possessed in common with her sex. Those faces on which we make them depend entirely, women can entirely control. Keenly sensible to humour as the Countess was, her face sidled up to his immovably sweet. Harry looked, and looked away, and looked again. The poor fellow was so profoundly aware of his foolishness that he even doubted whether he was admired.

The Countess trifled with his English nature; quietly watched him bob between tugging humility and airy conceit, and went on:

’Yes! I will trust you, and that is saying very much, for what protection is a brother? I am alone here—defenceless!’

Men, of course, grow virtuously zealous in an instant on behalf of the lovely dame who tells them bewitchingly, she is alone and defenceless, with pitiful dimples round the dewy mouth that entreats their guardianship and mercy!

The provincial Don Juan found words—a sign of clearer sensations within. He said:

‘Upon my honour, I’d look after you better than fifty brothers!’

The Countess eyed him softly, and then allowed herself the luxury of a laugh.

Page 1251

‘No, no! it is not the sheep, it is the wolf I fear.’

And she went through a bit of the concluding portion of the drama of Little Red Riding Hood very prettily, and tickled him so that he became somewhat less afraid of her.

‘Are you truly so bad as report would have you to be, Mr. Harry?’ she asked, not at all in the voice of a censor.

‘Pray don’t think me—a—anything you wouldn’t have me,’ the youth stumbled into an apt response.

‘We shall see,’ said the Countess, and varied her admiration for the noble creature beside her with gentle ejaculations on the beauty of the deer that ranged the park of Beckley Court, the grand old oaks and beeches, the clumps of flowering laurel, and the rich air swarming Summer.

She swept out her arm. ’And this most magnificent estate will be yours? How happy will she be who is led hither to reside by you, Mr. Harry!’

‘Mine? No; there’s the bother,’ he answered, with unfeigned chagrin. ’Beckley isn’t Elburne property, you know. It belongs to old Mrs. Bonner, Rose’s grandmama.’

‘Oh!’ interjected the Countess, indifferently.

‘I shall never get it—no chance,’ Harry pursued. ’Lost my luck with the old lady long ago.’ He waxed excited on a subject that drew him from his shamefacedness. ’It goes to Juley Bonner, or to Rosey; it’s a toss-up which. If I’d stuck up to Juley, I might have had a pretty fair chance. They wanted me to, that’s why I scout the premises. But fancy Juley Bonner!’

‘You couldn’t, upon your honour!’ rhymed the Countess. (And Harry let loose a delighted ‘Ha! ha!’ as at a fine stroke of wit.) ’Are we enamoured of a beautiful maiden, Senor Harry?’

‘Not a bit,’ he assured her eagerly. ’I don’t know any girl. I don’t care for ’em. I don’t, really.’

The Countess impressively declared to him that he must be guided by her; and that she might the better act his monitress, she desired to hear the pedigree of the estate, and the exact relations in which it at present stood toward the Elburne family.

Glad of any theme he could speak on, Harry informed her that Beckley Court was bought by his grandfather Bonner from the proceeds of a successful oil speculation.

‘So we ain’t much on that side,’ he said.

‘Oil!’ was the Countess’s weary exclamation. ’I imagined Beckley Court to be your ancestral mansion. Oil!’

Harry deprecatingly remarked that oil was money.

‘Yes,’ she replied; ’but you are not one to mix oil with your Elburne blood. Let me see—-oil! That, I conceive, is grocery. So, you are grocers on one side!’

‘Oh, come! hang it!’ cried Harry, turning red.

‘Am I leaning on the grocer’s side, or on the lord’s?’

Harry felt dreadfully taken down. ‘One ranks with one’s father,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ observed the Countess; ’but you should ever be careful not to expose the grocer. When I beheld my brother bow to you, and that your only return was to stare at him in that singular way, I was not aware of this, and could not account for it.’

Page 1252

I declare I'm very sorry,' said Harry, with a nettled air. 'Do just let me tell you how it happened. We were at an inn, where there was an odd old fellow gave a supper; and there was your brother, and another fellow—as thorough an upstart as I ever met, and infernally impudent. He got drinking, and wanted to fight us. Now I see it! Your brother, to save his friend's bones, said he was a tailor! Of course no gentleman could fight a tailor; and it blew over with my saying we'd order our clothes of him.'

'Said he was a—!' exclaimed the Countess, gazing blankly.

'I don't wonder at your feeling annoyed,' returned Harry. 'I saw him with Rosey next day, and began to smell a rat then, but Laxley won't give up the tailor. He's as proud as Lucifer. He wanted to order a suit of your brother to-day; but I said—not while he's in the house, however he came here.'

The Countess had partially recovered. They were now in the village street, and Harry pointed out the post-office.

'Your divination with regard to my brother's most eccentric behaviour was doubtless correct,' she said. 'He wished to succour his wretched companion. Anywhere—it matters not to him what!—he allies himself with miserable mortals. He is the modern Samaritan. You should thank him for saving you an encounter with some low creature.'

Swaying the letter to and fro, she pursued archly: 'I can read your thoughts. You are dying to know to whom this dear letter is addressed!'

Instantly Harry, whose eyes had previously been quite empty of expression, glanced at the letter wistfully.

Shall I tell you?'

'Yes, do.'

'It's to somebody I love.'

'Are you in love then?' was his disconcerted rejoinder.

'Am I not married?'

'Yes; but every woman that's married isn't in love with her husband, you know.'

'Oh! Don Juan of the provinces!' she cried, holding the seal of the letter before him in playful reproof. 'Fie!'

'Come! who is it?' Harry burst out.

’I am not, surely, obliged to confess my correspondence to you? Remember!’ she laughed lightly. ’He already assumes the airs of a lord and master! You are rapid, Mr. Harry.’

‘Won’t you really tell me?’ he pleaded.

She put a corner of the letter in the box. ‘Must I?’

All was done with the archest elegance: the bewildering condescension of a Goddess to a boor.

‘I don’t say you must, you know: but I should like to see it,’ returned Harry.

‘There!’ She showed him a glimpse of ‘Mrs.,’ cleverly concealing plebeian ‘Cogglesby,’ and the letter slid into darkness. ‘Are you satisfied?’

‘Yes,’ said Harry, wondering why he felt a relief at the sight of ‘Mrs.’ written on a letter by a lady he had only known half an hour.

‘And now,’ said she, ’I shall demand a boon of you, Mr. Harry. Will it be accorded?’

Page 1253

She was hurriedly told that she might count upon him for whatever she chose to ask; and after much trifling and many exaggerations of the boon in question, he heard that she had selected him as her cavalier for the day, and that he was to consent to accompany her to the village church.

'Is it so great a request, the desire that you should sit beside a solitary lady for so short a space?' she asked, noting his rueful visage.

Harry assured her he would be very happy, but hinted at the bother of having to sit and listen to that fool of a Parsley: again assuring her, and with real earnestness, which the lady now affected to doubt, that he would be extremely happy.

'You know, I haven't been there for ages,' he explained.

'I hear it!' she sighed, aware of the credit his escort would bring her in Beckley, and especially with Harry's grandmama Bonner.

They went together to the village church. The Countess took care to be late, so that all eyes beheld her stately march up the aisle, with her captive beside her.

Nor was her captive less happy than he professed he would be. Charming comic side-play, at the expense of Mr. Parsley, she mingled with exceeding devoutness, and a serious attention to Mr. Parsley's discourse. In her heart this lady really thought her confessed daily sins forgiven her by the recovery of the lost sheep to Mr. Parsley's fold. The results of this small passage of arms were, that Evan's disclosure at Fallow field was annulled in the mind of Harry Jocelyn, and the latter gentleman became the happy slave of the Countess de Saldar.

CHAPTER XVI

LEADS TO A SMALL SKIRMISH BETWEEN ROSE AND EVAN

Lady Jocelyn belonged properly to that order which the Sultans and the Roxalanas of earth combine to exclude from their little games, under the designation of blues, or strong-minded women: a kind, if genuine, the least dangerous and staunchest of the sex, as poor fellows learn when the flippant and the frail fair have made mummies of them. She had the frankness of her daughter, the same direct eyes and firm step: a face without shadows, though no longer bright with youth. It may be charged to her as one of the errors of her strong mind, that she believed friendship practicable between men and women, young or old. She knew the world pretty well, and was not amazed by extraordinary accidents; but as she herself continued to be an example of her faith: we must presume it natural that her delusion should cling to her. She welcomed Evan as her daughter's friend, walked half-way across the room to meet him on his introduction to her, and with the simple words, 'I have heard of you,' let him see that he stood upon

his merits in her house. The young man's spirit caught something of hers even in their first interview, and at once mounted to that level. Unconsciously he felt that she took, and would take

Page 1254

him, for what he was, and he rose to his worth in the society she presided over. A youth like Evan could not perceive, that in loving this lady's daughter, and accepting the place she offered him, he was guilty of a breach of confidence; or reflect, that her entire absence of suspicion imposed upon him a corresponding honesty toward her. He fell into a blindness. Without dreaming for a moment that she designed to encourage his passion for Rose, he yet beheld himself in the light she had cast on him; and, received as her daughter's friend, it seemed to him not so utterly monstrous that he might be her daughter's lover. A haughty, a grand, or a too familiar manner, would have kept his eyes clearer on his true condition. Lady Jocelyn spoke to his secret nature, and eclipsed in his mind the outward aspects with which it was warring. To her he was a gallant young man, a fit companion for Rose, and when she and Sir Franks said, and showed him, that they were glad to know him, his heart swam in a flood of happiness they little suspected.

This was another of the many forms of intoxication to which circumstances subjected the poor lover. In Fallow field, among impertinent young men, Evan's pride proclaimed him a tailor. At Beckley Court, acted on by one genuine soul, he forgot it, and felt elate in his manhood. The shades of Tailordom dispersed like fog before the full South-west breeze. When I say he forgot it, the fact was present enough to him, but it became an outward fact: he had ceased to feel it within him. It was not a portion of his being, hard as Mrs. Mel had struck to fix it. Consequently, though he was in a far worse plight than when he parted with Rose on board the Jocasta, he felt much less of an impostor now. This may have been partly because he had endured his struggle with the Demogorgon the Countess painted to him in such frightful colours, and found him human after all; but it was mainly owing to the hearty welcome Lady Jocelyn had extended to him as the friend of Rose.

Loving Rose, he nevertheless allowed his love no tender liberties. The eyes of a lover are not his own; but his hands and lips are, till such time as they are claimed. The sun must smile on us with peculiar warmth to woo us forth utterly-pluck our hearts out. Rose smiled on many. She smiled on Drummond Forth, Ferdinand Laxley, William Harvey, and her brother Harry; and she had the same eyes for all ages. Once, previous to the arrival of the latter three, there was a change in her look, or Evan fancied it. They were going to ride out together, and Evan, coming to his horse on the gravel walk, saw her talking with Drummond Forth. He mounted, awaiting her, and either from a slight twinge of jealousy, or to mark her dainty tread with her riding-habit drawn above her heels, he could not help turning his head occasionally. She listened to Drummond with attention, but presently broke from him, crying: 'It's an absurdity. Speak to them yourself—I shall not.'

Page 1255

On the ride that day, she began prattling of this and that with the careless glee that became her well, and then sank into a reverie. Between-whiles her eyes had raised tumults in Evan's breast by dropping on him in a sort of questioning way, as if she wished him to speak, or wished to fathom something she would rather have unspoken. Ere they had finished their ride, she tossed off what burden may have been on her mind as lightly as a stray lock from her shoulders. He thought that the singular look recurred. It charmed him too much for him to speculate on it.

The Countess's opportune ally, the gout, which had reduced the Hon. Melville Jocelyn's right hand to a state of uselessness, served her with her brother equally: for, having volunteered his services to the invalided diplomatist, it excused his stay at Beckley Court to himself, and was a mask to his intimacy with Rose, besides earning him the thanks of the family. Harry Jocelyn, released from the wing of the Countess, came straight to him, and in a rough kind of way begged Evan to overlook his rudeness.

'You took us all in at Fallow field, except Drummond,' he said. 'Drummond would have it you were joking. I see it now. And you're a confoundedly clever fellow into the bargain, or you wouldn't be quill-driving for Uncle Mel. Don't be uppish about it—will you?'

'You have nothing to fear on that point,' said Evan. With which promise the peace was signed between them. Drummond and William Harvey were cordial, and just laughed over the incident. Laxley, however, held aloof. His retention of ideas once formed befitted his rank and station. Some trifling qualms attended Evan's labours with the diplomatist; but these were merely occasioned by the iteration of a particular phrase. Mr. Goren, an enthusiastic tailor, had now and then thrown out to Evan stirring hints of an invention he claimed: the discovery of a Balance in Breeches: apparently the philosopher's stone of the tailor craft, a secret that should ensure harmony of outline to the person and an indubitable accommodation to the most difficult legs.

Since Adam's expulsion, it seemed, the tailors of this wilderness had been in search of it. But like the doctors of this wilderness, their science knew no specific: like the Babylonian workmen smitten with confusion of tongues, they had but one word in common, and that word was 'cut.' Mr. Goren contended that to cut was not the key of the science: but to find a Balance was. An artistic admirer of the frame of man, Mr. Goren was not wanting in veneration for the individual who had arisen to do it justice. He spoke of his Balance with supreme self-appreciation. Nor less so the Honourable Melville, who professed to have discovered the Balance of Power, at home and abroad. It was a capital Balance, but inferior to Mr. Goren's. The latter gentleman guaranteed a Balance with motion: whereas one step not only upset the Honourable Melville's, but shattered the limbs of Europe. Let us admit, that it is easier to fit a man's legs than to compress expansive empires.

Page 1256

Evan enjoyed the doctoring of kingdoms quite as well as the diplomatist. It suited the latent grandeur of soul inherited by him from the great Mel. He liked to prop Austria and arrest the Czar, and keep a watchful eye on France; but the Honourable Melville's deep-mouthed phrase conjured up to him a pair of colossal legs imperiously demanding their Balance likewise. At first the image scared him. In time he was enabled to smile it into phantom vagueness. The diplomatist diplomatically informed him, it might happen that the labours he had undertaken might be neither more nor less than education for a profession he might have to follow. Out of this, an ardent imagination, with the Countess de Saldar for an interpreter, might construe a promise of some sort. Evan soon had high hopes. What though his name blazed on a shop-front? The sun might yet illumine him to honour!

Where a young man is getting into delicate relations with a young woman, the more of his sex the better—they serve as a blind; and the Countess hailed fresh arrivals warmly. There was Sir John Loring, Dorothy's father, who had married the eldest of the daughters of Lord Elburne. A widower, handsome, and a flirt, he capitulated to the Countess instantly, and was played off against the provincial Don Juan, who had reached that point with her when youths of his description make bashful confidences of their successes, and receive delicious chidings for their naughtiness—rebukes which give immeasurable rebounds. Then came Mr. Gordon Graine, with his daughter, Miss Jenny Graine, an early friend of Rose's, and numerous others. For the present, Miss Isabella Current need only be chronicled among the visitors—a sprightly maid fifty years old, without a wrinkle to show for it—the Aunt Bel of fifty houses where there were young women and little boys. Aunt Bel had quick wit and capital anecdotes, and tripped them out aptly on a sparkling tongue with exquisite instinct for climax and when to strike for a laugh. No sooner had she entered the hall than she announced the proximate arrival of the Duke of Belfield at her heels, and it was known that his Grace was as sure to follow as her little dog, who was far better paid for his devotion.

The dinners at Beckley Court had hitherto been rather languid to those who were not intriguing or mixing young love with the repast. Miss Current was an admirable neutral, sent, as the Countess fervently believed, by Providence. Till now the Countess had drawn upon her own resources to amuse the company, and she had been obliged to restrain herself from doing it with that unctuous feeling for rank which warmed her Portuguese sketches in low society and among her sisters. She retired before Miss Current and formed audience, glad of a relief to her inventive labour. While Miss Current and her ephemerals lightly skimmed the surface of human life, the Countess worked in the depths. Vanities, passions, prejudices beneath the surface, gave her full employment.

Page 1257

How naturally poor Juliana Bonner was moved to mistake Evan's compassion for a stronger sentiment! The Countess eagerly assisted Providence to shuffle the company into their proper places. Harry Jocelyn was moodily happy, but good; greatly improved in the eyes of his grandmama Bonner, who attributed the change to the Countess, and partly forgave her the sinful consent to the conditions of her love-match with the foreign Count, which his penitent wife had privately confessed to that strict Churchwoman.

'Thank Heaven that you have no children,' Mrs. Bonner had said; and the Countess humbly replied:

'It is indeed my remorseful consolation!'

'Who knows that it is not your punishment?' added Mrs. Bonner; the Countess weeping.

She went and attended morning prayers in Mrs. Bonner's apartments, alone with the old lady. 'To make up for lost time in Catholic Portugal!' she explained it to the household.

On the morning after Miss Current had come to shape the party, most of the inmates of Beckley Court being at breakfast, Rose gave a lead to the conversation.

'Aunt Bel! I want to ask you something. We've been making bets about you. Now, answer honestly, we're all friends. Why did you refuse all your offers?'

'Quite simple, child,' replied the unabashed ex-beauty.

'A matter of taste. I liked twenty shillings better than a sovereign.'

Rose looked puzzled, but the men laughed, and Rose exclaimed:

'Now I see! How stupid I am! You mean, you may have friends when you are not married. Well, I think that's the wisest, after all. You don't lose them, do you? Pray, Mr. Evan, are you thinking Aunt Bel might still alter her mind for somebody, if she knew his value?'

'I was presuming to hope there might be a place vacant among the twenty,' said Evan, slightly bowing to both. 'Am I pardoned?'

'I like you!' returned Aunt Bel, nodding at him. 'Where do you come from? A young man who'll let himself go for small coin's a jewel worth knowing.'

'Where do I come from?' drawled Laxley, who had been tapping an egg with a dreary expression.

'Aunt Bel spoke to Mr. Harrington,' said Rose, pettishly.

‘Asked him where he came from,’ Laxley continued his drawl. ’He didn’t answer, so I thought it polite for another of the twenty to strike in.’

‘I must thank you expressly,’ said Evan, and achieved a cordial bow.

Rose gave Evan one of her bright looks, and then called the attention of Ferdinand Laxley to the fact that he had lost a particular bet made among them.

‘What bet?’ asked Laxley. ‘About the profession?’

A stream of colour shot over Rose’s face. Her eyes flew nervously from Laxley to Evan, and then to Drummond. Laxley appeared pleased as a man who has made a witty sally: Evan was outwardly calm, while Drummond replied to the mute appeal of Rose, by saying:

Page 1258

’Yes; we’ve all lost. But who could hit it? The lady admits no sovereign in our sex.’

‘So you’ve been betting about me?’ said Aunt Bel. ’I ’ll settle the dispute. Let him who guessed “Latin” pocket the stakes, and, if I guess him, let him hand them over to me.’

‘Excellent!’ cried Rose. ’One did guess “Latin,” Aunt Bel! Now, tell us which one it was.’

‘Not you, my dear. You guessed “temper."’

‘No! you dreadful Aunt Bel!’

‘Let me see,’ said Aunt Bel, seriously. ’A young man would not marry a woman with Latin, but would not guess it the impediment. Gentlemen moderately aged are mad enough to slip their heads under any yoke, but see the obstruction. It was a man of forty guessed “Latin.” I request the Hon. Hamilton Everard Jocelyn to confirm it.’

Amid laughter and exclamations Hamilton confessed himself the man who had guessed Latin to be the cause of Miss Current’s remaining an old maid; Rose, crying:

‘You really are too clever, Aunt Bel!’

A divergence to other themes ensued, and then Miss Jenny Graine said: ‘Isn’t Juley learning Latin? I should like to join her while I’m here.’

‘And so should I,’ responded Rose. ’My friend Evan is teaching her during the intervals of his arduous diplomatic labours. Will you take us into your class, Evan?’

‘Don’t be silly, girls,’ interposed Aunt Bel. ’Do you want to graduate for my state with your eyes open?’

Evan objected his poor qualifications as a tutor, and Aunt Bel remarked, that if Juley learnt Latin at all, she should have regular instruction.

‘I am quite satisfied,’ said Juley, quietly.

‘Of course you are,’ Rose snubbed her cousin. ’So would anybody be. But Mama really was talking of a tutor for Juley, if she could find one. There’s a school at Bodley; but that’s too far for one of the men to come over.’

A school at Bodley! thought Evan, and his probationary years at the Cudford Establishment rose before him; and therewith, for the first time since his residence at Beckley, the figure of John Raikes.

‘There’s a friend of mine,’ he said, aloud, ’I think if Lady Jocelyn does wish Miss Bonner to learn Latin thoroughly, he would do very well for the groundwork and would be glad of the employment. He is very poor’

‘If he’s poor, and a friend of yours, Evan, we’ll have him,’ said Rose: ‘we’ll ride and fetch him.’

‘Yes,’ added Miss Carrington, ’that must be quite sufficient qualification.’

Juliana was not gazing gratefully at Evan for his proposal.

Rose asked the name of Evan’s friend. ‘His name is Raikes,’ answered Evan. ’I don’t know where he is now. He may be at Fallow field. If Lady Jocelyn pleases, I will ride over to-day and see.’

‘My dear Evan!’ cried Rose, ’you don’t mean that absurd figure we saw on the cricket-field?’ She burst out laughing. ’Oh! what fun it will be! Let us have him here by all means.’

Page 1259

‘I shall not bring him to be laughed at,’ said Evan.

‘I will remember he is your friend,’ Rose returned demurely; and again laughed, as she related to Jenny Graine the comic appearance Mr. Raikes had presented.

Laxley waited for a pause, and then said: ’I have met this Mr. Raikes. As a friend of the family, I should protest against his admission here in any office whatever into the upper part of the house, at least. He is not a gentleman.’

We don’t want teachers to be gentlemen,’ observed Rose.

‘This fellow is the reverse,’ Laxley pronounced, and desired Harry to confirm it; but Harry took a gulp of coffee.

‘Oblige me by recollecting that I have called him a friend of mine,’ said Evan.

Rose murmured to him: ‘Pray forgive me! I forgot.’ Laxley hummed something about ‘taste.’ Aunt Bel led from the theme by a lively anecdote.

After breakfast the party broke into knots, and canvassed Laxley’s behaviour to Evan, which was generally condemned. Rose met the young men strolling on the lawn; and, with her usual bluntness, accused Laxley of wishing to insult her friend.

‘I speak to him—do I not?’ said Laxley. ’What would you have more? I admit the obligation of speaking to him when I meet him in your house. Out of it—that ‘s another matter.’

‘But what is the cause for your conduct to him, Ferdinand?’

‘By Jove!’ cried Harry, ’I wonder he puts up with it I wouldn’t. I’d have a shot with you, my boy.’

‘Extremely honoured,’ said Laxley. ’But neither you nor I care to fight tailors.’

‘Tailors!’ exclaimed Rose. There was a sharp twitch in her body, as if she had been stung or struck.

‘Look here, Rose,’ said Laxley; ’I meet him, he insults me, and to get out of the consequences tells me he’s the son of a tailor, and a tailor himself; knowing that it ties my hands. Very well, he puts himself hors de combat to save his bones. Let him unsay it, and choose whether he ’ll apologize or not, and I’ll treat him accordingly. At present I’m not bound to do more than respect the house I find he has somehow got admission to.’

‘It’s clear it was that other fellow,’ said Harry, casting a side-glance up at the Countess’s window.

Rose looked straight at Laxley, and abruptly turned on her heel.

In the afternoon, Lady Jocelyn sent a message to Evan that she wished to see him. Rose was with her mother. Lady Jocelyn had only to say, that if he thought his friend a suitable tutor for Miss Bonner, they would be happy to give him the office at Beckley Court. Glad to befriend poor Jack, Evan gave the needful assurances, and was requested to go and fetch him forthwith. When he left the room, Rose marched out silently beside him.

‘Will you ride over with me, Rose?’ he said, though scarcely anxious that she should see Mr. Raikes immediately.

The singular sharpness of her refusal astonished him none the less.

Page 1260

‘Thank you, no; I would rather not.’

A lover is ever ready to suspect that water has been thrown on the fire that burns for him in the bosom of his darling. Sudden as the change was, it was very decided. His sensitive ears were pained by the absence of his Christian name, which her lips had lavishly made sweet to him. He stopped in his walk.

’You spoke of riding to Fallow field. Is it possible you don’t want me to bring my friend here? There’s time to prevent it.’

Judged by the Countess de Saldar, the behaviour of this well-born English maid was anything but well-bred. She absolutely shrugged her shoulders and marched a-head of him into the conservatory, where she began smelling at flowers and plucking off sere leaves.

In such cases a young man always follows; as her womanly instinct must have told her, for she expressed no surprise when she heard his voice two minutes after.

‘Rose! what have I done?’

‘Nothing at all,’ she said, sweeping her eyes over his a moment, and resting them on the plants.

‘I must have uttered something that has displeased you.’

‘No.’

Brief negatives are not re-assuring to a lover’s uneasy mind.

‘I beg you—Be frank with me, Rose!’

A flame of the vanished fire shone in her face, but subsided, and she shook her head darkly.

‘Have you any objection to my friend?’

Her fingers grew petulant with an orange leaf. Eyeing a spot on it, she said, hesitatingly:

’Any friend of yours I am sure I should like to help. But—but I wish you wouldn’t associate with that—that kind of friend. It gives people all sorts of suspicions.’

Evan drew a sharp breath.

The voices of Master Alec and Miss Dorothy were heard shouting on the lawn. Alec gave Dorothy the slip and approached the conservatory on tip-toe, holding his hand out behind him to enjoin silence and secrecy. The pair could witness the scene through the glass before Evan spoke.

‘What suspicions?’ he asked.

Rose looked up, as if the harshness of his tone pleased her.

‘Do you like red roses best, or white?’ was her answer, moving to a couple of trees in pots.

‘Can’t make up your mind?’ she continued, and plucked both a white and red rose, saying: ‘There! choose your colour by-and-by,’ and ask Juley to sew the one you choose in your button-hole.’

She laid the roses in his hand, and walked away. She must have known that there was a burden of speech on his tongue. She saw him move to follow her, but this time she did not linger, and it may be inferred that she wished to hear no more.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH EVAN WRITES HIMSELF TAILOR

Page 1261

The only philosophic method of discovering what a young woman means, and what is in her mind, is that zigzag process of inquiry conducted by following her actions, for she can tell you nothing, and if she does not want to know a particular matter, it must be a strong beam from the central system of facts that shall penetrate her. Clearly there was a disturbance in the bosom of Rose Jocelyn, and one might fancy that amiable mirror as being wilfully ruffled to confuse a thing it was asked by the heavens to reflect: a good fight fought by all young people at a certain period, and now and then by an old fool or two. The young it seasons and strengthens; the old it happily kills off; and thus, what is, is made to work harmoniously with what we would have be.

After quitting Evan, Rose hied to her friend Jenny Graine, and in the midst of sweet millinery talk, darted the odd question, whether baronets or knights ever were tradesmen: to which Scottish Jenny, entirely putting aside the shades of beatified aldermen and the illustrious list of mayors that have welcomed royalty, replied that it was a thing quite impossible. Rose then wished to know if tailors were thought worse of than other tradesmen. Jenny, premising that she was no authority, stated she imagined she had heard that they were.

‘Why?’ said Rose, no doubt because she was desirous of seeing justice dealt to that class. But Jenny’s bosom was a smooth reflector of facts alone.

Rose pondered, and said with compressed eagerness, ’Jenny, do you think you could ever bring yourself to consent to care at all for anybody ever talked of as belonging to them? Tell me.’

Now Jenny had come to Beckley Court to meet William Harvey: she was therefore sufficiently soft to think she could care for him whatever his origin were, and composed in the knowledge that no natal stigma was upon him to try the strength of her affection. Designing to generalize, as women do (and seem tempted to do most when they are secretly speaking from their own emotions), she said, shyly moving her shoulders, with a forefinger laying down the principle:

’You know, my dear, if one esteemed such a person very very much, and were quite sure, without any doubt, that he liked you in return—that is, completely liked you, and was quite devoted, and made no concealment—I mean, if he was very superior, and like other men—you know what I mean—and had none of the cringing ways some of them have—I mean; supposing him gay and handsome, taking—’

‘Just like William,’ Rose cut her short; and we may guess her to have had some one in her head for her to conceive that Jenny must be speaking of any one in particular.

A young lady who can have male friends, as well as friends of her own sex, is not usually pressing and secret in her confidences, possibly because such a young lady is not always nursing baby-passions, and does not require her sex’s coddling and

posseting to keep them alive. With Rose love will be full grown when it is once avowed, and will know where to go to be nourished.

Page 1262

‘Merely an idea I had,’ she said to Jenny, who betrayed her mental pre-occupation by putting the question for the questions last.

Her Uncle Melville next received a visit from the restless young woman. To him she spoke not a word of the inferior classes, but as a special favourite of the diplomatist’s, begged a gift of him for her proximate birthday. Pushed to explain what it was, she said, ’It’s something I want you to do for a friend of mine, Uncle Mel.’

The diplomatist instanced a few of the modest requests little maids prefer to people they presume to have power to grant.

‘No, it’s nothing nonsensical,’ said Rose; ’I want you to get my friend Evan an appointment. You can if you like, you know, Uncle Mel, and it’s a shame to make him lose his time when he’s young and does his work so well—that you can’t deny! Now, please, be positive, Uncle Mel. You know I hate—I have no faith in your ‘nous verrons’. Say you will, and at once.’

The diplomatist pretended to have his weather-eye awakened.

‘You seem very anxious about feathering the young fellow’s nest, Rosey?’

‘There,’ cried Rose, with the maiden’s mature experience of us, ’isn’t that just like men? They never can believe you can be entirely disinterested!’

‘Hulloa!’ the diplomatist sung out, ‘I didn’t say anything, Rosey.’

She reddened at her hastiness, but retrieved it by saying:

’No, but you listen to your wife; you know you do, Uncle Mel; and now there’s Aunt Shorne and the other women, who make you think just what they like about me, because they hate Mama.’

‘Don’t use strong words, my dear.’

‘But it’s abominable!’ cried Rose. ’They asked Mama yesterday what Evan’s being here meant? Why, of course, he’s your secretary, and my friend, and Mama very properly stopped them, and so will I! As for me, I intend to stay at Beckley, I can tell you, dear old boy.’ Uncle Mel had a soft arm round his neck, and was being fondled. ’And I ’m not going to be bred up to go into a harem, you may be sure.’

The diplomatist whistled, ‘You talk your mother with a vengeance, Rosey.’

‘And she’s the only sensible woman I know,’ said Rose. ’Now promise me—in earnest. Don’t let them mislead you, for you know you’re quite a child, out of your politics, and I shall take you in hand myself. Why, now, think, Uncle Mel! wouldn’t any girl, as silly as

they make me out, hold her tongue—not talk of him, as I do; and because I really do feel for him as a friend. See the difference between me and Juley!'

It was a sad sign if Rose was growing a bit of a hypocrite, but this instance of Juliana's different manner of showing her feelings toward Evan would have quieted suspicion in shrewder men, for Juliana watched Evan's shadow, and it was thought by two or three at Beckley Court, that Evan would be conferring a benefit on all by carrying off the romantically-inclined but little presentable young lady.

Page 1263

The diplomatist, with a placid ‘Well, well!’ ultimately promised to do his best for Rose’s friend, and then Rose said, ’Now I leave you to the Countess,’ and went and sat with her mother and Drummond Forth. The latter was strange in his conduct to Evan. While blaming Laxley’s unmannered behaviour, he seemed to think Laxley had grounds for it, and treated Evan with a sort of cynical deference that had, for the last couple of days, exasperated Rose.

‘Mama, you must speak to Ferdinand,’ she burst upon the conversation, ’Drummond is afraid to—he can stand by and see my friend insulted. Ferdinand is insufferable with his pride—he’s jealous of everybody who has manners, and Drummond approves him, and I will not bear it.’

Lady Jocelyn hated household worries, and quietly remarked that the young men must fight it out together.

‘No, but it’s your duty to interfere, Mama,’ said Rose; ’and I know you will when I tell you that Ferdinand declares my friend Evan is a tradesman—beneath his notice. Why, it insults me!’

Lady Jocelyn looked out from a lofty window on such veritable squabbles of boys and girls as Rose revealed.

‘Can’t you help them to run on smoothly while they’re here?’ she said to Drummond, and he related the scene at the Green Dragon.

’I think I heard he was the son of Sir Something Harrington, Devonshire people,’ said Lady Jocelyn.

‘Yes, he is,’ cried Rose, ’or closely related. I’m sure I understood the Countess that it was so. She brought the paper with the death in it to us in London, and shed tears over it.’

‘She showed it in the paper, and shed tears over it?’ said Drummond, repressing an inclination to laugh. ’Was her father’s title given in full?’

’Sir Abraham Harrington, replied Rose. ’I think she said father, if the word wasn’t too common-place for her.’

‘You can ask old Tom when he comes, if you are anxious to know,’ said Drummond to her ladyship. ’His brother married one of the sisters. By the way, he’s coming, too. He ought to clear up the mystery.’

‘Now you’re sneering, Drummond,’ said Rose: ’for you know there ’s no mystery to clear up.’

Drummond and Lady Jocelyn began talking of old Tom Cogglesby, whom, it appeared, the former knew intimately, and the latter had known.

‘The Cogglesbys are sons of a cobbler, Rose,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’You must try and be civil to them.’

‘Of course I shall, Mama,’ Rose answered seriously.

‘And help the poor Countess to bear their presence as well as possible,’ said Drummond. ’The Harringtons have had to mourn a dreadful mesalliance. Pity the Countess!’

‘Oh! the Countess! the Countess!’ exclaimed Rose to Drummond’s pathetic shake of the head. She and Drummond were fully agreed about the Countess; Drummond mimicking the lady: ‘In verity, she is most mellifluous!’ while Rose sugared her lips and leaned gracefully forward with ’De Saldar, let me petition you—since we must endure our title—since it is not to be your Louisa?’ and her eyes sought the ceiling, and her hand slowly melted into her drapery, as the Countess was wont to effect it.

Page 1264

Lady Jocelyn laughed, but said: ’You’re too hard upon the Countess. The female euphuist is not to be met with every day. It’s a different kind from the Precieuse. She is not a Precieuse. She has made a capital selection of her vocabulary from Johnson, and does not work it badly, if we may judge by Harry and Melville. Euphuism—[affectation D.W.]—in “woman” is the popular ideal of a Duchess. She has it by nature, or she has studied it: and if so, you must respect her abilities.’

‘Yes—Harry!’ said Rose, who was angry at a loss of influence over her rough brother, ’any one could manage Harry! and Uncle Mel ’s a goose. You should see what a “female euphuist” Dorry is getting. She says in the Countess’s hearing: “Rose! I should in verity wish to play, if it were pleasing to my sweet cousin?” I’m ready to die with laughing. I don’t do it, Mama.’

The Countess, thus being discussed, was closeted with old Mrs. Bonner: not idle. Like Hannibal in Italy, she had crossed her Alps in attaining Beckley Court, and here in the enemy’s country the wary general found herself under the necessity of throwing up entrenchments to fly to in case of defeat. Sir Abraham Harrington of Torquay, who had helped her to cross the Alps, became a formidable barrier against her return.

Meantime Evan was riding over to Fallow field, and as he rode under black visions between the hedgeways crowned with their hop-garlands, a fragrance of roses saluted his nostril, and he called to mind the red and the white the peerless representative of the two had given him, and which he had thrust sullenly in his breast-pocket and he drew them out to look at them reproachfully and sigh farewell to all the roses of life, when in company with them he found in his hand the forgotten letter delivered to him on the cricket-field the day of the memorable match. He smelt at the roses, and turned the letter this way and that. His name was correctly worded on the outside. With an odd reluctance to open it, he kept trifling over the flowers, and then broke the broad seal, and these are the words that met his eyes:

’Mr. *Evan Harrington*.

’You have made up your mind to be a tailor, instead of a Tomnoddy. You’re right. Not too many men in the world—plenty of nincompoops.

’Don’t be made a weathercock of by a parcel of women. I want to find a man worth something. If you go on with it, you shall end by riding in your carriage, and cutting it as fine as any of them. I ’ll take care your belly is not punished while you’re about it.

’From the time your name is over your shop, I give you L300 per annum.

’Or stop. There’s nine of you. They shall have L40. per annum apiece, 9 times 40, eh? That’s better than L300., if you know how to reckon. Don’t you wish it was ninety-nine tailors to a man! I could do that too, and it would not break me; so don’t be a proud

young ass, or I ’ll throw my money to the geese. Lots of them in the world. How many geese to a tailor?

Page 1265

’Go on for five years, and I double it.

’Give it up, and I give you up.

’No question about me. The first tailor can be paid his L40 in advance, by applying at the offices of Messrs. Grist, Gray’s Inn Square, Gray’s Inn. Let him say he is tailor No. 1, and show this letter, signed Agreed, with your name in full at bottom. This will do—-money will be paid—no questions one side or other. So on—the whole nine. The end of the year they can give a dinner to their acquaintance. Send in bill to Messrs. Grist.

’The advice to you to take the cash according to terms mentioned is advice of ’A *friend*.

’P.S. You shall have your wine. Consult among yourselves, and carry it by majority what wine it’s to be. Five carries it. Dozen and half per tailor, per annum—that’s the limit.’

It was certainly a very hot day. The pores of his skin were prickling, and his face was fiery; and yet he increased his pace, and broke into a wild gallop for a mile or so; then suddenly turned his horse’s head back for Beckley. The secret of which evolution was, that he had caught the idea of a plotted insult of Laxley’s in the letter, for when the blood is up we are drawn the way the tide sets strongest, and Evan was prepared to swear that Laxley had written the letter, because he was burning to chastise the man who had injured him with Rose.

Sure that he was about to confirm his suspicion, he read it again, gazed upon Beckley Court in the sultry light, and turned for Fallow field once more, devising to consult Mr. John Raikes on the subject.

The letter had a smack of crabbed age hardly counterfeit. The savour of an old eccentric’s sour generosity was there. Evan fell into bitter laughter at the idea of Rose glancing over his shoulder and asking him what nine of him to a man meant. He heard her clear voice pursuing him. He could not get away from the mocking sound of Rose beseeching him to instruct her on that point. How if the letter were genuine? He began to abhor the sight and touch of the paper, for it struck division cold as death between him and his darling. He saw now the immeasurable hopes his residence at Beckley had lured him to. Rose had slightly awakened him: this letter was blank day to his soul. He saw the squalid shop, the good, stern, barren-spirited mother, the changeless drudgery, the existence which seemed indeed no better than what the ninth of a man was fit for. The influence of his mother came on him once more. Dared he reject the gift if true? No spark of gratitude could he feel, but chained, dragged at the heels of his fate, he submitted to think it true; resolving the next moment that it was a fabrication and a trap: but he flung away the roses.

As idle as a painted cavalier upon a painted drop-scene, the figure of Mr. John Raikes was to be observed leaning with crossed legs against a shady pillar of the Green Dragon; eyeing alternately, with an indifference he did not care to conceal, the assiduous pecking in the dust of some cocks and hens that had strayed from the yard of the inn, and the sleepy blinking in the sun of an old dog at his feet: nor did Evan's appearance discompose the sad sedateness of his demeanour.

Page 1266

‘Yes; I am here still,’ he answered Evan’s greeting, with a flaccid gesture. ‘Don’t excite me too much. A little at a time. I can’t bear it!’

‘How now? What is it now, Jack?’ said Evan.

Mr. Raikes pointed at the dog. ’I’ve made a bet with myself he won’t wag his tail within the next ten minutes. I beg of you, Harrington, to remain silent for both our sakes.’

Evan was induced to look at the dog, and the dog looked at him, and gently moved his tail.

’I ‘ve lost!’ cried Raikes, in languid anguish. ’He ’s getting excited. He’ll go mad. We’re not accustomed to this in Fallow field.’

Evan dismounted, and was going to tell him the news he had for him, when his attention was distracted by the sight of Rose’s maid, Polly Wheedle, splendidly bonneted, who slipped past them into the inn, after repulsing Jack’s careless attempt to caress her chin; which caused him to tell Evan that he could not get on without the society of intellectual women.

Evan called a boy to hold the horse.

‘Have you seen her before, Jack?’

Jack replied: ’Once. Your pensioner up-stairs she comes to visit. I do suspect there kinship is betwixt them. Ay! one might swear them sisters. She’s a relief to the monotony of the petrified street—the old man with the brown-gaitered legs and the doubled-up old woman with the crutch. I heard the London horn this morning.’

Evan thrust the letter in his hands, telling him to read and form an opinion on it, and went in the track of Miss Wheedle.

Mr. Raikes resumed his station against the pillar, and held the letter out on a level with his thigh. Acting (as it was his nature to do off the stage), he had not exaggerated his profound melancholy. Of a light soil and with a tropical temperament, he had exhausted all lively recollection of his brilliant career, and, in the short time since Evan had parted with him, sunk abjectly down into the belief that he was fixed in Fallow field for life. His spirit pitied for agitation and events. The horn of the London coach had sounded distant metropolitan glories in the ears of the exile in rustic parts.

Sighing heavily, Raikes opened the letter, in simple obedience to the wishes of his friend; for he would have preferred to stand contemplating his own state of hopeless stagnation. The sceptical expression he put on when he had read the letter through must not deceive us. John Raikes had dreamed of a beneficent eccentric old gentleman for many years: one against whom, haply, he had bumped in a crowded

thoroughfare, and had with cordial politeness begged pardon of; had then picked up his walking-stick; restored it, venturing a witty remark; retired, accidentally dropping his card-case; subsequently, to his astonishment and gratification, receiving a pregnant missive from that old gentleman's lawyer. Or it so happened that Mr. Raikes met the old gentleman at a tavern,

Page 1267

and, by the exercise of a signal dexterity, relieved him from a bone in his throat, and reluctantly imparted his address on issuing from the said tavern. Or perhaps it was a lonely highway where the old gentleman walked, and John Raikes had his name in the papers for a deed of heroism, nor was man ungrateful. Since he had eaten up his uncle, this old gentleman of his dreams walked in town and country-only, and alas! Mr. Raikes could never encounter him in the flesh. The muscles of his face, therefore, are no index to the real feelings of the youth when he had thoroughly mastered the contents of the letter, and reflected that the dream of his luck—his angelic old gentleman—had gone and wantonly bestowed himself upon Evan Harrington, instead of the expectant and far worthier John Raikes. Worthier inasmuch as he gave him credence for existing long ere he knew of him and beheld him manifest.

Raikes retreated to the vacant parlour of the Green Dragon, and there Evan found him staring at the unfolded letter, his head between his cramped fists, with a contraction of his mouth. Evan was troubled by what he had seen up-stairs, and did not speak till Jack looked up and said, ‘Oh, there you are.’

‘Well, what do you think, Jack?’

‘Yes—it’s all right,’ Raikes rejoined in most matter-of-course tone, and then he stepped to the window, and puffed a very deep breath indeed, and glanced from the straight line of the street to the heavens, with whom, injured as he was, he felt more at home now that he knew them capable of miracles.

‘Is it a bad joke played upon me?’ said Evan.

Raikes upset a chair. ’It’s quite childish. You’re made a gentleman for life, and you ask if it’s a joke played upon you! It’s maddening! There—there goes my hat!’

With a vehement kick, Mr. Raikes despatched his ancient head-gear to the other end of the room, saying that he must have some wine, and would; and disdainful was his look at Evan, when the latter attempted to reason him into economy. He ordered the wine; drank a glass, which coloured a new mood in him; and affecting a practical manner, said:

’I confess I have been a little hurt with you, Harrington. You left me stranded on the desert isle. I thought myself abandoned. I thought I should never see anything but the lengthening of an endless bill on my landlady’s face—my sole planet. I was resigned till I heard my friend “to-lool!” this morning. He kindled recollection. But, this is a tidy Port, and that was a delectable sort of young lady that you were riding with when we parted last! She laughs like the true metal. I suppose you know it ’s the identical damsel I met the day before, and owe it to for my run on the downs—I ‘ve a compliment ready made for her.’

‘You think that letter written in good faith?’ said Evan.

‘Look here.’ Mr. Raikes put on a calmness. ’You got up the other night, and said you were a tailor—a devotee of the cabbage and the goose. Why the notion didn’t strike me is extraordinary—I ought to have known my man. However, the old gentleman who gave the supper—he’s evidently one of your beastly rich old ruffianly republicans—-spent part of his time in America, I dare say. Put two and two together.’

Page 1268

But as Harrington desired plain, prose, Mr. Raikes tamed his imagination to deliver it. He pointed distinctly at the old gentleman who gave the supper as the writer of the letter. Evan, in return, confided to him his history and present position, and Mr. Raikes, without cooling to his fortunate friend, became a trifle patronizing.

'You said your father—I think I remember at old Cudford's—was a cavalry officer, a bold dragoon?'

'I did,' replied Evan. 'I told a lie.'

'We knew it; but we feared your prowess, Harrington.'

Then they talked over the singular letter uninterruptedly, and Evan, weak among his perplexities of position and sentiment: wanting money for the girl up-stairs, for this distasteful comrade's bill at the Green Dragon, and for his own immediate requirements, and with the bee buzzing of Rose in his ears: 'She despises you,' consented in a desperation ultimately to sign his name to it, and despatch Jack forthwith to Messrs. Grist.

'You'll find it's an imposition,' he said, beginning less to think it so, now that his name was put to the hated monstrous thing; which also now fell to pricking at curiosity. For he was in the early steps of his career, and if his lady, holding to pride, despised him—as, he was tortured into the hypocrisy of confessing, she justly might, why, then, unless he was the sport of a farceur, here seemed a gilding of the path of duty: he could be serviceable to friends. His claim on fair young Rose's love had grown in the short while so prodigiously asinine that it was a minor matter to constitute himself an old eccentric's puppet.

'No more an imposition than it's 50 of Virgil,' quoth the rejected usher.

'It smells of a plot,' said Evan.

'It 's the best joke that will be made in my time,' said Mr. Raikes, rubbing his hands.

'And now listen to your luck,' said Evan; 'I wish mine were like it!' and Jack heard of Lady Jocelyn's offer. He heard also that the young lady he was to instruct was an heiress, and immediately inspected his garments, and showed the sacred necessity there was for him to refit in London, under the hands of scientific tailors. Evan wrote him an introduction to Mr. Goren, counted out the contents of his purse (which Jack had reduced in his study of the pastoral game of skittles, he confessed), and calculated in a niggardly way, how far it would go to supply the fellow's wants; sighing, as he did it, to think of Jack installed at Beckley Court, while Jack, comparing his luck with Evan's, had discovered it to be dismally inferior.

‘Oh, confound those bellows you keep blowing!’ he exclaimed. ’I wish to be decently polite, Harrington, but you annoy me. Excuse me, pray, but the most unexampled case of a lucky beggar that ever was known—and to hear him panting and ready to whimper! —it’s outrageous. You’ve only to put up your name, and there you are—an independent gentleman! By Jove!

Page 1269

this isn't such a dull world. John Raikes! thou livest in times. I feel warm in the sun of your prosperity, Harrington. Now listen to me. Propound thou no inquiries anywhere about the old fellow who gave the supper. Humour his whim—he won't have it. All Fallow field is paid to keep him secret; I know it for a fact. I plied my rustic friends every night. "Eat you yer victuals, and drink yer beer, and none o' yer pryin's and peerin's among we!" That's my rebuff from Farmer Broadmead. And that old boy knows more than he will tell. I saw his cunning old eye on-cock. Be silent, Harrington. Let discretion be the seal of thy luck.'

'You can reckon on my silence,' said Evan. 'I believe in no such folly. Men don't do these things.'

'Ha!' went Mr. Raikes contemptuously.

Of the two he was the foolisher fellow; but quacks have cured incomprehensible maladies, and foolish fellows have an instinct for eccentric actions.

Telling Jack to finish the wine, Evan rose to go.

'Did you order the horse to be fed?'

'Did I order the feeding of the horse?' said Jack, rising and yawning. 'No, I forgot him. Who can think of horses now?'

'Poor brute!' muttered Evan, and went out to see to him.

The ostler had required no instructions to give the horse a feed of corn. Evan mounted, and rode out of the yard to where Jack was standing, bare-headed, in his old posture against the pillar, of which the shade had rounded, and the evening sun shone full on him over a black cloud. He now looked calmly gay.

'I 'm laughing at the agricultural Broadmead!' he said: "'None o' yer pryin's and peerin's!" He thought my powers of amusing prodigious. "Dang 'un, he do maak a chap laugh!" Well, Harrington, that sort of homage isn't much, I admit.'

Raikes pursued: 'There's something in a pastoral life, after all.'

'Pastoral!' muttered Evan. 'I was speaking of you at Beckley, and hope when you're there you won't make me regret my introduction of you. Keep your mind on old Cudford's mutton-bone.'

'I perfectly understood you,' said Jack. 'I 'm Presumed to be in luck. Ingratitude is not my fault—I'm afraid ambition is!'

’Console yourself with it or what you can get till we meet—here or in London. But the Dragon shall be the address for both of us,’ Evan said, and nodded, trotting off.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH EVAN CALLS HIMSELF GENTLEMAN

The young cavalier perused that letter again in memory. Genuine, or a joke of the enemy, it spoke wakening facts to him. He leapt from the spell Rose had encircled him with. Strange that he should have rushed into his dream with eyes open! But he was fully awake now. He would speak his last farewell to her, and so end the earthly happiness he paid for in deep humiliation, and depart into that gray cold mist where his duty lay. It is thus

Page 1270

that young men occasionally design to burst from the circle of the passions, and think that they have done it, when indeed they are but making the circle more swiftly. Here was Evan mouthing his farewell to Rose, using phrases so profoundly humble, that a listener would have taken them for bitter irony. He said adieu to her,—pronouncing it with a pathos to melt scornful princesses. He tried to be honest, and was as much so as his disease permitted.

The black cloud had swallowed the sun; and turning off to the short cut across the downs, Evan soon rode between the wind and the storm. He could see the heavy burden breasting the beacon-point, round which curled leaden arms, and a low internal growl saluted him advancing. The horse laid back his ears. A last gust from the opposing quarter shook the furzes and the clumps of long pale grass, and straight fell columns of rattling white rain, and in a minute he was closed in by a hissing ring. Men thus pelted abandon without protest the hope of retaining a dry particle of clothing on their persons. Completely drenched, the track lost, everything in dense gloom beyond the white enclosure that moved with him, Evan flung the reins to the horse, and curiously watched him footing on; for physical discomfort balanced his mental perturbation, and he who had just been chafing was now quite calm.

Was that a shepherd crouched under the thorn? The place betokened a shepherd, but it really looked like a bundle of the opposite sex; and it proved to be a woman gathered up with her gown over her head. Apparently, Mr. Evan Harrington was destined for these encounters. The thunder rolled as he stopped by her side and called out to her. She heard him, for she made a movement, but without sufficiently disengaging her head of its covering to show him a part of her face.

Bellowing against the thunder, Evan bade her throw back her garment, and stand and give him up her arms, that he might lift her on the horse behind him.

There came a muffled answer, on a big sob, as it seemed. And as if heaven paused to hear, the storm was mute.

Could he have heard correctly? The words he fancied he had heard sobbed were:

‘Best bonnet.’

The elements hereupon crashed deep and long from end to end, like a table of Titans passing a jest.

Rain-drops, hard as hail, were spattering a pool on her head. Evan stooped his shoulder, seized the soaked garment, and pulled it back, revealing the features of Polly Wheedle, and the splendid bonnet in ruins—all limp and stained.

Polly blinked at him penitentially.

‘Oh, Mr. Harrington; oh, ain’t I punished!’ she whimpered.

In truth, the maid resembled a well-watered poppy.

Evan told her to stand up close to the horse, and Polly stood up close, looking like a creature that expected a whipping. She was suffering, poor thing, from that abject sense of the lack of a circumference, which takes the pride out of women more than anything. Note, that in all material fashions, as in all moral observances, women demand a circumference, and enlarge it more and more as civilization advances. Respect the mighty instinct, however mysterious it seem.

Page 1271

‘Oh, Mr. Harrington, don’t laugh at me,’ said Polly.

Evan assured her that he was seriously examining her bonnet.

’It ‘s the bonnet of a draggletail,’ said Polly, giving up her arms, and biting her under-lip for the lift.

With some display of strength, Evan got the lean creature up behind him, and Polly settled there, and squeezed him tightly with her arms, excusing the liberty she took.

They mounted the beacon, and rode along the ridge whence the West became visible, and a washed edge of red over Beckley Church spire and the woods of Beckley Court.

‘And what have you been doing to be punished? What brought you here?’ said Evan.

‘Somebody drove me to Fallow field to see my poor sister Susan,’ returned Polly, half crying.

’Well, did he bring you here and leave you?

’No: he wasn’t true to his appointment the moment I wanted to go back; and I, to pay him out, I determined I’d walk it where he shouldn’t overtake me, and on came the storm . . . And my gown spoilt, and such a bonnet!’

‘Who was the somebody?’

‘He’s a Mr. Nicholas Frim, sir.’

‘Mr. Nicholas Frim will be very unhappy, I should think.’

‘Yes, that’s one comfort,’ said Polly ruefully, drying her eyes.

Closely surrounding a young man as a young woman must be when both are on the same horse, they, as a rule, talk confidentially together in a very short time. His ‘Are you cold?’ when Polly shivered, and her ’Oh, no; not very,’ and a slight screwing of her body up to him, as she spoke, to assure him and herself of it, soon made them intimate.

‘I think Mr. Nicholas Frim mustn’t see us riding into Beckley,’ said Evan.

‘Oh, my gracious! Ought I to get down, sir?’ Polly made no move, however.

‘Is he jealous?’

‘Only when I make him, he is.’

‘That’s very naughty of you.’

’Yes, I know it is—all the Wheedles are. Mother says, we never go right till we ‘ve once got in a pickle.’

‘You ought to go right from this hour,’ said Evan.

’It’s ‘dizenzy—[?? D.W.]—does it,’ said Polly. ’And then we’re ashamed to show it. My poor Susan went to stay with her aunt at Bodley, and then at our cousin’s at Hillford, and then she was off to Lymport to drown her poor self, I do believe, when you met her. And all because we can’t bear to be seen when we ’re in any of our pickles. I wish you wouldn’t look at me, Mr. Harrington.’

‘You look very pretty.’

’It ‘s quite impossible I can now,’ said Polly, with a wretched effort to spread open her collar. ’I can see myself a fright, like my Miss Rose did, making a face in the looking-glass when I was undressing her last night. But, do you know, I would much rather Nicholas saw us than somebody!

‘Who’s that?’

‘Miss Bonner. She’d never forgive me.’

‘Is she so strict?’

Page 1272

‘She only uses servants for spies,’ said Polly. ’And since my Miss Rose come—though I’m up a step—I’m still a servant, and Miss Bonner ’d be in a fury to see my—though I’m sure we’re quite respectable, Mr. Harrington—my having hold of you as I’m obliged to, and can’t help myself. But she’d say I ought to tumble off rather than touch her engaged with a little finger.’

‘Her engaged?’ cried Evan.

‘Ain’t you, sir?’ quoth Polly. ’I understand you were going to be, from my lady, the Countess. We all think so at Beckley. Why, look how Miss Bonner looks at you, and she’s sure to have plenty of money.’

This was Polly’s innocent way of bringing out a word about her own young mistress.

Evan controlled any denial of his pretensions to the hand of Miss Bonner. He said: ’Is it your mistress’s habit to make faces in the looking-glass?’

‘I’ll tell you how it happened,’ said Polly. ’But I’m afraid I’m in your way, sir. Shall I get off now?’

‘Not by any means,’ said Evan. ‘Make your arm tighter.’

‘Will that do?’ asked Polly.

Evan looked round and met her appealing face, over which the damp locks of hair straggled. The maid was fair: it was fortunate that he was thinking of the mistress.

‘Speak on,’ said Evan, but Polly put the question whether her face did not want washing, and so earnestly that he had to regard it again, and compromised the case by saying that it wanted kissing by Nicholas Frim, which set Polly’s lips in a pout.

’I ‘m sure it wants kissing by nobody,’ she said, adding with a spasm of passion: ’Oh! I know the colours of my bonnet are all smeared over it, and I’m a dreadful fright.’

Evan failed to adopt the proper measures to make Miss Wheedle’s mind easy with regard to her appearance, and she commenced her story rather languidly.

’My Miss Rose—what was it I was going to tell? Oh!—my Miss Rose. You must know, Mr. Harrington, she’s very fond of managing; I can see that, though I haven’t known her long before she gave up short frocks; and she said to Mr. Laxley, who’s going to marry her some day, “She didn’t like my lady, the Countess, taking Mr. Harry to herself like that.” I can’t a-bear to speak his name, but I suppose he’s not a bit more selfish than the rest of men. So Mr. Laxley said—just like the jealousy of men—they needn’t talk of women! I’m sure nobody can tell what we have to put up with. We mustn’t look out of

this eye, or out of the other, but they're up and—oh, dear me! there's such a to-do as never was known—all for nothing!'

'My good girl!' said Evan, recalling her to the subject-matter with all the patience he could command.

'Where was I?' Polly travelled meditatively back. 'I do feel a little cold.'

'Come closer,' said Evan. 'Take this handkerchief—it 's the only dry thing I have—cover your chest with it.'

'The shoulders feel wettest,' Polly replied, 'and they can't be helped. I'll tie it round my neck, if you'll stop, sir. There, now I'm warmer.'

Page 1273

To show how concisely women can narrate when they feel warmer, Polly started off:

’So, you know, Mr. Harrington, Mr. Laxley said—he said to Miss Rose, “You have taken her brother, and she has taken yours.” And Miss Rose said, “That was her own business, and nobody else’s.” And Mr. Laxley said, “He was glad she thought it a fair exchange.” I heard it all! And then Miss Rose said—for she can be in a passion about some things”—What do you mean, Ferdinand,” was her words, “I insist upon your speaking out.” Miss Rose always will call gentlemen by their Christian names when she likes them; that’s always a sign with her. And he wouldn’t tell her. And Miss Rose got awful angry, and she’s clever, is my Miss Rose, for what does she do, Mr. Harrington, but begins praising you up so that she knew it must make him mad, only because men can’t abide praise of another man when it’s a woman that says it—meaning, young lady; for my Miss Rose has my respect, however familiar she lets herself be to us that she likes. The others may go and drown themselves. Are you took ill, sir?’

‘No,’ said Evan, ‘I was only breathing.’

‘The doctors say it’s bad to take such long breaths,’ remarked artless Polly. ‘Perhaps my arms are pressing you?’

It ‘s the best thing they can do,’ murmured Evan, dejectedly.

‘What, sir?’

‘Go and drown themselves.’

Polly screwed her lips, as if she had a pin between them, and continued: ’Miss Rose was quite sensible when she praised you as her friend; she meant it—every word; and then sudden what does Mr. Laxley do, but say you was something else besides friend—worse or better; and she was silent, which made him savage, I could hear by his voice. And he said, Mr. Harrington, “You meant it if she did not.” “No,” says she, “I know better; he’s as honest as the day.” Out he flew and said such things: he said, Mr. Harrington, you wasn’t fit to be Miss Rose’s friend, even. Then she said, she heard he had told lies about you to her Mama, and her aunts; but her Mama, my lady, laughed at him, and she at her aunts. Then he said you—oh, abominable of him!’

‘What did he say?’ asked Evan, waking up.

‘Why, if I were to tell my Miss Rose some things of him,’ Polly went on, ‘she’d never so much as speak to him another instant.’

‘What did he say?’ Evan repeated.

‘I hate him!’ cried Polly. ’It’s Mr. Laxley that misleads Mr. Harry, who has got his good nature, and means no more harm than he can help. Oh, I didn’t hear what he said of

you, sir. Only I know it was abominable, because Miss Rose was so vexed, and you were her dearest friend.'

'Well, and about the looking-glass?'

'That was at night, Mr. Harrington, when I was undressing of her. Miss Rose has a beautiful figure, and no need of lacing. But I'd better get down now.'

'For heaven's sake, stay where you are.'

Page 1274

‘I tell her she stands as if she’d been drilled for a soldier,’ Polly quietly continued. ’You’re squeezing my arm with your elbow, Mr. Harrington. It didn’t hurt me. So when I had her nearly undressed, we were talking about this and that, and you amongst ’em—-and I, you know, rather like you, sir, if you’ll not think me too bold—she started off by asking me what was the nickname people gave to tailors. It was one of her whims. I told her they were called snips—I’m off!’

Polly gave a shriek. The horse had reared as if violently stung.

‘Go on,’ said Evan. ‘Hold hard, and go on.’

’Snips—Oh! and I told her they were called snips. It is a word that seems to make you hate the idea. I shouldn’t like to hear my intended called snip. Oh, he’s going to gallop!’

And off in a gallop Polly was borne.

‘Well,’ said Evan, ‘well?’

‘I can’t, Mr. Harrington; I have to press you so,’ cried Polly; ’and I’m bounced so—I shall bite my tongue.’

After a sharp stretch, the horse fell to a canter, and then trotted slowly, and allowed Polly to finish.

’So Miss Rose was standing sideways to the glass, and she turned her neck, and just as I’d said “snip,” I saw her saying it in the glass; and you never saw anything so funny. It was enough to make anybody laugh; but Miss Rose, she seemed as if she couldn’t forget how ugly it had made her look. She covered her face with her hands, and she shuddered! It is a word-snip! that makes you seem to despise yourself.’

Beckley was now in sight from the edge of the downs, lying in its foliage dark under the grey sky backed by motionless mounds of vapour. Miss Wheedle to her great surprise was suddenly though safely dropped; and on her return to the ground the damsel instantly ‘knew her place,’ and curtseyed becoming gratitude for his kindness; but he was off in a fiery gallop, the gall of Demogorgon in his soul.

What ’s that the leaves of the proud old trees of Beckley Court hiss as he sweeps beneath them? What has suddenly cut him short? Is he diminished in stature? Are the lackeys sneering? The storm that has passed has marvellously chilled the air.

His sister, the Countess, once explained to him what Demogorgon was, in the sensation it entailed. ‘You are skinned alive!’ said the Countess. Evan was skinned alive. Fly, wretched young man! Summon your pride, and fly! Fly, noble youth, for whom storms specially travel to tell you that your mistress makes faces in the looking-glass! Fly where human lips and noses are not scornfully distorted, and get thee a new skin, and

grow and attain to thy natural height in a more genial sphere! You, ladies and gentlemen, who may have had a matter to conceal, and find that it is oozing out: you, whose skeleton is seen stalking beside you, you know what it is to be breathed upon: you, too, are skinned alive: but this miserable youth is not

Page 1275

only flayed, he is doomed calmly to contemplate the hideous image of himself burning on the face of her he loves; making beauty ghastly. In vain—for he is two hours behind the dinner-bell—Mr. Burley, the butler, bows and offers him viands and wine. How can he eat, with the phantom of Rose there, covering her head, shuddering, loathing him? But he must appear in company: he has a coat, if he has not a skin. Let him button it, and march boldly. Our comedies are frequently youth's tragedies. We will smile reservedly as we mark Mr. Evan Harrington step into the midst of the fair society of the drawing-room. Rose is at the piano. Near her reclines the Countess de Saldar, fanning the languors from her cheeks, with a word for the diplomatist on one side, a whisper for Sir John Loring on the other, and a very quiet pair of eyes for everybody. Providence, she is sure, is keeping watch to shield her sensitive cuticle; and she is besides exquisitely happy, albeit outwardly composed: for, in the room sits his Grace the Duke of Belfield, newly arrived. He is talking to her sister, Mrs. Strike, masked by Miss Current. The wife of the Major has come this afternoon, and Andrew Cogglesby, who brought her, chats with Lady Jocelyn like an old acquaintance.

Evan shakes the hands of his relatives. Who shall turn over the leaves of the fair singer's music-book? The young men are in the billiard-room: Drummond is engaged in converse with a lovely person with Giorgione hair, which the Countess intensely admires, and asks the diplomatist whether he can see a soupcon of red in it. The diplomatist's taste is for dark beauties: the Countess is dark.

Evan must do duty by Rose. And now occurred a phenomenon in him. Instead of shunning her, as he had rejoiced in doing after the Jocasta scene, ere she had wounded him, he had a curious desire to compare her with the phantom that had dispossessed her in his fancy. Unconsciously when he saw her, he transferred the shame that devoured him, from him to her, and gazed coldly at the face that could twist to that despicable contortion.

He was in love, and subtle love will not be shamed and smothered. Love sits, we must remember, mostly in two hearts at the same time, and the one that is first stirred by any of the passions to wakefulness, may know more of the other than its owner. Why had Rose covered her head and shuddered? Would the girl feel that for a friend? If his pride suffered, love was not so downcast; but to avenge him for the cold she had cast on him, it could be critical, and Evan made his bearing to her a blank.

Page 1276

This somehow favoured him with Rose. Sheep's eyes are a dainty dish for little maids, and we know how largely they indulge in it; but when they are just a bit doubtful of the quality of the sheep, let the good animal shut his lids forthwith, for a time. Had she not been a little unkind to him in the morning? She had since tried to help him, and that had appeased her conscience, for in truth he was a good young man. Those very words she mentally pronounced, while he was thinking, 'Would she feel it for a friend?' We dare but guess at the puzzle young women present now and then, but I should say that Evan was nearer the mark, and that the 'good young man' was a sop she threw to that within her which wanted quieting, and was thereby passably quieted. Perhaps the good young man is offended? Let us assure him of our disinterested graciousness.

'Is your friend coming?' she asked, and to his reply said, 'I'm glad'; and pitched upon a new song-one that, by hazard, did not demand his attentions, and he surveyed the company to find a vacant seat with a neighbour. Juley Bonner was curled up on the sofa, looking like a damsel who has lost the third volume of an exciting novel, and is divining the climax. He chose to avoid Miss Bonner. Drummond was leaving the side of the Giorgione lady. Evan passed leisurely, and Drummond said 'You know Mrs. Evremonde? Let me introduce you.'

He was soon in conversation with the glorious-haired dame.

'Excellently done, my brother!' thinks the Countess de Saldar.

Rose sees the matter coolly. What is it to her? But she had finished with song. Jenny takes her place at the piano; and, as Rose does not care for instrumental music, she naturally talks and laughs with Drummond, and Jenny does not altogether like it, even though she is not playing to the ear of William Harvey, for whom billiards have such attractions; but, at the close of the performance, Rose is quiet enough, and the Countess observes her sitting, alone, pulling the petals of a flower in her lap, on which her eyes are fixed. Is the doe wounded? The damsel of the disinterested graciousness is assuredly restless. She starts up and goes out upon the balcony to breathe the night-air, mayhap regard the moon, and no one follows her.

Had Rose been guiltless of offence, Evan might have left Beckley Court the next day, to cherish his outraged self-love. Love of woman is strongly distinguished from pure egoism when it has got a wound: for it will not go into a corner complaining, it will fight its duel on the field or die. Did the young lady know his origin, and scorn him? He resolved to stay and teach her that the presumption she had imputed to him was her own mistake. And from this Evan graduated naturally enough the finer stages of self-deception downward.

A lover must have his delusions, just as a man must have a skin. But here was another singular change in Evan. After his ale-prompted speech in Fallow field, he was nerved to face the truth in the eyes of all save Rose. Now that the truth had enmeshed his

beloved, he turned to battle with it; he was prepared to deny it at any moment; his burnt flesh was as sensitive as the Countess’s.

Page 1277

Let Rose accuse him, and he would say, 'This is true, Miss Jocelyn—what then?' and behold Rose confused and dumb! Let not another dare suspect it. For the fire that had scorched him was in some sort healing, though horribly painful; but contact with the general air was not to be endured—was death! This, I believe, is common in cases of injury by fire. So it befell that Evan, meeting Rose the next morning was playfully asked by her what choice he had made between the white and the red; and he, dropping on her the shallow eyes of a conventional smile, replied, that unable to decide and form a choice, he had thrown both away; at which Miss Jocelyn gave him a look in the centre of his brows, let her head slightly droop, and walked off.

'She can look serious as well as grimace,' was all that Evan allowed himself to think, and he strolled out on the lawn with the careless serenity of lovers when they fancy themselves heart-free.

Rose, whipping the piano in the drawing-room, could see him go to sit by Mrs. Evremonde, till they were joined by Drummond, when he left her and walked with Harry, and apparently shadowed the young gentleman's unreflective face; after which Harry was drawn away by the appearance of that dark star, the Countess de Saldar, whom Rose was beginning to detest. Jenny glided by William Harvey's side, far off. Rose, the young Queen of Friendship, was left deserted on her music-stool for a throne, and when she ceased to hammer the notes she was insulted by a voice that cried from below:

'Go on, Rose, it's nice in the sun to hear you,' causing her to close her performances and the instrument vigorously.

Rose was much behind her age: she could not tell what was the matter with her. In these little torments young people have to pass through they gain a rapid maturity. Let a girl talk with her own heart an hour, and she is almost a woman. Rose came down-stairs dressed for riding. Laxley was doing her the service of smoking one of her rose-trees. Evan stood disengaged, prepared for her summons. She did not notice him, but beckoned to Laxley drooping over a bud, while the curled smoke floated from his lips.

'The very gracefullest of chimney-pots-is he not?' says the Countess to Harry, whose immense guffaw fails not to apprise Laxley that something has been said of him, for in his dim state of consciousness absence of the power of retort is the prominent feature, and when he has the suspicion of malicious tongues at their work, all he can do is silently to resent it. Probably this explains his conduct to Evan. Some youths have an acute memory for things that have shut their mouths.

The Countess observed to Harry that his dear friend Mr. Laxley appeared, by the cast of his face, to be biting a sour apple.

'Grapes, you mean?' laughed Harry. 'Never mind! she'll bite at him when he comes in for the title.'

‘Anything crude will do,’ rejoined the Countess. ’Why are you not courting Mrs. Evremonde, naughty Don?’

Page 1278

‘Oh! she’s occupied—castle’s in possession. Besides—!’ and Harry tried hard to look sly.

‘Come and tell me about her,’ said the Countess.

Rose, Laxley, and Evan were standing close together.

‘You really are going alone, Rose?’ said Laxley.

‘Didn’t I say so?—unless you wish to join us?’ She turned upon Evan.

‘I am at your disposal,’ said Evan.

Rose nodded briefly.

‘I think I’ll smoke the trees,’ said Laxley, perceptibly huffing.

‘You won’t come, Ferdinand?’

‘I only offered to fill up the gap. One does as well as another.’

Rose flicked her whip, and then declared she would not ride at all, and, gathering up her skirts, hurried back to the house.

As Laxley turned away, Evan stood before him.

The unhappy fellow was precipitated by the devil of his false position.

‘I think one of us two must quit the field; if I go I will wait for you,’ he said.

‘Oh; I understand,’ said Laxley. ’But if it ’s what I suppose you to mean, I must decline.’

‘I beg to know your grounds.’

‘You have tied my hands.’

‘You would escape under cover of superior station?’

‘Escape! You have only to unsay—tell me you have a right to demand it.’

The battle of the sophist victorious within him was done in a flash, as Evan measured his qualities beside this young man’s, and without a sense of lying, said: ‘I have.’

He spoke firmly. He looked the thing he called himself now. The Countess, too, was a dazzling shield to her brother. The beautiful Mrs. Strike was a completer vindicator of

him; though he had queer associates, and talked oddly of his family that night in Fallow field.

‘Very well, sir: I admit you manage to annoy me,’ said Laxley. ’I can give you a lesson as well as another, if you want it.’

Presently the two youths were seen bowing in the stiff curt style of those cavaliers who defer a passage of temper for an appointed settlement. Harry rushed off to them with a shout, and they separated; Laxley speaking a word to Drummond, Evan—most judiciously, the Countess thought—joining his fair sister Caroline, whom the Duke held in converse.

Drummond returned laughing to the side of Mrs. Evremonde, nearing whom, the Countess, while one ear was being filled by Harry’s eulogy of her brother’s recent handling of Laxley, and while her intense gratification at the success of her patient management of her most difficult subject made her smiles no mask, heard, ’Is it not impossible to suppose such a thing?’ A hush ensued—the Countess passed.

Page 1279

In the afternoon, the Jocelyns, William Harvey, and Drummond met together to consult about arranging the dispute; and deputations went to Laxley and to Evan. The former demanded an apology for certain expressions that day; and an equivalent to an admission that Mr. Harrington had said, in Fallow field, that he was not a gentleman, in order to escape the consequences. All the Jocelyns laughed at his tenacity, and 'gentleman' began to be bandied about in ridicule of the arrogant lean-headed adolescent. Evan was placable enough, but dogged; he declined to make any admission, though within himself he admitted that his antagonist was not in the position of an impostor; which he for one honest word among them would be exposed as being, and which a simple exercise of resolution to fly the place would save him from being further.

Lady Jocelyn enjoyed the fun, and still more the serious way in which her relatives regarded it.

'This comes of Rose having friends, Emily,' said Mrs. Shorne.

There would have been a dispute to arrange between Lady Jocelyn and Mrs. Shorne, had not her ladyship been so firmly established in her phlegmatic philosophy. She said: 'Quelle enfantillage! I dare say Rose was at the bottom of it: she can settle it best. Defer the encounter between the boys until they see they are in the form of donkeys. They will; and then they'll run on together, as long as their goddess permits.'

'Indeed, Emily,' said Mrs. Shorne, 'I desire you, by all possible means, to keep the occurrence secret from Rose. She ought not to hear of it.'

'No; I dare say she ought not,' returned Lady Jocelyn; 'but I wager you she does. You can teach her to pretend not to, if you like. Ecce signum.'

Her ladyship pointed through the library window at Rose, who was walking with Laxley, and showing him her pearly teeth in return for one of his jokes: an exchange so manifestly unfair, that Lady Jocelyn's womanhood, indifferent as she was, could not but feel that Rose had an object in view; which was true, for she was flattering Laxley into a consent to meet Evan half way.

The ladies murmured and hummed of these proceedings, and of Rose's familiarity with Mr. Harrington; and the Countess in trepidation took Evan to herself, and spoke to him seriously; a thing she had not done since her residence in Beckley. She let him see that he must be on a friendly footing with everybody in the house, or go which latter alternative Evan told her he had decided on. 'Yes,' said the Countess, 'and then you give people full warrant to say it was jealousy drove you hence; and you do but extinguish yourself to implicate dear Rose. In love, Evan, when you run away, you don't live to fight another day.'

She was commanded not to speak of love.

‘Whatever it may be, my dear,’ said the Countess, ’Mr. Laxley has used you ill. It may be that you put yourself at his feet’; and his sister looked at him, sighing a great sigh. She had, with violence, stayed her mouth concerning what she knew of the Fallow field business, dreading to alarm his sensitiveness; but she could not avoid giving him a little slap. It was only to make him remember by the smart that he must always suffer when he would not be guided by her.

Page 1280

Evan professed to the Jocelyns that he was willing to apologize to Laxley for certain expressions; determining to leave the house when he had done it. The Countess heard and nodded. The young men, sounded on both sides, were accordingly lured to the billiard-room, and pushed together: and when he had succeeded in thrusting the idea of Rose from the dispute, it did seem such folly to Evan's common sense, that he spoke with pleasant bonhommie about it. That done, he entered into his acted part, and towered in his conceit considerably above these aristocratic boors, who were speechless and graceless, but tigers for their privileges and advantages.

It will not be thought that the Countess intended to permit her brother's departure. To have toiled, and yet more, to have lied and fretted her conscience, for nothing, was as little her principle, as to quit the field of action till she is forcibly driven from it is that of any woman.

'Going, my dear,' she said coolly. 'To-morrow? Oh! very well. You are the judge. And this creature—the insolvent to the apple-woman, who is coming, whom you would push here—will expose us, without a soul to guide his conduct, for I shall not remain. And Carry will not remain. Carry——!' The Countess gave a semisob. 'Carry must return to her brute—' meaning the gallant Marine, her possessor.

And the Countess, knowing that Evan loved his sister Caroline, incidentally related to him an episode in the domestic life of Major and Mrs. Strike.

'Greatly redounding to the credit of the noble martinet for the discipline he upholds,' the Countess said, smiling at the stunned youth.

'I would advise you to give her time to recover from one bruise,' she added. 'You will do as it pleases you.'

Evan was sent rushing from the Countess to Caroline, with whom the Countess was content to leave him.

The young man was daintily managed. Caroline asked him to stay, as she did not see him often, and (she brought it in at the close) her home was not very happy. She did not entreat him, but looking resigned, her lovely face conjured up the Major to Evan, and he thought, 'Can I drive her back to her tyrant?' For so he juggled with himself to have but another day in the sunshine of Rose.

Andrew, too, threw out genial hints about the Brewery. Old Tom intended to retire, he said, and then they would see what they would see! He silenced every word about Lymport; called him a brewer already, and made absurd jokes, that were serviceable stuff nevertheless to the Countess, who deplored to this one and to that the chance existing that Evan might, by the urgent solicitations of his brother-in-law, give up diplomacy and its honours for a brewery and lucre!

Page 1281

Of course Evan knew that he was managed. The memoirs of a managed man have yet to be written; but if he be sincere he will tell you that he knew it all the time. He longed for the sugar-plum; he knew it was naughty to take it: he dared not for fear of the devil, and he shut his eyes while somebody else popped it into his mouth, and assumed his responsibility. Being man-driven or chicaned, is different from being managed. Being managed implies being led the way this other person thinks you should go: altogether for your own benefit, mind: you are to see with her eyes, that you may not disappoint your own appetites: which does not hurt the flesh, certainly; but does damage the conscience; and from the moment you have once succumbed, that function ceases to perform its office of moral strainer so well.

After all, was he not happier when he wrote himself tailor, than when he declared himself gentleman?

So he now imagined, till Rose, wishing him ‘Good night’ on the balcony, and abandoning her hand with a steady sweet voice and gaze, said: ’How generous of you to forgive my friend, dear Evan!’ And the ravishing little glimpse of womanly softness in her, set his heart beating. If he thought at all, it was that he would have sacrificed body and soul for her.

CHAPTER XIX

SECOND DESPATCH OF THE COUNTESS

We do not advance very far in this second despatch, and it will be found chiefly serviceable for the indications it affords of our General’s skill in mining, and addiction to that branch of military science. For the moment I must beg that a little indulgence be granted to her.

’Purely business. Great haste. Something has happened. An event? I know not; but events may flow from it.

’A lady is here who has run away from the conjugal abode, and Lady Jocelyn shelters her, and is hospitable to another, who is more concerned in this lady’s sad fate than he should be. This may be morals, my dear: but please do not talk of Portugal now. A fine-ish woman with a great deal of hair worn as if her maid had given it one comb straight down and then rolled it up in a hurry round one finger. Malice would say carrots. It is called gold. Mr. Forth is in a glass house, and is wrong to cast his sneers at perfectly inoffensive people.

’Perfectly impossible we can remain at Beckley Court together—if not dangerous. Any means that Providence may designate, I would employ. It will be like exorcising a

demon. Always excuseable. I only ask a little more time for stupid Evan. He might have little Bonner now. I should not object; but her family is not so good.

Page 1282

’Now, do attend. At once obtain a copy of Strike’s Company people. You understand—-prospectuses. Tell me instantly if the Captain Evremonde in it is Captain Lawson Evremonde. Pump Strike. Excuse vulgar words. Whether he is not Lord Laxley’s half-brother. Strike shall be of use to us. Whether he is not mad. Captain E——’s address. Oh! when I think of Strike—brute! and poor beautiful uncomplaining Carry and her shoulder! But let us indeed most fervently hope that his Grace may be balm to it. We must not pray for vengeance. It is sinful. Providence will inflict that. Always know that Providence is quite sure to. It comforts exceedingly.

’Oh, that Strike were altogether in the past tense! No knowing what the Duke might do—a widower and completely subjugated. It makes my bosom bound. The man tempts me to the wickedest Frenchy ideas. There!

We progress with dear venerable Mrs. Bonner. Truly pious—interested in your Louisa. She dreads that my husband will try to convert me to his creed. I can but weep and say—never!

’I need not say I have my circle. To hear this ridiculous boy Harry Jocelyn grunt under my nose when he has led me unsuspectingly away from company—Harriet! dearest! He thinks it a sigh! But there is no time for laughing.

’My maxim in any house is—never to despise the good opinion of the nonentities. They are the majority. I think they all look up to me. But then of course you must fix that by seducing the stars. My diplomatist praises my abilities—Sir John Loring my style—the rest follow and I do not withhold my smiles, and they are happy, and I should be but that for ungrateful Evan’s sake I sacrificed my peace by binding myself to a dreadful sort of half-story. I know I did not quite say it. It seems as if Sir A.’s ghost were going to haunt me. And then I have the most dreadful fears that what I have done has disturbed him in the other world. Can it be so? It is not money or estates we took at all, dearest! And these excellent young curates—I almost wish it was Protestant to speak a word behind a board to them and imbibe comfort. For after all it is nothing: and a word even from this poor thin mopy Mr. Parsley might be relief to a poor soul in trouble. Catholics tell you that what you do in a good cause is redeemable if not exactly right. And you know the Catholic is the oldest Religion of the two. I would listen to the Pope, staunch Protestant as I am, in preference to King Henry the Eighth. Though, as a woman, I bear him no rancour, for his wives were—fools, point blank. No man was ever so manageable. My diplomatist is getting liker and liker to him every day. Leaner, of course, and does not habitually straddle. Whiskers and morals, I mean. We must be silent before our prudish sister. Not a prude? We talk diplomacy, dearest. He complains of the exclusiveness of the port of Oporto, and would have strict alliance between Portugal and England, with mutual privileges. I wish the alliance, and think it better to maintain the exclusiveness. Very trifling; but what is life!

Page 1283

’Adieu. One word to leave you laughing. Imagine her situation! This stupid Miss Carrington has offended me. She has tried to pump Conning, who, I do not doubt, gave her as much truth as I chose she should have in her well. But the quandary of the wretched creature! She takes Conning into her confidence—a horrible malady just covered by high-neck dress! Skin! and impossible that she can tell her engaged—who is—guess—Mr. George Up------! Her name is Louisa Carrington. There was a Louisa Harrington once. Similarity of names perhaps. Of course I could not let her come to the house; and of course Miss C. is in a state of wonderment and bad passions, I fear. I went straight to Lady Racial, my dear. There was nothing else for it but to go and speak. She is truly a noble woman—serves us in every way. As she should!—much affected by sight of Evan, and keeps aloof from Beckley Court. The finger of Providence is in all. Adieu! but do pray think of Miss Carrington! It was foolish of her to offend me. Drives and walks-the Duke attentive. Description of him when I embrace you. I give amiable Sir Franks Portuguese dishes. Ah, my dear, if we had none but men to contend against, and only women for our tools! But this is asking for the world, and nothing less.

‘Open again,’ she pursues. ’Dear Carry just come in. There are fairies, I think, where there are dukes! Where could it have come from? Could any human being have sent messengers post to London, ordered, and had it despatched here within this short time? You shall not be mystified! I do not think I even hinted; but the afternoon walk I had with his Grace, on the first day of his arrival, I did shadow it very delicately how much it was to be feared our poor Carry could not, that she dared not, betray her liege lord in an evening dress. Nothing more, upon my veracity! And Carry has this moment received the most beautiful green box, containing two of the most heavenly old lace shawls that you ever beheld. We divine it is to hide poor Carry’s matrimonial blue mark! We know nothing. Will you imagine Carry is for not accepting it! Priority of birth does not imply superior wits, dear—no allusion to you. I have undertaken all. Arch looks, but nothing pointed. His Grace will understand the exquisite expression of feminine gratitude. It is so sweet to deal with true nobility. Carry has only to look as she always does. One sees Strike sitting on her. Her very pliability has rescued her from being utterly squashed long ere this! The man makes one vulgar. It would have been not the slightest use asking me to be a Christian had I wedded Strike. But think of the fairy presents! It has determined me not to be expelled by Mr. Forth—quite. Tell Silva he is not forgotten. But, my dear, between us alone, men are so selfish, that it is too evident they do not care for private conversations to turn upon a lady’s husband: not to be risked, only now and then.

Page 1284

’I hear that the young ladies and the young gentlemen have been out riding a race. The poor little Bonner girl cannot ride, and she says to Carry that Rose wishes to break our brother’s neck. The child hardly wishes that, but she is feelingless. If Evan could care for Miss Bonner, he might have B. C.! Oh, it is not so very long a shot, my dear. I am on the spot, remember. Old Mrs. Bonner is a most just-minded spirit. Juliana is a cripple, and her grandmother wishes to be sure that when she departs to her Lord the poor cripple may not be chased from this home of hers. Rose cannot calculate—Harry is in disgrace—there is really no knowing. This is how I have reckoned; L10,000 extra to Rose; perhaps L1000 or nothing to H.; all the rest of ready-money—a large sum—no use guessing—to Lady Jocelyn; and B. C. to little Bonner—it is worth L40,000 Then she sells, or stops—permanent resident. It might be so soon, for I can see worthy Mrs. Bonner to be breaking visibly. But young men will not see with wiser eyes than their own. Here is Evan risking his neck for an indifferent—there’s some word for “not soft.” In short, Rose is the cold-blooded novice, as I have always said, the most selfish of the creatures on two legs.

’Adieu! Would you have dreamed that Major Nightmare’s gallantry to his wife would have called forth a gallantry so truly touching and delicate? Can you not see Providence there? Out of Evil—the Catholics again!

’Address. If Lord Lax——’s half-brother. If wrong in noddle. This I know you will attend to scrupulously. Ridiculous words are sometimes the most expressive. Once more, may Heaven bless you all! I thought of you in church last Sunday.

’I may tell you this: young Mr. Laxley is here. He—but it was Evan’s utter madness was the cause, and I have not ventured a word to him. He compelled Evan to assert his rank, and Mr. Forth’s face has been one concentrated sneer since *then*. He must know the origin of the Cogglesbys, or something. Now you will understand the importance. I cannot be more explicit. Only—the man must go.

’P.S. I have just ascertained that Lady Jocelyn is quite familiar with Andrew’s origin!! She must think my poor Harriet an eccentric woman. Of course I have not pretended to rank here, merely gentry. It is gentry in reality, for had poor Papa been legitimized, he would have been a nobleman. You know that; and between the two we may certainly claim gentry. I twiddle your little good Andrew to assert it for us twenty times a day. Of all the dear little manageable men! It does you infinite credit that you respect him as you do. What would have become of me I do not know.

’P.S. I said two shawls—a black and a white. The black not so costly—very well. And so delicate of him to think of the mourning! But the white, my dear, must be family—-must! Old English point. Exquisitely chaste. So different from that Brussels poor Andrew surprised you with. I know it cost money, but this is a question of taste. The Duke reconciles me to England and all my troubles! He is more like poor Papa than any

one of the men I have yet seen. The perfect gentleman! I do praise myself for managing an invitation to our Carry. She has been a triumph.'

Page 1285

Admire the concluding stroke. The Countess calls this letter a purely business communication. Commercial men might hardly think so; but perhaps ladies will perceive it. She rambles concentrically, if I may so expound her. Full of luxurious enjoyment of her position, her mind is active, and you see her at one moment marking a plot, the next, with a light exclamation, appeasing her conscience, proud that she has one; again she calls up rival forms of faith, that she may show the Protestant its little shortcomings, and that it is slightly in debt to her (like Providence) for her constancy, notwithstanding. The Protestant you see, does not confess, and she has to absolve herself, and must be doing it internally while she is directing outer matters. Hence her slap at King Henry *viii*. In fact, there is much more business in this letter than I dare to indicate; but as it is both impertinent and unpopular to dive for any length of time beneath the surface (especially when there are few pearls to show for it), we will discontinue our examination.

The Countess, when she had dropped the letter in the bag, returned to her chamber, and deputed Dorothy Loring, whom she met on the stairs, to run and request Rose to lend her her album to beguile the afternoon with; and Dorothy dances to Rose, saying, 'The Countess de Lispy-Lispy would be delighted to look at your album all the afternoon.'

'Oh what a woman that is!' says Rose. 'Countess de Lazy-Lazy, I think.'

The Countess, had she been listening, would have cared little for accusations on that head. Idlesse was fashionable: exquisite languors were a sign of breeding; and she always had an idea that she looked more interesting at dinner after reclining on a couch the whole of the afternoon. The great Mel and his mate had given her robust health, and she was able to play the high-born invalid without damage to her constitution. Anything amused her; Rose's album even, and the compositions of W. H., E. H., D. F., and F. L. The initials F. L. were diminutive, and not unlike her own hand, she thought. They were appended to a piece of facetiousness that would not have disgraced the abilities of Mr. John Raikes; but we know that very stiff young gentlemen betray monkey-minds when sweet young ladies compel them to disport. On the whole, it was not a lazy afternoon that the Countess passed, and it was not against her wish that others should think it was.

CHAPTER XX

BREAK-NECK LEAP

The August sun was in mid-sky, when a troop of ladies and cavaliers issued from the gates of Beckley Court, and winding through the hopgardens, emerged on the cultivated slopes bordering the downs. Foremost, on her grey cob, was Rose, having on her right

her uncle Seymour, and on her left Ferdinand Laxley. Behind came Mrs. Evremonde, flanked by Drummond and Evan. Then followed Jenny Graine, supported by

Page 1286

Harry and William Harvey. In the rear came an open carriage, in which Miss Carrington and the Countess de Saldar were borne, attended by Lady Jocelyn and Andrew Cogglesby on horseback. The expedition had for its object the selection of a run of ground for an amateur steeple-chase: the idea of which had sprung from Laxley's boasts of his horsemanship: and Rose, quick as fire, had backed herself, and Drummond and Evan, to beat him. The mention of the latter was quite enough for Laxley.

'If he follows me, let him take care of his neck,' said that youth.

'Why, Ferdinand, he can beat you in anything!' exclaimed Rose, imprudently.

But the truth was, she was now more restless than ever. She was not distant with Evan, but she had a feverish manner, and seemed to thirst to make him show his qualities, and excel, and shine. Billiards, or jumping, or classical acquirements, it mattered not—-Evan must come first. He had crossed the foils with Laxley, and disarmed him; for Mel his father had seen him trained for a military career. Rose made a noise about the encounter, and Laxley was eager for his opportunity, which he saw in the proposed mad gallop.

Now Mr. George Uplift, who usually rode in buckskins whether he was after the fox or fresh air, was out on this particular morning; and it happened that, as the cavalcade wound beneath the down, Mr. George trotted along the ridge. He was a fat-faced, rotund young squire—a bully where he might be, and an obedient creature enough where he must be—good-humoured when not interfered with; fond of the table, and brimful of all the jokes of the county, the accent of which just seasoned his speech. He had somehow plunged into a sort of half-engagement with Miss Carrington. At his age, and to ladies of Miss Carrington's age, men unhappily do not plunge head-foremost, or Miss Carrington would have had him long before. But he was at least in for it half a leg; and a desperate maiden, on the criminal side of thirty, may make much of that. Previous to the visit of the Countess de Saldar, Mr. George had been in the habit of trotting over to Beckley three or four times a week. Miss Carrington had a little money: Mr. George was heir to his uncle. Miss Carrington was lean and blue-eyed.

Mr. George was black-eyed and obese. By everybody, except Mr. George, the match was made: but that exception goes for little in the country, where half the population are talked into marriage, and gossips entirely devote themselves to continuing the species. Mr. George was certain that he had not been fighting shy of the fair Carrington of late, nor had he been unfaithful. He had only been in an extraordinary state of occupation. Messages for Lady Racial had to be delivered, and he had become her cavalier and escort suddenly. The young squire was bewildered; but as he was only one leg in love —if the sentiment may be thus spoken of figuratively—his vanity in his present office kept him from remorse or uneasiness.

Page 1287

He rode at an easy pace within sight of the home of his treasure, and his back turned to it. Presently there rose a cry from below. Mr. George looked about. The party of horsemen hallooed: Mr. George yoicked. Rose set her horse to gallop up; Seymour Jocelyn cried ‘fox,’ and gave the view; hearing which Mr. George shouted, and seemed inclined to surrender; but the fun seized him, and, standing up in his stirrups, he gathered his coat-tails in a bunch, and waggled them with a jolly laugh, which was taken up below, and the clamp of hoofs resounded on the turf as Mr. George led off, after once more, with a jocose twist in his seat, showing them the brush mockingly. Away went fox, and a mad chase began. Seymour acted as master of the hunt. Rose, Evan, Drummond, and Mrs. Evremonde and Dorothy, skirted to the right, all laughing, and full of excitement. Harry bellowed the direction from above. The ladies in the carriage, with Lady Jocelyn and Andrew, watched them till they flowed one and all over the shoulder of the down.

‘And who may the poor hunted animal be?’ inquired the Countess.

‘George Uplift,’ said Lady Jocelyn, pulling out her watch. ’I give him twenty minutes.’

‘Providence speed him!’ breathed the Countess, with secret fervour.

‘Oh, he hasn’t a chance,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’The squire keeps wretched beasts.’

‘Is there not an attraction that will account for his hasty capture?’ said the Countess, looking tenderly at Miss Carrington, who sat a little straighter, and the Countess, hating manifestations of stiff-backedness, could not forbear adding: ’I am at war with my sympathies, which should be with the poor brute flying from his persecutors.’

She was in a bitter state of trepidation, or she would have thought twice before she touched a nerve of the enamoured lady, as she knew she did in calling her swain a poor brute, and did again by pertinaciously pursuing:

‘Does he then shun his captivity?’

‘Touching a nerve’ is one of those unforgivable small offences which, in our civilized state, produce the social vendettas and dramas that, with savage nations, spring from the spilling of blood. Instead of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, we demand a nerve for a nerve. ’Thou hast touched me where I am tender thee, too, will I touch.’

Miss Carrington had been alarmed and hurt at the strange evasion of Mr. George; nor could she see the fun of his mimicry of the fox and his flight away from instead of into her neighbourhood. She had also, or she now thought it, remarked that when Mr. George had been spoken of casually, the Countess had not looked a natural look. Perhaps it was her present inflamed fancy. At any rate the Countess was offensive now. She was positively vulgar, in consequence, to the mind of Miss Carrington, and

Miss Carrington was drawn to think of a certain thing Ferdinand Laxley had said he had heard from the mouth of this lady's brother when ale was in him. Alas! how one seed of a piece of folly will lurk and sprout to confound us; though, like the cock in the eastern tale, we peck up zealously all but that one!

Page 1288

The carriage rolled over the turf, attended by Andrew, and Lady Jocelyn, and the hunt was seen; Mr. George some forty paces a-head; Seymour gaining on him, Rose next.

‘Who’s that breasting Rose?’ said Lady Jocelyn, lifting her glass.

‘My brother-in-law, Harrington,’ returned Andrew.

‘He doesn’t ride badly,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’A little too military. He must have been set up in England.’

‘Oh, Evan can do anything,’ said Andrew enthusiastically. ’His father was a capital horseman, and taught him fencing, riding, and every accomplishment. You won’t find such a young fellow, my lady—’

‘The brother like him at all?’ asked Lady Jocelyn, still eyeing the chase.

‘Brother? He hasn’t got a brother,’ said Andrew.

Lady Jocelyn continued: ‘I mean the present baronet.’

She was occupied with her glass, and did not observe the flush that took hold of Andrew’s ingenuous cheeks, and his hurried glance at and off the quiet eye of the Countess. Miss Carrington did observe it.

Mr. Andrew dashed his face under the palm of his hand, and murmured:

‘Oh-yes! His brother-in-law isn’t much like him—ha! ha!’

And then the poor little man rubbed his hands, unconscious of the indignant pity for his wretched abilities in the gaze of the Countess; and he must have been exposed—there was a fear that the ghost of Sir Abraham would have darkened this day, for Miss Carrington was about to speak, when Lady Jocelyn cried: ‘There’s a purl! Somebody’s down.’

The Countess was unaware of the nature of a purl, but she could have sworn it to be a piece of Providence.

‘Just by old Nat Hodges’ farm, on Squire Copping’s ground,’ cried Andrew, much relieved by the particular individual’s misfortune. ’Dear me, my lady! how old Tom and I used to jump the brook there, to be sure! and when you were no bigger than little Miss Loring—do you remember old Tom? We’re all fools one time in our lives!’

‘Who can it be?’ said Lady Jocelyn, spying at the discomfited horseman. ‘I’m afraid it’s poor Ferdinand.’

They drove on to an eminence from which the plain was entirely laid open.

‘I hope my brother will enjoy his ride this day,’ sighed the Countess. ‘It will be his limit of enjoyment for a lengthened period!’

She perceived that Mr. George’s capture was inevitable, and her heart sank; for she was sure he would recognize her, and at the moment she misdoubted her powers. She dreamed of flight.

‘You’re not going to leave us?’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’My dear Countess, what will the future member do without you? We have your promise to stay till the election is over.’

‘Thanks for your extreme kind courtesy, Lady Jocelyn,’ murmured the Countess: ‘but my husband—the Count.’

‘The favour is yours,’ returned her ladyship. ’And if the Count cannot come, you at least are at liberty?’

Page 1289

‘You are most kind,’ said the Countess.

‘Andrew and his wife I should not dare to separate for more than a week,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’He is the great British husband. The proprietor! “My wife” is his unanswerable excuse.’

‘Yes,’ Andrew replied cheerily. ’I don’t like division between man and wife, I must say.’

The Countess dared no longer instance the Count, her husband. She was heard to murmur that citizen feelings were not hers:

‘You suggested Fallow field to Melville, did you not?’ asked Lady Jocelyn.

‘It was the merest suggestion,’ said the Countess, smiling.

‘Then you must really stay to see us through it,’ said her ladyship. ’Where are they now? They must be making straight for break-neck fence. They’ll have him there. George hasn’t pluck for that.’

‘Hasn’t what?’

It was the Countess who requested to know the name of this other piece of Providence Mr. George Uplift was deficient in.

‘Pluck-go,’ said her ladyship hastily, and telling the coachman to drive to a certain spot, trotted on with Andrew, saying to him: ’I’m afraid we are thought vulgar by the Countess.’

Andrew considered it best to reassure her gravely.

‘The young man, her brother, is well-bred,’ said Lady Jocelyn, and Andrew was very ready to praise Evan.

Lady Jocelyn, herself in slimmer days a spirited horsewoman, had correctly estimated Mr. George’s pluck. He was captured by Harry and Evan close on the leap, in the act of shaking his head at it; and many who inspected the leap would have deemed it a sign that wisdom weighted the head that would shake long at it; for it consisted of a post and rails, with a double ditch.

Seymour Jocelyn, Mrs. Evremonde, Drummond, Jenny Graine, and William Harvey, rode with Mr. George in quest of the carriage, and the captive was duly delivered over.

‘But where’s the brush?’ said Lady Jocelyn, laughing, and introducing him to the Countess, who dropped her head, and with it her veil.

‘Oh! they leave that on for my next run,’ said Mr. George, bowing civilly.

‘You are going to run again?’

Miss Carrington severely asked this question; and Mr. George protested.

‘Secure him, Louisa,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’See here: what’s the matter with poor Dorothy?’

Dorothy came slowly trotting up to them along the green lane, and thus expressed her grief, between sobs:

’Isn’t it a shame? Rose is such a tyrant. They’re going to ride a race and a jump down in the field, and it’s break-neck leap, and Rose won’t allow me to stop and see it, though she knows I’m just as fond of Evan as she is; and if he’s killed I declare it will be her fault; and it’s all for her stupid, dirty old pocket handkerchief!’

‘Break-neck fence!’ said Lady Jocelyn; ‘that’s rather mad.’

‘Do let’s go and see it, darling Aunty Joey,’ pleaded the little maid. Lady Jocelyn rode on, saying to herself: ’That girl has a great deal of devil in her.’ The lady’s thoughts were of Rose.

Page 1290

‘Black Lymport’d take the leap,’ said Mr. George, following her with the rest of the troop. ‘Who’s that fellow on him?’

‘His name’s Harrington,’ quoth Drummond.

‘Oh, Harrington!’ Mr. George responded; but immediately laughed—’Harrington? ’Gad, if he takes the leap it’ll be odd—another of the name. That’s where old Mel had his spill.’

‘Who?’ Drummond inquired.

‘Old Mel Harrington—the Lymport wonder. Old Marquis Mel,’ said Mr. George. ‘Haven’t ye heard of him?’

‘What! the gorgeous tailor!’ exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. ’How I regret never meeting that magnificent snob! that efflorescence of sublime imposture! I’ve seen the Regent; but one’s life doesn’t seem complete without having seen his twin-brother. You must give us warning when you have him down at Croftlands again, Mr. George.’

‘Gad, he’ll have to come a long distance—poor old Mel!’ said Mr. George; and was going on, when Seymour Jocelyn stroked his moustache to cry, ’Look! Rosey ’s starting ’em, by Jove!’

The leap, which did not appear formidable from where they stood, was four fields distant from the point where Rose, with a handkerchief in her hand, was at that moment giving the signal to Laxley and Evan.

Miss Carrington and the Countess begged Lady Jocelyn to order a shout to be raised to arrest them, but her ladyship marked her good sense by saying: ‘Let them go, now they’re about it’; for she saw that to make a fuss now matters had proceeded so far, was to be uncivil to the inevitable.

The start was given, and off they flew. Harry Jocelyn, behind them, was evidently caught by the demon, and clapped spurs to his horse to have his fling as well, for the fun of the thing; but Rose, farther down the field, rode from her post straight across him, to the imminent peril of a mutual overset; and the party on the height could see Harry fuming, and Rose coolly looking him down, and letting him understand what her will was; and her mother, and Drummond, and Seymour who beheld this, had a common sentiment of admiration for the gallant girl. But away went the rivals. Black Lymport was the favourite, though none of the men thought he would be put at the fence. The excitement became contagious. The Countess threw up her veil. Lady Jocelyn, and Seymour, and Drummond, galloped down the lane, and Mr. George was for accompanying them, till the line of Miss Carrington’s back gave him her unmistakeable opinion of such a course of conduct, and he had to dally and fret by her side. Andrew’s

arm was tightly grasped by the Countess. The rivals were crossing the second field, Laxley a little a-head.

'He 's holding in the black mare—that fellow!' said Mr. George. 'Gad, it looks like going at the fence. Fancy Harrington!'

They were now in the fourth field, a smooth shorn meadow. Laxley was two clear lengths in advance, but seemed riding, as Mr. George remarked, more for pace than to take the jump. The ladies kept plying random queries and suggestions: the Countess wishing to know whether they could not be stopped by a countryman before they encountered any danger. In the midst of their chatter, Mr. George rose in his stirrups, crying:

Page 1291

‘Bravo, the black mare!’

‘Has he done it?’ said Andrew, wiping his poll.

‘He? No, the mare!’ shouted Mr. George, and bolted off, no longer to be restrained.

The Countess, doubly relieved, threw herself back in the carriage, and Andrew drew a breath, saying: ’Evan has beat him—I saw that! The other’s horse swerved right round.’

‘I fear,’ said Mrs. Evremonde, ’Mr. Harrington has had a fall. Don’t be alarmed—it may not be much.’

‘A fall!’ exclaimed the Countess, equally divided between alarms of sisterly affection and a keen sense of the romance of the thing.

Miss Carrington ordered the carriage to be driven round. They had not gone far when they were met by Harry Jocelyn riding in hot haste, and he bellowed to the coachman to drive as hard as he could, and stop opposite Brook’s farm.

The scene on the other side of the fence would have been a sweet one to the central figure in it had his eyes then been open. Surrounded by Lady Jocelyn, Drummond, Seymour, and the rest, Evan’s dust-stained body was stretched along the road, and his head was lying in the lap of Rose, who, pale, heedless of anything spoken by those around her, and with her lips set and her eyes turning wildly from one to the other, held a gory handkerchief to his temple with one hand, and with the other felt for the motion of his heart.

But heroes don’t die, you know.

CHAPTER XXI

TRIBULATIONS AND TACTICS OF THE COUNTESS

‘You have murdered my brother, Rose Jocelyn!’

‘Don’t say so now.’

Such was the interchange between the two that loved the senseless youth, as he was being lifted into the carriage.

Lady Jocelyn sat upright in her saddle, giving directions about what was to be done with Evan and the mare, impartially.

’Stunned, and a good deal shaken, I suppose; Lymport’s knees are terribly cut,’ she said to Drummond, who merely nodded. And Seymour remarked, ‘Fifty guineas knocked off her value!’ One added, ’Nothing worse, I should think’; and another, ‘A little damage inside, perhaps.’ Difficult to say whether they spoke of Evan or the brute.

No violent outcries; no reproaches cast on the cold-blooded coquette; no exclamations on the heroism of her brother! They could absolutely spare a thought for the animal! And Evan had risked his life for this, and might die unpitied. The Countess diversified her grief with a deadly bitterness against the heartless Jocelyns.

Oh, if Evan dies! will it punish Rose sufficiently?

Andrew expressed emotion, but not of a kind the Countess liked a relative to be seen exhibiting; for in emotion worthy Andrew betrayed to her his origin offensively.

‘Go away and puke, if you must,’ she said, clipping poor Andrew’s word about his ‘dear boy.’ She could not help speaking in that way—he was so vulgar. A word of sympathy from Lady Jocelyn might have saved her from the sourness into which her many conflicting passions were resolving; and might also have saved her ladyship from the rancour she had sown in the daughter of the great Mel by her selection of epithets to characterize him.

Page 1292

Will it punish Rose at all, if Evan dies?

Rose saw that she was looked at. How could the Countess tell that Rose envied her the joy of holding Evan in the carriage there? Rose, to judge by her face, was as calm as glass. Not so well seen through, however. Mrs. Evremonde rode beside her, whose fingers she caught, and twined her own with them tightly once for a fleeting instant. Mrs. Evremonde wanted no further confession of her state.

Then Rose said to her mother, 'Mama, may I ride to have the doctor ready?'

Ordinarily, Rose would have clapped heel to horse the moment the thought came. She waited for the permission, and flew off at a gallop, waving back Laxley, who was for joining her.

'Franks will be a little rusty about the mare,' the Countess heard Lady Jocelyn say; and Harry just then stooped his head to the carriage, and said, in his blunt fashion, 'After all, it won't show much.'

'We are not cattle!' exclaimed the frenzied Countess, within her bosom. Alas! it was almost a democratic outcry they made her guilty of; but she was driven past patience. And as a further provocation, Evan would open his eyes. She laid her handkerchief over them with loving delicacy, remembering in a flash that her own face had been all the while exposed to Mr. George Uplift; and then the terrors of his presence at Beckley Court came upon her, and the fact that she had not for the last ten minutes been the serene Countess de Saldar; and she quite hated Andrew, for vulgarity in others evoked vulgarity in her, which was the reason why she ranked vulgarity as the chief of the deadly sins. Her countenance for Harry and all the others save poor Andrew was soon the placid heaven-confiding sister's again; not before Lady Jocelyn had found cause to observe to Drummond:

'Your Countess doesn't ruffle well.'

But a lady who is at war with two or three of the facts of Providence, and yet will have Providence for her ally, can hardly ruffle well. Do not imagine that the Countess's love for her brother was hollow. She was assured when she came up to the spot where he fell, that there was no danger; he had but dislocated his shoulder, and bruised his head a little. Hearing this, she rose out of her clamorous heart, and seized the opportunity for a small burst of melodrama. Unhappily, Lady Jocelyn, who gave the tone to the rest, was a Spartan in matters of this sort; and as she would have seen those dearest to her bear the luck of the field, she could see others. When the call for active help reached her, you beheld a different woman.

The demonstrativeness the Countess thirsted for was afforded her by Juley Bonner, and in a measure by her sister Caroline, who loved Evan passionately. The latter was in

riding attire, about to mount to ride and meet them, accompanied by the Duke. Caroline had hastily tied up her hair; a rich golden brown lump of it hung round her cheek; her limpid eyes and anxiously-nerved brows impressed the Countess wonderfully as she ran down the steps and bent her fine well-filled bust forward to ask the first hurried question.

Page 1293

The Countess patted her shoulder. ‘Safe, dear,’ she said aloud, as one who would not make much of it. And in a whisper, ‘You look superb.’

I must charge it to Caroline’s beauty under the ducal radiance, that a stream of sweet feelings entering into the Countess made her forget to tell her sister that George Uplift was by. Caroline had not been abroad, and her skin was not olive-hued; she was a beauty, and a majestic figure, little altered since the day when the wooden marine marched her out of Lymport.

The Countess stepped from the carriage to go and cherish Juliana’s petulant distress; for that unhealthy little body was stamping with impatience to have the story told to her, to burst into fits of pathos; and while Seymour and Harry assisted Evan to descend, trying to laugh off the pain he endured, Caroline stood by, soothing him with words and tender looks.

Lady Jocelyn passed him, and took his hand, saying, ’Not killed this time!’

‘At your ladyship’s service to-morrow,’ he replied, and his hand was kindly squeezed.

‘My darling Evan, you will not ride again?’ Caroline cried, kissing him on the steps; and the Duke watched the operation, and the Countess observed the Duke.

That Providence should select her sweetest moments to deal her wounds, was cruel; but the Countess just then distinctly heard Mr. George Uplift ask Miss Carrington.

‘Is that lady a Harrington?’

‘You perceive a likeness?’ was the answer.

Mr. George went ‘Whew!—tit-tit-tit!’ with the profound expression of a very slow mind.

The scene was quickly over. There was barely an hour for the ladies to dress for dinner. Leaving Evan in the doctor’s hand, and telling Caroline to dress in her room, the Countess met Rose, and gratified her vindictiveness, while she furthered her projects, by saying:

’Not till my brother is quite convalescent will it be adviseable that you should visit him. I am compelled to think of him entirely now. In his present state he is not fit to be, played with.’

Rose, stedfastly eyeing her, seemed to swallow down something in her throat, and said:

‘I will obey you, Countess. I hoped you would allow me to nurse him.’

‘Quiet above all things, Rose Jocelyn!’ returned the Countess, with the suavity of a governess, who must be civil in her sourness. ’If you would not complete this morning’s achievement—stay away.’

The Countess declined to see that Rose’s lip quivered. She saw an unpleasantness in the bottom of her eyes; and now that her brother’s decease was not even remotely to be apprehended, she herself determined to punish the cold, unimpressionable coquette of a girl. Before returning to Caroline, she had five minutes’ conversation with. Juliana, which fully determined her to continue the campaign at Beckley Court, commence decisive movements, and not to retreat, though fifty George Uplofts menaced her. Consequently, having dismissed Conning on a message to Harry Jocelyn, to ask him for a list of the names of the new people they were to meet that day at dinner, she said to Caroline:

Page 1294

‘My dear, I think it will be incumbent on us to depart very quickly.’

Much to the Countess’s chagrin and astonishment, Caroline replied:

‘I shall hardly be sorry.’

’Not sorry? Why, what now, dear one? Is it true, then, that a flagellated female kisses the rod? Are you so eager for a repetition of Strike?’

Caroline, with some hesitation, related to her more than the Countess had ventured to petition for in her prayers.

‘Oh! how exceedingly generous!’ the latter exclaimed. How very refreshing to think that there are nobles in your England as romantic, as courteous, as delicate as our own foreign ones! But his Grace is quite an exceptional nobleman. Are you not touched, dearest Carry?’

Caroline pensively glanced at the reflection of her beautiful arm in the glass, and sighed, pushing back the hair from her temples.

‘But, for mercy’s sake!’ resumed the Countess, in alarm at the sigh, ’do not be too—too touched. Do, pray, preserve your wits. You weep! Caroline, Caroline! O my goodness; it is just five-and-twenty minutes to the first dinner-bell, and you are crying! For God’s sake, think of your face! Are you going to be a Gorgon? And you show the marks twice as long as any other, you fair women. Squinnying like this! Caroline, for your Louisa’s sake, do not!’

Hissing which, half angrily and half with entreaty, the Countess dropped on her knees. Caroline’s fit of tears subsided. The eldest of the sisters, she was the kindest, the fairest, the weakest.

‘Not,’ said the blandishing Countess, when Caroline’s face was clearer, ’not that my best of Carrys does not look delicious in her shower. Cry, with your hair down, and you would subdue any male creature on two legs. And that reminds me of that most audacious Marquis de Remilla. He saw a dirty drab of a fruit-girl crying in Lisbon streets one day, as he was riding in the carriage of the Duchesse de Col da Rosta, and her husband and duena, and he had a letter for her—the Duchesse. They loved! How deliver the letter? “Save me!” he cried to the Duchesse, catching her hand, and pressing his heart, as if very sick. The Duchesse felt the paper—turned her hand over on her knee, and he withdrew his. What does my Carry think was the excuse he tendered the Duke? This—and this gives you some idea of the wonderful audacity of those dear Portuguese—that he—he must precipitate himself and marry any woman he saw weep, and be her slave for the term of his natural life, unless another woman’s

hand at the same moment restrained him! There!' and the Countess's eyes shone brightly.

'How excessively imbecile!' Caroline remarked, hitherto a passive listener to these Lusitanian contes.

It was the first sign she had yet given of her late intercourse with a positive Duke, and the Countess felt it, and drew back. No more anecdotes for Caroline, to whom she quietly said:

Page 1295

‘You are very English, dear!’

‘But now, the Duke—his Grace,’ she went on, ‘how did he inaugurate?’

’I spoke to him of Evan’s position. God forgive me!—I said that was the cause of my looks being sad.’

‘You could have thought of nothing better,’ interposed the Countess. ‘Yes?’

’He said, if he might clear them he should be happy!

‘In exquisite language, Carry, of course.’

‘No; just as others talk.’

‘Hum!’ went the Countess, and issued again brightly from a cloud of reflection, with the remark: ’It was to seem business-like—the commerciality of the English mind. To the point—I know. Well, you perceive, my sweetest, that Evan’s interests are in your hands. You dare not quit the field. In one week, I fondly trust, he will be secure. What more did his Grace say? May we not be the repository of such delicious secresies?’

Caroline gave tremulous indications about the lips, and the Countess jumped to the bell and rang it, for they were too near dinner for the trace of a single tear to be permitted. The bell and the appearance of Conning effectually checked the flood.

While speaking to her sister, the Countess had hesitated to mention George Uplift’s name, hoping that, as he had no dinner-suit, he would not stop to dinner that day, and would fall to the charge of Lady Racial once more. Conning, however, brought in a sheet of paper on which the names of the guests were written out by Harry, a daily piece of service he performed for the captivating dame, and George Uplift’s name was in the list.

‘We will do the rest, Conning-retire,’ she said, and then folding Caroline in her arms, murmured, the moment they were alone, ’Will my Carry dress her hair plain to-day, for the love of her Louisa?’

‘Goodness! what a request!’ exclaimed Caroline, throwing back her head to see if her Louisa could be serious.

‘Most inexplicable—is it not? Will she do it?’

‘Flat, dear? It makes a fright of me.’

‘Possibly. May I beg it?’

‘But why, dearest, why? If I only knew why!’

‘For the love of your Louy.’

‘Plain along the temples?’

‘And a knot behind.’

‘And a band along the forehead?’

‘Gems, if they meet your favour.’

‘But my cheek-bones, Louisa?’

‘They are not too prominent, Carry.’

‘Curls relieve them.’

‘The change will relieve the curls, dear one.’

Caroline looked in the glass, at the Countess, as polished a reflector, and fell into a chair. Her hair was accustomed to roll across her shoulders in heavy curls. The Duke would find a change of the sort singular. She should not at all know herself with her hair done differently: and for a lovely woman to be transformed to a fright is hard to bear in solitude, or in imagination.

‘Really!’ she petitioned.

Page 1296

‘Really—yes, or no?’ added the Countess.

‘So unaccountable a whim!’ Caroline looked in the glass dolefully, and pulled up her thick locks from one cheek, letting them fall on the instant.

‘She will?’ breathed the Countess.

‘I really cannot,’ said Caroline, with vehemence.

The Countess burst into laughter, replying: ’My poor child! it is not my whim—it is your obligation. George Uplift dines here to-day. Now do you divine it? Disguise is imperative for you.’

Mrs. Strike, gazing in her sister’s face, answered slowly, ’George? But how will you meet him?’ she hurriedly asked.

‘I have met him,’ rejoined the Countess, boldly. ’I defy him to know me. I brazen him! You with your hair in my style are equally safe. You see there is no choice. Pooh! contemptible puppy!’

’But I never,’—Caroline was going to say she never could face him. ’I will not dine. I will nurse Evan.’

‘You have faced him, my dear,’ said the Countess, ’and you are to change your head-dress simply to throw him off his scent.’

As she spoke the Countess tripped about, nodding her head like a girl. Triumph in the sense of her power over all she came in contact with, rather elated the lady.

Do you see why she worked her sister in this roundabout fashion? She would not tell her George Uplift was in the house till she was sure he intended to stay, for fear of frightening her. When the necessity became apparent, she put it under the pretext of a whim in order to see how far Caroline, whose weak compliance she could count on, and whose reticence concerning the Duke annoyed her, would submit to it to please her sister; and if she rebelled positively, why to be sure it was the Duke she dreaded to shock: and, therefore, the Duke had a peculiar hold on her: and, therefore, the Countess might reckon that she would do more than she pleased to confess to remain with the Duke, and was manageable in that quarter. All this she learnt without asking. I need not add, that Caroline sighingly did her bidding.

‘We must all be victims in our turn, Carry,’ said the Countess. ’Evan’s prospects—it may be, Silva’s restoration—depend upon your hair being dressed plain to-day. Reflect on that!’

Poor Caroline obeyed; but she was capable of reflecting only that her face was unnaturally lean and strange to her.

The sisters tended and arranged one another, taking care to push their mourning a month or two ahead and the Countess animadverted on the vulgar mind of Lady Jocelyn, who would allow a ’gentleman to sit down at a gentlewoman’s table, in full company, in pronounced undress’: and Caroline, utterly miserable, would pretend that she wore a mask and kept grimacing as they do who are not accustomed to paint on the cheeks, till the Countess checked her by telling her she should ask her for that before the Duke.

After a visit to Evan, the sisters sailed together into the drawing-room.

Page 1297

‘Uniformity is sometimes a gain,’ murmured the Countess, as they were parting in the middle of the room. She saw that their fine figures, and profiles, and resemblance in contrast, produced an effect. The Duke wore one of those calmly intent looks by which men show they are aware of change in the heavens they study, and are too devout worshippers to presume to disapprove. Mr. George was standing by Miss Carrington, and he also watched Mrs. Strike. To bewilder him yet more the Countess persisted in fixing her eyes upon his heterodox apparel, and Mr. George became conscious and uneasy. Miss Carrington had to address her question to him twice before he heard. Melville Jocelyn, Sir John Loring, Sir Franks, and Hamilton surrounded the Countess, and told her what they had decided on with regard to the election during the day; for Melville was warm in his assertion that they would not talk to the Countess five minutes without getting a hint worth having.

‘Call to us that man who is habited like a groom,’ said the Countess, indicating Mr. George. ‘I presume he is in his right place up here?’

‘Whew—take care, Countess—our best man. He’s good for a dozen,’ said Hamilton.

Mr. George was brought over and introduced to the Countess de Saldar.

‘So the oldest Tory in the county is a fox?’ she said, in allusion to the hunt. Never did Caroline Strike admire her sister’s fearful genius more than at that moment.

Mr. George ducked and rolled his hand over his chin, with ‘ah-um!’ and the like, ended by a dry laugh.

‘Are you our supporter, Mr. Uplift?’

‘Tory interest, ma—um—my lady.’

‘And are you staunch and may be trusted?’

‘’Pon my honour, I think I have that reputation.’

’And you would not betray us if we give you any secrets? Say “’Pon my honour,” again. You launch it out so courageously.’

The men laughed, though they could not see what the Countess was driving at. She had for two minutes spoken as she spoke when a girl, and George—entirely off his guard and unsuspicious—looked unenlightened. If he knew, there were hints enough for him in her words.

If he remained blind, they might pass as air. The appearance of the butler cut short his protestation as to his powers of secresy.

The Countess dismissed him.

‘You will be taken into our confidence when we require you.’ And she resumed her foreign air in a most elaborate and overwhelming bow.

She was now perfectly satisfied that she was safe from Mr. George, and, as she thoroughly detested the youthful squire, she chose to propagate a laugh at him by saying with the utmost languor and clearness of voice, as they descended the stairs:

‘After all, a very clever fox may be a very dull dog—don’t you think?’

Gentlemen in front of her, and behind, heard it, and at Mr. George’s expense her reputation rose.

Page 1298

Thus the genius of this born general prompted her to adopt the principle in tactics—-boldly to strike when you are in the dark as to your enemy's movements.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE DAUGHTERS OF THE GREAT MEL HAVE TO DIGEST HIM AT DINNER

You must know, if you would form an estimate of the Countess's heroic impudence, that a rumour was current in Lymport that the fair and well-developed Louisa Harrington, in her sixteenth year, did advisedly, and with the intention of rendering the term indefinite, entrust her guileless person to Mr. George Uplift's honourable charge. The rumour, unflavoured by absolute malignity, was such; and it went on to say, that the sublime Mel, alive to the honour of his family, followed the fugitives with a pistol, and with a horsewhip, that he might chastise the offender according to the degree of his offence. It was certain that he had not used the pistol: it was said that he had used the whip. The details of the interview between Mel and Mr. George were numerous, but at the same time various. Some declared that he put a pistol to Mr. George's ear, and under pressure of that persuader got him into the presence of a clergyman, when he turned sulky; and when the pistol was again produced, the ceremony would have been performed, had not the outraged Church cried out for help. Some vowed that Mr. George had referred all questions implying a difference between himself and Mel to their mutual fists for decision. At any rate, Mr. George turned up in Fallow field subsequently; the fair Louisa, unhurt and with a quiet mind, in Lymport; and this amount of truth the rumours can be reduced to—that Louisa and Mr. George had been acquainted. Rumour and gossip know how to build: they always have some solid foundation, however small. Upwards of twelve years had run since Louisa went to the wife of the brewer—a period quite long enough for Mr. George to forget any one in; and she was altogether a different creature; and, as it was true that Mr. George was a dull one, she was, after the test she had put him to, justified in hoping that Mel's progeny might pass unchallenged anywhere out of Lymport. So, with Mr. George facing her at table, the Countess sat down, determined to eat and be happy.

A man with the education and tastes of a young country squire is not likely to know much of the character of women; and of the marvellous power they have of throwing a veil of oblivion between themselves and what they don't want to remember, few men know much. Mr. George had thought, when he saw Mrs. Strike leaning to Evan, and heard she was a Harrington, that she was rather like the Lymport family; but the reappearance of Mrs. Strike, the attention of the Duke of Belfield to her, and the splendid tactics of the Countess, which had extinguished every thought in the thought of himself, drove Lymport out of his mind.

There were some dinner guests at the table-people of Fallow field, Beckley, and Bodley. The Countess had the diplomatist on one side, the Duke on the other. Caroline was under the charge of Sir Franks. The Countess, almost revelling in her position opposite Mr. George, was ambitious to lead the conversation, and commenced, smiling at Melville:

Page 1299

’We are to be spared politics to-day? I think politics and cookery do not assimilate.’

‘I’m afraid you won’t teach the true Briton to agree with you,’ said Melville, shaking his head over the sums involved by this British propensity.

‘No,’ said Seymour. ‘Election dinners are a part of the Constitution’: and Andrew laughed: ’They make Radicals pay as well as Tories, so it’s pretty square.’

The topic was taken up, flagged, fell, and was taken up again. And then Harry Jocelyn said:

’I say, have you worked the flags yet? The great Mel must have his flags.’

The flags were in the hands of ladies, and ladies would look to the rosettes, he was told.

Then a lady of the name of Barrington laughed lightly, and said:

’Only, pray, my dear Harry, don’t call your uncle the “Great Mel” at the election.’

‘Oh! very well,’ quoth Harry: ‘why not?’

’You ’ll get him laughed at—that ‘s all.’

‘Oh! well, then, I won’t,’ said Harry, whose wits were attracted by the Countess’s visage.

Mrs. Barrington turned to Seymour, her neighbour, and resumed:

’He really would be laughed at. There was a tailor—he was called the Great Mel—and he tried to stand for Fallow field once. I believe he had the support of Squire Uplift—-George’s uncle—and others. They must have done it for fun! Of course he did not get so far as the hustings; but I believe he had flags, and principles, and all sorts of things worked ready. He certainly canvassed.’

‘A tailor—canvassed—for Parliament?’ remarked an old Dowager, the mother of Squire Copping. ‘My what are we coming to next?’

‘He deserved to get in,’ quoth Aunt Bel: ’After having his principles worked ready, to eject the man was infamous.’

Amazed at the mine she had sprung, the Countess sat through it, lamenting the misery of owning a notorious father. Happily Evan was absent, on his peaceful blessed bed!

Bowing over wine with the Duke, she tried another theme, while still, like a pertinacious cracker, the Great Mel kept banging up and down the table.

‘We are to have a feast in the open air, I hear. What you call pic-nic.’

The Duke believed there was a project of the sort.

'How exquisitely they do those things in Portugal! I suppose there would be no scandal in my telling something now. At least we are out of Court-jurisdiction.'

'Scandal of the Court!' exclaimed his Grace, in mock horror.

'The option is yours to listen. The Queen, when young, was sweetly pretty; a divine complexion; and a habit of smiling on everybody. I presume that the young Habral, son of the first magistrate of Lisbon, was also smiled on. Most innocently, I would swear! But it operated on the wretched youth! He spent all his fortune in the purchase and decoration of a fairy villa, bordering on the

Page 1300

Val das Rosas, where the Court enjoyed its rustic festivities, and one day a storm! all the ladies hurried their young mistress to the house where the young Habral had been awaiting her for ages. None so polished as he! Musicians started up, the floors were ready, and torches beneath them!—there was a feast of exquisite wines and viands sparkling. Quite enchantment. The girl-Queen was in ecstasies. She deigned a dance with the young Habral, and then all sat down to supper; and in the middle of it came the cry of Fire! The Queen shrieked; the flames were seen all around; and if the arms of the young Habral were opened to save her, or perish, could she cast a thought on Royalty, and refuse? The Queen was saved the villa was burnt; the young Habral was ruined, but, if I know a Portuguese, he was happy till he died, and well remunerated! For he had held a Queen to his heart! So that was a pic-nic!'

The Duke slightly inclined his head.

'Vrai Portughez derrendo,' he said. 'They tell a similar story in Spain, of one of the Queens—I forget her name. The difference between us and your Peninsular cavaliers is, that we would do as much for uncrowned ladies.'

'Ah! your Grace!' The Countess swam in the pleasure of a nobleman's compliment.

'What's the story?' interposed Aunt Bel.

An outline of it was given her. Thank heaven, the table was now rid of the Great Mel. For how could he have any, the remotest relation with Queens and Peninsular pic-nics? You shall hear.

Lady Jocelyn happened to catch a word or two of the story.

'Why,' said she, 'that's English! Franks, you remember the ballet divertissement they improvised at the Bodley race-ball, when the magnificent footman fired a curtain and caught up Lady Racial, and carried her—'

'Heaven knows where!' cried Sir Franks. 'I remember it perfectly. It was said that the magnificent footman did it on purpose to have that pleasure.'

'Ay, of course,' Hamilton took him up. 'They talked of prosecuting the magnificent footman.'

'Ay,' followed Seymour, 'and nobody could tell where the magnificent footman bolted. He vanished into thin air.'

'Ay, of course,' Melville struck in; 'and the magic enveloped the lady for some time.'

At this point Mr. George Uplift gave a horse-laugh. He jerked in his seat excitedly.

‘Bodley race-ball!’ he cried; and looking at Lady Jocelyn: ’Was your ladyship there, then? Why—ha! ha! why, you have seen the Great Mel, then! That tremendous footman was old Mel himself!’

Lady Jocelyn struck both her hands on the table, and rested her large grey eyes, full of humorous surprise, on Mr. George.

There was a pause, and then the ladies and gentlemen laughed.

‘Yes,’ Mr. George went on, ‘that was old Mel. I’ll swear to him.’

‘And that’s how it began?’ murmured Lady Jocelyn.

Page 1301

Mr. George nodded at his plate discreetly.

‘Well,’ said Lady Jocelyn, leaning back, and lifting her face upward in the discursive fulness of her fancy, ’I feel I am not robbed. ’Il y a des miracles, et j’en ai vu’. One’s life seems more perfect when one has seen what nature can do. The fellow was stupendous! I conceive him present. Who’ll fire a house for me? Is it my deficiency of attraction, or a total dearth of gallant snobs?’

The Countess was drowned. The muscles of her smiles were horribly stiff and painful. Caroline was getting pale. Could it be accident that thus resuscitated Mel, their father, and would not let the dead man die? Was not malice at the bottom of it? The Countess, though she hated Mr. George infinitely, was clear-headed enough to see that Providence alone was trying her. No glances were exchanged between him and Laxley, or Drummond.

Again Mel returned to his peace, and again he had to come forth.

‘Who was this singular man you were speaking about just now?’ Mrs. Evremonde asked.

Lady Jocelyn answered her: ’The light of his age. The embodied protest against our social prejudice. Combine—say, Mirabeau and Alcibiades, and the result is the Lymport Tailor:—he measures your husband in the morning: in the evening he makes love to you, through a series of pantomimic transformations. He was a colossal Adonis, and I’m sorry he’s dead!’

‘But did the man get into society?’ said Mrs. Evremonde. ’How did he manage that?’

‘Yes, indeed! and what sort of a society!’ the dowager Copping interjected. ’None but bachelor-tables, I can assure you. Oh! I remember him. They talked of fetching him to Dox Hall. I said, No, thank you, Tom; this isn’t your Vauxhall.’

‘A sharp retort,’ said Lady Jocelyn, ’a most conclusive rhyme; but you’re mistaken. Many families were glad to see him, I hear. And he only consented to be treated like a footman when he dressed like one. The fellow had some capital points. He fought two or three duels, and behaved like a man. Franks wouldn’t have him here, or I would have received him. I hear that, as a conteur, he was inimitable. In short, he was a robust Brummel, and the Regent of low life.’

This should have been Mel’s final epitaph.

Unhappily, Mrs. Melville would remark, in her mincing manner, that the idea of the admission of a tailor into society seemed very unnatural; and Aunt Bel confessed that her experience did not comprehend it.

‘As to that,’ said Lady Jocelyn, ’phenomena are unnatural. The rules of society are lightened by the exceptions. What I like in this Mel is, that though he was a snob, and an impostor, he could still make himself respected by his betters. He was honest, so far; he acknowledged his tastes, which were those of Franks, Melville, Seymour, and George—the tastes of a gentleman. I prefer him infinitely to your cowardly democrat, who barks for what he can’t get, and is generally beastly. In fact, I’m not sure that I haven’t a secret passion for the great tailor.’

Page 1302

‘After all, old Mel wasn’t so bad,’ Mr. George Uplift chimed in.

’Granted a tailor—you didn’t see a bit of it at table. I’ve known him taken for a lord. And when he once got hold of you, you couldn’t give him up. The squire met him first in the coach, one winter. He took him for a Russian nobleman—didn’t find out what he was for a month or so. Says Mel, “Yes, I make clothes. You find the notion unpleasant; guess how disagreeable it is to me.” The old squire laughed, and was glad to have him at Croftlands as often as he chose to come. Old Mel and I used to spar sometimes; but he’s gone, and I should like to shake his fist again.’

Then Mr. George told the ‘Bath’ story, and episodes in Mel’s career as Marquis; and while he held the ear of the table, Rose, who had not spoken a word, and had scarcely eaten a morsel during dinner, studied the sisters with serious eyes. Only when she turned them from the Countess to Mrs. Strike, they were softened by a shadowy drooping of the eyelids, as if for some reason she deeply pitied that lady.

Next to Rose sat Drummond, with a face expressive of cynical enjoyment. He devoted uncommon attention to the Countess, whom he usually shunned and overlooked. He invited her to exchange bows over wine, in the fashion of that day, and the Countess went through the performance with finished grace and ease. Poor Andrew had all the time been brushing back his hair, and making strange deprecatory sounds in his throat, like a man who felt bound to assure everybody at table he was perfectly happy and comfortable.

‘Material enough for a Sartoriad,’ said Drummond to Lady Jocelyn.

‘Excellent. Pray write it forthwith, Drummond’, replied her ladyship; and as they exchanged talk unintelligible to the Countess, this lady observed to the Duke:

‘It is a relief to have buried that subject.’

The Duke smiled, raising an eyebrow; but the persecuted Countess perceived she had been much too hasty when Drummond added,

‘I’ll make a journey to Lymport in a day or two, and master his history.’

‘Do,’ said her ladyship; and flourishing her hand, '"I sing the Prince of Snobs!"'

’Oh, if it’s about old Mel, I ‘ll sing you material enough,’ said Mr. George. ’There! you talk of it’s being unnatural, his dining out at respectable tables. Why, I believe—upon my honour, I believe it’s a fact—he’s supped and thrown dice with the Regent.’

Lady Jocelyn clapped her hands. ’A noble culmination, Drummond! The man’s an Epic!’

‘Well, I think old Mel was equal to it,’ Mr. George pursued. ’He gave me pretty broad hints; and this is how it was, if it really happened, you know. Old Mel had a friend; some say he was more. Well, that was a fellow, a great gambler. I dare say you ’ve heard of him—Burley Bennet—him that won Ryelands Park of one of the royal dukes—died worth upwards of L100,000; and old Mel swore he ought to have had it, and would if he hadn’t somehow offended him. He left the money to Admiral Harrington, and he was a relation of Mel’s.’

Page 1303

‘But are we then utterly mixed up with tailors?’ exclaimed Mrs. Barrington.

‘Well, those are the facts,’ said Mr. George.

The wine made the young squire talkative. It is my belief that his suspicions were not awake at that moment, and that, like any other young country squire, having got a subject he could talk on, he did not care to discontinue it. The Countess was past the effort to attempt to stop him. She had work enough to keep her smile in the right place.

Every dinner may be said to have its special topic, just as every age has its marked reputation. They are put up twice or thrice, and have to contend with minor lights, and to swallow them, and then they command the tongues of men and flow uninterruptedly. So it was with the great Mel upon this occasion. Curiosity was aroused about him. Aunt Bel agreed with Lady Jocelyn that she would have liked to know the mighty tailor. Mrs. Shorne but very imperceptibly protested against the notion, and from one to another it ran. His Grace of Belfield expressed positive approval of Mel as one of the old school.

‘Si ce n’est pas le gentilhomme, au moins, c’est le gentilhomme manque,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’He is to be regretted, Duke. You are right. The stuff was in him, but the Fates were unkind. I stretch out my hand to the pauvre diable.’

’I think one learns more from the mock magnifico than from anything else,’ observed his Grace.

’When the lion saw the donkey in his own royal skin, said Aunt Bel, ’add the rhyme at your discretion—he was a wiser lion, that’s all.’

‘And the ape that strives to copy one—he’s an animal of judgement,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’We will be tolerant to the tailor, and the Countess must not set us down as a nation of shopkeepers: philosophically tolerant.’

The Countess started, and ran a little broken ‘Oh!’ affably out of her throat, dipped her lips to her tablenapkin, and resumed her smile.

‘Yes,’ pursued her ladyship; ’old Mel stamps the age gone by. The gallant adventurer tied to his shop! Alternate footman and marquis, out of intermediate tailor! Isn’t there something fine in his buffoon imitation of the real thing? I feel already that old Mel belongs to me. Where is the great man buried? Where have they, set the funeral brass that holds his mighty ashes?’

Lady Jocelyn’s humour was fully entered into by the men. The women smiled vacantly, and had a common thought that it was ill-bred of her to hold forth in that way at table, and unfeminine of any woman to speak continuously anywhere.

‘Oh, come!’ cried Mr. George, who saw his own subject snapped away from him by sheer cleverness; ’old Mel wasn’t only a buffoon, my lady, you know. Old Mel had his qualities. He was as much a “no-nonsense” fellow, in his way, as a magistrate, or a minister.’

‘Or a king, or a constable,’ Aunt Bel helped his illustration.

Page 1304

‘Or a prince, a poll-parrot, a Perigord-pie,’ added Drummond, whose gravity did not prevent Mr. George from seeing that he was laughed at.

‘Well, then, now, listen to this,’ said Mr. George, leaning his two hands on the table resolutely. Dessert was laid, and, with a full glass beside him, and a pear to peel, he determined to be heard.

The Countess’s eyes went mentally up to the vindictive heavens. She stole a glance at Caroline, and was alarmed at her excessive pallor. Providence had rescued Evan from this!

‘Now, I know this to be true,’ Mr. George began. ’When old Mel was alive, he and I had plenty of sparring, and that—but he’s dead, and I’ll do him justice. I spoke of Burley Bennet just now. Now, my lady, old Burley was, I think, Mel’s half-brother, and he came, I know, somewhere out of Drury Lane-one of the courts near the theatre—I don’t know much of London. However, old Mel wouldn’t have that. Nothing less than being born in St. James’s Square would content old Mel, and he must have a Marquis for his father. I needn’t be more particular. Before ladies—ahem! But Burley was the shrewd hand of the two. Oh-h-h! such a card! He knew the way to get into company without false pretences. Well, I told you, he had lots more than L100,000—some said two—and he gave up Ryelands; never asked for it, though he won it. Consequence was, he commanded the services of somebody pretty high. And it was he got Admiral Harrington made a captain, posted, commodore, admiral, and K.C.B., all in seven years! In the Army it ’d have been half the time, for the H.R.H. was stronger in that department. Now, I know old Burley promised Mel to leave him his money, and called the Admiral an ungrateful dog. He didn’t give Mel much at a time—now and then a twenty-pounder or so—I saw the cheques. And old Mel expected the money, and looked over his daughters like a turkey-cock. Nobody good enough for them. Whacking handsome gals—three! used to be called the Three Graces of Lymport. And one day Burley comes and visits Mel, and sees the girls. And he puts his finger on the eldest, I can tell you. She was a spanker! She was the handsomest gal, I think, ever I saw. For the mother’s a fine woman, and what with the mother, and what with old Mel —’

‘We won’t enter into the mysteries of origin,’ quoth Lady Jocelyn.

’Exactly, my lady. Oh, your servant, of course. Before ladies. A Burley Bennet, I said. Long and short was, he wanted to take her up to London. Says old Mel: “London ’s a sad place.”—“Place to make money,” says Burley. “That’s not work for a young gal,” says Mel. Long and short was, Burley wanted to take her, and Mel wouldn’t let her go.’ Mr. George lowered his tone, and mumbled, ’Don’t know how to explain it very well before ladies. What Burley wanted was—it wasn’t quite honourable, you know, though there was a good deal of spangles on it, and whether a real H.R.H., or a

Page 1305

Marquis, or a Viscount, I can't say, but—the offer was tempting to a tradesman. "No," says Mel; like a chap planting his flagstaff and sticking to it. I believe that to get her to go with him, Burley offered to make a will on the spot, and to leave every farthing of his money and property—upon my soul, I believe it to be true—to Mel and his family, if he'd let the gal go. "No," says Mel. I like the old bird! And Burley got in a rage, and said he'd leave every farthing to the sailor. Says Mel: "I'm a poor tradesman; but I have and I always will have the feelings of a gentleman, and they're more to me than hard cash, and the honour of my daughter, sir, is dearer to me than my blood. Out of the house!" cries Mel. And away old Burley went, and left every penny to the sailor, Admiral Harrington, who never noticed 'em an inch. Now, there!'

All had listened to Mr. George attentively, and he had slurred the apologetic passages, and emphasized the propitiatory 'before ladies' in a way to make himself well understood a generation back.

'Bravo, old Mel!' rang the voice of Lady Jocelyn, and a murmur ensued, in the midst of which Rose stood up and hurried round the table to Mrs. Strike, who was seen to rise from her chair; and as she did so, the ill-arranged locks fell from their unnatural restraint down over her shoulders; one great curl half forward to the bosom, and one behind her right ear. Her eyes were wide, her whole face, neck, and fingers, white as marble. The faintest tremor of a frown on her brows, and her shut lips, marked the continuation of some internal struggle, as if with her last conscious force she kept down a flood of tears and a wild outcry which it was death to hold. Sir Franks felt his arm touched, and looked up, and caught her, as Rose approached. The Duke and other gentlemen went to his aid, and as the beautiful woman was borne out white and still as a corpse, the Countess had this dagger plunged in her heart from the mouth of Mr. George, addressing Miss Carrington:

'I swear I didn't do it on purpose. She 's Carry Harrington, old Mel's daughter, as sure as she 's flesh and blood!'

CHAPTER XXIII

TREATS OF A HANDKERCHIEF

Running through Beckley Park, clear from the chalk, a little stream gave light and freshness to its pasturage. Near where it entered, a bathing-house of white marble had been built, under which the water flowed, and the dive could be taken to a paved depth, and you swam out over a pebbly bottom into sun-light, screened by the thick-weeded banks, loose-strife and willow-herb, and mint, nodding over you, and in the later season long-plumed yellow grasses. Here at sunrise the young men washed their limbs, and here since her return home English Rose loved to walk by night. She had often spoken of the little happy stream to Evan in Portugal, and when he came to Beckley Court, she

Page 1306

arranged that he should sleep in a bed-room overlooking it. The view was sweet and pleasant to him, for all the babbling of the water was of Rose, and winding in and out, to East, to North, it wound to embowered hopes in the lover's mind, to tender dreams; and often at dawn, when dressing, his restless heart embarked on it, and sailed into havens, the phantom joys of which coloured his life for him all the day. But most he loved to look across it when the light fell. The palest solitary gleam along its course spoke to him rich promise. The faint blue beam of a star chained all his longings, charmed his sorrows to sleep. Rose like a fairy had breathed her spirit here, and it was a delight to the silly luxurious youth to lie down, and fix some image of a flower bending to the stream on his brain, and in the cradle of fancies that grew round it, slide down the tide of sleep.

From the image of a flower bending to the stream, like his own soul to the bosom of Rose, Evan built sweet fables. It was she that exalted him, that led him through glittering chapters of adventure. In his dream of deeds achieved for her sake, you may be sure the young man behaved worthily, though he was modest when she praised him, and his limbs trembled when the land whispered of his great reward to come. The longer he stayed at Beckley the more he lived in this world within world, and if now and then the harsh outer life smote him, a look or a word from Rose encompassed him again, and he became sensible only of a distant pain.

At first his hope sprang wildly to possess her, to believe, that after he had done deeds that would have sent ordinary men in the condition of shattered hulks to the hospital, she might be his. Then blow upon blow was struck, and he prayed to be near her till he died: no more. Then she, herself, struck him to the ground, and sitting in his chamber, sick and weary, on the evening of his mishap, Evan's sole desire was to obtain the handkerchief he had risked his neck for. To have that, and hold it to his heart, and feel it as a part of her, seemed much.

Over a length of the stream the red round harvest-moon was rising, and the weakened youth was this evening at the mercy of the charm that encircled him. The water curved, and dimpled, and flowed flat, and the whole body of it rushed into the spaces of sad splendour. The clustered trees stood like temples of darkness; their shadows lengthened supernaturally; and a pale gloom crept between them on the sward. He had been thinking for some time that Rose would knock at his door, and give him her voice, at least; but she did not come; and when he had gazed out on the stream till his eyes ached, he felt that he must go and walk by it. Those little flashes of the hurrying tide spoke to him of a secret rapture and of a joy-seeking impulse; the pouring onward of all the blood of life to one illumined heart, mournful from excess of love.

Pardon me, I beg. Enamoured young men have these notions. Ordinarily Evan had sufficient common sense and was as prosaic as mankind could wish him; but he has had a terrible fall in the morning, and a young woman rages in his brain. Better, indeed, and 'more manly,' were he to strike and raise huge bosses on his forehead, groan, and so have done with it. We must let him go his own way.

Page 1307

At the door he was met by the Countess. She came into the room without a word or a kiss, and when she did speak, the total absence of any euphuism gave token of repressed excitement yet more than her angry eyes and eager step. Evan had grown accustomed to her moods, and if one moment she was the halcyon, and another the petrel, it no longer disturbed him, seeing that he was a stranger to the influences by which she was affected. The Countess rated him severely for not seeking repose and inviting sympathy. She told him that the Jocelyns had one and all combined in an infamous plot to destroy the race of Harrington, and that Caroline had already succumbed to their assaults; that the Jocelyns would repent it, and sooner than they thought for; and that the only friend the Harringtons had in the house was Miss Bonner, whom Providence would liberally reward.

Then the Countess changed to a dramatic posture, and whispered aloud, 'Hush: she is here. She is so anxious. Be generous, my brother, and let her see you!'

'She?' said Evan, faintly. 'May she come, Louisa?' He hoped for Rose.

'I have consented to mask it,' returned the Countess. 'Oh, what do I not sacrifice for you!'

She turned from him, and to Evan's chagrin introduced Juliana Bonner.

'Five minutes, remember!' said the Countess. 'I must not hear of more.' And then Evan found himself alone with Miss Bonner, and very uneasy. This young lady had restless brilliant eyes, and a contraction about the forehead which gave one the idea of a creature suffering perpetual headache. She said nothing, and when their eyes met she dropped hers in a manner that made silence too expressive. Feeling which, Evan began:

'May I tell you that I think it is I who ought to be nursing you, not you me?'

Miss Bonner replied by lifting her eyes and dropping them as before, murmuring subsequently, 'Would you do so?'

'Most certainly, if you did me the honour to select me.'

The fingers of the young lady commenced twisting and intertwining on her lap. Suddenly she laughed:

'It would not do at all. You won't be dismissed from your present service till you 're unfit for any other.'

'What do you mean?' said Evan, thinking more of the unmusical laugh than of the words.

He received no explanation, and the irksome silence caused him to look through the window, as an escape for his mind, at least. The waters streamed on endlessly into the golden arms awaiting them. The low moon burnt through the foliage. In the distance, over a reach of the flood, one tall aspen shook against the lighted sky.

‘Are you in pain?’ Miss Bonner asked, and broke his reverie.

‘No; I am going away, and perhaps I sigh involuntarily.’

‘You like these grounds?’

‘I have never been so happy in any place.’

‘With those cruel young men about you?’

Page 1308

Evan now laughed. ‘We don’t call young men cruel, Miss Bonner.’

’But were they not? To take advantage of what Rose told them—it was base!’

She had said more than she intended, possibly, for she coloured under his inquiring look, and added: ’I wish I could say the same as you of Beckley. Do you know, I am called Rose’s thorn?’

‘Not by Miss Jocelyn herself, certainly!’

’How eager you are to defend her. But am I not—tell me—do I not look like a thorn in company with her?’

‘There is but the difference that ill health would make.’

‘Ill health? Oh, yes! And Rose is so much better born.’

‘To that, I am sure, she does not give a thought.’

‘Not Rose? Oh!’

An exclamation, properly lengthened, convinces the feelings more satisfactorily than much logic. Though Evan claimed only the hand-kerchief he had won, his heart sank at the sound. Miss Bonner watched him, and springing forward, said sharply:

‘May I tell you something?’

‘You may tell me what you please.’

‘Then, whether I offend you or not, you had better leave this.’

‘I am going,’ said Evan. ’I am only waiting to introduce your tutor to you.’

She kept her eyes on him, and in her voice as well there was a depth, as she returned:

‘Mr. Laxley, Mr. Forth, and Harry, are going to Lymport to-morrow.’

Evan was looking at a figure, whose shadow was thrown towards the house from the margin of the stream.

He stood up, and taking the hand of Miss Bonner, said:

’I thank you. I may, perhaps, start with them. At any rate, you have done me a great service, which I shall not forget.’

The figure by the stream he knew to be that of Rose. He released Miss Bonner's trembling moist hand, and as he continued standing, she moved to the door, after once following the line of his eyes into the moonlight.

Outside the door a noise was audible. Andrew had come to sit with his dear boy, and the Countess had met and engaged and driven him to the other end of the passage, where he hung remonstrating with her.

'Why, Van,' he said, as Evan came up to him, 'I thought you were in a profound sleep. Louisa said—'

'Silly Andrew!' interposed the Countess, 'do you not observe he is sleep-walking now?' and she left them with a light laugh to go to Juliana, whom she found in tears. The Countess was quite aware of the efficacy of a little bit of burlesque lying to cover her retreat from any petty exposure.

Evan soon got free from Andrew. He was under the dim stars, walking to the great fire in the East. The cool air refreshed him. He was simply going to ask for his own, before he went, and had no cause to fear what would be thought by any one. A handkerchief! A man might fairly win that, and carry it out of a very noble family, without having to blush for himself.

Page 1309

I cannot say whether he inherited his feeling for rank from Mel, his father, or that the Countess had succeeded in instilling it, but Evan never took Republican ground in opposition to those who insulted him, and never lashed his ‘manhood’ to assert itself, nor compared the fineness of his instincts with the behaviour of titled gentlemen. Rather he seemed to admit the distinction between his birth and that of a gentleman, admitting it to his own soul, as it were, and struggled simply as men struggle against a destiny. The news Miss Bonner had given him sufficed to break a spell which could not have endured another week; and Andrew, besides, had told him of Caroline’s illness. He walked to meet Rose, honestly intending to ask for his own, and wish her good-bye.

Rose saw him approach, and knew him in the distance. She was sitting on a lower branch of the aspen, that shot out almost from the root, and stretched over the intervolving rays of light on the tremulous water. She could not move to meet him. She was not the Rose whom we have hitherto known. Love may spring in the bosom of a young girl, like Helper in the evening sky, a grey speck in a field of grey, and not be seen or known, till surely as the circle advances the faint planet gathers fire, and, coming nearer earth, dilates, and will and must be seen and known. When Evan lay like a dead man on the ground, Rose turned upon herself as the author of his death, and then she felt this presence within her, and her heart all day had talked to her of it, and was throbbing now, and would not be quieted. She could only lift her eyes and give him her hand; she could not speak. She thought him cold, and he was; cold enough to think that she and her cousin were not unlike in their manner, though not deep enough to reflect that it was from the same cause.

She was the first to find her wits: but not before she spoke did she feel, and start to feel, how long had been the silence, and that her hand was still in his.

‘Why did you come out, Evan? It was not right.’

’I came to speak to you. I shall leave early to-morrow, and may not see you alone.’

‘You are going——?’

She checked her voice, and left the thrill of it wavering in him.

‘Yes, Rose, I am going; I should have gone before.’

‘Evan!’ she grasped his hand, and then timidly retained it. ’You have not forgiven me? I see now. I did not think of any risk to you. I only wanted you to beat. I wanted you to be first and best. If you knew how I thank God for saving you! What my punishment would have been!’

Till her eyes were full she kept them on him, too deep in emotion to be conscious of it.

He could gaze on her tears coldly.

’I should be happy to take the leap any day for the prize you offered. I have come for that.’

‘For what, Evan?’ But while she was speaking the colour mounted in her cheeks, and she went on rapidly:

Page 1310

’Did you think it unkind of me not to come to nurse you. I must tell you, to defend myself. It was the Countess, Evan. She is offended with me—very justly, I dare say. She would not let me come. What could I do? I had no claim to come.’

Rose was not aware of the import of her speech. Evan, though he felt more in it, and had some secret nerves set tingling and dancing, was not to be moved from his demand.

‘Do you intend to withhold it, Rose?’

‘Withhold what, Evan? Anything that you wish for is yours.’

‘The handkerchief. Is not that mine?’

Rose faltered a word. Why did he ask for it? Because he asked for nothing else, and wanted no other thing save that.

Why did she hesitate? Because it was so poor a gift, and so unworthy of him.

And why did he insist? Because in honour she was bound to surrender it.

And why did she hesitate still? Let her answer.

’Oh, Evan! I would give you anything but that; and if you are going away, I should beg so much to keep it.’

He must have been in a singular state not to see her heart in the refusal, as was she not to see his in the request. But Love is blindest just when the bandage is being removed from his forehead.

’Then you will not give it me, Rose? Do you think I shall go about boasting “This is Miss Jocelyn’s handkerchief, and I, poor as I am, have won it"?’

The taunt struck aslant in Rose’s breast with a peculiar sting. She stood up.

‘I will give it you, Evan.’

Turning from him she drew it forth, and handed it to him hurriedly. It was warm. It was stained with his blood. He guessed where it had been nestling, and, now, as if by revelation, he saw that large sole star in the bosom of his darling, and was blinded by it and lost his senses.

‘Rose! beloved!’

Like the flower of his nightly phantasy bending over the stream, he looked and saw in her sweet face the living wonders that encircled his image; she murmuring: ‘No, you must hate me.’

’I love you, Rose, and dare to say it—and it ’s unpardonable. Can you forgive me?’

She raised her face to him.

‘Forgive you for loving me?’ she said.

Holy to them grew the stillness: the ripple suffused in golden moonlight: the dark edges of the leaves against superlative brightness. Not a chirp was heard, nor anything save the cool and endless carol of the happy waters, whose voices are the spirits of silence. Nature seemed consenting that their hands should be joined, their eyes intermingling. And when Evan, with a lover’s craving, wished her lips to say what her eyes said so well, Rose drew his fingers up, and, with an arch smile and a blush, kissed them. The simple act set his heart thumping, and from the look of love, she saw an expression of pain pass through him. Her fealty—her guileless, fearless truth—which the kissing of his hand brought vividly before him, conjured its contrast as well in this that was hidden from her, or but half suspected. Did she know—know and love him still? He thought it might be: but that fell dead on her asking:

Page 1311

‘Shall I speak to Mama to-night?’

A load of lead crushed him.

‘Rose!’ he said; but could get no farther.

Innocently, or with well-masked design, Rose branched off into little sweet words about his bruised shoulder, touching it softly, as if she knew the virtue that was in her touch, and accusing her selfish self as she caressed it:

’Dearest Evan! you must have been sure I thought no one like you. Why did you not tell me before? I can hardly believe it now! Do you know,’ she hurried on, ’they think me cold and heartless,—am I? I must be, to have made you run such risk; but yet I’m sure I could not have survived you.’

Dropping her voice, Rose quoted Ruth. As Evan listened, the words were like food from heaven poured into his spirit.

‘To-morrow,’ he kept saying to himself, ’to-morrow I will tell her all. Let her think well of me a few short hours.’

But the passing minutes locked them closer; each had a new link—in a word, or a speechless breath, or a touch: and to break the marriage of their eyes there must be infinite baseness on one side, or on the other disloyalty to love.

The moon was a silver ball, high up through the aspen-leaves. Evan kissed the hand of Rose, and led her back to the house. He had appeased his conscience by restraining his wild desire to kiss her lips.

In the hall they parted. Rose whispered, ‘Till death!’ giving him her hands.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COUNTESS MAKES HERSELF FELT

There is a peculiar reptile whose stroke is said to deprive men of motion. On the day after the great Mel had stalked the dinner-table of Beckley Court, several of the guests were sensible of the effect of this creature’s mysterious touch, without knowing what it was that paralyzed them. Drummond Forth had fully planned to go to Lymport. He had special reasons for making investigations with regard to the great Mel. Harry, who was fond of Drummond, offered to accompany him, and Laxley, for the sake of a diversion, fell into the scheme. Mr. George Uplift was also to be of the party, and promised them fun. But when the time came to start, not one could be induced to move: Laxley was

pressingly engaged by Rose: Harry showed the rope the Countess held him by; Mr. George made a singular face, and seriously advised Drummond to give up the project.

‘Don’t rub that woman the wrong way,’ he said, in a private colloquy they had. ’By Jingo, she’s a Tartar. She was as a gal, and she isn’t changed, Lou Harrington. Fancy now: she knew me, and she faced me out, and made me think her a stranger! Gad, I’m glad I didn’t speak to the others. Lord’s sake, keep it quiet. Don’t rouse that woman, now, if you want to keep a whole skin.’

Drummond laughed at his extreme earnestness in cautioning him, and appeared to enjoy his dread of the Countess. Mr. George would not tell how he had been induced to change his mind. He repeated his advice with a very emphatic shrug of the shoulder.

Page 1312

‘You seem afraid of her,’ said Drummond.

‘I am. I ain’t ashamed to confess it. She’s a regular viper, my boy!’ said Mr. George. ’She and I once were pretty thick—least said soonest mended, you know. I offended her. Wasn’t quite up to her mark—a tailor’s daughter, you know. Gad, if she didn’t set an Irish Dragoon Captain on me!—I went about in danger of my life. The fellow began to twist his damned black moustaches the moment he clapped eyes on me—bullied me till, upon my soul, I was almost ready to fight him! Oh, she was a little tripping Tartar of a bantam hen then. She’s grown since she’s been countessed, and does it peacocky. Now, I give you fair warning, you know. She’s more than any man’s match.’

‘I dare say I shall think the same when she has beaten me,’ quoth cynical Drummond, and immediately went and gave orders for his horse to be saddled, thinking that he would tread on the head of the viper.

But shortly before the hour of his departure, Mrs. Evremonde summoned him to her, and showed him a slip of paper, on which was written, in an uncouth small hand:

’Madam: a friend warns you that your husband is coming here. Deep interest in your welfare is the cause of an anonymous communication. The writer wishes only to warn you in time.’

Mrs. Evremonde told Drummond that she had received it from one of the servants when leaving the breakfast-room. Beyond the fact that a man on horseback had handed it to a little boy, who had delivered it over to the footman, Drummond could learn nothing. Of course, all thought of the journey to Lymport was abandoned. If but to excogitate a motive for the origin of the document, Drummond was forced to remain; and now he had it, and now he lost it again; and as he was wandering about in his maze, the Countess met him with a ’Good morning, Mr., Forth. Have I impeded your expedition by taking my friend Mr. Harry to cavalier me to-day?’

Drummond smilingly assured her that she had not in any way disarranged his projects, and passed with so absorbed a brow that the Countess could afford to turn her head and inspect him, without fear that he would surprise her in the act. Knocking the pearly edge of her fan on her teeth, she eyed him under her joined black lashes, and deliberately read his thoughts in the mere shape of his back and shoulders. She read him through and through, and was unconscious of the effective attitude she stood in for the space of two full minutes, and even then it required one of our unhappy sex to recall her. This was Harry Jocelyn.

‘My friend,’ she said to him, with a melancholy smile, ’my one friend here!’

Harry went through the form of kissing her hand, which he had been taught, and practised cunningly as the first step of the ladder.

‘I say, you looked so handsome, standing as you did just now,’ he remarked; and she could see how far beneath her that effective attitude had precipitated the youth.

Page 1313

‘Ah!’ she sighed, walking on, with the step of majesty in exile.

‘What the deuce is the matter with everybody to-day?’ cried Harry. ’I ’m hanged if I can make it out. There’s the Carrington, as you call her, I met her with such a pair of eyes, and old George looking as if he’d been licked, at her heels; and there’s Drummond and his lady fair moping about the lawn, and my mother positively getting excited—there’s a miracle! and Juley ’s sharpening her nails for somebody, and if Ferdinand don’t look out, your brother ’ll be walking off with Rosey—that ’s my opinion.’

‘Indeed,’ said the Countess. ‘You really think so?’

‘Well, they come it pretty strong together.’

‘And what constitutes the “come it strong,” Mr. Harry?’

‘Hold of hands; you know,’ the young gentleman indicated.

‘Alas, then! must not we be more discreet?’

‘Oh! but it’s different. With young people one knows what that means.’

‘Deus!’ exclaimed the Countess, tossing her head weariedly, and Harry perceived his slip, and down he went again.

What wonder that a youth in such training should consent to fetch and carry, to listen and relate, to play the spy and know no more of his office than that it gave him astonishing thrills of satisfaction, and now and then a secret sweet reward?

The Countess had sealed Miss Carrington’s mouth by one of her most dexterous strokes. On leaving the dinner-table over-night, and seeing that Caroline’s attack would preclude their instant retreat, the gallant Countess turned at bay. A word aside to Mr. George Uplift, and then the Countess took a chair by Miss Carrington. She did all the conversation, and supplied all the smiles to it, and when a lady has to do that she is justified in striking, and striking hard, for to abandon the pretence of sweetness is a gross insult from one woman to another.

The Countess then led circuitously, but with all the ease in the world, to the story of a Portuguese lady, of a marvellous beauty, and who was deeply enamoured of the Chevalier Miguel de Rasadio, and engaged to be married to him: but, alas for her! in the insolence of her happiness she wantonly made an enemy in the person of a most unoffending lady, and she repented it. While sketching the admirable Chevalier, the Countess drew a telling portrait of Mr. George Uplift, and gratified her humour and her wrath at once by strong truth to nature in the description and animated encomiums on the individual. The Portuguese lady, too, a little resembled Miss Carrington, in spite of her marvellous beauty. And it was odd that Miss Carrington should give a sudden start

and a horrified glance at the Countess just when the Countess was pathetically relating the proceeding taken by the revengeful lady on the beautiful betrothed of the Chevalier Miguel de Rasadio: which proceeding was nothing other than to bring to the Chevalier's knowledge that his beauty had a defect concealed by her apparel, and that the specks in his fruit were not one, or two, but, Oh! And the dreadful sequel to the story the Countess could not tell: preferring ingeniously to throw a tragic veil over it. Miss Carrington went early to bed that night.

Page 1314

The courage that mounteth with occasion was eminently the attribute of the Countess de Saldar. After that dreadful dinner she (since the weaknesses of great generals should not be altogether ignored), did pray for flight and total obscurity, but Caroline could not be left in her hysteric state, and now that she really perceived that Evan was progressing and on the point of sealing his chance, the devoted lady resolved to hold her ground. Besides, there was the pic-nic. The Countess had one dress she had not yet appeared in, and it was for the picnic she kept it. That small motives are at the bottom of many illustrious actions is a modern discovery; but I shall not adopt the modern principle of magnifying the small motive till it overshadows my noble heroine. I remember that the small motive is only to be seen by being borne into the range of my vision by a powerful microscope; and if I do more than see—if I carry on my reflections by the aid of the glass, I arrive at conclusions that must be false. Men who dwarf human nature do this. The gods are juster. The Countess, though she wished to remain for the pic-nic, and felt warm in anticipation of the homage to her new dress, was still a gallant general and a devoted sister, and if she said to herself, 'Come what may, I will stay for that pic-nic, and they shall not brow-beat me out of it,' it is that trifling pleasures are noisiest about the heart of human nature: not that they govern us absolutely. There is mob-rule in minds as in communities, but the Countess had her appetites in excellent drill. This pic-nic surrendered, represented to her defeat in all its ignominy. The largest longest-headed of schemes ask occasionally for something substantial and immediate. So the Countess stipulated with Providence for the pic-nic. It was a point to be passed: 'Thorough flood, thorough fire.'

In vain poor Andrew Cogglesby, to whom the dinner had been torture, and who was beginning to see the position they stood in at Beckley, begged to be allowed to take them away, or to go alone. The Countess laughed him into submission. As a consequence of her audacious spirits she grew more charming and more natural, and the humour that she possessed, but which, like her other faculties, was usually subordinate to her plans, gave spontaneous bursts throughout the day, and delighted her courtiers. Nor did the men at all dislike the difference of her manner with them, and with the ladies. I may observe that a woman who shows a marked depression in the presence of her own sex will be thought very superior by ours; that is, supposing she is clever and agreeable. Manhood distinguishes what flatters it. A lady approaches. 'We must be proper,' says the Countess, and her hearty laugh dies with suddenness and is succeeded by the maturest gravity. And the Countess can look a profound merriment with perfect sedateness when there appears to be an equivoque in company. Finely secret are her glances, as if under every eye-lash there lurked the shade of a meaning. What she meant was not so clear. All this was going on, and Lady Jocelyn was simply amused, and sat as at a play.

Page 1315

‘She seems to have stepped out of a book of French memoirs,’ said her ladyship. ‘La vie galante et devote—voila la Comtesse.’

In contradistinction to the other ladies, she did not detest the Countess because she could not like her.

’Where ‘s the harm in her?’ she asked. ’She doesn’t damage the men, that I can see. And a person you can laugh at and with, is inexhaustible.’

‘And how long is she to stay here?’ Mrs. Shorne inquired. Mrs. Melville remarking: ‘Her visit appears to be inexhaustible.’

‘I suppose she’ll stay till the Election business is over,’ said Lady Jocelyn.

The Countess had just driven with Melville to Fallow field in Caroline’s black lace shawl.

‘Upwards of four weeks longer!’ Mrs. Melville interjected.

Lady Jocelyn chuckled.

Miss Carrington was present. She had been formerly sharp in her condemnation of the Countess—her affectedness, her euphuism, and her vulgarity. Now she did not say a word, though she might have done it with impunity.

‘I suppose, Emily, you see what Rose is about?’ said Mrs. Melville. ’I should not have thought it adviseable to have that young man here, myself. I think I let you know that.’

‘One young man’s as good as another,’ responded her ladyship. ’I ’ve my doubts of the one that’s much better. I fancy Rose is as good a judge by this time as you or I.’

Mrs. Melville made an effort or two to open Lady Jocelyn’s eyes, and then relapsed into the confident serenity inspired by evil prognostications.

‘But there really does seem some infatuation about these people!’ exclaimed Mrs. Shorne, turning to Miss Current. ’Can you understand it? The Duke, my dear! Things seem to be going on in the house, that really—and so openly.’

‘That’s one virtue,’ said Miss Current, with her imperturbable metallic voice, and face like a cold clear northern sky. ’Things done in secret throw on the outsiders the onus of raising a scandal.’

‘You don’t believe, then?’ suggested Mrs. Shorne.

Miss Current replied: ‘I always wait for a thing to happen first.’

‘But haven’t you seen, my dear?’

‘I never see anything, my dear.’

‘Then you must be blind, my dear.’

’On the contrary, that ‘s how I keep my sight, my dear.’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Mrs. Shorne.

‘It’s a part of the science of optics, and requires study,’ said Miss Current.

Neither with the worldly nor the unworldly woman could the ladies do anything. But they were soon to have their triumph.

Page 1316

A delicious morning had followed the lovely night. The stream flowed under Evan's eyes, like something in a lower sphere, now. His passion took him up, as if a genie had lifted him into mid-air, and showed him the world on a palm of a hand; and yet, as he dressed by the window, little chinks in the garden wall, and nectarines under their shiny leaves, and the white walks of the garden, were stamped on his hot brain accurately and lastingly. Ruth upon the lips of Rose: that voice of living constancy made music to him everywhere. 'Thy God shall be my God.' He had heard it all through the night. He had not yet broken the tender charm sufficiently to think that he must tell her the sacrifice she would have to make. When partly he did, the first excuse he clutched at was, that he had not even kissed her on the forehead. Surely he had been splendidly chivalrous? Just as surely he would have brought on himself the scorn of the chivalrous or of the commonly balanced if he had been otherwise. The grandeur of this or of any of his proceedings, then, was forfeited, as it must needs be when we are in the false position: we can have no glory though martyred. The youth felt it, even to the seeing of why it was; and he resolved, in justice to the dear girl, that he would break loose from his fetters, as we call our weakness. Behold, Rose met him descending the stairs, and, taking his hand, sang, unabashed, by the tell-tale colour coming over her face, a stave of a little Portuguese air that they had both been fond of in Portugal; and he, listening to it, and looking in her eyes, saw that his feelings in—the old time had been hers. Instantly the old time gave him its breath, the present drew back.

Rose, now that she had given her heart out, had no idea of concealment. She would have denied nothing to her aunts: she was ready to confide it to her mother. Was she not proud of the man she loved? When Evan's hand touched hers she retained it, and smiled up at him frankly, as it were to make him glad in her gladness. If before others his eyes brought the blood to her cheeks, she would perhaps drop her eye-lids an instant, and then glance quickly level again to reassure him. And who would have thought that this boisterous, boyish creature had such depths of eye! Cold, did they call her? Let others think her cold. The tender knowledge of her—the throbbing secret they held in common sang at his heart. Rose made no confidante, but she attempted no mystery. Evan should have risen to the height of the noble girl. But the dearer and sweeter her bearing became, the more conscious he was of the dead weight he was dragging: in truth her behaviour stamped his false position to hard print the more he admired her for it, and he had shrinkings from the feminine part it imposed on him to play.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE STREAM FLOWS MUDDY AND CLEAR

Page 1317

An Irish retriever-pup of the Shannon breed, Pat by name, was undergoing tuition on the sward close by the kennels, Rose's hunting-whip being passed through his collar to restrain erratic propensities. The particular point of instruction which now made poor Pat hang out his tongue, and agitate his crisp brown curls, was the performance of the 'down-charge'; a ceremony demanding implicit obedience from the animal in the midst of volatile gambadoes, and a simulation of profound repose when his desire to be up and bounding was mighty. Pat's Irish eyes were watching Rose, as he lay with his head couched between his forepaws in the required attitude. He had but half learnt his lesson; and something in his half-humorous, half-melancholy look talked to Rose more eloquently than her friend Ferdinand at her elbow. Laxley was her assistant dog-breaker. Rose would not abandon her friends because she had accepted a lover. On the contrary, Rose was very kind to Ferdinand, and perhaps felt bound to be so to-day. To-day, also, her face was lighted; a readiness to colour, and an expression of deeper knowledge, which she now had, made the girl dangerous to friends. This was not Rose's fault but there is no doubt among the faculty that love is a contagious disease, and we ought not to come within miles of the creatures in whom it lodges.

Pat's tail kept hinting to his mistress that a change would afford him satisfaction. After a time she withdrew her wistful gaze from him, and listened entirely to Ferdinand: and it struck her that he spoke particularly well to-day, though she did not see so much in his eyes as in Pat's. The subject concerned his departure, and he asked Rose if she should be sorry. Rose, to make him sure of it, threw a music into her voice dangerous to friends. For she had given heart and soul to Evan, and had a sense, therefore, of being irredeemably in debt to her old associates, and wished to be doubly kind to them.

Pat took advantage of the diversion to stand up quietly and have a shake. He then began to kiss his mistress's hand, to show that all was right on both sides; and followed this with a playful pretence at a bite, that there might be no subsequent misunderstanding, and then a bark and a whine. As no attention was paid to this amount of plain-speaking, Pat made a bolt. He got no farther than the length of the whip, and all he gained was to bring on himself the terrible word of drill once more. But Pat had tasted liberty. Irish rebellion against constituted authority was exhibited. Pat would not: his ears tossed over his head, and he jumped to right and left, and looked the raggedest rapparee that ever his ancestry trotted after. Rose laughed at his fruitless efforts to get free; but Ferdinand meditatively appeared to catch a sentiment in them.

'Down-charge, Sir, will you? Ah, Pat! Pat! You'll have to obey me, my boy. Now, down-charge!'

While Rose addressed the language of reason to Pat, Ferdinand slipped in a soft word or two. Presently she saw him on one knee.

Page 1318

‘Pat won’t, and I will,’ said he.

‘But Pat shall, and you had better not,’ said she. ’Besides, my dear Ferdinand,’ she added, laughing, ‘you don’t know how to do it.’

‘Do you want me to prostrate on all fours, Rose?’

‘No. I hope not. Do get up, Ferdinand. You’ll be seen from the windows.’

Instead of quitting his posture, he caught her hand, and scared her with a declaration.

‘Of all men, you to be on your knees! and to me, Ferdinand!’ she cried, in discomfort.

‘Why shouldn’t I, Rose?’ was this youth’s answer.

He had got the idea that foreign cavalier manners would take with her; but it was not so easy to make his speech correspond with his posture, and he lost his opportunity, which was pretty. However, he spoke plain English. The interview ended by Rose releasing Pat from drill, and running off in a hurry. Where was Evan? She must have his consent to speak to her mother, and prevent a recurrence of these silly scenes.

Evan was with Caroline, his sister.

It was contrary to the double injunction of the Countess that Caroline should receive Evan during her absence, or that he should disturb the dear invalid with a visit. These two were not unlike both in organization and character, and they had not sat together long before they found each other out. Now, to further Evan’s love-suit, the Countess had induced Caroline to continue yet awhile in the Purgatory Beckley Court had become to her; but Evan, in speaking of Rose, expressed a determination to leave her, and Caroline caught at it.

’Can you?—will you? Oh, dear Van! have you the courage? I—look at me—you know the home I go to, and—and I think of it here as a place to be happy in. What have our marriages done for us? Better that we had married simple stupid men who earn their bread, and would not have been ashamed of us! And, my dearest, it is not only that. None can tell what our temptations are. Louisa has strength, but I feel I have none; and though, dear, for your true interest, I would indeed sacrifice myself—I would, Van! I would!—it is not good for you to stay,—I know it is not. For you have Papa’s sense of honour—and oh! if you should learn to despise me, my dear brother!’

She kissed him; her nerves were agitated by strong mental excitement. He attributed it to her recent attack of illness, but could not help asking, while he caressed her:

‘What’s that? Despise you?’

It may have been that Caroline felt then, that to speak of something was to forfeit something. A light glimmered across the dewy blue of her beautiful eyes. Desire to breathe it to him, and have his loving aid: the fear of forfeiting it, evil as it was to her, and at the bottom of all, that doubt we choose to encourage of the harm in a pleasant sin unaccomplished; these might be read in the rich dim gleam that swept like sunlight over sea-water between breaks of clouds.

Page 1319

‘Dear Van! do you love her so much?’

Caroline knew too well that she was shutting her own theme with iron clasps when she once touched on Evan’s.

Love her? Love Rose? It became an endless carol with Evan. Caroline sighed for him from her heart.

‘You know—you understand me; don’t you?’ he said, after a breathless excursion of his fancy.

’I believe you love her, dear. I think I have never loved any one but my one brother.’

His love for Rose he could pour out to Caroline; when it came to Rose’s love for him his blood thickened, and his tongue felt guilty. He must speak to her, he said,—tell her all.

‘Yes, tell her all,’ echoed Caroline. ’Do, do tell her. Trust a woman utterly if she loves you, dear. Go to her instantly.’

‘Could you bear it?’ said Evan. He began to think it was for the sake of his sisters that he had hesitated.

’Bear it? bear anything rather than perpetual imposture. What have I not borne? Tell her, and then, if she is cold to you, let us go. Let us go. I shall be glad to. Ah, Van! I love you so.’ Caroline’s voice deepened. ’I love you so, my dear. You won’t let your new love drive me out? Shall you always love me?’

Of that she might be sure, whatever happened.

‘Should you love me, Van, if evil befel me?’

Thrice as well, he swore to her.

’But if I—if I, Van Oh! my life is intolerable! Supposing I should ever disgrace you in any way, and not turn out all you fancied me. I am very weak and unhappy.’

Evan kissed her confidently, with a warm smile. He said a few words of the great faith he had in her: words that were bitter comfort to Caroline. This brother, who might save her, to him she dared not speak. Did she wish to be saved? She only knew that to wound Evan’s sense of honour and the high and chivalrous veneration for her sex and pride in himself and those of his blood, would be wicked and unpardonable, and that no earthly pleasure could drown it. Thinking this, with her hands joined in pale dejection, Caroline sat silent, and Evan left her to lay bare his heart to Rose. On his way to find Rose he was stopped by the announcement of the arrival of Mr. Raikes, who thrust a bundle of notes into his hand, and after speaking loudly of ‘his curricle,’ retired on

important business, as he said, with a mysterious air. 'I 'm beaten in many things, but not in the article Luck,' he remarked; 'you will hear of me, though hardly as a tutor in this academy.'

Scanning the bundle of notes, without a reflection beyond the thought that money was in his hand; and wondering at the apparition of the curricle, Evan was joined by Harry Jocelyn, and Harry linked his arm in Evan's and plunged with extraordinary spontaneity and candour into the state of his money affairs. What the deuce he was to do for money he did not know. From the impressive manner in which he put it, it appeared

Page 1320

to be one of Nature's great problems that the whole human race were bound to set their heads together to solve. A hundred pounds—Harry wanted no more, and he could not get it. His uncles? they were as poor as rats; and all the spare money they could club was going for Mel's Election expenses. A hundred and fifty was what Harry really wanted; but he could do with a hundred. Ferdinand, who had plenty, would not even lend him fifty. Ferdinand had dared to hint at a debt already unsettled, and he called himself a gentleman!

'You wouldn't speak of money-matters now, would you, Harrington?'

'I dislike the subject, I confess,' said Evan.

'And so do I' Harry jumped at the perfect similarity between them. 'You can't think how it bothers one to have to talk about it. You and I are tremendously alike.'

Evan might naturally suppose that a subject Harry detested, he would not continue, but for a whole hour Harry turned it over and over with grim glances at Jewry.

'You see,' he wound up, 'I'm in a fix. I want to help that poor girl, and one or two things —'

'It 's for that you want it?' cried Evan, brightening to him. 'Accept it from me.'

It is a thing familiar to the experience of money-borrowers, that your 'last chance' is the man who is to accommodate you; but we are always astonished, nevertheless; and Harry was, when notes to the amount of the largest sum named by him were placed in his hand by one whom he looked upon as the last to lend.

'What a trump you are, Harrington!' was all he could say; and then he was for hurrying Evan into the house, to find pen and paper, and write down a memorandum of the loan: but Evan insisted upon sparing him the trouble, though Harry, with the admirable scruples of an inveterate borrower, begged hard to be allowed to bind himself legally to repay the money.

''Pon my soul, Harrington, you make me remember I once doubted whether you were one of us—rather your own fault, you know!' said Harry. 'Bury that, won't you?'

''Till your doubts recur,' Evan observed; and Harry burst out, 'Gad, if you weren't such a melancholy beggar, you'd be the jolliest fellow I know! There, go after Rosey. Dashed if I don't think you're ahead of Ferdinand, long chalks. Your style does for girls. I like women.'

With a chuckle and a wink, Harry swung-off. Evan had now to reflect that he had just thrown away part of the price of his bondage to Tailordom; the mention of Rose filled his mind. Where was she? Both were seeking one another. Rose was in the cypress

walk. He saw the star-like figure up the length of it, between the swelling tall dark pillars, and was hurrying to her, resolute not to let one minute of deception blacken further the soul that loved so true a soul. She saw him, and stood smiling, when the Countess issued, shadow-like, from a side path, and declared that she must claim her brother for a few instants. Would her sweet Rose pardon her? Rose bowed coolly. The hearts of the lovers were chilled, not that they perceived any malice in the Countess, but their keen instincts felt an evil fate.

Page 1321

The Countess had but to tell Evan that she had met the insolvent in apples, and recognized him under his change of fortune, and had no doubt that at least he would amuse the company. Then she asked her brother the superfluous question, whether he loved her, which Evan answered satisfactorily enough, as he thought; but practical ladies require proofs.

‘Quick,’ said Evan, seeing Rose vanish, ’what do you want? I’ll do anything.’

‘Anything? Ah, but this will be disagreeable to you.’

‘Name it at once. I promise beforehand.’

The Countess wanted Evan to ask Andrew to be the very best brother-in-law in the world, and win, unknown to himself, her cheerful thanks, by lending Evan to lend to her the sum of one hundred pounds, as she was in absolute distress for money.

‘Really, Louisa, this is a thing you might ask him yourself,’ Evan remonstrated.

‘It would not become me to do so, dear,’ said the Countess, demurely; and inasmuch as she had already drawn on Andrew in her own person pretty largely, her views of propriety were correct in this instance.

Evan had to consent before he could be released. He ran to the end of the walk through the portal, into the park. Rose was not to be seen. She had gone in to dress for dinner. The opportunity might recur, but would his courage come with it? His courage had sunk on a sudden; or it may have been that it was worst for this young man to ask for a loan of money, than to tell his beloved that he was basely born, vile, and unworthy, and had snared her into loving him; for when he and Andrew were together, money was not alluded to. Andrew, however, betrayed remarkable discomposure. He said plainly that he wanted to leave Beckley Court, and wondered why he didn’t leave, and whether he was on his head or his feet, and how he had been such a fool as to come.

‘Do you mean that for me?’ said sensitive Evan.

‘Oh, you! You’re a young buck,’ returned Andrew, evasively. ’We common-place business men-we ’re out of our element; and there’s poor Carry can’t sit down to their dinners without an upset. I thank God I’m a Radical, Van; one man’s the same as another to me, how he’s born, as long as he’s honest and agreeable. But a chap like that George Uplift to look down on anybody! ’Gad, I’ve a good mind to bring in a Bill for the Abolition of the Squirearchy.’

Ultimately, Andrew somehow contrived to stick a hint or two about the terrible dinner in Evan’s quivering flesh. He did it as delicately as possible, half begging pardon, and

perspiring profusely. Evan grasped his hand, and thanked him. Caroline's illness was now explained to him.

'I'll take Caroline with me to-morrow,' he said. 'Louisa wishes to stay—there 's a pic-nic. Will you look to her, and bring her with you?'

Page 1322

‘My dear Van,’ replied Andrew, ’stop with Louisa? Now, in confidence, it’s as bad as a couple of wives; no disrespect to my excellent good Harry at home; but Louisa—I don’t know how it is—but Louisa, you lose your head, you’re in a whirl, you’re an automaton, a teetotum! I haven’t a notion of what I’ve been doing or saying since I came here. My belief is, I ’ve been lying right and left. I shall be found out to a certainty: Oh! if she’s made her mind up for the pic-nic, somebody must stop. I can only tell you, Van, it’s one perpetual vapour-bath to me. There ’ll be room for two in my trousers when I get back. I shall have to get the tailor to take them in a full half.’

Here occurred an opening for one of those acrid pleasantries which console us when there is horrid warfare within.

‘You must give me the work,’ said Evan, partly pleased with his hated self for being able to jest on the subject, as a piece of preliminary self-conquest.

‘Aha!’ went Andrew, as if the joke were too good to be dwelt on; ‘Hem’; and by way of diverting from it cleverly and naturally, he remarked that the weather was fine. This made Evan allude to his letter written from Lymport, upon which Andrew said: ’tush! pish! humbug! nonsense! won’t hear a word. Don’t know anything about it. Van, you’re going to be a brewer. I say you are. You’re afraid you can’t? I tell you, sir, I’ve got a bet on it. You’re not going to make me lose, are you—eh? I have, and a stiff bet, too. You must and shall, so there’s an end. Only we can’t make arrangements just yet, my boy. Old Tom—very good old fellow—but, you know—must get old Tom out of the way, first. Now go and dress for dinner. And Lord preserve us from the Great Mel to-day!’ Andrew mumbled as he turned away.

Evan could not reach his chamber without being waylaid by the Countess. Had he remembered the sister who sacrificed so much for him? ’There, there!’ cried Evan, and her hand closed on the delicious golden whispers of bank-notes. And, ‘Oh, generous Andrew! dear good Evan!’ were the exclamations of the gratified lady.

There remained nearly another hundred. Evan laid out the notes, and eyed them while dressing. They seemed to say to him, ‘We have you now.’ He was clutched by a beneficent or a most malignant magician. The former seemed due to him, considering the cloud on his fortunes. This enigma might mean, that by submitting to a temporary humiliation, for a trial of him—in fact, by his acknowledgement of the fact, loathed though it was,—he won a secret overlooker’s esteem, gained a powerful ally. Here was the proof, he held the proof. He had read Arabian Tales and could believe in marvels; especially could he believe in the friendliness of a magical thing that astounded without hurting him.

Page 1323

He, sat down in his room at night and wrote a fairly manful letter to Rose; and it is to be said of the wretch he then saw himself, that he pardoned her for turning from so vile a pretender. He heard a step in the passage. It was Polly Wheedle. Polly had put her young mistress to bed, and was retiring to her own slumbers. He made her take the letter and promise to deliver it immediately. Would not to-morrow morning do, she asked, as Miss Rose was very sleepy. He seemed to hesitate—he was picturing how Rose looked when very sleepy. Why should he surrender this darling? And subtler question—why should he make her unhappy? Why disturb her at all in her sweet sleep?

'Well,' said Evan. 'To-morrow will do.—No, take it to-night, for God's sake!' he cried, as one who bursts the spell of an opiate. 'Go at once.' The temptation had almost overcome him.

Polly thought his proceedings queer. And what could the letter contain? A declaration, of course. She walked slowly along the passage, meditating on love, and remotely on its slave, Mr. Nicholas Frim. Nicholas had never written her a letter; but she was determined that he should, some day. She wondered what love-letters were like? Like valentines without the Cupids. Practical valentines, one might say. Not vapoury and wild, but hot and to the point. Delightful things! No harm in peeping at a love-letter, if you do it with the eye of a friend.

Polly spelt just a word when a door opened at her elbow. She dropped her candle and curtsied to the Countess's voice. The Countess desired her to enter, and all in a tremble Polly crept in. Her air of guilt made the Countess thrill. She had merely called her in to extract daily gossip. The corner of the letter sticking up under Polly's neck attracted her strangely, and beginning with the familiar, 'Well, child,' she talked of things interesting to Polly, and then exhibited the pic-nic dress. It was a lovely half-mourning; airy sorrows, gauzy griefs, you might imagine to constitute the wearer. White delicately striped, exquisitely trimmed, and of a stuff to make the feminine mouth water!

Could Polly refuse to try it on, when the flattering proposal met her ears? Blushing, shame-faced, adoring the lady who made her look adorable, Polly tried it on, and the Countess complimented her, and made a doll of her, and turned her this way and that way, and intoxicated her.

'A rich husband, Polly, child! and you are a lady ready made.'

Infamous poison to poor Polly; but as the thunder destroys small insects, exalted schemers are to be excused for riding down their few thousands. Moreover, the Countess really looked upon domestics as being only half-souls.

Dressed in her own attire again, Polly felt in her pockets, and at her bosom, and sang out: 'Oh, my—Oh, where! Oh!'

The letter was lost. The letter could not be found. The Countess grew extremely fatigued, and had to dismiss Polly, in spite of her eager petitions to be allowed to search under the carpets and inside the bed.

Page 1324

In the morning came Evan's great trial. There stood Rose. She turned to him, and her eyes were happy and unclouded.

'You are not changed?' he said.

'Changed? what could change me?'

The God of true hearts bless her! He could hardly believe it.

'You are the Rose I knew yesterday?'

'Yes, Evan. But you—you look as if you had not slept.'

'You will not leave me this morning, before I go, Rose? Oh, my darling! this that you do for me is the work of an angel-nothing less! I have been a coward. And my beloved! to feel vile is agony to me—it makes me feel unworthy of the hand I press. Now all is clear between us. I go: I am forgiven.'

Rose repeated his last words, and then added hurriedly:

'All is clear between us? Shall I speak to Mama this morning? Dear Evan! it will be right that I should.'

For the moment he could not understand why, but supposing a scrupulous honesty in her, said: 'Yes, tell Lady Jocelyn all.'

'And then, Evan, you will never need to go.'

They separated. The deep-toned sentence sang in Evan's heart. Rose and her mother were of one stamp. And Rose might speak for her mother. To take the hands of such a pair and be lifted out of the slough, he thought no shame: and all through the hours of the morning the image of two angels stooping to touch a leper, pressed on his brain like a reality, and went divinely through his blood.

Toward mid-day Rose beckoned to him, and led him out across the lawn into the park, and along the borders of the stream.

'Evan,' she said, 'shall I really speak to Mama?'

'You have not yet?' he answered.

'No. I have been with Juliana and with Drummond. Look at this, Evan.' She showed a small black speck in the palm of her hand, which turned out, on your viewing it closely, to be a brand of the letter L. 'Mama did that when I was a little girl, because I told lies. I never could distinguish between truth and falsehood; and Mama set that mark on me,

and I have never told a lie since. She forgives anything but that. She will be our friend; she will never forsake us, Evan, if we do not deceive her. Oh, Evan! it never is of any use. But deceive her, and she cannot forgive you. It is not in her nature.'

Evan paused before he replied: 'You have only to tell her what I have told you. You know everything.'

Rose gave him a flying look of pain: 'Everything, Evan? What do I know?'

'Ah, Rose! do you compel me to repeat it?'

Bewildered, Rose thought: 'Have I slept and forgotten it?'

He saw the persistent grieved interrogation of her eyebrows.

'Well!' she sighed resignedly: 'I am yours; you know that, Evan.'

But he was a lover, and quarrelled with her sigh.

'It may well make you sad now, Rose.'

'Sad? no, that does not make me sad. No; but my hands are tied. I cannot defend you or justify myself; and induce Mama to stand by us. Oh, Evan! you love me! why can you not open your heart to me entirely, and trust me?'

Page 1325

‘More?’ cried Evan: ‘Can I trust you more?’ He spoke of the letter: Rose caught his hand.

’I never had it, Evan. You wrote it last night? and all was written in it? I never saw it—-but I know all.’

Their eyes fronted. The gates of Rose’s were wide open, and he saw no hurtful beasts or lurking snakes in the happy garden within, but Love, like a fixed star.

‘Then you know why I must leave, Rose.’

’Leave? Leave me? On the contrary, you must stay by me, and support me. Why, Evan, we have to fight a battle.’

Much as he worshipped her, this intrepid directness of soul startled him-almost humbled him. And her eyes shone with a firm cheerful light, as she exclaimed: ’It makes me so happy to think you were the first to mention this. You meant to be, and that’s the same thing. I heard it this morning: you wrote it last night. It’s you I love, Evan. Your birth, and what you were obliged to do—that’s nothing. Of course I’m sorry for it, dear. But I’m more sorry for the pain I must have sometimes put you to. It happened through my mother’s father being a merchant; and that side of the family the men and women are quite sordid and unendurable; and that’s how it came that I spoke of disliking tradesmen. I little thought I should ever love one sprung from that class.’

She turned to him tenderly.

‘And in spite of what my birth is, you love me, Rose?’

‘There’s no spite in it, Evan. I do.’

Hard for him, while his heart was melting to caress her, the thought that he had snared this bird of heaven in a net! Rose gave him no time for reflection, or the moony imagining of their raptures lovers love to dwell upon.

‘You gave the letter to Polly, of course?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, naughty Polly! I must punish you,’ Rose apostrophized her. ’You might have divided us for ever. Well, we shall have to fight a battle, you understand that. Will you stand by me?’

Would he not risk his soul for her?

’Very well, Evan. Then—but don’t be sensitive. Oh, how sensitive you are! I see it all now. This is what we shall have to do. We shall have to speak to Mama to-day—this morning. Drummond has told me he is going to speak to her, and we must be first. That ’s decided. I begged a couple of hours. You must not be offended with Drummond. He does it out of pure affection for us, and I can see he’s right—or, at least, not quite wrong. He ought, I think, to know that he cannot change me. Very well, we shall win Mama by what we do. My mother has ten times my wits, and yet I manage her like a feather. I have only to be honest and straightforward. Then Mama will gain over Papa. Papa, of course, won’t like it. He’s quiet and easy, but he likes blood, but he also likes peace better; and I think he loves Rosey—as well as somebody—almost? Look, dear, there is our seat where we—where you would rob me of my handkerchief. I can’t talk any more.’

Page 1326

Rose had suddenly fallen from her prattle, soft and short-breathed.

‘Then, dear,’ she went on, ’we shall have to fight the family. Aunt Shorne will be terrible. My poor uncles! I pity them. But they will come round. They always have thought what I did was right, and why should they change their minds now? I shall tell them that at their time of life a change of any kind is very unwise and bad for them. Then there is Grandmama Bonner. She can hurt us really, if she pleases. Oh, my dear Evan! if you had only been a curate! Why isn’t your name Parsley? Then my Grandmama the Countess of Elburne. Well, we have a Countess on our side, haven’t we? And that reminds me, Evan, if we’re to be happy and succeed, you must promise one thing: you will not tell the Countess, your sister. Don’t confide this to her. Will you promise?’

Evan assured her he was not in the habit of pouring secrets into any bosom, the Countess’s as little as another’s.

’Very well, then, Evan, it’s unpleasant while it lasts, but we shall gain the day. Uncle Melville will give you an appointment, and then?’

‘Yes, Rose,’ he said, ’I will do this, though I don’t think you can know what I shall have to endure-not in confessing what I am, but in feeling that I have brought you to my level.’

‘Does it not raise me?’ she cried.

He shook his head.

’But in reality, Evan—apart from mere appearances—in reality it does! it does!’

’Men will not think so, Rose, nor can I. Oh, my Rose! how different you make me. Up to this hour I have been so weak! torn two ways! You give me double strength.’

Then these lovers talked of distant days—compared their feelings on this and that occasion with mutual wonder and delight. Then the old hours lived anew. And—did you really think that, Evan? And—Oh, Rose! was that your dream? And the meaning of that by-gone look: was it what they fancied? And such and such a tone of voice; would it bear the wished interpretation? Thus does Love avenge himself on the unsatisfactory Past and call out its essence.

Could Evan do less than adore her? She knew all, and she loved him! Since he was too shy to allude more than once to his letter, it was natural that he should not ask her how she came to know, and how much the ‘all’ that she knew comprised. In his letter he had told all; the condition of his parents, and his own. Honestly, now, what with his dazzled state of mind, his deep inward happiness, and love’s endless delusions, he abstained from touching the subject further. Honestly, therefore, as far as a lover can be honest.

So they toyed, and then Rose, setting her fingers loose, whispered: 'Are you ready?' And Evan nodded; and Rose, to make him think light of the matter in hand, laughed: 'Pluck not quite up yet?'

'Quite, my Rose!' said Evan, and they walked to the house, not quite knowing what they were going to do.

Page 1327

On the steps they met Drummond with Mrs. Evremonde. Little imagining how heart and heart the two had grown, and that Evan would understand him, Drummond called to Rose playfully: 'Time's up.'

'Is it?' Rose answered, and to Mrs. Evremonde

'Give Drummond a walk. Poor Drummond is going silly.'

Evan looked into his eyes calmly as he passed.

'Where are you going, Rose?' said Mrs. Evremonde.

'Going to give my maid Polly a whipping for losing a letter she ought to have delivered to me last night,' said Rose, in a loud voice, looking at Drummond. 'And then going to Mama. Pleasure first—duty after. Isn't that the proverb, Drummond?'

She kissed her fingers rather scornfully to her old friend.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. MEL MAKES A BED FOR HERSELF AND FAMILY

The last person thought of by her children at this period was Mrs. Mel: nor had she been thinking much of them till a letter from Mr. Goren arrived one day, which caused her to pass them seriously in review. Always an early bird, and with maxims of her own on the subject of rising and getting the worm, she was standing in a small perch in the corner of the shop, dictating accounts to Mrs. Fiske, who was copying hurriedly, that she might earn sweet intervals for gossip, when Dandy limped up and delivered the letter. Mrs. Fiske worked hard while her aunt was occupied in reading it, for a great deal of fresh talk follows the advent of the post, and may be reckoned on. Without looking up, however, she could tell presently that the letter had been read through. Such being the case, and no conversation coming of it, her curiosity was violent. Her aunt's face, too, was an index of something extraordinary. That inflexible woman, instead of alluding to the letter in any way, folded it up, and renewed her dictation. It became a contest between them which should show her human nature first. Mrs. Mel had to repress what she knew; Mrs. Fiske to control the passion for intelligence. The close neighbourhood of one anxious to receive, and one capable of giving, waxed too much for both.

'I think, Anne, you are stupid this morning,' said Mrs. Mel.

'Well, I am, aunt,' said Mrs. Fiske, pretending not to see which was the first to unbend, 'I don't know what it is. The figures seem all dazzled like. I shall really be glad when Evan comes to take his proper place.'

‘Ah!’ went Mrs. Mel, and Mrs. Fiske heard her muttering. Then she cried out: ‘Are Harriet and Caroline as great liars as Louisa?’

Mrs. Fiske grimaced. ‘That would be difficult, would it not, aunt?’

’And I have been telling everybody that my son is in town learning his business, when he’s idling at a country house, and trying to play his father over again! Upon my word, what with liars and fools, if you go to sleep a minute you have a month’s work on your back.’

Page 1328

‘What is it, aunt?’ Mrs. Fiske feebly inquired.

’A gentleman, I suppose! He wouldn’t take an order if it was offered. Upon my word, when tailors think of winning heiresses it’s time we went back to Adam and Eve.’

‘Do you mean Evan, aunt?’ interposed Mrs. Fiske, who probably did not see the turns in her aunt’s mind.

‘There—read for yourself,’ said Mrs. Mel, and left her with the letter.

Mrs. Fiske read that Mr. Goren had been astonished at Evan’s non-appearance, and at his total silence; which he did not consider altogether gentlemanly behaviour, and certainly not such as his father would have practised. Mr. Goren regretted his absence the more as he would have found him useful in a remarkable invention he was about to patent, being a peculiar red cross upon shirts—a fortune to the patentee; but as Mr. Goren had no natural heirs of his body, he did not care for that. What affected him painfully was the news of Evan’s doings at a noble house, Beckley Court, to wit, where, according to the report of a rich young gentleman friend, Mr. Raikes (for whose custom Mr. Goren was bound to thank Evan), the youth who should have been learning the science of Tailoring, had actually passed himself off as a lord, or the son of one, or something of the kind, and had got engaged to a wealthy heiress, and would, no doubt, marry her if not found out. Where the chances of detection were so numerous, Mr. Goren saw much to condemn in the idea of such a marriage. But ‘like father like son,’ said Mr. Goren. He thanked the Lord that an honest tradesman was not looked down upon in this country; and, in fact, gave Mrs. Mel a few quiet digs to waken her remorse in having missed the man that he was.

When Mrs. Fiske met her aunt again she returned her the letter, and simply remarked: ‘Louisa.’

Mrs. Mel nodded. She understood the implication.

The General who had schemed so successfully to gain Evan time at Beckley Court in his own despite and against a hundred obstructions, had now another enemy in the field, and one who, if she could not undo her work, could punish her. By the afternoon coach, Mrs. Mel, accompanied by Dandy her squire, was journeying to Fallow field, bent upon things. The faithful squire was kept by her side rather as a security for others than for, his particular services. Dandy’s arms were crossed, and his countenance was gloomy. He had been promised a holiday that afternoon to give his mistress, Sally, Kilne’s cook, an airing, and Dandy knew in his soul that Sally, when she once made up her mind to an excursion, would go, and would not go alone, and that her very force of will endangered her constancy. He had begged humbly to be allowed to stay, but Mrs. Mel could not trust him. She ought to have told him so, perhaps. Explanations were not approved of by this well-intended despot, and however beneficial her resolves might

turn out for all parties, it was natural that in the interim the children of her rule should revolt, and Dandy, picturing his Sally flaunting on the arm of some accursed low marine, haply, kicked against Mrs. Mel's sovereignty, though all that he did was to shoot out his fist from time to time, and grunt through his set teeth: 'Iron!' to express the character of her awful rule.

Page 1329

Mrs. Mel alighted at the Dolphin, the landlady of which was a Mrs. Hawkshaw, a rival of Mrs. Sockley of the Green Dragon. She was welcomed by Mrs. Hawkshaw with considerable respect. The great Mel had sometimes slept at the Dolphin.

‘Ah, that black!’ she sighed, indicating Mrs. Mel’s dress and the story it told.

’I can’t give you his room, my dear Mrs. Harrington, wishing I could! I’m sorry to say it’s occupied, for all I ought to be glad, I dare say, for he’s an old gentleman who does you a good turn, if you study him. But there! I’d rather have had poor dear Mr. Harrington in my best bed than old or young—Princes or nobodies, I would—he was that grand and pleasant.’

Mrs. Mel had her tea in Mrs. Hawkshaw’s parlour, and was entertained about her husband up to the hour of supper, when a short step and a querulous voice were heard in the passage, and an old gentleman appeared before them.

‘Who’s to carry up my trunk, ma’am? No man here?’

Mrs. Hawkshaw bustled out and tried to lay her hand on a man. Failing to find the growth spontaneous, she returned and begged the old gentleman to wait a few moments and the trunk would be sent up.

‘Parcel o’ women!’ was his reply. ’Regularly bedevilled. Gets worse and worse. I ‘ll carry it up myself.’

With a wheezy effort he persuaded the trunk to stand on one end, and then looked at it. The exertion made him hot, which may account for the rage he burst into when Mrs. Hawkshaw began flutteringly to apologize.

’You’re sure, ma’am, sure—what are you sure of? I’ll tell you what I am sure of—eh? This keeping clear of men’s a damned pretence. You don’t impose upon me. Don’t believe in your pothouse nunneries—not a bit. Just like you! when you are virtuous it’s deuced inconvenient. Let one of the maids try? No. Don’t believe in ’em.’

Having thus relieved his spleen the old gentleman addressed himself to further efforts and waxed hotter. He managed to tilt the trunk over, and thus gained a length, and by this method of progression arrived at the foot of the stairs, where he halted, and wiped his face, blowing lustily.

Mrs. Mel had been watching him with calm scorn all the while. She saw him attempt most ridiculously to impel the trunk upwards by a similar process, and thought it time to interfere.

’Don’t you see you must either take it on your shoulders, or have a help?’

The old gentleman sprang up from his peculiarly tight posture to blaze round at her. He had the words well-peppered on his mouth, but somehow he stopped, and was subsequently content to growl: 'Where 's the help in a parcel of petticoats?'

Mrs. Mel did not consider it necessary to give him an answer. She went up two or three steps, and took hold of one handle of the trunk, saying: 'There; I think it can be managed this way,' and she pointed for him to seize the other end with his hand.

Page 1330

He was now in that unpleasant state of prickly heat when testy old gentlemen could commit slaughter with ecstasy. Had it been the maid holding a candle who had dared to advise, he would have overturned her undoubtedly, and established a fresh instance of the impertinence, the uselessness and weakness of women. Mrs. Mel topped him by half a head, and in addition stood three steps above him; towering like a giantess. The extreme gravity of her large face dispersed all idea of an assault. The old gentleman showed signs of being horribly injured: nevertheless, he put his hand to the trunk; it was lifted, and the procession ascended the stairs in silence.

The landlady waited for Mrs. Mel to return, and then said:

'Really, Mrs. Harrington, you are clever. That lifting that trunk's as good as a lock and bolt on him. You've as good as made him a Dolphin—him that was one o' the oldest Green Dragons in Fallifield. My thanks to you most sincere.'

Mrs. Mel sent out to hear where Dandy had got to after which, she said: 'Who is the man?'

'I told you, Mrs. Harrington—the oldest Green Dragon. His name, you mean? Do you know, if I was to breathe it out, I believe he'd jump out of the window. He 'd be off, that you might swear to. Oh, such a whimsical! not ill-meaning—quite the contrary. Study his whims, and you'll never want. There's Mrs. Sockley—she 's took ill. He won't go there—that 's how I've caught him, my dear—but he pays her medicine, and she looks to him the same. He hate a sick house: but he pity a sick woman. Now, if I can only please him, I can always look on him as half a Dolphin, to say the least; and perhaps to-morrow I'll tell you who he is, and what, but not to-night; for there's his supper to get over, and that, they say, can be as bad as the busting of one of his own vats. Awful!'

'What does he eat?' said Mrs. Mel.

'A pair o' chops. That seem simple, now, don't it? And yet they chops make my heart go pitty-pat.'

'The commonest things are the worst done,' said Mrs. Mel.

'It ain't that; but they must be done his particular way, do you see, Mrs. Harrington. Laid close on the fire, he say, so as to keep in the juice. But he ups and bounces in a minute at a speck o' black. So, one thing or the other, there you are: no blacks, no juices, I say.'

'Toast the chops,' said Mrs. Mel.

The landlady of the Dolphin accepted this new idea with much enlightenment, but ruefully declared that she was afraid to go against his precise instructions. Mrs. Mel then folded her hands, and sat in quiet reserve. She was one of those numerous

women who always know themselves to be right. She was also one of those very few whom Providence favours by confounding dissentients. She was positive the chops would be ill-cooked: but what could she do? She was not in command here; so she waited serenely for the certain disasters

Page 1331

to enthrone her. Not that the matter of the chops occupied her mind particularly: nor could she dream that the pair in question were destined to form a part of her history, and divert the channel of her fortunes. Her thoughts were about her own immediate work; and when the landlady rushed in with the chops under a cover, and said: 'Look at 'em, dear Mrs. Harrington!' she had forgotten that she was again to be proved right by the turn of events.

'Oh, the chops!' she responded. 'Send them while they are hot.'

'Send 'em! Why you don't think I'd have risked their cooling? I have sent 'em; and what do he do but send 'em travelling back, and here they be; and what objections his is I might study till I was blind, and I shouldn't see 'em.'

'No; I suppose not,' said Mrs. Mel. 'He won't eat 'em?'

'Won't eat anything: but his bed-room candle immediately. And whether his sheets are aired. And Mary says he sniffed at the chops; and that gal really did expect he 'd fling them at her. I told you what he was. Oh, dear!'

The bell was heard ringing in the midst of the landlady's lamentations.

'Go to him yourself,' said Mrs. Mel. 'No Christian man should go to sleep without his supper.'

'Ah! but he ain't a common Christian,' returned Mrs. Hawkshaw.

The old gentleman was in a hurry to know when his bed-room candle was coming up, or whether they intended to give him one at all that night; if not, let them say so, as he liked plain-speaking. The moment Mrs. Hawkshaw touched upon the chops, he stopped her mouth.

'Go about your business, ma'am. You can't cook 'em. I never expected you could: I was a fool to try you. It requires at least ten years' instruction before a man can get a woman to cook his chop as he likes it.'

'But what was your complaint, sir?' said Mrs. Hawkshaw, imploringly.

'That's right!' and he rubbed his hands, and brightened his eyes savagely. 'That's the way. Opportunity for gossip! Thing's well done—down it goes: you know that. You can't have a word over it—eh? Thing's done fit to toss on a dungheap, aha! Then there's a cackle! My belief is, you do it on purpose. Can't be such rank idiots. You do it on purpose. All done for gossip!'

'Oh, sir, no!' The landlady half curtsied.

‘Oh, ma’am, yes!’ The old gentleman bobbed his head.

‘No, indeed, sir!’ The landlady shook hers.

‘Damn it, ma’am, I swear you do.’

Symptoms of wrath here accompanied the declaration; and, with a sigh and a very bitter feeling, Mrs. Hawkshaw allowed him to have the last word. Apparently this—which I must beg to call the lady’s morsel—comforted his irascible system somewhat; for he remained in a state of composure eight minutes by the clock. And mark how little things hang together. Another word from the landlady, precipitating a retort from him, and a gesture or muttering from

Page 1332

her; and from him a snapping outburst, and from her a sign that she held out still; in fact, had she chosen to battle for that last word, as in other cases she might have done, then would he have exploded, gone to bed in the dark, and insisted upon sleeping: the consequence of which would have been to change this history. Now while Mrs. Hawkshaw was upstairs, Mrs. Mel called the servant, who took her to the kitchen, where she saw a prime loin of mutton; off which she cut two chops with a cunning hand: and these she toasted at a gradual distance, putting a plate beneath them, and a tin behind, and hanging the chops so that they would turn without having to be pierced. The bell rang twice before she could say the chops were ready. The first time, the maid had to tell the old gentleman she was taking up his water. Her next excuse was, that she had dropped her candle. The chops ready—who was to take them?

'Really, Mrs. Harrington, you are so clever, you ought, if I might be so bold as say so; you ought to end it yourself,' said the landlady. 'I can't ask him to eat them: he was all but on the busting point when I left him.'

'And that there candle did for him quite,' said Mary, the maid.

'I'm afraid it's chops cooked for nothing,' added the landlady.

Mrs. Mel saw them endangered. The maid held back: the landlady feared.

'We can but try,' she said.

'Oh! I wish, mum, you'd face him, 'stead o' me,' said Mary; 'I do dread that old bear's den.'

'Here, I will go,' said Mrs. Mel. 'Has he got his ale? Better draw it fresh, if he drinks any.'

And upstairs she marched, the landlady remaining below to listen for the commencement of the disturbance. An utterance of something certainly followed Mrs. Mel's entrance into the old bear's den. Then silence. Then what might have been question and answer. Then—was Mrs. Mel assaulted? and which was knocked down? It really was a chair being moved to the table. The door opened.

'Yes, ma'am; do what you like,' the landlady heard. Mrs. Mel descended, saying: 'Send him up some fresh ale.'

'And you have made him sit down obedient to those chops?' cried the landlady. 'Well might poor dear Mr. Harrington—pleasant man as he was!—say, as he used to say, "There's lovely women in the world, Mrs. Hawkshaw," he'd say, "and there's Duchesses," he'd say, "and there's they that can sing, and can dance, and some," he says, "that can cook." But he'd look sly as he'd stoop his head and shake it. "Roll 'em into one," he says, "and not any of your grand ladies can match my wife at home."

And, indeed, Mrs. Harrington, he told me he thought so many a time in the great company he frequented.'

Perfect peace reigning above, Mrs. Hawkshaw and Mrs. Mel sat down to supper below; and Mrs. Hawkshaw talked much of the great one gone. His relict did not care to converse about the dead, save in their practical aspect as ghosts; but she listened, and that passed the time. By-and-by, the old gentleman rang, and sent a civil message to know if the landlady had ship's rum in the house.

Page 1333

‘Dear! here’s another trouble,’ cried the poor woman. ‘No—none!’

‘Say, yes,’ said Mrs. Mel, and called Dandy, and charged him to run down the street to the square, and ask for the house of Mr. Coxwell, the maltster, and beg of him, in her name, a bottle of his ship’s rum.

’And don’t you tumble down and break the bottle, Dandy. Accidents with spirit-bottles are not excused.’

Dandy went on the errand, after an energetic grunt.

In due time he returned with the bottle, whole and sound, and Mr. Coxwell’s compliments. Mrs. Mel examined the cork to see that no process of suction had been attempted, and then said:

’Carry it up to him, Dandy. Let him see there’s a man in the house besides himself.’

‘Why, my dear,’ the landlady turned to her, ’it seems natural to you to be mistress where you go. I don’t at all mind, for ain’t it my profit? But you do take us off our legs.’

Then the landlady, warmed by gratitude, told her that the old gentleman was the great London brewer, who brewed there with his brother, and brewed for himself five miles out of Fallow field, half of which and a good part of the neighbourhood he owned, and his name was Mr. Tom Cogglesby.

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Mel. ‘And his brother is Mr. Andrew.’

’That ‘s it,’ said the landlady. ’And because he took it into his head to go and to choose for himself, and be married, no getting his brother, Mr. Tom, to speak to him. Why not, indeed? If there’s to be no marrying, the sooner we lay down and give up, the better, I think. But that ’s his way. He do hate us women, Mrs. Harrington. I have heard he was crossed. Some say it was the lady of Beckley Court, who was a Beauty, when he was only a poor cobbler’s son.’

Mrs. Mel breathed nothing of her relationship to Mr. Tom, but continued from time to time to express solicitude about Dandy. They heard the door open, and old Tom laughing in a capital good temper, and then Dandy came down, evidently full of ship’s rum.

‘He’s pumped me!’ said Dandy, nodding heavily at his mistress.

Mrs. Mel took him up to his bed-room, and locked the door. On her way back she passed old Tom’s chamber, and his chuckles were audible to her.

‘They finished the rum,’ said Mrs. Hawkshaw.

‘I shall rate him for that to-morrow,’ said Mrs. Mel. ’Giving that poor beast liquor!’

’Rate Mr. Tom! Oh! Mrs. Harrington! Why, he’ll snap your head off for a word.’

Mrs. Mel replied that her head would require a great deal of snapping to come off.

During this conversation they had both heard a singular intermittent noise above. Mrs. Hawkshaw was the first to ask:

‘What can it be? More trouble with him? He’s in his bed-room now.’

‘Mad with drink, like Dandy, perhaps,’ said Mrs. Mel.

‘Hark!’ cried the landlady. ‘Oh!’

It seemed that Old Tom was bouncing about in an extraordinary manner. Now came a pause, as if he had sworn to take his rest: now the room shook and the windows rattled.

Page 1334

’One ’d think, really, his bed was a frying-pan, and him a live fish in it,’ said the landlady. ’Oh—there, again! My goodness! have he got a flea?’

The thought was alarming. Mrs. Mel joined in:

‘Or a ------’

‘Don’t! don’t, my dear!’ she was cut short. ‘Oh! one o’ them little things ‘d be ruin to me. To think o’ that! Hark at him! It must be. And what’s to do? I ’ve sent the maids to bed. We haven’t a man. If I was to go and knock at his door, and ask?’

‘Better try and get him to be quiet somehow.’

‘Ah! I dare say I shall make him fire out fifty times worse.’

Mrs. Hawkshaw stipulated that Mrs. Mel should stand by her, and the two women went up-stairs and stood at Old Tom’s door. There they could hear him fuming and muttering imprecations, and anon there was an interval of silence, and then the room was shaken, and the cursings recommenced.

’It must be a fight he ‘s having with a flea,’ said the landlady. ’Oh! pray heaven, it is a flea. For a flea, my dear-gentlemen may bring that theirselves; but a b-----, that’s a stationary, and born of a bed. Don’t you hear? The other thing ’d give him a minute’s rest; but a flea’s hop-hop-off and on. And he sound like an old gentleman worried by a flea. What are you doing?’

Mrs. Mel had knocked at the door. The landlady waited breathlessly for the result. It appeared to have quieted Old Tom.

‘What’s the matter?’ said Mrs. Mel, severely.

The landlady implored her to speak him fair, and reflect on the desperate things he might attempt.

‘What’s the matter? Can anything be done for you?’

Mr. Tom Cogglesby’s reply comprised an insinuation so infamous regarding women when they have a solitary man in their power, that it cannot be placed on record.

‘Is anything the matter with your bed?’

’Anything? Yes; anything is the matter, ma’am. Hope twenty live geese inside it’s enough-eh? Bed, do you call it? It’s the rack! It’s damnation! Bed? Ha!’

After delivering this, he was heard stamping up and down the room.

‘My very best bed!’ whispered the landlady. ’Would it please you, sir, to change—I can give you another?’

‘I’m not a man of experiments, ma’am-’specially in strange houses.’

‘So very, very sorry!’

‘What the deuce!’ Old Tom came close to the door. ’You whimpering! You put a man in a beast of a bed—you drive him half mad—and then begin to blubber! Go away.’

‘I am so sorry, sir!’

’If you don’t go away, ma’am, I shall think your intentions are improper.’

‘Oh, my goodness!’ cried poor Mrs. Hawkshaw. ‘What can one do with him?’ Mrs. Mel put Mrs. Hawkshaw behind her.

‘Are you dressed?’ she called out.

In this way Mrs. Mel tackled Old Tom. He was told that should he consent to cover himself decently, she would come into his room and make his bed comfortable. And in a voice that dispersed armies of innuendoes, she bade him take his choice, either to rest quiet or do her bidding. Had Old Tom found his master at last, and in one of the hated sex? Breathlessly Mrs. Hawkshaw waited his answer, and she was an astonished woman when it came.

Page 1335

‘Very well, ma’am. Wait a couple of minutes. Do as you like.’

On their admission to the interior of the chamber, Old Tom was exhibited in his daily garb, sufficiently subdued to be civil and explain the cause of his discomfort. Lumps in his bed: he was bruised by them. He supposed he couldn’t ask women to judge for themselves—they’d be shrieking—but he could assure them he was blue all down his back. Mrs. Mel and Mrs. Hawkshaw turned the bed about, and punched it, and rolled it.

‘Ha!’ went Old Tom, ’what’s the good of that? That’s just how I found it. Moment I got into bed geese began to put up their backs.’

Mrs. Mel seldom indulged in a joke, and then only when it had a proverbial cast. On the present occasion, the truth struck her forcibly, and she said:

‘One fool makes many, and so, no doubt, does one goose.’

Accompanied by a smile the words would have seemed impudent; but spoken as a plain fact, and with a grave face, it set Old Tom blinking like a small boy ten minutes after the whip.

‘Now,’ she pursued, speaking to him as to an old child, ’look here. This is how you manage. Knead down in the middle of the bed. Then jump into the hollow. Lie there, and you needn’t wake till morning.’

Old Tom came to the side of the bed. He had prepared himself for a wretched night, an uproar, and eternal complaints against the house, its inhabitants, and its foundations; but a woman stood there who as much as told him that digging his fist into the flock and jumping into the hole—into that hole under his, eyes—was all that was wanted! that he had been making a noise for nothing, and because he had not the wit to hit on a simple contrivance! Then, too, his jest about the geese—this woman had put a stop to that! He inspected the hollow cynically. A man might instruct him on a point or two: Old Tom was not going to admit that a woman could.

’Oh, very well; thank you, ma’am; that’s your idea. I’ll try it. Good night.’

‘Good night,’ returned Mrs. Mel. ‘Don’t forget to jump into the middle.’

‘Head foremost, ma’am?’

‘As you weigh,’ said Mrs. Mel, and Old Tom trumped his lips, silenced if not beaten. Beaten, one might almost say, for nothing more was heard of him that night.

He presented himself to Mrs. Mel after breakfast next morning.

‘Slept well, ma’am.’

‘Oh! then you did as I directed you,’ said Mrs. Mel.

’Those chops, too, very good. I got through ’em.’

‘Eating, like scratching, only wants a beginning,’ said Mrs. Mel.

’Ha! you’ve got your word, then, as well as everybody else. Where’s your Dandy this morning, ma’am?’

’Locked up. You ought to be ashamed to give that poor beast liquor. He won’t get fresh air to-day.’

‘Ha! May I ask you where you’re going to-day, ma’am?’

‘I am going to Beckley.’

Page 1336

‘So am I, ma’am. What d’ ye say, if we join company. Care for insinuations?’

‘I want a conveyance of some sort,’ returned Mrs. Mel.

‘Object to a donkey, ma’am?’

‘Not if he’s strong and will go.’

‘Good,’ said Old Tom; and while he spoke a donkey-cart stopped in front of the Dolphin, and a well-dressed man touched his hat.

‘Get out of that damned bad habit, will you?’ growled Old Tom. What do you mean by wearing out the brim o’ your hat in that way? Help this woman in.’

Mrs. Mel helped herself to a part of the seat.

‘We are too much for the donkey,’ she said.

’Ha, that’s right. What I have, ma’am, is good. I can’t pretend to horses, but my donkey’s the best. Are you going to cry about him?’

‘No. When he’s tired I shall either walk or harness you,’ said Mrs. Mel.

This was spoken half-way down the High Street of Fallow field. Old Tom looked full in her face, and bawled out:

‘Deuce take it. Are you a woman?’

‘I have borne three girls and one boy,’ said Mrs. Mel.

‘What sort of a husband?’

‘He is dead.’

’Ha! that’s an opening, but ’tain’t an answer. I’m off to Beckley on a marriage business. I ’m the son of a cobbler, so I go in a donkey-cart. No damned pretences for me. I’m going to marry off a young tailor to a gal he’s been playing the lord to. If she cares for him she’ll take him: if not, they’re all the luckier, both of ’em.’

‘What’s the tailor’s name?’ said Mrs. Mel.

‘You are a woman,’ returned Old Tom. ’Now, come, ma’am, don’t you feel ashamed of being in a donkeycart?’

’I ‘m ashamed of men, sometimes,’ said Mrs. Mel; ‘never of animals.’

‘’Shamed o’ me, perhaps.’

‘I don’t know you.’

’Ha! well! I’m a man with no pretences. Do you like ’em? How have you brought up your three girls and one boy? No pretences—eh?’

Mrs. Mel did not answer, and Old Tom jogged the reins and chuckled, and asked his donkey if he wanted to be a racer.

‘Should you take me for a gentleman, ma’am?’

‘I dare say you are, sir, at heart. Not from your manner of speech.’

‘I mean appearances, ma’am.’

‘I judge by the disposition.’

’You do, ma’am? Then, deuce take it, if you are a woman, you ‘re -----’
Old Tom had no time to conclude.

A great noise of wheels, and a horn blown, caused them both to turn their heads, and they beheld a curricle descending upon them vehemently, and a fashionably attired young gentleman straining with all his might at the reins. The next instant they were rolling on the bank. About twenty yards ahead the curricle was halted and turned about to see the extent of the mischief done.

‘Pardon, a thousand times, my worthy couple,’ cried the sonorous Mr. Raikes. ’What we have seen we swear not to divulge. Franco and Fred—your pledge!’

Page 1337

‘We swear!’ exclaimed this couple.

But suddenly the cheeks of Mr. John Raikes flushed. He alighted from the box, and rushing up to Old Tom, was shouting, ‘My bene—’

‘Do you want my toe on your plate?’ Old Tom stopped him with.

The mysterious words completely changed the aspect of Mr. John Raikes. He bowed obsequiously and made his friend Franco step down and assist in the task of reestablishing the donkey, who fortunately had received no damage.

CHAPTER XXVII

Exhibits rose’s generalship; *Evan’s performance on the second fiddle*; *and the wretchedness of the countess*

We left Rose and Evan on their way to Lady Jocelyn. At the library-door Rose turned to him, and with her chin archly lifted sideways, said:

‘I know what you feel; you feel foolish.’

Now the sense of honour, and of the necessity of acting the part it imposes on him, may be very strong in a young man; but certainly, as a rule, the sense of ridicule is more poignant, and Evan was suffering horrid pangs. We none of us like to play second fiddle. To play second fiddle to a young woman is an abomination to us all. But to have to perform upon that instrument to the darling of our hearts—would we not rather die? nay, almost rather end the duet precipitately and with violence. Evan, when he passed Drummond into the house, and quietly returned his gaze, endured the first shock of this strange feeling. There could be no doubt that he was playing second fiddle to Rose. And what was he about to do? Oh, horror! to stand like a criminal, and say, or worse, have said for him, things to tip the ears with fire! To tell the young lady’s mother that he had won her daughter’s love, and meant—what did he mean? He knew not. Alas! he was second fiddle; he could only mean what she meant. Evan loved Rose deeply and completely, but noble manhood was strong in him. You may sneer at us, if you please, ladies. We have been educated in a theory, that when you lead off with the bow, the order of Nature is reversed, and it is no wonder therefore, that, having stript us of one attribute, our fine feathers moult, and the majestic cock-like march which distinguishes us degenerates. You unsex us, if I may dare to say so. Ceasing to be men, what are we? If we are to please you rightly, always allow us to play First.

Poor Evan did feel foolish. Whether Rose saw it in his walk, or had a loving feminine intuition of it, and was aware of the golden rule I have just laid down, we need not inquire. She hit the fact, and he could only stammer, and bid her open the door.

‘No,’ she said, after a slight hesitation, ’it will be better that I should speak to Mama alone, I see. Walk out on the lawn, dear, and wait for me. And if you meet Drummond, don’t be angry with him. Drummond is very fond of me, and of course I shall teach him to be fond of you. He only thinks . . . what is not true, because he does not know you. I do thoroughly, and there, you see, I give you my hand.’

Page 1338

Evan drew the dear hand humbly to his lips. Rose then nodded meaningly, and let her eyes dwell on him, and went in to her mother to open the battle.

Could it be that a flame had sprung up in those grey eyes latterly? Once they were like morning before sunrise. How soft and' warm and tenderly transparent they could now be! Assuredly she loved him. And he, beloved by the noblest girl ever fashioned, why should he hang his head, and shrink at the thought of human faces, like a wretch doomed to the pillory? He visioned her last glance, and lightning emotions of pride and happiness flashed through his veins. The generous, brave heart! Yes, with her hand in his, he could stand at bay—meet any fate. Evan accepted Rose because he believed in her love, and judged it by the strength of his own; her sacrifice of her position he accepted, because in his soul he knew he should have done no less. He mounted to the level of her nobleness, and losing nothing of the beauty of what she did, it was not so strange to him.

Still there was the baleful reflection that he was second fiddle to his beloved. No harmony came of it in his mind. How could he take an initiative? He walked forth on the lawn, where a group had gathered under the shade of a maple, consisting of Drummond Forth, Mrs. Evremonde, Mrs. Shorne, Mr. George Uplift, Seymour Jocelyn, and Ferdinand Laxley. A little apart Juliana Bonner was walking with Miss Carrington. Juliana, when she saw him, left her companion, and passing him swiftly, said, 'Follow me presently into the conservatory.'

Evan strolled near the group, and bowed to Mrs. Shorne, whom he had not seen that morning.

The lady's acknowledgement of his salute was constrained, and but a shade on the side of recognition. They were silent till he was out of earshot. He noticed that his second approach produced the same effect. In the conservatory Juliana was awaiting him.

'It is not to give you roses I called you here, Mr. Harrington,' she said.

'Not if I beg one?' he responded.

'Ah! but you do not want them from . . . It depends on the person.'

'Pluck this,' said Evan, pointing to a white rose.

She put her fingers to the stem.

What folly!' she cried, and turned from it.

'Are you afraid that I shall compromise you?' asked Evan.

'You care for me too little for that.'

‘My dear Miss Bonner!’

‘How long did you know Rose before you called her by her Christian name?’

Evan really could not remember, and was beginning to wonder what he had been called there for. The little lady had feverish eyes and fingers, and seemed to be burning to speak, but afraid.

‘I thought you had gone,’ she dropped her voice, ’without wishing me good-bye.’

‘I certainly should not do that, Miss Bonner.’

‘Formal!’ she exclaimed, half to herself. ’Miss Bonner thanks you. Do you think I wish you to stay? No friend of yours would wish it. You do not know the selfishness—brutal! —of these people of birth, as they call it.’

Page 1339

‘I have met with nothing but kindness here,’ said Evan.

‘Then go while you can feel that,’ she answered; ’for it cannot last another hour. Here is the rose.’ She broke it from the stem and handed it to him. ’You may wear that, and they are not so likely to call you an adventurer, and names of that sort. I am hardly considered a lady by them.’

An adventurer! The full meaning of the phrase struck Evan’s senses when he was alone. Miss Bonner knew something of his condition, evidently. Perhaps it was generally known, and perhaps it was thought that he had come to win Rose for his worldly advantage! The idea was overwhelmingly new to him. Up started self-love in arms. He would renounce her.

It is no insignificant contest when love has to crush self-love utterly. At moments it can be done. Love has divine moments. There are times also when Love draws part of his being from self-love, and can find no support without it.

But how could he renounce her, when she came forth to him,—smiling, speaking freshly and lightly, and with the colour on her cheeks which showed that she had done her part? How could he retract a step?

‘I have told Mama, Evan. That’s over. She heard it first from me.’

‘And she?’

’Dear Evan, if you are going to be sensitive, I’ll run away. You that fear no danger, and are the bravest man I ever knew! I think you are really trembling. She will speak to Papa, and then—and then, I suppose, they will both ask you whether you intend to give me up, or no. I’m afraid you’ll do the former.’

‘Your mother—Lady Jocelyn listened to you, Rose? You told her all?’

‘Every bit.’

‘And what does she think of me?’

’Thinks you very handsome and astonishing, and me very idiotic and natural, and that there is a great deal of bother in the world, and that my noble relatives will lay the blame of it on her. No, dear, not all that; but she talked very sensibly to me, and kindly. You know she is called a philosopher: nobody knows how deep-hearted she is, though. My mother is true as steel. I can’t separate the kindness from the sense, or I would tell you all she said. When I say kindness, I don’t mean any “Oh, my child,” and tears, and kisses, and maundering, you know. You mustn’t mind her thinking me a little fool. You want to know what she thinks of you. She said nothing to hurt you, Evan, and we have

gained ground so far, and now we'll go and face our enemies. Uncle Mel expects to hear about your appointment, in a day or two, and——'

'Oh, Rose!' Evan burst out.

'What is it?'

'Why must I owe everything to you?'

'Why, dear? Why, because, if you do, it's very much better than your owing it to anybody else. Proud again?'

Not proud: only second fiddle.

'You know, dear Evan, when two people love, there is no such thing as owing between them.'

Page 1340

’Rose, I have been thinking. It is not too late. I love you, God knows! I did in Portugal: I do now—more and more. But Oh, my bright angel!’ he ended the sentence in his breast.

‘Well? but—what?’

Evan sounded down the meaning of his ‘but.’ Stripped of the usual heroics, it was, ‘what will be thought of me?’ not a small matter to any of us. He caught a distant glimpse of the little bit of bare selfishness, and shrank from it.

‘Too late,’ cried Rose. ’The battle has commenced now, and, Mr. Harrington, I will lean on your arm, and be led to my dear friends yonder. Do they think that I am going to put on a mask to please them? Not for anybody! What they are to know they may as well know at once.’

She looked in Evan’s face.

‘Do you hesitate?’

He felt the contrast between his own and hers; between the niggard spirit of the beggarly receiver, and the high bloom of the exalted giver. Nevertheless, he loved her too well not to share much of her nature, and wedding it suddenly, he said:

’Rose; tell me, now. If you were to see the place where I was born, could you love me still?’

‘Yes, Evan.’

‘If you were to hear me spoken of with contempt—’

‘Who dares?’ cried Rose. ‘Never to me!’

’Contempt of what I spring from, Rose. Names used . . . Names are used . . .’

‘Tush!—names!’ said Rose, reddening. ’How cowardly that is! Have you finished? Oh, faint heart! I suppose I’m not a fair lady, or you wouldn’t have won me. Now, come. Remember, Evan, I conceal nothing; and if anything makes you wretched here, do think how I love you.’

In his own firm belief he had said everything to arrest her in her course, and been silenced by transcendent logic. She thought the same.

Rose made up to the conclave under the maple.

The voices hushed as they approached.

‘Capital weather,’ said Rose. ’Does Harry come back from London to-morrow—does anybody know?’

‘Not aware,’ Laxley was heard to reply.

‘I want to speak a word to you, Rose,’ said Mrs. Shorne.

‘With the greatest pleasure, my dear aunt’: and Rose walked after her.

‘My dear Rose,’ Mrs. Shorne commenced, ’your conduct requires that I should really talk to you most seriously. You are probably not aware of what you are doing: Nobody likes ease and natural familiarity more than I do. I am persuaded it is nothing but your innocence. You are young to the world’s ways, and perhaps a little too headstrong, and vain.’

‘Conceited and wilful,’ added Rose.

’If you like the words better. But I must say—I do not wish to trouble your father—you know he cannot bear worry—but I must say, that if you do not listen to me, he must be spoken to.’

‘Why not Mama?’

‘I should naturally select my brother first. No doubt you understand me.’

Page 1341

‘Any distant allusion to Mr. Harrington?’

‘Pertness will not avail you, Rose.’

‘So you want me to do secretly what I am doing openly?’

‘You must and shall remember you are a Jocelyn, Rose.’

‘Only half, my dear aunt!’

‘And by birth a lady, Rose.’

’And I ought to look under my eyes, and blush, and shrink, whenever I come near a gentleman, aunt!’

’Ah! my dear. No doubt you will do what is most telling. Since you have spoken of this Mr. Harrington, I must inform you that I have it on certain authority from two or three sources, that he is the son of a small shopkeeper at Lymport.’

Mrs. Shorne watched the effect she had produced.

‘Indeed, aunt?’ cried Rose. ‘And do you know this to be true?’

’So when you talk of gentlemen, Rose, please be careful whom you include.’

’I mustn’t include poor Mr. Harrington? Then my Grandpapa Bonner is out of the list, and such numbers of good worthy men?’

Mrs. Shorne understood the hit at the defunct manufacturer. She said: ’You must most distinctly give me your promise, while this young adventurer remains here—I think it will not be long—not to be compromising yourself further, as you now do. Or—indeed I must—I shall let your parents perceive that such conduct is ruin to a young girl in your position, and certainly you will be sent to Elburne House for the winter.’

Rose lifted her hands, crying: ’Ye Gods!—as Harry says. But I’m very much obliged to you, my dear aunt. Concerning Mr. Harrington, wonderfully obliged. Son of a small-----! Is it a t-t-tailor, aunt?’

‘It is—I have heard.’

’And that is much worse. Cloth is viler than cotton! And don’t they call these creatures sn-snips? Some word of that sort?’

‘It makes little difference what they are called.’

’Well, aunt, I sincerely thank you. As this subject seems to interest you, go and see Mama, now. She can tell you a great deal more: and, if you want her authority, come back to me.’

Rose then left her aunt in a state of extreme indignation. It was a clever move to send Mrs. Shorne to Lady Jocelyn. They were antagonistic, and, rational as Lady Jocelyn was, and with her passions under control, she was unlikely to side with Mrs. Shorne.

Now Rose had fought against herself, and had, as she thought, conquered. In Portugal Evan’s half insinuations had given her small suspicions, which the scene on board the Jocasta had half confirmed: and since she came to communicate with her own mind, she bore the attack of all that rose against him, bit by bit. She had not been too blind to see the unpleasantness of the fresh facts revealed to her. They did not change her; on the contrary, drew her to him faster—and she thought she had completely conquered whatever could rise against him. But when Juliana Bonner told her that day

Page 1342

that Evan was not only the son of the thing, but the thing himself, and that his name could be seen any day in Lymport, and that he had come from the shop to Beckley, poor Rosey had a sick feeling that almost sank her. For a moment she looked back wildly to the doors of retreat. Her eyes had to feed on Evan, she had to taste some of the luxury of love, before she could gain composure, and then her arrogance towards those she called her enemies did not quite return.

‘In that letter you told me all—all—all, Evan?’

‘Yes, all-religiously.’

‘Oh, why did I miss it!’

‘Would it give you pleasure?’

She feared to speak, being tender as a mother to his sensitiveness. The expressive action of her eyebrows sufficed. She could not bear concealment, or doubt, or a shadow of dishonesty; and he, gaining force of soul to join with hers, took her hands and related the contents of the letter fully. She was pale when he had finished. It was some time before she was able to get free from the trammels of prejudice, but when she did, she did without reserve, saying: ’Evan, there is no man who would have done so much.’ These little exaltations and generosities bind lovers tightly. He accepted the credit she gave him, and at that we need not wonder. It helped him further to accept herself, otherwise could he—his name known to be on a shop-front—have aspired to her still? But, as an unexampled man, princely in soul, as he felt, why, he might kneel to Rose Jocelyn. So they listened to one another, and blinded the world by putting bandages on their eyes, after the fashion of little boys and girls.

Meantime the fair being who had brought these two from the ends of the social scale into this happy tangle, the beneficent Countess, was wretched. When you are in the enemy’s country you are dependent on the activity and zeal of your spies and scouts, and the best of these—Polly Wheedle, to wit—had proved defective, recalcitrant even. And because a letter had been lost in her room! as the Countess exclaimed to herself, though Polly gave her no reasons. The Countess had, therefore, to rely chiefly upon personal observation, upon her intuitions, upon her sensations in the proximity of the people to whom she was opposed; and from these she gathered that she was, to use the word which seemed fitting to her, betrayed. Still to be sweet, still to smile and to amuse,—still to give her zealous attention to the business of the diplomatist’s Election, still to go through her church-services devoutly, required heroism; she was equal to it, for she had remarkable courage; but it was hard to feel no longer at one with Providence. Had not Providence suggested Sir Abraham to her? killed him off at the right moment in aid of her? And now Providence had turned, and the assistance she had formerly received from that Power, and given thanks for so profusely, was the

cause of her terror. It was absolutely as if she had been borrowing from a Jew, and were called upon to pay fifty-fold interest.

Page 1343

‘Evan!’ she writes in a gasp to Harriet. ’We must pack up and depart. Abandon everything. He has disgraced us all, and ruined himself. Impossible that we can stay for the pic-nic. We are known, dear. Think of my position one day in this house! Particulars when I embrace you. I dare not trust a letter here. If Evan had confided in me! He is impenetrable. He will be low all his life, and I refuse any more to sully myself in attempting to lift him. For Silva’s sake I must positively break the connection. Heaven knows what I have done for this boy, and will support me in the feeling that I have done enough. My conscience at least is safe.’

Like many illustrious Generals, the Countess had, for the hour, lost heart. We find her, however, the next day, writing:

’Oh! Harriet! what trials for sisterly affection! Can I possibly—weather the gale, as the old L—— sailors used to say? It is dreadful. I fear I am by duty bound to stop on. Little Bonner thinks Evan quite a duke’s son, has been speaking to her Grandmama, and to-day, this morning, the venerable old lady quite as much as gave me to understand that an union between our brother and her son’s child would sweetly gratify her, and help her to go to her rest in peace. Can I chase that spark of comfort from one so truly pious? Dearest Juliana! I have anticipated Evan’s feeling for her, and so she thinks his conduct cold. Indeed, I told her, point blank, he loved her. That, you know, is different from saying, dying of love, which would have been an untruth. But, Evan, of course! No getting him! Should Juliana ever reproach me, I can assure the child that any man is in love with any woman—which is really the case. It is, you dear humdrum! what the dictionary calls “nascent.” I never liked the word, but it stands for a fact.’

The Countess here exhibits the weakness of a self-educated intelligence. She does not comprehend the joys of scholarship in her employment of Latinisms. It will be pardoned to her by those who perceive the profound piece of feminine discernment which precedes it.

‘I do think I shall now have courage to stay out the pic-nic,’ she continues. ’I really do not think all is known. Very little can be known, or I am sure I could not feel as I do. It would burn me up. George Up—— does not dare; and his most beautiful lady-love had far better not. Mr. Forth may repent his whispers. But, Oh! what Evan may do! Rose is almost detestable. Manners, my dear? Totally deficient!

’An ally has just come. Evan’s good fortune is most miraculous. His low friend turns out to be a young Fortunatus; very original, sparkling, and in my hands to be made much of. I do think he will—for he is most zealous—he will counteract that hateful Mr. Forth, who may soon have work enough. Mr. Raikes (Evan’s friend) met a mad captain in Fallow field! Dear Mr. Raikes is ready to say anything; not from love of falsehood, but because he is ready to think it. He has confessed to me that Evan told him! Louisa de Saldar has changed his opinion, and much impressed this eccentric young gentleman. Do you know any young girl who wants a fortune, and would be grateful?

Page 1344

’Dearest! I have decided on the pic-nic. Let your conscience be clear, and Providence cannot be against you. So I feel. Mr. Parsley spoke very beautifully to that purpose last Sunday in the morning service. A little too much through his nose, perhaps; but the poor young man’s nose is a great organ, and we will not cast it in his teeth more than nature has done. I said so to my diplomatist, who was amused. If you are sparklingly vulgar with the English, you are aristocratic. Oh! what principle we women require in the thorny walk of life. I can show you a letter when we meet that will astonish humdrum. Not so diplomatic as the writer thought! Mrs. Melville (sweet woman!) must continue to practise civility; for a woman who is a wife, my dear, in verity she lives in a glass house, and let her fling no stones. “Let him who is without sin.” How beautiful that Christian sentiment! I hope I shall be pardoned, but it always seems to me that what we have to endure is infinitely worse than any other suffering, for you find no comfort for the children of T——s in Scripture, nor any defence of their dreadful position. Robbers, thieves, Magdalens! but, no! the unfortunate offspring of that class are not even mentioned: at least, in my most diligent perusal of the Scriptures, I never lighted upon any remote allusion; and we know the Jews did wear clothing. Outcasts, verily! And Evan could go, and write—but I have no patience with him. He is the blind tool of his mother, and anybody’s puppet.’

The letter concludes, with horrid emphasis:

’The Madre in Beckley! Has sent for Evan from a low public-house! I have intercepted the messenger. Evan closeted with Sir Franks. Andrew’s horrible old brother with Lady Jocelyn. The whole house, from garret to kitchen, full of whispers!’

A prayer to Providence closes the communication.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOM COGGLESEY’S PROPOSITION

The appearance of a curricle and a donkey-cart within the gates of Beckley Court, produced a sensation among the men of the lower halls, and a couple of them rushed out, with the left calf considerably in advance, to defend the house from violation. Toward the curricle they directed what should have been a bow, but was a nod. Their joint attention was then given to the donkey-cart, in which old Tom Cogglesby sat alone, bunchy in figure, bunched in face, his shrewd grey eyes twinkling under the bush of his eyebrows.

‘Oy, sir—you! my man!’ exclaimed the tallest of the pair, resolutely. ’This won’t do. Don’t you know driving this sort of conveyance slap along the gravel ’ere, up to the pillars, ’s unparliamentary? Can’t be allowed. Now, right about!’

This address, accompanied by a commanding elevation of the dexter hand, seemed to excite Mr. Raikes far more than Old Tom. He alighted from his perch in haste, and was running up to the stalwart figure, crying, ‘Fellow!’ when, as you tell a dog to lie down, Old Tom called out, ’Be quiet, Sir!’ and Raikes halted with prompt military obedience.

Page 1345

The sight of the curricle acting satellite to the donkey-cart staggered the two footmen.

‘Are you lords?’ sang out Old Tom.

A burst of laughter from the friends of Mr. Raikes, in the curricle, helped to make the powdered gentlemen aware of a sarcasm, and one with no little dignity replied that they were not lords.

‘Oh! Then come and hold my donkey.’

Great irresolution was displayed at the injunction, but having consulted the face of Mr. Raikes, one fellow, evidently half overcome by what was put upon him, with the steps of Adam into exile, descended to the gravel, and laid his hand on the donkey’s head.

‘Hold hard!’ cried Old Tom. ’Whisper in his ear. He’ll know your language.’

‘May I have the felicity of assisting you to terra firma?’ interposed Mr. Raikes, with the bow of deferential familiarity.

‘Done that once too often,’ returned Old Tom, jumping out. ’There. What’s the fee? There’s a crown for you that ain’t afraid of a live donkey; and there ’s a sixpenny bit for you that are—to keep up your courage; and when he’s dead you shall have his skin—to shave by.’

‘Excellent!’ shouted Raikes.

‘Thomas!’ he addressed a footman, ’hand in my card. Mr. John Feversham Raikes.’

‘And tell my lady, Tom Cogglesby’s come,’ added the owner of that name.

We will follow Tom Cogglesby, as he chooses to be called.

Lady Jocelyn rose on his entering the library, and walking up to him, encountered him with a kindly full face.

‘So I see you at last, Tom?’ she said, without releasing his hand; and Old Tom mounted patches of red in his wrinkled cheeks, and blinked, and betrayed a singular antiquated bashfulness, which ended, after a mumble of ‘Yes, there he was, and he hoped her ladyship was well,’ by his seeking refuge in a chair, where he sat hard, and fixed his attention on the leg of a table.

‘Well, Tom, do you find much change in me?’ she was woman enough to continue.

He was obliged to look up.

‘Can’t say I do, my lady.’

‘Don’t you see the grey hairs, Tom?’

‘Better than a wig,’ rejoined he.

Was it true that her ladyship had behaved rather ill to Old Tom in her youth? Excellent women have been naughty girls, and young Beauties will have their train. It is also very possible that Old Tom had presumed upon trifles, and found it difficult to forgive her his own folly.

’Preferable to a wig? Well, I would rather see you with your natural thatch. You’re bent, too. You look as if you had kept away from Beckley a little too long.’

‘Told you, my lady, I should come when your daughter was marriageable.’

’Oho! that’s it? I thought it was the Election!

‘Election be ------ hem!--beg pardon, my lady.’

’Swear, Tom, if it relieves you. I think it bad to check an oath or a sneeze.’

Page 1346

’I ’m come to see you on business, my lady, or I shouldn’t have troubled you.’

‘Malice?’

’You ‘ll see I don’t bear any, my lady.’

’Ah! if you had only sworn roundly twenty-five years ago, what a much younger man you would have been! and a brave capital old friend whom I should not have missed all that time.’

‘Come!’ cried Old Tom, varying his eyes rapidly between her ladyship’s face and the floor, ‘you acknowledge I had reason to.’

‘Mais, cela va sans dire.’

‘Cobblers’ sons ain’t scholars, my lady.’

’And are not all in the habit of throwing their fathers in our teeth, I hope!’

Old Tom wriggled in his chair. ’Well, my lady, I’m not going to make a fool of myself at my time o’ life. Needn’t be alarmed now. You’ve got the bell-rope handy and a husband on the premises.’

Lady Jocelyn smiled, stood up, and went to him. ‘I like an honest fist,’ she said, taking his. ’We ’re not going to be doubtful friends, and we won’t snap and snarl. That’s for people who’re independent of wigs, Tom. I find, for my part, that a little grey on the top of any head cools the temper amazingly. I used to be rather hot once.’

‘You could be peppery, my lady.’

’Now I’m cool, Tom, and so must you be; or, if you fight, it must be in my cause, as you did when you thrashed that saucy young carter. Do you remember?’

‘If you’ll sit ye down, my lady, I’ll just tell you what I’m come for,’ said Old Tom, who plainly showed that he did remember, and was alarmingly softened by her ladyship’s retention of the incident.

Lady Jocelyn returned to her place.

‘You’ve got a marriageable daughter, my lady?’

‘I suppose we may call her so,’ said Lady Jocelyn, with a composed glance at the ceiling.

‘’Gaged to be married to any young chap?’

‘You must put the question to her, Tom.’

‘Ha! I don’t want to see her.’

At this Lady Jocelyn looked slightly relieved. Old Tom continued.

’Happen to have got a little money—not so much as many a lord’s got, I dare say; such as ’tis, there ’tis. Young fellow I know wants a wife, and he shall have best part of it. Will that suit ye, my lady?’

Lady Jocelyn folded her hands. ’Certainly; I’ve no objection. What it has to do with me I can’t perceive.’

‘Ahem!’ went Old Tom. ’It won’t hurt your daughter to be married now, will it?’

‘Oh! my daughter is the destined bride of your “young fellow,"’ said Lady Jocelyn. ‘Is that how it’s to be?’

’She’—Old Tom cleared his throat ’she won’t marry a lord, my lady; but she—’hem—if she don’t mind that—’ll have a deuced sight more hard cash than many lord’s son ’d give her, and a young fellow for a husband, sound in wind and limb, good bone and muscle, speaks grammar and two or three languages, and—’

‘Stop!’ cried Lady Jocelyn. ’I hope this is not a prize young man? If he belongs, at his age, to the unco quid, I refuse to take him for a son-in-law, and I think Rose will, too.’

Page 1347

Old Tom burst out vehemently: 'He's a damned good young fellow, though he isn't a lord.'

'Well,' said Lady Jocelyn, 'I 've no doubt you're in earnest, Tom. It 's curious, for this morning Rose has come to me and given me the first chapter of a botheration, which she declares is to end in the common rash experiment. What is your "young fellow's" name? Who is he? What is he?'

'Won't take my guarantee, my lady?'

'Rose—if she marries—must have a name, you know?'

Old Tom hit his knee. 'Then there's a pill for ye to swallow, for he ain't the son of a lord.'

'That's swallowed, Tom. What is he?'

'He's the son of a tradesman, then, my lady.' And Old Tom watched her to note the effect he had produced.

'More 's the pity,' was all she remarked.

'And he 'll have his thousand a year to start with; and he's a tailor, my lady.'

Her ladyship opened her eyes.

'Harrington's his name, my lady. Don't know whether you ever heard of it.'

Lady Jocelyn flung herself back in her chair. 'The queerest thing I ever met!' said she.

'Thousand a year to start with,' Old Tom went on, 'and if she marries—I mean if he marries her, I'll settle a thousand per ann. on the first baby-boy or gal.'

'Hum! Is this gross collusion, Mr. Tom?' Lady Jocelyn inquired.

'What does that mean?'

'Have you spoken of this before to any one?'

'I haven't, my lady. Decided on it this morning. Hem! you got a son, too. He's fond of a young gal, or he ought to be. I'll settle him when I've settled the daughter.'

'Harry is strongly attached to a dozen, I believe,' said his mother. 'Well, Tom, we'll think of it. I may as well tell you: Rose has just been here to inform me that this Mr. Harrington has turned her head, and that she has given her troth, and all that sort of thing. I believe such was not to be laid to my charge in my day.'

‘You were open enough, my lady,’ said Old Tom. ’She’s fond of the young fellow? She’ll have a pill to swallow! poor young woman!’

Old Tom visibly chuckled. Lady Jocelyn had a momentary temptation to lead him out, but she did not like the subject well enough to play with it.

‘Apparently Rose has swallowed it,’ she said.

‘Goose, shears, cabbage, and all!’ muttered Old Tom. ’Got a stomach!—she knows he’s a tailor, then? The young fellow told her? He hasn’t been playing the lord to her?’

’As far as he’s concerned, I think he has been tolerably honest, Tom, for a man and a lover.’

‘And told her he was born and bound a tailor?’

‘Rose certainly heard it from him.’

Slapping his knee, Old Tom cried: ‘Bravo!’ For though one part of his nature was disappointed, and the best part of his plot disarranged, he liked Evan’s proceeding and felt warm at what seemed to him Rose’s scorn of rank.

Page 1348

‘She must be a good gal, my lady. She couldn’t have got it from t’ other side. Got it from you. Not that you—’

‘No,’ said Lady Jocelyn, apprehending him. ’I’m afraid I have no Republican virtues. I ’m afraid I should have rejected the pill. Don’t be angry with me,’ for Old Tom looked sour again; ’I like birth and position, and worldly advantages, and, notwithstanding Rose’s pledge of the instrument she calls her heart, and in spite of your offer, I shall, I tell you honestly, counsel her to have nothing to do with—’

‘Anything less than lords,’ Old Tom struck in. ’Very well. Are you going to lock her up, my lady?’

‘No. Nor shall I whip her with rods.’

‘Leave her free to her choice?’

’She will have my advice. That I shall give her. And I shall take care that before she makes a step she shall know exactly what it leads to. Her father, of course, will exercise his judgement.’ (Lady Jocelyn said this to uphold the honour of Sir Franks, knowing at the same time perfectly well that he would be wheedled by Rose.) ’I confess I like this Mr. Harrington. But it’s a great misfortune for him to have had a notorious father. A tailor should certainly avoid fame, and this young man will have to carry his father on his back. He ’ll never throw the great Mel off.’

Tom Cogglesby listened, and was really astonished at her ladyship’s calm reception of his proposal.

‘Shameful of him! shameful!’ he muttered perversely: for it would have made him desolate to have had to change his opinion of her ladyship after cherishing it, and consoling himself with it, five-and-twenty years. Fearing the approach of softness, he prepared to take his leave.

’Now—your servant, my lady. I stick to my word, mind: and if your people here are willing, I—I ’ve got a candidate up for Fall’field—I’ll knock him down, and you shall sneak in your Tory. Servant, my lady.’

Old Tom rose to go. Lady Jocelyn took his hand cordially, though she could not help smiling at the humility of the cobbler’s son in his manner of speaking of the Tory candidate.

‘Won’t you stop with us a few days?’

’I ‘d rather not, I thank ye.’

‘Won’t you see Rose?’

‘I won’t. Not till she’s married.’

‘Well, Tom, we’re friends now?’

‘Not aware I’ve ever done you any harm, my lady.’

‘Look me in the face.’

The trial was hard for him. Though she had been five-and-twenty years a wife, she was still very handsome: but he was not going to be melted, and when the perverse old fellow obeyed her, it was with an aspect of resolute disgust that would have made any other woman indignant. Lady Jocelyn laughed.

’Why, Tom, your brother Andrew’s here, and makes himself comfortable with us. We rode by Brook’s farm the other day. Do you remember Copping’s pond—how we dragged it that night? What days we had!’

Page 1349

Old Tom tugged once or twice at his imprisoned fist, while these youthful frolics of his too stupid self and the wild and beautiful Miss Bonner were being recalled.

‘I remember!’ he said savagely, and reaching the door hurled out: ’And I remember the Bull-dogs, too! servant, my lady.’ With which he effected a retreat, to avoid a ringing laugh he heard in his ears.

Lady Jocelyn had not laughed. She had done no more than look and smile kindly on the old boy. It was at the Bull-dogs, a fall of water on the borders of the park, that Tom Cogglesby, then a hearty young man, had been guilty of his folly: had mistaken her frank friendliness for a return of his passion, and his stubborn vanity still attributed her rejection of his suit to the fact of his descent from a cobbler, or, as he put it, to her infernal worship of rank.

‘Poor old Tom!’ said her ladyship, when alone. ’He ’s rough at the rind, but sound at the core.’ She had no idea of the long revenge Old Tom cherished, and had just shaped into a plot to be equal with her for the Bull-dogs.

CHAPTER XXIX

PRELUDE TO AN ENGAGEMENT

Money was a strong point with the Elburne brood. The Jocelyns very properly respected blood; but being, as Harry, their youngest representative, termed them, poor as rats, they were justified in considering it a marketable stuff; and when they married they married for money. The Hon. Miss Jocelyn had espoused a manufacturer, who failed in his contract, and deserved his death. The diplomatist, Melville, had not stepped aside from the family traditions in his alliance with Miss Black, the daughter of a bold bankrupt, educated in affluence; and if he touched nothing but L5000 and some very pretty ringlets, that was not his fault. Sir Franks, too, mixed his pure stream with gold. As yet, however, the gold had done little more than shine on him; and, belonging to expectancy, it might be thought unsubstantial. Beckley Court was in the hands of Mrs. Bonner, who, with the highest sense of duty toward her only living child, was the last to appreciate Lady Jocelyn’s entire absence of demonstrative affection, and severely reprobated her daughter’s philosophic handling of certain serious subjects. Sir Franks, no doubt, came better off than the others; her ladyship brought him twenty thousand pounds, and Harry had ten in the past tense, and Rose ten in the future; but living, as he had done, a score of years anticipating the demise of an incurable invalid, he, though an excellent husband and father, could scarcely be taught to imagine that the Jocelyn object of his bargain was attained. He had the semblance of wealth, without the personal glow which absolute possession brings. It was his habit to call himself a poor man, and it was his dream that Rose should marry a rich one. Harry was

hopeless. He had been his Grandmother's pet up to the years of adolescence: he was getting

Page 1350

too old for any prospect of a military career he had no turn for diplomacy, no taste for any of the walks open to blood and birth, and was in headlong disgrace with the fountain of goodness at Beckley Court, where he was still kept in the tacit understanding that, should Juliana inherit the place, he must be at hand to marry her instantly, after the fashion of the Jocelyns. They were an injured family; for what they gave was good, and the commercial world had not behaved honourably to them. Now, Ferdinand Laxley was just the match for Rose. Born to a title and fine estate, he was evidently fond of her, and there had been a gentle hope in the bosom of Sir Franks that the family fatality would cease, and that Rose would marry both money and blood.

From this happy delusion poor Sir Franks was awakened to hear that his daughter had plighted herself to the son of a tradesman: that, as the climax to their evil fate, she who had some blood and some money of her own—the only Jocelyn who had ever united the two—was desirous of wasting herself on one who had neither. The idea was so utterly opposed to the principles Sir Franks had been trained in, that his intellect could not grasp it. He listened to his sister, Mrs. Shorne: he listened to his wife; he agreed with all they said, though what they said was widely diverse: he consented to see and speak to Evan, and he did so, and was much the most distressed. For Sir Franks liked many things in life, and hated one thing alone—which was 'bother.' A smooth world was his delight. Rose knew this, and her instruction to Evan was: 'You cannot give me up —you will go, but you cannot give me up while I am faithful to you: tell him that.' She knew that to impress this fact at once on the mind of Sir Franks would be a great gain; for in his detestation of bother he would soon grow reconciled to things monstrous: and hearing the same on both sides, the matter would assume an inevitable shape to him. Mr. Second Fiddle had no difficulty in declaring the eternity of his sentiments; but he toned them with a despair Rose did not contemplate, and added also his readiness to repair, in any way possible, the evil done. He spoke of his birth and position. Sir Franks, with a gentlemanly delicacy natural to all lovers of a smooth world, begged him to see the main and the insurmountable objection. Birth was to be desired, of course, and position, and so forth: but without money how can two young people marry? Evan's heart melted at this generous way of putting it. He said he saw it, he had no hope: he would go and be forgotten: and begged that for any annoyance his visit might have caused Sir Franks and Lady Jocelyn, they would pardon him. Sir Franks shook him by the hand, and the interview ended in a dialogue on the condition of the knees of Black Lymport, and on horseflesh in Portugal and Spain.

Page 1351

Following Evan, Rose went to her father and gave him a good hour's excitement, after which the worthy gentleman hurried for consolation to Lady Jocelyn, whom he found reading a book of French memoirs, in her usual attitude, with her feet stretched out and her head thrown back, as in a distant survey of the lively people screening her from a troubled world. Her ladyship read him a piquant story, and Sir Franks capped it with another from memory; whereupon her ladyship held him wrong in one turn of the story, and Sir Franks rose to get the volume to verify, and while he was turning over the leaves, Lady Jocelyn told him incidentally of old Tom Cogglesby's visit and proposal. Sir Franks found the passage, and that her ladyship was right, which it did not move her countenance to hear.

'Ah!' said he, finding it no use to pretend there was no bother in the world, 'here's a pretty pickle! Rose says she will have that fellow.'

'Hum!' replied her ladyship. 'And if she keeps her mind a couple of years, it will be a wonder.'

'Very bad for her this sort of thing—talked about,' muttered Sir Franks. 'Ferdinand was just the man.'

'Well, yes; I suppose it's her mistake to think brains an absolute requisite,' said Lady Jocelyn, opening her book again, and scanning down a column.

Sir Franks, being imitative, adopted a similar refuge, and the talk between them was varied by quotations and choice bits from the authors they had recourse to. Both leaned back in their chairs, and spoke with their eyes on their books.

'Julia's going to write to her mother,' said he.

'Very filial and proper,' said she.

'There'll be a horrible hubbub, you know, Emily.'

'Most probably. I shall get the blame; 'cela se concoit'.'

'Young Harrington goes the day after to-morrow. Thought it better not to pack him off in a hurry.'

'And just before the pic-nic; no, certainly. I suppose it would look odd.'

'How are we to get rid of the Countess?'

'Eh? This Bautru is amusing, Franks; but he's nothing to Vandy. 'Homme incomparable!' On the whole I find Menage rather dull. The Countess? what an

accomplished liar that woman is! She seems to have stepped out of Tallemant's Gallery. Concerning the Countess, I suppose you had better apply to Melville.'

'Where the deuce did this young Harrington get his breeding from?'

'He comes of a notable sire.'

'Yes, but there's no sign of the snob in him.'

'And I exonerate him from the charge of "adventuring" after Rose. George Uplift tells me—I had him in just now—that the mother is a woman of mark and strong principle. She has probably corrected the too luxuriant nature of Mel in her offspring. That is to say in this one. 'Pour les autres, je ne dis pas'. Well, the young man will go; and if Rose chooses to become a monument of constancy, we can do nothing. I shall give my advice; but as she has not deceived me, and she is a reasonable being, I shan't interfere. Putting the case at the worst, they will not want money. I have no doubt Tom Cogglesby means what he says, and will do it. So there we will leave the matter till we hear from Elburne House.'

Page 1352

Sir Franks groaned at the thought.

‘How much does he offer to settle on them?’ he asked.

’A thousand a year on the marriage, and the same amount to the first child. I daresay the end would be that they would get all.’

Sir Franks nodded, and remained with one eye-brow pitiably elevated above the level of the other.

‘Anything but a tailor!’ he exclaimed presently, half to himself.

‘There is a prejudice against that craft,’ her ladyship acquiesced. ’Beranger—let me see—your favourite Frenchman, Franks, wasn’t it his father?—no, his grandfather. “Mon pauvre et humble grand-pyre,” I think, was a tailor. Hum! the degrees of the thing, I confess, don’t affect me. One trade I imagine to be no worse than another.’

‘Ferdinand’s allowance is about a thousand,’ said Sir Franks, meditatively.

‘And won’t be a farthing more till he comes to the title,’ added her ladyship.

‘Well,’ resumed Sir Franks, ‘it’s a horrible bother!’

His wife philosophically agreed with him, and the subject was dropped.

Lady Jocelyn felt with her husband, more than she chose to let him know, and Sir Franks could have burst into anathemas against fate and circumstances, more than his love of a smooth world permitted. He, however, was subdued by her calmness; and she, with ten times the weight of brain, was manoeuvred by the wonderful dash of General Rose Jocelyn. For her ladyship, thinking, ‘I shall get the blame of all this,’ rather sided insensibly with the offenders against those who condemned them jointly; and seeing that Rose had been scrupulously honest and straightforward in a very delicate matter, this lady was so constituted that she could not but applaud her daughter in her heart. A worldly woman would have acted, if she had not thought, differently; but her ladyship was not a worldly woman.

Evan’s bearing and character had, during his residence at Beckley Court, become so thoroughly accepted as those of a gentleman, and one of their own rank, that, after an allusion to the origin of his breeding, not a word more was said by either of them on that topic. Besides, Rose had dignified him by her decided conduct.

By the time poor Sir Franks had read himself into tranquillity, Mrs. Shorne, who knew him well, and was determined that he should not enter upon his usual negociations with an unpleasantness: that is to say, to forget it, joined them in the library, bringing with

her Sir John Loring and Hamilton Jocelyn. Her first measure was to compel Sir Franks to put down his book. Lady Jocelyn subsequently had to do the same.

‘Well, what have you done, Franks?’ said Mrs. Shorne.

‘Done?’ answered the poor gentleman. ’What is there to be done? I’ve spoken to young Harrington.’

’Spoken to him! He deserves horsewhipping! Have you not told him to quit the house instantly?’

Lady Jocelyn came to her husband’s aid: ’It wouldn’t do, I think, to kick him out. In the first place, he hasn’t deserved it.’

Page 1353

’Not deserved it, Emily!—the commonest, low, vile, adventuring tradesman!’

‘In the second place,’ pursued her ladyship, ’it’s not adviseable to do anything that will make Rose enter into the young woman’s sublimities. It ’s better not to let a lunatic see that you think him stark mad, and the same holds with young women afflicted with the love-mania. The sound of sense, even if they can’t understand it, flatters them so as to keep them within bounds. Otherwise you drive them into excesses best avoided.’

‘Really, Emily,’ said Mrs. Shorne, ’you speak almost, one would say, as an advocate of such unions.’

‘You must know perfectly well that I entirely condemn them,’ replied her ladyship, who had once, and once only, delivered her opinion of the nuptials of Mr. and Mrs. Shorne.

In self-defence, and to show the total difference between the cases, Mrs. Shorne interjected: ‘An utterly penniless young adventurer!’

‘Oh, no; there’s money,’ remarked Sir Franks.

‘Money is there?’ quoth Hamilton, respectfully.

‘And there’s wit,’ added Sir John, ‘if he has half his sister’s talent.’

‘Astonishing woman!’ Hamilton chimed in; adding, with a shrug, ’But, egad!’

‘Well, we don’t want him to resemble his sister,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’I acknowledge she’s amusing.’

‘Amusing, Emily!’ Mrs. Shorne never encountered her sister-in-law’s calmness without indignation. ’I could not rest in the house with such a person, knowing her what she is. A vile adventuress, as I firmly believe. What does she do all day with your mother? Depend upon it, you will repent her visit in more ways than one.’

‘A prophecy?’ asked Lady Jocelyn, smiling.

On the grounds of common sense, on the grounds of propriety, and consideration of what was due to themselves, all agreed to condemn the notion of Rose casting herself away on Evan. Lady Jocelyn agreed with Mrs. Shorne; Sir Franks with his brother, and Sir John. But as to what they were to do, they were divided. Lady Jocelyn said she should not prevent Rose from writing to Evan, if she had the wish to do so.

‘Folly must come out,’ said her ladyship. ’It’s a combustible material. I won’t have her health injured. She shall go into the world more. She will be presented at Court, and if it’s necessary to give her a dose or two to counteract her vanity, I don’t object. This will

wear off, or, 'si c'est veritablement une grande passion, eh bien' we must take what Providence sends us.'

'And which we might have prevented if we had condescended to listen to the plainest worldly wisdom,' added Mrs. Shorne.

'Yes,' said Lady Jocelyn, equably, 'you know, you and I, Julia, argue from two distinct points. Girls may be shut up, as you propose. I don't think nature intended to have them the obverse of men. I 'm sure their mothers never designed that they should run away with footmen, riding-masters, chance curates, as they occasionally do, and wouldn't if they had points of comparison. My opinion is that Prospero was just saved by the Prince of Naples being wrecked on his island, from a shocking mis-alliance between his daughter and the son of Sycorax. I see it clearly. Poetry conceals the extreme probability, but from what I know of my sex, I should have no hesitation in turning prophet also, as to that.'

Page 1354

What could Mrs. Shorne do with a mother who talked in this manner? Mrs. Melville, when she arrived to take part in the conference, which gradually swelled to a family one, was equally unable to make Lady Jocelyn perceive that her plan of bringing up Rose was, in the present result of it, other than unlucky.

Now the two Generals—Rose Jocelyn and the Countess de Saldar—had brought matters to this pass; and from the two tactical extremes: the former by openness and dash; the latter by subtlety, and her own interpretations of the means extended to her by Providence. I will not be so bold as to state which of the two I think right. Good and evil work together in this world. If the Countess had not woven the tangle, and gained Evan time, Rose would never have seen his blood,—never have had her spirit hurried out of all shows and forms and habits of thought, up to the gates of existence, as it were, where she took him simply as God created him and her, and clave to him. Again, had Rose been secret, when this turn in her nature came, she would have forfeited the strange power she received from it, and which endowed her with decision to say what was in her heart, and stamp it lastingly there. The two Generals were quite antagonistic, but no two, in perfect ignorance of one another's proceedings, ever worked so harmoniously toward the main result. The Countess was the skilful engineer: Rose the General of cavalry. And it did really seem that, with Tom Cogglesby and his thousands in reserve, the victory was about to be gained. The male Jocelyns, an easy race, decided that, if the worst came to the worst, and Rose proved a wonder, there was money, which was something.

But social prejudice was about to claim its champion. Hitherto there had been no General on the opposite side. Love, aided by the Countess, had engaged an inert mass. The champion was discovered in the person of the provincial Don Juan, Mr. Harry Jocelyn. Harry had gone on a mysterious business of his own to London. He returned with a green box under his arm, which, five minutes after his arrival, was entrusted to Conning, in company with a genial present for herself, of a kind not perhaps so fit for exhibition; at least they both thought so, for it was given in the shades. Harry then went to pay his respects to his mother, who received him with her customary ironical tolerance. His father, to whom he was an incarnation of bother, likewise nodded to him and gave him a finger. Duty done, Harry looked round him for pleasure, and observed nothing but glum faces. Even the face of John Raikes was, heavy. He had been hovering about the Duke and Miss Current for an hour, hoping the Countess would come and give him a promised introduction. The Countess stirred not from above, and Jack drifted from group to group on the lawn, and grew conscious that wherever he went he brought silence with him. His isolation made him humble, and when Harry shook his hand, and said he remembered Fallow field and the fun there, Mr. Raikes thanked him.

Page 1355

Harry made his way to join his friend Ferdinand, and furnished him with the latest London news not likely to appear in the papers. Laxley was distant and unamused. From the fact, too, that Harry was known to be the Countess's slave, his presence produced the same effect in the different circles about the grounds, as did that of John Raikes. Harry began to yawn and wish very ardently for his sweet lady. She, however, had too fine an instinct to descend.

An hour before dinner, Juliana sent him a message that she desired to see him.

'Jove! I hope that girl's not going to be blowing hot again,' sighed the conqueror.

He had nothing to fear from Juliana. The moment they were alone she asked him, 'Have you heard of it?'

Harry shook his head and shrugged.

'They haven't told you? Rose has engaged herself to Mr. Harrington, a tradesman, a tailor!'

'Pooh! have you got hold of that story?' said Harry. 'But I'm sorry for old Ferdy. He was fond of Rosey. Here's another bother!'

'You don't believe me, Harry?'

Harry was mentally debating whether, in this new posture of affairs, his friend Ferdinand would press his claim for certain moneys lent.

'Oh, I believe you,' he said. 'Harrington has the knack with you women. Why, you made eyes at him. It was a toss-up between you and Rosey once.'

Juliana let this accusation pass.

'He is a tradesman. He has a shop in Lymport, I tell you, Harry, and his name on it. And he came here on purpose to catch Rose. And now he has caught her, he tells her. And his mother is now at one of the village inns, waiting to see him. Go to Mr. George Uplift; he knows the family. Yes, the Countess has turned your head, of course; but she has schemed, and schemed, and told such stories—God forgive her!'

The girl had to veil her eyes in a spasm of angry weeping.

'Oh, come! Juley!' murmured her killing cousin. Harry boasted an extraordinary weakness at the sight of feminine tears. 'I say! Juley! you know if you begin crying I'm done for, and it isn't fair.'

He dropped his arm on her waist to console her, and generously declared to her that he always had been, very fond of her. These scenes were not foreign to the youth. Her fits of crying, from which she would burst in a frenzy of contempt at him, had made Harry say stronger things; and the assurances of profound affection uttered in a most languid voice will sting the hearts of women.

Harry still went on with his declarations, heating them rapidly, so as to bring on himself the usual outburst and check. She was longer in coming to it this time, and he had a horrid fear, that instead of dismissing him fiercely, and so annulling his words, the strange little person was going to be soft and hold him to them. There were her tears, however, which she could not stop.

'Well, then, Juley, look. I do, upon my honour, yes—there, don't cry any more—I do love you.'

Page 1356

Harry held his breath in awful suspense. Juliana quietly disengaged her waist, and looking at him, said, 'Poor Harry! You need not lie any more to please me.'

Such was Harry's astonishment, that he exclaimed,

'It isn't a lie! I say, I do love you.' And for an instant he thought and hoped that he did love her.

'Well, then, Harry, I don't love you,' said Juliana; which revealed to our friend that he had been mistaken in his own emotions. Nevertheless, his vanity was hurt when he saw she was sincere, and he listened to her, a moody being. This may account for his excessive wrath at Evan Harrington after Juliana had given him proofs of the truth of what she said.

But the Countess was Harrington's sister! The image of the Countess swam before him. Was it possible? Harry went about asking everybody he met. The initiated were discreet; those who had the whispers were open. A bare truth is not so convincing as one that discretion confirms. Harry found the detestable news perfectly true.

'Stop it by all means if you can,' said his father.

'Yes, try a fall with Rose,' said his mother.

'And I must sit down to dinner to-day with a confounded fellow, the son of a tailor, who's had the impudence to make love to my sister!' cried Harry. 'I'm determined to kick him out of the house!—half.'

'To what is the modification of your determination due?' Lady Jocelyn inquired, probably suspecting the sweet and gracious person who divided Harry's mind.

Her ladyship treated her children as she did mankind generally, from her intellectual eminence. Harry was compelled to fly from her cruel shafts. He found comfort with his Aunt Shorne, and she as much as told Harry that he was the head of the house, and must take up the matter summarily. It was expected of him. Now was the time for him to show his manhood.

Harry could think of but one way to do that.

'Yes, and if I do—all up with the old lady,' he said, and had to explain that his Grandmama Bonner would never leave a penny to a fellow who had fought a duel.

'A duel!' said Mrs. Shorne. 'No, there are other ways. Insist upon his renouncing her. And Rose—treat her with a high hand, as becomes you. Your mother is incorrigible, and as for your father, one knows him of old. This devolves upon you. Our family honour is in your hands, Harry.'

Considering Harry's reputation, the family honour must have got low: Harry, of course, was not disposed to think so. He discovered a great deal of unused pride within him, for which he had hitherto not found an agreeable vent. He vowed to his aunt that he would not suffer the disgrace, and while still that blandishing olive-hued visage swam before his eyes, he pledged his word to Mrs. Shorne that he would come to an understanding with Harrington that night.

'Quietly,' said she. 'No scandal, pray.'

Page 1357

‘Oh, never mind how I do it,’ returned Harry, manfully. ’How am I to do it, then?’ he added, suddenly remembering his debt to Evan.

Mrs. Shorne instructed him how to do it quietly, and without fear of scandal. The miserable champion replied that it was very well for her to tell him to say this and that, but—and she thought him demented—he must, previous to addressing Harrington in those terms, have money.

‘Money!’ echoed the lady. ‘Money!’

‘Yes, money!’ he iterated doggedly, and she learnt that he had borrowed a sum of Harrington, and the amount of the sum.

It was a disastrous plight, for Mrs. Shorne was penniless.

She cited Ferdinand Laxley as a likely lender.

‘Oh, I’m deep with him already,’ said Harry, in apparent dejection.

‘How dreadful are these everlasting borrowings of yours!’ exclaimed his aunt, unaware of a trifling incongruity in her sentiments. ’You must speak to him without—pay him by-and-by. We must scrape the money together. I will write to your grandfather.’

’Yes; speak to him! How can I when I owe him? I can’t tell a fellow he’s a blackguard when I owe him, and I can’t speak any other way. I ain’t a diplomatist. Dashed if I know what to do!’

‘Juliana,’ murmured his aunt.

‘Can’t ask her, you know.’

Mrs. Shorne combated the one prominent reason for the objection: but there were two. Harry believed that he had exhausted Juliana’s treasury. Reproaching him further for his wastefulness, Mrs. Shorne promised him the money should be got, by hook or by crook, next day.

’And you will speak to this Mr. Harrington to-night, Harry? No allusion to the loan till you return it. Appeal to his sense of honour.’

The dinner-bell assembled the inmates of the house. Evan was not among them. He had gone, as the Countess said aloud, on a diplomatic mission to Fallow field, with Andrew Cogglesby. The truth being that he had finally taken Andrew into his confidence concerning the letter, the annuity, and the bond. Upon which occasion Andrew had burst into a laugh, and said he could lay his hand on the writer of the letter.

’Trust Old Tom for plots, Van! He’ll blow you up in a twinkling, the cunning old dog! He pretends to be hard—he ’s as soft as I am, if it wasn’t for his crotchets. We’ll hand him back the cash, and that’s ended. And—eh? what a dear girl she is! Not that I’m astonished. My Harry might have married a lord—sit at top of any table in the land! And you’re as good as any man.

That’s my opinion. But I say she’s a wonderful girl to see it.’

Chattering thus, Andrew drove with the dear boy into Fallow field. Evan was still in his dream. To him the generous love and valiant openness of Rose, though they were matched in his own bosom, seemed scarcely human. Almost as noble to him were the gentlemanly plainspeaking of Sir Franks and Lady Jocelyn’s kind commonsense. But the more he esteemed them, the more unbounded and miraculous appeared the prospect of his calling their daughter by the sacred name, and kneeling with her at their feet. Did the dear heavens have that in store for him? The horizon edges were dimly lighted.

Page 1358

Harry looked about under his eye-lids for Evan, trying at the same time to compose himself for the martyrdom he had to endure in sitting at table with the presumptuous fellow. The Countess signalled him to come within the presence. As he was crossing the room, Rose entered, and moved to meet him, with: 'Ah, Harry! back again! Glad to see you.'

Harry gave her a blunt nod, to which she was inattentive.

'What!' whispered the Countess, after he pressed the tips of her fingers. 'Have you brought back the grocer?'

Now this was hard to stand. Harry could forgive her her birth, and pass it utterly by if she chose to fall in love with him; but to hear the grocer mentioned, when he knew of the tailor, was a little too much, and what Harry felt his ingenuous countenance was accustomed to exhibit. The Countess saw it. She turned her head from him to the diplomatist, and he had to remain like a sentinel at her feet. He did not want to be thanked for the green box: still he thought she might have favoured him with one of her much-embracing smiles:

In the evening, after wine, when he was warm, and had almost forgotten the insult to his family and himself, the Countess snubbed him. It was unwise on her part, but she had the ghastly thought that facts were oozing out, and were already half known. She was therefore sensitive tenfold to appearances; savage if one failed to keep up her lie to her, and was guilty of a shadow of difference of behaviour. The pic-nic over, our General would evacuate Beckley Court, and shake the dust off her shoes, and leave the harvest of what she had sown to Providence. Till then, respect, and the honours of war! So the Countess snubbed him, and he being full of wine, fell into the hands of Juliana, who had witnessed the little scene.

'She has made a fool of others as well as of you,' said Juliana.

'How has she?' he inquired.

'Never mind. Do you want to make her humble and crouch to you?'

'I want to see Harrington,' said Harry.

'He will not return to-night from Fallow field. He has gone there to get Mr. Andrew Cogglesby's brother to do something for him. You won't have such another chance of humbling them both—both! I told you his mother is at an inn here. The Countess has sent Mr. Harrington to Fallow field to be out of the way, and she has told her mother all sorts of falsehoods.'

'How do you know all that?' quoth Harry. 'By Jove, Juley! talk about plotters! No keeping anything from you, ever!'

’Never mind. The mother is here. She must be a vulgar woman. Oh! if you could manage, Harry, to get this woman to come—you could do it so easily! while they are at the pie-nic tomorrow. It would have the best effect on Rose. She would then understand! And the Countess!’

‘I could send the old woman a message!’ cried Harry, rushing into the scheme, inspired by Juliana’s fiery eyes. ’Send her a sort of message to say where we all were.’

Page 1359

‘Let her know that her son is here, in some way,’ Juley resumed.

‘And, egad! what an explosion!’ pursued Harry. ‘But, suppose—’

’No one shall know, if you leave it to me-if you do just as I tell you, Harry. You won’t be treated as you were this evening after that, if you bring down her pride. And, Harry, I hear you want money—I can give you some.’

‘You’re a perfect trump, Juley!’ exclaimed her enthusiastic cousin.

‘But, no; I can’t take it. I must kiss you, though.’

He put a kiss upon her cheek. Once his kisses had left a red waxen stamp; she was callous to these compliments now.

‘Will you do what I advise you to-morrow?’ she asked.

After a slight hesitation, during which the olive-hued visage flitted faintly in the distances of his brain, Harry said:

’It ‘ll do Rose good, and make Harrington cut. Yes! I declare I will.’

Then they parted. Juliana went to her bed-room, and flung herself upon the bed hysterically. As the tears came thick and fast, she jumped up to lock the door, for this outrageous habit of crying had made her contemptible in the eyes of Lady Jocelyn, and an object of pity to Rose. Some excellent and noble natures cannot tolerate disease, and are mystified by its ebullitions. It was very sad to see the slight thin frame grasped by those wan hands to contain the violence of the frenzy that possessed her! the pale, hapless face rigid above the torment in her bosom! She had prayed to be loved like other girls, and her readiness to give her heart in return had made her a by-word in the house. She went to the window and leaned out on the casement, looking towards Fallowfield over the downs, weeping bitterly, with a hard shut mouth. One brilliant star hung above the ridge, and danced on her tears.

‘Will he forgive me?’ she murmured. ’Oh, my God! I wish we were dead together!’

Her weeping ceased, and she closed the window, and undressed as far away from the mirror as she could get; but its force was too much for her, and drew her to it. Some undefined hope had sprung in her suddenly. With nervous slow steps she approached the glass, and first brushing back the masses of black hair from her brow, looked as for some new revelation. Long and anxiously she perused her features: the wide bony forehead; the eyes deep-set and rounded with the scarlet of recent tears, the thin nose-sharp as the dead; the weak irritable mouth and sunken cheeks. She gazed like a spirit disconnected from what she saw. Presently a sort of forlorn negative was indicated by the motion of her head.

‘I can pardon him,’ she said, and sighed. ’How could he love such a face!’

CHAPTER XXX

THE BATTLE OF THE BULL-DOGS. PART I

Page 1360

At the South-western extremity of the park, with a view extending over wide meadows and troubled mill waters, yellow barn-roofs and weather-gray old farm-walls, two grassy mounds threw their slopes to the margin of the stream. Here the bull-dogs held revel. The hollow between the slopes was crowned by a bending birch, which rose three-stemmed from the root, and hung a noiseless green shower over the basin of green it shadowed. Beneath it the interminable growl sounded pleasantly; softly shot the sparkle of the twisting water, and you might dream things half-fulfilled. Knots of fern were about, but the tops of the mounds were firm grass, evidently well rolled, and with an eye to airy feet. Olympus one eminence was called, Parnassus the other. Olympus a little overlooked Parnassus, but Parnassus was broader and altogether better adapted for the games of the Muses. Round the edges of both there was a well-trimmed bush of laurel, obscuring only the feet of the dancers from the observing gods. For on Olympus the elders reclined. Great efforts had occasionally been made to dispossess and unseat them, and their security depended mainly on a hump in the middle of the mound which defied the dance.

Watteau-like groups were already couched in the shade. There were ladies of all sorts: town-bred and country-bred: farmers' daughters and daughters of peers: for this pic-nic, as Lady Jocelyn, disgusting the Countess, would call it, was in reality a 'fete champetre', given annually, to which the fair offspring of the superior tenants were invited the brothers and fathers coming to fetch them in the evening. It struck the eye of the Countess de Saldar that Olympus would be a fitting throne for her, and a point whence her shafts might fly without fear of a return. Like another illustrious General at Salamanca, she directed a detachment to take possession of the height. Courtly Sir John Loring ran up at once, and gave the diplomatist an opportunity to thank her flatteringly for gaining them two minutes to themselves. Sir John waved his handkerchief in triumph, welcoming them under an awning where carpets and cushions were spread, and whence the Countess could eye the field. She was dressed ravishingly; slightly in a foreign style, the bodice being peaked at the waist, as was then the Portuguese persuasion. The neck, too, was deliciously veiled with fine lace—and thoroughly veiled, for it was a feature the Countess did not care to expose to the vulgar daylight. Off her gentle shoulders, as it were some fringe of cloud blown by the breeze this sweet lady opened her bosom to, curled a lovely black lace scarf: not Caroline's. If she laughed, the tinge of mourning lent her laughter new charms. If she sighed, the exuberant array of her apparel bade the spectator be of good cheer. Was she witty, men surrendered reason and adored her. Only when she entered the majestic mood, and assumed the languors of greatness, and recited musky anecdotes of her intimacy

Page 1361

with it, only then did mankind, as represented at Beckley Court, open an internal eye and reflect that it was wonderful in a tailor's daughter. And she felt that mankind did so reflect. Her instincts did not deceive her. She knew not how much was known; in the depths of her heart she kept low the fear that possibly all might be known; and succeeding in this, she said to herself that probably nothing was known after all. George Uplift, Miss Carrington, and Rose, were the three she abhorred. Partly to be out of their way, and to be out of the way of chance shots (for she had heard names of people coming that reminded her of Dubbins's, where, in past days, there had been on one awful occasion a terrific discovery made), the Countess selected Olympus for her station. It was her last day, and she determined to be happy. Doubtless, she was making a retreat, but have not illustrious Generals snatched victory from their pursuers? Fair, then, sweet, and full of grace, the Countess moved. As the restless shifting of colours to her motions was the constant interchange of her semisorrowful manner and ready archness. Sir John almost capered to please her, and the diplomatist in talking to her forgot his diplomacy and the craft of his tongue.

It was the last day also of Caroline and the Duke. The Countess clung to Caroline and the Duke more than to Evan and Rose. She could see the first couple walking under an avenue of limes, and near them that young man or monkey, Raikes, as if in ambush. Twice they passed him, and twice he doffed his hat and did homage.

'A most singular creature!' exclaimed the Countess. 'It is my constant marvel where my brother discovered such a curiosity. Do notice him.'

'That man? Raikes?' said the diplomatist. 'Do you know he is our rival? Harry wanted an excuse for another bottle last night, and proposed the "Member" for Fallowfield. Up got this Mr. Raikes and returned thanks.'

'Yes?' the Countess negligently interjected in a way she had caught from Lady Jocelyn.

'Cogglesby's nominee, apparently.'

'I know it all,' said the Countess. 'We need have no apprehension. He is docile. My brother-in-law's brother, you see, is most eccentric. We can manage him best through this Mr. Raikes, for a personal application would be ruin. He quite detests our family, and indeed all the aristocracy.'

Melville's mouth pursed, and he looked very grave.

Sir John remarked: 'He seems like a monkey just turned into a man.'

'And doubtful about the tail,' added the Countess.

Page 1362

The image was tolerably correct, but other causes were at the bottom of the air worn by John Raikes. The Countess had obtained an invitation for him, with instructions that he should come early, and he had followed them so implicitly that the curricle was flinging dust on the hedges between Fallow field and Beckley but an hour or two after the chariot of Apollo had mounted the heavens, and Mr. Raikes presented himself at the breakfast table. Fortunately for him the Countess was there. After the repast she introduced him to the Duke: and he bowed to the Duke, and the Duke bowed to him: and now, to instance the peculiar justness in the mind of Mr. Raikes, he, though he worshipped a coronet and would gladly have recalled the feudal times to a corrupt land, could not help thinking that his bow had beaten the Duke's and was better. He would rather not have thought so, for it upset his preconceptions and threatened a revolution in his ideas. For this reason he followed the Duke, and tried, if possible, to correct, or at least chasten the impressions he had of possessing a glaring advantage over the nobleman. The Duke's second notice of him was hardly a nod. 'Well!' Mr. Raikes reflected, 'if this is your Duke, why, egad! for figure and style my friend Harrington beats him hollow.' And Raikes thought he knew who could conduct a conversation with superior dignity and neatness. The torchlight of a delusion was extinguished in him, but he did not wander long in that gloomy cavernous darkness of the disenchanted, as many of us do, and as Evan had done, when after a week at Beckley Court he began to examine of what stuff his brilliant father, the great Mel, was composed. On the contrary, as the light of the Duke dwindled, Raikes gained in lustre. 'In fact,' he said, 'there's nothing but the title wanting.' He was by this time on a level with the Duke in his elastic mind.

Olympus had been held in possession by the Countess about half an hour, when Lady Jocelyn mounted it, quite unconscious that she was scaling a fortified point. The Countess herself fired off the first gun at her.

'It has been so extremely delightful up alone here, Lady Jocelyn: to look at everybody below! I hope many will not intrude on us!'

'None but the dowagers who have breath to get up,' replied her ladyship, panting. 'By the way, Countess, you hardly belong to us yet. You dance?'

'Indeed, I do not.'

'Oh, then you are in your right place. A dowager is a woman who doesn't dance: and her male attendant is—what is he? We will call him a fogy.'

Lady Jocelyn directed a smile at Melville and Sir John, who both protested that it was an honour to be the Countess's fogy.

Rose now joined them, with Laxley morally dragged in her wake.

‘Another dowager and fogy!’ cried the Countess, musically. ’Do you not dance, my child?’

‘Not till the music strikes up,’ rejoined Rose. ’I suppose we shall have to eat first.’

Page 1363

‘That is the Hamlet of the pic-nic play, I believe,’ said her mother.

‘Of course you dance, don’t you, Countess?’ Rose inquired, for the sake of amiable conversation.

The Countess’s head signified: ‘Oh, no! quite out of the question’: she held up a little bit of her mournful draperies, adding: ’Besides, you, dear child, know your company, and can select; I do not, and cannot do so. I understand we have a most varied assembly!’

Rose shut her eyes, and then looked at her mother. Lady Jocelyn’s face was undisturbed; but while her eyes were still upon the Countess, she drew her head gently back, imperceptibly. If anything, she was admiring the lady; but Rose could be no placid philosophic spectator of what was to her a horrible assumption and hypocrisy. For the sake of him she loved, she had swallowed a nauseous cup bravely. The Countess was too much for her. She felt sick to think of being allied to this person. She had a shuddering desire to run into the ranks of the world, and hide her head from multitudinous hootings. With a pang of envy she saw her friend Jenny walking by the side of William Harvey, happy, untried, unoffending: full of hope, and without any bitter draughts to swallow!

Aunt Bel now came tripping up gaily.

’Take the alternative, ‘douairiere or demoiselle’?’ cried Lady Jocelyn. ‘We must have a sharp distinction, or Olympus will be mobbed.’

‘Entre les deux, s’il vous plait,’ responded Aunt Bel. ’Rose, hurry down, and leaven the mass. I see ten girls in a bunch. It’s shocking. Ferdinand, pray disperse yourself. Why is it, Emily, that we are always in excess at pic-nics? Is man dying out?’

‘From what I can see,’ remarked Lady Jocelyn, ’Harry will be lost to his species unless some one quickly relieves him. He’s already half eaten up by the Conley girls. Countess, isn’t it your duty to rescue him?’

The Countess bowed, and murmured to Sir John:

‘A dismissal!’

’I fear my fascinations, Lady Jocelyn, may not compete with those fresh young persons.’

‘Ha! ha! “fresh young persons,"’ laughed Sir John for the ladies in question were romping boisterously with Mr. Harry.

The Countess inquired for the names and condition of the ladies, and was told that they sprang from Farmer Conley, a well-to-do son of the soil, who farmed about a couple of

thousand acres between Fallow field and Beckley, and bore a good reputation at the county bank.

‘But I do think,’ observed the Countess, ’it must indeed be pernicious for any youth to associate with that class of woman. A deterioration of manners!’

Rose looked at her mother again. She thought ’Those girls would scorn to marry a tradesman’s son!’

The feeling grew in Rose that the Countess lowered and degraded her. Her mother’s calm contemplation of the lady was more distressing than if she had expressed the contempt Rose was certain, according to her young ideas, Lady Jocelyn must hold.

Page 1364

Now the Countess had been considering that she would like to have a word or two with Mr. Harry, and kissing her fingers to the occupants of Olympus, and fixing her fancy on the diverse thoughts of the ladies and gentlemen, deduced from a rapturous or critical contemplation of her figure from behind, she descended the slope.

Was it going to be a happy day? The well-imagined opinions of the gentleman on her attire and style, made her lean to the affirmative; but Rose's demure behaviour, and something—something would come across her hopes. She had, as she now said to herself, stopped for the pic-nic, mainly to give Caroline a last opportunity of binding the Duke to visit the Cogglesby saloons in London. Let Caroline cleverly contrive this, as she might, without any compromise, and the stay at Beckley Court would be a great gain. Yes, Caroline was still with the Duke; they were talking earnestly. The Countess breathed a short appeal to Providence that Caroline might not prove a fool. Overnight she had said to Caroline: 'Do not be so English. Can one not enjoy friendship with a nobleman without wounding one's conscience or breaking with the world? My dear, the Duke visiting you, you cow that infamous Strike of yours. He will be utterly obsequious! I am not telling you to pass the line. The contrary. But we continentals have our grievous reputation because we dare to meet as intellectual beings, and defy the imputation that ladies and gentlemen are no better than animals.'

It sounded very lofty to Caroline, who, accepting its sincerity, replied:

'I cannot do things by halves. I cannot live a life of deceit. A life of misery—not deceit.'

Whereupon, pitying her poor English nature, the Countess gave her advice, and this advice she now implored her familiars to instruct or compel Caroline to follow.

The Countess's garment was plucked at. She beheld little Dorothy Loring glancing up at her with the roguish timidity of her years.

'May I come with you?' asked the little maid, and went off into a prattle: 'I spent that five shillings—I bought a shilling's worth of sweet stuff, and nine penn'orth of twine, and a shilling for small wax candles to light in my room when I'm going to bed, because I like plenty of light by the looking-glass always, and they do make the room so hot! My Jane declared she almost fainted, but I burnt them out! Then I only had very little left for a horse to mount my doll on; and I wasn't going to get a screw, so I went to Papa, and he gave me five shillings. And, oh, do you know, Rose can't bear me to be with you. Jealousy, I suppose, for you're very agreeable. And, do you know, your Mama is coming to-day? I've got a Papa and no Mama, and you've got a Mama and no Papa. Isn't it funny? But I don't think so much of it, as you 're grown up. Oh, I'm quite sure she is coming, because I heard Harry telling Juley she was, and Juley said it would be so gratifying to you.'

Page 1365

A bribe and a message relieved the Countess of Dorothy's attendance on her.

What did this mean? Were people so base as to be guilty of hideous plots in this house? Her mother coming! The Countess's blood turned deadly chill. Had it been her father she would not have feared, but her mother was so vilely plain of speech; she never opened her mouth save to deliver facts: which was to the Countess the sign of atrocious vulgarity.

But her mother had written to say she would wait for Evan in Fallow field! The Countess grasped at straws. Did Dorothy hear that? And if Harry and Juliana spoke of her mother, what did that mean? That she was hunted, and must stand at bay!

'Oh, Papa! Papa! why did you marry a Dawley?' she exclaimed, plunging to what was, in her idea, the root of the evil.

She had no time for outcries and lamentations. It dawned on her that this was to be a day of battle. Where was Harry? Still in the midst of the Conley throng, apparently pooh-poohing something, to judge by the twist of his mouth.

The Countess delicately signed for him to approach her. The extreme delicacy of the signal was at least an excuse for Harry to perceive nothing. It was renewed, and Harry burst into a fit of laughter at some fun of one of the Conley girls. The Countess passed on, and met Juliana pacing by herself near the lower gates of the park. She wished only to see how Juliana behaved. The girl looked perfectly trustful, as much so as when the Countess was pouring in her ears the tales of Evan's growing but bashful affection for her.

'He will soon be here,' whispered the Countess. 'Has he told you he will come by this entrance?'

'No,' replied Juliana.

'You do not look well, sweet child.'

'I was thinking that you did not, Countess?'

'Oh, indeed, yes! With reason, alas! All our visitors have by this time arrived, I presume?'

'They come all day.'

The Countess hastened away from one who, when roused, could be almost as clever as herself, and again stood in meditation near the joyful Harry. This time she did not signal so discreetly. Harry could not but see it, and the Conley girls accused him of cruelty to the beautiful dame, which novel idea stung Harry with delight, and he held out

to indulge in it a little longer. His back was half turned, and as he talked noisily, he could not observe the serene and resolute march of the Countess toward him. The youth gaped when he found his arm taken prisoner by the insertion of a small deliciously-gloved and perfumed hand through it. 'I must claim you for a few moments,' said the Countess, and took the startled Conley girls one and all in her beautiful smile of excuse.

'Why do you compromise me thus, sir?'

These astounding words were spoken out of the hearing of the Conley girls.

'Compromise you!' muttered Harry.

Page 1366

Masterly was the skill with which the Countess contrived to speak angrily and as an injured woman, while she wore an indifferent social countenance.

’I repeat, compromise me. No, Mr. Harry Jocelyn, you are not the jackanapes you try to make people think you: you understand me.’

The Countess might accuse him, but Harry never had the ambition to make people think him that: his natural tendency was the reverse: and he objected to the application of the word jackanapes to himself, and was ready to contest the fact of people having that opinion at all. However, all he did was to repeat: ‘Compromise!’

‘Is not open unkindness to me compromising me?’

‘How?’ asked Harry.

’Would you dare to do it to a strange lady? Would you have the impudence to attempt it with any woman here but me? No, I am innocent; it is my consolation; I have resisted you, but you by this cowardly behaviour place me—and my reputation, which is more—-at your mercy. Noble behaviour, Mr. Harry Jocelyn! I shall remember my young English gentleman.’

The view was totally new to Harry.

‘I really had no idea of compromising you,’ he said. ’Upon my honour, I can’t see how I did it now!’

’Oblige me by walking less in the neighbourhood of those fat-faced glaring farm-girls,’ the Countess spoke under her breath; ’and don’t look as if you were being whipped. The art of it is evident—you are but carrying on the game.—Listen. If you permit yourself to exhibit an unkindness to me, you show to any man who is a judge, and to every woman, that there has been something between us. You know my innocence—-yes! but you must punish me for having resisted you thus long.’

Harry swore he never had such an idea, and was much too much of a man and a gentleman to behave in that way.—And yet it seemed wonderfully clever! And here was the Countess saying:

’Take your reward, Mr. Harry Jocelyn. You have succeeded; I am your humble slave. I come to you and sue for peace. To save my reputation I endanger myself. This is generous of you.’

‘Am I such a clever fellow?’ thought the young gentleman. ’Deuced lucky with women’: he knew that: still a fellow must be wonderfully, miraculously, clever to be able to twist and spin about such a woman as this in that way. He did not object to conceive that he

was the fellow to do it. Besides, here was the Countess de Saldar-worth five hundred of the Conley girls—almost at his feet!

Mollified, he said: ‘Now, didn’t you begin it?’

‘Evasion!’ was the answer. ’It would be such pleasure to you so see a proud woman weep! And if yesterday, persecuted as I am, with dreadful falsehoods abroad respecting me and mine, if yesterday I did seem cold to your great merits, is it generous of you to take this revenge?’

Harry began to scent the double meaning in her words. She gave him no time to grow cool over it. She leaned, half abandoned, on his arm. Arts feminine and irresistible encompassed him. It was a fatal mistake of Juliana’s to enlist Harry Jocelyn against the Countess de Saldar. He engaged, still without any direct allusion to the real business, to move heaven and earth to undo all that he had done, and the Countess implied an engagement to do—what? more than she intended to fulfil.

Page 1367

Ten minutes later she was alone with Caroline.

‘Tie yourself to the Duke at the dinner,’ she said, in the forcible phrase she could use when necessary. ’Don’t let them scheme to separate you. Never mind looks—do it!’

Caroline, however, had her reasons for desiring to maintain appearances. The Countess dashed at her hesitation.

’There is a plot to humiliate us in the most abominable way. The whole family have sworn to make us blush publicly. Publicly blush! They have written to Mama to come and speak out. Now will you attend to me, Caroline? You do not credit such atrocity? I know it to be true.’

‘I never can believe that Rose would do such a thing,’ said Caroline.’ We can hardly have to endure more than has befallen us already.’

Her speech was pensive, as of one who had matter of her own to ponder over. A swift illumination burst in the Countess’s mind.

’No? Have you, dear, darling Carry? not that I intend that you should! but to-day the Duke would be such ineffable support to us. May I deem you have not been too cruel to-day? You dear silly English creature, “Duck,” I used to call you when I was your little Louy. All is not yet lost, but I will save you from the ignominy if I can. I will!’

Caroline denied nothing—confirmed nothing, just as the Countess had stated nothing. Yet they understood one another perfectly. Women have a subtler language than ours: the veil pertains to them morally as bodily, and they see clearer through it.

The Countess had no time to lose. Wrath was in her heart. She did not lend all her thoughts to self-defence.

Without phrasing a word, or absolutely shaping a thought in her head, she slanted across the sun to Mr. Raikes, who had taken refreshment, and in obedience to his instinct, notwithstanding his enormous pretensions, had commenced a few preliminary antics.

‘Dear Mr. Raikes!’ she said, drawing him aside, ‘not before dinner!’

‘I really can’t contain the exuberant flow!’ returned that gentleman. ’My animal spirits always get the better of me,’ he added confidentially.

‘Suppose you devote your animal spirits to my service for half an hour.’

’Yours, Countess, from the ‘os frontis’ to the chine!’ was the exuberant rejoinder.

The Countess made a wry mouth.

‘Your curricle is in Beckley?’

‘Behold!’ said Jack. ’Two juveniles, not half so blest as I, do from the seat regard the festive scene o’er yon park palings. They are there, even Franko and Fred. I ’m afraid I promised to get them in at a later period of the day. Which sadly sore my conscience doth disturb! But what is to be done about the curricle, my Countess?’

‘Mr. Raikes,’ said the Countess, smiling on him fixedly, ’you are amusing; but in addressing me, you must be precise, and above all things accurate. I am not your Countess!’

Page 1368

He bowed profoundly. ‘Oh, that I might say my Queen!’

The Countess replied: ’A conviction of your lunacy would prevent my taking offence, though I might wish you enclosed and guarded.’

Without any further exclamations, Raikes acknowledged a superior.

‘And, now, attend to me,’ said the Countess. ’Listen:

You go yourself, or send your friends instantly to Fallow field. Bring with you that girl and her child. Stop: there is such a person. Tell her she is to be spoken to about the prospects of the poor infant. I leave that to your inventive genius. Evan wishes her here. Bring her, and should you see the mad captain who behaves so oddly, favour him with a ride. He says he dreams his wife is here, and he will not reveal his name! Suppose it should be my own beloved husband! I am quite anxious.’

The Countess saw him go up to the palings and hold a communication with his friends Franko and Fred. One took the whip, and after mutual flourishes, drove away.

‘Now!’ mused the Countess, ‘if Captain Evremonde should come!’ It would break up the pic-nic. Alas! the Countess had surrendered her humble hopes of a day’s pleasure. But if her mother came as well, what a diversion that would be! If her mother came before the Captain, his arrival would cover the retreat; if the Captain preceded her, she would not be noticed. Suppose her mother refrained from coming? In that case it was a pity, but the Jocelyns had brought it on themselves.

This mapping out of consequences followed the Countess’s deeds, and did not inspire them. Her passions sharpened her instincts, which produced her actions. The reflections ensued: as in nature, the consequences were all seen subsequently! Observe the difference between your male and female Generals.

On reflection, too, the Countess praised herself for having done all that could be done. She might have written to her mother: but her absence would have been remarked: her messenger might have been overhauled and, lastly, Mrs. Mel—’Gorgon of a mother!’ the Countess cried out: for Mrs. Mel was like a Fate to her. She could remember only two occasions in her whole life when she had been able to manage her mother, and then by lying in such a way as to distress her conscience severely.

’If Mama has conceived this idea of coming, nothing will impede her. My prayers will infuriate her!’ said the Countess, and she was sure that she had acted both rightly and with wisdom.

She put on her armour of smiles: she plunged into the thick of the enemy. Since they would not allow her to taste human happiness—she had asked but for the pic-nic! a small truce! since they denied her that, rather than let them triumph by seeing her

wretched, she took into her bosom the joy of demons. She lured Mr. George Uplift away from Miss Carrington, and spoke to him strange hints of matrimonial disappointments, looking from time

Page 1369

to time at that apprehensive lady, doating on her terrors. And Mr. George seconded her by his clouded face, for he was ashamed not to show that he did not know Louisa Harrington in the Countess de Saldar, and had not the courage to declare that he did. The Countess spoke familiarly, but without any hint of an ancient acquaintance between them. 'What a post her husband's got!' thought Mr. George, not envying the Count. He was wrong: she was an admirable ally. All over the field the Countess went, watching for her mother, praying that if she did come, Providence might prevent her from coming while they were at dinner. How clearly Mrs. Shorne and Mrs. Melville saw her vulgarity now! By the new light of knowledge, how certain they were that they had seen her ungentle training in a dozen little instances.

'She is not well-bred, 'cela se voit',' said Lady Jocelyn.

'Bred! it's the stage! How could such a person be bred?' said Mrs. Shorne.

Accept in the Countess the heroine who is combating class-prejudices, and surely she is pre-eminently noteworthy. True, she fights only for her family, and is virtually the champion of the opposing institution misplaced. That does not matter: the Fates may have done it purposely: by conquering she establishes a principle. A Duke adores her sister, the daughter of the house her brother, and for herself she has many protestations in honour of her charms: nor are they empty ones. She can confound Mrs. Melville, if she pleases to, by exposing an adorer to lose a friend. Issuing out of Tailordom, she, a Countess, has done all this; and it were enough to make her glow, did not little evils, and angers, and spites, and alarms so frightfully beset her.

The sun of the pic-nic system is dinner. Hence philosophers may deduce that the pic-nic is a British invention. There is no doubt that we do not shine at the pic-nic until we reflect the face of dinner. To this, then, all who were not lovers began seriously to look forward, and the advance of an excellent county band, specially hired to play during the entertainment, gave many of the guests quite a new taste for sweet music; and indeed we all enjoy a thing infinitely more when we see its meaning.

About this time Evan entered the lower park-gates with Andrew. The first object he encountered was John Raikes in a state of great depression. He explained his case:

'Just look at my frill! Now, upon my honour, you know, I'm good-tempered; I pass their bucolic habits, but this is beyond bearing. I was near the palings there, and a fellow calls out, "Hi! will you help the lady over?" Holloa! thinks I, an adventure! However, I advised him to take her round to the gates. The beast burst out laughing. "Now, then," says he, and I heard a scrambling at the pales, and up came the head of a dog. "Oh! the dog first," says I. "Catch by the ears," says he. I did so. "Pull," says he. "'Gad, pull indeed!", The

Page 1370

beast gave a spring and came slap on my chest, with his dirty wet muzzle on my neck! I felt instantly it was the death of my frill, but gallant as you know me, I still asked for the lady. "If you will please, or an it meet your favour, to extend your hand to me!" I confess I did think it rather odd, the idea of a lady coming in that way over the palings! but my curst love of adventure always blinds me. It always misleads my better sense, Harrington. Well, instead of a lady, I see a fellow—he may have been a lineal descendant of Cedric the Saxon. "Where's the lady?" says I. "Lady?" says he, and stares, and then laughs: "Lady! why," he jumps over, and points at his beast of a dog, "don't you know a bitch when you see one?" I was in the most ferocious rage! If he hadn't been a big burly bully, down he'd have gone. "Why didn't you say what it was?" I roared. "Why," says he, "the word isn't considered polite!" I gave him a cut there. I said, "I rejoice to be positively assured that you uphold the laws and forms of civilization, sir." My belief is he didn't feel it.'

'The thrust sinned in its shrewdness,' remarked Evan, ending a laugh.

'Hem!' went Mr. Raikes, more contentedly: 'after all, what are appearances to the man of wit and intellect? Dress, and women will approve you: but I assure you they much prefer the man of wit in his slouched hat and stockings down. I was introduced to the Duke this morning. It is a curious thing that the seduction of a Duchess has always been one of my dreams.'

At this Andrew Cogglesby fell into a fit of laughter.

'Your servant,' said Mr. Raikes, turning to him. And then he muttered 'Extraordinary likeness! Good Heavens! Powers!'

From a state of depression, Mr. Raikes—changed into one of bewilderment. Evan paid no attention to him, and answered none of his hasty undertoned questions. Just then, as they were on the skirts of the company, the band struck up a lively tune, and quite unconsciously, the legs of Raikes, affected, it may be, by supernatural reminiscences, loosely hornpiped. It was but a moment: he remembered himself the next: but in that fatal moment eyes were on him. He never recovered his dignity in Beckley Court: he was fatally mercurial.

'What is the joke against this poor fellow?' asked Evan of Andrew.

'Never mind, Van. You'll roar. Old Tom again. We 'll see by-and-by, after the champagne. He—this young Raikes-ha! ha!—but I can't tell you.' And Andrew went away to Drummond, to whom he was more communicative. Then he went to Melville, and one or two others, and the eyes of many became concentrated on Raikes, and it was observed as a singular sign that he was constantly facing about, and flushing the fiercest red. Once he made an effort to get hold of Evan's arm and drag him away, as one who had an urgent confession to be delivered of, but Evan was talking to Lady

Jocelyn, and other ladies, and quietly disengaged his arm without even turning to notice the face of his friend. Then the dinner was announced, and men saw the dinner. The Countess went to shake her brother's hand, and with a very gratulatory visage, said through her half-shut teeth.

Page 1371

'If Mama appears, rise up and go away with her, before she has time to speak a word.' An instant after Evan found himself seated between Mrs. Evremonde and one of the Conley girls. The dinner had commenced. The first half of the Battle of the Bull-dogs was as peaceful as any ordinary pic-nic, and promised to the general company as calm a conclusion.

CHAPTER XXXI

The battle of the bull-dogs. *Part ii*.

If it be a distinct point of wisdom to hug the hour that is, then does dinner amount to a highly intellectual invitation to man, for it furnishes the occasion; and Britons are the wisest of their race, for more than all others they take advantage of it. In this Nature is undoubtedly our guide, seeing that he who, while feasting his body allows to his soul a thought for the morrow, is in his digestion curst, and becomes a house of evil humours. Now, though the epicure may complain of the cold meats, a dazzling table, a buzzing company, blue sky, and a band of music, are incentives to the forgetfulness of troubles past and imminent, and produce a concentration of the faculties. They may not exactly prove that peace is established between yourself and those who object to your carving of the world, but they testify to an armistice.

Aided by these observations, you will understand how it was that the Countess de Saldar, afflicted and menaced, was inspired, on taking her seat, to give so graceful and stately a sweep to her dress that she was enabled to conceive woman and man alike to be secretly overcome by it. You will not refuse to credit the fact that Mr. Raikes threw care to the dogs, heavy as was that mysterious lump suddenly precipitated on his bosom; and you will think it not impossible that even the springers of the mine about to explode should lose their subterranean countenances. A generous abandonment to one idea prevailed. As for Evan, the first glass of champagne rushed into reckless nuptials with the music in his head, bringing Rose, warm almost as life, on his heart. Sublime are the visions of lovers! He knew he must leave her on the morrow; he feared he might never behold her again; and yet he tasted bliss, for it seemed within the contemplation of the Gods that he should dance with his darling before dark-haply waltz with her! Oh, heaven! he shuts his eyes, blinded. The band wheels off meltingly in a tune all cadences, and twirls, and risings and sinkings, and passionate outbursts trippingly consoled. Ah! how sweet to waltz through life with the right partner. And what a singular thing it is to look back on the day when we thought something like it! Never mind: there may be spheres where it is so managed—doubtless the planets have their Hanwell and Bedlam.

Page 1372

I confess that the hand here writing is not insensible to the effects of that first glass of champagne. The poetry of our Countess's achievements waxes rich in manifold colours: I see her by the light of her own pleas to Providence. I doubt almost if the hand be mine which dared to make a hero play second fiddle, and to his beloved. I have placed a bushel over his light, certainly. Poor boy! it was enough that he should have tailordom on his shoulders: I ought to have allowed him to conquer Nature, and so come out of his eclipse. This shall be said of him: that he can play second fiddle without looking foolish, which, for my part, I call a greater triumph than if he were performing the heroics we are more accustomed to. He has steady eyes, can gaze at the right level into the eyes of others, and commands a tongue which is neither struck dumb nor set in a flutter by any startling question. The best instances to be given that he does not lack merit are that the Jocelyns, whom he has offended by his birth, cannot change their treatment of him, and that the hostile women, whatever they may say, do not think Rose utterly insane. At any rate, Rose is satisfied, and her self-love makes her a keen critic. The moment Evan appeared, the sickness produced in her by the Countess passed, and she was ready to brave her situation. With no mock humility she permitted Mrs. Shorne to place her in a seat where glances could not be interchanged. She was quite composed, calmly prepared for conversation with any one. Indeed, her behaviour since the hour of general explanation had been so perfectly well-contained, that Mrs. Melville said to Lady Jocelyn:

'I am only thinking of the damage to her. It will pass over—this fancy. You can see she is not serious. It is mere spirit of opposition. She eats and drinks just like other girls. You can see that the fancy has not taken such very strong hold of her.'

'I can't agree with you,' replied her ladyship. 'I would rather have her sit and sigh by the hour, and loathe roast beef. That would look nearer a cure.'

'She has the notions of a silly country girl,' said Mrs. Shorne.

'Exactly,' Lady Jocelyn replied. 'A season in London will give her balance.'

So the guests were tolerably happy, or at least, with scarce an exception, open to the influences of champagne and music. Perhaps Juliana was the wretchedest creature present. She was about to smite on both cheeks him she loved, as well as the woman she despised and had been foiled by. Still she had the consolation that Rose, seeing the vulgar mother, might turn from Evan: a poor distant hope, meagre and shapeless like herself. Her most anxious thoughts concerned the means of getting money to lockup Harry's tongue. She could bear to meet the Countess's wrath, but not Evan's offended look. Hark to that Countess!

'Why do you denominate this a pic-nic, Lady Jocelyn? It is in verity a fete!'

Page 1373

’I suppose we ought to lie down ‘A la Grecque’ to come within the term,’ was the reply. ‘On the whole, I prefer plain English for such matters.’

’But this is assuredly too sumptuous for a pic-nic, Lady Jocelyn. From what I can remember, pic-nic implies contribution from all the guests. It is true I left England a child!’

Mr. George Uplift could not withhold a sharp grimace: The Countess had throttled the inward monitor that tells us when we are lying, so grievously had she practised the habit in the service of her family.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Melville, ’I have heard of that fashion, and very stupid it is.’

‘Extremely vulgar,’ murmured Miss Carrington.

‘Possibly,’ Lady Jocelyn observed; ’but good fun. I have been to pic-nics, in my day. I invariably took cold pie and claret. I clashed with half-a-dozen, but all the harm we did was to upset the dictum that there can be too much of a good thing. I know for certain that the bottles were left empty.’

‘And this woman,’ thought the Countess, ’this woman, with a soul so essentially vulgar, claims rank above me!’ The reflection generated contempt of English society, in the first place, and then a passionate desire for self-assertion.

She was startled by a direct attack which aroused her momentarily lulled energies.

A lady, quite a stranger, a dry simpering lady, caught the Countess’s benevolent passing gaze, and leaning forward, said: ’I hope her ladyship bears her affliction as well as can be expected?’

In military parlance, the Countess was taken in flank. Another would have asked—What ladyship? To whom do you allude, may I beg to inquire? The Countess knew better. Rapid as light it shot through her that the relict of Sir Abraham was meant, and this she divined because she was aware that devilish malignity was watching to trip her.

A little conversation happening to buzz at the instant, the Countess merely turned her chin to an angle, agitated her brows very gently, and crowned the performance with a mournful smile. All that a woman must feel at the demise of so precious a thing as a husband, was therein eloquently expressed: and at the same time, if explanations ensued, there were numerous ladyships in the world, whom the Countess did not mind afflicting, should she be hard pressed.

‘I knew him so well!’ resumed the horrid woman, addressing anybody. ’It was so sad! so unexpected! but he was so subject to affection of the throat. And I was so sorry I could not get down to him in time. I had not seen him since his marriage, when I was a girl!

—and to meet one of his children!—But, my dear, in quinsey, I have heard that there is nothing on earth like a good hearty laugh.'

Mr. Raikes hearing this, sucked down the flavour of a glass of champagne, and with a look of fierce jollity, interposed, as if specially charged by Providence to make plain to the persecuted Countess his mission and business there: 'Then our vocation is at last revealed to us! Quinsey-doctor! I remember when a boy, wandering over the paternal mansion, and envying the life of a tinker, which my mother did not think a good omen in me. But the traps of a Quinsey-doctor are even lighter. Say twenty good jokes, and two or three of a practical kind. A man most enviable!'

Page 1374

‘It appears,’ he remarked aloud to one of the Conley girls, ’that quinsey is needed before a joke is properly appreciated.’

‘I like fun,’ said she, but had not apparently discovered it.

What did that odious woman mean by perpetually talking about Sir Abraham? The Countess intercepted a glance between her and the hated Juliana. She felt it was a malignant conspiracy: still the vacuous vulgar air of the woman told her that most probably she was but an instrument, not a confederate, and was only trying to push herself into acquaintance with the great: a proceeding scorned and abominated by the Countess, who longed to punish her for her insolent presumption. The bitterness of her situation stung her tenfold when she considered that she dared not.

Meantime the champagne became as regular in its flow as the Bull-dogs, and the monotonous bass of these latter sounded through the music, like life behind the murmur of pleasure, if you will. The Countess had a not unfeminine weakness for champagne, and old Mr. Bonner’s cellar was well and choicely stocked. But was this enjoyment to the Countess?—this dreary station in the background! ‘May I emerge?’ she as much as implored Providence.

The petition was infinitely tender. She thought she might, or it may be that nature was strong, and she could not restrain herself.

Taking wine with Sir John, she said:

’This bowing! Do you know how amusing it is deemed by us Portuguese? Why not embrace? as the dear Queen used to say to me.’

‘I am decidedly of Her Majesty’s opinion,’ observed Sir John, with emphasis, and the Countess drew back into a mingled laugh and blush.

Her fiendish persecutor gave two or three nods. ‘And you know the Queen!’ she said.

She had to repeat the remark: whereupon the Countess murmured, ‘Intimately.’

‘Ah, we have lost a staunch old Tory in Sir Abraham,’ said the lady, performing lamentation.

What did it mean? Could design lodge in that empty-looking head with its crisp curls, button nose, and diminishing simper? Was this pic-nic to be made as terrible to the Countess by her putative father as the dinner had been by the great Mel? The deep, hard, level look of Juliana met the Countess’s smile from time to time, and like flimsy light horse before a solid array of infantry, the Countess fell back, only to be worried afresh by her perfectly unwitting tormentor.

‘His last days?—without pain? Oh, I hope so!’ came after a lapse of general talk.

‘Aren’t we getting a little funereal, Mrs. Perkins?’ Lady Jocelyn asked, and then rallied her neighbours.

Miss Carrington looked at her vexedly, for the fiendish Perkins was checked, and the Countess in alarm, about to commit herself, was a pleasant sight to Miss Carrington.

’The worst of these indiscriminate meetings is that there is no conversation,’ whispered the Countess, thanking Providence for the relief.

Page 1375

Just then she saw Juliana bend her brows at another person. This was George Uplift, who shook his head, and indicated a shrewd-eyed, thin, middle-aged man, of a lawyer-like cast; and then Juliana nodded, and George Uplift touched his arm, and glanced hurriedly behind for champagne. The Countess's eyes dwelt on the timid young squire most affectionately. You never saw a fortress more unprepared for dread assault.

'Hem!' was heard, terrific. But the proper pause had evidently not yet come, and now to prevent it the Countess strained her energies and tasked her genius intensely. Have you an idea of the difficulty of keeping up the ball among a host of ill-assorted, stupid country people, who have no open topics, and can talk of nothing continuously but scandal of their neighbours, and who, moreover, feel they are not up to the people they are mixing with? Darting upon Seymour Jocelyn, the Countess asked touchingly for news of the partridges. It was like the unlocking of a machine. Seymour was not blythe in his reply, but he was loud and forcible; and when he came to the statistics—oh, then you would have admired the Countess!—for comparisons ensued, braces were enumerated, numbers given were contested, and the shooting of this one jeered at, and another's sure mark respectfully admitted. And how lay the coveys? And what about the damage done by last winter's floods? And was there good hope of the pheasants? Outside this latter the Countess hovered. Twice the awful 'Hem!' was heard. She fought on. She kept them at it. If it flagged she wished to know this or that, and finally thought that, really, she should like herself to try one shot. The women had previously been left behind. This brought in the women. Lady Jocelyn proposed a female expedition for the morrow.

'I believe I used to be something of a shot, formerly,' she said.

'You peppered old Tom once, my lady,' remarked Andrew, and her ladyship laughed, and that foolish Andrew told the story, and the Countess, to revive her subject, had to say: 'May I be enrolled to shoot?' though she detested and shrank from fire-arms.

'Here are two!' said the hearty presiding dame. 'Ladies, apply immediately to have your names put down.'

The possibility of an expedition of ladies now struck Seymour vividly, and said he: 'I 'll be secretary'; and began applying to the ladies for permission to put down their names. Many declined, with brevity, muttering, either aloud or to themselves, 'unwomanly'; varied by 'unladylike': some confessed cowardice; some a horror of the noise close to their ears; and there was the plea of nerves. But the names of half-a-dozen ladies were collected, and then followed much laughter, and musical hubbub, and delicate banter. So the ladies and gentlemen fell one and all into the partridge pit dug for them by the Countess: and that horrible 'Hem!' equal in force and terror to the roar of artillery preceding the

Page 1376

charge of ten thousand dragoons, was silenced—the pit appeared impassable. Did the Countess crow over her advantage? Mark her: the lady's face is entirely given up to partridges. 'English sports are so much envied abroad,' she says: but what she dreads is a reflection, for that leads off from the point. A portion of her mind she keeps to combat them in Lady Jocelyn and others who have the tendency: the rest she divides between internal-prayers for succour, and casting about for another popular subject to follow partridges. Now, mere talent, as critics say when they are lighting candles round a genius, mere talent would have hit upon pheasants as the natural sequitur, and then diverged to sports—a great theme, for it ensures a chorus of sneers at foreigners, and so on probably to a discussion of birds and beasts best adapted to enrapture the palate of man. Stories may succeed, but they are doubtful, and not to be trusted, coming after cookery. After an exciting subject which has made the general tongue to wag, and just enough heated the brain to cause it to cry out for spiced food—then start your story: taking care that it be mild; for one too marvellous stops the tide, the sense of climax being strongly implanted in all bosoms. So the Countess told an anecdote—one of Mel's. Mr. George Uplift was quite familiar with it, and knew of one passage that would have abashed him to relate 'before ladies.' The sylph-like ease with which the Countess floated over this foul abysm was miraculous. Mr. George screwed his eye-lids queerly, and closed his jaws with a report, completely beaten. The anecdote was of the character of an apologue, and pertained to game. This was, as it happened, a misfortune; for Mr. Raikes had felt himself left behind by the subject; and the stuff that was in this young man being naturally ebullient, he lay by to trip it, and take a lead. His remarks brought on him a shrewd cut from the Countess, which made matters worse; for a pun may also breed puns, as doth an anecdote. The Countess's stroke was so neat and perfect that it was something for the gentlemen to think over; and to punish her for giving way to her cleverness and to petty vexation, 'Hem!' sounded once more, and then: 'May I ask you if the present Baronet is in England?'

Now Lady Jocelyn perceived that some attack was directed against her guest. She allowed the Countess to answer:

'The eldest was drowned in the Lisbon waters'

And then said: 'But who is it that persists in serving up the funeral baked meats to us?'

Mrs. Shorne spoke for her neighbour: 'Mr. Farnley's cousin was the steward of Sir Abraham Harrington's estates.'

The Countess held up her head boldly. There is a courageous exaltation of the nerves known to heroes and great generals in action when they feel sure that resources within themselves will spring up to the emergency, and that over simple mortals success is positive.

Page 1377

‘I had a great respect for Sir Abraham,’ Mr. Farnley explained, ’very great. I heard that this lady’ (bowing to the Countess) ’was his daughter.’

Lady Jocelyn’s face wore an angry look, and Mrs. Shorne gave her the shade of a shrug and an expression implying, ‘I didn’t!’

Evan was talking to Miss Jenny Graine at the moment rather earnestly. With a rapid glance at him, to see that his ears were closed, the Countess breathed:

‘Not the elder branch!—Cadet!’

The sort of noisy silence produced by half-a-dozen people respirating deeply and moving in their seats was heard. The Countess watched Mr. Farnley’s mystified look, and whispered to Sir John: ’Est-ce qu’il comprenne le Francais, lui?’

It was the final feather-like touch to her triumph. She saw safety and a clear escape, and much joyful gain, and the pleasure of relating her sufferings in days to come. This vista was before her when, harsh as an execution bell, telling her that she had vanquished man, but that Providence opposed her, ‘Mrs. Melchisedec Harrington!’ was announced to Lady Jocelyn.

Perfect stillness reigned immediately, as if the pic-nic had heard its doom.

‘Oh! I will go to her,’ said her ladyship, whose first thought was to spare the family. ‘Andrew, come and give me your arm.’

But when she rose Mrs. Mel was no more than the length of an arm from her elbow.

In the midst of the horrible anguish she was enduring, the Countess could not help criticizing her mother’s curtsey to Lady Jocelyn. Fine, but a shade too humble. Still it was fine; all might not yet be lost.

‘Mama!’ she softly exclaimed, and thanked heaven that she had not denied her parent.

Mrs. Mel did not notice her or any of her children. There was in her bosom a terrible determination to cast a devil out of the one she best loved. For this purpose, heedless of all pain to be given, or of impropriety, she had come to speak publicly, and disgrace and humiliate, that she might save him from the devils that had ruined his father.

‘My lady,’ said the terrible woman, thanking her in reply to an invitation that she should be seated, ’I have come for my son. I hear he has been playing the lord in your house, my lady. I humbly thank your ladyship for your kindness to him, but he is nothing more than a tailor’s son, and is bound a tailor himself that his father may be called an honest man. I am come to take him away.’

Mrs. Mel seemed to speak without much effort, though the pale flush of her cheeks showed that she felt what she was doing. Juliana was pale as death, watching Rose. Intensely bright with the gem-like light of her gallant spirit, Rose's eyes fixed on Evan. He met them. The words of Ruth passed through his heart. But the Countess, who had given Rose to Evan, and the Duke to Caroline, where was her supporter? The Duke was entertaining Caroline with no less dexterity, and Rose's eyes said to Evan: 'Feel no shame that I do not feel!' but the Countess stood alone. It is ever thus with genius! to quote the numerous illustrious authors who have written of it.

Page 1378

What mattered it now that in the dead hush Lady Jocelyn should assure her mother that she had been misinformed, and that Mrs. Mel was presently quieted, and made to sit with others before the fruits and wines? All eyes were hateful—the very thought of Providence confused her brain. Almost reduced to imbecility, the Countess imagined, as a reality, that Sir Abraham had borne with her till her public announcement of relationship, and that then the outraged ghost would no longer be restrained, and had struck this blow.

The crushed pic-nic tried to get a little air, and made attempts at conversation. Mrs. Mel sat upon the company with the weight of all tailordom.

And now a messenger came for Harry. Everybody was so zealously employed in the struggle to appear comfortable under Mrs. Mel, that his departure was hardly observed. The general feeling for Evan and his sisters, by their superiors in rank, was one of kindly pity. Laxley, however, did not behave well. He put up his glass and scrutinized Mrs. Mel, and then examined Evan, and Rose thought that in his interchange of glances with any one there was a lurking revival of the scene gone by. She signalled with her eyebrows for Drummond to correct him, but Drummond had another occupation. Andrew made the diversion. He whispered to his neighbour, and the whisper went round, and the laugh; and Mr. Raikes grew extremely uneasy in his seat, and betrayed an extraordinary alarm. But he also was soon relieved. A messenger had come from Harry to Mrs. Evremonde, bearing a slip of paper. This the lady glanced at, and handed it to Drummond. A straggling pencil had traced these words:

'Just running by S.W. gates—saw the Captain coming in—couldn't stop to stop him—-tremendous hurry—important. Harry J.'

Drummond sent the paper to Lady Jocelyn. After her perusal of it a scout was despatched to the summit of Olympus, and his report proclaimed the advance in the direction of the Bull-dogs of a smart little figure of a man in white hat and white trousers, who kept flicking his legs with a cane.

Mrs. Evremonde rose and conferred with her ladyship an instant, and then Drummond took her arm quietly, and passed round Olympus to the East, and Lady Jocelyn broke up the sitting.

Juliana saw Rose go up to Evan, and make him introduce her to his mother. She turned lividly white, and went to a corner of the park by herself, and cried bitterly.

Lady Jocelyn, Sir Franks, and Sir John, remained by the tables, but before the guests were out of ear-shot, the individual signalled from Olympus presented himself.

'There are times when one can't see what else to do but to lie,' said her ladyship to Sir Franks, 'and when we do lie the only way is to lie intrepidly.'

Turning from her perplexed husband, she exclaimed:

‘Ah! Lawson?’

Captain Evremonde lifted his hat, declining an intimacy.

Page 1379

‘Where is my wife, madam?’

‘Have you just come from the Arctic Regions?’

‘I have come for my wife, madam!’

His unsettled grey eyes wandered restlessly on Lady Jocelyn’s face. The Countess standing near the Duke, felt some pity for the wife of that cropped-headed, tight-skinned lunatic at large, but deeper was the Countess’s pity for Lady Jocelyn, in thinking of the account she would have to render on the Day of Judgement, when she heard her ladyship reply—

‘Evelyn is not here.’

Captain Evremonde bowed profoundly, trailing his broad white hat along the sward.

‘Do me the favour to read this, madam,’ he said, and handed a letter to her.

Lady Jocelyn raised her brows as she gathered the contents of the letter.

‘Ferdinand’s handwriting!’ she exclaimed.

’I accuse no one, madam,—I make no accusation. I have every respect for you, madam,—you have my esteem. I am sorry to intrude, madam, an intrusion is regretted. My wife runs away from her bed, madam, and I have the law, madam, the law is with the husband. No force!’ He lashed his cane sharply against his white legs. ‘The law, madam. No brute force!’ His cane made a furious whirl, cracking again on his legs, as he reiterated, ‘The law!’

’Does the law advise you to strike at a tangent all over the country in search for her?’ inquired Lady Jocelyn.

Captain Evremonde became ten times more voluble and excited.

Mrs. Mel was heard by the Countess to say: ’Her ladyship does not know how to treat madmen.’

Nor did Sir Franks and Sir John. They began expostulating with him.

‘A madman gets madder when you talk reason to him,’ said Mrs. Mel.

And now the Countess stepped forward to Lady Jocelyn, and hoped she would not be thought impertinent in offering her opinion as to how this frantic person should be treated. The case indeed looked urgent. Many gentlemen considered themselves bound to approach and be ready in case of need. Presently the Countess passed

between Sir Franks and Sir John, and with her hand put up, as if she feared the furious cane, said:

‘You will not strike me?’

‘Strike a lady, madam?’ The cane and hat were simultaneously lowered.

’Lady Jocelyn permits me to fetch for you a gentleman of the law. Or will you accompany me to him?’

In a moment, Captain Evremonde’s manners were subdued and civilized, and in perfectly sane speech he thanked the Countess and offered her his arm. The Countess smilingly waved back Sir John, who motioned to attend on her, and away she went with the Captain, with all the glow of a woman who feels that she is heaping coals of fire on the heads of her enemies.

Was she not admired now?

‘Upon my honour,’ said Lady Jocelyn, ‘they are a remarkable family,’ meaning the Harringtons.

Page 1380

What farther she thought she did not say, but she was a woman who looked to natural gifts more than the gifts of accidents; and Evan's chance stood high with her then. So the battle of the Bull-dogs was fought, and cruelly as the Countess had been assailed and wounded, she gained a victory; yea, though Demogorgon, aided by the vindictive ghost of Sir Abraham, took tangible shape in the ranks opposed to her. True, Lady Jocelyn, forgetting her own recent intrepidity, condemned her as a liar; but the fruits of the Countess's victory were plentiful. Drummond Forth, fearful perhaps of exciting unjust suspicions in the mind of Captain Evremonde, disappeared altogether. Harry was in a mess which threw him almost upon Evan's mercy, as will be related. And, lastly, Ferdinand Laxley, that insufferable young aristocrat, was thus spoken to by Lady Jocelyn.

'This 'letter addressed to Lawson, telling him that his wife is here, is in your handwriting, Ferdinand. I don't say you wrote it—I don't think you could have written it. But, to tell you the truth, I have an unpleasant impression about it, and I think we had better shake hands and not see each other for some time.'

Laxley, after one denial of his guilt, disdained to repeat it. He met her ladyship's hand haughtily, and, bowing to Sir Franks, turned on his heel.

So, then, in glorious complete victory, the battle of the Bull-dogs ended!

Of the close of the pic-nic more remains to be told.

For the present I pause, in observance of those rules which demand that after an exhibition of consummate deeds, time be given to the spectator to digest what has passed before him.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH EVANS LIGHT BEGINS TO TWINKLE AGAIN

The dowagers were now firmly planted on Olympus. Along the grass lay the warm strong colours of the evening sun, reddening the pine-stems and yellowing the idle aspen-leaves. For a moment it had hung in doubt whether the pic-nic could survive the two rude shocks it had received. Happily the youthful element was large, and when the band, refreshed by chicken and sherry, threw off half-a-dozen bars of one of those irresistible waltzes that first catch the ear, and then curl round the heart, till on a sudden they invade and will have the legs, a rush up Parnassus was seen, and there were shouts and laughter and commotion, as over other great fields of battle the corn will wave gaily and mark the reestablishment of nature's reign.

How fair the sight! Approach the twirling couples. They talk as they whirl. 'Fancy the run-away tailor!' is the male's remark, and he expects to be admired for it, and is.

’That make-up Countess—his sister, you know—didn’t you see her? she turned green,’ says Creation’s second effort, almost occupying the place of a rib.

‘Isn’t there a run-away wife, too?’

Page 1381

‘Now, you mustn’t be naughty!’

They laugh and flatter one another. The power to give and take flattery to any amount is the rare treasure of youth.

Undoubtedly they are a poetical picture; but some poetical pictures talk dreary prose; so we will retire.

Now, while the dancers carried on their business, and distance lent them enchantment, Rose stood by Juliana, near an alder which hid them from the rest.

‘I don’t accuse you,’ she was saying; ’but who could have done this but you? Ah, Juley! you will never get what you want if you plot for it. I thought once you cared for Evan. If he had loved you, would I not have done all that I could for you both? I pardon you with all my heart.’

‘Keep your pardon!’ was the angry answer. ’I have done more for you, Rose. He is an adventurer, and I have tried to open your eyes and make you respect your family. You may accuse me of what you like, I have my conscience.’

‘And the friendship of the Countess,’ added Rose.

Juliana’s figure shook as if she had been stung.

‘Go and be happy—don’t stay here and taunt me,’ she said, with a ghastly look. ’I suppose he can lie like his sister, and has told you all sorts of tales.’

‘Not a word—not a word!’ cried Rose. ’Do you think my lover could tell a lie?’

The superb assumption of the girl, and the true portrait of Evan’s character which it flashed upon Juliana, were to the latter such intense pain, that she turned like one on the rack, exclaiming:

’You think so much of him? You are so proud of him? Then, yes! I love him too, ugly, beastly as I am to look at! Oh, I know what you think! I loved him from the first, and I knew all about him, and spared him pain. I did not wait for him to fall from a horse. I watched every chance of his being exposed. I let them imagine he cared for me. Drummond would have told what he knew long before—only he knew there would not be much harm in a tradesman’s son marrying me. And I have played into your hands, and now you taunt me!’

Rose remembered her fretful unkindness to Evan on the subject of his birth, when her feelings toward him were less warm. Dwelling on that alone, she put her arms round Juliana’s stiffening figure, and said: ’I dare say I am much more selfish than you. Forgive me, dear.’

Staring at her, Juliana replied, ‘Now you are acting.’

‘No,’ said Rose, with a little effort to fondle her; ’I only feel that I love you better for loving him.’

Generous as her words sounded, and were, Juliana intuitively struck to the root of them, which was comfortless. For how calm in its fortune, how strong in its love, must Rose’s heart be, when she could speak in this unwonted way!

‘Go, and leave me, pray,’ she said.

Rose kissed her burning cheek. ’I will do as you wish, dear. Try and know me better, and be sister Juley as you used to be. I know I am thoughtless, and horribly vain and disagreeable sometimes. Do forgive me. I will love you truly.’

Page 1382

Half melting, Juliana pressed her hand.

‘We are friends?’ said Rose. ‘Good-bye’; and her countenance lighted, and she moved away, so changed by her happiness! Juliana was jealous of a love strong as she deemed her own to overcome obstacles. She called to her: ’Rose! Rose, you will not take advantage of what I have told you, and repeat it to any one?’

Instantly Rose turned with a glance of full contempt over her shoulder.

‘To whom?’ she asked.

‘To any one.’

‘To him? He would not love me long if I did!’

Juliana burst into fresh tears, but Rose walked into the sunbeams and the circle of the music.

Mounting Olympus, she inquired whether Ferdinand was within hail, as they were pledged to dance the first dance together. A few hints were given, and then Rose learnt that Ferdinand had been dismissed.

‘And where is he?’ she cried with her accustomed impetuosity. ’Mama!—of course you did not accuse him—but, Mama! could you possibly let him go with the suspicion that you thought him guilty of writing an anonymous letter?’

‘Not at all,’ Lady Jocelyn replied. ’Only the handwriting was so extremely like, and he was the only person who knew the address and the circumstances, and who could have a motive—though I don’t quite see what it is—I thought it as well to part for a time.’

‘But that’s sophistry!’ said Rose. ’You accuse or you exonerate. Nobody can be half guilty. If you do not hold him innocent you are unjust!’ Lady Jocelyn rejoined: ’Yes? It’s singular what a stock of axioms young people have handy for their occasions.’

Rose loudly announced that she would right this matter.

‘I can’t think where Rose gets her passion for hot water,’ said her mother, as Rose ran down the ledge.

Two or three young gentlemen tried to engage her for a dance. She gave them plenty of promises, and hurried on till she met Evan, and, almost out of breath, told him the shameful injustice that had been done to her friend.

’Mama is such an Epicurean! I really think she is worse than Papa. This disgraceful letter looks like Ferdinand’s writing, and she tells him so; and, Evan! will you believe that

instead of being certain it's impossible any gentleman could do such a thing, she tells Ferdinand she shall feel more comfortable if she doesn't see him for some time? Poor Ferdinand! He has had so much to bear!'

Too sure of his darling to be envious now of any man she pitied, Evan said, 'I would forfeit my hand on his innocence!'

'And so would I,' echoed Rose. 'Come to him with me, dear. Or no,' she added, with a little womanly discretion, 'perhaps it would not be so well—you're not very much cast down by what happened at dinner?'

'My darling! I think of you.'

'Of me, dear? Concealment is never of any service. What there is to be known people may as well know at once. They'll gossip for a month, and then forget it. Your mother is dreadfully outspoken, certainly; but she has better manners than many ladies—I mean people in a position: you understand me? But suppose, dear, this had happened, and I had said nothing to Mama, and then we had to confess? Ah, you'll find I'm wiser than you imagine, Mr. Evan.'

Page 1383

‘Haven’t I submitted to somebody’s lead?’

’Yes, but with a sort of “under protest.” I saw it by the mouth. Not quite natural. You have been moody ever since—just a little. I suppose it’s our manly pride. But I’m losing time. Will you promise me not to brood over that occurrence? Think of me. Think everything of me. I am yours; and, dearest, if I love you, need you care what anybody else thinks? We will soon change their opinion.’

‘I care so little,’ said Evan, somewhat untruthfully, ’that till you return I shall go and sit with my mother.’

’Oh, she has gone. She made her dear old antiquated curtsey to Mama and the company. “If my son has not been guilty of deception, I will leave him to your good pleasure, my lady.” That’s what she said. Mama likes her, I know. But I wish she didn’t mouth her words so precisely: it reminds me of—’ the Countess, Rose checked herself from saying. ’Good-bye. Thank heaven! the worst has happened. Do you know what I should do if I were you, and felt at all distressed? I should keep repeating,’ Rose looked archly and deeply up under his eyelids, “’I am the son of a tradesman, and Rose loves me,” over and over, and then, if you feel ashamed, what is it of?’

She nodded adieu, laughing at her own idea of her great worth; an idea very firmly fixed in her fair bosom, notwithstanding. Mrs. Melville said of her, ‘I used to think she had pride.’ Lady Jocelyn answered, ’So she has. The misfortune is that it has taken the wrong turning.’

Evan watched the figure that was to him as that of an angel—no less! She spoke so frankly to them as she passed: or here and there went on with a light laugh. It seemed an act of graciousness that she should open her mouth to one! And, indeed, by virtue of a pride which raised her to the level of what she thought it well to do, Rose was veritably on higher ground than any present. She no longer envied her friend Jenny, who, emerging from the shades, allured by the waltz, dislinked herself from William’s arm, and whispered exclamations of sorrow at the scene created by Mr. Harrington’s mother. Rose patted her hand, and said: ’Thank you, Jenny dear but don’t be sorry. I’m glad. It prevents a number of private explanations.’

‘Still, dear!’ Jenny suggested.

’Oh! of course, I should like to lay my whip across the shoulders of the person who arranged the conspiracy,’ said Rose. ’And afterwards I don’t mind returning thanks to him, or her, or them.’

William cried out, ’I ‘m always on your side, Rose.’

‘And I’ll be Jenny’s bridesmaid,’ rejoined Rose, stepping blithely away from them.

Evan debated whither to turn when Rose was lost to his eyes. He had no heart for dancing. Presently a servant approached, and said that Mr. Harry particularly desired to see him. From Harry's looks at table, Evan judged that the interview was not likely to be amicable. He asked the direction he was to take, and setting out with long strides, came in sight of Raikes, who walked in gloom, and was evidently labouring under one of his mountains of melancholy. He affected to be quite out of the world; but finding that Evan took the hint in his usual prosy manner, was reduced to call after him, and finally to run and catch him.

Page 1384

‘Haven’t you one single spark of curiosity?’ he began.

‘What about?’ said Evan.

’Why, about my amazing luck! You haven’t asked a question. A matter of course.’

Evan complimented him by asking a question: saying that Jack’s luck certainly was wonderful.

‘Wonderful, you call it,’ said Jack, witheringly. ’And what’s more wonderful is, that I’d give up all for quiet quarters in the Green Dragon. I knew I was prophetic. I knew I should regret that peaceful hostelry. Diocletian, if you like. I beg you to listen. I can’t walk so fast without danger.’

‘Well, speak out, man. What’s the matter with you?’ cried Evan, impatiently.

Jack shook his head: ‘I see a total absence of sympathy,’ he remarked. ’I can’t.’

‘Then stand out of the way.’

Jack let him pass, exclaiming, with cold irony, ’I will pay homage to a loftier Nine!’

Mr. Raikes could not in his soul imagine that Evan was really so little inquisitive concerning a business of such importance as the trouble that possessed him. He watched his friend striding off, incredulously, and then commenced running in pursuit.

’Harrington, I give in; I surrender; you reduce me to prose. Thy nine have conquered my nine!—pardon me, old fellow. I’m immensely upset. This is the first day in my life that I ever felt what indigestion is. Egad, I’ve got something to derange the best digestion going!

’Look here, Harrington. What happened to you today, I declare I think nothing of. You owe me your assistance, you do, indeed; for if it hadn’t been for the fearful fascinations of your sister—that divine Countess—I should have been engaged to somebody by this time, and profited by the opportunity held out to me, and which is now gone. I ’m disgraced. I ’m known. And the worst of it is, I must face people. I daren’t turn tail. Did you ever hear of such a dilemma?’

‘Ay,’ quoth Evan, ‘what is it?’

Raikes turned pale. ‘Then you haven’t heard of it?’ ‘Not a word.’

’Then it’s all for me to tell. I called on Messrs. Grist. I dined at the Aurora afterwards. Depend upon it, Harrington, we’re led by a star. I mean, fellows with anything in them are. I recognized our Fallow field host, and thinking to draw him out, I told our mutual

histories. Next day I went to these Messrs. Grist. They proposed the membership for Fallow field, five hundred a year, and the loan of a curricle, on condition. It 's singular, Harrington; before anybody knew of the condition I didn't care about it a bit. It seemed to me childish. Who would think of minding wearing a tin plate? But now!—the sufferings of Orestes—what are they to mine? He wasn't tied to his Furies. They did hover a little above him; but as for me, I'm scorched; and I mustn't say where: my mouth is locked; the social laws which forbid the employment of obsolete words arrest my exclamations of despair. What do you advise?'

Page 1385

Evan stared a moment at the wretched object, whose dream of meeting a beneficent old gentleman had brought him to be the sport of a cynical farceur. He had shivers on his own account, seeing something of himself magnified, and he loathed the fellow, only to feel more acutely what a stigma may be.

'It 's a case I can't advise in,' he said, as gently as he could. 'I should be off the grounds in a hurry.'

'And then I'm where I was before I met the horrid old brute!' Raikes moaned.

'I told him over a pint of port-and noble stuff is that Aurora port!—I told him—I amused him till he was on the point of bursting—I told him I was such a gentleman as the world hadn't seen—minus money. So he determined to launch me. He said I should lead the life of such a gentleman as the world had not yet seen—on that simple condition, which appeared to me childish, a senile whim; rather an indulgence of his.'

Evan listened to the tribulations of his friend as he would to those of a doll—the sport of some experimental child. By this time he knew something of old Tom Cogglesby, and was not astonished that he should have chosen John Raikes to play one of his farces on. Jack turned off abruptly the moment he saw they were nearing human figures, but soon returned to Evan's side, as if for protection.

'Hoy! Harrington!' shouted Harry, beckoning to him. 'Come, make haste! I'm in a deuce of a mess.'

The two Wheedles—Susan and Polly—were standing in front of him, and after his call to Evan, he turned to continue some exhortation or appeal to the common sense of women, largely indulged in by young men when the mischief is done.

'Harrington, do speak to her. She looks upon you as a sort of parson. I can't make her believe I didn't send for her. Of course, she knows I 'm fond of her. My dear fellow,' he whispered, 'I shall be ruined if my grandmother hears of it. Get her away, please. Promise anything.'

Evan took her hand and asked for the child.

'Quite well, sir,' faltered Susan.

'You should not have come here.'

Susan stared, and commenced whimpering: 'Didn't you wish it, sir?'

'Oh, she's always thinking of being made a lady of,' cried Polly. 'As if Mr. Harry was going to do that. It wants a gentleman to do that.'

‘The carriage came for me, sir, in the afternoon,’ said Susan, plaintively, ‘with your compliments, and would I come. I thought—’

‘What carriage?’ asked Evan.

Raikes, who was ogling Polly, interposed grandly, ‘Mine!’

‘And you sent in my name for this girl to come here?’ Evan turned wrathfully on him.

’My dear Harrington, when you hit you knock down. The wise require but one dose of experience. The Countess wished it, and I did dispatch.’

‘The Countess!’ Harry exclaimed; ’Jove! do you mean to say that the Countess—’

‘De Saldar,’ added Jack. ‘In Britain none were worthy found.’

Page 1386

Harry gave a long whistle.

‘Leave at once,’ said Evan to Susan. ’Whatever you may want send to me for. And when you think you can meet your parents, I will take you to them. Remember that is what you must do.’

’Make her give up that stupidness of hers, about being made a lady of, Mr. Harrington,’ said the inveterate Polly.

Susan here fell a-weeping.

‘I would go, sir,’ she said. ’I ’m sure I would obey you: but I can’t. I can’t go back to the inn. They ’re beginning to talk about me, because—because I can’t—can’t pay them, and I’m ashamed.’

Evan looked at Harry.

‘I forgot,’ the latter mumbled, but his face was crimson. He put his hands in his pockets. ‘Do you happen to have a note or so?’ he asked.

Evan took him aside and gave him what he had; and this amount, without inspection or reserve, Harry offered to Susan. She dashed his hand impetuously from her sight.

‘There, give it to me,’ said Polly. ’Oh, Mr. Harry! what a young man you are!’

Whether from the rebuff, or the reproach, or old feelings reviving, Harry was moved to go forward, and lay his hand on Susan’s shoulder and mutter something in her ear that softened her.

Polly thrust the notes into her bosom, and with a toss of her nose, as who should say, ’Here ’s nonsense they ‘re at again,’ tapped Susan on the other shoulder, and said imperiously: ‘Come, Miss!’

Hurrying out a dozen sentences in one, Harry ended by suddenly kissing Susan’s cheek, and then Polly bore her away; and Harry, with great solemnity, said to Evan:

’’Pon my honour, I think I ought to! I declare I think I love that girl. What’s one’s family? Why shouldn’t you button to the one that just suits you? That girl, when she’s dressed, and in good trim, by Jove! nobody ’d know her from a born lady. And as for grammar, I’d soon teach her that.’

Harry began to whistle: a sign in him that he was thinking his hardest.

‘I confess to being considerably impressed by the maid Wheedle,’ said Raikes.

‘Would you throw yourself away on her?’ Evan inquired.

Apparently forgetting how he stood, Mr. Raikes replied:

’You ask, perhaps, a little too much of me. One owes consideration to one’s position. In the world’s eyes a matrimonial slip outweighs a peccadillo. No. To much the maid might wheedle me, but to Hymen! She’s decidedly fresh and pert—the most delicious little fat lips and cocky nose; but cease we to dwell on her, or of us two, to! one will be undone.’

Harry burst into a laugh: ‘Is this the T.P. for Fallow field?’

‘M.P. I think you mean,’ quoth Raikes, serenely; but a curious glance being directed on him, and pursuing him pertinaciously, it was as if the pediment of the lofty monument he topped were smitten with violence. He stammered an excuse, and retreated somewhat as it is the fashion to do from the presence of royalty, followed by Harry’s roar of laughter, in which Evan cruelly joined.

Page 1387

‘Gracious powers!’ exclaimed the victim of ambition, ’I’m laughed at by the son of a tailor!’ and he edged once more into the shade of trees.

It was a strange sight for Harry’s relatives to see him arm-in-arm with the man he should have been kicking, challenging, denouncing, or whatever the code prescribes: to see him talking to this young man earnestly, clinging to him affectionately, and when he separated from him, heartily wringing his hand. Well might they think that there was something extraordinary in these Harringtons. Convicted of Tailordom, these Harringtons appeared to shine with double lustre. How was it? They were at a loss to say. They certainly could say that the Countess was egregiously affected and vulgar; but who could be altogether complacent and sincere that had to fight so hard a fight? In this struggle with society I see one of the instances where success is entirely to be honoured and remains a proof of merit. For however boldly antagonism may storm the ranks of society, it will certainly be repelled, whereas affinity cannot be resisted; and they who, against obstacles of birth, claim and keep their position among the educated and refined, have that affinity. It is, on the whole, rare, so that society is not often invaded. I think it will have to front Jack Cade again before another Old Mel and his progeny shall appear. You refuse to believe in Old Mel? You know not nature’s cunning.

Mrs. Shorne, Mrs. Melville, Miss Carrington, and many of the guests who observed Evan moving from place to place, after the exposure, as they called it, were amazed at his audacity. There seemed such a quietly superb air about him. He would not look out of his element; and this, knowing what they knew, was his offence. He deserved some commendation for still holding up his head, but it was love and Rose who kept the fires of his heart alive.

The sun had sunk. The figures on the summit of Parnassus were seen bobbing in happy placidity against the twilight sky. The sun had sunk, and many of Mr. Raikes’ best things were unspoken. Wandering about in his gloom, he heard a feminine voice:

‘Yes, I will trust you.’

‘You will not repent it,’ was answered.

Recognizing the Duke, Mr. Raikes cleared his throat.

’A-hem, your Grace! This is how the days should pass. I think we should diurnally station a good London band on high, and play his Majesty to bed—the sun. My opinion is, it would improve the crops. I’m not, as yet, a landed proprietor—’

The Duke stepped aside with him, and Raikes addressed no one for the next twenty minutes. When he next came forth Parnassus was half deserted. It was known that old Mrs. Bonner had been taken with a dangerous attack, and under this third blow the pic-

nic succumbed. Simultaneously with the messenger that brought the news to Lady Jocelyn, one approached Evan, and informed him that the Countess de Saldar urgently entreated him to come to the house without delay. He also wished to speak a few words to her, and stepped forward briskly. He had no prophetic intimations of the change this interview would bring upon him.

Page 1388

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HERO TAKES HIS RANK IN THE ORCHESTRA

The Countess was not in her dressing-room when Evan presented himself. She was in attendance on Mrs. Bonner, Conning said; and the primness of Conning was a thing to have been noticed by any one save a dreamy youth in love. Conning remained in the room, keeping distinctly aloof. Her duties absorbed her, but a presiding thought mechanically jerked back her head from time to time: being the mute form of, 'Well, I never!' in Conning's rank of life and intellectual capacity. Evan remained quite still in a chair, and Conning was certainly a number of paces beyond suspicion, when the Countess appeared, and hurling at the maid one of those feminine looks which contain huge quartos of meaning, vented the cold query:

'Pray, why did you not come to me, as you were commanded?'

'I was not aware, my lady,' Conning drew up to reply, and performed with her eyes a lofty rejection of the volume cast at her, and a threat of several for offensive operations, if need were.

The Countess spoke nearer to what she was implying 'You know I object to this: it is not the first time.'

'Would your ladyship please to say what your ladyship means?'

In return for this insolent challenge to throw off the mask, the Countess felt justified in punishing her by being explicit. 'Your irregularities are not of yesterday,' she said, kindly making use of a word of double signification still.

'Thank you, my lady.' Conning accepted the word in its blackest meaning. 'I am obliged to you. If your ladyship is to be believed, my character is not worth much. But I can make distinctions, my lady.'

Something very like an altercation was continued in a sharp, brief undertone; and then Evan, waking up to the affairs of the hour, heard Conning say:

'I shall not ask your ladyship to give me a character.'

The Countess answering with pathos: 'It would, indeed, be to give you one.'

He was astonished that the Countess should burst into tears when Conning had departed, and yet more so that his effort to console her should bring a bolt of wrath upon himself.

’Now, Evan, now see what you have done for us-do, and rejoice at it. The very menials insult us. You heard what that creature said? She can make distinctions. Oh! I could beat her. They know it: all the servants know it: I can see it in their faces. I feel it when I pass them. The insolent wretches treat us as impostors; and this Conning—to defy me! Oh! it comes of my devotion to you. I am properly chastized. I passed Rose’s maid on the stairs, and her reverence was barely perceptible.’

Evan murmured that he was very sorry, adding, foolishly: ’Do you really care, Louisa, for what servants think and say?’

The Countess sighed deeply: ’Oh! you are too thickskinned! Your mother from top to toe! It is too dreadful! What have I done to deserve it? Oh, Evan, Evan!’

Page 1389

Her head dropped in her lap. There was something ludicrous to Evan in this excess of grief on account of such a business; but he was tender-hearted and wrought upon to declare that, whether or not he was to blame for his mother's intrusion that afternoon, he was ready to do what he could to make up to the Countess for her sufferings: whereat the Countess sighed again: asked him what he possibly could do, and doubted his willingness to accede to the most trifling request.

'No; I do in verity believe that were I to desire you to do aught for your own good alone, you would demur, Van.'

He assured her that she was mistaken.

'We shall see,' she said.

'And if once or twice, I have run counter to you, Louisa—'

'Abominable language!' cried the Countess, stopping her ears like a child. 'Do not excruciate me so. You laugh! My goodness! what will you come to!'

Evan checked his smile, and, taking her hand, said:

'I must tell you; that, on the whole, I see nothing to regret in what has happened to-day. You may notice a change in the manners of the servants and some of the country squiresses, but I find none in the bearing of the real ladies, the true gentlemen, to me.'

'Because the change is too fine for you to perceive it,' interposed the Countess.

'Rose, then, and her mother, and her father!' Evan cried impetuously.

'As for Lady Jocelyn!' the Countess shrugged:

'And Sir Franks!' her head shook: 'and Rose, Rose is, simply self-willed; a "she will" or "she won't" sort of little person. No criterion! Henceforth the world is against us. We have to struggle with it: it does not rank us of it!'

'Your feeling on the point is so exaggerated, my dear Louisa', said Evan, 'one can't bring reason to your ears. The tattle we shall hear we shall outlive. I care extremely for the good opinion of men, but I prefer my own; and I do not lose it because my father was in trade.'

'And your own name, Evan Harrington, is on a shop,' the Countess struck in, and watched him severely from under her brow, glad to mark that he could still blush.

'Oh, heaven!' she wailed to increase the effect, 'on a shop! a brother of mine!'

’Yes, Louisa. It may not last . . . I did it—is it not better that a son should blush, than cast dishonour on his father’s memory?’

‘Ridiculous boy-notion!’

’Rose has pardoned it, Louisa—cannot you? I find that the naturally vulgar and narrow-headed people, and cowards who never forego mean advantages, are those only who would condemn me and my conduct in that.’

‘And you have joy in your fraction of the world left to you!’ exclaimed his female-elder.

Changeing her manner to a winning softness, she said:

’Let me also belong to the very small party! You have been really romantic, and most generous and noble; only the shop smells! But, never mind, promise me you will not enter it.’

Page 1390

‘I hope not,’ said Evan.

’You do hope that you will not officiate? Oh, Evan the eternal contemplation of gentlemen’s legs! think of that! Think of yourself sculptured in that attitude!’ Innumerable little prickles and stings shot over Evan’s skin.

‘There—there, Louisa!’ he said, impatiently; ’spare your ridicule. We go to London to-morrow, and when there I expect to hear that I have an appointment, and that this engagement is over.’ He rose and walked up and down the room.

‘I shall not be prepared to go to-morrow,’ remarked the Countess, drawing her figure up stiffly.

‘Oh! well, if you can stay, Andrew will take charge of you, I dare say.’

‘No, my dear, Andrew will not—a nonentity cannot—you must.’

‘Impossible, Louisa,’ said Evan, as one who imagines he is uttering a thing of little consequence. ‘I promised Rose.’

’You promised Rose that you would abdicate and retire? Sweet, loving girl!’

Evan made no answer.

‘You will stay with me, Evan.’

‘I really can’t,’ he said in his previous careless tone.

‘Come and sit down,’ cried the Countess, imperiously.

’The first trifle is refused. It does not astonish me. I will honour you now by talking seriously to you. I have treated you hitherto as a child. Or, no—’ she stopped her mouth; ’it is enough if I tell you, dear, that poor Mrs. Bonner is dying, and that she desires my attendance on her to refresh her spirit with readings on the Prophecies, and Scriptural converse. No other soul in the house can so soothe her.’

‘Then, stay,’ said Evan.

‘Unprotected in the midst of enemies! Truly!’

’I think, Louisa, if you can call Lady Jocelyn an enemy, you must read the Scriptures by a false light.’

‘The woman is an utter heathen!’ interjected the Countess. ’An infidel can be no friend. She is therefore the reverse. Her opinions embitter her mother’s last days. But now you will consent to remain with me, dear Van!’

An implacable negative responded to the urgent appeal of her eyes.

‘By the way,’ he said, for a diversion, ’did you know of a girl stopping at an inn in Fallow field?’

‘Know a barmaid?’ the Countess’s eyes and mouth were wide at the question.

‘Did you send Raikes for her to-day?’

’Did Mr. Raikes—ah, Evan! that creature reminds me, you have no sense of contrast. For a Brazilian ape—he resembles, if he is not truly one—what contrast is he to an English gentleman! His proximity and acquaintance—rich as he may be—disfigure you. Study contrast!’

Evan had to remind her that she had not answered him: whereat she exclaimed: ’One would really think you had never been abroad. Have you not evaded me, rather?’

The Countess commenced fanning her languid brows, and then pursued: ’Now, my dear brother, I may conclude that you will acquiesce in my moderate wishes. You remain. My venerable friend cannot last three days. She is on the brink of a better world! I will confide to you that it is of the utmost importance we should be here, on the spot, until the sad termination! That is what I summoned you for. You are now at liberty. Ta-ta, as soon as you please.’

Page 1391

She had baffled his little cross-examination with regard to Raikes, but on the other point he was firm. She would listen to nothing: she affected that her mandate had gone forth, and must be obeyed; tapped with her foot, fanned deliberately, and was a consummate queen, till he turned the handle of the door, when her complexion deadened, she started up, trembling, and tripping towards him, caught him by the arm, and said: 'Stop! After all that I have sacrificed for you! As well try to raise the dead as a Dawley from the dust he grovels in! Why did I consent to visit this place? It was for you. I came, I heard that you had disgraced yourself in drunkenness at Fallow field, and I toiled to eclipse that, and I did. Young Jocelyn thought you were what you are I could spit the word at you! and I dazzled him to give you time to win this minx, who will spin you like a top if you get her. That Mr. Forth knew it as well, and that vile young Laxley. They are gone! Why are they gone? Because they thwarted me—they crossed your interests—I said they should go. George Uplift is going to-day. The house is left to us; and I believe firmly that Mrs. Bonner's will contains a memento of the effect of our frequent religious conversations. So you would leave now? I suspect nobody, but we are all human, and Wills would not have been tampered with for the first time. Besides, and the Countess's imagination warmed till she addressed her brother as a confederate, 'we shall then see to whom Beckley Court is bequeathed. Either way it may be yours. Yours! and you suffer their plots to drive you forth. Do you not perceive that Mama was brought here to-day on purpose to shame us and cast us out? We are surrounded by conspiracies, but if our faith is pure who can hurt us? If I had not that consolation—would that you had it, too!—would it be endurable to me to see those menials whispering and showing their forced respect? As it is, I am fortified to forgive them. I breathe another atmosphere. Oh, Evan! you did not attend to Mr. Parsley's beautiful last sermon. The Church should have been your vocation.'

From vehemence the Countess had subsided to a mournful gentleness. She had been too excited to notice any changes in her brother's face during her speech, and when he turned from the door, and still eyeing her fixedly, led her to a chair, she fancied from his silence that she had subdued and convinced him. A delicious sense of her power, succeeded by a weary reflection that she had constantly to employ it, occupied her mind, and when presently she looked up from the shade of her hand, it was to agitate her head pitifully at her brother.

'All this you have done for me, Louisa,' he said.

'Yes, Evan,—all!' she fell into his tone.

'And you are the cause of Laxley's going? Did you know anything of that anonymous letter?'

He was squeezing her hand-with grateful affection, as she was deluded to imagine.

Page 1392

‘Perhaps, dear,—a little,’ her conceit prompted her to admit.

‘Did you write it?’

He gazed intently into her eyes, and as the question shot like a javelin, she tried ineffectually to disengage her fingers; her delusion waned; she took fright, but it was too late; he had struck the truth out of her before she could speak. Her spirit writhed like a snake in his hold. Innumerable things she was ready to say, and strove to; the words would not form on her lips.

‘I will be answered, Louisa.’

The stern manner he had assumed gave her no hope of eluding him. With an inward gasp, and a sensation of nakedness altogether new to her, dismal, and alarming, she felt that she could not lie. Like a creature forsaken of her staunchest friend, she could have flung herself to the floor. The next instant her natural courage restored her. She jumped up and stood at bay.

‘Yes. I did.’

And now he was weak, and she was strong, and used her strength.

’I wrote it to save you. Yes. Call on your Creator, and be my judge, if you dare. Never, never will you meet a soul more utterly devoted to you, Evan. This Mr. Forth, this Laxley, I said, should go, because they were resolved to ruin you, and make you base. They are gone. The responsibility I take on myself. Nightly—during the remainder of my days—I will pray for pardon.’

He raised his head to ask sombrely: ‘Is your handwriting like Laxley’s?’

‘It seems so,’ she answered, with a pitiful sneer for one who could arrest her exaltation to inquire about minutiae. ’Right or wrong, it is done, and if you choose to be my judge, think whether your own conscience is clear. Why did you come here? Why did you stay? You have your free will,—do you deny that? Oh, I will take the entire blame, but you must not be a hypocrite, Van. You know you were aware. We had no confidences. I was obliged to treat you like a child; but for you to pretend to suppose that roses grow in your path—oh, that is paltry! You are a hypocrite or an imbecile, if that is your course.’

Was he not something of the former? The luxurious mist in which he had been living, dispersed before his sister’s bitter words, and, as she designed he should, he felt himself her accomplice. But, again, reason struggled to enlighten him; for surely he would never have done a thing so disproportionate to the end to be gamed! It was the unconnected action of his brain that thus advised him. No thoroughly-fashioned, clear-spirited man conceives wickedness impossible to him: but wickedness so largely mixed

with folly, the best of us may reject as not among our temptations. Evan, since his love had dawned, had begun to talk with his own nature, and though he knew not yet how much it would stretch or contract, he knew that he was weak and could not perform moral wonders without severe struggles. The cynic may add, if he likes—or without potent liquors.

Page 1393

Could he be his sister's judge? It is dangerous for young men to be too good. They are so sweeping in their condemnations, so sublime in their conceptions of excellence, and the most finished Puritan cannot out-do their demands upon frail humanity. Evan's momentary self-examination saved him from this, and he told the Countess, with a sort of cold compassion, that he himself dared not blame her.

His tone was distinctly wanting in admiration of her, but she was somewhat over-wrought, and leaned her shoulder against him, and became immediately his affectionate, only too-zealous, sister; dearly to be loved, to be forgiven, to be prized: and on condition of inserting a special petition for pardon in her orisons, to live with a calm conscience, and to be allowed to have her own way with him during the rest of her days.

It was a happy union—a picture that the Countess was lured to admire in the glass.

Sad that so small a murmur should destroy it for ever!

'What?' cried the Countess, bursting from his arm.

'Go?' she emphasized with the hardness of determined unbelief, as if plucking the words, one by one, out of her reluctant ears. 'Go to Lady Jocelyn, and tell her I wrote the letter?'

'You can do no less, I fear,' said Evan, eyeing the floor and breathing a deep breath.

'Then I did hear you correctly? Oh, you must be mad-idiotic! There, pray go away, Evan. Come in the morning. You are too much for my nerves.'

Evan rose, putting out his hand as if to take hers and plead with her. She rejected the first motion, and repeated her desire for him to leave her; saying, cheerfully—

'Good night, dear; I dare say we shan't meet till the morning.'

'You can't let this injustice continue a single night, Louisa?' said he.

She was deep in the business of arrangeing a portion of her attire.

'Go-go; please,' she responded.

Lingering, he said: 'If I go, it will be straight to Lady Jocelyn.'

She stamped angrily.

'Only go!' and then she found him gone, and she stooped lower to the glass, to mark if the recent agitation were observable under her eyes. There, looking at herself, her

heart dropped heavily in her bosom. She ran to the door and hurried swiftly after Evan, pulling him back speechlessly.

‘Where are you going, Evan?’

‘To Lady Jocelyn.’

The unhappy victim of her devotion stood panting.

‘If you go, I—I take poison!’ It was for him now to be struck; but he was suffering too strong an anguish to be susceptible to mock tragedy. The Countess paused to study him. She began to fear her brother. ’I will!’ she reiterated wildly, without moving him at all. And the quiet inflexibility of his face forbade the ultimate hope which lies in giving men a dose of hysterics when they are obstinate. She tried by taunts and angry vituperations to make him look fierce, if but an instant, to precipitate her into an exhibition she was so well prepared for.

Page 1394

’Evan! what! after all my love, my confidence in you—I need not have told you—to expose us! Brother? would you? Oh!’

‘I will not let this last another hour,’ said Evan, firmly, at the same time seeking to caress her. She spurned his fruitless affection, feeling, nevertheless, how cruel was her fate; for, with any other save a brother, she had arts at her disposal to melt the manliest resolutions. The glass showed her that her face was pathetically pale; the tones of her voice were rich and harrowing. What did they avail with a brother? ’Promise me,’ she cried eagerly, ’promise me to stop here—on this spot-till I return.’

The promise was extracted. The Countess went to fetch Caroline. Evan did not count the minutes. One thought was mounting in his brain-the scorn of Rose. He felt that he had lost her. Lost her when he had just won her! He felt it, without realizing it. The first blows of an immense grief are dull, and strike the heart through wool, as it were. The belief of the young in their sorrow has to be flogged into them, on the good old educational principle. Could he do less than this he was about to do? Rose had wedded her noble nature to him, and it was as much her spirit as his own that urged him thus to forfeit her, to be worthy of her by assuming unworthiness.

There he sat neither conning over his determination nor the cause for it, revolving Rose’s words about Laxley, and nothing else. The words were so sweet and so bitter; every now and then the heavy smiting on his heart set it quivering and leaping, as the whip starts a jaded horse.

Meantime the Countess was participating in a witty conversation in the drawing-room with Sir John and the Duke, Miss Current, and others; and it was not till after she had displayed many graces, and, as one or two ladies presumed to consider, marked effrontery, that she rose and drew Caroline away with her. Returning to her dressing-room, she found that Evan had faithfully kept his engagement; he was on the exact spot where she had left him.

Caroline came to him swiftly, and put her hand to his forehead that she might the better peruse his features, saying, in her mellow caressing voice: ’What is this, dear Van, that you will do? Why do you look so wretched?’

‘Has not Louisa told you?’

’She has told me something, dear, but I don’t know what it is. That you are going to expose us? What further exposure do we need? I’m sure, Van, my pride—what I had —is gone. I have none left!’

Evan kissed her brows warmly. An explanation, full of the Countess’s passionate outcries of justification, necessity, and innocence in higher than fleshly eyes, was given, and then the three were silent.

‘But, Van,’ Caroline commenced, deprecatingly, ’my darling! of what use—now! Whether right or wrong, why should you, why should you, when the thing is done, dear? —think!’

‘And you, too, would let another suffer under an unjust accusation?’ said Evan.

Page 1395

’But, dearest, it is surely your duty to think of your family first. Have we not been afflicted enough? Why should you lay us under this fresh burden?’

’Because it ‘s better to bear all now than a life of remorse,’ answered Evan.

’But this Mr. Laxley—I cannot pity him; he has behaved so insolently to you throughout! Let him suffer.’

‘Lady Jocelyn,’ said Evan, ’has been unintentionally unjust to him, and after her kindness—apart from the right or wrong—I will not—I can’t allow her to continue so.’

‘After her kindness!’ echoed the Countess, who had been fuming at Caroline’s weak expostulations. ’Kindness! Have I not done ten times for these Jocelyns what they have done for us? O mio Deus! why, I have bestowed on them the membership for Fallow field: I have saved her from being a convicted liar this very day. Worse! for what would have been talked of the morals of the house, supposing the scandal. Oh! indeed I was tempted to bring that horrid mad Captain into the house face to face with his flighty doll of a wife, as I, perhaps, should have done, acting by the dictates of my conscience. I lied for Lady Jocelyn, and handed the man to a lawyer, who withdrew him. And this they owe to me! Kindness? They have given us bed and board, as the people say. I have repaid them for that.’

‘Pray be silent, Louisa,’ said Evan, getting up hastily, for the sick sensation Rose had experienced came over him. His sister’s plots, her untruth, her coarseness, clung to him and seemed part of his blood. He now had a personal desire to cut himself loose from the wretched entanglement revealed to him, whatever it cost.

‘Are you really, truly going?’ Caroline exclaimed, for he was near the door.

‘At a quarter to twelve at night!’ sneered the Countess, still imagining that he, like herself, must be partly acting.

’But, Van, is it—dearest, think! is it manly for a brother to go and tell of his sister? And how would it look?’

Evan smiled. ’Is it that that makes you unhappy? Louisa’s name will not be mentioned—be sure of that.’

Caroline was stooping forward to him. Her figure straightened: ’Good Heaven, Evan! you are not going to take it on yourself? Rose!—she will hate you.’

‘God help me!’ he cried internally.

‘Oh, Evan, darling! consider, reflect!’ She fell on her knees, catching his hand. ’It is worse for us that you should suffer, dearest! Think of the dreadful meanness and baseness of what you will have to acknowledge.’

‘Yes!’ sighed the youth, and his eyes, in his extreme pain, turned to the Countess reproachfully.

‘Think, dear,’ Caroline hurried on, ’he gains nothing for whom you do this—you lose all. It is not your deed. You will have to speak an untruth. Your ideas are wrong—wrong, I know they are. You will have to lie. But if you are silent, the little, little blame that may attach to us will pass away, and we shall be happy in seeing our brother happy.’

Page 1396

‘You are talking to Evan as if he had religion,’ said the Countess, with steady sedateness. And at that moment, from the sublimity of his pagan virtue, the young man groaned for some pure certain light to guide him: the question whether he was about to do right made him weak. He took Caroline’s head between his two hands, and kissed her mouth. The act brought Rose to his senses insufferably, and she—his Goddess of truth and his sole guiding light-spurred him afresh.

’My family’s dishonour is mine, Caroline. Say nothing more—don’t think of me. I go to Lady Jocelyn tonight. To-morrow we leave, and there’s the end. Louisa, if you have any new schemes for my welfare, I beg you to renounce them.’

‘Gratitude I never expected from a Dawley!’ the Countess retorted.

‘Oh, Louisa! he is going!’ cried Caroline; ’kneel to him with me: stop him: Rose loves him, and he is going to make her hate him.’

‘You can’t talk reason to one who’s mad,’ said the Countess, more like the Dawley she sprang from than it would have pleased her to know.

‘My darling! My own Evan! it will kill me,’ Caroline exclaimed, and passionately imploring him, she looked so hopelessly beautiful, that Evan was agitated, and caressed her, while he said, softly: ’Where our honour is not involved I would submit to your smallest wish.’

‘It involves my life—my destiny!’ murmured Caroline.

Could he have known the double meaning in her words, and what a saving this sacrifice of his was to accomplish, he would not have turned to do it feeling abandoned of heaven and earth.

The Countess stood rigidly as he went forth. Caroline was on her knees, sobbing.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A PAGAN SACRIFICE

Three steps from the Countess’s chamber door, the knot of Evan’s resolution began to slacken. The clear light of his simple duty grew cloudy and complex. His pride would not let him think that he was shrinking, but cried out in him, ‘Will you be believed?’ and whispered that few would believe him guilty of such an act. Yet, while something said that full surely Lady Jocelyn would not, a vague dread that Rose might, threw him back on the luxury of her love and faith in him. He found himself hoping that his statement would be laughed at. Then why make it?

No: that was too blind a hope. Many would take him at his word; all—all save Lady Jocelyn! Rose the first! Because he stood so high with her now he feared the fall. Ah, dazzling pinnacle! our darlings shoot us up on a wondrous juggler's pole, and we talk familiarly to the stars, and are so much above everybody, and try to walk like creatures with two legs, forgetting that we have but a pin's point to stand on up there. Probably the absence of natural motion inspires the prophecy that we must ultimately come down: our unused legs wax morbidly restless. Evan thought it good that Rose should lift her head to look at him; nevertheless, he knew that Rose would turn from him the moment he descended from his superior station. Nature is wise in her young children, though they wot not of it, and are always trying to rush away from her. They escape their wits sooner than their instincts.

Page 1397

But was not Rose involved in him, and part of him? Had he not sworn never to renounce her? What was this but a betrayal?

Go on, young man: fight your fight. The little imps pluck at you: the big giant assails you: the seductions of the soft-mouthed siren are not wanting. Slacken the knot an instant, and they will all have play. And the worst is, that you may be wrong, and they may be right! For is it, can it be proper for you to stain the silvery whiteness of your skin by plunging headlong into yonder pitch-bath? Consider the defilement! Contemplate your hideous aspect on issuing from that black baptism!

As to the honour of your family, Mr. Evan Harrington, pray, of what sort of metal consists the honour of a tailor's family?

One little impertinent imp ventured upon that question on his own account. The clever beast was torn back and strangled instantaneously by his experienced elders, but not before Evan's pride had answered him. Exalted by Love, he could dread to abase himself and strip off his glittering garments; lowered by the world, he fell back upon his innate worth.

Yes, he was called on to prove it; he was on his way to prove it. Surrendering his dearest and his best, casting aside his dreams, his desires, his aspirations, for this stern duty, he at least would know that he made himself doubly worthy of her who abandoned him, and the world would scorn him by reason of his absolute merit. Coming to this point, the knot of his resolve tightened again; he hugged it with the furious zeal of a martyr.

Religion, the lack of which in him the Countess deplored, would have guided him and silenced the internal strife. But do not despise a virtue purely Pagan. The young who can act readily up to the Christian light are happier, doubtless: but they are led, they are passive: I think they do not make such capital Christians subsequently. They are never in such danger, we know; but some in the flock are more than sheep. The heathen ideal it is not so very easy to attain, and those who mount from it to the Christian have, in my humble thought, a firmer footing.

So Evan fought his hard fight from the top of the stairs to the bottom. A Pagan, which means our poor unsupported flesh, is never certain of his victory. Now you will see him kneeling to his Gods, and anon drubbing them; or he makes them fight for him, and is complacent at the issue. Evan had ceased to pick his knot with one hand and pull it with the other: but not finding Lady Jocelyn below, and hearing that she had retired for the night, he mounted the stairs, and the strife recommenced from the bottom to the top. Strange to say, he was almost unaware of any struggle going on within him. The suggestion of the foolish little imp alone was loud in the heart of his consciousness; the rest hung more in his nerves than in his brain. He thought: 'Well, I will speak it out to

her in the morning’; and thought so sincerely, while an ominous sigh of relief at the reprieve rose from his over-burdened bosom.

Page 1398

Hardly had the weary deep breath taken flight, when the figure of Lady Jocelyn was seen advancing along the corridor, with a lamp in her hand. She trod heavily, in a kind of march, as her habit was; her large fully-open grey eyes looking straight ahead. She would have passed him, and he would have let her pass, but seeing the unusual pallor on her face, his love for this lady moved him to step forward and express a hope that she had no present cause for sorrow.

Hearing her mother's name, Lady Jocelyn was about to return a conventional answer. Recognizing Evan, she said:

'Ah! Mr. Harrington! Yes, I fear it's as bad as it can be. She can scarcely outlive the night.'

Again he stood alone: his chance was gone. How could he speak to her in her affliction? Her calm sedate visage had the beauty of its youth, when lighted by the animation that attends meetings or farewells. In her bow to Evan, he beheld a lovely kindness more unique, if less precious, than anything he had ever seen on the face of Rose. Half exultingly, he reflected that no opportunity would be allowed him now to teach that noble head and truest of human hearts to turn from him: the clear-eyed morrow would come: the days of the future would be bright as other days!

Wrapped in the comfort of his cowardice, he started to see Lady Jocelyn advancing to him again.

'Mr. Harrington,' she said, 'Rose tells me you leave us early in the morning. I may as well shake your hand now. We part very good friends. I shall always be glad to hear of you.'

Evan pressed her hand, and bowed. 'I thank you, madam,' was all he could answer.

'It will be better if you don't write to Rose.'

Her tone was rather that of a request than an injunction.

'I have no right to do so, my lady.'

'She considers that you have: I wish her to have, a fair trial.'

His voice quavered. The philosophic lady thought it time to leave him.

'So good-bye. I can trust you without extracting a promise. If you ever have need of a friend, you know you are at liberty to write to me.'

'You are tired, my lady?' He put this question more to dally with what he ought to be saying.

’Tolerably. Your sister, the Countess, relieves me in the night. I fancy my mother finds her the better nurse of the two.’

Lady Jocelyn’s face lighted in its gracious pleasant way, as she just inclined her head: but the mention of the Countess and her attendance on Mrs. Bonner had nerved Evan: the contrast of her hypocrisy and vile scheming with this most open, noble nature, acted like a new force within him. He begged Lady Jocelyn’s permission to speak with her in private. Marking his fervid appearance, she looked at him seriously.

‘Is it really important?’

‘I cannot rest, madam, till it is spoken.’

‘I mean, it doesn’t pertain to the delirium? We may sleep upon that.’

Page 1399

He divined her sufficiently to answer: 'It concerns a piece of injustice done by you, madam, and which I can help you to set right.'

Lady Jocelyn stared somewhat. 'Follow me into my dressing-room,' she said, and led the way.

Escape was no longer possible. He was on the march to execution, and into the darkness of his brain danced John Raikes, with his grotesque tribulations. It was the harsh savour of reality that conjured up this flighty being, who probably never felt a sorrow or a duty. The farce Jack lived was all that Evan's tragic bitterness could revolve, and seemed to be the only light in his mind. You might have seen a smile on his mouth when he was ready to ask for a bolt from heaven to crush him.

'Now,' said her ladyship, and he found that the four walls enclosed them, 'what have I been doing?'

She did not bid him be seated. Her brevity influenced him to speak to the point.

'You have dismissed Mr. Laxley, my lady: he is innocent.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because,'—a whirl of sensations beset the wretched youth, 'because I am guilty.'

His words had run ahead of his wits; and in answer to Lady Jocelyn's singular exclamation he could but simply repeat them.

Her head drew back; her face was slightly raised; she looked, as he had seen her sometimes look at the Countess, with a sort of speculative amazement.

'And why do you come to tell me?'

'For the reason that I cannot allow you to be unjust, madam.'

'What on earth was your motive?'

Evan stood silent, flinching from her frank eyes.

'Well, well, well!' Her ladyship dropped into a chair, and thumped her knees.

There was lawyer's blood in Lady Jocelyn's veins she had the judicial mind. A confession was to her a confession. She tracked actions up to a motive; but one who came voluntarily to confess needed no sifting. She had the habit of treating things spoken as facts.

‘You absolutely wrote that letter to Mrs. Evremonde’s husband!’

Evan bowed, to avoid hearing his own lie.

’You discovered his address and wrote to him, and imitated Mr. Laxley’s handwriting, to effect the purpose you may have had?’

Her credulity did require his confirmation of it, and he repeated: ’It is my deed.’

‘Hum! And you sent that premonitory slip of paper to her?’

‘To Mrs. Evremonde?’

‘Somebody else was the author of that, perhaps?’

‘It is all on me.’

’In that case, Mr. Harrington, I can only say that it’s quite right you should quit this house to-morrow morning.’

Her ladyship commenced rocking in her chair, and then added: ’May I ask, have you madness in your family? No? Because when one can’t discern a motive, it’s natural to ascribe certain acts to madness. Had Mrs. Evremonde offended you? or Ferdinand—-but one only hears of such practices towards fortunate rivals, and now you have come to undo what you did! I must admit, that taking the monstrousness of the act and the inconsequence of your proceedings together, the whole affair becomes more incomprehensible to me than it was before. Would it be unpleasant to you to favour me with explanations?’

Page 1400

She saw the pain her question gave him, and, passing it, said:

‘Of course you need not be told that Rose must hear of this?’

‘Yes,’ said Evan, ‘she must hear it.’

’You know what that ’s equivalent to? But, if you like, I will not speak to her till you, have left us.’

‘Instantly,’ cried Evan. ’Now-to-night! I would not have her live a minute in a false estimate of me.’

Had Lady Jocelyn’s intellect been as penetrating as it was masculine, she would have taken him and turned him inside out in a very short time; for one who would bear to see his love look coldly on him rather than endure a minute’s false estimate of his character, and who could yet stoop to concoct a vile plot, must either be mad or simulating the baseness for some reason or other. She perceived no motive for the latter, and she held him to be sound in the head, and what was spoken from the mouth she accepted. Perhaps, also, she saw in the complication thus offered an escape for Rose, and was the less inclined to elucidate it herself. But if her intellect was baffled, her heart was unerring. A man proved guilty of writing an anonymous letter would not have been allowed to stand long in her room. She would have shown him to the door of the house speedily; and Evan was aware in his soul that he had not fallen materially in her esteem. He had puzzled and confused her, and partly because she had the feeling that this young man was entirely trustworthy, and because she never relied on her feelings, she let his own words condemn him, and did not personally discard him. In fact, she was a veritable philosopher. She permitted her fellows to move the world on as they would, and had no other passions in the contemplation of the show than a cultured audience will usually exhibit.

‘Strange,—most strange! I thought I was getting old!’ she said, and eyed the culprit as judges generally are not wont to do. ’It will be a shock to Rose. I must tell you that I can’t regret it. I would not have employed force with her, but I should have given her as strong a taste of the world as it was in my power to give. Girls get their reason from society. But, come! if you think you can make your case out better to her, you shall speak to her first yourself.’

‘No, my lady,’ said Evan, softly.

‘You would rather not?’

‘I could not.’

‘But, I suppose, she’ll want to speak to you when she knows it.’

‘I can take death from her hands, but I cannot slay myself.’

The language was natural to his condition, though the note was pitched high. Lady Jocelyn hummed till the sound of it was over, and an idea striking her, she said:

‘Ah, by the way, have you any tremendous moral notions?’

‘I don’t think I have, madam.’

’People act on that mania sometimes, I believe. Do you think it an outrage on decency for a wife to run away from a mad husband whom they won’t shut up, and take shelter with a friend? Is that the cause? Mr. Forth is an old friend of mine. I would trust my daughter with him in a desert, and stake my hand on his honour.’

Page 1401

‘Oh, Lady Jocelyn!’ cried Evan. ’Would to God you might ever have said that of me! Madam, I love you. I shall never see you again. I shall never meet one to treat me so generously. I leave you, blackened in character—you cannot think of me without contempt. I can never hope that this will change. But, for your kindness let me thank you.’

And as speech is poor where emotion is extreme—and he knew his own to be especially so—he took her hand with petitioning eyes, and dropping on one knee, reverentially kissed it.

Lady Jocelyn was human enough to like to be appreciated. She was a veteran Pagan, and may have had the instinct that a peculiar virtue in this young one was the spring of his conduct. She stood up and said: ‘Don’t forget that you have a friend here.’

The poor youth had to turn his head from her.

’You wish that I should tell Rose what you have told me at once, Mr. Harrington?’

‘Yes, my lady; I beg that you will do so.’

‘Well!’

And the queer look Lady Jocelyn had been wearing dimpled into absolute wonder. A stranger to Love’s cunning, she marvelled why he should desire to witness the scorn Rose would feel for him.

‘If she’s not asleep, then, she shall hear it now,’ said her ladyship. ‘You understand that it will be mentioned to no other person.’

’Except to Mr. Laxley, madam, to whom I shall offer the satisfaction he may require. But I will undertake that.’

‘Just as you think proper on that matter,’ remarked her philosophical ladyship, who held that man was a fighting animal, and must not have his nature repressed.

She lighted him part of the way, and then turned off to Rose’s chamber.

Would Rose believe it of him? Love combated his dismal foreboding. Strangely, too, now that he had plunged into his pitch-bath, the guilt seemed to cling to him, and instead of hoping serenely, or fearing steadily, his spirit fell in a kind of abject supplication to Rose, and blindly trusted that she would still love even if she believed him base. In his weakness he fell so low as to pray that she might love that crawling reptile who could creep into a house and shrink from no vileness to win her.

CHAPTER XXXV

ROSE WOUNDED

The light of morning was yet cold along the passages of the house when Polly Wheedle, hurrying to her young mistress, met her loosely dressed and with a troubled face.

'What 's the matter, Polly? I was coming to you.'

'O, Miss Rose! and I was coming to you. Miss Bonner's gone back to her convulsions again. She's had them all night. Her hair won't last till thirty, if she keeps on giving way to temper, as I tell her: and I know that from a barber.'

'Tush, you stupid Polly! Does she want to see me?'

'You needn't suspect that, Miss. But you quiet her best, and I thought I'd come to you. But, gracious!'

Page 1402

Rose pushed past her without vouchsafing any answer to the look in her face, and turned off to Juliana's chamber, where she was neither welcomed nor repelled. Juliana said she was perfectly well, and that Polly was foolishly officious: whereupon Rose ordered Polly out of the room, and said to Juliana, kindly: 'You have not slept, dear, and I have not either. I am so unhappy.'

Whether Rose intended by this communication to make Juliana eagerly attentive, and to distract her from her own affair, cannot be said, but something of the effect was produced.

'You care for him, too,' cried Rose, impetuously. 'Tell me, Juley: do you think him capable of any base action? Do you think he would do what any gentleman would be ashamed to own? Tell me.'

Juliana looked at Rose intently, but did not reply.

Rose jumped up from the bed. 'You hesitate, Juley? What? Could you think so?'

Young women after a common game are shrewd. Juliana may have seen that Rose was not steady on the plank she walked, and required support.

'I don't know,' she said, turning her cheek to her pillow.

'What an answer!' Rose exclaimed. 'Have you no opinion? What did you say yesterday? It's silent as the grave with me: but if you do care for him, you must think one thing or the other.'

'I suppose not, then—no,' said Juliana.

Repeating the languid words bitterly, Rose continued:

'What is it to love without having faith in him you love? You make my mind easier.'

Juliana caught the implied taunt, and said, fretfully:

'I'm ill. You're so passionate. You don't tell me what it is. How can I answer you?'

'Never mind,' said Rose, moving to the door, wondering why she had spoken at all: but when Juliana sprang forward, and caught her by the dress to stop her, and with a most unwonted outburst of affection, begged of her to tell her all, the wound in Rose's breast began to bleed, and she was glad to speak.

'Juley, do you-can you believe that he wrote that letter which poor Ferdinand was—-accused of writing?'

Juliana appeared to muse, and then responded: 'Why should he do such a thing?'

'O my goodness, what a girl!' Rose interjected.

'Well, then, to please you, Rose, of course I think he is too honourable.'

'You do think so, Juley? But if he himself confessed it—what then? You would not believe him, would you?'

'Oh, then I can't say. Why should he condemn himself?'

'But you would know—you would know that he was a man to suffer death rather than be guilty of the smallest baseness. His birth—what is that!' Rose filliped her fingers: 'But his acts—what he is himself you would be sure of, would you not? Dear Juley! Oh, for heaven's sake, speak out plainly to me.'

A wily look had crept over Juliana's features.

'Certainly,' she said, in a tone that belied it, and drawing Rose to her bosom, the groan she heard there was passing sweet to her.

Page 1403

‘He has confessed it to Mama,’ sobbed Rose. ’Why did he not come to me first? He has confessed it—the abominable thing has come out of his own mouth. He went to her last night . . .’

Juliana patted her shoulders regularly as they heaved. When words were intelligible between them, Juliana said:

‘At least, dear, you must admit that he has redeemed it.’

‘Redeemed it? Could he do less?’ Rose dried her eyes vehemently, as if the tears shamed her. ’A man who could have let another suffer for his crime—I could never have lifted my head again. I think I would have cut off this hand that plighted itself to him! As it is, I hardly dare look at myself. But you don’t think it, dear? You know it to be false! false! false!’

‘Why should Mr. Harrington confess it?’ said Juliana.

‘Oh, don’t speak his name!’ cried Rose.

Her cousin smiled. ‘So many strange things happen,’ she said, and sighed.

‘Don’t sigh: I shall think you believe it!’ cried Rose. An appearance of constrained repose was assumed. Rose glanced up, studied for an instant, and breathlessly uttered: ‘You do, you do believe it, Juley?’

For answer, Juliana hugged her with much warmth, and recommenced the patting.

‘I dare say it’s a mistake,’ she remarked. ’He may have been jealous of Ferdinand. You know I have not seen the letter. I have only heard of it. In love, they say, you ought to excuse . . . And the want of religious education! His sister . . .’

Rose interrupted her with a sharp shudder. Might it not be possible that one who had the same blood as the Countess would stoop to a momentary vileness.

How changed was Rose from the haughty damsel of yesterday!

‘Do you think my lover could tell a lie?’ ’He—would not love me long if I did!’

These phrases arose and rang in Juliana’s ears while she pursued the task of comforting the broken spirit that now lay prone on the bed, and now impetuously paced the room. Rose had come thinking the moment Juliana’s name was mentioned, that here was the one to fortify her faith in Evan: one who, because she loved, could not doubt him. She moaned in a terror of distrust, loathing her cousin: not asking herself why she needed support. And indeed she was too young for much clear self-

questioning, and her blood was flowing too quickly for her brain to perceive more than one thing at a time.

‘Does your mother believe it?’ said Juliana, evading a direct assault.

‘Mama? She never doubts what you speak,’ answered Rose, disconsolately.

‘She does?’

‘Yes.’

Whereat Juliana looked most grave, and Rose felt that it was hard to breathe.

She had grown very cold and calm, and Juliana had to be expansive unprovoked.

’Believe nothing, dear, till you hear it from his own lips. If he can look in your face and say that he did it . . . well, then! But of course he cannot. It must be some wonderful piece of generosity to his rival.’

Page 1404

‘So I thought, Juley! so I thought,’ cried Rose, at the new light, and Juliana smiled contemptuously, and the light flickered and died, and all was darker than before in the bosom of Rose. She had borne so much that this new drop was poison.

‘Of course it must be that, if it is anything,’ Juliana pursued. ’You were made to be happy, Rose. And consider, if it is true, people of very low birth, till they have lived long with other people, and if they have no religion, are so very likely to do things. You do not judge them as you do real gentlemen, and one must not be too harsh—I only wish to prepare you for the worst.’

A dim form of that very idea had passed through Rose, giving her small comfort.

’Let him tell you with his own lips that what he has told your mother is true, and then, and not till then, believe him,’ Juliana concluded, and they kissed kindly, and separated. Rose had suddenly lost her firm step, but no sooner was Juliana alone than she left the bed, and addressed her visage to the glass with brightening eyes, as one who saw the glimmer of young hope therein.

’She love him! Not if he told me so ten thousand times would I believe it! and before he has said a syllable she doubts him. Asking me in that frantic way! as if I couldn’t see that she wanted me to help her to her faith in him, as she calls it. Not name his name? Mr. Harrington! I may call him Evan: some day!’

Half-uttered, half-mused, the unconscious exclamations issued from her, and for many a weary day since she had dreamed of love, and studied that which is said to attract the creature, she had not been so glowingly elated or looked so much farther in the glass than its pale reflection.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BEFORE BREAKFAST

Cold through the night the dark-fringed stream had whispered under Evan’s eyes, and the night breeze voiced ‘Fool, fool!’ to him, not without a distant echo in his heart. By symbols and sensations he knew that Rose was lost to him. There was no moon: the water seemed aimless, passing on carelessly to oblivion. Now and then, the trees stirred and talked, or a noise was heard from the pastures. He had slain the life that lived in them, and the great glory they were to bring forth, and the end to which all things moved. Had less than the loss of Rose been involved, the young man might have found himself looking out on a world beneath notice, and have been sighing for one more worthy of his clouded excellence but the immense misery present to him in the contemplation of Rose’s sad restrained contempt, saved him from the silly elation which is the last, and generally successful, struggle of human nature in those who can

so far master it to commit a sacrifice. The loss of that brave high young soul-Rose, who had lifted him out of the mire with her own white hands: Rose, the image of all that he worshipped: Rose, so closely wedded to him

Page 1405

that to be cut away from her was to fall like pallid clay from the soaring spirit: surely he was stunned and senseless when he went to utter the words to her mother! Now that he was awake, and could feel his self-inflicted pain, he marvelled at his rashness and foolishness, as perhaps numerous mangled warriors have done for a time, when the battle-field was cool, and they were weak, and the uproar of their jarred nerves has beset them, lying uncherished.

By degrees he grew aware of a little consolatory touch, like the point of a needle, in his consciousness. Laxley would certainly insult him! In that case he would not refuse to fight him. The darkness broke and revealed this happy prospect, and Evan held to it an hour, and could hardly reject it when better thoughts conquered. For would it not be sweet to make the strength of his arm respected? He took a stick, and ran his eye musingly along the length, trifling with it grimly. The great Mel had been his son's instructor in the chivalrous science of fence, and a maitre d'armes in Portugal had given him polish. In Mel's time duels with swords had been occasionally fought, and Evan looked on the sword as the weapon of combat. Face to face with his adversary—what then were birth or position? Action!—action! he sighed for it, as I have done since I came to know that his history must be morally developed. A glow of bitter pleasure exalted him when, after hot passages, and parryings and thrusts, he had disarmed Ferdinand Laxley, and bestowing on him his life, said: 'Accept this worthy gift of the son of a tailor!' and he wiped his sword, haply bound up his wrist, and stalked off the ground, the vindicator of man's natural dignity. And then he turned upon himself with laughter, discovering a most wholesome power, barely to be suspected in him yet; but of all the children of glittering Mel and his solid mate, Evan was the best mixed compound of his parents.

He put the stick back in its corner and eyed his wrist, as if he had really just gone through the pretty scene he had just laughed at. It was nigh upon reality, for it suggested the employment of a handkerchief, and he went to a place and drew forth one that had the stain of his blood on it, and the name of Rose at one end. The beloved name was half-blotted by the dull-red mark, and at that sight a strange tenderness took hold of Evan. His passions became dead and of old date. This, then, would be his for ever! Love, for whom earth had been too small, crept exultingly into a nut-shell. He clasped the treasure on his breast, and saw a life beyond his parting with her.

Strengthened thus, he wrote by the morning light to Laxley. The letter was brief, and said simply that the act of which Laxley had been accused, Evan Harrington was responsible for. The latter expressed regret that Laxley should have fallen under a false charge, and, at the same time, indicated that if Laxley considered himself personally aggrieved, the writer was at his disposal.

Page 1406

A messenger had now to be found to convey it to the village-inn. Footmen were stirring about the house, and one meeting Evan close by his door, observed with demure grin, that he could not find the gentleman's nether-garments. The gentleman, it appeared, was Mr. John Raikes, who according to report, had been furnished with a bed at the house, because of a discovery, made at a late period over-night, that farther the gentleman could not go. Evan found him sleeping soundly. How much the poor youth wanted a friend! Fortune had given him instead a born buffoon; and it is perhaps the greatest evil of a position like Evan's, that, with cultured feelings, you are likely to meet with none to know you. Society does not mix well in money-pecking spheres. Here, however, was John Raikes, and Evan had to make the best of him.

'Eh?' yawned Jack, awakened; 'I was dreaming I was Napoleon Bonaparte's right-hand man.'

'I want you to be mine for half-an-hour,' said Evan.

Without replying, the distinguished officer jumped out of bed at a bound, mounted a chair, and peered on tip-toe over the top, from which, with a glance of self-congratulation, he pulled the missing piece of apparel, sighed dejectedly as he descended, while he exclaimed:

'Safe! but no distinction can compensate a man for this state of intolerable suspicion of everybody. I assure you, Harrington, I wouldn't be Napoleon himself—and I have always been his peculiar admirer—to live and be afraid of my valet! I believe it will develop cancer sooner or later in me. I feel singular pains already. Last night, after crowning champagne with ale, which produced a sort of French Revolution in my interior—by the way, that must have made me dream of Napoleon last night, with my lower members in revolt against my head, I had to sit and cogitate for hours on a hiding-place for these-call them what you will. Depend upon it, Harrington, this world is no such funny affair as we fancy.'

'Then it is true, that you could let a man play pranks on you,' said Evan. 'I took it for one of your jokes.'

'Just as I can't believe that you're a tailor,' returned Jack. 'It 's not a bit more extraordinary.'

'But, Jack, if you cause yourself to be contemptible——'

'Contemptible!' cried Jack. 'This is not the tone I like. Contemptible! why it's my eccentricity among my equals. If I dread the profane vulgar, that only proves that I'm above them. Odi, *etc*. Besides, Achilles had his weak point, and egad, it was when he faced about! By Jingo! I wish I'd had that idea yesterday. I should have behaved better.'

Evan could see that the creature was beginning to rely desperately on his humour.

‘Come,’ he said, ’be a man to-day. Throw off your motley. When I met you that night so oddly, you had been acting like a worthy fellow, trying to earn your bread in the best way you could—’

Page 1407

’And precisely because I met you, of all men, I’ve been going round and round ever since,’ said Jack. ’A clown or pantaloon would have given me balance. Say no more. You couldn’t help it. We met because we were the two extremes.’

Sighing, ‘What a jolly old inn!’ Raikes rolled himself over in the sheets, and gave two or three snug jolts indicative of his determination to be comfortable while he could.

‘Do you intend to carry on this folly, Jack?’

‘Say, sacrifice,’ was the answer. ’I feel it as much as you possibly could, Mr. Harrington. Hear the facts,’ Jack turned round again. ’Why did I consent to this absurdity? Because of my ambition. That old fellow, whom I took to be a clerk of Messrs. Grist, said: “You want to cut a figure in the world—you’re armed now.” A sort of Fortunatus’s joke. It was his way of launching me. But did he think I intended this for more than a lift? I his puppet? He, sir, was my tool! Well, I came. All my efforts were strained to shorten the period of penance. I had the best linen, and put on captivating manners. I should undoubtedly have won some girl of station, and cast off my engagement like an old suit, but just mark!—now mark how Fortune tricks us! After the pic-nic yesterday, the domestics of the house came to clear away, and the band being there, I stopped them and bade them tune up, and at the same time seizing the maid Wheedle, away we flew. We danced, we whirled, we twirled. Ale upon this! My head was lost. “Why don’t it last for ever?” says I. “I wish it did,” says she. The naivete enraptured me. “Oooo!” I cried, hugging her, and then, you know, there was no course open to a man of honour but to offer marriage and make a lady of her. I proposed: she accepted me, and here I am, eternally tied to this accurst insignia, if I’m to keep my promise! Isn’t that a sacrifice, friend H.? There’s no course open to me. The poor girl is madly in love. She called me a “rattle!” As a gentleman, I cannot recede.’

Evan got up and burst into damnable laughter at this burlesque of himself. Telling the fellow the service he required, and receiving a groaning assurance that the letter should, without loss of time, be delivered in proper style, the egoist, as Jack heartily thought him, fell behind his; knitted brows, and, after musing abstractedly, went forth to light upon his fate.

But a dread of meeting had seized both Rose and Evan. She had exhausted her first sincerity of unbelief in her interview with Juliana: and he had begun to consider what he could say to her. More than the three words ’I did it,’ would not be possible; and if she made him repeat them, facing her truthful eyes, would he be man enough to strike her bared heart twice? And, ah! the sullen brute he must seem, standing before her dumb, hearing her sigh, seeing her wretched effort not to show how unwillingly her kind spirit despised him. The reason for the act—she would ask for that! Rose would

Page 1408

not be so philosophic as her mother. She would grasp at every chance to excuse the deed. He cried out against his scheming sister in an agony, and while he did so, encountered Miss Carrington and Miss. Bonner in deep converse. Juliana pinched her arm, whereupon Miss Carrington said: 'You look merry this morning, Mr. Harrington': for he was unawares smiling at the image of himself in the mirror of John Raikes. That smile, transformed to a chuckling grimace, travelled to Rose before they met.

Why did she not come to him?

A soft voice at his elbow made his blood stop. It was Caroline. She kissed him, answering his greeting: 'Is it good morning?'

'Certainly,' said he. 'By the way, don't forget that the coach leaves early.'

'My darling Evan! you make me so happy. For it was really a mistaken sense of honour. For what can at all excuse a falsehood, you know, Evan!'

Caroline took his arm, and led him into the sun, watching his face at times. Presently she said: 'I want just to be assured that you thought more wisely than when you left us last night.'

'More wisely?' Evan turned to her with a playful smile.

'My dear brother! you did not do what you said you would do?'

'Have you ever known me not to do what I said I would do?'

'Evan! Good heaven! you did it? Then how can you remain here an instant? Oh, no, no!—say no, darling!'

'Where is Louisa?' he inquired.

'She is in her room. She will never appear at breakfast, if she knows this.'

'Perhaps more solitude would do her good,' said Evan.

'Remember, if this should prove true, think how you punish her!'

On that point Evan had his own opinion.

'Well, I shall never have to punish you in this way, my love, he said fondly, and Caroline dropped her eyelids.

'Don't think that I am blaming her,' he added, trying to feel as honestly as he spoke. 'I was mad to come here. I see it all now. Let us keep to our place. We are all the same

before God till we disgrace ourselves.’ Possibly with that sense of shame which some young people have who are not professors of sounding sentences, or affected by missionary zeal, when they venture to breathe the holy name, Evan blushed, and walked on humbly silent. Caroline murmured: ‘Yes, yes! oh, brother!’ and her figure drew to him as if for protection. Pale, she looked up.

‘Shall you always love me, Evan?’

‘Whom else have I to love?’

‘But always—always? Under any circumstances?’

’More and more, dear. I always have, and shall. I look to you now. I have no home but in your heart now.’

She was agitated, and he spoke warmly to calm her.

The throb of deep emotion rang in her rich voice. ’I will live any life to be worthy of your love, Evan,’ and she wept.

To him they were words and tears without a history.

Page 1409

Nothing further passed between them. Caroline went to the Countess: Evan waited for Rose. The sun was getting high. The face of the stream glowed like metal. Why did she not come? She believed him guilty from the mouth of another? If so, there was something less for him to lose. And now the sacrifice he had made did whisper a tale of mortal magnificence in his ears: feelings that were not his noblest stood up exalted. He waited till the warm meadow-breath floating past told that the day had settled into heat, and then he waited no more, but quietly walked into the house with the strength of one who has conquered more than human scorn.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RETREAT FROM BECKLEY

Never would the Countess believe that brother of hers, idiot as by nature he might be, and heir to unnumbered epithets, would so far forget what she had done for him, as to drag her through the mud for nothing: and so she told Caroline again and again, vehemently.

It was about ten minutes before the time for descending to the breakfast-table. She was dressed, and sat before the glass, smoothing her hair, and applying the contents of a pot of cold cream to her forehead between-whiles. With perfect sincerity she repeated that she could not believe it. She had only trusted Evan once since their visit to Beckley; and that this once he should, when treated as a man, turn traitor to their common interests, and prove himself an utter baby, was a piece of nonsense her great intelligence indignantly rejected.

‘Then, if true,’ she answered Caroline’s assurances finally, ’if true, he is not his father’s son!’

By which it may be seen that she had indeed taken refuge in the Castle of Negation against the whole army of facts.

’He is acting, Carry. He is acting the ideas of his ridiculous empty noddle!’

‘No,’ said Caroline, mournfully, ’he is not. I have never known Evan to lie.’

’Then you must forget the whipping he once had from his mother—little dolt! little selfish pig! He obtains his reputation entirely from his abominable selfishness, and then stands tall, and asks us to admire him. He bursts with vanity. But if you lend your credence to it, Carry, how, in the name of goodness, are you to appear at the breakfast?

‘I was going to ask you whether you would come,’ said Caroline, coldly.

‘If I can get my hair to lie flat by any means at all, of course!’ returned the Countess. ’This dreadful horrid country pomade! Why did we not bring a larger stock of the Andalugian Regenerator? Upon my honour, my dear, you use a most enormous quantity; I must really tell you that.’

Conning here entered to say that Mr. Evan had given orders for the boxes to be packed and everything got ready to depart by half-past eleven o’clock, when the fly would call for them and convey them to Fallow field in time to meet the coach for London.

Page 1410

The Countess turned her head round to Caroline like an astonished automaton.

‘Given orders!’ she interjected.

‘I have very little to get ready,’ remarked Caroline.

‘Be so good as to wait outside the door one instant,’ said the Countess to Conning, with particular urbanity.

Conning heard a great deal of vigorous whispering within, and when summoned to re-appear, a note was handed to her to convey to Mr. Harrington immediately. He was on the lawn; read it, and wrote back three hasty lines in pencil.

’Louisa. You have my commands to quit this house, at the hour named, this day. You will go with me. E. H.’

Conning was again requested to wait outside the Countess’s door. She was the bearer of another note. Evan read it likewise; tore it up, and said that there was no answer.

The Castle of Negation held out no longer. Ruthless battalions poured over the walls, blew up the Countess’s propriety, made frightful ravages in her complexion. Down fell her hair.

‘You cannot possibly go to breakfast,’ said Caroline.

‘I must! I must!’ cried the Countess. ’Why, my dear, if he has done it-wretched creature! don’t you perceive that, by withholding our presences, we become implicated with him?’ And the Countess, from a burst of frenzy, put this practical question so shrewdly, that Caroline’s wits succumbed to her.

‘But he has not done it; he is acting!’ she pursued, restraining her precious tears for higher purposes, as only true heroines can. ’Thinks to frighten me into submission!’

‘Do you not think Evan is right in wishing us to leave, after—after—’ Caroline humbly suggested.

‘Say, before my venerable friend has departed this life,’ the Countess took her up. ’No, I do not. If he is a fool, I am not. No, Carry: I do not jump into ditches for nothing. I will have something tangible for all that I have endured. We are now tailors in this place, remember. If that stigma is affixed to us, let us at least be remunerated for it. Come.’

Caroline’s own hard struggle demanded all her strength yet she appeared to hesitate. ‘You will surely not disobey Evan, Louisa?’

‘Disobey?’ The Countess amazedly dislocated the syllables. ’Why, the boy will be telling you next that he will not permit the Duke to visit you! Just your English order of mind, that cannot—brutes!—conceive of friendship between high-born men and beautiful women. Beautiful as you truly are, Carry, five years more will tell on you. But perhaps my dearest is in a hurry to return to her Maxwell? At least he thwacks well!’

Caroline’s arm was taken. The Countess loved an occasional rhyme when a point was to be made, and went off nodding and tripping till the time for stateliness arrived, near the breakfast-room door. She indeed was acting. At the bottom of her heart there was a dismal rage of passions: hatred of those who would or might look tailor in her face: terrors concerning the possible re-visitation of the vengeful Sir Abraham: dread of Evan and the efforts to despise him: the shocks of many conflicting elements. Above it all her countenance was calmly, sadly sweet: even as you may behold some majestic lighthouse glimmering over the tumult of a midnight sea.

Page 1411

An unusual assemblage honoured the breakfast that morning. The news of Mrs. Bonner's health was more favourable. How delighted was the Countess to hear that! Mrs. Bonner was the only firm ground she stood on there, and after receiving and giving gentle salutes, she talked of Mrs. Bonner, and her night-watch by the sick bed, in a spirit of doleful hope. This passed off the moments till she could settle herself to study faces. Decidedly, every lady present looked glum, with the single exception of Miss Current. Evan was by Lady Jocelyn's side. Her ladyship spoke to him; but the Countess observed that no one else did. To herself, however, the gentlemen were as attentive as ever. Evan sat three chairs distant from her.

If the traitor expected his sister to share in his disgrace, by noticing him, he was in error. On the contrary, the Countess joined the conspiracy to exclude him, and would stop a mild laugh if perchance he looked up. Presently Rose entered. She said 'Good morning' to one or two, and glided into a seat.

That Evan was under Lady Jocelyn's protection soon became generally apparent, and also that her ladyship was angry: an exhibition so rare with her that it was the more remarked. Rose could see that she was a culprit in her mother's eyes. She glanced from Evan to her. Lady Jocelyn's mouth shut hard. The girl's senses then perceived the something that was afloat at the table; she thought with a pang of horror: 'Has Juliana told?' Juliana smiled on her; but the aspect of Mrs. Shorne, and of Miss Carrington, spoke for their knowledge of that which must henceforth be the perpetual reproof to her headstrong youth.

'At what hour do you leave us?' said Lady Jocelyn to Evan.

'When I leave the table, my lady. The fly will call for my sisters at half-past eleven.'

'There is no necessity for you to start in advance?'

'I am going over to see my mother.'

Rose burned to speak to him now. Oh! why had she delayed! Why had she swerved from her good rule of open, instant explanations? But Evan's heart was stern to his love. Not only had she, by not coming, shown her doubt of him,—she had betrayed him!

Between the Countess, Melville, Sir John, and the Duke, an animated dialogue was going on, over which Miss Current played like a lively iris. They could not part with the Countess. Melville said he should be left stranded, and numerous pretty things were uttered by other gentlemen: by the women not a word. Glancing from certain of them lingeringly to her admirers, the Countess smiled her thanks, and then Andrew, pressed to remain, said he was willing and happy, and so forth; and it seemed that her admirers had prevailed over her reluctance, for the Countess ended her little protests with a

vanquished bow. Then there was a gradual rising from table. Evan pressed Lady Jocelyn's hand, and turning from her bent his head to Sir Franks, who, without offering

Page 1412

an exchange of cordialities, said, at arm's length: 'Good-bye, sir.' Melville also gave him that greeting stiffly. Harry was perceived to rush to the other end of the room, in quest of a fly apparently. Poor Caroline's heart ached for her brother, to see him standing there in the shadow of many faces. But he was not left to stand alone. Andrew quitted the circle of Sir John, Seymour Jocelyn, Mr. George Uplift, and others, and linked his arm to Evan's. Rose had gone. While Evan looked for her despairingly to say his last word and hear her voice once more, Sir Franks said to his wife:

'See that Rose keeps up-stairs.'

'I want to speak to her,' was her ladyship's answer, and she moved to the door.

Evan made way for her, bowing.

'You will be ready at half-past eleven, Louisa,' he said, with calm distinctness, and passed from that purgatory.

Now honest Andrew attributed the treatment Evan met with to the exposure of yesterday. He was frantic with democratic disgust.

'Why the devil don't they serve me like that; eh? 'Cause I got a few coppers! There, Van! I'm a man of peace; but if you'll call any man of 'em out I'll stand your second—-'pon my soul, I will. They must be cowards, so there isn't much to fear. Confound the fellows, I tell 'em every day I'm the son of a cobbler, and egad, they grow civiller. What do they mean? Are cobblers ranked over tailors?'

'Perhaps that's it,' said Evan.

'Hang your gentlemen!' Andrew cried.

'Let us have breakfast first,' uttered a melancholy voice near them in the passage.

'Jack!' said Evan. 'Where have you been?'

'I didn't know the breakfast-room,' Jack returned, 'and the fact is, my spirits are so down, I couldn't muster up courage to ask one of the footmen. I delivered your letter. Nothing hostile took place. I bowed fiercely to let him know what he might expect. That generally stops it. You see, I talk prose. I shall never talk anything else!'

Andrew recommenced his jests of yesterday with Jack. The latter bore them patiently, as one who had endured worse.

'She has rejected me!' he whispered to Evan. 'Talk of the ingratitude of women! Ten minutes ago I met her. She perked her eyebrows at me!—tried to run away. "Miss Wheedle": I said. "If you please, I 'd rather not," says she. To cut it short, the sacrifice I

made to her was the cause. It's all over the house. She gave the most excruciating hint. Those low-born females are so horribly indelicate. I stood confounded. Commending his new humour, Evan persuaded him to breakfast immediately, and hunger being one of Jack's solitary incitements to a sensible course of conduct, the disconsolate gentleman followed its dictates. 'Go with him, Andrew,' said Evan. 'He is here as my friend, and may be made uncomfortable.'

'Yes, yes,—ha! ha! I'll follow the poor chap,' said Andrew. 'But what is it all about? Louisa won't go, you know. Has the girl given you up because she saw your mother, Van? I thought it was all right. Why the deuce are you running away?'

Page 1413

‘Because I’ve just seen that I ought never to have come, I suppose,’ Evan replied, controlling the wretched heaving of his chest.

‘But Louisa won’t go, Van.’

’Understand, my dear Andrew, that I know it to be quite imperative. Be ready yourself with Caroline. Louisa will then make her choice. Pray help me in this. We must not stay a minute more than is necessary in this house.’

‘It’s an awful duty,’ breathed Andrew, after a pause. ’I see nothing but hot water at home. Why—but it’s no use asking questions. My love to your mother. I say, Van,—-now isn’t Lady Jocelyn a trump?’

‘God bless her!’ said Evan. And the moisture in Andrew’s eyes affected his own.

’She’s the staunchest piece of woman-goods I ever—I know a hundred cases of her!’

’I know one, and that ‘s enough,’ said Evan.

Not a sign of Rose! Can Love die without its dear farewell on which it feeds, away from the light, dying by bits? In Evan’s heart Love seemed to die, and all the pangs of a death were there as he trod along the gravel and stepped beneath the gates of Beckley Court.

Meantime the gallant Countess was not in any way disposed to retreat on account of Evan’s defection. The behaviour toward him at the breakfast-table proved to her that he had absolutely committed his egregious folly, and as no General can have concert with a fool, she cut him off from her affections resolutely. Her manifest disdain at his last speech, said as much to everybody present. Besides, the lady was in her element here, and compulsion is required to make us relinquish our element. Lady Jocelyn certainly had not expressly begged of her to remain: the Countess told Melville so, who said that if she required such an invitation she should have it, but that a guest to whom they were so much indebted, was bound to spare them these formalities.

‘What am I to do?’

The Countess turned piteously to the diplomatist’s wife.

She answered, retiringly: ‘Indeed I cannot say.’

Upon this, the Countess accepted Melville’s arm, and had some thoughts of punishing the woman.

They were seen parading the lawn. Mr. George Uplift chuckled singularly.

‘Just the old style,’ he remarked, but corrected the inadvertence with a ‘hem!’ committing himself more shamefully the instant after. ’I’ll wager she has the old Dip. down on his knee before she cuts.’

‘Bet can’t be taken,’ observed Sir John Loring. ‘It requires a spy.’

Harry, however, had heard the remark, and because he wished to speak to her, let us hope, and reproach her for certain things when she chose to be disengaged, he likewise sallied out, being forlorn as a youth whose sweet vanity is much hurt.

The Duke had paired off with Mrs. Strike. The lawn was fair in sunlight where they walked. The air was rich with harvest smells, and the scent of autumnal roses. Caroline was by nature luxurious and soft. The thought of that drilled figure to which she was returning in bondage, may have thrown into bright relief the polished and gracious nobleman who walked by her side, shadowing forth the chances of a splendid freedom. Two lovely tears fell from her eyes. The Duke watched them quietly.

Page 1414

‘Do you know, they make me jealous?’ he said.

Caroline answered him with a faint smile.

’Reassure me, my dear lady; you are not going with your brother this morning?’

‘Your Grace, I have no choice!’

’May I speak to you as your warmest friend? From what I hear, it appears to be right that your brother should not stay. To the best of my ability I will provide for him: but I sincerely desire to disconnect you from those who are unworthy of you. Have you not promised to trust in me? Pray, let me be your guide.’

Caroline replied to the heart of his words: ‘I dare not.’

‘What has changed you?’

‘I am not changed, but awakened,’ said Caroline.

The Duke paced on in silence.

‘Pardon me if I comprehend nothing of such a change,’ he resumed. ’I asked you to sacrifice much; all that I could give in return I offered. Is it the world you fear?’

‘What is the world to such as I am?’

‘Can you consider it a duty to deliver yourself bound to that man again?’

‘Heaven pardon me, my lord, I think of that too little!’

The Duke’s next question: ‘Then what can it be?’ stood in his eyes.

‘Oh!’ Caroline’s touch quivered on his arm, ’Do not suppose me frivolous, ungrateful, or —or cowardly. For myself you have offered more happiness than I could have hoped for. To be allied to one so generous, I could bear anything. Yesterday you had my word: give it me back to-day!’

Very curiously the Duke gazed on her, for there was evidence of internal torture across her forehead.

‘I may at least beg to know the cause for this request?’

She quelled some throbbing in her bosom. ‘Yes.’

He waited, and she said: ’There is one—if I offended him, I could not live. If now I followed my wishes, he would lose his faith in the last creature that loves him. He is

unhappy. I could bear what is called disgrace, my lord—I shudder to say it—I could sin against heaven; but I dare not do what would make him despise me.'

She was trembling violently; yet the nobleman, in his surprise, could not forbear from asking who this person might be, whose influence on her righteous actions was so strong.

'It is my brother, my lord,' she said.

Still more astonished, 'Your brother!' the Duke exclaimed. 'My dearest lady, I would not wound you; but is not this a delusion? We are so placed that we must speak plainly. Your brother I have reason to feel sure is quite unworthy of you.'

'Unworthy? My brother Evan? Oh! he is noble, he is the best of men!'

'And how, between yesterday and to-day, has he changed you?'

'It is that yesterday I did not know him, and to-day I do.'

Her brother, a common tradesman, a man guilty of forgery and the utmost baseness—-all but kicked out of the house! The Duke was too delicate to press her further. Moreover, Caroline had emphasized the 'yesterday' and 'to-day,' showing that the interval which had darkened Evan to everybody else, had illumined him to her. He employed some courtly eloquence, better unrecorded; but if her firm resolution perplexed him, it threw a strange halo round the youth from whom it sprang.

Page 1415

The hour was now eleven, and the Countess thought it full time to retire to her entrenchment in Mrs. Bonner's chamber. She had great things still to do: vast designs were in her hand awaiting the sanction of Providence. Alas! that little idle promenade was soon to be repented. She had joined her sister, thinking it safer to have her upstairs till they were quit of Evan. The Duke and the diplomatist loitering in the rear, these two fair women sailed across the lawn, conscious, doubtless, over all their sorrows and schemes, of the freight of beauty they carried.

What meant that gathering on the steps? It was fortuitous, like everything destined to confound us. There stood Lady Jocelyn with Andrew, fretting his pate. Harry leant against a pillar, Miss Carrington, Mrs. Shorne, and Mrs. Melville, supported by Mr. George Uplift, held watchfully by. Juliana, with Master Alec and Miss Dorothy, were in the background.

Why did our General see herself cut off from her stronghold, as by a hostile band? She saw it by that sombre light in Juliana's eyes, which had shown its ominous gleam whenever disasters were on the point of unfolding.

Turning to Caroline, she said: 'Is there a back way?'

Too late! Andrew called.

'Come along, Louisa, Just time, and no more. Carry, are you packed?'

This in reality was the first note of the retreat from Beckley; and having blown it, the hideous little trumpeter burst into scarlet perspirations, mumbling to Lady Jocelyn: 'Now, my lady, mind you stand by me.'

The Countess walked straight up to him.

'Dear Andrew! this sun is too powerful for you. I beg you, withdraw into the shade of the house.'

She was about to help him with all her gentleness.

'Yes, yes. All right, Louisa rejoined Andrew. 'Come, go and pack. The fly 'll be here, you know—too late for the coach, if you don't mind, my lass. Ain't you packed yet?'

The horrible fascination of vulgarity impelled the wretched lady to answer: 'Are we herrings?' And then she laughed, but without any accompaniment.

'I am now going to dear Mrs. Bonner,' she said, with a tender glance at Lady Jocelyn.

'My mother is sleeping,' her ladyship remarked.

‘Come, Carry, my darling!’ cried Andrew.

Caroline looked at her sister. The Countess divined Andrew’s shameful trap.

‘I was under an engagement to go and canvass this afternoon,’ she said.

‘Why, my dear Louisa, we’ve settled that in here this morning,’ said Andrew. ’Old Tom only stuck up a puppet to play with. We’ve knocked him over, and march in victorious —eh, my lady?’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the Countess, ’if Mr. Raikes shall indeed have listened to my inducements!’

‘Deuce a bit of inducements!’ returned Andrew. ’The fellow’s ashamed of himself-ha! ha! Now then, Louisa.’

While they talked, Juliana had loosed Dorothy and Alec, and these imps were seen rehearsing a remarkable play, in which the damsel held forth a hand and the cavalier advanced and kissed it with a loud smack, being at the same time reproached for his lack of grace.

Page 1416

‘You are so English!’ cried Dorothy, with perfect languor, and a malicious twitter passed between two or three. Mr. George spluttered indiscreetly.

The Countess observed the performance. Not to convert the retreat into a total rout, she, with that dark flush which was her manner of blushing, took formal leave of Lady Jocelyn, who, in return, simply said: ‘Good-bye, Countess.’ Mrs. Strike’s hand she kindly shook.

The few digs and slaps and thrusts at gloomy Harry and prim Miss Carrington and boorish Mr. George, wherewith the Countess, torn with wrath, thought it necessary to cover her retreat, need not be told. She struck the weak alone: Juliana she respected. Masterly tactics, for they showed her power, gratified her vengeance, and left her unassailed. On the road she had Andrew to tear to pieces. O delicious operation! And O shameful brother to reduce her to such joys! And, O Providence! may a poor desperate soul, betrayed through her devotion, unremunerated for her humiliation and absolute hard work, accuse thee? The Countess would have liked to. She felt it to be the instigation of the devil, and decided to remain on the safe side still.

Happily for Evan, she was not ready with her packing by half-past eleven. It was near twelve when he, pacing in front of the inn, observed Polly Wheedle, followed some yards in the rear by John Raikes, advancing towards him. Now Polly had been somewhat delayed by Jack’s persecutions, and Evan declining to attend to the masked speech of her mission, which directed him to go at once down a certain lane in the neighbourhood of the park, some minutes were lost.

‘Why, Mr. Harrington,’ said Polly, ’it’s Miss Rose: she’s had leave from her Ma. Can you stop away, when it’s quite proper?’

Evan hesitated. Before he could conquer the dark spirit, lo, Rose appeared, walking up the village street. Polly and her adorer fell back.

Timidly, unlike herself, Rose neared him.

’I have offended you, Evan. You would not come to me: I have come to you.’

‘I am glad to be able to say good-bye to you, Rose,’ was his pretty response.

Could she have touched his hand then, the blood of these lovers rushing to one channel must have made all clear. At least he could hardly have struck her true heart with his miserable lie. But that chance was lost they were in the street, where passions have no play.

‘Tell me, Evan,—it is not true.’

He, refining on his misery, thought, She would not ask it if she trusted me: and answered her: ‘You have heard it from your mother, Rose.’

’But I will not believe it from any lips but yours, Evan. Oh, speak, speak!’

It pleased him to think: How could one who loved me believe it even then?

He said: ‘It can scarcely do good to make me repeat it, Rose.’

And then, seeing her dear bosom heave quickly, he was tempted to fall on his knees to her with a wild outcry of love. The chance was lost. The inexorable street forbade it.

Page 1417

There they stood in silence, gasping at the barrier that divided them.

Suddenly a noise was heard. ‘Stop! stop!’ cried the voice of John Raikes. ’When a lady and gentleman are talking together, sir, do you lean your long ears over them—ha?’

Looking round, Evan beheld Laxley a step behind, and Jack rushing up to him, seizing his collar, and instantly undergoing ignominious prostration for his heroic defence of the privacy of lovers.

‘Stand aside’; said Laxley, imperiously. ’Rosey so you’ve come for me. Take my arm. You are under my protection.’

Another forlorn ‘Is it true?’ Rose cast toward Evan with her eyes. He wavered under them.

‘Did you receive my letter?’ he demanded of Laxley.

‘I decline to hold converse with you,’ said Laxley, drawing Rose’s hand on his arm.

‘You will meet me to-day or to-morrow?’

‘I am in the habit of selecting my own company.’

Rose disengaged her hand. Evan grasped it. No word of farewell was uttered. Her mouth moved, but her eyes were hard shut, and nothing save her hand’s strenuous pressure, equalling his own, told that their parting had been spoken, the link violently snapped.

Mr. John Raikes had been picked up and pulled away by Polly. She now rushed to Evan: ’Good-bye, and God bless you, dear Mr. Harrington. I’ll find means of letting you know how she is. And he shan’t have her, mind!’

Rose was walking by Laxley’s side, but not leaning on his arm. Evan blessed her for this. Ere she was out of sight the fly rolled down the street. She did not heed it, did not once turn her head. Ah, bitter unkindness!

When Love is hurt, it is self-love that requires the opiate. Conning gave it him in the form of a note in a handwriting not known to him. It said:

> ’I do not believe it, and nothing will ever make me.
> ‘*Juliana*.’

Evan could not forget these words. They coloured his farewell to Beckley: the dear old downs, the hopgardens, the long grey farms walled with clipped yew, the home of his lost love! He thought of them through weary nights when the ghostly image with the

hard shut eyelids and the quivering lips would rise and sway irresolutely in air till a shape out of the darkness extinguished it. Pride is the God of Pagans. Juliana had honoured his God. The spirit of Juliana seemed to pass into the body of Rose, and suffer for him as that ghostly image visibly suffered.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN WHICH WE HAVE TO SEE IN THE DARK

So ends the fourth act of our comedy.

After all her heroism and extraordinary efforts, after, as she feared, offending Providence—after facing Tailordom—the Countess was rolled away in a dingy fly unrewarded even by a penny, for what she had gone through. For she possessed eminently the practical nature of her sex; and though she would have scorned, and would have declined to handle coin so base, its absence was upbraidingly mentioned in her spiritual outcries. Not a penny!

Page 1418

Nor was there, as in the miseries of retreat she affected indifferently to imagine, a Duke fished out of the ruins of her enterprise, to wash the mud off her garments and edge them with radiance. Caroline, it became clear to her, had been infected by Evan's folly. Caroline, she subsequently learnt, had likewise been a fool. Instead of marvelling at the genius that had done so much in spite of the pair of fools that were the right and left wing of her battle array, the simple-minded lady wept. She wanted success, not genius. Admiration she was ever ready to forfeit for success.

Nor did she say to the tailors of earth: 'Weep, for I sought to emancipate you from opprobrium by making one of you a gentleman; I fought for a great principle and have failed.' Heroic to the end, she herself shed all the tears; took all the sorrow.

Where was consolation? Would any Protestant clergyman administer comfort to her? Could he? might he do so? He might listen, and quote texts; but he would demand the harsh rude English for everything; and the Countess's confessional thoughts were all innuendoish, aerial; too delicate to live in our shameless tongue. Confession by implication, and absolution; she could know this to be what she wished for, and yet not think it. She could see a haven of peace in that picture of the little brown box with the sleekly reverend figure bending his ear to the kneeling Beauty outside, thrice ravishing as she half-lifts the veil of her sins and her visage!—yet she started alarmed to hear it whispered that the fair penitent was the Countess de Saldar; urgently she prayed that no disgraceful brother might ever drive her to that!

Never let it be a Catholic priest!—she almost fashioned her petition into words. Who was to save her? Alas! alas! in her dire distress—in her sense of miserable pennilessness, she clung to Mr. John Raikes, of the curricle, the mysteriously rich young gentleman; and on that picture, with Andrew roguishly contemplating it, and Evan, with feelings regarding his sister that he liked not to own, the curtain commiseratingly drops.

As in the course of a stream you come upon certain dips, where, but here and there, a sparkle or a gloom of the full flowing water is caught through deepening foliage, so the history that concerns us wanders out of day for a time, and we must violate the post and open written leaves to mark the turn it takes.

First we have a letter from Mr. Goren to Mrs. Mel, to inform her that her son has arrived and paid his respects to his future instructor in the branch of science practised by Mr. Goren.

'He has arrived at last,' says the worthy tradesman. 'His appearance in the shop will be highly gentlemanly, and when he looks a little more pleasing, and grows fond of it, nothing will be left to be desired. The ladies, his sisters, have not thought proper to call. I had hopes of the custom of Mr. Andrew Cogglesby. Of course you wish him to learn tailoring thoroughly?'

Page 1419

Mrs. Mel writes back, thanking Mr. Goren, and saying that 'she had shown the letter to inquiring creditors, and that she does wish her son to learn his business from the root. This produces a second letter from Mr. Goren, which imparts to her that at the root of the tree, of tailoring the novitiate must sit no less than six hours a day with his legs crossed and doubled under him, cheerfully plying needle and thread; and that, without this probation, to undergo which the son resolutely objects, all hope of his climbing to the top of the lofty tree, and viewing mankind from an eminence, must be surrendered.

'If you do not insist, my dear Mrs. Harrington, I tell you candidly, your son may have a shop, but he will be no tailor.'

Mrs. Mel understands her son and his state of mind well enough not to insist, and is resigned to the melancholy consequence.

Then Mr. Goren discovers an extraordinary resemblance between Evan and his father: remarking merely that the youth is not the gentleman his father was in a shop, while he admits, that had it been conjoined to business habits, he should have envied his departed friend.

He has soon something fresh to tell; and it is that young Mr. Harrington is treating him cavalierly. That he should penetrate the idea or appreciate the merits of Mr. Goren's Balance was hardly to be expected at present: the world did not, and Mr. Goren blamed no young man for his ignorance. Still a proper attendance was requisite. Mr. Goren thought it very singular that young Mr. Harrington should demand all the hours of the day for his own purposes, up to half-past four. He found it difficult to speak to him as a master, and begged that Mrs. Harrington would, as a mother.

The reply of Mrs. Mel is dashed with a trifle of cajolery. She has heard from her son, and seeing that her son takes all that time from his right studies, to earn money wherewith to pay debts of which Mr. Goren is cognizant, she trusts that their oldest friend will overlook it.

Mr. Goren rejoins that he considers that he need not have been excluded from young Mr. Harrington's confidence. Moreover, it is a grief to him that the young gentleman should refrain from accepting any of his suggestions as to the propriety of requesting some, at least, of his rich and titled acquaintance to confer on him the favour of their patronage. 'Which they would not repent,' adds Mr. Goren, 'and might learn to be very much obliged to him for, in return for kindnesses extended to him.'

Notwithstanding all my efforts, you see, the poor boy is thrust into the shop. There he is, without a doubt. He sleeps under Mr. Goren's roof: he (since one cannot be too positive in citing the punishment of such a Pagan) stands behind a counter: he (and, oh! choke, young loves, that have hovered around him! shrink from him in natural horror, gentle ladies!) handles the shears. It is not my fault. He would be a Pagan. If

you can think him human enough still to care to know how he feels it, I must tell you that he feels it hardly-at all. After a big blow, a very little one scarcely counts. What are outward forms and social ignominies to him whose heart has been struck to the dust? His Gods have fought for him, and there he is! He deserves no pity.

Page 1420

But he does not ask it of you, the callous Pagan! Despise him, if you please, and rank with the Countess, who despises him most heartily. Dipping further into the secrets of the post, we discover a brisk correspondence between Juliana Bonner and Mrs. Strike.

‘A thousand thanks to you, my dear Miss Bonner,’ writes the latter lady. ’The unaffected interest you take in my brother touches me deeply. I know him to be worthy of your good opinion. Yes, I will open my heart to you, dearest Juliana; and it shall, as you wish, be quite secret between us. Not to a soul!

’He is quite alone. My sisters Harriet and Louisa will not see him, and I can only do so by stealth. His odd other little friend sometimes drives me out on Sundays, to a place where I meet him; and the Duke of Belfield kindly lends me his carriage. Oh, that we might never part! I am only happy with him!

’Ah, do not doubt him, Juliana, for anything he does! You say, that now the Duke has obtained for him the Secretaryship to my husband’s Company, he should not thing, and you do not understand why. I will tell you. Our poor father died in debt, and Evan receives money which enables him by degrees to liquidate these debts, on condition that he consents to be what I dislike as much as you can. He bears it; you can have no idea of his pride! He is too proud to own to himself that it debases him—too proud to complain. It is a tangle—a net that drags him down to it but whatever he is outwardly, he is the noblest human being in the world to me, and but for him, oh, what should I be? Let me beg you to forgive it, if you can. My darling has no friends. Is his temper as sweet as ever? I can answer that. Yes, only he is silent, and looks—when you look into his eyes—colder, as men look when they will not bear much from other men.

’He has not mentioned her name. I am sure she has not written.

‘Pity him, and pray for him.’

Juliana then makes a communication, which draws forth the following:—

’Mistress of all the Beckley property-dearest, dearest Juliana! Oh! how sincerely I congratulate you! The black on the letter alarmed me so, I could hardly open it, my fingers trembled so; for I esteem you all at Beckley; but when I had opened and read it, I was recompensed. You say you are sorry for Rose. But surely what your Grandmama has done is quite right. It is just, in every sense. But why am I not to tell Evan? I am certain it would make him very happy, and happiness of any kind he needs so much! I will obey you, of course, but I cannot see why. Do you know, my dear child, you are extremely mysterious, and puzzle me. Evan takes a pleasure in speaking of you. You and Lady Jocelyn are his great themes. Why is he to be kept ignorant of your good fortune? The spitting of blood is bad. You must winter in a warm climate. I do think that London is far better for you in the late Autumn than Hampshire. May I ask my sister

Harriet to invite you to reside with her for some weeks? Nothing, I know, would give her greater pleasure.’

Page 1421

Juliana answers this—

’If you love me—I sometimes hope that you do—but the feeling of being loved is so strange to me that I can only believe it at times—but, Caroline—there, I have mustered up courage to call you by your Christian name at last—Oh, dear Caroline! if you do love me, do not tell Mr. Harrington. I go on my knees to you to beg you not to tell him a word. I have no reasons indeed not any; but I implore you again never even to hint that I am anything but the person he knew at Beckley.

’Rose has gone to Elburne House, where Ferdinand, her friend, is to meet her. She rides and sings the same, and keeps all her colour.

’She may not, as you imagine, have much sensibility. Perhaps not enough. I am afraid that Rose is turning into a very worldly woman!

’As to what you kindly say about inviting me to London, I should like it, and I am my own mistress. Do you know, I think I am older than your brother! I am twenty-three. Pray, when you write, tell me if he is older than that. But should I not be a dreadful burden to you? Sometimes I have to keep to my chamber whole days and days. When that happens now, I think of you entirely. See how I open my heart to you. You say that you do to me. I wish I could really think it.’

A postscript begs Caroline ‘not to forget about the ages.’

In this fashion the two ladies open their hearts, and contrive to read one another perfectly in their mutual hypocrisies.

Some letters bearing the signatures of Mr. John Raikes, and Miss Polly Wheedle, likewise pass. Polly inquires for detailed accounts of the health and doings of Mr. Harrington. Jack replies with full particulars of her own proceedings, and mild corrections of her grammar. It is to be noted that Polly grows much humbler to him on paper, which being instantly perceived by the mercurial one, his caressing condescension to her is very beautiful. She is taunted with Mr. Nicholas Frim, and answers, after the lapse of a week, that the aforesaid can be nothing to her, as he ‘went in a passion to church last Sunday and got married.’ It appears that they had quarrelled, ‘because I danced with you that night.’ To this Mr. Raikes rejoins in a style that would be signified by ‘ahem!’ in language, and an arrangement of the shirt collar before the looking-glass, in action.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IN THE DOMAIN OF TAILORDOM

There was peace in Mr. Goren's shop. Badgered Ministers, bankrupt merchants, diplomatists with a headache—any of our modern grandees under difficulties, might have envied that peace over which Mr. Goren presided: and he was an enviable man. He loved his craft, he believed that he had not succeeded the millions of antecedent tailors in vain; and, excepting that trifling coquetry with shirt-fronts, *viz*., the red crosses, which a shrewd rival had very soon

Page 1422

eclipsed by representing nymphs triangularly posed, he devoted himself to his business from morning to night; as rigid in demanding respect from those beneath him, as he was profuse in lavishing it on his patrons. His public boast was, that he owed no man a farthing; his secret comfort, that he possessed two thousand pounds in the Funds. But Mr. Goren did not stop here. Behind these external characteristics he nursed a passion. Evan was astonished and pleased to find in him an enthusiastic fern-collector. Not that Mr. Harrington shared the passion, but the sight of these brown roots spread out, ticketed, on the stained paper, after supper, when the shutters were up and the house defended from the hostile outer world; the old man poring over them, and naming this and that spot where, during his solitary Saturday afternoon and Sunday excursions, he had lighted on the rare samples exhibited this contrast of the quiet evening with the sordid day humanized Mr. Goren to him. He began to see a spirit in the rigid tradesman not so utterly dissimilar to his own, and he fancied that he, too, had a taste for ferns. Round Beckley how they abounded!

He told Mr. Goren so, and Mr. Goren said:

‘Some day we’ll jog down there together, as the saying goes.’

Mr. Goren spoke of it as an ordinary event, likely to happen in the days to come: not as an incident the mere mention of which, as being probable, stopped the breath and made the pulses leap.

For now Evan’s education taught him to feel that he was at his lowest degree. Never now could Rose stoop to him. He carried the shop on his back. She saw the brand of it on his forehead. Well! and what was Rose to him, beyond a blissful memory, a star that he had once touched? Self-love kept him strong by day, but in the darkness of night came his misery; wakening from tender dreams, he would find his heart sinking under a horrible pressure, and then the fair fresh face of Rose swam over him; the hours of Beckley were revived; with intolerable anguish he saw that she was blameless—that he alone was to blame. Yet worse was it when his closed eyelids refused to conjure up the sorrowful lovely nightmare, and he lay like one in a trance, entombed-wretched Pagan! feeling all that had been blindly; when the Past lay beside him like a corpse that he had slain.

These nightly torments helped him to brave what the morning brought. Insensibly also, as Time hardened his sufferings, Evan asked himself what the shame of his position consisted in. He grew stiff-necked. His Pagan virtues stood up one by one to support him. Andrew, courageously evading the interdict that forbade him to visit Evan, would meet him by appointment at City taverns, and flatly offered him a place in the Brewery. Evan declined it, on the pretext that, having received Old Tom’s money for the year, he must at least work out that term according to the conditions. Andrew fumed and sneered at Tailordom.

Page 1423

Evan said that there was peace in Mr. Goren's shop. His sharp senses discerned in Andrew's sneer a certain sincerity, and he revolted against it. Mr John Raikes, too, burlesqued Society so well, that he had the satisfaction of laughing at his enemy occasionally. The latter gentleman was still a pensioner, flying about town with the Countess de Saldar, in deadly fear lest that fascinating lady should discover the seat of his fortune; happy, notwithstanding. In the mirror of Evan's little world, he beheld the great one from which he was banished.

Now the dusk of a winter's afternoon was closing over London, when a carriage drew up in front of Mr. Goren's shop, out of which, to Mr. Goren's chagrin, a lady stepped, with her veil down. The lady entered, and said that she wished to speak to Mr. Harrington. Mr. Goren made way for her to his pupil; and was amazed to see her fall into his arms, and hardly gratified to hear her say: 'Pardon me, darling, for coming to you in this place.'

Evan asked permission to occupy the parlour.

'My place,' said Mr. Goren, with humble severity, over his spectacles, 'is very poor. Such as it is, it is at the lady's service.'

Alone with her, Evan was about to ease his own feelings by remarking to the effect that Mr. Goren was human like the rest of us, but Caroline cried, with unwonted vivacity:

'Yes, yes, I know; but I thought only of you. I have such news for you! You will and must pardon my coming—that's my first thought, sensitive darling that you are!' She kissed him fondly. 'Juliana Bonner is in town, staying with us!'

'Is that your news?' asked Evan, pressing her against his breast.

'No, dear love—but still! You have no idea what her fortune—Mrs. Bonner has died and left her—but I mustn't tell you. Oh, my darling! how she admires you! She—she could recompense you; if you would! We will put that by, for the present. Dear! the Duke has begged you, through me, to accept—I think it 's to be a sort of bailiff to his estates—I don't know rightly. It's a very honourable post, that gentlemen take: and the income you are to have, Evan, will be near a thousand a year. Now, what do I deserve for my news?'

She put up her mouth for another kiss, out of breath.

'True?' looked Evan's eyes.

'True!' she said, smiling, and feasting on his bewilderment.

After the bubbling in his brain had a little subsided, Evan breathed as a man on whom fresh air is blown. Were not these tidings of release? His ridiculous pride must nevertheless inquire whether Caroline had been begging this for him.

‘No, dear—indeed!’ Caroline asserted with more than natural vehemence. ’It’s something that you yourself have done that has pleased him. I don’t know what. Only he says, he believes you are a man to be trusted with the keys of anything—and so you are. You are to call on him to-morrow. Will you?’

Page 1424

While Evan was replying, her face became white. She had heard the Major's voice in the shop. His military step advanced, and Caroline, exclaiming, 'Don't let me see him!' bustled to a door. Evan nodded, and she slipped through. The next moment he was facing the stiff marine.

'Well, young man,' the Major commenced, and, seating himself, added, 'be seated. I want to talk to you seriously, sir. You didn't think fit to wait till I had done with the Directors today. You're devilishly out in your discipline, whatever you are at two and two. I suppose there's no fear of being intruded on here? None of your acquaintances likely to be introducing themselves to me?'

'There is not one that I would introduce to you,' said Evan.

The Major nodded a brief recognition of the compliment, and then, throwing his back against the chair, fired out: 'Come, sir, is this your doing?'

In military phrase, Evan now changed front. His first thought had been that the Major had come for his wife. He perceived that he himself was the special object of his visitation.

'I must ask you what you allude to,' he answered.

'You are not at your office, but you will speak to me as if there was some distinction between us,' said the Major. 'My having married your sister does not reduce me to the ranks, I hope.'

The Major drummed his knuckles on the table, after this impressive delivery.

'Hem!' he resumed. 'Now, sir, understand, before you speak a word, that I can see through any number of infernal lies. I see that you're prepared for prevarication. By George! it shall come out of you, if I get it by main force. The Duke compelled me to give you that appointment in my Company. Now, sir, did you, or did you not, go to him and deliberately state to him that you believed the affairs of the Company to be in a bad condition—infamously handled, likely to involve his honour as a gentleman? I ask you, sir, did you do this, or did you not do it?'

Evan waited till the sharp rattle of the Major's close had quieted.

'If I am to answer the wording of your statement, I may say that I did not.'

'Very good; very good; that will do. Are you aware that the Duke has sent in his resignation as a Director of our Company?'

'I hear of it first from you.'

‘Confound your familiarity!’ cried the irritable officer, rising. ’Am I always to be told that I married your sister? Address me, sir, as becomes your duty.’

Evan heard the words ‘beggarly tailor’ mumbled ‘out of the gutters,’ and ‘cursed connection.’ He stood in the attitude of attention, while the Major continued:

’Now, young man, listen to these facts. You came to me this day last week, and complained that you did not comprehend some of our transactions and affairs. I explained them to your damned stupidity. You went away. Three days after that, you had an interview with the Duke. Stop, sir! What the devil do you mean by daring to speak while I am speaking? You saw the Duke, I say. Now, what took place at that interview?’

Page 1425

The Major tried to tower over Evan powerfully, as he put this query. They were of a common height, and to do so, he had to rise on his toes, so that the effect was but momentary.

‘I think I am not bound to reply,’ said Evan.

‘Very well, sir; that will do.’ The Major’s fingers were evidently itching for an absent rattan. ’Confess it or not, you are dismissed from your post. Do you hear? You are kicked in the street. A beggarly tailor you were born, and a beggarly tailor you will die.’

‘I must beg you to stop, now,’ said Evan. ’I told you that I was not bound to reply: but I will. If you will sit down, Major Strike, you shall hear what you wish to know.’

This being presently complied with, though not before a glare of the Major’s eyes had shown his doubt whether it might not be construed into insolence, Evan pursued:

’I came to you and informed you that I could not reconcile the cash-accounts of the Company, and that certain of the later proceedings appeared to me to jeopardize its prosperity. Your explanations did not satisfy me. I admit that you enjoined me to be silent. But the Duke, as a Director, had as strong a right to claim me as his servant, and when he questioned me as to the position of the Company, I told him what I thought, just as I had told you.’

‘You told him we were jobbers and swindlers, sir!’

’The Duke inquired of me whether I would, under the circumstances, while proceedings were going on which I did not approve of, take the responsibility of allowing my name to remain—’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ the Major burst out. This was too good a joke. The name of a miserable young tailor!’ Go on, sir, go on!’ He swallowed his laughter like oil on his rage.

‘I have said sufficient.’

Jumping up, the Major swore by the Lord, that he had said sufficient.

‘Now, look you here, young man.’ He squared his finger before Evan, eyeing him under a hard frown, ’You have been playing your game again, as you did down at that place in Hampshire. I heard of it—deserved to be shot, by heaven! You think you have got hold of the Duke, and you throw me over. You imagine, I dare say, that I will allow my wife to be talked about to further your interests—you self-seeking young dog! As long as he lent the Company his name, I permitted a great many things. Do you think me a blind idiot, sir? But now she must learn to be satisfied with people who ’ve got no titles, or carriages, and who can’t give hundred guinea compliments. You’re all of a piece-a set of . . .’

The Major paused, for half a word was on his mouth which had drawn lightning to Evan's eyes.

Not to be baffled, he added: 'But look you, sir. I may be ruined. I dare say the Company will go to the dogs—every ass will follow a Duke. But, mark, this goes on no more. I will be no woman's tally. Mind, sir, I take excellent care that you don't traffic in your sister!'

Page 1426

The Major delivered this culminating remark with a well-timed deflection of his forefinger, and slightly turned aside when he had done.

You might have seen Evan's figure rocking, as he stood with his eyes steadily levelled on his sister's husband.

The Major, who, whatever he was, was physically no coward, did not fail to interpret the look, and challenge it.

Evan walked to the door, opened it, and said, between his teeth, 'You must go at once.'

'Eh, sir, eh? what's this?' exclaimed the warrior but the door was open, Mr. Goren was in the shop; the scandal of an assault in such a house, and the consequent possibility of his matrimonial alliance becoming bruited in the newspapers, held his arm after it had given an involuntary jerk. He marched through with becoming dignity, and marched out into the street; and if necks unelastic and heads erect may be taken as the sign of a proud soul and of nobility of mind, my artist has the Major for his model.

Evan displayed no such a presence. He returned to the little parlour, shut and locked the door to the shop, and forgetting that one was near, sat down, covered his eyes, and gave way to a fit of tearless sobbing. With one foot in the room Caroline hung watching him. A pain that she had never known wrung her nerves. His whole manhood seemed to be shaken, as if by regular pulsations of intensest misery. She stood in awe of the sight till her limbs failed her, and then staggering to him she fell on her knees, clasping his, passionately kissing them.

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH THE COUNTESS STILL SCENTS GAME

Mr. Raikes and his friend Frank Remand, surnamed Franko, to suit the requirements of metre, in which they habitually conversed, were walking arm-in-arm along the drive in Society's Park on a fine frosty Sunday afternoon of midwinter. The quips and jokes of Franko were lively, and he looked into the carriages passing, as if he knew that a cheerful countenance is not without charms for their inmates. Raikes' face, on the contrary, was barren and bleak. Being of that nature that when a pun was made he must perforce outstrip it, he fell into Franko's humour from time to time, but albeit aware that what he uttered was good, and by comparison transcendent, he refused to enjoy it. Nor when Franko started from his arm to declaim a passage, did he do other than make limp efforts to unite himself to Franko again. A further sign of immense depression in him was that instead of the creative, it was the critical faculty he exercised, and rather than reply to Franko in his form of speech, he scanned occasional lines and objected to particular phrases. He had clearly exchanged the sanguine for the bilious

temperament, and was fast stranding on the rocky shores of prose. Franko bore this very well, for he, like Raikes in happier days, claimed all the glances of lovely woman as his own, and on his right there flowed a stream of Beauties. At last he was compelled to observe: 'This change is sudden: wherefore so downcast? With tigrine claw thou mangiest my speech, thy cheeks are like December's pippin, and thy tongue most sour!'

Page 1427

‘Then of it make a farce!’ said Raikes, for the making of farces was Franko’s profession. ’Wherefore so downcast! What a line! There! let’s walk on. Let us the left foot forward stout advance. I care not for the herd.’

‘’Tis love!’ cried Franko.

‘Ay, an’ it be!’ Jack gloomily returned.

‘For ever cruel is the sweet Saldar?’

Raikes winced at this name.

‘A truce to banter, Franko!’ he said sternly: but the subject was opened, and the wound.

‘Love!’ he pursued, mildly groaning. ’Suppose you adored a fascinating woman, and she knew—positively knew—your manly weakness, and you saw her smiling upon everybody, and she told you to be happy, and egad, when you came to reflect, you found that after three months’ suit you were nothing better than her errand-boy? A thing to boast of, is it not, quotha?’

‘Love’s yellow-fever, jealousy, methinks,’ Franko commenced in reply; but Raikes spat at the emphasized word.

’Jealousy!—who’s jealous of clergymen and that crew? Not I, by Pluto! I carried five messages to one fellow with a coat-tail straight to his heels, last week. She thought I should drive my curricle—I couldn’t afford an omnibus! I had to run. When I returned to her I was dirty. She made remarks!’

‘Thy sufferings are severe—but such is woman!’ said Franko. ’Gad, it’s a good idea, though.’ He took out a note-book and pencilled down a point or two. Raikes watched the process sardonically.

‘My tragedy is, then, thy farce!’ he exclaimed. ’Well, be it so! I believe I shall come to song-writing again myself shortly-beneath the shield of Catnach I’ll a nation’s ballads frame. I’ve spent my income in four months, and now I ’m living on my curricle. I underlet it. It ’s like trade—it ’s as bad as poor old Harrington, by Jove! But that isn’t the worst, Franko!’ Jack dropped his voice: ’I believe I’m furiously loved by a poor country wench.’

‘Morals!’ was Franko’s most encouraging reproof.

‘Oh, I don’t think I’ve even kissed her,’ rejoined Raikes, who doubted because his imagination was vivid. ’It ’s my intellect that dazzles her. I ’ve got letters—she calls me clever. By Jove! since I gave up driving I’ve had thoughts of rushing down to her and

making her mine in spite of home, family, fortune, friends, name, position—everything! I have, indeed.'

Franko looked naturally astonished at this amount of self-sacrifice. 'The Countess?' he shrewdly suggested.

'I'd rather be my Polly's prince,
Than yon great lady's errand-boy!'

Raikes burst into song.

He stretched out his hand, as if to discard all the great ladies who were passing. By the strangest misfortune ever known, the direction taken by his fingers was toward a carriage wherein, beautifully smiling opposite an elaborately reverend gentleman of middle age, the Countess de Saldar was sitting. This great lady is not to be blamed for deeming that her errand-boy was pointing her out vulgarly on a public promenade. Ineffable disdain curled off her sweet olive visage. She turned her head.

Page 1428

’I ‘ll go down to that girl to-night,’ said Raikes, with compressed passion. And then he hurried Franko along to the bridge, where, behold, the Countess alighted with the gentleman, and walked beside him into the gardens.

‘Follow her,’ said Raikes, in agitation. ’Do you see her? by yon long-tailed raven’s side? Follow her, Franko! See if he kisses her hand-anything! and meet me here in half an hour. I’ll have evidence!’

Franko did not altogether like the office, but Raikes’ dinners, singular luck, and superiority in the encounter of puns, gave him the upper hand with his friend, and so Franko went.

Turning away from the last glimpse of his Countess, Raikes crossed the bridge, and had not strolled far beneath the bare branches of one of the long green walks, when he perceived a gentleman with two ladies leaning on him.

‘Now, there,’ moralized this youth; ’now, what do you say to that? Do you call that fair? He can’t be happy, and it’s not in nature for them to be satisfied. And yet, if I went up and attempted to please them all by taking one away, the probabilities are that he would knock me down. Such is life! We won’t be made comfortable!’

Nevertheless, he passed them with indifference, for it was merely the principle he objected to; and, indeed, he was so wrapped in his own conceptions, that his name had to be called behind him twice before he recognized Evan Harrington, Mrs. Strike, and Miss Bonner. The arrangement he had previously thought good, was then spontaneously adopted. Mrs. Strike reposed her fair hand upon his arm, and Juliana, with a timid glance of pleasure, walked ahead in Evan’s charge. Close neighbourhood between the couples was not kept. The genius of Mr. Raikes was wasted in manoeuvres to lead his beautiful companion into places where he could be seen with her, and envied. It was, perhaps, more flattering that she should betray a marked disposition to prefer solitude in his society. But this idea illumined him only near the moment of parting. Then he saw it; then he groaned in soul, and besought Evan to have one more promenade, saying, with characteristic cleverness in the masking of his real thoughts: ‘It gives us an appetite, you know.’

In Evan’s face and Juliana’s there was not much sign that any protraction of their walk together would aid this beneficent process of nature. He took her hand gently, and when he quitted it, it dropped.

‘The Rose, the Rose of Beckley Court!’ Raikes sang aloud. ’Why, this is a day of meetings. Behold John Thomas in the rear-a tower of plush and powder! Shall I rush-shall I pluck her from the aged stem?’

On the gravel-walk above them Rose passed with her aristocratic grandmother, muffled in furs. She marched deliberately, looking coldly before her. Evan's face was white, and Juliana, whose eyes were fixed on him, shuddered.

'I'm chilled,' she murmured to Caroline. 'Let us go.' Caroline eyed Evan with a meaning sadness.

Page 1429

‘We will hurry to our carriage,’ she said.

They were seen to make a little circuit so as not to approach Rose; after whom, thoughtless of his cruelty, Evan bent his steps slowly, halting when she reached her carriage. He believed—rather, he knew that she had seen him. There was a consciousness in the composed outlines of her face as she passed: the indifference was too perfect. Let her hate him if she pleased. It recompensed him that the air she wore should make her appearance more womanly; and that black dress and crape-bonnet, in some way, touched him to mournful thoughts of her that helped a partial forgetfulness of wounded self.

Rose had driven off. He was looking at the same spot, where Caroline’s hand waved from her carriage. Juliana was not seen. Caroline requested her to nod to him once, but she would not. She leaned back hiding her eyes, and moving a petulant shoulder at Caroline’s hand.

‘Has he offended you, my child?’

Juliana answered harshly:

‘No-no.’

The wheels rolled on, and Caroline tried other subjects, knowing possibly that they would lead Juliana back to this of her own accord.

‘You saw how she treated him?’ the latter presently said, without moving her hand from before her eyes.

‘Yes, dear. He forgives her, and will forget it.’

‘Oh!’ she clenched her long thin hand, ’I pray that I may not die before I have made her repent it. She shall!’

Juliana looked glitteringly in Caroline’s face, and then fell a-weeping, and suffered herself to be folded and caressed. The storm was long subsiding.

‘Dearest! you are better now?’ said Caroline.

She whispered: ‘Yes.’

‘My brother has only to know you, dear—’

‘Hush! That’s past.’ Juliana stopped her; and, on a deep breath that threatened to break to sobs, she added in a sweeter voice than was common to her, ‘Ah, why—why did you tell him about the Beckley property?’

Caroline vainly strove to deny that she had told him. Juliana's head shook mournfully at her; and now Caroline knew what Juliana meant when she begged so earnestly that Evan should be kept ignorant of her change of fortune.

Some days after this the cold struck Juliana's chest, and she sickened. The three sisters held a sitting to consider what it was best to do with her. Caroline proposed to take her to Beckley without delay. Harriet was of opinion that the least they could do was to write to her relatives and make them instantly aware of her condition.

But the Countess said 'No,' to both. Her argument was, that Juliana being independent, they were by no means bound to 'bundle' her, in her state, back to a place where she had been so shamefully maltreated: that here she would live, while there she would certainly die: that absence of excitement was her medicine, and that here she had it. Mrs. Andrew, feeling herself responsible

Page 1430

as the young lady's hostess, did not acquiesce in the Countess's views till she had consulted Juliana; and then apologies for giving trouble were breathed on the one hand; sympathy, condolences, and professions of esteem, on the other. Juliana said, she was but slightly ill, would soon recover. Entreated not to leave them before she was thoroughly re-established, and to consent to be looked on as one of the family, she sighed, and said it was the utmost she could hope. Of course the ladies took this compliment to themselves, but Evan began to wax in importance. The Countess thought it nearly time to acknowledge him, and supported the idea by a citation of the doctrine, that to forgive is Christian. It happened, however, that Harriet, who had less art and more will than her sisters, was inflexible. She, living in a society but a few steps above Tailordom, however magnificent in expenditure and resources, abhorred it solemnly. From motives of prudence, as well as personal disgust, she continued firm in declining to receive her brother. She would not relent when the Countess pointed out a dim, a dazzling prospect, growing out of Evan's proximity to the heiress of Beckley Court; she was not to be moved when Caroline suggested that the specific for the frail invalid was Evan's presence. As to this, Juliana was sufficiently open, though, as she conceived, her art was extreme.

'Do you know why I stay to vex and trouble you?' she asked Caroline. 'Well, then, it is that I may see your brother united to you all: and then I shall go, happy.'

The pretext served also to make him the subject of many conversations. Twice a week a bunch of the best flowers that could be got were sorted and arranged by her, and sent namelessly to brighten Evan's chamber.

'I may do such a thing as this, you know, without incurring blame,' she said.

The sight of a love so humble in its strength and affluence, sent Caroline to Evan on a fruitless errand. What availed it, that accused of giving lead to his pride in refusing the heiress, Evan should declare that he did not love her? He did not, Caroline admitted as possible, but he might. He might learn to love her, and therefore he was wrong in wounding her heart. She related flattering anecdotes. She drew tearful pictures of Juliana's love for him: and noticing how he seemed to prize his bouquet of flowers, said:

'Do you love them for themselves, or the hand that sent them?'

Evan blushed, for it had been a struggle for him to receive them, as he thought, from Rose in secret. The flowers lost their value; the song that had arisen out of them, 'Thou livest in my memory,' ceased. But they came still. How many degrees from love gratitude may be, I have not reckoned. I rather fear it lies on the opposite shore. From a youth to a girl, it may yet be very tender; the more so, because their ages commonly exclude such a sentiment, and nature seems willing to make a transition stage of it. Evan wrote to Juliana. Incidentally he expressed a wish to see her. Juliana was under

doctor's interdict: but she was not to be prevented from going when Evan wished her to go. They met in the park, as before, and he talked to her five minutes through the carriage window.

Page 1431

‘Was it worth the risk, my poor child?’ said Caroline, pityingly.

Juliana cried: ‘Oh! I would give anything to live!’

A man might have thought that she made no direct answer.

’Don’t you think I am patient? Don’t you think I am very patient?’she asked Caroline, winningly, on their way home.

Caroline could scarcely forbear from smiling at the feverish anxiety she showed for a reply that should confirm her words and hopes.

’So we must all be!’she said, tend that common-place remark caused Juliana to exclaim: ’Prisoners have lived in a dungeon, on bread and water, for years!’

Whereat Caroline kissed her so tenderly that Juliana tried to look surprised, and failing, her thin lips quivered; she breathed a soft ‘hush,’ and fell on Caroline’s bosom.

She was transparent enough in one thing; but the flame which burned within her did not light her through.

Others, on other matters, were quite as transparent to her.

Caroline never knew that she had as much as told her the moral suicide Evan had committed at Beckley; so cunningly had she been probed at intervals with little casual questions; random interjections, that one who loved him could not fail to meet; petty doubts requiring elucidations. And the Countess, kind as her sentiments had grown toward the afflicted creature, was compelled to proclaim her densely stupid in material affairs. For the Countess had an itch of the simplest feminine curiosity to know whether the dear child had any notion of accomplishing a certain holy duty of the perishable on this earth, who might possess worldly goods; and no hints—not even plain speaking, would do. Juliana did not understand her at all.

The Countess exhibited a mourning-ring on her finger, Mrs. Bonner’s bequest to her.

’How fervent is my gratitude to my excellent departed friend for this! A legacy, however trifling, embalms our dear lost ones in the memory!’

It was of no avail. Juliana continued densely stupid. Was she not worse? The Countess could not, ‘in decency,’ as she observed, reveal to her who had prompted Mrs. Bonner so to bequeath the Beckley estates as to ’ensure sweet Juliana’s future’; but ought not Juliana to divine it?—Juliana at least had hints sufficient.

Cold Spring winds were now blowing. Juliana had resided no less than two months with the Cogglesbys. She was entreated still to remain, and she did. From Lady Jocelyn

she heard not a word of remonstrance; but from Miss Carrington and Mrs. Shorne she received admonishing letters. Finally, Mr. Harry Jocelyn presented himself. In London, and without any of that needful subsistence which a young gentleman feels the want of in London more than elsewhere, Harry began to have thoughts of his own, without any instigation from his aunts, about devoting himself to business. So he sent his card up to his cousin, and was graciously

Page 1432

met in the drawing-room by the Countess, who ruffled him and smoothed him, and would possibly have distracted his soul from business had his circumstances been less straitened. Juliana was declared to be too unwell to see him that day. He called a second time, and enjoyed a similar greeting. His third visit procured him an audience alone with Juliana, when, at once, despite the warnings of his aunts, the frank fellow plunged, 'medias res'. Mrs. Bonner had left him totally dependent on his parents and his chances.

'A desperate state of things, isn't it, Juley? I think I shall go for a soldier—common, you know.'

Instead of shrieking out against such a debasement of his worth and gentility, as was to be expected, Juliana said:

'That's what Mr. Harrington thought of doing.'

'He! If he'd had the pluck he would.'

'His duty forbade it, and he did not.'

'Duty! a confounded tailor! What fools we were to have him at Beckley!'

'Has the Countess been unkind to you Harry?'

'I haven't seen her to-day, and don't want to. It's my little dear old Juley I came for.'

'Dear Harry!' she thanked him with eyes and hands. 'Come often, won't you?'

'Why, ain't you coming back to us, Juley?'

'Not yet. They are very kind to me here. How is Rose?'

'Oh, quite jolly. She and Ferdinand are thick again. Balls every night. She dances like the deuce. They want me to go; but I ain't the sort of figure for those places, and besides, I shan't dance till I can lead you out.'

A spur of laughter at Harry's generous nod brought on Juliana's cough. Harry watched her little body shaken and her reddened eyes. Some real emotion—perhaps the fear which healthy young people experience at the sight of deadly disease—made Harry touch her arm with the softness of a child's touch.

'Don't be alarmed, Harry,' she said. 'It's nothing—only Winter. I'm determined to get well.'

‘That’s right,’ quoth he, recovering. ’I know you’ve got pluck, or you wouldn’t have stood that operation.’

‘Let me see: when was that?’ she asked slyly.

Harry coloured, for it related to a time when he had not behaved prettily to her.

’There, Juley, that ’s all forgotten. I was a fool-a scoundrel, if you like. I ‘m sorry for it now.’

‘Do you want money, Harry?’

‘Oh, money!’

‘Have you repaid Mr. Harrington yet?’

’There—no, I haven’t. Bother it! that fellow’s name’s always on your tongue. I’ll tell you what, Juley—but it’s no use. He’s a low, vulgar adventurer.’

‘Dear Harry,’ said Juliana, softly; ’don’t bring your aunts with you when you come to see me.’

’Well, then I’ll tell you, Juley. It’s enough that he’s a beastly tailor.’

‘Quite enough,’ she responded; ’and he is neither a fool nor a scoundrel.’

Page 1433

Harry's memory for his own speech was not quick. When Juliana's calm glance at him called it up, he jumped from his chair, crying: 'Upon my honour, I'll tell you what, Juley! If I had money to pay him to-morrow, I'd insult him on the spot.'

Juliana meditated, and said: 'Then all your friends must wish you to continue poor.'

This girl had once been on her knees to him. She had looked up to him with admiring love, and he had given her a crumb or so occasionally, thinking her something of a fool, and more of a pest; but now he could not say a word to her without being baffled in an elderly-sisterly tone exasperating him so far that he positively wished to marry her, and coming to the point, offered himself with downright sincerity, and was rejected. Harry left in a passion. Juliana confided the secret to Caroline, who suggested interested motives, which Juliana would not hear of.

'Ah,' said the Countess, when Caroline mentioned the case to her, 'of course the poor thing cherishes her first offer. She would believe a curate to be disinterested! But mind that Evan has due warning when she is to meet him. Mind that he is dressed becomingly.'

Caroline asked why.

'Because, my dear, she is enamoured of his person. These little unhealthy creatures are always attracted by the person. She thinks it to be Evan's qualities. I know better: it is his person. Beckley Court may be lost by a shabby coat!'

The Countess had recovered from certain spiritual languors into which she had fallen after her retreat. Ultimate victory hung still in the balance. Oh! if Evan would only marry this little sufferer, who was so sure to die within a year! or, if she lived (for marriage has often been as a resurrection to some poor female invalids), there was Beckley Court, a splendid basis for future achievements. Reflecting in this fashion, the Countess pardoned her brother. Glowing hopes hung fresh lamps in her charitable breast. She stepped across the threshold of Tailordom, won Mr. Goren's heart by her condescension, and worked Evan into a sorrowful mood concerning the invalid. Was not Juliana his only active friend? In return, he said things which only required a little colouring to be very acceptable to her.

The game waxed exciting again. The enemy (the Jocelyn party) was alert, but powerless. The three sisters were almost wrought to perform a sacrifice far exceeding Evan's. They nearly decided to summon him to the house: but the matter being broached at table one evening, Major Strike objected to it so angrily that they abandoned it, with the satisfactory conclusion that if they did wrong it was the Major's fault.

Meantime Juliana had much on her conscience. She knew Evan to be innocent, and she allowed Rose to think him guilty. Could she bring her heart to join them? That was not in her power: but desiring to be lulled by a compromise, she devoted herself to make his relatives receive him; and on days of bitter winds she would drive out to meet him, answering all expostulations with—'I should not go if he were here.'

Page 1434

The game waxed hot. It became a question whether Evan should be admitted to the house in spite of the Major. Juliana now made an extraordinary move. Having the Count with her in the carriage one day, she stopped in front of Mr. Goren's shop, and Evan had to come out. The Count returned home extremely mystified. Once more the unhappy Countess was obliged to draw bills on the fabulous; and as she had recommenced the system, which was not without its fascinations to her, Juliana, who had touched the spring, had the full benefit of it. The Countess had deceived her before—what of that? She spoke things sweet to hear. Who could be false that gave her heart food on which it lived?

One night Juliana returned from her drive alarmingly ill. She was watched through the night by Caroline and the Countess alternately. In the morning the sisters met.

'She has consented to let us send for a doctor,' said Caroline.

'Her chief desire seems to be a lawyer,' said the Countess.

'Yes, but the doctor must be sent for first.'

'Yes, indeed! But it behoves us to previse that the doctor does not kill her before the lawyer comes.'

Caroline looked at Louisa, and said: 'Are you ignorant?'

'No—what?' cried the Countess eagerly.

'Evan has written to tell Lady Jocelyn the state of her health, and—'

'And that naturally has aggravated her malady!' The Countess cramped her long fingers. 'The child heard it from him yesterday! Oh, I could swear at that brother!'

She dropped into a chair and sat rigid and square-jawed, a sculpture of unutterable rage.

In the afternoon Lady Jocelyn arrived. The doctor was there—the lawyer had gone. Without a word of protest Juliana accompanied her ladyship to Beckley Court. Here was a blow!

But Andrew was preparing one more mighty still. What if the Cogglesby Brewery proved a basis most unsound? Where must they fall then? Alas! on that point whence they sprang. If not to Perdition—Tailordom!

CHAPTER XLI

REVEALS AN ABOMINABLE PLOT OF THE BROTHERS COGGLESBY

A lively April day, with strong gusts from the Southwest, and long sweeping clouds, saluted the morning coach from London to Lymport. Thither Tailordom triumphant was bearing its victim at a rattling pace, to settle him, and seal him for ever out of the ranks of gentlemen: Society, meantime, howling exclusion to him in the background: 'Out of our halls, degraded youth: The smiles of turbaned matrons: the sighs of delicate maids; genial wit, educated talk, refined scandal, vice in harness, dinners sentineled by stately plush: these, the flavour of life, are not for you, though you stole a taste of them, wretched impostor! Pay for it with years of remorse!'

Page 1435

The coach went rushing against the glorious high wind. It stirred his blood, freshened his cheeks, gave a bright tone of zest to his eyes, as he cast them on the young green country. Not banished from the breath of heaven, or from self-respect, or from the appetite for the rewards that are to follow duties done! Not banished from the help that is always reached to us when we have fairly taken the right road: and that for him is the road to Lymport. Let the kingdom of Gilt Gingerbread howl as it will! We are no longer children, but men: men who have bitten hard at experience, and know the value of a tooth: who have had our hearts bruised, and cover them with armour: who live not to feed, but look to food that we may live! What matters it that yonder high-spiced kingdom should excommunicate such as we are? We have rubbed off the gilt, and have assumed the command of our stomachs. We are men from this day!

Now, you would have thought Evan's companions, right and left of him, were the wretches under sentence, to judge from appearances. In contrast with his look of insolent pleasure, Andrew, the moment an eye was on him, exhibited the cleverest impersonation of the dumps ever seen: while Mr. Raikes was from head to foot nothing better than a moan made visible. Nevertheless, they both agreed to rally Evan, and bid him be of good cheer.

'Don't be down, Van; don't be down, my boy,' said Andrew, rubbing his hands gloomily.

'I? do I look it?' Evan answered, laughing.

'Capital acting!' exclaimed Raikes. 'Try and keep it up.'

'Well, I hope you're acting too,' said Evan.

Raikes let his chest fall like a collapsing bellows.

At the end of five minutes, he remarked: 'I've been sitting on it the whole morning! There's violent inflammation, I'm persuaded. Another hour, and I jump slap from the summit of the coach!'

Evan turned to Andrew.

'Do you think he'll be let off?'

'Mr. Raikes? Can't say. You see, Van, it depends upon how Old Tom has taken his bad luck. Ahem! Perhaps he'll be all the stricter; and as a man of honour, Mr. Raikes, you see, can't very well—'

'By Jove! I wish I wasn't a man of honour!' Raikes interposed, heavily.

'You see, Van, Old Tom's circumstances'—Andrew ducked, to smother a sort of laughter—'are now such that he'd be glad of the money to let him off, no doubt; but Mr. Raikes

has spent it, I can't lend it, and you haven't got it, and there we all are. At the end of the year he's free, and he—ha! ha! I'm not a bit the merrier for laughing, I can tell you.'

Catching another glimpse of Evan's serious face, Andrew fell into louder laughter; checking it with doleful solemnity.

Up hill and down hill, and past little homesteads shining with yellow crocuses; across wide brown heaths, whose outlines raised in Evan's mind the night of his funeral walk, and tossed up old feelings dead as the whirling dust. At last Raikes called out:

Page 1436

‘The towers of Fallow field; heigho!’

And Andrew said:

’Now then, Van: if Old Tom’s anywhere, he’s here. You get down at the Dragon, and don’t you talk to me, but let me go in. It’ll be just the hour he dines in the country. Isn’t it a shame of him to make me face every man of the creditors—eh?’

Evan gave Andrew’s hand an affectionate squeeze, at which Andrew had to gulp down something—reciprocal emotion, doubtless.

‘Hark,’ said Raikes, as the horn of the guard was heard. ’Once that sound used to set me caracoling before an abject multitude. I did wonders. All London looked on me! It had more effect on me than champagne. Now I hear it—the whole charm has vanished! I can’t see a single old castle. Would you have thought it possible that a small circular bit of tin on a man’s person could produce such changes in him?’

‘You are a donkey to wear it,’ said Evan.

‘I pledged my word as a gentleman, and thought it small, for the money!’ said Raikes. ’This is the first coach I ever travelled on, without making the old whip burst with laughing. I’m not myself. I’m haunted. I’m somebody else.’

The three passengers having descended, a controversy commenced between Evan and Andrew as to which should pay. Evan had his money out; Andrew dashed it behind him; Evan remonstrated.

’Well, you mustn’t pay for us two, Andrew. I would have let you do it once, but—’

‘Stuff!’ cried Andrew. ’I ain’t paying—it ’s the creditors of the estate, my boy!’

Evan looked so ingenuously surprised and hurt at his lack of principle, that Andrew chucked a sixpence at a small boy, saying,

’If you don’t let me have my own way, Van, I ’ll shy my purse after it. What do you mean, sir, by treating me like a beggar?’

‘Our friend Harrington can’t humour us,’ quoth Raikes. ’For myself, I candidly confess I prefer being paid for’; and he leaned contentedly against one of the posts of the inn till the filthy dispute was arranged to the satisfaction of the ignobler mind. There Andrew left them, and went to Mrs. Sockley, who, recovered from her illness, smiled her usual placid welcome to a guest.

‘You know me, ma’am?’

‘Oh, yes! The London Mr. Cogglesby!’

’Now, ma’am, look here. I’ve come for my brother. Don’t be alarmed. No danger as yet. But, mind! if you attempt to conceal him from his lawful brother, I’ll summon here the myrmidons of the law.’

Mrs. Sockley showed a serious face.

’You know his habits, Mr. Cogglesby; and one doesn’t go against any one of his whimsies, or there’s consequences: but the house is open to you, sir. I don’t wish to hide him.’

Andrew accepted this intelligent evasion of Tom Cogglesby’s orders as sufficient, and immediately proceeded upstairs. A door shut on the first landing. Andrew went to this door and knocked. No answer. He tried to open it, but found that he had been forestalled. After threatening to talk business through the key-hole, the door was unlocked, and Old Tom appeared.

Page 1437

’So! now you’re dogging me into the country. Be off; make an appointment. Saturday’s my holiday. You know that.’

Andrew pushed through the doorway, and, by way of an emphatic reply and a silencing one, delivered a punch slap into Old Tom’s belt.

‘Confound you, Nan!’ said Old Tom, grimacing, but friendly, as if his sympathies had been irresistibly assailed.

’It ‘s done, Tom! I’ve done it. Won my bet, now,’ Andrew exclaimed. ’The women-poor creatures! What a state they’re in. I pity ’em.’

Old Tom pursed his lips, and eyed his brother incredulously, but with curious eagerness.

‘Oh, Lord! what a face I’ve had to wear!’ Andrew continued, and while he sank into a chair and rubbed his handkerchief over his crisp hair, Old Tom let loose a convinced and exulting, ‘ha! ha!’

‘Yes, you may laugh. I’ve had all the bother,’ said Andrew.

‘Serve ye right—marrying such cattle,’ Old Tom snapped at him.

‘They believe we’re bankrupt—owe fifty thousand clear, Tom!’

‘Ha! ha!’

’Brewery stock and household furniture to be sold by general auction, Friday week.’

‘Ha! ha!’

’Not a place for any of us to poke our heads into. I talked about “pitiless storms” to my poor Harry—no shelter to be had unless we go down to Lymport, and stop with their brother in shop!’

Old Tom did enjoy this. He took a great gulp of air for a tremendous burst of laughter, and when this was expended and reflection came, his features screwed, as if the acidest of flavours had ravished his palate.

’Bravo, Nan! Didn’t think you were man enough. Ha! ha! Nan—I say—eh? how did ye get on behind the curtains?’

The tale, to guess by Andrew’s face, appeared to be too strongly infused with pathos for revelation.

‘Will they go, Nan, eh? d’ ye think they ‘ll go?’

’Where else can they go, Tom? They must go there, or on the parish, you know.’

‘They’ll all troop down to the young tailor—eh?’

‘They can’t sleep in the parks, Tom.’

’No. They can’t get into Buckingham Palace, neither—’cept as housemaids. ’Gad, they’re howling like cats, I’d swear—nuisance to the neighbourhood—ha! ha!’

Old Tom’s cruel laughter made Andrew feel for the unhappy ladies. He stuck his forehead, and leaned forward, saying: ’I don’t know—’pon my honour, I don’t know—-can’t think we’ve—quite done right to punish ’em so.’

This acted like cold water on Old Tom’s delight. He pitched it back in the shape of a doubt of what Andrew had told him. Whereupon Andrew defied him to face three miserable women on the verge of hysterics; and Old Tom, beginning to chuckle again, rejoined that it would bring them to their senses, and emancipate him.

‘You may laugh, Mr. Tom,’ said Andrew; ’but if poor Harry should find me out, deuce a bit more home for me.’

Page 1438

Old Tom looked at him keenly, and rapped the table. 'Swear you did it, Nan.'

'You promise you'll keep the secret,' said Andrew.

'Never make promises.'

'Then there's a pretty life for me! I did it for that poor dear boy. You were only up to one of your jokes—I see that. Confound you, Old Tom, you've been making a fool of me.'

The flattering charge was not rejected by Old Tom, who now had his brother to laugh at as well. Andrew affected to be indignant and desperate.

'If you'd had a heart, Tom, you'd have saved the poor fellow without any bother at all. What do you think? When I told him of our smash—ha! ha! it isn't such a bad joke-well, I went to him, hanging my head, and he offered to arrange our affairs—that is—'

'Damned meddlesome young dog!' cried Old Tom, quite in a rage.

'There—you're up in a twinkling,' said Andrew. 'Don't you see he believed it, you stupid Old Tom? Lord! to hear him say how sorry he was, and to see how glad he looked at the chance of serving us!'

'Serving us!' Tom sneered.

'Ha!' went Andrew. 'Yes. There. You're a deuced deal prouder than fifty peers. You're an upside-down old despot!'

No sharper retort rising to Old Tom's lips, he permitted his brother's abuse of him to pass, declaring that bandying words was not his business, he not being a Parliament man.

'How about the Major, Nan? He coming down, too?'

'Major!' cried Andrew. 'Lucky if he keeps his commission. Coming down? No. He's off to the Continent.'

'Find plenty of scamps there to keep him company,' added Tom. 'So he's broke—eh? ha! ha!'

'Tom,' said Andrew, seriously, 'I'll tell you all about it, if you 'll swear not to split on me, because it would really upset poor Harry so. She 'd think me such a beastly hypocrite, I couldn't face her afterwards.'

'Lose what pluck you have—eh?' Tom jerked out his hand, and bade his brother continue.

Compelled to trust in him without a promise, Andrew said: 'Well, then, after we'd arranged it, I went back to Harry, and begged her to have poor Van at the house told her what I hoped you'd do for him about getting him into the Brewery. She's very kind, Tom, 'pon my honour she is. She was willing, only—'

'Only—eh?'

'Well, she was so afraid it'd hurt her sisters to see him there.'

Old Tom saw he was in for excellent fun, and wouldn't spoil it for the world.

'Yes, Nan?'

'So I went to Caroline. She was easy enough; and she went to the Countess.'

'Well, and she—?'

Page 1439

’She was willing, too, till Lady Jocelyn came and took Miss Bonner home to Beckley, and because Evan had written to my lady to fetch her, the Countess—she was angry. That was all. Because of that, you know. But yet she agreed. But when Miss Bonner had gone, it turned out that the Major was the obstacle. They were all willing enough to have Evan there, but the Major refused. I didn’t hear him. I wasn’t going to ask him. I mayn’t be a match for three women, but man to man, eh, Tom? You’d back me there? So Harry said the Major ’d make Caroline miserable, if his wishes were disrespected. By George, I wish I’d know, then. Don’t you think it odd, Tom, now? There’s a Duke of Belfield the fellow had hooked into his Company; and—through Evan I heard—the Duke had his name struck off. After that, the Major swore at the Duke once or twice, and said Caroline wasn’t to go out with him. Suddenly, he insists that she shall go. Days the poor thing kept crying! One day, he makes her go. She hasn’t the spirit of my Harry or the Countess. By good luck, Van, who was hunting ferns for some friends of his, met them on Sunday in Richmond Park, and Van took her away from the Duke. But, Tom, think of Van seeing a fellow watching her wherever she went, and hearing the Duke’s coachman tell that fellow he had orders to drive his master and a lady hard on to the sea that night. I don’t believe it—it wasn’t Caroline! But what do you think of our finding out that beast of a spy to be in the Major’s pay? We did. Van put a constable on his track; we found him out, and he confessed it. A fact, Tom! That decided me. If it was only to get rid of a brute, I determined I ’d do it, and I did. Strike came to me to get my name for a bill that night. ’Gad, he looked blanker than his bill when he heard of us two bankrupt. I showed him one or two documents I’d got ready. Says he: “Never mind; it’ll only be a couple of hundred more in the schedule.” Stop, Tom! he’s got some of our blood. I don’t think he meant it. He is hard pushed. Well, I gave him a twentier, and he was off the next night. You ‘ll soon see all about the Company in the papers.’

At the conclusion of Andrew’s recital, Old Tom thrummed and looked on the floor under a heavy frown. His mouth worked dubiously, and, from moment to moment, he plucked at his waistcoat and pulled it down, throwing back his head and glaring.

’I ‘ve knocked that fellow over once,’ he said. ’Wish he hadn’t got up again.’

Andrew nodded.

’One good thing, Nan. He never boasted of our connection. Much obliged to him.’

‘Yes,’ said Andrew, who was gladly watching Old Tom’s change of mood with a quiescent aspect.

‘Um!—must keep it quiet from his poor old mother.’

Page 1440

Andrew again affirmatived his senior's remarks. That his treatment of Old Tom was sound, he presently had proof of. The latter stood up, and after sniffing in an injured way for about a minute, launched out his right leg, and vociferated that he would like to have it in his power to kick all the villains out of the world: a modest demand Andrew at once chimed in with; adding that, were such a faculty extended to him, he would not object to lose the leg that could benefit mankind so infinitely, and consented to its following them. Then, Old Tom, who was of a practical turn, meditated, swung his foot, and gave one grim kick at the imaginary bundle of villains, discharged them headlong straight into space. Andrew, naturally imitative, and seeing that he had now to kick them flying, attempted to excel Old Tom in the vigour of his delivery. No wonder that the efforts of both were heating: they were engaged in the task of ridding the globe of the larger half of its inhabitants. Tom perceived Andrew's useless emulation, and with a sound translated by 'yack,' sent his leg out a long way. Not to be outdone, Andrew immediately, with a still louder 'yack,' committed himself to an effort so violent that the alternative between his leg coming off, or his being taken off his leg, was propounded by nature, and decided by the laws of gravity in a trice. Joyful grunts were emitted by Old Tom at the sight of Andrew prostrate, rubbing his pate. But Mrs. Sockley, to whom the noise of Andrew's fall had suggested awful fears of a fratricidal conflict upstairs, hurried forthwith to announce to them that the sovereign remedy for human ills, the promoter of concord, the healer of feuds, the central point of man's destiny in the flesh—Dinner, was awaiting them.

To the dinner they marched.

Of this great festival be it simply told that the supply was copious and of good quality—-much too good and copious for a bankrupt host: that Evan and Mr. John Raikes were formally introduced to Old Tom before the repast commenced, and welcomed some three minutes after he had decided the flavour of his first glass; that Mr. Raikes in due time preferred his petition for release from a dreadful engagement, and furnished vast amusement to the company under Old Tom's hand, until, by chance, he quoted a scrap of Latin, at which the brothers Cogglesby, who would have faced peers and princes without being disconcerted, or performing mental genuflexions, shut their mouths and looked injured, unhappy, and in the presence of a superior: Mr. Raikes not being the man to spare them. Moreover, a surprise was afforded to Evan. Andrew stated to Old Tom that the hospitality of Main Street, Lymport,—was open to him. Strange to say, Old Tom accepted it on the spot, observing, 'You're master of the house—can do what you like, if you 're man enough,' and adding that he thanked him, and would come in a day or two. The case of Mr. Raikes was still left uncertain, for as the bottle circulated, he exhibited such a faculty for apt, but to the brothers, totally incomprehensible quotation, that they fled from him without leaving him time to remember what special calamity was on his mind, or whether this earth was other than an abode conceived in great jollity for his life-long entertainment.

Page 1441

CHAPTER XLII

JULIANA

The sick night-light burned steadily in Juliana's chamber. On a couch, beside her bed, Caroline lay sleeping, tired with a long watch. Two sentences had been passed on Juliana: one on her heart: one on her body: 'Thou art not loved'; and, 'Thou must die.' The frail passion of her struggle against her destiny was over with her. Quiet as that quiet which Nature was taking her to, her body reposed. Calm as the solitary night-light before her open eyes, her spirit was wasting away. 'If I am not loved, then let me die!' In such a sense she bowed to her fate.

At an hour like this, watching the round of light on the ceiling, with its narrowing inner rings, a sufferer from whom pain has fled looks back to the shores she is leaving, and would be well with them who walk there. It is false to imagine that schemers and workers in the dark are destitute of the saving gift of conscience. They have it, and it is perhaps made livelier in them than with easy people; and therefore, they are imperatively spurred to hoodwink it. Hence, their self-delusion is deep and endures. They march to their object, and gaining or losing it, the voice that calls to them is the voice of a blind creature, whom any answer, provided that the answer is ready, will silence. And at an hour like this, when finally they snatch their minute of sight on the threshold of black night, their souls may compare with yonder shining circle on the ceiling, which, as the light below gasps for air, contracts, and extends but to mingle with the darkness. They would be nobler, better, boundlessly good to all;—to those who have injured them to those whom they have injured. Alas! for any definite deed the limit of their circle is immoveable, and they must act within it. The trick they have played themselves imprisons them. Beyond it, they cease to be.

Lying in this utter stillness, Juliana thought of Rose; of her beloved by Evan. The fever that had left her blood, had left it stagnant, and her thoughts were quite emotionless. She looked faintly on a far picture. She saw Rose blooming with pleasures in Elburne House, sliding as a boat borne by the river's tide to sea, away from her living joy. The breast of Rose was lucid to her, and in that hour of insight she had clear knowledge of her cousin's heart; how it scoffed at its base love, and unwittingly betrayed the power on her still, by clinging to the world and what it would give her to fill the void; how externally the lake was untroubled, and a mirror to the passing day; and how within there pressed a flood against an iron dam. Evan, too, she saw. The Countess was right in her judgement of Juliana's love. Juliana looked very little to his qualities. She loved him when she thought him guilty, which made her conceive that her love was of a diviner cast than Rose was capable of. Guilt did not spoil his beauty to her; his gentleness

Page 1442

and glowing manhood were unchanged; and when she knew him as he was, the revelation of his high nature simply confirmed her impression of his physical perfections. She had done him a wrong; at her death news would come to him, and it might be that he would bless her name. Because she sighed no longer for those dear lips and strong arms to close about her tremulous frame, it seemed to her that she had quite surrendered him. Generous to Evan, she would be just to Rose. Beneath her pillow she found pencil and paper, and with difficulty, scarce seeing her letters in the brown light, she began to trace lines of farewell to Rose. Her conscience dictated to her thus, 'Tell Rose that she was too ready to accept his guilt; and that in this as in all things, she acted with the precipitation of her character. Tell her that you always trusted, and that now you know him innocent. Give her the proofs you have. Show that he did it to shield his intriguing sister. Tell her that you write this only to make her just to him. End with a prayer that Rose may be happy.'

Ere Juliana had finished one sentence, she resigned the pencil. Was it not much, even at the gates of death, to be the instrument to send Rose into his arms? The picture swayed before her, helping her weakness. She found herself dreaming that he had kissed her once. Dorothy, she remembered, had danced up to her one day, to relate what the maids of the house said of the gentleman—(at whom, it is known, they look with the licence of cats toward kings); and Dorothy's fresh careless mouth had told how one observant maid, amorously minded, proclaimed of Evan, to a companion of her sex, that, 'he was the only gentleman who gave you an idea of how he would look when he was kissing you.' Juliana cherished that vision likewise. Young ladies are not supposed to do so, if menial maids are; but Juliana did cherish it, and it possessed her fancy. Bear in your recollection that she was not a healthy person. Diseased little heroines may be made attractive, and are now popular; but strip off the cleverly woven robe which is fashioned to cover them, and you will find them in certain matters bearing a resemblance to menial maids.

While the thoughts of his kiss lasted, she could do nothing; but lay with her two hands out on the bed, and her eyelids closed. Then waking, she took the pencil again. It would not move: her bloodless fingers fell from it.

'If they do not meet, and he never marries, I may claim him in the next world,' she mused.

But conscience continued uneasy. She turned her wrist and trailed a letter from beneath the pillow. It was from Mrs. Shorne. Juliana knew the contents. She raised it unopened as high as her faltering hands permitted, and read like one whose shut eyes read syllables of fire on the darkness.

'Rose has at last definitely engaged herself to Ferdinand, you will be glad to hear, and we may now treat her as a woman.'

Page 1443

Having absorbed these words, Juliana's hand found strength to write, with little difficulty, what she had to say to Rose. She conceived it to be neither sublime nor generous: not even good; merely her peculiar duty. When it was done, she gave a long, low sigh of relief.

Caroline whispered, 'Dearest child, are you awake?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'Sorrowful, dear?'

'Very quiet.'

Caroline reached her hand over to her, and felt the paper. 'What is this?'

'My good-bye to Rose. I want it folded now.'

Caroline slipped from the couch to fulfil her wish. She enclosed the pencilled scrap of paper, sealed it, and asked, 'Is that right?'

'Now unlock my desk,' Juliana uttered, feebly. 'Put it beside a letter addressed to a law-gentleman. Post both the morning I am gone.'

Caroline promised to obey, and coming to Juliana to mark her looks, observed a faint pleased smile dying away, and had her hand gently squeezed. Juliana's conscience had preceded her contentedly to its last sleep; and she, beneath that round of light on the ceiling, drew on her counted breaths in peace till dawn.

CHAPTER XLIII

ROSE

Have you seen a young audacious spirit smitten to the earth? It is a singular study; and, in the case of young women, a trap for inexperienced men. Rose, who had commanded and managed every one surrounding her since infancy, how humble had she now become!—how much more womanly in appearance, and more child-like at heart! She was as wax in Lady Elburne's hands. A hint of that veiled episode, the Beckley campaign, made Rose pliant, as if she had woven for herself a rod of scorpions. The high ground she had taken; the perfect trust in one; the scorn of any judgement, save her own; these had vanished from her. Rose, the tameless heroine who had once put her mother's philosophy in action, was the easiest filly that turbaned matron ever yet drove into the straight road of the world. It even surprised Lady Jocelyn to see how wonderfully she had been broken in by her grandmother. Her ladyship wrote to Drummond to tell him of it, and Drummond congratulated her, saying, however:

’Changes of this sort don’t come of conviction. Wait till you see her at home. I think they have been sticking pins into the sore part.’

Drummond knew Rose well. In reality there was no change in her. She was only a suppliant to be spared from ridicule: spared from the application of the scourge she had woven for herself.

And, ah! to one who deigned to think warmly still of such a disgraced silly creature, with what gratitude she turned! He might well suppose love alone could pour that profusion of jewels at his feet.

Page 1444

Ferdinand, now Lord Laxley, understood the merits of his finger-nails better than the nature of young women; but he is not to be blamed for presuming that Rose had learnt to adore him. Else why did she like his company so much? He was not mistaken in thinking she looked up to him. She seemed to beg to be taken into his noble serenity. In truth she sighed to feel as he did, above everybody!—she that had fallen so low! Above everybody!—born above them, and therefore superior by grace divine! To this Rose Jocelyn had come—she envied the mind of Ferdinand.

He, you may be sure, was quite prepared to accept her homage. Rose he had always known to be just the girl for him; spirited, fresh, and with fine teeth; and once tied to you safe to be staunch. They walked together, rode together, danced together. Her soft humility touched him to eloquence. Say she was a little hypocrite, if you like, when the blood came to her cheeks under his eyes. Say she was a heartless minx for allowing it to be bruited that she and Ferdinand were betrothed. I can but tell you that her blushes were blushes of gratitude to one who could devote his time to such a disgraced silly creature, and that she, in her abject state, felt a secret pleasure in the protection Ferdinand's name appeared to extend over her, and was hardly willing to lose it.

So far Lady Elburne's tact and discipline had been highly successful. One morning, in May, Ferdinand, strolling with Rose down the garden made a positive appeal to her common sense and friendly feeling; by which she understood that he wanted her consent to his marriage with her.

Rose answered:

'Who would have me?'

Ferdinand spoke pretty well, and ultimately got possession of her hand. She let him keep it, thinking him noble for forgetting that another had pressed it before him.

Some minutes later the letters were delivered. One of them contained Juliana's dark-winged missive.

'Poor, poor Juley!' said Rose, dropping her head, after reading all that was on the crumpled leaf with an inflexible face. And then, talking on, long low sighs lifted her bosom at intervals. She gazed from time to time with a wistful conciliatory air on Ferdinand. Rushing to her chamber, the first cry her soul framed was:

'He did not kiss me!'

The young have a superstitious sense of something incontestably true in the final protestations of the dead. Evan guiltless! she could not quite take the meaning this revelation involved. That which had been dead was beginning to move within her; but blindly: and now it stirred and troubled; now sank. Guiltless all she had thought him!

Oh! she knew she could not have been deceived. But why, why had he hidden his sacrifice from her?

‘It is better for us both, of course,’ said Rose, speaking the world’s wisdom, parrot-like, and bursting into tears the next minute. Guiltless, and gloriously guiltless! but nothing —nothing to her!

Page 1445

She tried to blame him. It would not do. She tried to think of that grovelling loathsome position painted to her by Lady Elburne's graphic hand. Evan dispersed the gloomy shades like sunshine. Then in a sort of terror she rejoiced to think she was partially engaged to Ferdinand, and found herself crying again with exultation, that he had not kissed her: for a kiss on her mouth was to Rose a pledge and a bond.

The struggle searched her through: bared her weakness, probed her strength; and she, seeing herself, suffered grievously in her self-love. Am I such a coward, inconstant, cold? she asked. Confirmatory answers coming, flung her back under the shield of Ferdinand if for a moment her soul stood up armed and defiant, it was Evan's hand she took.

To whom do I belong? was another terrible question. In her ideas, if Evan was not chargeable with that baseness which had sundered them he might claim her yet, if he would. If he did, what then? Must she go to him?

Impossible: she was in chains. Besides, what a din of laughter there would be to see her led away by him. Twisting her joined hands: weeping for her cousin, as she thought, Rose passed hours of torment over Juliana's legacy to her.

'Why did I doubt him?' she cried, jealous that any soul should have known and trusted him better. Jealous and I am afraid that the kindling of that one feature of love relighted the fire of her passion thus fervidly. To be outstripped in generosity was hateful to her. Rose, naturally, could not reflect that a young creature like herself, fighting against the world, as we call it, has all her faculties at the utmost stretch, and is often betrayed by failing nature when the will is still valiant.

And here she sat-in chains! 'Yes! I am fit only to be the wife of an idle brainless man, with money and a title,' she said, in extreme self-contempt. She caught a glimpse of her whole life in the horrid tomb of his embrace, and questions whether she could yield her hand to him—whether it was right in the eyes of heaven, rushed impetuously to console her, and defied anything in the shape of satisfactory affirmations. Nevertheless, the end of the struggle was, that she felt that she was bound to Ferdinand.

'But this I will do,' said Rose, standing with heat-bright eyes and deep-coloured cheeks before the glass. 'I will clear his character at Beckley. I will help him. I will be his friend. I will wipe out the injustice I did him.' And this bride-elect of a lord absolutely added that she was unworthy to be the wife of a tailor!

'He! how unequalled he is! There is nothing he fears except shame. Oh! how sad it will be for him to find no woman in his class to understand him and be his helpmate!'

Over, this sad subject, of which we must presume her to be accurately cognizant, Rose brooded heavily. By mid-day she gave her Grandmother notice that she was going home to Juliana's funeral.

Page 1446

‘Well, Rose, if you think it necessary to join the ceremony,’ said Lady Elburne. ’Beckley is bad quarters for you, as you have learnt. There was never much love between you cousins.’

‘No, and I don’t pretend to it,’ Rose answered. ’I am sorry poor Juley’s gone.’

’She’s better gone for many reasons—she appears to have been a little venomous toad,’ said Lady Elburne; and Rose, thinking of a snakelike death-bite working through her blood, rejoined: ’Yes, she isn’t to be pitied she ‘s better off than most people.’

So it was arranged that Rose should go. Ferdinand and her aunt, Mrs. Shorne, accompanied her. Mrs. Shorne gave them their opportunities, albeit they were all stowed together in a carriage, and Ferdinand seemed willing to profit by them; but Rose’s hand was dead, and she sat by her future lord forming the vow on her lips that they should never be touched by him.

Arrived at Beckley, she, to her great delight, found Caroline there, waiting for the funeral. In a few minutes she got her alone, and after kisses, looked penetratingly into her lovely eyes, shook her head, and said: ‘Why were you false to me?’

‘False?’ echoed Caroline.

‘You knew him. You knew why he did that. Why did you not save me?’

Caroline fell upon her neck, asking pardon. She spared her the recital of facts further than the broad avowal. Evan’s present condition she plainly stated: and Rose, when the bitter pangs had ceased, made oath to her soul she would rescue him from it.

In addition to the task of clearing Evan’s character, and rescuing him, Rose now conceived that her engagement to Ferdinand must stand ice-bound till Evan had given her back her troth. How could she obtain it from him? How could she take anything from one so noble and so poor! Happily there was no hurry; though before any bond was ratified, she decided conscientiously that it must be done.

You see that like a lithe snake she turns on herself, and must be tracked in and out. Not being a girl to solve the problem with tears, or outright perfidy, she had to ease her heart to the great shock little by little—sincere as far as she knew: as far as one who loves may be. The day of the funeral came and went. The Jocelyns were of their mother’s opinion: that for many reasons Juliana was better out of the way. Mrs. Bonner’s bequest had been a severe blow to Sir Franks. However, all was now well. The estate naturally lapsed to Lady Jocelyn. No one in the house dreamed of a will, signed with Juliana’s name, attested, under due legal forms, being in existence. None of the members of the family imagined that at Beckley Court they were then residing on somebody else’s ground.

Want of hospitable sentiments was not the cause that led to an intimation from Sir Franks to his wife, that Mrs. Strike must not be pressed to remain, and that Rose must not be permitted to have her own way in this. Knowing very well that Mrs. Shorne spoke through her husband's mouth, Lady Jocelyn still acquiesced, and Rose, who had pressed Caroline publicly to stay, had to be silent when the latter renewed her faint objections; so Caroline said she would leave on the morrow morning.

Page 1447

Juliana, with her fretfulness, her hand bounties, her petty egoisms, and sudden far-leaping generosities, and all the contradictory impulses of her malady, had now departed utterly. The joys of a landed proprietor mounted into the head of Sir Franks. He was up early the next morning, and he and Harry walked over a good bit of the ground before breakfast. Sir Franks meditated making it entail, and favoured Harry with a lecture on the duty of his shaping the course of his conduct at once after the model of the landed gentry generally.

'And you may think yourself lucky to come into that catalogue—the son of a younger son!' said Sir Franks, tapping Mr. Harry's shoulder. Harry also began to enjoy the look and smell of land. At the breakfast, which, though early, was well attended, Harry spoke of the adviseability of felling timber here, planting there, and so forth, after the model his father held up. Sir Franks nodded approval of his interest in the estate, but reserved his opinion on matters of detail.

'All I beg of you is,' said Lady Jocelyn, 'that you won't let us have turnips within the circuit of a mile'; which was obligingly promised.

The morning letters were delivered and opened with the customary calmness.

'Letter from old George,' Harry sings out, and buzzes over a few lines. 'Halloa!—Hum!' He was going to make a communication, but catching sight of Caroline, tossed the letter over to Ferdinand, who read it and tossed it back with the comment of a careless face.

'Read it, Rosey?' says Harry, smiling bluntly.

Rather to his surprise, Rose took the letter. Study her eyes if you wish to gauge the potency of one strong dose of ridicule on an ingenuous young heart. She read that Mr. George Uplift had met 'our friend Mr. Snip' riding, by moonlight, on the road to Beckley. That great orbed night of their deep tender love flashed luminously through her frame, storming at the base epithet by which her lover was mentioned, flooding grandly over the ignominies cast on him by the world. She met the world, as it were, in a death-grapple; she matched the living heroic youth she felt him to be, with that dead wooden image of him which it thrust before her. Her heart stood up singing like a craven who sees the tide of victory setting toward him. But this passed beneath her eyelids. When her eyes were lifted, Ferdinand could have discovered nothing in them to complain of, had his suspicions been light to raise: nor could Mrs. Shorne perceive that there was the opening for a shrewd bodkin-thrust. Rose had got a mask at last: her colour, voice, expression, were perfectly at command. She knew it to be a cowardice to wear any mask: but she had been burnt, horribly burnt: how much so you may guess from the supple dissimulation of such a bold clear-visaged girl. She conquered the sneers of the world in her soul: but her sensitive skin was yet alive to the pangs of the scorching it had been subjected to when weak, helpless, and betrayed by Evan, she stood with no philosophic parent to cry fair play for her, among the skilful torturers of Elburne House.

Page 1448

Sir Franks had risen and walked to the window.

‘News?’ said Lady Jocelyn, wheeling round in her chair.

The one eyebrow up of the easy-going baronet signified trouble of mind. He finished his third perusal of a letter that appeared to be written in a remarkably plain legal hand, and looking as men do when their intelligences are just equal to the comprehension or expression of an oath, handed the letter to his wife, and observed that he should be found in the library. Nevertheless he waited first to mark its effect on Lady Jocelyn. At one part of the document her forehead wrinkled slightly.

‘Doesn’t sound like a joke!’ he said.

She answered:

‘No.’

Sir Franks, apparently quite satisfied by her ready response, turned on his heel and left the room quickly.

An hour afterward it was rumoured and confirmed that Juliana Bonner had willed all the worldly property she held in her own right, comprising Beckley Court, to Mr. Evan Harrington, of Lymport, tailor. An abstract of the will was forwarded. The lawyer went on to say, that he had conformed to the desire of the testatrix in communicating the existence of the aforesaid will six days subsequent to her death, being the day after her funeral.

There had been railing and jeering at the Countess de Saldar, the clever outwitted exposed adventuress, at Elburne House and Beckley Court. What did the crowing cleverer aristocrats think of her now?

On Rose the blow fell bitterly. Was Evan also a foul schemer? Was he of a piece with his intriguing sister? His close kinship with the Countess had led her to think baseness possible to him when it was confessed by his own mouth once. She heard black names cast at him and the whole of the great Mel’s brood, and incapable of quite disbelieving them merited, unable to challenge and rebut them, she dropped into her recent state of self-contempt: into her lately-instilled doubt whether it really was in Nature’s power, unaided by family-portraits, coats-of-arms, ball-room practice, and at least one small phial of Essence of Society, to make a Gentleman.

CHAPTER XLIV

CONTAINS A WARNING TO ALL CONSPIRATORS

This, if you have done me the favour to read it aright, has been a chronicle of desperate heroism on the part of almost all the principal personages represented. But not the Countess de Saldar, scaling the embattled fortress of Society; nor Rose, tossing its keys to her lover from the shining turret-tops; nor Evan, keeping bright the lamp of self-respect in his bosom against South wind and East; none excel friend Andrew Cogglesby, who, having fallen into Old Tom's plot to humiliate his wife and her sisters, simply for Evan's sake, and without any distinct notion of the terror, confusion, and universal upset he was bringing on his home, could yet, after a scared contemplation of the scene when he returned from his expedition to Fallow field, continue to wear his rueful mask; and persevere in treacherously outraging his lofty wife.

Page 1449

He did it to vindicate the ties of blood against accidents of position. Was he justified? I am sufficiently wise to ask my own sex alone.

On the other side, be it said (since in our modern days every hero must have his weak heel), that now he had gone this distance it was difficult to recede. It would be no laughing matter to tell his solemn Harriet that he had been playing her a little practical joke. His temptations to give it up were incessant and most agitating; but if to advance seemed terrific, there was, in stopping short, an awfulness so overwhelming that Andrew abandoned himself to the current, his real dismay adding to his acting powers.

The worst was, that the joke was no longer his: it was Old Tom's. He discovered that he was in Old Tom's hands completely. Andrew had thought that he would just frighten the women a bit, get them down to Lymport for a week or so, and then announce that matters were not so bad with the Brewery as he had feared; concluding the farce with a few domestic fireworks. Conceive his dismay when he entered the house, to find there a man in possession.

Andrew flew into such a rage that he committed an assault on the man. So ungovernable was his passion, that for some minutes Harriet's measured voice summoned him from over the banisters above, quite in vain. The miserable Englishman refused to be taught that his house had ceased to be his castle. It was something beyond a joke, this! The intruder, perfectly docile, seeing that by accurate calculation every shake he got involved a bottle of wine for him, and ultimate compensation probably to the amount of a couple of sovereigns, allowed himself to be lugged up stairs, in default of summary ejection on the point of Andrew's toe into the street. There he was faced to the lady of the house, who apologized to him, and requested her husband to state what had made him guilty of this indecent behaviour. The man showed his papers. They were quite in order. 'At the suit of Messrs. Grist.'

'My own lawyers!' cried Andrew, smacking his forehead; and Old Tom's devilry flashed on him at once. He sank into a chair.

'Why did you bring this person up here?' said Harriet, like a speaking statue.

'My dear!' Andrew answered, and spread out his hand, and waggled his head; 'My—-please!—I—I don't know. We all want exercise.'

The man laughed, which was kindly of him, but offensive to Mrs. Cogglesby, who gave Andrew a glance which was full payment for his imbecile pleasantry, and promised more.

With a hospitable inquiry as to the condition of his appetite, and a request that he would be pleased to satisfy it to the full, the man was dismissed: whereat, as one delivered of noxious presences, the Countess rustled into sight. Not noticing Andrew, she lisped to

Harriet: 'Misfortunes are sometimes no curses! I bless the catarrh that has confined Silva to his chamber, and saved him from a bestial exhibition.'

Page 1450

The two ladies then swept from the room, and left Andrew to perspire at leisure.

Fresh tribulations awaited him when he sat down to dinner. Andrew liked his dinner to be comfortable, good, and in plenty. This may not seem strange. The fact is stated that I may win for him the warm sympathies of the body of his countrymen. He was greeted by a piece of cold boiled neck of mutton and a solitary dish of steaming potatoes. The blank expanse of table-cloth returned his desolate stare.

‘Why, what’s the meaning of this?’ Andrew brutally exclaimed, as he thumped the table.

The Countess gave a start, and rolled a look as of piteous supplication to spare a lady’s nerves, addressed to a ferocious brigand. Harriet answered: ‘It means that I will have no butcher’s bills.’

‘Butcher’s bills! butcher’s bills!’ echoed Andrew; ’why, you must have butcher’s bills; why, confound! why, you’ll have a bill for this, won’t you, Harry? eh? of course!’

‘There will be no more bills dating from yesterday,’ said his wife.

‘What! this is paid for, then?’

’Yes, Mr. Cogglesby; and so will all household expenses be, while my pocket-money lasts.’

Resting his eyes full on Harriet a minute, Andrew dropped them on the savourless white-rimmed chop, which looked as lonely in his plate as its parent dish on the table. The poor dear creature’s pocket-money had paid for it! The thought, mingling with a rush of emotion, made his ideas spin. His imagination surged deliriously. He fancied himself at the Zoological Gardens, exchanging pathetic glances with a melancholy marmoset. Wonderfully like one the chop looked! There was no use in his trying to eat it. He seemed to be fixing his teeth in solid tears. He choked. Twice he took up knife and fork, put them down again, and plucking forth his handkerchief, blew a tremendous trumpet, that sent the Countess’s eyes rolling to the ceiling, as if heaven were her sole refuge from such vulgarity.

‘Damn that Old Tom!’ he shouted at last, and pitched back in his chair.

‘Mr. Cogglesby!’ and ‘In the presence of ladies!’ were the admonishing interjections of the sisters, at whom the little man frowned in turns.

‘Do you wish us to quit the room, sir?’ inquired his wife.

‘God bless your soul, you little darling!’ he apostrophized that stately person. ’Here, come along with me, Harry. A wife’s a wife, I say—hang it! Just outside the room—just a second! or up in a corner will do.’

Mrs. Cogglesby was amazed to see him jump up and run round to her. She was prepared to defend her neck from his caress, and refused to go: but the words, ‘Something particular to tell you,’ awakened her curiosity, which urged her to compliance. She rose and went with him to the door.

‘Well, sir; what is it?’

No doubt he was acting under a momentary weakness he was about to betray the plot and take his chance of forgiveness; but her towering port, her commanding aspect, restored his courage. (There may be a contrary view of the case.) He enclosed her briskly in a connubial hug, and remarked with mad ecstasy: ’What a duck you are, Harry! What a likeness between you and your mother.’

Page 1451

Mrs. Cogglesby disengaged herself imperiously. Had he called her aside for this gratuitous insult? Contrite, he saw his dreadful error.

‘Harry! I declare!’ was all he was allowed to say. Mrs. Cogglesby marched back to her chair, and recommenced the repast in majestic silence.

Andrew sighed; he attempted to do the same. He stuck his fork in the blanched whiskerage of his marmoset, and exclaimed: ‘I can’t!’

He was unnoticed.

‘You do not object to plain diet?’ said Harriet to Louisa.

‘Oh, no, in verity!’ murmured the Countess. ’However plain it be! Absence of appetite, dearest. You are aware I partook of luncheon at mid-day with the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Duffian. You must not look condemnation at your Louy for that. Luncheon is not conversion!’

Harriet observed that this might be true; but still, to her mind, it was a mistake to be too intimate with dangerous people. ‘And besides,’ she added, ’Mr. Duffian is no longer “the Reverend.” We deprive all renegades of their spiritual titles. His worldly ones let him keep.’

Her superb disdain nettled the Countess.

‘Dear Harriet!’ she said, with less languor, ’You are utterly and totally and entirely mistaken. I tell you so positively. Renegade! The application of such a word to such a man! Oh! and it is false, Harriet quite! Renegade means one who has gone over to the Turks, my dear. I am almost certain I saw it in Johnson’s Dictionary, or an: improvement upon Johnson, by a more learned author. But there is the fact, if Harriet can only bring her—shall I say stiff-necked prejudices to envisage it?’

Harriet granted her sister permission to apply the phrases she stood in need of, without impeaching her intimacy with the most learned among lexicographers.

‘And is there no such thing as being too severe?’ the Countess resumed. ‘What our enemies call unchristian!’

‘Mr. Duffian has no cause to complain of us,’ said Harriet.

’Nor does he do so, dearest. Calumny may assail him; you may utterly denude him—’

‘Adam!’ interposed Andrew, distractedly listening. He did not disturb the Countess’s flow.

’You may vilify and victimize Mr. Duffian, and strip him of the honours of his birth, but, like the Martyrs, he will still continue the perfect nobleman. Stoned, I assure you that Mr. Duffian would preserve his breeding. In character he is exquisite; a polish to defy misfortune.’

‘I suppose his table is good?’ said Harriet, almost ruffled by the Countess’s lecture.

‘Plate,’ was remarked in the cold tone of supreme indifference.

‘Hem! good wines?’ Andrew asked, waking up a little and not wishing to be excluded altogether.

‘All is of the very best,’ the Countess pursued her eulogy, not looking at him.

‘Don’t you think you could—eh, Harry?—manage a pint for me, my dear?’ Andrew humbly petitioned. ’This cold water—ha! ha! my stomach don’t like cold bathing.’

Page 1452

His wretched joke rebounded from the impenetrable armour of the ladies.

‘The wine-cellar is locked,’ said his wife. ’I have sealed up the key till an inventory can be taken by some agent of the creditors.’

‘What creditors?’ roared Andrew.

‘You can have some of the servants’ beer,’ Mrs. Cogglesby appended.

Andrew studied her face to see whether she really was not hoisting him with his own petard. Perceiving that she was sincerely acting according to her sense of principle, he fumed, and departed to his privacy, unable to stand it any longer.

Then like a kite the Countess pounced upon his character. Would the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Duflian decline to participate in the sparest provender? Would he be guilty of the discourtesy of leaving table without a bow or an apology, even if reduced to extremest poverty? No, indeed! which showed that, under all circumstances, a gentleman was a gentleman. And, oh! how she pitied her poor Harriet—eternally tied to a most vulgar little man, without the gilding of wealth.

‘And a fool in his business to boot, dear!’

‘These comparisons do no good,’ said Harriet. ’Andrew at least is not a renegade, and never shall be while I live. I will do my duty by him, however poor we are. And now, Louisa, putting my husband out of the question, what are your intentions? I don’t understand bankruptcy, but I imagine they can do nothing to wife and children. My little ones must have a roof over their heads; and, besides, there is little Maxwell. You decline to go down to Lymport, of course.’

‘Decline!’ cried the Countess, melodiously; ‘and do not you?’

‘As far as I am concerned—yes. But I am not to think of myself.’

The Countess meditated, and said: ’Dear Mr. Duflian has offered me his hospitality. Renegades are not absolutely inhuman. They may be generous. I have no moral doubt that Mr. Duflian would, upon my representation—dare I venture?’

‘Sleep in his house! break bread with him!’ exclaimed Harriet. ’What do you think I am made of? I would perish—go to the workhouse, rather!’

‘I see you trooping there,’ said the Countess, intent on the vision.

‘And have you accepted his invitation for yourself, Louisa?’

The Countess was never to be daunted by threatening aspects. She gave her affirmative with calmness and a deliberate smile.

‘You are going to live with him?’

‘Live with him! What expressions! My husband accompanies me.’

Harriet drew up.

‘I know nothing, Louisa, that could give me more pain.’

The Countess patted Harriet’s knee. ’It succeeds to bankruptcy, assuredly. But would you have me drag Silva to the—the shop, Harriet, love? Alternatives!’

Mrs. Andrew got up and rang the bell to have the remains of their dinner removed. When this was done, she said,

Page 1453

’Louisa, I don’t know whether I am justified: you told me to-day I might keep my jewels, trinkets, and lace, and such like. To me, I know they do not belong now: but I will dispose of them to procure you an asylum somewhere—they will fetch, I should think, L400,—to prevent your going to Mr. Duffian.’

No exhibition of great-mindedness which the Countess could perceive, ever found her below it.

‘Never, love, never!’ she said.

‘Then, will you go to Evan?’

‘Evan? I hate him!’ The olive-hued visage was dark. It brightened as she added, ’At least as much as my religious sentiments permit me to. A boy who has thwarted me at every turn!—disgraced us! Indeed, I find it difficult to pardon you the supposition of such a possibility as your own consent to look on him ever again, Harriet.’

‘You have no children,’ said Mrs. Andrew.

The Countess mournfully admitted it.

‘There lies your danger with Mr. Duffian, Louisa!’

‘What! do you doubt my virtue?’ asked the Countess.

’Pish! I fear something different. You understand me. Mr. Duflian’s moral reputation is none of the best, perhaps.’

‘That was before he renegaded,’ said the Countess.

Harriet bluntly rejoined: ‘You will leave that house a Roman Catholic.’

‘Now you have spoken,’ said the Countess, pluming. ’Now let me explain myself. My dear, I have fought worldly battles too long and too earnestly. I am rightly punished. I do but quote Herbert Duffian’s own words: he is no flatterer though you say he has such soft fingers. I am now engaged in a spiritual contest. He is very wealthy! I have resolved to rescue back to our Church what can benefit the flock of which we form a portion, so exceedingly!’

At this revelation of the Countess’s spiritual contest, Mrs. Andrew shook a worldly head.

‘You have no chance with men there, Louisa.’

‘My Harriet complains of female weakness!’

’Yes. We are strong in our own element, Louisa. Don’t be tempted out of it.’

Sublime, the Countess rose:

’Element! am I to be confined to one? What but spiritual solaces could assist me to live, after the degradations I have had heaped on me? I renounce the world. I turn my sight to realms where caste is unknown. I feel no shame there of being a tailor’s daughter. You see, I can bring my tongue to name the thing in its actuality. Once, that member would have blistered. Confess to me that, in spite of your children, you are tempted to howl at the idea of Lymport—’

The Countess paused, and like a lady about to fire off a gun, appeared to tighten her nerves, crying out rapidly:

‘Shop! Shears! Geese! Cabbage! Snip! Nine to a man!’

Even as the silence after explosions of cannon, that which reigned in the room was deep and dreadful.

Page 1454

‘See,’ the Countess continued, ’you are horrified you shudder. I name all our titles, and if I wish to be red in my cheeks, I must rouge. It is, in verity, as if my senseless clay were pelted, as we heard of Evan at his first Lymport boys’ school. You remember when he told us the story? He lisped a trifle then. “I’m the thon of a thnip.” Oh! it was hell-fire to us, then; but now, what do I feel? Why, I avowed it to Herbert Duffian openly, and he said, that the misfortune of dear Papa’s birth did not the less enable him to proclaim himself in conduct a nobleman’s offspring—’

‘Which he never was.’ Harriet broke the rhapsody in a monotonous low tone: the Countess was not compelled to hear:

’—and that a large outfitter—one of the very largest, was in reality a merchant, whose daughters have often wedded nobles of the land, and become ancestresses! Now, Harriet, do you see what a truly religious mind can do for us in the way of comfort? Oh! I bow in gratitude to Herbert Duffian. I will not rest till I have led him back to our fold, recovered from his error. He was our own preacher and pastor. He quitted us from conviction. He shall return to us from conviction.’

The Countess quoted texts, which I respect, and will not repeat. She descanted further on spiritualism, and on the balm that it was to tailors and their offspring; to all outcasts from Society.

Overpowered by her, Harriet thus summed up her opinions: ’You were always self-willed, Louisa.’

‘Say, full of sacrifice, if you would be just,’ added the Countess; ’and the victim of basest ingratitude.’

‘Well, you are in a dangerous path, Louisa.’

Harriet had the last word, which usually the Countess was not disposed to accord; but now she knew herself strengthened to do so, and was content to smile pityingly on her sister.

Full upon them in this frame of mind, arrived Caroline’s great news from Beckley.

It was then that the Countess’s conduct proved a memorable refutation of cynical philosophy: she rejoiced in the good fortune of him who had offended her! Though he was not crushed and annihilated (as he deserved to be) by the wrong he had done, the great-hearted woman pardoned him!

Her first remark was: ’Let him thank me for it or not, I will lose no moment in hastening to load him with my congratulations.’

Pleasantly she joked Andrew, and defended him from Harriet now.

‘So we are not all bankrupts, you see, dear brother-in-law.’

Andrew had become so demoralized by his own plot, that in every turn of events he scented a similar piece of human ingenuity. Harriet was angry with his disbelief, or say, the grudging credit he gave to the glorious news. Notwithstanding her calmness, the thoughts of Lymport had sickened her soul, and it was only for the sake of her children, and from a sense of the dishonesty of spending a farthing of the money belonging, as she conceived, to the creditors, that she had consented to go.

Page 1455

‘I see your motive, Mr. Cogglesby,’ she observed. ’Your measures are disconcerted. I will remain here till my brother gives me shelter.’

‘Oh, that’ll do, my love; that’s all I want,’ said Andrew, sincerely.

‘Both of you, fools!’ the Countess interjected. ’Know you Evan so little? He will receive us anywhere: his arms are open to his kindred: but to his heart the road is through humiliation, and it is to his heart we seek admittance.’

‘What do you mean?’ Harriet inquired.

‘Just this,’ the Countess answered in bold English and her eyes were lively, her figure elastic: ’We must all of us go down to the old shop and shake his hand there—every man Jack of us!—I’m only quoting the sailors, Harriet—and that’s the way to win him.’

She snapped her fingers, laughing. Harriet stared at her, and so did Andrew, though for a different reason. She seemed to be transformed. Seeing him inclined to gape, she ran up to him, caught up his chin between her ten fingers, and kissed him on both cheeks, saying:

‘You needn’t come, if you’re too proud, you know, little man!’

And to Harriet’s look of disgust, the cause for which she divined with her native rapidity, she said: ’What does it matter? They will talk, but they can’t look down on us now. Why, this is my doing!’

She came tripping to her tall sister, to ask plaintively ’Mayn’t I be glad?’ and bobbed a curtsey.

Harriet desired Andrew to leave them. Flushed and indignant she then faced the Countess.

‘So unnecessary!’ she began. ‘What can excuse your indiscretion, Louisa?’

The Countess smiled to hear her talking to her younger sister once more. She shrugged.

’Oh, if you will keep up the fiction, do. Andrew knows—he isn’t an idiot—and to him we can make light of it now. What does anybody’s birth matter, who’s well off!’

It was impossible for Harriet to take that view. The shop, if not the thing, might still have been concealed from her husband, she thought.

‘It mattered to me when I was well off,’ she said, sternly.

’Yes; and to me when I was; but we’ve had a fall and a lesson since that, my dear. Half the aristocracy of England spring from shops!—Shall I measure you?’

Harriet never felt such a desire to inflict a slap upon mortal cheek. She marched away from her in a tiff. On the other hand, Andrew was half fascinated by the Countess’s sudden re-assumption of girlhood, and returned—silly fellow! to have another look at her. She had ceased, on reflection, to be altogether so vivacious: her stronger second nature had somewhat resumed its empire: still she was fresh, and could at times be roguishly affectionate and she patted him, and petted him, and made much of him; slightly railed at him for his uxoriousness and domestic subjection, and proffered him her fingers to try the taste of. The truth must be told:

Page 1456

Mr. Duflian not being handy, she in her renewed earthly happiness wanted to see her charms in a woman's natural mirror: namely, the face of man: if of man on his knees, all the better and though a little man is not much of a man, and a sister's husband is, or should be, hardly one at all, still some sort of a reflector he must be. Two or three jests adapted to Andrew's palate achieved his momentary captivation.

He said: 'Gad, I never kissed you in my life, Louy.'

And she, with a flavour of delicate Irish brogue, 'Why don't ye catch opportunity by the tail, then?'

Perfect innocence, I assure you, on both sides.

But mark how stupidity betrays. Andrew failed to understand her, and act on the hint immediately. Had he done so, the affair would have been over without a witness. As it happened, delay permitted Harriet to assist at the ceremony.

'It wasn't your mouth, Louy,' said Andrew.

'Oh, my mouth!—that I keep for, my chosen,' was answered.

'Gad, you make a fellow almost wish—' Andrew's fingers worked over his poll, and then the spectre of righteous wrath flashed on him—naughty little man that he was! He knew himself naughty, for it was the only time since his marriage that he had ever been sorry to see his wife. This is a comedy, and I must not preach lessons of life here: but I am obliged to remark that the husband must be proof, the sister-in-law perfect, where arrangements exist that keep them under one roof. She may be so like his wife! Or, from the knowledge she has of his circumstances, she may talk to him almost as his wife. He may forget that she is not his wife! And then again, the small beginnings, which are in reality the mighty barriers, are so easily slid over. But what is the use of telling this to a pure generation? My constant error is in supposing that I write for the wicked people who begat us.

Note, however, the difference between the woman and the man! Shame confessed Andrew's naughtiness; he sniggered pitiably: whereas the Countess jumped up, and pointing at him, asked her sister what she thought of that. Her next sentence, coolly delivered, related to some millinery matter. If this was not innocence, what is?

Nevertheless, I must here state that the scene related, innocent as it was, and, as one would naturally imagine, of puny consequence, if any, did no less a thing than, subsequently, to precipitate the Protestant Countess de Saldar into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. A little bit of play!

It seems barely just. But if, as I have heard, a lady has trod on a pebble and broken her nose, tremendous results like these warn us to be careful how we walk. As for play, it was never intended that we should play with flesh and blood.

And, oh, be charitable, matrons of Britain! See here, Andrew Cogglesby, who loved his wife as his very soul, and who almost disliked her sister; in ten minutes the latter had set his head spinning! The whole of the day he went about the house meditating frantically on the possibility of his Harriet demanding a divorce.

Page 1457

She was not the sort of woman to do that. But one thing she resolved to do; and it was, to go to Lymport with Louisa, and having once got her out of her dwelling-place, never to allow her to enter it, wherever it might be, in the light of a resident again. Whether anything but the menace of a participation in her conjugal possessions could have despatched her to that hateful place, I doubt. She went: she would not let Andrew be out of her sight. Growing haughtier toward him at every step, she advanced to the strange old shop. *Evan Harrington* over the door! There the Countess, having meantime returned to her state of womanhood, shared her shudders. They entered, and passed in to Mrs. Mel, leaving their footman, apparently, in the rear. Evan was not visible. A man in the shop, with a yard measure negligently adorning his shoulders, said that Mr. Harrington was in the habit of quitting the shop at five.

‘Deuced good habit, too,’ said Andrew.

‘Why, sir,’ observed another, stepping forward, ’as you truly say—yes. But—ah! Mr. Andrew Cogglesby? Pleasure of meeting you once in Fallow field! Remember Mr. Perkins?—the lawyer, not the maltster. Will you do me the favour to step out with me?’

Andrew followed him into the street.

‘Are you aware of our young friend’s good fortune?’ said Lawyer Perkins. ’Yes. Ah! Well!—Would you believe that any sane person in his condition, now—nonsense apart—could bring his mind wilfully to continue a beggar? No. Um! Well; Mr. Cogglesby, I may tell you that I hold here in my hands a document by which Mr. Evan Harrington transfers the whole of the property bequeathed to him to Lady Jocelyn, and that I have his orders to execute it instantly, and deliver it over to her ladyship, after the will is settled, probate, and so forth: I presume there will be an arrangement about his father’s debts. Now what do you think of that?’

‘Think, sir,—think!’ cried Andrew, cocking his head at him like an indignant bird, ’I think he’s a damned young idiot to do so, and you’re a confounded old rascal to help him.’

Leaving Mr. Perkins to digest his judgement, which he had solicited, Andrew bounced back into the shop.

CHAPTER XLV

IN WHICH THE SHOP BECOMES THE CENTRE OF ATTRACTION

Under the first lustre of a May-night, Evan was galloping over the moon-shadowed downs toward Beckley. At the ridge commanding the woods, the park, and the stream, his horse stopped, as if from habit, snorted, and puffed its sides, while he gazed steadily across the long lighted vale. Soon he began to wind down the glaring chalk-track, and reached grass levels. Here he broke into a round pace, till, gaining the first straggling

cottages of the village, he knocked the head of his whip against the garden-gate of one, and a man came out, who saluted him, and held the reins.

Page 1458

‘Animal does work, sir,’ said the man.

Evan gave directions for it to be looked to, and went on to the doorway, where he was met by a young woman. She uttered a respectful greeting, and begged him to enter.

The door closed, he flung himself into a chair, and said:

‘Well, Susan, how is the child?’

‘Oh! he’s always well, Mr. Harrington; he don’t know the tricks o’ trouble yet.’

‘Will Polly be here soon?’

‘At a quarter after nine, she said, sir.’

Evan bade her sit down. After examining her features quietly, he said:

’I ’m glad to see you here, Susan. You don’t regret that you followed my advice?’

’No, sir; now it’s over, I don’t. Mother’s kind enough, and father doesn’t mention anything. She’s a-bed with bile—father’s out.’

‘But what? There’s something on your mind.’

‘I shall cry, if I begin, Mr. Harrington.’

‘See how far you can get without.’

‘Oh! Sir, then,’ said Susan, on a sharp rise of her bosom, ’it ain’t my fault. I wouldn’t cause trouble to Mr. Harry, or any friend of yours; but, sir, father have got hold of his letters to me, and he says, there ’s a promise in ’em—least, one of ’em; and it’s as good as law, he says—he heard it in a public-house; and he’s gone over to Fall’field to a law-gentleman there.’ Susan was compelled to give way to some sobs. ’It ain’t for me—-father does it, sir,’ she pleaded. ’I tried to stop him, knowing how it’d vex you, Mr. Harrington; but he’s heady about points, though a quiet man ordinary; and he says he don’t expect—and I know now no gentleman ’d marry such as me—I ain’t such a stupid gaper at words as I used to be; but father says it’s for the child’s sake, and he does it to have him provided for. Please, don’t ye be angry with me, sir.’

Susan’s half-controlled spasms here got the better of her.

While Evan was awaiting the return of her calmer senses, the latch was lifted, and Polly appeared.

‘At it again!’ was her sneering comment, after a short survey of her apron-screened sister; and then she bobbed to Evan.

’It’s whimper, whimper, and squeak, squeak, half their lives with some girls. After that they go wondering they can’t see to thread a needle! The neighbours, I suppose. I should like to lift the top off some o’ their houses. I hope I haven’t kept you, sir.’

‘No, Polly,’ said Evan; ’but you must be charitable, or I shall think you want a lesson yourself. Mr. Raikes tells me you want to see me. What is it? You seem to be correspondents.’

Polly replied: ’Oh, no, Mr. Harrington: only accidental ones—when something particular’s to be said. And he dances-like on the paper, so that you can’t help laughing. Isn’t he a very eccentric gentleman, sir?’

‘Very,’ said Evan. ’I ‘ve no time to lose, Polly.’

‘Here, you must go,’ the latter called to her sister. ’Now pack at once, Sue. Do rout out, and do leave off thinking you’ve got a candle at your eyes, for Goodness’ sake!’

Page 1459

Susan was too well accustomed to Polly's usage to complain. She murmured a gentle 'Good night, sir,' and retired. Whereupon Polly exclaimed: 'Bless her poor dear soft heart! It 's us hard ones that get on best in the world. I'm treated better than her, Mr. Harrington, and I know I ain't worth half of her. It goes nigh to make one religious, only to see how exactly like Scripture is the way Beckley treats her, whose only sin is her being so soft as to believe in a man! Oh, dear! Mr. Harrington! I wish I had good news for you.'

In spite of all his self-control, Evan breathed quickly and looked eagerly.

'Speak it out, Polly.'

'Oh, dear! I must, I suppose,' Polly answered. 'Mr. Laxley's become a lord now, Mr. Harrington.'

Evan tasted in his soul the sweets of contrast. 'Well?'

'And my Miss Rose—she—'

'What?'

Moved by the keen hunger of his eyes, Polly hesitated. Her face betrayed a sudden change of mind.

'Wants to see you, sir,' she said, resolutely.

'To see me?'

Evan stood up, so pale that Polly was frightened.

'Where is she? Where can I meet her?'

'Please don't take it so, Mr. Harrington.'

Evan commanded her to tell him what her mistress had said.

Now up to this point Polly had spoken truth. She was positive her mistress did want to see him. Polly, also, with a maiden's tender guile, desired to bring them together for once, though it were for the last time, and for no good on earth. She had been about to confide to him her young mistress's position toward Lord Laxley, when his sharp interrogation stopped her. Shrinking from absolute invention, she remarked that of course she could not exactly remember Miss Rose's words; which seemed indeed too much to expect of her.

'She will see me to-night?' said Evan.

‘I don’t know about to-night,’ Polly replied.

’Go to her instantly. Tell her I am ready. I will be at the West park-gates. This is why you wrote, Polly? Why did you lose time? Don’t delay, my good girl! Come!’

Evan had opened the door. He would not allow Polly an instant for expostulation; but drew her out, saying, ’You will attend to the gates yourself. Or come and tell me the day, if she appoints another.’

Polly made a final effort to escape from the pit she was being pushed into.

’Mr. Harrington! it wasn’t to tell you this I wrote.

Miss Rose is engaged, sir.’

‘I understand,’ said Evan, hoarsely, scarcely feeling it, as is the case with men who are shot through the heart.

Ten minutes later he was on horseback by the Fallow field gates, with the tidings shrieking through his frame. The night was still, and stiller in the pauses of the nightingales. He sat there, neither thinking of them nor reproached in his manhood for the tears that rolled down his cheeks. Presently his horse’s ears pricked, and the animal gave a low neigh. Evan’s eyes fixed harder on the length of gravel leading to the house. There was no sign, no figure. Out from the smooth grass of the lane a couple of horsemen issued, and came straight to the gates. He heard nothing till one spoke. It was a familiar voice.

Page 1460

’By Jove, Ferdy, here is the fellow, and we’ve been all the way to Lymport!’

Evan started from his trance.

’It ‘s you, Harrington?’

‘Yes, Harry.’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed that youth, evidently flushed with wine, ’what the devil do you mean by addressing me by my Christian name?’

Laxley pushed his horse’s head in front of Harry. In a manner apparently somewhat improved by his new dignity, he said: ’We have ridden to Lymport to speak to you, sir. Favour me by moving a little ahead of the lodge.’

Evan bowed, and moved beside him a short way down the lane, Harry following.

‘The purport of my visit, sir,’ Laxley began, ’was to make known to you that Miss Jocelyn has done me the honour to accept me as her husband. I learn from her that during the term of your residence in the house, you contrived to extract from her a promise to which she attaches certain scruples. She pleases to consider herself bound to you till you release her. My object is to demand that you will do so immediately.’

There was no reply.

’Should you refuse to make this reparation for the harm you have done to her and her family,’ Laxley pursued, ’I must let you know that there are means of compelling you to it, and that those means will be employed.’

Harry, fuming at these postured sentences, burst out:

’What do you talk to the fellow in that way for? A fellow who makes a fool of my cousin, and then wants to get us to buy off my sister! What’s he spying after here? The place is ours till we troop. I tell you there’s only one way of dealing with him, and if you don’t do it, I will.’

Laxley pulled his reins with a jerk that brought him to the rear.

’Miss Jocelyn has commissioned you to make this demand on me in her name?’ said Evan.

‘I make it in my own right,’ returned—Laxley. ‘I demand a prompt reply.’

’My lord, you shall have it. Miss Jocelyn is not bound to me by any engagement. Should she entertain scruples which I may have it in my power to obliterate, I shall not hesitate to do so—but only to her. What has passed between us I hold sacred.’

‘Hark at that!’ shouted Harry. ’The damned tradesman means money! You ass, Ferdinand! What did we go to Lymport for? Not to bandy words. Here! I’ve got my own quarrel with you, Harrington. You’ve been setting that girl’s father on me. Can you deny that?’

It was enough for Harry that Evan did not deny it. The calm disdain which he read on Evan’s face acted on his fury, and digging his heels into his horse’s flanks he rushed full at him and dealt him a sharp flick with his whip. Evan’s beast reared.

‘Accept my conditions, sir, or afford me satisfaction,’ cried Laxley.

‘You do me great honour, my lord; but I have told you I cannot,’ said Evan, curbing his horse.

At that moment Rose came among them. Evan raised his hat, as did Laxley. Harry, a little behind the others, performed a laborious mock salute, and then ordered her back to the house. A quick altercation ensued; the end being that Harry managed to give his sister the context of the previous conversation.

Page 1461

‘Now go back, Rose,’ said Laxley. ’I have particular business with Mr. Harrington.’

‘I came to see him,’ said Rose, in a clear voice.

Laxley reddened angrily.

‘Then tell him at once you want to be rid of him,’ her brother called to her.

Rose looked at Evan. Could he not see that she had no word in her soul for him of that kind? Yes: but love is not always to be touched to tenderness even at the sight of love.

‘Rose,’ he said, ’I hear from Lord Laxley, that you fancy yourself not at liberty; and that you require me to disengage you.’

He paused. Did he expect her to say there that she wished nothing of the sort? Her stedfast eyes spoke as much: but misery is wanton, and will pull all down to it. Even Harry was checked by his tone, and Laxley sat silent. The fact that something more than a tailor was speaking seemed to impress them.

’Since I have to say it, Rose, I hold you in no way bound to me. The presumption is forced upon me. May you have all the happiness I pray God to give you.

Gentlemen, good night!’

He bowed and was gone. How keenly she could have retorted on that false prayer for her happiness! Her limbs were nerveless, her tongue speechless. He had thrown her off—there was no barrier now between herself and Ferdinand. Why did Ferdinand speak to her with that air of gentle authority, bidding her return to the house? She was incapable of seeing, what the young lord acutely felt, that he had stooped very much in helping to bring about such a scene. She had no idea of having trifled with him and her own heart, when she talked feebly of her bondage to another, as one who would be warmer to him were she free. Swiftly she compared the two that loved her, and shivered as if she had been tossed to the embrace of a block of ice.

‘You are cold, Rose,’ said Laxley, bending to lay his hand on her shoulder.

‘Pray, never touch me,’ she answered, and walked on hastily to the house.

Entering it, she remembered that Evan had dwelt there. A sense of desolation came over her. She turned to Ferdinand remorsefully, saying: ‘Dear Ferdinand!’ and allowed herself to be touched and taken close to him. When she reached her bed-room, she had time to reflect that he had kissed her on the lips, and then she fell down and shed such tears as had never been drawn from her before.

Next day she rose with an undivided mind. Belonging henceforth to Ferdinand, it was necessary that she should invest him immediately with transcendent qualities. The absence of character in him rendered this easy. What she had done for Evan, she did for him. But now, as if the Fates had been lying in watch to entrap her and chain her, that they might have her at their mercy, her dreams of Evan's high nature—hitherto dreams only—were to be realized. With the purposeless waywardness of her sex, Pony Wheedle, while dressing her young mistress, and though quite aware that the parting had been spoken, must needs relate her sister's story and Evan's share in it. Rose praised him like one forever aloof from him. Nay, she could secretly congratulate herself on not being deceived. Upon that came a letter from Caroline:

Page 1462

’Do not misjudge my brother. He knew Juliana’s love for him and rejected it. You will soon have proofs of his disinterestedness. Then do not forget that he works to support us all. I write this with no hope save to make you just to him. That is the utmost he will ever anticipate.’

It gave no beating of the heart to Rose to hear good of Evan now: but an increased serenity of confidence in the accuracy of her judgement of persons.

The arrival of Lawyer Perkins supplied the key to Caroline’s communication. No one was less astonished than Rose at the news that Evan renounced the estate. She smiled at Harry’s contrite stupefaction, and her father’s incapacity of belief in conduct so singular, caused her to lift her head and look down on her parent.

‘Shows he knows nothing of the world, poor young fellow!’ said Sir Franks.

‘Nothing more clearly,’ observed Lady Jocelyn. ’I presume I shall cease to be blamed for having had him here?’

‘Upon my honour, he must have the soul of a gentleman!’ said the baronet. ‘There’s nothing he can expect in return, you know!’

‘One would think, Papa, you had always been dealing with tradesmen!’ remarked Rose, to whom her father now accorded the treatment due to a sensible girl.

Laxley was present at the family consultation. What was his opinion? Rose manifested a slight anxiety to hear it.

‘What those sort of fellows do never surprises me,’ he said, with a semi-yawn.

Rose felt fire on her cheeks.

‘It’s only what the young man is bound to do,’ said Mrs. Shorne.

‘His duty, aunt? I hope we may all do it!’ Rose interjected.

‘Championing him again?’

Rose quietly turned her face, too sure of her cold appreciation of him to retort. But yesterday night a word from him might have made her his; and here she sat advocating the nobility of his nature with the zeal of a barrister in full swing of practice. Remember, however, that a kiss separates them: and how many millions of leagues that counts for in love, in a pure girl’s thought, I leave you to guess.

Now, in what way was Evan to be thanked? how was he to be treated? Sir Franks proposed to go down to him in person, accompanied by Harry. Lady Jocelyn acquiesced. But Rose said to her mother:

‘Will not you wound his sensitiveness by going to him there?’

‘Possibly,’ said her ladyship. ’Shall we write and ask him to come to us?’

‘No, Mama. Could we ask him to make a journey to receive our thanks?’

‘Not till we have solid ones to offer, perhaps.’

’He will not let us help him, Mama, unless we have all given him our hands.’

’Probably not. There’s always a fund of nonsense in those who are capable of great things, I observe. It shall be a family expedition, if you like.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Mrs. Shorne. ’Do you mean that you intend to allow Rose to make one of the party? Franks! is that your idea?’

Page 1463

Sir Franks looked at his wife.

‘What harm?’ Lady Jocelyn asked; for Rose’s absence of conscious guile in appealing to her reason had subjugated that great faculty.

‘Simply a sense of propriety, Emily,’ said Mrs. Shorne, with a glance at Ferdinand.

‘You have no objection, I suppose!’ Lady Jocelyn addressed him.

‘Ferdinand will join us,’ said Rose.

‘Thank you, Rose, I’d rather not,’ he replied. ’I thought we had done with the fellow for good last night.’

‘Last night?’ quoth Lady Jocelyn.

No one spoke. The interrogation was renewed. Was it Rose’s swift instinct which directed her the shortest way to gain her point? or that she was glad to announce that her degrading engagement was at an end? She said:

’Ferdinand and Mr. Harrington came to an understanding last night, in my presence.’

That, strange as it struck on their ears, appeared to be quite sufficient to all, albeit the necessity for it was not so very clear. The carriage was ordered forthwith; Lady Jocelyn went to dress; Rose drew Ferdinand away into the garden. Then, with all her powers, she entreated him to join her.

‘Thank you, Rose,’ he said; ‘I have no taste for the genus.’

‘For my sake, I beg it, Ferdinand.’

‘It’s really too much to ask of me, Rose.’

‘If you care for me, you will.’

‘’Pon my honour, quite impossible!’

‘You refuse, Ferdinand?’

’My London tailor ‘d find me out, and never forgive me.’

This pleasantry stopped her soft looks. Why she wished him to be with her, she could not have said. For a thousand reasons: which implies no distinct one something prophetically pressing in her blood.

CHAPTER XLVI

A LOVERS' PARTING

Now, to suppose oneself the fashioner of such a chain of events as this which brought the whole of the Harrington family in tender unity together once more, would have elated an ordinary mind. But to the Countess de Saldar, it was simply an occasion for reflecting that she had misunderstood—and could most sincerely forgive—Providence. She admitted to herself that it was not entirely her work; for she never would have had their place of meeting to be the Shop. Seeing, however, that her end was gained, she was entitled to the credit of it, and could pardon the means adopted. Her brother lord of Beckley Court, and all of them assembled in the old 193, Main Street, Lymport! What matter for proud humility! Providence had answered her numerous petitions, but in its own way. Stipulating that she must swallow this pill, Providence consented to serve her. She swallowed it with her wonted courage. In half an hour subsequent to her arrival at Lymport, she laid siege to the heart of Old Tom Cogglesby, whom she found installed in the parlour, comfortably sipping at a tumbler of rum-and-water. Old Tom was astonished to meet such an agreeable unpretentious woman, who talked of tailors and lords with equal ease, appeared to comprehend a man's habits instinctively, and could amuse him while she ministered to them.

Page 1464

‘Can you cook, ma’am?’ asked Old Tom.

‘All but that,’ said the Countess, with a smile of sweet meaning.

‘Ha! then you won’t suit me as well as your mother.’

‘Take care you do not excite my emulation,’ she returned, graciously, albeit disgusted at his tone.

To Harriet, Old Tom had merely nodded. There he sat, in the arm-chair, sucking the liquor, with the glimpse of a sour chuckle on his cheeks. Now and then, during the evening, he rubbed his hands sharply, but spoke little. The unbending Harriet did not conceal her disdain of him. When he ventured to allude to the bankruptcy, she cut him short.

’Pray, excuse me—I am unacquainted with affairs of business—I cannot even understand my husband.’

‘Lord bless my soul!’ Old Tom exclaimed, rolling his eyes.

Caroline had informed her sisters up-stairs that their mother was ignorant of Evan’s change of fortune, and that Evan desired her to continue so for the present. Caroline appeared to be pained by the subject, and was glad when Louisa sounded his mysterious behaviour by saying:

‘Evan has a native love of concealment—he must be humoured.’

At the supper, Mr. Raikes made his bow. He was modest and reserved. It was known that this young gentleman acted as shopman there. With a tenderness for his position worthy of all respect, the Countess spared his feelings by totally ignoring his presence; whereat he, unaccustomed to such great-minded treatment, retired to bed, a hater of his kind. Harriet and Caroline went next. The Countess said she would wait up for Evan, but hearing that his hours of return were about the chimes of matins, she cried exultingly: ‘Darling Papa all over!’ and departed likewise. Mrs. Mel, when she had mixed Old Tom’s third glass, wished the brothers good night, and they were left to exchange what sentiments they thought proper for the occasion. The Countess had certainly, disappointed Old Tom’s farce, in a measure; and he expressed himself puzzled by her. ‘You ain’t the only one,’ said his brother. Andrew, with some effort, held his tongue concerning the news of Evan—his fortune and his folly, till he could talk to the youth in person.

All took their seats at the early breakfast next morning.

‘Has Evan not come—home yet?’ was the Countess’s first question.

Mrs. Mel replied, ‘No.’

‘Do you know where he has gone, dear Mama?’

‘He chooses his own way.’

‘And you fear that it leads somewhere?’ added the Countess.

‘I fear that it leads to knocking up the horse he rides.’

’The horse, Mama! He is out on a horse all night! But don’t you see, dear old pet! his morals, at least, are safe on horseback.’

‘The horse has to be paid for, Louisa,’ said her mother, sternly; and then, for she had a lesson to read to the guests of her son, ’Ready money doesn’t come by joking. What will the creditors think? If he intends to be honest in earnest, he must give up four-feet mouths.’

Page 1465

‘Fourteen-feet, ma’am, you mean,’ said Old Tom, counting the heads at table.

‘Bravo, Mama!’ cried the Countess, and as she was sitting near her mother, she must show how prettily she kissed, by pouting out her playful lips to her parent. ’Do be economical always! And mind! for the sake of the wretched animals, I will intercede for you to be his inspector of stables.’

This, with a glance of intelligence at her sisters.

‘Well, Mr. Raikes,’ said Andrew, ’you keep good hours, at all events—eh?’

‘Up with the lark,’ said Old Tom. ’Ha! ’fraid he won’t be so early when he gets rid of his present habits—eh?’

‘Nec dierum numerum, ut nos, sed noctium computant,’ said Mr. Raikes, and both the brothers sniffed like dogs that have put their noses to a hot coal, and the Countess, who was less insensible to the aristocracy of the dead languages than are women generally, gave him the recognition that is occasionally afforded the family tutor.

About the hour of ten Evan arrived. He was subjected to the hottest embrace he had ever yet received from his sister Louisa.

‘Darling!’ she called him before them all. ’Oh! how I suffer for this ignominy I see you compelled for a moment to endure. But it is but for a moment. They must vacate; and you will soon be out of this horrid hole.’

‘Where he just said he was glad to give us a welcome,’ muttered Old Tom.

Evan heard him, and laughed. The Countess laughed too.

‘No, we will not be impatient. We are poor insignificant people!’ she said; and turning to her mother, added: ’And yet I doubt not you think the smallest of our landed gentry equal to great continental seigneurs. I do not say the contrary.’

’You will fill Evan’s head with nonsense till you make him knock up a horse a week, and never go to his natural bed,’ said Mrs. Mel, angrily. ‘Look at him! Is a face like that fit for business?’

‘Certainly, certainly not!’ said the Countess.

’Well, Mother, the horse is dismissed,—you won’t have to complain any more,’ said Evan, touching her hand. ’Another history commences from to-day.’

The Countess watched him admiringly. Such powers of acting she could not have ascribed to him.

‘Another history, indeed!’ she said. ’By the way, Van, love! was it out of Glamorganshire —were we Tudors, according to Papa? or only Powys chieftains? It’s of no moment, but it helps one in conversation.’

‘Not half so much as good ale, though!’ was Old Tom’s comment.

The Countess did not perceive its fitness, till Evan burst into a laugh, and then she said:

’Oh! we shall never be ashamed of the Brewery. Do not fear that, Mr. Cogglesby.’

Page 1466

Old Tom saw his farce reviving, and encouraged the Countess to patronize him. She did so to an extent that called on her Mrs. Mel's reprobation, which was so cutting and pertinent, that Harriet was compelled to defend her sister, remarking that perhaps her mother would soon learn that Louisa was justified in not permitting herself and family to be classed too low. At this Andrew, coming from a private interview with Evan, threw up his hands and eyes as one who foretold astonishment but counselled humility. What with the effort of those who knew a little to imply a great deal; of those who knew all to betray nothing; and of those who were kept in ignorance to strain a fact out of the conflicting innuendos the general mystification waxed apace, and was at its height, when a name struck on Evan's ear that went through his blood like a touch of the torpedo.

He had been called into the parlour to assist at a consultation over the Brewery affairs. Raikes opened the door, and announced, 'Sir Franks and Lady Jocelyn.'

Them he could meet, though it was hard for his pride to pardon their visit to him there. But when his eyes discerned Rose behind them, the passions of his lower nature stood up armed. What could she have come for but to humiliate, or play with him?

A very few words enabled the Countess to guess the cause for this visit. Of course, it was to beg time! But they thanked Evan. For something generous, no doubt.

Sir Franks took him aside, and returning remarked to his wife that she perhaps would have greater influence with him. All this while Rose sat talking to Mrs. Andrew Cogglesby, Mrs. Strike, and Evan's mother. She saw by his face the offence she had committed, and acted on by one of her impulses, said: 'Mama, I think if I were to speak to Mr. Harrington—'

Ere her mother could make light of the suggestion, Old Tom had jumped up, and bowed out his arm.

'Allow me to conduct ye to the drawing room, upstairs, young lady. He'll follow, safe enough!'

Rose had not stipulated for that. Nevertheless, seeing no cloud on her mother's face, or her father's, she gave Old Tom her hand, and awaited a movement from Evan. It was too late to object to it on either side. Old Tom had caught the tide at the right instant. Much as if a grim old genie had planted them together, the lovers found themselves alone.

'Evan, you forgive me?' she began, looking up at him timidly.

'With all my heart, Rose,' he answered, with great cheerfulness.

’No. I know your heart better. Oh, Evan! you must be sure that we respect you too much to wound you. We came to thank you for your generosity. Do you refuse to accept anything from us? How can we take this that you thrust on us, unless in some way—’

‘Say no more,’ he interposed. ’You see me here. You know me as I am, now.’

‘Yes, yes!’ the tears stood in her eyes. ’Why did I come, you would ask? That is what you cannot forgive! I see now how useless it was. Evan! why did you betray me?’

Page 1467

‘Betray you, Rose?’

‘You said that you loved me once.’

She was weeping, and all his spirit melted, and his love cried out: ’I said “till death,” and till death it will be, Rose.’

’Then why, why did you betray me, Evan? I know it all. But if you blackened yourself to me, was it not because you loved something better than me? And now you think me false! Which of us two has been false? It ’s silly to talk of these things now too late! But be just. I wish that we may be friends. Can we, unless you bend a little?’

The tears streamed down her cheeks, and in her lovely humility he saw the baseness of that pride of his which had hitherto held him up.

’Now that you are in this house where I was born and am to live, can you regret what has come between us, Rose?’

Her lips quivered in pain.

‘Can I do anything else but regret it all my life, Evan?’

How was it possible for him to keep his strength?

‘Rose!’ he spoke with a passion that made her shrink, ’are you bound to this man?’ and to the drooping of her eyes, ’No. Impossible, for you do not love him. Break it. Break the engagement you cannot fulfil. Break it and belong to me. It sounds ill for me to say that in such a place. But Rose, I will leave it. I will accept any assistance that your father—that any man will give me. Beloved—noble girl! I see my falseness to you, though I little thought it at the time—fool that I was! Be my help, my guide-as the soul of my body! Be mine!’

‘Oh, Evan!’ she clasped her hands in terror at the change in him, that was hurrying her she knew not whither, and trembling, held them supplicatingly.

’Yes, Rose: you have taught me what love can be. You cannot marry that man.’

’But, my honour, Evan! No. I do not love him; for I can love but one. He has my pledge. Can I break it?’

The stress on the question choked him, just as his heart sprang to her.

‘Can you face the world with me, Rose?’

’Oh, Evan! is there an escape for me? Think Decide!—No—no! there is not. My mother, I know, looks on it so. Why did she trust me to be with you here, but that she thinks me engaged to him, and has such faith in me? Oh, help me!—be my guide. Think whether you would trust me hereafter! I should despise myself.’

Not if you marry him!’ said Evan, bitterly. And then thinking as men will think when they look on the figure of a fair girl marching serenely to a sacrifice, the horrors of which they insist that she ought to know: half-hating her for her calmness—adoring her for her innocence: he said: ’It rests with you, Rose. The world will approve you, and if your conscience does, why—farewell, and may heaven be your help.’

She murmured, ‘Farewell.’

Did she expect more to be said by him? What did she want or hope for now? And yet a light of hunger grew in her eyes, brighter and brighter, as it were on a wave of yearning.

Page 1468

‘Take my hand once,’ she faltered.

Her hand and her whole shape he took, and she with closed eyes let him strain her to his breast.

Their swoon was broken by the opening of the door, where Old Tom Cogglesby and Lady Jocelyn appeared.

‘Gad! he seems to have got his recompense—eh, my lady?’ cried Old Tom. However satisfactorily they might have explained the case, it certainly did seem so.

Lady Jocelyn looked not absolutely displeased. Old Tom was chuckling at her elbow. The two principal actors remained dumb.

’I suppose, if we leave young people to settle a thing, this is how they do it,’ her ladyship remarked.

‘Gad, and they do it well!’ cried Old Tom.

Rose, with a deep blush on her cheeks, stepped from Evan to her mother. Not in effrontery, but earnestly, and as the only way of escaping from the position, she said: ’I have succeeded, Mama. He will take what I offer.’

‘And what’s that, now?’ Old Tom inquired.

Rose turned to Evan. He bent and kissed her hand.

‘Call it “recompense” for the nonce,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’Do you still hold to your original proposition, Tom?’

’Every penny, my lady. I like the young fellow, and she’s a jolly little lass—if she means it:—she’s a woman.’

‘True,’ said Lady Jocelyn. ’Considering that fact, you will oblige me by keeping the matter quiet.’

’Does she want to try whether the tailor’s a gentleman still, my lady-eh?’

‘No. I fancy she will have to see whether a certain nobleman may be one.’

The Countess now joined them. Sir Franks had informed her of her brother’s last fine performance. After a short, uneasy pause, she said, glancing at Evan:—

’You know his romantic nature. I can assure you he was sincere; and even if you could not accept, at least—’

‘But we have accepted, Countess,’ said Rose.

‘The estate!’

’The estate, Countess. And what is more, to increase the effect of his generosity, he has consented to take a recompense.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed the Countess, directing a stony look at her brother.

‘May I presume to ask what recompense?’

Rose shook her head. ’Such a very poor one, Countess! He has no idea of relative value.’

The Countess’s great mind was just then running hot on estates, and thousands, or she would not have played goose to them, you may be sure. She believed that Evan had been wheedled by Rose into the acceptance of a small sum of money, in return for his egregious gift.

With an internal groan, the outward aspect of which she had vast difficulty in masking, she said: ’You are right—he has no head. Easily cajoled!’

Old Tom sat down in a chair, and laughed outright. Lady Jocelyn, in pity for the poor lady, who always amused her, thought it time to put an end to the scene.

Page 1469

‘I hope your brother will come to us in about a week,’ she said. ’May I expect the favour of your company as well?’

The Countess felt her dignity to be far superior as she responded: ’Lady Jocelyn, when next I enjoy the gratification of a visit to your hospitable mansion, I must know that I am not at a disadvantage. I cannot consent to be twice pulled down to my brother’s level.’

Evan’s heart was too full of its dim young happiness to speak, or care for words. The cold elegance of the Countess’s curtsey to Lady Jocelyn: her ladyship’s kindly pressure of his hand: Rose’s stedfast look into his eyes: Old Tom’s smothered exclamation that he was not such a fool as he seemed: all passed dream-like, and when he was left to the fury of the Countess, he did not ask her to spare him, nor did he defend himself. She bade adieu to him and their mutual relationship that very day. But her star had not forsaken her yet. Chancing to peep into the shop, to intrust a commission to Mr. John Raikes, who was there doing penance for his career as a gentleman, she heard Old Tom and Andrew laughing, utterly unlike bankrupts.

’Who ‘d have thought the women such fools! and the Countess, too!’

This was Andrew’s voice. He chuckled as one emancipated. The Countess had a short interview with him (before she took her departure to join her husband, under the roof of the Honourable Herbert Duffian), and Andrew chuckled no more.

CHAPTER XLVII

A YEAR LATER, THE COUNTESS DE SALDAR DE SANCORVO TO HER SISTER CAROLINE

’Rome. ’Let the post-mark be my reply to your letter received through the Consulate, and most courteously delivered with the Consul’s compliments. We shall yet have an ambassador at Rome—mark your Louisa’s words. Yes, dearest! I am here, body and spirit! I have at last found a haven, a refuge, and let those who condemn me compare the peace of their spirits with mine. You think that you have quite conquered the dreadfulness of our origin. My love, I smile at you! I know it to be impossible for the Protestant heresy to offer a shade of consolation. Earthly-born, it rather encourages earthly distinctions. It is the sweet sovereign Pontiff alone who gathers all in his arms, not excepting tailors. Here, if they could know it, is their blessed comfort!

’Thank Harriet for her message. She need say nothing. By refusing me her hospitality, when she must have known that the house was as free of creditors as any foreigner under the rank of Count is of soap, she drove me to Mr. Duflian. Oh! how I rejoice at her exceeding unkindness! How warmly I forgive her the unsisterly—to say the least—-vindictiveness of her unaccountable conduct! Her sufferings will one day be terrible.

Good little Andrew supplies her place to me. Why do you refuse his easily afforded bounty? No one need know of it. I tell you candidly, I take double, and the small good punch of a body is only too delighted. But then, I can be discreet.

Page 1470

’Oh! the gentlemanliness of these infinitely maligned Jesuits! They remind me immensely of Sir Charles Grandison, and those frontispiece pictures to the novels we read when girls—I mean in manners and the ideas they impose—not in dress or length of leg, of course. The same winning softness; the same irresistible ascendancy over the female mind! They require virtue for two, I assure you, and so I told Silva, who laughed.

’But the charms of confession, my dear! I will talk of Evan first. I have totally forgiven him. Attache to the Naples embassy, sounds tol-lol. In such a position I can rejoice to see him, for it permits me to acknowledge him. I am not sure that, spiritually, Rose will be his most fitting helpmate. However, it is done, and I did it, and there is no more to be said. The behaviour of Lord Laxley in refusing to surrender a young lady who declared that her heart was with another, exceeds all I could have supposed. One of the noble peers among his ancestors must have been a pig! Oh! the Roman nobility! Grace, refinement, intrigue, perfect comprehension of your ideas, wishes—the meanest trifles! Here you have every worldly charm, and all crowned by Religion! This is my true delight. I feel at last that whatsoever I do, I cannot go far wrong while I am within hail of my gentle priest. I never could feel so before.

’The idea of Mr. Parsley proposing for the beautiful widow Strike! It was indecent to do so so soon—widowed under such circumstances! But I dare say he was as disinterested as a Protestant curate ever can be. Beauty is a good dowry to bring a poor, lean, worldly curate of your Church, and he knows that. Your bishops and arches are quite susceptible to beautiful petitioners, and we know here how your livings and benefices are dispensed. What do you intend to do? Come to me; come to the bosom of the old and the only true Church, and I engage to marry you to a Roman prince the very next morning or two. That is, if you have no ideas about prosecuting a certain enterprise which I should not abandon. In that case, stay. As Duchess of B., Mr. Duffian says you would be cordially welcome to his Holiness, who may see women. That absurd report is all nonsense. We do not kiss his toe, certainly, but we have privileges equally enviable. Herbert is all charm. I confess he is a little wearisome with his old ruins, and his Dante, the poet. He is quite of my opinion, that Evan will never wash out the trade stain on him until he comes over to the Church of Rome. I adjure you, Caroline, to lay this clearly before our dear brother. In fact, while he continues a Protestant, to me he is a tailor. But here Rose is the impediment. I know her to be just one of those little dogged minds that are incapable of receiving new impressions. Was it not evident in the way she stuck to Evan after I had once brought them together? I am not at all astonished that Mr. Raikes should have married her maid. It is a case of natural selection.

Page 1471

But it is amusing to think of him carrying on the old business in 193, and with credit! I suppose his parents are to be pitied; but what better is the creature fit for? Mama displeases me in consenting to act as housekeeper to old Grumpus. I do not object to the fact, for it is prospective; but she should have insisted on another place of resort than Fallow field. I do not agree with you in thinking her right in refusing a second marriage. Her age does not shelter her from scandal in your Protestant communities.

'I am every day expecting Harry Jocelyn to turn up.

He was rightly sent away, for to think of the folly Evan put into his empty head! No; he shall have another wife, and Protestantism shall be his forsaken mistress!

'See how your Louy has given up the world and its vanities! You expected me to creep up to you contrite and whimpering? On the contrary, I never felt prouder. And I am not going to live a lazy life, I can assure you. The Church hath need of me! If only for the peace it hath given me on one point, I am eternally bound to serve it.

'Postscript: I am persuaded of this; that it is utterly impossible for a man to be a true gentleman who is not of the true Church. What it is I cannot say; but it is as a convert that I appreciate my husband. Love is made to me, dear, for Catholics are human. The other day it was a question whether a lady or a gentleman should be compromised. It required the grossest fib. The gentleman did not hesitate. And why? His priest was handy. Fancy Lord Laxley in such a case. I shudder. This shows that your religion precludes any possibility of the being the real gentleman, and whatever Evan may think of himself, or Rose think of him, I *know the thing*.'

Etext editor's bookmarks

A woman rises to her husband. But a man is what he is
A share of pity for the objects she despised
A sixpence kindly meant is worth any crown-piece that's grudged
A youth who is engaged in the occupation of eating his heart
A man who rejected medicine in extremity
A lover must have his delusions, just as a man must have a skin
A madman gets madder when you talk reason to him
A man to be trusted with the keys of anything
Abject sense of the lack of a circumference
Accustomed to be paid for by his country
Adept in the lie implied
Admirable scruples of an inveterate borrower
After a big blow, a very little one scarcely counts
Ah! how sweet to waltz through life with the right partner
Amiable mirror as being wilfully ruffled to confuse
An obedient creature enough where he must be

And not any of your grand ladies can match my wife at home
Any man is in love with any woman
Because you loved something better than me
Because men can’t

Page 1472

abide praise of another man
Because he stood so high with her now he feared the fall
Believed in her love, and judged it by the strength of his own
Bitten hard at experience, and know the value of a tooth
Bound to assure everybody at table he was perfectly happy
Brief negatives are not re-assuring to a lover’s uneasy mind
British hunger for news; second only to that for beef
Brotherhood among the select who wear masks instead of faces
But a woman must now and then ingratiate herself
By forbearance, put it in the wrong
Can you not be told you are perfect without seeking to improve
Cheerful martyr
Command of countenance the Countess possessed
Commencement of a speech proves that you have made the plunge
Common voice of praise in the mouths of his creditors
Confident serenity inspired by evil prognostications
Damsel who has lost the third volume of an exciting novel
Eating, like scratching, only wants a beginning
Embarrassments of an uncongenial employment
Empty stomachs are foul counsellors
Enamoured young men have these notions
English maids are domesticated savage animals
Equally acceptable salted when it cannot be had fresh
Every woman that’s married isn’t in love with her husband
Eyes of a lover are not his own; but his hands and lips are
Far higher quality is the will that can subdue itself to wait
Feel no shame that I do not feel!
Feel they are not up to the people they are mixing with
Few feelings are single on this globe
Forty seconds too fast, as if it were a capital offence
Found it difficult to forgive her his own folly
Friend he would not shake off, but could not well link with
From head to foot nothing better than a moan made visible
Gentlefolks like straight-forwardness in their inferiors
Glimpse of her whole life in the horrid tomb of his embrace
Good nature, and means no more harm than he can help
Good and evil work together in this world
Gossip always has some solid foundation, however small
Graduated naturally enough the finer stages of self-deception
Gratuitous insult
Habit, what a sacred and admirable thing it is
Hated one thing alone—which was ‘bother’
Have her profile very frequently while I am conversing with her

He has been tolerably honest, Tom, for a man and a lover
He grunted that a lying clock was hateful to him
He was in love, and subtle love will not be shamed and smothered
He kept saying to himself, ‘to-morrow I will tell’
He had his character to maintain
He squandered the guineas, she patiently picked up the pence
His wife alone, had, as they termed it, kept him together
Hope which lies in giving

Page 1473

men a dose of hysterics
How many degrees from love gratitude may be
I ’m a bachelor, and a person—you’re married, and an object
I cannot live a life of deceit. A life of misery—not deceit
I take off my hat, Nan, when I see a cobbler’s stall
I always wait for a thing to happen first
I never see anything, my dear
I did, replied Evan. ‘I told a lie.’
I’ll come as straight as I can
If we are to please you rightly, always allow us to play First
If I love you, need you care what anybody else thinks
In truth she sighed to feel as he did, above everybody
Incapable of putting the screw upon weak excited nature
Informed him that he never played jokes with money, or on men
Is he jealous? ‘Only when I make him, he is.’
It ’s us hard ones that get on best in the world
It is better for us both, of course
It was in a time before our joyful era of universal equality
It is no insignificant contest when love has to crush self-love
It’s no use trying to be a gentleman if you can’t pay for it
It’s a fool that hopes for peace anywhere
Lay no petty traps for opportunity
Listened to one another, and blinded the world
Looked as proud as if he had just clapped down the full amount
Love is a contagious disease
Make no effort to amuse him. He is always occupied
Man without a penny in his pocket, and a gizzard full of pride
Married a wealthy manufacturer—bartered her blood for his money
Maxims of her own on the subject of rising and getting the worm
Men they regard as their natural prey
Men do not play truant from home at sixty years of age
Most youths are like Pope’s women; they have no character
My belief is, you do it on purpose. Can’t be such rank idiots
Never intended that we should play with flesh and blood
Never to despise the good opinion of the nonentities
No great harm done when you’re silent
No conversation coming of it, her curiosity was violent
Notoriously been above the honours of grammar
Occasional instalments—just to freshen the account
Oh! I can’t bear that class of people
One fool makes many, and so, no doubt, does one goose
One seed of a piece of folly will lurk and sprout to confound us
Our comedies are frequently youth’s tragedies

Partake of a morning draught
Patronizing woman
Play second fiddle without looking foolish
Pride is the God of Pagans
Propitiate common sense on behalf of what seems tolerably absurd
Rare as epic song is the man who is thorough in what he does
Read one another perfectly in their mutual hypocrisies
Rebukes which give immeasurable rebounds
Recalling her to the subject-matter with all the patience

Page 1474

Refuge in the Castle of Negation against the whole army of facts
Remarked that the young men must fight it out together
Requiring natural services from her in the button department
Rose was much behind her age
Rose! what have I done? ‘Nothing at all,’ she said
Said she was what she would have given her hand not to be
Says you’re so clever you ought to be a man
Second fiddle; he could only mean what she meant
Secrets throw on the outsiders the onus of raising a scandal
Sense, even if they can’t understand it, flatters them so
She did not detest the Countess because she could not like her
She was unworthy to be the wife of a tailor
She, not disinclined to dilute her grief
She believed friendship practicable between men and women
She was at liberty to weep if she pleased
Sincere as far as she knew: as far as one who loves may be
Small beginnings, which are in reality the mighty barriers
Speech is poor where emotion is extreme
Speech that has to be hauled from the depths usually betrays
Spiritualism, and on the balm that it was
Such a man was banned by the world, which was to be despised?
Taking oath, as it were, by their lower nature
Tears that dried as soon as they had served their end
Tenderness which Mrs. Mel permitted rather than encouraged
That plain confession of a lack of wit; he offered combat
That beautiful trust which habit gives
The ass eats at my table, and treats me with contempt
The Countess dieted the vanity according to the nationality
The letter had a smack of crabbed age hardly counterfeit
The commonest things are the worst done
The thrust sinned in its shrewdness
The power to give and take flattery to any amount
The grey furniture of Time for his natural wear
Those numerous women who always know themselves to be right
Thus does Love avenge himself on the unsatisfactory Past
To be both generally blamed, and generally liked
To let people speak was a maxim of Mrs. Mel’s, and a wise one
Took care to be late, so that all eyes beheld her
Touching a nerve
Toyed with little flowers of palest memory
Tradesman, and he never was known to have sent in a bill

Tried to be honest, and was as much so as his disease permitted
True enjoyment of the princely disposition
Two people love, there is no such thing as owing between them
Unfeminine of any woman to speak continuously anywhere
Virtuously zealous in an instant on behalf of the lovely dame
Vulgarity in others evoked vulgarity in her
Waited serenely for the certain disasters to enthrone her
We deprive all renegades of their spiritual titles
What a stock of axioms

Page 1475

young people have handy
What will be thought of me? not a small matter to any of us
What he did, she took among other inevitable matters
What's an eccentric? a child grown grey!
When testy old gentlemen could commit slaughter with ecstasy
When you run away, you don't live to fight another day
When Love is hurt, it is self-love that requires the opiate
Whose bounty was worse to him than his abuse
Why, he'll snap your head off for a word
With good wine to wash it down, one can swallow anything
With a proud humility
Wrapped in the comfort of his cowardice
You do want polish
You talk your mother with a vengeance
You accuse or you exonerate—Nobody can be half guilty
You rides when you can, and you walks when you must
You're the puppet of your women!
Youth is not alarmed by the sound of big sums

VITTORIA

By George Meredith

CONTENTS:

Book 1.
I. *Up Monte Motterone*
ii. *On the heights*
III. *Signorina Vittoria*
iv. *Ammiani's intercession*
V. *The spy*
vi. *The warning*
VII. *Barto Rizzo*
viii. *The letter*

Book 2.
IX. *In Verona*
X. *The pope's mouth*
xi. *Laura Piaveni*
XII. *The bronze butterfly*
XIII. *The plot of the signor Antonio*

Book 3.
XIV. *At the maestro's door*
XV. *Ammiani through the midnight*
XVI. *Countess Ammiani*
xvii. *In the piazza* D'ARMI
XVIII. *The night of the fifteenth*
XIX. *The prima donna*

Book 4.
XX. *The opera of Camilla*
XXI. *The third act*
XXII. *Wilfrid comes forward*
XXIII. *First hours of the flight*
XXIV. *Adventures of Vittoria and Angelo*
XXV. *Across the mountains*

Book 5.
XXVI. *The duel in the pass*
XXVII. A *new ordeal*
XXVIII. *The escape of Angelo*

Page 1476

Book 6.
XXIX. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—the tobacco riots —Rinaldo Guidascarpi*
XXX. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—the five days of Milan*
XXXI. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—Vittoria disobeys her lover*
XXXII. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—the treachery of Pericles-the write umbrella—the death of Rinaldo Guidascarpi*

Book 7.
XXXIII. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—count Karl Lenkenstein— the story of the Guidascarpi—the victory of the volunteers*
XXXIV. *Episodes of the revolt and the war—the deeds of Barto Rizzo— the meeting at Roveredo*
XXXV. *Close of the Lombard campaign—Vittoria's perplexity*
XXXVI. A *fresh entanglement*
XXXVII. *On Lago Maggiore*
XXXVIII. *Violetta* D'ISORELLA
XXXIX. *Anna of Lenkenstein*

Book 8.
XL. *Through the winter*
XLI. *The interview*
XLII. *The shadow of conspiracy*
XLIII. *The last meeting in Milan*
XLIV. *The wife and the husband*
XLV. *Shows many paths converging to the end*
XLVI. *The last epilogue*

CHAPTER I

From Monte Motterone you survey the Lombard plain. It is a towering dome of green among a hundred pinnacles of grey and rust-red crags. At dawn the summit of the mountain has an eagle eye for the far Venetian boundary and the barrier of the Apennines; but with sunrise come the mists. The vast brown level is seen narrowing in; the Ticino and the Sesia waters, nearest, quiver on the air like sleepy lakes; the plain is engulphed up to the high ridges of the distant Southern mountain range, which lie stretched to a faint cloud-like line, in shape like a solitary monster of old seas crossing the Deluge. Long arms of vapour stretch across the urn-like valleys, and gradually thickening and swelling upward, enwrap the scored bodies of the ashen-faced peaks and the pastures of

Page 1477

the green mountain, till the heights become islands over a forgotten earth. Bells of herds down the hidden run of the sweet grasses, and a continuous leaping of its rivulets, give the Motterone a voice of youth and homeliness amid that stern company of Titan-heads, for whom the hawk and the vulture cry. The storm has beaten at them until they have got the aspect of the storm. They take colour from sunlight, and are joyless in colour as in shade. When the lower world is under pushing steam, they wear the look of the revolted sons of Time, fast chained before scornful heaven in an iron peace. Day at last brings vigorous fire; arrows of light pierce the mist-wreaths, the dancing draperies, the floors of vapour; and the mountain of piled pasturages is seen with its foot on the shore of Lago Maggiore. Down an extreme gulf the full sunlight, as if darting on a jewel in the deeps, seizes the blue-green lake with its isles. The villages along the darkly-wooded borders of the lake show white as clustered swans; here and there a tented boat is visible, shooting from terraces of vines, or hanging on its shadow. Monte Boscero is unveiled; the semicircle of the Piedmontese and the Swiss peaks, covering Lake Orta, behind, on along the Ticinese and the Grisons, leftward toward and beyond the Lugano hills, stand bare in black and grey and rust-red and purple. You behold a burnished realm of mountain and plain beneath the royal sun of Italy. In the foreground it shines hard as the lines of an irradiated Cellini shield. Farther away, over middle ranges that are soft and clear, it melts, confusing the waters with hot rays, and the forests with darkness, to where, wavering in and out of view like flying wings, and shadowed like wings of archangels with rose and with orange and with violet, silverwhite Alps are seen. You might take them for mystical streaming torches on the border-ground between vision and fancy. They lean as in a great flight forward upon Lombardy.

The curtain of an early autumnal morning was everywhere lifted around the Motterone, save for one milky strip of cloud that lay lizard-like across the throat of Monte Boscero facing it, when a party of five footfarers, who had met from different points of ascent some way below, and were climbing the mountain together, stood upon the cropped herbage of the second plateau, and stopped to eye the landscape; possibly also to get their breath. They were Italians. Two were fair-haired muscular men, bronzed by the sun and roughly bearded, bearing the stamp of breed of one or other of the hill-cities under the Alps. A third looked a sturdy soldier, squareset and hard of feature, for whom beauties of scenery had few awakening charms. The remaining couple were an old man and a youth, upon whose shoulder the veteran leaned, and with a whimsical turn of head and eye, indicative of some playful cast of mind, poured out his remarks upon the objects in sight, and chuckled to himself, like one who has learnt the necessity to appreciate his

Page 1478

own humour if he is disposed to indulge it. He was carelessly wrapped about in long loose woollen stuff, but the youth was dressed like a Milanese cavalier of the first quality, and was evidently one who would have been at home in the fashionable Corso. His face was of the sweetest virile Italian beauty. The head was long, like a hawk's, not too lean, and not sharply ridged from a rapacious beak, but enough to show characteristics of eagerness and promptitude. His eyes were darkest blue, the eyebrows and long disjoining eyelashes being very dark over them, which made their colour precious. The nose was straight and forward from the brows; a fluent black moustache ran with the curve of the upper lip, and lost its line upon a smooth olive cheek. The upper lip was firmly supported by the under, and the chin stood freely out from a fine neck and throat.

After a space an Austrian war-steamer was discerned puffing out of the harbour of Laveno.

"That will do," said the old man. "Carlo, thou son of Paolo, we will stump upward once more. Tell me, hulloa, sir! are the best peaches doomed to entertain vile, domiciliary, parasitical insects? I ask you, does nature exhibit motherly regard, or none, for the regions of the picturesque? None, I say. It is an arbitrary distinction of our day. To complain of the intrusion of that black-yellow flag and foul smoke-line on the lake underneath us is preposterous, since, as you behold, the heavens make no protestation. Let us up. There is comfort in exercise, even for an ancient creature such as I am. This mountain is my brother, and flatters me not—I am old."

"Take my arm, dear Agostino," said the youth.

"Never, my lad, until I need it. On, ahead of me, goat! chamois! and teach me how the thing used to be done in my time. Old legs must be the pupils of young ones mark that piece of humility, and listen with respectfulness to an old head by-and-by."

It was the autumn antecedent to that memorable Spring of the great Italian uprising, when, though for a tragic issue, the people of Italy first felt and acted as a nation, and Charles Albert, called the Sword of Italy, aspired, without comprehension of the passion of patriotism by which it was animated, to lead it quietly into the fold of his Piedmontese kingship.

There is not an easier or a pleasanter height to climb than the Motterone, if, in Italian heat, you can endure the disappointment of seeing the summit, as you ascend, constantly flit away to a farther station. It seems to throw its head back, like a laughing senior when children struggle up for kissings. The party of five had come through the vines from Stresa and from Baveno. The mountain was strange to them, and they had already reckoned twice on having the topmost eminence in view, when reaching it they found themselves on a fresh plateau, traversed by wild water-courses, and browsed by Alpine herds; and again the green dome

Page 1479

was distant. They came to the highest chalet, where a hearty wiry young fellow, busily employed in making cheese, invited them to the enjoyment of shade and fresh milk. “For the sake of these adolescents, who lose much and require much, let it be so,” said Agostino gravely, and not without some belief that he consented to rest on behalf of his companions. They allowed the young mountaineer to close the door, and sat about his fire like sagacious men. When cooled and refreshed, Agostino gave the signal for departure, and returned thanks for hospitality. Money was not offered and not expected. As they were going forth the mountaineer accompanied them to the step on the threshold, and with a mysterious eagerness in his eyes, addressed Agostino.

“Signore, is it true?—the king marches?”

“Who is the king, my friend?” returned Agostino. “If he marches out of his dominions, the king confers a blessing on his people perchance.”

“Our king, signore!” The mountaineer waved his finger as from Novara toward Milan.

Agostino seemed to awaken swiftly from his disguise of an absolute gravity. A red light stood in his eyeballs, as if upon a fiery answer. The intemperate fit subsided. Smoothing dawn his mottled grey beard with quieting hands, he took refuge in his habitual sententious irony.

“My friend, I am not a hare in front of the king, nor am I a ram in the rear of him: I fly him not, neither do I propel him. So, therefore, I cannot predict the movements of the king. Will the wind blow from the north to-morrow, think you?”

The mountaineer sent a quick gaze up the air, as to descry signs.

“Who knows?” Agostino continued, though not playing into the smiles of his companions; “the wind will blow straight thither where there is a vacuum; and all that we can state of the king is, that there is a positive vacuum here. It would be difficult to predict the king’s movements save by such weighty indications.”

He laid two fingers hard against the rib which shields the heart. It had become apparently necessary for the speaker to relieve a mind surcharged with bile at the mention of the king; for, having done, he rebuked with an amazed frown the indiscretion of Carlo, who had shouted, “The Carbonaro king!”

“Carlo, my son, I will lean on your arm. On your mouth were better,” Agostino added, under his voice, as they moved on.

“Oh, but,” Carlo remonstrated, “let us trust somebody. Milan has made me sick of late. I like the look of that fellow.”

“You allow yourself, my Carlo, an immense indulgence in permitting yourself to like the look of anything. Now, listen—Viva Carlo Alberto!”

The old man rang out the loyal salutation spiritedly, and awoke a prompt response from the mountaineer, who sounded his voice wide in the keen upper air.

“There’s the heart of that fellow!” said Agostino. “He has but one idea—his king! If you confound it, he takes you for an enemy. These free mountain breezes intoxicate you. You would embrace the king himself if you met him here.”

Page 1480

“I swear I would never be guilty of the bad joke of crying a ‘Viva’ to him anywhere upon earth,” Carlo replied. “I offend you,” he said quickly.

The old man was smiling.

“Agostino Balderini is too notoriously a bad joker to be offended by the comments of the perfectly sensible, boy of mine! My limbs were stiff, and the first three steps from a place of rest reminded me acutely of the king’s five years of hospitality. He has saved me from all fatigue so long, that the necessity to exercise these old joints of mine touched me with a grateful sense of his royal bounty. I had from him a chair, a bed, and a table: shelter from sun and from all silly chatter. Now I want a chair or a bed. I should like to sit at a table; the sun burns me; my ears are afflicted. I cry ‘Viva!’ to him that I may be in harmony with the coming chorus of Italy, which I prophetically hear. That young fellow, in whom you confide so much, speaks for his country. We poor units must not be discordant. No! Individual opinion, my Carlo, is discord when there is a general delirium. The tide arriving, let us make the best of the tide. My voice is wisdom. We shall have to follow this king!”

“Shall we!” uttered one behind them gruffly. “When I see this king swallow one ounce of Austrian lead, I shall not be sorry to follow him!”

“Right, my dear Ugo,” said Agostino, turning round to him; “and I will then compose his hymn of praise. He has swallowed enough of Austrian bread. He took an Austrian wife to his bed. Who knows? he may some day declare a preference for Austrian lead. But we shall have to follow him, or stay at home drivelling.”

Agostino raised his eyes, that were glazed with the great heat of his frame.

“Oh, that, like our Dante, I had lived in the days when souls were damned! Then would I uplift another shout, believe me! As things go now, we must allow the traitor to hope for his own future, and we simply shrug. We cannot plant him neck-deep for everlasting in a burning marl, and hear him howling. We have no weapons in these times—none! Our curses come back to roost. This is one of the serious facts of the century, and controls violent language. What! are you all gathered about me? Oracles must be moving, too. There’s no rest even for them, when they have got a mountain to scale.”

A cry, “He is there!” and “Do you see him?” burst from the throats of men surrounding Agostino.

Looking up to the mountain’s top, they had perceived the figure of one who stood with folded arms, sufficiently near for the person of an expected friend to be descried. They waved their hats, and Carlo shot ahead. The others trod after him more deliberately, but in glad excitement, speculating on the time which this sixth member of the party, who were engaged to assemble at a certain hour of the morning upon yonder height, had

taken to reach the spot from Omegna, or Orta, or Pella, and rejoicing that his health should be so stout in despite of his wasting labours under city smoke.

Page 1481

“Yes, health!” said Agostino. “Is it health, do you think? It’s the heart of the man! and a heart with a mill-stone about it—a heart to breed a country from! There stands the man who has faith in Italy, though she has been lying like a corpse for centuries. God bless him! He has no other comfort. Viva l’Italia!”

The exclamation went up, and was acknowledged by him on the eminence overhanging them; but at a repetition of it his hand smote the air sideways. They understood the motion, and were silent; while he, until Carlo breathed his name in his hearing, eyed the great scene stedfastly, with the absorbing simple passion of one who has endured long exile, and finds his clustered visions of it confronting the strange, beloved, visible life:—-the lake in the arms of giant mountains: the far-spreading hazy plain; the hanging forests; the pointed crags; the gleam of the distant rose-shadowed snows that stretch for ever like an airy host, mystically clad, and baffling the eye as with the motions of a flight toward the underlying purple land.

CHAPTER II

He was a man of middle stature, thin, and even frail, as he stood defined against the sky; with the complexion of the student, and the student’s aspect. The attentive droop of his shoulders and head, the straining of the buttoned coat across his chest, the air as of one who waited and listened, which distinguished his figure, detracted from the promise of other than contemplative energy, until his eyes were fairly seen and felt. That is, until the observer became aware that those soft and large dark meditative eyes had taken hold of him. In them lay no abstracted student’s languor, no reflex burning of a solitary lamp; but a quiet grappling force engaged the penetrating look. Gazing upon them, you were drawn in suddenly among the thousand whirring wheels of a capacious and a vigorous mind, that was both reasoning and prompt, keen of intellect, acting throughout all its machinery, and having all under full command: an orbed mind, supplying its own philosophy, and arriving at the sword-stroke by logical steps,—a mind much less supple than a soldier’s; anything but the mind of a Hamlet. The eyes were dark as the forest’s border is dark; not as night is dark. Under favourable lights their colour was seen to be a deep rich brown, like the chestnut, or more like the hazeledged sunset brown which lies upon our western rivers in the winter floods, when night begins to shadow them.

The side-view of his face was an expression of classic beauty rarely now to be beheld, either in classic lands or elsewhere. It was severe; the tender serenity of the full bow of the eyes relieved it. In profile they showed little of their intellectual quality, but what some might have thought a playful luminousness, and some a quick pulse of feeling. The chin was firm; on it, and on the upper lip, there was a clipped growth of black hair. The whole

Page 1482

visage widened upward from the chin, though not very markedly before it reached the broad-lying brows. The temples were strongly indented by the swelling of the forehead above them: and on both sides of the head there ran a pregnant ridge, such as will sometimes lift men a deplorable half inch above the earth we tread. If this man was a problem to others, he was none to himself; and when others called him an idealist, he accepted the title, reading himself, notwithstanding, as one who was less flighty than many philosophers and professedly practical teachers of his generation. He saw far, and he grasped ends beyond obstacles: he was nourished by sovereign principles; he despised material present interests; and, as I have said, he was less supple than a soldier. If the title of idealist belonged to him, we will not immediately decide that it was opprobrious. The idealized conception of stern truths played about his head certainly for those who knew and who loved it. Such a man, perceiving a devout end to be reached, might prove less scrupulous in his course, possibly, and less remorseful, than revolutionary Generals. His smile was quite unclouded, and came softly as a curve in water. It seemed to flow with, and to pass in and out of, his thoughts, to be a part of his emotion and his meaning when it shone transiently full. For as he had an orbed mind, so had he an orbed nature. The passions were absolutely in harmony with the intelligence. He had the English manner; a remarkable simplicity contrasting with the demonstrative outcries and gesticulations of his friends when they joined him on the height. Calling them each by name, he received their caresses and took their hands; after which he touched the old man's shoulder.

"Agostino, this has breathed you?"

"It has; it has, my dear and best one!" Agostino replied. "But here is a good market-place for air. Down below we have to scramble for it in the mire. The spies are stifling down below. I don't know my own shadow. I begin to think that I am important. Footing up a mountain corrects the notion somewhat. Yonder, I believe, I see the Grisons, where Freedom sits. And there's the Monte della Disgrazia. Carlo Alberto should be on the top of it, but he is invisible. I do not see that Unfortunate."

"No," said Carlo Ammiani, who chimed to his humour more readily than the rest, and affected to inspect the Grisons' peak through a diminutive opera-glass. "No, he is not there."

"Perhaps, my son, he is like a squirrel, and is careful to run up t'other side of the stem. For he is on that mountain; no doubt of it can exist even in the Boeotian mind of one of his subjects; myself, for example. It will be an effulgent fact when he gains the summit."

Page 1483

The others meantime had thrown themselves on the grass at the feet of their manifestly acknowledged leader, and looked up for Agostino to explode the last of his train of conceits. He became aware that the moment for serious talk had arrived, and bent his body, groaning loudly, and uttering imprecations against him whom he accused of being the promoter of its excruciating stiffness, until the ground relieved him of its weight. Carlo continued standing, while his eyes examined restlessly the slopes just surmounted by them, and occasionally the deep descent over the green-glowing Orta Lake. It was still early morning. The heat was tempered by a cool breeze that came with scents of thyme. They had no sight of human creature anywhere, but companionship of Alps and birds of upper air; and though not one of them seasoned the converse with an exclamation of joy and of blessings upon a place of free speech and safety, the thought was in their hunted bosoms, delicious as a woodland rivulet that sings only to the leaves overshadowing it.

They were men who had sworn to set a nation free,—free from the foreigner, to begin with.

(He who tells this tale is not a partisan; he would deal equally toward all. Of strong devotion, of stout nobility, of unswerving faith and self-sacrifice, he must approve; and when these qualities are displayed in a contest of forces, the wisdom of means employed, or of ultimate views entertained, may be questioned and condemned; but the men themselves may not be.)

These men had sworn their oath, knowing the meaning of it, and the nature of the Fury against whom men who stand voluntarily pledged to any great resolve must thenceforward match themselves. Many of the original brotherhood had fallen, on the battle-field, on the glacis, or in the dungeon. All present, save the youthfuller Carlo, had suffered. Imprisonment and exile marked the Chief. Ugo Corte, of Bergamo, had seen his family swept away by the executioner and pecuniary penalties. Thick scars of wounds covered the body and disfigured the face of Giulio Bandinelli. Agostino had crawled but half-a-year previously out of his Piedmontese cell, and Marco Sana, the Brescian, had in such a place tasted of veritable torture. But if the calamity of a great oath was upon them, they had now in their faithful prosecution of it the support which it gives. They were unwearied; they had one object; the mortal anguish they had gone through had left them no sense for regrets. Life had become the field of an endless engagement to them; and as in battle one sees beloved comrades struck down, and casts but a glance at their prostrate forms, they heard the mention of a name, perchance, and with a word or a sign told what was to be said of a passionate glorious heart at rest, thanks to Austrian or vassal-Sardinian mercy.

So they lay there and discussed their plans.

“From what quarter do you apprehend the surprise?” Ugo Corte glanced up from the maps and papers spread along the grass to question Carlo ironically, while the latter

appeared to be keeping rigid watch over the safety of the position. Carlo puffed the smoke of a cigarette rapidly, and Agostino replied for him:—“From the quarter where the best donkeys are to be had.”

Page 1484

It was supposed that Agostino had resumed the habit usually laid aside by him for the discussion of serious matters, and had condescended to father a coarse joke; but his eyes showed no spark of their well-known twinkling solicitation for laughter, and Carlo spoke in answer gravely:—“From Baveno it will be.”

“From Baveno! They might as well think to surprise hawks from Baveno. Keep watch, dear Ammiani; a good start in a race is a kick from the Gods.”

With that, Corte turned to the point of his finger on the map. He conceived it possible that Carlo Ammiani, a Milanese, had reason to anticipate the approach of people by whom he, or they, might not wish to be seen. Had he studied Carlo’s face he would have been reassured. The brows of the youth were open, and his eyes eager with expectation, that showed the flying forward of the mind, and nothing of knotted distrust or wary watchfulness. Now and then he would move to the other side of the mountain, and look over upon Orta; or with the opera-glass clasped in one hand beneath an arm, he stopped in his sentinel-march, frowning reflectively at a word put to him, as if debating within upon all the bearings of it; but the only answer that came was a sharp assent, given after the manner of one who dealt conscientiously in definite affirmatives; and again the glass was in requisition. Marco Sana was a fighting soldier, who stated what he knew, listened, and took his orders. Giulio Bandinelli was also little better than the lieutenant in an enterprise. Corte, on the other hand, had the conspirator’s head,—-a head like a walnut, bulging above the ears,—and the man was of a sallying temper. He lay there putting bit by bit of his plot before the Chief for his approval, with a careful construction, that upon the expression of any doubt of its working smoothly in the streets of Milan, caused him to shout a defensive, “But Carlo says yes!”

This uniform character of Ammiani’s replies, and the smile of Agostino on hearing them, had begun to strike the attention of the soldierly Marco Sana. He ran his hand across his shorn head, and puffed his burnt red mole-spotted cheeks, with a sidelong stare at the abstracted youth, “Said yes!” he remarked. “He might say no, for a diversion. He has yeses enough in his pay to earn a Cardinal’s hat. ‘Is Milan preparing to rise?’ ‘Yes.’—’Is she ready for the work?’ ’Yes.’—’Is the garrison on its guard?’ ‘Yes.’—’Have you seen Barto Rizzo?’ ’Yes.’—’Have the people got the last batch of arms?’ ’Yes.’—-And ‘Yes,’ the secret is well kept; ‘Yes,’ Barto Rizzo is steadily getting them together. We may rely on him: Carlo is his intimate friend: Yes, Yes:—There’s a regiment of them at your service, and you may shuffle them as you will. This is the help we get from Milan: a specimen of what we may expect!”

Sana had puffed himself hot, and now blew for coolness.

Page 1485

“You are,”—Agostino addressed him,—“philosophically totally wrong, my Marco. Those affirmatives are fat worms for the catching of fish. They are the real pretty fruit of the Hesperides. Personally, you or I may be irritated by them: but I’m not sure they don’t please us. Were Carlo a woman, of course he should learn to say no;—as he will now if I ask him, Is she in sight? I won’t do it, you know; but as a man and a diplomatist, it strikes me that he can’t say yes too often.”

“Answer me, Count Ammiani, and do me the favour to attend to these trifles for the space of two minutes,” said Corte. “Have you seen Barto Rizzo? Is he acting for Medole?”

“As mole, as reindeer, and as bloody northern Raven!” ejaculated Agostino: “perhaps to be jackal, by-and-by. But I do not care to abuse our Barto Rizzo, who is a prodigy of nature, and has, luckily for himself, embraced a good cause, for he is certain to be hanged if he is not shot. He has the prophetic owl’s face. I have always a fancy of his hooting his own death-scrip. I wrong our Barto:—Medole would be the jackal, if it lay between the two.”

Carlo Ammiani had corrected Corte’s manner to him by a complacent readiness to give him distinct replies. He then turned and set off at full speed down the mountain.

“She is sighted at last,” Agostino murmured, and added rapidly some spirited words under his breath to the Chief, whose chin was resting on his doubled hand.

Corte, Marco, and Giulio were full of denunciations against Milan and the Milanese, who had sent a boy to their councils. It was Brescia and Bergamo speaking in their jealousy, but Carlo’s behaviour was odd, and called for reproof. He had come as the deputy of Milan to meet the Chief, and he had not spoken a serious word on the great business of the hour, though the plot had been unfolded, the numbers sworn to, and Brescia, and Bergamo, and Cremona, and Venice had spoken upon all points through their emissaries, the two latter cities being represented by Sana and Corte.

“We’ve had enough of this lad,” said Corte. “His laundress is following him with a change of linen, I suppose, or it’s a scent-bottle. He’s an admirable representative of the Lombard metropolis!” Corte drawled out the words in prodigious mimicry. “If Milan has nothing better to send than such a fellow, we’ll finish without her, and shame the beast that she is. She has been always a treacherous beast!”

“Poor Milan!” sighed the Chief; “she lies under the beak of the vulture, and has twice been devoured; but she has a soul: she proves it. Ammiani, too, will prove his value. I have no doubt of him. As to boys, or even girls, you know my faith is in the young. Through them Italy lives. What power can teach devotion to the old?”

“I thank you, signore,” Agostino gesticulated.

“But, tell me, when did you learn it, my friend?”

In answer, Agostino lifted his hand a little boy’s height from the earth.

Page 1486

The old man then said: “I am afraid, my dear Corte, you must accept the fellowship of a girl as well as of a boy upon this occasion. See! our Carlo! You recognize that dancing speck below there?—he has joined himself—the poor lad wishes he could, I dare swear!—to another bigger speck, which is verily a lady: who has joined herself to a donkey—a common habit of the sex, I am told; but I know them not. That lady, signor Ugo, is the signorina Vittoria. You stare? But, I tell you, the game cannot go on without her; and that is why I have permitted you to knock the ball about at your own pleasure for these forty minutes.”

Corte drew his under-lip on his reddish stubble moustache. “Are we to have women in a conference?” he asked from eye to eye.

“Keep to the number, Ugo; and moreover, she is not a woman, but a noble virgin. I discern a distinction, though you may not. The Vestal’s fire burns straight.”

“Who is she?”

“It rejoices me that she should be so little known. All the greater the illumination when her light shines out! The signorina Vittoria is a cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards.”

“Ah! that completes it.” Corte rose to his feet with an air of desperation. “We require to be refreshed with quavers and crescendos and trillets! Who ever knew a singer that cared an inch of flesh for her country? Money, flowers, flattery, vivas! but, money! money! and Austrian as good as Italian. I’ve seen the accursed wenches bow gratefully for Austrian bouquets:—bow? ay, and more; and when the Austrian came to them red with our blood. I spit upon their polluted cheeks! They get us an ill name wherever they go. These singers have no country. One—I knew her—betrayed Filippo Mastalone, and sang the night of the day he was shot. I heard the white demon myself. I could have taken her long neck till she twisted like a serpent and hissed. May heaven forgive me for not levelling a pistol at her head! If God, my friends, had put the thought into my brain that night!”

A flush had deadened Corte’s face to the hue of nightshade.

“You thunder in a clear atmosphere, my Ugo,” returned the old man, as he fell back calmly at full length.

“And who is this signorina Vittoria?” cried Corte.

“A cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards, as I have already remarked: of La Scala, let me add, if you hold it necessary.”

“And what does she do here?”

“Her object in coming, my friend? Her object in coming is, first, to make her reverence to one who happens to be among us this day; and secondly, but principally, to submit a proposition to him and to us.”

“What’s her age?” Corte sneered.

“According to what calendar would you have it reckoned? Wisdom would say sixty: Father Chronos might divide that by three, and would get scarce a month in addition, hungry as he is for her, and all of us! But Minerva’s handmaiden has no age. And now, dear Ugo, you have your opportunity to denounce her as a convicted screecher by night. Do so.”

Page 1487

Corte turned his face to the Chief, and they spoke together for some minutes: after which, having had names of noble devoted women, dead and living, cited to him, in answer to brutal bellowings against that sex, and hearing of the damsel under debate as one who was expected and was welcome, he flung himself upon the ground again, inviting calamity by premature resignation. Giulio Bandinelli stretched his hand for Carlo's glass, and spied the approach of the signorina.

"Dark," he said.

"A jewel of that complexion," added Agostino, by way of comment.

"She has scorching eyes."

"She may do mischief; she may do mischief; let it be only on the right Side!"

"She looks fat."

"She sits doubled up and forward, don't you see, to relieve the poor donkey. You, my Giulio, would call a swan fat if the neck were not always on the stretch."

"By Bacchus! what a throat she has!"

"And well interjected, Giulio! It runs down like wine, like wine, to the little ebbing and flowing wave! Away with the glass, my boy! You must trust to all that's best about you to spy what's within. She makes me young—young!"

Agostino waved his hand in the form of a salute to her on the last short ascent. She acknowledged it gracefully; and talking at intervals to Carlo Ammiani, who footed briskly by her side, she drew by degrees among the eyes fixed on her, some of which were not gentle; but hers were for the Chief, at whose feet, when dismounted by Ammiani's solicitous aid, she would have knelt, had he not seized her by her elbows, and put his lips to her cheek.

"The signorina Vittoria, gentlemen," said Agostino.

CHAPTER III

The old man had introduced her with much of the pride of a father displaying some noble child of his for the first time to admiring friends.

"She is one of us," he pursued; "a daughter of Italy! My daughter also; is it not so?"

He turned to her as for a confirmation. The signorina pressed his fingers. She was a little intimidated, and for the moment seemed shy and girlish. The shade of her broad straw hat partly concealed her vivid features.

“Now, gentlemen, if you please, the number is complete, and we may proceed to business,” said Agostino, formally but as he conducted the signorina to place her at the feet of the Chief, she beckoned to her servant, who was holding the animal she had ridden. He came up to her, and presented himself in something of a military posture of attention to her commands. These were that he should take the poor brute to water, and then lead him back to Baveno, and do duty in waiting upon her mother. The first injunction was received in a decidedly acquiescent manner. On hearing the second, which directed his abandonment of his post of immediate watchfulness over her safety, the man flatly objected with a “Signorina, no.”

Page 1488

He was a handsome bright-eyed fellow, with a soldier's frame and a smile as broad and beaming as laughter, indicating much of that mixture of acuteness, and simplicity which is a characteristic of the South, and means no more than that the extreme vivacity of the blood exceeds at times that of the brain.

A curious frown of half-amused astonishment hung on the signorina's face.

"When I tell you to go, Beppo!"

At once the man threw out his fingers, accompanied by an amazingly voluble delivery of his reasons for this revolt against her authority. Among other things, he spoke of an oath sworn by him to a foreign gentleman, his patron,—for whom, and for whomsoever he loved, he was ready to pour forth his heart's blood,—to the effect that he would never quit her side when she left the roof of her house.

"You see, Beppo," she remonstrated, "I am among friends."

Beppo gave a sweeping bow, but remained firm where he stood. Ammiani cast a sharp hard look at the man.

"Do you hear the signorina's orders?"

"I hear them, signore."

"Will you obey them?"

She interposed. "He must not hear quick words. Beppo is only showing his love for his master and for me. But you are wrong in this case, my Beppo. You shall give me your protection when I require it; and now, you are sensible, and must understand that it is not wanted. I tell you to go."

Beppo read the eyes of his young mistress.

"Signorina,"—he stooped forward mysteriously,—"signorina, that fellow is in Baveno. I saw him this morning."

"Good, good. And now go, my friend."

"The signor Agostino," he remarked loudly, to attract the old man; "the signor Agostino may think proper to advise you."

"The signor Agostino will laugh at nothing that you say to-day, Beppo. You will obey me. Go at once," she repeated, seeing him on tiptoe to gain Agostino's attention.

Beppo knew by her eyes that her ears were locked against him; and, though she spoke softly, there was an imperiousness in her voice not to be disregarded. He showed plainly by the lost rigidity of his attitude that he was beaten and perplexed. Further expostulations being disregarded, he turned his head to look at the poor panting beast under his charge, and went slowly up to him: they walked off together, a crest-fallen pair.

“You have gained the victory, signorina,” said Ugo Corte.

She replied, smiling, “My poor Beppo! it’s not difficult to get the best of those who love us.”

“Ha!” cried Agostino; “here is one of their secrets, Carlo. Take heed of it, my boy. We shall have queens when kings are fossils, mark me!”

Ammiani muttered a courtly phrase, whereat Corte yawned in very grim fashion.

Page 1489

The signorina had dropped to the grass, at a short step from the Chief, to whom her face was now seriously given. In Ammiani's sight she looked a dark Madonna, with the sun shining bright gold through the edges of the summer hat, thrown back from her head. The full and steady contemplative eyes had taken their fixed expression, after a vanishing affectionate gaze of an instant cast upon Agostino. Attentive as they were, light played in them like water. The countenance was vivid in repose. She leaned slightly forward, clasping the wrist of one hand about her knee, and the sole of one little foot showed from under her dress.

Deliberately, but with no attempt at dramatic impressiveness, the Chief began to speak. He touched upon the condition of Italy, and the new lilt animating her young men and women. "I have heard many good men jeer," he said, "at our taking women to our counsel, accepting their help, and putting a great stake upon their devotion. You have read history, and you know what women can accomplish. They may be trained, equally as we are, to venerate the abstract idea of country, and be a sacrifice to it. Without their aid, and the fire of a fresh life being kindled in their bosoms, no country that has lain like ours in the death-trance can revive. In the death-trance, I say, for Italy does not die!"

"True," said other voices.

"We have this belief in the eternal life of our country, and the belief is the life itself. But let no strong man among us despise the help of women. I have seen our cause lie desperate, and those who despaired of it were not women. Women kept the flame alive. They worship in the temple of the cause."

Ammiani's eyes dwelt fervidly upon the signorina. Her look, which was fastened upon the Chief, expressed a mind that listened to strange matter concerning her very little. But when the plans for the rising of the Bergamascs and Brescians, the Venetians, the Bolognese, the Milanese, all the principal Northern cities, were recited, with a practical emphasis thrown upon numbers, upon the readiness of the organized bands, the dispositions of the leaders, and the amount of resistance to be expected at the various points indicated for the outbreak, her hands disjoined, and she stretched her fingers to the grass, supporting herself so, while her extended chin and animated features told how eagerly her spirit drank at positive springs, and thirsted for assurance of the coming storm.

"It is decided that Milan gives the signal," said the Chief; and a light, like the reflection of a beacon-fire upon the night, flashed over her.

Page 1490

He was pursuing, when Ugo Corte smote the air with his nervous fingers, crying out passionately, “Bunglers! are we again to wait for them, and hear that fifteen patriots have stabbed a Croat corporal, and wrestled hotly with a lieutenant of the guard? I say they are bunglers. They never mean the thing. Fifteen! There were just three Milanese among the last lot—the pick of the city; and the rest were made up of Trentini, and our lads from Bergamo and Brescia; and the order from the Council was, ’Go and do the business!’ which means, ’Go and earn your ounce of Austrian lead.’ They went, and we gave fifteen true men for one poor devil of a curst tight blue-leg. They can play the game on if we give them odds like that. Milan burns bad powder, and goes off like a drugged pistol. It’s a nest of bunglers, and may it be razed! We could do without it, and well! If it were a family failing, should not I too be trusting them? My brother was one of the fifteen who marched out as targets to try the skill of those hell-plumed Tyrolese: and they did it thoroughly—shot him straight here.” Corte struck his chest. “He gave a jump and a cry. Was it a viva for Milan? They swear that it was, and they can’t translate from a living mouth, much more from a dead one; but I know my Niccolo better. I have kissed his lips a thousand times, and I know the poor boy meant, ‘Scorn and eternal distrust of such peddling conspirators as these!’ I can deal with traitors, but these flash-in-the-pan plotters—these shaking, jelly-bodied patriots!—trust to them again? Rather draw lots for another fifteen to bare their breasts and bandage their eyes, and march out in the grey morning, while the stupid Croat corporal goes on smoking his lumpy pipe! We shall hear that Milan is moving; we shall rise; we shall be hot at it; and the news will come that Milan has merely yawned and turned over to sleep on the other side. Twice she has done this trick, and the garrison there has sent five regiments to finish us—-teach us to sleep soundly likewise! I say, let it be Bergamo; or be it Brescia, if you like; or Venice: she is ready. You trust to Milan, and you are fore-doomed. I would swear it with this hand in the flames. She give the signal? Shut your eyes, cross your hands flat on your breasts: you are dead men if you move. She lead the way? Spin on your heels, and you have followed her!”

Corte had spoken in a thick difficult voice, that seemed to require the aid of his vehement gestures to pour out as it did like a water-pipe in a hurricane of rain. He ceased, red almost to blackness, and knotted his arms, that were big as the cable of a vessel. Not a murmur followed his speech. The word was, given to the Chief, and he resumed:—“You have a personal feeling in this case, Ugo. You have not heard me. I came through Paris. A rocket will soon shoot up from Paris that will be a signal for Christendom. The keen French wit is sick of its compromise-king. All Europe is

Page 1491

in convulsions in a few months: to-morrow it may be. The elements are in the hearts of the people, and nothing will contain them. We have sown them to reap them. The sowing asks for persistency; but the reaping demands skill and absolute truthfulness. We have now one of those occasions coming which are the flowers to be plucked by resolute and worthy hands: they are the tests of our sincerity. This time now rapidly approaching will try us all, and we must be ready for it. If we have believed in it, we stand prepared. If we have conceived our plan of action in purity of heart, we shall be guided to discern the means which may serve us. You will know speedily what it is that has prompted you to move. If passion blindfolds you, if you are foiled by a prejudice, I also shall know. My friend, the nursing of a single antipathy is a presumption that your motive force is personal—whether the thirst for vengeance or some internal union of a hundred indistinct little fits of egoism. I have seen brave and even noble men fail at the ordeal of such an hour: not fail in courage, not fail in the strength of their desire; that was the misery for them! They failed because midway they lost the vision to select the right instruments put in our way by heaven. That vision belongs solely to such as have clean and disciplined hearts. The hope in the bosom of a man whose fixed star is Humanity becomes a part of his blood, and is extinguished when his blood flows no more. To conquer him, the principle of life must be conquered. And he, my friend, will use all, because he serves all. I need not touch on Milan."

The signorina drew in her breath quickly, as if in this abrupt close she had a revelation of the Chief's whole meaning, and was startled by the sudden unveiling of his mastery. Her hands hung loose; her figure was tremulous. A murmur from Corte jarred within her like a furious discord, but he had not offended by refusing to disclaim his error, and had simply said in a gruff acquiescent way, "Proceed." Her sensations of surprise at the singular triumph of the Chief made her look curiously into the faces of the other men; but the pronouncing of her name engaged her attention.

"Your first night is the night of the fifteenth of next month?"

"It is, signore," she replied, abashed to find herself speaking with him who had so moved her.

"There is no likelihood of a postponement?"

"I am certain, signore, that I shall be ready."

"There are no squabbles of any serious kind among the singers?"

A soft dimple played for a moment on her lips. "I have heard something."

"Among the women?"

"Yes, and the men."

“But the men do not concern you?”

“No, signore. Except that the women twist them.”

Agostino chuckled audibly. The Chief resumed:

“You believe, notwithstanding, that all will go well? The opera will be acted; and you will appear in it?”

Page 1492

“Yes, signore. I know one who has determined on it, and can do it.”

“Good. The opera is Camilla?”

She was answering with an affirmative, when Agostino broke in,—“Camilla! And honour to whom honour is due! Let Caesar claim the writing of the libretto, if it be Caesar’s! It has passed the censorship, signed Agostino Balderini—a disaffected person out of Piedmont, rendered tame and fangless by a rigorous imprisonment. The sources of the tale, O ye grave Signori Tedeschi? The sources are partly to be traced to a neat little French vaudeville, very sparkling—Camille, or the Husband Asserted; and again to a certain Chronicle that may be mediaeval, may be modern, and is just, as the great Shakespeare would say, ’as you like it.’”

Agostino recited some mock verses, burlesquing the ordinary libretti, and provoked loud laughter from Carlo Ammiani, who was familiar enough with the run of their nonsense.

“Camilla is the bride of Camillo. I give to her all the brains, which is a modern idea, quite! He does all the mischief, which is possibly mediaeval. They have both an enemy, which is mediaeval and modern. None of them know exactly what they are about; so there you have the modern, the mediaeval, and the antique, all in one. Finally, my friends, Camilla is something for you to digest at leisure. The censorship swallowed it at a gulp. Never was bait so handsomely taken! At present I have the joy of playing my fish. On the night of the fifteenth I land him. Camilla has a mother. Do you see? That mother is reported, is generally conceived, as dead. Do you see further? Camilla’s first song treats of a dream she has had of that mother. Our signorina shall not be troubled to favour you with a taste of it, or, by Bacchus and his Indian nymphs, I should speedily behold you jumping like peas in a pan, like trout on a bank! The earth would be hot under you, verily! As I was remarking, or meant to be, Camilla and her husband disagree, having agreed to. ’Tis a plot to deceive Count Orso—aha? You are acquainted with Count Orso! He is Camilla’s antenuptial guardian. Now you warm to it! In that condition I leave you. Perhaps my child here will give you a taste of her voice. The poetry does much upon reflection, but it has to ripen within you—a matter of time. Wed this voice to the poetry, and it finds passage ’twixt your ribs, as on the point of a driven blade. Do I cry the sweetness and the coolness of my melons? Not I! Try them.”

The signorina put her hand out for the scroll he was unfolding, and cast her eyes along bars of music, while Agostino called a “Silenzio tutti!” She sang one verse, and stopped for breath.

Between her dismayed breathings she said to the Chief:—“Believe me, signore, I can be trusted to sing when the time comes.”

Page 1493

“Sing on, my blackbird—my viola!” said Agostino. “We all trust you. Look at Colonel Corte, and take him for Count Orso. Take me for pretty Camillo. Take Marco for Michiela; Giulio for Leonardo; Carlo for Cupid. Take the Chief for the audience. Take him for a frivolous public. Ah, my Pippo!” (Agostino laughed aside to him). “Let us lead off with a lighter piece; a trifle-tra-la-la! and then let the frisky piccolo be drowned in deep organ notes, as on some occasions in history the people overrun certain puling characters. But that, I confess, is an illustration altogether out of place, and I’ll simply jot it down in my notebook.”

Agostino had talked on to let her gain confidence. When he was silent she sang from memory. It was a song of flourishes: one of those be-flowered arias in which the notes flicker and leap like young flames. Others might have sung it; and though it spoke favourably of her aptitude and musical education, and was of a quality to enrapture easy, merely critical audiences, it won no applause from these men. The effect produced by it was exhibited in the placid tolerance shown by the uplifting of Ugo Corte’s eyebrows, which said, “Well, here’s a voice, certainly.” His subsequent look added, “Is this what we have come hither to hear?”

Vittoria saw the look. “Am I on my trial before you?” she thought; and the thought nerved her throat. She sang in strong and grave contralto tones, at first with shut eyes. The sense of hostility left her, and left her soul free, and she raised them. The song was of Camilla dying. She pardons the treacherous hand, commending her memory and the strength of her faith to her husband:—

> “Beloved, I am quickly out of sight:
> I pray that you will love more than my dust.
>
> Were death defeat, much weeping would be right;
> ’Tis victory when it leaves surviving trust.
> You will not find me save when you forget
> Earth’s feebleness, and come to faith, my friend,
> For all Humanity doth owe a debt
> To all Humanity, until the end.”

Agostino glanced at the Chief to see whether his ear had caught note of his own language.

The melancholy severity of that song of death changed to a song of prophetic triumph. The signorina stood up. Camilla has thrown off the mask, and has sung the name “Italia!” At the recurrence of it the men rose likewise.

> “Italia, Italia, shall be free!”

Vittoria gave the inspiration of a dying voice: the conquest of death by an eternal truth seemed to radiate from her. Voice and features were as one expression of a rapture of belief built upon pathetic trustfulness.

“Italia, Italia shall be free!”

Page 1494

She seized the hearts of those hard and serious men as a wind takes the strong oak-trees, and rocks them on their knotted roots, and leaves them with the song of soaring among their branches. Italy shone about her; the lake, the plains, the peaks, and the shouldering flushed snowridges. Carlo Ammiani breathed as one who draws in fire. Grizzled Agostino glittered with suppressed emotion, like a frosted thorn-bush in the sunlight. Ugo Corte had his thick brows down, as a man who is reading iron matter. The Chief alone showed no sign beyond a half lifting of the hand, and a most luminous fixed observation of the fair young woman, from whom power was an emanation, free of effort. The gaze was sad in its thoughtfulness, such as our feelings translate of the light of evening.

She ceased, and he said, “You sing on the night of the fifteenth?”

“I do, signore.”

“It is your first appearance?”

She bent her head.

“And you will be prepared on that night to sing this song?”

“Yes, signore.”

“Save in the event of your being forbidden?”

“Unless you shall forbid me, I will sing it, signore.”

“Should they imprison you?—”

“If they shoot me I shall be satisfied to know that I have sung a song that cannot be forgotten.”

The Chief took her hand in a gentle grasp.

“Such as you will help to give our Italy freedom. You hold the sacred flame, and know you hold it in trust.”

“Friends,”—he turned to his companions,—“you have heard what will be the signal for Milan.”

CHAPTER IV

It was a surprise to all of them, save to Agostino Balderini, who passed his inspecting glance from face to face, marking the effect of the announcement. Corte gazed at her

heavily, but not altogether disapprovingly. Giulio Bandinelli and Marco Sana, though evidently astonished, and to some extent incredulous, listened like the perfectly trusty lieutenants in an enterprise which they were. But Carlo Ammiani stood horror-stricken. The blood had left his handsome young olive-hued face, and his eyes were on the signorina, large with amazement, from which they deepened to piteousness of entreaty.

“Signorina!—you! Can it be true? Do you know?—do you mean it?”

“What, signor Carlo?”

“This; will you venture to do such a thing?”

“Oh, will I venture? What can you think of me? It is my own request.”

“But, signorina, in mercy, listen and consider.”

Carlo turned impetuously to the Chief. “The signorina can’t know the danger she is running. She will be seized on the boards, and shut up between four walls before a man of us will be ready,—or more than one,” he added softly. “The house is sure to be packed for a first night; and the Polizia have a suspicion of her. She has been off her guard in the Conservatorio; she has talked

Page 1495

of a country called Italy; she has been indiscreet;—pardon, pardon, signorina! but it is true that she has spoken out from her noble heart. And this opera! Are they fools?—-they must see through it. It will never,—it can't possibly be reckoned on to appear. I knew that the signorina was heart and soul with us; but who could guess that her object was to sacrifice herself in the front rank,—to lead a forlorn hope! I tell you it's like a Pagan rite. You are positively slaying a victim. I beg you all to look at the case calmly!"

A burst of laughter checked him; for his seniors by many years could not hear such veteran's counsel from a hurried boy without being shrewdly touched by the humour of it, while one or two threw a particular irony into their tones.

"When we do slay a victim, we will come to you as our augur, my Carlo," said Agostino.

Corte was less gentle. As a Milanese and a mere youth Ammiani was antipathetic to Corte, who closed his laughter with a windy rattle of his lips, and a "pish!" of some emphasis.

Carlo was quick to give him a challenging frown.

"What is it?" Corte bent his head back, as if inquiringly.

"It's I who claim that question by right," said Carlo.

"You are a boy."

"I have studied war."

"In books."

"With brains, Colonel Corte."

"War is a matter of blows, my little lad."

"Let me inform you, signor Colonel, that war is not a game between bulls, to be played with the horns of the head."

"You are prepared to instruct me?" The fiery Bergamasc lifted his eyebrows.

"Nay, nay!" said Agostino. "Between us two first;" and he grasped Carlo's arm, saying in an underbreath, "Your last retort was too long-winded. In these conflicts you must be quick, sharp as a rifle-crack that hits echo on the breast-bone and makes her cry out. I correct a student in the art of war." Then aloud: "My opera, young man!—well, it's my libretto, and you know we writers always say 'my opera' when we have put the pegs for the voice; you are certainly aware that we do. How dare you to make calumnious observations upon my opera? Is it not the ripe and admirable fruit of five years of

confinement? Are not the lines sharp, the stanzas solid? and the stuff, is it not good? Is not the subject simple, pure from offence to sensitive authority, constitutionally harmless? Reply!”

“It’s transparent to any but asses,” said Carlo.

“But if it has passed the censorship? You are guilty, my boy, of bestowing upon those highly disciplined gentlemen who govern your famous city—what title? I trust a prophetic one, since that it comes from an animal whose custom is to turn its back before it delivers a blow, and is, they remark, fonder of encountering dead lions than live ones. Still, it is you who are indiscreet,—eminently so, I must add, if you will look lofty. If my opera has passed the censorship! eh, what have you to say?”

Page 1496

Carlo endured this banter till the end of it came.

“And you—you encourage her!” he cried wrathfully. “You know what the danger is for her, if they once lay hands on her. They will have her in Verona in four-and-twenty hours; through the gates of the Adige in a couple of days, and at Spielberg, or some other of their infernal dens of groans, within a week. Where is the chance of a rescue then? They torture, too, they torture! It’s a woman; and insult will be one mode of torturing her. They can use rods—”

The excited Southern youth was about to cover his face, but caught back his hands, clenching them.

“All this,” said Agostino, “is an evasion, manifestly, of the question concerning my opera, on which you have thought proper to cast a slur. The phrase, ‘transparent to any but asses,’ may not be absolutely objectionable, for transparency is, as the critics rightly insist, meritorious in a composition. And, according to the other view, if we desire our clever opponents to see nothing in something, it is notably skilful to let them see through it. You perceive, my Carlo. Transparency, then, deserves favourable comment. So, I do not complain of your phrase, but I had the unfortunate privilege of hearing it uttered. The method of delivery scarcely conveyed a compliment. Will you apologize?”

Carlo burst from him with a vehement question to the Chief: “Is it decided?”

“It is, my friend,” was the reply.

“Decided! She is doomed! Signorina! what can you know of this frightful risk? You are going to the slaughter. You will be seized before the first verse is out of your lips, and once in their clutches, you will never breathe free air again. It’s madness!—ah, forgive me!—yes, madness! For you shut your eyes; you rush into the trap blindfolded. And that is how you serve our Italy! She sees you an instant, and you are caught away;—-and you who might serve her, if you would, do you think you can move dungeon walls?”

“Perhaps, if I have been once seen, I shall not be forgotten,” said the signorina smoothly, and then cast her eyes down, as if she felt the burden of a little possible accusation of vanity in this remark. She raised them with fire.

“No; never!” exclaimed Carlo. “But, now you are ours. And—surely it is not quite decided?”

He had spoken imploringly to the Chief. “Not irrevocably?” he added.

“Irrevocably!”

“Then she is lost!”

“For shame, Carlo Ammiani;” said old Agostino, casting his sententious humours aside. “Do you not hear? It is decided! Do you wish to rob her of her courage, and see her tremble? It’s her scheme and mine: a case where an old head approves a young one. The Chief says Yes! and you bellow still! Is it a Milanese trick? Be silent.”

“Be silent!” echoed Carlo. “Do you remember the beast Marschatska’s bet?” The allusion was to a black incident concerning a young Italian ballet girl who had been carried off by an Austrian officer, under the pretext of her complicity in one of the antecedent conspiracies.

Page 1497

“He rendered payment for it,” said Agostino.

“He perished; yes! as we shake dust to the winds; but she!—it’s terrible! You place women in the front ranks—girls! What can defenceless creatures do? Would you let the van-regiment in battle be the one without weapons? It’s slaughter. She’s like a lamb to them. You hold up your jewel to the enemy, and cry, ‘Come and take it.’ Think of the insults! think of the rough hands, and foul mouths! She will be seized on the boards—”

“Not if you keep your tongue from wagging,” interposed Ugo Corte, fevered by this unseasonable exhibition of what was to him manifestly a lover’s frenzied selfishness. He moved off, indifferent to Carlo’s retort. Marco Sana and Giulio Bandinelli were already talking aside with the Chief.

“Signor Carlo, not a hand shall touch me,” said the signorina. “And I am not a lamb, though it is good of you to think me one. I passed through the streets of Milan in the last rising. I was unharmed. You must have some confidence in me.”

“Signorina, there’s the danger,” rejoined Carlo. “You trust to your good angels once, twice—the third time they fail you! What are you among a host of armed savages? You would be tossed like weed on the sea. In pity, do not look so scornfully! No, there is no unjust meaning in it; but you despise me for seeing danger. Can nothing persuade you? And, besides,” he addressed the Chief, who alone betrayed no signs of weariness; “listen, I beg of you. Milan wants no more than a signal. She does not require to be excited. I came charged with several proposals for giving the alarm. Attend, you others! The night of the Fifteenth comes; it is passing like an ordinary night. At twelve a fire-balloon is seen in the sky. Listen, in the name of saints and devils!”

But even the Chief was observed to show signs of amusement, and the gravity of the rest forsook them altogether at the display of this profound and original conspiratorial notion.

“Excellent! excellent! my Carlo,” said old Agostino, cheerfully. “You have thought. You must have thought, or whence such a conception? But, you really mistake. It is not the garrison whom we desire to put on their guard. By no means. We are not in the Imperial pay. Probably your balloon is to burst in due time, and, wind permitting, disperse printed papers all over the city?”

“What if it is?” cried Carlo fiercely.

“Exactly. I have divined your idea. You have thought, or, to correct the tense, are thinking, which is more hopeful, though it may chance not to seem so meritorious. But, if yours are the ideas of full-blown jackets, bear in mind that our enemies are coated

and breeched. It may be creditable to you that your cunning is not the cunning of the serpent; to us it would be more valuable if it were. Continue."

"Oh! there are a thousand ways." Carlo controlled himself with a sharp screw of all his muscles. "I simply wish to save the signorina from an annoyance."

Page 1498

“Very mildly put,” Agostino murmured assentingly.

“In our Journal,” said Carlo, holding out the palm of one hand to dot the forefinger of the other across it, by way of personal illustration—“in our Journal we might arrange for certain letters to recur at distinct intervals in Roman capitals, which might spell out, ’This Night *at* Twelve,’ or ‘At Once.’”

“Quite as ingenious, but on the present occasion erring on the side of intricacy. Aha! you want to increase the sale of your Journal, do you, my boy? The rogue!”

With which, and a light slap over Carlo’s shoulder, Agostino left him.

The aspect of his own futile proposals stared the young man in the face too forcibly for him to nurse the spark of resentment which was struck out in the turmoil of his bosom. He veered, as if to follow Agostino, and remained midway, his chest heaving, and his eyelids shut.

“Signor Carlo, I have not thanked you.” He heard Vittoria speak. “I know that a woman should never attempt to do men’s work. The Chief will tell you that we must all serve now, and all do our best. If we fail, and they put me to great indignity, I promise you that I will not live. I would give this up to be done by anyone else who could do it better. It is in my hands, and my friends must encourage me.”

“Ah, signorina!” the young man sighed bitterly. The knowledge that he had already betrayed himself in the presence of others too far, and the sob in his throat labouring to escape, kept him still.

A warning call from Ugo Corte drew their attention. Close by the chalet where the first climbers of the mountain had refreshed themselves, Beppo was seen struggling to secure the arms of a man in a high-crowned green Swiss hat, who was apparently disposed to give the signorina’s faithful servant some trouble. After gazing a minute at this singular contention, she cried—“It’s the same who follows me everywhere!”

“And you will not believe you are suspected,” murmured Carlo in her ear.

“A spy?” Sana queried, showing keen joy at the prospect of scotching such a reptile on the lonely height. Corte went up to the Chief. They spoke briefly together, making use of notes and tracings on paper. The Chief then said “Adieu” to the signorina. It was explained to the rest by Corte that he had a meeting to attend near Pella about noon, and must be in Fobello before midnight. Thence his way would be to Genoa.

“So, you are resolved to give another trial to our crowned ex-Carbonaro,” said Agostino.

“Without leaving him an initiative this time!” and the Chief embraced the old man. “You know me upon that point. I cannot trust him. I do not. But, if we make such a tide in

Lombardy that his army must be drawn into it, is such an army to be refused? First, the tide, my friend! See to that."

"The king is our instrument!" cried Carlo Ammiani, brightening.

Page 1499

“Yes, if we were particularly well skilled in the use of that kind of instrument,” Agostino muttered.

He stood apart while the Chief said a few words to Carlo, which made the blood play vividly across the visage of the youth. Carlo tried humbly to expostulate once or twice. In the end his head was bowed, and he signified a dumb acquiescence.

“Once more, good-bye.” The Chief addressed the signorina in English.

She replied in the same tongue, “Good-bye,” tremulously; and passion mounting on it, added—“Oh! when shall I see you again?”

“When Rome is purified to be a fit place for such as you.”

In another minute he was hidden on the slope of the mountain lying toward Orta.

CHAPTER V

Beppo had effected a firm capture of his man some way down the slope. But it was a case of check that entirely precluded his own free movements. They hung together intertwisted in the characters of specious pacificator and appealing citizen, both breathless.

“There! you want to hand me up neatly; I know your vanity, my Beppo; and you don’t even know my name,” said the prisoner.

“I know your ferret of a face well enough,” said Beppo. “You dog the signorina. Come up, and don’t give trouble.”

“Am I not a sheep? You worry me. Let me go.”

“You’re a wriggling eel.”

“Catch me fast by the tail then, and don’t hold me by the middle.”

“You want frightening, my pretty fellow!”

“If that’s true, my Beppo, somebody made a mistake in sending you to do it. Stop a moment. You’re blown. I think you gulp down your minestra too hot; you drink beer.”

“You dog the signorina! I swore to scotch you at last.”

“I left Milan for the purpose—don’t you see? Act fairly, my Beppo, and let us go up to the signorina together decently.”

“Ay, ay, my little reptile! You’ll find no Austrians here. Cry out to them to come to you from Baveno. If the Motterone grew just one tree! Saints! one would serve.”

“Why don’t you—fool that you are, my Beppo!—pray to the saints earlier? Trees don’t grow from heaven.”

“You’ll be going there soon, and you’ll know better about it.”

“Thanks to the Virgin, then, we shall part at some time or other!”

The struggles between them continued sharply during this exchange of intellectual shots; but hearing Ugo Corte’s voice, the prisoner’s confident audacity forsook him, and he drew a long tight face like the mask of an admonitory exclamation addressed to himself from within.

“Stand up straight!” the soldier’s command was uttered.

Even Beppo was amazed to see that the man had lost the power to obey or to speak.

Corte grasped him under the arm-pit. With the force of his huge fist he swung him round and stretched him out at arm’s length, all collar and shanks. The man hung like a mole from the twig. Yet, while Beppo poured out the tale of his iniquities, his eyes gave the turn of a twinkle, showing that he could have answered one whom he did not fear. The charge brought against him was, that for the last six months he had been untiringly spying on the signorina.

Page 1500

Corte stamped his loose feet to earth, shook him and told him to walk aloft. The flexible voluble fellow had evidently become miserably disconcerted. He walked in trepidation, speechless, and when interrogated on the height his eyes flew across the angry visages with dismal uncertainty. Agostino perceived that he had undoubtedly not expected to come among them, and forthwith began to excite Giulio and Marco to the worst suspicions, in order to indulge his royal poetic soul with a study of a timorous wretch pushed to anticipations of extremity.

“The execution of a spy,” he preluded, “is the signal for the ringing of joy-bells on this earth; not only because he is one of a pestiferous excess, in point of numbers, but that he is no true son of earth. He escaped out of hell’s doors on a windy day, and all that we do is to puff out a bad light, and send him back. Look at this fellow in whom conscience is operating so that he appears like a corked volcano! You can see that he takes Austrian money; his skin has got to be the exact colour of Munz. He has the greenish-yellow eyes of those elective, thrice-abhorred vampyres who feed on patriot-blood. He is condemned without trial by his villainous countenance, like an ungrammatical preface to a book. His tongue refuses to confess, but nature is stronger:—observe his knees. Now this is guilt. It is execrable guilt. He is a nasty object. Nature has in her wisdom shortened his stature to indicate that it is left to us to shorten the growth of his offending years. Now, you dangling soul! answer me:—what name hailed you when on earth?”

The fan, with no clearly serviceable tongue, articulated, “Luigi.”

“Luigi! the name Christian and distinctive. The name historic:-Luigi Porco?”

“Luigi Saracco, signore.”

“Saracco: Saracco: very possibly a strip of the posterity of cut-throat Moors. To judge by your face, a Moor undoubtedly: glib, slippery! with a body that slides and a soul that jumps. Taken altogether, more serpent than eagle. I misdoubt that little quick cornering eye of yours. Do you ever remember to have blushed?”

“No, signore,” said Luigi.

“You spy upon the signorina, do you?”

“You have Beppo’s word for that,” interposed Marco Sana, growling.

“And you are found spying on the mountain this particular day! Luigi Saracco, you are a fellow of a tremendous composition. A goose walking into a den of foxes is alone to be compared to you,—if ever such goose was! How many of us did you count, now, when you were, say, a quarter of a mile below?”

Marco interposed again: “He has already seen enough up here to make a rope of florins.”

“The fellow’s eye takes likenesses,” said Giulio.

Agostino’s question was repeated by Corte, and so sternly that Luigi, beholding kindness upon no other face save Vittoria’s, watched her, and muttering “Six,” blinked his keen black eyes piteously to get her sign of assent to his hesitated naming of that number. Her mouth and the turn of her head were expressive to him, and he cried “Seven.”

Page 1501

“So; first six, and next seven,” said Corte.

“Six, I meant, without the signorina,” Luigi explained.

“You saw six of us without the signorina! You see we are six here, including the signorina. Where is the seventh?”

Luigi tried to penetrate Vittoria’s eyes for a proper response; but she understood the grave necessity for getting the full extent of his observations out of him, and she looked as remorseless as the men. He feigned stupidity and sullenness, rage and cunning, in quick succession.

“Who was the seventh?” said Carlo.

“Was it the king?” Luigi asked.

This was by just a little too clever; and its cleverness, being seen, magnified the intended evasion so as to make it appear to them that Luigi knew well the name of the seventh.

Marco thumped a hand on his shoulder, shouting—“Here; speak out! You saw seven of us. Where has the seventh one gone?”

Luigi’s wits made a dash at honesty. “Down Orta, signore.”

“And down Orta, I think, you will go; deeper down than you may like.”

Corte now requested Vittoria to stand aside. He motioned to her with his hand to stand farther, and still farther off; and finally told Carlo to escort her to Baveno. She now began to think that the man Luigi was in some perceptible danger, nor did Ammiani disperse the idea.

“If he is a spy, and if he has seen the Chief, we shall have to detain him for at least four-and-twenty hours,” he said, “or do worse.”

“But, Signor Carlo,”—Vittoria made appeal to his humanity,—“do they mean, if they decide that he is guilty, to hurt him?”

“Tell me, signorina, what punishment do you imagine a spy deserves?”

“To be called one!”

Carlo smiled at her lofty method of dealing with the animal.

“Then you presume him to have a conscience?”

“I am sure, Signor Carlo, that I could make him loathe to be called a spy.”

They were slowly pacing from the group, and were on the edge of the descent, when the signorina’s name was shrieked by Luigi. The man came running to her for protection, Beppo and the rest at his heels. She allowed him to grasp her hand.

“After all, he is my spy; he does belong to me,” she said, still speaking on to Carlo. “I must beg your permission, Colonel Corte and Signor Marco, to try an experiment. The Signor Carlo will not believe that a spy can be ashamed of his name.—Luigi!”

“Signorina!”—he shook his body over her hand with a most plaintive utterance.

“You are my countryman, Luigi?”

“Yes, signorina.”

“You are an Italian?”

“Certainly, signorina!”

“A spy!”

Vittoria had not always to lift her voice in music for it to sway the hearts of men. She spoke the word very simply in a mellow soft tone. Luigi’s blood shot purple. He thrust his fists against his ears.

Page 1502

“See, Signor Carlo,” she said; “I was right. Luigi, you will be a spy no more?”

Carlo Ammiani happened to be rolling a cigarette-paper. She put out her fingers for it, and then reached it to Luigi, who accepted it with singular contortions of his frame, declaring that he would confess everything to her. “Yes, signorina, it is true; I am a spy on you. I know the houses you visit. I know you eat too much chocolate for your voice. I know you are the friend of the Signora Laura, the widow of Giacomo Piaveni, shot—-shot on Annunciation Day. The Virgin bless him! I know the turning of every street from your house near the Duomo to the signora’s. You go nowhere else, except to the maestro’s. And it’s something to spy upon you. But think of your Beppo who spies upon me! And your little mother, the lady most excellent, is down in Baveno, and she is always near you when you make an expedition. Signorina, I know you would not pay your Beppo for spying upon me. Why does he do it? I do not sing ’Italia, Italia shall be free!’ I have heard you when I was under the maestro’s windows; and once you sang it to the Signor Agostino Balderini. Indeed, signorina, I am a sort of guardian of your voice. It is not gold of the Tedeschi I get from the Signor Antonio Pericles.”

At the mention of this name, Agostino and Vittoria laughed out.

“You are in the pay of the Signor Antonio-Pericles,” said Agostino. “Without being in our pay, you have done us the service to come up here among us! Bravo! In return for your disinterestedness, we kick you down, either upon Baveno or upon Stresa, or across the lake, if you prefer it.—The man is harmless. He is hired by a particular worshipper of the signorina’s voice, who affects to have first discovered it when she was in England, and is a connoisseur, a millionaire, a Greek, a rich scoundrel, with one indubitable passion, for which I praise him. We will let his paid eavesdropper depart, I think. He is harmless.”

Neither Ugo nor Marco was disposed to allow any description of spy to escape unscotched. Vittoria saw that Luigi’s looks were against him, and whispered: “Why do you show such cunning eyes, Luigi?”

He replied: “Signorina, take me out of their hearing, and I will tell you everything.”

She walked aside. He seemed immediately to be inspired with confidence, and stretched his fingers in the form of a grasshopper, at which sight they cried: “He knows Barto Rizzo—this rascal!” They plied him with signs and countersigns, and speedily let him go. There ensued a sharp snapping of altercation between Luigi and Beppo. Vittoria had to order Beppo to stand back.

Page 1503

“It is a poor dog, not of a good breed, signorina,” Luigi said, casting a tolerant glance over his shoulder. “Faithful, but a poor nose. Ah! you gave me this cigarette. Not the Virgin could have touched my marrow as you did. That’s to be remembered by-and-by. Now, you are going to sing on the night of the fifteenth of September. Change that night. The Signor Antonio-Pericles watches you, and he is a friend of the Government, and the Government is snoring for you to think it asleep. The Signor Antonio-Pericles pacifies the Tedeschi, but he will know all that you are doing, and how easy it will be, and how simple, for you to let me know what you think he ought to know, and just enough to keep him comfortable! So we work like a machine, signorina. Only, not through that Beppo, for he is vain of his legs, and his looks, and his service, and because he has carried a gun and heard it go off. Yes; I am a spy. But I am honest. I, too, have visited England. One can be honest and a spy. Signorina, I have two arms, but only one heart. If you will be gracious and consider! Say, here are two hands. One hand does this thing, one hand does that thing, and that thing wipes out this thing. It amounts to clear reasoning! Here are two eyes. Were they meant to see nothing but one side! Here is a tongue with a line down the middle almost to the tip of it—which is for service. That Beppo couldn’t deal double, if he would; for he is imperfectly designed—a mere dog’s pattern! But, only one heart, signorina—mind that. I will never forget the cigarette. I shall smoke it before I leave the mountain, and think—oh!”

Having illustrated the philosophy of his system, Luigi continued: “I am going to tell you everything. Pray, do not look on Beppo! This is important. The Signor Antonio-Pericles sent me to spy on you, because he expects some people to come up the mountain, and you know them; and one is an Austrian officer, and he is an Englishman by birth, and he is coming to meet some English friends who enter Italy from Switzerland over the Moro, and easily up here on mules or donkeys from Pella. The Signor Antonio-Pericles has gold ears for everything that concerns the signorina. ‘A patriot is she!’ he says; and he is jealous of your English friends. He thinks they will distract you from your studies; and perhaps”—Luigi nodded sagaciously before he permitted himself to say—“perhaps he is jealous in another way. I have heard him speak like a sonnet of the signorina’s beauty. The Signor Antonio-Pericles thinks that you have come here to-day to meet them. When he heard that you were going to leave Milan for Baveno, he was mad, and with two fists up, against all English persons. The Englishman who is an Austrian officer is quartered at Verona, and the Signor Antonio Pericles said that the Englishman should not meet you yet, if he could help it.”

Victoria stood brooding. “Who can it be,—who is an Englishman, and an Austrian officer, and knows me?”

Page 1504

“Signorina, I don’t know names. Behold, that Beppo is approaching like the snow! What I entreat is, that the signorina will wait a little for the English party, if they come, so that I may have something to tell my patron. To invent upon nothing is most unpleasant, and the Signor Antonio can soon perceive whether one swims with corks. Signorina, I can dance on one rope—I am a man. I am not a midge—I cannot dance upon nothing.”

The days of Vittoria’s youth had been passed in England. It was not unknown to her that old English friends were on the way to Italy; the recollection of a quiet and a buried time put a veil across her features. She was perplexed by the mention of the Austrian officer by Luigi, as one may be who divines the truth too surely, but will not accept it for its loathsomeness. There were Englishmen in the army of Austria. Could one of them be this one whom she had cared for when she was a girl? It seemed hatefully cruel to him to believe it. She spoke to Agostino, begging him to remain with her on the height awhile to see whether the Signor Antonio-Pericles was right; to see whether Luigi was a truth-teller; to see whether these English persons were really coming. “Because,” she said, “if they do come, it will at once dissolve any suspicions you may have of this Luigi. And I always long so much to know if the Signor Antonio is correct. I have never yet known him to be wrong.”

“And you want to see these English,” said Agostino. He frowned.

“Only to hear them. They shall not recognize me. I have now another name; and I am changed. My hat is enough to hide me. Let me hear them talk a little. You and the Signor Carlo will stay with me, and when they come, if they do come, I will remain no longer than just sufficient to make sure. I would refuse to know any of them before the night of the fifteenth; I want my strength too much. I shall have to hear a misery from them; I know it, I feel it; it turns my blood. But let me hear their voices! England is half my country, though I am so willing to forget her and give all my life to Italy. Stay with me, dear friend, my best father! humour me, for you know that I am always charming when I am humoured.”

Agostino pressed his finger on a dimple in her cheeks. “You can afford to make such a confession as that to a greybeard. The day is your own. Bear in mind that you are so situated that it will be prudent for you to have no fresh relations, either with foreigners or others, until your work is done,—in which, my dear child, may God bless you!”

“I pray to him with all my might,” Vittoria said in reply.

Page 1505

After a consultation with Agostino, Ugo Corte and Marco and Giulio bade their adieux to her. The task of keeping Luigi from their clutches was difficult; but Agostino helped her in that also. To assure them, after his fashion, of the harmlessness of Luigi, he seconded him in a contest of wit against Beppo, and the little fellow, now that he had shaken off his fears, displayed a quickness of retort and a liveliness “unknown to professional spies and impossible to the race,” said Agostino; “so absolutely is the mind of man blunted by Austrian gold. We know that for a fact. Beppo is no match for him. Beppo is sententious; ponderously illustrative; he can’t turn; he is long-winded; he, I am afraid, my Carlo, studies the journals. He has got your journalistic style, wherein words of six syllables form the relief to words of eight, and hardly one dares to stand by itself. They are like huge boulders across a brook. The meaning, do you, see, would run of itself, but you give us these impedimenting big stones to help us over it, while we profess to understand you by implication. For my part, I own, that to me, your parliamentary, illegitimate academic, modern crocodile phraseology, which is formidable in the jaws, impenetrable on the back, can’t circumvent a corner, and is enabled to enter a common understanding solely by having a special highway prepared for it,—in short, the writing in your journals is too much for me. Beppo here is an example that the style is useless for controversy. This Luigi baffles him at every step.”

“Some,” rejoined Carlo, “say that Beppo has had the virtue to make you his study.”

Agostino threw himself on his back and closed his eyes. “That, then, is more than you have done, signor Tuquoque. Look on the Bernina yonder, and fancy you behold a rout of phantom Goths; a sleepy rout, new risen, with the blood of old battles on their shroud-shirts, and a North-east wind blowing them upon our fat land. Or take a turn at the other side toward Orta, and look out for another invasion, by no means so picturesque, but preferable. Tourists! Do you hear them?”

Carlo Ammiani had descried the advanced troop of a procession of gravely-heated climbers ladies upon donkeys, and pedestrian guards stalking beside them, with courier, and lacqueys, and baskets of provisions, all bearing the stamp of pilgrims from the great Western Island.

CHAPTER VI

A mountain ascended by these children of the forcible Isle, is a mountain to be captured, and colonized, and absolutely occupied for a term; so that Vittoria soon found herself and her small body of adherents observed, and even exclaimed against, as a sort of intruding aborigines, whose presence entirely dispelled the sense of romantic dominion which a mighty eminence should give, and which Britons expect when they have expended a portion of their energies. The exclamations were not complimentary; nevertheless, Vittoria listened

Page 1506

with pleased ears, as one listens by a brookside near an old home, hearing a music of memory rather than common words. They talked of heat, of appetite, of chill, of thirst, of the splendour of the prospect, of the anticipations of good hotel accommodation below, of the sadness superinduced by the reflection that in these days people were found everywhere, and poetry was thwarted; again of heat, again of thirst, of beauty, and of chill. There was the enunciation of matronly advice; there was the outcry of girlish insubordination; there were sighings for English ale, and namings of the visible ranges of peaks, and indicatings of geographical fingers to show where Switzerland and Piedmont met, and Austria held her grasp on Lombardy; and “to this point we go to-night; yonder to-morrow; farther the next day,” was uttered, soberly or with excitement, as befitted the age of the speaker.

Among these tourists there was one very fair English lady, with long auburn curls of the traditionally English pattern, and the science of Paris displayed in her bonnet and dress; which, if not as graceful as severe admirers of the antique in statuary or of the mediaeval in drapery demand, pleads prettily to be thought so, and commonly succeeds in its object, when assisted by an artistic feminine manner. Vittoria heard her answer to the name of Mrs. Sedley. She had once known her as a Miss Adela Pole. Amidst the cluster of assiduous gentlemen surrounding this lady it was difficult for Vittoria’s stolen glances to discern her husband; and the moment she did discern him she became as indifferent to him as was his young wife, by every manifestation of her sentiments. Mrs. Sedley informed her lord that it was not expected of him to care, or to pretend to care, for such scenes as the Motterone exhibited; and having dismissed him to the shade of an umbrella near the provision baskets, she took her station within a few steps of Vittoria, and allowed her attendant gentlemen to talk while she remained plunged in a meditative rapture at the prospect. The talk indicated a settled scheme for certain members of the party to reach Milan from the Como road. Mrs. Sedley was asked if she expected her brother to join her here or in Milan.

“Here, if a man’s promises mean anything,” she replied languidly.

She was told that some one waved a handkerchief to them from below.

“Is he alone?” she said; and directing an operaglass upon the slope of the mountain, pursued, as in a dreamy disregard of circumstances: “That is Captain Gambier. My brother Wilfrid has not kept his appointment. Perhaps he could not get leave from the General; perhaps he is married; he is engaged to an Austrian Countess, I have heard. Captain Gambier did me the favour to go round to a place called Stresa to meet him. He has undertaken the journey for nothing. It is the way with all journeys though this” (the lady had softly reverted to her rapture) “this is too exquisite! Nature at least does not deceive.”

Page 1507

Vittoria listened to a bubbling of meaningless chatter, until Captain Gambier had joined Mrs. Sedley; and at him, for she had known him likewise, she could not forbear looking up. He was speaking to Mrs. Sedley, but caught the look, and bent his head for a clearer view of the features under the broad straw hat. Mrs. Sedley commanded him imperiously to say on.

“Have you no letter from Wilfrid? Has the mountain tired you? Has Wilfrid failed to send his sister one word? Surely Mr. Pericles will have made known our exact route to him? And his uncle, General Pierson, could—I am certain he did—exert his influence to procure him leave for a single week to meet the dearest member of his family.”

Captain Gambier gathered his wits to give serviceable response to the kindled lady, and letting his eyes fall from time to time on the broad straw hat, made answer—“Lieutenant Pierson, or, in other words, Wilfrid Pole—”

The lady stamped her foot and flushed.

“You know, Augustus, I detest that name.”

“Pardon me a thousandfold. I had forgotten.”

“What has happened to you?”

Captain Gambier accused the heat.

“I found a letter from Wilfrid at the hotel. He is apparently kept on constant service between Milan, and Verona, and Venice. His quarters are at Verona. He informs me that he is to be married in the Spring; that is, if all continues quiet; married in the Spring. He seems to fancy that there may be disturbances; not of a serious kind, of course. He will meet you in Milan. He has never been permitted to remain at Milan longer than a couple of days at a stretch. Pericles has told him that she is in Florence. Pericles has told me that Miss Belloni has removed to Florence.”

“Say it a third time,” the lady indulgently remarked.

“I do not believe that she has gone.”

“I dare say not.”

“She has changed her name, you know.”

“Oh, dear, yes; she has done something fantastic, naturally! For my part, I should have thought her own good enough.”

“Emilia Alessandra Belloni is good enough, certainly,” said Captain Gambier.

The shading straw rim had shaken once during the colloquy. It was now a fixed defence.

“What is her new name?” Mrs. Sedley inquired.

“That I cannot tell. Wilfrid merely mentions that he has not seen her.”

“I,” said Mrs. Sedley, “when I reach Milan, shall not trust to Mr. Pericles, but shall write to the Conservatorio; for if she is going to be a great cantatrice,really, it will be agreeable to renew acquaintance with her. Nor will it do any mischief to Wilfrid, now that he is engaged. Are you very deeply attached to straw hats? They are sweet in a landscape.”

Mrs. Sedley threw him a challenge from her blue eyes; but his reply to it was that of an unskilled youth, who reads a lady by the letters of her speech:—“One minute. I will be with you instantly. I want to have a look down on the lake. I suppose this is one of the most splendid views in Italy. Half a minute!”

Page 1508

Captain Gambier smiled brilliantly; and the lady, perceiving that polished shield, checked the shot of indignation on her astonished features, and laid it by. But the astonishment lingered there, like the lines of a slackened bow. She beheld her ideal of an English gentleman place himself before these recumbent foreign people, and turn to talk across them, with a pertinacious pursuit of the face under the bent straw hat. Nor was it singular to her that one of them at last should rise and protest against the continuation of the impertinence.

Carlo Ammiani, in fact, had opened matters with a scrupulously-courteous bow.

“Monsieur is perhaps unaware that he obscures the outlook?”

“Totally, monsieur,” said Captain Gambier, and stood fast.

“Will monsieur do me the favour to take three steps either to the right or to the left?”

“Pardon, monsieur, but the request is put almost in the form of an order.”

“Simply if it should prove inefficacious in the form of a request.”

“What, may I ask, monsieur, is your immediate object?”

“To entreat you to behave with civility.”

“I am at a loss, monsieur, to perceive any offence.”

“Permit me to say, it is lamentable you do not know when you insult a lady.”

“I have insulted a lady?” Captain Gambier looked profoundly incredulous. “Oh! then you will not take exception to my assuming the privilege to apologize to her in person?”

Ammiani arrested him as he was about to pass.

“Stay, monsieur; you determine to be impudent, I perceive; you shall not be obtrusive.”

Vittoria had tremblingly taken old Agostino’s hand, and had risen to her feet. Still keeping her face hidden, she walked down the slope, followed at an interval by her servant, and curiously watched by the English officer, who said to himself, “Well, I suppose I was mistaken,” and consequently discovered that he was in a hobble.

A short duologue in their best stilted French ensued between him and Ammiani. It was pitched too high in a foreign tongue for Captain Gambier to descend from it, as he would fain have done, to ask the lady’s name. They exchanged cards and formal salutes, and parted.

The dignified altercation had been witnessed by the main body of the tourists. Captain Gambier told them that he had merely interchanged amicable commonplaces with the Frenchman,—"or Italian," he added carelessly, reading the card in his hand. "I thought she might be somebody whom we knew," he said to Mrs. Sedley.

"Not the shadow of a likeness to her," the lady returned.

She had another opinion when later a scrap of paper bearing one pencilled line on it was handed round. A damsel of the party had picked it up near the spot where, as she remarked, "the foreigners had been sitting." It said:—

"Let none who look for safety go to Milan."

Page 1509

CHAPTER VII

A week following the day of meetings on the Motterone, Luigi the spy was in Milan, making his way across the Piazza de' Mercanti. He entered a narrow court, one of those which were anciently built upon the Oriental principle of giving shade at the small cost of excluding common air. It was dusky noon there through the hours of light, and thrice night when darkness fell. The atmosphere, during the sun's short passage overhead, hung with a glittering heaviness, like the twinkling iron-dust in a subterranean smithy. On the lower window of one of the houses there was a board, telling men that Barto Rizzo made and mended shoes, and requesting people who wished to see him to make much noise at the door, for he was hard of hearing. It speedily became known in the court that a visitor desired to see Barto Rizzo. The noise produced by Luigi was like that of a fanatical beater of the tomtom; he knocked and banged and danced against the door, crying out for his passing amusement an adaptation of a popular ballad:—"Oh, Barto, Barto! my boot is sadly worn: The toe is seen that should be veiled from sight. The toe that should be veiled like an Eastern maid: like a sultan's daughter: Shocking! shocking! One of a company of ten that were living a secluded life in chaste privacy! Oh, Barto, Barto! must I charge it to thy despicable leather or to my incessant pilgrimages? One fair toe! I fear presently the corruption of the remaining nine: Then, alas! what do I go on? How shall I come to a perfumed end, who walk on ten indecent toes? Well may the delicate gentlemen sneer at me and scorn me: As for the angelic Lady who deigns to look so low, I may say of her that her graciousness clothes what she looks at: To her the foot, the leg, the back: To her the very soul is bared: But she is a rarity upon earth. Oh, Barto, Barto, she is rarest in Milan! I might run a day's length and not find her. If, O Barto, as my boot hints to me, I am about to be stripped of my last covering, I must hurry to the inconvenient little chamber of my mother, who cannot refuse to acknowledge me as of this pattern: Barto, O shoemaker! thou son of artifice and right-hand-man of necessity, preserve me in the fashion of the time: Cobble me neatly: A dozen wax threads and I am remade:—Excellent! I thank you! Now I can plant my foot bravely: Oh, Barto, my shoemaker! between ourselves, it is unpleasant in these refined days to be likened at all to that preposterous Adam!"

The omission of the apostrophes to Barto left it one of the ironical, veiled Republican, semi-socialistic ballads of the time, which were sung about the streets for the sharpness and pith of the couplets, and not from a perception of the double edge down the length of them.

Page 1510

As Luigi was coming to the terminating line, the door opened. A very handsome sullen young woman, of the dark, thick-browed Lombard type, asked what was wanted; at the same time the deep voice of a man; conjecturally rising from a lower floor, called, and a lock was rattled. The woman told Luigi to enter. He sent a glance behind him; he had evidently been drained of his sprightliness in a second; he moved in with the slackness of limb of a gibbeted figure. The door shut; the woman led him downstairs. He could not have danced or sung a song now for great pay. The smell of mouldiness became so depressing to him that the smell of leather struck his nostrils refreshingly. He thought: "Oh, Virgin! it's dark enough to make one believe in every single thing they tell us about the saints." Up in the light of day Luigi had a turn for careless thinking on these holy subjects.

Barto Rizzo stood before him in a square of cellarage that was furnished with implements of his craft, too dark for a clear discernment of features.

"So, here you are!" was the greeting Luigi received.

It was a tremendous voice, that seemed to issue from a vast cavity. "Lead the gentleman to my sitting-room," said Barto. Luigi felt the wind of a handkerchief, and guessed that his eyes were about to be bandaged by the woman behind him. He petitioned to be spared it, on the plea, firstly, that it expressed want of confidence; secondly, that it took him in the stomach. The handkerchief was tight across his eyes while he was speaking. His hand was touched by the woman, and he commenced timidly an ascent of stairs. It continued so that he would have sworn he was a shorter time going up the Motterone; then down, and along a passage; lower down, deep into corpse-climate; up again, up another enormous mountain; and once more down, as among rats and beetles, and down, as among faceless horrors, and down, where all things seemed prostrate and with a taste of brass. It was the poor fellow's nervous imagination, preternaturally excited. When the handkerchief was caught away, his jaw was shuddering, his eyes were sickly; he looked as if impaled on the prongs of fright. It required just half a minute to reanimate this mercurial creature, when he found himself under the light of two lamps, and Barto Rizzo fronting him, in a place so like the square of cellarage which he had been led to with unbandaged eyes, that it relieved his dread by touching his humour. He cried, "Have I made the journey of the Signor Capofinale, who visited the other end of the world by standing on his head?"

Barto Rizzo rolled out a burly laugh.

"Sit," he said. "You're a poor sweating body, and must needs have a dry tongue. Will you drink?"

"Dry!" quoth Luigi. "Holy San Carlo is a mash in a wine-press compared with me."

Barto Rizzo handed him a liquor, which he drank, and after gave thanks to Providence. Barto raised his hand.

Page 1511

“We’re too low down here for that kind of machinery,” he said. “They say that Providence is on the side of the Austrians. Now then, what have you to communicate to me? This time I let you come to my house trust at all, trust entirely. I think that’s the proverb. You are admitted: speak like a guest.”

Luigi’s preference happened to be for categorical interrogations. Never having an idea of spontaneously telling the whole truth, the sense that he was undertaking a narrative gave him such emotions as a bad swimmer upon deep seas may have; while, on the other hand, his being subjected to a series of questions seemed at least to leave him with one leg on shore, for then he could lie discreetly, and according to the finger-posts, and only when necessary, and he could recover himself if he made a false step. His ingenious mind reasoned these images out to his own satisfaction. He requested, therefore, that his host would let him hear what he desired to know.

Barto Rizzo’s forefinger was pressed from an angle into one temple. His head inclined to meet it: so that it was like the support to a broad blunt pillar. The cropped head was flat as an owl’s; the chest of immense breadth; the bulgy knees and big hands were those of a dwarf athlete. Strong colour, lying full on him from the neck to the forehead, made the big veins purple and the eyes fierier than the movements of his mind would have indicated. He was simply studying the character of his man. Luigi feared him; he was troubled chiefly because he was unaware of what Barto Rizzo wanted to know, and could not consequently tell what to bring to the market. The simplicity of the questions put to him was bewildering: he fell into the trap. Barto’s eyes began to get terribly oblique. Jingling money in his pocket, he said:—“You saw Colonel Corte on the Motterone: you saw the Signor Agostino Balderini: good men, both! Also young Count Ammiani: I served his father, the General, and jogged the lad on my knee. You saw the Signorina Vittoria. The English people came, and you heard them talk, but did not understand. You came home and told all this to the Signor Antonio, your employer number one. You have told the same to me, your employer number two. There’s your pay.”

Barto summed up thus the information he had received, and handed Luigi six gold pieces. The latter, springing with boyish thankfulness and pride at the easy earning of them, threw in a few additional facts, as, that he had been taken for a spy by the conspirators, and had heard one of the Englishmen mention the Signorina Vittoria’s English name. Barto Rizzo lifted his eyebrows queerly. “We’ll go through another interrogatory in an hour,” he said; “stop here till I return.”

Page 1512

Luigi was always too full of his own cunning to suspect the same in another, until he was left alone to reflect on a scene; when it became overwhelmingly transparent. “But, what could I say more than I did say?” he asked himself, as he stared at the one lamp Barto had left. Finding the door unfastened, he took the lamp and lighted himself out, and along a cavernous passage ending in a blank wall, against which his heart knocked and fell, for his sensation was immediately the terror of imprisonment and helplessness. Mad with alarm, he tried every spot for an aperture. Then he sat down on his haunches; he remembered hearing word of Barto Rizzo’s rack:—certain methods peculiar to Barto Rizzo, by which he screwed matters out of his agents, and terrified them into fidelity. His personal dealings with Barto were of recent date; but Luigi knew him by repute: he knew that the shoemaking business was a mask. Barto had been a soldier, a schoolmaster: twice an exile; a conspirator since the day when the Austrians had the two fine Apples of Pomona, Lombardy and Venice, given them as fruits of peace. Luigi remembered how he had snapped his fingers at the name of Barto Rizzo. There was no despising him now. He could only arrive at a peaceful contemplation of Barto Rizzo’s character by determining to tell all, and (since that seemed little) more than he knew. He got back to the leather-smelling chamber, which was either the same or purposely rendered exactly similar to the one he had first been led to.

At the end of a leaden hour Barto Rizzo returned.

“Now, to recommence,” he said. “Drink before you speak, if your tongue is dry.”

Luigi thrust aside the mention of liquor. It seemed to him that by doing so he propitiated that ill-conceived divinity called Virtue, who lived in the open air, and desired men to drink water. Barto Rizzo evidently understood the kind of man he was schooling to his service.

“Did that Austrian officer, who is an Englishman, acquainted with the Signor Antonio-Pericles, meet the lady, his sister, on the Motterone?”

Luigi answered promptly, “Yes.”

“Did the Signorina Vittoria speak to the lady?”

“No.”

“Not a word?”

“No.”

“Not one communication to her?”

“No: she sat under her straw hat.”

“She concealed her face?”

“She sat like a naughty angry girl.”

“Did she speak to the officer?”

“Not she!”

“Did she see him?”

“Of course she did! As if a woman’s eyes couldn’t see through straw-plait!”

Barto paused, calculatingly, eye on victim.

“The Signorina Vittoria,” he resumed, “has engaged to sing on the night of the Fifteenth; has she?”

A twitching of Luigi’s muscles showed that he apprehended a necessary straining of his invention on another tack.

“On the night of the Fifteenth, Signor Barto Rizzo? That’s the night of her first appearance. Oh, yes!”

Page 1513

“To sing a particular song?”

“Lots of them! ay-aie!”

Barto took him by the shoulder and pressed him into his seat till he howled, saying, “Now, there’s a slate and a pencil. Expect me at the end of two hours, this time. Next time it will be four: then eight, then sixteen. Find out how many hours that will be at the sixteenth examination.”

Luigi flew at the torturer and stuck at the length of his straightened arm, where he wriggled, refusing to listen to the explanation of Barto’s system; which was that, in cases where every fresh examination taught him more, they were continued, after regularly-lengthening intervals, that might extend from the sowing of seed to the ripening of grain. “When all’s delivered,” said Barto, “then we begin to correct discrepancies. I expect,” he added, “you and I will have done before a week’s out.”

“A week!” Luigi shouted. “Here’s my stomach already leaping like a fish at the smell of this hole. You brute bear! it’s a smell of bones. It turns my inside with a spoon. May the devil seize you when you’re sleeping! You shan’t go: I’ll tell you everything—-everything. I can’t tell you anything more than I have told you. She gave me a cigarette —there! Now you know:—gave me a cigarette; a cigarette. I smoked it—there! Your faithful servant!”

“She gave you a cigarette, and you smoked it; ha!” said Barto Rizzo, who appeared to see something to weigh even in that small fact. “The English lady gave you the cigarette?”

Luigi nodded: “Yes;” pertinacious in deception. “Yes,” he repeated; “the English lady. That was the person. What’s the use of your skewering me with your eyes!”

“I perceive that you have never travelled, my Luigi,” said Barto. “I am afraid we shall not part so early as I had supposed. I double the dose, and return to you in four hours’ time.”

Luigi threw himself flat on the ground, shrieking that he was ready to tell everything—-anything. Not even the apparent desperation of his circumstances could teach him that a promise to tell the truth was a more direct way of speaking. Indeed, the hitting of the truth would have seemed to him a sort of artful archery, the burden of which should devolve upon the questioner, whom he supplied with the relation of “everything and anything.”

All through a night Luigi’s lesson continued. In the morning he was still breaking out in small and purposeless lies; but Barto Rizzo had accomplished his two objects: that of squeezing him, and that of subjecting his imagination. Luigi confessed (owing to a

singular recovery of his memory) the gift of the cigarette as coming from the Signorina Vittoria. What did it matter if she did give him a cigarette?

“You adore her for it?” said Barto.

“May the Virgin sweep the floor of heaven into her lap!” interjected Luigi. “She is a good patriot.”

“Are you one?” Barto asked.

Page 1514

“Certainly I am.”

“Then I shall have to suspect you, for the good of your country.”

Luigi could not see the deduction. He was incapable of guessing that it might apply forcibly to Vittoria, who had undertaken a grave, perilous, and imminent work. Nothing but the spontaneous desire to elude the pursuit of a questioner had at first instigated his baffling of Barto Rizzo, until, fearing the dark square man himself, he feared him dimly for Vittoria’s sake; he could not have said why. She was a good patriot: wherefore the reason for wishing to know more of her? Barto Rizzo had compelled him at last to furnish a narrative of the events of that day on the Motterone, and, finding himself at sea, Luigi struck out boldly and swam as well as he could. Barto disentangled one succinct thread of incidents: Vittoria had been commissioned by the Chief to sing on the night of the Fifteenth; she had subsequently, without speaking to any of the English party, or revealing her features “keeping them beautifully hidden,” Luigi said, with unaccountable enthusiasm—written a warning to them that they were to avoid Milan. The paper on which the warning had been written was found by the English when he was the only Italian on the height, lying thereto observe and note things in the service of Barto Rizzo. The writing was English, but when one of the English ladies—“who wore her hair like a planed shred of wood; like a torn vine; like a kite with two tails; like Luxury at the Banquet, ready to tumble over marble shoulders” (an illustration drawn probably from Luigi’s study of some allegorical picture,—he was at a loss to describe the foreign female head-dress)—when this lady had read the writing, she exclaimed that it was the hand of “her Emilia!” and soon after she addressed Luigi in English, then in French, then in “barricade Italian” (by which phrase Luigi meant that the Italian words were there, but did not present their proper smooth footing for his understanding), and strove to obtain information from him concerning the signorina, and also concerning the chances that Milan would be an agitated city. Luigi assured her that Milan was the peacefullest of cities—a pure babe. He admitted his acquaintance with the Signorina Vittoria Campa, and denied her being “any longer” the Emilia Alessandra Belloni of the English lady. The latter had partly retained him in her service, having given him directions to call at her hotel in Milan, and help her to communicate with her old friend. “I present myself to her to-morrow, Friday,” said Luigi.

“That’s to-day,” said Barto.

Luigi clapped his hand to his cheek, crying wofully, “You’ve drawn, beastly gaoler! a night out of my life like an old jaw-tooth.”

“There’s day two or three fathoms above us,” said Barto; “and hot coffee is coming down.”

“I believe I’ve been stewing in a pot while the moon looked so cool.” Luigi groaned, and touched up along the sleeves of his arms: that which he fancied he instantaneously felt.

Page 1515

The coffee was brought by the heavy-browed young woman. Before she quitted the place Barto desired her to cast her eyes on Luigi, and say whether she thought she should know him again. She scarcely glanced, and gave answer with a shrug of the shoulders as she retired. Luigi at the time was drinking. He rose; he was about to speak, but yawned instead. The woman's carelessly-dropped upper eyelids seemed to him to be reading him through a dozen of his contortions and disguises, and checked the idea of liberty which he associated with getting to the daylight.

"But it is worth the money!" shouted Barto Rizzo, with a splendid divination of his thought. "You skulker! are you not paid and fattened to do business which you've only to remember, and it'll honey your legs in purgatory? You're the shooting-dog of that Greek, and you nose about the bushes for his birds, and who cares if any fellow, just for exercise, shoots a dagger a yard from his wrist and sticks you in the back? You serve me, and there's pay for you; brothers, doctors, nurses, friends,—a tight blanket if you fall from a housetop! and masses for your soul when your hour strikes. The treacherous cur lies rotting in a ditch! Do you conceive that when I employ you I am in your power? Your intelligence will open gradually. Do you know that here in this house I can conceal fifty men, and leave the door open to the Croats to find them? I tell you now—you are free; go forth. You go alone; no one touches you; ten years hence a skeleton is found with an English letter on its ribs—"

"Oh, stop! signor Barto, and be a blessed man," interposed Luigi, doubling and wriggling in a posture that appeared as if he were shaking negatives from the elbows of his crossed arms. "Stop. How did you know of a letter? I forgot—I have seen the English lady at her hotel. I was carrying the signorina's answer, when I thought 'Barto Rizzo calls me,' and I came like a lamb. And what does it matter? She is a good patriot; you are a good patriot; here it is. Consider my reputation, do; and be careful with the wax."

Barto drew a long breath. The mention of the English letter had been a shot in the dark. The result corroborated his devotional belief in the unerringness of his own powerful intuition. He had guessed the case, or hardly even guessed it—merely stated it, to horrify Luigi. The letter was placed in his hands, and he sat as strongly thrilled by emotion, under the mask of his hard face, as a lover hearing music. "I read English," he remarked.

After he had drawn the seal three or four times slowly over the lamp, the green wax bubbled and unsnapped. Vittoria had written the following lines in reply to her old English friend:—

Page 1516

“Forgive me, and do not ask to see me until we have passed the fifteenth of the month. You will see me that night at La Scala. I wish to embrace you, but I am miserable to think of your being in Milan. I cannot yet tell you where my residence is. I have not met your brother. If he writes to me it will make me happy, but I refuse to see him. I will explain to him why. Let him not try to see me. Let him send by this messenger. I hope he will contrive to be out of Milan all this month. Pray let me influence you to go for a time. I write coldly; I am tired, and forget my English. I do not forget my friends. I have you close against my heart. If it were prudent, and it involved me alone, I would come to you without a moment’s loss of time. Do know that I am not changed, and am your affectionate

“Emilia.”

When Barto Rizzo had finished reading, he went from the chamber and blew his voice into what Luigi supposed to be a hollow tube.

“This letter,” he said, coming back, “is a repetition of the Signorina Vittoria’s warning to her friends on the Motterone. The English lady’s brother, who is in the Austrian service, was there, you say?”

Luigi considered that, having lately been believed in, he could not afford to look untruthful, and replied with a sprightly “Assuredly.”

“He was there, and he read the writing on the paper?”

“Assuredly: right out loud, between puff-puff of his cigar.”

“His name is Lieutenant Pierson. Did not Antonio-Pericles tell you his name? He will write to her: you will be the bearer of his letter to the signorina. I must see her reply. She is a good patriot; so am I; so are you. Good patriots must be prudent. I tell you, I must see her reply to this Lieutenant Pierson.” Barto stuck his thumb and finger astride Luigi’s shoulder and began rocking him gently, with a horrible meditative expression. “You will have to accomplish this, my Luigi. All fair excuses will be made, if you fail generally. This you must do. Keep upright while I am speaking to you! The excuses will be made; but I, not you, must make them: bear that in mind. Is there any person whom you, my Luigi, like best in the world?”

It was a winning question, and though Luigi was not the dupe of its insinuating gentleness, he answered, “The little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala.”

“Ah! the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala. Now, my Luigi, you may fail me, and I may pardon you. Listen attentively: if you are false; if you are guilty of one piece of treachery:—do you see? You can’t help slipping, but you can

help jumping. Restrain yourself from jumping, that's all. If you are guilty of treachery, hurry at once, straight off, to the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala. Go to her, take her by the two cheeks, kiss her, say to her 'addio, addio,' for, by the thunder of heaven! you will never see her more."

Page 1517

Luigi was rocked forward and back, while Barto spoke in level tones, till the voice dropped into its vast hollow, when Barto held him fast a moment, and hurled him away by the simple lifting of his hand.

The woman appeared and bound Luigi's eyes. Barto did not utter another word. On his journey back to daylight, Luigi comforted himself by muttering oaths that he would never again enter into this trap. As soon as his eyes were unbandaged, he laughed, and sang, and tossed a compliment from his finger-tips to the savage-browed beauty; pretended that he had got an armful, and that his heart was touched by the ecstasy; and sang again: "Oh, Barto, Barto! my boot is sadly worn. The toe is seen," *etc*., half-way down the stanzas. Without his knowing it, and before he had quitted the court, he had sunk into songless gloom, brooding on the scenes of the night. However free he might be in body, his imagination was captive to Barto Rizzo. He was no luckier than a bird, for whom the cage is open that it may feel the more keenly with its little taste of liberty that it is tied by the leg.

CHAPTER VIII

The importance of the matters extracted from Luigi does not lie on the surface; it will have to be seen through Barto Rizzo's mind. This man regarded himself as the mainspring of the conspiracy; specially its guardian, its wakeful Argus. He had conspired sleeplessly for thirty years; so long, that having no ideal reserve in his nature, conspiracy had become his professional occupation,—the wheel which it was his business to roll. He was above jealousy; he was above vanity. No one outstripping him cast a bad colour on him; nor did he object to bow to another as his superior. But he was prepared to suspect every one of insincerity and of faithlessness; and, being the master of the machinery of the plots, he was ready, upon a whispered justification, to despise the orders of his leader, and act by his own light in blunt disobedience. For it was his belief that while others speculated he knew all. He knew where the plots had failed; he knew the man who had bent and doubled. In the patriotic cause, perfect arrangements are crowned with perfect success, unless there is an imperfection of the instruments; for the cause is blessed by all superior agencies. Such was his governing idea. His arrangements had always been perfect; hence the deduction was a denunciation of some one particular person. He pointed out the traitor here, the traitor there; and in one or two cases he did so with a mildness that made those fret at their beards vaguely who understood his character. Barto Rizzo was, it was said, born in a village near Forli, in the dominions of the Pope; according to the rumour, he was the child of a veiled woman and a cowled paternity. If not an offender against Government, he was at least a wanderer early in life. None could accuse him of personal ambition. He

Page 1518

boasted that he had served as a common soldier with the Italian contingent furnished by Eugene to the Moscow campaign; he showed scars of old wounds: brown spots, and blue spots, and twisted twine of white skin, dotting the wrist, the neck, the calf, the ankle, and looking up from them, he slapped them proudly. Nor had he personal animosities of any kind. One sharp scar, which he called his shoulder knot, he owed to the knife of a friend, by name Sarpo, who had things ready to betray him, and struck him, in anticipation of that tremendous moment of surprise and wrath when the awakened victim frequently is nerved with devil's strength; but, striking, like a novice, on the bone, the stilet stuck there; and Barto coolly got him to point the outlet of escape, and walked off, carrying the blade where the terrified assassin had planted it. This Sarpo had become a tradesman in Milan—a bookseller and small printer; and he was unmolested. Barto said of him, that he was as bad as a few odd persons thought himself to be, and had in him the making of a great traitor; but, that as Sarpo hated him and had sought to be rid of him for private reasons only, it was a pity to waste on such a fellow steel that should serve the Cause. "While I live," said Barto, "my enemies have a tolerably active conscience."

The absence of personal animosity in him was not due to magnanimity. He doubted the patriotism of all booksellers. He had been twice betrayed by women. He never attempted to be revenged on them; but he doubted the patriotism of all women. "Use them; keep eye on them," he said. In Venice he had conspired when he was living there as the clerk of a notary; in Bologna subsequently while earning his bread as a petty schoolmaster. His evasions, both of Papal sbirri and the Austrian polizia, furnished instances of astonishing audacity that made his name a byword for mastery in the hour of peril. His residence in Milan now, after seven years of exile in England and Switzerland, was an act of pointed defiance, incomprehensible to his own party, and only to be explained by the prevalent belief that the authorities feared to provoke a collision with the people by laying hands on him. They had only once made a visitation to his house, and appeared to be satisfied at not finding him. At that period Austria was simulating benevolence in her Lombardic provinces, with the half degree of persuasive earnestness which makes a Government lax in its vigilance, and leaves it simply open to the charge of effeteness. There were contradictory rumours as to whether his house had ever been visited by the polizia; but it was a legible fact that his name was on the window, and it was understood that he was not without elusive contrivances in the event of the authorities declaring war against him.

Page 1519

Of the nature of these contrivances Luigi had just learnt something. He had heard Barto Rizzo called ‘The Miner’ and ‘The Great Cat,’ and he now comprehended a little of the quality of his employer. He had entered a very different service from that of the Signor Antonio-Pericles, who paid him for nothing more than to keep eye on Vittoria, and recount her goings in and out; for what absolute object he was unaware, but that it was not for a political one he was certain. “Cursed be the day when the lust of gold made me open my hand to Barto Rizzo!” he thought; and could only reflect that life is short and gold is sweet, and that he was in the claws of the Great Cat. He had met Barto in a wine-shop. He cursed the habit which led him to call at that shop; the thirst which tempted him to drink: the ear which had been seduced to listen. Yet as all his expenses had been paid in advance, and his reward at the instant of his application for it; and as the signorina and Barto were both good patriots, and he, Luigi, was a good patriot, what harm could be done to her? Both she and Barto had stamped their different impressions on his waxen nature. He reconciled his service to them separately by the exclamation that they were both good patriots.

The plot for the rising in Milan city was two months old. It comprised some of the nobles of the city, and enjoyed the good wishes of the greater part of them, whose payment of fifty to sixty per cent to the Government on the revenue of their estates was sufficient reason for a desire to change masters, positively though they might detest Republicanism, and dread the shadow of anarchy. These looked hopefully to Charles Albert. Their motive was to rise, or to countenance a rising, and summon the ambitious Sardinian monarch with such assurances of devotion, that a Piedmontese army would be at the gates when the banner of Austria was in the dust. Among the most active members of the prospectively insurgent aristocracy of Milan was Count Medole, a young nobleman of vast wealth and possessed of a reliance on his powers of mind that induced him to take a prominent part in the opening deliberations, and speedily necessitated his hire of the friendly offices of one who could supply him with facts, with suggestions, with counsel, with fortitude, with everything to strengthen his pretensions to the leadership, excepting money. He discovered his man in Barto Rizzo, who quitted the ranks of the republican section to serve him, and wield a tool for his own party. By the help of Agostino Balderini, Carlo Ammiani, and others, the aristocratic and the republican sections of the conspiracy were brought near enough together to permit of a common action between them, though the maintaining of such harmony demanded an extreme and tireless delicacy of management. The presence of the Chief, whom we have seen on the Motterone, was claimed by other cities of Italy. Unto him solely did Barto Rizzo yield thorough adhesion.

Page 1520

He being absent from Milan, Barto undertook to represent him and carry out his views. How far he was entitled to do so may be guessed when it is stated that, on the ground of his general contempt for women, he objected to the proposition that Vittoria should give the signal. The proposition was Agostino's. Count Medole, Barto, and Agostino discussed it secretly: Barto held resolutely against it, until Agostino thrust a sly-handed letter into his fingers and let him know that previous to any consultation on the subject he had gained the consent of his Chief. Barto then fell silent. He despatched his new spy, Luigi, to the Motterone, more for the purpose of giving him a schooling on the expedition, and on his return from it, and so getting hand and brain and soul service out of him. He expected no such a report of Vittoria's indiscretion as Luigi had spiced with his one foolish lie. That she should tell the relatives of an Austrian officer that Milan was soon to be a dangerous place for them;—and that she should write it on paper and leave it for the officer to read,—left her, according to Barto's reading of her, open to the alternative charges of imbecility or of treachery. Her letter to the English lady, the Austrian officer's sister, was an exaggeration of the offence, but lent it more the look of heedless folly. The point was to obtain sight of her letter to the Austrian officer himself. Barto was baffled during a course of anxious days that led closely up to the fifteenth. She had written no letter. Lieutenant Pierson, the officer in question, had ridden into the city once from Verona, and had called upon Antonio-Pericles to extract her address from him; the Greek had denied that she was in Milan. Luigi could tell no more. He described the officer's personal appearance, by saying that he was a recognizable Englishman in Austrian dragoon uniform;—white tunic, white helmet, brown moustache;—ay! and eh! and oh! and ah! coming frequently from his mouth; that he stood square while speaking, and seemed to like his own smile; an extraordinary touch of portraiture, or else a scoff at insular self-satisfaction; at any rate, it commended itself to the memory. Barto dismissed him, telling him to be daily in attendance on the English lady.

Barto Rizzo's respect for the Chief was at war with his intense conviction that a blow should be struck at Vittoria even upon the narrow information which he possessed. Twice betrayed, his dreams and haunting thoughts cried "Shall a woman betray you thrice?" In his imagination he stood identified with Italy: the betrayal of one meant that of both. Falling into a deep reflection, Barto counted over his hours of conspiracy: he counted the Chief's; comparing the two sets of figures he discovered, that as he had suspected, he was the elder in the patriotic work therefore, if he bowed his head to the Chief, it was a voluntary act, a form of respect, and not the surrendering of his judgement. He

Page 1521

was on the spot: the Chief was absent. Barto reasoned that the Chief could have had no experience of women, seeing that he was ready to trust in them. “Do I trust to my pigeon, my sling-stone?” he said jovially to the thickbrowed, splendidly ruddy young woman, who was his wife; “do I trust her? Not half a morsel of her!” This young woman, a peasant woman of remarkable personal attractions, served him with the fidelity of a fascinated animal, and the dumbness of a wooden vessel. She could have hanged him, had it pleased her. She had all his secrets: but it was not vain speaking on Barto Rizzo’s part; he was master of her will; and on the occasions when he showed that he did not trust her, he was careful at the same time to shock and subdue her senses. Her report of Vittoria was, that she went to the house of the Signora, Laura Piaveni, widow of the latest heroic son of Milan, and to that of the maestro Rocco Ricci; to no other. It was also Luigi’s report.

“She’s true enough,” the woman said, evidently permitting herself to entertain an opinion; a sign that she required fresh schooling.

“So are you,” said Barto, and eyed her in a way that made her ask, “Now, what’s for me to do?”

He thought awhile.

“You will see the colonel. Tell him to come in corporal’s uniform. What’s the little wretch twisting her body for? Shan’t I embrace her presently if she’s obedient? Send to the polizia. You believe your husband is in the city, and will visit you in disguise at the corporal’s hour. They seize him. They also examine the house up to the point where we seal it. Your object is to learn whether the Austrians are moving men upon Milan. If they are-I learn something. When the house has been examined, our court here will have rest for a good month ahead; and it suits me not to be disturbed. Do this, and we will have a red-wine evening in the house, shut up alone, my snake! my pepper-flower!”

It happened that Luigi was entering the court to keep an appointment with Barto when he saw a handful of the polizia burst into the house and drag out a soldier, who was in the uniform, as he guessed it to be, of the Prohaska regiment. The soldier struggled and offered money to them. Luigi could not help shouting, “You fools! don’t you see he’s an officer?” Two of them took their captive aside. The rest made a search through the house. While they were doing so Luigi saw Barto Rizzo’s face at the windows of the house opposite. He clamoured at the door, but Barto was denied to him there. When the polizia had gone from the court, he was admitted and allowed to look into every room. Not finding him, he said, “Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then!” The same words were repeated in his ear when he had left the court, and was in the street running parallel with it. “Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then!” It was Barto who smacked him on the back, and spoke out his own name with brown-faced laughter

Page 1522

in the bustling street. Luigi was so impressed by his cunning and his recklessness that he at once told him more than he wished to tell:—The Austrian officer was with his sister, and had written to the signorina, and Luigi had delivered the letter; but the signorina was at the maestro's, Rocco Ricci's, and there was no answer: the officer was leaving for Verona in the morning. After telling so much, Luigi drew back, feeling that he had given Barto his full measure and owed to the signorina what remained.

Barto probably read nothing of the mind of his spy, but understood that it was a moment for distrust of him. Vittoria and her mother lodged at the house of one Zotti, a confectioner, dwelling between the Duomo and La Scala. Luigi, at Barto's bidding, left word with Zotti that he would call for the signorina's answer to a certain letter about sunrise. "I promised my Rosellina, my poppyheaded sipper, a red-wine evening, or I would hold this fellow under my eye till the light comes," thought Barto misgivingly, and let him go. Luigi slouched about the English lady's hotel. At nightfall her brother came forth. Luigi directed him to be in the square of the Duomo by sunrise, and slipped from his hold; the officer ran after him some distance. "She can't say I was false to her now," said Luigi, dancing with nervous ecstasy. At sunrise Barto Rizzo was standing under the shadow of the Duomo. Luigi passed him and went to Zotti's house, where the letter was placed in his hand, and the door shut in his face. Barto rushed to him, but Luigi, with a vixenish countenance, standing like a humped cat, hissed, "Would you destroy my reputation and have it seen that I deliver up letters, under the noses of the writers, to the wrong persons?—ha! pestilence!" He ran, Barto following him. They were crossed by the officer on horseback, who challenged Luigi to give up the letter, which was very plainly being thrust from his hand into his breast. The officer found it no difficult matter to catch him and pluck the letter from him; he opened it, reading it on the jog of the saddle as he cantered off. Luigi turned in a terror of expostulation to ward Barto's wrath. Barto looked at him hard, while he noted the matter down on the tablet of an ivory book. All he said was, "I have that letter!" stamping the assertion with an oath. Half-an-hour later Luigi saw Barto in the saddle, tight-legged about a rusty beast, evidently bound for the South-eastern gate, his brows set like a black wind. "Blessings on his going!" thought Luigi, and sang one of his street-songs:—"O lemons, lemons, what a taste you leave in the mouth! I desire you, I love you, but when I suck you, I'm all caught up in a bundle and turn to water, like a wry-faced fountain. Why not be satisfied by a sniff at the blossoms? There's gratification. Why did you grow up from the precious little sweet chuck that you were, Marietta? Lemons, O lemons! such a thing as a decent appetite is not known after sucking at you."

Page 1523

His natural horror of a resolute man, more than fear (of which he had no recollection in the sunny Piazza), made him shiver and gave his tongue an acid taste at the prospect of ever meeting Barto Rizzo again. There was the prospect also that he might never meet him again.

CHAPTER IX

IN VERONA

The lieutenant read these lines, as he clattered through the quiet streets toward the Porta Tosa:

'*Dear friend*,—I am glad that you remind me of our old affection, for it assures me that yours is not dead. I cannot consent to see you yet. I would rather that we should not meet.

'I thought I would sign my name here, and say, "God bless you, Wilfrid; go!"

'Oh! why have you done this thing! I must write on. It seems like my past life laughing at me, that my old friend should have come here in Italy, to wear the detestable uniform. How can we be friends when we must act as enemies? We shall soon be in arms, one against the other. I pity you, for you have chosen a falling side; and when you are beaten back, you can have no pride in your country, as we Italians have; no delight, no love. They will call you a mercenary soldier. I remember that I used to have the fear of your joining our enemies, when we were in England, but it seemed too much for my reason.

'You are with a band of butchers. If I could see you and tell you the story of Giacomo Piaveni, and some other things, I believe you would break your sword instantly.

'There is time. Come to Milan on the fifteenth. You will see me then. I appear at La Scala. Promise me, if you hear me, that you will do exactly what I make you feel it right to do. Ah, you will not, though thousands will! But step aside to me, when the curtain falls, and remain—oh, dear friend! I write in honour to you; we have sworn to free the city and the country—remain among us: break your sword, tear off your uniform; we are so strong that we are irresistible. I know what a hero you can be on the field: then, why not in the true cause? I do not understand that you should waste your bravery under that ugly flag, bloody and past forgiveness.

'I shall be glad to have news of you all, and of England. The bearer of this is a trusty messenger, and will continue to call at the hotel. A. is offended that I do not allow my messenger to give my address; but I must not only be hidden, I must have peace, and forget you all until I have done my task. Addio. We have both changed names. I am the same. Can I think that you are? Addio, dear friend.

‘*Vittoria*.’

Page 1524

Lieutenant Pierson read again and again the letter of her whom he had loved in England, to get new lights from it, as lovers do when they have lost the power to take single impressions. He was the bearer of a verbal despatch from the commandant in Milan to the Marshal in Verona. At that period great favour was shown to Englishmen in the Austrian service, and the lieutenant's uncle being a General of distinction, he had a sort of semi-attachment to the Marshal's staff, and was hurried to and fro, for the purpose of keeping him out of duelling scrapes, as many of his friendlier comrades surmised. The right to the distinction of exercising staff-duties is, of course, only to be gained by stout competitorship in the Austrian service; but favour may do something for a young man even in that rigorous school of Arms. He had to turn to Brescia on his way, and calculated that if luck should put good horses under him, he would enter Verona gates about sunset. Meantime; there was Vittoria's letter to occupy him as he went.

We will leave him to his bronzing ride through the mulberries and the grapes, and the white and yellow and arid hues of the September plain, and make acquaintance with some of his comrades of that proud army which Vittoria thought would stand feebly against the pouring tide of Italian patriotism.

The fairest of the cities of the plain had long been a nest of foreign soldiery. The life of its beauty was not more visible then than now. Within the walls there are glimpses of it, that belong rather to the haunting spirit than to the life. Military science has made a mailed giant of Verona, and a silent one, save upon occasion. Its face grins of war, like a skeleton of death; the salient image of the skull and congregating worms was one that Italian lyrists applied naturally to Verona.

The old Field-Marshal and chief commander of the Austrian forces in Lombardy, prompted by the counsels of his sagacious adlatus, the chief of the staff, was engaged at that period in adding some of those ugly round walls and flanking bastions to Verona, upon which, when Austria was thrown back by the first outburst of the insurrection and the advance of the Piedmontese, she was enabled to plant a sturdy hind-foot, daring her foes as from a rock of defence.

A group of officers, of the cavalry, with a few infantry uniforms skirting them, were sitting in the pleasant cooling evening air, fanned by the fresh springing breeze, outside one of the Piazza Bra caffes, close upon the shadow of the great Verona amphitheatre. They were smoking their attenuated long straw cigars, sipping iced lemonade or coffee, and talking the common talk of the garrison officers, with perhaps that additional savour of a robust immorality which a Viennese social education may give. The rounded ball of the brilliant September moon hung still aloft, lighting a fathomless sky as well as the fair earth. It threw solid blackness from the old savage walls almost to a junction

Page 1525

with their indolent outstretched feet. Itinerant street music twittered along the Piazza; officers walked arm-in-arm; now in moonlight bright as day, now in a shadow black as night: distant figures twinkled with the alternation. The light lay like a blade's sharp edge around the massive circle. Of Italians of a superior rank, Verona sent none to this resort. Even the melon-seller stopped beneath the arch ending the Stradone Porta Nuova, as if he had reached a marked limit of his popular customers.

This isolation of the rulers of Lombardy had commenced in Milan, but, owing to particular causes, was not positively defined there as it was in Verona. War was already rageing between the Veronese ladies and the officers of Austria. According to the Gallic Terpsichorean code, a lady who permits herself to make election of her partners and to reject applicants to the honour of her hand in the dance, when that hand is disengaged, has no just ground of complaint if a glove should smite her cheek. The Austrians had to endure this sort of rejection in Ballrooms. On the promenade their features were forgotten. They bowed to statues. Now, the officers of Austria who do not belong to a Croat regiment, or to one drawn from any point of the extreme East of the empire, are commonly gentlemanly men; and though they can be vindictive after much irritation, they may claim at least as good a reputation for forbearance in a conquered country as our officers in India. They are not ill-humoured, and they are not peevishly arrogant, except upon provocation. The conduct of the tender Italian dames was vexatious. It was exasperating to these knights of the slumbering sword to hear their native waltzes sounding of exquisite Vienna, while their legs stretched in melancholy inactivity on the Piazza pavement, and their arms encircled no ductile waists. They tried to despise it more than they disliked it, called their female foes Amazons, and their male by a less complimentary title, and so waited for the patriotic epidemic to pass.

A certain Captain Weisspriess, of the regiment named after a sagacious monarch whose crown was the sole flourishing blossom of diplomacy, particularly distinguished himself by insisting that a lady should remember him in public places. He was famous for skill with his weapons. He waltzed admirably; erect as under his Field-Marshal's eye. In the language of his brother officers, he was successful; that is, even as God Mars when Bellona does not rage. Captain Weisspriess (Johann Nepomuk, Freiherr von Scheppenhausen) resembled in appearance one in the Imperial Royal service, a gambling General of Division, for whom Fame had not yet blown her blast. Rumour declared that they might be relatives; a little-scrupulous society did not hesitate to mention how. The captain's moustache was straw-coloured; he wore it beyond the regulation length and caressed it infinitely. Surmounted by a pair of hot eyes, wavering in their

Page 1526

direction, this grand moustache was a feature to be forgotten with difficulty, and Weisspriess was doubtless correct in asserting that his face had endured a slight equal to a buffet. He stood high and square-shouldered; the flame of the moustache streamed on either side his face in a splendid curve; his vigilant head was loftily posted to detect what he chose to construe as insult, or gather the smiles of approbation, to which, owing to the unerring judgement of the sex, he was more accustomed. Handsome or not, he enjoyed the privileges of masculine beauty.

This captain of a renown to come pretended that a superb Venetian lady of the Branciani family was bound to make response in public to his private signals, and publicly to reply to his salutations. He refused to be as a particle in space floating airily before her invincible aspect. Meeting her one evening, ere sweet Italy had exiled herself from the Piazza, he bowed, and stepping to the front of her, bowed pointedly. She crossed her arms and gazed over him. He called up a thing to her recollection in resonant speech. Shameful lie, or shameful truth, it was uttered in the hearing of many of his brother officers, of three Italian ladies, and of an Italian gentleman, Count Broncini, attending them. The lady listened calmly. Count Broncini smote him on the face. That evening the lady's brother arrived from Venice, and claimed his right to defend her. Captain Weisspriess ran him through the body, and attached a sinister label to his corpse. This he did not so much from brutality; the man felt that henceforth while he held his life he was at war with every Italian gentleman of mettle. Count Broncini was his next victim. There, for a time, the slaughtering business of the captain stopped. His brother officers of the better kind would not have excused him at another season, but the avenger of their irritation and fine vindicator of the merits of Austrian steel, had a welcome truly warm, when at the termination of his second duel he strode into mess, or what serves for an Austrian regimental mess.

It ensued naturally that there was everywhere in Verona a sharp division between the Italians of all classes and their conquerors. The great green-rinded melons were never wheeled into the neighbourhood of the whitecoats. Damsels were no longer coquettish under the military glance, but hurried by in couples; and there was much scowling mixed with derisive servility, throughout the city, hard to be endured without that hostile state of the spirit which is the military mind's refuge in such cases. Itinerant musicians, and none but this fry, continued to be attentive to the dispensers of soldi.

The Austrian army prides itself upon being a brotherhood. Discipline is very strict, but all commissioned officers, when off duty, are as free in their intercourse as big boys. The General accepts a cigar from the lieutenant, and in return lifts his glass to him. The General takes an interest in his lieutenant's love-affairs: nor is the latter shy when he feels it his duty modestly to compliment his superior officer upon a recent conquest. There is really good fellowship both among the officers and in the ranks, and it is systematically encouraged.

Page 1527

The army of Austria was in those days the Austrian Empire. Outside the army the empire was a jealous congery of intriguing disaffected nationalities. The same policy which played the various States against one another in order to reduce all to subserviency to the central Head, erected a privileged force wherein the sentiment of union was fostered till it became a nationality of the sword. Nothing more fatal can be done for a country; but for an army it is a simple measure of wisdom. Where the password is *march*, and not *develop*, a body of men, to be a serviceable instrument, must consent to act as one. Hannibal is the historic example of what a General can accomplish with tribes who are thus, enrolled in a new citizenship; and (as far as we know of him and his fortunes) he appears to be an example of the necessity of the fusing fire of action to congregated aliens in arms. When Austria was fighting year after year, and being worsted in campaign after campaign, she lost foot by foot, but she held together soundly; and more than the baptism, the atmosphere of strife has always been required to give her a healthy vitality as a centralized empire. She knew it; this (apart from the famous promptitude of the Hapsburgs) was one secret of her dauntless readiness to fight. War did the work of a smithy for the iron and steel holding her together; and but that war costs money, she would have been an empire distinguished by aggressiveness. The next best medicinal thing to war is the military occupation of insurgent provinces. The soldiery soon feel where their home is, and feel the pride of atomies in unitive power, when they are sneered at, hooted, pelted, stabbed upon a gross misinterpretation of the slightest of moral offences, shamefully abused for doing their duty with a considerate sense of it, and too accurately divided from the inhabitants of the land they hold. In Italy, the German, the Czech, the Magyar, the Croft, even in general instances the Italian, clung to the standard for safety, for pay, for glory, and all became pre-eminently Austrian soldiers; little besides.

It was against a power thus bound in iron hoops, that Italy, dismembered, and jealous, and corrupt, with an organization promoted by passion chiefly, was preparing to rise. In the end, a country true to itself and determined to claim God's gift to brave men will overmatch a mere army, however solid its force. But an inspired energy of faith is demanded of it. The intervening chapters will show pitiable weakness, and such a schooling of disaster as makes men, looking on the surface of things, deem the struggle folly. As well, they might say, let yonder scuffling vagabonds up any of the Veronese side-streets fall upon the patrol marching like one man, and hope to overcome them! In Vienna there was often despair: but it never existed in the Austrian camp. Vienna was frequently double-dealing and time-serving her force in arms was like a trained man feeling his muscle. Thus, when the Government thought of temporizing, they issued orders to Generals whose one idea was to strike the blow of a mallet.

Page 1528

At this period there was no suspicion of any grand revolt being in process of development. The abounding dissatisfaction was treated as nothing more than the Italian disease showing symptoms here and there, and Vienna counselled measures mildly repressive,—'conciliating,' it was her pleasure to call them. Her recent commands with respect to turbulent Venice were the subject of criticism among the circle outside the Piazza Gaffe. An enforced inactivity of the military legs will quicken the military wits, it would appear, for some of the younger officers spoke hotly as to their notion of the method of ruling Venezia. One had bidden his Herr General to 'look here,' while he stretched forth his hand and declared that Italians were like women, and wanted—yes, wanted—(their instinct called for it) a beating, a real beating; as the emphatic would say in our vernacular, a thundering thrashing, once a month:-'Or so,' the General added acquiescingly. A thundering thrashing, once a month or so, to these unruly Italians, because they are like women! It was a youth who spoke, but none doubted his acquaintance with women, or cared to suggest that his education in that department of knowledge was an insufficient guarantee for his fitness to govern Venezia. Two young dragoon officers had approached during the fervid allocution, and after the salute to their superior, caught up chairs and stamped them down, thereupon calling for the loan of anybody's cigar-case. Where it is that an Austrian officer ordinarily keeps this instrument so necessary to his comfort, and obnoxious, one would suppose, to the rigid correctness of his shapely costume, we cannot easily guess. None can tell even where he stows away his pocket-handkerchief, or haply his purse. However, these things appear on demand. Several elongated cigar-cases were thrust forward, and then it was seen that the attire of the gallant youngsters was in disorder.

'Did you hunt her to earth?' they were asked.

The reply trenched on philosophy; and consisted in an inquiry as to who cared for the whole basketful—of the like description of damsels, being implied. Immoderate and uproarious laughter burst around them. Both seemed to have been clawed impartially. Their tightfitting coats bulged at the breast or opened at the waist, as though buttons were lacking, and the whiteness of that garment cried aloud for the purification of pipeclay. Questions flew. The damsel who had been pursued was known as a pretty girl, the daughter of a blacksmith, and no prolonged resistance was expected from one of her class. But, as it came out, she had said, a week past, 'I shall be stabbed if I am seen talking to you'; and therefore the odd matter was, not that she had, in tripping down the Piazza with her rogue-eyed cousin from Milan, looked away and declined all invitation to moderate her pace and to converse, but that, after doubling down and about lonely streets, the length of which she ran as swiftly as her feet would carry

Page 1529

her, at a corner of the Via Colomba she allowed herself to be caught—wilfully, beyond a doubt, seeing that she was not a bit breathed—allowed one quick taste of her lips, and then shrieked as naturally as a netted bird, and brought a hustling crowd just at that particular point to her rescue: not less than fifty, and all men. ‘Not a woman among them!’ the excited young officer repeated.

A veteran in similar affairs could see that he had the wish to remain undisturbed in his bewilderment at the damsel’s conduct. Profound belief in her partiality for him perplexed his recent experience rather agreeably. Indeed, it was at this epoch an article of faith with the Austrian military that nothing save terror of their males kept sweet Italian women from the expression of their preference for the broad-shouldered, thick-limbed, yellow-haired warriors—the contrast to themselves which is supposed greatly to inspirit genial Cupid in the selection from his quiver.

‘What became of her? Did you let her go?’ came pestering remarks, too absurd for replies if they had not been so persistent.

’Let her go? In the devil’s name, how was I to keep my hold of her in a crowd of fifty of the fellows, all mowing, and hustling, and elbowing—every rascal stinking right under my nose like the pit?’

‘’Hem!’ went the General present. ’As long as you did not draw! Unsheathe, a minute.’

He motioned for a sight of their naked swords.

The couple of young officers flushed.

‘Herr General! Pardon!’ they remonstrated.

’No, no. I know how boys talk; I’ve been one myself. Tutt! You tell the truth, of course; but the business is for me to know in what! how far! Your swords, gentlemen.’

‘But, General!’

‘Well? I merely wish to examine the blades.’

‘Do you doubt our words?’

’Hark at them! Words? Are you lawyers? A soldier deals in acts. I don’t want to know your words, but your deeds, my gallant lads. I want to look at the blades of your swords, my children. What was the last order? That on no account were we to provoke, or, if possibly to be avoided, accept a collision, *etc*., *etc*. The soldier in peace is a citizen, *etc*. No sword on any account, or for any excuse, to be drawn, *etc*. You all heard it? So, good! I receive your denial, my children. In addition, I merely desire to satisfy curiosity. Did the guard clear a way for you?’

The answer was affirmative.

‘Your swords!’

One of them drew, and proffered the handle.

The other clasped the haft angrily, and with a resolute smack on it, settled it in the scabbard.

‘Am I a prisoner, General?’

‘Not at all!’

‘Then I decline to surrender my sword.’

Another General officer happened to be sauntering by. Applauding with his hands, and choosing the Italian language as the best form of speech for the enunciation of ironical superlatives, he said:

Page 1530

’Eccellentemente! most admirable! of a distinguished loftiness of moral grandeur: “Then I decline,” *etc*.: you are aware that you are quoting? “as the drummerboy said to Napoleon.” I think you forgot to add that? It is the same young soldier who utters these immense things, which we can hardly get out of our mouths. So the little fellow towers! His moral greatness is as noisy as his drum. What’s wrong?’

‘General Pierson, nothing’s wrong,’ was replied by several voices; and some explained that Lieutenant Jenna had been called upon by General Schoneck to show his sword, and had refused.

The heroic defender of his sword shouted to the officer with whom General Pierson had been conversing: ‘Here! Weisspriess!’

‘What is it, my dear fellow? Speak, my good Jenna!’

The explanation was given, and full sympathy elicited from Captain Weisspriess, while the two Generals likewise whispered and nodded.

‘Did you draw?’ the captain inquired, yawning. ’You needn’t say it in quite so many words, if you did. I shall be asked by the General presently; and owing to that duel pending ’twixt you and his nephew, of which he is aware, he may put a bad interpretation on your pepperiness.’

‘The devil fetch his nephew!’ returned the furious Lieutenant Jenna. ’He comes back to-night from Milan, and if he doesn’t fight me to-morrow, I post him a coward. Well, about that business! My good Weisspriess, the fellows had got into a thick crowd all round, and had begun to knead me. Do you understand me? I felt their knuckles.’

‘Ah, good, good!’ said the captain. ’Then, you didn’t draw, of course. What officer of the Imperial service would, under similar circumstances! That is my reply to the Emperor, if ever I am questioned. To draw would be to show that an Austrian officer relies on his good sword in the thick of his enemies; against which, as you know, my Jenna, the Government have issued an express injunction button. Did you sell it dear?’

‘A fellow parted with his ear for it.’

Lieutenant Jenna illustrated a particular cut from a turn of his wrist.

‘That oughtn’t to make a noise?’ he queried somewhat anxiously.

‘It won’t hear one any longer, at all events,’ said Captain Weisspriess; and the two officers entered into the significance of the remark with enjoyment.

Meantime General Pierson had concluded an apparently humorous dialogue with his brother General, and the later, now addressing Lieutenant Jenna, said: ’Since you

prefer surrendering your person rather than your sword—it is good! Report yourself at the door of my room to-night, at ten. I suspect that you have been blazing your steel, sir. They say, 'tis as ready to flash out as your temper.'

Several voices interposed: 'General! what if he did draw!'

'Silence. You have read the recent order. Orlando may have his Durindarda bare; but you may not. Grasp that fact. The Government wish to make Christians of you, my children. One cheek being smitten, what should you do?'

Page 1531

‘Shall I show you, General?’ cried a quick little subaltern.

’The order, my children, as received a fortnight since from our old Wien, commands you to offer the other cheek to the smiter.’

‘So that a proper balance may be restored to both sides of the face,’ General Pierson appended.

‘And mark me,’ he resumed. ’There may be doubts about the policy of anything, though I shouldn’t counsel you to cherish them: but there’s no mortal doubt about the punishment for this thing.’ The General spoke sternly; and then relaxing the severity of his tone, he said, ’The desire of the Government is to make an army of Christians.’

‘And a precious way of doing it!’ interjected two or three of the younger officers. They perfectly understood how hateful the Viennese domination was to their chiefs, and that they would meet sympathy and tolerance for any extreme of irony, provided that they showed a disposition to be subordinate. For the bureaucratic order, whatever it was, had to be obeyed. The army might, and of course did, know best: nevertheless it was bound to be nothing better than a machine in the hands of the dull closeted men in Vienna, who judged of difficulties and plans of action from a calculation of numbers, or from foreign journals—from heaven knows what!

General Schoneck and General Pierson walked away laughing, and the younger officers were left to themselves. Half-a-dozen of them interlaced arms, striding up toward the Porta Nuova, near which, at the corner of the Via Trinita, they had the pleasant excitement of beholding a riderless horse suddenly in mid gallop sink on its knees and roll over. A crowd came pouring after it, and from the midst the voice of a comrade hailed them. ‘It’s Pierson,’ cried Lieutenant Jenna. The officers drew their swords, and hailed the guard from the gates. Lieutenant Pierson dropped in among their shoulders, dead from want of breath. They held him up, and finding him sound, thumped his back. The blade of his sword was red. He coughed with their thumpings, and sang out to them to cease; the idle mob which had been at his heels drew back before the guard could come up with them. Lieutenant Pierson gave no explanation except that he had been attacked near Juliet’s tomb on his way to General Schoneck’s quarters. Fellows had stabbed his horse, and brought him to the ground, and torn the coat off his back. He complained in bitter mutterings of the loss of a letter therein, during the first candid moments of his anger: and, as he was known to be engaged to the Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, it was conjectured by his comrades that this lady might have had something to do with the ravishment of the letter. Great laughter surrounded him, and he looked from man to man. Allowance is naturally made for the irascibility of a brother officer coming tattered out of the hands of enemies, or Lieutenant Jenna would have construed his eye’s challenge on the spot. As it

Page 1532

was, he cried out, 'The letter! the letter! Charge, for the honour of the army, and rescue the letter!' Others echoed him: 'The letter! the letter! the English letter!' A foreigner in an army can have as much provocation as he pleases; if he is anything of a favourite with his superiors, his fellows will task his forbearance. Wilfrid Pierson glanced at the blade of his sword, and slowly sheathed it. 'Lieutenant Jenna is a good actor before a mob,' he said. 'Gentlemen, I rely upon you to make no noise about that letter; it is a private matter. In an hour or so, if any officer shall choose to question me concerning it, I will answer him.'

The last remnants of the mob had withdrawn. The officer in command at the gates threw a cloak over Wilfrid's shoulders; and taking the arm of a friend Wilfrid hurried to barracks, and was quickly in a position to report himself to his General, whose first remark, 'Has the dead horse been removed?' robbed him of his usual readiness to equivocate. 'When you are the bearer of a verbal despatch, come straight to quarters, if you have to come like a fig-tree on the north side of the wall in Winter,' said General Schoneck, who was joined presently by General Pierson.

'What 's this I hear of some letter you have been barking about all over the city?' the latter asked, after returning his nephew's on-duty salute.

Wilfrid replied that it was a letter of his sister's treating of family matters.

The two Generals, who were close friends, discussed the attack to which he had been subjected. Wilfrid had to recount it with circumstance: how, as he was nearing General Schoneck's quarters at a military trot, six men headed by a leader had dashed out on him from a narrow side-street, unhorsed him after a struggle, rifled the saddlebags, and torn the coat from his back, and had taken the mark of his sword, while a gathering crowd looked on, hooting. His horse had fled, and he confessed that he had followed his horse. General Schoneck spoke the name of Countess Lena suggestively. 'Not a bit,' returned General Pierson; 'the fellow courts her too hotly. The scoundrels here want a bombardment; that 's where it lies. A dose of iron pills will make Verona a healthy place. She must have it.'

General Schoneck said, 'I hope not,' and laughed at the heat of Irish blood. He led Wilfrid in to the Marshal, after which Wilfrid was free to seek Lieutenant Jenna, who had gained the right to a similar freedom by pledging his honour not to fight within a stipulated term of days. The next morning Wilfrid was roused by an orderly coming from his uncle, who placed in his hands a copy of Vittoria's letter: at the end of it his uncle had written, 'Rather astonishing. Done pretty well; but by a foreigner. "Affection" spelt with one "f." An Italian: you will see the letters are emphatic at "ugly flag"; also "bloody and past forgiveness" very large; the copyist had a dash of the feelings of a

Page 1533

commentator, and did his (or her) best to add an oath to it. Who the deuce, sir, is this opera girl calling herself Vittoria? I have a lecture for you. German women don't forgive diversions during courtship; and if you let this Countess Lena slip, your chance has gone. I compliment you on your power of lying; but you must learn to show your right face to me, or the very handsome feature, your nose, and that useful box, your skull, will come to grief. The whole business is a mystery. The letter (copy) was directed to you, brought to me, and opened in a fit of abstraction, necessary to commanding uncles who are trying to push the fortunes of young noodles pretending to be related to them. Go to Countess Lena. Count Paul is with her, from Bologna. Speak to her, and observe her and him. He knows English—has been attached to the embassy in London; but, pooh! the hand's Italian. I confess myself puzzled. We shall possibly have to act on the intimation of the fifteenth, and profess to be wiser than others. Something is brewing for business. See Countess Lena boldly, and then come and breakfast with me.'

Wilfrid read the miserable copy of Vittoria's letter, utterly unable to resolve anything in his mind, except that he would know among a thousand the leader of those men who had attacked him, and who bore the mark of his sword.

CHAPTER X

THE POPE'S MOUTH

Barto Rizzo had done what he had sworn to do. He had not found it difficult to outstrip the lieutenant (who had to visit Brescia on his way) and reach the gates of Verona in advance of him, where he obtained entrance among a body of grape-gatherers and others descending from the hills to meet a press of labour in the autumnal plains. With them he hoped to issue forth unchallenged on the following morning; but Wilfrid's sword had made lusty play; and, as in the case when the order has been given that a man shall be spared in life and limb, Barto and his fellow-assailants suffered by their effort to hold him simply half a minute powerless. He received a shrewd cut across the head, and lay for a couple of hours senseless in the wine-shop of one Battista—one of the many all over Lombardy who had pledged their allegiance to the Great Cat, thinking him scarcely vulnerable. He read the letter, dizzy with pain, and with the frankness proper to inflated spirits after loss of blood, he owned to himself that it was not worth much as a prize. It was worth the attempt to get possession of it, for anything is worth what it costs, if it be only as a schooling in resolution, energy, and devotedness:—regrets are the sole admission of a fruitless business; they show the bad tree;—so, according to his principle of action, he deliberated; but he was compelled to admit that Vittoria's letter was little else than a repetition of her want of discretion when she was on the Motterone. He admitted it, wrathfully:

Page 1534

his efforts to convict this woman telling him she deserved some punishment; and his suspicions being unsatisfied, he resolved to keep them hungry upon her, and return to Milan at once. As to the letter itself, he purposed, since the harm in it was accomplished, to send it back honourably to the lieutenant, till finding it blood-stained, he declined to furnish the gratification of such a sight to any Austrian sword. For that reason, he copied it, while Battista's wife held double bandages tight round his head: believing that the letter stood transcribed in a precisely similar hand, he forwarded it to Lieutenant Pierson, and then sank and swooned. Two days he lay incapable and let his thoughts dance as they would. Information was brought to him that the gates were strictly watched, and that troops were starting for Milan. This was in the dull hour antecedent to the dawn. 'She is a traitress!' he exclaimed, and leaping from his bed, as with a brain striking fire, screamed, 'Traitress! traitress!' Battista and his wife had to fling themselves on him and gag him, guessing him as mad. He spoke pompously and theatrically; called himself the Eye of Italy, and said that he must be in Milan, or Milan would perish, because of the traitress: all with a great sullen air of composure and an odd distension of the eyelids. When they released him, he smiled and thanked them, though they knew, that had he chosen, he could have thrown off a dozen of them, such was his strength. The woman went down on her knees to him to get his consent that she should dress and bandage his head afresh. The sound of the regimental bugles drew him from the house, rather than any immediate settled scheme to watch at the gates.

Artillery and infantry were in motion before sunrise, from various points of the city, bearing toward the Palio and Zeno gates, and the people turned out to see them, for it was a march that looked like the beginning of things. The soldiers had green twigs in their hats, and kissed their hands good-humouredly to the gazing crowd, shouting bits of verses:

'I'm off! I'm off! Farewell, Mariandl! if I come back a sergeant-major or a Field-Marshal, don't turn up your nose at me: Swear you will be faithful all the while; because, when a woman swears, it's a comfort, somehow: Farewell! Squeeze the cow's udders: I shall be thirsty enough: You pretty wriggler! don't you know, the first cup of wine and the last, I shall float your name on it? Luck to the lads we leave behind! Farewell, Mariandl!'

The kindly fellows waved their hands and would take no rebuff. The soldiery of Austria are kindlier than most, until their blood is up. A Tyrolese regiment passed, singing splendidly in chorus. Songs of sentiment prevailed, but the traditions of a soldier's experience of the sex have informed his ballads with strange touches of irony, that help him to his (so to say) philosophy, which is recklessness. The Tyroler's 'Katchen' here, was a saturnine Giulia, who gave him no response, either of eye or lip.

Page 1535

’Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, ‘ade! ade!’ My little sweetheart, your meadow is half-way up the mountain; it’s such a green spot on the eyeballs of a roving boy! and the chapel just above it, I shall see it as I’ve seen it a thousand times; and the cloud hangs near it, and moves to the door and enters, for it is an angel, not a cloud; a white angel gone in to pray for Katerlein and me: Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, ‘ade! ade!’ Keep single, Katerlein, as long as you can: as long as you can hold out, keep single: ‘ade!’’

Fifteen hundred men and six guns were counted as they marched on to one gate.

Barto Rizzo, with Battista and his wife on each side of him, were among the spectators. The black cock’s feathers of the Tyrolese were still fluttering up the Corso, when the woman said, ’I ’ve known the tail of a regiment get through the gates without having to show paper.’

Battista thereupon asked Barto whether he would try that chance. The answer was a vacuous shake of the head, accompanied by an expression of unutterable mournfulness. ‘There’s no other way,’ pursued Battista, ’unless you jump into the Adige, and swim down half-a-mile under water; and cats hate water—eh, my comico?’

He conceived that the sword-cut had rendered Barto imbecile, and pulled his hat down his forehead, and patted his shoulder, and bade him have cheer, patronizingly: but women do not so lightly lose their impression of a notable man. His wife checked him. Barto had shut his eyes, and hung swaying between them, as in drowsiness or drunkenness. Like his body, his faith was swaying within him. He felt it borne upon the reeling brain, and clung to it desperately, calling upon chance to aid him; for he was weak, incapable of a physical or mental contest, and this part of his settled creed that human beings alone failed the patriotic cause as instruments, while circumstances constantly befriended it—was shocked by present events. The image of Vittoria, the traitress, floated over the soldiery marching on Milan through her treachery. Never had an Austrian force seemed to him so terrible. He had to yield the internal fight, and let his faith sink and be blackened, in order that his mind might rest supine, according to his remembered system; for the inspiration which points to the right course does not come during mental strife, but after it, when faith summons its agencies undisturbed—if only men will have the faith, and will teach themselves to know that the inspiration must come, and will counsel them justly. This was a part of Barto Rizzo’s sustaining creed; nor did he lose his grasp of it in the torment and the darkness of his condition.

Page 1536

He heard English voices. A carriage had stopped almost in front of him. A General officer was hat in hand, talking to a lady, who called him uncle, and said that she had been obliged to decide to quit Verona on account of her husband, to whom the excessive heat was unendurable. Her husband, in the same breath, protested that the heat killed him. He adorned the statement with all kinds of domestic and subterranean imagery, and laughed faintly, saying that after the fifteenth—on which night his wife insisted upon going to the Opera at Milan to hear a new singer and old friend—he should try a week at the Baths of Bormio, and only drop from the mountains when a proper temperature reigned, he being something of an invalid.

‘And, uncle, will you be in Milan on the fifteenth?’ said the lady; ’and Wilfrid, too?’

’Wilfrid will reach Milan as soon as you do, and I shall undoubtedly be there on the fifteenth,’ said the General.

‘I cannot possibly express to you how beautiful I think your army looks,’ said the lady.

’Fine men, General Pierson, very fine men. I never saw such marching—equal to our Guards,’ her husband remarked.

The lady named her Milanese hotel as the General waved his plumes, nodded, and rode off.

Before the carriage had started, Barto Rizzo dashed up to it; and ’Dear good English lady,’ he addressed her, ’I am the brother of Luigi, who carries letters for you in Milan—-little Luigi!—and I have a mother dying in Milan; and here I am in Verona, ill, and can’t get to her, poor soul! Will you allow me that I may sit up behind as quiet as a mouse, and be near one of the lovely English ladies who are so kind to unfortunate persons, and never deaf to the name of charity? It’s my mother who is dying, poor soul!’

The lady consulted her husband’s face, which presented the total blank of one who refused to be responsible for an opinion hostile to the claims of charity, while it was impossible for him to fall in with foreign habits of familiarity, and accede to extraordinary petitions. Barto sprang up. ‘I shall be your courier, dear lady,’ he said, and commenced his professional career in her service by shouting to the vetturino to drive on. Wilfrid met them as he was trotting down from the Porta del Palio, and to him his sister confided her new trouble in having a strange man attached to her, who might be anything. ‘We don’t know the man,’ said her husband; and Adela pleaded for him: ’Don’t speak to him harshly, pray, Wilfrid; he says he has a mother dying in Milan.’ Barto kept his head down on his arms and groaned; Adela gave a doleful little grimace. ’Oh, take the poor beggar,’ said Wilfrid; and sang out to him in Italian: ’Who are you—-what are you, my fine fellow?’ Barto groaned louder, and replied in Swiss-French from a smothering depth: ’A poor man, and the gracious lady’s servant till we reach Milan.’

‘I can’t wait,’ said Wilfrid; ’I start in half-an-hour. It’s all right; you must take him now you’ve got him, or else pitch him out—one of the two. If things go on quietly we shall have the Autumn manoeuvres in a week, and then you may see something of the army.’ He rode away. Barto passed the gates as one of the licenced English family.

Page 1537

Milan was more strictly guarded than when he had quitted it. He had anticipated that it would be so, and tamed his spirit to submit to the slow stages of the carriage, spent a fiery night in Brescia, and entered the city of action on the noon of the fourteenth. Safe within the walls, he thanked the English lady, assuring her that her charitable deed would be remembered aloft. He then turned his steps in the direction of the Revolutionary post-office. This place was nothing other than a blank abutment of a corner house that had long been undergoing repair, and had a great bank of brick and mortar rubbish at its base. A stationary melonseller and some black fig and vegetable stalls occupied the triangular space fronting it. The removal of a square piece of cement showed a recess, where, chiefly during the night, letters and proclamation papers were deposited, for the accredited postman to disperse them. Hither, as one would go to a caffe for the news, Barto Rizzo came in the broad glare of noon, and flinging himself down like a tired man under the strip of shade, worked with a hand behind him, and drew out several folded scraps, of which one was addressed to him by his initials. He opened it and read:

’Your house is watched.

’A corporal of the P . . . ka regiment was seen leaving it this morning in time for the second bugle.

’Reply:—where to meet.

’Spies are doubled, troops coming.

’The numbers in Verona; who heads them.

’Look to your wife.

‘Letters are called for every third hour.’

Barto sneered indolently at this fresh evidence of the small amount of intelligence which he could ever learn from others. He threw his eyes all round the vacant space while pencilling in reply:—’V. waits for M., but in a box’ (that is, Verona for Milan). ’We take the key to her.

’I have no wife, but a little pupil.

’A Lieutenant Pierson, of the dragoons; Czech white coats, helmets without plumes; an Englishman, nephew of General Pierson: speaks crippled Italian; returns from V. to-day. Keep eye on him;—what house, what hour.’

Meditating awhile, Barto wrote out Vittoria’s name and enclosed it in a thick black ring.

Beneath it he wrote

’The same on all the play-bills.

’The Fifteenth is cancelled.

’We meet the day after.

‘At the house of Count M. to-night.’

He secreted this missive, and wrote Vittoria’s name on numbers of slips to divers addresses, heading them, ‘From the Pope’s Mouth,’ such being the title of the Revolutionary postoffice, to whatsoever spot it might in prudence shift. The title was entirely complimentary to his Holiness. Tangible freedom, as well as airy blessings, were at that time anticipated, and not without warrant, from the mouth of the successor of St. Peter. From the Pope’s Mouth the clear voice of Italian liberty was to issue. This sentiment of the period was

Page 1538

a natural and a joyful one, and endowed the popular ebullition with a sense of unity and a stamp of righteousness that the abstract idea of liberty could not assure to it before martyrdom. After suffering, after walking in the shades of death and despair, men of worth and of valour cease to take high personages as representative objects of worship, even when these (as the good Pope was then doing) benevolently bless the nation and bid it to have great hope, with a voice of authority. But, for an extended popular movement a great name is like a consecrated banner. Proclamations from the Pope's Mouth exacted reverence, and Barto Rizzo, who despised the Pope (because he was Pope, doubtless), did not hesitate to make use of him by virtue of his office.

Barto lay against the heap of rubbish, waiting for the approach of his trained lad, Checco, a lanky simpleton, cunning as a pure idiot, who was doing postman's duty, when a kick, delivered by that youth behind, sent him bounding round with rage, like a fish in air. The marketplace resounded with a clapping of hands; for it was here that Checco came daily to eat figs, and it was known that the 'povero,' the dear half-witted creature, would not tolerate an intruder in the place where he stretched his limbs to peel and suck in the gummy morsels twice or thrice a day. Barto seized and shook him. Checco knocked off his hat; the bandage about the wound broke and dropped, and Barto put his hand to his forehead, murmuring: 'What 's come to me that I lose my temper with a boy—an animal?'

The excitement all over the triangular space was hushed by an imperious guttural shout that scattered the groups. Two Austrian officers, followed by military servants, rode side by side. Dust had whitened their mustachios, and the heat had laid a brown-red varnish on their faces. Way was made for them, while Barto stood smoothing his forehead and staring at Checco.

'I see the very man!' cried one of the officers quickly. 'Weisspriess, there's the rascal who headed the attack on me in Verona the other day. It's the same!

'Himmel!' returned his companion, scrutinizing the sword-cut, 'if that's your work on his head, you did it right well, my Pierson! He is very neatly scored indeed. A clean stroke, manifestly!'

'But here when I left Milan! at Verona when I entered the North-west gate there; and the first man I see as I come back is this very brute. He dogs me everywhere! By the way, there may be two of them.'

Lieutenant Pierson leaned over his horse's neck, and looked narrowly at the man Barto Rizzo. He himself was eyed as in retort, and with yet greater intentness. At first Barto's hand was sweeping the air within a finger's length of his forehead, like one who fought a giddiness for steady sight. The mist upon his brain dispersing under the gaze of his enemy, his eyeballs fixed, and he became a curious picture of passive malice, his eyes seeming to say: 'It is enough for me to know your features, and I know them.' Such a

look from a civilian is exasperating: it was scarcely to be endured from an Italian of the plebs.

Page 1539

‘You appear to me to want more,’ said the lieutenant audibly to himself; and he repeated words to the same effect to his companion, in bad German.

‘Eh? You would promote him to another epaulette?’ laughed Captain Weisspriess. ’Come off. Orders are direct against it. And we’re in Milan—not like being in Verona! And my good fellow! remember your bet; the dozen of iced Rudesheimer. I want to drink my share, and dream I’m quartered in Mainz—the only place for an Austrian when he quits Vienna. Come.’

’No; but if this is the villain who attacked me, and tore my coat from my back,’ cried Wilfrid, screwing in his saddle.

’And took your letter took your letter; a particular letter; we have heard of it,’ said Weisspriess.

The lieutenant exclaimed that he should overhaul and examine the man, and see whether he thought fit to give him into custody. Weisspriess laid hand on his bridle.

’Take my advice, and don’t provoke a disturbance in the streets. The truth is, you Englishmen and Irishmen get us a bad name among these natives. If this is the man who unhorsed you and maltreated you, and committed the rape of the letter, I’m afraid you won’t get satisfaction out of him, to judge by his look. I’m really afraid not. Try it if you like. In any case, if you halt, I am compelled to quit your society, which is sometimes infinitely diverting. Let me remind you that you bear despatches. The other day they were verbal ones; you are now carrying paper.’

‘Are you anxious to teach me my duty, Captain Weisspriess?’

’If you don’t know it. I said I would “remind you.” I can also teach you, if you need it.’

’And I can pay you for the instruction, whenever you are disposed to receive payment.’

‘Settle your outstanding claims, my good Pierson!’

‘When I have fought Jenna?’

‘Oh! you’re a Prussian—a Prussian!’ Captain Weisspriess laughed. ’A Prussian, I mean, in your gross way of blurting out everything. I’ve marched and messed with Prussians —with oxen.’

’I am, as you are aware, an Englishman, Captain Weisspriess. I am due to Lieutenant Jenna for the present. After that you or any one may command me.’

‘As you please,’ said Weisspriess, drawing out one stream of his moustache. ’In the meantime, thank me for luring you away from the chances of a street row.’

Barto Rizzo was left behind, and they rode on to the Duomo. Glancing up at its pinnacles, Weisspriess said:

'How splendidly Flatschmann's jagers would pick them off from there, now, if the dogs were giving trouble in this part of the city!'

Page 1540

They entered upon a professional discussion of the ways and means of dealing with a revolutionary movement in the streets of a city like Milan, and passed on to the Piazza La Scala. Weisspriess stopped before the Play-bills. 'To-morrow's the fifteenth of the month,' he said. 'Shall I tell you a secret, Pierson? I am to have a private peep at the new prima donna this night. They say she's charming, and very pert. "I do not interchange letters with Germans." Benlomik sent her a neat little note to the conservatorio—he hadn't seen her only heard of her, and that was our patriotic reply. She wants taming. I believe I am called upon for that duty. At least, my friend Antonio-Pericles, who occasionally assists me with supplies, hints as much to me. You're an engaged man, or, upon my honour, I wouldn't trust you; but between ourselves, this Greek—and he's quite right—is trying to get her away from the set of snuffy vagabonds who are prompting her for mischief, and don't know how to treat her.'

While he was speaking Barto Rizzo pushed roughly between them, and with a black brush painted the circle about Vittoria's name.

'Do you see that?' said Weisspriess.

'I see,' Wilfrid retorted, 'that you are ready to meddle with the reputation of any woman who is likely to be talked about. Don't do it in my presence.'

It was natural for Captain Weisspriess to express astonishment at this outburst, and the accompanying quiver of Wilfrid's lip.

'Austrian military etiquette, Lieutenant Pierson,' he said, 'precludes the suspicion that the officers of the Imperial army are subject to dissension in public. We conduct these affairs upon a different principle. But I'll tell you what. That fellow's behaviour may be construed as a more than common stretch of incivility. I'll do you a service. I'll arrest him, and then you can hear tidings of your precious letter. We'll have his confession published.'

Weisspriess drew his sword, and commanded the troopers in attendance to lay hands on Barto; but the troopers called, and the officer found that they were surrounded. Weisspriess shrugged dismally. 'The brute must go, I suppose,' he said. The situation was one of those which were every now and then occurring in the Lombard towns and cities, when a chance provocation created a riot that became a revolt or not, according to the timidity of the ruling powers or the readiness of the disaffected. The extent and evident regulation of the crowd operated as a warning to the Imperial officers. Weisspriess sheathed his sword and shouted, 'Way, there!' Way was made for him; but Wilfrid lingered to scrutinize the man who, for an unaccountable reason, appeared to be his peculiar enemy. Barto carelessly threaded the crowd, and Wilfrid, finding it useless to get out after him, cried, 'Who is he? Tell me the name of that man?' The question drew a great burst of laughter around him, and exclamations of 'Englishman!

Englishman!’ He turned where there was a clear way left for him in the track of his brother officer.

Page 1541

Comments on the petty disturbance had been all the while passing at the Caffe La Scala, where sat Agostino Balderini, with, Count Medole and others, who, if the order for their arrest had been issued, were as safe in that place as in their own homes. Their policy, indeed, was to show themselves openly abroad. Agostino was enjoying the smoke of paper cigarettes, with all prudent regard for the well-being of an inflammable beard. Perceiving Wilfrid going by, he said, 'An Englishman! I continue to hope much from his countrymen. I have no right to do so, only they insist on it. They have promised, and more than once, to sail a fleet to our assistance across the plains of Lombardy, and I believe they will—probably in the watery epoch which is to follow Metternich. Behold my Carlo approaching. The heart of that lad doth so boil the brain of him, he can scarcely keep the lid on. What is it now? Speak, my son.'

Carlo Ammiani had to communicate that he had just seen a black circle to Vittoria's name on two public playbills. His endeavour to ape a deliberate gravity while he told the tale, roused Agostino's humouristic ire.

'Round her name?' said Agostino.

'Yes; in every bill.'

'Meaning that she is suspected!'

'Meaning any damnable thing you like.'

'It's a device of the enemy.'

Agostino, glad of the pretext to recur to his habitual luxurious irony, threw himself back, repeating 'It 's a device of the enemy. Calculate, my son, that the enemy invariably knows all you intend to do: determine simply to astonish him with what you do. Intentions have lungs, Carlo, and depend on the circumambient air, which, if not designedly treacherous, is communicative. Deeds, I need not remark, are a different body. It has for many generations been our Italian error to imagine a positive blood relationship—not to say maternity itself—existing between intentions and deeds. Nothing of the sort! There is only the intention of a link to unite them. You perceive? It's much to be famous for fine intentions, so we won't complain. Indeed, it's not our business to complain, but Posterity's; for fine intentions are really rich possessions, but they don't leave grand legacies; that is all. They mean to possess the future: they are only the voluptuous sons of the present. It's my belief, Carlino, from observation, apprehension, and other gifts of my senses, that our paternal government is not unacquainted with our intention to sing a song in a certain opera. And it may have learnt our clumsy method of enclosing names publicly, at the bidding of a non-appointed prosecutor, so to, isolate or extinguish them. Who can say? Oh, ay! Yes! the machinery that can so easily be made rickety is to blame; we admit that; but if you will have a conspiracy like a Geneva watch, you must expect any slight interference with the

laws that govern it to upset the mechanism altogether. Ah-a! look yonder, but not hastily, my Carlo. Checco is nearing us, and he knows that he has fellows after him. And if I guess right, he has a burden to deliver to one of us.'

Page 1542

Checco came along at his usual pace, and it was quite evident that he fancied himself under espionage. On two sides of the square a suspicious figure threaded its way in the line of shade not far behind him. Checco passed the cafe looking at nothing but the huge hands he rubbed over and over. The manifest agents of the polizia were nearing when Checco ran back, and began mouthing as in retort at something that had been spoken from the cafe as he shot by. He made a gabbling appeal on either side, and addressed the pair of apparent mouchards, in what, if intelligible, should have been the language of earnest entreaty. At the first word which the caffe was guilty of uttering, a fit of exasperation seized him, and the exciteable creature plucked at his hat and sent it whirling across the open-air tables right through the doorway. Then, with a whine, he begged his followers to get his hat back for him. They complied.

'We only called "Illustrissimo!"' said Agostino, as one of the men returned from the interior of the caffe hat in hand.

'The Signori should have known better—it is an idiot,' the man replied. He was a novice: in daring to rebuke he betrayed his office.

Checco snatched his hat from his attentive friend grinning, and was away in a flash. Thereupon the caffe laughed, and laughed with an abashing vehemence that disconcerted the spies. They wavered in their choice of following Checco or not; one went a step forward, one pulled back; the loiterer hurried to rejoin his comrade, who was now for a retrograde movement, and standing together they swayed like two imperfectly jolly fellows, or ballet bandits, each plucking at the other, until at last the maddening laughter made them break, reciprocate cat-like hisses of abuse, and escape as they best could—lamentable figures.

'It says well for Milan that the Tedeschi can scrape up nothing better from the gutters than rascals the like of those for their service,' quoth Agostino. 'Eh, Signor Conte?'

'That enclosure about La Vittoria's name on the bills is correct,' said the person addressed, in a low tone. He turned and indicated one who followed from the interior of the caffe.

'If Barto is to be trusted she is not safe,' the latter remarked. He produced a paper that had been secreted in Checco's hat. Under the date and the superscription of the Pope's Mouth, '*la Vittoria*' stood out in the ominous heavily-pencilled ring: the initials of Barto Rizzo were in a corner. Agostino began smoothing his beard.

'He has discovered that she is not trustworthy,' said Count Medole, a young man of a premature gravity and partial baldness, who spoke habitually with a forefinger pressed flat on his long pointed chin.

’Do you mean to tell me, Count Medole, that you attach importance to a communication of this sort?’ said Carlo, forcing an amazement to conceal his anger.

‘I do, Count Ammiani,’ returned the patrician conspirator.

Page 1543

‘You really listen to a man you despise?’

‘I do not despise him, my friend.’

’You cannot surely tell us that you allow such a man, on his sole authority, to blacken the character of the signorina?’

‘I believe that he has not.’

’Believe? trust him? Then we are all in his hands. What can you mean? Come to the signorina herself instantly. Agostino, you now conduct Count Medole to her, and save him from the shame of subscribing to the monstrous calumny. I beg you to go with our Agostino, Count Medole. It is time for you—I honour you for the part you have taken; but it is time to act according to your own better judgement.’

Count Medole bowed.

‘The filthy rat!’ cried Ammiani, panting to let out his wrath.

‘A serviceable dog,’ Agostino remarked correctingly. ’Keep true to the form of animal, Carlo. He has done good service in his time.’

‘You listen to the man?’ Carlo said, now thoroughly amazed.

’An indiscretion is possible to woman, my lad. She may have been indiscreet in some way I am compelled to admit the existence of possibilities.’

’Of all men, you, Agostino! You call her daughter, and profess to love her.’

‘You forget,’ said Agostino sharply. ’The question concerns the country, not the girl.’ He added in an underbreath, ’I think you are professing that you love her a little too strongly, and scarce give her much help as an advocate. The matter must be looked into. If Barto shall be found to have acted without just grounds, I am certain that Count Medole’—he turned suavely to the nobleman—’will withdraw confidence from him; and that will be equivalent to a rope’s-end for Barto. We shall see him to-night at your house?’

‘He will be there,’ Medole said.

’But the harm’s done; the mischief’s done! And what’s to follow if you shall choose to consider this vile idiot justified?’ asked Ammiani.

‘She sings, and there is no rising,’ said Medole.

’She is detached from the patriotic battery, for the moment: it will be better for her not to sing at all,’ said Agostino. ’In fact, Barto has merely given us warning that—and things look like it—the Fifteenth is likely to be an Austrian feast-day. Your arm, my son. We will join you to-night, my dear Count. Now, Carlo, I was observing, it appears to me that the Austrians are not going to be surprised by us, and it affords me exquisite comfort. Fellows prepared are never more than prepared for one day and another day; and they are sure to be in a state of lax preparation after a first and second disappointment. On the contrary, fellows surprised’—Agostino had recovered his old smile again—’fellows surprised may be expected to make use of the inspirations pertaining to genius. Don’t you see?’

‘Oh, cruel! I am sick of you all!’ Carlo exclaimed. ’Look at her; think of her, with her pure dream of Italy and her noble devotion. And you permit a doubt to be cast on her!’

Page 1544

'Now, is it not true that you have an idea of the country not being worthy of her?' said Agostino, slyly. 'The Chief, I fancy, did not take certain facts into his calculation when he pleaded that the conspiratrix was the sum and completion of the conspirator. You will come to Medole's to-night, Carlo. You need not be too sweet to him, but beware of explosiveness. I, a Republican, am nevertheless a practical exponent of the sacrifices necessary to unity. I accept the local leadership of Medole—on whom I can never look without thinking of an unfeathered pie; and I submit to be assisted by the man Barto Rizzo. Do thou likewise, my son. Let your enamoured sensations follow that duty, and with a breezy space between. A conspiracy is an epitome of humanity, with a boiling power beneath it. You're no more than a bit of mechanism—happy if it goes at all!'

Agostino said that he would pay a visit to Vittoria in the evening. Ammiani had determined to hunt out Barto Rizzo and the heads of the Clubs before he saw her. It was a relief to him to behold in the Piazza the Englishman who had exchanged cards with him on the Motterone. Captain Gambier advanced upon a ceremonious bow, saying frankly, in a more colloquial French than he had employed at their first interview, that he had to apologize for his conduct, and to request monsieur's excuse. 'If,' he pursued, 'that lady is the person whom I knew formerly in England as Mademoiselle Belloni, and is now known as Mademoiselle Vittoria Campa, may I beg you to inform her that, according to what I have heard, she is likely to be in some danger to-morrow?' What the exact nature of the danger was, Captain Gambier could not say.

Ammiani replied: 'She is in need of all her friends,' and took the pressure of the Englishman's hand, who would fair have asked more but for the stately courtesy of the Italian's withdrawing salute. Ammiani could no longer doubt that Vittoria's implication in the conspiracy was known.

CHAPTER XI

LAURA PIAVENI

After dark on the same day antecedent to the outbreak, Vittoria, with her faithful Beppo at her heels, left her mother to run and pass one comforting hour in the society of the Signora Laura Piaveni and her children.

There were two daughters of a parasitical Italian nobleman, of whom one had married the patriot Giacomo Piaveni, and one an Austrian diplomatist, the Commendatore Graf von Lenkenstein. Count Serabiglione was traditionally parasitical. His ancestors all had moved in Courts. The children of the House had illustrious sponsors. The House itself was a symbolical sunflower constantly turning toward Royalty. Great excuses are to be made for this, the last male descendant, whose father in his youth had been an Imperial page, and who had been nursed in the conception that Italy (or at least Lombardy) was a natural fief of Austria, allied by instinct and by interest to

Page 1545

the holders of the Alps. Count Serabiglione mixed little with his countrymen,—the statement might be inversed,—but when, perchance, he was among them, he talked willingly of the Tedeschi, and voluntarily declared them to be gross, obstinate, offensive-bears, in short. At such times he would intimate in any cordial ear that the serpent was probably a match for the bear in a game of skill, and that the wisdom of the serpent was shown in his selection of the bear as his master, since, by the ordination of circumstances, master he must have. The count would speak pityingly of the poor depraved intellects which admitted the possibility of a coming Kingdom of Italy united: the lunatics who preached of it he considered a sort of self-elected targets for appointed files of Tyrolese jagers. But he was vindictive against him whom he called the professional doctrinaire, and he had vile names for the man. Acknowledging that Italy mourned her present woes, he charged this man with the crime of originating them:—-and why? what was his object? He was, the count declared in answer, a born intriguer, a lover of blood, mad for the smell of it!—an Old Man of the Mountain; a sheaf of assassins; and more—the curse of Italy! There should be extradition treaties all over the world to bring this arch-conspirator to justice. The door of his conscience had been knocked at by a thousand bleeding ghosts, and nothing had opened to them. What was Italy in his eyes? A chess-board; and Italians were the chessmen to this cold player with live flesh. England nourished the wretch, that she might undermine the peace of the Continent.

Count Serabiglione would work himself up in the climax of denunciation, and then look abroad frankly as one whose spirit had been relieved. He hated bad men; and it was besides necessary for him to denounce somebody, and get relief of some kind. Italians edged away from him. He was beginning to feel that he had no country. The detested title 'Young Italy' hurried him into fits of wrath. 'I am,' he said, 'one of the Old Italians, if a distinction is to be made.' He assured his listeners that he was for his commune, his district, and aired his old-Italian prejudices delightedly; clapping his hands to the quarrels of Milan and Brescia; Florence and Siena—haply the feuds of villages—and the common North-Italian jealousy of the chief city. He had numerous capital tales to tell of village feuds, their date and origin, the stupid effort to heal them, and the wider consequent split; saying, 'We have, all Italians, the tenacity, the unforgiveness, the fervent blood of pure Hebrews; and a little more gaiety, perhaps; together with a love of fair things. We can outlive ten races of conquerors.'

In this fashion he philosophized, or forced a kind of philosophy. But he had married his daughter to an Austrian, which was what his countrymen could not overlook, and they made him feel it. Little by little, half acquiescing, half protesting, and gradually denationalized, the count was edged out of Italian society, save of the parasitical class, which he very much despised. He was not a happy man. Success at the Imperial Court might have comforted him; but a remorseless sensitiveness of his nature tripped his steps.

Page 1546

Bitter laughter rang throughout Lombardy when, in spite of his efforts to save his daughter's husband, Giacomo Piaveni suffered death. No harder blow had ever befallen the count: it was as good as a public proclamation that he possessed small influence. To have bent the knee was not afflicting to this nobleman's conscience: but it was an anguish to think of having bent the knee for nothing.

Giacomo Piaveni was a noble Italian of the young blood, son of a General loved by Eugene. In him the loss of Italy was deplorable. He perished by treachery at the age of twenty-three years. So splendid was this youth in appearance, of so sweet a manner with women, and altogether so-gentle and gallant, that it was a widowhood for women to have known him: and at his death the hearts of two women who had loved him in rivalry became bound by a sacred tie of friendship. He, though not of distinguished birth, had the choice of an almost royal alliance in the first blush of his manhood. He refused his chance, pleading in excuse to Count Serabiglione, that he was in love with that nobleman's daughter, Laura; which it flattered the count to hear, but he had ever after a contempt for the young man's discretion, and was observed to shrug, with the smooth sorrowfulness of one who has been a prophet, on the day when Giacomo was shot. The larger estates of the Piaveni family, then in Giacomo's hands, were in a famous cheese-making district, producing a delicious cheese:—'white as lambkins!' the count would ejaculate most dolefully; and in a rapture of admiration, 'You would say, a marble quarry when you cut into it.' The theme was afflicting, for all the estates of Giacomo were for the time forfeit, and the pleasant agitation produced among his senses by the mention of the cheese reminded him at the same instant that he had to support a widow with two children. The Signora Piaveni lived in Milan, and the count her father visited her twice during the summer months, and wrote to her from his fitful Winter residences in various capital cities, to report progress in the settled scheme for the recovery of Giacomo's property, as well for his widow as for the heirs of his body. 'It is a duty,' Count Serabiglione said emphatically. 'My daughter can entertain no proposal until her children are duly established; or would she, who is young and lovely and archly capricious, continue to decline the very best offers of the Milanese nobility, and live on one flat in an old quarter of the city, instead of in a bright and handsome street, musical with equipages, and full of the shows of life?'

In conjunction with certain friends of the signora, the count worked diligently for the immediate restitution of the estates. He was ably seconded by the young princess of Schyll-Weilingen,—by marriage countess of Fohrendorf, duchess of Graatli, in central Germany, by which title she passed,—an Austrian princess; she who had loved Giacomo, and would have given all for him, and who now loved his widow.

Page 1547

The extreme and painful difficulty was that the Signora Piaveni made no concealment of her abhorrence of the House of Austria, and hatred of Austrian rule in Italy. The spirit of her dead husband had come to her from the grave, and warmed a frame previously indifferent to anything save his personal merits. It had been covertly communicated to her that if she performed due submission to the authorities, and lived for six months in good legal, that is to say, nonpatriotic odour, she might hope to have the estates. The duchess had obtained this mercy for her, and it was much; for Giacomo's scheme of revolt had been conceived with a subtlety of genius, and contrived on a scale sufficient to incense any despotic lord of such a glorious milch-cow as Lombardy. Unhappily the signora was more inspired by the remembrance of her husband than by consideration for her children. She received disaffected persons: she subscribed her money ostentatiously for notoriously patriotic purposes; and she who, in her father's Como villa, had been a shy speechless girl, nothing more than beautiful, had become celebrated for her public letters, and the ardour of declamation against the foreigner which characterized her style. In the face of such facts, the estates continued to be withheld from her governance. Austria could do that: she could wreak her spite against the woman, but she respected her own law even in a conquered land: the estates were not confiscated, and not absolutely sequestrated; and, indeed, money coming from them had been sent to her for the education of her children. It lay in unopened official envelopes, piled one upon another, quarterly remittances, horrible as blood of slaughter in her sight. Count Serabiglione made a point of counting the packets always within the first five minutes of a visit to his daughter. He said nothing, but was careful to see to the proper working of the lock of the cupboard where the precious deposits were kept, and sometimes in forgetfulness he carried off the key. When his daughter reclaimed it, she observed, 'Pray believe me quite as anxious as yourself to preserve these documents.' And the count answered, 'They represent the estates, and are of legal value, though the amount is small. They represent your protest, and the admission of your claim. They are priceless.'

In some degree, also, they compensated him for the expense he was put to in providing for his daughter's subsistence and that of her children. For there, at all events, visible before his eyes, was the value of the money, if not the money expended. He remonstrated with Laura for leaving it more than necessarily exposed. She replied,

'My people know what that money means!' implying, of course, that no one in her house would consequently touch it. Yet it was reserved for the count to find it gone.

Page 1548

The discovery was made by the astounded nobleman on the day preceding Vittoria's appearance at La Scala. His daughter being absent, he had visited the cupboard merely to satisfy an habitual curiosity. The cupboard was open, and had evidently been ransacked. He rang up the domestics, and would have charged them all with having done violence to the key, but that on reflection he considered this to be a way of binding faggots together, and he resolved to take them one by one, like the threading Jesuit that he was, and so get a Judas. Laura's return saved him from much exercise of his peculiar skill. She, with a cool 'Ebbene!' asked him how long he had expected the money to remain there. Upon which, enraged, he accused her of devoting the money to the accursed patriotic cause. And here they came to a curious open division.

'Be content, my father,' she said; 'the money is my husband's, and is expended on his behalf.'

'You waste it among the people who were the cause of his ruin!' her father retorted.

'You presume me to have returned it to the Government, possibly?'

'I charge you with tossing it to your so-called patriots.'

'Sir, if I have done that, I have done well.'

'Hear her!' cried the count to the attentive ceiling; and addressing her with an ironical 'madame,' he begged permission to inquire of her whether haply she might be the person in the pay of Revolutionists who was about to appear at La Scala, under the name of the Signorina Vittoria. 'For you are getting dramatic in your pose, my Laura,' he added, familiarizing the colder tone of his irony. 'You are beginning to stand easily in attitudes of defiance to your own father.'

'That I may practise how to provoke a paternal Government, you mean,' she rejoined, and was quite a match for him in dialectics.

The count chanced to allude further to the Signorina Vittoria.

'Do you know much of that lady?' she asked.

'As much as is known,' said he.

They looked at one another; the count thinking, 'I gave to this girl an excess of brains, in my folly!'

Compelled to drop his eyes, and vexed by the tacit defeat, he pursued, 'You expect great things from her?'

'Great,' said his daughter.

‘Well, well,’ he murmured acquiescingly, while sounding within himself for the part to play. ‘Well-yes! she may do what you expect.’

‘There is not the slightest doubt of her capacity,’ said his daughter, in a tone of such perfect conviction that the count was immediately and irresistibly tempted to play the part of sagacious, kindly, tolerant but foreseeing father; and in this becoming character he exposed the risks her party ran in trusting anything of weight to a woman. Not that he decried women. Out of their sphere he did not trust them, and he simply objected to them when out of their sphere: the last four words being uttered staccato.

Page 1549

‘But we trust her to do what she has undertaken to do,’ said Laura.

The count brightened prodigiously from his suspicion to a certainty; and as he was still smiling at the egregious trap his clever but unskilled daughter had fallen into, he found himself listening incredulously to her plain additional sentence:—’She has easy command of three octaves.’

By which the allusion was transformed from politics to Art. Had Laura reserved this cunning turn a little further, yielding to the natural temptation to increase the shock of the antithetical battery, she would have betrayed herself: but it came at the right moment: the count gave up his arms. He told her that this Signorina Vittoria was suspected. ’Whom will they not suspect!’ interjected Laura. He assured her that if a conspiracy had ripened it must fail. She was to believe that he abhorred the part of a spy or informer, but he was bound, since she was reckless, to watch over his daughter; and also bound, that he might be of service to her, to earn by service to others as much power as he could reasonably hope to obtain. Laura signified that he argued excellently well. In a fit of unjustified doubt of her sincerity, he complained, with a querulous snap:

’You have your own ideas; you have your own ideas. You think me this and that. A man must be employed.’

‘And this is to account for your occupation?’ she remarked.

‘Employed, I say!’ the count reiterated fretfully. He was unmasking to no purpose, and felt himself as on a slope, having given his adversary vantage.

‘So that there is no choice for you, do you mean?’

The count set up a staggering affirmative, but knocked it over with its natural enemy as soon as his daughter had said, ’Not being for Italy, you must necessarily be against her:—I admit that to be the position!’

‘No!’ he cried; ’no: there is no question of “for” or “against,” as you are aware. “Italy, and not Revolution”: that is my motto.’

‘Or, in other words, “The impossible,"’ said Laura. ‘A perfect motto!’

Again the count looked at her, with the remorseful thought: ’I certainly gave you too much brains.’

He smiled: ‘If you could only believe it not impossible!’

’Do you really imagine that “Italy without Revolution” does not mean “Austria"?’ she inquired.

She had discovered how much he, and therefore his party, suspected, and now she had reasons for wishing him away. Not daring to show symptoms of restlessness, she offered him the chance of recovering himself on the crutches of an explanation. He accepted the assistance, praising his wits for their sprightly divination, and went through a long-winded statement of his views for the welfare of Italy, quoting his favourite Berni frequently, and forcing the occasion for that jolly poet. Laura gave quiet attention to all, and when he was exhausted at the close, said meditatively, 'Yes. Well; you are older. It may seem to you that I shall think as you do when I have had a similar, or the same, length of experience.'

Page 1550

This provoking reply caused her father to jump up from his chair and spin round for his hat. She rose to speed him forth.

‘It may seem to me!’ he kept muttering. ’It may seem to me that when a daughter gets married—addio! she is nothing but her husband.’

‘Ay! ay! if it might be so!’ the signora wailed out.

The count hated tears, considering them a clog to all useful machinery. He was departing, when through the open window a noise of scuffling in the street below arrested him.

‘Has it commenced?’ he said, starting.

‘What?’ asked the signora, coolly; and made him pause.

‘But-but-but!’ he answered, and had the grace to spare her ears. The thought in him was: ’But that I had some faith in my wife, and don’t admire the devil sufficiently, I would accuse him point-blank, for, by Bacchus! you are as clever as he.’

It is a point in the education of parents that they should learn to apprehend humbly the compliment of being outwitted by their own offspring.

Count Serabiglione leaned out of the window and saw that his horses were safe and the coachman handy. There were two separate engagements going on between angry twisting couples.

‘Is there a habitable town in Italy?’ the count exclaimed frenziedly. First he called to his coachman to drive away, next to wait as if nailed to the spot. He cursed the revolutionary spirit as the mother of vices. While he was gazing at the fray, the door behind him opened, as he knew by the rush of cool air which struck his temples. He fancied that his daughter was hurrying off in obedience to a signal, and turned upon her just as Laura was motioning to a female figure in the doorway to retire.

‘Who is this?’ said the count.

A veil was over the strange lady’s head. She was excited, and breathed quickly. The count brought forward a chair to her, and put on his best court manner. Laura caressed her, whispering, ere she replied: ’The Signorina Vittoria Romana!—Biancolla!—-Benarriva!’ and numerous other names of inventive endearment. But the count was too sharp to be thrown off the scent. ‘Aha!’ he said, ’do I see her one evening before the term appointed?’ and bowed profoundly. ‘The Signorina Vittoria!’

She threw up her veil.

‘Success is certain,’ he remarked and applauded, holding one hand as a snuff-box for the fingers of the other to tap on.

‘Signor Conte, you—must not praise me before you have heard me.’

‘To have seen you!’

‘The voice has a wider dominion, Signor Conte.’

’The fame of the signorina’s beauty will soon be far wider. Was Venus a cantatrice?’

She blushed, being unable to continue this sort of Mayfly-shooting dialogue, but her first charming readiness had affected the proficient social gentleman very pleasantly, and with fascinated eyes he hummed and buzzed about her like a moth at a lamp. Suddenly his head dived: ‘Nothing, nothing, signorina,’ he said, brushing delicately at her dress; ‘I thought it might be paint.’ He smiled to reassure her, and then he dived again, murmuring: ’It must be something sticking to the dress. Pardon me.’ With that he went to the bell. ’I will ring up my daughter’s maid. Or Laura—where is Laura?’

Page 1551

The Signora Piaveni had walked to the window. This antiquated fussiness of the dilettante little nobleman was sickening to her.

'Probably you expect to discover a revolutionary symbol in the lines of the signorina's dress,' she said.

'A revolutionary symbol!—my dear! my dear!' The count reproved his daughter. 'Is not our signorina a pure artist, accomplishing easily three octaves? aha! Three!' and he rubbed his hands. 'But, three good octaves!' he addressed Vittoria seriously and admonishingly. 'It is a fortune-millions! It is precisely the very grandest heritage! It is an army!'

'I trust that it may be!' said Vittoria, with so deep and earnest a ring of her voice that the count himself, malicious as his ejaculations had been, was astonished. At that instant Laura cried from the window: 'These horses will go mad.'

The exclamation had the desired effect.

'Eh?—pardon me, signorina,' said the count, moving half-way to the window, and then askant for his hat. The clatter of the horses' hoofs sent him dashing through the doorway, at which place his daughter stood with his hat extended. He thanked and blessed her for the kindly attention, and in terror lest the signorina should think evil of him as 'one of the generation of the hasty,' he said, 'Were it anything but horses! anything but horses! one's horses!—ha!' The audible hoofs called him off. He kissed the tips of his fingers, and tripped out.

The signora stepped rapidly to the window, and leaning there, cried a word to the coachman, who signalled perfect comprehension, and immediately the count's horses were on their hind-legs, chafing and pulling to right and left, and the street was tumultuous with them. She flung down the window, seized Vittoria's cheeks in her two hands, and pressed the head upon her bosom. 'He will not disturb us again,' she said, in quite a new tone, sliding her hands from the cheeks to the shoulders and along the arms to the fingers'-ends, which they clutched lovingly. 'He is of the old school, friend of my heart! and besides, he has but two pairs of horses, and one he keeps in Vienna. We live in the hope that our masters will pay us better! Tell me! you are in good health? All is well with you? Will they have to put paint on her soft cheeks to-morrow? Little, if they hold the colour as full as now? My Sandra! amica! should I have been jealous if Giacomo had known you? On my soul, I cannot guess! But, you love what he loved. He seems to live for me when they are talking of Italy, and you send your eyes forward as if you saw the country free. God help me! how I have been containing myself for the last hour and a half!'

The signora dropped in a seat and laughed a languid laugh.

’The little ones? I will ring for them. Assunta shall bring them down in their night-gowns if they are undressed; and we will muffle the windows, for my little man will be wanting his song; and did you not promise him the great one which is to raise Italy-his mother, from the dead? Do you remember our little fellow’s eyes as he tried to see the picture? I fear I force him too much, and there’s no need-not a bit.’

Page 1552

The time was exciting, and the signora spoke excitedly. Messing and Reggio were in arms. South Italy had given the open signal. It was near upon the hour of the unmasking of the great Lombard conspiracy, and Vittoria, standing there, was the beacon-light of it. Her presence filled Laura with transports of exultation; and shy of displaying it, and of the theme itself, she let her tongue run on, and satisfied herself by smoothing the hand of the brave girl on her chin, and plucking with little loving tugs at her skirts. In doing this she suddenly gave a cry, as if stung.

‘You carry pins,’ she said. And inspecting the skirts more closely, ’You have a careless maid in that creature Giacinta; she lets paper stick to your dress. What is this?’

Vittoria turned her head, and gathered up her dress to see.

‘Pinned with the butterfly!’ Laura spoke under her breath.

Vittoria asked what it meant.

‘Nothing—nothing,’ said her friend, and rose, pulling her eagerly toward the lamp.

A small bronze butterfly secured a square piece of paper with clipped corners to her dress. Two words were written on it:—

‘*Sei sospetta*.’

CHAPTER XII

THE BRONZE BUTTERFLY

The two women were facing one another in a painful silence when Carlo Ammiani was announced to them. He entered with a rapid stride, and struck his hands together gladly at sight of Vittoria.

Laura met his salutation by lifting the accusing butterfly attached to Vittoria’s dress.

‘Yes; I expected it,’ he said, breathing quick from recent exertion. ’They are kind—they give her a personal warning. Sometimes the dagger heads the butterfly. I have seen the mark on the Play-bills affixed to the signorina’s name.’

‘What does it mean?’ said Laura, speaking huskily, with her head bent over the bronze insect. ‘What can it mean?’ she asked again, and looked up to meet a covert answer.

‘Unpin it.’ Vittoria raised her arms as if she felt the thing to be enveloping her.

The signora loosened the pin from its hold; but dreading lest she thereby sacrificed some possible clue to the mystery, she hesitated in her action, and sent an intolerable shiver of spite through Vittoria's frame, at whom she gazed in a cold and cruel way, saying, 'Don't tremble.' And again, 'Is it the doing of that 'garritrice magrezza,' whom you call 'la Lazzeruola?' Speak. Can you trace it to her hand? Who put the plague-mark upon you?'

Vittoria looked steadily away from her.

'It means just this,' Carlo interposed; 'there! now it 's off; and, signorina, I entreat you to think nothing of it,—it means that any one who takes a chief part in the game we play, shall and must provoke all fools, knaves, and idiots to think and do their worst. They can't imagine a pure devotion. Yes, I see—"Sei sospetta." They would write their 'Sei sospetta' upon St. Catherine in the Wheel. Put it out of your mind. Pass it.'

Page 1553

‘But they suspect her; and why do they suspect her?’ Laura questioned vehemently. ’I ask, is it a Conservatorio rival, or the brand of one of the Clubs? She has no answer.’

‘Observe.’ Carlo laid the paper under her eyes.

Three angles were clipped, the fourth was doubled under. He turned it back and disclosed the initials B. R. ’This also is the work of our man-devil, as I thought. I begin to think that we shall be eternally thwarted, until we first clear our Italy of its vermin. Here is a weazel, a snake, a tiger, in one. They call him the Great Cat. He fancies himself a patriot,—he is only a conspirator. I denounce him, but he gets the faith of people, our Agostino among them, I believe. The energy of this wretch is terrific. He has the vigour of a fasting saint. Myself—I declare it to you, signora, with shame, I know what it is to fear this man. He has Satanic blood, and the worst is, that the Chief trusts him.’

‘Then, so do I,’ said Laura.

‘And I,’ Vittoria echoed her.

A sudden squeeze beset her fingers. ‘And I trust you,’ Laura said to her. ’But there has been some indiscretion. My child, wait: give no heed to me, and have no feelings. Carlo, my friend—my husband’s boy—brother-in-arms! let her teach you to be generous. She must have been indiscreet. Has she friends among the Austrians? I have one, and it is known, and I am not suspected. But, has she? What have you said or done that might cause them to suspect you? Speak, Sandra mia.’

It was difficult for Vittoria to speak upon the theme, which made her appear as a criminal replying to a charge. At last she said, ’English: I have no foreign friends but English. I remember nothing that I have done.—Yes, I have said I thought I might tremble if I was led out to be shot.’

‘Pish! tush!’ Laura checked her. ’They flog women, they do not shoot them. They shoot men.’

‘That is our better fortune,’ said Ammiani.

‘But, Sandra, my sister,’ Laura persisted now, in melodious coaxing tones. ’Can you not help us to guess? I am troubled: I am stung. It is for your sake I feel it so. Can’t you imagine who did it, for instance?’

‘No, signora, I cannot,’ Vittoria replied.

‘You can’t guess?’

I cannot help you.’

‘You will not!’ said the irritable woman. ’Have you noticed no one passing near you?’

’A woman brushed by me as I entered this street. I remember no one else. And my Beppo seized a man who was spying on me, as he said. That is all I can remember.’

Vittoria turned her face to Ammiani.

‘Barto Rizzo has lived in England,’ he remarked, half to himself. ’Did you come across a man called Barto Rizzo there, signorina? I suspect him to be the author of this.’

At the name of Barto Rizzo, Laura’s eyes widened, awakening a memory in Ammiani; and her face had a spectral wanness.

Page 1554

‘I must go to my chamber,’ she said. ’Talk of it together. I will be with you soon.’

She left them.

Ammiani bent over to Vittoria’s ear. ’It was this man who sent the warning to Giacomo, the signora’s husband, which he despised, and which would have saved him.

It is the only good thing I know of Barto Rizzo. Pardon her.’

‘I do,’ said the girl, now weeping.

’She has evidently a rooted superstitious faith in these revolutionary sign-marks. They are contagious to her. She loves you, and believes in you, and will kneel to you for forgiveness by-and-by. Her misery is a disease. She thinks now, “If my husband had given heed to the warning!”

‘Yes, I see how her heart works,’ said Vittoria. ’You knew her husband, Signor Carlo?’

’I knew him. I served under him. He was the brother of my love. I shall have no other.’

Vittoria placed her hand for Ammiani to take it. He joined his own to the fevered touch. The heart of the young man swelled most ungovernably, but the perils of the morrow were imaged by him, circling her as with a tragic flame, and he had no word for his passion.

The door opened, when a noble little boy bounded into the room; followed by a little girl in pink and white, like a streamer in the steps of her brother. With shouts, and with arms thrown forward, they flung themselves upon Vittoria, the boy claiming all her lap, and the girl struggling for a share of the kingdom. Vittoria kissed them, crying, ’No, no, no, Messer Jack, this is a republic, and not an empire, and you are to have no rights of “first come”; and Amalia sits on one knee, and you on one knee, and you sit face to face, and take hands, and swear to be satisfied.’

’Then I desire not to be called an English Christian name, and you will call me Giacomo,’ said the boy.

Vittoria sang, in mountain-notes, ’Giacomo!—Giacomo—Giac-giac-giac . . como!’

The children listened, glistening up at her, and in conjunction jumped and shouted for more.

‘More?’ said Vittoria; ’but is the Signor Carlo no friend of ours? and does he wear a magic ring that makes him invisible?’

‘Let the German girl go to him,’ said Giacomo, and strained his throat to reach at kisses.

‘I am not a German girl,’ little Amalia protested, refusing to go to Carlo Ammiani under that stigma, though a delightful haven of open arms and knees, and filliping fingers, invited her.

‘She is not a German girl, O Signor Giacomo,’ said Vittoria, in the theatrical manner.

‘She has a German name.’

‘It’s not a German name!’ the little girl shrieked.

Giacomo set Amalia to a miauling tune.

‘So, you hate the Duchess of Graatli!’ said Vittoria. ’Very well. I shall remember.’

The boy declared that he did not hate his mother’s friend and sister’s godmother: he rather liked her, he really liked her, he loved her; but he loathed the name ‘Amalia,’ and could not understand why the duchess would be a German. He concluded by miauling ‘Amalia’ in the triumph of contempt.

Page 1555

‘Cat, begone!’ said Vittoria, promptly setting him down on his feet, and little Amalia at the same time perceiving that practical sympathy only required a ring at the bell for it to come out, straightway pulled the wires within herself, and emitted a doleful wail that gave her sole possession of Vittoria’s bosom, where she was allowed to bring her tears to an end very comfortingly. Giacomo meanwhile, his body bent in an arch, plucked at Carlo Ammiani’s wrists with savagely playful tugs, and took a stout boy’s lesson in the art of despising what he coveted. He had only to ask for pardon. Finding it necessary, he came shyly up to Vittoria, who put Amalia in his way, kissing whom, he was himself tenderly kissed.

‘But girls should not cry!’ Vittoria reproved the little woman.

‘Why do you cry?’ asked Amalia simply.

‘See! she has been crying.’ Giacomo appropriated the discovery, perforce of loudness, after the fashion of his sex.

‘Why does our Vittoria cry?’ both the children clamoured.

‘Because your mother is such a cruel sister to her,’ said Laura, passing up to them from the doorway. She drew Vittoria’s head against her breast, looked into her eyes, and sat down among them. Vittoria sang one low-toned soft song, like the voice of evening, before they were dismissed to their beds. She could not obey Giacomo’s demand for a martial air, and had to plead that she was tired.

When the children had gone, it was as if a truce had ended. The signora and Ammiani fell to a brisk counterchange of questions relating to the mysterious suspicion which had fallen upon Vittoria. Despite Laura’s love for her, she betrayed her invincible feeling that there must be some grounds for special or temporary distrust.

‘The lives that hang on it knock at me here,’ she said, touching under her throat with fingers set like falling arrows.

But Ammiani, who moved in the centre of conspiracies, met at their councils, and knew their heads, and frequently combated their schemes, was not possessed by the same profound idea of their potential command of hidden facts and sovereign wisdom. He said, ’We trust too much to one man. We are compelled to trust him, but we trust too much to him. I mean this man, this devil, Barto Rizzo. Signora, signora, he must be spoken of. He has dislocated the plot. He is the fanatic of the revolution, and we are trusting him as if he had full sway of reason. What is the consequence? The Chief is absent he is now, as I believe, in Genoa. All the plan for the rising is accurate; the instruments are ready, and we are paralyzed. I have been to three houses to-night, and where, two hours previously, there was union and concert, all are irresolute and divided. I have hurried off a messenger to the Chief. Until we hear from him, nothing

can be done. I left Ugo Corte storming against us Milanese, threatening, as usual, to work without us, and have a Bergamasc and Brescian Republic of his own. Count Medole is for a week's postponement. Agostino smiles and chuckles, and talks his poetisms.'

Page 1556

‘Until you hear from the Chief, nothing is to be done?’ Laura said passionately. ’Are we to remain in suspense? Impossible! I cannot bear it. We have plenty of arms in the city. Oh, that we had cannon! I worship cannon! They are the Gods of battle! But if we surprise the citadel;—one true shock of alarm makes a mob of an army. I have heard my husband say so. Let there be no delay. That is my word.’

‘But, signora, do you see that all concert about the signal is lost?’

‘My friend, I see something’; Laura nodded a significant half-meaning at him. ’And perhaps it will be as well. Go at once. See that another signal is decided upon. Oh! because we are ready—ready. Inaction now is uttermost anguish—kills the heart. What number of the white butchers have we in the city to-night?’

’They are marching in at every gate. I saw a regiment of Hungarians coming up the Borgo della Stella. Two fresh squadrons of Uhlans in the Corso Francesco. In the Piazza d’Armi artillery is encamped.’

‘The better for Brescia, for Bergamo, for Padua, for Venice!’ exclaimed Laura. ’There is a limit to their power. We Milanese can match them. For days and days I have had a dream lying in my bosom that Milan was soon to breathe. Go, my brother; go to Barto Rizzo; gather him and Count Medole, Agostino, and Colonel Corte—to whom I kiss my fingers—gather them together, and squeeze their brains for the one spark of divine fire in this darkness which must exist where there are so many thorough men bent upon a sacred enterprise. And, Carlo,’—Laura checked her nervous voice, ‘don’t think I am declaiming to you from one of my “Midnight Lamps."’ (She spoke of the title of her pamphlets to the Italian people.) ’You feel among us women very much as Agostino and Colonel Corte feel when the boy Carlo airs his impetuosities in their presence. Yes, my fervour makes a philosopher of you. That is human nature. Pity me, pardon me, and do my bidding.’

The comparison of Ammiani’s present sentiments to those of the elders of the conspiracy, when his mouth was open in their midst, was severe and masterful, for the young man rose instantly without a thought in his head.

He remarked: ’I will tell them that the signorina does not give the signal.’

’Tell them that the name she has chosen shall be Vittoria still; but say, that she feels a shadow of suspicion to be an injunction upon her at such a crisis, and she will serve silently and humbly until she is rightly known, and her time comes. She is willing to appear before them, and submit to interrogation. She knows her innocence, and knowing that they work for the good of the country, she, if it is their will, is content to be blotted out of all participation:—all! She abjures all for the common welfare. Say that. And say, to-morrow night the rising must be. Oh! to-morrow night! It is my husband to me.’

Laura Piaveni crossed her arms upon her bosom.

Page 1557

Ammiani was moving from them with a downward face, when a bell-note of Vittoria's voice arrested him.

'Stay, Signor Carlo; I shall sing to-morrow night.'

The widow heard her through that thick emotion which had just closed her' speech with its symbolical sensuous rapture. Divining opposition fiercely, like a creature thwarted when athirst for the wells, she gave her a terrible look, and then said cajolingly, as far as absence of sweetness could make the tones pleasant, 'Yes, you will sing, but you will not sing that song.'

'It is that song which I intend to sing, signora.'

'When it is interdicted?'

'There is only one whose interdict I can acknowledge.'

'You will dare to sing in defiance of me?'

'I dare nothing when I simply do my duty.'

Ammiani went up to the window, and leaned there, eyeing the lights leading down to the crowding Piazza. He wished that he were among the crowd, and might not hear those sharp stinging utterances coming from Laura, and Vittoria's unwavering replies, less frequent, but firmer, and gravely solid. Laura spent her energy in taunts, but Vittoria spoke only of her resolve, and to the point. It was, as his military instincts framed the simile, like the venomous crackling of skirmishing rifles before a fortress, that answered slowly with its volume of sound and sweeping shot. He had the vision of himself pleading to secure her safety, and in her hearing, on the Motterone, where she had seemed so simple a damsel, albeit nobly enthusiastic: too fair, too gentle to be stationed in any corner of the conflict at hand. Partly abased by the remembrance of his brainless intercessions then, and of the laughter which had greeted them, and which the signora had recently recalled, it was nevertheless not all in self-abasement (as the momentary recognition of a splendid character is commonly with men) that he perceived the stature of Vittoria's soul. Remembering also what the Chief had spoken of women, Ammiani thought 'Perhaps he has known one such as she.' The passion of the young man's heart magnified her image. He did not wonder to see the signora acknowledge herself worsted in the conflict.

'She talks like the edge of a sword,' cried Laura, desperately, and dropped into a chair. 'Take her home, and convince her, if you can, on the way, Carlo. I go to the Duchess of Graatli to-night. She has a reception. Take this girl home. She says she will sing: she obeys the Chief, and none but the Chief. We will not suppose that it is her desire to shine. She is suspected; she is accused; she is branded; there is no general faith in

her; yet she will hold the torch to-morrow night:—and what ensues? Some will move, some turn back, some run headlong over to treachery, some hang irresolute all are for the shambles! The blood is on her head.'

'I will excuse myself to you another time,' said Vittoria. 'I love you, Signora Laura.'

Page 1558

‘You do, you do, or you would not think of excusing yourself to me,’ said Laura. ’But now, go. You have cut me in two. Carlo Ammiani may succeed where I have failed, and I have used every weapon; enough to make a mean creature hate me for life and kiss me with transports. Do your best, Carlo, and let it be your utmost.’

It remained for Ammiani to assure her that their views were different.

’The signorina persists in her determination to carry out the programme indicated by the Chief, and refuses to be diverted from her path by the false suspicions of subordinates.’ He employed a sententious phraseology instinctively, as men do when they are nervous, as well as when they justify the cynic’s definition of the uses of speech. ’The signorina is, in my opinion, right. If she draws back, she publicly accepts the blot upon her name. I speak against my own feelings and my wishes.’

‘Sandra, do you hear?’ exclaimed Laura. ’This is a friend’s interpretation of your inconsiderate wilfulness.’

Vittoria was content to reply, ’The Signor Carlo judges of me differently.’

‘Go, then, and be fortified by him in this headstrong folly.’ Laura motioned her hand, and laid it on her face.

Vittoria knelt and enclosed her with her arms, kissing her knees.

‘Beppo waits for me at the house-door,’ she said; but Carlo chose not to hear of this shadow-like Beppo.

’You have nothing to say for her save that she clears her name by giving the signal,’ Laura burst out on his temperate ‘Addio,’ and started to her feet. ’Well, let it be so. Fruitless blood again! A ‘rivederla’ to you both. To-night I am in the enemy’s camp. They play with open cards. Amalia tells me all she knows by what she disguises. I may learn something. Come to me to-morrow. My Sandra, I will kiss you. These shudderings of mine have no meaning.’

The signora embraced her, and took Ammiani’s salute upon her fingers.

‘Sour fingers!’ he said. She leaned her cheek to him, whispering, ’I could easily be persuaded to betray you.’

He answered, ‘I must have some merit in not betraying myself.’

‘At each elbow!’ she laughed. ’You show the thumps of an electric battery at each elbow, and expect your Goddess of lightnings not to see that she moves you. Go. You have not sided with me, and I am right, and I am a woman. By the way, Sandra mia, I would beg the loan of your Beppo for two hours or less.’

Vittoria placed Beppo at her disposal.

‘And you run home to bed,’ continued Laura. ’Reason comes to you obstinate people when you are left alone for a time in the dark.’

She hardly listened to Vittoria’s statement that the chief singers in the new opera were engaged to attend a meeting at eleven at night at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLOT OF THE SIGNOR ANTONIO

Page 1559

There was no concealment as to Laura's object in making request for the services of Beppo. She herself knew it to be obvious that she intended to probe and cross-examine the man, and in her wilfulness she chose to be obtuse to opinion. She did not even blush to lean a secret ear above the stairs that she might judge, by the tones of Vittoria's voice upon her giving Beppo the order to wait, whether she was at the same time conveying a hint for guardedness. But Vittoria said not a word: it was Ammiani who gave the order. 'I am despicable in distrusting her for a single second,' said Laura. That did not the less encourage her to question Beppo rigorously forthwith; and as she was not to be deceived by an Italian's affectation of simplicity, she let him answer two or three times like a plain fool, and then abruptly accused him of standing prepared with these answers. Beppo, within his own bosom, immediately ascribed to his sagacious instinct the mere spirit of opposition and dislike to serve any one save his own young mistress which had caused him to irritate the signora and be on his guard. He proffered a candid admission of the truth of the charge; adding, that he stood likewise prepared with an unlimited number of statements. 'Questions, illustrious signora, invariably put me on the defensive, and seem to cry for a return thrust; and this I account for by the fact that my mother—the blessed little woman now among the Saints!—was questioned, brows and heels, by a ferruginously—faced old judge at the momentous period when she carried me. So that, a question—and I show point; but ask me for a statement, and, ah, signora!' Beppo delivered a sweep of the arm, as to indicate the spontaneous flow of his tongue.

'I think,' said Laura, 'you have been a soldier, and a serving-man.'

'And a scene-shifter, most noble signora, at La Scala.'

'You accompanied the Signor Mertyrio to England when he was wounded?'

'I did.'

'And there you beheld the Signorina Vittoria, who was then bearing the name of Emilia Belloni?'

'Which name she changed on her arrival in Italy, illustrious signora, for that of Vittoria Campa—"sull' campo dells gloria"—ah! ah!—her own name being an attraction to the blow-flies in her own country. All this is true.'

'It should be a comfort to you! The Signor Mertyrio . . .'

Beppo writhed his person at the continuance of the questionings, and obtaining a pause, he rushed into his statement: 'The Signor Mertyrio was well, and on the point of visiting Italy, and quitting the wave-embraced island of fog, of beer, of moist winds, and much money, and much kindness, where great hearts grew. The signorina corresponded with him, and with him only.'

‘You know that, and will swear to it?’ Laura exclaimed.

Page 1560

Beppo thereby receiving the cue he had commenced beating for, swore to its truth profoundly, and straightway directed his statement to prove that his mistress had not been politically (or amorously, if the suspicion aimed at her in those softer regions) indiscreet or blameable in any of her actions. The signorina, he said, never went out from her abode without the companionship of her meritorious mother and his own most humble attendance. He, Beppo, had a master and a mistress, the Signor Mertyrio and the Signorina Vittoria. She saw no foreigners: though—a curious thing!—he had seen her when the English language was talked in her neighbourhood; and she had a love for that language: it made her face play in smiles like an infant's after it has had suck and is full;—the sort of look you perceive when one is dreaming and hears music. She did not speak to foreigners. She did not care to go to foreign cities, but loved Milan, and lived in it free and happy as an earwig in a ripe apricot. The circumvallation of Milan gave her elbow-room enough, owing to the absence of forts all round—'which knock one's funny-bone in Verona, signora.' Beppo presented a pure smile upon a simple bow for acceptance. 'The air of Milan,' he went on, with less confidence under Laura's steady gaze, and therefore more forcing of his candour—'the sweet air of Milan gave her a deep chestful, so that she could hold her note as long as five lengths of a fiddle-bow:—by the body of Sant' Ambrogio, it was true!' Beppo stretched out his arm, and chopped his hand edgeways five testificatory times on the shoulder-ridge. 'Ay, a hawk might fly from St. Luke's head (on the Duomo) to the stone on San Primo over Como, while the signorina held on her note! You listened, you gasped—you thought of a poet in his dungeon, and suddenly, behold, his chains are struck off!—you thought of a gold-shelled tortoise making his pilgrimage to a beatific shrine!—you thought—you knew not what you thought!'

Here Beppo sank into a short silence of ecstasy, and wakening from it, as with an ardent liveliness: 'The signora has heard her sing? How to describe it! Tomorrow night will be a feast for Milan.'

'You think that the dilettanti of Milan will have a delight to-morrow night?' said Laura; but seeing that the man's keen ear had caught note of the ironic reptile under the flower, and unwilling to lose further time, she interdicted his reply.

'Beppo, my good friend, you are a complete Italian—you waste your cleverness. You will gratify me by remembering that I am your countrywoman. I have already done you a similar favour by allowing you to air your utmost ingenuity. The reflection that it has been to no purpose will neither scare you nor instruct you. Of that I am quite assured. I speak solely to suit the present occasion. Now, don't seek to elude me. If you are a snake with friends as well as enemies, you are nothing but a snake. I ask you—you are not compelled to answer, but I forbid you to lie—has your mistress seen, or conversed and had correspondence with any one receiving the Tedeschi's gold, man or woman? Can any one, man or woman, call her a traitress?'

Page 1561

‘Not twice!’ thundered Beppo, with a furrowed red forehead.

There was a noble look about the fellow as he stood with stiff legs in a posture, frowning—theatrical, but noble also; partly the look of a Figaro defending his honour in extremity, yet much like a statue of a French Marshal of the Empire.

‘That will do,’ said Laura, rising. She was about to leave him, when the Duchess of Graatli’s chasseur was ushered in, bearing a missive from Amalia, her friend. She opened it and read:—

> ’*Best beloved*,—Am I soon to be reminded bitterly that there is a river of steel between my heart and me?

’Fail not in coming to-night. Your new Bulbul is in danger. The silly thing must have been reading Roman history. Say not no! It intoxicates you all. I watch over her for my Laura’s sake: a thousand kisses I shower on you, dark delicious soul that you are! Are you not my pine-grove leading to the evening star? Come, that we may consult how to spirit her away during her season of peril. Gulfs do not close over little female madcaps, my Laura; so we must not let her take the leap. Enter the salle when you arrive: pass down it once and return upon your steps; then to my boudoir. My maid Aennchen will conduct you. Addio. Tell this messenger that you come. Laura mine, I am for ever thy

‘*Amalia*.’

Laura signalled to the chasseur that her answer was affirmative. As he was retiring, his black-plumed hat struck against Beppo, who thrust him aside and gave the hat a dexterous kick, all the while keeping a decorous front toward the signora. She stood meditating. The enraged chasseur mumbled a word or two for Beppo’s ear, in execrable Italian, and went. Beppo then commenced bowing half toward the doorway, and tried to shoot through, out of sight and away, in a final droop of excessive servility, but the signora stopped him, telling him to consider himself her servant until the morning; at which he manifested a surprising readiness, indicative of nothing short of personal devotion, and remained for two minutes after she had quitted the room. So much time having elapsed, he ran bounding down the stairs and found the hall-door locked, and that he was a prisoner during the signora’s pleasure. The discovery that he was mastered by superior cunning, instead of disconcerting, quieted him wonderfully; so he put by the resources of his ingenuity for the next opportunity, and returned stealthily to his starting-point, where the signora found him awaiting her with composure. The man was in mortal terror lest he might be held guilty of a trust betrayed, in leaving his mistress for an hour, even in obedience to her command, at this crisis: but it was not in his nature to state the case openly to the signora, whom he knew to be his mistress’s friend, or to think of practising other than shrewd evasion to accomplish his duty and satisfy his conscience.

Page 1562

Laura said, without smiling, ‘The street-door opens with a key,’ and she placed the key in his hand, also her fan to carry. Once out of the house, she was sure that he would not forsake his immediate charge of the fan: she walked on, heavily veiled, confident of his following. The Duchess of Graatli’s house neighboured the Corso Francesco; numerous carriages were disburdening their freights of fair guests, and now and then an Austrian officer in full uniform ran up the steps, glittering under the lamps. ’I go in among them,’ thought Laura. It rejoiced her that she had come on foot. Forgetting Beppo, and her black fan, as no Italian woman would have done but she who paced in an acute quivering of the anguish of hopeless remembrances and hopeless thirst of vengeance, she suffered herself to be conducted in the midst of the guests, and shuddered like one who has taken a fever-chill as she fulfilled the duchess’s directions; she passed down the length of the saloon, through a light of visages that were not human to her sensations.

Meantime Beppo, oppressed by his custody of the fan, and expecting that most serviceable lady’s instrument to be sent for at any minute, stood among a strange body of semi-feudal retainers below, where he was soon singled out by the duchess’s chasseur, a Styrian, who, masking his fury under jest, in the South-German manner, endeavoured to lead him up to an altercation. But Beppo was much too supple to be entrapped. He apologized for any possible offences that he might have committed, assuring the chasseur that he considered one hat as good as another, and some hats better than others: in proof of extreme cordiality, he accepted the task of repeating the chasseur’s name, which was ’Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz,’ a tolerable mouthful for an Italian; and it was with remarkable delicacy that Beppo contrived to take upon himself the whole ridicule of his vile pronunciation of the unwieldy name. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz offered him beer to refresh him after the effort. While Beppo was drinking, he seized the fan. ‘Good; good; a thousand thanks,’ said Beppo, relinquishing it; ‘convey it aloft, I beseech you.’ He displayed such alacrity and lightness of limb at getting rid of it, that Jacob thrust it between the buttons of his shirtfront, returning it to his possession by that aperture. Beppo’s head sank. A handful of black lace and cedarwood chained him to the spot! He entreated the men in livery to take the fan upstairs and deliver it to the Signora Laura Piaveni; but they, being advised by Jacob, refused. ‘Go yourself,’ said Jacob, laughing, and little prepared to see the victim, on whom he thought that for another hour at least he had got his great paw firmly, take him at his word. Beppo sprang into the hall and up the stairs. The duchess’s maid, ivory-faced Aennchen, was flying past him. She saw a very taking dark countenance making eyes at her, leaned her ear shyly, and pretending to understand all that was said by the rapid foreign tongue, acted from the suggestion of the sole thing which she did understand. Beppo had mentioned the name of the Signora Piaveni. ‘This way,’ she indicated with her finger, supposing that of course he wanted to see the signora very urgently.

Page 1563

Beppo tried hard to get her to carry the fan; but she lifted her fingers in a perfect Susannah horror of it, though still bidding him to follow. Naturally she did not go fast through the dark passages, where the game of the fan was once more played out, and with accompaniments. The accompaniments she objected to no further than a fish is agitated in escaping from the hook; but 'Nein, nein!' in her own language, and 'No, no!' in his, burst from her lips whenever he attempted to transfer the fan to her keeping. 'These white women are most wonderful!' thought Beppo, ready to stagger between perplexity and impatience.

'There; in there!' said Aennchen, pointing to a light that came through the folds of a curtain. Beppo kissed her fingers as they tugged unreluctantly in his clutch, and knew by a little pause that the case was hopeful for higher privileges. What to do? He had not an instant to spare; yet he dared not offend a woman's vanity. He gave an ecstatic pressure of her hand upon his breastbone, to let her be sure she was adored, albeit not embraced. After this act of prudence he went toward the curtain, while the fair Austrian soubrette flew on her previous errand.

It was enough that Beppo found himself in a dark antechamber for him to be instantly scrupulous in his footing and breathing. As he touched the curtain, a door opened on the other side of the interior, and a tender gabble of fresh feminine voices broke the stillness and ran on like a brook coming from leaps to a level, and again leaping and making noise of joy. The Duchess of Graatli had clasped the Signora Laura's two hands and drawn her to an ottoman, and between kissings and warmer claspings, was questioning of the little ones, Giacomo and her goddaughter Amalia.

'When, when did I see you last?' she exclaimed. 'Oh! not since we met that morning to lay our immortelles upon his tomb. My soul's sister! kiss me, remembering it. I saw you in the gateway—it seemed to me, as in a vision, that we had both had one warning to come for him, and knock, and the door would be opened, and our beloved would come forth! That was many days back. It is to me like a day locked up forever in a casket of pearl. Was it not an unstained morning, my own! If I weep, it is with pleasure. But,' she added with precipitation, 'weeping of any kind will not do for these eyelids of mine.' And drawing forth a tiny gold-framed pocket-mirror she perceived convincingly that it would not do.

'They will think it is for the absence of my husband,' she said, as only a woman can say it who deplores nothing so little as that.

'When does he return from Vienna?' Laura inquired in the fallen voice of her thoughtfulness.

Page 1564

’I receive two couriers a week; I know not any more, my Laura. I believe he is pushing some connubial complaint against me at the Court. We have been married seventeen months. I submitted to the marriage because I could get no proper freedom without, and now I am expected to abstain from the very thing I sacrificed myself to get! Can he hear that in Vienna?’ She snapped her fingers. ’If not, let him come and behold it in Milan. Besides, he is harmless. The Archduchess is all ears for the very man of whom he is jealous. This is my reply: You told me to marry: I obeyed. My heart ’s in the earth, and I must have distractions. My present distraction is De Pyrmont, a good Catholic and a good Austrian soldier, though a Frenchman. I grieve to say—it’s horrible—that it sometimes tickles me when I reflect that De Pyrmont is keen with the sword. But remember, Laura, it was not until after our marriage my husband told me he could have saved Giacomo by the lifting of a finger. Away with the man!—if it amuses me to punish him, I do so.’

The duchess kissed Laura’s cheek, and continued:—’Now to the point where we stand enemies! I am for Austria, you are for Italy. Good. But I am always for Laura. So, there’s a river between us and a bridge across it. My darling, do you know that we are much too strong for you, if you mean anything serious tomorrow night?’

‘Are you?’ Laura said calmly.

‘I know, you see, that something is meant to happen to-morrow night.’

Laura said, ‘Do you?’

’We have positive evidence of it. More than that: Your Vittoria—but do you care to have her warned? She will certainly find herself in a pitfall if she insists on carrying out her design. Tell me, do you care to have her warned and shielded? A year of fortress-life is not agreeable, is not beneficial for the voice. Speak, my Laura.’

Laura looked up in the face of her friend mildly with her large dark eyes, replying, ’Do you think of sending Major de Pyrmont to her to warn her?’

‘Are you not wicked?’ cried the duchess, feeling that she blushed, and that Laura had thrown her off the straight road of her interrogation. ’But, play cards with open hands, my darling, to-night. Look:—She is in danger. I know it; so do you. She will be imprisoned perhaps before she steps on the boards—who knows? Now, I—are not my very dreams all sworn in a regiment to serve my Laura?—I have a scheme. Truth, it is hardly mine. It belongs to the Greek, the Signor Antonio Pericles Agriolopoulos. It is simply’—the duchess dropped her voice out of Beppo’s hearing—’a scheme to rescue her: speed her away to my chateau near Meran in Tyrol.’ ‘Tyrol’ was heard by Beppo. In his frenzy at the loss of the context he indulged in a yawn, and a grimace, and a dance of disgust all in one; which lost him the next sentence likewise. ’There we purpose keeping her till all is quiet and her revolutionary

Page 1565

fever has passed. Have you heard of this Signor Antonio? He could buy up the kingdom of Greece, all Tyrol, half Lombardy. The man has a passion for your Vittoria; for her voice solely, I believe. He is considered, no doubt truly, a great connoisseur. He could have a passion for nothing else, or alas!' (the duchess shook her head with doleful drollery) 'would he insist on written securities and mortgages of my private property when he lends me money? How different the world is from the romances, my Laura! But for De Pyrmont, I might fancy my smile was really incapable of ransoming an empire; I mean an emperor. Speak; the man is waiting to come; shall I summon him?'

Laura gave an acquiescent nod.

By this time Beppo had taken root to the floor. 'I am in the best place after all,' he said, thinking of the duties of his service. He was perfectly well acquainted with the features of the Signor Antonio. He knew that Luigi was the Signor Antonio's spy upon Vittoria, and that no personal harm was intended toward his mistress; but Beppo's heart was in the revolt of which Vittoria was to give the signal; so, without a touch of animosity, determined to thwart him, Beppo waited to hear the Signor Antonio's scheme.

The Greek was introduced by Aennchen. She glanced at the signora's lap, and seeing her still without her fan, her eye shot slyly up with her shining temple, inspecting the narrow opening in the curtain furtively. A short hush of preluding ceremonies passed.

Presently Beppo heard them speaking; he was aghast to find that he had no comprehension of what they were uttering. 'Oh, accursed French dialect!' he groaned; discovering the talk to be in that tongue. The Signor Antonio warmed rapidly from the frigid politeness of his introductory manner. A consummate acquaintance with French was required to understand him. He held out the fingers of one hand in regimental order, and with the others, which alternately screwed his moustache from its constitutional droop over the corners of his mouth, he touched the uplifted digits one by one, buzzing over them: flashing his white eyes, and shrugging in a way sufficient to madden a surreptitious listener who was aware that a wealth of meaning escaped him and mocked at him. At times the Signor Antonio pitched a note compounded half of cursing, half of crying, it seemed: both pathetic and objurgative, as if he whimpered anathemas and had inexpressible bitter things in his mind. But there was a remedy! He displayed the specific on a third finger. It was there. This being done (number three on the fingers), matters might still be well. So much his electric French and gesticulations plainly asserted. Beppo strained all his attention for names, in despair at the riddle of the signs. Names were pillars of light in the dark unintelligible waste. The signora put a question. It was replied to with the name of the Maestro Rocco Ricci. Following that, the

Page 1566

Signor Antonio accompanied his voluble delivery with pantomimic action which seemed to indicate the shutting of a door and an instantaneous galloping of horses—a flight into air, any-whither. He whipped the visionary steeds with enthusiastic glee, and appeared to be off skyward like a mad poet, when the signora again put a question, and at once he struck his hand flat across his mouth, and sat postured to answer what she pleased with a glare of polite vexation. She spoke; he echoed her, and the duchess took up the same phrase. Beppo was assisted by the triangular recurrence of the words and their partial relationship to Italian to interpret them: 'This night.' Then the signora questioned further. The Greek replied: 'Mademoiselle Irma di Karski.'

'La Lazzeruola,' she said.

The Signor Antonio flashed a bit of sarcastic mimicry, as if acquiescing in the justice of the opprobrious term from the high point of view: but mademoiselle might pass, she was good enough for the public.

Beppo heard and saw no more. A tug from behind recalled him to his situation. He put out his arms and gathered Aennchen all dark in them: and first kissing her so heartily as to set her trembling on the verge of a betrayal, before she could collect her wits he struck the fan down the pretty hollow of her back, between her shoulder-blades, and bounded away. It was not his intention to rush into the embrace of Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, but that perambulating chasseur received him in a semi-darkness where all were shadows, and exclaimed, 'Aennchen!' Beppo gave an endearing tenderness to the few words of German known to him: 'Gottschaf-donner-dummer!' and slipped from the hold of the astonished Jacob, sheer under his arm-pit. He was soon in the street, excited he knew not by what, or for what object. He shuffled the names he remembered to have just heard—'Rocco Ricci, and 'la Lazzeruola.' Why did the name of la Lazzeruola come in advance of la Vittoria? And what was the thing meant by 'this night,' which all three had uttered as in an agreement?—ay! and the Tyrol! The Tyrol—-this night-Rocco Ricci la Lazzeruola!

Beppo's legs were carrying him toward the house of the Maestro Rocco Ricci ere he had arrived at any mental decision upon these imminent mysteries.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE MAESTRO'S DOOR

The house of the Maestro Rocco Ricci turned off the Borgo della Stella. Carlo Ammiani conducted Vittoria to the maestro's door. They conversed very little on the way.

'You are a good swordsman?' she asked him abruptly.

'I have as much skill as belongs to a perfect intimacy with the weapon,' he answered.

‘Your father was a soldier, Signor Carlo.’

’He was a General officer in what he believed to be the army of Italy. We used to fence together every day for two hours.’

‘I love the fathers who do that,’ said Vittoria.

Page 1567

After such speaking Ammiani was not capable of the attempt to preach peace and safety to her. He postponed it to the next minute and the next.

Vittoria's spirit was in one of those angry knots which are half of the intellect, half of the will, and are much under the domination of one or other of the passions in the ascendant. She was resolved to go forward; she felt justified in going forward; but the divine afflatus of enthusiasm buoyed her no longer, and she required the support of all that accuracy of insight and that senseless stubbornness which there might be in her nature. The feeling that it was she to whom it was given to lift the torch and plant the standard of Italy, had swept her as through the strings of a harp. Laura, and the horrible little bronze butterfly, and the 'Sei sospetta,' now made her duty seem dry and miserably fleshless, imaging itself to her as if a skeleton had been told to arise and walk:—say, the thing obeys, and fills a ghastly distension of men's eyelids for a space, and again lies down, and men get their breath: but who is the rosier for it? where is the glory of it? what is the good? This Milan, and Verona, Padua, Vicenza, Brescia, Venice, Florence, the whole Venetian, Tuscan, and Lombardic lands, down to far Sicily, and that Rome which always lay under the crown of a dead sunset in her idea—they too might rise; but she thought of them as skeletons likewise. Even the shadowy vision of Italy Free had no bloom on it, and stood fronting the blown trumpets of resurrection Lazarus-like.

At these moments young hearts, though full of sap and fire, cannot do common nursing labour for the little suckling sentiments and hopes, the dreams, the languors and the energies hanging about them for nourishment. Vittoria's horizon was within five feet of her. She saw neither splendid earth nor ancient heaven; nothing save a breach to be stepped over in defiance of foes and (what was harder to brave) of friends. Some wayward activity of old associations set her humming a quaint English tune, by which she was brought to her consciousness.

'Dear friend,' she said, becoming aware that there might be a more troubled depth in Ammiani's absence of speech than in her own.

'Yes?' said he, quickly, as for a sentence to follow. None came, and he continued, 'The Signora Laura is also your friend.'

She rejoined coldly, 'I am not thinking of her.'

Vittoria had tried to utter what might be a word of comfort for him, and she found she had not a thought or an emotion. Here she differed from Laura, who, if the mood to heal a favourite's little sore at any season came upon her, would shower out lively tendernesses and all cajoleries possible to the tongue of woman. Yet the irritation of action narrowed Laura more than it did Vittoria; fevered her and distracted her sympathies. Being herself a plaything at the time, she could easily play a part for others. Vittoria had not grown, probably never would grow, to be so plastic off the

stage. She was stringing her hand to strike a blow as men strike, and women when they do that cannot be quite feminine.

Page 1568

‘How dull the streets are,’ she remarked.

‘They are, just now,’ said Ammiani, thinking of them on the night to come convulsed with strife, and of her, tossed perhaps like a weed along the torrent of bloody deluge waters. Her step was so firm, her face so assured, that he could not fancy she realized any prospect of the sort, and it filled him with pity and a wretched quailing.

If I speak now I shall be talking like a coward, he said to himself: and he was happily too prudent to talk to her in that strain. So he said nothing of peace and safety. She was almost at liberty to believe that he approved the wisdom of her resolution. At the maestro’s door she thanked him for his escort, and begged for it further within an hour. ’And do bring me some chocolate.’ She struck her teeth together champing in a pretty hunger for it. ’I have no chocolate in my pocket, and I hardly know myself.’

‘What will your Signor Antonio say?’

Vittoria filliped her fingers. ’His rule is over, and he is my slave: I am not his. I will not eat much; but some some I must have.’

Ammiani laughed and promised to obtain it. ’That is, if there’s any to be had.’

‘Break open doors to get it for me,’ she said, stamping with fun to inspirit him.

No sooner was she standing alone, than her elbow was gently plucked at on the other side: a voice was sibilating: ‘S-s-signorina.’ She allowed herself to be drawn out of the light of the open doorway, having no suspicion and no fear. ‘Signorina, here is chocolate.’ She beheld two hands in cup-shape, surcharged with packets of Turin chocolate.

‘Lugi, it is you?’

The Motterone spy screwed his eyelids to an expression of the shrewdest secresy.

’Hist! signorina. Take some. You shall have all, but wait:—by-and-by. Aha! you look at my eyes as you did on the Monterone, because one of them takes the shoulder-view; but, the truth is, my father was a contrabandist, and had his eye in his ear when the frontier guard sent a bullet through his back, cotton-bags and cutleries, and all! I inherit from him, and have been wry-eyed ever since. How does that touch a man’s honesty, signorina? Not at all. Don’t even suspect that you won’t appreciate Luigi by-and-by. So, you won’t ask me a word, signorina, but up you go to the maestro:—signorina, I swear I am your faithful servant—up to the maestro, and down first. Come down first not last:—first. Let the other one come down after you; and you come down first. Leave her behind, la Lazzeruola; and here, ’Luigi displayed a black veil, the common head-dress of the Milanese women, and twisted his fingers round and round on his forehead to personate the horns of the veil; ’take it, signorina; you know how to wear it.

Luigi and the saints watch over you.’ Vittoria found herself left in possession of the veil and a packet of chocolate.

‘If I am watched over by the saints and Luigi,’ she thought, and bit at the chocolate.

Page 1569

When the door had closed upon her, Luigi resumed his station near it, warily casting his glances along the house-fronts, and moving his springy little legs like a heath-cock alert. They carried him sharp to an opposite corner of the street at a noise of some one running exposed to all eyes right down the middle of the road, straight to the house: in which foolish person he discerned Beppo, all of whose proceedings Luigi observed and commented on from the safe obscurity under eaves and starlight, while Beppo was in the light of the lamps. 'You thunder at the door, my Beppo. You are a fire-balloon: you are going to burn yourself up with what you carry. You think you can do something, because you read books and frequent the talking theatres—fourteen syllables to a word. Mother of heaven! will you never learn anything from natural intelligence? There you are, in at the door. And now you will disturb the signorina, and you will do nothing but make la Lazzeruola's ears lively. Bounce! you are up the stairs. Bounce! you are on the landing. Thrum! you drum at the door, and they are singing; they don't hear you. And now you're meek as a mouse. That's it—if you don't hit the mark when you go like a bullet, you 're stupid as lead. And they call you a clever fellow! Luigi's day is to come. When all have paid him all round, they will acknowledge Luigi's worth. You are honest enough, my Beppo; but you might as well be a countryman. You are the signorina's servant, but I know the turnings, said the rat to the cavaliere weazel.'

In a few minutes Beppo stepped from the house, and flung himself with his back against the lintel of the doorway.

'That looks like determination to stop on guard,' said Luigi.

He knew the exact feeling expressed by it, when one has come violently on an errand and has done no good.

'A flea, my feathery lad, will set you flying again.'

As it was imperative in Luigi's schemes that Beppo should be set flying again, he slipped away stealthily, and sped fast into the neighbouring Corso, where a light English closed carriage, drawn by a pair of the island horses, moved at a slow pace. Two men were on the driver's seat, one of whom Luigi hailed to come down then he laid a strip of paper on his knee, and after thumping on the side of his nose to get a notion of English-Italian, he wrote with a pencil, dancing upon one leg all the while for a balance:—

'Come, Beppo, daughter sake, now, at once, immediate,
Beppo, signor.'

'That's to the very extremity how the little signora Inglese would write,' said Luigi; yet cogitating profoundly in a dubitative twinkle of a second as to whether it might not be the English habit to wind up a hasty missive with an expediting oath. He had heard the oath of emphasis in that island: but he decided to let it go as it stood. The man he had

summoned was directed to take it straightway and deliver it to one who would be found at the house-door of the Maestro Rocco Ricci.

Page 1570

‘Thus, like a drunken sentinel,’ said Luigi, folding his arms, crossing his legs, and leaning back. ‘Forward, Matteo, my cherub.’

‘All goes right?’ the coachman addressed Luigi.

’As honey, as butter, as a mulberry leaf with a score of worms on it! The wine and the bread and the cream-cheeses are inside, my dainty one, are they? She must not starve, nor must I. Are our hampers fastened out side? Good. We shall be among the Germans in a day and a night. I ’ve got the route, and I pronounce the name of the chateau very perfectly—“Schloss Sonnenberg.” Do that if you can.’

The unpractised Italian coachman declined to attempt it. He and Luigi compared time by their watches. In three-quarters of an hour he was to be within hail of the maestro’s house. Thither Luigi quietly returned.

Beppo’s place there was vacant.

‘That’s better than a draught of Asti,’ said Luigi.

The lighted windows of the maestro’s house, and the piano striking corrective notes, assured him that the special rehearsal was still going on; and as he might now calculate on two or three minutes to spare, he threw back his coat-collar, lifted his head, and distended his chest, apparently to chime in with the singing, but simply to listen to it. For him, it was imperative that he should act the thing, in order to apprehend and appreciate it.

A hurried footing told of the approach of one whom he expected.

‘Luigi!’

‘Here, padrone.’

‘You have the chocolate?’

‘Signor Antonio, I have deposited it in the carriage.’

‘She is in up there?’

‘I beheld her entering.’

‘Good; that is fixed fact.’ The Signor Antonio drove at his moustache right and left. ’I give you, see, Italian money and German money: German money in paper; and a paper written out by me to explain the value of the German paper-money. Silence, engine that you are, and not a man! I am preventive of stupidity, I am? Do I not know that, hein? Am I in need of the acclamation of you, my friend? On to the Chateau

Sonnenberg:—drive on, drive on, and one who stops you, you drive over him: the gendarmes in white will peruse this paper, if there is any question, and will pass you and the cage, bowing; you hear? It is a pass; the military pass you when you show this paper. My good friend, Captain Weisspriess, on the staff of General Pierson, gives it, signed, and it is effectual. But you lose not the paper: put it away with the paper-money, quite safe. For yourself, this is half your pay—I give you napoleons; ten. Count. And now—once at the Chateau Sonnenberg, I repeat, you leave her in charge of two persons, one a woman, at the gate, and then back—frrrrr..'

Antonio-Pericles smacked on the flat of his hand, and sounded a rapid course of wheels.

'Back, and drop not a crumb upon the road. You have your map. It is, after Roveredo, straight up the Adige, by Bolzano . . . say "Botzen."'

Page 1571

‘"Botz,"’ said Luigi, submissively.

‘"Botz”—“Botz”—ass! fool! double idiot! “Botzon!"’ Antonio-Pericles corrected him furiously, exclaiming to the sovereign skies, ’Though I pay for brains, can I get them! No. But make a fiasco, Luigi, and not a second ten for you, my friend: and away, out of my sight, show yourself no more!’

Luigi humbly said that he was not the instrument of a fiasco.

Half spurning him, Antonio-Pericles snarled an end both to his advices and his prophetic disgust of the miserable tools furnished unto masterly minds upon this earth. He paced forward and back, murmuring in French, ’Mon Dieu! was there ever such a folly as in the head of this girl? It is her occasion:—Shall I be a Star? Shall I be a Cinder? It is tomorrow night her moment of Birth! No; she prefers to be extinguished. For what? For this thing she calls her country. It is infamous. Yes, vile little cheat! But, do you know Antonio-Pericles? Not yet. I will nourish you, I will imprison you: I will have you tortured by love, by the very devil of love, by the red-hot pincers of love, till you scream a music, and die to melt him with your voice, and kick your country to the gutter, and know your Italy for a birthplace and a cradle of Song, and no more, and enough! Bah!’

Having thus delivered himself of the effervescence of his internal agitation, he turned sharply round upon Luigi, with a military stamp of the foot and shout of the man’s name.

‘It is love she wants,’ Antonio-Pericles resumed his savage soliloquy. ’She wants to be kindled on fire. Too much Government of brain; not sufficient Insurrection of heart! There it is. There it lies. But, little fool! you shall find people with arms and shots and cannon running all up and down your body, firing and crying out “Victory for Love!” till you are beaten, till you gasp “Love! love! love!” and then comes a beatific—oh! a heaven and a hell to your voice. I will pay,’ the excited connoisseur pursued more deliberately: ’I will pay half my fortune to bring this about. I am fortified, for I know such a voice was sent to be sublime.’ He exclaimed in an ecstasy: ‘It opens the skies!’ and immediately appended: ‘It is destined to suffocate the theatres!’

Pausing as before a splendid vision: ’Money—let it go like dust! I have an object. Sandra Belloni—you stupid Vittoria Campa!—I have millions and the whole Austrian Government to back me, and you to be wilful, little rebel! I could laugh. It is only Love you want. Your voice is now in a marble chamber. I will put it in a palace of cedarwood. This Ammiani I let visit you in the hope that he would touch you.

Bah! he is a patriot—not a man! He cannot make you wince and pine, and be cold and be hot, and—Bah! I give a chance to some one else who is not a patriot. He has done mischief with the inflammable little Anna von Lenkenstein—I know it. Your proper lovers, you women, are the broad, the business lovers, and Weisspriess is your man.’

Page 1572

Antonio-Pericles glanced up at the maestro's windows. 'Hark! it is her voice,' he said, and drew up his clenched fists with rage, as if pumping. 'Cold as ice! Not a flaw. She is a lantern with no light in it—crystal, if you like. Hark now at Irma, the stork-neck. Aie! what a long way it is from your throat to your head, Mademoiselle Irma! You were reared upon lemons. The split hair of your mural crown is not thinner than that voice of yours. It is a mockery to hear you; but you are good enough for the people, my dear, and you do work, running up and down that ladder of wires between your throat and your head;—you work, it is true, you puss! sleek as a puss, bony as a puss, musical as a puss. But you are good enough for the people. Hola!'

This exclamation was addressed to a cavalier who was dismounting from his horse about fifty yards down the street, and who, giving the reins to a mounted servant, advanced to meet the Signor Antonio.

'It is you, Herr Captain von Weisspriess!'

'When he makes an appointment you see him, as a rule, my dear Pericles,' returned the captain.

'You are out of uniform—good. We will go up. Remember, you are a connoisseur, from Bonn—from Berlin—from Leipsic: not of the K.K. army! Abjure it, or you make no way with this mad thing. You shall see her and hear her, and judge if she is worth your visit to Schloss Sonnenberg and a short siege. Good: we go aloft. You bow to the maestro respectfully twice, as in duty; then a third time, as from a whisper of your soul. Vanitas, vanitatis! You speak of the '*ut* de poitrine.' You remark: "Albrechtsberger has said—–," and you slap your head and stop. They think, "He is polite, and will not quote a German authority to us": and they think, "He will not continue his quotation; in truth, he scornfully considers it superfluous to talk of counterpoint to us poor Italians." Your Christian name is Johann?—you are Herr Johannes. Look at her well. I shall not expose you longer than ten minutes to their observation. Frown meditative; the elbow propped and two fingers in the left cheek; and walk into the room with a stoop: touch a note of the piano, leaning your ear to it as in detection of five-fifteenths of a shade of discord. Frown in trouble as of a tooth. So, when you smile, it is immense praise to them, and easy for you.'

The names of the Signor Antonio-Pericles and Herr Johannes were taken up to the maestro.

Tormented with curiosity, Luigi saw them enter the house. The face and the martial or sanguinary reputation of Captain Weisspriess were not unknown to him. 'What has he to do with this affair?' thought Luigi, and sauntered down to the captain's servant, who accepted a cigar from him, but was rendered incorruptible by ignorance of his language. He observed that the horses were fresh, and were furnished with saddle-

bags as for an expedition. What expedition? To serve as escort to the carriage?—a nonsensical

Page 1573

idea. But the discovery that an idea is nonsensical is not a satisfactory solution of a difficulty. Luigi squatted on his haunches beside the doorstep, a little under one of the lower windows of Rocco Ricci's house. Earlier than he expected, the captain and Signor Antonio came out; and as soon as the door had closed behind them, the captain exclaimed, 'I give you my hand on it, my brave Pericles. You have done me many services, but this is finest of all. She's superb. She's a nice little wild woman to tame. I shall go to the Sonnenberg immediately. I have only to tell General Pierson that his nephew is to be prevented from playing the fool, and I get leave at once, if there's no active work.'

'His nephew, Lieutenant Pierson, or Pole—hein?' interposed the Greek.

'That 's the man. He 's on the Marshal's staff. He 's engaged to the Countess Lena von Lenkenstein. She has fire enough, my Pericles.'

'The Countess Anna, you say?' The Greek stretched forward his ear, and was never so near getting it vigorously cuffed.

'Deafness is an unpardonable offence, my dear Pericles.'

Antonio-Pericles sniffed, and assented, 'It is the stupidity of the ear.'

'I said, the Countess Lena.'

'Von Lenkenstein; but I choose to be further deaf.'

'To the devil, sir. Do you pretend to be angry?' cried Weisspriess.

'The devil, sir, with your recommendation, is too black for me to visit him,' Antonio-Pericles rejoined.

'By heaven, Pericles, for less than what you allow yourself to say, I've sent men to him howling!'

They faced one another, pulling at their moustachios. Weisspriess laughed.

'You're not a fighting man, Pericles.'

The Greek nodded affably. 'One is in my way, I have him put out of my way. It is easiest.'

'Ah! easiest, is it?' Captain Weisspriess 'frowned meditative' over this remarkable statement of a system. 'Well, it certainly saves trouble. Besides, my good Pericles, none but an ass would quarrel with you. I was observing that General Pierson wants his nephew to marry the Countess Lena immediately; and if, as you tell me, this girl

Belloni, who is called la Vittoria—the precious little woman!—has such power over him, it's quite as well, from the General's point of view, that she should be out of the way at Sonnenberg. I have my footing at the Duchess of Graath's. I believe she hopes that I shall some day challenge and kill her husband; and as I am supposed to have saved Major de Pyrmont's life, I am also an object of present gratitude. Do you imagine that your little brown-eyed Belloni scented one of her enemies in me?'

'I know nothing of imagination,' the Signor Antonio observed frigidly.

'Till we meet!' Captain Weisspriess kissed his fingers, half as up toward the windows, and half to the Greek. 'Save me from having to teach love to your Irma!'

Page 1574

He ran to join his servant.

Luigi had heard much of the conversation, as well as the last sentence.

‘It shall be to la Irma if it is to anybody,’ Luigi muttered.

’Let Weisspriess—he will not awake love in her—let him kindle hate, it will do,’ said the Signor Antonio. ’She has seen him, and if he meets her on the route to Meran, she will think it her fascination.’

Looking at his watch and at the lighted windows, he repeated his special injunctions to Luigi. ’It is near the time. I go to sleep. I am getting old: I grow nervous. Ten-twenty in addition, you shall have, if all is done right. Your weekly pay runs on. Twenty—you shall have thirty! Thirty napoleons additional!’

Ten fingers were flashed thrice.

Luigi gave a jump. ‘Padrone, they are mine.’

‘Animal, that shake your belly-bag and brain-box, stand!’ cried the Greek, who desired to see Luigi standing firm that he might inspire himself with confidence in his integrity. When Luigi’s posture had satisfied him, he turned and went off at great strides.

‘He does pay,’ Luigi reflected, seeing that immense virtue in his patron. ’Yes, he pays; but what is he about? It is this question for me—“Do I serve my hand? or, Do I serve my heart?” My hand takes the money, and it is not German money. My heart gives the affection, and the signorina has my heart. She reached me that cigarette on the Motterone like the Madonna: it is never to be forgotten! I serve my heart! Now, Beppo, you may come; come quick for her. I see the carriage, and there are three stout fellows in it who could trip and muzzle you at a signal from me before you could count the letters of your father’s baptismal name. Oh! but if the signorina disobeys me and comes out last!—the Signor Antonio will ask the maestro, who will say, “Yes, la Vittoria was here with me last of the two”; and I lose my ten, my twenty, my thirty napoleons.’

Luigi’s chest expanded largely with a melancholy draught of air.

The carriage meantime had become visible at the head of the street, where it remained within hearing of a whistle. One of the Milanese hired vehicles drove up to the maestro’s door shortly after, and Luigi cursed it. His worst fears for the future of the thirty napoleons were confirmed; the door opened and the Maestro Rocco Ricci, bareheaded and in his black silk dressing-gown, led out Irma di Karski, by some called rival to la Vittoria; a tall Slavic damsel, whose laughter was not soft and smooth, whose cheeks were bright, and whose eyes were deep in the head and dull. But she had vivacity both of lips and shoulders. The shoulders were bony; the lips were sharp and red, like winter-berries in the morning-time. Freshness was not absent from her aspect.

The critical objection was that it seemed a plastered freshness and not true bloom; or rather it was a savage and a hard, not a sweet freshness. Hence perhaps the name which distinguished her la Lazzeruola (crab apple). It was a freshness that did not invite the bite; sour to Italian taste.

Page 1575

She was apparently in vast delight. 'There will be a perfect inundation to-morrow night from Prague and Vienna to see me even in so miserable a part as Michiella,' she said. 'Here I am supposed to be a beginner; I am no debutante there.'

'I can believe it, I can believe it,' responded Rocco, bowing for her speedy departure.

'You are not satisfied with my singing of Michiella's score! Now, tell me, kind, good, harsh old master! you think that Miss Vittoria would sing it better. So do I. And I can sing another part better. You do not know my capacities.'

'I am sure there is nothing you would not attempt,' said Rocco, bowing resignedly.

'There never was question of my courage.'

'Yes, but courage, courage! away with your courage!' Rocco was spurred by his personal grievances against her in a manner to make him forget his desire to be rid of her. 'Your courage sets you flying at once at every fioritura and bravura passage, to subdue, not to learn: not to accomplish, but to conquer it. And the ability, let me say, is not in proportion to the courage, which is probably too great to be easily equalled; but you have the opportunity to make your part celebrated to-morrow night, if, as you tell me, the house is to be packed with Viennese, and, signorina, you let your hair down.'

The hair of Irma di Karski was of singular beauty, and so dear to her that the allusion to the triumphant feature of her person passed off Rocco's irony in sugar.

'Addio! I shall astonish you before many hours have gone by,' she said; and this time they bowed together, and the maestro tripped back hurriedly, and shut his door.

Luigi's astonishment eclipsed his chagrin when he beheld the lady step from her place, bidding the driver move away as if he carried a freight, and indicating a position for him at the end of the street, with an imperative sway and deflection of her hand. Luigi heard the clear thin sound of a key dropped to her from one of the upper windows. She was quick to seize it; the door opened stealthily to her, and she passed out of sight without casting a look behind. 'That's a woman going to discover a secret, if she can,' remarked the observer; meaning that he considered the sex bad Generals, save when they have occasion to preserve themselves secret; then they look behind them carefully enough. The situation was one of stringent torment to a professional and natural spy. Luigi lost count of minutes in his irritation at the mystery, which he took as a personal offence. Some suspicion or wariness existed in the lighted room, for the maestro threw up a window, and inspected the street to right and left. Apparently satisfied he withdrew his head, and the window was closed.

In a little while Vittoria's voice rose audible out of the stillness, though she restrained its volume.

Page 1576

Its effect upon Luigi was to make him protest to her, whimpering with pathos as if she heard and must be melted: 'Signorina! signorina, most dear! for charity's sake! I am one of you; I am a patriot. Every man to his trade, but my heart is all with you.' And so on, louder by fits, in a running murmur, like one having his conscience ransacked, from which he was diverted by a side-thought of Irma di Karski, la Lazzeruola, listening, taking poison in at her ears; for Luigi had no hesitation in ascribing her behaviour to jealousy. 'Does not that note drive through your bosom, excellent lady? I can fancy the tremble going all down your legs. You are poisoned with honey. How you hate it! If you only had a dagger!'

Vittoria sang but for a short space. Simultaneously with the cessation of her song Ammiani reached the door, but had scarcely taken his stand there when, catching sight of Luigi, he crossed the street, and recognizing him, questioned him sternly as to his business opposite the maestro's house. Luigi pointed to a female figure emerging. 'See! take her home,' he said. Ammiani released him and crossed back hurriedly, when, smiting his forehead, Luigi cried in despair, 'Thirty napoleons and my professional reputation lost!' He blew a whistle; the carriage dashed down from the head of the street. While Ammiani was following the swiftly-stepping figure in wonderment (knowing it could not be Vittoria, yet supposing it must be, without any clear aim of his wits), the carriage drew up a little in advance of her; three men—men of bulk and sinew jumped from it; one threw himself upon Ammiani, the others grasped the affrighted lady, tightening a veil over her face, and the carriage-door shut sharp upon her. Ammiani's assailant then fell away: Luigi flung himself on the box and shouted, 'The signorina is behind you!' And Ammiani beheld Vittoria standing in alarm, too joyful to know that it was she. In the spasm of joy he kissed her hands. Before they could intercommunicate intelligibly the carriage was out of their sight, going at a gallop along the eastern strada of the circumvallation of the city.

CHAPTER XV

AMMIANI THROUGH THE MIDNIGHT

Ammiani hurried Vittoria out of the street to make safety sure. 'Home,' she said, ashamed of her excitement, and not daring to speak more words, lest the heart in her throat should betray itself. He saw what the fright had done for her. Perhaps also he guessed that she was trying to conceal her fancied cowardice from him. 'I have kissed her hands,' he thought, and the memory of it was a song of tenderness in his blood by the way.

Page 1577

Vittoria's dwelling-place was near the Duomo, in a narrow thoroughfare leading from the Duomo to the Piazza of La Scala, where a confectioner of local fame conferred upon the happier members of the population most piquant bocconi and tartlets, and offered by placard to give an emotion to the nobility, the literati, and the epicures of Milan, and to all foreigners, if the aforesaid would adventure upon a trial of his art. Meanwhile he let lodgings. It was in the house of this famous confectioner Zotti that Vittoria and her mother had lived after leaving England for Italy. As Vittoria came under the fretted shadow of the cathedral, she perceived her mother standing with Zotti at the house-door, though the night was far advanced. She laughed, and walked less hurriedly. Ammiani now asked her if she had been alarmed. 'Not alarmed,' she said, 'but a little more nervous than I thought I should be.'

He was spared from putting any further question by her telling him that Luigi, the Motterone spy, had in all probability done her a service in turning one or other f the machinations of the Signor Antonio. 'My madman,' she called this latter. 'He has got his Irma instead of me. We shall have to supply her place tomorrow; she is travelling rapidly, and on my behalf! I think, Signor Carlo, you would do well by going to the maestro when you leave me, and telling him that Irma has been caught into the skies. Say, "Jealous that earth should possess such overpowering loveliness," or "Attracted in spite of themselves by that combination of genius and beauty which is found united nowhere but in Irma, the spirits of heaven determined to rob earth of her Lazzeruola." Only tell it to him seriously, for my dear Rocco will have to work with one of the singers all day, and I ought to be at hand by them to help her, if I dared stir out. What do you think?'

Ammiani pronounced his opinion that it would be perilous for her to go abroad.

'I shall in truth, I fear, have a difficulty in getting to La Scala unseen,' she said; 'except that we are cunning people in our house. We not only practise singing and invent wonderful confectionery, but we do conjuring tricks. We profess to be able to deceive anybody whom we please.'

'Do the dupes enlist in a regiment?' said Ammiani, with an intonation that professed his readiness to serve as a recruit. His humour striking with hers, they smiled together in the bright fashion of young people who can lose themselves in a ray of fancy at any season.

Vittoria heard her mother's wailful voice. 'Twenty gnats in one,' she said.

Ammiani whispered quickly to know whether she had decided for the morrow. She nodded, and ran up to her mother, who cried:

'At this hour! And Beppo has been here after you, and he told me I wrote for him, in Italian, when not a word can I put to paper: I wouldn't!—and you are threatened by

dreadful dangers, he declares. His behaviour was mad; they are all mad over in this country, I believe. I have put the last stitch to your dress. There is a letter or two upstairs for you. Always letters!'

Page 1578

‘My dear good Zotti,’ Vittoria turned to the artist in condiments, ’you must insist upon my mother going to bed at her proper time when I am out.’

‘Signorina,’ rejoined Zotti, a fat little round-headed man, with vivacious starting brown eyes, ’I have only to tell her to do a thing—I pull a dog by the collar; be it said with reverence.’

‘However, I am very glad to see you both such good friends.’

’Yes, signorina, we are good friends till we quarrel again. I regret to observe to you that the respectable lady is incurably suspicious. Of me—Zotti! Mother of heaven!’

‘It is you that are suspicious of me, sir,’ retorted madame. ’Of me, of all persons! It’s “tell me this, tell me that,” all day with you; and because I can’t answer, you are angry.’

‘Behold! the signora speaks English; we have quarrelled again,’ said Zotti.

‘My mother thinks him a perfect web of plots,’ Vittoria explained the case between them, laughing, to Ammiani; ’and Zotti is persuaded that she is an inveterate schemer. They are both entirely innocent, only they are both excessively timid. Out of that it grows.’

The pair dramatized her outline on the instant:

’"Did I not see him speak to an English lady, and he will not tell me a word about it, though she’s my own countrywoman?"’

’"Is it not true that she received two letters this afternoon, and still does she pretend to be ignorant of what is going on?"’

‘Happily,’ said Vittoria, ’my mother is not a widow, or these quarrels might some day end in a fearful reconciliation.’

‘My child,’ her mother whimpered, ’you know what these autumn nights are in this country; as sure as you live, Emilia, you will catch cold, and then you’re like a shop with shutters up for the dead.’

At the same time Zotti whispered: ’Signorina, I have kept the minestra hot for your supper; come in, come in. And, little things, little dainty bits!—do you live in Zotti’s house for nothing? Sweetest delicacies that make the tongue run a stream!—just notions of a taste—the palate smacks and forgets; the soul seizes and remembers!’

‘Oh, such seductions!’ Vittoria exclaimed.

‘It is,’ Zotti pursued his idea, with fingers picturesquely twirling in a spider-like distension; ’it is like the damned, and they have but a crumb of a chance of Paradise,

and down swoops St. Peter and has them in the gates fast! You are worthy of all that a man can do for you, signorina. Let him study, let him work, let him invent,—you are worthy of all.'

'I hope I am not too hungry to discriminate! Zotti I see Monte Rosa.'

'Signorina, you are pleased to say so when you are famishing. It is because—' the enthusiastic confectioner looked deep and oblique, as one who combined a remarkable subtlety of insight with profound reflection; 'it is because the lighter you get the higher you mount; up like an eagle of the peaks! But we'll give that hungry fellow a fall. A dish of hot minestra shoots him dead. Then, a tart of pistachios and chocolate and cream—-and my head to him who shall reveal to me the flavouring!'

Page 1579

’When I wake in the morning, I shall have lived a month or two in Arabia, Zotti. Tell me no more; I will come in,’ said Vittoria.

’Then, signorina, a little crisp filbert—biscuit—a composition! You crack it, and a surprise! And then, and then my dish; Zotti’s dish, that is not yet christened. Signorina, let Italy rise first; the great inventor of the dish winked and nodded temperately. ’Let her rise. A battle or a treaty will do. I have two or three original conceptions, compositions, that only wait for some brilliant feat of arms, or a diplomatic triumph, and I send them forth baptized.’

Vittoria threw large eyes upon Ammiani, and set the underlids humorously quivering. She kissed her fingers: ‘Addio; a rivederla.’ He bowed formally: he was startled to find the golden thread of their companionship cut with such cruel abruptness. But it was cut; the door had closed on her. The moment it had closed she passed into his imagination. By what charm had she allayed the fever of his anxiety? Her naturalness had perforce given him assurance that peace must surround one in whom it shone so steadily, and smiling at the thought of Zotti’s repast and her twinkle of subdued humour, he walked away comforted; which, for a lover in the season of peril means exalted, as in a sudden conflagration of the dry stock of his intelligence. ’She must have some great faith in her heart,’ he thought, no longer attributing his exclusion from it to a lover’s rivalry, which will show that more than imagination was on fire within him. For when the soul of a youth can be heated above common heat, the vices of passion shrivel up and aid the purer flame. It was well for Ammiani that he did perceive (dimly though it was perceived) the force of idealistic inspiration by which Vittoria was supported. He saw it at this one moment, and it struck a light to light him in many subsequent perplexities; it was something he had never seen before. He had read Tuscan poetry to her in old Agostino’s rooms; he had spoken of secret preparations for the revolt; he had declaimed upon Italy,—the poetry was good though the declamation may have been bad,—but she had always been singularly irresponsive, with a practical turn for ciphers. A quick reckoning, a sharp display of figures in Italy’s cause, kindled her cheeks and took her breath. Ammiani now understood that there lay an unspoken depth in her, distinct from her visible nature.

He had first an interview with Rocco Ricci, whom he prepared to replace Irma.

His way was then to the office of his Journal, where he expected to be greeted by two members of the Polizia, who would desire him to march before the central bureau, and exhibit proofs of articles and the items of news for inspection, for correction haply, and possibly for approval. There is a partial delight in the contemplated submission to an act of servitude for the last time. Ammiani stepped in with combative

Page 1580

gaiety, but his stiff glance encountered no enemy. This astonished him. He turned back into the street and meditated. The Pope's Mouth might, he thought, hold the key to the riddle. It is not always most comfortable for a conspirator to find himself unsuspected: he reads the blank significantly. It looked ill that the authorities should allow anything whatsoever to be printed on such a morrow: especially ill, if they were on the alert. The neighbourhood by the Pope's Mouth was desolate under dark starlight. Ammiani got his fingers into the opening behind the rubbish of brick, and tore them on six teeth of a saw that had been fixed therein. Those teeth were as voluble to him as loud tongues. The Mouth was empty of any shred of paper. They meant that the enemy was ready to bite, and that the conspiracy had ceased to be active. He perceived that a stripped ivy-twig, with the leaves scattered around it, stretched at his feet. That was another and corroborative sign, clearer to him than printed capitals. The reading of it declared that the Revolt had collapsed. He wound and unwound his handkerchief about his fingers mechanically: great curses were in his throat. 'I would start for South America at dawn, but for her!' he said. The country of Bolivar still had its attractions for Italian youth. For a certain space Ammiani's soul was black with passion. He was the son of that fiery Paolo Ammiani who had cast his glove at Eugene's feet, and bade the viceroy deliver it to his French master. (The General was preparing to break his sword on his knee when Eugene rushed up to him and kissed him.) Carlo was of this blood. Englishmen will hardly forgive him for having tears in his eyes, but Italians follow the Greek classical prescription for the emotions, while we take example by the Roman. There is no sneer due from us. He sobbed. It seemed that a country was lost.

Ammiani had moved away slowly: he was accidentally the witness of a curious scene. There came into the irregular triangle, and walking up to where the fruitstalls stood by day, a woman and a man. The man was an Austrian soldier. It was an Italian woman by his side. The sight of the couple was just then like an incestuous horror to Ammiani. She led the soldier straight up to the Mouth, directing his hand to it, and, what was far more wonderful, directing it so that he drew forth a packet of papers from where Ammiani had found none. Ammiani could see the light of them in his hand. The Austrian snatched an embrace and ran. Ammiani was moving over to her to seize and denounce the traitress, when he beheld another figure like an apparition by her side; but this one was not a whitecoat. Had it risen from the earth? It was earthy, for a cloud of dust was about it, and the woman gave a stifled scream. 'Barto! Barto!' she cried, pressing upon her eyelids. A strong husky laugh came from him. He tapped her shoulder heartily, and his 'Ha! ha!' rang in the night air.

Page 1581

‘You never trust me,’ she whimpered from shaken nerves.

He called her, ‘Brave little woman! rare girl!’

‘But you never trust me!’

‘Do I not lay traps to praise you?’

‘You make a woman try to deceive you.’ If she could! If only she could!’

Ammiani was up with them.

‘You are Barto Rizzo,’ he spoke, half leaning over the man in his impetuosity.

Barto stole a defensive rearward step. The thin light of dawn had in a moment divided the extreme starry darkness, and Ammiani, who knew his face, had not to ask a second time. It was scored by a recent sword-cut. He glanced at the woman: saw that she was handsome. It was enough; he knew she must be Barto’s wife, and, if not more cunning than Barto, his accomplice, his instrument, his slave.

’Five minutes ago I would have sworn you were a traitress he said to her.

She was expressionless, as if she had heard nothing; which fact, considering that she was very handsome, seemed remarkable to the young man. Youth will not believe that stupidity and beauty can go together.

‘She is the favourite pupil of Bartolommeo Rizzo, Signor Carlo Ammiani,’ quoth Barto, having quite regained his composure. ’She is my pretty puppet-patriot. I am not in the habit of exhibiting her; but since you see her, there she is.’

Barto had fallen into the Southern habit of assuming ease in quasi-rhetorical sentences, but with wary eyes over them. The peculiar, contracting, owl-like twinkle defied Ammiani’s efforts to penetrate his look; so he took counsel of his anger, and spoke bluntly.

‘She does your work?’

‘Much of it, Signor Carlo: as the bullet does the work of the rifle.’

’Beast! was it your wife who pinned the butterfly to the Signorina Vittoria’s dress?’

’Signor Carlo Ammiani, you are the son of Paolo, the General: you call me beast? I have dandled you in my arms, my little lad, while the bands played “There’s yet a heart in Italy!” Do you remember it?’ Barto sang out half-a-dozen bars. ’You call me beast? I’m the one man in Milan who can sing you that.’

‘Beast or man, devil or whatever you are!’ cried Ammiani, feeling nevertheless oddly unnerved, ’you have committed a shameful offence: you, or the woman, your wife, who serves you, as I see. You have thwarted the best of plots; you have dared to act in defiance of your Chief—’

‘Eyes to him!’ Barto interposed, touching over his eyeballs.

’And you have thrown your accursed stupid suspicions on the Signorina Vittoria. You are a mad fool. If I had the power, I would order you to be shot at five this morning; and that ’s the last rising of the light you should behold. Why did you do it? Don’t turn your hellish eyes in upon one another, but answer at once! Why did you do it?’

Page 1582

‘The Signorina Vittoria,’ returned Barto—his articulation came forth serpent-like—’she is not a spy, you think. She has been in England: I have been in England. She writes; I can read. She is a thing of whims. Shall she hold the goblet of Italy in her hand till it overflows? She writes love-letters to an English whitecoat. I have read them. Who bids her write? Her whim! She warns her friends not to enter Milan. She—whose puppet is she? Not yours; not mine. She is the puppet of an English Austrian!’

Barto drew back, for Ammiani was advancing.

‘What is it you mean?’ he cried.

‘I mean,’ said Ammiani, still moving on him, ’I mean to drag you first before Count Medole, and next before the signorina; and you shall abjure your slander in her presence. After that I shall deal with you. Mark me! I have you: I am swifter on foot, and I am stronger. Come quietly.’

Barto smiled in grim contempt.

‘Keep your foot fast on that stone, you’re a prisoner,’ he replied, and seeing Ammiani coming, ‘Net him, my sling-stone! my serpent!’ he signalled to his wife, who threw herself right round Ammiani in a tortuous twist hard as wire-rope. Stung with irritation, and a sense of disgrace and ridicule and pitifulness in one, Ammiani, after a struggle, ceased the attempt to disentwine her arms, and dragged her clinging to him. He was much struck by hearing her count deliberately, in her desperation, numbers from somewhere about twenty to one hundred. One hundred was evidently the number she had to complete, for when she had reached it she threw her arms apart. Barto was out of sight. Ammiani waved her on to follow in his steps: he was sick of her presence, and had the sensations of a shame-faced boy whom a girl has kissed. She went without uttering a word.

The dawn had now traversed the length of the streets, and thrown open the wide spaces of the city. Ammiani found himself singing, ’There’s yet a heart in Italy!’ but it was hardly the song of his own heart. He slept that night on a chair in the private room of his office, preferring not to go to his mother’s house. ’There ‘s yet a heart in Italy!’ was on his lips when he awoke with scattered sensations, all of which collected in revulsion against the song. ‘There’s a very poor heart in Italy!’ he said, while getting his person into decent order; ’it’s like the bell in the lunatic’s tower between Venice and the Lido: it beats now and then for meals: hangs like a carrion-lump in the vulture’s beak meanwhile!’

These and some other similar sentiments, and a heat about the brows whenever he set them frowning over what Barto had communicated concerning an English Austrian, assured Ammiani that he had no proper command of himself: or was, as the doctors

would have told him, bilious. It seemed to him that he must have dreamed of meeting the dark and subtle Barto Rizzo overnight; on realizing that fact he could not

Page 1583

realize how the man had escaped him, except that when he thought over it, he breathed deep and shook his shoulders. The mind will, as you may know, sometimes refuse to work when the sensations are shameful and astonished. He despatched a messenger with a ‘good morrow’ to his mother, and then went to a fencing-saloon that was fitted up in the house of Count Medole, where, among two or three, there was the ordinary shrugging talk of the collapse of the projected outbreak, bitter to hear. Luciano Romara came in, and Ammiani challenged him to small-sword and broadsword. Both being ireful to boiling point, and mad to strike at something, they attacked one another furiously, though they were dear friends, and the helmet-wires and the padding rattled and smoked to the thumps. For half an hour they held on to it, when, their blood being up, they flashed upon the men present, including the count, crying shame to them for letting a woman alone be faithful to her task that night. The blood forsook Count Medole’s cheeks, leaving its dead hue, as when blotting-paper is laid on running-ink. He deliberately took a pair of foils, and offering the handle of one to Ammiani, broke the button off the end of his own, and stood to face an adversary. Ammiani followed the example: a streak of crimson was on his shirt-sleeve, and his eyes had got their hard black look, as of the flint-stone, before Romara in amazement discovered the couple to be at it in all purity of intention, on the sharp edge of the abyss. He knocked up their weapons and stood between them, puffing his cigarette leisurely.

‘I fine you both,’ he said.

He touched Ammiani’s sword-arm, nodded with satisfaction to find that there was no hurt, and cried, ’You have an Austrian out on the ground by this time tomorrow morning. So, according to the decree!’

‘Captain Weisspriess is in the city,’ was remarked.

‘There are a dozen on the list,’ said little Pietro Cardi, drawing out a paper.

‘If you are to be doing nothing else to-morrow morning,’ added Leone Rufo, ‘we may as well march out the whole dozen.’

These two were boys under twenty.

‘Shall it be the first hit for Captain Weisspriess?’ Count Medole said this while handing a fresh and fairly-buttoned foil to Ammiani.

Romara laughed: ’You will require to fence the round of Milan city, my dear count, to win a claim to Captain Weisspriess. In the first place, I yield him to no man who does not show himself a better man than I. It’s the point upon which I don’t pay compliments.’

Count Medole bowed.

‘But, if you want occupation,’ added Luciano, closing his speech with a merely interrogative tone.

‘I scarcely want that, as those who know me will tell you,’ said Medole, so humbly, that those who knew him felt that he had risen to his high seat of intellectual contempt. He could indulge himself, having shown his courage.

Page 1584

’Certainly not; if you are devising means of subsistence for the widows and orphans of the men who will straggle out to be slaughtered to-night,’ said Luciano; ‘you have occupation in that case.’

’I will do my best to provide for them,’—the count persisted in his air of humility, ’though it is a question with some whether idiots should live.’ He paused effectively, and sucked in a soft smile of self-approbation at the stroke. Then he pursued: ’We meet the day after to-morrow. The Pope’s Mouth is closed. We meet here at nine in the morning. The next day at eleven at Farugino’s, the barber’s, in Monza. The day following at Camerlata, at eleven likewise. Those who attend will be made aware of the dispositions for the week, and the day we shall name for the rising. It is known to you all, that without affixing a stigma on our new prima-donna, we exclude her from any share in this business. All the Heads have been warned that we yield this night to the Austrians. Gentlemen, I cannot be more explicit. I wish that I could please you better.’

‘Oh, by all means,’ said Pietro Cardi: ’but patience is the pestilence; I shall roam in quest of adventure. Another quiet week is a tremendous trial.’

He crossed foils with Leone Rufo, but finding no stop to the drawn ‘swish’ of the steel, he examined the end of his weapon with a lengthening visage, for it was buttonless. Ammiani burst into laughter at the spontaneous boyishness in the faces of the pair of ambitious lads. They both offered him one of the rapiers upon equal terms. Count Medole’s example of intemperate vanity was spoiling them.

‘You know my opinion,’ Ammiani said to the count. ’I told you last night, and I tell you again to-day, that Barto Rizzo is guilty of gross misconduct, and that you must plead the same to a sort of excuseable treason. Count Medole, you cannot wind and unwind a conspiracy like a watch. Who is the head of this one? It is the man Barto Rizzo. He took proceedings before he got you to sanction them. You may be the vessel, but he commands, or at least, he steers it.’

The count waited undemonstratively until Ammiani had come to an end. ’You speak, my good Ammiani, with an energy that does you credit,’ he said, ’considering that it is not in your own interest, but another person’s. Remember, I can bear to have such a word as treason ascribed to my acts.’

Fresh visitors, more or less mixed, in the conspiracy, and generally willing to leave the management of it to Count Medole, now entered the saloon. These were Count Rasati, Angelo Dovili, a Piedmontese General, a Tuscan duke, and one or two aristocratic notabilities and historic nobodies. They were hostile to the Chief whom Luciano and Carlo revered and obeyed. The former lit a cigarette, and saying to his friend, ’Do you breakfast with your mother? I will come too,’ slipped his hand on Ammiani’s arm; they walked out indolently together, with the smallest shade of an appearance of tolerating scorn for those whom they left behind.

Page 1585

’Medole has money and rank and influence, and a kind of I-don’t-know-what womanishness, that makes him push like a needle for the lead, and he will have the lead and when he has got the lead, there ’s the last chapter of him,’ said Luciano. ’His point of ambition is the perch of the weather-cock. Why did he set upon you, my Carlo? I saw the big V running up your forehead when you faced him. If you had finished him no great harm would have been done.’

’I saw him for a short time last night, and spoke to him in my father’s style,’ said Carlo. ’The reason was, that he defended Barto Rizzo for putting the ring about the Signorina Vittoria’s name, and causing the black butterfly to be pinned to her dress.’

Luciano’s brows stood up.

‘If she sings to-night, depend upon it there will be a disturbance,’ he said. ’There may be a rising in spite of Medole and such poor sparks, who’re afraid to drop on powder, and twirl and dance till the wind blows them out. And mind, the chance rising is commonly the luckiest. If I get a command I march to the Alps. We must have the passes of the Tyrol. It seems to me that whoever holds the Alps must ride the Lombard mare. You spring booted and spurred into the saddle from the Alps.’

Carlo was hurt by his friend’s indifference to the base injury done to Vittoria.

‘I have told Medole that she will sing to-night in spite of him,’ he was saying, with the intention of bringing round some reproach upon Luciano for his want of noble sympathy, when the crash of an Austrian regimental band was heard coming up the Corso. It stirred him to love his friend with all his warmth. ’At any rate, for my sake, Luciano, you will respect and uphold her.’

‘Yes, while she’s true,’ said Luciano, unsatisfactorily. The regiment, in review uniform, followed by two pieces of artillery, passed by. Then came a squadron of hussars and one of Uhlans, and another foot regiment, more artillery, fresh cavalry.

’Carlo, if three generations of us pour out our blood to fertilize Italian ground, it’s not too much to pay to chase those drilled curs.’ Luciano spoke in vehement undertone.

’We ’ll breakfast and have a look at them in the Piazza d’Armi, and show that we Milanese are impressed with a proper idea of their power,’ said Carlo, brightening as he felt the correction of his morbid lover’s anger in Luciano’s reaching view of their duties as Italian citizens. The heat and whirl of the hour struck his head, for to-morrow they might be wrestling with that living engine which had marched past, and surely all the hate he could muster should be turned upon the outer enemy. He gained his mother’s residence with clearer feelings.

CHAPTER XVI

COUNTESS AMMIANI

Page 1586

Countess Ammiani was a Venetian lady of a famous House, the name of which is as a trumpet sounding from the inner pages of the Republic. Her face was like a leaf torn from an antique volume; the hereditary features told the story of her days. The face was sallow and fireless; life had faded like a painted cloth upon the imperishable moulding. She had neither fire in her eyes nor colour on her skin. The thin close multitudinous wrinkles ran up accurately ruled from the chin to the forehead's centre, and touched faintly once or twice beyond, as you observe the ocean ripples run in threads confused to smoothness within a space of the grey horizon sky. But the chin was firm, the mouth and nose were firm, the forehead sat calmly above these shows of decay. It was a most noble face; a fortress face; strong and massive, and honourable in ruin, though stripped of every flower.

This lady in her girlhood had been the one lamb of the family dedicated to heaven. Paolo, the General, her lover, had wrenched her from that fate to share with him a life of turbulent sorrows till she should behold the blood upon his grave. She, like Laura Fiaveni, had bent her head above a slaughtered husband, but, unlike Laura, Marcellina Ammiani had not buried her heart with him. Her heart and all her energies had been his while he lived; from the visage of death it turned to her son. She had accepted the passion for Italy from Paolo; she shared it with Carlo. Italian girls of that period had as little passion of their own as flowers kept out of sunlight have hues. She had given her son to her country with that intensely apprehensive foresight of a mother's love which runs quick as Eastern light from the fervour of the devotion to the remote realization of the hour of the sacrifice, seeing both in one. Other forms of love, devotion in other bosoms, may be deluded, but hers will not be. She sees the sunset in the breast of the springing dawn. Often her son Carlo stood a ghost in her sight. With this haunting prophetic vision, it was only a mother, who was at the same time a supremely noble woman, that could feel all human to him notwithstanding. Her heart beat thick and fast when Carlo and Luciano entered the morning-room where she sat, and stopped to salute her in turn.

'Well?' she said without betraying anxiety or playing at carelessness.

Carlo answered, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. I think that's the language of peaceful men.'

'You are to be peaceful men to-morrow, my Carlo?'

'The thing is in Count Medole's hands,' said Luciano; 'and he is constitutionally of our Agostino's opinion that we are bound to wait till the Gods kick us into action; and, as Agostino says, Medole has raised himself upon our shoulders so as to be the more susceptible to their wishes when they blow a gale.'

He informed her of the momentary thwarting of the conspiracy, and won Carlo's gratitude by not speaking of the suspicion which had fallen on Vittoria.

Page 1587

‘Medole,’ he said, ’has the principal conduct of the business in Milan, as you know, countess. Our Chief cannot be everywhere at once; so Medole undertakes to decide for him here in old Milan. He decided yesterday afternoon to put off our holiday for what he calls a week. Checco, the idiot, in whom he confides, gave me the paper signifying the fact at four o’clock. There was no appeal; for we can get no place of general meeting under Medole’s prudent management. He fears our being swallowed in a body if we all meet.’

The news sent her heart sinking in short throbs down to a delicious rest; but Countess Ammiani disdained to be servile to the pleasure, even as she had strengthened herself to endure the shocks of pain. It was a conquered heart that she and every Venetian and Lombard mother had to carry; one that played its tune according to its nature, shaping no action, sporting no mask. If you know what is meant by that phrase, a conquered heart, you will at least respect them whom you call weak women for having gone through the harshest schooling which this world can show example of. In such mothers Italy revived. The pangs and the martyrdom were theirs. Fathers could march to the field or to the grey glacis with their boys; there was no intoxication of hot blood to cheer those who sat at home watching the rise and fall of trembling scales which said life or death for their dearest. Their least shadowy hope could be but a shrouded contentment in prospect; a shrouded submission in feeling. What bloom of hope was there when Austria stood like an iron wall, and their own ones dashing against it were as little feeble waves that left a red mark and no more? But, duty to their country had become their religion; sacrifice they accepted as their portion; when the last stern evil befell them they clad themselves in a veil and walked upon an earth they had passed from for all purposes save service of hands. Italy revived in these mothers. Their torture was that of the re-animation of her frame from the death-trance.

Carlo and Luciano fell hungrily upon dishes of herb-flavoured cutlets, and Neapolitan maccaroni, green figs, green and red slices of melon, chocolate, and a dry red Florentine wine. The countess let them eat, and then gave her son a letter that been delivered at her door an hour back by the confectioner Zotti. It proved to be an enclosure of a letter addressed to Vittoria by the Chief. Genoa was its superscription. From that place it was forwarded by running relays of volunteer messengers. There were points of Italy which the Chief could reach four-and-twenty hours in advance of the Government with all its aids and machinery. Vittoria had simply put her initials at the foot of the letter. Carlo read it eagerly and cast it aside. It dealt in ideas and abstract phraseology; he could get nothing of it between his impatient teeth; he was reduced to a blank wonder at the reason for her sending it on to him. It said indeed—and so far it seemed to have a meaning for her:

Page 1588

‘No backward step. We can bear to fall; we cannot afford to draw back.’

And again:

’Remember that these uprisings are the manifested pulsations of the heart of your country, so that none shall say she is a corpse, and knowing that she lives, none shall say that she deserves not freedom. It is the protest of her immortal being against her impious violator.’

Evidently the Chief had heard nothing of the counterstroke of Barto Rizzo, and of Count Medole’s miserable weakness: but how, thought Carlo, how can a mind like Vittoria’s find matter to suit her in such sentences? He asked himself the question, forgetting that a little time gone by, while he was aloof from the tumult and dreaming of it, this airy cloudy language and every symbolism, had been strong sustaining food, a vital atmosphere, to him. He did not for the moment (though by degrees he recovered his last night’s conception of her) understand that among the noble order of women there is, when they plunge into strife, a craving for idealistic truths, which men are apt, under the heat and hurry of their energies, to put aside as stars that are meant merely for shining.

His mother perused the letter—holding it out at arm’s length—and laid it by; Luciano likewise. Countess Ammiani was an aristocrat: the tone and style of the writing were distasteful to her. She allowed her son’s judgement of the writer to stand for her own, feeling that she could surrender little prejudices in favour of one who appeared to hate the Austrians so mortally. On the other hand, she defended Count Medole. Her soul shrank at the thought of the revolution being yielded up to theorists and men calling themselves men of the people—a class of men to whom Paolo her soldier-husband’s aversion had always been formidably pronounced. It was an old and a wearisome task for Carlo to explain to her that the times were changed and the necessities of the hour different since the day when his father conspired and fought for freedom. Yet he could not gainsay her when she urged that the nobles should be elected to lead, if they consented to lead; for if they did not lead, were they not excluded from the movement?

‘I fancy you have defined their patriotism,’ said Carlo.

‘Nay, my son; but you are one of them.’

‘Indeed, my dearest mother, that is not what they will tell you.’

‘Because you have chosen to throw yourself into the opposite ranks.’

’You perceive that you divide our camp, madame my mother. For me there is no natural opposition of ranks. What are we? We are slaves: all are slaves. While I am a slave, shall I boast that I am of noble birth? “Proud of a coronet with gems of paste!” some

one writes. Save me from that sort of pride! I am content to take my patent of nobility for good conduct in the revolution. Then I will be count, or marquis, or duke; I am not a Republican pure blood;—but not till then. And in the meantime—'

Page 1589

‘Carlo is composing for his newspaper,’ the countess said to Luciano.

‘Those are the leaders who can lead,’ the latter replied. ’Give the men who are born to it the first chance. Old Agostino is right—the people owe them their vantage ground. But when they have been tried and they have failed, decapitate them. Medole looks upon revolution as a description of conjuring trick. He shuffles cards and arranges them for a solemn performance, but he refuses to cut them if you look too serious or I look too eager; for that gives him a suspicion that you know what is going to turn up; and his object is above all things to produce a surprise.’

‘You are both of you unjust to Count Medole,’ said the countess. ’He imperils more than all of you.’

’Magnificent estates, it is true; but of head or of heart not quite so much as some of us,’ said Luciano, stroking his thick black pendent moustache and chin-tuft. ’Ah, pardon me; yes! he does imperil a finer cock’s comb.

’When he sinks, and his vanity is cut in two, Medole will bleed so as to flood his Lombard flats. It will be worse than death to him.’

Carlo said: ‘Do you know what our Agostino says of Count Medole?’

‘Oh, for ever Agostino with you young men!’ the countess exclaimed. ’I believe he laughs at you.’

’To be sure he does: he laughs at all. But, what he says of Count Medole holds the truth of the thing, and may make you easier concerning the count’s estates. He says that Medole is vaccine matter which the Austrians apply to this generation of Italians to spare us the terrible disease. They will or they won’t deal gently with Medole, by-and-by; but for the present he will be handled tenderly. He is useful. I wish I could say that we thought so too. And now,’ Carlo stooped to her and took her hand, ‘shall we see you at La Scala to-night?’

The countess, with her hands lying in his, replied: ’I have received an intimation from the authorities that my box is wanted.’

‘So you claim your right to occupy it!’

‘That is my very humble protest for personal liberty.’

’Good: I shall be there, and shall much enjoy an introduction to the gentleman who disputes it with you. Besides, mother, if the Signorina Vittoria sings . . .’

Countess Ammiani’s gaze fixed upon her son with a level steadiness. His voice threatened to be unequal. All the pleading force of his eyes was thrown into it, as he

said: ’She will sing: and she gives the signal; that is certain. We may have to rescue her. If I can place her under your charge, I shall feel that she is safe, and is really protected.’

The countess looked at Luciano before she answered:

’Yes, Carlo, whatever I can do. But you know I have not a scrap of influence.’

‘Let her lie on your bosom, my mother.’

‘Is this to be another Violetta?’

‘Her name is Vittoria,’ said Carlo, colouring deeply. A certain Violetta had been his boy’s passion.

Page 1590

Further distracting Austrian band-music was going by. This time it was a regiment of Italians in the white and blue uniform. Carlo and Luciano leaned over the balcony, smoking, and scanned the marching of their fellow-countrymen in the livery of servitude.

‘They don’t step badly,’ said one; and the other, with a smile of melancholy derision, said, ‘We are all brothers!’

Following the Italians came a regiment of Hungarian grenadiers, tall, swam-faced, and particularly light-limbed men, looking brilliant in the clean tight military array of Austria. Then a squadron of blue hussars, and Croat regiment; after which, in the midst of Czech dragoons and German Uhlans and blue Magyar light horsemen, with General officers and aides about him, the veteran Austrian Field-Marshal rode, his easy hand and erect figure and good-humoured smile belying both his age and his reputation among Italians. Artillery, and some bravely-clad horse of the Eastern frontier, possibly Serb, wound up the procession. It gleamed down the length of the Corso in a blinding sunlight; brass helmets and hussar feathers, white and violet surcoats, green plumes, maroon capes, bright steel scabbards, bayonet-points,—as gallant a show as some portentously-magnified summer field, flowing with the wind, might be; and over all the banner of Austria—the black double-headed eagle ramping on a yellow ground. This was the flower of iron meaning on such a field.

The two young men held their peace. Countess Ammiani had pushed her chair back into a dark corner of the room, and was sitting there when they looked back, like a sombre figure of black marble.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE PIAZZA D’ARMI

Carlo and Luciano followed the regiments to the Piazza d’Armi, drawn after them by that irresistible attraction to youths who have as yet had no shroud of grief woven for them —desire to observe the aspect of a brilliant foe.

The Piazza d’Armi was the field of Mars of Milan, and an Austrian review of arms there used to be a tropical pageant. The place was too narrow for broad manoeuvres, or for much more than to furnish an inspection of all arms to the General, and a display (with its meaning) to the populace. An unusually large concourse of spectators lined the square, like a black border to a vast bed of flowers, nodding now this way, now that. Carlo and Luciano passed among the groups, presenting the perfectly smooth faces of young men of fashion, according to the universal aristocratic pattern handed down to querulous mortals from Olympus—the secret of which is to show a triumphant inaction of the heart and the brain, that are rendered positively subservient to elegance of limb. They knew the chances were in favour of their being arrested at any instant. None of

the higher members of the Milanese aristocracy were visible; the people looked sullen. Carlo was

Page 1591

attracted by the tall figure of the Signor Antonio-Pericles, whom he beheld in converse with the commandant of the citadel, out in the square, among chatting and laughing General officers. At Carlo's elbow there came a burst of English tongues; he heard Vittoria's English name spoken with animation. 'Admire those faces,' he said to Luciano, but the latter was interchanging quiet recognitions among various heads of the crowd; a language of the eyelids and the eyebrows. When he did look round he admired the fair island faces with an Italian's ardour: 'Their women are splendid!' and he no longer pushed upon Carlo's arm to make way ahead. In the English group were two sunny-haired girls and a blue-eyed lady with the famous English curls, full, and rounding richly. This lady talked of her brother, and pointed him out as he rode down the line in the Marshal's staff. The young officer indicated presently broke away and galloped up to her, bending over his horse's neck to join the conversation. Emilia Belloni's name was mentioned. He stared, and appeared to insist upon a contrary statement.

Carlo scrutinized his features. While doing so he was accosted, and beheld his former adversary of the Motter—one, with whom he had yesterday shaken hands in the Piazza of La Scala. The ceremony was cordially renewed. Luciano unlinked his arm from Carlo and left him.

'It appears that you are mistaken with reference to Mademoiselle Belloni,' said Captain Gambier. 'We hear on positive authority that she will not appear at La Scala to-night. It's a disappointment; though, from what you did me the honour to hint to me, I cannot allow myself to regret it.'

Carlo had a passionate inward prompting to trust this Englishman with the secret. It was a weakness that he checked. When one really takes to foreigners, there is a peculiar impulse (I speak of the people who are accessible to impulse) to make brothers of them. He bowed, and said, 'She does not appear?'

'She has in fact quitted Milan. Not willingly. I would have stopped the business if I had known anything of it; but she is better out of the way, and will be carefully looked after, where she is. By this time she is in the Tyrol.'

'And where?' asked Carlo, with friendly interest.

'At a schloss near Meran. Or she will be there in a very few hours. I feared—I may inform you that we were very good friends in England—I feared that when she once came to Italy she would get into political scrapes. I dare say you agree with me that women have nothing to do with politics. Observe: you see the lady who is speaking to the Austrian officer?—he is her brother. Like Mademoiselle Belloni he has adopted a fresh name; it's the name of his uncle, a General Pierson in the Austrian service. I knew him in England: he has been in our service. Mademoiselle Belloni lived with his sisters

for some years two or three. As you may suppose, they are all anxious to see her. Shall I introduce you? They will be glad to know one of her Italian friends.'

Page 1592

Carlo hesitated; he longed to hear those ladies talk of Vittoria. 'Do they speak French?'

'Oh, dear, yes. That is, as we luckless English people speak it. Perhaps you will more easily pardon their seminary Italian. See there,' Captain Gambier pointed at some trotting squadrons; 'these Austrians have certainly a matchless cavalry. The artillery seems good. The infantry are fine men—very fine men. They have a "woodeny" movement; but that's in the nature of the case: tremendous discipline alone gives homogeneity to all those nationalities. Somehow they get beaten. I doubt whether anything will beat their cavalry.'

'They are useless in street-fighting,' said Carlo.

'Oh, street-fighting!' Captain Gambier vented a soldier's disgust at the notion. 'They're not in Paris. Will you step forward?'

Just then the tall Greek approached the party of English. The introduction was delayed.

He was addressed by the fair lady, in the island tongue, as 'Mr. Pericles.' She thanked him for his extreme condescension in deigning to notice them. But whatever his condescension had been, it did not extend to an admitted acquaintance with the poor speech of the land of fogs. An exhibition of aching deafness was presented to her so resolutely, that at last she faltered, 'What! have you forgotten English, Mr. Pericles? You spoke it the other day.'

'It is ze language of necessity—of commerce,' he replied.

'But, surely, Mr. Pericles, you dare not presume to tell me you choose to be ignorant of it whenever you please?'

'I do not take grits into ze teeth, madame; no more.' 'But you speak it perfectly.'

'Perfect it may be, for ze transactions of commerce. I wish to keep my teez.'

'Alas!' said the lady, compelled, 'I must endeavour to swim in French.'

'At your service, madame,' quoth the Greek, with an immediate doubling of the length of his body.

Carlo heard little more than he knew; but the confirmation of what we know will sometimes instigate us like fresh intelligence, and the lover's heart was quick to apprehend far more than he knew in one direction. He divined instantaneously that the English-Austrian spoken of by Barto Rizzo was the officer sitting on horseback within half-a-dozen yards of him. The certainty of the thought cramped his muscles. For the rest, it became clear to him that the attempt of the millionaire connoisseur to carry off Vittoria had received the tacit sanction of the Austrian authorities; for reasons quite

explicable, Mr. Pericles, as the English lady called him, distinctly hinted it, while affirming with vehement self-laudation that his scheme had succeeded for the vindication of Art.

‘The opera you will hear zis night,’ he said, ’will be hissed. You will hear a chorus of screech-owls to each song of that poor Irma, whom the Italian people call “crabapple.” Well; she pleases German ears, and if they can support her, it is well. But la Vittoria—-your Belloni—you will not hear; and why? She has been false to her Art, false! She has become a little devil in politics. It is a Guy Fawkes femelle! She has been guilty of the immense crime of ingratitude. She is dismissed to study, to penitence, and to the society of her old friends, if they will visit her.’

Page 1593

‘Of course we will,’ said the English lady; ’either before or after our visit to Venice—-delicious Venice!’

‘Which you have not seen—hein?’ Mr. Pericles snarled; ’and have not smelt. There is no music in Venice! But you have nothing but street tinkle-tinkle! A place to live in! mon Dieu!’

The lady smiled. ’My husband insists upon trying the baths of Bormio, and then we are to go over a pass for him to try the grape-cure at Meran. If I can get him to promise me one whole year in Italy, our visit to Venice may be deferred. Our doctor, monsieur, indicates our route. If my brother can get leave of absence, we shall go to Bormio and to Meran with him. He is naturally astonished that Emilia refused to see him; and she refused to see us too! She wrote a letter, dated from the Conservatorio to him, he had it in his saddlebag, and was robbed of it and other precious documents, when the wretched, odious people set upon him in Verona-poor boy! She said in the letter that she would see him in a few days after the fifteenth, which is to-day!

‘Ah! a few days after the fifteenth, which is to-day,’ Mr. Pericles repeated. ’I saw you but the day before yesterday, madame, or I could have brought you together.

She is now away-off—out of sight—the perfule! Ah false that she is; speak not of her. You remember her in England. There it was trouble, trouble; but here, we are a pot on a fire with her; speak not of her. She has used me ill, madame. I am sick.’

His violent gesticulation drooped. In a temporary abandonment to chagrin, he wiped the moisture from his forehead, unwilling or heedless of the mild ironical mouthing of the ladies, and looked about; for Carlo had made a movement to retire,—he had heard enough for discomfort.

’Ah! my dear Ammiani, the youngest editor in Europe! how goes it with you?’ the Greek called out with revived affability.

Captain Gambier perceived that it was time to present his Italian acquaintance to the ladies by name, as a friend of Mademoiselle Belloni.

‘My most dear Ammiani,’ Antonio-Pericles resumed; he barely attempted to conceal his acrid delight in casting a mysterious shadow of coming vexation over the youth; ’I am afraid you will not like the opera Camilla, or perhaps it is the Camilla you will not like. But, shoulder arms, march!’ (a foot regiment in motion suggested the form of the recommendation) ’what is not for to-day may be for to-morrow. Let us wait. I think, my Ammiani, you are to have a lemon and not an orange. Never mind. Let us wait.’

Carlo got his forehead into a show of smoothness, and said, ’Suppose, my dear Signor Antonio, the prophet of dark things were to say to himself, “Let us wait?"'

‘Hein-it is deep.’ Antonio-Pericles affected to sound the sentence, eye upon earth, as a sparrow spies worm or crumb. ‘Permit me,’ he added rapidly; an idea had struck him from his malicious reserve stores,—’Here is Lieutenant Pierson, of the staff of the Field-Marshal of Austria, unattached, an old friend of Mademoiselle Emilia Belloni,—permit me,—here is Count Ammiani, of the Lombardia Milanese journal, a new friend of the Signorina Vittoria Campa-Mademoiselle Belloni the Signorina Campa—it is the same person, messieurs; permit me to introduce you.’

Page 1594

Antonio-Pericles waved his arm between the two young men.

Their plain perplexity caused him to dash his fingers down each side of his moustachios in tugs of enjoyment.

For Lieutenant Pierson, who displayed a certain readiness to bow, had caught a sight of the repellent stare on Ammiani's face; a still and flat look, not aggressive, yet anything but inviting; like a shield.

Nevertheless, the lieutenant's head produced a stiff nod. Carlo's did not respond; but he lifted his hat and bowed humbly in retirement to the ladies.

Captain Gambier stepped aside with him.

'Inform Lieutenant Pierson, I beg you,' said Ammiani, 'that I am at his orders, if he should consider that I have insulted him.'

'By all means,' said Gambier; 'only, you know, it's impossible for me to guess what is the matter; and I don't think he knows.'

Luciano happened to be coming near. Carlo went up to him, and stood talking for half a minute. He then returned to Captain Gambier, and said, 'I put myself in the hands of a man of honour. You are aware that Italian gentlemen are not on terms with Austrian officers. If I am seen exchanging salutes with any one of them, I offend my countrymen; and they have enough to bear already.'

Perceiving that there was more in the background, Gambier simply bowed. He had heard of Italian gentlemen incurring the suspicion of their fellows by merely being seen in proximity to an Austrian officer.

As they were parting, Carlo said to him, with a very direct meaning in his eyes, 'Go to the opera tonight.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' the Englishman answered, and digested the look and the recommendation subsequently.

Lieutenant Pierson had ridden off. The war-machine was in motion from end to end: the field of flowers was a streaming flood; regiment by regiment, the crash of bands went by. Outwardly the Italians conducted themselves with the air of ordinary heedless citizens, in whose bosoms the music set no hell-broth boiling. Patrician and plebeian, they were chiefly boys; though here and there a middle-aged workman cast a look of intelligence upon Carlo and Luciano, when these two passed along the crowd. A gloom of hoarded hatred was visible in the mass of faces, ready to spring fierily.

Arms were in the city. With hatred to prompt the blow, with arms to strike, so much dishonour to avenge, we need not wonder that these youths beheld the bit of liberty in prospect magnified by their mighty obfuscating ardour, like a lantern in a fog. Reason did not act. They were in such a state when just to say ‘Italia! Italia!’ gave them nerve to match an athlete. So, the parading of Austria, the towering athlete, failed of its complete lesson of intimidation, and only ruffled the surface of insurgent hearts. It seemed, and it was, an insult to the trodden people, who read it as a lesson for cravens: their instinct commonly hits the

Page 1595

bell. They felt that a secure supremacy would not have paraded itself: so they divined indistinctly that there was weakness somewhere in the councils of the enemy. When the show had vanished, their spirits hung pausing, like the hollow air emptied of big sound, and reacted. Austria had gained little more by her display than the conscientious satisfaction of the pedagogue who lifts the rod to advise intending juvenile culprits how richly it can be merited and how poor will be their future grounds of complaint.

But before Austria herself had been taught a lesson she conceived that she had but one man and his feeble instruments, and occasional frenzies, opposed to her, him whom we saw on the Motterone, which was ceasing to be true; though it was true that the whole popular movement flowed from that one man. She observed travelling sparks in the embers of Italy, and crushed them under her heel, without reflecting that a vital heat must be gathering where the spots of fire run with such a swiftness. It was her belief that if she could seize that one man, whom many of the younger nobles and all the people acknowledged as their Chief—for he stood then without a rival in his task—she would have the neck of conspiracy in her angry grasp. Had she caught him, the conspiracy for Italian freedom would not have crowed for many long seasons; the torch would have been ready, but not the magazine. He prepared it; it was he who preached to the Italians that opportunity is a mocking devil when we look for it to be revealed; or, in other words, wait for chance; as it is God's angel when it is created within us, the ripe fruit of virtue and devotion. He cried out to Italians to wait for no inspiration but their own; that they should never subdue their minds to follow any alien example; nor let a foreign city of fire be their beacon. Watching over his Italy; her wrist in his meditative clasp year by year; he stood like a mystic leech by the couch of a fair and hopeless frame, pledged to revive it by the inspired assurance, shared by none, that life had not forsaken it. A body given over to death and vultures-he stood by it in the desert. Is it a marvel to you that when the carrion-wings swooped low, and the claws fixed, and the beak plucked and savoured its morsel, he raised his arm, and urged the half-resuscitated frame to some vindicating show of existence? Arise! he said, even in what appeared most fatal hours of darkness. The slack limbs moved; the body rose and fell. The cost of the effort was the breaking out of innumerable wounds, old and new; the gain was the display of the miracle that Italy lived. She tasted her own blood, and herself knew that she lived.

Then she felt her chains. The time was coming for her to prove, by the virtues within her, that she was worthy to live, when others of her sons, subtle and adept, intricate as serpents, bold, unquestioning as well-bestridden steeds, should grapple and play deep for her in the game of worldly strife. Now—at this hour of which I speak—when Austrians marched like a merry flame down Milan streets, and Italians stood like the burnt-out cinders of the fire-grate, Italy's faint wrist was still in the clutch of her grave leech, who counted the beating of her pulse between long pauses, that would have made another think life to be heaving its last, not beginning.

Page 1596

The Piazza d’Armi was empty of its glittering show.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT OF THE FIFTEENTH

We quit the Piazza d’Armi. Rumour had its home in Milan. On their way to the caffe La Scala, Luciano and Carlo (who held together, determined to be taken together if the arrest should come) heard it said that the Chief was in Milan. A man passed by and uttered it, going. They stopped a second man, who was known to them, and he confirmed the rumour. Glad as sunlight once more, they hurried to Count Medole forgivingly. The count’s servant assured them that his master had left the city for Monza. ’Is Medole a coward?’ cried Luciano, almost in the servant’s hearing. The fleeing of so important a man looked vile, now that they were sharpened by new eagerness. Forthwith they were off to Agostino, believing that he would know the truth. They found him in bed. ‘Well, and what?’ said Agostino, replying to their laughter. ’I am old; too old to stride across a day and night, like you giants of youth. I take my rest when I can, for I must have it.’

‘But, you know, O conscript father,’ said Carlo, willing to fall a little into his mood, ‘you know that nothing will be done to-night.’

‘Do I know so much?’ Agostino murmured at full length.

‘Do you know that the Chief is in the city?’ said Luciano.

‘A man who is lying in bed knows this,’ returned Agostino, ’that he knows less than those who are up, though what he does know he perhaps digests better. ’Tis you who are the fountains, my boys, while I am the pool into which you play. Say on.’

They spoke of the rumour. He smiled at it. They saw at once that the rumour was false, for the Chief trusted Agostino.

‘Proceed to Barto, the mole,’ he said, ’Barto the miner; he is the father of daylight in the city: of the daylight of knowledge, you understand, for which men must dig deep. Proceed to him;—if you can find him.’

But Carlo brought flame into Agostino’s eyes.

’The accursed beast! he has pinned the black butterfly to the signorina’s dress.’

Agostino rose on his elbow. He gazed at them. ’We are followers of a blind mole,’ he uttered with an inner voices while still gazing wrathfully, and then burst out in grief, ’"Patria o mea creatrix, patria o mea genetrix!"’

’The signorina takes none of his warnings, nor do we. She escaped a plot last night, and to-night she sings.’

‘She must not,’ said Agostino imperiously.

‘She does.’

‘I must stop that.’ Agostino jumped out of bed.

The young men beset him with entreaties to leave the option to her.

‘Fools!’ he cried, plunging a rageing leg into his garments. ’Here, Iris! Mercury! fly to Jupiter and say we are all old men and boys in Italy, and are ready to accept a few middleaged mortals as Gods, if they will come and help us. Young fools! Do you know that when you conspire you are in harness, and yoke-fellows, every one?’

Page 1597

‘Yoked to that Barto Rizzo!’

’Yes; and the worse horse of the two. Listen, you pair of Nuremberg puppet-heads! If the Chief were here, I would lie still in my bed. Medole has stopped the outbreak. Right or wrong, he moves a mass; we are subordinates—particles. The Chief can’t be everywhere. Milan is too hot for him. Two men are here, concealed—Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpi. The rumour springs from that. They have slain Count Paul Lenkenstein, and rushed to old Milan for work, with the blood on their swords. Oh, the tragedy!—when I have time to write it. Let me now go to my girl, to my daughter! The blood of the Lenkenstein must rust on the steel. Angelo slew him: Rinaldo gave him the cross to kiss. You shall have the whole story by-and-by; but this will be a lesson to Germans not to court our Italian damsels. Lift not that curtain, you Pannonian burglars! Much do we pardon; but bow and viol meet not, save that they be of one wood; especially not when signor bow is from yonderside the Rhoetian Alps, and donzella Viol is a growth of warm Lombardy. Witness to it, Angelo and Rinaldo Guidascarpi! bravo! You boys there—you stand like two Tyrolese salad-spoons! I say that my girl, my daughter, shall never help to fire blank shot. I sent my paternal commands to her yesterday evening. Does the wanton disobey her father and look up to a pair of rocket-headed rascals like you? Apes! if she sings that song to-night, the ear of Italy will be deaf to her for ever after. There’s no engine to stir to-night; all the locks are on it; she will send half-a-dozen milkings like you to perdition, and there will be a circle of black blood about her name in the traditions of the insurrection—do you hear? Have I cherished her for that purpose? to have her dedicated to a brawl!’

Agostino fumed up and down the room in a confusion of apparel, savouring his epithets and imaginative peeps while he stormed, to get a relish out of something, as beseems the poetic temperament. The youths were silenced by him; Carlo gladly.

‘Troop!’ said the old man, affecting to contrast his attire with theirs; ’two graces and a satyr never yet went together, and we’ll not frighten the classic Government of Milan. I go out alone. No, Signor Luciano, I am not sworn to Count Medole. I see your sneer contain it. Ah! what a thing is hurry to a mind like mine. It tears up the trees by the roots, floods the land, darkens utterly my poor quiet universe. I was composing a pastoral when you came in. Observe what you have done with my “Lovely Age of Gold!"’

Agostino’s transfigurement from lymphatic poet to fiery man of action, lasted till his breath was short, when the necessity for taking a deep draught of air induced him to fall back upon his idle irony. ’Heads, you illustrious young gentlemen!—heads, not legs and arms, move a conspiracy. Now, you—think what you will of it—are only legs and arms in this business. And if you are insubordinate,

Page 1598

you present the shocking fabular spirit of the members of the body in revolt; which is not the revolt we desire to see. I go to my daughter immediately, and we shall all have a fat sleep for a week, while the Tedeschi hunt and stew and exhaust their naughty suspicions. Do you know that the Pope's Mouth is closed? We made it tell a big lie before it shut tight on its teeth—a bad omen, I admit; but the idea was rapturously neat. Barto, the sinner—be sure I throttle him for putting that blot on my swan; only, not yet, not yet: he's a blind mole, a mad patriot; but, as I say, our beast Barto drew an Austrian to the Mouth last night, and led the dog to take a letter out of it, detailing the whole plot of tonight, and how men will be stationed at the vicolo here, ready to burst out on the Corso, and at the vicolo there, and elsewhere, all over the city, carrying fire and sword; a systematic map of the plot. It was addressed to Count Serabiglione—my boys! my boys! what do you think of it? Bravo! though Barto is a deadly beast if he—'Agostino paused. 'Yes, he went too far! too far!'

'Has he only gone too far, do you say?'

Carlo spoke sternly. His elder was provoked enough by his deadness of enthusiasm, and that the boy should dare to stalk on a bare egoistical lover's sentiment to be critical of him, Agostino, struck him as monstrous. With the treachery of controlled rage, Agostino drew near him, and whispered some sentences in his ear.

Agostino then called him his good Spartan boy for keeping brave countenance. 'Wait till you comprehend women philosophically. All's trouble with them till then. At La Scala tonight, my sons! We have rehearsed the fiasco; the Tedeschi perform it. Off with you, that I may go out alone!'

He seemed to think it an indubitable matter that he would find Vittoria and bend her will.

Agostino had betrayed his weakness to the young men, who read him with the keen eyes of a particular disapprobation. He delighted in the dark web of intrigue, and believed himself to be no ordinary weaver of that sunless work. It captured his imagination, filling his pride with a mounting gas. Thus he had become allied to Medole on the one hand, and to Barto Rizzo on the other. The young men read him shrewdly, but speaking was useless.

Before Carlo parted from Luciano, he told him the burden of the whisper, which had confirmed what he had heard on the Piazzi d'Armi. It was this: Barto Rizzo, aware that Lieutenant Pierson was the bearer of despatches from the Archduke in Milan to the marshal, then in Verona, had followed, and by extraordinary effort reached Verona in advance; had there tricked and waylaid him, and obtained, instead of despatches, a letter of recent date, addressed to him by Vittoria, which compromised the insurrectionary project.

‘If that’s the case, my Carlo!’ said his friend, and shrugged, and spoke in a very worldly fashion of the fair sex.

Page 1599

Carlo shook him off. For the rest of the day he was alone, shut up with his journalistic pen. The pen traversed seas and continents like an old hack to whom his master has thrown the reins. Apart from the desperate perturbation of his soul, he thought of the Guidascarpi, whom he knew, and was allied to, and of the Lenkensteins, whom he knew likewise, or had known in the days when Giacomo Piaveni lived, and Bianca von Lenkenstein, Laura's sister, visited among the people of her country. Countess Anna and Countess Lena von Lenkenstein were the German beauties of Milan, lively little women, and sweet. Between himself and Countess Lena there had been tender dealings about the age when sweetmeats have lost their attraction, and the charm has to be supplied. She was rich, passionate for Austria, romantic concerning Italy, a vixen in temper, but with a pearly light about her temples that kept her picture in his memory. And besides, during those days when women are bountiful to us as Goddesses, give they never so little, she had deigned to fondle hands with him; had set the universe rocking with a visible heave of her bosom; jingled all the keys of mystery; and had once (as to embalm herself in his recollection), once had surrendered her lips to him. Countess Lena would have espoused Ammiani, believing in her power to make an Austrian out of such Italian material. The Piaveni revolt had stopped that and all their intercourse by the division of the White Hand, as it was called; otherwise, the hand of the corpse. Ammiani had known also Count Paul von Lenkenstein. To his mind, death did not mean much, however pleasant life might be: his father and his friend had gone to it gaily; and he himself stood ready for the summons: but the contemplation of a domestic judicial execution, which the Guidascarpi seemed to have done upon Count Paul, affrighted him, and put an end to his temporary capacity for labour. He felt as if a spent shot were striking on his ribs; it was the unknown sensation of fear. Changeing, it became pity. 'Horrible deaths these Austrians die!' he said.

For a while he regarded their lot as the hardest. A shaft of sunlight like blazing brass warned him that the day dropped. He sent to his mother's stables, and rode at a gallop round Milan, dining alone in one of the common hotel gardens, where he was a stranger. A man may have good nerve to face the scene which he is certain will be enacted, who shrinks from an hour that is suspended in doubt. He was aware of the pallor and chill of his looks, and it was no marvel to him when two sbirri in mufti, foreign to Milan, set their eyes on him as they passed by to a vacant table on the farther side of the pattering gold-fish pool, where he sat. He divined that they might be in pursuit of the Guidascarpi, and alive to read a troubled visage. 'Yet neither Rinaldo nor Angelo would look as I do now,' he thought, perceiving that these men were judging by such signs, and had their ideas. Democrat

Page 1600

as he imagined himself to be, he despised with a nobleman's contempt creatures who were so dead to the character of men of birth as to suppose that they were pale and remorseful after dealing a righteous blow, and that they trembled! Ammiani looked at his hand: no force of his will could arrest its palsy. The Guidascarpi were sons of Bologna. The stupidity of Italian sbirri is proverbial, or a Milanese cavalier would have been astonished to conceive himself mistaken for a Bolognese. He beckoned to the waiter, and said, 'Tell me what place has bred those two fellows on the other side of the fountain.' After a side-glance of scrutiny, the reply was, 'Neapolitans.' The waiter was ready to make an additional remark, but Ammiani nodded and communed with a toothpick. He was sure that those Neapolitans were recruits of the Bolognese Polizia; on the track of the Guidascarpi, possibly. As he was not unlike Angelo Guidascarpi in figure, he became uneasy lest they should blunder 'twixt him and La Scala; and the notion of any human power stopping him short of that destination, made Ammiani's hand perfectly firm. He drew on his gloves, and named the place whither he was going, aloud. 'Excellency,' said the waiter, while taking up and pretending to reckon the money for the bill: 'they have asked me whether there are two Counts Ammiani in Milan.' Carlo's eyebrows started. 'Can they be after me?' he thought, and said: 'Certainly; there is twice anything in this world, and Milan is the epitome of it.'

Acting a part gave him Agostino's catching manner of speech. The waiter, who knew him now, took this for an order to say 'Yes.' He had evidently a respect for Ammiani's name: Carlo supposed that he was one of Milan's fighting men. A sort of answer leading to 'Yes' by a circuit and the assistance of the hearer, was conveyed to the, sbirri. They were true Neapolitans quick to suspect, irresolute upon their suspicions. He was soon aware that they were not to be feared more than are the general race of bunglers, whom the Gods sometimes strangely favour. They perplexed him: for why were they after him? and what had made them ask whether he had a brother? He was followed, but not molested, on his way to La Scala.

Ammiani's heart was in full play as he looked at the curtain of the stage. The Night of the Fifteenth had come. For the first few moments his strong excitement fronting the curtain, amid a great host of hearts thumping and quivering up in the smaller measures like his own, together with the predisposing belief that this was to be a night of events, stopped his consciousness that all had been thwarted; that there was nothing but plot, plot, counterplot and tangle, disunion, silly subtlety, jealousy, vanity, a direful congregation of antagonistic elements; threads all loose, tongues wagging, pressure here, pressure there, like an uncertain rage in the entrails of the undirected earth, and no master hand on the spot to fuse and point the intense distracted forces.

Page 1601

The curtain, therefore, hung like any common opera-screen; big only with the fate of the new prima donna. He was robbed even of the certainty that Vittoria would appear. From the blank aspect of the curtain he turned to the house, which was crowding fast, and was not like listless Milan about to criticize an untried voice. The commonly empty boxes of the aristocracy were full of occupants, and for a wonder the white uniforms were not in excess, though they were to be seen. The first person whom Ammiani met was Agostino, who spoke gruffly. Vittoria had been invisible to him. Neither the maestro, nor the impresario, nor the waiting-woman had heard of her. Uncertainty was behind the curtain, as well as in front; but in front it was the uncertainty which is tipped with expectation, hushing the usual noisy chatter, and setting a daylight of eyes forward. Ammiani spied about the house, and caught sight of Laura Piaveni with Colonel Corte by her side. The Lenkensteins were in the Archduke's box. Antonio-Pericles, and the English lady and Captain Gambier, were next to them. The appearance of a white uniform in his mother's box over the stage caused Ammiani to shut up his glass. He was making his way thither for the purpose of commencing the hostilities of the night, when Countess Ammiani entered the lobby, and took her son's arm with a grave face and a trembling touch.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRIMA DONNA

'Whover is in my box is my guest,' said the countess, adding a convulsive imperative pressure on Carlo's arm, to aid the meaning of her deep underbreath. She was a woman who rarely exacted obedience, and she was spontaneously obeyed. No questions could be put, no explanations given in the crash, and they threaded on amid numerous greetings in a place where Milanese society had habitually ceased to gather, and found itself now in assembly with unconcealed sensations of strangeness. A card lay on the table of the countess's private retiring-room: it bore the name of General Pierson. She threw off her black lace scarf. 'Angelo Guidascarpi is in Milan,' she said. 'He has killed one of the Lenkensteins, sword to sword. He came to me an hour after you left; the sbirri were on his track; he passed for my son. He is now under the charge of Barto Rizzo, disguised; probably in this house. His brother is in the city. Keep the cowl on your head as long as possible; if these hounds see and identify you, there will be mischief.' She said no more, satisfied that she was understood, but opening the door of the box, passed in, and returned a stately acknowledgement of the salutations of two military officers. Carlo likewise bent his head to them; it was like bending his knee, for in the younger of the two intruders he recognized Lieutenant Pierson. The countess accepted a vacated seat; the cavity of her ear accepted the General's apologies. He informed her that he deeply regretted

Page 1602

the intrusion; he was under orders to be present at the opera, and to be as near the stage as possible, the countess's box being designated. Her face had the unalterable composure of a painted head upon an old canvas. The General persisted in tendering excuses. She replied, 'It is best, when one is too weak to resist, to submit to an outrage quietly.' General Pierson at once took the position assigned to him; it was not an agreeable one. Between Carlo and the lieutenant no attempt at conversation was made.

The General addressed his nephew in English. 'Did you see the girl behind the scenes, Wilfrid?'

The answer was 'No.'

'Pericles has her fast shut up in the Tyrol: the best habitat for her if she objects to a whipping. Did you see Irma?'

'No; she has disappeared too.'

'Then I suppose we must make up our minds to an opera without head or tail. As Pat said of the sack of potatoes, "'twould be a mighty fine beast if it had them."'

The officers had taken refuge in their opera-glasses, and spoke while gazing round the house.

'If neither this girl nor Irma is going to appear, there is no positive necessity for my presence here,' said the General, reduced to excuse himself to himself. 'I'll sit through the first scene and then beat a retreat. I might be off at once; the affair looks harmless enough only, you know, when there's nothing to see, you must report that you have seen it, or your superiors are not satisfied.'

The lieutenant was less able to cover the irksomeness of his situation with easy talk. His glance rested on Countess Len a von Lenkenstein, a quick motion of whose hand made him say that he should go over to her.

'Very well,' said the General; 'be careful that you give no hint of this horrible business. They will hear of it when they get home: time enough!'

Lieutenant Pierson touched at his sister's box on the way. She was very excited, asked innumerable things,—whether there was danger? whether he had a whole regiment at hand to protect peaceable persons? 'Otherwise,' she said, 'I shall not be able to keep that man (her husband) in Italy another week. He refused to stir out to-night, though we know that nothing can happen. Your prima donna celestissima is out of harm's way.'

'Oh, she is safe,—ze minx'; cried Antonio-Pericles, laughing and saluting the Duchess of Graatli, who presented herself at the front of her box. Major de Pyrmont was behind

her, and it delighted the Greek to point them out to the English lady, with a simple intimation of the character of their relationship, at which her curls shook sadly.

‘Pardon, madame,’ said Pericles. ’In Italy, a husband away, ze friend takes title: it is no more.’

‘It is very disgraceful,’ she said.

‘Ze morales, madame, suit ze sun.’

Captain Gambier left the box with Wilfrid, expressing in one sentence his desire to fling Pericles over to the pit, and in another his belief that an English friend, named Merthyr Powys, was in the house.

Page 1603

‘He won’t be in the city four-and-twenty hours,’ said Wilfrid.

‘Well; you’ll keep your tongue silent.’

’By heavens! Gambier, if you knew the insults we have to submit to! The temper of angels couldn’t stand it. I’m sorry enough for these fellows, with their confounded country, but it’s desperate work to be civil to them; upon my honour, it is! I wish they would stand up and let us have it over. We have to bear more from the women than the men.’

‘I leave you to cool,’ said Gambier.

The delayed absence of the maestro from his post at the head of the orchestra, where the musicians sat awaiting him, seemed to confirm a rumour that was now circling among the audience, warning all to prepare for a disappointment. His baton was brought in and laid on the book of the new overture. When at last he was seen bearing onward through the music-stands, a low murmur ran round. Rocco paid no heed to it. His demeanour produced such satisfaction in the breast of Antonio-Pericles that he rose, and was guilty of the barbarism of clapping his hands. Meeting Ammiani in the lobby, he said, ’Come, my good friend, you shall help me to pull Irma through to-night. She is vinegar—we will mix her with oil. It is only for to-night, to save that poor Rocco’s opera.’

‘Irma!’ said Ammiani; ’she is by this time in Tyrol. Your Irma will have some difficulty in showing herself here within sixty hours.’

‘How!’ cried Pericles, amazed, and plucking after Carlo to stop him. ’I bet you—’

‘How much?’

‘I bet you a thousand florins you do not see la Vittoria to-night.’

‘Good. I bet you a thousand florins you do not see Irma.’

‘No Vittoria, I say!’

‘And I say, no Lazzeruola!’

Agostino, who was pacing the lobby, sent Pericles distraught with the same tale of the rape of Irma. He rushed to Signora Piaveni’s box and heard it repeated. There he beheld, sitting in the background, an old English acquaintance, with whom Captain Gambier was conversing.

’My dear Powys, you have come all the way from England to see your favourite’s first night. You will be shocked, sir. She has neglected her Art. She is exiled, banished, sent away to study and to compose her mind.’

‘I think you are mistaken,’ said Laura. ’You will see her almost immediately.’

‘Signora, pardon me; do I not know best?’

‘You may have contrived badly.’

Pericles blinked and gnawed his moustache as if it were food for patience.

‘I would wager a milliard of francs,’ he muttered. With absolute pathos he related to Mr. Powys the aberrations of the divinely-gifted voice, the wreck which Vittoria strove to become, and from which he alone was striving to rescue her. He used abundant illustrations, coarse and quaint, and was half hysterical; flashing a white fist and thumping the long projection of his knee with a wolfish aspect. His grotesque sincerity was little short of the shedding of tears.

Page 1604

‘And your sister, my dear Powys?’ he asked, as one returning to the consideration of shadows.

‘My sister accompanies me, but not to the opera.’

‘For another campaign—hein?’

‘To winter in Italy, at all events.’

Carlo Ammiani entered and embraced Merthyr Powys warmly. The Englishman was at home among Italians: Pericles, feeling that he was not so, and regarding them all as a community of fever-patients without hospital, retired. To his mind it was the vilest treason, the grossest selfishness, to conspire or to wink at the sacrifice of a voice like Vittoria’s to such a temporal matter as this, which they called patriotism. He looked on it as one might look on the Hindoo drama of a Suttee. He saw in it just that stupid action of a whole body of fanatics combined to precipitate the devotion of a precious thing to extinction. And worse; for life was common, and women and Hindoo widows were common; but a Vittorian voice was but one in a generation—in a cycle of years. The religious belief of the connoisseur extended to the devout conception that her voice was a spiritual endowment, the casting of which priceless jewel into the bloody ditch of patriots was far more tragic and lamentable than any disastrous concourse of dedicated lives. He shook the lobby with his tread, thinking of the great night this might have been but for Vittoria’s madness. The overture was coming to an end. By tightening his arms across his chest he gained some outward composure, and fixed his eyes upon the stage.

While sitting with Laura Piaveni and Merthyr Powys, Ammiani saw the apparition of Captain Weisspriess in his mother’s box. He forgot her injunction, and hurried to her side, leaving the doors open. His passion of anger spurned her admonishing grasp of his arm, and with his glove he smote the Austrian officer on the face. Weisspriess plucked his sword out; the house rose; there was a moment like that of a wild beast’s show of teeth. It passed: Captain Weisspriess withdrew in obedience to General Pierson’s command. The latter wrote on a slip of paper that two pieces of artillery should be placed in position, and a squad of men about the doors: he handed it out to Weisspriess.

‘I hope,’ the General said to Carlo, ’we shall be able to arrange things for you without the interposition of the authorities.’

Carlo rejoined, ’General, he has the blood of our family on his hands. I am ready.’

The General bowed. He glanced at the countess for a sign of maternal weakness, saw none, and understood that a duel was down in the morrow’s bill of entertainments, as

well as a riot possibly before dawn. The house had revealed its temper in that short outburst, as a quivering of quick lightning-flame betrays the forehead of the storm.

Countess Ammiani bade her son make fast the outer door. Her sedate energies could barely control her agitation. In helping Angelo Guidascarpi to evade the law, she had imperilled her son and herself. Many of the Bolognese sbirri were in pursuit of Angelo. Some knew his person; some did not; but if those two before whom she had identified Angelo as being her son Carlo chanced now to be in the house, and to have seen him, and heard his name, the risks were great and various.

Page 1605

‘Do you know that handsome young Count Ammiani?’ Countess Lena said to Wilfrid. ’Perhaps you do not think him handsome? He was for a short time a play-fellow of mine. He is more passionate than I am, and that does not say a little; I warn you! Look how excited he is. No wonder. He is—everybody knows it—he is la Vittoria’s lover.’

Countess Lena uttered that sentence in Italian. The soft tongue sent it like a coiling serpent through Wilfrid’s veins. In English or in German it would not have possessed the deadly meaning.

She may have done it purposely, for she and her sister Countess Anna studied his face. The lifting of the curtain drew all eyes to the stage.

Rocco Ricci’s baton struck for the opening of one of his spirited choruses; a chorus of villagers, who sing to the burden that Happiness, the aim of all humanity, has promised to visit the earth this day, that she may witness the union of the noble lovers, Camillo and Camilla. Then a shepherd sings a verse, with his hand stretched out to the impending castle. There lives Count Orso: will he permit their festivities to pass undisturbed? The puling voice is crushed by the chorus, which protests that the heavens are above Count Orso. But another villager tells of Orso’s power, and hints at his misdeeds. The chorus rises in reply, warning all that Count Orso has ears wherever three are congregated; the villagers break apart and eye one another distrustfully, reuniting to the song of Happiness before they disperse. Camillo enters solus. Montini, as Camillo, enjoyed a warm reception; but as he advanced to deliver his canzone, it was seen that he and Rocco interchanged glances of desperate resignation. Camillo has had love passages with Michiella, Count Orso’s daughter, and does not hesitate to declare that he dreads her. The orphan Camilla, who has been reared in yonder castle with her, as her sister, is in danger during all these last minutes which still retain her from his arms.

’If I should never see her—I who, like a poor ghost upon the shores of the dead river, have been flattered with the thought that she would fall upon my breast like a ray of the light of Elysium—if I should never see her more!’ The famous tenore threw his whole force into that outcry of projected despair, and the house was moved by it: there were many in the house who shared his apprehension of a foul mischance.

Thenceforward the opera and the Italian audience were as one. All that was uttered had a meaning, and was sympathetically translated. Camilla they perceived to be a grave burlesque with a core to it. The quick-witted Italians caught up the interpretation in a flash. ’Count Orso’ Austria; ‘Michiella’ is Austria’s spirit of intrigue; ‘Camillo’ is indolent Italy, amorous Italy, Italy aimless; ‘Camilla’ is *young Italy*!

Their eagerness for sight of Vittoria was now red-hot, and when Camillo exclaimed ‘She comes!’ many rose from their seats.

Page 1606

A scrap of paper was handed to Antonio-Pericles from Captain Weisspriess, saying briefly that he had found Irma in the carriage instead of the little ‘v,’ thanked him for the joke, and had brought her back. Pericles was therefore not surprised when Irma, as Michiella, came on, breathless, and looking in an excitement of anger; he knew that he had been tricked.

Between Camillo and Michiella a scene of some vivacity ensued—reproaches, threats of calamity, offers of returning endearment upon her part; a display of courtly scorn upon his. Irma made her voice claw at her quondam lover very finely; it was a voice with claws, that entered the hearing sharp-edged, and left it plucking at its repose. She was applauded relishingly when, after vainly wooing him, she turned aside and said—

> ’What change is this in one who like a reed
> Bent to my twisting hands? Does he recoil?
> Is this the hound whom I have used to feed
> With sops of vinegar and sops of oil?’

Michiella’s further communications to the audience make it known that she has allowed the progress toward the ceremonies of espousal between Camillo and Camilla, in order, at the last moment, to show her power over the youth and to plunge the detested Camilla into shame and wretchedness.

Camillo retires: Count Orso appears. There is a duet between father and daughter: she confesses her passion for Camillo, and entreats her father to stop the ceremony; and here the justice of the feelings of Italians, even in their heat of blood, was noteworthy. Count Orso says that he would willingly gratify his daughter, as it would gratify himself, but that he must respect the law. ‘The law is of your own making,’ says Michiella. ‘Then, the more must I respect it,’ Count Orso replies.

The audience gave Austria credit for that much in a short murmur.

Michiella’s aside, ‘Till anger seizes him I wait!’ created laughter; it came in contrast with an extraordinary pomposity of self-satisfaction exhibited by Count Orso—the flower-faced, tun-bellied basso, Lebruno. It was irresistible. He stood swollen out like a morning cock. To make it further telling, he took off his yellow bonnet with a black-gloved hand, and thumped the significant colours prominently on his immense chest—-an idea, not of Agostino’s, but Lebruno’s own; and Agostino cursed with fury. Both he and Rocco knew that their joint labour would probably have only one night’s display of existence in the Austrian dominions, but they grudged to Lebruno the chief merit of despatching it to the Shades.

The villagers are heard approaching. ‘My father!’ cries Michiella, distractedly; ’the hour is near: it will be death to your daughter! Imprison Camillo: I can bring twenty witnesses to prove that he has sworn you are illegally the lord of this country. You will

rue the marriage. Do as you once did. Be bold in time. The arrow-head is on the string-cut the string!'

Page 1607

‘As I once did?’ replies Orso with frown terrific, like a black crest. He turns broadly and receives the chorus of countrymen in paternal fashion—an admirably acted bit of grave burlesque.

By this time the German portion of the audience had, by one or other of the senses, dimly divined that the opera was a shadow of something concealed—thanks to the buffo-basso Lebruno. Doubtless they would have seen this before, but that the Austrian censorship had seemed so absolute a safeguard.

‘My children! all are my children in this my gladsome realm!’ Count Orso says, and marches forth, after receiving the compliment of a choric song in honour of his paternal government. Michiella follows him.

Then came the deep suspension of breath. For, as upon the midnight you count bell-note after bell-note of the toiling hour, and know not in the darkness whether there shall be one beyond it, so that you hang over an abysm until Twelve is sounded, audience and actors gazed with equal expectation at the path winding round from the castle, waiting for the voice of the new prima donna.

‘Mia madre!’ It issued tremblingly faint. None could say who was to appear.

Rocco Ricci struck twice with his baton, flung a radiant glance across his shoulders for all friends, and there was joy in the house. Vittoria stood before them.

CHAPTER XX

THE OPERA OF CAMILLA

She was dressed like a noble damsel from the hands of Titian. An Italian audience cannot but be critical in their first glance at a prima donna, for they are asked to do homage to a queen who is to be taken on her merits: all that they have heard and have been taught to expect of her is compared swiftly with the observation of her appearance and her manner. She is crucially examined to discover defects. There is no boisterous loyalty at the outset. And as it was now evident that Vittoria had chosen to impersonate a significant character, her indications of method were jealously watched for a sign of inequality, either in her, motion, or the force of her eyes. So silent a reception might have seemed cruel in any other case; though in all cases the candidate for laurels must, in common with the criminal, go through the ordeal of justification. Men do not heartily bow their heads until they have subjected the aspirant to some personal contest, and find themselves overmatched. The senses, ready to become so slavish in adulation and delight, are at the beginning more exacting than the judgement, more imperious than the will. A figure in amber and pale blue silk was seen, such as the great Venetian might have sketched from his windows on a day when the Doge went forth to wed the

Adriatic a superb Italian head, with dark banded hair-braid, and dark strong eyes under unabashed soft eyelids! She moved as, after long gazing at a painting of a fair woman, we may have the vision of her moving from the frame. It was an animated picture of ideal Italia. The sea of heads right up to the highest walls fronted her glistening, and she was mute as moonrise. A virgin who loosens a dove from her bosom does it with no greater effort than Vittoria gave out her voice. The white bird flutters rapidly; it circles and takes its flight. The voice seemed to be as little the singer's own.

Page 1608

The theme was as follows:—Camilla has dreamed overnight that her lost mother came to her bedside to bless her nuptials. Her mother was folded in a black shroud, looking formless as death, like very death, save that death sheds no tears. She wept, without change of voice, or mortal shuddering, like one whose nature weeps: 'And with the forth-flowing of her tears the knowledge of her features was revealed to me.' Behold the Adige, the Mincio, Tiber, and the Po!—such great rivers were the tears pouring from her eyes. She threw apart the shroud: her breasts and her limbs were smooth and firm as those of an immortal Goddess: but breasts and limbs showed the cruel handwriting of base men upon the body of a martyred saint. The blood from those deep gashes sprang out at intervals, mingling with her tears. She said:

'My child! were I a Goddess, my wounds would heal. Were I a Saint, I should be in Paradise. I am no Goddess, and no Saint: yet I cannot die. My wounds flow and my tears. My tears flow because of no fleshly anguish: I pardon my enemies. My blood flows from my body, my tears from my soul. They flow to wash out my shame. I have to expiate my soul's shame by my body's shame. Oh! how shall I tell you what it is to walk among my children unknown of them, though each day I bear the sun abroad like my beating heart; each night the moon, like a heart with no blood in it. Sun and moon they see, but not me! They know not their mother. I cry to God. The answer of our God is this:—"Give to thy children one by one to drink of thy mingled tears and blood:—then, if there is virtue in them, they shall revive, thou shaft revive. If virtue is not in them, they and thou shall continue prostrate, and the ox shall walk over you." From heaven's high altar, O Camilla, my child, this silver sacramental cup was reached to me. Gather my tears in it, fill it with my blood, and drink.'

The song had been massive in monotones, almost Gregorian in its severity up to this point.

'I took the cup. I looked my mother in the face. I filled the cup from the flowing of her tears, the flowing of her blood; and I drank!'

Vittoria sent this last phrase ringing out forcefully. From the inveterate contralto of the interview, she rose to pure soprano in describing her own action. 'And I drank,' was given on a descent of the voice: the last note was in the minor key—it held the ear as if more must follow: like a wail after a triumph of resolve. It was a masterpiece of audacious dramatic musical genius addressed with sagacious cunning and courage to the sympathizing audience present. The supposed incompleteness kept them listening; the intentness sent that last falling (as it were, broken) note travelling awakeningly through their minds. It is the effect of the minor key to stir the hearts of men with this particular suggestiveness. The house rose, Italians—and Germans together. Genius, music, and enthusiasm

Page 1609

break the line of nationalities. A rain of nosegays fell about Vittoria; evvivas, bravas, shouts—all the outcries of delirious men surrounded her. Men and women, even among the hardened chorus, shook together and sobbed. ‘Agostino!’ and ‘Rocco!’ were called; ‘Vittoria!’ ‘Vittoria!’ above all, with increasing thunder, like a storm rushing down a valley, striking in broad volume from rock to rock, humming remote, and bursting up again in the face of the vale. Her name was sung over and over—’Vittoria! Vittoria!’ as if the mouths were enamoured of it.

‘Evviva la Vittoria a d’ Italia!’ was sung out from the body of the house.

An echo replied—’"Italia a il premio della *Vittoria*!"’ a well-known saying gloriously adapted, gloriously rescued from disgrace.

But the object and source of the tremendous frenzy stood like one frozen by the revelation of the magic the secret of which she has studiously mastered. A nosegay, the last of the tributary shower, discharged from a distance, fell at her feet. She gave it unconsciously preference over the rest, and picked it up. A little paper was fixed in the centre. She opened it with a mechanical hand, thinking there might be patriotic orders enclosed for her. It was a cheque for one thousand guineas, drawn upon an English banker by the hand of Antonio-Pericles Agriolopoulos; freshly drawn; the ink was only half dried, showing signs of the dictates of a furious impulse. This dash of solid prose, and its convincing proof that her Art had been successful, restored Vittoria’s composure, though not her early statuesque simplicity. Rocco gave an inquiring look to see if she would repeat the song. She shook her head resolutely. Her opening of the paper in the bouquet had quieted the general ebullition, and the expression of her wish being seen, the chorus was permitted to usurp her place. Agostino paced up and down the lobby, fearful that he had been guilty of leading her to anticlimax.

He met Antonio-Pericles, and told him so; adding (for now the mask had been seen through, and was useless any further) that he had not had the heart to put back that vision of Camilla’s mother to a later scene, lest an interruption should come which would altogether preclude its being heard. Pericles affected disdain of any success which Vittoria had yet achieved. ‘Wait for Act the Third,’ he said; but his irritable anxiousness to hold intercourse with every one, patriot or critic, German, English, or Italian, betrayed what agitation of exultation coursed in his veins. ‘Aha!’ was his commencement of a greeting; ’was Antonio-Pericles wrong when he told you that he had a prima donna for you to amaze all Christendom, and whose notes were safe and firm as the footing of the angels up and down Jacob’s ladder, my friends? Aha!’

‘Do you see that your uncle is signalling to you?’ Countess Lena said to Wilfrid. He answered like a man in a mist, and looked neither at her nor at the General, who, in default of his obedience to gestures, came good-humouredly to the box, bringing Captain Weisspriess with him.

Page 1610

’We ‘re assisting at a pretty show,’ he said.

‘I am in love with her voice,’ said Countess Anna.

‘Ay; if it were only a matter of voices, countess.’

‘I think that these good people require a trouncing,’ said Captain Weisspriess.

‘Lieutenant Pierson is not of your opinion,’ Countess Anna remarked. Hearing his own name, Wilfrid turned to them with a weariness well acted, but insufficiently to a jealous observation, for his eyes were quick under the carelessly-dropped eyelids, and ranged keenly over the stage while they were affecting to assist his fluent tongue.

Countess Lena levelled her opera-glass at Carlo Ammiani, and then placed the glass in her sister’s hand. Wilfrid drank deep of bitterness. ’That is Vittoria’s lover,’ he thought; ’the lover of the Emilia who once loved me!’

General Pierson may have noticed this by-play: he said to his nephew in the brief military tone: ’Go out; see that the whole regiment is handy about the house; station a dozen men, with a serjeant, at each of the backdoors, and remain below. I very much mistake, or we shall have to make a capture of this little woman to-night.’

‘How on earth,’ he resumed, while Wilfrid rose savagely and went out with his stiffest bow, ’this opera was permitted to appear, I can’t guess! A child could see through it. The stupidity of our civil authorities passes my understanding—it’s a miracle! We have stringent orders not to take any initiative, or I would stop the Fraulein Camilla from uttering another note.’

‘If you did that, I should be angry with you, General,’ said Countess Anna.

‘And I also think the Government cannot do wrong,’ Countess Lena joined in.

The General contented himself by saying: ‘Well, we shall see.’

Countess Lena talked to Captain Weisspriess in an undertone, referring to what she called his dispute with Carlo Ammiani. The captain was extremely playful in rejoinders.

‘You iron man!’ she exclaimed.

‘Man of steel would be the better phrase,’ her sister whispered.

‘It will be an assassination, if it happens.’

‘No officer can bear with an open insult, Lena.’

‘I shall not sit and see harm done to my old playmate, Anna.’

‘Beware of betraying yourself for one who detests you.’

A grand duo between Montini and Vittoria silenced all converse. Camilla tells Camillo of her dream. He pledges his oath to discover her mother, if alive; if dead, to avenge her. Camilla says she believes her mother is in the dungeons of Count Orso’s castle. The duo tasked Vittoria’s execution of florid passages; it gave evidence of her sound artistic powers.

‘I was a fool,’ thought Antonio-Pericles; ’I flung my bouquet with the herd. I was a fool! I lost my head!’

Page 1611

He tapped angrily at the little ink-flask in his coat-pocket. The first act, after scenes between false Camillo and Michiella, ends with the marriage of Camillo and Camilla;—a quatuor composed of Montini, Vittoria, Irma, and Lebruno. Michiella is in despair; Count Orso is profoundly sonorous with paternity and devotion to the law. He has restored to Camilla a portion of her mother's sequestrated estates. A portion of the remainder will be handed over to her when he has had experience of her husband's good behaviour. The rest he considers legally his own by right of (Treaties), and by right of possession and documents his sword. Yonder castle he must keep. It is the key of all his other territories. Without it, his position will be insecure. (Allusion to the Austrian argument that the plains of Lombardy are the strategic defensive lines of the Alps.)

Agostino, pursued by his terror of anticlimax, ran from the sight of Vittoria when she was called, after the fall of the curtain. He made his way to Rocco Ricci (who had given his bow to the public from his perch), and found the maestro drinking Asti to counteract his natural excitement. Rocco told Agostino, that up to the last moment, neither he nor any soul behind the scenes knew Vittoria would be able to appear, except that she had sent a note to him with a pledge to be in readiness for the call. Irma had come flying in late, enraged, and in disorder, praying to take Camilla's part; but Montini refused to act with the seconda donna as prima donna. They had commenced the opera in uncertainty whether it could go on beyond the situation where Camilla presents herself. 'I was prepared to throw up my baton,' said Rocco, 'and publicly to charge the Government with the rape of our prima donna. Irma I was ready to replace. I could have filled that gap.' He spoke of Vittoria's triumph. Agostino's face darkened. 'Ha!' said he, 'provided we don't fall flat, like your Asti with the cork out. I should have preferred an enthusiasm a trifle more progressive. The notion of travelling backwards is upon me forcibly, after that tempest of acclamation.'

'Or do you think that you have put your best poetry in the first Act?' Rocco suggested with malice.

'Not a bit of it!' Agostino repudiated the idea very angrily, and puffed and puffed. Yet he said, 'I should not be lamenting if the opera were stopped at once.'

'No!' cried Rocco; 'let us have our one night. I bargain for that. Medole has played us false, but we go on. We are victims already, my Agostino.'

'But I do stipulate,' said Agostino, 'that my jewel is not to melt herself in the cup to-night. I must see her. As it is, she is inevitably down in the list for a week's or a month's incarceration.'

Page 1612

Antonio-Pericles had this, in his case, singular piece of delicacy, that he refrained from the attempt to see Vittoria immediately after he had flung his magnificent bouquet of treasure at her feet. In his intoxication with the success which he had foreseen and cradled to its apogee, he was now reckless of any consequences. He felt ready to take patriotic Italy in his arms, provided that it would succeed as Vittoria had done, and on the spot. Her singing of the severe phrases of the opening chant, or hymn, had turned the man, and for a time had put a new heart in him. The consolation was his also, that he had rewarded it the most splendidly—as it were, in golden italics of praise; so that her forgiveness of his disinterested endeavour to transplant her was certain, and perhaps her future implicit obedience or allegiance bought. Meeting General Pierson, the latter rallied him.

'Why, my fine Pericles, your scheme to get this girl out of the way was capitally concerted. My only fear is that on another occasion the Government will take another view of it and you.'

Pericles shrugged. 'The Gods, my dear General, decree. I did my best to lay a case before them; that is all.'

'Ah, well! I am of opinion you will not lay many other cases before the Gods who rule in Milan.'

'I have helped them to a good opera.'

'Are you aware that this opera consists entirely of political allusions?'

General Pierson spoke offensively, as the urbane Austrian military permitted themselves to do upon occasion when addressing the conquered or civilians.

'To me,' returned Pericles, 'an opera—it is music. I know no more.'

'You are responsible for it,' said the General, harshly. 'It was taken upon trust from you.'

'Brutal Austrians!' Pericles murmured. 'And you do not think much of her voice, General?'

'Pretty fair, sir.'

'What wonder she does not care to open her throat to these swine!' thought the changed Greek.

Vittoria's door was shut to Agostino. No voice within gave answer. He tried the lock of the door, and departed. She sat in a stupor. It was harder for her to make a second appearance than it was to make the first, when the shameful suspicion cruelly attached to her had helped to balance her steps with rebellious pride; and more, the great

collected wave of her ambitious years of girlhood had cast her forward to the spot, as in a last effort for consummation. Now that she had won the public voice (love, her heart called it) her eyes looked inward; she meditated upon what she had to do, and coughed nervously. She frightened herself with her coughing, and shivered at the prospect of again going forward in the great nakedness of stagelights and thirsting eyes. And, moreover, she was not strengthened by the character of the music and the poetry of the second Act:—a knowledge of its somewhat inferior quality may possibly

Page 1613

have been at the root of Agostino's dread of an anticlimax. The seconda donna had the chief part in it—notably an aria (Rocco had given it to her in compassion) that suited Irma's pure shrieks and the tragic skeleton she could be. Vittoria knew how low she was sinking when she found her soul in the shallows of a sort of jealousy of Irma. For a little space she lost all intimacy with herself; she looked at her face in the glass and swallowed water, thinking that she had strained a dream and confused her brain with it. The silence of her solitary room coming upon the blaze of light the colour and clamour of the house, and the strange remembrance of the recent impersonation of an ideal character, smote her with the sense of her having fallen from a mighty eminence, and that she lay in the dust. All those incense-breathing flowers heaped on her table seemed poisonous, and reproached her as a delusion. She sat crouching alone till her tirewomen called; horrible talkative things! her own familiar maid Giacinta being the worst to bear with.

Now, Michiella, by making love to Leonardo, Camillo's associate, discovers that Camillo is conspiring against her father. She utters to Leonardo very pleasant promises indeed, if he will betray his friend. Leonardo, a wavering baritono, complains that love should ask for any return save in the coin of the empire of love. He is seduced, and invokes a malediction upon his head should he accomplish what he has sworn to perform. Camilla reposes perfect confidence in this wretch, and brings her more doubtful husband to be of her mind.

Camillo and Camilla agree to wear the mask of a dissipated couple. They throw their mansion open; dicing, betting, intriguing, revellings, maskings, commence. Michiella is courted ardently by Camillo; Camilla trifles with Leonardo and with Count Orso alternately. Jealous again of Camilla, Michiella warns and threatens Leonardo; but she becomes Camillo's dupe, partly from returning love, partly from desire for vengeance on her rival. Camilla persuades Orso to discard Michiella. The infatuated count waxes as the personification of portentous burlesque; he is having everything his own way. The acting throughout—owing to the real gravity of the vast basso Lebruno's burlesque, and Vittoria's archness—was that of high comedy with a lurid background. Vittoria showed an enchanting spirit of humour. She sang one bewitching barcarole that set the house in rocking motion. There was such melancholy in her heart that she cast herself into all the flippancy with abandonment. The Act was weak in too distinctly revealing the finger of the poetic political squib at a point here and there. The temptation to do it of an Agostino, who had no other outlet, had been irresistible, and he sat moaning over his artistic depravity, now that it stared him in the face. Applause scarcely consoled him, and it was with humiliation of mind that he acknowledged his debt to the music and the singers, and how little they owed to him.

Page 1614

Now Camillo is pleased to receive the ardent passion of his wife, and the masking suits his taste, but it is the vice of his character that he cannot act to any degree subordinately in concert; he insists upon positive headship!—(allusion to an Italian weakness for sovereignties; it passed unobserved, and chuckled bitterly over his excess of subtlety). Camillo cannot leave the scheming to her. He pursues Michiella to subdue her with blandishments. Reproaches cease upon her part. There is a duo between them. They exchange the silver keys, which express absolute intimacy, and give mutual freedom of access. Camillo can now secrete his followers in the castle; Michiella can enter Camilla's blue-room, and ravage her caskets for treasonable correspondence. Artfully she bids him reflect on what she is forfeiting for him; and so helps him to put aside the thought of that which he also may be imperilling.

Irma's shrill crescendos and octave-leaps, assisted by her peculiar attitudes of strangulation, came out well in this scene. The murmurs concerning the sour privileges to be granted by a Lazzeruola were inaudible. But there has been a witness to the stipulation. The ever-shifting baritono, from behind a pillar, has joined in with an aside phrase here and there. Leonardo discovers that his fealty to Camilla is reviving. He determines to watch over her. Camillo now tosses a perfumed handkerchief under his nose, and inhales the coxcombical incense of the idea that he will do all without Camilla's aid, to surprise her; thereby teaching her to know him to be somewhat a hero. She has played her part so thoroughly that he can choose to fancy her a giddy person; he remarks upon the frequent instances of girls who in their girlhood were wild dreamers becoming after marriage wild wives. His followers assemble, that he may take advantage of the exchanged key of silver. He is moved to seek one embrace of Camilla before the conflict:—she is beautiful! There was never such beauty as hers! He goes to her in the fittest preparation for the pangs of jealousy. But he has not been foremost in practising the uses of silver keys. Michiella, having first arranged with her father to be before Camillo's doors at a certain hour with men-at-arms, is in Camilla's private chamber, with her hand upon a pregnant box of ebony wood, when she is startled by a noise, and slips into concealment. Leonardo bursts through the casement window. Camilla then appears. Leonardo stretches the tips of his fingers out to her; on his knees confesses his guilt and warns her. Camillo comes in. Thrusting herself before him, Michiella points to the stricken couple 'See! it is to show you this that I am here.' Behold occasion for a grand quatuor!

Page 1615

While confessing his guilt to Camilla, Leonardo has excused it by an emphatic delineation of Michiella's magic sway over him. (Leonardo, in fact, is your small modern Italian Machiavelli, overmatched in cunning, for the reason that he is always at a last moment the victim of his poor bit of heart or honesty: he is devoid of the inspiration of great patriotic aims.) If Michiella (Austrian intrigue) has any love, it is for such a tool. She cannot afford to lose him. She pleads for him; and, as Camilla is silent on his account, the cynical magnanimity of Camillo is predisposed to spare a fangless snake. Michiella withdraws him from the naked sword to the back of the stage. The terrible repudiation scene ensues, in which Camillo casts off his wife. If it was a puzzle to one Italian half of the audience, the other comprehended it perfectly, and with rapture. It was thus that *young Italy* had too often been treated by the compromising, merely discontented, dallying aristocracy. Camilla cries to him, 'Have faith in me! have faith in me! have faith in me!' That is the sole answer to his accusations, his threats of eternal loathing, and generally blustering sublimities. She cannot defend herself; she only knows her innocence. He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two. Turning from him with crossed arms, Camilla sings:

'Mother! it is my fate that I should know Thy miseries, and in thy footprints go. Grief treads the starry places of the earth: In thy long track I feel who gave me birth. I am alone; a wife without a lord; My home is with the stranger—home abhorr'd!—But that I trust to meet thy spirit there. Mother of Sorrows! joy thou canst not share: So let me wander in among the tombs, Among the cypresses and the withered blooms. Thy soul is with dead suns: there let me be; A silent thing that shares thy veil with thee.'

The wonderful viol-like trembling of the contralto tones thrilled through the house. It was the highest homage to Vittoria that no longer any shouts arose nothing but a prolonged murmur, as when one tells another a tale of deep emotion, and all exclamations, all ulterior thoughts, all gathered tenderness of sensibility, are reserved for the close, are seen heaping for the close, like waters above a dam. The flattery of beholding a great assembly of human creatures bound glittering in wizard subservience to the voice of one soul, belongs to the artist, and is the cantatrice's glory, pre-eminent over whatever poor glory this world gives. She felt it, but she felt it as something apart. Within her was the struggle of Italy calling to Italy: Italy's shame, her sadness, her tortures, her quenchless hope, and the view of Freedom. It sent her blood about her body in rebellious volumes. Once it completely strangled her notes. She dropped the ball of her chin in her throat; paused without ceremony; and recovered herself. Vittoria had too severe an artistic instinct to court reality; and as much as she could she from that moment corrected the underlinings of Agostino's libretto.

Page 1616

On the other hand, Irma fell into all his traps, and painted her Austrian heart with a prodigal waste of colour and frank energy:

’Now Leonardo is my tool:
Camilla is my slave:
And she I hate goes forth to cool
Her rage beyond the wave.
Joy! joy!
Paid am I in full coin for my caressing;
I take, but give nought, ere the priestly blessing.’

A subtle distinction. She insists upon her reverence for the priestly (papistical) blessing, while she confides her determination to have it dispensed with in Camilla’s case. Irma’s known sympathies with the Austrian uniform seasoned the ludicrousness of many of the double-edged verses which she sang or declaimed in recitative. The irony of applauding her vehemently was irresistible.

Camilla is charged with conspiracy, and proved guilty by her own admission.

The Act ends with the entry of Count Orso and his force; conspirators overawed; Camilla repudiated; Count Orso imperially just; Leonardo chagrined; Camillo pardoned; Michiella triumphant. Camillo sacrifices his wife for safety. He holds her estates; and therefore Count Orso, whose respect for law causes him to have a keen eye for matrimonial alliances, is now paternally willing, and even anxious to bestow Michiella upon him when the Pontifical divorce can be obtained; so that the long-coveted fruitful acres may be in the family. The chorus sings a song of praise to Hymen, the ‘builder of great Houses.’ Camilla goes forth into exile. The word was not spoken, but the mention of ’bread of strangers, strange faces, cold climes,’ said sufficient.

’It is a question whether we ought to sit still and see a firebrand flashed in our faces,’ General Pierson remarked as the curtain fell. He was talking to Major de Pyrmont outside the Duchess of Graatli’s box. Two General officers joined them, and presently Count Serabiglione, with his courtly semi-ironical smile, on whom they straightway turned their backs. The insult was happily unseen, and the count caressed his shaven chin and smiled himself onward. The point for the officers to decide was, whether they dared offend an enthusiastic house—the fiery core of the population of Milan—by putting a stop to the opera before worse should come.

Their own views were entirely military; but they were paralyzed by the recent pseudo-liberalistic despatches from Vienna; and agreed, with some malice in their shrugs, that the odium might as well be left on the shoulders of the bureau which had examined the libretto. In fact, they saw that there would be rank peril in attempting to arrest the course of things within the walls of the house.

‘The temper this people is changeing oddly,’ said General Pierson. Major de Pyrmont listened awhile to what they had to say, and returned to the duchess. Amalia wrote these lines to Laura:—’If she sings that song she is to be seized on the wings of the stage. I order my carriage to be in readiness to take her whither she should have gone last night. Do you contrive only her escape from the house. Georges de P. will aid you. I adore the naughty rebel!’

Page 1617

Major de Pyrmont delivered the missive at Laura's box. He went down to the duchess's chasseur, and gave him certain commands and money for a journey. Looking about, he beheld Wilfrid, who implored him to take his place for two minutes. De Pyrmont laughed. 'She is superb, my friend. Come up with me. I am going behind the scenes. The unfortunate impresario is a ruined man; let us both condole with him. It is possible that he has children, and children like bread.'

Wilfrid was linking his arm to De Pyrmont's, when, with a vivid recollection of old times, he glanced at his uniform with Vittoria's eyes. 'She would spit at me!' he muttered, and dropped behind.

Up in her room Vittoria held council with Rocco, Agostino, and the impresario, Salvolo, who was partly their dupe. Salvolo had laid a freshly-written injunction from General Pierson before her, bidding him to exclude the chief solo parts from the Third Act, and to bring it speedily to a termination. His case was, that he had been ready to forfeit much if a rising followed; but that simply to beard the authorities was madness. He stated his case by no means as a pleader, although the impression made on him by the prima donna's success caused his urgency to be civil.

'Strike out what you please,' said Vittoria.

Agostino smote her with a forefinger. 'Rogue! you deserve an imperial crown. You have been educated for monarchy. You are ready enough to dispense with what you don't care for, and what is not your own.'

Much of the time was lost by Agostino's dispute with Salvolo. They haggled and wrangled laughingly over this and that printed aria, but it was a deplorable deception of the unhappy man; and with Vittoria's stronger resolve to sing the incendiary song, the more necessary it was for her to have her soul clear of deceit. She said, 'Signor Salvolo, you have been very kind to me, and I would do nothing to hurt your interests. I suppose you must suffer for being an Italian, like the rest of us. The song I mean to sing is not written or printed. What is in the book cannot harm you, for the censorship has passed it; and surely I alone am responsible for singing what is not in the book—I and the maestro. He supports me. We have both taken precautions' (she smiled) 'to secure our property. If you are despoiled, we will share with you. And believe, oh! in God's name, believe that you will not suffer to no purpose!'

Salvolo started from her in a horror of amazement. He declared that he had been miserably deceived and entrapped. He threatened to send the company to their homes forthwith. 'Dare to!' said Agostino; and to judge by the temper of the house, it was only too certain, that if he did so, La Scala would be a wrecked tenement in the eye of morning. But Agostino backed his entreaty to her to abjure that song; Rocco gave way, and half shyly requested her to think of prudence. She remembered Laura,

Page 1618

and Carlo, and her poor little frightened foreign mother. Her intense ideal conception of her duty sank and danced within her brain as the pilot-star dances on the bows of a tossing vessel. All were against her, as the tempest is against the ship. Even light above (by which I would image that which she could appeal to pleading in behalf of the wisdom of her obstinate will) was dyed black in the sweeping obscuration; she failed to recollect a sentence that was to be said to vindicate her settled course. Her sole idea was her holding her country by an unseen thread, and of the everlasting welfare of Italy being jeopardized if she relaxed her hold. Simple obstinacy of will sustained her.

You mariners batten down the hatchways when the heavens are dark and seas are angry. Vittoria, with the same faith in her instinct, shut the avenues to her senses—-would see nothing, hear nothing. The impresario's figure of despair touched her later. Giacinta drove him forth in the act of smiting his forehead with both hands. She did the same for Agostino and Rocco, who were not demonstrative.

They knew that by this time the agents of the Government were in all probability ransacking their rooms, and confiscating their goods.

'Is your piano hired?' quoth the former.

'No,' said the latter, 'are your slippers?'

They went their separate ways, laughing.

CHAPTER XXI

THE THIRD ACT

The libretto of the Third Act was steeped in the sentiment of Young Italy. I wish that I could pipe to your mind's hearing any notion of the fine music of Rocco Ricci, and touch you to feel the revelations which were in this new voice. Rocco and Vittoria gave the verses a life that cannot belong to them now; yet, as they contain much of the vital spirit of the revolt, they may assist you to some idea of the faith animating its heads, and may serve to justify this history.

Rocco's music in the opera of Camilla had been sprung from a fresh Italian well; neither the elegiac-melodious, nor the sensuous-lyrical, nor the joyous buffo; it was severe as an old masterpiece, with veins of buoyant liveliness threading it, and with sufficient distinctness of melody to enrapture those who like to suck the sugarplums of sound. He would indeed have favoured the public with more sweet things, but Vittoria, for whom the opera was composed, and who had been at his elbow, was young, and stern in her devotion to an ideal of classical music that should elevate and never stoop to seduce or to flatter thoughtless hearers. Her taste had directed as her voice had inspired the opera. Her voice belonged to the order of the simply great voices, and was a royal

voice among them. Pure without attenuation, passionate without contortion, when once heard it exacted absolute confidence. On this night her theme and her impersonation were adventitious introductions, but there were passages

Page 1619

when her artistic pre-eminence and the sovereign fulness and fire of her singing struck a note of grateful remembered delight. This is what the great voice does for us. It rarely astonishes our ears. It illumines our souls, as you see the lightning make the unintelligible craving darkness leap into long mountain ridges, and twisting vales, and spires of cities, and inner recesses of light within light, rose-like, toward a central core of violet heat.

At the rising of the curtain the knights of the plains, Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnoldo, and others, who were conspiring to overthrow Count Orso at the time when Camillo's folly ruined all, assemble to deplore Camilla's banishment, and show, bereft of her, their helplessness and indecision. They utter contempt of Camillo, who is this day to be Pontifically divorced from his wife to espouse the detested Michiella. His taste is not admired.

They pass off. Camillo appears. He is, as he knows, little better than a pensioner in Count Orso's household. He holds his lands on sufferance. His faculties are paralyzed. He is on the first smooth shoulder-slope of the cataract. He knows that not only was his jealousy of his wife groundless, but it was forced by a spleenful pride. What is there to do? Nothing, save resignedly to prepare for his divorce from the conspiratrix Camilla and espousals with Michiella. The cup is bitter, and his song is mournful. He does the rarest thing a man will do in such a predicament—he acknowledges that he is going to get his deserts. The faithfulness and purity of Camilla have struck his inner consciousness. He knows not where she may be. He has secretly sent messengers in all directions to seek her, and recover her, and obtain her pardon: in vain. It is as well, perhaps, that he should never see her more. Accursed, he has cast off his sweetest friend. The craven heart could never beat in unison with hers.

'She is in the darkness: I am in the light. I am a blot upon the light; she is light in the darkness.'

Montini poured this out with so fine a sentiment that the impatience of the house for sight of its heroine was quieted. But Irma and Lebruno came forward barely under tolerance.

'We might as well be thumping a tambourine,' said Lebruno, during a caress. Irma bit her underlip with mortification. Their notes fell flat as bullets against a wall.

This circumstance aroused the ire of Antonio-Pericles against the libretto and revolutionists. 'I perceive,' he said, grinning savagely, 'it has come to be a concert, not an opera; it is a musical harangue in the marketplace. Illusion goes: it is politics here!'

Carlo Ammiani was sitting with his mother and Luciano breathlessly awaiting the entrance of Vittoria. The inner box-door was rudely shaken: beneath it a slip of paper

had been thrust. He read a warning to him to quit the house instantly. Luciano and his mother both counselled his departure. The detestable initials ‘B. R.,’ and the one word ‘Sbirri,’ revealed who had warned, and what was the danger. His friend’s advice and the commands of his mother failed to move him. ’When I have seen her safe; not before,’ he said.

Page 1620

Countess Ammiani addressed Luciano: 'This is a young man's love for a woman.'

'The woman is worth it,' Luciano replied.

'No woman is worth the sacrifice of a mother and of a relative.'

'Dearest countess,' said Luciano, 'look at the pit; it's a cauldron. We shall get him out presently, have no fear: there will soon be hubbub enough to let Lucifer escape unseen. If nothing is done to-night, he and I will be off to the Lago di Garda to-morrow morning, and fish and shoot, and talk with Catullus.'

The countess gazed on her son with sorrowful sternness. His eyes had taken that bright glazed look which is an indication of frozen brain and turbulent heart—madness that sane men enamoured can be struck by. She knew there was no appeal to it.

A very dull continuous sound, like that of an angry swarm, or more like a rapid mufed thrumming of wires, was heard. The audience had caught view of a brown-coated soldier at one of the wings. The curious Croat had merely gratified a desire to have a glance at the semicircle of crowded heads; he withdrew his own, but not before he had awakened the wild beast in the throng. Yet a little while and the roar of the beasts would have burst out. It was thought that Vittoria had been seized or interdicted from appearing. Conspirators—the knights of the plains—meet: Rudolfos, Romualdos, Arnoldos, and others,—so that you know Camilla is not idle. She comes on in the great scene which closes the opera.

It is the banqueting hall of the castle. The Pontifical divorce is spread upon the table. Courtly friends, guards, and a choric bridal company, form a circle.

'I have obtained it,' says Count Orso: 'but at a cost.'

Leonardo, wavering eternally, lets us know that it is weighted with a proviso: *If* Camilla shall not present herself within a certain term, this being the last day of it. Camillo comes forward. Too late, he has perceived his faults and weakness. He has cast his beloved from his arms to clasp them on despair. The choric bridal company gives intervening strophes. Cavaliers enter. 'Look at them well,' says Leonardo. They are the knights of the plains. 'They have come to mock me,' Camillo exclaims, and avoids them.

Leonardo, Michiella, and Camillo now sing a trio that is tricuspidato, or a three-pointed manner of declaring their divergent sentiments in harmony. The fast-gathering cavaliers lend masculine character to the choric refrains at every interval. Leonardo plucks Michiella entreatingly by the arm. She spurns him. He has served her; she needs him no more; but she will recommend him in other quarters, and bids him to seek them. 'I will give thee a collar for thy neck, marked "Faithful." It is the utmost I can do for thy

species.’ Leonardo thinks that he is insulted, but there is a vestige of doubt in him still. ’She is so fair! she dissembles so magnificently ever!’ She has previously told him that she is acting a part, as Camilla did. Irma had shed all her hair from a golden circlet about her temples, barbarian-wise. Some Hunnish grandeur pertained to her appearance, and partly excused the infatuated wretch who shivered at her disdain and exulted over her beauty and artfulness.

Page 1621

In the midst of the chorus there is one veiled figure and one voice distinguishable. This voice outlives the rest at every strophe, and contrives to add a supplemental antiphonic phrase that recalls in turn the favourite melodies of the opera. Camillo hears it, but takes it as a delusion of impassioned memory and a mere theme for the recurring melodious utterance of his regrets. Michiella hears it. She chimes with the third notes of Camillo's solo to inform us of her suspicions that they have a serpent among them. Leonardo hears it. The trio is formed. Count Orso, without hearing it, makes a quatuor by inviting the bridal couple to go through the necessary formalities. The chorus changes its measure to one of hymeneals. The unknown voice closes it ominously with three bars in the minor key. Michiella stalks close around the rank singers like an enraged daughter of Attila. Stopping in front of the veiled figure, she says: 'Why is it thou wearest the black veil at my nuptials?'

'Because my time of mourning is not yet ended.'

'Thou standest the shadow in my happiness.'

'The bright sun will have its shadow.'

'I desire that all rejoice this day.'

'My hour of rejoicing approaches.'

'Wilt thou unveil?'

'Dost thou ask to look the storm in the face?'

'Wilt thou unveil?'

'Art thou hungry for the lightning?'

'I bid thee unveil, woman!'

Michiella's ringing shriek of command produces no response.

'It is she!' cries Michiella, from a contracted bosom; smiting it with clenched hands.

'Swift to the signatures. O rival! what bitterness hast thou come hither to taste.'

Camilla sings aside: 'If yet my husband loves me and is true.'

Count Orso exclaims: 'Let trumpets sound for the commencement of the festivities. The lord of his country may slumber while his people dance and drink!'

Trumpets flourish. Witnesses are called about the table. Camillo, pen in hand, prepares for the supreme act. Leonardo at one wing watches the eagerness of Michiella. The chorus chants to a muted measure of suspense, while Camillo dips pen in ink.

'She is away from me: she scorns me: she is lost to me. Life without honour is the life of swine. Union without love is the yoke of savage beasts. O me miserable! Can the heavens themselves plumb the depth of my degradation?'

Count Orso permits a half-tone of paternal severity to point his kindly hint that time is passing. When he was young, he says, in the broad and benevolently frisky manner, he would have signed ere the eye of the maiden twinkled her affirmative, or the goose had shed its quill.

Camillo still trifles. Then he dashes the pen to earth.

'Never! I have but one wife. Our marriage is irrevocable. The dishonoured man is the everlasting outcast. What are earthly possessions to me, if within myself shame faces me? Let all go. Though I have lost Camilla, I will be worthy of her. Not a pen no pen; it is the sword that I must write with. Strike, O count! I am here: I stand alone. By the edge of this sword, I swear that never deed of mine shall rob Camilla of her heritage; though I die the death, she shall not weep for a craven!'

Page 1622

The multitude break away from Camilla—veiled no more, but radiant; fresh as a star that issues through corrupting vapours, and with her voice at a starry pitch in its clear ascendency:

’Tear up the insufferable scroll!—
O thou, my lover and my soul!
It is the Sword that reunites;
The Pen that our perdition writes.’

She is folded in her husband’s arms.

Michiella fronts them, horrid of aspect:—
’Accurst divorced one! dost thou dare
To lie in shameless fondness there?
Abandoned! on thy lying brow
Thy name shall be imprinted now.’

Camilla parts from her husband’s embrace:

’My name is one I do not fear;
’Tis one that thou wouldst shrink to hear.
Go, cool thy penitential fires,
Thou creature, foul with base desires!’

Camillo(facing Count Orso).

‘The choice is thine!’

CountOrso (draws).

‘The choice is made!’

Chorus(narrowing its circle).

’Familiar is that naked blade.
Of others, of himself, the fate
How swift ‘tis Provocation’s mate!’

Michiella(torn with jealous rage).

’Yea; I could smite her on the face.
Father, first read the thing’s disgrace.
I grudge them, honourable death.
Put poison in their latest breath!’

Orso(his left arm extended).

’You twain are sundered: hear with awe
The judgement of the Source of Law.’

Camilla(smiling confidently).

’Not such, when I was at the Source,
It said to me;—but take thy course.’

Orso (astounded).

‘Thither thy steps were bent?’

Michiella (spurning verbal controversy).

’She feigns!
A thousand swords are in my veins.
Friends! soldiers I strike them down, the pair!’

Camillo (on guard, clasping his wife).

’’Tis well! I cry, to all we share.
Yea, life or death, ’tis well! ‘tis well!’

Michiella (stamps her foot).

’My heart ‘s a vessel tossed on hell!’

Leonardo(aside).

‘Not in glad nuptials ends the day.’

Orso(to Camilla).

‘What is thy purpose with us?—say!’

Camilla (lowly).
’Unto my Father I have crossed
For tidings of my Mother lost.’

Orso.
‘Thy mother dead!’

Camilla.
‘She lives!’

Michiella.
’Thou liest!

The tablets of the tomb defiest!
The Fates denounce, the Furies chase
The wretch who lies in Reason’s face.’

Page 1623

Camilla.
’Fly, then; for we are match’d to try
Which is the idiot, thou or I’

Michiella.
Graceless Camilla!’

Orso
’Senseless girl!
I cherished thee a precious pearl,
And almost owned thee child of mine.’

Camilla.
’Thou kept’st me like a gem, to shine,
Careless that I of blood am made;
No longer be the end delay’d.
’Tis time to prove I have a heart—
Forth from these walls of mine depart!
The ghosts within them are disturb’d
Go forth, and let thy wrath be curb’d,
For I am strong: Camillo’s truth
Has arm’d the visions of our youth.
Our union by the Head Supreme
Is blest: our severance was the dream.
We who have drunk of blood and tears,
Knew nothing of a mortal’s fears.
Life is as Death until the strife
In our just cause makes Death as Life.’

Orso
‘’Tis madness?’

Leonardo.
‘Is it madness?’

Camilla.
’Men!
’Tis Reason, but beyond your ken.
There lives a light that none can view
Whose thoughts are brutish:—seen by few,
The few have therefore light divine
Their visions are God’s legions!—sign,
I give you; for we stand alone,
And you are frozen to the bone.

Your palsied hands refuse their swords.
A sharper edge is in my words,
A deadlier wound is in my cry.
Yea, tho' you slay us, do we die?
In forcing us to bear the worst,
You made of us Immortals first.
Away! and trouble not my sight.'

Chorus of Cavaliers: *Rudolfo*, *Romualdo*, *Arnoldo*, and others.

'She moves us with an angel's might.
What if his host outnumber ours!
'Tis heaven that gives victorious powers.'

[They draw their steel. *Orso*, simulating gratitude for their devotion to him, addresses them as to pacify their friendly ardour.]

*Michiella*to *Leonardo* (supplicating).
'Ever my friend I shall I appeal
In vain to see thy flashing steel?'

Leonardo(finally resolved).
'Traitress! pray, rather, it may rest,
Or its first home will be thy breast.'

Chorus of Bridal Company.
'The flowers from bright Aurora's head
We pluck'd to strew a happy bed,
Shall they be dipp'd in blood ere night?
Woe to the nuptials! woe the sight!'

Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnoldo, and the others, advance toward Camillo. Michiella calls to them encouragingly that it were well for the deed to be done by their hands. They bid Camillo to direct their lifted swords upon his enemies. Leonardo joins them. Count Orso, after a burst of upbraidings, accepts Camillo's offer of peace, and gives his bond to quit the castle. Michiella, gazing savagely at Camilla, entreats her for an utterance of her triumphant scorn. She assures Camilla that she knows her feelings accurately.

Page 1624

’Now you think that I am overwhelmed; that I shall have a restless night, and lie, after all my crying’s over, with my hair spread out on my pillow, on either side my face, like green moss of a withered waterfall: you think you will bestow a little serpent of a gift from my stolen treasures to comfort me. You will comfort me with a lock of Camillo’s hair, that I may have it on my breast to-night, and dream, and wail, and writhe, and curse the air I breathe, and clasp the abominable emptiness like a thousand Camillos. Speak!’

The dagger is seen gleaming up Michiella’s wrist; she steps on in a bony triangle, faced for mischief: a savage Hunnish woman, with the hair of a Goddess—the figure of a cat taking to its forepaws. Close upon Camilla she towers in her whole height, and crying thrice, swift as the assassin trebles his blow, ‘Speak,’ to Camilla, who is fronting her mildly, she raises her arm, and the stilet flashes into Camilla’s bosom.

‘Die then, and outrage me no more.’

Camilla staggers to her husband. Camillo receives her falling. Michiella, seized by Leonardo, presents a stiffened shape of vengeance with fierce white eyes and dagger aloft. There are many shouts, and there is silence.

Camilla, supported by *Camillo*.

’If this is death, it is not hard to bear.
Your handkerchief drinks up my blood so fast
It seems to love it. Threads of my own hair
Are woven in it. ’Tis the one I cast
That midnight from my window, when you stood
Alone, and heaven seemed to love you so!
I did not think to wet it with my blood
When next I tossed it to my love below.’

Camillo(cherishing her).

’Camilla, pity! say you will not die.
Your voice is like a soul lost in the sky.’

Camilla.

’I know not if my soul has flown; I know
My body is a weight I cannot raise:
My voice between them issues, and
I go Upon a journey of uncounted days.
Forgetfulness is like a closing sea;
But you are very bright above me still.
My life I give as it was given to me
I enter on a darkness wide and chill.’

Camillo.
’O noble heart! a million fires consume
The hateful hand that sends you to your doom.’

Camilla.
’There is an end to joy: there is no end
To striving; therefore ever let us strive
In purity that shall the toil befriend,
And keep our poor mortality alive.
I hang upon the boundaries like light
Along the hills when downward goes the day
I feel the silent creeping up of night.
For you, my husband, lies a flaming way.’

Camillo.
’I lose your eyes: I lose your voice: ’tis faint.
Ah, Christ! see the fallen eyelids of a saint.’

Page 1625

Camilla.
’Our life is but a little holding, lent
To do a mighty labour: we are one
With heaven and the stars when it is spent
To serve God’s aim: else die we with the sun.’

She sinks. Camillo droops his head above her.

The house was hushed as at a veritable death-scene. It was more like a cathedral service than an operatic pageant. Agostino had done his best to put the heart of the creed of his Chief into these last verses. Rocco’s music floated them in solemn measures, and Vittoria had been careful to articulate throughout the sacred monotony so that their full meaning should be taken.

In the printed book of the libretto a chorus of cavaliers, followed by one harmless verse of Camilla’s adieux to them, and to her husband and life, concluded the opera.

‘Let her stop at that—it’s enough!—and she shall be untouched,’ said General Pierson to Antonio-Pericles.

’I have information, as you know, that an extremely impudent song is coming.’

The General saw Wilfrid hanging about the lobby, in flagrant disobedience to orders. Rebuking his nephew with a frown, he commanded the lieutenant to make his way round to the stage and see that the curtain was dropped according to the printed book.

‘Off, mon Dieu! off!’ Pericles speeded him; adding in English, ’Shall she taste prison-damp, zat voice is killed.’

The chorus of cavaliers was a lamentation: the keynote being despair: ordinary libretto verses.

Camilla’s eyes unclose. She struggles to be lifted, and, raised on Camillo’s arm, she sings as if with the last pulsation of her voice, softly resonant in its rich contralto. She pardons Michiella. She tells Count Orso that when he has extinguished his appetite for dominion, he will enjoy an unknown pleasure in the friendship of his neighbours. Repeating that her mother lives, and will some day kneel by her daughter’s grave—not mournfully, but in beatitude—she utters her adieu to all.

At the moment of her doing so, Montini whispered in Vittoria’s ear. She looked up and beheld the downward curl of the curtain. There was confusion at the wings: Croats were visible to the audience. Carlo Ammiani and Luciano Romara jumped on the stage; a dozen of the noble youths of Milan streamed across the boards to either wing, and caught the curtain descending. The whole house had risen insurgent with cries of ‘Vittoria.’ The curtain-ropes were in the hands of the Croats, but Carlo, Luciano, and

their fellows held the curtain aloft at arm’s length at each side of her. She was seen, and she sang, and the house listened.

Page 1626

The Italians present, one and all, rose up reverently and murmured the refrain. Many of the aristocracy would, doubtless, have preferred that this public declaration of the plain enigma should not have rung forth to carry them on the popular current; and some might have sympathized with the insane grin which distorted the features of Antonio-Pericles, when he beheld illusion wantonly destroyed, and the opera reduced to be a mere vehicle for a fulmination of politics. But the general enthusiasm was too tremendous to permit of individual protestations. To sit, when the nation was standing, was to be a German. Nor, indeed, was there an Italian in the house who would willingly have consented to see Vittoria silenced, now that she had chosen to defy the Tedeschi from the boards of La Scala. The fascination of her voice extended even over the German division of the audience. They, with the Italians, said: 'Hear her! hear her!' The curtain was agitated at the wings, but in the centre it was kept above Vittoria's head by the uplifted arms of the twelve young men:—

'I cannot count the years,
That you will drink, like me,
The cup of blood and tears,
Ere she to you appears:—
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

So the great name was out, and its enemies had heard it.

'You dedicate your lives
To her, and you will be
The food on which she thrives,
Till her great day arrives
Italia, Italia shall be free!

'She asks you but for faith!
Your faith in her takes she
As draughts of heaven's breath,
Amid defeat and death:—
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

The prima donna was not acting exhaustion when sinking lower in Montini's arms. Her bosom rose and sank quickly, and she gave the terminating verse:—

'I enter the black boat
Upon the wide grey sea,
Where all her set suns float;
Thence hear my voice remote
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

The curtain dropped.

CHAPTER XXII

WILFRID COMES FORWARD

An order for the immediate arrest of Vittoria was brought round to the stage at the fall of the curtain by Captain Weisspriess, and delivered by him on the stage to the officer commanding, a pothered lieutenant of Croats, whose first proceeding was dictated by the military instinct to get his men in line, and who was utterly devoid of any subsequent idea. The thunder of the house on the other side of the curtain was enough to disconcert a youngster such as he was; nor have the subalterns of Croat regiments a very signal reputation for efficiency in the Austrian Service. Vittoria stood among her supporters apart; pale, and 'only very thirsty,' as she told the enthusiastic youths who pressed near her, and implored her to have

Page 1627

no fear. Carlo was on her right hand; Luciano on her left. They kept her from going off to her room. Montini was despatched to fetch her maid Giacinta with cloak and hood for her mistress. The young lieutenant of Croats drew his sword, but hesitated. Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and Major de Pyrmont were at one wing, between the Italian gentlemen and the soldiery. The operatic company had fallen into the background, or stood crowding the side places of exit. Vittoria's name was being shouted with that angry, sea-like, horrid monotony of iteration which is more suggestive of menacing impatience and the positive will of the people, than varied, sharp, imperative calls. The people had got the lion in their throats. One shriek from her would bring them, like a torrent, on the boards, as the officers well knew; and every second's delay in executing the orders of the General added to the difficulty of their position. The lieutenant of Croats strode up to Weisspriess and Wilfrid, who were discussing a plan of action vehemently; while, amid hubbub and argument, De Pyrmont studied Vittoria's features through his opera-glass, with an admirable simple languor.

Wilfrid turned back to him, and De Pyrmont, without altering the level of his glass, said, 'She's as cool as a lemon-ice. That girl will be a mother of heroes. To have volcanic fire and the mastery of her nerves at the same time, is something prodigious. She is magnificent. Take a peep at her. I suspect that the rascal at her right is seizing his occasion to plant a trifle or so in her memory—the animal! It's just the moment, and he knows it.'

De Pyrmont looked at Wilfrid's face.

'Have I hit you anywhere accidentally?' he asked, for the face had grown dead-white.

'Be my friend, for heaven's sake!' was the choking answer. 'Save her! Get her away! She is an old acquaintance of mine—of mine, in England. Do; or I shall have to break my sword.'

'You know her? and you don't go over to her?' said De Pyrmont.

'I—yes, she knows me.'

'Then, why not present yourself?'

'Get her away. Talk Weisspriess down. He is for seizing her at all hazards. It 's madness to provoke a conflict. Just listen to the house! I may be broken, but save her I will. De Pyrmont, on my honour, I will stand by you for ever if you will help me to get her away.'

'To suggest my need in the hour of your own is not a bad notion,' said the cool Frenchman. 'What plan have you?'

Wilfrid struck his forehead miserably.

‘Stop Lieutenant Zettlisch. Don’t let him go up to her. Don’t—’

De Pyrmont beheld in astonishment that a speechlessness such as affects condemned wretches in the supreme last minutes of existence had come upon the Englishman.

‘I’m afraid yours is a bad case,’ he said; ’and the worst of it is, it’s just the case women have no compassion for. Here comes a parlementaire from the opposite camp. Let’s hear him.’

Page 1628

It was Luciano Romara. He stood before them to request that the curtain should be raised. The officers debated together, and deemed it prudent to yield consent.

Luciano stipulated further that the soldiers were to be withdrawn.

‘On one wing, or on both wings?’ said Captain Weisspriess, twinkling eyes oblique.

‘Out of the house,’ said Luciano.

The officers laughed.

‘You must confess,’ said De Pyrmont, affably, ’that though the drum does issue command to the horse, it scarcely thinks of doing so after a rent in the skin has shown its emptiness. Can you suppose that we are likely to run when we see you empty-handed? These things are matters of calculation.’

‘It is for you to calculate correctly,’ said Luciano.

As he spoke, a first surge of the exasperated house broke upon the stage and smote the curtain, which burst into white zigzags, as it were a breast stricken with panic.

Giacinta came running in to her mistress, and cloaked and hooded her hurriedly.

Enamoured; impassioned, Ammiani murmured in Vittoria’s ear: ’My own soul!’

She replied: ‘My lover!’

So their first love-speech was interchanged with Italian simplicity, and made a divine circle about them in the storm.

Luciano returned to his party to inform them that they held the key of the emergency.

‘Stick fast,’ he said. ’None of you move. Whoever takes the first step takes the false step; I see that.’

‘We have no arms, Luciano.’

‘We have the people behind us.’

There was a fiercer tempest in the body of the house, and, on a sudden, silence. Men who had invaded the stage joined the Italian guard surrounding Vittoria, telling that the lights had been extinguished; and then came the muffled uproar of universal confusion. Some were for handing her down into the orchestra, and getting her out through the general vomitorium, but Carlo and Luciano held her firmly by them. The theatre was a rageing darkness; and there was barely a light on the stage. ‘Santa Maria!’ cried

Giacinta, 'how dreadful that steel does look in the dark! I wish our sweet boys would cry louder.' Her mistress, almost laughing, bade her keep close, and be still. 'Oh! this must be like being at sea,' the poor creature whined, stopping her ears and shutting her eyes. Vittoria was in a thick gathering of her defenders; she could just hear that a parley was going on between Luciano and the Austrians. Luciano made his way back to her. 'Quick!' he said; 'nothing cows a mob like darkness. One of these officers tells me he knows you, and gives his word of honour—he's an Englishman—to conduct you out: come.'

Vittoria placed her hands in Carlo's one instant. Luciano cleared a space for them. She heard a low English voice.

'You do not recognize me? There is no time to lose. You had another name once, and I have had the honour to call you by it.'

Page 1629

‘Are you an Austrian?’ she exclaimed, and Carlo felt that she was shrinking back.

’I am the Wilfrid Pole whom you knew. You are entrusted to my charge; I have sworn to conduct you to the doors in safety, whatever it may cost me.’

Vittoria looked at him mournfully. Her eyes filled with tears. ’The night is spoiled for me!’ she murmured.

‘Emilia!’

‘That is not my name.’

’I know you by no other. Have mercy on me. I would do anything in the world to serve you.’

Major de Pyrmont came up to him and touched his arm. He said briefly: ’We shall have a collision, to a certainty, unless the people hear from one of her set that she is out of the house.’

Wilfrid requested her to confide her hand to him.

‘My hand is engaged,’ she said.

Bowing ceremoniously, Wilfrid passed on, and Vittoria, with Carlo and Luciano and her maid Giacinta, followed between files of bayonets through the dusky passages, and downstairs into the night air.

Vittoria spoke in Carlo’s ear: ’I have been unkind to him. I had a great affection for him in England.’

‘Thank him; thank him,’ said Carlo.

She quitted her lover’s side and went up to Wilfrid with a shyly extended hand. A carriage was drawn up by the kerbstone; the doors of it were open. She had barely made a word intelligible; when Major de Pyrmont pointed to some officers approaching. ’Get her out of the way while there’s time,’ he said in French to Luciano. ’This is her carriage. Swiftly, gentlemen, or she’s lost.’

Giacinta read his meaning by signs, and caught her mistress by the sleeve, using force. She and Major de Pyrmont placed Vittoria, bewildered, in the carriage; De Pyrmont shut the door, and signalled to the coachman. Vittoria thrust her head out for a last look at her lover, and beheld him with the arms of dark-clothed men upon him. La Scala was pouring forth its occupants in struggling roaring shoals from every door. Her outcry returned to her deadened in the rapid rolling of the carriage across the lighted Piazza. Giacinta had to hold her down with all her might. Great clamour was for one moment

heard by them, and then a rushing voicelessness. Giacinta screamed to the coachman till she was exhausted. Vittoria sank shuddering on the lap of her maid, hiding her face that she might plunge out of recollection.

The lightnings shot across her brain, but wrote no legible thing; the scenes of the opera lost their outlines as in a white heat of fire. She tried to weep, and vainly asked her heart for tears, that this dry dreadful blind misery of mere sensation might be washed out of her, and leave her mind clear to grapple with evil; and then, as the lurid breaks come in a storm-driven night sky, she had the picture of her lover in the hands of enemies, and of Wilfrid in the white uniform; the torment of her living passion, the mockery of her passion by-gone. Recollection,

Page 1630

when it came back, overwhelmed her; she swayed from recollection to oblivion, and was like a caged wild thing. Giacinta had to be as a mother with her. The poor trembling girl, who had begun to perceive that the carriage was bearing them to some unknown destination, tore open the bands of her corset and drew her mistress's head against the full warmth of her bosom, rocked her, and moaned over her, mixing comfort and lamentation in one offering, and so contrived to draw the tears out from her, a storm of tears; not fitfully hysterical, but tears that poured a black veil over the eyeballs, and fell steadily streaming. Once subdued by the weakness, Vittoria's nature melted; she shook piteously with weeping; she remembered Laura's words, and thought of what she had done, in terror and remorse, and tried to ask if the people would be fighting now, but could not. Laura seemed to stand before her like a Fury stretching her finger at the dear brave men whom she had hurled upon the bayonets and the guns. It was an unendurable anguish. Giacinta was compelled to let her cry, and had to reflect upon their present situation unaided. They had passed the city gates. Voices on the coachman's box had given German pass-words. She would have screamed then had not the carriage seemed to her a sanctuary from such creatures as foreign soldiers, whitecoats; so she cowered on. They were in the starry open country, on the high-road between the vine-hung mulberry trees. She held the precious head of her mistress, praying the Saints that strength would soon come to her to talk of their plight, or chatter a little comfortingly at least; and but for the singular sweetness which it shot thrilling to her woman's heart, she would have been fretted when Vittoria, after one long-drawn wavering sob, turned her lips to the bared warm breast, and put a little kiss upon it, and slept.

CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST HOURS OF THE FLIGHT

Vittoria slept on like an outworn child, while Giacinta nodded over her, and started, and wondered what embowelled mountain they might be passing through, so cold was the air and thick the darkness; and wondered more at the old face of dawn, which appeared to know nothing of her agitation. But morning was better than night, and she ceased counting over her sins forward and backward; adding comments on them, excusing some and admitting the turpitude of others, with 'Oh! I was naughty, padre mio! I was naughty—she huddled them all into one of memory's spare sacks, and tied the neck of it, that they should keep safe for her father-confessor. At such times, after a tumult of the blood, women have tender delight in one another's beauty. Giacinta doted on the marble cheek, upturned on her lap, with the black unbound locks slipping across it; the braid of the coronal of hair loosening; the chance flitting movement of the pearly little dimple that lay at the edge of the bow of the joined lips, like the cradling hollow of a dream. At whiles it would twitch; yet the dear eyelids continued sealed.

Page 1631

Looking at shut eyelids when you love the eyes beneath, is more or less a teazing mystery that draws down your mouth to kiss them. Their lashes seem to answer you in some way with infantine provocation; and fine eyelashes upon a face bent sideways, suggest a kind of internal smiling. Giacinta looked till she could bear it no longer; she kissed the cheek, and crooned over it, gladdened by a sense of jealous possession when she thought of the adored thing her mistress had been overnight. One of her hugs awoke Vittoria, who said, 'Shut my window, mother,' and slept again fast. Giacinta saw that they were nearer to the mountains. Mountain-shadows were thrown out, and long lank shadows of cypresses that climbed up reddish-yellow undulations, told of the sun coming. The sun threw a blaze of light into the carriage. He shone like a good friend, and helped Giacinta think, as she had already been disposed to imagine, that the machinery by which they had been caught out of Milan was amicable magic after all, and not to be screamed at. The sound medicine of sleep and sunlight was restoring livelier colour to her mistress. Giacinta hushed her now, but Vittoria's eyes opened, and settled on her, full of repose.

'What are you thinking about?' she asked.

'Signorina, my own, I was thinking whether those people I see on the hill-sides are as fond of coffee as I am.'

Vittoria sat up and tumbled questions out headlong, pressing her eyes and gathering her senses; she shook with a few convulsions, but shed no tears. It was rather the discomfort of their position than any vestige of alarm which prompted Giacinta to project her head and interrogate the coachman and chasseur. She drew back, saying, 'Holy Virgin! they are Germans. We are to stop in half-an-hour.' With that she put her hands to use in arranging and smoothing Vittoria's hair and dress—the dress of Camilla—of which triumphant heroine Vittoria felt herself an odd little ghost now. She changed her seat that she might look back on Milan. A letter was spied fastened with a pin to one of the cushions. She opened it, and read in pencil writing:

'Go quietly. You have done all that you could do for good or for ill. The carriage will take you to a safe place, where you will soon see your friends and hear the news. Wait till you reach Meran. You will see a friend from England. Avoid the lion's jaw a second time. Here you compromise everybody. Submit, or your friends will take you for a mad girl. Be satisfied. It is an Austrian who rescues you. Think yourself no longer appointed to put match to powder. Drown yourself if a second frenzy comes. I feel I could still love your body if the obstinate soul were out of it. You know who it is that writes. I might sign "Michiella" to this: I have a sympathy with her anger at the provoking Camilla. Addio! From La Scala.'

Page 1632

The lines read as if Laura were uttering them. Wrapping her cloak across the silken opera garb, Vittoria leaned back passively until the carriage stopped at a village inn, where Giacinta made speedy arrangements to satisfy as far as possible her mistress's queer predilection for bathing her whole person daily in cold water. The household service of the inn recovered from the effort to assist her sufficiently to produce hot coffee and sweet bread, and new green-streaked stracchino, the cheese of the district, which was the morning meal of the fugitives. Giacinta, who had never been so thirsty in her life, became intemperately refreshed, and was seized by the fatal desire to do something: to do what she could not tell; but chancing to see that her mistress had silken slippers on her feet, she protested loudly that stouter foot-gear should be obtained for her, and ran out to circulate inquiries concerning a shoemaker who might have a pair of country overshoes for sale. She returned to say that the coachman and his comrade, the German chasseur, were drinking and watering their horses, and were not going to start until after a rest of two hours, and that she proposed to walk to a small Bergamasc town within a couple of miles of the village, where the shoes could be obtained, and perhaps a stuff to replace the silken dress. Receiving consent, Giacinta whispered, 'A man outside wishes to speak to you, signorina. Don't be frightened. He pounced on me at the end of the village, and had as little breath to speak as a boy in love. He was behind us all last night on the carriage. He mentioned you by name. He is quite commonly dressed, but he's a gallant gentleman, and exactly like our Signor Carlo. My dearest lady, he'll be company for you while I am absent. May I beckon him to come into the room?'

Vittoria supposed at once that this was a smoothing of the way for the entrance of her lover and her joy. She stood up, letting all her strength go that he might the more justly take her and cherish her. But it was not Carlo who entered. So dead fell her broken hope that her face was repellent with the effort she made to support herself. He said, 'I address the Signorina Vittoria. I am a relative of Countess Ammiani. My name is Angelo Guidascarpi. Last night I was evading the sbirri in this disguise by the private door of La Scala, from which I expected Carlo to come forth. I saw him seized in mistake for me. I jumped up on the empty box-seat behind your carriage. Before we entered the village I let myself down. If I am seen and recognized, I am lost, and great evil will befall Countess Ammiani and her son; but if they are unable to confront Carlo and me, my escape ensures his safety!

'What can I do?' said Vittoria.

He replied, 'Shall I answer you by telling you what I have done?'

'You need not, signore!

'Enough that I want to keep a sword fresh for my country. I am at your mercy, signorina; and I am without anxiety. I heard the chasseur saying at the door of La Scala that he had the night-pass for the city gates and orders for the Tyrol. Once in Tyrol I leap into

Switzerland. I should have remained in Milan, but nothing will be done there yet, and quiet cities are not homes for me.’

Page 1633

Vittoria began to admit the existence of his likeness to her lover, though it seemed to her a guilty weakness that she should see it.

‘Will nothing be done in Milan?’ was her first eager question.

‘Nothing, signorina, or I should be there, and safe!’

‘What, signore, do you require me to help you in?’

‘Say that I am your servant.’

‘And take you with me?’

‘Such is my petition.’

‘Is the case very urgent?’

’Hardly more, as regards myself, than a sword lost to Italy if I am discovered. But, signorina, from what Countess Ammiani has told me, I believe that you will some day be my relative likewise. Therefore I appeal not only to a charitable lady, but to one of my own family.’

Vittoria reddened. ‘All that I can do I will do.’

Angelo had to assure her that Carlo’s release was certain the moment his identity was established. She breathed gladly, saying, ’I wonder at it all very much. I do not know where they are carrying me, but I think I am in friendly hands. I owe you a duty. You will permit me to call you Beppo till our journey ends.’

They were attracted to the windows by a noise of a horseman drawing rein under it, whose imperious shout for the innkeeper betrayed the soldier’s habit of exacting prompt obedience from civilians, though there was no military character in his attire. The innkeeper and his wife came out to the summons, and then both made way for the chasseur in attendance on Vittoria. With this man the cavalier conversed.

‘Have you had food?’ said Vittoria. ’I have some money that will serve for both of us three days. Go, and eat and drink. Pay for us both.’

She gave him her purse. He received it with a grave servitorial bow, and retired.

Soon after the chasseur brought up a message. Herr Johannes requested that he might have the honour of presenting his homage to her: it was imperative that he should see her. She nodded. Her first glance at Herr Johannes assured her of his being one of the officers whom she had seen on the stage last night, and she prepared to act her part. Herr Johannes desired her to recall to mind his introduction to her by

the Signor Antonio-Pericles at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci. 'It is true; pardon me,' said Vittoria.

He informed her that she had surpassed herself at the opera; so much so that he and many other Germans had been completely conquered by her. Hearing, he said, that she was to be pursued, he took horse and galloped all night on the road toward Schloss Sonnenberg, whither, as it had been whispered to him, she was flying, in order to counsel her to lie 'perdu' for a short space, and subsequently to conduct her to the schloss of the amiable duchess. Vittoria thanked him, but stated humbly that she preferred to travel alone. He declared that it was impossible: that she was precious to the world of Art, and must

Page 1634

on no account be allowed to run into peril. Vittoria tried to assert her will; she found it unstrung. She thought besides that this disguised officer, with the ill-looking eyes running into one, might easily, since he had heard her, be a devotee of her voice; and it flattered her yet more to imagine him as a capture from the enemy—a vanquished subservient Austrian. She had seen him come on horseback; he had evidently followed her; and he knew what she now understood must be her destination.

Moreover, Laura had underlined ‘it is an Austrian who rescues you.’ This man perchance was the Austrian. His precise manner of speech demanded an extreme repugnance, if it was to be resisted; Vittoria’s reliance upon her own natural fortitude was much too secure for her to encourage the physical revulsions which certain hard faces of men create in the hearts of young women.

‘Was all quiet in Milan?’ she asked.

‘Quiet as a pillow,’ he said.

‘And will continue to be?’

‘Not a doubt of it.’

‘Why is there not a doubt of it, signore?’

’You beat us Germans on one field. On the other you have no chance. But you must lose no time. The Croats are on your track. I have ordered out the carriage.’

The mention of the Croats struck her fugitive senses with a panic.

‘I must wait for my maid,’ she said, attempting to deliberate.

‘Ha! you have a maid: of course you have! Where is your maid?’

‘She ought to have returned by this time. If not, she is on the road.’

’On the road? Good; we will pick up the maid on the road. We have not a minute to spare. Lady, I am your obsequious servant. Hasten out, I beg of you. I was taught at my school that minutes are not to be wasted. Those Croats have been drinking and what not on the way, or they would have been here before this. You can’t rely on Italian innkeepers to conceal you.’

‘Signore, are you a man of honour?’

‘Illustrious lady, I am.’

She listened simply to the response without giving heed to the prodigality of gesture. The necessity for flight now that Milan was announced as lying quiet, had become her sole thought. Angelo was standing by the carriage.

‘What man is this?’ said Herr Johannes, frowning.

‘He is my servant,’ said Vittoria.

’My dear good lady, you told me your servant was a maid. This will never do. We can’t have him.’

‘Excuse me, signore, I never travel without him.’

’Travel! This is not a case of travelling, but running; and when you run, if you are in earnest about it, you must fling away your baggage and arms.’

Herr Johannes tossed out his moustache to right and left, and stamped his foot. He insisted that the man should be left behind.

‘Off, sir! back to Milan, or elsewhere,’ he cried.

‘Beppo, mount on the box,’ said Vittoria.

Page 1635

Her command was instantly obeyed. Herr Johannes looked her in the face. ‘You are very decided, my dear lady.’ He seemed to have lost his own decision, but handing Vittoria in, he drew a long cigar from his breastpocket, lit it, and mounted beside the coachman. The chasseur had disappeared.

Vittoria entreated that a general look-out should be kept for Giacinta. The road was straight up an ascent, and she had no fear that her maid would not be seen. Presently there was a view of the violet domes of a city. ‘Is it Bergamo?—is it Brescia?’ she longed to ask, thinking of her Bergamasc and Brescian friends, and of those two places famous for the bravery of their sons: one being especially dear to her, as the birthplace of a genius of melody, whose blood was in her veins. ’Did he look on these mulberry trees?—did he look on these green-grassed valleys?—did he hear these falling waters?’ she asked herself, and closed her spirit with reverential thoughts of him and with his music. She saw sadly that they were turning from the city. A little ball of paper was shot into her lap. She opened it and read: ’An officer of the cavalry.—Beppo.’ She put her hand out of the window to signify that she was awake to the situation. Her anxiety, however, began to fret. No sight of Giacinta was to be had in any direction. Her mistress commenced chiding the absent garrulous creature, and did so until she pitied her, when she accused herself of cowardice, for she was incapable of calling out to the coachman to stop. The rapid motion subdued such energy as remained to her, and she willingly allowed her hurried feelings to rest on the faces of rocks impending over long ravines, and of perched old castles and white villas and sub-Alpine herds. She burst from the fascination as from a dream, but only to fall into it again, reproaching her weakness, and saying, ‘What a thing am I!’ When she did make her voice heard by Herr Johannes and the coachman, she was nervous and ashamed, and met the equivocating pacification of the reply with an assent half-way, though she was far from comprehending the consolation she supposed that it was meant to convey. She put out her hand to communicate with Beppo. Another ball of pencilled writing answered to it. She read: ’Keep watch on this Austrian. Your maid is two hours in the rear. Refuse to be separated from me. My life is at your service.—Beppo.’

Vittoria made her final effort to get a resolve of some sort; ending it with a compassionate exclamation over poor Giacinta. The girl could soon find her way back to Milan. On the other hand, the farther from Milan, the less the danger to Carlo’s relative, in whom she now perceived a stronger likeness to her lover. She sank back in the carriage and closed her eyes. Though she smiled at the vanity of forcing sleep in this way, sleep came. Her healthy frame seized its natural medicine to rebuild her after the fever of recent days.

Page 1636

She slept till the rocks were purple, and rose-purple mists were in the valleys. The stopping of the carriage aroused her. They were at the threshold of a large wayside hostelry, fronting a slope of forest and a plunging brook. Whitecoats in all attitudes leaned about the door; she beheld the inner court full of them. Herr Johannes was ready to hand her to the ground. He said: 'You have nothing to fear. These fellows are on the march to Cremona. Perhaps it will be better if you are served up in your chamber. You will be called early in the morning.'

She thanked him, and felt grateful. 'Beppo, look to yourself,' she said, and ran to her retirement.

'I fancy that 's about all that you are fit for,' Herr Johannes remarked, with his eyes on the impersonator of Beppo, who bore the scrutiny carelessly, and after seeing that Vittoria had left nothing on the carriage-seats, directed his steps to the kitchen, as became his functions. Herr Johannes beckoned to a Tyrolese maid-servant, of whom Beppo had asked his way. She gave her name as Katchen.

'Katchen, Katchen, my sweet chuck,' said Herr Johannes, 'here are ten florins for you, in silver, if you will get me the handkerchief of that man: you have just stretched your finger out for him.'

According to the common Austrian reckoning of them, Herr Johannes had adopted the right method for ensuring the devotion of the maidens of Tyrol. She responded with an amazed gulp of her mouth and a grimace of acquiescence. Ten florins in silver shortened the migratory term of the mountain girl by full three months. Herr Johannes asked her the hour when the officers in command had supper, and deferred his own meal till that time. Katchen set about earning her money. With any common Beppo it would have been easy enough—simple barter for a harmless kiss. But this Beppo appeared inaccessible; he was so courtly and so reserved; nor is a maiden of Tyrol a particularly skilled seductress. The supper of the officers was smoking on the table when Herr Johannes presented himself among them, and very soon the inn was shaken with an uproar of greeting. Katchen found Beppo listening at the door of the salle. She clapped her hands upon him to drag him away.

'What right have you to be leaning your head there?' she said, and threatened to make his proceedings known. Beppo had no jewel to give, little money to spare. He had just heard Herr Johannes welcomed among the officers by a name that half paralyzed him. 'You shall have anything you ask of me if you will find me out in a couple of hours,' he said. Katchen nodded truce for that period, and saw her home in the Oberinnthal still nearer—twelve mountain goats and a cow her undisputed property. She found him out, though he had strayed through the court of the inn, and down a hanging garden to the borders of a torrent that drenched the air and sounded awfully in the dark ravine below. He embraced her very mildly. 'One scream and you go,' he said; she felt the saving hold of her feet plucked from her, with all the sinking horror, and bit her under lip, as if

keeping in the scream with bare stitches. When he released her she was perfectly mastered. ‘You do play tricks,’ she said, and quaked.

Page 1637

‘I play no tricks. Tell me at what hour these soldiers march.’

‘At two in the morning.’

’Don’t be afraid, silly child: you’re safe if you obey me. At what time has our carriage been ordered?’

‘At four.’

’Now swear to do this:—rouse my mistress at a quarter past two: bring her down to me.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Kitchen, eagerly: ’give me your handkerchief, and she will follow me. I do swear; that I do; by big St. Christopher! who’s painted on the walls of our house at home.’

Beppo handed her sweet silver, which played a lively tune for her temporarily—vanished cow and goats. Peering at her features in the starlight, he let her take the handkerchief from his pocket.

‘Oh! what have you got in there?’ she said.

He laid his finger across her mouth, bidding her return to the house.

‘Dear heaven!’ Katchen went in murmuring; ’would I have gone out to that soft-looking young man if I had known he was a devil.’

Angelo Guidascarpi was aware that an officer without responsibility never sleeps faster than when his brothers-in-arms have to be obedient to the reveillee. At two in the morning the bugle rang out: many lighted cigars were flashing among the dark passages of the inn; the whitecoats were disposed in marching order; hot coffee was hastily swallowed; the last stragglers from the stables, the outhouses, the court, and the straw beds under roofs of rock, had gathered to the main body. The march set forward. A pair of officers sent a shout up to the drowsy windows, ’Good luck to you, Weisspriess!’ Angelo descended from the concealment of the opposite trees, where he had stationed himself to watch the departure. The inn was like a sleeper who has turned over. He made Katchen bring him bread and slices of meat and a flask of wine, which things found a place in his pockets: and paying for his mistress and himself, he awaited Vittoria’s foot on the stairs. When Vittoria came she asked no questions, but said to Katchen, ‘You may kiss me’; and Kitchen began crying; she believed that they were lovers daring everything for love.

’You have a clear start of an hour and a half. Leave the high-road then, and turn left through the forest and ask for Bormio. If you reach Tyrol, and come to Silz, tell people that you know Katchen Giesslinger, and they will be kind to you.’

So saying, she let them out into the black-eyed starlight.

CHAPTER XXIV

ADVENTURES OF VITTORIA AND ANGELO

Page 1638

Nothing was distinguishable for the flying couple save the high-road winding under rock and forest, and here and there a coursing water in the depths of the ravines, that showed like a vein in black marble. They walked swiftly, keeping brisk ears for sound of hoof or foot behind them. Angelo promised her that she should rest after the morning light had come; but she assured him that she could bear fatigue, and her firm cheerfulness lent his heart vigour. At times they were hooded with the darkness, which came on them as if, as benighted children fancy, their faces were about to meet the shaggy breast of the forest. Rising up to lighter air, they had sight of distant twinklings: it might be city, or autumn weed, or fires of the woodmen, or beacon fires: they glimmered like eyelets to the mystery of the vast unseen land. Innumerable brooks went talking to the night: torrents in seasons of rain, childish voices now, with endless involutions of a song of three notes and a sort of unnoted clanging chorus, as if a little one sang and would sing on through the thumping of a tambourine and bells. Vittoria had these fancies: Angelo had none. He walked like a hunted man whose life is at stake.

‘If we reach a village soon we may get some conveyance,’ he said.

‘I would rather walk than drive,’ said Vittoria; ’it keeps me from thinking!

’There is the dawn, signorina!

Vittoria frightened him by taking a seat upon a bench of rock; while it was still dark about them, she drew off Camilla’s silken shoes and stockings, and stood on bare feet.

‘You fancied I was tired,’ she said. ’No, I am thrifty; and I want to save as much of my finery as I can. I can go very well on naked feet. These shoes are no protection; they would be worn out in half-a-day, and spoilt for decent wearing in another hour.’

The sight of fair feet upon hard earth troubled Angelo; he excused himself for calling her out to endure hardship; but she said, ’I trust you entirely.’ She looked up at the first thin wave of colour while walking.

‘You do not know me,’ said he.

‘You are the Countess Ammiani’s nephew.’

’I have, as I had the honour to tell you yesterday, the blood of your lover in my veins.’

‘Do not speak of him now, I pray,’ said Vittoria; ’I want my strength!

’Signorina, the man we have left behind us is his enemy;—mine. I would rather see you dead than alive in his hands. Do you fear death?’

‘Sometimes; when I am half awake,’ she confessed. ’I dislike thinking of it.’

He asked her curiously: ‘Have you never seen it?’

‘Death?’ said she, and changed a shudder to a smile; ‘I died last night.’

Angelo smiled with her. ’I saw you die!

‘It seems a hundred years ago.’

‘Or half-a-dozen minutes. The heart counts everything’

‘Was I very much liked by the people, Signor Angelo?’

Page 1639

‘They love you.’

‘I have done them no good.’

‘Every possible good. And now, mine is the duty to protect you.’

’And yesterday we were strangers! Signor Angelo, you spoke of sbirri. There is no rising in Bologna. Why are they after you? You look too gentle to give them cause.’

’Do I look gentle? But what I carry is no burden. Who that saw you last night would know you for Camilla? You will hear of my deeds, and judge. We shall soon have men upon the road; you must be hidden. See, there: there are our colours in the sky. Austria cannot wipe them out. Since I was a boy I have always slept in a bed facing East, to keep that truth before my eyes. Black and yellow drop to the earth: green, white, and red mount to heaven. If more of my countrymen saw these meanings!—but they are learning to. My tutor called them Germanisms. If so, I have stolen a jewel from my enemy.’

Vittoria mentioned the Chief.

‘Yes,’ said Angelo; ’he has taught us to read God’s handwriting. I revere him. It’s odd; I always fancy I hear his voice from a dungeon, and seeing him looking at one light. He has a fault: he does not comprehend the feelings of a nobleman. Do you think he has made a convert of our Carlo in that? Never! High blood is ineradicable.’

‘I am not of high blood,’ said Vittoria.

’Countess Ammiani overlooks it. And besides, low blood may be elevated without the intervention of a miracle. You have a noble heart, signorina. It may be the will of God that you should perpetuate our race. All of us save Carlo Ammiani seem to be falling.’

Vittoria bent her head, distressed by a broad beam of sunlight. The country undulating to the plain lay under them, the great Alps above, and much covert on all sides. They entered a forest pathway, following chance for safety. The dark leafage and low green roofing tasted sweeter to their senses than clear air and sky. Dark woods are home to fugitives, and here there was soft footing, a surrounding gentleness,—grass, and moss with dead leaves peacefully flat on it. The birds were not timorous, and when a lizard or a snake slipped away from her feet, it was amusing to Vittoria and did not hurt her tenderness to see that they were feared. Threading on beneath the trees, they wound by a valley’s incline, where tumbled stones blocked the course of a green water, and filled the lonely place with one onward voice. When the sun stood over the valley they sat beneath a chestnut tree in a semicircle of orange rock to eat the food which Angelo had procured at the inn. He poured out wine for her in the hollow of a stone, deep as an egg-shell, whereat she sipped, smiling at simple contrivances; but no smile crossed the

face of Angelo. He ate and drank to sustain his strength, as a weapon is sharpened; and having done, he gathered up what was left, and lay at her feet with his eyes fixed upon an old grey stone. She, too, sat brooding.

Page 1640

The endless babble and noise of the water had hardened the sense of its being a life in that solitude. The floating of a hawk overhead scarce had the character of an animated thing. Angelo turned round to look at her, and looking upward as he lay, his sight was smitten by spots of blood upon one of her torn white feet, that was but half-nestled in the folds of her dress. Bending his head down, like a bird beaking at prey, he kissed the foot passionately. Vittoria's eyelids ran up; a chord seemed to snap within her ears: she stole the shamed foot into concealment, and throbbed, but not fearfully, for Angelo's forehead was on the earth. Clumps of grass, and sharp flint-dust stuck between his fists, which were thrust out stiff on either side of him. She heard him groan heavily. When he raised his face, it was white as madness. Her womanly nature did not shrink from caressing it with a touch of soothing hands.

She chanced to say, 'I am your sister.'

'No, by God! you are not my sister,' cried the young man. 'She died without a stain of blood; a lily from head to foot, and went into the vault so. Our mother will see that. She will kiss the girl in heaven and see that.' He rose, crying louder: 'Are there echoes here?' But his voice beat against the rocks undoubted.

She saw that a frenzy had seized him. He looked with eyes drained of human objects; standing square, with stiff half-dropped arms, and an intense melody of wretchedness in his voice.

'Rinaldo, Rinaldo!' he shouted: 'Clelia!—no answer from man or ghost. She is dead. We two said to her die! and she died. Therefore she is silent, for the dead have not a word. Oh! Milan, Milan! accursed betraying city! I should have found my work in you if you had kept faith. Now here am I, talking to the strangled throat of this place, and can get no answer. Where am I? The world is hollow: the miserable shell! They lied. Battle and slaughter they promised me, and enemies like ripe maize for the reaping-hook. I would have had them in thick to my hands. I would have washed my hands at night, and eaten and drunk and slept, and sung again to work in the morning. They promised me a sword and a sea to plunge it in, and our mother Italy to bless me. I would have toiled: I would have done good in my life. I would have bathed my soul in our colours. I would have had our flag about my body for a winding-sheet, and the fighting angels of God to unroll me. Now here am I, and my own pale mother trying at every turn to get in front of me. Have her away! It's a ghost, I know. She will be touching the strength out of me. She is not the mother I love and I serve. Go: cherish your daughter, you dead woman!'

Angelo reeled. 'A spot of blood has sent me mad,' he said, and caught for a darkness to cross his sight, and fell and lay flat.

Vittoria looked around her; her courage was needed in that long silence.

She adopted his language: ’Our mother Italy is waiting for us. We must travel on, and not be weary. Angelo, my friend, lend me your help over these stones.’

Page 1641

He rose quietly. She laid her elbow on his hand; thus supported she left a place that seemed to shudder. All the heavy day they walked almost silently; she not daring to probe his anguish with a question; and he calm and vacant as the hour following thunder. But, of her safety by his side she had no longer a doubt. She let him gather weeds and grasses, and bind them across her feet, and perform friendly services, sure that nothing earthly could cause such a mental tempest to recur. The considerate observation which at all seasons belongs to true courage told her that it was not madness afflicting Angelo.

Near nightfall they came upon a forester's hut, where they were welcomed by an old man and a little girl, who gave them milk and black bread, and straw to rest on. Angelo slept in the outer air. When Vittoria awoke she had the fancy that she had taken one long dive downward in a well; and on touching the bottom found her head above the surface. While her surprise was wearing off, she beheld the woodman's little girl at her feet holding up one end of her cloak, and peeping underneath, overcome by amazement at the flashing richness of the dress of the heroine Camilla. Entering into the state of her mind spontaneously, Vittoria sought to induce the child to kiss her; but quite vainly. The child's reverence for the dress allowed her only to be within reach of the hem of it, so as to delight her curiosity. Vittoria smiled when, as she sat up, the child fell back against the wall; and as she rose to her feet, the child scampered from the room. 'My poor Camilla! you can charm somebody, yet,' she said, limping; her visage like a broken water with the pain of her feet. 'If the bell rings for Camilla now, what sort of an entry will she make?' Vittoria treated her physical weakness and ailments with this spirit of humour. 'They may say that Michiella has bewitched you, my Camilla. I think your voice would sound as if it were dragging its feet after it just as a stork flies. O my Camilla! don't I wish I could do the same, and be ungraceful and at ease! A moan is married to every note of your treble, my Camilla, like December and May. Keep me from shrieking!'

The pangs shooting from her feet were scarce bearable, but the repression of them helped her to meet Angelo with a freer mind than, after the interval of separation, she would have had. The old woodman was cooking a queer composition of flour and milk sprinkled with salt for them. Angelo cut a stout cloth to encase each of her feet, and bound them in it. He was more cheerful than she had ever seen him, and now first spoke of their destination. His design was to conduct her near to Bormio, there to engage a couple of men in her service who would accompany her to Meran, by the Val di Sole, while he crossed the Stelvio alone, and turning leftward in the Tyrolese valley, tried the passage into Switzerland.

Bormio, if, when they quitted the forest, a conveyance could be obtained, was no more than a short day's distance, according to the old woodman's directions. Vittoria induced the little girl to sit upon her knee, and sang to her, but greatly unspirited the charm of her dress. The sun was rising as they bade adieu to the hut.

Page 1642

About mid-day they quitted the shelter of forest trees and stood on broken ground, without a path to guide them. Vittoria did her best to laugh at her mishaps in walking, and compared herself to a Capuchin pilgrim; but she was unused to going bareheaded and shoeless, and though she held on bravely, the strong beams of the sun and the stony ways warped her strength. She had to check fancies drawn from Arabian tales, concerning the help sometimes given by genii of the air and enchanted birds, that were so incessant and vivid that she found herself sulking at the loneliness and helplessness of the visible sky, and feared that her brain was losing its hold of things. Angelo led her to a half-shaded hollow, where they finished the remainder of yesterday's meat and wine. She set her eyes upon a gold-green lizard by a stone and slept.

'The quantity of sleep I require is unmeasured,' she said, a minute afterwards, according to her reckoning of time, and expected to see the lizard still by the stone. Angelo was near her; the sky was full of colours, and the earth of shadows.

'Another day gone!' she exclaimed in wonderment, thinking that the days of human creatures had grown to be as rapid and (save toward the one end) as meaningless as the gaspings of a fish on dry land. He told her that he had explored the country as far as he had dared to stray from her. He had seen no habitation along the heights. The vale was too distant for strangers to reach it before nightfall. 'We can make a little way on,' said Vittoria, and the trouble of walking began again. He entreated her more than once to have no fear. 'What can I fear?' she asked. His voice sank penitently: 'You can rely on me fully when there is anything to do for you.'

'I am sure of that,' she replied, knowing his allusion to be to his frenzy of yesterday. In truth, no woman could have had a gentler companion.

On the topmost ridge of the heights, looking over an interminable gulf of darkness they saw the lights of the vale. 'A bird might find his perch there, but I think there is no chance for us,' said Vittoria. 'The moment we move forward to them the lights will fly back. It is their way of behaving.'

Angelo glanced round desperately. Farther on along the ridge his eye caught sight of a low smouldering fire. When he reached it he had a great disappointment. A fire in the darkness gives hopes that men will be at hand. Here there was not any human society. The fire crouched on its ashes. It was on a little circular eminence of mossed rock; black sticks, and brushwood, and dry fern, and split logs, pitchy to the touch, lay about; in the centre of them the fire coiled sullenly among its ashes, with a long eye like a serpent's.

'Could you sleep here?' said Angelo.

'Anywhere!' Vittoria sighed with droll dolefulness.

‘I can promise to keep you warm, signorina.’

‘I will not ask for more till to-morrow, my friend.’

Page 1643

She laid herself down sideways, curling up her feet, with her cheek on the palm of her hand.

Angelo knelt and coaxed the fire, whose appetite, like that which is said to be ours, was fed by eating, for after the red jaws had taken half-a-dozen sticks, it sang out for more, and sent up flame leaping after flame and thick smoke. Vittoria watched the scene through a thin division of her eyelids; the fire, the black abyss of country, the stars, and the sentinel figure. She dozed on the edge of sleep, unable to yield herself to it wholly. She believed that she was dreaming when by-and-by many voices filled her ears. The fire was sounding like an angry sea, and the voices were like the shore, more intelligible, but confused in shriller clamour. She was awakened by Angelo, who knelt on one knee and took her outlying hand; then she saw that men surrounded them, some of whom were hurling the lighted logs about, some trampling down the outer rim of flames. They looked devilish to a first awakening glance. He told her that the men were friendly; they were good Italians. This had been the beacon arranged for the night of the Fifteenth, when no run of signals was seen from Milan; and yesterday afternoon it had been in mockery partially consumed. 'We have aroused the country, signorina, and brought these poor fellows out of their beds. They supposed that Milan must be up and at work. I have explained everything to them.'

Vittoria had rather to receive their excuses than to proffer her own. They were mostly youths dressed like the better class of peasantry. They laughed at the incident, stating how glad they would have been to behold the heights all across the lakes ablaze and promising action for the morrow. One square-shouldered fellow raised her lightly from the ground. She felt herself to be a creature for whom circumstance was busily plotting, so that it was useless to exert her mind in thought. The long procession sank down the darkness, leaving the low red fire to die out behind them.

Next morning she awoke in a warm bed, possessed by odd images of flames that stood up like crowing cocks, and cowered like hens above the brood. She was in the house of one of their new friends, and she could hear Angelo talking in the adjoining room. A conveyance was ready to take her on to Bormio. A woman came to her to tell her this, appearing to have a dull desire to get her gone. She was a draggled woman, with a face of slothful anguish, like one of the inner spectres of a guilty man. She said that her husband was willing to drive the lady to Bormio for a sum that was to be paid at once into his wife's hand; and little enough it was which poor persons could ever look for from your patriots and disturbers who seduced orderly men from their labour, and made widows and ruined households. This was a new Italian language to Vittoria, and when the woman went on giving instances of households ruined by a husband's vile infatuation about his country, she did not attempt to defend the reckless lord, but dressed quickly that she might leave the house as soon as she could. Her stock of money barely satisfied the woman's demand. The woman seized it, and secreted it in her girdle. When they had passed into the sitting-room, her husband, who was sitting conversing with Angelo, stretched out his hand and knocked the girdle.

Page 1644

‘That’s our trick,’ he said. ’I guessed so. Fund up, our little Maria of the dirty fingers’-ends! We accept no money from true patriots. Grub in other ground, my dear!’

The woman stretched her throat awry, and set up a howl like a dog; but her claws came out when he seized her.

‘Would you disgrace me, old fowl?’

‘Lorenzo, may you rot like a pumpkin!’

The connubial reciprocities were sharp until the money lay on the table, when the woman began whining so miserably that Vittoria’s sensitive nerves danced on her face, and at her authoritative interposition, Lorenzo very reluctantly permitted his wife to take what he chose to reckon a fair portion of the money, and also of his contempt. She seemed to be licking the money up, she bent over it so greedily.

‘Poor wretch!’ he observed; ‘she was born on a hired bed.’

Vittoria felt that the recollection of this woman would haunt her. It was inconceivable to her that a handsome young man like Lorenzo should ever have wedded the unsweet creature, who was like a crawling image of decay; but he, as if to account for his taste, said that they had been of a common age once, when he married her; now she had grown old. He repeated that she ‘was born on a hired bed.’ They saw nothing further of her.

Vittoria’s desire was to get to Meran speedily, that she might see her friends, and have tidings of her lover and the city. Those baffled beacon-flames on the heights had become an irritating indicative vision: she thirsted for the history. Lorenzo offered to conduct her over the Tonale Pass into the Val di Sole, or up the Val Furva, by the pass of the Corno dei Tre Signori, into the Val del Monte to Pejo, thence by Cles, or by Bolzano, to Meran. But she required shoeing and refitting; and for other reasons also, she determined to go on to Bormio. She supposed that Angelo had little money, and that in a place such as Bormio sounded to her ears she might possibly obtain the change for the great money-order which the triumph of her singing had won from Antonio-Pericles. In spite of Angelo’s appeals to her to hurry on to the end of her journey without tempting chance by a single pause, she resolved to go to Bormio. Lorenzo privately assured her that there were bankers in Bormio. Many bankers, he said, came there from Milan, and that fact she thought sufficient for her purpose. The wanderers parted regretfully. A little chapel, on a hillock off the road, shaded by chestnuts, was pointed out to Lorenzo where to bring a letter for Angelo. Vittoria begged Angelo to wait till he heard from her; and then, with mutual wavings of hands, she was driven out of his sight.

CHAPTER XXV

ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

After parting from Vittoria, Angelo made his way to an inn, where he ate and drank like a man of the fields, and slept with the power of one from noon till after morning. The innkeeper came up to his room, and, finding him awake, asked him if he was disposed to take a second holiday in bed. Angelo jumped up; as he did so, his stiletto slipped from under his pillow and flashed.

Page 1645

‘That’s a pretty bit of steel,’ said the innkeeper, but could not get a word out of him. It was plain to Angelo that this fellow had suspicions. Angelo had been careful to tie up his clothes in a bundle; there was nothing for the innkeeper to see, save a young man in bed, who had a terrible weapon near his hand, and a look in his eyes of wary indolence that counselled prudent dealings. He went out, and returned a second and a third time, talking more and more confusedly and fretfully; but as he was again going to leave, ‘No, no,’ said Angelo, determined to give him a lesson, ’I have taken a liking to your company. Here, come here; I will show you a trick. I learnt it from the Servians when I was three feet high. Look; I lie quite still, you observe. Try to get on the other side of that door and the point of this blade shall scratch you through it.’

Angelo laid the blue stilet up his wrist, and slightly curled his arm. ‘Try,’ he repeated, but the innkeeper had stopped short in his movement to the door. ‘Well, then, stay where you are,’ said Angelo, ’and look; I’ll be as good as my word. There’s the point I shall strike.’ With that he gave the peculiar Servian jerk of the muscles, from the wrist up to the arm, and the blade quivered on the mark. The innkeeper fell back in admiring horror. ‘Now fetch it to me,’ said Angelo, putting both hands carelessly under his head. The innkeeper tugged at the blade. ‘Illustrious signore, I am afraid of breaking it,’ he almost whimpered; ‘it seems alive, does it not?’

‘Like a hawk on a small bird,’ said Angelo; ’that’s the beauty of those blades. They kill, and put you to as little pain as a shot; and it ’s better than a shot in your breast—there’s something to show for it. Send up your wife or your daughter to take orders about my breakfast. It ’s the breakfast of five mountaineers; and don’t “Illustrious signore” me, sir, either in my hearing or out of it. Leave the knife sticking.’

The innkeeper sidled out with a dumb salute. ’I can count on his discretion for a couple of hours,’ Angelo said to himself. He knew the effect of an exhibition of physical dexterity and strength upon a coward. The landlord’s daughter came and received his orders for breakfast. Angelo inquired whether they had been visited by Germans of late. The girl told him that a German chasseur with a couple of soldiers had called them up last night.

‘Wouldn’t it have been a pity if they had dragged me out and shot me?’ said Angelo.

‘But they were after a lady,’ she explained; ’they have gone on to Bormio, and expect to catch her there or in the mountains.’

‘Better there than in the mountains, my dear; don’t you think so?’

The girl said that she would not like to meet those fellows among the mountains.

’Suppose you were among the mountains, and those fellows came up with you; wouldn’t you clap your hands to see me jumping down right in front of you all?’ said Angelo.

Page 1646

‘Yes, I should,’ she admitted. ‘What is one man, though!’

‘Something, if he feeds like five. Quick! I must eat. Have you a lover?’

‘Yes.’

‘Fancy you are waiting on him.’

’He’s only a middling lover, signore. He lives at Cles, over Val Pejo, in Val di Non, a long way, and courts me twice a year, when he comes over to do carpentering. He cuts very pretty Madonnas. He is a German.’

‘Ha! you kneel to the Madonna, and give your lips to a German? Go.’

’But I don’t like him much, signore; it’s my father who wishes me to have him; he can make money.’

Angelo motioned to her to be gone, saying to himself, ’That father of hers would betray the Saints for a handful of florins.’

He dressed, and wrenched his knife from the door. Hearing the clatter of a horse at the porch, he stopped as he was descending the stairs. A German voice said, ’Sure enough, my jolly landlord, she’s there, in Worms—your Bormio. Found her at the big hotel: spoke not a syllable; stole away, stole away. One chopin of wine! I’m off on four legs to the captain. Those lads who are after her by Roveredo and Trent have bad noses. “Poor nose—empty belly.” Says the captain, “I stick at the point of the cross-roads.” Says I, “Herr Captain, I’m back to you first of the lot.” My business is to find the runaway lady-pretty Fraulein! pretty Fraulein! lai-ai! There’s money on her servant, too; he’s a disguised Excellency—a handsome boy; but he has cut himself loose, and he go hang. Two birds for the pride of the thing; one for satisfaction—I ’m satisfied. I’ve killed chamois in my time. Jacob, I am; Baumwalder, I am; Feckelwitz, likewise; and the very devil for following a track. Ach! the wine is good. You know the song?

“He who drinks wine, he may cry with a will,
Fortune is mine, may she stick to me still.”

I give it you in German—the language of song! my own, my native ‘lai-ai-lai-ai-la-la-lai-ai-i-ie!’

“While stars still sit
On mountain tops,
I take my gun,
Kiss little one
On mother’s breast.
Ai-iu-e!

“My pipe is lit,
I climb the slopes,
I meet the dawn
A little one
On mother’s breast.
Ai-aie: ta-ta-tai: iu-iu-iu-e!”

Another chopin, my jolly landlord. What’s that you’re mumbling? About the servant of my runaway young lady? He go hang! What——?’

Angelo struck his foot heavily on the stairs; the innkeeper coughed and ran back, bowing to his guest. The chasseur cried, ’I ’ll drink farther on-wine between gaps!’ A coin chinked on the steps in accompaniment to the chasseur’s departing gallop. ‘Beast of a Tedesco,’ the landlord exclaimed as he picked up the money; ’they do the reckoning —not we. If I had served him with the worth of this, I should have had the bottle at my head. What a country ours is! We’re ridden over, ridden over!’ Angelo compelled the landlord to sit with him while he ate like five mountaineers. He left mere bones on the table. ‘It’s wonderful,’ said the innkeeper; ‘you can’t know what fear is.’

Page 1647

‘I think I don’t,’ Angelo replied; ’you do; cowards have to serve every party in turn. Up, and follow at my heels till I dismiss you. You know the pass into the Val Pejo and the Val di Sole.’ The innkeeper stood entrenched behind a sturdy negative. Angelo eased him to submission by telling him that he only wanted the way to be pointed out. ’Bring tobacco; you’re going to have an idle day,’ said Angelo: ’I pay you when we separate.’ He was deaf to entreaties and refusals, and began to look mad about the eyes; his poor coward plied him with expostulations, offered his wife, his daughter, half the village, for the service: he had to follow, but would take no cigars. Angelo made his daughter fetch bread and cigars, and put a handful in his pocket, upon which, after two hours of inactivity at the foot of the little chapel, where Angelo waited for the coming of Vittoria’s messenger, the innkeeper was glad to close his fist. About noon Lorenzo came, and at once acted a play of eyes for Angelo to perceive his distrust of the man and a multitude of bad things about him he was reluctant, notwithstanding Angelo’s ready nod, to bring out a letter; and frowned again, for emphasis to the expressive comedy. The letter said:

’I have fallen upon English friends. They lend me money. Fly to Lugano by the help of these notes: I inclose them, and will not ask pardon for it. The Valtellina is dangerous; the Stelvio we know to be watched. Retrace your way, and then try the Engadine. I should stop on a breaking bridge if I thought my companion, my Carlo’s cousin, was near capture. I am well taken care of: one of my dearest friends, a captain in the English army, bears me company across. I have a maid from one of the villages, a willing girl. We ride up to the mountains; to-morrow we cross the pass; there is a glacier. Val di Non sounds Italian, but I am going into the enemy’s land. You see I am well guarded. My immediate anxiety concerns you; for what will our Carlo ask of me? Lose not one moment. Away, and do not detain Lorenzo. He has orders to meet us up high in the mountain this evening. He is the best of servants but I always meet the best everywhere—that is, in Italy. Leaving it, I grieve. No news from Milan, except of great confusion there. I judge by the quiet of my sleep that we have come to no harm there.

’Your faithfullest

‘*Vittoria*.’

Lorenzo and the innkeeper had arrived at an altercation before Angelo finished reading. Angelo checked it, and told Lorenzo to make speed: he sent no message.

‘My humanity,’ Angelo then addressed his craven associate, ’counsels me that it’s better to drag you some distance on than to kill you. You ’re a man of intelligence, and you know why I have to consider the matter. I give you guide’s pay up to the glacier, and ten florins buon’mano. Would you rather earn it with the blood of a countryman? I can’t let that tongue of yours be on the high-road of running Tedeschi: you know it.

Page 1648

‘Illustrious signore, obedience oils necessity,’ quoth the innkeeper. ’If we had but a few more of my cigars!’

‘Step on,’ said Angelo sternly.

They walked till dark and they were in keen air. A hut full of recent grass-cuttings, on the border of a sloping wood, sheltered them. The innkeeper moaned for food at night and in the morning, and Angelo tossed him pieces of bread. Beyond the wood they came upon bare crag and commenced a sharper ascent, reached the height, and roused an eagle. The great bird went up with a sharp yelp, hanging over them with knotted claws. Its shadow stretched across sweeps of fresh snow. The innkeeper sent a mocking yelp after the eagle.

‘Up here, one forgets one is a father—what’s more, a husband,’ he said, striking a finger on the side of his nose.

‘And a cur, a traitor, carrion,’ said Angelo.

’Ah, signore, one might know you were a noble. You can’t understand our troubles, who carry a house on our heads, and have to fill mouths agape.’

‘Speak when you have better to say,’ Angelo replied.

’Padrone, one would really like to have your good opinion; and I’m lean as a wolf for a morsel of flesh. I could part with my buon’mano for a sight of red meat—oh! red meat dripping.’

‘If,’ cried Angelo, bringing his eyebrows down black on the man, ’if I knew that you had ever in your life betrayed one of us look below; there you should lie to be pecked and gnawed at.’

’Ah, Jacopo Cruchi, what an end for you when you are full of good meanings!’ the innkeeper moaned. ‘I see your ribs, my poor soul!’

Angelo quitted him. The tremendous excitement of the Alpine solitudes was like a stringent wine to his surcharged spirit. He was one to whom life and death had become as the yes and no of ordinary men: not more than a turning to the right or to the left. It surprised him that this fellow, knowing his own cowardice and his conscience, should consent to live, and care to eat to live.

When he returned to his companion, he found the fellow drinking from the flask of an Austrian soldier. Another whitecoat was lying near. They pressed Angelo to drink, and began to play lubberly pranks. One clapped hands, while another rammed the flask at the reluctant mouth, till Angelo tripped him and made him a subject for derision; whereupon they were all good friends. Musket on shoulder, the soldiers descended,

blowing at their finger-nails and puffing at their tobacco—lauter kaiserlicher (rank Imperial), as with a sad enforcement of resignation they had, while lighting, characterized the universally detested Government issue of the leaf.

‘They are after her,’ said Jacopo, and he shot out his thumb and twisted an eyelid. His looks became insolent, and he added: ’I let them go on; but now, for my part, I must tell you, my worthy gentleman, I’ve had enough of it. You go your way, I go mine. Pay me, and we part. With the utmost reverence, I quit you. Climbing mountains at my time of life is out of all reason. If you want companions, I ’ll signal to that pair of Tedeschi; they’re within hail. Would you like it? Say the word, if you would—hey!’

Page 1649

Angelo smiled at the visible effect of the liquor.

‘Barto Rizzo would be the man to take you in hand,’ he remarked.

The innkeeper flung his head back to ejaculate, and murmured, ’Barto Rizzo! defend me from him! Why, he levies contribution upon us in the Valtellina for the good of Milan; and if we don’t pay, we’re all of us down in a black book. Disobey, and it’s worse than swearing you won’t pay taxes to the legitimate—perdition to it!—Government. Do you know Barto Rizzo, padrone? You don’t know him, I hope? I’m sure you wouldn’t know such a fellow.’

‘I am his favourite pupil,’ said Angelo.

‘I’d have sworn it,’ groaned the innkeeper, and cursed the day and hour when Angelo crossed his threshold. That done, he begged permission to be allowed to return, crying with tears of entreaty for mercy: ’Barto Rizzo’s pupils are always out upon bloody business!’ Angelo told him that he had now an opportunity of earning the approval of Barto Rizzo, and then said, ‘On,’ and they went in the track of the two whitecoats; the innkeeper murmuring all the while that he wanted the approval of Barto Rizzo as little as his enmity; he wanted neither frost nor fire. The glacier being traversed, they skirted a young stream, and arrived at an inn, where they found the soldiers regaling. Jacopo was informed by them that the lady whom they were pursuing had not passed. They pushed their wine for Angelo to drink: he declined, saying that he had sworn not to drink before he had shot the chamois with the white cross on his back.

‘Come: we’re two to one,’ they said, ‘and drink you shall this time!’

‘Two to two,’ returned Angelo: ’here is my Jacopo, and if he doesn’t count for one, I won’t call him father-in-law, and the fellow living at Cles may have his daughter without fighting for her.’

‘Right so,’ said one of the soldiers, ’and you don’t speak bad German already.’

‘Haven’t I served in the ranks?’ said Angelo, giving a bugle-call of the reveille of the cavalry.

He got on with them so well that they related the object of their expedition, which was, to catch a runaway young rebel lady and hold her fast down at Cles for the great captain —’unser tuchtiger Hauptmann.’

‘Hadn’t she a servant, a sort of rascal?’ Angelo inquired.

‘Right so; she had: but the doe’s the buck in this chase.’

Angelo tossed them cigars. The valley was like a tumbled mountain, thick with crags and eminences, through which the river worked strenuously, sinuous in foam, hurrying at the turns. Angelo watched all the ways from a distant height till set of sun. He saw another couple of soldiers meet those two at the inn, and then one pair went up toward the vale-head. It seemed as if Vittoria had disconcerted them by having chosen another route.

Page 1650

‘Padrone,’ said Jacopo to him abruptly, when they descended to find a resting-place, ’you are, I speak humbly, so like the devil that I must enter into a stipulation with you, before I continue in your company, and take the worst at once. This is going to be the second night of my sleeping away from my wife: I merely mention it. I pinch her, and she beats me, and we are equal. But if you think of making me fight, I tell you I won’t. If there was a furnace behind me, I should fall into it rather than run against a bayonet. I ’ve heard say that the nerves are in the front part of us, and that’s where I feel the shock. Now we’re on a plain footing. Say that I’m not to fight. I’ll be your servant till you release me, but say I ‘m not to fight; padrone, say that.’

‘I can’t say that: I’ll say I won’t make you fight,’ Angelo pacified him by replying. From this moment Jacopo followed him less like a graceless dog pulled by his chain. In fact, with the sense of prospective security, he tasted a luxurious amazement in being moved about by a superior will, wafted from his inn, and paid for witnessing strange incidents. Angelo took care that he was fed well at the place where they slept, but himself ate nothing. Early after dawn they mounted the heights above the road. It was about noon that Angelo discerned a party coming from the pass on foot, consisting of two women and three men. They rested an hour at the village where he had slept overnight; the muskets were a quarter of a mile to the rear of them. When they started afresh, one of the muskets was discharged, and while the echoes were rolling away, a reply to it sounded in the front. Angelo, from his post of observation, could see that Vittoria and her party were marching between two guards, and that she herself must have perceived both the front and rearward couple. Yet she and her party held on their course at an even pace. For a time he kept them clearly in view; but it was tough work along the slopes of crag: presently Jacopo slipped and went down. ‘Ah, padrone,’ he said: ‘I’m done for; leave me.’

‘Not though I should have to haul you on my back,’ replied Angelo. ’If I do leave you, I must cut out your tongue.’

‘Rather than that, I’d go on a sprained ankle,’ said Jacopo, and he strove manfully to conquer pain; limping and exclaiming, ’Oh, my little village! Oh, my little inn! When can a man say that he has finished running about the world! The moment he sits, in comes the devil.’

Angelo was obliged to lead him down to the open way, upon which they made slow progress.

‘The noble gentleman might let me return—he might trust me now,’ Jacopo whimpered.

‘The devil trusts nobody,’ said Angelo.

‘Ah, padrone! there’s a crucifix. Let me kneel by that.’

Angelo indulged him. Jacopo knelt by the wayside and prayed for an easy ankle and a snoring pillow and no wakeners. After this he was refreshed. The sun sank; the darkness spread around; the air grew icy. 'Does the Blessed Virgin ever consider what patriots have to endure?' Jacopo muttered to himself, and aroused a rare laugh from Angelo, who seized him under the arm, half-lifting him on. At the inn where they rested, he bathed and bandaged the foot.

Page 1651

‘I can’t help feeling a kindness to you for it,’ said Jacopo.

‘I can’t afford to leave you behind,’ Angelo accounted for his attention.

’Padrone, we’ve been understanding one another all along by our thumbs. It’s that old inn of mine—the taxes! we have to sell our souls to pay the taxes. There’s the tongue of the thing. I wouldn’t betray you; I wouldn’t.’

‘I’ll try you,’ said Angelo, and put him to proof next day, when the soldiers stopped them as they were driving in a cart, and Jacopo swore to them that Angelo was his intended son-in-law.

There was evidently an unusual activity among the gendarmerie of the lower valley, the Val di Non; for Jacopo had to repeat his fable more than once, and Angelo thought it prudent not to make inquiries about travellers. In this valley they were again in summer heat. Summer splendours robed the broken ground. The Val di Non lies toward the sun, banked by the Val di Sole, like the southern lizard under a stone. Chestnut forest and shoulder over shoulder of vineyard, and meadows of marvellous emerald, with here and there central partly-wooded crags, peaked with castle-ruins, and ancestral castles that are still warm homes, and villages dropped among them, and a river bounding and rushing eagerly through the rich enclosure, form the scene, beneath that Italian sun which turns everything to gold. There is a fair breadth to the vale: it enjoys a great oval of sky: the falls of shade are dispersed, dot the hollow range, and are not at noontide a broad curtain passing over from right to left. The sun reigns and also governs in the Val di Non.

‘The, grape has his full benefit here, padrone,’ said Jacopo.

But the place was too populous, and too much subjected to the general eye, to please Angelo. At Cles they were compelled to bear an inspection, and a little comedy occurred. Jacopo, after exhibiting Angelo as his son-in-law, seeing doubts on the soldiers’ faces, mentioned the name of the German suitor for his daughter’s hand—the carpenter, Johann Spellmann, to whose workshop he requested to be taken. Johann, being one of the odd Germans in the valley, was well known: he was carving wood astride a stool, and stopped his whistling to listen to the soldiers, who took the first word out of Jacopo’s mouth, and were convinced, by Johann’s droop of the chin, that the tale had some truth in it; and more when Johann yelled at the Valtelline innkeeper to know why, then, he had come to him, if he was prepared to play him false. One of the soldiers said bluntly, that as Angelo’s appearance answered to the portrait of a man for whom they were on the lookout, they would, if their countryman liked, take him and give him a dose of marching and imprisonment.

‘Ach! that won’t make my little Rosetta love me better,’ cried Johann, who commenced taking up a string of reproaches against women, and pitched his carving-blade and tools abroad in the wood-dust.

Page 1652

’Well, now, it ‘s queer you don’t want to fight this lad,’ said Jacopo; ‘he’s come to square it with you that way, if you think best.’

Johann spared a remark between his vehement imprecations against the sex to say that he was ready to fight; but his idea of vengeance was directed upon the abstract conception of a faithless womankind. Angelo, by reason of his detestation of Germans, temporarily threw himself into the part he was playing to the extent of despising him. Johann admitted to Jacopo that intervals of six months’ duration in a courtship were wide jumps for Love to take.

‘Yes; amor! amor!’ he exclaimed with extreme dejection; ’I could wait. Well! since you’ve brought the young man, we’ll have it out.’

He stepped before Angelo with bare fists. Jacopo had to interpose. The soldiers backed Johann, who now said to Angelo, ’Since you’ve come for it, we’ll have it out.’

Jacopo had great difficulty in bringing him to see that it was a matter to talk over. Johann swore he would not talk about it, and was ready to fight a dozen Italians, man up man down.

‘Bare-fisted?’ screamed Jacopo.

‘Hey! the old way! Give him knuckles, and break his back, my boy!’ cried the soldiers; ‘none of their steel this side of the mountain.’

Johann waited for Angelo to lift his hands; and to instigate his reluctant adversary, thumped his chest; but Angelo did not move. The soldiers roared.

‘If she has you, she shall have a dolly,’ said Johann, now heated with the prospect of presenting that sort of husband to his little Rosetta. At this juncture Jacopo threw himself between them.

‘It shall be a real fight,’ he said; ’my daughter can’t make up her mind, and she shall have the best man. Leave me to arrange it all fairly; and you come here in a couple of hours, my children,’ he addressed the soldiers, who unwillingly quitted the scene where there was a certainty of fun, on the assurance of there being a livelier scene to come.

When they had turned their heels on the shop, Jacopo made a face at Johann; Johann swung round upon Angelo, and met a smile. Then followed explanations.

‘What’s that you say? She’s true—she’s true?’ exclaimed the astounded lover.

‘True enough, but a girl at an inn wants hotter courting,’ said Jacopo. ‘His Excellency here is after his own sweetheart.’

Johann huzzaed, hugged at Angelo's hands, and gave a lusty filial tap to Jacopo on the shoulder. Bread and grapes and Tyrolese wine were placed for them, and Johann's mother soon produced a salad, eggs, and fowl; and then and there declared her willingness to receive Rosetta into the household, 'if she would swear at the outset never to have 'heimweh' (home-longing); as people—men and women, both—always did when they took a new home across a mountain.'

'She won't—will she?' Johann inquired with a dubious sparkle.

Page 1653

‘Not she,’ said Jacopo.

After the meal he drew Johann aside. They returned to Angelo, and Johann beckoned him to leave the house by a back way, leading up a slope of garden into high vine-poles. He said that he had seen a party pass out of Cles from the inn early, in a light car, on for Meran. The gendarmerie were busy on the road: a mounted officer had dashed up to the inn an hour later, and had followed them: it was the talk of the village.

‘Padrone, you dismiss me now,’ said Jacopo.

‘I pay you, but don’t dismiss you,’ said Angelo, and handed him a bank-note.

‘I stick to you, padrone, till you do dismiss me,’ Jacopo sighed.

Johann offered to conduct them as far as the Monte Pallade pass, and they started, avoiding the high road, which was enviably broad and solid. Within view of a village under climbing woods, they discerned an open car, flanked by bayonets, returning to Cles. Angelo rushed ahead of them down the declivity, and stood full in the road to meet the procession. A girl sat in the car, who hung her head, weeping; Lorenzo was beside her; an Englishman on foot gave employment to a pair of soldiers to get him along. As they came near at marching pace, Lorenzo yawned and raised his hand to his cheek, keeping the thumb pointed behind him. Including the girl, there were four prisoners: Vittoria was absent. The Englishman, as he was being propelled forward, addressed Angelo in French, asking him whether he could bear to see an unoffending foreigner treated with wanton violation of law. The soldiers bellowed at their captive, and Angelo sent a stupid shrug after him. They rounded a bend of the road. Angelo tightened the buckle at his waist.

‘Now I trust you,’ he said to Jacopo. ’Follow the length of five miles over the pass: if you don’t see me then, you have your liberty, tongue and all.’

With that he doubled his arms and set forth at a steady run, leaving his companions to speculate on his powers of endurance. They did so complacently enough, until Jacopo backed him for a distance and Johann betted against him, when behold them at intervals taking a sharp trot to keep him in view.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DUEL IN THE PASS

Meanwhile Captain Weisspriess had not been idle. Standing at a blunt angle of the ways converging upon Vittoria’s presumed destination, he had roused up the gendarmerie along the routes to Meran by Trent on one side, and Bormio on the other; and he soon came to the conclusion that she had rejected the valley of the Adige for the

Valtelline, whence he supposed that she would be tempted either to cross the Stelvio or one of the passes into Southernmost Tyrol. He was led to think that she would certainly bear upon Switzerland, by a course of reasoning connected with Angelo Guidascarpi, who, fleeing under the cross of blood, might be calculated on to push for the mountains

Page 1654

of the Republic; and he might judging by the hazards—conduct the lady thither, to enjoy the fruits of crime and love in security. The captain, when he had discovered Angelo's crest and name on the betraying handkerchief, had no doubts concerning the nature of their intimacy, and he was spurred by a new and thrice eager desire to capture the couple—the criminal for the purposes of justice, and the other because he had pledged his notable reputation in the chase of her. The conscience of this man's vanity was extremely active. He had engaged to conquer the stubborn girl, and he thought it possible that he might take a mistress from the patriot ranks, with a loud ha! ha! at revolutionists, and some triumph over his comrades. And besides, he was the favourite of Countess Anna of Lenkenstein, who yet refused to bring her estates to him; she dared to trifle; she also was a woman who required rude lessons. Weisspriess, a poor soldier bearing the heritage of lusty appetites, had an eye on his fortune, and served neither Mars alone nor Venus. Countess Anna was to be among that company assembled at the Castle of Sonnenberg in Meran; and if, while introducing Vittoria there with a discreet and exciting reserve, he at the same time handed over the assassin of Count Paul, a fine harvest of praise and various pleasant forms of female passion were to be looked for—a rich vista of a month's intrigue; at the end of it possibly his wealthy lady, thoroughly tamed, for a wife, and redoubled triumph over his comrades. Without these successes, what availed the fame of the keenest swordsman in the Austrian army?—The feast as well as the plumes of vanity offered rewards for the able exercise of his wits.

He remained at the sub-Alpine inn until his servant Wilhelm (for whom he had despatched the duchess's chasseur, then in attendance on Vittoria) arrived from Milan, bringing his uniform. The chasseur was directed on the Bormio line, with orders that he should cause the arrest of Vittoria only in the case of her being on the extreme limit of the Swiss frontier. Keeping his communications alert, Weisspriess bore that way to meet him. Fortune smiled on his strategy. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz—full of wine, and discharging hurrahs along the road—met him on the bridge over the roaring Oglio, just out of Edolo, and gave him news of the fugitives. 'Both of them were at the big hotel in Bormio,' said Jacob; 'and I set up a report that the Stelvio was watched; and so it is.' He added that he thought they were going to separate; he had heard something to that effect; he believed that the young lady was bent upon crossing one of the passes to Meran. Last night it had devolved on him to kiss away the tears of the young lady's maid, a Valtelline peasant-girl, who deplored the idea of an expedition over the mountains, and had, with the usual cat-like tendencies of these Italian minxes, torn his cheek in return for his assiduities. Jacob displayed the pretty scratch obtained in the

Page 1655

Herr Captain's service, and got his money for having sighted Vittoria and seen double. Weisspriess decided in his mind that Angelo had now separated from her (or rather, she from him) for safety. He thought it very probable that she would likewise fly to Switzerland. Yet, knowing that there was the attraction of many friends for her at Meran, he conceived that he should act more prudently by throwing himself on that line, and he sped Jacob Baumwalder along the Valtelline by Val Viola, up to Ponte in the Engadine, with orders to seize her if he could see her, and have her conveyed to Cles, in Tyrol. Vittoria being only by the gentlest interpretation of her conduct not under interdict, an unscrupulous Imperial officer might in those military times venture to employ the gendarmerie for his own purposes, if he could but give a plausible colour of devotion to the Imperial interests.

The chasseur sped lamentingly back, and Weisspriess, taking a guide from the skirting hamlet above Edolo, quitted the Val Camonica, climbed the Tonale, and reached Vermiglio in the branch valley of that name, scientifically observing the features of the country as he went. At Vermiglio he encountered a brother officer of one of his former regiments, a fat major on a tour of inspection, who happened to be a week behind news of the army, and detained him on the pretext of helping him on his car—a mockery that drove Weisspriess to the perpetual reply, 'You are my superior officer,' which reduced the major to ask him whether he had been degraded a step. As usual, Weisspriess was pushed to assert his haughtiness, backed by the shadow of his sword. 'I am a man with a family,' said the major, modestly. 'Then I shall call you my superior officer while they allow you to remain so,' returned Weisspriess, who scorned a married soldier.

'I aspired to the Staff once myself,' said the major. 'Unfortunately, I grew in girth—the wrong way for ambition. I digest, I assimilate with a fatal ease. Stout men are doomed to the obscurer paths. You may quote Napoleon as a contrary instance. I maintain positively that his day was over, his sun was eclipsed, when his valet had to loosen the buckles of his waistcoat and breech. Now, what do you say?'

'I say,' Weisspriess replied, 'that if there's a further depreciation of the paper currency, we shall none of us have much chance of digesting or assimilating either—if I know at all what those processes mean.'

'Our good Lombard cow is not half squeezed enough,' observed the major, confidentially in tone. 'When she makes a noise—quick! the pail at her udders and work away; that's my advice. What's the verse?—our Zwitterwitz's, I mean; the Viennese poet:—

> "Her milk is good-the Lombard cow;
> Let her be noisy when she pleases
> But if she kicks the pail, I vow,
> We'll make her used to sharper squeezes:

We'll write her mighty deeds in *cheeses*:
(That is, if she yields milk enow)."

Page 1656

‘Capital! capital!’ the major applauded his quotation, and went on to speak of ‘that Zwitterwitz’ as having served in a border regiment, after creating certain Court scandal, and of his carrying off a Wallach lady from her lord and selling her to a Turk, and turning Turk himself and keeping a harem. Five years later he reappeared in Vienna with a volume of what he called ‘Black Eagle Poems,’ and regained possession of his barony. ‘So far, so good,’ said the major; ’but when he applied for his old commission in the army—that was rather too cool.’

Weisspriess muttered intelligibly, ’I’ve heard the remark, that you can’t listen to a man five minutes without getting something out of him.’

‘I don’t know; it may be,’ said the major, imagining that Weisspriess demanded some stronger flavours of gossip in his talk. ’There’s no stir in these valleys. They arrested, somewhere close on Trent yesterday afternoon, a fellow calling himself Beppo, the servant of an Italian woman—a dancer, I fancy. They’re on the lookout for her too, I’m told; though what sort of capers she can be cutting in Tyrol, I can’t even guess.’

The major’s car was journeying leisurely toward Cles. ‘Whip that brute!’ Weisspriess sang out to the driver, and begging the major’s pardon, requested to know whither he was bound. The major informed him that he hoped to sup in Trent. ‘Good heaven! not at this pace,’ Weisspriess shouted. But the pace was barely accelerated, and he concealed his reasons for invoking speed. They were late in arriving at Trent, where Weisspriess cast eye on the imprisoned wretch, who declared piteously that he was the trusted and innocent servant of the Signorina Vittoria, and had been visiting all the castles of Meran in search of her. The captain’s man Wilhelm had been the one to pounce on poor Beppo while the latter was wandering disconsolately. Leaving him to howl, Weisspriess procured the loan of a horse from a colonel of cavalry at the Buon Consiglio barracks, and mounted an hour before dawn, followed by Wilhelm. He reached Cles in time to learn that Vittoria and her party had passed through it a little in advance of him. Breakfasting there, he enjoyed the first truly calm cigar of many days. Gendarmes whom he had met near the place came in at his heels. They said that the party would positively be arrested, or not allowed to cross the Monte Pallade. The passes to Meran and Botzen, and the road to Trent, were strictly guarded. Weisspriess hurried them forward with particular orders that they should take into custody the whole of the party, excepting the lady; her, if arrested with the others, they were to release: her maid and the three men were to be marched back to Cles, and there kept fast.

The game was now his own: he surveyed its pretty intricate moves as on a map. The character of Herr Johannes he entirely discarded: an Imperial officer in his uniform, sword in belt, could scarcely continue that meek performance. ’But I may admire music, and entreat her to give me a particular note, if she has it,’ said the captain, hanging in contemplation over a coming scene, like a quivering hawk about to close its wings. His heart beat thick; which astonished him: hitherto it had never made that sort of movement.

Page 1657

From Cles he despatched a letter to the fair chatelaine at Meran, telling her that by dainty and skilful management of the paces, he was bringing on the intractable heroine of the Fifteenth, and was to be expected in about two or three days. The letter was entrusted to Wilhelm, who took the borrowed horse back to Trent.

Weisspriess was on the mule-track a mile above the last village ascending to the pass, when he observed the party of prisoners, and climbed up into covert. As they went by he discerned but one person in female garments; the necessity to crouch for obscurity prevented him from examining them separately. He counted three men and beheld one of them between gendarmes. 'That must be my villain,' he said.

It was clear that Vittoria had chosen to go forward alone. The captain praised her spirit, and now pushed ahead with hunter's strides. He passed an inn, closed and tenantless: behind him lay the Val di Non; in front the darker valley of the Adige: where was the prey? A storm of rage set in upon him with the fear that he had been befooled. He lit a cigar, to assume ease of aspect, whatever the circumstances might be, and gain some inward serenity by the outer reflection of it—not altogether without success. 'My lady must be a doughty walker,' he thought; 'at this rate she will be in the Ultenthal before sunset.' A wooded height ranged on his left as he descended rapidly. Coming to a roll of grass dotted with grey rock, he climbed it, and mounting one of the boulders, beheld at a distance of half-a-dozen stone-throws downward, the figure of a woman holding her hand cup-shape to a wayside fall of water. The path by which she was going rounded the height he stood on. He sprang over the rocks, catching up his clattering steel scabbard; and plunging through tinted leafage and green underwood, steadied his heels on a sloping bank, and came down on the path with stones and earth and brambles, in time to appear as a seated pedestrian when Vittoria turned the bend of the mountain way.

Gracefully withdrawing the cigar from his mouth, and touching his breast with turned-in fingers, he accosted her with a comical operatic effort at her high notes

'Italia!'

She gathered her arms on her bosom and looked swiftly round: then at the apparition of her enemy.

It is but an ironical form of respect that you offer to the prey you have been hotly chasing and have caught. Weisspriess conceived that he had good reasons for addressing her in the tone best suited to his character: he spoke with a ridiculous mincing suavity:

'My pretty sweet! are you not tired? We have not seen one another for days! Can you have forgotten the enthusiastic Herr Johannes? You have been in pleasant company, no doubt; but I have been all—all alone. Think of that! What an exceedingly fortunate

chance this is! I was smoking dolefully, and imagining anything but such a rapture.—-No, no, mademoiselle, be

Page 1658

mannerly.’ The captain blocked her passage. ’You must not leave me while I am speaking. A good governess would have taught you that in the nursery. I am afraid you had an inattentive governess, who did not impress upon you the duty of recognizing friends when you meet them! Ha! you were educated in England, I have heard. Shake hands. It is our custom—I think a better one—to kiss on the right cheek and the left, but we will shake hands.’

‘In God’s name, sir, let me go on,’ Vittoria could just gather voice to utter.

‘But,’ cried the delighted captain, ’you address me in the tones of a basso profundo! It is absurd. Do you suppose that I am to be deceived by your artifice?—rogue that you are! Don’t I know you are a woman? a sweet, an ecstatic, a darling little woman!’

He laughed. She shivered to hear the solitary echoes. There was sunlight on the farthest Adige walls, but damp shade already filled the East-facing hollows.

‘I beg you very earnestly, to let me go on,’ said Vittoria.

‘With equal earnestness, I beg you to let me accompany you,’ he replied. ’I mean no offence, mademoiselle; but I have sworn that I and no one but I shall conduct you to the Castle of Sonnenberg, where you will meet the Lenkenstein ladies, with whom I have the honour to be acquainted. You see, you have nothing to fear if you play no foolish pranks, like a kicking filly in the pasture.’

‘If it is your pleasure,’ she said gravely; but he obtruded the bow of an arm. She drew back. Her first blank despair at sight of the trap she had fallen into, was clearing before her natural high courage.

’My little lady! my precious prima donna! do you refuse the most trifling aid from me? It’s because I’m a German.’

‘There are many noble gentlemen who are Germans,’ said Vittoria.

’It ’s because I’m a German; I know it is. But, don’t you see, Germany invades Italy, and keeps hold of her? Providence decrees it so—ask the priests! You are a delicious Italian damsel, and you will take the arm of a German.’

Vittoria raised her face. ‘Do you mean that I am your prisoner?’

‘You did not look braver at La Scala’; the captain bowed to her.

‘Ah, I forgot,’ said she; ’you saw me there. If, signore, you will do me the favour to conduct me to the nearest inn, I will sing to you.’

’It is precisely my desire, signorina.

You are not married to that man Guidascarpi, I presume? No, no: you are merely his . . . friend. May I have the felicity of hearing you call me your friend? Why, you tremble! are you afraid of me?'

'To tell the truth, you talk too much to please me,' said Vittoria.

The captain praised her frankness, and he liked it. The trembling of her frame still fascinated his eyes, but her courage and the absence of all womanly play and cowering about her manner impressed him seriously. He stood looking at her, biting his moustache, and trying to provoke her to smile.

Page 1659

‘Conduct you to the nearest inn; yes,’ he said, as if musing. ’To the nearest inn, where you will sing to me; sing to me. It is not an objectionable scheme. The inns will not be choice: but the society will be exquisite. Say first, I am your sworn cavalier?’

‘It does not become me to say that,’ she replied, feigning a demure sincerity, on the verge of her patience.

‘You allow me to say it?’

She gave him a look of fire and passed him; whereat, following her, he clapped hands, and affected to regard the movement as part of an operatic scena. ‘It is now time to draw your dagger,’ he said. ’You have one, I’m certain.’

‘Anything but touch me!’ cried Vittoria, turning on him. ’I know that I am safe. You shall teaze me, if it amuses you.’

‘Am I not, now, the object of your detestation?’

‘You are near being so.’

‘You see! You put on no disguise; why should I?’

This remark struck her with force.

‘My temper is foolish,’ she said softly. ’I have always been used to kindness.’

He vowed that she had no comprehension of kindness; otherwise would she continue defiant of him? She denied that she was defiant: upon which he accused the hand in her bosom of clutching a dagger. She cast the dagger at his feet. It was nobly done, and he was not insensible to the courage and inspiration of the act; for it checked a little example of a trial of strength that he had thought of exhibiting to an armed damsel.

‘Shall I pick it up for you?’ he said.

‘You will oblige me,’ was her answer; but she could not control a convulsion of her underlip that her defensive instinct told her was best hidden.

‘Of course, you know you are safe,’ he repeated her previous words, while examining the silver handle of the dagger. ’Safe? certainly! Here is C. A. to V. . . . A. neatly engraved: a gift; so that the young gentleman may be sure the young lady will defend herself from lions and tigers and wild boars, if ever she goes through forests and over mountain passes. I will not obtrude my curiosity, but who is V . . . . A. ?’

The dagger was Carlo’s gift to her; the engraver, by singular misadventure, had put a capital letter for the concluding letter of her name instead of little a; she remembered the

blush on Carlo's face when she had drawn his attention to the error, and her own blush when she had guessed its meaning.

'It spells my name,' she said.

'Your assumed name of Vittoria. And who is C. A.?'

'Those are the initials of Count Carlo Ammiani.'

'Another lover?'

'He is my sole lover. He is my betrothed. Oh, good God!' she threw her eyes up to heaven; 'how long am I to endure the torture of this man in my pathway? Go, sir, or let me go on. You are intolerable. It 's the spirit of a tiger. I have no fear of you.'

'Nay, nay,' said Weisspriess, 'I asked the question because I am under an obligation to run Count Carlo Ammiani through the body, and felt at once that I should regret the necessity. As to your not fearing me, really, far from wishing to hurt you—'

Page 1660

Vittoria had caught sight of a white face framed in the autumnal forest above her head. So keen was the glad expression of her face, that Weisspriess looked up.

‘Come, Angelo, come to me;’ she said confidently.

Weisspriess plucked his sword out, and called to him imperiously to descend.

Beckoned downward by white hand and flashing blade, Angelo steadied his feet and hands among drooping chestnut boughs, and bounded to Vittoria’s side.

‘Now march on,’ Weisspriess waved his sword; ‘you are my prisoners.’

‘You,’ retorted Angelo; ’I know you; you are a man marked out for one of us. I bid you turn back, if you care for your body’s safety.’

’Angelo Guidascarpi, I also know you. Assassin! you double murderer! Defy me, and I slay you in the sight of your paramour.’

’Captain Weisspriess, what you have spoken merits death. I implore of my Maker that I may not have to kill you.’

‘Fool! you are unarmed.’

Angelo took his stilet in his fist.

’I have warned you, Captain Weisspriess. Here I stand. I dare you to advance.’

‘You pronounce my name abominably,’ said the captain, dropping his sword’s point. ’If you think of resisting me, let us have no women looking on.’ He waved his left hand at Vittoria.

Angelo urged her to go. ‘Step on for our Carlo’s sake.’ But it was asking too much of her.

‘Can you fight this man?’ she asked.

‘I can fight him and kill him.’

‘I will not step on,’ she said. ‘Must you fight him?’

‘There is no choice.’ Vittoria walked to a distance at once.

Angelo directed the captain’s eyes to where, lower in the pass, there was a level plot of meadow.

Weisspriess nodded. ’The odds are in my favour, so you shall choose the ground.’

All three went silently to the meadow.

It was a circle of green on a projecting shoulder of the mountain, bounded by woods that sank toward the now shadowy South-flowing Adige vale, whose Western heights were gathering red colour above a strongly-marked brown line. Vittoria stood at the border of the wood, leaving the two men to their work. She knew when speech was useless.

Captain Weisspriess paced behind Angelo until the latter stopped short, saying, ‘Here!’

‘Wherever you please,’ Weisspriess responded. ’The ground is of more importance to you than to me.’

They faced mutually; one felt the point of his stilet, the other the temper of his sword.

’Killing you, Angelo Guidascarpi, is the killing of a dog. But there are such things as mad dogs. This is not a duel. It is a righteous execution, since you force me to it: I shall deserve your thanks for saving you from the hangman. I think you have heard that I can use my weapon. There’s death on this point for you. Make your peace with your Maker.’

Weisspriess spoke sternly. He delayed the lifting of his sword that the bloody soul might pray.

Page 1661

Angelo said, ‘You are a good soldier: you are a bad priest. Come on.’

A nod of magnanimous resignation to the duties of his office was the captain’s signal of readiness. He knew exactly the method of fighting which Angelo must adopt, and he saw that his adversary was supple, and sinewy, and very keen of eye. But, what can well compensate for even one additional inch of steel? A superior weapon wielded by a trained wrist in perfect coolness means victory, by every reasonable reckoning. In the present instance, it meant nothing other than an execution, as he had said. His contemplation of his own actual share in the performance was nevertheless unpleasant; and it was but half willingly that he straightened out his sword and then doubled his arm. He lessened the odds in his favour considerably by his too accurate estimation of them. He was also a little unmanned by the thought that a woman was to see him using his advantage; but she stood firm in her distant corner, refusing to be waved out of sight. Weisspriess had again to assure himself that it was not a duel, but the enforced execution of a criminal who would not surrender, and who was in his way. Fronting a creature that would vainly assail him, and temporarily escape impalement by bounding and springing, dodging and backing, now here now there, like a dangling bob-cherry, his military gorge rose with a sickness of disgust. He had to remember as vividly as he could realize it, that this man’s life was forfeited, and that the slaughter of him was a worthy service to Countess Anna; also, that there were present reasons for desiring to be quit of him. He gave Angelo two thrusts, and bled him. The skill which warded off the more vicious one aroused his admiration.

‘Pardon my blundering,’ he said; ’I have never engaged a saltimbanque before.’

They recommenced. Weisspriess began to weigh the sagacity of his opponent’s choice of open ground, where he could lengthen the discourse of steel by retreating and retreating, and swinging easily to right or to left. In the narrow track the sword would have transfixed him after a single feint. He was amused. Much of the cat was in his combative nature. An idea of disabling or dismembering Angelo, and forwarding him to Meran, caused him to trifle further with the edge of the blade. Angelo took a cut, and turned it on his arm; free of the deadly point, he rushed in and delivered a stab; but Weisspriess saved his breast. Quick, they resumed their former positions.

‘I am really so unused to this game!’ said Weisspriess, apologetically.

He was pale: his unsteady breathing, and a deflection of his dripping sword-wrist, belied his coolness. Angelo plunged full on him, dropped, and again reached his right arm; they hung, getting blood for blood, with blazing interpenetrating eyes; a ghastly work of dark hands at half lock thrusting, and savage eyes reading the fiery pages of the book of hell. At last the Austrian got loose from the lock and hurled him off.

Page 1662

‘That bout was hotter,’ he remarked; and kept his sword-point out on the whole length of the arm: he would have scorned another for so miserable a form either of attack or defence.

Vittoria beheld Angelo circling round the point, which met him everywhere; like the minute hand of a clock about to sound his hour, she thought.

He let fall both his arms, as if beaten, which brought on the attack: by sheer evasion he got away from the sword’s lunge, and essayed a second trial of the bite of steel at close quarters; but the Austrian backed and kept him to the point, darting short alluring thrusts, thinking to tempt him on, or to wind him, and then to have him. Weisspriess was chilled by a more curious revulsion from this sort of engagement than he at first experienced. He had become nervously incapable of those proper niceties of sword-play which, without any indecent hacking or maiming, should have stretched Angelo, neatly slain, on the mat of green, before he had a chance. Even now the sight of the man was distressing to an honourable duellist. Angelo was scored with blood-marks. Feeling that he dared not offer another chance to a fellow so desperately close-dealing, Weisspriess thrust fiercely, but delayed his fatal stroke. Angelo stooped and pulled up a handful of grass and soft earth in his left hand.

‘We have been longer about it than I expected,’ said Weisspriess.

Angelo tightened his fingers about the stringy grasstuft; he stood like a dreamer, leaning over to the sword; suddenly he sprang on it, received the point right in his side, sprang on it again, and seized it in his hand, and tossed it up, and threw it square out in time to burst within guard and strike his stilet below the Austrian’s collar-bone. The blade took a glut of blood, as when the wolf tears quick at dripping flesh. It was at a moment when Weisspriess was courteously bantering him with the question whether he was ready, meaning that the affirmative should open the gates of death to him.

The stilet struck thrice. Weisspriess tottered, and hung his jaw like a man at a spectre: amazement was on his features.

‘Remember Broncini and young Branciani!’

Angelo spoke no other words throughout the combat.

Weisspriess threw himself forward on a feeble lunge of his sword, and let the point sink in the ground, as a palsied cripple supports his frame, swayed, and called to Angelo to come on, and try another stroke, another—one more! He fell in a lump: his look of amazement was surmounted by a strong frown.

His enemy was hanging above him panting out of wide nostrils, like a hunter’s horse above the long-tongued quarry, when Vittoria came to them.

She reached her strength to the wounded man to turn his face to heaven.

He moaned, ‘Finish me’; and, as he lay with his back to earth, ‘Good-evening to the old army!’

Page 1663

A vision of leaping tumbrils, and long marching columns about to deploy, passed before his eyelids: he thought he had fallen on the battle-field, and heard a drum beat furiously in the back of his head; and on streamed the cavalry, wonderfully caught away to such a distance that the figures were all diminutive, and the regimental colours swam in smoke, and the enemy danced a plume here and there out of the sea, while his mother and a forgotten Viennese girl gazed at him with exactly the same unfamiliar countenance, and refused to hear that they were unintelligible in the roaring of guns and floods and hurrahs, and the thumping of the tremendous big drum behind his head—'somewhere in the middle of the earth': he tried to explain the locality of that terrible drumming noise to them, and Vittoria conceived him to be delirious; but he knew that he was sensible; he knew her and Angelo and the mountain-pass, and that he had a cigar-case in his pocket worked in embroidery of crimson, blue, and gold, by the hands of Countess Anna. He said distinctly that he desired the cigar-case to be delivered to Countess Anna at the Castle of Sonnenberg, and rejoiced on being assured that his wish was comprehended and should be fulfilled; but the marvel was, that his mother should still refuse to give him wine, and suppose him to be a boy: and when he was so thirsty and dry-lipped that though Mina was bending over him, just fresh from Mariazell, he had not the heart to kiss her or lift an arm to her!—His horse was off with him-whither?—He was going down with a company of infantry in the Gulf of Venice: cards were in his hands, visible, though he could not feel them, and as the vessel settled for the black plunge, the cards flushed all honours, and his mother shook her head at him: he sank, and heard Mina sighing all the length of the water to the bottom, which grated and gave him two horrid shocks of pain: and he cried for a doctor, and admitted that his horse had managed to throw him; but wine was the cure, brandy was the cure, or water, water! Water was sprinkled on his forehead and put to his lips.

He thanked Vittoria by name, and imagined himself that General, serving under old Wurmser, of whom the tale is told that being shot and lying grievously wounded on the harsh Rivoli ground, he obtained the help of a French officer in as bad case as himself, to moisten his black tongue and write a short testamentary document with his blood, and for a way of returning thanks to the Frenchman, he put down among others, the name of his friendly enemy's widow; whereupon both resigned their hearts to death; but the Austrian survived to find the sad widow and espouse her.

His mutterings were full of gratitude, showing a vividly transient impression to what was about him, that vanished in a narrow-headed flight through clouds into lands of memory. It pained him, he said, that he could not offer her marriage; but he requested that when his chin was shaved his moustache should be brushed up out of the way of the clippers, for he and all his family were conspicuous for the immense amount of life which they had in them, and his father had lain six-and-thirty hours bleeding on the field of Wagram, and had yet survived to beget a race as hearty as himself:—'Old Austria! thou grand old Austria!'

Page 1664

The smile was proud, though faint, which accompanied the apostrophe, addressed either to his country or to his father's personification of it; it was inexpressibly pathetic to Vittoria, who understood his 'Oesterreich,' and saw the weak and helpless bleeding man, with his eyeballs working under the lids, and the palms of his hands stretched out open-weak as a corpse, but conquering death.

The arrival of Jacopo and Johann furnished help to carry him onward to the nearest place of shelter. Angelo would not quit her side until he had given money and directions to both the trembling fellows, together with his name, that they might declare the author of the deed at once if questioned. He then bowed to Vittoria slightly and fled. They did not speak.

The last sunbeams burned full crimson on the heights of the Adige mountains as Vittoria followed the two pale men who bore the wounded officer between them at a slow pace for the nearest village in the descent of the pass.

Angelo watched them out of sight. The far-off red rocks spun round his eyeballs; the meadow was a whirling thread of green; the brown earth heaved up to him. He felt that he was diving, and had the thought that there was but water enough to moisten his red hands when his senses left him.

CHAPTER XXVII

A NEW ORDEAL

The old city of Meran faces Southward to the yellow hills of Italy, across a broad vale, between two mountain-walls and torrent-waters. With one hand it takes the bounding green Passeyr, and with the other the brown-rolling Adige, and plunges them together in roaring foam under the shadow of the Western wall. It stands on the spur of a lower central eminence crowned by a grey castle, and the sun has it from every aspect. The shape of a swan in water may describe its position, for the Vintschgau and the stony Passeyrthal make a strong curve on two sides as they descend upon it with their rivers, and the bosom of the city projects, while the head appears bending gracefully backward. Many castles are in view of it; the loud and tameless Passeyr girdles it with an emerald cincture; there is a sea of arched vineyard foliage at his feet.

Vittoria reached the Castle of Sonnenberg about noon, and found empty courts and open doors. She sat in the hall like a supplicant, disregarded by the German domestics, who beheld a travel-stained humble-faced young Italian woman, and supposed that their duty was done in permitting her to rest; but the duchess's maid Aennchen happening to come by, questioned her in moderately intelligible Italian, and hearing her name gave a cry, and said that all the company were out hunting, shooting, and riding, in the vale below or the mountain above. "Ah, dearest lady, what a fright we have all

been in about you! Signora Piaveni has not slept a wink, and the English gentleman has made great excursions every day to find you. This morning the soldier Wilhelm arrived with news that his master was bringing you on."

Page 1665

Vittoria heard that Laura and her sister and the duchess had gone down to Meran. Countess Lena von Lenkenstein was riding to see her betrothed shoot on a neighbouring estate. Countess Anna had disappeared early, none knew where. Both these ladies, and their sister-in-law, were in mourning for the terrible death of their brother, Count Paul Aennchen repeated what she knew of the tale concerning him.

The desire to see Laura first, and be embraced and counselled by her, and lie awhile in her arms to get a breath of home, made Vittoria refuse to go up to her chamber, and notwithstanding Aennchen's persuasions, she left the castle, and went out and sat in the shaded cart-track. On the winding ascent she saw a lady in a black riding habit, leading her horse and talking to a soldier, who seemed to be receiving orders from her, and presently saluted and turned his steps downward. The lady came on, and passed her without a glance. After entering the courtyard, where she left her horse, she reappeared, and stood hesitating, but came up to Vittoria and said bluntly, in Italian:

"Are you the signorina Campa, or Belloni, who is expected here?"

The Austrian character and colouring of her features told Vittoria that this must be the Countess Anna or her sister.

"I think I have been expected," she replied.

"You come alone?"

"I am alone."

"I am Countess Anna von Lenkenstein; one of the guests of the castle."

"My message is to the Countess Anna."

"You have a message?"

Vittoria lifted the embroidered cigar-case. Countess Anna snatched it from her hand.

"What does this mean? Is it insolence? Have the kindness, if you please, not to address me in enigmas. Do you"—Anna was deadly pale as she turned the cigarcase from side to side—"do you imagine that I smoke, 'par hasard?'" She tried to laugh off her intemperate manner of speech; the laugh broke at sight of a blood-mark on one corner of the case; she started and said earnestly, "I beg you to let me hear what the meaning of this may be?"

"He lies in the Ultenthal, wounded; and his wish was that I should deliver it to you." Vittoria spoke as gently as the harsh tidings would allow.

“Wounded? My God! my God!” Anna cried in her own language. “Wounded?-in the breast, then! He carried it in his breast. Wounded by what? by what?”

“I can tell you no more.”

“Wounded by whom?”

“It was an honourable duel.”

“Are you afraid to tell me he has been assassinated?”

“It was an honourable duel.”

“None could match him with the sword.”

“His enemy had nothing but a dagger.”

“Who was his enemy?”

“It is no secret, but I must leave him to say.”

“You were a witness of the fight?”

“I saw it all.”

“The man was one of your party!

Page 1666

“Ah!” exclaimed Vittoria, “lose no time with me, Countess Anna, go to him at once, for though he lived when I left him, he was bleeding; I cannot say that he was not dying, and he has not a friend near.”

Anna murmured like one overborne by calamity. “My brother struck down one day—he the next!” She covered her face a moment, and unclosed it to explain that she wept for her brother, who had been murdered, stabbed in Bologna.

“Was it Count Ammiani who did this?” she asked passionately.

Vittoria shook her head; she was divining a dreadful thing in relation to the death of Count Paul.

“It was not?” said Anna. “They had a misunderstanding, I know. But you tell me the man fought with a dagger. It could not be Count Ammiani. The dagger is an assassin’s weapon, and there are men of honour in Italy still.”

She called to a servant in the castle-yard, and sent him down with orders to stop the soldier Wilhelm.

“We heard this morning that you were coming, and we thought it curious,” she observed; and called again for her horse to be saddled. “How far is this place where he is lying? I have no knowledge of the Ultenthal. Has he a doctor attending him? When was he wounded? It is but common humanity to see that he is attended by an efficient doctor. My nerves are unstrung by the recent blow to our family; that is why—Oh, my father! my holy father!” she turned to a grey priest’s head that was rising up the ascent, “I thank God for you! Lena is away riding; she weeps constantly when she is within four walls. Come in and give me tears, if you can; I am half mad for the want of them. Tears first; teach me patience after.”

The old priest fanned his face with his curled hat, and raised one hand as he uttered a gentle chiding in reproof of curbless human sorrow. Anna said to Vittoria, coldly, “I thank you for your message:” she walked into the castle by his side, and said to him there: “The woman you saw outside has a guilty conscience. You will spend your time more profitably with her than with me. I am past all religious duties at this moment. You know, father, that I can open my heart. Probe this Italian woman; search her through and through. I believe her to be blood-stained and abominable. She hates us. She has sworn an oath against us. She is malignant.”

It was not long before Anna issued forth and rode down to the vale. The priest beckoned to Vittoria from the gates. He really supposed her to have come to him with a burdened spirit.

“My daughter,” he addressed her. The chapter on human error was opened:” We are all of one family—all of us erring children—all of us bound to abnegate hatred: by love alone are we saved. Behold the Image of Love—the Virgin and Child. Alas! and has it been visible to man these more than eighteen hundred years, and humankind are still blind to it? Are their ways the ways of comfort and blessedness?

Page 1667

Their ways are the ways of blood; paths to eternal misery among howling fiends. Why have they not chosen the sweet ways of peace, which are strewn with flowers, which flow with milk?"—The priest spread his hand open for Vittoria's, which she gave to his keeping, and he enclosed it softly, smoothing it with his palms, and retaining it as a worldly oyster between spiritual shells. "Why, my daughter, why, but because we do not bow to that Image daily, nightly, hourly, momently! We do not worship it that its seed may be sown in us. We do not cling to it, that in return it may cling to us."

He spoke with that sensuous resource of rich feeling which the contemplation of the Image does inspire. And Vittoria was not led reluctantly into the oratory of the castle to pray with him; but she refused to confess. Thereupon followed a soft discussion that was as near being acerb as nails are near velvet paws.

Vittoria perceived his drift, and also the dear good heart of the old man, who meant no harm to her, and believed that he was making use of his professional weapons for her ultimate good. The inquisitions and the kindness went musically together; she responded to the kindness, but rebutted the inquisitions; at which he permitted a shade of discontent to traverse his features, and asked her with immense tenderness whether she had not much on her mind; she expressing melodious gratitude for his endeavours to give her comfort. He could not forbear directing an admonishment to her stubborn spirit, and was obliged, for the sake of impressiveness, to speak it harshly; until he saw, that without sweetness of manner and unction of speech, he left her untouched; so he was driven back to the form of address better suited to his nature and habits; the end of which was that both were cooing.

Vittoria was ashamed to tell herself how much she liked him and his ghostly brethren, whose preaching was always of peace, while the world was full of lurid hatred, strife, and division. She begged the baffled old man to keep her hand in his. He talked in Latinized Italian, and only appeared to miss the exact meaning of her replies when his examination of the state of her soul was resumed. They sat in the soft colour of the consecrated place like two who were shut away from earth. Often he thought that her tears were about to start and bring her low; for she sighed heavily; at the mere indication of the displacement of her hand, she looked at him eagerly, as if entreating him not to let it drop.

"You are a German, father?" she said.

"I am of German birth, my daughter."

"That makes it better. Remain beside me. The silence is sweet music."

The silence was broken at intervals by his murmur of a call for patience! patience!

Page 1668

This strange scene concluded with the entry of the duchess, who retired partly as soon as she saw them. Vittoria smiled to the old man, and left him: the duchess gave her a hushed welcome, and took her place. Vittoria was soon in Laura's arms, where, after a storm of grief, she related the events of the journey following her flight from Milan. Laura interrupted her but once to exclaim, "Angelo Guidascarpi!" Vittoria then heard from her briefly that Milan was quiet, Carlo Ammiani in prison. It had been for tidings of her lover that she had hastened over the mountains to Meran. She craved for all that could be told of him, but Laura repeated, as in a stupefaction, "Angelo Guidascarpi!" She answered Vittoria's question by saying, "You could not have had so fatal a companion."

"I could not have had so devoted a protector."

"There is such a thing as an evil star. We are all under it at present, to some degree; but he has been under it from his birth. My Sandra, my beloved, I think I have pardoned you, if I ever pardon anyone! I doubt it; but it is certain that I love you. You have seen Countess Anna, or I would have told you to rest and get over your fatigue. The Lenkensteins are here—my poor sister among them. You must show yourself. I was provident enough to call at your mother's for a box of your clothes before I ran out of wretched Milan."

Further, the signora stated that Carlo might have to remain in prison. She made no attempt to give dark or fair colour to the misery of the situation; telling Vittoria to lie on her bed and sleep, if sleep could be persuaded to visit her, she went out to consult with the duchess. Vittoria lay like a dead body on the bed, counting the throbs of her heart. It helped her to fall into a state of insensibility. When she awoke, the room was dark; she felt that some one had put a silken cushion across her limbs. The noise of a storm traversing the vale rang through the castle, and in the desolation of her soul, that stealthy act of kindness wrought in her till she almost fashioned a vow upon her lips that she would leave the world to toss its wrecks, and dedicate her life to God.

For, O heaven! of what avail is human effort? She thought of the Chief, whose life was stainless, but who stood proscribed because his aim was too high to be attained within compass of a mortal's years. His error seemed that he had ever aimed at all. He seemed less wise than the old priest of the oratory. She could not disentangle him from her own profound humiliation and sense of fallen power. Her lover's imprisonment accused her of some monstrous culpability, which she felt unrepentingly, not as we feel a truth, but as we submit to a terrible force of pressure.

The morning light made her realize Carlo's fate, to whom it would penetrate through a hideous barred loophole—a defaced and dreadful beam. She asked herself why she had fled from Milan. It must have been some cowardly instinct that had prompted her to fly. "Coward, coward! thing of vanity! you, a mere woman!" she cried out, and

succeeded in despising herself sufficiently to think it possible that she had deserved to forfeit her lover’s esteem.

Page 1669

It was still early when the duchess's maid came to her, bringing word that her mistress would be glad to visit her. From the duchess Vittoria heard of the charge against Angelo. Respecting Captain Weisspriess, Amalia said that she had perceived his object in wishing to bring the great cantatrice to the castle; and that it was a well-devised audacious scheme to subdue Countess Anna:—"We Austrians also can be jealous. The difference between us is, that it makes us tender, and you Italians savage." She asked pointedly for an affirmative, that Vittoria was glad to reply with, when she said: "Captain Weisspriess was perfectly respectful to you?" She spoke comforting words of Carlo Ammiani, whom she hoped to see released as soon as the excitement had subsided. The chief comfort she gave was by saying that he had been originally arrested in mistake for his cousin Angelo.

"I will confide what is now my difficulty here frankly to you," said the duchess. "The Lenkensteins are my guests; I thought it better to bring them here. Angelo Guidascarpi has slain their brother—a base deed! It does not affect you in my eyes; you can understand that in theirs it does. Your being present—Laura has told me everything—at the duel, or fight, between that young man and Captain Weisspriess, will make you appear as his accomplice—at least, to Anna it will; she is the most unreasoning, the most implacable of women. She returned from the Ultenthal last night, and goes there this morning, which is a sign that Captain Weisspriess lives. I should be sorry if we lost so good an officer. As she is going to take Father Bernardus with her, it is possible that the wound is serious. Do you know you have mystified the worthy man exceedingly? What tempted you to inform him that your conscience was heavily burdened, at the same time that you refused to confess?"

"Surely he has been deluded about me," said Vittoria.

"I do but tell you his state of mind in regard to you," the duchess pursued. "Under all the circumstances, this is what I have to ask: you are my Laura's guest, therefore the guest of my heart. There is another one here, an Englishman, a Mr. Powys; and also Lieutenant Pierson, whom, naughty rebel that you are, you have been the means of bringing into disgrace; naturally you would wish to see them: but my request is, that you should keep to these rooms for two or three days: the Lenkensteins will then be gone. They can hardly reproach me for retaining an invalid. If you go down among them, it will be a cruel meeting."

Vittoria thankfully consented to the arrangement. They agreed to act in accordance with it.

Page 1670

The signora was a late riser. The duchess had come on a second visit to Vittoria when Laura joined them, and hearing of the arrangement, spurned the notion of playing craven before the Lenkensteins, who, she said, might think as it pleased them to think, but were never to suppose that there was any fear of confronting them. “And now, at this very moment, when they have their triumph, and are laughing over Viennese squibs at her, she has an idea of hiding her head—she hangs out the white flag! It can’t be. We go or we stay; but if we stay, the truth is that we are too poor to allow our enemies to think poorly of us. You, Amalia, are victorious, and you may snap your fingers at opinion. It is a luxury we cannot afford. Besides, I wish her to see my sister and make acquaintance with the Austrianized-Italian—such a wonder as is nowhere to be seen out of the Serabiglione and in the Lenkenstein family. Marriage is, indeed, a tremendous transformation. Bianca was once declared to be very like me.”

The brow-beaten duchess replied to the outburst that she had considered it right to propose the scheme for Vittoria’s seclusion on account of the Guidascarpi.

“Even if that were a good reason, there are better on the other side,” said Laura; adding, with many little backward tosses of the head, “That story has to be related in full before I denounce Angelo and Rinaldo.”

“It cannot be denied that they are assassins,” returned the duchess.

“It cannot be denied that they have killed one man or more. For you, Justice drops from the bough: we have to climb and risk our necks for it. Angelo stood to defend my darling here. Shall she be ashamed of him?”

“You will never persuade me to tolerate assassination,” said the duchess colouring.

“Never, never; I shall never persuade you; never persuade—never attempt to persuade any foreigner that we can be driven to extremes where their laws do not apply to us—-are not good for us—goad a subjected people till their madness is pardonable. Nor shall I dream of persuading you that Angelo did right in defending her from that man.”

“I maintain that there are laws applicable to all human creatures,” said the duchess. “You astonish me when you speak compassionately of such a criminal.”

“No; not of such a criminal, of such an unfortunate youth, and my countryman, when every hand is turned against him, and all tongues are reviling him. But let Angelo pass; I pray to heaven he may escape. All who are worth anything in our country are strained in every fibre, and it’s my trick to be half in love with anyone of them when he is persecuted. I fancy he is worth more than the others, and is simply luckless. You must make allowances for us, Amalia—pity captive Judah!”

“I think, my Laura, you will never be satisfied till I have ceased to be Babylonian,” said the duchess, smiling and fondling Vittoria, to whom she said, “Am I not a complaisant German?”

Page 1671

Vittoria replied gently, “If they were like you!”

“Yes, if they were like the duchess,” said Laura, “nothing would be left for us then but to hate ourselves. Fortunately, we deal with brutes.”

She was quite pitiless in prompting Vittoria to hasten down, and marvelled at the evident reluctance in doing this slight duty, of one whose courage she had recently seen rise so high. Vittoria was equally amazed by her want of sympathy, which was positive coldness, and her disregard for the sentiments of her hostess. She dressed hesitatingly, responding with forlorn eyes to Laura’s imperious “Come.” When at last she was ready to descend, Laura took her dawn, full of battle. The duchess had gone in advance to keep the peace.

The ladies of the Lenkenstein family were standing at one window of the morning room conversing. Apart from them, Merthyr Powys and Wilfrid were examining one of the cumbrous antique arms ranged along the wall. The former of these old English friends stepped up to Vittoria quickly and kissed her forehead. Wilfrid hung behind him; he made a poor show of indifference, stammered English and reddened; remembering that he was under observation he recovered wonderfully, and asked, like a patron, “How is the voice?” which would have been foolish enough to Vittoria’s more attentive hearing. She thanked him for the service he had rendered her at La Scala. Countess Lena, who looked hard at both, saw nothing to waken one jealous throb.

“Bianca, you expressed a wish to give a salute to my eldest daughter,” said Laura.

The Countess of Lenkenstein turned her head. “Have I done so?”

“It is my duty to introduce her,” interposed the duchess, and conducted the ceremony with a show of its embracing these ladies, neither one of whom changed her cold gaze.

Careful that no pause should follow, she commenced chatting to the ladies and gentlemen alternately, keeping Vittoria under her peculiar charge. Merthyr alone seconded her efforts to weave the web of converse, which is an armistice if not a treaty on these occasions.

“Have you any fresh caricatures from Vienna?” Laura continued to address her sister.

“None have reached me,” said the neutral countess.

“Have they finished laughing?”

“I cannot tell.”

“At any rate, we sing still,” Laura smiled to Vittoria. “You shall hear us after breakfast. I regret excessively that you were not in Milan on the Fifteenth. We will make amends to

you as much as possible. You shall hear us after breakfast. You will sing to please my sister, Sandra mia, will you not?”

Vittoria shook her head. Like those who have become passive, she read faces—the duchess’s imploring looks thrown from time to time to the Lenkenstein ladies, Wilfrid’s oppressed forehead, the resolute neutrality of the countess—and she was not only incapable of seconding Laura’s aggressive war, but shrank from the involvement and sickened at the indelicacy. Anna’s eyes were fixed on her and filled her with dread lest she should be resolving to demand a private interview.

Page 1672

“You refuse to sing?” said Laura; and under her breath, “When I bid you not, you insist!”

“Can she possibly sing before she grows accustomed to the air of the place?” said the duchess.

Merthyr gravely prescribed a week’s diet on grapes antecedent to the issuing of a note. “Have you never heard what a sustained grape-diet will do for the bullfinches?”

“Never,” exclaimed the duchess. “Is that the secret of their German education?”

“Apparently, for we cannot raise them to the same pitch of perfection in England.”

“I will try it upon mine. Every morning they shall have two big bunches.”

“Fresh plucked, and with the first sunlight on them. Be careful of the rules.”

Wilfrid remarked, “To make them exhibit the results, you withdraw the benefit suddenly, of course?”

“We imitate the general run of Fortune’s gifts as much as we can,” said Merthyr.

“That is the training for little shrill parrots: we have none in Italy,” Laura sighed, mock dolefully; “I fear the system would fail among us.”

“It certainly would not build Como villas,” said Lena.

Laura cast sharp eyes on her pretty face.

“It is adapted for caged voices that are required to chirrup to tickle the ears of boors.”

Anna said to the duchess: “I hope your little birds are all well this morning.”

“Come to them presently with me and let our ears be tickled,” the duchess laughed in answer; and the spiked dialogue broke, not to revive.

The duchess had observed the constant direction of Anna’s eyes upon Vittoria during the repast, and looked an interrogation at Anna, who replied to it firmly. “I must be present,” the duchess whispered. She drew Vittoria away by the hand, telling Merthyr Powys that it was unkind to him, but that he should be permitted to claim his fair friend from noon to the dinner-bell.

Laura and Bianca were discussing the same subject as the one for which Anna desired an interview with Vittoria. It was to know the conditions and cause of the duel between Angelo Guidascarpi and Captain Weisspriess, and whither Angelo had fled. “In other

words, you cry for vengeance under the name of justice," Laura phrased it, and put up a prayer for Angelo's escape.

The countess rebuked her. "It is men like Angelo who are a scandal to Italy."

"Proclaimed so; but by what title are they judged?" Laura retorted. "I have heard that his duel with Count Paul was fair, and that the grounds for it were just. Deplore it; but to condemn an Italian gentleman without hearing his personal vindication, is infamous; nay, it is Austrian. I know next to nothing of the story. Countess Ammiani has assured me that the brothers have a clear defence—not from your Vienna point of view: Italy and Vienna are different sides of the shield."

Vittoria spoke most humbly before Anna; her sole irritating remark was, that even if she were aware of the direction of Angelo's flight, she would not betray him.

Page 1673

The duchess did her utmost to induce her to see that he was a criminal, outlawed from common charity. “These Italians are really like the Jews,” she said to Anna; “they appear to me to hold together by a bond of race: you cannot get them to understand that any act can be infamous when one of their blood is guilty of it.”

Anna thought gloomily: “Then, why do you ally yourself to them?”

The duchess, with Anna, Lena, and Wilfrid, drove to the Ultenthal. Vittoria and Merthyr had a long afternoon of companionship. She had been shyer in meeting him than in meeting Wilfrid, whom she had once loved. The tie between herself and Wilfrid was broken; but Merthyr had remained true to his passionless affection, which ennobled him to her so that her heart fluttered, though she was heavily depressed. He relieved her by letting her perceive that Carlo Ammiani’s merits were not unknown to him. Merthyr smiled at Carlo for abjuring his patrician birth. He said: “Count Ammiani will be cured in time of those little roughnesses of his adopted Republicanism. You must help to cure him. Women are never so foolish as men in these things.”

When Merthyr had spoken thus, she felt that she might dare to press his hand. Sharing friendship with this steadfast nature and brotherly gentleman; who was in the ripe manhood of his years; who loved Italy and never despaired; who gave great affection, and took uncomplainingly the possible return for it;—seemed like entering on a great plain open to boundless heaven. She thought that friendship was sweeter than love. Merthyr soon left the castle to meet his sister at Coire. Laura and Vittoria drove some distance up the Vintschgau, on the way to the Engadine, with him. He affected not to be downcast by the failure of the last attempt at a rising in Milan. “Keep true to your Art; and don’t let it be subservient to anything,” he said, and his final injunction to her was that she should get a German master and practise rigidly.

Vittoria could only look at Laura in reply.

“He is for us, but not of us,” said Laura, as she kissed her fingers to him.

“If he had told me to weep and pray,” Vittoria murmured, “I think I should by-and-by lift up my head.”

“By-and-by! By-and-by I think I see a convent for me,” said Laura.

Their faces drooped.

Vittoria cried: “Ah! did he mean that my singing at La Scala was below the mark?”

At this, Laura’s laughter came out in a volume. “And that excellent Father Bernardus thinks he is gaining a convert!” she said.

Page 1674

Vittoria's depression was real, though her strong vitality appeared to mock it. Letters from Milan, enclosed to the duchess, spoke of Carlo Ammiani's imprisonment as a matter that might be indefinitely prolonged. His mother had been subjected to an examination; she had not hesitated to confess that she had received her nephew in her house, but it could not be established against her that it was not Carlo whom she had passed off to the sbirri as her son. Countess Ammiani wrote to Laura, telling her she scarcely hoped that Carlo would obtain his liberty save upon the arrest of Angelo:—-"Therefore, what I most desire, I dare not pray for!" That line of intense tragic grief haunted Vittoria like a veiled head thrusting itself across the sunlight. Countess Ammiani added that she must give her son what news she could gather;—"Concerning you," said Laura, interpreting the sentence: "Bitter days do this good, they make a proud woman abjure the traditions of her caste." A guarded answer was addressed, according to the countess's directions, to Sarpo the bookseller, in Milan. For purposes of such a nature, Barto Rizzo turned the uneasy craven to account.

It happened that one of the maids at Sonnenberg was about to marry a peasant, of Meran, part proprietor of a vineyard, and the nuptials were to be celebrated at the castle. Among those who thronged the courtyard on the afternoon of the ceremony, Vittoria beheld her faithful Beppo, who related the story of his pursuit of her, and the perfidy of Luigi;—a story so lengthy, that his voluble tongue running at full speed could barely give the outlines of it. He informed her, likewise, that he had been sent for, while lying in Trent, by Captain Weisspriess, whom he had seen at an inn of the Ultenthal, weak but improving. Beppo was the captain's propitiatory offering to Vittoria. Meanwhile the ladies sat on a terrace, overlooking the court, where a stout fellow in broad green braces and blue breeches lay half across a wooden table, thrumming a zither, which set the groups in motion. The zither is a melancholy little instrument; in range of expression it is to the harp what the winchat is to the thrush; or to the violin, what that bird is to the nightingale; yet few instruments are so exciting: here and there along these mountain valleys you may hear a Tyrolese maid set her voice to its plaintive thin tones; but when the strings are swept madly there is mad dancing; it catches at the nerves. "Andreas! Andreas!" the dancers shouted to encourage the player. Some danced with vine-poles; partners broke and wandered at will, taking fresh partners, and occasionally huddling in confusion, when the poles were levelled and tilted at them, and they dispersed. Beppo, dancing mightily to recover the use of his legs, met his acquaintance Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, and the pair devoted themselves to a rivalry of capers; jump, stamp, shuffle, leg aloft, arms in air, yell and shriek: all took hands around them and streamed, tramping the

Page 1675

measure, and the vine-poles guarded the ring. Then Andreas raised the song: "Our Lady is gracious," and immediately the whole assemblage were singing praise to the Lady of the castle. Following which, wine being brought to Andreas, he drank to his lady, to his lady's guests, to the bride, to the, bridegroom, to everybody. He was now ready to improvize, and dashed thumb and finger on the zither, tossing up his face, swarthy-flushed: "There was a steinbock with a beard." Half-a-dozen voices repeated it, as to proclaim the theme.

Alas! a beard indeed, for there is no end to this animal. I know him;" said the duchess dolefully.

> "There was a steinbock with a beard;
> Of no gun was he afeard
> Piff-paff left of him: piff-paff right of him
> Piff-paff everywhere, where you get a sight of him."

The steinbock led through the whole course of a mountaineer's emotions and experiences, with piff-paff continually left of him and right of him and nothing hitting him. The mountaineer is perplexed; an able man, a dead shot, who must undo the puzzle or lose faith in his skill, is a tremendous pursuer, and the mountaineer follows the steinbock ever. A 'sennderin' at a 'sennhutchen' tells him that she admitted the steinbock last night, and her curled hair frizzled under the steinbock's eyes. The case is only too clear: my goodness! the steinbock is the— "Der Teu . . . !" said Andreas, with a comic stop of horror, the rhyme falling cleverly to "ai." Henceforth the mountaineer becomes transformed into a champion of humanity, hunting the wicked bearded steinbock in all corners; especially through the cabinet of those dark men who decree the taxes detested in Tyrol.

The song had as yet but fairly commenced, when a break in the 'piff-paff' chorus warned Andreas that he was losing influence, women and men were handing on a paper and bending their heads over it; their responses hushed altogether, or were ludicrously inefficient.

"I really believe the poor brute has come to a Christian finish—this Ahasuerus of steinbocks!" said the duchess.

The transition to silence was so extraordinary and abrupt, that she called to her chasseur to know the meaning of it. Feckelwitz fetched the paper and handed it up. It exhibited a cross done in blood under the word 'Meran,' and bearing that day's date. One glance at it told Laura what it meant. The bride in the court below was shedding tears: the bridegroom was lighting his pipe and consoling her; women were chattering, men shrugging. Some said they had seen an old grey-haired hag (hexe) stand at the gates and fling down a piece of paper. A little boy whose imagination was alive with the tale of the steinbock, declared that her face was awful, and that she had only the, use of

one foot. A man patted him on the shoulder, and gave him a gulp of wine, saying with his shrewdest air: “One may laugh at the devil once too

Page 1676

often, though!” and that sentiment was echoed; the women suggested in addition the possibility of the bride Lisa having something on her conscience, seeing that she had lived in a castle two years and more. The potential persuasions of Father Bernardus were required to get the bride to go away to her husband’s roof that evening: when she did make her departure, the superstitious peasantry were not a merry party that followed at her heels.

At the break-up of the festivities Wilfrid received an intimation that his sister had arrived in Meran from Bormio. He went down to see her, and returned at a late hour. The ladies had gone to rest. He wrote a few underlined words, entreating Vittoria to grant an immediate interview in the library of the castle. The missive was entrusted to Aennchen. Vittoria came in alarm.

“My sister is perfectly well,” said Wilfrid. “She has heard that Captain Gambier has been arrested in the mountains; she had some fears concerning you, which I quieted. What I have to tell you, does not relate to her. The man Angelo Guidascarpi is in Meran. I wish you to let the signora know that if he is not carried out of the city before sunset to-morrow, I must positively inform the superior officer of the district of his presence there.”

This was their first private interview. Vittoria (for she knew him) had acceded to it, much fearing that it would lead to her having to put on her sex’s armour. To collect her wits, she asked tremblingly how Wilfrid had chanced to see Angelo. An old Italian woman, he said, had accosted him at the foot of the mountain, and hearing that he was truly an Englishman—“I am out of my uniform,” Wilfrid remarked with intentional bitterness—had conducted him to the house of an Italian in the city, where Angelo Guidascarpi was lying.

“Ill?” said Vittoria.

“Just recovering. After that duel, or whatever it may be called with Weisspriess, he lay all night out on the mountains. He managed to get the help of a couple of fellows, who led him at dusk into Meran, saw an Italian name over a shop, and—I will say for them that the rascals hold together. There he is, at all events.”

“Would you denounce a sick man, Wilfrid?”

“I certainly cannot forget my duty upon every point”

“You are changed!”

“Changed! Am I the only one who is changed?”

“He must have supposed that it would be Merthyr. I remember speaking of Merthyr to him as our unchangeable friend. I told him Merthyr would be here.”

“Instead of Merthyr, he had the misfortune to see your changeable friend, if you will have it so.”

“But how can it be your duty to denounce him, Wilfrid. You have quitted that army.”

“Have I? I have forfeited my rank, perhaps.”

“And Angelo is not guilty of a military offence.”

“He has slain one of a family that I am bound to respect.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Vittoria hurriedly.

Page 1677

Her forehead showed distress of mind; she wanted Laura's counsel.

"Wilfrid, do you know the whole story?"

"I know that he inveigled Count Paul to his house and slew him; either he or his brother, or both."

"I have been with him for days, Wilfrid. I believe that he would do no dishonourable thing. He is related——".

"He is the cousin of Count Ammiani."

"Ah! would you plunge us in misery?"

"How?"

"Count Ammiani is my lover."

She uttered it unblushingly, and with tender eyes fixed on him.

"Your lover!" he exclaimed, with vile emphasis.

"He will be my husband," she murmured, while the mounting hot colour burned at her temples.

"Changed—who is changed?" he said, in a vehement underneath. "For that reason I am to be false to her who does me the honour to care for me!"

"I would not have you false to her in thought or deed."

"You ask me to spare this man on account of his relationship to your lover, and though he has murdered the brother of the lady whom I esteem. What on earth is the meaning of the petition? Really, you amaze me."

"I appeal to your generosity, Wilfrid, I am Emilia."

"Are you?"

She gave him her hand. He took it, and felt at once the limit of all that he might claim. Dropping the hand, he said:

"Will nothing less than my ruin satisfy you? Since that night at La Scala, I am in disgrace with my uncle; I expect at any moment to hear that I am cashiered from the army, if not a prisoner. What is it that you ask of me now? To conspire with you in shielding the man who has done a mortal injury to the family of which I am almost one. Your reason must perceive that you ask too much. I would willingly assist you in sparing

the feelings of Count Ammiani; and, believe me, gratitude is the last thing I require to stimulate my services. You ask too much; you must see that you ask too much."

"I do," said Vittoria. "Good-night, Wilfrid."

He was startled to find her going, and lost his equable voice in trying to detain her. She sought relief in Laura's bosom, to whom she recapitulated the interview.

"Is it possible," Laura said, looking at her intently, "that you do not recognize the folly of telling this Lieutenant Pierson that you were pleading to him on behalf of your lover? Could anything be so monstrous, when one can see that he is malleable to the twist of your little finger? Are you only half a woman, that you have no consciousness of your power? Probably you can allow yourself—enviable privilege!—to suppose that he called you down at this late hour simply to inform you that he is compelled to do something which will cause you unhappiness! I repeat, it is an enviable privilege. Now, when the real occasion has come for you to serve us, you have not a single weapon—-except these tears, which you are wasting on my lap.

Page 1678

Be sure that if he denounces Angelo, Angelo's life cries out against you. You have but to quicken your brain to save him. Did he expose his life for you or not? I knew that he was in Meran," the signora continued sadly. "The paper which frightened the silly peasants, revealed to me that he was there, needing help. I told you Angelo was under an evil star. I thought my day to-morrow would be a day of scheming. The task has become easy, if you will."

"Be merciful; the task is dreadful," said Vittoria.

"The task is simple. You have an instrument ready to your hands. You can do just what you like with him—make an Italian of him; make him renounce his engagement to this pert little Lena of Lenkenstein, break his sword, play Arlecchino, do what you please. He is not required for any outrageous performance. A week, and Angelo will have recovered his strength; you likewise may resume the statuesque demeanour which you have been exhibiting here. For the space of one week you are asked for some natural exercise of your wits and compliancy. Hitherto what have you accomplished, pray?" Laura struck spitefully at Vittoria's degraded estimation of her worth as measured by events. "You have done nothing—worse than nothing. It gives me horrors to find it necessary to entreat you to look your duty in the face and do it, that even three or four Italian hearts—Carlo among them—may thank you. Not Carlo, you say?" (Vittoria had sobbed, "No, not Carlo.") "How little you know men! How little do you think how the obligations of the hour should affect a creature deserving life! Do you fancy that Carlo wishes you to be for ever reading the line of a copy-book and shaping your conduct by it? Our Italian girls do this; he despises them. Listen to me; do not I know what is meant by the truth of love? I pass through fire, and keep constant to it; but you have some vile Romance of Chivalry in your head; a modern sculptor's figure, '*meditation*;' that is the sort of bride you would give him in the stirring days of Italy. Do you think it is only a statue that can be true? Perceive—will you not—that this Lieutenant Pierson is your enemy. He tells you as much; surely the challenge is fair? Defeat him as you best can. Angelo shall not be abandoned."

"O me! it is unendurable; you are merciless," said Vittoria, shuddering.

She saw the vile figure of herself aping smirks and tender meanings to her old lover. It was a picture that she dared not let her mind rest on: how then could she personate it? All through her life she had been frank; as a young woman, she was clear of soul; she felt that her, simplicity was already soiled by the bare comprehension of the abominable course indicated by Laura. Degradation seemed to have been a thing up to this moment only dreamed of; but now that it was demanded of her to play coquette and trick her womanhood with false allurements, she knew the sentiment of utter ruin; she was ashamed.

Page 1679

No word is more lightly spoken than shame. Vittoria's early devotion to her Art, and subsequently to her Italy, had carried her through the term when she would otherwise have showed the natural mild attack of the disease. It came on her now in a rush, penetrating every chamber of her heart, overwhelming her; she could see no distinction between being ever so little false and altogether despicable. She had loathings of her body and her life. With grovelling difficulty of speech she endeavoured to convey the sense of her repugnance to Laura, who leaned her ear, wondering at such bluntness of wit in a woman, and said, "Are you quite deficient in the craft of your sex, child? You can, and you will, guard yourself ten times better when your aim is simply to subject him." But this was not reason to a spirit writhing in the serpent-coil of fiery blushes.

Vittoria said, "I shall pity him so."

She meant she would pity Wilfrid in deluding him. It was a taint of the hypocrisy which comes with shame.

The signora retorted: "I can't follow the action of your mind a bit."

Pity being a form of tenderness, Laura supposed that she would intuitively hate the man who compelled her to do what she abhorred.

They spent the greater portion of the night in this debate.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ESCAPE OF ANGELO

Vittoria knew better than Laura that the task was easy; she had but to override her aversion to the show of trifling with a dead passion; and when she thought of Angelo lying helpless in the swarm of enemies, and that Wilfrid could consent to use his tragic advantage to force her to silly love-play, his selfishness wrought its reflection, so that she became sufficiently unjust to forget her marvellous personal influence over him. Even her tenacious sentiment concerning his white uniform was clouded. She very soon ceased to be shamefaced in her own fancy. At dawn she stood at her window looking across the valley of Meran, and felt the whole scene in a song of her heart, with the faintest recollection of her having passed through a tempest overnight. The warm Southern glow of the enfoliaged valley recalled her living Italy, and Italy her voice. She grew wakefully glad: it was her nature, not her mind, that had twisted in the convulsions of last night's horror of shame. The chirp of healthy blood in full-flowing veins dispersed it; and as a tropical atmosphere is cleared by the hurricane, she lost her depression and went down among her enemies possessed by an inner delight, that was again of her nature, not of her mind. She took her gladness for a happy sign that she had power to

rise buoyant above circumstances; and though aware that she was getting to see things in harsh outlines, she was unconscious of her haggard imagination.

Page 1680

The Lenkensteins had projected to escape the blandishments of Vienna by residing during the winter in Venice, where Wilfrid and his sister were to be the guests of the countess:—a pleasant prospect that was dashed out by an official visit from Colonel Zofel of the Meran garrison, through whom it was known that Lieutenant Pierson, while enjoying his full liberty to investigate the charms of the neighbourhood, might not extend his excursions beyond a pedestrian day's limit;—he was, in fact, under surveillance. The colonel formally exacted his word of honour that he would not attempt to pass the bounds, and explained to the duchess that the injunction was favourable to the lieutenant, as implying that he must be ready at any moment to receive the order to join his regiment. Wilfrid bowed with a proper soldierly submission. Respecting the criminal whom his men were pursuing, Colonel Zofel said that he was sparing no efforts to come on his traces; he supposed, from what he had heard in the Ultenthal, that Guidascarpi was on his back somewhere within a short range of Meran. Vittoria strained her ears to the colonel's German; she fancied his communication to be that he suspected Angelo's presence in Meran.

The official part of his visit being terminated, the colonel addressed some questions to the duchess concerning the night of the famous Fifteenth at La Scala. He was an amateur, and spoke with enthusiasm of the reports of the new prima donna. The duchess perceived that he was asking for an introduction to the heroine of the night, and graciously said that perhaps that very prima donna would make amends, to him for his absence on the occasion. Vittoria checked a movement of revolt in her frame. She cast an involuntary look at Wilfrid. "Now it begins," she thought, and went to the piano: she had previously refused to sing. Wilfrid had to bend his head over his betrothed and listen to her whisperings. He did so, carelessly swaying his hand to the measure of the aria, with an increasing bitter comparison of the two voices. Lena persisted in talking; she was indignant at his abandonment of the journey to Venice; she reproached him as feeble, inconsiderate, indifferent. Then for an instant she would pause to hear the voice, and renew her assault. "We ought to be thankful that she is not singing a song of death and destruction to us! The archduchess is coming to Venice. If you are presented to her and please her, and get the writs of naturalization prepared, you will be one of us completely, and your fortune is made. If you stay here—why should you stay? It is nothing but your uncle's caprice. I am too angry to care for music. If you stay, you will earn my contempt. I will not be buried another week in such a place. I am tired of weeping. We all go to Venice: Captain Weisspriess follows us. We are to have endless Balls, an opera, a Court there—with whom am I to dance, pray, when I am out of mourning? Am I to sit and govern my feet under a chair, and gaze like an imbecile nun? It is too preposterous. I am betrothed to you; I wish, I wish to behave like a betrothed. The archduchess herself will laugh to see me chained to a chair. I shall have to reply a thousand times to 'Where is he?' What can I answer? 'Wouldn't come,' will be the only true reply."

Page 1681

During this tirade, Vittoria was singing one of her old songs, well known to Wilfrid, which brought the vision of a foaming weir, and moonlight between the branches of a great cedar-tree, and the lost love of his heart sitting by his side in the noising stillness. He was sure that she could be singing it for no one but for him. The leap taken by his spirit from this time to that, was shorter than from the past back to the present.

“You do not applaud,” said Lena, when the song had ceased.

He murmured: “I never do, in drawing-rooms.”

“A cantatrice expects it everywhere; these creatures live on it.”

“I’ll tell her, if you like, what we thought of it, when I take her down to my sister, presently.”

“Are you not to take me down?”

“The etiquette is to hand her up to you.”

“No, no!” Lena insisted, in abhorrence of etiquette; but Wilfrid said pointedly that his sister’s feelings must be spared. “Her husband is an animal: he is a millionaire city-of-London merchant; conceive him! He has drunk himself gouty on Port wine, and here he is for the grape-cure.”

“Ah! in that England of yours, women marry for wealth,” said Lena.

“Yes, in your Austria they have a better motive” he interpreted her sentiment.

“Say, in our Austria.”

“In our Austria, certainly.”

“And with our holy religion?”

“It is not yet mine.”

“It will be?” She put the question eagerly.

Wilfrid hesitated, and by his adept hesitation succeeded in throwing her off the jealous scent.

“Say that it will be, my Wilfrid!”

“You must give me time”

“This subject always makes you cold.”

“My own Lena!”

“Can I be, if we are doomed to be parted when we die?”

There is small space for compunction in a man’s heart when he is in Wilfrid’s state, burning with the revival of what seemed to him a superhuman attachment. He had no design to break his acknowledged bondage to Countess Lena, and answered her tender speech almost as tenderly.

It never occurred to him, as he was walking down to Meran with Vittoria, that she could suppose him to be bartering to help rescue the life of a wretched man in return for soft confidential looks of entreaty; nor did he reflect, that when cast on him, they might mean no more than the wish to move him for a charitable purpose. The completeness of her fascination was shown by his reading her entirely by his own emotions, so that a lowly-uttered word, or a wavering unwilling glance, made him think that she was subdued by the charm of the old days.

“Is it here?” she said, stopping under the first Italian name she saw in the arcade of shops.

“How on earth have you guessed it?” he asked, astonished.

Page 1682

She told him to wait at the end of the arcade, and passed in. When she joined him again, she was downcast. They went straight to Adela's hotel, where the one thing which gave her animation was the hearing that Mr. Sedley had met an English doctor there, and had placed himself in his hands. Adela dressed splendidly for her presentation to the duchess. Having done so, she noticed Vittoria's depressed countenance and difficult breathing. She commanded her to see the doctor. Vittoria consented, and made use of him. She could tell Laura confidently at night that Wilfrid would not betray Angelo, though she had not spoken one direct word to him on the subject.

Wilfrid was peculiarly adept in the idle game he played. One who is intent upon an evil end is open to expose his plan. But he had none in view; he lived for the luxurious sensation of being near the woman who fascinated him, and who was now positively abashed when by his side. Adela suggested to him faintly—she believed it was her spontaneous idea—that he might be making his countess jealous. He assured her that the fancy sprang from scenes which she remembered, and that she could have no idea of the pride of a highborn Austrian girl, who was incapable of conceiving jealousy of a person below her class. Adela replied that it was not his manner so much as Emilia's which might arouse the suspicion; but she immediately affected to appreciate the sentiments of a highborn Austrian girl toward a cantatrice, whose gifts we regard simply as an aristocratic entertainment. Wilfrid induced his sister to relate Vittoria's early history to Countess Lena; and himself almost wondered, when he heard it in bare words, at that haunting vision of the glory of Vittoria at La Scala—where, as he remembered, he would have run against destruction to cling to her lips. Adela was at first alarmed by the concentrated wrathfulness which she discovered in the bosom of Countess Anna, who, as their intimacy waxed, spoke of the intruding opera siren in terms hardly proper even to married women; but it seemed right, as being possibly aristocratic. Lena was much more tolerant. "I have just the same enthusiasm for soldiers that my Wilfrid has for singers," she said; and it afforded Adela exquisite pleasure to hear her tell how that she had originally heard of the 'eccentric young Englishman,' General Pierson's nephew, as a Lustspiel—a comedy; and of his feats on horseback, and his duels, and his—"he was very wicked over here, you know;" Lena laughed. She assumed the privileges of her four-and-twenty years and her rank. Her marriage was to take place in the Spring. She announced it with the simplicity of an independent woman of the world, adding, "That is, if my Wilfrid will oblige me by not plunging into further disgrace with the General."

"No; you will not marry a man who is under a cloud," Anna subjoined.

"Certainly not a soldier," said Lena. "What it was exactly that he did at La Scala, I don't know, and don't care to know, but he was then ignorant that she had touched the hand of that Guidascarpi. I decide by this—he was valiant; he defied everybody: therefore I forgive him. He is not in disgrace with me. I will reinstate him."

Page 1683

“You have your own way of being romantic,” said Anna. “A soldier who forgets his duty is in my opinion only a brave fool.”

“It seems to me that a great many gallant officers are fond of fine voices,” Lena retorted.

“No doubt it is a fashion among them,” said Anna.

Adela recoiled with astonishment when she began to see the light in which the sisters regarded Vittoria; and she was loyal enough to hint and protest on her friend’s behalf. The sisters called her a very good soul. “It may not be in England as over here,” said Anna. “We have to submit to these little social scourges.”

Lena whispered to Adela, “An angry woman will think the worst. I have no doubt of my Wilfrid. If I had!—”

Her eyes flashed. Fire was not wanting in her.

The difficulties which tasked the amiable duchess to preserve an outward show of peace among the antagonistic elements she gathered together were increased by the arrival at the castle of Count Lenkenstein, Bianca’s husband, and head of the family, from Bologna. He was a tall and courtly man, who had one face for his friends and another for the reverse party; which is to say, that his manners could be bad. Count Lenkenstein was accompanied by Count Serabiglione, who brought Laura’s children with their Roman nurse, Assunta. Laura kissed her little ones, and sent them out of her sight. Vittoria found her home in their play and prattle. She needed a refuge, for Count Lenkenstein was singularly brutal in his bearing toward her. He let her know that he had come to Meran to superintend the hunt for the assassin, Angelo Guidascarpi. He attempted to exact her promise in precise speech that she would be on the spot to testify against Angelo when that foul villain should be caught. He objected openly to Laura’s children going about with her. Bitter talk on every starting subject was exchanged across the duchess’s table. She herself was in disgrace on Laura’s account, and had to practise an overflowing sweetness, with no one to second her efforts. The two noblemen spoke in accord on the bubble revolution. The strong hand—ay, the strong hand! The strong hand disposes of vermin. Laura listened to them, pallid with silent torture. “Since the rascals have taken to assassination, we know that we have them at the dregs,” said Count Lenkenstein. “A cord round the throats of a few scores of them, and the country will learn the virtue of docility.”

Laura whispered to her sister: “Have you espoused a hangman?”

Such dropping of deadly shells in a quiet society went near to scattering it violently; but the union was necessitous. Count Lenkenstein desired to confront Vittoria with Angelo; Laura would not quit her side, and Amalia would not expel her friend. Count Lenkenstein complained roughly of Laura’s conduct; nor did Laura escape her father’s

reproof. “Sir, you are privileged to say what you will to me,” she responded, with the humility which exasperated him.

Page 1684

“Yes, you bend, you bend, that you may be stiff-necked when it suits you,” he snapped her short.

“Surely that is the text of the sermon you preach to our Italy!”

“A little more, as you are running on now, madame, and our Italy will be froth on the lips. You see, she is ruined.”

“Chi lo fa, lo sa,” hummed Laura; “but I would avoid quoting you as that authority.”

“After your last miserable fiasco, my dear!”

“It was another of our school exercises. We had not been good boys and girls. We had learnt our lesson imperfectly. We have received our punishment, and we mean to do better next time.”

“Behave seasonably, fittingly; be less of a wasp; school your tongue.”

“Bianca is a pattern to me, I am aware,” said Laura.

“She is a good wife.”

“I am a poor widow.”

“She is a good daughter.”

“I am a wicked rebel.”

“And you are scheming at something now,” said the little nobleman, sagacious so far; but he was too eager to read the verification of the tentative remark in her face, and she perceived that it was a guess founded on her show of spirit.

“Scheming to contain my temper, which is much tried,” she said. “But I suppose it supports me. I can always keep up against hostility.”

“You provoke it; you provoke it.”

“My instinct, then, divines my medicine.”

“Exactly, my dear; your personal instinct. That instigates you all. And none are so easily conciliated as these Austrians. Conciliate them, and you have them.” Count Serabiglione diverged into a repetition of his theory of the policy and mission of superior intelligences, as regarded his system for dealing with the Austrians.

Nurse Assunta’s jealousy was worked upon to separate the children from Vittoria. They ran down with her no more to meet the vast bowls of grapes in the morning and feather

their hats with vine leaves. Deprived of her darlings, the loneliness of her days made her look to Wilfrid for commiseration. Father Bernardus was too continually exhortative, and fenced too much to "hit the eyeball of her conscience," as he phrased it, to afford her repose. Wilfrid could tell himself that he had already done much for her; for if what he had done were known, his career, social and military, was ended. This idea being accompanied by a sense of security delighted him; he was accustomed to inquire of Angelo's condition, and praise the British doctor who was attending him gratuitously. "I wish I could get him out of the way," he said, and frowned as in a mental struggle. Vittoria heard him repeat his "I wish!" It heightened greatly her conception of the sacrifice he would be making on her behalf and charity's. She spoke with a reverential tenderness, such as it was hard to suppose a woman capable of addressing to other than the man who moved her soul. The words she uttered were pure thanks; it was the tone which sent them winged and shaking seed. She had spoken partly to prompt his activity, but her self-respect had been sustained by his avoidance of the dreaded old themes, and that grateful feeling made her voice musically rich.

Page 1685

“I dare not go to him, but the doctor tells me the fever has left him, Wilfrid; his wounds are healing; but he is bandaged from head to foot. The sword pierced his side twice, and his arms and hands are cut horribly. He cannot yet walk. If he is discovered he is lost. Count Lenkenstein has declared that he will stay at the castle till he has him his prisoner. The soldiers are all round us. They know that Angelo is in the ring. They have traced him all over from the Valtellina to this Ultenthal, and only cannot guess where he is in the lion’s jaw. I rise in the morning, thinking, ‘Is this to be the black day?’ He is sure to be caught.”

“If I could hit on a plan,” said Wilfrid, figuring as though he had a diorama of impossible schemes revolving before his eyes.

“I could believe in the actual whispering of an angel if you did. It was to guard me that Angelo put himself in peril.”

“Then,” said Wilfrid, “I am his debtor. I owe him as much as my life is worth.”

“Think, think,” she urged; and promised affection, devotion, veneration, vague things, that were too like his own sentiments to prompt him pointedly. Yet he so pledged himself to her by word, and prepared his own mind to conceive the act of service, that (as he did not reflect) circumstance might at any moment plunge him into a gulf. Conduct of this sort is a challenge sure to be answered.

One morning Vittoria was gladdened by a letter from Rocco Ricci, who had fled to Turin. He told her that the king had promised to give her a warm welcome in his capital, where her name was famous. She consulted with Laura, and they resolved to go as soon as Angelo could stand on his feet. Turin was cold—Italy, but it was Italy; and from Turin the Italian army was to flow, like the Mincio from the Garda lake. “And there, too, is a stage,” Vittoria thought, in a suddenly revived thirst for the stage and a field for work. She determined to run down to Meran and see Angelo. Laura walked a little way with her, till Wilfrid, alert for these occasions, joined them. On the commencement of the zig-zag below, there were soldiers, the sight of whom was not confusing. Military messengers frequently came up to the castle where Count Lenkenstein, assisted by Count Serabiglione, examined their depositions, the Italian in the manner of a winding lawyer, the German of a gruff judge. Half-way down the zig-zag Vittoria cast a preconcerted signal back to Laura. The soldiers had a pair of prisoners between their ranks; Vittoria recognized the men who had carried Captain Weisspriess from the ground where the duel was fought. A quick divination told her that they held Angelo’s life on their tongues. They must have found him in the mountain-pass while hurrying to their homes, and it was they who had led him to Meran. On the Passeyr bridge, she turned and said to Wilfrid, “Help me now. Send instantly the doctor in a carriage to the place where he is lying.”

Page 1686

Wilfrid was intent on her flushed beauty and the half-compressed quiver of her lip.

She quitted him and hurried to Angelo. Her joy broke out in a cry of thankfulness at sight of Angelo; he had risen from his bed; he could stand, and he smiled.

“That Jacopo is just now the nearest link to me,” he said, when she related her having seen the two men guarded by soldiers; he felt helpless, and spoke in resignation. She followed his eye about the room till it rested on the stilet. This she handed to him. “If they think of having me alive!” he said softly. The Italian and his wife who had given him shelter and nursed him came in, and approved his going, though they did not complain of what they might chance to have incurred. He offered them his purse, and they took it. Minutes of grievous expectation went by; Vittoria could endure them no longer; she ran out to the hotel, near which, in the shade of a poplar, Wilfrid was smoking quietly. He informed her that his sister and the doctor had driven out to meet Captain Gambier; his brother-in-law was alone upstairs. Her look of amazement touched him more shrewdly than scorn, and he said, “What on earth can I do?”

“Order out a carriage. Send your brother-in-law in it. If you tell him ‘for your health,’ he will go.”

“On my honour, I don’t know where those three words would not send him,” said Wilfrid; but he did not move, and was for protesting that he really could not guess what was the matter, and the ground for all this urgency.

Vittoria compelled her angry lips to speak out her suspicions explicitly, whereupon he glanced at the sun-glare in a meditation, occasionally blinking his eyes. She thought, “Oh, heaven! can he be waiting for me to coax him?” It was the truth, though it would have been strange to him to have heard it. She grew sure that it was the truth; never had she despised living creature so utterly as when she murmured, “My best friend! my brother! my noble Wilfrid! my old beloved! help me now, without loss of a minute.”

It caused his breath to come and go unevenly.

“Repeat that—once, only once,” he said.

She looked at him with the sorrowful earnestness which, as its meaning was shut from him, was so sweet.

“You will repeat it by-and-by?—another time? Trust me to do my utmost. Old beloved! What is the meaning of ‘old beloved’? One word in explanation. If it means anything, I would die for you! Emilia, do you hear?—die for you! To me you are nothing old or by-gone, whatever I may be to you. To me—yes, I will order the carriage you are the Emilia—listen! listen! Ah! you have shut your ears against me. I am bound in all seeming, but I—you drive me mad; you know your power. Speak one word, that I may

feel—that I may be convinced . . , or not a single word; I will obey you without. I have said that you command my life."

Page 1687

In a block of carriages on the bridge, Vittoria perceived a lifted hand. It was Laura's; Beppo was in attendance on her. Laura drove up and said: "You guessed right; where is he?" The communications between them were more indicated than spoken. Beppo had heard Jacopo confess to his having conducted a wounded Italian gentleman into Meran. "That means that the houses will be searched within an hour," said Laura; "my brother-in-law Bear is radiant." She mimicked the Lenkenstein physiognomy spontaneously in the run of her speech. "If Angelo can help himself ever so little, he has a fair start." A look was cast on Wilfrid; Vittoria nodded—Wilfrid was entrapped.

"Englishmen we can trust," said Laura, and requested him to step into her carriage. He glanced round the open space. Beppo did the same, and beheld the chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz crossing the bridge on foot, but he said nothing. Wilfrid was on the step of the carriage, for what positive object neither he nor the others knew, when his sister and the doctor joined them. Captain Gambier was still missing.

"He would have done anything for us," Vittoria said in Wilfrid's hearing.

"Tell us what plan you have," the latter replied fretfully.

She whispered: "Persuade Adela to make her husband drive out. The doctor will go too, and Beppo. They shall take Angelo. Our carriage will follow empty, and bring Mr. Sedley back."

Wilfrid cast his eyes up in the air, at the monstrous impudence of the project. "A storm is coming on," he suggested, to divert her reading of his grimace; but she was speaking to the doctor, who readily answered her aloud: "If you are certain of what you say." The remark incited Wilfrid to be no subordinate in devotion; handing Adela from the carriage, while the doctor ran up to Mr. Sedley, he drew her away. Laura and Vittoria watched the motion of their eyes and lips.

"Will he tell her the purpose?" said Laura.

Vittoria smiled nervously: "He is fibbing."

Marking the energy expended by Wilfrid in this art, the wiser woman said: "Be on your guard the next two minutes he gets you alone."

"You see his devotion."

"Does he see his compensation? But he must help us at any hazard."

Adela broke away from her brother twice, and each time he fixed her to the spot more imperiously. At last she ran into the hotel; she was crying. "A bad economy of tears," said Laura, commenting on the dumb scene, to soothe her savage impatience. "In another twenty minutes we shall have the city gates locked."

They heard a window thrown up; Mr. Sedley's head came out, and peered at the sky. Wilfrid said to Vittoria: "I can do nothing beyond what I have done, I fear."

She thought it was a petition for thanks, but Laura knew better; she said: "I see Count Lenkenstein on his way to the barracks."

Wilfrid bowed: "I may be able to serve you in that quarter."

Page 1688

He retired: whereupon Laura inquired how her friend could reasonably suppose that a man would ever endure being thanked in public.

“I shall never understand and never care to understand them,” said Vittoria.

“It is a knowledge that is forced on us, my dear. May heaven make the minds of our enemies stupid for the next five hours!—Apropos of what I was saying, women and men are in two hostile camps. We have a sort of general armistice and everlasting strife of individuals—Ah!” she clapped hands on her knees, “here comes your doctor; I could fancy I see a pointed light on his head. Men of science, my Sandra, are always the humanest.”

The chill air of wind preceding thunder was driving round the head of the vale, and Mr. Sedley, wrapped in furs, and feebly remonstrating with his medical adviser, stepped into his carriage. The doctor followed him, giving a grave recognition of Vittoria’s gaze. Both gentlemen raised their hats to the ladies, who alighted as soon as they had gone in the direction of the Vintschgau road.

“One has only to furnish you with money, my Beppo,” said Vittoria, complimenting his quick apprehensiveness. “Buy bread and cakes at one of the shops, and buy wine. You will find me where you can, when you have seen him safe. I have no idea of where my home will be. Perhaps England.”

“Italy, Italy! faint heart,” said Laura.

Furnished with money, Beppo rolled away gaily.

The doubt was in Laura whether an Englishman’s wits were to be relied on in such an emergency; but she admitted that the doctor had looked full enough of serious meaning, and that the Englishman named Merthyr Powys was keen and ready. They sat a long half-hour, that thumped itself out like an alarm-bell, under the poplars, by the clamouring Passeyr, watching the roll and spring of the waters, and the radiant foam, while band-music played to a great company of visitors, and sounds of thunder drew near. Over the mountains above the Adige, the leaden fingers of an advance of the thunder-cloud pushed slowly, and on a sudden a mighty gale sat heaped blank on the mountain-top and blew. Down went the heads of the poplars, the river staggered in its leap, the vale was shuddering grey. It was like the transformation in a fairy tale; Beauty had taken her old cloak about her, and bent to calamity. The poplars streamed their length sideways, and in the pauses of the strenuous wind nodded and dashed wildly and white over the dead black water, that waxed in foam and hissed, showing its teeth like a beast enraged. Laura and Vittoria joined hands and struggled for shelter. The tent of a travelling circus from the South, newly-pitched on a grassplot near the river, was caught up and whirled in the air and flung in the face of a marching guard of soldiery, whom it

swathed and bore sheer to earth, while on them and around them a line of poplars fell flat, the wind whistling over them. Laura directed Vittoria's

Page 1689

eyes to the sight. “See,” she said, and her face was set hard with cold and excitement, so that she looked a witch in the uproar; “would you not say the devil is loose now Angelo is abroad?” Thunder and lightning possessed the vale, and then a vertical rain. At the first gleam of sunlight, Laura and Vittoria walked up to the Laubengasse—the street of the arcades, where they made purchases of numerous needless articles, not daring to enter the Italian’s shop. A woman at a fruitstall opposite to it told them that no carriage could have driven up there. During their great perplexity, mud and rain-stained soldiers, the same whom they had seen borne to earth by the flying curtain, marched before the shop; the shop and the house were searched; the Italian and his old liming wife were carried away.

“Tell me now, that storm was not Angelo’s friend!” Laura muttered.

“Can he have escaped?” said Vittoria.

“He is ‘on horseback.’” Laura quoted the Italian proverb to signify that he had flown; how, she could not say, and none could inform her. The joy of their hearts rose in one fountain.

“I shall feel better blood in my body from this moment,” Laura said; and Vittoria, “Oh! we can be strong, if we only resolve.”

“You want to sing?”

“I do.”

“I shall find pleasure in your voice now.”

“The wicked voice!”

“Yes, the very wicked voice! But I shall be glad to hear it. You can sing to-night, and drown those Lenkensteins.”

“If my Carlo could hear me!”

“Ah!” sighed the signora, musing. “He is in prison now. I remember him, the dearest little lad, fencing with my husband for exercise after they had been writing all day. When Giacomo was imprisoned, Carlo sat outside the prison walls till it was time for him to enter; his chin and upper lip were smooth as a girl’s. Giacomo said to him, ’May you always have the power of going out, or not have a wife waiting for you.’ Here they come.” (She spoke of tears.) “It’s because I am joyful. The channel for them has grown so dry that they prick and sting. Oh, Sandra! it would be pleasant to me if we might both be buried for seven days, and have one long howl of weakness together. A little bite of satisfaction makes me so tired. I believe there’s something very bad for us in our always being at war, and never, never gaining ground. Just one spark of triumph

intoxicates us. Look at all those people pouring out again. They are the children of fair weather. I hope the state of their health does not trouble them too much. Vienna sends consumptive patients here. If you regard them attentively, you will observe that they have an anxious air. Their constitutions are not sound; they fear they may die."

Laura's irony was unforced; it was no more than a subtle discord naturally struck from the scene by a soul in contrast with it.

Page 1690

They beheld the riding forth of troopers and a knot of officers hotly conversing together. At another point the duchess and the Lenkenstein ladies, Count Lenkenstein, Count Serabiglione, and Wilfrid paced up and down, waiting for music. Laura left the public places and crossed an upper bridge over the Passeyr, near the castle, by which route she skirted vines and dropped over sloping meadows to some shaded boulders where the Passeyr found a sandy bay, and leaped in transparent green, and whitened and swung twisting in a long smooth body down a narrow chasm, and noised below. The thundering torrent stilled their sensations: and the water, making battle against great blocks of porphyry and granite, caught their thoughts. So strong was the impression of it on Vittoria's mind, that for hours after, every image she conceived seemed proper to the inrush and outpour; the elbowing, the tossing, the foaming, the burst on stones, and silvery bubbles under and silvery canopy above, the chattering and huzzaing; all working on to the one-toned fall beneath the rainbow on the castle-rock.

Next day, the chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz deposed in full company at Sonnenberg, that, obeying Count Serabiglione's instructions, he had gone down to the city, and had there seen Lieutenant Pierson with the ladies in front of the hotel; he had followed the English carriage, which took up a man who was standing ready on crutches at the corner of the Laubengasse, and drove rapidly out of the North-western gate, leading to Schlanders and Mals and the Engadine. He had witnessed the transfer of the crippled man from one carriage to another, and had raised shouts and given hue and cry, but the intervention of the storm had stopped his pursuit.

He was proceeding to say what his suppositions were. Count Lenkenstein lifted his finger for Wilfrid to follow him out of the room. Count Serabiglione went at their heels. Then Count Lenkenstein sent for his wife, whom Anna and Lena accompanied.

"How many persons are you going to ruin in the course of your crusade, my dear?" the duchess said to Laura.

"Dearest, I am penitent when I succeed," said Laura.

"If that young man has been assisting you, he is irretrievably ruined."

"I am truly sorry for him."

"As for me, the lectures I shall get in Vienna are terrible to think of. This is the consequence of being the friend of both parties, and a peace-maker."

Count Serabiglione returned alone from the scene at the examination, rubbing his hands and nodding affably to his daughter. He maliciously declined to gratify the monster of feminine curiosity in the lump, and doled out the scene piecemeal. He might state, he observed, that it was he who had lured Beppo to listen at the door during the examination of the prisoners; and who had then planted a spy on him—following the

dictation of precepts exceedingly old. “We are generally beaten, duchess; I admit it; and yet

Page 1691

we generally contrive to show the brain. As I say, wed brains to brute force!—but my Laura prefers to bring about a contest instead of an union, so that somebody is certain to be struck, and"—the count spread out his arms and bowed his head—"deserves the blow." He informed them that Count Lenkenstein had ordered Lieutenant Pierson down to Meran, and that the lieutenant might expect to be cashiered within five days. "What does it matter?" he addressed Vittoria. "It is but a shuffling of victims; Lieutenant Pierson in the place of Guidascarpi! I do not object."

Count Lenkenstein withdrew his wife and sisters from Sonnenberg instantly. He sent an angry message of adieu to the duchess, informing her that he alone was responsible for the behaviour of the ladies of his family. The poor duchess wept. "This means that I shall be summoned to Vienna for a scolding, and have to meet my husband," she said to Laura, who permitted herself to be fondled, and barely veiled her exultation in her apology for the mischief she had done. An hour after the departure of the Lenkensteins, the castle was again officially visited by Colonel Zofel. Vittoria and Laura received an order to quit the district of Meran before sunset. The two firebrands dropped no tears. "I really am sorry for others when I succeed," said Laura, trying to look sad upon her friend.

"No; the heart is eaten out of you both by excitement," said the duchess.

Her tender parting, "Love me," in the ear of Vittoria, melted one heart of the two.

Count Serabiglione continued to be buoyed up by his own and his daughter's recent display of a superior intellectual dexterity until the carriage was at the door and Laura presented her cheek to him. He said, "You will know me a wise man when I am off the table." His gesticulations expressed "Ruin, headlong ruin!" He asked her how she could expect him to be for ever repairing her follies. He was going to Vienna; how could he dare to mention her name there? Not even in a trifle would she consent to be subordinate to authority. Laura checked her replies—the surrendering, of a noble Italian life to the Austrians was such a trifle! She begged only that a poor wanderer might depart with a father's blessing. The count refused to give it; he waved her off in a fury of reproof; and so got smoothly over the fatal moment when money, or the promise of money, is commonly extracted from parental sources, as Laura explained his odd behaviour to her companion. The carriage-door being closed, he regained his courtly composure; his fury was displaced by a chiding finger, which he presently kissed. Father. Bernardus was on the steps beside the duchess, and his blessing had not been withheld from Vittoria, though he half confessed to her that she was a mystery in his mind, and would always be one.

"He can understand robust hostility," Laura said, when Vittoria recalled the look of his benevolent forehead and drooping eyelids; "but robust ductility does astonish him. He has not meddled with me; yet I am the one of the two who would be fair prey for an enterprising spiritual father, as the destined roan of heaven will find out some day."

Page 1692

She bent and smote her lap. “How little they know us, my darling! They take fever for strength, and calmness for submission. Here is the world before us, and I feel that such a man, were he to pounce on me now, might snap me up and lock me in a praying-box with small difficulty. And I am the inveterate rebel! What is it nourishes you and keeps you always aiming straight when you are alone? Once in Turin, I shall feel that I am myself. Out of Italy I have a terrible craving for peace. It seems here as if I must lean down to him, my beloved, who has left me.”

Vittoria was in alarm lest Wilfrid should accost her while she drove from gate to gate of the city. They passed under the archway of the gate leading up to Schloss Tyrol, and along the road bordered by vines. An old peasant woman stopped them with the signal of a letter in her hand. “Here it is,” said Laura, and Vittoria could not help smiling at her shrewd anticipation of it.

“May I follow?”

Nothing more than that was written.

But the bearer of the missive had been provided with a lead pencil to obtain the immediate reply.

“An admirable piece of foresight!” Laura’s honest exclamation burst forth.

Vittoria had to look in Laura’s face before she could gather her will to do the cruel thing which was least cruel. She wrote firmly:—“Never follow me.”

CHAPTER XXIX

Episodes of the revolt and the war—the tobacco-riots—Rinaldo Guidascarpi

Anna von Lenkenstein was one who could wait for vengeance. Lena punished on the spot, and punished herself most. She broke off her engagement with Wilfrid, while at the same time she caused a secret message to be conveyed to him, telling him that the prolongation of his residence in Meran would restore him to his position in the army.

Wilfrid remained at Meran till the last days of December.

It was winter in Milan, turning to the new year—the year of flames for continental Europe. A young man with a military stride, but out of uniform, had stepped from a travelling carriage and entered a cigar-shop. Upon calling for cigars, he was surprised to observe the woman who was serving there keep her arms under her apron. She cast a look into the street, where a crowd of boys and one or two lean men had gathered about the door. After some delay, she entreated her customer to let her pluck his cloak halfway over the counter; at the same time she thrust a cigar-box under that

concealment, together with a printed song in the Milanese dialect. He lifted the paper to read it, and found it tough as Russ. She translated some of the more salient couplets. Tobacco had become a dead business, she said, now that the popular edict had gone forth against ‘smoking gold into the pockets of the Tedeschi.’ None smoked except officers and Englishmen.

Page 1693

“I am an Englishman,” he said.

“And not an officer?” she asked; but he gave no answer. “Englishmen are rare in winter, and don’t like being mobbed,” said the woman.

Nodding to her urgent petition, he deferred the lighting of his cigar. The vetturino requested him to jump up quickly, and a howl of “No smoking in Milan—fuori!—down with tobacco-smokers!” beset the carriage. He tossed half-a-dozen cigars on the pavement derisively. They were scrambled for, as when a pack of wolves are diverted by a garment dropped from the flying sledge, but the unluckier hands came after his heels in fuller howl. He noticed the singular appearance of the streets. Bands of the scum of the population hung at various points: from time to time a shout was raised at a distance, “Abasso il zigarro!” and “Away with the cigar!” went an organized file-firing of cries along the open place. Several gentlemen were mobbed, and compelled to fling the cigars from their teeth. He saw the polizta in twos and threes taking counsel and shrugging, evidently too anxious to avoid a collision. Austrian soldiers and subalterns alone smoked freely; they puffed the harder when the yells and hootings and whistlings thickened at their heels. Sometimes they walked on at their own pace; or, when the noise swelled to a crisis, turned and stood fast, making an exhibition of curling smoke, as a mute form of contempt. Then commenced hustlings and a tremendous uproar; sabres were drawn, the whitecoats planted themselves back to back. Milan was clearly in a condition of raging disease. The soldiery not only accepted the challenge of the mob, but assumed the offensive. Here and there they were seen crossing the street to puff obnoxiously in the faces of people. Numerous subalterns were abroad, lively for strife, and bright with the signal of their readiness. An icy wind blew down from the Alps, whitening the housetops and the ways, but every street, torso, and piazza was dense with loungers, as on a summer evening; the clamour of a skirmish anywhere attracted streams of disciplined rioters on all sides; it was the holiday of rascals.

Our traveller had ordered his vetturino to drive slowly to his hotel, that he might take the features of this novel scene. He soon showed his view of the case by putting an unlighted cigar in his mouth. The vetturino noted that his conveyance acted as a kindling-match to awaken cries in quiet quarters, looked round, and grinned savagely at the sight of the cigar.

“Drop it, or I drop you,” he said; and hearing the command to drive on, pulled up short.

They were in a narrow way leading to the Piazza de’ Mercanti. While the altercation was going on between them, a great push of men emerged from one of the close courts some dozen paces ahead of the horse, bearing forth a single young officer in their midst.

“Signore, would you like to be the froth of a boiling of that sort?” The vetturino seized the image at once to strike home his instance of the danger of outraging the will of the people.

Page 1694

Our traveller immediately unlocked a case that lay on the seat in front of him, and drew out a steel scabbard, from which he plucked the sword, and straightway leaped to the ground. The officer's cigar had been dashed from his mouth: he stood at bay, sword in hand, meeting a rush with a desperate stroke. The assistance of a second sword got him clear of the fray. Both hastened forward as the crush melted with the hiss of a withdrawing wave. They interchanged exclamations: "Is it you, Jenna!"

"In the devil's name, Pierson, have you come to keep your appointment in mid-winter?"

"Come on: I'll stick beside you."

"On, then!"

They glanced behind them, heeding little the tail of ruffians whom they had silenced.

"We shall have plenty of fighting soon, so we'll smoke a cordial cigar together," said Lieutenant Jenna, and at once struck a light and blazed defiance to Milan afresh—an example that was necessarily followed by his comrade. "What has happened to you, Pierson? Of course, I knew you were ready for our bit of play—though you'll hear what I said of you. How the deuce could you think of running off with that opera girl, and getting a fellow in the mountains to stab our merry old Weisspriess, just because you fancied he was going to slip a word or so over the back of his hand in Countess Lena's ear? No wonder she's shy of you now."

"So, that's the tale afloat," said Wilfrid. "Come to my hotel and dine with me. I suppose that cur has driven my luggage there."

Jenna informed him that officers had to muster in barracks every evening.

"Come and see your old comrades; they'll like you better in bad luck—there's the comfort of it: hang the human nature! She's a good old brute, if you don't drive her hard. Our regiment left Verona in November. There we had tolerable cookery; come and take the best we can give you."

But this invitation Wilfrid had to decline.

"Why?" said Jenna.

He replied: "I've stuck at Meran three months. I did it, in obedience to what I understood from Colonel Zofel to be the General's orders. When I was as perfectly dry as a baked Egyptian, I determined to believe that I was not only in disgrace, but dismissed the service. I posted to Botzen and Riva, on to Milan; and here I am. The least I can do is to show myself here."

“Very well, then, come and show yourself at our table,” said Jenna. “Listen: we’ll make a furious row after supper, and get hauled in by the collar before the General. You can swear you have never been absent from duty: swear the General never gave you forcible furlough. I’ll swear it; all our fellows will swear it. The General will say, ’Oh! a very big lie’s equal to a truth; big brother to a fact, or something; as he always does, you know. Face it out. We can’t spare a good stout sword in these times. On with me, my Pierson.”

“I would,” said Wilfrid, doubtfully.

Page 1695

A douse of water from a window extinguished their cigars.

Lieutenant Jenna wiped his face deliberately, and lighting another cigar, remarked—-“This is the fifth poor devil who has come to an untimely end within an hour. It is brisk work. Now, I’ll swear I’ll smoke this one out.”

The cigar was scattered in sparks from his lips by a hat skilfully flung. He picked it up miry and cleaned it, observing that his honour was pledged to this fellow. The hat he trampled into a muddy lump. Wilfrid found it impossible to ape his coolness. He swung about for an adversary. Jenna pulled him on.

“A salute from a window,” he said. “We can’t storm the houses. The time’ll come for it —and then, you cats!”

Wilfrid inquired how long this state of things had been going on. Jenna replied that they appeared to be in the middle of it;—nearly a week. Another week, and their, day would arrive; and then!

“Have you heard anything of a Count Ammiani here?” said Wilfrid.

“Oh! he’s one of the lot, I believe. We have him fast, as we’ll have the bundle of them. Keep eye on those dogs behind us, and manoeuvre your cigar. The plan is, to give half-a-dozen bright puffs, and then keep it in your fist; and when you see an Italian head, volcano him like fury. Yes, I’ve heard of that Ammiani. The scoundrels, made an attempt to get him out of prison—I fancy he’s in the city prison—last Friday night. I don’t know exactly where he is; but it’s pretty fair reckoning to say that he’ll enjoy a large slice of the next year in the charming solitude of Spielberg, if Milan is restless. Is he a friend of yours?”

“Not by any means,” said Wilfrid.

“Mio prigione!” Jenna mouthed with ineffable contemptuousness; “he’ll have time to write his memoirs, as, one of the dogs did. I remember my mother crying over, the book. I read it? Not I! I never read books. My father said—the stout old colonel—-’Prison seems to make these Italians take an interest in themselves.’ ‘Oh!’ says my mother, ’why can’t they be at peace with us?’ ‘That’s exactly the question,’ says my father, ’we’re always putting to them.’ And so I say. Why can’t they let us smoke our cigars in peace?”

Jenna finished by assaulting a herd of faces with smoke.

“Pig of a German!” was shouted; and “Porco, porco,” was sung in a scale of voices. Jenna received a blinding slap across the eyes. He staggered back; Wilfrid slashed his sword in defence of him. He struck a man down. “Blood! blood!” cried the gathering mob, and gave space, but hedged the couple thickly. Windows were thrown up; forth

came a rain of household projectiles. The cry of “Blood! blood!” was repeated by numbers pouring on them from the issues to right and left. It is a terrible cry in a city. In a city of the South it rouses the wild beast in men to madness. Jenna smoked triumphantly and blew great clouds, with an eye aloft for the stools,

Page 1696

basins, chairs, and water descending. They were in the middle of one of the close streets of old Milan. The man felled by Wilfrid was raised on strong arms, that his bleeding head might be seen of all, and a dreadful hum went round. A fire of missiles, stones, balls of wax, lumps of dirt, sticks of broken chairs, began to play. Wilfrid had a sudden gleam of the face of his Verona assailant. He and Jenna called “Follow me,” in one breath, and drove forward with sword-points, which they dashed at the foremost; by dint of swift semicirclings of the edges they got through, but a mighty voice of command thundered; the rearward portion of the mob swung rapidly to the front, presenting a scattered second barrier; Jenna tripped on a fallen body, lost his cigar, and swore that he must find it. A dagger struck his sword-arm. He staggered and flourished his blade in the air, calling “On!” without stirring. “This infernal cigar!” he said; and to the mob, “What mongrel of you took my cigar?” Stones thumped on his breast; the barrier-line ahead grew denser. “I’ll go at them first; you’re bleeding,” said Wilfrid. They were refreshed by the sound of German cheering, as in approach. Jenna uplifted a crow of the regimental hurrah of the charge; it was answered; on they went and got through the second fence, saw their comrades, and were running to meet them, when a weighted ball hit Wilfrid on the back of the head. He fell, as he believed, on a cushion of down, and saw thousands of saints dancing with lamps along cathedral aisles.

The next time he opened his eyes he fancied he had dropped into the vaults of the cathedral. His sensation of sinking was so vivid that he feared lest he should be going still further below. There was a lamp in the chamber, and a young man sat reading by the light of the lamp. Vision danced fantastically on Wilfrid’s brain. He saw that he rocked as in a ship, yet there was no noise of the sea; nothing save the remote thunder haunting empty ears at strain for sound. He looked again; the young man was gone, the lamp was flickering. Then he became conscious of a strong ray on his eyelids; he beheld his enemy gazing down on him and swooned. It was with joy, that when his wits returned, he found himself looking on the young man by the lamp. “That other face was a dream,” he thought, and studied the aspect of the young man with the unwearied attentiveness of partial stupor, that can note accurately, but cannot deduce from its noting, and is inveterate in patience because it is unideaed. Memory wakened first.

“Guidascarpi!” he said to himself.

The name was uttered half aloud. The young man started and closed his book.

“You know me?” he asked.

“You are Guidascarpi?”

“I am.”

“Guidascarpi, I think I helped to save your life in Meran.”

The young man stooped over him. “You speak of my brother Angelo. I am Rinaldo. My debt to you is the same, if you have served him.”

Page 1697

“Is he safe?”

“He is in Lugano.”

“The signorina Vittoria?”

“In Turin.”

“Where am I?”

The reply came from another mouth than Rinaldo’s.

“You are in the poor lodging of the shoemaker, whose shoes, if you had thought fit to wear them, would have conducted you anywhere but to this place.”

“Who are you?” Wilfrid moaned.

“You ask who I am. I am the Eye of Italy. I am the Cat who sees in the dark.” Barto Rizzo raised the lamp and stood at his feet. “Look straight. You know me, I think.”

Wilfrid sighed, “Yes, I know you; do your worst.”

His head throbbed with the hearing of a heavy laugh, as if a hammer had knocked it. What ensued he knew not; he was left to his rest. He lay there many days and nights, that were marked by no change of light; the lamp burned unwearyingly. Rinaldo and a woman tended him. The sign of his reviving strength was shown by a complaint he launched at the earthy smell of the place.

“It is like death,” said Rinaldo, coming to his side. “I am used to it, and familiar with death too,” he added in a musical undertone.

“Are you also a prisoner here?” Wilfrid questioned him.

“I am.”

“The brute does not kill, then?”

“No; he saves. I owe my life to him. He has rescued yours.”

“Mine?” said Wilfrid.

“You would have been torn to pieces in the streets but for Barto Rizzo.”

The streets were the world above to Wilfrid; he was eager to hear of the doings in them. Rinaldo told him that the tobacco-war raged still; the soldiery had recently

received orders to smoke abroad, and street battles were hourly occurring. “They call this government!” he interjected.

He was a soft-voiced youth; slim and tall and dark, like Angelo, but with a more studious forehead. The book he was constantly reading was a book of chemistry. He entertained Wilfrid with very strange talk. He spoke of the stars and of a destiny. He cited certain minor events of his life to show the ground of his present belief in there being a written destiny for each individual man. “Angelo and I know it well. It was revealed to us when we were boys. It has been certified to us up to this moment. Mark what I tell you,” he pursued in a devout sincerity of manner that baffled remonstrance, “my days end with this new year. His end with the year following. Our house is dead.”

Wilfrid pressed his hand. “Have you not been too long underground?”

“That is the conviction I am coming to. But when I go out to breathe the air of heaven, I go to my fate. Should I hesitate? We Italians of this period are children of thunder and live the life of a flash. The worms may creep on: the men must die. Out of us springs a better world. Romara, Ammiani, Mercadesco, Montesini, Rufo, Cardi, whether they see it or not, will sweep forward to it. To some of them, one additional day of breath is precious. Not so for Angelo and me. We are unbeloved. We have neither mother nor sister, nor betrothed. What is an existence that can fly to no human arms? I have been too long underground, because, while I continue to hide, I am as a drawn sword between two lovers.”

Page 1698

The previous mention of Ammiani's name, together with the knowledge he had of Ammiani's relationship to the Guidascarpi, pointed an instant identification of these lovers to Wilfrid.

He asked feverishly who they were, and looked his best simplicity, as one who was always interested by stories of lovers.

The voice of Barto Rizzo, singing "Vittoria!" stopped Rinaldo's reply: but Wilfrid read it in his smile at that word. He was too weak to restrain his anguish, and flung on the couch and sobbed. Rinaldo supposed that he was in fear of Barto, and encouraged him to meet the man confidently. A lusty "Viva l'Italia! Vittoria!" heralded Barto's entrance. "My boy! my noblest! we have beaten them the cravens! Tell me now—have I served an apprenticeship to the devil for nothing? We have struck the cigars out of their mouths and the monopoly-money out of their pockets. They have surrendered. The Imperial order prohibits soldiers from smoking in the streets of Milan, and so throughout Lombardy! Soon we will have the prisons empty, by our own order. Trouble yourself no more about Ammiani. He shall come out to the sound of trumpets. I hear them! Hither, my Rosellina, my plump melon; up with your red lips, and buss me a Napoleon salute —ha! ha!"

Barto's wife went into his huge arm, and submissively lifted her face. He kissed her like a barbaric king, laughing as from wine.

Wilfrid smothered his head from his incarnate thunder. He was unnoticed by Barto. Presently a silence told him that he was left to himself. An idea possessed him that the triumph of the Italians meant the release of Ammiani, and his release the loss of Vittoria for ever. Since her graceless return of his devotion to her in Meran, something like a passion—arising from the sole spring by which he could be excited to conceive a passion—had filled his heart. He was one of those who delight to dally with gentleness and faith, as with things that are their heritage; but the mere suspicion of coquettry and indifference plunged him into a fury of jealous wrathfulness, and tossed so desireable an image of beauty before him that his mad thirst to embrace it seemed love. By our manner of loving we are known. He thought it no meanness to escape and cause a warning to be conveyed to the Government that there was another attempt brewing for the rescue of Count Ammiani. Acting forthwith on the hot impulse, he seized the lamp. The door was unlocked. Luckier than Luigi had been, he found a ladder outside, and a square opening through which he crawled; continuing to ascend along close passages and up narrow flights of stairs, that appeared to him to be fashioned to avoid the rooms of the house. At last he pushed a door, and found himself in an armoury, among stands of muskets, swords, bayonets, cartouche-boxes, and, most singular of all, though he observed them last, small brass pieces of cannon, shining with polish. Shot was piled in pyramids beneath their mouths.

Page 1699

He examined the guns admiringly. There were rows of daggers along shelves; some in sheath, others bare; one that had been hastily wiped showed a smear of ropy blood. He stood debating whether he should seize a sword for his protection. In the act of trying its temper on the floor, the sword-hilt was knocked from his hand, and he felt a coil of arms around him. He was in the imprisoning embrace of Barto Rizzo's wife. His first, and perhaps natural, impression accused her of a violent display of an eccentric passion for his manly charms; and the tighter she locked him, the more reasonably was he held to suppose it; but as, while stamping on the floor, she offered nothing to his eyes save the yellow poll of her neck, and hung neither panting nor speaking, he became undeceived. His struggles were preposterous; his lively sense of ridicule speedily stopped them. He remained passive, from time to time desperately adjuring his living prison to let him loose, or to conduct him whither he had come; but the inexorable coil kept fast—how long there was no guessing—till he could have roared out tears of rage, and that is extremity for an Englishman. Rinaldo arrived in his aid; but the woman still clung to him. He was freed only by the voice of Barto Rizzo, who marched him back. Rinaldo subsequently told him that his discovery of the armoury necessitated his confinement.

"Necessitates it!" cried Wilfrid. "Is this your Italian gratitude?"

The other answered: "My friend, you risked your fortune for my brother; but this is a case that concerns our country."

He deemed these words to be an unquestionable justification, for he said no more. After this they ceased to converse.

Each lay down on his strip of couch-matting; rose and ate, and passed the dreadful untamed hours; nor would Wilfrid ask whether it was day or night. We belong to time so utterly, that when we get no note of time, it wears the shrouded head of death for us already. Rinaldo could quit the place as he pleased; he knew the hours; and Wilfrid supposed that it must be hatred that kept him from voluntarily divulging that blessed piece of knowledge. He had to encourage a retorting spirit of hatred in order to mask his intense craving. By an assiduous calculation of seconds and minutes, he was enabled to judge that the lamp burned a space of six hours before it required replenishing. Barto Rizzo's wife trimmed it regularly, but the accursed woman came at all seasons. She brought their meals irregularly, and she would never open her lips: she was like a guardian of the tombs. Wilfrid abandoned his dream of the variation of night and day, and with that the sense of life deadened, as the lamp did toward the sixth hour. Thenceforward his existence fed on the movements of his companion, the workings of whose mind he began to read with a marvellous insight. He knew once, long in advance of the act or an indication of it, that Rinaldo was bent on prayer. Rinaldo had slightly

Page 1700

closed his eyelids during the perusal of his book; he had taken a pencil and traced lines on it from memory, and dotted points here and there; he had left the room, and returned to resume his study. Then, after closing the book softly, he had taken up the mark he was accustomed to place in the last page of his reading, and tossed it away. Wilfrid was prepared to clap hands when he should see the hated fellow drop on his knees; but when that sight verified his calculation, he huddled himself exultingly in his couch-cloth:—it was like a confirming clamour to him that he was yet wholly alive. He watched the anguish of the prayer, and was rewarded for the strain of his faculties by sleep. Barto Rizzo's rough voice awakened him. Barto had evidently just communicated dismal tidings to Rinaldo, who left the vault with him, and was absent long enough to make Wilfrid forget his hatred in an irresistible desire to catch him by the arm and look in his face.

"Ah! you have not forsaken me," the greeting leaped out.

"Not now," said Rinaldo.

"Do you think of going?"

"I will speak to you presently, my friend."

"Hound!" cried Wilfrid, and turned his face to the wall.

Until he slept, he heard the rapid travelling of a pen; on his awakening, the pen vexed him like a chirping cricket that tells us that cock-crow is long distant when we are moaning for the dawn. Great drops of sweat were on Rinaldo's forehead. He wrote as one who poured forth a history without pause. Barto's wife came to the lamp and beckoned him out, bearing the lamp away. There was now for the first time darkness in this vault. Wilfrid called Rinaldo by name, and heard nothing but the fear of the place, which seemed to rise bristling at his voice and shrink from it. He called till dread of his voice held him dumb. "I am, then, a coward," he thought. Nor could he by-and-by repress a start of terror on hearing Rinaldo speak out of the darkness. With screams for the lamp, and cries that he was suffering slow murder, he underwent a paroxysm in the effort to conceal his abject horror. Rinaldo sat by his side patiently. At last, he said: "We are both of us prisoners on equal terms now." That was quieting intelligence to Wilfrid, who asked eagerly: "What hour is it?"

It was eleven of the forenoon. Wilfrid strove to dissociate his recollection of clear daylight from the pressure of the hideous featureless time surrounding him. He asked: "What week?" It was the first week in March. Wilfrid could not keep from sobbing aloud. In the early period of such a captivity, imagination, deprived of all other food, conjures phantasms for the employment of the brain; but there is still some consciousness within the torpid intellect wakeful to laugh at them as they fly, though

they have held us at their mercy. The face of time had been imaged like the withering mask of a corpse to him. He had felt, nevertheless,

Page 1701

that things had gone on as we trust them to do at the closing of our eyelids: he had preserved a mystical remote faith in the steady running of the world above, and hugged it as his most precious treasure. A thunder was rolled in his ears when he heard of the flight of two months at one bound. Two big months! He would have guessed, at farthest, two weeks. "I have been two months in one shirt? Impossible!" he exclaimed. His serious idea (he cherished it for the support of his reason) was, that the world above had played a mad prank since he had been shuffled off its stage.

"It can't be March," he said. "Is there sunlight overhead?"

"It is a true Milanese March," Rinaldo replied.

"Why am I kept a prisoner?"

"I cannot say. There must be some idea of making use of you."

"Have you arms?"

"I have none."

"You know where they're to be had."

"I know, but I would not take them if I could. They, my friend, are for a better cause."

"A thousand curses on your country!" cried Wilfrid. "Give me air; give me freedom, I am stifled; I am eaten up with dirt; I am half dead. Are we never to have the lamp again?"

"Hear me speak," Rinaldo stopped his ravings. "I will tell you what my position is. A second attempt has been made to help Count Ammiani's escape; it has failed. He is detained a prisoner by the Government under the pretence that he is implicated in the slaying of an Austrian noble by the hands of two brothers, one of whom slew him justly —not as a dog is slain, but according to every honourable stipulation of the code. I was the witness of the deed. It is for me that my cousin, Count Ammiani, droops in prison when he should be with his bride. Let me speak on, I pray you. I have said that I stand between two lovers. I can release him, I know well, by giving myself up to the Government. Unless I do so instantly, he will be removed from Milan to one of their fortresses in the interior, and there he may cry to the walls and iron-bars for his trial. They are aware that he is dear to Milan, and these two miserable attempts have furnished them with their excuse. Barto Rizzo bids me wait. I have waited: I can wait no longer. The lamp is withheld from me to stop my writing to my brother, that I may warn him of my design, but the letter is written; the messenger is on his way to Lugano. I do not state my intentions before I have taken measures to accomplish them. I am as much Barto Rizzo's prisoner now as you are."

The plague of darkness and thirst for daylight prevented Wilfrid from having any other sentiment than gladness that a companion equally unfortunate with himself was here, and equally desirous to go forth. When Barto's wife brought their meal, and the lamp to light them eating it, Rinaldo handed her pen, ink, pencil, paper, all the material of correspondence; upon which, as one who had received a stipulated exchange,

Page 1702

she let the lamp remain. While the new and thrice-dear rays were illumining her dark-coloured solid beauty, I know not what touch of man-like envy or hurt vanity led Wilfrid to observe that the woman's eyes dwelt with a singular fulness and softness on Rinaldo. It was fulness and softness void of fire, a true ox-eyed gaze, but human in the fall of the eyelids; almost such as an early poet of the brush gave to the Virgin carrying her Child, to become an everlasting reduplicated image of a mother's strong beneficence of love. He called Rinaldo's attention to it when the woman had gone. Rinaldo understood his meaning at once.

"It will have to be so, I fear," he said; "I have thought of it. But if I lead her to disobey Barto, there is little hope for the poor soul." He rose up straight, like one who would utter grace for meat. "Must we, O my God, give a sacrifice at every step?"

With that he resumed his seat stiffly, and bent and murmured to himself. Wilfrid had at one time of his life imagined that he was marked by a peculiar distinction from the common herd; but contact with this young man taught him to feel his fellowship to the world at large, and to rejoice at it, though it partially humbled him.

They had no further visit from Barto Rizzo. The woman tended them in the same unswerving silence, and at whiles that adorable maternity of aspect. Wilfrid was touched by commiseration for her. He was too bitterly fretful on account of clean linen and the liberty which fluttered the prospect of it, to think much upon what her fate might be: perhaps a beating, perhaps the knife. But the vileness of wearing one shirt two months and more had hardened his heart; and though he was considerate enough not to prompt his companion very impatiently, he submitted desperate futile schemes to him, and suggested—"To-night?—tomorrow?—the next day?" Rinaldo did not heed him. He lay on his couch like one who bleeds inwardly, thinking of the complacent faithfulness of that poor creature's face. Barto Rizzo had sworn to him that there should be a rising in Milan before the month was out; but he had lost all confidence in Milanese risings. Ammiani would be removed, if he delayed; and he knew that the moment his letter reached Lugano, Angelo would start for Milan and claim to surrender in his stead. The woman came, and went forth, and Rinaldo did not look at her until his resolve was firm.

He said to Wilfrid in her presence, "Swear that you will reveal nothing of this house."

Wilfrid spiritedly pronounced his gladdest oath.

"It is dark in the streets," Rinaldo addressed the woman. "Lead us out, for the hour has come when I must go."

She clutched her hands below her bosom to stop its great heaving, and stood as one smitten by the sudden hearing of her sentence. The sight was pitiful, for her face scarcely changed; the anguish was expressionless. Rinaldo pointed sternly to the door.

Page 1703

“Stay,” Wilfrid interposed. “That wretch may be in the house, and will kill her.”

“She is not thinking of herself,” said Rinaldo.

“But, stay,” Wilfrid repeated. The woman’s way of taking breath shocked and enfeebled him.

Rinaldo threw the door open.

“Must you? must you?” her voice broke.

“Waste no words.”

“You have not seen a priest?”

“I go to him.”

“You die.”

“What is death to me? Be dumb, that I may think well of you till my last moment.”

“What is death tome? Be dumb!”

She had spoken with her eyes fixed on his couch. It was the figure of one upon the scaffold, knitting her frame to hold up a strangled heart.

“What is death to me? Be dumb!” she echoed him many times on the rise and fall of her breathing, and turned to get him in her eyes. “Be dumb! be dumb!” She threw her arms wide out, and pressed his temples and kissed him.

The scene was like hot iron to Wilfrid’s senses. When he heard her coolly asking him for his handkerchief to blind him, he had forgotten the purpose, and gave it mechanically. Nothing was uttered throughout the long mountings and descent of stairs. They passed across one corridor where the walls told of a humming assemblage of men within. A current of keen air was the first salute Wilfrid received from the world above; his handkerchief was loosened; he stood foolish as a blind man, weak as a hospital patient, on the steps leading into a small square of visible darkness, and heard the door shut behind him. Rinaldo led him from the court to the street.

“Farewell,” he said. “Get some housing instantly; avoid exposure to the air. I leave you.”

Wilfrid spent his tongue in a fruitless and meaningless remonstrance. “And you?” he had the grace to ask.

“I go straight to find a priest. Farewell.”

So they parted.

CHAPTER XXX

Episodes of the revolt and the war
the five days of Milan

The same hand which brought Rinaldo’s letter to his brother delivered a message from Barto Rizzo, bidding Angelo to start at once and head a stout dozen or so of gallant Swiss. The letter and the message appeared to be grievous contradictions: one was evidently a note of despair, while the other sang like a trumpet. But both were of a character to draw him swiftly on to Milan. He sent word to his Lugano friends, naming a village among the mountains between Como and Varese, that they might join him there if they pleased.

Page 1704

Toward nightfall, on the nineteenth of the month, he stood with a small band of Ticinese and Italian fighting lads two miles distant from the city. There was a momentary break in long hours of rain; the air was full of inexplicable sounds, that floated over them like a toning of multitudes wailing and singing fitfully behind a swaying screen. They bent their heads. At intervals a sovereign stamp on the pulsation of the uproar said, distinct as a voice in the ear—Cannon. "Milan's alive!" Angelo cried, and they streamed forward under the hurry of stars and scud, till thumping guns and pattering musket-shots, the long big boom of surgent hosts, and the muffled voluming and crash of storm-bells, proclaimed that the insurrection was hot. A rout of peasants bearing immense ladders met them, and they joined with cheers, and rushed to the walls. As yet no gate was in the possession of the people. The walls showed bayonet-points: a thin edge of steel encircled a pit of fire. Angelo resolved to break through at once. The peasants hesitated, but his own men were of one mind to follow, and, planting his ladder in the ditch, he rushed up foremost. The ladder was full short; he called out in German to a soldier to reach his hand down, and the butt-end of a musket was dropped, which he grasped, and by this aid sprang to the parapet, and was seized. "Stop," he said, "there's a fellow below with my brandy-flask and portmanteau." The soldiers were Italians; they laughed, and hauled away at man after man of the mounting troop, calling alternately "brandy-flask!—portmanteau!" as each one raised a head above the parapet. "The signor has a good supply of spirits and baggage," they remarked. He gave them money for porterage, saying, "You see, the gates are held by that infernal people, and a quiet traveller must come over the walls. Viva l'Italia! who follows me?" He carried away three of those present. The remainder swore that they and their comrades would be on his side on the morrow. Guided by the new accession to his force, Angelo gained the streets. All shots had ceased; the streets were lighted with torches and hand-lamps; barricades were up everywhere, like a convulsion of the earth. Tired of receiving challenges and mounting the endless piles of stones, he sat down at the head of the Corso di Porta Nuova, and took refreshments from the hands of ladies. The house-doors were all open. The ladies came forth bearing wine and minestra, meat and bread, on trays; and quiet eating and drinking, and fortifying of the barricades, went on. Men were rubbing their arms and trying rusty gun-locks. Few of them had not seen Barto Rizzo that day; but Angelo could get no tidings of his brother. He slept on a door-step, dreaming that he was blown about among the angels of heaven and hell by a glorious tempest. Near morning an officer of volunteers came to inspect the barricade defences. Angelo knew him by sight; it was Luciano Romara. He explained the position

Page 1705

of the opposing forces. The Marshal, he said, was clearly no street-fighter. Estimating the army under his orders in Milan at from ten to eleven thousand men of all arms, it was impossible for him to guard the gates and then walls, and at the same time fight the city. Nor could he provision his troops. Yesterday the troops had made one: charge and done mischief, but they had immediately retired. “And if they take to cannonading us to-day, we shall know what that means,” Romara concluded. Angelo wanted to join him. “No, stay here,” said Romara. “I think you are a man who won’t give ground.” He had not seen either Rinaldo or Ammiani, but spoke of both as certain to be rescued.

Rain and cannon filled the weary space of that day. Some of the barricades fronting the city gates had been battered down by nightfall; they were restored within an hour. Their defenders entered the houses right and left during the cannonade, waiting to meet the charge; but the Austrians held off. “They have no plan,” Romara said on his second visit of inspection; “they are waiting on Fortune, and starve meanwhile. We can beat them at that business.”

Romara took Angelo and his Swiss away with him. The interior of the city was abandoned by the Imperialists, who held two or three of the principal buildings and the square of the Duomo. Clouds were driving thick across the cold-gleaming sky when the storm-bells burst out with the wild Jubilee-music of insurrection—a carol, a jangle of all discord, savage as flame. Every church of the city lent its iron tongue to the peal; and now they joined and now rolled apart, now joined again and clanged like souls shrieking across the black gulfs of an earthquake; they swam aloft with mournful delirium, tumbled together, were scattered in spray, dissolved, renewed, died, as a last worn wave casts itself on an unfooted shore, and rang again as through rent doorways, became a clamorous host, an iron body, a pressure as of a down-drawn firmament, and once more a hollow vast, as if the abysses of the Circles were sounded through and through. To the Milanese it was an intoxication; it was the howling of madness to the Austrians—a torment and a terror: they could neither sing, nor laugh, nor talk under it. Where they stood in the city, the troops could barely hear their officers’ call of command. No sooner had the bells broken out than the length of every street and Corso flashed with the tri-coloured flag; musket-muzzles peeped from the windows; men with great squares of pavement lined the roofs. Romara mounted a stiff barricade and beheld a scattered regiment running the gauntlet of storms of shot and missiles, in full retreat upon the citadel. On they came, officers in front for the charge, as usual with the Austrians; fire on both flanks, a furious mob at their heels, and the barricade before them. They rushed at Romara, and were hurled back, and stood in a riddled lump. Suddenly Romara knocked up the rifles of the couching Swiss; he yelled to the houses to stop firing. “Surrender your prisoners,—you shall pass,” he called. He had seen one dear head in the knot of the soldiery. No answer was given. Romara, with Angelo and his Swiss and the ranks of the barricade, poured over and pierced the streaming mass, steel for steel.

Page 1706

“Ammiani! Ammiani!” Romara cried; a roar from the other side, “Barto! Barto! the Great Cat!” met the cry. The Austrians struck up a cheer under the iron derision of the bells; it was ludicrous, it was as if a door had slammed on their mouths, ringing tremendous echoes in a vaulted roof. They stood sweeping fire in two oblong lines; a show of military array was preserved like a tattered robe, till Romara drove at their centre and left the retreat clear across the barricade. Then the whitecoats were seen flowing over, the motley surging hosts from the city in pursuit—foam of a storm-torrent hurled forward by the black tumult of precipitous waters. Angelo fell on his brother’s neck; Romara clasped Carlo Ammiani. These two were being marched from the prison to the citadel when Barto Rizzo, who had prepared to storm the building, assailed the troops. To him mainly they were indebted for their rescue.

Even in that ecstasy of meeting, the young men smiled at the preternatural transport on his features as he bounded by them, mad for slaughter, and mounting a small brass gun on the barricade, sent the charges of shot into the rear of the enemy. He kissed the black lip of his little thunderer in, a rapture of passion; called it his wife, his naked wife; the best of mistresses, who spoke only when he charged her to speak; raved that she was fair, and liked hugging; that she was true, and the handsomest daughter of Italy; that she would be the mother of big ones—none better than herself, though they were mountains of sulphur big enough to make one gulp of an army.

His wife in the flesh stood at his feet with a hand-grenade and a rifle, daggers and pistols in her belt. Her face was black with powder-smoke as the muzzle of the gun. She looked at Rinaldo once, and Rinaldo at her; both dropped their eyes, for their joy at seeing one another alive was mighty.

Dead Austrians were gathered in a heap. Dead and wounded Milanese were taken into the houses. Wine was brought forth by ladies and household women. An old crutched beggar, who had performed a deed of singular intrepidity in himself kindling a fire at the door of one of the principal buildings besieged by the people, and who showed perforated rags with a comical ejaculation of thanks to the Austrians for knowing how to hit a scarecrow and make a beggar holy, was the object of particular attention. Barto seated him on his gun, saying that his mistress and beauty was honoured; ladies were proud in waiting on the fine frowzy old man. It chanced during that morning that Wilfrid Pierson had attached himself to Lieutenant Jenna’s regiment as a volunteer. He had no arms, nothing but a huge white umbrella, under which he walked dry in the heavy rain, and passed through the fire like an impassive spectator of queer events. Angelo’s Swiss had captured them, and the mob were maltreating them because they declined to shout for this valorous ancient beggarman. “No doubt he’s a capital fellow,”

Page 1707

said Jenna; “but ‘Viva Scottocorni’ is not my language;” and the spirited little subaltern repeated his “Excuse me,” with very good temper, while one knocked off his shako, another tugged at his coat-skirts. Wilfrid sang out to the Guidascarpi, and the brothers sprang to him and set them free; but the mob, like any other wild beast gorged with blood, wanted play, and urged Barto to insist that these victims should shout the viva in exaltation of their hero.

“Is there a finer voice than mine?” said Barto, and he roared the ‘viva’ like a melodious bull. Yet Wilfrid saw that he had been recognized. In the hour of triumph Barto Rizzo had no lust for petty vengeance. The magnanimous devil plumped his gorge contentedly on victory. His ardour blazed from his swarthy crimson features like a blown fire, when scouts came running down with word that all about the Porta Camosina, Madonna del Carmine, and the Gardens, the Austrians were reaping the white flag of the inhabitants of that district. Thitherward his cry of “Down with the Tedeschi!” led the boiling tide. Rinaldo drew Wilfrid and Jenna to an open doorway, counselling the latter to strip the gold from his coat and speak his Italian in monosyllables. A woman of the house gave her promise to shelter and to pass them forward. Romara, Ammiani, and the Guidascarpi, went straight to the Casa Gonfalonieri, where they hoped to see stray members of the Council of War, and hear a correction of certain unpleasant rumours concerning the dealings of the Provisional Government with Charles Albert.

The first crack of a division between the patriot force and the aristocracy commenced this day; the day following it was a breach.

A little before dusk the bells of the city ceased their hammering, and when they ceased, all noises of men and musketry seemed childish. The woman who had promised to lead Wilfrid and Jenna to the citadel, feared no longer either for herself or them, and passed them on up the Corso Francesco past the Contrada del Monte. Jenna pointed out the Duchess of Graatli’s house, saying, “By the way, the Lenkensteins are here; they left Venice last week. Of course you know, or don’t you?—and there they must stop, I suppose.” Wilfrid nodded an immediate good-bye to him, and crossed to the house-door. His eccentric fashion of acting had given him fame in the army, but Jenna stormed at it now, and begged him to come on and present himself to General Schoneck, if not to General Pierson. Wilfrid refused even to look behind him. In fact, it was a part of the gallant fellow’s coxcombry (or nationality) to play the Englishman. He remained fixed by the housedoor till midnight, when a body of men in the garb of citizens, volubly and violently Italian in their talk, struck thrice at the door. Wilfrid perceived Count Lenkenstein among them. The ladies Bianca, Anna, and Lena issued mantled and hooded between the lights of two barricade watchfires. Wilfrid stepped after them. They had the password, for

Page 1708

the barricades were crossed. The captain of the head-barricade in the Corso demurred, requiring a counter-sign. Straightway he was cut down. He blew an alarm-call, when up sprang a hundred torches. The band of Germans dashed at the barricade as at the tusks of a boar. They were picked men, most of them officers, but a scanty number in the thick of an armed populace. Wilfrid saw the lighted passage into the great house, and thither, throwing out his arms, he bore the affrighted group of ladies, as a careful shepherd might do. Returning to Count Lenkenstein's side, "Where are they?" the count said, in mortal dread. "Safe," Wilfrid replied. The count frowned at him inquisitively. "Cut your way through, and on!" he cried to three or four who hung near him; and these went to the slaughter.

"Why do you stand by me, sir?" said the count. Interior barricades were pouring their combatants to the spot; Count Lenkenstein was plunged upon the door-steps. Wilfrid gained half-a-minute's parley by shouting in his foreign accent, "Would you hurt an Englishman?" Some one took him by the arm, and helping to raise the count, hurried them both into the house.

"You must make excuses for popular fury in times like these," the stranger observed.

The Austrian nobleman asked him stiffly for his name. The name of Count Ammiani was given. "I think you know it," Carlo added.

"You escaped from your lawful imprisonment this day, did you not?—you and your cousin, the assassin. I talk of law! I might as justly talk of honour. Who lives here?" Carlo contained himself to answer, "The present occupant is, I believe, if I have hit the house I was seeking, the Countess d'Isorella."

"My family were placed here, sir?" Count Lenkenstein inquired of Wilfrid. But Wilfrid's attention was frozen by the sight of Vittoria's lover. A wifely call of "Adalbert" from above quieted the count's anxiety.

"Countess d'Isorella," he said. "I know that woman. She belongs to the secret cabinet of Carlo Alberto—a woman with three edges. Did she not visit you in prison two weeks ago? I speak to you, Count Ammiani. She applied to the Archduke and the Marshal for permission to visit you. It was accorded. To the devil with our days of benignity! She was from Turin. The shuffle has made her my hostess for the nonce. I will go to her. You, sir," the count turned to Wilfrid—"you will stay below. Are you in the pay of the insurgents?"

Wilfrid, the weakest of human beings where women were involved with him, did one of the hardest things which can task a young man's fortitude: he looked his superior in the face, and neither blenched, nor frowned, nor spoke.

Ammiani spoke for him. "There is no pay given in our ranks."

“The licence to rob is supposed to be an equivalent,” said the count.

Countess d’Isorella herself came downstairs, with profuse apologies for the absence of all her male domestics, and many delicate dimples about her mouth in uttering them. Her look at Ammiani struck Wilfrid as having a peculiar burden either of meaning or of passion in it. The count grimaced angrily when he heard that his sister Lena was not yet able to bear the fatigue of a walk to the citadel. “I fear you must all be my guests, for an hour at least,” said the countess.

Page 1709

Wilfrid was left pacing the hall. He thought he had never beheld so splendid a person, or one so subjugatingly gracious. Her speech and manner poured oil on the uncivil Austrian nobleman. What perchance had stricken Lena?

He guessed; and guessed it rightly. A folded scrap of paper signed by the Countess of Lenkenstein was brought to him.

It said:—"Are you making common cause with the rebels? Reply. One asks who should be told."

He wrote:—"I am an outcast of the army. I fight as a volunteer with the K. K. troops. Could I abandon them in their peril?"

The touch of sentiment he appended for Lena's comfort. He was too strongly impressed by the new vision of beauty in the house for his imagination to be flushed by the romantic posture of his devotion to a trailing flag.

No other message was delivered. Ammiani presently descended and obtained a guard from the barricade; word was sent on to the barricades in advance toward the citadel. Wilfrid stood aside as Count Lenkenstein led the ladies to the door, bearing Lena on his arm. She passed her lover veiled. The count said, "You follow." He used the menial second person plural of German, and repeated it peremptorily.

"I follow no civilian," said Wilfrid.

"Remember, sir, that if you are seen with arms in your hands, and are not in the ranks, you run the chances of being hanged."

Lena broke loose from her brother; in spite of Anna's sharp remonstrance and the count's vexed stamp of the foot, she implored her lover:—"Come with us; pardon us; protect me—me! You shall not be treated harshly. They shall not Oh! be near me. I have been ill; I shrink from danger. Be near me!"

Such humble pleading permitted Wilfrid's sore spirit to succumb with the requisite show of chivalrous dignity. He bowed, and gravely opened his enormous umbrella, which he held up over the heads of the ladies, while Ammiani led the way. All was quiet near the citadel. A fog of plashing rain hung in red gloom about the many watchfires of the insurgents, but the Austrian head-quarters lay sombre and still. Close at the gates, Ammiani saluted the ladies. Wilfrid did the same, and heard Lena's call to him unmoved.

"May I dare to hint to you that it would be better for you to join your party?" said Ammiani.

Wilfrid walked on. After appearing to weigh the matter, he answered, “The umbrella will be of no further service to them to-night.”

Ammiani laughed, and begged to be forgiven; but he could have done nothing more flattering.

Sore at all points, tricked and ruined, irascible under the sense of his injuries, hating everybody and not honouring himself, Wilfrid was fast growing to be an eccentric by profession. To appear cool and careless was the great effort of his mind.

“We were introduced one day in the Piazza d’Armi,” said Ammiani. “I would have found means to convey my apologies to you for my behaviour on that occasion, but I have been at the mercy of my enemies. Lieutenant Pierson, will you pardon me? I have learnt how dear you and your family should be to me. Pray, accept my excuses and my counsel. The Countess Lena was my friend when I was a boy. She is in deep distress.”

Page 1710

“I thank you, Count Ammiani, for your extremely disinterested advice,” said Wilfrid; but the Italian was not cut to the quick by his irony; and he added: “I have hoisted, you perceive, the white umbrella instead of wearing the white coat. It is almost as good as an hotel in these times; it gives as much shelter and nearly as much provision, and, I may say, better attendance. Good-night. You will be at it again about daylight, I suppose?”

“Possibly a little before,” said Ammiani, cooled by the false ring of this kind of speech.

“It’s useless to expect that your infernal bells will not burst out like all the lunatics on earth?”

“Quite useless, I fear. Good-night.”

Ammiani charged one of the men at an outer barricade to follow the white umbrella and pass it on.

He returned to the Countess d’Isorella, who was awaiting him, and alone.

This glorious head had aroused his first boyish passion. Scandal was busy concerning the two, when Violetta d’Asola, the youthfullest widow in Lombardy and the loveliest woman, gave her hand to Count d’Isorella, who took it without question of the boy Ammiani. Carlo’s mother assisted in that arrangement; a maternal plot, for which he could thank her only after he had seen Vittoria, and then had heard the buzz of whispers at Violetta’s name. Countess d’Isorella proved her friendship to have survived the old passion, by travelling expressly from Turin to obtain leave to visit him in prison. It was a marvellous face to look upon between prison walls. Rescued while the soldiers were marching him to the citadel that day, he was called by pure duty to pay his respects to the countess as soon as he had heard from his mother that she was in the city. Nor was his mother sorry that he should go. She had patiently submitted to the fact of his betrothal to Vittoria, which was his safeguard in similar perils; and she rather hoped for Violetta to wean him from his extreme republicanism. By arguments? By influence, perhaps. Carlo’s republicanism was preternatural in her sight, and she presumed that Violetta would talk to him discreetly and persuasively of the noble designs of the king.

Violetta d’Isorella received him with a gracious lifting of her fingers to his lips; congratulating him on his escape, and on the good fortune of the day. She laughed at the Lenkensteins and the singular Englishman; sat down to a little supper-tray, and pouted humorously as she asked him to feed on confects and wine; the huge appetites of the insurgents had devoured all her meat and bread.

“Why are you here?” he said.

She did well in replying boldly, “For the king.”

“Would you tell another that it is for the king?”

“Would I speak to another as I speak to you?”

Ammiani inclined his head.

Page 1711

They spoke of the prospects of the insurrection, of the expected outbreak in Venice, the eruption of Paris and Vienna, and the new life of Italy; touching on Carlo Alberto to explode the truce in a laughing dissension. At last she said seriously, “I am a born Venetian, you know; I am not Piedmontese. Let me be sure that the king betrays the country, and I will prefer many heads to one. Excuse me if I am more womanly just at present. The king has sent his accredited messenger Tartini to the Provisional Government, requesting it to accept his authority. Why not? why not? on both sides. Count Medole gives his adhesion to the king, but you have a Council of War that rejects the king’s overtures—a revolt within a revolt.

“It is deplorable. You must have an army. The Piedmontese once over the Ticino, how can you act in opposition to it? You must learn to take a master. The king is only, or he appears, tricksy because you compel him to wind and counterplot. I swear to you, Italy is his foremost thought. The Star of Italy sits on the Cross of Savoy.”

Ammiani kept his eyelids modestly down. “Ten thousand to plead for him, such as you!” he said. “But there is only one!”

“If you had been headstrong once upon a time, and I had been weak, you see, my Carlo, you would have been a domestic tyrant, I a rebel. You will not admit the existence of a virtue in an opposite opinion. Wise was your mother when she said ‘No’ to a wilful boy!”

Violetta lit her cigarette and puffed the smoke lightly.

“I told you in that horrid dungeon, my Carlo Amaranto—I call you by the old name—the old name is sweet!—I told you that your Vittoria is enamoured of the king. She blushes like a battle-flag for the king. I have heard her ‘Viva il Re!’ It was musical.”

“So I should have thought.”

“Ay, but my amaranto-innamorato, does it not foretell strife? Would you ever—ever take a heart with a king’s head stamped on it into your arms?”

“Give me the chance!”

He was guilty of this ardent piece of innocence though Violetta had pitched her voice in the key significant of a secret thing belonging to two memories that had not always flowed dividedly.

“Like a common coin?” she resumed.

“A heart with a king’s head stamped on it like a common coin.”

He recollected the sentence. He had once, during the heat of his grief for Giacomo Piaveni, cast it in her teeth.

Violetta repeated it, as to herself, tonelessly; a method of making an old unkindness strike back on its author with effect.

“Did we part good friends? I forget,” she broke the silence.

“We meet, and we will be the best of friends,” said Ammiani.

“Tell your mother I am not three years older than her son,—I am thirty. Who will make me young again? Tell her, my Carlo, that the genius for intrigue, of which she accuses me, develops at a surprising rate. As regards my beauty,” the countess put a tooth of pearl on her soft under lip.

Page 1712

Ammiani assured her that he would find words of his own for her beauty.

“I hear the eulogy, I know the sonnet,” said Violetta, smiling, and described the points of a brunette: the thick black banded hair, the full brown eyes, the plastic brows couching over them;—it was Vittoria’s face: Violetta was a flower of colour, fair, with but one shade of dark tinting on her brown eye-brows and eye-lashes, as you may see a strip of night-cloud cross the forehead of morning. She was yellow-haired, almost purple-eyed, so rich was the blue of the pupils. Vittoria could be sallow in despondency; but this Violetta never failed in plumpness and freshness. The pencil which had given her aspect the one touch of discord, endowed it with a subtle harmony, like mystery; and Ammiani remembered his having stood once on the Lido of Venice, and eyed the dawn across the Adriatic, and dreamed that Violetta was born of the loveliness and held in her bosom the hopes of morning. He dreamed of it now, feeling the smooth roll of a torrent.

A cry of “Arms!” rang down the length of the Corso.

He started to his feet thankfully.

“Take me to your mother,” she said. “I loathe to hear firing and be alone.”

Ammiani threw up the window. There was a stir of lamps and torches below, and the low sky hung red. Violetta stood quickly thick-shod and hooded.

“Your mother will admit my companionship, Carlo?”

“She desires to thank you.”

“She has no longer any fear of me?”

“You will find her of one mind with you.”

“Concerning the king!”

“I would say, on most subjects.”

“But that you do not know my mind! You are modest. Confess that you are thinking the hour you have passed with me has been wasted.”

“I am, now I hear the call to arms.”

“If I had all the while entertained you with talk of your Vittoria! It would not have been wasted then, my amaranto. It is not wasted for me. If a shot should strike you—”

“Tell her I died loving her with all my soul!” cried Ammiani.

Violetta's frame quivered as if he had smitten her.

They left the house. Countess Ammiani's door was the length of a barricade distant: it swung open to them, like all the other house-doors which were, or wished to be esteemed, true to the cause, and hospitable toward patriots.

"Remember, when you need a refuge, my villa is on Lago Maggiore," Violetta said, and kissed her finger-tips to him.

An hour after, by the light of this unlucky little speech, he thought of her as a shameless coquette. "When I need a refuge? Is not Milan in arms?—Italy alive? She considers it all a passing epidemic; or, perhaps, she is to plead for me to the king!"

That set him thinking moodily over the things she had uttered of Vittoria's strange and sudden devotion to the king.

Page 1713

Rainy dawn and the tongues of the churches ushered in the last day of street fighting. Ammiani found Romara and Colonel Corte at the head of strong bodies of volunteers, well-armed, ready to march for the Porta 'rosa. All three went straight to the house where the Provisional Government sat, and sword in hand denounced Count Medole as a traitor who sold his country to the king. Corte dragged him to the window to hear the shouts for the Republic. Medole wrote their names down one by one, and said, "Shall I leave the date vacant?" They put themselves at the head of their men, and marched in the ringing of the bells. The bells were their sacro-military music. Barto Rizzo was off to make a spring at the Porta Ticinese. Students, peasants, noble youths of the best blood, old men and young women, stood ranged in the drenching rain, eager to face death for freedom. At mid-day the bells were answered by cannon and the blunt snap of musketry volleys; dull, savage responses, as of a wounded great beast giving short howls and snarls by the interminable over-roaring of a cataract. Messengers from the gates came running to the quiet centre of the city, where cool men discoursed and plotted. Great news, big lies, were shouted:—Carlo Alberto thundered in the plains; the Austrians were everywhere retiring; the Marshal was a prisoner; the flag of surrender was on the citadel! These things were for the ears of thirsty women, diplomatists, and cripples.

Countess Ammiani and Countess d'Isorella sat together throughout the agitation of the day.

The life prayed for by one seemed a wisp of straw flung on this humming furnace.

Countess Ammiani was too well used to defeat to believe readily in victory, and had shrouded her head in resignation too long to hope for what she craved. Her hands were joined softly in her lap. Her visage had the same unmoved expression when she conversed with Violetta as when she listened to the ravings of the Corso.

Darkness came, and the bells ceased not rolling by her open windows: the clouds were like mists of conflagration.

She would not have the windows closed. The noise of the city had become familiar and akin to the image of her boy. She sat there cloaked.

Her heart went like a time-piece to the two interrogations to heaven: "Alive?—or dead?"

The voice of Luciano Romara was that of an angel's answering. He entered the room neat and trim as a cavalier dressed for social evening duty, saying with his fine tact, "We are all well;" and after talking like a gazette of the Porta Tosa taken by the volunteers, Barto Rizzo's occupation of the gate opening on the Ticino, and the bursting of the Porta Camosina by the freebands of the plains, he handed a letter to Countess Ammiani.

“Carlo is on the march to Bergamo and Brescia, with Corte, Sana, and about fifty of our men,” he said.

“And is wounded—where?” asked Violetta.

Page 1714

“Slightly in the hand—you see, he can march,” Romara said, laughing at her promptness to suspect a subterfuge, until he thought, “Now, what does this mean, madam?”

A lamp was brought to Countess Ammiani. She read:

“*My mother*!

“Cotton-wool on the left fore-finger. They deigned to give me no other memorial of my first fight. I am not worthy of papa’s two bullets. I march with Corte and Sana to Brescia. We keep the passes of the Tyrol. Luciano heads five hundred up to the hills to-morrow or next day. He must have all our money. Then go from door to door and beg subscriptions. Yes, my Chief! it is to be like God, and deserving of his gifts to lay down all pride, all wealth. This night send to my betrothed in Turin. She must be with no one but my mother. It is my command. Tell her so. I hold imperatively to it.

“I breathe the best air of life. Luciano is a fine leader in action, calm as in a ball-room. What did I feel? I will talk of it with you by-and-by;—my father whispered in my ears; I felt him at my right hand. He said, ‘I died for this day.’ I feel now that I must have seen him. This is imagination. We may say that anything is imagination. I certainly heard his voice. Be of good heart, my mother, for I can swear that the General wakes up when I strike Austrian steel. He loved Brescia; so I go there. God preserve my mother! The eyes of heaven are wide enough to see us both. Vittoria by your side, remember! It is my will.

“*Carlo*.”

Countess Ammiani closed her eyes over the letter, as in a dead sleep. “He is more his father than himself, and so suddenly!” she said. She was tearless. Violetta helped her to her bed-room under the pretext of a desire to hear the contents of the letter.

That night, which ended the five days of battle in Milan, while fires were raging at many gates, bells were rolling over the roof-tops, the army of Austria coiled along the North-eastern walls of the city, through rain and thick obscurity, and wove its way like a vast worm into the outer land.

CHAPTER XXXI

Episodes of the revolt and the war
Vittoria disobeys her lover

Countess d’Isorella’s peculiar mission to Milan was over with the victory of the city. She undertook personally to deliver Carlo’s injunction to Vittoria on her way to the king. Countess Ammiani deemed it sufficient that her son’s wishes should be repeated

verbally; and as there appeared to be no better messenger than one who was bound for Turin and knew Vittoria’s place of residence, she entrusted the duty to Violetta.

The much which hangs on little was then set in motion:

Page 1715

Violetta was crossing the Ticino when she met a Milanese nobleman who had received cold greeting from the king, and was returning to Milan with word that the Piedmontese declaration of war against Austria had been signed. She went back to Milan, saw and heard, and gathered a burden for the royal ears. This was a woman, tender only to the recollection of past days, who used her beauty and her arts as weapons for influence. She liked kings because she saw neither master nor dupe in a republic; she liked her early lover because she could see nothing but a victim in any new one. She was fond of Carlo, as greatly occupied minds may be attached to an old garden where they have aforetime sown fair seed. Jealousy of a rival in love that was disconnected with political business and her large expenditure, had never yet disturbed the lady's nerves.

At Turin she found Vittoria singing at the opera, and winning marked applause from the royal box. She thought sincerely that to tear a prima donna from her glory would be very much like dismissing a successful General to his home and gabbling family. A most eminent personage agreed with her. Vittoria was carelessly informed that Count Ammiani had gone to Brescia, and having regard for her safety, desired her to go to Milan to be under the protection of his mother, and that Countess Ammiani was willing to receive her.

Now, with her mother, and her maid Giacinta, and Beppo gathered about her, for three weeks Vittoria had been in full operatic career, working, winning fame, believing that she was winning influence, and establishing a treasury. The presence of her lover in Milan would have called her to the noble city; but he being at Brescia, she asked herself why she should abstain from labours which contributed materially to the strength of the revolution and made her helpful. It was doubtful whether Countess Ammiani would permit her to sing at La Scala; or whether the city could support an opera in the throes of war. And Vittoria was sending money to Milan. The stipend paid to her by the impresario, the jewels, the big bouquets—all flowed into the treasury of the insurrection. Antonio-Pericles advanced her a large sum on the day when the news of the Milanese uprising reached Turin: the conditions of the loan had simply been that she should continue her engagement to sing in Turin. He was perfectly slavish to her, and might be trusted to advance more. Since the great night at La Scala, she had been often depressed by a secret feeling that there was divorce between her love of her country and devotion to her Art. Now that both passions were in union, both active, each aiding the fire of the other, she lived a consummate life. She could not have abandoned her path instantly though Carlo had spoken his command to her in person. Such were her first spontaneous seasonings, and Laura Piaveni seconded them; saying, "Money, money!, we must be Jews for money. We women are not allowed to fight, but we can manage to contribute our lire and soldi; we can forge the sinews of war."

Page 1716

Vittoria wrote respectfully to Countess Ammiani stating why she declined to leave Turin. The letter was poorly worded. While writing it she had been taken by a sentiment of guilt and of isolation in presuming to disobey her lover. “I am glad he will not see it,” she remarked to Laura, who looked rapidly across the lines, and said nothing. Praise of the king was in the last sentence. Laura’s eyes lingered on it half-a-minute.

“Has he not drawn his sword? He is going to march,” said Vittoria.

“Oh, yes,” Laura replied coolly; “but you put that to please Countess Ammiani.”

Vittoria confessed she had not written it purposely to defend the king. “What harm?” she asked.

“None. Only this playing with shades allows men to call us hypocrites.”

The observation angered Vittoria. She had seen the king of late; she had breathed Turin incense and its atmosphere; much that could be pleaded on the king’s behalf she had listened to with the sympathetic pity which can be woman’s best judgement, and is the sentiment of reason. She had also brooded over the king’s character, and had thought that if the Chief could have her opportunities for studying this little impressible, yet strangely impulsive royal nature, his severe condemnation of him would be tempered. In fact, she was doing what makes a woman excessively tender and opinionated; she was petting her idea of the misunderstood one: she was thinking that she divined the king’s character by mystical intuition; I will dare to say, maternally apprehended it. And it was a character strangely open to feminine perceptions, while to masculine comprehension it remained a dead blank, done either in black or in white.

Vittoria insisted on praising the king to Laura.

“With all my heart,” Laura said, “so long as he is true to Italy.”

“How, then, am I hypocritical?”

“My Sandra, you are certainly perverse. You admitted that you did something for the sake of pleasing Countess Ammiani.”

“I did. But to be hypocritical one must be false.”

“Oh!” went Laura.

“And I write to Carlo. He does not care for the king; therefore it is needless for me to name the king to him; and I shall not.”

Laura said, “Very well.” She saw a little deeper than the perversity, though she did not see the springs. In Vittoria’s letter to her lover, she made no allusion to the Sword of Italy.

Countess Ammiani forwarded both letters on to Brescia.

When Carlo had finished reading them, he heard all Brescia clamouring indignantly at the king for having disarmed volunteers on Lago Maggiore and elsewhere in his dominions. Milan was sending word by every post of the overbearing arrogance of the Piedmontese officers and officials, who claimed a prostrate submission from a city fresh with the ardour of the glory it had won for itself, and that would fain have welcomed

Page 1717

them as brothers. Romara and others wrote of downright visible betrayal. It was a time of passions;—great readiness for generosity, equal promptitude for undiscriminating hatred. Carlo read Vittoria's praise of the king with insufferable anguish. "You—you part of me, can write like this!" he struck the paper vehemently. The fury of action transformed the gentle youth. Countess Ammiani would not have forwarded the letter addressed to herself had she dreamed the mischief it might do. Carlo saw double-dealing in the absence of any mention of the king in his own letter.

"Quit Turin at once," he dashed hasty lines to Vittoria; "and no 'Viva il Re' till we know what he may merit. Old delusions are pardonable; but you must now look abroad with your eyes. Your words should be the echoes of my soul. Your acts are mine. For the sake of the country, do nothing to fill me with shame. The king is a traitor. I remember things said of him by Agostino; I subscribe to them every one. Were you like any other Italian girl, you might cry for him—who would care! But you are Vittoria. Fly to my mother's arms, and there rest. The king betrays us. Is a stronger word necessary? I am writing too harshly to you;—and here are the lines of your beloved letter throbbing round me while I write; but till the last shot is fired I try to be iron, and would hold your hand and not kiss it—not be mad to fall between your arms—not wish for you—not think of you as a woman, as my beloved, as my Vittoria; I hope and pray not, if I thought there was an ace of work left to do for the country. Or if one could say that you cherished a shred of loyalty for him who betrays it. Great heaven! am I to imagine that royal flatteries—My hand is not my own! You shall see all that it writes. I will seem to you no better than I am. I do not tell you to be a Republican, but an Italian. If I had room for myself in my prayers—oh! one half-instant to look on you, though with chains on my limbs. The sky and the solid ground break up when I think of you. I fancy I am still in prison. Angelo was music to me for two whole days (without a morning to the first and a night to the second). He will be here to-morrow and talk of you again. I long for him more than for battle—almost long for you more than for victory for our Italy.

> "This is Brescia, which my father said he loved better than his wife.
>
> "General Paolo Ammiani is buried here. I was at his tombstone this morning. I wish you had known him.

"You remember, we talked of his fencing with me daily. 'I love the fathers who do that.' You said it. He will love you. Death is the shadow—not life. I went to his tomb. It was more to think of Brescia than of him. Ashes are only ashes; tombs are poor places. My soul is the power.

> "If I saw the Monte Viso this morning, I saw right over your head when you were sleeping.

Page 1718

“Farewell to journalism—I hope, for ever. I jump at shaking off the journalistic phraseology Agostino laughs at. Yet I was right in printing my ‘young nonsense.’ I did, hold the truth, and that was felt, though my vehicle for delivering it was rubbish.

“In two days Corte promises to sing his song, ‘Avanti.’ I am at his left hand. Venice, the passes of the Adige, the Adda, the Oglio are ours. The room is locked; we have only to exterminate the reptiles inside it. Romara, D’Arci, Carnischi march to hold the doors. Corte will push lower; and if I can get him to enter the plains and join the main army I shall rejoice.”

The letter concluded with a postscript that half an Italian regiment, with white coats swinging on their bayonet-points, had just come in.

It reached Vittoria at a critical moment.

Two days previously, she and Laura Piaveni had talked with the king. It was an unexpected honour. Countess, d’Isorella conducted them to the palace. The lean-headed sovereign sat booted and spurred, his sword across his knees; he spoke with a peculiar sad hopefulness of the prospects of the campaign, making it clear that he was risking more than anyone risked, for his stake was a crown. The few words he uttered of Italy had a golden ring in them; Vittoria knew not why they had it. He condemned the Republican spirit of Milan more regretfully than severely. The Republicans were, he said, impracticable. Beyond the desire for change, they knew not what they wanted. He did not state that he should avoid Milan in his march. On the contrary, he seemed to indicate that he was about to present himself to the people of Milan. “To act against the enemy successfully, we must act as one, under one head, with one aim.” He said this, adding that no heart in Italy had yearned more than his own for the signal to march for the Mincio and the Adige.

Vittoria determined to put him to one test. She summoned her boldness to crave grace for Agostino Balderini to return to Piedmont. The petition was immediately granted. Alluding to the libretto of Camilla, the king complimented Vittoria for her high courage on the night of the Fifteenth of the foregoing year. “We in Turin were prepared, though we had only then the pleasure of hearing of you,” he said.

“I strove to do my best to help. I wish to serve our cause now,” she replied, feeling an inexplicable new sweetness running in her blood.

He asked her if she did not know that she had the power to move multitudes.

“Sire, singing appears so poor a thing in time of war.”

He remarked that wine was good for soldiers, singing better, such a voice as hers best of all.

For hours after the interview, Vittoria struggled with her deep blushes. She heard the drums of the regiments, the clatter of horses, the bugle-call of assembly, as so many confirmatory notes that it was a royal hero who was going forth.

Page 1719

“He stakes a crown,” she said to Laura.

“Tusk! it tumbles off his head if he refuses to venture something,” was Laura’s response.

Vittoria reproached her for injustice.

“No,” Laura said; “he is like a young man for whom his mother has made a match. And he would be very much in love with his bride if he were quite certain of winning her, or rather, if she would come a little more than halfway to meet him. Some young men are so composed. Genoa and Turin say, ‘Go and try.’ Milan and Venice say, ‘Come and have faith in us.’ My opinion is that he is quite as much propelled as attracted.”

“This is shameful,” said Vittoria.

“No; for I am quite willing to suspend my judgement. I pray that fortune may bless his arms. I do think that the stir of a campaign, and a certain amount of success will make him in earnest.”

“Can you look on his face and not see pure enthusiasm?”

“I see every feminine quality in it, my dear.”

“What can it be that he is wanting in?”

“Masculine ambition.”

“I am not defending him,” said Vittoria hastily.

“Not at all; and I am not attacking him. I can excuse his dread of Republicanism. I can fancy that there is reason for him just now to fear Republicanism worse than Austria. Paris and Milan are two grisly phantoms before him. These red spectres are born of earthquake, and are more given to shaking thrones than are hostile cannonshot. Earthquakes are dreadfuller than common maladies to all of us. Fortune may help him, but he has not the look of one who commands her. The face is not aquiline. There’s a light over him like the ray of a sickly star.”

“For that reason!” Vittoria burst out.

“Oh, for that reason we pity men, assuredly, my Sandra, but not kings. Luckless kings are not generous men, and ungenerous men are mischievous kings.”

“But if you find him chivalrous and devoted; if he proves his noble intentions, why not support him?”

“Dandle a puppet, by all means,” said Laura.

Her intellect, not her heart, was harsh to the king; and her heart was not mistress of her intellect in this respect, because she beheld riding forth at the head of Italy one whose spirit was too much after the pattern of her supple, springing, cowering, impressionable sex, alternately ardent and abject, chivalrous and treacherous, and not to be confided in firmly when standing at the head of a great cause.

Aware that she was reading him very strictly by the letters of his past deeds, which were not plain history to Vittoria, she declared that she did not countenance suspicion in dealing with the king, and that it would be a delight to her to hear of his gallant bearing on the battle-field. “Or to witness it, my Sandra, if that were possible;—we two! For, should he prove to be no General, he has the courage of his family.”

Vittoria took fire at this. “What hinders our following the army?”

Page 1720

“The less baggage the better, my dear.”

“But the king said that my singing—I have no right to think it myself.” Vittoria concluded her sentence with a comical intention of humility.

“It was a pretty compliment,” said Laura. “You replied that singing is a poor thing in time of war, and I agree with you. We might serve as hospital nurses.”

“Why do we not determine?”

“We are only considering possibilities.”

“Consider the impossibility of our remaining quiet.”

“Fire that goes to flame is a waste of heat, my Sandra.”

The signora, however, was not so discreet as her speech. On all sides there was uproar and movement. High-born Italian ladies were offering their hands for any serviceable work. Laura and Vittoria were not alone in the desire which was growing to be resolution to share the hardships of the soldiers, to cherish and encourage them, and by seeing, to have the supreme joy of feeling the blows struck at the common enemy.

The opera closed when the king marched. Carlo Ammiani’s letter was handed to Vittoria at the fall of the curtain on the last night.

Three paths were open to her: either that she should obey her lover, or earn an immense sum of money from Antonio-Pericles by accepting an immediate engagement in London, or go to the war. To sit in submissive obedience seemed unreasonable; to fly from Italy impossible. Yet the latter alternative appealed strongly to her sense of duty, and as it thereby threw her lover’s commands into the background, she left it to her heart to struggle with Carlo, and thought over the two final propositions. The idea of being apart from Italy while the living country streamed forth to battle struck her inflamed spirit like the shock of a pause in martial music. Laura pretended to take no part in Vittoria’s decision, but when it was reached, she showed her a travelling-carriage stocked with lint and linen, wine in jars, chocolate, cases of brandy, tea, coffee, needles, thread, twine, scissors, knives; saying, as she displayed them, “there, my dear, all my money has gone in that equipment, so you must pay on the road.”

“This doesn’t leave me a choice, then,” said Victoria, joining her humour.

“Ah, but think over it,” Laura suggested.

“No! not think at all,” cried Vittoria.

“You do not fear Carlo’s anger?”

“If I think, I am weak as water. Let us go.”

Countess d’Isorella wrote to Carlo: “Your Vittoria is away after the king to Pavia. They tell me she stood up in her carriage on the Ponte del Po-’Viva il Re d’Italia!’ waving the cross of Savoy. As I have previously assured you, no woman is Republican. The demonstration was a mistake. Public characters should not let their personal preferences betrumpeted: a diplomatic truism:—but I must add, least of all a cantatrice for a king. The famous Greek amateur—the prop of failing finances—is after her to arrest her for breach of engagement. You wished to discover an independent mind in a woman, my Carlo; did you not? One would suppose her your wife—or widow. She looked a superb thing the last night she sang. She is not, in my opinion, wanting in height. If, behind all that innocence and candour, she has any trained artfulness, she will beat us all. Heaven bless your arms!”

Page 1721

The demonstration mentioned by the countess had not occurred.

Vittoria's letter to her lover missed him. She wrote from Pavia, after she had taken her decisive step.

Carlo Ammiani went into the business of the war with the belief that his betrothed had despised his prayer to her.

He was under Colonel Corte, operating on the sub-Alpine range of hills along the line of the Chiese South-eastward. Here the volunteers, formed of the best blood of Milan, the gay and brave young men, after marching in the pride of their strength to hold the Alpine passes and bar Austria from Italy while the fight went on below, were struck by a sudden paralysis. They hung aloft there like an arm cleft from the body. Weapons, clothes, provisions, money, the implements of war, were withheld from them. The Piedmontese officers despatched to watch their proceedings laughed at them like exasperating senior scholars examining the accomplishments of a lower form. It was manifest that Count Medole and the Government of Milan worked everywhere to conquer the people for the king before the king had done a stroke to conquer the Austrians for the people; while, in order to reduce them to the condition of Piedmontese soldiery, the flame of their patriotic enthusiasm was systematically damped, and instead of apprentices in war, who possessed at any rate the elementary stuff of soldiers, miserable dummies were drafted into the royal service. The Tuscans and the Romans had good reason to complain on behalf of their princes, as had the Venetians and the Lombards for the cause of their Republic. Neither Tuscans, Romans, Venetians, nor Lombards were offering up their lives simply to obtain a change of rulers; though all Italy was ready to bow in allegiance to a king of proved kingly quality. Early in the campaign the cry of treason was muttered, and on all sides such became the temper of the Alpine volunteers, that Angelo and Rinaldo Guidascarpi were forced to join their cousin under Corte, by the dispersion of their band, amounting to something more than eighteen hundred fighting lads, whom a Piedmontese superior officer summoned peremptorily to shout for the king. They thundered as one voice for the Italian Republic, and instantly broke up and disbanded. This was the folly of the young: Carlo Ammiani confessed that it was no better; but he knew that a breath of generous confidence from the self-appointed champion of the national cause would have subdued his impatience at royalty and given heart and cheer to his sickening comrades. He began to frown angrily when he thought of Vittoria. "Where is she now?—where now?" he asked himself in the season of his most violent wrath at the king. Her conduct grew inseparable in his mind from the king's deeds. The sufferings, the fierce irony, the very deaths of the men surrounding him in aims, rose up in accusation against the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XXXI

Page 1722

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

The treachery of Pericles—the white umbrella—the death of Rinaldo Guidascarpi

The king crossed the Mincio. The Marshal, threatened on his left flank, drew in his line from the farther Veronese heights upon a narrowed battle front before Verona. Here they manoeuvred, and the opening successes fell to the king. Holding Peschiera begirt, with one sharp passage of arms he cleared the right bank of the Adige and stood on the semicircle of hills, master of the main artery into Tyrol.

The village of Pastrengo has given its name to the day. It was a day of intense heat coming after heavy rains. The arid soil steamed; the white powder-smoke curled in long horizontal columns across the hazy ring of the fight. Seen from a distance it was like a huge downy ball, kicked this way and that between the cypresses by invisible giants. A pair of eager-eyed women gazing on a battle-field for the first time could but ask themselves in bewilderment whether the fate of countries were verily settled in such a fashion. Far in the rear, Vittoria and Laura heard the cannon-shots; a sullen dull sound, as of a mallet striking upon rotten timber. They drove at speed. The great thumps became varied by musketry volleys, that were like blocks of rockboulder tumbled in the roll of a mountain torrent. These, then, were the voices of Italy and Austria speaking the devilish tongue of the final alternative. Cannon, rockets, musketry, and now the run of drums, now the ring of bugles, now the tramp of horses, and the field was like a landslip. A joyful bright black death-wine seemed to pour from the bugles all about. The women strained their senses to hear and see; they could realize nothing of a reality so absolute; their feelings were shattered, and crowded over them in patches;—horror, glory, panic, hope, shifted lights within their bosoms. The fascination and repulsion of the image of Force divided them. They feared; they were prostrate; they sprang in praise. The image of Force was god and devil to their souls. They strove to understand why the field was marked with blocks of men who made a plume of vapour here, and hurried thither. The action of their intellects resolved to a blank marvel at seeing an imminent thing—an interrogation to almighty heaven treated with method, not with fury streaming forward. Cleave the opposing ranks! Cry to God for fire? Cut them through! They had come to see the Song of Deborah performed before their eyes, and they witnessed only a battle. Blocks of infantry gathered densely, thinned to a line, wheeled in column, marched: blocks of cavalry changed posts: artillery bellowed from one spot and quickly selected another. Infantry advanced in the wake of tiny smokepuffs, halted, advanced again, rattled files of shots, became struck into knots, faced half about as from a blow of the back of a hand,

Page 1723

retired orderly. Cavalry curved like a flickering scimetar in their rear; artillery plodded to its further station. Innumerable tiny smoke-puffs then preceded a fresh advance of infantry. The enemy were on the hills and looked mightier, for they were revealed among red flashes of their guns, and stood partly visible above clouds of hostile smoke and through clouds of their own, which grasped viscously by the skirts of the hills. Yet it seemed a strife of insects, until, one by one, soldiers who had gone into yonder white pit for the bloody kiss of death, and had got it on their faces, were borne by Vittoria and Laura knelt in this horrid stream of mortal anguish to give succour from their stores in the carriage. Their natural emotions were distraught. They welcomed the sight of suffering thankfully, for the poor blotted faces were so glad at sight of them. Torture was their key to the reading of the battle. They gazed on the field no longer, but let the roaring wave of combat wash up to them what it would.

The hill behind Pastrengo was twice stormed. When the bluecoats first fell back, a fine charge of Piedmontese horse cleared the slopes for a second effort, and they went up and on, driving the enemy from hill to hill. The Adige was crossed by the Austrians under cover of Tyrolese rifleshots.

Then, with Beppo at their heels, bearing water, wine, and brandy, the women walked in the paths of carnage, and saw the many faces of death. Laura whispered strangely, “How light-hearted they look!” The wounded called their comforters sweet names. Some smoked and some sang, some groaned; all were quick to drink. Their jokes at the dead were universal. They twisted their bodies painfully to stick a cigar between dead lips, and besprinkle them with the last drops of liquor in their cups, laughing a benediction. These scenes put grievous chains on Vittoria’s spirit, but Laura evidently was not the heavier for them. Glorious Verona shone under the sunset as their own to come; Peschiera, on the blue lake, was in the hollow of their hands. “Prizes worth any quantity of blood,” said Laura. Vittoria confessed that she had seen enough of blood, and her aspect provoked Laura to utter, “For God’s sake, think of something miserable; —cry, if you can!”

Vittoria’s underlip dropped sickly with the question, “Why?”

Laura stated the physical necessity with Italian naivete.

“If I can,” said Vittoria, and blinked to get a tear; but laughter helped as well to relieve her, and it came on their return to the carriage. They found the spy Luigi sitting beside the driver. He informed them that Antonio-Pericles had been in the track of the army ever since their flight from Turin; daily hurrying off with whip of horses at the sound of cannon-shot, and gradually stealing back to the extreme rear. This day he had flown from Oliosi to Cavriani, and was, perhaps, retracing his way already as before, on fearful toe-tips. Luigi acted the caution of one who stepped blindfolded across hot iron plates. Vittoria, without a spark of interest, asked why the Signor Antonio should be following the army.

Page 1724

“Why, it’s to find you, signorina.”

Luigi’s comical emphasis conjured up in a jumbled picture the devotion, the fury, the zeal, the terror of Antonio-Pericles—a mixture of demoniacal energy and ludicrous trepidation. She imagined his long figure, fantastical as a shadow, off at huge strides, and back, with eyes sliding swiftly to the temples, and his odd serpent’s head raised to peer across the plains and occasionally to exclaim to the reasonable heavens in anger at men and loathing of her. She laughed ungovernably. Luigi exclaimed that, albeit in disgrace with the signor Antonio, he had been sent for to serve him afresh, and had now been sent forward to entreat the gracious signorina to grant her sincerest friend and adorer an interview. She laughed at Pericles, but in truth she almost loved the man for his worship of her Art, and representation of her dear peaceful practice of it.

The interview between them took place at Oliosi. There, also, she met Georgiana Ford, the half-sister of Merthyr Powys, who told her that Merthyr and Augustus Gambier were in the ranks of a volunteer contingent in the king’s army, and might have been present at Pastrengo. Georgiana held aloof from battle-fields, her business being simply to serve as Merthyr’s nurse in case of wounds, or to see the last of him in case of death. She appeared to have no enthusiasm. She seconded strongly the vehement persuasions addressed by Pericles to Vittoria. Her disapproval of the presence of her sex on fields of battle was precise. Pericles had followed the army to give Vittoria one last chance, he said, and drag her away from this sick country, as he called it, pointing at the dusty land from the windows of the inn. On first seeing her he gasped like one who has recovered a lost thing. To Laura he was a fool; but Vittoria enjoyed his wildest outbursts, and her half-sincere humility encouraged him to think that he had captured her at last. He enlarged on the perils surrounding her voice in dusty bellowing Lombardy, and on the ardour of his friendship in exposing himself to perils as tremendous, that he might rescue her. While speaking he pricked a lively ear for the noise of guns, hearing a gun in everything, and jumping to the window with horrid imprecations. His carriage was horsed at the doors below. Let the horses die, he said, let the coachman have sun-stroke. Let hundreds perish, if Vittoria would only start in an hour-in two—to-night—to-morrow.

“Because, do you see,”—he turned to Laura and Georgiana, submitting to the vexatious necessity of seeming reasonable to these creatures,—“she is a casket for one pearl. It is only one, but it is *one*, mon Dieu! and inscrutable heaven, mesdames, has made the holder of it mad. Her voice has but a sole skin; it is not like a body; it bleeds to death at a scratch. A spot on the pearl, and it is perished—pfoof! Ah, cruel thing! impious, I say. I have watched, I have reared

Page 1725

her. Speak to me of mothers! I have cherished her for her splendid destiny—to see it go down, heels up, among quarrels of boobies! Yes; we have war in Italy. Fight! Fight in this beautiful climate that you may be dominated by a blue coat, not by a white coat. We are an intelligent race; we are a civilized people; we will fight for that. What has a voice of the very heavens to do with your fighting? I heard it first in England, in a firwood, in a month of Spring, at night-time, fifteen miles and a quarter from the city of London—oh, city of peace! Sandra you will come there. I give you thousands additional to the sum stipulated. You have no rival. Sandra Belloni! no rival, I say"—he invoked her in English, "and you hear—you, to be a draggle-tail vivandiere wiz a brandy-bottle at your hips and a reputation going like ze brandy. Ah! pardon, mesdames; but did mankind ever see a frenzy like this girl's? Speak, Sandra. I could cry it like Michiella to Camilla—Speak!"

Vittoria compelled him to despatch his horses to stables. He had relays of horses at war-prices between Castiglione and Pavia, and a retinue of servants; nor did he hesitate to inform the ladies that, before entrusting his person to the hazards of war, he had taken care to be provided with safe-conduct passes for both armies, as befitted a prudent man of peace—"or sense; it is one, mesdames."

Notwithstanding his terror at the guns, and disgust at the soldiery and the bad fare at the inn, Vittoria's presence kept him lingering in this wretched place, though he cried continually, "I shall have heart-disease." He believed at first that he should subdue her; then it became his intention to carry her off.

It was to see Merthyr that she remained. Merthyr came there the day after the engagement at Santa Lucia. They had not met since the days at Meran. He was bronzed, and keen with strife, and looked young, but spoke not over-hopefully. He scolded her for wishing to taste battle, and compared her to a bad swimmer on deep shores. Pericles bounded with delight to hear him, and said he had not supposed there was so much sense in Powys. Merthyr confessed that the Austrians had as good as beaten them at Santa Lucia. The tactical combinations of the Piedmontese were wretched. He was enamoured of the gallantly of the Duke of Savoy, who had saved the right wing of the army from rout while covering the backward movement. Why there had been any fight at all at Santa Lucia, where nothing was to be gained, much to be lost, he was incapable of telling; but attributed it to an antique chivalry on the part of the king, that had prompted the hero to a trial of strength, a bout of blood-letting.

"You do think he is a hero?" said Vittoria.

"He is; and he will march to Venice."

"And open the opera at Venice," Pericles sneered. "Powys, mon cher, cure her of this beastly dream. It is a scandal to you to want a woman's help. You were defeated at Santa Lucia. I say bravo to anything that brings you to reason. Bravo! You hear me."

Page 1726

The engagement at Santa Lucia was designed by the king to serve as an instigating signal for the Veronese to rise in revolt; and this was the secret of Charles Albert's stultifying manoeuvres between Peschiera and Mantua. Instead of matching his military skill against the wary old Marshal's, he was offering incentives to conspiracy. Distrusting the revolution, which was a force behind him, he placed such reliance on its efforts in his front as to make it the pivot of his actions.

"The volunteers North-east of Vicenza are doing the real work for us, I believe," said Merthyr; and it seemed so then, as it might have been indeed, had they not been left almost entirely to themselves to do it.

These tidings of a fight lost set Laura and Vittoria quivering with nervous irritation. They had been on the field of Pastrengo, and it was won. They had been absent from Santa Lucia. What was the deduction? Not such as reason would have made for them; but they were at the mercy of the currents of the blood. "Let us go on," said Laura. Merthyr refused to convoy them. Pericles drove with him an hour on the road, and returned in glee, to find Vittoria and Laura seated in their carriage, and Luigi scuffling with Beppo.

"Padrone, see how I assist you," cried Luigi.

Upon this Beppo instantly made a swan's neck of his body and trumpeted: "A sally from the fortress for forage."

"Whip! whip!" Pericles shouted to his coachman, and the two carriages parted company at the top of their speed.

Pericles fell a victim to a regiment of bersaglieri that wanted horses, and unceremoniously stopped his pair and took possession of them on the route for Peschiera. He was left in a stranded carriage between a dusty ditch and a mulberry bough. Vittoria and Laura were not much luckier. They were met by a band of deserters, who made no claim upon the horses, but stood for drink, and having therewith fortified their fine opinion of themselves, petitioned for money. A kiss was their next demand. Money and good humour saved the women from indignity. The band of rascals went off with a 'Viva l'Italia.' Such scum is upon every popular rising, as Vittoria had to learn. Days of rain and an incomprehensible inactivity of the royal army kept her at a miserable inn, where the walls were bare, the cock had crowed his last. The guns of Peschiera seemed to roam over the plain like an echo unwillingly aroused that seeks a hollow for its further sleep. Laura sat pondering for hours, harsh in manner, as if she hated her. "I think," she said once, "that women are those persons who have done evil in another world:" The "why?" from Vittoria was uttered simply to awaken friendly talk, but Laura relapsed into her gloom. A village priest, a sleek gentle creature, who shook his head to earth when he hoped, and filled his nostrils with snuff when he desponded, gave them occasional companionship under the title of consolation. He wished the

Page 1727

Austrians to be beaten, remarking, however, that they were good Catholics, most fervent Catholics. As the Lord decided, so it would end! "Oh, delicious creed!" Laura broke out: "Oh, dear and sweet doctrine! that results and developments in a world where there is more evil than good are approved by heaven." She twisted the mild man in supple steel of her irony so tenderly that Vittoria marvelled to hear her speak of him in abhorrence when they quitted the village. "Not to be born a woman, and voluntarily to be a woman!" ejaculated Laura. "How many, how many are we to deduct from the male population of Italy? Cross in hand, he should be at the head of our arms, not whimpering in a corner for white bread. Wretch! he makes the marrow in my bones rage at him. He chronicled pig that squeaked."

"Why had she been so gentle with him?"

"Because, my dear, when I loathe a thing I never care to exhaust my detestation before I can strike it," said the true Italian.

They were on the field of Goito; it was won. It was won against odds. At Pastrengo they witnessed an encounter; this was a battle. Vittoria perceived that there was the difference between a symphony and a lyric song. The blessedness of the sensation that death can be light and easy dispossessed her of the meaner compassion, half made up of cowardice, which she had been nearly borne down by on the field of Pastrengo. At an angle on a height off the left wing of the royal army the face of the battle was plain to her: the movements of the troops were clear as strokes on a slate. Laura flung her life into her eyes, and knelt and watched, without summing one sole thing from what her senses received.

Vittoria said, "We are too far away to understand it."

"No," said Laura, "we are too far away to feel it."

The savage soul of the woman was robbed of its share of tragic emotion by having to hold so far aloof. Flashes of guns were but flashes of guns up there where she knelt. She thirsted to read the things written by them; thirsted for their mystic terrors, somewhat as souls of great prophets have craved for the full revelation of those fitful underlights which inspired their mouths.

Charles Albert's star was at its highest when the Piedmontese drums beat for an advance of the whole line at Goito.

Laura stood up, white as furnace-fire. "Women can do some good by praying," she said. She believed that she had been praying. That was her part in the victory.

Rain fell as from the forehead of thunder. From black eve to black dawn the women were among dead and dying men, where the lanterns trailed a slow flame across faces

that took the light and let it go. They returned to their carriage exhausted. The ways were almost impassable for carriage-wheels. While they were toiling on and exchanging their drenched clothes, Vittoria heard Merthyr's voice speaking to Beppo on the box. He was saying that Captain

Page 1728

Gambier lay badly wounded; brandy was wanted for him. She flung a cloak over Laura, and handed out the flask with a naked arm. It was not till she saw him again that she remembered or even felt that he had kissed the arm. A spot of sweet fire burned on it just where the soft fulness of a woman's arm slopes to the bend. He chid her for being on the field and rejoiced in a breath, for the carriage and its contents helped to rescue his wounded brother in arms from probable death. Gambier, wounded in thigh and ankle by rifle-shot, was placed in the carriage. His clothes were saturated with the soil of Goito; but wounded and wet, he smiled gaily, and talked sweet boyish English. Merthyr gave the driver directions to wind along up the Mincio. "Georgiana will be at the nearest village—she has an instinct for battle-fields, or keeps spies in her pay," he said.

"Tell her I am safe. We march to cut them (the enemy) off from Verona, and I can't leave. The game is in our hands. We shall give you Venice."

Georgiana was found at the nearest village. Gambier's wounds had been dressed by an army-surgeon. She looked at the dressing, and said that it would do for six hours. This singular person had fully qualified herself to attend on a soldier-brother. She had studied medicine for that purpose, and she had served as nurse in a London hospital. Her nerves were completely under control. She could sit in attendance by a sick-bed for hours, hearing distant cannon, and the brawl of soldiery and vagabonds in the street, without a change of countenance. Her dress was plain black from throat to heel, with a skull cap of white, like a Moravian sister. Vittoria reverenced her; but Georgiana's manner in return was cold aversion, so much more scornful than disdain that it offended Laura, who promptly put her finger on the blot in the fair character with the word 'Jealousy;' but a single word is too broad a mark to be exactly true. "She is a perfect example of your English," Laura said. "Brave, good, devoted, admirable—ice at the heart. The judge of others, of course. I always respected her; I never liked her; and I should be afraid of a comparison with her. Her management of the household of this inn is extraordinary."

Georgiana condescended to advise Vittoria once more not to dangle after armies.

"I wish to wait here to assist you in nursing our friend," said Vittoria.

Georgiana replied that her strength was unlikely to fail.

After two days of incessant rain, sunshine blazed over 'the watery Mantuan flats. Laura drove with Beppo to see whether the army was in motion, for they were distracted by rumours. Vittoria clung to her wounded friend, whose pleasure was the hearing her speak. She expected Laura's return by set of sun. After dark a messenger came to her, saying that the signora had sent a carriage to fetch her to Valeggio. Her immediate supposition was that Merthyr might have fallen. She found Luigi at the carriage-door, and listened to his mysterious directions and remarks that not a minute must be lost,

without suspicion. He said that the signora was in great trouble, very anxious to see the signorina instantly; there was but a distance of five miles to traverse.

Page 1729

She thought it strange that the carriage should be so luxuriously fitted with lights and silken pillows, but her ideas were all of Merthyr, until she by chance discovered a packet marked I chocolate, which told her at once that she was entrapped by Antonio-Pericles. Luigi would not answer her cry to him. After some fruitless tremblings of wrath, she lay back relieved by the feeling that Merthyr was safe, come what might come to herself. Things could lend to nothing but an altercation with Pericles, and for this scene she prepared her mind. The carriage stopped while she was dozing. Too proud to supplicate in the darkness, she left it to the horses to bear her on, reserving her energies for the morning's interview, and saying, "The farther he takes me the angrier I shall be." She dreamed of her anger while asleep, but awakened so frequently during the night that morning was at her eyelids before they divided. To her amazement, she saw the carriage surrounded by Austrian troopers. Pericles was spreading cigars among them, and addressing them affably. The carriage was on a good road, between irrigated flats, that flashed a lively green and bright steel blue for miles away. She drew down the blinds to cry at leisure; her wings were clipped, and she lost heart. Pericles came round to her when the carriage had drawn up at an inn. He was egregiously polite, but modestly kept back any expressions of triumph. A body of Austrians, cavalry and infantry, were breaking camp. Pericles accorded her an hour of rest. She perceived that he was anticipating an outbreak of the anger she had nursed overnight, and baffled him so far by keeping dumb. Luigi was sent up to her to announce the expiration of her hour of grace.

"Ah, Luigi!" she said. "Signorina, only wait, and see how Luigi can serve two," he whispered, writhing under the reproachfulness of her eyes. At the carriage-door she asked Pericles whither he was taking her. "Not to Turin, not to London, Sandra Belloni!" he replied; "not to a place where you are wet all night long, to wheeze for ever after it. Go in." She entered the carriage quickly, to escape from staring officers, whose laughter rang in her ears and humbled her bitterly; she felt herself bringing dishonour on her lover. The carriage continued in the track of the Austrians. Pericles was audibly careful to avoid the border regiments. He showered cigars as he passed; now and then he exhibited a paper; and on one occasion he brought a General officer to the carriage-door, opened it and pointed in. A white-helmeted dragoon rode on each side of the carriage for the remainder of the day. The delight of the supposition that these Austrians were retreating before the invincible arms of King Carlo Alberto kept her cheerful; but she heard no guns in the rear. A blocking of artillery and waggons compelled a halt, and then Pericles came and faced her. He looked profoundly ashamed of himself, ready as he was for an animated defence of his proceedings.

Page 1730

“Where are you taking me, sir?” she said in English.

“Sandra, will you be a good child? It is anywhere you please, if you will promise—”

“I will promise nothing.”

“Zen, I lock you up in Verona.” In Verona!”

“Sandra, will you promise to me?”

“I will promise nothing.”

“Zen I lock you up in Verona. It is settled. No more of it. I come to say, we shall not reach a village. I am sorry. We have soldiers for a guard. You draw out a board and lodge in your carriage as in a bed. Biscuits, potted meats, prunes, bon-bona, chocolate, wine—you shall find all at your right hand and your left. I am desolate in offending you. Sandra, if you will promise—”

“I will promise—this is what I will promise,” said Vittoria.

Pericles thrust his ear forward, and withdrew it as if it had been slapped.

She promised to run from him at the first opportunity, to despise him ever after, and never to sing again in his hearing. With the darkness Luigi appeared to light her lamp; he mouthed perpetually, “To-morrow, to-morrow.” The watch-fires of Austrians encamped in the fields encircled her; and moving up and down, the cigar of Antonio-Pericles was visible. He had not eaten or drunk, and he was out there sleepless; he walked conquering his fears in the thick of war troubles: all for her sake. She watched critically to see whether the cigar-light was puffed in fretfulness. It burned steadily; and the thought of Pericles supporting patience quite overcame her. In a fit of humour that was almost tears, she called to him and begged him to take a place in the carriage and have food. “If it is your pleasure,” he said; and threw off his cloak. The wine comforted him. Thereupon he commenced a series of strange gesticulations, and ended by blinking at the window, saying, “No, no; it is impossible to explain. I have no voice; I am not, gifted. It is,” he tapped at his chest, “it is here. It is, imprisoned in me.”

“What?” said Vittoria, to encourage him.

“It can never be explained, my child. Am I not respectful to you? Am I not worshipful to you? But, no! it can never be explained. Some do call me mad. I know it; I am laughed at. Oh! do I not know zat? Perfectly well. My ancestors adored Goddesses. I discover ze voice of a Goddess: I adore it. So you call me mad; it is to me what you call me—-juste ze same. I am possessed wiz passion for her voice. So it will be till I go to ashes. It is to me ze one zsing divine in a pig, a porpoise world. It is to me—I talk! It is unutterable—impossible to tell.”

“But I understand it; I know you must feel it,” said Vittoria.

“But you hate me, Sandra. You hate your Pericles.”

“No, I do not; you are my good friend, my good Pericles.”

“I am your good Pericles? So you obey me?”

“In what?”

“You come to London?”

Page 1731

“I shall not.”

“You come to Turin?”

“I cannot promise.”

“To Milan?”

“No; not yet.”

“Ungrateful little beast! minx! temptress! You seduce me into your carriage to feed me, to fill me, for to coax me,” cried Pericles.

“Am I the person to have abuse poured on me?” Vittoria rejoined, and she frowned. “Might I not have called you a wretched whimsical money-machine, without the comprehension of a human feeling? You are doing me a great wrong—to win my submission, as I see, and it half amuses me; but the pretence of an attempt to carry me off from my friends is an offence that I should take certain care to punish in another. I do not give you any promise, because the first promise of all—the promise to keep one—is not in my power. Shut your eyes and sleep where you are, and in the morning think better of your conduct!”

“Of my conduct, mademoiselle!” Pericles retained this sentence in his head till the conclusion of her animated speech,—“of my conduct I judge better zan to accept of such a privilege as you graciously offer to me;” and he retired with a sour grin, very much subdued by her unexpected capacity for expression. The bugles of the Austrians were soon ringing. There was a trifle of a romantic flavour in the notes which Vittoria tried not to feel; the smart iteration of them all about her rubbed it off, but she was reduced to repeat them, and take them in various keys. This was her theme for the day.

They were in the midst of mulberries, out of sight of the army; green mulberries, and the green and the bronze young vine-leaf. It was a delicious day, but she began to fear that she was approaching Verona, and that Pericles was acting seriously. The bronze young vine-leaf seemed to her like some warrior’s face, as it would look when beaten by weather, burned by the sun. They came now to inns which had been visited by both armies. Luigi established communication with the innkeepers before the latter had stated the names of villages to Pericles, who stood map in hand, believing himself at last to be no more conscious of his position than an atom in a whirl of dust. Vittoria still refused to give him any promise, and finally, on a solitary stretch of the road, he appealed to her mercy. She was the mistress of the carriage, he said; he had never meant to imprison her in Verona; his behaviour was simply dictated by his adoration—alas! This was true or not true, but it was certain that the ways were confounded to them. Luigi, despatched to reconnoitre from a neighbouring eminence, reported a Piedmontese encampment far ahead, and a walking tent that was coming on their

route. The walking tent was an enormous white umbrella. Pericles advanced to meet it; after an interchange of opening formalities, he turned about and clapped hands. The umbrella was folded. Vittoria recognized the last man she would then have thought of meeting; he seemed to have jumped out of an ambush from Meran

Page 1732

in Tyrol:—it was Wilfrid. Their greeting was disturbed by the rushing up of half-a-dozen troopers. The men claimed him as an Austrian spy. With difficulty Vittoria obtained leave to drive him on to their commanding officer. It appeared that the white umbrella was notorious for having been seen on previous occasions threading the Piedmontese lines into and out of Peschiera. These very troopers swore to it; but they could not swear to Wilfrid, and white umbrellas were not absolutely uncommon. Vittoria declared that Wilfrid was an old English friend; Pericles vowed that Wilfrid was one of their party. The prisoner was clearly an Englishman. As it chanced, the officer before whom Wilfrid was taken had heard Vittoria sing on the great night at La Scala. “Signorina, your word should pass the Austrian Field-Marshal himself,” he said, and merely requested Wilfrid to state on his word of honour that he was not in the Austrian service, to which Wilfrid unhesitatingly replied, “I am not.”

Permission was then accorded to him to proceed in the carriage.

Vittoria held her hand to Wilfrid. He took the fingers and bowed over them.

He was perfectly self-possessed, and cool even under her eyes. Like a pedlar he carried a pack on his back, which was his life; for his business was a combination of scout and spy.

“You have saved me from a ditch to-day,” he said; “every fellow has some sort of love for his life, and I must thank you for the odd luck of your coming by. I knew you were on this ground somewhere. If the rascals had searched me, I should not have come off so well. I did not speak falsely to that officer; I am not in the Austrian service. I am a volunteer spy. I am an unpaid soldier. I am the dog of the army—fetching and carrying for a smile and a pat on the head. I am ruined, and I am working my way up as best I can. My uncle disowns me. It is to General Schoneck that I owe this chance of re-establishing myself. I followed the army out of Milan. I was at Melegnano, at Pastrengo, at Santa Lucia. If I get nothing for it, the Lenkensteins at least shall not say that I abandoned the flag in adversity. I am bound for Rivoli. The fortress (Peschiera) has just surrendered. The Marshal is stealing round to make a dash on Vicenza.” So far he spoke like one apart from her, but a flush crossed his forehead. “I have not followed you. I have obeyed your brief directions. I saw this carriage yesterday in the ranks of our troops. I saw Pericles. I guessed who might be inside it. I let it pass me. Could I do more?”

“Not if you wanted to punish me,” said Vittoria.

She was afflicted by his refraining from reproaches in his sunken state.

Their talk bordered the old life which they had known, like a rivulet, coming to falls where it threatens to be e, torrent and a flood; like flame bubbling the wax of a seal. She was surprised to find herself expecting tenderness from him: and, startled by the

languor in her veins, she conceived a contempt for her sex and her own weak nature. To mask that, an excessive outward coldness was assumed. “You can serve as a spy, Wilfrid!”

Page 1733

The answer was ready: “Having twice served as a traitor, I need not be particular. It is what my uncle and the Lenkensteins call me. I do my best to work my way up again. Despise me for it, if you please.”

On the contrary, she had never respected him so much. She got herself into opposition to him by provoking him to speak with pride of his army; but the opposition was artificial, and she called to Carlo Ammiani in heart. “I will leave these places, cover up my head, and crouch till the struggle is decided.”

The difficulty was now to be happily rid of Wilfrid by leaving him in safety. Piedmontese horse scoured the neighbourhood, and any mischance that might befall him she traced to her hand. She dreaded at every instant to hear him speak of his love for her; yet how sweet it would have been to hear it,—to hear him speak of passionate love; to shape it in deep music; to hear one crave for what she gave to another! “I am sinking: I am growing degraded,” she thought. But there was no other way for her to quicken her imagination of her distant and offended lover. The sights on the plains were strange contrasts to these conflicting inner emotions: she seemed to be living in two divided worlds.

Pericles declared anew that she was mistress of the carriage. She issued orders: “The nearest point to Rivoli, and then to Brescia.”

Pericles broke into shouts. “She has arrived at her reason! Hurrah for Brescia! I beheld you,” he confessed to Wilfrid,—“it was on ze right of Mincio, my friend. I did not know you were so true for Art, or what a hand I would have reached to you! Excuse me now. Let us whip on. I am your banker. I shall desire you not to be shot or sabred. You are deserving of an effigy on a theatral grand stair-case!” His gratitude could no further express itself. In joy he whipped the horses on. Fools might be fighting—he was the conqueror. From Brescia, one leap took him in fancy to London. He composed mentally a letter to be forwarded immediately to a London manager, directing him to cause the appearance of articles in the journals on the grand new prima donna, whose singing had awakened the people of Italy.

Another day brought them in view of the Lago di Garda. The flag of Sardinia hung from the walls of Peschiera. And now Vittoria saw the Pastrengo hills—dear hills, that drove her wretched languor out of her, and made her soul and body one again. The horses were going at a gallop. Shots were heard. To the left of them, somewhat in the rear, on higher ground, there was an encounter of a body of Austrians and Italians: Tyrolese riflemen and the volunteers. Pericles was raving. He refused to draw the reins till they had reached the village, where one of the horses dropped. From the windows of the inn, fronting a clear space, Vittoria beheld a guard of Austrians surrounding two or more prisoners. A woman sat near them with her head buried in her lap.

Page 1734

Presently an officer left the door of the inn and spoke to the soldiers. "That is Count Karl von Lenkenstein," Wilfrid said in a whisper. Pericles had been speaking with Count Karl and came up to the room, saying, "We are to observe something; but we are safe; it is only fortune of war." Wilfrid immediately went out to report himself. He was seen giving his papers, after which Count Karl waved his finger back to the inn, and he returned. Vittoria sprang to her feet at the words he uttered. Rinaldo Guidascarpi was one of the prisoners. The others Wilfrid professed not to know. The woman was the wife of Barto Rizzo.

In the great red of sunset the Tyrolese riflemen and a body of Italians in Austrian fatigue uniform marched into the village. These formed in the space before the inn. It seemed as if Count Karl were declaiming an indictment. A voice answered, "I am the man." It was clear and straight as a voice that goes up in the night. Then a procession walked some paces on. The woman followed. She fell prostrate at the feet of Count Karl. He listened to her and nodded. Rinaldo Guidascarpi stood alone with bandaged eyes. The woman advanced to him; she put her mouth on his ear; there she hung.

Vittoria heard a single shot. Rinaldo Guidascarpi lay stretched upon the ground and the woman stood over him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

Count Karl Lenkenstein—the story of the Guidascarpi—the victory of the volunteers

The smoke of a pistol-shot thinned away while there was yet silence.

"It is a saving of six charges of Austrian ammunition," said Pericles.

Vittoria stared at the scene, losing faith in her eyesight. She could in fact see no distinct thing beyond what appeared as an illuminated copper medallion, held at a great distance from her, with a dead man and a towering female figure stamped on it.

The events following were like a rush of water on her senses. There was fighting up the street of the village, and a struggle in the space where Rinaldo had fallen; successive yellowish shots under the rising moonlight, cries from Italian lips, quick words of command from German in Italian, and one sturdy bull's roar of a voice that called across the tumult to the Austro-Italian soldiery, "Venite fratelli!—come, brothers, come under our banner!" She heard "Rinaldo!" called.

This was a second attack of the volunteers for the rescue of their captured comrades. They fought more desperately than on the hill outside the village: they fought with

steel. Shot enfiladed them; yet they bore forward in a scattered body up to that spot where Rinaldo lay, shouting for him. There they turned,—they fled.

Then there was a perfect stillness, succeeding the strife as quickly, Vittoria thought, as a breath yielded succeeds a breath taken.

Page 1735

She accused the heavens of injustice.

Pericles, prostrate on the floor, moaned that he was wounded. She said, “Bleed to death!”

“It is my soul, it is my soul is wounded for you, Sandra.”

“Dreadful craven man!” she muttered.

“When my soul is shaking for your safety, Sandra Belloni!” Pericles turned his ear up. “For myself—not; it is for you, for you.”

Assured of the cessation of arms by delicious silence he jumped to his feet.

“Ah! brutes to fight. It is ‘immonde;’ it is unnatural!”

He tapped his finger on the walls for marks of shot, and discovered a shot-hole in the wood-work, that had passed an arm’s length above her head, into which he thrust his finger in an intense speculative meditation, shifting eyes from it to her, and throwing them aloft.

He was summoned to the presence of Count Karl, with whom he found Captain Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and officers of jagers and the Italian battalion. Barto Rizzo’s wife was in a corner of the room. Weisspriess met him with a very civil greeting, and introduced him to Count Karl, who begged him to thank Vittoria for the aid she had afforded to General Schoneck’s emissary in crossing the Piedmontese lines. He spoke in Italian. He agreed to conduct Pericles to a point on the route of his march, where Pericles and his precious prima donna—“our very good friend,” he said, jovially—could escape the risk of unpleasant mishaps, and arrive at Trent and cities of peace by easy stages. He was marching for the neighbourhood of Vicenza.

A little before dawn Vittoria came down to the carriage. Count Karl stood at the door to hand her in. He was young and handsome, with a soft flowing blonde moustache and pleasant eyes, a contrast to his brother Count Lenkenstein. He repeated his thanks to her, which Pericles had not delivered; he informed her that she was by no means a prisoner, and was simply under the guardianship of friends—“though perhaps, signorina, you will not esteem this gentleman to be one of your friends.” He pointed to Weisspriess. The officer bowed, but kept aloof. Vittoria perceived a singular change in him: he had become pale and sedate. “Poor fellow! he has had his dose,” Count Karl said. “He is, I beg to assure you, one of your most vehement admirers.”

A piece of her property that flushed her with recollections, yet made her grateful, was presently handed to her, though not in her old enemy’s presence, by a soldier. It was the silver-hilted dagger, Carlo’s precious gift, of which Weisspriess had taken possession in the mountain-pass over the vale of Meran, when he fought the duel with

Angelo. Whether intended as a peace-offering, or as a simple restitution, it helped Vittoria to believe that Weisspriess was no longer the man he had been.

The march was ready, but Barto Rizzo's wife refused to move a foot. The officers consulted. She, was brought before them. The soldiers swore with jesting oaths that she had been carefully searched for weapons, and only wanted a whipping. "She must have it," said Weisspriess. Vittoria entreated that she might have a place beside her in the carriage. "It is more than I would have asked of you; but if you are not afraid of her," said Count Karl, with an apologetic shrug.

Page 1736

Her heart beat fast when she found herself alone with the terrible woman.

Till then she had never seen a tragic face. Compared with this tawny colourlessness, this evil brow, this shut mouth, Laura, even on the battle-field, looked harmless. It was like the face of a dead savage. The eyeballs were full on Vittoria, as if they dashed at an obstacle, not embraced an image. In proportion as they seemed to widen about her, Vittoria shrank. The whole woman was blood to her gaze.

When she was capable of speaking, she said entreatingly:

“I knew his brother.”

Not a sign of life was given in reply.

Companionship with this ghost of broad daylight made the flattering
Tyrolese feathers at both windows a welcome sight.

Precautions had been taken to bind the woman’s arms. Vittoria offered to loosen the cords, but she dared not touch her without a mark of assent.

“I know Angelo Guidascarpi, Rinaldo’s brother,” she spoke again.

The woman’s nostrils bent inward, as when the breath we draw is keen as a sword to the heart. Vittoria was compelled to look away from her.

At the mid-day halt Count Karl deigned to justify to her his intended execution of Rinaldo —the accomplice in the slaying of his brother Count Paula. He was evidently eager to obtain her good opinion of the Austrian military. “But for this miserable spirit of hatred against us,” he said, “I should have espoused an Italian lady;” and he asked, “Why not? For that matter, in all but blood we Lenkensteins are half Italian, except when Italy menaces the empire. Can you blame us for then drawing the sword in earnest?”

He proffered his version of the death of Count Paul. She kept her own silent in her bosom.

Clelia Guidascarpi, according to his statement, had first been slain by her brothers. Vittoria believed that Clelia had voluntarily submitted to death and died by her own hand. She was betrothed to an Italian nobleman of Bologna, the friend of the brothers. They had arranged the marriage; she accepted the betrothal. “She loved my brother, poor thing!” said Count Karl. “She concealed it, and naturally. How could she take a couple of wolves into her confidence? If she had told the pair of ruffians that she was plighted to an Austrian, they would have quieted her at an earlier period. A woman! a girl—signorina! The intolerable cowardice amazes me. It amazes me that you or anyone can uphold the character of such brutes. And when she was dead they lured my brother to the house and slew him; fell upon him with daggers, stretched him at the

foot of her coffin, and then—what then?—ran! ran for their lives. One has gone to his account. We shall come across the other. He is among that volunteer party which attacked us yesterday. The body was carried off by them; it is sufficient testimony that Angelo Guidascarpi is in the neighbourhood. I should be hunting him now but that I am under orders to march South-east."

Page 1737

The story, as Vittoria knew it, had a different, though yet a dreadful, colour.

“I could have hanged Rinaldo,” Count Karl said further. “I suppose the rascals feared I should use my right, and that is why they sent their mad baggage of a woman to spare any damage to the family pride. If I had been a man to enjoy vengeance, the rope would have swung for him. In spite of provocation, I shall simply shoot the other; I pledge my word to it. They shall be paid in coin. I demand no interest.”

Weisspriess prudently avoided her. Wilfrid held aloof. She sat in garden shade till the bugle sounded. Tyrolese and Italian soldiers were gibing at her haggard companion when she entered the carriage. Fronting this dumb creature once more, Vittoria thought of the story of the brothers. She felt herself reading it from the very page. The woman looked that evil star incarnate which Laura said they were born under.

This is in brief the story of the Guidascarpi.

They were the offspring of a Bolognese noble house, neither wealthy nor poor. In her early womanhood, Clelia was left to the care of her brothers. She declined the guardianship of Countess Ammiani because of her love for them; and the three, with their passion of hatred to the Austrians inherited from father and mother, schemed in concert to throw off the Austrian yoke. Clelia had soft features of no great mark; by her colouring she was beautiful, being dark along the eyebrows, with dark eyes, and a surpassing richness of Venetian hair. Bologna and Venice were married in her aspect. Her brothers conceived her to possess such force of mind that they held no secrets from her. They did not know that the heart of their sister was struggling with an image of Power when she uttered hatred of it. She was in truth a woman of a soft heart, with a most impressionable imagination.

There were many suitors for the hand of Clelia Guidascarpi, though her dowry was not the portion of a fat estate. Her old nurse counselled the brothers that they should consent to her taking a husband. They fulfilled this duty as one that must be done, and she became sorrowfully the betrothed of a nobleman of Bologna; from which hour she had no cheerfulness. The brothers quitted Bologna for Venice, where there was the bed of a conspiracy. On their return they were shaken by rumours of their sister’s misconduct. An Austrian name was allied to hers in busy mouths. A lady, their distant relative, whose fame was light, had withdrawn her from the silent house, and made display of her. Since she had seen more than an Italian girl should see, the brothers proposed to the nobleman her betrothed to break the treaty; but he was of a mind to hurry on the marriage, and recollecting now that she was but a woman, the brothers fixed a day for her espousals, tenderly, without reproach. She had the choice of taking the vows or surrendering her hand. Her old nurse prayed for the day of her espousals to come with a quicker step.

Page 1738

One night she surprised Count Paul Lenkenstein at Clelia's window. Rinaldo was in the garden below. He moved to the shadow of a cypress, and was seen moving by the old nurse. The lover took the single kiss he had come for, was led through the chamber, and passed unchallenged into the street. Clelia sat between locked doors and darkened windows, feeling colder to the brothers she had been reared with than to all other men upon the earth. They sent for her after a lapse of hours. Her old nurse was kneeling at their feet. Rinaldo asked for the name of her lover. She answered with it. Angelo said, "It will be better for you to die: but if you cannot do so easy a thing as that, prepare widow's garments." They forced her to write three words to Count Paul, calling him to her window at midnight. Rinaldo fetched a priest: Angelo laid out two swords. An hour before the midnight, Clelia's old nurse raised the house with her cries. Clelia was stretched dead in her chamber. The brothers kissed her in turn, and sat, one at her head, one at her feet. At midnight her lover stood among them. He was gravely saluted, and bidden to look upon the dead body. Angelo said to him, "Had she lived you should have wedded her hand. She is gone of her own free choice, and one of us follows her." With the sweat of anguish on his forehead, Count Paul drew sword. The window was barred; six male domestics of the household held high lights in the chamber; the priest knelt beside one corpse, awaiting the other.

Vittoria's imagination could not go beyond that scene, but she looked out on the brother of the slain youth with great pity, and with a strange curiosity. The example given by Clelia of the possible love of an Italian girl for the white uniform, set her thinking whether so monstrous a fact could ever be doubled in this world. "Could it happen to me?" she asked herself, and smiled, as she half-fashioned the words on her lips, "It is a pretty uniform."

Her reverie was broken by a hiss of "Traitress!" from the woman opposite.

She coloured guiltily, tried to speak, and sat trembling. A divination of intense hatred had perhaps read the thought within her breast: or it was a mere outburst of hate. The woman's face was like the wearing away of smoke from a spot whence shot has issued. Vittoria walked for the remainder of the day. That fearful companion oppressed her. She felt that one who followed armies should be cast in such a frame, and now desired with all her heart to render full obedience to Carlo, and abide in Brescia, or even in Milan—a city she thought of shyly.

The march was hurried to the slopes of the Vicentino, for enemies were thick in this district. Pericles refused to quit the soldiers, though Count Karl used persuasion. The young nobleman said to Vittoria, "Be on your guard when you meet my sister Anna. I tell you, we can be as revengeful as any of you: but you will exonerate me. I do my duty; I seek to do no more."

Page 1739

At an inn that they reached toward evening she saw the innkeeper shoot a little ball of paper at an Italian corporal, who put his foot on it and picked it up. The soldier subsequently passed through the ranks of his comrades, gathering winks and grins. They were to have rested at the inn, but Count Karl was warned by scouts, which was sufficient to make Pericles cling to him in avoidance of the volunteers, of whom mainly he was in terror. He looked ague-stricken. He would not listen to her, or to reason in any shape. “I am on the sea—shall I trust a boat? I stick to a ship,” he said. The soldiers marched till midnight. It was arranged that the carriage should strike off for Schio at dawn. The soldiers bivouacked on the slope of one of the low undulations falling to the Vicentino plain. Vittoria spread her cloak, and lay under bare sky, not suffering the woman to be ejected from the carriage. Hitherto Luigi had avoided her. Under pretence of doubling Count Karl’s cloak as a pillow for her head, he whispered, “If the signorina hears shots let her lie on the ground flat as a sheet.” The peacefulness surrounding her precluded alarm. There was brilliant moonlight, and the host of stars, all dim; and first they beckoned her up to come away from trouble, and then, through long gazing, she had the fancy that they bent and swam about her, making her feel that she lay in the hollows of a warm hushed sea. She wished for her lover.

Men and officers were lying at a stone’s-throw distant. The Tyrolese had lit a fire for cooking purposes, by which four of them stood, and, lifting hands, sang one of their mountain songs, that seemed to her to spring like clear water into air, and fall wavering as a feather falls, or the light about a stone in water. It lulled her to a half-sleep, during which she fancied hearing a broad imitation of a cat’s-call from the mountains, that was answered out of the camp, and a talk of officers arose in connection with the response, and subsided. The carriage was in the shadows of the fire. In a little while Luigi and the driver began putting the horses to, and she saw Count Karl and Weisspriess go up to Luigi, who declared loudly that it was time. The woman inside was aroused. Weisspriess helped to drag her out. Luigi kept making much noise, and apologized for it by saying that he desired to awaken his master, who was stretched in a secure circle among the Tyrolese. Presently Vittoria beheld the woman’s arms thrown out free; the next minute they were around the body of Weisspriess, and a shrewd cry issued from Count Karl. Shots rang from the outposts; the Tyrolese sprang to arms; “Sandra!” was shouted by Pericles; and once more she heard the ‘Venite fratelli!’ of the bull’s voice, and a stream of volunteers dashed at the Tyrolese with sword and dagger and bayonet. The Austro-Italians stood in a crescent line—the ominous form of incipient military insubordination. Their officers stormed at them, and called for Count Karl and for Weisspriess. The latter replied like a man stifling, but Count Karl’s voice was silent.

Page 1740

“Weisspriess! here, to me!” the captain sang out in Italian.

“Ammiani! here, to me!” was replied.

Vittoria struck her hands together in electrical gladness at her lover’s voice and name. It rang most cheerfully. Her home was in the conflict where her lover fought, and she muttered with ecstasy, “We have met! we have met!” The sound of the keen steel, so exciting to dream of, paralyzed her nerves in a way that powder, more terrible for a woman’s imagination, would not have done, and she could only feebly advance. It was a spacious moonlight, but the moonlight appeared to have got of a brassy hue to her eyes, though the sparkle of the steel was white; and she felt too, and wondered at it, that the cries and the noise went to her throat, as if threatening to choke her. Very soon she found herself standing there, watching for the issue of the strife, almost as dead as a weight in scales, incapable of clear vision.

Matched against the Tyrolese alone, the volunteers had an equal fight in point of numbers, and the advantage of possessing a leader; for Count Karl was down, and Weisspriess was still entangled in the woman’s arms. When at last Wilfrid got him free, the unsupported Tyrolese were giving ground before Carlo Ammiani and his followers. These fought with stern fury, keeping close up to their enemy, rarely shouting. They presented something like the line of a classic bow, with its arrow-head; while the Tyrolese were huddled in groups, and clubbed at them, and fell back for space, and ultimately crashed upon their betraying brothers in arms, swinging rifles and flying. The Austro-Italians rang out a Viva for Italy, and let them fly: they were swept from the scene.

Vittoria heard her lover addressing his followers. Then he and Angelo stood over Count Karl, whom she had forgotten. Angelo ran up to her, but gave place the moment Carlo came; and Carlo drew her by the hand swiftly to an obscure bend of the rolling ground, and stuck his sword in the earth, and there put his arms round her and held her fast.

“Obey me now,” were his first words.

“Yes,” she answered.

He was harsh of eye and tongue, not like the gentle youth she had been torn from at the door of La Scala.

“Return; make your way to Brescia. My mother is in Brescia. Milan is hateful. I throw myself into Vicenza. Can I trust you to obey?”

“Carlo, what evil have you heard of me?”

“I listen to no tales.”

“Let me follow you to Vicenza and be your handmaid, my beloved.”

“Say that you obey.”

“I have said it.”

He seemed to shut her in his heart, so closely was she enfolded.

“Since La Scala,” she murmured; and he bent his lips to her ear, whispering, “Not one thought of another woman! and never till I die.”

“And I only of you, Carlo, and for you, my lover, my lover!”

“You love me absolutely?”

Page 1741

“I belong to you.”

“I could be a coward and pray for life to live to hear you say it.”

“I feel I breathe another life when you are away from me.”

“You belong to me; you are my own?”

“You take my voice, beloved.”

“And when I claim you, I am to have you?”

“Am I not in your hands?”

“The very instant I make my claim you will say yes?”

“I shall not have strength for more than to nod.”

Carlo shuddered at the delicious image of her weakness.

“My Sandra! Vittoria, my soul! my bride!”

“O my Carlo! Do you go to Vicenza? And did you know I was among these people?”

“You will hear everything from little Leone Rufo, who is wounded and accompanies you to Brescia. Speak of nothing. Speak my name, and look at me. I deserve two minutes of blessedness.”

“Ah! my dearest, if I am sweet to you, you might have many!”

“No; they begin to hum a reproach at me already, for I must be marching. Vicenza will soon bubble on a fire, I suspect. Comfort my mother; she wants a young heart at her elbow. If she is alone, she feeds on every rumour; other women scatter in emotions what poisons her. And when my bride is with her, I am between them.”

“Yes, Carlo, I will go,” said Vittoria, seeing her duty at last through tenderness.

Carlo sprang from her side to meet Angelo, with whom he exchanged some quick words. The bugle was sounding, and Barto Rizzo audible. Luigi came to, her, ruefully announcing that the volunteers had sacked the carriage behaved worse than the Austrians; and that his padrone, the signor Antonio-Pericles, was off like a gossamer. Angelo induced her to remain on the spot where she stood till the carriage was seen on the Schio road, when he led her to it, saying that Carlo had serious work to do. Count Karl Lenkenstein was lying in the carriage, supported by Wilfrid and by young Leone Rufo, who sat laughing, with one eye under a cross-bandage and an arm slung in a

handkerchief. Vittoria desired to wait that she might see her lover once more; but Angelo entreated her that she should depart, too earnestly to leave her in doubt of there being good reason for it and for her lover's absence. He pointed to Wilfrid: "Barto Rizzo captured this man; Carlo has released him. Take him with you to attend on his superior officer." She drew Angelo's observation to the first morning colours over the peaks. He looked up, and she knew that he remembered that morning of their flight from the inn. Perhaps he then had the image of his brother in his mind, for the colours seemed to be plucking at his heart, and he said, "I have lost him."

"God help you, my friend!" said Vittoria, her throat choking.

Angelo pointed at the insensible nobleman: "These live. I do not grudge him his breath or his chances; but why should these men take so much killing? Weisspriess has risen, as though I struck the blow of a babe. But we one shot does for us! Nevertheless, signorina," Angelo smiled firmly, "I complain of nothing while we march forward."

Page 1742

He kissed his hand to her, and turned back to his troop. The carriage was soon under the shadows of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Episodes of the revolt and the war
the deeds of Barto Rizzo—the meeting at Roveredo

At Schio there was no medical attendance to be obtained for Count Karl, and he begged so piteously to be taken on to Roveredo, that, on his promising to give Leone Rufo a pass, Vittoria decided to work her way round to Brescia by the Alpine route. She supposed Pericles to have gone off among the Tyrolese, and wished in her heart that Wilfrid had gone likewise, for he continued to wear that look of sad stupefaction which was the harshest reproach to her. Leone was unconquerably gay in spite of his wounds. He narrated the doings of the volunteers, with proud eulogies of Carlo Ammiani's gallant leadership; but the devices of Barto Rizzo appeared to have struck his imagination most. "He is positively a cat—a great cat," Leone said. "He can run a day; he can fast a week; he can climb a house; he can drop from a crag; and he never lets go his hold. If he says a thing to his wife, she goes true as a bullet to the mark. The two make a complete piece of artillery. We are all for Barto, though our captain Carlo is often enraged with him. But there's no getting on without him. We have found that."

Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpi and Barto Rizzo had done many daring feats. They had first, heading about a couple of dozen out of a force of sixty, endeavoured to surprise the fortress Rocca d'Anfo in Lake Idro—an insane enterprise that touched on success, and would have been an achievement had all the men who followed them been made of the same desperate stuff. Beaten off, they escaped up the Val di Ledro, and secretly entered Trent, where they hoped to spread revolt, but the Austrian commandant knew what a quantity of dry wood was in the city, and stamped his heel on sparks. A revolt was prepared notwithstanding the proclamation of imprisonment and death. Barto undertook to lead a troop against the Buon Consiglio barracks, while Angelo and Rinaldo cleared the ramparts. It chanced, whether from treachery or extra-vigilance was unknown, that the troops paid domiciliary visits an hour before the intended outbreak, and the three were left to accomplish their task alone. They remained in the city several days, hunted from house to house, and finally they were brought to bay at night on the roof of a palace where the Lenkenstein ladies were residing. Barto took his dagger between his teeth and dropped to the balcony of Lena's chamber. The brothers soon after found the rooftrap opened to them, and Lena and Anna conducted them to the postern-door. There Angelo asked whom they had to thank. The terrified ladies gave their name; upon hearing which,

Page 1743

Rinaldo turned and said that he would pay for a charitable deed to the extent of his power, and would not meanly allow them to befriend persons who were to continue strangers to them. He gave the name of Guidascarpi, and relieved his brother, as well as himself, of a load of obligation, for the ladies raised wild screams on the instant. In falling from the walls to the road, Rinaldo hurt his foot. Barto lifted him on his back, and journeyed with him so till at the appointed place he met his wife, who dressed the foot, and led them out of the line of pursuit, herself bending under the beloved load. Her adoration of Rinaldo was deep as a mother's, pure as a virgin's, fiery as a saint's. Leone Rufo dwelt on it the more fervidly from seeing Vittoria's expression of astonishment. The woman led them to a cave in the rocks, where she had stored provision and sat two days expecting the signal from Trent. They saw numerous bands of soldiers set out along the valleys—merry men whom it was Barto's pleasure to beguile by shouts, as a relief for his parched weariness upon the baking rock. Accident made it an indiscretion. A glass was levelled at them by a mounted officer, and they had quickly to be moving. Angelo knew the voice of Weisspriess in the word of command to the soldiers, and the call to him to surrender. Weisspriess followed them across the mountain track, keeping at their heels, though they doubled and adopted all possible contrivances to shake him off. He was joined by Count Karl Lenkenstein on the day when Carlo Ammiani encountered them, with the rear of Colonel Corte's band marching for Vicenza. In the collision between the Austrians and the volunteers, Rinaldo was taken fighting upon his knee-cap. Leone cursed the disabled foot which had carried the hero in action, to cast him at the mercy of his enemies; but recollection of that sight of Rinaldo fighting far ahead and alone, half-down-like a scuttled ship, stood like a flower in the lad's memory. The volunteers devoted themselves to liberate or avenge him. It was then that Barto Rizzo sent his wife upon her mission. Leone assured Vittoria that Angelo was aware of its nature, and approved it—hoped that the same might be done for himself. He shook his head when she asked if Count Ammiani approved it likewise.

"Signorina, Count Ammiani has a grudge against Barto, though he can't help making use of him. Our captain Carlo is too much of a mere soldier. He would have allowed Rinaldo to be strung up, and Barto does not owe him obedience in those things."

"But why did this Barto Rizzo employ a woman's hand?"

Page 1744

“The woman was capable. No man could have got permission to move freely among the rascal Austrians, even in the character of a deserter. She did, and she saved him from the shame of execution. And besides, it was her punishment. You are astonished? Barto Rizzo punishes royally. He never forgives, and he never persecutes; he waits for his opportunity. That woman disobeyed him once—once only; but once was enough. It occurred in Milan, I believe. She released an Austrian, or did something—I don’t know the story exactly—and Barto said to her, ’Now you can wash out your crime and send your boy to heaven unspotted, with one blow.’ I saw her set out to do it. She was all teeth and eyes, like a frightened horse; she walked like a Muse in a garden.”

Vittoria discovered that her presence among the Austrians had been known to Carlo. Leone alluded slightly to Barto Rizzo’s confirmed suspicion of her, saying that it was his weakness to be suspicious of women. The volunteers, however, were all in her favour, and had jeered at Barto on his declaring that she might, in proof of her willingness to serve the cause, have used her voice for the purpose of subjugating the wavering Austro-Italians, who wanted as much coaxing as women. Count Karl had been struck to earth by Barto Rizzo. “Not with his boasted neatness, I imagine,” Leone said. In fact, the dagger had grazed an ivory portrait of a fair Italian head wreathed with violets in Count Karl’s breast.

Vittoria recognized the features of Violetta d’Isorella as the original of the portrait.

They arrived at Roveredo late in the evening. The wounded man again entreated Vittoria to remain by him till a messenger should bring one of his sisters from Trent. “See,” she said to Leone, “how I give grounds for suspicion of me; I nurse an enemy.”

“Here is a case where Barto is distinctly to blame,” the lad replied. “The poor fellow must want nursing, for he can’t smoke.”

Anna von Lenkenstein came from Trent to her brother’s summons. Vittoria was by his bedside, and the sufferer had fallen asleep with his head upon her arm. Anna looked upon this scene with more hateful amazement than her dull eyelids could express. She beckoned imperiously for her to come away, but Vittoria would not allow him to be disturbed, and Anna sat and faced her. The sleep was long. The eyes of the two women met from time to time, and Vittoria thought that Barto Rizzo’s wife, though more terrible, was pleasanter to behold, and less brutal, than Anna. The moment her brother stirred, Anna repeated her imperious gesture, murmuring, “Away! out of my sight!” With great delicacy of touch she drew the arm from the pillow and thrust it back, and then motioning in an undisguised horror, said, “Go.” Vittoria rose to go.

“Is it my Lena?” came from Karl’s faint lips.

“It is your Anna.”

“I should have known,” he moaned.

Vittoria left them.

Page 1745

Some hours later, Countess Lena appeared, bringing a Trentino doctor. She said when she beheld Vittoria, “Are you our evil genius, then?” Vittoria felt that she must necessarily wear that aspect to them.

Still greater was Lena’s amazement when she looked on Wilfrid. She passed him without a sign.

Vittoria had to submit to an interview with both sisters before her departure. Apart from her distress on their behalf, they had always seemed as very weak, flippant young women to her, and she could have smiled in her heart when Anna pointed to a day of retribution in the future.

“I shall not seek to have you assassinated,” Anna said; “do not suppose that I mean the knife or the pistol. But your day will come, and I can wait for it. You murdered my brother Paul: you have tried to murder my brother Karl. I wish you to leave this place convinced of one thing:—you shall be repaid for it.”

There was no direct allusion either to Weisspriess or to Wilfrid.

Lena spoke of the army. “You think our cause is ruined because we have insurrection on all sides of us: you do not know our army. We can fight the Hungarians with one hand, and you Italians with the other—with a little finger. On what spot have we given way? We have to weep, it is true; but tears do not testify to defeat; and already I am inclined to pity those fools who have taken part against us. Some have experienced the fruits of their folly.”

This was the nearest approach to a hint at Wilfrid’s misconduct.

Lena handed Leone’s pass to Vittoria, and drawing out a little pocket almanac, said, “You proceed to Milan, I presume. I do not love your society; mademoiselle Belloni or Campa: yet I do not mind making an appointment—the doctor says a month will set my brother on his feet again,—I will make an appointment to meet you in Milan or Como, or anywhere in your present territories, during the month of August. That affords time for a short siege and two pitched battles.”

She appeared to be expecting a retort.

Vittoria replied, “I could beg one thing on my knees of you, Countess Lena.”

“And that is—?” Lena threw her head up superbly.

“Pardon my old friend the service he did me through friendship.”

The sisters interchanged looks. Lena flushed angrily.

Anna said, “The person to whom you allude is here.”

“He is attending on your brother.”

“Did he help this last assassin to escape, perchance?”

Vittoria sickened at the cruel irony, and felt that she had perhaps done ill in beginning to plead for Wilfrid.

“He is here; let him speak for himself: but listen to him, Countess Lena.”

“A dishonourable man had better be dumb,” interposed Anna.

“Ah! it is I who have offended you.”

“Is that his excuse?”

Vittoria kept her eyes on the fiercer sister, who now declined to speak.

Page 1746

“I will not excuse my own deeds; perhaps I cannot. We Italians are in a hurricane; I cannot reflect. It may be that I do not act more thinkingly than a wild beast.”

“You have spoken it,” Anna exclaimed.

“Countess Lena, he fights in your ranks as a common soldier. He encounters more than a common soldier’s risks.”

“The man is brave,—we knew that,” said Anna.

“He is more than brave, he is devoted. He fights against us, without hope of reward from you. Have I utterly ruined him?”

“I imagine that you may regard it as a fact that you have utterly ruined him,” said Anna, moving to break up the parting interview. Lena turned to follow her.

“Ladies, if it is I who have hardened your hearts, I am more guilty than I thought.” Vittoria said no more. She knew that she had been speaking badly, or ineffectually, by a haunting flatness of sound, as of an unstrung instrument, in her ears: she was herself unstrung and dispirited, while the recollection of Anna’s voice was like a sombre conquering monotony on a low chord, with which she felt insufficient to compete.

Leone was waiting in the carriage to drive to the ferry across the Adige. There was news in Roveredo of the king’s advance upon Rivoli; and Leone sat trying to lift and straighten out his wounded arm, with grimaces of laughter at the pain of the effort, which resolutely refused to acknowledge him to be an able combatant. At the carriage-door Wilfrid bowed once over Vittoria’s hand.

“You see that,” Anna remarked to her sister.

“I should have despised him if he had acted indifference,” replied Lena.

She would have suspected him—that was what her heart meant; the artful show of indifference had deceived her once. The anger within her drew its springs much more fully from his refusal to respond to her affection, when she had in a fit of feminine weakness abased herself before him on the night of the Milanese revolt, than from the recollection of their days together in Meran. She had nothing of her sister’s unforgivingness. And she was besides keenly curious to discover the nature of the charm Vittoria threw on him, and not on him solely. Vittoria left Wilfrid to better chances than she supposed. “Continue fighting with your army,” she said, when they parted. The deeper shade which traversed his features told her that, if she pleased, her sway might still be active; but she had no emotion to spare for sentimental regrets. She asked herself whether a woman who has cast her lot in scenes of strife does not lose much of her womanhood and something of her truth; and while her imagination remained depressed, her answer was sad. In that mood she pitied Wilfrid with a

reckless sense of her inability to repay him for the harm she had done him. The tragedies written in fresh blood all about her, together with that ever-present image of the fate of Italy hanging in the balance, drew her away from personal reflections.

Page 1747

She felt as one in a war-chariot, who has not time to cast more than a glance on the fallen. At the place where the ferry is, she was rejoiced by hearing positive news of the proximity of the Royal army. There were none to tell her that Charles Albert had here made his worst move by leaving Vicenza to the operations of the enemy, that he might become master of a point worthless when Vicenza fell into the enemy's hands. The old Austrian Field-Marshal had eluded him at Mantua on that very night when Vittoria had seen his troops in motion. The daring Austrian flank-march on Vicenza, behind the fortresses of the Quadrilateral, was the capital stroke of the campaign. But the presence of a Piedmontese vanguard at Rivoli flushed the Adige with confidence, and Vittoria went on her way sharing the people's delight. She reached Brescia to hear that Vicenza had fallen. The city was like a landscape smitten black by the thunder-cloud. Vittoria found Countess Ammiani at her husband's tomb, stiff, colourless, lifeless as a monument attached to the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLOSE OF THE LOMBARD CAMPAIGN—VITTORIA'S PERPLEXITY

The fall of Vicenza turned a tide that had overflowed its barriers with force enough to roll it to the Adriatic. From that day it was as if a violent wind blew East over Lombardy; flood and wind breaking here and there a tree, bowing everything before them. City, fortress, and battle-field resisted as the eddy whirls. Venice kept her brave colours streaming aloft in a mighty grasp despite the storm, but between Venice and Milan there was this unutterable devastation,—so sudden a change, so complete a reversal of the shield, that the Lombards were at first incredulous even in their agony, and set their faces against it as at a monstrous eclipse, as though the heavens were taking false oath of its being night when it was day. From Vicenza and Rivoli, to Sommacampagna, and across Monte Godio to Custozza, to Volta on the right of the Mincio, up to the gates of Milan, the line of fire travelled, with a fantastic overbearing swiftness that, upon the map, looks like the zig-zag elbowing of a field-rocket. Vicenza fell on the 11th of June; the Austrians entered Milan on the 6th of August. Within that short time the Lombards were struck to the dust.

Countess Ammiani quitted Brescia for Bergamo before the worst had happened; when nothing but the king's retreat upon the Lombard capital, after the good fight at Volta, was known. According to the king's proclamation the Piedmontese army was to defend Milan, and hope was not dead. Vittoria succeeded in repressing all useless signs of grief in the presence of the venerable lady, who herself showed none, but simply recommended her accepted daughter to pray daily. "I can neither confess nor pray," Vittoria said to the priest, a comfortable, irritable ecclesiastic, long attached to the family, and little able to deal

Page 1748

with this rebel before Providence, that would not let her swollen spirit be bled. Yet she admitted to him that the countess possessed resources which she could find nowhere; and she saw the full beauty of such inimitable grave endurance. Vittoria's foolish trick of thinking for herself made her believe, nevertheless, that the countess suffered more than she betrayed, was less consoled than her spiritual comforter imagined. She continued obstinate and unrepentant, saying, "If my punishment is to come, it will at least bring experience with it, and I shall know why I am punished. The misery now is that I do not know, and do not see, the justice of the sentence."

Countess Ammiani thought better of her case than the priest did; or she was more indulgent, or half indifferent. This girl was Carlo's choice;—a strange choice, but the times were strange, and the girl was robust. The channels of her own and her husband's house were drying on all sides; the house wanted resuscitating. There was promise that the girl would bear children of strong blood. Countess Ammiani would not for one moment have allowed the spiritual welfare of the children to hang in dubitation, awaiting their experience of life; but a certain satisfaction was shown in her faint smile when her confessor lamented over Vittoria's proud stony state of moral revolt. She said to her accepted daughter, "I shall expect you to be prepared to espouse my son as soon as I have him by my side;" nor did Vittoria's silent bowing of her face assure her that strict obedience was implied. Precise words—"I will," and "I will not fail"—were exacted. The countess showed some emotion after Vittoria had spoken. "Now, may God end this war quickly, if it is to go against us," she exclaimed, trembling in her chair visibly a half-minute, with dropped eyelids and lips moving.

Carlo had sent word that he would join his mother as early as he was disengaged from active service, and meantime requested her to proceed to a villa on Lago Maggiore. Vittoria obtained permission from the countess to order the route of the carriage through Milan, where she wished to take up her mother and her maid Giacinta. For other reasons she would have avoided the city. The thought of entering it was painful with the shrewdest pain. Dante's profoundly human line seemed branded on the forehead of Milan.

The morning was dark when they drove through the streets of Bergamo. Passing one of the open places, Vittoria beheld a great concourse of volunteer youth and citizens, all of them listening to the voice of one who stood a few steps above them holding a banner. She gave an outcry of bitter joy. It was the Chief. On one side of him was Agostino, in the midst of memorable heads that were unknown to her. The countess refused to stay, though Vittoria strained her hands together in extreme entreaty that she might for a few moments hear what the others were hearing. "I speak for my son, and I forbid it," Countess Ammiani said. Vittoria fell back and closed her eyes to cherish the vision. All those faces raised to the one speaker under the dark sky were beautiful. He had breathed some new glory of hope in them, making them shine beneath the overcast heavens, as when the sun breaks from an evening cloud and flushes the stems of a company of pine-trees.

Page 1749

Along the road to Milan she kept imagining his utterance until her heart rose with music. A delicious stream of music, thin as poor tears, passed through her frame, like a life reviving. She reached Milan in a mood to bear the idea of temporary defeat. Music had forsaken her so long that celestial reassurance seemed to return with it.

Her mother was at Zotti's, very querulous, but determined not to leave the house and the few people she knew. She had, as she told her daughter, fretted so much on her account that she hardly knew whether she was glad to see her. Tea, of course, she had given up all thoughts of; but now coffee was rising, and the boasted sweet bread of Lombardy was something to look at! She trusted that Emilia would soon think of singing no more, and letting people rest: she might sing when she wanted money. A letter recently received from Mr. Pericles said that Italy was her child's ruin, and she hoped Emilia was ready to do as he advised, and hurry to England, where singing did not upset people, and people lived like real Christians, not——Vittoria flapped her hand, and would not hear of the unchristian crimes of the South. As regarded the expected defence of Milan, the little woman said, that if it brought on a bombardment, she would call it unpardonable wickedness, and only hoped that her daughter would repent.

Zotti stood by, interpreting the English to himself by tones. "The amiable donnina is not of our persuasion," he observed. "She remains dissatisfied with patriotic Milan. I have exhibited to her my dabs of bread through all the processes of making and baking. It is in vain. She rejects analogy. She is wilful as a principessina: 'Tis so! 'tis not so! 'tis my will! be silent, thou! Signora, I have been treated in that way by your excellent mother."

"Zotti has not been paid for three weeks, and he certainly has not mentioned it or looked it, I will say, Emilia."

"Zotti has had something to think of during the last three weeks," said Vittoria, touching him kindly on the arm.

The confectioner lifted his fingers and his big brown eyes after them, expressive of the unutterable thoughts. He informed her that he had laid in a stock of flour, in the expectation that Carlo Alberto would defend the city: The Milanese were ready to aid him, though some, as Zotti confessed, had ceased to effervesce; and a great number who were perfectly ready to fight regarded his tardy appeal to Italian patriotism very coldly. Zotti set out in person to discover Giacinta. The girl could hardly fetch her breath when she saw her mistress. She was in Laura's service, and said that Laura had brought a wounded Englishman from the field of Custozza. Vittoria hurried to Laura, with whom she found Merthyr, blue-white as a corpse, having been shot through the body. His sister was in one of the Lombard hamlets, unaware of his fall; Beppo had been sent to her.

Page 1750

They noticed one another's embrowned complexions, but embraced silently. "Twice widowed!" Laura said when they sat together. Laura hushed all speaking of the war or allusion to a single incident of the miserable campaign, beyond the bare recital of Vittoria's adventures; yet when Vicenza by chance was mentioned, she burst out: "They are not cities, they are living shrieks. They have been made impious for ever. Burn them to ashes, that they may not breathe foul upon heaven!" She had clung to the skirts of the army as far as the field of Custozza. "He," she said, pointing to the room where Merthyr lay,—"he groans less than the others I have nursed. Generally, when they looked at me, they appeared obliged to recollect that it was not I who had hurt them. Poor souls! some ended in great torment. 'I think of them as the happiest; for pain is a cloak that wraps you about, and I remember one middle-aged man who died softly at Custozza, and said, 'Beaten!' To take that thought as your travelling companion into the gulf, must be worse than dying of agony; at least, I think so."

Vittoria was too well used to Laura's way of meeting disaster to expect from her other than this ironical fortitude, in which the fortitude leaned so much upon the irony. What really astonished her was the conception Laura had taken of the might of Austria. Laura did not directly speak of it, but shadowed it in allusive hints, much as if she had in her mind the image of an iron roller going over a field of flowers—hateful, imminent, irresistible. She felt as a leaf that has been flying before the gale.

Merthyr's wound was severe: Vittoria could not leave him. Her resolution to stay in Milan brought her into collision with Countess Ammiani, when the countess reminded her of her promise, sedately informing her that she was no longer her own mistress, and had a primary duty to fulfil. She offered to wait three days, or until the safety of the wounded man was medically certified to. It was incomprehensible to her that Vittoria should reject her terms; and though it was true that she would not have listened to a reason, she was indignant at not hearing one given in mitigation of the offence. She set out alone on her journey, deeply hurt. The reason was a feminine sentiment, and Vittoria was naturally unable to speak it. She shrank with pathetic horror from the thought of Merthyr's rising from his couch to find her a married woman, and desired most earnestly that her marriage should be witnessed by him. Young women will know how to reconcile the opposition of the sentiment. Had Merthyr been only slightly wounded, and sound enough to seem to be able to bear a bitter shock, she would not have allowed her personal feelings to cause chagrin to the noble lady. The sight of her dear steadfast friend prostrate in the cause of Italy, and who, if he lived to rise again, might not have his natural strength to bear the thought of her loss with his old brave firmness, made it impossible for her to act decisively in one direct line of conduct.

Page 1751

Countess Ammiani wrote brief letters from Luino and Pallanza on Lago Maggiore. She said that Carlo was in the Como mountains; he would expect to find his bride, and would accuse his mother; “but his mother will be spared those reproaches,” she added, “if the last shot fired kills, as it generally does, the bravest and the dearest.”

“If it should!”—the thought rose on a quick breath in Vittoria’s bosom, and the sentiment which held her away dispersed like a feeble smoke, and showed her another view of her features. She wept with longing for love and dependence. She was sick of personal freedom, tired of the exercise of her will, only too eager to give herself to her beloved. The blessedness of marriage, of peace and dependence, came on her imagination like a soft breeze from a hidden garden, like sleep. But this very longing created the resistance to it in the depths of her soul. ’There was a light as of reviving life, or of pain comforted, when it was she who was sitting by Merthyr’s side, and when at times she saw the hopeless effort of his hand to reach to hers, or during the long still hours she laid her head on his pillow, and knew that he breathed gratefully. The sweetness of helping him, and of making his breathing pleasant to him, closed much of the world which lay beyond her windows to her thoughts, and surprised her with an unknown emotion, so strange to her that when it first swept up her veins she had the fancy of her having been touched by a supernatural hand, and heard a flying accord of instruments. She was praying before she knew what prayer was. A crucifix hung over Merthyr’s head. She had looked on it many times, and looked on it still, without seeing more than the old sorrow. In the night it was dim. She found herself trying to read the features of the thorn-crowned Head in the solitary night. She and it were alone with a life that was faint above the engulphing darkness. She prayed for the life, and trembled, and shed tears, and would have checked them; they seemed to be bearing away her little remaining strength. The tears streamed. No answer was given to her question, “Why do I weep?” She wept when Merthyr had passed the danger, as she had wept when the hours went by, with shrouded visages; and though she felt the difference m the springs of her tears, she thought them but a simple form of weakness showing shade and light.

These tears were a vanward wave of the sea to follow; the rising of her voice to heaven was no more than a twitter of the earliest dawn before the coming of her soul’s outcry.

“I have had a weeping fit,” she thought, and resolved to remember it tenderly, as being associated with her friend’s recovery, and a singular masterful power absolutely to look on the Austrians marching up the streets of Milan, and not to feel the surging hatred, or the nerveless despair, which she had supposed must be her alternatives.

Page 1752

It is a mean image to say that the entry of the Austrians into the reconquered city was like a river of oil permeating a lake of vinegar, but it presents the fact in every sense. They demanded nothing more than submission, and placed a gentle foot upon the fallen enemy; and wherever they appeared they were isolated. The deepest wrath of the city was, nevertheless, not directed against them, but against Carlo Alberto, who had pledged his honour to defend it, and had forsaken it. Vittoria committed a public indiscretion on the day when the king left Milan to its fate: word whereof was conveyed to Carlo Ammiani, and he wrote to her.

“It is right that I should tell you what I have heard,” the letter said. “I have heard that my bride drove up to the crowned traitor, after he had unmasked himself, and when he was quitting the Greppi palace, and that she kissed his hand before the people—poor bleeding people of Milan! This is what I hear in the Val d’Intelvi:—that she despised the misery and just anger of the people, and, by virtue of her name and mine, obtained a way for him. How can she have acted so as to give a colour to this infamous scandal? True or false, it does not affect my love for her. Still, my dearest, what shall I say? You keep me divided in two halves. My heart is out of me; and if I had a will, I think I should be harsh with you. You are absent from my mother at a time when we are about to strike another blow. Go to her. It is kindness; it is charity: I do not say duty. I remember that I did write harshly to you from Brescia. Then our march was so clear in view that a little thing ruffled me. Was it a little thing? But to applaud the Traitor now! To uphold him who has spilt our blood only to hand the country over to the old gaolers! He lent us his army like a Jew, for huge interest. Can you not read him? If not, cease, I implore you, to think at all for yourself.

“Is this a lover’s letter? I know that my beloved will see the love in it. To me your acts are fair and good as the chronicle of a saint. I find you creating suspicion—almost justifying it in others, and putting your name in the mouth of a madman who denounces you. I shall not speak more of him. Remember that my faith in you is unchangeable, and I pray you to have the same in me.

“I sent you a greeting from the Chief. He marched in the ranks from Bergamo. I saw him on the line of march strip off his coat to shelter a young lad from the heavy rain. He is not discouraged; none are who have been near him.

“Angelo is here, and so is our Agostino; and I assure you he loads and fires a carbine much more deliberately than he composes a sonnet. I am afraid that your adored Antonio-Pericles fared badly among our fellows, but I could gather no particulars.

“Oh! the bright two minutes when I held you right in my heart. That spot on the Vicentino is alone unclouded. If I live I will have that bit of ground. I will make a temple of it. I could reach it blindfolded.”

Page 1753

A townsman of Milan brought this letter to Vittoria. She despatched Luigi with her reply, which met the charge in a straightforward affirmative.

“I was driving to Zotti’s by the Greppi palace, when I saw the king come forth, and the people hooted him. I stood up, and petitioned to kiss his hand. The people knew me. They did not hoot any more for some time.

“So that you have heard the truth, and you must judge me by it. I cannot even add that I am sorry, though I strive to wish that I had not been present. I might wish it really, if I did not feel it to be a cowardly wish.

“Oh, my Carlo! my lover! my husband! you would not have me go against my nature? I have seen the king upon the battle-field. He has deigned to speak to me of Italy and our freedom. I have seen him facing our enemy; and to see him hooted by the people, and in misfortune and with sad eyes!—he looked sad and nothing else—and besides, I am sure I know the king. I mean that I understand him. I am half ashamed to write so boldly, even to you. I say to myself you should know me, at least; and if I am guilty of a piece of vanity, you should know that also. Carlo Alberto is quite unlike other men. He worships success as, much; but they are not, as he is, so much bettered by adversity. Indeed I do not believe that he has exact intentions of any sort, or ever had the intention to betray us, or has done so in reality, that is, meaningly, of his own will. Count Medole and his party did, as you know, offer Lombardy to him; and Venice gave herself—brave, noble Venice! Oh! if we two were there—Venice has England’s sea-spirit. But, did we not flatter the king? And ask yourself, my Carlo, could a king move in such an enterprise as a common person? Ought we not to be in union with Sardinia? How can we be if we reject her king? Is it not the only positive army that, we can look to—I mean regular army? Should we not; make some excuses for one who is not in our position?

“I feel that I push my questions like waves that fall and cannot get beyond—they crave so for answers agreeing to them. This should make me doubt myself, perhaps; but they crowd again, and seem so conclusive until I have written them down. I am unworthy to struggle with your intellect; but I say to myself, how unworthy of you I should be if I did not use my own, such as it is! The poor king; had to conclude an armistice to save his little kingdom. Perhaps we ought to think of that sternly. My heart is; filled with pity.

“It cannot but be right that you should know the worst; of me. I call you my husband, and tremble to be permitted to lean my head on your bosom for hours, my sweet lover! And yet my cowardice, if I had let the king go by without a reverential greeting from me, in his adversity, would have rendered me insufferable to myself. You are hearing me, and I am compelled to say, that rather than behave so basely I would forfeit your love, and be widowed till death should offer us for God to join us. Does your face change to me?

Page 1754

“Dearest, and I say it when the thought of you sets me almost swooning. I find my hands clasped, and I am muttering I know not what, and I am blushing. The ground seems to rock; I can barely breathe; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy: it will not rest. I fear everything. I hear a whisper, ‘Delay not an instant!’ and it is like a furnace; ‘Hasten to him! Speed!’ and I seem to totter forward and drop—I think I have lost you—I am like one dead.

“I remain here to nurse our dear friend Merthyr. For that reason I am absent from your mother. It is her desire that we should be married.

“Soon, soon, my own soul!

“I seem to be hanging on a tree for you, swayed by such a teazing wind.

“Oh, soon! or I feel that I shall hate any vestige of will that I have in this head of mine. Not in the heart—it is not there!

“And sometimes I am burning to sing. The voice leaps to my lips; it is quite like a thing that lives apart—my prisoner.

“It is true, Laura is here with Merthyr.

“Could you come at once?—not here, but to Pallanza? We shall both make our mother happy. This she wishes, this she lives for, this consoles her—and oh, this gives me peace! Yes, Merthyr is recovering! I can leave him without the dread I had; and Laura confesses to the feminine sentiment, if her funny jealousy of a rival nurse is really simply feminine. She will be glad of our resolve, I am sure. And then you will order all my actions; and I shall be certain that they are such as I would proudly call mine; and I shall be shut away from the world. Yes; let it be so! Addio. I reserve all sweet names for you. Addio. In Pallanza:—no not Pallanza—Paradise!

“Hush! and do not smile at me:—it was not my will, I discover, but my want of will, that distracted me.

“See my last signature of—not Vittoria; for I may sign that again and still be Emilia Alessandra Ammiani.

“*SandraBelloni*”

The letter was sealed; Luigi bore it away, and a brief letter to Countess Ammiani, in Pallanza, as well.

Vittoria was relieved of her anxiety concerning Merthyr by the arrival of Georgiana, who had been compelled to make her way round by Piacenza and Turin, where she had left Gambier, with Beppo in attendance on him. Georgiana at once assumed all the duties

of head-nurse, and the more resolutely because of her brother's evident moral weakness in sighing for the hand of a fickle girl to smooth his pillow. "When he is stronger you can sit beside him a little," she said to Vittoria, who surrendered her post without a struggle, and rarely saw him, though Laura told her that his frequent exclamation was her name, accompanied by a soft look at his sister—"which would have stirred my heart like poor old Milan last March," Laura added, with a lift of her shoulders.

Georgiana's icy manner appeared infinitely strange to Vittoria when she heard from Merthyr that his sister had become engaged to Captain Gambier.

Page 1755

“Nothing softens these women,” said Laura, putting Georgiana in a class.

“I wish you could try the effect of your winning Merthyr,” Vittoria suggested.

“I remember that when I went to my husband, I likewise wanted every woman of my acquaintance to be married.” Laura sighed deeply. “What is this poor withered body of mine now? It feels like an old volcano, cindery, with fire somewhere:—a charming bride! My dear, if I live till my children make me a grandmother, I shall look on the love of men and women as a toy that I have played with. A new husband? I must be dragged through the Circles of Dante before I can conceive it, and then I should loathe the stranger.”

News came that the volunteers were crushed. It was time for Vittoria to start for Pallanza, and she thought of her leave-taking; a final leave-taking, in one sense, to the friends who had cared too much for her. Laura delicately drew Georgiana aside in the sick-room, which she would not quit, and alluded to the necessity for Vittoria’s departure without stating exactly wherefore: but Georgiana was a Welshwoman. Partly to show her accurate power of guessing, and chiefly that she might reprove Laura’s insulting whisper, which outraged and irritated her as much as if “Oh! your poor brother!” had been exclaimed, she made display of Merthyr’s manly coldness by saying aloud, “You mean, that she is going to her marriage.” Laura turned her face to Merthyr. He had striven to rise on his elbow, and had dropped flat in his helplessness. Big tears were rolling down his cheeks. His articulation failed him, beyond a reiterated “No, no,” pitiful to hear, and he broke into childish sobs. Georgiana hurried Laura from the room. By-and-by the doctor was promptly summoned, and it was Georgiana herself, miserably humbled, who obtained Vittoria’s sworn consent to keep the life in Merthyr by lingering yet awhile.

Meantime Luigi brought a letter from Pallanza in Carlo’s handwriting. This was the burden of it:

“I am here, and you are absent. Hasten!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

A FRESH ENTANGLEMENT

The Lenkenstein ladies returned to Milan proudly in the path of the army which they had followed along the city walls on the black March midnight. The ladies of the Austrian aristocracy generally had to be exiles from Vienna, and were glad to flock together even in an alien city. Anna and Lena were aware of Vittoria’s residence in Milan, through the interchange of visits between the Countess of Lenkenstein and her sister Signora Piaveni. They heard also of Vittoria’s prospective and approaching marriage to Count

Ammiani. The Duchess of Graatli, who had forborne a visit to her unhappy friends, lest her Austrian face should wound their sensitiveness, was in company with the Lenkensteins one day, when Irma di Karski called on them. Irma had come from Lago Maggiore, where she had left her patron,

Page 1756

as she was pleased to term Antonio-Pericles. She was full of chatter of that most worthy man's deplorable experiences of Vittoria's behaviour to him during the war, and of many things besides. According to her account, Vittoria had enticed him from place to place with promises that the next day, and the next day, and the day after, she would be ready to keep her engagement to go to London, and at last she had given him the slip and left him to be plucked like a pullet by a horde of volunteer banditti, out of whose hands Antonio-Pericles-"one of our richest millionaires in Europe, certainly our richest amateur," said Irma—escaped in fit outward condition for the garden of Eden.

Count Karl was lying on the sofa, and went into endless invalid's laughter at the picture presented by Irma of the 'wild man' wanderings of poor infatuated Pericles, which was exaggerated, though not intentionally, for Irma repeated the words and gestures of Pericles in the recital of his tribulations. Being of a somewhat similar physical organization, she did it very laughably. Irma declared that Pericles was cured of his infatuation. He had got to Turin, intending to quit Italy for ever, when—"he met me," said Irma modestly.

"And heard that the war was at an end," Count Karl added.

"And he has taken the superb Villa Ricciardi, on Lago Maggiore, where he will have a troupe of singers, and perform operas, in which I believe I may possibly act as prima donna. The truth is, I would do anything to prevent him from leaving the country."

But Irma had more to say; with "I bear no malice," she commenced it. The story she had heard was that Count Ammiani, after plighting himself to a certain signorina, known as Vittoria Campa, had received tidings that she was one of those persons who bring discredit on Irma's profession. "Gifted by nature, I can acknowledge," said Irma; "but devoured by vanity—a perfect slave to the appetite for praise; ready to forfeit anything for flattery! Poor signor Antonio-Pericles!—he knows her." And now Count Ammiani, persuaded to reason by his mother, had given her up. There was nothing more positive, for Irma had seen him in the society of Countess Violetta d'Isorella.

Anna and Lena glanced at their brother Karl.

"I should not allude to what is not notorious," Irma pursued. "They are always together. My dear Antonio-Pericles is most amusing in his expressions of delight at it. For my part, though she served me an evil turn once,—you will hardly believe, ladies, that in her jealousy of me she was guilty of the most shameful machinations to get me out of the way on the night of the first performance of Camilla,—but, for my part, I bear no malice. The creature is an inveterate rebel, and I dislike her for that, I do confess."

"The signorina Vittoria Campa is my particular and very dear friend," said the duchess.

"She is not the less an inveterate rebel," said Anna.

Page 1757

Count Karl gave a long-drawn sigh. “Alas, that she should have brought discredit on Fraulein di Karski’s profession!”

The duchess hurried straightway to Laura, with whom was Count Serabiglione, reviewing the present posture of affairs from the condescending altitudes of one that has foretold it. Laura and Amalia embraced and went apart. During their absence Vittoria came down to the count and listened to a familiar illustration of his theory of the relations which should exist between Italy and Austria, derived from the friendship of those two women.

“What I wish you to see, signorina, is that such an alliance is possible; and, if we supply the brains, as we do, is by no means likely to be degrading. These bears are absolutely on their knees to us for good fellowship. You have influence, you have amazing wit, you have unparalleled beauty, and, let me say it with the utmost sadness, you have now had experience. Why will you not recognize facts? Italian unity! I have exposed the fatuity—who listens? Italian freedom! I do not attempt to reason with my daughter. She is pricked by an envenomed fly of Satan. Yet, behold her and the duchess! It is the very union I preach; and I am, I declare to you, signorina, in great danger. I feel it, but I persist. I am in danger” (Count Serabiglione bowed his head low) “of the transcendent sin of scorn of my species.”

The little nobleman swayed deploringly in his chair. “Nothing is so perilous for a soul’s salvation as that. The one sane among madmen! The one whose reason is left to him among thousands who have forsaken it! I beg you to realize the idea. The Emperor, as I am given to understand, is about to make public admission of my services. I shall be all the more hated. Yet it is a considerable gain. I do not deny that I esteem it as a promotion for my services. I shall not be the first martyr in this world, signorina.”

Count Serabiglione produced a martyr’s smile.

“The profits of my expected posts will be,” he was saying, with a reckoning eye cast upward into his cranium for accuracy, when Laura returned, and Vittoria ran out to the duchess. Amalia repeated Irma’s tattle. A curious little twitching of the brows at Violetta d’Isorella’s name marked the reception of it.

“She is most lovely,” Vittoria said.

“And absolutely reckless.”

“She is an old friend of Count Ammiani’s.”

“And you have an old friend here. But the old friend of a young woman—I need not say further than that it is different.”

The duchess used the privilege of her affection, and urged Vittoria not to trifle with her lover's impatience.

Admitted to the chamber where Merthyr lay, she was enabled to make allowance for her irresolution. The face of the wounded man was like a lake-water taking light from Vittoria's presence.

"This may go on for weeks," she said to Laura.

Page 1758

Three days later, Vittoria received an order from the Government to quit the city within a prescribed number of hours, and her brain was racked to discover why Laura appeared so little indignant at the barbarous act of despotism. Laura undertook to break the bad news to Merthyr. The parting was as quiet and cheerful as, in the opposite degree, Vittoria had thought it would be melancholy and regretful. “What a Government!” Merthyr said, and told her to let him hear of any changes. “All changes that please my friends please me.”

Vittoria kissed his forehead with one grateful murmur of farewell to the bravest heart she had ever known. The going to her happiness seemed more like going to something fatal until she reached the Lago Maggiore. There she saw September beauty, and felt as if the splendour encircling her were her bridal decoration. But no bridegroom stood to greet her on the terrace-steps between the potted orange and citron-trees. Countess Ammiani extended kind hands to her at arms’ length.

“You have come,” she said. “I hope that it is not too late.”

Vittoria was a week without sight of her lover: nor did Countess Ammiani attempt to explain her words, or speak of other than common daily things. In body and soul Vittoria had taken a chill. The silent blame resting on her in this house called up her pride, so that she would not ask any questions; and when Carlo came, she wanted warmth to melt her. Their meeting was that of two passionless creatures. Carlo kissed her loyally, and courteously inquired after her health and the health of friends in Milan, and then he rallied his mother. Agostino had arrived with him, and the old man, being in one of his soft moods, unvexed by his conceits, Vittoria had some comfort from him of a dull kind. She heard Carlo telling his mother that he must go in the morning. Agostino replied to her quick look at him, “I stay;” and it seemed like a little saved from the wreck, for she knew that she could speak to Agostino as she could not to the countess. When his mother prepared to retire, Carlo walked over to his bride, and repeated rapidly and brightly his inquiries after friends in Milan. She, with a pure response to his natural-unnatural manner, spoke of Merthyr Powys chiefly: to which he said several times, “Dear fellow!” and added, “I shall always love Englishmen for his sake.”

This gave her one throb. “I could not leave him, Carlo.”

“Certainly not, certainly not,” said Carlo. “I should have been happy to wait on him myself. I was busy; I am still. I dare say you have guessed that I have a new journal in my head: the Pallanza Iris is to be the name of it;—to be printed in three colours, to advocate three principles, in three styles. The Legitimists, the Moderates, and the Republicans are to proclaim themselves in its columns in prose, poetry, and hotch-potch. Once an editor, always an editor. The authorities suspect that something of the sort is about to be planted, so I can only make occasional visits here:—therefore, as you will believe,”—Carlo let his voice fall—“I have good reason to hate them still. They may cease to persecute me soon.”

Page 1759

He insisted upon lighting his mother to her room. Vittoria and Agostino sat talking of the Chief and the minor events of the war—of Luciano, Marco, Giulio, and Ugo Corte—till the conviction fastened on them that Carlo would not return, when Agostino stood up and said, yawning wearily, “I’ll talk further to you, my child, tomorrow.”

She begged that it might be now.

“No; to-morrow,” said he.

“Now, now!” she reiterated, and brought down a reproof from his fore-finger.

“The poetic definition of ‘now’ is that it is a small boat, my daughter, in which the female heart is constantly pushing out to sea and sinking. ‘To-morrow’ is an island in the deeps, where grain grows. When I land you there, I will talk to you.”

She knew that he went to join Carlo after he had quitted her.

Agostino was true to his promise next day. He brought her nearer to what she had to face, though he did not help her vision much. Carlo had gone before sunrise.

They sat on the terrace above the lake, screened from the sunlight by thick myrtle bushes. Agostino smoked his loosely-rolled cigarettes, and Vittoria sipped chocolate and looked upward to the summit of Motterone, with many thoughts and images in her mind.

He commenced by giving her a love-message from Carlo. “Hold fast to it that he means it: conduct is never a straight index where the heart’s involved,” said the chuckling old man; “or it is not in times like ours. You have been in the wrong, and your having a good excuse will not help you before the deciding fates. Woman that you are! did you not think that because we were beaten we were going to rest for a very long while, and that your Carlo of yesterday was going to be your Carlo of to-day?”

Vittoria tacitly confessed to it.

“Ay,” he pursued, “when you wrote to him in the Val d’Intelvi, you supposed you had only to say, ‘I am ready,’ which was then the case. You made your summer and left the fruits to hang, and now you are astounded that seasons pass and fruits drop. You should have come to this place, if but for a pair of days, and so have fixed one matter in the chapter. This is how the chapter has run on. I see I talk to a stunned head; you are thinking that Carlo’s love for you can’t have changed: and it has not, but occasion has gone and times have changed. Now listen. The countess desired the marriage. Carlo could not go to you in Milan with the sword in his hand. Therefore you had to come to him. He waited for you, perhaps for his own preposterous lover’s sake as much as to make his mother’s heart easy. If she loses him she loses everything, unless he leaves

a wife to her care and the hope that her House will not be extinct, which is possibly not much more the weakness of old aristocracy than of human nature.

Page 1760

“Meantime, his brothers in arms had broken up and entered Piedmont, and he remained waiting for you still. You are thinking that he had not waited a month. But if four months finished Lombardy, less than one month is quite sufficient to do the same for us little beings. He met the Countess d’Isorella here. You have to thank her for seeing him at all, so don’t wrinkle your forehead yet. Luciano Romara is drilling his men in Piedmont; Angelo Guidascarpi has gone there. Carlo was considering it his duty to join Luciano, when he met this lady, and she has apparently succeeded in altering his plans. Luciano and his band will go to Rome. Carlo fancies that another blow will be struck for Lombardy. This lady should know; the point is, whether she can be trusted. She persists in declaring that Carlo’s duty is to remain, and—I cannot tell how, for I am as a child among women—she has persuaded him of her sincerity. Favour me now with your clearest understanding, and deliver it from feminine sensations of any description for just two minutes.”

Agostino threw away the end of a cigarette and looked for firmness in Vittoria’s eyes.

“This Countess d’Isorella is opposed to Carlo’s marriage at present. She says that she is betraying the king’s secrets, and has no reliance on a woman. As a woman you will pardon her, for it is the language of your sex. You are also denounced by Barto Rizzo, a madman—he went mad as fire, and had to be chained at Varese. In some way or other Countess d’Isorella got possession of him; she has managed to subdue him. A sword-cut he received once in Verona has undoubtedly affected his brain, or caused it to be affected under strong excitement. He is at her villa, and she says—perhaps with some truth—that Carlo would in several ways lose his influence by his immediate marriage with you. The reason must have weight; otherwise he would fulfil his mother’s principal request, and be at the bidding of his own desire. There; I hope I have spoken plainly.”

Agostino puffed a sigh of relief at the conclusion of his task.

Vittoria had been too strenuously engaged in defending the steadiness of her own eyes to notice the shadow of an assumption of frankness in his.

She said that she understood.

She got away to her room like an insect carrying a load thrice its own size. All that she could really gather from Agostino’s words was, that she felt herself rocking in a tower, and that Violetta d’Isorella was beautiful. She had striven hard to listen to him with her wits alone, and her sensations subsequently revenged themselves in this fashion. The tower rocked and struck a bell that she discovered to be her betraying voice uttering cries of pain. She was for hours incapable of meeting Agostino again. His delicate intuition took the harshness off the meeting. He led her even to examine her state of mind, and to discern the fancies from the feelings by which she was agitated. He said shrewdly and bluntly, “You can master pain, but not doubt. If you show a sign of

unhappiness, remember that I shall know you doubt both what I have told you, and Carlo as well.”

Page 1761

Vittoria fenced: “But is there such a thing as happiness?”

“I should imagine so,” said Agostino, touching her cheek, “and slipperiness likewise. There’s patience at any rate; only you must dig for it. You arrive at nothing, but the eternal digging constitutes the object gained. I recollect when I was a raw lad, full of ambition, in love, and without a franc in my pockets, one night in Paris, I found myself looking up at a street lamp; there was a moth in it. He couldn’t get out, so he had very little to trouble his conscience. I think he was near happiness: he ought to have been happy. My luck was not so good, or you wouldn’t see me still alive, my dear.”

Vittoria sighed for a plainer speaker.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ON LAGO MAGGIORE

Carlo’s hours were passed chiefly across the lake, in the Piedmontese valleys. When at Pallanza he was restless, and he shunned the two or three minutes of privacy with his betrothed which the rigorous Italian laws besetting courtship might have allowed him to take. He had perpetually the look of a man starting from wine. It was evident that he and Countess d’Isorella continued to hold close communication, for she came regularly to the villa to meet him. On these occasions Countess Ammiani accorded her one ceremonious interview, and straightway locked herself in her room. Violetta’s grace of ease and vivacity soared too high to be subject to any hostile judgement of her character. She seemed to rely entirely on the force of her beauty, and to care little for those who did not acknowledge it. She accepted public compliments quite royally, nor was Agostino backward in offering them. “And you have a voice, you know,” he sometimes said aside to Vittoria; but she had forgotten how easily she could swallow great praise of her voice; she had almost forgotten her voice. Her delight was to hang her head above inverted mountains in the lake, and dream that she was just something better than the poorest of human creatures. She could not avoid putting her mind in competition with this brilliant woman’s, and feeling eclipsed; and her weakness became pitiable. But Countess d’Isorella mentioned once that Pericles was at the Villa Ricciardi, projecting magnificent operatic entertainments. The reviving of a passion to sing possessed Vittoria like a thirst for freedom, and instantly confused all the reflected images within her, as the fury of a sudden wind from the high Alps scourges the glassy surface of the lake. She begged Countess Ammiani’s permission that she might propose to Pericles to sing in his private operatic company, in any part, at the shortest notice.

“You wish to leave me?” said the countess, and resolutely conceived it.

Page 1762

Speaking to her son on this subject, she thought it necessary to make some excuse for a singer's instinct, who really did not live save on the stage. It amused Carlo; he knew when his mother was really angry with persons she tried to shield from the anger of others; and her not seeing the wrong on his side in his behaviour to his betrothed was laughable. Nevertheless she had divined the case more correctly than he: the lover was hurt. After what he had endured, he supposed, with all his forgiveness, that he had an illimitable claim upon his bride's patience. He told his another to speak to her openly.

"Why not you, my Carlo?" said the countess.

"Because, mother, if I speak to her, I shall end by throwing out my arms and calling for the priest."

"I would clap hands to that."

"We will see; it may be soon or late, but it can't be now."

"How much am I to tell her, Carlo?"

"Enough to keep her from fretting."

The countess then asked herself how much she knew. Her habit of receiving her son's word and will as supreme kept her ignorant of anything beyond the outline of his plans; and being told to speak openly of them to another, she discovered that her acquiescing imagination supplied the chief part of her knowledge. She was ashamed also to have it thought, even by Carlo, that she had not gathered every detail of his occupation, so that she could not argue against him, and had to submit to see her dearest wishes lightly swept aside.

"I beg you to tell me what you think of Countess d'Isorella; not the afterthought," she said to Vittoria.

"She is beautiful, dear Countess Ammiani."

"Call me mother now and then. Yes; she is beautiful. She has a bad name."

"Envy must have given it, I think."

"Of course she provokes envy. But I say that her name is bad, as envy could not make it. She is a woman who goes on missions, and carries a husband into society like a passport. You have only thought of her beauty?"

"I can see nothing else," said Vittoria, whose torture at the sight of the beauty was appeased by her disingenuous pleading on its behalf.

“In my time Beauty was a sinner,” the countess resumed. “My confessor has filled my ears with warnings that it is a net to the soul, a weapon for devils. May the saints of Paradise make bare the beauty of this woman. She has persuaded Carlo that she is serving the country. You have let him lie here alone in a fruitless bed, silly girl. He stayed for you while his comrades called him to Vercelli, where they are assembled. The man whom he salutes as his Chief gave him word to go there. They are bound for Rome. Ah me! Rome is a great name, but Lombardy is Carlo’s natal home, and Lombardy bleeds. You were absent—how long you were absent! If you could know the heaviness of those days of his waiting for you. And it was I who kept him here! I must have omitted a

Page 1763

prayer, for he would have been at Vercelli now with Luciano and Emilio, and you might have gone to him; but he met this woman, who has convinced him that Piedmont will make a Winter march, and that his marriage must be delayed." The countess raised her face and drooped her hands from the wrists, exclaiming, "If I have lately omitted one prayer, enlighten me, blessed heaven! I am blind; I cannot see for my son; I am quite blind. I do not love the woman; therefore I doubt myself. You, my daughter, tell me your thought of her, tell me what you think. Young eyes observe; young heads are sometimes shrewd in guessing."

Vittoria said, after a pause, "I will believe her to be true, if she supports the king." It was hardly truthful speaking on her part.

"How can Carlo have been persuaded!" the countess sighed.

"By me?" Victoria asked herself, and for a moment she was exulting.

She spoke from that emotion when it had ceased to animate her.

"Carlo was angry with the king. He echoed Agostino, but Agostino does not sting as he did, and Carlo cannot avoid seeing what the king has sacrificed. Perhaps the Countess d'Isorella has shown him promises of fresh aid in the king's handwriting. Suffering has made Carlo Alberto one with the Republicans, if he had other ambitions once. And Carlo dedicates his blood to Lombardy: he does rightly. Dear countess—my mother! I have made him wait for me; I will be patient in waiting for him. I know that Countess d'Isorella is intimate with the king. There is a man named Barto Rizzo, who thinks me a guilty traitress, and she is making use of this man. That must be her reason for prohibiting the marriage. She cannot be false if she is capable of uniting extreme revolutionary agents and the king in one plot, I think; I do not know." Vittoria concluded her perfect expression of confidence with this atoning doubtfulness.

Countess Ammiani obtained her consent that she would not quit her side.

After Violetta had gone, Carlo, though he shunned secret interviews, addressed his betrothed as one who was not strange to his occupation and the trial his heart was undergoing. She could not doubt that she was beloved, in spite of the colourlessness and tonelessness of a love that appealed to her intellect. He showed her a letter he had received from Laura, laughing at its abuse of Countess d'Isorella, and the sarcasms levelled at himself.

In this letter Laura said that she was engaged in something besides nursing.

Carlo pointed his finger to the sentence, and remarked, "I must have your promise—a word from you is enough—that you will not meddle with any intrigue."

Vittoria gave the promise, half trusting it to bring the lost bloom of their love to him; but he received it as a plain matter of necessity. Certain of his love, she wondered painfully that it should continue so barren of music.

“Why am I to pledge myself that I will be useless?” she asked. “You mean, my Carlo, that I am to sit still, and watch, and wait.”

Page 1764

He answered, “I will tell you this much: I can be struck vitally through you. In the game I am playing, I am able to defend myself. If you enter it, distraction begins. Stay with my mother.”

“Am I to know nothing?”

“Everything—in good time.”

“I might—might I not help you, my Carlo?”

“Yes; and nobly too. And I show you the way.”

Agostino and Carlo made an expedition to Turin. Before he went, Carlo took her in his arms.

“Is it coming?” she said, shutting her eyelids like a child expecting the report of firearms.

He pressed his lips to the closed eyes. “Not yet; but are you growing timid?”

His voice seemed to reprove her.

She could have told him that keeping her in the dark among unknown terrors ruined her courage; but the minutes were too precious, his touch too sweet. In eyes and hands he had become her lover again. The blissful minutes rolled away like waves that keep the sunshine out at sea.

Her solitude in the villa was beguiled by the arrival of the score of an operatic scena, entitled “*Hagar*,” by Rocco Ricci, which she fancied that either Carlo or her dear old master had sent, and she devoured it. She thought it written expressly for her. With *Hagar* she communed during the long hours, and sang herself on to the verge of an imagined desert beyond the mountain-shadowed lake and the last view of her beloved Motterone. Hagar’s face of tears in the Brerawas known to her; and Hagar in her ‘Addio’ gave the living voice to that dumb one. Vittoria revelled in the delicious vocal misery. She expanded with the sorrow of poor Hagar, whose tears refreshed her, and parted her from her recent narrowing self-consciousness. The great green mountain fronted her like a living presence. Motterone supplied the place of the robust and venerable patriarch, whom she reproached, and worshipped, but with a fathomless burdensome sense of cruel injustice, deeper than the tears or the voice which spoke of it: a feeling of subjected love that was like a mother’s giving suck to a detested child. Countess Ammiani saw the abrupt alteration of her step and look with a dim surprise. “What do you conceal from me?” she asked, and supplied the answer by charitably attributing it to news that the signora Piaveni was coming.

When Laura came, the countess thanked her, saying, “I am a wretched companion for this boiling head.”

Laura soon proved to her that she had been the best, for after very few hours Vittoria was looking like the Hagar on the canvas.

Page 1765

A woman such as Violetta d'Isorella was of the sort from which Laura shrank with all her feminine power of loathing; but she spoke of her with some effort at personal tolerance until she heard of Violetta's stipulation for the deferring of Carlo's marriage, and contrived to guess that Carlo was reserved and unfamiliar with his betrothed. Then she cried out, "Fool that he is! Is it ever possible to come to the end of the folly of men? She has inflamed his vanity. She met him when you were holding him waiting, and no doubt she commenced with lamentations over the country, followed by a sigh, a fixed look, a cheerful air, and the assurance to him that she knew it—uttered as if through the keyhole of the royal cabinet—she knew that Sardinia would break the Salasco armistice in a mouth:—if only, if the king could be sure of support from the youth of Lombardy."

"Do you suspect the unhappy king?" Vittoria interposed.

"Grasp your colours tight," said Laura, nodding sarcastic approbation of such fidelity, and smiling slightly. "There has been no mention of the king. Countess d'Isorella is a spy and a tool of the Jesuits, taking pay from all parties—Austria as well, I would swear. Their object is to paralyze the march on Rome, and she has won Carlo for them. I am told that Barto Rizzo is another of her conquests. Thus she has a madman and a fool, and what may not be done with a madman and a fool? However, I have set a watch on her. She must have inflamed Carlo's vanity. He has it, just as they all have. There's trickery: I would rather behold the boy charging at the head of a column than putting faith in this base creature. She must have simulated well," Laura went on talking to herself.

"What trickery?" said Vittoria.

"He was in love with the woman when he was a lad," Laura replied, and pertinently to Vittoria's feelings. This threw the moist shade across her features.

Beppo in Turin and Luigi on the lake were the watch set on Countess d'Isorella; they were useless except to fortify Laura's suspicions. The Duchess of Graatli wrote mere gossip from Milan. She mentioned that Anna of Lenkenstein had visited with her the tomb of her brother Count Paul at Bologna, and had returned in double mourning; and that Madame Sedley—"the sister of our poor ruined Pierson"—had obtained grace, for herself at least, from Anna, by casting herself at Anna's feet,—and that they were now friends.

Vittoria felt ashamed of Adela.

When Carlo returned, the signora attacked him boldly with all her weapons; reproached him; said, "Would my husband have treated me in such a manner?" Carlo twisted his moustache and stroked his young beard for patience. They passed from room to balcony and terrace, and Laura brought him back into company without cessation of her fire of questions and sarcasms, saying, "No, no; we will speak of these things publicly."

She appealed alternately to Agostino, Vittoria, and Countess Ammiani for support, and as she certainly spoke sense, Carlo was reduced to gloom and silence. Laura then paused. “Surely you have punished your bride enough?” she said; and more softly, “Brother of my Giacomo! you are under an evil spell.”

Page 1766

Carlo started up in anger. Bending to Vittoria, he offered her his hand to lead her out, They went together.

“A good sign,” said the countess.

“A bad sign!” Laura sighed. “If he had taken me out for explanation! But tell me, my Agostino, are you the woman’s dupe?”

“I have been,” Agostino admitted frankly.

“You did really put faith in her?”

“She condescends to be so excessively charming.”

“You could not advance a better reason.”

“It is one of our best; perhaps our very best, where your sex is concerned, signora.”

“You are her dupe no more?”

“No more. Oh, dear no!”

“You understand her now, do you?”

“For the very reason, signora, that I have been her dupe. That is, I am beginning to understand her. I am not yet in possession of the key.”

“Not yet in possession!” said Laura contemptuously; “but, never mind. Now for Carlo.”

“Now for Carlo. He declares that he never has been deceived by her.”

“He is perilously vain,” sighed the signora.

“Seriously”—Agostino drew out the length of his beard—“I do not suppose that he has been—boys, you know, are so acute. He fancies he can make her of service, and he shows some skill.”

“The skill of a fish to get into the net!”

“My dearest signora, you do not allow for the times. I remember”—Agostino peered upward through his eyelashes in a way that he had—“I remember seeing in a meadow a gossamer running away with a spider-thread. It was against all calculation. But, observe: there were exterior agencies at work: a stout wind blew. The ordinary reckoning is based on calms. Without the operation of disturbing elements, the spider-thread would have gently detained the gossamer.”

“Is that meant for my son?” Countess Ammiani asked slowly, with incredulous emphasis.

Agostino and Laura, laughing in their hearts at the mother’s mysterious veneration for Carlo, had to explain that ‘gossamer’ was a poetic, generic term, to embrace the lighter qualities of masculine youth.

A woman’s figure passed swiftly by the window, which led Laura to suppose that the couple outside had parted. She ran forth, calling to one of them, but they came hand in hand, declaring that they had seen neither woman nor man. “And I am happy,” Vittoria whispered. She looked happy, pale though she was.

“It is only my dreadful longing for rest which makes me pale,” she said to Laura, when they were alone. “Carlo has proved to me that he is wiser than I am.”

“A proof that you love Carlo, perhaps,” Laura rejoined.

“Dearest, he speaks more gently of the king.”

“It may be cunning, or it may be carelessness.”

“Will nothing satisfy you, wilful sceptic? He is quite alive to the Countess d’Isorella’s character. He told me how she dazzled him once.”

Page 1767

“Not how she has entangled him now?”

“It is not true. He told me what I should like to dream over without talking any more to anybody. Ah, what a delight! to have known him, as you did, when he was a boy. Can one who knew him then mean harm to him? I am not capable of imagining it. No; he will not abandon poor broken Lombardy, and he is right; and it is my duty to sit and wait. No shadow shall come between us. He has said it, and I have said it. We have but one thing to fear, which is contemptible to fear; so I am at peace.”

“Love-sick,” was Laura’s mental comment. Yet when Carlo explained his position to her next day, she was milder in her condemnation of him, and even admitted that a man must be guided by such brains as he possesses. He had conceived that his mother had a right to claim one month from him at the close of the war; he said this reddening. Laura nodded. He confessed that he was irritated when he met the Countess d’Isorella, with whom, to his astonishment, he found Barto Rizzo. She had picked him up, weak from a paroxysm, on the high-road to Milan. “And she tamed the brute,” said Carlo, in admiration of her ability; “she saw that he was plot-mad, and she set him at work on a stupendous plot; agents running nowhere, and scribblings concentring in her work-basket. You smile at me, as if I were a similar patient, signora. But I am my own agent. I have personally seen all my men in Turin and elsewhere. Violetta has not one grain of love for her country; but she can be made to serve it. As for me, I have gone too far to think of turning aside and drilling with Luciano. He may yet be diverted from Rome, to strike another blow for Lombardy. The Chief, I know, has some religious sentiment about Rome. So might I have; it is the Head of Italy. Let us raise the body first. And we have been beaten here. Great Gods! we will have another fight for it on the same spot, and quickly. Besides, I cannot face Luciano and tell him why I was away from him in the dark hour. How can I tell him that I was lingering to bear a bride to the altar? while he and the rest—poor fellows! Hard enough to have to mention it to you, signora!”

She understood his boyish sense of shame. Making smooth allowances for a feeling natural to his youth and the circumstances, she said, “I am your sister, for you were my husband’s brother in arms, Carlo. We two speak heart to heart: I sometimes fancy you have that voice: you hurt me with it more than you know; gladden me too! My Carlo, I wish to hear why Countess d’Isorella objects to your marriage.”

“She does not object.”

“An answer that begins by quibbling is not propitious. She opposes it.”

“For this reason: you have not forgotten the bronze butterfly?”

“I see more clearly,” said Laura, with a start.

“There appears to be no cure for the brute’s mad suspicion of her,” Carlo pursued: “and he is powerful among the Milanese. If my darling takes my name, he can damage much of my influence, and—you know what there is to be dreaded from a fanatic.”

Page 1768

Laura nodded, as if in full agreement with him, and said, after meditating a minute, “What sort of a lover is this!”

She added a little laugh to the singular interjection.

“Yes, I have also thought of a secret marriage,” said Carlo, stung by her penetrating instinct so that he was enabled to read the meaning in her mind.

“The best way, when you are afflicted by a dilemma of such a character, my Carlo,” the signora looked at him, “is to take a chess-table and make your moves on it. ‘King—my duty;’ ‘Queen—my passion;’ ’Bishop—my social obligation;’ ’Knight—my what-you-will and my round-the-corner wishes.’ Then, if you find that queen may be gratified without endangering king, and so forth, why, you may follow your inclinations; and if not, not. My Carlo, you are either enviably cool, or you are an enviable hypocrite.”

“The matter is not quite so easily settled as that,” said Carlo.

On the whole, though against her preconception, Laura thought him an honest lover, and not the player of a double game. She saw that Vittoria should have been with him in the critical hour of defeat, when his passions were down, and heaven knows what weakness of our common manhood, that was partly pride, partly love-craving, made his nature waxen to every impression; a season, as Laura knew, when the mistress of a loyal lover should not withhold herself from him. A nature tender like Carlo’s, and he bearing an enamoured heart, could not, as Luciano Romara had done, pass instantly from defeat to drill. And vain as Carlo was (the vanity being most intricate and subtle, like a nervous fluid), he was very open to the belief that he could diplomatize as well as fight, and lead a movement yet better than follow it. Even so the signora tried to read his case.

They were all, excepting Countess Ammiani ("who will never, I fear, do me this honour,” Violetta wrote, and the countess said, “Never,” and quoted a proverb), about to pass three or four days at the villa of Countess d’Isorella. Before they set out, Vittoria received a portentous envelope containing a long scroll, that was headed “*Your crimes*,” and detailing a lest of her offences against the country, from the revelation of the plot in her first letter to Wilfrid, to services rendered to the enemy during the war, up to the departure of Charles Albert out of forsaken Milan.

“B. R.” was the undisguised signature at the end of the scroll.

Things of this description restored her old war-spirit to Vittoria. She handed the scroll to Laura; Laura, in great alarm, passed it on to Carlo. He sent for Angelo Guidascarpi in haste, for Carlo read it as an ante-dated justificatory document to some mischievous design, and he desired that hands as sure as his own, and yet more vigilant eyes, should keep watch over his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VIOLETTA D’ISORELLA

Page 1769

The villa inhabited by Countess d'Isorella was on the water's edge, within clear view of the projecting Villa Ricciardi, in that darkly-wooded region of the lake which leads up to the Italian-Swiss canton.

Violetta received here an envoy from Anna of Lenkenstein, direct out of Milan: an English lady, calling herself Mrs. Sedley, and a particular friend of Countess Anna. At the first glance Violetta saw that her visitor had the pretension to match her arts against her own; so, to sound her thoroughly, she offered her the hospitalities of the villa for a day or more. The invitation was accepted. Much to Violetta's astonishment, the lady betrayed no anxiety to state the exact terms of her mission: she appeared, on the contrary, to have an unbounded satisfaction in the society of her hostess, and prattled of herself and Antonio-Pericles, and her old affection for Vittoria, with the wiliest simplicity, only requiring to be assured at times that she spoke intelligible Italian and exquisite French. Violetta supposed her to feel that she commanded the situation. Patient study of this woman revealed to Violetta the amazing fact that she was dealing with a born bourgeoise, who, not devoid of petty acuteness, was unaffectedly enjoying her noble small-talk, and the prospect of a footing in Italian high society. Violetta smiled at the comedy she had been playing in, scarcely reproaching herself for not having imagined it. She proceeded to the point of business without further delay.

Adela Sedley had nothing but a verbal message to deliver. The Countess Anna of Lenkenstein offered, on her word of honour as a noblewoman, to make over the quarter of her estate and patrimony to the Countess d'Isorella, if the latter should succeed in thwarting—something.

Forced to speak plainly, Adela confessed she thought she knew the nature of that something.

To preclude its being named, Violetta then diverged from the subject.

"We will go round to your friend the signor Antonio-Pericles at Villa Ricciardi," she said. "You will see that he treats me familiarly, but he is not a lover of mine. I suspect your 'something' has something to do with the Jesuits."

Adela Sedley replied to the penultimate sentence: "It would not surprise me, indeed, to hear of any number of adorers."

"I have the usual retinue, possibly," said Violetta.

"Dear countess, I could be one of them myself!" Adela burst out with tentative boldness.

"Then, kiss me."

And behold, they interchanged that unsweet feminine performance.

Adela’s lips were unlocked by it.

“How many would envy me, dear Countess d’Isorella!”

She really conceived that she was driving into Violetta’s heart by the great high-road of feminine vanity. Violetta permitted her to think as she liked.

“Your countrywomen, madame, do not make large allowances for beauty, I hear.”

Page 1770

“None at all. But they are so stiff! so frigid! I know one, a Miss Ford, now in Italy, who would not let me have a male friend, and a character, in conjunction.”

“You are acquainted with Count Karl Lenkenstein?”

Adela blushingly acknowledged it.

“The whisper goes that I was once admired by him,” said Violetta.

“And by Count Ammiani.”

“By count? by milord? by prince? by king?”

“By all who have good taste.”

“Was it jealousy, then, that made Countess Anna hate me?”

“She could not—or she cannot now.”

“Because I have not taken possession of her brother.”

“I could not—may I say it?—I could not understand his infatuation until Countess Anna showed me the portrait of Italy’s most beautiful living woman. She told me to look at the last of the Borgia family.”

Violetta laughed out clear music. “And now you see her?”

“She said that it had saved her brother’s life. It has a star and a scratch on the left cheek from a dagger. He wore it on his heart, and an assassin struck him there: a true romance. Countess Anna said to me that it had saved one brother, and that it should help to avenge the other. She has not spoken to me of Jesuits.”

“Nothing at all of the Jesuits?” said Violetta carelessly. “Perhaps she wishes to use my endeavours to get the Salaseo armistice prolonged, and tempts me, knowing I am a prodigal. Austria is victorious, you know, but she wants peace. Is that the case? I do not press you to answer.”

Adela replied hesitatingly: “Are you aware, countess, whether there is any truth in the report that Countess Lena has a passion for Count Ammiani?”

“Ah, then,” said Violetta, “Countess Lena’s sister would naturally wish to prevent his contemplated marriage! We may have read the riddle at last. Are you discreet? If you are, you will let it be known that I had the honour of becoming intimate with you in Turin—say, at the Court. We shall meet frequently there during winter, I trust, if you care to make a comparison of the Italian with the Austrian and the English nobility.”

An eloquent “Oh!” escaped from Adela’s bosom. She had certainly not expected to win her way with this estimable Italian titled lady thus rapidly. Violetta had managed her so well that she was no longer sure whether she did know the exact nature of her mission, the words of which she had faithfully transmitted as having been alone confided to her. It was with chagrin that she saw Pericles put his fore-finger on a salient dimple of the countess’s cheek when he welcomed them. He puffed and blew like one working simultaneously at bugle and big drum on hearing an allusion to Victoria. The mention of the name of that abominable traitress was interdicted at Villa Ricciardi, he said; she had dragged him at two armies’ tails to find his right senses at last: Pericles was cured of his passion for her

Page 1771

at last. He had been mad, but he was cured—and so forth, in the old strain. His preparations for a private operatic performance diverted him from these fierce incriminations, and he tripped busily from spot to spot, conducting the ladies over the tumbled lower floors of the spacious villa, and calling their admiration on the desolation of the scene. Then they went up to the maestro's room. Pericles became deeply considerate for the master's privacy. "He is my slave; the man has ruined himself for la Vittoria; but I respect the impersonation of art," he said under his breath to the ladies as they stood at the door; "hark!" The piano was touched, and the voice of Irma di Karski broke out in a shrill crescendo. Rocco Ricci within gave tongue to the vehement damnatory dance of Pericles outside. Rocco struck his piano again encouragingly for a second attempt, but Irma was sobbing. She was heard to say: "This is the fifteenth time you have pulled me down in one morning. You hate me; you do; you hate me." Rocco ran his fingers across the keys, and again struck the octave for Irma. Pericles wiped his forehead, when, impenitent and unteachable, she took the notes in the manner of a cock. He thumped at the door violently and entered.

"Excellent! horrid! brava! abominable! beautiful! My Irma, you have reached the skies. You ascend like a firework, and crown yourself at the top. No more to-day; but descend at your leisure, my dear, and we will try to mount again by-and-by, and not so fast, if you please. Ha! your voice is a racehorse. You will learn to ride him with temper and judgement, and you will go. Not so, my Rocco? Irma, you want repose, my dear. One thing I guarantee to you—you will please the public. It is a minor thing that you should please me."

Countess d'Isorella led Irma away, and had to bear with many fits of weeping, and to assent to the force of all the charges of vindictive conspiracy and inveterate malice with which the jealous creature assailed Vittoria's name. The countess then claimed her ear for half-a-minute.

"Have you had any news of Countess Anna lately?"

Irma had not; she admitted it despondently. "There is such a vile conspiracy against me in Italy—and Italy is a poor singer's fame—that I should be tempted to do anything. And I detest la Vittoria. She has such a hold on this Antonio-Pericles, I don't see how I can hurt her, unless I meet her and fly at her throat."

"You naturally detest her," said the countess. "Repeat Countess Anna's proposal to you."

"It was insulting—she offered me money."

"That you should persuade me to assist you in preventing la Vittoria's marriage to Count Ammiani?"

“Dear lady, you know I did not try to persuade you.”

“You knew that you would not succeed, my Irma. But Count Ammiani will not marry her; so you will have a right to claim some reward. I do not think that la Vittoria is quite idle. Look out for yourself, my child. If you take to plotting, remember it is a game of two.”

Page 1772

“If she thwarts me in one single step, I will let loose that madman on her,” said Irma, trembling.

“You mean the signor Antonio-Pericles?”

“No; I mean that furious man I saw at your villa, dear countess.”

“Ah! Barto Rizzo. A very furious man. He bellowed when he heard her name, I remember. You must not do it. But, for Count Ammiani’s sake, I desire to see his marriage postponed, at least.”

“Where is she?” Irma inquired.

The countess shrugged. “Even though I knew, I could not prudently tell you in your present excited state.”

She went to Pericles for a loan of money. Pericles remarked that there was not much of it in Turin. “But, countess, you whirl the gold-pieces like dust from your wheels; and a spy, my good soul, a lovely secret emissary, she will be getting underpaid if she allows herself to want money. There is your beauty; it is ripe, but it is fresh, and it is extraordinary. Yes; there is your beauty.” Before she could obtain a promise of the money, Violetta had to submit to be stripped to her character, which was hard; but on the other hand, Pericles exacted no interest on his money, and it was not often that he exacted a return of it in coin. Under these circumstances, ladies in need of money can find it in their hearts to pardon mere brutality of phrase. Pericles promised to send it to the countess on one condition; which condition he cancelled, saying dejectedly, “I do not care to know where she is. I will not know.”

“She has the score of Hagar, wherever she is,” said Violetta, “and when she hears that you have done the scene without her aid, you will have stuck a dagger in her bosom.”

“Not,” Pericles cried in despair, “not if she should hear Irma’s Hagar! To the desert with Irma. It is the place for a crab-apple. Bravo, Abraham! you were wise.”

Pericles added that Montini was hourly expected, and that there was to be a rehearsal in the evening.

When she had driven home, Violetta found Barto Rizzo’s accusatory paper laid on her writing-desk. She gathered the contents in a careless glance, and walked into the garden alone, to look for Carlo.

He was leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, near the water-gate, looking into the deep clear lake-water. Violetta placed herself beside him without a greeting.

“You are watching fish for coolness, my Carlo?”

“Yes,” he said, and did not turn to her face.

“You were very angry when you arrived?”

She waited for his reply.

“Why do you not speak, Carlino?”

“I am watching fish for coolness,” he said.

“Meantime,” said Violetta, “I am scorched.”

He looked up, and led her to an arch of shade, where he sat quite silent.

“Can anything be more vexing than this?” she was reduced to exclaim.

“Ah!” said he, “you would like the catalogue to be written out for you in a big bold hand, possibly, with a terrific initials at the end of the page.”

Page 1773

“Carlo, you have done worse than that. When I saw you first here, what crimes did you not accuse me of? what names did you not scatter on my head? and what things did I not, confess to? I bore the unkindness, for you were beaten, and you wanted a victim. And, my dear friend, considering that I am after all a woman, my forbearance has subsequently been still greater.”

“How?” he asked. Her half-pathetic candour melted him.

“You must, have a lively memory for the uses of forgetfulness, Carlo, When you had scourged me well, you thought it proper to raise me up and give me comfort. I was wicked for serving the king, and therefore the country, as a spy; but I was to persevere, and cancel my iniquities by betraying those whom I served to you. That was your instructive precept. Have I done it or not? Answer, too have I done it for any payment beyond your approbation? I persuaded you to hope for Lombardy, and without any vaunting of my own patriotism. You have seen and spoken to the men I directed you to visit. If their heads master yours, I shall be reprobated for it, I know surely; but I am confident as yet that you can match them. In another month I expect to see the king over the Ticino once more, and Carlo in Brescia with his comrades. You try to penetrate my eyes. That’s foolish; I can make them glass. Read me by what I say and what I do. I do not entreat you to trust me; I merely beg that you will trust your own judgement of me by what I have helped you to do hitherto. You and I, my dear boy, have had some trifling together. Admit that another woman would have refused to surrender you as I did when your unruly Vittoria was at last induced to come to you from Milan. Or, another woman would have had her revenge on discovering that she had been a puppet of soft eyes and a lover’s quarrel with his mistress. Instead of which, I let you go. I am opposed to the marriage, it’s true; and you know why.”

Carlo had listened to Violetta, measuring the false and the true in this recapitulation of her conduct with cool accuracy until she alluded to their personal relations. Thereat his brows darkened.

“We had I some trifling together,” he said, musingly.

“Is it going to be denied in these sweeter days?” Violetta reddened.

“The phrase is elastic. Suppose my bride were to hear it?”

“It was addressed to your ears, Carlo.”

“It cuts two ways. Will you tell me when it was that I last had the happiness of saluting you, lip to lip?”

“In Brescia—before I had espoused an imbecile—two nights before my marriage—near the fountain of the Greek girl with a pitcher.”

Pride and anger nerved the reply. It was uttered in a rapid low breath. Coming altogether unexpectedly, it created an intense momentary revulsion of his feelings by conjuring up his boyish love in a scene more living than the sunlight.

He lifted her hand to his mouth. He was Italian enough, though a lover, to feel that she deserved more. She had reddened deliciously, and therewith hung a dewy rosy moisture on her underlids. Raising her eyes, she looked like a cut orange to a thirsty lip. He kissed her, saying, “Pardon.”

Page 1774

“Keep it secret, you mean?” she retorted. “Yes, I pardon that wish of yours. I can pardon much to my beauty.”

She stood up as majestically as she had spoken.

“You know, my Violetta, that I am madly in love.”

“I have learnt it.”

“You know it:—what else would . . ? If I were not lost in love, could I see you as I do and let Brescia be the final chapter?”

Violetta sighed. “I should have preferred its being so rather than this superfluous additional line to announce an end, like a foolish staff on the edge of a cliff. You thought that you were saluting a leper, or a saint?”

“Neither. If ever we can talk together again, as we have done,” Carlo said gloomily, “I will tell you what I think of myself.”

“No, but Richelieu might have behaved . . . . Ah! perhaps not quite in the same way,” she corrected her flowing apology for him. “But then, he was a Frenchman. He could be flighty without losing his head. Dear Italian Carlo! Yes, in the teeth of Barto Rizzo, and for the sake of the country, marry her at once. It will be the best thing for you; really the best. You want to know from me the whereabout of Barto Rizzo. He may be in the mountain over Stresa, or in Milan. He also has thrown off my yoke, such as it was! I do assure you, Carlo, I have no command over him: but, mind, I half doat on the wretch. No man made me desperately in love with myself before he saw me, when I stopped his raving in the middle of the road with one look of my face. There was foam on his beard and round his eyes; the poor wretch took out his handkerchief, and he sobbed. I don’t know how many luckless creatures he had killed on his way; but when I took him into my carriage—king, emperor, orator on stilts, minister of police not one has flattered me as he did, by just gazing at me. Beauty can do as much as music, my Carlo.”

Carlo thanked heaven that Violetta had no passion in her nature. She had none: merely a leaning toward evil, a light sense of shame, a desire for money, and in her heart a contempt for the principles she did not possess, but which, apart from the intervention of other influences, could occasionally sway her actions. Friendship, or rather the shadowy recovery of a past attachment that had been more than friendship, inclined her now and then to serve a master who failed distinctly to represent her interests; and when she met Carlo after the close of the war, she had really set to work in hearty kindliness to rescue him from what she termed “shipwreck with that disastrous Republican crew.” He had obtained greater ascendency over her than she liked; yet she would have forgiven it, as well as her consequent slight deviation from direct allegiance to her masters in various cities, but for Carlo’s commanding personal

coolness. She who had tamed a madman by her beauty, was outraged, and not unnaturally, by the indifference of a former lover.

Page 1775

Later in the day, Laura and Vittoria, with Agostino, reached the villa; and Adela put her lips to Vittoria's ear, whispering: "Naughty! when are you to lose your liberty to turn men's heads?" and then she heaved a sigh with Wilfrid's name. She had formed the acquaintance of Countess d'Isorella in Turin, she said, and satisfactorily repeated her lesson, but with a blush. She was little more than a shade to Vittoria, who wondered what she had to live for. After the early evening dinner, when sunlight and the colours of the sun were beyond the western mountains, they pushed out on the lake. A moon was overhead, seeming to drop lower on them as she filled with light.

Agostino and Vittoria fell upon their theme of discord, as usual—the King of Sardinia.

"We near the vesper hour, my daughter," said Agostino; "you would provoke me to argumentation in heaven itself. I am for peace. I remember looking down on two cats with arched backs in the solitary arena of the Verona amphitheatre. We men, my Carlo, will not, in the decay of time, so conduct ourselves."

Vittoria looked on Laura and thought of the cannon-sounding hours, whose echoes rolled over their slaughtered hope. The sun fell, the moon shone, and the sun would rise again, but Italy lay face to earth. They had seen her together before the enemy. That recollection was a joy that stood, though the winds beat at it, and the torrents. She loved her friend's worn eyelids and softly-shut mouth; the after-glow of battle seemed on them; the silence of the field of carnage under heaven;—and the patient turning of Laura's eyes this way and that to speakers upon common things, covered the despair of her heart as with a soldier's cloak.

Laura met the tender study of Vittoria's look, and smiled.

They neared the Villa Ricciardi, and heard singing. The villa was lighted profusely, so that it made a little mock-sunset on the lake.

"Irma!" said Vittoria, astonished at the ring of a well-known voice that shot up in firework fashion, as Pericles had said of it. Incredulous, she listened till she was sure; and then glanced hurried questions at all eyes. Violetta laughed, saying, "You have the score of Rocco Ricci's Hagar."

The boat drew under the blazing windows, and half guessing, half hearing, Vittoria understood that Pericles was giving an entertainment here, and had abjured her. She was not insensible to the slight. This feeling, joined to her long unsatisfied craving to sing, led her to be intolerant of Irma's style, and visibly vexed her.

Violetta whispered: "He declares that your voice is cracked: show him! Burst out with the 'Addio' of Hagar. May she not, Carlo? Don't you permit the poor soul to sing? She cannot contain herself."

Carlo, Adela, Agostino, and Violetta prompted her, and, catching a pause in the villa, she sang the opening notes of Hagar's 'Addio' with her old glorious fulness of tone and perfect utterance.

Page 1776

The first who called her name was Rocco Ricci, but Pericles was the first to rush out and hang over the boat. “Witch! traitress! infernal ghost! heart of ice!” and in English “humbug!” and in French “coquin!":—these were a few of the titles he poured on her. Rocco Ricci and Montini kissed hands to her, begging her to come to them. She was very willing outwardly, and in her heart most eager; but Carlo bade the rowers push off. Then it was pitiful to hear the shout of abject supplication from Pericles. He implored Count Ammiani’s pardon, Vittoria’s pardon, for telling her what she was; and as the boat drew farther away, he offered her sums of money to enter the villa and sing the score of Hagar. He offered to bear the blame of her bad behaviour to him, said he would forget it and stamp it out; that he would pay for the provisioning of a regiment of volunteers for a whole month; that he would present her marriage trousseau to her—yes, and let her marry. “Sandra! my dear! my dear!” he cried, and stretched over the parapet speechless, like a puppet slain.

So strongly did she comprehend the sincerity of his passion for her voice that she could or would see nothing extravagant in this demonstration, which excited unrestrained laughter in every key from her companions in the boat. When the boat was about a hundred yards from the shore, and in full moonlight, she sang the great “Addio” of Hagar. At the close of it, she had to feel for her lover’s hand blindly. No one spoke, either at the Villa Ricciardi, or about her. Her voice possessed the mountain-shadowed lake.

The rowers pulled lustily home through chill air.

Luigi and Beppo were at the villa, both charged with news from Milan. Beppo claiming the right to speak first, which Luigi granted with a magnificent sweep of his hand, related that Captain Weisspriess, of the garrison, had wounded Count Medole in a duel severely. He brought a letter to Vittoria from Merthyr, in which Merthyr urged her to prevent Count Ammiani’s visiting Milan for any purpose whatever, and said that he was coming to be present at, her marriage. She was reading this while Luigi delivered his burden; which was, that in a subsequent duel, the slaughtering captain had killed little Leone Rufo, the gay and gallant boy, Carlo’s comrade, and her friend.

Luigi laughed scornfully at his rival, and had edged away—out of sight before he could be asked who had sent him. Beppo ignominiously confessed that he had not heard of this second duel. At midnight he was on horseback, bound for Milan, with a challenge to the captain from Carlo, who had a jealous fear that Luciano at Vercelli might have outstripped him. Carlo requested the captain to guarantee him an hour’s immunity in the city on a stated day, or to name any spot on the borders of Piedmont for the meeting. The challenge was sent with Countess Ammiani’s approbation and Laura’s. Vittoria submitted.

That done, Carlo gave up his heart to his bride. A fight in prospect was the hope of wholesome work after his late indecision and double play. They laughed at themselves, accused hotly, and humbly excused themselves, praying for mutual pardon.

Page 1777

She had behaved badly in disobeying his mandate from Brescia.

Yes, but had he not been over-imperious?

True; still she should have remembered her promise in the Vicentino.

She did indeed; but how could she quit her wounded friend Merthyr?

Perhaps not: then, why had she sent word to him from Milan that she would be at Pallanza?

This question knocked at a sealed chamber. She was silent, and Carlo had to brood over something as well. He gave her hints of his foolish pique, his wrath and bitter baffled desire for her when, coming to Pallanza, he came to an empty house. But he could not help her to see, for he did not himself feel, that he had been spurred by silly passions, pique, and wrath, to plunge instantly into new political intrigue; and that some of his worst faults had become mixed up with his devotion to his country. Had he taken Violetta for an ally in all purity of heart? The kiss he had laid on the woman's sweet lips had shaken his absolute belief in that. He tried to set his brain travelling backward, in order to contemplate accurately the point of his original weakness. It being almost too severe a task for any young head, Carlo deemed it sufficient that he should say—and this he felt—that he was unworthy of his beloved.

Could Vittoria listen to such stuff? She might have kissed him to stop the flow of it, but kissings were rare between them; so rare, that when they had put mouth to mouth, a little quivering spire of flame, dim at the base, stood to mark the spot in their memories. She moved her hand, as to throw aside such talk. Unfretful in blood, chaste and keen, she at least knew the foolishness of the common form of lovers' trifling when there is a burning love to keep under, and Carlo saw that she did, and adored her for this highest proof of the passion of her love.

"In three days you will be mine, if I do not hear from Milan? within five, if I do?" he said.

Vittoria gave him the whole beauty of her face a divine minute, and bowed it assenting. Carlo then led her to his mother, before whom he embraced her for the comfort of his mother's heart. They decided that there should be no whisper of the marriage until the couple were one. Vittoria obtained the countess's permission to write for Merthyr to attend her at the altar. She had seen Weisspriess fall in combat, and she had perfect faith in her lover's right hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ANNA OF LENKENSTEIN

Captain Weisspriess replied to Carlo Ammiani promptly, naming Camerlata by Como, as the place where he would meet him.

He stated at the end of some temperate formal lines, that he had given Count Ammiani the preference over half-a-dozen competitors for the honour of measuring swords with him; but that his adversary must not expect him to be always ready to instruct the young gentlemen of the Lombardo-Venetian province in the arts of fence; and therefore he begged to observe, that his encounter with Count Ammiani would be the last occasion upon which he should hold himself bound to accept a challenge from Count Ammiani's countrymen.

Page 1778

It was quite possible, the captain said, drawing a familiar illustration from the gaming-table, to break the stoutest Bank in the world by a perpetual multiplication of your bets, and he was modest enough to remember that he was but one man against some thousands, to contend with all of whom would be exhausting.

Consequently the captain desired Count Ammiani to proclaim to his countrymen that the series of challenges must terminate; and he requested him to advertize the same in a Milanese, a Turin, and a Neapolitan journal.

“I am not a butcher,” he concluded. “The task you inflict upon me is scarcely bearable. Call it by what name you will, it is having ten shots to one, which was generally considered an equivalent to murder. My sword is due to you, Count Ammiani; and, as I know you to be an honourable nobleman, I would rather you were fighting in Venice, though your cause is hopeless, than standing up to match yourself against me. Let me add, that I deeply respect the lady who is engaged to be united to you, and would not willingly cross steel either with her lover or her husband. I shall be at Camerlata at the time appointed. If I do not find you there, I shall understand that you have done me the honour to take my humble advice, and have gone where your courage may at least appear to have done better service. I shall sheathe my sword and say no more about it.”

All of this, save the concluding paragraph, was written under the eyes of Countess Anna of Lenkenstein.

He carried it to his quarters, where he appended the as he deemed it—conciliatory passage: after which he handed it to Beppo, in a square of the barracks, with a buon’mano that Beppo received bowing, and tossed to an old decorated regimental dog of many wounds and a veteran’s gravity. For this offence a Styrian grenadier seized him by the shoulders, lifting him off his feet and swinging him easily, while the dog arose from his contemplation of the coin and swayed an expectant tail. The Styrian had dashed Beppo to earth before Weisspriess could interpose, and the dog had got him by the throat. In the struggle Beppo tore off the dog’s medal for distinguished conduct on the field of battle. He restored it as soon as he was free, and won unanimous plaudits from officers and soldiers for his kindly thoughtfulness and the pretty manner with which he dropped on one knee, and assuaged the growls, and attached the medal to the old dog’s neck. Weisspriess walked away. Beppo then challenged his Styrian to fight. The case was laid before a couple of sergeants, who shook their heads on hearing his condition to be that of a serving-man, the Styrian was ready to waive considerations of superiority; but the “judge” pronounced their veto. A soldier in the Imperial Royal service, though he was merely a private in the ranks, could not accept a challenge from civilians below the rank of notary, secretary, hotel- or inn- keeper, and suchlike:

Page 1779

servants and tradesmen he must seek to punish in some other way; and they also had their appeal to his commanding officer. So went the decision of the military tribunal, until the Styrian, having contrived to make Beppo understand, by the agency of a single Italian verb, that he wanted a blow, Beppo spun about and delivered a stinging smack on the Styrian's cheek; which altered the view of the case, for, under peculiar circumstances—supposing that he did not choose to cut him down—a soldier might condescend to challenge his civilian inferiors: "in our regiment," said the sergeants, meaning that they had relaxed the stringency of their laws.

Beppo met his Styrian outside the city walls, and laid him flat. He declined to fight a second; but it was represented to him, by the aid of an interpreter, that the officers of the garrison were subjected to successive challenges, and that the first trial of his skill might have been nothing finer than luck; and besides, his adversary had a right to call a champion. "We all do it," the soldiers assured him. "Now your blood's up you're ready for a dozen of us;" which was less true of a constitution that was quicker in expending its heat. He stood out against a young fellow almost as limber as himself, much taller, and longer in the reach, by whom he was quickly disabled with cuts on thigh and head. Seeing this easy victory over him, the soldiers, previously quite civil, cursed him for having got the better of their fallen comrade, and went off discussing how be had done the trick, leaving him to lie there. A peasant carried him to a small suburban inn, where he remained several days oppressed horribly by a sense that he had forgotten something. When he recollected what it was, he entrusted the captain's letter to his landlady;—a good woman, but she chanced to have a scamp of a husband, who snatched it from her and took it to his market. Beppo supposed the letter to be on its Way to Pallauza, when it was in General Schoneck's official desk; and soon after the breath of a scandalous rumour began to circulate.

Captain Weisspriess had gone down to Camerlata, accompanied by a Colonel Volpo, of an Austro-Italian regiment, and by Lieutenant Jenna. At Camerlata a spectacled officer, Major Nagen, joined them. Weisspriess was the less pleased with his company on hearing that he had come to witness the meeting, in obedience to an express command of a person who was interested in it. Jenna was the captain's friend: Volpo was seconding him for the purpose of getting Count Ammiani to listen to reason from the mouth of a countryman. There could be no doubt in the captain's mind that this Major Nagen was Countess Anna's spy as well as his rival, and he tried to be rid of him; but in addition to the shortness of sight which was Nagen's plea for pushing his thin transparent nose into every corner, he enjoyed at will an intermittent deafness, and could hear anything without knowing of it. Brother officers said of Major Nagen that

Page 1780

he was occasionally equally senseless in the nose, which had been tweaked without disturbing the repose of his features. He waited half-an-hour on the ground after the appointed time, and then hurried to Milan. Weisspriess waited an hour. Satisfied that Count Ammiani was not coming, he exacted from Volpo and from Jenna their word of honour as Austrian officers that they would forbear-to cast any slur on the courage of his adversary, and would be so discreet on the subject as to imply that the duel was a drawn affair. They pledged themselves accordingly. “There’s Nagen, it’s true,” said Weisspriess, as a man will say and feel that he has done his best to prevent a thing inevitable.

Milan, and some of the journals of Milan, soon had Carlo Ammiani’s name up for challenging Weisspriess and failing to keep his appointment. It grew to be discussed as a tremendous event. The captain received fifteen challenges within two days; among these a second one from Luciano Romara, whom he was beginning to have a strong desire to encounter. He repressed it, as quondam drunkards fight off the whisper of their lips for liquor. “No more blood,” was his constant inward cry. He wanted peace; but as he also wanted Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and her estates, it may possibly be remarked of him that what he wanted he did not want to pay for.

At this period Wilfrid had resumed the Austrian uniform as a common soldier in the ranks of the Kinsky regiment. General Schoneck had obtained the privilege for him from the Marshal, General Pierson refusing to lift a finger on his behalf. Nevertheless the uncle was not sorry to hear the tale of his nephew’s exploits during the campaign, or of the eccentric intrepidity of the white umbrella; and both to please him, and to intercede for Wilfrid, the tatter’s old comrades recited his deeds as a part of the treasured familiar history of the army in its late arduous struggle.

General Pierson was chiefly anxious to know whether Countess Lena would be willing to give her hand to Wilfrid in the event of his restoration to his antecedent position in the army. He found her extremely excited about Carlo Ammiani, her old playmate, and once her dear friend. She would not speak of Wilfrid at all. To appease the chivalrous little woman, General Pierson hinted that his nephew, being under the protection of General Schoneck, might get some intelligence from that officer. Lena pretended to reject the notion of her coming into communication with Wilfrid for any earthly purpose. She said to herself, however, that her object was pre-eminently unselfish; and as the General pointedly refused to serve her in a matter that concerned an Italian nobleman, she sent directions to Wilfrid to go before General Schoeneck the moment he was off duty, and ask his assistance, in her name, to elucidate the mystery of Count Ammiani’s behaviour. The answer was a transmission of Captain Weisspriess’s letter to Carlo. Lena caused the fact of this letter having missed its way to be circulated in the journals, and then she carried it triumphantly to her sister, saying:

Page 1781

“There! I knew these reports were abase calumny.”

“Reports, to what effect?” said Anna.

“That Carlo Ammiani had slunk from a combat with your duellist.”

“Oh! I knew that myself,” Anna remarked.

“You were the loudest in proclaiming it.”

“Because I intend to ruin him.”

“Carlo Ammiani? What has he done to you?”

Anna’s eyes had fallen on the additional lines of the letter which she had not dictated. She frowned and exclaimed:

“What is this? Does the man play me false? Read those lines, Lena, and tell me, does the man mean to fight in earnest who can dare to write them? He advises Ammiani to go to Venice. It’s treason, if it is not cowardice. And see here—he has the audacity to say that he deeply respects the lady Ammiani is going to marry. Is Ammiani going to marry her? I think not.”

Anna dashed the letter to the floor.

“But I will make use of what’s within my reach,” she said, picking it up.

“Carlo Ammiani will marry her, I presume,” said Lena.

“Not before he has met Captain Weisspriess, who, by the way, has obtained his majority. And, Lena, my dear, write to inform him that we wish to offer him our congratulations. He will be a General officer in good time.”

“Perhaps you forget that Count Ammiani is a perfect swordsman, Anna.”

“Weisspriess remembers it for me, perhaps;—is that your idea, Lena?”

“He might do so profitably. You have thrown him on two swords.”

“Merely to provoke the third. He is invincible. If he were not, where would his use be?”

“Oh, how I loathe revenge!” cried Lena.

“You cannot love!” her sister retorted. “That woman calling herself Vittoria Campa shall suffer. She has injured and defied me. How was it that she behaved to us at Meran? She is mixed up with assassins; she is insolent—a dark-minded slut; and she catches

stupid men. My brother, my country, and this weak Weisspriess, as I saw him lying in the Ultenthal, cry out against her. I have no sleep. I am not revengeful. Say it, say it, all of you! but I am not. I am not unforgiving. I worship justice, and a black deed haunts me. Let the wicked be contrite and washed in tears, and I think I can pardon them. But I will have them on their knees. I hate that woman Vittoria more than I hate Angelo Guidascarpi. Look, Lena. If both were begging for life to me, I would send him to the gallows and her to her bedchamber; and all because I worship justice, and believe it to be the weapon of the good and pious. You have a baby's heart; so has Karl. He declines to second Weisspriess; he will have nothing to do with duelling; he would behold his sisters mocked in the streets and pass on. He talks of Paul's death like a priest. Priests are worthy men; a great resource! Give me a priests lap when I need it. Shall I be condemned to go to the priest

Page 1782

and leave that woman singing? If I did, I might well say the world's a snare, a sham, a pitfall, a horror! It's what I don't think in any degree. It's what you think, though. Yes, whenever you are vexed you think it. So do the priests, and so do all who will not exert themselves to chastise. I, on the contrary, know that the world is not made up of nonsense. Write to Weisspriess immediately; I must have him here in an hour."

Weisspriess, on visiting the ladies to receive their congratulations, was unprepared for the sight of his letter to Carlo Ammiani, which Anna thrust before him after he had saluted her, bidding him read it aloud. He perused it in silence. He was beginning to be afraid of his mistress.

"I called you Austria once, for you were always ready," Anna said, and withdrew from him, that the sung of her words might take effect.

"God knows, I have endeavoured to earn the title in my humble way," Weisspriess appealed to Lena.

"Yes, Major Weisspriess, you have," she said. "Be Austria still, and forbear toward these people as much as you can. To beat them is enough, in my mind. I am rejoiced that you have not met Count Ammiani, for if you had, two friends of mine, equally dear and equally skilful, would have held their lives at one another's mercy."

"Equally!" said Weisspriess, and pulled out the length of his moustache.

"Equally courageous," Lena corrected herself. "I never distrusted Count Ammiani's courage, nor could distrust yours."

"Equally dear!" Weisspriess tried to direct a concentrated gaze on her.

Lena evaded an answer by speaking of the rumour of Count Ammiani's marriage.

Weisspriess was thinking with all the sagacious penetration of the military mind, that perhaps this sister was trying to tell him that she would be willing to usurp the piece of the other in his affections; and if so, why should she not?

"I may cherish the idea that I am dear to you, Countess Lena?"

"When you are formally betrothed to my sister, you will know you are very dear to me, Major Weisspriess."

"But," said he, perceiving his error, "how many persons am I to call out before she will consent to a formal betrothal?"

Lena was half smiling at the little tentative bit of sentiment she had so easily turned aside. Her advice to him was to refuse to fight, seeing that he had done sufficient for glory and his good name.

He mentioned Major Nagen as a rival.

Upon this she said: “Hear me one minute. I was in my sister’s bed-room on the first night when she knew of your lying wounded in the Ultenthal. She told you just now that she called you Austria. She adores our Austria in you. The thought that you had been vanquished seemed like our Austria vanquished, and she is so strong for Austria that it is really out of her power to fancy you as defeated without suspecting foul play. So when she makes you fight, she thinks you safe. Many are to go down because you have gone down. Do you not see? And now, Major Weisspriess, I need not expose my sister to you any more, I hope, or depreciate Major Nagen for your satisfaction.”

Page 1783

Weisspriess had no other interview with Anna for several days. She shunned him openly. Her carriage moved off when he advanced to meet her at the parade, or review of arms; and she did not scruple to speak in public with Major Nagen, in the manner of those who have begun to speak together in private. The offender received his punishment gracefully, as men will who have been taught that it flatters them. He refused every challenge. From Carlo Ammiani there came not a word.

It would have been a deadly lull to any fiery temperament engaged in plotting to destroy a victim, but Anna had the patience of hatred—that absolute malignity which can measure its exultation rather by the gathering of its power to harm than by striking. She could lay it aside, or sink it to the bottom of her emotions, at will, when circumstances appeared against it. And she could do this without fretful regrets, without looking to the future. The spirit of her hatred extracted its own nourishment from things, like an organized creature. When foiled she became passive, and she enjoyed—forced herself compliantly to enjoy—her redoubled energy of hatred voluptuously, if ever a turn in events made wreck of her scheming. She hated Vittoria for many reasons, all of them vague within her bosom because the source of them was indefinite and lay in the fact of her having come into collision with an opposing nature, whose rivalry was no visible rivalry, whose triumph was an ignorance of scorn—a woman who attracted all men, who scattered injuries with insolent artlessness, who never appealed to forgiveness, and was a low-born woman daring to be proud. By repute Anna was implacable, but she had, and knew she had, the capacity for magnanimity of a certain kind; and her knowledge of the existence of this unsuspected fund within her justified in some degree her reckless efforts to pull her enemy down on her knees. It seemed doubly right that she should force Vittoria to penitence, as being good for the woman, and an end that exonerated her own private sins committed to effect it.

Yet she did not look clearly forward to the day of Vittoria's imploring for mercy. She had too many vexations to endure: she was an insufficient schemer, and was too frequently thwarted to enjoy that ulterior prospect. Her only servile instruments were Major Nagen, and Irma, who came to her from the Villa Ricciardi, hot to do her rival any deadly injury; but though willing to attempt much, these were apparently able to perform little more than the menial work of vengeance. Major Nagen wrote in the name of Weisspriess to Count Ammiani, appointing a second meeting at Como, and stating that he would be at the villa of the Duchess of Graatli there. Weisspriess was unsuspectingly taken down to the place by Anna and Lena. There was a gathering of such guests as the duchess alone among her countrywomen could assemble, under the patronage of the conciliatory Government, and the duchess projected to give a series of brilliant entertainments in the saloons of the Union, as she named her house-roof. Count Serabiglione arrived, as did numerous Moderates and priest-party men, Milanese garrison officers and others. Laura Piaveni travelled with Countess d'Isorella and the happy Adela Sedley, from Lago Maggiore.

Page 1784

Laura came, as she cruelly told her friend, for the purpose of making Victoria's excuses to the duchess. "Why can she not come herself?" Amalia persisted in asking, and began to be afflicted with womanly curiosity. Laura would do nothing but shrug and smile, and repeat her message. A little after sunset, when the saloons were lighted, Weisspriess, sitting by his Countess Anna's side, had a slip of paper placed in his hands by one of the domestics. He quitted his post frowning with astonishment, and muttered once, "My appointment!" Laura noticed that Anna's heavy eyelids lifted to shoot an expressive glance at Violetta d'Isorella. She said: "Can that have been anything hostile, do you suppose?" and glanced slyly at her friend.

"No, no," said Amalia; "the misunderstanding is explained, and Major Weisspriess is just as ready as Count Ammiani to listen to reason. Besides, Count Ammiani is not so unfriendly but that if he came so near he would come up to me, surely."

Laura brought Amalia's observation to bear upon Anna and Violetta by turning pointedly from one to the other as she said: "As for reason, perhaps you have chosen the word. If Count Ammiani attended an appointment this time, he would be unreasonable."

A startled "Why?"—leaped from Anna's lips. She reddened at her impulsive clumsiness.

Laura raised her shoulders slightly: "Do you not know?" The expression of her face reproved Violetta, as for remissness in transmitting secret intelligence. "You can answer why, countess," she addressed the latter, eager to exercise her native love of conflict with this doubtfully-faithful countrywoman;—the Austrian could feel that she had beaten her on the essential point, and afford to give her any number of dialectical victories.

"I really cannot answer why," Violetta said; "unless Count Ammiani is, as I venture to hope, better employed."

"But the answer is charming and perfect," said Laura.

"Enigmatical answers are declared to be so when they come from us women," the duchess remarked; "but then, I fancy, women must not be the hearers, or they will confess that they are just as much bewildered and irritated as I am. Do speak out, my dearest. How is he better employed?"

Laura passed her eyes around the group of ladies. "If any hero of yours had won the woman he loves, he would be right in thinking it folly to be bound by the invitation to fight, or feast, or what you will, within a space of three months or so; do you not agree with me?"

The different emotions on many visages made the scene curious.

"Count Ammiani has married her!" exclaimed the duchess.

“My old friend Carlo is really married!” said Lena.

Anna stared at Violetta.

The duchess, recovering from her wonder, confirmed the news by saying that she now knew why M. Powys had left Milan in haste, three or four days previously, as she was aware that the bride had always wished him to be present at the ceremony of her marriage.

Page 1785

“Signora, may I ask you, were you present?” Violetta addressed Laura.

“I will answer most honestly that I was not,” said Laura.

“The marriage was a secret one; perhaps?”

“Even for friends, you see.”

“Necessarily, no doubt,” Lena said, with an idea of easing her sister’s stupefaction by a sarcasm foreign to her sentiments.

Adela Sedley, later in exactly comprehending what had been spoken, glanced about for some one who would not be unsympathetic to her exclamation, and suddenly beheld her brother entering the room with Weisspriess. “Wilfrid! Wilfrid! do you know she is married?”

“So they tell me,” Wilfrid replied, while making his bow to the duchess. He was much broken in appearance, but wore his usual collected manner. Who had told him of the marriage? A person downstairs, he said; not Count Ammiani; not signor Balderini; no one whom he saw present, no one whom he knew.

“A very mysterious person,” said the duchess.

“Then it’s true after all,” cried Laura. “I did but guess it.” She assured Violetta that she had only guessed it.

“Does Major Weisspriess know it to be true?” The question came from Anna.

Weisspriess coolly verified it, on the faith of a common servant’s communication.

The ladies could see that some fresh piece of mystery lay between him and Wilfrid.

“With whom have you had an interview, and what have you heard?” asked Lena, vexed by Wilfrid’s pallid cheeks.

Both men stammered and protested, out of conceit, and were as foolish as men are when pushed to play at mutual concealment.

The duchess’s chasseur, Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, stepped up to his mistress and whispered discreetly. She gazed straight at Laura. After hesitation she shook her head, and the chasseur retired. Amalia then came to the rescue of the unhappy military wits that were standing a cross-fire of sturdy interrogation.

“Do you not perceive what it is?” she said to Anna. “Major Weisspriess meets Private Pierson at the door of my house, and forgets that he is well-born and my guest. I may

be revolutionary, but I declare that in plain clothes Private Pierson is the equal of Major Weisspriess. If bravery made men equals, who would be Herr Pierson's superior? Ire has done me the honour, at a sacrifice of his pride, I am sure, to come here and meet his sister, and rejoice me with his society. Major Weisspriess, if I understand the case correctly, you are greatly to blame."

"I beg to assert," Weisspriess was saying as the duchess turned her shoulder on him.

"There is really no foundation," Wilfrid began, with similar simplicity.

"What will sharpen the wits of these soldiers!" the duchess murmured dolefully to Laura.

"But Major Weisspriess was called out of his room by a message—was that from Private Pierson?" said Anna.

"Assuredly; I should presume so," the duchess answered for them.

Page 1786

“Ay; undoubtedly,” Weisspriess supported her.

“Then,” Laura smiled encouragement to Wilfrid, “you know nothing of Count Ammiani’s marriage after all?”

Wilfrid launched his reply on a sharp repression of his breath, “Nothing whatever.”

“And the common servant’s communication was not made to you?” Anna interrogated Weisspriess.

“I simply followed in the track of Pierson,” said that officer, masking his retreat from the position with a duck of his head and a smile, tooth on lip.

“How could you ever suppose, child, that a common servant would be sent to deliver such tidings? and to Major Weisspriess!” the duchess interposed.

This broke up the Court of inquiry.

Weisspriess shortly after took his leave, on the plea that he wished to prove his friendliness by accompanying Private Pierson, who had to be on duty early next day in Milan. Amalia had seen him breaking from Anna in extreme irritation, and he had only to pledge his word that he was really bound for Milan to satisfy her. “I believe you to be at heart humane,” she said meaningly.

“Duchess, you may be sure that I would not kill an enemy save on the point of my sword,” he answered her.

“You are a gallant man,” said Amalia, and pride was in her face as she looked on him.

She willingly consented to Wilfrid’s sudden departure, as it was evident that some shot had hit him hard.

On turning to Laura, the duchess beheld an aspect of such shrewd disgust that she was provoked to exclaim: “What on earth is the matter now?”

Laura would favour her with no explanation until they were alone in the duchess’s boudoir, when she said that to call Weisspriess a gallant man was an instance of unblushing adulation of brutal strength: “Gallant for slaying a boy? Gallant because he has force of wrist?”

“Yes; gallant;—an honour to his countrymen: and an example to some of yours,” Amalia rejoined.

“See,” cried Laura, “to what a degeneracy your excess of national sentiment reduces you!”

While she was flowing on, the duchess leaned a hand across her shoulder, and smiling kindly, said she would not allow her to utter words that she would have to eat. “You saw my chasseur step up to me this evening, my Laura? Well, not to torment you, he wished to sound an alarm cry after Angelo Guidascarpi. I believe my conjecture is correct, that Angelo Guidascarpi was seen by Major Weisspriess below, and allowed to pass free. Have you no remark to make?”

“None,” said Laura.

“You cannot admit that he behaved like a gallant man?” Laura sighed deeply. “Perhaps it was well for you to encourage him!”

The mystery of Angelo’s interview with Weisspriess was cleared the next night, when in the midst of a ball-room’s din, Aennchen, Amalia’s favourite maid, brought a letter to Laura from Countess Ammiani. These were the contents:

Page 1787

"*Dearest signora*,

"You now learn a new and blessed thing. God make the marriage fruitful! I have daughter as well as son. Our Carlo still hesitated, for hearing of the disgraceful rumours in Milan, he fancied a duty lay there for him to do. Another menace came to my daughter from the madman Barto Rizzo. God can use madmen to bring about the heavenly designs. We decided that Carlo's name should cover her. My son was like a man who has awakened up. M. Powys was our good genius. He told her that he had promised you to bring it about. He, and Angelo, and myself, were the witnesses. So much before heaven! I crossed the lake with them to Stress. I was her tirewoman, with Giacinta, to whom I will give a husband for the tears of joy she dropped upon the bed. Blessed be it! I placed my daughter in my Carlo's arms. Both kissed their mother at parting.

"This is something fixed. I had great fears during the war. You do not yet know what it is to have a sonless son in peril. Terror and remorse haunted me for having sent the last Ammiani out to those fields, unattached to posterity.

"An envelope from Milan arrived on the morning of his nuptials. It was intercepted by me. The German made a second appointment at Como. Angelo undertook to assist me in saving my son's honour. So my Carlo had nothing to disturb his day. Pray with me, Laura Piaveni, that the day and the night of it may prove fresh springs of a river that shall pass our name through the happier mornings of Italy! I commend you to God, my dear, and am your friend,

"MARCCELLINA, *countess Ammiani*.

"P.S. Countess Alessandra will be my daughter's name."

The letter was read and re-read before the sweeter burden it contained would allow Laura to understand that Countess Ammiani had violated a seal and kept a second hostile appointment hidden from her son.

"Amalia, you detest me," she said, when they had left the guests for a short space, and the duchess had perused the letter, "but acknowledge Angelo Guidascarpi's devotion. He came here in the midst of you Germans, at the risk of his life, to offer battle for his cousin."

The duchess, however, had much more to say for the magnanimity of Major Weisspriess, who, if he saw him, had spared him; she compelled Laura to confess that Weisspriess must have behaved with some nobleness, which Laura did, humming and I 'brumming,' and hinting at the experience he had gained of Angelo's skill. Her naughtiness provoked first, and then affected Amalia; in this mood the duchess had the habit of putting on a grand air of pitying sadness. Laura knew it well, and never could

make head against it. She wavered, as a stray floating thing detached from an eddy whirls and passes on the flood. Close on Amalia's bosom she sobbed out: "Yes; you Austrians have good qualities some: many! but you choose to think us mean because we can't readily admit them when we are under your heels. Just see me; what a crumb feeds me! I am crying with delight at a marriage!"

Page 1788

The duchess clasped her fondly.

“It’s not often one gets you so humble, my Laura.”

“I am crying with delight at a marriage! Amalia, look at me: you would suppose it a mighty triumph. A marriage! two little lovers lying cheek to cheek! and me blessing heaven for its goodness! and there may be dead men unburied still on the accursed Custozza hill-top!”

Amalia let her weep. The soft affection which the duchess bore to her was informed with a slight touch of envy of a complexion that could be torn with tears one minute, and the next be fit to show in public. No other thing made her regard her friend as a southern—that is, a foreign-woman.

“Be patient,” Laura said.

“Cry; you need not be restrained,” said Amalia.

“You sighed.”

“No!”

“A sort of sigh. My fit’s over. Carlo’s marriage is too surprising and delicious. I shall be laughing presently. I hinted at his marriage—I thought it among the list of possible things, no more—to see if that crystal pool, called Violetta d’Isorella, could be discoloured by stirring. Did you watch her face? I don’t know what she wanted with Carlo, for she’s cold as poison—a female trifler; one of those women whom I, and I have a chaste body, despise as worse than wantons; but she certainly did not want him to be married. It seems like a victory—though we’re beaten. You have beaten us, my dear!”

“My darling! it is your husband kisses you,” said Amalia, kissing Laura’s forehead from a full heart.

CHAPTER XL

THROUGH THE WINTER

Weisspriess and Wilfrid made their way toward Milan together, silently smoking, after one attempt at conversation, which touched on Vittoria’s marriage; but when they reached Monza the officer slapped his degraded brother in arms upon the shoulder, and asked him whether he had any inclination to crave permission to serve in Hungary. For his own part, Weisspriess said that he should quit Italy at once; he had here to skewer the poor devils, one or two weekly, or to play the mightily generous; in short, to do

things unsoldierly; and he was desirous of getting away from the country. General Schoneck was at Monza, and might arrange the matter for them both. Promotion was to be looked for in Hungary; the application would please the General; one battle would restore the lieutenant's star to Wilfrid's collar. Wilfrid, who had been offended by his companion's previous brooding silence, nodded briefly, and they stopped at Monza, where they saw General Schoneck in the morning, and Wilfrid being by extraordinary favour in civilian's dress during his leave of absence, they were jointly invited to the General's table at noon, though not to meet any other officer. General Schoneck agreed with Weisspriess that Hungary would be a better field for Wilfrid; said he would do his utmost to serve them in the manner they wished, and dismissed

Page 1789

them after the second cigar. They strolled about the city, glad for reasons of their own to be out of Milan as long as the leave permitted. At night, when they were passing a palace in one of the dark streets, a feather, accompanied by a sharp sibilation from above, dropped on Wilfrid's face. Weisspriess held the feather up, and judged by its length that it was an eagle's, and therefore belonging to the Hungarian Hussar regiment stationed in Milan. "The bird's aloft," he remarked. His voice aroused a noise of feet that was instantly still. He sent a glance at the doorways, where he thought he discerned men. Fetching a whistle in with his breath, he unsheathed his sword, and seeing that Wilfrid had no weapon, he pushed him to a gate of the palace-court that had just cautiously turned a hinge. Wilfrid found his hand taken by a woman's hand inside. The gate closed behind him. He was led up to an apartment where, by the light of a darkly-veiled lamp, he beheld a young Hungarian officer and a lady clinging to his neck, praying him not to go forth. Her Italian speech revealed how matters stood in this house. The officer accosted Wilfrid: "But you are not one of us!" He repeated it to the lady: "You see, the man is not one of us!"

She assured him that she had seen the uniform when she dropped the feather, and wept protesting it.

"Louis, Louis! why did you come to-night! why did I make you come! You will be slain. I had my warning, but I was mad."

The officer hushed her with a quick squeeze of her inter-twisted fingers.

"Are you the man to take a sword and be at my back, sir?" he said; and resumed in a manner less contemptuous toward the civil costume: "I request it for the sole purpose of quieting this lady's fears."

Wilfrid explained who and what he was. On hearing that he was General Pierson's nephew the officer laughed cheerfully, and lifted the veil from the lamp, by which Wilfrid knew him to be Colonel Prince Radocky, a most gallant and the handsomest cavalier in the Imperial service. Radocky laughed again when he was told of Weisspriess keeping guard below.

"Aha! we are three, and can fight like a pyramid."

He flourished his hand above the lady's head, and called for a sword. The lady affected to search for one while he stalked up and down in the jaunty fashion of a Magyar horseman; but the sword was not to be discovered without his assistance, and he was led away in search of it. The moment he was alone Wilfrid burst into tears. He could bear anything better than the sight of fondling lovers. When they rejoined him, Radocky had evidently yielded some point; he stammered and worked his underlip on his moustache. The lady undertook to speak for him. Happily for her, she said, Wilfrid would not compromise her; and taking her lover's hand, she added with Italian mixture

of wit and grace: “Happily for me, too, he does. The house is surrounded by enemies; it is a reign of terror for women. I am dead, if they slay him; but if they recognize him, I am lost.”

Page 1790

Wilfrid readily leaped to her conclusion. He offered his opera-hat and civil mantle to Radocky, who departed in them, leaving his military cloak in exchange. During breathless seconds the lady hung kneeling at the window. When the gate opened there was a noise as of feet preparing to rush; Weisspriess uttered an astonished cry, but addressed Radocky as “my Pierson!” lustily and frequently; and was heard putting a number of meaningless questions, laughing and rallying Pierson till the two passed out of hearing unmolested. The lady then kissed a Cross passionately, and shivered Wilfrid’s manhood by asking him whether he knew what love was. She went on:

“Never, never love a married woman! It’s a past practice. Never! Thrust a spike in the palm of your hands drink scalding oil, rather than do that.”

“The Prince Radocky is now safe,” Wilfrid said.

“Yes, he is safe; and he is there, and I am here: and I cannot follow him; and when will he come to me?”

The tones were lamentable. She struck her forehead, after she had mutely thrust her hand to right and left to show the space separating her from her lover.

Her voice changed when she accepted Wilfrid’s adieux, to whose fate in the deadly street she appeared quite indifferent, though she gave him one or two prudent directions, and expressed a hope that she might be of service to him.

He was set upon as soon as he emerged from the gateway; the cavalry cloak was torn from his back, and but for the chance circumstance of his swearing in English, he would have come to harm. A chill went through his blood on hearing one of his assailants speak the name of Barto Rizzo. The English oath stopped an arm that flashed a dagger half its length. Wilfrid obeyed a command to declare his name, his country, and his rank. “It’s not the prince! it’s not the Hungarian!” went many whispers; and he was drawn away by a man who requested him to deliver his reasons for entering the palace, and who appeared satisfied by Wilfrid’s ready mixture of invention and fact. But the cloak! Wilfrid stated boldly that the cloak was taken by him from the Duchess of Graatli’s at Como; that he had seen a tall Hussar officer slip it off his shoulders; that he had wanted a cloak, and had appropriated it. He had entered the gate of the palace because of a woman’s hand that plucked at the skirts of this very cloak.

“I saw you enter,” said the man; “do that no more. We will not have the blood of Italy contaminated—do you hear? While that half-Austrian Medole is tip-toeing ’twixt Milan and Turin, we watch over his honour, to set an example to our women and your officers. You have outwitted us to-night. Off with you!”

Wilfrid was twirled and pushed through the crowd till he got free of them. He understood very well that they were magnanimous rascals who could let an accomplice go, though they would have driven steel into the principal.

Page 1791

Nothing came of this adventure for some time. Wilfrid's reflections (apart from the horrible hard truth of Vittoria's marriage, against which he dashed his heart perpetually, almost asking for anguish) had leisure to examine the singularity of his feeling a commencement of pride in the clasping of his musket;—he who on the first day of his degradation had planned schemes to stick the bayonet-point between his breast-bones: he thought as well of the queer woman's way in Countess Medole's adjuration to him that he should never love a married woman;—in her speaking, as it seemed, on his behalf, when it was but an outcry of her own acute wound. Did he love a married woman? He wanted to see one married woman for the last time; to throw a frightful look on her; to be sublime in scorn of her; perhaps to love her all the better for the cruel pain, in the expectation of being consoled. While doing duty as a military machine, these were the pictures in his mind; and so well did his routine drudgery enable him to bear them, that when he heard from General Schoneck that the term of his degradation was to continue in Italy, and from his sister that General Pierson refused to speak of him or hear of him until he had regained his gold shoulder-strap, he revolted her with an ejaculation of gladness, and swore brutally that he desired to have no advancement; nothing but sleep and drill; and, he added conscientiously, Havannah cigars. "He has grown to be like a common soldier," Adela said to herself with an amazed contemplation of the family tie. Still, she worked on his behalf, having, as every woman has, too strong an instinct as to what is natural to us to believe completely in any eccentric assertion. She carried the tale of his grief and trials and his romantic devotion to the Imperial flag, daily to Countess Lena; persisting, though she could not win a responsive look from Lena's face.

One day on the review-ground, Wilfrid beheld Prince Radocky bending from his saddle in conversation with Weisspriess. The prince galloped up to General Pierson, and stretched his hand to where Wilfrid was posted as marker to a wheeling column, kept the hand stretched out, and spoke furiously, and followed the General till he was ordered to head his regiment. Wilfrid began to hug his musket less desperately. Little presents—feminine he knew by the perfumes floating round them,—gloves and cigars, fine handkerchiefs, and silks for wear, came to his barracks. He pretended to accuse his sister of sending them. She in honest delight accused Lena. Lena then accused herself of not having done so.

It was winter: Vittoria had been seen in Milan. Both Lena and Wilfrid spontaneously guessed her to be the guilty one. He made a funeral pyre of the gifts and gave his sister the ashes, supposing that she had guessed with the same spirited intuition. It suited Adela to relate this lover's performance to Lena. "He did well!" Lena said, and kissed Adela for the first time. Adela was

Page 1792

the bearer of friendly messages to the poor private in the ranks. From her and from little Jenna, Wilfrid heard that he was unforgotten by Countess Lena, and new hopes mingled with gratitude caused him to regard his situation seriously. He confessed to his sister that the filthy fellows, his comrades, were all but too much for him, and asked her to kiss him, that he might feel he was not one of them. But he would not send a message in reply to Lena. “That is also well!” Lena said. Her brother Karl was a favourite with General Pierson. She proposed that Adela and herself should go to Count Karl, and urge him to use his influence with the General. This, however, Adela was disinclined to do; she could not apparently say why. When Lena went to him, she was astonished to hear that he knew every stage of her advance up to the point of pardoning her erratic lover; and even knew as much as that Wilfrid’s dejected countenance on the night when Vittoria’s marriage was published in the saloon of the duchess on Lake Como, had given her fresh offence. He told her that many powerful advocates were doing their best for the down-fallen officer, who, if he were shot, or killed, would still be gazetted an officer. “A nice comfort!” said Lena, and there was a rallying exchange of banter between them, out of which she drew the curious discovery that Karl had one of his strong admirations for the English lady. “Surely!” she said to herself; “I thought they were all so cold.” And cold enough the English lady seemed when Lena led to the theme. “Do I admire your brother, Countess Lena? Oh! yes;—in his uniform exceedingly.”

Milan was now full. Wilfrid had heard from Adela that Count Ammiani and his bride were in the city and were strictly watched. Why did not conspirators like these two take advantage of the amnesty? Why were they not in Rome? Their Chief was in Rome; their friends were in Rome. Why were they here? A report, coming from Countess d’Isorella, said that they had quarrelled with their friends, and were living for love alone. As she visited the Lenkensteins—high Austrians—some believed her; and as Count Ammiani and his bride had visited the Duchess of Graatli, it was thought possible. Adela had refused to see Vittoria; she did not even know the house where Count Ammiani dwelt; so Wilfrid was reduced to find it for himself. Every hour when off duty the miserable sentimentalist wandered in that direction, nursing the pangs of a delicious tragedy of emotions; he was like a drunkard going to his draught. As soon as he had reached the head of the Corso, he wheeled and marched away from it with a lofty head, internally grinning at his abject folly, and marvelling at the stiff figure of an Austrian common soldier which flashed by the windows as he passed. He who can unite prudence and madness, sagacity and stupidity, is the true buffoon; nor, vindictive as were his sensations, was Wilfrid unaware of the contrast of Vittoria’s soul to his own, that was now made up of antics. He could not endure the tones of cathedral music; but he had at times to kneel and listen to it, and be overcome.

Page 1793

On a night in the month of February, a servant out of livery addressed him at the barrack-gates, requesting him to go at once to a certain hotel, where his sister was staying. He went, and found there, not his sister, but Countess Medole. She smiled at his confusion. Both she and the prince, she said, had spared no effort to get him reinstated in his rank; but his uncle continually opposed the endeavours of all his friends to serve him. This interview was dictated by the prince's wish, so that he might know them to be a not ungrateful couple. Wilfrid's embarrassment in standing before a lady in private soldier's uniform, enabled him with very peculiar dignity to declare that his present degradation, from the General's point of view, was a just punishment, and he did not crave to have it abated. She remarked that it must end soon. He made a dim allusion to the littleness of humanity. She laughed. "It's the language of an unfortunate lover," she said, and straightway, in some undistinguished sentence, brought the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani tingling to his ears. She feared that she could not be of service to him there; "at least, not just yet," the lady astonished him by remarking. "I might help you to see her. If you take my advice you will wait patiently. You know us well enough to understand what patience will do. She is supposed to have married for love. Whether she did or not, you must allow a young married woman two years' grace."

The effect of speech like this, and more in a similar strain of frank corruptness, was to cleanse Wilfrid's mind, and nerve his heart, and he denied that he had any desire to meet the Countess Ammiani, unless he could perform a service that would be agreeable to her.

The lady shrugged. "Well, that is one way. She has enemies, of course."

Wilfrid begged for their names.

"Who are they not?" she replied. "Chiefly women, it is true."

He begged most earnestly for their names; he would have pleaded eloquently, but dreaded that the intonation of one in his low garb might be taken for a whine; yet he ventured to say that if the countess did imagine herself indebted to him in a small degree, the mention of two or three of the names of Countess Alessandra Ammiani's enemies would satisfy him.

"Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, Countess Violetta d'Isorella, signorina Irma di Karski."

She spoke the names out like a sum that she was paying down in gold pieces, and immediately rang the bell for her servant and carriage, as if she had now acquitted her debt. Wilfrid bowed himself forth. A resolution of the best kind, quite unconnected with his interests or his love, urged him on straight to the house of the Lenkensteins, where he sent up his name to Countess Lena. After a delay of many minutes, Count

Lenkenstein accompanied by General Pierson came down, both evidently affecting not to see him. The General barely acknowledged his salute.

Page 1794

“Hey! Kinsky!” the count turned in the doorway to address him by the title of his regiment; “here; show me the house inhabited by the Countess d’Isorella during the revolt.”

Wilfrid followed them to the end of the street, pointing his finger to the house, and saluted.

“An Englishman did me the favour—from pure eccentricity, of course—to save my life on that exact spot, General,” said the count. “Your countrymen usually take the other side; therefore I mention it.”

As Wilfrid was directing his steps to barracks (the little stir to his pride superinduced by these remarks having demoralized him), Count Lenkenstein shouted: “Are you off duty?” Wilfrid had nearly replied that he was, but just mastered himself in time. “No, indeed!” said the count, “when you have sent up your name to a lady.” This time General Pierson put two fingers formally to his cap, and smiled grimly at the private’s rigid figure of attention. If Wilfrid’s form of pride had consented to let him take delight in the fact, he would have seen at once that prosperity was ready to shine on him. He nursed the vexations much too tenderly to give prosperity a welcome; and even when along with Lena, and convinced of her attachment, and glad of it, he persisted in driving at the subject which had brought him to her house; so that the veil of opening commonplaces, pleasant to a couple in their position, was plucked aside. His business was to ask her why she was the enemy of Countess Alessandra Ammiani, and to entreat her that she should not seek to harm that lady. He put it in a set speech. Lena felt that it ought to have come last, not in advance of their reconciliation. “I will answer you,” she said. “I am not the Countess Alessandra Ammiani’s enemy.”

He asked her: “Could you be her friend?”

“Does a woman who has a husband want a friend?”

“I could reply, countess, in the case of a man who has a bride.”

By dint of a sweet suggestion here and there, love-making crossed the topic. It appeared that General Pierson had finally been attacked, on the question of his resistance to every endeavour to restore Wilfrid to his rank, by Count Lenkenstein, and had barely spoken the words—that if Wilfrid came to Countess Lena of his own free-will, unprompted, to beg her forgiveness, he would help to reinstate him, when Wilfrid’s name was brought up by the chasseur. All had laughed, “Even I,” Lena confessed. And then the couple had a pleasant petitish wrangle;—he was requested to avow that he had came solely, or principally, to beg forgiveness of her, who had such heaps to forgive. No; on his honour, he had come for the purpose previously stated, and on the spur of his hearing that she was Countess Alessandra Ammiani’s deadly enemy. “Could

you believe that I was?” said Lena; “why should I be?” and he coloured like a lad, which sign of an ingenuousness supposed to belong to her set, made Lena bold to take

Page 1795

the upper hand. She frankly accused herself of jealousy, though she did not say of whom. She almost admitted that when the time for reflection came, she should rejoice at his having sought her to plead for his friend rather than for her forgiveness. In the end, but with a drooping pause of her bright swift look at Wilfrid, she promised to assist him in defeating any machinations against Vittoria's happiness, and to keep him informed of Countess d'Isorella's movements. Wilfrid noticed the withdrawing fire of the look. "By heaven! she doubts me still," he ejaculated inwardly.

These half-comic little people have their place in the history of higher natures and darker destinies. Wilfrid met Pericles, from whom he heard that Vittoria, with her husband's consent, had pledged herself to sing publicly. "It is for ze Lombard widows," Pericles apologized on her behalf; "but, do you see, I only want a beginning. She thaerst for ze stage; and it is, after marriage, a good sign. Oh! you shall hear, my friend; marriage have done her no hurt—ze contrary! You shall hear Hymen—Cupids—not a cold machine; it is an organ alaif! She has privily sung to her Pericles, and ser, and if I wake not very late on Judgement. Day, I shall zen hear—but why should I talk poetry to you, to make you laugh? I have a divin' passion for zat woman. Do I not give her to a husband, and say, Be happy! onnly sing! Be kissed! be hugged! onnly give Pericles your voice. By Saint Alexandre! it is to say to ze heavens, Move on your way, so long as you drop rain on us r—you smile—you look kind."

Pericles accompanied him into a caffe, the picture of an enamoured happy man. He waived aside contemptuously all mention of Vittoria's having enemies. She had them when, as a virgin, she had no sense. As a woman, she had none, for she now had sense. Had she not brought her husband to be sensible, so that they moved together in Milanese society, instead of stupidly fighting at Rome? so that what he could not take to himself—the marvellous voice—he let bless the multitude! "She is the Beethoven of singers," Pericles concluded. Wilfrid thought so on the night when she sang to succour the Lombard widows. It was at a concert, richly thronged; ostentatiously thronged with Austrian uniforms. He fancied that he could not bear to look on her. He left the house thinking that to hear her and see her and feel that she was one upon the earth, made life less of a burden.

This evening was rendered remarkable by a man's calling out, "You are a traitress!" while Vittoria stood before the seats. She became pale, and her eyelids closed. No thinness was subsequently heard in her voice. The man was caught as he strove to burst through the crowd at the entrance-door, and proved to be a petty bookseller of Milan, by name Sarpo, known as an orderly citizen. When taken he was inflamed with liquor. Next day the man was handed from the civil to the military authorities,

Page 1796

he having confessed to the existence of a plot in the city. Pericles came fuming to Wilfrid's quarters. Wilfrid gathered from him that Sarpo's general confession had been retracted: it was too foolish to snare the credulity of Austrian officials. Sarpo stated that he had fabricated the story of a plot, in order to escape the persecutions of a terrible man, and find safety in prison lodgings vender Government. The short confinement for a civic offence was not his idea of safety; he desired to be sheltered by Austrian soldiers and a fortress, and said that his torments were insupportable while Barto Rizzo was at large. This infamous Republican had latterly been living in his house, eating his bread, and threatening death to him unless he obeyed every command. Sarpo had undertaken his last mission for the purpose of supplying his lack of resolution to release himself from his horrible servitude by any other means; not from personal animosity toward the Countess Alessandra Ammiani, known as la Vittoria. When seized, fear had urged him to escape. Such was his second story. The points seemed irreconcilable to those who were not in the habit of taking human nature into their calculations of a possible course of conduct; even Wilfrid, though he was aware that Barto Rizzo hated Vittoria inveterately, imagined Sarpo's first lie to have necessarily fathered a second. But the second story was true: and the something like lover's wrath with which the outrage to Vittoria fired Pericles, prompted him to act on it as truth. He told Wilfrid that he should summon Barto Rizzo to his presence. As the Government was unable to exhibit so much power, Wilfrid looked sarcastic; whereupon Pericles threw up his chin crying: "Oh! you shall know my resources. Now, my friend, one bit of paper, and a messenger, and zen home to my house, to Tokay and cigarettes, and wait to see." He remarked after pencilling a few lines, "Countess d'Isorella is her enemy? hein!"

"Why, you wouldn't listen to me when I told you," said Wilfrid.

"No," Pericles replied while writing and humming over his pencil; "my ear is a pelican-pouch, my friend; it—and Irma is her enemy also?—it takes and keeps, but does not swallow till it wants. I shall hear you, and I shall hear my Sandra Vittoria, and I shall not know you have spoken, when by-and-by I tinkle, tinkle, a bell of my brain, and your word walks in,—'quite well?'—'very well! '—sit down'—'if it is ze same to you, I prefer to stand'—'good; zen I examine you.' My motto:—'Time opens ze gates: my system: 'it is your doctor of regiment's system when your twelve, fifteen, forty recruits strip to him:—-'Ah! you, my man, have varicose vein: no soldier in our regiment, you!' So on. Perhaps I am not intelligible; but, hear zis. I speak not often of my money; but I say—it is in your ear—a man of millions, he is a king!" The Greek jumped up and folded a couple of notes. "I will not have her disturbed. Let her

Page 1797

sing now and awhile to Pericles and his public: and to ze Londoners, wiz your permission, Count Ammiani, one saison. I ask no more, and I am satisfied, and I endow your oldest child, signor Conte—it is said! For its mama was a good girl, a brave girl; she troubled Pericles, because he is an intellect; but he forgives when he sees sincerity —rare zing! Sincerity and genius: it may be zey are as man and wife in a bosom. He forgives; it is not onnly voice he craves, but a soul, and Sandra, your countess, she has a soul—I am not a Turk. I say, it is a woman in whom a girl I did see a soul! A woman when she is married, she is part of ze man; but a soul, it is for ever alone, apart, confounded wiz nobody! For it I followed Sandra, your countess. It was a sublime devotion of a dog. Her voice tsrilled, her soul possessed me, Your countess is my Sandra still. I shall be pleased if child-bearing trouble her not more zan a very little; but, enfin! she is married, and you and I, my friend Wilfrid, we must accept ze decree, and say, no harm to her out of ze way of nature, by Saint Nicolas! or any what saint you choose for your invocation. Come along. And speed my letters by one of your militaires at once off. Are Pericles' millions gold of bad mint? If so, he is an incapable. He presumes it is not so. Come along; we will drink to her in essence of Tokay. You shall witness two scenes. Away!"

Wilfrid was barely to be roused from his fit of brooding into which Pericles had thrown him. He sent the letters, and begged to be left to sleep. The image of Vittoria seen through this man's mind was new, and brought a new round of torments. "The devil take you," he cried when Pericles plucked at his arm, "I've sent the letters; isn't that enough?" He was bitterly jealous of the Greek's philosophic review of the conditions of Vittoria's marriage; for when he had come away from the concert, not a thought of her being a wife had clouded his resignation to the fact. He went with Pericles, nevertheless, and was compelled to acknowledge the kindling powers of the essence of Tokay. "Where do you get this stuff?" he asked several times. Pericles chattered of England, and Hagar's 'Addio,' and 'Camilla.' What cabinet operas would he not give! What entertainments! Could an emperor offer such festivities to his subjects? Was a Field Review equal to Vittoria's voice? He stung Wilfrid's ears by insisting on the mellowed depth, the soft human warmth, which marriage had lent to the voice. At a late hour his valet announced Countess d'Isorella. "Did I not say so?" cried Pericles, and corrected himself: "No, I did not say so; it was a surprise to you, my friend. You shall see; you shall hear. Now you shall see what a friend Pericles can be when a person satisfy him." He pushed Wilfrid into his dressing-room, and immediately received the countess with an outburst of brutal invectives—pulling her up and down the ranked regiment of her misdeeds,

Page 1798

as it were. She tried dignity, tried anger, she affected amazement, she petitioned for the heads of his accusations, and, as nothing stopped him, she turned to go. Pericles laughed when she had left the room. Irma di Karski was announced the next minute, and Countess d'Isorella re-appeared beside her. Irma had a similar greeting. "I am lost," she exclaimed. "Yes, you are lost," said Pericles; "a word from me, and the back of the public is humped at you—ha! contessa, you touched Mdlle. Irma's hand? She is to be on her guard, and never to think she is lost till down she goes? You are a more experienced woman! I tell you I will have no nonsense. I am Countess Alessandra Ammiani's friend. You two, you women, are her enemies. I will ruin you both. You would prevent her singing in public places—you, Countess d'Isorella, because you do not forgive her marriage to Count Ammiani; you, Irma, to spite her for her voice. You would hiss her out of hearing, you two miserable creatures. Not another soldo for you! Not one! and to-morrow, countess, I will see my lawyer. Irma, begone, and shriek to your wardrobe! Countess d'Isorella, I have the extreme honour."

Wilfrid marvelled to hear this titled and lovely woman speaking almost in tones of humility in reply to such outrageous insolence. She craved a private interview. Irma was temporarily expelled, and then Violetta stooped to ask what the Greek's reason for his behaviour could be. She admitted that it was in his power to ruin her, as far as money went. "Perhaps a little farther," said Pericles; "say two steps. If one is on a precipice, two steps count for something." But, what had she done? Pericles refused to declare it. This set her guessing with a charming naivete. Pericles called Irma back to assist her in the task, and quitted them that they might consult together and hit upon the right thing. His object was to send his valet for Luigi Saracco. He had seen that no truth could be extracted from these women, save forcibly. Unaware that he had gone out, Wilfrid listened long enough to hear Irma say, between sobs: "Oh! I shall throw myself upon his mercy. Oh, Countess d'Isorella, why did you lead me to think of vengeance! I am lost! He knows everything. Oh, what is it to me whether she lives with her husband! Let them go on plotting. I am not the Government. I am sure I don't much dislike her. Yes, I hate her, but why should I hurt myself? She will wear those jewels on her forehead; she will wear that necklace with the big amethysts, and pretend she's humble because she doesn't carry earrings, when her ears have never been pierced! I am lost! Yes, you may say, lookup! I am only a poor singer, and he can ruin me. Oh! Countess d'Isorella, oh! what a fearful punishment. If Countess Anna should betray Count Ammiani to-night, nothing, nothing, will save me. I will confess. Let us both be beforehand with her—or you, it does not matter for a noble lady."

Page 1799

“Hush!” said Violetta. “What dreadful fool is this I sit with? You may have done what you think of doing already.”

She walked to the staircase door, and to that of the suite. An honourable sentiment, conjoined to the knowledge that he had heard sufficient, induced Wilfrid to pass on into the sleeping apartment a moment or so before Violetta took this precaution. The potent liquor of Pericles had deprived him of consecutive ideas; he sat nursing a thunder in his head, imagining it to be profound thought, till Pericles flung the door open. Violetta and Irma had departed. “Behold! I have it; ze address of your rogue Barto Rizzo,” said Pericles, in the manner of one whose triumph is absolutely due to his own shrewdness. “Are two women a match for me? Now, my friend, you shall see. Barto Rizzo is too clever for zis government, which cannot catch him. I catch him, and I teach him he may touch politics—it is not for him to touch Art. What! to hound men to interrupt her while she sings in public places? What next! But I knew my Countess d’Isorella could help me, and so I sent for her to confront Irma, and dare to say she knew not Barto’s dwelling—and why? I will tell you a secret. A long-flattered woman, my friend, she has had, you will think, enough of it; no! she is like avarice. If it is worship of swine, she cannot refuse it. Barto Rizzo worships her; so it is a deduction—she knows his abode—I act upon that, and I arrive at my end. I now send him to ze devil.”

Barto Rizzo, after having evaded the polizia of the city during a three months’ steady chase, was effectually captured on the doorstep of Vittoria’s house in the Corso Francesco, by gendarmes whom Pericles had set on his track. A day later Vittoria was stabbed at about the same hour, on the same spot. A woman dealt the blow. Vittoria was returning from an afternoon drive with Laura Piaveni and the children. She saw a woman seated on the steps as beggarwomen sit, face in lap. Anxious to shield her from the lacquey, she sent the two little ones up to her with small bits of money. But, as the woman would not lift her head, she and Laura prepared to pass her, Laura coming last. The blow, like all such unexpected incidents, had the effect of lightning on those present; the woman might have escaped, but after she had struck she sat down impassive as a cat by the hearth, with a round-eyed stare.

The news that Vittoria had been assassinated traversed the city. Carlo was in Turin, Merthyr in Rome. Pericles was one of the first who reached the house; he was coming out when Wilfrid and the Duchess of Graatli drove up; and he accused the Countess d’Isorella flatly of having instigated the murder. He was frantic. They supposed that she must have succumbed to the wound. The duchess sent for Laura. There was a press of carriages and soft-humming people in the street; many women and men sobbing. Wilfrid had to wait an hour for the duchess, who brought comfort when she came. Her first words were reassuring. “Ah!” she said, “did I not do well to make you drive here with me instead of with Lena? Those eyes of yours would be unpardonable to her. Yes, indeed; though a corpse were lying in this house; but Countess Alessandra is safe. I have seen her. I have held her hand.”

Page 1800

Wilfrid kissed the duchess's hand passionately.

What she had said of Lena was true: Lena could only be generous upon the after-thought; and when the duchess drove Wilfrid back to her, he had to submit to hear scorn: and indignation against all Italians, who were denounced as cut-throats, and worse and worse and worse, males and females alike. This way grounded on her sympathy for Vittoria. But Wilfrid now felt toward the Italians through his remembrance of that devoted soul's love of them, and with one direct look he bade his betrothed good-bye, and they parted.

It was in the early days of March that Merthyr, then among the Republicans of Rome, heard from Laura Piaveni. Two letters reached him, one telling of the attempted assassination, and a second explaining circumstances connected with it. The first summoned him to Milan; the other left it to his option to make the journey. He started, carrying kind messages from the Chief to Vittoria, and from Luciano Ramara the offer of a renewal of old friendship to Count Ammiani. His political object was to persuade the Lombard youth to turn their whole strength upon Rome. The desire of his heart was again to see her, who had been so nearly lost to all eyes for ever.

Laura's first letter stated brief facts. "She was stabbed this afternoon, at half-past two, on the steps of her house, by a woman called the wife of Barto Rizzo. She caught her hands up under her throat when she saw the dagger. Her right arm was penetrated just above the wrist, and half-an-inch in the left breast, close to the centre bone. She behaved firmly. The assassin only struck once. No visible danger; but you should come, if you have no serious work."

"Happily," ran the subsequent letter, of two days' later date, "the assassin was a woman, and one effort exhausts a woman; she struck only once, and became idiotic. Sandra has no fever. She had her wits ready—where were mine?—when she received the wound. While I had her in my arms, she gave orders that the woman should be driven out of the city in her carriage. The Greek, her mad musical adorer, accuses Countess d'Isorella. Carlo has seen this person—returns convinced of her innocence. That is not an accepted proof; but we have one. It seems that Rizzo (Sandra was secret about it and about one or two other things) sent to her commanding her to appoint an hour detestable style! I can see it now; I fear these conspiracies no longer:—she did appoint an hour; and was awaiting him when the gendarmes sprang on the man at her door.

He had evaded them several weeks, so we are to fancy that his wife charged Countess Alessandra with the betrayal. This appears a reasonable and simple way of accounting for the deed. So I only partly give credit to it. But it may be true.

Page 1801

“The wound has not produced a shock to her system—very, very fortunately. On the whole, a better thing could not have happened. Should I be more explicit? Yes, to you; for you are not of those who see too much in what is barely said. The wound, then, my dear good friend, has healed another wound, of which I knew nothing. Bergamasc and Brescian friends of her husband’s, have imagined that she interrupted or diverted his studies. He also discovered that she had an opinion of her own, and sometimes he consulted it; but alas! they are lovers, and he knew not when love listened, or she when love spoke; and there was grave business to be done meanwhile. Can you kindly allow that the case was open to a little confusion? I know that you will. He had to hear many violent reproaches from his fellow-students. These have ceased. I send this letter on the chance of the first being lost on the road; and it will supplement the first pleasantly to you in any event. She lies here in the room where I write, propped on high pillows, the right arm bound up, and says: ’Tell Merthyr I prayed to be in Rome with my husband, and him, and the Chief. Tell him I love my friend. Tell him I think he deserves to be in Rome. Tell him—’ Enter Countess Ammiani to reprove her for endangering the hopes of the house by fatiguing herself. Sandra sends a blush at me, and I smile, and the countess kisses her. I send you a literal transcript of one short scene, so that you may feel at home with us.

“There is a place called Venice, and there is a place called Rome, and both places are pretty places and famous places; and there is a thing called the fashion; and these pretty places and famous places set the fashion: and there is a place called Milan, and a place called Bergamo, and a place called Brescia, and they all want to follow the fashion, for they are giddy-pated baggages. What is the fashion, mama? The fashion, my dear, is &c. &c. &c.:—Extract of lecture to my little daughter, Amalia, who says she forgets you; but Giacomo sends his manly love. Oh, good God! should I have blood in my lips when I kissed him, if I knew that he was old enough to go out with a sword in his hand a week hence? I seem every day to be growing more and more all mother. This month in front of us is full of thunder. Addio!”

When Merthyr stood in sight of Milan an army was issuing from the gates.

CHAPTER XLI

THE INTERVIEW

Merthyr saw Laura first. He thought that Vittoria must be lying on her couch: but Laura simply figured her arm in a sling, and signified, more than said, that Vittoria was well and taking the air. She then begged hungrily for news of Rome, and again of Rome, and sat with her hands clasped in her lap to listen. She mentioned Venice in a short breath of praise, as if her spirit could not repose there. Rome, its hospitals, its municipal arrangements, the

Page 1802

names of the triumvirs, the prospects of the city, the edicts, the aspects of the streets, the popularity of the Government, the number of volunteers ranked under the magical Republic—of these things Merthyr talked, at her continual instigation, till, stopping abruptly, he asked her if she wished to divert him from any painful subject. "No, no!" she cried, "it's only that I want to feel an anchor. We are all adrift. Sandra is in perfect health. Our bodies, dear Merthyr, are enjoying the perfection of comfort. Nothing is done here except to keep us from boiling over."

"Why does not Count Ammiani come to Rome?" said Merthyr.

"Why are we not all in Rome? Yes, why! why! We should make a carnival of our own if we were."

"She would have escaped that horrible knife," Merthyr sighed.

"Yes, she would have escaped that horrible knife. But see the difference between Milan and Rome, my friend! It was a blessed knife here. It has given her husband back to her; it has destroyed the intrigues against her. It seems to have been sent—I was kneeling in the cathedral this morning, and had the very image crossing my eyes—from the saints of heaven to cut the black knot. Perhaps it may be the means of sending us to Rome."

Laura paused, and, looking at him, said, "It is so utterly impossible for us women to comprehend love without folly in a man; the trait by which we recognize it! Merthyr, you dear Englishman, you shall know everything. Do we not think a tisane a weak washy drink, when we are strong? But we learn, when we lie with our chins up, and our ten toes like stopped organ-pipes—as Sandra says—we learn then that it means fresh health and activity, and is better than rivers of your fiery wines. You love her, do you not?"

The question came with great simplicity.

"If I can give a proof of it, I am ready to answer," said Merthyr, in some surprise.

"Your whole life is the proof of it. The women of your country are intolerable to me, Merthyr: but I do see the worth of the men. Sandra has taught me. She can think of you, talk of you, kiss the vision of you, and still be a faithful woman in our bondage of flesh; and to us you know what a bondage it is: How can that be? I should have asked, if I had not seen it. Dearest, she loves her husband, and she loves you. She has two husbands, and she turns to the husband of her spirit when that, or any, dagger strikes her bosom. Carlo has an unripe mind. They have been married but a little more than four months; and he reveres her and loves her." . . . . Laura's voice dragged. "Multiply the months by thousands, we shall not make those two lives one. It is the curse of man's education in Italy? He can see that she has wits and courage. He will not

consent to make use of them. You know her: she is not one to talk of these things. She, who has both heart and judgement—she is merely a little boat tied to a big ship. Such is their marriage. She cannot influence him. She is not allowed to advise him. And she is the one who should lead the way. And—if she did, we should now be within sight of the City."

Page 1803

Laura took his hand. She found it moist, though his face was calm and his chest heaved regularly. An impish form of the pity women feel for us at times moved her to say, “Your skin is as bronzed as it was last year. Sandra spoke of it. She compared it to a young vine-leaf. I wonder whether girls have really an admonition of what is good for them while they are going their ways like destined machines?”

“Almost all men are of flesh and blood,” said Merthyr softly.

“I spoke of girls.”

“I speak of men.”

“Blunt—witted that I am! Of course you did. But do not imagine that she is not happy with her husband. They are united firmly.”

“The better for her, and him, and me,” said Merthyr.

Laura twisted an end of her scarf with fretful fingers. “Carlo Albert has crossed the Ticino?”

“Is about to do so,” Merthyr rejoined.

“Will Rome hold on if he is defeated?”

“Rome has nothing to fear on that side.”

“But you do not speak hopefully of Rome.”

“I suppose I am thinking of other matters.”

“You confess it!”

The random conversation wearied him. His foot tapped the floor.

“Why do you say that?” he asked.

“Verily, for no other reason than that I have a wicked curiosity, and that you come from Rome,” said Laura, now perfectly frank, and believing that she had explained her enigmatical talk, if she had not furnished an excuse for it. Merthyr came from the City which was now encircled by an irradiating halo in her imagination, and a fit of spontaneous inexplicable feminine tenderness being upon her at the moment of their meeting, she found herself on a sudden prompted to touch and probe and brood voluptuously over an unfortunate lover’s feelings, supposing that they existed. For the glory of Rome was on him, and she was at the same time angry with Carlo Ammiani. It

was the form of passion her dedicated widowhood could still be subject to in its youth; the sole one. By this chance Merthyr learnt what nothing else would have told him.

Her tale of the attempted assassination was related with palpable indifference. She stated the facts. “The woman seemed to gasp while she had her hand up; she struck with no force; and she has since been inanimate, I hear. The doctor says that a spasm of the heart seized her when she was about to strike. It has been shaken—I am not sure that he does not say displaced, or unseated—by some one of her black tempers. She shot Rinaldo Guidascarpi dead. Perhaps it was that. I am informed that she worshipped the poor boy, and has been like a trapped she-wolf since she did it. In some way she associated our darling with Rinaldo’s death, like the brute she is. The ostensible ground for her futile bit of devilishness was that she fancied Sandra to have betrayed Barto Rizzo, her husband, into the hands of the polizia. He wrote to the Countess Alessandra—such a letter!—a

Page 1804

curiosity!—he must see her and cross-examine her to satisfy himself that she was a true patriot, &c. You know the style: we neither of us like it. Sandra was waiting to receive him when they pounced on him by the door. Next day the woman struck at her. Decidedly a handsome woman. She is the exact contrast to the Countess Violetta in face, in everything. Heart-disease will certainly never affect that pretty spy! But, mark," pursued Laura, warming, "when Carlo arrived, tears, penitence, heaps of self-accusations: he had been unkind to her even on Lake Orta, where they passed their golden month; he had neglected her at Turin; he had spoken angry words in Milan; in fact, he had misused his treasure, and begged pardon;—'If you please, my poor bleeding angel, I am sorry. But do not, I entreat, distract me with petitions of any sort, though I will perform anything earthly to satisfy you. Be a good little boat in the wake of the big ship. I will look over at you, and chirrup now and then to you, my dearest, when I am not engaged in piloting extraordinary.'—Very well; I do not mean to sneer at the unhappy boy, Merthyr; I love him; he was my husband's brother in arms; the sweetest lad ever seen. He is in the season of faults. He must command; he must be a chief; he fancies he can intrigue poor thing! It will pass. And so will the hour to be forward to Rome. But I call your attention to this: when he heard of the dagger—I have it from Colonel Corte, who was with him at the time in Turin—he cried out Violetta d'Isorella's name. Why? After he had buried his head an hour on Sandra's pillow, he went straight to Countess d'Isorella, and was absent till night. The woman is hideous to me. No; don't conceive that I think her Sandra's rival. She is too jealous. She has him in some web. If she has not ruined him, she will. She was under my eyes the night she heard of his marriage: I saw how she will look at seventy! Here is Carlo at the head of a plot she has prepared for him; and he has Angelo Guidascarpi, and Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and about fifty others. They have all been kept away from Rome by that detestable ----- you object to hear bad names cast on women, Merthyr. Hear Agostino! The poor old man comes daily to this house to persuade Carlo to lead his band to Rome. It is so clearly Rome—Rome, where all his comrades are; where the chief stand must be made by the side of Italy's Chief. Worst sign of all, it has been hinted semi-officially to Carlo that he may upon application be permitted to re-issue his journal. Does not that show that the Government wishes to blindfold him, and keep him here, and knows his plans?"

Laura started up as the door opened, and Vittoria appeared leaning upon Carlo's arm. Countess Ammiani, Countess d'Isorella, and Pericles were behind them. Laura's children followed.

When Merthyr rose, Vittoria was smiling in Carlo's face at something that had been spoken. She was pale, and her arm was in a sling, but there was no appearance of her being unnerved. Merthyr waited for her recognition of him. She turned her eyes from Carlo slowly. The soft dull smile in them died out as it were with a throb, and then her head drooped on one shoulder, and she sank to the floor.

Page 1805

CHAPTER XLII

THE SHADOW ON CONSPIRACY

Merthyr left the house at Laura's whispered suggestion. He was agitated beyond control, for Vittoria had fallen with her eyes fixed on him; and at times the picture of his beloved, her husband, and Countess Ammiani, and the children bending over her still body, swam before him like a dark altar-piece floating in incense, so lost was he to the reality of that scene. He did not hear Beppo, his old servant, at his heels. After a while he walked calmly, and Beppo came up beside him. Merthyr shook his hand.

"Ah, signor Mertyrio! ah, padrone!" said Beppo.

Merthyr directed his observation to a regiment of Austrians marching down the Corso Venezia to the Ticinese gate.

"Yes, they are ready enough for us," Beppo remarked. "Perhaps Carlo Alberto will beat them this time. If he does, viva to him! If they beat him, down goes another Venetian pyramid. The Countess Alessandra—" Beppo's speech failed.

"What of your mistress?" said Merthyr.

"When she dies, my dear master, there's no one for me but the Madonna to serve."

"Why should she die, silly fellow?"

"Because she never cries."

Merthyr was on the point of saying, "Why should she cry?" His heart was too full, and he shrank from inquisitive shadows of the thing known to him.

"Sit down at this caffe with me," he said. It's fine weather for March. The troops will camp comfortably. Those Hungarians never require tents. Did you see much sacking of villages last year?"

"Padrone, the Imperial command is always to spare the villages."

"That's humane."

"Padrone, yes; if policy is humanity."

"It's humanity not carried quite as far as we should wish it."

Beppo shrugged and said: "It won't leave much upon the conscience if we kill them."

“Do you expect a rising?” said Merthyr.

“If the Ticino overflows, it will flood Milan,” was the answer.

“And your occupation now is to watch the height of the water?”

“My occupation, padrone? I am not on the watch-tower.” Beppo winked, adding: “I have my occupation.” He threw off the effort or pretence to be discreet. “Master of my soul! this is my occupation. I drink coffee, but I do not smoke, because I have to kiss a pretty girl, who means to object to the smell of the smoke. Via! I know her! At five she draws me into the house.”

“Are you relating your amours to me, rascal?” Merthyr interposed.

“Padrone, at five precisely she draws me into the house. She is a German girl. Pardon me if I make no war on women. Her name is Aennchen, which one is able to say if one grimaces;—why not? It makes her laugh; and German girls are amiable when one can make them laugh. ’Tis so that they begin to melt. Behold the difference of races! I must kiss her to melt her, and then have a quarrel. I could have it after the first, or the fiftieth with an Italian girl; but my task will be excessively difficult with a German girl, if I am compelled to allow myself to favour her with one happy solicitation for a kiss, to commence with. We shall see. It is, as my abstention from tobacco declares, an anticipated catastrophe.”

Page 1806

“Long-worded, long-winded, obscure, affirmatizing by negatives, confessing by implication!—where’s the beginning and end of you, and what’s your meaning?” said Merthyr, who talked to him as one may talk to an Italian servant.

“The contessa, my mistress, has enemies. Padrone, I devote myself to her service.”

“By making love to a lady’s maid?”

“Padrone, a rat is not born to find his way up the grand staircase. She has enemies. One of them was the sublime Barto Rizzo—admirable—though I must hate him. He said to his wife: ’If a thing happens to me, stab to the heart the Countess Alessandra Ammiani.’”

“Inform me how you know that?” said Merthyr.

Beppo pointed to his head, and Merthyr smiled. To imagine, invent, and believe, were spontaneous with Beppo when has practical sagacity was not on the stretch. He glanced at the caffe clock.

“Padrone, at eleven to-night shall I see you here? At eleven I shall come like a charged cannon. I have business. I have seen my mistress’s blood! I will tell you: this German girl lets me know that some one detests my mistress. Who? I am off to discover. But who is the damned creature? I must coo and kiss, while my toes are dancing on hot plates, to find her out. Who is she? If she were half Milan . . .”

His hands waved in outline the remainder of the speech, and he rose, but sat again. He had caught sight of the spy, Luigi Saracco, addressing the signor Antonio-Pericles in his carriage. Pericles drove on. The horses presently turned, and he saluted Merthyr.

“She has but one friend in Milan: it is myself,” was his introductory remark. “My poor child! my dear Powys, she is the best—’I cannot sing to you to-day, dear Pericles’—she said that after she had opened her eyes; after the first mist, you know. She is the best child upon earth. I could wish she were a devil, my Powys. Such a voice should be in an iron body. But she has immense health. The doctor, who is also mine, feels her pulse. He assures me it goes as Time himself, and Time, my friend, you know, has the intention of going a great way. She is good: she is too good. She makes a baby of Pericles, to whom what is woman? Have I not the sex in my pocket? Her husband, he is a fool, ser.” Pericles broke thundering into a sentence of English, fell in love with it, and resumed in the same tongue: “I—it is I zat am her guard, her safety. Her husband—oh! she must marry a young man, little donkey zat she is! We accept it as a destiny, my Powys. And he plays false to her. Good; I do not object. But, imagine in your own mind, my Powys—instead of passion, of rage, of tempest, she is frozen wiz a repose. Do you, hein? sink it will come out,”—Pericles eyed Merthyr with a subtle smile askew,

—“I have sot so;—it will come out when she is one day in a terrible scene . . . Mon Dieu! it was a terrible scene for me when I looked on ze clout

Page 1807

zat washed ze blood of ze terrible assassination. So goes out a voice, possibly! Divine, you say? We are a machine. Now, you behold, she has faints. It may happen at my concert where she sings to-morrow night. You saw me in my carriage speaking to a man. He is my spy—my dog wiz a nose. I have set him upon a woman. If zat woman has a plot for to-morrow night to spoil my concert, she shall not know where she shall wake to-morrow morning after. Ha! here is military music—twenty sossand doors jam on horrid hinge; and right, left, right, left, to it, confound! like dolls all wiz one face. Look at your soldiers, Powys. Put zem on a stage, and you see all background people—a bawling chorus. It shows to you how superior it is—a stage to life! Hark to such music! I cannot stand it; I am driven away; I am violent; I rage."

Pericles howled the name of his place of residence, with an offer of lodgings in it, and was carried off writhing his body as he passed a fine military marching band.

The figure of old Agostino Balderini stood in front of Merthyr. They exchanged greetings. At the mention of Rome, Agostino frowned impatiently. He spoke of Vittoria in two or three short exclamations, and was about to speak of Carlo, but checked his tongue. "Judge for yourself. Come, and see, and approve, if you can. Will you come? There's a meeting; there's to be a resolution. Question—Shall we second the King of Sardinia, Piedmont, and Savoy? If so, let us set this pumpkin, called Milan, on its legs. I shall be an attentive listener like you, my friend. I speak no more."

Merthyr went with him to the house of a carpenter, where in one of the uppermost chambers communicating with the roof, Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and others, sat waiting for the arrival of Carlo Ammiani; when he came Carlo had to bear with the looks of mastiffs for being late. He shook Merthyr's hand hurriedly, and as soon as the door was fastened, began to speak. His first sentence brought a grunt of derision from Ugo Corte. It declared that there was no hope of a rising in Milan. Carlo swung round upon the Bergamasc. "Observe our leader," Agostino whispered to Merthyr; "it would be kindness to give him a duel." More than one tumult of outcries had to be stilled before Merthyr gathered any notion of the designs of the persons present. Bergamasc sneered at Brescian, and both united in contempt of the Milanese, who, having a burden on their minds, appealed at once to their individual willingness to use the sword in vindication of Milan against its traducers. By a great effort, Carlo got some self-mastery. He admitted, colouring horribly, that Brescia and Bergamo were ready, and Milan was not; therefore those noble cities (he read excerpts from letters showing their readiness) were to take the lead, and thither on the morrow-night he would go, let the tidings from the king's army be what they might.

Page 1808

Merthyr quitted the place rather impressed by his eloquence, but unfavourably by his feverish look. Countess d'Isorella had been referred to as one who served the cause ably and faithfully. In alluding to her, Carlo bit his lip; he did not proceed until surrounding murmurs of satisfaction encouraged him to continue a sort of formal eulogy of the lady, which proved to be a defence against foregone charges, for Corte retracted an accusation, and said that he had no fault to find with the countess. A proposal to join the enterprise was put to Merthyr, but his engagement with the Chief in Rome saved him from hearing much of the marvellous facilities of the plot. "I should have wished to see you to-night," Carlo said as they were parting. Merthyr named his hotel. Carlo nodded. "My wife is still slightly feeble," he said.

"I regret it," Merthyr rejoined.

"She is not ill."

"No, it cannot be want of courage," Merthyr spoke at random.

"Yes, that's true," said Carlo, as vacantly. "You will see her while I am travelling."

"I hope to find the Countess Alessandra well enough to receive me."

"Always; always," said Carlo, wishing apparently to say more. Merthyr waited an instant, but Carlo broke into a conventional smile of adieu.

"While he is travelling," Merthyr repeated to Agostino, who had stood by during the brief dialogue, and led the way to the Corso.

"He did not say how far!" was the old man's ejaculation.

"But, good heaven! if you think he's on an unfortunate errand, why don't you stop him, advise him?" Merthyr broke out.

"Advise him! stop him! my friend. I would advise him, if I had the patience of angels; stop him, if I had the power of Lucifer. Did you not see that he shunned speaking to me? I have been such a perpetual dish of vinegar under his nose for the last month, that the poor fellow sniffs when I draw near. He must go his way. He leads a torrent that must sweep him on. Corte, Sana, and the rest would be in Rome now, but for him. So should I. Your Agostino, however, is not of Bergamo, or of Brescia; he is not a madman; simply a poor rheumatic Piedmontese, who discerns the point where a united Italy may fix its standard. I would start for Rome to-morrow, if I could leave her—my soul's child!" Agostino raised his hand: "I do love the woman, Countess Alessandra Ammiani. I say, she is a peerless woman. Is she not?"

"There is none like her," said Merthyr.

“A peerless woman, recognized and sacrificed! I cannot leave her. If the Government here would lay hands on Carlo and do their worst at once, I would be off. They are too wary. I believe that they are luring him to his ruin. I can give no proofs, but I judge by the best evidence. What avails my telling him? I lose my temper the moment I begin to speak. A curst witch beguiles the handsome idiot—poor darling lad that he is! She has him—can I tell you how? She has got him—got him fast!—The nature of the chains are doubtless innocent, if those which a woman throws round us be ever distinguishable. He loves his wife—he is not a monster.”

Page 1809

“He appears desperately feverish,” said Merthyr.

“Did you not notice it? Yes, like a man pushed by his destiny out of the path. He is ashamed to hesitate; he cannot turn back. Ahead of him he sees a gulf. That army of Carlo Alberto may do something under its Pole. Prophecy is too easy. I say no more. We may have Lombardy open; and if so, my poor boy’s vanity will be crowned: he will only have the king and his army against him then.”

Discoursing in this wise, they reached the caffe where Beppo had appointed to meet his old master, and sat amid here and there a whitecoat, and many nods and whispers over such news as the privileged journals and the official gazette afforded.

Beppo’s destination was to the Duchess of Graatli’s palace. Nearing it, he perceived Luigi endeavouring to gain a passage beside the burly form of Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, who presently seized him and hurled him into the road. As Beppo was sidling up the courtway, Jacob sprang back; Luigi made a rush; Jacob caught them both, but they wriggled out of his clutch, and Luigi, being the fearfuller, ran the farthest. While he was out of hearing, Beppo told Jacob to keep watch upon Luigi, as the bearer of an amorous letter from a signor of quality to Aennchen, the which he himself desired to obtain sight of; “for the wench has caused me three sleepless nights,” he confessed frankly. Jacob affected not to understand. Luigi and Beppo now leaned against the wall on either side of him and baited him till he shook with rage.

“He is the lord of the duchess, his mistress—what a lucky fellow!” said Luigi. “When he’s dog at the gates no one can approach her. When he isn’t, you can fancy what!”—-“He’s only a mechanical contrivance; he’s not a man,” said Beppo. “He’s the principal flea-catcher of the palace,” said Luigi—“here he is all day, and at night the devil knows where he hunts.”—Luigi hopped in a half-circle round the exacerbated Jacob, and finally provoked an assault that gave an opening to Beppo. They all ran in, Luigi last. Jacob chased Beppo up the stairs, lost him, and remembered what he had said of the letter borne by Luigi, for whom he determined to lie in waiting. “Better two in there than one,” he thought. The two courted his Aennchen openly; but Luigi, as the bearer of an amorous letter from the signor of quality, who could be no other than signor Antonio-Pericles, was the one to be intercepted. Like other jealous lovers, Jacob wanted to read Aennchen’s answer, to be cured of his fatal passion for the maiden, and on this he set the entire force of his mind.

Page 1810

Running up by different staircases, Beppo and Luigi came upon Aennchen nearly at the same time. She turned a cold face on Beppo, and requested Luigi to follow her. Astonished to see him in such favour, Beppo was ready to provoke the quarrel before the kiss when she returned; but she said that she had obeyed her mistress's orders, and was obeying the duchess in refusing to speak of them, or of anything relating to them. She had promised him an interview in that little room leading into the duchess's boudoir. He pressed her to conduct him. "Ah; then it's not for me you come," she said. Beppo had calculated that the kiss would open his way to the room, and the quarrel disembarrass him of his pretty companion when there. "You have come to listen to conversation again," said Aennchen. "Ach! the fool a woman is to think that you Italians have any idea except self-interest when you, when you . . . talk nonsense to us. Go away, if you please. Good-evening." She dropped a curtsey with a surly coquetry, charming of its kind. Beppo protested that the room was dear to him because there first he had known for one blissful half-second the sweetness of her mouth.

"Who told you that persons who don't like your mistress are going to talk in there?" said Aennchen.

"You," said Beppo.

Aennchen drew up in triumph: "And now will you pretend that you didn't come up here to go in there to listen to what they say?"

Beppo clapped hands at her cleverness in trapping him. "Hush," said all her limbs and features, belying the previous formal "good-evening." He refused to be silent, thinking it a way of getting to the little antechamber. "Then, I tell you, downstairs you go," said Aennchen stiffly.

"Is it decided?" Beppo asked. "Then, good-evening. You detestable German girls can't love. One step—a smile: another step—a kiss. You tit-for-tat minx! Have you no notion of the sacredness of the sentiments which inspires me to petition that the place for our interview should be there where I tasted ecstatic joy for the space of a flash of lightning? I will go; but it is there that I will go, and I will await you there, signorina Aennchen. Yes, laugh at me! laugh at me!"

"No; really, I don't laugh at you, signor Beppo," said Aennchen, protesting in denial of what she was doing. "This way."

"No, it's that way," said Beppo.

"It's through here." She opened a door. "The duchess has a reception to-night, and you can't go round. Ach! you would not betray me?"

“Not if it were the duchess herself,” said Beppo; “he would refuse to satisfy man’s natural vanity, in such a case.”

Eager to advance to the little antechamber, he allowed Aennchen to wait behind him. He heard the door shut and a lock turn, and he was in the dark, and alone, left to take counsel of his fingers’ ends.

“She was born to it,” Beppo remarked, to extenuate his outwitted cunning, when he found each door of the room fast against him.

Page 1811

On the following night Vittoria was to sing at a concert in the Duchess of Graatli's great saloon, and the duchess had humoured Pericles by consenting to his preposterous request that his spy should have an opportunity of hearing Countess d'Isorella and Irma di Karski in private conversation together, to discover whether there was any plot of any sort to vex the evening's entertainment; as the jealous spite of those two women, Pericles said, was equal to any devilry on earth. It happened that Countess d'Isorella did not come. Luigi, in despair,—was the hearer of a quick question and answer dialogue, in the obscure German tongue, between Anna von Lenkenstein and Irma di Karski; but a happy peep between the hanging curtains gave him sight of a letter passing from Anna's hands to Irma's. Anna quitted her. Irma, was looking at the superscription of the letter, an the act of passing in her steps, when Luigi tore the curtains apart, and sprang on her arm like a cat. Before her shrieks could bring succour, Luigi was bounding across the court with the letter in his possession. A dreadful hug awaited him; his pockets were ransacked, and he was pitched aching into the street. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz went straightway under a gas-lamp, where he read the address of the letter to Countess d'Isorella. He doubted; he had a half-desire to tear the letter open. But a rumour of the attack upon Irma had spread among the domestics and Jacob prudently went up to his mistress. The duchess was sitting with Laura. She received the letter, eyed: it all over, and held it to a candle.

Laura's head was bent in dark meditation. The sudden increase of light aroused her, and she asked, "What is that?"

"A letter from Countess Anna to Countess d'Isorella," said the duchess.

"Burnt!" Laura screamed.

"It's only fair," the duchess remarked.

"From her to that woman! It may be priceless. Stop! Let me see what remains. Amalia! are you mad? Oh! you false friend. I would have sacrificed my right hand to see it."

"Try and love me still," said the duchess, letting her take one unburnt corner, and crumble the black tissuey fragments to smut in her hands.

There was no writing; the unburnt corner of the letter was a blank.

Laura fooled the wretched ashes between her palms. "Good-night," she said. "Your face will be of this colour to me, my dear, for long."

"I cannot behave disgracefully, even to keep your love, my beloved," said the duchess.

"You cannot betray a German, you mean," Laura retorted. "You could let a spy into the house."

“That was a childish matter—merely to satisfy a whim.”

“I say you could let a spy into the house. Who is to know where the scruples of you women begin? I would have given my jewels, my head, my husband’s sword, for a sight of that letter. I swear that it concerns us. Yes, us. You are a false friend. Fish-blooded creature! may it be a year before I look on you again. Hide among your miserable set!”

Page 1812

“Judge me when you are cooler, dearest,” said the duchess, seeking to detain the impetuous sister of her affection by the sweeping skirts; but Laura spurned her touch, and went from her.

Irma drove to Countess d’Isorella’s. Violetta was abed, and lay fair and placid as a Titian Venus, while Irma sputtered out her tale, with intermittent sobs. She rose upon her elbow, and planting it in her pillow, took half-a-dozen puffs of a cigarette, and then requested Irma to ring for her maid. “Do nothing till you see me again,” she said; “and take my advice: always get to bed before midnight, or you’ll have unmanageable wrinkles in a couple of years. If you had been in bed at a prudent hour to-night, this scandal would not have occurred.”

“How can I be in bed? How could I help it?” moaned Irma, replying to the abstract rule, and the perplexing illustration of its force.

Violetta dismissed her. “After all, my wish is to save my poor Amaranto,” she mused. “I am only doing now what I should have been doing in the daylight; and if I can’t stop him, the Government must; and they will. Whatever the letter contained, I can anticipate it. He knows my profession and my necessities. I must have money. Why not from the rich German woman whom he jilted?”

She attributed Anna’s apparent passion of revenge to a secret passion of unrequited love. What else was implied by her willingness to part with land and money for the key to his machinations?

Violetta would have understood a revenge directed against Angelo Guidascarpi, as the slayer of Anna’s brother. But of him Anna had only inquired once, and carelessly, whether he was in Milan. Anna’s mystical semi-patriotism—prompted by her hatred of Vittoria, hatred of Carlo as Angelo’s cousin and protector, hatred of the Italy which held the three, who never took the name Tedesco on their tongues without loathing—was perfectly hidden from this shrewd head.

Some extra patrols were in the streets. As she stepped into the carriage, a man rushed up, speaking hoarsely and inarticulately, and jumped in beside her. She had discerned Barto Rizzo in time to give directions to her footman, before she was addressed by a body of gendarmes in pursuit, whom she mystified by entreating them to enter her house and search it through, if they supposed that any evil-doer had taken advantage of the open door. They informed her that a man had escaped from the civil prison. “Poor creature!” said the countess, with womanly pity; “but you must see that he is not in my house. How could three of you let one escape?” She drove off laughing at their vehement assertion that he would not have escaped from them. Barto Rizzo made her conduct him to Countess Ammiani’s gates.

Page 1813

Violetta was frightened by his eyes when she tried to persuade him in her best coaxing manner to avoid Count Ammiani. In fact she apprehended that he would be very much in her way. She had no time for chagrin at her loss of power over him, though she was sensible of vexation. Barto folded his arms and sat with his head in his chest, silent, till they reached the' gates, when he said in French, “Madame, I am a nameless person in your train. Gabble!” he added, when the countess advised him not to enter; nor would he allow her to precede him by more than one step. Violetta sent up her name. The man had shaken her nerves. “At least, remember that your appearance should be decent,” she said, catching sight of blood on his hands, and torn garments. “I expect, madame,” he replied, “I shall not have time to wash before I am laid out. My time is short. I want tobacco. The washing can be done by-and-by, but not the smoking.”

They were ushered up to the reception-room, where Countess Ammiani, Vittoria, and Carlo sat, awaiting the visitor whose unexpected name, cast in their midst at so troubled a season, had clothed her with some of the midnight’s terrors.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE LAST MEETING IN MILAN

Barto Rizzo had silence about him without having to ask for it, when he followed Violetta into Countess Ammiani’s saloon of reception. Carlo was leaning over his mother’s chair, holding Vittoria’s wrist across it, and so enclosing her, while both young faces were raised to the bowed forehead of the countess. They stood up. Violetta broke through the formal superlatives of an Italian greeting. “Speak to me alone,” she murmured for Carlo’s ear and glancing at Barto: “Here is a madman; a mild one, I trust.” She contrived to show that she was not responsible for his intrusion. Countess Ammiani gathered Vittoria in her arms; Carlo stepped a pace before them. Terror was on the venerable lady’s face, wrath on her son’s. As he fronted Barto, he motioned a finger to the curtain hangings, and Violetta, quick at reading signs, found his bare sword there. “But you will not want it,” she remarked, handing the hilt to him, and softly eyeing the impression of her warm touch on the steel as it passed.

“Carlo, thou son of Paolo! Countess Marcellina, wife of a true patriot! stand aside, both of you. It is between the Countess Alessandra and myself,” so the man commenced, with his usual pomp of interjection. “Swords and big eyes,—are they things to stop me?” Barto laughed scornfully. He had spoken in the full roll of his voice, and the sword was hard back for the thrust.

Vittoria disengaged herself from the countess. “Speak to me,” she said, dismayed by the look of what seemed an exaltation of madness in Barto’s visage, but firm as far as the trembling of her limbs would let her be.

He dropped to her feet and kissed them.

Page 1814

“Emilia Alessandra Belloni! Vittoria! Countess Alessandra Ammiani! pity me. Hear this:—I hated you as the devil is hated. Yesterday I woke up in prison to hear that I must adore you. God of all the pits of punishment! was there ever one like this? I had to change heads.”

It was the language of a distorted mind, and lamentable to hear when a sob shattered his voice.

“Am I mad?” he asked piteously, clasping his temples.

“You are as we are, if you weep,” said Vittoria, to sooth him.

“Then I have been mad!” he cried, starting. “I knew you a wicked virgin—signora contessa, confess to me, marriage has changed you. Has it not changed you? In the name of the Father of the Saints, help me out of it:—my brain reels backwards. You were false, but marriage—It acts in this way with you women; yes, that we know—you were married, and you said, ‘Now let us be faithful.’ Did you not say that? I am forgiving, though none think it. You have only to confess. If you will not,—oh!” He smote his face, groaning.

Carlo spoke a stern word in an undertone; counselling him to be gone.

“If you will not—what was she to do?” Barto cut the question to interrogate his strayed wits. “Look at me, Countess Alessandra. I was in the prison. I heard that my Rosellina had a tight heart. She cried for her master, poor heathen, and I sprang out of the walls to her. There—there—she lay like a breathing board; a woman with a body like a coffin half alive; not an eye to show; nothing but a body and a whisper. She perished righteously, for she disobeyed. She acted without my orders: she dared to think! She will be damned, for she would have vengeance before she went. She glorified you over me—over Barto Rizzo. Oh! she shocked my soul. But she is dead, and I am her slave. Every word was of you. Take another head, Barto Rizzo your old one was mad: she said that to my soul. She died blessing you above me. I saw the last bit of life go up from her mouth blessing you. It’s heard by this time in heaven, and it’s written. Then I have had two years of madness. If she is right, I was wrong; I was a devil of hell. I know there’s an eye given to dying creatures, and she looked with it, and she said, the soul of Rinaldo Guidascarpi, her angel, was glorifying you; and she thanked the sticking of her heart, when she tried to stab you, poor fool!”

Carlo interrupted: “Now go; you have said enough.”

“No, let him speak,” said Vittoria. She supposed that Barto was going to say that he had not given the order for her assassination. “You do not wish me dead, signore?”

Page 1815

“Nothing that is not standing in my way, signora contessa,” said Barto; and his features blazed with a smile of happy self-justification. “I have killed a sentinel this night: Providence placed him there. I wish for no death, but I punish, and—ah! the cursed sight of the woman who calls me mad for two years. She thrusts a bar of iron in an engine at work, and says, Work on! work on! Were you not a traitress? Countess Alessandra, were you not once a traitress? Oh! confess it; save my head. Reflect, dear lady! it’s cruel to make a man of a saintly sincerity look back—I count the months—-seventeen months! to look back seventeen months, and see that his tongue was a clapper,—his will, his eyes, his ears, all about him, everything, stirred like a pot on the fire. I traced you. I saw your treachery. I said—I, I am her Day of Judgement. She shall look on me and perish, struck down by her own treachery. Were my senses false to me? I had lived in virtuous fidelity to my principles. None can accuse me. Why were my senses false, if my principles were true? I said you were a traitress. I saw it from the first. I had the divine contempt for women. My distrust of a woman was the eye of this brain, and I said—Follow her, dog her, find her out! I proved her false; but her devilish cunning deceived every other man in the world. Oh! let me bellow, for it’s me she proves the mass of corruption! Tomorrow I die, and if I am mad now, what sort of a curse is that?

“Now to-morrow is an hour—a laugh! But if I’ve not been shot from a true bow—if I’ve been a sham for two years—if my name, and nature, bones, brains, were all false things hunting a shadow, Countess Alessandra, see the misery of Barto Rizzo! Look at those two years, and say that I had my head. Answer me, as you love your husband: are you heart and soul with him in the fresh fight for Lombardy?” He said this with a look penetrating and malignant, and then by a sudden flash pitifully entreating.

Carlo feared to provoke, revolted from the thought of slaying him. “Yes, yes,” he interposed, “my wife is heart and soul in it. Go.”

Barto looked from him to her with the eyes of a dog that awaits an order.

Victoria gathered her strength, and said: “I am not.”

“It is her answer!” Barto roared, and from deep dejection his whole countenance radiated. “She says it—she might give the lie to a saint! I was never mad. I saw the spot, and put my finger on it, and not a madman can do that. My two years are my own. Mad now, for, see!

“I worship the creature. She is not heart and soul in it. She is not in it at all. She is a little woman, a lovely thing, a toy, a cantatrice. Joy to the big heart of Barto Rizzo! I am for Brescia!”

He flung his arm like a banner, and ran out.

Carlo laid his sword on a table. Vittoria's head was on his mother's bosom.

The hour was too full of imminent grief for either of the three to regard this scene as other than a gross intrusion ended.

Page 1816

“Why did you deny my words?” Carlo said coldly.

“I could not lie to make him wretched,” she replied in a low murmur.

“Do you know what that ‘I am for Brescia’ means? He goes to stir the city before a soul is ready.”

“I warned you that I should speak the truth of myself to-night, dearest.”

“You should discern between speaking truth to a madman, and to a man.”

Vittoria did not lift her eyes, and Carlo beckoned to Violetta, with whom he left the room.

“He is angry,” Countess Ammiani murmured. “My child, you cannot deal with men in a fever unless you learn to dissemble; and there is exemption for doing it, both in plain sense, and in our religion. If I could arrest him, I would speak boldly. It is, alas! vain to dream of that; and it is therefore an unkindness to cause him irritation. Carlo has given way to you by allowing you to be here when his friends assemble. He knows your intention to speak. He has done more than would have been permitted by my husband to me, though I too was well-beloved.”

Vittoria continued silent that her head might be cherished where it lay. She was roused from a stupor by hearing new voices. Laura’s lips came pressing to her cheek. Colonel Corte, Agostino, Marco Sana, and Angelo Guidascarpi, saluted her. Angelo she kissed.

“That lady should be abed and asleep,” Corte was heard to say.

The remark passed without notice. Angelo talked apart with Vittoria. He had seen the dying of the woman whose hand had been checked in the act of striking by the very passion of animal hatred which raised it. He spoke of her affectionately, attesting to the fact that Barto Rizzo had not prompted her guilt. Vittoria moaned at a short outline that he gave of the last minutes between those two, in which her name was dreadfully and fatally, incomprehensibly prominent.

All were waiting impatiently for Carlo’s return.

When he appeared he informed his mother that the Countess d’Isorella would remain in the house that night, and his mother passed out to her abhorred guest, who, for the time at least, could not be doing further mischief.

It was a meeting for the final disposition of things before the outbreak. Carlo had begun to speak when Corte drew his attention to the fact that ladies were present, at which Carlo put out his hand as if introducing them, and went on speaking.

“Your wife is here,” said Corte.

“My wife and signora Piaveni,” Carlo rejoined. “I have consented to my wife’s particular wish to be present.”

“The signora Piaveni’s opinions are known: your wife’s are not.”

“Countess Alessandra shares mine,” said Laura, rather tremulously.

Countess Ammiani at the same time returned and took Vittoria’s hand and pressed it with force. Carlo looked at them both.

“I have to ask your excuses, gentlemen. My wife, my mother, and signora Piaveni, have served the cause we worship sufficiently to claim a right—I am sorry to use such phrases; you understand my meaning. Permit them to remain. I have to tell you that Barto Rizzo has been here: he has started for Brescia. I should have had to kill him to stop him—a measure that I did not undertake.”

Page 1817

“Being your duty!” remarked Corte.

Agostino corrected him with a sarcasm.

“I cannot allow the presence of ladies to exclude a comment on manifest indifference,” said Corte. “Pass on to the details, if you have any.”

“The details are these,” Carlo resumed, too proud to show a shade of self-command; “my cousin Angelo leaves Milan before morning. You, Colonel Corte, will be in Bergamo at noon to-morrow. Marco and Angelo will await my coming in Brescia, where we shall find Giulio and the rest. I join them at five on the following afternoon, and my arrival signals the revolt. We have decided that the news from the king’s army is good.”

A perceptible shudder in Vittoria’s frame at this concluding sentence caught Corte’s eye.

“Are you dissatisfied with that arrangement?” he addressed her boldly.

“I am, Colonel Corte,” she replied. So simple was the answering tone of her voice that Corte had not a word.

“It is my husband who is going,” Vittoria spoke on steadily; “him I am prepared to sacrifice, as I am myself. If he thinks it right to throw himself into Brescia, nothing is left for me but to thank him for having done me the honour to consult me. His will is firm. I trust to God that he is wise. I look on him now as one of many brave men whose lives belong to Italy, and if they all are misdirected and perish, we have no more; we are lost. The king is on the Ticino; the Chief is in Rome. I desire to entreat you to take counsel before you act in anticipation of the king’s fortune. I see that it is a crushed life in Lombardy. In Rome there is one who can lead and govern. He has suffered and is calm. He calls to you to strengthen his hands. My prayer to you is to take counsel. I know the hour is late; but it is not too late for wisdom. Forgive me if I am not speaking humbly. Brescia is but Brescia; Rome is Italy. I have understood little of my country until these last days, though I have both talked and sung of her glories. I know that a deep duty binds you to Bergamo and to Brescia—poor Milan we must not think of. You are not personally pledged to Rome: yet Rome may have the greatest claims on you. The heart of our country is beginning to beat there. Colonel Corte! signor Marco! my Agostino! my cousin Angelo! it is not a woman asking for the safety of her husband, but one of the blood of Italy who begs to offer you her voice, without seeking to disturb your judgement.”

She ceased.

“Without seeking to disturb their judgement!” cried Laura. “Why not, when the judgement is in error?”

To Laura's fiery temperament Vittoria's speech had been feebleness. She was insensible to that which the men felt conveyed to them by the absence of emotion in the language of a woman so sorrowfully placed. "Wait," she said, "wait for the news from Carlo Alberto, if you determine to play at swords and guns in narrow streets." She spoke long and vehemently, using irony, coarse and fine, with the eloquence which was her gift. In conclusion she apostrophized Colonel Corte as one who had loved him might have done. He was indeed that figure of indomitable strength to which her spirit, exhausted by intensity of passion, clung more than to any other on earth, though she did not love him, scarcely liked him.

Page 1818

Corte asked her curiously—for she had surprised and vexed his softer side—why she distinguished him with such remarkable phrases only to declare her contempt for him.

“It’s the flag whipping the flag-pole,” murmured Agostino; and he now spoke briefly in support of the expedition to Rome; or at least in favour of delay until the King of Sardinia had gained a battle. While he was speaking, Merthyr entered the room, and behind him a messenger who brought word that Bergamo had risen.

The men drew hurriedly together, and Countess Ammiani, Vittoria and Laura stood ready to leave them.

“You will give me, five minutes?” Vittoria whispered to her husband, and he nodded.

“Merthyr,” she said, passing him, “can I have your word that you will not go from me?”

Merthyr gave her his word after he had looked on her face.

“Send to me every two hours, that I may know you are near,” she added; “do not fear waking me. Or, no, dear friend; why should I have any concealment from you? Be not a moment absent, if you would not have me fall to the ground a second time: follow me.”

Even as he hesitated, for he had urgent stuff to communicate to Carlo, he could see a dreadful whiteness rising on her face, darkening the circles of her eyes.

“It’s life or death, my dearest, and I am bound to live,” she said. Her voice sprang up from tears.

Merthyr turned and tried in vain to get a hearing among the excited, voluble men. They shook his hand, patted his shoulder, and counselled him to leave them. He obtained Carlo’s promise that he would not quit the house without granting him an interview; after which he passed out to Vittoria, where Countess Ammiani and Laura sat weeping by the door.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE WIFE AND THE HUSBAND

When they were alone Merthyr said: “I cannot give many minutes, not much time. I have to speak to your husband.”

She answered: “Give me many minutes—much time. All other speaking is vain here.”

“It concerns his safety.”

“It will not save him.”

“But I have evidence that he is betrayed. His plans are known; a trap is set for him. If he moves, he walks into a pit.”

“You would talk reason, Merthyr,” Vittoria sighed. “Talk it to me. I can listen; I thirst for it. I beat at the bars of a cage all day. When I saw you this afternoon, I looked on another life. It was too sudden, and I swooned. That was my only show of weakness. Since then you are the only strength I feel.”

“Have they all become Barto Rizzos?” Merthyr exclaimed.

Page 1819

“Beloved, I will open my mind to you,” said Vittoria. “I am cowardly, and I thought I had such courage! Tonight a poor mad creature has been here, who has oppressed me, I cannot say how long, with real fear—that I only understand now that I know the little ground I had for it. I am even pleased that one like Barto Rizzo should see me in a better light. I find the thought smiling in my heart when every other thing is utterly dark there. You have heard that Carlo goes to Brescia. When I was married, I lost sight of Italy, and everything but happiness. I suffer as I deserve for it now. I could have turned my husband from this black path; I preferred to dream and sing. I would not see—it was my pride that would not let me see his error. My cowardice would not let me wound him with a single suggestion. You say that he is betrayed. Then he is betrayed by the woman who has never been unintelligible to me. We were in Turin surrounded by intrigues, and there I thanked her so much for leaving me the days with my husband by Lake Orta that I did not seek to open his eyes to her. We came to Milan, and here I have been thanking her for the happy days in Turin. Carlo is no longer to blame if he will not listen to me. I have helped to teach him that I am no better than any of these Italian women whom he despises. I spoke to him as his wife should do, at last. He feigned to think me jealous, and I too remember the words of the reproach, as if they had a meaning. Ah, my friend! I would say of nothing that it is impossible, except this task of recovering lost ground with one who is young. Experience of trouble has made me older than he. When he accused me of jealousy, I could mention Countess d’Isorella’s name no more. I confess to that. Yet I knew my husband feigned. I knew that he could not conceive the idea of jealousy existing in me, as little as I could imagine unfaithfulness in him. But my lips would not take her name! Wretched cowardice cannot go farther. I spoke of Rome. As often as I spoke, that name was enough to shake me off: he had but to utter it, and I became dumb. He did it to obtain peace; for no other cause. So, by degrees, I have learnt the fatal truth. He has trusted her, for she is very skilful; distrusting her, for she is treacherous. He has, therefore, believed excessively in his ability to make use of her, and to counteract her baseness. I saw his error from the first; and I went on dreaming and singing; and now this night has come!”

Vittoria shadowed her eyes.

“I will go to him at once,” said Merthyr.

“Yes; I am relieved. Go, dear friend,” she sobbed; “you have given me tears, as I hoped. You will not turn him; had it been possible, could I have kept you from him so long? I know that you will not turn him from his purpose, for I know what a weight it is that presses him forward in that path. Do not imagine our love to be broken. He will convince you that it is not. He has the nature of an angel. He permitted me to speak before these men to-night—feeble thing that I am! It was a last effort. I might as well have tried to push a rock.”

Page 1820

She rose at a noise of voices in the hall below.

“They are going, Merthyr. See him now. There may be help in heaven; if one could think it! If help were given to this country—if help were only visible! The want of it makes us all without faith.”

“Hush! you may hear good news from Carlo Alberto in a few hours,” said Merthyr.

“Ask Laura; she has witnessed how he can be shattered,” Vittoria replied bitterly.

Merthyr pressed her fingers. He was met by Carlo on the stairs.

“Quick!” Carlo said; “I have scarce a minute to spare. I have my adieux to make, and the tears have set in already. First, a request: you will promise to remain beside my wife; she will want more than her own strength.”

Such a request, coming from an Italian husband, was so great a proof of the noble character of his love and his knowledge of the woman he loved, that Merthyr took him in his arms and kissed him.

“Get it over quickly, dear good fellow,” Carlo murmured; “you have something to tell me. Whatever it is, it’s air; but I’ll listen.”

They passed into a vacant room. “You know you are betrayed,” Merthyr began.

“Not exactly that,” said Carlo, humming carelessly.

“Positively and absolutely. The Countess d’Isorella has sold your secrets.”

“I commend her to the profit she has made by it.”

“Do you play with your life?”

Carlo was about to answer in the tone he had assumed for the interview. He checked the laugh on his lips.

“She must have some regard for my life, such as it’s worth, since, to tell you the truth, she is in the house now, and came here to give me fair warning.”

“Then, you trust her.”

“I? Not a single woman in the world!—that is, for a conspiracy.”

It was an utterly fatuous piece of speech. Merthyr allowed it to slip, and studied him to see where he was vulnerable.

“She is in the house, you say. Will you cause her to come before me?”

“Curiously,” said Carlo, “I kept her for some purpose of the sort. Will I? and have a scandal now? Oh! no. Let her sleep.”

Whether he spoke from noble-mindedness or indifference, Merthyr could not guess.

“I have a message from your friend Luciano. He sends you his love, in case he should be shot the first, and says that when Lombardy is free he hopes you will not forget old comrades who are in Rome.”

“Forget him! I would to God I could sit and talk of him for hours. Luciano! Luciano! He has no wife.”

Carlo spoke on hoarsely. “Tell me what authority you have for charging Countess d’Isorella with . . . with whatever it may be.”

“A conversation between Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and a Major Nagen, in the Duchess of Graatli’s house, was overheard by our Beppo. They spoke German. The rascal had a German sweetheart with him. She imprisoned him for some trespass, and had come stealing in to rescue him, when those two entered the room. Countess Anna detailed to Nagen the course of your recent plotting. She named the hour this morning when you are to start for Brescia. She stated what force you have, what arms you expect; she named you all.”

Page 1821

“Nagen—Nagen,” Carlo repeated; “the man’s unknown to me.”

“It’s sufficient that he is an Austrian officer.”

“Quite. She hates me, and she has reason, for she’s aware that I mean to fight her lover, and choose my time. The blood of my friends is on that man’s head.”

“I will finish what I have to say,” pursued Merthyr. “When Beppo had related as much as he could make out from his sweetheart’s translation, I went straight to the duchess. She is an Austrian, and a good and reasonable woman. She informed me that a letter addressed by Countess Anna to Countess d’Isorella fell into her hands this night. She burnt it unopened. I leave it to you to consider whether you have been betrayed and who has betrayed you. The secret was bought. Beppo himself caught the words, ‘from a mercenary Italian.’ The duchess tells me that Countess Anna is in the habit of alluding to Countess d’Isorella in those terms.”

Carlo stretched his arms like a man who cannot hide the yawning fit.

“I promised my wife five minutes, though we have had the worst of the parting over. Perhaps you will wait for me; I may have a word to say.”

He was absent for little more than the space named. When he returned, he was careful to hide his face. He locked the door, and leading Merthyr to an inner room, laid his watch on the table, and said: “Now, friend, you will see that I have nothing to shrink from, for I am going to do execution upon myself, and before him whom I would, above all other men, have think well of me. My wife supposes that I am pledged to this Brescian business because I am insanely patriotic. If I might join Luciano tomorrow I would shout like a boy. I would be content to serve as the lowest in the ranks, if I might be with you all under the Chief. Rome crowns him, and Brescia is my bloody ditch, and it is deserved! When I was a little younger—I am a boy still, no doubt—I had the honour to be distinguished by a handsome woman; and when I grew a little older, I discovered by chance that she had wit. The lady is the Countess Violetta d’Isorella. It is a grief to me to know that she is sordid: it hurts my vanity the more. Perhaps: you begin to perceive that vanity governs me. The signora Laura has not expressed her opinion on this subject with any reserve, but to Violetta belongs the merit of having seen it without waiting for the signs. First—it is a small matter, but you are English—let me assure you that my wife has had no rival. I have taunted her with jealousy when I knew that it was neither in her nature to feel it, nor in mine to give reason for it. No man who has a spark of his Maker in him could be unfaithful to such a woman. When Lombardy was crushed, we were in the dust. I fancy we none of us knew how miserably we had fallen—we, as men. The purest—I dare say, the bravest—marched to Rome. God bless my Luciano there! But I, sir, I, my friend, I, Merthyr, I said proudly that I would not abandon a

Page 1822

beaten country: and I was admired for my devotion. The dear old poet, Agostino, praised me. It stopped his epigrams—during a certain time, at least. Colonel Corte admired me. Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli admired me. Vast numbers admired me. I need not add that I admired myself. I plunged into intrigues with princes, and priests, and republicans. A clever woman was at my elbow. In the midst of all this, my marriage: I had seven weeks of peace; and then I saw what I was. You feel that you are tired, when you want to go another way and you feel that you have been mad when you want to undo your work. But I could not break the chains I had wrought, for I was a chief of followers. The men had come from exile, or they had refused to join the Roman enterprise:—they, in fact, had bound themselves to me; and that means, I was irrevocably bound to them. I had an insult to wipe out: I refrained from doing it, sincerely, I may tell you, on the ground that this admired life of mine was precious. I will heap no more clumsy irony on it: I can pity it. Do you see now how I stand? I know that I cannot rely on the king's luck or on the skill of his generals, or on the power of his army, or on the spirit in Lombardy: neither on men nor on angels. But I cannot draw back. I have set going a machine that's merciless. From the day it began working, every moment has added to its force. Do not judge me by your English eyes: other lands, other habits; other habits, other thoughts. And besides, if honour said nothing, simple humanity would preserve me from leaving my band to perish like a flock of sheep."

He uttered this with a profound conviction of his quality as leader, that escaped the lurid play of self-inspection which characterized what he had previously spoken, and served singularly in bearing witness to the truth of his charge against himself.

"Useless!" he said, waving his hand at anticipated remonstrances. "Look with the eyes of my country; not with your own, my friend. I am disgraced if I do not go out. My friends are disgraced if I do not head them in. Brescia—sacrificed!—murdered!—how can I say what? Can I live under disgrace or remorse? The king stakes on his army; I on the king. Whether he fights and wins, or fights and loses, I go out. I have promised my men—promised them success, I believe!—God forgive me! Did you ever see a fated man before? None had plotted against me. I have woven my own web, and that's the fatal thing. I have a wife, the sweetest woman of her time. Goodnight to her! our parting is over."

He glanced at his watch. "Perhaps she will be at the door below. Her heart beats like mine just now. You wish to say that you think me betrayed, and therefore I may draw back? Did you not hear that Bergamo has risen? The Brescians are up too by this time. Gallant Brescians! they never belie the proverb in their honour; and to die among them would be sweet if I had all my manhood about me. You would have me making a scene with Violetta."

Page 1823

“Set the woman face to face with me!” cried Merthyr, sighting a gleam of hope.

Carlo smiled. “Can she bear my burden though she be ten times guilty? Let her sleep. I have her here harmless for the night. The Brescians are up:—that’s an hour that has struck, and there’s no calling it to move a step in the rear. Brescia under the big Eastern hill which throws a cloak on it at sunrise! Brescia is always the eagle that looks over Lombardy! And Bergamo! you know the terraces of Bergamo. Aren’t they like a morning sky? Dying there is not death; it’s flying into the dawn. You Romans envy us. Come, confess it; you envy us. You have no Alps, no crimson hills, nothing but old walls to look on while you fight. Farewell, Merthyr Powys. I hear my servant’s foot outside. My horse is awaiting me saddled, a mile from the city. Perhaps I shall see my wife again at the door below, or in heaven. Addio! Kiss Luciano for me. Tell him that I knew myself as well as he did, before the end came. Enrico, Emilio, and the others—tell them I love them. I doubt if there will ever be but a ghost of me to fight beside them in Rome. And there’s no honour, Merthyr, in a ghost’s fighting, because he’s shotproof; so I won’t say what the valiant disembodied ‘I’ may do by-and-by.”

He held his hands out, with the light soft smile of one who asks forgiveness for flippant speech, and concluded firmly: “I have talked enough, and you are the man of sense I thought you; for to give me advice is childish when no power on earth could make me follow it. Addio! Kiss me.”

They embraced. Merthyr said no more than that he would place messengers on the road to Brescia to carry news of the king’s army. His voice was thick, and when Carlo laughed at him, his sensations strangely reversed their situations.

There were two cloaked figures at different points in the descent of the stairs. These rose severally at Carlo’s approach, took him to their bosoms, and kissed him in silence. They were his mother and Laura. A third crouched by the door of the courtyard, which was his wife.

Merthyr kept aloof until the heavy door rolled a long dull sound. Vittoria’s head was shawled over. She stood where her husband had left her, groping for him with one hand, that closed tremblingly hard on Merthyr when he touched it. Not a word was uttered in the house.

CHAPTER XLV

SHOWS MANY PATHS CONVERGING TO THE END

Until daylight Merthyr sat by himself, trying to realize the progressive steps of the destiny which seemed like a visible hand upon Count Ammiani, that he might know it to be nothing else than Carlo’s work. He sat in darkness in the room where Carlo had

spoken, thinking of him as living and dead. The brilliant life in Carlo protested against a possible fatal tendency in his acts so irrevocable as to plunge him to destruction when his head was clear, his blood cool, and a choice

Page 1824

lay open to him. That brilliant young life, that fine face, the tones of Carlo's voice, swept about Merthyr, accusing him of stupid fatalism. Grief stopped his answer to the charge; but in his wise mind he knew Carlo to have surveyed things justly; and that the Fates are within us. Those which are the forces of the outer world are as shadows to the power we have created within us. He felt this because it was his gathered wisdom. Human compassion, and love for the unhappy youth, crushed it in his heart, and he marvelled how he could have been paralyzed when he had a chance of interceding. Can a man stay a torrent? But a noble and fair young life in peril will not allow our philosophy to liken it to things of nature. The downward course of a fall that takes many waters till it rushes irresistibly is not the course of any life. Yet it is true that our destiny is of our own weaving. Carlo's involvements cast him into extreme peril, almost certain death, unless he abjured his honour, dearer than a life made precious by love. Merthyr saw that it was not vanity, but honour; for Carlo stood pledged to lead a forlorn enterprise, the ripeness of his own scheming. In the imminent hour Carlo had recognized his position as Merthyr with the wisdom of years looked on it. That was what had paralyzed the older man, though he could not subsequently trace the cause. Thinking of the beauty of the youth, husband of the woman who was to his soul utterly an angel, Merthyr sat in the anguish of self-accusation, believing that some remonstrance, some inspired word, might have turned him, and half dreading to sound his own heart, as if an evil knowledge of his nature haunted it.

He rose up at last with a cry. The door opened, and Giacinta, Vittoria's maid, appeared, bearing a lamp. She had been sitting outside, waiting to hear him stir before she intruded. He touched her cheek kindly, and thought that one could do little better than die, if need were, in the service of such a people. She said that her mistress was kneeling. She wished to make coffee for him, and Merthyr let her do it, knowing the comfort there is to a woman in the ministering occupation of her hands. It was soon daylight. Beppo had not come back to the house.

"No one has left the house?" Merthyr asked.

"Not since—" she answered convulsively.

"The Countess d'Isorella is here?"

"Yes, signore."

"Asleep?" he put the question mournfully, in remembrance of Carlo's "Let her sleep!"

"Yes, signore; like the first night after confession."

"She resides, I think, in the Corso Venezia. When she awakens, let her know that I request to have the honour of conducting her."

“Yes, signore. Her carriage is still at the gates. The countess’s horses are accustomed to stand.”

Merthyr knew this for a hint against his leaving, as well as against the lady’s character.

“Let your mistress be assured that I shall on no account be long absent at any time.”

Page 1825

“Signore, I shall do so,” said Giacinta.

She brought him word soon after, that Countess d’Isorella was stirring. Merthyr met Violetta on the stairs.

“Can it be true?” she accosted him first.

“Count Ammiani has left for Brescia,” he replied.

“In spite of my warning?”

Merthyr gave space for her to pass into the room. She appeared undecided, saying that she had a dismal apprehension of her not having dismissed her coachman overnight.

“In spite of my warning,” she murmured again, “he has really gone? Surely I cannot have slept more than three hours.”

“It was Count Ammiani’s wish that you should enjoy your full sleep undisturbed in his house,” said Merthyr, “As regards your warning to him, he has left Milan perfectly convinced of the gravity of a warning that comes from you.”

Violetta shrugged lightly. “Then all we have to do is to pray for the success of Carlo Alberto.”

“Oh! pardon me, countess,” Merthyr rejoined, “prayers may be useful, but you at least have something to do besides.”

His eyes caught hers firmly as they were letting a wild look of interrogation fall on him, and he continued with perfect courtesy, “You will accompany me to see Countess Anna of Lenkenstein. You have great influence, madame. It is not Count Ammiani’s request; for, as I informed you, it was his wish that you should enjoy your repose. The request is mine, because his life is dear to me. Nagen, I think, is the name of the Austrian officer who has started for Brescia.”

She had in self-defence to express surprise while he spoke, which compelled her to meet his mastering sight and submit to a struggle of vision sufficient to show him that he had hit a sort of guilty consciousness. Otherwise she was not discomposed, and with marvellous sagacity she accepted the forbearance he assumed, not affecting innocence to challenge it, as silly criminals always do when they are exposed, but answering quite in the tone of innocence, and so throwing the burden by an appearance of mutual consent on some unnamed third person.

“Certainly; let us go to Countess Anna of Lenkenstein, if you think fit. I have to rely on your judgement. I quite abjure my own. If I have to plead for anything, I am going before a woman, remember.”

“I do not forget it,” said Merthyr.

“The expedition to Brescia may be unfortunate,” she resumed hurriedly; “I wish it had not been undertaken. At any rate, it rescues Count Ammiani from an expedition to Rome, and his slavish devotion to that priest-hating man whom he calls, or called, his Chief. At Brescia he is not outraging the head of our religion. That is a gain.”

“A gain for him in the next world?” said Merthyr. “I believe that Countess Anna of Lenkenstein is also a fervent Catholic; is she not?”

“I trust so.”

“On behalf of her peace of mind, I trust so, too. In that case, she also must be a sound sleeper.”

Page 1826

“We shall have to awaken her. What excuse—what am I to say to her?”

“I beg you to wait for the occasion, Countess d’Isorella. The words will come.”

Violetta bit her lip. She had consented to this extraordinary step in an amazement. As she contemplated it now, it seemed worse than a partial confession and an appeal to his generosity. She broke out in pity for her horses, in dread of her coachman, declaring that it was impossible for her to give him the order to drive her anywhere but home.

“With your permission, countess, I will undertake to give him the order,” said Merthyr.

“But have you no compassion, signor Powys? and you are an Englishman! I thought that Englishmen were excessively compassionate with horses.”

“They have been known to kill them in the service of their friends, nevertheless.”

“Well!”—Violetta had recourse to the expression of her shoulders—“and I am really to see Countess Anna?”

“In my presence.”

“Oh! that cannot be. Pardon me; it is impossible. She will decline the scene. I say it with the utmost sincerity: I know that she will refuse.”

“Then, countess,” Merthyr’s face grew hard, “if I am not to be in your company to prompt you, allow me to instruct you beforehand.”

Violetta looked at him eagerly, as one looks for tidings, with an involuntary beseeching quiver of the strained eyelids.

“No irony!” she said, fearing horribly that he was about to throw off the mask of irony.

This desperate effort of her wits at the crisis succeeded.

Merthyr, not knowing what design he had, hopeless of any definite end in tormenting the woman, and never having it in his mind merely to punish, was diverted by the exclamation to speak ironically. “You can tell Countess Anna that it is only her temporal sovereign who is attacked, and that therefore—” he could not continue.

“Some affection?” he murmured, in intense grief.

His manly forbearance touched her whose moral wit was too blunt to apprehend the contempt in it.

“Much affection—much!” Violetta exclaimed. “I have a deep affection for Count Ammiani; an old friendship. Believe me! believe me! I came here last night to save him. Anything on earth that I can do, I will do—on my honour; and do not smile at that—I have never pledged it without fulfilling the oath. I will not sleep while I can aid in preserving him. He shall know that I am not the base person he has conceived me to be. You, signor Powys, are not a man to paint all women black that are a little less than celestial—are you? I am told it is a trick with your, countrymen; and they have a poet who knew us! I entreat you to confide in me. I am at present quite unaware that Count Ammiani runs particular—I mean personal danger. He is in danger, of course; everyone can see it. But, on my honour—and never in my life have I spoken so earnestly, my friends would hardly recognize me—I declare to you on my faith as a Christian lady, I am ignorant of any plot against him. I can take a Cross and kiss it, like a peasant, and swear to you by the Madonna that I know nothing of it.”

Page 1827

She corrected her ardour, half-exulting in finding herself carried so far and so swimmingly on a tide of truth, half wondering whether the flowering beauty of her face in excitement had struck his sensibility. He was cold and speculative.

“Ah!” she said, “if I were to ask my compatriots to put faith in a woman’s pure friendship for a man, I should know the answer; but you, signor Powys, who have shown us that a man is capable of the purest friendship for a woman, should believe me.”

He led her down to the gates, where her coachman sat muffled in a three-quarter sleep. The word was given to drive to her own house; rejoiced by which she called his attention deploringly to the condition of her horses, requesting him to say whether he could imagine them the best English, and confessing with regret, that she killed three sets a year—loved them well, notwithstanding. Merthyr saw enough of her to feel that she was one of the weak creatures who are strong through our greater weakness; and, either by intuition or quick wit, too lively and too subtle to be caught by simple suspicion. She even divined that reflection might tell him she had evaded him by an artifice—a piece of gross cajolery; and said, laughing: “Concerning friendship, I could offer it to a boy, like Carlo Ammiani; not to you, signor Powys. I know that I must check a youth, and I am on my guard. I should be eternally tormented to discover whether your armour was proof.”

“I dare say that a lady who had those torments would soon be able to make them mine,” said Merthyr.

“You could not pay a fairer compliment to some one else,” she remarked. In truth, the candid personal avowal seemed to her to hold up Vittoria’s sacred honour in a crystal, and the more she thought of it, the more she respected him, for his shrewd intelligence, if not for his sincerity; but on the whole she fancied him a loyal friend, not solely a clever maker of phrases; and she was pleased with herself for thinking such a matter possible, in spite of her education.

“I do most solemnly hope that you may not have to sustain Countess Alessandra under any affliction whatsoever,” she said at parting.

Violetta had escaped an exposure—a rank and naked accusation of her character and deeds. She feared nothing but that, being quite indifferent to opinion; a woman who would not have thought it preternaturally sad to have to walk as a penitent in the streets, with the provision of a very thick veil to cover her. She had escaped, but the moment she felt herself free, she was surprised by a sharp twinge of remorse. She summoned her maid to undress her, and smelt her favourite perfume, and lay in her bed, to complete her period of rest, closing her eyes there with a child’s faith in pillows. Flying lights and blood-blotches rushed within a span of her forehead. She met this symptom promptly with a medical receipt; yet she had no sleep; nor would coffee give her sleep.

She shrank from opium as deleterious to the constitution, and her mind settled on music as the remedy.

Page 1828

Some time after her craving for it had commenced, an Austrian foot regiment, marching to the drum, passed under her windows. The fife is a merry instrument; fife and drum colour the images of battle gaily; but the dull ringing Austrian step-drum, beating unaccompanied, strikes the mind with the real nature of battles, as the salt smell of powder strikes it, and more in horror, more as a child's imagination realizes bloodshed, where the scene is a rolling heaven, black and red on all sides, with pitiable men moving up to the mouth of butchery, the insufferable flashes, the dark illumination of red, red of black, like a vision of the shadows Life and Death in a shadow-fight over the dear men still living. Sensitive minds may be excited by a small stimulant to see such pictures. This regimental drum is like a song of the flat-headed savage in man. It has no rise or fall, but leads to the bloody business with an unvarying note, and a savage's dance in the middle of the rhythm. Violetta listened to it until her heart quickened with alarm lest she should be going to have a fever. She thought of Carlo Ammiani, and of the name of Nagen; she had seen him at the Lenkensteins. Her instant supposition was that Anna had perhaps paid heavily for the secret of Carlo's movements an purpose to place Major Nagen on the Brescian high-road to capture him. Capture meant a long imprisonment, if not execution. Partly for the sake of getting peace of mind—for she was shocked by her temporary inability to command repose—but with some hope of convincing Carlo that she strove to be of use to him, she sent for the spy Luigi, and at a cost of two hundred and twenty Austrian florins, obtained his promise upon oath to follow Count Ammiani into Brescia, if necessary, and deliver to him a letter she had written, wherein Nagen's name was mentioned, and Carlo was advised to avoid personal risks; the letter hinted that he might have incurred a private enmity, and he had better keep among his friends. She knew the writing of this letter to be the foolishest thing she had ever done. Two hundred and twenty florins—the man originally stipulated to have three hundred—was a large sum to pay for postage. However, sacrifices must now and then be made for friendship, and for sleep. When she had paid half the money, her mind was relieved, and she had the slumber which preserves beauty. Luigi was to be paid the other half on his return. "He may never return," she thought, while graciously dismissing him. The deduction by mental arithmetic of the two hundred and twenty, or the one hundred and ten florins, from the large amount Countess Anna was bound to pay her in turn, annoyed her, though she knew it was a trifle. For this lady, Milan, Turin, and Paris sighed deeply.

Page 1829

When he had left Violetta at her house in the Corso, Merthyr walked briskly for exercise, knowing that he would have need of his health and strength. He wanted a sight of Alps to wash out the image of the woman from his mind, and passed the old Marshal's habitation fronting the Gardens, wishing that he stood in the field against the fine old warrior, for whom he had a liking. Near the walls he discovered Beppo sitting pensively with his head between his two fists. Beppo had not seen Count Ammiani, but he had seen Barto Rizzo, and pointing to the walls, said that Barto had dropped down there. He had met him hurrying in the Corso Francesco. Barto took him to the house of Sarpo, the bookseller, who possessed a small printing-press. Beppo described vividly, with his usual vivacity of illustration, the stupefaction of the man at the apparition of his tormentor, whom he thought fast in prison; and how Barto had compelled him to print a proclamation to the Piedmontese, Lombards, and Venetians, setting forth that a battle had been fought South of the Ticino, and that Carlo Alberto was advancing on Milan, signed with the name of the Piedmontese Pole in command of the king's army. A second, framed as an order of the day, spoke of victory and the planting of the green, white and red banner on the Adige, and forward to the Isonzo.

"I can hear nothing of Carlo Alberto's victory," Beppo said; "no one has heard of it. Barto told us how the battle was fought, and the name of the young lieutenant who discovered the enemy's flank march, and got the artillery down on him, and pounded him so that—-signore, it's amazing! I'm ready to cry, and laugh, and howl!—fifteen thousand men capitulated in a heap!"

"Don't you know you've been listening to a madman?" said Merthyr, irritated, and thoroughly angered to see Beppo's opposition to that view.

"Signore, Barto described the whole battle. It began at five o'clock in the morning."

"When it was dark!"

"Yes; when it was dark. He said so. And we sent up rockets, and caught the enemy coming on, and the cavalry of Alessandria fell upon two batteries of field guns and carried them off, and Colonel Romboni was shot in his back, and cries he, 'Best give up the ghost if you're hit in the rear. Evviva l'Italia!'"

"A Piedmontese colonel, you fool! he would have shouted 'Viva Carlo Alberto!'" said Merthyr, now critically disgusted with the tale, and refusing to hear more. Two hours later, he despatched Beppo to Carlo in Brescia, warning him that for some insane purpose these two proclamations had been printed by Barto Rizzo, and that they were false.

Page 1830

It was early on the morning of a second day, before sunrise, when Vittoria sent for Merthyr to conduct her to the cathedral. “There has been a battle,” she said. Her lips hardly joined to frame the syllables in speech. Merthyr refrained from asking where she had heard of the battle. As soon as the Duomo doors were open, he led her in and left her standing shrinking under the great vault with her neck fearfully drawn on her shoulders, as one sees birds under thunder. He thought that she was losing courage. Choosing to go out on the steps rather than look on her, he was struck by the sight of two horsemen, who proved to be Austrian officers, rattling at racing speed past the Duomo up the Corso. The sight of them made it seem possible that a battle had been fought. As soon as he was free, Merthyr went to the Duchess of Graatli, from whom he had the news of Novara. The officers he had seen were Prince Radocky and Lieutenant Wilfrid Pierson, the old Marshal’s emissaries of victory. They had made a bet on the bloody field about reaching Milan first, and the duchess affected to be full of the humour of this bet in order to conceal her exultation. The Lenkensteins called on her; the Countess of Lenkenstein, Anna, and Lena; and they were less considerate, and drew their joy openly from the source of his misery—a dreadful house for Merthyr to remain in; but he hoped to see Wilfrid, having heard the duchess rally Lena concerning the deeds of the white umbrella, which, Lena said, was pierced with balls, and had been preserved for her. “The dear foolish fellow insisted on marching right into the midst of the enemy with his absurd white umbrella; and wherever there was danger the men were seen following it. Prince Radocky told me the whole army was laughing. How he escaped death was a miracle!” She spoke unaffectedly of her admiration for the owner, and as Wilfrid came in she gave him brilliant eyes. He shook Merthyr’s hand without looking at him. The ladies would talk of nothing but the battle, so he went up to Merthyr, and under pretext of an eager desire for English news, drew him away.

“Her husband was not there? not at Novara, I mean?” he said.

“He’s at Brescia,” said Merthyr.

“Well, thank goodness he didn’t stand in those ranks!”

Wilfrid murmured, puffing thoughtfully over the picture they presented to his memory.

Merthyr then tried to hint to him that he had a sort of dull suspicion of Carlo’s being in personal danger, but of what kind he could not say. He mentioned Weisspriess by name; and Nagen; and Countess Anna. Wilfrid said, “I’ll find out if there’s anything, only don’t be fancying it. The man’s in a bad hole at Brescia. Weisspriess, I believe, is at Verona. He’s an honourable fellow. The utmost he would do would be to demand a duel; and I’m sure he’s heartily sick of that work. Besides, he and Countess Anna have quarrelled. Meet me;—by the way, you and I mustn’t be seen meeting, I suppose.

Page 1831

The duchess is neutral ground. Come here to-night. And don't talk of me, but say that a friend asks how she is, and hopes—the best things you can say for me. I must go up to their confounded chatter again. Tell her there's no fear, none whatever. You all hate us, naturally; but you know that Austrian officers are gentlemen. Don't speak my name to her just yet. Unless, of course, she should happen to allude to me, which is unlikely. I had a dismal idea that her husband was at Novara."

The tender-hearted duchess sent a message to Vittoria, bidding her not to forget that she had promised her at Meran to 'love her always.'

"And tell her," she said to Merthyr, "that I do not think I shall have my rooms open for the concert to-morrow night. I prefer to let Antonio-Pericles go mad. She will not surely consider that she is bound by her promise to him? He drags poor Irma from place to place to make sure the miserable child is not plotting to destroy his concert, as that man Sarpo did. Irma is half dead, and hasn't the courage to offend him. She declares she depends upon him for her English reputation. She has already caught a violent cold, and her sneezing is frightful. I have never seen so abject a creature. I have no compassion at the sight of her."

That night Merthyr heard from Wilfrid that a plot against Carlo Ammiani did exist. He repeated things he had heard pass between Countess d'Isorella and Irma in the chamber of Pericles before the late battle. Modestly confessing that he was 'for some reasons' in high favour with Countess Lena, he added that after a long struggle he had brought her to confess that her sister had sworn to have Countess Alessandra Ammiani begging at her feet.

By mutual consent they went to consult the duchess. She repelled the notion of Austrian women conspiring. "An Austrian noble lady—do you think it possible that she would act secretly to serve a private hatred? Surely I may ask you, for my sake, to think better of us?"

Merthyr showed her an opening to his ground by suggesting that Anna's antipathy to Victoria might spring more from a patriotic than a private source.

"Oh! I will certainly make inquiries, if only to save Anna's reputation with her enemies," the duchess answered rather proudly.

It would have been a Novara to Pericles if Vittoria had refused to sing. He held the pecuniarily-embarrassed duchess sufficiently in his power to command a concert at her house; his argument to those who pressed him to spare Vittoria in a season of grief running seriously, with visible contempt of their intellects, thus: "A great voice is an ocean. You cannot drain it with forty dozen opera-hats. It is something found—an addition to the wealth of this life. Shall we not enjoy what we find? You do not wear out

a picture by looking at it; likewise you do not wear out a voice by listening to it. A bird has wings;—here is a voice.

Page 1832

Why were they given? I should say, to go into the air. Ah; but not if grandmother is ill. What is a grandmother to the wings and the voice? If to sing would kill,—yes, then let the puny thing be silent! But Sandra Belloni has a soul that has not a husband—except her Art. Her body is husbanded; but her soul is above her body. You would treat it as below. Art is her soul's husband! Besides, I have her promise. She is a girl who will go up to a loaded gun's muzzle if she gives her word. And besides, her husband may be shot to-morrow. So, all she sings now is clear gain."

Vittoria sent word to him that she would sing.

In the meantime a change had come upon Countess Anna. Weisspriess, her hero, appeared at her brother's house, fresh from the field of Novara, whither he had hurried from Verona on a bare pretext, that was a breach of military discipline requiring friendly interposition in high quarters. Unable to obtain an audience with Count Lenkenstein, he remained in the hall, hoping for things which he affected to care nothing for; and so it chanced that he saw Lena, who was mindful that her sister had suffered much from passive jealousy when Wilfrid returned from the glorious field, and led him to Anna, that she also might rejoice in a hero. Weisspriess did not refrain from declaring on the way that he would rather charge against a battery. Some time after, Anna lay in Lena's arms, sobbing out one of the wildest confessions ever made by woman:—she adored Weisspriess; she hated Nagen; but was miserably bound to the man she hated. "Oh! now I know what love is." She repeated this with transparent enjoyment of the opposing sensations by whose shock the knowledge was revealed to her.

"How can you be bound to Major Nagan?" asked Lena.

"Oh! why? except that I have been possessed by devils."

Anna moaned. "Living among these Italians has distempered my blood." She exclaimed that she was lost.

"In what way can you be lost?" said Lena.

"I have squandered more than half that I possess. I am almost a beggar. I am no longer the wealthy Countess Anna. I am much poorer than anyone of us."

"But Major Weisspriess is a man of honour, and if he loves you—"

"Yes; he loves me! he loves me! or would he come to me after I have sent him against a dozen swords? But he is poor; he must, must marry a wealthy woman. I used to hate him because I thought he had his eye on money. I love him for it now. He deserves wealth; he is a matchless hero. He is more than the first swordsman of our army; he is a knightly man. Oh my soul Johann!" She very soon fell to raving. Lena was implored by her to give her hand to Weisspriess in reward for his heroism—"For you are rich,"

Anna said; “you will not have to go to him feeling that you have made him face death a dozen times for your sake, and that you thank him and reward him by being a whimpering beggar in his

Page 1833

arms. Do, dearest! Will you? Will you, to please me, marry Johann? He is not unworthy of you." And more of this hysterical hypocrisy, which brought on fits of weeping. "I have lived among these savages till I have ceased to be human—forgotten everything but my religion," she said. "I wanted Weisspriess to show them that they dared not stand up against a man of us, and to tame the snarling curs. He did. He is brave. He did as much as a man could do, but I was unappeasable. They seem to have bitten me till I had a devouring hunger to humiliate them. Lena, will you believe that I have no hate for Carlo Ammiani or the woman he has married? None! and yet, what have I done!" Anna smote her forehead. "They are nothing but little dots on a field for me. I don't care whether they live or die. It's like a thing done in sleep."

"I want to know what you have done," said Lena caressingly.

"You at least will try to reward our truest hero, and make up to him for your sister's unkindness, will you not?" Anna replied with a cajolery wonderfully like a sincere expression of her wishes. "He will be a good husband.. He has proved it by having been so faithful a—a lover. So you may be sure of him. And when he is yours, do not let him fight again, Lena, for I have a sickening presentiment that his next duel is his last."

"Tell me," Lena entreated her, "pray tell me what horrible thing you have done to prevent your marrying him."

"With their pride and their laughter," Anna made answer; "the fools! were they to sting us perpetually and not suffer for it? That woman, the Countess Alessandra, as she's now called—have you forgotten that she helped our Paul's assassin to escape? was she not eternally plotting against Austria? And I say that I love Austria. I love my country; I plot for my country. She and her husband plot, and I plot to thwart them. I have ruined myself in doing it. Oh, my heart! why has it commenced beating again? Why did Weisspriess come here? He offended me. He refused to do my orders, and left me empty-handed, and if he suffers too," Anna relieved a hard look with a smile of melancholy, "I hope he will not; I cannot say more."

"And I'm to console him if he does?" said Lena.

"At least, I shall be out of the way," said Anna. "I have still money enough to make me welcome in a convent."

"I am to marry him?" Lena persisted, and half induced Anna to act a feeble part, composed of sobs and kisses and full confession of her plight. Anna broke from her in time to leave what she had stated of herself vague and self-justificatory, so that she kept her pride, and could forgive, as she was ready to do even so far as to ask forgiveness in turn, when with her awakened enamoured heart she heard Vittoria sing at the concert of

Pericles. Countess Alessandra’s divine gift, which she would not withhold, though in a misery of apprehension; her grave eyes, which

Page 1834

none could accuse of coldness, though they showed no emotion; her simple noble manner that seemed to lift her up among the forces threatening her; these expressions of a superior soul moved Anna under the influence of the incomparable voice to pass over envious contrasts, and feel the voice and the nature were one in that bosom. Could it be the same as the accursed woman who had stood before her at Meran? She could hardly frame the question, but she had the thought sufficiently firmly to save her dignity; she was affected by very strong emotion when Vittoria's singing ended, and nothing but the revival of the recollection of her old contempt preserved her from an impetuous desire to take the singer by the hand and have all clear between them; for they were now of equal rank to tolerating eyes. "But she has no religious warmth!" Anna reflected with a glow of satisfaction. The concert was broken up by Laura Piaveni. She said out loud that the presence of Major Weisspriess was intolerable to the Countess Alessandra. It happened that Weisspriess entered the room while Laura sat studying the effect produced by her countrywoman's voice on the thick eyelids of Austrian Anna; and Laura, seeing their enemy ready to weep in acknowledgment of their power, scorned the power which could never win freedom, and broke up the sitting, citing the offence of the presence of Weisspriess for a pretext. The incident threw Anna back upon her old vindictiveness. It caused an unpleasant commotion in the duchess's saloon. Count Serabiglione was present, and ran round to Weisspriess, apologizing for his daughter's behaviour. "Do you think I can't deal with your women as well as your men, you ass?" said Weisspriess, enraged by the scandal of the scene. He was overheard by Count Karl Lenkenstein, who took him to task sharply for his rough speech; but Anna supported her lover, and they joined hands publicly. Anna went home prostrated with despair. "What conscience is in me that I should wish one of my Kaiser's officers killed?" she cried enigmatically to Lena. "But I must have freedom. Oh! to be free. I am chained to my enemy, and God blesses that woman. He makes her weep, but he blesses her, for her body is free, and mine,—the thought of mine sets flames creeping up my limbs as if I were tied to the stake. Losing a husband you love —what is that to taking a husband you hate?" Still Lena could get no plain confession from her, for Anna clung to self-justification, and felt it abandoning her, and her soul fluttering in a black gulf when she opened her month to disburden herself.

There came tidings of the bombardment of Brescia one of the historic deeds of infamy. Many officers of the Imperial army perceived the shame which it cast upon their colours, even in those intemperate hours, and Karl Lenkenstein assumed the liberty of private friendship to go complaining to the old Marshal, who was too true a soldier to condemn a soldier in action, however strong his disapproval of proceedings.

Page 1835

The liberty assumed by Karl was excessive; he spoke out in the midst of General officers as if his views were shared by them and the Marshal; and his error was soon corrected; one after another reproached him, until the Marshal, pitying his condition, sent him into his writing-closet, where he lectured the youth on military discipline. It chanced that there followed between them a question upon what the General in command at Brescia would do with his prisoners; and hearing that they were subject to the rigours of a court-martial, and if adjudged guilty, would forthwith summarily be shot, Karl ventured to ask grace for Vittoria's husband. He succeeded finally in obtaining his kind old Chief's promise that Count Ammiani should be tried in Milan, and as the bearer of a paper to that effect, he called on his sisters to get them or Wilfrid to convey word to Vittoria of her husband's probable safety. He found Anna in a swoon, and Lena and the duchess bending over her. The duchess's chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz had been returning from Moran, when on the Brescian high-road he met the spy Luigi, and acting promptly under the idea that Luigi was always a pestilential conductor of detestable correspondence, he attacked him, overthrew him, and ransacked him, and bore the fruit of his sagacious exertions to his mistress in Milan; it was Violetta d'Isorella's letter to Carlo Ammiani. "I have read it," the duchess said; "contrary to any habits when letters are not addressed to me. I bring it open to your sister Anna. She catches sight of one or two names and falls down in the state in which you see her."

"Leave her to me," said Karl.

He succeeded in extracting from Anna hints of the fact that she had paid a large sum of her own money to Countess d'Isorella for secrets connected with the Bergamasc and Brescian rising. "We were under a mutual oath to be silent, but if one has broken it the other cannot; so I confess it to you, dearest good brother. I did this for my country at my personal sacrifice."

Karl believed that he had a sister magnificent in soul. She was glad to have deluded him, but she could not endure his praises, which painted to her imagination all that she might have been if she had not dashed her patriotism with the low cravings of vengeance, making herself like some abhorrent mediaeval grotesque, composed of eagle and reptile. She was most eager in entreating him to save Count Ammiani's life. Carlo, she said, was their enemy, but he had been their friend, and she declared with singular earnestness that she should never again sleep or hold up her head, if he were slain or captured.

"My Anna is justified by me in everything she has done," Karl said to the duchess.

"In that case," the duchess replied, "I have only to differ with her to feel your sword's point at my breast."

"I should certainly challenge the man who doubted her," said Karl.

The duchess laughed with a scornful melancholy.

Page 1836

On the steps of the door where his horse stood saddled, he met Wilfrid, and from this promised brother-in-law received matter for the challenge. Wilfrid excitedly accused Anna of the guilt of a conspiracy to cause the destruction of Count Ammiani. In the heat of his admiration for his sister, Karl struck him on the cheek with his glove, and called him a name by which he had passed during the days of his disgrace, signifying one who plays with two parties. Lena's maid heard them arrange to meet within an hour, and she having been a witness of the altercation, ran to her mistress in advance of Wilfrid, and so worked on Lena's terrors on behalf of her betrothed and her brother, that Lena, dropped at Anna's feet telling her all that she had gathered and guessed in verification of Wilfrid's charge, and imploring her to confess the truth. Anna, though she saw her concealment pierced, could not voluntarily forego her brother's expressed admiration of her, and clung to the tatters of secresy. After a brief horrid hesitation, she chose to face Wilfrid. This interview began with lively recriminations, and was resulting in nothing—for Anna refused to be shaken by his statement that the Countess d'Isorella had betrayed her, and perceived that she was listening to suspicions only—when, to give his accusation force, Wilfrid said that Brescia had surrendered and that Count Ammiani had escaped.

"And I thank God for it!" Anna exclaimed, and with straight frowning eyes demanded the refutation of her sincerity.

"Count Ammiani and his men have five hours' grace ahead of Major Nagen and half a regiment," said Wilfrid.

At this she gasped; she had risen her breath to deny or defy, and hung on the top of it without a voice.

"Tell us—say, but do say—confess that you know Nagen to be a name of mischief," Lena prayed her.

"I will say anything to prevent my brother from running into danger," Anna rejoined.

"She is most foully accused by one whom we permitted to aspire to be of our own family," said Karl.

"Yet you, Karl, have always been the first to declare her revengeful," Lena turned to him.

"Help, Karl, help me," said Anna.

"Yes!" cried her sister; "there you stand, and ask for help, meanest of women! Do you think these men are not in earnest? Karl is to help you, and you will not speak a word to save him from a grave before night, or me from a lover all of blood."

"Am I to be the sacrifice?" said Anna.

“Whatever you call it, Wilfrid has spoken truth of you, and to none but members of our family; and he had a right to say it, and you are bound now to acknowledge it.”

“I acknowledge that I love and serve my country, Lena.”

“Not with a pure heart: you can’t forgive. Insult or a wrong makes a madwoman of you. Confess, Anna! You know well that you can’t kneel to a priest’s ear, for you’ve stopped your conscience. You have pledged yourself to misery to satisfy a spite, and you have not the courage to ask for—” Lena broke her speech like one whose wits have been kindled. “Yes, Karl,” she resumed; “Anna begged you to help her. You will. Take her aside and save her from being miserable forever. You do mean to fight my Wilfrid?”

Page 1837

“I am certainly determined to bring him to repentance leaving him the option of the way,” said Karl.

Lena took her sullen sister by the arm.

“Anna, will you let these two men go—to slaughter? Look at them; they are both our brothers. One is dearer than a brother to me, and, oh God! I have known what it is to half-lose him. You to lose a lover and have to go bound by a wretched oath to be the wife of a detestable short-sighted husband! Oh, what an abominable folly!”

This epithet, ‘short-sighted,’ curiously forced in by Lena, was like a shock of the very image of Nagen’s needle features thrust against Anna’s eyes; the spasm of revulsion in her frame was too quick for her habitual self-control.

At that juncture Weisspriess opened the door, and Anna’s eyes met his.

“You don’t spare me,” she murmured to Lena.

Her voice trembled, and Wilfrid bent his head near her, pressing her hand, and said, “Not only I, but Countess Alessandra Ammiani exonerates you from blame. As she loves her country, you love yours. My words to Karl were an exaggeration of what I know and think. Only tell me this;—if Nagen captures Count Ammiani, how is he likely to deal with him?”

“How can I inform you?” Anna replied coldly; but she reflected in a fire of terror. She had given Nagen the prompting of a hundred angry exclamations in the days of her fever of hatred; she had nevertheless forgotten their parting words; that is, she had forgotten her mood when he started for Brescia, and the nature of the last instructions she had given him. Revolting from the thought of execution being done upon Count Ammiani, as one quickly springing out of fever dreams, all her white face went into hard little lines, like the withered snow which wears away in frost. “Yes,” she said; and again, “Yes,” to something Weisspriess whispered in her ear, she knew not clearly what. Weisspriess told Wilfrid that he would wait below. As he quitted the room, the duchess entered, and went up to Anna. “My good soul,” she said, “you have, I trust, listened to Major Weisspriess. Oh, Anna! you wanted revenge. Now take it, as becomes a high-born woman; and let your enemy come to your feet, and don’t spurn her when she is there. Must I inform you that I have been to Countess d’Isorella myself with a man who can compel her to speak? But Anna von Lenkenstein is not base like that Italian. Let them think of you as they will, I believe you to have a great heart. I am sure you will not allow personal sentiment to sully your devotion to our country. Show them that our Austrian faces can be bright; and meet her whom you call your enemy; you cannot fly. You must see her, or you betray yourself. The poor creature’s husband is in danger of capture or death.”

Page 1838

While the duchess's stern under-breath ran on hurriedly, convincing Anna that she had, with no further warning, to fall back upon her uttermost strength—the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani was called at the door. Instinctively the others left a path between Vittoria and Anna. It was one of the moments when the adoption of a decisive course says more in vindication of conduct than long speeches. Anna felt that she was on her trial. For the first time since she had looked on this woman she noticed the soft splendour of Vittoria's eyes, and the harmony of her whole figure; nor was the black dress of protesting Italian mourning any longer offensive in her sight, but on a sudden pitiful, for Anna thought: "It may at this very hour be for her husband, and she not knowing it." And with that she had a vision under her eyelids of Nagen like a shadowy devil in pursuit of men flying, and striking herself and Vittoria worse than dead in one blow levelled at Carlo Ammiani. A sense of supernatural horror chilled her blood when she considered again, facing her enemy, that their mutual happiness was by her own act involved in the fate of one life. She stepped farther than the half-way to greet her visitor, whose hands she took. Before a word was uttered between them, she turned to her brother, and with a clear voice said:

"Karl, the Countess Alessandra's husband, our old, friend Carlo Ammiani, may need succour in his flight. Try to cross it; or better, get among those who are pursuing him; and don't delay one minute. You understand me."

Count Karl bowed his head, bitterly humbled.

Anna's eyes seemed to interrogate Vittoria, "Can I do, more?" but her own heart answered her.

Inveterate when following up her passion for vengeance, she was fanatical in responding to the suggestions of remorse.

"Stay; I will despatch Major Weisspriess in my own name," she said. "He is a trusty messenger, and he knows those mountains. Whoever is the officer broken for aiding Count Ammiani's escape, he shall be rewarded by me to the best of my ability. Countess Alessandra, I have anticipated your petition; I hope you may not have to reproach me. Remember that my country was in pieces when you and I declared war. You will not suffer without my suffering tenfold. Perhaps some day you will do me the favour to sing to me, when there is no chance of interruption. At present it is cruel to detain you."

Vittoria said simply: "I thank you, Countess Anna."

She was led out by Count Karl to where Merthyr awaited her. All wondered at the briefness of a scene that had unexpectedly brought the crisis to many emotions and passions, as the broken waters of the sea beat together and make here or there the wave which is topmost. Anna's grand initiative hung in their memories like the throbbing

of a pulse, so hotly their sensations swarmed about it, and so intensely it embraced and led what all were desiring. The duchess kissed Anna, saying:

Page 1839

“That is a noble heart to which you have become reconciled. Though you should never be friends, as I am with one of them, you will esteem her. Do not suppose her to be cold. She is the mother of an unborn little one, and for that little one’s sake she follows out every duty; she checks every passion in her bosom. She will spare no sacrifice to save her husband, but she has brought her mind to look at the worst, for fear that a shock should destroy her motherly guard.”

“Really, duchess,” Anna replied, “these are things for married women to hear;” and she provoked some contempt of her conventional delicacy, at the same time that in her imagination the image of Vittoria struggling to preserve this burden of motherhood against a tragic mischance, completely humiliated and overwhelmed her, as if nature had also come to add to her mortifications.

“I am ready to confess everything I have done, and to be known for what I am,” she said.

“Confess no more than is necessary, but do everything you can; that’s wisest,” returned the duchess.

“Ah; you mean that you have nothing to learn.” Anna shuddered.

“I mean that you are likely to run into the other extreme of disfavouring yourself just now, my child. And,” continued the duchess, “you have behaved so splendidly that I won’t think ill of you.”

Before the day darkened, Wilfrid obtained, through Prince Radocky’s influence, an order addressed to Major Nagen for the surrender of prisoners into his hands. He and Count Karl started for the Val Camonica on the chance of intercepting the pursuit. These were not much wiser than their guesses and their apprehensions made them; but Weisspriess started on the like errand after an interview with Anna, and he had drawn sufficient intelligence out of sobs, and broken sentences, and torture of her spirit, to understand that if Count Ammiani fell alive or dead into Nagen’s hands, Nagen by Anna’s scrupulous oath, had a claim on her person and her fortune: and he knew Nagen to be a gambler. As he was now by promotion of service Nagen’s superior officer, and a near relative of the Brescian commandant, who would be induced to justify his steps, his object was to reach and arbitrarily place himself over Nagen, as if upon a special mission, and to get the lead of the expedition. For that purpose he struck somewhat higher above the Swiss borders than Karl and Wilfrid, and gained a district in the mountains above the vale, perfectly familiar to him. Obeying directions forwarded to her by Wilfrid, Vittoria left Milan for the Val Camonica no later than the evening; Laura was with her in the carriage; Merthyr took horse after them as soon as he had succeeded in persuading Countess Ammiani to pardon her daughter’s last act of wilfulness, and believe that, during the agitation of unnumbered doubts, she ran less peril in the wilds where her husband fled, than in her home.

“I will trust to her idolatrously, as you do,” Countess Ammiani said; “and perhaps she has already proved to me that I may.”

Page 1840

Merthyr saw Agostino while riding out of Milan, and was seen by him; but the old man walked onward, looking moodily on the stones, and merely waved his hand behind.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE LAST

There is hard winter overhead in the mountains when Italian Spring walks the mountain-sides with flowers, and hangs deep valley-walls with flowers half fruit; the sources of the rivers above are set about with fangs of ice, while the full flat stream runs to a rose of sunlight. High among the mists and snows were the fugitives of Brescia, and those who for love or pity struggled to save them wandered through the blooming vales, sometimes hearing that they had crossed the frontier into freedom, and as often that they were scattered low in death and captivity. Austria here, Switzerland yonder, and but one depth between to bound across and win calm breathing. But mountain might call to mountain, peak shine to peak; a girdle of steel drove the hunted men back to frosty heights and clouds, the shifting bosom of snows and lightnings. They saw nothing of hands stretched out to succour. They saw a sun that did not warm them, a home of exile inaccessible, crags like an earth gone to skeleton in hungry air; and below, the land of their birth, beautiful, and sown everywhere for them with torture and captivity, or death, the sweetest. Fifteen men numbered the escape from Brescia. They fought their way twice through passes of the mountains, and might easily, in their first dash Northward from the South-facing hills, have crossed to the Valtelline and Engadine, but that in their insanity of anguish they meditated another blow, and were readier to march into the plains with the tricolour than to follow any course of flight. When the sun was no longer in their blood they thought of reason and of rest; they voted the expedition to Switzerland, that so they should get round to Rome, and descended from the crags of the Tonale, under which they were drawn to an ambush, suffering three of their party killed, and each man bloody with wounds. The mountain befriended them, and gave them safety, as truth is given by a bitter friend. Among icy crags and mists, where the touch of life grows dull as the nail of a fore-finger, the features of the mountain were stamped on them, and with hunger they lost pride, and with solitude laughter; with endless fleeing they lost the aim of flight; some became desperate, a few craven. Companionship was broken before they parted in three bodies, commanded severally by Colonel Corte, Carlo Ammiani, and Barto Rizzo. Corte reached the plains, masked by the devotion of Carlo's band, who lured the soldiery to a point and drew a chase, while Corte passed the line and pushed on for Switzerland. Carlo told off his cousin Angelo Guidascarpi in the list of those following Corte; but when he fled up to the snows again, he beheld Angelo spectral as the vapour on a jut of rock awaiting him.

Page 1841

Barto Rizzo had chosen his own way, none knew whither. Carlo, Angelo, Marco Sana, and a sharply-wounded Brescian lad, conceived the scheme of traversing the South Tyrol mountain-range toward Friuli, whence Venice, the still-breathing republic, might possibly be gained. They carried the boy in turn till his arms drooped long down, and when they knew the soul was out of him they buried him in snow, and thought him happy. It was then that Marco Sana took his death for an omen, and decided them to turn their heads once more for Switzerland; telling them that the boy, whom he last had carried, uttered “Rome” with the flying breath. Angelo said that Sana would get to Rome; and Carlo, smiling on Angelo, said they were to die twins though they had been born only cousins. The language they had fallen upon was mystical, scarce intelligible to other than themselves. On a clear morning, with the Swiss peaks in sight, they were condemned by want of food to quit their fastness for the valley.

Vittoria read the faces of the mornings as human creatures base tried to gather the sum of their destinies off changing surfaces, fair not meaning fair, nor black black, but either the mask upon the secret of God’s terrible will; and to learn it and submit, was the spiritual burden of her motherhood, that the child leaping with her heart might live. Not to hope blindly, in the exceeding anxiousness of her passionate love, nor blindly to fear; not to bet her soul fly out among the twisting chances; not to sap her great maternal duty by affecting false stoical serenity:—to nurse her soul’s strength, and suckle her womanly weakness with the tsars which are poison—when repressed; to be at peace with a disastrous world for the sake of the dependent life unborn; lay such pure efforts she clung to God. Soft dreams of sacred nuptial tenderness, tragic images, wild pity, were like phantoms encircling her, plucking at her as she went, lest they were beneath her feet, and she kept them from lodging between her breasts. The thought that her husband, though he should have perished, was not a life lost if their child lived, sustained her powerfully. It seemed to whisper at times almost as it were Carlo’s ghost breathing in her ears: “On thee!” On her the further duty devolved; and she trod down hope, lest it should build her up and bring a shock to surprise her fortitude; she put back alarm.

The mountains and the valleys scarce had names for her understanding; they were but a scene where the will of her Maker was at work. Rarely has a soul been so subjected to its own force. She certainly had the image of God in her mind.

Yet when her ayes lingered on any mountain gorge, the fate of her husband sang within it a strange chant, ending in a key that rang sounding through all her being, and seemed to question heaven. This music framed itself; it was still when she looked at the shrouded mountain-tops. A shadow meting sunlight on the long green slopes aroused it, and it hummed above the tumbling hasty foam, and penetrated hanging depths of foliage, sad-hued rock-clefts, dark green ravines; it became convulsed where the mountain threw forward in a rushing upward line against the sky, there to be severed at the head by cloud. It was silent among the vines.

Page 1842

Most painfully did human voices affect her when she had this music; speech was a scourge to her sense of hearing, and touch distressed her: an edge of purple flame would then unfold the vision of things to her eyes. She had lost memory; and if by hazard unawares one idea was projected by some sudden tumult of her enslaved emotions beyond known and visible circumstances, her intelligence darkened with am oppressive dread like that of zealots of the guilt of impiety.

Thus destitute, her eye took innumerable pictures sharp as on a brass-plate: torrents, goat-tracks winding up red earth, rocks veiled with water, cottage and children, strings of villagers mounting to the church, one woman kneeling before a wayside cross, her basket at her back, and her child gazing idly by; perched hamlets, rolling pasture-fields, the vast mountain lines. She asked all that she saw, “Does he live?” but the life was out of everything, and these shows told of no life, neither of joy nor of grief. She could only distantly connect the appearance of the white-coated soldiery with the source of her trouble. They were no more than figures on a screen that hid the flashing of the sword which renders dumb. She had charity for one who was footsore and sat cherishing his ankle by a village spring, and she fed him, and not until he was far behind, thought that he might have seen the white face of her husband.

Accurate tidings could not be obtained, though the whole course of the vale was full of stories of escapes, conflicts, and captures. Merthyr learnt positively that some fugitives had passed the cordon. He came across Wilfrid and Count Karl, who both verified it in the most sanguine manner. They knew, however, that Major Nagen continued in the mountains. Riding by a bend of the road, Merthyr beheld a man playing among children, with one hand and his head down apparently for concealment at his approach. It proved to be Beppo. The man believed that Count Ammiani had fled to Switzerland. Barto Rizzo, he said, was in the mountains still, and Beppo invoked damnation on him, as the author of those lying proclamations which had ruined Brescia. He had got out of the city later than the others and was seeking to evade the outposts, that he might join his master—“that is, my captain, for I have only one master;” he corrected the slip of his tongue appealingly to Merthyr. His left hand was being continually plucked at by the children while he talked, and after Merthyr had dispersed them with a shower of small coin, he showed the hand, saying, glad of eye, that it had taken a sword-cut intended for Count Ammiani. Merthyr sent him back to mount the carriage, enjoining him severely not to speak.

Page 1843

When Carlo and his companions descended from the mountains, they entered a village where there was an inn recognized by Angelo as the abode of Jacopo Cruchi. He there revived Carlo's animosity toward Weisspriess by telling the tale of the passage to Meran, and his good reasons for determining to keep guard over the Countess Alessandra all the way. Subsequently Angelo went to Jacopo for food. This he procured, but he was compelled to leave the man behind, and unpaid. It was dark when he left the inn; he had some difficulty in evading a flock of whitecoats, and his retreat from the village was still on the Austrian side. Somewhat about midnight Merthyr reached the inn, heralding the carriage. As Jacopo caught sight of Vittoria's face, he fell with his shoulders straightened against the wall, and cried out loudly that he had betrayed no one, and mentioned Major Weisspriess by name as having held the point of his sword at him and extracted nothing better than a wave of the hand and a lie; in other words, that the fugitives had retired to the Tyrolese mountains, and that he had shammed ignorance of who they were. Merthyr read at a glance that Jacopo had the large swallow and calm digestion for bribes, and getting the fellow alone he laid money in view, out of which, by doubling the sum to make Jacopo correct his first statement, and then by threatening to withdraw it altogether, he gained knowledge of the fact that Angelo Guidascarpi had recently visited the inn, and had started from it South-eastward, and that Major Weisspriess was following on his track. He wrote a line of strong entreaty to Weisspriess, lest that officer should perchance relapse into anger at the taunts of prisoners abhorring him with the hatred of Carlo and Angelo. At the same time he gave Beppo a considerable supply of money, and then sent him off, armed as far as possible to speed Count Ammiani safe across the borders, if a fugitive; or if a prisoner, to ensure the best which could be hoped for him from an adversary become generous. That evening Vittoria lay with her head on Laura's lap, and the pearly little crescent of her ear in moonlight by the window. So fair and young and still she looked that Merthyr feared for her, and thought of sending her back to Countess Ammiani.

Her first question with the lifting of her eyelids was if he had ceased to trust to her courage.

"No," said Merthyr; "there are bounds to human strength; that is all."

She answered: "There would be to mine—if I had not more than human strength beside me. I bow my head, dearest; it is that. I feel that I cannot break down as long as I know what is passing. Does my husband live?"

"Yes, he lives," said Merthyr; and she gave him her hand, and went to her bed.

He learnt from Laura that when Beppo mounted the carriage in silence, a fit of ungovernable wild trembling had come on her, broken at intervals by a cry that something was concealed. Laura could give no advice; she looked on Merthyr and Vittoria as two that had an incomprehensible knowledge of the power of one another's

natures, and the fiery creature remained passive in perplexity of minds as soft an attendant as a suffering woman could have:

Page 1844

Merthyr did not sleep, and in the morning Vittoria said to him, “You want to be active, my friend. Go, and we will wait for you here. I know that I am never deceived by you, and when I see you I know that the truth speaks and bids me be worthy of it Go up there,” she pointed with shut eyes at the mountains; “leave me to pray for greater strength. I am among Italians at this inn; and shall spend money here; the poor people love it.” She smiled a little, showing a glimpse of her old charitable humour.

Merthyr counselled Laura that in case of evil tidings during his absence she should reject her feminine ideas of expediency, and believe that she was speaking to a brave soul firmly rooted in the wisdom of heaven.

“Tell her?—she will die,” said Laura, shuddering.

“Get tears from her,” Merthyr rejoined; “but hide nothing from her for a single instant; keep her in daylight. For God’s sake, keep her in daylight.”

“It’s too sharp a task for me.” She repeated that she was incapable of it.

“Ah,” said he, “look at your Italy, how she weeps! and she has cause. She would die in her grief, if she had no faith for what is to come. I dare say it is not, save in the hearts of one or two, a conscious faith, but it’s real divine strength; and Alessandra Ammiani has it. Do as I bid you. I return in two days.”

Without understanding him, Laura promised that she would do her utmost to obey, and he left her muttering to herself as if she were schooling her lips to speak reluctant words. He started for the mountains with gladdened limbs, taking a guide, who gave his name as Lorenzo, and talked of having been ‘out’ in the previous year. “I am a patriot, signore! and not only in opposition to my beast of a wife, I assure you: a downright patriot, I mean.” Merthyr was tempted to discharge him at first, but controlled his English antipathy to babblers, and discovered him to be a serviceable fellow. Toward nightfall they heard shots up a rock-strewn combe of the lower slopes; desultory shots indicating rifle-firing at long range. Darkness made them seek shelter in a pine-hut; starting from which at dawn, Lorenzo ran beating about like a dog over the place where the shots had sounded on the foregoing day; he found a stone spotted with blood. Not far from the stone lay a military glove that bore brown-crimson finger-ends. They were striking off to a dairy-but for fresh milk, when out of a crevice of rock overhung by shrubs a man’s voice called, and Merthyr climbing up from perch to perch, saw Marco Sana lying at half length, shot through hand and leg. From him Merthyr learnt that Carlo and Angelo had fled higher up; yesterday they had been attacked by coming who tried to lure there to surrender by coming forward at the head of his men and offering safety, and “other gabble,” said Marco. He offered a fair shot at his heart, too, while he stood below a rock that Marco pointed at gloomily as a hope gone for ever; but Carlo would

Page 1845

not allow advantage to be taken of even the treacherous simulation of chivalry, and only permitted firing after he had returned to his men. “I was hit here and here,” said Marco, touching his wounds, as men can hardly avoid doing when speaking of the fresh wound. Merthyr got him on his feet, put money in his pocket, and led him off the big stones painfully. “They give no quarter,” Marco assured him, and reasoned that it must be so, for they had not taken him prisoner, though they saw him fall, and ran by or in view of him in pursuit of Carlo. By this Merthyr was convinced that Weisspriess meant well. He left his guide in charge of Marco to help him into the Engadine. Greatly to his astonishment, Lorenzo tossed the back of his hand at the offer of money. “There shall be this difference between me and my wife,” he remarked; “and besides, gracious signore, serving my countrymen for nothing, that’s for love, and the Tedeschi can’t punish me for it, so it’s one way of cheating them, the wolves!” Merthyr shook his hand and said, “Instead of my servant, be my friend;” and Lorenzo made no feeble mouth, but answered, “Signore, it is much to my honour,” and so they went different ways.

Left to himself Merthyr set step vigorously upward. Information from herdsmen told him that he was an hour off the foot of one of the passes. He begged them to tell any hunted men who might come within hail that a friend ran seeking them. Farther up, while thinking of the fine nature of that Lorenzo, and the many men like him who could not by the very existence of nobility in their bosoms suffer their country to go through another generation of servitude, his heart bounded immensely, for he heard a shout and his name, and he beheld two figures on a rock near the gorge where the mountain opened to its heights. But they were not Carlo and Angelo. They were Wilfrid and Count Karl, the latter of whom had discerned him through a telescope. They had good news to revive him, however: good at least in the main. Nagen had captured Carlo and Angelo, they believed; but they had left Weisspriess near on Nagen’s detachment, and they furnished sound military reasons to show why, if Weisspriess favoured the escape, they should not be present. They supposed that they were not half-a-mile from the scene in the pass where Nagen was being forcibly deposed from his authority: Merthyr borrowed Count Karl’s glass, and went as they directed him round a bluff of the descending hills, that faced the vale, much like a blown and beaten sea-cliff. Wilfrid and Karl were so certain of Count Ammiani’s safety, that their only thought was to get under good cover before nightfall, and haply into good quarters, where the three proper requirements of the soldier-meat, wine, and tobacco—might be furnished to them. After an imperative caution that they should not present themselves before the Countess Alessandra, Merthyr sped quickly over the broken ground. How gaily the two young men cheered

Page 1846

to him as he hurried on! He met a sort of pedlar turning the bluntfaced mountain-spur, and this man said, “Yes, sure enough, prisoners had been taken,” and he was not aware of harm having been done to them; he fancied there was a quarrel between two captains. His plan being always to avoid the military, he had slunk round and away from them as fast as might be. An Austrian common soldier, a good-humoured German, distressed by a fall that had hurt his knee-cap, sat within the gorge, which was very wide at the mouth. Merthyr questioned him, and he, while mending one of his gathered cigar-ends, pointed to a meadow near the beaten track, some distance up the rocks. Whitecoats stood thick on it. Merthyr lifted his telescope and perceived an eager air about the men, though they stood ranged in careless order. He began to mount forthwith, but amazed by a sudden ringing of shot, he stopped, asking himself in horror whether it could be an execution. The shots and the noise increased, until the confusion of a positive mellay reigned above. The fall of the meadow swept to a bold crag right over the pathway, and with a projection that seen sideways made a vulture’s head and beak of it. There rolled a corpse down the precipitous wave of green grass on to the crag, where it lodged, face to the sky; sword dangled from swordknot at one wrist, heels and arms were in the air, and the body caught midway hung poised and motionless. The firing deadened. Then Merthyr drawing nearer beneath the crag, saw one who had life in him slipping down toward the body, and knew the man for Beppo. Beppo knocked his hands together and groaned miserably, but flung himself astride the beak of the crag, and took the body in his arms, sprang down with it, and lay stunned at Merthyr’s feet. Merthyr looked on the face of Carlo Ammiani.

EPILOGUE

No uncontested version of the tragedy of Count Ammiani’s death passed current in Milan during many years. With time it became disconnected from passion, and took form in a plain narrative. He and Angelo were captured by Major Nagen, and were, as the soldiers of the force subsequently let it be known, roughly threatened with what he termed I ’Brescian short credit.’ The appearance of Major Weisspriess and his claim to the command created a violent discussion between the two officers. For Nagen, by all military rules, could well contest it. But Weisspriess had any body of the men of the army under his charm, and seeing the ascendency he gained with them over an unpopular officer, he dared the stroke for the charitable object he had in view. Having established his command, in spite of Nagen’s wrathful protests and menaces, he spoke to the prisoners, telling Carlo that for his wife’s sake he should be spared, and Angelo that he must expect the fate of a murderer. His address to them was deliberate, and quite courteous: he expressed himself sorry that a gallant gentleman

Page 1847

like Angelo Guidascarpi should merit a bloody grave, but so it was. At the same time he entreated Count Ammiani to rely on his determination to save him. Major Nagen did not stand far removed from them. Carlo turned to him and repeated the words of Weisspriess; nor could Angelo restrain his cousin's vehement renunciation of hope and life in doing this. He accused Weisspriess of a long evasion of a brave man's obligation to repair an injury, charged him with cowardice, and requested Major Nagen, as a man of honour, to drag his brother officer to the duel. Nagen then said that Major Weisspriess was his superior, adding that his gallant brother officer had only of late objected to vindicate his reputation with his sword. Stung finally beyond the control of an irritable temper, Weisspriess walked out of sight of the soldiery with Carlo, to whom, at a special formal request from Weisspriess, Nagen handed his sword. Again he begged Count Ammiani to abstain from fighting; yea, to strike him and disable him, and fly, rather—than provoke the skill of his right hand. Carlo demanded his cousin's freedom. It was denied to him, and Carlo claimed his privilege. The witnesses of the duel were Jenna and another young subaltern: both declared it fair according to the laws of honour, when their stupefaction on beholding the proud swordsman of the army stretched lifeless on the brown leaves of the past year left them with power to speak. Thus did Carlo slay his old enemy who would have served as his friend. A shout of rescue was heard before Carlo had yielded up his weapon. Four haggard and desperate men, headed by Barto Rizzo, burst from an ambush on the guard encircling Angelo. There, with one thought of saving his doomed cousin and comrade, Carlo rushed, and not one Italian survived the fight.

An unarmed spectator upon the meadow-borders, Beppo, had but obscure glimpses of scenes shifting like a sky in advance of hurricane winds.

Merthyr delivered the burden of death to Vittoria. Her soul had crossed the darkness of the river of death in that quiet agony preceding the revelation of her Maker's will, and she drew her dead husband to her bosom and kissed him on the eyes and the forehead, not as one who had quite gone away from her, but as one who lay upon another shore whither she would come. The manful friend, ever by her side, saved her by his absolute trust in her fortitude to bear the burden of the great sorrow undeceived, and to walk with it to its last resting-place on earth unobstructed. Clear knowledge of her, the issue of reverent love, enabled him to read her unequalled strength of nature, and to rely on her fidelity to her highest mortal duty in a conflict with extreme despair. She lived through it as her Italy had lived through the hours which brought her face to face with her dearest in death; and she also on the day, ten years later, when an Emperor and a King stood beneath the vault of the grand Duomo, and the organ and a peal of voices rendered thanks to heaven for liberty, could show the fruit of her devotion in the dark-eyed boy, Carlo Merthyr Ammiani, standing between Merthyr and her, with old blind Agostino's hands upon his head. And then once more, and but for once, her voice was heard in Milan.

Page 1848

Etext editor's bookmarks for the complete Vittoria:

A common age once, when he married her; now she had grown old
A fortress face; strong and massive, and honourable in ruin
Agostino was enjoying the smoke of paper cigarettes
An angry woman will think the worst
Anguish to think of having bent the knee for nothing
Art of despising what he coveted
As the Lord decided, so it would end! "Oh, delicious creed!"
Be on your guard the next two minutes he gets you alone
But is there such a thing as happiness
By our manner of loving we are known
Compliment of being outwitted by their own offspring
Conduct is never a straight index where the heart's involved
Confess no more than is necessary, but do everything you can
Critical in their first glance at a prima donna
Deep as a mother's, pure as a virgin's, fiery as a saint's
Defiance of foes and (what was harder to brave) of friends
Do I serve my hand? or, Do I serve my heart?
English antipathy to babblers
Every church of the city lent its iron tongue to the peal
Fast growing to be an eccentric by profession
Foolish trick of thinking for herself
Forgetfulness is like a closing sea
Fortitude leaned so much upon the irony
Good nerve to face the scene which he is certain will be enacted
Government of brain; not sufficient Insurrection of heart
Grand air of pitying sadness
Had taken refuge in their opera-glasses
Hated tears, considering them a clog to all useful machinery
He is in the season of faults
He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two
He postponed it to the next minute and the next
Her singing struck a note of grateful remembered delight
I always respected her; I never liked her
I hope I am not too hungry to discriminate
I know nothing of imagination
Impossible for us women to comprehend love without folly in man
In Italy, a husband away, ze friend takes title
Intentions are really rich possessions
Ironical fortitude
It rarely astonishes our ears It illumines our souls
Italians were like women, and wanted—a real beating

Longing for love and dependence
Love of men and women as a toy that I have played with
Madness that sane men enamoured can be struck by
Morales, madame, suit ze sun
Necessary for him to denounce somebody
Never, never love a married woman
No intoxication of hot blood to cheer those who sat at home
No word is more lightly spoken than shame
Not to be feared more than are the general race of bunglers
O heaven! of what avail is human effort?
Obedience oils necessity

Page 1849

Our life is but a little holding, lent To do a mighty labour
Pain is a cloak that wraps you about
Patience is the pestilence
People who can lose themselves in a ray of fancy at any season
Profound belief in her partiality for him
Question with some whether idiots should live
Rarely exacted obedience, and she was spontaneously obeyed
She thought that friendship was sweeter than love
She was sick of personal freedom
Simple obstinacy of will sustained her
Speech was a scourge to her sense of hearing
Taint of the hypocrisy which comes with shame
The devil trusts nobody
The divine afflatus of enthusiasm buoyed her no longer
They take fever for strength, and calmness for submission
Too weak to resist, to submit to an outrage quietly
Too well used to defeat to believe readily in victory
Was born on a hired bed
Watch, and wait
We are good friends till we quarrel again
We can bear to fall; we cannot afford to draw back
Went into endless invalid’s laughter
Who shrinks from an hour that is suspended in doubt
Whole body of fanatics combined to precipitate the devotion
Why should these men take so much killing?
Will not admit the existence of a virtue in an opposite opinion
Women and men are in two hostile camps
You can master pain, but not doubt
Youth will not believe that stupidity and beauty can go together

THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND

By George Meredith

CONTENTS

Book 1.
I. I *am* A *subject of contention*
ii. *An adventure on my own account*
III. *Dipwell farm*

iv. I *have* A *taste of grandeur*
V. I *have* A *dear friend*
vi. A *tale of* A *goose*

Book 2.
VII. A *free life on the road*
viii. *Janet Ilchester*
IX. *An evening with captain Bulsted*
X. *An expedition*
xi. *The great fog and the fire at midnight*
XII. *We find ourselves bound on* A *voyage*
XIII. *We conduct several learned arguments with the captain of the* '*Priscilla*'
xiv. I *meet old friends*

Page 1850

Book 3.
XV. *We are accosted by* A *beautiful little lady in the forest*
XVI. *The statue on the promontory*
xvii. *My father breathes*, *moves*, *and speaks*
XVIII. *We pass* A *delightful evening*, *and* I *have* A *morning vision*
XIX. *Our return homeward*
XX. *News of* A *fresh conquest of my father's*
XXI. A *promenade in bath*
XXII. *Conclusion of the bath episode*

Book 4.
XXIII. *My twenty-first birthday*
XXIV. I *meet the princess*
XXV. *On board* A *yacht*
XXVI. *In view of the* HOHENZOLLERN'S *birthplace*
XXVII. *The time of roses*
XXVIII. *Ottilia*
XXIX. *An evening with Dr*. *Julius von Karsteg*
XXX. A *summer storm*, *and love*
XXXI. *Princess Ottilia's letter*
XXXII. *An interview with prince Ernest and* A *meeting with prince Otto*

Book 5.
XXXIII. *What came of* A *shilling*
XXXIV. I *gain* A *perception of princely state*
XXXV. *The scene in the lake-palace library*
XXXVI. *Homeward and home again*.
XXXVII. *Janet renounces me*
XXXVIII. *My bankers' book*.

Book 6.
XXXIX. I *see my father taking the tide and am carried on it myself*
XL. *My father's meeting with my grandfather*
XLI. *Commencement of the splendours and perplexities of my father's grand parade*
XLII. *The marquis of Edbury and his puppet*
XLIII. I *become one of the chosen of the nation*
XLIV. *My father is miraculously relieved by fortune*

Page 1851

Book 7.
XLV. *Within an inch of my life* .
XLVI. *Among gipsy women*
XLVII. *My father acts the charmer again*
XLVIII. *The princess entrapped*
XLIX. *Which foreshadows* A *general gathering*
L. *We are all in my father's net*
LI. *An encounter showing my father's genius in* A *strong light*

Book 8.
LII. *Strange revelations*, *and my grandfather has his last outburst*
LIII. *The heiress proves that she inherits the feud and* I *go drifting*
LIV. *My return to England*
LV. I *meet my first playfellow and take my punishment*
LVI. *Conclusion*

CHAPTER I

I AM A SUBJECT OF CONTENTION

One midnight of a winter month the sleepers in Riversley Grange were awakened by a ringing of the outer bell and blows upon the great hall-doors. Squire Beltham was master there: the other members of the household were, his daughter Dorothy Beltham; a married daughter Mrs. Richmond; Benjamin Sewis, an old half-caste butler; various domestic servants; and a little boy, christened Harry Lepel Richmond, the squire's grandson. Riversley Grange lay in a rich watered hollow of the Hampshire heath-country; a lonely circle of enclosed brook and pasture, within view of some of its dependent farms, but out of hail of them or any dwelling except the stables and the head-gardener's cottage. Traditions of audacious highwaymen, together with the gloomy surrounding fir-scenery, kept it alive to fears of solitude and the night; and there was that in the determined violence of the knocks and repeated bell-peals which assured all those who had ever listened in the servants' hall to prognostications of a possible night attack, that the robbers had come at last most awfully. A crowd of maids gathered along the upper corridor of the main body of the building: two or three footmen hung lower down, bold in attitude. Suddenly the noise ended, and soon after the voice of old Sewis commanded them to scatter away to their beds; whereupon the footmen took agile leaps to the post of danger, while the women, in whose bosoms intense curiosity now supplanted terror, proceeded to a vacant room overlooking the front entrance, and spied from the window.

Meanwhile Sewis stood by his master's bedside. The squire was a hunter, of the old sort: a hard rider, deep drinker, and heavy slumberer. Before venturing to shake his arm Sewis struck a light and flashed it over the squire's eyelids to make the task of

rousing him easier. At the first touch the squire sprang up, swearing by his Lord Harry he had just dreamed of fire, and muttering of buckets.

Page 1852

‘Sewis! you’re the man, are you: where has it broken out?’

‘No, sir; no fire,’ said Sewis; ‘you be cool, sir.’

’Cool, sir! confound it, Sewis, haven’t I heard a whole town of steeples at work? I don’t sleep so thick but I can hear, you dog! Fellow comes here, gives me a start, tells me to be cool; what the deuce! nobody hurt, then? all right!’

The squire had fallen back on his pillow and was relapsing to sleep.

Sewis spoke impressively: ’There’s a gentleman downstairs; a gentleman downstairs, sir. He has come rather late.’

‘Gentleman downstairs come rather late.’ The squire recapitulated the intelligence to possess it thoroughly. ’Rather late, eh? Oh! Shove him into a bed, and give him hot brandy and water, and be hanged to him!’

Sewis had the office of tempering a severely distasteful announcement to the squire.

He resumed: ’The gentleman doesn’t talk of staying. That is not his business. It ‘s rather late for him to arrive.’

‘Rather late!’ roared the squire. ‘Why, what’s it o’clock?’

Reaching a hand to the watch over his head, he caught sight of the unearthly hour. ’A quarter to two? Gentleman downstairs? Can’t be that infernal apothecary who broke ’s engagement to dine with me last night? By George, if it is I’ll souse him; I’ll drench him from head to heel as though the rascal ’d been drawn through the duck-pond. Two o’clock in the morning? Why, the man’s drunk. Tell him I’m a magistrate, and I’ll commit him, deuce take him; give him fourteen days for a sot; another fourteen for impudence. I’ve given a month ’fore now. Comes to me, a Justice of the peace!—man ’s mad! Tell him he’s in peril of a lunatic asylum. And doesn’t talk of staying? Lift him out o’ the house on the top o’ your boot, Sewis, and say it ’s mine; you ‘ve my leave.’

Sewis withdrew a step from the bedside. At a safe distance he fronted his master steadily; almost admonishingly. ’It ‘s Mr. Richmond, sir,’ he said.

‘Mr. . . .’ The squire checked his breath. That was a name never uttered at the Grange. ‘The scoundrel?’ he inquired harshly, half in a tone of one assuring himself, and his rigid dropped jaw shut.

The fact had to be denied or affirmed instantly, and Sewis was silent.

Grasping his bedclothes in a lump, the squire cried:

‘Downstairs? downstairs, Sewis? You’ve admitted him into my house?’

‘No, sir.’

‘You have!’

‘He is not in the house, sir.’

‘You have! How did you speak to him, then?’

‘Out of my window, sir.’

‘What place here is the scoundrel soiling now?’

‘He is on the doorstep outside the house.’

‘Outside, is he? and the door’s locked?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Let him rot there!’

By this time the midnight visitor’s patience had become exhausted. A renewal of his clamour for immediate attention fell on the squire’s ear, amazing him to stupefaction at such challengeing insolence.

Page 1853

‘Hand me my breeches,’ he called to Sewis; ’I can’t think brisk out of my breeches.’

Sewis held the garment ready. The squire jumped from the bed, fuming speechlessly, chafing at gaiters and braces, cravat and coat, and allowed his buttons to be fitted neatly on his calves; the hammering at the hall-door and plucking at the bell going on without intermission. He wore the aspect of one who assumes a forced composure under the infliction of outrages on his character in a Court of Law, where he must of necessity listen and lock his boiling replies within his indignant bosom.

‘Now, Sewis, now my horsewhip,’ he remarked, as if it had been a simple adjunct of his equipment.

‘Your hat, sir?’

‘My horsewhip, I said.’

‘Your hat is in the hall,’ Sewis observed gravely.

‘I asked you for my horsewhip.’

‘That is not to be found anywhere,’ said Sewis.

The squire was diverted from his objurgations against this piece of servitorial defiance by his daughter Dorothy’s timid appeal for permission to come in. Sewis left the room. Presently the squire descended, fully clad, and breathing sharply from his nostrils. Servants were warned off out of hearing; none but Sewis stood by.

The squire himself unbolted the door, and threw it open to the limit of the chain.

‘Who’s there?’ he demanded.

A response followed promptly from outside: ’I take you to be Mr. Harry Lepel Beltham. Correct me if I err. Accept my apologies for disturbing you at a late hour of the night, I pray.’

‘Your name?’

’Is plain Augustus Fitz-George Roy Richmond at this moment, Mr. Beltham. You will recognize me better by opening your door entirely: voices are deceptive. You were born a gentleman, Mr. Beltham, and will not reduce me to request you to behave like one. I am now in the position, as it were, of addressing a badger in his den. It is on both sides unsatisfactory. It reflects egregious discredit upon you, the householder.’

The squire hastily bade Sewis see that the passages to the sleeping apartments were barred, and flung the great chain loose. He was acting under strong control of his temper.

It was a quiet grey night, and as the doors flew open, a largely-built man, dressed in a high-collared great-coat and fashionable hat of the time, stood clearly defined to view. He carried a light cane, with the point of the silver handle against his under lip. There was nothing formidable in his appearance, and his manner was affectedly affable. He lifted his hat as soon as he found himself face to face with the squire, disclosing a partially bald head, though his whiskering was luxuriant, and a robust condition of manhood was indicated by his erect attitude and the immense swell of his furred great-coat at the chest. His features were exceedingly frank and cheerful. From his superior height, he was enabled to look down quite royally on the man whose repose he had disturbed.

Page 1854

The following conversation passed between them.

’You now behold who it is, Mr. Beltham, that acknowledges to the misfortune of arousing you at an unseemly hour—unbetimes, as our gossips in mother Saxon might say—and with profound regret, sir, though my habit is to take it lightly.’

‘Have you any accomplices lurking about here?’

‘I am alone.’

’What ‘s your business?’

‘I have no business.’

’You have no business to be here, no. I ask you what ’s the object of your visit?’

’Permit me first to speak of the cause of my protracted arrival, sir. The ridicule of casting it on the post-boys will strike you, Mr. Beltham, as it does me. Nevertheless, I must do it; I have no resource. Owing to a rascal of the genus, incontinent in liquor, I have this night walked seven miles from Ewling. My complaint against him is not on my own account.’

‘What brought you here at all?’

‘Can you ask me?’

‘I ask you what brought you to my house at all?’

‘True, I might have slept at Ewling.’

‘Why didn’t you?’

’For the reason, Mr. Beltham, which brought me here originally. I could not wait-not a single minute. So far advanced to the neighbourhood, I would not be retarded, and I came on. I crave your excuses for the hour of my arrival. The grounds for my coming at all you will very well understand, and you will applaud me when I declare to you that I come to her penitent; to exculpate myself, certainly, but despising self-justification. I love my wife, Mr. Beltham. Yes; hear me out, sir. I can point to my unhappy star, and say, blame that more than me. That star of my birth and most disastrous fortunes should plead on my behalf to you; to my wife at least it will.’

‘You’ve come to see my daughter Marian, have you?’

‘My wife, sir.’

‘You don’t cross my threshold while I live.’

‘You compel her to come out to me?’

’She stays where she is, poor wretch, till the grave takes her. You’ve done your worst; be off.’

‘Mr. Beltham, I am not to be restrained from the sight of my wife.’

‘Scamp!’

’By no scurrilous epithets from a man I am bound to respect will I be deterred or exasperated.’

‘Damned scamp, I say!’ The squire having exploded his wrath gave it free way. ’I’ve stopped my tongue all this while before a scoundrel ’d corkscrew the best-bottled temper right or left, go where you will one end o’ the world to the other, by God! And here ’s a scoundrel stinks of villany, and I’ve proclaimed him ’ware my gates as a common trespasser, and deserves hanging if ever rook did nailed hard and fast to my barn doors! comes here for my daughter, when he got her by stealing her, scenting his carcase, and talking ’bout his birth, singing what not sort o’ foreign mewin’ stuff, and she found him out a liar and a beast, by God! And she turned home. My

Page 1855

doors are open to my flesh and blood. And here she halts, I say, 'gainst the law, if the law's against me. She's crazed: you've made her mad; she knows none of us, not even her boy. Be off; you've done your worst; the light's gone clean out in her; and hear me, you Richmond, or Roy, or whatever you call yourself, I tell you I thank the Lord she has lost her senses. See her or not, you 've no hold on her, and see her you shan't while I go by the name of a man.'

Mr. Richmond succeeded in preserving an air of serious deliberation under the torrent of this tremendous outburst, which was marked by scarce a pause in the delivery.

He said, 'My wife deranged! I might presume it too truly an inherited disease. Do you trifle with me, sir? Her reason unseated! and can you pretend to the right of dividing us? If this be as you say—Oh! ten thousand times the stronger my claim, my absolute claim, to cherish her. Make way for me, Mr. Beltham. I solicit humbly the holiest privilege sorrow can crave of humanity. My wife! my wife! Make way for me, sir.'

His figure was bent to advance. The squire shouted an order to Sewis to run round to the stables and slip the dogs loose.

'Is it your final decision?' Mr. Richmond asked.

'Damn your fine words! Yes, it is. I keep my flock clear of a foul sheep.'

'Mr. Beltham, I implore you, be merciful. I submit to any conditions: only let me see her. I will walk the park till morning, but say that an interview shall be granted in the morning. Frankly, sir, it is not my intention to employ force: I throw myself utterly on your mercy. I love the woman; I have much to repent of. I see her, and I go; but once I must see her. So far I also speak positively.'

'Speak as positively as you like,' said the squire.

'By the laws of nature and the laws of man, Marian Richmond is mine to support and comfort, and none can hinder me, Mr. Beltham; none, if I resolve to take her to myself.'

'Can't they!' said the squire.

'A curse be on him, heaven's lightnings descend on him, who keeps husband from wife in calamity!'

The squire whistled for his dogs.

As if wounded to the quick by this cold-blooded action, Mr. Richmond stood to his fullest height.

'Nor, sir, on my application during to-morrow's daylight shall I see her?'

’Nor, sir, on your application’—the squire drawled in uncontrollable mimicking contempt of the other’s florid forms of speech, ending in his own style,—’no, you won’t.’

’You claim a paternal right to refuse me: my wife is your child. Good. I wish to see my son.’

On that point the squire was equally decided. ‘You can’t. He’s asleep.’

‘I insist.’

‘Nonsense: I tell you he’s a-bed and asleep.’

‘I repeat, I insist.’

‘When the boy’s fast asleep, man!’

’The boy is my flesh and blood. You have spoken for your daughter—I speak for my son. I will see him, though I have to batter at your doors till sunrise.’

Page 1856

Some minutes later the boy was taken out of his bed by his aunt Dorothy, who dressed him by the dark window-light, crying bitterly, while she said, ‘Hush, hush!’ and fastened on his small garments between tender huggings of his body and kissings of his cheeks. He was told that he had nothing to be afraid of. A gentleman wanted to see him: nothing more. Whether the gentleman was a good gentleman, and not a robber, he could not learn but his aunt Dorothy, having wrapped him warm in shawl and comforter, and tremblingly tied his hat-strings under his chin, assured him, with convulsive caresses, that it would soon be over, and he would soon be lying again snug and happy in his dear little bed. She handed him to Sewis on the stairs, keeping his fingers for an instant to kiss them: after which, old Sewis, the lord of the pantry, where all sweet things were stored, deposited him on the floor of the hall, and he found himself facing the man of the night. It appeared to him that the stranger was of enormous size, like the giants of fairy books: for as he stood a little out of the doorway there was a peep of night sky and trees behind him, and the trees looked very much smaller, and hardly any sky was to be seen except over his shoulders.

The squire seized one of the boy’s hands to present him and retain him at the same time: but the stranger plucked him from his grandfather’s hold, and swinging him high, exclaimed, ’Here he is! This is Harry Richmond. He has grown a grenadier.’

‘Kiss the little chap and back to bed with him,’ growled the squire.

The boy was heartily kissed and asked if he had forgotten his papa. He replied that he had no papa: he had a mama and a grandpapa. The stranger gave a deep groan.

‘You see what you have done; you have cut me off from my own,’ he said terribly to the squire; but tried immediately to soothe the urchin with nursery talk and the pats on the shoulder which encourage a little boy to grow fast and tall. ‘Four years of separation,’ he resumed, ’and my son taught to think that he has no father. By heavens! it is infamous, it is a curst piece of inhumanity. Mr. Beltham, if I do not see my wife, I carry off my son.’

’You may ask till you’re hoarse, you shall never see her in this house while I am here to command,’ said the squire.

’Very well; then Harry Richmond changes homes. I take him. The affair is concluded.’

‘You take him from his mother?’ the squire sang out.

’You swear to me she has lost her wits; she cannot suffer. I can. I shall not expect from you, Mr. Beltham, the minutest particle of comprehension of a father’s feelings. You are earthy; you are an animal.’

The squire saw that he was about to lift the boy, and said, 'Stop, never mind that. Stop, look at the case. You can call again to-morrow, and you can see me and talk it over.'

'Shall I see my wife?'

'No, you shan't.'

Page 1857

‘You remain faithful to your word, sir, do you?’

‘I do.’

‘Then I do similarly.’

’What! Stop! Not to take a child like that out of a comfortable house at night in Winter, man?’

’Oh, the night is temperate and warm; he shall not remain in a house where his father is dishonoured.’

‘Stop! not a bit of it,’ cried the squire. ’No one speaks of you. I give you my word, you ’re never mentioned by man, woman or child in the house.’

‘Silence concerning a father insinuates dishonour, Mr. Beltham.’

‘Damn your fine speeches, and keep your blackguardly hands off that boy,’ the squire thundered. ’Mind, if you take him, he goes for good. He doesn’t get a penny from me if you have the bringing of him up. You’ve done for him, if you decide that way. He may stand here a beggar in a stolen coat like you, and I won’t own him. Here, Harry, come to me; come to your grandad.’

Mr. Richmond caught the boy just when he was turning to run.

‘That gentleman,’ he said, pointing to the squire, ’is your grandpapa. I am your papa. You must learn at any cost to know and love your papa. If I call for you to-morrow or next day they will have played tricks with Harry Richmond, and hid him. Mr. Beltham, I request you, for the final time, to accord me your promise observe, I accept your promise—that I shall, at my demand, to-morrow or the next day, obtain an interview with my wife.’

The squire coughed out an emphatic ‘Never!’ and fortified it with an oath as he repeated it upon a fuller breath.

‘Sir, I will condescend to entreat you to grant this permission,’ said Mr. Richmond, urgently.

‘No, never: I won’t!’ rejoined the squire, red in the face from a fit of angry coughing. ’I won’t; but stop, put down that boy; listen to me, you Richmond! I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I ’ll—if you swear on a Bible, like a cadger before a bench of magistrates, you’ll never show your face within a circuit o’ ten miles hereabouts, and won’t trouble the boy if you meet him, or my daughter or me, or any one of us-hark ye, I’ll do this: let go the boy, and I’ll give ye five hundred—I’ll give ye a cheque on my banker for a thousand pounds; and, hark me out, you do this, you swear, as I said, on the servants’ Bible, in the

presence of my butler and me, “Strike you dead as Ananias and t’ other one if you don’t keep to it,” do that now, here, on the spot, and I’ll engage to see you paid fifty pounds a year into the bargain. Stop! and I’ll pay your debts under two or three hundred. For God’s sake, let go the boy! You shall have fifty guineas on account this minute. Let go the boy! And your son—there, I call him your son—your son, Harry Richmond, shall inherit from me; he shall have Riversley and the best part of my property, if not every bit of it. Is it a bargain? Will you swear? Don’t, and the boy’s a beggar, he’s a stranger here as much as you. Take him, and by the Lord, you ruin him. There now, never mind, stay, down with him. He’s got a cold already; ought to be in his bed; let the boy down!’

Page 1858

‘You offer me money,’ Mr. Richmond answered.

’That is one of the indignities belonging to a connection with a man like you. You would have me sell my son. To see my afflicted wife I would forfeit my heart’s yearnings for my son; your money, sir, I toss to the winds; and I am under the necessity of informing you that I despise and loathe you. I shrink from the thought of exposing my son to your besotted selfish example. The boy is mine; I have him, and he shall traverse the wilderness with me. By heaven! his destiny is brilliant. He shall be hailed for what he is, the rightful claimant of a place among the proudest in the land; and mark me, Mr. Beltham, obstinate sensual old man that you are! I take the boy, and I consecrate my life to the duty of establishing him in his proper rank and station, and there, if you live and I live, you shall behold him and bow your grovelling pig’s head to the earth, and bemoan the day, by heaven! when you,—a common country squire, a man of no origin, a creature with whose blood we have mixed ours—and he is stone-blind to the honour conferred on him—when you in your besotted stupidity threatened to disinherit Harry Richmond.’

The door slammed violently on such further speech as he had in him to utter. He seemed at first astonished; but finding the terrified boy about to sob, he drew a pretty box from one of his pockets and thrust a delicious sweetmeat between the whimpering lips. Then, after some moments of irresolution, during which he struck his chest soundingly and gazed down, talked alternately to himself and the boy, and cast his eyes along the windows of the house, he at last dropped on one knee and swaddled the boy in the folds of the shawl. Raising him in a business-like way, he settled him on an arm and stepped briskly across gravel-walk and lawn, like a horse to whose neck a smart touch of the whip has been applied.

The soft mild night had a moon behind it somewhere; and here and there a light-blue space of sky showed small rayless stars; the breeze smelt fresh of roots and heath. It was more a May-night than one of February. So strange an aspect had all these quiet hill-lines and larch and fir-tree tops in the half-dark stillness, that the boy’s terrors were overlaid and almost subdued by his wonderment; he had never before been out in the night, and he must have feared to cry in it, for his sobs were not loud. On a rise of the park-road where a fir-plantation began, he heard his name called faintly from the house by a woman’s voice that he knew to be his aunt Dorothy’s. It came after him only once: ’Harry Richmond’; but he was soon out of hearing, beyond the park, among the hollows that run dipping for miles beside the great highroad toward London. Sometimes his father whistled to him, or held him high and nodded a salutation to him, as though they had just discovered one another; and his perpetual accessibility to the influences of spicy sugarplums, notwithstanding his grief, caused his father to prognosticate hopefully of his future wisdom. So, when obedient to command he had given his father a kiss, the boy fell asleep on his shoulder, ceasing to know that he was a wandering infant: and, if I remember rightly, he dreamed he was in a ship of cinnamon-wood upon a sea that

rolled mighty, but smooth immense broad waves, and tore thing from thing without a sound or a hurt.

Page 1859

CHAPTER II

AN ADVENTURE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT

That night stands up without any clear traces about it or near it, like the brazen castle of romance round which the sea-tide flows. My father must have borne me miles along the road; he must have procured food for me; I have an idea of feeling a damp forehead and drinking new milk, and by-and-by hearing a roar of voices or vehicles, and seeing a dog that went alone through crowded streets without a master, doing as he pleased, and stopping every other dog he met. He took his turning, and my father and I took ours. We were in a house that, to my senses, had the smell of dark corners, in a street where all the house-doors were painted black, and shut with a bang. Italian organ-men and milk-men paraded the street regularly, and made it sound hollow to their music. Milk, and no cows anywhere; numbers of people, and no acquaintances among them; my thoughts were occupied by the singularity of such things.

My father could soon make me forget that I was transplanted; he could act dog, tame rabbit, fox, pony, and a whole nursery collection alive, but he was sometimes absent for days, and I was not of a temper to be on friendly terms with those who were unable to captivate my imagination as he had done. When he was at home I rode him all round the room and upstairs to bed, I lashed him with a whip till he frightened me, so real was his barking; if I said ‘Menagerie’ he became a caravan of wild beasts; I undid a button of his waistcoat, and it was a lion that made a spring, roaring at me; I pulled his coat-tails and off I went tugging at an old bear that swung a hind leg as he turned, in the queerest way, and then sat up and beating his breast sent out a mew-moan. Our room was richer to me than all the Grange while these performances were going forward. His monkey was almost as wonderful as his bear, only he was too big for it, and was obliged to aim at reality in his representation of this animal by means of a number of breakages; a defect that brought our landlady on the scene. The enchantment of my father’s companionship caused me to suffer proportionately in his absence. During that period of solitude, my nursemaid had to order me to play, and I would stumble about and squat in the middle of the floor, struck suddenly by the marvel of the difference between my present and my other home. My father entered into arrangements with a Punch and Judy man for him to pay me regular morning visits opposite our window; yet here again his genius defeated his kind intentions; for happening once to stand by my side during the progress of the show, he made it so vivid to me by what he said and did, that I saw no fun in it without him: I used to dread the heralding crow of Punch if he was away, and cared no longer for wooden heads being knocked ever so hard.

Page 1860

On Sundays we walked to the cathedral, and this was a day with a delight of its own for me. He was never away on the Sunday. Both of us attired in our best, we walked along the streets hand in hand; my father led me before the cathedral monuments, talking in a low tone of British victories, and commending the heroes to my undivided attention. I understood very early that it was my duty to imitate them. While we remained in the cathedral he talked of glory and Old England, and dropped his voice in the middle of a murmured chant to introduce Nelson's name or some other great man's and this recurred regularly. 'What are we for now?' he would ask me as we left our house. I had to decide whether we took a hero or an author, which I soon learnt to do with capricious resolution. We were one Sunday for Shakespeare; another for Nelson or Pitt. 'Nelson, papa,' was my most frequent rejoinder, and he never dissented, but turned his steps toward Nelson's cathedral dome, and uncovered his head there, and said: 'Nelson, then, to-day'; and we went straight to his monument to perform the act of homage. I chose Nelson in preference to the others because near bed-time in the evening my father told me stories of our hero of the day, and neither Pitt nor Shakespeare lost an eye, or an arm, or fought with a huge white bear on the ice to make himself interesting. I named them occasionally out of compassion, and to please my father, who said that they ought to have a turn. They were, he told me, in the habit of paying him a visit, whenever I had particularly neglected them, to learn the grounds for my disregard of their claims, and they urged him to intercede with me, and imparted many of their unpublished adventures, so that I should be tempted to give them a chance on the following Sunday.

'Great Will,' my father called Shakespeare, and 'Slender Billy,' Pitt. The scene where Great Will killed the deer, dragging Falstaff all over the park after it by the light of Bardolph's nose, upon which they put an extinguisher if they heard any of the keepers, and so left everybody groping about and catching the wrong person, was the most wonderful mixture of fun and tears. Great Will was extremely youthful, but everybody in the park called him, 'Father William'; and when he wanted to know which way the deer had gone, King Lear (or else my memory deceives me) punned, and Lady Macbeth waved a handkerchief for it to be steeped in the blood of the deer; Shylock ordered one pound of the carcase; Hamlet (the fact was impressed on me) offered him a three-legged stool; and a number of kings and knights and ladies lit their torches from Bardolph; and away they flew, distracting the keepers and leaving Will and his troop to the deer. That poor thing died from a different weapon at each recital, though always with a flow of blood and a successful dash of his antlers into Falstaff; and to hear Falstaff bellow! But it was mournful to hear how sorry Great Will was over the animal he

Page 1861

had slain. He spoke like music. I found it pathetic in spite of my knowing that the whole scene was lighted up by Bardolph's nose. When I was just bursting out crying—for the deer's tongue was lolling out and quick pantings were at his side; he had little ones at home—Great Will remembered his engagement to sell Shylock a pound of the carcase; determined that no Jew should eat of it, he bethought him that Falstaff could well spare a pound, and he said the Jew would not see the difference: Falstaff only got off by hard running and roaring out that he knew his unclean life would make him taste like pork and thus let the Jew into the trick.

My father related all this with such a veritable matter-of-fact air, and such liveliness—he sounded the chase and its cries, and showed King Lear tottering, and Hamlet standing dark, and the vast substance of Falstaff—that I followed the incidents excitedly, and really saw them, which was better than understanding them. I required some help from him to see that Hamlet's offer of a three-legged stool at a feverish moment of the chase, was laughable. He taught me what to think of it by pitching Great Will's voice high, and Hamlet's very low. By degrees I got some unconscious knowledge of the characters of Shakespeare.

There never was so fascinating a father as mine for a boy anything under eight or ten years old. He could guess on Saturday whether I should name William Pitt on the Sunday; for, on those occasions, 'Slender Billy,' as I hope I am not irreverent in calling him, made up for the dulness of his high career with a raspberry-jam tart, for which, my father told me solemnly, the illustrious Minister had in his day a passion. If I named him, my father would say, 'W. P., otherwise S. B., was born in the year so-and-so; now,' and he went to the cupboard, 'in the name of Politics, take this and meditate upon him.' The shops being all shut on Sunday, he certainly bought it, anticipating me unerringly, on the Saturday, and, as soon as the tart appeared, we both shouted. I fancy I remember his repeating a couplet,

> 'Billy Pitt took a cake and a raspberry jam,
> When he heard they had taken Seringapatam.'

At any rate, the rumour of his having done so, at periods of strong excitement, led to the inexplicable display of foresight on my father's part.

My meditations upon Pitt were, under this influence, favourable to the post of a Prime Minister, but it was merely appetite that induced me to choose him; I never could imagine a grandeur in his office, notwithstanding my father's eloquent talk of ruling a realm, shepherding a people, hurling British thunderbolts. The day's discipline was, that its selected hero should reign the undisputed monarch of it, so when I was for Pitt, I had my tart as he used to have it, and no story, for he had none, and I think my idea of the ruler of a realm presented him to me as a sort of shadow about a pastrycook's shop.

Page 1862

But I surprised people by speaking of him. I made remarks to our landlady which caused her to throw up her hands and exclaim that I was astonishing. She would always add a mysterious word or two in the hearing of my nursemaid or any friend of hers who looked into my room to see me. After my father had got me forward with instructions on the piano, and exercises in early English history and the book of the Peerage, I became the wonder of the house. I was put up on a stool to play 'In my Cottage near a Wood,' or 'Cherry Ripe,' and then, to show the range of my accomplishments, I was asked, 'And who married the Dowager Duchess of Dewlap?' and I answered, 'John Gregg Wetherall, Esquire, and disgraced the family.' Then they asked me how I accounted for her behaviour.

'It was because the Duke married a dairymaid,' I replied, always tossing up my chin at that. My father had concocted the questions and prepared me for the responses, but the effect was striking, both upon his visitors and the landlady's. Gradually my ear grew accustomed to her invariable whisper on these occasions. 'Blood Rile,' she said; and her friends all said 'No!' like the run of a finger down a fiddlestring.

A gentleman of his acquaintance called on him one evening to take him out for a walk. My father happened to be playing with me when this gentleman entered our room: and he jumped up from his hands and knees, and abused him for intruding on his privacy, but afterwards he introduced him to me as Shylock's great-great-great-grandson, and said that Shylock was satisfied with a pound, and his descendant wanted two hundred pounds, or else all his body: and this, he said, came of the emigration of the family from Venice to England. My father only seemed angry, for he went off with Shylock's very great grandson arm-in-arm, exclaiming, 'To the Rialto!' When I told Mrs. Waddy about the visitor, she said, 'Oh, dear! oh, dear! then I'm afraid your sweet papa won't return very soon, my pretty pet.' We waited a number of days, until Mrs. Waddy received a letter from him. She came full-dressed into my room, requesting me to give her twenty kisses for papa, and I looked on while she arranged her blue bonnet at the glass. The bonnet would not fix in its place. At last she sank down crying in a chair, and was all brown silk, and said that how to appear before a parcel of dreadful men, and perhaps a live duke into the bargain, was more than she knew, and more than could be expected of a lone widow woman. 'Not for worlds!' she answered my petition to accompany her. She would not, she said, have me go to my papa there for anything on earth; my papa would perish at the sight of me; I was not even to wish to go. And then she exclaimed, 'Oh, the blessed child's poor papa!' and that people were cruel to him, and would never take into account his lovely temper, and that everybody was his enemy, when he ought to be sitting with the highest in the land. I had realized the extremity

Page 1863

of my forlorn state on a Sunday that passed empty of my father, which felt like his having gone for ever. My nursemaid came in to assist in settling Mrs. Waddy's bonnet above the six crisp curls, and while they were about it I sat quiet, plucking now and then at the brown silk, partly to beg to go with it, partly in jealousy and love at the thought of its seeing him from whom I was so awfully separated. Mrs. Waddy took fresh kisses off my lips, assuring me that my father would have them in twenty minutes, and I was to sit and count the time. My nursemaid let her out. I pretended to be absorbed in counting, till I saw Mrs. Waddy pass by the window. My heart gave a leap of pain. I found the street-door open and no one in the passage, and I ran out, thinking that Mrs. Waddy would be obliged to take me if she discovered me by her side in the street.

I was by no means disconcerted at not seeing her immediately. Running on from one street to another, I took the turnings with unhesitating boldness, as if I had a destination in view. I must have been out near an hour before I understood that Mrs. Waddy had eluded me; so I resolved to enjoy the shop-windows with the luxurious freedom of one whose speculations on those glorious things all up for show are no longer distracted by the run of time and a nursemaid. Little more than a glance was enough, now that I knew I could stay as long as I liked. If I stopped at all, it was rather to exhibit the bravado of liberty than to distinguish any particular shop with my preference: all were equally beautiful; so were the carriages; so were the people. Ladies frequently turned to look at me, perhaps because I had no covering on my head; but they did not interest me in the least. I should have been willing to ask them or any one where the Peerage lived, only my mind was quite full, and I did not care. I felt sure that a great deal of walking would ultimately bring me to St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey; to anything else I was indifferent.

Toward sunset my frame was struck as with an arrow by the sensations of hunger on passing a cook's-shop. I faltered along, hoping to reach a second one, without knowing why I had dragged my limbs from the first. There was a boy in ragged breeches, no taller than myself, standing tiptoe by the window of a very large and brilliant pastry-cook's. He persuaded me to go into the shop and ask for a cake. I thought it perfectly natural to do so, being hungry; but when I reached the counter and felt the size of the shop, I was abashed, and had to repeat the nature of my petition twice to the young woman presiding there.

'Give you a cake, little boy?' she said. 'We don't give cakes, we sell them.'

'Because I am hungry,' said I, pursuing my request.

Another young woman came, laughing and shaking lots of ringlets.

'Don't you see he's not a common boy? he doesn't whine,' she remarked, and handed me a stale bun, saying, 'Here, Master Charles, and you needn't say thank you.'

Page 1864

‘My name is Harry Richmond, and I thank you very much,’ I replied.

I heard her say, as I went out, ‘You can see he’s a gentleman’s son.’ The ragged boy was awaiting me eagerly. ‘Gemini! you’re a lucky one,’ he cried; ‘here, come along, curly-poll.’ I believe that I meant to share the bun with him, but of course he could not be aware of my beneficent intentions: so he treated me as he thought I was for treating him, and making one snatch at the bun, ran off cramming it into his mouth. I stood looking at any hand. I learnt in that instant what thieving was, and begging, and hunger, for I would have perished rather than have asked for another cake, and as I yearned for it in absolute want of food, the boy’s ungenerous treatment of me came down in a cloud on my reason. I found myself being led through the crush of people, by an old gentleman, to whom I must have related an extraordinary rigmarole. He shook his head, saying that I was unintelligible; but the questions he put to me, ’Why had I no hat on in the open street?—Where did my mother live?—What was I doing out alone in London?’ were so many incitements to autobiographical composition to an infant mind, and I tumbled out my history afresh each time that he spoke. He led me into a square, stooping his head to listen all the while; but when I perceived that we had quitted the region of shops I made myself quite intelligible by stopping short and crying: ‘I am so hungry.’ He nodded and said, ’It ’s no use cross-examining an empty stomach. You’ll do me the favour to dine with me, my little man. We’ll talk over your affairs by-and-by.’

My alarm at having left the savoury street of shops was not soothed until I found myself sitting at table with him, and a nice young lady, and an old one who wore a cap, and made loud remarks on my garments and everything I did. I was introduced to them as the little boy dropped from the sky. The old gentleman would not allow me to be questioned before I had eaten. It was a memorable feast. I had soup, fish, meat, and pastry, and, for the first time in my life, a glass of wine. How they laughed to see me blink and cough after I had swallowed half the glass like water. At once my tongue was unloosed. I seemed to rise right above the roofs of London, beneath which I had been but a wandering atom a few minutes ago. I talked of my wonderful father, and Great Will, and Pitt, and the Peerage. I amazed them with my knowledge. When I finished a long recital of Great Will’s chase of the deer, by saying that I did not care about politics (I meant, in my own mind, that Pitt was dull in comparison), they laughed enormously, as if I had fired them off. ’Do you know what you are, sir?’ said the old gentleman; he had frowning eyebrows and a merry mouth ‘you’re a comical character.’

I felt interested in him, and asked him what he was. He informed me that he was a lawyer, and ready to be pantaloon to my clown, if I would engage him.

Page 1865

‘Are you in the Peerage?’ said I.

‘Not yet,’ he replied.

‘Well, then,’ said I, ‘I know nothing about you.’

The young lady screamed with laughter. ’Oh, you funny little boy; you killing little creature!’ she said, and coming round to me, lifted me out of my chair, and wanted to know if I knew how to kiss.

‘Oh, yes; I’ve been taught that,’ said I, giving the salute without waiting for the invitation; ‘but,’ I added, ‘I don’t care about it much.’

She was indignant, and told me she was going to be offended, so I let her understand that I liked being kissed and played with in the morning before I was up, and if she would come to my house ever so early, she would find me lying next the wall and ready for her.

‘And who lies outside?’ she asked.

‘That’s my papa,’ I was beginning to say, but broke the words with a sob, for I seemed to be separated from him now by the sea itself.

They petted me tenderly. My story was extracted by alternate leading questions from the old gentleman and timely caresses from the ladies. I could tell them everything except the name of the street where I lived. My midnight excursion from the house of my grandfather excited them chiefly; also my having a mother alive who perpetually fanned her face and wore a ball-dress and a wreath; things that I remembered of my mother. The ladies observed that it was clear I was a romantic child. I noticed that the old gentleman said ‘Humph,’ very often, and his eyebrows were like a rook’s nest in a tree when I spoke of my father walking away with Shylock’s descendant and not since returning to me. A big book was fetched out of his library, in which he read my grandfather’s name. I heard him mention it aloud. I had been placed on a stool beside a tea-tray near the fire, and there I saw the old red house of Riversley, and my mother dressed in white, and my aunt Dorothy; and they all complained that I had ceased to love them, and must go to bed, to which I had no objection. Somebody carried me up and undressed me, and promised me a great game of kissing in the morning.

The next day in the strange house I heard that the old gentleman had sent one of his clerks down to my grandfather at Riversley, and communicated with the constables in London; and, by-and-by, Mrs. Waddy arrived, having likewise visited those authorities, one of whom supported her claims upon me. But the old gentleman wished to keep me until his messenger returned from Riversley. He made all sorts of pretexts. In the end, he insisted on seeing my father, and Mrs. Waddy, after much hesitation, and even

weeping, furnished the address: upon hearing which, spoken aside to him, he said, ‘I thought so.’ Mrs. Waddy entreated him to be respectful to my father, who was, she declared, his superior, and, begging everybody’s pardon present, the superior of us all, through no sin of his own, that caused him to be so unfortunate;

Page 1866

and a real Christian and pattern, in spite of outsides, though as true a gentleman as ever walked, and by rights should be amongst the highest. She repeated ‘amongst the highest’ reprovingly, with the ears of barley in her blue bonnet shaking, and her hands clasped tight in her lap. Old Mr. Bannerbridge (that was the old gentleman’s name) came back very late from his visit to my father, so late that he said it would be cruel to let me go out in the street after my bed-time. Mrs. Waddy consented to my remaining, on the condition of my being surrendered to her at nine o’clock, and no later, the following morning.

I was assured by Mr. Bannerbridge that my father’s health and appetite were excellent; he gave me a number of unsatisfying messages, all the rest concerning his interview he whispered to his daughter and his sister, Miss Bannerbridge, who said they hoped they would have news from Hampshire very early, so that the poor child might be taken away by the friends of his infancy. I could understand that my father was disapproved of by them, and that I was a kind of shuttlecock flying between two battledores; but why they pitied me I could not understand. There was a great battle about me when Mrs. Waddy appeared punctual to her appointed hour. The victory was hers, and I, her prize, passed a whole day in different conveyances, the last of which landed us miles away from London, at the gates of an old drooping, mossed and streaked farmhouse, that was like a wall-flower in colour.

CHAPTER III

DIPWELL FARM

In rain or in sunshine this old farmhouse had a constant resemblance to a wall-flower; and it had the same moist earthy smell, except in the kitchen, where John and Martha Thresher lived, apart from their furniture. All the fresh eggs, and the butter stamped, with three bees, and the pots of honey, the fowls, and the hare lifted out of the hamper by his hind legs, and the country loaves smelling heavenly, which used to come to Mrs. Waddy’s address in London, and appear on my father’s table, were products of Dipwell farm, and presents from her sister, Martha Thresher. On receiving this information I felt at home in a moment, and asked right off, ’How long am I to stay here?—Am I going away tomorrow?—What’s going to be done with me?’ The women found these questions of a youthful wanderer touching. Between kissings and promises of hens to feed, and eggs that were to come of it, I settled into contentment. A strong impression was made on me by Mrs. Waddy’s saying, ’Here, Master Harry, your own papa will come for you; and you may be sure he will, for I have his word he will, and he’s not one to break it, unless his country’s against him; and for his darling boy he’d march against cannons. So here you’ll sit and wait for him, won’t you?’ I sat down immediately, looking up. Mrs. Waddy and Mrs. Thresher raised their hands. I had given them some extraordinary proof of my love for my father. The impression I received was, that sitting was the thing to conjure him to me.

Page 1867

‘Where his heart’s not concerned,’ Mrs. Waddy remarked of me flatteringly, ‘he’s shrewd as a little schoolmaster.’

‘He’ve a bird’s-nesting eye,’ said Mrs. Thresher, whose face I was studying.

John Thresher wagered I would be a man before either of them reached that goal. But whenever he spoke he suffered correction on account of his English.

’More than his eating and his drinking, that child’s father worrits about his learning to speak the language of a British gentleman,’ Mrs. Waddy exclaimed. ’Before that child your h’s must be like the panting of an engine—to please his father. He ’d stop me carrying the dinner-tray on meat-dish hot, and I’m to repeat what I said, to make sure the child haven’t heard anything ungrammatical. The child’s nursemaid he’d lecture so, the poor girl would come down to me ready to bend double, like a bundle of nothing, his observations so took the pride out of her. That’s because he ’s a father who knows his duty to the child:—“Child!” says he, “man, ma’am.” It’s just as you, John, when you sow your seed you think of your harvest. So don’t take it ill of me, John; I beg of you be careful of your English. Turn it over as you’re about to speak.’

‘Change loads on the road, you mean,’ said John Thresher. ’Na, na, he’s come to settle nigh a weedy field, if you like, but his crop ain’t nigh reaping yet. Hark you, Mary Waddy, who’re a widde, which ’s as much as say, an unocc’pied mind, there’s cockney, and there’s country, and there ’s school. Mix the three, strain, and throw away the sediment. Now, yon ’s my view.

His wife and Mrs. Waddy said reflectively, in a breath, ‘True!’

‘Drink or no, that’s the trick o’ brewery,’ he added.

They assented. They began praising him, too, like meek creatures.

’What John says is worth listening to, Mary. You may be over-careful. A stew’s a stew, and not a boiling to shreds, and you want a steady fire, and not a furnace.’

’Oh, I quite agree with John, Martha: we must take the good and the evil in a world like this.’

‘Then I’m no scholar, and you’re at ease,’ said John.

Mrs. Waddy put her mouth to his ear.

Up went his eyebrows, wrinkling arches over a petrified stare.

In some way she had regained her advantage. ‘Art sure of it?’ he inquired.

‘Pray, don’t offend me by expressing a doubt of it,’ she replied, bowing.

John Thresher poised me in the very centre of his gaze. He declared he would never have guessed that, and was reproved, inasmuch as he might have guessed it. He then said that I could not associate with any of the children thereabout, and my dwelling in the kitchen was not to be thought of. The idea of my dwelling in the kitchen seemed to be a serious consideration with Mrs. Martha likewise. I was led into the rooms of state. The sight of them was enough. I stamped my feet for the kitchen,

Page 1868

and rarely in my life have been happier than there, dining and supping with John and Martha and the farm-labourers, expecting my father across the hills, and yet satisfied with the sun. To hope, and not be impatient, is really to believe, and this was my feeling in my father's absence. I knew he would come, without wishing to hurry him. He had the world beyond the hills; I this one, where a slow full river flowed from the sounding mill under our garden wall, through long meadows. In Winter the wild ducks made letters of the alphabet flying. On the other side of the copses bounding our home, there was a park containing trees old as the History of England, John Thresher said, and the thought of their venerable age enclosed me comfortably. He could not tell me whether he meant as old as the book of English History; he fancied he did, for the furrow-track follows the plough close upon; but no one exactly could swear when that (the book) was put together. At my suggestion, he fixed the trees to the date of the Heptarchy, a period of heavy ploughing. Thus begirt by Saxon times, I regarded Riversley as a place of extreme baldness, a Greenland, untrodden by my Alfred and my Harold. These heroes lived in the circle of Dipwell, confidently awaiting the arrival of my father. He sent me once a glorious letter. Mrs. Waddy took one of John Thresher's pigeons to London, and in the evening we beheld the bird cut the sky like an arrow, bringing round his neck a letter warm from him I loved. Planet communicating with planet would be not more wonderful to men than words of his to me, travelling in such a manner. I went to sleep, and awoke imagining the bird bursting out of heaven.

Meanwhile there was an attempt to set me moving again. A strange young man was noticed in the neighbourhood of the farm, and he accosted me at Leckham fair. 'I say, don't we know one another? How about your grandfather the squire, and your aunt, and Mr. Bannerbridge? I've got news for you.'

Not unwilling to hear him, I took his hand, leaving my companion, the miller's little girl, Mabel Sweetwinter, at a toy-stand, while Bob, her brother and our guardian, was shying sticks in a fine attitude. 'Yes, and your father, too,' said the young man; 'come along and see him; you can run?' I showed him how fast. We were pursued by Bob, who fought for me, and won me, and my allegiance instantly returned to him. He carried me almost the whole of the way back to Dipwell. Women must feel for the lucky heroes who win them, something of what I felt for mine; I kissed his bloody face, refusing to let him wipe it. John Thresher said to me at night, 'Ay, now you've got a notion of boxing; and will you believe it, Master Harry, there's people fools enough to want to tread that ther' first-rate pastime under foot? I speak truth, and my word for 't, they'd better go in petticoats. Let clergymen preach as in duty bound; you and I'll uphold a manful sport, we will, and a cheer for Bob!'

Page 1869

He assured me, and he had my entire faith, that boxing was England's natural protection from the foe. The comfort of having one like Bob to defend our country from invasion struck me as inexpressible. Lighted by John Thresher's burning patriotism, I entered the book of the History of England at about the pace of a carthorse, with a huge waggon at my heels in the shape of John. There was no moving on until he was filled. His process of receiving historical knowledge was to fight over again the personages who did injury to our honour as a nation, then shake hands and be proud of them. 'For where we ain't quite successful we're cunning,' he said; 'and we not being able to get rid of William the Conqueror, because he's got a will of his own and he won't budge, why, we takes and makes him one of ourselves; and no disgrace in that, I should hope! He paid us a compliment, don't you see, Master Harry? he wanted to be an Englishman. "Can you this?" says we, sparrin' up to him. "Pretty middlin'," says he, "and does it well." "Well then," says we, "then you're one of us, and we'll beat the world"; and did so.'

John Thresher had a laborious mind; it cost him beads on his forehead to mount to these heights of meditation. He told me once that he thought one's country was like one's wife: you were born in the first, and married to the second, and had to learn all about them afterwards, ay, and make the best of them. He recommended me to mix, strain, and throw away the sediment, for that was the trick o' brewery. Every puzzle that beset him in life resolved to this cheerful precept, the value of which, he said, was shown by clear brown ale, the drink of the land. Even as a child I felt that he was peculiarly an Englishman. Tales of injustice done on the Niger river would flush him in a heat of wrath till he cried out for fresh taxes to chastise the villains. Yet at the sight of the beggars at his gates he groaned at the taxes existing, and enjoined me to have pity on the poor taxpayer when I lent a hand to patch the laws. I promised him I would unreservedly, with a laugh, but with a sincere intention to legislate in a direct manner on his behalf. He, too, though he laughed, thanked me kindly.

I was clad in black for my distant mother. Mrs. Waddy brought down a young man from London to measure me, so that my mourning attire might be in the perfect cut of fashion. 'The child's papa would strip him if he saw him in a country tailor's funeral suit,' she said, and seemed to blow a wind of changes on me that made me sure my father had begun to stir up his part of the world. He sent me a prayer in his own handwriting to say for my mother in heaven. I saw it flying up between black edges whenever I shut my eyes. Martha Thresher dosed me for liver. Mrs. Waddy found me pale by the fireside, and prescribed iron. Both agreed upon high-feeding, and the apothecary agreed with both in everything, which reconciled them, for both good women loved me so heartily they were near upon disputing over the medicines I was to consume.

Page 1870

Under such affectionate treatment I betrayed the alarming symptom that my imagination was set more on my mother than on my father: I could not help thinking that for any one to go to heaven was stranger than to drive to Dipwell, and I had this idea when my father was clasping me in his arms; but he melted it like snow off the fields. He came with postillions in advance of him wearing crape rosettes, as did the horses. We were in the cricket-field, where Dipwell was playing its first match of the season, and a Dipwell lad, furious to see the elevens commit such a breach of the rules and decency as to troop away while the game was hot, and surround my father, flung the cricket-ball into the midst and hit two or three of the men hard. My father had to shield him from the consequences. He said he liked that boy; and he pleaded for him so winningly and funnily that the man who was hurt most laughed loudest.

Standing up in the carriage, and holding me by the hand, he addressed them by their names: 'Sweetwinter, I thank you for your attention to my son; and you, Thribble; and you, my man; and you, Baker; Rippengale, and you; and you, Jupp'; as if he knew them personally. It was true he nodded at random. Then he delivered a short speech, and named himself a regular subscriber to their innocent pleasures. He gave them money, and scattered silver coin among the boys and girls, and praised John Thresher, and Martha, his wife, for their care of me, and pointing to the chimneys of the farm, said that the house there was holy to him from henceforth, and he should visit it annually if possible, but always in the month of May, and in the shape of his subscription, as certain as the cowslip. The men, after their fit of cheering, appeared unwilling to recommence their play, so he alighted and delivered the first ball, and then walked away with my hand in his, saying:

'Yes, my son, we will return to them tenfold what they have done for you. The eleventh day of May shall be a day of pleasure for Dipwell while I last, and you will keep it in memory of me when I am gone. And now to see the bed you have slept in.'

Martha Thresher showed him the bed, showed him flowers I had planted, and a Spanish chestnut tree just peeping.

'Ha!' said he, beaming at every fresh sight of my doings: 'madam, I am your life-long debtor and friend!' He kissed her on the cheek.

John Thresher cried out: 'Why, dame, you trembles like a maid.'

She spoke very faintly, and was red in the face up to the time of our departure. John stood like a soldier. We drove away from a cheering crowd of cricketers and farm-labourers, as if discharged from a great gun. 'A royal salvo!' said my father, and asked me earnestly whether I had forgotten to reward and take a particular farewell of any one of my friends. I told him I had forgotten no one, and thought it was true, until on our way up the sandy lane, which offered us a last close view

Page 1871

of the old wall-flower farm front, I saw little Mabel Sweetwinter, often my playfellow and bedfellow, a curly-headed girl, who would have danced on Sunday for a fairing, and eaten gingerbread nuts during a ghost-story. She was sitting by a furze-bush in flower, cherishing in her lap a lamb that had been worried. She looked half up at me, and kept looking so, but would not nod. Then good-bye, thought I, and remembered her look when I had forgotten that of all the others.

CHAPTER IV

I HAVE A TASTE OF GRANDEUR

Though I had not previously seen a postillion in my life, I gazed on the pair bobbing regularly on their horses before me, without a thought upon the marvel of their sudden apparition and connection with my fortunes. I could not tire of hearing the pleasant music of the many feet at the trot, and tried to explain to my father that the men going up and down made it like a piano that played of itself. He laughed and kissed me; he remembered having once shown me the inside of a piano when the keys were knocked. My love for him as we drove into London had a recognized footing: I perceived that he was my best friend and only true companion, besides his being my hero. The wicked men who had parted us were no longer able to do harm, he said. I forgot, in my gladness at their defeat, to ask what had become of Shylock's descendant.

Mrs. Waddy welcomed us when we alighted. Do not imagine that it was at the door of her old house. It was in a wide street opening on a splendid square, and pillars were before the houses, and inside there was the enchantment of a little fountain playing thin as whipcord, among ferns, in a rock-basin under a window that glowed with kings of England, copied from boys' history books. All the servants were drawn up in the hall to do homage to me. They seemed less real and living than the wonder of the sweet-smelling chairs, the birds, and the elegant dogs. Richest of treats, a monkey was introduced to me. 'It 's your papa's whim,' Mrs. Waddy said, resignedly; 'he says he must have his jester. Indeed it is no joke to me.'

Yet she smiled happily, though her voice was melancholy. From her I now learnt that my name was Richmond Roy, and not Harry Richmond. I said, 'Very well,' for I was used to change. Everybody in the house wore a happy expression of countenance, except the monkey, who was too busy. As we mounted the stairs I saw more kings of England painted on the back-windows. Mrs. Waddy said: 'It is considered to give a monarchical effect,'—she coughed modestly after the long word, and pursued: 'as it should.' I insisted upon going to the top floor, where I expected to find William the Conqueror, and found him; but that strong connecting link between John Thresher and me presented himself only to carry my recollections of the Dipwell of yesterday as far back into the past as the old Norman days.

Page 1872

‘And down go all the kings, downstairs,’ I said, surveying them consecutively.

‘Yes,’ she replied, in a tone that might lead one to think it their lamentable fate. ’And did the people look at you as you drove along through the streets, Master Richmond?’

I said ‘Yes,’ in turn; and then we left off answering, but questioned one another, which is a quicker way of getting at facts; I know it is with boys and women. Mrs. Waddy cared much less to hear of Dipwell and its inhabitants than of the sensation created everywhere by our equipage. I noticed that when her voice was not melancholy her face was. She showed me a beautiful little pink bed, having a crown over it, in a room opening to my father’s. Twenty thousand magnificent dreams seemed to flash their golden doors when I knew that the bed was mine. I thought it almost as nice as a place by my father’s side.

‘Don’t you like it, Mrs. Waddy?’ I said.

She smiled and sighed. ’Like it? Oh! yes, my dear, to be sure I do. I only hope it won’t vanish.’ She simpered and looked sad.

I had too many distractions, or I should have asked her whether my amazing and delightful new home had ever shown symptoms of vanishing; it appeared to me, judging from my experience, that nothing moved violently except myself, and my principal concern was lest any one should carry me away at a moment’s notice. In the evening I was introduced to a company of gentlemen, who were drinking wine after dinner with my father. They clapped their hands and laughed immoderately on my telling them that I thought those kings of England who could not find room on the windows must have gone down to the cellars.

‘They are going,’ my father said. He drank off a glassful of wine and sighed prodigiously. ’They are going, gentlemen, going there, like good wine, like old Port, which they tell us is going also. Favour me by drinking to the health of Richmond Roy the younger.’

They drank to me heartily, but my father had fallen mournful before I left the room.

Pony-riding, and lessons in boxing and wrestling, and lessons in French from a French governess, at whose appearance my father always seemed to be beginning to dance a minuet, so exuberantly courteous was he; and lessons in Latin from a tutor, whom my father invited to dinner once a fortnight, but did not distinguish otherwise than occasionally to take down Latin sentences in a notebook from his dictation, occupied my mornings. My father told the man who instructed me in the art of self-defence that our family had always patronized his profession. I wrestled ten minutes every day with this man’s son, and was regularly thrown. On fine afternoons I was dressed in black velvet for a drive in the park, where my father uncovered his head to numbers of people, and

was much looked at. 'It is our duty, my son, never to forget names and persons; I beg you to bear that in mind, my dearest Richie,' he said. We used to go to his opera-box; and we visited the House of Lords and the House of Commons; and my father, though he complained of the decay of British eloquence, and mourned for the days of Chatham, and William Pitt (our old friend of the cake and the raspberry jam), and Burke, and Sheridan, encouraged the orators with approving murmurs.

Page 1873

My father no longer laid stress on my studies of the Peerage. 'Now I have you in the very atmosphere, that will come of itself,' he said. I wished to know whether I was likely to be transported suddenly to some other place. He assured me that nothing save a convulsion of the earth would do it, which comforted me, for I took the firmness of the earth in perfect trust. We spoke of our old Sunday walks to St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey as of a day that had its charm. Our pew among a fashionable congregation pleased him better. The pew-opener curtseyed to none as she did to him. For my part, I missed the monuments and the chants, and something besides that had gone—I knew not what. At the first indication of gloom in me, my father became alarmed, and, after making me stand with my tongue out before himself and Mrs. Waddy, like a dragon in a piece of tapestry, would resume his old playfulness, and try to be the same that he had been in Mrs. Waddy's lodgings. Then we read the Arabian Nights together, or, rather, he read them to me, often acting out the incidents as we rode or drove abroad. An omission to perform a duty was the fatal forgetfulness to sprinkle pepper on the cream-tarts; if my father subjected me to an interrogation concerning my lessons, he was the dread African magician to whom must be surrendered my acquisition of the ring and the musty old lamp. We were quite in the habit of meeting fair Persians. He would frequently ejaculate that he resembled the Three Calendars in more respects than one. To divert me during my recovery from measles, he one day hired an actor in a theatre, and put a cloth round his neck, and seated him in a chair, rubbed his chin with soap, and played the part of the Barber over him, and I have never laughed so much in my life. Poor Mrs. Waddy got her hands at her sides, and kept on gasping, 'Oh, sir! oh!' while the Barber hurried away from the half-shaved young man to consult his pretended astrolabe in the next room, where we heard him shouting the sun's altitude, and consulting its willingness for the impatient young man to be further shaved; and back he came, seeming refreshed to have learnt the sun's favourable opinion, and gabbling at an immense rate, full of barber's business. The servants were allowed to be spectators; but as soon as the young man was shaved, my father dismissed them with the tone of a master. No wonder they loved him. Mrs. Waddy asked who could help it?

I remember a pang I had when she spoke of his exposure to the risk of marrying again; it added a curious romantic tenderness to my adoration of him, and made me feel that he and I stood against the world. To have his hand in mine was my delight. Then it was that I could think earnestly of Prince Ahmed and the kind and beautiful Peribanou, whom I would not have minded his marrying. My favourite dream was to see him shooting an arrow in a match for a prize, and losing the prize because of not finding his arrow, and wondering where the arrow had flown to, and wandering after it till he passed out of green fields to grassy rocks, and to a stony desert, where at last he found his arrow at an enormous distance from the shooting line, and there was the desert all about him, and the sweetest fairy ever imagined going to show herself to him in the ground under his feet. In his absence I really hungered for him, and was jealous.

Page 1874

During this Arabian life, we sat on a carpet that flew to the Continent, where I fell sick, and was cured by smelling at an apple; and my father directed our movements through the aid of a telescope, which told us the titles of the hotels ready to receive us. As for the cities and cathedrals, the hot meadows under mountains, the rivers and the castles-they were little more to me than an animated book of geography, opening and shutting at random; and travelling from place to place must have seemed to me so much like the life I had led, that I was generally as quick to cry as to laugh, and was never at peace between any two emotions. By-and-by I lay in a gondola with a young lady. My father made friends fast on our travels: her parents were among the number, and she fell in love with me and enjoyed having the name of Peribanou, which I bestowed on her for her delicious talk of the blue and red-striped posts that would spout up fountains of pearls if they were plucked from their beds, and the palaces that had flown out of the farthest corners of the world, and the city that would some night or other vanish suddenly, leaving bare sea-ripple to say 'Where? where?' as they rolled over. I would have seen her marry my father happily. She was like rest and dreams to me, soft sea and pearls. We entered into an arrangement to correspond for life. Her name was Clara Goodwin; she requested me to go always to the Horse Guards to discover in what part of the world Colonel Goodwin might be serving when I wanted to write to her. I, in return, could give no permanent address, so I related my history from the beginning. 'To write to you would be the same as writing to a river,' she said; and insisted that I should drop the odious name of Roy when I grew a man. My father quarrelled with Colonel Goodwin. Months after I felt as if I had only just been torn from Clara, but she stood in a mist, irrecoverably distant. I had no other friend.

Twelve dozen of splendid Burgundy were the fruit of our tour, to be laid down at Dipwell farm for my arrival at my majority, when I should be a legal man, embarked in my own ship, as my father said. I did not taste the wine. 'Porter for me that day, please God!' cried Mrs. Waddy, who did. My father eyed her with pity, and ordered her to send the wine down to Dipwell, which was done. He took me between his knees, and said impressively, 'Now, Richie, twelve dozen of the best that man can drink await you at the gates of manhood. Few fathers can say that to their sons, my boy! If we drink it together, blessings on the day! If I'm gone, Richie, shut up in the long box,' his voice shook, and he added, 'gone to Peribanou underneath, you know, remember that your dada saw that the wine was a good vintage, and bought it and had it bottled in his own presence while you were asleep in the Emperor's room in the fine old Burgundy city, and swore that, whatever came to them both, his son should drink the wine of princes on the day of his majority.' Here my father's tone was highly exalted, and he sat in a great flush.

Page 1875

I promised him I would bend my steps toward Dipwell to be there on my twenty-first birthday, and he pledged himself to be there in spirit at least, bodily if possible. We sealed the subject with some tears. He often talked of commissioning a poet to compose verses about that wonderful coming day at Dipwell. The thought of the day in store for us sent me strutting as though I had been in the presence of my drill-master. Mrs. Waddy, however, grew extremely melancholy at the mention of it.

‘Lord only knows where we shall all be by that time!’ she sighed.

‘She is a dewy woman,’ said my father, disdainfully They appeared always to be at variance, notwithstanding her absolute devotion to him. My father threatened to have her married to somebody immediately if she afflicted him with what he called her Waddyism. She had got the habit of exclaiming at the end of her remarks, ’No matter; our clock strikes soon!’ in a way that communicated to me an obscure idea of a door going to open unexpectedly in one of the walls, and conduct us, by subterranean passages, into a new country. My father’s method of rebuking her anxious nature was to summon his cook, the funniest of Frenchmen, Monsieur Alphonse, and issue orders for a succession of six dinner-parties. ’And now, ma’am, you have occupation for your mind,’ he would say.

To judge by the instantaneous composure of her whole appearance, he did produce a temporary abatement of her malady. The good soul bustled out of the room in attendance upon M. Alphonse, and never complained while the dinners lasted, but it was whispered that she had fits in the upper part of the house. No sooner did my father hear the rumour than he accused her to her face of this enormity, telling her that he was determined to effect a permanent cure, even though she should drive him to unlimited expense. We had a Ball party and an Aladdin supper, and for a fortnight my father hired postillions; we flashed through London. My father backed a horse to run in the races on Epsom Downs named Prince Royal, only for the reason that his name was Prince Royal, and the horse won, which was, he said, a proof to me that in our country it was common prudence to stick to Royalty; and he bade me note that if he went in a carriage and two, he was comparatively unnoticed, whereas when he was beheld in a carriage and four, with postillions, at a glance from him the country people tugged their forelocks, and would like, if he would let them, to kiss his hand. ’We will try the scarlet livery on one of our drives, Richie,’ said he. Mrs. Waddy heard him. ‘It is unlawful, sir,’ she said. ‘For whom, ma’am?’ asked my father. ‘None but Royal . . .’ she was explaining, but stopped, for he showed her an awful frown, and she cried so that my heart ached for her. My father went out to order the livery on the spot. He was very excited. Then it was that Mrs. Waddy, embracing me, said, ’My dear, my own Master Richmond, my little Harry, prepare your poor child’s heart for evil days.’ I construed her unintelligible speech as an attack upon my father, and abused her violently.

Page 1876

While I was in this state of wrathful championship, the hall-door was opened. I ran out and caught sight of my aunt Dorothy, in company with old Mr. Bannerbridge. I was kissed and hugged for I know not how long, until the smell of Riversley took entire possession of me, and my old home seemed nearer than the one I lived in; but my aunt, seeing tears on my cheeks, asked me what was my cause of sorrow. In a moment I poured out a flood of complaints against Mrs. Waddy for vexing my father. When she heard of the scarlet livery, my aunt lifted her hands. 'The man is near the end of his wits and his money together,' said Mr. Bannerbridge; and she said to me, 'My darling Harry will come back to his own nice little room, and see his grandpapa soon, won't you, my pet? All is ready for him there as it used to be, except poor mama. "Kiss my boy, my Harry—Harry Richmond." Those were her last words on her death-bed, before she went to God, Harry, my own! There is Sampson the pony, and Harry's dog Prince, and his lamb Daisy, grown a sheep, and the ploughboy, Dick, with the big boots.' Much more sweet talk of the same current that made my face cloudy and bright, and filled me with desire for Riversley, to see my mother's grave and my friends.

Aunt Dorothy looked at me. 'Come now,' she said; 'come with me, Harry.' Her trembling seized on me like a fire. I said, 'Yes,' though my heart sank as if I had lost my father with the word. She caught me in her arms tight, murmuring, 'And dry our tears and make our house laugh. Oh! since the night that Harry went . . . . . And I am now Harry's mama, he has me.'

I looked on her forehead for the wreath of white flowers my mother used to wear, and thought of my father's letter with the prayer written on the black-bordered page. I said I would go, but my joy in going was gone. We were stopped in the doorway by Mrs. Waddy. Nothing would tempt her to surrender me. Mr. Bannerbridge tried reasoning with her, and, as he said, put the case, which seemed to have perched on his forefinger. He talked of my prospects, of my sole chance of being educated morally and virtuously as became the grandson of an English gentleman of a good old family, and of my father having spent my mother's estate, and of the danger of his doing so with mine, and of religious duty and the awfulness of the position Mrs. Waddy stood in. He certainly subdued me to very silent breathing, but did not affect me as my aunt Dorothy's picturing of Riversley had done; and when Mrs. Waddy, reduced to an apparent submissiveness, addressed me piteously, 'Master Richmond, would you leave papa?' I cried out, 'No, no, never leave my papa,' and twisted away from my aunt's keeping. My father's arrival caused me to be withdrawn, but I heard his offer of his hospitality and all that was his; and subsequently there was loud talking on his part. I was kissed by my aunt before she went. She whispered, 'Come to us when you are free; think of us when you pray.' She was full of tears. Mr. Bannerbridge patted my head.

Page 1877

The door closed on them and I thought it was a vision that had passed. But now my father set my heart panting with questions as to the terrible possibility of us two ever being separated. In some way he painted my grandfather so black that I declared earnestly I would rather die than go to Riversley; I would never utter the name of the place where there was evil speaking of the one I loved dearest. 'Do not, my son,' he said solemnly, 'or it parts us two.' I repeated after him, 'I am a Roy and not a Beltham.' It was enough to hear that insult and shame had been cast on him at Riversley for me to hate the name of the place. We cried and then laughed together, and I must have delivered myself with amazing eloquence, for my father held me at arms' length and said, 'Richie, the notion of training you for a General commandership of the British army is a good one, but if you have got the winning tongue, the woolsack will do as well for a whisper in the ear of the throne. That is our aim, my son. We say,—you will not acknowledge our birth, you shall acknowledge our worth.' He complained bitterly of my aunt Dorothy bringing a lawyer to our house. The sins of Mrs. Waddy were forgiven her, owing to her noble resistance to the legal gentleman's seductive speech. So I walked up and down stairs with the kings of England looking at me out of the coloured windows quietly for a week; and then two ugly men entered the house, causing me to suffer a fearful oppression, though my father was exceedingly kind to them and had beds provided for them, saying that they were very old retainers of his.

But the next day our scarlet livery appeared. After exacting particular attention to his commands, my father quitted Mrs. Waddy, and we mounted the carriage, laughing at her deplorable eyes and prim lips, which he imitated for my amusement. 'A load is off my head,' he remarked. He asked me if splendour did not fatigue me also. I caught the answer from his face and replied that it did, and that I should like to go right on to Dipwell 'The Burgundy sleeps safe there,' said my father, and thought over it. We had an extraordinary day. People stood fast to gaze at us; in the country some pulled off their hats and set up a cheer. The landlords of the inns where we baited remained bare-headed until we started afresh, and I, according to my father's example, bowed and lifted my cap gravely to persons saluting us along the roads. Nor did I seek to know the reason for this excess of respectfulness; I was beginning to take to it naturally. At the end of a dusty high-road, where it descends the hill into a town, we drew up close by a high red wall, behind which I heard boys shouting at play. We went among them, accompanied by their master. My father tipped the head boy for the benefit of the school, and following lunch with the master and his daughter, to whom I gave a kiss at her request, a half-holiday was granted to the boys in my name. How they cheered! The young lady saw my delight,

Page 1878

and held me at the window while my father talked with hers; and for a long time after I beheld them in imagination talking: that is to say, my father issuing his instructions and Mr. Rippenger receiving them like a pliant hodman; for the result of it was that two days later, without seeing my kings of England, my home again, or London, I was Julia Rippenger's intimate friend and the youngest pupil of the school. My father told me subsequently that we slept at an hotel those two nights intervening. Memory transplants me from the coach and scarlet livery straight to my place of imprisonment.

CHAPTER V

I MAKE A DEAR FRIEND

Heriot was the name of the head boy of the school. Boddy was the name of one of the ushers. They were both in love with Julia Rippenger. It was my fortune to outrun them in her favour for a considerable period, during which time, though I had ceased to live in state, and was wearing out my suits of velvet, and had neither visit nor letter from my father, I was in tolerable bliss. Julia's kisses were showered on me for almost anything I said or did, but her admiration of heroism and daring was so fervent that I was in no greater danger of becoming effeminate than Achilles when he wore girl's clothes. She was seventeen, an age bewitching for boys to look up to and men to look down on. The puzzle of the school was how to account for her close relationship to old Rippenger. Such an apple on such a crab-tree seemed monstrous. Heriot said that he hoped Boddy would marry old Rippenger's real daughter, and, said he, that's birch-twigs. I related his sparkling speech to Julia, who laughed, accusing him, however, of impudence. She let me see a portrait of her dead mother, an Irish lady raising dark eyelashes, whom she resembled. I talked of the portrait to Heriot, and as I had privileges accorded to none of the other boys and could go to her at any hour of the day after lessons, he made me beg for him to have a sight of it. She considered awhile, but refused. On hearing of the unkind refusal, Heriot stuck his hands into his pockets and gave up cricketing. We saw him leaning against a wall in full view of her window, while the boys crowded round him trying to get him to practise, a school-match of an important character coming off with a rival academy; and it was only through fear of our school being beaten if she did not relent that Julia handed me the portrait, charging me solemnly to bring it back. I promised, of course. Heriot went into his favourite corner of the playground, and there looked at it and kissed it, and then buttoned his jacket over it tight, growling when I asked him to return it. Julia grew frightened. She sent me with numbers of petitions to him.

'Look here, young un,' said Heriot; 'you're a good little fellow, and I like you, but just tell her I believe in nothing but handwriting, and if she writes to me for it humbly and nicely she shall have it back. Say I only want to get a copy taken by a first-rate painter.'

Page 1879

Julia shed tears at his cruelty, called him cruel, wicked, false to his word. She wrote, but the letter did not please him, and his reply was scornful. At prayers morning and evening, it was pitiful to observe her glance of entreaty and her downfallen eyelashes. I guessed that in Heriot's letters to her he wanted to make her confess something, which she would not do. 'Now I write to him no more; let him know it, my darling,' she said, and the consequence of Heriot's ungrateful obstinacy was that we all beheld her, at the ceremony of the consecration of the new church, place her hand on Mr. Boddy's arm and allow him to lead her about. Heriot kept his eyes on them; his mouth was sharp, and his arms stiff by his sides. I was the bearer of a long letter to her that evening. She tore it to pieces without reading it. Next day Heriot walked slowly past Mr. Boddy holding the portrait in his hands. The usher called to him!

'What have you there, Heriot?'

My hero stared. 'Only a family portrait,' he answered, thrusting it safe in his pocket and fixing his gaze on Julia's window.

'Permit me to look at it,' said Mr. Boddy.

'Permit me to decline to let you,' said Heriot.

'Look at me, sir,' cried Boddy.

'I prefer to look elsewhere, sir,' replied Heriot, and there was Julia visible at her window.

'I asked you, sir, civilly,' quoth Boddy, 'for permission to look,—I used the word intentionally; I say I asked you for permission . . .'

'No, you didn't,' Heriot retorted, quite cool; 'inferentially you did; but you did not use the word permission.'

'And you turned upon me impudently,' pursued Boddy, whose colour was thunder: 'you quibbled, sir; you prevaricated; you concealed what you were carrying . . .'

'Am carrying,' Heriot corrected his tense; 'and mean to, in spite of every Boddy,' he murmured audibly.

'Like a rascal detected in an act of felony,' roared Boddy, 'you concealed it, sir . . .'

'Conceal it, sir.'

'And I demand, in obedience to my duty, that you instantly exhibit it for my inspection, now, here, at once; no parleying; unbutton, or I call Mr. Rippenger to compel you.'

I was standing close by my brave Heriot, rather trembling, studious of his manfulness though I was. His left foot was firmly in advance, as he said, just in the manner to start an usher furious:

'I concealed it, I conceal it; I was carrying it, I carry it: you demand that I exhibit for your inspection what I mean no Boddy to see? I have to assure you respectfully, sir, that family portraits are sacred things with the sons of gentlemen. Here, Richie, off!'

I found the portrait in my hand, and Heriot between me and the usher, in the attitude of a fellow keeping another out of his home at prisoner's-base. He had spied Mr. Rippenger's head at the playground gate. I had just time to see Heriot and the usher in collision before I ran through the gate and into Julia's arms in her garden, whither the dreadful prospect of an approaching catastrophe had attracted her.

Page 1880

Heriot was merely reported guilty of insolence. He took his five hundred lines of Virgil with his usual sarcastic dignity: all he said to Mr. Rippenger was, 'Let it be about Dido, sir,' which set several of the boys upon Dido's history, but Heriot was condemned to the battles with Turnus. My share in this event secured Heriot's friendship to me without costing me the slightest inconvenience. 'Papa would never punish you,' Julia said; and I felt my rank. Nor was it wonderful I should when Mr. Rippenger was constantly speaking of my father's magnificence in my presence before company. Allowed to draw on him largely for pocket-money, I maintained my father's princely reputation in the school. At times, especially when the holidays arrived and I was left alone with Julia, I had fits of mournfulness, and almost thought the boys happier than I was. Going home began to seem an unattainable thing to me. Having a father, too, a regular father, instead of a dazzling angel that appeared at intervals, I considered a benefaction, in its way, some recompense to the boys, for their not possessing one like mine. My anxiety was relieved by my writing letters to my father, addressed to the care of Miss Julia Rippenger, and posting them in her work-basket. She favoured me with very funny replies, signed, 'Your own ever-loving Papa,' about his being engaged killing Bengal tigers and capturing white elephants, a noble occupation that gave me exciting and consolatory dreams of him.

We had at last a real letter of his, dated from a foreign city; but he mentioned nothing of coming to me. I understood that Mr. Rippenger was disappointed with it.

Gradually a kind of cloud stole over me. I no longer liked to ask for pocket-money; I was clad in a suit of plain cloth; I was banished from the parlour, and only on Sunday was I permitted to go to Julia. I ceased to live in myself. Through the whole course of lessons, at play-time, in my bed, and round to morning bell, I was hunting my father in an unknown country, generally with the sun setting before me: I ran out of a wood almost into a brook to see it sink as if I had again lost sight of him, and then a sense of darkness brought me back to my natural consciousness, without afflicting me much, but astonishing me. Why was I away from him? I could repeat my lessons in the midst of these dreams quite fairly; it was the awakening among the circle of the boys that made me falter during a recital and ask myself why I was there and he absent? They had given over speculating on another holiday and treat from my father; yet he had produced such an impression in the school that even when I had descended to the level of a total equality with them, they continued to have some consideration for me. I was able to talk of foreign cities and could tell stories, and I was, besides, under the immediate protection of Heriot. But now the shadow of a great calamity fell on me, for my dear Heriot announced his intention of leaving the school next half.

Page 1881

’I can’t stand being prayed at, morning and evening, by a fellow who hasn’t the pluck to strike me like a man,’ he said. Mr. Rippenger had the habit of signalizing offenders, in his public prayers, as boys whose hearts he wished to be turned from callousness. He perpetually suspected plots; and to hear him allude to some deep, long-hatched school conspiracy while we knelt motionless on the forms, and fetch a big breath to bring out, ’May the heart of Walter Heriot be turned and he comprehend the multitudinous blessings,’ *etc*., was intensely distressing. Together with Walter Heriot, Andrew Saddlebank, our best bowler, the drollest fellow in the world, John Salter, and little Gus Temple, were oftenest cited. They declared that they invariably uttered ‘Amen,’ as Heriot did, but we none of us heard this defiant murmur of assent from their lips. Heriot pronounced it clearly and cheerfully, causing Julia’s figure to shrink as she knelt with her face in the chair hard by her father’s desk-pulpit. I received the hearty congratulations of my comrades for singing out ‘Amen’ louder than Heriot, like a chorister, though not in so prolonged a note, on hearing to my stupefaction Mr. Rippenger implore that the heart of ‘him we know as Richmond Roy’ might be turned. I did it spontaneously. Mr. Rippenger gazed at me in descending from his desk; Julia, too, looking grieved. For my part, I exulted in having done a thing that gave me a likeness to Heriot.

‘Little Richmond, you’re a little hero,’ he said, caressing me. ’I saw old Rippenger whisper to that beast, Boddy. Never mind; they won’t hurt you as long as I’m here. Grow tough, that’s what you’ve got to do. I’d like to see you horsed, only to see whether you’re game to take it without wincing—if it didn’t hurt you much, little lad.’

He hugged me up to him.

‘I’d take anything for you, Heriot,’ said I.

‘All right,’ he answered, never meaning me to suffer on his account. He had an inimitable manner of sweet speaking that endeared him to younger boys capable of appreciating it, with the supernatural power of music. It endeared him, I suppose, to young women also. Julia repeated his phrases, as for instance, ‘Silly boy, silly boy,’ spoken with a wave of his hand, when a little fellow thanked him for a kindness. She was angry at his approval of what she called my defiance of her father, and insisted that I was the catspaw of one of Heriot’s plots to vex him. ’Tell Heriot you have my command to say you belong to me and must not be misled,’ she said. His answer was that he wanted it in writing. She requested him to deliver up her previous letters. Thereupon he charged me with a lengthy epistle, which plunged us into boiling water. Mr. Boddy sat in the schoolroom while Heriot’s pen was at work, on the wet Sunday afternoon. His keen little eyes were busy in his flat bird’s head all the time Heriot continued writing. He saw no more than that Heriot gave me a book; but as I was marching away to Julia he called to know where I was going.

Page 1882

‘To Miss Rippenger,’ I replied.

‘What have you there?’

‘A book, sir.’

‘Show me the book.’

I stood fast.

’It ‘s a book I have lent him, sir,’ said Heriot, rising. ’I shall see if it’s a fit book for a young boy,’ said Boddy; and before Heriot could interpose, he had knocked the book on the floor, and out fell the letter. Both sprang down to seize it: their heads encountered, but Heriot had the quicker hand; he caught the letter, and cried ‘Off!’ to me, as on another occasion. This time, however, he was not between me and the usher. I was seized by the collar, and shakes roughly.

’You will now understand that you are on a footing with the rest of the boys, you Roy,’ said Boddy. ’Little scoundrelly spoilt urchins, upsetting the discipline of the school, won’t do here. Heriot, here is your book. I regret,’ he added, sneering, ‘that a leaf is torn.’

‘I regret, sir, that the poor boy was so savagely handled,’ said Heriot.

He was warned to avoid insolence.

‘Oh, as much Virgil as you like,’ Heriot retorted; ‘I know him by heart.’

It was past the hour of my customary visit to Julia, and she came to discover the reason of my delay. Boddy stood up to explain. Heriot went forward, saying, ’I think I’m the one who ought to speak, Miss Rippenger. The fact is, I hear from little Roy that you are fond of tales of Indian adventure, and I gave him a book for you to read, if you like it. Mr. Boddy objected, and treated the youngster rather rigorously. It must have been quite a misunderstanding on his part. Here is the book it’s extremely amusing.’

Julia blushed very red. She accepted the book with a soft murmur, and the sallow usher had not a word.

‘Stay,’ said Heriot. ’I took the liberty to write some notes. My father is an Indian officer, you know, and some of the terms in the book are difficult without notes. Richie, hand that paper. Here they are, Miss Rippenger, if you’ll be so kind as to place them in the book.’

I was hoping with all my might that she would not deny him. She did, and my heart sank.

‘Oh, I can read it without notes,’ she said, cheerfully.

After that, I listened with indifference to her petition to Boddy that I might be allowed to accompany her, and was not at all chagrined by his refusal. She laid down the book, saying that I could bring it to her when I was out of disgrace.

In the evening we walked in the playground, where Heriot asked me to do a brave thing, which he would never forget. This was that I should take a sharp run right past Boddy, who was pacing up and down before the gate leading into Julia’s garden, and force her to receive the letter. I went bounding like a ball. The usher, suspecting only that I hurried to speak to him, let me see how indignant he was with my behaviour by striding all the faster as I drew near, and so he passed the gate, and I rushed in. I had just time to say to Julia, ‘Hide it, or I’m in such a scrape.’

Page 1883

The next minute she was addressing my enemy:

‘Surely you would not punish him because he loves me?’ and he, though he spoke of insubordination, merited chastisement; and other usher phrases, seemed to melt, and I had what I believe was a primary conception of the power of woman. She led him to talk in the gentlest way possible of how the rain had refreshed her flowers, and of this and that poor rose.

I could think of nothing but the darling letter, which had flashed out of sight as a rabbit pops into burrows. Boddy departed with a rose.

‘Ah, Richie,’ she said, ‘I have to pay to have you with me now.’

We walked to the summer-house, where she read Heriot’s letter through. ‘But he is a boy! How old is Heriot? He is not so old as I am!’

These were her words, and she read the letter anew, and read it again after she had placed it in her bosom, I meanwhile pouring out praises of Heriot.

‘You speak of him as if you were in love with him, Richmond,’ she said.

‘And I do love him,’ I answered.

‘Not with me?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I do love you too, if you will not make him angry.’

‘But do you know what it is he wants of me?’

I guessed: ’Yes; he wants you to let him sit close to you for half an hour.’

She said that he sat very near her in church.

‘Ah,’ said I, ‘but he mustn’t interrupt the sermon.’

She laughed, and mouthed me over with laughing kisses. ’There’s very little he hasn’t daring enough for!’

We talked of his courage.

‘Is he good as well?’ said Julia, more to herself than to me; but I sang out,

‘Good! Oh, so kind!’

This appeared to convince her.

‘Very generous to you and every one, is he not?’ she said; and from that moment was all questions concerning his kind treatment of the boys, and as to their looking up to him.

I quitted her, taking her message to Heriot: ’You may tell him—tell him that I can’t write.’

Heriot frowned on hearing me repeat it.

‘Humph!’ he went, and was bright in a twinkling: ’that means she’ll come!’ He smacked his hands together, grew black, and asked, ’Did she give that beast Boddy a rose?’

I had to confess she did; and feeling a twinge of my treason to her, felt hers to Heriot.

‘Humph!’ he went; ‘she shall suffer for that.’

All this was like music going on until the curtain should lift and reveal my father to me.

There was soon a secret to be read in Heriot’s face for one who loved it as I did. Julia’s betrayed nothing. I was not taken into their confidence, and luckily not; otherwise I fear I should have served them ill, I was so poor a dissembler and was so hotly plied with interrogations by the suspicious usher. I felt sure that Heriot and Julia met. His eyes were on her all through prayer-time, and hers

Page 1884

wandered over the boys' heads till they rested on him, when they gave a short flutter and dropped, like a bird shot dead. The boys must have had some knowledge that love was busy in their midst, for they spoke of Heriot and Julia as a jolly couple, and of Boddy as one meaning to play the part of old Nick the first opportunity. She was kinder to them than ever. It was not a new thing that she should send in cakes of her own making, but it was extraordinary that we should get these thoughtful presents as often as once a fortnight, and it became usual to hear a boy exclaim, either among a knot of fellows or to himself, 'By jingo, she is a pretty girl!' on her passing out of the room, and sometimes entirely of his own idea. I am persuaded that if she had consented to marry Boddy, the boys would have been seriously disposed to conspire to jump up in the church and forbid the banns. We should have preferred to hand her to the junior usher, Catman, of whom the rumour ran in the school that he once drank a bottle of wine and was sick after it, and he was therefore a weak creature to our minds; the truth of the rumour being confirmed by his pale complexion. That we would have handed our blooming princess to him was full proof of our abhorrence of Boddy. I might have thought with the other boys that she was growing prettier, only I never could imagine her so delicious as when she smiled at my father.

The consequence of the enlistment of the whole school in Heriot's interests was that at cricket-matches, picnics on the hills, and boating on the canal, Mr. Boddy was begirt with spies, and little Temple reported to Heriot a conversation that he, lying hidden in tall grass, had heard between Boddy and Julia. Boddy asked her to take private lessons in French from him. Heriot listened to the monstrous tale as he was on the point of entering Julia's boat, where Boddy sat beside her, and Heriot rowed stroke-oar. He dipped his blade, and said, loud enough to be heard by me in Catman's boat,

'Do you think French useful in a military education, sir?'

And Boddy said, 'Yes, of course it is.'

Says Heriot, 'Then I think I shall take lessons.'

Boddy told him he was taking lessons in the school.

'Oh!' says Heriot, 'I mean private lessons'; and here he repeated one of Temple's pieces of communication: 'so much more can be imparted in a private lesson!'

Boddy sprang half up from his seat. 'Row, sir, and don't talk,' he growled.

'Sit, sir, and don't dance in the boat, if you please, or the lady will be overset,' said Heriot.

Julia requested to be allowed to land and walk home. Boddy caught the rudder lines and leapt on the bank to hand her out; then all the boys in her boat and in Catman's

shouted, ’Miss Julia! dear Miss Julia, don’t leave us!’ and we heard wheedling voices: ‘Don’t go off with him alone!’ Julia bade us behave well or she would not be able to come out with us. At her entreaty Boddy stepped back to his post, and the two boats went forward like swans that have done ruffling their feathers.

Page 1885

The boys were exceedingly disappointed that no catastrophe followed the events of the day. Heriot, they thought, might have upset the boat, saved Julia, and drowned Boddy, and given us a feast of pleasurable excitement: instead of which Boddy lived to harass us with his tyrannical impositions and spiteful slaps, and it was to him, not to our Heriot, that Julia was most gracious. Some of us discussed her conduct.

‘She’s a coquette,’ said little Temple. I went off to the French dictionary.

‘Is Julia Rippenger a coquette, Heriot?’ I asked him.

‘Keep girls out of your heads, you little fellows,’ said he, dealing me a smart thump.

‘Is a coquette a nasty girl?’ I persisted.

‘No, a nice one, as it happens,’ was his answer.

My only feeling was jealousy of the superior knowledge of the sex possessed by Temple, for I could not fathom the meaning of coquette; but he had sisters. Temple and I walked the grounds together, mutually declaring how much we would forfeit for Heriot’s sake. By this time my Sunday visits to Julia had been interdicted: I was plunged, as it were, in the pit of the school, and my dreams of my father were losing distinctness. A series of boxes on the ears from Boddy began to astound and transform me. Mr. Rippenger, too, threatened me with carvings, though my offences were slight. ‘Yes,’ said Temple and I, in chorus, ’but you daren’t strike Heriot!’ This was our consolation, and the sentiment of the school. Fancy, then, our amazement to behold him laying the cane on Heriot’s shoulders as fiercely as he could, and Boddy seconding him. The scene was terrible. We were all at our desks doing evening tasks for the morrow, a great matchday at cricket, Boddy watching over us, and bellowing, ’Silence at your work, you lazy fellows, if you want lessons to be finished at ten in the morning!’ A noise came growing up to us from below, up the stairs from the wet-weather shed, and Heriot burst into the room, old Rippenger after him, panting.

‘Mr. Boddy, you were right,’ he cried, ’I find him a prowler, breaking all rules of discipline. A perverted, impudent rascal! An example shall be set to my school, sir. We have been falling lax. What! I find the puppy in my garden whistling—he confesses—-for one of my servants—here, Mr. Boddy, if you please. My school shall see that none insult me with impunity!’ He laid on Heriot like a wind on a bulrush. Heriot bent his shoulders a trifle, not his head.

‘Hit away, sir,’ he said, during the storm of blows, and I, through my tears, imagined him (or I do now) a young eagle forced to bear the thunder, but with his face to it. Then we saw Boddy lay hands on him, and in a twinkling down pitched the usher, and the boys cheered—chirped, I should say, they exulted so, and merely sang out like birds, without

any wilfulness of delight or defiance. After the fall of Boddy we had no sense of our hero suffering shame. Temple and I clutched fingers

Page 1886

tight as long as the blows went on. We hoped for Boddy to make another attempt to touch Heriot; he held near the master, looking ready to spring, like a sallow panther; we kept hoping he would, in our horror of the murderous slashes of the cane; and not a syllable did Heriot utter. Temple and I started up, unaware of what we were going to do, or of anything until we had got a blow a-piece, and were in the thick of it, and Boddy had us both by the collars, and was knocking our heads together, as he dragged us back to our seats. But the boys told us we stopped the execution. Mr. Rippenger addressed us before he left the school-room. Saddlebank, Salter, and a good many others, plugged their ears with their fists. That night Boddy and Catman paced in the bedchambers, to prevent plotting and conspiracy, they said. I longed to get my arms about Heriot, and thought of him, and dreamed of blood, and woke in the morning wondering what made me cry, and my arms and back very stiff. Heriot was gay as ever, but had fits of reserve; the word passed round that we were not to talk of yesterday evening. We feared he would refuse to play in the match.

'Why not?' said he, staring at us angrily. 'Has Saddlebank broken his arm, and can't bowl?'

No, Saddlebank was in excellent trim, though shamefaced, as was Salter, and most of the big boys were. They begged Heriot to let them shake his hand.

'Wait till we win our match,' said Heriot.

Julia did not appear at morning prayers.

'Ah,' said Temple, 'it'd make her sick to hear old Massacre praying.' It had nearly made him sick, he added, and I immediately felt that it had nearly made me sick.

We supposed we should not see Julia at the match. She came, however, and talked to everybody. I could not contain myself, I wanted so to tell her what had befallen Heriot overnight, while he was batting, and the whole ground cheering his hits. I on one side of her whispered:

'I say, Julia, my dear, I say, do you know . . .'

And Temple on the other: 'Miss Julia, I wish you'd let me tell you—'

We longed to arouse her pity for Heriot at the moment she was admiring him, but she checked us, and as she was surrounded by ladies and gentlemen of the town, and particular friends of hers, we could not speak out. Heriot brought his bat to the booth for eighty-nine runs. His sleeve happened to be unbuttoned, and there, on his arm, was a mark of the cane.

'Look!' I said to Julia. But she looked at me.

‘Richie, are you ill?’

She assured me I was very pale, and I felt her trembling excessively, and her parasol was covering us.

‘Here, Roy, Temple,’ we heard Heriot call; ’here, come here and bowl to me.’

I went and bowled till I thought my head was flying after the ball and getting knocks, it swam and throbbed so horribly.

Temple related that I fell, and was carried all the way from the cricket-field home by Heriot, who would not give me up to the usher. I was in Julia’s charge three days. Every time I spoke of her father and Heriot, she cried, ‘Oh, hush!’ and had tears on her eyelids. When I was quite strong again, I made her hear me out. She held me and rocked over me like a green tree in the wind and rain.

Page 1887

‘Was any name mentioned?’ she asked, with her mouth working, and to my ‘No,’ said ‘No, she knew there was none,’ and seemed to drink and choke, and was one minute calm, all but a trembling hanging underlip, next smiling on me, and next having her face carved in grimaces by the jerking little tugs of her mouth, which I disliked to see, for she would say nothing of what she thought of Heriot, and I thought to myself, though I forbore to speak unkindly, ’It’s no use your making yourself look ugly, Julia.’ If she had talked of Heriot, I should have thought that crying persons’ kisses were agreeable.

On my return into the school, I found it in a convulsion of excitement, owing to Heriot’s sending Boddy a challenge to fight a duel with pistols. Mr. Rippenger preached a sermon to the boys concerning the unChristian spirit and hideous moral perversity of one who would even consent to fight a duel. How much more reprehensible, then, was one that could bring himself to defy a fellow-creature to mortal combat! We were not of his opinion; and as these questions are carried by majorities, we decided that Boddy was a coward, and approved the idea that Heriot would have to shoot or scourge him when the holidays came. Mr. Rippenger concluded his observations by remarking that the sharpest punishment he could inflict upon Heriot was to leave him to his own conscience; which he did for three days, and then asked him if he was in a fit state of mind to beg Mr. Boddy’s pardon publicly.

‘I’m quite prepared to tell him what I think of him publicly, sir,’ said Heriot.

A murmur of exultation passed through the school. Mr. Rippenger seized little Temple, and flogged him. Far from dreading the rod, now that Heriot and Temple had tasted it, I thought of punishment as a mad pleasure, not a bit more awful than the burning furze-bush plunged into by our fellows in a follow-my-leader scamper on the common; so I caught Temple’s hand as he went by me, and said, eagerly, ’Shall I sing out hurrah?’

‘Bother it!’ was Temple’s answer, for he had taken a stinging dozen, and had a tender skin.

Mr. Rippenger called me up to him, to inform me, that whoever I was, and whatever I was, and I might be a little impostor foisted on his benevolence, yet he would bring me to a knowledge of myself: he gave me warning of it; and if my father objected to his method, my father must write word to that effect, and attend punctually to business duties, for Surrey House was not an almshouse, either for the sons of gentlemen of high connection, or for the sons of vagabonds. Mr. Rippenger added a spurning shove on my shoulder to his recommendation to me to resume my seat. I did not understand him at all. I was, in fact, indebted to a boy named Drew, a known sneak, for the explanation, in itself difficult to comprehend. It was, that Mr. Rippenger was losing patience because he had received no money on account of my boarding and schooling. The intelligence filled my head like the buzz of a fly, occupying my meditations without leading them anywhere. I spoke on the subject to Heriot.

Page 1888

‘Oh, the sordid old brute!’ said he of Mr. Rippenger. ’How can he know the habits and feelings of gentlemen? Your father’s travelling, and can’t write, of course. My father’s in India, and I get a letter from him about once a year. We know one another, and I know he’s one of the best officers in the British army. It’s just the way with schoolmasters and tradesmen: they don’t care whether a man is doing his duty to his country; he must attend to them, settle accounts with them—hang them! I’ll send you money, dear little lad, after I’ve left.’

He dispersed my brooding fit. I was sure my father was a fountain of gold, and only happened to be travelling. Besides, Heriot’s love for Julia, whom none of us saw now, was an incessant distraction. She did not appear at prayers. She sat up in the gallery at church, hardly to be spied. A letter that Heriot flung over the gardenwall for her was returned to him, open, enclosed by post.

‘A letter for Walter Heriot,’ exclaimed Mr. Boddy, lifting it high for Heriot to walk and fetch it; and his small eyes blinked when Heriot said aloud on his way, cheerfully,

‘A letter from the colonel in India!’

Boddy waited a minute, and then said, ‘Is your father in good health?’

Heriot’s face was scarlet. At first he stuttered, ’My father!—I hope so! What have you in common with him, sir?’

‘You stated that the letter was from your father,’ said Boddy.

‘What if it is, sir?’

‘Oh, in that case, nothing whatever to me.’

They talked on, and the youngest of us could perceive Boddy was bursting with devilish glee. Heriot got a letter posted to Julia. It was laid on his desk, with her name scratched completely out, and his put in its place. He grew pale and sad, but did his work, playing his games, and only letting his friends speak to him of lessons and play. His counsel to me was, that in spite of everything, I was always to stick to my tasks and my cricket. His sadness he could not conceal. He looked like an old lamp with a poor light in it. Not a boy in the school missed seeing how Boddy’s flat head perpetually had a side-eye on him.

All this came to an end. John Salter’s father lived on the other side of the downs, and invited three of us to spend a day at his house. The selection included Heriot, Saddlebank, and me. Mr. Rippenger, not liking to refuse Mr. Salter, consented to our going, but pretended that I was too young. Salter said his mother and sisters very much wished to make my acquaintance. We went in his father’s carriage. A jolly wind blew clouds and dust and leaves: I could have fancied I was going to my own father. The

sensation of freedom had a magical effect on me, so that I was the wildest talker of them all. Even in the middle of the family I led the conversation; and I did not leave Salter's house without receiving an assurance from his elder sisters that they were in love with me. We drove

Page 1889

home—back to prison, we called it—full of good things, talking of Salter's father's cellar of wine and of my majority Burgundy, which I said, believing it was true, amounted to twelve hundred dozen; and an appointment was made for us to meet at Dipwell Farm, to assist in consuming it, in my honour and my father's. That matter settled, I felt myself rolling over and over at a great rate, and clasping a juniper tree. The horses had trenched from the chalk road on to the downs. I had been shot out. Heriot and Salter had jumped out—Heriot to look after me; but Saddlebank and the coachman were driving at a great rate over the dark slope. Salter felt some anxiety concerning his father's horses, so we left him to pursue them, and walked on laughing, Heriot praising me for my pluck.

'I say good-bye to you to-night, Richie,' said he. 'We're certain to meet again. I shall go to a military school. Mind you enter a cavalry regiment when you're man enough. Look in the Army List, you'll find me there. My aunt shall make a journey and call on you while you're at Rippenger's, so you shan't be quite lonely.'

To my grief, I discovered that Heriot had resolved he would not return to school.

'You'll get thrashed,' he said; 'I can't help it: I hope you've grown tough by this time. I can't stay here. I feel more like a dog than a man in that house now. I'll see you back safe. No crying, young cornet!'

We had lost the sound of the carriage. Heriot fell to musing. He remarked that the accident took away from Mr. Salter the responsibility of delivering him at Surrey House, but that he, Heriot, was bound, for Mr. Salter's sake, to conduct me to the doors; an unintelligible refinement of reasoning, to my wits. We reached our town between two and three in the morning. There was a ladder leaning against one of the houses in repair near the school. 'You are here, are you!' said Heriot, speaking to the ladder: 'you 'll do me a service—the last I shall want in the neighbourhood.' He managed to poise the ladder on his shoulder, and moved forward.

'Are we going in through the window?' I asked, seeing him fix the ladder against the school-house wall.

He said, 'Hush; keep a look-out.'

I saw him mount high. When he tapped at the window I remembered it was Julia's; I heard her cry out inside. The window rose slowly. Heriot spoke:

'I have come to say good-bye to you, Julia, dear girl: don't be afraid of me.' She answered inaudibly to my ears. He begged her to come to him at once, only once, and hear him and take his hand. She was timid; he had her fingers first, then her whole arm, and she leaned over him. 'Julia, my sweet, dear girl,' he said; and she:

’Heriot, Walter, don’t go—don’t go; you do not care for me if you go. Oh, don’t go.’

‘We’ve come to it,’ said Heriot.

She asked why he was not in bed, and moaned on:

Page 1890

‘Don’t go.’ I was speechless with wonder at the night and the scene. They whispered; I saw their faces close together, and Heriot’s arms round her neck. ‘Oh, Heriot, my darling, my Walter,’ she said, crying, I knew by the sound of her voice.

‘Tell me you love me,’ said Heriot.

‘I do, I do, only don’t go,’ she answered.

‘Will you love me faithfully?’

‘I will; I do.’

‘Say, “I love you, Walter."’

‘I love you, Walter.’

‘For ever.’

’For ever. Oh! what a morning for me. Do you smell my honeysuckle? Oh, don’t go away from me, Walter. Do you love me so?’

‘I’d go through a regiment of sabres to get at you.’

’But smell the night air; how sweet! oh, how sweet! No, not kiss me, if you are going to leave me; not kiss me, if you can be so cruel!’

‘Do you dream of me in your bed?’

‘Yes, every night.’

‘God bless the bed!’

’Every night I dream of you. Oh! brave Heriot; dear, dear Walter, you did not betray me; my father struck you, and you let him for my sake. Every night I pray heaven to make you forgive him: I thought you would hate me. I cried till I was glad you could not see me. Look at those two little stars; no, they hurt me, I can’t look at them ever again. But no, you are not going; you want to frighten me. Do smell the flowers. Don’t make them poison to me. Oh, what a morning for me when you’re lost! And me, to look out on the night alone! No, no more kisses! Oh, yes, I will kiss you, dear.’

Heriot said, ‘Your mother was Irish, Julia.’

‘Yes. She would have loved you.’

’I ’ve Irish blood too. Give me her portrait. It ‘s the image of you.’

‘To take away? Walter! not to take it away?’

‘You darling! to keep me sure of you.’

‘Part with my mother’s portrait?’

‘Why, yes, if you love me one bit.’

‘But you are younger than me, Heriot.’

‘Then good-night, good-bye, Julia.’

‘Walter, I will fetch it.’

Heriot now told her I was below, and she looked down on me and called my name softly, sending kisses from her fingers while he gave the cause for our late return.

‘Some one must be sitting up for you—are we safe?’ she said.

Heriot laughed, and pressed for the portrait.

‘It is all I have. Why should you not have it? I want to be remembered.’

She sobbed as she said this and disappeared. Heriot still talked into her room. I thought I heard a noise of the garden-door opening. A man came out rushing at the ladder. I called in terror: ‘Mr. Boddy, stop, sir.’ He pushed me savagely aside, pitching his whole force against the ladder. Heriot pulled down Julia’s window; he fell with a heavy thump on the ground, and I heard a shriek above. He tried to spring to his feet, but dropped, supported himself on one of his hands, and cried:

Page 1891

’All right; no harm done; how do you do, Mr. Boddy? I thought I’d try one of the attics, as we were late, not to disturb the house. I ’m not hurt, I tell you,’ he cried as loud as he could.

The usher’s words were in a confusion of rage and inquiries. He commanded Heriot to stand on his legs, abused him, asked him what he meant by it, accused him of depravity, of crime, of disgraceful conduct, and attempted to pluck him from the spot.

‘Hands off me,’ said Heriot; ’I can help myself. The youngster ’ll help me, and we’ll go round to the front door. I hope, sir, you will behave like a gentleman; make no row here, Mr. Boddy, if you’ve any respect for people inside. We were upset by Mr. Salter’s carriage; it’s damaged my leg, I believe. Have the goodness, sir, to go in by your road, and we’ll go round and knock at the front door in the proper way. We shall have to disturb the house after all.’

Heriot insisted. I was astonished to see Boddy obey him and leave us, after my dear Heriot had hopped with his hand on my shoulder to the corner of the house fronting the road. While we were standing alone a light cart drove by. Heriot hailed it, and hopped up to the driver.

‘Take me to London, there’s a good fellow,’ he said; ’I’m a gentleman; you needn’t look fixed. I’ll pay you well and thank you. But quick. Haul me up, up; here’s my hand. By jingo! this is pain.’

The man said, ‘Scamped it out of school, sir?’

Heriot replied: ‘Mum. Rely on me when I tell you I’m a gentleman.’

‘Well, if I pick up a gentleman, I can’t be doing a bad business,’ said the man, hauling him in tenderly.

Heriot sung to me in his sweet manner, ’Good-bye, little Richie. Knock when five minutes are over. God bless you, dear little lad! Leg ’ll get well by morning, never fear for me; and we’ll meet somehow; we’ll drink the Burgundy. No crying. Kiss your hand to me.’

I kissed my hand to him. I had no tears to shed; my chest kept heaving enormously. My friend was gone. I stood in the road straining to hear the last of the wheels after they had long been silent.

CHAPTER VI

A TALE OF A GOOSE

From that hour till the day Heriot's aunt came to see me, I lived systematically out of myself in extreme flights of imagination, locking my doors up, as it were, all the faster for the extremest strokes of Mr. Rippenger's rod. He remarked justly that I grew an impenetrably sullen boy, a constitutional rebel, a callous lump: and assured me that if my father would not pay for me, I at least should not escape my debts. The title of little impostor, transmitted from the master's mouth to the school in designation of one who had come to him as a young prince, and for whom he had not received one penny's indemnification, naturally caused me to have fights with several of the boys. Whereupon I was reported:

Page 1892

I was prayed at to move my spirit, and flogged to exercise my flesh. The prayers I soon learnt to laugh to scorn. The floggings, after they were over, crowned me with delicious sensations of martyrdom. Even while the sting lasted I could say, it's for Heriot and Julia! and it gave me a wonderful penetration into—the mournful ecstasy of love. Julia was sent away to a relative by the sea-side, because, one of the housemaids told me, she could not bear to hear of my being beaten. Mr. Rippenger summoned me to his private room to bid me inform him whether I had other relatives besides my father, such as grandfather, grandmother, uncles, or aunts, or a mother. I dare say Julia would have led me to break my word to my father by speaking of old Riversley, a place I half longed for since my father had grown so distant and dim to me; but confession to Mr. Rippenger seemed, as he said of Heriot's behaviour to him, a gross breach of trust to my father; so I refused steadily to answer, and suffered the consequences now on my dear father's behalf. Heriot's aunt brought me a cake, and in a letter from him an extraordinary sum of money for a boy of my age. He wrote that he knew I should want it to pay my debts for treats to the boys and keep them in good humour. He believed also that his people meant to have me for the Christmas holidays. The sum he sent me was five pounds, carefully enclosed. I felt myself a prince again. The money was like a golden gate through which freedom twinkled a finger. Forthwith I paid my debts, amounting to two pounds twelve shillings, and instructed a couple of day-boarders, commercial fellows, whose heavy and mysterious charges for commissions ran up a bill in no time, to prepare to bring us materials for a feast on Saturday. Temple abominated the trading propensities of these boys. 'They never get licked and they've always got money, at least I know they always get mine,' said he; 'but you and I and Heriot despise them.' Our position toward them was that of an encumbered aristocracy, and really they paid us great respect. The fact was that, when they had trusted us, they were compelled to continue obsequious, for Heriot had instilled the sentiment in the school, that gentlemen never failed to wipe out debts in the long run, so it was their interest to make us feel they knew us to be gentlemen, who were at some time or other sure to pay, and thus also they operated on our consciences. From which it followed that one title of superiority among us, ranking next in the order of nobility to the dignity conferred by Mr. Rippenger's rod, was the being down in their books. Temple and I walked in the halo of unlimited credit like more than mortal twins. I gave an order for four bottles of champagne.

Page 1893

On the Friday evening Catman walked out with us. His studious habits endeared him to us immensely, owing to his having his head in his book on all occasions, and a walk under his superintendence was first cousin to liberty. Some boys roamed ahead, some lagged behind, while Catman turned over his pages, sounding the return only when it grew dark. The rumour of the champagne had already intoxicated the boys. There was a companion and most auspicious rumour that Boddy was going to be absent on Saturday. If so, we said, we may drink our champagne under Catman's nose and he be none the wiser. Saddlebank undertook to manage our feast for us. Coming home over the downs, just upon twilight, Temple and I saw Saddlebank carrying a long withy upright. We asked him what it was for. He shouted back: 'It's for fortune. You keep the rear guard.' Then we saw him following a man and a flock of geese, and imitating the action of the man with his green wand. As we were ready to laugh at anything Saddlebank did, we laughed at this. The man walked like one half asleep, and appeared to wake up now and then to find that he was right in the middle of his geese, and then he waited, and Saddlebank waited behind him. Presently the geese passed a lane leading off the downs. We saw Saddlebank duck his wand in a coaxing way, like an angler dropping his fly for fish; he made all sorts of curious easy flourishes against the sky and branched up the lane. We struck after him, little suspecting that he had a goose in front, but he had; he had cut one of the loiterers off from the flock; and to see him handle his wand on either side his goose, encouraging it to go forward, and remonstrating, and addressing it in bits of Latin, and the creature pattering stiff and astonished, sent us in a dance of laughter.

'What have you done, old Saddle?' said Temple, though it was perfectly clear what Saddlebank had done.

'I've carved off a slice of Michaelmas,' said Saddlebank, and he hewed the air to flick delicately at his goose's head.

'What do you mean—a slice?' said we.

We wanted to be certain the goose was captured booty. Saddlebank would talk nothing but his fun. Temple fetched a roaring sigh:

'Oh! how good this goose 'd be with our champagne.'

The idea seized and enraptured me. 'Saddlebank, I 'll buy him off you,' I said.

'Chink won't flavour him,' said Saddlebank, still at his business: 'here, you two, cut back by the down and try all your might to get a dozen apples before Catman counts heads at the door, and you hold your tongues.'

We shot past the man with the geese—I pitied him—clipped a corner of the down, and by dint of hard running reached the main street, mad for apples, before Catman

appeared there. Apples, champagne, and cakes were now provided; all that was left to think of was the goose. We glorified Saddlebank's cleverness to the boys.

'By jingo! what a treat you'll have,' Temple said among them, bursting with our secret.

Page 1894

Saddlebank pleaded that he had missed his way on presenting himself ten minutes after time. To me and Temple he breathed of goose, but he shunned us; he had no fun in him till Saturday afternoon, when Catman called out to hear if we were for cricket or a walk.

‘A walk on the downs,’ said Saddlebank.

Temple and I echoed him, and Saddlebank motioned his hand as though he were wheedling his goose along. Saddlebank spoke a word to my commissioners. I was to leave the arrangements for the feast to him, he said. John Salter was at home unwell, so Saddlebank was chief. No sooner did we stand on the downs than he gathered us all in a circle, and taking off his cap threw in it some slips of paper. We had to draw lots who should keep by Catman out of twenty-seven; fifteen blanks were marked. Temple dashed his hand into the cap first ‘Like my luck,’ he remarked, and pocketed both fists as he began strutting away to hide his desperation at drawing a blank. I bought a substitute for him at the price of half-a-crown,—Drew, a fellow we were glad to get rid of; he wanted five shillings. The feast was worth fifty, but to haggle about prices showed the sneak. He begged us to put by a taste for him; he was groaned out of hearing. The fifteen looked so wretched when they saw themselves divided from us that I gave them a shilling a-piece to console them. They took their instructions from Saddlebank as to how they were to surround Catman, and make him fancy us to be all in his neighbourhood; and then we shook hands, they requesting us feebly to drink their healths, and we saying, ay, that we would.

Temple was in distress of spirits because of his having been ignominiously bought off. Saddlebank, however, put on such a pace that no one had leisure for melancholy. ’I’ll get you fellows up to boiling point,’ said he. There was a tremendously hot sun overhead. On a sudden he halted, exclaiming: ‘Cooks and gridirons! what about sage and onions?’ Only Temple and I jumped at the meaning of this. We drew lots for a messenger, and it was miserable to behold an unfortunate fellow touch Saddlebank’s hand containing the notched bit of stick, and find himself condemned to go and buy sage and onions somewhere, without knowing what it was for how could he guess we were going to cook a raw goose! The lot fell to a boy named Barnshed, a big slow boy, half way up every class he was in, but utterly stupid out of school; which made Saddlebank say: ‘They’ll take it he’s the bird that wants stuffing.’ Barnshed was directed where to rejoin us. The others asked why he was trotted after sage and onions. ‘Because he’s an awful goose,’ said Saddlebank.

Page 1895

Temple and I thought the word was out and hurrahed, and back came Barnshed. We had a task in persuading him to resume his expedition, as well as Saddlebank to forgive us. Saddlebank's anger was excessive. We conciliated him by calling him captain, and pretending to swear an oath of allegiance. He now led us through a wood on to some fields down to a shady dell, where we were to hold the feast in privacy. He did not descend it himself. Vexatious as it was to see a tramp's tent there, we nevertheless acknowledged the respectful greeting of the women and the man with a few questions about tentpegs, pots, and tin mugs. Saddlebank remained aloft, keeping a look-out for the day-school fellows, Chaunter, Davis, and Bystop, my commissioners. They did not keep us waiting long. They had driven to the spot in a cart, according to Saddlebank's directions. Our provisions were in three large hampers. We praised their forethought loudly at the sight of an extra bottle of champagne, with two bottles of ginger-wine, two of currant, two of raisin, four pint bottles of ale, six of ginger-beer, a Dutch cheese, a heap of tarts, three sally-lunns, and four shillingsworth of toffy. Temple and I joined our apples to the mass: a sight at which some of the boys exulted aloud. The tramp-women insisted on spreading things out for us: ten yards off their children squatted staring: the man smoked and chaffed us.

At last Saddlebank came running over the hill-side, making as if he meant to bowl down what looked a black body of a baby against the sky, and shouting, 'See, you fellows, here's a find!' He ran through us, swinging his goose up to the hampers, saying that he had found the goose under a furze-bush. While the words were coming out of his mouth, he saw the tramps, and the male tramp's eyes and his met.

The man had one eyebrow and his lips at one corner screwed in a queer lift: he winked slowly. 'Odd! ain't it?' he said.

Saddlebank shouldered round on us, and cried, 'Confound you fellows! here's a beastly place you've pitched upon.' His face was the colour of scarlet in patches.

'Now, I call it a beautiful place,' said the man, 'and if you finds gooses hereabouts growing ready for the fire, all but plucking, why, it's a bountiful place, I call it.'

The women tried to keep him silent. But for them we should have moved our encampment. 'Why, of course, young gentlemen, if you want to eat the goose, we'll pluck it for you and cook it for you, all nice,' they said. 'How can young gentlemen do that for theirselves?'

It was clear to us we must have a fire for the goose. Certain observations current among us about the necessity to remove the goose's inside, and not to lose the giblets, which even the boy who named them confessed his inability to recognize, inclined the majority to accept the woman's proposal. Saddlebank said it was on our heads, then.

Page 1896

To revive his good humour, Temple uncorked a bottle of champagne. The tramp-woman lent us a tin mug, and round it went. One boy said, 'That's a commencement'; another said, 'Hang old Rippenger.' Temple snapped his fingers, and Bystop, a farmer's son, said, 'Well, now I've drunk champagne; I meant to before I died!' Most of the boys seemed puzzled by it. As for me, my heart sprang up in me like a colt turned out of stables to graze. I determined that the humblest of my retainers should feed from my table, and drink to my father's and Heriot's honour, and I poured out champagne for the women, who just sipped, and the man, who vowed he preferred beer. A spoonful of the mashed tarts I sent to each of the children. Only one, the eldest, a girl about a year older than me, or younger, with black eyebrows and rough black hair, refused to eat or drink.

'Let her bide, young gentlemen,' said a woman; 'she's a regular obstinate, once she sets in for it.'

'Ah!' said the man, 'I've seen pigs druv, and I've seen iron bent double. She's harder 'n both, once she takes 't into her head.'

'By jingo, she's pig-iron!' cried Temple, and sighed, 'Oh, dear old Heriot!'

I flung myself beside him to talk of our lost friend.

A great commotion stirred the boys. They shrieked at beholding their goose vanish in a pot for stewing. They wanted roast-goose, they exclaimed, not boiled; who cared for boiled goose! But the woman asked them how it was possible to roast a goose on the top of wood-flames, where there was nothing to hang it by, and nothing would come of it except smoked bones!

The boys groaned in consternation, and Saddlebank sowed discontent by grumbling, 'Now you see what your jolly new acquaintances have done for you.'

So we played at catch with the Dutch cheese, and afterwards bowled it for long-stopping, when, to the disgust of Saddlebank and others, down ran the black-haired girl and caught the ball clean at wicket-distance. As soon as she had done it she was ashamed, and slunk away.

The boys called out, 'Now, then, pig-iron!'

One fellow enraged me by throwing an apple that hit her in the back. We exchanged half-a-dozen blows, whereupon he consented to apologize, and roared, 'Hulloa, pig-iron, sorry if I hurt you.'

Temple urged me to insist on the rascal's going on his knees for flinging at a girl.

'Why,' said Chaunter, 'you were the first to call her pig-iron.'

Temple declared he was a blackguard if he said that. I made the girl take a piece of toffy.

‘Aha!’ Saddlebank grumbled, ’this comes of the precious company you would keep in spite of my caution.’

The man told us to go it, for he liked to observe young gentlemen enjoying themselves. Temple tossed him a pint bottle of beer, with an injunction to him to shut his trap.

‘Now, you talk my mother tongue,’ said the man; ’you’re what goes by the name of a learned gentleman. Thank ye, sir. You’ll be a counsellor some day.’

Page 1897

‘I won’t get off thieves, I can tell you,’ said Temple. He was the son of a barrister.

‘Nor you won’t help cook their gooses for them, may be,’ said the man. ‘Well, kindness is kindness, all over the world.’

The women stormed at him to command him not to anger the young gentlemen, for Saddlebank was swearing awfully in an undertone. He answered them that he was the mildest lamb afloat.

Despairing of the goose, we resolved to finish the cold repast awaiting us. The Dutch cheese had been bowled into bits. With a portion of the mashed tarts on it, and champagne, it tasted excellently; toffy to follow. Those boys who chose ginger-wine had it, and drank, despised. The ginger-beer and ale, apples and sallylunns, were reserved for supper. My mind became like a driving sky, with glimpses of my father and Heriot bursting through.

‘If I’m not a prince, I’m a nobleman,’ I said to Temple.

He replied, ’Army or Navy. I don’t much care which. We’re sure of a foreign war some time. Then you’ll see fellows rise: lieutenant, captain, colonel, General—quick as barrels popping at a bird. I should like to be Governor of Gibraltar.’

‘I’ll come and see you, Temple,’ said I.

‘Done! old Richie,’ he said, grasping my hand warmly.

‘The truth is, Temple,’ I confided to him, ’I’ve an uncle-I mean a grandfather-of enormous property; he owns half Hampshire, I believe, and hates my father like poison. I won’t stand it. You’ve seen my father, haven’t you? Gentlemen never forget their servants, Temple. Let’s drink lots more champagne. I wish you and I were knights riding across that country there, as they used to, and you saying, “I wonder whether your father’s at home in the castle expecting our arrival."’

‘The Baron!’ said Temple. ’He’s like a Baron, too. His health. Your health, sir! It’s just the wine to drink it in, Richie. He’s one of the men I look up to. It ’s odd he never comes to see you, because he’s fond of you; the right sort of father! Big men can’t be always looking after little boys. Not that we’re so young, though, now. Lots of fellows of our age have done things fellows write about. I feel—’ Temple sat up swelling his chest to deliver an important sentiment; ’I feel uncommonly thirsty.’

So did I. We attributed it to the air of the place, Temple going so far as to say that it came off the chalk, which somehow stuck in the throat.

‘Saddleback, don’t look glum,’ said Temple. ’Lord, Richie, you should hear my father plead in Court with his wig on. They used to say at home I was a clever boy when I was a baby. Saddleback, you’ve looked glum all the afternoon.’

‘Treat your superiors respectfully,’ Saddlebank retorted.

The tramp was irritating him. That tramp had never left off smoking and leaning on his arm since we first saw him. Two boys named Hackman and Montague, not bad fellows, grew desirous of a whiff from his pipe. They had it, and lay down silent, back to back. Bystop was led away in a wretched plight. Two others, Paynter and Ashworth, attacked the apples, rendered desperate by thirst. Saddlebank repelled them furiously. He harangued those who might care to listen.

Page 1898

’You fellows, by George! you shall eat the goose, I tell you. You’ve spoilt everything, and I tell you, whether you like it or not, you shall have apples with it, and sage and onions too. I don’t ask for thanks. And I propose to post outposts in the wood to keep watch.’

He wanted us to draw lots again. His fun had entirely departed from him; all he thought of was seeing the goose out of the pot. I had a feeling next to hatred for one who could talk of goose. Temple must have shared it.

’We ’ve no real captain now dear old Heriot ‘s gone,’ he said. ’The school’s topsy-turvy: we’re like a lot of things rattled in a box. Oh, dear! how I do like a good commander. On he goes, you after him, never mind what happens.’

A pair of inseparable friends, Happitt and Larkins, nicknamed Happy-go-Lucky, were rolling arm-in-arm, declaring they were perfectly sober, and, for a proof of it, trying to direct their feet upon a lump of chalk, and marching, and missing it. Up came Chaunter to them: ’Fat goose?’ he said-no more. Both the boys rushed straight as far as they could go; both sung out, ‘I’m done!’ and they were.

Temple and I contemplated these proceedings as matters belonging to the ordinary phenomena of feasting. We agreed that gentlemen were always the last to drop, and were assured, therefore, of our living out the field; but I dreaded the moment of the goose’s appearance, and I think he did also. Saddlebank’s pertinacity in withholding the cool ginger-beer and the apples offended us deeply; we should have conspired against him had we reposed confidence in our legs and our tongues.

Twilight was around us. The tramp-children lay in little bundles in one tent; another was being built by the women and the girl. Overhead I counted numbers of stars, all small; and lights in the valley-lights of palaces to my imagination. Stars and tramps seemed to me to go together. Houses imprisoned us, I thought a lost father was never to be discovered by remaining in them. Plunged among dark green leaves, smelling wood-smoke, at night; at morning waking up, and the world alight, and you standing high, and marking the hills where you will see the next morning and the next, morning after morning, and one morning the dearest person in the world surprising you just before you wake: I thought this a heavenly pleasure. But, observing the narrowness of the tents, it struck me there would be snoring companions. I felt so intensely sensitive, that the very idea of a snore gave me tremours and qualms: it was associated with the sense of fat. Saddlebank had the lid of the pot in his hand; we smelt the goose, and he cried, ’Now for supper; now for it! Halloa, you fellows!’

‘Bother it, Saddlebank, you’ll make Catman hear you,’ said Temple, wiping his forehead.

I perspired coldly.

‘Catman! He’s been at it for the last hour and a half,’ Saddlebank replied.

Page 1899

One boy ran up: he was ready, and the only one who was. Presently Chaunter rushed by.

'Barnshed 's in custody; I'm away home,' he said, passing.

We stared at the black opening of the dell.

'Oh, it's Catman; we don't mind him,' Saddlebank reassured us; but we heard ominous voices, and perceived people standing over a prostrate figure. Then we heard a voice too well known to us. It said, 'The explanation of a pupil in your charge, Mr. Catman, being sent barefaced into the town—a scholar of mine-for sage and onions . . .'

'Old Rippenger!' breathed Temple.

We sat paralyzed. Now we understood the folly of despatching a donkey like Barnshed for sage and onions.

'Oh, what asses we have been!' Temple continued. 'Come along-we run for it! Come along, Richie! They 're picking up the fellows like windfalls.'

I told him I would not run for it; in fact, I distrusted my legs; and he was staggering, answering Saddlebank's reproaches for having come among tramps.

'Temple, I see you, sir!' called Mr. Rippenger. Poor Temple had advanced into the firelight.

With the instinct to defeat the master, I crawled in the line of the shadows to the farther side of a tent, where I felt a hand clutch mine. 'Hide me,' said I; and the curtain of the tent was raised. After squeezing through boxes and straw, I lay flat, covered by a mat smelling of abominable cheese, and felt a head outside it on my chest. Several times Mr. Rippenger pronounced my name in the way habitual to him in anger: 'Rye!'

Temple's answer was inaudible to me. Saddlebank spoke, and other boys, and the man and the woman. Then a light was thrust in the tent, and the man said, 'Me deceive you, sir! See for yourself, to satisfy yourself. Here's our little uns laid warm, and a girl there, head on the mat, going down to join her tribe at Lipcombe, and one of our women sleeps here, and all told. But for you to suspect me of combining—Thank ye, sir. You've got my word as a man.'

The light went away. My chest was relieved of the weight on it. I sat up, and the creature who had been kind to me laid mat and straw on the ground, and drew my head on her shoulder, where I slept fast.

CHAPTER VII

A FREE LIFE ON THE ROAD

I woke very early, though I had taken kindly to my pillow, as I found by my having an arm round my companion's neck, and her fingers intertwisted with mine. For awhile I lay looking at her eyes, which had every imaginable light and signification in them; they advised me to lie quiet, they laughed at my wonder, they said, 'Dear little fellow!' they flashed as from under a cloud, darkened, flashed out of it, seemed to dip in water and shine, and were sometimes like a view into a forest, sometimes intensely sunny, never quite still. I trusted her, and could have slept again, but the sight of the tent stupefied me; I fancied the sky had fallen, and gasped for air; my head was extremely dizzy too; not one idea in it was kept from wheeling. This confusion of my head flew to my legs when, imitating her, I rose to go forth. In a fit of horror I thought, 'I 've forgotten how to walk!'

Page 1900

Summoning my manful resolution, I made the attempt to step across the children swaddled in matting and straw and old gowns or petticoats. The necessity for doing it with a rush seized me after the first step. I pitched over one little bundle, right on to the figure of a sleeping woman. All she did was to turn round, murmuring, 'Naughty Jackie.' My companion pulled me along gravely, and once in the air, with a good breath of it in my chest, I felt tall and strong, and knew what had occurred. The tent where I had slept struck me as more curious than my own circumstances. I lifted my face to the sky; it was just sunrise, beautiful; bits of long and curling cloud brushed any way close on the blue, and rosy and white, deliciously cool; the grass was all grey, our dell in shadow, and the tops of the trees burning, a few birds twittering.

I sucked a blade of grass.

'I wish it was all water here,' I said.

'Come and have a drink and a bathe,' said my companion.

We went down the dell and over a juniper slope, reminding me of my day at John Salter's house and the last of dear Heriot. Rather to my shame, my companion beat me at running; she was very swift, and my legs were stiff.

'Can you swim?' she asked me.

'I can row, and swim, and fence, and ride, and fire a pistol,' I said.

'Oh, dear,' said she, after eyeing me enviously. I could see that I had checked a recital of her accomplishments.

We arrived at a clear stream in a gentleman's park, where grass rolled smooth as sea-water on a fine day, and cows and horses were feeding.

'I can catch that horse and mount him,' she said.

I was astonished.

'Straddle?'

She nodded down for 'Yes.'

'No saddle?'

She nodded level for 'No.'

My respect for her returned. But she could not swim.

‘Only up to my knees,’ she confessed.

‘Have a look at me,’ said I; and I stripped and shot into the water, happy as a fish, and thinking how much nicer it was than champagne. My enjoyment made her so envious that she plucked off her stockings, and came in as far as she dared. I called to her. ‘You’re like a cow,’ and she showed her teeth, bidding me not say that.

‘A cow! a cow!’ I repeated, in my superior pleasure.

She spun out in a breath, ’If you say that, I ’ll run away with every bit of your clothes, and you’ll come out and run about naked, you will.’

‘Now I float,’ was my answer, ‘now I dive’; and when I came up she welcomed me with a big bright grin.

A smart run in the heat dried me. I dressed, finding half my money on the grass. She asked me to give her one of those bits-a shilling. I gave her two, upon which she asked me, invitingly, if ever I tossed. I replied that I never tossed for money; but she had caught a shilling, and I could not resist guessing ‘heads,’ and won; the same with her second shilling. She handed them to me sullenly, sobbing, yet she would not take them back.

Page 1901

‘By-and-by you give me another two,’ she said, growing lively again. We agreed that it would be a good thing if we entered the village and bought something. None of the shops were open. We walked through the churchyard. I said, ‘Here’s where dead people are buried.’

‘I’ll dance if you talk about dead people,’ said she, and began whooping at the pitch of her voice. On my wishing to know why she did it, her reply was that it was to make the dead people hear. My feelings were strange: the shops not open, and no living people to be seen. We climbed trees, and sat on a branch talking of birds’ eggs till hunger drove us to the village street, where, near the public-house, we met the man-tramp, who whistled.

He was rather amusing. He remarked that he put no questions to me, because he put no question to anybody, because answers excited him about subjects that had no particular interest to him, and did not benefit him to the extent of a pipe of ’tobacco; and all through not being inquisitive, yesterday afternoon he had obtained, as if it had been chucked into his lap, a fine-flavoured fat goose honourably for his supper, besides bottles of ale, bottles of ginger-pop, and a fair-earned half-crown. That was through his not being inquisitive, and he was not going to be inquisitive now, knowing me for a gentleman: my master had tipped him half-a-crown.

Fortunately for him, and perhaps for my liberty, he employed a verb marvellously enlightening to a schoolboy. I tipped him another half-crown. He thanked me, observing that there were days when you lay on your back and the sky rained apples; while there were other days when you wore your fingers down to the first joint to catch a flea. Such was Fortune!

In a friendly manner he advised me to go to school; if not there, then to go home. My idea, which I had only partly conceived, was to have a look at Riversley over a hedge, kiss my aunt Dorothy unaware, and fly subsequently in search of my father. Breakfast, however, was my immediate thought. He and the girl sat down to breakfast at the inn as my guests. We ate muttonchops and eggs, and drank coffee. After it, though I had no suspicions, I noticed that the man grew thoughtful. He proposed to me, supposing I had no objection against slow travelling, to join company for a couple of days, if I was for Hampshire, which I stated was the county I meant to visit.

’Well then, here now, come along, d ‘ye see, look,’ said he, ’I mustn’t be pounced on, and no missing young gentleman in my society, and me took half-a-crown for his absence; that won’t do. You get on pretty well with the gal, and that ’s a screaming farce: none of us do. Lord! she looks down on such scum as us. She’s gipsy blood, true sort; everything’s sausages that gets into their pockets, no matter what it was when it was out. Well then, now, here, you and the gal go t’ other side o’ Bed’lming, and you wait for us on the heath, and we ’ll be there to comfort ye ’fore dark. Is it a fister?’

Page 1902

He held out his hand; I agreed; and he remarked that he now counted a breakfast in the list of his gains from never asking questions.

I was glad enough to quit the village in a hurry, for the driver of the geese, or a man dreadfully resembling him, passed me near the public-house, and attacked my conscience on the cowardly side, which is, I fear, the first to awaken, and always the liveliest half while we are undisciplined. I would have paid him money, but the idea of a conversation with him indicated the road back to school. My companion related her history. She belonged to a Hampshire gipsy tribe, and had been on a visit to a relative down in the East counties, who died on the road, leaving her to be brought home by these tramps: she called them mumpers, and made faces when she spoke of them. Gipsies, she said, were a different sort: gipsies camped in gentlemen's parks; gipsies, horses, fiddles, and the wide world—that was what she liked. The wide world she described as a heath, where you looked and never saw the end of it I let her talk on. For me to talk of my affairs to a girl without bonnet and boots would have been absurd. Otherwise, her society pleased me: she was so like a boy, and unlike any boy I knew.

My mental occupation on the road was to calculate how many hill-tops I should climb before I beheld Riversley. The Sunday bells sounded homely from village to village as soon as I was convinced that I heard no bells summoning boarders to Rippenger's school. The shops in the villages continued shut; however, I told the girl they should pay me for it next day, and we had an interesting topic in discussing as to the various things we would buy. She was for bright ribands and draper's stuff, I for pastry and letter-paper. The smell of people's dinners united our appetites. Going through a village I saw a man carrying a great baked pie, smelling overpoweringly, so that to ask him his price for it was a natural impulse with me. 'What! sell my Sunday dinner?' he said, and appeared ready to drop the dish. Nothing stopped his staring until we had finished a plateful a-piece and some beer in his cottage among his family. He wanted to take me in alone. 'She's a common tramp,' he said of the girl.

'That's a lie,' she answered.

Of course I would not leave her hungry outside, so in the end he reluctantly invited us both, and introduced us to his wife.

'Here's a young gentleman asks a bit o' dinner, and a young I-d'n-know-what 's after the same; I leaves it to you, missus.'

His wife took it off his shoulders in good humour, saying it was lucky she made the pie big enough for her family and strays. They would not accept more than a shilling for our joint repast. The man said that was the account to a farthing, if I was too proud to be a poor man's guest, and insisted on treating him like a public. Perhaps I would shake hands at parting? I did cordially, and remembered him when people were not so civil.

Page 1903

They wanted to know whether we had made a runaway match of it. The fun of passing a boys'-school and hearing the usher threaten to punish one fellow for straying from ranks, entertained me immensely. I laughed at them just as the stupid people we met laughed at me, which was unpleasant for the time; but I knew there was not a single boy who would not have changed places with me, only give him the chance, though my companion was a gipsy girl, and she certainly did look odd company for a gentleman's son in a tea-garden and public-house parlour. At nightfall, however, I was glad of her and she of me, and we walked hand in hand. I narrated tales of Roman history. It was very well for her so say, 'I'll mother you,' as we lay down to sleep; I discovered that she would never have hooted over churchyard graves in the night. She confessed she believed the devil went about in the night. Our bed was a cart under a shed, our bed-clothes fern-leaves and armfuls of straw. The shafts of the cart were down, so we lay between upright and level, and awakening in the early light I found our four legs hanging over the seat in front. 'How you have been kicking!' said I. She accused me of the same. Next minute she pointed over the side of the cart, and I saw the tramp's horse and his tents beneath a broad roadside oak-tree. Her face was comical, just like a boy's who thinks he has escaped and is caught. 'Let's run,' she said. Preferring positive independence, I followed her, and then she told me that she had overheard the tramp last night swearing I was as good as a fistful of half-crowns lost to him if he missed me. The image of Rippenger's school overshadowed me at this communication. With some melancholy I said: 'You'll join your friends, won't you?'

She snapped her fingers: 'Mumpers!' and walked on carelessly.

We were now on the great heaths. They brought the memory of my father vividly; the smell of the air half inclined me to turn my steps toward London, I grew so full of longing for him. Nevertheless I resolved to have one gaze at Riversley, my aunt Dorothy, and Sewis, the old grey-brown butler, and the lamb that had grown a sheep; wonderful contrasts to my grand kings of England career. My first clear recollection of Riversley was here, like an outline of a hill seen miles away. I might have shed a tear or two out of love for my father, had not the thought that I was a very queer boy displaced his image. I could not but be a very queer boy, such a lot of things happened to me. Suppose I joined the gipsies? My companion wished me to. She had brothers, horse-dealers, beautiful fiddlers. Suppose I learnt the fiddle? Suppose I learnt their language and went about with them and became king of the gipsies? My companion shook her head; she could not encourage this ambitious idea because she had never heard of a king of the gipsies or a queen either. 'We fool people,' she said, and offended me, for our school believed in

Page 1904

a gipsy king, and one fellow, Hackman, used to sing a song of a gipsy king; and it was as much as to say that my schoolfellows were fools, every one of them. I accused her of telling lies. She grinned angrily. 'I don't tell 'em to friends,' she said. We had a quarrel. The truth was, I was enraged at the sweeping out of my prospects of rising to distinction among the gipsies. After breakfast at an inn, where a waiter laughed at us to our faces, and we fed scowling, shy, and hungry, we had another quarrel. I informed her of my opinion that gipsies could not tell fortunes.

'They can, and you come to my mother and my aunt, and see if they can't tell your fortune,' said she, in a fury.

'Yes, and that's how they fool people,' said I. I enjoyed seeing the flash of her teeth. But my daring of her to look me in the eyes and swear on her oath she believed the fortunes true ones, sent her into a fit of sullenness.

'Go along, you nasty little fellow, your shadow isn't half a yard,' she said, and I could smile at that; my shadow stretched half across the road. We had a quarrelsome day wherever we went; rarely walking close together till nightfall, when she edged up to my hand, with, 'I say, I'll keep you warm to-night, I will.' She hugged me almost too tight, but it was warm and social, and helped to the triumph of a feeling I had that nothing made me regret running away from Rippenger's school.

An adventure befell us in the night. A farmer's wife, whom we asked for a drink of water after dark, lent us an old blanket to cover us in a dry ditch on receiving our promise not to rob the orchard. An old beggar came limping by us, and wanted to share our covering. My companion sank right under the blanket to peer at him through one of its holes. He stood enormous above me in the moonlight, like an apparition touching earth and sky.

'Cold, cold,' he whined: 'there's ne'er a worse off but there's a better off. Young un!' His words dispersed the fancy that he was something horrible, or else my father in disguise going to throw off his rags, and shine, and say he had found me. 'Are ye one, or are ye two?' he asked.

I replied that we were two.

'Then I'll come and lie in the middle,' said he.

'You can't; there's no room,' I sang out.

'Lord,' said he, 'there's room for any reckoning o' empty stomachs in a ditch.'

'No, I prefer to be alone: good-night,' said I.

'Why!' he exclaimed, 'where ha' you been t' learn language? Halloa!'

‘Please, leave me alone; it’s my intention to go to sleep,’ I said, vexed at having to conciliate him; he had a big stick.

‘Oho!’ went the beggar. Then he recommenced:

’Tell me you’ve stole nothing in your life! You’ve stole a gentleman’s tongue, I knows the ring o’ that. How comes you out here? Who’s your mate there down below? Now, see, I’m going to lift my stick.’

Page 1905

At these menacing words the girl jumped out of the blanket, and I called to him that I would rouse the farmer.

‘Why . . . because I’m goin’ to knock down a apple or two on your head?’ he inquired, in a tone of reproach. ’It’s a young woman you’ve got there, eh? Well, odd grows odder, like the man who turned three shillings into five. Now, you gi’ me a lie under your blanket, I ’ll knock down a apple apiece. If ever you’ve tasted gin, you ’ll say a apple at night’s a cordial, though it don’t intoxicate.’

The girl whispered in my ear, ‘He’s lame as ducks.’ Her meaning seized me at once; we both sprang out of the ditch and ran, dragging our blanket behind us. He pursued, but we eluded him, and dropped on a quiet sleeping-place among furzes. Next morning, when we took the blanket to the farm-house, we heard that the old wretch had traduced our characters, and got a breakfast through charging us with the robbery of the apple-tree. I proved our innocence to the farmer’s wife by putting down a shilling. The sight of it satisfied her. She combed my hair, brought me a bowl of water and a towel, and then gave us a bowl of milk and bread, and dismissed us, telling me I had a fair face and dare-devil written on it: as for the girl, she said of her that she knew gipsies at a glance, and what God Almighty made them for there was no guessing. This set me thinking all through the day, ‘What can they have been made for?’ I bought a red scarf for the girl, and other things she fixed her eyes on, but I lost a great deal of my feeling of fellowship with her. ’I dare say they were made for fun,’ I thought, when people laughed at us now, and I laughed also.

I had a day of rollicking laughter, puzzling the girl, who could only grin two or three seconds at a time, and then stared like a dog that waits for his master to send him off again running, the corners of her mouth twitching for me to laugh or speak, exactly as a dog might wag his tail. I studied her in the light of a harmless sort of unaccountable creature; witness at any rate for the fact that I had escaped from school.

We loitered half the morning round a cricketers’ booth in a field, where there was moderately good cricketing. The people thought it of first-rate quality. I told them I knew a fellow who could bowl out either eleven in an hour and a half. One of the men frightened me by saying, ’By Gearge! I’ll in with you into a gig, and off with you after that ther’ faller.’ He pretended to mean it, and started up. I watched him without flinching. He remarked that if I ’had not cut my lucky from school, and tossed my cap for a free life, he was ——’ whatever may be expressed by a slap on the thigh. We played a single-wicket side game, he giving me six runs, and crestfallen he was to find himself beaten; but, as I let him know, one who had bowled to Heriot for hours and stood against Saddlebank’s bowling, was a tough customer, never mind his age.

Page 1906

This man offered me his friendship. He made me sit and eat beside him at the afternoon dinner of the elevens, and sent platefuls of food to the girl, where she was allowed to squat; and said he, 'You and I'll tie a knot, and be friends for life.'

I replied, 'With pleasure.'

We nodded over a glass of ale. In answer to his questions, I stated that I liked farms, I would come and see his farm, I would stay with him two or three days, I would give him my address if I had one, I was on my way to have a look at Riversley Grange.

'Hey!' says he, 'Riversley Grange! Well, to be sure now! I'm a tenant of Squire Beltham's, and a right sort of landlord, too.'

'Oh!' says I, 'he's my grandfather, but I don't care much about him.'

'Lord!' says he. 'What! be you the little boy, why, Master Harry Richmond that was carried off in the night, and the old squire shut up doors for a fortnight, and made out you was gone in a hearse! Why, I know all about you, you see. And back you are, hurrah! The squire 'll be hearty, that he will. We've noticed a change in him ever since you left. Gout's been at his leg, off and on, a deal shrewder. But he rides to hounds, and dines his tenants still, that he does; he's one o' th' old style. Everything you eat and drink's off his estate, the day he dines his tenants. No humbug 'bout old Squire Beltham.

I asked him if Sewis was alive.

'Why, old Sewis,' says he, 'you're acquainted with old Sewis? Why, of course you are. Yes, old Sewis 's alive, Master Harry. And you bet me at single-wicket! That 'll be something to relate to 'em all. By Gearge, if I didn't think I'd got a nettle in my fist when I saw you pitch into my stumps. Dash it! thinks I. But th' old squire 'll be proud of you, that he will. My farm lies three miles away. You look at a crow flying due South-east five minutes from Riversley, and he's over Throckham farm, and there I 'll drive ye to-night, and to-morrow, clean and tidy out o' my wife's soap and water, straight to Riversley. Done, eh? My name's Eckerthy. No matter where you comes from, here you are, eh, Master Harry? And I see you last time in a donkey-basket, and here you come in breeches and defy me to singlewicket, and you bet me too!'

He laughed for jollity. An extraordinary number of emotions had possession of me: the most intelligible one being a restless vexation at myself, as the principal person concerned, for not experiencing anything like the farmer's happiness. I preferred a gipsy life to Riversley. Gipsies were on the road, and that road led to my father. I endeavoured to explain to Farmer Eckerthy that I was travelling in this direction merely to have a short look at Riversley; but it was impossible; he could not understand me. The more I tried, the more he pressed me to finish my glass of ale, which had nothing to

do with it. I drank, nevertheless, and I suppose said many funny things in my anxiety that the farmer should know what I meant; he laughed enough.

Page 1907

While he was fielding against the opposite eleven, the tramp came into the booth, and we had a match of cunning.

‘Schoolmaster’s out after you, young gentleman,’ said he, advising me to hurry along the road if I sought to baffle pursuit.

I pretended alarm, and then said, ‘Oh, you’ll stand by me,’ and treated him to ale.

He assured me I left as many tracks behind me as if I went spilling a box of lucifer-matches. He was always for my hastening on until I ordered fresh ale for him. The girl and he grimaced at one another in contempt. So we remained seeing the game out. By the time the game ended, the tramp had drunk numbers of glasses of ale.

‘A fine-flavoured fat goose,’ he counted his gains since the commencement of our acquaintance, ’bottles of ale and ginger-pop, two half-crowns, more ale, and more to follow, let’s hope. You only stick to your friends, young gentleman, won’t you, sir? It’s a hard case for a poor man like me if you don’t. We ain’t got such chances every morning of our lives. Do you perceive, sir? I request you to inform me, do you perceive, sir? I’m muddled a bit, sir, but a man must look after his interests.’

I perceived he was so muddled as to be unable to conceal that his interests were involved in my capture; but I was merry too. Farmer Eckerthy dealt the tramp a scattering slap on the back when he returned to the booth, elated at having beaten the enemy by a single run.

’Master Harry Richmond go to Riversley to his grandfather in your company, you scoundrel!’ he cried in a rage, after listening to him. ’I mean to drive him over. It ’s a comfortable ten-mile, and no more. But I say, Master Harry, what do you say to a peck o’ supper?’

He communicated to me confidentially that he did not like to seem to slink away from the others, who had made up their minds to stop and sup; so we would drive home by moonlight, singing songs. And so we did. I sat beside the farmer, the girl scrambled into the hinder part of the cart, and the tramp stood moaning, ’Oh dear! oh dear! you goes away to Riversley without your best friend.’

I tossed him a shilling. We sang beginnings and ends of songs. The farmer looked at the moon, and said, ‘Lord! she stares at us!’ Then he sang:

> ’The moon is shining on Latworth lea,
> And where’ll she see such a jovial three
> As we, boys, we? And why is she pale?
> It’s because she drinks water instead of ale.’

’Where ’s the remainder? There’s the song!—

"Oh! handsome Miss Gammon
Has married Lord Mammon,
And jilted her suitors,
All Cupid's sharpshooters,
And gone in a carriage
And six to her marriage,
Singing hey! for I've landed my salmon, my salmon!"

Where's the remainder? I heard it th' only time I ever was in London town, never rested till I'd learnt it, and now it's clean gone. What's come to me?'

Page 1908

He sang to ‘Mary of Ellingmere’ and another maid of some place, and a loud song of Britons.

It was startling to me to wake up to twilight in the open air and silence, for I was unaware that I had fallen asleep. The girl had roused me, and we crept down from the cart. Horse and farmer were quite motionless in a green hollow beside the roadway. Looking across fields and fir plantations, I beheld a house in the strange light of the hour, and my heart began beating; but I was overcome with shyness, and said to myself, ‘No, no, that’s not Riversley; I’m sure it isn’t’; though the certainty of it was, in my teeth, refuting me. I ran down the fields to the park and the bright little river, and gazed. When I could say, ’Yes, it is Riversley!’ I turned away, hurt even to a sense of smarting pain, without knowing the cause. I dare say it is true, as the girl declared subsequently, that I behaved like one in a fit. I dropped, and I may have rolled my body and cried. An indefinite resentment at Riversley was the feeling I grew conscious of after very fast walking. I would not have accepted breakfast there.

About mid-day, crossing a stubble-field, the girl met a couple of her people-men. Near evening we entered one of their tents. The women set up a cry, ‘Kiomi! Kiomi!’ like a rising rookery. Their eyes and teeth made such a flashing as when you dabble a hand in a dark waterpool. The strange tongue they talked, with a kind of peck of the voice at a word, rapid, never high or low, and then a slide of similar tones all round,—not musical, but catching and incessant,—gave me an idea that I had fallen upon a society of birds, exceedingly curious ones. They welcomed me kindly, each of them looking me in the face a bright second or so. I had two helps from a splendid pot of broth that hung over a fire in the middle of the tent.

Kiomi was my companion’s name. She had sisters Adeline and Eveleen, and brothers Osric and William, and she had a cousin a prizefighter. ’That’s what I’ll be,’ said I. Fiddling for money was not a prospect that charmed me, though it was pleasant lying in Kiomi’s arms to hear Osric play us off to sleep; it was like floating down one of a number of visible rivers; I could see them converging and breaking away while I floated smoothly, and a wonderful fair country nodded drowsy. From that to cock-crow at a stride. Sleep was no more than the passage through the arch of a canal. Kiomi and I were on the heath before sunrise, jumping gravel-pits, chasing sandpipers, mimicking pewits; it seemed to me I had only just heard the last of Osric’s fiddle when yellow colour filled in along the sky over Riversley. The curious dark thrill of the fiddle in the tent by night seemed close up behind the sun, and my quiet fancies as I lay dropping to sleep, followed me like unobtrusive shadows during daylight, or, to speak truthfully, till about dinner-time, when I thought of nothing but the great stew-pot.

Page 1909

We fed on plenty; nicer food than Rippenger's, minus puddings. After dinner I was ready for mischief. My sensations on seeing Kiomi beg of a gentleman were remarkable. I reproached her. She showed me sixpence shining in the palm of her hand. I gave her a shilling to keep her from it. She had now got one and sixpence, she said: meaning, I supposed upon reflection, that her begging had produced that sum, and therefore it was a good thing. The money remaining in my pocket amounted to five shillings and a penny. I offered it to Kiomi's mother, who refused to accept it; so did the father, and Osric also. I might think of them, they observed, on my return to my own house: they pointed at Riversley. 'No,' said I, 'I shan't go there, you may be sure.' The women grinned, and the men yawned. The business of the men appeared to be to set to work about everything as if they had a fire inside them, and then to stretch out their legs and lie on their backs, exactly as if the fire had gone out. Excepting Osric's practice on the fiddle, and the father's bringing in and leading away of horses, they did little work in my sight but brown themselves in the sun. One morning Osric's brother came to our camp with their cousin the prizefighter—a young man of lighter complexion, upon whom I gazed, remembering John Thresher's reverence for the heroical profession. Kiomi whispered some story concerning her brother having met the tramp. I did not listen; I was full of a tempest, owing to two causes: a studious admiration of the smart young prizefighter's person, and wrathful disgust at him for calling Kiomi his wife, and telling her he was prepared to marry her as soon as she played her harp like King David. The intense folly of his asking a girl to play like David made me despise him, but he was splendidly handsome and strong, and to see him put on the gloves for a spar with big William, Kiomi's brother, and evade and ward the huge blows, would have been a treat to others besides old John of Dipwell Farm. He had the agile grace of a leopard; his waistcoat reminded me of one; he was like a piece of machinery in free action. Pleased by my enthusiasm, he gave me a lesson, promising me more.

'He'll be champion some day,' said Kiomi, at gnaw upon an apple he had given her.

I knocked the apple on the ground, and stamped on it. She slapped my cheek. In a minute we stood in a ring. I beheld the girl actually squaring at me.

'Fight away,' I said, to conceal my shame, and imagining I could slip from her hits as easily as the prizefighter did from big William's. I was mistaken.

'Oh! you think I can't defend myself,' said Kiomi; and rushed in with one, two, quick as a cat, and cool as a statue.

'Fight, my merry one; she takes punishment,' the prizefighter sang out. 'First blood to you, Kiomi; uncork his claret, my duck; straight at the nozzle, he sees more lamps than shine in London, I warrant. Make him lively, cook him; tell him who taught you; a downer to him, and I'll marry you to-morrow!'

Page 1910

I conceived a fury against her as though she had injured me by appearing the man's property—and I was getting the worst of it; her little fists shot straight and hard as bars of iron; she liked fighting; she was at least my match. To avoid the disgrace of seriously striking her, or of being beaten at an open exchange of blows, I made a feint, and caught her by the waist and threw her, not very neatly, for I fell myself in her grip. They had to pluck her from me by force.

'And you've gone a course of tuition in wrestling, squire?' the prizefighter said to me rather savagely.

The others were cordial, and did not snarl at me for going to the ropes, as he called it. Kiomi desired to renew the conflict. I said aloud:

'I never fight girls, and I tell you I don't like their licking me.'

'Then you come down to the river and wash your face,' said she, and pulled me by the fingers, and when she had washed my face clear of blood, kissed me. I thought she tasted of the prizefighter.

Late in the afternoon Osric proposed that he and I and the prizefighter should take a walk. I stipulated for Kiomi to be of the party, which was allowed, and the gipsy-women shook my hand as though I had been departing on a long expedition, entreating me not to forget them, and never to think evil of poor gipsy-folk.

'Why, I mean to stay with you,' said I.

They grinned delightedly, and said I must be back to see them break up camp in the evening. Every two or three minutes Kiomi nudged my elbow and pointed behind, where I saw the women waving their coloured neckerchiefs. Out of sight of our tents we came in view of the tramp. Kiomi said, 'Hide!' I dived into a furze dell. The tramp approached, calling out for news of me. Now at Rippenger's school, thanks to Heriot, lying was not the fashion; still I had heard boys lie, and they can let it out of their mouths like a fish, so lively, simple, and solid, that you could fancy a master had asked them for it and they answered, 'There it is.' But boys cannot lie in one key spontaneously, a number of them to the same effect, as my friends here did. I was off, they said; all swung round to signify the direction of my steps; my plans were hinted at; particulars were not stated on the plea that there should be no tellings; it was remarked that I ought to have fair play and 'law.' Kiomi said she hoped he would not catch me. The tramp winced with vexation, and the gipsies chaffed him. I thanked them in my heart for their loyal conduct. Creeping under cover of the dell I passed round to the road over a knoll of firs as quick as my feet could carry me, and had just cried, 'Now I'm safe'; when a lady stepping from a carriage on the road, caught me in her arms and hugged me blind. It was my aunt Dorothy.

CHAPTER VIII

JANET ILCHESTER

I was a prisoner, captured by fraud, and with five shillings and a penny still remaining to me for an assurance of my power to enjoy freedom. Osric and Kiomi did not show themselves on the road, they answered none of my shouts.

Page 1911

‘She is afraid to look me in the face,’ I said, keeping my anger on Kiomi.

‘Harry, Harry,’ said my aunt, ’they must have seen me here; do you grieve, and you have me, dear?’

Her eager brown eyes devoured me while I stood panting to be happy, if only I might fling my money at Kiomi’s feet, and tell her, ’There, take all I have; I hate you!’ One minute I was curiously perusing the soft shade of a moustache on my aunt’s upper lip; the next, we jumped into the carriage, and she was my dear aunt Dorothy again, and the world began rolling another way.

The gipsies had made an appointment to deliver me over to my aunt; Farmer Eckerthy had spoken of me to my grandfather; the tramp had fetched Mr. Rippenger on the scene. Rippenger paid the tramp, I dare say; my grandfather paid Rippenger’s bill and for Saddlebank’s goose; my aunt paid the gipsies, and I think it doubtful that they handed the tramp a share, so he came to the end of his list of benefits from not asking questions.

I returned to Riversley more of a man than most boys of my age, and more of a child. A small child would not have sulked as I did at Kiomi’s behaviour; but I met my grandfather’s ridiculous politeness with a man’s indifference.

‘So you’re back, sir, are you!’

‘I am, sir.’

’Ran like a hare, ‘stead of a fox, eh?’

‘I didn’t run like either, sir.’

‘Do you ride?’

‘Yes, sir; a horse.’

That was his greeting and how I took it. I had not run away from him, so I had a quiet conscience.

He said, shortly after, ’Look here; your name is Harry Richmond in my house—do you understand? My servants have orders to call you Master Harry Richmond, according to your christening. You were born here, sir, you will please to recollect. I’ll have no vagabond names here’—he puffed himself hot, muttering, ‘Nor vagabond airs neither.’

I knew very well what it meant. A sore spirit on my father’s behalf kept me alive to any insult of him; and feeling that we were immeasurably superior to the Beltham blood, I

merely said, apart to old Sewis, shrugging my shoulders, 'The squire expects me to recollect where I was born. I'm not likely to forget his nonsense.'

Sewis, in reply, counselled me to direct a great deal of my attention to the stables, and drink claret with the squire in the evening, things so little difficult to do that I moralized reflectively, 'Here 's a way of gaining a relative's affection!' The squire's punctilious regard for payments impressed me, it is true. He had saved me from the disgrace of owing money to my detested schoolmaster; and, besides, I was under his roof, eating of his bread. My late adventurous life taught me that I incurred an obligation by it. Kiomi was the sole victim of my anger that really seemed to lie down to be trampled on, as she deserved for her unpardonable treachery.

Page 1912

By degrees my grandfather got used to me, and commenced saying in approval of certain of my performances, 'There's Beltham in that—Beltham in that!' Once out hunting, I took a nasty hedge and ditch in front of him; he bawled proudly, 'Beltham all over!' and praised me. At night, drinking claret, he said on a sudden, 'And, egad, Harry, you must jump your head across hedges and ditches, my little fellow. It won't do, in these confounded days, to have you clever all at the wrong end. In my time, good in the saddle was good for everything; but now you must get your brains where you can—pick here, pick there—and sell 'em like a huckster; some do. Nature's gone—it's damned artifice rules, I tell ye; and a squire of our country must be three parts lawyer to keep his own. You must learn; by God, sir, you must cogitate; you must stew at books and maps, or you'll have some infernal upstart taking the lead of you, and leaving you nothing but the whiff of his tail.' He concluded, 'I'm glad to see you toss down your claret, my boy.'

Thus I grew in his favour, till I heard from him that I was to be the heir of Riversley and his estates, but on one condition, which he did not then mention. If I might have spoken to him of my father, I should have loved him. As it was, I liked old Sewis better, for he would talk to me of the night when my father carried me away, and though he never uttered the flattering words I longed to hear, he repeated the story often, and made the red hall glow with beams of my father's image. My walks and rides were divided between the road he must have followed toward London, bearing me in his arms, and the vacant place of Kiomi's camp. Kiomi stood for freedom, pointing into the darkness I wished to penetrate that I might find him. If I spoke of him to my aunt she trembled. She said, 'Yes, Harry, tell me all you are thinking about, whatever you want to know'; but her excessive trembling checked me, and I kept my feelings to myself—a boy with a puzzle in his head and hunger in his heart. At times I rode out to the utmost limit of the hour giving me the proper number of minutes to race back and dress for dinner at the squire's table, and a great wrestling I had with myself to turn my little horse's head from hills and valleys lying East; they seemed to have the secret of my father. Blank enough they looked if ever I despaired of their knowing more than I. My Winter and Summer were the moods of my mind constantly shifting. I would have a week of the belief that he was near Riversley, calling for me; a week of the fear that he was dead; long dreams of him, as travelling through foreign countries, patting the foreheads of boys and girls on his way; or driving radiantly, and people bowing. Radiantly, I say: had there been touches of colour in these visions, I should have been lured off in pursuit of him. The dreams passed colourlessly; I put colouring touches to the figures seen in them afterward, when I was cooler, and could say, 'What is the use of fancying things?' yet knew that fancying things was a consolation. By such means I came to paint the mystery surrounding my father in tender colours. I built up a fretted cathedral from what I imagined of him, and could pass entirely away out of the world by entering the doors.

Page 1913

Want of boys' society as well as hard head-work produced this mischief. My lessons were intermittent Resident tutors arrived to instruct me, one after another. They were clergymen, and they soon proposed to marry my aunt Dorothy, or they rebuked the squire for swearing. The devil was in the parsons, he said: in his time they were modest creatures and stuck to the bottle and heaven. My aunt was of the opinion of our neighbours, who sent their boys to school and thought I should be sent likewise.

'No, no,' said the squire; 'my life's short when the gout's marching up to my middle, and I'll see as much of my heir as I can. Why, the lad's my daughter's son: He shall grow up among his tenantry. We'll beat the country and start a man at last to drive his yard of learning into him without rolling sheep's eyes right and left.'

Unfortunately the squire's description of man was not started. My aunt was handsome, an heiress (that is, she had money of her own coming from her mother's side of the family), and the tenderest woman alive, with a voice sweeter than flutes. There was a saying in the county that to marry a Beltham you must po'chay her.

A great-aunt of mine, the squire's sister, had been carried off. She died childless. A favourite young cousin of his likewise had run away with a poor baronet, Sir Roderick Ilchester, whose son Charles was now and then our playmate, and was a scapegrace. But for me he would have been selected by the squire for his heir, he said; and he often 'confounded' me to my face on that account as he shook my hand, breaking out: 'I'd as lief fetch you a cuff o' the head, Harry Richmond, upon my honour!' and cursing at his luck for having to study for his living, and be what he called a sloppy curate now that I had come to Riversley for good.

He informed me that I should have to marry his sister Janet; for that they could not allow the money to go out of the family. Janet Ilchester was a quaint girl, a favourite of my aunt Dorothy, and the squire's especial pet; red-cheeked, with a good upright figure in walking and riding, and willing to be friendly, but we always quarrelled: she detested hearing of Kiomi.

'Don't talk of creatures you met when you were a beggar, Harry Richmond,' she said.

'I never was a beggar,' I replied.

'Then she was a beggar,' said Janet; and I could not deny it; though the only difference I saw between Janet and Kiomi was, that Janet continually begged favours and gifts of people she knew, and Kiomi of people who were strangers.

My allowance of pocket-money from the squire was fifty pounds a year. I might have spent it all in satisfying Janet's wishes for riding-whips, knives, pencil-cases, cairngorm buttons, and dogs. A large part of the money went that way. She was always getting

notice of fine dogs for sale. I bought a mastiff for her, a brown retriever, and a little terrier. She was permitted to keep the terrier at home, but

Page 1914

I had to take care of the mastiff and retriever. When Janet came to look at them she called them by their names; of course they followed me in preference to her; she cried with jealousy. We had a downright quarrel. Lady Ilchester invited me to spend a day at her house, Charley being home for his Midsummer holidays. Charley, Janet, and I fished the river for trout, and Janet, to flatter me (of which I was quite aware), while I dressed her rod as if she was likely to catch something, talked of Heriot, and then said:

'Oh! dear, we are good friends, aren't we? Charley says we shall marry one another some day, but mama's such a proud woman she won't much like your having such a father as you 've got unless he 's dead by that time and I needn't go up to him to be kissed.'

I stared at the girl in wonderment, but not too angrily, for I guessed that she was merely repeating her brother's candid speculations upon the future. I said: 'Now mind what I tell you, Janet: I forgive you this once, for you are an ignorant little girl and know no better. Speak respectfully of my father or you never see me again.'

Here Charley sang out: 'Hulloa! you don't mean to say you're talking of your father.'

Janet whimpered that I had called her an ignorant little girl. If she had been silent I should have pardoned her. The meanness of the girl in turning on me when the glaring offence was hers, struck me as contemptible beyond words. Charley and I met half way. He advised me not to talk to his sister of my father. They all knew, he said, that it was no fault of mine, and for his part, had he a rascal for a father, he should pension him and cut him; to tell the truth, no objection against me existed in his family except on the score of the sort of father I owned to, and I had better make up my mind to shake him off before I grew a man; he spoke as a friend. I might frown at him and clench my fists, but he did speak as a friend.

Janet all the while was nibbling a biscuit, glancing over it at me with mouse-eyes. Her short frock and her greediness, contrasting with the talk of my marrying her, filled me with renewed scorn, though my heart was sick at the mention of my father. I asked her what she knew of him. She nibbled her biscuit, mumbling, 'He went to Riversley, pretending he was a singing-master. I know that's true, and more.'

'Oh, and a drawing-master, and a professor of legerdemain,' added her brother. 'Expunge him, old fellow; he's no good.'

'No, I'm sure he's no good,' said Janet.

I took her hand, and told her, 'You don't know how you hurt me; but you're a child: you don't know anything about the world. I love my father, remember that, and what you want me to do is mean and disgraceful; but you don't know better. I would forfeit everything in the world for him. And when you're of age to marry, marry anybody you

like—you won't marry me. And good-bye, Janet. Think of learning your lessons, and not of marrying. I can't help laughing.' So I said, but without the laughter. Her brother tried hard to get me to notice him.

Page 1915

Janet betook herself to the squire. Her prattle of our marriage in days to come was excuseable. It was the squire's notion. He used to remark generally that he liked to see things look safe and fast, and he had, as my aunt confided to me, arranged with Lady Ilchester, in the girl's hearing, that we should make a match. My grandfather pledged his word to Janet that he would restore us to an amicable footing. He thought it a light task. Invitations were sent out to a large party at Riversley, and Janet came with all my gifts on her dress or in her pockets. The squire led the company to the gates of his stables; the gates opened, and a beautiful pony, with a side-saddle on, was trotted forth, amid cries of admiration. Then the squire put the bridle-reins in my hands, bidding me present it myself. I asked the name of the person. He pointed at Janet. I presented the pony to Janet, and said, 'It's from the squire.'

She forgot, in her delight, our being at variance.

'No, no, you stupid Harry, I'm to thank you. He's a darling pony. I want to kiss you.'

I retired promptly, but the squire had heard her.

'Back, sir!' he shouted, swearing by this and that. 'You slink from a kiss, and you're Beltham blood?

Back to her, lad. Take it. Up with her in your arms or down on your knees. Take it manfully, somehow. See there, she 's got it ready for you.'

'I've got a letter ready for you, Harry, to say—oh! so sorry for offending you,' Janet whispered, when I reached the pony's head; 'and if you'd rather not be kissed before people, then by-and-by, but do shake hands.'

'Pull the pony's mane,' said I; 'that will do as well. Observe—I pull, and now you pull.'

Janet mechanically followed my actions. She grimaced, and whimpered, 'I could pull the pony's mane right out.'

'Don't treat animals like your dolls,' said I.

She ran to the squire, and refused the pony. The squire's face changed from merry to black.

'Young man,' he addressed me, 'don't show that worse half of yours in genteel society, or, by the Lord! you won't carry Beltham buttons for long. This young lady, mind you, is a lady by birth both sides.'

'She thinks she is marriageable,' said I; and walked away, leaving loud laughter behind me.

But laughter did not console me for the public aspersion of him I loved. I walked off the grounds, and thought to myself it was quite time I should be moving. Wherever I stayed for any length of time I was certain to hear abuse of my father. Why not wander over the country with Kiomi, go to sea, mount the Andes, enlist in a Prussian regiment, and hear the soldiers tell tales of Frederick the Great? I walked over Kiomi's heath till dark, when one of our grooms on horseback overtook me, saying that the squire begged me to jump on the horse and ride home as quick as possible. Two other lads and the coachman were

Page 1916

out scouring the country to find me, and the squire was anxious, it appeared. I rode home like a wounded man made to feel proud by victory, but with no one to stop the bleeding of his wounds: and the more my pride rose, the more I suffered pain. There at home sat my grandfather, dejected, telling me that the loss of me a second time would kill him, begging me to overlook his roughness, calling me his little Harry and his heir, his brave-spirited boy; yet I was too sure that a word of my father to him would have brought him very near another ejaculation concerning Beltham buttons.

‘You’re a fiery young fellow, I suspect,’ he said, when he had recovered his natural temper. ’I like you for it; pluck’s Beltham. Have a will of your own. Sweat out the bad blood. Here, drink my health, Harry. You’re three parts Beltham, at least, and it’ll go hard if you’re not all Beltham before I die. Old blood always wins that race, I swear. We ’re the oldest in the county.

Damn the mixing. My father never let any of his daughters marry, if he could help it, nor’ll I, bar rascals.

Here’s to you, young Squire Beltham. Harry Lepel Beltham—does that suit ye? Anon, anon, as they say in the play. Take my name, and drop the Richmond no, drop the subject: we’ll talk of it by-and-by.’

So he wrestled to express his hatred of my father without offending me; and I studied him coldly, thinking that the sight of my father in beggar’s clothes, raising a hand for me to follow his steps, would draw me forth, though Riversley should beseech me to remain clad in wealth.

CHAPTER IX

AN EVENING WITH CAPTAIN BULSTED

A dream that my father lay like a wax figure in a bed gave me thoughts of dying. I was ill and did not know it, and imagined that my despair at the foot of the stairs of ever reaching my room to lie down peacefully was the sign of death. My aunt Dorothy nursed me for a week: none but she and my dogs entered the room. I had only two faint wishes left in me: one that the squire should be kept out of my sight, the other that she would speak to me of my mother’s love for my father. She happened to say, musing, ‘Harry, you have your mother’s heart.’

I said, ‘No, my father’s.’

From that we opened a conversation, the sweetest I had ever had away from him, though she spoke shyly and told me very little. It was enough for me in the narrow world of my dogs’ faces, and the red-leaved creeper at the window, the fir-trees on the distant heath, and her hand clasping mine. My father had many faults, she said, but he

had been cruelly used, or deceived, and he bore a grievous burden; and then she said, ‘Yes,’ and ‘Yes,’ and ‘Yes,’ in the voice one supposes of a ghost retiring, to my questions of his merits. I was refreshed and satisfied, like the parched earth with dews when it gets no rain, and I was soon well.

Page 1917

When I walked among the household again, I found that my week of seclusion had endowed me with a singular gift; I found that I could see through everybody. Looking at the squire, I thought to myself, 'My father has faults, but he has been cruelly used,' and immediately I forgave the old man; his antipathy to my father seemed a craze, and to account for it I lay in wait for his numerous illogical acts and words, and smiled visibly in contemplation of his rough unreasonable nature, and of my magnanimity. He caught the smile, and interpreted it.

'Grinning at me, Harry; have I made a slip in my grammar, eh?'

Who could feel any further sensitiveness at his fits of irritation, reading him as I did? I saw through my aunt: she was always in dread of a renewal of our conversation. I could see her ideas flutter like birds to escape me. And I penetrated the others who came in my way just as unerringly. Farmer Eckerthy would acknowledge, astonished, his mind was running on cricket when I taxed him with it.

'Crops was the cart-load of my thoughts, Master Harry, but there was a bit o' cricket in it, too, ne'er a doubt.'

My aunt's maid, Davis, was shocked by my discernment of the fact that she was in love, and it was useless for her to pretend the contrary, for I had seen her granting tender liberties to Lady Ilchester's footman.

Old Sewis said gravely, 'You've been to the witches, Master Harry'; and others were sure 'I had got it from the gipsies off the common.'

The maids were partly incredulous, but I perceived that they disbelieved as readily as they believed. With my latest tutor, the Rev. Simon Hart, I was not sufficiently familiar to offer him proofs of my extraordinary power; so I begged favours of him, and laid hot-house flowers on his table in the name of my aunt, and had the gratification of seeing him blush. His approval of my Latin exercise was verbal, and weak praise in comparison; besides I cared nothing for praises not referring to my grand natural accomplishment. 'And my father now is thinking of me!' That was easy to imagine, but the certainty of it confirmed me in my conceit.

'How can you tell?—how is it possible for you to know people's thoughts?' said Janet Ilchester, whose head was as open to me as a hat. She pretended to be rather more frightened of me than she was.

'And now you think you are flattering me!' I said.

She looked nervous.

'And now you're asking yourself what you can do better than I can!'

She said, ‘Go on.’

I stopped.

She charged me with being pulled up short.

I denied it.

‘Guess, guess!’ said she. ‘You can’t.’

My reply petrified her. ’You were thinking that you are a lady by birth on both sides.’

At first she refused to admit it. ’No, it wasn’t that, Harry, it wasn’t really. I was thinking how clever you are.’

Page 1918

‘Yes, after, not before.’

’No, Harry, but you are clever. I wish I was half as clever. Fancy reading people’s ideas! I can read my pony’s, but that’s different; I know by his ears. And as for my being a lady, of course I am, and so are you—I mean, a gentleman. I was thinking—-now this is really what I was thinking—I wished your father lived near, that we might all be friends. I can’t bear the squire when he talks . . . . And you quite as good as me, and better. Don’t shake me off, Harry.’

I shook her in the gentlest manner, not suspecting that she had read my feelings fully as well as I her thoughts. Janet and I fell to talking of my father incessantly, and were constantly together. The squire caught one of my smiles rising, when he applauded himself lustily for the original idea of matching us; but the idea was no longer distasteful to me. It appeared to me that if I must some day be married, a wife who would enjoy my narratives, and travel over the four quarters of the globe, as Janet promised to do, in search of him I loved, would be the preferable person. I swore her to secresy; she was not to tell her brother Charley the subject we conversed on.

‘Oh dear, no!’ said she, and told him straightway.

Charley, home for his winter holidays, blurted out at the squire’s table: ’So, Harry Richmond, you’re the cleverest fellow in the world, are you? There’s Janet telling everybody your father’s the cleverest next to you, and she’s never seen him!’

’How? hulloa, what ‘s that?’ sang out the squire.

‘Charley was speaking of my father, sir,’ I said, preparing for thunder.

We all rose. The squire looked as though an apoplectic seizure were coming on.

‘Don’t sit at my table again,’ he said, after a terrible struggle to be articulate.

His hand was stretched at me. I swung round to depart. ’No, no, not you; that fellow,’ he called, getting his arm level toward Charley.

I tried to intercede—the last who should have done it.

‘You like to hear him, eh?’ said the squire.

I was ready to say that I did, but my aunt, whose courage was up when occasion summoned it, hushed the scene by passing the decanter to the squire, and speaking to him in a low voice.

‘Biter’s bit. I’ve dished myself, that’s clear,’ said Charley; and he spoke the truth, and such was his frankness that I forgave him.

He and Janet were staying at Riversley. They left next morning, for the squire would not speak to him, nor I to Janet.

'I 'll tell you what; there 's no doubt about one thing,' said Charley; 'Janet's right—some of those girls are tremendously deep: you're about the cleverest fellow I've ever met in my life. I thought of working into the squire in a sort of collateral manner, you know. A cornetcy in the Dragoon Guards in a year or two. I thought the squire might do that for me without much damaging you;—perhaps a

Page 1919

couple of hundred a year, just to reconcile me to a nose out of joint. For, upon my honour, the squire spoke of making me his heir—or words to that effect neatly conjugated—before you came back; and rather than be a curate like that Reverend Hart of yours, who hands raisins and almonds, and orange-flower biscuits to your aunt the way of all the Reverends who drop down on Riversley—I 'd betray my bosom friend. I'm regularly "hoist on my own petard," as they say in the newspapers. I'm a curate and no mistake. You did it with a turn of the wrist, without striking out: and I like neat boxing. I bear no malice when I'm floored neatly.'

Five minutes after he had spoken it would have been impossible for me to tell him that my simplicity and not my cleverness had caused his overthrow. From this I learnt that simplicity is the keenest weapon and a beautiful refinement of cleverness; and I affected it extremely. I pushed it so far that I could make the squire dance in his seat with suppressed fury and jealousy at my way of talking of Venice, and other Continental cities, which he knew I must have visited in my father's society; and though he raged at me and pshawed the Continent to the deuce, he was ready, out of sheer rivalry, to grant anything I pleased to covet. At every stage of my growth one or another of my passions was alert to twist me awry, and now I was getting a false self about me and becoming liker to the creature people supposed me to be, despising them for blockheads in my heart, as boys may who preserve a last trace of the ingenuousness denied to seasoned men.

Happily my aunt wrote to Mr. Rippenger for the address of little Gus Temple's father, to invite my schoolfellow to stay a month at Riversley. Temple came, everybody liked him; as for me my delight was unbounded, and in spite of a feeling of superiority due to my penetrative capacity, and the suspicion it originated, that Temple might be acting the plain well-bred schoolboy he was, I soon preferred his pattern to my own. He confessed he had found me changed at first. His father, it appeared, was working him as hard at Latin as Mr. Hart worked me, and he sat down beside me under my tutor and stumbled at Tacitus after his fluent Cicero. I offered excuses for him to Mr. Hart, saying he would soon prove himself the better scholar. 'There's my old Richie!' said Temple, fondling me on the shoulder, and my nonsensical airs fell away from me at once.

We roamed the neighbourhood talking old school-days over, visiting houses, hunting and dancing, declaring every day we would write for Heriot to join us, instead of which we wrote a valentine to Julia Rippenger, and despatched a companion one composed in a very different spirit to her father. Lady Ilchester did us the favour to draw a sea-monster, an Andromeda, and a Perseus in the shape of a flying British hussar, for Julia's valentine. It seemed to us so successful that we scattered half-a-dozen over the neighbourhood,

Page 1920

and rode round it on the morning of St. Valentine's Day to see the effect of them, meeting the postman on the road. He gave me two for myself. One was transparently from Janet, a provoking counterstroke of mine to her; but when I opened the other my heart began beating. The standard of Great Britain was painted in colours at the top; down each side, encricled in laurels, were kings and queens of England with their sceptres, and in the middle I read the initials, A. F-G. R. R., embedded in blue forget-me-hots. I could not doubt it was from my father. Riding out in the open air as I received it, I could fancy in my hot joy that it had dropped out of heaven.

'He's alive; I shall have him with me; I shall have him with me soon!' I cried to Temple. 'Oh! why can't I answer him? where is he? what address? Let's ride to London. Don't you understand, Temple? This letter's from my father. He knows I'm here. I'll find him, never mind what happens.'

'Yes, but,' said Temple, 'if he knows where you are, and you don't know where he is, there's no good in your going off adventuring. If a fellow wants to be hit, the best thing he can do is to stop still.'

Struck by the perspicacity of his views, I turned homeward. Temple had been previously warned by me to avoid speaking of my father at Riversley; but I was now in such a boiling state of happiness, believing that my father would certainly appear as he had done at Dipwell farm, brilliant and cheerful, to bear me away to new scenes and his own dear society, that I tossed the valentine to my aunt across the breakfast-table, laughing and telling her to guess the name of the sender. My aunt flushed.

'Miss Bannerbridge?' she said.

A stranger was present. The squire introduced us.

'My grandson, Harry Richmond, Captain William Bulsted, frigate Polyphemus; Captain Bulsted, Master Augustus Temple.'

For the sake of conversation, Temple asked him if his ship was fully manned.

'All but a mate,' said the captain.

I knew him by reputation as the brother of Squire Gregory Bulsted of Bulsted, notorious for his attachment to my aunt, and laughing-stock of the county.

'So you've got a valentine,' the captain addressed me. 'I went on shore at Rio last year on this very day of the month, just as lively as you youngsters for one. Saltwater keeps a man's youth in pickle. No valentine for me! Paid off my ship yesterday at Spithead, and here I am again on Valentine's Day.'

Temple and I stared hard at a big man with a bronzed skin and a rubicund laugh who expected to receive valentines.

My aunt thrust the letter back to me secretly. ‘It must be from a lady,’ said she.

‘Why, who’d have a valentine from any but a lady?’ exclaimed the captain.

The squire winked at me to watch his guest. Captain Bulsted fed heartily; he was thoroughly a sailor-gentleman, between the old school and the new, and, as I perceived, as far gone in love with my aunt as his brother was. Presently Sewis entered carrying a foaming tankard of old ale, and he and the captain exchanged a word or two upon Jamaica.

Page 1921

’Now, when you’ve finished that washy tea of yours, take a draught of our October, brewed here long before you were a lieutenant, captain,’ said the squire.

‘Thank you, sir,’ the captain replied; ’I know that ale; a moment, and I will gladly. I wish to preserve my faculties; I don’t wish to have it supposed that I speak under fermenting influences. Sewis, hold by, if you please.’

My aunt made an effort to retire.

‘No, no, fair play; stay,’ said the squire, trying to frown, but twinkling; my aunt tried to smile, and sat as if on springs.

‘Miss Beltham,’ the captain bowed to her, and to each one as he spoke, ’Squire Beltham, Mr. Harry Richmond; Mr. Temple; my ship was paid off yesterday, and till a captain’s ship is paid off, he ’s not his own master, you are aware. If you think my behaviour calls for comment, reflect, I beseech you, on the nature of a sailor’s life. A three-years’ cruise in a cabin is pretty much equivalent to the same amount of time spent in a coffin, I can assure you; with the difference that you’re hard at work thinking all the time like the—hum.’

‘Ay, he thinks hard enough,’ the squire struck in.

’Pardon me, sir; like the—hum—plumb-line on a leeshore, I meant to observe. This is now the third—the fourth occasion on which I have practised the observance of paying my first visit to Riversley to know my fate, that I might not have it on my conscience that I had missed a day, a minute, as soon as I was a free man on English terra firma. My brother Greg and I were brought up in close association with Riversley. One of the Beauties of Riversley we lost! One was left, and we both tried our luck with her; honourably, in turn, each of us, nothing underhand; above-board, on the quarter-deck, before all the company. I ’ll say it of my brother, I can say it of myself. Greg’s chances, I need not remark, are superior to mine; he is always in port. If he wins, then I tell him —“God bless you, my boy; you’ve won the finest woman, the handsomest, and the best, in or out of Christendom!” But my chance is my property, though it may be value only one farthing coin of the realm, and there is always pity for poor sinners in the female bosom. Miss Beltham, I trespass on your kind attention. If I am to remain a bachelor and you a maiden lady, why, the will of heaven be done! If you marry another, never mind who the man, there’s my stock to the fruit of the union, never mind what the sex. But, if you will have one so unworthy of you as me, my hand and heart are at your feet, ma’am, as I have lost no time in coming to tell you.’ So Captain Bulsted concluded. Our eyes were directed on my aunt. The squire bade her to speak out, for she had his sanction to act according to her judgement and liking.

She said, with a gracefulness that gave me a little aching of pity for the poor captain: ’I am deeply honoured by you, Captain Bulsted, but it is not my intention to marry.’

Page 1922

The captain stood up, and bowing humbly, replied ’I am ever your servant, ma’am.’

My aunt quitted the room.

‘Now for the tankard, Sewis,’ said the captain.

Gradually the bottom of the great tankard turned up to the ceiling. He drank to the last drop in it.

The squire asked him whether he found consolation in that.

The captain sighed prodigiously and said: ’It ‘s a commencement, sir.’

’Egad, it’s a commencement ’d be something like a final end to any dozen of our fellows round about here. I’ll tell you what: if stout stomachs gained the day in love-affairs, I suspect you’d run a good race against the male half of our county, William. And a damned good test of a man’s metal, I say it is! What are you going to do to-day?’

‘I am going to get drunk, sir.’

’Well, you might do worse. Then, stop here, William, and give my old Port the preference. No tongue in the morning, I promise you, and pleasant dreams at night.’ The captain thanked him cordially, but declined, saying that he would rather make a beast of himself in another place.

The squire vainly pressed his hospitality by assuring him of perfect secresy on our part, as regarded my aunt, and offering him Sewis and one of the footmen to lift him to bed. ‘You are very good, squire,’ said the captain; ’nothing but a sense of duty restrains me. I am bound to convey the information to my brother that the coast is clear for him.’

‘Well, then, fall light, and for’ard,’ said the squire, shaking him by the hand. Forty years ago a gentleman, a baronet, had fallen on the back of his head and never recovered.

‘Ay, ay, launch stern foremost, if you like!’ said the captain, nodding; ’no, no, I don’t go into port pulled by the tail, my word for it, squire; and good day to you, sir.’

‘No ill will about this bothering love-business of yours, William?’

‘On my soul, sir, I cherish none.’

Temple and I followed him out of the house, fascinated by his manners and oddness. He invited us to jump into the chariot beside him. We were witnesses of the meeting between him and his brother, a little sniffling man, as like the captain as a withered nut is like a milky one.

‘Same luck, William?’ said Squire Gregory.

‘Not a point of change in the wind, Greg,’ said the captain.

They wrenched hands thereupon, like two carpet-shakers, with a report, and much in a similar attitude.

’These young gentlemen will testify to you solemnly, Greg, that I took no unfair advantage,’ said the captain; ’no whispering in passages, no appointments in gardens, no letters. I spoke out. Bravely, man! And now, Greg, referring to the state of your cellar, our young friends here mean to float with us to-night. It is now half-past eleven A.M. Your dinner-hour the same as usual, of course? Therefore at four P.M. the hour of execution. And come, Greg, you and I will visit the cellar. A dozen and half of light and half-a-dozen of the old family—that will be about the number of bottles to give me my quietus, and you yours—all of us! And you, young gentlemen, take your guns or your rods, and back and be dressed by the four bell, or you ’ll not find the same man in Billy Bulsted.’

Page 1923

Temple was enraptured with him. He declared he had been thinking seriously for a long time of entering the Navy, and his admiration of the captain must have given him an intuition of his character, for he persuaded me to send to Riversley for our evening-dress clothes, appearing in which at the dinner-table, we received the captain's compliments, as being gentlemen who knew how to attire ourselves to suit an occasion. The occasion, Squire Gregory said, happened to him too often for him to distinguish it by the cut of his coat.

'I observe, nevertheless, Greg, that you have a black tie round your neck instead of a red one,' said the captain.

'Then it came there by accident,' said Squire Gregory.

'Accident! There's no such thing as accident. If I wander out of the house with a half dozen or so in me, and topple into the brook, am I accidentally drowned? If a squall upsets my ship, is she an accidental residue of spars and timber and old iron? If a woman refuses me, is that an accident? There's a cause for every disaster: too much cargo, want of foresight, want of pluck. Pooh! when I'm hauled prisoner into a foreign port in time of war, you may talk of accidents. Mr. Harry Richmond, Mr. Temple, I have the accidental happiness of drinking to your healths in a tumbler of hock wine. Nominative, hic, haec, hoc.'

Squire Gregory carried on the declension, not without pride. The Vocative confused him.

'Claret will do for the Vocative,' said the captain, gravely; 'the more so as there is plenty of it at your table, Greg. Ablative hoc, hac, hoc, which sounds as if the gentleman had become incapable of speech beyond the name of his wine. So we will abandon the declension of the article for a dash of champagne, which there's no declining, I hope. Wonderful men, those Romans! They fought their ships well, too. A question to you, Greg. Those heathen Pagan dogs had a religion that encouraged them to swear. Now, my experience of life pronounces it to be a human necessity to rap out an oath here and there. What do you say?'

Squire Gregory said: 'Drinking, and no thinking, at dinner, William.' The captain pledged him.

'I 'll take the opportunity, as we're not on board ship, of drinking to you, sir, now,' Temple addressed the captain, whose face was resplendent; and he bowed, and drank, and said,

'As we are not on board ship? I like you!'

Temple thanked him for the compliment.

’No compliment, my lad. You see me in my weakness, and you have the discernment to know me for something better than I seem. You promise to respect me on my own quarter-deck. You are of the right stuff. Do I speak correctly, Mr. Harry?’

‘Temple is my dear friend,’ I replied.

’And he would not be so if not of the right stuff! Good! That ’s a way of putting much in little. By Jove! a royal style.’

‘And Harry’s a royal fellow!’ said Temple.

Page 1924

We all drank to one another. The captain's eyes scrutinized me speculatingly.

'This boy might have been yours or mine, Greg,' I heard him say in a faltering rough tone.

They forgot the presence of Temple and me, but spoke as if they thought they were whispering. The captain assured his brother that Squire Beltham had given him as much fair play as one who holds a balance. Squire Gregory doubted it, and sipped and kept his nose at his wineglass, crabbedly repeating his doubts of it. The captain then remarked, that doubting it, his conscience permitted him to use stratagems, though he, the captain, not doubting it, had no such permission.

'I count I run away with her every night of my life,' said Squire Gregory. 'Nothing comes of it but empty bottles.'

'Court her, serenade her,' said the captain; 'blockade the port, lay siege to the citadel. I'd give a year of service for your chances, Greg. Half a word from her, and you have your horses ready.'

'She's past po'chaises,' Squire Gregory sighed.

'She's to be won by a bold stroke, brother Greg.'

'Oh, Lord, no! She's past po'chaises.'

'Humph! it's come to be half-bottle, half-beauty, with your worship, Greg, I suspect.'

'No. I tell you, William, she's got her mind on that fellow. You can't po'chay her.'

'After he jilted her for her sister? Wrong, Greg, wrong. You are muddled. She has a fright about matrimony—a common thing at her age, I am told. Where's the man?'

'In the Bench, of course. Where'd you have him?'

'I, sir? If I knew my worst enemy to be there, I'd send him six dozen of the best in my cellar.'

Temple shot a walnut at me. I pretended to be meditating carelessly, and I had the heat and roar of a conflagration round my head.

Presently the captain said, 'Are you sure the man's in the Bench?'

'Cock,' Squire Gregory replied.

'He had money from his wife.'

‘And he had the wheels to make it go.’ Here they whispered in earnest.

‘Oh, the Billings were as rich as the Belthams,’ said the captain, aloud.

‘Pretty nigh, William.’

’That’s our curse, Greg. Money settled on their male issue, and money in hand; by the Lord! we’ve always had the look of a pair of highwaymen lurking for purses, when it was the woman, the woman, penniless, naked, mean, destitute; nothing but the woman we wanted. And there was one apiece for us. Greg, old boy, when will the old county show such another couple of Beauties! Greg, sir, you’re not half a man, or you’d have carried her, with your, opportunities. The fellow’s in the Bench, you say? How are you cocksure of that, Mr. Greg?’

Page 1925

‘Company,’ was the answer; and the captain turned to Temple and me, apologizing profusely for talking over family matters with his brother after a separation of three years. I had guessed but hastily at the subject of their conversation until they mentioned the Billings, the family of my maternal grandmother. The name was like a tongue of fire shooting up in a cloud of smoke: I saw at once that the man in the Bench must be my father, though what the Bench was exactly, and where it was, I had no idea, and as I was left to imagination I became, as usual, childish in my notions, and brooded upon thoughts of the Man in the Iron Mask; things I dared not breathe to Temple, of whose manly sense I stood in awe when under these distracting influences.

‘Remember our feast in the combe?’ I sang across the table to him.

‘Never forget it!’ said he; and we repeated the tale of the goose at Rippenger’s school to our entertainers, making them laugh.

‘And next morning Richie ran off with a gipsy girl,’ said Temple; and I composed a narrative of my wanderings with Kiomi, much more amusing than the real one. The captain vowed he would like to have us both on board his ship, but that times were too bad for him to offer us a prospect of promotion. ‘Spin round the decanters,’ said he; ’now’s the hour for them to go like a humming-top, and each man lend a hand: whip hard, my lads. It’s once in three years, hurrah! and the cause is a cruel woman. Toast her; but no name. Here’s to the nameless Fair! For it’s not my intention to marry, says she, and, ma’am, I’m a man of honour or I’d catch you tight, my nut-brown maid, and clap you into a cage, fal-lal, like a squirrel; to trot the wheel of mat-trimony. Shame to the first man down!’

‘That won’t be I,’ said Temple.

‘Be me, sir, me,’ the captain corrected his grammar.

’Pardon me, Captain Bulsted; the verb “To be” governs the nominative case in our climate,’ said Temple.

’Then I’m nominative hic . . . I say, sir, I’m in the tropics, Mr. Tem . . . Mr. Tempus. Point of honour, not forget a man’s name. Rippenger, your schoolmaster? Mr. Rippenger, you’ve knocked some knowledge into this young gentleman.’ Temple and I took counsel together hastily; we cried in a breath: ’Here ’s to Julia Rippenger, the prettiest, nicest girl living!’ and we drank to her.

‘Julia!’ the captain echoed us. ’I join your toast, gentlemen. Mr. Richmond, Mr. Tempus-Julia! By all that’s holy, she floats a sinking ship! Julia consoles me for the fairest, cruellest woman alive. A rough sailor, Julia! at your feet.’

The captain fell commendably forward. Squire Gregory had already dropped. Temple and I tried to meet, but did not accomplish it till next morning at breakfast. A couple of footmen carried us each upstairs in turn, as if they were removing furniture.

Out of this strange evening came my discovery of my father, and the captain's winning of a wife.

Page 1926

CHAPTER X

AN EXPEDITION

I wondered audibly where the Bench was when Temple and I sat together alone at Squire Gregory's breakfast-table next morning, very thirsty for tea. He said it was a place in London, but did not add the sort of place, only that I should soon be coming to London with him; and I remarked, 'Shall I?' and smiled at him, as if in a fit of careless affection. Then he talked runningly of the theatres and pantomimes and London's charms.

The fear I had of this Bench made me passingly conscious of Temple's delicacy in not repeating its name, though why I feared it there was nothing to tell me. I must have dreamed of it just before waking, and I burned for reasonable information concerning it. Temple respected my father too much to speak out the extent of his knowledge on the subject, so we drank our tea with the grandeur of London for our theme, where, Temple assured me, you never had a headache after a carouse overnight: a communication that led me to think the country a far less favourable place of abode for gentlemen. We quitted the house without seeing our host or the captain, and greatly admired by the footmen, the maids, and the grooms for having drunk their masters under the table, which it could not be doubted that we had done, as Temple modestly observed while we sauntered off the grounds under the eyes of the establishment. We had done it fairly, too, with none of those Jack the Giant-Killer tricks my grandfather accused us of.

The squire would not, and he could not, believe our story until he heard the confession from the mouth of the captain. After that he said we were men and heroes, and he tipped us both, much to Janet Ilchester's advantage, for the squire was a royal giver, and Temple's money had already begun to take the same road as mine.

Temple, in fact, was falling desperately in love; for this reason he shrank from quitting Riversley. I perceived it as clearly as a thing seen through a windowpane. He was always meditating upon dogs, and what might be the price of this dog or that, and whether lapdogs were good travellers. The fashionable value of pugs filled him with a sort of despair. 'My goodness!' he used an exclamation more suitable to women, 'forty or fifty pounds you say one costs, Richie?'

I pretended to estimate the probable cost of one. 'Yes, about that; but I'll buy you one, one day or other, Temple.'

The dear little fellow coloured hot; he was too much in earnest to laugh at the absurdity of his being supposed to want a pug for himself, and walked round me, throwing himself into attitudes with shrugs and loud breathings. 'I don't . . . don't think that I . . . I care

for nothing but Newfoundlands and mastiffs,' said he. He went on shrugging and kicking up his heels.

'Girls like pugs,' I remarked.

'I fancy they do,' said Temple, with a snort of indifference.

Page 1927

Then I suggested, 'A pocket-knife for the hunting-field is a very good thing.'

'Do you think so?' was Temple's rejoinder, and I saw he was dreadfully afraid of my speaking the person's name for whom it would be such a very good thing.

'You can get one for thirty shillings. We'll get one when we're in London. They're just as useful for women as they are for us, you know.'

'Why, of course they are, if they hunt,' said Temple.

'And we mustn't lose time,' I drew him to the point I had at heart, 'for hunting 'll soon be over. It 's February, mind!'

'Oh, lots of time!' Temple cried out, and on every occasion when I tried to make him understand that I was bursting to visit London, he kept evading me, simply because he hated saying good-bye to Janet Ilchester. His dulness of apprehension in not perceiving that I could not commit a breach of hospitality by begging him downright to start, struck me as extraordinary. And I was so acute. I saw every single idea in his head, every shift of, his mind, and how he half knew that he profited by my shunning to say flatly I desired to set out upon the discovery of the Bench. He took the benefit of my shamefacedness, for which I daily punished his. I really felt that I was justified in giving my irritability an airing by curious allusions to Janet; yet, though I made him wince, it was impossible to touch his conscience. He admitted to having repeatedly spoken of London's charms, and 'Oh, yes! you and I'll go back together, Richie,' and saying that satisfied him: he doubled our engagements with Janet that afternoon, and it was a riding party, a dancing-party, and a drawing of a pond for carp, and we over to Janet, and Janet over to us, until I grew so sick of her I was incapable of summoning a spark of jealousy in order the better to torture Temple.

Now, he was a quick-witted boy. Well, I one day heard Janet address my big dog, Ajax, in the style she usually employed to inform her hearers, and especially the proprietor, that she coveted a thing: 'Oh, you own dear precious pet darling beauty! if I might only feed you every day of my life I should be happy! I curtsey to him every time I see him. If I were his master, the men should all off hats, and the women all curtsey, to Emperor Ajax, my dog! my own! my great, dear irresistible love! Then she nodded at me, 'I would make them, though.' And then at Temple, 'You see if I wouldn't.'

Ajax was a source of pride to me. However, I heard Temple murmur, in a tone totally unlike himself, 'He would be a great protection to you'; and I said to him, 'You know, Temple, I shall be going to London to-morrow or the next day, not later: I don't know when I shall be back. I wish you would dispose of the dog just as you like: get him a kind master or mistress, that's all.'

Page 1928

I sacrificed my dog to bring Temple to his senses. I thought it would touch him to see how much I could sacrifice just to get an excuse for begging him to start. He did not even thank me. Ajax soon wore one of Janet's collars, like two or three other of the Riversley dogs, and I had the satisfaction of hearing Temple accept my grandfather's invitation for a further fortnight. And, meanwhile, I was the one who was charged with going about looking lovelorn! I smothered my feelings and my reflections on the wisdom of people.

At last my aunt Dorothy found the means of setting me at liberty on the road to London. We had related to her how Captain Bulsted toasted Julia Rippenger, and we had both declared in joke that we were sure the captain wished to be introduced to her. My aunt reserved her ideas on the subject, but by-and-by she proposed to us to ride over to Julia, and engage her to come and stay at Riversley for some days. Kissing me, my aunt said, 'She was my Harry's friend when he was an outcast.'

The words revived my affection for Julia. Strong in the sacred sense of gratitude, I turned on Temple, reproaching him with selfish forgetfulness of her good heart and pretty face. Without defending himself, as he might have done, he entreated me to postpone our journey for a day; he and Janet had some appointment. Here was given me a noble cause and matter I need not shrink from speaking of. I lashed Temple in my aunt's presence with a rod of real eloquence that astonished her, and him, and myself too; and as he had a sense of guilt not quite explicable in his mind, he consented to bear what was in reality my burden; for Julia had distinguished me and not him with all the signs of affection, and of the two I had the more thoroughly forgotten her; I believe Temple was first in toasting her at Squire Gregory's table. There is nothing like a pent-up secret of the heart for accumulating powers of speech; I mean in youth. The mental distilling process sets in later, and then you have irony instead of eloquence. From brooding on my father, and not daring to mention his name lest I should hear evil of it, my thoughts were a proud family, proud of their origin, proud of their isolation,—and not to be able to divine them was for the world to confess itself basely beneath their level. But, when they did pour out, they were tremendous, as Temple found. This oratorical display of mine gave me an ascendancy over him. He adored eloquence, not to say grandiloquence: he was the son of a barrister. 'Let 's go and see her at once, Richie,' he said of Julia. 'I 'm ready to be off as soon as you like; I'm ready to do anything that will please you'; which was untrue, but it was useless to tell him so. I sighed at my sad gift of penetration, and tossed the fresh example of it into the treasury of vanity.

'Temple,' said I, dissembling a little; 'I tell you candidly: you won't please me by doing anything disagreeable to you. A dog pulled by the collar is not much of a companion. I start for Julia to-morrow before daylight. If you like your bed best, stop there; and mind you amuse Janet for me duing my absence.'

Page 1929

‘I’m not going to let any one make comparisons between us,’ Temple muttered.

He dropped dozens of similar remarks, and sometimes talked downright flattery, I had so deeply impressed him.

We breakfasted by candle-light, and rode away on a frosty foggy morning, keeping our groom fifty yards to the rear, a laughable sight, with both his coat-pockets bulging, a couple of Riversley turnover pasties in one, and a bottle of champagne in the other, for our lunch on the road. Now and then, when near him, we galloped for the fun of seeing him nurse the bottle-pocket. He was generally invisible. Temple did not think it strange that we should be riding out in an unknown world with only a little ring, half a stone’s-throw clear around us, and blots of copse, and queer vanishing cottages, and hard grey meadows, fir-trees wonderfully magnified, and larches and birches rigged like fairy ships, all starting up to us as we passed, and melting instantly. One could have fancied the fir-trees black torches. And here the shoulder of a hill invited us to race up to the ridge: some way on we came to crossroads, careless of our luck in hitting the right one: yonder hung a village church in the air, and church-steeple piercing ever so high; and out of the heart of the mist leaped a brook, and to hear it at one moment, and then to have the sharp freezing silence in one’s ear, was piercingly weird. It all tossed the mind in my head like hay on a pitchfork. I forgot the existence of everything but what I loved passionately,—and that had no shape, was like a wind.

Up on a knoll of firs in the middle of a heath, glowing rosy in the frost, we dismounted to lunch, leaning against the warm saddles, Temple and I, and Uberly, our groom, who reminded me of a certain tramp of my acquaintance in his decided preference of beer to champagne; he drank, though, and sparkled after his draught. No sooner were we on horseback again—ere the flanks of the dear friendly brutes were in any way cool—than Temple shouted enthusiastically, ’Richie, we shall do it yet! I’ve been funking, but now I’m sure we shall do it. Janet said, “What’s the use of my coming over to dine at Riversley if Harry Richmond and you don’t come home before ten or eleven o’clock?” I told her we’d do it by dinner-time: Don’t you like Janet, Richie?—That is, if our horses’ hic-haec-hocks didn’t get strained on this hard nominative-plural-masculine of the article road. Don’t you fancy yourself dining with the captain, Richie? Dative huic, says old Squire Gregory. I like to see him at dinner, because he loves the smell of his wine. Oh! it’s nothing to boast of, but we did drink them under the table, it can’t be denied. Janet heard of it. Hulloa! you talk of a hunting-knife. What do you say to a pair of skates? Here we are in for a frost of six weeks. It strikes me, a pair of skates . . .’

Page 1930

This was the champagne in Temple. In me it did not bubble to speech, and I soon drew him on at a pace that rendered conversation impossible. Uberly shouted after us to spare the horses' legs. We heard him twice out of the deepening fog. I called to Temple that he was right, we should do it. Temple hurrahed rather breathlessly. At the end of an hour I pulled up at an inn, where I left the horses to be groomed and fed, and walked away rapidly as if I knew the town, Temple following me with perfect confidence, and, indeed, I had no intention to deceive him. We entered a new station of a railway.

'Oh!' said Temple, 'the rest of the way by rail.'

When the railway clerk asked me what place I wanted tickets for, London sprang to my mouth promptly in a murmur, and taking the tickets I replied to Temple,

'The rest of the way by rail. Uberly's sure to stop at that inn'; but my heart beat as the carriages slid away with us; an affectionate commiseration for Temple touched me when I heard him count on our being back at Riversley in time to dress for dinner.

He laughed aloud at the idea of our plumping down on Rippenger's school, getting a holiday for the boys, tipping them, and then off with Julia, exactly like two Gods of the Mythology, Apollo and Mercury.

'I often used to think they had the jolliest lives that ever were lived,' he said, and trying to catch glimpses of the country, and musing, and singing, he continued to feel like one of those blissful Gods until wonder at the passage of time supervened. Amazement, when he looked at my watch, struck him dumb. Ten minutes later we were in yellow fog, then in brown. Temple stared at both windows and at me; he jumped from his seat and fell on it, muttering, 'No; nonsense! I say!' but he had accurately recognized London's fog. I left him unanswered to bring up all his senses, which the railway had outstripped, for the contemplation of this fact, that we two were in the city of London.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT FOG AND THE FIRE AT MIDNIGHT

It was London city, and the Bench was the kernel of it to me. I throbbed with excitement, though I sat looking out of the windows into the subterranean atmosphere quite still and firm. When you think long undividedly of a single object it gathers light, and when you draw near it in person the strange thing to your mind is the absence of that light; but I, approaching it in this dense fog, seemed to myself to be only thinking of it a little more warmly than usual, and instead of fading it reversed the process, and became, from light, luminous. Not being able, however, to imagine the Bench a happy place, I corrected the excess of brightness and gave its walls a pine-torch glow; I set

them in the middle of a great square, and hung the standard of England drooping over them in a sort of mournful family pride. Then, because

Page 1931

I next conceived it a foreign kind of place, different altogether from that home growth of ours, the Tower of London, I topped it with a multitude of domes of pumpkin or turban shape, resembling the Kremlin of Moscow, which had once leapt up in the eye of Winter, glowing like a million pine-torches, and flung shadows of stretching red horses on the black smoke-drift. But what was the Kremlin, that had seen a city perish, to this Bench where my father languished! There was no comparing them for tragic horror. And the Kremlin had snow-fields around it; this Bench was caught out of sight, hemmed in by an atmosphere thick as Charon breathed; it might as well be underground.

'Oh! it's London,' Temple went on, correcting his incorrigible doubts about it. He jumped on the platform; we had to call out not to lose one another. 'I say, Richie, this is London,' he said, linking his arm in mine: 'you know by the size of the station; and besides, there's the fog. Oh! it's London. We've overshot it, we're positively in London.'

I could spare no sympathy for his feelings, and I did not respond to his inquiring looks. Now that we were here I certainly wished myself away, though I would not have retreated, and for awhile I was glad of the discomforts besetting me; my step was hearty as I led on, meditating upon asking some one the direction to the Bench presently. We had to walk, and it was nothing but traversing on a slippery pavement atmospheric circles of black brown and brown red, and sometimes a larger circle of pale yellow; the colours of old bruised fruits, medlars, melons, and the smell of them; nothing is more desolate. Neither of us knew where we were, nor where we were going. We struggled through an interminable succession of squalid streets, from the one lamp visible to its neighbour in the darkness: you might have fancied yourself peering at the head of an old saint on a smoky canvas; it was like the painting of light rather than light. Figures rushed by; we saw no faces.

Temple spoke solemnly: 'Our dinner-hour at home is half-past six.' A street-boy overheard him and chaffed him. Temple got the worst of it, and it did him good, for he had the sweetest nature in the world. We declined to be attended by link-boys; they would have hurt our sense of independence. Possessed of a sovereign faith that, by dint of resolution, I should ultimately penetrate to the great square enclosing the Bench, I walked with the air of one who had the map of London in his eye and could thread it blindfold. Temple was thereby deceived into thinking that I must somehow have learnt the direction I meant to take, and knew my way, though at the slightest indication of my halting and glancing round his suspicions began to boil, and he was for asking some one the name of the ground we stood on: he murmured, 'Fellows get lost in London.' By this time he clearly understood that I had come to London on purpose: he could not but be aware of the object of my coming, and I was too proud, and he still too delicate, to allude to it.

Page 1932

The fog choked us. Perhaps it took away the sense of hunger by filling us as if we had eaten a dinner of soot. We had no craving to eat until long past the dinner-hour in Temple's house, and then I would rather have plunged into a bath and a bed than have been requested to sit at a feast; Temple too, I fancy. We knew we were astray without speaking of it. Temple said, 'I wish we hadn't drunk that champagne.' It seemed to me years since I had tasted the delicious crushing of the sweet bubbles in my mouth. But I did not blame them; I was after my father: he, dear little fellow, had no light ahead except his devotion to me: he must have had a touch of conscious guilt regarding his recent behaviour, enough to hold him from complaining formally. He complained of a London without shops and lights, wondered how any one could like to come to it in a fog, and so forth; and again regretted our having drunk champagne in the morning; a sort of involuntary whimpering easily forgiven to him, for I knew he had a gallant heart. I determined, as an act of signal condescension, to accost the first person we met, male or female, for Temple's sake. Having come to this resolve, which was to be an open confession that I had misled him, wounding to my pride, I hoped eagerly for the hearing of a footfall. We were in a labyrinth of dark streets where no one was astir. A wretched dog trotted up to us, followed at our heels a short distance, and left us as if he smelt no luck about us; our cajoleries were unavailing to keep that miserable companion.

'Sinbad escaped from the, pit by tracking a lynx,' I happened to remark. Temple would not hear of Sinbad.

'Oh, come, we're not Mussulmen,' said he; 'I declare, Richie, if I saw a church open, I'd go in and sleep there. Were you thinking of tracking the dog, then? Beer may be had somewhere. We shall have to find an hotel. What can the time be?'

I owed it to him to tell him, so I climbed a lamppost and spelt out the hour by my watch. When I descended we were three. A man had his hands on Temple's shoulders, examining his features.

'Now speak,' the man said, roughly.

I was interposing, but Temple cried, 'All right, Richie, we are two to one.'

The man groaned. I asked him what he wanted.

'My son! I've lost my son,' the man replied, and walked away; and he would give no answer to our questions.

I caught hold of the lamp-post, overcome. I meant to tell Temple, in response to the consoling touch of his hand, that I hoped the poor, man would discover his son, but said instead, 'I wish we could see the Bench to-night.' Temple exclaimed, 'Ah!' pretending by his tone of voice that we had recently discussed our chance of it, and then he ventured

to inform me that he imagined he had heard of the place being shut up after a certain hour of the night.

My heart felt released, and gushed with love for him. 'Very well, Temple,' I said: 'then we'll wait till tomorrow, and strike out for some hotel now.'

Page 1933

Off we went at a furious pace. Saddlebank's goose was reverted to by both of us with an exchange of assurances that we should meet a dish the fellow to it before we slept.

'As for life,' said I, as soon as the sharp pace had fetched my breathing to a regular measure, 'adventures are what I call life.'

Temple assented. 'They're capital, if you only see the end of them.'

We talked of Ulysses and Penelope. Temple blamed him for leaving Calypso. I thought Ulysses was right, otherwise we should have had no slaying of the Suitors but Temple shyly urged that to have a Goddess caring for you (and she was handsomer than Penelope, who must have been an oldish woman) was something to make you feel as you do on a hunting morning, when there are half-a-dozen riding-habits speckling the field—a whole glorious day your own among them! This view appeared to me very captivating, save for an obstruction in my mind, which was, that Goddesses were always conceived by me as statues. They talked and they moved, it was true, but the touch of them was marble; and they smiled and frowned, but they had no variety they were never warm.

'If I thought that!' muttered Temple, puffing at the raw fog. He admitted he had thought just the contrary, and that the cold had suggested to him the absurdity of leaving a Goddess.

'Look here, Temple,' said I, 'has it never struck you? I won't say I'm like him. It's true I've always admired Ulysses; he could fight best, talk best, and plough, and box, and how clever he was! Take him all round, who wouldn't rather have had him for a father than Achilles? And there were just as many women in love with him.'

'More,' said Temple.

'Well, then,' I continued, thanking him in my heart, for it must have cost him something to let Ulysses be set above Achilles, 'Telemachus is the one I mean. He was in search of his father. He found him at last. Upon my honour, Temple, when I think of it, I 'm ashamed to have waited so long. I call that luxury I've lived in senseless. Yes! while I was uncertain whether my father had enough to eat or not.'

'I say! hush!' Temple breathed, in pain at such allusions. 'Richie, the squire has finished his bottle by about now; bottle number two. He won't miss us till the morning, but Miss Beltham will. She'll be at your bedroom door three or four times in the night, I know. It's getting darker and darker, we must be in some dreadful part of London.'

The contrast he presented to my sensations between our pleasant home and this foggy solitude gave me a pang of dismay. I diverged from my favourite straight line, which seemed to pierce into the bowels of the earth, sharp to the right. Soon or late after, I

cannot tell, we were in the midst of a thin stream of people, mostly composed of boys and young women, going at double time, hooting and screaming with the delight of loosened animals, not quite so

Page 1934

agreeably; but animals never hunted on a better scent. A dozen turnings in their company brought us in front of a fire. There we saw two houses preyed on by the flames, just as if a lion had his paws on a couple of human creatures, devouring them; we heard his jaws, the cracking of bones, shrieks, and the voracious in-and-out of his breath edged with anger. A girl by my side exclaimed, 'It's not the Bench, after all! Would I have run to see a paltry two-story washerwoman's mangling-shed flare up, when six penn'orth of squibs and shavings and a cracker make twice the fun!'

I turned to her, hardly able to speak. 'Where 's the Bench, if you please?' She pointed. I looked on an immense high wall. The blunt flames of the fire opposite threw a sombre glow on it.

The girl said, 'And don't you go hopping into debt, my young cock-sparrow, or you'll know one side o' the turnkey better than t' other.' She had a friend with her who chid her for speaking so freely.

'Is it too late to go in to-night?' I asked.

She answered that it was, and that she and her friend were the persons to show me the way in there. Her friend answered more sensibly: 'Yes, you can't go in there before some time—in the morning.'

I learnt from her that the Bench was a debtors' prison.

The saucy girl of the pair asked me for money. I handed her a crown-piece.

'Now won't you give another big bit to my friend?' said she.

I had no change, and the well-mannered girl bade me never mind, the saucy one pressed for it, and for a treat. She was amusing in her talk of the quantity of different fires she had seen; she had also seen accidental-death corpses, but never a suicide in the act; and here she regretted the failure of her experiences. This conversation of a good-looking girl amazed me. Presently Temple cried, 'A third house caught, and no engines yet! Richie, there's an old woman in her night-dress; we can't stand by.'

The saucy girl joked at the poor half-naked old woman. Temple stood humping and agitating his shoulders like a cat before it springs. Both the girls tried to stop us. The one I liked best seized my watch, and said, 'Leave this to me to take care of,' and I had no time to wrestle for it. I had a glimpse of her face that let me think she was not fooling me, the watch-chain flew off my neck, Temple and I clove through the crowd of gapers. We got into the heat, which was in a minute scorching. Three men were under the window; they had sung out to the old woman above to drop a blanket—she tossed them a water-jug. She was saved by the blanket of a neighbour. Temple and I strained at one corner of it to catch her.

Page 1935

She came down, the men said, like a singed turkey. The flames illuminated her as she descended. There was a great deal of laughter in the crowd, but I was shocked. Temple shared the painful impression produced on me. I cannot express my relief when the old woman was wrapped in the blanket which had broken her descent, and stood like a blot instead of a figure. I handed a sovereign to the three men, complimenting them on the humanity of their dispositions. They cheered us, and the crowd echoed the cheer, and Temple and I made our way back to the two girls: both of us lost our pocket-handkerchiefs, and Temple a penknife as well. Then the engines arrived and soused the burning houses. We were all in a crimson mist, boys smoking, girls laughing and staring, men hallooing, hats and caps flying about, fights going on, people throwing their furniture out of the windows. The great wall of the Bench was awful in its reflection of the labouring flames—it rose out of sight like the flame-tops till the columns of water brought them down. I thought of my father, and of my watch. The two girls were not visible. ‘A glorious life a fireman’s!’ said Temple.

The firemen were on the roofs of the houses, handsome as Greek heroes, and it really did look as if they were engaged in slaying an enormous dragon, that hissed and tongued at them, and writhed its tail, paddling its broken big red wings in the pit of wreck and smoke, twisting and darkening-something fine to conquer, I felt with Temple.

A mutual disgust at the inconvenience created by the appropriation of our pocket-handkerchiefs by members of the crowd, induced us to disentangle ourselves from it without confiding to any one our perplexity for supper and a bed. We were now extremely thirsty. I had visions of my majority bottles of Burgundy, lying under John Thresher’s care at Dipwell, and would have abandoned them all for one on the spot. After ranging about the outskirts of the crowd, seeking the two girls, we walked away, not so melancholy but that a draught of porter would have cheered us. Temple punned on the loss of my watch, and excused himself for a joke neither of us had spirit to laugh at. Just as I was saying, with a last glance at the fire, ‘Anyhow, it would have gone in that crowd,’ the nice good girl ran up behind us, crying, ‘There!’ as she put the watch-chain over my head.

‘There, Temple,’ said I, ‘didn’t I tell you so?’ and Temple kindly supposed so.

The girl said, ’I was afraid I’d missed you, little fellow, and you’d take me for a thief, and thank God, I’m no thief yet. I rushed into the crowd to meet you after you caught that old creature, and I could have kissed you both, you’re so brave.’

‘We always go in for it together,’ said Temple.

I made an offer to the girl of a piece of gold. ‘Oh, I’m poor,’ she cried, yet kept her hand off it like a bird alighting on ground, not on prey. When I compelled her to feel the money tight, she sighed, ’If I wasn’t so poor! I don’t want your gold. Why are you out so late?’

Page 1936

We informed her of our arrival from the country, and wanderings in the fog.

‘And you’ll say you’re not tired, I know,’ the girl remarked, and laughed to hear how correctly she had judged of our temper. Our thirst and hunger, however, filled her with concern, because of our not being used to it as she was, and no place was open to supply our wants. Her friend, the saucy one, accompanied by a man evidently a sailor, joined us, and the three had a consultation away from Temple and me, at the end of which the sailor, whose name was Joe, raised his leg dancingly, and smacked it. We gave him our hands to shake, and understood, without astonishment, that we were invited on, board his ship to partake of refreshment. We should not have been astonished had he said on board his balloon. Down through thick fog of a lighter colour, we made our way to a narrow lane leading to the river-side, where two men stood thumping their arms across their breasts, smoking pipes, and swearing. We entered a boat and were rowed to a ship. I was not aware how frozen and befogged my mind and senses had become until I had taken a desperate and long gulp of smoking rum-and-water, and then the whole of our adventures from morning to midnight, with the fir-trees in the country fog, and the lamps in the London fog, and the man who had lost his son, the fire, the Bench, the old woman with her fowl-like cry and limbs in the air, and the row over the misty river, swam flashing before my eyes, and I cried out to the two girls, who were drinking out of one glass with the sailor Joe, my entertainer, ‘Well, I’m awake now!’ and slept straight off the next instant.

CHAPTER XII

WE FIND OURSELVES BOUND ON A VOYAGE

It seemed to me that I had but taken a turn from right to left, or gone round a wheel, when I repeated the same words, and I heard Temple somewhere near me mumble something like them. He drew a long breath, so did I: we cleared our throats with a sort of whinny simultaneously. The enjoyment of lying perfectly still, refreshed, incurious, unexcited, yet having our minds animated, excursive, reaping all the incidents of our lives at leisure, and making a dream of our latest experiences, kept us tranquil and incommunicative. Occasionally we let fall a sigh fathoms deep, then by-and-by began blowing a bit of a wanton laugh at the end of it. I raised my foot and saw the boot on it, which accounted for an uneasy sensation setting in through my frame.

I said softly, ‘What a pleasure it must be for horses to be groomed!’

‘Just what I was thinking!’ said Temple.

We started up on our elbows, and one or the other cried:

’There’s a chart! These are bunks! Hark at the row overhead! We’re in a ship! The ship’s moving! Is it foggy this morning? It’s time to get up! I’ve slept in my clothes! Oh, for a dip! How I smell of smoke! What a noise of a steamer! And the squire at Riversley! Fancy Uberly’s tale!’

Page 1937

Temple, with averted face, asked me whether I meant to return to Riversley that day. I assured him I would, on my honour, if possible; and of course he also would have to return there. 'Why, you've an appointment with Janet Ilchester,' said I, 'and we may find a pug; we'll buy the hunting-knife and the skates. And she shall know you saved an old woman's life.'

'No, don't talk about that,' Temple entreated me, biting his lip. 'Richie, we're going fast through the water. It reminds me of breakfast. I should guess the hour to be nine A.M.'

My watch was unable to assist us; the hands pointed to half-past four, and were fixed. We ran up on deck. Looking over the stern of the vessel, across a line of rippling eddying red gold, we saw the sun low upon cushions of beautiful cloud; no trace of fog anywhere; blue sky overhead, and a mild breeze blowing.

'Sunrise,' I said.

Temple answered, 'Yes,' most uncertainly.

We looked round. A steam-tug was towing our ship out toward banks of red-reflecting cloud, and a smell of sea air.

'Why, that's the East there!' cried Temple. We faced about to the sun, and behold, he was actually sinking!

'Nonsense!' we exclaimed in a breath. From seaward to this stupefying sunset we stood staring. The river stretched to broad lengths; gulls were on the grey water, knots of seaweed, and the sea-foam curled in advance of us.

'By jingo!' Temple spoke out, musing, 'here's a whole day struck out of our existence.'

'It can't be!' said I, for that any sensible being could be tricked of a piece of his life in that manner I thought a preposterous notion.

But the sight of a lessening windmill in the West, shadows eastward, the wide water, and the air now full salt, convinced me we two had slept through an entire day, and were passing rapidly out of hail of our native land.

'We must get these fellows to put us on shore at once,' said Temple: 'we won't stop to eat. There's a town; a boat will row us there in half-an-hour. Then we can wash, too. I've got an idea nothing's clean here. And confound these fellows for not having the civility to tell us they were going to start!'

We were rather angry, a little amused, not in the least alarmed at our position. A sailor, to whom we applied for an introduction to the captain, said he was busy. Another gave us a similar reply, with a monstrous grimace which was beyond our comprehension.

The sailor Joe was nowhere to be seen. None of the sailors appeared willing to listen to us, though they stopped as they were running by to lend half an ear to what we had to say. Some particular movement was going on in the ship. Temple was the first to observe that the steamtug was casting us loose, and cried he, 'She'll take us on board and back to London Bridge. Let's hail her.' He sang out, 'Whoop! ahoy!' I meanwhile had caught sight of Joe.

Page 1938

‘Well, young gentleman!’ he accosted me, and he hoped I had slept well. My courteous request to him to bid the tug stand by to take us on board, only caused him to wear a look of awful gravity. ’You’re such a deuce of a sleeper,’ he said. ’You see, we had to be off early to make up for forty hours lost by that there fog. I tried to wake you both; no good; so I let you snore away. We took up our captain mid-way down the river, and now you’re in his hands, and he’ll do what he likes with you, and that ’s a fact, and my opinion is you ’ll see a foreign shore before you’re in the arms of your family again.’

At these words I had the horrible sensation of being caged, and worse, transported into the bargain.

I insisted on seeing the captain. A big bright round moon was dancing over the vessel’s bowsprit, and this, together with the tug thumping into the distance, and the land receding, gave me—coming on my wrath—suffocating emotions.

No difficulties were presented in my way. I was led up to a broad man in a pilot-coat, who stood square, and looked by the bend of his eyebrows as if he were always making head against a gale. He nodded to my respectful salute. ‘Cabin,’ he said, and turned his back to me.

I addressed him, ’Excuse me, I want to go on shore, captain. I must and will go! I am here by some accident; you have accidentally overlooked me here. I wish to treat you like a gentleman, but I won’t be detained.’

Joe spoke a word to the captain, who kept his back as broad to me as a school-slate for geography and Euclid’s propositions.

‘Cabin, cabin,’ the captain repeated.

I tried to get round him to dash a furious sentence or so in his face, since there was no producing any impression on his back; but he occupied the whole of a way blocked with wire-coil, and rope, and boxes, and it would have been ridiculous to climb this barricade when by another right-about-face he could in a minute leave me volleying at the blank space between his shoulders.

Joe touched my arm, which, in as friendly a way as I could assume, I bade him not do a second time; for I could ill contain myself as it was, and beginning to think I had been duped and tricked, I was ready for hostilities. I could hardly bear meeting Temple on my passage to the cabin. ‘Captain Jasper Welsh,’ he was reiterating, as if sounding it to discover whether it had an ominous ring: it was the captain’s name, that he had learnt from one of the seamen.

Irritated by his repetition of it, I said, I know not why, or how the words came: ’A highwayman notorious for his depredations in the vicinity of the city of Bristol.’

This set Temple off laughing: ’And so he bought a ship and had traps laid down to catch young fellows for ransom.’

Page 1939

I was obliged to request Temple not to joke, but the next moment I had launched Captain Jasper Welsh on a piratical exploit; Temple lifted the veil from his history, revealing him amid the excesses of a cannibal feast. I dragged him before a British jury; Temple hanged him in view of an excited multitude. As he boasted that there was the end of Captain Welsh, I broke the rope. But Temple spoiled my triumph by depriving him of the use of his lower limbs after the fall, for he was a heavy man. I could not contradict it, and therefore pitched all his ship's crew upon the gallows in a rescue. Temple allowed him to be carried off by his faithful ruffians, only stipulating that the captain was never after able to release his neck from the hangman's slip knot. The consequence was that he wore a shirt-collar up to his eyebrows for concealment by day, and a pillow-case over his head at night, and his wife said she was a deceived unhappy woman, and died of curiosity.

The talking of even such nonsense as this was a relief to us in our impatience and helplessness, with the lights of land heaving far distant to our fretful sight through the cabin windows.

When we had to talk reasonably we were not so successful. Captain Welsh was one of those men who show you, whether you care to see them or not, all the processes by which they arrive at an idea of you, upon which they forthwith shape their course. Thus, when he came to us in the cabin, he took the oil-lamp in his hand and examined our faces by its light; he had no reply to our remonstrances and petitions: all he said was, 'Humph! well, I suppose you're both gentlemen born'; and he insisted on prosecuting his scrutiny without any reference to the tenour of our observations.

We entreated him half imperiously to bring his ship to and put us on shore in a boat. He bunched up his mouth, remarking, 'Know their grammar: habit o' speaking to grooms, eh? humph.' We offered to pay largely. 'Loose o' their cash,' was his comment, and so on; and he was the more exasperating to us because he did not look an evil-minded man; only he appeared to be cursed with an evil opinion of us. I tried to remove it; I spoke forbearingly. Temple, imitating me, was sugar-sweet. We exonerated the captain from blame, excused him for his error, named the case a mistake on both sides. That long sleep of ours, we said, was really something laughable; we laughed at the recollection of it, a lamentable piece of merriment.

Our artfulness and patience becoming exhausted, for the captain had vouchsafed us no direct answer, I said at last, 'Captain Welsh, here we are on board your ship will you tell us what you mean to do with us?'

He now said bluntly, 'I will.'

'You'll behave like a man of honour,' said I, and to that he cried vehemently, 'I will.'

'Well, then,' said I, 'call out the boat, if you please; we're anxious to be home.'

‘So you shall!’ the captain shouted, ’and per ship—my barque Priscilla; and better men than you left, or I ‘m no Christian.’

Page 1940

Temple said briskly, ‘Thank you, captain.’

‘You may wait awhile with that, my lad,’ he answered; and, to our astonishment, recommended us to go and clean our faces and prepare to drink some tea at his table.

’Thank you very much, captain, we’ll do that when we ‘re on shore,’ said we.

‘You’ll have black figure-heads and empty gizzards, then, by that time,’ he remarked. We beheld him turning over the leaves of a Bible.

Now, this sight of the Bible gave me a sense of personal security, and a notion of hypocrisy in his conduct as well; and perceiving that we had conjectured falsely as to his meaning to cast us on shore per ship, his barque Priscilla, I burst out in great heat, ’What! we are prisoners? You dare to detain us?’

Temple chimed in, in a similar strain. Fairly enraged, we flung at him without anything of what I thought eloquence.

The captain ruminated up and down the columns of his Bible.

I was stung to feel that we were like two small terriers baiting a huge mild bull. At last he said, ‘The story of the Prodigal Son.’

‘Oh!’ groaned Temple, at the mention of this worn-out old fellow, who has gone in harness to tracts ever since he ate the fatted calf.

But the captain never heeded his interruption.

’Young gentlemen, I’ve finished it while you ’ve been barking at me. If I ’d had him early in life on board my vessel, I hope I’m not presumptuous in saying—the Lord forgive me if I be so!—I’d have stopped his downward career—ay, so!—with a trip in the right direction. The Lord, young gentlemen, has not thrown you into my hands for no purpose whatsoever. Thank him on your knees to-night, and thank Joseph Double, my mate, when you rise, for he was the instrument of saving you from bad company. If this was a vessel where you ’d hear an oath or smell the smell of liquor, I ’d have let you run when there was terra firma within stone’s throw. I came on board, I found you both asleep, with those marks of dissipation round your eyes, and I swore—in the Lord’s name, mind you—I’d help pluck you out of the pit while you had none but one leg in. It’s said! It’s no use barking. I am not to be roused. The devil in me is chained by the waist, and a twenty-pound weight on his tongue. With your assistance I’ll do the same for the devil in you. Since you’ve had plenty of sleep, I ’ll trouble you to commit to memory the whole story of the Prodigal Son ’twixt now and morrow’s sunrise. We ’ll have our commentary on it after labour done. Labour you will in my vessel, for your soul’s health. And let me advise you not to talk; in your situation talking’s temptation to lying. You’ll do me the obligation to feed at my table. And when I hand you back to your

parents, why, they'll thank me, if you won't. But it's not thanks I look for: it's my bounden Christian duty I look to. I reckon a couple o' stray lambs equal to one lost sheep.'

Page 1941

The captain uplifted his arm, ejaculating solemnly, ‘By!’ and faltered. ‘You were going to swear!’ said Temple, with savage disdain.

‘By the blessing of Omnipotence! I’ll save a pair o’ pups from turning wolves. And I’m a weak mortal man, that ‘s too true.’

‘He was going to swear,’ Temple muttered to me.

I considered the detection of Captain Welsh’s hypocrisy unnecessary, almost a condescension toward familiarity; but the ire in my bosom was boiling so that I found it impossible to roll out the flood of eloquence with which I was big. Soon after, I was trying to bribe the man with all my money and my watch.

‘Who gave you that watch?’ said he.

‘Downright Church catechism!’ muttered Temple.

‘My grandfather,’ said I.

The captain’s head went like a mechanical hammer, to express something indescribable.

‘My grandfather,’ I continued, ’will pay you handsomely for any service you do to me and my friend.’

‘Now, that’s not far off forgoing,’ said the captain, in a tone as much as to say we were bad all over.

I saw the waters slide by his cabin-windows. My desolation, my humiliation, my chained fury, tumbled together. Out it came—

’Captain, do behave to us like a gentleman, and you shall never repent it. Our relatives will be miserable about us. They—captain!—they don’t know where we are. We haven’t even a change of clothes. Of course we know we’re at your mercy, but do behave like an honest man. You shall be paid or not, just as you please, for putting us on shore, but we shall be eternally grateful to you. Of course you mean kindly to us; we see that—’

‘I thank the Lord for it!’ he interposed.

’Only you really are under a delusion. It ’s extraordinary. You can’t be quite in your right senses about us; you must be—I don’t mean to speak disrespectfully-what we call on shore, cracked about us. . . .

‘Doddered, don’t they say in one of the shires?’ he remarked.

Half-encouraged, and in the belief that I might be getting eloquent, I appealed to his manliness. Why should he take advantage of a couple of boys? I struck the key of his possible fatherly feelings: What misery were not our friends suffering now. ('Ay, a bucketful now saves an ocean in time to come!' he flung in his word.) I bade him, with more pathetic dignity reflect on the dreadful hiatus in our studies.

'Is that Latin or Greek?' he asked.

I would not reply to the cold-blooded question. He said the New Testament was written in Greek, he knew, and happy were those who could read it in the original.

'Well, and how can we be learning to read it on board ship?' said Temple, an observation that exasperated me because it seemed more to the point than my lengthy speech, and betrayed that he thought so; however, I took it up:—

'How can we be graduating for our sphere in life, Captain Welsh, on board your vessel? Tell us that.'

Page 1942

He played thumb and knuckles on his table. Just when I was hoping that good would come of the senseless tune, Temple cried,

’Tell us what your exact intentions are, Captain Welsh. What do you mean to do with us?’

’Mean to take you the voyage out and the voyage home, Providence willing,’ said the captain, and he rose.

We declined his offer of tea, though I fancy we could have gnawed at a bone.

‘There’s no compulsion in that matter,’ he said. ’You share my cabin while you’re my guests, shipmates, and apprentices in the path of living; my cabin and my substance, the same as if you were what the North-countrymen call bairns o’ mine: I’ve none o’ my own. My wife was a barren woman. I’ve none but my old mother at home. Have your sulks out, lads; you’ll come round like the Priscilla on a tack, and discover you’ve made way by it.’

We quitted his cabin, bowing stiffly.

Temple declared old Rippenger was better than this canting rascal.

The sea was around us, a distant yellow twinkle telling of land.

‘His wife a barren woman! what’s that to us!’ Temple went on, exploding at intervals. ’So was Sarah. His cabin and his substance! He talks more like a preacher than a sailor. I should like to see him in a storm! He’s no sailor at all. His men hate him. It wouldn’t be difficult to get up a mutiny on board this ship. Richie, I understand the whole plot: he’s in want of cabin-boys. The fellow has impressed us. We shall have to serve till we touch land. Thank God, there’s a British consul everywhere; I say that seriously. I love my country; may she always be powerful! My life is always at her—Did you feel that pitch of the ship? Of all the names ever given to a vessel, I do think Priscilla is without exception the most utterly detestable. Oh! there again. No, it’ll be too bad, Richie, if we ‘re beaten in this way.’

‘If *you* are beaten,’ said I, scarcely venturing to speak lest I should cry or be sick.

We both felt that the vessel was conspiring to ruin our self-respect. I set my head to think as hard as possible on Latin verses (my instinct must have drawn me to them as to a species of intellectual biscuit steeped in spirit, tough, and comforting, and fundamentally opposed to existing circumstances, otherwise I cannot account for the attraction). They helped me for a time; they kept off self-pity, and kept the machinery of the mind at work. They lifted me, as it were, to an upper floor removed from the treacherously sighing Priscilla. But I came down quickly with a crash; no dexterous management of my mental resources could save me from the hemp-like smell of the

ship, nor would leaning over the taffrail, nor lying curled under a tarpaulin. The sailors heaped pilot-coats upon us. It was a bad ship, they said, to be sick on board of, for no such thing as brandy was allowed in the old Priscilla. Still I am sure I tasted

Page 1943

some before I fell into a state of semi-insensibility. As in a trance I heard Temple's moans, and the captain's voice across the gusty wind, and the forlorn crunching of the ship down great waves. The captain's figure was sometimes stooping over us, more great-coats were piled on us; sometimes the wind whistled thinner than one fancies the shrieks of creatures dead of starvation and restless, that spend their souls in a shriek as long as they can hold it on, say nursery-maids; the ship made a truce with the waters and grunted; we took two or three playful blows, we were drenched with spray, uphill we laboured, we caught the moon in a net of rigging, away we plunged; we mounted to plunge again and again. I reproached the vessel in argument for some imaginary inconsistency. Memory was like a heavy barrel on my breast, rolling with the sea.

CHAPTER XIII

WE CONDUCT SEVERAL LEARNED ARGUMENTS WITH THE CAPTAIN OF THE PRISCILLA

Captain Welsh soon conquered us. The latest meal we had eaten was on the frosty common under the fir-trees. After a tremendous fast, with sea-sickness supervening, the eggs and bacon, and pleasant benevolent-smelling tea on the captain's table were things not to be resisted by two healthy boys who had previously stripped and faced buckets of maddening ice-cold salt-water, dashed at us by a jolly sailor. An open mind for new impressions came with the warmth of our clothes. We ate, bearing within us the souls of injured innocents; nevertheless, we were thankful, and, to the captain's grace, a long one, we bowed heads decently. It was a glorious breakfast, for which land and sea had prepared us in about equal degrees: I confess, my feelings when I jumped out of the cabin were almost those of one born afresh to life and understanding. Temple and I took counsel. We agreed that sulking would be ridiculous, unmanly, ungentlemanly. The captain had us fast, as if we were under a lion's paw; he was evidently a well-meaning man, a fanatic deluded concerning our characters: the barque Priscilla was bound for a German port, and should arrive there in a few days,—why not run the voyage merrily since we were treated with kindness? Neither the squire nor Temple's father could complain of our conduct; we were simply victims of an error that was assisting us to a knowledge of the world, a youth's proper ambition. 'And we're not going to be starved,' said Temple.

I smiled, thinking I perceived the reason why I had failed in my oration over-night; so I determined that on no future occasion would I let pride stand in the way of provender. Breakfast had completely transformed us We held it due to ourselves that we should demand explanations from Joseph Double, the mate, and then, after hearing him, furnish them with a cordial alacrity to which we might have attached unlimited credence had he not protested against our dreaming him to have supplied hot rum-and-water on board, we wrote our names and addresses in the captain's log-book, and immediately asked permission to go to the mast-head.

Page 1944

He laughed. Out of his cabin there was no smack of the preacher in him. His men said he was a stout seaman, mad on the subject of grog and girls. Why, it was on account of grog and girls that he was giving us this dish of salt-water to purify us! Grog and girls! cried we. We vowed upon our honour as gentlemen we had tasted grog for the first time in our lives on board the Priscilla. How about the girls? they asked. We informed them we knew none but girls who were ladies. Thereupon one sailor nodded, one sent up a crow, one said the misfortune of the case lay in all girls being such precious fine ladies; and one spoke in dreadfully blank language, he accused us of treating the Priscilla as a tavern for the entertainment of bad company, stating that he had helped to row me and my associates from the shore to the ship.

'Poor Mr. Double!' says he; 'there was only one way for him to jump you two young gentlemen out o' that snapdragon bowl you was in—or quashmire, call it; so he 'ticed you on board wi' the bait you was swallowing, which was making the devil serve the Lord's turn. And I'll remember that night, for I yielded to swearing, and drank too!' The other sailors roared with laughter.

I tipped them, not to appear offended by their suspicions. We thought them all hypocrites, and were as much in error as if we had thought them all honest.

Things went fairly well with the exception of the lessons in Scripture. Our work was mere playing at sailoring, helping furl sails, haul ropes, study charts, carry messages, and such like. Temple made his voice shrewdly emphatic to explain to the captain that we liked the work, but that such lessons as these out of Scripture were what the eeriest youngsters were crammed with.

'Such lessons as these, maybe, don't have the meaning on land they get to have on the high seas,' replied the captain: 'and those youngsters you talk of were not called in to throw a light on passages: for I may teach you ship's business aboard my barque, but we're all children inside the Book.'

He groaned heartily to hear that our learning lay in the direction of Pagan Gods and Goddesses, and heathen historians and poets; adding, it was not new to him, and perhaps that was why the world was as it was. Nor did he wonder, he said, at our running from studies of those filthy writings loose upon London; it was as natural as dunghill steam. Temple pretended he was forced by the captain's undue severity to defend Venus; he said, I thought rather wittily, 'Sailors ought to have a respect for her, for she was born in the middle of the sea, and she steered straight for land, so she must have had a pretty good idea of navigation.'

But the captain answered none the less keenly, 'She had her idea of navigating, as the devil of mischief always has, in the direction where there's most to corrupt; and, my lad, she teaches the navigation that leads to the bottom beneath us.'

Page 1945

He might be right, still our mien was evil in reciting the lessons from Scripture; and though Captain Welsh had intelligence we could not draw into it the how and the why of the indignity we experienced. We had rather he had been a savage captain, to have braced our spirits to sturdy resistance, instead of a mild, good-humoured man of kind intentions, who lent us his linen to wear, fed us at his table, and taxed our most gentlemanly feelings to find excuses for him. Our way of revenging ourselves becomingly was to laud the heroes of antiquity, as if they had possession of our souls and touched the fountain of worship. Whenever Captain Welsh exclaimed, 'Well done,' or the equivalent, 'That 's an idea,' we referred him to Plutarch for our great exemplar. It was Alcibiades gracefully consuming his black broth that won the captain's thanks for theological acuteness, or the young Telemachus suiting his temper to the dolphin's moods, since he must somehow get on shore on the dolphin's back. Captain Welsh could not perceive in Temple the personifier of Alcibiades, nor Telemachus in me; but he was aware of an obstinate obstruction behind our compliance. This he called the devil coiled like a snake in its winter sleep. He hurled texts at it openly, or slyly dropped a particularly heavy one, in the hope of surprising it with a death-blow. We beheld him poring over his Bible for texts that should be sovereign medicines for us, deadly for the devil within us. Consequently, we were on the defensive: bits of Cicero, bits of Seneca, soundly and nobly moral, did service on behalf of Paganism; we remembered them certainly almost as if an imp had brought them from afar. Nor had we any desire to be in opposition to the cause he supported. What we were opposed to was the dogmatic arrogance of a just but ignorant man, who had his one specific for everything, and saw mortal sickness in all other remedies or recreations. Temple said to him,

'If the Archbishop of Canterbury were to tell me Greek and Latin authors are bad for me, I should listen to his remarks, because he 's a scholar: he knows the languages and knows what they contain.'

Captain Welsh replied,

'If the Archbishop o' Canterbury sailed the sea, and lived in Foul Alley, Waterside, when on shore, and so felt what it is to toss on top of the waves o' perdition, he'd understand the value of a big, clean, well-manned, well-provisioned ship, instead o' your galliots wi' gaudy sails, your barges that can't rise to a sea, your yachts that run to port like mother's pets at first pipe o' the storm, your trim-built wherries.'

'So you'd have only one sort of vessel afloat!' said I. 'There's the difference of a man who's a scholar.'

'I'd have,' said the captain, 'every lad like you, my lad, trained in the big ship, and he wouldn't capsize, and be found betrayed by his light timbers as I found you. Serve your apprenticeship in the Lord's three-decker; then to command what you may.'

Page 1946

‘No, no, Captain Welsh,’ says Temple: ’you must grind at Latin and Greek when you ’re a chick, or you won’t ever master the rudiments. Upon my honour, I declare it ’s the truth, you must. If you’d like to try, and are of a mind for a go at Greek, we’ll do our best to help you through the aorists. It looks harder than Latin, but after a start it ’s easier. Only, I’m afraid your three-decker’s apprenticeship ’ll stand in your way.’

’Greek ’s to be done for me; I can pay clever gentlemen for doing Greek for me,’ said the captain. ’The knowledge and the love of virtue I must do for myself; and not to be wrecked, I must do it early.’

‘Well, that’s neither learning nor human nature,’ said I.

‘It’s the knowledge o’ the right rules for human nature, my lad.’

‘Would you kidnap youngsters to serve in your ship, captain?’

‘I’d bless the wind that blew them there, foul or not, my lad.’

‘And there they’d stick when you had them, captain?’

’I’d think it was the Lord’s will they should stick there awhile, my lad—yes.’

‘And what of their parents?’

’Youngsters out like gossamers on a wind, their parents are where they sow themselves, my lad.’

‘I call that hard on the real parents, Captain Welsh,’ said Temple.

‘It’s harder on Providence when parents breed that kind o’ light creature, my lad.’

We were all getting excited, talking our best, such as it was; the captain leaning over his side of the table, clasping his hands unintentionally preacher-like; we on our side supporting our chins on our fists, quick to be at him. Temple was brilliant; he wanted to convert the captain, and avowed it.

‘For,’ said he, ’you’re not like one of those tract-fellows. You’re a man we can respect, a good seaman, master of your ship, and hearty, and no mewing sanctimoniousness, and we can see and excuse your mistake as to us two; but now, there’s my father at home —he’s a good man, but he ’s a man of the world, and reads his classics and his Bible. He’s none the worse for it, I assure you.’

‘Where was his son the night of the fog?’ said the captain.

‘Well, he happened to be out in it.’

‘Where’d he be now but for one o’ my men?’

‘Who can answer that, Captain Welsh?’

‘I can, my lad-stewing in an ante-room of hell-gates, I verily believe.’

Temple sighed at the captain’s infatuation, and said, ’I’ll tell you of a fellow at our school named Drew; he was old Rippenger’s best theological scholar—always got the prize for theology. Well, he was a confirmed sneak. I’ve taken him into a corner and described the torments of dying to him, and his look was disgusting—he broke out in a clammy sweat. “Don’t, don’t!” he’d cry. “You’re just the fellow to suffer intensely,” I told him. And what was his idea of escaping it? Why, by learning the whole of Deuteronomy and the Acts of the Apostles by heart! His idea of Judgement Day was old Rippenger’s half-yearly examination. These are facts, you know, Captain Welsh.’

Page 1947

I testified to them briefly.

The captain said a curious thing: 'I'll make an appointment with you in leviathan's jaws the night of a storm, my lad.'

'With pleasure,' said Temple.

'The Lord send it!' exclaimed the captain.

His head was bent forward, and he was gazing up into his eyebrows.

Before we knew that anything was coming, he was out on a narrative of a scholar of one of the Universities. Our ears were indifferent to the young man's career from the heights of fortune to delirium tremens down the cataract of brandy, until the captain spoke of a dark night on the Pool of the Thames; and here his voice struggled, and we tried hard to catch the thread of the tale. Two men and a girl were in the boat. The men fought, the girl shrieked, the boat was upset, the three were drowned.

All this came so suddenly that nothing but the captain's heavy thump of his fist on the table kept us from laughing.

He was quite unable to relate the tale, and we had to gather it from his exclamations. One of the men was mate of a vessel lying in the Pool, having only cast anchor that evening; the girl was his sweetheart; the other man had once been a fine young University gentleman, and had become an outfitter's drunken agent. The brave sailor had nourished him often when on shore, and he, with the fluent tongue which his college had trimmed for him, had led the girl to sin during her lover's absence. Howsoever, they put off together to welcome him on his arrival, never suspecting that their secret had been whispered to Robert Welsh beforehand. Howsoever, Robert gave them hearty greeting, and down to the cabin they went, and there sat drinking up to midnight.

'Three lost souls!' said the captain.

'See how they run,' Temple sang, half audibly, and flushed hot, ashamed of himself.

''Twas I had to bear the news to his mother,' the captain pursued; 'and it was a task, my lads, for I was then little more than your age, and the glass was Robert's only fault, and he was my only brother.'

I offered my hand to the captain. He grasped it powerfully. 'That crew in a boat, and wouldn't you know the devil'd be coxswain?' he called loudly, and buried his face.

‘No,’ he said, looking up at us, ’I pray for no storm, but, by the Lord’s mercy, for a way to your hearts through fire or water. And now on deck, my lads, while your beds are made up. Three blind things we verily are.’

Captain Welsh showed he was sharp of hearing. His allusion to the humming of the tune of the mice gave Temple a fit of remorse, and he apologized.

‘Ay,’ said the captain, ’it is so; own it: frivolity’s the fruit of that training that’s all for the flesh. But dip you into some o’ my books on my shelves here, and learn to see living man half skeleton, like life and shadow, and never to living man need you pray forgiveness, my lad.’

Page 1948

By sheer force of character he gained the command of our respect. Though we agreed on deck that he had bungled his story, it impressed us; we felt less able to cope with him, and less willing to encounter a storm.

‘We shall have one, of course,’ Temple said, affecting resignation, with a glance aloft.

I was superstitiously of the same opinion, and praised the vessel.

’Oh, Priscilla’s the very name of a ship that founders with all hands and sends a bottle on shore,’ said Temple.

‘There isn’t a bottle on board,’ said I; and this piece of nonsense helped us to sleep off our gloom.

CHAPTER XIV

I MEET OLD FRIENDS

Notwithstanding the prognostications it pleased us to indulge, we had a tolerably smooth voyage. On a clear cold Sunday morning we were sailing between a foreign river’s banks, and Temple and I were alternately reading a chapter out of the Bible to the assembled ship’s crew, in advance of the captain’s short exhortation. We had ceased to look at ourselves inwardly, and we hardly thought it strange. But our hearts beat for a view of the great merchant city, which was called a free city, and therefore, Temple suggested, must bear certain portions of resemblance to old England; so we made up our minds to like it.

‘A wonderful place for beer cellars,’ a sailor observed to us slyly, and hitched himself up from the breech to the scalp.

At all events, it was a place where we could buy linen.

For that purpose, Captain Welsh handed us over to the care of his trusted mate Mr. Joseph Double, and we were soon in the streets of the city, desirous of purchasing half their contents. My supply of money was not enough for what I deemed necessary purchases. Temple had split his clothes, mine were tarred; we were appearing at a disadvantage, and we intended to dine at a good hotel and subsequently go to a theatre. Yet I had no wish to part with my watch. Mr. Double said it might be arranged. It was pawned at a shop for a sum equivalent in our money to about twelve pounds, and Temple obliged me by taking charge of the ticket. Thus we were enabled to dress suitably and dine pleasantly, and, as Mr. Double remarked, no one could rob me of my gold watch now. We visited a couple of beer-cellars to taste the drink of the people, and discovered three of our men engaged in a similar undertaking. I proposed that it should be done at my expense. They praised their captain, but asked us, as gentlemen and

scholars, whether it was reasonable to object to liquor because your brother was carried out on a high tide? Mr. Double commended them to moderation. Their reply was to estimate an immoderate amount of liquor as due to them, with profound composure.

‘Those rascals,’ Mr. Double informed us, ’are not in the captain’s confidence they’re tidy seamen, though, and they submit to the captain’s laws on board and have their liberty ashore.’

Page 1949

We inquired what the difference was between their privileges and his.

‘Why,’ said he, ’if they’re so much as accused of a disobedient act, off they ’re scurried, and lose fair wages and a kind captain. And let any man Jack of ’em accuse me, and he bounds a india-rubber ball against a wall and gets it; all he meant to give he gets. Once you fix the confidence of your superior, you’re waterproof.’

We held our peace, but we could have spoken.

Mr. Double had no moral hostility toward theatres. Supposing he did not relish the performance, he could enjoy a spell in the open air, he said, and this he speedily decided to do. Had we not been bound in honour to remain for him to fetch us, we also should have retired from a representation of which we understood only the word ja. It was tiresome to be perpetually waiting for the return of this word. We felt somewhat as dogs must feel when human speech is addressed to them. Accordingly, we professed, without concealment, to despise the whole performance. I reminded Temple of a saying of the Emperor Charles V. as to a knowledge of languages.

‘Hem!’ he went critically; ’it’s all very well for a German to talk in that way, but you can’t be five times an Englishman if you’re a foreigner.’

We heard English laughter near us. Presently an English gentleman accosted us.

‘Mr. Villiers, I believe?’ He bowed at me.

‘My name is Richmond.’

He bowed again, with excuses, talked of the Play, and telegraphed to a lady sitting in a box fronting us. I saw that she wrote on a slip of paper; she beckoned; the gentleman quitted us, and soon after placed a twisted note in my hand. It ran:

’Miss Goodwin (whose Christian name is Clara) wishes very much to know how it has fared with Mr. Harry Richmond since he left Venice.’

I pushed past a number of discontented knees, trying, on my way to her box, to recollect her vividly, but I could barely recollect her at all, until I had sat beside her five minutes. Colonel Goodwin was asleep in a corner of the box. Awakened by the sound of his native tongue, he recognized me immediately.

‘On your way to your father?’ he said, as he shook my hand.

I thought it amazing he should guess that in Germany.

‘Do you know where he is, sir?’ I asked.

‘We saw him,’ replied the colonel; ’when was it, Clara? A week or ten days ago.’

‘Yes,’ said Miss Goodwin; ‘we will talk of that by-and-by.’ And she overflowed with comments on my personal appearance, and plied me with questions, but would answer none of mine.

I fetched Temple into the box to introduce him. We were introduced in turn to Captain Malet, the gentleman who had accosted me below.

‘You understand German, then?’ said Miss Goodwin.

She stared at hearing that we knew only the word ja, for it made our presence in Germany unaccountable.

Page 1950

‘The most dangerous word of all,’ said Colonel Goodwin, and begged us always to repeat after it the negative nein for an antidote.

‘You have both seen my father?’ I whispered to Miss Goodwin; ’both? We have been separated. Do tell me everything. Don’t look at the stage-they speak such nonsense. How did you remember me? How happy I am to have met you! Oh! I haven’t forgotten the gondolas and the striped posts, and stali and the other word; but soon after we were separated, and I haven’t seen him since.’

She touched her father’s arm.

‘At once, if you like,’ said he, jumping up erect.

‘In Germany was it?’ I persisted.

She nodded gravely and leaned softly on my arm while we marched out of the theatre to her hotel—I in such a state of happiness underlying bewilderment and strong expectation that I should have cried out loud had not pride in my partner restrained me. At her tea-table I narrated the whole of my adventure backwards to the time of our parting in Venice, hurrying it over as quick as I could, with the breathless termination, ‘And now?’

They had an incomprehensible reluctance to perform their part of the implied compact. Miss Goodwin looked at Captain Malet. He took his leave. Then she said, ’How glad I am you have dropped that odious name of Roy! Papa and I have talked of you frequently—latterly very often. I meant to write to you, Harry Richmond. I should have done it the moment we returned to England.’

‘You must know,’ said the colonel, ’that I am an amateur inspector of fortresses, and my poor Clara has to trudge the Continent with me to pick up the latest inventions in artillery and other matters, for which I get no thanks at head-quarters—but it ’s one way of serving one’s country when the steel lies rusting. We are now for home by way of Paris. I hope that you and your friend will give us your company. I will see this Captain Welsh of yours before we start. Clara, you decided on dragging me to the theatre to-night with your usual admirable instinct.’

I reminded Miss Goodwin of my father being in Germany.

‘Yes, he is at one of the Courts, a long distance from here,’ she said, rapidly. ’And you came by accident in a merchant-ship! You are one of those who are marked for extraordinary adventures. Confess: you would have set eyes on me, and not known me. It’s a miracle that I should meet my little friend Harry—little no longer my friend all the same, are you not?’

I hoped so ardently.

She with great urgency added, ’Then come with us. Prove that you put faith in our friendship.’

In desperation I exclaimed, ‘But I must, I must hear of my father.’

She turned to consult the colonel’s face.

‘Certainly,’ he said, and eulogized a loving son. ’Clara will talk to you. I’m for bed. What was the name of the play we saw this evening? Oh! Struensee, to be sure. We missed the scaffold.’

Page 1951

He wished us good-night on an appointment of the hour for breakfast, and ordered beds for us in the hotel.

Miss Goodwin commenced: 'But really I have nothing to tell you, or very little. You know, Papa has introductions everywhere; we are like Continental people, and speak a variety of languages, and I am almost a foreigner, we are so much abroad; but I do think English boys should be educated at home: I hope you'll go to an English college.'

Noticing my painful look, 'We saw him at the Court of the Prince of Eppenwelzen,' she said, as if her brows ached. 'He is very kindly treated there; he was there some weeks ago. The place lies out in the Hanover direction, far from here. He told us that you were with your grandfather, and I must see Riversley Grange, and the truth is you must take me there. I suspect you have your peace to make; perhaps I shall help you, and be a true Peribanou. We go over Amsterdam, the Hague, Brussels, and you shall see the battlefield, Paris, straight to London. Yes, you are fickle; you have not once called me Peribanou.'

Her voluble rattling succeeded in fencing off my questions before I could exactly shape them, as I staggered from blind to blind idea, now thinking of the sombre red Bench, and now of the German prince's Court.

'Won't you tell me any more to-night?' I said, when she paused.

'Indeed, I have not any more to tell,' she assured me.

It was clear to me that she had joined the mysterious league against my father. I began to have a choking in the throat. I thanked her and wished her good-night while I was still capable of smiling.

At my next interview with Colonel Goodwin he spoke promptly on the subject of my wanderings. I was of an age, he said, to know my own interests. No doubt filial affection was excellent in its way, but in fact it was highly questionable whether my father was still at the Court of this German prince; my father had stated that he meant to visit England to obtain an interview with his son, and I might miss him by a harum-scarum chase over Germany. And besides, was I not offending my grandfather and my aunt, to whom I owed so much? He appealed to my warmest feelings on their behalf. This was just the moment, he said, when there was a turning-point in my fortunes. He could assure me most earnestly that I should do no good by knocking at this prince's doors, and have nothing but bitterness if I did in the end discover my father. 'Surely you understand the advantages of being bred a gentleman?' he wound up. 'Under your grandfather's care you have a career before you, a fine fortune in prospect, everything a young man can wish for. And I must tell you candidly, you run great risk of missing all these things by hunting your father to earth. Give yourself a little time: reflect on it.'

‘I have,’ I cried. ‘I have come out to find him, and I must.’

Page 1952

The colonel renewed his arguments and persuasions until he was worn out. I thanked him continually for his kindness. Clara Goodwin besought me in a surprising manner to accompany her to England, called herself Peribanou, and with that name conjured up my father to my eyes in his breathing form. She said, as her father had done, that I was called on now to decide upon my future: she had a presentiment that evil would come to me of my unchecked, headstrong will, which she dignified by terming it a true but reckless affection: she believed she had been thrown in my path to prove herself a serviceable friend, a Peribanou of twenty-six who would not expect me to marry her when she had earned my gratitude.

They set Temple on me, and that was very funny. To hear him with his 'I say, Richie, come, perhaps it's as well to know where a thing should stop; your father knows you're at Riversley, and he'll be after you when convenient; and just fancy the squire!' was laughable. He had some anxiety to be home again, or at least at Riversley. I offered him to Miss Goodwin.

She reproached me and coaxed me; she was exceedingly sweet. 'Well,' she said, in an odd, resigned fashion, 'rest a day with us; will you refuse me that?'

I consented; she knew not with what fretfulness. We went out to gaze at the shops and edifices, and I bought two light bags for slinging over the shoulder, two nightshirts, toothbrushes, and pocket-combs, and a large map of Germany. By dint of vehement entreaties I led her to point to the territory of the Prince of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld. 'His income is rather less than that of your grandfather, friend Harry,' she remarked. I doated on the spot until I could have dropped my finger on it blindfold.

Two or three pitched battles brought us to a friendly arrangement. The colonel exacted my promise that if I saw my father at Sarkeld in Eppenwelzen I would not stay with him longer than seven days: and that if he was not there I would journey home forthwith. When I had yielded the promise frankly on my honour, he introduced me to a banker of the city, who agreed to furnish me money to carry me on to England in case I should require it. A diligence engaged to deliver me within a few miles of Sarkeld. I wrote a letter to my aunt Dorothy, telling her facts, and one to the squire, beginning, 'We were caught on our arrival in London by the thickest fog ever remembered,' as if it had been settled on my departure from Riversley that Temple and I were bound for London. Miss Goodwin was my post-bag. She said when we had dined, about two hours before the starting of the diligence, 'Don't you think you ought to go and wish that captain of the vessel you sailed in goodbye?' I fell into her plot so far as to walk down to the quays on the river-side and reconnoitre the ship. But there I saw my prison. I kissed my hand to Captain Welsh's mainmast rather ironically, though not without regard for him. Miss Goodwin lifted her eyelids at our reappearance. As she made no confession of her treason I did not accuse her, and perhaps it was owing to a movement of her conscience that at our parting she drew me to her near enough for a kiss to come of itself.

Page 1953

Four-and-twenty German words of essential service to a traveller in Germany constituted our knowledge of the language, and these were on paper transcribed by Miss Goodwin's own hand. In the gloom of the diligence, packed between Germans of a size that not even Tacitus had prepared me for, smoked over from all sides, it was a fascinating study. Temple and I exchanged the paper half-hourly while the light lasted. When that had fled, nothing was left us to combat the sensation that we were in the depths of a manure-bed, for the windows were closed, the tobacco-smoke thickened, the hides of animals wrapping our immense companions reeked; fire occasionally glowed in their pipe-bowls; they were silent, and gave out smoke and heat incessantly, like inanimate forces of nature. I had most fantastic ideas,—that I had taken root and ripened, and must expect my head to drop off at any instant: that I was deep down, wedged in the solid mass of the earth. But I need not repeat them: they were accurately translated in imagination from my physical miseries. The dim revival of light, when I had well-nigh ceased to hope for it, showed us all like malefactors imperfectly hanged, or drowned wretches in a cabin under water. I had one Colossus bulging over my shoulder! Temple was blotted out. His face, emerging from beneath a block of curly bearskin, was like that of one frozen in wonderment. Outside there was a melting snow on the higher hills; the clouds over them grew steel-blue. We were going through a valley in a fir-forest.

CHAPTER XV

WE ARE ACCOSTED BY A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE LADY IN THE FOREST

Bowls of hot coffee and milk, with white rolls of bread to dip in them, refreshed us at a forest inn. For some minutes after the meal Temple and I talked like interchangeing puffs of steam, but soon subsided to our staring fit. The pipes were lit again. What we heard sounded like a language of the rocks and caves, and roots plucked up, a language of gluttons feasting; the word ja was like a door always on the hinge in every mouth. Dumpy children, bulky men, compressed old women with baked faces, and comical squat dogs, kept the villages partly alive. We observed one young urchin sitting on a stone opposite a dog, and he and the dog took alternate bites off a platter-shaped cake, big enough to require both his hands to hold it. Whether the dog ever snapped more than his share was matter of speculation to us. It was an education for him in good manners, and when we were sitting at dinner we wished our companions had enjoyed it. They fed with their heads in their plates, splashed and clattered jaws, without paying us any hospitable attention whatever, so that we had the dish of Lazarus. They were perfectly kind, notwithstanding, and allowed a portion of my great map of Germany to lie spread over their knees in the diligence, whilst Temple and I pored along the lines

Page 1954

of the rivers. One would thrust his square-nailed finger to the name of a city and pronounce it; one gave us lessons in the expression of the vowels, with the softening of three of them, which seemed like a regulation drill movement for taking an egg into the mouth, and showing repentance of the act. ‘Sarkeld,’ we exclaimed mutually, and they made a galloping motion of their hands, pointing beyond the hills. Sarkeld was to the right, Sarkeld to the left, as the road wound on. Sarkeld was straight in front of us when the conductor, according to directions he had received, requested us to alight and push through this endless fir-forest up a hilly branch road, and away his hand galloped beyond it, coming to a deep place, and then to grapes, then to a tip-toe station, and under it lay Sarkeld. The pantomime was not bad. We waved our hand to the diligence, and set out cheerfully, with our bags at our backs, entering a gorge in the fir-covered hills before sunset, after starting the proposition—Does the sun himself look foreign in a foreign country?

‘Yes, he does,’ said Temple; and so I thought, but denied it, for by the sun’s favour I hoped to see my father that night, and hail Apollo joyfully in the morning; a hope that grew with exercise of my limbs. Beautiful cascades of dark bright water leaped down the gorge; we chased an invisible animal. Suddenly one of us exclaimed, ’We ’re in a German forest’; and we remembered grim tales of these forests, their awful castles, barons, knights, ladies, long-bearded dwarfs, gnomes and thin people. I commenced a legend off-hand.

‘No, no,’ said Temple, as if curdling; ’let’s call this place the mouth of Hades. Greek things don’t make you feel funny.’

I laughed louder than was necessary, and remarked that I never had cared so much for Greek as on board Captain Welsh’s vessel.

‘It’s because he was all on the opposite tack I went on quoting,’ said Temple. ’I used to read with my father in the holidays, and your Rev. Simon has kept you up to the mark; so it was all fair. It ’s not on our consciences that we crammed the captain about our knowledge.’

‘No. I’m glad of it,’ said I.

Temple pursued, ’Whatever happens to a fellow, he can meet anything so long as he can say—I ’ve behaved like a man of honour. And those German tales—they only upset you. You don’t see the reason of the thing. Why is a man to be haunted half his life? Well, suppose he did commit a murder. But if he didn’t, can’t he walk through an old castle without meeting ghosts? or a forest?’

The dusky scenery of a strange land was influencing Temple. It affected me so, I made the worst of it for a cure.

Page 1955

’Fancy those pines saying, “There go two more,” Temple. Well; and fancy this—a little earth-dwarf as broad as I’m long and high as my shoulder. One day he met the loveliest girl in the whole country, and she promised to marry him in twenty years’ time, in return for a sack of jewels worth all Germany and half England. You should have seen her dragging it home. People thought it full of charcoal. She married the man she loved, and the twenty years passed over, and at the stroke of the hour when she first met the dwarf, thousands of bells began ringing through the forest, and her husband cries out, “What is the meaning of it?” and they rode up to a garland of fresh flowers that dropped on her head, and right into a gold ring that closed on her finger, and—look, Temple, look!’

‘Where?’ asked the dear little fellow, looking in all earnest, from which the gloom of the place may be imagined, for, by suddenly mixing it with my absurd story, I discomposed his air of sovereign indifference as much as one does the surface of a lake by casting a stone in it.

We rounded the rocky corner of the gorge at a slightly accelerated pace in dead silence. It opened out to restorative daylight, and we breathed better and chaffed one another, and, beholding a house with pendent gold grapes, applauded the diligence conductor’s expressive pantomime. The opportunity was offered for a draught of wine, but we held water preferable, so we toasted the Priscilla out of the palms of our hands in draughts of water from a rill that had the sound of aspen-leaves, such as I used to listen to in the Riversley meadows, pleasantly familiar.

Several commanding elevations were in sight, some wooded, some bare. We chose the nearest, to observe the sunset, and concurred in thinking it unlike English sunsets, though not so very unlike the sunset we had taken for sunrise on board the Priscilla. A tumbled, dark and light green country of swelling forest-land and slopes of meadow ran to the West, and the West from flaming yellow burned down to smoky crimson across it. Temple bade—me ‘catch the disc—that was English enough.’ A glance at the sun’s disc confirmed the truth of his observation. Gazing on the outline of the orb, one might have fancied oneself in England. Yet the moment it had sunk under the hill this feeling of ours vanished with it. The coloured clouds drew me ages away from the recollection of home.

A tower on a distant hill, white among pines, led us to suppose that Sarkeld must lie somewhere beneath it. We therefore descended straight toward the tower, instead of returning to the road, and struck confidently into a rugged path. Recent events had given me the assurance that in my search for my father I was subject to a special governing direction. I had aimed at the Bench—missed it—been shipped across sea and precipitated into the arms of friends who had seen him and could tell me I was on his actual track, only blindly, and no longer blindly now.

Page 1956

‘Follow the path,’ I said, when Temple wanted to have a consultation.

‘So we did in the London fog!’ said he, with some gloom.

But my retort: ‘Hasn’t it brought us here?’ was a silencer.

Dark night came on. Every height stood for a ruin in our eyes, every dip an abyss. It grew bewilderingly dark, but the path did not forsake us, and we expected, at half-hour intervals, to perceive the lights of Sarkeld, soon to be thundering at one of the inns for admission and supper. I could hear Temple rehearsing his German vocabulary, ’Brod, butter, wasser, fleisch, bett,’ as we stumbled along. Then it fell to ‘Brod, wasser, bett,’ and then, ‘Bett’ by itself, his confession of fatigue. Our path had frequently the nature of a waterway, and was very fatiguing, more agreeable to mount than descend, for in mounting the knees and shins bore the brunt of it, and these sufferers are not such important servants of the footfarer as toes and ankles in danger of tripping and being turned.

I was walking on leveller ground, my head bent and eyes half-shut, when a flash of light in a brook at my feet caused me to look aloft. The tower we had marked after sunset was close above us, shining in a light of torches. We adopted the sensible explanation of this mysterious sight, but were rather in the grip of the superstitious absurd one, until we discerned a number of reddened men.

‘Robbers!’ exclaimed one of us. Our common thought was, ’No; robbers would never meet on a height in that manner’; and we were emboldened to mount and request their help.

Fronting the tower, which was of white marble, a high tent had been pitched on a green platform semicircled by pines. Torches were stuck in clefts of the trees, or in the fork of the branches, or held by boys and men, and there were clearly men at work beneath the tent at a busy rate. We could hear the paviour’s breath escape from them. Outside the ring of torchbearers and others was a long cart with a dozen horses harnessed to it. All the men appeared occupied too much for chatter and laughter. What could be underneath the tent? Seeing a boy occasionally lift one of the flapping corners, we took licence from his example to appease our curiosity. It was the statue of a bronze horse rearing spiritedly. The workmen were engaged fixing its pedestal in the earth.

Our curiosity being satisfied, we held debate upon our immediate prospects. The difficulty of making sure of a bed when you are once detached from your home, was the philosophical reflection we arrived at, for nothing practical presented itself. To arm ourselves we pulled out Miss Goodwin’s paper. ‘Gasthof is the word!’ cried Temple. ’Gasthof, zimmer, bett; that means inn, hot supper, and bed. We’ll ask.’ We asked several of the men. Those in motion shot a stare at us; the torchbearers pointed at the

tent and at an unseen height, muttering ‘Morgen.’ Referring to Miss Goodwin’s paper we discovered

Page 1957

this to signify the unintelligible word morning, which was no answer at all; but the men, apparently deeming our conduct suspicious, gave us to understand by rather menacing gestures that we were not wanted there, so we passed into the dusk of the trees, angry at their incivility. Had it been Summer we should have dropped and slept. The night air of a sharp season obliged us to keep active, yet we were not willing to get far away from the torches. But after a time they were hidden; then we saw one moving ahead. The holder of it proved to be a workman of the gang, and between us and him the strangest parley ensued. He repeated the word morgen, and we insisted on zimmer and bett.

'He takes us for twin Caspar Hausers,' sighed Temple.

'Nein,' said the man, and, perhaps enlightened by hearing a foreign tongue, beckoned for us to step at his heels.

His lodging was a woodman's hut. He offered us bread to eat, milk to drink, and straw to lie on: we desired nothing more, and were happy, though the bread was black, the milk sour, the straw mouldy.

Our breakfast was like a continuation of supper, but two little girls of our host, whose heads were cased in tight-fitting dirty linen caps, munched the black bread and drank the sour milk so thankfully, while fixing solemn eyes of wonder upon us, that to assure them we were the same sort of creature as themselves we pretended to relish the stuff. Rather to our amazement we did relish it. 'Mutter!' I said to them. They pointed to the room overhead. Temple laid his cheek on his hand. One of the little girls laid hers on the table. I said 'Doctor?' They nodded and answered 'Princess,' which seemed perfectly good English, and sent our conjectures as to the state of their mother's health astray. I shut a silver English coin in one of their fat little hands.

We now, with the name Sarkeld, craved of their father a direction to that place. At the door of his but he waved his hand carelessly South for Sarkeld, and vigorously West where the tower stood, then swept both hands up to the tower, bellowed a fire of cannon, waved his hat, and stamped and cheered. Temple, glancing the way of the tower, performed on a trumpet of his joined fists to show we understood that prodigious attractions were presented by the tower; we said ja and ja, and nevertheless turned into the Sarkeld path.

Some minutes later the sound of hoofs led us to imagine he had despatched a messenger after us. A little lady on a pony, attended by a tawny-faced great square-shouldered groom on a tall horse, rode past, drew up on one side, and awaited our coming. She was dressed in a grey riding-habit and a warm winter-jacket of gleaming grey fur, a soft white boa loose round her neck, crossed at her waist, white gauntlets, and a pretty black felt hat with flowing rim and plume. There she passed as under review. It was a curious scene: the iron-faced great-sized groom on his bony black

Page 1958

charger dead still: his mistress, a girl of about eleven or twelve or thirteen, with an arm bowed at her side, whip and reins in one hand, and slips of golden brown hair straying on her flushed cheek; rocks and trees, high silver firs rising behind her, and a slender water that fell from the rocks running at her pony's feet. Half-a-dozen yards were between the charger's head and the pony's flanks. She waited for us to march by, without attempting to conceal that we were the objects of her inspection, and we in good easy swing of the feet gave her a look as we lifted our hats. That look was to me like a net thrown into moonlighted water: it brought nothing back but broken lights of a miraculous beauty.

Burning to catch an excuse for another look over my shoulder, I heard her voice:

'Young English gentlemen!'

We turned sharp round.

It was she without a doubt who had addressed us: she spurred her pony to meet us, stopped him, and said with the sweetest painful attempt at accuracy in pronouncing a foreign tongue:

'I sthink you go a wrong way?'

Our hats flew off again, and bareheaded, I seized the reply before Temple could speak.

'Is not this, may I ask you, the way to Sarkeld?'

She gathered up her knowledge of English deliberately.

'Yes, one goes to Sarkeld by sthis way here, but to-day goes everybody up to our Bella Vista, and I entreat you do not miss it, for it is some-s-thing to write to your home of.'

'Up at the tower, then? Oh, we were there last night, and saw the bronze horse, mademoiselle.'

'Yes, I know. I called on my poor sick woman in a but where you fell asleep, sirs. Her little ones are my lambs; she has been of our household; she is good; and they said, two young, strange, small gentlemen have gone for Sarkeld; and I supposed, sthey cannot know all go to our Bella Vista to-day.'

'You knew at once we were English, mademoiselle?'

'Yes, I could read it off your backs, and truly too your English eyes are quite open at a glance. It is of you both I speak. If I but make my words plain! My "th" I cannot always. And to understand, your English is indeed heavy speech! not so in books. I have my English governess. We read English tales, English poetry—and sthat is your

excellence. And so, will you not come, sirs, up when a way is to be shown to you? It is my question.'

Temple thanked her for the kindness of the offer.

I was hesitating, half conscious of surprise that I should ever be hesitating in doubt of taking the direction toward my father. Hearing Temple's boldness I thanked her also, and accepted. Then she said, bowing:

'I beg you will cover your heads.'

We passed the huge groom bolt upright on his towering horse; he raised two fingers to the level of his eyebrows in the form of a salute.

Temple murmured: 'I shouldn't mind entering the German Army,' just as after our interview with Captain Bulsted he had wished to enter the British Navy.

Page 1959

This was no more than a sign that he was highly pleased. For my part delight fluttered the words in my mouth, so that I had to repeat half I uttered to the attentive ears of our gracious new friend and guide:

‘Ah,’ she said, ’one does sthink one knows almost all before experiment. I am ashamed, yet I will talk, for is it not so? experiment is a school. And you, if you please, will speak slow. For I say of you English gentlemen, silk you spin from your lips; it is not as a language of an alphabet; it is pleasant to hear when one would lull, but Italian can do that, and do it more—am I right? soft?

‘Bella Vista, lovely view,’ said I.

‘Lovely view,’ she repeated.

She ran on in the most musical tongue, to my thinking, ever heard:

‘And see my little pensioners’ poor cottage, who are out up to Lovely View. Miles round go the people to it. Good, and I will tell you strangers: sthe Prince von Eppenwelzen had his great ancestor, and his sister Markgrafin von Rippau said, “Erect a statue of him, for he was a great warrior.” He could not, or he would not, we know not. So she said, “I will,” she said, “I will do it in seven days.” She does constantly amuse him, everybody at de Court. Immense excitement! For suppose it!—a statue of a warrior on horseback, in perfect likeness, chapeau tricorne, perruque, all of bronze, and his marshal’s baton. Eh bien, well, a bronze horse is come at a gallop from Berlin; sthat we know. By fortune a most exalted sculptor in Berlin has him ready,—and many horses pulled him to here, to Lovely View, by post-haste; sthat we know. But we are in extremity of puzzlement. For where is the statue to ride him? where—am I plain to you, sirs?—is sthe Marshal Furst von Eppenwelzen, our great ancestor? Yet the Markgrafin says, “It is right, wait!” She nods, she smiles. Our Court is all at de lake-palace odder side sthe tower, and it is bets of gems, of feathers, of lace, not to be numbered! The Markgrafin says—sthere to-day you see him, Albrecht Wohlgemuth Furst von Eppenwelzen! But no sculptor can have cast him in bronze—not copied him and cast him in a time of seven days! And we say sthis:—Has she given a secret order to a sculptor—you understand me, sirs, commission—where, how, has he sthe likeness copied? Or did he come to our speisesaal of our lake-palace disguised? Oh! but to see, to copy, to model, to cast in bronze, to travel betwixt Berlin and Sarkeld in a time of seven days? No! so-oh! we guess, we guess, we are in exhaustion. And to-day is like an eagle we have sent an arrow to shoot and know not if he will come down. For shall we see our ancestor on horseback? It will be a not-scribable joy! Or not? So we guess, we are worried. At near eleven o’clock a cannon fires, sthe tent is lifted, and we see; but I am impatient wid my breaths for de gun to go.’

I said it would be a fine sight.

’For strangers, yes; you should be of de palace to know what a fine sight! sthe finest! And you are for Sarkeld? You have friends in Sarkeld?’

Page 1960

‘My father is in Sarkeld, mademoiselle. I am told he is at the palace.’

‘Indeed; and he is English, your fater?’

‘Yes. I have not seen him for years; I have come to find him.’

’Indeed; it is for love of him, your fater, sir, you come, and not speak German?’

I signified that it was so.

’She stroked her pony’s neck musing.

‘Because, of love is not much in de family in England, it is said,’ she remarked very shyly, and in recovering her self-possession asked the name of my father.

‘His name, mademoiselle, is Mr. Richmond.’

‘Mr. Richmond?’

‘Mr. Richmond Roy.’

She sprang in her saddle.

‘You are son to Mr. Richmond Roy? Oh! it is wonderful.’

‘Mademoiselle, then you have seen him lately?’

’Yes, yes! I have seen him. I have heard of his beautiful child, his son; and you it is?’

She studied my countenance a moment.

‘Tell me, is he well?’ mademoiselle, is he quite well?’

‘Oh, yes,’ she answered, and broke into smiles of merriment, and then seemed to bite her underlip. ’He is our fun-maker. He must always be well. I owe to him some of my English. You are his son? you were for Sarkeld? You will see him up at our Bella Vista. Quick, let us run.’

She put her pony to a canter up the brown path between the fir-trees, crying that she should take our breath; but we were tight runners, and I, though my heart beat wildly, was full of fire to reach the tower on the height; so when she slackened her pace, finding us close on her pony’s hoofs, she laughed and called us brave boys. Temple’s being no more than my friend, who had made the expedition with me out of friendship, surprised her. Not that she would not have expected it to be done by Germans; further she was unable to explain her astonishment.

At a turning of the ascent she pointed her whip at the dark knots and lines of the multitude mounting by various paths to behold the ceremony of unveiling the monument.

I besought her to waste no time.

‘You must, if you please, attend my pleasure, if I guide you,’ she said, tossing her chin.

‘I thank you, I can’t tell you how much, mademoiselle,’ said I.

She answered: ‘You were kind to my two pet lambs, sir.’

So we moved forward.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STATUE ON THE PROMONTORY

The little lady was soon bowing to respectful salutations from crowds of rustics and others on a broad carriage-way circling level with the height. I could not help thinking how doubly foreign I was to all the world here—I who was about to set eyes on my lost living father, while these people were tip-toe to gaze on a statue. But as my father might also be taking an interest in the statue, I got myself round to a moderate sentiment of curiosity and a partial

Page 1961

share of the general excitement. Temple and mademoiselle did most of the conversation, which related to glimpses of scenery, pine, oak, beech-wood, and lake-water, until we gained the plateau where the tower stood, when the giant groom trotted to the front, and worked a clear way for us through a mass of travelling sight-seers, and she leaned to me, talking quite inaudibly amid the laughter and chatting. A band of wind instruments burst out. 'This is glorious!' I conceived Temple to cry like an open-mouthed mute. I found it inspiriting.

The rush of pride and pleasure produced by the music was irresistible. We marched past the tower, all of us, I am sure, with splendid feelings. A stone's throw beyond it was the lofty tent; over it drooped a flag, and flags were on poles round a wide ring of rope guarded by foresters and gendarmes, mounted and afoot. The band, dressed in green, with black plumes to their hats, played in the middle of the ring. Outside were carriages, and ladies and gentlemen on horseback, full of animation; rustics, foresters, town and village people, men, women, and children, pressed against the ropes. It was a day of rays of sunshine, now from off one edge, now from another of large slow clouds, so that at times we and the tower were in a blaze; next the lake-palace was illuminated, or the long grey lake and the woods of pine and of bare brown twigs making bays in it.

Several hands beckoned on our coming in sight of the carriages. 'There he is, then!' I thought; and it was like swallowing my heart in one solid lump. Mademoiselle had free space to trot ahead of us. We saw a tall-sitting lady, attired in sables, raise a finger to her, and nip her chin. Away the little lady flew to a second carriage, and on again, as one may when alive with an inquiry. I observed to Temple, 'I wonder whether she says in her German, "It is my question"; do you remember?' There was no weight whatever in what I said or thought.

She rode back, exclaiming, 'Nowhere. He is nowhere, and nobody knows. He will arrive. But he is not yet. Now,' she bent coaxingly down to me, 'can you not a few words of German? Only a smallest sum! It is the Markgrafin, my good aunt, would speak wid you, and she can no English-only she is eager to behold you, and come! You will know, for my sake, some scrap of German—ja? You will—nicht wahr? Or French? Make your glom-pudding of it, will you?'

I made a shocking plum-pudding of it. Temple was no happier.

The margravine, a fine vigorous lady with a lively mouth and livelier eyes of a restless grey that rarely dwelt on you when she spoke, and constantly started off on a new idea, did me the honour to examine me, much as if I had offered myself for service in her corps of grenadiers, and might do in time, but was decreed to be temporarily wanting in manly proportions.

She smiled a form of excuse of my bungling half-English horrid French, talked over me and at me, forgot me, and recollected me, all within a minute, and fished poor Temple

for intelligible replies to incomprehensible language in the same manner, then threw her head back to gather the pair of us in her sight, then eyed me alone.

Page 1962

‘C’est peut-etre le fils de son petit papa, et c’est tout dire.’

Such was her summary comment.

But not satisfied with that, she leaned out of the carriage, and, making an extraordinary grimace appear the mother in labour of the difficult words, said, ‘Doos yo’ laff?’

There was no helping it: I laughed like a madman, giving one outburst and a dead stop.

Far from looking displeased, she nodded. I was again put to the dreadful test.

‘Can yo’ mak’ laff?’

It spurred my wits. I had no speech to ‘mak’ laff’ with. At the very instant of my dilemma I chanced to see a soberly-clad old townsman hustled between two helpless women of the crowd, his pipe in his mouth, and his hat, wig, and handkerchief sliding over his face, showing his bald crown, and he not daring to cry out, for fear his pipe should be trodden under foot.

‘He can, your Highness.’

Her quick eyes caught the absurd scene. She turned to one of her ladies and touched her forehead. Her hand was reached out to me; Temple she patted on the shoulder.

‘He can—ja: du auch.’

A grand gentleman rode up. They whispered, gazed at the tent, and appeared to speak vehemently. All the men’s faces were foreign: none of them had the slightest resemblance to my father’s. I fancied I might detect him disguised. I stared vainly. Temple, to judge by the expression of his features, was thinking. Yes, thought I, we might as well be at home at old Riversley, that distant spot! We ’re as out of place here as frogs in the desert!

Riding to and fro, and chattering, and commotion, of which the margravine was the centre, went on, and the band played beautiful waltzes. The workmen in and out of the tent were full of their business, like seamen under a storm.

‘Fraulein Sibley,’ the margravine called.

I hoped it might be an English name. So it proved to be; and the delight of hearing English spoken, and, what was more, having English ears to speak to, was blissful as the leap to daylight out of a nightmare.

‘I have the honour to be your countrywoman,’ said a lady, English all over to our struggling senses.

We became immediately attached to her as a pair of shipwrecked boats lacking provender of every sort are taken in tow by a well-stored vessel. She knew my father, knew him intimately. I related all I had to tell, and we learnt that we had made acquaintance with her pupil, the Princess Ottilia Wilhelmina Frederika Hedwig, only child of the Prince of Eppenwelzen.

’Your father will certainly be here; he is generally the margravine’s right hand, and it’s wonderful the margravine can do without him so long,’ said Miss Sibley, and conversed with the margravine; after which she informed me that she had been graciously directed to assure me my father would be on the field when the cannon sounded.

Page 1963

‘Perhaps you know nothing of Court life?’ she resumed. ’We have very curious performances in Sarkeld, and we owe it to the margravine that we are frequently enlivened. You see the tall gentleman who is riding away from her. I mean the one with the black hussar jacket and thick brown moustache. That is the prince. Do you not think him handsome? He is very kind—rather capricious; but that is a way with princes. Indeed, I have no reason to complain. He has lost his wife, the Princess Frederika, and depends upon his sister the margravine for amusement. He has had it since she discovered your papa.’

‘Is the gun never going off?’ I groaned.

‘If they would only conduct their ceremonies without their guns!’ exclaimed Miss Sibley. ’The origin of the present ceremony is this: the margravine wished to have a statue erected to an ancestor, a renowned soldier—and I would infinitely prefer talking of England. But never mind. Oh, you won’t understand what you gaze at. Well, the prince did not care to expend the money. Instead of urging that as the ground of his refusal, he declared there were no sculptors to do justice to Prince Albrecht Wohlgemuth, and one could not rely on their effecting a likeness. We have him in the dining-hall; he was strikingly handsome. Afterward he pretended—I’m speaking now of the existing Prince Ernest—that it would be ages before the statue was completed. One day the margravine induced him to agree to pay the sum stipulated for by the sculptor, on condition of the statue being completed for public inspection within eight days of the hour of their agreement. The whole Court was witness to it. They arranged for the statue, horse and man, to be exhibited for a quarter of an hour. Of course, the margravine did not signify it would be a perfectly finished work. We are kept at a great distance, that we may not scrutinize it too closely. They unveil it to show she has been as good as her word, and then cover it up to fix the rider to the horse,—a screw is employed, I imagine. For one thing we know about it, we know that the horse and the horseman travelled hither separately. In all probability, the margravine gave the order for the statue last autumn in Berlin. Now look at the prince. He has his eye on you. Look down. Now he has forgotten you. He is impatient to behold the statue. Our chief fear is that the statue will not maintain its balance. Fortunately, we have plenty of guards to keep the people from pushing against it. If all turns out well, I shall really say the margravine has done wonders. She does not look anxious; but then she is not one ever to show it. The prince does. Every other minute he is glancing at the tent and at his watch. Can you guess my idea? Your father’s absence leads me to think-oh! only a passing glimmer of an idea—the statue has not arrived, and he is bringing it on. Otherwise, he would be sure to be here. The margravine beckons me.’

Page 1964

‘Don’t go!’ we cried simultaneously.

The Princess Ottilia supplied her place.

’I have sent to our stables for two little pretty Hungarian horses for you two to ride,’ she said. ’No, I have not yet seen him. He is asked for, and de Markgrafin knows not at all. He bades in our lake; he has been seen since. The man is exciteable; but he is so sensible. Oh, no. And he is full of laughter. We shall soon see him. Would he not ever be cautious of himself for a son like you?’

Her compliment raised a blush on me.

The patience of the people was creditable to their phlegm. The smoke of pipes curling over the numberless heads was the most stirring thing about them.

Temple observed to me,

‘We’ll give the old statue a British cheer, won’t we, Richie?’

‘After coming all the way from England!’ said I, in dejection.

’No, no, Richie; you’re sure of him now. He ’s somewhere directing affairs, I suspect. I say, do let us show them we can ring out the right tune upon occasion. By jingo! there goes a fellow with a match.’

We saw the cannonier march up to the margravine’s carriage for orders. She summoned the prince to her side. Ladies in a dozen carriages were standing up, handkerchief in hand, and the gentlemen got their horses’ heads on a line. Temple counted nearly sixty persons of quality stationed there. The workmen were trooping out of the tent.

Miss Sibley ran to us, saying,—

’The gun-horror has been commanded. Now then: the prince can scarcely contain himself. The gunner is ready near his gun; he has his frightful match lifted. See, the manager-superintendent is receiving the margravine’s last injunctions. How firm women’s nerves are! Now the margravine insists on the prince’s reading the exact time by her watch. Everybody is doing it. Let us see. By my watch it is all but fifteen minutes to eleven, A.M. Dearest,’ she addressed the little princess; ‘would you not like to hold my hand until the gun is fired?’

‘Dearest,’ replied the princess, whether in childish earnest or irony I could not divine, ‘if I would hold a hand it would be a gentleman’s.’

All eyes were on the Prince of Eppenwelzen, as he gazed toward the covered statue. With imposing deliberation his hand rose to his hat. We saw the hat raised. The cannon was fired and roared; the band struck up a pompous slow march: and the tent-veil broke apart and rolled off. It was like the dawn flying and sunrise mounting.

I confess I forgot all thought of my father for awhile; the shouts of the people, the braying of the brass instruments, the ladies cheering sweetly, the gentlemen giving short, hearty expressions of applause, intoxicated me. And the statue was superb-horse and rider in new bronze polished by sunlight.

Page 1965

‘It is life-like! it is really noble! it is a true Prince!’ exclaimed Miss Sibley. She translated several exclamations of the ladies and gentlemen in German: they were entirely to the same effect. The horse gave us a gleam of his neck as he pawed a forefoot, just reined in. We knew him; he was a gallant horse; but it was the figure of the Prince Albrecht that was so fine. I had always laughed at sculptured figures on horseback. This one overawed me. The Marshal was acknowledging the salute of his army after a famous victory over the infidel Turks. He sat upright, almost imperceptibly but effectively bending his head in harmony with the curve of his horse’s neck, and his baton swept the air low in proud submission to the honours cast on him by his acclaiming soldiery. His three-cornered lace hat, curled wig, heavy-trimmed surcoat, and high boots, reminded me of Prince Eugene. No Prince Eugene—nay, nor Marlborough, had such a martial figure, such an animated high old warrior’s visage. The bronze features reeked of battle.

Temple and I felt humiliated (without cause, I granted) at the success of a work of Art that struck us as a new military triumph of these Germans, and it was impossible not to admire it. The little Princess Ottilia clapped hands by fits. What words she addressed to me I know not. I dealt out my stock of German—’Ja, ja—to her English. We were drawn by her to congratulate the margravine, whose hand was then being kissed by the prince: he did it most courteously and affectionately. Other gentlemen, counts and barons, bowed over her hand. Ladies, according to their rank and privileges, saluted her on the cheek or in some graceful fashion. When our turn arrived, Miss Sibley translated for us, and as we were at concert pitch we did not acquit ourselves badly. Temple’s remark was, that he wished she and all her family had been English. Nothing was left for me to say but that the margravine almost made us wish we had been German.

Smiling cordially, the margravine spoke, Miss Sibley translated:

‘Her Royal Highness asks you if you have seen your father?’

I shook my head.

The Princess Ottilia translated, ’Her Highness, my good aunt, would know, would you know him, did you see him?’

‘Yes, anywhere,’ I cried.

The margravine pushed me back with a gesture.

‘Yes, your Highness, on my honour; anywhere on earth!’

She declined to hear the translation.

Her insulting disbelief in my ability to recognize the father I had come so far to embrace would have vexed me but for the wretched thought that I was losing him again. We threaded the carriages; gazed at the horsemen in a way to pierce the hair on their faces. The little princess came on us hurriedly.

'Here, see, are the horses. I will you to mount. Are they not pretty animals?' She whispered, 'I believe your fater have been hurt in his mind by something. It is only perhaps. Now mount, for de Markgrafin says you are our good guests.'

Page 1966

We mounted simply to show that we could mount, for we would rather have been on foot, and drew up close to the right of the margravine's carriage.

'Hush! a poet is reading his ode,' said the princess. 'It is Count Fretzel von Wolfenstein.'

This ode was dreadful to us, and all the Court people pretended they liked it. When he waved his right hand toward the statue there was a shout from the rustic set; when he bowed to the margravine, the ladies and gentlemen murmured agreeably and smiled. We were convinced of its being downright hypocrisy, rustic stupidity, Court flattery. We would have argued our case, too. I proposed a gallop; Temple said,

'No, we'll give the old statue our cheer as soon as this awful fellow has done. I don't care much for poetry, but don't let me ever have to stand and hear German poetry again for the remainder of my life.'

We could not imagine why they should have poetry read out to them instead of their fine band playing, but supposed it was for the satisfaction of the margravine, with whom I grew particularly annoyed on hearing Miss Sibley say she conceived her Highness to mean that my father was actually on the ground, and that we neither of us, father and son, knew one another. I swore on my honour, on my life, he was not present; and the melancholy in my heart taking the form of extreme irritation, I spoke passionately. I rose in my stirrups, ready to shout, 'Father! here's Harry Richmond come to see you. Where are you!' I did utter something—a syllable or two: 'Make haste!' I think the words were. They sprang from my inmost bosom, addressed without forethought to that drawling mouthing poet. The margravine's face met mine like a challenge. She had her lips tight in a mere lip-smile, and her eyes gleamed with provocation.

'Her Highness,' Miss Sibley translated, 'asks whether you are prepared to bet that your father is not on the ground?'

'Beg her to wait two minutes, and I'll be prepared to bet any sum,' said I.

Temple took one half the circle, I the other, riding through the attentive horsemen and carriage-lines, and making sure the face we sought was absent, more or less discomposing everybody. The poet finished his ode; he was cheered, of course. Mightily relieved, I beheld the band resuming their instruments, for the cheering resembled a senseless beating on brass shields. I felt that we English could do it better. Temple from across the sector of the circle, running about two feet in front of the statue, called aloud,

'Richie! he's not here!'

'Not here!' cried I.

The people gazed up at us, wondering at the tongue we talked.

'Richie! now let 's lead these fellows off with a tiptop cheer!'

Little Temple crowed lustily.

The head of the statue turned from Temple to me.

I found the people falling back with amazed exclamations. I—so prepossessed was I—-simply stared at the sudden-flashing white of the statue's eyes. The eyes, from being an instant ago dull carved balls, were animated. They were fixed on me. I was unable to give out a breath. Its chest heaved; both bronze hands struck against the bosom.

Page 1967

‘Richmond! my son! Richie! Harry Richmond! Richmond Roy!’

That was what the statue gave forth.

My head was like a ringing pan. I knew it was my father, but my father with death and strangeness, earth, metal, about him; and his voice was like a human cry contending with earth and metal-mine was stifled. I saw him descend. I dismounted. We met at the ropes and embraced. All his figure was stiff, smooth, cold. My arms slid on him. Each time he spoke I thought it an unnatural thing: I myself had not spoken once.

After glancing by hazard at the empty saddle of the bronze horse, I called to mind more clearly the appalling circumstance which had stupefied the whole crowd. They had heard a statue speak—had seen a figure of bronze walk. For them it was the ancestor of their prince; it was the famous dead old warrior of a hundred and seventy years ago set thus in motion. Imagine the behaviour of people round a slain tiger that does not compel them to fly, and may yet stretch out a dreadful paw! Much so they pressed for a nearer sight of its walnut visage, and shrank in the act. Perhaps I shared some of their sensations. I cannot tell: my sensations were tranced. There was no warmth to revive me in the gauntlet I clasped. I looked up at the sky, thinking that it had fallen dark.

CHAPTER XVII

MY FATHER BREATHES, MOVES, AND SPEAKS

The people broke away from us like furrowed water as we advanced on each side of the ropes toward the margravine’s carriage.

I became a perfectly mechanical creature: incapable, of observing, just capable of taking an impression here and there; and in such cases the impressions that come are stamped on hot wax; they keep the scene fresh; they partly pervert it as well. Temple’s version is, I am sure, the truer historical picture. He, however, could never repeat it twice exactly alike, whereas I failed not to render image for image in clear succession as they had struck me at the time. I could perceive that the figure of the Prince Albrecht, in its stiff condition, was debarred from vaulting, or striding, or stooping, so that the ropes were a barrier between us. I saw the little Princess Ottilia eyeing us with an absorbed comprehensive air quite unlike the manner of a child. Dots of heads, curious faces, peering and starting eyes, met my vision. I heard sharp talk in German, and a rider flung his arm, as if he wished to crash the universe, and flew off. The margravine seemed to me more an implacable parrot than a noble lady. I thought to myself: This is my father, and I am not overjoyed or grateful. In the same way, I felt that the daylight was bronze, and I did not wonder at it: nay, I reasoned on the probability of a composition of sun and mould producing that colour. The truth was, the powers of my heart and will were frozen; I thought and felt at random. And I crave excuses for

dwelling on such trifling phenomena of the sensations, which have been useful to me by helping me to realize the scene, even as at the time they obscured it.

Page 1968

According to Temple's description, when the statue moved its head toward him, a shudder went through the crowd, and a number of forefingers were levelled at it, and the head moved toward me, marked of them all. Its voice was answered by a dull puling scream from women, and the men gaped. When it descended from the saddle, the act was not performed with one bound, as I fancied, but difficultly; and it walked up to me like a figure dragging logs at its heels. Half-a-dozen workmen ran to arrest it; some townswomen fainted. There was a heavy altercation in German between the statue and the superintendent of the arrangements. The sun shone brilliantly on our march to the line of carriages where the Prince of Eppenwelzen was talking to the margravine in a fury, and he dashed away on his horse, after bellowing certain directions to his foresters and the workmen, by whom we were surrounded; while the margravine talked loudly and amiably, as though everything had gone well. Her watch was out. She acknowledged my father's bow, and overlooked him. She seemed to have made her courtiers smile. The ladies and gentlemen obeyed the wave of her hand by quitting the ground; the band headed a long line of the commoner sort, and a body of foresters gathered the remnants and joined them to the rear of the procession. A liveried groom led away Temple's horse and mine. Temple declared he could not sit after seeing the statue descend from its pedestal.

Her Highness's behaviour roughened as soon as the place was clear of company. She spoke at my father impetuously, with manifest scorn and reproach, struck her silver-mounted stick on the carriage panels, again and again stamped her foot, lifting a most variable emphatic countenance. Princess Ottilia tried to intercede. The margravine clenched her hands, and, to one not understanding her speech, appeared literally to blow the little lady off with the breath of her mouth. Her whole bearing consisted of volleys of abuse, closed by magisterial interrogations. Temple compared her Highness's language to the running out of Captain Welsh's chaincable, and my father's replies to the hauling in: his sentences were short, they sounded like manful protestations; I barely noticed them. Temple's version of it went: 'And there was your father apologizing, and the margravine rating him,' *etc*. My father, as it happened, was careful not to open his lips wide on account of the plaster, or thick coating of paint on his face. No one would have supposed that he was burning with indignation; the fact being, that to give vent to it, he would have had to exercise his muscular strength; he was plastered and painted from head to foot. The fixture of his wig and hat, too, constrained his skin, so that his looks were no index of his feelings. I longed gloomily for the moment to come when he would present himself to me in his natural form. He was not sensible of the touch of my hand, nor I of his. There we had to stand until the voluble portion of the margravine's anger came to an end. She shut her eyes and bowed curtly to our salute.

Page 1969

‘You have seen the last of me, madam,’ my father said to her whirling carriage-wheels.

He tried to shake, and strained in his ponderous garments. Temple gazed abashed. I knew not how to act. My father kept lifting his knees on the spot as if practising a walk.

The tent was in its old place covering the bronze horse. A workman stepped ahead of us, and we all went at a strange leisurely pace down the hill through tall pinetrees to where a closed vehicle awaited us. Here were also a couple of lackeys, who deposited my father on a bed of moss, and with much effort pulled his huge boots off, leaving him in red silk stockings. Temple and I snatched his gauntlets; Temple fell backward, but we had no thought of laughter; people were seen approaching, and the three of us jumped into the carriage. I had my father’s living hand in mine to squeeze; feeling him scarcely yet the living man I had sought, and with no great warmth of feeling. His hand was very moist. Often I said, ‘Dear father!—Papa, I’m so glad at last,’ in answer to his short-breathed ’Richie, my little lad, my son Richmond! You found me out; you found me!’ We were conscious that his thick case of varnished clothing was against us. One would have fancied from his way of speaking that he suffered from asthma. I was now gifted with a tenfold power of observation, and let nothing escape me.

Temple, sitting opposite, grinned cheerfully at times to encourage our spirits; he had not recovered from his wonderment, nor had I introduced him. My father, however, had caught his name. Temple (who might as well have talked, I thought) was perpetually stealing secret glances of abstracted perusal at him with a pair of round infant’s eyes, sucking his reflections the while. My father broke our silence.

‘Mr. Temple, I have the honour,’ he said, as if about to cough; ’the honour of making your acquaintance; I fear you must surrender the hope of making mine at present.’

Temple started and reddened like a little fellow detected in straying from his spelling-book, which was the window-frame. In a minute or so the fascination proved too strong for him; his eyes wandered from the window and he renewed his shy inspection bit by bit as if casting up a column of figures.

‘Yes, Mr. Temple, we are in high Germany,’ said my father.

It must have cost Temple cruel pain, for he was a thoroughly gentlemanly boy, and he could not resist it. Finally he surprised himself in his stealthy reckoning: arrived at the full-breech or buttoned waistband, about half-way up his ascent from the red silk stocking, he would pause and blink rapidly, sometimes jump and cough.

To put him at his ease, my father exclaimed, ‘As to this exterior,’ he knocked his knuckles on the heaving hard surface, ’I can only affirm that it was, on horseback—-ahem! particularly as the horse betrayed no restivity, pronounced perfect! The sole complaint of our interior concerns the resemblance we bear to a lobster. Human

somewhere, I do believe myself to be. I shall have to be relieved of my shell before I can at all satisfactorily proclaim the fact. I am a human being, believe me.'

Page 1970

He begged permission to take breath a minute.

'I know you for my son's friend, Mr. Temple: here is my son, my boy, Harry Lepel Richmond Roy. Have patience: I shall presently stand unshelled. I have much to relate; you likewise have your narrative in store. That you should have lit on me at the critical instant is one of those miracles which combine to produce overwhelming testimony—ay, Richie! without a doubt there is a hand directing our destiny.' His speaking in such a strain, out of pure kindness to Temple, huskily, with his painful attempt to talk like himself, revived his image as the father of my heart and dreams, and stirred my torpid affection, though it was still torpid enough, as may be imagined, when I state that I remained plunged in contemplation of his stocking of red silk emerging from the full bronzed breech, considering whether his comparison of himself to a shell-fish might not be a really just one. We neither of us regained our true natures until he was free of every vestige of the garb of Prince Albrecht Wohlgemuth. Attendants were awaiting him at the garden-gate of a beautiful villa partly girdled by rising fir-woods on its footing of bright green meadow. They led him away, and us to bath-rooms.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE PASS A DELIGHTFUL EVENING, AND I HAVE A MORNING VISION

In a long saloon ornamented with stags' horns and instruments of the chase, tusks of boars, spear-staves, boarknives, and silver horns, my father, I, and Temple sat down to a memorable breakfast, my father in his true form, dressed in black silken jacket and knee-breeches, purple-stockings and pumps; without a wig, I thanked heaven to see. How blithely he flung out his limbs and heaved his chest released from confinement! His face was stained brownish, but we drank old Rhine wine, and had no eye for appearances.

'So you could bear it no longer, Richie?' My father interrupted the narrative I doled out, anxious for his, and he began, and I interrupted him.

'You did think of me often, papa, didn't you?'

His eyes brimmed with tenderness.

'Think of you!' he sighed.

I gave him the account of my latest adventures in a few panting breaths, suppressing the Bench. He set my face to front him.

'We are two fools, Mr. Temple,' he said.

'No, sir,' said Temple.

‘Now you speak, papa,’ said I.

He smiled warmly.

‘Richie begins to remember me.’

I gazed at him to show it was true.

‘I do, papa—I’m not beginning to.’

At his request, I finished the tale of my life at school. ’Ah, well! that was bad fortune; this is good!’ he exclaimed. ’Tis your father, my son: ’tis day-light, though you look at it through a bed-curtain, and think you are half-dreaming. Now then for me, Richie.’

My father went on in this wise excitedly:

Page 1971

’I was laying the foundation of your fortune here, my boy. Heavens! when I was in that bronze shell I was astonished only at my continence in not bursting. You have grown, —you have shot up and filled out. I register my thanks to your grandfather Beltham; the same, in a minor degree, to Captain Jasper Welsh. Between that man Rippenger and me there shall be dealings. He flogged you: let that pass. He exposed you to the contempt of your school-fellows because of a breach in my correspondence with a base-born ferule-swinger. What are we coming to? Richie, my son, I was building a future for you here. And Colonel Goodwin-Colonel Goodwin, you encountered him too, and his marriageable daughter—I owe it to them that I have you here! Well, in the event of my sitting out the period this morning as the presentment of Prince Albrecht, I was to have won something would have astonished that unimpressionable countryman of ours. Goodness gracious, my boy! when I heard your English shout, it went to my marrow. Could they expect me to look down on my own flesh and blood, on my son—-my son Richmond—after a separation of years, and continue a statue? Nay, I followed my paternal impulse. Grant that the show was spoilt, does the Markgrafin insist on my having a bronze heart to carry on her pastime? Why, naturally, I deplore a failure, let the cause be what it will. Whose regrets can eclipse those of the principal actor? Quotha! as our old Plays have it. Regrets? Did I not for fifteen minutes and more of mortal time sit in view of a multitude, motionless, I ask you, like a chiselled block of stone,—and the compact was one quarter of an hour, and no farther? That was my stipulation. I told her—I can hold out one quarter of an hour: I pledged myself to it. Who, then, is to blame? I was exposed to view twenty-three minutes, odd seconds. Is there not some ancient story of a monstrous wretch baked in his own bull? My situation was as bad. If I recollect aright, he could roar; no such relief was allowed to me. And I give you my word, Richie, lads both, that while that most infernal Count Fretzel was pouring forth his execrable humdrum, I positively envied the privilege of an old palsied fellow, chief boatman of the forest lake, for, thinks I, hang him! he can nod his head and I can not. Let me assure you, twenty minutes of an ordeal like that,—one posture, mind you, no raising of your eyelids, taking your breath mechanically, and your heart beating —jumping like an enraged balletdancer boxed in your bosom—a literal description, upon my honour; and not only jumping, jumping every now and then, I may say, with a toe in your throat: I was half-choked:—well, I say, twenty minutes, twenty-seven minutes and a half of that, getting on, in fact, to half-an-hour, it is superhuman!—by heavens, it is heroical!

Page 1972

And observe my reward: I have a son—my only one. I have been divided from him for years; I am establishing his fortune; I know he is provided with comforts: Richie, you remember the woman Waddy? A faithful soul! She obtained my consent at last—-previously I had objections; in fact, your address was withheld from the woman—to call at your school. She saw Rippenger, a girl of considerable attractions. She heard you were located at Riversley: I say, I know the boy is comfortably provided for; but we have been separated since he was a little creature with curls on his forehead, scarce breeched.'

I protested:

'Papa, I have been in jacket and trousers I don't know how long.'

'Let me pursue,' said my father. 'And to show you, Richie, it is a golden age ever when you and I are together, and ever shall be till we lose our manly spirit, and we cling to that,—till we lose our princely spirit, which we never will abandon—perish rather!—I drink to you, and challenge you; and, mind you, old Hock wine has charms. If Burgundy is the emperor of wines, Hock is the empress. For youngsters, perhaps, I should except the Hock that gets what they would fancy a trifle pique, turned with age, so as to lose in their opinion its empress flavour.'

Temple said modestly: 'I should call that the margravine of wines.'

My father beamed on him with great approving splendour. 'Join us, Mr. Temple; you are a man of wit, and may possibly find this specimen worthy of you. This wine has a history. You are drinking wine with blood in it. Well, I was saying, the darling of my heart has been torn from me; I am in a foreign land; foreign, that is, by birth, and on the whole foreign. Yes!—I am the cynosure of eyes; I am in a singular posture, a singular situation; I hear a cry in the tongue of my native land, and what I presume is my boy's name: I look, I behold him, I follow a parent's impulse. On my soul! none but a fish-father could have stood against it.

Well, for this my reward is—and I should have stepped from a cathedral spire just the same, if I had been mounted on it—that I, I,—and the woman knows all my secret—I have to submit to the foul tirade of a vixen.

She drew language, I protest, from the slums. And I entreat you, Mr. Temple, with your "margravine of wines"—which was very neatly said, to be sure—note you this curious point for the confusion of Radicals in your after life; her Highness's pleasure was to lend her tongue to the language—or something like it—of a besotted fish-wife; so! very well, and just as it is the case with that particular old Hock you youngsters would disapprove of, and we cunning oldsters know to contain more virtues in maturity than a nunnery of May-blooming virgins, just so the very faults of a royal lady-royal by birth and in temper a termagant—impart a perfume! a flavour! You must age; you must live in Courts, you

must sound the human bosom, rightly to appreciate it. She is a woman of the most malicious fine wit imaginable.

Page 1973

She is a generous woman, a magnanimous woman; wear her chains and she will not brain you with her club. She is the light, the centre of every society where she appears, like what shall I say? like the moon in a bowl of old Rhenish. And you will drain that bowl to the bottom to seize her, as it were—catch a correct idea of her; ay, and your brains are drowned in the attempt. Yes, Richie; I was aware of your residence at Riversley. Were you reminded of your wandering dada on Valentine's day? Come, my boy, we have each of us a thousand things to relate. I may be dull—I do not understand what started you on your journey in search of me. An impulse? An accident? Say, a directing angel! We rest our legs here till evening, and then we sup. You will be astonished to hear that you have dined. 'Tis the fashion with the Germans. I promise you good wine shall make it up to you for the return to school-habits. We sup, and we pack our scanty baggage, and we start tonight. Brook no insult at Courts if you are of material value: if not, it is unreservedly a question whether you like kickings.'

My father paused, yawned and stretched, to be rid of the remainder of his aches and stiffness. Out of a great yawn he said:

'Dear lads, I have fallen into the custom of the country; I crave your permission that I may smoke. Wander, if you choose, within hail of me, or sit by me, if you can bear it, and talk of your school-life, and your studies. Your aunt Dorothy, Richie? She is well? I know not her like. I could bear to hear of any misfortune but that she suffered pain.

My father smoked his cigar peacefully. He had laid a guitar on his knees, and flipped a string, or chafed over all the strings, and plucked and thrummed them as his mood varied. We chatted, and watched the going down of the sun, and amused ourselves idly, fermenting as we were. Anything that gave pleasure to us two boys pleased and at once occupied my father. It was without aid from Temple's growing admiration of him that I recovered my active belief and vivid delight in his presence. My younger days sprang up beside me like brothers. No one talked, looked, flashed, frowned, beamed, as he did! had such prompt liveliness as he! such tenderness! No one was ever so versatile in playfulness. He took the colour of the spirits of the people about him. His vivacious or sedate man-of-the-world tone shifted to playfellow's fun in a twinkling. I used as a little fellow to think him larger than he really was, but he was of good size, inclined to be stout; his eyes were grey, rather prominent, and his forehead sloped from arched eyebrows. So conversational were his eyes and brows that he could persuade you to imagine he was carrying on a dialogue without opening his mouth. His voice was charmingly clear; his laughter confident, fresh, catching, the outburst of his very self, as laughter should be. Other sounds of laughter were like echoes.

Page 1974

Strange to say, I lost the links of my familiarity with him when he left us on a short visit to his trunks and portmanteaux, and had to lean on Temple, who tickled but rejoiced me by saying: 'Richie, your father is just the one I should like to be secretary to.'

We thought it a pity to have to leave this nice foreign place immediately. I liked the scenery, and the wine, and what I supposed to be the habit of the gentlemen here to dress in silks. On my father's return to us I asked him if we could not stay till morning.

'Till morning, then,' he said: 'and to England with the first lark.'

His complexion was ruddier; his valet had been at work to restore it; he was getting the sanguine hue which coloured my recollection of him. Wearing a black velvet cap and a Spanish furred cloak, he led us over the villa. In Sarkeld he resided at the palace, and generally at the lake-palace on the removal of the Court thither. The margravine had placed the villa, which was her own property, at his disposal, the better to work out their conspiracy.

'It would have been mine!' said my father, bending suddenly to my ear, and humming his philosophical 'heigho,' as he stepped on in minuet fashion. We went through apartments rich with gilded oak and pine panellings: in one was a rough pattern of a wooden horse opposite a mirror; by no means a figure of a horse, but apparently a number of pieces contributed by a carpenter's workshop, having a rueful seat in the middle. My father had practised the attitude of Prince Albrecht Wohlgemuth on it. 'She timed me five and twenty minutes there only yesterday,' he said; and he now supposed he had sat the bronze horse as a statue in public view exactly thirty-seven minutes and a quarter. Tubs full of colouring liquid to soak the garments of the prince, pots of paint, and paint and plaster brushes, hinted the magnitude of the preparations.

'Here,' said my father in another apartment, 'I was this morning apparelled at seven o'clock: and I would have staked my right arm up to the collar-bone on the success of the undertaking!'

'Weren't they sure to have found it out in the end, papa?' I inquired.

'I am not so certain of that,' he rejoined: 'I cannot quaff consolation from that source. I should have been covered up after exhibition; I should have been pronounced imperfect in my fitting-apparatus; the sculptor would have claimed me, and I should have been enjoying the fruits of a brave and harmless conspiracy to do honour to an illustrious prince, while he would have been moulding and casting an indubitable bronze statue in my image. A fig for rumours! We show ourself; we are caught from sight; we are again on show. Now this being successfully done, do you see, Royalty declines to listen to vulgar tattle. Presumably, Richie, it was suspected by the Court that the margravine had many months ago commanded the statue at her own cost, and had set her mind on winning back

Page 1975

the money. The wonder of it was my magnificent resemblance to the defunct. I sat some three hours before the old warrior's portraits in the dining-saloon of the lake-palace. Accord me one good spell of meditation over a tolerable sketch, I warrant myself to represent him to the life, provided that he was a personage: I incline to stipulate for handsome as well. On my word of honour as a man and a gentleman, I pity the margravine—my poor good Frau Feldmarschall! Now, here, Richie,'—my father opened a side-door out of an elegant little room into a spacious dark place, 'here is her cabinet-theatre, where we act German and French comediettas in Spring and Autumn. I have superintended it during the two or more years of my stay at the Court. Humph! 'tis over.'

He abruptly closed the door. His dress belonged to the part of a Spanish nobleman, personated by him in a Play called The Hidalgo Enraged, he said, pointing a thumb over his shoulder at the melancholy door, behind which gay scenes had sparkled.

'Papa!' said I sadly, for consolation.

'You're change for a sovereign to the amount of four hundred and forty-nine thousand shillings every time you speak!' cried he, kissing my forehead.

He sparkled in good earnest on hearing that I had made acquaintance with the little Princess Ottilia. What I thought of her, how she looked at me, what I said to her, what words she answered, how the acquaintance began, who were observers of it,—I had to repair my omission to mention her by furnishing a precise description of the circumstances, describing her face and style, repeating her pretty English.

My father nodded: he thought I exaggerated that foreign English of hers; but, as I said, I was new to it and noticed it. He admitted the greater keenness of attention awakened by novelty.

'Only,' said he, 'I rather wonder—' and here he smiled at me inquiringly. ''Tis true,' he added, 'a boy of fourteen or fifteen—ay, Richie, have your fun out. A youngster saw the comic side of her. Do you know, that child has a remarkable character? Her disposition is totally unfathomable. You are a deep reader of English poetry, I hope; she adores it, and the English Navy. She informed me that if she had been the English people she would have made Nelson king. The Royal family of England might see objections to that, I told her. Cries she: "Oh! anything for a sea-hero." You will find these young princes and princesses astonishingly revolutionary when they entertain brains. Now at present, just at present, an English naval officer, and a poet, stand higher in the esteem of that young Princess Ottilia than dukes, kings, or emperors. So you have seen her!' my father ejaculated musingly, and hummed, and said: 'By the way, we must be careful not to offend our grandpapa Beltham, Richie. Good acres—good anchorage; good coffers—good harbourage. Regarding poetry, my dear boy, you ought to be writing it, for I do—the diversion of leisure hours, impromptus. In poetry, I would scorn anything

but impromptus. I was saying, Richie, that if tremendous misfortune withholds from you your legitimate prestige, you must have the substantial element. 'Tis your springboard to vault by, and cushions on the other side if you make a miss and fall. 'Tis the essence if you have not the odour.'

Page 1976

I followed my father's meaning as the shadow of a bird follows it in sunlight; it made no stronger an impression than a flying shadow on the grass; still I could verify subsequently that I had penetrated him—I had caught the outline of his meaning—-though I was little accustomed to his manner of communicating his ideas: I had no notion of what he touched on with the words, prestige, essence, and odour.

My efforts to gather the reason for his having left me neglected at school were fruitless. 'Business, business! sad necessity! hurry, worry-the-hounds!' was his nearest approach to an explicit answer; and seeing I grieved his kind eyes, I abstained. Nor did I like to defend Mr. Rippenger for expecting to be paid. We came to that point once or twice, when so sharply wronged did he appear, and vehement and indignant, that I banished thoughts which marred my luxurious contentment in hearing him talk and sing, and behave in his old ways and new habits.

Plain velvet was his dress at dinner. We had a yellow Hock. Temple's meditative face over it, to discover the margravine, or something, in its flavour, was a picture. It was an evening of incessant talking; no telling of events straightforwardly, but all by fits—all here and there. My father talked of Turkey, so I learnt he had been in that country; Temple of the routine of our life at Riversley; I of Kiomi, the gipsy girl; then we two of Captain Jasper Welsh; my father of the Princess Ottilia. When I alluded to the margravine, he had a word to say of Mrs. Waddy; so I learnt she had been in continual correspondence with him, and had cried heavily about me, poor soul. Temple laughed out a recollection of Captain Bulsted's 'hic, haec, hoc'; I jumped Janet Ilchester up on the table; my father expatiated on the comfort of a volume of Shakespeare to an exiled Englishman. We drank to one another, and heartily to the statue. My father related the history of the margravine's plot in duck-and-drake skips, and backward to his first introduction to her at some Austrian Baths among the mountains. She wanted amusement—he provided it; she never let him quit her sight from that moment.

'And now,' he said, 'she has lost me!' He drew out of his pocket-book a number of designs for the statue of Prince Albrecht, to which the margravine's initials were appended, and shuffled them, and sighed, and said:'Most complete arrangements! most complete! No body of men were ever so well drilled as those fellows up at Bella Vista—could not have been! And at the climax, in steps the darling boy for whom I laboured and sweated, and down we topple incontinently! Nothing would have shaken me but the apparition of my son! I was proof against everything but that! I sat invincible for close upon an hour—call it an hour! Not a muscle of me moved: I repeat, the heart in my bosom capered like an independent organ; had it all its own way, leaving me mine, until Mr. Temple, take my word for it, there is a guiding

Page 1977

hand in some families; believe it, and be serene in adversity. The change of life at a merry Court to life in a London alley will exercise our faith. But the essential thing is that Richie has been introduced here, and I intend him to play a part here. The grandson and heir of one of the richest commoners in England—I am not saying commoner as a term of reproach—possessed of a property that turns itself over and doubles itself every ten years, may—mind you, may—on such a solid foundation as that!—and as to birth, your Highness has only to grant us a private interview.'

Temple was dazed by this mystifying address to him; nor could I understand it.

'Why, papa, you always wished for me to go into Parliament,' said I.

'I do,' he replied, 'and I wish you to lead the London great world. Such topics are for by-and-by. Adieu to them!' He kissed his wafting finger-tips.

We fell upon our random talk again with a merry rattle.

I had to give him a specimen of my piano-playing and singing.

He shook his head. 'The cricketer and the scholar have been developed at the expense of the musician; and music, Richie, music unlocks the chamber of satinrose.'

Late at night we separated. Temple and I slept in companion-rooms. Deadly drowsy, the dear little fellow sat on the edge of my bed chattering of his wonder. My dreams led me wandering with a ship's diver under the sea, where we walked in a light of pearls and exploded old wrecks. I was assuring the glassy man that it was almost as clear beneath the waves as above, when I awoke to see my father standing over me in daylight; and in an ecstasy I burst into sobs.

'Here, Richie'—he pressed fresh violets on my nostrils—'you have had a morning visitor. Quick out of bed, and you will see the little fairy crossing the meadow.'

I leapt to the window in time to have in view the little Princess Ottilia, followed by her faithful gaunt groom, before she was lost in the shadow of the fir-trees.

CHAPTER XIX

OUR RETURN HOMEWARD

We started for England at noon, much against my secret wishes; but my father would not afford the margravine time to repent of her violent language and injustice toward him. Reflection increased his indignation. Anything that went wrong on the first stages of the journey caused him to recapitulate her epithets and reply to them proudly. He confided to me in Cologne Cathedral that the entire course of his life was a grand plot,

resembling an unfinished piece of architecture, which might, at a future day, prove the wonder of the world: and he had, therefore, packed two dozen of hoar old (uralt: he used comical German) Hock for a present to my grandfather Beltham, in the hope of its being found acceptable.

Page 1978

‘For, Richie,’ said he, ’you may not know—and it is not to win your thanks I inform you of it—that I labour unremittingly in my son’s interests. I have established him, on his majority, in Germany, at a Court. My object now is to establish him in England. Promise me that it shall be the decided endeavour of your energies and talents to rise to the height I point out to you? You promise, I perceive,’ he added, sharp in detecting the unpleasant predicament of a boy who is asked to speak priggishly. So then I could easily promise with a firm voice. He dropped certain explosive hints, which reminded me of the funny ideas of my state and greatness I had when a child. I shrugged at them; I cared nothing for revelations to come by-and-by. My object was to unite my father and grandfather on terms of friendship.

This was the view that now absorbed and fixed my mind. To have him a frequent visitor at Riversley, if not a resident in the house, enlivening them all, while I, perhaps, trifled a cavalry sabre, became one of my settled dreams. The difficult part of the scheme appeared to me the obtaining of my father’s consent. I mentioned it, and he said immediately that he must have his freedom. ‘Now, for instance,’ said he, ’what is my desire at this moment? I have always a big one perched on a rock in the distance; but I speak of my present desire. And let it be supposed that the squire is one of us: we are returning to England. Well, I want to show you a stork’s nest. We are not far enough South for the stork to build here. It is a fact, Richie, that I do want to show you the bird for luck, and as a feature of the country. And in me, a desire to do a thing partakes of the impetus of steam.

Well, you see we are jogging home to England. I resist myself for duty’s sake: that I can do. But if the squire were here with his yea and his nay, by heavens! I should be off to the top of the Rhine like a tornado. I submit to circumstances: I cannot, and I will not, be dictated to by men.’

‘That seems to me rather unreasonable,’ I remonstrated.

‘It is; I am ashamed of it,’ he answered. ’Do as you will, Richie; set me down at Riversley, but under no slight, mark you. I keep my honour intact, like a bottled cordial; my unfailing comfort in adversity! I hand it to you, my son, on my death-bed, and say, “You have there the essence of my life. Never has it been known of me that I swallowed an insult.”’

‘Then, papa, I shall have a talk with the squire.’

‘Make good your ground in the castle,’ said he. ’I string a guitar outside. You toss me a key from the walls. If there is room, and I have leisure, I enter. If not, you know I am paving your way in other quarters. Riversley, my boy, is an excellent foothold and fortress: Riversley is not the world. At Riversley I should have to wear a double face, and, egad! a double stomach-bag, like young Jack feeding with the giant—one full of ambition, the other of provender. That place is our touchstone to discover whether we

have prudence. We have, I hope. And we will have, Mr. Temple, a pleasant day or two in Paris.'

Page 1979

It was his habit to turn off the bent of these conversations by drawing Temple into them. Temple declared there was no feeling we were in a foreign country while he was our companion. We simply enjoyed strange scenes, looking idly out of our windows. Our recollection of the strangest scene ever witnessed filled us with I know not what scornful pleasure, and laughed in the background at any sight or marvel pretending to amuse us. Temple and I cantered over the great Belgian battlefield, talking of Bella Vista tower, the statue, the margravine, our sour milk and black-bread breakfast, the little Princess Ottilia, with her 'It is my question,' and 'You were kind to my lambs, sir,' thoughtless of glory and dead bones. My father was very differently impressed. He was in an exultant glow, far outmatching the bloom on our faces when we rejoined him. I cried,

'Papa, if the prince won't pay for a real statue, I will, and I'll present it in your name!'

'To the nation?' cried he, staring, and arresting his arm in what seemed an orchestral movement.

'To the margravine!'

He heard, but had to gather his memory. He had been fighting the battle, and made light of Bella Vista. I found that incidents over which a day or two had rolled lost their features to him. He never smiled at recollections. If they were forced on him noisily by persons he liked, perhaps his face was gay, but only for a moment. The gaiety of his nature drew itself from hot-springs of hopefulness: our arrival in England, our interviews there, my majority Burgundy, my revisitation of Germany—these events to come gave him the aspect children wear out a-Maying or in an orchard. He discussed the circumstances connected with the statue as dry matter-of-fact, and unless it was his duty to be hilarious at the dinner-table, he was hardly able to respond to a call on his past life and mine. His future, too, was present tense: 'We do this,' not 'we will do this'; so that, generally, no sooner did we speak of an anticipated scene than he was acting in it. I studied him eagerly, I know, and yet quite unconsciously, and I came to no conclusions. Boys are always putting down the ciphers of their observations of people beloved by them, but do not add up a sum total.

Our journey home occupied nearly eleven weeks, owing to stress of money on two occasions. In Brussels I beheld him with a little beggar-girl in his arms.

'She has asked me for a copper coin, Richie,' he said, squeezing her fat cheeks to make cherries of her lips.

I recommended him to give her a silver one.

'Something, Richie, I must give the little wench, for I have kissed her, and, in my list of equivalents, gold would be the sole form of repayment after that. You must buy me off with honour, my boy.'

I was compelled to receive a dab from the child’s nose, by way of a kiss, in return for buying him off with honour.

Page 1980

The child stumped away on the pavement fronting our hotel, staring at its fist that held the treasure.

‘Poor pet wee drab of it!’ exclaimed my father. ’One is glad, Richie, to fill a creature out of one’s emptiness. Now she toddles; she is digesting it rapidly. The last performance of one’s purse is rarely so pleasant as that. I owe it to her that I made the discovery in time.’

In this manner I also made the discovery that my father had no further supply of money, none whatever. How it had run out without his remarking it, he could not tell; he could only assure me that he had become aware of the fact while searching vainly for a coin to bestow on the beggar-girl. I despatched a letter attested by a notary of the city, applying for money to the banker to whom Colonel Goodwin had introduced me on my arrival on the Continent. The money came, and in the meantime we had formed acquaintances and entertained them; they were chiefly half-pay English military officers, dashing men. One, a Major Dykes, my father established in our hotel, and we carried him on to Paris, where, consequent upon our hospitalities, the purse was again deficient.

Two reasons for not regretting it were adduced by my father; firstly, that it taught me not to despise the importance of possessing money; secondly, that we had served our country by assisting Dykes, who was on the scent of a new and terrible weapon of destruction, which he believed to be in the hands of the French Government. Major Dykes disappeared on the scent, but we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had done our best toward saving the Navy of Great Britain from being blown out of water. Temple and I laughed over Major Dykes, and he became our puppet for by-play, on account of his enormous whiskers, his passion for strong drinks, and his air of secresy. My father’s faith in his patriotic devotedness was sufficient to withhold me from suspicions of his character. Whenever my instinct, or common sense, would have led me to differ with my father in opinion fun supervened; I was willing that everything in the world should be as he would have it be, and took up with a spirit of laughter, too happy in having won him, in having fished him out of the deep sea at one fling of the net, as he said, to care for accuracy of sentiment in any other particular.

Our purse was at its lowest ebb; he suggested no means of replenishing it, and I thought of none. He had heard that it was possible to live in Paris upon next to nothing with very great luxury, so we tried it; we strolled through the lilac aisles among bonnes and babies, attended military spectacles, rode on omnibuses, dined on the country heights, went to theatres, and had a most pleasurable time, gaining everywhere front places, friendly smiles, kind little services, in a way that would have been incomprehensible to me but for my consciousness of the magical influence of my father’s address, a mixture of the ceremonious and the affable such as the people could not withstand.

Page 1981

‘The poet is perhaps, on the whole, more exhilarating than the alderman,’ he said.

These were the respective names given by him to the empty purse and the full purse. We vowed we preferred the poet.

‘Ay,’ said he, ’but for all that the alderman is lighter on his feet: I back him to be across the Channel first. The object of my instructions to you will be lost, Richie, if I find you despising the Alderman’s Pegasus. On money you mount. We are literally chained here, you know, there is no doubt about it; and we are adding a nail to our fetters daily. True, you are accomplishing the Parisian accent. Paris has also this immense advantage over all other cities: ’tis the central hotel on the high-road of civilization. In Paris you meet your friends to a certainty; it catches them every one in turn; so now we must abroad early and late, and cut for trumps.’ A meeting with a friend of my father, Mr. Monterez Williams, was the result of our resolute adoption of this system. He helped us on to Boulogne, where my father met another friend, to whom he gave so sumptuous a dinner that we had not money enough to pay the hotel bill.

‘Now observe the inconvenience of leaving Paris,’ said he. ’Ten to one we shall have to return. We will try a week’s whistling on the jetty; and if no luck comes, and you will admit, Richie—Mr. Temple, I call your attention to it—that luck will scarcely come in profuse expedition through the narrow neck of a solitary seaport, why, we must return to Paris.’

I proposed to write to my aunt Dorothy for money, but he would not hear of that. After two or three days of whistling, I saw my old friend, Mr. Bannerbridge, step out of the packetboat. On condition of my writing to my aunt to say that I was coming home, he advanced me the sum we were in need of, grudgingly though, and with the prediction that we should break down again, which was verified. It occurred only a stage from Riversley, where my grandfather’s name was good as coin of the realm. Besides, my father remained at the inn to guarantee the payment of the bill, while Temple and I pushed on in a fly with the two dozen of Hock. It could hardly be called a break-down, but my father was not unwilling for me to regard it in that light. Among his parting remarks was an impressive adjuration to me to cultivate the squire’s attachment at all costs.

‘Do this,’ he said, ’and I shall know that the lesson I have taught you on your journey homeward has not been thrown away. My darling boy! my curse through life has been that the sense of weight in money is a sense I am and was born utterly a stranger to. The consequence is, my grandest edifices fall; there is no foundation for them. Not that I am worse, understand me, than under a temporary cloud, and the blessing of heaven has endowed me with a magnificent constitution. Heaven forefend that I should groan for myself, or you for me! But digest what you have learnt, Richie; press nothing on the squire; be guided by the advice of that esteemed and admirable woman, your aunt Dorothy. And, by the way, you may tell her confidentially of the progress of your

friendship with the Princess Ottilia. Here I shall employ my hours in a tranquil study of nature until I see you.' Thus he sped me forward.

Page 1982

We sighted Riversley about mid-day on a sunny June morning. Compared with the view from Bella Vista, our firs looked scanty, our heath-tracts dull, as places having no page of history written on them, our fresh green meadows not more than commonly homely. I was so full of my sense of triumph in my adventurous journey and the recovery of my father, that I gazed on the old Grange from a towering height. The squire was on the lawn, surrounded by a full company: the Ilchesters, the Ambroses, the Wilfords, Captain and Squire Gregory Bulsted, the Rubreys, and others, all bending to roses, to admire, smell, or pluck. Charming groups of ladies were here and there; and Temple whispered as we passed them:

‘We beat foreigners in our women, Richie.’

I, making it my business to talk with perfect unconcern, replied

‘Do you think so? Perhaps. Not in all cases’; all the while I was exulting at the sweet beams of England radiating from these dear early-morning-looking women.

My aunt Dorothy swam up to me, and, kissing me, murmured:

‘Take no rebuff from your grandpapa, darling.’

My answer was: ‘I have found him!’

Captain Bulsted sang out our names; I caught sight of Julia Rippenger’s face; the squire had his back turned to me, which reminded me of my first speech with Captain Jasper Welsh, and I thought to myself, I know something of the world now, and the thing is to keep a good temper. Here there was no wire-coil to intercept us, so I fronted him quickly.

‘Hulloa!’ he cried, and gave me his shoulder.

‘Temple is your guest, sir,’ said I.

He was obliged to stretch out his hand to Temple.

A prompt instinct warned me that I must show him as much Beltham as I could summon.

‘Dogs and horses all right, sir?’ I asked.

Captain Bulsted sauntered near.

‘Here, William,’ said the squire, ‘tell this fellow about my stables.’

‘In excellent condition, Harry Richmond,’ returned the captain.

’Oh! he ’s got a new name, I ‘ll swear,’ said the squire.

‘Not I!’

‘Then what have you got of your trip, eh?’

‘A sharper eye than I had, sir.’

‘You’ve been sharpening it in London, have you?’

‘I’ve been a little farther than London, squire.’

‘Well, you’re not a liar.’

‘There, you see the lad can stand fire!’ Captain Bulsted broke in. ’Harry Richmond, I’m proud to shake your hand, but I’ll wait till you’re through the ceremony with your grandad.’

The squire’s hands were crossed behind him. I smiled boldly in his face.

‘Shall I make the tour of you to get hold of one of them, sir?’ He frowned and blinked.

’Shuffle in among the ladies; you seem to know how to make friends among them,’ he said, and pretended to disengage his right hand for the purpose of waving it toward one of the groups.

Page 1983

I seized it, saying heartily, 'Grandfather, upon my honour, I love you, and I'm glad to be home again.'

'Mind you, you're not at home till you've begged Uberly's pardon in public, you know what for,' he rejoined.

'Leaving the horse at that inn is on my conscience,' said I.

The squire grumbled a bit.

'Suppose he kicks?' said I; and the captain laughed, and the squire too, and I was in such high spirits I thought of a dozen witty suggestions relative to the seat of the conscience, and grieved for a minute at going to the ladies.

All the better; keep him there Captain Bulsted convoyed me to pretty Irish-eyed Julia Rippenger. Temple had previously made discovery of Janet Ilchester. Relating our adventures on different parts of the lawn, we both heard that Colonel Goodwin and his daughter had journeyed down to Riversley to smooth the way for my return; so my easy conquest of the squire was not at all wonderful; nevertheless, I maintained my sense of triumph, and was assured in my secret heart that I had a singular masterfulness, and could, when I chose to put it forth, compel my grandfather to hold out his hand to my father as he had done to me.

Julia Rippenger was a guest at Riversley through a visit paid to her by my aunt Dorothy in alarm at my absence. The intention was to cause the squire a distraction. It succeeded; for the old man needed lively prattle of a less childish sort than Janet Ilchester's at his elbow, and that young lady, though true enough in her fashion, was the ardent friend of none but flourishing heads; whereas Julia, finding my name under a cloud at Riversley, spoke of me, I was led to imagine by Captain Bulsted, as a ballad hero, a gloriful fellow, a darling whose deeds were all pardonable—a mere puff of smoke in the splendour of his nature.

'To hear the young lady allude to me in that style!' he confided to my ear, with an ineffable heave of his big chest.

Certain good influences, at any rate, preserved the squire from threatening to disinherit me. Colonel Goodwin had spoken to him very manfully and wisely as to my relations with my father. The squire, it was assumed by my aunt, and by Captain Bulsted and Julia, had undertaken to wink at my father's claims on my affection. All three vehemently entreated me to make no mention of the present of Hock to him, and not to attempt to bring about an interview. Concerning the yellow wine I disregarded their advice, for I held it to be a point of filial duty, and an obligation religiously contracted beneath a cathedral dome; so I performed the task of offering the Hock, stating that it was of ancient birth. The squire bunched his features; he tutored his temper, and said

not a word. I fancied all was well. Before I tried the second step, Captain Bulsted rode over to my father, who himself generously enjoined the prudent course, in accordance with his aforegone precepts. He was floated off, as he termed it, from the inn

Page 1984

where he lay stranded, to London, by I knew not what heaven-sent gift of money, bidding me keep in view the grand career I was to commence at Dipwell on arriving at my majority. I would have gone with him had he beckoned a finger. The four-and-twenty bottles of Hock were ranged in a line for the stable-boys to cock-shy at them under the squire's supervision and my enforced attendance, just as revolutionary criminals are executed. I felt like the survivor of friends, who had seen their blood flow.

He handed me a cheque for the payment of debts incurred in my recent adventures. Who could help being grateful for it? And yet his remorseless spilling of the kindly wine full of mellow recollections of my father and the little princess, drove the sense of gratitude out of me.

CHAPTER XX

NEWS OF A FRESH CONQUEST OF MY FATHER'S

Temple went to sea. The wonder is that I did not go with him: we were both in agreement that adventures were the only things worth living for, and we despised English fellows who had seen no place but England. I could not bear the long separation from my father that was my reason for not insisting on the squire's consent to my becoming a midshipman. After passing a brilliant examination, Temple had the good fortune to join Captain Bulsted's ship, and there my honest-hearted friend dismally composed his letter of confession, letting me know that he had been untrue to friendship, and had proposed to Janet Ilchester, and interchanged vows with her. He begged my forgiveness, but he did love her so!—he hoped I would not mind. I sent him a reproachful answer; I never cared for him more warmly than when I saw the letter shoot the slope of the postoffice mouth. Aunt Dorothy undertook to communicate assurances of my undying affection for him. As for Janet—Temple's letter, in which he spoke of her avowed preference for Oriental presents, and declared his intention of accumulating them on his voyages, was a harpoon in her side. By means of it I worried and terrified her until she was glad to have it all out before the squire. What did he do? He said that Margery, her mother, was niggardly; a girl wanted presents, and I did not act up to my duty; I ought to buy Turkey and Tunis to please her, if she had a mind for them.

The further she was flattered the faster she cried; she had the face of an old setter with these hideous tears. The squire promised her fifty pounds per annum in quarterly payments, that she might buy what presents she liked, and so tie herself to constancy. He said aside to me, as if he had a knowledge of the sex—'Young ladies must have lots of knickknacks, or their eyes 'll be caught right and left, remember that.' I should have been delighted to see her caught. She talked of love in a ludicrous second-hand way, sending me into fits of disgusted laughter. On other occasions her lips were not hypocritical, and her figure anything

Page 1985

but awkward. She was a bold, plump girl, fond of male society. Heriot enraptured her. I believed at the time she would have appointed a year to marry him in, had he put the question. But too many women were in love with Heriot. He and I met Kiomi on the road to the race-course on the Southdowns; the prettiest racecourse in England, shut against gipsies. A bare-footed swarthy girl ran beside our carriage and tossed us flowers. He and a friend of his, young Lord Destrier, son of the Marquis of Edbury, who knew my father well, talked and laughed with her, and thought her so very handsome that I likewise began to stare, and I suddenly called 'Kiomi!' She bounded back into the hedge. This was our second meeting. It would have been a pleasant one had not Heriot and Destrier pretended all sorts of things about our previous acquaintance. Neither of us, they said, had made a bad choice, but why had we separated? She snatched her hand out of mine with a grin of anger like puss in a fury. We had wonderful fun with her. They took her to a great house near the race-course, and there, assisted by one of the young ladies, dressed her in flowing silks, and so passed her through the gate of the enclosure interdicted to bare feet. There they led her to groups of fashionable ladies, and got themselves into pretty scrapes. They said she was an Indian. Heriot lost his wagers and called her a witch. She replied, 'You'll find I'm one, young man,' and that was the only true thing she spoke of the days to come. Owing to the hubbub around the two who were guilty of this unmeasured joke upon consequential ladies, I had to conduct her to the gate. Instantly, and without a good-bye, she scrambled up her skirts and ran at strides across the road and through the wood, out of sight. She won her dress and a piece of jewelry.

With Heriot I went on a sad expedition, the same I had set out upon with Temple. This time I saw my father behind those high red walls, once so mysterious and terrible to me. Heriot made light of prisons for debt. He insisted, for my consolation, that they had but a temporary dishonourable signification; very estimable gentlemen, as well as scamps, inhabited them, he said. The impression produced by my visit—the feasting among ruined men who believed in good luck the more the lower they fell from it, and their fearful admiration of my imprisoned father—was as if I had drunk a stupefying liquor. I was unable clearly to reflect on it. Daily afterwards, until I released him, I made journeys to usurers to get a loan on the faith of the reversion of my mother's estate. Heriot, like the real friend he was, helped me with his name to the bond. When my father stood free, I had the proudest heart alive; and as soon as we had parted, the most amazed. For a long while, for years, the thought of him was haunted by racketballs and bearded men in their shirtsleeves; a scene sickening to one's pride. Yet it had grown impossible for me to think of him without

Page 1986

pride. I delighted to hear him. We were happy when we were together. And, moreover, he swore to me on his honour, in Mrs. Waddy's presence, that he and the constable would henceforth keep an even pace. His exuberant cheerfulness and charming playfulness were always fascinating. His visions of our glorious future enchained me. How it was that something precious had gone out of my life, I could not comprehend.

Julia Rippenger's marriage with Captain Bulsted was, an agreeable distraction. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, she went to the altar poignantly pale. My aunt Dorothy settled the match. She had schemed it, her silence and half-downcast look seemed to confess, for the sake of her own repose, but neither to her nor to others did that come of it. I wrote a plain warning of the approaching catastrophe to Heriot, and received his reply after it was over, to this effect:

'In my regiment we have a tolerable knowledge of women. They like change, old Richie, and we must be content to let them take their twenty shillings for a sovereign. I myself prefer the Navy to the Army; I have no right to complain. Once she swore one thing, now she has sworn another. We will hope the lady will stick to her choice, and not seek smaller change. "I could not forgive coppers"; that 's quoting your dad. I have no wish to see the uxorious object, though you praise him. His habit of falling under the table is middling old-fashioned; but she may like him the better, or she may cure him. Whatever she is as a woman, she was a very nice girl to enliven the atmosphere of the switch. I sometimes look at a portrait I have of J. R., which, I fancy, Mrs. William Bulsted has no right to demand of me; but supposing her husband thinks he has, why then I must consult my brother officers. We want a war, old Richie, and I wish you were sitting at our mess, and not mooning about girls and women.'

I presumed from this that Heriot's passion for Julia was extinct. Aunt Dorothy disapproved of his tone, which I thought admirably philosophical and coxcombi-cally imitable, an expression of the sort of thing I should feel on hearing of Janet Ilchester's nuptials.

The daring and success of that foreign adventure of mine had, with the aid of Colonel and Clara Goodwin, convinced the squire of the folly of standing between me and him I loved. It was considered the best sign possible that he should take me down on an inspection of his various estates and his great coal-mine, and introduce me as the heir who would soon relieve him of the task.

Page 1987

Perhaps he thought the smell of wealth a promising cure for such fits of insubordination as I had exhibited. My occasional absences on my own account were winked at. On my return the squire was sour and snappish, I cheerful and complaisant; I grew cold, and he solicitous; he would drink my health with a challenge to heartiness, and I drank to him heartily and he relapsed to a fit of sulks, informing me, that in his time young men knew when they were well off, and asking me whether I was up to any young men's villanies, had any concealed debts perchance, because, if so—Oh! he knew the ways of youngsters, especially when they fell into bad hands: the list of bad titles rumbled on in an underbreath like cowardly thunder:—well, to cut the matter short, because, if so, his cheque-book was at my service; didn't I know that, eh? Not being immediately distressed by debt, I did not exhibit the gush of gratitude, and my sedate 'Thank you, sir,' confused his appeal for some sentimental show of affection.

I am sure the poor old man suffered pangs of jealousy; I could even at times see into his breast and pity him. He wanted little more than to be managed; but a youth when he perceives absurdity in opposition to him chafes at it as much as if he were unaware that it is laughable. Had the squire talked to me in those days seriously and fairly of my father's character, I should have abandoned my system of defence to plead for him as before a judge. By that time I had gained the knowledge that my father was totally of a different construction from other men. I wished the squire to own simply to his loveable nature. I could have told him women did. Without citing my dear aunt Dorothy, or so humble a creature as the devoted Mrs. Waddy, he had sincere friends among women, who esteemed him, and were staunch adherents to his cause; and if the widow of the City knight, Lady Sampleman, aimed openly at being something more, she was not the less his friend. Nor was it only his powerful animation, generosity, and grace that won them.

There occurred when I was a little past twenty, already much in his confidence, one of those strange crucial events which try a man publicly, and bring out whatever can be said for and against him. A young Welsh heiress fell in love with him. She was, I think, seven or eight months younger than myself, a handsome, intelligent, high-spirited girl, rather wanting in polish, and perhaps in the protecting sense of decorum. She was well-born, of course—she was Welsh. She was really well-bred too, though somewhat brusque. The young lady fell hopelessly in love with my father at Bath. She gave out that he was not to be for one moment accused of having encouraged her by secret addresses. It was her unsolicited avowal—thought by my aunt Dorothy immodest, not by me—that she preferred him to all living men. Her name was Anna Penrhys. The squire one morning received a letter from her family, requesting him to furnish them with information as to the antecedents of a gentleman calling himself Augustus Fitz-George Frederick William Richmond Guelph Roy, for purposes which would, they assured him, warrant the inquiry. He was for throwing the letter aside, shouting that he thanked his God he was unacquainted with anybody on earth with such an infernal list of names as that. Roy! Who knew anything of Roy?

Page 1988

‘It happens to be my father’s present name,’ said I.

’It sounds to me like the name of one of those blackguard adventurers who creep into families to catch the fools,’ pursued the squire, not hearing me with his eyes.

‘The letter at least must be answered,’ my aunt Dorothy said.

‘It shall be answered!’ the squire worked himself up to roar. He wrote a reply, the contents of which I could guess at from my aunt’s refusal to let me be present at the discussion of it. The letter despatched was written by her, with his signature. Her eyes glittered for a whole day.

Then came a statement of the young lady’s case from Bath.

‘Look at that! look at that!’ cried the squire, and went on, ’Look at that!’ in a muffled way. There was a touch of dignity in his unforced anger.

My aunt winced displeasingly to my sight: ’I see nothing to astonish one.’

‘Nothing to astonish one!’ The squire set his mouth in imitation of her.

’You see nothing to astonish one? Well, ma’am, when a man grows old enough to be a grandfather, I do see something astonishing in a child of nineteen—by George! it’s out o’ nature. But you women like monstrosities. Oh! I understand. Here’s an heiress to fifteen thousand a year. It’s not astonishing if every ruined gambler and scapegrace in the kingdom’s hunting her hot! no, no! that’s not astonishing. I suppose she has her money in a coal mine.’

The squire had some of his in a coal-mine; my mother once had; it was the delivery of a blow at my father, signifying that he had the scent for this description of wealth. I left the room. The squire then affected that my presence had constrained him, by bellowing out epithets easy for me to hear in the hall and out on the terrace. He vowed by solemn oath he was determined to save this girl from ruin. My aunt’s speech was brief.

I was summoned to Bath by my father in a curious peremptory tone implying the utmost urgent need of me.

I handed the letter to the squire at breakfast, saying, ’You must spare me for a week or so, sir.’

He spread the letter flat with his knife, and turned it over with his fork.

‘Harry,’ said he, half-kindly, and choking, ‘you’re better out of it.’

‘I’m the best friend he could have by him, sir.’

‘You’re the best tool he could have handy, for you’re a gentleman.’

‘I hope I shan’t offend you, grandfather, but I must go.’

’Don’t you see, Harry Richmond, you’re in for an infernal marriage ceremony there!’

‘The young lady is not of age,’ interposed my aunt.

’Eh? An infernal elopement, then. It’s clear the girl’s mad-head’s cracked as a cocoa-nut bowled by a monkey, brains nowhere. Harry, you’re not a greenhorn; you don’t suspect you’re called down there to stop it, do you? You jump plump into a furious lot of the girl’s relatives; you might as well take a header into a leech-pond. Come! you’re a man; think for yourself. Don’t have this affair on your conscience, boy. I tell you, Harry Richmond, I’m against your going. You go against my will; you offend me, sir; you drag my name and blood into the mire. She’s Welsh, is she? Those Welsh are addle-pated, every one. Poor girl!’

Page 1989

He threw a horrible tremour into his accent of pity.

My aunt expressed her view mildly, that I was sent for to help cure the young lady of her delusion.

‘And take her himself!’ cried the squire. ’Harry, you wouldn’t go and do that? Why, the law, man, the law—the whole country ’d be up about it. You’ll be stuck in a coloured caricature!’

He was really alarmed lest this should be one of the consequences of my going, and described some of the scourging caricatures of his day with an intense appreciation of their awfulness as engines of the moral sense of the public. I went nevertheless.

CHAPTER XXI

A PROMENADE IN BATH

I found my father at his hotel, sitting with his friend Jorian DeWitt, whom I had met once before, and thought clever. He was an ex-captain of dragoons, a martyr to gout, and addicted to Burgundy, which necessitated his resorting to the waters, causing him, as he said, between his appetites and the penance he paid for them, to lead the life of a pendulum. My father was in a tempered gay mood, examining a couple of the county newspapers. One abused him virulently; he was supported by the other. After embracing me, he desired me to listen while he read out opposing sentences from the columns of these eminent journals:

’The person calling himself “Roy,” whose monstrously absurd pretensions are supposed to be embodied in this self-dubbed surname . . .’

’—The celebrated and courtly Mr. Richmond Roy, known no less by the fascination of his manners than by his romantic history . . .’

’—has very soon succeeded in making himself the talk of the town . . ’

‘—has latterly become the theme of our tea-tables . . .’

‘—which is always the adventurer’s privilege . . .’

’—through no fault of his own . . ’

’—That we may throw light on the blushing aspirations of a crow-sconced Cupid, it will be as well to recall the antecedents of this (if no worse) preposterous imitation buck of the old school . . .’

’—Suffice it, without seeking to draw the veil from those affecting chapters of his earlier career which kindled for him the enthusiastic sympathy of all classes of his countrymen, that he is not yet free from a tender form of persecution . . .’

’—We think we are justified in entitling him the Perkin Warbeck of society . . .’

‘—Reference might be made to mythological heroes . . .’

Hereat I cried out mercy.

Captain DeWitt (stretched nursing a leg) removed his silk handkerchief from his face to murmur,

‘The bass stedfastly drowns the treble, if this is meant for harmony.’

My father rang up the landlord, and said to him,

’The choicest of your cellar at dinner to-day, Mr. Lumley; and, mind you, I am your guest, and I exercise my right of compelling you to sit down with us and assist in consuming a doubtful quality of wine. We dine four. Lay for five, if your conscience is bad, and I excuse you.’

Page 1990

The man smirked. He ventured to say he had never been so tempted to supply an inferior article.

My father smiled on him.

‘You invite our editorial advocate?’ said Captain DeWitt.

‘Our adversary,’ said my father.

I protested I would not sit at table with him. But he assured me he believed his advocate and his adversary to be one and the same, and referred me to the collated sentences.

’The man must earn his bread, Richie, boy! To tell truth, it is the advocate I wish to rebuke, and to praise the adversary. It will confound him.’

‘It does me,’ said DeWitt.

’You perceive, Jorian, a policy in dining these men of the Press now and occasionally, considering their growing power, do you not?’

’Ay, ay! it’s a great gossiping machine, mon Roy. I prefer to let it spout.’

’I crave your permission to invite him in complimentary terms, cousin Jorian. He is in the town; remember, it is for the good of the nation that he and his like should have the opportunity of studying good society. As to myself personally, I give him carte blanche to fire his shots at me.’

Near the fashionable hour of the afternoon my father took my arm, Captain DeWitt a stick, and we walked into the throng and buzz.

’Whenever you are, to quote our advocate, the theme of tea-tables, Richie,’ said my father, ’walk through the crowd: it will wash you. It is doing us the honour to observe us. We in turn discover an interest in its general countenance.’

He was received, as we passed, with much staring; here and there a lifting of hats, and some blunt nodding that incensed me, but he, feeling me bristle, squeezed my hand and talked of the scene, and ever and anon gathered a line of heads and shed an indulgent bow along them-; so on to the Casino. Not once did he offend my taste and make my acute sense of self-respect shiver by appearing grateful for a recognition, or anxious to court it, though the curtest salute met his acknowledgement.

The interior of the Casino seemed more hostile. I remarked it to him. ’A trifle more eye-glassy,’ he murmured. He was quite at his easy there.

‘We walk up and down, my son,’ he said, in answer to a question of mine, ’because there are very few who can; even walking is an art; and if nobody does, the place is dull.’

‘The place is pretty well supplied with newspapers,’ said Captain DeWitt.

’And dowagers, friend Jorian. They are cousins. ’Tis the fashion to have our tattle done by machinery. They have their opportunity to compare the portrait with the original. Come, invent some scandal for us; let us make this place our social Exchange. I warrant a good bold piece of invention will fit them, too, some of them. Madam,’—my father bowed low to the beckoning of a fan, ’I trust your ladyship did not chance to overhear that last remark I made?’

The lady replied: ’I should have shut my eyes if I had. I called you to tell me, who is the young man?’

Page 1991

‘For twenty years I have lived in the proud belief that he is my son!’

‘I would not disturb it for the world.’ She did me the honour to inspect me from the lowest waistcoat button to the eyebrows. ’Bring him to me to-night. Captain DeWitt, you have forsaken my whist-tables.’

‘Purely temporary fits of unworthiness, my lady.’

‘In English, gout?’

‘Not gout in the conscience, I trust,’ said my father.

‘Oh! that’s curable,’ laughed the captain.

‘You men of repartee would be nothing without your wickedness,’ the lady observed.

‘Man was supposed to be incomplete—’ Captain DeWitt affected a murmur.

She nodded ‘Yes, yes,’ and lifted eyes on my father. ’So you have not given up going to church?’

He bent and spoke low.

She humphed her lips. ’Very well, I will see. It must be a night in the early part of the week after next, then: I really don’t know why I should serve you; but I like your courage.’

’I cannot consent to accept your ladyship’s favour on account of one single virtue,’ said he, drooping.

She waved him to move forward.

During this frothy dialogue, I could see that the ear of the assembly had been caught by the sound of it.

‘That,’ my father informed me, ’is the great Lady Wilts. Now you will notice a curious thing. Lady Wilts is not so old but that, as our Jorian here says of her, she is marriageable. Hence, Richie, she is a queen to make the masculine knee knock the ground. I fear the same is not to be said of her rival, Lady Denewdney, whom our good Jorian compares to an antiquated fledgeling emerging with effort from a nest of ill construction and worse cement. She is rich, she is sharp, she uses her quill; she is emphatically not marriageable. Bath might still accept her as a rival queen, only she is always behindhand in seizing an occasion. Now you will catch sight of her fan working in a minute. She is envious and imitative. It would be undoubtedly better policy on her part to continue to cut me: she cannot, she is beginning to rustle like December’s oaks.

If Lady Wilts has me, why, she must. We refrain from noticing her until we have turned twice. Ay, Richie, there is this use in adversity; it teaches one to play sword and target with etiquette and retenue better than any crowned king in Europe. For me now to cross to her summons immediately would be a gross breach of homage to Lady Wilts, who was inspired to be the first to break through the fence of scandal environing me. But I must still show that I am independent. These people must not suppose that I have to cling to a party. Let them take sides; I am on fair terms with both the rivals. I show just such a nuance of a distinction in my treatment of them just such—enough, I mean, to make the flattered one warm to me, and t' other be jealous of her. Ay, Richie, these things are trivial things beyond the grave; but here are we, my boy; and, by the way, I suspect the great campaign of my life is opening.'

Page 1992

Captain DeWitt said that if so it would be the tenth, to his certain knowledge.

‘Not great campaign!’ my father insisted: ‘mere skirmishes before this.’

They conversed in humorous undertones, each in turn seeming to turn over the earth of some amusing reminiscence, so rapt, that as far as regarded their perception of it, the assembly might have been nowhere. Perhaps, consequently, they became observed with all but undivided attention. My father’s hand was on my shoulder, his head toward Captain DeWitt; instead of subduing his voice, he gave it a moderate pitch, at which it was not intrusive, and was musical, to my ear charming, especially when he continued talking through his soft laughter, like a hunter that would in good humour press for his game through links of water-nymphs.

Lady Denewdney’s fan took to beating time meditatively. Two or three times she kept it elevated, and in vain: the flow of their interchangeing speech was uninterrupted. At last my father bowed to her from a distance. She signalled: his eyelids pleaded short sight, awakening to the apprehension of a pleasant fact: the fan tapped, and he halted his march, leaning scarce perceptibly in her direction. The fan showed distress. Thereupon, his voice subsided in his conversation, with a concluding flash of animation across his features, like a brook that comes to the leap on a descent, and he left us.

Captain DeWitt and I were led by a common attraction to the portico, the truth being that we neither of us could pace easily nor talk with perfect abandonment under eye-fire any longer.

‘Look,’ said he to me, pointing at the equipages and equestrians: ’you’ll see a sight like this in dozens—dozens of our cities and towns! The wealth of this country is frightful.’

My reply, addressed at the same time mentally to Temple at sea, was:

‘Well, as long as we have the handsomest women, I don’t care.’

Captain DeWitt was not so sure that we had. The Provencal women, the women of a part of South Germany, and certain favoured spots of Italy, might challenge us, he thought. This was a point I could argue on, or, I should rather say, take up the cudgels, for I deemed such opinions treason to one’s country and an outrage to common sense, and I embarked in controversy with the single-minded intention of knocking down the man who held them.

He accepted his thrashing complacently.

‘Now here comes a young lady on horseback,’ he said; ’do you spy her? dark hair, thick eyebrows, rides well, followed by a groom. Is she a Beauty?’

In the heat of patriotism I declared she was handsome, and repeated it, though I experienced a twinge of remorse, like what I should have felt had I given Minerva the apple instead of Venus.

‘Oh!’ he commented, and stepped down to the road to meet her, beginning, in my hearing, ‘I am the bearer of a compliment—’ Her thick eyebrows stood in a knot, then she glanced at me and hung pensive. She had not to wait a minute before my father came to her side.

Page 1993

‘I knew you would face them,’ she said.

He threw back his head like a swimmer tossing spray from his locks.

‘You have read the paper?’ he asked.

‘You have horsewhipped the writer?’ she rejoined.

‘Oh! the poor penster!’

‘Nay, we can’t pretend to pity him!’

‘Could we condescend to offer him satisfaction?’

‘Would he dare to demand it?’

‘We will lay the case before Lady Wilts to-night.’

‘You are there to-night?’

‘At Lady Denewdney’s to-morrow night—if I may indulge a hope?’

’Both? Oh! bravo, bravo! Tell me nothing more just now. How did you manage it? I must have a gallop. Yes, I shall be at both, be sure of that.’

My father introduced me.

’Let me present to your notice my son, Harry Lepel Richmond, Miss Penrhys.’

She touched my fingers, and nodded at me; speaking to him:

‘He has a boy’s taste: I hear he esteems me moderately well-favoured.’

‘An inherited error certain to increase with age!’

‘Now you have started me!’ she exclaimed, and lashed the flanks of her horse.

We had evidently been enacting a part deeply interesting to the population of Bath, for the heads of all the strolling groups were bent on us; and when Miss Penrhys cantered away, down dropped eyeglasses, and the promenade returned to activity. I fancied I perceived that my father was greeted more cordially on his way back to the hotel.

‘You do well, Richie,’ he observed, ’in preserving your composure until you have something to say. Wait for your opening; it will come, and the right word will come with it. The main things are to be able to stand well, walk well, and look with an eye at home in its socket: I put you my hand on any man or woman born of high blood.—Not a

brazen eye!—of the two extremes, I prefer the beaten spaniel sort.—Blindfold me, but I put you my hand on them. As to repartee, you must have it. Wait for that, too. Do not,' he groaned, 'do not force it! Bless my soul, what is there in the world so bad?' And rising to the upper notes of his groan: 'Ignorance, density, total imbecility, is better; I would rather any day of my life sit and carve for guests—the grossest of human trials—-a detestable dinner, than be doomed to hear some wretched fellow—and you hear the old as well as the young—excruciate feelings which, where they exist, cannot but be exquisitely delicate. Goodness gracious me! to see the man pumping up his wit! For me, my visage is of an unalterable gravity whenever I am present at one of these exhibitions. I care not if I offend. Let them say I wish to revolutionize society—I declare to you, Richie boy, delightful to my heart though I find your keen stroke of repartee, still your fellow who takes the thrust gracefully, knows when he's traversed by a master-stroke, and yields sign of it, instead of plunging like a spitted buffalo and asking us to admire his agility—you follow me?—I say I hold that man—and I delight vastly in ready wit; it is the wine of language!—I regard that man as the superior being. True, he is not so entertaining.'

Page 1994

My father pressed on my arm to intimate, with a cavernous significance of eyebrow, that Captain DeWitt had the gift of repartee in perfection.

‘Jorian,’ said he, ‘will you wager our editor declines to dine with us?’

The answer struck me as only passable. I think it was:

‘When rats smell death in toasted cheese.’

Captain DeWitt sprang up the staircase of our hotel to his bedroom.

‘I should not have forced him,’ my father mused. ’Jorian DeWitt has at times brilliant genius, Richie—in the way of rejoinders, I mean. This is his happy moment—his one hour’s dressing for dinner. I have watched him; he most thoroughly enjoys it! I am myself a quick or slow dresser, as the case may be. But to watch Jorian you cannot help entering into his enjoyment of it. He will have his window with a view of the sunset; there is his fire, his warmed linen, and his shirt-studs; his bath, his choice of a dozen things he will or will not wear; the landlord’s or host’s menu is up against the looking-glass, and the extremely handsome miniature likeness of his wife, who is in the madhouse, by a celebrated painter, I forget his name. Jorian calls this, new birth—you catch his idea? He throws off the old and is on with the new with a highly hopeful anticipation. His valet is a scoundrel, but never fails in extracting the menu from the cook, wherever he may be, and, in fine, is too attentive to the hour’s devotion to be discarded! Poor Jorian. I know no man I pity so much.’

I conceived him, I confessed, hardly pitiable, though not enviable.

‘He has but six hundred a year, and a passion for Burgundy,’ said my father.

We were four at table. The editor came, and his timidity soon wore off in the warmth of hospitality. He appeared a kind exciteable little man, glad of his dinner from the first, and in due time proud of his entertainer. His response to the toast of the Fourth Estate was an apology for its behaviour to my father. He regretted it; he regretted it. A vinous speech.

My father heard him out. Addressing him subsequently,

‘I would not interrupt you in the delivery of your sentiments,’ he said. ’I must, however, man to man, candidly tell you I should have wished to arrest your expressions of regret. They convey to my mind an idea, that on receipt of my letter of invitation, you attributed to me a design to corrupt you. Protest nothing, I beg. Editors are human, after all. Now, my object is, that as you write of me, you should have some knowledge of me; and I naturally am interested in one who does me so much honour. The facts of my life are at your disposal for publication and comment. Simply, I entreat you, say this one thing of me: I seek for justice, but I never complain of my fortunes. Providence

decides:—that might be the motto engraven on my heart. Nay, I may risk declaring it is! In the end I shall be righted. Meanwhile you contribute to my happiness by favouring me with your society.'

Page 1995

‘Ah, sir,’ replied the little man, ’were all our great people like you! In the country—the provinces—they treat the representatives of the Fourth Estate as the squires a couple of generations back used to treat the parsons.’

‘What! Have you got a place at their tables?’ inquired Captain DeWitt.

’No, I cannot say that—not even below the salt. Mr. Richmond—Mr. Roy, you may not be aware of it: I am the proprietor of the opposition journals in this county. I tell you in confidence, one by itself would not pay; and I am a printer, sir, and it is on my conscience to tell you I have, in the course of business, been compelled this very morning to receive orders for the printing of various squibs and, I much fear, scurrilous things.’

My father pacified him.

‘You will do your duty to your family, Mr. Hickson.’

Deeply moved, the little man pulled out proof-sheets and slips.

‘Even now, at the eleventh hour,’ he urged, ’there is time to correct any glaring falsehoods, insults, what not!’

My father accepted the copy of proofs.

’Not a word,—not a line! You spoke of the eleventh hour, Mr. Hickson. If we are at all near the eleventh, I must be on my way to make my bow to Lady Wilts; or is it Lady Denewdney’s to-night? No, to-morrow night.’

A light of satisfaction came over Mr. Hickson’s face at the mention of my father’s visiting both these sovereign ladies.

As soon as we were rid of him, Captain DeWitt exclaimed,

‘If that’s the Fourth Estate, what’s the Realm?’

‘The Estate,’ pleaded my father, ‘is here in its infancy—on all fours—’

’Prehensile! Egad, it has the vices of the other three besides its own. Do you mean that by putting it on all fours?’

’Jorian, I have noticed that when you are malignant you are not witty. We have to thank the man for not subjecting us to a pledge of secresy. My Lady Wilts will find the proofs amusing. And mark, I do not examine their contents before submitting them to her inspection. You will testify to the fact.’

I was unaware that my father played a master-stroke in handing these proof-sheets publicly to Lady Wilts for her perusal. The incident of the evening was the display of her character shown by Miss Penrhys in positively declining to quit the house until she likewise had cast her eye on them. One of her aunts wept. Their carriage was kept waiting an hour.

‘You ask too much of me: I cannot turn her out’, Lady Wilts said to her uncle. And aside to my father, ‘You will have to marry her.’

‘In heaven’s name keep me from marriage, my lady!’ I heard him reply.

There was sincerity in his tone when he said that.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCLUSION OF THE BATH EPISODE

Page 1996

The friends of Miss Penrhys were ill advised in trying to cry down a man like my father. Active persecution was the breath of life to him. When untroubled he was apt to let both his ambition and his dignity slumber. The squibs and scandal set afloat concerning him armed his wit, nerved his temper, touched him with the spirit of enterprise; he became a new creature. I lost sight of certain characteristics which I had begun to ponder over critically. I believed with all my heart that circumstances were blameable for much that did not quite please me. Upon the question of his magnanimity, as well as of his courage, there could not be two opinions. He would neither retort nor defend himself. I perceived some grandeur in his conduct, without, however, appreciating it cordially, as I did a refinement of discretion about him that kept him from brushing good taste while launched in ostentatious displays. He had a fine tact and a keen intuition. He may have thought it necessary to throw a little dust in my eyes; but I doubt his having done it, for he had only, as he knew, to make me jealous to blind me to his faults utterly, and he refrained.

In his allusions to the young lady he was apologetic, affectionate; one might have fancied oneself listening to a gracious judge who had well weighed her case, and exculpated her from other excesses than that of a generous folly. Jorian DeWitt, a competent critic, pronounced his behaviour consummate at all points. For my behoof, he hinted antecedent reverses to the picture: meditating upon which, I traced them to the fatal want of money, and that I might be able to fortify him in case of need, I took my own counsel, and wrote to my aunt for the loan of as large a sum as she could afford to send. Her eagerness for news of our doings was insatiable. ‘You do not describe her,’ she replied, not naming Miss Penrhys; and again, ’I can form no image of her. Your accounts of her are confusing. Tell me earnestly, do you like her? She must be very wilful, but is she really nice? I want to know how she appears to my Harry’s mind.’

My father borrowed these letters, and returning them to me, said, ’A good soul! the best of women! There—there is a treasure lost!’ His forehead was clouded in speaking. He recommended me to assure my aunt that she would never have to take a family interest in Miss Penrhys. But this was not deemed perfectly satisfactory at Riversley. My aunt wrote: ’Am I to understand that you, Harry, raise objections to her? Think first whether she is in herself objectionable. She is rich, she may be prudent, she may be a forethoughtful person. She may not be able to support a bitter shock of grief. She may be one who can help. She may not be one whose heart will bear it. Put your own feelings aside, my dearest. Our duties cannot ever be clear to us until we do. It is possible for headstrong wilfulness and secret tenderness to go together. Think whether she is capable of sacrifice before you compel her to it. Do not inflict misery wantonly. One would like to see her. Harry, I brood on your future; that is why I seem to you preternaturally anxious about you.’

Page 1997

She seemed to me preternaturally anxious about Miss Penrhys.

My father listened in silence to my flippant satire on women's letters.

He answered after a pause,

'Our Jorian says that women's letters must be read like anagrams. To put it familiarly, they are like a child's field of hop-scotch. You may have noticed the urchins at their game: a bit of tile, and a variety of compartments to pass it through to the base, hopping. Or no, Richie, pooh! 'tis an unworthy comparison, this hopscotch. I mean, laddie, they write in zigzags; and so will you when your heart trumpets in your ear. Tell her, tell that dear noble good woman—say, we are happy, you and I, and alone, and shall be; and do me the favour—she loves you, my son—address her sometimes—she has been it—call her "mother"; she will like it she deserves—nothing shall supplant her!'

He lost his voice.

She sent me three hundred pounds; she must have supposed the occasion pressing. Thus fortified against paternal improvidence, I expended a hundred in the purchase of a horse, and staked the remainder on him in a match, and was beaten. Disgusted with the horse, I sold him for half his purchase-money, and with that sum paid a bill to maintain my father's credit in the town. Figuratively speaking, I looked at my hands as astonished as I had been when the poor little rascal in the street snatched my cake, and gave me the vision of him gorging it in the flurried alley of the London crowd.

'Money goes,' I remarked.

'That is the general experience of the nature of money,' said my father freshly; 'but nevertheless you will be surprised to find how extraordinarily few are the people to make allowance for particular cases. It plays the trick with everybody, and almost nobody lets it stand as a plea for the individual. Here is Jorian, and you, my son, and perhaps your aunt Dorothy, and upon my word, I think I have numbered all I know—or, ay, Sukey Sampleman, I should not omit her in an honourable list—and that makes positively all I know who would commiserate a man touched on the shoulder by a sheriff's officer—not that such an indignity is any longer done to me.'

'I hope we have seen the last of Shylock's great-grandnephew,' said I emphatically.

'Merely to give you the instance, Richie. Ay! I hope so, I hope so! But it is the nature of money that you never can tell if the boarding's sound, once be dependent upon it. But this is talk for tradesmen.' Thinking it so myself, I had not attempted to discover the source of my father's income. Such as it was, it was paid half-yearly, and spent within a month of the receipt, for the most signal proof possible of its shameful insufficiency. Thus ten months of the year at least he lived protesting, and many with him,

compulsorily. For two months he was a brilliant man. I penetrated his mystery enough to abstain from questioning him, and enough to determine that on my coming of age he should cease to be a pensioner, petitioner, and adventurer. He aimed at a manifest absurdity.

Page 1998

In the meantime, after the lesson I had received as to the nature of money, I saw with some alarm my father preparing to dig a great pit for it. He had no doubt performed wonders. Despite of scandal and tattle, and the deadly report of a penniless fortune-hunter having fascinated the young heiress, he commanded an entrance to the receptions of both the rival ladies dominant. These ladies, Lady Wilts and Lady Denewdney, who moved each in her select half-circle, and could heretofore be induced by none to meet in a common centre, had pledged themselves to honour with their presence a ball he proposed to give to the choice world here assembled on a certain illuminated day of the calendar.

‘So I have now possession of Bath, Richie,’ said he, twinkling to propitiate me, lest I should suspect him of valuing his achievements highly. He had, he continued, promised Hickson of the Fourth Estate, that he would, before leaving the place, do his utmost to revive the ancient glories of Bath: Bath had once set the fashion to the kingdom; why not again? I might have asked him, why at all, or why at his expense; but his lead was irresistible. Captain DeWitt and his valet, and I, and a score of ladies, scores of tradesmen, were rushing, reluctant or not, on a torrent. My part was to show that I was an athlete, and primarily that I could fence and shoot. ‘It will do no harm to let it be known,’ said DeWitt. He sat writing letters incessantly. My father made the tour of his fair stewardesses from noon to three, after receiving in audience his jewellers, linen-drapers, carpenters, confectioners, from nine in the morning till twelve. At three o’clock business ceased. Workmen then applying to him for instructions were despatched to the bar of the hotel, bearing the recommendation to the barmaid not to supply them refreshment if they had ever in their lives been seen drunk. At four he dressed for afternoon parade. Nor could his enemy have said that he was not the chief voice and eye along his line of march. His tall full figure maintained a superior air without insolence, and there was a leaping beam in his large blue eyes, together with the signification of movement coming to his kindly lips, such as hardly ever failed to waken smiles of greeting. People smiled and bowed, and forgot their curiosity, forgot even to be critical, while he was in sight. I can say this, for I was acutely critical of their bearing; the atmosphere of the place was never perfectly pleasing to me.

My attitude of watchful reserve, and my reputation as the heir of immense wealth, tended possibly to constrain a certain number of the inimical party to be ostensibly civil. Lady Wilts, who did me the honour to patronize me almost warmly, complimented me on my manner of backing him, as if I were the hero; but I felt his peculiar charm; she partly admitted it, making a whimsical mouth, saying, in allusion to Miss Penrhys, ’I, you know, am past twenty. At twenty forty is charming; at forty twenty.’

Page 1999

Where I served him perhaps was in showing my resolution to protect him: he had been insulted before my arrival. The male relatives of Miss Penrhys did not repeat the insult; they went to Lady Wilts and groaned over their hard luck in not having the option of fighting me. I was, in her phrase, a new piece on the board, and checked them. Thus, if they provoked a challenge from me, they brought the destructive odour of powder about the headstrong creature's name. I was therefore of use to him so far. I leaned indolently across the rails of the promenade while she bent and chattered in his ear, and her attendant cousin and cavalier chewed vexation in the form of a young mustachio's curl. His horse fretted; he murmured deep notes, and his look was savage; but he was bound to wait on her, and she would not go until it suited her pleasure. She introduced him to me—as if conversation could be carried on between two young men feeling themselves simply pieces on the board, one giving check, and the other chafing under it! I need not say that I disliked my situation. It was worse when my father took to bowing to her from a distance, unobservant of her hand's prompt pull at the reins as soon as she saw him. Lady Wilts had assumed the right of a woman still possessing attractions to exert her influence with him on behalf of the family, for I had done my best to convince her that he entertained no serious thought of marrying, and decidedly would not marry without my approval. He acted on her advice to discourage the wilful girl.

'How is it I am so hateful to you?' Miss Penrhys accosted me abruptly. I fancied she must have gone mad, and an interrogative frown was my sole answer.

'Oh! I hear that you pronounce me everywhere unendurable,' she continued. 'You are young, and you misjudge me in some way, and I should be glad if you knew me better. By-and-by, in Wales.—Are you fond of mountain scenery? We might be good friends; my temper is not bad—at least, I hope not. Heaven knows what one's relatives think of one. Will you visit us? I hear you have promised your confidante, Lady Wilts.'

At a dancing party where we met, she was thrown on my hands by her ungovernable vehemence, and I, as I had told Lady Wilts, not being able to understand the liking of twenty for forty (fifty would have been nearer the actual mark, or sixty), offered her no lively sympathy. I believe she had requested my father to pay public court to her. If Captain DeWitt was to be trusted, she desired him to dance, and dance with her exclusively, and so confirm and defy the tattle of the town; but my father hovered between the dowagers. She in consequence declined to dance, which was the next worse thing she could do. An aunt, a miserable woman, was on her left; on her right she contrived, too frequently for my peace of mind, to reserve a vacant place for me, and she eyed me intently across the room, under her persistent brows, until perforce

Page 2000

I was drawn to her side. I had to listen to a repetition of sharp queries and replies, and affect a flattered gaiety, feeling myself most uncomfortably, as Captain DeWitt (who watched us) said, Chip the son of Block the father. By fixing the son beside her, she defeated the father's scheme of coldness, and made it appear a concerted piece of policy. Even I saw that. I saw more than I grasped. Love for my father was to my mind a natural thing, a proof of taste and goodness; women might love him; but the love of a young girl with the morning's mystery about her! and for my progenitor!—a girl (as I reflected in the midst of my interjections) well-built, clear-eyed, animated, clever, with soft white hands and pretty feet; how could it be? She was sombre as a sunken fire until he at last came round to her, and then her sudden vivacity was surprising.

Affairs were no further advanced when I had to obey the squire's commands and return to Riversley, missing the night of the grand ball with no profound regret, except for my father's sake. He wrote soon after one of his characteristic letters, to tell me that the ball had, been a success. Immediately upon this announcement, he indulged luxurious reflections, as his manner was:

'To have stirred up the old place and given it something to dream of for the next half century, is a satisfaction, Richie. I have a kindness for Bath. I leave it with its factions reconciled, its tea-tables furnished with inexhaustible supplies of the chief thing necessary, and the persuasion firmly established in my own bosom that it is impossible to revive the past, so we must march with the age. And let me add, all but every one of the bills happily discharged, to please you. Pray, fag at your German. If (as I myself confess to) you have enjoyment of old ways, habits, customs, and ceremonies, look to Court life. It is only in Courts that a man may now air a leg; and there the women are works of Art. If you are deficient in calves (which my boy, thank heaven! will never be charged with) you are there found out, and in fact every deficiency, every qualification, is at once in patent exhibition at a Court. I fancy Parliament for you still, and that is no impediment as a step. Jorian would have you sit and wallow in ease, and buy (by the way, we might think of it) a famous Burgundy vineyard (for an investment), devote the prime of your life to the discovery of a cook, your manhood to perfect the creature's education—so forth; I imagine you are to get five years of ample gratification (a promise hardly to be relied on) in the sere leaf, and so perish. Take poor Jorian for an example of what the absence of ambition brings men to. I treasure Jorian, I hoard the poor fellow, to have him for a lesson to my boy. Witty and shrewd, and a masterly tactician (I wager he would have won his spurs on the field of battle), you see him now living for one hour of the day—absolutely twenty-three hours of the man's life are chained slaves, beasts of burden, to the four-and-twentieth! So, I repeat, fag at your German.

Page 2001

’Miss Penrhys retires to her native Wales; Jorian and I on to London, to the Continent. Plinlimmon guard us all! I send you our local newspapers. That I cut entrechats is false. It happens to be a thing I could do, and not an Englishman in England except myself; only I did not do it. I did appear in what I was educated to believe was the evening suit of a gentleman, and I cannot perceive the immodesty of showing my leg. A dress that is not indecent, and is becoming to me, and is the dress of my fathers, I wear, and I impose it on the generation of my sex. However, I dined Hickson of the Fourth Estate (Jorian considers him hungry enough to eat up his twentieth before he dies—I forget the wording of the mot), that he might know I was without rancour in the end, as originally I had been without any intention of purchasing his allegiance. He offered me his columns; he wished me luck with the heiress; by his Gods, he swore he worshipped entrechats, and held a silk leg the most admirable work of the manufactures. “Sir, you’re a gentleman,” says he; “you’re a nobleman, sir; you ’re a prince, you ’re a star of the first magnitude.” Cries Jorian, “Retract that, scum! you see nothing large but what you dare to think neighbours you,” and quarrels the inebriate dog. And this is the maker and destroyer of reputations in his day! I study Hickson as a miraculous engine of the very simplest contrivance; he is himself the epitome of a verdict on his period. Next day he disclaimed in his opposition penny sheet the report of the entrechats, and “the spectators laughing consumedly,” and sent me (as I had requested him to do) the names of his daughters, to whom I transmit little comforting presents, for if they are nice children such a parent must afflict them.

’Cultivate Lady Wilts. You have made an impression. She puts you forward as a good specimen of our young men. ’Hem! madam.

’But, my dear boy, as I said, we cannot revive the past. I acknowledge it. Bath rebukes my last fit of ambition, and the experience is very well worth the expense. You have a mind, Richie, for discussing outlay, upon which I congratulate you, so long as you do not overlook equivalents. The system of the world is barter varied by robbery. Show that you have something in hand, and you enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that you were not robbed. I pledge you my word to it—I shall not repeat Bath. And mark you, an heiress is never compromised. I am not, I hope, responsible for every creature caught up in my circle of attraction. Believe me, dear boy, I should consult you, and another one, estimable beyond mortal speech! if I had become involved—impossible! No; I am free of all fresh chains, because of the old ones. Years will not be sufficient for us when you and I once begin to talk in earnest, when I open! To resume—so I leave Bath with a light conscience. Mixed with pleasant recollections is the transient regret that you were not a spectator

Page 2002

of the meeting of the Wilts and Denewdney streams. Jorian compared them to the Rhone and the—I forget the name of the river below Geneva—dirtyish; for there was a transparent difference in the Denewdney style of dress, and did I choose it I could sit and rule those two factions as despotically as Buonaparte his Frenchmen. Ask me what I mean by scaling billows, Richie. I will some day tell you. I have done it all my life, and here I am. But I thank heaven I have a son I love, and I can match him against the best on earth, and henceforward I live for him, to vindicate and right the boy, and place him in his legitimate sphere. From this time I take to looking exclusively forward, and I labour diligently. I have energies.

'Not to boast, darling old son, I tell truth; I am only happy when my heart is beating near you. Here comes the mother in me pumping up. Adieu. Lebe wohl. The German!—the German!—may God in his Barmherzigkeit!—Tell her I never encouraged the girl, have literally nothing to trace a temporary wrinkle on my forehead as regards conscience. I say, may it please Providence to make you a good German scholar by the day of your majority. Hurrah for it! Present my humble warm respects to your aunt Dorothy. I pray to heaven nightly for one of its angels on earth. Kunst, Wissenschaft, Ehre, Liebe. Die Liebe. Quick at the German poets. Frau: Fraulein. I am actually dazzled at the prospect of our future. To be candid, I no longer see to write. Gruss' dich herzlich. From Vienna to you next. Lebe wohl!'

My aunt Dorothy sent a glance at the letter while I was folding it evidently thinking my unwillingness to offer it a sign of bad news or fresh complications. She spoke of Miss Penrhys.

'Oh! that's over,' said I. 'Heiresses soon get consoled.'

She accused me of having picked up a vulgar idea. I maintained that it was my father's.

'It cannot be your father's,' said she softly; and on affirming that he had uttered it and written it, she replied in the same tone, more effective than the ordinary language of conviction, 'He does not think it.'

The rage of a youth to prove himself in the right of an argument was insufficient to make me lay the letter out before other eyes than my own, and I shrank from exposing it to compassionate gentle eyes that would have pleaded similar allowances to mine for the wildness of the style. I should have thanked, but despised the intelligence of one who framed my excuses for my father, just as the squire, by abusing him, would have made me a desperate partisan in a minute. The vitality of the delusion I cherished was therefore partly extinct; not so the love; yet the love of him could no longer shake itself free from oppressive shadows.

Out of his circle of attraction books were my resource.

CHAPTER XXIII

MY TWENTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY

Page 2003

Books and dreams, like the two rivers cited by my father, flowed side by side in me without mixing; and which the bright Rhone was, which the brown Arve, needs not to be told to those who know anything of youth; they were destined to intermingle soon enough. I read well, for I felt ground and had mounting views; the real world, and the mind and passions of the world, grew visible to me. My tutor pleased the squire immensely by calling me matter-of-fact. In philosophy and history I hated speculation; but nothing was too fantastic for my ideas of possible occurrences. Once away from books, I carried a head that shot rockets to the farthest hills.

My dear friend Temple was at sea, or I should have had one near me to detect and control the springs of nonsense. I was deemed a remarkably quiet sober thoughtful young man, acquiescent in all schemes projected for my welfare. The squire would have liked to see me courting the girl of his heart, as he termed Janet Ilchester, a little more demonstratively. We had, however, come to the understanding that I was to travel before settling. Traditional notions of the importance of the Grand Tour in the education of gentlemen led him to consent to my taking a year on the Continent accompanied by my tutor. He wanted some one, he said, to represent him when I was out over there; which signified that he wanted some one to keep my father in check; but as the Rev. Ambrose Peterborough, successor to the Rev. Simon Hart, was hazy and manageable, I did not object. Such faith had the quiet thoughtful young man at Riversley in the convulsions of the future, the whirlwinds and whirlpools spinning for him and all connected with him, that he did not object to hear his name and Janet's coupled, though he had not a spark of love for her.

I tried to realize to myself the general opinion that she was handsome. Her eyebrows were thick and level and long; her eyes direct in their gaze, of a flinty blue, with dark lashes; her nose firm, her lips fullish, firm when joined; her shape straight, moderately flexible. But she had no softness; she could admire herself in my presence; she claimed possession of me openly, and at the same time openly provoked a siege from the remainder of my sex: she was not maidenly. She caught imagination by the sleeve, and shut it between square whitewashed walls. Heriot thought her not only handsome, but comparable to Mrs. William Bulsted, our Julia Rippenger of old. At his meeting with Julia, her delicious loss of colour made her seem to me one of the loveliest women on earth. Janet never lost colour, rarely blushed; she touched neither nerve nor fancy.

'You want a rousing coquette,' said Heriot; 'you won't be happy till you 've been racked by that nice instrument of torture, and the fair Bulsted will do it for you if you like. You don't want a snake or a common serpent, you want a Python.'

Page 2004

I wanted bloom and mystery, a woman shifting like the light with evening and night and dawn, and sudden fire. Janet was bald to the heart inhabiting me then, as if quite shaven. She could speak her affectionate mind as plain as print, and it was dull print facing me, not the arches of the sunset. Julia had only to lisp, ‘my husband,’ to startle and agitate me beyond expression. She said simple things—’I slept well last night,’ or ‘I dreamed,’ or ‘I shivered,’ and plunged me headlong down impenetrable forests. The mould of her mouth to a reluctant ‘No,’ and her almost invariable drawing in of her breath with a ‘Yes,’ surcharged the everyday monosyllables with meanings of life and death. At last I was reduced to tell her, seeing that she reproached my coldness for Janet, how much I wished Janet resembled her. Her Irish eyes lightened: ’Me! Harry’; then they shadowed: ‘She is worth ten of me.’ Such pathetic humility tempted me to exalt her supremely.

I talked like a boy, feeling like a man: she behaved like a woman, blushing like a girl.

‘Julia! I can never call you Mrs. Bulsted.’

‘You have an affection for my husband, have you not, Harry?’

Of a season when this was adorable language to me, the indication is sufficient. Riding out perfectly crazed by it, I met Kiomi, and transferred my emotions. The squire had paid her people an annual sum to keep away from our neighbourhood, while there was a chance of my taking to gipsy life. They had come back to their old camping-ground, rather dissatisfied with the squire.

‘Speak to him yourself, Kiomi,’ said I; ’whatever you ask for, he can’t refuse anything to such eyes as yours.’

‘You!’ she rallied me; ‘why can’t you talk sensible stuff!’

She had grown a superb savage, proof against weather and compliments. Her face was like an Egyptian sky fronting night. The strong old Eastern blood put ruddy flame for the red colour; tawny olive edged from the red; rare vivid yellow, all but amber. The light that first looks down upon the fallen sun was her complexion above the brows, and round the cheeks, the neck’s nape, the throat, and the firm bosom prompt to lift and sink with her vigour of speech, as her eyes were to flash and darken. Meeting her you swore she was the personification of wandering Asia. There was no question of beauty and grace, for these have laws. The curve of her brows broke like a beaten wave; the lips and nostrils were wide, tragic in repose. But when she laughed she illuminated you; where she stepped she made the earth hers. She was as fresh of her East as the morning when her ancient people struck tents in the track of their shadows. I write of her in the style consonant to my ideas of her at the time. I would have carried her off on the impulse and lived her life, merely to have had such a picture moving in my sight, and call it mine.

‘You’re not married?’ I said, ludicrously faintly.

Page 2005

’I ‘ve not seen the man I’d marry,’ she answered, grinning scorn.

The prizefighter had adopted drinking for his pursuit; one of her aunts was dead, and she was in quest of money to bury the dead woman with the conventional ceremonies and shows of respect dear to the hearts of gipsies, whose sense of propriety and adherence to customs are a sentiment indulged by them to a degree unknown to the stabled classes. In fact, they have no other which does not come under the definite title of pride;—pride in their physical prowess, their dexterity, ingenuity, and tricksiness, and their purity of blood. Kiomi confessed she had hoped to meet me; confessed next that she had been waiting to jump out on me: and next that she had sat in a tree watching the Grange yesterday for six hours; and all for money to do honour to her dead relative, poor little soul! Heriot and I joined the decent procession to the grave. Her people had some quarrel with the Durstan villagers, and she feared the scandal of being pelted on the way to the church. I knew that nothing of the sort would happen if I was present. Kiomi walked humbly with her head bent, leaving me the thick rippling coarse black locks of her hair for a mark of observation. We were entertained at her camp in the afternoon. I saw no sign of intelligence between her and Heriot. On my asking her, the day before, if she remembered him, she said, ’I do, I’m dangerous for that young man.’ Heriot’s comment on her was impressed on me by his choosing to call her ‘a fine doe leopard,’ and maintaining that it was a defensible phrase.

She was swept from my amorous mind by Mabel Sweetwinter, the miller’s daughter of Dipwell. This was a Saxon beauty in full bud, yellow as mid-May, with the eyes of opening June. Beauty, you will say, is easily painted in that style. But the sort of beauty suits the style, and the well-worn comparisons express the well-known type. Beside Kiomi she was like a rich meadow on the border of the heaths.

We saw them together on my twenty-first birthday. To my shame I awoke in the early morning at Riversley, forgetful of my father’s old appointment for the great Dipwell feast. Not long after sunrise, when blackbirds peck the lawns, and swallows are out from under eaves to the flood’s face, I was hailed by Janet Ilchester beneath my open windows. I knew she had a bet with the squire that she would be the first to hail me legal man, and was prepared for it. She sat on horseback alone in the hazy dewy Midsummer morning, giving clear note:

‘Whoop! Harry Richmond! halloo!’ To which I tossed her a fox’s brush, having a jewelled bracelet pendant. She missed it and let it lie, and laughed.

’No, no; it’s foxie himself!—anybody may have the brush. You’re dressed, are you, Harry? You were sure I should come? A thousand happy years to you, and me to see them, if you don’t mind. I ’m first to wish it, I’m certain. I was awake at three, out at halfpast, over Durstan heath, across Eckerthy’s fields—we’ll pay the old man for damage—down by the plantation, Bran and Sailor at my heels, and here I am. Crow, cocks! bark, dogs! up, larks! I said I’d be first. And now I ’m round to stables to stir up

Uberly. Don’t be tardy, Mr. Harry, and we’ll be Commodore Arson and his crew before the world’s awake.’

Page 2006

We rode out for a couple of hours, and had to knock at a farmhouse for milk and bread. Possibly a sense of independence, owing to the snatching of a meal in midflight away from home, made Janet exclaim that she would gladly be out all day. Such freaks were exceedingly to my taste. Then I remembered Dipwell, and sure that my father would be there, though he had not written of it, I proposed to ride over. She pleaded for the horses and the squire alternately. Feasting was arranged at Riversley, as well as at Dipwell, and she said musically,

'Harry, the squire is a very old man, and you may not have many more chances of pleasing him. To-day do, do! To-morrow, ride to your father, if you must: of course you must if you think it right; but don't go this day.'

'Not upset my fortune, Janet?'

'Don't hurt the kind old man's heart to-day.'

'Oh! you're the girl of his heart, I know.'

'Well, Harry, you have first place, and I want you to keep it.'

'But here's an oath I've sworn to my father.'

'He should not have exacted it, I think.'

'I promised him when I was a youngster.'

'Then be wiser now, Harry.'

'You have brilliant ideas of the sacredness of engagements.'

'I think I have common sense, that's all.'

'This is a matter of feeling.'

'It seems that you forgot it, though!'

Kiomi's tents on Durstan heath rose into view. I controlled my verbal retort upon Janet to lead her up to the gipsy girl, for whom she had an odd aversion, dating from childhood. Kiomi undertook to ride to Dipwell, a distance of thirty miles, and carry the message that I would be there by nightfall. Tears were on Janet's resolute face as we cantered home.

After breakfast the squire introduced me to his lawyer, Mr. Burgin, who, closeted alone with me, said formally,

’Mr. Harry Richmond, you are Squire Beltham’s grandson, his sole male descendant, and you are established at present, and as far as we can apprehend for the future, as the direct heir to the whole of his property, which is enormous now, and likely to increase so long as he lives. You may not be aware that your grandfather has a most sagacious eye for business. Had he not been born a rich man he would still have been one of our very greatest millionaires. He has rarely invested but to double his capital; never speculated but to succeed. He may not understand men quite so well, but then he trusts none entirely; so if there is a chasm in his intelligence, there is a bridge thrown across it. The metaphor is obscure perhaps: you will doubtless see my meaning. He knows how to go on his road without being cheated. For himself, your grandfather, Mr. Harry, is the soul of honour. Now, I have to explain certain family matters. The squire’s wife, your maternal grandmother, was a rich heiress. Part of her money was settled on her to descend to her children by reversion upon

Page 2007

her death. What she herself possessed she bequeathed to them in reversion likewise to their children. Thus at your maternal grandmother's death, your mother and your aunt inherited money to use as their own, and the interest of money tied fast in reversion to their children (in case of marriage) after their death. Your grandfather, as your natural guardian, has left the annual interest of your money to accumulate, and now you are of age he hands it to you, as you see, without much delay. Thus you become this day the possessor of seventy thousand pounds, respecting the disposal of which I am here to take your orders. Ahem!—as to the remaining property of your mother's—the sum held by her for her own use, I mean, it devolved to her husband, your father, who, it is probable, will furnish you an account of it—ah!—at his leisure—ah! um! And now, in addition, Mr. Harry, I have the squire's commands to speak to you as a man of business, on what may be deemed a delicate subject, though from the business point of view no peculiar delicacy should pertain to it. Your grandfather will settle on you estates and money to the value of twenty thousand pounds per annum on the day of your union with a young lady in this district, Miss Janet Ilchester. He undertakes likewise to provide her pin-money. Also, let me observe, that it is his request—but he makes no stipulation of it that you will ultimately assume the name of Beltham, subscribing yourself Harry Lepel Richmond Beltham; or, if it pleases you, Richmond-Beltham, with the junction hyphen. Needless to say, he leaves it to your decision. And now, Mr. Harry, I have done, and may most cordially congratulate you on the blessings it has pleased a kind and discerning Providence to shower on your head.'

None so grimly ironical as the obsequious! I thought of Burgin's 'discerning' providence (he spoke with all professional sincerity) in after days.

On the occasion I thought of nothing but the squire's straight-forwardness, and grieved to have to wound him. Janet helped me. She hinted with a bashfulness, quite new to her, that I must go through some ceremony. Guessing what it was, I saluted her on the cheek. The squire observed that a kiss of that sort might as well have been planted on her back hair. 'But,' said he, and wisely, 'I'd rather have the girl worth ten of you, than you be more than her match. Girls like my girl here are precious.' Owing to her intercession, he winked at my departure after I had done duty among the tenants; he barely betrayed his vexation, and it must have been excessive.

Heriot and I rode over to Dipwell. Next night we rode back by moonlight with matter for a year of laughter, singing like two Arabian poets praises of dark and fair, challengeing one to rival the other. Kiomi! Mabel! we shouted separately. We had just seen the dregs of the last of the birthday Burgundy.

'Kiomi! what a splendid panther she is!' cries Heriot; and I: 'Teeth and claws, and a skin like a burnt patch on a common! Mabel's like a wonderful sunflower.'

Page 2008

’Butter and eggs! old Richie, and about as much fire as a rushlight. If the race were Fat she ‘d beat the world.’

’Heriot, I give you my word of honour, the very look of her ’s eternal Summer. Kiomi rings thin—she tinkles; it ’s the difference between metal and flesh.’

’Did she tinkle, as you call it, when that fellow Destrier, confound him! touched her?’

‘The little cat! Did you notice Mabel’s blush?’

’How could I help it? We’ve all had a dozen apiece. You saw little Kiomi curled up under the hop and briony?’

‘I took her for a dead jackdaw.’

’I took her for what she is, and she may slap, scream, tear, and bite, I ’ll take her yet-and all her tribe crying thief, by way of a diversion. She and I are footed a pair.’

His impetuosity surpassed mine so much that I fell to brooding on the superior image of my charmer. The result was, I could not keep away from her. I managed to get home with leaden limbs. Next day I was back at Dipwell.

Such guilt as I have to answer for I may avow. I made violent love to this silly country beauty, and held every advantage over her other flatterers. She had met me on the evening of the great twenty-first, she and a line of damsels dressed in white and wearing wreaths, and I had claimed the privilege of saluting her. The chief superintendent of the festivities, my father’s old cook, Monsieur Alphonse, turned twilight into noonday with a sheaf of rockets at the moment my lips brushed her cheek. It was a kiss marred; I claimed to amend it. Besides, we had been bosom friends in childhood. My wonder at the growth of the rose I had left but an insignificant thorny shoot was exquisite natural flattery, sweet reason, to which she could not say nonsense. At each step we trod on souvenirs, innocent in themselves, had they recurred to childish minds. The whisper, ‘Hark! it’s sunset, Mabel, Martha Thresher calls,’ clouded her face with stormy sunset colours. I respected Martha even then for boldly speaking to me on the girl’s behalf. Mrs. Waddy’s courage failed. John Thresher and Mark Sweetwinter were overcome by my father’s princely prodigality; their heads were turned, they appeared to have assumed that I could do no wrong. To cut short the episode, some one wrote to the squire in uncouth English, telling him I was courting a country lass, and he at once started me for the Continent. We had some conversation on money before parting. The squire allowed me a thousand a year, independent of my own income. He counselled prudence, warned me that I was on my trial, and giving me his word of honour that he should not spy into my Bank accounts, desired me to be worthy of the trust reposed in me. Speculation he forbade. I left him satisfied with the

assurance that I meant to make my grand tour neither as a merchant, a gambler, nor a rake, but simply as a plain English gentleman.

‘There’s nothing better in the world than that,’ said he.

Page 2009

Arrived in London, I left my travelling companion, the Rev. Ambrose Peterborough, sipping his Port at the hotel, and rushed down to Dipwell, shot a pebble at Mabel's window by morning twilight, and soon had her face at the casement. But it was a cloudy and rainbeaten face. She pointed toward the farm, saying that my father was there.

'Has he grieved you, Mabel?' I asked softly.

'Oh, no, not he! he wouldn't, he couldn't; he talked right. Oh, go, go: for I haven't a foot to move. And don't speak so soft; I can't bear kindness.'

My father in admonishing her had done it tenderly, I was sure. Tenderness was the weapon which had wounded her, and so she shrank from it; and if I had reproached and abused her she might, perhaps, have obeyed me by coming out, not to return. She was deaf. I kissed my hand to her regretfully; a condition of spirit gradually dissolved by the haunting phantom of her forehead and mouth crumpling up for fresh floods of tears. Had she concealed that vision with her handkerchief, I might have waited to see her before I saw my father. He soon changed the set of the current.

'Our little Mabel here,' he said, 'is an inflammable puss, I fear. By the way, talking of girls, I have a surprise for you. Remind me of it when we touch Ostend. We may want a yacht there to entertain high company. I have set inquiries afloat for the hire of a schooner. This child Mabel can read and write, I suppose? Best write no letters, boy. Do not make old Dipwell a thorny bed. I have a portrait to show you, Richie. A portrait! I think you will say the original was worthy of more than to be taken up and thrown away like a weed. You see, Richie, girls have only one chance in the world, and good God! to ruin that—no, no. You shall see this portrait. A pretty little cow-like Mabel, I grant you. But to have her on the conscience! What a coronet to wear! My young Lord Destrier—-you will remember him as one of our guests here; I brought him to make your acquaintance; well, he would not be scrupulous, it is possible. Ay, but compare yourself with him, Richie! and you and I, let us love one another and have no nettles.'

He flourished me away to London, into new spheres of fancy. He was irresistible.

In a London Club I was led up to the miniature of a youthful woman, singular for her endearing beauty Her cheeks were merry red, her lips lively with the spark of laughter, her eyes in good union with them, showing you the laughter was gentle; eyes of overflowing blue light.

'Who is she?' I asked.

The old-fashioned building of the powdered hair counselled me to add, 'Who was she?'

Captain DeWitt, though a member of the Club, seemed unable to inform me. His glance consulted my father. He hummed and drawled, and said: 'Mistress Anastasia Dewsbury; that was her name.'

'She does not look a grandmother,' said my father.

Page 2010

‘She would be one by this time, I dare say,’ said I.

We gazed in silence.

‘Yes!’ he sighed. ’She was a charming actress, and one of the best of women. A noble-minded young woman! A woman of cultivation and genius! Do you see a broken heart in that face? No? Very well. A walk will take us to her grave. She died early.’

I was breathing ‘Who?’ when he said, ‘She was my mother, my dear.’

It was piteous.

We walked to an old worn flat stone in a London street, where under I had to imagine those features of beautiful humanity lying shut from us.

She had suffered in life miserably.

CHAPTER XXIV

I MEET THE PRINCESS

Hearing that I had not slept at the hotel, the Rev. Ambrose rushed down to Riversley with melancholy ejaculations, and was made to rebound by the squire’s contemptuous recommendation to him to learn to know something of the spirit of young bloods, seeing that he had the nominal charge of one, and to preach his sermon in secret, if he would be sermonizing out of church. The good gentleman had not exactly understood his duties, or how to conduct them. Far from objecting to find me in company with my father, as he would otherwise have done by transmitting information of that fact to Riversley, he now congratulated himself on it, and after the two had conversed apart, cordially agreed to our scheme of travelling together. The squire had sickened him. I believe that by comparison he saw in my father a better friend of youth.

‘We shall not be the worse for a ghostly adviser at hand,’ my father said to me with his quaintest air of gravity and humour mixed, which was not insincerely grave, for the humour was unconscious. ’An accredited casuist may frequently be a treasure. And I avow it, I like to travel with my private chaplain.’

Mr. Peterborough’s temporary absence had allowed me time for getting ample funds placed at our disposal through the agency of my father’s solicitors, Messrs. Dettermain and Newson, whom I already knew from certain transactions with them on his behalf. They were profoundly courteous to me, and showed me his box, and alluded to his Case—a long one, and a lamentable, I was taught to apprehend, by their lugubriously professional tone about it. The question was naturally prompted in me, ‘Why do you not go on with it?’

‘Want of funds.’

‘There’s no necessity to name that now,’ I insisted. But my father desired them to postpone any further exposition of the case, saying, ’Pleasure first, business by-and-by. That, I take it, is in the order of our great mother Nature, gentlemen. I will not have him help shoulder his father’s pack until he has had his, fill of entertainment.’

Page 2011

A smooth voyage brought us in view of the towers of Ostend at sunrise. Standing with my father on deck, and gazing on this fringe of the grand romantic Continent, I remembered our old travels, and felt myself bound to him indissolubly, ashamed of my recent critical probings of his character. My boy's love for him returned in full force. I was sufficiently cognizant of his history to know that he kept his head erect, lighted by the fire of his robust heart in the thick of overhanging natal clouds. As the way is with men when they are too happy to be sentimental, I chattered of anything but my feelings.

'What a capital idea that was of yours to bring down old Alphonse to Dipwell! You should have heard old John Thresher and Mark Sweetwinter and the others grumbling at the interference of "French frogs;" with their beef, though Alphonse vowed he only ordered the ox to be turned faster, and he dressed their potatoes in six different ways. I doubt if Dipwell has composed itself yet. You know I sat for president in their tent while the beef went its first round; and Alphonse was in an awful hurry to drag me into what he called the royal tent. By the way, you should have hauled the standard down at sunset.'

'Not when the son had not come down among us,' said my father, smiling.

'Well, I forgot to tell you about Alphonse. By the way, we'll have him in our service. There was he plucking at me: "Monsieur Henri-Richie, Monsieur Henri-Richie! mille complimens . . . et les potages, Monsieur!—a la Camerani, a la tortue, aux petits pois . . . c'est en vrai artiste que j'ai su tout retarder jusqu'au dernier moment . . . . Monsieur! cher Monsieur Henri-Richie, je vous en supplie, laissez-la, ces planteurs de choux." And John Thresher, as spokesman for the rest: "Master Harry, we beg to say, in my name, we can't masticate comfortably while we've got a notion Mr. Frenchman he 's present here to play his Frenchified tricks with our plain wholesome dishes. Our opinion is, he don't know beef from hedgehog; and let him trim 'em, and egg 'em,' and bread-crumb 'em, and pound the mess all his might, and then tak' and roll 'em into balls, we say we wun't, for we can't make English muscle out o' that."—And Alphonse, quite indifferent to the vulgar: "He! mais pensez donc au Papa, Monsieur Henri-Richie, sans doute il a une sante de fer: mais encore faut-il lui menager le suc gastrique, pancreatique . . . ."'

'Ay, ay!' laughed my father; 'what sets you thinking of Alphonse?'

'I suppose because I shall have to be speaking French in an hour.'

'German, Richie, German.'

'But these Belgians speak French.'

'Such French as it is. You will, however, be engaged in a German conversation first, I suspect.'

‘Very well, I’ll stumble on. I don’t much like it.’

’In six hours from this second of time, Richie, boy, I undertake to warrant you fonder of the German tongue than of any other spoken language.’

Page 2012

I looked at him. He gave me a broad pleasant smile, without sign of a jest lurking in one corner.

The scene attracted me. Laughing fishwife faces radiant with sea-bloom in among the weedy pier-piles, and sombre blue-cheeked officers of the douane, with their double row of buttons extending the breadth of their shoulders. My father won Mr. Peterborough's approval by declaring cigars which he might easily have passed.

'And now, sir,'—he used the commanding unction of a lady's doctor,—'you to bed, and a short repose. We will, if it pleases you, breakfast at eight. I have a surprise for Mr. Richie. We are about to beat the drum in the market-place, and sing out for echoes.'

'Indeed, sir?' said the simple man.

'I promise you we shall not disturb you, Mr. Peterborough. You have reached that middle age, have you not, when sleep is, so to put it, your capital? And your activity is the interest you draw from it to live on. You have three good hours. So, then, till we meet at the breakfast-table.'

My father's first proceeding at the hotel was to examine the list of visitors. He questioned one of the waiters aside, took information from him, and seized my arm rather tremulously, saying,

'They are here. 'Tis as I expected. And she is taking the morning breath of sea-air on the dunes. Come, Richie, come.'

'Who's the "she"?' I asked incuriously.

'Well, she is young, she is of high birth, she is charming. We have a crowned head or two here. I observe in you, Richie, an extraordinary deficiency of memory. She has had an illness; Neptune speed her recovery! Now for a turn at our German. Die Strassen ruhen; die Stadt schlaft; aber dort, siehst Du, dort liegt das blaue Meer, das nimmer-schlafende! She is gazing on it, and breathing it, Richie. Ach! ihr jauchzende Seejungfern. On my soul, I expect to see the very loveliest of her sex!

You must not be dismayed at pale cheeks-blasse Wangen. Her illness has been alarming. Why, this air is the top of life; it will, and it shall, revive her. How will she address him?—"Freund," in my presence, perchance: she has her invalid's privilege. "Theure Prinzessin" you might venture on. No ice! Ay, there she is!'

Solitary, on the long level of the sand-bank, I perceived a group that became discernible as three persons attached to an invalid's chair, moving leisurely toward us. I was in the state of mind between divination and doubt when the riddle is not impossible to read, would but the heart cease its hurry an instant; a tumbled sky where the break is coming. It came. The dear old days of my wanderings with Temple framed her face. I

knew her without need of pause or retrospect. The crocus raising its cup pointed as when it pierced the earth, and the crocus stretched out on earth, wounded by frost, is the same flower. The face was the same, though the features were changed. Unaltered in expression, but wan, and the kind blue eyes large upon lean brows, her aspect was that of one who had been half caught away and still shook faintly in the relaxing invisible grasp.

Page 2013

We stopped at a distance of half-a-dozen paces to allow her time for recollection. She eyed us softly in a fixed manner, while the sea-wind blew her thick redbrown hair to threads on her cheek. Colour on the fair skin told us we were recognized.

‘Princess Ottilia!’ said my father.

‘It is I, my friend,’ she answered. ‘And you?’

‘With more health than I am in need of, dearest princess.’

‘And he?’

’Harry Richmond! my son, now of age, commencing his tour; and he has not forgotten the farewell bunch of violets.’

Her eyelids gently lifted, asking me.

‘Nor the mount you did me the honour to give me on the little Hungarian,’ said I.

‘How nice this sea-air is!’ she spoke in English. ’England and sea go together in my thoughts. And you are here! I have been down very low, near the lowest. But your good old sea makes me breathe again. I want to toss on it. Have you yet seen the Markgrafin?’

My father explained that we had just landed from the boat.

‘Is our meeting, then, an accident?’

‘Dear princess, I heard of your being out by the shore.’

’Ah! kind: and you walked to meet me? I love that as well, though I love chance. And it is chance that brings you here! I looked out on the boat from England while they were dressing me: I cannot have too much of the morning, for then I have all to myself: sea and sky and I. The night people are all asleep, and you come like an old Marchen.’

Her eyelids dropped without closing.

‘Speak no more to her just at present,’ said an English voice, Miss Silbey’s. Schwartz, the huge dragoon, whose big black horse hung near him in my memory like a phantom, pulled the chair at a quiet pace, head downward. A young girl clad in plain black walked beside Miss Sibley, following the wheels.

‘Danger is over,’ Miss Sibley answered my gaze. ’She is convalescent. You see how weak she is.’

I praised the lady for what I deemed her great merit in not having quitted the service of the princess.

‘Oh!’ said she, ’my adieux to Sarkeld were uttered years ago. But when I heard of her fall from the horse I went and nursed her. We were once in dread of her leaving us. She sank as if she had taken some internal injury. It may have been only the shock to her system and the cessation of her accustomed exercise. She has a little over-studied.’

‘The margravine?’

’The margravine is really very good and affectionate, and has won my esteem. So you and your father are united at last? We have often talked of you. Oh! that day up by the tower. But, do you know, the statue is positively there now, and no one—no one who had the privilege of beholding the first bronze Albrecht Wohlgemuth, Furst von Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld, no one will admit that the second is half worthy of him. I can feel to this day the leap of the heart in my mouth when the statue dismounted. The prince sulked for a month: the margravine still longer at your father’s evasion. She could not make allowance for the impulsive man: such a father; such a son!’

Page 2014

‘Thank you, thank you most humbly,’ said I, bowing to her shadow of a mock curtsey.

The princess’s hand appeared at a side of the chair. We hastened to her.

‘Let me laugh, too,’ she prayed.

Miss Sibley was about to reply, but stared, and delight sprang to her lips in a quick cry.

’What medicine is this? Why, the light of morning has come to you, my darling!’

‘I am better, dearest, better.’

‘You sigh, my own.’

’No; I breathe lots, lots of salt air now, and lift like a boat. Ask him—he had a little friend, much shorter than himself, who came the whole way with him out of true friendship—ask him where is the friend?’

Miss Sibley turned her head to me.

‘Temple,’ said I; ‘Temple is a midshipman; he is at sea.’

‘That is something to think of,’ the princess murmured, and dropped her eyelids a moment. She resumed ’The Grand Seigneur was at Vienna last year, and would not come to Sarkeld, though he knew I was ill.’

My father stooped low.

’The Grand Seigneur, your servant, dear princess, was an Ottoman Turk, and his Grand Vizier advised him to send flowers in his place weekly.’

‘I had them, and when we could get those flowers nowhere else,’ she replied. ‘So it was you! So my friends have been about me.’

During the remainder of the walk I was on one side of the chair, and her little maid on the other, while my father to rearward conversed with Miss Sibley. The princess took a pleasure in telling me that this Aennchen of hers knew me well, and had known me before ever her mistress had seen me. Aennchen was the eldest of the two children Temple and I had eaten breakfast with in the forester’s hut. I felt myself as if in the forest again, merely wondering at the growth of the trees, and the narrowness of my vision in those days.

At parting, the princess said,

’Is my English improved? You smiled at it once. I will ask you when I meet you next.’

‘It is my question,’ I whispered to my own ears.

She caught the words.

‘Why do you say—“It is my question"?’

I was constrained to remind her of her old forms of English speech.

‘You remember that? Adieu,’ she said.

My father considerately left me to carry on my promenade alone. I crossed the ground she had traversed, noting every feature surrounding it, the curving wheel-track, the thin prickly sand-herbage, the wave-mounds, the sparse wet shells and pebbles, the gleaming flatness of the water, and the vast horizon-boundary of pale flat land level with shore, looking like a dead sister of the sea. By a careful examination of my watch and the sun’s altitude, I was able to calculate what would, in all likelihood, have been his height above yonder waves when her chair was turned toward the city, at a point I reached in the track. But of the matter then simultaneously occupying my mind, to recover which was the second supreme task I proposed to myself-of what. I also was thinking upon the stroke of five o’clock, I could recollect nothing. I could not even recollect whether I happened to be looking on sun and waves when she must have had them full and glorious in her face.

Page 2015

CHAPTER XXV

ON BOARD A YACHT

With the heartiest consent I could give, and a blank cheque, my father returned to England to hire forthwith a commodious yacht, fitted and manned. Before going he discoursed of prudence in our expenditure; though not for the sake of the mere money in hand, which was a trifle, barely more than the half of my future income; but that the squire, should he by and by bethink him of inspecting our affairs, might perceive we were not spendthrifts.

‘I promised you a surprise, Richie,’ said he, ’and you have had it; whether at all equal to your expectations is for you to determine. I was aware of the margravine’s intention to bring the princess to these sea-sands; they are famous on the Continent. It was bruited last Winter and Spring that she would be here in the season for bathing; so I held it likely we should meet. We have, you behold. In point of fact, we owe the good margravine some show of hospitality. The princess has a passion for tossing on the sea. To her a yacht is a thing dropped from the moon. His Highness the prince her father could as soon present her with one as with the moon itself. The illustrious Serenity’s revenue is absorbed, my boy, in the state he has to support. As for his daughter’s dowry, the young gentleman who anticipates getting one with her, I commend to the practise of his whistling. It will be among the sums you may count, if you are a moderate arithmetician, in groschen. The margravine’s income I should reckon to approach twenty thousand per annum, and she proves her honourable sense that she holds it in trust for others by dispersing it rapidly. I fear she loves cards. So, then, I shall go and hire the yacht through Dettermain and Newson, furnish it with piano and swing-cot, *etc*.; and if the ladies shrink from a cruise they can have an occasional sail. Here are we at their service. I shall be seriously baffled by fortune if I am not back to you at the end of a week. You will take your early morning walk, I presume. On Sunday see that our chaplain, the excellent Mr. Peterborough, officiates for the assembled Protestants of all nations. It excites our English enthusiasm. In addition, son Richie, it is peculiarly our duty. I, at least, hold the view that it is a family duty. Think it over, Richie boy. Providence, you see, has sent us the man. As for me, I feel as if I were in the dawn of one life with all the mature experience of another. I am calm, I am perfectly unexcited, and I tell you, old son, I believe—pick among the highest—our destinies are about the most brilliant of any couple in Great Britain.’

Page 2016

His absence relieved me in spite of my renewed pleasure in his talk; I may call it a thirsty craving to have him inflating me, puffing the deep unillumined treasure-pits of my nature with laborious hints, as mines are filled with air to keep the miners going. While he talked he made these inmost recesses habitable. But the pain lay in my having now and then to utter replies. The task of speaking was hateful. I found a sweetness in brooding unrealizingly over hopes and dreams and possibilities, and I let him go gladly that I might enjoy a week of silence, just taking impressions as they came, like the sands in the ebb-tide. The impression of the morning was always enough for a day's meditation. The green colour and the crimson athwart it, and higher up the pinky lights, flamingo feathers, on a warm half-circle of heaven, in hue between amethyst and milky opal; then the rim of the sun's disc not yet severe; and then the monstrous shadow of tall Schwartz darting at me along the sand, then the princess. This picture, seen at sunrise, lasted till I slept. It stirred no thoughts, conjured no images, it possessed me. In the afternoon the margravine accompanied the princess to a point facing seaward, within hearing of the military band. She did me the favour to tell me that she tolerated me until I should become efficient in German to amuse her, but the dulness of the Belgian city compared with her lively German watering-places compelled her to try my powers of fun in French, and in French I had to do duty, and failed in my office.

'Do you know,' said she, 'that your honourable papa is one in a million? He has the life of a regiment in his ten fingers. What astonishes me is that he does not make fury in that England of yours—that Lapland! Je ne puffs me passer de cet homme! He offends me, he trifles, he outrages, he dares permit himself to be indignant. Bon! we part, and absence pleads for him with the eloquence of Satan. I am his victim. Does he, then, produce no stir whatever in your England? But what a people! But yes, you resemble us, as bottles—bottles; seulement, you are emptied of your wine. Ce Monsieur Peterbooroo'! Il m'agace les nerfs. It cannot be blood in his veins. One longs to see him cuffed, to see if he has the English lion in him, one knows not where. But you are so, you English, when not intoxicated. And so censorious! You win your battles, they say, upon beer and cordials: it is why you never can follow up a success. Je tiens cela du Marechal Prince B-----. Let that pass. One groans at your intolerable tristesse. La vie en Angleterre est comme un marais. It is a scandal to human nature. It blows fogs, foul vapours, joint-stiffnesses, agues, pestilences, over us here,—yes, here! That is your best side: but your worst is too atrocious! Mon Dieu! Your men-rascals! Your women-rascals!'

'Good soul!' the princess arrested her, 'I beg that you will not abuse England.'

Page 2017

‘Have I abused England?’ exclaimed the margravine. ’Nay, then, it was because England is shockingly unjust to the most amusing, the most reviving, charming of men. There is he fresh as a green bubbling well, and those English decline to do honour to his source. Now tell me, you!’ She addressed me imperiously. ’Are you prosecuting his claims? Are you besieging your Government? What! you are in the season of generosity, an affectionate son, wealthy as a Magyar prince of flocks, herds, mines, and men, and you let him stand in the shade deprived of his birthright? Are you a purse-proud commoner or an imbecile?’

‘My whimsy aunt!’ the princess interposed again, ’now you have taken to abusing a defenceless Englishman.’

’Nothing of the sort, child. I compliment him on his looks and manners; he is the only one of his race who does not appear to have marched out of a sentinel’s box with a pocket-mirror in his hand. I thank him from my soul for not cultivating the national cat’s whisker. None can imagine what I suffer from the oppressive sight of his Monsieur Peterbooroo’! And they are of one pattern—the entire nation! He! no, he has the step of a trained blood-horse. Only, as Kaunitz, or somebody, said of Joseph *ii*., or somebody, he thinks or he chews. Englishmen’s mouths were clearly not made for more purposes than one. In truth, I am so utterly wearied, I could pray for the diversion of a descent of rain. The life here is as bad as in Rippau. I might just as well be in Rippau doing duty: the silly people complain, I hear. I am gathering dust. These, my dear, these are the experiences which age women at a prodigious rate. I feel chains on my limbs here.’

‘Madame, I would,’ said I, ’that I were the Perseus to relieve you of your monster Ennui, but he is coming quickly.’

‘You see he has his pretty phrases!’ cried the margravine; adding encouragingly, ‘S’il nest pas tant sort peu impertinent?’

The advance of some German or Russian nobleman spared me further efforts.

We were on shore, listening to the band in the afternoon, when a sail like a spark of pure white stood on the purple black edge of a storm-cloud. It was the yacht. By sunset it was moored off shore, and at night hung with variegated lamps. Early next morning we went on board. The ladies were astonished at the extent of the vessel, and its luxurious fittings and cunning arrangements. My father, in fact, had negotiated for the hire of the yacht some weeks previously, with his accustomed forethought.

‘House and town and fortress provisioned, and moveable at will!’ the margravine interjected repeatedly.

The princess was laid on raised pillows in her swingcot under an awning aft, and watched the sailors, the splendid offspring of old sea-fights, as I could observe her spirited fancy conceiving them. They were a set of men to point to for an answer to the margravine's strictures on things English.

Page 2018

‘Then, are you the captain, my good Herr Heilbrunn?’ the margravine asked my father.

He was dressed in cheerful blue, wearing his cheerfullest air, and seemed strongly inclined for the part of captain, but presented the actual commander of the schooner-yacht, and helped him through the margravine’s interrogations.

‘All is excellent,—excellent for a day’s sail,’ she said. ’I have no doubt you could nourish my system for a month, but to deal frankly with you—prepared meats and cold pies!—to face them once is as much as I am capable of.’

‘Dear Lady Field-Marshal,’ returned my father, ’the sons of Neptune would be of poor account, if they could not furnish you cookery at sea.’

They did, for Alphonse was on board. He and my father had a hot discussion about the margravine’s dishes, Alphonse declaring that it was against his conscience to season them pungently, and my father preaching expediency. Alphonse spoke of the artist and his duty to his art, my father of the wise diplomatist who manipulated individuals without any sacrifice of principle. They were partly at play, of course, both having humour.

It ended in the margravine’s being enraptured. The delicacy of the invalid’s dishes, was beyond praise. ’So, then, we are absolutely better housed and accommodated than on shore!’ the margravine made her wonder heard, and from that fell to enthusiasm for the vessel. After a couple of pleasant smooth-sailing days, she consented to cruise off the coasts of France and England. Adieu to the sands. Throughout the cruise she was placable, satisfied with earth and sea, and constantly eulogizing herself for this novel state of serenity. Cards, and a collection of tripping French books bound in yellow, danced the gavotte with time, which made the flying minutes endurable to her: and for relaxation there was here the view of a shining town dropped between green hills to dip in sea-water, yonder a ship of merchandise or war to speculate upon, trawlers, collier-brigs, sea-birds, wave over wave. No cloud on sun and moon. We had gold and silver in our track, like the believable children of fairyland.

The princess, lying in her hammock-cot on deck, both day and night, or for the greater part of the night, let her eyes feast incessantly on a laughing sea: when she turned them to any of us, pure pleasure sparkled in them. The breezy salt hours were visible ecstasy to her blood. If she spoke it was but to utter a few hurried, happy words, and shrink as you see the lightning behind a cloud-rack, suggestive of fiery swift emotion within, and she gazed away overjoyed at the swoop and plunge of the gannet, the sunny spray, the waves curling crested or down-like. At night a couple of sailors, tender as women, moved her in the cot to her cabin. We heard her voice in the dark of the morning, and her little maid Aennchen came out and was met by me; and I at that hour had the privilege to help move her back to her favourite

Page 2019

place, and strap the iron-stand fast, giving the warm-hooded cot room to swing. The keen sensations of a return to health amid unwonted scenes made things magical to her. When she beheld our low green Devon hills she signalled for help to rise, and ‘That is England!’ she said, summoning to her beautiful clear eyeballs the recollection of her first desire to see my country. Her petition was that the yacht should go in nearer and nearer to the land till she could discern men, women, and children, and their occupations. A fisherman and his wife sat in the porch above their hanging garden, the woman knitting, the man mending his nets, barefooted boys and girls astride the keel of a boat below them. The princess eyed them and wept. ’They give me happiness; I can give them nothing,’ she said.

The margravine groaned impatiently at talk of such a dieaway sort.

My father sent a couple of men on shore with a gift of money to their family in the name of the Princess Ottilia. How she thanked him for his prompt ideas! ‘It is because you are generous you read one well.’

She had never thanked me. I craved for that vibrating music as of her deep heart penetrated and thrilling, but shrank from grateful words which would have sounded payment. Running before the wind swiftly on a night of phosphorescent sea, when the waves opened to white hollows with frayed white ridges, wreaths of hissing silver, her eyelids closed, and her hand wandered over the silken coverlet to the hammock cloth, and up, in a blind effort to touch. Mine joined to it. Little Aennchen was witness. Ottilia held me softly till her slumber was deep.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN VIEW OF THE HOHENZOLLERN’S BIRTHPLACE

Our cruise came to an end in time to save the margravine from yawning. The last day of it was windless, and we hung in sight of the colourless low Flemish coast for hours, my father tasking his ingenuity to amuse her. He sang with Miss Sibley, rallied Mr. Peterborough, played picquet to lose, threw over the lead line to count the fathoms, and whistling for the breeze, said to me, ’We shall decidedly have to offer her an exhibition of tipsy British seamen as a final resource. The case is grave either way; but we cannot allow the concluding impression to be a dull one.’

It struck me with astonishment to see the vigilant watch she kept over the princess this day, after having left her almost uninterruptedly to my care.

‘You are better?’ She addressed Ottilia. ’You can sit up? You think you can walk? Then I have acted rightly, nay, judiciously,—I have not made a sacrifice for nothing. I took the cruise, mind you, on your account. You would study yourself to the bone, till you looked

like a canary's quill, with that Herr Professor of yours. Now I 've given you a dose of life. Yes, you begin to look like human flesh. Something has done you good.'

Page 2020

The princess flushing scarlet, the margravine cried,

’There’s no occasion for you to have the whole British army in your cheeks. Goodness me! what’s the meaning of it? Why, you answer me like flags, banners, uhlans’ pennons, fullfrocked cardinals!’

My father stepped in.

‘Ah, yes,’ said the margravine. ’But you little know, my good Roy, the burden of an unmarried princess; and heartily glad shall I be to hand her over to Baroness Turckems. That’s her instituted governess, duenna, dragon, what you will. She was born for responsibility, I was not; it makes me miserable. I have had no holiday. True, while she was like one of their wax virgins I had a respite. Fortunately, I hear of you English, that when you fall to sighing, you suck your thumbs and are consoled.’

My father bowed her, and smiled her, and whirled her away from the subject. I heard him say, under his breath, that he had half a mind to issue orders for an allowance of grog to be served out to the sailors on the spot. I suggested, as I conceived in a similar spirit the forcible ducking of Mr. Peterborough. He appeared to entertain and relish the notion in earnest.

‘It might do. It would gratify her enormously,’ he said, and eyed the complacent clerical gentleman with transparent jealousy of his claims to decent treatment. ‘Otherwise, I must confess,’ he added, ’I am at a loss. My wits are in the doldrums.’

He went up to Mr. Peterborough, and, with an air of great sincerity and courtesy, requested him in French to create a diversion for her Highness the Margravine of Rippau during the extreme heat of the afternoon by precipitating himself headlong into forty fathoms, either attached or unattached. His art in baffling Mr. Peterborough’s attempts to treat the unheard-of request as a jest was extraordinary. The ingenuity of his successive pleas for pressing such a request pertinaciously upon Mr. Peterborough in particular, his fixed eye, yet cordial deferential manner, and the stretch of his forefinger, and argumentative turn of the head—indicative of an armed disputant fully on the alert, and as if it were of profound and momentous importance that he should thoroughly defeat and convince his man—overwhelmed us. Mr. Peterborough, not being supple in French, fell back upon his English with a flickering smile of protestation; but even in his native tongue he could make no head against the tremendous volubility and brief eager pauses besetting him.

The farce was too evanescent for me to reproduce it.

Peterborough turned and fled to his cabin. Half the crew were on the broad grin. The margravine sprang to my father’s arm, and entreated him to be her guest in her Austrian mountain summer-seat. Ottilia was now her darling and her comfort. Whether we

English youth sucked our thumbs, or sighed furiously, she had evidently ceased to care. Mr. Peterborough assured me at night that he had still

Page 2021

a difficulty in persuading himself of my father's absolute sanity, so urgent was the fire of his eye in seconding his preposterous proposal; and, as my father invariably treated with the utmost reserve a farce played out, they never arrived at an understanding about it, beyond a sententious agreement once, in the extreme heat of an Austrian highland valley, that the option of taking a header into sea-water would there be divine.

Our yacht winged her way home. Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld, accompanied by Baroness Turckems, and Prince Otto, his nephew, son of the Prince of Eisenberg, a captain of Austrian lancers, joined the margravine in Wurtemberg, and we felt immediately that domestic affairs were under a different management. Baroness Turckems relieved the margravine of her guard. She took the princess into custody. Prince Ernest greeted us with some affability; but it was communicated to my father that he expected an apology before he could allow himself to be as absolutely unclouded toward us as the blaze of his titles. My father declined to submit; so the prince inquired of us what our destination was. Down the Danube to the Black Sea and Asia Minor, Greece, Egypt, the Nile, the Desert, India, possibly, and the Himalayas, my father said. The prince bowed. The highest personages, if they cannot travel, are conscious of a sort of airy majesty pertaining to one who can command so wide and far a flight. We were supplicated by the margravine to appease her brother's pride with half a word. My father was firm. The margravine reached her two hands to him. He kissed over them each in turn. They interchanged smart semi-flattering or cutting sentences.

'Good!' she concluded; 'now I sulk you for five years.'

'You would decapitate me, madam, and weep over my astonished head, would you not?'

'Upon my honour, I would,' she shook herself to reply.

He smiled rather sadly.

'No pathos!' she implored him.

'Not while I live, madam,' said he.

At this her countenance underwent a tremour.

'And when that ends . . . friend! well, I shall have had my last laugh in the world.'

Both seemed affected. My father murmured some soothing word.

'Then you do mean to stay with me?' the margravine caught him up.

'Not in livery, your Highness.'

‘To the deuce with you!’ would be a fair translation of the exalted lady’s reply. She railed at his insufferable pride.

‘And you were wrong, wrong,’ she pursued. ’You offended the prince mightily: you travestied his most noble ancestor—’

‘In your service, may it please you.’

’You offended, offended him, I say, and you haven’t the courage to make reparation. And when I tell you the prince is manageable as your ship, if you will only take and handle the rudder. Do you perceive?’

She turned to me.

’Hither, Mr. Harry; come, persuade him. Why, you do not desire to leave me, do you?’

Page 2022

Much the reverse. But I had to congratulate myself subsequently on having been moderate in the expression of my wishes; for, as my father explained to me, with sufficient lucidity to enlighten my dulness, the margravine was tempting him grossly. She saw more than I did of his plans. She could actually affect to wink at them that she might gain her point, and have her amusement, and live for the hour, treacherously beguiling a hoodwinked pair to suppose her partially blind or wholly complaisant. My father knew her and fenced her.

‘Had I yielded,’ he said, when my heart was low after the parting, ’I should have shown her my hand. I do not choose to manage the prince that the margravine may manage me. I pose my pride—immolate my son to it, Richie? I hope not. No. At Vienna we shall receive an invitation to Sarkeld for the winter, if we hear nothing of entreaties to turn aside to Ischl at Munich. She is sure to entreat me to accompany her on her annual visit to her territory of Rippau, which she detests; and, indeed, there is not a vine in the length and breadth of it. She thought herself broad awake, and I have dosed her with an opiate.’

He squeezed my fingers tenderly. I was in want both of consolation and very delicate handling when we drove out of the little Wurtemberg town: I had not taken any farewell from Ottilia. Baroness Turckems was already exercising her functions of dragon. With the terrible forbidding word ‘Repose’ she had wafted the princess to her chamber in the evening, and folded her inextricably round and round in the morning. The margravine huffed, the prince icy, Ottilia invisible, I found myself shooting down from the heights of a dream among shattered fragments of my cloud-palace before I well knew that I had left off treading common earth. All my selfish nature cried out to accuse Ottilia. We drove along a dusty country road that lay like a glaring shaft of the desert between vineyards and hills.

‘There,’ said my father, waving his hand where the hills on our left fell to a distance and threw up a lofty head and neck cut with one white line, ’your Hohenzollerns shot up there. Their castle looks like a tight military stock. Upon my word, their native mountain has the air of a drum major. Mr. Peterborough, have you a mind to climb it? We are at your disposal.’

‘Thank you, thank you, sir,’ said the Rev. Ambrose, gazing enthusiastically, but daunted by the heat: ‘if it is your wish?’

’We have none that is not yours, Mr. Peterborough. You love ruins, and we are adrift just now. I presume we can drive to the foot of the ascent. I should wish my son perhaps to see the source of great houses.’

Here it was that my arm was touched by old Schwartz. He saluted stiffly, and leaning from the saddle on the trot of his horse at an even pace with our postillion, stretched out a bouquet of roses. I seized it palpitating, smelt the roses, and wondered. May a man

write of his foolishness?—tears rushed to my eyes. Schwartz was far behind us when my father caught sight of the magical flowers.

Page 2023

‘Come!’ said he, glowing, ’we will toast the Hohenstaufens and the Hohenzollerns to-night, Richie.’

Later, when I was revelling in fancies sweeter than the perfume of the roses, he pressed their stems reflectively, unbound them, and disclosed a slip of crested paper. On it was written:

> ‘Violets are over.’

Plain words; but a princess had written them, and never did so golden a halo enclose any piece of human handiwork.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TIME OF ROSES

I sat and thrilled from head to foot with a deeper emotion than joy. Not I, but a detached self allied to the careering universe and having life in it.

‘Violets are over.’

The first strenuous effort of my mind was to grasp the meaning, subtle as odour, in these words. Innumerable meanings wreathed away unattainable to thought. The finer senses could just perceive them ere they vanished. Then as I grew material, two camps were pitched and two armies prepared to fight to establish one distinct meaning. ’Violets are over, so I send you roses’; she writes you simple fact. Nay, ’Our time of violets is over, now for us the roses’; she gives you heavenly symbolism.

‘From violets to roses, so run the seasons.’

Or is it,

‘From violets to roses, thus far have we two travelled?’

But would she merely say, ’I have not this kind of flower, and I send you another?’

True, but would she dare to say, ’The violets no longer express my heart; take the roses?’

’Maidenly, and a Princess, yet sweet and grateful, she gives you the gracefullest good speed.

’Noble above all human distinctions, she binds you to herself, if you will it.’

The two armies came into collision, the luck of the day going to the one I sided with.

But it was curiously observable that the opposing force recovered energy from defeat, while mine languished in victory. I headed them alternately, and—it invariably happened so.

‘She cannot mean so much as this.’

‘She must mean more than that.’

Thus the Absolute and the Symbolical factions struggled on. A princess drew them as the moon the tides.

By degrees they subsided and united, each reserving its view; a point at which I imagined myself to have regained my proper humility. ’The princess has sent you these flowers out of her homely friendliness; not seeing you to speak her farewell, she, for the very reason that she can do it innocent of any meaning whatsoever, bids you be sure you carry her esteem with you. Is the sun of blue heavens guilty of the shadow it casts? Clear your mind. She means nothing. Warmth and beauty come from her, and are on you for the moment. But full surely she is a thing to be won: she is human: did not her hand like a gentle snake seek yours, and detain it, and bear it away into the heart of her sleep?—Be moderate. Let not a thought or a dream spring from her condescension, lest you do outrage to her noble simplicity. Look on that high Hohenzollern hill-top: she also is of the line of those who help to found illustrious Houses: what are you?’

Page 2024

I turned to my father and stared him in the face. What was he? Were we not losing precious time in not prosecuting his suit? I put this question to him, believing that it would sound as too remote from my thoughts to betray them. He glanced at the roses, and answered gladly,

'Yes!—no, no! we must have our holiday. Mr. Peterborough is for exploring a battle-field in the neighbourhood of Munich. He shall. I wish him to see the Salzkammergut, and have a taste of German Court-life. Allow me to be captain, Richie, will you? I will show you how battles are gained and mountains are scaled. That young Prince Otto of Eisenberg is a fine young fellow. Those Austrian cavalry regiments are good training-schools for the carriage of a young man's head and limbs. I would match my boy against him in the exercises—fencing, shooting, riding.'

'As you did at Bath,' said I.

He replied promptly: 'We might give him Anna Penrhys to marry. English wives are liked here—adored—if they fetch a dowry. Concerning my suit, Richie, enough if it keeps pace with us: and we are not going slow. It is a thing certain. Dettermain and Newson have repeatedly said, "Money, money!' hand us money, and we guarantee you a public recognition." Money we now have. But we cannot be in two fields at once. Is it your desire to return to England?'

'Not at all,' said I, with a chill at the prospect.

'If it is—?' he pressed me, and relenting added: 'I confess I enjoy this Suabian land as much as you do. Indolence is occasionally charming. I am at work, nevertheless. But, Richie, determine not to think little of yourself: there is the main point; believe me, that is half the battle. You, sir, are one of the wealthiest gentlemen in Europe. You are pronouncedly a gentleman. That is what we can say of you at present, as you appear in the world's eye. And you are by descent illustrious. Well, no more of that, but consider if you kneel down, who will decline to put a foot on you? Princes have the habit, and they do it as a matter of course. Challenge them. And they, Richie, are particularly susceptible to pity for the misfortunes of their class—kind, I should say, for class it is not; now I have done. All I tell you is, I intend you, under my guidance, to be happy.'

I thought his remarks the acutest worldly wisdom I had ever heard,—his veiled method of treating my case the shrewdest, delicatest, and most consoling, most inspiring. It had something of the mystical power of the Oracles,—the power which belongs to anonymous writing. Had he disposed of my apparent rival, and exalted me to the level of a princely family, in open speech, he would have conveyed no balm to me—I should have classed it as one confident man's opinion. Disguised and vague, but emphatic, and interpreted by the fine beam of his eye, it was intoxicating; and when he said subsequently, 'Our majority Burgundy was good emperor wine, Richie. You approved it? I laid that vintage down to give you a lesson to show you that my plans come safe to

maturity,’—I credited him with a large share of foresight, though I well knew his habit of antedating his sagacity, and could not but smile at the illustration of it.

Page 2025

You perceive my state without rendering it necessary for me to label myself.

I saw her next in a pinewood between Ischl and the Traun. I had climbed the steep hill alone, while my father and Mr. Peterborough drove round the carriage-road to the margravine's white villa. Ottilia was leaning on the arm of Baroness Turckems, walking —a miracle that disentangled her cruelly from my net of fancies. The baroness placed a second hand upon her as soon as I was seen standing in the path. Ottilia's face coloured like the cyclamen at her feet.

'You!' she said.

'I might ask, is it you, princess?'

'Some wonder has been worked, you see.'

'I thank heaven.'

'You had a part in it.'

'The poorest possible.'

'Yet I shall presume to call you Doctor Oceanus,'

'Will you repeat his medicine? The yacht awaits you always.'

'When I am well I study. Do not you?'

'I have never studied in my life.'

'Ah, lose no more time. The yacht is delicious idleness, but it is idleness. I am longing for it now, I am still so very weak. My dear Sibley has left me to be married. She marries a Hanoverian officer. We change countries—I mean,' the princess caught back her tongue, 'she will become German, not compatriot of your ships of war. My English rebukes me. I cease to express . . . It is like my walking, done half for pride, I think. Baroness, lower me, and let me rest.'

The baroness laid her gently on the dry brown pine-sheddings, and blew a whistle that hung at her girdle, by which old Schwartzy kept out of sight to encourage the princess's delusion of pride in her walking, was summoned. Ottilia had fainted. The baroness shot a suspicious glance at me. 'It comes of this everlasting English talk,' I heard her mutter. She was quick to interpose between me and the form I had once raised and borne undisputedly.

'Schwartz is the princess's attendant, sir,' she said. 'In future, may I request you to talk German?'

The Prince of Eppenwelzen and Prince Otto were shooting in the mountains. The margravine, after conversing with the baroness, received me stiffly. She seemed eager to be rid of us; was barely hospitable. My mind was too confused to take much note of words and signs. I made an appointment to meet my father the day following, and walked away and returned at night, encountered Schwartz and fed on the crumbs of tidings I got from him, a good, rough old faithful fellow, far past the age for sympathy, but he had carried Ottilia when she was an infant, and meant to die in her service. I thought him enviable above most creatures.

Page 2026

His principal anxiety was about my finding sleeping quarters. When he had delivered himself three times over of all that I could lead him to say, I left him still puffing at his pipe. He continued on guard to be in readiness to run for a doctor, should one be wanted. Twice in the night I came across his path. The night was quiet, dark blue, and starry; the morning soft and fragrant. The burden of the night was bearable, but that of daylight I fled from, and all day I was like one expecting a crisis. Laughter, with so much to arouse it, hardly had any foothold within me to stir my wits. For if I said 'Folly!' I did not feel it, and what I felt I did not understand. My heart and head were positively divided. Days and weeks were spent in reconciling them a little; days passed with a pencil and scribbled slips of paper—the lines written with regular commencements and irregular terminations; you know them. Why had Ottilia fainted? She recommended hard study—thinks me idle, worthless; she has a grave intelligence, a serious estimation of life; she thinks me intrinsically of the value of a summer fly. But why did she say, 'We change countries,' and immediately flush, break and falter, lose command of her English, grow pale and swoon; why? With this question my disastrous big heart came thundering up to the closed doors of-comprehension. It was unanswerable. 'We change countries.' That is, she and Miss Sibley change countries, because the English woman marries a German, and the German princess—oh! enormous folly. Pierce it, slay it, trample it under. Is that what the insane heart is big with? Throughout my night-watch I had been free of it, as one who walks meditating in cloisters on a sentence that once issued from divine lips. There was no relief, save in those pencilled lines which gave honest laughter a chance; they stood like such a hasty levy of raw recruits raised for war, going through the goose-step, with pretty accurate shoulders, and feet of distracting degrees of extension, enough to craze a rhythmical drill-sergeant. I exulted at the first reading, shuddered at the second, and at the third felt desperate, destroyed them and sat staring at vacancy as if I had now lost the power of speech.

At last I flung away idleness and came to a good resolution; and I carried it through. I studied at a famous German university, not far from Hanover. My father, after discussing my project with me from the point of view of amazement, settled himself in the University town, a place of hopeless dulness, where the stones of the streets and the houses seemed to have got their knotty problem to brood over, and never knew holiday. A fire for acquisition possessed me, and soon an ungovernable scorn for English systems of teaching—sound enough for the producing of gentlemen, and perhaps of merchants; but gentlemen rather bare of graces, and merchants not too scientific in finance. Mr. Peterborough conducted the argument against me until my stout display of facts, or it may have been my insolence, combined with the ponderous pressure of the atmosphere upon one who was not imbibing a counteracting force, drove him on a tour among German cathedrals.

Page 2027

Letters from Riversley informed me that my proceedings were approved, though the squire wanted me near him. We offered entertainments to the students on a vast scale. The local newspaper spoke of my father as the great Lord Roy. So it happened that the margravine at Sarkeld heard of us. Returning from a visit to the prince's palace, my father told me that he saw an opportunity for our being useful to the prince, who wanted money to work a newly-discovered coal-mine in his narrow dominions, and he suggested that I might induce the squire to supply it; as a last extremity I could advance the money. Meanwhile he had engaged to accompany the prince in mufti to England to examine into the working of coal-mines, and hire an overseer and workmen to commence operations on the Sarkeld property. It would be obligatory to entertain him fitly in London.

'Certainly,' said I.

'During our absence the margravine will do her best to console you, Richie. The prince chafes at his poverty. We give him a display of wealth in England; here we are particularly discreet. We shall be surer of our ground in time. I set Dettermain and Newson at work. I have written for them to hire a furnished mansion for a couple of months, carriages, horses, lacqueys. But over here we must really be—goodness me! I know how hard it is!—we must hold the reins on ourselves tight. Baroness Turckems is a most estimable person on the side of her duty. Why, the Dragon of Wantley sat on its eggs, you may be convinced! She is a praiseworthy dragon. The side she presents to us is horny, and not so agreeable. Talk German when she is on guard. Further I need not counsel a clever old son. Counsel me, Richie. Would it be adviseable to run the prince down to Riversley?—a Prince!'

'Oh! decidedly not,' was my advice.

'Well, well,' he assented.

I empowered him to sell out Bank stock.

He wrote word from England of a very successful expedition. The prince, travelling under the title of Count Delzenburg, had been suitably entertained, received by Lady Wilts, Serena Marchioness of Edbury, Lady Denewdney, Lady Sampleman, and others. He had visited my grandfather's mine, and that of Miss Penrhys, and was astounded; had said of me that I wanted but a title to be as brilliant a parti as any in Europe.

The margravine must have received orders from her brother to be civil to me; she sent me an imperious invitation from her villa, and for this fruit of my father's diplomacy I yielded him up my daintier feelings, my judgement into the bargain.

Snows of early Spring were on the pinewood country I had traversed with Temple. Ottilia greeted me in health and vivacity. The margravine led me up to her in the very

saloon where Temple, my father, and I had sat after the finale of the statue scene, saying—

‘Our sea-lieutenant.’

‘It delights me to hear he has turned University student,’ she said; and in English: ‘You have made friends of your books?’

Page 2028

She was dressed in blue velvet to the throat; the hair was brushed from the temples and bound in a simple knot. Her face and speech, fair and unconstrained, had neither shadow nor beam directed specially for me. I replied,

‘At least I have been taught to despise idleness.’

’My Professor tells me it is strange for any of your countrymen to love books.’

‘We have some good scholars, princess.’

’You have your Bentley and Porson. Oh! I know many of the world’s men have grown in England. Who can deny that? What we mean is, your society is not penetrated with learning. But my Professor shall dispute with you. Now you are facile in our German you can defend yourself. He is a deep scholar, broad over tongues and dialects, European, Asiatic-a lion to me, poor little mouse! I am speaking of Herr Professor von Karsteg, lady aunt.’

‘Speak intelligibly, and don’t drum on my ear with that hybrid language,’ rejoined the margravine.

’Hybrid! It is my Herr Professor’s word. But English is the choice gathering of languages, and honey is hybrid, unless you condemn the bee to suck at a single flower.’

‘Ha! you strain compliments like the poet Fretzel,’ the margravine exclaimed. ’Luckily, they’re not, addressed to human creatures. You will find the villa dull, Herr Harry Richmond. For my part, every place is dull to me that your father does not enliven. We receive no company in the prince’s absence, so we are utterly cut off from fools; we have simply none about us.’

‘The deprivation is one we are immensely sensible of!’ said the princess.

’Laugh on! you will some day be aware of their importance in daily life, Ottilia.’

The princess answered: ‘If I could hate, it would be such persons.’ A sentence that hung in the memory of one knowing himself to be animated by the wildest genius of folly.

We drove to the statue of Prince Albrecht Wohlgemuth, overlooking leagues of snow-roofed branches. Again Ottilia reverted to Temple,

’That dear little friend of yours who wandered out with you to seek your father, and is now a sailor! I cannot forget him. It strikes me as a beautiful piece of the heroism of boys. You both crossed the sea to travel over the whole Continent until you should find him, did you not? What is hard to understand, is your father’s not writing to you while he did us the favour to reside at the palace.’

‘Roy is a butterfly,’ said the margravine.

‘That I cannot think.’

’Roy was busy, he was occupied. I won’t have him abused. Besides, one can’t be always caressing and cajoling one’s pretty brats.’

‘He is an intensely loving father.’

’Very well; establish that, and what does it matter whether he wrote or not? A good reputation is the best vindication.’

The princess smiled. ’See here, dearest aunty, the two boys passed half the night here, until my Aennchen’s father gave them shelter.’

Page 2029

‘Apparently he passes half or all the night in the open air everywhere,’ said the margravine.

I glanced hurriedly over both faces. The margravine was snuffing her nostrils up contemptuously. The princess had vividly reddened. Her face was luminous over the nest of white fur folding her neck.

‘Yes, I must have the taste for it: for when I was a child,’ said I, plunging at anything to catch a careless topic, ’I was out in my father’s arms through a winter night, and I still look back on it as one of the most delightful I have ever known. I wish I could describe the effect it had on me. A track of blood in the snow could not be brighter.’

The margravine repeated,

’A track of blood in the snow! My good young man, you have excited forms of speech.’

I shuddered. Ottilia divined that her burning blush had involved me. Divination is fiery in the season of blushes, and I, too, fell on the track of her fair spirit, setting out from the transparent betrayal by Schwartz of my night-watch in the pine-wood near the Traun river-falls. My feelings were as if a wave had rolled me helpless to land, at the margravine’s mercy should she put another question. She startled us with a loud outburst of laughter.

’No! no man upon this earth but Roy could have sat that horse I don’t know how many minutes by the clock, as a figure of bronze,’ she exclaimed.

Ottilia and I exchanged a grave look. The gentleness of the old time was sweet to us both: but we had the wish that my father’s extravagant prominency in it might be forgotten.

At the dinner-table I made the acquaintance of the Herr Professor Dr. Julius von Karsteg, tutor to the princess, a grey, broad-headed man, whose chin remained imbedded in his neck-cloth when his eyelids were raised on a speaker. The first impression of him was, that he was chiefly neck-cloth, coat-collar, grand head, and gruffness. He had not joined the ceremonial step from the reception to the dining saloon, but had shuffled in from a side-door. No one paid him any deference save the princess. The margravine had the habit of thrumming the table thrice as soon as she heard his voice: nor was I displeased by such an exhibition of impatience, considering that he spoke merely for the purpose of snubbing me. His powers were placed in evidence by her not daring to utter a sarcasm, which was possibly the main cause of her burning fretfulness.

I believe there was not a word uttered by me throughout the dinner that escaped him. Nevertheless, he did his business of catching and worrying my poor unwary sentences

too neatly for me, an admirer of real force and aptitude, to feel vindictive. I behaved to him like a gentleman, as we phrase it, and obtained once an encouraging nod from the margravine. She leaned to me to say, that they were accustomed to think themselves lucky if no learned talk came on between the Professor and his pupil. The truth was, that

Page 2030

his residence in Sarkeld was an honour to the prince, and his acceptance of the tutorship a signal condescension, accounted for by his appreciation of the princess's intelligence. He was a man distinguished even in Germany for scholarship, rather notorious for his political and social opinions too. The margravine, with infinite humour in her countenance, informed me that he wished to fit the princess for the dignity of a Doctor of Laws.

'It says much for her that he has not spoilt her manners; her health, you know, he succeeded in almost totally destroying, and he is at it again. The man is, I suspect, at heart arrant Republican. He may teach a girl whatever nonsensical politics he likes—it goes at the lifting of the bridegroom's little finger. We could not permit him to be near a young prince. Alas! we have none.'

The Professor allowed himself extraordinary liberties with strangers, the guests of the margravine. I met him crossing an inner court next day. He interrupted me in the middle of a commonplace remark, and to this effect:

'You are either a most fortunate or a most unfortunate young man!'

So profoundly penetrated with thoughtfulness was the tone of his voice that I could not take umbrage. The attempt to analyze his signification cost me an aching forehead, perhaps because I knew it too acutely.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OTTILIA

She was on horseback; I on foot, Schwartz for sole witness, and a wide space of rolling silent white country around us.

We had met in the fall of the winter noon by accident. 'You like my Professor?' said Ottilia.

'I do: I respect him for his learning.'

'You forgive him his irony? It is not meant to be personal to you. England is the object; and partly, I may tell you, it springs from jealousy. You have such wealth! You embrace half the world: you are such a little island! All this is wonderful. The bitterness is, you are such a mindless people—I do but quote to explain my Professor's ideas. "Mindless," he says, "and arrogant, and neither in the material nor in the spiritual kingdom of noble or gracious stature, and ceasing to have a brave aspect." He calls you squat Goths. Can you bear to hear me?'

'Princess!'

’And to his conception, you, who were pioneers when the earth had to be shaped for implements and dug for gold, will turn upon us and stop our march; you are to be overthrown and left behind, there to gain humility from the only teacher you can understand—from poverty. Will you defend yourself?’

’Well, no, frankly, I will not. The proper defence for a nation is its history.’

‘For an individual?’

‘For a man, his readiness to abide by his word.’

‘For a woman—what?’

‘For a princess, her ancestry.’

Page 2031

’Ah! but I spoke of women. There, there is my ground of love for my Professor! I meet my equals, princes, princesses, and the man, the woman, is out of them, gone, flown! They are out of the tide of humanity; they are walking titles, “Now,” says my Professor, “that tide is the blood of our being; the blood is the life-giver; and to be cut off from it is to perish.” Our princely houses he esteems as dead wood. Not near so much say I: yet I hear my equals talk, and I think, “Oh! my Professor, they testify to your wisdom.” I love him because he has given my every sense a face-forward attitude (you will complain of my feebleness of speech) to exterior existence. There is a princely view of life which is a true one; but it is a false one if it is the sole one. In your Parliament your House of Commons shows us real princes, your Throne merely titled ones. I speak what everybody knows, and you, I am sure, are astonished to hear me.’

‘I am,’ said I.

’It is owing to my Professor, my mind’s father and mother. They say it is the pleasure of low-born people to feel themselves princes; mine it is to share their natural feelings. “For a princess, her ancestry.” Yes; but for a princess who is no more than princess, her ancestors are a bundle of faggots, and she, with her mind and heart tied fast to them, is, at least a good half of her, dead wood. This is our opinion. May I guess at your thoughts?’

‘It’s more than I could dare to do myself, princess.’

How different from the Ottilia I had known, or could have imagined! That was one thought.

‘Out of the number, then, this,’ she resumed: ’you think that your English young ladies have command over their tongues: is it not so?’

‘There are prattlers among them.’

‘Are they educated strictly?’

’I know little of them. They seem to me to be educated to conceal their education.’

‘They reject ideas?’

‘It is uncertain whether they have had the offer.’

Ottilia smiled. ‘Would it be a home in their midst?’

Something moved my soul to lift wings, but the passion sank.

‘I questioned you of English ladies,’ she resumed, ’because we read your writings of us. Your kindness to us is that which passes from nurse to infant; your criticism reminds one

of paedagogue and urchin. You make us sorry for our manners and habits, if they are so bad; but most of all you are merry at our simplicity. Not only we say what we feel, we display it. Now, I am so German, this offence is especially mine.'

I touched her horse's neck, and said, 'I have not seen it.'

'Yet you understand me. You know me well. How is that?'

The murmur of honest confession came from me: 'I have seen it!'

She laughed. 'I bring you to be German, you see. Could you forsake your England?'

'Instantly, though not willingly.'

'Not regrettingly?'

Page 2032

‘Cheerfully, if I had my work and my—my friend.’

’No; but well I know a man’s field of labour is his country. You have your ambition.’

‘Yes, now I have.’

She struck a fir-branch with her riding-whip, scattering flakes on my head. ‘Would that extinguish it?’

‘In the form of an avalanche perhaps it would.’

‘Then you make your aims a part of your life?’

‘I do.’

’Then you win! or it is written of you that you never knew failure! So with me. I set my life upon my aim when I feel that the object is of true worth. I win, or death hides from me my missing it.

This I look to; this obtains my Professor’s nod, and the approval of my conscience. Worthiness, however!—the mind must be trained to discern it. We can err very easily in youth; and to find ourselves shooting at a false mark uncontrollably must be a cruel thing. I cannot say it is undeserving the scourge of derision. Do you know yourself? I do not; and I am told by my Professor that it is the sole subject to which you should not give a close attention. I can believe him. For who beguiles so much as Self? Tell her to play, she plays her sweetest. Lurk to surprise her, and what a serpent she becomes! She is not to be aware that you are watching her. You have to review her acts, observe her methods. Always be above her; then by-and-by you catch her hesitating at cross-roads; then she is bare: you catch her bewailing or exulting; then she can no longer pretend she is other than she seems. I make self the feminine, for she is the weaker, and the soul has to purify and raise her. On that point my Professor and I disagree. Dr. Julius, unlike our modern Germans, esteems women over men, or it is a further stroke of his irony. He does not think your English ladies have heads: of us he is proud as a laurelled poet. Have I talked you dumb?’

‘Princess, you have given me matter to think upon.’

She shook her head, smiling with closed eyelids.

I, now that speech had been summoned to my lips, could not restrain it, and proceeded, scarcely governing the words, quite without ideas; ’For you to be indifferent to rank—-yes, you may well be; you have intellect; you are high above me in both—’ So on, against good taste and common sense.

She cried: 'Oh! no compliments from you to me. I will receive them, if you please, by deputy. Let my Professor hear your immense admiration for his pupil's accomplishments. Hear him then in return! He will beat at me like the rainy West wind on a lily. "See," he will say, when I am broken and bespattered, "she is fair, she is stately, is she not!" And really I feel, at the sound of praise, though I like it, that the opposite, satire, condemnation, has its good right to pelt me. Look; there is the tower, there 's the statue, and under that line of pine-trees the path we ran up;—"dear English boys!" as I remember saying to myself; and what did you say of me?'

Page 2033

Her hand was hanging loose. I grasped it. She drew a sudden long breath, and murmured, without fretting to disengage herself,

‘My friend, not that!’

Her voice carried an unmistakeable command. I kissed above the fingers and released them.

‘Are you still able to run?’ said she, leading with an easy canter, face averted. She put on fresh speed; I was outstripped.

Had she quitted me in anger? Had she parted from me out of view of the villa windows to make it possible for us to meet accidentally again in the shadow of her old protecting Warhead, as we named him from his appearance, gaunt Schwartz?

CHAPTER XXIX

AN EVENING WITH DR. JULIUS VON KARSTEG

In my perplexity, I thought of the Professor’s saying: ’A most fortunate or a most unfortunate young man.’ These words began to strike me as having a prophetic depth that I had not fathomed. I felt myself fast becoming bound in every limb, every branch of my soul. Ottilia met me smiling. She moved free as air. She could pursue her studies, and argue and discuss and quote, keep unclouded eyes, and laugh and play, and be her whole living self, unfettered, as if the pressure of my hand implied nothing. Perhaps for that reason I had her pardon. ‘My friend, not that!’ Her imperishably delicious English rang me awake, and lulled me asleep. Was it not too securely friendly? Or was it not her natural voice to the best beloved, bidding him respect her, that we might meet with the sanction of her trained discretion? The Professor would invite me to his room after the ‘sleep well’ of the ladies, and I sat with him much like his pipe-bowl, which burned bright a moment at one sturdy puff, but generally gave out smoke in fantastical wreaths. He told me frankly he had a poor idea of my erudition. My fancifulness he commended as something to be turned to use in writing stories. ’Give me time, and I’ll do better things,’ I groaned. He rarely spoke of the princess; with grave affection always when he did. He was evidently observing me comprehensively. The result was beyond my guessing.

One night he asked me what my scheme of life was.

On the point of improvizing one of an impressive character, I stopped and confessed: ‘I have so many that I may say I have none.’ Expecting reproof, I begged him not to think the worse of me for that.

‘Quite otherwise,’ said he. ’I have never cared to read deliberately in the book you open to me, my good young man.’

‘The book, Herr Professor?’

’Collect your wits. We will call it Shakespeare’s book; or Gothe’s, in the minor issues. No, not minor, but a narrower volume. You were about to give me the answer of a hypocrite. Was it not so?’

I admitted it, feeling that it was easily to have been perceived. He was elated.

’Good. Then I apprehend that you wait for the shifting of a tide to carry you on?’

Page 2034

‘I try to strengthen my mind.’

‘So I hear,’ said he dryly.

‘Well, as far as your schools of teaching will allow.’

’That is, you read and commit to memory, like other young scholars. Whereunto? Have you no aim? You have, or I am told you are to have, fabulous wealth—a dragon’s heap. You are one of the main drainpipes of English gold. What is your object? To spend it?’

‘I shall hope to do good with it.’

’To do good! There is hardly a prince or millionaire, in history or alive, who has not in his young days hugged that notion. Pleasure swarms, he has the pick of his market. You English live for pleasure.’

‘We are the hardest workers in the world.’

‘That you may live for pleasure! Deny it!’

He puffed his tobacco-smoke zealously, and resumed:

’Yes, you work hard for money. You eat and drink, and boast of your exercises: they sharpen your appetites. So goes the round. We strive, we fail; you are our frog-chorus of critics, and you suppose that your brekek-koax affects us. I say we strive and fail, but we strive on, while you remain in a past age, and are proud of it. You reproach us with lack of common sense, as if the belly were its seat. Now I ask you whether you have a scheme of life, that I may know whether you are to be another of those huge human pumpkins called rich men, who cover your country and drain its blood and intellect—-those impoverishers of nature! Here we have our princes; but they are rulers, they are responsible, they have their tasks, and if they also run to gourds, the scandal punishes them and their order, all in seasonable time. They stand eminent. Do you mark me? They are not a community, and are not—bad enough! bad enough!—but they are not protected by laws in their right to do nothing for what they receive. That system is an invention of the commercial genius and the English.’

‘We have our aristocracy, Herr Professor.’

’Your nobles are nothing but rich men inflated with empty traditions of insufferable, because unwarrantable, pride, and drawing, substance from alliances with the merchant class. Are they your leaders? Do they lead you in Letters? in the Arts? ay, or in Government? No, not, I am informed, not even in military service! and there our titled witlings do manage to hold up their brainless pates. You are all in one mass, struggling

in the stream to get out and lie and wallow and belch on the banks. You work so hard that you have all but one aim, and that is fatness and ease!'

'Pardon me, Herr Professor,' I interposed, 'I see your drift. Still I think we are the only people on earth who have shown mankind a representation of freedom. And as to our aristocracy, I must, with due deference to you, maintain that it is widely respected.'

I could not conceive why he went on worrying me in this manner with his jealous outburst of Continental bile.

Page 2035

‘Widely!’ he repeated. ’It is widely respected; and you respect it: and why do you respect it?’

‘We have illustrious names in our aristocracy.’

’We beat you in illustrious names and in the age of the lines, my good young man.’

‘But not in a race of nobles who have stood for the country’s liberties.’

‘So long as it imperilled their own! Any longer?’

’Well, they have known how to yield. They have helped to build our Constitution.’

’Reverence their ancestors, then! The worse for such descendants. But you have touched the exact stamp of the English mind:—it is, to accept whatsoever is bequeathed it, without inquiry whether there is any change in the matter. Nobles in very fact you would not let them be if they could. Nobles in name, with a remote recommendation to posterity—that suits you!’

He sat himself up to stuff a fresh bowl of tobacco, while he pursued: ’Yes, yes: you worship your aristocracy. It is notorious. You have a sort of sagacity. I am not prepared to contest the statement that you have a political instinct. Here it is chiefly social. You worship your so-called aristocracy perforce in order to preserve an ideal of contrast to the vulgarity of the nation.’

This was downright insolence.

It was intolerable. I jumped on my feet. ’The weapons I would use in reply to such remarks I cannot address to you, Herr Professor. Therefore, excuse me.’

He sent out quick spirts of smoke rolling into big volumes. ’Nay, my good young Englishman, but on the other hand you have not answered me. And hear me: yes, you have shown us a representation of freedom. True. But you are content with it in a world that moves by computation some considerable sum upwards of sixty thousand miles an hour.’

‘Not on a fresh journey—a recurring course!’ said I.

‘Good!’ he applauded, and I was flattered.

‘I grant you the physical illustration,’ the Professor continued, and with a warm gaze on me, I thought. ’The mind journeys somewhat in that way, and we in our old Germany hold that the mind advances notwithstanding. Astronomers condescending to earthly philosophy may admit that advance in the physical universe is computable, though not perceptible. Some—whither we tend, shell and spirit. You English, fighting your little

battles of domestic policy, and sneering at us for flying at higher game, you unimpressionable English, who won't believe in the existence of aims that don't drop on the ground before your eyes, and squat and stare at you, you assert that man's labour is completed when the poor are kept from crying out. Now my question is, have you a scheme of life consonant with the spirit of modern philosophy—with the views of intelligent, moral, humane human beings of this period? Or are you one of your robust English brotherhood worthy of a Caligula in his prime, lions in gymnastics—for a time; sheep always in the dominions of mind; and all of one pattern, all in a rut! Favour me with an outline of your ideas. Pour them out pell-mell, intelligibly or not, no matter. I undertake to catch you somewhere. I mean to know you, hark you, rather with your assistance than without it.'

Page 2036

We were deep in the night. I had not a single idea ready for delivery. I could have told him, that wishing was a good thing, excess of tobacco a bad, moderation in speech one of the outward evidences of wisdom; but Ottilia's master in the Humanities exacted civility from me.

'Indeed,' I said, 'I have few thoughts to communicate at present, Herr Professor. My German will fail me as soon as I quit common ground. I love my country, and I do not reckon it as perfect. We are swillers, possibly gluttons; we have a large prosperous middle class; many good men are to be found in it.'

His discharges of smoke grew stifling. My advocacy was certainly of a miserable sort.

'Yes, Herr Professor, on my way when a boy to this very place I met a thorough good man.'

Here I related the tale of my encounter with Captain Welsh.

Dr. Julius nodded rapidly for continuations. Further! further!

He refused to dig at the mine within me, and seemed to expect it to unbosom its riches by explosion.

'Well, Herr Professor, we have conquered India, and hold it as no other people could.'

'Vide the articles in the last file of English newspapers!' said he.

'Suppose we boast of it.'

'Can you?' he simulated wonderment.

'Why, surely it's something!'

'Something for non-commissioned officers to boast of; not for statesmen. However, say that you are fit to govern Asiatics. Go on.'

'I would endeavour to equalize ranks at home, encourage the growth of ideas . . .'

'Supporting a non-celibate clergy, and an intermingled aristocracy? Your endeavours, my good young man, will lessen like those of the man who employed a spade to uproot a rock. It wants blasting. Your married clergy and merchandized aristocracy are coils: they are the ivy about your social tree: you would resemble Laocoon in the throes, if one could imagine you anything of a heroic figure. Forward.'

In desperation I exclaimed, 'It 's useless! I have not thought at all. I have been barely educated. I only know that I do desire with all my heart to know more, to be of some service.'

'Now we are at the bottom, then!' said he.

But I cried, 'Stay; let me beg you to tell me what you meant by calling me a most fortunate, or a most unfortunate young man.'

He chuckled over his pipe-stem, 'Aha!'

'How am I one or the other?'

'By the weight of what you carry in your head.'

'How by the weight?'

He shot a keen look at me. 'The case, I suspect, is singular, and does not often happen to a youth. You are fortunate if you have a solid and adventurous mind: most unfortunate if you are a mere sensational whipster. There 's an explanation that covers the whole. I am as much in the dark as you are. I do not say which of us two has the convex eye.'

Protesting that I was unable to read riddles, though the heat of the one in hand made my frame glow, I entreated to have explicit words. He might be in Ottilia's confidence, probing me—why not? Any question he chose to put to me, I said, I was ready to answer.

Page 2037

‘But it’s the questioner who unmasks,’ said he.

‘Are we masked, Herr Professor? I was not aware of it.’

‘Look within, and avoid lying.’

He stood up. ‘My nights,’ he remarked, ’are not commonly wasted in this manner. We Germans use the night for work.’

After a struggle to fling myself on his mercy and win his aid or counsel, I took his hand respectfully, and holding it, said, ’I am unable to speak out. I would if it involved myself alone.’

’Yes, yes, I comprehend; your country breeds honourable men, chivalrous youngsters,’ he replied. ’It ’s not enough—not enough. I want to see a mental force, energy of brain. If you had that, you might look as high as you liked for the match for it, with my consent. Do you hear? What I won’t have is, flat robbery! Mark me, Germany or England, it ’s one to me if I see vital powers in the field running to a grand career. It ’s a fine field over there. As well there as here, then! But better here than there if it ‘s to be a wasp’s life. Do you understand me?’

I replied, ‘I think I do, if I may dare to’; and catching breath: ’Herr Professor, dear friend, forgive my boldness; grant me time to try me; don’t judge of me at once; take me for your pupil—am I presumptuous in asking it?—make of me what you will, what you can; examine me; you may find there’s more in me than I or anybody may know. I have thoughts and aims, feeble at present—Good God! I see nothing for me but a choice of the two—“most unfortunate” seems likeliest. You read at a glance that I had no other choice. Rather the extremes!—I would rather grasp the limits of life and be swung to the pits below, be the most unfortunate of human beings, than never to have aimed at a star. You laugh at me? An Englishman must be horribly in earnest to talk as I do now. But it is a star!’ (The image of Ottilia sprang fountain-like into blue night heavens before my eyes memorably.) ‘She,’ was my next word. I swallowed it, and with a burning face, petitioned for help in my studies.

To such sight as I had at that instant he appeared laughing outrageously. It was a composed smile ‘Right,’ he said; ’you shall have help in a settled course. Certain Professors, friends of mine, at your University, will see you through it. Aim your head at a star—your head!—and even if you miss it you don’t fall. It’s that light dancer, that gambler, the heart in you, my good young man, which aims itself at inaccessible heights, and has the fall—somewhat icy to reflect on! Give that organ full play and you may make sure of a handful of dust. Do you hear? It’s a mind that wins a mind. That is why I warn you of being most unfortunate if you are a sensational whipster. Good-night Shut my door fast that I may not have the trouble to rise.’

I left him with the warm lamplight falling on his forehead, and books piled and sloped, shut and open; an enviable picture to one in my condition. The peacefulness it indicated made scholarship seem beautiful, attainable, I hoped. I had the sense to tell myself that it would give me unrotting grain, though it should fail of being a practicable road to my bright star; and when I spurned at consolations for failure, I could still delight to think that she shone over these harvests and the reapers.

Page 2038

CHAPTER XXX

A SUMMER STORM, AND LOVE

The foregoing conversations with Ottilia and her teacher, hard as they were for passion to digest, grew luminous on a relapsing heart. Without apprehending either their exact purport or the characters of the speakers, I was transformed by them from a state of craving to one of intense quietude. I thought neither of winning her, nor of aiming to win her, but of a foothold on the heights she gazed at reverently. And if, sometimes, seeing and hearing her, I thought, Oh, rarest soul! the wish was, that brother and sisterhood of spirit might be ours. My other eager thirstful self I shook off like a thing worn out. Men in my confidence would have supposed me more rational: I was simply possessed.

My desire was to go into harness, buried in books, and for recreation to chase visions of original ideas for benefiting mankind. A clear-wined friend at my elbow, my dear Temple, perhaps, could have hit on the track of all this mental vagueness, but it is doubtful that he would have pushed me out of the strange mood, half stupor, half the folding-in of passion; it was such magical happiness. Not to be awake, yet vividly sensible; to lie calm and reflect, and only to reflect; be satisfied with each succeeding hour and the privations of the hour, and, as if in the depths of a smooth water, to gather fold over patient fold of the submerged self, safe from wounds; the happiness was not noble, but it breathed and was harmless, and it gave me rest when the alternative was folly and bitterness.

Visitors were coming to the palace to meet the prince, on his return with my father from England. I went back to the University, jealous of the invasion of my ecstatic calm by new faces, and jealous when there of the privileges those new faces would enjoy; and then, how my recent deadness of life cried out against me as worse than a spendthrift, a destroyer! a nerveless absorbent of the bliss showered on me—the light of her morning presence when, just before embracing, she made her obeisance to the margravine, and kindly saluted me, and stooped her forehead for the baroness to kiss it; her gestures and her voice; her figure on horseback, with old Warhead following, and I meeting her but once!—her walk with the Professor, listening to his instructions; I used to see them walking up and down the cypress path of the villa garden, her ear given to him wholly as she continued her grave step, and he shuffling and treading out of his line across hers, or on the path-borders, and never apologizing, nor she noticing it. At night she sang, sometimes mountain ditties to the accompaniment of the zither, leaning on the table and sweeping the wires between snatches of talk. Nothing haunted me so much as those tones of, her zither, which were little louder than summer gnats when fireflies are at their brightest and storm impends.

Page 2039

My father brought horses from England, and a couple of English grooms, and so busy an air of cheerfulness, that I had, like a sick invalid, to beg him to keep away from me and prolong unlimitedly his visit to Sarkeld; the rather so, as he said he had now become indispensable to the prince besides the margravine. 'Only no more bronze statues!' I adjured him. He nodded. He had hired Count Fretzel's chateau, in the immediate neighbourhood, and was absolutely independent, he said. His lawyers were busy procuring evidence. He had impressed Prince Ernest with a due appreciation of the wealth of a young English gentleman, by taking him over my grandfather's mine.

'And, Richie, we have advanced him a trifle of thousands for the working of this coal discovery of his. In six weeks our schooner yacht will be in the Elbe to offer him entertainment. He graciously deigns to accept a couple of English hunters at our hands; we shall improve his breed of horses, I suspect. Now, Richie, have I done well? I flatter myself I have been attentive to your interests, have I not?'

He hung waiting for confidential communications on my part, but did not press for them; he preserved an unvarying delicacy in that respect.

'You have nothing to tell?' he asked.

'Nothing,' I said. 'I have only to thank you.'

He left me. At no other period of our lives were we so disunited. I felt in myself the reverse of everything I perceived in him, and such letters as I wrote to the squire consequently had a homelier tone. It seems that I wrote of the pleasures of simple living—of living for learning's sake. Mr. Peterborough at the same time despatched praises of my sobriety of behaviour and diligent studiousness, confessing that I began to outstrip him in some of the higher branches. The squire's brief reply breathed satisfaction, but too evidently on the point where he had been led to misconceive the state of affairs. 'He wanted to have me near him, as did another person, whom I appeared to be forgetting; he granted me another year's leave of absence, bidding me bluffly not to be a bookworm and forget I was an Englishman.' The idea that I was deceiving him never entered my mind.

I was deceiving everybody, myself in the bargain, as a man must do when in chase of a woman above him in rank. The chase necessitates deceit—who knows? chicanery of a sort as well; it brings inevitable humiliations; such that ever since the commencement of it at speed I could barely think of my father with comfort, and rarely met him with pleasure. With what manner of face could I go before the prince or the margravine, and say, I am an English commoner, the son of a man of doubtful birth, and I claim the hand of the princess? What contortions were not in store for these features of mine! Even as affairs stood now, could I make a confidant of Temple and let him see me through the stages of the adventure? My jingling of verses, my fretting about the signification of

flowers, and trifling with symbols, haunted me excrutiatingly, taunting me with I know not what abject vileness of spirit.

Page 2040

In the midst of these tortures an arrow struck me, in the shape of an anonymous letter, containing one brief line: 'The princess is in need of help.'

I threw my books aside, and repaired to Count Fretzel's chateau, from which, happily, my father was absent; but the countenance of the princess gave me no encouragement to dream I could be of help to her; yet a second unsigned note worded in a quaint blunt manner, insisted that it was to me she looked. I chanced to hear the margravine, addressing Baroness Turckems, say: 'The princess's betrothal,' what further, escaped me. Soon after, I heard that Prince Otto was a visitor at the lake-palace. My unknown correspondent plied me a third time.

I pasted the scrap in my neglected book of notes and reflections, where it had ample space and about equal lucidity. It drew me to the book, nearly driving me desperate; I was now credulous of anything, except that the princess cared for help from me. I resolved to go home; I had no longer any zeal for study. The desolation of the picture of England in my mind grew congenial. It became imperative that I should go somewhere, for news arrived of my father's approach with a French company of actors, and deafening entertainments were at hand. On the whole, I thought it decent to finish my course at the University, if I had not quite lost the power of getting into the heart of books. One who studies is not being a fool: that is an established truth. I thanked Dr. Julius for planting it among my recollections. The bone and marrow of study form the surest antidote to the madness of that light gambler, the heart, and distasteful as books were, I had gained the habit of sitting down to them, which was as good as an instinct toward the right medicine, if it would but work.

On an afternoon of great heat I rode out for a gaze at the lake-palace, that I chose to fancy might be the last, foreseeing the possibility of one of my fits of movement coming on me before sunset. My very pulses throbbed 'away!' Transferring the sense of overwhelming heat to my moral condition, I thought it the despair of silliness to stay baking in that stagnant place, where the sky did nothing but shine, gave nothing forth. The sky was bronze, a vast furnace dome. The folds of light and shadow everywhere were satin-rich; shadows perforce of blackness had light in them, and the light a sword-like sharpness over their edges. It was inanimate radiance. The laurels sparkled as with frost-points; the denser foliage dropped burning brown: a sickly saint's-ring was round the heads of the pines. That afternoon the bee hummed of thunder, and refreshed the ear.

I pitied the horse I rode, and the dog at his heels, but for me the intensity was inspiriting. Nothing lay in the light, I had the land to myself. 'What hurts me?' I thought. My physical pride was up, and I looked on the cattle in black corners of the fields, and here and there a man tumbled anyhow, a wreck of limbs, out of the insupportable glare, with an even glance. Not an eye was lifted on me.

Page 2041

I saw nothing that moved until a boat shot out of the bight of sultry lake-water, lying close below the dark promontory where I had drawn rein. The rower was old Schwartz Warhead. How my gorge rose at the impartial brute! He was rowing the princess and a young man in uniform across the lake.

That they should cross from unsheltered paths to close covert was reasonable conduct at a time when the vertical rays of the sun were fiery arrow-heads. As soon as they were swallowed in the gloom I sprang in my saddle with torture, transfixed by one of the coarsest shafts of hideous jealousy. Off I flew, tearing through dry underwood, and round the bend of the lake, determined to confront her, wave the man aside, and have my last word with the false woman. Of the real Ottilia I had lost conception. Blood was inflamed, brain bare of vision: 'He takes her hand, she jumps from the boat; he keeps her hand, she feigns to withdraw it, all woman to him in her eyes: they pass out of sight.' A groan burst from me. I strained my crazy imagination to catch a view of them under cover of the wood and torture myself trebly, but it was now blank, shut fast. Sitting bolt upright, panting on horseback in the yellow green of one of the open woodways, I saw the young officer raise a branch of chestnut and come out. He walked moodily up to within a yard of my horse, looked up at me, and with an angry stare that grew to be one of astonishment, said, 'Ah? I think I have had the pleasure—-somewhere? in Wurtemberg, if I recollect.'

It was Prince Otto. I dismounted. He stood alone. The spontaneous question on my lips would have been 'Where is she?' but I was unable to speak a word.

'English?' he said, patting the horse's neck.

'Yes—the horse? an English hunter. How are you, Prince Otto? Do you like the look of him?'

'Immensely. You know we have a passion for English thoroughbreds. Pardon me, you look as if you had been close on a sunstroke. Do you generally take rides in this weather?'

'I was out by chance. If you like him, pray take him; take him. Mount him and try him. He is yours if you care to have him; if he doesn't suit you send him up to Count Fretzel's. I've had riding enough in the light.'

'Perhaps you have,' said he, and hesitated. 'It's difficult to resist the offer of such a horse. If you want to dispose of him, mention it when we meet again. Shall I try him? I have a slight inclination to go as hard as you have been going, but he shall have good grooming in the prince's stables, and that 's less than half as near again as Count Pretzel's place; and a horse like this ought not to be out in this weather, if you will permit me the remark.'

’No: I’m ashamed of bringing him out, and shan’t look on him with satisfaction,’ said I. ’Take him and try him, and then take him from me, if you don’t mind.’

‘Do you know, I would advise your lying down in the shade awhile?’ he observed solicitously. ’I have seen men on the march in Hungary and Italy. An hour’s rest under cover would have saved them.’

Page 2042

I thanked him.

‘Ice is the thing!’ he ejaculated. ’I ’ll ride and have some fetched to you. Rest here.’

With visible pleasure he swung to the saddle. I saw him fix his cavalry thighs and bound off as if he meant to take a gate. Had he glanced behind him he would have fancied that the sun had done its worst. I ran at full speed down the footpath, mad to think she might have returned homeward by the lake. The two had parted—why? He this way, she that. They would not have parted but for a division of the will. I came on the empty boat. Schwartz lay near it beneath heavy boughs, smoking and perspiring in peace. Neither of us spoke. And it was now tempered by a fit of alarm that I renewed my search. So when I beheld her, intense gratitude broke my passion; when I touched her hand it was trembling for absolute assurance of her safety. She was leaning against a tree, gazing on the ground, a white figure in that iron-moted gloom.

‘Otto!’ she cried, shrinking from the touch; but at sight of me, all softly as a light in the heavens, her face melted in a suffusion of wavering smiles, and deep colour shot over them, heavenly to see. She pressed her bosom while I spoke: a lover’s speech, breathless.

‘You love me?’ she said.

‘You have known it!’

‘Yes, yes!’

‘Forgiven me? Speak, princess.’

‘Call me by my name.’

‘My own soul! Ottilia!’

She disengaged her arms tenderly.

‘I have known it by my knowledge of myself,’ she said, breathing with her lips dissevered. ’My weakness has come upon me. Yes, I love you. It is spoken. It is too true. Is it a fate that brings us together when I have just lost my little remaining strength—all power? You hear me! I pretend to wisdom, and talk of fate!’

She tried to laugh in scorn of herself, and looked at me with almost a bitter smile on her features, made beautiful by her soft eyes. I feared from the helpless hanging of her underlip that she would swoon; a shudder convulsed her; and at the same time I became aware of the blotting out of sunlight, and a strange bowing and shore-like noising of the forest.

‘Do not heed me,’ she said in happy undertones. ’I think I am going to cry like a girl. One cannot see one’s pride die like this, without but it is not anguish of any kind. Since we are here together, I would have no other change.’

She spoke till the tears came thick.

I told her of the letters I had received, warning me of a trouble besetting her. They were, perhaps, the excuse for my conduct, if I had any.

Schwartz burst on us with his drill-sergeant’s shout for the princess. Standing grey in big rain-drops he was an object of curiosity to us both. He came to take her orders.

‘The thunder,’ he announced, raising a telegraphic arm, ’rolls. It rains. We have a storm. Command me, princess! your highness!’

Page 2043

Ottilia's eyelids were set blinking by one look aloft. Rain and lightning filled heaven and earth.

'Direct us, you!' she said to me gently.

The natural proposal was to despatch her giant by the direct way down the lake to fetch a carriage from the stables, or matting from the boathouse. I mentioned it, but did not press it.

She meditated an instant. 'I believe I may stay with my beloved?'

Schwartz and I ran to the boat, hauled it on land, and set it keel upward against a low leafy dripping branch. To this place of shelter, protecting her as securely as I could, I led the princess, while Schwartz happed a rough trench around it with one of the sculls. We started him on foot to do the best thing possible; for the storm gave no promise that it was a passing one. In truth, I knew that I should have been the emissary and he the guard; but the storm overhead was not fuller of its mighty burden than I of mine. I looked on her as mine for the hour, and well won.

CHAPTER XXXI

PRINCESS OTTILIA'S LETTER

That hour of tempest went swift as one of its flashes over our little nest of peace, where we crouched like insects. The lightning and the deluge seemed gloriously endless. Ottilia's harbouring nook was dry within an inch of rushing floods and pattered mire. On me the torrents descended, and her gentle efforts drew me to her side, as with a maternal claim to protect me, or to perish in my arms if the lightning found us. We had for prospect an ever-outbursting flame of foliage, and the hubbub of the hissing lake, crimson, purple, dusky grey, like the face of a passionate creature scourged. It was useless to speak. Her lips were shut, but I had the intent kindness of her eyes on me almost unceasingly.

The good hour slipped away. Old Warhead's splashed knees on the level of our heads were seen by us when the thunder had abated. Ottilia prepared to rise.

'You shall hear from me,' she said, bending with brows measuring the boat-roof, like a bird about to fly.

'Shall I see you?'

'Ultimately you surely will. Ah! still be patient.'

'Am I not? have I not been?'

‘Yes; and can you regret it?’

‘No; but we separate!’

‘Would you have us be two feet high for ever?’ she answered smiling.

‘One foot high, or under earth, if it might be together!’

‘Poor little gnomes!’ said she.

The homeliness of our resting-place arrested her for an instant, and perhaps a touch of comic pity for things of such diminutive size as to see nothing but knees where a man stood. Our heads were hidden.

‘Adieu! no pledge is needed,’ she said tenderly.

‘None!’ I replied.

She returned to the upper world with a burning blush.

Schwartz had borne himself with extraordinary discretion by forbearing to spread alarm at the palace. He saluted his young mistress in the regulation manner while receiving her beneath a vast umbrella, the holiday peasant’s invariable companion in these parts. A forester was in attendance carrying shawls, clogs, and matting. The boat was turned and launched.

Page 2044

‘Adieu, Harry Richmond. Will you be quite patient till you hear from me?’ said Ottilia, and added, ‘It is my question!’ delightfully recalling old times.

I was soon gazing at the track of the boat in rough water.

Shouts were being raised somewhere about the forest, and were replied to by hearty bellow of the rower’s lungs. She was now at liberty to join my name to her own or not, as she willed. I had to wait. But how much richer was I than all the world! The future owed me nothing. I would have registered a vow to ask nothing of it. Among the many determined purposes framing which I walked home, was one to obtain a grant of that bit of land where we had sat together, and build a temple on it. The fear that it might be trodden by feet of men before I had enclosed it beset me with anguish. The most absolute pain I suffered sprang from a bewildering incapacity to conjure up a vision of Ottilia free of the glittering accessories of her high birth; and that was the pain of shame; but it came only at intervals, when pride stood too loftily and the shadow of possible mischance threatened it with the axe.

She did not condemn me to long waiting. Her favourite Aennchen brought me her first letter. The girl’s face beamed, and had a look as if she commended me for a worthy deed.

‘An answer, Aennchen?’ I asked her.

‘Yes, yes!’ said she anxiously; ’but it will take more time than I can spare.’ She appointed a meeting near the palace garden-gates at night.

I chose a roof of limes to read under.

‘Noblest and best beloved!’ the princess addressed me in her own tongue, doubting, I perceived, as her training had taught her, that my English eyes would tolerate apostrophes of open-hearted affection. The rest was her English confided to a critic who would have good reason to be merciful:

’The night has come that writes the chapter of the day. My father has had his interview with his head-forester to learn what has befallen from the storm in the forest. All has not been told him! That shall not be delayed beyond to-morrow.

’I am hurried to it. And I had the thought that it hung perhaps at the very end of my life among the coloured leaves, the strokes of sunset—that then it would be known! or if earlier, distant from this strange imperative Now. But we have our personal freedom now, and I have learnt from minutes what I did mean to seek from years, and from our forest what I hoped that change of scene, travel, experience, would teach me. Yet I was right in my intention. It was a discreet and a just meaning I had. For things will not go smoothly for him at once: he will have his hard battle. He is proved: he has passed his

most brave ordeal. But I! Shall I see him put to it and not certainly know myself? Even thus I reasoned. One cannot study without knowing that our human nature is most frail. Daily the body changes, daily the mind—why not the heart? I did design to travel and converse with various persons.

Page 2045

’Pardon it to one who knew that she would require super-feminine power of decision to resolve that she would dispose of herself!

’I heard of Harry Richmond before I saw him. My curiosity to behold the two fair boys of the sailor kingdom set me whipping my pony after them that day so remote, which is always yesterday. My thoughts followed you, and I wondered—does he mean to be a distinguished countryman of his Nelson? or a man of learning? Then many an argument with “my Professor,” until—for so it will ever be—the weaker creature did succumb in the open controversy, and thought her thoughts to herself. Contempt of England gained on me still. But when I lay withered, though so young, by the sea-shore, his country’s ancient grandeur insisted, and I dreamed of Harry Richmond, imagining that I had been false to my childhood. You stood before me, dearest. You were kind: you were strong, and had a gentle voice. Our souls were caught together on the sea. Do you recollect my slip in the speaking of Lucy Sibley’s marriage?—“We change countries.” At that moment I smelt salt air, which would bring you to my sight and touch were you and I divided let me not think how far.

’To-morrow I tell the prince, my father, that I am a plighted woman. Then for us the struggle, for him the grief. I have to look on him and deal it.

’I can refer him to Dr. Julius for my estimate of my husband’s worth.

’"My Professor” was won by it. He once did incline to be the young bold Englishman’s enemy. “Why is he here? what seeks he among us?” It was his jealousy, not of the man, but of the nation, which would send one to break and bear away his carefully cultivated German lily. No eye but his did read me through. And you endured the trial that was forced on you. You made no claim for recompense when it was over. No, there is no pure love but strong love! It belongs to our original elements, and of its purity should never be question, only of its strength.

’I could not help you when you were put under scrutiny before the margravine and the baroness. Help from me would have been the betrayal of both. The world has accurate eyes, if they are not very penetrating. The world will see a want of balance immediately, and also too true a balance, but it will not detect a depth of concord between two souls that do not show some fretfulness on the surface.

’So it was considered that in refusing my cousin Otto and other proposed alliances, I was heart-free. An instructed princess, they thought, was of the woeful species of woman. You left us: I lost you. I heard you praised for civil indifference to me—the one great quality you do not possess! Then it was the fancy of people that I, being very cold, might be suffered to hear my cousin plead for himself. The majority of our family favour Otto. He was permitted to woo me as though I had been a simple maid; and henceforth shall I have pity for all poor

Page 2046

little feminine things who are so persecuted, asked to inflict cruelty—to take a sword and strike with it. But I—who look on marriage as more than a surrender—I could well withstand surpassing eloquence. It was easy to me to be inflexible in speech and will when I stood there, entreated to change myself. But when came magically the other, who is my heart, my voice, my mate, the half of me, and broke into illumination of things long hidden—oh! then did I say to you that it was my weakness had come upon me? It was my last outcry of self—the "I" expiring. I am now yours, "We" has long overshadowed "I," and now engulphs it. We are one. If it were new to me to find myself interrogating the mind of my beloved, relying on his courage, taking many proofs of his devotion, I might pause to re-peruse my words here, without scruple, written. I sign it, before heaven, your Ottilia.

'*OttiliaFrederika Wilhelmina Hedwig*,
'Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.'

CHAPTER XXXII

AN INTERVIEW WITH PRINCE ERNEST AND A MEETING WITH PRINCE OTTO

A messenger from Prince Ernest commanding my immediate attendance at the palace signified that the battle had begun. I could have waited for my father, whose return from one of his expeditions in the prince's service was expected every instant; but though I knew I should have, had a powerful coadjutor in him to assist me through such a conference, I preferred to go down alone. Prince Otto met me in the hall. He passed by, glancing an eye sharply, and said over his shoulder,

'We shall have a word together presently!'

The library door was flung open. Prince Ernest and the margravine were in the room. She walked out with angry majesty. The prince held his figure in the stiff attitude of reception. He could look imposing.

The character of the interview was perceptible at once.

'You have not, I presume, to be informed of the business in hand, Mr. Richmond!'

'Your Highness, I believe I can guess it.'

This started him pacing the floor.

'An impossibility! a monstrous extravagance! a thing unheard of! mania! mania!' he muttered. 'You are aware, sir, that you have been doing your worst to destroy the settled arrangements of my family? What does it mean? In common reason you cannot indulge any legitimate hope of succeeding. Taking you as a foreigner, you must

know that. Judge of the case by your own reigning Families. Such events never happen amongst them. Do you suppose that the possession of immense wealth entitles you to the immeasurable presumption of aspiring to equality of position with reigning Houses? Such folly is more frequently castigated than reasoned with. Why, now—now, were it published—that I had condescended—condescend as I am doing, I should be the laughing-stock of every Court in Europe.

Page 2047

You English want many lessons. You are taught by your scribes to despise the dignity which is not supported by a multitude of bayonets, guns, and gold. I heard of it when I travelled incognito. You make merry over little potentates. Good. But do not cross their paths. Their dominion may be circumscribed, but they have it; and where we are now, my power equals that of the Kaiser and the Czar. You will do me the favour to understand that I am not boasting, not menacing; I attempt, since it is extraordinarily imposed on me, to instruct you. I have cause to be offended; I waive it. I meet you on common ground, and address myself to your good sense. Have you anything to say?'

'Much, sir.'

'Much?' he said, with affected incredulity.

The painful hardship for me was to reply in the vague terms he had been pleased to use.

'I have much to say, your Highness. First, to ask pardon of you, without excusing myself.'

'A condition, apparently, that absolves the necessity for the grant. Speak precisely.'

But I was as careful as he in abstaining from any direct indication of his daughter's complicity, and said, 'I have offended your Highness. You have done me the honour to suggest that it is owing to my English training. You will credit my assurance that the offence was not intentional, not preconceived.'

'You charge it upon your having been trained among a nation of shopkeepers?'

'My countrymen are not illiterate or unmannerly, your Highness.'

'I have not spoken it; I may add, I do not think it.'

'I feared that your Highness entertained what I find to be a very general, perhaps here and there wilful, error with regard to England.'

'When I was in the service I had a comrade, a gallant gentleman, deeply beloved by me, and he was an Englishman. He died in the uniform and under the flag I reverence.'

'I rejoice that your Highness has had this experience of us. I have to imagine that I expressed myself badly. My English training certainly does not preclude the respect due to exalted rank. Your Highness will, I trust humbly, pardon my offence. I do not excuse myself because I cannot withdraw, and I am incapable of saying that I regret it.'

'In cool blood you utter that?' exclaimed the prince.

His amazement was unfeigned.

'What are the impossible, monstrous ideas you—where—? Who leads you to fancy there is one earthly chance for you when you say you cannot withdraw? Cannot? Are you requested? Are you consulted? It is a question to be decided in the imperative: you must. What wheel it is you think you have sufficient vigour to stop, I am profoundly unaware, but I am prepared to affirm that it is not the wheel of my household. I would declare it, were I a plain citizen. You are a nullity in the case, in point of your individual will—a nullity swept away with one wave of the hand. You can

Page 2048

do this, and nothing else: you can apologize, recognize your station, repair a degree of mischief that I will not say was preconceived or plotted. So for awhile pursue your studies, your travels. In time it will give me pleasure to receive you. Mr. Richmond,' he added, smiling and rising; 'even the head of a little German principality has to give numberless audiences.' His features took a more cordial smile to convince me that the dismissing sentence was merely playful.

As for me, my mind was confused by the visible fact that the father's features resembled the daughter's. I mention it, that my mind's condition may be understood.

Hardly had I been bowed out of the room when my father embraced me, and some minutes later I heard Prince Otto talking to me and demanding answers. That he or any one else should have hostile sentiments toward a poor devil like me seemed strange. My gift of the horse appeared to anger him most. I reached the chateau without once looking back, a dispirited wretch. I shut myself up; I tried to read. The singular brevity of my interview with the prince, from which I had expected great if not favourable issues, affected me as though I had been struck by a cannon shot; my brains were nowhere. His perfect courtesy was confounding. I was tormented by the delusion that I had behaved pusillanimously.

My father rushed up to me after dark. Embracing me and holding me by the hand, he congratulated me with his whole heart. The desire of his life was accomplished; the thing he had plotted for ages had come to pass. He praised me infinitely. My glorious future, he said, was to carry a princess to England and sit among the, highest there, the husband of a lady peerless in beauty and in birth, who, in addition to what she was able to do for me by way of elevation in my country, could ennoble in her own territory. I had the option of being the father of English nobles or of German princes; so forth. I did not like the strain; yet I clung to him. I was compelled to ask whether he had news of any sort worth hearing.

'None,' said he calmly; 'none. I have everything to hear, nothing to relate; and, happily, I can hardly speak for joy.' He wept.

He guaranteed to have the margravine at the chateau within a week, which seemed to me a sufficient miracle. The prince, he said, might require three months of discretionary treatment. Three further months to bring the family round, and the princess would be mine. 'But she is yours! she is yours already!' he cried authoritatively. 'She is the reigning intellect there. I dreaded her very intellect would give us all the trouble, and behold, it is our ally! The prince lives with an elbow out of his income. But for me it would be other parts of his person as well, I assure you, and the world would see such a princely tatterdemalion as would astonish it. Money to him is important. He must carry on his mine. He can carry on nothing without my help. By the way, we have to deal out cheques?'

Page 2049

I assented.

In spite of myself, I caught the contagion of his exuberant happiness and faith in his genius. The prince had applauded his energetic management of the affairs of the mine two or three times in my hearing. It struck me that he had really found his vocation, and would turn the sneer on those who had called him volatile and reckless. This led me to a luxurious sense of dependence on him, and I was willing to live on dreaming and amused, though all around me seemed phantoms, especially the French troupe, the flower of the Parisian stage: Regnault, Carigny, Desbarolles, Mesdames Blanche Bignet and Dupertuy, and Mdlle. Jenny Chassediane, the most spirituelle of Frenchwomen. 'They are a part of our enginery, Richie,' my father said. They proved to be an irresistible attraction to the margravine. She sent word to my father that she meant to come on a particular day when, as she evidently knew, I should not be present. Two or three hours later I had Prince Otto's cartel in my hands. Jorian DeWitt, our guest at this season, told me subsequently, and with the utmost seriousness, that I was largely indebted to Mdlle. Jenny for a touching French song of a beau chevalier she sang before Ottilia in my absence. Both he and my father believed in the efficacy of this kind of enginery, but, as the case happened, the beau chevalier was down low enough at the moment his highborn lady listened to the song.

It appeared that when Prince Otto met me after my interview with Prince Ernest, he did his best to provoke a rencontre, and failing to get anything but a nod from my stunned head, betook himself to my University. A friendly young fellow there, Eckart vom Hof, offered to fight him on my behalf, should I think proper to refuse. Eckart and two or three others made a spirited stand against the aristocratic party siding with Prince Otto, whose case was that I had played him a dishonourable trick to laugh at him. I had, in truth, persuaded him to relieve me at once of horse and rival at the moment when he was suffering the tortures of a rejection, and I was rushing to take the hand he coveted; I was so far guilty. But to how great a degree guiltless, how could I possibly explain to the satisfaction of an angry man? I had the vision of him leaping on the horse, while I perused his challenge; saw him fix to the saddle and smile hard, and away to do me of all services the last he would have performed wittingly. The situation was exactly of a sort for one of his German phantasy-writers to image the forest jeering at him as he flew, blind, deaf, and unreasonable, vehement for one fierce draught of speed. We are all dogged by the humour of following events when we start on a wind of passion. I could almost fancy myself an accomplice. I realized the scene with such intensity in the light running at his heels: it may be quite true that I laughed in the hearing of his messenger as I folded up the letter. That was the man's report. I am not commonly one to be forgetful of due observances.

Page 2050

The prospect of the possible eternal separation from my beloved pricked my mechanical wits and set them tracing the consequent line by which I had been brought to this pass as to a natural result. Had not my father succeeded in inspiring the idea that I was something more than something? The tendency of young men is to conceive it for themselves without assistance; a prolonged puff from the breath of another is nearly sure to make them mad as kings, and not so pardonably.

I see that I might have acted wisely, and did not; but that is a speculation taken apart from my capabilities. If a man's fate were as a forbidden fruit, detached from him, and in front of him, he might hesitate fortunately before plucking it; but, as most of us are aware, the vital half of it lies in the seed-paths he has traversed. We are sons of yesterday, not of the morning. The past is our mortal mother, no dead thing. Our future constantly reflects her to the soul. Nor is it ever the new man of to-day which grasps his fortune, good or ill. We are pushed to it by the hundreds of days we have buried, eager ghosts. And if you have not the habit of taking counsel with them, you are but an instrument in their hands.

My English tongue admonishes me that I have fallen upon a tone resembling one who uplifts the finger of piety in a salon of conversation. A man's review of the course of his life grows for a moment stringently serious when he beholds the stream first broadening perchance under the light interpenetrating mine just now.

My seconds were young Eckart vom Hof, and the barely much older, though already famous Gregorius Bandelmeyer, a noted mathematician, a savage Republican, lean-faced, spectacled, and long, soft-fingered; a cat to look at, a tiger to touch. Both of them were animated by detestation of the Imperial uniform. They distrusted my skill in the management of the weapon I had chosen; for reasons of their own they carried a case of pistols to the field. Prince Otto was attended by Count Loepel and a Major Edelsheim of his army, fresh from the garrison fortress of Mainz, gentlemen perfectly conversant with the laws of the game, which my worthy comrades were not. Several minutes were spent in an altercation between Edelsheim and Bandelmeyer. The major might have had an affair of his own had he pleased. My feelings were concentrated within the immediate ring where I stood: I can compare them only to those of a gambler determined to throw his largest stake and abide the issue. I was not open to any distinct impression of the surrounding scenery; the hills and leafage seemed to wear an iron aspect. My darling, my saint's face was shut up in my heart, and with it a little inaudible cry of love and pain. The prince declined to listen to apologies. 'He meant to teach me that this was not a laughing matter.' Major Edelsheim had misunderstood Bandelmeyer; no offer of an apology had been made. A momentary human sensation of an unworthy sort beset me when I saw them standing together again, and contrasted the collectedness and good-humour of my adversary's representative with the vexatious and unnecessary naggling of mine, the sight of whose yard-long pipe scandalized me.

Page 2051

At last the practical word was given. The prince did not reply to my salute. He was smoking, and kept his cigar in one corner of his mouth, as if he were a master fencer bidding his pupil to come on. He assumed that he had to do with a bourgeois Briton unused to arms, such as we are generally held to be on the Continent. After feeling my wrist for a while he shook the cigar out of his teeth.

The ‘cliquetis’ of the crossed steel must be very distant in memory, and yourself in a most dilettante frame of mind, for you to be accessible to the music of that thin skeleton’s clank. Nevertheless, it is better and finer even at the time of action, than the abominable hollow ogre’s eye of the pistol-muzzle. We exchanged passes, the prince chiefly attacking. Of all the things to strike my thoughts, can you credit me that the vividest was the picture of the old woman Temple and I had seen in our boyhood on the night of the fire dropping askew, like forks of brown flame, from the burning house in London city; I must have smiled. The prince cried out in French: ‘Laugh, sir; you shall have it!’ He had nothing but his impetuosity for an assurance of his promise, and was never able to force me back beyond a foot. I touched him on the arm and the shoulder, and finally pierced his arm above the elbow. I could have done nearly what I liked with him; his skill was that of a common regimental sabreur.

‘Ludere qui nescit campestribus abstinet armis!’ Bandelmeyer sang out.

‘You observed?’ said Major Edelsheim, and received another disconcerting discharge of a Latin line. The prince frowned and made use of some military slang. Was his honour now satisfied? Not a whit. He certainly could not have kept his sword-point straight, and yet he clamoured to fight on, stamped, and summoned me to assault him, proposed to fight me with his left hand after his right had failed; in short, he was beside himself, an example of the predicament of a man who has given all the provocation and finds himself disabled. My seconds could have stopped it had they been equal to their duties; instead of which Bandelmeyer, hearing what he deemed an insult to the order of student and scholar, retorted furiously and offensively, and Eckart, out of good-fellowship, joined him, whereat Major Edelsheim, in the act of bandaging the prince’s arm, warned them that he could not pass by an outrage on his uniform. Count Loepel stept politely forward, and gave Eckart a significant bow. The latter remarked mockingly, ‘With pleasure and condescension!’ At a murmur of the name of doctor from Edelsheim, the prince damned the doctor until he or I were food for him. Irritated by the whole scene, and his extravagant vindictiveness, in which light I regarded the cloak of fury he had flung over the shame of his defeat, I called to Bandelmeyer to open his case of pistols and offer them for a settlement. As the proposal came from me, it was found acceptable. The major remonstrated with the prince, and expressed to me his regrets and et caeteras of well-meant civility. He had a hard task to keep out of the hands of Bandelmeyer, who had seized my sword, and wanted vi et armis to defend the cause of Learning and the People against military brigands on the spot. If I had not fallen we should have had one or two other prostrate bodies.

Page 2052

A silly business on all sides.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT CAME OF A SHILLING

The surgeon, who attended us both, loudly admired our mutual delicacy in sparing arteries and vital organs: but a bullet cuts a rougher pathway than the neat steel blade, and I was prostrate when the prince came to press my hand on his departure for his quarters at Laibach. The utterly unreasonable nature of a duel was manifested by his declaring to me, that he was now satisfied I did not mean to insult him and then laugh at him. We must regard it rather as a sudorific for feverish blood and brains. I felt my wound acutely, seeing his brisk step when he retired. Having overthrown me bodily, it threw my heart back to its first emotions, and I yearned to set eyes on my father, with a haunting sense that I had of late injured him and owed him reparation. It vanished after he had been in my room an hour, to return when he had quitted it, and incessantly and inexplicably it went and came in this manner. He was depressed. I longed for drollery, relieved only by chance allusions to my beloved one, whereas he could not conceal his wish to turn the stupid duel to account.

‘Pencil a line to her,’ he entreated me, and dictated his idea of a moving line, adding urgently, that the crippled letters would be affecting to her, as to the Great Frederick his last review of his invalid veterans. ’Your name—the signature of your name alone, darling Richie,’ and he traced a crooked scrawl with a forefinger,—“Still, dearest angel, in contempt of death and blood, I am yours to eternity, Harry Lepel Richmond, sometimes called Roy—a point for your decision in the future, should the breath everlastingly devoted to the most celestial of her sex, continue to animate the frame that would rise on wings to say adieu! adieu!”—Richie, just a sentence?’

He was distracting.

His natural tenderness and neatness of hand qualified him for spreading peace in a sick-room; but he was too full of life and his scheme, and knowing me out of danger, he could not forbear giving his despondency an outlet. I heard him exclaim in big sighs: ‘Heavens! how near!’ and again, ‘She must hear of it!’ Never was man so incorrigibly dramatic.

He would walk up to a bookcase and take down a volume, when the interjectional fit waxed violent, flip the pages, affecting a perplexity he would assuredly have been struck by had he perused them, and read, as he did once,—’Italy, the land of the sun! and she is to be hurried away there, and we are left to groan. The conspiracy is infamous! One of the Family takes it upon himself to murder us! and she is to be hurried out of hearing! And so we are to have the blood of the Roys spilt for nothing?—-

no!’ and he shut up the book with a report, and bounded to my side to beg pardon of me. From his particular abuse of the margravine, the iteration of certain phrases, which he uttered to denounce and defy them, I gathered that an interview had passed between the two, and that she had notified a blockade against all letters addressed to the princess. He half admitted having rushed to the palace on his road to me.

Page 2053

‘But, Richie,’ said he, pressing me again to write the moving line, ’a letter with a broad black border addressed by me might pass.’ He looked mournfully astute. ’The margravine might say to herself, “Here’s Doctor Death in full diploma come to cure the wench of her infatuation.” I am but quoting the coarse old woman, Richie; confusion on her and me! for I like her. It might pass in my handwriting, with a smudge for paternal grief—it might. “To Her Serene Highness the Margravine of Rippau, *etc*., *etc*., *etc*., in trust for the Most Exalted the Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.” I transpose or omit a title or so. “Aha!” says she, “there’s verwirrung in Roy’s poor head, poor fellow; the boy has sunk to a certainty. Here (to the princess), it seems, my dear, this is for you. Pray do not communicate the contents for a day or so, or a month."’

His imitation of the margravine was the pleasantest thing I heard from him. The princess’s maid and confidante, he regretted to state, was incorruptible, which I knew. That line of Ottilia’s writing, ’Violets are over,’ read by me in view of the root-mountain of the Royal House of Princes, scoffed at me insufferably whenever my father showed me these openings of his mind, until I was dragged down to think almost that I had not loved the woman and noble soul, but only the glorified princess—the carved gilt frame instead of the divine portrait! a shameful acrid suspicion, ransacking my conscience with the thrusting in of a foul torch here and there.

For why had I shunned him of late? How was it that he tortured me now? Did I in no degree participate in the poignant savour of his scheme? Such questionings set me flushing in deadly chills. My brain was weak, my heart exhausted, my body seemed truthful perforce and confessed on the rack. I could not deny that I had partly, insensibly clung to the vain glitter of hereditary distinction, my father’s pitfall; taking it for a substantial foothold, when a young man of wit and sensibility and, mark you, true pride, would have made it his first care to trample that under heel. Excellent is pride; but oh! be sure of its foundations before you go on building monument high. I know nothing to equal the anguish of an examination of the basis of one’s pride that discovers it not solidly fixed; an imposing, self-imposing structure, piled upon empty cellarage. It will inevitably, like a tree striking bad soil, betray itself at the top with time. And the anguish I speak of will be the sole healthy sign about you. Whether in the middle of life it is adviseable to descend the pedestal altogether, I dare not say. Few take the precaution to build a flight of steps inside—it is not a labour to be proud of; fewer like to let themselves down in the public eye—it amounts to a castigation; you must, I fear, remain up there, and accept your chance in toppling over. But in any case, delude yourself as you please, your lofty

Page 2054

baldness will assuredly be seen with time. Meanwhile, you cannot escape the internal intimations of your unsoundness. A man's pride is the front and headpiece of his character, his soul's support or snare. Look to it in youth. I have to thank the interminable hours on my wretched sick-bed for a singularly beneficial investigation of the ledger of my deeds and omissions and moral stock. Perhaps it has already struck you that one who takes the trouble to sit and write his history for as large a world as he can obtain, and shape his style to harmonize with every development of his nature, can no longer have much of the hard grain of pride in him. A proud puppet-showman blowing into Pandaean pipes is an inconceivable object, except to those who judge of characteristics from posture.

It began to be observed by others that my father was not the most comforting of nurses to me. My landlady brought a young girl up to my room, and introduced her under the name of Lieschen, saying that she had for a long time been interested in me, and had been diligent in calling to inquire for news of my condition. Commanded to speak for herself, this Lieschen coloured and said demurely, 'I am in service here, sir, among good-hearted people, who will give me liberty to watch by you, for three hours of the afternoon and three of the early part of the night, if you will honour me.'

My father took her shoulder between finger and thumb, and slightly shook her to each ejaculation of his emphatic 'No! no! no! no! What! a young maiden nurse to a convalescent young gentleman! Why, goodness gracious me! Eh?'

She looked at me softly, and I said I wished her to come.

My father appealed to the sagacity of the matron. So jealous was he of a suggested partner in his task that he had refused my earnest requests to have Mr. Peterborough to share the hours of watching by my side. The visits of college friends and acquaintances were cut very short, he soon reduced them to talk in a hush with thumbs and nods and eyebrows; and if it had not been so annoying to me, I could have laughed at his method of accustoming the regular visitors to make ready, immediately after greeting, for his affectionate dismissal of them. Lieschen went away with the mute blessing of his finger on one of her modest dimples; but, to his amazement, she returned in the evening. He gave her a lecture, to which she listened attentively, and came again in the morning. He was petrified. 'Idiots, insects, women, and the salt sea ocean!' said he, to indicate a list of the untameables, without distressing the one present, and, acknowledging himself beaten, he ruefully accepted his holiday.

The girl was like sweet Spring in my room. She spoke of Sarkeld familiarly. She was born in that neighbourhood, she informed me, and had been educated by a dear great lady. Her smile of pleasure on entering the room one morning, and seeing me dressed and sitting in a grand-fatherly chair by the breezy window, was like a salutation of returning health. My father made another stand against the usurper of his privileges; he refused to go out.

Page 2055

‘Then must I go,’ said Lieschen, ‘for two are not allowed here.’

‘No! don’t leave me,’ I begged of her, and stretched out my hands for hers, while she gazed sadly from the doorway. He suspected some foolishness or he was actually jealous. ‘Hum-oh!’ He went forthwith a murmured groan.

She deceived me by taking her seat in perfect repose.

After smoothing her apron, ‘Now I must go,’ she said.

‘What! to leave me here alone?’

She looked at the clock, and leaned out of the window.

‘Not alone; oh, not alone!’ the girl exclaimed. ’And please, please do not mention me—-presently. Hark! do you hear wheels? Your heart must not beat. Now farewell. You will not be alone: at least, so I think. See what I wear, dear Mr. Patient!’ She drew from her bosom, attached to a piece of blue ribbon, the half of an English shilling, kissed it, and blew a soft farewell to me:

She had not been long gone when the Princess Ottilia stood in her place.

A shilling tossed by an English boy to a couple of little foreign girls in a woodman’s hut! —you would not expect it to withstand the common fate of silver coins, and preserve mysterious virtues by living celibate, neither multiplying nor reduced, ultimately to play the part of a powerful magician in bringing the boy grown man to the feet of an illustrious lady, and her to his side in sickness, treasonably to the laws of her station. The little women quarrelled over it, and snatched and hid and contemplated it in secret, each in her turn, until the strife it engendered was put an end to by a doughty smith, their mother’s brother, who divided it into equal halves, through which he drove a hole, and the pieces being now thrown out of the currency, each one wore her share of it in her bosom from that time, proudly appeased. They were not ordinary peasant children, and happily for them they had another friend that was not a bird of passage, and was endowed by nature and position to do the work of an angel. She had them educated to read, write, and knit, and learn pretty manners, and in good season she took one of the sisters to wait on her own person. The second went, upon her recommendation, into the household of a Professor of a neighbouring University. But neither of them abjured her superstitious belief in the proved merits of the talisman she wore. So when they saw the careless giver again they remembered him; their gratitude was as fresh as on that romantic morning of their childhood, and they resolved without concert to serve him after their own fashion, and quickly spied a way to it. They were German girls.

You are now enabled to guess more than was known to Ottilia and me of the curious agency at work to shuffle us together. The doors of her suite in the palace were barred

against letters addressed to the princess; the delivery of letters to her was interdicted, she consenting, yet she found one: it lay on the broad walk of the orange-trees, between the pleasure and the fruit-gardens, as if dropped by a falcon in mid air. Ottilia beheld it, and started. Her little maid walking close by, exclaimed, scuttling round in front of her the while like an urchin in sabots,

Page 2056

‘Ha! what is it? a snake? let me! let me!’ The guileless mistress replied, ‘A letter!’ Whereupon the maid said: ’Not a window near! and no wall neither! Why, dearest princess, we have walked up and down here a dozen times and not seen it staring at us! Oh, my good heaven!’ The letter was seized and opened, and Ottilia read:

’He who loves you with his heart has been cruelly used. They have shot him. He is not dead. He must not die. He is where he has studied since long. He has his medicine and doctors, and they say the bullet did not lodge. He has not the sight that cures. Now is he, the strong young man, laid helpless at anybody’s mercy.’

She supped at her father’s table, and amused the margravine and him alternately with cards and a sonata. Before twelve at midnight she was driving on the road to the University, saying farewell to what her mind reverenced, so that her lover might but have sight of her. She imagined I had been assassinated. For a long time, and most pertinaciously, this idea dwelt with her. I could not dispossess her of it, even after uttering the word ‘duel’ I know not how often. I had flatly to relate the whole-of the circumstances.

‘But Otto is no assassin,’ she cried out.

What was that she reverenced? It was what she jeopardized—her state, her rank, her dignity as princess and daughter of an ancient House, things typical to her of sovereign duties, and the high seclusion of her name. To her the escapades of foolish damsels were abominable. The laws of society as well as of her exalted station were in harmony with her intelligence. She thought them good, but obeyed them as a subject, not slavishly: she claimed the right to exercise her trained reason. The modestest, humblest, sweetest of women, undervaluing nothing that she possessed, least of all what was due from her to others, she could go whithersoever her reason directed her, putting anything aside to act justly according to her light. Nor would she have had cause to repent had I been the man she held me to be. Even with me she had not behaved precipitately. My course of probation was severe and long before she allowed her heart to speak.

Pale from a sleepless night and her heart’s weariful eagerness to be near me, she sat by my chair, holding my hand, and sometimes looking into my eyes to find the life reflecting hers as in a sunken well that has once been a spring. My books and poor bachelor comforts caught her attention between-whiles. We talked of the day of storm by the lake; we read the unsigned letter. With her hand in mine I slept some minutes, and awoke grasping it, doubting and terrified, so great a wave of life lifted me up.

‘No! you are not gone,’ I sighed.

‘Only come,’ said she.

The nature of the step she had taken began to dawn on me.

‘But when they miss you at the palace? Prince Ernest?’

‘Hush! they have missed me already. It is done.’ She said it smiling.

Page 2057

‘Ottilia, will he take you away?’

‘Us, dear, us.’

‘Can you meet his anger?’

’Our aunt will be the executioner. We have a day of sweet hours before she can arrive.’

‘May I see her first?’

‘We will both see her as we are now.’

‘We must have prompt answers for the margravine.’

‘None, Harry. I do not defend myself ever.’

Distant hills, and folds of receding clouds and skies beyond them, were visible from my window, and beyond the skies I felt her soul.

‘Ottilia, you were going to Italy?’

’Yes: or whither they please, for as long as they please. I wished once to go, I have told you why. One of the series’ (she touched the letter lying on a reading-table beside her) ’turned the channel of all wishes and intentions. My friends left me to fall at the mercy of this one. I consented to the injunction that I should neither write nor receive letters. Do I argue ill in saying that a trust was implied? Surely it was a breach of the trust to keep me ignorant of the danger of him I love! Now they know it. I dared not consult them—not my dear father! about any design of mine when I had read this odd copybook writing, all in brief sentences, each beginning “he” and “he.” It struck me like thrusts of a sword; it illuminated me like lightning. That “he” was the heart within my heart. The writer must be some clever woman or simple friend, who feels for us very strongly. My lover assassinated, where could I be but with him?’

Her little Ann coming in with chocolate and strips of fine white bread to dip in it stopped my efforts to explain the distinction between an assassination and a duel. I noticed then the likeness of Aennchen to Lieschen.

‘She has a sister here,’ said Ottilia; ’and let her bring Lieschen to visit me here this afternoon.’

Aennchen, with a blush, murmured, that she heard and would obey. I had a memorable pleasure in watching my beloved eat and drink under my roof.

The duel remained incomprehensible to her. She first frightened me by remarking that duels were the pastime of brainless young men. Her next remark, in answer to my

repeated attempts to shield my antagonist from a capital charge: ‘But only military men and Frenchmen fight duels!’ accompanied by a slightly investigating glance of timid surprise, gave me pain, together with a flashing apprehension of what she had forfeited, whom offended, to rush to the succour of a duellist. I had to repeat to her who my enemy was, so that there should be no further mention of assassination. Prince Otto’s name seemed to entangle her understanding completely.

‘Otto! Otto!’ she murmured; ’he has, I have heard, been obliged by some so-called laws of honour once or twice to—to—he is above suspicion of treachery! To my mind it is one and the same, but I would not harshly exclude the view the world puts on things; and I use the world’s language in saying that he could not do a dishonourable deed. How far he honours himself is a question apart. That may be low enough, while the world is full of a man’s praises.’

Page 2058

She knew the nature of a duel. ‘It is the work of soulless creatures!’ she broke through my stammered explanations with unwonted impatience, and pressing my hand: ’Ah! You are safe. I have you still. Do you know, Harry, I am not yet able to endure accidents and misadventures: I have not fortitude to meet them, or intelligence to account for them. They are little ironical laughter. Say we build so high: the lightning strikes us:—why build at all? The Summer fly is happier. If I had lost you! I can almost imagine that I should have asked for revenge. For why should the bravest and purest soul of my worship be snatched away? I am not talking wisdom, only my shaken self will speak just now! I pardon Otto, though he has behaved basely.’

‘No, not basely,’ I felt bound to plead on his behalf, thinking, in spite of a veritable anguish of gathering dread, that she had become enlightened and would soon take the common view of our case; ’not basely. He was excessively irritated, without cause in my opinion; he simply misunderstood certain matters. Dearest, you have nations fighting: a war is only an exaggerated form of duelling.’

‘Nations at war are wild beasts,’ she replied. ’The passions of these hordes of men are not an example for a living soul. Our souls grow up to the light: we must keep eye on the light, and look no lower. Nations appear to me to have no worse than a soiled mirror of themselves in mobs. They are still uncivilized: they still bear a resemblance to the old monsters of the mud. Do you not see their claws and fangs, Harry? Do you find an apology in their acts for intemperate conduct? Men who fight duels appear in my sight no nobler than the first desperate creatures spelling the cruel A B C of the passions.’

‘No, nor in mine,’ I assented hastily. ’We are not perfect. But hear me. Yes, the passions are cruel. Circumstances however—I mean, there are social usages—Ay, if one were always looking up t. But should we not be gentle with our comparisons if we would have our views in proportion?’

She hung studiously silent, and I pursued:

’I trust you so much as my helper and my friend that I tell you what we do not usually tell to women—the facts, and the names connected with them. Sooner or later you would have learnt everything. Beloved, I do not wait to let you hear it by degrees, to be reconciled to it piecemeal.’

‘And I forgive him,’ she sighed. ’I scarcely bring myself to believe that Harry has bled from Otto’s hand.’

‘It was the accident of the case, Ottilia. We had to meet.’

‘To meet?’

’There are circumstances when men will not accept apologies; they—we—heaven knows, I was ready to do all that a man could do to avoid this folly—wickedness; give it the worst of titles!’

‘It did not occur accidentally?’ she inquired. Her voice sounded strange, half withheld in the utterance.

Page 2059

‘It occurred,’ said I, feeling my strength ebb and despair set in, ’it occurred—the prince compelled me to the meet him.’

’But my cousin Otto is no assassin?

’Compelled, I say: that is, he conceived I had injured him, and left me no other way of making amends.’

Her defence of Otto was in reality the vehement cherishing of her idea of me. This caused her bewilderment, and like a barrier to the flowing of her mind it resisted and resisted. She could not suffer herself to realize that I was one of the brainless young savages, creatures with claws and fangs.

Her face was unchanged to me. The homeliness of her large mild eyes embraced me unshadowed, and took me to its inner fire unreservedly. Leaning in my roomy chair, I contemplated her at leisure while my heart kept saying ‘Mine! mine!’ to awaken an active belief in its possession. Her face was like the quiet morning of a winter day when cloud and sun intermix and make an ardent silver, with lights of blue and faint fresh rose; and over them the beautiful fold of her full eyebrow on the eyelid like a bending upper heaven. Those winter mornings are divine. They move on noiselessly. The earth is still, as if awaiting. A wren warbles, and flits through the lank drenched brambles; hill-side opens green; elsewhere is mist, everywhere expectancy. They bear the veiled sun like a sangreal aloft to the wavy marble flooring of stainless cloud.

She was as fair. Gazing across her shoulder’s gentle depression, I could have desired to have the couchant brow, and round cheek, and rounding chin no more than a young man’s dream of woman, a picture alive, without the animating individual awful mind to judge of me by my acts. I chafed at the thought that one so young and lovely should meditate on human affairs at all. She was of an age to be maidenly romantic: our situation favoured it. But she turned to me, and I was glad of the eyes I knew. She kissed me on the forehead.

‘Sleep,’ she whispered.

I feigned sleep to catch my happiness about me.

Some disenchanting thunder was coming, I was sure, and I was right. My father entered.

‘Princess!’ He did amazed and delighted homage, and forthwith uncontrollably poured out the history of my heroism, a hundred words for one;—my promptitude in picking the prince’s glove up on my sword’s point, my fine play with the steel, my scornful magnanimity, the admiration of my fellow-students;—every line of it; in stupendous language; an artillery celebration of victory. I tried to stop him. Ottilia rose, continually

assenting, with short affirmatives, to his glorifying interrogations—a method he had of recapitulating the main points. She glanced to right and left, as if she felt caged.

‘Is it known?’ I heard her ask, in the half audible strange voice which had previously made me tremble.

’Known? I certify to you, princess,’—the unhappy man spouted his withering fountain of interjections over us anew; known in every Court and garrison of Germany! Known by this time in Old England! And, what was more, the correct version of it was known! It was known that the young Englishman had vanquished his adversary with the small sword, and had allowed him, because he had raged demoniacally on account of his lamed limb, to have a shot in revenge.

Page 2060

‘The honour done me by the princess in visiting me is not to be known,’ I summoned energy enough to say.

She shook her head.

My father pledged himself to the hottest secresy, equivalent to a calm denial of the fact, if necessary.

‘Pray be at no trouble,’ she addressed him.

The ‘Where am I?’ look was painful in her aspect.

It led me to perceive the difference of her published position in visiting a duellist lover instead of one assassinated. In the latter case, the rashness of an hereditary virgin princess avowing her attachment might pass condoned or cloaked by general compassion. How stood it in the former? I had dragged her down to the duellist’s level! And as she was not of a nature to practise concealments, and scorned to sanction them, she was condemned, seeing that concealment as far as possible was imperative, to suffer bitterly in her own esteem. This, the cruellest, was the least of the evils. To keep our names disjoined was hopeless. My weakened frame and mental misery coined tears when thoughts were needed.

Presently I found the room empty of our poor unconscious tormentor. Ottilia had fastened her hand to mine again.

‘Be generous,’ I surprised her by saying. ’Go back at once. I have seen you! Let my father escort you the road. You will meet the margravine, or some one. I think, with you, it will be the margravine, and my father puts her in good humour. Pardon a wretched little scheme to save you from annoyance! So thus you return within a day, and the margravine, shelters you. Your name will not be spoken. But go at once, for the sake of Prince Ernest. I have hurt him already; help me to avoid doing him a mortal injury. It was Schwartz who drove you? our old Schwartz! Old Warhead! You see, we may be safe; only every fresh minute adds to the danger. And another reason for going-another—’

‘Ah!’ she breathed, ‘my Harry will talk himself into a fever.’

‘I shall have it if the margravine comes here.’

‘She shall not be admitted.’

’Or if I hear her, or hear that she has come! Consent at once, and revive me. Oh! I am begging you to leave me, and wishing it with all my soul. Think over what I have done. Do not write to me. I shall see the compulsion of mere kindness between the lines. You consent. Your wisdom I never doubt—I doubt my own.’

‘When it is yours you would persuade me to confide in?’ said she, with some sorrowful archness.

Wits clear as hers could see that I had advised well, except in proposing my father for escort. It was evidently better that she should go as she came.

Page 2061

I refrained from asking her what she thought of me now. Suing for immediate pardon would have been like the applying of a lancet to a vein for blood: it would have burst forth, meaning mere words coloured by commiseration, kindness, desperate affection, anything but her soul's survey of herself and me; and though I yearned for the comfort passion could give me, I knew the mind I was dealing with, or, rather, I knew I was dealing with a mind; and I kept my tongue silent. The talk between us was of the possible date of my recovery, the hour of her return to the palace, the writer of the unsigned letters, books we had read apart or peeped into together. She was a little quicker in speech, less meditative. My sensitive watchfulness caught no other indication of a change.

My father drove away an hour in advance of the princess to encounter the margravine.

'By,' said he, rehearsing his exclamation of astonishment and delight at meeting her, 'by the most miraculous piece of good fortune conceivable, dear madam. And now comes the question, since you have condescended to notice a solitary atom of your acquaintance on the public highroad, whether I am to have the honour of doubling the freight of your carriage, or you will deign to embark in mine? But the direction of the horses' heads must be reversed, absolutely it must, if your Highness would repose in a bed to-night. Good. So. And now, at a conversational trot, we may happen to be overtaken by acquaintances.'

I had no doubt of his drawing on his rarely-abandoned seven-league boots of jargon, once so delicious to me, for the margravine's entertainment. His lack of discernment in treating the princess to it ruined my patience.

The sisters Aennchen and Lieschen presented themselves a few minutes before his departure. Lieschen dropped at her feet.

'My child,' said the princess, quite maternally, 'could you be quit of your service with the Mahrlens for two weeks, think you, to do duty here?'

'The Professor grants her six hours out of the twenty-four already,' said I.

'To go where?' she asked, alarmed.

'To come here.'

'Here? She knows you? She did not curtsey to you.'

'Nurses do not usually do that.'

The appearance of both girls was pitiable; but having no suspicion of the cause for it, I superadded,

‘She was here this morning.’

‘Ah! we owe her more than we were aware of.’

The princess looked on her kindly, though with suspense in the expression.

‘She told me of my approaching visitor,’ I said.

‘Oh! not told!’ Lieschen burst out.

’Did you,’—the princess questioned her, and murmured to me, ’These children cannot speak falsehoods,’ they shone miserably under the burden of uprightness ‘did you make sure that I should come?’

Lieschen thought—she supposed. But why? Why did she think and suppose? What made her anticipate the princess’s arrival? This inveterate why communicated its terrors to Aennchen, upon whom the princess turned scrutinizing eyes, saying, ‘You write of me to your sister?’

Page 2062

‘Yes, princess.’

‘And she to you?’

Lieschen answered: ‘Forgive me, your Highness, dearest lady!’

‘You offered yourself here unasked?’

‘Yes, princess.’

‘Have you written to others besides your sister?’

‘Seldom, princess; I do not remember.’

‘You know the obligation of signatures to letters?’

‘Ah!’

‘You have been remiss in not writing to me, child.’

‘Oh, princess! I did not dare to.’

‘You have not written to me?’

‘Ah! princess, how dared I?’

‘Are you speaking truthfully?’

The unhappy girls stood trembling. Ottilia spared them the leap into the gulfs of confession. Her intuitive glance, assisted by a combination of minor facts, had read the story of their misdeeds in a minute. She sent them down to the carriage, suffering her culprits to kiss her fingers; while she said to one: ‘This might be a fable of a pair of mice.’

When she was gone, after many fits of musing, the signification of it was revealed to my slower brain. I felt that it could not but be an additional shock to the regal pride of such a woman that these little maidens should have been permitted to act forcibly on her destiny. The mystery of the letters was easily explained as soon as a direct suspicion fell on one of the girls who lived in my neighbourhood and the other who was near the princess’s person. Doubtless the revelation of their effective mouse plot had its humiliating bitterness for her on a day of heavy oppression, smile at it as she subsequently might. The torture of heart with which I twisted the meaning of her words about the pair of mice to imply that the pair had conspired to make a net for an eagle and had enmeshed her, may have struck a vein of the truth. I could see no other antithesis to the laudable performance of the single mouse of fable. Lieschen, when

she next appeared in the character of nurse, met my inquiries by supplicating me to imitate her sister's generous mistress, and be merciful.

She remarked by-and-by, of her own accord: 'Princess Ottilia does not regret that she had us educated.'

A tender warmth crept round me in thinking that a mind thus lofty would surely be, however severe in its insight, above regrets and recantations.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I GAIN A PERCEPTION OF PRINCELY STATE

I had a visit from Prince Ernest, nominally one of congratulation on my escape. I was never in my life so much at any man's mercy: he might have fevered me to death with reproaches, and I expected them on hearing his name pronounced at the door. I had forgotten the ways of the world. For some minutes I listened guardedly to his affable talk. My thanks for the honour done me were awkward, as if they came upon reflection. The prince was particularly civil and cheerful. His relative, he said, had written of me in high terms—the very highest, declaring that I was blameless in the matter, and that, though he had sent the horse back to my stables, he fully believed in the fine qualities of the animal, and acknowledged his fault in making it a cause of provocation. To all of which I assented with easy nods.

Page 2063

‘Your Shakespeare, I think,’ said the prince, ’has a scene of young Frenchmen praising their horses. I myself am no stranger to the enthusiasm: one could not stake life and honour on a nobler brute. Pardon me if I state my opinion that you young Englishmen of to-day are sometimes rather overbearing in your assumption of a superior knowledge of horseflesh. We Germans in the Baltic provinces and in the Austrian cavalry think we have a right to a remark or two; and if we have not suborned the testimony of modern history, the value of our Hanoverian troopers is not unknown to one at least of your Generals. However, the odds are that you were right and Otto wrong, and he certainly put himself in the wrong to defend his ground.’

I begged him to pass a lenient sentence upon fiery youth. He assured me that he remembered his own. Our interchange of courtesies was cordially commonplace: we walked, as it were, arm-in-arm on thin ice, rivalling one another’s gentlemanly composure. Satisfied with my discretion, the prince invited me to the lake-palace, and then a week’s shooting in Styria to recruit. I thanked him in as clear a voice as I could command:

‘Your Highness, the mine flourishes, I trust?’

‘It does; I think I may say it does,’ he replied. ’There is always the want of capital. What can be accomplished, in the present state of affairs, your father performs, on the whole, well. You smile—but I mean extraordinarily well. He has, with an accountant at his elbow, really the genius of management. He serves me busily, and, I repeat, well. A better employment for him than the direction of Court theatricals?’

‘Undoubtedly it is.’

’Or than bestriding a bronze horse, personifying my good ancestor! Are you acquainted with the Chancellor von Redwitz?’

’All I know of him, sir, is that he is fortunate to enjoy the particular confidence of his master.’

’He has a long head. But, now, he is a disappointing man in action; responsibility overturns him. He is the reverse of Roy, whose advice I do not take, though I’m glad to set him running. Von Redwitz is in the town. He shall call on you, and amuse an hour or so of your convalescence.’

I confessed that I began to feel longings for society.

Prince Ernest was kind enough to quit me without unmasking. I had not to learn that the simplest visits and observations of ruling princes signify more than lies on the surface. Interests so highly personal as theirs demand from them a decent insincerity.

Chancellor von Redwitz called on me, and amused me with secret anecdotes of all the royal Houses of Germany, amusing chiefly through the veneration he still entertained for them. The grave senior was doing his utmost to divert one of my years. The immoralities of blue blood, like the amours of the Gods, were to his mind tolerable, if not beneficial to mankind, and he presumed I should find them toothsome. Nay,

Page 2064

he besought me to coincide in his excuses of a widely charming young archduchess, for whom no estimable husband of a fitting rank could anywhere be discovered, so she had to be bestowed upon an archducal imbecile; and hence—and hence—Oh, certainly! Generous youth and benevolent age joined hands of exoneration over her. The princess of Satteberg actually married, under covert, a colonel of Uhlans at the age of seventeen; the marriage was quashed, the colonel vanished, the princess became the scandalous Duchess of Ilm-Ilm, and was surprised one infamous night in the outer court of the castle by a soldier on guard, who dragged her into the guard-room and unveiled her there, and would have been summarily shot for his pains but for the locket on his breast, which proved him to be his sovereign's son.—A perfect romance, Mr. Chancellor. We will say the soldier son loved a delicate young countess in attendance on the duchess. The countess spies the locket, takes it to the duchess, is reprimanded, when behold! the locket opens, and Colonel von Bein appears as in his blooming youth, in Lancer uniform.—Young sir, your piece of romance has exaggerated history to caricature. Romances are the destruction of human interest. The moment you begin to move the individuals, they are puppets. 'Nothing but poetry, and I say it who do not read it'—(Chancellor von Redwitz is the speaker)'nothing but poetry makes romances passable: for poetry is the everlastingly and embracingly human. Without it your fictions are flat foolishness, non-nourishing substance—a species of brandy and gruel! —diet for craving stomachs that can support nothing solider, and must have the weak stuff stiffened. Talking of poetry, there was an independent hereditary princess of Leiterstein in love with a poet!—a Leonora d'Este!—This was no Tasso. Nevertheless, she proposed to come to nuptials. Good, you observe? I confine myself to the relation of historical circumstances; in other words, facts; and of good or bad I know not.'

Chancellor von Redwitz smoothed the black silk stocking of his crossed leg, and set his bunch of seals and watch-key swinging. He resumed, entirely to amuse me,

'The Princess Elizabeth of Leiterstein promised all the qualities which the most solicitous of paternal princes could desire as a guarantee for the judicious government of the territory to be bequeathed to her at his demise. But, as there is no romance to be extracted from her story, I may as well tell you at once that she did not espouse the poet.'

'On the contrary, dear Mr. Chancellor, I am interested in the princess. Proceed, and be as minute as you please.'

'It is but a commonplace excerpt of secret historical narrative buried among the archives of the Family, my good Mr. Richmond. The Princess Elizabeth thoughtlessly pledged her hand to the young sonneteer. Of course, she could not fulfil her engagement.'

'Why not?'

'You see, you are impatient for romance, young gentleman.'

Page 2065

‘Not at all, Mr. Chancellor. I do but ask a question.’

‘You fence. Your question was dictated by impatience.’

’Yes, for the facts and elucidations!

‘For the romance, that is. You wish me to depict emotions.’

Hereupon this destroyer of temper embrowned his nostrils with snuff, adding,—’I am unable to.’

’Then one is not to learn why the princess could not fulfil her engagement?’

’Judged from the point of view of the pretender to the supreme honour of the splendid alliance, the fault was none of hers. She overlooked his humble, his peculiarly dubious, birth.’

‘Her father interposed?’

‘No.’

‘The Family?’

‘Quite inefficacious to arrest her determinations.’

‘What then—what was in her way?’

‘Germany.’

‘What?’

’Great Germany, young gentleman. I should have premised that, besides mental, she had eminent moral dispositions,—I might term it the conscience of her illustrious rank. She would have raised the poet to equal rank beside her had she possessed the power. She could and did defy the Family, and subdue her worshipping father, the most noble prince, to a form of paralysis of acquiescence—if I make myself understood. But she was unsuccessful in her application for the sanction of the Diet.’

‘The Diet?’

’The German Diet. Have you not lived among us long enough to know that the German Diet is the seat of domestic legislation for the princely Houses of Germany? A prince or a princess may say, “I will this or that.” The Diet says, “Thou shalt not”; pre-eminently, “Thou shalt not mix thy blood with that of an impure race, nor with blood of inferiors.” Hence, we have it what we see it, a translucent flood down from the topmost founts of

time. So we revere it. “Qua man and woman,” the Diet says, by implication, “do as you like, marry in the ditches, spawn plentifully. Qua prince and princess, No! Your nuptials are nought. Or would you maintain them a legal ceremony, and be bound by them, you descend, you go forth; you are no reigning sovereign, you are a private person.” His Serene Highness the prince was thus prohibited from affording help to his daughter. The princess was reduced to the decision either that she, the sole child born of him in legal wedlock, would render him qua prince childless, or that she would—in short, would have her woman’s way. The sovereignty of Leiterstein continued uninterruptedly with the elder branch. She was a true princess.’

‘A true woman,’ said I, thinking the sneer weighty.

The Chancellor begged me to recollect that he had warned me there was no romance to be expected.

I bowed; and bowed during the remainder of the interview.

Chancellor von Redwitz had performed his mission. The hours of my convalescence were furnished with food for amusement sufficient to sustain a year’s blockade; I had no further longing for society, but I craved for fresh air intensely.

Page 2066

Did Ottilia know that this iron law, enforced with the might of a whole empire, environed her, held her fast from any motion of heart and will? I could not get to mind that the prince had hinted at the existence of such a law. Yet why should he have done so? The word impossible, in which he had not been sparing when he deigned to speak distinctly, comprised everything. More profitable than shooting empty questions at the sky was the speculation on his project in receiving me at the palace, and that was dark. My father, who might now have helped me, was off on duty again.

I found myself driving into Sarkeld with a sense of a whirlwind round my head; wheels in multitudes were spinning inside, striking sparks for thoughts. I met an orderly in hussar uniform of blue and silver, trotting on his errand. There he was; and whether many were behind him or he stood for the army in its might, he wore the trappings of an old princely House that nestled proudly in the bosom of its great jealous Fatherland. Previously in Sarkeld I had noticed members of the diminutive army to smile down on them. I saw the princely arms and colours on various houses and in the windows of shops. Emblems of a small State, they belonged to the history of the Empire. The Court-physician passed with a bit of ribbon in his buttonhole. A lady driving in an open carriage encouraged me to salute her. She was the wife of the Prince's Minister of Justice. Upon what foundation had I been building?

A reflection of the ideas possessing me showed Riversley, my undecorated home of rough red brick, in the middle of barren heaths. I entered the palace, I sent my respects to the prince. In return, the hour of dinner was ceremoniously named to me: ceremony damped the air. I had been insensible to it before, or so I thought, the weight was now so crushing. Arms, emblems, colours, liveries, portraits of princes and princesses of the House, of this the warrior, that the seductress, burst into sudden light. What had I to do among them?

The presence of the living members of the Family was an extreme physical relief.

For the moment, beholding Ottilia, I counted her but as one of them. She welcomed me without restraint.

We chattered pleasantly at the dinner-table.

'Ah! You missed our French troupe,' said the margravine.'

'Yes,' said I, resigning them to her. She nodded:

'And one very pretty little woman they had, I can tell you—for a Frenchwoman.'

'You thought her pretty? Frenchwomen know what to do with their brains and their pins, somebody has said.'

’And exceedingly well said, too. Where is that man Roy? Good things always remind me of him.’

The question was addressed to no one in particular. The man happened to be my father, I remembered. A second allusion to him was answered by Prince Ernest:

’Roy is off to Croatia to enrol some dozens of cheap workmen. The strength of those Croats is prodigious, and well looked after they work. He will be back in three or four or more days.’

Page 2067

‘You have spoilt a good man,’ rejoined the margravine; ’and that reminds me of a bad one—a cutthroat. Have you heard of that creature, the princess’s tutor? Happily cut loose from us, though! He has published a book—a horror! all against Scripture and Divine right! Is there any one to defend him now, I should like to ask?’

‘I,’ said Ottilia.

‘Gracious me! you have not read the book?’

‘Right through, dear aunt, with all respect to you.’

’It ‘s in the house?’

‘It is in my study.’

‘Then I don’t wonder! I don’t wonder!’ the margravine exclaimed.

‘Best hear what the enemy has to say,’ Prince Ernest observed.

‘Excellently argued, papa, supposing that he be an enemy.’

’An enemy as much as the fox is the enemy of the poultry-yard, and the hound is the enemy of the fox!’ said the margravine.

‘I take your illustration, auntie,’ said Ottilia. ’He is the enemy of chickens, and only does not run before the numbers who bark at him. My noble old Professor is a resolute truth-seeker: he raises a light to show you the ground you walk on. How is it that you, adoring heroes as you do, cannot admire him when he stands alone to support his view of the truth! I would I were by him! But I am, whenever I hear him abused.’

‘I daresay you discard nothing that the wretch has taught you!’

‘Nothing! nothing!’ said Ottilia, and made my heart live.

The grim and taciturn Baroness Turckems, sitting opposite to her, sighed audibly.

‘Has the princess been trying to convert you?’ the margravine asked her.

‘Trying? no, madam. Reading? yes.’

‘My good Turckems! you do not get your share of sleep?’

‘It is her Highness the princess who despises sleep.’

’See there the way with your free-thinkers! They commence by treading under foot the pleasantest half of life, and then they impose their bad habits on their victims. Ottilia!

Ernest! I do insist upon having lights extinguished in the child's apartments by twelve o'clock at midnight.'

'Twelve o'clock is an extraordinary latitude for children,' said Ottilia, smiling.

The prince, with a scarce perceptible degree of emphasis, said,

'Women born to rule must be held exempt from nursery restrictions.'

Here the conversation opened to let me in. More than once the margravine informed me that I was not the equal of my father.

'Why,' said she, 'why can't you undertake this detestable coal-mine, and let your father disport himself?'

I suggested that it might be because I was not his equal. She complimented me for inheriting a spark of Roy's brilliancy.

I fancied there was a conspiracy to force me back from my pretensions by subjecting me to the contemplation of my bare self and actual condition. Had there been, I should have suffered from less measured strokes. The unconcerted design to humiliate inferiors is commonly successfuller than conspiracy.

Page 2068

The prince invited me to smoke with him, and talked of our gradual subsidence in England to one broad level of rank through the intermixture by marriage of our aristocracy, squirearchy, and merchants.

‘Here it is not so,’ he said; ’and no democratic rageings will make it so. Rank, with us, is a principle. I suppose you have not read the Professor’s book? It is powerful—he is a powerful man. It can do no damage to the minds of persons destined by birth to wield authority—none, therefore, to the princess. I would say to you—avoid it. For those who have to carve their way, it is bad. You will enter your Parliament, of course? There you have a fine career.’

He asked me what I had made of Chancellor von Redwitz.

I perceived that Prince Ernest could be cool and sagacious in repairing what his imprudence or blindness had left to occur: that he must have enlightened his daughter as to her actual position, and was most dexterously and devilishly flattering her worldly good sense by letting it struggle and grow, instead of opposing her. His appreciation of her intellect was an idolatry; he really confided in it, I knew; and this reacted upon her. Did it? My hesitations and doubts, my fantastic raptures and despair, my loss of the power to appreciate anything at its right value, revealed the madness of loving a princess.

There were preparations for the arrival of an important visitor. The margravine spoke of him emphatically. I thought it might be her farcically pompous way of announcing my father’s return, and looked pleased, I suppose, for she added, ’Do you know Prince Hermann? He spends most of his time in Eberhardstadt. He is cousin of the King, a wealthy branch; tant soit peu philosophe, a ce qu’on dit; a traveller. They say he has a South American complexion. I knew him a boy; and his passion is to put together what Nature has unpieced, bones of fishes and animals. Il faut passer le temps. He adores the Deluge. Anything antediluvian excites him. He can tell us the “modes” of those days; and, if I am not very much misinformed, he still expects us to show him the very latest of these. Happily my milliner is back from Paris. Ay, and we have fossils in our neighbourhood, though, on my honour, I don’t know where—somewhere; the princess can guide him, and you can help at the excavations. I am told he would go through the crust of earth for the backbone of an idio—ilio-something-saurus.’

I scrutinized Prince Hermann as rarely my observation had dwelt on any man. He had the German head, wide, so as seemingly to force out the ears; honest, ready, interested eyes in conversation; parched lips; a rather tropically-coloured skin; and decidedly the manners of a gentleman to all, excepting his retinue of secretaries, valets, and chasseurs—his ‘blacks,’ he called them. They liked him. One could not help liking him.

‘You study much?’ he addressed the princess at table.

Page 2069

She answered: 'I throw aside books, now you have come to open the earth and the sea.'

From that time the topics started on every occasion were theirs; the rest of us ran at their heels, giving tongue or not.

To me Prince Hermann was perfectly courteous. He had made English friends on his travels; he preferred English comrades in adventure to any other: thought our East Indian empire the most marvellous thing the world had seen, and our Indian Government cigars very smokeable upon acquaintance. When stirred, he bubbled with anecdote. 'Not been there,' was his reply to the margravine's tentatives for gossip of this and that of the German Courts. His museum, hunting, and the Opera absorbed and divided his hours. I guessed his age to be mounting forty. He seemed robust; he ate vigorously. Drinking he conscientiously performed as an accompanying duty, and was flushed after dinner, burning for tobacco and a couch for his length. Then he talked of the littleness of Europe and the greatness of Germany; logical postulates fell in collapse before him. America to America, North and South; India to Europe. India was for the land with the largest sea-board. Mistress of the Baltic, of the North Sea and the East, as eventually she must be, Germany would claim to take India as a matter of course, and find an outlet for the energies of the most prolific and the toughest of the races of mankind,—the purest, in fact, the only true race, properly so called, out of India, to which it would return as to its source, and there create an empire magnificent in force and solidity, the actual wedding of East and West; an empire firm on the ground and in the blood of the people, instead of an empire of aliens, that would bear comparison to a finely fretted cotton-hung palanquin balanced on an elephant's back, all depending on the docility of the elephant (his description of Great Britain's Indian Empire). 'And mind me,' he said, 'the masses of India are in character elephant all over, tail to proboscis! servile till they trample you, and not so stupid as they look. But you've done wonders in India, and we can't forget it. Your administration of Justice is worth all your battles there.'

This was the man: a milder one after the evaporation of his wine in speech, and peculiarly moderate on his return, exhaling sandal-wood, to the society of the ladies.

Ottilia danced with Prince Hermann at the grand Ball given in honour of him. The wives and daughters of the notables present kept up a buzz of comment on his personal advantages, in which, I heard it said, you saw his German heart, though he had spent the best years of his life abroad. Much court was paid to him by the men. Sarkeld visibly expressed satisfaction. One remark, 'We shall have his museum in the town!' left me no doubt upon the presumed object of his visit: it was uttered and responded to with a depth of sentiment that showed how lively would be the general gratitude toward one who should exhilarate the place by introducing cases of fish-bones.

Page 2070

So little did he think of my presence, that returning from a ride one day, he seized and detained the princess's hand. She frowned with pained surprise, but unresistingly, as became a young gentlewoman's dignity. Her hand was rudely caught and kept in the manner of a boisterous wooer—a Harry the Fifth or lusty Petruchio. She pushed her horse on at a bound. Prince Hermann rode up head to head with her gallantly, having now both hands free of the reins, like an Indian spearing the buffalo—it was buffalo courtship; and his shout of rallying astonishment at her resistance, 'What? What?' rang wildly to heighten the scene, she leaning constrained on one side and he bending half his body's length; a strange scene for me to witness.

They proceeded with old Schwartz at their heels doglike. It became a question for me whether I should follow in the bitter track, and further the question whether I could let them escape from sight. They wound up the roadway, two figures and one following, now dots against the sky, now a single movement in the valley, now concealed, buried under billows of forest, making the low noising of the leaves an intolerable whisper of secresy, and forward I rushed again to see them rounding a belt of firs or shadowed by rocks, solitary on shorn fields, once more dipping to the forest, and once more emerging, vanishing. When I had grown sure of their reappearance from some point of view or other, I spied for them in vain. My destiny, whatever it might be, fluttered over them; to see them seemed near the knowing of it, and not to see them, deadly. I galloped, so intent on the three in the distance, that I did not observe a horseman face toward me, on the road: it was Prince Hermann. He raised his hat; I stopped short, and he spoke:

'Mr. Richmond, permit me to apologize to you. I have to congratulate you, it appears. I was not aware.—However, the princess has done me the favour to enlighten me. How you will manage, I can't guess, but that is not my affair. I am a man of honour; and, on my honour, I conceived that I was invited here to decide, as my habit is, on the spot, if I would, or if I would not. I speak clearly to you, no doubt. There could be no hesitation in the mind of a man of sense. My way is prompt and blunt; I am sorry I gave you occasion to reflect on it. There! I have been deceived—deceived myself, let's say. Sharp methods play the devil with you now and then. To speak the truth,—perhaps you won't care to listen to it,—family arrangements are the best; take my word for it, they are the best. And in the case of princesses of the Blood!—Why, look you, I happen to be suitable. It 's a matter of chance, like your height, complexion, constitution. One is just what one is born to be, eh? You have your English notions, I my German; but as a man of the world in the bargain, and "gentleman," I hope, I should say, that to take a young princess's fancy, and drag her from her station is not—of course, you know that the actual value of the title goes if she steps down? Very well. But enough said; I thought I was in a clear field. We are used to having our way cleared for us, nous autres. I will not detain you.'

Page 2071

We saluted gravely, and I rode on at a mechanical pace, discerning by glimpses the purport of what I had heard, without drawing warmth from it. The man's outrageously royal way of wooing, in contempt of minor presences and flimsy sentiment, made me jealous of him, notwithstanding his overthrow.

I was in the mood to fall entirely into my father's hands, as I did by unbosoming myself to him for the first time since my heart had been under the charm. Fresh from a rapid course of travel, and with the sense of laying the prince under weighty obligations, he made light of my perplexity, and at once delivered himself bluntly: 'She plights her hand to you in the presence of our good Peterborough.' His plans were shaped on the spot. 'We start for England the day after to-morrow to urge on the suit, Richie. Our Peterborough is up at the chateau. The Frau Feldmarschall honours him with a farewell invitation: you have a private interview with the princess at midnight in the library, where you are accustomed to read, as a student of books should, my boy at a touch of the bell, or mere opening of the door, I see that Peterborough comes to you. It will not be a ceremony, but a binding of you both by your word of honour before a ghostly gentleman.' He informed me that his foresight had enlisted and detained Peterborough for this particular moment and identical piece of duty, which seemed possible, and in a singular manner incited me to make use of Peterborough. For the princess still denied me the look of love's intelligence, she avoided me, she still kept to the riddle, and my delicacy went so far that I was restrained from writing. I agreed with my father that we could not remain in Germany; but how could I quit the field and fly to England on such terms? I composed the flattest letter ever written, requesting the princess to meet me about midnight in the library, that I might have the satisfaction of taking my leave of her; and this done, my spirits rose, and it struck me my father was practically wise, and I looked on Peterborough as an almost supernatural being. If Ottilia refused to come, at least I should know my fate. Was I not bound in manly honour to be to some degree adventurous?

So I reasoned in exclamations, being, to tell truth, tired of seeming to be what I was not quite, of striving to become what I must have divined that I never could quite attain to. So my worthier, or ideal, self fell away from me. I was no longer devoted to be worthy of a woman's love, but consenting to the plot to entrap a princess. I was somewhat influenced, too, by the consideration, which I regarded as a glimpse of practical wisdom, that Prince Ernest was guilty of cynical astuteness in retaining me as his guest under manifold disadvantages. Personal pride stood up in arms, and my father's exuberant spirits fanned it. He dwelt loudly on his services to the prince, and his own importance and my heirship to mighty riches. He made me almost believe that Prince Ernest hesitated about rejecting me; nor did it appear altogether foolish to think so, or why was I at the palace? I had no head for reflections.

Page 2072

My father diverted me by levelling the whole battery of his comic mind upon Peterborough, who had a heap of manuscript, directed against heretical German theologians, to pack up for publication in his more congenial country: how different, he ejaculated, from this nest—this forest of heresy, where pamphlets and critical essays were issued without let or hindrance, and, as far as he could see, no general reprobation of the Press, such as would most undoubtedly, with one voice, hail any strange opinions in our happy land at home! Whether he really understood the function my father prepared him for, I cannot say. The invitation to dine and pass a night at the lake-palace flattered him immensely.

We went up to the chateau to fetch him.

A look of woe was on Peterborough's countenance when we descended at the palace portals: he had forgotten his pipe.

'You shall smoke one of the prince's,' my father said. Peterborough remarked to me,—-'We shall have many things to talk over in England.'

'No tobacco allowed on the premises at Riversley, I 'm afraid,' said I.

He sighed, and bade me jocosely to know that he regarded tobacco as just one of the consolations of exiles and bachelors.

'Peterborough, my good friend, you are a hero!' cried my father. 'He divorces tobacco to marry!'

'Permit me,' Peterborough interposed, with an ingenuous pretension to subtle waggery, in itself very comical,—'permit me; no legitimate union has taken place between myself and tobacco!'

'He puts an end to the illegitimate union between himself and tobacco that he may marry according to form!' cried my father.

We entered the palace merrily, and presently Peterborough, who had worn a studious forehead in the midst of his consenting laughter, observed, 'Well, you know, there is more in that than appears on the surface.'

His sweet simpleton air of profundity convulsed me. I handed my father the letter addressed to the princess to entrust it to the charge of one of the domestics, thinking carelessly at the time that Ottilia now stood free to make appointments and receive communications, and moreover that I was too proud to condescend to subterfuge, except this minor one, in consideration for her, of making it appear that my father, and not I, was in communication with her. My fit of laughter clung. I dressed chuckling. The margravine was not slow to notice and comment on my hilarious readiness.

‘Roy,’ she said, ’you have given your son spirit. One sees he has your blood when you have been with him an hour.’

‘The season has returned, if your Highness will let it be Spring,’ said my father.

‘Far fetched!—from the Lower Danube!’ she ejaculated in mock scorn to excite his sprightliness, and they fell upon a duologue as good as wit for the occasion.

Page 2073

Prince Hermann had gone. His departure was mentioned with the ordinary commonplaces of regret. Ottilia was unembarrassed, both in speaking of him and looking at me. We had the Court physician and his wife at table, Chancellor von Redwitz and his daughter, and General Happenwyll, chief of the prince's contingent, a Prussian at heart, said to be a good officer on the strength of a military book of some sort that he had full leisure to compose. The Chancellor's daughter and Baroness Turckems enclosed me.

I was questioned by the baroness as to the cause of my father's unexpected return. 'He is generally opportune,' she remarked.

'He goes with me to England,' I said.

'Oh! he goes,' said she; and asked why we were honoured with the presence of Mr. Peterborough that evening. There had always been a smouldering hostility between her and my father.

To my surprise, the baroness spoke of Ottilia by her name.

'Ottilia must have mountain air. These late hours destroy her complexion. Active exercise by day and proper fatigue by night time—that is my prescription.'

'The princess,' I replied, envying Peterborough, who was placed on one side of her, 'will benefit, I am sure, from mountain air. Does she read excessively? The sea—'

'The sea I pronounce bad for her—unwholesome,' returned the baroness. 'It is damp.'

I laughed.

'Damp,' she reiterated. 'The vapours, I am convinced, affect mind and body. That excursion in the yacht did her infinite mischief. The mountains restored her. They will again, take my word for it. Now take you my word for it, they will again. She is not too strong in constitution, but in order to prescribe accurately one must find out whether there is seated malady. To ride out in the night instead of reposing! To drive on and on, and not reappear till the night of the next day—I ask you, is it sensible? Does it not approach mania?'

'The princess—?' said I.

'Ottilia has done that.'

'Baroness, can I believe you?—and alone?'

A marvellous twinkle of shuffle appeared in the small slate-coloured eyes I looked at under their roofing of thick black eyebrows.

‘Alone,’ she said. ’That is, she was precautious to have her giant to protect her from violence. There you have a glimmering of reason in her; and all of it that I can see.’

‘Old Schwartz is a very faithful servant,’ said I, thinking that she resembled the old Warhead in visage.

‘A dog’s obedience to the master’s whims you call faithfulness! Hem!’ The baroness coughed dryly.

I whispered: ‘Does Prince Ernest—is he aware?’

‘You are aware,’ retorted the baroness, ’that what a man idolizes he won’t see flaw in. Remember, I am something here, or I am nothing.’

Page 2074

The enigmatical remark was received by me decorously as a piece of merited chastisement. Nodding with gravity, I expressed regrets that the sea did not please her, otherwise I could have offered her a yacht for a cruise. She nodded stiffly. Her mouth shut up a smile, showing more of the door than the ray. The dinner, virtually a German supper, ended in general conversation on political affairs, preceded and supported by a discussion between the Prussian-hearted General and the Austrian-hearted margravine. Prince Ernest, true to his view that diplomacy was the weapon of minor sovereigns, held the balance, with now a foot in one scale, now in the other; a politic proceeding, so long as the rival powers passively consent to be weighed.

We trifled with music, made our bow to the ladies, and changed garments for the smoking-room. Prince Ernest smoked his one cigar among guests. The General, the Chancellor, and the doctor, knew the signal for retirement, and rose simultaneously with the discharge of his cigar-end in sparks on the unlit logwood pile. My father and Mr. Peterborough kept their chairs.

There was, I felt with relief, no plot, for nothing had been definitely assented to by me. I received Prince Ernest's proffer of his hand, on making my adieux to him, with a passably clear conscience.

I went out to the library. A man came in for orders; I had none to give. He saw that the shutters were fixed and the curtains down, examined my hand-lamp, and placed lamps on the reading-desk and mantel-piece. Bronze busts of sages became my solitary companions. The room was long, low and dusky, voluminously and richly hung with draperies at the farther end, where a table stood for the prince to jot down memoranda, and a sofa to incline him to the relaxation of romance-reading. A door at this end led to the sleeping apartments of the West wing of the palace. Where I sat the student had ranges of classical volumes in prospect and classic heads; no other decoration to the walls. I paced to and fro and should have flung myself on the sofa but for a heap of books there covered from dust, perhaps concealed, that the yellow Parisian volumes, of which I caught sight of some new dozen, might not be an attraction to the eyes of chance-comers. At the lake-palace the prince frequently gave audience here. He had said to me, when I stated my wish to read in the library, 'You keep to the classical department?' I thought it possible he might not like the coloured volumes to be inspected; I had no taste for a perusal of them. I picked up one that fell during my walk, and flung it back, and disturbed a heap under cover, for more fell, and there I let them lie.

Ottilia did not keep me waiting.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SCENE IN THE LAKE-PALACE LIBRARY

I was humming the burden of Gothe's Zigeunerlied, a favourite one with me whenever I had too much to think of, or nothing. A low rush of sound from the hall-doorway swung me on my heel, and I saw her standing with a silver lamp raised in her right hand to the level of her head, as if she expected to meet obscurity. A thin blue Indian scarf mufed her throat and shoulders. Her hair was loosely knotted. The lamp's full glow illumined and shadowed her. She was like a statue of Twilight.

Page 2075

I went up to her quickly, and closed the door, saying, ‘You have come’; my voice was not much above a breath.

She looked distrustfully down the length of the room; ’You were speaking to some one?’

‘No.’

‘You were speaking.’

‘To myself, then, I suppose.’

I remembered and repeated the gipsy burden.

She smiled faintly and said it was the hour for Anna and Ursel and Kith and Liese to be out.

Her hands were gloved, a small matter to tell of.

We heard the portico-sentinel challenged and relieved.

‘Midnight,’ I said.

She replied: ’You were not definite in your directions about the minutes.’

‘I feared to name midnight.’

‘Why?’

’Lest the appointment of midnight—I lose my knowledge of you!—should make you reflect, frighten you. You see, I am inventing a reason; I really cannot tell why, if it was not that I hoped to have just those few minutes more of you. And now they’re gone. I would not have asked you but that I thought you free to act.’

‘I am.’

‘And you come freely?’

‘A “therefore” belongs to every grant of freedom.’

‘I understand: your judgement was against it.’

‘Be comforted,’ she said; ’it is your right to bid me come, if you think fit.’

One of the sofa-volumes fell. She caught her breath; and smiled at her foolish alarm.

I told her that it was my intention to start for England in the morning; that this was the only moment I had, and would be the last interview: my rights, if I possessed any, and I was not aware that I did, I threw down.

‘You throw down one end of the chain,’ she said.

‘In the name of heaven, then,’ cried I, ‘release yourself.’

She shook her head. ‘That is not my meaning.’

Note the predicament of a lover who has a piece of dishonesty lurking in him. My chilled self-love had certainly the right to demand the explanation of her coldness, and I could very well guess that a word or two drawn from the neighbourhood of the heart would fetch a warmer current to unlock the ice between us, but feeling the coldness I complained of to be probably a suspicion, I fixed on the suspicion as a new and deeper injury done to my loyal love for her, and armed against that I dared not take an initiative for fear of unexpectedly justifying it by betraying myself.

Yet, supposing her inclination to have become diverted, I was ready frankly to release her with one squeeze of hands and take all the pain of she pain, and I said: ‘Pray, do not speak of chains.’

‘But they exist. Things cannot be undone for us two by words.’

The tremble as of a strung wire in the strenuous pitch of her voice seemed to say she was not cold, though her gloved hand resting its finger-ends on the table, her restrained attitude, her very calm eyes, declared the reverse. This and that sensation beset me in turn.

Page 2076

We shrank oddly from uttering one another's Christian name. I was the first with it; my 'Ottilia!' brought soon after 'Harry' on her lips, and an atmosphere about us much less Arctic.

'Ottilia, you have told me you wish me to go to England.'

'I have.'

'We shall be friends.'

'Yes, Harry; we cannot be quite divided; we have that knowledge for our present happiness.'

'The happy knowledge that we may have our bone to gnaw when food's denied. It is something. One would like possibly, after expulsion out of Eden, to climb the gates to see how the trees grow there. What I cannot imagine is the forecasting of any joy in the privilege.'

'By nature or system, then, you are more impatient than I, for I can,' said Ottilia. She added: 'So much of your character I divined early. It was part of my reason for wishing you to work. You will find that hard work in England—but why should I preach to you Harry, you have called me here for some purpose?'

'I must have detained you already too long.'

'Time is not the offender. Since I have come, the evil——'

'Evil? Are not your actions free?'

'Patience, my friend. The freer my actions, the more am I bound to deliberate on them. I have the habit of thinking that my deliberations are not in my sex's fashion of taking counsel of the nerves and the blood.

In truth, Harry, I should not have come but for my acknowledgement of your right to bid me come.'

'You know, princess, that in honouring me with your attachment, you imperil your sovereign rank?'

'I do.'

'What next?'

'Except that it is grievously in peril, nothing!'

‘Have you known it all along?’

’Dimly-scarcely. To some extent I knew it, but it did not stand out in broad daylight. I have been learning the world’s wisdom recently. Would you have had me neglect it? Surely much is due to my father? My relatives have claims on me. Our princely Houses have. My country has.’

‘Oh, princess, if you are pleading——’

‘Can you think that I am?’

The splendour of her high nature burst on me with a shock.

I could have fallen to kiss her feet, and I said indifferently: ’Not pleading, only it is evident the claims—I hate myself for bringing you in antagonism with them. Yes, and I have been learning some worldly wisdom; I wish for your sake it had not been so late. What made me overleap the proper estimate of your rank! I can’t tell; but now that I know better the kind of creature—the man who won your esteem when you knew less of the world!’—

‘Hush! I have an interest in him, and do not suffer him to be spurned,’ Ottilia checked me. ’I, too, know him better, and still, if he is dragged down I am in the dust; if he is abused the shame is mine.’ Her face bloomed.

Her sweet warmth of colour was transfused through my veins.

Page 2077

‘We shall part in a few minutes. I have a mind to beg a gift of you.’

‘Name it.’

‘That glove.’

She made her hand bare and gave me, not the glove, but the hand.

‘Ah! but this I cannot keep.’

‘Will you have everything spoken?’ she said, in a tone that would have been reproachful had not tenderness melted it. ’There should be a spirit between us, Harry, to spare the task. You do keep it, if you choose. I have some little dread of being taken for a madwoman, and more—an actual horror of behaving ungratefully to my generous father. He has proved that he can be indulgent, most trusting and considerate for his daughter, though he is a prince; my duty is to show him that I do not forget I am a princess. I owe my rank allegiance when he forgets his on my behalf, my friend! You are young. None but an inexperienced girl hoodwinked by her tricks of intuition, would have dreamed you superior to the passions of other men. I was blind; I am regretful—-take my word as you do my hand—for no one’s sake but my father’s. You and I are bound fast; only, help me that the blow may be lighter for him; if I descend from the place I was born to, let me tell him it is to occupy one I am fitted for, or should not at least feel my Family’s deep blush in filling. To be in the midst of life in your foremost England is, in my imagination, very glorious. Harry, I remember picturing to myself when I reflected upon your country’s history—perhaps a year after I had seen the two “young English gentlemen,” that you touch the morning and evening star, and wear them in your coronet, and walk with the sun West and East! Child’s imagery; but the impression does not wear off. If I rail at England, it is the anger of love. I fancy I have good and great things to speak to the people through you.’

There she stopped. The fervour she repressed in speech threw a glow over her face, like that on a frosty bare autumn sky after sunset.

I pressed my lips to her hand.

In our silence another of the fatal yellow volumes thumped the floor.

She looked into my eyes and asked,

‘Have we been speaking before a witness?’

So thoroughly had she renovated me, that I accused and reproved the lurking suspicion with a soft laugh.

‘Beloved! I wish we had been.’

‘If it might be,’ she said, divining me and musing.

‘Why not?’

She stared.

‘How? What do you ask?’

The look on my face alarmed her. I was breathless and colourless, with the heart of a hawk eyeing his bird—a fox, would be the truer comparison, but the bird was noble, not one that cowered. Her beauty and courage lifted me into high air, in spite of myself, and it was a huge weight of greed that fell away from me when I said,

’I would not urge it for an instant. Consider—if you had just plighted your hand in mine before a witness!’

Page 2078

‘My hand is in yours; my word to you is enough.’

’Enough. My thanks to heaven for it! But consider—a pledge of fidelity that should be my secret angel about me in trouble and trial; my wedded soul! She cannot falter, she is mine for ever, she guides me, holds me to work, inspirits me!—she is secure from temptation, from threats, from everything—nothing can touch, nothing move her, she is mine! I mean, an attested word, a form, that is—a betrothal. For me to say—my beloved and my betrothed! You hear that? Beloved! is a lonely word:—betrothed! carries us joined up to death. Would you?—I do but ask to know that you would. To-morrow I am loose in the world, and there ’s a darkness in the thought of it almost too terrible. Would you?—one sworn word that gives me my bride, let men do what they may! I go then singing to battle—sure!—Remember, it is but the question whether you would.’

‘Harry, I would, and will,’ she said, her lips shuddering—’wait’—for a cry of joy escaped me—’I will look you me in the eyes and tell me you have a doubt of me.’

I looked: she swam in a mist.

We had our full draught of the divine self-oblivion which floated those ghosts of the two immortal lovers through the bounds of their purgatorial circle, and for us to whom the minutes were ages, as for them to whom all time was unmarked, the power of supreme love swept out circumstance. Such embraces cast the soul beyond happiness, into no known region of sadness, but we drew apart sadly, even as that involved pair of bleeding recollections looked on the life lost to them. I knew well what a height she dropped from when the senses took fire. She raised me to learn how little of fretful thirst and its reputed voracity remains with love when it has been met midway in air by a winged mate able to sustain, unable to descend farther.

And it was before a witness, though unviewed by us.

The farewell had come. Her voice was humbled.

Never, I said, delighting in the now conscious bravery of her eyes engaging mine, shadowy with the struggle, I would never doubt her, and I renounced all pledges. To be clear in my own sight as well as in hers, I made mention of the half-formed conspiracy to obtain her plighted troth in a binding manner. It was not necessary for me to excuse myself; she did that, saying, ’Could there be a greater proof of my darling’s unhappiness? I am to blame.’

We closed hands for parting. She hesitated and asked if my father was awake; then promptly to my answer:

’I will see him. I have treated you ill. I have exacted too much patience. The suspicion was owing to a warning I had this evening, Harry; a silly warning to beware of snares; and I had no fear of them, believe me, though for some moments, and without the slightest real desire to be guarded, I fancied Harry’s father was overhearing me. He is your father, dearest: fetch him to me.

Page 2079

My father will hear of this from my lips—why not he? Ah! did I suspect you ever so little? I will atone for it; not atone, I will make it my pleasure; it is my pride that has hurt you both. O my lover! my lover! Dear head, dear eyes! Delicate and noble that you are! my own stronger soul! Where was my heart? Is it sometimes dead, or sleeping? But you can touch it to life. Look at me—I am yours. I consent, I desire it; I will see him. I will be bound. The heavier the chains, oh! the better for me. What am I, to be proud of anything not yours, Harry? and I that have passed over to you! I will see him at once.'

A third in the room cried out, 'No, not that—you do not!'

The tongue was German and struck on us like a roll of unfriendly musketry before we perceived the enemy. 'Princess Ottilia! you remember your dignity or I defend you and it, think of me what you will!'

Baroness Turckems, desperately entangled by the sofa-covering, rushed into the ray of the lamps and laid her hand on the bell-rope. In a minute we had an alarm sounding, my father was among us, there was a mad play of chatter, and we stood in the strangest nightmare-light that ever ended an interview of lovers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOMEWARD AND HOME AGAIN

The room was in flames, Baroness Turckems plucking at the bell-rope, my father looking big and brilliant.

'Hold hand!' he shouted to the frenzied baroness.

She counter-shouted; both of them stamped feet; the portico sentinel struck the butt of his musket on the hall-doors; bell answered bell along the upper galleries.

'Foolish woman, be silent!' cried my father.

'Incendiary!' she half-shrieked.

He turned to the princess, begging her to retire, but she stared at him, and I too, after having seen him deliberately apply the flame of her lamp to the curtains, deemed him mad. He was perfectly self-possessed, and said, 'This will explain the bell!' and fetched a deep breath, and again urged the princess to retire.

Peterborough was the only one present who bethought him of doing fireman's duty. The risk looked greater than it was. He had but to tear the lighted curtains down and trample on them. Suddenly the baroness called out, 'The man is right! Come with me,

princess; escape, your Highness, escape! And you,' she addressed me—'you rang the bell, you!'

'To repair your error, baroness,' said my father.

'I have my conscience pure; have you?' she retorted.

He bowed and said, 'The fire will also excuse your presence on the spot, baroness.'

'I thank my God I am not so cool as you,' said she.

'Your warmth'—he bent to her—'shall always be your apology, baroness.'

Seeing the curtains extinguished, Ottilia withdrew. She gave me no glance.

Page 2080

All this occurred before the night-porter, who was going his rounds, could reach the library. Lacqueys and maids were soon at his heels. My father met Prince Ernest with a florid story of a reckless student, either asleep or too anxious to secure a particular volume, and showed his usual consideration by not asking me to verify the narrative. With that, and with high praise of Peterborough, as to whose gallantry I heard him deliver a very circumstantial account, he, I suppose, satisfied the prince's curiosity, and appeased him, the damage being small compared with the uproar. Prince Ernest questioned two or three times, 'What set him ringing so furiously?' My father made some reply.

Ottilia's cloud-pale windows were the sole greeting I had from her on my departure early next morning, far wretcheder than if I had encountered a misfortune. It was impossible for me to deny that my father had shielded the princess: she would never have run for a menace. As he remarked, the ringing of the bell would not of itself have forced her to retreat, and the nature of the baroness's alarm demanded nothing less than a conflagration to account for it to the household. But I felt humiliated on Ottilia's behalf, and enraged on my own. And I had, I must confess, a touch of fear of a man who could unhesitatingly go to extremities, as he had done, by summoning fire to the rescue. He assured me that moments such as those inspired him and were the pride of his life, and he was convinced that, upon reflection, 'I should rise to his pitch.' He deluded himself with the idea of his having foiled Baroness Turckems, nor did I choose to contest it, though it struck me that she was too conclusively the foiler. She must have intercepted the letter for the princess. I remembered acting carelessly in handing it to my father for him to consign it to one of the domestics, and he passed it on with a flourish. Her place of concealment was singularly well selected under the sofa-cover, and the little heaps of paper-bound volumes. I do not fancy she meant to rouse the household; her notion probably was to terrorize the princess, that she might compel her to quit my presence. In rushing to the bell-rope, her impetuosity sent her stumbling on it with force, and while threatening to ring, and meaning merely to threaten, she rang; and as it was not a retractable act, she continued ringing, and the more violently upon my father's appearance. Catching sight of Peterborough at his heels, she screamed a word equivalent to a clergyman. She had lost her discretion, but not her wits.

For any one save a lover—thwarted as I was, and perturbed by the shadow falling on the princess—my father's Aplomb and promptness in conjuring a check to what he assumed to be a premeditated piece of villany on the part of Baroness Turckems, might have seemed tolerably worthy of admiration. Me the whole scene affected as if it had burnt my skin. I loathed that picture of him, constantly present

Page 2081

to me, of his shivering the glass of Ottilia's semi-classical night-lamp, gravely asking her pardon, and stretching the flame to the curtain, with large eyes blazing on the baroness. The stupid burlesque majesty of it was unendurable to thought. Nevertheless, I had to thank him for shielding Ottilia, and I had to brood on the fact that I had drawn her into a situation requiring such a shield. He, meanwhile, according to his habit, was engaged in reviewing the triumphs to come. 'We have won a princess!' And what England would say, how England would look, when, on a further journey, I brought my princess home, entirely occupied his imagination, to my excessive torture—a state of mind for which it was impossible to ask his mercy. His sole link with the past appeared to be this notion that he had planned all the good things in store for us. Consequently I was condemned to hear of the success of the plot, until—for I had not the best of consciences—I felt my hand would be spell-bound in the attempt to write to the princess; and with that sense of incapacity I seemed to be cut loose from her, drifting back into the desolate days before I saw her wheeled in her invalid chair along the sands and my life knew sunrise.

But whatever the mood of our affections, so it is with us island wanderers: we cannot gaze over at England, knowing the old country to be close under the sea-line, and not hail it, and partly forget ourselves in the time that was. The smell of sea-air made me long for the white cliffs, the sight of the white cliffs revived pleasant thoughts of Riversley, and thoughts of Riversley thoughts of Janet, which were singularly and refreshingly free from self-accusations. Some love for my home, similar to what one may have for Winter, came across me, and some appreciation of Janet as well, in whose society was sure to be at least myself, a creature much reduced in altitude, but without the cramped sensations of a man on a monument. My hearty Janet! I thanked her then for seeing me of my natural height.

Some hours after parting with my father in London, I lay down to sleep in my old home, feeling as if I had thrown off a coat of armour. I awoke with a sailor's song on my lips. Looking out of window at the well-known features of the heaths and dark firs, and waning oak copses, and the shadowy line of the downs stretching their long whale backs South to West, it struck me that I had been barely alive of late. Indeed one who consents to live as I had done, in a hope and a retrospect, will find his life slipping between the two, like the ships under the striding Colossus. I shook myself, braced myself, and saluted every one at the breakfast table with the frankness of Harry Richmond. Congratulated on my splendid spirits, I was confirmed in the idea that I enjoyed them, though I knew of something hollow which sent an echo through me at intervals. Janet had become a fixed inmate of the house. 'I've bought her, and I shall keep her; she's the

Page 2082

apple of my eye,' said the squire, adding with characteristic scrupulousness, 'if apple's female.' I asked her whether she had heard from Temple latterly. 'No; dear little fellow!' cried she, and I saw in a twinkling what it was that the squire liked in her, and liked it too. I caught sight of myself, as through a rift of cloud, trotting home from the hunt to a glad, frank, unpretending mate, with just enough of understanding to look up to mine. For a second or so it was pleasing, as a glance out of his library across hill and dale will be to a strained student. Our familiarity sanctioned a comment on the growth of her daughter-of-the-regiment moustache, the faintest conceivable suggestion of a shadow on her soft upper lip, which a poet might have feigned to have fallen from her dark thick eyebrows.

'Why, you don't mean to say, Hal, it's not to your taste?' said the squire.

'No,' said I, turning an eye on my aunt Dorothy, 'I've loved it all my life.'

The squire stared at me to make sure of this, muttered that it was to his mind a beauty, and that it was nothing more on Janet's lip than down on a flower, bloom on a plum. The poetical comparisons had the effect of causing me to examine her critically. She did not raise a spark of poetical sentiment in my bosom. She had grown a tall young woman, firmly built, light of motion, graceful perhaps; but it was not the grace of grace: the grace of simplicity, rather. She talked vivaciously and frankly, and gave (to friends) her whole eyes and a fine animation in talking; and her voice was a delight to friends; there was always the full ring of Janet in it, and music also. She still lifted her lip when she expressed contempt or dislike of persons; nor was she cured of her trick of frowning. She was as ready as ever to be flattered; that was evident. My grandfather's praise of her she received with a rewarding look back of kindness; she was not discomposed by flattery, and threw herself into no postures, nor blushed very deeply. 'Thank you for perceiving my merits,' she seemed to say; and to be just I should add that one could fancy her saying, you see them because you love me. She wore her hair in a plain knot, peculiarly neatly rounded away from the temples, which sometimes gave to a face not aquiline a look of swiftness. The face was mobile, various, not at all suggestive of bad temper, in spite of her frowns. The profile of it was less assuring than the front, because of the dark eyebrows' extension and the occasional frown, but that was not shared by the mouth, which was, I admitted to myself, a charming bow, running to a length at the corners like her eyebrows, quick with smiles. The corners of the mouth would often be in movement, setting dimples at work in her cheek, while the brows remained fixed, and thus at times a tender meditative air was given her that I could not think her own. Upon what could she possibly reflect? She had not a care, she had no education, she could hardly boast an idea—two at a time I was sure she never had entertained. The sort of wife for a fox-hunting lord, I summed up, and hoped he would be a good fellow.

Page 2083

Peterborough was plied by the squire for a description of German women. Blushing and shooting a timid look from under his pendulous eyelids at my aunt, indicating that he was prepared to go the way of tutors at Riversley, he said he really had not much observed them.

‘They’re a whitey-brown sort of women, aren’t they?’ the squire questioned him, ‘with tow hair and fish eyes, high o’ the shoulder, bony, and a towel skin and gone teeth, so I’ve heard tell. I’ve heard that’s why the men have all taken to their beastly smoking.’

Peterborough ejaculated: ‘Indeed! sir, really!’ He assured my aunt that German ladies were most agreeable, cultivated persons, extremely domesticated, retiring; the encomiums of the Roman historian were as well deserved by them in the present day as they had been in the past; decidedly, on the whole, Peterborough would call them a virtuous race.

‘Why do they let the men smoke, then?’ said the squire. ’A pretty style o’ courtship. Come, sit by my hearth, ma’am; I ’ll be your chimney—faugh! dirty rascals!’

Janet said: ‘I rather like the smell of cigars.’

‘Like what you please, my dear—he’ll be a lucky dog,’ the squire approved her promptly, and asked me if I smoked.

I was not a stranger to the act, I confessed.

’Well’—he took refuge in practical philosophy—’a man must bring some dirt home from every journey: only don’t smoke me out, mercy’s sake.’

Here was a hint of Janet’s influence with him, and of what he expected from my return to Riversley.

Peterborough informed me that he suffered persecution over the last glasses of Port in the evening, through the squire’s persistent inquiries as to whether a woman had anything to do with my staying so long abroad. ‘A lady, sir?’ quoth Peterborough. ‘Lady, if you like,’ rejoined the squire. ’You parsons and petticoats must always mince the meat to hash the fact.’ Peterborough defended his young friend Harry’s moral reputation, and was amazed to hear that the squire did not think highly of a man’s chastity. The squire acutely chagrined the sensitive gentleman by drawling the word after him, and declaring that he tossed that kind of thing into the women’s wash-basket. Peterborough, not without signs of indignation, protesting, the squire asked him point-blank if he supposed that Old England had been raised to the head of the world by such as he. In fine, he favoured Peterborough with a lesson in worldly views. ’But these,’ Peterborough said to me, ’are not the views, dear Harry—if they are the views of ladies of any description, which I take leave to doubt—not the views of the ladies you and I

would esteem. For instance, the ladies of this household.' My aunt Dorothy's fate was plain.

In reply to my grandfather's renewed demand to know whether any one of those High-Dutch women had got hold of me, Peterborough said: 'Mr. Beltham, the only lady of whom it could be suspected that my friend Harry regarded her with more than ordinary admiration was Hereditary-Princess of one of the ancient princely Houses of Germany.' My grandfather thereupon said, 'Oh!' pushed the wine, and was stopped.

Page 2084

Peterborough chuckled over this ‘Oh!’ and the stoppage of further questions, while acknowledging that the luxury of a pipe would help to make him more charitable. He enjoyed the Port of his native land, but he did, likewise, feel the want of one whiff or so of the less restrictive foreigner’s pipe; and he begged me to note the curiosity of our worship of aristocracy and royalty; and we, who were such slaves to rank, and such tyrants in our own households,—we Britons were the great sticklers for freedom! His conclusion was, that we were not logical. We would have a Throne, which we would not allow the liberty to do anything to make it worthy of rational veneration: we would have a peerage, of which we were so jealous that it formed almost an assembly of automatons; we would have virtuous women, only for them to be pursued by immoral men. Peterborough feared, he must say, that we were an inconsequent people. His residence abroad had so far unhinged him; but a pipe would have stopped his complainings.

Moved, perhaps, by generous wine, in concert with his longing for tobacco, he dropped an observation of unwonted shrewdness; he said: ’The squire, my dear Harry, a most honourable and straightforward country gentleman, and one of our very wealthiest, is still, I would venture to suggest, an example of old blood that requires—I study race—-varying, modifying, one might venture to say, correcting; and really, a friend with more privileges than I possess, would or should throw him a hint that no harm has been done to the family by an intermixture . . . old blood does occasionally need it—you know I study blood—it becomes too coarse, or, in some cases, too fine. The study of the mixture of blood is probably one of our great physical problems.’

Peterborough commended me to gratitude for the imaginative and chivalrous element bestowed on me by a father that was other than a country squire; one who could be tolerant of innocent habits, and not of guilty ones—a further glance at the interdicted pipe. I left him almost whimpering for it.

The contemplation of the curious littleness of the lives of men and women lived in this England of ours, made me feel as if I looked at them out of a palace balcony-window; for no one appeared to hope very much or to fear; people trotted in their different kinds of harness; and I was amused to think of my heart going regularly in imitation of those about me. I was in a princely state of mind indeed, not disinclined for a time to follow the general course of life, while despising it. An existence without colour, without anxious throbbing, without salient matter for thought, challenged contempt. But it was exceedingly funny. My aunt Dorothy, the squire, and Janet submitted to my transparent inward laughter at them, patiently waiting for me to share their contentment, in the deluded belief that the hour would come. The principal items of news embraced the death of Squire Gregory

Page 2085

Bulsted, the marriage of this and that young lady, a legal contention between my grandfather and Lady Maria Higginson, the wife of a rich manufacturer newly located among us, on account of a right of encampment on Durstan heath, my grandfather taking side with the gipsies, and beating her ladyship—a friend of Heriot's, by the way. Concerning Heriot, my aunt Dorothy was in trouble. She could not, she said, approve his behaviour in coming to this neighbourhood at all, and she hinted that I might induce him to keep away. I mentioned Julia Bulsted's being in mourning, merely to bring in her name tentatively.

'Ay, mourning's her outer rig, never doubt,' said the squire. 'Flick your whip at her, she 's a charitable soul, Judy Bulsted! She knits stockings for the poor. She'd down and kiss the stump of a sailor on a stick o' timber. All the same, she oughtn't to be alone. Pity she hasn't a baby. You and I'll talk it over by-and-by, Harry.'

Kiomi was spoken of, and Lady Maria Higginson, and then Heriot.

'M-m-m-m rascal!' hummed the squire. 'There's three, and that's not enough for him. Six months back a man comes over from Surreywards, a farm he calls Dipwell, and asks after you, Harry; rigmaroles about a handsome lass gone off . . . some scoundrel! You and I'll talk it over by-and-by, Harry.'

Janet raised and let fall her eyebrows. The fiction, that so much having been said, an immediate show of reserve on such topics preserved her in ignorance of them, was one she subscribed to merely to humour the squire. I was half in doubt whether I disliked or admired her want of decent hypocrisy. She allowed him to suppose that she did not hear, but spoke as a party to the conversation. My aunt Dorothy blamed Julia. The squire thundered at Heriot; Janet, liking both, contented herself with impartial comments.

'I always think in these cases that the women must be the fools,' she said. Her affectation was to assume a knowledge of the world and all things in it. We rode over to Julia's cottage, on the outskirts of the estate now devolved upon her husband. Irish eyes are certainly bewitching lights. I thought, for my part, I could not do as the captain was doing, serving his country in foreign parts, while such as these were shining without a captain at home. Janet approved his conduct, and was right. 'What can a wife think the man worth who sits down to guard his house-door?' she answered my slight innuendo. She compared the man to a kennel-dog. 'This,' said I, 'comes of made-up matches,' whereat she was silent.

Julia took her own view of her position. She asked me whether it was not dismal for one who was called a grass widow, and was in reality a salt-water one, to keep fresh, with a lapdog, a cook, and a maid-servant, and a postman that passed the gate twenty times for twice that he opened it, and nothing to look for but this disappointing creature day after day! At first she was shy, stole out a coy line of fingers

Page 2086

to be shaken, and lisped; and out of that mood came right-about-face, with an exclamation of regret that she supposed she must not kiss me now. I projected, she drew back. ‘Shall Janet go?’ said I. ’Then if nobody’s present I ‘ll be talked of,’ said she, moaning queerly. The tendency of her hair to creep loose of its bands gave her handsome face an aspect deliriously wild. I complimented her on her keeping so fresh, in spite of her salt-water widowhood. She turned the tables on me for looking so powerful, though I was dying for a foreign princess.

‘Oh! but that’ll blow over,’ she said; ’anything blows over as long as you don’t go up to the altar’; and she eyed her ringed finger, woebegone, and flashed the pleasantest of smiles with the name of her William. Heriot, whom she always called Walter Heriot, was, she informed me, staying at Durstan Hall, the new great house, built on a plot of ground that the Lancashire millionaire had caught up, while the squire and the other landowners of the neighbourhood were sleeping. ’And if you get Walter Heriot to come to you, Harry Richmond, it’ll be better for him, I’m sure,’ she added, and naively:

’I ‘d like to meet him up at the Grange.’ Temple, she said, had left the Navy and was reading in London for the Bar—good news to me.

‘You have not told us anything about your princess, Harry,’ Janet observed on the ride home.

‘Do you take her for a real person, Janet?’

‘One thinks of her as a snow-mountain you’ve been admiring.’

‘Very well; so let her be.’

‘Is she kind and good?’

‘Yes.’

‘Does she ride well?’

‘She rides remarkably well.’

’She ‘s fair, I suppose?’

’Janet, if I saw you married to Temple, it would be the second great wish of my heart.’

‘Harry, you’re a bit too cruel, as Julia would say.’

‘Have you noticed she gets more and more Irish?’

’Perhaps she finds it is liked. Some women can adapt themselves . . . they ’re the happiest. All I meant to ask you is, whether your princess is like the rest of us?’

‘Not at all,’ said I, unconscious of hurting.

’Never mind. Don’t be hard on Julia. She has the making of a good woman—a girl can see that; only she can’t bear loneliness, and doesn’t understand yet what it is to be loved by a true gentleman. Persons of that class can’t learn it all at once.’

I was pained to see her in tears. Her figure was straight, and she spoke without a quaver of her voice.

‘Heriot’s an excellent fellow,’ I remarked.

‘He is. I can’t think ill of my friends,’ said she.

‘Dear girl, is it these two who make you unhappy?’

‘No; but dear old grandada! . . .’

The course of her mind was obvious. I would rather have had her less abrupt and more personal in revealing it. I stammered something.

Page 2087

‘Heriot does not know you as I do,’ she said, strangling a whimper. ’I was sure it was serious, though one’s accustomed to associate princesses with young men’s dreams. I fear, Harry, it will half break our dear old grandada’s heart. He is rough, and you have often been against him, for one unfortunate reason. If you knew him as I do you would pity him sincerely. He hardly grumbled at all at your terribly long absence. Poor old man! he hopes on.’

‘He’s incurably unjust to my father.’

‘Your father has been with you all the time, Harry? I guessed it.’

‘Well?’

’It generally bodes no good to the Grange. Do pardon me for saying that. I know nothing of him; I know only that the squire is generous, and *that* I stand for with all my might. Forgive me for what I said.’

’Forgive you—with all my heart. I like you all the better. You ’re a brave partisan. I don’t expect women to be philosophers.’

‘Well, Harry, I would take your side as firmly as anybody’s.’

‘Do, then; tell the squire how I am situated.’

‘Ah!’ she half sighed, ‘I knew this was coming.’

’How could it other than come? You can do what you like with the squire. I’m dependent on him, and I am betrothed to the Princess Ottilia. God knows how much she has to trample down on her part. She casts off—to speak plainly, she puts herself out of the line of succession, and for whom? for me. In her father’s lifetime she will hardly yield me her hand; but I must immediately be in a position to offer mine. She may: who can tell? she is above all women in power and firmness. You talk of generosity; could there be a higher example of it?’

‘I daresay; I know nothing of princesses,’ Janet murmured. ’I don’t quite comprehend what she has done. The point is, what am I to do?’

’Prepare him for it. Soothe him in advance. Why, dear Janet, you can reconcile him to anything in a minute.’

‘Lie to him downright?’

’Now what on earth is the meaning of that, and why can’t you speak mildly?’

’I suppose I speak as I feel. I’m a plain speaker, a plain person. You don’t give me an easy task, friend Harry.’

’If you believe in his generosity, Janet, should you be afraid to put it to proof?’

’Grandada’s generosity, Harry? I do believe in it as I believe in my own life. It happens to be the very thing I must keep myself from rousing in him, to be of any service to you. Look at the old house!’ She changed her tone. ’Looking on old Riversley with the eyes of my head even, I think I’m looking at something far away in the memory. Perhaps the deep red brick causes it. There never was a house with so many beautiful creepers. Bright as they are, you notice the roses on the wall. There’s a face for me forever from every window; and good-bye, Riversley! Harry, I’ll obey your wishes.’

So saying, she headed me, trotting down the heath-track.

Page 2088

CHAPTER XXXVII

JANET RENOUNCES ME

An illness of old Sewis, the butler,—amazingly resembling a sick monkey in his bed,—-kept me from paying a visit to Temple and seeing my father for several weeks, during which time Janet loyally accustomed the squire to hear of the German princess, and she did it with a decent and agreeable cheerfulness that I quite approved of. I should have been enraged at a martyr-like appearance on her part, for I demanded a sprightly devotion to my interests, considering love so holy a thing, that where it existed, all surrounding persons were bound to do it homage and service. We were thrown together a great deal in attending on poor old Sewis, who would lie on his pillows recounting for hours my father's midnight summons of the inhabitants of Riversley, and his little Harry's infant expedition into the world. Temple and Heriot came to stay at the Grange, and assisted in some rough scene-painting—torrid colours representing the island of Jamaica. We hung it at the foot of old Sewis's bed. He awoke and contemplated it, and went downstairs the same day, cured, he declared: the fact being that the unfortunate picture testified too strongly to the reversal of all he was used to in life, in having those he served to wait on him. The squire celebrated his recovery by giving a servants' ball. Sewis danced with the handsomest lass, swung her to supper, and delivered an extraordinary speech, entirely concerning me, and rather to my discomposure, particularly so when it was my fate to hear that the old man had made me the heir of his savings. Such was his announcement, in a very excited voice, but incidentally upon a solemn adjuration to the squire to beware of his temper—govern his temper and not be a turncoat.

We were present at the head of the supper-table to hear our healths drunk. Sewis spoke like a half-caste oblivious of his training, and of the subjects he was at liberty to touch on as well. Evidently there was a weight of foreboding on his mind. He knew his master well. The squire excused him under the ejaculation, 'Drunk, by the Lord!' Sewis went so far as to mention my father 'He no disgrace, sar, he no disgrace, I say! but he pull one way, old house pull other way, and 'tween 'em my little Harry torn apieces, squire. He set out in the night "You not enter it any more!" Very well. I go my lawyer next day. You see my Will, squire. Years ago, and little Harry so high. Old Sewis not the man to change. He no turncoat, squire. God bless you, my master; you recollect, and ladies tell you if you forget, old Sewis no turncoat. You hate turncoat. You taught old Sewis, and God bless you, and Mr. Harry, and British Constitution, all Amen!'

With that he bounded to bed. He was dead next morning.

Page 2089

The squire was humorous over my legacy. It amounted to about seventeen hundred pounds invested in Government Stock, and he asked me what I meant to do with it; proposed a Charity to be established on behalf of decayed half-castes, insisting that servants' money could never be appropriated to the uses of gentlemen. All the while he was muttering, 'Turncoat! eh? turncoat?'—proof that the word had struck where it was aimed. For me, after thinking on it, I had a superstitious respect for the legacy, so I determined, in spite of the squire's laughter over 'Sixty pounds per annum!' to let it rest in my name: I saw for the first time the possibility that I might not have my grandfather's wealth to depend upon. He warned me of growing miserly. With my father in London, living freely on my property, I had not much fear of that. However, I said discreetly, 'I don't mind spending when I see my way.'

'Oh! see your way,' said he. 'Better a niggard than a chuckfist. Only, there 's my girl: she 's good at accounts. One 'll do for them, Harry?—ha'n't been long enough at home yet?'

Few were the occasions when our conversation did not diverge to this sort of interrogation. Temple and Heriot, with whom I took counsel, advised me to wait until the idea of the princess had worn its way into his understanding, and leave the work to Janet. 'Though,' said Heriot to me aside, 'upon my soul, it's slaughter.' He believed that Janet felt keenly. But then, she admired him, and so they repaid one another.

I won my grandfather's confidence in practical matters on a trip we took into Wales. But it was not enough for me to be a man of business, he affirmed; he wanted me to have some ambition; why not stand for our county at the next general election? He offered me his Welsh borough if I thought fit to decline a contest. This was to speak as mightily as a German prince. Virtually, in wealth and power, he was a prince; but of how queer a kind! He was immensely gratified by my refraining to look out for my father on our return journey through London, and remarked, that I had not seen him for some time, he supposed. To which I said, no, I had not, He advised me to let the fellow run his length. Suggesting that he held it likely I contributed to 'the fellow's' support: he said generously, 'Keep clear of him, Hal: I add you a thousand a year to your allowance,' and damned me for being so thoughtful over it. I found myself shuddering at a breath of anger from him. Could he not with a word dash my hopes for ever? The warning I had taken from old Sewis transformed me to something like a hypocrite, and I dare say I gave the squire to understand, that I had not seen my father for a very long period and knew nothing of his recent doings.

'Been infernally quiet these last two or three years,' the squire muttered of the object of his aversion. 'I heard of a City widow last, sick as a Dover packet-boat 'bout the fellow! Well, the women are ninnies, but you're a man, Harry; you're not to be taken in any longer, eh?'

Page 2090

I replied that I knew my father better now, and was asked how the deuce I knew him better; it was the world I knew better after my stay on the Continent.

I contained myself enough to say, ‘Very well, the world, sir.’

‘Flirted with one of their princesses?’ He winked.

‘On that subject I will talk to you some other time,’ said I.

‘Got to pay an indemnity? or what?’ He professed alarm, and pushed for explanations, with the air of a man of business ready to help me if need were. ’Make a clean breast of it, Harry. You ’re not the son of Tom Fool the Bastard for nothing, I’ll swear. All the same you’re Beltham; you’re my grandson and heir, and I’ll stand by you. Out with ’t! She’s a princess, is she?’

The necessity for correcting his impressions taught me to think the moment favourable. I said, ‘I am engaged to her, sir.’

He returned promptly: ‘Then you’ll break it off.’

I shook my head.

‘Why, you can’t jilt my girl at home!’ said he.

‘Do you find a princess objectionable, sir?’

’Objectionable? She’s a foreigner. I don’t know her. I never saw her. Here’s my Janet I’ve brought up for you, under my own eyes, out of the way of every damned soft-sawderer, safe and plump as a melon under a glass, and you fight shy of her, and go and engage yourself to a foreigner I don’t know and never saw! By George, Harry, I’ll call in a parson to settle you soon as ever we sight Riversley. I’ll couple you, by George, I will! ’fore either of you know whether you’re on your legs or your backs.’

We were in the streets of London, so he was obliged to moderate his vehemence.

‘Have you consulted Janet?’ said I.

‘Consulted her? ever since she was a chick with half a feather on.’

‘A chick with half a feather on,’ I remarked, ’is not always of the same mind as a piece of poultry of full plumage.’

’Hang your sneering and your talk of a fine girl, like my Janet, as a piece of poultry, you young rooster! You toss your head up like a cock too conceited to crow. I ’ll swear the girl ’s in love with you. She does you the honour to be fond of you. She ’s one in a

million. A handsome girl, straight-backed, honest, just a dash, and not too much, of our blood in her.'

'Consult her again, sir,' I broke in. 'You will discover she is not of your way of thinking.'

'Do you mean to say she's given you a left-hander, Harry?'

'I have only to say that I have not given her the option.'

He groaned going up the steps of his hotel, faced me once or twice, and almost gained my sympathy by observing, 'When we're boys, the old ones worry us; when we're old ones, the boys begin to tug!' He rarely spoke so humanely,—rarely, at least, to me.

For a wonder, he let the matter drop: possibly because he found me temperate. I tried the system on him with good effect during our stay in London; that is, I took upon myself to be always cool, always courteous, deliberate in my replies, and not uncordial, though I was for representing the reserved young man. I obtained some praise for my style and bearing among his acquaintances. To one lady passing an encomium on me, he said, 'Oh, some foreign princess has been training him,' which seemed to me of good augury.

Page 2091

My friends Temple and Heriot were among the Riversley guests at Christmas. We rode over to John Thresher's, of whom we heard that the pretty Mabel Sweetwinter had disappeared, and understood that suspicion had fallen upon one of us gentlemen. Bob, her brother, had gone the way of the bravest English fellows of his class-to America. We called on the miller, a soured old man. Bob's evasion affected him more than Mabel's, Martha Thresher said, in derision of our sex. I was pained to hear from her that Bob supposed me the misleader of his sister; and that he had, as she believed, left England, to avoid the misery of ever meeting me again, because he liked me so much. She had been seen walking down the lanes with some one resembling me in figure. Heriot took the miller's view, counting the loss of one stout young Englishman to his country of far greater importance than the escapades of dozens of girls, for which simple creatures he had no compassion: he held the expression of it a sham. He had grown coxcombical. Without talking of his conquests, he talked largely of the ladies who were possibly in the situation of victims to his grace of person, though he did not do so with any unctuous boasting. On the contrary, there was a rather taking undertone of regret that his enfeebled over-fat country would give her military son no worthier occupation. He laughed at the mention of Julia Bulsted's name. 'She proves, Richie, marriage is the best of all receipts for women, just as it's the worst for men. Poor Billy Bulsted, for instance, a first-rate seaman, and his heart's only half in his profession since he and Julia swore their oath; and no wonder,—he made something his own that won't go under lock and key. No military or naval man ought ever to marry.'

'Stop,' said Temple, 'is the poor old country—How about continuing the race of heroes?'

Heriot commended him to rectories, vicarages, and curates' lodgings for breeding grounds, and coming round to Julia related one of the racy dialogues of her married life. 'The saltwater widow's delicious. Billy rushes home from his ship in a hurry. What's this Greg writes me?—That he 's got a friend of his to drink with him, d' ye mean, William?—A friend of yours, ma'am.—And will you say a friend of mine is not a friend of yours, William?—Julia, you're driving me mad!—And is that far from crazy, where you said I drove you at first sight of me, William? Back to his ship goes Billy with a song of love and constancy.'

I said nothing of my chagrin at the behaviour of the pair who had furnished my first idea of the romantic beauty of love.

'Why does she talk twice as Irish as she used to, Heriot?'

'Just to coax the world to let her be as nonsensical as she likes. She's awfully dull; she has only her nonsense to amuse her. I repeat: soldiers and sailors oughtn't to marry. I'm her best friend. I am, on my honour: for I 'm going to make Billy give up the service, since he can't give her up. There she is!' he cried out, and waved his hat to a lady on horseback some way down the slope of a road leading to the view of our heathland:

Page 2092

’There’s the only girl living fit to marry a man and swear she ’ll stick to him through life and death.’

He started at a gallop. Temple would have gone too at any possible speed, for he knew as well as I did that Janet was the girl alone capable of winning a respectful word from Heriot; but I detained him to talk of Ottilia and my dismal prospect of persuading the squire to consent to my proposal for her, and to dower her in a manner worthy a princess. He doled out his yes and no to me vacantly. Janet and Heriot came at a walking pace to meet us, he questioning her, she replying, but a little differently from her usual habit of turning her full face to the speaker. He was evidently startled, and, to judge from his posture, repeated his question, as one would say, ‘You did this?’ She nodded, and then uttered some rapid words, glanced at him, laughed shyly, and sank her features into repose as we drew near. She had a deep blush on her face. I thought it might be, that Janet and her loud champion had come to particular terms, a supposition that touched me with regrets for Temple’s sake. But Heriot was not looking pleased. It happened that whatever Janet uttered struck a chord of opposition in me. She liked the Winter and the Winter sunsets, had hopes of a frost for skating, liked our climate, thought our way of keeping Christmas venerable, rejoiced in dispensing the squire’s bounties—called them bounties, joined Heriot in abusing foreign countries to the exaltation of her own: all this with ’Well, Harry, I’m sorry you don’t think as we do. And we do, don’t we?’ she addressed him.

‘I reserve a point,’ he said, and not playfully.

She appeared distressed, and courted a change of expression in his features, and I have to confess that never having seen her gaze upon any one save myself in that fashion, which was with her very winning, especially where some of her contralto tones of remonstrance or entreaty aided it, I felt as a man does at a neighbour’s shadow cast over his rights of property.

Heriot dropped to the rear: I was glad to leave her with Temple, and glad to see them canter ahead together on the sand of tie heaths.

‘She has done it,’ Heriot burst out abruptly. ‘She has done it!’ he said again. ’Upon my soul, I never wished in my life before that I was a marrying man: I might have a chance of ending worth something. She has won the squire round with a thundering fib, and you’re to have the German if you can get her. Don’t be in a hurry. The squire ’ll speak to you to-night: but think over it. Will you? Think what a girl this is. I believe on my honour no man ever had such an offer of a true woman. Come, don’t think it’s Heriot speaking—I’ve always liked her, of course. But I have always respected her, and that’s not of course. Depend upon it, a woman who can be a friend of men is the right sort of woman to make a match with. Do you suppose she couldn’t have a dozen fellows

Page 2093

round her at the lift of her finger? the pick of the land! I'd trust her with an army. I tell you, Janet Ilchester 's the only girl alive who'll double the man she marries. I don't know another who wouldn't make the name of wife laugh the poor devil out of house and company. She's firm as a rock; and sweet as a flower on it! Will that touch you? Bah! Richie, let's talk like men. I feel for her because she's fond of you, and I know what it is when a girl like that sets her heart on a fellow. There,' he concluded, 'I 'd ask you to go down on your knees and pray before you decide against her!'

Heriot succeeded in raising a certain dull indistinct image in my mind of a well-meaning girl, to whom I was bound to feel thankful, and felt so. I thanked Heriot, too, for his friendly intentions. He had never seen the Princess Ottilia. And at night I thanked my grandfather. He bore himself, on the whole, like the good and kindly old gentleman Janet loved to consider him. He would not stand in my light, he said, recurring to that sheet-anchor of a tolerant sentence whenever his forehead began to gather clouds. He regretted that Janet was no better than her sex in her preference for rakes, and wished me to the deuce for bringing Heriot into the house, and not knowing when I was lucky. 'German grandchildren, eh!' he muttered. No Beltham had ever married a foreigner. What was the time fixed between us for the marriage? He wanted to see his line safe before he died. 'How do I know this foreign woman'll bear?' he asked, expecting an answer. His hand was on the back of a chair, grasping and rocking it; his eyes bent stormily on the carpet; they were set blinking rapidly after a glance at me. Altogether his self-command was creditable to Janet's tuition.

Janet met me next day, saying with some insolence (so it struck me from her liveliness): 'Well, it's all right, Harry? Now you'll be happy, I hope. I did not shine in my reply. Her amiable part appeared to be to let me see how brilliant and gracious the commonplace could be made to look. She kept Heriot at the Grange, against the squire's remonstrance and her mother's. 'It 's to keep him out of harm's way: the women he knows are not of the best kind for him,' she said, with astounding fatuity. He submitted, and seemed to like it. She must be teaching Temple to skate figures in the frost, with a great display of good-humoured patience, and her voice at musical pitches. But her principal affectation was to talk on matters of business with Mr. Burgin and Mr. Trewint, the squire's lawyer and bailiff, on mines and interest, on money and economical questions; not shrinking from politics either, until the squire cries out to the males assisting in the performance, 'Gad, she 's a head as good as our half-dozen put together,' and they servilely joined their fragmentary capitals in agreement. She went so far as to retain Peterborough to teach her Latin. He was idling in the expectation of a living in the squire's gift.

Page 2094

The annoyance for me was that I could not detach myself from a contemplation of these various scenes, by reverting to my life in Germany. The preposterous closing of my interview with Ottilia blocked the way, and I was unable to write to her—unable to address her even in imagination, without pangs of shame at the review of the petty conspiracy I had sanctioned to entrap her to plight her hand to me, and without perpetually multiplying excuses for my conduct. So to escape them I was reduced to study Janet, forming one of her satellites. She could say to me impudently, with all the air of a friendly comrade, 'Had your letter from Germany yet, Harry?' She flew—she was always on the chase. I saw her permit Heriot to kiss her hand, and then the squire appeared, and Heriot and she burst into laughter, and the squire, with a puzzled face, would have the game explained to him, but understood not a bit of it, only growled at me; upon which Janet became serious and chid him. I was told by my aunt Dorothy to admire this behaviour of hers. One day she certainly did me a service: a paragraph in one of the newspapers spoke of my father, not flatteringly: 'Richmond is in the field again,' it commenced. The squire was waiting for her to hand the paper to him. None of us could comprehend why she played him off and denied him his right to the first perusal of the news; she was voluble, almost witty, full of sprightly Roxalana petulance.

'This paper,' she said, 'deserves to be burnt,' and she was allowed to burn it—money article, mining column as well—on the pretext of an infamous anti-Tory leader, of which she herself composed the first sentence to shock the squire completely. I had sight of that paper some time afterwards. Richmond was in the field again, it stated, with mock flourishes. But that was not the worst. My grandfather's name was down there, and mine, and Princess Ottilia's. My father's connection with the court of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld was alluded to as the latest, and next to his winning the heiress of Riversley, the most successful of his ventures, inasmuch as his son, if rumour was to be trusted, had obtained the promise of the hand of the princess. The paragraph was an excerpt from a gossiping weekly journal, perhaps less malevolent than I thought it. There was some fun to be got out of a man who, the journal in question was informed, had joined the arms of England and a petty German principality stamped on his plate and furniture.

My gratitude to Janet was fervent enough when I saw what she had saved me from. I pressed her hand and held it. I talked stupidly, but I made my cruel position intelligible to her, and she had the delicacy, on this occasion, to keep her sentiments regarding my father unuttered. We sat hardly less than an hour side by side—I know not how long hand in hand. The end was an extraordinary trembling in the limb abandoned to me. It seized her frame. I would have detained her, but it was

Page 2095

plain she suffered both in her heart and her pride. Her voice was under fair command-more than mine was. She counselled me to go to London, at once. 'I would be off to London if I were you, Harry,'—for the purpose of checking my father's extravagances,—would have been the further wording, which she spared me; and I thanked her, wishing, at the same time, that she would get the habit of using choicer phrases whenever there might, by chance, be a stress of emotion between us. Her trembling, and her 'I'd be off,' came into unpleasant collision in the recollection.

I acknowledge to myself that she was a true and hearty friend. She listened with interest to my discourse on the necessity of my being in Parliament before I could venture to propose formally for the hand of the princess, and undertook to bear the burden of all consequent negotiations with my grandfather. If she would but have allowed me to speak of Temple, instead of saying, 'Don't, Harry, I like him so much!' at the very mention of his name, I should have sincerely felt my indebtedness to her, and some admiration of her fine spirit and figure besides. I could not even agree with my aunt Dorothy that Janet was handsome. When I had to grant her a pardon I appreciated her better.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MY BANKERS' BOOK

The squire again did honour to Janet's eulogy and good management of him.

'And where,' said she, 'would you find a Radical to behave so generously, Harry, when it touches him so?'

He accorded me his permission to select my side in politics, merely insisting that I was never to change it, and this he requested me to swear to, for (he called the ghost of old Sewis to witness) he abhorred a turncoat.

'If you're to be a Whig, or a sneaking half-and-half, I can't help you much,' he remarked. 'I can pop a young Tory in for my borough, maybe; but I can't insult a number of independent Englishmen by asking them to vote for the opposite crew; that's reasonable, eh? And I can't promise you plumpers for the county neither. You can date your Address from Riversley. You'll have your house in town. Tell me this princess of yours is ready with her hand, and,' he threw in roughly, 'is a respectable young woman, I'll commence building. You'll have a house fit for a prince in town and country, both.'

Temple had produced an effect on him by informing him that 'this princess of mine' was entitled to be considered a fit and proper person, in rank and blood, for an alliance with the proudest royal Houses of Europe, and my grandfather was not quite destitute of consolation in the prospect I presented to him. He was a curious study to me, of the

Tory mind, in its attachment to solidity, fixity, certainty, its unmatched generosity within a limit, its devotion to the family, and its family eye for the country. An immediate introduction to Ottilia would have won him to enjoy the idea of his grandson's marriage; but not having seen her, he could not realize her dignity, nor even the womanliness of a 'foreign woman.'

Page 2096

‘Thank God for one thing,’ he said: ’we shan’t have that fellow bothering—shan’t have the other half of your family messing the business. You’ll have to account for him to your wife as you best can. I ’ve nothing to do with him, mind that. He came to my house, stole my daughter, crazed her wits, dragged us all . . .’

The excuse to turn away from the hearing of abuse of my father was too good to be neglected, though it was horribly humiliating that I should have to take advantage of it —vexatious that I should seem chargeable with tacit lying in allowing the squire to suppose the man he hated to be a stranger to the princess. Not feeling sure whether it might be common prudence to delude him even passively, I thought of asking Janet for her opinion, but refrained. A stout deceiver has his merits, but a feeble hypocrite applying to friends to fortify him in his shifts and tergiversations must provoke contempt. I desired that Janet might continue to think well of me. I was beginning to drop in my own esteem, which was the mirror of my conception of Ottilia’s view of her lover.

Now, had I consulted Janet, I believe the course of my history would have been different, for she would not then, I may imagine, have been guilty of her fatal slip of the tongue that threw us into heavy seas when we thought ourselves floating on canal waters. A canal barge (an image to me of the most perfect attainable peace), suddenly, on its passage through our long fir-woods, with their scented reeds and flowing rushes, wild balsam and silky cotton-grass beds, sluiced out to sea and storm, would be somewhat in my likeness soon after a single luckless observation had passed at our Riversley breakfast-table one Sunday morning.

My aunt Dorothy and Mr. Peterborough were conversing upon the varieties of Christian sects, and particularly such as approached nearest to Anglicanism, together with the strange, saddening fact that the Christian religion appeared to be more divided than, Peterborough regretted to say, the forms of idolatry established by the Buddha, Mahomet, and other impostors. He claimed the audacious merit for us, that we did not discard the reason of man we admitted man’s finite reason to our school of faith, and it was found refractory. Hence our many divisions.

‘The Roman Catholics admit reason?’ said Janet, who had too strong a turn for showing her keenness in little encounters with Peterborough.

‘No,’ said he; ‘the Protestants.’ And, anxious to elude her, he pressed on to enchain my aunt Dorothy’s attention. Janet plagued him meanwhile; and I helped her. We ran him and his schoolboy, the finite refractory, up and down, until Peterborough was glad to abandon him, and Janet said, ‘Did you preach to the Germans much?’ He had officiated in Prince Ernest’s private chapel: not, he added in his egregious modesty, not that he personally wished to officiate.

‘It was Harry’s wish?’ Janet said, smiling.

Page 2097

‘My post of tutor,’ Peterborough hastened to explain, ’was almost entirely supernumerary. The circumstances being so, I the more readily acquiesced in the title of private chaplain, prepared to fulfil such duties as devolved upon me in that capacity, and acting thereon I proffered my occasional services. Lutheranism and Anglicanism are not, doubtless you are aware, divided on the broader bases. We are common Protestants. The Papacy, I can assure you, finds as little favour with one as with the other. Yes, I held forth, as you would say, from time to time. My assumption of the title of private chaplain, it was thought, improved the family dignity—that is, on our side.’

‘Thought by Harry?’ said Janet; and my aunt Dorothy said, ’You and Harry had a consultation about it?’

‘Wanted to appear as grand as they could,’ quoth the squire.

Peterborough signified an assent, designed to modify the implication. ‘Not beyond due bounds, I trust, sir.’

‘Oh! now I understand,’ Janet broke out in the falsetto notes of a puzzle solved in the mind. ’It was his father! Harry proclaiming his private chaplain!’

‘Mr. Harry’s father did first suggest—’ said Peterborough, but her quickly-altered features caused him to draw in his breath, as she had done after one short laugh.

My grandfather turned a round side-eye on me, hard as a cock’s.

Janet immediately started topics to fill Peterborough’s mouth: the weather, the walk to church, the probable preacher. ‘And, grandada,’ said she to the squire, who was muttering ominously with a grim under-jaw, ‘His private chaplain!’ and for this once would not hear her, ’Grandada, I shall drive you over to see papa this afternoon.’ She talked as if nothing had gone wrong. Peterborough, criminal red, attacked a jam-pot for a diversion. ‘Such sweets are rare indeed on the Continent,’ he observed to my aunt Dorothy. ‘Our homemade dainties are matchless.’

‘Private chaplain!’ the squire growled again.

‘It’s you that preach this afternoon,’ Janet said to Peterborough. ’Do you give us an extempore sermon?’

’You remind me, Miss Ilchester, I must look to it; I have a little trimming to do.’

Peterborough thought he might escape, but the squire arrested him. ‘You’ll give me five minutes before you’re out of the house, please. D’ ye smoke on Sundays?’

‘Not on Sundays, sir,’ said Peterborough, openly and cordially, as to signify that they were of one mind regarding the perniciousness of Sunday smoking.

’See you don’t set fire to my ricks with your foreign chaplain’s tricks. I spied you puffing behind one t’ other day. There,’ the squire dispersed Peterborough’s unnecessary air of abstruse recollection, ’don’t look as though you were trying to hit on a pin’s head in a bushel of oats. Don’t set my ricks on fire—that ‘s all.’

‘Mr. Peterborough,’ my aunt Dorothy interposed her voice to soften this rough treatment of him with the offer of some hot-house flowers for his sitting-room.

Page 2098

‘Oh, I thank you!’ I heard the garlanded victim lowing as I left him to the squire’s mercy.

Janet followed me out. ’It was my fault, Harry. You won’t blame him, I know. But will he fib? I don’t think he’s capable of it, and I’m sure he can’t run and double. Grandada will have him fast before a minute is over.’

I told her to lose no time in going and extracting the squire’s promise that Peterborough should have his living,—so much it seemed possible to save.

She flew back, and in Peterborough’s momentary absence, did her work. Nothing could save the unhappy gentleman from a distracting scene and much archaic English. The squire’s power of vituperation was notorious: he could be more than a match for roadside navvies and predatory tramps in cogency of epithet. Peterborough came to me drenched, and wailing that he had never heard such language,—never dreamed of it. And to find himself the object of it!—and, worse, to be unable to conscientiously defend himself! The pain to him was in the conscience,—which is, like the spleen, a function whose uses are only to be understood in its derangement. He had eased his conscience to every question right out, and he rejoiced to me at the immense relief it gave him. Conscientiously, he could not deny that he knew the squire’s objection to my being in my father’s society; and he had connived at it ’for reasons, my dearest Harry, I can justify to God and man, but not—I had to confess as much—not, I grieve to say, to your grandfather. I attempted to do justice to the amiable qualities of the absent. In a moment I was assailed with epithets that . . . and not a word is to be got in when he is so violent. One has to make up one’s mind to act Andromeda, and let him be the sea-monster, as somebody has said; I forget the exact origin of the remark.’

The squire certainly had a whole ocean at command. I strung myself to pass through the same performance. To my astonishment I went unchallenged. Janet vehemently asserted that she had mollified the angry old man, who, however, was dark of visage, though his tongue kept silence. He was gruff over his wine-glass the blandishments of his favourite did not brighten him. From his point of view he had been treated vilely, and he was apparently inclined to nurse his rancour and keep my fortunes trembling in the balance. Under these circumstances it was impossible for me to despatch a letter to Ottilia, though I found that I could write one now, and I sat in my room writing all day,—-most eloquent stuff it was. The shadow of misfortune restored the sense of my heroical situation, which my father had extinguished, and this unlocked the powers of speech. I wrote so admirably that my wretchedness could enjoy the fine millinery I decorated it in. Then to tear the noble composition to pieces was a bitter gratification. Ottilia’s station repelled and attracted me mysteriously. I could not separate her from it, nor keep my love of her from the contentions into which it threw me. In vain I raved, ‘What is rank?’ There was a magnet in it that could at least set me quivering and twisting, behaving like a man spellbound, as madly as any hero of the ballads under a wizard’s charm.

Page 2099

At last the squire relieved us. He fixed that side-cast cock's eye of his on me, and said, 'Where 's your bankers' book, sir?'

I presumed that it was with my bankers, but did not suggest the possibility that my father might have it in his custody; for he had a cheque-book of his own, and regulated our accounts. Why not? I thought, and flushed somewhat defiantly. The money was mine.

'Any objection to my seeing that book?' said the squire.

'None whatever, sir.'

He nodded. I made it a point of honour to write for the book to be sent down to me immediately.

The book arrived, and the squire handed it to me to break the cover, insisting, 'You're sure you wouldn't rather not have me look at it?'

'Quite,' I replied. The question of money was to me perfectly unimportant. I did not see a glimpse of danger in his perusing the list of my expenses.

''Cause I give you my word I know nothing about it now,' he said.

I complimented him on his frank method of dealing, and told him to look at the book if he pleased, but with prudence sufficiently awake to check the declaration that I had not once looked at it myself.

He opened it. We had just assembled in the hall, where breakfast was laid during Winter, before a huge wood fire. Janet had her teeth on her lower lip, watching the old man's face. I did not condescend to be curious; but when I turned my head to him he was puffing through thin lips, and then his mouth crumpled in a knob. He had seen sights.

'By George, I must have breakfast 'fore I go into this!' he exclaimed, and stared as if he had come out of an oven.

Dorothy Beltham reminded him that Prayers had not been read.

'Prayers!' He was about to objurgate, but affirmatived her motion to ring the bell for the servants, and addressed Peterborough: 'You read 'em abroad every morning?'

Peterborough's conscience started off on its inevitable jog-trot at a touch of the whip. 'A-yes; that is—oh, it was my office.' He had to recollect with exactitude:

'I should specify exceptions; there were intervals . . .'

‘Please, open your Bible,’ the squire cut him short; ’I don’t want a damned fine edge on everything.’

Partly for an admonition to him, or in pure nervousness, Peterborough blew his nose monstrously: an unlucky note; nothing went well after it. ‘A slight cold,’ he murmured and resumed the note, and threw himself maniacally into it. The unexpected figure of Captain Bulsted on tiptoe, wearing the ceremonial depressed air of intruders on these occasions, distracted our attention for a moment.

‘Fresh from ship, William?’ the squire called out.

The captain ejaculated a big word, to judge of it from the aperture, but it was mute as his footing on the carpet, and he sat and gazed devoutly toward Peterborough, who had waited to see him take his seat, and must now, in his hurry to perform his duty, sweep the peccant little redbound book to the floor. ‘Here, I’ll have that,’ said the squire. ’Allow me, sir,’ said Peterborough; and they sprang into a collision.

Page 2100

‘Would you jump out of your pulpit to pick up an old woman’s umbrella?’ the squire asked him in wrath, and muttered of requiring none of his clerical legerdemain with books of business. Tears were in Peterborough’s eyes. My aunt Dorothy’s eyes dwelt kindly on him to encourage him, but the man’s irritable nose was again his enemy.

Captain Bulsted chanced to say in the musical voice of inquiry: ’Prayers are not yet over, are they?’

‘No, nor never will be with a parson blowing his horn at this rate,’ the squire rejoined. ‘And mind you,’ he said to Peterborough, after dismissing the servants, to whom my aunt Dorothy read the morning lessons apart, ’I’d not have had this happen, sir, for money in lumps. I’ve always known I should hang the day when my house wasn’t blessed in the morning by prayer. So did my father, and his before him. Fiddle! sir, you can’t expect young people to wear decent faces when the parson’s hopping over the floor like a flea, and trumpeting as if the organ-pipe wouldn’t have the sermon at any price. You tried to juggle me out of this book here.’

‘On my!—indeed, sir, no!’ Peterborough proclaimed his innocence, and it was unlikely that the squire should have suspected him.

Captain Bulsted had come to us for his wife, whom he had not found at home on his arrival last midnight.

‘God bless my soul,’ said the squire, ’you don’t mean to tell me she’s gone off, William?’

‘Oh! dear, no, sir,’ said the captain, ‘she’s only cruising.’

The squire recommended a draught of old ale. The captain accepted it. His comportment was cheerful in a sober fashion, notwithstanding the transparent perturbation of his spirit. He answered my aunt Dorothy’s questions relating to Julia simply and manfully, as became a gallant seaman, cordially excusing his wife for not having been at home to welcome him, with the singular plea, based on his knowledge of the sex, that the nearer she knew him to be the less able was she to sit on her chair waiting like Patience. He drank his ale from the hands of Sillabin, our impassive new butler, who had succeeded Sewis, the squire told him, like a Whig Ministry the Tory; proof that things were not improving.

‘I thought, sir, things were getting better,’ said the captain.

’The damnedest mistake ever made, William. How about the Fall of Man, then? eh? You talk like a heathen Radical. It’s Scripture says we’re going from better to worse, and that’s Tory doctrine. And stick to the good as long as you can! Why, William, you were a jolly bachelor once.’

‘Sir, and ma’am,’ the captain bowed to Dorothy Beltham, ’I have, thanks to you, never known happiness but in marriage, and all I want is my wife.’

The squire fretted for Janet to depart. ’I ‘m going, grandada,’ she said. ’You’ll oblige me by not attending to any matter of business to-day. Give me that book of Harry’s to keep for you.’

Page 2101

‘How d’ ye mean, my dear?’

’It ‘s bad work done on a Sunday, you know.’

‘So it is. I’ll lock up the book.’

‘I have your word for that, grandada,’ said Janet.

The ladies retired, taking Peterborough with them.

‘Good-bye to the frocks! and now, William, out with your troubles,’ said the squire.

The captain’s eyes were turned to the door my aunt Dorothy had passed through.

‘You remember the old custom, sir!’

’Ay, do I, William. Sorry for you then; infernally sorry for you now, that I am! But you’ve run your head into the halter.’

’I love her, sir; I love her to distraction. Let any man on earth say she’s not an angel, I flatten him dead as his lie. By the way, sir, I am bound in duty to inform you I am speaking of my wife.’

‘To be sure you are, William, and a trim schooner-yacht she is.’

’She ‘s off, sir; she’s off!’

I thought it time to throw in a word. ’Captain Bulsted, I should hold any man but you accountable to me for hinting such things of my friend.’

‘Harry, your hand,’ he cried, sparkling.

‘Hum; his hand!’ growled the squire. ’His hand’s been pretty lively on the Continent, William. Here, look at this book, William, and the bundle o’ cheques! No, I promised my girl. We’ll go into it to-morrow, he and I, early. The fellow has shot away thousands and thousands—been gallivanting among his foreign duchesses and countesses. There ’s a petticoat in that bank-book of his; and more than one, I wager. Now he’s for marrying a foreign princess—got himself in a tangle there, it seems.’

‘Mightily well done, Harry!’ Captain Bulsted struck a terrific encomium on my shoulder, groaning, ‘May she be true to you, my lad!’

The squire asked him if he was going to church that morning.

‘I go to my post, sir, by my fireside,’ the captain replied; nor could he be induced to leave his post vacant by the squire’s promise to him of a sermon that would pickle his temper

for a whole week's wear and tear. He regretted extremely that he could not enjoy so excellent a trial of his patience, but he felt himself bound to go to his post and wait.

I walked over to Bulsted with him, and heard on the way that it was Heriot who had called for her and driven her off. 'The man had been, I supposed,' Captain Bulsted said, 'deputed by some of you to fetch her over to Riversley. My servants mentioned his name. I thought it adviseable not to trouble the ladies with it to-day.' He meditated. 'I hoped I should find her at the Grange in the morning, Harry. I slept on it, rather than startle the poor lamb in the night.'

I offered him to accompany him at once to Heriot's quarters.

'What! and let my wife know I doubted her fidelity. My girl shall never accuse me of that.'

Page 2102

As it turned out, Julia had been taken by Heriot on a visit to Lady Maria Higginson, the wife of the intrusive millionaire, who particularly desired to know her more intimately. Thoughtless Julia, accepting the impudent invitation without scruple, had allowed herself to be driven away without stating the place of her destination. She and Heriot were in the Higginsons' pew at church. Hearing from Janet of her husband's arrival, she rushed home, and there, instead of having to beg forgiveness, was summoned to grant pardon. Captain Bulsted had drawn largely on Squire Gregory's cellar to assist him in keeping his post.

The pair appeared before us fondling ineffably next day, neither one of them capable of seeing that our domestic peace at the Grange was unseated. 'We 're the two wretchedest creatures alive; haven't any of ye to spare a bit of sympathy for us?' Julia began. 'We 're like on a pitchfork. There's William's duty to his country, and there 's his affection for me, and they won't go together, because Government, which is that horrid Admiralty, fears pitching and tossing for post-captains' wives. And William away, I 'm distracted, and the Admiralty's hair's on end if he stops. And, 'deed, Miss Beltham, I'm not more than married to just half a husband.'

The captain echoed her, 'Half! but happy enough for twenty whole ones, if you'll be satisfied, my duck.'

Julia piteously entreated me, for my future wife's sake, not to take service under Government. As for the Admiralty, she said, it had no characteristic but the abominable one, that it hated a woman. The squire laid two or three moderately coarse traps for the voluble frank creature, which she evaded with surprising neatness, showing herself more awake than one would have imagined her. Janet and I fancied she must have come with the intention to act uxorious husband and Irish wife for the distinct purpose of diverting the squire's wrath from me, for he greatly delighted in the sight of merry wedded pairs. But they were as simple as possible in their display of happiness.

It chanced that they came opportunely. My bankers' book had been the theme all the morning, and an astonishing one to me equally with my grandfather: Since our arrival in England, my father had drawn nine thousand pounds. The sums expended during our absence on the Continent reached the perplexing figures of forty-eight thousand. I knew it too likely, besides, that all debts were not paid. Self—self—self drew for thousands at a time; sometimes, as the squire's convulsive forefinger indicated, for many thousands within a week. It was incomprehensible to him until I, driven at bay by questions and insults, and perceiving that concealment could not long be practised, made a virtue of the situation by telling him (what he in fact must have seen) that my father possessed a cheque-book as well as I, and likewise drew upon the account. We had required the money; it was

Page 2103

mine, and I had sold out Bank Stock and Consols,—which gave very poor interest, I remarked cursorily-and had kept the money at my bankers', to draw upon according to our necessities. I pitied the old man while speaking. His face was livid; language died from his lips. He asked to have little things explained to him—the two cheque-books, for instance,—and what I thought of doing when this money was all gone: for he supposed I did not expect the same amount to hand every two years; unless, he added, I had given him no more than a couple of years' lease of life when I started for my tour. 'Then the money's gone!' he summed up; and this was the signal for redemanding explanations. Had he not treated me fairly and frankly in handing over my own to me on the day of my majority? Yes.

'And like a fool, you think—eh?'

'I have no such thought in my head, sir.'

'You have been keeping that fellow in his profligacy, and you 're keeping him now. Why, you 're all but a beggar! . . . Comes to my house, talks of his birth, carries off my daughter, makes her mad, lets her child grow up to lay hold of her money, and then grips him fast and pecks him, fleeces him! . . . You 're beggared—d 'ye know that? He's had the two years of you, and sucked you dry. What were you about? What were you doing? Did you have your head on? You shared cheque-books? good! . . . The devil in hell never found such a fool as you! You had your house full of your foreign bonyrobers—eh? Out with it! How did you pass your time? Drunk and dancing?'

By such degrees my grandfather worked himself up to the pitch for his style of eloquence. I have given a faint specimen of it. When I took the liberty to consider that I had heard enough, he followed me out of the library into the hall, where Janet stood. In her presence, he charged the princess and her family with being a pack of greedy adventurers, conspirators with 'that fellow' to plunder me; and for a proof of it, he quoted my words, that my father's time had been spent in superintending the opening of a coal-mine on Prince Ernest's estate. 'That fellow pretending to manage a coal-mine!' Could not a girl see it was a shuffle to hoodwink a greenhorn? And now he remembered it was Colonel Goodwin and his daughter who had told him of having seen 'the fellow' engaged in playing Court-buffoon to a petty German prince, and performing his antics, cutting capers like a clown at a fair.

'Shame!' said Janet.

'Hear her!' The squire turned to me.

But she cried: 'Oh! grandada, hear yourself! or don't, be silent. If Harry has offended you, speak like one gentleman to another. Don't rob me of my love for you: I haven't much besides that.'

‘No, because of a scoundrel and his young idiot!’

Janet frowned in earnest, and said: ’I don’t permit you to change the meaning of the words I speak.’

He muttered a proverb of the stables. Reduced to behave temperately, he began the whole history of my bankers’ book anew—the same queries, the same explosions and imprecations.

Page 2104

‘Come for a walk with me, dear Harry,’ said Janet.

I declined to be protected in such a manner, absurdly on my dignity; and the refusal, together possibly with some air of contemptuous independence in the tone of it, brought the squire to a climax. ’You won’t go out and walk with her? You shall go down on your knees to her and beg her to give you her arm for a walk. By God! you shall, now, here, on the spot, or off you go to your German princess, with your butler’s legacy, and nothing more from me but good-bye and the door bolted. Now, down with you!’

He expected me to descend.

‘And if he did, he would never have my arm.’ Janet’s eyes glittered hard on the squire.

’Before that rascal dies, my dear, he shall whine like a beggar out in the cold for the tips of your fingers!’

‘Not if he asks me first,’ said Janet.

This set him off again. He realized her prospective generosity, and contrasted it with my actual obtuseness. Janet changed her tactics. She assumed indifference. But she wanted experience, and a Heriot to help her in playing a part. She did it badly—overdid it; so that the old man, now imagining both of us to be against his scheme for uniting us, counted my iniquity as twofold. Her phrase, ‘Harry and I will always be friends,’ roused the loudest of his denunciations upon me, as though there never had been question of the princess, so inveterate was his mind’s grasp of its original designs. Friends! Would our being friends give him heirs by law to his estate and name? And so forth. My aunt Dorothy came to moderate his invectives. In her room the heavily-burdened little book of figures was produced, and the items read aloud; and her task was to hear them without astonishment, but with a business-like desire to comprehend them accurately, a method that softened the squire’s outbursts by degrees. She threw out hasty running commentaries: ’Yes, that was for a yacht’; and ‘They were living at the Court of a prince’; such and such a sum was ’large, but Harry knew his grandfather did not wish him to make a poor appearance.’

‘Why, do you mean to swear to me, on your oath, Dorothy Beltham,’ said the squire, amazed at the small amazement he created ’you think these two fellows have been spending within the right margin? What’ll be women’s ideas next!’

‘No,’ she answered demurely. ’I think Harry has been extravagant, and has had his lesson. And surely it is better now than later? But you are, not making allowances for his situation as the betrothed of a princess.’

’That ‘s what turns your head,’ said he; and she allowed him to have the notion, and sneer at herself and her sex.

‘How about this money drawn since he came home?’ the squire persisted.

My aunt Dorothy reddened. He struck his finger on the line marking the sum, repeating his demand; and at this moment Captain Bulsted and Julia arrived. The ladies manoeuvred so that the captain and the squire were left alone together. Some time afterward the captain sent out word that he begged his wife’s permission to stay to dinner at the Grange, and requested me to favour him by conducting his wife to Bulsted: proof, as Julia said, that the two were engaged in a pretty hot tussle. She was sure her William would not be the one to be beaten.

Page 2105

I led her away, rather depressed by the automaton performance assigned to me; from which condition I awoke with a touch of horror to find myself paying her very warm compliments; for she had been coquettish and charming to cheer me, and her voice was sweet. We reached a point in our conversation I know not where, but I must have spoken with some warmth. 'Then guess,' said she, 'what William is suffering for your sake now, Harry'; that is, 'suffering in remaining away from me on your account'; and thus, in an instant, with a skill so intuitive as to be almost unconscious, she twirled me round to a right sense of my position, and set me reflecting, whether a love that clad me in such imperfect armour as to leave me penetrable to these feminine graces—a plump figure, swinging skirts, dewy dark eyelids, laughing red lips—could indeed be absolute love. And if it was not love of the immortal kind, what was I? I looked back on the thought like the ship on its furrow through the waters, and saw every mortal perplexity, and death under. My love of Ottilia delusion? Then life was delusion! I contemplated Julia in alarm, somewhat in the light fair witches were looked on when the faggots were piled for them. The sense of her unholy attractions abased and mortified me: and it set me thinking on the strangeness of my disregard of Mdlle. Jenny Chassediane when in Germany, who was far sprightlier, if not prettier, and, as I remembered, had done me the favour to make discreet play with her eyelids in our encounters, and long eyes in passing. I caught myself regretting my coldness of that period; for which regrets I could have swung the scourge upon my miserable flesh. Ottilia's features seemed dying out of my mind. 'Poor darling Harry!' Julia sighed. 'And d' ye know, the sight of a young man far gone in love gives me the trembles?' I rallied her concerning the ladder scene in my old schooldays, and the tender things she had uttered to Heriot. She answered, 'Oh, I think I got them out of poets and chapters about lovemaking, or I felt it very much. And that's what I miss in William; he can't talk soft nice nonsense. I believe him, he would if he could, but he 's like a lion of the desert—it 's a roar!'

I rejoiced when we heard the roar. Captain Bulsted returned to take command of his ship, not sooner than I wanted him, and told us of a fierce tussle with the squire. He had stuck to him all day, and up to 11 P.M. 'By George! Harry, he had to make humble excuses to dodge out of eyeshot a minute. Conquered him over the fourth bottle! And now all's right. He'll see your dad. "In a barn?" says the squire. "Here 's to your better health, sir," I bowed to him; "gentlemen don't meet in barns; none but mice and traps make appointments there." To shorten my story, my lad, I have arranged for the squire and your excellent progenitor to meet at Bulsted: we may end by bringing them over a bottle of old Greg's best. "See the boy's father,"

Page 2106

I kept on insisting. The point is, that this confounded book must be off your shoulders, my lad. A dirty dog may wash in a duck-pond. You see, Harry, the dear old squire may set up your account twenty times over, but he has a right to know how you twirl the coin. He says you don't supply the information. I suggest to him that your father can, and will. So we get them into a room together. I'll be answerable for the rest. And now top your boom, and to bed here: off in the morning and tug the big vessel into port here! And, Harry, three cheers, and another bottle to crown the victory, if you 're the man for it?'

Julia interposed a decided negative to the proposal; an ordinarily unlucky thing to do with bibulous husbands, and the captain looked uncomfortably checked; but when he seemed to be collecting to assert himself, the humour of her remark, 'Now, no bravado, William,' disarmed him.

'Bravado, my sweet chuck?'

'Won't another bottle be like flashing your sword after you've won the day?' said she.

He slung his arm round her, and sent a tremendous whisper into my ear—'A perfect angel!'

I started for London next day, more troubled aesthetically regarding the effect produced on me by this order of perfect angels than practically anxious about material affairs, though it is true that when I came into proximity with my father, the thought of his all but purely mechanical power of making money spin, fly, and vanish, like sparks from a fire-engine, awakened a serious disposition in me to bring our monetary partnership to some definite settlement. He was living in splendour, next door but one to the grand establishment he had driven me to from Dipwell in the old days, with Mrs. Waddy for his housekeeper once more, Alphonse for his cook. Not living on the same scale, however, the troubled woman said. She signified that it was now the whirlwind. I could not help smiling to see how proud she was of him, nevertheless, as a god-like charioteer—in pace, at least.

'Opera to-night,' she answered my inquiries for him, admonishing me by her tone that I ought not to be behindhand in knowing his regal rules and habits. Praising his generosity, she informed me that he had spent one hundred pounds, and offered a reward of five times the sum, for the discovery of Mabel Sweetwinter. 'Your papa never does things by halves, Mr. Harry!' Soon after she was whimpering, 'Oh, will it last?' I was shown into the room called 'The princess's room,' a miracle of furniture, not likely to be occupied by her, I thought, the very magnificence of the apartment striking down hope in my heart like cold on a nerve. Your papa says the whole house is to be for you, Mr. Harry, when the happy day comes.' Could it possibly be that he had talked of the princess? I took a hasty meal and fortified myself with claret to have matters clear with him before the night was over.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Page 2107

I SEE MY FATHER TAKING THE TIDE AND AM CARRIED ON IT MYSELF

My father stood in the lobby of the Opera, holding a sort of open court, it appeared to me, for a cluster of gentlemen hung round him; and I had presently to bow to greetings which were rather of a kind to flatter me, leading me to presume that he was respected as well as marvelled at. The names of Mr. Serjeant Wedderburn, Mr. Jennings, Lord Alton, Sir Weeton Slater, Mr. Monterez Williams, Admiral Loftus, the Earl of Witlington, were among those which struck my ear, and struck me as good ones. I could not perceive anything of the air of cynical satellites in these gentlemen—on the contrary, they were cordially deferential. I felt that he was encompassed by undoubted gentlemen, and my warmer feelings to my father returned when I became sensible of the pleasant sway he held over the circle, both in speaking and listening. His sympathetic smile and semi-droop of attention; his readiness, when occasion demanded it, to hit the key of the subject and help it on with the right word; his air of unobtrusive appreciation; his sensibility to the moment when the run of conversation depended upon him—showed inimitable art coming of natural genius; and he did not lose a shade of his superior manner the while. Mr. Serjeant Wedderburn, professionally voluble, a lively talker, brimming with anecdote, but too sparkling, too prompt, too full of personal relish of his point, threw my father's urbane supremacy into marked relief; and so in another fashion did the Earl of Witlington, 'a youth in the season of guffaws,' as Jorian DeWitt described him, whom a jest would seize by the throat, shaking his sapling frame. Jorian strolled up to us goutily. No efforts of my father's would induce him to illustrate his fame for repartee, so it remained established. 'Very pretty waxwork,' he said to me of our English beauties swimming by. 'Now, those women, young Richmond, if they were inflammable to the fiftieth degree, that is, if they had the fiftieth part of a Frenchwoman in them, would have canvassed society on the great man's account long before this, and sent him to the top like a bubble. He wastes his time on them. That fat woman he's bowing to is Viscountess Sedley, a porcine empress, widow of three, with a soupcon of bigamy to flavour them. She mounted from a grocer's shop, I am told. Constitution has done everything for that woman. So it will everywhere—it beats the world! Now he's on all-fours to Lady Rachel Stokes, our pure aristocracy; she walks as if she were going through a doorway, and couldn't risk an eyelid. I 'd like to see her tempting St. Anthony. That's little Wreckham's wife: she's had as many adventures as Gil Blas before he entered the Duke of Lerma's service.' He reviewed several ladies, certainly not very witty when malignant, as I remembered my father to have said of him. 'The style of your Englishwoman is to keep the nose exactly at one elevation, to show you're

Page 2108

born to it. They daren't run a gamut, these women. These Englishwomen are a fiction! The model of them is the nursery-miss, but they're like the names of true lovers cut on the bark of a tree—awfully stiff and longitudinal with the advance of time. We've our Lady Jezebels, my boy! They're in the pay of the bishops, or the police, to make vice hideous. The rest do the same for virtue, and get their pay for it somewhere, I don't doubt; perhaps from the newspapers, to keep up the fiction. I tell you, these Englishwomen have either no life at all in them, or they're nothing but animal life. 'Gad, how they dizen themselves! They've no other use for their fingers. The wealth of this country's frightful!'

Jorian seemed annoyed that he could not excite me to defend my countrywomen; but I had begun to see that there was no necessity for the sanguine to encounter the bilious on their behalf, and was myself inclined to be critical. Besides I was engaged in watching my father, whose bearing toward the ladies he accosted did not dissatisfy my critical taste, though I had repeated fears of seeing him overdo it. He summoned me to an introduction to the Countess Szezedy, a merry little Hungarian dame.

'So,' said she at once, speaking German, 'you are to marry the romantic head, the Princess Ottilia of Eppenwelzen! I know her well. I have met her in Vienna. Schone Seele, and bas bleu! It's just those that are won with a duel. I know Prince Otto too.' She prattled away, and asked me whether the marriage was to take place in the Summer. I was too astounded to answer.

'No date is yet fixed,' my father struck in.

'It's the talk of London,' she said.

Before I could demand explanations of my father with regard to this terrible rumour involving Ottilia, I found myself in the box of the City widow, Lady Sampleman, a grievous person, of the complexion of the autumnal bramble-leaf, whose first words were: 'Ah! the young suitor! And how is our German princess?' I had to reply that the theme was more of German princes than princesses in England. 'Oh! but,' said she, 'you are having a—shall I call it—national revenge on them? "I will take one of your princesses," says you; and as soon as said done! I'm dying for a sight of her portrait. Captain DeWitt declares her heavenly—I mean, he says she is fair and nice, quite a lady-that of course! And never mind her not being rich. You can do the decoration to the match. H'm,' she perused my features; 'pale! Lovelorn? Excuse an old friend of your father's. One of his very oldest, I'd say, if it didn't impugn. As such, proud of your alliance. I am. I speak of it everywhere—everywhere.'

Here she dramatized the circulation of the gossip. 'Have you heard the news? No, what? Fitz-George's son marries a princess of the German realm. Indeed! True as gospel. And how soon? In a month; and now you will see the dear, neglected man command the Court . . . .'

Page 2109

I looked at my father: I felt stifling with confusion and rage. He leant over to her, imparting some ecstatic news about a great lady having determined to call on her to regulate the affairs of an approaching grand Ball, and under cover of this we escaped.

‘If it were not,’ said he, ’for the Chassediane—you are aware, Richie, poor Jorian is lost to her?—he has fallen at her quicksilver feet. She is now in London. Half the poor fellow’s income expended in bouquets! Her portrait, in the character of the widow Lefourbe, has become a part of his dressing apparatus; he shaves fronting her playbill. His first real affaire de coeur, and he is forty-five! So he is taken in the stomach. That is why love is such a dangerous malady for middle age. As I said, but for Jenny Chassediane, our Sampleman would be the fortune for Jorian. I have hinted it on both sides. Women, Richie, are cleverer than the illustrious Lord Nelson in not seeing what their inclinations decline to see, and Jorian would do me any service in the world except that one. You are restless, my son?’

I begged permission to quit the house, and wait for him outside. He, in return, begged me most urgently to allow myself to be introduced to Lady Edbury, the stepmother of Lord Destrier, now Marquis of Edbury; and, using conversational pressure, he adjured me not to slight this lady, adding, with more significance than the words conveyed, ’I am taking the tide, Richie.’ The tide took me, and I bowed to a lady of impressive languor, pale and young, with pleasant manners, showing her character in outline, like a glove on the hand, but little of its quality. She accused my father of coming direct from ‘that person’s’ box. He replied that he never forsook old friends. ‘You should,’ was her rejoinder. It suggested to me an image of one of the sister Fates cutting a thread.

My heart sank when, from Lady Edbury too, I heard the allusion to Germany and its princess. ‘Some one told me she was dark?’

‘Blonde,’ my father corrected the report.

Lady Edbury ’thought it singular for a German woman of the Blood to be a brunette. They had not much dark mixture among them, particularly in the North. Her name? She had forgotten the name of the princess.’

My father repeated: ’The Princess Ottilia, Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.’

‘Brunette, you say?’

‘The purest blonde.’

‘A complexion?’

‘A complexion to dazzle the righteous!’

Lady Edbury threw a flying glance in a mirror: ’The unrighteous you leave to us then?’

They bandied the weariful shuttlecock of gallantry. I bowed and fled. My excuse was that I had seen Anna Penrhys in an upper tier of boxes, and I made my way to her, doubting how I should be welcomed. 'The happy woman is a German princess, we hear!' she set me shivering. Her welcome was perfectly unreserved and friendly.

Page 2110

She asked the name of the lady whose box I had quitted, and after bending her opera-glass on it for a moment, said, with a certain air of satisfaction, ‘She is young’; which led me to guess that Lady Edbury was reputed to be Anna’s successor; but why the latter should be flattered by the former’s youth was one of the mysteries for me then. Her aunt was awakened from sleep by the mention of my name. ‘Is the man here?’ she exclaimed, starting. Anna smiled, and talked to me of my father, saying, that she was glad to see me at his right hand, for he had a hard battle to fight. She spoke of him with affectionate interest in his fortunes; no better proof of his generosity as well as hers could have been given me. I promised her heartily I would not be guilty of letting our intimacy drop, and handed the ladies down to the crush-room, where I saw my father leading Lady Edbury to her carriage, much observed. Destrier, the young marquis, coming in to meet the procession from other haunts, linked his arm to his friend Witlington’s, and said something in my hearing of old ‘Duke Fitz,’ which provoked, I fancied, signs of amusement equivalent to tittering in a small ring of the select assembly. Lady Sampleman’s carriage was called. ‘Another victim,’ said a voice. Anna Penrhys walked straight out to find her footman and carriage for herself.

I stood alone in the street, wondering, fretting, filled with a variety of ugly sensations, when my father joined me humming an air of the opera. ’I was looking for Jorian, Richie. He had our Sampleman under his charge. He is off to the Chassediane. Well! And well, Richie, you could not bear the absence from your dada? You find me in full sail on the tide. I am at home, if our fortunes demand it, in a little German principality, but there is,’ he threw out his chest, ’a breadth in London; nowhere else do I breathe with absolute freedom—so largely: and this is my battlefield. By the way, Lady Edbury accounts you complete; which is no more to say than that she is a woman of taste. The instance: she positively would not notice that you wear a dress-coat of a foreign cut. Correct it to-morrow; my tailor shall wait on you. I meant to point out to you that when a London woman has not taken note of that, the face and the man have made the right impression on her. Richie, dear boy, how shall I speak the delight I have in seeing you! My arm in yours, old Richie! strolling home from the Fashion: this seems to me what I dreamt of! All in sound health at the Grange? She too, the best of women?’

‘I have come on very particular business,’ I interposed briefly.

He replied, ‘I am alive to you, Richie; speak.’

‘The squire has seen my bankers’ book. He thinks I’ve been drawing rather wildly: no doubt he’s right. He wants some sort of explanation. He consents to an interview with you. I have come to ask you to go down to him, sir.’

’To-morrow morning, without an hour’s delay, my dear boy. Very agreeable will be the sight of old Riversley. And in the daylight!’

Page 2111

’He prefers to meet you at Bulsted. Captain Bulsted offers his house for the purpose. I have to warn you, sir, that we stand in a very exceptional position. The squire insists upon having a full account of the money rendered to him.’

’I invite him to London, Richie. I refer him to Dettermain and Newson. I request him to compute the value of a princess.’

‘You are aware that he will not come to your invitation.’

’Tell me, then, how is he to understand what I have established by the expenditure, my son? I refer him to Dettermain and Newson.’

’But you must know that he sets his face against legal proceedings involving exposure.’

’But surely, Richie, exposure is the very thing we court. The innocent, the unjustly treated, court it. We would be talked about; you shall hear of us! And into the bargain an hereditary princess. Upon my faith, Mr. Beltham, I think you have mighty little to complain of.’

My temper was beginning to chafe at the curb. ’As regards any feeling about the money, personally, sir, you know I have none. But I must speak of one thing. I have heard to-night, I confess with as much astonishment as grief, the name . . . I could not have guessed that I should hear the princess’s name associated with mine, and quite openly.’

‘As a matter of course.’ He nodded, and struck out a hand in wavy motion.

’Well, sir, if you can’t feel for her or her family, be good enough to think of me, and remember that I object to it.’

‘For you all,’ said he, buoyantly; ’I feel for you all, and I will act for you all. I bring the princess to your arms, my dear boy. You have written me word that the squire gives her a royal dowry—have you not? My combinations permit of no escape to any one of you. Nay, ’tis done. I think for you—I feel for you—I act for you. By heaven, you shall be happy! Sigh, Richie, sigh; your destiny is now entrusted to me!’

’I daresay I’m wasting my breath, sir, but I protest against false pretences. You know well that you have made use of the princess’s name for your own purposes.’

’Most indubitably, Richie, I have; and are they not yours? I must have social authority to succeed in our main enterprise. Possibly the princess’s name serves for a temporary chandelier to cast light on us. She belongs to us. For her sake, we are bringing the house she enters into order. Thus, Richie, I could tell Mr. Beltham: you and he supply the money, the princess the name, and I the energy, the skilfulness, and the estimable cause. I pay the princess for the use of her name with the dowry, which is royal; I pay

you with the princess, who is royal too; and I, Richie, am paid by your happiness most royally. Together, it is past contest that we win.—Here, my little one,' he said to a woman, and dropped a piece of gold into her hand, 'on condition that you go straight home.' The woman thanked him and promised. 'As

Page 2112

I was observing, we are in the very tide of success. Curious! I have a slight inclination to melancholy. Success, quotha? Why, hundreds before us have paced the identical way homeward at night under these lamps between the mansions and the park. The bare thought makes them resemble a double line of undertakers. The tomb is down there at the end of them—costly or not. At the age of four, on my birthday, I was informed that my mother lay dead in her bed. I remember to this day my astonishment at her not moving. “Her heart is broken,” my old nurse said. To me she appeared intact. Her sister took possession of me, and of her papers, and the wedding-ring—now in the custody of Dettermain and Newson—together with the portraits of both my parents; and she, poor soul, to sustain me, as I verily believe—she had a great idea of my never asking unprofitably for anything in life—bartered the most corroborative of the testificatory documents, which would now make the establishment of my case a comparatively light task. Have I never spoken to you of my boyhood? My maternal uncle was a singing-master and master of elocution. I am indebted to him for the cultivation of my voice. He taught me an effective delivery of my sentences. The English of a book of his called The Speaker is still to my mind a model of elegance. Remittances of money came to him from an unknown quarter; and, with a break or two, have come ever since up to this period. My old nurse-heaven bless her—resumed the occupation of washing. I have stood by her tub, Richie, blowing bubbles and listening to her prophecies of my exalted fortune for hours. On my honour, I doubt, I seriously doubt, if I have ever been happier. I depend just now—I have to avow it to you—slightly upon stimulants . . . of a perfectly innocuous character. Mrs. Waddy will allow me a pint of champagne. The truth is, Richie—you see these two or three poor pensioners of mine, honi soit qui mal y pense—my mother has had hard names thrown at her. The stones of these streets cry out to me to have her vindicated. I am not tired; but I want my wine.’

He repeated several times before he reached his housedoor, that he wanted his wine, in a manner to be almost alarming. His unwonted effort of memory, the singular pictures of him which it had flashed before me, and a sort of impatient compassion, made me forget my wrath. I saw him take his restorative at one draught. He lay down on a sofa, and his valet drew his boots off and threw a cloak over him. Lying there, he wished me gaily good-night. Mrs. Waddy told me that he had adopted this system of sleeping for the last month. ’Bless you, as many people call on him at night now as in the day,’ she said; and I was induced to suppose he had some connection with the Press. She had implicit faith in his powers of constitution, and would affirm, that he had been the death of dozens whom the attraction had duped to imitate his habits. ’He is now a Field-Marshal on his campaign.’ She betrayed a twinkle of humour. He must himself have favoured her with that remark. The report of the house-door frequently shutting in the night suggested the passage of his aides-de-camp.

Page 2113

Early in the morning, I found him pacing through the open doors of the dining-room and the library dictating to a secretary at a desk, now and then tossing a word to Dettermain and Newson's chief clerk. The floor was strewn with journals. He wore Hessian boots; a voluminous black cloak hung loosely from his shoulders.

'I am just settling the evening papers,' he said after greeting me, with a show of formality in his warmth; and immediately added, 'That will do, Mr. Jopson. Put in a note—"Mr. Harry Lepel Richmond of Riversley and Twn-y-glas, my son, takes no step to official distinction in his native land save through the ordinary Parliamentary channels." Your pardon, Richie; presently. I am replying to a morning paper.'

'What's this? Why print my name?' I cried.

'Merely the correction of an error. I have to insist, my dear boy, that you claim no privileges: you are apart from them. Mr. Jopson, I beseech you, not a minute's delay in delivering that. Fetch me from the printer's my pamphlet this afternoon. Mr. Jacobs, my compliments to Dettermain and Newson: I request them to open proceedings instanter, and let the world know of it. Good-morning, gentlemen.'

And now, turning to me, my father fenced me with the whole weight of his sententious volubility, which was the force of a river. Why did my name appear in the papers? Because I was his son. But he assured me that he carefully separated me from public companionship with his fortunes, and placed me on the side of my grandfather, as a plain gentleman of England, the heir of the most colossal wealth possible in the country.

'I dis-sociate you from me, Richie, do you see? I cause it to be declared that you need, on no account, lean on me. Jopson will bring you my pamphlet—my Declaration of Rights—to peruse. In the Press, in Literature, at Law, and on social ground, I meet the enemy, and I claim my own; by heaven, I do! And I will down to the squire for a distraction, if you esteem it necessary, certainly. Half-a-dozen words to him. Why, do you maintain him to be insensible to a title for you? No, no. And ask my friends. I refer him to any dozen of my friends to convince him I have the prize almost in my possession. Why, dear boy, I have witnesses, living witnesses, to the ceremony. Am I, tell me, to be deprived of money now, once again, for the eleventh time? Oh! And put aside my duty to you, I protest I am bound in duty to her who bore me—you have seen her miniature: how lovely that dear woman was! how gentle!—bound in duty to her to clear her good name. This does not affect you . . . '

'Oh, but it does,' he allowed me to plead.

'Ay, through your love for your dada.'

Page 2114

He shook me by both hands. I was touched with pity, and at the same time in doubt whether it was not an actor that swayed me; for I was discontented, and could not speak my discontent; I was overborne, overflowed. His evasion of the matter of my objections relating to the princess I felt to be a palpable piece of artfulness, but I had to acknowledge to myself that I knew what his argument would be, and how overwhelmingly his defence of it would spring forth. My cowardice shrank from provoking a recurrence to the theme. In fact, I submitted consciously to his masterful fluency and emotional power, and so I was carried on the tide with him, remaining in London several days to witness that I was not the only one. My father, admitting that money served him in his conquest of society, and defying any other man to do as much with it as he did, replied to a desperate insinuation of mine, 'This money I spend I am actually putting out to interest as much as, or more than, your grandad.' He murmured confidentially, 'I have alarmed the Government. Indeed, I have warrant for saying I am in communication with its agents. They are bribing me; they are positively bribing me, Richie. I receive my stipend annually. They are mighty discreet. So am I. But I push them hard. I take what they offer: I renounce none of my claims.'

Janet wrote that it would be prudent for me to return.

'I am prepared,' my father said. 'I have only to meet Mr. Beltham in a room—I stipulate that it shall be between square walls—to win him. The squire to back us, Richie, we have command of the entire world. His wealth, and my good cause, and your illustrious union—by the way, it is announced definitely in this morning's paper.'

Dismayed, I asked what was announced.

'Read,' said he. 'This will be something to hand to Mr. Beltham at our meeting. I might trace it to one of the embassies, Imperial or Royal. No matter—there it is.'

I read a paragraph in which Ottilia's name and titles were set down; then followed mine and my wealthy heirship, and—woe was me in the perusing of it!—a roundabout vindication of me as one not likely to be ranked as the first of English commoners who had gained the hand of an hereditary foreign princess, though it was undoubtedly in the light of a commoner that I was most open to the congratulations of my countrymen upon my unparalleled felicity. A display of historical erudition cited the noble inferiors by birth who had caught princesses to their arms—Charles, Humphrey, William, John. Under this list, a later Harry!

The paragraph closed by fixing the nuptials to take place before the end of the Season.

I looked at my father to try a struggle with him. The whole man was efflorescent.

'Can't it be stopped?' I implored him.

He signified the impossibility in a burst of gesticulations, motions of the mouth, smiling frowns; various patterns of an absolute negative beating down opposition.

Page 2115

’Things printed can never be stopped, Richie. Our Jorian compares them to babies baptized. They have a soul from that moment, and go on for ever!—an admirable word of Jorian’s. And a word to you, Richie. Will you swear to me by the veracity of your lover’s heart, that paragraph affords you no satisfaction? He cannot swear it!’ my father exclaimed, seeing me swing my shoulder round, and he made me feel that it would have been a false oath if I had sworn it. But I could have sworn, that I had rather we two were at the bottom of the sea than that it should come under the princess’s eyes. I read it again. It was in print. It looked like reality. It was at least the realization of my dream. But this played traitor and accused me of being crowned with no more than a dream. The sole practical thing I could do was to insist on our starting for Riversley immediately, to make sure of my own position. ’Name your hour, Richie,’ my father said confidently: and we waited.

A rather plainer view of my father’s position, as I inclined to think, was afforded to me one morning at his breakfast-table, by a conversation between him and Jorian DeWitt, who brought me a twisted pink note from Mdlle. Chassediane, the which he delivered with the air of a dog made to disgorge a bone, and he was very cool to me indeed. The cutlets of Alphonse were subject to snappish criticism. ‘I assume,’ he said, ’the fellow knew I was coming?’

‘He saw it in my handwriting of yesterday,’ replied my father. ’But be just to him, acknowledge that he is one of the few that perform their daily duties with a tender conscience.’

’This English climate has bedevilled the fellow! He peppers his dishes like a mongrel Indian reared on mangoes.’

’Ring him up, ring him up, Jorian. All I beg of you is not to disgust him with life, for he quits any service in the world to come to me, and, in fact, he suits me.’

‘Exactly so: you spoil him.’

My father shrugged. ’The state of the case is, that your stomach is growing delicate, friend Jorian.’

’The actual state of the case being, that my palate was never keener, and consequently my stomach knows its business.’

‘You should have tried the cold turbot with oil and capers.’

‘Your man had better stick to buttered eggs, in my opinion.’

‘Say, porridge!’

‘No, I’ll be hanged if I think he’s equal to a bowl of porridge.’

‘Careme might have confessed to the same!’

‘With this difference,’ cried Jorian in a heat, ’that he would never have allowed the thought of any of your barbarous messes to occur to a man at table. Let me tell you, Roy, you astonish me: up till now I have never known you guilty of the bad taste of defending a bad dish on your own board.’

‘Then you will the more readily pardon me, Jorian.’

‘Oh, I pardon you,’ Jorian sneered, tripped to the carpet by such ignoble mildness. ‘A breakfast is no great loss.’

Page 2116

My father assured him he would have a serious conversation with Alphonse, for whom he apologized by saying that Alphonse had not, to his knowledge, served as hospital cook anywhere, and was therefore quite possibly not sufficiently solicitous for appetites and digestions of invalids.

Jorian threw back his head as though to discharge a spiteful sarcasm with good aim; but turning to me, said, 'Harry, the thing must be done; your father must marry. Notoriety is the season for a pick and choice of the wealthiest and the loveliest. I refuse to act the part of warming-pan any longer; I refuse point blank. It's not a personal feeling on my part; my advice is that of a disinterested friend, and I tell you candidly, Roy, set aside the absurd exhibition of my dancing attendance on that last rose of Guildhall,—egad, the alderman went like Summer, and left us the very picture of a fruity Autumn,—I say you can't keep her hanging on the tree of fond expectation for ever. She'll drop.'

'Catch her, Jorian; you are on guard.'

'Upwards of three hundred thousand, if a penny, Roy Richmond! Who? I? I am not a fortune-hunter.'

'Nor am I, friend Jorian.'

'No, it 's because you're not thorough: you 'll fall between the stools.'

My father remarked that he should visit this upon Mr. Alphonse.

'You shook off that fine Welsh girl, and she was in your hand—the act of a madman!' Jorian continued. 'You're getting older: the day will come when you're a flat excitement. You know the first Lady Edbury spoilt one of your best chances when you had the market. Now you're trifling with the second. She's the head of the Light Brigade, but you might fix her down, if she's not too much in debt. You 're not at the end of your run, I dare say. Only, my good Roy, let me tell you, in life you mustn't wait for the prize of the race till you touch the goal—if you prefer metaphor. You generally come forward about every seven years or so. Add on another seven, and women'll begin to think. You can't beat Time, mon Roy.'

'So,' said my father, 'I touch the goal, and women begin to think, and I can't beat time to them. Jorian, your mind is in a state of confusion. I do not marry.'

'Then, Roy Richmond, hear what a friend says . . .'

'I do not marry, Jorian, and you know my reasons.'

'Sentiments!'

‘They are a part of my life.’

’Just as I remarked, you are not thorough. You have genius and courage out of proportion, and you are a dead failure, Roy; because, no sooner have you got all Covent Garden before you for the fourth or fifth time, than in go your hands into your pockets, and you say—No, there’s an apple I can’t have, so I’ll none of these; and, by the way, the apple must be tolerably withered by this time. And you know perfectly well (for you don’t lack common sense at a shaking, Roy Richmond), that you’re guilty of simple madness in refusing

Page 2117

to make the best of your situation. You haven't to be taught what money means. With money—and a wife to take care of it, mind you—you are pre-eminently the man for which you want to be recognized. Without it—Harry 'll excuse me, I must speak plainly—you're a sort of a spectacle of a bob-cherry, down on your luck, up on your luck, and getting dead stale and never bitten; a familiar curiosity'

Jorian added, 'Oh, by Jove! it's not nice to think of.' My father said: 'Harry, I am sure, will excuse you for talking, in your extreme friendliness, of matters that he and I have not—and they interest us deeply—yet thought fit to discuss. And you may take my word for it, Jorian, that I will give Alphonse his medical dose. I am quite of your opinion that the kings of cooks require it occasionally. Harry will inform us of Mdlle. Chassediane's commands.'

The contents of the letter permitted me to read it aloud. She desired to know how she could be amused on the Sunday.

'We will undertake it,' said my father. 'I depute the arrangements to you, Jorian. Respect the prejudices, and avoid collisions, that is all.'

Captain DeWitt became by convenient stages cheerful, after the pink slip of paper had been made common property, and from a seriously-advising friend, in his state of spite, relapsed to the idle and shadow-like associate, when pleased. I had to thank him for the gift of fresh perceptions. Surely it would be as well if my father could get a woman of fortune to take care of him!

We had at my request a consultation with Dettermain and Newson on the eve of the journey to Riversley, Temple and Jorian DeWitt assisting. Strange documentary evidence was unfolded and compared with the date of a royal decree: affidavits of persons now dead; a ring, the ring; fans, and lace, and handkerchiefs with notable initials; jewelry stamped 'To the Divine Anastasia' from an adoring Christian name: old brown letters that shrieked 'wife' when 'charmer' seemed to have palled; oaths of fidelity ran through them like bass notes. Jorian held up the discoloured sheets of ancient paper saying:

'Here you behold the mummy of the villain Love.' Such love as it was—the love of the privileged butcher for the lamb. The burden of the letters, put in epigram, was rattlesnake and bird. A narrative of Anastasia's sister, Elizabeth, signed and sealed, with names of witnesses appended, related in brief bald English the history of the events which had killed her. It warmed pathetically when dwelling on the writer's necessity to part with letters and papers of greater moment, that she might be enabled to sustain and educate her sister's child. She named the certificate; she swore to the tampering with witnesses. The number and exact indication of the house where the ceremony took place was stated—a house in Soho;—the date was given, and the

incident on that night of the rape of the beautiful Miss Armett by mad Lord Beaumaris at the theatre doors, aided by masked ruffians, after Anastasia’s performance of Zamira.

Page 2118

‘There are witnesses I know to be still living, Mr. Temple,’ my father said, seeing the young student-at-law silent and observant. ’One of them I have under my hand; I feed him. Listen to this.’

He read two or three insufferable sentences from one of the love-epistles, and broke down. I was ushered aside by a member of the firm to inspect an instrument prepared to bind me as surety for the costs of the appeal. I signed it. We quitted the attorney’s office convinced (I speak of Temple and myself) that we had seen the shadow of something.

CHAPTER XL

MY FATHER’S MEETING WITH MY GRANDFATHER

My father’s pleasure on the day of our journey to Bulsted was to drive me out of London on a lofty open chariot, with which he made the circuit of the fashionable districts, and caused innumerable heads to turn. I would have preferred to go the way of other men, to be unnoticed, but I was subject to an occasional glowing of undefined satisfaction in the observance of the universally acknowledged harmony existing between his pretensions, his tastes and habits, and his person. He contrived by I know not what persuasiveness and simplicity of manner and speech to banish from me the idea that he was engaged in playing a high stake; and though I knew it, and he more than once admitted it, there was an ease and mastery about him that afforded me some degree of positive comfort still. I was still most securely attached to his fortunes. Supposing the ghost of dead Hector to have hung over his body when the inflamed son of Peleus whirled him at his chariot wheels round Troy, he would, with his natural passions sobered by Erebus, have had some of my reflections upon force and fate, and my partial sense of exhilaration in the tremendous speed of the course during the whole of the period my father termed his Grand Parade. I showed just such acquiescence or resistance as were superinduced by the variations of the ground. Otherwise I was spell-bound; and beyond interdicting any further public mention of my name or the princess’s, I did nothing to thwart him. It would have been no light matter.

We struck a station at a point half-way down to Bulsted, and found little Kiomi there, thunder in her brows, carrying a bundle, and purchasing a railway-ticket, not to travel in our direction. She gave me the singular answer that she could not tell me where her people were; nor would she tell me whither she was going, alone, and by rail. I chanced to speak of Heriot. One of her sheet-lightning flashes shot out. ’He won’t be at Bulsted,’ she said, as if that had a significance. I let her know we were invited to Bulsted. ’Oh, she ‘s at home’; Kiomi blinked, and her features twitched like whip-cord. I saw that she was possessed by one of her furies. That girl’s face had the art of making me forget beautiful women, and what beauty was by comparison.

Page 2119

It happened that the squire came across us as we were rounding the slope of larch and fir plantation near a part of the Riversley hollows, leading to the upper heath-land, where, behind a semicircle of birches, Bulsted lay. He was on horseback, and called hoarsely to the captain's coachman, who was driving us, to pull up. 'Here, Harry,' he sang out to me, in the same rough voice, 'I don't see why we should bother Captain William. It's a bit of business, not pleasure. I've got the book in my pocket. You ask—-is it convenient to step into my bailiff's cottage hard by, and run through it? Ten minutes 'll tell me all I want to know. I want it done with. Ask.'

My father stood up and bowed, bareheaded.

My grandfather struck his hat and bobbed.

'Mr. Beltham, I trust I see you well.'

'Better, sir, when I've got rid of a damned unpleasant bit o' business.'

'I offer you my hearty assistance.'

'Do you? Then step down and come into my bailiff's.'

'I come, sir.'

My father alighted from the carriage. The squire cast his gouty leg to be quit of his horse, but not in time to check my father's advances and ejaculations of condolence.

'Gout, Mr. Beltham, is a little too much a proof to us of a long line of ancestry.'

His hand and arm were raised in the form of a splint to support the squire, who glared back over his cheekbone, horrified that he could not escape the contact, and in too great pain from arthritic throes to protest: he resembled a burglar surprised by justice. 'What infernal nonsense . . , fellow talking now?' I heard him mutter between his hoppings and dancings, with one foot in the stirrup and a toe to earth, the enemy at his heel, and his inclination half bent upon swinging to the saddle again.

I went to relieve him. 'Damn! . . . Oh, it's you,' said he.

The squire directed Uberly, acting as his groom, to walk his horse up and down the turf fronting young Tom Eckerthy's cottage, and me to remain where I was; then hobbled up to the door, followed at a leisurely march by my father. The door opened. My father swept the old man in before him, with a bow and flourish that admitted of no contradiction, and the door closed on them. I caught a glimpse of Uberly screwing his wrinkles in a queer grimace, while he worked his left eye and thumb expressively at the cottage, by way of communicating his mind to Samuel, Captain Bulsted's coachman; and I became quite of his opinion as to the nature of the meeting, that it was comical

and not likely to lead to much. I thought of the princess and of my hope of her depending upon such an interview as this. From that hour when I stepped on the sands of the Continent to the day of my quitting them, I had been folded in a dream: I had stretched my hands to the highest things of earth, and here now was the retributive material money-question, like a keen scythe-blade!

Page 2120

The cottage-door continued shut. The heaths were darkening. I heard a noise of wheels, and presently the unmistakable voice of Janet saying, ‘That must be Harry.’ She was driving my aunt Dorothy. Both of them hushed at hearing that the momentous duel was in progress. Janet’s first thought was of the squire. ‘I won’t have him ride home in the dark,’ she said, and ordered Uberly to walk the horse home. The ladies had a ladies’ altercation before Janet would permit my aunt to yield her place and proceed on foot, accompanied by me. Naturally the best driver of the two kept the whip. I told Samuel to go on to Bulsted, with word that we were coming: and Janet, nodding bluntly, agreed to direct my father as to where he might expect to find me on the Riversley road. My aunt Dorothy and I went ahead slowly: at her request I struck a pathway to avoid the pony-carriage, which was soon audible; and when Janet, chattering to the squire, had gone by, we turned back to intercept my father. He was speechless at the sight of Dorothy Beltham. At his solicitation, she consented to meet him next day; his account of the result of the interview was unintelligible to her as well as to me. Even after leaving her at the park-gates, I could get nothing definite from him, save that all was well, and that the squire was eminently practical; but he believed he had done an excellent evening’s work. ‘Yes,’ said he, rubbing his hands, ’excellent! making due allowances for the emphatically commoner’s mind we have to deal with.’ And then to change the subject he dilated on that strange story of the man who, an enormous number of years back in the date of the world’s history, carried his little son on his shoulders one night when the winds were not so boisterous, though we were deeper in Winter, along the identical road we traversed, between the gorsemounds, across the heaths, with yonder remembered fir-tree clump in sight and the waste-water visible to footfarers rounding under the firs. At night-time he vowed, that as far as nature permitted it, he had satisfied the squire—’completely satisfied him, I mean,’ he said, to give me sound sleep. ‘No doubt of it; no doubt of it, Richie.’

He won Julia’s heart straight off, and Captain Bulsted’s profound admiration. ’Now I know the man I’ve always been adoring since you were so high, Harry,’ said she. Captain Bulsted sighed: ’Your husband bows to your high good taste, my dear.’ They relished him sincerely, and between them and him I suffered myself to be dandled once more into a state of credulity, until I saw my aunt Dorothy in the afternoon subsequent to the appointed meeting. His deep respect and esteem for her had stayed him from answering any of her questions falsely. To that extent he had been veracious. It appeared, that driven hard by the squire, who would have no waving of flags and lighting of fireworks in a matter of business, and whose ‘commoner’s mind’ chafed sturdily at a hint of the necessity

Page 2121

for lavish outlays where there was a princess to win, he had rallied on the fiction that many of the cheques, standing for the bulk of the sums expended, were moneys borrowed by him of me, which he designed to repay, and was prepared to repay instantly—could in fact, the squire demanding it, repay, as it were, on the spot; for behold, these borrowed moneys were not spent; they were moneys invested in undertakings, put out to high rates of interest; moneys that perhaps it would not be adviseable to call in without a season of delay; still, if Mr. Beltham, acting for his grandson and heir, insisted, it should be done. The moneys had been borrowed purely to invest them with profit on my behalf: a gentleman's word of honour was pledged to it.

The squire grimly gave him a couple of months to make it good.

Dorothy Beltham and my father were together for about an hour at Eckerthy's farm. She let my father kiss her hand when he was bending to take his farewell of her, but held her face away. He was in manifest distress, hardly master of his voice, begged me to come to him soon, and bowing, with 'God bless you, madam, my friend on earth!' turned his heel, bearing his elastic frame lamentably. A sad or a culprit air did not befit him: one reckoned up his foibles and errors when seeing him under a partly beaten aspect. At least, I did; not my dear aunt, who was compassionate of him, however thoroughly she condemned his ruinous extravagance, and the shifts and evasions it put him to. She feared, that instead of mending the difficulty, he had postponed merely to exaggerate it in the squire's mind; and she was now of opinion that the bringing him down to meet the squire was very bad policy, likely to result in danger to my happiness; for, if the money should not be forthcoming on the date named, all my father's faults would be transferred to me as his accomplice, both in the original wastefulness and the subterfuges invented to conceal it. I recollected that a sum of money had really been sunk in Prince Ernest's coal-mine. My aunt said she hoped for the best.

Mounting the heaths, we looked back on the long yellow road, where the carriage conveying my father to the railway-station was visible, and talked of him, and of the elements of antique tragedy in his history, which were at that period, let me say, precisely what my incessant mental efforts were strained to expel from the idea of our human life. The individual's freedom was my tenet of faith; but pity pleaded for him that he was well-nigh irresponsible, was shamefully sinned against at his birth, one who could charge the Gods with vindictiveness, and complain of the persecution of natal Furies. My aunt Dorothy advised me to take him under my charge, and sell his house and furniture, make him live in bachelor chambers with his faithful waiting-woman and a single manservant.

'He will want money even to do that,' I remarked.

She murmured, 'Is there not some annual income paid to him?'

Page 2122

Her quick delicacy made her redden in alluding so closely to his personal affairs, and I loved her for the nice feeling. ‘It was not much,’ I said. The miserable attempt to repair the wrongs done to him with this small annuity angered me—and I remembered, little pleased, the foolish expectations he founded on this secret acknowledgement of the justice of his claims. ‘We won’t talk of it,’ I pursued. ’I wish he had never touched it. I shall interdict him.’

‘You would let him pay his debts with it, Harry?’

’I am not sure, aunty, that he does not incur a greater debt by accepting it.’

‘One’s wish would be, that he might not ever be in need of it.’

‘Ay, or never be caring to find the key of it.’

‘That must be waste of time,’ she said.

I meant something else, but it was useless to tell her so.

CHAPTER XLI

Commencement of the splendours and perplexities of my father’s grand parade

Janet, in reply to our inquiries as to the condition of the squire’s temper, pointed out in the newspaper a notification of a grand public Ball to be given by my father, the first of a series of three, and said that the squire had seen it and shrugged. She thought there was no positive cause for alarm, even though my father should fail of his word; but expressed her view decidedly, that it was an unfortunate move to bring him between the squire and me, and so she blamed Captain Bulsted. This was partly for the reason that the captain and his wife, charmed by my father, were for advocating his merits at the squire’s table: our ingenuity was ludicrously taxed to mystify him on the subject of their extravagant eulogies. They told him they had been invited, and were going to the great London Balls.

‘Subscription Balls?’ asked the squire.

‘No, sir,’ rejoined the captain.

‘Tradesmen’s Balls, d’ ye call ’em, then?’

‘No, sir; they are Balls given by a distinguished gentleman.’

‘Take care it’s not another name for tradesmen’s Balls, William.’

‘I do not attend tradesmen’s Balls, sir.’

‘Take care o’ that, William.’

The captain was very angry. ‘What,’ said he, turning to us, ’what does the squire mean by telling an officer of the Royal Navy that he is conducting his wife to a tradesmen’s Ball?’

Julia threatened malicious doings for the insult. She and the squire had a controversy upon the explication of the word gentleman, she describing my father’s appearance and manners to the life. ’Now listen to me, squire. A gentleman, I say, is one you’d say, if he wasn’t born a duke, he ought to have been, and more shame to the title! He turns the key of a lady’s heart with a twinkle of his eye. He ’s never mean—what he has is yours. He’s a true friend; and if he doesn’t keep his word, you know in a jiffy it’s the fault of affairs; and stands about five feet eleven: he’s a full-blown man’: and so forth.

Page 2123

The squire listened, and perspired at finding the object of his abhorrence crowned thus in the unassailable realms of the abstract. Julia might have done it more elegantly; but her husband was rapturous over her skill in portraiture, and he added: 'That's a gentleman, squire; and that 's a man pretty sure to be abused by half the world.'

'Three-quarters, William,' said the squire; 'there's about the computation for your gentleman's creditors, I suspect.'

'Ay, sir; well,' returned the captain, to whom this kind of fencing in the dark was an affliction, 'we make it up in quality—in quality.'

'I 'll be bound you do,' said the squire; 'and so you will so long as you 're only asked to dance to the other poor devils' fiddling.'

Captain Bulsted bowed. 'The last word to you, squire.'

The squire nodded. 'I 'll hand it to your wife, William.'

Julia took it graciously. 'A perfect gentleman! perfect! confound his enemies!'

'Why, ma'am, you might keep from swearing,' the squire bawled.

'La! squire,' said she, 'why, don't you know the National Anthem?'

'National Anthem, ma'am! and a fellow, a velvet-tongued—confound him, if you like.'

'And where's my last word, if you please?' Julia jumped up, and dropped a provoking curtsey.

'You silly old grandada!' said Janet, going round to him; 'don't you see the cunning woman wants to dress you in our garments, and means to boast of it to us while you're finishing your wine?'

The old man fondled her. I could have done the same, she bent over him with such homely sweetness. 'One comfort, you won't go to these gingerbread Balls,' he said.

'I'm not invited,' she moaned comically.

'No; nor shan't be, while I can keep you out of bad company.'

'But, grandada, I do like dancing.

'Dance away, my dear; I've no objection.'

'But where's the music?'

‘Oh, you can always have music.’

‘But where are my partners?’

The squire pointed at me.

‘You don’t want more than one at a time, eh?’ He corrected his error: ’No, the fellow’s engaged in another quadrille. Mind you, Miss Janet, he shall dance to your tune yet. D’ ye hear, sir?’ The irritation excited by Captain Bulsted and Julia broke out in fury. ’Who’s that fellow danced when Rome was burning?’

‘The Emperor Nero,’ said Janet. ’He killed Harry’s friend Seneca in the eighty-somethingth year of his age; an old man, and—hush, grandada!’ She could not check him.

’Hark you, Mr. Harry; dance your hardest up in town with your rips and reps, and the lot of ye; all very fine while the burning goes on: you won’t see the fun of dancing on the ashes. A nice king of Rome Nero was next morning! By the Lord, if I couldn’t swear you’ll be down on your knees to an innocent fresh-hearted girl ’s worth five hundred of the crew you’re for partnering now while you’ve a penny for the piper.’

Page 2124

Janet shut his mouth, kissed him, and held his wine up. He drank, and thumped the table. 'We 'll have parties here, too. The girl shall have her choice of partners: she shan't be kept in the background by a young donkey. Take any six of your own age, and six sensible men, to try you by your chances. By George, the whole dozen 'd bring you in non-compos. You've only got the women on your side because of a smart face and figure.'

Janet exclaimed indignantly, 'Grandada, I'm offended with you'; and walked out on a high step.

'Come, if he has the women on his side,' said Captain Bulsted, mildly.

'He'll be able to go partnering and gallopading as long as his banker 'll let him, William —like your gentleman! That's true. We shall soon see.'

'I leave my character in your hands, sir,' said I, rising. 'If you would scold me in private, I should prefer it, on behalf of your guests; but I am bound to submit to your pleasure, and under any circumstances I remember, what you appear to forget, that you are my grandfather.'

So saying, I followed the ladies. It was not the wisest of speeches, and happened, Captain Bulsted informed me, to be delivered in my father's manner, for the squire pronounced emphatically that he saw very little Beltham in me. The right course would have been for me to ask him then and there whether I had his consent to start for Germany. But I was the sport of resentments and apprehensions; and, indeed, I should not have gone. I could not go without some title beyond that of the heir of great riches.

Janet kept out of my sight. I found myself strangely anxious to console her: less sympathetic, perhaps, than desirous to pour out my sympathy in her ear, which was of a very pretty shape, with a soft unpierced lobe. We danced together at the Riversley Ball, given by the squire on the night of my father's Ball in London. Janet complimented me upon having attained wisdom. 'Now we get on well,' she said. 'Grandada only wants to see us friendly, and feel that I am not neglected.'

The old man, a martyr to what he considered due to his favourite, endured the horror of the Ball until suppertime, and kept his eyes on us two. He forgot, or pretended to forget, my foreign engagement altogether, though the announcement in the newspapers was spoken of by Sir Roderick and Lady Echester and others.

'How do you like that?' he remarked to me, seeing her twirled away by one of the young Rubreys.

'She seems to like it, sir,' I replied.

‘Like it!’ said he. ’In my day you wouldn’t have caught me letting the bloom be taken off the girl I cared for by a parcel o’ scampish young dogs. Right in their arms! Look at her build. She’s strong; she’s healthy; she goes round like a tower. If you want a girl to look like a princess!’

Page 2125

His eulogies were not undeserved. But she danced as lightly and happily with Mr. Fred Rubrey as with Harry Richmond. I congratulated myself on her lack of sentiment. Later, when in London, where *Mlle*. Jenny Chassediane challenged me to perilous sarabandes, I wished that Janet had ever so small a grain of sentiment, for a preservative to me. Ottilia glowed high and distant; she sent me no message; her image did not step between me and disorder. The whole structure of my idea of my superior nature seemed to be crumbling to fragments; and beginning to feel in despair that I was wretchedly like other men, I lost by degrees the sense of my hold on her. It struck me that my worst fears of the effect produced on the princess's mind by that last scene in the lake-palace must be true, and I abandoned hope. Temple thought she tried me too cruelly. Under these circumstances I became less and less resolutely disposed to renew the forlorn conflict with my father concerning his prodigal way of living. 'Let it last as long as I have a penny to support him!' I exclaimed. He said that Dettermain and Newson were now urging on his case with the utmost despatch in order to keep pace with him, but that the case relied for its life on his preserving a great appearance. He handed me his division of our twin cheque-books, telling me he preferred to depend on his son for supplies, and I was in the mood to think this a partial security.

'But you can take what there is,' I said.

'On the contrary, I will accept nothing but minor sums—so to speak, the fractional shillings; though I confess I am always bewildered by silver,' said he.

I questioned him upon his means of carrying on his expenditure. His answer was to refer to the pavement of the city of London. By paving here and there he had, he informed me, made a concrete for the wheels to roll on. He calculated that he now had credit for the space of three new years—ample time for him to fight his fight and win his victory.

'My tradesmen are not like the tradesmen of other persons,' he broke out with a curious neigh of supreme satisfaction in that retinue. 'They believe in me. I have de facto harnessed them to my fortunes; and if you doubt me on the point of success, I refer you to Dettermain and Newson. All I stipulate for is to maintain my position in society to throw a lustre on my Case. So much I must do. My failures hitherto have been entirely owing to the fact that I had not my son to stand by me.'

'Then you must have money, sir.'

'Yes, money.'

'Then what can you mean by refusing mine?'

Page 2126

’I admit the necessity for it, my son. Say you hand me a cheque for a temporary thousand. Your credit and mine in conjunction can replace it before the expiration of the two months. Or,’ he meditated, ’it might be better to give a bond or so to a professional lender, and preserve the account at your bankers intact. The truth is, I have, in my interview with the squire, drawn in advance upon the, material success I have a perfect justification to anticipate, and I cannot allow the old gentleman to suppose that I retrench for the purpose of giving a large array of figures to your bankers’ book. It would be sheer madness. I cannot do it. I cannot afford to do it. When you are on a runaway horse, I prefer to say a racehorse,—Richie, you must ride him. You dare not throw up the reins. Only last night Wedderburn, appealing to Loftus, a practical sailor, was approved when he offered—I forget the subject-matter—the illustration of a ship on a lee-shore; you are lost if you do not spread every inch of canvas to the gale. Retrenchment at this particular moment is perdition. Count our gains, Richie. We have won a princess . . .’

I called to him not to name her.

He persisted: ’Half a minute. She is won; she is ours. And let me, in passing,—bear with me one second—counsel you to write to Prince Ernest instanter, proposing formally for his daughter, and, in your grandfather’s name, state her dowry at fifty thousand per annum.’

‘Oh, you forget!’ I interjected.

’No, Richie, I do not forget that you are off a leeshore; you are mounted on a skittish racehorse, with, if you like, a New Forest fly operating within an inch of his belly-girths. Our situation is so far ticklish, and prompts invention and audacity.’

’You must forget, sir, that in the present state of the squire’s mind, I should be simply lying in writing to the prince that he offers a dowry.’

‘No, for your grandfather has yielded consent.’

‘By implication, you know he withdraws it.’

‘But if I satisfy him that you have not been extravagant?’

‘I must wait till he is satisfied.’

’The thing is done, Richie, done. I see it in advance—it is done! Whatever befalls me, you, my dear boy, in the space of two months, may grasp—your fortune. Besides, here is my hand. I swear by it, my son, that I shall satisfy the squire. I go farther; I say I shall have the means to refund to you—the means, the money. The marriage is announced in our prints for the Summer—say early June. And I undertake that you, the husband of the princess, shall be the first gentleman in England—that is, Europe. Oh! not ruling a

coterie: not dazzling the world with entertainments.' He thought himself in earnest when he said, 'I attach no mighty importance to these things, though there is no harm I can perceive in leading the fashion—none that I see in having a consummate style. I know your taste, and hers, Richie, the noble lady's.

Page 2127

She shall govern the intellectual world—your poets, your painters, your men of science. They reflect a beautiful sovereign mistress more exquisitely than almost aristocracy does. But you head our aristocracy also. You are a centre of the political world. So I scheme it. Between you, I defy the Court to rival you. This I call distinction. It is no mean aim, by heaven! I protest, it is an aim with the mark in sight, and not out of range.'

He whipped himself up to one of his oratorical frenzies, of which a cheque was the common fruit. The power of his persuasiveness in speech, backed by the spectacle of his social accomplishments, continued to subdue me, and I protested only inwardly even when I knew that he was gambling with fortune. I wrote out many cheques, and still it appeared to me that they were barely sufficient to meet the current expenses of his household. Temple and I calculated that his Grand Parade would try the income of a duke, and could but be a matter of months. Mention of it reached Riversley from various quarters, from Lady Maria Higginson, from Captain Bulsted and his wife, and from Sir Roderick Ilchester, who said to me, with fine accentuation, 'I have met your father.' Sir Roderick, an Englishman reputed of good breeding, informed the son that he had actually met the father in lofty society, at Viscountess Sedley's, at Lady Dolchester's, at Bramham DeWitt's, and heard of him as a frequenter of the Prussian and Austrian Embassy entertainments; and also that he was admitted to the exclusive dinner-parties of the Countess de Strode, 'which are,' he observed, in the moderated tone of an astonishment devoting itself to propagation, 'the cream of society.' Indubitably, then, my father was an impostor: more Society proved it. The squire listened like one pelted by a storm, sure of his day to come at the close of the two months. I gained his commendation by shunning the metropolitan Balls, nor did my father press me to appear at them. It was tacitly understood between us that I should now and then support him at his dinner-table, and pass bowing among the most select of his great ladies. And this I did, and I felt at home with them, though I had to bear with roughnesses from one or two of the more venerable dames, which were not quite proper to good breeding. Old Lady Kane, great-aunt of the Marquis of Edbury, was particularly my tormentor, through her plain-spoken comments on my father's legal suit; for I had to listen to her without wincing, and agree in her general contempt of the Georges, and foil her queries coolly, when I should have liked to perform Jorian DeWitt's expressed wish to 'squeeze the acid out of her in one grip, and toss her to the Gods that collect exhausted lemons.' She took extraordinary liberties with me.

'Why not marry an Englishwoman? Rich young men ought to choose wives from their own people, out of their own sets. Foreign women never get on well in this country, unless they join the hounds to hunt the husband.'

Page 2128

She cited naturalized ladies famous for the pastime. Her world and its outskirts she knew thoroughly, even to the fact of my grandfather's desire that I should marry Janet Ilchester. She named a duke's daughter, an earl's. Of course I should have to stop the scandal: otherwise the choice I had was unrestricted. My father she evidently disliked, but she just as much disliked an encounter with his invincible bonhomie and dexterous tongue. She hinted at family reasons for being shy of him, assuring me that I was not implicated in them.

'The Guelph pattern was never much to my taste,' she said, and it consoled me with the thought that he was not ranked as an adventurer in the houses he entered. I learned that he was supposed to depend chiefly on my vast resources. Edbury acted the part of informant to the inquisitive harridan: 'Her poor dear good-for-nothing Edbury! whose only cure would be a nice, well-conducted girl, an heiress.' She had cast her eye on Anna Penrhys, but considered her antecedents doubtful. Spotless innocence was the sole receipt for Edbury's malady. My father, in a fit of bold irony, proposed Lady Kane for President of his Tattle and Scandal Club,—a club of ladies dotted with select gentlemen, the idea of which Jorian DeWitt claimed the merit of starting, and my father surrendered it to him, with the reservation, that Jorian intended an association of backbiters pledged to reveal all they knew, whereas the Club, in its present form, was an engine of morality and decency, and a social safeguard, as well as an amusement. It comprised a Committee of Investigation, and a Court of Appeal; its object was to arraign slander. Lady Kane declined the honour. 'I am not a washerwoman,' she said to me, and spoke of where dirty linen should be washed, and was distressingly broad in her innuendoes concerning Edbury's stepmother. This Club sat and became a terror for a month, adding something to my father's reputation. His inexhaustible conversational art and humour gave it such vitality as it had. Ladies of any age might apply for admission when well seconded: gentlemen under forty-five years were rigidly excluded, and the seniors must also have passed through the marriage ceremony.

Outside tattle and scandal declared, that the Club was originated to serve as a club for Lady Edbury, but I chose to have no opinion upon what I knew nothing of.

These matters were all ephemeral, and freaks; they produced, however, somewhat of the same effect on me as on my father, in persuading me that he was born for the sphere he occupied, and rendering me rather callous as to the sources of ways and means. I put my name to a bond for several thousand pounds, in conjunction with Lord Edbury, thinking my father right in wishing to keep my cheque-book unworried, lest the squire should be seized with a spasm of curiosity before the two months were over. 'I promise you I surprise him,' my father said repeatedly. He did not say how: I had the suspicion that he did not know. His confidence and my growing recklessness acted in unison.

Page 2129

Happily the newspapers were quiet. I hoped consequently to find peace at Riversley; but there the rumours of the Grand Parade were fabulous, thanks to Captain Bulsted and Julia, among others. These two again provoked an outbreak of rage from the squire, and I, after hearing them, was almost disposed to side with him; they suggested an inexplicable magnificence, and created an image of a man portentously endowed with the capacity to throw dust in the eyes. No description of the Balls could have furnished me with such an insight of their brilliancy as the consuming ardour they awakened in the captain and his wife. He reviewed them: 'Princely entertainments! Arabian Nights!'

She built them up piecemeal: 'The company! the dresses! the band! the supper!' The host was a personage supernatural. 'Aladdin's magician, if you like,' said Julia, 'only-good! A perfect gentleman! and I'll say again, confound his enemies.' She presumed, as she was aware she might do, upon the squire's prepossession in her favour, without reckoning that I was always the victim.

'Heard o' that new story 'bout a Dauphin?' he asked.

'A Dauphin?' quoth Captain Bulsted. 'I don't know the fish.'

'You've been in a pretty kettle of 'em lately, William. I heard of it yesterday on the Bench. Lord Shale, our new Lord-Lieutenant, brought it down. A trick they played the fellow 'bout a Dauphin. Serve him right. You heard anything 'bout it, Harry?'

I had not.

'But I tell ye there is a Dauphin mixed up with him. A Dauphin and Mr. Ik Dine!'

'Mr. Ik Dine!' exclaimed the captain, perplexed.

'Ay, that's German lingo, William, and you ought to know it if you're a loyal sailor—-means "I serve."'

'Mr. Beltham,' said the captain, seriously, 'I give you my word of honour as a man and a British officer, I don't understand one syllable of what you're saying; but if it means any insinuation against the gentleman who condescends to extend his hospitalities to my wife and me, I must, with regret, quit the place where I have had the misfortune to hear it.'

'You stop where you are, William,' the squire motioned to him. 'Gad, I shall have to padlock my mouth, or I shan't have a friend left soon . . . confounded fellow. . . I tell you they call him Mr. Ik Dine in town. Ik Dine and a Dauphin! They made a regular clown and pantaloon o' the pair, I'm told. Couple o' pretenders to Thrones invited to dine together and talk over their chances and show their private marks. Oho! by-and-by, William! You and I! Never a man made such a fool of in his life!'

The ladies retired. The squire continued, in a furious whisper:

Page 2130

’They got the two together, William. Who are you? I’m a Dauphin; who are you? I’m Ik Dine, bar sinister. Oh! says the other, then I take precedence of you! Devil a bit, says the other; I’ve got more spots than you. Proof, says one. You first, t’ other. Count, one cries. T’ other sings out, Measles. Better than a dying Dauphin, roars t’ other; and swore both of ’m ’twas nothing but Port-wine stains and pimples. Ha! ha! And, William, will you believe it?—the couple went round begging the company to count spots—ha! ha! to prove their big birth! Oh, Lord, I’d ha’ paid a penny to be there! A Jack o’ Bedlam Ik Dine damned idiot!—makes name o’ Richmond stink.’ (Captain Bulsted shot a wild stare round the room to make sure that the ladies had gone.) ’I tell ye, William, I had it from Lord Shale himself only yesterday on the Bench. He brought it to us hot from town—didn’t know I knew the fellow; says the fellow’s charging and firing himself off all day and all night too-can’t make him out. Says London’s mad about him: lots o’ women, the fools! Ha, ha! a Dauphin!’

‘Ah, well, sir,’ Captain Bulsted supplicated feverishly, rubbing his brows and whiskers.

’It ’s true, William. Fellow ought to be taken up and committed as a common vagabond, and would be anywhere but in London. I’d jail him ’fore you cocked your eye twice. Fellow came here and talked me over to grant him a couple o’ months to prove he hasn’t swindled his son of every scrap of his money. We shall soon see. Not many weeks to run! And pretends—fellow swears to me—can get him into Parliament; swears he’ll get him in ‘fore the two months are over! An infernal—’

‘Please to recollect, sir; the old hereditary shall excuse you——’

‘Gout, you mean, William? By——’

’You are speaking in the presence of his son, sir, and you are trying the young gentleman’s affection for you hard.’

’Eh? ‘Cause I’m his friend? Harry,’ my grandfather faced round on me, ’don’t you know I ’m the friend you can trust? Hal, did I ever borrow a farthing of you? Didn’t I, the day of your majority, hand you the whole of your inheritance from your poor broken-hearted mother, with interest, and treat you like a man? And never played spy, never made an inquiry, till I heard the scamp had been fastening on you like a blood-sucker, and singing hymns into the ears of that squeamish dolt of a pipe-smoking parson, Peterborough—-never thought of doing it! Am I the man that dragged your grandmother’s name through the streets and soiled yours?’

I remarked that I was sensible of the debt of gratitude I owed to him, but would rather submit to the scourge, or to destitution, than listen to these attacks on my father.

‘Cut yourself loose, Harry,’ he cried, a trifle mollified. ’Don’t season his stew—d’ ye hear? Stick to decent people. Why, you don’t expect he’ll be locked up in the Tower for

a finish, eh? It'll be Newgate, or the Bench. He and his Dauphin—ha! ha! A rascal crow and a Jack Dauphin!'

Page 2131

Captain Bulsted reached me his hand. 'You have a great deal to bear, Harry. I commend you, my boy, for taking it manfully.'

'I say no more,' quoth the squire. 'But what I said was true. The fellow gives his little dinners and suppers to his marchionesses, countesses, duchesses, and plays clown and pantaloon among the men. He thinks a parcel o' broidered petticoats 'll float him. So they may till a tradesman sent stark mad pops a pin into him. Harry, I'd as lief hang on to a fire-ship. Here's Ilchester tells me . . . and Ilchester speaks of him under his breath now as if he were sitting in a pew funking the parson. Confound the fellow! I say he's guilty of treason. Pooh! who cares! He cuts out the dandies of his day, does he? He's past sixty, if he's a month. It's all damned harlequinade. Let him twirl off one columbine or another, or a dozen, and then—the last of him! Fellow makes the world look like a farce. He 's got about eight feet by five to caper on, and all London gaping at him—geese! Are you a gentleman and a man of sense, Harry Richmond, to let yourself be lugged about in public—by the Lord! like a pair of street-tumblers in spangled haunch-bags, father and boy, on a patch of carpet, and a drum banging, and tossed and turned inside out, and my God! the ass of a fellow strutting the ring with you on his shoulder! That's the spectacle. And you, Harry, now I 'll ask you, do you mean your wife—egad, it'd be a pretty scene, with your princess in hip-up petticoats, stiff as bottle-funnel top down'ards, airing a whole leg, and knuckling a tambourine!'

'Not crying, my dear lad?' Captain Bulsted put his arm round me kindly, and tried to catch a glimpse of my face. I let him see I was not going through that process. 'Whew!' said he, 'and enough to make any Christian sweat! You're in a bath, Harry. I wouldn't expect the man who murdered his godmother for one shilling and fivepence three-farthings the other day, to take such a slinging, and think he deserved it.'

My power of endurance had reached its limit.

'You tell me, sir, you had this brutal story from the Lord-Lieutenant of the county?'

'Ay, from Lord Shale. But I won't have you going to him and betraying our connection with a—'

'Halloo!' Captain Bulsted sang out to his wife on the lawn. 'And now, squire, I have had my dose. And you will permit me to observe, that I find it emphatically what we used to call at school black-jack.'

'And you were all the better for it afterwards, William.'

'We did not arrive at that opinion, sir. Harry, your arm. An hour with the ladies will do us both good. The squire,' he murmured, wiping his forehead as he went out, 'has a knack of bringing us into close proximity with hell-fire when he pleases.'

Julia screamed on beholding us, ‘Aren’t you two men as pale as death!’

Janet came and looked. ‘Merely a dose,’ said the captain. ’We are anxious to play battledore and shuttlecock madly.’

Page 2132

‘So he shall, the dear!’ Julia caressed him. ’We’ll all have a tournament in the wet-weather shed.’

Janet whispered to me, ‘Was it—the Returning Thanks?’

‘The what?’ said I, with the dread at my heart of something worse than I had heard.

She hailed Julia to run and fetch the battledores, and then told me she had been obliged to confiscate the newspapers that morning and cast the burden on post-office negligence. ’They reach grandada’s hands by afternoon post, Harry, and he finds objectionable passages blotted or cut out; and as long as the scissors don’t touch the business columns and the debates, he never asks me what I have been doing. He thinks I keep a scrap-book. I haven’t often time in the morning to run an eye all over the paper. This morning it was the first thing I saw.’

What had she seen? She led me out of view of the windows and showed me.

My father was accused of having stood up at a public dinner and returned thanks on behalf of an Estate of the Realm: it read monstrously. I ceased to think of the suffering inflicted on me by my grandfather.

Janet and I, side by side with the captain and Julia, carried on the game of battledore and shuttlecock, in a match to see whether the unmarried could keep the shuttle flying as long as the married, with varying fortunes. She gazed on me, to give me the comfort of her sympathy, too much, and I was too intent on the vision of my father either persecuted by lies or guilty of hideous follies, to allow the match to be a fair one. So Julia could inform the squire that she and William had given the unmarried pair a handsome beating, when he appeared peeping round one of the shed-pillars.

’Of course you beat ’em,’ said the squire. ’It ‘s not my girl’s fault.’ He said more, to the old tune, which drove Janet away.

I remembered, when back in the London vortex, the curious soft beauty she won from casting up her eyes to watch the descending feathers, and the brilliant direct beam of those thick-browed, firm, clear eyes, with her frown, and her set lips and brave figure, when she was in the act of striking to keep up a regular quick fusilade. I had need of calm memories. The town was astir, and humming with one name.

CHAPTER XLII

THE MARQUIS OF EDBURY AND HIS PUPPET

I passed from man to man, hearing hints and hesitations, alarming half-remarks, presumed to be addressed to one who could supply the remainder, and deduce

consequences. There was a clearer atmosphere in the street of Clubs. Jennings was the first of my father's more intimate acquaintances to meet me frankly. He spoke, though not with great seriousness, of the rumour of a possible prosecution. Sir Weeton Slater tripped up to us with a mixed air of solicitude and restraint, asked whether I was well, and whether I had seen the newspapers that morning; and on my informing him that I had just come up from Riversley, on account of certain rumours, advised me to remain in town strictly for the present. He also hinted at rumours of prosecutions. 'The fact is——' he began several times, rendered discreet, I suppose, by my juvenility, fierte, and reputed wealth.

Page 2133

We were joined by Admiral Loftus and Lord Alton. They queried and counterqueried as to passages between my father and the newspapers, my father and the committee of his Club, preserving sufficient consideration for me to avoid the serious matter in all but distant allusions; a point upon which the breeding of Mr. Serjeant Wedderburn was not so accurate a guide to him. An exciting public scandal soon gathers knots of gossips in Clubland. We saw Wedderburn break from a group some way down the pavement and pick up a fresh crumb of amusement at one of the doorsteps. 'Roy Richmond is having his benefit to-day!' he said, and repeated this and that, half audible to me. For the rest, he pooh-poohed the idea of the Law intervening. His 'How d' ye do, Mr. Richmond, how d' ye do?' was almost congratulatory. 'I think we meet at your father's table to-night? It won't be in the Tower, take my word for it. Oh! the papers! There's no Act to compel a man to deny what appears in the papers. No such luck as the Tower!—though Littlepitt (Mr. Wedderburn's nickname for our Premier) would be fool enough for that. He would. If he could turn attention from his Bill, he'd do it. We should have to dine off Boleyn's block:—coquite horum obsonia he'd say, eh?''

Jennings espied my father's carriage, and stepped to speak a word to the footman. He returned, saying, with a puff of his cheeks: 'The Grand Monarque has been sending his state equipage to give the old backbiting cripple Brisby an airing. He is for horse exercise to-day they've dropped him in Courtenay Square. There goes Brisby. He'd take the good Samaritan's shilling to buy a flask of poison for him. He 'll use Roy's carriage to fetch and carry for that venomous old woman Kane, I'll swear.'

'She's a male in Scripture,' said Wedderburn, and this reminded me of an anecdote that reminded him of another, and after telling them, he handed round his hat for the laugh, as my father would have phrased it.

'Has her ladyship declared war?' Sir Weeton Slater inquired.

'No, that's not her preliminary to wageing it,' Wedderburn replied. These high-pressure smart talkers had a moment of dulness, and he bethought him that he must run into the Club for letters, and was busy at Westminster, where, if anything fresh occurred between meridian and six o'clock, he should be glad, he said, to have word of it by messenger, that he might not be behind his Age.

The form of humour to express the speed of the world was common, but it struck me as a terrible illustration of my father's. I had still a sense of pleasure in the thought that these intimates of his were gentlemen who relished and, perhaps, really liked him. They were not parasites; not the kind of men found hanging about vulgar profligates.

Page 2134

I quitted them. Sir Weeton Slater walked half-a-dozen steps beside me. 'May I presume on a friendly acquaintance with your father, Mr. Richmond?' he said. 'The fact is—you will not be offended?—he is apt to lose his head, unless the Committee of Supply limits him very precisely. I am aware that there is no material necessity for any restriction.' He nodded to me as to one of the marvellously endowed, as who should say, the Gods presided at your birth. The worthy baronet struggled to impart his meaning, which was, that he would have me define something like an allowance to my father, not so much for the purpose of curtailing his expenditure—he did not venture upon private ground—as to bridle my father's ideas of things possible for a private gentleman in this country. In that character none were like him. As to his suit, or appeal, he could assure me that Serjeant Wedderburn, and all who would or could speak on the subject, saw no prospect of success; not any. The worst of it was, that it caused my father to commit himself in sundry ways. It gave a handle to his enemies. It —he glanced at me indicatively.

I thanked the well-meaning gentleman without encouraging him to continue.

'It led him to perform once more as a Statue of Bronze before the whole of gaping London!' I could have added. That scene on the pine-promontory arose in my vision, followed by other scenes of the happy German days. I had no power to conjure up the princess.

Jorian DeWitt was the man I wanted to see. After applications at his Club and lodgings I found him dragging his Burgundy leg in the Park, on his road to pay a morning visit to his fair French enchantress. I impeached him, and he pleaded guilty, clearly not wishing to take me with him, nor would he give me *Mlle*. Jenny's address, which I had. By virtue of the threat that I would accompany him if he did not satisfy me, I managed to extract the story of the Dauphin, aghast at the discovery of its being true. The fatal after-dinner speech he believed to have been actually spoken, and he touched on that first. 'A trap was laid for him, Harry Richmond; and a deuced clever trap it was. They smuggled in special reporters. There wasn't a bit of necessity for the toast. But the old vixen has shown her hand, so now he must fight. He can beat her single-handed on settees. He'll find her a tartar at long bowls: she sticks at nothing. She blazes out, that he scandalizes her family. She has a dozen indictments against him. You must stop in town and keep watch. There's fire in my leg to explode a powder-magazine a mile off!'

'Is it the Margravine of Rippau?' I inquired. I could think of no other waspish old woman.

'Lady Dane,' said Jorian. 'She set Edbury on to face him with the Dauphin. You don't fancy it came of the young dog "all of himself," do you? Why, it was clever! He trots about a briefless little barrister, a scribbler, devilish clever and impudent, who does his farces for him. Tenby 's the fellow's name, and it's the only thing I haven't heard him pun on. Puns are the smallpox of the language;—we're cursed with an epidemic. By gad, the next time I meet him I 'll roar out for vaccine matter.'

Page 2135

He described the dinner given by Edbury at a celebrated City tavern where my father and this so-called Dauphin were brought together. 'Dinner to-night,' he nodded, as he limped away on his blissful visit of ceremony to sprightly Chassediane (a bouquet had gone in advance): he left me stupefied. The sense of ridicule enveloped me in suffocating folds, howling sentences of the squire's Boeotian burlesque by fits. I felt that I could not but take the world's part against the man who allowed himself to be made preposterous externally, when I knew him to be staking his frail chances and my fortune with such rashness. It was unpardonable for one in his position to incur ridicule. Nothing but a sense of duty kept me from rushing out of London, and I might have indulged the impulse advantageously. Delay threw me into the clutches of Lady Kane herself, on whom I looked with as composed a visage as I could command, while she leaned out of her carriage chattering at me, and sometimes over my head to passing gentlemen.

She wanted me to take a seat beside her, she had so much to say. Was there not some funny story abroad of a Pretender to the Throne of France? she asked, wrinkling her crow'sfeet eyelids to peer at me, and wished to have the particulars. I had none to offer. 'Ah! well,' said she; 'you stay in London? Come and see me. I'm sure you 're sensible. You and I can put our heads together. He's too often in Courtenay Square, and he's ten years too young for that, still. He ought to have good advice. Tell me, how can a woman who can't guide herself help a man?—and the most difficult man alive! I'm sure you understand me. I can't drive out in the afternoon for them. They make a crush here, and a clatter of tongues! . . . That's my private grievance. But he's now keeping persons away who have the first social claim . . . I know they can't appear. Don't look confused; no one accuses you. Only I do say it 's getting terribly hot in London for somebody. Call on me. Will you?'

She named her hours. I bowed as soon as I perceived my opportunity. Her allusions were to Lady Edbury, and to imputed usurpations of my father's. I walked down to the Chambers where Temple was reading Law, for a refuge from these annoyances. I was in love with the modest shadowed life Temple lived, diligently reading, and glancing on the world as through a dusky window, happy to let it run its course while he sharpened his weapons. A look at Temple's face told me he had heard quite as much as was known in the West. Dining-halls of lawyers are not Cistercian; he was able to give me three distinct versions of the story of the Dauphin. No one could be friendlier. Indeed Temple now urged me forcibly to prevent my father from spending money and wearing his heart out in vain, by stopping the case in Dettermain and Newson's hands. They were respectable lawyers, he said, in a lawyer's ordinary tone when including such of his species as are not black sheep. He thought it possible that my father's personal influence overbore their judgment. In fact, nothing bound them to refuse to work for him, and he believed that they had submitted their views for his consideration.

Page 2136

‘I do wish he’d throw it up,’ Temple exclaimed. ’It makes him enemies. And just examining it, you see he could get no earthly good out of it: he might as well try to scale a perpendicular rock. But when I’m with him, I’m ready to fancy what he pleases—I acknowledge that. He has excess of phosphorus, or he’s ultra-electrical; doctors could tell us better than lawyers.’ Temple spoke of the clever young barrister Tenby as the man whom his father had heard laughing over the trick played upon ’Roy Richmond.’ I conceived that I might furnish Mr. Tenby a livelier kind of amusement, and the thought that I had once been sur le terrain, and had bitterly regretted it, by no means deterred me from the idea of a second expedition, so black was my mood. A review of the circumstances, aided by what reached my ears before the night went over, convinced me that Edbury was my man. His subordinate helped him to the instrument, and possibly to the plot, but Edbury was the capital offender.

The scene of the prank was not in itself so bad as the stuff which a cunning anecdotist could make out of it. Edbury invited my father to a dinner at a celebrated City tavern. He kept his guests (Jennings, Jorian DeWitt, Alton, Wedderburn, were among the few I was acquainted with who were present) awaiting the arrival of a person for whom he professed extraordinary respect. The Dauphin of France was announced. A mild, flabby, amiable-looking old person, with shelving forehead and grey locks—excellently built for the object, Jorian said—entered. The Capet head and embonpoint were there. As far as a personal resemblance might go, his pretensions to be the long-lost Dauphin were grotesquely convincing, for, notwithstanding the accurate picture of the Family presented by him, the man was a pattern bourgeois:—a sturdy impostor, one would have thought, and I thought so when I heard of him; but I have been assured that he had actually grown old in the delusion that he, carrying on his business in the City of London, was the identical Dauphin.

Edbury played his part by leading his poor old victim half way to meet his other most honoured guest, hesitating then and craving counsel whether he was right in etiquette to advance the Dauphin so far. The Dauphin left him mildly to decide the point: he was eminently mild throughout, and seems to have thought himself in good faith surrounded by believers and adherents. Edbury’s task soon grew too delicate for that coarse boy. In my father’s dexterous hands he at once lost his assumption of the gallantry of manner which could alone help him to retain his advantage. When the wine was in him he began to bawl. I could imagine the sort of dialogue he raised. Bets on the Dauphin, bets on Roy: they were matched as on a racecourse. The Dauphin remembered incidents of his residence in the Temple, with a beautiful juvenile faintness: a conscientious angling for recollection, Wedderburn said. Roy was requested to remember something, to drink and refresh his memory infantine incidents were suggested. He fenced the treacherous host during dinner with superb complacency.

Page 2137

The Dauphin was of an immoveable composure. He 'stated simple facts: he was the Dauphin of France, providentially rescued from the Temple in the days of the Terror.' For this deliverance, somewhat to the consternation of the others, he offered up a short prayer of thanksgiving over his plate. He had, he said, encountered incredulity. He had his proofs. He who had never been on the soil of France since early boyhood, spoke French with a pure accent: he had the physical and moral constitution of the Family: owing to events attending his infant days, he was timid. Jorian imitated him:—'I start at the opening of a door; I see dark faces in my sleep: it is a dungeon; I am at the knees of my Unfortunate Royal Father, with my Beautiful Mother.' His French was quaint, but not absurd. He became loquacious, apostrophizing vacancy with uplifted hand and eye. The unwonted invitation to the society of noblemen made him conceive his Dauphinship to be on the high road to a recognition in England, and he was persuaded to drink and exhibit proofs: which were that he had the constitution of the Family, as aforesaid, in every particular; that he was peculiarly marked with testificatory spots; and that his mere aspect inspired all members and branch members of the Family with awe and stupefaction. One of the latter hearing of him, had appointed to meet him in a pastrycook's shop. He met him, and left the place with a cloud on his brow, showing tokens of respectful sympathy.

Conceive a monomaniacal obese old English citizen, given to lift hand and eye and address the cornices, claiming to be an Illustrious Boy, and calling on a beautiful historic mother and unfortunate Royal sire to attest it! No wonder the table was shaken with laughter. He appealed to Tenby constantly, as to the one man he knew in the room. Tenby it was who made the discovery of him somewhere in the City, where he earned his livelihood either as a corn-merchant; or a stockbroker, or a chronometer-maker, or a drysalter, and was always willing to gratify a customer with the sight of his proofs of identity. Mr. Tenby made it his business to push his clamorous waggishness for the exhibition. I could readily believe that my father was more than his match in disposable sallies and weight of humour, and that he shielded the old creature successfully, so long as he had a tractable being to protect. But the Dauphin was plied with wine, and the marquis had his fun. Proof upon proof in verification of his claims was proffered by the now-tremulous son of St. Louis—so he called himself. With, Jorian admitted, a real courtly dignity, he stood up and proposed to lead the way to any neighbouring cabinet to show the spots on his person; living witnesses to the truth of his allegations, he declared them to be. The squire had authority for his broad farce, except in so far as he mixed up my father in the swinery of it.

Page 2138

I grew more and more convinced that my father never could have lost his presence of mind when he found himself in the net of a plot to cover him with ridicule. He was the only one who did not retire to the Dauphin's 'chamber of testification,' to return convulsed with vinous laughter after gravely inspecting the evidence; for which abstention the Dauphin reproached him violently, in round terms of abuse, challengeing him to go through a similar process. This was the signal for Edbury, Tenby, and some of the rest. They formed a circle, one-half for the Dauphin, one for Roy. How long the boorish fun lasted, and what exactly came of it, I did not hear. Jorian DeWitt said my father lost his temper, a point contested by Wedderburn and Jennings, for it was unknown of him. Anyhow, he thundered to some effect, inasmuch as he detached those that had gentlemanly feelings from the wanton roysterers, and next day the latter pleaded wine. But they told the story, not without embellishments. The world followed their example.

I dined and slept at Temple's house, not caring to meet my incarnate humiliation. I sent to hear that he was safe. A quiet evening with a scholarly man, and a man of strong practical ability and shrewdness, like Mr. Temple, did me good. I wished my father and I were on the same footing as he and his son, and I may add his daughters. They all talked sensibly; they were at feud with nobody; they reflected their condition. It was a simple orderly English household, of which the father was the pillar, the girls the ornaments, the son the hope, growing to take his father's place. My envy of such a home was acute, and I thought of Janet, and how well she was fashioned to build one resembling it, if only the mate allotted to her should not be a fantastical dreamer. Temple's character seemed to me to demand a wife like Janet on its merits; an idea that depressed me exceedingly. I had introduced Temple to Anna Penrhys, who was very kind to him; but these two were not framed to be other than friends. Janet, on the contrary, might some day perceive the sterling fellow Temple was, notwithstanding his moderate height. She might, I thought. I remembered that I had once wished that she would, and I was amazed at myself. But why? She was a girl sure to marry. I brushed these meditations away. They recurred all the time I was in Temple's house.

Mr. Temple waited for my invitation to touch on my father's Case, when he distinctly pronounced his opinion that it could end but in failure. Though a strict Constitutionalist, he had words of disgust for princes, acknowledging, however, that we were not practical in our use of them, and kept them for political purposes often to the perversion of our social laws and their natural dispositions. He spoke of his son's freak in joining the Navy. 'That was the princess's doing,' said Temple. 'She talked of our naval heroes, till she made me feel I had only to wear the anchor

Page 2139

buttons to be one myself. Don't tell her I was invalided from the service, Richie, for the truth is, I believe, I half-shammed. And the time won't be lost. You'll see I shall extract guineas from "old ocean" like salt. Precious few barristers understand maritime cases. The other day I was in Court, and prompted a great Q.C. in a case of collision. Didn't I, sir?'

'I think there was a hoarse whisper audible up to the Judge's seat at intervals,' said Mr. Temple.

'The Bar cannot confess to obligations from those who don't wear the robe,' Temple rejoined.

His father advised me to read for the Bar, as a piece of very good training.

I appealed to Temple, whether he thought it possible to read law-books in a cockboat in a gale of wind.

Temple grimaced and his father nodded. Still it struck me that I might one day have the felicity of quiet hours to sit down with Temple and read Law—far behind him in the race. And he envied me, in his friendly manner, I knew. My ambition had been blown to tatters.

A new day dawned. The household rose and met at the breakfast-table, devoid of any dread of the morning newspapers. Their talk was like the chirrup of birds. Temple and his father walked away together to chambers, bent upon actual business—upon doing something! I reflected emphatically, and compared them to ships with rudders, while I was at the mercy of wind, tide, and wave. I called at Dettermain and Newson's, and heard there of a discovery of a witness essential to the case, either in North Wales or in New South. I did not, as I had intended, put a veto on their proceedings. The thing to do was to see my father, and cut the case at the fountain head. For this purpose, it was imperative that I should go to him, and prepare myself for the interview by looking at the newspapers first. I bought one, hastily running my eyes down the columns in the shop. His name was printed, but merely in a fashionable notification that carriages took up and set down for his costume Ball, according to certain regulations. The relief of comparative obscurity helped me to breathe freely: not to be laughed at, was a gain. I was rather inclined to laud his courage in entering assembly-rooms, where he must be aware that he would see the Dauphin on every face. Perhaps he was guilty of some new extravagance last night, too late for scandal to reinforce the reporters!

Mrs. Waddy had a woeful visage when informing me that he was out, gone to Courtenay Square. She ventured a murmur of bills coming in. Like everybody else, she fancied he drew his supplies from my inexhaustible purse; she hoped the bills would be paid off immediately: the servants' wages were overdue. 'Never can I get him to attend to small accounts,' she whimpered, and was so ready to cry outright, that I said, 'Tusk,' and with

the one word gave her comfort. ’Of course, you, Mr. Harry, can settle them, I know that.’ We were drawing near to poor old Sewis’s legacy, even for the settling of the small accounts!

Page 2140

London is a narrow place to one not caring to be seen. I could not remain in this creditor-riddled house; I shunned the Parks, the Clubs, and the broad, brighter streets of the West. Musing on the refreshing change it would be to me to find myself suddenly on board Captain Jasper Welsh's barque Priscilla, borne away to strange climes and tongues, the world before me, I put on the striding pace which does not invite interruption, and no one but Edbury would have taken the liberty. I heard his shout. 'Halloa! Richmond.' He was driving his friend Witlington in his cabriolet. 'Richmond, my hearty, where the deuce have you been? I wanted you to dine with me the other night.'

I replied, looking at him steadily, that I wished I had been there.

'Compendious larks!' cried he, in the slang of his dog's day. 'I say; you're one at Duke Fitz's masquerade to-night? Tell us your toggery. Hang it, you might go for the Black Prince. I'm Prince Hal. Got a headache? Come to my Club and try my mixture. Yoicks! it'd make Methuselah and Melchisedec jump up and have a twirl and a fandango. I say, you're thick with that little French actress Chastedian jolly little woman! too much to say for herself to suit me.'

He described the style of woman that delighted him—an ideal English shepherdess of the print-shops, it appeared, and of extremely remote interest to me, I thought at the time. Eventually I appointed to walk round to his Club, and he touched his horse gently, and bobbed his diminutive henchman behind his smart cabriolet, the admiration of the street.

I found him waiting for me on the steps of his Club, puffing a cigar with all his vigour, in the classic attitude of a trumpeter. My first words were: 'I think I have to accuse you of insulting me.'

'Insulting you, Richmond!' he cried, much surprised, holding his cigar in transit.

'If you insult my father, I make you responsible to me.'

'Insult old Duke Fitz! I give you my word of honour, Richmond—why, I like him; I like the old boy. Wouldn't hurt him for the world and all Havannah.

What the deuce have you got into your head? Come in and smoke.'

The mention of his dinner and the Dauphin crazed him with laughter. He begged me as a man to imagine the scene: the old Bloated Bourbon of London Wall and Camberwell! an Illustrious Boy!—drank like a fish!—ready to show himself to the waiters! And then with 'Gee' and 'Gaw,' the marquis spouted out reminiscences of scene, the best ever witnessed! 'Up starts the Dauphin. "Damn you, sir! and damn me, sir, if believe you have a spot on your whole body!" And snuffles and puffs—you should have been there

Richmond, I wrote to ask you: did, upon my life! wanted you there. Lord! why, you won't get such fun in a century. And old Roy! he behaved uncommonly finely: said capital things, by Jove! Never saw him shine so; old trump! Says Dauphin, "My beautiful mother had a longing for strawberries out of season. I am marked with a strawberry, here." Says Roy: "It is an admirable and roomy site, but as I am not your enemy, sir, I doubt if I shall often have the opportunity to behold it." Ha! ha!—gee! Richmond, you've missed the deucedest good scene ever acted.'

Page 2141

How could I, after having had an adversary like Prince Otto, call upon a fellow such as Edbury to give me reason for his conduct? He rollicked and laughed until my ungovernable impatience brought him to his senses.

'Dash it, you're a fire-eater, I know, Richmond. We can't fight in this country; ain't allowed. And fighting 's infernal folly. By Jove! If you're going to tumble down every man who enjoys old Roy, you've your work cut out for you. He's long chalks the best joke out. 'Twixt you and me, he did return thanks. What does it matter what old Duke Fitz does? I give him a lift on his ladder with all my heart. He keeps a capital table. And I'll be hanged if he hasn't got the secret of the women. How he does it old Roy! If the lords were ladies they'd vote him premier peer, double quick. And I'll tell you what, Richmond, I'm thought a devil of a good-tempered fellow for not keeping watch over Courtenay Square. I don't call it my business to be house dog for a pretty stepmother. But there's talking and nodding, and oh! leave all that: come in and smoke, and let me set you up; and I'll shake your hand. Halloa! I'm hailed.'

A lady, grasping the veil across her face, beckoned her hand from a closed carriage below. Edbury ran down to her. I caught sight of ravishing golden locks, reminding me of Mabel Sweetwinter's hair, and pricking me with a sensation of spite at the sex for their deplorable madness in the choice of favourites. Edbury called me to come to the carriage window. I moved slowly, but the carriage wheeled about and rolled away. I could just see the outline of a head muffled in furs and lace.

'Queer fish, women!' he delivered himself of the philosophical ejaculation cloudily. I was not on terms with him to offer any remark upon the one in question. His imperturbable good humour foiled me, and I left him, merely giving him a warning, to which his answer was:

'Oh! come in and have a bottle of claret.'

Claret or brandy had done its work on him by the time I encountered him some hours later, in the Park. Bramham DeWitt, whom I met in the same neighbourhood, offered me a mount after lunch, advising me to keep near my father as much as I conveniently could; and he being sure to appear in the Park, I went, and heard his name to the right and left of me. He was now, as he said to me once that he should become, 'the tongue of London.' I could hardly expect to escape from curious scrutiny myself; I was looked at. Here and there I had to lift my hat and bow. The stultification of one's feelings and ideas in circumstances which divide and set them at variance is worse than positive pain. The looks shed on me were rather flattering, but I knew that in the background I was felt to be the son of the notorious. Edbury came trotting up to us like a shaken sack, calling, 'Neigh! any of you seen old Roy?' Bramham DeWitt, a stiff, fashionable man of fifty, proud of his blood and quick as his cousin Jorian to resent an impertinence, replied:

Page 2142

‘Are you the Marquis of Edbury, or a drunken groom, sir?’

‘Gad, old gentleman, I’ve half a mind to ride you down,’ said Edbury, and, espying me, challenged me to a race to run down the fogies.

A cavalcade of six abreast came cantering along. I saw my father listen to a word from Lady Edbury, and push his horse to intercept the marquis. They spoke. ‘Presently, presently,’ my father said; ’ride to the rear, and keep at half a stone’s throw-say, a groom’s distance.’

‘Groom be hanged!’ Edbury retorted. ’I made a bet I’d drive you out of the Park, old Roy!’

‘Ride behind, then,’ said my father, and to my astonishment Edbury obeyed him, with laughter. Lady Edbury smiled to herself; and I experienced the esteem I perceived in her for a masterful manner. A few minutes later my father beckoned me to pay my respects to Graf Kesensky, an ambassador with strong English predilections and some influence among us. He asked me if he was right in supposing I wished to enter Parliament. I said he was, wondering at the interest a foreigner could find in it. The count stopped a quiet-pacing gentleman. Bramhaxri DeWitt joined them, and a group of friends. I was introduced to Mr. Beauchamp Hill, the Government whip, who begged me to call on him with reference to the candidature of a Sussex borough: ‘that is,’ said he, turning to Graf Kesensky, ’if you’re sure the place is open? I’ve heard nothing of Falmouth’s accident.’ The count replied that Falmouth was his intimate friend; he had received a special report that Falmouth was dying, just as he was on the point of mounting his horse. ‘We shan’t have lost time,’ said Mr. Hill. The Government wanted votes. I went down to the House of Commons at midnight to see him. He had then heard of Falmouth’s hopeless condition, and after extracting my political views, which were for the nonce those of a happy subserviency, he expressed his belief that the new writ for the borough of Chippenden might be out, and myself seated on the Government benches, within a very short period. Nor would it be necessary, he thought, for the Government nominee to spend money: ’though that does not affect you, Mr. Richmond!’ My supposed wealth gave me currency even in political circles.

CHAPTER XLIII

I BECOME ONE OF THE CHOSEN OF THE NATION

An entire revulsion in my feelings and my way of thinking was caused by this sudden change of prospect. A member of our Parliament, I could then write to Ottilia, and tell her that I had not wasted time. And it was due to my father, I confessed, when he returned from his ball at dawn, that I should thank him for speaking to Graf Kesensky. ‘Oh!’ said he, ’that was our luck, Richie. I have been speaking about you to hundreds

for the last six months, and now we owe it to a foreigner!' I thanked him again. He looked eminently handsome in his Henry III. costume, and was disposed to be

Page 2143

as luxurious as his original. He had brought Count Lika, Secretary of Legation to the Austrian Embassy, dressed as an Albanian, with him. The two were stretched on couches, and discoursing of my father's reintroduction of the sedan chair to society. My father explained that he had ordered a couple of dozen of these chairs to be built on a pattern of his own. And he added, 'By the way, Richie, there will be sedaniers—porters to pay to-day. Poor men should be paid immediately.' I agreed with the monarch. Contemplating him, I became insensible to the sting of ridicule which had been shooting through me, agonizing me for the last eight-and-forty hours. Still I thought: can I never escape from the fascination?—let me only get into Parliament! The idea in me was that Parliament lifted me nearer to Ottilia, and would prompt me to resolute action, out of his tangle of glittering cobwebs. I told him of my interview with Beauchamp Hill. 'I have never known Kesensky wrong yet,' said he; 'except in his backing of Falmouth's horses.' Count Lika murmured that he hoped his Chief would be wrong in something else: he spoke significantly. My father raised his eyebrows. 'In his opinion,' Lika accepted the invitation to pursue, 'Prince Ernest will not let that announcement stand uncontradicted.'

My father's eyes dwelt on him. 'Are we accused of it?'

Lika slipped from the question. 'Who is accused of a newspaper's doings? It is but the denial of a statement.'

'I dare them to deny it!—and, Lika, my dear fellow, light me a cigarette,' said my father.

'Then,' said Lika, touching the flame delicately, 'you take the view that Kesensky is wrong in another thing besides horses.'

I believe he struck on the subject casually: there was nothing for him to gain or lose in it; and he had a liking for my father.

After puffing the cigarette twice or thrice my father threw it down, resuming his conversation upon the sedan, the appropriate dresses of certain of the great masquerading ladies, and an incident that appeared to charge Jorian DeWitt with having misconducted himself. The moment Lika had gone upstairs for two or three hours' sleep, he said to me: 'Richie, you and I have no time for that. We must have a man at Falmouth's house by eight o'clock. If the scrubbing-maid on all fours-not an inelegant position, I have remarked—declares him dead, we are at Bartlett's (money-lender) by ten: and in Chippenden borough before two post meridian. As I am a tactician, there is mischief! but I will turn it to my uses, as I did our poor Jorian to-night; he smuggled in the Chassediane: I led her out on my arm. Of that by and by. The point is, that from your oath in Parliament you fly to Sarkeld. I implore you now, by your love for me and the princess, not to lose precious minutes. Richie, we will press things so that you shall be in Sarkeld by the end of the month. My son! my dear boy! how you

Page 2144

loved me once!—you do still! then follow my directions. I have a head. Ay, you think it wild? 'Tis true, my mother was a poetess. But I will convince my son as I am convincing the world-tut, tut! To avoid swelling talk, I tell you, Richie, I have my hand on the world's wheel, and now is the time for you to spring from it and gain your altitude. If you fail, my success is emptiness.'

'Will you avoid Edbury and his like, and protect yourself?' was my form of stipulation, spoken to counteract his urgency.

He gave no answer beyond a wave of the hand suitable to his princely one-coloured costume of ruffled lavender silk, and the magnificent leg he turned to front me. My senses even up to that period were so impressionable as to be swayed by a rich dress and a grand manner when circumstances were not too unfavourable. Now they seemed very favourable, for they offered me an upward path to tread. His appearance propitiated me less after he had passed through the hands of his man Tollingby, but I had again surrendered the lead to him. As to the risk of proceedings being taken against him, he laughed scornfully at the suggestion. 'They dare not. The more I dare, the less dare they.' Again I listened to his curious roundabout reasoning, which dragged humour at its heels like a comical cur, proclaiming itself imposingly, in spite of the mongrel's barking, to be prudence and common sense. Could I deny that I owed him gratitude for the things I cherished most?—for my acquaintance with Ottilia?—for his services in Germany?—for the prospect of my elevation in England? I could not; and I tried hard to be recklessly grateful. As to money, he reiterated that he could put his hand on it to satisfy the squire on the day of accounts: for the present, we must borrow. His argument upon borrowing—which I knew well, and wondered that I did not at the outset disperse with a breath of contempt—gained on me singularly when reviewed under the light of my immediate interests: it ran thus:—We have a rich or a barren future, just as we conceive it. The art of generalship in life consists in gathering your scattered supplies to suit a momentous occasion; and it is the future which is chiefly in debt to us, and adjures us for its sake to fight the fight and conquer. That man is vile and fit to be trampled on who cannot count his future in gold and victory. If, as we find, we are always in debt to the past, we should determine that the future is in our debt, and draw on it. Why let our future lie idle while we need succour? For instance, to-morrow I am to have what saves my reputation in the battle to-day; shall I not take it at once? The military commander who acts on that principle overcomes his adversary to a certainty.

Page 2145

’You, Richie, the member for this borough of Chippenden, have won solid ground. I guarantee it to you. And you go straight from the hustings, or the first taste of parliamentary benches, to Sarkeld: you take your grandad’s proposition to Prince Ernest: you bring back the prince’s acceptance to the squire. Can you hope to have a princess without a battle for her?’ More and much more in this strain, until—for he could read me and most human beings swiftly on the surface, notwithstanding the pressure of his fancifulness—he perceived that talking influenced me far less than activity, and so after a hurried breakfast and an innocuous glance at the damp morning papers, we started to the money-lender’s, with Jennings to lend his name. We were in Chippenden close upon the hour my father had named, bringing to the startled electors the first news of their member’s death.

During the heat of the canvass for votes I received a kind letter from the squire in reply to one of mine, wherein he congratulated me on my prospects of success, and wound up: ’Glad to see it announced you are off with that princess of yours. Show them we are as proud as they are, Harry, and a fig for the whole foreign lot! Come to Riversley soon, and be happy.’ What did that mean? Heriot likewise said in a letter: ’So it’s over? The proud prince kicks? You will not thank me for telling you now what you know I think about it.’ I appealed to my father. ’Canvass! canvass!’ cried he; and he persistently baffled me. It was from Temple I learnt that on the day of our starting for Chippenden, the newspapers contained a paragraph in large print flatly denying upon authority that there was any foundation for the report of an intended marriage between the Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld and an English gentleman. Then I remembered how that morning my father had flung the papers down, complaining of their dampness.

Would such denial have appeared without Ottilia’s sanction?

My father proved that I was harnessed to him; there was no stopping, no time for grieving. Pace was his specific. He dragged me the round of the voters; he gave dinners at the inn of true Liberals, and ate of them contentedly; he delivered speeches incessantly. The whole force of his. serio-comic genius was alive in its element at Chippenden. From balls and dinners, and a sharp contest to maintain his position in town, he was down among us by the first morning train, bright as Apollo, and quite the sun of the place, dazzling the independent electors and their wives, and even me somewhat; amazing me, certainly. Dettermain, his lawyer, who had never seen him in action, and supposed he would treat an election as he did his Case, with fits and starts of energy, was not less astonished, and tried to curb him.

’Mr. Dettermain, my dear sir, I apprehend it is the electoral maxim to woo the widowed borough with the tear in its eye, and I shall do so hotly, in a right masculine manner,’ my father said. ’We have the start; and if we beat the enemy by nothing else we will beat him by constitution. We are the first in the field, and not to reap it is to acknowledge oneself deficient in the very first instrument with which grass was cut.’

Page 2146

Our difficulty all through the election was to contend with his humour. The many triumphs it won for him, both in speech and in action, turned at least the dialectics of the argument against us, and amusing, flattering, or bewildering, contributed to silence and hold us passive. Political convictions of his own, I think I may say with truth, he had none. He would have been just as powerful, after his fashion, on the Tory side, pleading for Mr. Normanton Hipperdon; more, perhaps: he would have been more in earnest. His store of political axioms was Tory; but he did remarkably well, and with no great difficulty, in confuting them to the wives of voters, to the voters themselves, and at public assemblies. Our adversary was redoubtable; a promising Opposition member, ousted from his seat in the North—a handsome man, too, which my father admitted, and wealthy, being junior partner in a City banking firm. Anna Penrhys knew him, and treacherously revealed some of the enemy's secrets, notably concerning what he termed our incorrigible turn for bribery.

'And that means,' my father said, 'that Mr. Hipperdon does not possess the art of talking to the ladies. I shall try him in repartee on the hustings. I must contrive to have our Jorian at my elbow.'

The task of getting Jorian to descend upon such a place as Chippenden worried my father more than electoral anxieties. Jorian wrote, 'My best wishes to you. Be careful of your heads. The habit of the Anglo-Saxon is to conclude his burlesques with a play of cudgels. It is his notion of freedom, and at once the exordium and peroration of his eloquence. Spare me the Sussex accent on your return.'

My father read out the sentences of this letter with admiring bursts of indignation at the sarcasms, and an evident idea that I inclined to jealousy of the force displayed.

'But we must have him,' he said; 'I do not feel myself complete without Jorian.'

So he made dispositions for a concert to be given in Chippenden town. Jenny Chassediane was invited down to sing, and Jorian came in her wake, of course. He came to suffer tortures. She was obliging enough to transform me into her weapon of chastisement upon the poor fellow for his behaviour to her at the Ball-atrocious, I was bound to confess. On this point she hesitated just long enough to imply a doubt whether, under any circumstances, the dues of men should be considered before those of her sex, and then struck her hands together with enthusiasm for my father, who was, she observed—critical in millinery in the height of her ecstasy—the most majestic, charming, handsome Henri III. imaginable, the pride and glory of the assembly, only one degree too rosy at night for the tone of the lavender, needing a touch of French hands, and the merest trifle in want of compression about the waistband. She related that a certain Prince Henri d'Angleterre had buzzed at his ear annoyingly. 'Et Gascoigne, ou est-il?' called the King, and the Judge stepped forth to correct the obstreperous youth. The Judge was Jennings, clearly prepared by my father to foil the Prince—no other than

Edbury. It was incomprehensible to me that my father should tolerate the tatter's pranks; unless, indeed, he borrowed his name to bonds of which I heard nothing.

Page 2147

Mademoiselle Chassediane vowed that her own dress was ravishing. She went attired as a boudoir-shepherdess or demurely-coquettish Sevres-china Ninette, such of whom Louis Quinze would chuck the chin down the deadly introductory walks of Versailles. The reason of her desiring to go was the fatal sin of curiosity, and, therefore, her sex's burden, not hers. Jorian was a Mousquetaire, with plumes and ruffles prodigious, and a hen's heart beneath his cock's feathers. 'Pourtant j'y allai. I saw your great ladies, how they carry themselves when they would amuse themselves, and, mon Dieu! Paris has done its utmost to grace their persons, and the length of their robes did the part of Providence in bestowing height upon them, parceque, vous savez, Monsieur, c'est extraordinaire comme ils ont les jambes courtes, ces Anglaises!' Our aristocracy, however, was not so bad in that respect as our bourgeoisie; yet it was easy to perceive that our female aristocracy, though they could ride, had never been drilled to walk: 'de belles femmes, oui; seulement, tenez, je n'admire ni les yeux de vache, ni de souris, ni mime ceux de verre comme ornement feminin. Avec de l'embonpoint elles font de l'effet, mais maigre il n'y a aucune illusion possible.'

This vindictive critic smarted, with cause, at the recollection of her walk out of her rooms. Jorian's audacity or infatuation quitted him immediately after he had gratified her whim. The stout Mousquetaire placed her in a corner, and enveloped her there, declaring that her petition had been that she might come to see, not to be seen,—as if, she cried out tearfully, the two wishes must not necessarily exist together, like the masculine and the feminine in this world! Prince Hal, acting the most profligate period of his career, espied her behind the Mousquetaire's moustache, and did not fail to make much of his discovery. In a perilous moment for the reputation of the Ball, my father handed him over to Gascoigne, and conducted Jenny in a leisurely walk on his arm out of the rooms.

'Il est comme les Romains,' she said: 'he never despairs of himself. It is a Jupiter! If he must punish you he confers a dignity in doing it. Now I comprehend, that with such women as these grandes dames Anglaises I should have done him harm but for his greatness of soul.'

Some harm, I fancied, must have been done, in spite of his boast to the contrary. He had to be in London every other night, and there were tales current of intrigues against him which had their sources from very lofty regions. But in Chippenden he threw off London, just as lightly as in London he discarded Chippenden. No symptom of personal discouragement, or of fatigue, was betrayed in his face. I spoke once of that paragraph purporting to emanate from Prince Ernest.

'It may,' he said. 'Business! Richie.'

Page 2148

He set to counting the promises of votes, disdaining fears and reflections. Concerts, cricket-matches, Balls, dinner-parties, and the round of the canvass, and speech-making at our gatherings, occupied every minute of my time, except on Saturday evenings, when I rode over to Riversley with Temple to spend the Sunday. Temple, always willing to play second to me, and a trifle melancholy under his partial eclipse-which, perhaps, suggested the loss of Janet to him—would have it that this election was one of the realizations of our boyish dreams of greatness. The ladies were working rosettes for me. My aunt Dorothy talked very anxiously about the day appointed by my father to repay the large sum expended. All hung upon that day, she said, speaking from her knowledge of the squire. She was moved to an extreme distress by the subject.

'He is confident, Harry; but where can he obtain the money? If your grandfather sees it invested in your name in Government securities, he will be satisfied, not otherwise: nothing less will satisfy him; and if that is not done, he will join you and your father together in his mind; and as he has hitherto treated one he will treat both. I know him. He is just, to the extent of his vision; but he will not be able to separate you. He is aware that your father has not restricted his expenses since they met; he will say you should have used your influence.'

She insisted on this, until the tears streamed from her eyes, telling me that my grandfather was the most upright and unsuspicious of men, and precisely on that account the severest when he thought he had been deceived. The fair chances of my election did not console her, as it did me, by dazzling me. She affirmed strongly that she was sure my father expected success at the election to be equivalent to the promised restitution of the money, and begged me to warn him that nothing short of the sum squandered would be deemed sufficient at Riversley. My dear aunt, good woman though she was, seemed to me to be waxing miserly. The squire had given her the name of Parsimony; she had vexed him, Janet told me, by subscribing a miserable sum to a sailors' asylum that he patronized—a sum he was ashamed to see standing as the gift of a Beltham; and she had stopped the building of a wing of her village school-house, designed upon his plan. Altogether, she was fretful and distressful; she appeared to think that I could have kept my father in better order. Riversley was hearing new and strange reports of him. But how could I at Chippenden thwart his proceedings in London? Besides, he was serving me indefatigably.

It can easily be imagined what description of banter he had to meet and foil.

'This gentleman is obliging enough to ask me, "How about the Royal Arms?" If in his extreme consideration he means to indicate my Arms, I will inform him that they are open to him; he shall find entertainment for man and beast; so he is doubly assured of a welcome.'

Page 2149

Questioned whether he did not think he was entitled to be rated at the value of half-a-crown, he protested that whatever might be the sum of his worth, he was pure coin, of which neither party in Chippenden could accuse the silver of rubbing off; and he offered forthwith an impromptu apologue of a copper penny that passed itself off for a crown-piece, and deceived a portion of the country: that was why (with a wave of the arm over the Hipperdon faction) it had a certain number of backers; for everybody on whom the counterfeit had been foisted, praised it to keep it in the currency.

’Now, gentlemen, I apprehend that Chippenden is not the pocket-borough for Hipperdon coin. Back with him to the Mint! and, with your permission, we will confiscate the first syllable of his name, while we consign him to oblivion, with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah for Richmond!’

The cheers responded thunderingly, and were as loud when he answered a ’How ‘bout the Dauphin?’ by saying that it was the Tory hotel, of which he knew nothing.

‘A cheer for old Roy!’ Edbury sang out.

My father checked the roar, and turned to him.

‘Marquis of Edbury, come to the front!’

Edbury declined to budge, but the fellows round him edged aside to show him a mark for my father’s finger.

’Gentlemen, this is the young Marquis of Edbury, a member of the House of Lords by right of his birth, born to legislate for you and me. He, gentlemen, makes our laws. Examine him, hear him, meditate on him.’

He paused cruelly for Edbury to open his mouth. The young lord looked confounded, and from that moment behaved becomingly.

‘He might have been doing mischief to-morrow,’ my father said to me, and by letting me conceive his adroitness a matter of design, comforted me with proofs of intelligent power, and made me feel less the melancholy conjunction of a piece of mechanism and a piece of criticism, which I was fast growing to be in the contemplation of the agencies leading to honour in our land. Edbury whipped his four-in-hand to conduct our voters to the poll. We had to pull hard against Tory interest. It was a sharp, dubious, hot day—a day of outcries against undue influence and against bribery—a day of beer and cheers and the insanest of tricks to cheat the polling-booth. Old John Thresher of Dipwell, and Farmer Eckerthy drove over to Chippenden to afford me aid and countenance, disconcerting me by the sight of them, for I associated them with Janet rather than with Ottilia, and it was to Ottilia that I should have felt myself rising when the figures

increased their pace in my favour, and the yeasty mob surrounding my father's superb four-horsed chariot responded to his orations by proclaiming me victor.

'I congratulate you, Mr. Richmond,' Dettermain said. 'Up to this day I have had my fears that we should haul more moonshine than fish in our net. Your father has accomplished prodigies.'

Page 2150

My father, with the bloom of success on his face, led me aside soon after a safe majority of upwards of seventy had been officially announced. ‘Now, Richie,’ said he, ’you are a Member. Now to the squire away! Thank the multitude and off, and as quick to Sarkeld as you well can, and tell the squire from me that I pardon his suspicions. I have landed you a Member—that will satisfy him. I am willing, tell him . . . you know me competent to direct mines . . . bailiff of his estates—whatever he pleases, to effect a reconciliation. I must be in London to-night—I am in the thick of the fray there. No matter: go, my son.’ He embraced me. It was not a moment for me to catechize him, though I could see that he was utterly deluded.

Between moonlight and morning, riding with Temple and Captain Bulsted on either side of me, I drew rein under the red Grange windows, tired, and in love with its air of sleepy grandeur. Janet’s window was open. I hailed her. ‘Has he won?’ she sang out in the dark of her room, as though the cry of delight came upon the leap from bed. She was dressed. She had commissioned Farmer Eckerthy to bring her the news at any hour of the night. Seeing me, she clapped hands. ’Harry, I congratulate you a thousand times.’ She had wit to guess that I should never have thought of coming had I not been the winner. I could just discern the curve and roll of her famed thick brown hair in the happy shrug of her shoulder, and imagined the full stream of it as she leaned out of window to talk to us.

Janet herself, unfastened the hall-door bolts. She caressed the horses, feverishly exulting, with charming subdued laughter of victory and welcome, and amused us by leading my horse round to stables, and whistling for one of the lads, playing what may, now and then, be a pretty feature in a young woman of character—the fair tom-boy girl. She and her maid prepared coffee and toast for us, and entered the hall, one after the other, laden with dishes of cold meat; and not until the captain had eaten well did she tell him slyly that somebody, whom she had brought to Riversley yesterday, was abed and asleep upstairs. The slyness and its sisterly innocence lit up our eyes, and our hearts laughed. Her cheeks were deliciously overcoloured. We stole I know not what from the night and the day, and conventional circumstances, and rallied Captain Bulsted, and behaved as decorous people who treat the night properly, and live by rule, do not quite do. Never since Janet was a girl had I seen her so spirited and responsive: the womanly armour of half-reserve was put away. We chatted with a fresh-hearted natural young creature who forfeited not a particle of her ladyship while she made herself our comrade in talk and frolic.

Janet and I walked part of the way to the station with Temple, who had to catch an early train, and returning—the song of skylarks covering us—joined hands, having our choice between nothing to say, and the excess; perilous both.

Page 2151

CHAPTER XLIV

MY FATHER IS MIRACULOUSLY RELIEVED BY FORTUNE

My grandfather had a gratification in my success, mingled with a transparent jealousy of the chief agent in procuring it. He warned me when I left him that he was not to be hoodwinked: he must see the money standing in my name on the day appointed. His doubts were evident, but he affected to be expectant. Not a word of Sarkeld could be spoken. My success appeared to be on a more visionary foundation the higher I climbed.

Now Jorian DeWitt had affirmed that the wealthy widow Lady Sampleman was to be had by my father for the asking. Placed as we were, I regarded the objections to his alliance with her in a mild light. She might lend me the money to appease the squire; that done, I would speedily repay it. I admitted, in a letter to my aunt Dorothy, the existing objections: but the lady had long been enamoured of him, I pleaded, and he was past the age for passionate affection, and would infallibly be courteous and kind. She was rich. We might count on her to watch over him carefully. Of course, with such a wife, he would sink to a secondary social sphere; was it to be regretted if he did? The letter was a plea for my own interests, barely veiled.

At the moment of writing it, and moreover when I treated my father with especial coldness, my heart was far less warm in the contemplation of its pre-eminent aim than when I was suffering him to endanger it, almost without a protest. Janet and a peaceful Riversley, and a life of quiet English distinction, beckoned to me visibly, and not hatefully. The image of Ottilia conjured up pictures of a sea of shipwrecks, a scene of immeasurable hopelessness. Still, I strove toward that. My strivings were against my leanings, and imagining the latter, which involved no sacrifice of the finer sense of honour, to be in the direction of my lower nature, I repelled them to preserve a lofty aim that led me through questionable ways.

‘Can it be you, Harry,’ my aunt Dorothy’s reply ran (I had anticipated her line of reasoning, though not her warmth), ’who advise him to this marriage from a motive so inexplicably unworthy? That you will repay her the money, I do not require your promise to assure me. The money is nothing. It is the prospect of her life and fortune which you are consenting, if not urging him, to imperil for your own purposes. Are you really prepared to imitate in him, with less excuse for doing it, the things you most condemn? Let it be checked at the outset. It cannot be. A marriage of inclination on both sides, prudent in a worldly sense, we might wish for him, perhaps, if he could feel quite sure of himself. His wife might persuade him not to proceed in his law-case. There I have long seen his ruin. He builds such expectations on it! You speak of something worse than a mercenary marriage. I see this in your handwriting!—your

Page 2152

approval of it! I have to check the whisper that tells me it reads like a conspiracy. Is she not a simpleton? Can you withhold your pity? and pitying, can you possibly allow her to be entrapped? Forgive my seeming harshness. I do not often speak to my Harry so. I do now because I must appeal to you, as the one chiefly responsible, on whose head the whole weight of a dreadful error will fall. Oh! my dearest, be guided by the purity of your feelings to shun doubtful means. I have hopes that after the first few weeks your grandfather will—I know he does not 'expect to find the engagement fulfilled—be the same to you that he was before he discovered the extravagance. You are in Parliament, and I am certain, that by keeping as much as possible to yourself, and living soberly, your career there will persuade him to meet your wishes.'

The letter was of great length. In conclusion, she entreated me to despatch an answer by one of the early morning trains; entreating me once more to cause 'any actual deed' to be at least postponed. The letter revealed what I had often conceived might be.

My rejoinder to my aunt Dorothy laid stress on my father's pledge of his word of honour as a gentleman to satisfy the squire on a stated day. I shrank from the idea of the Riversley crow over him. As to the lady, I said we would see that her money was fastened to her securely before she committed herself to the deeps. The money to be advanced to me would lie at my bankers, in my name,—untouched: it would be repaid in the bulk after a season. This I dwelt on particularly, both to satisfy her and to appease my sense of the obligation. An airy pleasantry in the tone of this epistle amused me while writing it and vexed me when it had gone. But a letter sent, upon special request, by railway, should not, I thought, be couched in the ordinary strain. Besides one could not write seriously of a person like Lady Sampleman.

I consulted my aunt Dorothy's scruples by stopping my father on his way to the lady. His carriage was at the door: I suggested money-lenders: he had tried them all. He begged me to permit him to start: but it was too ignominious to think of its being done under my very eyes, and I refused. He had tried the money-lenders yesterday. They required a mortgage solider than expectations for the sum we wanted. Dettermain and Newson had declined to undertake the hypothecation of his annuity. Providence pointed to Sampleman.

'You change in a couple of nights, Richie,' said he. 'Now I am always the identical man. I shall give happiness to one sincerely good soul. I have only to offer myself—let me say in becoming modesty, I believe so. Let me go to her and have it over, for with me a step taken is a thing sanctified. I have in fact held her in reserve. Not that I think Fortune has abandoned us: but a sagacious schemer will not leave everything to the worthy Dame. I should have driven to her yesterday, if I had not heard from Dettermain and Newson that there was a hint of a negotiation for a compromise. Government is fairly frightened.'

Page 2153

He mused. 'However, I slept on it, and arrived at the conclusion this morning that my old Richie stood in imminent jeopardy of losing the fruit of all my toil. The good woman will advance the money to her husband. When I pledged my word to the squire I had reason to imagine the two months a sufficient time. We have still a couple of days. I have heard of men who lost heart at the eleventh hour, and if they had only hung on, with gallant faith in themselves, they would have been justified by the result. Faith works miracles. At least it allows time for them.'

His fertile ingenuity spared mine the task of persuading him to postpone the drive to Lady Sampleman. But that he would have been prompt to go, at a word from me, and was actually about to go when I entered his house, I could not question.

He drove in manifest relief of mind to Dettermain and Newson's.

I had an appointment with Mr. Temple at a great political Club, to meet the gentlemen who were good enough to undertake the introduction of the infant member to the House of Commons. My incessantly twisting circumstances foiled the pleasure and pride due to me. From the Club I bent my steps to Temple's district, and met in the street young Eckart vom Hof, my champion and second on a memorable occasion, fresh upon London, and looking very Germanic in this drab forest of our city people. He could hardly speak of Deutschland for enthusiasm at the sight of the moving masses. His object in coming to England, he assured me honestly, was to study certain editions of Tibullus in the British Museum. When he deigned to speak of Sarkeld, it was to say that Prince Hermann was frequently there. I gave him no chance to be sly, though he pushed for it, at a question of the Princess Ottilia's health.

The funeral pace of the block of cabs and omnibuses engrossed his attention. Suddenly the Englishman afforded him an example of the reserve of impetuosity we may contain. I had seen my aunt Dorothy in a middle line of cabs coming from the City, and was darting in a twinkling among wheels and shafts and nodding cab-horse noses to take her hand and know the meaning of her presence in London. She had family business to do: she said no more. I mentioned that I had checked my father for a day or two. She appeared grateful. Her anxiety was extreme that she might not miss the return train, so I relinquished her hand, commanded the cabman to hasten, and turned to rescue Eckart—too young and faithful a collegian not to follow his friend, though it were into the lion's den-from a terrific entanglement of horseflesh and vehicles brawled over by a splendid collision of tongues. Secure on the pavement again, Eckart humbly acknowledged that the English tongue could come out upon occasions. I did my best to amuse him.

Page 2154

Whether it amused him to see me take my seat in the House of Commons, and hear a debate in a foreign language, I cannot say; but the only pleasure of which I was conscious at that period lay in the thought that he or his father, Baron vom Hof, might some day relate the circumstance at Prince Ernest's table, and fix in Ottilia's mind the recognition of my having tried to perform my part of the contract. Beggared myself, and knowing Prince Hermann to be in Sarkeld, all I hoped for was to show her I had followed the path she traced. My state was lower: besides misfortune I now found myself exalted only to feel my profound insignificance.

'The standard for the House is a man's ability to do things,' said Charles Etherell, my friendly introductor, by whom I was passingly, perhaps ironically, advised to preserve silence for two or three sessions.

He counselled the study of Foreign Affairs for a present theme. I talked of our management of them, in the strain of Dr. Julius von Karsteg.

'That's journalism, or clippings from a bilious essay; it won't do for the House,' he said. 'Revile the House to the country, if you like, but not the country to the House.'

When I begged him to excuse my absurdity, he replied:

'It's full of promise, so long as you're silent.'

But to be silent was to be merely an obedient hound of the whip. And if the standard for the House was a man's ability to do things, I was in the seat of a better man. External sarcasms upon the House, flavoured with justness, came to my mind, but if these were my masters surrounding me, how indefinitely small must I be!

Leaving the House on that first night of my sitting, I received Temple's congratulations outside, and, as though the sitting had exhausted every personal sentiment, I became filled with his; under totally new sensations, I enjoyed my distinction through the perception of my old comrade's friendly jealousy.

'I'll be there, too, some day,' he said, moaning at the prospect of an extreme age before such honours would befall him.

The society of Eckart prevented me from urging him to puff me up with his talk as I should have wished, and after I had sent the German to be taken care of by Mrs. Waddy, I had grown so accustomed to the worldly view of my position that I was fearing for its stability. Threats of a petition against me were abroad. Supposing the squire disinherited me, could I stand? An extraordinary appetite for wealth, a novel appreciation of it—which was, in truth, a voluntary enlistment into the army of mankind, and the adoption of its passions—pricked me with an intensity of hope and dread concerning my dependence on my grandfather. I lay sleepless all night, tossing from

Riversley to Sarkeld, condemned, it seemed, to marry Janet and gain riches and power by renouncing my hope of the princess and the glory belonging to her, unless I should within a few hours obtain a show of figures at my bankers.

Page 2155

I had promised Etherell to breakfast with him. A note—a faint scream—despatched by Mrs. Waddy to Mr. Temple's house informed me that 'the men' were upon them. If so, they were the forerunners of a horde, and my father was as good as extinguished. He staked everything on success; consequently, he forfeited pity.

Good-bye to ambition, I thought, and ate heartily, considering robustly the while how far lower than the general level I might avoid falling. The report of the debates in morning papers—doubtless, more flowing and, perhaps, more grammatical than such as I gave ear to overnight—had the odd effect on me of relieving me from the fit of subserviency into which the speakers had sunk me.

A conceit of towering superiority took its place, and as Etherell was kind enough to draw me out and compliment me, I was attacked by a tragic sense of contrast between my capacities and my probable fortunes. It was open to me to marry Janet. But this meant the loosening of myself with my own hand for ever from her who was my mentor and my glory, to gain whom I was in the very tideway. I could not submit to it, though the view was like that of a green field of the springs passed by a climber up the crags. I went to Anna Penrhys to hear a woman's voice, and partly told her of my troubles. She had heard Mr. Hipperdon express his confident opinion that he should oust me from my seat. Her indignation was at my service as a loan: it sprang up fiercely and spontaneously in allusions to something relating to my father, of which the Marquis of Edbury had been guilty. 'How you can bear it!' she exclaimed, for I was not wordy. The exclamation, however, stung me to put pen to paper—the woman was not so remote in me as not to be roused by the woman. I wrote to Edbury, and to Heriot, bidding him call on the young nobleman. Late at night I was at my father's door to perform the act of duty of seeing him, and hearing how he had entertained Eckart, if he was still master of his liberty. I should have known him better: I expected silence and gloom. The windows were lighted brilliantly. As the hall-door opened, a band of stringed and wood instruments commenced an overture. Mrs. Waddy came to me in the hall; she was unintelligible. One thing had happened to him at one hour of the morning, and another at another hour. He was at one moment suffering the hands of the 'officers' on his shoulder:

'And behold you, Mr. Harry! a knock, a letter from a messenger, and he conquers Government!' It struck me that the epitome of his life had been played in a day: I was quite incredulous of downright good fortune. He had been giving a dinner followed by a concert, and the deafening strains of the music clashed with my acerb spirit, irritating me excessively. 'Where are those men you spoke of?' I asked her. 'Gone,' she replied,'gone long ago!'

'Paid?' said I.

She was afraid to be precise, but repeated that they were long since gone.

Page 2156

I singled Jorian DeWitt from among the crowd of loungers on the stairs and landing between the drawing-rooms. 'Oh, yes, Government has struck its flag to him,' Jorian said. 'Why weren't you here to dine? Alphonse will never beat his achievement of to-day. Jenny and Carigny gave us a quarter-of-an-hour before dinner—a capital idea!—-"*Veuve et* BACHELIER." As if by inspiration. No preparation for it, no formal taking of seats. It seized amazingly—floated small talk over the soup beautifully.'

I questioned him again.

'Oh, dear, yes; there can't be a doubt about it,' he answered, airily. 'Roy Richmond has won his game.'

Two or three urgent men round a great gentleman were extracting his affable approbation of the admirable nature of the experiment of the Chassediane before dinner. I saw that Eckart was comfortably seated, and telling Jorian to provide for him in the matter of tobacco, I went to my room, confused beyond power of thought by the sensible command of fortune my father, fortune's sport at times, seemed really to have.

His statement of the circumstances bewildered me even more. He was in no hurry to explain them; when we met next morning he waited for me to question him, and said, 'Yes. I think we have beaten them so far!' His mind was pre-occupied, he informed me, concerning the defence of a lady much intrigued against, and resuming the subject: 'Yes, we have beaten them up to a point, Richie. And that reminds me: would you have me go down to Riversley and show the squire the transfer paper? At any rate you can now start for Sarkeld, and you do, do you not? To-day: to-morrow at latest.'

I insisted: 'But how, and in what manner has this money been paid?' The idea struck me that he had succeeded in borrowing it.

'Transferred to me in the Bank, and intelligence of the fact sent to Dettermain and Newson, my lawyers,' he replied. 'Beyond that, I know as little as you, Richie, though indubitably I hoped to intimidate them. If,' he added, with a countenance perfectly simple and frank, 'they expect me to take money for a sop, I am not responsible, as I by no means provoked it, for their mistake.

'I proceed. The money is useful to you, so I rejoice at it.'

Five and twenty thousand pounds was the amount.

'No stipulation was attached to it?'

'None. Of course a stipulation was implied: but of that I am not bound to be cognizant.'

'Absurd!' I cried: 'it can't have come from the quarter you suspect.'

‘Where else?’ he asked.

I thought of the squire, Lady Edbury, my aunt, Lady Sampleman, Anna Penrhys, some one or other of his frantic female admirers. But the largeness of the amount, and the channel selected for the payment, precluded the notion that any single person had come to succour him in his imminent need, and, as it chanced, mine.

Observing that my speculations wavered, he cited numerous instances in his life of the special action of Providence in his favour, and was bold enough to speak of a star, which his natural acuteness would have checked his doing before me, if his imagination had not been seriously struck.

Page 2157

‘You hand the money over to me, sir?’ I said.

‘Without a moment of hesitation, my dear boy,’ he melted me by answering.

‘You believe you have received a bribe?’

’That is my entire belief—the sole conclusion I can arrive at. I will tell you, Richie: the old Marquis of Edbury once placed five thousand pounds to my account on a proviso that I should—neglect, is the better word, my Case. I inherited from him at his death; of course his demise cancelled the engagement. He had been the friend of personages implicated. He knew. I suspect he apprehended the unpleasant position of a witness.’

‘But what was the stipulation you presume was implied?’ said I.

’Something that passed between lawyers: I am not bound to be cognizant of it. Abandon my claims for a few thousands? Not for ten, not for ten hundred times the sum!’

To be free from his boisterous influence, which made my judgement as unsteady as the weather-glass in a hurricane, I left my house and went straight to Dettermain and Newson, who astonished me quite as much by assuring me that the payment of the money was a fact. There was no mystery about it. The intelligence and transfer papers, they said, had not been communicated to them by the firm they were opposed to, but by a solicitor largely connected with the aristocracy; and his letter had briefly declared the unknown donator’s request that legal proceedings should forthwith be stopped. They offered no opinion of their own. Suggestions of any kind, they seemed to think, had weight, and all of them an equal weight, to conclude from the value they assigned to every idea of mine. The name of the solicitor in question was Charles Adolphus Bannerbridge. It was, indeed, my old, one of my oldest friends; the same by whom I had been led to a feast and an evening of fun when a little fellow starting in the London streets. Sure of learning the whole truth from old Mr. Bannerbridge, I walked to his office and heard that he had suddenly been taken ill. I strode on to his house, and entered a house of mourning. The kind old man, remembered by me so vividly, had died overnight. Miss Bannerbridge perceived that I had come on an errand, and with her gentle good breeding led me to speak of it. She knew nothing whatever of the sum of money. She was, however, aware that an annuity had been regularly paid through the intervention of her father. I was referred by her to a Mr. Richards, his recently-established partner. This gentleman was ignorant of the whole transaction.

Throughout the day I strove to combat the pressure of evidence in favour of the idea that an acknowledgement of special claims had been wrested from the enemy. Temple hardly helped me, though his solid sense was dead against the notions entertained by my father and Jorian DeWitt, and others besides, our elders. The payment of the sum through the same channel which supplied the annuity, pointed distinctly to an admission

Page 2158

of a claim, he inclined to think, and should be supposed to come from a personage having cause either to fear him or to assist him. He set my speculations astray by hinting that the request for the stopping of the case might be a blind. A gift of money, he said shrewdly, was a singularly weak method of inducing a man to stop the suit of a life-time. I thought of Lady Edbury; but her income was limited, and her expenditure was not of Lady Sampleman, but it was notorious that she loved her purse as well as my aunt Dorothy, and was even more, in the squire's phrase, 'a petticoated parsimony.' Anna Penrhys appeared the likelier, except for the fact that the commencement of the annuity was long before our acquaintance with her. I tried her on the subject. Her amazement was without a shadow of reserve. 'It 's Welsh, it's not English,' she remarked. I knew no Welshwoman save Anna.

'Do you know the whole of his history?' said she. Possibly one of the dozen unknown episodes in it might have furnished the clue, I agreed with her.

The sight of twenty-one thousand pounds placed to my credit in the Funds assuaged my restless spirit of investigation. Letters from the squire and my aunt Dorothy urged me to betake myself to Riversley, there finally to decide upon what my course should be.

'Now that you have the money, pray,' St. Parsimony wrote,—'pray be careful of it. Do not let it be encroached on. Remember it is to serve one purpose. It should be guarded strictly against every appeal for aid,' *etc*., with much underlining.

My grandfather returned the papers. His letter said 'I shall not break my word. Please to come and see me before you take steps right or left.'

So here was the dawn again.

I could in a day or two start for Sarkeld. Meanwhile, to give my father a lesson, I discharged a number of bills, and paid off the bond to which Edbury's name was attached. My grandfather, I knew, was too sincerely and punctiliously a gentleman in practical conduct to demand a further inspection of my accounts. These things accomplished, I took the train for Riversley, and proceeded from the station to Durstan, where I knew Heriot to be staying. Had I gone straight to my grandfather, there would have been another story to tell.

CHAPTER XLV

WITHIN AN INCH OF MY LIFE

A single tent stood in a gully running from one of the gravel-pits of the heath, near an iron-red rillet, and a girl of Kiomi's tribe leaned over the lazy water at half length, striking it with her handkerchief. At a distance of about twice a stone's-throw from the new

carriage-road between Durstan and Bulsted, I fancied from old recollections she might be Kiomi herself. This was not the time for her people to be camping on Durstan. Besides, I feared it improbable that one would find her in any of the tracks of her people. The noise of the wheels brought

Page 2159

the girl's face round to me. She was one of those who were babies in the tents when I was a boy. We were too far apart for me to read her features. I lay back in the carriage, thinking that it would have been better for my poor little wild friend if I had never crossed the shadow of her tents. A life caught out of its natural circle is as much in danger of being lost as a limb given to a wheel in spinning machinery; so it occurred to me, until I reflected that Prince Ernest might make the same remark, and deplore the damage done to the superior machinery likewise.

My movements appeared to interest the girl. She was up on a mound of the fast-purpling heath, shading her eyes to watch me, when I called at Bulsted lodge-gates to ask for a bed under Julia's roof that night. Her bare legs twinkled in a nimble pace on the way to Durstan Hall, as if she was determined to keep me in sight. I waved my hand to her. She stopped. A gipsy's girl's figure is often as good an index to her mind as her face, and I perceived that she had not taken my greeting favourably; nor would she advance a step to my repeated beckonings; I tried hat, handkerchief, purse, in vain. My driver observed that she was taken with a fit of the obstinacy of 'her lot.' He shouted, 'Silver,' and then 'Fortune.' She stood looking. The fellow discoursed on the nature of gipsies. Foxes were kept for hunting, he said; there was reason in that. Why we kept gipsies none could tell. He once backed a gipsy prizefighter, who failed to keep his appointment. 'Heart sunk too low below his belt, sir. You can't reckon on them for performances. And that same man afterwards fought the gamest fight in the chronicles o' the Ring! I knew he had it in him. But they're like nothing better than the weather; you can't put money on 'em and feel safe.' Consequently he saw no good in them.

'She sticks to her post,' he said, as we turned into the Durstan grounds. The girl was like a flag-staff on the upper line of heathland.

Heriot was strolling, cigar in mouth, down one of the diminutive alleys of young fir in this upstart estate. He affected to be prepossessed by the case between me and Edbury, and would say nothing of his own affairs, save that he meant to try for service in one of the Continental armies; he whose susceptible love for his country was almost a malady. But he had given himself to women it was Cissy this, Trichy that, and the wiles of a Florence, the spites of an Agatha, duperies, innocent-seemings, witcheries, reptile-tricks of the fairest of women, all through his conversation. He had so saturated himself with the resources, evasions, and desperate cruising of these light creatures of wind, tide, and tempest, that, like one who has been gazing on the whirligoround, he saw the whole of women running or only waiting for a suitable partner to run the giddy ring to perdition and an atoning pathos.

Page 2160

I cut short one of Heriot's narratives by telling him that this picking bones of the dish was not to my taste. He twitted me with turning parson. I spoke of Kiomi. Heriot flushed, muttering, 'The little devil!' with his usual contemplative relish of devilry. We parted, feeling that severe tension of the old links keeping us together which indicates the lack of new ones: a point where simple affection must bear the strain of friendship if it can. Heriot had promised to walk half-way with me to Bulsted, in spite of Lady Maria's childish fears of some attack on him. He was now satisfied with a good-bye at the hall-doors, and he talked ostentatiously of a method that he had to bring Edbury up to the mark. I knew that same loud decreeing talk to be a method on his own behalf of concealing his sensitive resentment at the tone I had adopted: Lady Maria's carriage had gone to fetch her husband from a political dinner. My portmanteau advised me to wait for its return. Durstan and Riversley were at feud, however, owing to some powerful rude English used toward the proprietor of the former place by the squire; so I thought it better to let one of the grooms shoulder my luggage, and follow him.

The night was dark; he chose the roadway, and I crossed the heath, meeting an exhilarating high wind that made my blood race: Egoism is not peculiar to any period of life; it is only especially curious in a young man beginning to match himself against his elders, for in him it suffuses the imagination; he is not merely selfishly sentient, or selfishly scheming: his very conceptions are selfish. I remember walking at my swiftest pace, blaming everybody I knew for insufficiency, for want of subordination to my interests, for poverty of nature, grossness, blindness to the fine lights shining in me; I blamed the Fates for harassing me, circumstances for not surrounding me with friends worthy of me. The central 'I' resembled the sun of this universe, with the difference that it shrieked for nourishment, instead of dispensing it.

My monstrous conceit of elevation will not suffer condensation into sentences. What I can testify to is, that for making you bless the legs you stand on, a knockdown blow is a specific. I had it before I knew that a hand was up. I should have fancied that I had run athwart a tree, but for the recollection, as I was reeling to the ground, of a hulk of a fellow suddenly fronting me, and he did not hesitate with his fist. I went over and over into a heathery hollow. The wind sang shrill through the furzes; nothing was visible but black clumps, black cloud. Astonished though I was, and shaken, it flashed through me that this was not the attack of a highwayman. He calls upon you to stand and deliver: it is a foe that hits without warning. The blow took me on the forehead, and might have been worse. Not seeing the enemy, curiosity was almost as strong in me as anger; but reflecting that I had injured no

Page 2161

one I knew of, my nerves were quickly at the right pitch. Brushing some spikes of furze off my hands, I prepared for it. A cry rose. My impression seemed to be all backward, travelling up to me a moment or two behind time. I recognised a strange tongue in the cry, but too late that it was Romany to answer it. Instantly a voice was audible above the noisy wind: 'I spot him.' Then began some good and fair fighting. I got my footing on grass, and liked the work. The fellow facing me was unmistakably gipsy-build. I, too, had length of arm, and a disposition to use it by hitting straight out, with footing firm, instead of dodging and capering, which told in my favour, and is decidedly the best display of the noble art on a dark night.

My dancer went over as neatly as I had preceded him; and therewith I considered enough was done for vengeance. The thrill of a salmon on the gut is known to give a savage satisfaction to our original nature; it is but an extension and attenuation of the hearty contentment springing from a thorough delivery of the fist upon the prominent features of an assailant that yields to it perforce. Even when you receive such perfect blows you are half satisfied. Feeling conqueror, my wrath was soothed; I bent to have a look at my ruffian, and ask him what cause of complaint gipsies camping on Durstan could find against Riversley. A sharp stroke on the side of my neck sent me across his body. He bit viciously. In pain and desperation I flew at another of the tawny devils. They multiplied. I took to my heels; but this was the vainest of stratagems, they beat me in nimbleness. Four of them were round me when I wheeled breathless to take my chance at fighting the odds. Fiery men have not much notion of chivalry: gipsies the least of all. They yelled disdain of my summons to them to come on one by one: 'Now they had caught me, now they would pay me, now they would pound me; and, standing at four corners, they commended me to think of becoming a jelly. Four though they were, they kept their positions; they left it to me to rush in for a close; the hinder ones held out of arms' reach so long as I was disengaged. I had perpetually to shift my front, thinking—Oh, for a stick! any stout bit of timber! My fists ached, and a repetition of nasty dull knocks on back and neck, slogging thumps dealt by men getting to make sure of me, shattered my breathing.

I cried out for a pause, offered to take a couple of them at a time: I challenged three-the fourth to bide. I was now the dancer: left, right, and roundabout I had to swing, half-stunned, half-strangled with gorge. Those terrible blows in the back did the mischief. Sickness threatened to undermine me. Boxers have breathing-time: I had none. Stiff and sick, I tried to run; I tottered, I stood to be knocked down, I dropped like a log-careless of life. But I smelt earth keenly, and the damp grass and the devil's play of their feet on my chin, chest, and thighs, revived a fit of wrath

Page 2162

enough to set me staggering on my legs again. They permitted it, for the purpose of battering me further. I passed from down to up mechanically, and enjoyed the chestful of air given me in the interval of rising: thought of Germany and my father, and Janet at her window, complacently; raised a child's voice in my throat for mercy, quite inaudible, and accepted my punishment. One idea I had was, that I could not possibly fail as a speaker after this—I wanted but a minute's grace to fetch breath for an oration, beginning, 'You fools!' for I guessed that they had fallen upon the wrong man. Not a second was allowed. Soon the shrewd physical bracing, acting momentarily on my brain, relaxed; the fitful illumination ceased: all ideas faded out-clung about my beaten body-fled. The body might have been tossed into its grave, for aught I knew.

CHAPTER XLVI

AMONG GIPSY WOMEN

I cannot say how long it was after my senses had gone when I began to grope for them on the warmest of heaving soft pillows, and lost the slight hold I had on them with the effort. Then came a series of climbings and fallings, risings to the surface and sinkings fathoms below. Any attempt to speculate pitched me back into darkness. Gifted with a pair of enormous eyes, which threw surrounding objects to a distance of a mile away, I could not induce the diminutive things to approach; and shutting eyes led to such a rolling of mountains in my brain, that, terrified by the gigantic revolution, I lay determinedly staring; clothed, it seemed positive, in a tight-fitting suit of sheet-lead; but why? I wondered why, and immediately received an extinguishing blow. My pillow was heavenly; I was constantly being cooled on it, and grew used to hear a croon no more musical than the unstopped reed above my head; a sound as of a breeze about a cavern's mouth, more soothing than a melody. Conjecture of my state, after hovering timidly in dread of relapses, settled and assured me I was lying baked, half-buried in an old river-bed; moss at my cheek, my body inextricable; water now and then feebly striving to float me out, with horrid pain, with infinite refreshingness. A shady light, like the light through leafage, I could see; the water I felt. Why did it keep trying to move me? I questioned and sank to the depths again.

The excruciated patient was having his wet bandages folded across his bruises, and could not bear a motion of the mind.

The mind's total apathy was the sign of recovering health. Kind nature put that district to sleep while she operated on the disquieted lower functions. I looked on my later self as one observes the mossy bearded substances travelling blind along the undercurrent of the stream, clinging to this and that, twirling absurdly.

Page 2163

Where was I? Not in a house. But for my condition of absolute calm, owing to skilful treatment, open air, and physical robustness, the scene would have been of a kind to scatter the busy little workmen setting up the fabric of my wits. A lighted oil-cup stood on a tripod in the middle of a tent-roof, and over it the creased neck and chin of a tall old woman, splendid in age, reddened vividly; her black eyes and grey brows, and greyishblack hair fell away in a dusk of their own. I thought her marvellous. Something she held in her hands that sent a thin steam between her and the light. Outside, in the A cutting of the tent's threshold, a heavy-coloured sunset hung upon dark land. My pillow meantime lifted me gently at a regular measure, and it was with untroubled wonder that I came to the knowledge of a human heart beating within it. So soft could only be feminine; so firm still young. The bosom was Kiomi's. A girl sidled at the opening of the tent, peeping in, and from a mufed rattle of subpectoral thunder discharged at her in quick heated snaps, I knew Kiomi's voice. After an altercation of their monotonous gipsy undertones, the girl dropped and crouched outside.

It was morning when I woke next, stronger, and aching worse. I was lying in the air, and she who served for nurse, pillow, parasol, and bank of herbage, had her arms round beneath mine cherishingly, all the fingers outspread and flat on me, just as they had been when I went to sleep.

'Kiomi!'

'Now, you be quiet.'

'Can I stand up a minute or two?'

'No, and you won't talk.'

I submitted. This was our duel all day: she slipped from me only twice, and when she did the girl took her place.

I began to think of Bulsted and Riversley.

'Kiomi, how long have I been here?'

'You 'll be twice as long as you've been.'

'A couple of days?'

'More like a dozen.'

'Just tell me what happened.'

'Ghm-m-m,' she growled admonishingly.

Reflecting on it, I felt sure there must have been searching parties over the heath.

‘Kiomi, I say, how was it they missed me?’

She struck at once on my thought.

‘They’re fools.’

‘How did you cheat them?’

‘I didn’t tie a handkercher across their eyes.’

‘You half smothered me once, in the combe.’

‘You go to sleep.’

‘Have you been doctor?’

The growling tigerish ‘Ghm-m-m’ constrained me to take it for a lullaby.

‘Kiomi, why the deuce did your people attack me?’ She repeated the sound resembling that which sometimes issues from the vent of a mine; but I insisted upon her answering.

’I ‘ll put you down and be off,’ she threatened.

‘Brute of a girl! I hate you!’

‘Hate away.’

‘Tell me who found me.’

‘I shan’t. You shut your peepers.’

Page 2164

The other and younger girl sung out: ‘I found you.’

Kiomi sent a volley at her.

‘I did,’ said the girl; ’yes, and I nursed you first, I did; and mother doctored you. Kiomi hasn’t been here a day.’

The old mother came out of the tent. She felt my pulse, and forthwith squatted in front of me. ‘You’re hard to kill, and oily as a bean,’ said she. ’You’ve only to lie quiet in the sun like a handsome gentleman; I’m sure you couldn’t wish for more. Air and water’s the doctor for such as you. You’ve got the bound in you to jump the ditch: don’t you fret at it, or you’ll lose your spring, my good gentleman.’

‘Leave off talking to me as a stranger,’ I bawled. ’Out with it; why have you kept me here? Why did your men pitch into me?’

‘*Our* men, my good gentleman!’ the old woman ejaculated. There was innocence indeed! sufficient to pass the whole tribe before a bench of magistrates. She wheedled: ’What have they against a handsome gentleman like you? They’d run for you fifty mile a day, and show you all their tricks and secrets for nothing.’

My despot Kiomi fired invectives at her mother. The old mother retorted; the girl joined in. All three were scowling, flashing, showing teeth, driving the wordy javelin upon one another, indiscriminately, or two to one, without a pause; all to a sound like the slack silver string of the fiddle.

I sang out truce to them; they racked me with laughter; and such laughter!—the shaking of husks in a half-empty sack.

Ultimately, on a sudden cessation of the storm of tongues, they agreed that I must have my broth.

Sheer weariness, seasoned with some hope that the broth would give me strength to mount on my legs and walk, persuaded me to drink it. Still the old mother declared that none of her men would ever have laid hands on me. Why should they? she asked. What had I done to them? Was it their way?

Kiomi’s arms tightened over my breast. The involuntary pressure was like an illumination to me.

No longer asking for the grounds of the attack on a mistaken person, and bowing to the fiction that none of the tribe had been among my assailants, I obtained information. The girl Eveleen had spied me entering Durstan. Quite by chance, she was concealed near Bulsted Park gates when the groom arrived and told the lodge-keeper that Mr. Harry Richmond was coming up over the heath, and might have lost his way. ‘Richmond!’ the

girl threw a world of meaning into the unexpected name. Kiomi clutched me to her bosom, but no one breathed the name we had in our thoughts.

Page 2165

Eveleen and the old mother had searched for me upon the heath, and having haled me head and foot to their tent, despatched a message to bring Kiomi down from London to aid them in their desperate shift. They knew Squire Beltham's temper. He would have scattered the tribe to the shores of the kingdom at a rumour of foul play to his grandson. Kiomi came in time to smuggle me through an inspection of the tent and cross-examination of its ostensible denizens by Captain Bulsted, who had no suspicions, though he was in a state of wonderment. Hearing all this, I was the first to say it would be better I should get out of the neighbourhood as soon as my legs should support me. The grin that goes for a laugh among gipsies followed my question of how Kiomi had managed to smuggle me. Eveleen was my informant when the dreaded Kiomi happened to be off duty for a minute. By a hasty transformation, due to a nightcap on the bandages about the head, and an old petticoat over my feet, Captain William's insensible friend was introduced to him as the sore sick great-grandmother of the tribe, mother of Kiomi's mother, aged ninety-one. The captain paid like a man for doctor and burial fees; he undertook also to send the old lady a pound of snuff to assist her to a last sneeze or two on the right side of the grave, and he kept his word; for, deeming it necessary to paint her in a characteristic, these prodigious serpents told him gravely that she delighted in snuff; it was almost the only thing that kept her alive, barring a sip of broth. Captain William's comment on the interesting piece of longevity whose well-covered length and framework lay exposed to his respectful contemplation, was, that she must have been a devilish fine old lady in her day. 'Six foot' was given as her measurement.

One pound of snuff, a bottle of rum, and five sovereigns were the fruits of the captain's sensibility. I shattered my ribs with laughter over the story. Eveleen dwelt on the triumph, twinkling. Kiomi despised laughter or triumph resulting from the natural exercise of craft in an emergency. 'But my handsome gentleman he won't tell on us, will he, when we've nursed him and doctored him, and made him one of us, and as good a stick o' timber as grows in the forest?' whined the old mother. I had to swear I would not.

'He!' cried Kiomi.

'He may forget us when he's gone,' the mother said. She would have liked me to kiss a book to seal the oath. Anxiety about the safety of their 'homes,' that is, the assurance of an untroubled reception upon their customary camping-ground, is a peculiarity of the gipsies, distinguishing them, equally with their cleanliness and thriftiness, from mumpers and the common wanderers.

It is their tribute to civilization, which generally keeps them within the laws.

Page 2166

Who that does not know them will believe that under their domestic system I had the best broth and the best tea I have ever tasted! They are very cunning brewers and sagacious buyers too; their maxims show them to direct all their acuteness upon obtaining quality for their money. A compliment not backed by silver is hardly intelligible to the pretty ones: money is a really credible thing to them; and when they have it, they know how to use it. Apparently because they know so well, so perfectly appreciating it, they have only vague ideas of a corresponding sentiment on the opposite side to the bargain, and imagine that they fool people much more often than they succeed in doing. Once duped themselves, they are the wariest of the dog-burnt; the place is notched where it occurred, and for ever avoided. On the other hand, they repose implicit faith in a reputation vouched for by their experience. I was amused by the girl Eveleen's dotting of houses over the breadth of five counties, where for this and that article of apparel she designed to expend portions of a golden guinea, confident that she would get the very best, and a shilling besides. The unwonted coin gave her the joy of supposing she cheated the Mint of that sum. This guinea was a present to the girl (to whom I owed my thrashing, by the way) that excused itself under cover of being a bribe for sight of a mirror interdicted by the implacable Kiomi. I wanted to have a look at my face. Now that the familiar scenes were beginning to wear their original features to me, my dread of personal hideousness was distressing, though Eveleen declared the bad blood in my cheeks and eyes 'had been sucked by pounds of red meat.' I wondered, whether if I stood up and walked to either one of the three great halls lying in an obtuse triangle within view, I should easily be recognized. When I did see myself, I groaned verily. With the silence of profound resignation, I handed back to Eveleen the curious fragment of her boudoir, which would have grimaced at Helen of Troy.

'You're feeling your nose—you've been looking at a glass!' Kiomi said, with supernatural swiftness of deduction on her return.

She added for my comfort that nothing was broken, but confessed me to be still 'a sight'; and thereupon drove knotty language at Eveleen. The girl retorted, and though these two would never acknowledge to me that any of their men had been in this neighbourhood recently, the fact was treated as a matter of course in their spiteful altercation, and each saddled the other with the mistake they had committed. Eveleen snatched the last word. What she said I did not comprehend, she must have hit hard. Kiomi's eyes lightened, and her lips twitched; she coloured like the roofing smoke of the tent fire; twice she showed her teeth, as in a spasm, struck to the heart, unable to speak, breathing in and out of a bitterly disjoined mouth. Eveleen ran. I guessed at the ill-word spoken. Kiomi sat eyeing the wood-ashes, a devouring gaze that shot straight and read but one thing. They who have seen wild creatures die will have her before them, saving the fiery eyes. She became an ashen-colour, I took her little hand. Unconscious of me, her brown fingers clutching at mine, she flung up her nostrils, craving air.

Page 2167

This was the picture of the woman who could not weep in her misery.

‘Kiomi, old friend!’ I called to her. I could have cursed that other friend, the son of mischief; for she, I could have sworn, had been fiercely and wantonly hunted. Chastity of nature, intense personal pride, were as proper to her as the free winds are to the heaths: they were as visible to dull divination as the milky blue about the iris of her eyeballs. She had actually no animal vileness, animal though she might be termed, and would have appeared if compared with Heriot’s admirable Cissies and Gwennies, and other ladies of the Graces that run to fall, and spend their pains more in kindling the scent of the huntsman than in effectively flying.

There was no consolation for her.

The girl Eveleen came in sight, loitering and looking, kicking her idle heels.

Kiomi turned sharp round to me.

’I’m going. Your father’s here, up at Bulsted. I’ll see him. He won’t tell. He’ll come soon. You’ll be fit to walk in a day. You’re sound as a nail. Goodbye—I shan’t say good-bye twice,’ she answered my attempt to keep her, and passed into the tent, out of which she brought a small bundle tied in a yellow handkerchief, and walked away, without nodding or speaking.

‘What was that you said to Kiomi?’ I questioned Eveleen, who was quickly beside me.

She replied, accurately or not: ’I told her our men’d give her as good as she gave me, let her wait and see.’

Therewith she pouted; or, to sketch her with precision, ‘snouted’ would better convey the vivacity of her ugly flash of features. It was an error in me to think her heartless. She talked of her aunt Kiomi affectionately, for a gipsy girl, whose modulated tones are all addressed to the soft public. Eveleen spoke with the pride of bated breath of the ferocious unforgivingness of their men. Perhaps if she had known that I traced the good repute of the tribes for purity to the sweeter instincts of the women, she would have eulogized her sex to amuse me. Gipsy girls, like other people, are fond of showing off; but it would have been a victory of education to have helped her to feel the distinction of the feminine sense of shame half as awfully and warmly as she did the inscrutable iron despotism of the males. She hinted that the mistake of which I had been the victim would be rectified.

‘Tell your men I’ll hunt them down like rats if I hear of it,’ said I.

While we were conversing my father arrived. Eveleen, not knowing him, would have had me accept the friendly covering of a mat.

’Here ‘s a big one! he’s a clergyman,’ she muttered to herself, and ran to him and set up a gipsy whine, fronting me up to the last step while she advanced; she only yielded ground to my outcry.

My father bent over me. Kiomi had prepared him for what he saw. I quieted his alarm by talking currently and easily. Julia Bulsted had despatched a messenger to inform him of my mysterious disappearance; but he, as his way was, revelling in large conjectures, had half imagined me seized by a gust of passion, and bound for Germany. ‘Without my luggage?’ I laughed.

Page 2168

‘Ay, without your luggage, Richie,’ he answered seriously. His conceit of a better knowledge of me than others possessed, had buoyed him up. ’For I knew,’ he said, ’we two do nothing like the herd of men. I thought you were off to her, my boy. Now!’ he looked at me, and this look of dismay was a perfect mirror. I was not a presentable object.

He stretched his limbs on the heather and kept hold of my hand, looking and talking watchfully, doctor-like, doubting me to be as sound in body as I assured him I was, despite aches and pains. Eveleen hung near.

‘These people have been kind to you?’ he said.

‘No, the biggest brutes on the earth,’ said I.

’Oh! you say that, when I spotted you out in the dark where you might have lied to be eaten, and carried you and washed your bloody face, and watched you, and never slept, I didn’t, to mother you and wet your head!’ cried the girl.

My father beckoned to her and thanked her appreciably in the yellow tongue.

’So these scoundrels of the high road fell upon you and robbed you, Richie?’

I nodded.

’You let him think they robbed you, and you had your purse to give me a gold guinea out of it!’ Eveleen cried, and finding herself in the wrong track, volubly resumed: ’That they didn’t, for they hadn’t time, whether they meant to, and the night black as a coal, whoever they were.’

The mystery of my not having sent word to Bulsted or to Riversley perplexed my father.

‘Comfortable here!’ he echoed me, disconsolately, and glanced at the heath, the tent, the black circle of the broth-pot, and the wild girl.

CHAPTER XLVII

MY FATHER ACTS THE CHARMER AGAIN

Kiomi’s mother was seen in a turn of the gravel-cutting, bearing purchases from Durstan village. She took the new circumstances in with a single cast up of her wary eyelids; and her, and her skill in surgery and art in medicine, I praised to lull her fears, which procured me the denomination of old friend, as well as handsome gentleman: she went so far as to add, in a fit of natural warmth, nice fellow; and it is the truth, that this term effected wonders in flattering me: it seemed to reveal to me how simple it was for Harry

Richmond, one whom gipsies could think a nice fellow, to be the lord of Janet's affections—to be her husband. My heart throbbed; yet she was within range of a mile and a half, and I did not wish to be taken to her. I did wish to smell the piney air about the lake-palace; but the thought of Ottilia caused me no quick pulsations.

Page 2169

My father remained an hour. He could not perceive the drift of my objection to go either to Bulsted or to Riversley, and desire that my misadventure should be unknown at those places. However, he obeyed me, as I could always trust him to do scrupulously, and told a tale at Bulsted. In the afternoon he returned in a carriage to convey me to the seaside. When I was raised I fainted, and saw the last of the camp on Durstan much as I had come to it first. Sickness and swimming of the head continued for several days. I was persecuted with the sensation of the carriage journey, and an iteration of my father's that ran: 'My son's inanimate body in my arms,' or 'Clasping the lifeless body of my sole son, Harry Richmond,' and other variations. I said nothing about it. He told me aghast that I had spat blood. A battery of eight fists, having it in the end all its own way, leaves a deeper indentation on its target than a pistol-shot that passes free of the vital chords. My convalescence in Germany was a melody compared with this. I ought to have stopped in the tent, according to the wise old mother's advice, given sincerely, for prudence counselled her to strike her canvas and be gone. There I should have lain, interested in the progress of a bee, the course of a beetle or a cloud, a spider's business, and the shaking of the gorse and the heather, until good health had grown out of thoughtlessness. The very sight of my father was as a hive of humming troubles.

His intense anxiety about me reflected in my mind the endless worry I had concerning him. It was the intellect which condemned him when he wore a joyful air, and the sensations when he waxed over-solicitous. Whether or not the sentences were just, the judges should have sometimes shifted places. I was unable to divine why he fevered me so much. Must I say it?—He had ceased to entertain me. Instead of a comic I found him a tragic spectacle; and his exuberant anticipations, his bursting hopes that fed their forcing-bed with the blight and decay of their predecessors, his transient fits of despair after a touch at my pulses, and exclamation of 'Oh, Richie, Richie, if only I had my boy up and well!'—assuming that nothing but my tardy recovery stood in the way of our contentment—were examples of downright unreason such as contemplation through the comic glass would have excused; the tragic could not. I knew, nevertheless, that to the rest of the world he was a progressive comedy: and the knowledge made him seem more tragic still. He clearly could not learn from misfortune; he was not to be contained. Money I gave him freely, holding the money at my disposal his own; I chafed at his unteachable spirit, surely one of the most tragical things in life; and the proof of my love for him was that I thought it so, though I should have been kinder had he amused me, as in the old days.

Page 2170

Conceive to yourself the keeping watch over a fountain choked in its spouting, incessantly labouring to spin a jet into the air; now for a moment glittering and towering in a column, and once more straining to mount. My father appeared to me in that and other images. He would have had me believe him shooting to his zenith, victorious at last. I likewise was to reap a victory of the highest kind from the attack of the mysterious ruffians; so much; he said, he thought he could assure me of. He chattered of an intimidated Government, and Dettermain and Newson; duchesses, dukes, most friendly; innumerable invitations to country castles; and among other things one which really showed him to be capable of conceiving ideas and working from an initiative. But this, too, though it accomplished a temporary service, he rendered illusory to me by his unhappy manner of regarding it as an instance of his now permanent social authority. He had instituted what he called his *jury of honour court*, composed of the select gentlemen of the realm, ostensibly to weigh the causes of disputes between members of their class, and decree the method of settlement: but actually, my father admitted, to put a stop to the affair between Edbury and me.

'That was the origin of the notion, Richie. I carried it on. I dined some of the best men of our day. I seized the opportunity when our choicest "emperor" was rolling on wheels to propound my system. I mention the names of Bramham DeWitt, Colonel Hibbert Segrave, Lord Alonzo Carr, Admiral Loftus, the Earl of Luton, the Marquis of Hatchford, Jack Hippony, Monterez Williams,—I think you know him?—and little Dick Phillimore, son of a big-wig, a fellow of a capital wit and discretion; I mention them as present to convince you we are not triflers, dear boy. My argument ran, it is absurd to fight; also it is intolerable to be compelled to submit to insult. As the case stands, we are under a summary edict of the citizens, to whom chivalry is unknown. Well, well, I delivered a short speech. Fighting, I said, resembled butting,—a performance proper to creatures that grow horns instead of brains . . not to allude to a multitude of telling remarks; and the question "Is man a fighting animal?" my answer being that he is not born with spurs on his heels or horns to his head and that those who insisted on fighting should be examined by competent anatomists, "ologists" of some sort, to decide whether they have the excrescences, and proclaim them . . . touching on these lighter parts of my theme with extreme delicacy. But—and here I dwelt on my point: Man, if not a fighting animal in his glorious—I forgot what—is a sensitive one, and has the idea of honour. "Hear," from Colonel Segrave, and Sir Weeton Slaterhe was one of the party. In fine, Richie, I found myself wafted into a breathing oration. I cannot, I confess it humbly, hear your "hear, hear," without going up and off, inflated like a balloon.

Page 2171

“Shall the arbitration of the magistracy, indemnifications in money awarded by the Law-courts, succeed in satisfying,”—but I declare to you, Richie, it was no platform speech. I know your term—“the chaincable sentence.” Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Plain sense, as from gentlemen to gentlemen. We require, I said, a protection that the polite world of Great Britain does not now afford us against the aggressions of the knave, the fool, and the brute. We establish a Court. We do hereby—no, no, not the “hereby”; quite simply, Richie—pledge ourselves—I said some other word not “pledge” to use our utmost authority and influence to exclude from our circles persons refusing to make the reparation of an apology for wanton common insults: we renounce intercourse with men declining, when guilty of provoking the sentiment of hostility, to submit to the jurisdiction of our Court. All I want you to see is the notion. We raise the shield against the cowardly bully which the laws have raised against the bloody one. “And gentlemen,"' my father resumed his oration, forgetting my sober eye for a minute—-'"Gentlemen, we are the ultimate Court of Appeal for men who cherish their honour, yet abstain from fastening it like a millstone round the neck of their common-sense.” Credit me, Richie, the proposition kindled. We cited Lord Edbury to appear before us, and I tell you we extracted an ample apology to you from that young nobleman. And let me add, one that I, that we, must impose it upon an old son to accept. He does! Come, come. And you shall see, Richie, society shall never repose an inert mass under my leadership. I cure it; I shake it and cure it.’

He promenaded the room, repeating: ’I do not say I am possessed of a panacea,’ and bending to my chin as he passed; ’I maintain that I can and do fulfil the duties of my station, which is my element, attained in the teeth of considerable difficulties, as no other man could, be he prince or Prime Minister. Not one,’ he flourished, stepping onward. ’And mind you, Richie, this,’ he swung round, conscious as ever of the critic in me, though witless to correct his pomp of style, ’this is not self-glorification. I point you facts. I have a thousand schemes—projects. I recognize the value of early misfortune. The particular misfortune of princes born is that they know nothing of the world—-babies! I grant you, babies. Now, I do. I have it on my thumbnail. I know its wants. And just as I succeeded in making you a member of our Parliament in assembly, and the husband of an hereditary princess—hear me—so will I make good my original determination to be in myself the fountain of our social laws, and leader. I have never, I believe—to speak conscientiously—failed in a thing I have once determined on.’

Page 2172

The single wish that I might be a boy again, to find pleasure in his talk, was all that remained to combat the distaste I had for such oppressive deliveries of a mind apparently as little capable of being seated as a bladder charged with gas. I thanked him for getting rid of Edbury, and a touch of remorse pricked me, it is true, on his turning abruptly and saying: 'You see me in my nakedness, Richie. To you and my valet, the heart, the body!' He was too sympathetic not to have a keen apprehension of a state of hostility in one whom he loved. If I had inclined to melt, however, his next remark would have been enough to harden me: 'I have fought as many battles, and gained as startling victories as Napoleon Buonaparte; he was an upstart.' The word gave me a jerk.

Sometimes he would indulge me transparently in a political controversy, confessing that my dialectical dexterity went far to make a Radical of him. I had no other amusement, or I should have held my peace. I tried every argument I could think of to prove to him that there was neither honour, nor dignity, nor profit in aiming at titular distinctions not forced upon us by the circumstances of our birth. He kept his position with much sly fencing, approaching shrewdness; and, whatever I might say, I could not deny that a vile old knockknee'd world, tugging its forelock to the look of rank and chink of wealth, backed him, if he chose to be insensible to radical dignity.

'In my time,' said he, 'all young gentlemen were born Tories. The doctor no more expected to see a Radical come into the world from a good family than a radish. But I discern you, my dear boy. Our reigning Families must now be active; they require the discipline I have undergone; and I also dine at aldermen's tables, and lay a foundation-stone—as Jorian says—with the facility of a hen-mother: that should not suffice them. 'Tis not sufficient for me. I lay my stone, eat my dinner, make my complimentary speech—and that is all that is expected of us; but I am fully aware we should do more. We must lead, or we are lost. Ay, and—to quote you a Lord Mayor's barge is a pretty piece of gilt for the festive and luxurious to run up the river Thames in and mark their swans. I am convinced there is something deep in that. But what am I to do? Would you have me frown upon the people? Richie, it is prudent—I maintain it righteous, nay, it is, I affirm positively, sovereign wisdom—to cultivate every flower in the British bosom. Riposte me—have you too many? Say yes, and you pass my guard. You cannot. I fence you there. This British loyalty is, in my estimation, absolutely beautiful. We grow to a head in our old England. The people have an eye! I need no introduction to them. We reciprocate a highly cordial feeling when they line the streets and roads with respectful salutations, and I acknowledge their demonstrative goodwill. These things make us a nation. By heaven, Richie, you are, on this occasion,

Page 2173

if your dad may tell you so, wrong. I ask pardon for my bluntness; but I put it to you, could we, not travelling as personages in our well-beloved country, count on civility to greet us everywhere? Assuredly not. My position is, that by consenting to their honest enthusiasm, we the identical effect you are perpetually crying out for—we civilize them, we civilize them. Goodness!—a Great Britain without Royalty!'

He launched on a series of desolate images. In the end, he at least persuaded himself that he had an idea in his anxiety to cultivate the primary British sentiment.

We moved from town to town along the South coast; but it was vain to hope we might be taken for simple people. Nor was he altogether to blame, except in allowing the national instinct for 'worship and reverence' to air itself unrebuked. I fled to the island. Temple ran down to meet me there, and I heard that Janet had written to him for news of me. He entered our hotel a private person; when he passed out, hats flew off before him. The modest little fellow went along a double line of attentive observers on the pier, and came back, asking me in astonishment who he was supposed to be.

'I petitioned for privacy here!' exclaimed my father. It accounted for the mystery.

Temple knew my feelings, and did but glance at me.

Close upon Temple's arrival we had a strange couple of visitors. 'Mistress Dolly Disher and her husband,' my father introduced them. She called him by one of his Christian names inadvertently at times. The husband was a confectioner, a satisfied shade of a man who reserved the exercise of his will for his business, we learnt; she, a bustling, fresh-faced woman of forty-five, with still expressive dark eyes, and, I guessed, the ideal remainder of a passion in her bosom. The guess was no great hazard. She was soon sitting beside me, telling me of the 'years' she had known my father, and of the most affectionate friend and perfect gentleman he was of the ladies who had been in love with him; 'no wonder': and of his sorrows and struggles, and his beautiful voice, and hearts that bled for him; and of one at least who prayed and trusted he would be successful at last.

Temple and the pallid confectioner spent the day on board a yacht with my father. Mrs. Dolly stayed to nurse me and persuade me to swallow medicine. She talked of her youth, when, as a fashionable bootmaker's daughter, she permitted no bills to be sent in to Mr. Richmond, alleging, as a sufficient reason for it to her father, that their family came from Richmond in Yorkshire. Eventually, the bills were always paid. She had not been able to manage her husband so well; and the consequence was, that (she breathed low) an execution was out; 'though I tell him,' she said tremulously, 'he 's sure to be paid in the long run, if only he'll wait. But no; he is you cannot think how obstinate in his business. And my girl Augusta waiting for Mr.

Page 2174

Roy Richmond, the wish of our hearts! to assist at her wedding; and can we ask it, and have an execution hanging over him? And for all my husband's a guest here, he's as likely as not to set the officers at work, do what I will, to-morrow or any day. Your father invited us, Mr. Harry. I forced my husband to come, hoping against hope; for your papa gave the orders, relying on me, as he believed he might, and my husband undertook them, all through me. There it stops; he hears reports, and he takes fright: in goes the bill: then it's law, and last Oh! I'm ashamed.'

Mr. Disher's bill was for supplying suppers to the Balls. He received my cheque for the amount in full, observing that he had been confident his wife was correct when she said it would be paid, but a tradesman's business was to hasten the day of payment; and, for a penance, he himself would pacify the lawyers.

On hearing of the settlement of Mr. Disher's claim, my father ahem'd, speechless, which was a sign of his swallowing vexation. He remarked that I had, no doubt with the best intentions, encroached on his liberty. 'I do not like to have my debts disturbed.' He put it to me, whether a man, carrying out a life-long plan, would not be disconcerted by the friendliest intervention. This payment to Disher he pronounced fatal in policy. 'You have struck a heavy blow to my credit, Richie. Good little Mistress Dolly brought the man down here—no select addition to our society—and we were doing our utmost to endure him, as the ladies say, for the very purpose . . . but the error stands committed! For the future, friend Disher will infallibly expect payments within the year. Credit for suppers is the guarantee of unlimited entertainments. And I was inspiring him with absolute confidence for next year's campaign. Money, you are aware, is no longer a question to terrify me. I hold proofs that I have conclusively frightened Government, and you know it. But this regards the manipulation of the man Disher. He will now dictate to me. A refresher of a few hundreds would have been impolitic to this kind of man; but the entire sum! and to a creditor in arms! You reverse the proper situations of gentleman and tradesman. My supperman, in particular, should be taught to understand that he is bound up in my success. Something frightened him; he proceeded at law; and now we have shown him that he has frightened us. An execution? My dear boy, I have danced an execution five years running, and ordered, consecutively, at the same house. Like other matters, an execution depends upon how you treat it. The odds are that we have mortally offended Mistress Dolly.' He apologized for dwelling on the subject, with the plea that it was an essential part of his machinery of action, and the usual comparison of 'the sagacious General' whose forethought omitted no minutiae. I had to listen.

Page 2175

The lady professed to be hurt. The payment, however, put an end to the visit of this couple. Politic or not, it was a large sum to disburse, and once more my attention became fixed on the probable display of figures in my bankers' book. Bonds and bills were falling due: the current expenses were exhausting. I tried to face the evil, and take a line of conduct, staggering, as I did on my feet. Had I been well enough, I believe I should have gone to my grandfather, to throw myself on his good-nature; such was the brain's wise counsel: but I was all nerves and alarms, insomuch that I interdicted Temple's writing to Janet, lest it should bring on me letters from my aunt Dorothy, full of advice that could no longer be followed, well-meant cautions that might as well be addressed to the mile-posts behind me. Moreover, Janet would be flying on the wind to me, and I had a craving for soft arms and the look of her eyebrows, that warned me to keep her off if I intended to act as became a man of good faith.

Fair weather, sunny green sea-water speckled with yachts shooting and bounding, and sending me the sharp sense of life there is in dashed-up fountains of silvery salt-spray, would have quickened my blood sooner but for this hot-bed of fruitless adventure, tricksy precepts, and wisdom turned imp, in which my father had again planted me. To pity him seemed a childish affectation. His praise of my good looks pleased me, for on that point he was fitted to be a judge, and I was still fancying I had lost them on the heath. Troops of the satellites of his grand parade surrounded him. I saw him walk down the pier like one breaking up a levee. At times he appeared to me a commanding phantasm in the midst of phantasm figures of great ladies and their lords, whose names he told off on his return like a drover counting his herd; but within range of his eye and voice the reality of him grew overpowering. It seduced me, and, despite reason, I began to feel warm under his compliments. He was like wine. Gaiety sprang under his feet. Sitting at my window, I thirsted to see him when he was out of sight, and had touches of the passion of my boyhood.

I listened credulously, too, as in the old days, when he repeated, 'You will find I am a magician, and very soon, Richie, mark me.' His manner hinted that there was a surprise in store. 'You have not been on the brink of the grave for nothing.' He resembled wine in the other conditions attached to its rare qualities. Oh for the choice of having only a little of him, instead of having him on my heart! The unfilial wish attacked me frequently: he could be, and was, so ravishing to strangers and light acquaintances. Did by chance a likeness exist between us? My sick fancy rushed to the Belthams for a denial. There did, of some sort, I knew; and the thought partitioned my dreamy ideas, of which the noblest, taking advantage of my physical weakness, compelled me to confess that it was a vain delusion

Page 2176

for one such as I to hope for Ottilia. This looking at the roots of yourself, if you are possessed of a nobler half that will do it, is a sound corrective of an excessive ambition. Unfortunately it would seem that young men can do it only in sickness. With the use of my legs, and open-air breathing, I became compact, and as hungry and zealous on behalf of my individuality, as proud of it as I had ever been: prouder and hungrier.

My first day of outing, when, looking at every face, I could reflect on the miraculous issue of mine almost clear from its pummelling, and above all, that my nose was safe—-not stamped with the pugilist's brand—inspired a lyrical ebullition of gratitude. Who so intoxicated as the convalescent catching at health?

I met Charles Etherell on the pier, and heard that my Parliamentary seat was considered in peril, together with a deal of gossip about my disappearance.

My father, who was growing markedly restless, on the watch for letters and new arrivals, started to pay Chippenden a flying visit. He begged me urgently to remain for another few days, while he gathered information, saying my presence at his chief quarters did him infinite service, and I always thought that possible. I should find he was a magician, he repeated, with a sort of hesitating fervour.

I had just waved my hand to him as the boat was bearing him away from the pier-head, when a feminine voice murmured in my ear, 'Is not this our third meeting, Mr. Harry Richmond?—Venice, Elbestadt, and the Isle of Wight?' She ran on, allowing me time to recognize Clara Goodwin. 'What was your last adventure? You have been ill. Very ill? Has it been serious?'

I made light of it. 'No: a tumble.'

'You look pale,' she said quickly.

'That's from grieving at the loss of my beauty, Miss Goodwin.'

'Have you really not been seriously ill?' she asked with an astonishing eagerness.

I told her mock-loftily that I did not believe in serious illnesses coming to godlike youth, and plied her in turn with inquiries.

'You have not been laid up in bed?' she persisted.

'No, on my honour, not in bed.'

'Then,' said she, 'I would give much to be able to stop that boat.'

She amazed me. 'Why?'

‘Because it’s going on a bad errand,’ she replied.

‘Miss Goodwin, you perplex me. My father has started in that boat.’

‘Yes, I saw him.’ She glanced hastily at the foam in a way to show indifference. ’What I am saying concerns others . . . who have heard you were dangerously ill. I have sent for them to hasten across.’

‘My aunt and Miss Ilchester?’

‘No.’

’Who are they? Miss Goodwin, I’ll answer any question. I’ve been queerish, that’s true. Now let me hear who they are, when you arrived, when you expect them. Where are they now?’

‘As to me,’ she responded with what stretched on my ears like an insufferable drawl, ’I came over last night to hire a furnished house or lodgings. Papa has an appointment attached to the fortifications yonder. We’ll leave the pier, if you please. You draw too much attention on ladies who venture to claim acquaintance with so important a gentleman.’

Page 2177

We walked the whole length of the pier, chatting of our former meetings.

‘Not here,’ she said, as soon as I began to question.

I was led farther on, half expecting that the accessories of time and place would have to do with the revelation.

The bitter creature drew me at her heels into a linendraper’s shop. There she took a seat, pitched her voice to the key of a lady’s at a dinner-table, when speaking to her cavalier of the history or attire of some one present, and said, ’You are sure the illness was not at all feigned?’

She had me as completely at her mercy in this detestable shop as if I had been in a witness-box.

‘Feigned!’ I exclaimed.

‘That is no answer. And pray remember where you are.’

‘No, the illness was not feigned.’

‘And you have not made the most of it?’

‘What an extraordinary thing to say!’

’That is no answer. And please do not imagine yourself under the necessity of acting every sentiment of your heart before these people.’

She favoured a shopman with half-a-dozen directions.

‘My answer is, then, that I have not made the most of it,’ I said.

‘Not even by proxy?’

‘Once more I’m adrift.’

’You are certainly energetic. I must address you as a brother, or it will be supposed we are quarrelling. Harry, do you like that pattern?’

‘Yes. What’s the meaning of proxy?’

’With the accent you give it, heaven only knows what it means. I would rather you did not talk here like a Frenchman relating his last love-affair in company.

Must your voice escape control exactly at the indicatory words? Do you think your father made the most of it?’

’Of my illness? Oh! yes; the utmost. I should undoubtedly think so. That’s his way.’

‘Why did you permit it?’

’I was what they call “wandering” half the time. Besides, who could keep him in check? I rarely know what he is doing.’

‘You don’t know what he wrote?’

‘Wrote?’

‘That you were dying.’

‘Of me? To whom?’

She scrutinized me, and rose from her chair. ’I must try some other shop. How is it, that if these English people cannot make a “berthe” fit to wear, they do not conceive the idea of importing such things from Paris? I will take your arm, Harry.’

‘You have bought nothing,’ I remarked.

‘I have as much as I went for,’ she replied, and gravely thanked the assistant leaning on his thumbs across the counter; after which, dropping the graceless play of an enigma, she inquired whether I had forgotten the Frau von Dittmarsch.

I had, utterly; but not her maiden name of Sibley.

‘Miss Goodwin, is she one of those who are coming to the island?’

’Frau von Dittmarsch? Yes. She takes an interest in you. She and I have been in correspondence ever since my visit to Sarkeld. It reminds me, you may vary my maiden name with the Christian, if you like. Harry, I believe you are truthful as ever, in spite—’

Page 2178

‘Don’t be unjust,’ said I.

‘I wish I could think I was!’ she rejoined. ’Frau von Dittmarsch was at Sarkeld, and received terrible news of you. She called on me, at my father’s residence over the water yonder, yesterday afternoon, desiring greatly to know—she is as cautious as one with a jewel in her custody—how it fared with you, whether you were actually in a dying state. I came here to learn; I have friends here: you were not alone, or I should have called on you. The rumour was that you were very ill; so I hired a furnished place for Frau von Dittmarsch at once. But when I saw you and him together, and the parting between you, I began to have fears; I should have countermanded the despatch I sent by the boat, had it been possible.’

‘It has gone! And tell me the name of the other.’

‘Frau von Dittmarsch has a husband.’

‘Not with her now. Oh! cruel! speak: her name?’

‘Her name, Harry?’ Her title is Countess von Delzenburg.’

‘Not princess?’

‘Not in England.’

Then Ottilia was here!

My father was indeed a magician!

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE PRINCESS ENTRAPPED

‘Not princess in England,’ could betoken but one thing—an incredible act of devotion, so great that it stunned my senses, and I thought of it, and of all it involved, before the vision of Ottilia crossing seas took possession of me.

‘The Princess Ottilia, Miss Goodwin?’

‘The Countess of Delzenburg, Harry.’

‘To see me? She has come!’

’Harry, you talk like the boy you were when we met before you knew her. Yes and yes to everything you have to say, but I think you should spare her name.’

‘She comes thinking me ill?’

‘Dying.’

‘I’m as strong as ever I was.’

‘I should imagine you are, only rather pale.’

‘Have you, tell me, Clara, seen her yourself? Is she well?’

‘Pale: not unwell: anxious.’

‘About me?’

’It may be about the political affairs of the Continent; they are disturbed.’

‘She spoke of me?’

‘Yes.’

‘She is coming by the next boat?’

‘It’s my fear that she is.’

‘Why do you fear?’

’Shall I answer you, Harry? It is useless now. Well, because she has been deceived. That is why. You will soon find it out.’

‘Prince Ernest is at Sarkeld?’

‘In Paris, I hear.’

’How will your despatch reach these ladies in time for them to come over by the next boat?’

’I have sent my father’s servant. The General—he is promoted at last, Harry—attends the ladies in person, and is now waiting for the boat’s arrival over there, to follow my directions.’

‘You won’t leave me?’

Page 2179

Miss Goodwin had promised to meet the foreign ladies on the pier. We quarrelled and made it up a dozen times like girl and boy, I calling her aunt Clara, as in the old days, and she calling me occasionally son Richie: an imitation of my father's manner of speech to me when we formed acquaintance first in Venice. But I was very little aware of what I was saying or doing. The forces of my life were yoked to the heart, and tumbled as confusedly as the world under Phaethon charioteer. We walked on the heights above the town. I looked over the water to the white line of shore and batteries where this wonder stood, who was what poets dream of, deep-hearted men hope for, none quite believe in. Hardly could I; and though my relenting spinster friend at my elbow kept assuring me it was true that she was there, my sceptical sight fixed on the stale prominences visible in the same features which they had worn day after empty day of late. This deed of hers was an act of devotion great as death. I knew it from experience consonant to Ottilia's character; but could a princess, hereditary, and bound in the league of governing princes, dare so to brave her condition? Complex of mind, simplest in character, the uncontrollable nobility of her spirit was no sooner recognized by me than I was shocked throughout by a sudden light, contrasting me appallingly with this supreme of women, who swept the earth aside for truth. I had never before received a distinct intimation of my littleness of nature, and my first impulse was to fly from thought, and then, as if to prove myself justly accused, I caught myself regretting —no, not regretting, gazing, as it were, on a picture of regrets—that Ottilia was not a romantic little lady of semi-celestial rank, exquisitely rash, wilful, desperately enamoured, bearing as many flying hues and peeps of fancy as a love-ballad, and not more roughly brushing the root-emotions.

If she had but been such an one, what sprightly colours, delicious sadness, magical transformations, tenderest intermixture of earth and heaven; what tears and sunbeams, divinest pathos: what descents from radiance to consolatory twilight, would have surrounded me for poetry and pride to dwell on! What captivating melody in the minor key would have been mine, though I lost her—the legacy of it all for ever! Say a petulant princess, a star of beauty, mad for me, and the whisper of our passion and sorrows traversing the flushed world! Was she coming? Not she, but a touchstone, a relentless mirror, a piercing eye, a mind severe as the Goddess of the God's head: a princess indeed, but essentially a princess above women: a remorseless intellect, an actual soul visible in the flesh. She was truth. Was I true? Not so very false, yet how far from truth! The stains on me (a modern man writing his history is fugitive and crepuscular in alluding to them, as a woman kneeling at the ear-guichet) burnt like the blood-spots on the criminal compelled to touch his victim by savage ordinance, which knew the savage and how to search him. And these were faults of weakness rather than the sins of strength. I might as fairly hope for absolution of them from Ottilia as from offended laws of my natural being, gentle though she was, and charitable.

Page 2180

Was I not guilty of letting her come on to me hoodwinked at this moment? I had a faint memory of Miss Goodwin's saying that she had been deceived, and I suggested a plan of holding aloof until she had warned the princess of my perfect recovery, to leave it at her option to see me.

'Yes,' Miss Goodwin assented: 'if you like, Harry.'

Her compassion for me only tentatively encouraged the idea. 'It would, perhaps, be right. You are the judge. If you can do it. You are acting bravely.' She must have laughed at me in her heart.

The hours wore on. My curse of introspection left me, and descending through the town to the pier, amid the breezy blue skirts and bonnet-strings, we watched the packet-boat approaching. There was in advance one of the famous swift island wherries. Something went wrong with it, for it was overtaken, and the steamer came in first. I jumped on board, much bawled at. Out of a crowd of unknown visages, Janet appeared: my aunt Dorothy was near her. The pair began chattering of my paleness, and wickedness in keeping my illness unknown to them. They had seen Temple on an excursion to London; he had betrayed me, as he would have betrayed an archangel to Janet.

'Will you not look at us, Harry?' they both said.

The passengers were quitting the boat, strangers every one.

'Harry, have we really offended you in coming?' said Janet.

My aunt Dorothy took the blame on herself.

I scarcely noticed them, beyond leading them on to the pier-steps and leaving them under charge of Miss Goodwin, who had, in matters of luggage and porterage, the practical mind and aplomb of an Englishwoman that has passed much of her time on the Continent. I fancied myself vilely duped by this lady. The boat was empty of its passengers; a grumbling pier-man, wounded in his dignity, notified to me that there were fines for disregard of the Company's rules and regulations. His tone altered; he touched his hat: 'Didn't know who you was, my lord.' Janet overheard him, and her face was humorous.

'We may break the rules, you see,' I said to her.

'We saw him landing on the other side of the water,' she replied; so spontaneously did the circumstance turn her thoughts on my father.

'Did you speak to him?'

‘No.’

‘You avoided him?’

‘Aunty and I thought it best. He landed . . . there was a crowd.’

Miss Goodwin interposed: ‘You go to Harry’s hotel?’

‘Grandada is coming down to-morrow or next day,’ Janet prompted my aunt Dorothy.

‘If we could seek for a furnished house; Uberly would watch the luggage,’ Dorothy murmured in distress.

’Furnished houses, even rooms at hotels, are doubtful in the height of the season,’ Miss Goodwin remarked. ’Last night I engaged the only decent set of rooms I could get, for friends of Harry’s who are coming.’

Page 2181

‘No wonder he was disappointed at seeing us—he was expecting them!’ said Janet, smiling a little.

‘They are sure to come,’ said Miss Goodwin.

Near us a couple of yachtsmen were conversing.

‘Oh, he’ll be back in a day or two,’ one said. ’When you ’ve once tasted that old boy, you can’t do without him. I remember when I was a youngster—it was in Lady Betty Bolton’s day; she married old Edbury, you know, first wife—the Magnificent was then in his prime. He spent his money in a week: so he hired an eighty-ton schooner; he laid violent hands on a Jew, bagged him, lugged him on board, and sailed away.’

‘What the deuce did he want with a Jew?’ cried the other.

‘Oh, the Jew supplied cheques for a three months’ cruise in the Mediterranean, and came home, I heard, very good friends with his pirate. That’s only one of dozens.’

The unconscious slaughterers laughed.

’On another occasion’—I heard it said by the first speaker, as they swung round to parade the pier, and passed on narrating.

‘Not an hotel, if it is possible to avoid it,’ my aunt Dorothy, with heightened colour, urged Miss Goodwin. They talked together.

‘Grandada is coming to you, Harry,’ Janet said. ’He has business in London, or he would have been here now. Our horses and carriages follow us: everything you would like. He does love you! he is very anxious. I’m afraid his health is worse than he thinks. Temple did not say your father was here, but grandada must have suspected it when he consented to our coming, and said he would follow us. So that looks well perhaps. He has been much quieter since your money was paid back to you. If they should meet . . . no, I hope they will not: grandada hates noise. And, Harry, let me tell you: it may be nothing: if he questions you, do not take fire; just answer plainly: I’m sure you understand. One in a temper at a time I’m sure ’s enough: you have only to be patient with him. He has been going to London, to the City, seeing lawyers, bankers, brokers, and coming back muttering. Ah! dear old man. And when he ought to have peace! Harry, the poor will regret him in a thousand places. I write a great deal for him now, and I know how they will. What are you looking at?’

I was looking at a man of huge stature, of the stiffest build, whose shoulders showed me their full breadth while he stood displaying frontwards the open of his hand in a salute.

‘Schwartz!’ I called. Janet started, imagining some fierce interjection. The giant did not stir.

But others had heard. A lady stepped forward. 'Dear Mr. Harry Richmond! Then you are better? We had most alarming news of you.'

I bowed to the Frau von Dittmarsch, anciently Miss Sibley.

'The princess?'

'She is here.'

Frau von Dittmarsch clasped Miss Goodwin's hand. I was touching Ottilia's. A veil partly swathed her face. She trembled: the breeze robbed me of her voice.

Page 2182

Our walk down the pier was almost in silence. Miss Goodwin assumed the guardianship of the foreign ladies. I had to break from them and provide for my aunt Dorothy and Janet.

‘They went over in a little boat, they were so impatient. Who is she?’ Dorothy Beltham asked.

‘The Princess Ottilia,’ said Janet.

‘Are you certain? Is it really, Harry?’

I confirmed it, and my aunt said, ’I should have guessed it could be no other; she has a foreign grace.’

‘General Goodwin was with them when the boat came in from the island,’ said Janet. ’He walked up to Harry’s father, and you noticed, aunty, that the ladies stood away, as if they wished to be unobserved, as we did, and pulled down their veils. They would not wait for our boat. We passed them crossing. People joked about the big servant over-weighing the wherry.’

Dorothy Beltham thought the water too rough for little boats.

‘She knows what a sea is,’ I said.

Janet gazed steadily after the retreating figures, and then commended me to the search for rooms. The end of it was that I abandoned my father’s suite to them. An accommodating linen-draper possessed of a sea-view, and rooms which hurled the tenant to the windows in desire for it, gave me harbourage.

Till dusk I scoured the town to find Miss Goodwin, without whom there was no clue to the habitation I was seeking, and I must have passed her blindly again and again. My aunt Dorothy and Janet thanked me for my consideration in sitting down to dine with them; they excused my haste to retire. I heard no reproaches except on account of my not sending them word of my illness. Janet was not warm. She changed in colour and voice when I related what I had heard from Miss Goodwin, namely, that ’some one’ had informed the princess I was in a dying state. I was obliged to offer up my father as a shield for Ottilia, lest false ideas should tarnish the image of her in their minds. Janet did not speak of him. The thought stood in her eyes; and there lies the evil of a sore subject among persons of one household: they have not to speak to exhibit their minds.

After a night of suspense I fell upon old Schwartz and Aennchen out in the earliest dawn, according to their German habits, to have a gaze at sea, and strange country and people. Aennchen was all wonder at the solitary place, Schwartz at the big ships. But when they tried to direct me to the habitation of their mistress, it was discovered by them that they had lost their bearings. Aennchen told me the margravine had been

summoned to Rippau just before they left Sarkeld. Her mistress had informed Baroness Turckems of her intention to visit England. Prince Ernest was travelling in France.

Page 2183

The hour which brought me to Ottilia was noon. The arrangements of the ladies could only grant me thirty minutes, for Janet was to drive the princess out into the country to view the island. She and my aunt Dorothy had been already introduced. Miss Goodwin, after presenting them, insisted upon ceremoniously accompanying me to the house. Quite taking the vulgar view of a proceeding such as the princess had been guilty of, and perhaps fearing summary audacity and interestedness in the son of a father like mine, she ventured on lecturing me, as though it lay with me to restrain the fair romantic head, forbear from calling up my special advantages, advise, and stand to the wisdom of this world, and be the man of honour. The princess had said: 'Not see him when I have come to him?' I reassured my undiscerning friend partly, not wholly.

'Would it be commonly sensible or civil, to refuse to see me, having come?'

Miss Goodwin doubted.

I could indicate forcibly, because I felt, the clear-judging brain and tempered self-command whereby Ottilia had gained her decision.

Miss Goodwin nodded and gave me the still-born affirmative of politeness. Her English mind expressed itself willing to have exonerated the rash great lady for visiting a dying lover, but he was not the same person now that he was on his feet, consequently her expedition wore a different aspect:—my not dying condemned her. She entreated me to keep the fact of the princess's arrival unknown to my father, on which point we were one. Intensely enthusiastic for the men of her race, she would have me, above all things, by a form of adjuration designed to be a masterpiece of persuasive rhetoric, 'prove myself an Englishman.' I was to show that 'the honour, interests, reputation and position of any lady (demented or not,' she added) 'were as precious to me as to the owner': that 'no woman was ever in peril of a shadow of loss in the hands of an English gentleman,' and so forth, rather surprisingly to me, remembering her off-hand manner of the foregoing day. But the sense of responsibility thrown upon her ideas of our superior national dignity had awakened her fervider naturalness—made her a different person, as we say when accounting, in our fashion, for what a little added heat may do.

The half hour allotted to me fled. I went from the room and the house, feeling that I had seen and heard her who was barely of the world of humankind for me, so strongly did imagination fly with her. I kissed her fingers, I gazed in her eyes, I heard the beloved voice. All passed too swift for happiness. Recollections set me throbbing, but recollection brought longing. She said, 'Now I have come I must see you, Harry.' Did it signify that to see me was a piece of kindness at war with her judgement? She rejoiced at my perfect recovery, though it robbed her of the plea in extenuation of this step she had taken. She praised me for abstaining to write to her, when I was stammering a set of hastily-impressed reasons to excuse myself for the omission. She praised my step into Parliament. It did not seem to involve a nearer approach to her. She said, 'You

have not wasted your time in England.’ It was for my solitary interests that she cared, then.

Page 2184

I brooded desperately. I could conceive an overlooking height that made her utterance simple and consecutive: I could not reach it. Topics which to me were palpitating, had no terror for her. She said, 'I have offended my father; I have written to him; he will take me away.' In speaking of the letter which had caused her to offend, she did not blame the writer. I was suffered to run my eyes over it, and was ashamed. It read to me too palpably as an outcry to delude and draw her hither:—pathos and pathos: the father holding his dying son in his arms, his sole son, Harry Richmond; the son set upon by enemies in the night: the lover never daring to beg for a sight of his beloved ere he passed away:—not an ill-worded letter; read uncritically, it may have been touching: it must have been, though it was the reverse for me. I frowned, broke down in regrets, under sharp humiliation.

She said, 'You knew nothing of it. A little transgression is the real offender. When we are once out of the way traced for us, we are in danger of offending at every step; we are as lawless as the outcasts.' That meant, 'My turning aside to you originally was the blameable thing.' It might mean, 'My love of you sets my ideas of duty at variance with my father's.'

She smiled; nothing was uttered in a tone of despondency. Her high courage and breeding gave her even in this pitfall the smoothness which most women keep for society. Why she had not sent me any message or tidings of herself to Riversley was not a matter that she could imagine to perplex me: she could not imagine my losing faith in her. The least we could do, I construed it, the religious bond between us was a faith in one another that should sanctify to our souls the external injuries it caused us to commit. But she talked in no such strain. Her delight in treading English ground was her happy theme. She said, 'It is as young as when we met in the forest'; namely, the feeling revived for England. How far off we were from the green Devonshire coast, was one of her questions, suggestive of our old yacht-voyage lying among her dreams. Excepting an extreme and terrorizing paleness, there was little to fever me with the thought that she suffered mortally. Of reproach, not a word; nor of regret. At the first touch of hands, when we stood together, alone, she said, 'Would hearing of your recovery have given me peace?' My privileges were the touch of hands, the touch of her fingers to my lips, a painless hearing and seeing, and passionate recollection. She said, 'Impatience is not for us, Harry': I was not to see her again before the evening. These were the last words she said, and seemed the lightest until my hot brain made a harvest of them transcending thrice-told vows of love. Did they not mean, 'We two wait': therefore, 'The years are bondmen to our stedfastness.' Could sweeter have been said? They might mean nothing!

Page 2185

She was veiled when Janet drove her out; Janet sitting upright in her masterly way, smoothing her pet ponies with the curl of her whip, chatting and smiling; the princess slightly leaning back. I strode up to the country roads, proud of our land's beauty under a complacent sky. By happy chance, which in a generous mood I ascribed to Janet's good nature, I came across them at a seven miles' distance. They were talking spiritedly: what was wonderful, they gave not much heed to me: they seemed on edge for one another's conversation: each face was turned to the other's, and after nodding an adieu, they resumed the animated discourse. I had been rather in alarm lest Ottilia should think little of Janet. They passed out of sight without recurring to a thought of me behind them.

In the evening I was one among a group of ladies. I had the opportunity of hearing the running interchange between Ottilia and Janet, which appeared to be upon equal terms; indeed, Janet led. The subjects were not very deep. Plain wits, candour, and an unpretending tongue, it seemed, could make common subjects attractive, as fair weather does our English woods and fields. The princess was attracted by something in Janet. I myself felt the sway of something, while observing Ottilia's rapt pleasure in her talk and her laughter, with those funny familiar frowns and current dimples twisting and melting away like a play of shadows on the eddies of the brook.

'I 'm glad to be with her,' Janet said of Ottilia.

It was just in that manner she spoke in Ottilia's presence. Why it should sound elsewhere unsatisfactorily blunt, and there possess a finished charm, I could not understand.

I mentioned to Janet that I feared my father would be returning.

She contained herself with a bridled 'Oh!'

We were of one mind as to the necessity for keeping him absent, if possible.

'Harry, you'll pardon me; I can't talk of him,' said she.

I proposed half-earnestly to foil his return by going to London at once.

'That's manly; that's nice of you,' Janet said.

This was on our walk from the house at night. My aunt Dorothy listened, pressing my arm. The next morning Janet urged me to go at once. 'Keep him away, bring down grandada, Harry. She cannot quit the island, because she has given Prince Ernest immediate rendezvous here. You must not delay to go. Yes, the Countess of Delzenburg shall have your excuses. And no, I promise you I will run nobody down. Besides, if I do, aunty will be at hand to plead for the defence, and she can! She has a way that binds one to accept everything she says, and Temple ought to study with her

for a year or two before he wears his gown. Bring him back with you and grandada. He is esteemed here at his true worth. I love him for making her in love with English boys. I leave the men for those who know them, but English boys are unrivalled,

Page 2186

I declare. Honesty, bravery, modesty, and nice looks! They are so nice in their style and their way of talking. I tell her, our men may be shy and sneering,—awkward, I daresay; but our boys beat the world. Do bring down Temple. I should so like her to see a cricket-match between two good elevens of our boys, Harry, while she is in England! We could have arranged for one at Riversley.'

I went, and I repressed the idea, on my way, that Janet had manoeuvred by sending me off to get rid of me, but I felt myself a living testimony to her heartlessness: for no girl of any heart, acting the part of friend, would have allowed me to go without a leave-taking of her I loved few would have been so cruel as to declare it a duty to go at all, especially when the chances were that I might return to find the princess wafted away. Ottilia's condescension had done her no good. 'Turn to the right, that's your path; on.' She seemed to speak in this style, much as she made her touch of the reins understood by her ponies. 'I 'll take every care of the princess,' she said. Her conceit was unbounded. I revelled in contemptuous laughter at her assumption of the post of leader with Ottilia. However, it was as well that I should go: there was no trusting my father.

CHAPTER XLIX

WHICH FORESHADOWS A GENERAL GATHERING

At our Riversley station I observed the squire, in company with Captain Bulsted, jump into a neighbouring carriage. I joined them, and was called upon to answer various inquiries. The squire gave me one of his short tight grasps of the hand, in which there was warmth and shyness, our English mixture. The captain whispered in my ear: 'He oughtn't to be alone.'

'How's the great-grandmother of the tribe?' said I.

Captain Bulsted nodded, as if he understood, but was at sea until I mentioned the bottle of rum and the remarkable length of that old lady's measurement.

'Ay, to be sure! a grand old soul,' he said. 'You know that scum of old, Harry.'

I laughed, and so did he, at which I laughed the louder.

'He laughs, I suppose, because his party's got a majority in the House,' said the squire.

'We gave you a handsome surplus this year, sir.'

'Sweated out of the country's skin and bone, ay!'

'You were complimented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer!'

’Yes, that fellow’s compliments are like a cabman’s, and cry fool:—he never thanks you but when he’s overpaid.’

Captain Bulsted applauded the sarcasm.

‘Why did you keep out of knowledge all this time, Hal?’ my grandfather asked.

I referred him to the captain.

‘Hang it,’ cried Captain Bulsted, ’do you think I’d have been doing duty for you if I’d known where to lay hold of you.’

‘Well, if you didn’t shake hands with me, you touched my toes,’ said I, and thanked him with all my heart for his kindness to an old woman on the point of the grave. I had some fun to flavour melancholy with.

Page 2187

My grandfather resumed his complaint: ’You might have gone clean off, and we none the wiser.’

‘Are we quite sure that his head’s clean on?’ said the mystified captain.

’Of course we should run to him, wherever he was, if he was down on his back,’ the squire muttered.

‘Ay, ay, sir; of course,’ quoth Captain William, frowning to me to reciprocate this relenting mood. ’But, Harry, where did you turn off that night? We sat up expecting you. My poor Julia was in a terrible fright, my lad. Eh? speak up.’

I raised the little finger.

‘Oh, oh,’ went he, happily reassured; but, reflecting, added: ’A bout of it?’

I dropped him a penitent nod.

‘That’s bad, though,’ said he.

‘Then why did you tip me a bottle of rum, Captain William?’

‘By George, Harry, you’ve had a crack o’ the sconce,’ he exclaimed, more sagaciously than he was aware of.

My grandfather wanted to keep me by his side in London until we two should start for the island next day; but his business was in the city, mine toward the West. We appointed to meet two hours after reaching the terminus.

He turned to me while giving directions to his man.

’You ‘ve got him down there, I suppose?’

‘My father’s in town, sir. He shall keep away,’ I said.

‘Humph! I mayn’t object to see him.’

This set me thinking.

Captain Bulsted—previously asking me in a very earnest manner whether I was really all right and sound—favoured me with a hint:

’The squire has plunged into speculations of his own, or else he is peeping at somebody else’s. No danger of the dad being mixed up with Companies? Let’s hope not. Julia pledged her word to Janet that I would look after the old squire. I suppose I can go home this evening? My girl hates to be alone.’

‘By all means,’ said I; and the captain proposed to leave the squire at his hotel, in the event of my failing to join him in the city.

‘But don’t fail, if you can help it,’ he urged me; ’for things somehow, my dear Harry, appear to me to look like the compass when the needle gives signs of atmospheric disturbance. My only reason for saying so is common observation. You can judge for yourself that he is glad to have you with him.’

I told the captain I was equally glad; for, in fact, my grandfather’s quietness and apparently friendly disposition tempted me to petition for a dower for the princess at once, so that I might be in the position to offer Prince Ernest on his arrival a distinct alternative; supposing—it was still but a supposition—Ottilia should empower me. Incessant dialogues of perpetually shifting tendencies passed between Ottilia and me in my brain—now dark, now mildly fair, now very wild, on one side at least. Never, except by downright force of will, could I draw from the phantom of her one purely irrational outcry, so deeply-rooted was the knowledge of her nature and mind; and when I did force it, I was no gainer: a puppet stood in her place—the vision of Ottilia melted out in threads of vapour.

Page 2188

‘And yet she has come to me; she has braved everything to come.’ I might say that, to liken her to the women who break rules and read duties by their own light, but I could not cheat my knowledge of her. Mrs. Waddy met me in the hall of my father’s house, as usual, pressing, I regretted to see, one hand to her side. ‘Her heart,’ she said, ’was easily set pitty-pat now.’ She had been, by her master’s orders, examined by two of the chief physicians of the kingdom, ‘baronets both.’ They advised total rest. As far as I could apprehend, their baronetcies and doings in high regions had been of more comfort than their prescriptions.

‘What I am I must be,’ she said, meekly; ’and I cannot quit his service till he’s abroad again, or I drop. He has promised me a monument. I don’t want it; but it shows his kindness.’

A letter from Heriot informed me that the affair between Edbury and me was settled: he could not comprehend how.

‘What is this new Jury of Honour? Who are the jurymen?’ he asked, and affected wit.

I thanked him for a thrashing in a curt reply.

My father had left the house early in the morning. Mrs. Waddy believed that he meant to dine that evening at the season’s farewell dinner of the Trump-Trick Club: ’Leastways, Tollingby has orders to lay out his gentlemen’s-dinners’ evening-suit. Yesterday afternoon he flew down to Chippenden, and was home late. To-day he’s in the City, or one of the squares. Lady Edbury’s—ah! detained in town with the jaundice or toothache. He said he was sending to France for a dentist: or was it Germany, for some lady’s eyes? I am sure I don’t know. Well or ill, so long as you’re anything to him, he will abound. Pocket and purse! You know him by this time, Mr. Harry. Oh, my heart!’

A loud knock at the door had brought on the poor creature’s palpitations.

This visitor was no other than Prince Ernest. The name on his card was Graf von Delzenburg, and it set my heart leaping to as swift a measure as Mrs. Waddy’s.

Hearing that I was in the house, he desired to see me.

We met, with a formal bow.

’I congratulate you right heartily upon being out of the list of the nekron,’ he said, civilly. ’I am on my way to one of your watering-places, whither my family should have preceded me. Do you publish the names and addresses of visitors daily, as it is the custom with us?’

I relieved his apprehensions on that head: 'Here and there, rarely; and only at the hotels, I believe.' The excuse was furnished for offering the princess's address.

'Possibly, in a year or two, we may have the pleasure of welcoming you at Sarkeld,' said the prince, extending his hand. 'Then, you have seen the Countess of Delzenburg?'

'On the day of her arrival, your Highness. Ladies of my family are staying on the island.'

'Ah?'

He paused, and invited me to bow to him. We bowed thus in the room, in the hall, and at the street-door.

Page 2189

For what purpose could he have called on my father? To hear the worst at once? That seemed likely, supposing him to have lost his peculiar confidence in the princess, of which the courtly paces he had put me through precluded me from judging.

But I guessed acutely that it was not his intention to permit of my meeting Ottilia a second time. The blow was hard: I felt it as if it had been struck already, and thought I had gained resignation, until, like a man reprieved on his road to execution, the narrowed circle of my heart opened out to the breadth of the world in a minute. Returning from the city, I hurried to my father's house, late in the afternoon, and heard that he had started to overtake the prince, leaving word that the prince was to be found at his address in the island. No doubt could exist regarding the course I was bound to take. I drove to my grandfather, stated my case to him, and by sheer vehemence took the wind out of his sails; so that when I said, 'I am the only one alive who can control my father,' he answered mildly, 'Seems t' other way,' and chose a small snort for the indulgence of his private opinion.

'What! this princess came over alone, and is down driving out with my girl under an alias?' he said, showing sour aversion at the prospect of a collision with the foreign species, as expressive as the ridge of a cat's back.

Temple came to dine with us, so I did not leave him quite to himself, and Temple promised to accompany him down to the island.

'Oh, go, if you like,' the fretted old man dismissed me:

'I've got enough to think over. Hold him fast to stand up to me within forty-eight hours, present time; you know who I mean; I've got a question or two for him. How he treats his foreign princes and princesses don't concern me. I'd say, like the Prevention-Cruelty-Animal's man to the keeper of the menagerie, "Lecture 'em, wound their dignity, hurt their feelings, only don't wop 'em." I don't wish any harm to them, but what the deuce they do here nosing after my grandson! . . . There, go; we shall be having it out ha' done with to-morrow or next day. I've run the badger to earth, else I'm not fit to follow a scent.'

He grumbled at having to consume other than his Riversley bread, butter, beef, and ale for probably another fortnight. One of the boasts of Riversley was, that while the rest of the world ate and drank poison, the Grange lived on its own solid substance, defying malefactory Radical tricksters.

Temple was left to hear the rest. He had the sweetest of modest wishes for a re-introduction to Ottilia.

CHAPTER L

WE ARE ALL IN MY FATHER'S NET

Page 2190

Journeying down by the mail-train in the face of a great sunken sunset broken with cloud, I chanced to ask myself what it was that I seriously desired to have. My purpose to curb my father was sincere and good; but concerning my heart's desires, whitherward did they point? I thought of Janet—she made me gasp for air; of Ottilia, and she made me long for earth. Sharp, as I write it, the distinction smote me. I might have been divided by an electrical shot into two halves, with such an equal force was I drawn this way and that, pointing nowhither. To strangle the thought of either one of them was like the pang of death; yet it did not strike me that I loved the two: they were apart in my mind, actually as if I had been divided. I passed the Riversley station under sombre sunset fires, saddened by the fancy that my old home and vivacious Janet were ashes, past hope. I came on the smell of salt air, and had that other spirit of woman around me, of whom the controlled seadeeps were an image, who spoke to my soul like starlight. Much wise counsel, and impatience of the wisdom, went on within me. I walked like a man with a yawning wound, and had to whip the sense of passion for a drug. Toward which one it strove I know not; it was blind and stormy as the night.

Not a boatman would take me across. The lights of the island lay like a crown on the water. I paced the ramparts, eyeing them, breathing the keen salt of thundering waves, until they were robbed of their magic by the coloured Fast.

It is, I have learnt, out of the conflict of sensations such as I then underwent that a young man's brain and morality, supposing him not to lean overmuch to sickly sentiment, becomes gradually enriched and strengthened, and himself shaped for capable manhood. I was partly conscious of a better condition in the morning; and a sober morning it was to me after my long sentinel's step to and fro. I found myself possessed of one key—whether the right one or not—wherewith to read the princess, which was never possible to me when I was under stress of passion, or of hope or despair; my perplexities over what she said, how she looked, ceased to trouble me. I read her by this strange light: that she was a woman who could only love intelligently—-love, that is, in the sense of giving herself. She had the power of passion, and it could be stirred; but he who kindled it wrecked his chance if he could not stand clear in her intellect's unsparing gaze. Twice already she must have felt herself disillusioned by me. This third time, possibly, she blamed her own fatally credulous tenderness, not me; but it was her third awakening, and could affection and warmth of heart combat it? Her child's enthusiasm for my country had prepared her for the impression which the waxen mind of the dreamy invalid received deeply; and so, aided by the emotional blood of youth, she gave me place in her imagination, probing me still curiously, as I remembered, at a season when her sedate mind was attaining to joint deliberations with the impulsive overgenerous heart.

Page 2191

Then ensued for her the successive shocks of discernment. She knew the to have some of the vices, many follies, all the intemperateness of men who carve a way for themselves in the common roads, if barely they do that. And resembling common men (men, in a judgement elective as hers, common, however able), I was not assuredly to be separated by her from my associations; from the thought of my father, for example. Her look at him in the lake-palace library, and her manner in unfolding and folding his recent letter to her, and in one or two necessitated allusions, embraced a kind of grave, pitiful humour, beyond smiles or any outward expression, as if the acknowledgement that it was so quite obliterated the wonder that it should be so—that one such as he could exercise influence upon her destiny. Or she may have made her reckoning generally, not personally, upon our human destinies: it is the more likely, if, as I divine, the calm oval of her lifted eyelids contemplated him in the fulness of the recognition that this world, of which we hope unuttered things, can be shifted and swayed by an ignis-fatuus. The father of one now seen through, could hardly fail of being transfixed himself. It was horrible to think of. I would rather have added a vice to my faults than that she should have penetrated him.

Nearing the island, I was reminded of the early morning when I landed on the Flemish flats. I did not expect a similar surprise, but before my rowers had pulled in, the tall beaconhead of old Schwartz notified that his mistress might be abroad. Janet walked with her. I ran up the steps to salute them, and had Ottilia's hand in mine.

'Prince Ernest has arrived?'

'My father came yesterday evening.'

'Do you leave to-day?'

'I cannot tell; he will decide.'

It seemed a good omen, until I scanned Janet's sombre face.

'You will not see us out for the rest of the day, Harry,' said she.

'That is your arrangement?'

'It is.'

'Your own?'

'Mine, if you like.'

There was something hard in her way of speaking, as though she blamed me, and the princess were under her protection against me. She vouchsafed no friendly significance of look and tone.

In spite of my readiness to criticize her (which in our language means condemn) for always assuming leadership with whomsoever she might be, I was impressed by the air of high-bred friendliness existing between her and the princess. Their interchange was pleasant to hear. Ottilia had caught the spirit of her frank manner of speech; and she, though in a less degree, the princess's fine ease and sweetness. They conversed, apparently, like equal minds. On material points, Janet unhesitatingly led. It was she who brought the walk to a close.

'Now, Harry, you had better go and have a little sleep. I should like to speak to you early.'

Ottilia immediately put her hand out to me.

Page 2192

I begged permission to see her to her door.

Janet replied for her, indicating old Schwartz: 'We have a protector, you see, six feet and a half.'

An hour later, Schwartz was following her to the steps of her hotel. She saw me, and waited. For a wonder, she displayed reluctance in disburdening herself of what she had to say. 'Harry, you know that he has come? He and Prince Ernest came together. Get him to leave the island at once: he can return to-morrow. Grandada writes of wishing to see him. Get him away to-day.'

'Is the prince going to stay here?' I asked.

'No. I daresay I am only guessing; I hope so. He has threatened the prince.'

'What with?'

'Oh! Harry, can't you understand? I'm no reader of etiquette, but even I can see that the story of a young princess travelling over to England alone to visit . . . and you . . ., and her father fetching her away! The prince is almost at his mercy, unless you make the man behave like a gentleman. This is exactly the thing Miss Goodwin feared!'

'But who's to hear of the story?' said I.

Janet gave an impatient sigh.

'Do you mean that my father has threatened to publish it, Janet?'

'I won't say he has. He has made the prince afraid to move: that I think is true.'

'Did the princess herself mention it to you?'

'She understands her situation, I am sure.'

'Did she speak of "the man," as you call him?'

'Yes: not as I do. You must try by-and-by to forgive me. Whether he set a trap or not, he has decoyed her—don't frown at words—and it remains for you to act as I don't doubt you will; but lose no time. Determine. Oh! if I were a man!'

'You would muzzle us?'

'Muzzle, or anything you please; I would make any one related to me behave honourably. I would give him the alternative . . .'

'You foolish girl! suppose he took it?'

’I would make him feel my will. He should not take it. Keep to the circumstances, Harry. If you have no control over him—I should think I was not fit to live, in such a position! No control over him at a moment like this? and the princess in danger of having her reputation hurt! Surely, Harry! But why should I speak to you as if you were undecided!’

‘Where is he?’

’At the house where you sleep. He surrendered his rooms here very kindly.’

‘Aunty has seen him?’

Janet blushed: I thought I knew why. It was for subtler reasons than I should have credited her with conceiving.

Page 2193

’She sent for him, at my request, late last night. She believed her influence would be decisive. So do I. She could not even make the man perceive that he was acting—to use her poor dear old-fashioned word—reprehensibly in frightening the prince to further your interests. From what I gathered he went off in a song about them. She said he talked so well! And aunty Dorothy, too! I should nearly as soon have expected grandada to come in for his turn of the delusion. How I wish he was here! Uberly goes by the first boat to bring him down. I feel with Miss Goodwin that it will be a disgrace for all of us—the country’s disgrace. As for our family! . . . Harry, and your name! Good-bye. Do your best.’

I was in the mood to ask, ‘On behalf of the country?’ She had, however, a glow and a ringing articulation in her excitement that forbade trifling; a minute’s reflection set me weighing my power of will against my father’s. I nodded to her.

‘Come to us when you are at liberty,’ she called.

I have said that I weighed my power of will against my father’s. Contemplation of the state of the scales did not send me striding to meet him. Let it be remembered—I had it strongly in memory that he habitually deluded himself under the supposition that the turn of all events having an aspect of good fortune had been planned by him of old, and were offered to him as the legitimately-won fruits of a politic life. While others deemed him mad, or merely reckless, wild, a creature living for the day, he enjoyed the conceit of being a profound schemer, in which he was fortified by a really extraordinary adroitness to take advantage of occurrences: and because he was prompt in an emergency, and quick to profit of a crisis, he was deluded to imagine that he had created it. Such a man would be with difficulty brought to surrender his prize.

Again, there was his love for me. ‘Pater est, Pamphile;—difficile est.’ How was this vast conceit of a not unreal paternal love to be encountered? The sense of honour and of decency might appeal to him personally; would either of them get a hearing if he fancied them to be standing in opposition to my dearest interests? I, unhappily, as the case would be sure to present itself to him, appeared the living example of his eminently politic career. After establishing me the heir of one of the wealthiest of English commoners, would he be likely to forego any desperate chance of ennobling me by the brilliant marriage? His dreadful devotion to me extinguished the hope that he would, unless I should happen to be particularly masterful in dealing with him. I heard his nimble and overwhelming volubility like a flood advancing. That could be withstood, and his arguments and persuasions. But by what steps could I restrain the man himself? I said ‘the man,’ as Janet did. He figured in my apprehensive imagination as an engine more than as an individual. Lassitude oppressed

Page 2194

me. I felt that I required every access of strength possible, physical besides moral, in anticipation of our encounter, and took a swim in sea-water, which displaced my drowsy fit, and some alarming intimations of cowardice menacing a paralysis of the will: I had not altogether recovered from my gipsy drubbing. And now I wanted to have the contest over instantly. It seemed presumable that my father had slept at my lodgings. There, however, the report of him was, that he had inspected the rooms, highly complimented the owner of them, and vanished.

Returning to the pier, I learnt that he had set sail in his hired yacht for the sister town on the Solent, at an early hour:—for what purpose? I knew of it too late to intercept it. One of the squire's horses trotted me over; I came upon Colonel Hibbert Segrave near the Club-house, and heard that my father was off again:

'But your German prince and papa-in-law shall be free of the Club for the next fortnight,' said he, and cordially asked to have the date of the marriage. My face astonished him. He excused himself for speaking of this happy event so abruptly. A sting of downright anger drove me back at a rapid canter. It flashed on me that this Prince Ernest, whose suave fashion of depressing me, and philosophical skill in managing his daughter, had induced me to regard him as a pattern of astuteness, was really both credulous and feeble, or else supremely unsuspecting: and I was confirmed in the latter idea on hearing that he had sailed to visit the opposite harbour and docks on board my father's yacht. Janet shared my secret opinion.

'The prince is a gentleman,' she said.

Her wrath and disgust were unspeakable. My aunt Dorothy blamed her for overdue severity. 'The prince, I suppose, goes of his own free will where he pleases.'

Janet burst out, 'Oh! can't you see through it, aunty? The prince goes about without at all knowing that the person who takes him—Harry sees it—is making him compromise himself: and by-and-by the prince will discover that he has no will of his own, whatever he may wish to resolve upon doing.'

'Is he quite against Harry?' asked my aunt Dorothy.

'Dear aunty, he 's a prince, and a proud man. He will never in his lifetime consent to . . . to what you mean, without being hounded into it. I haven't the slightest idea whether anything will force him. I know that the princess would have too much pride to submit, even to save her name. But it 's her name that 's in danger. Think of the scandal to a sovereign princess! I know the signification of that now; I used to laugh at Harry's "sovereign princess." She is one, and thorough! there is no one like her. Don't you understand, aunty, that the intrigue, plot—I don't choose to be nice upon terms—may be perfectly successful, and do good to nobody. The prince may be tricked; the princess, I am sure, will not.'

Page 2195

Janet's affectation of an intimate and peculiar knowledge of the princess was a show of her character that I was accustomed to: still, it was evident they had conversed much, and perhaps intimately. I led her to tell me that the princess had expressed no views upon my father. 'He does not come within her scope, Harry.' 'Scope' was one of Janet's new words, wherewith she would now and then fall to seasoning a serviceable but savourless outworn vocabulary of the common table. In spite of that and other offences, rendered prominent to me by the lifting of her lip and her frown when she had to speak of my father, I was on her side, not on his. Her estimation of the princess was soundly based. She discerned exactly the nature of Ottilia's entanglement, and her peril.

She and my aunt Dorothy passed the afternoon with Ottilia, while I crossed the head of the street, looking down at the one house, where the princess was virtually imprisoned, either by her father's express injunction or her own discretion. And it was as well that she should not be out. The yachting season had brought many London men to the island. I met several who had not forgotten the newspaper-paragraph assertions and contradictions. Lord Alton, Admiral Loftus, and others were on the pier and in the outfitters' shops, eager for gossip, as the languid stretch of indolence inclines men to be. The Admiral asked me for the whereabout of Prince Ernest's territory. He too said that the prince would be free of the Club during his residence, adding:

'Where is he?'—not a question demanding an answer. The men might have let the princess go by, but there would have been questions urgently demanding answers had she been seen by their women.

Late in the evening my father's yacht was sighted from the pier. Just as he reached his moorings, and his boat was hauled round, the last steamer came in. Sharp-eyed Janet saw the squire on board among a crowd, and Temple next to him, supporting his arm.

'Has grandada been ill?' she exclaimed.

My chief concern was to see my father's head rising in the midst of the crowd, uncovering repeatedly. Prince Ernest and General Goodwin were behind him, stepping off the lower pier-platform. The General did not look pleased. My grandfather, with Janet holding his arm, in the place of Temple, stood waiting to see that his man had done his duty by the luggage.

My father, advancing, perceived me, and almost taking the squire into his affectionate salutation, said:

'Nothing could be more opportune than your arrival, Mr. Beltham.'

The squire rejoined: 'I wanted to see you, Mr. Richmond; and not in public.'

‘I grant the private interview, sir, at your convenience.’

Janet went up to General Goodwin. My father talked to me, and lost a moment in shaking Temple’s hand and saying kind things.

‘Name any hour you please, Mr. Beltham,’ he resumed; ’meantime, I shall be glad to effect the introduction between Harry’s grandfather and his Highness Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.’

Page 2196

He turned. General Goodwin was hurrying the prince up the steps, the squire at the same time retreating hastily. I witnessed the spectacle of both parties to the projected introduction swinging round to make their escape. My father glanced to right and left. He covered in the airiest fashion what would have been confusion to another by carrying on a jocose remark that he had left half spoken to Temple, and involved Janet in it, and soon—through sheer amiable volubility and his taking manner—the squire himself for a minute or so.

‘Harry, I have to tell you she is not unhappy,’ Janet whispered rapidly. ’She is reading of one of our great men alive now. She is glad to be on our ground.’ Janet named a famous admiral, kindling as a fiery beacon to our blood. She would have said more: she looked the remainder; but she could have said nothing better fitted to spur me to the work she wanted done. Mournfulness dropped on me like a cloud in thinking of the bright little princess of my boyhood, and the Ottilia of to-day, faithful to her early passion for our sea-heroes and my country, though it had grievously entrapped her. And into what hands! Not into hands which could cast one ray of honour on a devoted head. The contrast between the sane service—giving men she admired, and the hopping skipping social meteor, weaver of webs, thrower of nets, who offered her his history for a nuptial acquisition, was ghastly, most discomforting. He seemed to have entangled us all.

He said that he had. He treated me now confessedly as a cipher. The prince, the princess, my grandfather, and me—he had gathered us together, he said. I heard from him that the prince, assisted by him in the part of an adviser, saw no way of cutting the knot but by a marriage. All were at hand for a settlement of the terms:—Providence and destiny were dragged in.

‘Let’s have no theatrical talk,’ I interposed.

‘Certainly, Richie; the plainest English,’ he assented.

This was on the pier, while he bowed and greeted passing figures. I dared not unlink my arm, for fear of further mischief. I got him to my rooms, and insisted on his dining there.

‘Dry bread will do,’ he said.

My anticipations of the nature of our wrestle were correct. But I had not expected him to venture on the assertion that the prince was for the marriage. He met me at every turn with this downright iteration. ’The prince consents: he knows his only chance is to yield. I have him fast.’

‘How?’ I inquired.

’How, Richie? Where is your perspicuity? I have him here. I loosen a thousand tongues on him. I—’

‘No, not on him; on the princess, you mean.’

Page 2197

’On him. The princess is the willing party; she and you are one. On him, I say. ’Tis but a threat: I hold it in terrorem. And by heaven, son Richie, it assures me I have not lived and fought for nothing. “Now is the day and now is the hour.” On your first birthday, my boy, I swore to marry you to one of the highest ladies upon earth: she was, as it turns out, then unborn. No matter: I keep my oath. Abandon it? pooh! you are—forgive me—silly. Pardon me for remarking it, you have not that dashing courage—never mind. The point is, I have my prince in his trap. We are perfectly polite, but I have him, and he acknowledges it; he shrugs: love has beaten him. Very well. And observe: I permit no squire-of-low-degree insinuations; none of that. The lady—all earthly blessings on her!—does not stoop to Harry Richmond. I have the announcement in the newspapers. I maintain it the fruit of a life of long and earnest endeavour, legitimately won, by heaven it is! and with the constituted authorities of my native land against me. Your grandad proposes formally for the princess to-morrow morning.’

He maddened me. Merely to keep him silent I burst out in a flux of reproaches as torrent-like as his own could be; and all the time I was wondering whether it was true that a man who talked as he did, in his strain of florid flimsy, had actually done a practical thing.

The effect of my vehemence was to brace him and make him sedately emphatic. He declared himself to have gained entire possession of the prince’s mind. He repeated his positive intention to employ his power for my benefit. Never did power of earth or of hell seem darker to me than he at that moment, when solemnly declaiming that he was prepared to forfeit my respect and love, die sooner than ‘yield his prince.’ He wore a new aspect, spoke briefly and pointedly, using the phrases of a determined man, and in voice and gesture signified that he had us all in a grasp of iron. The charge of his having plotted to bring it about he accepted with exultation.

‘I admit,’ he said, ’I did not arrange to have Germany present for a witness besides England, but since he is here, I take advantage of the fact, and to-morrow you will see young Eckart down.’

I cried out, as much enraged at my feebleness to resist him, as in disgust of his unscrupulous tricks.

‘Ay, you have not known me, Richie,’ said he. ’I pilot you into harbour, and all you can do is just the creaking of the vessel to me. You are in my hands. I pilot you. I have you the husband of the princess within the month. No other course is open to her. And I have the assurance that she loses nothing by it. She is yours, my son.’

’She will not be. You have wrecked my last chance. You cover me with dishonour.’

’You are a youngster, Richie. ’Tis the wish of her heart. Probably while you and I are talking it over, the prince is confessing that he has no escape. He has not a loophole!

She came to you; you take her. I am far from withholding my admiration of her behaviour; but there it is—she came. Not consent? She is a ruined woman if she refuses!'

Page 2198

‘Through you, through you!—through my father!’

‘Have you both gone mad?’

‘Try to see this,’ I implored him. ’She will not be subjected by any threats. The very whisper of one will make her turn from me . . .’

He interrupted. ’Totally the contrary. The prince acknowledges that you are master of her affections.’

‘Consistently with her sense of honour and respect for us.’

‘Tell me of her reputation, Richie.’

‘You pretend that you can damage it!’

’Pretend? I pretend in the teeth of all concerned to establish her happiness and yours, and nothing human shall stop me. I have you grateful to me before your old dad lays his head on his last pillow. And that reminds me: I surrender my town house and furniture to you. Waddy has received the word. By the way, should you hear of a good doctor for heart-disease, tell me: I have my fears for the poor soul.’

He stood up, saying, ’Richie, I am not like Jorian, to whom a lodging-house dinner is no dinner, and an irreparable loss, but I must have air. I go forth on a stroll.’

It was impossible for me to allow it. I stopped him.

We were in the midst of a debate as to his right of personal freedom, upon the singularity of which he commented with sundry ejaculations, when Temple arrived and General Goodwin sent up his card. Temple and I left the general closeted with my father, and stood at the street-door. He had seen the princess, having at her request been taken to present his respects to her by Janet. How she looked, what she said, he was dull in describing; he thought her lively, though she was pale. She had mentioned my name, ‘kindly,’ he observed. And he knew, or suspected, the General to be an emissary from the prince. But he could not understand the exact nature of the complication, and plagued me with a mixture of blunt inquiries and the delicate reserve proper to him so much that I had to look elsewhere for counsel and sympathy. Janet had told him everything; still he was plunged in wonder, tempting me to think the lawyer’s mind of necessity bourgeois, for the value of a sentiment seemed to have no weight in his estimation of the case. Nor did he appear disinclined to excuse my father. Some of his remarks partly swayed me, in spite of my seeing that they were based on the supposition of an ‘all for love’ adventure of a mad princess. They whispered a little hope, when I was adoring her passionately for being the reverse of whatever might have given hope a breath.

General Goodwin, followed by my father, came down and led me aside after I had warned Temple not to let my father elude him. The General was greatly ruffled. ‘Clara tells me she can rely on you,’ he said. ’I am at the end of my arguments with that man, short of sending him to the lock-up. You will pardon me, Mr. Harry; I foresaw the scrapes in store for you, and advised you.’

‘You did, General,’ I confessed. ’Will you tell me what it is Prince Ernest is in dread of?’

Page 2199

’A pitiable scandal, sir; and if he took my recommendation, he would find instant means of punishing the man who dares to threaten him. You know it.’

I explained that I was aware of the threat, not of the degree of the prince’s susceptibility; and asked him if he had seen the princess.

‘I have had the honour,’ he replied, stiffly. ’You gain nothing with her by this infamous proceeding.’

I swallowed my anger, and said, ‘Do you accuse me, General?’

‘I do not accuse you,’ he returned, unbendingly. ’You chose your path some ten or twelve years ago, and you must take the consequences. I foresaw it; but this I will say, I did not credit the man with his infernal cleverness. If I speak to you at all, I must speak my mind. I thought him a mere buffoon and spendthrift, flying his bar-sinister story for the sake of distinction. He has schemed up to this point successfully: he has the prince in his toils. I would cut through them, as I have informed Prince Ernest. I daresay different positions lead to different reasonings; the fellow appears to have a fascination over him. Your father, Mr. Harry, is guilty now—he is guilty, I reiterate, now of a piece of iniquity that makes me ashamed to own him for a countryman.’

The General shook himself erect. ‘Are you unable to keep him in?’ he asked.

My nerves were pricking and stinging with the insults I had to listen to, and conscience’s justification of them.

He repeated the question.

‘I will do what I can,’ I said, unsatisfactorily to myself and to him, for he transposed our situations, telling me the things he would say and do in my place; things not dissimilar to those I had already said and done, only more toweringly enunciated; and for that reason they struck me as all the more hopelessly ineffectual, and made me despair.

My dumbness excited his ire. ‘Come,’ said he; ’the lady is a spoilt child. She behaved foolishly; but from your point of view you should feel bound to protect her on that very account. Do your duty, young gentleman. He is, I believe, fond of you, and if so, you have him by a chain. I tell you frankly, I hold you responsible.’

His way of speaking of the princess opened an idea of the world’s, in the event of her name falling into its clutches.

I said again, ‘I will do what I can,’ and sang out for Temple.

He was alone. My father had slipped from him to leave a card at the squire’s hotel. General Goodwin touched Temple on the shoulder kindly, in marked contrast to his

treatment of me, and wished us good-night. Nothing had been heard of my father by Janet, but while I was sitting with her, at a late hour, his card was brought up, and a pencilled entreaty for an interview the next morning.

‘That will suit grandada,’ Janet said. ’He commissioned me before going to bed to write the same for him.’

She related that the prince was in a state of undisguised distraction. From what I could comprehend—it appeared incredible—he regarded his daughter’s marriage as the solution of the difficulty, the sole way out of the meshes.

Page 2200

‘Is not that her wish?’ said Temple; perhaps with a wish of his own.

‘Oh, if you think a lady like the Princess Ottilia is led by her wishes,’ said Janet. Her radiant perception of an ideal in her sex (the first she ever had) made her utterly contemptuous toward the less enlightened.

We appointed the next morning at half-past eleven for my father’s visit.

‘Not a minute later,’ Janet said in my ear, urgently. ’Don’t—don’t let him move out of your sight, Harry! The princess is convinced you are not to blame.’

I asked her whether she had any knowledge of the squire’s designs.

‘I have not, on my honour,’ she answered. ’But I hope . . . It is so miserable to think of this disgraceful thing! She is too firm to give way. She does not blame you. I am sure I do not; only, Harry, one always feels that if one were in another’s place, in a case like this, I could and would command him. I would have him obey me. One is not born to accept disgrace even from a father. I should say, “You shall not stir, if you mean to act dishonourably.” One is justified, I am sure, in breaking a tie of relationship that involves you in dishonour. Grandada has not spoken a word to me on the subject. I catch at straws. This thing burns me! Oh, good-night, Harry. I can’t sleep.’

‘Good-night,’ she called softly to Temple on the stairs below. I heard the poor fellow murmuring good-night to himself in the street, and thought him happier than I. He slept at a room close to the hotel.

A note from Clara Goodwin adjured me, by her memory of the sweet, brave, gracious fellow she loved in other days, to be worthy of what I had been. The General had unnerved her reliance on me.

I sat up for my father until long past midnight. When he came his appearance reminded me of the time of his altercation with Baroness Turckems under the light of the blazing curtains: he had supped and drunk deeply, and he very soon proclaimed that I should find him invincible, which, as far as insensibility to the strongest appeals to him went, he was.

’Deny you love her, deny she loves you, deny you are one—I knot you fast!’

He had again seen Prince Ernest; so he said, declaring that the Prince positively desired the marriage; would have it. ‘And I,’ he dramatized their relative situations, ‘consented.’

After my experience of that night, I forgive men who are unmoved by displays of humour. Commonly we think it should be irresistible. His description of the thin-skinned sensitive prince striving to run and dodge for shelter from him, like a fever-patient

pursued by a North-easter, accompanied by dozens of quaint similes full of his mental laughter, made my loathing all the more acute. But I had not been an equal match for him previous to his taking wine; it was waste of breath and heart to contend with him. I folded my arms tight, sitting rigidly silent, and he dropped on the sofa luxuriously.

Page 2201

‘Bed, Richie!’ he waved to me. ’You drink no wine, you cannot stand dissipation as I do. Bed, my dear boy! I am a God, sir, inaccessible to mortal ailments! Seriously, dear boy, I have never known an illness in my life. I have killed my hundreds of poor devils who were for imitating me. This I boast—I boast constitution. And I fear, Richie, you have none of my superhuman strength. Added to that, I know I am watched over. I ask —I have: I scheme the tricks are in my hand! It may be the doing of my mother in heaven; there is the fact for you to reflect on. “Stand not in my way, nor follow me too far,” would serve me for a motto admirably, and you can put it in Latin, Richie. Bed! You shall turn your scholarship to account as I do my genius in your interest. On my soul, that motto in Latin will requite me. Now to bed.’

‘No,’ said I. ’You have got away from me once. I shall keep you in sight and hearing, if I have to lie at your door for it. You will go with me to London to-morrow. I shall treat you as a man I have to guard, and I shall not let you loose before I am quite sure of you.’

‘Loose!’ he exclaimed, throwing up an arm and a leg.

’I mean, sir, that you shall be in my presence wherever you are, and I will take care you don’t go far and wide. It’s useless to pretend astonishment. I don’t argue and I don’t beseech any further: I just sit on guard, as I would over a powder-cask.’

My father raised himself on an elbow. ‘The explosion,’ he said, examining his watch, ’occurred at about five minutes to eleven—we are advancing into the morning—last night. I received on your behalf the congratulations of friends Loftus, Alton, Segrave, and the rest, at that hour. So, my dear Richie, you are sitting on guard over the empty magazine.’

I listened with a throbbing forehead, and controlled the choking in my throat, to ask him whether he had touched the newspapers.

‘Ay, dear lad, I have sprung my mine in them,’ he replied.

‘You have sent word—?’

’I have despatched a paragraph to the effect, that the prince and princess have arrived to ratify the nuptial preliminaries.’

‘You expect it to appear this day?’

’Or else my name and influence are curiously at variance with the confidence I repose in them, Richie.’

‘Then I leave you to yourself,’ I said. ’Prince Ernest knows he has to expect this statement in the papers?’

‘We trumped him with that identical court-card, Richie.’

’Very well. To-morrow, after we have been to my grandfather, you and I part company for good, sir. It costs me too much.’

‘Dear old Richie,’ he laughed, gently. ’And now to bye-bye! My blessing on you now and always.’

He shut his eyes.

CHAPTER LI

AN ENCOUNTER SHOWING MY FATHER’S GENIUS IN A STRONG LIGHT

Page 2202

The morning was sultry with the first rising of the sun. I knew that Ottilia and Janet would be out. For myself, I dared not leave the house. I sat in my room, harried by the most penetrating snore which can ever have afflicted wakeful ears. It proclaimed so deep-seated a peacefulness in the bosom of the disturber, and was so arrogant, so ludicrous, and inaccessible to remonstrance, that it sounded like a renewal of our midnight altercation on the sleeper's part. Prolonged now and then beyond all bounds, it ended in the crashing blare whereof utter wakefulness cannot imagine honest sleep to be capable, but a playful melody twirled back to the regular note. He was fast asleep on the sitting-room sofa, while I walked fretting and panting. To this twinship I seemed condemned. In my heart nevertheless there was a reserve of wonderment at his apparent astuteness and resolution, and my old love for him whispered disbelief in his having disgraced me. Perhaps it was wilful self-deception. It helped me to meet him with a better face.

We both avoided the subject of our difference for some time: he would evidently have done so altogether, and used his best and sweetest manner to divert me: but when I struck on it, asking him if he had indeed told me the truth last night, his features clouded as though with an effort of patience. To my consternation, he suddenly broke away, with his arms up, puffing and stammering, stamping his feet. He would have a truce—he insisted on a truce, I understood him to exclaim, and that I was like a woman, who would and would not, and wanted a master. He raved of the gallant down-rightedness of the young bloods of his day, and how splendidly this one and that had compassed their ends by winning great ladies, lawfully, or otherwise. For several minutes he was in a state of frenzy, appealing to his pattern youths of a bygone generation, as to moral principles—stuttering, and of a dark red hue from the neck to the temples. I refrained from a scuffle of tongues. Nor did he excuse himself after he had cooled. His hand touched instinctively for his pulse, and, with a glance at the ceiling, he exclaimed, 'Good Lord!' and brought me to his side. 'These wigwam houses check my circulation,' said he. 'Let us go out-let us breakfast on board.'

The open air restored him, and he told me that he had been merely oppressed by the architect of the inferior classes, whose ceiling sat on his head. My nerves, he remarked to me, were very exciteable. 'You should take your wine, Richie,—you require it. Your dear mother had a low-toned nervous system.' I was silent, and followed him, at once a captive and a keeper.

This day of slackened sails and a bright sleeping water kept the yachtsmen on land; there was a crowd to meet the morning boat. Foremost among those who stepped out of it was the yellow-haired Eckart, little suspecting what the sight of him signalled to me. I could scarcely greet him at all, for in him I perceived that my father had fully committed himself to his plot, and left me nothing to hope. Eckart said something of Prince Hermann. As we were walking off the pier, I saw Janet conversing with Prince Ernest, and the next minute Hermann himself was one of the group. I turned to Eckart for an explanation.

Page 2203

’Didn’t I tell you he called at your house in London and travelled down with me this morning!’ said Eckart.

My father looked in the direction of the princes, but his face was for the moment no index. They bowed to Janet, and began talking hurriedly in the triangle of road between her hotel, the pier, and the way to the villas: passing on, and coming to a full halt, like men who are not reserving their minds. My father stept out toward them. He was met by Prince Ernest. Hermann turned his back.

It being the hour of the appointment, I delivered Eckart over to Temple’s safe-keeping, and went up to Janet. ‘Don’t be late, Harry,’ she said.

I asked her if she knew the object of the meeting appointed by my grandfather.

She answered impatiently, ‘Do get him away from the prince.’ And then: ’I ought to tell you the princess is well, and so on—pardon me just now: Grandada is kept waiting, and I don’t like it.’

Her actual dislike was to see Prince Ernest in dialogue with my father, it seemed to me; and the manner of both, which was, one would have said, intimate, anything but the manner of adversaries. Prince Ernest appeared to affect a pleasant humour; he twice, after shaking my father’s hand, stepped back to him, as if to renew some impression. Their attitude declared them to be on the best of terms. Janet withdrew her attentive eyes from observing them, and threw a world of meaning into her abstracted gaze at me. My father’s advance put her to flight.

Yet she gave him the welcome of a high-bred young woman when he entered the drawing-room of my grandfather’s hotel-suite. She was alone, and she obliged herself to accept conversation graciously. He recommended her to try the German Baths for the squire’s gout, and evidently amused her with his specific probations for English persons designing to travel in company, that they should previously live together in a house with a collection of undisciplined chambermaids, a musical footman, and a mad cook: to learn to accommodate their tempers. ’I would add a touch of earthquake, Miss Ilchester, just to make sure that all the party know one another’s edges before starting.’ This was too far a shot of nonsense for Janet, whose native disposition was to refer to lunacy or stupidity, or trickery, whatsoever was novel to her understanding. ‘I, for my part,’ said he, ’stipulate to have for comrade no man who fancies himself a born and stamped chieftain, no inveterate student of maps, and no dog with a turn for feeling himself pulled by the collar. And that reminds me you are amateur of dogs. Have you a Pomeranian boar-hound?’

‘No,’ said Janet; ‘I have never even seen one’

‘That high.’ My father raised his hand flat.

‘Bigger than our Newfoundlands!’

’Without exaggeration, big as a pony. You will permit me to send you one, warranted to have passed his distemper, which can rarely be done for our human species, though here and there I venture to guarantee my man as well as my dog.’

Page 2204

Janet interposed her thanks, declining to take the dog, but he dwelt on the dog's charms, his youth, stature, appearance, fitness, and grandeur, earnestly. I had to relieve her apprehensions by questioning where the dog was.

'In Germany,' he said.

It was not improbable, nor less so that the dog was in Pomerania likewise.

The entry of my aunt Dorothy, followed by my grandfather, was silent.

'Be seated,' the old man addressed us in a body, to cut short particular salutations.

My father overshadowed him with drooping shoulders.

Janet wished to know whether she was to remain.

'I like you by me always,' he answered, bluff and sharp.

'We have some shopping to do,' my aunt Dorothy murmured, showing she was there against her will.

'Do you shop out of London?' said my father; and for some time he succeeded in making us sit for the delusive picture of a comfortable family meeting.

My grandfather sat quite still, Janet next to him. 'When you've finished, Mr. Richmond,' he remarked.

'Mr. Beltham, I was telling Miss Beltham that I join in the abuse of London exactly because I love it. A paradox! she says. But we seem to be effecting a kind of insurance on the life of the things we love best by crying them down violently. You have observed it? Denounce them—they endure for ever! So I join any soul on earth in decrying our dear London. The naughty old City can bear it.'

There was a clearing of throats. My aunt Dorothy's foot tapped the floor.

'But I presume you have done me the honour to invite me to this conference on a point of business, Mr. Beltham?' said my father, admonished by the hint.

'I have, sir,' the squire replied.

'And I also have a point. And, in fact, it is urgent, and with your permission, Mr. Beltham, I will lead the way.'

'No, sir, if you please.

I’m a short speaker, and go to it at once, and I won’t detain you a second after you’ve answered me.’

My father nodded to this, with the conciliatory comment that it was business-like.

The old man drew out his pocket-book.

‘You paid a debt,’ he said deliberately, ’amounting to twenty-one thousand pounds to my grandson’s account.’

’Oh! a debt! I did, sir. Between father and boy, dad and lad; debts! . . . but use your own terms, I pray you.’

’I don’t ask you where that money is now. I ask you to tell me where you got it from.’

‘You speak bluntly, my dear sir.’

‘You won’t answer, then?’

Page 2205

’You ask the question as a family matter? I reply with alacrity, to the best of my ability: and with my hand on my heart, Mr. Beltham, let me assure you, I very heartily desire the information to be furnished to me. Or rather—why should I conceal it? The sources are irregular, but a child could toddle its way to them—you take my indication. Say that I obtained it from my friends. My friends, Mr. Beltham, are of the kind requiring squeezing. Government, as my chum and good comrade, Jorian DeWitt, is fond of saying, is a sponge—a thing that when you dive deep enough to catch it gives liberal supplies, but will assuredly otherwise reverse the process by acting the part of an absorbent. I get what I get by force of arms, or I might have perished long since.’

‘Then you don’t know where you got it from, sir?’

‘Technically, you are correct, sir.’

‘A bird didn’t bring it, and you didn’t find it in the belly of a fish.’

’Neither of these prodigies. They have occurred in books I am bound to believe; they did not happen to me.’

’You swear to me you don’t know the man, woman, or committee, who gave you that sum?’

’I do not know, Mr. Beltham. In an extraordinary history, extraordinary circumstances! I have experienced so many that I am surprised at nothing.’

‘You suppose you got it from some fool?’

‘Oh! if you choose to indict Government collectively?’

‘You pretend you got it from Government?’

’I am termed a Pretender by some, Mr. Beltham. The facts are these: I promised to refund the money, and I fulfilled the promise. There you have the only answer I can make to you. Now to my own affair. I come to request you to demand the hand of the Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld on behalf of my son Harry, your grandson; and I possess the assurance of the prince, her father, that it will be granted. Doubtless you, sir, are of as old a blood as the prince himself. You will acknowledge that the honour brought to the family by an hereditary princess is considerable: it is something. I am prepared to accompany you to his Highness, or not, as you please. It is but a question of dotation, and a selection from one or two monosyllables.’

Janet shook her dress.

The squire replied: ’We ’ll take that up presently. I haven’t quite done. Will you tell me what agent paid you the sum of money?’

’The usual agent—a solicitor, Mr. Beltham; a gentleman whose business lay amongst the aristocracy; he is defunct; and a very worthy old gentleman he was, with a remarkable store of anecdotes of his patrons, very discreetly told: for you never heard a name from him.’

‘You took him for an agent of Government, did you? why?’

Page 2206

’To condense a long story, sir, the kernel of the matter is, that almost from the hour I began to stir for the purpose of claiming my rights—which are transparent enough this old gentleman—certainly from no sinister motive, I may presume—commenced the payment of an annuity; not sufficient for my necessities, possibly, but warrant of an agreeable sort for encouraging my expectations; although oddly, this excellent old Mr. Bannerbridge invariably served up the dish in a sauce that did not agree with it, by advising me of the wish of the donator that I should abandon my Case. I consequently, in common with my friends, performed a little early lesson in arithmetic, and we came to the one conclusion open to reflective minds—namely, that I was feared.’

My aunt Dorothy looked up for the first time.

‘Janet and I have some purchases to make,’ she said.

The squire signified sharply that she must remain where she was.

‘I think aunty wants fresh air; she had a headache last night,’ said Janet.

I suggested that, as my presence did not seem to be required, I could take her on my arm for a walk to the pier-head.

Her face was burning; she would gladly have gone out, but the squire refused to permit it, and she nodded over her crossed hands, saying that she was in no hurry.

‘Ha! I am,’ quoth he.

‘Dear Miss Beltham!’ my father ejaculated solicitously. ’Here, sir, oblige me by attending to me,’ cried the squire, fuming and blinking. ’I sent for you on a piece of business. You got this money through a gentleman, a solicitor, named Bannerbridge, did you?’

‘His name was Bannerbridge, Mr. Beltham.’

‘Dorothy, you knew a Mr. Bannerbridge?’

She faltered: ’I knew him .... Harry was lost in the streets of London when he was a little fellow, and the Mr. Bannerbridge I knew found him and took him to his house, and was very kind to him.’

‘What was his Christian name?’

I gave them: ‘Charles Adolphus.’

‘The identical person!’ exclaimed my father.

‘Oh! you admit it,’ said the squire. ’Ever seen him since the time Harry was lost, Dorothy?’

‘Yes,’ she answered. ’I have heard he is dead:

‘Did you see him shortly before his death?’

’I happened to see him a short time before!

‘He was your man of business, was he?’

‘For such little business as I had to do.’

‘You were sure you could trust him, eh?’

‘Yes.’

My aunt Dorothy breathed deeply.

‘By God, ma’am, you’re a truthful woman!’

The old man gave her a glare of admiration.

It was now my turn to undergo examination, and summoned by his apostrophe to meet his eyes, I could appreciate the hardness of the head I had to deal with.

’Harry, I beg your pardon beforehand; I want to get at facts; I must ask you what you know about where the money came from?’

Page 2207

I spoke of my attempts to discover the whence and wherefore of it.

‘Government? eh?’ he sneered.

‘I really can’t judge whether it came from that quarter,’ said I.

‘What do you think?—think it likely?’

I thought it unlikely, and yet likelier than that it should have come from an individual.

’Then you don’t suspect any particular person of having sent it in the nick of time, Harry Richmond?’

I replied: ‘No, sir; unless you force me to suspect you.’

He jumped in his chair, astounded and wrathful, confounded me for insinuating that he was a Bedlamite, and demanded the impudent reason of my suspecting him to have been guilty of the infernal folly.

I had but the reason to instance that he was rich and kind at heart.

‘Rich! kind!’ he bellowed. ’Just excuse me—I must ask for the purpose of my inquiry;—-there, tell me, how much do you believe you ’ve got of that money remaining? None o’ that Peterborough style of counting in the back of your pate. Say!’

There was a dreadful silence.

My father leaned persuasively forward.

’Mr. Beltham, I crave permission to take up the word. Allow me to remind you of the prize Harry has won. The prince awaits you to bestow on him the hand of his daughter —’

‘Out with it, Harry,’ shouted the squire.

‘Not to mention Harry’s seat in Parliament,’ my father resumed, ’he has a princess to wife, indubitably one of the most enviable positions in the country! It is unnecessary to count on future honours; they may be alluded to. In truth, sir, we make him the first man in the country. Not necessarily Premier: you take my meaning: he possesses the combination of social influence and standing with political achievements, and rank and riches in addition—’

’I ‘m speaking to my grandson, sir,’ the squire rejoined, shaking himself like a man rained on. ’I ’m waiting for a plain answer, and no lie. You’ve already confessed as

much as that the money you told me on your honour you put out to interest; psh!—for my grandson was smoke. Now let's hear him.'

My father called out: 'I claim a hearing! The money you speak of was put out to the very highest interest. You have your grandson in Parliament, largely acquainted with the principal members of society, husband of an hereditary princess! You have only at this moment to propose for her hand. I guarantee it to you. With that money I have won him everything. Not that I would intimate to you that princesses are purchaseable. The point is, I knew how to employ it.'

'In two months' time, the money in the Funds in the boy's name—you told me that.'

'You had it in the Funds in Harry Richmond's name, sir.'

'Well, sir, I'm asking him whether it's in the Funds now.'

'Oh! Mr. Beltham.'

'What answer's that?'

The squire was really confused by my father's interruption, and lost sight of me.

Page 2208

‘I ask where it came from: I ask whether it’s squandered?’ he continued.

’Mr. Beltham, I reply that you have only to ask for it to have it; do so immediately.’

’What ‘s he saying?’ cried the baffled old man.

‘I give you a thousand times the equivalent of the money, Mr. Beltham.’

‘Is the money there?’

‘The lady is here.’

‘I said money, sir.’

‘A priceless honour and treasure, I say emphatically.’ My grandfather’s brows and mouth were gathering for storm. Janet touched his knee.

’Where the devil your understanding truckles, if you have any, I don’t know,’ he muttered. ‘What the deuce—lady got to do with money!’

‘Oh!’ my father laughed lightly, ’customarily the alliance is, they say, as close as matrimony. Pardon me. To speak with becoming seriousness, Mr. Beltham, it was duly imperative that our son should be known in society, should be, you will apprehend me, advanced in station, which I had to do through the ordinary political channel. There could not but be a considerable expenditure for such a purpose.’

‘In Balls, and dinners!’

‘In everything that builds a young gentleman’s repute.’

’You swear to me you gave your Balls and dinners, and the lot, for Harry Richmond’s sake?’

‘On my veracity, I did, sir!’

’Please don’t talk like a mountebank. I don’t want any of your roundabout words for truth; we’re not writing a Bible essay. I try my best to be civil.’

My father beamed on him.

’I guarantee you succeed, sir. Nothing on earth can a man be so absolutely sure of as to succeed in civility, if he honestly tries at it. Jorian DeWitt,—by the way, you may not know him—an esteemed old friend of mine, says—that is, he said once—to a tolerably impudent fellow whom he had disconcerted with a capital retort, “You may try to be a gentleman, and blunder at it, but if you will only try to be his humble servant, we are

certain to establish a common footing." Jorian, let me tell you, is a wit worthy of our glorious old days.'

My grandfather eased his heart with a plunging breath.

'Well, sir, I didn't ask you here for your opinion or your friend's, and I don't care for modern wit.'

'Nor I, Mr. Beltham, nor I! It has the reek of stable straw. We are of one mind on that subject. The thing slouches, it sprawls. It—to quote Jorian once more—is like a dirty, idle, little stupid boy who cannot learn his lesson and plays the fool with the alphabet. You smile, Miss Ilchester: you would appreciate Jorian. Modern wit is emphatically degenerate. It has no scintillation, neither thrust nor parry. I compare it to boxing, as opposed to the more beautiful science of fencing.'

'Well, sir, I don't want to hear your comparisons,' growled the squire, much oppressed. 'Stop a minute . . .'

'Half a minute to me, sir,' said my father, with a glowing reminiscence of Jorian DeWitt, which was almost too much for the combustible old man, even under Janet's admonition.

Page 2209

My aunt Dorothy moved her head slightly toward my father, looking on the floor, and he at once drew in.

‘Mr. Beltham, I attend to you submissively.’

‘You do? Then tell me what brought this princess to England?’

’The conviction that Harry had accomplished his oath to mount to an eminence in his country, and had made the step she is about to take less, I will say, precipitous: though I personally decline to admit a pointed inferiority.’

‘You wrote her a letter.’

’That, containing the news of the attack on him and his desperate illness, was the finishing touch to the noble lady’s passion.’

’Attack? I know nothing about an attack. You wrote her a letter and wrote her a lie. You said he was dying.’

‘I had the boy inanimate on my breast when I despatched the epistle.’

‘You said he had only a few days to live.’

‘So in my affliction I feared.’

’Will you swear you didn’t write that letter with the intention of drawing her over here to have her in your power, so that you might threaten you’d blow on her reputation if she or her father held out against you and all didn’t go as you fished for it?’

My father raised his head proudly.

’I divide your query into two parts. I wrote, sir, to bring her to his side. I did not write with any intention to threaten.’

‘You’ve done it, though.’

‘I have done this,’ said my father, toweringly: ’I have used the power placed in my hands by Providence to overcome the hesitations of a gentleman whose illustrious rank predisposes him to sacrifice his daughter’s happiness to his pride of birth and station. Can any one confute me when I assert that the princess loves Harry Richmond?’

I walked abruptly to one of the windows, hearing a pitiable wrangling on the theme. My grandfather vowed she had grown wiser, my father protested that she was willing and anxious; Janet was appealed to. In a strangely-sounding underbreath, she said, ’The princess does not wish it.’

‘You hear that, Mr. Richmond?’ cried the squire.

He returned: ’Can Miss Ilchester say that the Princess Ottilia does not passionately love my son Harry Richmond? The circumstances warrant me in beseeching a direct answer.’

She uttered: ‘No.’

I looked at her; she at me.

‘You can conduct a case, Richmond,’ the squire remarked.

My father rose to his feet. ’I can conduct my son to happiness and greatness, my dear sir; but to some extent I require your grandfatherly assistance; and I urge you now to present your respects to the prince and princess, and judge yourself of his Highness’s disposition for the match. I assure you in advance that he welcomes the proposal.’

‘I do not believe it,’ said Janet, rising.

My aunt Dorothy followed her example, saying: ’In justice to Harry the proposal should be made. At least it will settle this dispute.’

Page 2210

Janet stared at her, and the squire threw his head back with an amazed interjection.

‘What! You’re for it now? Why, at breakfast you were all t’ other way! You didn’t want this meeting because you pooh-poohed the match.’

‘I do think you should go,’ she answered. ’You have given Harry your promise, and if he empowers you, it is right to make the proposal, and immediately, I think.’

She spoke feverishly, with an unsweet expression of face, that seemed to me to indicate vexedness at the squire’s treatment of my father.

‘Harry,’ she asked me in a very earnest fashion, ’is it your desire? Tell your grandfather that it is, and that you want to know your fate. Why should there be any dispute on a fact that can be ascertained by crossing a street? Surely it is trifling.’

Janet stooped to whisper in the squire’s ear.

He caught the shock of unexpected intelligence apparently; faced about, gazed up, and cried: ’You too! But I haven’t done here. I ’ve got to cross-examine . . . Pretend, do you mean? Pretend I’m ready to go? I can release this prince just as well here as there.’

Janet laughed faintly.

‘I should advise your going, grandada.’

‘You a weathercock woman!’ he reproached her, quite mystified, and fell to rubbing his head. ‘Suppose I go to be snubbed?’

’The prince is a gentleman, grandada. Come with me. We will go alone. You can relieve the prince, and protect him.’

My father nodded: ‘I approve.’

‘And grandada—but it will not so much matter if we are alone, though,’ Janet said.

‘Speak out.’

‘See the princess as well; she must be present.’

‘I leave it to you,’ he said, crestfallen.

Janet pressed my aunt Dorothy’s hand.

’Aunty, you were right, you are always right. This state of suspense is bad all round, and it is infinitely worse for the prince and princess.’

My aunt Dorothy accepted the eulogy with a singular trembling wrinkle of the forehead.

She evidently understood that Janet had seen her wish to get released.

For my part, I shared my grandfather's stupefaction at their unaccountable changes. It appeared almost as if my father had won them over to baffle him. The old man tried to insist on their sitting down again, but Janet perseveringly smiled and smiled until he stood up. She spoke to him softly. He was one black frown; displeased with her; obedient, however.

Too soon after, I had the key to the enigmatical scene. At the moment I was contemptuous of riddles, and heard with idle ears Janet's promptings to him and his replies. 'It would be so much better to settle it here,' he said. She urged that it could not be settled here without the whole burden and responsibility falling upon him.

'Exactly,' interposed my father, triumphing.

Dorothy Beltham came to my side, and said, as if speaking to herself, while she gazed out of window, 'If a refusal, it should come from the prince.' She dropped her voice: 'The money has not been spent? Has it? Has any part of it been spent? Are you sure you have more than three parts of it?'

Page 2211

Now, that she should be possessed by the spirit of parsimony on my behalf at such a time as this, was to my conception insanely comical, and her manner of expressing it was too much for me. I kept my laughter under to hear her continue: 'What numbers are flocking on the pier! and there is no music yet. Tell me, Harry, that the money is all safe; nearly all; it is important to know; you promised economy.'

'Music did you speak of, Miss Beltham?' My father bowed to her gallantly. 'I chanced to overhear you. My private band performs to the public at midday.'

She was obliged to smile to excuse his interruption.

'What's that? whose band?' said the squire, bursting out of Janet's hand. 'A private band?'

Janet had a difficulty in resuming her command of him. The mention of the private band made him very restive.

'I 'm not acting on my own judgement at all in going to these foreign people,' he said to Janet. 'Why go? I can have it out here and an end to it, without bothering them and their interpreters.'

He sang out to me: 'Harry, do you want me to go through this form for you?—mn'd unpleasant!'

My aunt Dorothy whispered in my ear: 'Yes! yes!'

'I feel tricked!' he muttered, and did not wait for me to reply before he was again questioning my aunt Dorothy concerning Mr. Bannerbridge, and my father as to 'that sum of money.' But his method of interrogation was confused and pointless. The drift of it was totally obscure.

'I'm off my head to-day,' he said to Janet, with a sideshot of his eye at my father.

'You waste time and trouble, grandada,' said she.

He vowed that he was being bewildered, bothered by us all; and I thought I had never seen him so far below his level of energy; but I had not seen him condescend to put himself upon a moderately fair footing with my father. The truth was, that Janet had rigorously schooled him to bridle his temper, and he was no match for the voluble easy man without the freest play of his tongue.

'This prince!' he kept ejaculating.

'Won't you understand, grandada, that you relieve him, and make things clear by going?' Janet said.

He begged her fretfully not to be impatient, and hinted that she and he might be acting the part of dupes, and was for pursuing his inauspicious cross-examination in spite of his blundering, and the ‘Where am I now?’ which pulled him up. My father, either talking to my aunt Dorothy, to Janet, or to me, on ephemeral topics, scarcely noticed him, except when he was questioned, and looked secure of success in the highest degree consistent with perfect calmness.

‘So you say you tell me to go, do you?’ the squire called to me. ’Be good enough to stay here and wait. I don’t see that anything’s gained by my going: it’s damned hard on me, having to go to a man whose language I don’t know, and he don’t know mine, on a business we’re all of us in a muddle about. I’ll do it if it’s right. You’re sure?’

Page 2212

He glanced at Janet. She nodded.

I was looking for this quaint and, to me, incomprehensible interlude to commence with the departure of the squire and Janet, when a card was handed in by one of the hotel-waiters.

‘Another prince!’ cried the squire. ’These Germans seem to grow princes like potatoes—dozens to a root! Who’s the card for? Ask him to walk up. Show him into a quiet room. Does he speak English?’

’Does Prince Hermann of—I can’t pronounce the name of the place—speak English, Harry?’ Janet asked me.

‘As well as you or I,’ said I, losing my inattention all at once with a mad leap of the heart.

Hermann’s presence gave light, fire, and colour to the scene in which my destiny had been wavering from hand to hand without much more than amusedly interesting me, for I was sure that I had lost Ottilia; I knew that too well, and worse could not happen. I had besides lost other things that used to sustain me, and being reckless, I was contemptuous, and listened to the talk about money with sublime indifference to the subject: with an attitude, too, I daresay. But Hermann’s name revived my torment. Why had he come? to persuade the squire to control my father? Nothing but that would suffer itself to be suggested, though conjectures lying in shadow underneath pressed ominously on my mind.

My father had no doubts.

’A word to you, Mr. Beltham, before you go to Prince Hermann. He is an emissary, we treat him with courtesy, and if he comes to diplomatize we, of course, give a patient hearing. I have only to observe in the most emphatic manner possible that I do not retract one step. I will have this marriage: I have spoken! It rests with Prince Ernest.’

The squire threw a hasty glare of his eyes back as he was hobbling on Janet’s arm. She stopped short, and replied for him.

’Mr. Beltham will speak for himself, in his own name. We are not concerned in any unworthy treatment of Prince Ernest. We protest against it.’

‘Dear young lady!’ said my father, graciously. ’I meet you frankly. Now tell me. I know you a gallant horsewoman: if you had lassoed the noble horse of the desert would you let him run loose because of his remonstrating? Side with me, I entreat you! My son is my first thought. The pride of princes and wild horses you will find wonderfully similar, especially in the way they take their taming when once they feel they are positively caught. We show him we have him fast—he falls into our paces on the spot! For Harry’s sake—for the princess’s, I beg you exert your universally—deservedly

acknowledged influence. Even now—and you frown on me!—I cannot find it in my heart to wish you the sweet and admirable woman of the world you are destined to be, though you would comprehend me and applaud me, for I could not—no, not to win your favourable opinion!—consent that you should be robbed of a single ray of your fresh

Page 2213

maidenly youth. If you must misjudge me, I submit. It is the price I pay for seeing you young and lovely. Prince Ernest is, credit me, not unworthily treated by me, if life is a battle, and the prize of it to the General's head. I implore you'—he lured her with the dimple of a lurking smile—'do not seriously blame your afflicted senior, if we are to differ. I am vastly your elder: you instil the doubt whether I am by as much the wiser of the two; but the father of Harry Richmond claims to know best what will ensure his boy's felicity. Is he rash? Pronounce me guilty of an excessive anxiety for my son's welfare; say that I am too old to read the world with the accuracy of a youthful intelligence: call me indiscreet: stigmatize me unlucky; the severest sentence a judge'—he bowed to her deferentially—'can utter; only do not cast a gaze of rebuke on me because my labour is for my son—my utmost devotion. And we know, Miss Ilchester, that the princess honours him with her love. I protest in all candour, I treat love as love; not as a weight in the scale; it is the heavenly power which dispenses with weighing! its ascendancy . . .'

The squire could endure no more, and happily so, for my father was losing his remarkably moderated tone, and threatening polysyllables. He had followed Janet, step for step, at a measured distance, drooping toward her with his winningest air, while the old man pulled at her arm to get her out of hearing of the obnoxious flatterer. She kept her long head in profile, trying creditably not to appear discourteous to one who addressed her by showing an open ear, until the final bolt made by the frenzied old man dragged her through the doorway. His neck was shortened behind his collar as though he shrugged from the blast of a bad wind. I believe that, on the whole, Janet was pleased. I will wager that, left to herself, she would have been drawn into an answer, if not an argument. Nothing would have made her resolution swerve, I admit.

They had not been out of the room three seconds when my aunt Dorothy was called to join them. She had found time to say that she hoped the money was intact.

CHAPTER LII

STRANGE REVELATIONS, AND MY GRANDFATHER HAS HIS LAST OUTBURST

My father and I stood at different windows, observing the unconcerned people below.

'Did you scheme to bring Prince Hermann over here as well?' I asked him.

He replied laughing: 'I really am not the wonderful wizard you think me, Richie. I left Prince Ernest's address as mine with Waddy in case the Frau Feld-Marschall should take it into her head to come. Further than that you must question Providence, which I humbly thank for its unfailing support, down to unexpected trifles. Only this—to you and to all of them: nothing bends me. I will not be robbed of the fruit of a lifetime.'

‘Supposing I refuse?’

Page 2214

’You refuse, Richie, to restore the princess her character and the prince his serenity of mind at their urgent supplication? I am utterly unable to suppose it. You are married in the papers this morning. I grieve to say that the position of Prince Hermann is supremely ridiculous. I am bound to add he is a bold boy. It requires courage in one of the pretenders to the hand of the princess to undertake the office of intercessor, for he must know—the man must know in his heart that he is doing her no kindness. He does not appeal to me, you see. I have shown that my arrangements are unalterable. What he will make of your grandad! . . . Why on earth he should have been sent to—of all men in the world—your grandad, Richie!’

I was invited to sympathetic smiles of shrewd amusement.

He caught sight of friends, and threw up the window, saluting them.

The squire returned with my aunt Dorothy and Janet to behold the detested man communicating with the outer world from his own rooms. He shouted unceremoniously, ‘Shut that window!’ and it was easy to see that he had come back heavily armed for the offensive. ’Here, Mr. Richmond, I don’t want all men to know you’re in my apartments.’

‘I forgot, sir, temporarily,’ said my father, ’I had vacated the rooms for your convenience —be assured.’

An explanation on the subject of the rooms ensued between the old man and the ladies; —it did not improve his temper.

His sense of breeding, nevertheless, forced him to remark, ’I can’t thank you, sir, for putting me under an obligation I should never have incurred myself.’

’Oh, I was happy to be of use to the ladies, Mr. Beltham, and require no small coin of exchange,’ my father responded with the flourish of a pacifying hand. ’I have just heard from a posse of friends that the marriage is signalled in this morning’s papers—-numberless congratulations, I need not observe.’

‘No, don’t,’ said the squire. ’Nobody’ll understand them here, and I needn’t ask you to sit down, because I don’t want you to stop. I’ll soon have done now; the game’s played. Here, Harry, quick; has all that money been spent—no offence to you, but as a matter of business?’

‘Not all, sir,’ I was able to say.

‘Half?’

‘Yes, I think so.’

‘Three parts?’

‘It may be.’

‘And liabilities besides?’

‘There are some.’

‘You’re not a liar. That’ll do for you.’

He turned to my aunt: her eyes had shut.

‘Dorothy, you’ve sold out twenty-five thousand pounds’ worth of stock. You’re a truthful woman, as I said, and so I won’t treat you like a witness in a box. You gave it to Harry to help him out of his scrape. Why, short of staring lunacy, did you pass it through the hands of this man? He sweated his thousands out of it at the start. Why did you make a secret of it to make the man think his nonsense?—Ma’am, behave like a lady and my daughter,’ he cried, fronting her, for the sudden and blunt attack had slackened her nerves; she moved as though to escape, and was bewildered. I stood overwhelmed. No wonder she had attempted to break up the scene.

Page 2215

’Tell me your object, Dorothy Beltham, in passing the money through the hands of this man? Were you for helping him to be a man of his word? Help the boy—that I understand. However, you were mistress of your money! I’ve no right to complain, if you will go spending a fortune to whitewash the blackamoor! Well, it’s your own, you’ll say. So it is: so ’s your character!’

The egregious mildness of these interjections could not long be preserved.

’You deceived me, ma’am. You wouldn’t build school-houses, you couldn’t subscribe to Charities, you acted parsimony, to pamper a scamp and his young scholar! You went to London—you did it in cool blood; you went to your stockbroker, and from the stockbroker to the Bank, and you sold out stock to fling away this big sum. I went to the Bank on business, and the books were turned over for my name, and there at “Beltham” I saw quite by chance the cross of the pen, and I saw your folly, ma’am; I saw it all in a shot. I went to the Bank on my own business, mind that. Ha! you know me by this time; I loathe spying; the thing jumped out of the book; I couldn’t help seeing. Now I don’t reckon how many positive fools go to make one superlative humbug; you’re one of the lot, and I’ve learnt it.’

My father airily begged leave to say: ’As to positive and superlative, Mr. Beltham, the three degrees of comparison are no longer of service except to the trader. I do not consider them to exist for ladies. Your positive is always particularly open to dispute, and I venture to assert I cap you your superlative ten times over.’

He talked the stuff for a diversion, presenting in the midst of us an incongruous image of smiles that filled me with I knew not what feelings of angry alienation, until I was somewhat appeased by the idea that he had not apprehended the nature of the words just spoken.

It seemed incredible, yet it was true; it was proved to be so to me by his pricking his ears and his attentive look at the mention of the word prepossessing him in relation to the money: Government.

The squire said something of Government to my aunt Dorothy, with sarcastical emphasis.

As the observation was unnecessary, and was wantonly thrown in by him, she seized on it to escape from her compromising silence: ’I know nothing of Government or its ways.’

She murmured further, and looked at Janet, who came to her aid, saying: ’Grandada, we’ve had enough talk of money, money! All is done that you wanted done. Stocks, Shares, Banks—we’ve gone through them all. Please, finish! Please, do. You have only to state what you have heard from Prince Hermann.’

Janet gazed in the direction of my father, carefully avoiding my eyes, but evidently anxious to shield my persecuted aunty.

‘Speaking of Stocks and Shares, Miss Ilchester,’ said my father, ’I myself would as soon think of walking into a field of scythe-blades in full activity as of dabbling in them. One of the few instances I remember of our Jorian stooping to a pun, is upon the contango: ingenious truly, but objectionable, because a pun. I shall not be guilty of repeating it. “The stockmarket is the national snapdragon bowl,” he says, and is very amusing upon the Jews; whether quite fairly, Mr. Beltham knows better than I, on my honour.’

Page 2216

He appealed lightly to the squire, for thus he danced on the crater's brink, and had for answer,

'You're a cool scoundrel, Richmond.'

'I choose to respect you, rather in spite of yourself, I fear, sir,' said my father, bracing up.

'Did you hear my conversation with my daughter?'

'I heard, if I may say so, the lion taking his share of it.'

'All roaring to you, was it?'

'Mr. Beltham, we have our little peculiarities; I am accustomed to think of a steam-vent when I hear you indulging in a sentence of unusual length, and I hope it is for our good, as I thoroughly believe it is for yours, that you should deliver yourself freely.'

'So you tell me; like a stage lacquey!' muttered the old man, with surprising art in caricaturing a weakness in my father's bearing, of which I was cruelly conscious, though his enunciation was flowing. He lost his naturalness through forcing for ease in the teeth of insult.

'Grandada, aunty and I will leave you,' said Janet, waxing importunate.

'When I've done,' said he, facing his victim savagely. 'The fellow pretends he didn't understand. She's here to corroborate. Richmond, there, my daughter, Dorothy Beltham, there's the last of your fools and dupes. She's a truthful woman, I'll own, and she'll contradict me if what I say is not the fact. That twenty-five thousand from "Government" came out of her estate.'

'Out of—'

'Out of be damned, sir! She's the person who paid it.'

'If the "damns" have set up, you may as well let the ladies go,' said I.

He snapped at me like a rabid dog in career.

'She's the person—one of your petticoat "Government"—who paid—do you hear me, Richmond?—the money to help you to keep your word: to help you to give your Balls and dinners too. She—I won't say she told you, and you knew it—she paid it. She sent it through her Mr. Bannerbridge. Do you understand now? You had it from her. My God! look at the fellow!'

A dreadful gape of stupefaction had usurped the smiles on my father's countenance; his eyes rolled over, he tried to articulate, and was indeed a spectacle for an enemy. His convulsed frame rocked the syllables, as with a groan, unpleasant to hear, he called on my aunt Dorothy by successive stammering apostrophes to explain, spreading his hands wide. He called out her Christian name. Her face was bloodless.

'Address my daughter respectfully, sir, will you! I won't have your infernal familiarities!' roared the squire.

'He is my brother-in-law,' said Dorothy, reposing on the courage of her blood, now that the worst had been spoken. 'Forgive me, Mr. Richmond, for having secretly induced you to accept the loan from me.'

'Loan!' interjected the squire. 'They fell upon it like a pair of kites. You'll find the last ghost of a bone of your loan in a bill, and well picked. They've been doing their bills: I've heard that.'

Page 2217

My father touched the points of his fingers on his forehead, straining to think, too theatrically, but in hard earnest, I believe. He seemed to be rising on tiptoe.

'Oh, madam! Dear lady! my friend! Dorothy, my sister! Better a thousand times that I had married, though I shrank from a heartless union! This money?—it is not—'

The old man broke in: 'Are you going to be a damned low vulgar comedian and tale of a trumpet up to the end, you Richmond? Don't think you'll gain anything by standing there as if you were jumping your trunk from a shark. Come, sir, you're in a gentleman's rooms; don't pitch your voice like a young jackanapes blowing into a horn. Your gasps and your spasms, and howl of a yawning brute! Keep your menagerie performances for your pantomime audiences. What are you meaning? Do you pretend you're astonished? She's not the first fool of a woman whose money you've devoured, with your "Madam," and "My dear" and mouthing and elbowing your comedy tricks; your gabble of "Government" protection, and scandalous advertisements of the by-blow of a star-coated rapscallion. If you've a recollection of the man in you, show your back, and be off, say you've fought against odds—I don't doubt you have, counting the constables—and own you're a villain: plead guilty, and be off and be silent, and do no more harm. Is it "Government" still?'

My aunt Dorothy had come round to me. She clutched my arm to restrain me from speaking, whispering:

'Harry, you can't save him. Think of your own head.' She made me irresolute, and I was too late to check my father from falling into the trap.

'Oh! Mr. Beltham,' he said, 'you are hard, sir. I put it to you: had you been in receipt of a secret subsidy from Government for a long course of years—'

'How long?' the squire interrupted.

Prompt though he would have been to dismiss the hateful person, he was not, one could see, displeased to use the whip upon so exciteable and responsive a frame. He seemed to me to be basely guilty of leading his victim on to expose himself further.

'There's no necessity for "how long,"' I said.

The old man kept the question on his face.

My father reflected.

'I have to hit my memory, I am shattered, sir. I say, you would be justified, amply justified—'

'How long?' was reiterated.

‘I can at least date it from the period of my marriage.’

’From the date when your scoundrelism first touches my family, that’s to say! So “Government” agreed to give you a stipend to support your wife!’

’Mr. Beltham, I breathe with difficulty. It was at that period, on the death of a nobleman interested in restraining me—I was his debtor for kindnesses . . . my head is whirling! I say, at that period, upon the recommendation of friends of high standing, I began to agitate for the restitution of my rights. From infancy——’

Page 2218

’To the deuce, your infancy! I know too much about your age. Just hark, you Richmond! none of your “I was a child” to provoke compassion from women. I mean to knock you down and make you incapable of hurting these poor foreign people you trapped. They defy you, and I’ll do my best to draw your teeth. Now for the annuity. You want one to believe ’you thought you frightened “Government,” eh?’

‘Annual proof was afforded me, sir.’

‘Oh! annual! through Mr. Charles Adolphus Bannerbridge, deceased!’

Janet stepped up to my aunt Dorothy to persuade her to leave the room, but she declined, and hung by me, to keep me out of danger, as she hoped, and she prompted me with a guarding nervous squeeze of her hand on my arm to answer temperately when I was questioned:

‘Harry, do you suspect Government paid that annuity?’

‘Not now, certainly.’

’Tell the man who ‘tis you suspect.’

My aunt Dorothy said: ‘Harry is not bound to mention his suspicions.’

‘Tell him yourself, then.’

‘Does it matter—?’

’Yes, it matters. I’ll break every plank he walks on, and strip him stark till he flops down shivering into his slough—a convicted common swindler, with his dinners and Balls and his private bands! Richmond, you killed one of my daughters; t’ other fed you, through her agent, this Mr. Charles Adolphus Bannerbridge, from about the date of your snaring my poor girl and carrying her off behind your postillions—your trotting undertakers! and the hours of her life reckoned in milestones. She’s here to contradict me, if she can. Dorothy Beltham was your “Government” that paid the annuity.’

I took Dorothy Beltham into my arms. She was trembling excessively, yet found time to say, ‘Bear up, dearest; keep still.’ All I thought and felt foundered in tears.

For a while I heard little distinctly of the tremendous tirade which the vindictive old man, rendered thrice venomous by the immobility of the petrified large figure opposed to him, poured forth. My poor father did not speak because he could not; his arms dropped; and such was the torrent of attack, with its free play of thunder and lightning in the form of oaths, epithets, short and sharp comparisons, bitter home thrusts and most vehement imprecatory denunciations, that our protesting voices quailed. Janet plucked at my aunt Dorothy’s dress to bear her away.

‘I can’t leave my father,’ I said.

‘Nor I you, dear,’ said the tender woman; and so we remained to be scourged by this tongue of incarnate rage.

‘You pensioner of a silly country spinster!’ sounded like a return to mildness. My father’s chest heaved up.

I took advantage of the lull to make myself heard: I did but heap fuel on fire, though the old man’s splenetic impetus had partly abated.

Page 2219

’You Richmond! do you hear him? he swears he’s your son, and asks to be tied to the stake beside you. Disown him, and I’ll pay you money and thank you. I’ll thank my God for anything short of your foul blood in the family. You married the boy’s mother to craze and kill her, and guttle her property. You waited for the boy to come of age to swallow what was settled on him. You wait for me to lie in my coffin to pounce on the strongbox you think me the fool to toss to a young donkey ready to ruin all his belongings for you! For nine-and-twenty years you’ve sucked the veins of my family, and struck through my house like a rotting-disease. Nine-and-twenty years ago you gave a singing-lesson in my house: the pest has been in it ever since! You breed vermin in the brain to think of you! Your wife, your son, your dupes, every soul that touches you, mildews from a blight! You were born of ropery, and you go at it straight, like a webfoot to water. What’s your boast?—your mother’s disgrace! You shame your mother. Your whole life’s a ballad o’ bastardy. You cry up the woman’s infamy to hook at a father. You swell and strut on her pickings. You’re a cock forced from the smoke of the dunghill! You shame your mother, damned adventurer! You train your boy for a swindler after your own pattern; you twirl him in your curst harlequinade to a damnation as sure as your own. The day you crossed my threshold the devils danced on their flooring. I’ve never seen the sun shine fair on me after it. With your guitar under the windows, of moonlight nights! your Spanish fopperies and trickeries! your French phrases and toeings! I was touched by a leper. You set your traps for both my girls: you caught the brown one first, did you, and flung her second for t’ other, and drove a tandem of ’em to live the spangled hog you are; and down went the mother of the boy to the place she liked better, and my other girl here—the one you cheated for her salvation—you tried to cajole her from home and me, to send her the same way down. She stuck to decency. Good Lord! you threatened to hang yourself, guitar and all. But her purse served your turn. For why? You ’re a leech. I speak before ladies or I’d rip your town-life to shreds. Your cause! your romantic history! your fine figure! every inch of you ’s notched with villany! You fasten on every moneyed woman that comes in your way. You’ve outdone Herod in murdering the innocents, for he didn’t feed on ’em, and they’ve made you fat. One thing I’ll say of you: you look the beastly thing you set yourself up for. The kindest blow to you ‘s to call you impostor.’

He paused, but his inordinate passion of speech was unsated: his white lips hung loose for another eruption.

I broke from my aunt Dorothy to cross over to my father, saying on the way: ’We ’ve heard enough, sir. You forget the cardinal point of invective, which is, not to create sympathy for the person you assail.’

Page 2220

‘Oh! you come in with your infernal fine language, do you!’ the old man thundered at me. ’I ‘ll just tell you at once, young fellow—’

My aunt Dorothy supplicated his attention. ‘One error I must correct.’ Her voice issued from a contracted throat, and was painfully thin and straining, as though the will to speak did violence to her weaker nature. ’My sister loved Mr. Richmond. It was to save her life, because I believed she loved him much and would have died, that Mr. Richmond—in pity—offered her his hand, at my wish’: she bent her head: ’at my cost. It was done for me. I wished it; he obeyed me. No blame—’ her dear mouth faltered. ‘I am to be accused, if anybody.’

She added more firmly: ’My money would have been his. I hoped to spare his feelings, I beg his forgiveness now, by devoting some of it, unknown to him, to assist him. That was chiefly to please myself, I see, and I am punished.’

‘Well, ma’am,’ said the squire, calm at white heat; ’a fool’s confession ought to be heard out to the end. What about the twenty-five thousand?’

‘I hoped to help my Harry.’

‘Why didn’t you do it openly?’

She breathed audible long breaths before she could summon courage to say: ’His father was going to make an irreparable sacrifice. I feared that if he knew this money came from me he would reject it, and persist.’

Had she disliked the idea of my father’s marrying?

The old man pounced on the word sacrifice. ’What sacrifice, ma’am? What’s the sacrifice?’

I perceived that she could not without anguish, and perhaps peril of a further exposure, bring herself to speak, and explained: ’It relates to my having tried to persuade my father to marry a very wealthy lady, so that he might produce the money on the day appointed. Rail at me, sir, as much as you like. If you can’t understand the circumstances without a chapter of statements, I’m sorry for you. A great deal is due to you, I know; but I can’t pay a jot of it while you go on rating my father like a madman.’

‘Harry!’ either my aunt or Janet breathed a warning.

I replied that I was past mincing phrases. The folly of giving the tongue an airing was upon me: I was in fact invited to continue, and animated to do it thoroughly, by the old man’s expression of face, which was that of one who says, ‘I give you rope,’ and I dealt him a liberal amount of stock irony not worth repeating; things that any cultivated man in anger can drill and sting the Boeotian with, under the delusion that he has not lost a

particle of his self-command because of his coolness. I spoke very deliberately, and therefore supposed that the words of composure were those of prudent sense. The error was manifest. The women saw it. One who has indulged his soul in invective will not, if he has power in his hand, be robbed of his climax with impunity by a cool response that seems to trifle, and scourges.

Page 2221

I wound up by thanking my father for his devotion to me: I deemed it, I said, excessive and mistaken in the recent instance, but it was for me.

Upon this he awoke from his dreamy-looking stupefaction.

'Richie does me justice. He is my dear boy. He loves me: I love him. None can cheat us of that. He loves his wreck of a father. You have struck me to your feet, Mr. Beltham.'

'I don't want to see you there, sir; I want to see you go, and not stand rapping your breast-bone, sounding like a burst drum, as you are,' retorted the unappeasable old man.

I begged him in exasperation to keep his similes to himself.

Janet and my aunt Dorothy raised their voices.

My father said: 'I am broken.'

He put out a swimming hand that trembled when it rested, like that of an aged man grasping a staff. I feared for a moment he was acting, he spoke so like himself, miserable though he appeared: but it was his well-known native old style in a state of decrepitude.

'I am broken,' he repeated. 'I am like the ancient figure of mortality entering the mouth of the tomb on a sepulchral monument, somewhere, by a celebrated sculptor: I have seen it: I forget the city. I shall presently forget names of men. It is not your abuse, Mr. Beltham. I should have bowed my head to it till the storm passed. Your facts . . . Oh! Miss Beltham, this last privilege to call you dearest of human beings! my benefactress! my blessing! Do not scorn me, madam.'

'I never did; I never will; I pitied you,' she cried, sobbing.

The squire stamped his foot.

'Madam,' my father bowed gently. 'I was under heaven's special protection—I thought so. I feel I have been robbed—I have not deserved it! Oh! madam, no: it was your generosity that I did not deserve. One of the angels of heaven persuaded me to trust in it. I did not know. . . . Adieu, madam. May I be worthy to meet you!—Ay, Mr. Beltham, your facts have committed the death-wound. You have taken the staff out of my hand: you have extinguished the light. I have existed—ay, a pensioner, unknowingly, on this dear lady's charity; to her I say no more. To you, sir, by all that is most sacred to a man-by the ashes of my mother! by the prospects of my boy! I swear the annuity was in my belief a tangible token that my claims to consideration were in the highest sources acknowledged to be just. I cannot speak! One word to you, Mr. Beltham: put me aside,

I am nothing:—Harry Richmond!—his fortunes are not lost; he has a future! I entreat you—he is your grandson—give him your support; go this instant to the prince—no! you will not deny your countenance to Harry Richmond: let him abjure my name; let me be nameless in his house. And I promise you I shall be unheard of both in Christendom and Heathendom: I have no heart except for my boy's nuptials with the princess: this one thing, to see him the husband

Page 2222

of the fairest and noblest lady upon earth, with all the life remaining in me I pray for! I have won it for him. I have a moderate ability, immense devotion. I declare to you, sir, I have lived, actually subsisted, on this hope! and I have directed my efforts incessantly, sleeplessly, to fortify it. I die to do it! I implore you, sir, go to the prince. If I' (he said this touchingly) 'if I am any further in anybody's way, it is only as a fallen tree.' But his inveterate fancifulness led him to add: 'And that may bridge a cataract.'

My grandfather had been clearing his throat two or three times.

'I 'm ready to finish and get rid of you, Richmond.'

My father bowed.

'I am gone, sir. I feel I am all but tongue-tied. Think that it is Harry who petitions you to ensure his happiness. To-day I guarantee-it.'

The old man turned an inquiring eyebrow upon me. Janet laid her hand on him. He dismissed the feline instinct to prolong our torture, and delivered himself briskly.

'Richmond, your last little bit of villany 's broken in the egg. I separate the boy from you: he's not your accomplice there, I'm glad to know. You witched the lady over to pounce on her like a fowler, you threatened her father with a scandal, if he thought proper to force the trap; swore you 'd toss her to be plucked by the gossips, eh? She's free of you! You got your English and your Germans here to point their bills, and stretch their necks, and hiss, if this gentleman—and your newspapers!—if he didn't give up to you like a funky traveller to a highwayman. I remember a tale of a clumsy Turpin, who shot himself when he was drawing the pistol out of his holsters to frighten the money-bag out of a market farmer. You've done about the same, you Richmond; and, of all the damned poor speeches I ever heard from a convicted felon, yours is the worst—a sheared sheep'd ha' done it more respectably, grant the beast a tongue! The lady is free of you, I tell you. Harry has to thank you for that kindness. She—what is it, Janet? Never mind, I've got the story—she didn't want to marry; but this prince, who called on me just now, happened to be her father's nominee, and he heard of your scoundrelism, and he behaved like a man and a gentleman, and offered himself, none too early nor too late, as it turns out; and the princess, like a good girl, has made amends to her father by accepting him. I've the word of this Prince Hermann for it. Now you can look upon a game of stale-mate. If I had gone to the prince, it wouldn't have been to back your play; but, if you hadn't been guilty of the tricks of a blackguard past praying for, this princess would never have been obliged to marry a man to protect her father and herself. They sent him here to stop any misunderstanding. He speaks good English, so that's certain. Your lies will be contradicted, every one of 'em, seriatim, in to-morrow's newspapers, setting the real man in place of the wrong one; and you 'll draw no profit from them in your fashionable world, where you 've been grinning lately, like a

blackamoor’s head on a conjuror’s plate—the devil alone able to account for the body and joinings. Now you can be off.’

Page 2223

I went up to my father. His plight was more desperate than mine, for I had resembled the condemned before the firing-party, to whom the expected bullet brings a merely physical shock. He, poor man, heard his sentence, which is the heart's pang of death; and how fondly and rootedly he had clung to the idea of my marriage with the princess was shown in his extinction after this blow.

My grandfather chose the moment as a fitting one to ask me for the last time to take my side.

I replied, without offence in the tones of my voice, that I thought my father need not lose me into the bargain, after what he had suffered that day.

He just as quietly rejoined with a recommendation to me to divorce myself for good and all from a scoundrel.

I took my father's arm: he was not in a state to move away unsupported.

My aunt Dorothy stood weeping; Janet was at the window, no friend to either of us.

I said to her, 'You have your wish.'

She shook her head, but did not look back.

My grandfather watched me, step by step, until I had reached the door.

'You're going, are you?' he said. 'Then I whistle you off my fingers!'

An attempt to speak was made by my father in the doorway. He bowed wide of the company, like a blind man. I led him out.

Dimness of sight spared me from seeing certain figures, which were at the toll-bar of the pier, on the way to quit our shores. What I heard was not of a character to give me faith in the sanity of the companion I had chosen. He murmured it at first to himself:

'Waddy shall have her monument!'

My patience was not proof against the repetition of it aloud to me. Had I been gentler I might have known that his nature was compelled to look forward to something, and he discerned nothing in the future, save the task of raising a memorial to a faithful servant.

CHAPTER LIII

THE HEIRESS PROVES THAT SHE INHERITS THE FEUD AND I GO DRIFTING

My grandfather lived eight months after a scene that had afforded him high gratification at the heaviest cost a plain man can pay for his pleasures: it killed him.

My father's supple nature helped him to survive it in apparently unimpeded health, so that the world might well suppose him unconquerable, as he meant that it should. But I, who was with him, knew, though he never talked of his wounds, they had been driven into his heart. He collapsed in speech, and became what he used to call 'one of the ordinary nodding men,' forsaken of his swamping initiative. I merely observed him; I did not invite his confidences, being myself in no mood to give sympathy or to receive it. I was about as tender in my care of him as a military escort bound to deliver up a captive alive.

Page 2224

I left him at Bulsted on my way to London to face the creditors. Adversity had not lowered the admiration of the captain and his wife for the magnificent host of those select and lofty entertainments which I was led by my errand to examine in the skeleton, and with a wonder as big as theirs, but of another complexion: They hung about him, and perused and petted him quaintly; it was grotesque; they thought him deeply injured: by what, by whom, they could not say; but Julia was disappointed in me for refraining to come out with a sally on his behalf. He had quite intoxicated their imaginations. Julia told me of the things he did not do as marvellingly as of the things he did or had done; the charm, it seemed, was to find herself familiar with him to the extent of all but nursing him and making him belong to her. Pilgrims coming upon the source of the mysteriously-abounding river, hardly revere it the less because they love it more when they behold the babbling channels it issues from; and the sense of possession is the secret, I suppose. Julia could inform me rapturously that her charge had slept eighteen hours at a spell. His remarks upon the proposal to fetch a doctor, feeble in themselves, were delicious to her, because they recalled his old humour to show his great spirit, and from her and from Captain William in turn I was condemned to hear how he had said this and that of the doctor, which in my opinion might have been more concise. 'Really, deuced good indeed!' Captain William would exclaim. 'Don't you see it, Harry, my boy? He denies the doctor has a right to cast him out of the world on account of his having been the official to introduce him, and he'll only consent to be visited when he happens to be as incapable of resisting as upon their very first encounter.'

The doctor and death and marriage, I ventured to remind the captain, had been riddled in this fashion by the whole army of humourists and their echoes.

He and Julia fancied me cold to my father's merits. Fond as they were of the squire, they declared war against him in private, they criticized Janet, they thought my aunt Dorothy slightly wrong in making a secret of her good deed: my father was the victim. Their unabated warmth consoled me in the bitterest of seasons. He found a home with them at a time when there would have been a battle at every step. The world soon knew that my grandfather had cast me off, and with this foundation destroyed, the entire fabric of the Grand Parade fell to the ground at once. The crash was heavy. Jorian DeWitt said truly that what a man hates in adversity is to see 'faces'; meaning that the humanity has gone out of them in their curious observation of you under misfortune. You see neither friends nor enemies. You are too sensitive for friends, and are blunted against enemies. You see but the mask of faces: my father was sheltered from that. Julia consulted his wishes in everything; she set traps to catch his whims, and treated them

Page 2225

as birds of paradise; she could submit to have the toppling crumpled figure of a man, Bagenhope, his pensioner and singular comforter, in her house. The little creature was fetched out of his haunts in London purposely to soothe my father with performances on his ancient clarionet, a most querulous plaintive instrument in his discoursing, almost the length of himself; and she endured the nightly sound of it in the guest's blue bedroom, heroically patient, a model to me. Bagenhope drank drams: she allowanced him. He had known my father's mother, and could talk of her in his cups: his playing, and his aged tunes, my father said, were a certification to him that he was at the bottom of the ladder. Why that should afford him peculiar comfort, none of us could comprehend. 'He was the humble lover of my mother, Richie,' I heard with some confusion, and that he adored her memory. The statement was part of an entreaty to me to provide liberally for Bagenhope's pension before we quitted England. 'I am not seriously anxious for much else,' said my father. Yet was he fully conscious of the defeat he had sustained and the catastrophe he had brought down upon me: his touch of my hand told me that, and his desire for darkness and sleep. He had nothing to look to, nothing to see twinkling its radiance for him in the dim distance now; no propitiating Government, no special Providence. But he never once put on a sorrowful air to press for pathos, and I thanked him. He was a man endowed to excite it in the most effective manner, to a degree fearful enough to win English sympathies despite his un-English faults. He could have drawn tears in floods, infinite pathetic commiseration, from our grangousier public, whose taste is to have it as it may be had to the mixture of one-third of nature in two-thirds of artifice. I believe he was expected to go about with this beggar's petition for compassion, and it was a disappointment to the generous, for which they punished him, that he should have abstained. And moreover his simple quietude was really touching to true-hearted people. The elements of pathos do not permit of their being dispensed from a stout smoking bowl. I have to record no pathetic field-day. My father was never insincere in emotion.

I spared his friends, chums, associates, excellent men of a kind, the trial of their attachment by shunning them. His servants I dismissed personally, from M. Alphonse down to the coachman Jeremy, whose speech to me was, that he should be happy to serve my father again, or me, if he should happen to be out of a situation when either of us wanted him, which at least showed his preference for employment: on the other hand, Alphonse, embracing the grand extremes of his stereotyped national oratory, where '*si jamais*,' like the herald Mercury new-mounting, takes its august flight to set in the splendour of 'ausqu'n *la mort*,' declared all other service than my father's repugnant, and vowed himself

Page 2226

to a hermitage, remote from condiments. They both meant well, and did but speak the diverse language of their blood. Mrs. Waddy withdrew a respited heart to Dipwell; it being, according to her experiences, the third time that my father had relinquished house and furniture to go into eclipse on the Continent after blazing over London. She strongly recommended the Continent for a place of restoration, citing his likeness to that animal the chameleon, in the readiness with which he forgot himself among them that knew nothing of him. We quitted Bulsted previous to the return of the family to Riversley. My grandfather lay at the island hotel a month, and was brought home desperately ill. Lady Edbury happened to cross the channel with us. She behaved badly, I thought; foolishly, my father said. She did as much as obliqueness of vision and sharpness of feature could help her to do to cut him in the presence of her party: and he would not take nay. It seemed in very bad taste on his part; he explained to me off-handedly that he insisted upon the exchange of a word or two for the single purpose of protecting her from calumny. By and by it grew more explicable to me how witless she had been to give gossip a handle in the effort to escape it. She sent for him in Paris, but he did not pay the visit.

My grandfather and I never saw one another again. He had news of me from various quarters, and I of him from one; I was leading a life in marked contrast from the homely Riversley circle of days: and this likewise was set in the count of charges against my father. Our Continental pilgrimage ended in a course of riotousness that he did not participate in, and was entirely innocent of, but was held accountable for, because he had been judged a sinner.

‘I am ordered to say,’ Janet wrote, scrupulously obeying the order, ’that if you will leave Paris and come home, and not delay in doing it, your grandfather will receive you on the same footing as heretofore.’

As heretofore! in a letter from a young woman supposed to nourish a softness!

I could not leave my father in Paris, alone; I dared not bring him to London. In wrath at what I remembered, I replied that I was willing to return to Riversley if my father should find a welcome as well.

Janet sent a few dry lines to summon me over in April, a pleasant month on heath-lands when the Southwest sweeps them. The squire was dead. I dropped my father at Bulsted. I could have sworn to the terms of the Will; Mr. Burgin had little to teach me. Janet was the heiress; three thousand pounds per annum fell to the lot of Harry Lepel Richmond, to be paid out of the estate, and pass in reversion to his children, or to Janet’s should the aforesaid Harry die childless.

I was hard hit, and chagrined, but I was not at all angry, for I knew what the Will meant. My aunt Dorothy supplied the interlining eagerly to mollify the seeming cruelty. ’You have only to ask to have it all, Harry.’ The sturdy squire had done his utmost to forward

his cherished wishes after death. My aunt received five-and-twenty thousand pounds, the sum she had thrown away. 'I promised that no money of mine should go where the other went,' she said.

Page 2227

The surprise in store for me was to find how much this rough-worded old man had been liked by his tenantry, his agents and servants. I spoke of it to Janet. 'They loved him,' she said. 'No one who ever met him fairly could help loving him.' They followed him to his grave in a body. From what I chanced to hear among them, their squire was the man of their hearts: in short, an Englishman of the kind which is perpetually perishing out of the land. Janet expected me to be enthusiastic likewise, or remorseful. She expected sympathy; she read me the long list of his charities. I was reminded of Julia Bulsted commenting on my father, with her this he did and that. 'He had plenty,' I said, and Janet shut her lips. Her coldness was irritating.

What ground of accusation had she against me? Our situation had become so delicate that a cold breath sundered us as far as the Poles. I was at liberty to suspect that now she was the heiress, her mind was simply obedient to her grandada's wish; but, as I told my aunt Dorothy, I would not do her that injustice.

'No,' said Dorothy; 'it is the money that makes her position so difficult, unless you break the ice.'

I urged that having steadily refused her before, I could hardly advance without some invitation now.

'What invitation?' said my aunt.

'Not a corpse-like consent,' said I.

'Harry,' she twitted me, 'you have not forgiven her.' That was true.

Sir Roderick and Lady Ilchester did not conceal their elation at their daughter's vast inheritance, though the lady appealed to my feelings in stating that her son Charles was not mentioned in the Will. Sir Roderick talked of the squire with personal pride:—'Now, as to his management of those unwieldy men, his miners they sent him up the items of their complaints. He took them one by one, yielding here, discussing there, and holding to his point. So the men gave way; he sent them a month's pay to reward them for their good sense. He had the art of moulding the men who served him in his own likeness. His capacity for business was extraordinary; you never expected it of a country gentleman. He more than quadrupled his inheritance—much more!' I state it to the worthy Baronet's honour, that although it would have been immensely to his satisfaction to see his daughter attracting the suitor proper to an heiress of such magnitude, he did not attempt to impose restriction upon my interviews with Janet: Riversley was mentioned as my home. I tried to feel at home; the heir of the place seemed foreign, and so did Janet. I attributed it partly to her deep mourning dress that robed her in so sedate a womanliness, partly, in spite of myself, to her wealth.

‘Speak to her kindly of your grandfather,’ said my aunt Dorothy. To do so, however, as she desired it, would be to be guilty of a form of hypocrisy, and I belied my better sentiments by keeping silent. Thus, having ruined myself through anger, I allowed silly sensitiveness to prevent the repair.

Page 2228

It became known that my father was at Bulsted.

I saw trouble one morning on Janet's forehead.

We had a conversation that came near to tenderness; at last she said: 'Will you be able to forgive me if I have ever the misfortune to offend you?'

'You won't offend me,' said I.

She hoped not.

I rallied her: 'Tut, tut, you talk like any twelve-years-old, Janet.'

'I offended you then!'

'Every day! it's all that I care much to remember.'

She looked pleased, but I was so situated that I required passion and abandonment in return for a confession damaging to my pride. Besides, the school I had been graduating in of late unfitted me for a young English gentlewoman's shades and intervolved descents of emotion. A glance up and a dimple in the cheek, were pretty homely things enough, not the blaze I wanted to unlock me, and absolutely thought I had deserved.

Sir Roderick called her to the library on business, which he was in the habit of doing ten times a day, as well as of discussing matters of business at table, ostentatiously consulting his daughter, with a solemn countenance and a transparently reeling heart of parental exultation. 'Janet is supreme,' he would say: 'my advice is simple advice; I am her chief agent, that is all.' Her chief agent, as director of three Companies and chairman of one, was perhaps competent to advise her, he remarked. Her judgement upon ordinary matters he agreed with my grandfather in thinking consummate.

Janet went to him, and shortly after drove him to the station for London. My aunt Dorothy had warned me that she was preparing some deed in my favour, and as I fancied her father to have gone to London for that purpose, and supposed she would now venture to touch on it, I walked away from the East gates of the park as soon as I heard the trot of her ponies, and was led by an evil fate (the stuff the fates are composed of in my instance I have not kept secret) to walk Westward. Thither my evil fate propelled me, where accident was ready to espouse it and breed me mortifications innumerable. My father chanced to have heard the particulars of Squire Beltham's will that morning: I believe Captain William's coachman brushed the subject despondently in my interests; it did not reach him through Julia.

He stood outside the Western gates, and as I approached, I could perceive a labour of excitement on his frame. He pulled violently at the bars of the obstruction.

‘Richie, I am interdicted house and grounds!’ he called, and waved his hand toward the lodge: ‘they decline to open to me.’

‘Were you denied admission?’ I asked him.

’—Your name, if you please, sir?—Mr. Richmond Roy.—We are sorry we have orders not to admit you. And they declined; they would not admit me to see my son.’

‘Those must be the squire’s old orders,’ I said, and shouted to the lodge-keeper.

Page 2229

My father, with the forethoughtfulness which never forsook him, stopped me.

’No, Richie, no; the good woman shall not have the responsibility of letting me in against orders; she may be risking her place, poor soul! Help me, dear lad.’

He climbed the bars to the spikes, tottering, and communicating a convulsion to me as I assisted him in the leap down: no common feat for one of his age and weight.

He leaned on me, quaking.

‘Impossible! Richie, impossible!’ he cried, and reviewed a series of interjections.

It was some time before I discovered that they related to the Will. He was frenzied, and raved, turning suddenly from red to pale under what I feared were redoubtable symptoms, physical or mental. He came for sight of the Will; he would contest it, overthrow it. Harry ruined? He would see Miss Beltham and fathom the plot;—angel, he called her, and was absurdly exclamatory, but in dire earnest. He must have had the appearance of a drunken man to persons observing him from the Grange windows.

My father was refused admission at the hall-doors.

The butler, the brute Sillabin, withstood me impassively.

Whose orders had he?

Miss Ilchester’s.

‘They are afraid of me!’ my father thundered.

I sent a message to Janet.

She was not long in coming, followed by a footman who handed a twist of note-paper from my aunt Dorothy to my father. He opened it and made believe to read it, muttering all the while of the Will.

Janet dismissed the men-servants. She was quite colourless.

‘We have been stopped in the doorway,’ I said.

She answered: ‘I wish it could have been prevented.’

‘You take it on yourself, then?’

She was inaudible.

‘My dear Janet, you call Riversley my home, don’t you?’

‘It is yours.’

‘Do you intend to keep up this hateful feud now my grandfather is dead?’

‘No, Harry, not I.’

’Did you give orders to stop my father from entering the house and grounds?’

‘I did.’

‘You won’t have him here?’

‘Dear Harry, I hoped he would not come just yet.’

‘But you gave the orders?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re rather incomprehensible, my dear Janet.’

‘I wish you could understand me, Harry.’

‘You arm your servants against him!’

‘In a few days—’ she faltered.

‘You insult him and me now,’ said I, enraged at the half indication of her relenting, which spoiled her look of modestly—resolute beauty, and seemed to show that she meant to succumb without letting me break her. ‘You are mistress of the place.’

‘I am. I wish I were not.’

‘You are mistress of Riversley, and you refuse to let my father come in!’

‘While I am the mistress, yes.’

’Anywhere but here, Harry! If he will see me or aunty, if he will kindly appoint any other place, we will meet him, we shall be glad.’

Page 2230

‘I request you to let him enter the house. Do you consent or not?’

‘He was refused once at these doors. Do you refuse him a second time?’

‘I do.’

‘You mean that?’

‘I am obliged to.’

‘You won’t yield a step to me?’

‘I cannot.’

The spirit of an armed champion was behind those mild features, soft almost to supplication to me, that I might know her to be under a constraint. The nether lip dropped in breathing, the eyes wavered: such was her appearance in open war with me, but her will was firm.

Of course I was not so dense as to be unable to perceive her grounds for refusing.

She would not throw the burden on her grandada, even to propitiate me—the man she still loved.

But that she should have a reason, and think it good, in spite of me, and cling to it, defying me, and that she should do hurt to a sentient human creature, who was my father, for the sake of blindly obeying to the letter the injunction of the dead, were intolerable offences to me and common humanity. I, for my own part, would have forgiven her, as I congratulated myself upon reflecting. It was on her account—to open her mind, to enlighten her concerning right and wrong determination, to bring her feelings to bear upon a crude judgement—that I condescended to argue the case. Smarting with admiration, both of the depths and shallows of her character, and of her fine figure, I began:—She was to consider how young she was to pretend to decide on the balance of duties, how little of the world she had seen; an oath sworn at the bedside of the dead was a solemn thing, but was it Christian to keep it to do an unnecessary cruelty to the living? if she had not studied philosophy, she might at least discern the difference between just resolves and insane—between those the soul sanctioned, and those hateful to nature; to bind oneself to carry on another person’s vindictiveness was voluntarily to adopt slavery; this was flatly-avowed insanity, and so forth, with an emphatic display of patience.

The truth of my words could not be controverted. Unhappily I confounded right speaking with right acting, and conceived, because I spoke so justly, that I was specially approved in pressing her to yield.

She broke the first pause to say, ’It’s useless, Harry. I do what I think I am bound to do.’

‘Then I have spoken to no purpose!’

‘If you will only be kind, and wait two or three days?’

‘Be sensible!’

‘I am, as much as I can be.’

’Hard as a flint—you always were! The most grateful woman alive, I admit. I know not another, I assure you, Janet, who, in return for millions of money, would do such a piece of wanton cruelty. What! You think he was not punished enough when he was berated and torn to shreds in your presence? They would be cruel, perhaps—we will suppose it of your sex—but not so fond of their consciences as to stamp a life out to keep an oath. I forget the terms of the Will. Were you enjoined in it to force him away?’

Page 2231

My father had stationed himself in the background. Mention of the Will caught his ears, and he commenced shaking my aunt Dorothy's note, blinking and muttering at a great rate, and pressing his temples.

'I do not read a word of this,' he said,—'upon my honour, not a word; and I know it is her handwriting. That Will!—only, for the love of heaven, madam,'—he bowed vaguely to Janet 'not a syllable of this to the princess, or we are destroyed. I have a great bell in my head, or I would say more. Hearing is out of the question.'

Janet gazed piteously from him to me.

To kill the deer and be sorry for the suffering wretch is common.

I begged my father to walk along the carriage-drive. He required that the direction should be pointed out accurately, and promptly obeyed me, saying: 'I back you, remember. I should certainly be asleep now but for this extraordinary bell.' After going some steps, he turned to shout 'Gong,' and touched his ear. He walked loosely, utterly unlike the walk habitual to him even recently in Paris.

'Has he been ill?' Janet asked.

'He won't see the doctor; the symptoms threaten apoplexy or paralysis, I 'm told. Let us finish. You were aware that you were to inherit Riversley?'

'Yes, Riversley, Harry; I knew that; I knew nothing else.'

'The old place was left to you that you might bar my father out?'

'I gave my word.'

'You pledged it—swore?'

'No.'

'Well, you've done your worst, my dear. If the axe were to fall on your neck for it, you would still refuse, would you not?'

Janet answered softly: 'I believe so.'

'Then, good-bye,' said I.

That feminine softness and its burden of unalterable firmness pulled me two ways, angering me all the more that I should feel myself susceptible to a charm which came of spiritual rawness rather than sweetness; for she needed not to have made the answer

in such a manner; there was pride in it; she liked the soft sound of her voice while declaring herself invincible: I could see her picturing herself meek but fixed.

‘Will you go, Harry? Will you not take Riversley?’ she said.

I laughed.

‘To spare you the repetition of the dilemma?’

‘No, Harry; but this might be done.’

’But—my fullest thanks to you for your generosity: really! I speak in earnest: it would be decidedly against your grandada’s wishes, seeing that he left the Grange to you, and not to me.’

‘Grandada’s wishes! I cannot carry out all his wishes,’ she sighed.

‘Are you anxious to?’

We were on the delicate ground, as her crimson face revealed to me that she knew as well as I.

I, however, had little delicacy in leading her on it. She might well feel that she deserved some wooing.

I fancied she was going to be overcome, going to tremble and show herself ready to fall on my bosom, and I was uncertain of the amount of magnanimity in store there.

Page 2232

She replied calmly, ‘Not immediately.’

‘You are not immediately anxious to fulfil his wishes?’

‘Harry, I find it hard to do those that are thrust on me.’

’But, as a matter of serious obligation, you would hold yourself bound by and by to perform them all?’

‘I cannot speak any further of my willingness, Harry.’

’The sense of duty is evidently always sufficient to make you act upon the negative—to deny, at least?’

‘Yes, I daresay,’ said Janet.

We shook hands like a pair of commercial men.

I led my father to Bulsted. He was too feverish to remain there. In the evening, after having had a fruitless conversation with my aunt Dorothy upon the event of the day, I took him to London that he might visit his lawyers, who kindly consented to treat him like doctors, when I had arranged to make over to them three parts of my annuity, and talked of his Case encouragingly; the effect of which should not have astonished me. He closed a fit of reverie resembling his drowsiness, by exclaiming: ’Richie will be indebted to his dad for his place in the world after all!’ Temporarily, he admitted, we must be fugitives from creditors, and as to that eccentric tribe, at once so human and so inhuman, he imparted many curious characteristics gained of his experience. Jorian DeWitt had indeed compared them to the female ivy that would ultimately kill its tree, but inasmuch as they were parasites, they loved their debtor; he was life and support to them, and there was this remarkable fact about them: by slipping out of their clutches at critical moments when they would infallibly be pulling you down, you were enabled to return to them fresh, and they became inspired with another lease of lively faith in your future: et caetera. I knew the language. It was a flash of himself, and a bad one, but I was not the person whom he meant to deceive with it. He was soon giving me other than verbal proof out of England that he was not thoroughly beaten. We had no home in England. At an hotel in Vienna, upon the close of the aristocratic season there, he renewed an acquaintance with a Russian lady, Countess Kornikoff, and he and I parted. She disliked the Margravine of Rippau, who was in Vienna, and did not recognize us. I heard that it was the Margravine who had despatched Prince Hermann to England as soon as she discovered Ottilia’s flight thither. She commissioned him to go straightway to Roy in London, and my father’s having infatuatedly left his own address for Prince Ernest’s in the island, brought Hermann down: he only met Eckart in the morning train. I mention it to show the strange working of events.

Janet sent me a letter by the hands of Temple in August. It was moderately well written for so blunt a writer, and might have touched me but for other news coming simultaneously that shook the earth under my feet.

She begged my forgiveness for her hardness, adding characteristically that she could never have acted in any other manner. The delusion, that what she was she must always be, because it was her nature, had mastered her understanding, or rather it was one of the doors of her understanding not yet opened: she had to respect her grandada's wishes. She made it likewise appear that she was ready for further sacrifices to carry out the same.

Page 2233

’At least you will accept a division of the property, Harry. It should be yours. It is an excess, and I feel it a snare to me. I was a selfish child: I may not become an estimable woman. You have not pardoned my behaviour at the island last year, and I cannot think I was wrong: perhaps I might learn: I want your friendship and counsel. Aunty will live with me: she says that you would complete us. At any rate I transfer Riversley to you. Send me your consent. Papa will have it before the transfer is signed.’

The letter ended with an adieu, a petition for an answer, and ’yours affectionately.’

On the day of its date, a Viennese newspaper lying on the Salzburg Hotel table chronicled Ottilia’s marriage with Prince Hermann.

I turned on Temple to walk him off his legs if I could.

Carry your fever to the Alps, you of minds diseased not to sit down in sight of them ruminating, for bodily ease and comfort will trick the soul and set you measuring our lean humanity against yonder sublime and infinite; but mount, rack the limbs, wrestle it out among the peaks; taste danger, sweat, earn rest: learn to discover ungrudgingly that haggard fatigue is the fair vision you have run to earth, and that rest is your uttermost reward. Would you know what it is to hope again, and have all your hopes at hand?—hang upon the crags at a gradient: that makes your next step a debate between the thing you are and the thing you may become. There the merry little hopes grow for the climber like flowers and food, immediate, prompt to prove their uses, sufficient: if just within the grasp, as mortal hopes should be. How the old lax life closes in about you there! You are the man of your faculties, nothing more. Why should a man pretend to more? We ask it wonderingly when we are healthy. Poetic rhapsodists in the vales below may tell you of the joy and grandeur of the upper regions, they cannot pluck you the medical herb. He gets that for himself who wanders the marshy ledge at nightfall to behold the distant Sennhiittchen twinkle, who leaps the green-eyed crevasses, and in the solitude of an emerald alp stretches a salt hand to the mountain kine.

CHAPTER LIV

MY RETURN TO ENGLAND

I passed from the Alps to the desert, and fell in love with the East, until it began to consume me. History, like the air we breathe, must be in motion to keep us uncorrupt: otherwise its ancient homes are infectious. My passion for the sun and his baked people lasted awhile, the drudgery of the habit of voluntary exile some time longer, and then, quite unawares, I was seized with a thirst for England, so violent that I abandoned a correspondence of several months, lying for me both at Damascus and Cairo, to catch

the boat for Europe. A dream of a rainy morning, in the midst of the glowing furnace, may have been the origin of the wild craving I had for my native

Page 2234

land and Janet. The moist air of flying showers and drenched spring buds surrounded her; I saw her plainly lifting a rose's head; was it possible I had ever refused to be her yokefellow? Could so noble a figure of a fair young woman have been offered and repudiated again and again by a man in his senses? I spurned the intolerable idiot, to stop reflection. Perhaps she did likewise now. There was nothing to alarm me save my own eagerness.

The news of my father was perplexing, leading me to suppose him re-established in London, awaiting the coming on of his Case. Whence the money?

Money and my father, I knew, met as they divided, fortuitously; in illustration of which, I well remembered, while passing in view of the Key of the Adige along the Lombard plain, a circumstance during my Alpine tour with Temple, of more importance to him than to me, when my emulous friend, who would never be beaten, sprained his ankle severely on the crags of a waterfall, not far from Innsbruck, and was invited into a house by a young English lady, daughter of a retired Colonel of Engineers of our army. The colonel was an exile from his country for no grave crime: but, as he told us, as much an exile as if he had committed a capital offence in being the father of nine healthy girls. He had been, against his judgement, he averred, persuaded to fix on his Tyrolese spot of ground by the two elder ones. Five were now married to foreigners; thus they repaid him, by scattering good English blood on the race of Counts and Freiherrs! 'I could understand the decrees of Providence before I was a parent,' said this dear old Colonel Heddon. 'I was looking up at the rainbow when I heard your steps, asking myself whether it was seen in England at that instant, and why on earth I should be out of England!' He lived abroad to be able to dower his girls. His sons-in-law were gentlemen; so far he was condemned to be satisfied, but supposing all his girls married foreigners? His primitive frankness charmed us, and it struck me that my susceptible Temple would have liked to be in a position to reassure him with regard to the Lucy of the four. We were obliged to confess that she was catching a foreign accent. The old colonel groaned. He begged us to forgive him for not treating us as strangers; his heart leapt out to young English gentlemen.

My name, he said, reminded him of a great character at home, in the old days: a certain Roy-Richmond, son of an actress and somebody, so the story went: and there was an old Lord Edbury who knew more about it than most. 'Now Roy was an adventurer, but he had a soul of true chivalry, by gad, he had! Plenty of foreign whiffmajigs are to be found, but you won't come upon a fellow like that. Where he got his money from none knew: all I can say is, I don't believe he ever did a dirty action for it. And one matter I'll tell you of: pardon me a moment, Mr. Richmond, I haven't talked English for half a century, or, at least, a

Page 2235

quarter. Old Lord Edbury put him down in his will for some thousands, and he risked it to save a lady, who hated him for his pains. Lady Edbury was of the Bolton blood, none of the tamest; they breed good cavalry men. She ran away from her husband once. The old lord took her back. “It ’s at your peril, mind!” says she. Well, Roy hears by-and-by of afresh affair. He mounted horse; he was in the saddle, I’ve been assured, a night and a day, and posted himself between my lady’s park-gates, and the house, at dusk. The rumour ran that he knew of the marquis playing spy on his wife. However, such was the fact; she was going off again, and the marquis did play the mean part. She walked down the parkroad, and, seeing the cloaked figure of a man, she imagined him to be her Lothario, and very naturally, you will own, fell into his arms. The gentleman in question was an acquaintance of mine; and the less you follow our example the better for you. It was a damnable period in morals! He told me that he saw the scene from the gates, where he had his carriage-and-four ready. The old lord burst out of an ambush on his wife and her supposed paramour; the lady was imprisoned in her rescuer’s arms, and my friend retired on tiptoe, which was, I incline to think, the best thing he could do. Our morals were abominable. Lady Edbury would never see Roy-Richmond after that, nor the old lord neither. He doubled the sum he had intended to leave him, though. I heard that he married a second young wife. Roy, I believe, ended by marrying a great heiress, and reforming. He was an eloquent fellow, and stood like a general in full uniform, cocked hat and feathers; most amusing fellow at table; beat a Frenchman for anecdote.’

I spared Colonel Heddon the revelation of my relationship to his hero, thanking his garrulity for interrupting me.

How I pitied him when I drove past the gates of the main route to Innsbruck! For I was bound homeward: I should soon see England, green cloudy England, the white cliffs, the meadows, the heaths! And I thanked the colonel again in my heart for having done something to reconcile me to the idea of that strange father of mine.

A banner-like stream of morning-coloured smoke rolled North-eastward as I entered London, and I drove to Temple’s chambers. He was in Court, engaged in a case as junior to his father. Temple had become that radiant human creature, a working man, then? I walked slowly to the Court, and saw him there, hardly recognising him in his wig. All that he had to do was to prompt his father in a case of collision at sea; the barque Priscilla had run foul of a merchant brig, near the mouth of the Thames, and though I did not expect it on hearing the vessel’s name, it proved to be no other than the barque Priscilla of Captain Jasper Welsh. Soon after I had shaken Temple’s hand, I was going through the same ceremony with the captain himself, not at all changed in appearance, who blessed his heart for seeing me, cried out that a beard and mustachios made a foreign face of a young Englishman, and was full of the ‘providential’ circumstance of his having confided his case to Temple and his father.

Page 2236

‘Ay, ay, Captain Welsh,’ said Temple, ’we have pulled you through, only another time mind you keep an eye on that look-out man of yours. Some of your men, I suspect, see double with an easy conscience. A close net makes slippery eels.’

‘Have you anything to say against my men?’ the captain inquired.

Temple replied that he would talk to him about it presently, and laughed as he drew me away.

’His men will get him into a deuce of a scrape some day, Richie. I shall put him on his guard. Have you had all my letters? You look made of iron. I’m beginning capitally, not afraid of the Court a bit, and I hope I’m not pert. I wish your father had taken it better!’

‘Taken what?’ said I.

‘Haven’t you heard from him?’

‘Two or three times: a mass of interjections.’

’You know he brought his Case forward at last? Of course it went as we all knew it would.’

‘Where is he? Have you seen Janet lately?’

‘He is at Miss Ilchester’s house in London.’

‘Write the address on a card.’

Temple wrote it rather hesitatingly, I thought.

We talked of seeing one another in the evening, and I sprang off to Janet’s residence, forgetting to grasp my old friend’s hand at parting. I was madly anxious to thank her for the unexpected tenderness to my father. And now nothing stood between us!

My aunt Dorothy was the first to welcome me. ’He must be prepared for the sight of you, Harry. The doctors say that a shock may destroy him. Janet treats him so wonderfully.’

I pressed her on my heart and cheered her, praising Janet. She wept.

‘Is there anything new the matter?’ I said.

’It ‘s not new to us, Harry. I’m sure you’re brave?’

‘Brave! what am I asked to bear?’

‘Much, if you love her, Harry!’

‘Speak.’

’It is better you should hear it from me, Harry. I wrote you word of it. We all imagined it would not be disagreeable to you. Who could foresee this change in you? She least of all!’

‘She’s in love with some one?’

‘I did not say in love.’

‘Tell me the worst.’

‘She is engaged to be married.’

Janet came into the room—another Janet for me. She had engaged herself to marry the Marquis of Edbury. At the moment when she enslaved me with gratitude and admiration she was lost to me. I knew her too well to see a chance of her breaking her pledged word.

My old grandfather said of Janet, ‘She’s a compassionate thing.’ I felt now the tears under his speech, and how late I was in getting wisdom. Compassion for Edbury in Janet’s bosom was the matchmaker’s chief engine of assault, my aunt Dorothy told me. Lady Ilchester had been for this suitor, Sir Roderick for the other, up to the verge of a quarrel between the most united of wedding couples. Janet was persecuted. She heard that Edbury’s life was running to waste; she liked him for his cricketing and hunting, his frankness, seeming manliness, and general native English enthusiasm. I permitted myself to comprehend the case as far as I could allow myself to excuse her.

Page 2237

Dorothy Beltham told me something of Janet that struck me to the dust.

’It is this, dear Harry; bear to hear it! Janet and I and his good true woman of a housekeeper, whose name is Waddy, we are, I believe, the only persons that know it. He had a large company to dine at a City tavern, she told us, on the night after the decision—when the verdict went against him. The following morning I received a note from this good Mrs. Waddy addressed to Sir Roderick’s London house, where I was staying with Janet; it said that he was ill; and Janet put on her bonnet at once to go to him.’

‘The lady didn’t fear contagion any longer?’

’She went, walking fast. He was living in lodgings, and the people of the house insisted on removing him, Mrs. Waddy told us. She was cowering in the parlour. I had not the courage to go upstairs. Janet went by herself.’

My heart rose on a huge swell.

‘She was alone with him, Harry. We could hear them.’

Dorothy Beltham looked imploringly on me to waken my whole comprehension.

’She subdued him. When I saw him he was white as death, but quiet, not dangerous at all.’

‘Do you mean she found him raving?’ I cried out on our Maker’s name, in grief and horror.

‘Yes, dear Harry, it was so.’

‘She stepped between him and an asylum?’

’She quitted Sir Roderick’s house to lodge your father safe in one that she hired, and have him under her own care. She watched him day and night for three weeks, and governed him, assisted only at intervals by the poor frightened woman, Mrs. Waddy, and just as frightened me. And I am still subject to the poor woman’s way of pressing her hand to her heart at a noise. It ’s over now. Harry, Janet wished that you should never hear of it. She dreads any excitement for him. I think she is right in fancying her own influence the best: he is used to it. You know how gentle she is though she is so firm.’

‘Oh! don’t torture me, ma’am, for God’s sake,’ I called aloud.

CHAPTER LV

I MEET MY FIRST PLAYFELLOW AND TAKE MY PUNISHMENT

There came to me a little note on foreign paper, unaddressed, an enclosure forwarded by Janet, and containing merely one scrap from the playful XENIEN of Ottilia's favourite brotherly poets, of untranslatable flavour:—

> Who shuns true friends flies fortune in the concrete:
> Would he see what he aims at? let him ask his heels.

It filled me with a breath of old German peace.

From this I learnt that Ottilia and Janet corresponded. Upon what topics? to what degree of intimacy?

Janet now confessed to me that their intimacy had never known reserve. The princess had divined her attachment for Harry Richmond when their acquaintance was commenced in the island, and knew at the present moment that I had travelled round to the recognition of Janet's worth.

Page 2238

Thus encouraged by the princess's changeless friendship, I wrote to her, leaving little to be guessed of my state of mind, withholding nothing of the circumstances surrounding me. Imagination dealt me all my sharpest misery, and now that Ottilia resumed her place there, I became infinitely peacefuller, and stronger to subdue my hungry nature. It caused me no pang, strangely though it read in my sight when written, to send warm greetings and respects to the prince her husband.

Is it any waste of time to write of love? The trials of life are in it, but in a narrow ring and a fierier. You may learn to know yourself through love, as you do after years of life, whether you are fit to lift them that are about you, or whether you are but a cheat, and a load on the backs of your fellows. The impure perishes, the inefficient languishes, the moderate comes to its autumn of decay—these are of the kinds which aim at satisfaction to die of it soon or late. The love that survives has strangled craving; it lives because it lives to nourish and succour like the heavens.

But to strangle craving is indeed to go through a death before you reach your immortality.

But again, to write of a love perverted by all the elements contributing to foolishness, and foredoomed to chastisement, would be a graceless business. Janet and I went through our trial, she, you may believe, the braver under the most to bear.

I was taken by Temple down to the ship—smelling East of London, for the double purpose of trying to convince Captain Welsh of the extravagance of a piece of chivalry he was about to commit, and of seeing a lady with a history, who had recently come under his guardianship. Temple thought I should know her, but he made a mystery of it until the moment of our introduction arrived, not being certain of her identity, and not wishing to have me disappointed. It appeared that Captain Welsh questioned his men closely after he had won his case, and he arrived at the conclusion that two or three of them had been guilty of false swearing in his interests. He did not dismiss them, for, as he said, it was twice a bad thing to turn sinners loose: it was to shove them out of the direct road of amendment, and it was a wrong to the population. He insisted, however, on paying the legal costs and an indemnity for the collision at sea; and Temple was in great distress about it, he having originally suggested the suspicion of his men to Captain Welsh. 'I wanted to put him on his guard against those rascals,' Temple said, 'and I suppose,' he sighed, 'I wanted the old captain to think me enormously clever all round.' He shook himself, and assumed a bearish aspect, significant of disgust and recklessness. 'The captain 'll be ruined, Richie; and he's not young, you know, to go on sailing his barque Priscilla for ever. If he pays, why, I ought to pay, and then you ought to pay, for I shouldn't have shown off before him alone, and then the wind that fetched you ought to pay. Toss common sense overboard, there's no end to your fine-drawings; that's why it's always safest to swear by the Judge.'

Page 2239

We rolled down to the masts among the chimneys on the top of an omnibus. The driver was eloquent on cricket-matches. Now, cricket, he said, was fine manly sport; it might kill a man, but it never meant mischief: foreigners themselves had a bit of an idea that it was the best game in the world, though it was a nice joke to see a foreigner playing at it! None of them could stand to be bowled at. Hadn't stomachs for it; they'd have to train for soldiers first. On one occasion he had seen a Frenchman looking on at a match. 'Ball was hit a shooter twixt the slips: off starts Frenchman, catches it, heaves it up, like his head, half-way to wicket, and all the field set to bawling at him, and sending him, we knew where. He tripped off: "You no comprong politeness in dis country." Ha! ha!'

To prove the aforesaid Frenchman wrong, we nodded to the driver's laughter at his exquisite imitation.

He informed us that he had backed the Surrey Eleven last year, owing to the report of a gentleman-bowler, who had done things in the way of tumbling wickets to tickle the ears of cricketers. Gentlemen-batters were common: gentlemen-bowlers were quite another dish. Saddlebank was the gentleman's name.

'Old Nandrew Saddle?' Temple called to me, and we smiled at the supposition of Saddlebank's fame, neither of us, from what we had known of his bowling, doubting that he deserved it.

'Acquainted with him, gentlemen?' the driver inquired, touching his hat. 'Well, and I ask why don't more gentlemen take to cricket? 'stead of horses all round the year! Now, there's my notion of happiness,' said the man condemned to inactivity, in the perpetual act of motion; 'cricket in cricket season! It comprises—count: lots o' running; and that's good: just enough o' taking it easy; that's good: a appetite for your dinner, and your ale or your Port, as may be the case; good, number three. Add on a tired pipe after dark, and a sound sleep to follow, and you say good morning to the doctor and the parson; for you're in health body and soul, and ne'er a parson 'll make a better Christian of ye, that I'll swear.'

As if anxious not to pervert us, he concluded: 'That's what I think, gentlemen.'

Temple and I talked of the ancient raptures of a first of May cricketing-day on a sunny green meadow, with an ocean of a day before us, and well-braced spirits for the match. I had the vision of a matronly, but not much altered Janet, mounted on horseback, to witness the performance of some favourite Eleven of youngsters with her connoisseur's eye; and then the model of an English lady, wife, and mother, waving adieu to the field and cantering home to entertain her husband's guests. Her husband!

Temple was aware of my grief, but saw no remedy. I knew that in his heart he thought me justly punished, though he loved me.

Page 2240

We had a long sitting with Captain Welsh, whom I found immoveable, as I expected I should. His men, he said, had confessed their sin similarly to the crab in a hole, with one claw out, as the way of sinners was. He blamed himself mainly. 'Where you have accidents, Mr. Richmond, you have faults; and where you have faults aboard a ship you may trace a line to the captain. I should have treated my ship's crew like my conscience, and gone through them nightly. As it is, sir, here comes round one of your accidents to tell me I have lived blinded by conceit. That is my affliction, my young friend. The payment of the money is no more so than to restore money held in trust.'

Temple and I argued the case with him, as of old on our voyage, on board the barque Priscilla, quite unavailingly.

'Is a verdict built on lies one that my Maker approves of?' said he. 'If I keep possession of that money, my young friends, will it clothe me? Ay, with stings! Will it feed me? Ay, with poison. And they that should be having it shiver and want!'

He was emphatic, as he would not have been, save to read us an example, owing to our contention with him. 'The money is Satan in my very hands!' When he had dismissed the subject he never returned to it.

His topic of extreme happiness, to which Temple led him, was the rescue of a beautiful sinner from a life of shame. It appeared that Captain Welsh had the habit between his voyages of making one holiday expedition to the spot of all creation he thought the fairest, Richmond Hill, overlooking the Thames; and there, one evening, he espied a lady in grief, and spoke to her, and gave her consolation. More, he gave her a blameless home. The lady's name was Mabel Bolton. She was in distress of spirit rather than of circumstances, for temptation was thick about one so beautiful, to supply the vanities and luxuries of the father of sin. He described her.

She was my first playfellow, the miller's daughter of Dipwell, Mabel Sweetwinter, taken from her home by Lord Edbury during my German university career, and now put away by him upon command of his family on the eve of his marriage.

She herself related her history to me, after telling me that she had seen me once at the steps of Edbury's Club. Our meeting was no great surprise to either of us. She had heard my name as that of an expected visitor; she had seen Temple, moreover, and he had prompted me with her Christian name and the praise of her really glorious hair, to anticipate the person who was ushered into the little cabin-like parlour by Captain Welsh's good old mother.

Page 2241

Of Edbury she could not speak for grief, believing that he loved her still and was acting under compulsion. Her long and faithful attachment to the scapegrace seemed to preserve her from the particular regrets Captain Welsh supposed to occupy her sinner's mind; so that, after some minutes of the hesitation and strangeness due to our common recollections, she talked of him simply and well—as befitted her situation, a worldling might say. But she did not conceal her relief in escaping to this quaint little refuge (she threw a kindly-comical look, not overtoned, at the miniature ships on the mantelpiece, and the picture of Joseph leading Mary with her babe on the ass) from the temptations I could imagine a face like hers would expose her to. The face was splendid, the figure already overblown. I breathed some thanks to my father while she and I conversed apart. The miller was dead, her brother in America. She had no other safe home than the one Captain Welsh had opened to her. When I asked her (I had no excuse for it) whether she would consent to go to Edbury again, she reddened and burst into tears. I cursed my brutality. 'Let her cry,' said Captain Welsh on parting with us at his street door. 'Tears are the way of women and their comfort.'

To our astonishment he told us he intended to take her for a voyage in the Priscilla. 'Why?' we asked.

'I take her,' he said, 'because not to do things wholly is worse than not to do things at all, for it 's waste of time and cause for a chorus below, down in hell, my young friends. The woman is beautiful as Solomon's bride. She is weak as water. And the man is wicked. He has written to her a letter. He would have her reserved for himself, a wedded man: such he is, or is soon to be. I am searching, and she is not deceitful; and I am a poor man again and must go the voyage. I wrestled with her, and by grace I conquered her to come with me of a free will, and be out of his snares. Aboard I do not fear him, and she shall know the mercy of the Lord on high seas.'

We grimaced a little on her behalf, but had nothing to reply.

Seeing Janet after Mabel was strange. In the latter one could perceive the palpably suitable mate for Edbury.

I felt that my darling was insulted—no amends for it I had to keep silent and mark the remorseless preparations going forward. Not so Heriot. He had come over from the camp in Ireland on leave at this juncture. His talk of women still suggested the hawk with the downy feathers of the last little plucked bird sticking to his beak; but his appreciation of Janet and some kindness for me made him a vehement opponent of her resolve. He took licence of his friendship to lay every incident before her, to complete his persuasions. She resisted his attacks, as I knew she would, obstinately, and replied to his entreaties with counter-supplications that he should urge me to accept old Riversley. The conflicts went on between

Page 2242

those two daily, and I heard of them from Heriot at night. He refused to comprehend her determination under the head of anything save madness. Varied by reproaches of me for my former inveterate blindness, he raved upon Janet's madness incessantly, swearing that he would not be beaten. I told him his efforts were useless, but thought them friendly, and so they were, only Janet's resistance had fired his vanity, and he stalked up and down my room talking a mixture of egregious coxcombry and hearty good sense that might have shown one the cause he meant to win had become personal to him. Temple, who was sometimes in consultation with him, and was always amused by his quasi-fanfaronade, assured me that Herriot was actually scheming. The next we heard of him was, that he had been seen at a whitebait hotel down the river drunk with Edbury. Janet also heard of that, and declined to see Heriot again.

Our last days marched frightfully fast. Janet had learnt that any the most distant allusion to her marriage day was an anguish to the man who was not to marry her, so it was through my aunt Dorothy that I became aware of Julia Bulsted's kindness in offering to take charge of my father for a term. Lady Sampleman undertook to be hostess to him for one night, the eve of Janet's nuptials. He was quiet, unlikely to give annoyance to persons not strongly predisposed to hear sentences finished and exclamations fall into their right places.

Adieu to my darling! There have been women well won; here was an adorable woman well lost. After twenty years of slighting her, did I fancy she would turn to me and throw a man over in reward of my ultimate recovery of my senses?—or fancy that one so tenacious as she had proved would snap a tie depending on her pledged word? She liked Edbury; she saw the best of him, and liked him. The improved young lord was her handiwork. After the years of humiliation from me, she had found herself courted by a young nobleman who clung to her for help, showed improvement, and brought her many compliments from a wondering world. She really felt that she was strength and true life to him. She resisted Heriot: she resisted a more powerful advocate, and this was the princess Ottilia. My aunt Dorothy told me that the princess had written. Janet either did or affected to weigh the princess's reasonings; and she did not evade the task of furnishing a full reply.

Her resolution was unchanged. Loss of colour, loss of light in her eyes, were the sole signs of what it cost her to maintain it. Our task was to transfer the idea of Janet to that of Julia in my father's whirling brain, which at first rebelled violently, and cast it out like a stick thrust between rapidly revolving wheels.

The night before I was to take him away, she gave me her hand with a 'good-bye, dear Harry.' My words were much the same. She had a ghastly face, but could not have known it, for she smiled, and tried to keep the shallow smile in play, as friends do. There was the end.

Page 2243

It came abruptly, and was schoolingly cold and short.

It had the effect on me of freezing my blood and setting what seemed to be the nerves of my brain at work in a fury of calculation to reckon the minutes remaining of her maiden days. I had expected nothing, but now we had parted I thought that one last scene to break my heart on should not have been denied to me. My aunt Dorothy was a mute; she wept when I spoke of Janet, whatever it was I said.

The minutes ran on from circumstance to circumstance of the destiny Janet had marked for herself, each one rounded in my mind of a blood colour like the edge about prismatic hues. I lived through them a thousand times before they occurred, as the wretch who fears death dies multitudinously.

Some womanly fib preserved my father from a shock on leaving Janet's house. She left it herself at the same time that she drove him to Lady Sampleman's, and I found him there soon after she had gone to her bridesmaids. A letter was for me:—

'*Dear harry*,—I shall not live at Riversley, never go there again; do not let it be sold to a stranger; it will happen unless you go there. For the sake of the neighbourhood and poor people, I cannot allow it to be shut up. I was the cause of the chief misfortune. You never blamed me. Let me think that the old place is not dead. Adieu.

'Your affectionate,
'*Janet*.'

I tore the letter to pieces, and kept them.

The aspect of the new intolerable world I was to live in after to-morrow, paralyzed sensation. My father chattered, Lady Sampleman hushed him; she said I might leave him to her, and I went down to Captain Welsh to bid him good-bye and get such peace as contact with a man clad in armour proof against earthly calamity could give.

I was startled to see little Kiomi in Mabel's company.

They had met accidentally at the head of the street, and had been friends in childhood, Captain Welsh said, adding: 'She hates men.'

'Good reason, when they're beasts,' said Kiomi.

Amid much weeping of Mabel and old Mrs. Welsh, Kiomi showed as little trouble as the heath when the woods are swept.

Captain Welsh wanted Mabel to be on board early, owing, he told me, to information. Kiomi had offered to remain on board with her until the captain was able to come. He had business to do in the City.

We saw them off from the waterside.

'Were I to leave that young woman behind me, on shore, I should be giving the devil warrant to seize upon his prey,' said Captain Welsh, turning his gaze from the boat which conveyed Kiomi and Mabel to the barque Priscilla. He had information that the misleader of her youth was hunting her.

He and I parted, and for ever, at a corner of crossways in the central city. There I saw the last of one who deemed it as simple a matter to renounce his savings for old age, to rectify an error of justice, as to plant his foot on the pavement; a man whose only burden was the folly of men.

Page 2244

I thought to myself in despair, under what protest can I also escape from England and my own intemperate mind? It seemed a miraculous answer:—There lay at my chambers a note written by Count Kesensky; I went to the embassy, and heard of an Austrian ship of war being at one of our ports upon an expedition to the East, and was introduced to the captain, a gentlemanly fellow, like most of the officers of his Government. Finding in me a German scholar, and a joyful willingness, he engaged me to take the post of secretary to the expedition in the place of an invalided Freiherr von Redwitz. The bargain was struck immediately: I was to be ready to report myself to the captain on board not later than the following day. Count Kesensky led me aside: he regretted that he could do nothing better for me: but I thought his friendliness extreme and astonishing, and said so; whereupon the count assured me that his intentions were good, though he had not been of great use hitherto—an allusion to the borough of Chippenden he had only heard of von Redwitz's illness that afternoon. I thanked him cordially, saying I was much in his debt, and he bowed me out, letting me fancy, as my father had fancied before me, and as though I had never observed and reflected in my life, that the opportuneness of this intervention signified a special action of Providence.

The flattery of the thought served for an elixir. But with whom would my father abide during my absence? Captain Bulsted and Julia saved me from a fit of remorse; they had come up to town on purpose to carry him home with them, and had left a message on my table, and an invitation to dinner at their hotel, where the name of Janet was the Marino Faliero of our review of Riversley people and old times. The captain and his wife were indignant at her conduct. Since, however, I chose to excuse it, they said they would say nothing more about her, and she was turned face to the wall. I told them how Janet had taken him for months. 'But I 'll take him for years,' said Julia. 'The truth is, Harry, my old dear! William and I are never so united—for I'm ashamed to quarrel with him—as when your father's at Bulsted. He belongs to us, and other people shall know you 're not obliged to depend on your family for help, and your aunt Dorothy can come and see him whenever she likes.'

That was settled. Captain Bulsted went with me to Lady Sampleman's to prepare my father for the change of nurse and residence. We were informed that he had gone down with Alderman Duke Saddlebank to dine at one of the great City Companies' halls. I could hardly believe it. 'Ah! my dear Mr. Harry,' said Lady Sampleman, 'old friends know one another best, believe that, now. I treated him as if he was as well as ever he was, gave him his turtle and madeira lunch; and Alderman Saddlebank, who lunched here—your father used to say, he looks like a robin hopping out of a larderquite jumped to dine him in the City like old times; and he will see a great spread of plate!'

Page 2245

She thought my father only moderately unwell, wanting novelty. Captain Bulsted agreed with me that it would be prudent to go and fetch him. At the door of the City hall stood Andrew Saddlebank, grown to be simply a larger edition of Rippenger's head boy, and he imparted to us that my father was 'on his legs' delivering a speech: It alarmed me. With Saddlebank's assistance I pushed in.

'A prince! a treacherous lover! an unfatherly man!'

Those were the words I caught: a reproduction of many of my phrases employed in our arguments on this very subject.

He bade his audience to beware of princes, beware of idle princes; and letting his florid fancy loose on these eminent persons, they were at one moment silver lamps, at another poising hawks, and again sprawling pumpkins; anything except useful citizens. How could they be? They had the attraction of the lamp, the appetite of the hawk, the occupation of the pumpkin: nothing was given them to do but to shine, destroy, and fatten. Their hands were kept empty: a trifle in their heads would topple them over; they were monuments of the English system of compromise. Happy for mankind if they were monuments only! Happy for them! But they had the passions of men. The adulation of the multitude was raised to inflate them, whose self-respect had not one prop to rest an, unless it were contempt for the flatterers and prophetic foresight of their perfidy. They were the monuments of a compromise between the past and terror of the future; puppets as princes, mannikins as men, the snares of frail women, stop-gaps of the State, feathered nonentities!

So far (but not in epigram) he marshalled the things he had heard to his sound of drum and trumpet, like one repeating a lesson off-hand. Steering on a sudden completely round, he gave his audience an outline of the changes he would have effected had he but triumphed in his cause; and now came the lashing of arms, a flood of eloquence. Princes with brains, princes leaders, princes flowers of the land, he had offered them! princes that should sway assemblies, and not stultify the precepts of a decent people 'by making you pay in the outrage of your morals for what you seem to gain in policy.' These or similar words. The whole scene was too grotesque and afflicting. But his command of his hearers was extraordinary, partly a consolation I thought, until, having touched the arm of one of the gentlemen of the banquet and said, 'I am his son; I wish to remove him,' the reply enlightened me: 'I 'm afraid there's danger in interrupting him; I really am.'

They were listening obediently to one whom they dared not interrupt for fear of provoking an outburst of madness.

Page 2246

I had to risk it. His dilated eyes looked ready to seize on me for an illustration. I spoke peremptorily, and he bowed his head low, saying, ‘My son, gentlemen,’ and submitted himself to my hands. The feasters showed immediately that they felt released by rising and chatting in groups. Alderman Saddlebank expressed much gratitude to me for the service I had performed. ’That first half of your father’s speech was the most pathetic thing I ever heard!’ I had not shared his privilege, and could not say. The remark was current that a great deal was true of what had been said of the Fitzs. My father leaned heavily on my arm with the step and bent head of an ancient pensioner of the Honourable City Company. He was Julia Bulsted’s charge, and I was on board the foreign vessel weighing anchor from England before dawn of Janet’s marriage-day.

CHAPTER LVI

CONCLUSION

The wind was high that morning. The rain came in gray rings, through which we worked on the fretted surface of crumbling seas, heaving up and plunging, without an outlook.

I remember having thought of the barque Priscilla as I watched our lithe Dalmatians slide along the drenched decks of the Verona frigate. At night it blew a gale. I could imagine it to have been sent providentially to brush the torture of the land from my mind, and make me feel that men are trifles.

What are their passions, then? The storm in the clouds—even more short-lived than the clouds.

I philosophized, but my anguish was great.

Janet’s ‘Good-bye, Harry,’ ended everything I lived for, and seemed to strike the day, and bring out of it the remorseless rain. A featureless day, like those before the earth was built; like night under an angry moon; and each day the same until we touched the edge of a southern circle and saw light, and I could use my brain.

The matter most present to me was my injustice regarding my poor father’s speech in the City hall. He had caused me to suffer so much that I generally felt for myself when he appealed for sympathy, or provoked some pity: but I was past suffering, and letting kindly recollection divest the speech of its verbiage, I took it to my heart. It was true that he had in his blind way struck the keynote of his position, much as I myself had conceived it before. Harsh trials had made me think of my own fortunes more than of his. This I felt, and I thought there never had been so moving a speech. It seemed to make the world in debt to us. What else is so consolatory to a ruined man?

Page 2247

In reality the busy little creature within me, whom we call self, was digging pits for comfort to flow in, of any kind, in any form; and it seized on every idea, every circumstance, to turn it to that purpose, and with such success, that when by-and-by I learnt how entirely inactive special Providence had been in my affairs, I had to collect myself before I could muster the conception of gratitude toward the noble woman who clothed me in the illusion. It was to the Princess Ottilia, acting through Count Kesensky, that I owed both my wafting away from England at a wretched season, and that chance of a career in Parliament! The captain of the Verona hinted as much when, after a year of voyaging, we touched at an East Indian seaport, and von Redwitz joined the vessel to resume the post I was occupying. Von Redwitz (the son of Prince Ernest's Chancellor, I discovered) could have told me more than he did, but he handed me a letter from the princess, calling me home urgently, and even prescribing my route, and bidding me come straight to Germany and to Sarkeld. The summons was distasteful, for I had settled into harness under my scientific superiors, and had proved to my messmates that I was neither morose nor over-conceited. Captain Martinitz persuaded me to return, and besides, there lay between the lines of Ottilia's letter a signification of welcome things better guessed at than known. Was I not bound to do her bidding? Others had done it: young von Redwitz, for instance, in obeying the telegraph wires and feigning sickness to surrender his place to me, when she wished to save me from misery by hurrying me to new scenes with a task for my hand and head;—no mean stretch of devotion on his part. Ottilia was still my princess; she my providence. She wrote:

'Come home, my friend Harry: you have been absent too long. He who intercepts you to displace you has his career before him in the vessel, and you nearer home. The home is always here where I am, but it may now take root elsewhere, and it is from Ottilia you hear that delay is now really loss of life. I tell you no more. You know me, that when I say come, it is enough.'

A simple adieu and her name ended the mysterious letter. Not a word of Prince Hermann. What had happened? I guessed at it curiously and incessantly and only knew the nature of my suspicion by ceasing to hope as soon as I seemed to have divined it. I did not wrong my soul's high mistress beyond the one flash of tentative apprehension which in perplexity struck at impossibilities. Ottilia would never have summoned me to herself. But was Janet free? The hope which refused to live in that other atmosphere of purest calm, sprang to full stature at the bare thought, and would not be extinguished though all the winds beset it. Had my girl's courage failed, to spare her at the last moment? I fancied it might be: I was sure it was not so. Yet the doubt pressed on me with the force of a world of unimagined shifts and chances, and just kept the little flame alive, at times intoxicating me, though commonly holding me back to watch its forlorn conflict with probabilities known too well. It cost me a struggle to turn aside to Germany from the Italian highroad.

Page 2248

I chose the line of the Brenner, and stopped half a day at Innsbruck to pay a visit to Colonel Heddon, of whom I had the joyful tidings that two of his daughters were away to go through the German form of the betrothal of one of them to an Englishman. The turn of the tide had come to him. And it comes to me, too, in a fresh spring tide whenever I have to speak of others instead of this everlastingly recurring I of the autobiographer, of which the complacent penman has felt it to be his duty to expose the mechanism when out of action, and which, like so many of our sins of commission, appears in the shape of a terrible offence when the occasion for continuing it draws to a close. The pleasant narrator in the first person is the happy bubbling fool, not the philosopher who has come to know himself and his relations toward the universe. The words of this last are one to twenty; his mind is bent upon the causes of events rather than their progress. As you see me on the page now, I stand somewhere between the two, approximating to the former, but with sufficient of the latter within me to tame the delightful expansiveness proper to that coming hour of marriage-bells and bridal-wreaths. It is a sign that the end, and the delivery of reader and writer alike, should not be dallied with.

The princess had invited Lucy Heddon to Sarkeld to meet Temple, and Temple to meet me. Onward I flew. I saw the old woods of the lake-palace, and, as it were, the light of my past passion waning above them. I was greeted by the lady of all nobility with her gracious warmth, and in his usual abrupt manful fashion by Prince Hermann. And I had no time to reflect on the strangeness of my stepping freely under the roof where a husband claimed Ottilia, before she led me into the library, where sat my lost and recovered, my darling; and, unlike herself, for a moment, she faltered in rising and breathing my name.

We were alone. I knew she was no bondwoman. The question how it had come to pass lurked behind everything I said and did; speculation on the visible features, and touching of the unfettered hand, restrained me from uttering or caring to utter it. But it was wonderful. It thrust me back on Providence again for the explanation—humbly this time. It was wonderful and blessed, as to loving eyes the first-drawn breath of a drowned creature restored to life. I kissed her hand. 'Wait till you have heard everything, Harry,' she said, and her voice was deeper, softer, exquisitely strange in its known tones, as her manner was, and her eyes. She was not the blooming, straight-shouldered, high-breathing girl of other days, but sister to the day of her 'Good-bye, Harry,' pale and worn. The eyes had wept. This was Janet, haply widowed. She wore no garb nor a shade of widowhood. Perhaps she had thrown it off, not to offend an implacable temper in me. I said, 'I shall hear nothing that can make you other than my own Janet—if you will?'

Page 2249

She smiled a little. 'We expected Temple's arrival sooner than yours, Harry!'

'Do you take to his Lucy?'

'Yes, thoroughly.'

The perfect ring of Janet was there.

Mention of Riversley made her conversation lively, and she gave me moderately good news of my father, quaint, out of Julia Bulsted's latest letter to her.

'Then how long,' I asked astonished, 'how long have you been staying with the princess?'

She answered, colouring, 'So long, that I can speak fairish German.'

'And read it easily?'

'I have actually taken to reading, Harry.'

Her courage must have quailed, and she must have been looking for me on that morning of miserable aspect when I beheld the last of England through wailful showers, like the scene of a burial. I did not speak of it, fearing to hurt her pride, but said, 'Have you been here—months?'

'Yes, some months,' she replied.

'Many?'

'Yes,' she said, and dropped her eyelids, and then, with a quick look at me, 'Wait for Temple, Harry. He is a day behind his time. We can't account for it.'

I suggested, half in play, that perhaps he had decided, for the sake of a sea voyage, to come by our old route to Germany on board the barque Priscilla, with Captain Welsh.

A faint shudder passed over her. She shut her eyes and shook her head.

Our interview satisfied my heart's hunger no further. The Verona's erratic voyage had cut me off from letters.

Janet might be a widow, for aught I knew. She was always Janet to me; but why at liberty? why many months at Sarkeld, the guest of the princess? Was she neither maid nor widow—a wife flown from a brutal husband? or separated, and forcibly free? Under such conditions Ottilia would not have commanded my return but what was I to imagine? A boiling couple of hours divided me from the time for dressing, when, as I

meditated, I could put a chance question or two to the man commissioned to wait on me, and hear whether the English lady was a Fraulein. The Margravine and Prince Ernest were absent. Hermann worked in his museum, displaying his treasures to Colonel Heddon. I sat with the ladies in the airy look-out tower of the lake-palace, a prey to intense speculations, which devoured themselves and changed from fire to smoke, while I recounted the adventures of our ship's voyage, and they behaved as if there were nothing to tell me in turn, each a sphinx holding the secret I thirsted for. I should not certainly have thirsted much if Janet had met me as far half-way as a delicate woman may advance. The mystery lay in her evident affection, her apparent freedom and unfathomable reserve, and her desire that I should see Temple before she threw off her feminine armour, to which, judging by the indications, Ottilia seemed to me to accede.

My old friend was spied first by his sweetheart Lucy, winding dilatorily over the hill away from Sarkeld, in one of the carriages sent to meet him. He was guilty of wasting a prodigious number of minutes with his trumpery 'How d' ye do's,' and his glances and excuses, and then I had him up in my room, and the tale was told; it was not Temple's fault if he did not begin straightforwardly.

Page 2250

I plucked him from his narrator's vexatious and inevitable commencement: 'Temple, tell me, did she go to the altar?'

He answered 'Yes!'

'She did? Then she's a widow?'

'No, she isn't,' said Temple, distracting me by submitting to the lead I distracted him by taking.

'Then her husband's alive?'

Temple denied it, and a devil seized him to perceive some comicality in the dialogue.

'Was she married?'

Temple said 'No,' with a lurking drollery about his lips. He added, 'It 's nothing to laugh over, Richie.'

'Am I laughing? Speak out. Did Edbury come to grief overnight in any way?'

Again Temple pronounced a negative, this time wilfully enigmatical: he confessed it, and accused me of the provocation. He dashed some laughter with gravity to prepare for my next assault.

'Was Edbury the one to throw up the marriage? Did he decline it?'

'No,' was the answer once more.

Temple stopped my wrath by catching at me and begging me to listen.

'Edbury was drowned, Richie.'

'Overnight?'

'No, not overnight. I can tell it all in half-a-dozen words, if you'll be quiet; and I know you're going to be as happy as I am, or I shouldn't trifle an instant. He went overnight on board the barque Priscilla to see Mabel Sweetwinter, the only woman he ever could have cared for, and he went the voyage, just as we did. He was trapped, caged, and transported; it's a repetition, except that the poor old Priscilla never came to land. She foundered in a storm in the North Sea. That 's all we know. Every soul perished, the captain and all. I knew how it would be with that crew of his some day or other. Don't you remember my saying the Priscilla was the kind of name of a vessel that would go down with all hands, and leave a bottle to float to shore? A gin-bottle was found on our East coast-the old captain must have discovered in the last few moments that such

things were on board—and in it there was a paper, and the passengers' and crew's names in his handwriting, written as if he had been sitting in his parlour at home; over them a line—"The Lord's will is about to be done"; and underneath—"We go to His judgement resigned and cheerful." You know the old captain, Richie?

Temple had tears in his eyes. We both stood blinking for a second or two.

I could not but be curious to hear the reason for Edbury's having determined to sail.

'Don't you understand how it was, Richie?' said Temple. 'Edbury went to persuade her to stay, or just to see her for once, and he came to persuasions. He seems to have been succeeding, but the captain stepped on board and he treated Edbury as he did us two: he made him take the voyage for discipline's sake and "his soul's health."'

'How do you know all this, Temple?'

'You know your friend Kiomi was one of the party. The captain sent her back on shore because he had no room for her. She told us Edbury offered bribes of hundreds and thousands for the captain to let him and Mabel go off in the boat with Kiomi, and then he took to begging to go alone. He tried to rouse the crew. The poor fellow cringed, she says; he threatened to swim off. The captain locked him up.'

Page 2251

My immediate reflections hit on the Bible lessons Edbury must have had to swallow, and the gaping of the waters when its truths were suddenly and tremendously brought home to him.

An odd series of accidents! I thought.

Temple continued: 'Heriot held his tongue about it next morning. He was one of the guests, though he had sworn he wouldn't go. He said something to Janet that betrayed him, for she had not seen him since.'

'How betrayed him?' said I.

'Why,' said Temple, 'of course it was Heriot who put Edbury in Kiomi's hands. Edbury wouldn't have known of Mabel's sailing, or known the vessel she was in, without her help. She led him down to the water and posted him in sight before she went to Captain Welsh's; and when you and Captain Welsh walked away, Edbury rowed to the Priscilla. Old Heriot is not responsible for the consequences. What he supposed was likely enough. He thought that Edbury and Mabel were much of a pair, and thought, I suppose, that if Edbury saw her he'd find he couldn't leave her, and old Lady Kane, who managed him, would stand nodding her plumes for nothing at the altar. And so she did: and a pretty scene it was. She snatched at the minutes as they slipped past twelve like fishes, and snarled at the parson, and would have kept him standing till one P.M., if Janet had not turned on her heel. The old woman got in front of her to block her way. "Ah, Temple," she said to me, "it would be hard if I could not think I had done all that was due to them." I didn't see her again till she was starting for Germany. And, Richie, she thinks you can never forgive her. She wrote me word that the princess is of another mind, but her own opinion, she says, is based upon knowing you.'

'Good heaven! how little!' cried I.

Temple did me a further wrong by almost thanking me on Janet's behalf for my sustained love for her, while he praised the very qualities of pride and a spirited sense of obligation which had reduced her to dread my unforgivingness. Yet he and Janet had known me longest. Supposing that my idea of myself differed from theirs for the simple reason that I thought of what I had grown to be, and they of what I had been through the previous years? Did I judge by the flower, and they by root and stem? But the flower is a thing of the season; the flower drops off: it may be a different development next year. Did they not therefore judge me soundly?

Ottilia was the keenest reader. Ottilia had divined what could be wrought out of me. I was still subject to the relapses of a not perfectly right nature, as I perceived when glancing back at my thought of 'An odd series of accidents!' which was but a disguised fashion of attributing to Providence the particular concern, in my fortunes: an impiety and a folly! This is the temptation of those who are rescued and made happy by

circumstances. The wretched think themselves spited, and are merely childish, not egregious in egoism. Thither on leads to a chapter—already written by the wise, doubtless. It does not become an atom of humanity to dwell on it beyond a point where students of the human condition may see him passing through the experiences of the flesh and the brain.

Page 2252

Meantime, Temple and I, at two hand-basins, soaped and towelled, and I was more discreet toward him than I have been to you, for I reserved from him altogether the pronunciation of the council of senators in the secret chamber of my head. Whether, indeed, I have fairly painted the outer part of myself waxes dubious when I think of his spluttering laugh and shout; ‘Richie, you haven’t changed a bit—you’re just like a boy!’ Certain indications of external gravity, and a sinking of the natural springs within characterized Temple’s approach to the responsible position of a British husband and father. We talked much of Captain Welsh, and the sedate practical irony of his imprisoning one like Edbury to discipline him on high seas, as well as the singular situation of the couple of culprits under his admonishing regimen, and the tragic end. My next two minutes alone with Janet were tempered by it. Only my eagerness for another term of privacy persuaded her that I was her lover instead of judge, and then, having made the discovery that a single-minded gladness animated me in the hope that she and I would travel together one in body and soul, she surrendered, with her last bit of pride broken; except, it may be, a fragment of reserve traceable in the confession that came quaintly after supreme self-blame, when she said she was bound to tell me that possibly—probably, were the trial to come over again, she should again act as she had done.

Happily for us both, my wits had been sharpened enough to know that there is more in men and women than the stuff they utter. And blessed privilege now! if the lips were guilty of nonsense, I might stop them. Besides, I was soon to be master upon such questions. She admitted it, admitting with an unwonted emotional shiver, that absolute freedom could be the worst of perils. ‘For women?’ said I. She preferred to say, ‘For girls,’ and then ‘Yes, for women, as they are educated at present.’ Spice of the princess’s conversation flavoured her speech. The signs unfamiliar about her for me were marks of the fire she had come out of; the struggle, the torture, the determined sacrifice, through pride’s conception of duty. She was iron once. She had come out of the fire finest steel.

‘Riversley! Harry,’ she murmured, and my smile, and word, and squeeze in reply, brought back a whole gleam of the fresh English morning she had been in face, and voice, and person.

Was it conceivable that we could go back to Riversley single?

Before that was answered she had to make a statement; and in doing it she blushed, because it involved Edbury’s name, and seemed to involve her attachment to him; but she paid me the compliment of speaking it frankly. It was that she had felt herself bound in honour to pay Edbury’s debts. Even by such slight means as her saying, ‘Riversley, Harry,’ and my kiss of her fingers when a question of money was in debate, did we burst aside the vestiges of mutual strangeness, and recognize one another, but with an added warmth of love. When I pleaded for the marriage to be soon, she said, ‘I wish it, Harry.’

Page 2253

Sentiment you do not obtain from a Damascus blade. She most cordially despised the ladies who parade and play on their sex, and are for ever acting according to the feminine standard:—a dangerous stretch of contempt for one less strong than she.

Riding behind her and Temple one day with the princess, I said, 'What takes you most in Janet?'

She replied, 'Her courage. And it is of a kind that may knot up every other virtue worth having. I have impulses, and am capable of desperation, but I have no true courage: so I envy and admire, even if I have to blame her; for I know that this possession of hers, which identifies her and marks her from the rest of us, would bear the ordeal of fire. I can imagine the qualities I have most pride in withering and decaying under a prolonged trial. I cannot conceive her courage failing. Perhaps because I have it not myself I think it the rarest of precious gifts. It seems to me to imply one half, and to dispense with the other.'

I have lived to think that Ottilia was right. As nearly right, too, in the wording of her opinion as one may be in three or four sentences designed to be comprehensive.

My Janet's readiness to meet calamity was shown ere we reached home upon an evening of the late autumn, and set eye on a scene, for her the very saddest that could have been devised to test her spirit of endurance, when, driving up the higher heath-land, we saw the dark sky ominously reddened over Riversley, and, mounting the ridge, had the funeral flames of the old Grange dashed in our faces. The blow was evil, sudden, unaccountable. Villagers, tenants, farm-labourers, groups of a deputation that had gone to the railway station to give us welcome; and returned, owing to a delay in our arrival, stood gazing from all quarters. The Grange was burning in two great wings, that soared in flame-tips and columns of crimson smoke, leaving the central hall and chambers untouched as yet, but alive inside with mysterious ranges of lights, now curtained, now made bare—a feeble contrast to the savage blaze to right and left, save for the wonder aroused as to its significance. These were soon cloaked. Dead sable reigned in them, and at once a jet of flame gave the whole vast building to destruction. My wife thrust her hand in mine. Fire at the heart, fire at the wings—our old home stood in that majesty of horror which freezes the limbs of men, bidding them look and no more.

'What has Riversley done to deserve this?' I heard Janet murmur to herself. 'His room!' she said, when at the South-east wing, where my old grandfather had slept, there burst a glut of flame. We dove down to the park and along the carriage-road to the first red line of gazers. They told us that no living creatures were in the house. My aunt Dorothy was at Bulsted. I perceived my father's man Tollingby among the servants, and called him to me; others came, and out of a clatter of tongues, and

Page 2254

all eyes fearfully askant at the wall of fire, we gathered that a great reception had been prepared for us by my father: lamps, lights in all the rooms, torches in the hall, illuminations along the windows, stores of fireworks, such a display as only he could have dreamed of. The fire had broken out at dusk, from an explosion of fireworks at one wing and some inexplicable mismanagement at the other. But the house must have been like a mine, what with the powder, the torches, the devices in paper and muslin, and the extraordinary decorations fitted up to celebrate our return in harmony with my father's fancy.

Gentlemen on horseback dashed up to us. Captain Bulsted seized my hand. He was hot from a ride to fetch engines, and sang sharp in my ear, 'Have you got him?' It was my father he meant. The cry rose for my father, and the groups were agitated and split, and the name of the missing man, without an answer to it, shouted. Captain Bulsted had left him bravely attempting to quench the flames after the explosion of fireworks. He rode about, interrogating the frightened servants and grooms holding horses and dogs. They could tell us that the cattle were safe, not a word of my father; and amid shrieks of women at fresh falls of timber and ceiling into the pit of fire, and warnings from the men, we ran the heated circle of the building to find a loophole and offer aid if a living soul should be left; the night around us bright as day, busier than day, and a human now added to elemental horror. Janet would not quit her place. She sent her carriage-horses to Bulsted, and sat in the carriage to see the last of burning Riversley. Each time that I came to her she folded her arms on my neck and kissed me silently.

We gathered from the subsequent testimony of men and women of the household who had collected their wits, that my father must have remained in the doomed old house to look to the safety of my aunt Dorothy. He was never seen again.

Etext editor's bookmarks

A stew's a stew, and not a boiling to shreds
Absolute freedom could be the worst of perils
Add on a tired pipe after dark, and a sound sleep to follow
All passed too swift for happiness
Allowed silly sensitiveness to prevent the repair
As little trouble as the heath when the woods are swept
Ask pardon of you, without excusing myself
Attacked my conscience on the cowardly side
Bade his audience to beware of princes
Bandied the weariful shuttlecock of gallantry
But the flower is a thing of the season; the flower drops off
But to strangle craving is indeed to go through a death
Days when you lay on your back and the sky rained apples
Decent insincerity
Determine that the future is in our debt, and draw on it

Discreet play with her eyelids in our encounters
Dogmatic arrogance of

Page 2255

a just but ignorant man
Excellent is pride; but oh! be sure of its foundations
Faith works miracles. At least it allows time for them
Habit of antedating his sagacity
He clearly could not learn from misfortune
He thinks or he chews
He would neither retort nor defend himself
He whipped himself up to one of his oratorical frenzies
He put no question to anybody
I can’t think brisk out of my breeches
I can pay clever gentlemen for doing Greek for me
I do not defend myself ever
I was discontented, and could not speak my discontent
I laughed louder than was necessary
If you kneel down, who will decline to put a foot on you?
Intimations of cowardice menacing a paralysis of the will
Irony instead of eloquence
Is it any waste of time to write of love?
It goes at the lifting of the bridegroom’s little finger
Kindness is kindness, all over the world
Learn all about them afterwards, ay, and make the best of them
Like a woman, who would and would not, and wanted a master
Look within, and avoid lying
Mindless, he says, and arrogant
Nations at war are wild beasts
No Act to compel a man to deny what appears in the papers
Not to do things wholly is worse than not to do things at all
One in a temper at a time I’m sure ’s enough
One who studies is not being a fool
Only true race, properly so called, out of India—German
Payment is no more so than to restore money held in trust
Puns are the smallpox of the language
Self, was digging pits for comfort to flow in
Simple affection must bear the strain of friendship if it can
Simplicity is the keenest weapon
Some so-called laws of honour
Stand not in my way, nor follow me too far
Stultification of one’s feelings and ideas
Tears are the way of women and their comfort
Tension of the old links keeping us together
The most dangerous word of all—ja
The love that survives has strangled craving
The thought stood in her eyes

The proper defence for a nation is its history
The wretch who fears death dies multitudinously
The past is our mortal mother, no dead thing
Then for us the struggle, for him the grief
There is more in men and women than the stuff they utter
There's ne'er a worse off but there's a better off
They seem to me to be educated to conceal their education
They have not to speak to exhibit their minds
They dare not. The more I dare, the less dare they
They are little ironical laughter—Accidents
Those who are rescued and made happy by circumstances
Tight grasps of the hand, in which there was warmth and shyness
'Tis the fashion

Page 2256

to have our tattle done by machinery
To hope, and not be impatient, is really to believe
To the rest of the world he was a progressive comedy
To kill the deer and be sorry for the suffering wretch is common
Too prompt, too full of personal relish of his point
Twice a bad thing to turn sinners loose
Unseemly hour—unbetimes
Vessel was conspiring to ruin our self-respect
War is only an exaggerated form of duelling
Was I true? Not so very false, yet how far from truth!
We has long overshadowed “I”
What a man hates in adversity is to see ‘faces’
What else is so consolatory to a ruined man?
Who beguiles so much as Self?
Who so intoxicated as the convalescent catching at health?
Who shuns true friends flies fortune in the concrete
Winter mornings are divine. They move on noiselessly
Would he see what he aims at? let him ask his heels
You may learn to know yourself through love

BEAUCHAMP’S CAREER

By George Meredith

1897

CONTENTS

Book 1.
I. *The champion of his country*
ii. *Uncle*, *nephew*, *and another*
III. *Contains baronial views of the present*
iv. A *glimpse of Nevil in action*
V. *Renee*
vi. *Love in Venice*
VII. *An awakening for both*
viii. A *night on the Adriatic*
IX. *Morning at sea under the Alps*
X. A *singular council*

Book 2.
XI. *Captain Baskelett*

XII. *An interview with the infamous* Dr. *Shrapnel*
XIII. A *superfine conscience*
xiv. *The leading article and Mr*. *Timothy turbot*
XV. *Cecilia Halkett*
XVI. A *partial display of Beauchamp in his colours*
xvii. *His friend and foe*
XVIII. *Concerning the act of canvassing*

Book 3.
XIX. *Lord Palmet*, *and certain electors*
XX. A *day at Itchincope*
XXI. *The question as to the examination of the whigs*,
and the fine blow struck by Mr. *Everard Romfrey*
XXII. *The drive into Bevisham*
XXIII. *Tourdestelle*
XXIV. *His holiday*
XXV. *The adventure of the boat*.

Page 2257

Book 4.
XXVI. *Mr. Blackburn Tuckham*
XXVII. A *short* SIDELOOK *at the election*
XXVIII. *Touching* A *young lady's heart and her intellect*
XXIX. *The epistle of Dr. Shrapnel to commander Beauchamp*
XXX. *The baiting of Dr. Shrapnel*
XXXI. *Showing* A *chivalrous gentleman set in motion*
XXXII. *An effort to conquer Cecilia in Beauchamp's fashion*
XXXIII. *The first encounter at Steynham*

Book 5.
XXXIV. *The face of Renee*
XXXV. *The ride in the wrong direction*
XXXVI. *Pursuit of the apology of Mr. Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel*
XXXVII. *Cecilia conquered*
XXXVIII. *Lord Avonley*
XXXIX. *Between Beauchamp and Cecilia*
XL. A *trial of him*
XLI. A *lame victory*

Book 6.
XLII. *The two passions*
XLIII. *The earl of Romfrey and the countess*
XLIV. *The nephews of the earl, and another exhibition of the two passions in Beauchamp.*
XLV. A *little plot against Cecilia*
XLVI. *As it might have been foreseen*
XLVII. *The refusal of him*
XLVIII. *Of the trial awaiting the earl of Romfrey*
XLIX. A *fabric of baronial despotism crumbles*

Book 7.
L. *At the cottage on the common*
LI. *In the night*
LII. *Question of* A *pilgrimage and an act of penance*
LIII. *The apology to Dr. Shrapnel*
LIV. *The fruits of the apology*
LV. *Without love*
LVI. *The last of Nevil Beauchamp*

CHAPTER I

THE CHAMPION OF HIS COUNTRY

Page 2258

When young Nevil Beauchamp was throwing off his midshipman's jacket for a holiday in the garb of peace, we had across Channel a host of dreadful military officers flashing swords at us for some critical observations of ours upon their sovereign, threatening Afric's fires and savagery. The case occurred in old days now and again, sometimes, upon imagined provocation, more furiously than at others. We were unarmed, and the spectacle was distressing. We had done nothing except to speak our minds according to the habit of the free, and such an explosion appeared as irrational and excessive as that of a powder-magazine in reply to nothing more than the light of a spark. It was known that a valorous General of the Algerian wars proposed to make a clean march to the capital of the British Empire at the head of ten thousand men; which seems a small quantity to think much about, but they wore wide red breeches blown out by Fame, big as her cheeks, and a ten thousand of that sort would never think of retreating. Their spectral advance on quaking London through Kentish hopgardens, Sussex corn-fields, or by the pleasant hills of Surrey, after a gymnastic leap over the riband of salt water, haunted many pillows. And now those horrid shouts of the legions of Caesar, crying to the inheritor of an invading name to lead them against us, as the origin of his title had led the army of Gaul of old gloriously, scared sweet sleep. We saw them in imagination lining the opposite shore; eagle and standard-bearers, and gallifers, brandishing their fowls and their banners in a manner to frighten the decorum of the universe. Where were our men?

The returns of the census of our population were oppressively satisfactory, and so was the condition of our youth. We could row and ride and fish and shoot, and breed largely: we were athletes with a fine history and a full purse: we had first-rate sporting guns, unrivalled park-hacks and hunters, promising babies to carry on the renown of England to the next generation, and a wonderful Press, and a Constitution the highest reach of practical human sagacity. But where were our armed men? where our great artillery? where our proved captains, to resist a sudden sharp trial of the national mettle? Where was the first line of England's defence, her navy? These were questions, and Ministers were called upon to answer them. The Press answered them boldly, with the appalling statement that we had no navy and no army. At the most we could muster a few old ships, a couple of experimental vessels of war, and twenty-five thousand soldiers indifferently weaponed.

We were in fact as naked to the Imperial foe as the merely painted Britons.

Page 2259

This being apprehended, by the aid of our own shortness of figures and the agitated images of the red-breeched only waiting the signal to jump and be at us, there ensued a curious exhibition that would be termed, in simple language, writing to the newspapers, for it took the outward form of letters: in reality, it was the deliberate saddling of our ancient nightmare of Invasion, putting the postillion on her, and trotting her along the high-road with a winding horn to rouse old Panic. Panic we will, for the sake of convenience, assume to be of the feminine gender, and a spinster, though properly she should be classed with the large mixed race of mental and moral neuters which are the bulk of comfortable nations. She turned in her bed at first like the sluggard of the venerable hymnist: but once fairly awakened, she directed a stare toward the terrific foreign contortionists, and became in an instant all stormy nightcap and fingers starving for the bell-rope. Forthwith she burst into a series of shrieks, howls, and high piercing notes that caused even the parliamentary Opposition, in the heat of an assault on a parsimonious Government, to abandon its temporary advantage and be still awhile. Yet she likewise performed her part with a certain deliberation and method, as if aware that it was a part she had to play in the composition of a singular people. She did a little mischief by dropping on the stock-markets; in other respects she was harmless, and, inasmuch as she established a subject for conversation, useful.

Then, lest she should have been taken too seriously, the Press, which had kindled, proceeded to extinguish her with the formidable engines called leading articles, which fling fire or water, as the occasion may require. It turned out that we had ships ready for launching, and certain regiments coming home from India; hedges we had, and a spirited body of yeomanry; and we had pluck and patriotism, the father and mother of volunteers innumerable. Things were not so bad.

Panic, however, sent up a plaintive whine. What country had anything like our treasures to defend? countless riches, beautiful women, an inviolate soil! True, and it must be done. Ministers were authoritatively summoned to set to work immediately. They replied that they had been at work all the time, and were at work now. They could assure the country, that though they flourished no trumpets, they positively guaranteed the safety of our virgins and coffers.

Then the people, rather ashamed, abused the Press for unreasonably disturbing them. The Press attacked old Panic and stripped her naked. Panic, with a desolate scream, arraigned the parliamentary Opposition for having inflated her to serve base party purposes. The Opposition challenged the allegations of Government, pointed to the trimness of army and navy during its term of office, and proclaimed itself watch-dog of the country, which is at all events an office of a kind. Hereupon the ambassador of yonder ireful soldiery let fall a word, saying, by the faith of his Master, there was no necessity for watch-dogs to bark; an ardent and a reverent army had but fancied its beloved chosen Chief insulted; the Chief and chosen held them in; he, despite obloquy, discerned our merits and esteemed us.

Page 2260

So, then, Panic, or what remained of her, was put to bed again. The Opposition retired into its kennel growling. The People coughed like a man of two minds, doubting whether he has been divinely inspired or has cut a ridiculous figure. The Press interpreted the cough as a warning to Government; and Government launched a big ship with hurrahs, and ordered the recruiting-sergeant to be seen conspicuously.

And thus we obtained a moderate reinforcement of our arms.

It was not arrived at by connivance all round, though there was a look of it. Certainly it did not come of accident, though there was a look of that as well. Nor do we explain much of the secret by attributing it to the working of a complex machinery. The housewife's remedy of a good shaking for the invalid who will not arise and dance away his gout, partly illustrates the action of the Press upon the country: and perhaps the country shaken may suffer a comparison with the family chariot of the last century, built in a previous one, commodious, furnished agreeably, being all that the inside occupants could require of a conveyance, until the report of horsemen crossing the heath at a gallop sets it dishonourably creaking and complaining in rapid motion, and the squire curses his miserly purse that would not hire a guard, and his dame says, I told you so! —Foolhardy man, to suppose, because we have constables in the streets of big cities, we have dismissed the highwayman to limbo. And here he is, and he will cost you fifty times the sum you would have laid out to keep him at a mile's respectful distance! But see, the wretch is bowing: he smiles at our carriage, and tells the coachman that he remembers he has been our guest, and really thinks we need not go so fast. He leaves word for you, sir, on your peril to denounce him on another occasion from the magisterial Bench, for that albeit he is a gentleman of the road, he has a mission to right society, and succeeds legitimately to that bold Good Robin Hood who fed the poor.—-Fresh from this polite encounter, the squire vows money for his personal protection: and he determines to speak his opinion of Sherwood's latest captain as loudly as ever. That he will, I do not say. It might involve a large sum per annum.

Similes are very well in their way. None can be sufficient in this case without levelling a finger at the taxpayer—nay, directly mentioning him. He is the key of our ingenuity. He pays his dues; he will not pay the additional penny or two wanted of him, that we may be a step or two ahead of the day we live in, unless he is frightened. But scarcely anything less than the wild alarum of a tocsin will frighten him. Consequently the tocsin has to be sounded; and the effect is woeful past measure: his hugging of his army, his kneeling on the shore to his navy, his implorations of his yeomanry and his hedges, are sad to note. His bursts of pot-valiancy (the male side of the maiden Panic within his bosom) are awful to his friends.

Page 2261

Particular care must be taken after he has begun to cool and calculate his chances of security, that he do not gather to him a curtain of volunteers and go to sleep again behind them; for they cost little in proportion to the much they pretend to be to him. Patriotic taxpayers doubtless exist: prophetic ones, provident ones, do not. At least we show that we are wanting in them. The taxpayer of a free land taxes himself, and his disinclination for the bitter task, save under circumstances of screaming urgency—as when the night-gear and bed-linen of old convulsed Panic are like the churned Channel sea in the track of two hundred hostile steamboats, let me say—is of the kind the gentle schoolboy feels when death or an expedition has relieved him of his tyrant, and he is entreated notwithstanding to go to his books.

Will you not own that the working of the system for scaring him and bleeding is very ingenious? But whether the ingenuity comes of native sagacity, as it is averred by some, or whether it shows an instinct labouring to supply the deficiencies of stupidity, according to others, I cannot express an opinion. I give you the position of the country undisturbed by any moralizings of mine. The youth I introduce to you will rarely let us escape from it; for the reason that he was born with so extreme and passionate a love for his country, that he thought all things else of mean importance in comparison: and our union is one in which, following the counsel of a sage and seer, I must try to paint for you what is, not that which I imagine. This day, this hour, this life, and even politics, the centre and throbbing heart of it (enough, when unburlesqued, to blow the down off the gossamer-stump of fiction at a single breath, I have heard tell), must be treated of men, and the ideas of men, which are—it is policy to be emphatic upon truisms—are actually the motives of men in a greater degree than their appetites: these are my theme; and may it be my fortune to keep them at bloodheat, and myself calm as a statue of Memnon in prostrate Egypt! He sits there waiting for the sunlight; I here, and readier to be musical than you think. I can at any rate be impartial; and do but fix your eyes on the sunlight striking him and swallowing the day in rounding him, and you have an image of the passive receptivity of shine and shade I hold it good to aim at, if at the same time I may keep my characters at blood-heat. I shoot my arrows at a mark that is pretty certain to return them to me. And as to perfect success, I should be like the panic-stricken shopkeepers in my alarm at it; for I should believe that genii of the air fly above our tree-tops between us and the incognizable spheres, catching those ambitious shafts they deem it a promise of fun to play pranks with.

Page 2262

Young Mr. Beauchamp at that period of the panic had not the slightest feeling for the taxpayer. He was therefore unable to penetrate the mystery of our roundabout way of enlivening him. He pored over the journals in perplexity, and talked of his indignation nightly to his pretty partners at balls, who knew not they were lesser Andromedas of his dear Andromeda country, but danced and chatted and were gay, and said they were sure he would defend them. The men he addressed were civil. They listened to him, sometimes with smiles and sometimes with laughter, but approvingly, liking the lad's quick spirit. They were accustomed to the machinery employed to give our land a shudder and to soothe it, and generally remarked that it meant nothing. His uncle Everard, and his uncle's friend Stukely Culbrett, expounded the nature of Frenchmen to him, saying that they were uneasy when not periodically thrashed; it would be cruel to deny them their crow beforehand; and so the pair of gentlemen pooh-poohed the affair; agreeing with him, however, that we had no great reason to be proud of our appearance, and the grounds they assigned for this were the activity and the prevalence of the ignoble doctrines of Manchester—a power whose very existence was unknown to Mr. Beauchamp. He would by no means allow the burden of our national disgrace to be cast on one part of the nation. We were insulted, and all in a poultry-flutter, yet no one seemed to feel it but himself! Outside the Press and Parliament, which must necessarily be the face we show to the foreigner, absolute indifference reigned. Navy men and red-coats were willing to join him or anybody in sneers at a clipping and paring miserly Government, but they were insensible to the insult, the panic, the startled-poultry show, the shame of our exhibition of ourselves in Europe. It looked as if the blustering French Guard were to have it all their own way. And what would they, what could they but, think of us! He sat down to write them a challenge.

He is not the only Englishman who has been impelled by a youthful chivalry to do that. He is perhaps the youngest who ever did it, and consequently there were various difficulties to be overcome. As regards his qualifications for addressing Frenchmen, a year of his prae-neptunal time had been spent in their capital city for the purpose of acquiring French of Paris, its latest refinements of pronunciation and polish, and the art of conversing. He had read the French tragic poets and Moliere; he could even relish the Gallic-classic—'Qu'il mourut!' and he spoke French passably, being quite beyond the Bullish treatment of the tongue. Writing a letter in French was a different undertaking. The one he projected bore no resemblance to an ordinary letter. The briefer the better, of course; but a tone of dignity was imperative, and the tone must be individual, distinctive, Nevil Beauchamp's, though not in his native language. First he tried his letter in French, and lost sight of himself completely.

Page 2263

‘Messieurs de la Garde Francaise,’ was a good beginning; the remainder gave him a false air of a masquerader, most uncomfortable to see; it was Nevil Beauchamp in moustache and imperial, and bagbreeches badly fitting. He tried English, which was really himself, and all that heart could desire, supposing he addressed a body of midshipmen just a little loftily. But the English, when translated, was bald and blunt to the verge of offensiveness.

’*Gentlemen of the French guard*,

’I take up the glove you have tossed us. I am an Englishman.
That will do for a reason.’

This might possibly pass with the gentlemen of the English Guard. But read:

’*Messieurs de la garde Francaise*,

‘J’accepte votre gant. Je suis Anglais. La raison est suffisante.’

And imagine French Guardsmen reading it!

Mr. Beauchamp knew the virtue of punctiliousness in epithets and phrases of courtesy toward a formal people, and as the officers of the French Guard were gentlemen of birth, he would have them to perceive in him their equal at a glance. On the other hand, a bare excess of phrasing distorted him to a likeness of Mascarille playing Marquis. How to be English and think French! The business was as laborious as if he had started on the rough sea of the Channel to get at them in an open boat.

The lady governing his uncle Everard’s house, Mrs. Rosamund Culling, entered his room and found him writing with knitted brows. She was young, that is, she was not in her middleage; and they were the dearest of friends; each had given the other proof of it. Nevil looked up and beheld her lifted finger.

‘You are composing a love-letter, Nevil!’ The accusation sounded like irony.

‘No,’ said he, puffing; ’I wish I were!

‘What can it be, then?’

He thrust pen and paper a hand’s length on the table, and gazed at her.

‘My dear Nevil, is it really anything serious?’ said she.

‘I am writing French, ma’am.’

’Then I may help you. It must be very absorbing, for you did not hear my knock at your door.’

Now, could he trust her? The widow of a British officer killed nobly fighting for his country in India, was a person to be relied on for active and burning sympathy in a matter that touched the country’s honour. She was a woman, and a woman of spirit. Men had not pleased him of late. Something might be hoped from a woman.

He stated his occupation, saying that if she would assist him in his French she would oblige him; the letter must be written and must go. This was uttered so positively that she bowed her head, amused by the funny semi-tone of defiance to the person to whom he confided the secret. She had humour, and was ravished by his English boyishness, with the novel blush of the heroical-nonsensical in it.

Page 2264

Mrs. Culling promised him demurely that she would listen, objecting nothing to his plan, only to his French.

‘Messieurs de la Garde Francaise!’ he commenced.

Her criticism followed swiftly.

‘I think you are writing to the Garde Imperiale.’

He admitted his error, and thanked her warmly.

‘Messieurs de la Garde Imperiale!’

‘Does not that,’ she said, ’include the non-commissioned officers, the privates, and the cooks, of all the regiments?’

He could scarcely think that, but thought it provoking the French had no distinctive working title corresponding to gentlemen, and suggested ‘Messieurs les Officiers’: which might, Mrs. Culling assured him, comprise the barbers. He frowned, and she prescribed his writing, ‘Messieurs les Colonels de la Garde Imperiale.’ This he set down. The point was that a stand must be made against the flood of sarcasms and bullyings to which the country was exposed in increasing degrees, under a belief that we would fight neither in the mass nor individually. Possibly, if it became known that the colonels refused to meet a midshipman, the gentlemen of our Household troops would advance a step.

Mrs. Calling’s adroit efforts to weary him out of his project were unsuccessful. He was too much on fire to know the taste of absurdity.

Nevil repeated what he had written in French, and next the English of what he intended to say.

The lady conscientiously did her utmost to reconcile the two languages. She softened his downrightness, passed with approval his compliments to France and the ancient high reputation of her army, and, seeing that a loophole was left for them to apologize, asked how many French colonels he wanted to fight.

‘I do not *want*, ma’am,’ said Nevil.

He had simply taken up the glove they had again flung at our feet: and he had done it to stop the incessant revilings, little short of positive contempt, which we in our indolence exposed ourselves to from the foreigner, particularly from Frenchmen, whom he liked; and precisely because he liked them he insisted on forcing them to respect us. Let his challenge be accepted, and he would find backers. He knew the stuff of Englishmen: they only required an example.

‘French officers are skilful swordsmen,’ said Mrs. Culling. ’My husband has told me they will spend hours of the day thrusting and parrying. They are used to duelling.’

‘We,’ Nevil answered, ’don’t get apprenticed to the shambles to learn our duty on the field. Duelling is, I know, sickening folly. We go too far in pretending to despise every insult pitched at us. A man may do for his country what he wouldn’t do for himself.’

Mrs. Culling gravely said she hoped that bloodshed would be avoided, and Mr. Beauchamp nodded.

She left him hard at work.

Page 2265

He was a popular boy, a favourite of women, and therefore full of engagements to Balls and dinners. And he was a modest boy, though his uncle encouraged him to deliver his opinions freely and argue with men. The little drummer attached to wheeling columns thinks not more of himself because his short legs perform the same strides as the grenadiers'; he is happy to be able to keep the step; and so was Nevil; and if ever he contradicted a senior, it was in the interests of the country. Veneration of heroes, living and dead, kept down his conceit. He worshipped devotedly. From an early age he exacted of his flattering ladies that they must love his hero. Not to love his hero was to be strangely in error, to be in need of conversion, and he proselytized with the ardour of the Moslem. His uncle Everard was proud of his good looks, fire, and nonsense, during the boy's extreme youth. He traced him by cousinships back to the great Earl Beauchamp of Froissart, and would have it so; and he would have spoilt him had not the young fellow's mind been possessed by his reverence for men of deeds. How could he think of himself, who had done nothing, accomplished nothing, so long as he brooded on the images of signal Englishmen whose names were historic for daring, and the strong arm, and artfulness, all given to the service of the country?—men of a magnanimity overcast with simplicity, which Nevil held to be pure insular English; our type of splendid manhood, not discoverable elsewhere. A method of enraging him was to distinguish one or other of them as Irish, Scottish, or Cambrian. He considered it a dismemberment of the country. And notwithstanding the pleasure he had in uniting in his person the strong red blood of the chivalrous Lord Beauchamp with the hard and tenacious Romfrey blood, he hated the title of Norman. We are English—British, he said. A family resting its pride on mere ancestry provoked his contempt, if it did not show him one of his men. He had also a disposition to esteem lightly the family which, having produced a man, settled down after that effort for generations to enjoy the country's pay. Boys are unjust; but Nevil thought of the country mainly, arguing that we should not accept the country's money for what we do not ourselves perform. These traits of his were regarded as characteristics hopeful rather than the reverse; none of his friends and relatives foresaw danger in them. He was a capital boy for his elders to trot out and banter.

Mrs. Rosamund Culling usually went to his room to see him and doat on him before he started on his rounds of an evening. She suspected that his necessary attention to his toilet would barely have allowed him time to finish his copy of the letter. Certain phrases had bothered him. The thrice recurrence of 'ma patrie' jarred on his ear. 'Sentiments' afflicted his acute sense of the declamatory twice. 'C'est avec les sentiments du plus profond regret': and again, 'Je suis bien scar que vous comprendrez mes sentiments, et m'accorderez l'honneur que je reclame au nom de ma patrie outrage.' The word 'patrie' was broadcast over the letter, and 'honneur' appeared four times, and a more delicate word to harp on than the others!

Page 2266

‘Not to Frenchmen,’ said his friend Rosamund. ’I would put “Je suis convaincu”: it is not so familiar.’

’But I have written out the fair copy, ma’am, and that alteration seems a trifle.’

‘I would copy it again and again, Nevil, to get it right.’

‘No: I’d rather see it off than have it right,’ said Nevil, and he folded the letter.

How the deuce to address it, and what direction to write on it, were further difficulties. He had half a mind to remain at home to conquer them by excogitation.

Rosamund urged him not to break his engagement to dine at the Halketts’, where perhaps from his friend Colonel Halkett, who would never imagine the reason for the inquiry, he might learn how a letter to a crack French regiment should be addressed and directed.

This proved persuasive, and as the hour was late Nevil had to act on her advice in a hurry.

His uncle Everard enjoyed a perusal of the manuscript in his absence.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE, NEPHEW, AND ANOTHER

The Honourable Everard Romfrey came of a race of fighting earls, toughest of men, whose high, stout, Western castle had weathered our cyclone periods of history without changeing hands more than once, and then but for a short year or two, as if to teach the original possessors the wisdom of inclining to the stronger side. They had a queen’s chamber in it, and a king’s; and they stood well up against the charge of having dealt darkly with the king. He died among them—how has not been told. We will not discuss the conjectures here. A savour of North Sea foam and ballad pirates hangs about the early chronicles of the family. Indications of an ancestry that had lived between the wave and the cloud were discernible in their notions of right and wrong. But a settlement on solid earth has its influences. They were chivalrous knights bannerets, and leaders in the tented field, paying and taking fair ransom for captures; and they were good landlords, good masters blithely followed to the wars. Sing an old battle of Normandy, Picardy, Gascony, and you celebrate deeds of theirs. At home they were vexatious neighbours to a town of burghers claiming privileges: nor was it unreasonable that the Earl should flout the pretensions of the town to read things for themselves, documents, titleships, rights, and the rest. As well might the flat plain boast of seeing as far as the pillar. Earl and town fought the fight of Barons and Commons in epitome. The Earl gave way; the Barons gave way. Mighty men may thrash numbers

for a time; in the end the numbers will be thrashed into the art of beating their teachers. It is bad policy to fight the odds inch by inch. Those primitive school masters of the million liked it, and took their pleasure in that way. The Romfreys did not breed warriors for a parade at Court; wars, though frequent, were not constant, and they wanted

Page 2267

occupation: they may even have felt that they were bound in no common degree to the pursuit of an answer to what may be called the parent question of humanity: Am I thy master, or thou mine? They put it to lords of other castles, to town corporations, and sometimes brother to brother: and notwithstanding that the answer often unseated and once discastled them, they swam back to their places, as born warriors, urged by a passion for land, are almost sure to do; are indeed quite sure, so long as they multiply sturdily, and will never take no from Fortune. A family passion for land, that survives a generation, is as effective as genius in producing the object it conceives; and through marriages and conflicts, the seizure of lands, and brides bearing land, these sharp-feeding eagle-eyed earls of Romfrey spied few spots within their top tower's wide circle of the heavens not their own.

It is therefore manifest that they had the root qualities, the prime active elements, of men in perfection, and notably that appetite to flourish at the cost of the weaker, which is the blessed exemplification of strength, and has been man's cheerfulest encouragement to fight on since his comparative subjugation (on the whole, it seems complete) of the animal world. By-and-by the struggle is transferred to higher ground, and we begin to perceive how much we are indebted to the fighting spirit. Strength is the brute form of truth. No conspicuously great man was born of the Romfreys, who were better served by a succession of able sons. They sent undistinguished able men to army and navy—lieutenants given to be critics of their captains, but trustworthy for their work. In the later life of the family, they preferred the provincial state of splendid squires to Court and political honours. They were renowned shots, long-limbed stalking sportsmen in field and bower, fast friends, intemperate enemies, handsome to feminine eyes, resembling one another in build, and mostly of the Northern colour, or betwixt the tints, with an hereditary nose and mouth that cried Romfrey from faces thrice diluted in cousinships.

The Hon. Everard (Stephen Denely Craven Romfrey), third son of the late Earl, had some hopes of the title, and was in person a noticeable gentleman, in mind a mediaeval baron, in politics a crotchety unintelligible Whig. He inherited the estate of Holdesbury, on the borders of Hampshire and Wilts, and espoused that of Steynham in Sussex, where he generally resided. His favourite in the family had been the Lady Emily, his eldest sister, who, contrary to the advice of her other brothers and sisters, had yielded her hand to his not wealthy friend, Colonel Richard Beauchamp. After the death of Nevil's parents, he adopted the boy, being himself childless, and a widower. Childlessness was the affliction of the family. Everard, having no son, could hardly hope that his brother the Earl, and Craven, Lord Avonley, would have one, for he loved the prospect of the title.

Page 2268

Yet, as there were no cousins of the male branch extant, the lack of an heir was a serious omission, and to become the Earl of Romfrey, and be the last Earl of Romfrey, was a melancholy thought, however brilliant. So sinks the sun: but he could not desire the end of a great day. At one time he was a hot Parliamentarian, calling himself a Whig, called by the Whigs a Radical, called by the Radicals a Tory, and very happy in fighting them all round. This was during the decay of his party, before the Liberals were defined. A Liberal deprived him of the seat he had held for fifteen years, and the clearness of his understanding was obscured by that black vision of popular ingratitude which afflicts the free fighting man yet more than the malleable public servant. The latter has a clerkly humility attached to him like a second nature, from his habit of doing as others bid him: the former smacks a voluntarily sweating forehead and throbbing wounds for witness of his claim upon your palpable thankfulness. It is an insult to tell him that he fought for his own satisfaction. Mr. Romfrey still called himself a Whig, though it was Whig mean vengeance on account of his erratic vote and voice on two or three occasions that denied him a peerage and a seat in haven. Thither let your good sheep go, your echoes, your wag-tail dogs, your wealthy pursy manufacturers! He decried the attractions of the sublimer House, and laughed at the transparent Whiggery of his party in replenishing it from the upper shoots of the commonalty: 'Dragging it down to prop it up! swamping it to keep it swimming!' he said.

He was nevertheless a vehement supporter of that House. He stood for King, Lords, and Commons, in spite of his personal grievances, harping the triad as vigorously as bard of old Britain. Commons he added out of courtesy, or from usage or policy, or for emphasis, or for the sake of the Constitutional number of the Estates of the realm, or it was because he had an intuition of the folly of omitting them; the same, to some extent, that builders have regarding bricks when they plan a fabric. Thus, although King and Lords prove the existence of Commons in days of the political deluge almost syllogistically, the example of not including one of the Estates might be imitated, and Commons and King do not necessitate the conception of an intermediate third, while Lords and Commons suggest the decapitation of the leading figure. The united three, however, no longer cast reflections on one another, and were an assurance to this acute politician that his birds were safe. He preserved game rigorously, and the deduction was the work of instinct with him. To his mind the game-laws were the corner-stone of Law, and of a man's right to hold his own; and so delicately did he think the country poised, that an attack on them threatened the structure of justice. The three conjoined Estates were therefore his head gamekeepers; their duty was to back him against the poacher, if they would not see the country tumble. As to his under-gamekeepers, he was their intimate and their friend, saying, with none of the misanthropy which proclaims the virtues of the faithful dog to the confusion of humankind, he liked their company better than that of his equals, and learnt more from them. They also listened deferentially to their instructor.

Page 2269

The conversation he delighted in most might have been going on in any century since the Conquest. Grant him his not unreasonable argument upon his property in game, he was a liberal landlord. No tenants were forced to take his farms. He dragged none by the collar. He gave them liberty to go to Australia, Canada, the Americas, if they liked. He asked in return to have the liberty to shoot on his own grounds, and rear the marks for his shot, treating the question of indemnification as a gentleman should. Still there were grumbling tenants. He swarmed with game, and, though he was liberal, his hares and his birds were immensely destructive: computation could not fix the damage done by them. Probably the farmers expected them not to eat. 'There are two parties to a bargain,' said Everard, 'and one gets the worst of it. But if he was never obliged to make it, where's his right to complain?' Men of sense rarely obtain satisfactory answers: they are provoked to despise their kind. But the poacher was another kind of vermin than the stupid tenant. Everard did him the honour to hate him, and twice in a fray had he collared his ruffian, and subsequently sat in condemnation of the wretch: for he who can attest a villany is best qualified to punish it. Gangs from the metropolis found him too determined and alert for their sport. It was the factiousness of here and there an unbroken young scoundrelly colt poacher of the neighbourhood, a born thief, a fellow damned in an inveterate taste for game, which gave him annoyance. One night he took Master Nevil out with him, and they hunted down a couple of sinners that showed fight against odds. Nevil attempted to beg them off because of their boldness. 'I don't set my traps for nothing,' said his uncle, silencing him. But the boy reflected that his uncle was perpetually lamenting the cowed spirit of the common English-formerly such fresh and merry men! He touched Rosamund Culling's heart with his description of their attitudes when they stood resisting and bawling to the keepers, 'Come on we'll die for it.' They did not die. Everard explained to the boy that he could have killed them, and was contented to have sent them to gaol for a few weeks. Nevil gaped at the empty magnanimity which his uncle presented to him as a remarkably big morsel. At the age of fourteen he was despatched to sea.

He went unwillingly; not so much from an objection to a naval life as from a wish, incomprehensible to grown men and boys, and especially to his cousin, Cecil Baskelett, that he might remain at school and learn. 'The fellow would like to be a parson!' Everard said in disgust. No parson had ever been known of in the Romfrey family, or in the Beauchamp. A legend of a parson that had been a tutor in one of the Romfrey houses, and had talked and sung blandly to a damsel of the blood—degenerate maid—-to receive a handsome trouncing for his pains, instead of the holy marriage-tie he aimed at, was the only

Page 2270

connection of the Romfreys with the parsonry, as Everard called them. He attributed the boy's feeling to the influence of his great-aunt Beauchamp, who would, he said, infallibly have made a parson of him. 'I'd rather enlist for a soldier,' Nevil said, and he ceased to dream of rebellion, and of his little property of a few thousand pounds in the funds to aid him in it. He confessed to his dear friend Rosamund Culling that he thought the parsons happy in having time to read history. And oh, to feel for certain which side was the wrong side in our Civil War, so that one should not hesitate in choosing! Such puzzles are never, he seemed to be aware, solved in a midshipman's mess. He hated bloodshed, and was guilty of the 'cotton-spinners' babble,' abhorred of Everard, in alluding to it. Rosamund liked him for his humanity; but she, too, feared he was a slack Romfrey when she heard him speak in precocious contempt of glory. Somewhere, somehow, he had got hold of Manchester sarcasms concerning glory: a weedy word of the newspapers had been sown in his bosom perhaps. He said: 'I don't care to win glory; I know all about that; I 've seen an old hat in the Louvre.' And he would have had her to suppose that he had looked on the campaigning head-cover of Napoleon simply as a shocking bad, bald, brown-rubbed old tricorne rather than as the nod of extinction to thousands, the great orb of darkness, the still-trembling gloomy quiver—the brain of the lightnings of battles.

Now this boy nursed no secret presumptuous belief that he was fitted for the walks of the higher intellect; he was not having his impudent boy's fling at superiority over the superior, as here and there a subtle-minded vain juvenile will; nor was he a parrot repeating a line from some Lancastrian pamphlet. He really disliked war and the sword; and scorning the prospect of an idle life, confessing that his abilities barely adapted him for a sailor's, he was opposed to the career opened to him almost to the extreme of shrinking and terror. Or that was the impression conveyed to a not unsympathetic hearer by his forlorn efforts to make himself understood, which were like the tappings of the stick of a blind man mystified by his sense of touch at wrong corners. His bewilderment and speechlessness were a comic display, tragic to him.

Just as his uncle Everard predicted, he came home from his first voyage a pleasant sailor lad. His features, more than handsome to a woman, so mobile they were, shone of sea and spirit, the chance lights of the sea, and the spirit breathing out of it. As to war and bloodshed, a man's first thought must be his country, young Jacket remarked, and 'Ich dien' was the best motto afloat. Rosamund noticed the peculiarity of the books he selected for his private reading. They were not boys' books, books of adventure and the like. His favourite author was one writing of Heroes, in (so she esteemed it) a style resembling either early architecture or

Page 2271

utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street-slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints. This was its effect on the lady. To her the incomprehensible was the abominable, for she had our country's high critical feeling; but he, while admitting that he could not quite master it, liked it. He had dug the book out of a bookseller's shop in Malta, captivated by its title, and had, since the day of his purchase, gone at it again and again, getting nibbles of golden meaning by instalments, as with a solitary pick in a very dark mine, until the illumination of an idea struck him that there was a great deal more in the book than there was in himself. This was sufficient to secure the devoted attachment of young Mr. Beauchamp. Rosamund sighed with apprehension to think of his unlikeness to boys and men among his countrymen in some things. Why should he hug a book he owned he could not quite comprehend? He said he liked a bone in his mouth; and it was natural wisdom, though unappreciated by women. A bone in a boy's mind for him to gnaw and worry, corrects the vagrancies and promotes the healthy activities, whether there be marrow in it or not. Supposing it furnishes only dramatic entertainment in that usually vacant tenement, or powder-shell, it will be of service.

Nevil proposed to her that her next present should be the entire list of his beloved Incomprehensible's published works, and she promised, and was not sorry to keep her promise dangling at the skirts of memory, to drop away in time. For that fire-and-smoke writer dedicated volumes to the praise of a regicide. Nice reading for her dear boy! Some weeks after Nevil was off again, she abused herself for her half-hearted love of him, and would have given him anything—the last word in favour of the Country versus the royal Martyr, for example, had he insisted on it. She gathered, bit by bit, that he had dashed at his big blustering cousin Cecil to vindicate her good name. The direful youths fought in the Steynham stables, overheard by the grooms. Everard received a fine account of the tussle from these latter, and Rosamund, knowing him to be of the order of gentlemen who, whatsoever their sins, will at all costs protect a woman's delicacy, and a dependant's, man or woman, did not fear to have her ears shocked in probing him on the subject.

Everard was led to say that Nevil's cousins were bedevilled with womanfolk.

From which Rosamund perceived that women had been at work; and if so, it was upon the business of the scandal-monger; and if so, Nevil fought his cousin to protect her good name from a babbler of the family gossip.

Page 2272

She spoke to Stukely Culbrett, her dead husband's friend, to whose recommendation she was indebted for her place in Everard Romfrey's household.

'Nevil behaved like a knight, I hear.'

'Your beauty was disputed,' said he, 'and Nevil knocked the blind man down for not being able to see.'

She thought, 'Not my beauty! Nevil struck his cousin on behalf of the only fair thing I have left to me!'

This was a moment with her when many sensations rush together and form a knot in sensitive natures. She had been very good-looking. She was good-looking still, but she remembered the bloom of her looks in her husband's days (the tragedy of the mirror is one for a woman to write: I am ashamed to find myself smiling while the poor lady weeps), she remembered his praises, her pride; his death in battle, her anguish: then, on her strange entry to this house, her bitter wish to be older; and then, the oppressive calm of her recognition of her wish's fulfilment, the heavy drop to dead earth, when she could say, or pretend to think she could say—I look old enough: will they tattle of me now? Nevil's championship of her good name brought her history spinning about her head, and threw a finger of light on her real position. In that she saw the slenderness of her hold on respect, as well as felt her personal stainlessness. The boy warmed her chill widowhood. It was written that her, second love should be of the pattern of mother's love. She loved him hungrily and jealously, always in fear for him when he was absent, even anxiously when she had him near. For some cause, born, one may fancy, of the hour of her love's conception, his image in her heart was steeped in tears. She was not, happily, one of the women who betray strong feeling, and humour preserved her from excesses of sentiment.

CHAPTER III

CONTAINS BARONIAL VIEWS OF THE PRESENT TIME

Upon the word of honour of Rosamund, the letter to the officers of the French Guard was posted.

'Post it, post it,' Everard said, on her consulting him, with the letter in her hand. 'Let the fellow stand his luck.' It was addressed to the Colonel of the First Regiment of the Imperial Guard, Paris. That superscription had been suggested by Colonel Halkett. Rosamund was in favour of addressing it to Versailles, Nevil to the Tuileries; but Paris could hardly fail to hit the mark, and Nevil waited for the reply, half expecting an appointment on the French sands: for the act of posting a letter, though it be to little short of the Pleiades even, will stamp an incredible proceeding as a matter of business,

so ready is the ardent mind to take footing on the last thing done. The flight of Mr. Beauchamp's letter placed it in the common order of occurrences for the youthful author of it. Jack Wilmore, a messmate, offered to second him, though he should be dismissed the service for it. Another

Page 2273

second would easily be found somewhere; for, as Nevil observed, you have only to set these affairs going, and British blood rises: we are not the people you see on the surface. Wilmore's father was a parson, for instance. What did he do? He could not help himself: he supplied the army and navy with recruits! One son was in a marching regiment, the other was Jack, and three girls had vowed never to quit the rectory save as brides of officers. Nevil thought that seemed encouraging; we were evidently not a nation of shopkeepers at heart; and he quoted sayings of Mr. Stukely Culbrett's, in which neither his ear nor Wilmore's detected the under-ring Stukely was famous for: as that England had saddled herself with India for the express purpose of better obeying the Commandments in Europe; and that it would be a lamentable thing for the Continent and our doctrines if ever beef should fail the Briton, and such like. 'Depend upon it we're a fighting nation naturally, Jack,' said Nevil. 'How can we submit! . . . however, I shall not be impatient. I dislike duelling, and hate war, but I will have the country respected.' They planned a defence of the country, drawing their strategy from magazine articles by military pens, reverberations of the extinct voices of the daily and weekly journals, customary after a panic, and making bloody stands on spots of extreme pastoral beauty, which they visited by coach and rail, looking back on unfortified London with particular melancholy.

Rosamund's word may be trusted that she dropped the letter into a London post-office in pursuance of her promise to Nevil. The singular fact was that no answer to it ever arrived. Nevil, without a doubt of her honesty, proposed an expedition to Paris; he was ordered to join his ship, and he lay moored across the water in the port of Bevisham, panting for notice to be taken of him. The slight of the total disregard of his letter now affected him personally; it took him some time to get over this indignity put upon him, especially because of his being under the impression that the country suffered, not he at all. The letter had served its object: ever since the transmission of it the menaces and insults had ceased.

But they might be renewed, and he desired to stop them altogether. His last feeling was one of genuine regret that Frenchmen should have behaved unworthily of the high estimation he held them in. With which he dismissed the affair.

He was rallied about it when he next sat at his uncle's table, and had to pardon Rosamund for telling.

Nevil replied modestly: 'I dare say you think me half a fool, sir. All I know is, I waited for my betters to speak first. I have no dislike of Frenchmen.'

Page 2274

Everard shook his head to signify, ‘not half.’ But he was gentle enough in his observations. ’There’s a motto, Ex pede Herculem. You stepped out for the dogs to judge better of us. It’s an infernally tripping motto for a composite structure like the kingdom of Great Britain and Manchester, boy Nevil. We can fight foreigners when the time comes.’ He directed Nevil to look home, and cast an eye on the cotton-spinners, with the remark that they were binding us hand and foot to sell us to the biggest buyer, and were not Englishmen but ’Germans and Jews, and quakers and hybrids, diligent clerks and speculators, and commercial travellers, who have raised a fortune from foisting drugged goods on an idiot population.’

He loathed them for the curse they were to the country. And he was one of the few who spoke out. The fashion was to pet them. We stood against them; were halfhearted, and were beaten; and then we petted them, and bit by bit our privileges were torn away. We made lords of them to catch them, and they grocers of us by way of a return. ‘Already,’ said Everard, ’they have knocked the nation’s head off, and dry-rotted the bone of the people.’

‘Don’t they,’ Nevil asked, ‘belong to the Liberal party?’

‘I’ll tell you,’ Everard replied, ’they belong to any party that upsets the party above them. They belong to the *George Foxe* party, and my poultry-roosts are the mark they aim at. You shall have a glance at the manufacturing district some day. You shall see the machines they work with. You shall see the miserable lank-jawed half-stewed pantaloons they’ve managed to make of Englishmen there. My blood ’s past boiling. They work young children in their factories from morning to night. Their manufactories are spreading like the webs of the devil to suck the blood of the country. In that district of theirs an epidemic levels men like a disease in sheep. Skeletons can’t make a stand. On the top of it all they sing Sunday tunes!’

This behaviour of corn-law agitators and protectors of poachers was an hypocrisy too horrible for comment. Everard sipped claret. Nevil lashed his head for the clear idea which objurgation insists upon implanting, but batters to pieces in the act.

‘Manchester’s the belly of this country!’ Everard continued. ’So long as Manchester flourishes, we’re a country governed and led by the belly. The head and the legs of the country are sound still; I don’t guarantee it for long, but the middle’s rapacious and corrupt. Take it on a question of foreign affairs, it ’s an alderman after a feast. Bring it upon home politics, you meet a wolf.’

The faithful Whig veteran spoke with jolly admiration of the speech of a famous Tory chief.

Page 2275

’That was the way to talk to them! Denounce them traitors! Up whip, and set the ruffians capering! Hit them facers! Our men are always for the too-clever trick. They pluck the sprouts and eat them, as if the loss of a sprout or two thinned Manchester! Your policy of absorption is good enough when you’re dealing with fragments. It’s a devilish unlucky thing to attempt with a concrete mass. You might as well ask your head to absorb a wall by running at it like a pugnacious nigger. I don’t want you to go into Parliament ever. You’re a fitter man out of it; but if ever you’re bitten—and it’s the curse of our country to have politics as well as the other diseases—don’t follow a flag, be independent, keep a free vote; remember how I’ve been tied, and hold foot against Manchester. Do it blindfold; you don’t want counselling, you’re sure to be right. I’ll lay you a blood-brood mare to a cabstand skeleton, you’ll have an easy conscience and deserve the thanks of the country.’

Nevil listened gravely. The soundness of the head and legs of the country he took for granted. The inflated state of the unchivalrous middle, denominated Manchester, terrified him. Could it be true that England was betraying signs of decay? and signs how ignoble! Half-a-dozen crescent lines cunningly turned, sketched her figure before the world, and the reflection for one ready to die upholding her was that the portrait was no caricature. Such an emblematic presentation of the land of his filial affection haunted him with hideous mockeries. Surely the foreigner hearing our boasts of her must compare us to showmen bawling the attractions of a Fat Lady at a fair!

Swoln Manchester bore the blame of it. Everard exulted to hear his young echo attack the cotton-spinners. But Nevil was for a plan, a system, immediate action; the descending among the people, and taking an initiative, *leading* them, insisting on their following, not standing aloof and shrugging.

‘We lead them in war,’ said he; ’why not in peace? There’s a front for peace as well as war, and that’s our place rightly. We’re pushed aside; why, it seems to me we’re treated like old-fashioned ornaments! The fault must be ours. Shrugging and sneering is about as honourable as blazing fireworks over your own defeat. Back we have to go! that’s the point, sir. And as for jeering the cotton-spinners, I can’t while they’ve the lead of us. We let them have it! And we have thrice the stake in the country. I don’t mean properties and titles.’

‘Deuce you don’t,’ said his uncle.

’I mean our names, our histories; I mean our duties. As for titles, the way to defend them is to be worthy of them.’

Page 2276

‘Damned fine speech,’ remarked Everard. ’Now you get out of that trick of prize-orationing. I call it snuffery, sir; it’s all to your own nose! You’re talking to me, not to a gallery. “Worthy of them!” Caesar wraps his head in his robe: he gets his dig in the ribs for all his attitudinizing. It’s very well for a man to talk like that who owns no more than his barebodkin life, poor devil. Tall talk’s his jewelry: he must have his dandification in bunkum. You ought to know better. Property and titles are worth having, whether you are “worthy of them” or a disgrace to your class. The best way of defending them is to keep a strong fist, and take care you don’t draw your fore-foot back more than enough.’

‘Please propose something to be done,’ said Nevil, depressed by the recommendation of that attitude.

Everard proposed a fight for every privilege his class possessed. ’They say,’ he said, ’a nobleman fighting the odds is a sight for the gods: and I wouldn’t yield an inch of ground. It’s no use calling things by fine names—the country’s ruined by cowardice. Poursuivez! I cry. Haro! at them! The biggest hart wins in the end. I haven’t a doubt about that. And I haven’t a doubt we carry the tonnage.’

‘There’s the people,’ sighed Nevil, entangled in his uncle’s haziness.

‘What people?’

‘I suppose the people of Great Britain count, sir.’

‘Of course they do; when the battle’s done, the fight lost and won.’

‘Do you expect the people to look on, sir?’

‘The people always wait for the winner, boy Nevil.’

The young fellow exclaimed despondingly, ‘If it were a race!’

‘It’s like a race, and we’re confoundedly out of training,’ said Everard.

There he rested. A mediaeval gentleman with the docile notions of the twelfth century, complacently driving them to grass and wattling them in the nineteenth, could be of no use to a boy trying to think, though he could set the youngster galloping. Nevil wandered about the woods of Steynham, disinclined to shoot and lend a hand to country sports. The popping of the guns of his uncle and guests hung about his ears much like their speech, which was unobjectionable in itself, but not sufficient; a little hard, he thought, a little idle. He wanted something, and wanted them to give their time and energy to something, that was not to be had in a market. The nobles, he felt sure, might resume their natural alliance with the people, and lead them, as they did of old, to the battle-field. How might they? A comely Sussex lass could not well tell him how. Sarcastic reports of the troublesome questioner represented him applying to a nymph of

the country for enlightenment. He thrilled surprisingly under the charm of feminine beauty. 'The fellow's sound at bottom,' his uncle said, hearing of his having really been seen walking in the complete form proper to his budding age, that is, in two halves. Nevil showed that

Page 2277

he had gained an acquaintance with the struggles of the neighbouring agricultural poor to live and rear their children. His uncle's table roared at his enumeration of the sickly little beings, consumptive or bandy-legged, within a radius of five miles of Steynham. Action was what he wanted, Everard said. Nevil perhaps thought the same, for he dashed out of his mooning with a wave of the Tory standard, delighting the ladies, though in that conflict of the Lion and the Unicorn (which was a Tory song) he seemed rather to wish to goad the dear lion than crush the one-horned intrusive upstart. His calling on the crack corps of Peers to enrol themselves forthwith in the front ranks, and to anticipate opposition by initiating measures, and so cut out that funny old crazy old galleon, the People, from under the batteries of the enemy, highly amused the gentlemen.

Before rejoining his ship, Nevil paid his customary short visit of ceremony to his great-aunt Beauchamp—a venerable lady past eighty, hitherto divided from him in sympathy by her dislike of his uncle Everard, who had once been his living hero. That was when he was in frocks, and still the tenacious fellow could not bear to hear his uncle spoken ill of.

'All the men of that family are heartless, and he is a man of wood, my dear, and a bad man,' the old lady said. 'He should have kept you at school, and sent you to college. You want reading and teaching and talking to. Such a house as that is should never be a home for you.' She hinted at Rosamund. Nevil defended the persecuted woman, but with no better success than from the attacks of the Romfrey ladies; with this difference, however, that these decried the woman's vicious arts, and Mistress Elizabeth Mary Beauchamp put all the sin upon the man. Such a man! she said. 'Let me hear that he has married her, I will not utter another word.' Nevil echoed, 'Married!' in a different key.

'I am as much of an aristocrat as any of you, only I rank morality higher,' said Mrs. Beauchamp. 'When you were a child I offered to take you and make you my heir, and I would have educated you. You shall see a great-nephew of mine that I did educate; he is eating his dinners for the bar in London, and comes to me every Sunday. I shall marry him to a good girl, and I shall show your uncle what my kind of man-making is.'

Nevil had no desire to meet the other great-nephew, especially when he was aware of the extraordinary circumstance that a Beauchamp great-niece, having no money, had bestowed her hand on a Manchester man defunct, whereof this young Blackburn Tuckham, the lawyer, was issue. He took his leave of Mrs. Elizabeth Beauchamp, respecting her for her constitutional health and brightness, and regretting for the sake of the country that she had not married to give England men and women resembling her. On the whole he considered her wiser in her prescription for the malady besetting him than his uncle. He knew that action was but a temporary remedy. College would have been his chronic medicine, and the old lady's acuteness in seeing it impressed him forcibly. She had given him a peaceable two days on the Upper Thames, in an atmosphere of plain good sense and just-mindedness. He wrote to thank her, saying:

Page 2278

'My England at sea will be your parlour-window looking down the grass to the river and rushes; and when you do me the honour to write, please tell me the names of those wildflowers growing along the banks in Summer.' The old lady replied immediately, enclosing a cheque for fifty pounds: 'Colonel Halkett informs me you are under a cloud at Steynham, and I have thought you may be in want of pocket-money. The wild-flowers are willowherb, meadow-sweet, and loosestrife. I shall be glad when you are here in Summer to see them.'

Nevil despatched the following: 'I thank you, but I shall not cash the cheque. The Steynham tale is this:

I happened to be out at night, and stopped the keepers in chase of a young fellow trespassing. I caught him myself, but recognized him as one of a family I take an interest in, and let him run before they came up. My uncle heard a gun; I sent the head gamekeeper word in the morning to out with it all. Uncle E. was annoyed, and we had a rough parting. If you are rewarding me for this, I have no right to it.'

Mrs. Beauchamp rejoined: 'Your profession should teach you subordination, if it does nothing else that is valuable to a Christian gentleman. You will receive from the publisher the "Life and Letters of Lord Collingwood," whom I have it in my mind that a young midshipman should task himself to imitate. Spend the money as you think fit.'

Nevil's ship, commanded by Captain Robert Hall (a most gallant officer, one of his heroes, and of Lancashire origin, strangely!), flew to the South American station, in and about Lord Cochrane's waters; then as swiftly back. For, like the frail Norwegian bark on the edge of the maelstrom, liker to a country of conflicting interests and passions, that is not mentally on a level with its good fortune, England was drifting into foreign complications. A paralyzed Minister proclaimed it. The governing people, which is looked to for direction in grave dilemmas by its representatives and reflectors, shouted that it had been accused of pusillanimity. No one had any desire for war, only we really had (and it was perfectly true) been talking gigantic nonsense of peace, and of the everlastingness of the exchange of fruits for money, with angels waving raw-groceries of Eden in joy of the commercial picture. Therefore, to correct the excesses of that fit, we held the standing by the Moslem, on behalf of the Mediterranean (and the Moslem is one of our customers, bearing an excellent reputation for the payment of debts), to be good, granting the necessity. We deplored the necessity. The Press wept over it. That, however, was not the politic tone for us while the Imperial berg of Polar ice watched us keenly; and the Press proceeded to remind us that we had once been bull-dogs. Was there not an animal within us having a right to a turn now and then? And was it not (Falstaff, on a calm world, was quoted) for the benefit of our constitutions now and then to loosen the animal?

Page 2279

Granting the necessity, of course. By dint of incessantly speaking of the necessity we granted it unknowingly. The lighter hearts regarded our period of monotonously lyrical prosperity as a man sensible of fresh morning air looks back on the snoring bolster. Many of the graver were glad of a change. After all that maundering over the blessed peace which brings the raisin and the currant for the pudding, and shuts up the cannon with a sheep's head, it became a principle of popular taste to descant on the vivifying virtues of war; even as, after ten months of money-mongering in smoky London, the citizen hails the sea-breeze and an immersion in unruly brine, despite the cost, that breeze and brine may make a man of him, according to the doctor's prescription: sweet is home, but health is sweeter! Then was there another curious exhibition of us. Gentlemen, to the exact number of the Graces, dressed in drab of an ancient cut, made a pilgrimage to the icy despot, and besought him to give way for Piety's sake. He, courteous, colossal, and immoveable, waved them homeward. They returned and were hooted for belying the bellicose by their mission, and interpreting too well the peaceful. They were the unparalyzed Ministers of the occasion, but helpless.

And now came war, the purifier and the pestilence.

The cry of the English people for war was pretty general, as far as the criers went. They put on their Sabbath face concerning the declaration of war, and told with approval how the Royal hand had trembled in committing itself to the form of signature to which its action is limited. If there was money to be paid, there was a bugbear to be slain for it; and a bugbear is as obnoxious to the repose of commercial communities as rivals are to kings.

The cry for war was absolutely unanimous, and a supremely national cry, Everard Romfrey said, for it excluded the cotton-spinners.

He smacked his hands, crowing at the vociferations of disgust of those negrophiles and sweaters of Christians, whose isolated clamour amid the popular uproar sounded of gagged mouths.

One of the half-stifled cotton-spinners, a notorious one, a spouter of rank sedition and hater of aristocracy, a political poacher, managed to make himself heard. He was tossed to the Press for morsel, and tossed back to the people in strips. Everard had a sharp return of appetite in reading the daily and weekly journals. They printed logic, they printed sense; they abused the treasonable barking cur unmercifully. They printed almost as much as he would have uttered, excepting the strong salt of his similes, likening that rascal and his crew to the American weed in our waters, to the rotting wild bees' nest in our trees, to the worm in our ships' timbers, and to lamentable afflictions of the human frame, and of sheep, oxen, honest hounds. Manchester was in eclipse. The world of England discovered that the peace-party which opposed was the actual cause of the war: never was indication clearer. But my business is with Mr. Beauchamp, to

know whom, and partly understand his conduct in after-days, it will be as well to take a bird’seye glance at him through the war.

Page 2280

‘Now,’ said Everard, ’we shall see what staff there is in that fellow Nevil.’

He expected, as you may imagine, a true young Beauchamp-Romfrey to be straining his collar like a leash-hound.

CHAPTER IV

A GLIMPSE OF NEVIL IN ACTION

The young gentleman to whom Everard Romfrey transferred his combative spirit despatched a letter from the Dardanelles, requesting his uncle not to ask him for a spark of enthusiasm. He despised our Moslem allies, he said, and thought with pity of the miserable herds of men in regiments marching across the steppes at the bidding of a despot that we were helping to popularize. He certainly wrote in the tone of a jejune politician; pardonable stuff to seniors entertaining similar opinions, but most exasperating when it runs counter to them: though one question put by Nevil was not easily answerable. He wished to know whether the English people would be so anxious to be at it if their man stood on the opposite shore and talked of trying conclusions on their green fields. And he suggested that they had become so ready for war because of their having grown rather ashamed of themselves, and for the special reason that they could have it at a distance.

‘The rascal’s liver’s out of order,’ Everard said.

Coming to the sentence: ’Who speaks out in this crisis? There is one, and I am with him’; Mr. Romfrey’s compassionate sentiments veered round to irate amazement. For the person alluded to was indeed the infamous miauling cotton-spinner. Nevil admired him. He said so bluntly. He pointed to that traitorous George-Foxite as the one heroical Englishman of his day, declaring that he felt bound in honour to make known his admiration for the man; and he hoped his uncle would excuse him. ’If we differ, I am sorry, sir; but I should be a coward to withhold what I think of him when he has all England against him, and he is in the right, as England will discover. I maintain he speaks wisely—I don’t mind saying, like a prophet; and he speaks on behalf of the poor as well as of the country. He appears to me the only public man who looks to the state of the poor—I mean, their interests. They pay for war, and if we are to have peace at home and strength for a really national war, the only war we can ever call necessary, the poor must be contented. He sees that. I shall not run the risk of angering you by writing to defend him, unless I hear of his being shamefully mishandled, and the bearer of an old name can be of service to him. I cannot say less, and will say no more.’

Everard apostrophized his absent nephew: ‘You jackass!’

Page 2281

I am reminded by Mr. Romfrey's profound disappointment in the youth, that it will be repeatedly shared by many others: and I am bound to forewarn readers of this history that there is no plot in it. The hero is chargeable with the official disqualification of constantly offending prejudices, never seeking to please; and all the while it is upon him the narrative hangs. To be a public favourite is his last thought. Beauchampism, as one confronting him calls it, may be said to stand for nearly everything which is the obverse of Byronism, and rarely woos your sympathy, shuns the statuesque pathetic, or any kind of posturing. For Beauchamp will not even look at happiness to mourn its absence; melodious lamentations, demoniacal scorn, are quite alien to him. His faith is in working and fighting. With every inducement to offer himself for a romantic figure, he despises the pomades and curling-irons of modern romance, its shears and its labels: in fine, every one of those positive things by whose aid, and by some adroit flourishing of them, the nimbus known as a mysterious halo is produced about a gentleman's head. And a highly alluring adornment it is! We are all given to lose our solidity and fly at it; although the faithful mirror of fiction has been showing us latterly that a too superhuman beauty has disturbed popular belief in the bare beginnings of the existence of heroes: but this, very likely, is nothing more than a fit of Republicanism in the nursery, and a deposition of the leading doll for lack of variety in him. That conqueror of circumstances will, the dullest soul may begin predicting, return on his cockhorse to favour and authority. Meantime the exhibition of a hero whom circumstances overcome, and who does not weep or ask you for a tear, who continually forfeits attractiveness by declining to better his own fortunes, must run the chances of a novelty during the interregnum. Nursery Legitimists will be against him to a man; Republicans likewise, after a queer sniff at his pretensions, it is to be feared. For me, I have so little command over him, that in spite of my nursery tastes, he drags me whither he lists. It is artless art and monstrous innovation to present so wilful a figure, but were I to create a striking fable for him, and set him off with scenic effects and contrasts, it would be only a momentary tonic to you, to him instant death. He could not live in such an atmosphere. The simple truth has to be told: how he loved his country, and for another and a broader love, growing out of his first passion, fought it; and being small by comparison, and finding no giant of the Philistines disposed to receive a stone in his fore-skull, pummelled the obmutescent mass, to the confusion of a conceivable epic. His indifferent England refused it to him. That is all I can say. The greater power of the two, she seems, with a quiet derision that does not belie her amiable passivity, to have reduced in Beauchamp's career the boldest readiness for public action, and some good stout efforts besides, to the flat result of an optically discernible influence of our hero's character in the domestic circle; perhaps a faintly-outlined circle or two beyond it. But this does not forbid him to be ranked as one of the most distinguishing of her children of the day he lived in. Blame the victrix if you think he should have been livelier.

Page 2282

Nevil soon had to turn his telescope from politics. The torch of war was actually lighting, and he was not fashioned to be heedless of what surrounded him. Our diplomacy, after dancing with all the suppleness of stilts, gravely resigned the gift of motion. Our dauntless Lancastrian thundered like a tempest over a gambling tent, disregarded. Our worthy people, consenting to the doctrine that war is a scourge, contracted the habit of thinking it, in this case, the dire necessity which is the sole excuse for giving way to an irritated pugnacity, and sucked the comforting caramel of an alliance with their troublesome next-door neighbour, profuse in comfits as in scorpions. Nevil detected that politic element of their promptitude for war. His recollections of dissatisfaction in former days assisted him to perceive the nature of it, but he was too young to hold his own against the hubbub of a noisy people, much too young to remain sceptical of a modern people's enthusiasm for war while journals were testifying to it down the length of their columns, and letters from home palpitated with it, and shipmates yawned wearily for the signal, and shiploads of red coats and blue, infantry, cavalry, artillery, were singing farewell to the girl at home, and hurrah for anything in foreign waters. He joined the stream with a cordial spirit. Since it must be so! The wind of that haughty proceeding of the Great Bear in putting a paw over the neutral brook brushed his cheek unpleasantly. He clapped hands for the fezzy defenders of the border fortress, and when the order came for the fleet to enter the old romantic sea of storms and fables, he wrote home a letter fit for his uncle Everard to read. Then there was the sailing and the landing, and the march up the heights, which Nevil was condemned to look at. To his joy he obtained an appointment on shore, and after that Everard heard of him from other channels. The two were of a mind when the savage winter advanced which froze the attack of the city, and might be imaged as the hoar god of hostile elements pointing a hand to the line reached, and menacing at one farther step. Both blamed the Government, but they divided as to the origin of governmental inefficiency; Nevil accusing the Lords guilty of foulest sloth, Everard the Quakers of dry-rotting the country. He passed with a shrug Nevil's puling outcry for the enemy as well as our own poor fellows: 'At his steppes again!' And he had to be forgiving when reports came of his nephew's turn for overdoing his duty: 'show-fighting,' as he termed it.

'Braggadocioing in deeds is only next bad to mouthing it,' he wrote very rationally. 'Stick to your line. Don't go out of it till you are ordered out. Remember that we want soldiers and sailors, we don't want suicides.' He condescended to these italics, considering impressiveness to be urgent. In his heart, notwithstanding his implacably clear judgement, he was passably well pleased with the congratulations encompassing him on account

Page 2283

of his nephew's gallantry at a period of dejection in Britain: for the winter was dreadful; every kind heart that went to bed with cold feet felt acutely for our soldiers on the frozen heights, and thoughts of heroes were as good as warming-pans. Heroes we would have. It happens in war as in wit, that all the birds of wonder fly to a flaring reputation. He that has done one wild thing must necessarily have done the other; so Nevil found himself standing in the thick of a fame that blew rank eulogies on him for acts he had not performed. The Earl of Romfrey forwarded hampers and a letter of praise. 'They tell me that while you were facing the enemy, temporarily attaching yourself to one of the regiments—I forget which, though I have heard it named—you sprang out under fire on an eagle clawing a hare. I like that. I hope you had the benefit of the hare. She is our property, and I have issued an injunction that she shall not go into the newspapers.' Everard was entirely of a contrary opinion concerning the episode of eagle and hare, though it was a case of a bird of prey interfering with an object of the chase. Nevil wrote home most entreatingly and imperatively, like one wincing, begging him to contradict that and certain other stories, and prescribing the form of a public renunciation of his proclaimed part in them. 'The hare,' he sent word, 'is the property of young Michell of the Rodney, and he is the humanest and the gallantest fellow in the service. I have written to my Lord. Pray help to rid me of burdens that make me feel like a robber and impostor.'

Everard replied:

'I have a letter from your captain, informing me that I am unlikely to see you home unless you learn to hold yourself in. I wish you were in another battery than Robert Hall's. He forgets the force of example, however much of a dab he may be at precept. But there you are, and please clap a hundredweight on your appetite for figuring, will you. Do you think there is any good in helping to Frenchify our army? I loathe a fellow who shoots at a medal. I wager he is easy enough to be caught by circumvention—put me in the open with him. Tom Biggot, the boxer, went over to Paris, and stood in the ring with one of their dancing pugilists, and the first round he got a crack on the chin from the rogue's foot; the second round he caught him by the lifted leg, and punished him till pec was all he could say of peccavi. Fight the straightforward fight. Hang flan! Battle is a game of give and take, and if our men get elanned, we shall see them refusing to come up to time. This new crossing and medalling is the devil's own notion for upsetting a solid British line, and tempting fellows to get invalided that they may blaze it before the shopkeepers and their wives in the city. Give us an army!—none of your caperers. Here are lots of circusy heroes coming home to rest after their fatigues. One was spouting at a public dinner yesterday night. He went into it upright, and he ran out of it upright—at the head of his men!—and here he is feasted by the citizens and making a speech upright, and my boy fronting the enemy!'

Page 2284

Everard's involuntary break-down from his veteran's roughness to a touch of feeling thrilled Nevil, who began to perceive what his uncle was driving at when he rebuked the coxcombry of the field, and spoke of the description of compliment your hero was paying Englishmen in affecting to give them examples of bravery and preternatural coolness. Nevil sent home humble confessions of guilt in this respect, with fresh praises of young Michell: for though Everard, as Nevil recognized it, was perfectly right in the abstract, and generally right, there are times when an example is needed by brave men—times when the fiery furnace of death's dragon-jaw is not inviting even to Englishmen receiving the word that duty bids them advance, and they require a leader of the way. A national coxcombry that pretends to an independence of human sensations, and makes a motto of our dandiacal courage, is more perilous to the armies of the nation than that of a few heroes. It is this coxcombry which has too often caused disdain of the wise chief's maxim of calculation for winners, namely, to have always the odds on your side, and which has bled, shattered, and occasionally disgraced us. Young Michell's carrying powder-bags to the assault, and when ordered to retire, bearing them on his back, and helping a wounded soldier on the way, did surely well; nor did Mr. Beauchamp himself behave so badly on an occasion when the sailors of his battery caught him out of a fire of shell that raised jets of dust and smoke like a range of geysers over the open, and hugged him as loving women do at a meeting or a parting. He was penitent before his uncle, admitting, first, that the men were not in want of an example of the contempt of death, and secondly, that he doubted whether it was contempt of death on his part so much as pride—a hatred of being seen running.

'I don't like the fellow to be drawing it so fine,' said Everard. It sounded to him a trifle parsonical. But his heart was won by Nevil's determination to wear out the campaign rather than be invalided or entrusted with a holiday duty.

'I see with shame (admiration of them) old infantry captains and colonels of no position beyond their rank in the army, sticking to their post,' said Nevil, 'and a lord and a lord and a lord slipping off as though the stuff of the man in him had melted. I shall go through with it.' Everard approved him. Colonel Halkett wrote that the youth was a skeleton. Still Everard encouraged him to persevere, and said of him:

'I like him for holding to his work after the strain's over. That tells the man.'

He observed at his table, in reply to commendations of his nephew:

'Nevil's leak is his political craze, and that seems to be going: I hope it is. You can't rear a man on politics. When I was of his age I never looked at the newspapers, except to read the divorce cases. I came to politics with a ripe judgement. He shines in action, and he'll find that out, and leave others the palavering.'

Page 2285

It was upon the close of the war that Nevil drove his uncle to avow a downright undisguised indignation with him. He caught a fever in the French camp, where he was dispensing vivers and provends out of English hampers.

'Those French fellows are every man of them trained up to snapping-point,' said Everard. 'You're sure to have them if you hold out long against them. And greedy dogs too: they're for half our hampers, and all the glory. And there's Nevil down on his back in the thick of them! Will anybody tell me why the devil he must be poking into the French camp? They were ready enough to run to him and beg potatoes. It 's all for humanity he does it-mark that. Never was a word fitter for a quack's mouth than "humanity." Two syllables more, and the parsons would be riding it to sawdust. Humanity! Humanitomtity! It's the best word of the two for half the things done in the name of it.'

A tremendously bracing epistle, excellent for an access of fever, was despatched to humanity's curate, and Everard sat expecting a hot rejoinder, or else a black sealed letter, but neither one nor the other arrived.

Suddenly, to his disgust, came rumours of peace between the mighty belligerents.

The silver trumpets of peace were nowhere hearkened to with satisfaction by the bull-dogs, though triumph rang sonorously through the music, for they had been severely mangled, as usual at the outset, and they had at last got their grip, and were in high condition for fighting.

The most expansive panegyrists of our deeds did not dare affirm of the most famous of them, that England had embarked her costly cavalry to offer it for a mark of artillery-balls on three sides of a square: and the belief was universal that we could do more business-like deeds and play the great game of blunders with an ability refined by experience. Everard Romfrey was one of those who thought themselves justified in insisting upon the continuation of the war, in contempt of our allies. His favourite saying that constitution beats the world, was being splendidly manifested by our bearing. He was very uneasy; he would not hear of peace; and not only that, the imperial gentleman soberly committed the naivete of sending word to Nevil to let him know immediately the opinion of the camp concerning it, as perchance an old Roman knight may have written to some young aquilifer of the Praetorians.

Allies, however, are of the description of twins joined by a membrane, and supposing that one of them determines to sit down, the other will act wisely in bending his knees at once, and doing the same: he cannot but be extremely uncomfortable left standing. Besides, there was the Ottoman cleverly poised again; the Muscovite was battered; fresh guilt was added to the military glory of the Gaul. English grumblers might well be asked what they had fought for, if they were not contented.

Page 2286

Colonel Halkett mentioned a report that Nevil had received a slight thigh-wound of small importance. At any rate, something was the matter with him, and it was naturally imagined that he would have double cause to write home; and still more so for the reason, his uncle confessed, that he had foreseen the folly of a war conducted by milky cotton-spinners and their adjuncts, in partnership with a throned gambler, who had won his stake, and now snapped his fingers at them. Everard expected, he had prepared himself for, the young naval politician's crow, and he meant to admit frankly that he had been wrong in wishing to fight anybody without having first crushed the cotton faction. But Nevil continued silent.

'Dead in hospital or a Turk hotel!' sighed Everard; 'and no more to the scoundrels over there than a body to be shovelled into slack lime.'

Rosamund Culling was the only witness of his remarkable betrayal of grief.

CHAPTER V

RENEE

At last, one morning, arrived a letter from a French gentleman signing himself Comte Cresnes de Croisnel, in which Everard was informed that his nephew had accompanied the son of the writer, Captain de Croisnel, on board an Austrian boat out of the East, and was lying in Venice under a return-attack of fever,—not, the count stated pointedly, in the hands of an Italian physician. He had brought his own with him to meet his son, who was likewise disabled.

Everard was assured by M. de Croisnel that every attention and affectionate care were being rendered to his gallant and adored nephew—'vrai type de tout ce qu'il y a de noble et de chevaleresque dans la vieille Angleterre'—from a family bound to him by the tenderest obligations, personal and national; one as dear to every member of it as the brother, the son, they welcomed with thankful hearts to the Divine interposition restoring him to them. In conclusion, the count proposed something like the embrace of a fraternal friendship should Everard think fit to act upon the spontaneous sentiments of a loving relative, and join them in Venice to watch over his nephew's recovery. Already M. Nevil was stronger. The gondola was a medicine in itself, the count said.

Everard knitted his mouth to intensify a peculiar subdued form of laughter through the nose, in hopeless ridicule of a Frenchman's notions of an Englishman's occupations—presumed across Channel to allow of his breaking loose from shooting engagements at a minute's notice, to rush off to a fetid foreign city notorious for mud and mosquitoes, and commence capering and grimacing, pouring forth a jugful of ready-made extravagances, with 'mon fils! mon cher neveu! Dieu!' and similar fiddlededee. These were matters for women to do, if they chose: women and Frenchmen were much of a

pattern. Moreover, he knew the hotel this Comte de Croisnel was staying at. He gasped at the name of it: he had rather encounter a grisly bear than a mosquito any night of his life, for no stretch of cunning outwits a mosquito; and enlarging on the qualities of the terrific insect, he vowed it was damnation without trial or judgement.

Page 2287

Eventually, Mrs. Culling's departure was permitted. He argued, 'Why go? the fellow's comfortable, getting himself together, and you say the French are good nurses.' But her entreaties to go were vehement, though Venice had no happy place in her recollections, and he withheld his objections to her going. For him, the fields forbade it. He sent hearty messages to Nevil, and that was enough, considering that the young dog of 'humanity' had clearly been running out of his way to catch a jaundice, and was bereaving his houses of the matronly government, deprived of which they were all of them likely soon to be at sixes and sevens with disorderly lacqueys, peccant maids, and cooks in hysterics.

Now if the master of his fortunes had come to Venice!—Nevil started the supposition in his mind often after hope had sunk.—Everard would have seen a young sailor and a soldier the thinner for wear, reclining in a gondola half the day, fanned by a brunette of the fine lineaments of the good blood of France. She chattered snatches of Venetian caught from the gondoliers, she was like a delicate cup of crystal brimming with the beauty of the place, and making one of them drink in all his impressions through her. Her features had the soft irregularities which run to rarities of beauty, as the ripple rocks the light; mouth, eyes, brows, nostrils, and bloomy cheeks played into one another liquidly; thought flew, tongue followed, and the flash of meaning quivered over them like night-lightning. Or oftener, to speak truth, tongue flew, thought followed: her age was but newly seventeen, and she was French.

Her name was Renee. She was the only daughter of the Comte de Croisnel. Her brother Roland owed his life to Nevil, this Englishman proud of a French name—Nevil Beauchamp. If there was any warm feeling below the unruffled surface of the girl's deliberate eyes while gazing on him, it was that he who had saved her brother must be nearly brother himself, yet was not quite, yet must be loved, yet not approached. He was her brother's brother-in-arms, brother-in-heart, not hers, yet hers through her brother. His French name rescued him from foreignness. He spoke her language with a piquant accent, unlike the pitiable English. Unlike them, he was gracious, and could be soft and quick. The battle-scarlet, battle-black, Roland's tales of him threw round him in her imagination, made his gentleness a surprise. If, then, he was hers through her brother, what was she to him? The question did not spring clearly within her, though she was alive to every gradual change of manner toward the convalescent necessitated by the laws overawing her sex.

Page 2288

Venice was the French girl's dream. She was realizing it hungrily, revelling in it, anatomizing it, picking it to pieces, reviewing it, comparing her work with the original, and the original with her first conception, until beautiful sad Venice threatened to be no more her dream, and in dread of disenchantment she tried to take impressions humbly, really tasked herself not to analyze, not to dictate from a French footing, not to scorn. Not to be petulant with objects disappointing her, was an impossible task. She could not consent to a compromise with the people, the merchandize, the odours of the city. Gliding in the gondola through the narrow canals at low tide, she leaned back simulating stupor, with one word—'Venezia!' Her brother was commanded to smoke: 'Fumez, fumez, Roland!' As soon as the steel-crested prow had pushed into her Paradise of the Canal Grande, she quietly shrouded her hair from tobacco, and called upon rapture to recompense her for her sufferings. The black gondola was unendurable to her. She had accompanied her father to the Accademia, and mused on the golden Venetian streets of Carpaccio: she must have an open gondola to decorate in his manner, gaily, splendidly, and mock at her efforts—a warning to all that might hope to improve the prevailing gloom and squalor by levying contributions upon the Merceria! Her most constant admiration was for the English lord who used once to ride on the Lido sands and visit the Armenian convent—a lord and a poet. [Lord Byron D.W.]

This was to be infinitely more than a naval lieutenant. But Nevil claimed her as little personally as he allowed her to be claimed by another. The graces of her freaks of petulance and airy whims, her sprightly jets of wilfulness, fleeting frowns of contempt, imperious decisions, were all beautiful, like silver-shifting waves, in this lustrous planet of her pure freedom; and if you will seize the divine conception of Artemis, and own the goddess French, you will understand his feelings.

But though he admired fervently, and danced obediently to her tunes, Nevil could not hear injustice done to a people or historic poetic city without trying hard to right the mind guilty of it. A newspaper correspondent, a Mr. John Holles, lingering on his road home from the army, put him on the track of an Englishman's books—touching the spirit as well as the stones of Venice, and Nevil thanked him when he had turned some of the leaves.

The study of the books to school Renee was pursued, like the Bianchina's sleep, in gondoletta, and was not unlike it at intervals. A translated sentence was the key to a reverie. Renee leaned back, meditating; he forward, the book on his knee: Roland left them to themselves, and spied for the Bianchina behind the window-bars. The count was in the churches or the Galleries. Renee thought she began to comprehend the spirit of Venice, and chided her rebelliousness.

'But our Venice was the Venice of the decadence, then!' she said, complaining. Nevil read on, distrustful of the perspicuity of his own ideas.

Page 2289

‘Ah, but,’ said she, ’when these Venetians were rough men, chanting like our Huguenots, how cold it must have been here!’

She hoped she was not very wrong in preferring the times of the great Venetian painters and martial doges to that period of faith and stone-cutting. What was done then might be beautiful, but the life was monotonous; she insisted that it was Huguenot; harsh, nasal, sombre, insolent, self-sufficient. Her eyes lightened for the flashing colours and pageantries, and the threads of desperate adventure crossing the Rii to this and that palace-door and balcony, like faint blood-streaks; the times of Venice in full flower. She reasoned against the hard eloquent Englishman of the books. ’But we are known by our fruits, are we not? and the Venice I admire was surely the fruit of these stonecutters chanting hymns of faith; it could not but be: and if it deserved, as he says, to die disgraced, I think we should go back to them and ask them whether their minds were as pure and holy as he supposes.’ Her French wits would not be subdued. Nevil pointed to the palaces. ‘Pride,’ said she. He argued that the original Venetians were not responsible for their offspring. ‘You say it?’ she cried, ’you, of an old race? Oh, no; you do not feel it!’ and the trembling fervour of her voice convinced him that he did not, could not.

Renee said: ’I know my ancestors are bound up in me, by my sentiments to them; and so do you, M. Nevil. We shame them if we fail in courage and honour. Is it not so? If we break a single pledged word we cast shame on them. Why, that makes us what we are; that is our distinction: we dare not be weak if we would. And therefore when Venice is reproached with avarice and luxury, I choose to say—what do we hear of the children of misers? and I say I am certain that those old cold Huguenot stonecutters were proud and grasping. I am sure they were, and they shall share the blame.’

Nevil plunged into his volume.

He called on Roland for an opinion.

‘Friend,’ said Roland, ’opinions may differ: mine is, considering the defences of the windows, that the only way into these houses or out of them bodily was the doorway.’

Roland complimented his sister and friend on the prosecution of their studies: he could not understand a word of the subject, and yawning, he begged permission to be allowed to land and join the gondola at a distant quarter. The gallant officer was in haste to go.

Renee stared at her brother. He saw nothing; he said a word to the gondoliers, and quitted the boat. Mars was in pursuit. She resigned herself, and ceased then to be a girl.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE IN VENICE

The air flashed like heaven descending for Nevil alone with Renee. They had never been alone before. Such happiness belonged to the avenue of wishes leading to golden mists beyond imagination, and seemed, coming on him suddenly, miraculous. He leaned toward her like one who has broken a current of speech, and waits to resume it. She was all unsuspecting indolence, with gravely shadowed eyes.

Page 2290

‘I throw the book down,’ he said.

She objected. ‘No; continue: I like it.’

Both of them divined that the book was there to do duty for Roland.

He closed it, keeping a finger among the leaves; a kind of anchorage in case of indiscretion.

’Permit me to tell you, M. Nevil, you are inclined to play truant to-day.’

‘I am.’

’Now is the very time to read; for my poor Roland is at sea when we discuss our questions, and the book has driven him away.’

‘But we have plenty of time to read. We miss the scenes.’

’The scenes are green shutters, wet steps, barcaroli, brown women, striped posts, a scarlet night-cap, a sick fig-tree, an old shawl, faded spots of colour, peeling walls. They might be figured by a trodden melon. They all resemble one another, and so do the days here.’

’That’s the charm. I wish I could look on you and think the same. You, as you are, for ever.’

‘Would you not let me live my life?’

‘I would not have you alter.’

‘Please to be pathetic on that subject after I am wrinkled, monsieur.’

‘You want commanding, mademoiselle.’

Renee nestled her chin, and gazed forward through her eyelashes.

’Venice is like a melancholy face of a former beauty who has ceased to rouge, or wipe away traces of her old arts,’ she said, straining for common talk, and showing the strain.

‘Wait; now we are rounding,’ said he; ’now you have three of what you call your theatre-bridges in sight. The people mount and drop, mount and drop; I see them laugh. They are full of fun and good-temper. Look on living Venice!

’Provided that my papa is not crossing when we go under!

‘Would he not trust you to me?’

‘Yes.’

‘He would? And you?’

‘I do believe they are improvizing an operetta on the second bridge.’

‘You trust yourself willingly?’

’As to my second brother. You hear them? How delightfully quick and spontaneous they are! Ah, silly creatures! they have stopped. They might have held it on for us while we were passing.’

‘Where would the naturalness have been then?’

’Perhaps, M. Nevil, I do want commanding. I am wilful. Half my days will be spent in fits of remorse, I begin to think.’

‘Come to me to be forgiven.’

‘Shall I? I should be forgiven too readily.’

‘I am not so sure of that.’

’Can you be harsh? No, not even with enemies. Least of all with . . . with us.’

Oh for the black gondola!—the little gliding dusky chamber for two; instead of this open, flaunting, gold and crimson cotton-work, which exacted discretion on his part and that of the mannerly gondoliers, and exposed him to window, balcony, bridge, and borderway.

They slipped on beneath a red balcony where a girl leaned on her folded arms, and eyed them coming and going by with Egyptian gravity.

Page 2291

‘How strange a power of looking these people have,’ said Renee, whose vivacity was fascinated to a steady sparkle by the girl. ’Tell me, is she glancing round at us?’

Nevil turned and reported that she was not. She had exhausted them while they were in transit; she had no minor curiosity.

‘Let us fancy she is looking for her lover,’ he said.

Renee added: ‘Let us hope she will not escape being seen.’

‘I give her my benediction,’ said Nevil.

‘And I,’ said Renee; ‘and adieu to her, if you please. Look for Roland.’

‘You remind me; I have but a few instants.’

’M. Nevil, you are a preux of the times of my brother’s patronymic. And there is my Roland awaiting us. Is he not handsome?’

‘How glad you are to have him to relieve guard!’

Renee bent on Nevil one of her singular looks of raillery. She had hitherto been fencing at a serious disadvantage.

‘Not so very glad,’ she said, ’if that deprived me of the presence of his friend.’

Roland was her tower. But Roland was not yet on board. She had peeped from her citadel too rashly. Nevil had time to spring the flood of crimson in her cheeks, bright as the awning she reclined under.

‘Would you have me with you always?’

‘Assuredly,’ said she, feeling the hawk in him, and trying to baffle him by fluttering.

‘Always? forever? and—listen-give me a title?’

Renee sang out to Roland like a bird in distress, and had some trouble not to appear too providentially rescued. Roland on board, she resumed the attack.

’M. Nevil vows he is a better brother to me than you, who dart away on an impulse and leave us threading all Venice till we do not know where we are, naughty brother!’

‘My little sister, the spot where you are,’ rejoined Roland, ’is precisely the spot where I left you, and I defy you to say you have gone on without me. This is the identical riva I stepped out on to buy you a packet of Venetian ballads.’

They recognized the spot, and for a confirmation of the surprising statement, Roland unrolled several sheets of printed blotting-paper, and rapidly read part of a Canzonetta concerning Una Giovine who reproved her lover for his extreme addiction to wine:

’Ma se, ma se,
Cotanto beve,
Mi no, mi no,
No ve sposero.’

’This astounding vagabond preferred Nostrani to his heart’s mistress. I tasted some of their Nostrani to see if it could be possible for a Frenchman to exonerate him.’

Roland’s wry face at the mention of Nostrani brought out the chief gondolier, who delivered himself:

’Signore, there be hereditary qualifications. One must be born Italian to appreciate the merits of Nostrani!’

Roland laughed. He had covered his delinquency in leaving his sister, and was full of an adventure to relate to Nevil, a story promising well for him.

Page 2292

CHAPTER VII

AN AWAKENING FOR BOTH

Renee was downcast. Had she not coquetted? The dear young Englishman had reduced her to defend herself, the which fair ladies, like besieged garrisons, cannot always do successfully without an attack at times, which, when the pursuer is ardent, is followed by a retreat, which is a provocation; and these things are coquettry. Her still fresh convent-conscience accused her of it pitilessly. She could not forgive her brother, and yet she dared not reproach him, for that would have inculpated Nevil. She stepped on to the Piazzetta thoughtfully. Her father was at Florian's, perusing letters from France. 'We are to have the marquis here in a week, my child,' he said. Renee nodded. Involuntarily she looked at Nevil. He caught the look, with a lover's quick sense of misfortune in it.

She heard her brother reply to him: 'Who? the Marquis de Rouaillout? It is a jolly gaillard of fifty who spoils no fun.'

'You mistake his age, Roland,' she said.

'Forty-nine, then, my sister.'

'He is not that.'

'He looks it.'

'You have been absent.'

'Probably, my arithmetical sister, he has employed the interval to grow younger. They say it is the way with green gentlemen of a certain age. They advance and they retire. They perform the first steps of a quadrille ceremoniously, and we admire them.'

'What's that?' exclaimed the Comte de Croisnel. 'You talk nonsense, Roland. M. le marquis is hardly past forty. He is in his prime.'

'Without question, mon pere. For me, I was merely offering proof that he can preserve his prime unlimitedly.'

'He is not a subject for mockery, Roland.'

'Quite the contrary; for reverence!'

'Another than you, my boy, and he would march you out.'

'I am to imagine, then, that his hand continues firm?'

’Imagine to the extent of your capacity; but remember that respect is always owing to your own family, and deliberate before you draw on yourself such a chastisement as mercy from an accepted member of it.’

Roland bowed and drummed on his knee.

The conversation had been originated by Renee for the enlightenment of Nevil and as a future protection to herself. Now that it had disclosed its burden she could look at him no more, and when her father addressed her significantly: ’Marquise, you did me the honour to consent to accompany me to the Church of the Frari this afternoon?’ she felt her self-accusation of coquettry biting under her bosom like a thing alive.

Roland explained the situation to Nevil.

Page 2293

’It is the mania with us, my dear Nevil, to marry our girls young to established men. Your established man carries usually all the signs, visible to the multitude or not, of the stages leading to that eminence. We cannot, I believe, unless we have the good fortune to boast the paternity of Hercules, disconnect ourselves from the steps we have mounted; not even, the priests inform us, if we are ascending to heaven; we carry them beyond the grave. However, it seems that our excellent marquis contrives to keep them concealed, and he is ready to face marriage—the Grandest Inquisitor, next to Death. Two furious matchmakers—our country, beautiful France, abounds in them—met one day; they were a comtesse and a baronne, and they settled the alliance. The bell was rung, and Renee came out of school. There is this to be said: she has no mother; the sooner a girl without a mother has a husband the better. That we are all agreed upon. I have no personal objection to the marquis; he has never been in any great scandals. He is Norman, and has estates in Normandy, Dauphiny, Touraine; he is hospitable, luxurious. Renee will have a fine hotel in Paris. But I am eccentric: I have read in our old Fabliaux of December and May. Say the marquis is November, say October; he is still some distance removed from the plump Spring month. And we in our family have wits and passions. In fine, a bud of a rose in an old gentleman’s button-hole! it is a challenge to the whole world of youth; and if the bud should leap? Enough of this matter, friend Nevil; but sometimes a friend must allow himself to be bothered. I have perfect confidence in my sister, you see; I simply protest against her being exposed to . . . You know men. I protest, that is, in the privacy of my cigar-case, for I have no chance elsewhere. The affair is on wheels. The very respectable matchmakers have kindled the marquis on the one hand, and my father on the other, and Renee passes obediently from the latter to the former. In India they sacrifice the widows, in France the virgins.’

Roland proceeded to relate his adventure. Nevil’s inattention piqued him to salt and salt it wonderfully, until the old story of He and She had an exciting savour in its introductory chapter; but his friend was flying through the circles of the Inferno, and the babble of an ephemeral upper world simply affected him by its contrast with the overpowering horrors, repugnances, despairs, pities, rushing at him, surcharging his senses. Those that live much by the heart in their youth have sharp foretastes of the issues imaged for the soul. St. Mark’s was in a minute struck black for him. He neither felt the sunlight nor understood why column and campanile rose, nor why the islands basked, and boats and people moved. All were as remote little bits of mechanism.

Page 2294

Nevil escaped, and walked in the direction of the Frari down calle and campiello. Only to see her—to compare her with the Renee of the past hour! But that Renee had been all the while a feast of delusion; she could never be resuscitated in the shape he had known, not even clearly visioned. Not a day of her, not an hour, not a single look had been his own. She had been sold when he first beheld her, and should, he muttered austerely, have been ticketed the property of a middle-aged man, a worn-out French marquis, whom she had agreed to marry, unwooed, without love—the creature of a transaction. But she was innocent, she was unaware of the sin residing in a loveless marriage; and this restored her to him somewhat as a drowned body is given back to mourners.

After aimless walking he found himself on the Zattere, where the lonely Giudecca lies in front, covering mud and marsh and lagune-flames of later afternoon, and you have sight of the high mainland hills which seem to fling forth one over other to a golden sea-cape.

Midway on this unadorned Zattere, with its young trees and spots of shade, he was met by Renee and her father. Their gondola was below, close to the riva, and the count said, 'She is tired of standing gazing at pictures. There is a Veronese in one of the churches of the Giudecca opposite. Will you, M. Nevil, act as parade-escort to her here for half an hour, while I go over? Renee complains that she loses the vulgar art of walking in her complaisant attention to the fine Arts. I weary my poor child.'

Renee protested in a rapid chatter.

'Must I avow it?' said the count; 'she damps my enthusiasm a little.'

Nevil mutely accepted the office.

Twice that day was she surrendered to him: once in his ignorance, when time appeared an expanse of many sunny fields. On this occasion it puffed steam; yet, after seeing the count embark, he commenced the parade in silence.

'This is a nice walk,' said Renee; 'we have not the steps of the Riva dei Schiavoni. It is rather melancholy though. How did you discover it? I persuaded my papa to send the gondola round, and walk till we came to the water. Tell me about the Giudecca.'

'The Giudecca was a place kept apart for the Jews, I believe. You have seen their burial-ground on the Lido. Those are, I think, the Euganean hills. You are fond of Petrarch.'

'M. Nevil, omitting the allusion to the poet, you have, permit me to remark, the brevity without the precision of an accredited guide to notabilities.'

‘I tell you what I know,’ said Nevil, brooding on the finished tone and womanly aplomb of her language. It made him forget that she was a girl entrusted to his guardianship. His heart came out.

’Renee, if you loved him, I, on my honour, would not utter a word for myself. Your heart’s inclinations are sacred for me. I would stand by, and be your friend and his. If he were young, that I might see a chance of it!’

Page 2295

She murmured, ‘You should not have listened to Roland.’

’Roland should have warned me. How could I be near you and not . . . But I am nothing. Forget me; do not think I speak interestedly, except to save the dearest I have ever known from certain wretchedness. To yield yourself hand and foot for life! I warn you that it must end miserably. Your countrywomen . . . You have the habit in France; but like what are you treated? You! none like you in the whole world! You consent to be extinguished. And I have to look on! Listen to me now.’

Renee glanced at the gondola conveying her father. And he has not yet landed! she thought, and said, ’Do you pretend to judge of my welfare better than my papa?’

’Yes; in this. He follows a fashion. You submit to it. His anxiety is to provide for you. But I know the system is cursed by nature, and that means by heaven.’

‘Because it is not English?’

’O Renee, my beloved for ever! Well, then, tell me, tell me you can say with pride and happiness that the Marquis de Rouaillout is to be your—there’s the word—husband!’

Renee looked across the water.

‘Friend, if my father knew you were asking me!’

‘I will speak to him.’

‘Useless.’

‘He is generous, he loves you.’

‘He cannot break an engagement binding his honour.’

’Would you, Renee, would you—it must be said—consent to have it known to him—I beg for more than life—that your are not averse . . . that you support me?’

His failing breath softened the bluntness.

She replied, ’I would not have him ever break an engagement binding his honour.’

‘You stretch the point of honour.’

’It is our way. Dear friend, we are French. And I presume to think that our French system is not always wrong, for if my father had not broken it by treating you as one of us and leaving me with you, should I have heard . . . ?’

‘I have displeased you.’

‘Do not suppose that. But, I mean, a mother would not have left me.’

‘You wished to avoid it.’

‘Do not blame me. I had some instinct; you were very pale.’

‘You knew I loved you.’

‘No.’

‘Yes; for this morning . . .’

This morning it seemed to me, and I regretted my fancy, that you were inclined to trifle, as, they say, young men do.’

‘With Renee?’

’With your friend Renee. And those are the hills of Petrarch’s tomb? They are mountains.’

They were purple beneath a large brooding cloud that hung against the sun, waiting for him to enfold him, and Nevil thought that a tomb there would be a welcome end, if he might lift Renee in one wild flight over the chasm gaping for her. He had no language for thoughts of such a kind, only tumultuous feeling.

She was immoveable, in perfect armour.

He said despairingly, ‘Can you have realized what you are consenting to?’

Page 2296

She answered, ‘It is my duty.’

’Your duty! it’s like taking up a dice-box, and flinging once, to certain ruin!’

’I must oppose my father to you, friend. Do you not understand duty to parents? They say the English are full of the idea of duty.’

’Duty to country, duty to oaths and obligations; but with us the heart is free to choose.’

‘Free to choose, and when it is most ignorant?’

‘The heart? ask it. Nothing is surer.’

’That is not what we are taught. We are taught that the heart deceives itself. The heart throws your dicebox; not prudent parents.’

She talked like a woman, to plead the cause of her obedience as a girl, and now silenced in the same manner that she had previously excited him.

‘Then you are lost to me,’ he said.

They saw the gondola returning.

‘How swiftly it comes home; it loitered when it went,’ said Renee. ’There sits my father, brimming with his picture; he has seen one more! We will congratulate him. This little boulevard is not much to speak of. The hills are lovely. Friend,’ she dropped her voice on the gondola’s approach, ‘we have conversed on common subjects.’

Nevil had her hand in his, to place her in the gondola.

She seemed thankful that he should prefer to go round on foot. At least, she did not join in her father’s invitation to him. She leaned back, nestling her chin and half closing her eyes, suffering herself to be divided from him, borne away by forces she acquiesced in.

Roland was not visible till near midnight on the Piazza. The promenaders, chiefly military of the garrison, were few at that period of social protestation, and he could declare his disappointment aloud, ringingly, as he strolled up to Nevil, looking as if the cigar in his mouth and the fists entrenched in his wide trowsers-pockets were mortally at feud. His adventure had not pursued its course luminously. He had expected romance, and had met merchandize, and his vanity was offended. To pacify him, Nevil related how he had heard that since the Venetian rising of ’49, Venetian ladies had issued from the ordeal of fire and famine of another pattern than the famous old Benzon one, in which they touched earthiest earth. He praised Republicanism for that. The spirit of the new and short-lived Republic wrought that change in Venice.

‘Oh, if they’re republican as well as utterly decayed,’ said Roland, ’I give them up; let them die virtuous.’

Nevil told Roland that he had spoken to Renee. He won sympathy, but Roland could not give him encouragement. They crossed and recrossed the shadow of the great campanile, on the warm-white stones of the square, Nevil admitting the weight of whatsoever Roland pointed to him in favour of the arrangement according to French notions, and indeed, of aristocratic notions everywhere, saving that it was imperative for Renee to be disposed of in marriage early. Why rob her of her young springtime!

Page 2297

‘French girls,’ replied Roland, confused by the nature of the explication in his head—-’well, they’re not English; they want a hand to shape them, otherwise they grow all awry. My father will not have one of her aunts to live with him, so there she is. But, my dear Nevil, I owe my life to you, and I was no party to this affair. I would do anything to help you. What says Renee?’

‘She obeys.’

’Exactly. You see! Our girls are chess-pieces until they ’re married. Then they have life and character sometimes too much.’

’She is not like them, Roland; she is like none. When I spoke to her first, she affected no astonishment; never was there a creature so nobly sincere. She’s a girl in heart, not in mind. Think of her sacrificed to this man thrice her age!’

’She differs from other girls only on the surface, Nevil. As for the man, I wish she were going to marry a younger. I wish, yes, my friend,’ Roland squeezed Nevil’s hand, ’I wish! I’m afraid it’s hopeless. She did not tell you to hope?’

‘Not by one single sign,’ said Nevil.

‘You see, my friend!’

‘For that reason,’ Nevil rejoined, with the calm fanaticism of the passion of love, ’I hope all the more . . . because I will not believe that she, so pure and good, can be sacrificed. Put me aside—I am nothing. I hope to save her from that.’

‘We have now,’ said Roland, ’struck the current of duplicity. You are really in love, my poor fellow.’

Lover and friend came to no conclusion, except that so lovely a night was not given for slumber. A small round brilliant moon hung almost globed in the depths of heaven, and the image of it fell deep between San Giorgio and the Dogana.

Renee had the scene from her window, like a dream given out of sleep. She lay with both arms thrown up beneath her head on the pillow, her eyelids wide open, and her visage set and stern. Her bosom rose and sank regularly but heavily. The fluctuations of a night stormy for her, hitherto unknown, had sunk her to this trance, in which she lay like a creature flung on shore by the waves. She heard her brother’s voice and Nevil’s, and the pacing of their feet. She saw the long shaft of moonlight broken to zigzags of mellow lightning, and wavering back to steadiness; dark San Giorgio, and the sheen of the Dogana’s front. But the visible beauty belonged to a night that had shivered repose, humiliated and wounded her, destroyed her confident happy half-infancy of heart, and she had flown for a refuge to hard feelings. Her predominant sentiment was anger; an anger that touched all and enveloped none, for it was quite fictitious, though she felt it,

and suffered from it. She turned it on Nevil, as against an enemy, and became the victim in his place. Tears for him filled in her eyes, and ran over; she disdained to notice them, and blinked offendedly to have her sight clear of the weakness; but these interceding tears would

Page 2298

flow; it was dangerous to blame him, harshly. She let them roll down, figuring to herself with quiet simplicity of mind that her spirit was independent of them as long as she restrained her hands from being accomplices by brushing them away, as weeping girls do that cry for comfort. Nevil had saved her brother's life, and had succoured her countrymen; he loved her, and was a hero. He should not have said he loved her; that was wrong; and it was shameful that he should have urged her to disobey her father. But this hero's love of her might plead excuses she did not know of; and if he was to be excused, he, unhappy that he was, had a claim on her for more than tears. She wept resentfully. Forces above her own swayed and hurried her like a lifeless body dragged by flying wheels: they could not unnerve her will, or rather, what it really was, her sense of submission to a destiny. Looked at from the height of the palm-waving cherubs over the fallen martyr in the picture, she seemed as nerveless as a dreamy girl. The raised arms and bent elbows were an illusion of indifference. Her shape was rigid from hands to feet, as if to keep in a knot the resolution of her mind; for the second and in that young season the stronger nature grafted by her education fixed her to the religious duty of obeying and pleasing her father, in contempt, almost in abhorrence, of personal inclinations tending to thwart him and imperil his pledged word. She knew she had inclinations to be tender. Her hands released, how promptly might she not have been confiding her innumerable perplexities of sentiment and emotion to paper, undermining self-governance; self-respect, perhaps! Further than that, she did not understand the feelings she struggled with; nor had she any impulse to gaze on him, the cause of her trouble, who walked beside her brother below, talking betweenwhiles in the night's grave undertones. Her trouble was too overmastering; it had seized her too mysteriously, coming on her solitariness without warning in the first watch of the night, like a spark crackling serpentine along dry leaves to sudden flame. A thought of Nevil and a regret had done it.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT ON THE ADRIATIC

The lovers met after Roland had spoken to his sister—not exactly to advocate the cause of Nevil, though he was under the influence of that grave night's walk with him, but to sound her and see whether she at all shared Nevil's view of her situation. Roland felt the awfulness of a French family arrangement of a marriage, and the impertinence of a foreign Cupid's intrusion, too keenly to plead for his friend: at the same time he loved his friend and his sister, and would have been very ready to smile blessings on them if favourable circumstances had raised a signal; if, for example, apoplexy or any other cordial ex machina intervention had removed the middle-aged marquis; and, perhaps, if Renee had shown the repugnance to her

Page 2299

engagement which Nevil declared she must have in her heart, he would have done more than smile; he would have laid the case deferentially before his father. His own opinion was that young unmarried women were incapable of the passion of love, being, as it were, but half-feathered in that state, and unable to fly; and Renee confirmed it. The suspicion of an advocacy on Nevil's behalf steeled her. His tentative observations were checked at the outset.

'Can such things be spoken of to me, Roland? I am plighted. You know it.'

He shrugged, said a word of pity for Nevil, and went forth to let his friend know that it was as he had predicted: Renee was obedience in person, like a rightly educated French girl. He strongly advised his friend to banish all hope of her from his mind. But the mind he addressed was of a curious order; far-shooting, tough, persistent, and when acted on by the spell of devotion, indomitable. Nevil put hope aside, or rather, he clad it in other garments, in which it was hardly to be recognized by himself, and said to Roland: 'You must bear this from me; you must let me follow you to the end, and if she wavers she will find me near.'

Roland could not avoid asking the use of it, considering that Renee, however much she admired and liked, was not in love with him.

Nevil resigned himself to admit that she was not: and therefore,' said he, 'you won't object to my remaining.'

Renee greeted Nevil with as clear a conventional air as a woman could assume.

She was going, she said, to attend High Mass in the church of S. Moise, and she waved her devoutest Roman Catholicism to show the breadth of the division between them. He proposed to go likewise. She was mute. After some discourse she contrived to say inoffensively that people who strolled into her churches for the music, or out of curiosity, played the barbarian.

'Well, I will not go,' said Nevil.

'But I do not wish to number you among them,' she said.

'Then,' said Nevil, 'I will go, for it cannot be barbarous to try to be with you.'

'No, that is wickedness,' said Renee.

She was sensible that conversation betrayed her, and Nevil's apparently deliberate pursuit signified to her that he must be aware of his mastery, and she resented it, and stumbled into pitfalls whenever she opened her lips. It seemed to be denied to them to utter what she meant, if indeed she had a meaning in speaking, save to hurt herself cruelly by wounding the man who had caught her in the toils: and so long as she could

imagine that she was the only one hurt, she was the braver and the harsher for it; but at the sight of Nevil in pain her heart relented and shifted, and discovering it to be so weak as to be almost at his mercy, she defended it with an aggressive unkindness, for which, in charity to her sweeter nature, she had to ask his pardon, and then had to fib to give

Page 2300

reasons for her conduct, and then to pretend to herself that her pride was humbled by him; a most humiliating round, constantly recurring; the worse for the reflection that she created it. She attempted silence. Nevil spoke, and was like the magical piper: she was compelled to follow him and dance the round again, with the wretched thought that it must resemble coquettry. Nevil did not think so, but a very attentive observer now upon the scene, and possessed of his half of the secret, did, and warned him. Rosamund Culling added that the French girl might be only an unconscious coquette, for she was young. The critic would not undertake to pronounce on her suggestion, whether the candour apparent in merely coquettish instincts was not more dangerous than a battery of the arts of the sex. She had heard Nevil's frank confession, and seen Renee twice, when she tried in his service, though not greatly wishing for success, to stir the sensitive girl for an answer to his attachment. Probably she went to work transparently, after the insular fashion of opening a spiritual mystery with the lancet. Renee suffered herself to be probed here and there, and revealed nothing of the pain of the operation. She said to Nevil, in Rosamund's hearing:

'Have you the sense of honour acute in your country?' Nevil inquired for the apropos.

'None,' said she.

Such pointed insolence disposed Rosamund to an irritable antagonism, without reminding her that she had given some cause for it.

Renee said to her presently: 'He saved my brother's life'; the apropos being as little perceptible as before.

Her voice dropped to her sweetest deep tones, and there was a supplicating beam in her eyes, unintelligible to the direct Englishwoman, except under the heading of a power of witchery fearful to think of in one so young, and loved by Nevil.

The look was turned upon her, not upon her hero, and Rosamund thought, 'Does she want to entangle me as well?'

It was, in truth, a look of entreaty from woman to woman, signifying need of womanly help. Renee would have made a confidante of her, if she had not known her to be Nevil's, and devoted to him. 'I would speak to you, but that I feel you would betray me,' her eyes had said. The strong sincerity dwelling amid multiform complexities might have made itself comprehensible to the English lady for a moment or so, had Renee spoken words to her ears; but belief in it would hardly have survived the girl's next convolutions. 'She is intensely French,' Rosamund said to Nevil—a volume of insular criticism in a sentence.

'You do not know her, ma'am,' said Nevil. 'You think her older than she is, and that is the error I fell into. She is a child.'

’A serpent in the egg is none the less a serpent, Nevil. Forgive me; but when she tells you the case is hopeless!’

’No case is hopeless till a man consents to think it is; and I shall stay.’

Page 2301

‘But then again, Nevil, you have not consulted your uncle.’

‘Let him see her! let him only see her!’

Rosamund Culling reserved her opinion compassionately. His uncle would soon be calling to have him home: society panted for him to make much of him and here he was, cursed by one of his notions of duty, in attendance on a captious ’young French beauty, who was the less to be excused for not dismissing him peremptorily, if she cared for him at all. His career, which promised to be so brilliant, was spoiling at the outset. Rosamund thought of Renee almost with detestation, as a species of sorceress that had dug a trench in her hero’s road, and unhorsed and fast fettered him.

The marquis was expected immediately. Renee sent up a little note to Mrs. Calling’s chamber early in the morning, and it was with an air of one-day-more-to-ourselves, that, meeting her, she entreated the English lady to join the expedition mentioned in her note. Roland had hired a big Chioggian fishing-boat to sail into the gulf at night, and return at dawn, and have sight of Venice rising from the sea. Her father had declined; but M. Nevil wished to be one of the party, and in that case. . . . Renee threw herself beseechingly into the mute interrogation, keeping both of Rosamund’s hands. They could slip away only by deciding to, and this rare Englishwoman had no taste for the petty overt hostilities. ‘If I can be of use to you,’ she said.

’If you can bear sea-pitching and tossing for the sake of the loveliest sight in the whole world,’ said Renee.

‘I know it well,’ Rosamund replied.

Renee rippled her eyebrows. She divined a something behind that remark, and as she was aware of the grief of Rosamund’s life, her quick intuition whispered that it might be connected with the gallant officer dead on the battle-field.

‘Madame, if you know it too well . . .’ she said.

‘No; it is always worth seeing,’ said Rosamund, ’and I think, mademoiselle, with your permission, I should accompany you.’

‘It is only a whim of mine, madame. I can stay on shore.’

‘Not when it is unnecessary to forego a pleasure.’

‘Say, my last day of freedom.’

Renee kissed her hand.

She is terribly winning, Rosamund avowed. Renee was in debate whether the woman devoted to Nevil would hear her and help.

Just then Roland and Nevil returned from their boat, where they had left carpenters and upholsterers at work, and the delicate chance for an understanding between the ladies passed by.

The young men were like waves of ocean overwhelming it, they were so full of their boat, and the scouring and cleaning out of it, and provisioning, and making it worthy of its freight. Nevil was surprised that Mrs. Culling should have consented to come, and asked her if she really wished it—really; and ‘Really,’ said Rosamund; ‘certainly.’

Page 2302

‘Without dubitation,’ cried Roland. ’And now my little Renee has no more shore-qualms; she is smoothly chaperoned, and madame will present us tea on board. All the etcaeteras of life are there, and a mariner’s eye in me spies a breeze at sunset to waft us out of Malamocco.’

The count listened to the recital of their preparations with his usual absent interest in everything not turning upon Art, politics, or social intrigue. He said, ‘Yes, good, good,’ at the proper intervals, and walked down the riva to look at the busy boat, said to Nevil, ’You are a sailor; I confide my family to you,’ and prudently counselled Renee to put on the dresses she could toss to the deep without regrets. Mrs. Culling he thanked fervently for a wonderful stretch of generosity in lending her presence to the madcaps.

Altogether the day was a reanimation of external Venice. But there was a thunderbolt in it; for about an hour before sunset, when the ladies were superintending and trying not to criticize the ingenious efforts to produce a make-believe of comfort on board for them, word was brought down to the boat by the count’s valet that the Marquis de Rouaillout had arrived. Renee turned her face to her brother superciliously. Roland shrugged. ‘Note this, my sister,’ he said; ’an anticipation of dates in paying visits precludes the ripeness of the sentiment of welcome. It is, however, true that the marquis has less time to spare than others.’

‘We have started; we are on the open sea. How can we put back?’ said Renee.

‘You hear, Francois; we are on the open sea,’ Roland addressed the valet.

‘Monsieur has cut loose his communications with land,’ Francois responded, and bowed from the landing.

Nevil hastened to make this a true report; but they had to wait for tide as well as breeze, and pilot through intricate mud-channels before they could see the outside of the Lido, and meanwhile the sun lay like a golden altarplatter on mud-banks made bare by the ebb, and curled in drowsy yellow links along the currents. All they could do was to push off and hang loose, bumping to right and left in the midst of volleys and countervolleys of fishy Venetian, Chioggian, and Dalmatian, quite as strong as anything ever heard down the Canalaggio. The representatives of these dialects trotted the decks and hung their bodies half over the sides of the vessels to deliver fire, flashed eyes and snapped fingers, not a whit less fierce than hostile crews in the old wars hurling an interchange of stink-pots, and then resumed the trot, apparently in search of fresh ammunition. An Austrian sentinel looked on passively, and a police inspector peeringly. They were used to it. Happily, the combustible import of the language was unknown to the ladies, and Nevil’s attempts to keep his crew quiet, contrasting with Roland’s phlegm, which a Frenchman can assume so philosophically when his tongue is tied, amused them. During the clamour, Renee saw her

Page 2303

father beckoning from the riva. She signified that she was no longer in command of circumstances; the vessel was off. But the count stamped his foot, and nodded imperatively. Thereupon Roland repeated the eloquent demonstrations of Renee, and the count lost patience, and Roland shouted, 'For the love of heaven, don't join this babel; we're nearly bursting.' The rage of the babel was allayed by degrees, though not appeased, for the boat was behaving wantonly, as the police officer pointed out to the count.

Renee stood up to bend her head. It was in reply to a salute from the Marquis de Rouaillout, and Nevil beheld his rival.

'M. le Marquis, seeing it is out of the question that we can come to you, will you come to us?' cried Roland.

The marquis gesticulated 'With alacrity' in every limb.

'We will bring you back on to-morrow midnight's tide, safe, we promise you.'

The marquis advanced a foot, and withdrew it. Could he have heard correctly? They were to be out a whole night at sea! The count dejectedly confessed his incapability to restrain them: the young desperadoes were ready for anything. He had tried the voice of authority, and was laughed at. As to Renee, an English lady was with her.

'The English lady must be as mad as the rest,' said the marquis.

'The English are mad,' said the count; 'but their women are strict upon the proprieties.'

'Possibly, my dear count; but what room is there for the proprieties on board a fishing-boat?'

'It is even as you say, my dear marquis.'

'You allow it?'

'Can I help myself? Look at them. They tell me they have given the boat the fittings of a yacht.'

'And the young man?'

'That is the M. Beauchamp of whom I have spoken to you, the very pick of his country, fresh, lively, original; and he can converse. You will like him.'

'I hope so,' said the marquis, and roused a doleful laugh. 'It would seem that one does not arrive by hastening!'

’Oh! but my dear marquis, you have paid the compliment; you are like Spring thrusting in a bunch of lilac while the winds of winter blow. If you were not expected, your expeditiousness is appreciated, be sure.’

Roland fortunately did not hear the marquis compared to Spring. He was saying: ‘I wonder what those two elderly gentlemen are talking about’; and Nevil confused his senses by trying to realize that one of them was destined to be the husband of his now speechless Renee. The marquis was clad in a white silken suit, and a dash of red round the neck set off his black beard; but when he lifted his broad straw hat, a baldness of sconce shone. There was elegance in his gestures; he looked a gentleman, though an ultra-Gallican one, that is, too scrupulously finished for our taste, smelling of the valet. He had the habit of balancing his body on the hips, as if to emphasize a juvenile vigour, and his general

Page 2304

attitude suggested an idea that he had an oration for you. Seen from a distance, his baldness and strong nasal projection were not winning features; the youthful standard he had evidently prescribed to himself in his dress and his ready jerks of acquiescence and delivery might lead a forlorn rival to conceive him something of an ogre straining at an Adonis. It could not be disputed that he bore his disappointment remarkably well; the more laudably, because his position was within a step of the ridiculous, for he had shot himself to the mark, despising sleep, heat, dust, dirt, diet, and lo, that charming object was deliberately slipping out of reach, proving his headlong journey an absurdity.

As he stood declining to participate in the lunatic voyage, and bidding them perforce good speed off the tips of his fingers, Renee turned her eyes on him, and away. She felt a little smart of pity, arising partly from her antagonism to Roland's covert laughter: but it was the colder kind of feminine pity, which is nearer to contempt than to tenderness. She sat still, placid outwardly, in fear of herself, so strange she found it to be borne out to sea by her sailor lover under the eyes of her betrothed. She was conscious of a tumultuous rush of sensations, none of them of a very healthy kind, coming as it were from an unlocked chamber of her bosom, hitherto of unimagined contents; and the marquis being now on the spot to defend his own, she no longer blamed Nevil: it was otherwise utterly. All the sweeter side of pity was for him.

He was at first amazed by the sudden exquisite transition. Tenderness breathed from her, in voice, in look, in touch; for she accepted his help that he might lead her to the stern of the vessel, to gaze well on setting Venice, and sent lightnings up his veins; she leaned beside him over the vessel's rails, not separated from him by the breadth of a fluttering riband. Like him, she scarcely heard her brother when for an instant he intervened, and with Nevil she said adieu to Venice, where the faint red Doge's palace was like the fading of another sunset north-westward of the glory along the hills. Venice dropped lower and lower, breasting the waters, until it was a thin line in air. The line was broken, and ran in dots, with here and there a pillar standing on opal sky. At last the topmost campanile sank.

Renee looked up at the sails, and back for the submerged city.

'It is gone!' she said, as though a marvel had been worked; and swiftly: 'we have one night!'

She breathed it half like a question, like a petition, catching her breath. The adieu to Venice was her assurance of liberty, but Venice hidden rolled on her the sense of the return and plucked shrewdly at her tether of bondage.

They set their eyes toward the dark gulf ahead. The night was growing starry. The softly ruffled Adriatic tossed no foam.

'One night?' said Nevil; 'one? Why only one?'

Page 2305

Renee shuddered. ‘Oh! do not speak.’

‘Then, give me your hand.’

‘There, my friend.’

He pressed a hand that was like a quivering chord. She gave it as though it had been his own to claim. But that it meant no more than a hand he knew by the very frankness of her compliance, in the manner natural to her; and this was the charm, it filled him with her peculiar image and spirit, and while he held it he was subdued.

Lying on the deck at midnight, wrapt in his cloak and a coil of rope for a pillow, considerably apart from jesting Roland, the recollection of that little sanguine spot of time when Renee’s life-blood ran with his, began to heave under him like a swelling sea. For Nevil the starred black night was Renee. Half his heart was in it: but the combative division flew to the morning and the deadly iniquity of the marriage, from which he resolved to save her; in pure devotedness, he believed. And so he closed his eyes. She, a girl, with a heart fluttering open and fearing, felt only that she had lost herself somewhere, and she had neither sleep nor symbols, nothing but a sense of infinite strangeness, as though she were borne superhumanly through space.

CHAPTER IX

MORNING AT SEA UNDER THE ALPS

The breeze blew steadily, enough to swell the sails and sweep the vessel on smoothly. The night air dropped no moisture on deck.

Nevil Beauchamp dozed for an hour. He was awakened by light on his eyelids, and starting up beheld the many pinnacles of grey and red rocks and shadowy high white regions at the head of the gulf waiting for the sun; and the sun struck them. One by one they came out in crimson flame, till the vivid host appeared to have stepped forward. The shadows on the snow-fields deepened to purple below an irradiation of rose and pink and dazzling silver. There of all the world you might imagine Gods to sit. A crowd of mountains endless in range, erect, or flowing, shattered and arid, or leaning in smooth lustre, hangs above the gulf. The mountains are sovereign Alps, and the sea is beneath them. The whole gigantic body keeps the sea, as with a hand, to right and left.

Nevil’s personal rapture craved for Renee with the second long breath he drew; and now the curtain of her tent-cabin parted, and greeting him with a half smile, she looked out. The Adriatic was dark, the Alps had heaven to themselves. Crescents and hollows, rosy mounds, white shelves, shining ledges, domes and peaks, all the towering heights were in illumination from Friuli into farthest Tyrol; beyond earth to the stricken senses of the gazers. Colour was stedfast on the massive front ranks: it wavered in the

remoteness, and was quick and dim as though it fell on beating wings; but there too divine colour seized and shaped forth solid forms, and thence away to others in uttermost distances where the incredible flickering gleam of new heights arose, that soared, or stretched their white uncertain curves in sky like wings traversing infinity.

Page 2306

It seemed unlike morning to the lovers, but as if night had broken with a revelation of the kingdom in the heart of night. While the broad smooth waters rolled unlighted beneath that transfigured upper sphere, it was possible to think the scene might vanish like a view caught out of darkness by lightning. Alp over burning Alp, and around them a hueless dawn! The two exulted they threw off the load of wonderment, and in looking they had the delicious sensation of flight in their veins.

Renee stole toward Nevil. She was mystically shaken and at his mercy; and had he said then, ‘Over to the other land, away from Venice!’ she would have bent her head.

She asked his permission to rouse her brother and madame, so that they should not miss the scene.

Roland lay in the folds of his military greatcoat, too completely happy to be disturbed, Nevil Beauchamp chose to think; and Rosamund Culling, he told Renee, had been separated from her husband last on these waters.

‘Ah! to be unhappy here,’ sighed Renee. ’I fancied it when I begged her to join us. It was in her voice.’

The impressionable girl trembled. He knew he was dear to her, and for that reason, judging of her by himself, he forbore to urge his advantage, conceiving it base to fear that loving him she could yield her hand to another; and it was the critical instant. She was almost in his grasp. A word of sharp entreaty would have swung her round to see her situation with his eyes, and detest and shrink from it. He committed the capital fault of treating her as his equal in passion and courage, not as metal ready to run into the mould under temporary stress of fire.

Even later in the morning, when she was cooler and he had come to speak, more than her own strength was needed to resist him. The struggle was hard. The boat’s head had been put about for Venice, and they were among the dusky-red Chioggian sails in fishing quarters, expecting momently a campanile to signal the sea-city over the level. Renee waited for it in suspense. To her it stood for the implacable key of a close and stifling chamber, so different from this brilliant boundless region of air, that she sickened with the apprehension; but she knew it must appear, and soon, and therewith the contraction and the gloom it indicated to her mind. He talked of the beauty. She fretted at it, and was her petulant self again in an epigrammatic note of discord.

He let that pass.

‘Last night you said “one night,"’ he whispered. ’We will have another sail before we leave Venice.’

’One night, and in a little time one hour! and next one minute! and there’s the end,’ said Renee.

Her tone alarmed him. ‘Have you forgotten that you gave me your hand?’

‘I gave my hand to my friend.’

‘You gave it to me for good.’

‘No; I dared not; it is not mine.’

‘It is mine,’ said Beauchamp.

Page 2307

Renee pointed to the dots and severed lines and isolated columns of the rising city, black over bright sea.

‘Mine there as well as here,’ said Beauchamp, and looked at her with the fiery zeal of eyes intent on minutest signs for a confirmation, to shake that sad negation of her face.

‘Renee, you cannot break the pledge of the hand you gave me last night.’

‘You tell me how weak a creature I am.’

’You are me, myself; more, better than me. And say, would you not rather coast here and keep the city under water?’

She could not refrain from confessing that she would be glad never to land there.

‘So, when you land, go straight to your father,’ said Beauchamp, to whose conception it was a simple act resulting from the avowal.

‘Oh! you torture me,’ she cried. Her eyelashes were heavy with tears. ’I cannot do it. Think what you will of me! And, my friend, help me. Should you not help me? I have not once actually disobeyed my father, and he has indulged me, but he has been sure of me as a dutiful girl. That is my source of self-respect. My friend can always be my friend.’

‘Yes, while it’s not too late,’ said Beauchamp.

She observed a sudden stringing of his features. He called to the chief boatman, made his command intelligible to that portly capitano, and went on to Roland, who was puffing his after-breakfast cigarette in conversation with the tolerant English lady.

‘You condescend to notice us, Signor Beauchamp,’ said Roland. ’The vessel is up to some manoeuvre?’

‘We have decided not to land,’ replied Beauchamp. ‘And Roland,’ he checked the Frenchman’s shout of laughter, ’I think of making for Trieste. Let me speak to you, to both. Renee is in misery. She must not go back.’

Roland sprang to his feet, stared, and walked over to Renee.

‘Nevil,’ said Rosamund Culling, ‘do you know what you are doing?’

‘Perfectly,’ said he. ’Come to her. She is a girl, and I must think and act for her.’

Roland met them.

‘My dear Nevil, are you in a state of delusion? Renee denies . . .’

’There’s no delusion, Roland. I am determined to stop a catastrophe. I see it as plainly as those Alps. There is only one way, and that’s the one I have chosen.’

‘Chosen! my friend’. But allow me to remind you that you have others to consult. And Renee herself . . .’

‘She is a girl. She loves me, and I speak for her.’

‘She has said it?’

‘She has more than said it.’

’You strike me to the deck, Nevil. Either you are downright mad—which seems the likeliest, or we are all in a nightmare. Can you suppose I will let my sister be carried away the deuce knows where, while her father is expecting her, and to fulfil an engagement affecting his pledged word?’

Beauchamp simply replied:

‘Come to her.’

Page 2308

CHAPTER X

A SINGULAR COUNCIL

The four sat together under the shadow of the helmsman, by whom they were regarded as voyagers in debate upon the question of some hours further on salt water. ‘No bora,’ he threw in at intervals, to assure them that the obnoxious wind of the Adriatic need not disturb their calculations.

It was an extraordinary sitting, but none of the parties to it thought of it so when Nevil Beauchamp had plunged them into it. He compelled them, even Renee—and she would have flown had there been wings on her shoulders—to feel something of the life and death issues present to his soul, and submit to the discussion, in plain language of the market-place, of the most delicate of human subjects for her, for him, and hardly less for the other two. An overmastering fervour can do this. It upsets the vessel we float in, and we have to swim our way out of deep waters by the directest use of the natural faculties, without much reflection on the change in our habits. To others not under such an influence the position seems impossible. This discussion occurred. Beauchamp opened the case in a couple of sentences, and when the turn came for Renee to speak, and she shrank from the task in manifest pain, he spoke for her, and no one heard her contradiction. She would have wished the fearful impetuous youth to succeed if she could have slept through the storm he was rousing.

Roland appealed to her. ’You! my sister! it is you that consent to this wild freak, enough to break your father’s heart?’

He had really forgotten his knowledge of her character—what much he knew—in the dust of the desperation flung about her by Nevil Beauchamp.

She shook her head; she had not consented.

‘The man she loves is her voice and her will,’ said Beauchamp. ’She gives me her hand and I lead her.’

Roland questioned her. It could not be denied that she had given her hand, and her bewildered senses made her think that it had been with an entire abandonment; and in the heat of her conflict of feelings, the deliciousness of yielding to him curled round and enclosed her, as in a cool humming sea-shell.

‘Renee!’ said Roland.

‘Brother!’ she cried.

‘You see that I cannot suffer you to be borne away.’

‘No; do not!’

But the boat was flying fast from Venice, and she could have fallen at his feet and kissed them for not countermanding it.

‘You are in my charge, my sister.’

‘Yes.’

‘And now, Nevil, between us two,’ said Roland.

Beauchamp required no challenge. He seemed, to Rosamund Culling, twice older than he was, strangely adept, yet more strangely wise of worldly matters, and eloquent too. But it was the eloquence of frenzy, madness, in Roland’s ear. The arrogation of a terrible foresight that harped on present and future to persuade him of the righteousness of this headlong proceeding advocated by his friend, vexed his natural equanimity. The argument was out of the domain of logic. He could hardly sit to listen, and tore at his moustache at each end. Nevertheless his sister listened. The mad Englishman accomplished the miracle of making her listen, and appear to consent.

Page 2309

Roland laughed scornfully. 'Why Trieste? I ask you, why Trieste? You can't have a Catholic priest at your bidding, without her father's sanction.'

'We leave Renee at Trieste, under the care of madame,' said Beauchamp, 'and we return to Venice, and I go to your father. This method protects Renee from annoyance.'

'It strikes me that if she arrives at any determination she must take the consequences.'

'She does. She is brave enough for that. But she is a girl; she has to fight the battle of her life in a day, and I am her lover, and she leaves it to me.'

'Is my sister such a coward?' said Roland.

Renee could only call out his name.

'It will never do, my dear Nevil; Roland tried to deal with his unreasonable friend affectionately. 'I am responsible for her. It's your own fault—if you had not saved my life I should not have been in your way. Here I am, and your proposal can't be heard of. Do as you will, both of you, when you step ashore in Venice.'

'If she goes back she is lost,' said Beauchamp, and he attacked Roland on the side of his love for Renee, and for him.

Roland was inflexible. Seeing which, Renee said, 'To Venice, quickly, my brother!' and now she almost sighed with relief to think that she was escaping from this hurricane of a youth, who swept her off her feet and wrapt her whole being in a delirium.

'We were in sight of the city just now!' cried Roland, staring and frowning. 'What's this?'

Beauchamp answered him calmly, 'The boat's under my orders.'

'Talk madness, but don't act it,' said Roland. 'Round with the boat at once. Hundred devils! you haven't your wits.'

To his amazement, Beauchamp refused to alter the boat's present course.

'You heard my sister?' said Roland.

'You frighten her,' said Beauchamp.

'You heard her wish to return to Venice, I say.'

'She has no wish that is not mine.'

It came to Roland's shouting his command to the men, while Beauchamp pointed the course on for them.

‘You will make this a ghastly pleasantry,’ said Roland.

‘I do what I know to be right,’ said Beauchamp.

‘You want an altercation before these fellows?’

‘There won’t be one; they obey me.’

Roland blinked rapidly in wrath and doubt of mind.

‘Madame,’ he stooped to Rosamund Culling, with a happy inspiration, ’convince him; you have known him longer than I, and I desire not to lose my friend. And tell me, madame—I can trust you to be truth itself, and you can see it is actually the time for truth to be spoken—is he justified in taking my sister’s hand? You perceive that I am obliged to appeal to you. Is he not dependent on his uncle? And is he not, therefore, in your opinion, bound in reason as well as in honour to wait for his uncle’s approbation before he undertakes to speak for my sister? And, since the occasion is urgent, let me ask you one thing more: whether, by your knowledge of his position, you think him entitled to presume to decide upon my sister’s destiny? She, you are aware, is not so young but that she can speak for herself . . .’

Page 2310

‘There you are wrong, Roland,’ said Beauchamp; ’she can neither speak nor think for herself: you lead her blindfolded.’

’And you, my friend, suppose that you are wiser than any of us. It is understood. I venture to appeal to madame on the point in question.’

The poor lady’s heart beat dismally. She was constrained to answer, and said, ‘His uncle is one who must be consulted.’

‘You hear that, Nevil,’ said Roland.

Beauchamp looked at her sharply; angrily, Rosamund feared. She had struck his hot brain with the vision of Everard Romfrey as with a bar of iron. If Rosamund had inclined to the view that he was sure of his uncle’s support, it would have seemed to him a simple confirmation of his sentiments, but he was not of the same temper now as when he exclaimed, ‘Let him see her!’ and could imagine, give him only Renee’s love, the world of men subservient to his wishes.

Then he was dreaming; he was now in fiery earnest, for that reason accessible to facts presented to him; and Rosamund’s reluctantly spoken words brought his stubborn uncle before his eyes, inflicting a sense of helplessness of the bitterest kind.

They were all silent. Beauchamp stared at the lines of the deck-planks.

His scheme to rescue Renee was right and good; but was he the man that should do it? And was she, moreover, he thought—speculating on her bent head—the woman to be forced to brave the world with him, and poverty? She gave him no sign. He was assuredly not the man to pretend to powers he did not feel himself to possess, and though from a personal, and still more from a lover’s, inability to see all round him at one time and accurately to weigh the forces at his disposal, he had gone far, he was not a wilful dreamer nor so very selfish a lover. The instant his consciousness of a superior strength failed him he acknowledged it.

Renee did not look up. She had none of those lightnings of primitive energy, nor the noble rashness and reliance on her lover, which his imagination had filled her with; none. That was plain. She could not even venture to second him. Had she done so he would have held out. He walked to the head of the boat without replying.

Soon after this the boat was set for Venice again.

When he rejoined his companions he kissed Rosamund’s hand, and Renee, despite a confused feeling of humiliation and anger, loved him for it.

Glittering Venice was now in sight; the dome of Sta. Maria Salute shining like a globe of salt.

Roland flung his arm round his friend's neck, and said, 'Forgive me.'

'You do what you think right,' said Beauchamp.

'You are a perfect man of honour, my friend, and a woman would adore you. Girls are straws. It's part of Renee's religion to obey her father. That's why I was astonished! . . . I owe you my life, and I would willingly give you my sister in part payment, if I had the giving of her; most willingly. The case is, that she's a child, and you?'

Page 2311

‘Yes, I’m dependent,’ Beauchamp assented. ’I can’t act; I see it. That scheme wants two to carry it out: she has no courage. I feel that I could carry the day with my uncle, but I can’t subject her to the risks, since she dreads them; I see it. Yes, I see that! I should have done well, I believe; I should have saved her.’

‘Run to England, get your uncle’s consent, and then try.’

‘No; I shall go to her father.’

’My dear Nevil, and supposing you have Renee to back you—supposing it, I say—won’t you be falling on exactly the same bayonet-point?’

‘If I leave her!’ Beauchamp interjected. He perceived the quality of Renee’s unformed character which he could not express.

‘But we are to suppose that she loves you?’

‘She is a girl.’

’You return, my friend, to the place you started from, as you did on the canal without knowing it. In my opinion, frankly, she is best married. And I think so all the more after this morning’s lesson. You understand plainly that if you leave her she will soon be pliant to the legitimate authorities; and why not?’

’Listen to me, Roland. I tell you she loves me. I am bound to her, and when—if ever I see her unhappy, I will not stand by and look on quietly.’

Roland shrugged. ’The future not being born, my friend, we will abstain from baptizing it. For me, less privileged than my fellows, I have never seen the future. Consequently I am not in love with it, and to declare myself candidly I do not care for it one snap of the fingers. Let us follow our usages, and attend to the future at the hour of its delivery. I prefer the sage-femme to the prophet. From my heart, Nevil, I wish I could help you. We have charged great guns together, but a family arrangement is something different from a hostile battery. There’s Venice! and, as soon as you land, my responsibility’s ended. Reflect, I pray you, on what I have said about girls. Upon my word, I discover myself talking wisdom to you. Girls are precious fragilities. Marriage is the mould for them; they get shape, substance, solidity: that is to say, sense, passion, a will of their own: and grace and tenderness, delicacy; all out of the rude, raw, quaking creatures we call girls. Paris! my dear Nevil. Paris! It’s the book of women.’

The grandeur of the decayed sea-city, where folly had danced Parisianly of old, spread brooding along the waters in morning light; beautiful; but with that inner light of history seen through the beauty Venice was like a lowered banner. The great white dome and the campanili watching above her were still brave emblems. Would Paris leave signs of

an ancient vigour standing to vindicate dignity when her fall came? Nevil thought of Renee in Paris.

She avoided him. She had retired behind her tent-curtains, and reappeared only when her father's voice hailed the boat from a gondola. The count and the marquis were sitting together, and there was a spare gondola for the voyagers, so that they should not have to encounter another babel of the riva. Salutes were performed with lifted hats, nods, and bows.

Page 2312

‘Well, my dear child, it has all been very wonderful and uncomfortable?’ said the count.

‘Wonderful, papa; splendid.’

‘No qualms of any kind?’

‘None, I assure you.’ And madame?’

‘Madame will confirm it, if you find a seat for her.’

Rosamund Culling was received in the count’s gondola, cordially thanked, and placed beside the marquis.

‘I stay on board and pay these fellows,’ said Roland.

Renee was told by her father to follow madame. He had jumped into the spare gondola and offered a seat to Beauchamp.

‘No,’ cried Renee, arresting Beauchamp, ’it is I who mean to sit with papa.’

Up sprang the marquis with an entreating, ‘Mademoiselle!’

‘M. Beauchamp will entertain you, M. le Marquis.’

‘I want him here,’ said the count; and Beauchamp showed that his wish was to enter the count’s gondola, but Renee had recovered her aplomb, and decisively said ‘No,’ and Beauchamp had to yield.

That would have been an opportunity of speaking to her father without a formal asking of leave. She knew it as well as Nevil Beauchamp.

Renee took his hand to be assisted in the step down to her father’s arms, murmuring:

‘Do nothing—nothing! until you hear from me.’

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN BASKELETT

Our England, meanwhile, was bustling over the extinguished war, counting the cost of it, with a rather rueful eye on Manchester, and soothing the taxed by an exhibition of heroes at brilliant feasts. Of course, the first to come home had the cream of the praises. She hugged them in a manner somewhat suffocating to modest men, but heroism must be brought to bear upon these excesses of maternal admiration; modesty, too, when it accepts the place of honour at a public banquet, should not protest

overmuch. To be just, the earliest arrivals, which were such as reached the shores of Albion before her war was at an end, did cordially reciprocate the hug. They were taught, and they believed most naturally, that it was quite as well to repose upon her bosom as to have stuck to their posts. Surely there was a conscious weakness in the Spartans, who were always at pains to discipline their men in heroical conduct, and rewarded none save the stand-fasts. A system of that sort seems to betray the sense of poverty in the article. Our England does nothing like it. All are welcome home to her so long as she is in want of them. Besides, she has to please the taxpayer. You may track a shadowy line or crazy zigzag of policy in almost every stroke of her domestic history: either it is the forethought finding it necessary to stir up an impulse, or else dashing impulse gives a lively pull to the afterthought: policy becomes evident somehow, clumsily very possibly. How can she manage an enormous middle-class, to keep it happy, other than a little clumsily? The managing of

Page 2313

it at all is the wonder. And not only has she to stupefy the taxpayer by a timely display of feastings and fireworks, she has to stop all that nonsense (to quote a satiated man lightened in his purse) at the right moment, about the hour when the old standfasts, who have simply been doing duty, return, poor jog-trot fellows, and a complimentary motto or two is the utmost she can present to them. On the other hand, it is true she gives her first loves, those early birds, fully to understand that a change has come in their island mother's mind. If there is a balance to be righted, she leaves that business to society, and if it be the season for the gathering of society, it will be righted more or less; and if no righting is done at all, perhaps the Press will incidentally toss a leaf of laurel on a name or two: thus in the exercise of grumbling doing good.

With few exceptions, Nevil Beauchamp's heroes received the motto instead of the sweetmeat. England expected them to do their duty; they did it, and she was not dissatisfied, nor should they be. Beauchamp, at a distance from the scene, chafed with customary vehemence, concerning the unjust measure dealt to his favourites: Captain Hardist, of the Diomed, twenty years a captain, still a captain! Young Michell denied the cross! Colonel Evans Cuff, on the heights from first to last, and not advanced a step! But Prancer, and Plunger, and Lammakin were thoroughly well taken care of, this critic of the war wrote savagely, reviving an echo of a queer small circumstance occurring in the midst of the high dolour and anxiety of the whole nation, and which a politic country preferred to forget, as we will do, for it was but an instance of strong family feeling in high quarters; and is not the unity of the country founded on the integrity of the family sentiment? Is it not certain, which the master tells us, that a line is but a continuation of a number of dots? Nevil Beauchamp was for insisting that great Government officers had paid more attention to a dot or two than to the line. He appeared to be at war with his country after the peace. So far he had a lively ally in his uncle Everard; but these remarks of his were a portion of a letter, whose chief burden was the request that Everard Romfrey would back him in proposing for the hand of a young French lady, she being, Beauchamp smoothly acknowledged, engaged to a wealthy French marquis, under the approbation of her family. Could mortal folly outstrip a petition of that sort? And apparently, according to the wording and emphasis of the letter, it was the mature age of the marquis which made Mr. Beauchamp so particularly desirous to stop the projected marriage and take the girl himself. He appealed to his uncle on the subject in a 'really—really' remonstrative tone, quite overwhelming to read. 'It ought not to be permitted: by all the laws of chivalry, I should write to the girl's father to interdict it: I really am particeps criminis in a sin against nature if I don't!' Mr. Romfrey interjected in burlesque of his ridiculous nephew, with collapsing laughter. But he expressed an indignant surprise at Nevil for allowing Rosamund to travel alone.

Page 2314

‘I can take very good care of myself,’ Rosamund protested.

’You can do hundreds of things you should never be obliged to do while he’s at hand, or I, ma’am,’ said Mr. Romfrey. ’The fellow’s insane. He forgets a gentleman’s duty. Here’s his “humanity” dogging a French frock, and pooh!—the age of the marquis! Fifty? A man’s beginning his prime at fifty, or there never was much man in him. It’s the mark of a fool to take everybody for a bigger fool than himself-or he wouldn’t have written this letter to me. He can’t come home yet, not yet, and he doesn’t know when he can! Has he thrown up the service? I am to preserve the alliance between England and France by getting this French girl for him in the teeth of her marquis, at my peril if I refuse!’

Rosamund asked, ‘Will you let me see where Nevil says that, sir?’

Mr. Romfrey tore the letter to strips. ’He’s one of your fellows who cock their eyes when they mean to be cunning. He sends you to do the wheedling, that’s plain. I don’t say he has hit on a bad advocate; but tell him I back him in no mortal marriage till he shows a pair of epaulettes on his shoulders. Tell him lieutenants are fledglings—he’s not marriageable at present. It’s a very pretty sacrifice of himself he intends for the sake of the alliance, tell him that, but a lieutenant’s not quite big enough to establish it. You will know what to tell him, ma’am. And say, it’s the fellow’s best friend that advises him to be out of it and home quick. If he makes one of a French trio, he’s dished. He’s too late for his luck in England. Have him out of that mire, we can’t hope for more now.’

Rosamund postponed her mission to plead. Her heart was with Nevil; her understanding was easily led to side against him, and for better reasons than Mr. Romfrey could be aware of: so she was assured by her experience of the character of Mademoiselle de Croisnel. A certain belief in her personal arts of persuasion had stopped her from writing on her homeward journey to inform him that Nevil was not accompanying her, and when she drove over Steynham Common, triumphal arches and the odour of a roasting ox richly browning to celebrate the hero’s return afflicted her mind with all the solid arguments of a common-sense country in contravention of a wild lover’s vaporous extravagances. Why had he not come with her? The disappointed ox put the question in a wavering drop of the cheers of the villagers at the sight of the carriage without their bleeding hero. Mr. Romfrey, at his hall-doors, merely screwed his eyebrows; for it was the quality of this gentleman to foresee most human events, and his capacity to stifle astonishment when they trifled with his prognostics. Rosamund had left Nevil fast bound in the meshes of the young French sorceress, no longer leading, but submissively following, expecting blindly, seeing strange new virtues in the lurid indication of what appeared to border on the reverse. How could she plead for her infatuated darling to one who was common sense in person?

Page 2315

Everard's pointed interrogations reduced her to speak defensively, instead of attacking and claiming his aid for the poor enamoured young man. She dared not say that Nevil continued to be absent because he was now encouraged by the girl to remain in attendance on her, and was more than half inspired to hope, and too artfully assisted to deceive the count and the marquis under the guise of simple friendship. Letters passed between them in books given into one another's hands with an audacious openness of the saddest augury for the future of the pair, and Nevil could be so lost to reason as to glory in Renee's intrepidity, which he justified by their mutual situation, and cherished for a proof that she was getting courage. In fine, Rosamund abandoned her task of pleading. Nevil's communications gave the case a worse and worse aspect: Renee was prepared to speak to her father; she delayed it; then the two were to part; they were unable to perform the terrible sacrifice and slay their last hope; and then Nevil wrote of destiny—language hitherto unknown to him, evidently the tongue of Renee. He slipped on from Italy to France. His uncle was besieged by a series of letters, and his cousin, Cecil Baskelett, a captain in England's grand reserve force—her Horse Guards, of the Blue division—helped Everard Romfrey to laugh over them.

It was not difficult, alack! Letters of a lover in an extremity of love, crying for help, are as curious to cool strong men as the contortions of the proved heterodox tied to a stake must have been to their chastening ecclesiastical judges. Why go to the fire when a recantation will save you from it? Why not break the excruciating faggot-bands, and escape, when you have only to decide to do it? We naturally ask why. Those martyrs of love or religion are madmen. Altogether, Nevil's adjurations and supplications, his threats of wrath and appeals to reason, were an odd mixture. 'He won't lose a chance while there's breath in his body,' Everard said, quite good-humouredly, though he deplored that the chance for the fellow to make his hero-parade in society, and haply catch an heiress, was waning. There was an heiress at Steynham, on her way with her father to Italy, very anxious to see her old friend Nevil—Cecilia Halkett—and very inquisitive this young lady of sixteen was to know the cause of his absence. She heard of it from Cecil.

'And one morning last week mademoiselle was running away with him, and the next morning she was married to her marquis!'

Cecil was able to tell her that.

'I used to be so fond of him,' said the ingenuous young lady. She had to thank Nevil for a Circassian dress and pearls, which he had sent to her by the hands of Mrs. Culling—a pretty present to a girl in the nursery, she thought, and in fact she chose to be a little wounded by the cause of his absence.

'He's a good creature-really,' Cecil spoke on his cousin's behalf. 'Mad; he always will be mad. A dear old savage; always amuses me. He does! I get half my entertainment from him.'

Page 2316

Captain Baskelett was gifted with the art, which is a fine and a precious one, of priceless value in society, and not wanting a benediction upon it in our elegant literature, namely, the art of stripping his fellow-man and so posturing him as to make every movement of the comical wretch puppet-like, constrained, stiff, and foolish. He could present you heroical actions in that fashion; for example:

'A long-shanked trooper, bearing the name of John Thomas Drew, was crawling along under fire of the batteries. Out pops old Nevil, tries to get the man on his back. It won't do. Nevil insists that it's exactly one of the cases that ought to be, and they remain arguing about it like a pair of nine-pins while the Muscovites are at work with the bowls. Very well. Let me tell you my story. It's perfectly true, I give you my word. So Nevil tries to horse Drew, and Drew proposes to horse Nevil, as at school. Then Drew offers a compromise. He would much rather have crawled on, you know, and allowed the shot to pass over his head; but he's a Briton, old Nevil the same; but old Nevil's peculiarity is that, as you are aware, he hates a compromise—won't have it—retro Sathanas! and Drew's proposal to take his arm instead of being carried pickaback disgusts old Nevil. Still it won't do to stop where they are, like the cocoa-nut and the pincushion of our friends, the gipsies, on the downs: so they take arms and commence the journey home, resembling the best of friends on the evening of a holiday in our native clime—two steps to the right, half-a-dozen to the left, etcaetera.'

Thus, with scarce a variation from the facts, with but a flowery chaplet cast on a truthful narrative, as it were, Captain Baskelett could render ludicrous that which in other quarters had obtained honourable mention. Nevil and Drew being knocked down by the wind of a ball near the battery, 'Confound it!' cries Nevil, jumping on his feet, 'it's because I consented to a compromise!'—a transparent piece of fiction this, but so in harmony with the character stripped naked for us that it is accepted. Imagine Nevil's love-affair in such hands! Recovering from a fever, Nevil sees a pretty French girl in a gondola, and immediately thinks, 'By jingo, I'm marriageable.' He hears she is engaged. 'By jingo, she's marriageable too.' He goes through a sum in addition, and the total is a couple; so he determines on a marriage. 'You can't get it out of his head; he must be married instantly, and to her, because she is going to marry somebody else. Sticks to her, follows her, will have her, in spite of her father, her marquis, her brother, aunts, cousins, religion, country, and the young woman herself. I assure you, a perfect model of male fidelity! She is married. He is on her track. He knows his time will come; he has only to be handy. You see, old Nevil believes in Providence, is perfectly sure he will one day hear it cry out, "Where's Beauchamp?"—"Here I am!"—"And here's your marquise!"—"I knew I should have her at last," says Nevil, calm as Mont Blanc on a reduced scale.'

Page 2317

The secret of Captain Baskelett's art would seem to be to show the automatic human creature at loggerheads with a necessity that winks at remarkable pretensions, while condemning it perpetually to doll-like action. You look on men from your own elevation as upon a quantity of our little wooden images, unto whom you affix puny characteristics, under restrictions from which they shall not escape, though they attempt it with the enterprising vigour of an extended leg, or a pair of raised arms, or a head awry, or a trick of jumping; and some of them are extraordinarily addicted to these feats; but for all they do the end is the same, for necessity rules, that exactly so, under stress of activity must the doll Nevil, the doll Everard, or the dolliest of dolls, fair woman, behave. The automatic creature is subject to the laws of its construction, you perceive. It can this, it can that, but it cannot leap out of its mechanism. One definition of the art is, humour made easy, and that may be why Cecil Baskelett indulged in it, and why it is popular with those whose humour consists of a readiness to laugh.

The fun between Cecil Baskelett and Mr. Romfrey over the doll Nevil threatened an intimacy and community of sentiment that alarmed Rosamund on behalf of her darling's material prospects. She wrote to him, entreating him to come to Steynham. Nevil Beauchamp replied to her both frankly and shrewdly: 'I shall not pretend that I forgive my uncle Everard, and therefore it is best for me to keep away. Have no fear. The baron likes a man of his own tastes: they may laugh together, if it suits them; he never could be guilty of treachery, and to disinherit me would be that. If I were to become his open enemy to-morrow, I should look on the estates as mine-unless I did anything to make him disrespect me. You will not suppose it likely. I foresee I shall want money. As for Cecil, I give him as much rope as he cares to have. I know very well Everard Romfrey will see where the point of likeness between them stops. I apply for a ship the moment I land.'

To test Nevil's judgement of his uncle, Rosamund ventured on showing this letter to Mr. Romfrey. He read it, and said nothing, but subsequently asked, from time to time, 'Has he got his ship yet?' It assured her that Nevil was not wrong, and dispelled her notion of the vulgar imbroglio of a rich uncle and two thirsty nephews. She was hardly less relieved in reflecting that he could read men so soberly and accurately. The desperation of the youth in love had rendered her one little bit doubtful of the orderliness of his wits. After this she smiled on Cecil's assiduities. Nevil obtained his appointment to a ship bound for the coast of Africa to spy for slavers. He called on his uncle in London, and spent the greater part of the hour's visit with Rosamund; seemed cured of his passion, devoid of rancour, glad of the prospect of a run among the slaving hulls. He and his uncle shook hands manfully, at the full outstretch

Page 2318

of their arms, in a way so like them, to Rosamund's thinking—that is, in a way so unlike any other possible couple of men so situated—that the humour of the sight eclipsed all the pleasantries of Captain Baskelett. 'Good-bye, sir,' Nevil said heartily; and Everard Romfrey was not behind-hand with the cordial ring of his 'Good-bye, Nevil'; and upon that they separated. Rosamund would have been willing to speak to her beloved of his false Renee—the Frenchwoman, she termed her, *i.e*. generically false, needless to name; and one question quivered on her tongue's tip: 'How, when she had promised to fly with you, how could she the very next day step to the altar with him now her husband?' And, if she had spoken it, she would have added, 'Your uncle could not have set his face against you, had you brought her to England.' She felt strongly the mastery Nevil Beauchamp could exercise even over his uncle Everard. But when he was gone, unquestioned, merely caressed, it came to her mind that he had all through insisted on his possession of this particular power, and she accused herself of having wantonly helped to ruin his hope—a matter to be rejoiced at in the abstract; but what suffering she had inflicted on him! To quiet her heart, she persuaded herself that for the future she would never fail to believe in him and second him blindly, as true love should; and contemplating one so brave, far-sighted, and self-assured, her determination seemed to impose the lightest of tasks.

Practically humane though he was, and especially toward cattle and all kinds of beasts, Mr. Romfrey entertained no profound fellow-feeling for the negro, and, except as the representative of a certain amount of working power commonly requiring the whip to wind it up, he inclined to despise that black spot in the creation, with which our civilization should never have had anything to do. So he pronounced his mind, and the long habit of listening to oracles might grow us ears to hear and discover a meaning in it. Nevil's captures and releases of the grinning freights amused him for awhile. He compared them to strings of bananas, and presently put the vision of the whole business aside by talking of Nevil's banana-wreath. He desired to have Nevil out of it. He and Cecil handed Nevil in his banana-wreath about to their friends. Nevil, in his banana-wreath, was set preaching 'humanitomtity.' At any rate, they contrived to keep the remembrance of Nevil Beauchamp alive during the period of his disappearance from the world, and in so doing they did him a service.

There is a pause between the descent of a diver and his return to the surface, when those who would not have him forgotten by the better world above him do rightly to relate anecdotes of him, if they can, and to provoke laughter at him. The encouragement of the humane sense of superiority over an object of interest, which laughter gives, is good for the object; and besides, if you begin to tell sly stories

Page 2319

of one in the deeps who is holding his breath to fetch a pearl or two for you all, you divert a particular sympathetic oppression of the chest, that the extremely sensitive are apt to suffer from, and you dispose the larger number to keep in mind a person they no longer see. Otherwise it is likely that he will, very shortly after he has made his plunge, fatigue the contemplative brains above, and be shuffled off them, even as great ocean smoothes away the dear vanished man's immediate circle of foam, and rapidly confounds the rippling memory of him with its other agitations. And in such a case the apparition of his head upon our common level once more will almost certainly cause a disagreeable shock; nor is it improbable that his first natural snorts in his native element, though they be simply to obtain his share of the breath of life, will draw down on him condemnation for eccentric behaviour and unmannerly; and this in spite of the jewel he brings, unless it be an exceedingly splendid one. The reason is, that our brave world cannot pardon a breach of continuity for any petty bribe.

Thus it chanced, owing to the prolonged efforts of Mr. Romfrey and Cecil Baskelett to get fun out of him, at the cost of considerable inventiveness, that the electoral Address of the candidate, signing himself 'R. C. S. Nevil Beauchamp,' to the borough of Bevisham, did not issue from an altogether unremembered man.

He had been cruising in the Mediterranean, commanding the Ariadne, the smartest corvette in the service. He had, it was widely made known, met his marquise in Palermo. It was presumed that he was dancing the round with her still, when this amazing Address appeared on Bevisham's walls, in anticipation of the general Election. The Address, moreover, was ultra-Radical: museums to be opened on Sundays; ominous references to the Land question, *etc*.; no smooth passing mention of Reform, such as the Liberal, become stately, adopts in speaking of that property of his, but swinging blows on the heads of many a denounced iniquity.

Cecil forwarded the Address to Everard Romfrey without comment.

Next day the following letter, dated from Itchincope, the house of Mr. Grancey Lespel, on the borders of Bevisham, arrived at Steynham:

'I have despatched you the proclamation, folded neatly. The electors of Bevisham are summoned, like a town at the sword's point, to yield him their votes. Proclamation is the word. I am your born representative! I have completed my political education on salt water, and I tackle you on the Land question. I am the heir of your votes, gentlemen!—I forgot, and I apologize; he calls them fellow-men. Fraternal, and not so risky. Here at Lespel's we read the thing with shouts. It hangs in the smoking-room. We throw open the curacoa to the intelligence and industry of the assembled guests; we carry the right of the multitude to our host's cigars by a majority. C'est un farceur que notre bon petit cousin.

Page 2320

Lespel says it is sailorlike to do something of this sort after a cruise. Nevil's Radicalism would have been clever anywhere out of Bevisham. Of all boroughs! Grancey Lespel knows it. He and his family were Bevisham's Whig M.P.'s before the day of Manchester. In Bevisham an election is an arrangement made by Providence to square the accounts of the voters, and settle arrears. They reckon up the health of their two members and the chances of an appeal to the country when they fix the rents and leases. You have them pointed out to you in the street, with their figures attached to them like titles. Mr. Tomkins, the twenty-pound man; an elector of uncommon purity. I saw the ruffian yesterday. He has an extra breadth to his hat. He has never been known to listen to a member under L20, and is respected enormously—like the lady of the Mythology, who was an intolerable Tartar of virtue, because her price was nothing less than a god, and money down. Nevil will have to come down on Bevisham in the Jupiter style. Bevisham is downright the dearest of boroughs—"vaulting-boards," as Stukely Culbrett calls them—in the kingdom. I assume we still say "kingdom."

'He dashed into the Radical trap exactly two hours after landing. I believe he was on his way to the Halketts at Mount Laurels. A notorious old rascal revolutionist retired from his licenced business of slaughterer—one of your gratis doctors—met him on the high-road, and told him he was the man. Up went Nevil's enthusiasm like a bottle rid of the cork. You will see a great deal about faith in the proclamation; "faith in the future," and "my faith in you." When you become a Radical you have faith in any quantity, just as an alderman gets turtle soup. It is your badge, like a livery-servant's cockade or a corporal's sleeve stripes—your badge and your bellyful. Calculations were gone through at the Liberal newspaper-office, old Nevil adding up hard, and he was informed that he was elected by something like a topping eight or nine hundred and some fractions. I am sure that a fellow who can let himself be gulled by a pile of figures trumped up in a Radical newspaper-office must have great faith in the fractions. Out came Nevil's proclamation.

'I have not met him, and I would rather not. I shall not pretend to offer you advice, for I have the habit of thinking your judgement can stand by itself. We shall all find this affair a nuisance. Nevil will pay through the nose. We shall have the ridicule spattered on the family. It would be a safer thing for him to invest his money on the Turf, and I shall advise his doing it if I come across him.

'Perhaps the best course would be to telegraph for the marquise!'

This was from Cecil Baskelett. He added a postscript:

'Seriously, the "mad commander" has not an ace of a chance. Grancey and I saw some Working Men (you have to write them in capitals, king and queen small); they were reading the Address on a board carried by a red-nosed man, and shrugging. They are not such fools.

Page 2321

’By the way, I am informed Shrapnel has a young female relative living with him, said to be a sparkler. I bet you, sir, she is not a Radical. Do you take me?’

Rosamund Culling drove to the railway station on her way to Bevisham within an hour after Mr. Romfrey’s eyebrows had made acute play over this communication.

CHAPTER XII

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE INFAMOUS DR. SHRAPNEL

In the High street of the ancient and famous town and port of Bevisham, Rosamund met the military governor of a neighbouring fortress, General Sherwin, once colonel of her husband’s regiment in India; and by him, as it happened, she was assisted in finding the whereabout of the young Liberal candidate, without the degrading recourse of an application at the newspaper-office of his party. The General was leisurely walking to a place of appointment to fetch his daughter home from a visit to an old school-friend, a Miss Jenny Denham, no other than a ward, or a niece, or an adoption of Dr. Shrapnel’s: ‘A nice girl; a great favourite of mine,’ the General said. Shrapnel he knew by reputation only as a wrong-headed politician; but he spoke of Miss Denham pleasantly two or three times, praising her accomplishments and her winning manners. His hearer suspected that it might be done to dissociate the idea of her from the ruffling agitator. ‘Is she pretty?’ was a question that sprang from Rosamund’s intimate reflections. The answer was, ‘Yes.’

‘Very pretty?’

‘I think very pretty,’ said the General.

‘Captivatingly?’

’Clara thinks she is perfect; she is tall and slim, and dresses well. The girls were with a French Madam in Paris. But, if you are interested about her, you can come on with me, and we shall meet them somewhere near the head of the street. I don’t,’ the General hesitated and hummed—’I don’t call at Shrapnel’s.’

‘I have never heard her name before to-day,’ said Rosamund.

‘Exactly,’ said the General, crowing at the aimlessness of a woman’s curiosity.

The young ladies were seen approaching, and Rosamund had to ask herself whether the first sight of a person like Miss Denham would be of a kind to exercise a lively influence over the political and other sentiments of a dreamy sailor just released from ship-service. In an ordinary case she would have said no, for Nevil enjoyed a range of society where faces charming as Miss Denham’s were plentiful as roses in the rose-

garden. But, supposing him free of his bondage to the foreign woman, there was, she thought and feared, a possibility that a girl of this description might capture a young man's vacant heart sighing for a new mistress. And if so, further observation assured her Miss Denham was likely to be dangerous far more than professedly attractive persons, enchantresses and the rest. Rosamund watchfully gathered all the superficial indications which incite women to

Page 2322

judge of character profoundly. This new object of alarm was, as the General had said of her, tall and slim, a friend of neatness, plainly dressed, but exquisitely fitted, in the manner of Frenchwomen. She spoke very readily, not too much, and had the rare gift of being able to speak fluently with a smile on the mouth. Vulgar archness imitates it. She won and retained the eyes of her hearer sympathetically, it seemed. Rosamund thought her as little conscious as a woman could be. She coloured at times quickly, but without confusion. When that name, the key of Rosamund's meditations, chanced to be mentioned, a flush swept over Miss Denham's face. The candour of it was unchanged as she gazed at Rosamund, with a look that asked, 'Do you know him?'

Rosamund said, 'I am an old friend of his.'

'He is here now, in this town.'

'I wish to see him very much.'

General Sherwin interposed: 'We won't talk about political characters just for the present.'

'I wish you knew him, papa, and would advise him,' his daughter said.

The General nodded hastily. 'By-and-by, by-and-by.'

They had in fact taken seats at a table of mutton pies in a pastrycook's shop, where dashing military men were restrained solely by their presence from a too noisy display of fascinations before the fashionable waiting-women.

Rosamund looked at Miss Denham. As soon as they were in the street the latter said, 'If you will be good enough to come with me, madam . . .?' Rosamund bowed, thankful to have been comprehended. The two young ladies kissed cheeks and parted. General Sherwin raised his hat, and was astonished to see Mrs. Culling join Miss Denham in accepting the salute, for they had not been introduced, and what could they have in common? It was another of the oddities of female nature.

'My name is Mrs. Culling, and I will tell you how it is that I am interested in Captain Beauchamp,' Rosamund addressed her companion. 'I am his uncle's housekeeper. I have known him and loved him since he was a boy. I am in great fear that he is acting rashly.'

'You honour me, madam, by speaking to me so frankly,' Miss Denham answered.

'He is quite bent upon this Election?'

'Yes, madam. I am not, as you can suppose, in his confidence, but I hear of him from Dr. Shrapnel.'

‘Your uncle?’

‘I call him uncle: he is my guardian, madam.’

It is perhaps excuseable that this communication did not cause the doctor to shine with added lustre in Rosamund’s thoughts, or ennoble the young lady.

‘You are not relatives, then?’ she said.

‘No, unless love can make us so.’

‘Not blood-relatives?’

‘No.’

‘Is he not very . . . extreme?’

‘He is very sincere.’

‘I presume you are a politician?’

Miss Denham smiled. ‘Could you pardon me, madam, if I said that I was?’ The counter-question was a fair retort enfolding a gentler irony. Rosamund felt that she had to do with wits as well as with vivid feminine intuitions in the person of this Miss Denham.

Page 2323

She said, ’I really am of opinion that our sex might abstain from politics.’

‘We find it difficult to do justice to both parties,’ Miss Denham followed. ’It seems to be a kind of clanship with women; hardly even that.’

Rosamund was inattentive to the conversational slipshod, and launched one of the heavy affirmatives which are in dialogue full stops. She could not have said why she was sensible of anger, but the sentiment of anger, or spite (if that be a lesser degree of the same affliction), became stirred in her bosom when she listened to the ward of Dr. Shrapnel. A silly pretty puss of a girl would not have excited it, nor an avowed blood-relative of the demagogue.

Nevil’s hotel was pointed out to Rosamund, and she left her card there. He had been absent since eight in the morning. There was the probability that he might be at Dr. Shrapnel’s, so Rosamund walked on.

‘Captain Beauchamp gives himself no rest,’ Miss Denham said.

‘Oh! I know him, when once his mind is set on anything,’ said Rosamund.

‘Is it not too early to begin to—canvass, I think, is the word?’

’He is studying whatever the town can teach him of its wants; that is, how he may serve it.’

‘Indeed! But if the town will not have him to serve it?’

’He imagines that he cannot do better, until that has been decided, than to fit himself for the post.’

’Acting upon your advice? I mean, of course, your uncle’s; that is, Dr. Shrapnel’s.’

’Dr. Shrapnel thinks it will not be loss of time for Captain Beauchamp to grow familiar with the place, and observe as well as read.’

’It sounds almost as if Captain Beauchamp had submitted to be Dr. Shrapnel’s pupil.’

’It is natural, madam, that Dr. Shrapnel should know more of political ways at present than Captain Beauchamp.’

’To Captain Beauchamp’s friends and relatives it appears very strange that he should have decided to contest this election so suddenly. May I inquire whether he and Dr. Shrapnel are old acquaintances?’

’No, madam, they are not. They had never met before Captain Beauchamp landed, the other day.’

’I am surprised, I confess. I cannot understand the nature of an influence that induces him to abandon a profession he loves and shines in, for politics, at a moment’s notice.’

Miss Denham was silent, and then said:

’I will tell you, madam, how it occurred, as far as circumstances explain it. Dr. Shrapnel is accustomed to give a little country feast to the children I teach, and their parents if they choose to come, and they generally do. They are driven to Northeden Heath, where we set up a booth for them, and try with cakes and tea and games to make them spend one of their happy afternoons and evenings. We succeed, I know, for the little creatures talk of it and look forward to the day. When they are at their last romp, Dr. Shrapnel speaks to the parents.’

Page 2324

‘Can he obtain a hearing?’ Rosamund asked.

’He has not so very large a crowd to address, madam, and he is much beloved by those that come.’

‘He speaks to them of politics on those occasions?’

’Adouci a leur intention. It is not a political speech, but Dr. Shrapnel thinks, that in a so-called free country seeking to be really free, men of the lowest class should be educated in forming a political judgement.’

‘And women too?’

’And women, yes. Indeed, madam, we notice that the women listen very creditably.’

‘They can put on the air.’

’I am afraid, not more than the men do. To get them to listen is something. They suffer like the men, and must depend on their intelligence to win their way out of it.’

Rosamund’s meditation was exclamatory: What can be the age of this pretentious girl?

An afterthought turned her more conciliatorily toward the person, but less to the subject. She was sure that she was lending ear to the echo of the dangerous doctor, and rather pitied Miss Denham for awhile, reflecting that a young woman stuffed with such ideas would find it hard to get a husband. Mention of Nevil revived her feeling of hostility.

We had seen a gentleman standing near and listening attentively,’ Miss Denham resumed, ’and when Dr. Shrapnel concluded a card was handed to him. He read it and gave it to me, and said, “You know that name.” It was a name we had often talked about during the war.

He went to Captain Beauchamp and shook his hand. He does not pay many compliments, and he does not like to receive them, but it was impossible for him not to be moved by Captain Beauchamp’s warmth in thanking him for the words he had spoken. I saw that Dr. Shrapnel became interested in Captain Beauchamp the longer they conversed. We walked home together. Captain Beauchamp supped with us. I left them at half-past eleven at night, and in the morning I found them walking in the garden. They had not gone to bed at all. Captain Beauchamp has remained in Bevisham ever since. He soon came to the decision to be a candidate for the borough.’

Rosamund checked her lips from uttering: To be a puppet of Dr. Shrapnel’s!

She remarked, ‘He is very eloquent—Dr. Shrapnel?’

Miss Denham held some debate with herself upon the term.

‘Perhaps it is not eloquence; he often . . . no, he is not an orator.’

Rosamund suggested that he was persuasive, possibly.

Again the young lady deliberately weighed the word, as though the nicest measure of her uncle or adoptor’s quality in this or that direction were in requisition and of importance—an instance of a want of delicacy of perception Rosamund was not sorry to detect. For good-looking, refined-looking, quick-witted girls can be grown; but the nimble sense of fitness, ineffable lightning-footed tact, comes of race and breeding, and she was sure Nevil was a man soon to feel the absence of that.

Page 2325

’Dr. Shrapnel is persuasive to those who go partly with him, or whose condition of mind calls on him for great patience,’ Miss Denham said at last.

’I am only trying to comprehend how it was that he should so rapidly have won Captain Beauchamp to his views,’ Rosamund explained; and the young lady did not reply.

Dr. Shrapnel’s house was about a mile beyond the town, on a common of thorn and gorse, through which the fir-bordered highway ran. A fence waist-high enclosed its plot of meadow and garden, so that the doctor, while protecting his own, might see and be seen of the world, as was the case when Rosamund approached. He was pacing at long slow strides along the gravel walk, with his head bent and bare, and his hands behind his back, accompanied by a gentleman who could be no other than Nevil, Rosamund presumed to think; but drawing nearer she found she was mistaken.

‘That is not Captain Beauchamp’s figure,’ she said.

‘No, it is not he,’ said Miss Denham.

Rosamund saw that her companion was pale. She warmed to her at once; by no means on account of the pallor in itself.

‘I have walked too fast for you, I fear.’

‘Oh no; I am accused of being a fast walker.’

Rosamund was unwilling to pass through the demagogue’s gate. On second thoughts, she reflected that she could hardly stipulate to have news of Nevil tossed to her over the spikes, and she entered.

While receiving Dr. Shrapnel’s welcome to a friend of Captain Beauchamp, she observed the greeting between Miss Denham and the younger gentleman. It reassured her. They met like two that have a secret.

The dreaded doctor was an immoderately tall man, lean and wiry, carelessly clad in a long loose coat of no colour, loose trowsers, and huge shoes.

He stooped from his height to speak, or rather swing the stiff upper half of his body down to his hearer’s level and back again, like a ship’s mast on a billowy sea. He was neither rough nor abrupt, nor did he roar bullmouthedly as demagogues are expected to do, though his voice was deep. He was actually, after his fashion, courteous, it could be said of him, except that his mind was too visibly possessed by distant matters for Rosamund’s taste, she being accustomed to drawing-room and hunting and military gentlemen, who can be all in the words they utter. Nevertheless he came out of his lizard-like look with the down-dropped eyelids quick at a resumption of the dialogue; sometimes gesturing, sweeping his arm round. A stubborn tuft of iron-grey hair fell

across his forehead, and it was apparently one of his life's labours to get it to lie amid the mass, for his hand rarely ceased to be in motion without an impulsive stroke at the refractory forelock. He peered through his eyelashes ordinarily, but from no infirmity of sight. The truth was, that the man's nature counteracted his spirit's intenser eagerness and restlessness by alternating a state of repose that resembled dormancy, and so preserved him. Rosamund was obliged to give him credit for straightforward eyes when they did look out and flash. Their filmy blue, half overflown with grey by age, was poignant while the fire in them lasted. Her antipathy attributed something electrical to the light they shot.

Page 2326

Dr. Shrapnel's account of Nevil stated him to have gone to call on Colonel Halkett, a new resident at Mount Laurels, on the Otley river. He offered the welcome of his house to the lady who was Captain Beauchamp's friend, saying, with extraordinary fatuity (so it sounded in Rosamund's ears), that Captain Beauchamp would certainly not let an evening pass without coming to him. Rosamund suggested that he might stay late at Mount Laurels.

'Then he will arrive here after nightfall,' said the doctor. 'A bed is at your service, ma'am.'

The offer was declined. 'I should like to have seen him to-day; but he will be home shortly.'

'He will not quit Bevisham till this Election's decided unless to hunt a stray borough vote, ma'am.'

'He goes to Mount Laurels.

'For that purpose.'

'I do not think he will persuade Colonel Halkett to vote in the Radical interest.'

'That is the probability with a landed proprietor, ma'am. We must knock, whether the door opens or not. Like,' the doctor laughed to himself up aloft, 'like a watchman in the night to say that he smells smoke on the premises.'

'Surely we may expect Captain Beauchamp to consult his family about so serious a step as this he is taking,' Rosamund said, with an effort to be civil.

Why should he?' asked the impending doctor.

His head continued in the interrogative position when it had resumed its elevation. The challenge for a definite reply to so outrageous a question irritated Rosamund's nerves, and, loth though she was to admit him to the subject, she could not forbear from saying, 'Why? Surely his family have the first claim on him!'

'Surely not, ma'am. There is no first claim. A man's wife and children have a claim on him for bread. A man's parents have a claim on him for obedience while he is a child. A man's uncles, aunts, and cousins have no claim on him at all, except for help in necessity, which he can grant and they require. None—wife, children, parents, relatives—none has a claim to bar his judgement and his actions. Sound the conscience, and sink the family! With a clear conscience, it is best to leave the family to its own debates. No man ever did brave work who held counsel with his family. The family view of a man's fit conduct is the weak point of the country. It is no other view than, "Better thy condition for our sakes." Ha! In this way we breed sheep, fatten oxen: men

are dying off. Resolution taken, consult the family means—waste your time! Those who go to it want an excuse for altering their minds. The family view is everlastingly the shopkeeper's! Purse, pence, ease, increase of worldly goods, personal importance—-the pound, the English pound! Dare do that, and you forfeit your share of Port wine in this world; you won't be dubbed with a title; you'll be fingered at! Lord, Lord! is it the region inside a man, or out, that gives him peace? Out, they

Page 2327

say; for they have lost faith in the existence of an inner. They haven't it. Air-sucker, blood-pump, cooking machinery, and a battery of trained instincts, aptitudes, fill up their vacuum. I repeat, ma'am, why should young Captain Beauchamp spend an hour consulting his family? They won't approve him; he knows it. They may annoy him; and what is the gain of that? They can't move him; on that I let my right hand burn. So it would be useless on both sides. He thinks so. So do I. He is one of the men to serve his country on the best field we can choose for him. In a ship's cabin he is thrown away. Ay, ay, War, and he may go aboard. But now we must have him ashore. Too few of such as he!'

'It is matter of opinion,' said Rosamund, very tightly compressed; scarcely knowing what she said.

How strange, besides hateful, it was to her to hear her darling spoken of by a stranger who not only pretended to appreciate but to possess him! A stranger, a man of evil, with monstrous ideas! A terribly strong inexhaustible man, of a magical power too; or would he otherwise have won such a mastery over Nevil?

Of course she could have shot a rejoinder, to confute him with all the force of her indignation, save that the words were tumbling about in her head like a world in disruption, which made her feel a weakness at the same time that she gloated on her capacity, as though she had an enormous army, quite overwhelming if it could but be got to move in advance. This very common condition of the silent-stricken, unused in dialectics, heightened Rosamund's disgust by causing her to suppose that Nevil had been similarly silenced, in his case vanquished, captured, ruined; and he dwindled in her estimation for a moment or two. She felt that among a sisterhood of gossips she would soon have found her voice, and struck down the demagogue's audacious sophisms: not that they affected her in the slightest degree for her own sake.

Shrapnel might think what he liked, and say what he liked, as far as she was concerned, apart from the man she loved. Rosamund went through these emotions altogether on Nevil's behalf, and longed for her affirmatizing inspiring sisterhood until the thought of them threw another shade on him.

What champion was she to look to? To whom but to Mr. Everard Romfrey?

It was with a spasm of delighted reflection that she hit on Mr. Romfrey. He was like a discovery to her. With his strength and skill, his robust common sense and rough shrewd wit, his prompt comparisons, his chivalry, his love of combat, his old knightly blood, was not he a match, and an overmatch, for the ramping Radical who had tangled Nevil in his rough snares? She ran her mind over Mr. Romfrey's virtues, down even to his towering height and breadth. Could she but once draw these two giants into collision in Nevil's presence, she was sure it would save him. The method of doing it she did not stop to consider: she enjoyed her triumph in the idea.

Page 2328

Meantime she had passed from Dr. Shrapnel to Miss Denham, and carried on a conversation becomingly.

Tea had been made in the garden, and she had politely sipped half a cup, which involved no step inside the guilty house, and therefore no distress to her antagonism. The sun descended. She heard the doctor reciting. Could it be poetry? In her imagination the sombre hues surrounding an incendiary opposed that bright spirit. She listened, smiling incredulously. Miss Denham could interpret looks, and said, 'Dr. Shrapnel is very fond of those verses.'

Rosamund's astonishment caused her to say, 'Are they his own?'—a piece of satiric innocency at which Miss Denham laughed softly as she answered, 'No.'

Rosamund pleaded that she had not heard them with any distinctness.

'Are they written by the gentleman at his side?'

'Mr. Lydiard? No. He writes, but the verses are not his.'

'Does he know—has he met Captain Beauchamp?'

'Yes, once. Captain Beauchamp has taken a great liking to his works.'

Rosamund closed her eyes, feeling that she was in a nest that had determined to appropriate Nevil. But at any rate there was the hope and the probability that this Mr. Lydiard of the pen had taken a long start of Nevil in the heart of Miss Denham: and struggling to be candid, to ensure some meditative satisfaction, Rosamund admitted to herself that the girl did not appear to be one of the wanton giddy-pated pusses who play two gentlemen or more on their line. Appearances, however, could be deceptive: never pretend to know a girl by her face, was one of Rosamund's maxims.

She was next informed of Dr. Shrapnel's partiality for music toward the hour of sunset. Miss Denham mentioned it, and the doctor, presently sauntering up, invited Rosamund to a seat on a bench near the open window of the drawing-room. He nodded to his ward to go in.

'I am a fire-worshipper, ma'am,' he said. 'The God of day is the father of poetry, medicine, music: our best friend. See him there! My Jenny will spin a thread from us to him over the millions of miles, with one touch of the chords, as quick as he shoots a beam on us. Ay! on her wretched tinkler called a piano, which tries at the whole orchestra and murders every instrument in the attempt. But it's convenient, like our modern civilization—a taming and a diminishing of individuals for an insipid harmony!'

'You surely do not object to the organ?—I fear I cannot wait, though,' said Rosamund.

Miss Denham entreated her. ’Oh! do, madam. Not to hear me—I am not so perfect a player that I should wish it—but to see him. Captain Beauchamp may now be coming at any instant.’

Mr. Lydiard added, ’I have an appointment with him here for this evening.’

Page 2329

‘You build a cathedral of sound in the organ,’ said Dr. Shrapnel, casting out a league of leg as he sat beside his only half-persuaded fretful guest. ’You subject the winds to serve you; that’s a gain. You do actually accomplish a resonant imitation of the various instruments; they sing out as your two hands command them—trumpet, flute, dulcimer, hautboy, drum, storm, earthquake, ethereal quire; you have them at your option. But tell me of an organ in the open air? The sublimity would vanish, ma’am, both from the notes and from the structure, because accessories and circumstances produce its chief effects. Say that an organ is a despotism, just as your piano is the Constitutional bourgeois. Match them with the trained orchestral band of skilled individual performers, indoors or out, where each grasps his instrument, and each relies on his fellow with confidence, and an unrivalled concord comes of it. That is our republic each one to his work; all in union! There’s the motto for us! Then you have music, harmony, the highest, fullest, finest! Educate your men to form a band, you shame dexterous trickery and imitation sounds. Then for the difference of real instruments from clever shams! Oh, ay, one will set your organ going; that is, one in front, with his couple of panting air-pumpers behind—his ministers!’ Dr. Shrapnel laughed at some undefined mental image, apparently careless of any laughing companionship. ’One will do it for you, especially if he’s born to do it. Born!’ A slap of the knee reported what seemed to be an immensely contemptuous sentiment. ’But free mouths blowing into brass and wood, ma’am, beat your bellows and your whifflers; your artificial choruses—crash, crash! your unanimous plebiscitums! Beat them? There’s no contest: we’re in another world; we’re in the sun’s world,—yonder!’

Miss Denham’s opening notes on the despised piano put a curb on the doctor. She began a Mass of Mozart’s, without the usual preliminary rattle of the keys, as of a crier announcing a performance, straight to her task, for which Rosamund thanked her, liking that kind of composed simplicity: she thanked her more for cutting short the doctor’s fanatical nonsense. It was perceptible to her that a species of mad metaphor had been wriggling and tearing its passage through a thorn-bush in his discourse, with the furious urgency of a sheep in a panic; but where the ostensible subject ended and the metaphor commenced, and which was which at the conclusion, she found it difficult to discern—much as the sheep would, be when he had left his fleece behind him. She could now have said, ‘Silly old man!’

Dr. Shrapnel appeared most placable. He was gazing at his Authority in the heavens, tangled among gold clouds and purple; his head bent acutely on one side, and his eyes upturned in dim speculation. His great feet planted on their heels faced him, suggesting the stocks; his arms hung loose. Full many a hero of the alehouse, anciently amenable to leg-and-foot imprisonment in the grip of the parish, has presented as respectable an air. His forelock straggled as it willed.

Page 2330

Rosamund rose abruptly as soon as the terminating notes of the Mass had been struck.

Dr. Shrapnel seemed to be concluding his devotions before he followed her example.

‘There, ma’am, you have a telegraphic system for the soul,’ he said. ’It is harder work to travel from this place to this’ (he pointed at ear and breast) ‘than from here to yonder’ (a similar indication traversed the distance between earth and sun). ’Man’s aim has hitherto been to keep men from having a soul for this world: he takes it for something infernal. He?—I mean, they that hold power. They shudder to think the conservatism of the earth will be shaken by a change; they dread they won’t get men with souls to fetch and carry, dig, root, mine, for them. Right!—what then? Digging and mining will be done; so will harping and singing. But then we have a natural optimacy! Then, on the one hand, we whip the man-beast and the man-sloth; on the other, we seize that old fatted iniquity—that tyrant! that tempter! that legitimated swindler cursed of Christ! that palpable Satan whose name is Capital! by the neck, and have him disgorging within three gasps of his life. He is the villain! Let him live, for he too comes of blood and bone. He shall not grind the faces of the poor and helpless—that’s all.’

The comicality of her having such remarks addressed to her provoked a smile on Rosamund’s lips.

‘Don’t go at him like Samson blind,’ said Mr. Lydiard; and Miss Denham, who had returned, begged her guardian to entreat the guest to stay.

She said in an undertone, ’I am very anxious you should see Captain Beauchamp, madam.’

‘I too; but he will write, and I really can wait no longer,’ Rosamund replied, in extreme apprehension lest a certain degree of pressure should overbear her repugnance to the doctor’s dinner-table. Miss Denham’s look was fixed on her; but, whatever it might mean, Rosamund’s endurance was at an end. She was invited to dine; she refused. She was exceedingly glad to find herself on the high-road again, with a prospect of reaching Steynham that night; for it was important that she should not have to confess a visit to Bevisham now when she had so little of favourable to tell Mr. Everard Romfrey of his chosen nephew. Whether she had acted quite wisely in not remaining to see Nevil, was an agitating question that had to be silenced by an appeal to her instincts of repulsion, and a further appeal for justification of them to her imaginary sisterhood of gossips. How could she sit and eat, how pass an evening in that house, in the society of that man? Her tuneful chorus cried, ‘How indeed.’ Besides, it would have offended Mr. Romfrey to hear that she had done so. Still she could not refuse to remember Miss Denham’s marked intimations of there being a reason for Nevil’s friend to seize the chance of an immediate interview with him; and in her distress at the thought, Rosamund reluctantly, but as if compelled by necessity, ascribed the young lady’s conduct to a strong sense of personal interests.

Page 2331

’Evidently she has no desire he should run the risk of angering a rich uncle.’

This shameful suspicion was unavoidable: there was no other opiate for Rosamund’s blame of herself after letting her instincts gain the ascendancy.

It will be found a common case, that when we have yielded to our instincts, and then have to soothe conscience, we must slaughter somebody, for a sacrificial offering to our sense of comfort.

CHAPTER XIII

A SUPERFINE CONSCIENCE

However much Mr. Everard Romfrey may have laughed at Nevil Beauchamp with his ‘banana-wreath,’ he liked the fellow for having volunteered for that African coast-service, and the news of his promotion by his admiral to the post of commander through a death vacancy, had given him an exalted satisfaction, for as he could always point to the cause of failures, he strongly appreciated success. The circumstance had offered an occasion for the new commander to hit him hard upon a matter of fact. Beauchamp had sent word of his advance in rank, but requested his uncle not to imagine him wearing an additional epaulette; and he corrected the infallible gentleman’s error (which had of course been reported to him when he was dreaming of Renee, by Mrs. Culling) concerning a lieutenant’s shoulder decorations, most gravely; informing him of the anchor on the lieutenant’s pair of epaulettes, and the anchor and star on a commander’s, and the crown on a captain’s, with a well-feigned solicitousness to save his uncle from blundering further. This was done in the dry neat manner which Mr. Romfrey could feel to be his own turned on him.

He began to conceive a vague respect for the fellow who had proved him wrong upon a matter of fact. Beauchamp came from Africa rather worn by the climate, and immediately obtained the command of the Ariadne corvette, which had been some time in commission in the Mediterranean, whither he departed, without visiting Steynham; allowing Rosamund to think him tenacious of his wrath as well as of love. Mr. Romfrey considered him to be insatiable for service. Beauchamp, during his absence, had shown himself awake to the affairs of his country once only, in an urgent supplication he had forwarded for all his uncle’s influence to be used to get him appointed to the first vacancy in Robert Hall’s naval brigade, then forming a part of our handful in insurgent India. The fate of that chivalrous Englishman, that born sailor-warrior, that truest of heroes, imperishable in the memory of those who knew him, and in our annals, young though he was when death took him, had wrung from Nevil Beauchamp such a letter of tears as to make Mr. Romfrey believe the naval crown of glory his highest ambition. Who on earth could have guessed him to be bothering his head about politics all the while! Or was the whole stupid business a freak of the moment?

Page 2332

It became necessary for Mr. Romfrey to contemplate his eccentric nephew in the light of a mannikin once more. Consequently he called to mind, and bade Rosamund Culling remember, that he had foreseen and had predicted the mounting of Nevil Beauchamp on his political horse one day or another; and perhaps the earlier the better. And a donkey could have sworn that when he did mount he would come galloping in among the Radical rough-riders. Letters were pouring upon Steynham from men and women of Romfrey blood and relationship concerning the positive tone of Radicalism in the commander's address. Everard laughed at them. As a practical man, his objection lay against the poor fool's choice of the peccant borough of Bevisham. Still, in view of the needfulness of his learning wisdom, and rapidly, the disbursement of a lot of his money, certain to be required by Bevisham's electors, seemed to be the surest method for quickening his wits. Thus would he be acting as his own chirurgeon, gaily practising phlebotomy on his person to cure him of his fever. Too much money was not the origin of the fever in Nevil's case, but he had too small a sense of the value of what he possessed, and the diminishing stock would be likely to cry out shrilly.

To this effect, never complaining that Nevil Beauchamp had not come to him to take counsel with him, the high-minded old gentleman talked. At the same time, while indulging in so philosophical a picture of himself as was presented by a Romfrey mildly accounting for events and smoothing them under the infliction of an offence, he could not but feel that Nevil had challenged him: such was the reading of it; and he waited for some justifiable excitement to fetch him out of the magnanimous mood, rather in the image of an angler, it must be owned.

'Nevil understands that I am not going to pay a farthing of his expenses in Bevisham?' he said to Mrs. Culling.

She replied blandly and with innocence, 'I have not seen him, sir.'

He nodded. At the next mention of Nevil between them, he asked, 'Where is it he's lying perdu, ma'am?'

'I fancy in that town, in Bevisham.'

'At the Liberal, Radical, hotel?'

'I dare say; some place; I am not certain . . . .'

'The rascal doctor's house there? Shrapnel's?'

'Really . . . I have not seen him.'

'Have you heard from him?'

'I have had a letter; a short one.'

‘Where did he date his letter from?’

‘From Bevisham.’

‘From what house?’

Rosamund glanced about for a way of escaping the question. There was none but the door. She replied, ‘From Dr. Shrapnel’s.’

‘That’s the Anti-Game-Law agitator.’

’You do not imagine, sir, that Nevil subscribes to every thing the horrid man agitates for?’

‘You don’t like the man, ma’am?’

‘I detest him.’

‘Ha! So you have seen Shrapnel?’

Page 2333

’Only for a moment; a moment or two. I cannot endure him. I am sure I have reason.’

Rosamund flushed exceedingly red. The visit to Dr. Shrapnel’s house was her secret, and the worming of it out made her feel guilty, and that feeling revived and heated her antipathy to the Radical doctor.

‘What reason?’ said Mr. Romfrey, freshening at her display of colour.

She would not expose Nevil to the accusation of childishness by confessing her positive reason, so she answered, ’The man is a kind of man . . . I was not there long; I was glad to escape. He . . .’ she hesitated: for in truth it was difficult to shape the charge against him, and the effort to be reticent concerning Nevil, and communicative, now that he had been spoken of, as to the detested doctor, reduced her to some confusion. She was also fatally anxious to be in the extreme degree conscientious, and corrected and modified her remarks most suspiciously.

‘Did he insult you, ma’am?’ Mr. Romfrey inquired.

She replied hastily, ’Oh no. He may be a good man in his way. He is one of those men who do not seem to think a woman may have opinions. He does not scruple to outrage those we hold. I am afraid he is an infidel. His ideas of family duties and ties, and his manner of expressing himself, shocked me, that is all. He is absurd. I dare say there is no harm in him, except for those who are so unfortunate as to fall under his influence—-and that, I feel sure, cannot be permanent. He could not injure me personally. He could not offend me, I mean. Indeed, I have nothing whatever to say against him, as far as I . . .’

‘Did he fail to treat you as a lady, ma’am?’

Rosamund was getting frightened by the significant pertinacity of her lord.

‘I am sure, sir, he meant no harm.’

‘Was the man uncivil to you, ma’am?’ came the emphatic interrogation.

She asked herself, had Dr. Shrapnel been uncivil toward her? And so conscientious was she, that she allowed the question to be debated in her mind for half a minute, answering then, ’No, not uncivil. I cannot exactly explain . . . . He certainly did not intend to be uncivil. He is only an unpolished, vexatious man; enormously tall.’

Mr. Romfrey ejaculated, ‘Ha! humph!’

His view of Dr. Shrapnel was taken from that instant. It was, that this enormously big blustering agitator against the preservation of birds, had behaved rudely toward the lady officially the chief of his household, and might be considered in the light of an adversary

one would like to meet. The size of the man increased his aspect of villany, which in return added largely to his giant size. Everard Romfrey's mental eye could perceive an attractiveness about the man little short of magnetic; for he thought of him so much that he had to think of what was due to his pacifical disposition (deeply believed in by him) to spare himself the trouble of a visit to Bevisham.

Page 2334

The young gentleman whom he regarded as the Radical doctor's dupe, fell in for a share of his view of the doctor, and Mr. Romfrey became less fitted to observe Nevil Beauchamp's doings with the Olympian gravity he had originally assumed.

The extreme delicacy of Rosamund's conscience was fretted by a remorseful doubt of her having conveyed a just impression of Dr. Shrapnel, somewhat as though the fine sleek coat of it were brushed the wrong way. Reflection warned her that her deliberative intensely sincere pause before she responded to Mr. Romfrey's last demand, might have implied more than her words. She consoled herself with the thought that it was the dainty susceptibility of her conscientiousness which caused these noble qualms, and so deeply does a refined nature esteem the gift, that her pride in it helped her to overlook her moral perturbation. She was consoled, moreover, up to the verge of triumph in her realization of the image of a rivalling and excelling power presented by Mr. Romfrey, though it had frightened her at the time. Let not Dr. Shrapnel come across him! She hoped he would not. Ultimately she could say to herself, 'Perhaps I need not have been so annoyed with the horrid man.' It was on Nevil's account. Shrapnel's contempt of the claims of Nevil's family upon him was actually a piece of impudence, impudently expressed, if she remembered correctly. And Shrapnel was a black malignant, the foe of the nation's Constitution, deserving of punishment if ever man was; with his ridiculous metaphors, and talk of organs and pianos, orchestras and despotisms, and flying to the sun! How could Nevil listen to the creature! Shrapnel must be a shameless, hypocrite to mask his wickedness from one so clear-sighted as Nevil, and no doubt he indulged in his impudence out of wanton pleasure in it. His business was to catch young gentlemen of family, and to turn them against their families, plainly. That was thinking the best of him. No doubt he had his objects to gain. 'He might have been as impudent as he liked to me; I would have pardoned him!' Rosamund exclaimed. Personally, you see, she was generous. On the whole, knowing Everard Romfrey as she did, she wished that she had behaved, albeit perfectly discreet in her behaviour, and conscientiously just, a shade or two differently. But the evil was done.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LEADING ARTICLE AND MR. TIMOTHY TURBOT

Nevil declined to come to Steynham, clearly owing to a dread of hearing Dr. Shrapnel abused, as Rosamund judged by the warmth of his written eulogies of the man, and an ensuing allusion to Game. He said that he had not made up his mind as to the Game Laws. Rosamund mentioned the fact to Mr. Romfrey. 'So we may stick by our licences to shoot to-morrow,' he rejoined. Of a letter that he also had received from Nevil, he did not speak. She hinted at it, and he stared. He would have deemed it as vain

Page 2335

a subject to discourse of India, or Continental affairs, at a period when his house was full for the opening day of sport, and the expectation of keeping up his renown for great bags on that day so entirely occupied his mind. Good shots were present who had contributed to the fame of Steynham on other opening days. Birds were plentiful and promised not to be too wild. He had the range of the Steynham estate in his eye, dotted with covers; and after Steynham, Holdesbury, which had never yielded him the same high celebrity, but both lay mapped out for action under the profound calculations of the strategist, ready to show the skill of the field tactician. He could not attend to Nevil. Even the talk of the forthcoming Elections, hardly to be avoided at his table, seemed a puerile distraction. Ware the foe of his partridges and pheasants, be it man or vermin! The name of Shrapnel was frequently on the tongue of Captain Baskelett. Rosamund heard him, in her room, and his derisive shouts of laughter over it. Cecil was a fine shot, quite as fond of the pastime as his uncle, and always in favour with him while sport stalked the land. He was in gallant spirits, and Rosamund, brooding over Nevil's fortunes, and sitting much alone, as she did when there were guests in the house, gave way to her previous apprehensions. She touched on them to Mr. Stukely Culbrett, her husband's old friend, one of those happy men who enjoy perceptions without opinions, and are not born to administer comfort to other than themselves. As far as she could gather, he fancied Nevil Beauchamp was in danger of something, but he delivered his mind only upon circumstances and characters: Nevil risked his luck, Cecil knew his game, Everard Romfrey was the staunchest of mankind: Stukely had nothing further to say regarding the situation. She asked him what he thought, and he smiled. Could a reasonable head venture to think anything in particular? He repeated the amazed, 'You don't say so' of Colonel Halkett, on hearing the name of the new Liberal candidate for Bevisham at the dinner-table, together with some of Cecil's waggish embroidery upon the theme.

Rosamund exclaimed angrily, 'Oh! if I had been there he would not have dared.'

'Why not be there?' said Stukely. 'You have had your choice for a number of years.'

She shook her head, reddening.

But supposing that she had greater privileges than were hers now? The idea flashed. A taint of personal pique, awakened by the fancied necessity for putting her devotedness to Nevil to proof, asked her if she would then be the official housekeeper to whom Captain Baskelett bowed low with affected respect and impertinent affability, ironically praising her abroad as a wonder among women, that could at one time have played the deuce in the family, had she chosen to do so.

'Just as you like,' Mr. Culbrett remarked. It was his ironical habit of mind to believe that the wishes of men and women—women as well as men—were expressed by their utterances.

Page 2336

‘But speak of Nevil to Colonel Halkett,’ said Rosamund, earnestly carrying on what was in her heart. ’Persuade the colonel you do not think Nevil foolish—not more than just a little impetuous. I want that marriage to come off! Not on account of her wealth. She is to inherit a Welsh mine from her uncle, you know, besides being an only child. Recall what Nevil was during the war. Miss Halkett has not forgotten it, I am sure, and a good word for him from a man of the world would, I am certain, counteract Captain Baskelett’s—are they designs? At any rate, you can if you like help Nevil with the colonel. I am convinced they are doing him a mischief. Colonel Halkett has bought an estate—and what a misfortune that is!—close to Bevisham. I fancy he is Toryish. Will you not speak to him? At my request? I am so helpless I could cry.

‘Fancy you have no handkerchief,’ said Mr. Culbrett, ’and give up scheming, pray. One has only to begin to scheme, to shorten life to half-a-dozen hops and jumps. I could say to the colonel, “Young Beauchamp’s a political cub: he ought to have a motherly wife.”’

‘Yes, yes, you are right; don’t speak to him at all,’ said Rosamund, feeling that there must be a conspiracy to rob her of her proud independence, since not a soul could be won to spare her from taking some energetic step, if she would be useful to him she loved.

Colonel Halkett was one of the guests at Steynham who knew and respected her, and he paid her a visit and alluded to Nevil’s candidature, apparently not thinking much the worse of him. ’We can’t allow him to succeed,’ he said, and looked for a smiling approval of such natural opposition, which Rosamund gave him readily after he had expressed the hope that Nevil Beauchamp would take advantage of his proximity to Mount Laurels during the contest to try the hospitality of the house. ’He won’t mind meeting his uncle?’ The colonel’s eyes twinkled. ’My daughter has engaged Mr. Romfrey and Captain Baskelett to come to us when they have shot Holdesbury.’

And Captain Baskelett! thought Rosamund; her jealousy whispering that the mention of his name close upon Cecilia Halkett’s might have a nuptial signification.

She was a witness from her window—a prisoner’s window, her ’eager heart could have termed it—of a remarkable ostentation of cordiality between the colonel and Cecil, in the presence of Mr. Romfrey. Was it his humour to conspire to hand Miss Halkett to Cecil, and then to show Nevil the prize he had forfeited by his folly? The three were on the lawn a little before Colonel Halkett’s departure. The colonel’s arm was linked with Cecil’s while they conversed. Presently the latter received his afternoon’s letters, and a newspaper. He soon had the paper out at a square stretch, and sprightly information for the other two was visible in his crowing throat. Mr. Romfrey raised the gun from his shoulder-pad, and grounded it. Colonel

Page 2337

Halkett wished to peruse the matter with his own eyes, but Cecil could not permit it; he must read it aloud for them, and he suited his action to his sentences. Had Rosamund been accustomed to leading articles which are the composition of men of an imposing vocabulary, she would have recognized and as good as read one in Cecil's gestures as he tilted his lofty stature forward and back, marking his commas and semicolons with flapping of his elbows, and all but doubling his body at his periods. Mr. Romfrey had enough of it half-way down the column; his head went sharply to left and right. Cecil's peculiar foppish slicing down of his hand pictured him protesting that there was more and finer of the inimitable stuff to follow. The end of the scene exhibited the paper on the turf, and Colonel Halkett's hand on Cecil's shoulder, Mr. Romfrey nodding some sort of acquiescence over the muzzle of his gun, whether reflective or positive Rosamund could not decide. She sent out a footman for the paper, and was presently communing with its eloquent large type, quite unable to perceive where the comicality or the impropriety of it lay, for it would have struck her that never were truer things of Nevil Beauchamp better said in the tone befitting them. This perhaps was because she never heard fervid praises of him, or of anybody, delivered from the mouth, and it is not common to hear Englishmen phrasing great eulogies of one another. Still, as a rule, they do not object to have it performed in that region of our national eloquence, the Press, by an Irishman or a Scotchman. And what could there be to warrant Captain Baskelett's malicious derision, and Mr. Romfrey's nodding assent to it, in an article where all was truth?

The truth was mounted on an unusually high wind. It was indeed a leading article of a banner-like bravery, and the unrolling of it was designed to stir emotions. Beauchamp was the theme. Nevil had it under his eyes earlier than Cecil. The paper was brought into his room with the beams of day, damp from the presses of the Bevisham Gazette, exactly opposite to him in the White Hart Hotel, and a glance at the paragraphs gave him a lively ardour to spring to his feet. What writing! He was uplifted as 'The heroical Commander Beauchamp, of the Royal Navy,' and 'Commander Beauchamp, R.N., a gentleman of the highest connections': he was 'that illustrious Commander Beauchamp, of our matchless, navy, who proved on every field of the last glorious war of this country that the traditional valour of the noble and indomitable blood transmitted to his veins had lost none of its edge and weight since the battle-axes of the Lords de Romfrey, ever to the fore, clove the skulls of our national enemy on the wide and fertile campaigns of France.' This was pageantry.

Page 2338

There was more of it. Then the serious afflatus of the article condescended, as it were, to blow a shrill and well-known whistle:—the study of the science of navigation made by Commander Beauchamp, R.N., was cited for a jocose warranty of a seaman's aptness to assist in steering the Vessel of the State. After thus heeling over, to tip a familiar wink to the multitude, the leader tone resumed its fit deportment. Commander Beauchamp, in responding to the invitation of the great and united Liberal party of the borough of Bevisham, obeyed the inspirations of genius, the dictates of humanity, and what he rightly considered the paramount duty, as it is the proudest ambition, of the citizen of a free country.

But for an occasional drop and bump of the sailing gasbag upon catch-words of enthusiasm, which are the rhetoric of the merely windy, and a collapse on a poetic line, which too often signalizes the rhetorician's emptiness of his wind, the article was eminent for flight, sweep, and dash, and sailed along far more grandly than ordinary provincial organs for the promoting or seconding of public opinion, that are as little to be compared with the mighty metropolitan as are the fife and bugle boys practising on their instruments round melancholy outskirts of garrison towns with the regimental marching full band under the presidency of its drum-major. No signature to the article was needed for Bevisham to know who had returned to the town to pen it. Those long-stretching sentences, comparable to the very ship Leviathan, spanning two Atlantic billows, appertained to none but the renowned Mr. Timothy Turbot, of the Corn Law campaigns, Reform agitations, and all manifestly popular movements requiring the heaven-endowed man of speech, an interpreter of multitudes, and a prompter. Like most men who have little to say, he was an orator in print, but that was a poor medium for him—his body without his fire. Mr. Timothy's place was the platform. A wise discernment, or else a lucky accident (for he came hurriedly from the soil of his native isle, needing occupation), set him on that side in politics which happened to be making an established current and strong headway. Oratory will not work against the stream, or on languid tides. Driblets of movements that allowed the world to doubt whether they were so much movements as illusions of the optics, did not suit his genius. Thus he was a Liberal, no Radical, fountain. Liberalism had the attraction for the orator of being the active force in politics, between two passive opposing bodies, the aspect of either of which it can assume for a menace to the other, Toryish as against Radicals; a trifle red in the eyes of the Tory. It can seem to lean back on the Past; it can seem to be amorous of the Future. It is actually the thing of the Present and its urgencies, therefore popular, pouring forth the pure waters of moderation, strong in their copiousness. Delicious and rapturous effects are to be produced in the flood of a Liberal oration

Page 2339

by a chance infusion of the fierier spirit, a flavour of Radicalism. That is the thing to set an audience bounding and quirking. Whereas if you commence by tilling a Triton pitcher full of the neat liquor upon them, 'you have to resort to the natural element for the orator's art of variation, you are diluted—and that's bathos, to quote Mr. Timothy. It was a fine piece of discernment in him. Let Liberalism be your feast, Radicalism your spice. And now and then, off and on, for a change, for diversion, for a new emotion, just for half an hour or so-now and then the Sunday coat of Toryism will give you an air. You have only to complain of the fit, to release your shoulders in a trice. Mr. Timothy felt for his art as poets do for theirs, and considered what was best adapted to speaking, purely to speaking. Upon no creature did he look with such contempt as upon Dr. Shrapnel, whose loose disjunct audiences he was conscious he could, giving the doctor any start he liked, whirl away from him and have compact, enchained, at his first flourish; yea, though they were composed of 'the poor man,' with a stomach for the political distillery fit to drain relishingly every private bogside or mountain-side tap in old Ireland in its best days—the illicit, you understand.

Further, to quote Mr. Timothy's points of view, the Radical orator has but two notes, and one is the drawling pathetic, and the other is the ultra-furious; and the effect of the former we liken to the English working man's wife's hob-set queasy brew of well-meant villany, that she calls by the innocent name of tea; and the latter is to be blown, asks to be blown, and never should be blown without at least seeming to be blown, with an accompaniment of a house on fire. Sir, we must adapt ourselves to our times. Perhaps a spark or two does lurk about our house, but we have vigilant watchmen in plenty, and the house has been pretty fairly insured. Shrieking in it is an annoyance to the inmates, nonsensical; weeping is a sickly business. The times are against Radicalism to the full as much as great oratory is opposed to extremes. These drag the orator too near to the matter. So it is that one Radical speech is amazingly like another—they all have the earth-spots. They smell, too; they smell of brimstone. Soaring is impossible among that faction; but this they can do, they can furnish the Tory his opportunity to soar. When hear you a thrilling Tory speech that carries the country with it, save when the incendiary Radical has shrieked? If there was envy in the soul of Timothy, it was addressed to the fine occasions offered to the Tory speaker for vindicating our ancient principles and our sacred homes. He admired the tone to be assumed for that purpose: it was a good note. Then could the Tory, delivering at the right season the Shakesperian 'This England . . .' and Byronic—'The inviolate Island . . .' shake the frame, as though smiting it with the tail of the gymnotus electricus.

Page 2340

Ah, and then could he thump out his Horace, the Tory's mentor and his cordial, with other great ancient comic and satiric poets, his old Port of the classical cellarage, reflecting veneration upon him who did but name them to an audience of good dispositions. The Tory possessed also an innate inimitably easy style of humour, that had the long reach, the jolly lordly indifference, the comfortable masterfulness, of the whip of a four-in-hand driver, capable of flicking and stinging, and of being ironically caressing. Timothy appreciated it, for he had winced under it. No professor of Liberalism could venture on it, unless it were in the remote district of a back parlour, in the society of a cherishing friend or two, and with a slice of lemon requiring to be refloated in the glass.

But gifts of this description were of a minor order. Liberalism gave the heading cry, devoid of which parties are dogs without a scent, orators mere pump-handles. The Tory's cry was but a whistle to his pack, the Radical howled to the moon like any chained hound. And no wonder, for these parties had no established current, they were as hard-bound waters; the Radical being dyked and dammed most soundly, the Tory resembling a placid lake of the plains, fed by springs and no confluents. For such good reasons, Mr. Timothy rejoiced in the happy circumstances which had expelled him from the shores of his native isle to find a refuge and a vocation in Manchester at a period when an orator happened to be in request because dozens were wanted. That centre of convulsions and source of streams possessed the statistical orator, the reasoning orator, and the inspired; with others of quality; and yet it had need of an ever-ready spontaneous imperturbable speaker, whose bubbling generalizations and ability to beat the drum humorous could swing halls of meeting from the grasp of an enemy, and then ascend on incalescent adjectives to the popular idea of the sublime. He was the artistic orator of Corn Law Repeal—the Manchester flood, before which time Whigs were, since which they have walked like spectral antediluvians, or floated as dead canine bodies that are sucked away on the ebb of tides and flung back on the flow, ignorant whether they be progressive or retrograde. Timothy Turbot assisted in that vast effort. It should have elevated him beyond the editorship of a country newspaper. Why it did not do so his antagonists pretended to know, and his friends would smile to hear. The report was that he worshipped the nymph Whisky.

Timothy's article had plucked Beauchamp out of bed; Beauchamp's card in return did the same for him.

Page 2341

’Commander Beauchamp? I am heartily glad to make your acquaintance, sir; I’ve been absent, at work, on the big business we have in common, I rejoice to say, and am behind my fellow townsmen in this pleasure and lucky I slept here in my room above, where I don’t often sleep, for the row of the machinery—it ’s like a steamer that won’t go, though it’s always starting ye,’ Mr. Timothy said in a single breath, upon entering the back office of the Gazette, like unto those accomplished violinists who can hold on the bow to finger an incredible number of notes, and may be imaged as representing slow paternal Time, that rolls his capering dot-headed generation of mortals over the wheel, hundreds to the minute. ’You’ll excuse my not shaving, sir, to come down to your summons without an extra touch to the neck-band.’

Beauchamp beheld a middle-sized round man, with loose lips and pendant indigo jowl, whose eyes twinkled watery, like pebbles under the shore-wash, and whose neck-band needed an extra touch from fingers other than his own.

‘I am sorry to have disturbed you so early,’ he replied.

’Not a bit, Commander Beauchamp, not a bit, sir. Early or late, and ay ready—with the Napiers; I’ll wash, I’ll wash.’

’I came to speak to you of this article of yours on me. They tell me in the office that you are the writer. Pray don’t “Commander” me so much.—It’s not customary, and I object to it.’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ Timothy acquiesced.

’And for the future, Mr. Turbot, please to be good enough not to allude in print to any of my performances here and there. Your intentions are complimentary, but it happens that I don’t like a public patting on the back.’

‘No, and that’s true,’ said Timothy.

His appreciative and sympathetic agreement with these sharp strictures on the article brought Beauchamp to a stop.

Timothy waited for him; then, smoothing his prickly cheek, remarked: ’If I’d guessed your errand, Commander Beauchamp, I’d have called in the barber before I came down, just to make myself decent for a ’first introduction.’

Beauchamp was not insensible to the slyness of the poke at him. ’You see, I come to the borough unknown to it, and as quietly as possible, and I want to be taken as a politician,’ he continued, for the sake of showing that he had sufficient to say to account for his hasty and peremptory summons of the writer of that article to his presence. ’It’s excessively disagreeable to have one’s family lugged into notice in a newspaper—-especially if they are of different politics. I feel it.’

All would, sir,’ said Timothy.

‘Then why the deuce did you do it?’

Page 2342

Timothy drew a lading of air into his lungs. 'Politics, Commander Beauchamp, involves the doing of lots of disagreeable things to ourselves and our relations; it 's positive. I'm a soldier of the Great Campaign: and who knows it better than I, sir? It's climbing the greasy pole for the leg o' mutton, that makes the mother's heart ache for the jacket and the nether garments she mended neatly, if she didn't make them. Mutton or no mutton, there's grease for certain! Since it's sure we can't be disconnected from the family, the trick is to turn the misfortune to a profit; and allow me the observation, that an old family, sir, and a high and titled family, is not to be despised for a background of a portrait in naval uniform, with medal and clasps, and some small smoke of powder clearing off over there:—that's if we're to act sagaciously in introducing an unknown candidate to a borough that has a sneaking liking for the kind of person, more honour to it. I'm a political veteran, sir; I speak from experience. We must employ our weapons, every one of them, and all off the grindstone.'

'Very well,' said Beauchamp. 'Now understand; you are not in future to employ the weapons, as you call them, that I have objected to.'

Timothy gaped slightly.

'Whatever you will, but no puffery,' Beauchamp added. 'Can I by any means arrest—-purchase—is it possible, tell me, to lay an embargo—stop to-day's issue of the Gazette?'

'No more—than the bite of a mad dog,' Timothy replied, before he had considered upon the monstrous nature of the proposal.

Beauchamp humphed, and tossed his head. The simile of the dog struck him with intense effect.

'There'd be a second edition,' said Timothy, 'and you might buy up that. But there'll be a third, and you may buy up that; but there'll be a fourth and a fifth, and so on ad infinitum, with the advertisement of the sale of the foregoing creating a demand like a rageing thirst in a shipwreck, in Bligh's boat, in the tropics. I'm afraid, Com—Captain Beauchamp, sir, there's no stopping the Press while the people have an appetite for it —and a Company's at the back of it.'

'Pooh, don't talk to me in that way; all I complain of is the figure you have made of me,' said Beauchamp, fetching him smartly out of his nonsense; 'and all I ask of you is not to be at it again. Who would suppose from reading an article like that, that I am a candidate with a single political idea!'

'An article like that,' said Timothy, winking, and a little surer of his man now that he suggested his possession of ideas, 'an article like that is the best cloak you can put on a candidate with too many of 'em, Captain Beauchamp. I'll tell you, sir; I came, I heard of

your candidature, I had your sketch, the pattern of ye, before me, and I was told that Dr. Shrapnel fathered you politically. There was my brief! I had to persuade our constituents that you, Commander Beauchamp

Page 2343

of the Royal Navy, and the great family of the Earls of Romfrey, one of the heroes of the war, and the recipient of a Royal Humane Society's medal for saving life in Bevisham waters, were something more than the Radical doctor's political son; and, sir, it was to this end, aim, and object, that I wrote the article I am not ashamed to avow as mine, and I do so, sir, because of the solitary merit it has of serving your political interests as the liberal candidate for Bevisham by counteracting the unpopularity of Dr. Shrapnel's name, on the one part, and of reviving the credit due to your valour and high bearing on the field of battle in defence of your country, on the other, so that Bevisham may apprehend, in spite of party distinctions, that it has the option, and had better seize upon the honour, of making a M.P. of a hero.'

Beauchamp interposed hastily: 'Thank you, thank you for the best of intentions. But let me tell you I am prepared to stand or fall with Dr. Shrapnel, and be hanged to all that humbug.'

Timothy rubbed his hands with an abstracted air of washing. 'Well, commander, well, sir, they say a candidate's to be humoured in his infancy, for he has to do all the humouring before he's many weeks old at it; only there's the fact!—he soon finds out he has to pay for his first fling, like the son of a family sowing his oats to reap his Jews. Credit me, sir, I thought it prudent to counteract a bit of an apothecary's shop odour in the junior Liberal candidate's address. I found the town sniffing, they scented Shrapnel in the composition.'

'Every line of it was mine,' said Beauchamp.

'Of course it was, and the address was admirably worded, sir, I make bold to say it to your face; but most indubitably it threatened powerful drugs for weak stomachs, and it blew cold on votes, which are sensitive plants like nothing else in botany.'

'If they are only to be got by abandoning principles, and by anything but honesty in stating them, they may go,' said Beauchamp.

'I repeat, my dear sir, I repeat, the infant candidate delights in his honesty, like the babe in its nakedness, the beautiful virgin in her innocence. So he does; but he discovers it's time for him to wear clothes in a contested election. And what's that but to preserve the outlines pretty correctly, whilst he doesn't shock and horrify the optics? A dash of conventionalism makes the whole civilized world kin, ye know. That's the truth. You must appear to be one of them, for them to choose you. After all, there's no harm in a dyer's hand; and, sir, a candidate looking at his own, when he has won the Election . . .'

'Ah, well,' said Beauchamp, swinging on his heel, 'and now I'll take my leave of you, and I apologize for bringing you down here so early. Please attend to what I have said; it's peremptory. You will give me great pleasure by dining with me to-night, at the hotel

opposite. Will you? I don’t know what kind of wine I shall be able to offer you. Perhaps you know the cellar, and may help me in that.’

Page 2344

Timothy grasped his hand, 'With pleasure, Commander Beauchamp. They have a bucellas over there that 's old, and a tolerable claret, and a Port to be inquired for under the breath, in a mysteriously intimate tone of voice, as one says, "I know of your treasure, and the corner under ground where it lies." Avoid the champagne: 'tis the banqueting wine. Ditto the sherry. One can drink them, one can drink them.'

'At a quarter to eight this evening, then,' said Nevil.

'I'll be there at the stroke of the clock, sure as the date of a bill,' said Timothy.

And it's early to guess whether you'll catch Bevisham or you won't, he reflected, as he gazed at the young gentleman crossing the road; but female Bevisham's with you, if that counts for much. Timothy confessed, that without the employment of any weapon save arrogance and a look of candour, the commander had gone some way toward catching the feminine side of himself.

CHAPTER XV

CECILIA HALKETT

Beauchamp walked down to the pier, where he took a boat for H.M.S. Isis, to see Jack Wilmore, whom he had not met since his return from his last cruise, and first he tried the efficacy of a dive in salt water, as a specific for irritation. It gave the edge to a fine appetite that he continued to satisfy while Wilmore talked of those famous dogs to which the navy has ever been going.

'We want another panic, Beauchamp,' said Lieutenant Wilmore. 'No one knows better than you what a naval man has to complain of, so I hope you'll get your Election, if only that we may reckon on a good look-out for the interests of the service. A regular Board with a permanent Lord High Admiral, and a regular vote of money to keep it up to the mark. Stick to that. Hardist has a vote in Bevisham. I think I can get one or two more. Why aren't you a Tory? No Whigs nor Liberals look after us half so well as the Tories. It's enough to break a man's heart to see the troops of dockyard workmen marching out as soon as ever a Liberal Government marches in. Then it's one of our infernal panics again, and patch here, patch there; every inch of it make-believe! I'll prove to you from examples that the humbug of Government causes exactly the same humbugging workmanship. It seems as if it were a game of "rascals all." Let them sink us! but, by heaven! one can't help feeling for the country. And I do say it's the doing of those Liberals. Skilled workmen, mind you, not to be netted again so easily. America reaps the benefit of our folly . . . . That was a lucky run of yours up the Niger; the admiral was friendly, but you deserved your luck. For God's sake, don't forget the state of our service when you're one of our cherubs up aloft, Beauchamp. This I'll say, I've never

heard a man talk about it as you used to in old midshipmite days, whole watches through—don’t you remember? on the North American station, and in the Black Sea,

Page 2345

and the Mediterranean. And that girl at Malta! I wonder what has become of her? What a beauty she was! I dare say she wasn't so fine a girl as the Armenian you unearthed on the Bosphorus, but she had something about her a fellow can't forget. That was a lovely creature coming down the hills over Granada on her mule. Ay, we've seen handsome women, Nevil Beauchamp. But you always were lucky, invariably, and I should bet on you for the Election.'

'Canvass for me, Jack,' said Beauchamp, smiling at his friend's unconscious double-skeining of subjects. 'If I turn out as good a politician as you are a seaman, I shall do. Pounce on Hardist's vote without losing a day. I would go to him, but I've missed the Halketts twice. They 're on the Otley river, at a place called Mount Laurels, and I particularly want to see the colonel. Can you give me a boat there, and come?'

'Certainly,' said Wilmore. 'I've danced there with the lady, the handsomest girl, English style, of her time. And come, come, our English style's the best. It wears best, it looks best. Foreign women . . . they're capital to flirt with. But a girl like Cecilia Halkett—one can't call her a girl, and it won't do to say Goddess, and queen and charmer are out of the question, though she's both, and angel into the bargain; but, by George! what a woman to call wife, you say; and a man attached to a woman like that never can let himself look small. No such luck for me; only I swear if I stood between a good and a bad action, the thought of that girl would keep me straight, and I've only danced with her once!'

Not long after sketching this rough presentation of the lady, with a masculine hand, Wilmore was able to point to her in person on the deck of her father's yacht, the Esperanza, standing out of Otley river. There was a gallant splendour in the vessel that threw a touch of glory on its mistress in the minds of the two young naval officers, as they pulled for her in the ship's gig.

Wilmore sang out, 'Give way, men!'

The sailors bent to their oars, and presently the schooner's head was put to the wind.

'She sees we're giving chase,' Wilmore said. 'She can't be expecting me, so it must be you. No, the colonel doesn't race her. They've only been back from Italy six months: I mean the schooner. I remember she talked of you when I had her for a partner. Yes, now I mean Miss Halkett. Blest if I think she talked of anything else. She sees us. I'll tell you what she likes: she likes yachting, she likes Italy, she likes painting, likes things old English, awfully fond of heroes. I told her a tale of one of our men saving life. "Oh!" said she, "didn't your friend Nevil Beauchamp save a man from drowning, off the guardship, in exactly the same place?" And next day she sent me a cheque for three pounds for the fellow. Steady, men! I keep her letter.'

The boat went smoothly alongside the schooner. Miss Halkett had come to the side. The oars swung fore and aft, and Beauchamp sprang on deck.

Page 2346

Wilmore had to decline Miss Halkett's invitation to him as well as his friend, and returned in his boat. He left the pair with a ruffling breeze, and a sky all sail, prepared, it seemed to him, to enjoy the most delicious you-and-I on salt water that a sailor could dream of; and placidly envying, devoid of jealousy, there was just enough of fancy quickened in Lieutenant Wilmore to give him pictures of them without disturbance of his feelings—one of the conditions of the singular visitation we call happiness, if he could have known it.

For a time his visionary eye followed them pretty correctly. So long since they had parted last! such changes in the interval! and great animation in Beauchamp's gaze, and a blush on Miss Halkett's cheeks.

She said once, 'Captain Beauchamp.' He retorted with a solemn formality. They smiled, and immediately took footing on their previous intimacy.

'How good it was of you to come twice to Mount Laurels,' said she. 'I have not missed you to-day. No address was on your card. Where are you staying in the neighbourhood? At Mr. Lespel's?'

'I'm staying at a Bevisham hotel,' said Beauchamp.

'You have not been to Steynham yet? Papa comes home from Steynham to-night.'

'Does he? Well, the Ariadne is only just paid off, and I can't well go to Steynham yet. I —' Beauchamp was astonished at the hesitation he found in himself to name it: 'I have business in Bevisham.'

'Naval business?' she remarked.

'No,' said he.

The sensitive prescience we have of a critical distaste of our proceedings is, the world is aware, keener than our intuition of contrary opinions; and for the sake of preserving the sweet outward forms of friendliness, Beauchamp was anxious not to speak of the business in Bevisham just then, but she looked and he had hesitated, so he said flatly, 'I am one of the candidates for the borough.'

'Indeed!'

'And I want the colonel to give me his vote.'

The young lady breathed a melodious 'Oh!' not condemnatory or reproachful—a sound to fill a pause. But she was beginning to reflect.

‘Italy and our English Channel are my two Poles,’ she said. ’I am constantly swaying between them. I have told papa we will not lay up the yacht while the weather holds fair. Except for the absence of deep colour and bright colour, what can be more beautiful than these green waves and that dark forest’s edge, and the garden of an island! The yachting-water here is an unrivalled lake; and if I miss colour, which I love, I remind myself that we have temperate air here, not a sun that fiends you under cover. We can have our fruits too, you see.’ One of the yachtsmen was handing her a basket of hot-house grapes, reclining beside crisp home-made loaflets. ‘This is my luncheon. Will you share it, Nevil?’

His Christian name was pleasant to hear from her lips. She held out a bunch to him.

Page 2347

‘Grapes take one back to the South,’ said he. ’How do you bear compliments? You have been in Italy some years, and it must be the South that has worked the miracle.’

‘In my growth?’ said Cecilia, smiling. ’I have grown out of my Circassian dress, Nevil.’

‘You received it, then?’

’I wrote you a letter of thanks—and abuse, for your not coming to Steynham. You may recognize these pearls.’

The pearls were round her right wrist. He looked at the blue veins.

‘They’re not pearls of price,’ he said.

‘I do not wear them to fascinate the jewellers,’ rejoined Miss Halkett. ’So you are a candidate at an Election. You still have a tinge of Africa, do you know? But you have not abandoned the navy?’

‘—Not altogether.’

’Oh! no, no: I hope not. I have heard of you, . . . but who has not? We cannot spare officers like you. Papa was delighted to hear of your promotion. Parliament!’

The exclamation was contemptuous.

‘It’s the highest we can aim at,’ Beauchamp observed meekly.

’I think I recollect you used to talk politics when you were a midshipman,’ she said. ‘You headed the aristocracy, did you not?’

‘The aristocracy wants a head,’ said Beauchamp.

‘Parliament, in my opinion, is the best of occupations for idle men,’ said she.

‘It shows that it is a little too full of them.’

‘Surely the country can go on very well without so much speech-making?’

‘It can go on very well for the rich.’

Miss Halkett tapped with her foot.

‘I should expect a Radical to talk in that way, Nevil.’

‘Take me for one.’

‘I would not even imagine it.’

‘Say Liberal, then.’

’Are you not’—her eyes opened on him largely, and narrowed from surprise to reproach, and then to pain—are you not one of us? Have you gone over to the enemy, Nevil?’

’I have taken my side, Cecilia; but we, on our side, don’t talk of an enemy.’

’Most unfortunate! We are Tories, you know, Nevil. Papa is a thorough Tory. He cannot vote for you. Indeed I have heard him say he is anxious to defeat the plots of an old Republican in Bevisham—some doctor there; and I believe he went to London to look out for a second Tory candidate to oppose to the Liberals. Our present Member is quite safe, of course. Nevil, this makes me unhappy. Do you not feel that it is playing traitor to one’s class to join those men?’

Such was the Tory way of thinking, Nevil Beauchamp said: the Tories upheld their Toryism in the place of patriotism.

Page 2348

‘But do we not owe the grandeur of the country to the Tories?’ she said, with a lovely air of conviction. ’Papa has told me how false the Whigs played the Duke in the Peninsula: ruining his supplies, writing him down, declaring, all the time he was fighting his first hard battles, that his cause was hopeless—that resistance to Napoleon was impossible. The Duke never, never had loyal support but from the Tory Government. The Whigs, papa says, absolutely preached submission to Napoleon! The Whigs, I hear, were the Liberals of those days. The two Pitts were Tories. The greatness of England has been built up by the Tories. I do and will defend them: it is the fashion to decry them now. They have the honour and safety of the country at heart. They do not play disgracefully at reductions of taxes, as the Liberals do. They have given us all our heroes. Non fu mai gloria senza invidia. They have done service enough to despise the envious mob. They never condescend to supplicate brute force for aid to crush their opponents. You feel in all they do that the instincts of gentlemen are active.’

Beauchamp bowed.

‘Do I speak too warmly?’ she asked. ’Papa and I have talked over it often, and especially of late. You will find him your delighted host and your inveterate opponent.’

‘And you?’

‘Just the same. You will have to pardon me; I am a terrible foe.’

’I declare to you, Cecilia, I would prefer having you against me to having you indifferent.’

’I wish I had not to think it right that you should be beaten. And now—can you throw off political Nevil, and be sailor Nevil? I distinguish between my old friend, and my . . .our . . .’

‘Dreadful antagonist?’

’Not so dreadful, except in the shock he gives us to find him in the opposite ranks. I am grieved. But we will finish our sail in peace. I detest controversy. I suppose, Nevil, you would have no such things as yachts? they are the enjoyments of the rich!’

He reminded her that she wished to finish her sail in peace; and he had to remind her of it more than once. Her scattered resources for argumentation sprang up from various suggestions, such as the flight of yachts, mention of the shooting season, sight of a royal palace; and adopted a continually heightened satirical form, oddly intermixed with an undisguised affectionate friendliness. Apparently she thought it possible to worry him out of his adhesion to the wrong side in politics. She certainly had no conception of the nature of his political views, for one or two extreme propositions flung to him in jest, he swallowed with every sign of a perfect facility, as if the Radical had come to regard stupendous questions as morsels barely sufficient for his daily sustenance. Cecilia

reflected that he must be playing, and as it was not a subject for play she tacitly reproved him by letting him be the last to speak of it. He may not have been susceptible to the delicate chastisement,

Page 2349

probably was not, for when he ceased it was to look on the beauty of her lowered eyelids, rather with an idea that the weight of his argument lay on them. It breathed from him; both in the department of logic and of feeling, in his plea for the poor man and his exposition of the poor man's rightful claims, he evidently imagined that he had spoken overwhelmingly; and to undeceive him in this respect, for his own good, Cecilia calmly awaited the occasion when she might show the vanity of arguments in their effort to overcome convictions. He stood up to take his leave of her, on their return to the mouth of the Otley river, unexpectedly, so that the occasion did not arrive; but on his mentioning an engagement he had to give a dinner to a journalist and a tradesman of the town of Bevisham, by way of excuse for not complying with her gentle entreaty that he would go to Mount Laurels and wait to see the colonel that evening, 'Oh! then your choice must be made irrevocably, I am sure,' Miss Halkett said, relying upon intonation and manner to convey a great deal more, and not without a minor touch of resentment for his having dragged her into the discussion of politics, which she considered as a slime wherein men hustled and tussled, no doubt worthily enough, and as became them; not however to impose the strife upon the elect ladies of earth. What gentleman ever did talk to a young lady upon the dreary topic seriously? Least of all should Nevil Beauchamp have done it. That object of her high imagination belonged to the exquisite sphere of the feminine vision of the pure poetic, and she was vexed by the discord he threw between her long-cherished dream and her unanticipated realization of him, if indeed it was he presenting himself to her in his own character, and not trifling, or not passing through a phase of young man's madness.

Possibly he might be the victim of the latter and more pardonable state, and so thinking she gave him her hand.

'Good-bye, Nevil. I may tell papa to expect you tomorrow?'

'Do, and tell him to prepare for a field-day.'

She smiled. 'A sham fight that will not win you a vote! I hope you will find your guests this evening agreeable companions.'

Beauchamp half-shrugged involuntarily. He obliterated the piece of treason toward them by saying that he hoped so; as though the meeting them, instead of slipping on to Mount Laurels with her, were an enjoyable prospect.

He was dropped by the Esperanza's boat near Otley ferry, to walk along the beach to Bevisham, and he kept eye on the elegant vessel as she glided swan-like to her moorings off Mount Laurels park through dusky merchant craft, colliers, and trawlers, loosely shaking her towering snow-white sails, unchallenged in her scornful supremacy; an image of a refinement of beauty, and of a beautiful servicelessness.

As the yacht, so the mistress: things of wealth, owing their graces to wealth, devoting them to wealth—splendid achievements of art both! and dedicated to the gratification of the superior senses.

Page 2350

Say that they were precious examples of an accomplished civilization; and perhaps they did offer a visible ideal of grace for the rough world to aim at. They might in the abstract address a bit of a monition to the uncultivated, and encourage the soul to strive toward perfection, in beauty: and there is no contesting the value of beauty when the soul is taken into account. But were they not in too great a profusion in proportion to their utility? That was the question for Nevil Beauchamp. The democratic spirit inhabiting him, temporarily or permanently, asked whether they were not increasing to numbers which were oppressive? And further, whether it was good, for the country, the race, ay, the species, that they should be so distinctly removed from the thousands who fought the grand, and the grisly, old battle with nature for bread of life. Those grimy sails of the colliers and fishing-smacks, set them in a great sea, would have beauty for eyes and soul beyond that of elegance and refinement. And do but look on them thoughtfully, the poor are everlastingly, unrelievedly, in the abysses of the great sea . . . .

One cannot pursue to conclusions a line of meditation that is half-built on the sensations as well as on the mind. Did Beauchamp at all desire to have those idly lovely adornments of riches, the Yacht and the Lady, swept away? Oh, dear, no. He admired them, he was at home with them. They were much to his taste. Standing on a point of the beach for a last look at them before he set his face to the town, he prolonged the look in a manner to indicate that the place where business called him was not in comparison at all so pleasing: and just as little enjoyable were his meditations opposed to predilections. Beauty plucked the heart from his breast. But he had taken up arms; he had drunk of the questioning cup, that which denieth peace to us, and which projects us upon the missionary search of the How, the Wherefore, and the Why not, ever afterward. He questioned his justification, and yours, for gratifying tastes in an ill-regulated world of wrong-doing, suffering, sin, and bounties unrighteously dispensed—-not sufficiently dispersed. He said by-and-by to pleasure, battle to-day. From his point of observation, and with the store of ideas and images his fiery yet reflective youth had gathered, he presented himself as it were saddled to that hard-riding force known as the logical impetus, which spying its quarry over precipices, across oceans and deserts, and through systems and webs, and into shops and cabinets of costliest china, will come at it, will not be refused, let the distances and the breakages be what they may. He went like the meteoric man with the mechanical legs in the song, too quick for a cry of protestation, and reached results amazing to his instincts, his tastes, and his training, not less rapidly and naturally than tremendous Ergo is shot forth from the clash of a syllogism.

CHAPTER XVI

Page 2351

A PARTIAL DISPLAY OF BEAUCHAMP IN HIS COLOURS

Beauchamp presented himself at Mount Laurels next day, and formally asked Colonel Halkett for his vote, in the presence of Cecilia.

She took it for a playful glance at his new profession of politician: he spoke half-playfully. Was it possible to speak in earnest?

'I 'm of the opposite party,' said the colonel; as conclusive a reply as could be: but he at once fell upon the rotten navy of a Liberal Government. How could a true sailor think of joining those Liberals! The question referred to the country, not to a section of it, Beauchamp protested with impending emphasis: Tories and Liberals were much the same in regard to the care of the navy. 'Nevil!' exclaimed Cecilia. He cited beneficial Liberal bills recently passed, which she accepted for a concession of the navy to the Tories, and she smiled. In spite of her dislike of politics, she had only to listen a few minutes to be drawn into the contest: and thus it is that one hot politician makes many among women and men of a people that have the genius of strife, or else in this case the young lady did unconsciously feel a deep interest in refuting and overcoming Nevil Beauchamp. Colonel Halkett denied the benefits of those bills. 'Look,' said he, 'at the scarecrow plight of the army under a Liberal Government!' This laid him open to the charge that he was for backing Administrations instead of principles.

'I do,' said the colonel. 'I would rather have a good Administration than all your talk of principles: one's a fact, but principles? principles?' He languished for a phrase to describe the hazy things. 'I have mine, and you have yours. It's like a dispute between religions. There's no settling it except by main force. That's what principles lead you to.'

Principles may be hazy, but heavy artillery is disposable in defence of them, and Beauchamp fired some reverberating guns for the eternal against the transitory; with less of the gentlemanly fine taste, the light and easy social semi-irony, than Cecilia liked and would have expected from him. However, as to principles, no doubt Nevil was right, and Cecilia drew her father to another position. 'Are not we Tories to have principles as well as the Liberals, Nevil?'

'They may have what they call principles,' he admitted, intent on pursuing his advantage over the colonel, who said, to shorten the controversy: 'It's a question of my vote, and my liking. I like a Tory Government, and I don't like the Liberals. I like gentlemen; I don't like a party that attacks everything, and beats up the mob for power, and repays it with sops, and is dragging us down from all we were proud of.'

'But the country is growing, the country wants expansion,' said Beauchamp; 'and if your gentlemen by birth are not up to the mark, you must have leaders that are.'

’Leaders who cut down expenditure, to create a panic that doubles the outlay! I know them.’

Page 2352

‘A panic, Nevil.’ Cecilia threw stress on the memorable word.

He would hear no reminder in it. The internal condition of the country was now the point for seriously-minded Englishmen.

‘My dear boy, what have you seen of the country?’ Colonel Halkett inquired.

’Every time I have landed, colonel, I have gone to the mining and the manufacturing districts, the centres of industry; wherever there was dissatisfaction. I have attended meetings, to see and hear for myself. I have read the papers . . . .’

‘The papers!’

‘Well, they’re the mirror of the country.’

‘Does one see everything in a mirror, Nevil?’ said Cecilia: ’even in the smoothest?’

He retorted softly: ‘I should be glad to see what you see,’ and felled her with a blush.

For an example of the mirror offered by the Press, Colonel Halkett touched on Mr. Timothy Turbot’s article in eulogy of the great Commander Beauchamp. ‘Did you like it?’ he asked. ’Ah, but if you meddle with politics, you must submit to be held up on the prongs of a fork, my boy; soaped by your backers and shaved by the foe; and there’s a figure for a gentleman! as your uncle Romfrey says.’

Cecilia did not join this discussion, though she had heard from her father that something grotesque had been written of Nevil. Her foolishness in blushing vexed body and mind. She was incensed by a silly compliment that struck at her feminine nature when her intellect stood in arms. Yet more hurt was she by the reflection that a too lively sensibility might have conjured up the idea of the compliment. And again, she wondered at herself for not resenting so rare a presumption as it implied, and not disdaining so outworn a form of flattery. She wondered at herself too for thinking of resentment and disdain in relation to the familiar commonplaces of licenced impertinence. Over all which hung a darkened image of her spirit of independence, like a moon in eclipse.

Where lay his weakness? Evidently in the belief that he had thought profoundly. But what minor item of insufficiency or feebleness was discernible? She discovered that he could be easily fretted by similes and metaphors they set him staggering and groping like an ancient knight of faery in a forest bewitched.

‘Your specific for the country is, then, Radicalism,’ she said, after listening to an attack on the Tories for their want of a policy and indifference to the union of classes.

‘I would prescribe a course of it, Cecilia; yes,’ he turned to her.

‘The Dr. Dulcamara of a single drug?’

‘Now you have a name for me! Tory arguments always come to epithets.’

’It should not be objectionable. Is it not honest to pretend to have only one cure for mortal maladies? There can hardly be two panaceas, can there be?’

‘So you call me quack?’

‘No, Nevil, no,’ she breathed a rich contralto note of denial: ’but if the country is the patient, and you will have it swallow your prescription . . .’

Page 2353

‘There’s nothing like a metaphor for an evasion,’ said Nevil, blinking over it.

She drew him another analogy, longer than was at all necessary; so tedious that her father struck through it with the remark:

‘Concerning that quack—that’s one in the background, though!’

‘I know of none,’ said Beauchamp, well-advised enough to forbear mention of the name of Shrapnel.

Cecilia petitioned that her stumbling ignorance, which sought the road of wisdom, might be heard out. She had a reserve entanglement for her argumentative friend. ’You were saying, Nevil, that you were for principles rather than for individuals, and you instanced Mr. Cougham, the senior Liberal candidate of Bevisham, as one whom you would prefer to see in Parliament instead of Seymour Austin, though you confess to Mr. Austin’s far superior merits as a politician and servant of his country: but Mr. Cougham supports Liberalism while Mr. Austin is a Tory. You are for the principle.’

‘I am,’ said he, bowing.

She asked: ‘Is not that equivalent to the doctrine of election by Grace?’

Beauchamp interjected: ‘Grace! election?’

Cecilia was tender to his inability to follow her allusion.

‘Thou art a Liberal—then rise to membership,’ she said. ’Accept my creed, and thou art of the chosen. Yes, Nevil, you cannot escape from it. Papa, he preaches Calvinism in politics.’

‘We stick to men, and good men,’ the colonel flourished. ’Old English for me!’

‘You might as well say, old timber vessels, when Iron’s afloat, colonel.’

‘I suspect you have the worst of it there, papa,’ said Cecilia, taken by the unexpectedness and smartness of the comparison coming from wits that she had been undervaluing.

‘I shall not own I’m worsted until I surrender my vote,’ the colonel rejoined.

‘I won’t despair of it,’ said Beauchamp.

Colonel Halkett bade him come for it as often as he liked. You’ll be beaten in Bevisham, I warn you. Tory reckonings are safest: it’s an admitted fact: and we know you can’t win. According to my judgement a man owes a duty to his class.’

’A man owes a duty to his class as long as he sees his class doing its duty to the country,’ said Beauchamp; and he added, rather prettily in contrast with the sententious commencement, Cecilia thought, that the apathy of his class was proved when such as he deemed it an obligation on them to come forward and do what little they could. The deduction of the proof was not clearly consequent, but a meaning was expressed; and in that form it brought him nearer to her abstract idea of Nevil Beauchamp than when he raged and was precise.

After his departure she talked of him with her father, to be charitably satirical over him, it seemed.

Page 2354

The critic in her ear had pounced on his repetition of certain words that betrayed a dialectical stiffness and hinted a narrow vocabulary: his use of emphasis, rather reminding her of his uncle Everard, was, in a young man, a little distressing. 'The apathy of the country, papa; the apathy of the rich; a state of universal apathy. Will you inform me, papa, what the Tories are doing? Do we really give our consciences to the keeping of the parsons once a week, and let them dogmatize for us to save us from exertion? We must attach ourselves to principles; nothing is permanent but principles. Poor Nevil! And still I am sure you have, as I have, the feeling that one must respect him. I am quite convinced that he supposes he is doing his best to serve his country by trying for Parliament, fancying himself a Radical. I forgot to ask him whether he had visited his great-aunt, Mrs. Beauchamp. They say the dear old lady has influence with him.'

'I don't think he's been anywhere,' Colonel Halkett half laughed at the quaint fellow. 'I wish the other great-nephew of hers were in England, for us to run him against Nevil Beauchamp. He's touring the world. I'm told he's orthodox, and a tough debater. We have to take what we can get.'

'My best wishes for your success, and you and I will not talk of politics any more, papa. I hope Nevil will come often, for his own good; he will meet his own set of people here. And if he should dogmatize so much as to rouse our apathy to denounce his principles, we will remember that we are British, and can be sweet-blooded in opposition. Perhaps he may change, even tra le tre ore a le quattro: electioneering should be a lesson. From my recollection of Blackburn Tuckham, he was a boisterous boy.'

'He writes uncommonly clever letters home to his aunt Beauchamp. She has handed them to me to read,' said the colonel. 'I do like to see tolerably solid young fellows: they give one some hope of the stability of the country.'

'They are not so interesting to study, and not half so amusing,' said Cecilia.

Colonel Halkett muttered his objections to the sort of amusement furnished by firebrands.

'Firebrand is too strong a word for poor Nevil,' she remonstrated.

In that estimate of the character of Nevil Beauchamp, Cecilia soon had to confess that she had been deceived, though not by him.

CHAPTER XVII

HIS FRIEND AND FOE

Looking from her window very early on a Sunday morning, Miss Halkett saw Beauchamp strolling across the grass of the park. She dressed hurriedly and went out to greet him, smiling and thanking him for his friendliness in coming.

He said he was delighted, and appeared so, but dashed the sweetness. 'You know I can't canvass on Sundays!

'I suppose not,' she replied. 'Have you walked up from Bevisham? You must be tired.'

Page 2355

‘Nothing tires me,’ said he.

With that they stepped on together.

Mount Laurels, a fair broad house backed by a wood of beeches and firs, lay open to view on the higher grassed knoll of a series of descending turfy mounds dotted with gorseclumps, and faced South-westerly along the run of the Otley river to the gleaming broad water and its opposite border of forest, beyond which the downs of the island threw long interlapping curves. Great ships passed on the line of the water to and fro; and a little mist of masts of the fishing and coasting craft by Otley village, near the river’s mouth, was like a web in air. Cecilia led him to her dusky wood of firs, where she had raised a bower for a place of poetical contemplation and reading when the clear lapping salt river beneath her was at high tide. She could hail the Esperanza from that cover; she could step from her drawing-room window, over the flower-beds, down the gravel walk to the hard, and be on board her yacht within seven minutes, out on her salt-water lake within twenty, closing her wings in a French harbour by nightfall of a summer’s day, whenever she had the whim to fly abroad. Of these enviable privileges she boasted with some happy pride.

‘It’s the finest yachting-station in England,’ said Beauchamp.

She expressed herself very glad that he should like it so much. Unfortunately she added, ’I hope you will find it pleasanter to be here than canvassing.’

‘I have no pleasure in canvassing,’ said he. ’I canvass poor men accustomed to be paid for their votes, and who get nothing from me but what the baron would call a parsonical exhortation. I’m in the thick of the most spiritless crew in the kingdom. Our southern men will not compare with the men of the north. But still, even among these fellows, I see danger for the country if our commerce were to fail, if distress came on them. There’s always danger in disunion. That’s what the rich won’t see. They see simply nothing out of their own circle; and they won’t take a thought of the overpowering contrast between their luxury and the way of living, that’s half-starving, of the poor. They understand it when fever comes up from back alleys and cottages, and then they join their efforts to sweep the poor out of the district. The poor are to get to their work anyhow, after a long morning’s walk over the proscribed space; for we must have poor, you know. The wife of a parson I canvassed yesterday, said to me, “Who is to work for us, if you do away with the poor, Captain Beauchamp?"’

Cecilia quitted her bower and traversed the wood silently.

’So you would blow up my poor Mount Laurels for a peace-offering to the lower classes?’

‘I should hope to put it on a stronger foundation, Cecilia.’

‘By means of some convulsion?’

‘By forestalling one.’

‘That must be one of the new ironclads,’ observed Cecilia, gazing at the black smoke-pennon of a tower that slipped along the water-line. ’Yes? You were saying? Put us on a stronger——?’

Page 2356

’It’s, I think, the Hastings: she broke down the other day on her trial trip,’ said Beauchamp, watching the ship’s progress animatedly. ’Peppel commands her—a capital officer. I suppose we must have these costly big floating barracks. I don’t like to hear of everything being done for the defensive. The defensive is perilous policy in war. It’s true, the English don’t wake up to their work under half a year. But, no: defending and looking to defences is bad for the fighting power; and there’s half a million gone on that ship. Half a million! Do you know how many poor taxpayers it takes to make up that sum, Cecilia?’

‘A great many,’ she slurred over them; ’but we must have big ships, and the best that are to be had.’

’Powerful fast rams, sea-worthy and fit for running over shallows, carrying one big gun; swarms of harryers and worriers known to be kept ready for immediate service; readiness for the offensive in case of war—there’s the best defence against a declaration of war by a foreign State.’

‘I like to hear you, Nevil,’ said Cecilia, beaming: ’Papa thinks we have a miserable army—in numbers. He says, the wealthier we become the more difficult it is to recruit able-bodied men on the volunteering system. Yet the wealthier we are the more an army is wanted, both to defend our wealth and to preserve order. I fancy he half inclines to compulsory enlistment. Do speak to him on that subject.’

Cecilia must have been innocent of a design to awaken the fire-flash in Nevil’s eyes. She had no design, but hostility was latent, and hence perhaps the offending phrase.

He nodded and spoke coolly. ’An army to preserve order? So, then, an army to threaten civil war!’

‘To crush revolutionists.’

’Agitators, you mean. My dear good old colonel—I have always loved him—must not have more troops at his command.’

‘Do you object to the drilling of the whole of the people?’

’Does not the colonel, Cecilia? I am sure he does in his heart, and, for different reasons, I do. He won’t trust the working-classes, nor I the middle.’

‘Does Dr. Shrapnel hate the middle-class?’

’Dr. Shrapnel cannot hate. He and I are of opinion, that as the middle-class are the party in power, they would not, if they knew the use of arms, move an inch farther in Reform, for they would no longer be in fear of the class below them.’

’But what horrible notions of your country have you, Nevil! It is dreadful to hear. Oh! do let us avoid politics for ever. Fear!’

‘All concessions to the people have been won from fear.’

‘I have not heard so.’

‘I will read it to you in the History of England.’

‘You paint us in a condition of Revolution.’

’Happily it’s not a condition unnatural to us. The danger would be in not letting it be progressive, and there’s a little danger too at times in our slowness. We change our blood or we perish.’

Page 2357

‘Dr. Shrapnel?’

’Yes, I have heard Dr. Shrapnel say that. And, by-the-way, Cecilia—will you? can you?—take me for the witness to his character. He is the most guileless of men, and he’s the most unguarded. My good Rosamund saw him. She is easily prejudiced when she is a trifle jealous, and you may hear from her that he rambles, talks wildly. It may seem so. I maintain there is wisdom in him when conventional minds would think him at his wildest. Believe me, he is the humanest, the best of men, tenderhearted as a child: the most benevolent, simple-minded, admirable old man—the man I am proudest to think of as an Englishman and a man living in my time, of all men existing. I can’t overpraise him.’

‘He has a bad reputation.’

‘Only with the class that will not meet him and answer him.’

‘Must we invite him to our houses?’

’It would be difficult to get him to come, if you did. I mean, meet him in debate and answer his arguments. Try the question by brains.’

‘Before mobs?’

‘Not before mobs. I punish you by answering you seriously.’

‘I am sensible of the flattery.’

‘Before mobs!’ Nevil ejaculated. ’It’s the Tories that mob together and cry down every man who appears to them to threaten their privileges. Can you guess what Dr. Shrapnel compares them to?’

’Indeed, Nevil, I have not an idea. I only wish your patriotism were large enough to embrace them.’

’He compares them to geese claiming possession of the whole common, and hissing at every foot of ground they have to yield. They’re always having to retire and always hissing. “Retreat and menace,” that’s the motto for them.’

‘Very well, Nevil, I am a goose upon a common.’

So saying, Cecilia swam forward like a swan on water to give the morning kiss to her papa, by the open window of the breakfast-room.

Never did bird of Michaelmas fling off water from her feathers more thoroughly than this fair young lady the false title she pretended to assume.

‘I hear you’re of the dinner party at Grancey Lespel’s on Wednesday,’ the colonel said to Beauchamp. ‘You’ll have to stand fire.’

‘They will, papa,’ murmured Cecilia. ‘Will Mr. Austin be there?’

‘I particularly wish to meet Mr. Austin,’ said Beauchamp.

‘Listen to him, if you do meet him,’ she replied.

His look was rather grave.

’Lespel ‘s a Whig,’ he said.

The colonel answered. ’Lespel was a Whig. Once a Tory always a Tory,—but court the people and you’re on quicksands, and that’s where the Whigs are. What he is now I don’t think he knows himself. You won’t get a vote.’

Cecilia watched her friend Nevil recovering from his short fit of gloom. He dismissed politics at breakfast and grew companionable, with the charm of his earlier day. He was willing to accompany her to church too.

Page 2358

‘You will hear a long sermon,’ she warned him.

‘Forty minutes.’ Colonel Halkett smothered a yawn that was both retro and prospective.

‘It has been fifty, papa.’

‘It has been an hour, my dear.’

It was good discipline nevertheless, the colonel affirmed, and Cecilia praised the Rev. Mr. Brisk of Urplesdon vicarage as one of our few remaining Protestant clergymen.

‘Then he ought to be supported,’ said Beauchamp. ’In the dissensions of religious bodies it is wise to pat the weaker party on the back—I quote Stukely Culbrett.’

’I ‘ve heard him,’ sighed the colonel. ’He calls the Protestant clergy the social police of the English middle-class. Those are the things he lets fly. I have heard that man say that the Church stands to show the passion of the human race for the drama. He said it in my presence. And there ’s a man who calls himself a Tory!

You have rather too much of that playing at grudges and dislikes at Steynham, with squibs, nicknames, and jests at things that—well, that our stability is bound up in. I hate squibs.’

‘And I,’ said Beauchamp. Some shadow of a frown crossed him; but Stukely Culbrett’s humour seemed to be a refuge. ‘Protestant parson-not clergy,’ he corrected the colonel. ’Can’t you hear Mr. Culbrett, Cecilia? The Protestant parson is the policeman set to watch over the respectability of the middle-class. He has sharp eyes for the sins of the poor. As for the rich, they support his church; they listen to his sermon—to set an example: discipline, colonel. You discipline the tradesman, who’s afraid of losing your custom, and the labourer, who might be deprived of his bread. But the people? It’s put down to the wickedness of human nature that the parson has not got hold of the people. The parsons have lost them by senseless Conservatism, because they look to the Tories for the support of their Church, and let the religion run down the gutters. And how many thousands have you at work in the pulpit every Sunday? I’m told the Dissenting ministers have some vitality.’

Colonel Halkett shrugged with disgust at the mention of Dissenters.

’And those thirty or forty thousand, colonel, call the men that do the work they ought to be doing demagogues. The parsonry are a power absolutely to be counted for waste, as to progress.’

Cecilia perceived that her father was beginning to be fretted.

She said, with a tact that effected its object: ’I am one who hear Mr. Culbrett without admiring his wit.’

‘No, and I see no good in this kind of Steynham talk,’ Colonel Halkett said, rising. ’We’re none of us perfect. Heaven save us from political parsons!’

Beauchamp was heard to utter, ‘Humanity.’

The colonel left the room with Cecilia, muttering the Steynham tail to that word: ‘tomtity,’ for the solace of an aside repartee.

She was on her way to dress for church. He drew her into the library, and there threw open a vast placard lying on the table. It was printed in blue characters and red. ’This is what I got by the post this morning. I suppose Nevil knows about it. He wants tickling, but I don’t like this kind of thing. It ’s not fair war. It ’s as bad as using explosive bullets in my old game.’

Page 2359

‘Can he expect his adversaries to be tender with him?’ Cecilia simulated vehemence in an underbreath. She glanced down the page:

‘*French marquees*’ caught her eye.

It was a page of verse. And, oh! could it have issued from a Tory Committee?

‘The Liberals are as bad, and worse,’ her father said.

She became more and more distressed. ’It seems so very mean, papa; so base. Ungenerous is no word for it. And how vulgar! Now I remember, Nevil said he wished to see Mr. Austin.’

‘Seymour Austin would not sanction it.’

‘No, but Nevil might hold him responsible for it.’

’I suspect Mr. Stukely Culbrett, whom he quotes, and that smoking-room lot at Lespel’s. I distinctly discountenance it. So I shall tell them on Wednesday night. Can you keep a secret?’

’And after all Nevil Beauchamp is very young, papa!—of course I can keep a secret.’

The colonel exacted no word of honour, feeling quite sure of her.

He whispered the secret in six words, and her cheeks glowed vermilion.

‘But they will meet on Wednesday after this,’ she said, and her sight went dancing down the column of verse, of which the following trotting couplet is a specimen:—

’O did you ever, hot in love, a little British middy see,
Like Orpheus asking what the deuce to do without Eurydice?’

The middy is jilted by his *French marquees*, whom he ‘did adore,’ and in his wrath he recommends himself to the wealthy widow Bevisham, concerning whose choice of her suitors there is a doubt: but the middy is encouraged to persevere:

’Up, up, my pretty middy; take a draught of foaming Sillery;
Go in and win the uriddy with your Radical artillery.’

And if Sillery will not do, he is advised, he being for superlatives, to try the sparkling Sillery of the Radical vintage, selected grapes.

This was but impudent nonsense. But the reiterated apostrophe to ’*my French marquees*’ was considered by Cecilia to be a brutal offence.

She was shocked that her party should have been guilty of it. Nevil certainly provoked, and he required, hard blows; and his uncle Everard might be right in telling her father that they were the best means of teaching him to come to his understanding. Still a foul and stupid squib did appear to her a debasing weapon to use.

‘I cannot congratulate you on your choice of a second candidate, papa,’ she said scornfully.

‘I don’t much congratulate myself,’ said the colonel.

’Here’s a letter from Mrs. Beauchamp informing me that her boy Blackburn will be home in a month. There would have been plenty of time for him. However, we must make up our minds to it. Those two ’ll be meeting on Wednesday, so keep your secret. It will be out tomorrow week.’

‘But Nevil will be accusing Mr. Austin.’

Page 2360

’Austin won’t be at Lespel’s. And he must bear it, for the sake of peace.’

‘Is Nevil ruined with his uncle, papa?’

‘Not a bit, I should imagine. It’s Romfrey’s fun.’

‘And this disgraceful squib is a part of the fun?’

’That I know nothing about, my dear. I’m sorry, but there’s pitch and tar in politics as well as on shipboard.’

‘I do not see that there should be,’ said Cecilia resolutely.

‘We can’t hope to have what should be.’

‘Why not? I would have it: I would do my utmost to have it,’ she flamed out.

‘Your utmost?’ Her father was glancing at her foregone mimicry of Beauchamp’s occasional strokes of emphasis. ’Do your utmost to have your bonnet on in time for us to walk to church. I can’t bear driving there.’

Cecilia went to her room with the curious reflection, awakened by what her father had chanced to suggest to her mind, that she likewise could be fervid, positive, uncompromising—who knows? Radicalish, perhaps, when she looked eye to eye on an evil. For a moment or so she espied within herself a gulf of possibilities, wherein black night-birds, known as queries, roused by shot of light, do flap their wings.—Her utmost to have be what should be! And why not?

But the intemperate feeling subsided while she was doing duty before her mirror, and the visionary gulf closed immediately.

She had merely been very angry on Nevil Beauchamp’s behalf, and had dimly seen that a woman can feel insurgent, almost revolutionary, for a personal cause, Tory though her instinct of safety and love of smoothness make her.

No reflection upon this casual piece of self or sex revelation troubled her head. She did, however, think of her position as the friend of Nevil in utter antagonism to him. It beset her with contradictions that blew rough on her cherished serenity; for she was of the order of ladies who, by virtue of their pride and spirit, their port and their beauty, decree unto themselves the rank of princesses among women, before our world has tried their claim to it. She had lived hitherto in upper air, high above the clouds of earth. Her ideal of a man was of one similarly disengaged and lofty-loftier. Nevil, she could honestly say, was not her ideal; he was only her old friend, and she was opposed to him in his present adventure. The striking at him to cure him of his mental errors and excesses was an obligation; she could descend upon him calmly with the chastening rod, pointing

to the better way; but the shielding of him was a different thing; it dragged her down so low, that in her condemnation of the Tory squib she found herself asking herself whether haply Nevil had flung off the yoke of the French lady; with the foolish excuse for the question, that if he had not, he must be bitterly sensitive to the slightest public allusion to her. Had he? And if not, how desperately faithful he was! or else how marvellously seductive she!

Page 2361

Perhaps it was a lover's despair that had precipitated him into the mire of politics. She conceived the impression that it must be so, and throughout the day she had an inexplicable unsweet pleasure in inciting him to argumentation and combating him, though she was compelled to admit that he had been colloquially charming antecedent to her naughty provocation; and though she was indebted to him for his patient decorum under the weary wave of the Reverend Mr. Brisk. Now what does it matter what a woman thinks in politics? But he deemed it of great moment. Politically, he deemed that women have souls, a certain fire of life for exercise on earth. He appealed to reason in them; he would not hear of convictions. He quoted the Bevisham doctor!

'Convictions are generally first impressions that are sealed with later prejudices,' and insisted there was wisdom in it. Nothing tired him, as he had said, and addressing woman or man, no prospect of fatigue or of hopeless effort daunted him in the endeavour to correct an error of judgement in politics—his notion of an error. The value he put upon speaking, urging his views, was really fanatical. It appeared that he canvassed the borough from early morning till near midnight, and nothing would persuade him that his chance was poor; nothing that an entrenched Tory like her father, was not to be won even by an assault of all the reserve forces of Radical pathos, prognostication, and statistics.

Only conceive Nevil Beauchamp knocking at doors late at night, the sturdy beggar of a vote! or waylaying workmen, as he confessed without shame that he had done, on their way trooping to their midday meal; penetrating malodoriferous rooms of dismal ten-pound cottagers, to exhort bedraggled mothers and babes, and besotted husbands; and exposed to rebuffs from impertinent tradesmen; and lampooned and travestied, shouting speeches to roaring men, pushed from shoulder to shoulder of the mob! . . .

Cecilia dropped a curtain on her mind's picture of him. But the blinding curtain rekindled the thought that the line he had taken could not but be the desperation of a lover abandoned. She feared it was, she feared it was not. Nevil Beauchamp's foe persisted in fearing that it was not; his friend feared that it was. Yet why? For if it was, then he could not be quite in earnest, and might be cured. Nay, but earnestness works out its own cure more surely than frenzy, and it should be preferable to think him sound of heart, sincere though mistaken. Cecilia could not decide upon what she dared wish for his health's good. Friend and foe were not further separable within her bosom than one tick from another of a clock; they changed places, and next his friend was fearing what his foe had feared: they were inextricable.

Why had he not sprung up on a radiant aquiline ambition, whither one might have followed him, with eyes and prayers for him, if it was not possible to do so companionably? At present, in the shape of a canvassing candidate, it was hardly honourable to let imagination dwell on him, save compassionately.

Page 2362

When he rose to take his leave, Cecilia said, ’Must you go to Itchincope on Wednesday, Nevil?’

Colonel Halkett added: ’I don’t think I would go to Lespel’s if I were you. I rather suspect Seymour Austin will be coming on Wednesday, and that ’ll detain me here, and you might join us and lend him an ear for an evening.’

’I have particular reasons for going to Lespel’s; I hear he wavers toward a Tory conspiracy of some sort,’ said Beauchamp.

The colonel held his tongue.

The untiring young candidate chose to walk down to Bevisham at eleven o’clock at night, that he might be the readier to continue his canvass of the borough on Monday morning early. He was offered a bed or a conveyance, and he declined both; the dog-cart he declined out of consideration for horse and groom, which an owner of stables could not but approve.

Colonel Halkett broke into exclamations of pity for so good a young fellow so misguided.

The night was moonless, and Cecilia, looking through the window, said whimsically, ‘He has gone out into the darkness, and is no light in it!’

Certainly none shone. She however carried a lamp that revealed him footing on with a wonderful air of confidence, and she was rather surprised to hear her father regret that Nevil Beauchamp should be losing his good looks already, owing to that miserable business of his in Bevisham. She would have thought the contrary, that he was looking as well as ever.

‘He dresses just as he used to dress,’ she observed.

The individual style of a naval officer of breeding, in which you see neatness trifling with disorder, or disorder plucking at neatness, like the breeze a trim vessel, had been caught to perfection by Nevil Beauchamp, according to Cecilia. It presented him to her mind in a cheerful and a very undemocratic aspect, but in realizing it, the thought, like something flashing black, crossed her—how attractive such a style must be to a Frenchwoman!

‘He may look a little worn,’ she acquiesced.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCERNING THE ACT OF CANVASSING

Tories dread the restlessness of Radicals, and Radicals are in awe of the organization of Tories. Beauchamp thought anxiously of the high degree of confidence existing in the Tory camp, whose chief could afford to keep aloof, while he slaved all day and half the night to thump ideas into heads, like a cooper on a cask:—an impassioned cooper on an empty cask! if such an image is presentable. Even so enviously sometimes the writer and the barrister, men dependent on their active wits, regard the man with a business fixed in an office managed by clerks. That man seems by comparison celestially seated. But he has his fits of trepidation; for new tastes prevail and new habits are formed, and the structure of his business will not allow him to adapt himself to them in a minute. The secure and comfortable

Page 2363

have to pay in occasional panics for the serenity they enjoy. Mr. Seymour Austin candidly avowed to Colonel Halkett, on his arrival at Mount Laurels, that he was advised to take up his quarters in the neighbourhood of Bevisham by a recent report of his committee, describing the young Radical's canvass as redoubtable. Cougham he did not fear: he could make a sort of calculation of the votes for the Liberal thumping on the old drum of Reform; but the number for him who appealed to feelings and quickened the romantic sentiments of the common people now huddled within our electoral penfold, was not calculable. Tory and Radical have an eye for one another, which overlooks the Liberal at all times except when he is, as they imagine, playing the game of either of them.

'Now we shall see the passions worked,' Mr. Austin said, deploring the extension of the franchise.

He asked whether Beauchamp spoke well.

Cecilia left it to her father to reply; but the colonel appealed to her, saying, 'Inclined to dragoon one, isn't he?'

She did not think that. 'He speaks . . . he speaks well in conversation. I fancy he would be liked by the poor. I should doubt his being a good public speaker. He certainly has command of his temper: that is one thing. I cannot say whether it favours oratory. He is indefatigable. One may be sure he will not faint by the way. He quite believes in himself. But, Mr. Austin, do you really regard him as a serious rival?'

Mr. Austin could not tell. No one could tell the effect of an extended franchise. The untried venture of it depressed him. 'Men have come suddenly on a borough before now and carried it,' he said.

'Not a borough like Bevisham?'

He shook his head. 'A fluid borough, I'm afraid.'

Colonel Halkettt interposed: 'But Ferbrass is quite sure of his district.'

Cecilia wished to know who the man was, of the mediaevally sounding name.

'Ferbrass is an old lawyer, my dear. He comes of five generations of lawyers, and he 's as old in the county as Grancey Lespel. Hitherto he has always been to be counted on for marching his district to the poll like a regiment. That's our strength—the professions, especially lawyers.'

'Are not a great many lawyers Liberals, papa?'

'A great many barristers are, my dear.'

Thereat the colonel and Mr. Austin smiled together.

It was a new idea to Cecilia that Nevil Beauchamp should be considered by a man of the world anything but a well-meaning, moderately ridiculous young candidate; and the fact that one so experienced as Seymour Austin deemed him an adversary to be grappled with in earnest, created a small revolution in her mind, entirely altering her view of the probable pliability of his Radicalism under pressure of time and circumstances. Many of his remarks, that she had previously half smiled at, came across her memory hard as metal. She began to feel some terror of him, and said, to reassure herself: 'Captain Beauchamp is not likely to be a champion with a very large following. He is too much of a political mystic, I think.'

Page 2364

’Many young men are, before they have written out a fair copy of their meaning,’ said Mr. Austin.

Cecilia laughed to herself at the vision of the fiery Nevil engaged in writing out a fair copy of his meaning. How many erasures! what foot-notes!

The arrangement was for Cecilia to proceed to Itchincope alone for a couple of days, and bring a party to Mount Laurels through Bevisham by the yacht on Thursday, to meet Mr. Seymour Austin and Mr. Everard Romfrey. An early day of the next week had been agreed on for the unmasking of the second Tory candidate. She promised that in case Nevil Beauchamp should have the hardihood to enter the enemy’s nest at Itchincope on Wednesday, at the great dinner and ball there, she would do her best to bring him back to Mount Laurels, that he might meet his uncle Everard, who was expected there. At least he may consent to come for an evening,’ she said. ’Nothing will take him from that canvassing. It seems to me it must be not merely distasteful . . . ?’

Mr. Austin replied: ’It ‘s disagreeable, but it’s’ the practice. I would gladly be bound by a common undertaking to abstain.’

’Captain Beauchamp argues that it would be all to your advantage. He says that a personal visit is the only chance for an unknown candidate to make the people acquainted with him.’

’It’s a very good opportunity for making him acquainted with them; and I hope he may profit by it.’

‘Ah! pah! “To beg the vote and wink the bribe,"’ Colonel Halkett subjoined abhorrently:

> “’It well becomes the Whiggish tribe
> To beg the vote and wink the bribe.”

Canvassing means intimidation or corruption.’

‘Or the mixture of the two, called cajolery,’ said Mr. Austin; ’and that was the principal art of the Whigs.’

Thus did these gentlemen converse upon canvassing.

It is not possible to gather up in one volume of sound the rattle of the knocks at Englishmen’s castle-gates during election days; so, with the thunder of it unheard, the majesty of the act of canvassing can be but barely appreciable, and he, therefore, who would celebrate it must follow the candidate obsequiously from door to door, where, like a cross between a postman delivering a bill and a beggar craving an alms, patiently he attempts the extraction of the vote, as little boys pick periwinkles with a pin.

‘This is your duty, which I most abjectly entreat you to do,’ is pretty nearly the form of the supplication.

How if, instead of the solicitation of the thousands by the unit, the meritorious unit were besought by rushing thousands?—as a mound of the plains that is circumvented by floods, and to which the waters cry, Be thou our island. Let it be answered the questioner, with no discourteous adjectives, Thou fool! To come to such heights of popular discrimination and political ardour the people would have to be vivified to a pitch little short of eruptive: it would be Boreas blowing AEtna inside them; and we should have impulse at work in the country, and immense importance attaching to a man’s whether he will or he won’t—enough to womanize him. We should be all but having Parliament for a sample of our choicest rather than our likest: and see you not a peril in that?

Page 2365

Conceive, for the fleeting instants permitted to such insufferable flights of fancy, our picked men ruling! So despotic an oligarchy as would be there, is not a happy subject of contemplation. It is not too much to say that a domination of the Intellect in England would at once and entirely alter the face of the country. We should be governed by the head with a vengeance: all the rest of the country being base members indeed; Spartans—helots. Criticism, now so helpful to us, would wither to the root: fun would die out of Parliament, and outside of it: we could never laugh at our masters, or command them: and that good old-fashioned shouldering of separate interests, which, if it stops progress, like a block in the pit entrance to a theatre, proves us equal before the law, puts an end to the pretence of higher merit in the one or the other, and renders a stout build the safest assurance for coming through ultimately, would be transformed to a painful orderliness, like a City procession under the conduct of the police, and to classifications of things according to their public value: decidedly no benefit to burly freedom. None, if there were no shouldering and hustling, could tell whether actually the fittest survived; as is now the case among survivors delighting in a broad-chested fitness.

And consider the freezing isolation of a body of our quintessential elect, seeing below them none to resemble them! Do you not hear in imagination the land's regrets for that amiable nobility whose pretensions were comically built on birth, acres, tailoring, style, and an air? Ah, that these unchallengeable new lords could be exchanged for those old ones! These, with the traditions of how great people should look in our country, these would pass among us like bergs of ice—a pure Polar aristocracy, inflicting the woes of wintriness upon us. Keep them from concentrating! At present I believe it to be their honest opinion, their wise opinion, and the sole opinion common to a majority of them, that it is more salutary, besides more diverting, to have the fools of the kingdom represented than not. As professors of the sarcastic art they can easily take the dignity out of the fools' representative at their pleasure, showing him at antics while he supposes he is exhibiting an honourable and a decent series of movements. Generally, too, their archery can check him when he is for any of his measures; and if it does not check, there appears to be such a property in simple sneering, that it consoles even when it fails to right the balance of power. Sarcasm, we well know, confers a title of aristocracy straightway and sharp on the sconce of the man who does but imagine that he is using it. What, then, must be the elevation of these princes of the intellect in their own minds! Hardly worth bartering for worldly commanderships, it is evident.

Page 2366

Briefly, then, we have a system, not planned but grown, the outcome and image of our genius, and all are dissatisfied with parts of it; but, as each would preserve his own, the surest guarantee is obtained for the integrity of the whole by a happy adjustment of the energies of opposition, which—you have only to look to see—goes far beyond concord in the promotion of harmony. This is our English system; like our English pudding, a fortuitous concourse of all the sweets in the grocer's shop, but an excellent thing for all that, and let none threaten it. Canvassing appears to be mixed up in the system; at least I hope I have shown that it will not do to reverse the process, for fear of changes leading to a sovereignty of the austere and antipathetic Intellect in our England, that would be an inaccessible tyranny of a very small minority, necessarily followed by tremendous convulsions.

CHAPTER XIX

LORD PALMET, AND CERTAIN ELECTORS OF BEVISHAM

Meantime the candidates raised knockers, rang bells, bowed, expounded their views, praised their virtues, begged for votes, and greatly and strangely did the youngest of them enlarge his knowledge of his countrymen. But he had an insatiable appetite, and except in relation to Mr. Cougham, considerable tolerance. With Cougham, he was like a young hound in the leash. They had to run as twins; but Beauchamp's conjunct would not run, he would walk. He imposed his experience on Beauchamp, with an assumption that it must necessarily be taken for the law of Beauchamp's reason in electoral and in political affairs, and this was hard on Beauchamp, who had faith in his reason. Beauchamp's early canvassing brought Cougham down to Bevisham earlier than usual in the days when he and Seymour Austin divided the borough, and he inclined to administer correction to the Radically-disposed youngster. 'Yes, I have gone all over that,' he said, in speech sometimes, in manner perpetually, upon the intrusion of an idea by his junior. Cougham also, Cougham had passed through his Radical phase, as one does on the road to wisdom. So the frog telleth tadpoles: he too has wriggled most preposterous of tails; and he has shoved a circular flat head into corners unadapted to its shape; and that the undeveloped one should dutifully listen to experience and accept guidance, is devoutly to be hoped. Alas! Beauchamp would not be taught that though they were yoked they stood at the opposite ends of the process of evolution.

The oddly coupled pair deplored, among their respective friends, the disastrous Siamese twinship created by a haphazard improvident Liberal camp. Look at us! they said:—Beauchamp is a young demagogue; Cougham is chrysalis Tory. Such Liberals are the ruin of Liberalism; but of such must it be composed when there is no new cry to loosen floods. It was too late to think of an operation to divide them. They held the heart of the cause between them, were

Page 2367

bound fast together, and had to go on. Beauchamp, with a furious tug of Radicalism, spoken or performed, pulled Cougham on his beam-ends. Cougham, to right himself, defined his Liberalism sharply from the politics of the pit, pointed to France and her Revolutions, washed his hands of excesses, and entirely overset Beauchamp. Seeing that he stood in the Liberal interest, the junior could not abandon the Liberal flag; so he seized it and bore it ahead of the time, there where Radicals trip their phantom dances like shadows on a fog, and waved it as the very flag of our perfectible race. So great was the impetus that Cougham had no choice but to step out with him briskly—-voluntarily as a man propelled by a hand on his coat-collar. A word saved him: the word practical. 'Are we practical?' he inquired, and shivered Beauchamp's galloping frame with a violent application of the stop abrupt; for that question, 'Are we practical?' penetrates the bosom of an English audience, and will surely elicit a response if not. plaudits. Practical or not, the good people affectingly wish to be thought practical. It has been asked by them.

If we're not practical, what are we?—Beauchamp, talking to Cougham apart, would argue that the daring and the far-sighted course was often the most practical. Cougham extended a deprecating hand: 'Yes, I have gone over all that.' Occasionally he was maddening.

The melancholy position of the senior and junior Liberals was known abroad and matter of derision.

It happened that the gay and good-humoured young Lord Palmet, heir to the earldom of Elsea, walking up the High Street of Bevisham, met Beauchamp on Tuesday morning as he sallied out of his hotel to canvass. Lord Palmet was one of the numerous half-friends of Cecil Baskelett, and it may be a revelation of his character to you, that he owned to liking Beauchamp because of his having always been a favourite with the women. He began chattering, with Beauchamp's hand in his: 'I've hit on you, have I? My dear fellow, Miss Halkett was talking of you last night. I slept at Mount Laurels; went on purpose to have a peep. I'm bound for Itchincope. They've some grand procession in view there; Lespel wrote for my team; I suspect he's for starting some new October races. He talks of half-a-dozen drags. He must have lots of women there. I say, what a splendid creature Cissy Halkett has shot up! She topped the season this year, and will next. You're for the darkies, Beauchamp. So am I, when I don't see a blonde; just as a fellow admires a girl when there's no married woman or widow in sight. And, I say, it can't be true you've gone in for that crazy Radicalism? There's nothing to be gained by it, you know; the women hate it! A married blonde of five-and-twenty's the Venus of them all. Mind you, I don't forget that Mrs. Wardour-Devereux is a thorough-paced brunette; but, upon my honour, I'd bet on Cissy Halkett at forty. "A dark eye in woman," if you like, but blue and auburn drive it into a corner.'

Page 2368

Lord Palmet concluded by asking Beauchamp what he was doing and whither going.

Beauchamp proposed to him maliciously, as one of our hereditary legislators, to come and see something of canvassing. Lord Palmet had no objection. 'Capital opportunity for a review of their women,' he remarked.

'I map the places for pretty women in England; some parts of Norfolk, and a spot or two in Cumberland and Wales, and the island over there, I know thoroughly. Those Jutes have turned out some splendid fair women. Devonshire's worth a tour. My man Davis is in charge of my team, and he drives to Itchincope from Washwater station. I am independent; I 'll have an hour with you. Do you think much of the women here?'

Beauchamp had not noticed them.

Palmet observed that he should not have noticed anything else.

'But you are qualifying for the Upper House,' Beauchamp said in the tone of an encomium.

Palmet accepted the statement. 'Though I shall never care to figure before peeresses,' he said. 'I can't tell you why. There's a heavy sprinkling of the old bird among them. It isn't that. There's too much plumage; I think it must be that. A cloud of millinery shoots me off a mile from a woman. In my opinion, witches are the only ones for wearing jewels without chilling the feminine atmosphere about them. Fellows think differently.' Lord Palmet waved a hand expressive of purely amiable tolerance, for this question upon the most important topic of human affairs was deep, and no judgement should be hasty in settling it. 'I'm peculiar,' he resumed. 'A rose and a string of pearls: a woman who goes beyond that's in danger of petrifying herself and her fellow man. Two women in Paris, last winter, set us on fire with pale thin gold ornaments—neck, wrists, ears, ruche, skirts, all in a flutter, and so were you. But you felt witchcraft. "The magical Orient," Vivian Ducie called the blonde, and the dark beauty, "Young Endor."'

'Her name?' said Beauchamp.

'A marquise; I forget her name. The other was Countess Rastaglione; you must have heard of her; a towering witch, an empress, Helen of Troy; though Ducie would have it the brunette was Queen of Paris. For French taste, if you like.'

Countess Rastaglione was a lady enamelled on the scroll of Fame. 'Did you see them together?' said Beauchamp. 'They weren't together?'

Palmet looked at him and laughed. 'You're yourself again, are you? Go to Paris in January, and cut out the Frenchmen.'

'Answer me, Palmet: they weren't in couples?'

‘I fancy not. It was luck to meet them, so they couldn’t have been.’

‘Did you dance with either of them?’

Unable to state accurately that he had, Palmet cried, ’Oh! for dancing, the Frenchwoman beat the Italian.’

‘Did you see her often—more than once?’

’My dear fellow, I went everywhere to see her: balls, theatres, promenades, rides, churches.’

Page 2369

‘And you say she dressed up to the Italian, to challenge her, rival her?’

’Only one night; simple accident. Everybody noticed it, for they stood for Night and Day, —both hung with gold; the brunette Etruscan, and the blonde Asiatic; and every Frenchman present was epigramizing up and down the rooms like mad.’

’Her husband ‘s Legitimist; he wouldn’t be at the Tuileries?’ Beauchamp spoke half to himself.

‘What, then, what?’ Palmet stared and chuckled. ’Her husband must have taken the Tuileries’ bait, if we mean the same woman. My dear old Beauchamp, have I seen her, then? She’s a darling! The Rastaglione was nothing to her. When you do light on a grand smoky pearl, the milky ones may go and decorate plaster. That’s what I say of the loveliest brunettes. It must be the same: there can’t be a couple of dark beauties in Paris without a noise about them. Marquise—? I shall recollect her name presently.’

‘Here’s one of the houses I stop at,’ said Beauchamp, ’and drop that subject.’

A scared servant-girl brought out her wizened mistress to confront the candidate, and to this representative of the sex he addressed his arts of persuasion, requesting her to repeat his words to her husband. The contrast between Beauchamp palpably canvassing and the Beauchamp who was the lover of the Marquise of the forgotten name, struck too powerfully on Palmet for his gravity he retreated.

Beauchamp found him sauntering on the pavement, and would have dismissed him but for an agreeable diversion that occurred at that moment. A suavely smiling unctuous old gentleman advanced to them, bowing, and presuming thus far, he said, under the supposition that he was accosting the junior Liberal candidate for the borough. He announced his name and his principles Tomlinson, progressive Liberal.

‘A true distinction from some Liberals I know,’ said Beauchamp.

Mr. Tomlinson hoped so. Never, he said, did he leave it to the man of his choice at an election to knock at his door for the vote.

Beauchamp looked as if he had swallowed a cordial. Votes falling into his lap are heavenly gifts to the candidate sick of the knocker and the bell. Mr. Tomlinson eulogized the manly candour of the junior Liberal candidate’s address, in which he professed to see ideas that distinguished it from the address of the sound but otherwise conventional Liberal, Mr. Cougham. He muttered of plumping for Beauchamp. ’Don’t plump,’ Beauchamp said; and a candidate, if he would be an honourable twin, must say it. Cougham had cautioned him against the heresy of plumping.

Page 2370

They discoursed of the poor and their beverages, of pothouses, of the anti-liquorites, and of the duties of parsons, and the value of a robust and right-minded body of the poor to the country. Palmet found himself following them into a tolerably spacious house that he took to be the old gentleman's until some of the apparatus of an Institute for literary and scientific instruction revealed itself to him, and he heard Mr. Tomlinson exalt the memory of one Wingham for the blessing bequeathed by him to the town of Bevisham. 'For,' said Mr. Tomlinson, 'it is open to both sexes, to all respectable classes, from ten in the morning up to ten at night. Such a place affords us, I would venture to say, the advantages without the seductions of a Club. I rank it next—at a far remove, but next-the church.'

Lord Palmet brought his eyes down from the busts of certain worthies ranged along the top of the book-shelves to the cushioned chairs, and murmured, 'Capital place for an appointment with a woman.'

Mr. Tomlinson gazed up at him mildly, with a fallen countenance. He turned sadly agape in silence to the busts, the books, and the range of scientific instruments, and directed a gaze under his eyebrows at Beauchamp. 'Does your friend canvass with you?' he inquired.

'I want him to taste it,' Beauchamp replied, and immediately introduced the affable young lord—a proceeding marked by some of the dexterity he had once been famous for, as was shown by a subsequent observation of Mr. Tomlinson's:

'Yes,' he said, on the question of classes, 'yes, I fear we have classes in this country whose habitual levity sharp experience will have to correct. I very much fear it.'

'But if you have classes that are not to face realities classes that look on them from the box-seats of a theatre,' said Beauchamp, 'how can you expect perfect seriousness, or any good service whatever?'

'Gently, sir, gently. No; we can, I feel confident, expand within the limits of our most excellent and approved Constitution. I could wish that socially . . . that is all.'

'Socially and politically mean one thing in the end,' said Beauchamp. 'If you have a nation politically corrupt, you won't have a good state of morals in it, and the laws that keep society together bear upon the politics of a country.'

'True; yes,' Mr. Tomlinson hesitated assent. He dissociated Beauchamp from Lord Palmet, but felt keenly that the latter's presence desecrated Wingham's Institute, and he informed the candidate that he thought he would no longer detain him from his labours.

'Just the sort of place wanted in every provincial town,' Palmet remarked by way of a parting compliment.

Mr. Tomlinson bowed a civil acknowledgement of his having again spoken.

No further mention was made of the miraculous vote which had risen responsive to the candidate’s address of its own inspired motion; so Beauchamp said, ’I beg you to bear in mind that I request you not to plump.’

Page 2371

‘You may be right, Captain Beauchamp. Good day, sir.’

Palmet strode after Beauchamp into the street.

‘Why did you set me bowing to that old boy?’ he asked.

‘Why did you talk about women?’ was the rejoinder.

‘Oh, aha!’ Palmet sang to himself. ’You’re a Romfrey, Beauchamp. A blow for a blow! But I only said what would strike every fellow first off. It is the place; the very place. Pastry-cooks’ shops won’t stand comparison with it. Don’t tell me you ’re the man not to see how much a woman prefers to be under the wing of science and literature, in a good-sized, well-warmed room, with a book, instead of making believe, with a red face, over a tart.’

He received a smart lecture from Beauchamp, and began to think he had enough of canvassing. But he was not suffered to escape. For his instruction, for his positive and extreme good, Beauchamp determined that the heir to an earldom should have a day’s lesson. We will hope there was no intention to punish him for having frozen the genial current of Mr. Tomlinson’s vote and interest; and it may be that he clung to one who had, as he imagined, seen Renee. Accompanied by a Mr. Oggler, a tradesman of the town, on the Liberal committee, dressed in a pea-jacket and proudly nautical, they applied for the vote, and found it oftener than beauty. Palmet contrasted his repeated disappointments with the scoring of two, three, four and more in the candidate’s list, and informed him that he would certainly get the Election. ‘I think you’re sure of it,’ he said. ‘There’s not a pretty woman to be seen; not one.’

One came up to them, the sight of whom counselled Lord Palmet to reconsider his verdict. She was addressed by Beauchamp as Miss Denham, and soon passed on.

Palmet was guilty of staring at her, and of lingering behind the others for a last look at her.

They were on the steps of a voter’s house, calmly enduring a rebuff from him in person, when Palmet returned to them, exclaiming effusively, ’What luck you have, Beauchamp!’ He stopped till the applicants descended the steps, with the voice of the voter ringing contempt as well as refusal in their ears; then continued: ’You introduced me neck and heels to that undertakerly old Tomlinson, of Wingham’s Institute; you might have given me a chance with that Miss—Miss Denham, was it? She has a bit of a style!’

‘She has a head,’ said Beauchamp.

’A girl like that may have what she likes. I don’t care what she has—there’s woman in her. You might take her for a younger sister of Mrs. Wardour-Devereux. Who ’s the uncle she speaks of? She ought not to be allowed to walk out by herself.’

‘She can take care of herself,’ said Beauchamp.

Palmet denied it. ’No woman can. Upon my honour, it’s a shame that she should be out alone. What are her people? I’ll run—from you, you know—and see her safe home. There’s such an infernal lot of fellows about; and a girl simply bewitching and unprotected! I ought to be after her.’

Page 2372

Beauchamp held him firmly to the task of canvassing.

‘Then will you tell me where she lives?’ Palmet stipulated. He reproached Beauchamp for a notorious Grand Turk exclusiveness and greediness in regard to women, as well as a disposition to run hard races for them out of a spirit of pure rivalry.

‘It’s no use contradicting, it’s universally known of you,’ reiterated Palmet. ’I could name a dozen women, and dozens of fellows you deliberately set yourself to cut out, for the honour of it. What’s that story they tell of you in one of the American cities or watering-places, North or South? You would dance at a ball a dozen times with a girl engaged to a man—who drenched you with a tumbler at the hotel bar, and off you all marched to the sands and exchanged shots from revolvers; and both of you, they say, saw the body of a drowned sailor in the water, in the moonlight, heaving nearer and nearer, and you stretched your man just as the body was flung up by a wave between you. Picturesque, if you like!’

‘Dramatic, certainly. And I ran away with the bride next morning?’

‘No!’ roared Palmet; ’you didn’t. There’s the cruelty of the whole affair.’

Beauchamp laughed. ’An old messmate of mine, Lieutenant Jack Wilmore, can give you a different version of the story. I never have fought a duel, and never will. Here we are at the shop of a tough voter, Mr. Oggler. So it says in my note-book. Shall we put Lord Palmet to speak to him first?’

‘If his lordship will put his heart into what he says,’ Mr. Oggler bowed. ‘Are you for giving the people recreation on a Sunday, my lord?’

’Trap-bat and ball, cricket, dancing, military bands, puppet-shows, theatres, merry-go-rounds, bosky dells—anything to make them happy,’ said Palmet.

’Oh, dear! then I ’m afraid we cannot ask you to speak to this Mr. Carpendike.’ Oggler shook his head.

‘Does the fellow want the people to be miserable?’

‘I’m afraid, my lord, he would rather see them miserable.’

They introduced themselves to Mr. Carpendike in his shop. He was a flat-chested, sallow young shoemaker, with a shelving forehead, who seeing three gentlemen enter to him recognized at once with a practised resignation that they had not come to order shoe-leather, though he would fain have shod them, being needy; but it was not the design of Providence that they should so come as he in his blindness would have had them. Admitting this he wished for nothing.

The battle with Carpendike lasted three-quarters of an hour, during which he was chiefly and most effectively silent. Carpendike would not vote for a man that proposed to open museums on the Sabbath day. The striking simile of the thin end of the wedge was recurred to by him for a damning illustration. Captain Beauchamp might be honest in putting his mind on most questions in his address, when there was no demand upon him to do it; but honesty was no antidote to impiety. Thus Carpendike.

Page 2373

As to Sunday museuming being an antidote to the pothouse—no. For the people knew the frequenting of the pothouse to be a vice; it was a temptation of Satan that often in overcoming them was the cause of their flying back to grace: whereas museums and picture galleries were insidious attractions cloaked by the name of virtue, whereby they were allured to abandon worship.

Beauchamp flew at this young monster of unreason: 'But the people are not worshipping; they are idling and sotting, and if you carry your despotism farther still, and shut them out of every shop on Sundays, do you suppose you promote the spirit of worship? If you don't revolt them you unman them, and I warn you we can't afford to destroy what manhood remains to us in England. Look at the facts.'

He flung the facts at Carpendike with the natural exaggeration of them which eloquence produces, rather, as a rule, to assure itself in passing of the overwhelming justice of the cause it pleads than to deceive the adversary. Brewers' beer and publicans' beer, wife-beatings, the homes and the blood of the people, were matters reviewed to the confusion of Sabbatarians.

Carpendike listened with a bent head, upraised eyes, and brows wrinkling far on to his poll: a picture of a mind entrenched beyond the potentialities of mortal assault. He signified that he had spoken. Indeed Beauchamp's reply was vain to one whose argument was that he considered the people nearer to holiness in the: indulging of an evil propensity than in satisfying a harmless curiosity and getting a recreation. The Sabbath claimed them; if they were disobedient, Sin ultimately might scourge them back to the fold, but never if they were permitted to regard themselves as innocent in their backsliding and rebelliousness.

Such language was quite new to Beauchamp. The parsons he had spoken to were of one voice in objecting to the pothouse. He appealed to Carpendike's humanity. Carpendike smote him with a text from Scripture.

'Devilish cold in this shop,' muttered Palmet.

Two not flourishing little children of the emaciated Puritan burst into the shop, followed by their mother, carrying a child in her arms. She had a sad look, upon traces of a past fairness, vaguely like a snow landscape in the thaw. Palmet stooped to toss shillings with her young ones, that he might avoid the woman's face. It cramped his heart.

'Don't you see, Mr. Carpendike,' said fat Mr. Oggler, 'it's the happiness of the people we want; that's what Captain Beauchamp works for—their happiness; that's the aim of life for all of us. Look at me! I'm as happy as the day. I pray every night, and I go to church every Sunday, and I never know what it is to be unhappy. The Lord has blessed me with a good digestion, healthy pious children, and a prosperous shop that's a

competency—a modest one, but I make it satisfy me, because I know it's the Lord's gift. Well, now,

Page 2374

and I hate Sabbath-breakers; I would punish them; and I'm against the public-houses on a Sunday; but aboard my little yacht, say on a Sunday morning in the Channel, I don't forget I owe it to the Lord that he has been good enough to put me in the way of keeping a yacht; no; I read prayers to my crew, and a chapter in the Bible-Genesis, Deuteronomy, Kings, Acts, Paul, just as it comes. All's good that's there. Then we're free for the day! man, boy, and me; we cook our victuals, and we must look to the yacht, do you see. But we've made our peace with the Almighty. We know that. He don't mind the working of the vessel so long as we've remembered him. He put us in that situation, exactly there, latitude and longitude, do you see, and work the vessel we must. And a glass of grog and a pipe after dinner, can't be any offence. And I tell you, honestly and sincerely, I'm sure my conscience is good, and I really and truly don't know what it is not to know happiness.'

'Then you don't know God,' said Carpendike, like a voice from a cave.

'Or nature: or the state of the world,' said Beauchamp, singularly impressed to find himself between two men, of whom—each perforce of his tenuity and the evident leaning of his appetites—one was for the barren black view of existence, the other for the fantastically bright. As to the men personally, he chose Carpendike, for all his obstinacy and sourness. Oggler's genial piety made him shrink with nausea.

But Lord Palmet paid Mr. Oggler a memorable compliment, by assuring him that he was altogether of his way of thinking about happiness.

The frank young nobleman did not withhold a reference to the two or three things essential to his happiness; otherwise Mr. Oggler might have been pleased and flattered.

Before quitting the shop, Beauchamp warned Carpendike that he should come again. 'Vote or no vote, you're worth the trial. Texts as many as you like. I'll make your faith active, if it's alive at all. You speak of the Lord loving his own; you make out the Lord to be your own, and use your religion like a drug. So it appears to me. That Sunday tyranny of yours has to be defended.

Remember that; for I for one shall combat it and expose it. Good day.'

Beauchamp continued, in the street: 'Tyrannies like this fellow's have made the English the dullest and wretchedest people in Europe.'

Palmet animadverted on Carpendike: 'The dog looks like a deadly fungus that has poisoned the woman.'

'I'd trust him with a post of danger, though,' said Beauchamp.

Before the candidate had opened his mouth to the next elector he was beamed on. M'Gilliper, baker, a floured brick face, leaned on folded arms across his counter and

said, in Scotch: ’My vote? and he that asks me for my vote is the man who, when he was midshipman, saved the life of a relation of mine from death by drowning! my wife’s first cousin, Johnny Brownson—and held him up four to five minutes in the water, and never left him till he was out of danger! There ’s my hand on it, I will, and a score of householders in Bevisham the same.’ He dictated precious names and addresses to Beauchamp, and was curtly thanked for his pains.

Page 2375

Such treatment of a favourable voter seemed odd to Palmet.

‘Oh, a vote given for reasons of sentiment!’ Beauchamp interjected.

Palmet reflected and said: ’Well, perhaps that’s how it is women don’t care uncommonly for the men who love them, though they like precious well to be loved. Opposition does it.’

‘You have discovered my likeness to women,’ said Beauchamp, eyeing him critically, and then thinking, with a sudden warmth, that he had seen Renee: ’Look here, Palmet, you’re too late for Itchincope, to-day; come and eat fish and meat with me at my hotel, and come to a meeting after it. You can run by rail to Itchincope to breakfast in the morning, and I may come with you. You’ll hear one or two men speak well to-night.’

‘I suppose I shall have to be at this business myself some day,’ sighed Palmet. ’Any women on the platform? Oh, but political women! And the Tories get the pick of the women. No, I don’t think I ’ll stay. Yes, I will; I’ll go through with it. I like to be learning something. You wouldn’t think it of me, Beauchamp, but I envy fellows at work.’

‘You might make a speech for me, Palmet.’

’No man better, my dear fellow, if it were proposing a toast to the poor devils and asking them to drink it. But a dry speech, like leading them over the desert without a well to cheer them—no oasis, as we used to call a five-pound note and a holiday—I haven’t the heart for that. Is your Miss Denham a Radical?’

Beauchamp asserted that he had not yet met a woman at all inclining in the direction of Radicalism. ’I don’t call furies Radicals. There may be women who think as well as feel; I don’t know them.’

’Lots of them, Beauchamp. Take my word for it. I do know women. They haven’t a shift, nor a trick, I don’t know. They’re as clear to me as glass. I’ll wager your Miss Denham goes to the meetings. Now, doesn’t she? Of course she does. And there couldn’t be a gallanter way of spending an evening, so I’ll try it. Nothing to repent of next morning! That’s to be said for politics, Beauchamp, and I confess I’m rather jealous of you. A thoroughly good-looking girl who takes to a fellow for what he’s doing in the world, must have ideas of him precious different from the adoration of six feet three and a fine seat in the saddle. I see that. There’s Baskelett in the Blues; and if I were he I should detest my cuirass and helmet, for if he’s half as successful as he boasts—it’s the uniform.’

Two notorious Radicals, Peter Molyneux and Samuel Killick, were called on. The first saw Beauchamp and refused him; the second declined to see him. He was amazed and staggered, but said little.

Among the remainder of the electors of Bevisham, roused that day to a sense of their independence by the summons of the candidates, only one man made himself conspicuous, by premising that he had two important questions to ask, and he trusted Commander Beauchamp to answer them unreservedly. They were: first, What is a *French marquees*? and second: Who was EURYDICEY?

Page 2376

Beauchamp referred him to the Tory camp, whence the placard alluding to those ladies had issued.

’Both of them ‘s ladies! I guessed it,’ said the elector.

‘Did you guess that one of them is a mythological lady?’

’I’m not far wrong in guessing t’other’s not much better, I reckon. Now, sir, may I ask you, is there any tale concerning your morals?’

‘No: you may not ask; you take a liberty.’

’Then I’ll take the liberty to postpone talking about my vote. Look here, Mr. Commander; if the upper classes want anything of me and come to me for it, I’ll know what sort of an example they’re setting; now that’s me.’

‘You pay attention to a stupid Tory squib?’

‘Where there’s smoke there’s fire, sir.’

Beauchamp glanced at his note-book for the name of this man, who was a ragman and dustman.

‘My private character has nothing whatever to do with my politics,’ he said, and had barely said it when he remembered having spoken somewhat differently, upon the abstract consideration of the case, to Mr. Tomlinson.

’You’re quite welcome to examine my character for yourself, only I don’t consent to be catechized. Understand that.’

‘You quite understand that, Mr. Tripehallow,’ said Oggler, bolder in taking up the strange name than Beauchamp had been.

’I understand that. But you understand, there’s never been a word against the morals of Mr. Cougham. Here’s the point: Do we mean to be a moral country? Very well, then so let our representatives be, I say. And if I hear nothing against your morals, Mr. Commander, I don’t say you shan’t have my vote. I mean to deliberate. You young nobs capering over our heads—I nail you down to morals. Politics secondary. Adew, as the dying spirit remarked to weeping friends.’

‘Au revoir—would have been kinder,’ said Palmet.

Mr. Tripehallow smiled roguishly, to betoken comprehension.

Beauchamp asked Mr. Oggler whether that fellow was to be taken for a humourist or a five-pound-note man.

‘It may be both, sir. I know he’s called Morality Joseph.’

An all but acknowledged five-pound-note man was the last they visited. He cut short the preliminaries of the interview by saying that he was a four-o’clock man; *i.e*. the man who waited for the final bids to him upon the closing hour of the election day.

‘Not one farthing!’ said Beauchamp, having been warned beforehand of the signification of the phrase by his canvassing lieutenant.

‘Then you’re nowhere,’ the honest fellow replied in the mystic tongue of prophecy.

Page 2377

Palmet and Beauchamp went to their fish and meat; smoked a cigarette or two afterward, conjured away the smell of tobacco from their persons as well as they could, and betook themselves to the assembly-room of the Liberal party, where the young lord had an opportunity of beholding Mr. Cougham, and of listening to him for an hour and forty minutes. He heard Mr. Timothy Turbot likewise. And Miss Denham was present. Lord Palmet applauded when she smiled. When she looked attentive he was deeply studious. Her expression of fatigue under the sonorous ring of statistics poured out from Cougham was translated by Palmet into yawns and sighs of a profoundly fraternal sympathy. Her face quickened on the rising of Beauchamp to speak. She kept eye on him all the while, as Palmet, with the skill of an adept in disguising his petty larceny of the optics, did on her. Twice or thrice she looked pained: Beauchamp was hesitating for the word. Once she looked startled and shut her eyes: a hiss had sounded; Beauchamp sprang on it as if enlivened by hostility, and dominated the factious note. Thereat she turned to a gentleman sitting beside her; apparently they agreed that some incident had occurred characteristic of Nevil Beauchamp; for whom, however, it was not a brilliant evening. He was very well able to account for it, and did so, after he had walked a few steps with Miss Denham on her homeward way.

'You heard Cougham, Palmet! He's my senior, and I'm obliged to come second to him, and how am I to have a chance when he has drenched the audience for close upon a couple of hours!'

Palmet mimicked the manner of Cougham.

'They cry for Turbot naturally; they want a relief,' Beauchamp groaned.

Palmet gave an imitation of Timothy Turbot.

He was an admirable mimic, perfectly spontaneous, without stressing any points, and Beauchamp was provoked to laugh his discontentment with the evening out of recollection.

But a grave matter troubled Palmet's head.

'Who was that fellow who walked off with Miss Denham?'

'A married man,' said Beauchamp: 'badly married; more 's the pity; he has a wife in the madhouse. His name is Lydiard.'

'Not her brother! Where's her uncle?'

'She won't let him come to these meetings. It's her idea; well-intended, but wrong, I think. She's afraid that Dr. Shrapnel will alarm the moderate Liberals and damage Radical me.'

Palmet muttered between his teeth, ’What queer things they let their women do!’ He felt compelled to say, ’Odd for her to be walking home at night with a fellow like that.’

It chimed too consonantly with a feeling of Beauchamp’s, to repress which he replied: ’Your ideas about women are simply barbarous, Palmet. Why shouldn’t she? Her uncle places his confidence in the man, and in her. Isn’t that better—ten times more likely to call out the sense of honour and loyalty, than the distrust and the scandal going on in your class?’

Page 2378

‘Please to say yours too.’

’I’ve no class. I say that the education for women is to teach them to rely on themselves.’

‘Ah! well, I don’t object, if I’m the man.’

’Because you and your set are absolutely uncivilized in your views of women.’

‘Common sense, Beauchamp!’

’Prey. You eye them as prey. And it comes of an idle aristocracy. You have no faith in them, and they repay you for your suspicion.’

’All the same, Beauchamp, she ought not to be allowed to go about at night with that fellow. “Rich and rare were the gems she wore”: but that was in Erin’s isle, and if we knew the whole history, she’d better have stopped at home. She’s marvellously pretty, to my mind. She looks a high-bred wench. Odd it is, Beauchamp, to see a lady’s-maid now and then catch the style of my lady. No, by Jove! I’ve known one or two—you couldn’t tell the difference! Not till you were intimate. I know one would walk a minuet with a duchess. Of course—all the worse for her. If you see that uncle of Miss Denham’s—upon my honour, I should advise him: I mean, counsel him not to trust her with any fellow but you.’

Beauchamp asked Lord Palmet how old he was.

Palmet gave his age; correcting the figures from six-and-twenty to one year more. ‘And never did a stroke of work in my life,’ he said, speaking genially out of an acute guess at the sentiments of the man he walked with.

It seemed a farcical state of things.

There was a kind of contrition in Palmet’s voice, and to put him at his ease, as well as to stamp something in his own mind, Beauchamp said: ‘It’s common enough.’

CHAPTER XX

A DAY AT ITCHINCOPE

An election in Bevisham was always an exciting period at Itchincope, the large and influential old estate of the Lespels, which at one time, with but a ceremonious drive through the town, sent you two good Whig men to Parliament to sit at Reform banquets; two unswerving party men, blest subscribers to the right Review, and personally proud of its trenchancy. Mr. Grancey Lespel was the survivor of them, and well could he

remember the happier day of his grandfather, his father, and his own hot youth. He could be carried so far by affectionate regrets as to think of the Tories of that day benignly:—when his champion Review of the orange and blue livery waved a wondrous sharp knife, and stuck and bled them, proving to his party, by trenchancy alone, that the Whig was the cause of Providence. Then politics presented you a table whereat two parties feasted, with no fear of the intrusion of a third, and your backs were turned on the noisy lower world, your ears were deaf to it.

Apply we now the knocker to the door of venerable Quotation, and call the aged creature forth, that he, half choked by his eheu!—

> ‘A sound between a sigh and bray,’

Page 2379

may pronounce the familiar but respectable words, the burial-service of a time so happy!

Mr. Grancey Lespel would still have been sitting for Bevisham (or politely at this elective moment bowing to resume the seat) had not those Manchester jugglers caught up his cry, appropriated his colours, displaced and impersonated him, acting beneficent Whig on a scale approaching treason to the Constitution; leaning on the people in earnest, instead of taking the popular shoulder for a temporary lift, all in high party policy, for the clever manoeuvre, to oust the Tory and sway the realm. See the consequences. For power, for no other consideration, those manufacturing rascals have raised Radicalism from its primaeval mire—from its petty backslum bookseller's shop and public-house back-parlour effluvia of oratory—to issue dictates in England, and we, England, formerly the oak, are topsy-turvy, like onions, our heels in the air!

The language of party is eloquent, and famous for being grand at illustration; but it is equally well known that much of it gives us humble ideas of the speaker, probably because of the naughty temper party is prone to; which, while endowing it with vehemence, lessens the stout circumferential view that should be taken, at least historically. Indeed, though we admit party to be the soundest method for conducting us, party talk soon expends its attractiveness, as would a summer's afternoon given up to the contemplation of an encounter of rams' heads. Let us be quit of Mr. Grancey Lespel's lamentations. The Whig gentleman had some reason to complain. He had been trained to expect no other attack than that of his hereditary adversary-ram in front, and a sham ram—no honest animal, but a ramming engine rather—had attacked him in the rear. Like Mr. Everard Romfrey and other Whigs, he was profoundly chagrined by popular ingratitude: 'not the same man,' his wife said of him. It nipped him early. He took to proverbs; sure sign of the sere leaf in a man's mind.

His wife reproached the people for their behaviour to him bitterly. The lady regarded politics as a business that helped hunting-men a stage above sportsmen, for numbers of the politicians she was acquainted with were hunting-men, yet something more by virtue of the variety they could introduce into a conversation ordinarily treating of sport and the qualities of wines. Her husband seemed to have lost in that Parliamentary seat the talisman which gave him notions distinguishing him from country squires; he had sunk, and he no longer cared for the months in London, nor for the speeches she read to him to re-awaken his mind and make him look out of himself, as he had done when he was a younger man and not a suspended Whig. Her own favourite reading was of love-adventures written in the French tongue. She had once been in love, and could be so sympathetic with that passion as to avow to Cecilia Halkett a tenderness for Nevil Beauchamp, on account of his relations with the Marquise de Rouaillout, and notwithstanding the demoniacal flame-halo of the Radical encircling him.

Page 2380

The allusion to Beauchamp occurred a few hours after Cecilia's arrival at Itchincope.

Cecilia begged for the French lady's name to be repeated; she had not heard it before, and she tasted the strange bitter relish of realization when it struck her ear to confirm a story that she believed indeed, but had not quite sensibly felt.

'And it is not over yet, they say,' Mrs. Grancey Lespel added, while softly flipping some spots of the colour proper to radicals in morals on the fame of the French lady. She possessed fully the grave judicial spirit of her countrywomen, and could sit in judgement on the personages of tales which had entranced her, to condemn the heroines: it was impolitic in her sex to pity females. As for the men—poor weak things! As for Nevil Beauchamp, in particular, his case, this penetrating lady said, was clear: he ought to be married. 'Could you make a sacrifice?' she asked Cecilia playfully.

'Nevil Beauchamp and I are old friends, but we have agreed that we are deadly political enemies,' Miss Halkett replied.

'It is not so bad for a beginning,' said Mrs. Lespel.

'If one were disposed to martyrdom.'

The older woman nodded. 'Without that.'

'My dear Mrs. Lespel, wait till you have heard him. He is at war with everything we venerate and build on. The wife you would give him should be a creature rooted in nothing—in sea-water. Simply two or three conversations with him have made me uncomfortable ever since; I can see nothing durable; I dream of surprises, outbreaks, dreadful events. At least it is perfectly true that I do not look with the same eyes on my country. He seems to delight in destroying one's peaceful contemplation of life. The truth is that he blows a perpetual gale, and is all agitation,' Cecilia concluded, affecting with a smile a slight shiver.

'Yes, one tires of that,' said Mrs. Lespel. 'I was determined I would have him here if we could get him to come. Grancey objected. We shall have to manage Captain Beauchamp and the rest as well. He is sure to come late to-morrow, and will leave early on Thursday morning for his canvass; our driving into Bevisham is for Friday or Saturday. I do not see that he need have any suspicions. Those verses you are so angry about cannot be traced to Itchincope. My dear, they are a childish trifle. When my husband stood first for Bevisham, the whole of his University life appeared in print. What we have to do is to forewarn the gentlemen to be guarded, and especially in what they say to my nephew Lord Palmet, for that boy cannot keep a secret; he is as open as a plate.'

‘The smoking-room at night?’ Cecilia suggested, remembering her father’s words about Itchincope’s tobacco-hall.

‘They have Captain Beauchamp’s address hung up there, I have heard,’ said Mrs. Lespel. ’There may be other things—another address, though it is not yet, placarded. Come with me. For fifteen years I have never once put my head into that room, and now I ‘ve a superstitious fear about it.’

Page 2381

Mrs. Lespel led the way to the deserted smoking-room, where the stale reek of tobacco assailed the ladies, as does that dire place of Customs the stranger visiting savage (or too natural) potentates.

In silence they tore down from the wall Beauchamp's electoral Address—flanked all its length with satirical pen and pencil comments and sketches; and they consigned to flames the vast sheet of animated verses relating to the *French marquees*. A quarter-size chalk-drawing of a slippered pantaloon having a duck on his shoulder, labelled to say 'Quack-quack,' and offering our nauseated Dame Britannia (or else it was the widow Bevisham) a globe of a pill to swallow, crossed with the consolatory and reassuring name of Shrapnel, they disposed of likewise. And then they fled, chased forth either by the brilliancy of the politically allusive epigrams profusely inscribed around them on the walls, or by the atmosphere. Mrs. Lespel gave her orders for the walls to be scraped, and said to Cecilia: 'A strange air to breathe, was it not? The less men and women know of one another, the happier for them. I knew my superstition was correct as a guide to me. I do so much wish to respect men, and all my experience tells me the Turks know best how to preserve it for us. Two men in this house would give their wives for pipes, if it came to the choice. We might all go for a cellar of old wine. After forty, men have married their habits, and wives are only an item in the list, and not the most important.'

With the assistance of Mr. Stukely Culbrett, Mrs. Lespel prepared the house and those of the company who were in the secret of affairs for the arrival of Beauchamp. The ladies were curious to see him. The gentlemen, not anticipating extreme amusement, were calm: for it is an axiom in the world of buckskins and billiard-cues, that one man is very like another; and so true is it with them, that they can in time teach it to the fair sex. Friends of Cecil Baskelett predominated, and the absence of so sprightly a fellow was regretted seriously; but he was shooting with his uncle at Holdesbury, and they did not expect him before Thursday.

On Wednesday morning Lord Palmet presented himself at a remarkably well-attended breakfast-table at Itchincope. He passed from Mrs. Lespel to Mrs. Wardour-Devsreux and Miss Halkett, bowed to other ladies, shook hands with two or three men, and nodded over the heads of half-a-dozen, accounting rather mysteriously for his delay in coming, it was thought, until he sat down before a plate of Yorkshire pie, and said:

'The fact is I've been canvassing hard. With Beauchamp!'

Astonishment and laughter surrounded him, and Palmet looked from face to face, equally astonished, and desirous to laugh too.

'Ernest! how could you do that?' said Mrs. Lespel; and her husband cried in stupefaction, 'With Beauchamp?'

‘Oh! it’s because of the Radicalism,’ Palmet murmured to himself. ’I didn’t mind that.’

Page 2382

‘What sort of a day did you have?’ Mr. Culbrett asked him; and several gentlemen fell upon him for an account of the day.

Palmet grimaced over a mouthful of his pie.

‘Bad!’ quoth Mr. Lespel; ’I knew it. I know Bevisham. The only chance there is for five thousand pounds in a sack with a hole in it.’

‘Bad for Beauchamp? Dear me, no’; Palmet corrected the error. ’He is carrying all before him. And he tells them,’ Palmet mimicked Beauchamp, ’they shall not have one penny: not a farthing. I gave a couple of young ones a shilling apiece, and he rowed me for bribery; somehow I did wrong.’

Lord Palmet described the various unearthly characters he had inspected in their dens: Carpendike, Tripehallow, and the radicals Peter Molyneux and Samuel Killick, and the ex-member for the borough, Cougham, posing to suit sign-boards of Liberal inns, with a hand thrust in his waistcoat, and his head well up, the eyes running over the under-lids, after the traditional style of our aristocracy; but perhaps more closely resembling an urchin on tiptoe peering above park-palings. Cougham’s remark to Beauchamp, heard and repeated by Palmet with the object of giving an example of the senior Liberal’s phraseology: ’I was necessitated to vacate my town mansion, to my material discomfort and that of my wife, whose equipage I have been compelled to take, by your premature canvass of the borough, Captain Beauchamp: and now, I hear, on undeniable authority, that no second opponent to us will be forthcoming’——this produced the greatest effect on the company.

‘But do you tell me,’ said Mr. Lespel, when the shouts of the gentlemen were subsiding, ‘do you tell me that young Beauchamp is going ahead?’

‘That he is. They flock to him in the street.’

‘He stands there, then, and jingles a money-bag.’

Palmet resumed his mimicry of Beauchamp: ’Not a stiver; purity of election is the first condition of instruction to the people! Principles! Then they’ve got a capital orator: Turbot, an Irishman. I went to a meeting last night, and heard him; never heard anything finer in my life. You may laugh he whipped me off my legs; fellow spun me like a top; and while he was orationing, a donkey calls, “Turbot! ain’t you a flat fish?” and he swings round, “Not for a fool’s hook!” and out they hustled the villain for a Tory. I never saw anything like it.’

‘That repartee wouldn’t have done with a Dutchman or a Torbay trawler,’ said Stukely Culbrett. ‘But let us hear more.’

‘Is it fair?’ Miss Halkett murmured anxiously to Mrs. Lespel, who returned a flitting shrug.

‘Charming women follow Beauchamp, you know,’ Palmet proceeded, as he conceived, to confirm and heighten the tale of success. ’There’s a Miss Denham, niece of a doctor, a Dr . . . . Shot—Shrapnel! a wonderfully good-looking, clever-looking girl, comes across him in half-a-dozen streets to ask how he’s getting on, and goes every night to his meetings, with a man who ’s a writer and has a mad wife; a man named Lydia-no, that’s a woman—Lydiard. It’s rather a jumble; but you should see her when Beauchamp’s on his legs and speaking.’

Page 2383

‘Mr. Lydiard is in Bevisham?’ Mrs. Wardour-Devereux remarked.

‘I know the girl,’ growled Mr. Lespel. ’She comes with that rascally doctor and a bobtail of tea-drinking men and women and their brats to Northeden Heath—my ground. There they stand and sing.’

’Hymns?’inquired Mr. Culbrett.

’I don’t know what they sing. And when it rains they take the liberty to step over my bank into my plantation. Some day I shall have them stepping into my house.’

‘Yes, it’s Mr. Lydiard; I’m sure of the man’s name,’ Palmet replied to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.

‘We met him in Spain the year before last,’ she observed to Cecilia.

The ‘we’ reminded Palmet that her husband was present.

‘Ah, Devereux, I didn’t see you,’ he nodded obliquely down the table. ’By the way, what’s the grand procession? I hear my man Davis has come all right, and I caught sight of the top of your coach-box in the stableyard as I came in. What are we up to?’

‘Baskelett writes, it’s to be for to-morrow morning at ten-the start.’ Mr. Wardour-Devereux addressed the table generally. He was a fair, huge, bush-bearded man, with a voice of unvarying bass: a squire in his county, and energetic in his pursuit of the pleasures of hunting, driving, travelling, and tobacco.

’Old Bask’s the captain of us? Very well, but where do we drive the teams? How many are we? What’s in hand?’

Cecilia threw a hurried glance at her hostess.

Luckily some witling said, ‘Fours-in-hand!’ and so dryly that it passed for humour, and gave Mrs. Lespel time to interpose. ’You are not to know till to-morrow, Ernest.’

Palmet had traced the authorship of the sally to Mr. Algy Borolick, and crowned him with praise for it. He asked, ‘Why not know till to-morrow?’ A word in a murmur from Mr. Culbrett, ‘Don’t frighten the women,’ satisfied him, though why it should he could not have imagined.

Mrs. Lespel quitted the breakfast-table before the setting in of the dangerous five minutes of conversation over its ruins, and spoke to her husband, who contested the necessity for secresy, but yielded to her judgement when it was backed by Stukely Culbrett. Soon after Lord Palmet found himself encountered by evasions and

witticisms, in spite of the absence of the ladies, upon every attempt he made to get some light regarding the destination of the four-in-hands next day.

‘What are you going to do?’ he said to Mr. Devereux, thinking him the likeliest one to grow confidential in private.

‘Smoke,’ resounded from the depths of that gentleman.

Palmet recollected the ground of division between the beautiful brunette and her lord—his addiction to the pipe in perpetuity, and deemed it sweeter to be with the lady.

She and Miss Halkett were walking in the garden.

Miss Halkett said to him: ’How wrong of you to betray the secrets of your friend! Is he really making way?’

Page 2384

‘Beauchamp will head the poll to a certainty,’ Palmet replied.

‘Still,’ said Miss Halkett, ’you should not forget that you are not in the house of a Liberal. Did you canvass in the town or the suburbs?’

’Everywhere. I assure you, Miss Halkett, there’s a feeling for Beauchamp—they’re in love with him!’

‘He promises them everything, I suppose?’

’Not he. And the odd thing is, it isn’t the Radicals he catches. He won’t go against the game laws for them, and he won’t cut down army and navy. So the Radicals yell at him. One confessed he had sold his vote for five pounds last election: “you shall have it for the same,” says he, “for you’re all humbugs.” Beauchamp took him by the throat and shook him—metaphorically, you know. But as for the tradesmen, he’s their hero; bakers especially.’

‘Mr. Austin may be right, then!’ Cecilia reflected aloud.

She went to Mrs. Lespel to repeat what she had extracted from Palmet, after warning the latter not, in common loyalty, to converse about his canvass with Beauchamp.

‘Did you speak of Mr. Lydiard as Captain Beauchamp’s friend?’ Mrs. Devereux inquired of him.

‘Lydiard? why, he was the man who made off with that pretty Miss Denham,’ said Palmet. ’I have the greatest trouble to remember them all; but it was not a day wasted. Now I know politics. Shall we ride or walk? You will let me have the happiness? I’m so unlucky; I rarely meet you!’

‘You will bring Captain Beauchamp to me the moment he comes?’

‘I’ll bring him. Bring him? Nevil Beauchamp won’t want bringing.’

Mrs. Devereux smiled with some pleasure.

Grancey Lespel, followed at some distance by Mr. Ferbrass, the Tory lawyer, stepped quickly up to Palmet, and asked whether Beauchamp had seen Dollikins, the brewer.

Palmet could recollect the name of one Tomlinson, and also the calling at a brewery. Moreover, Beauchamp had uttered contempt of the brewer’s business, and of the social rule to accept rich brewers for gentlemen. The man’s name might be Dollikins and not Tomlinson, and if so, it was Dollikins who would not see Beauchamp. To preserve his political importance, Palmet said, ‘Dollikins! to be sure, that was the man.’

‘Treats him as he does you,’ Mr. Lespel turned to Ferbrass. ’I’ve sent to Dollikins to come to me this morning, if he’s not driving into the town. I’ll have him before Beauchamp sees him. I’ve asked half-a-dozen of these country gentlemen-tradesmen to lunch at my table to-day.’

‘Then, sir,’ observed Ferbrass, ’if they are men to be persuaded, they had better not see me.’

‘True; they’re my old supporters, and mightn’t like your Tory face,’ Mr. Lespel assented.

Mr. Ferbrass congratulated him on the heartiness of his espousal of the Tory cause.

Mr. Lespel winced a little, and told him not to put his trust in that.

Page 2385

‘Turned Tory?’ said Palmet.

Mr. Lespel declined to answer.

Palmet said to Mrs. Devereux, ’He thinks I’m not worth speaking to upon politics. Now I’ll give him some Beauchamp; I learned lots yesterday.’

‘Then let it be in Captain Beauchamp’s manner,’ said she softly.

Palmet obeyed her commands with the liveliest exhibition of his peculiar faculty: Cecilia, rejoining them, seemed to hear Nevil himself in his emphatic political mood. ’Because the Whigs are defunct! They had no root in the people! Whig is the name of a tribe that was! You have Tory, Liberal, and Radical. There is no place for Whig. He is played out.’

‘Who has been putting that nonsense into your head?’ Mr. Lespel retorted. ‘Go shooting, go shooting!’

Shots were heard in the woods. Palmet pricked up his ears; but he was taken out riding to act cavalier to Mrs. Devereux and Miss Halkett.

Cecilia corrected his enthusiasm with the situation. ’No flatteries to-day. There are hours when women feel their insignificance and helplessness. I begin to fear for Mr. Austin; and I find I can do nothing to aid him. My hands are tied. And yet I know I could win voters if only it were permissible for me to go and speak to them.’

‘Win them!’ cried Palmet, imagining the alacrity of men’s votes to be won by her. He recommended a gallop for the chasing away of melancholy, and as they were on the Bevisham high road, which was bordered by strips of turf and heath, a few good stretches brought them on the fir-heights, commanding views of the town and broad water.

‘No, I cannot enjoy it,’ Cecilia said to Mrs. Devereux; ’I don’t mind the grey light; cloud and water, and halftones of colour, are homely English and pleasant, and that opal where the sun should be has a suggestiveness richer than sunlight. I’m quite northern enough to understand it; but with me it must be either peace or strife, and that Election down there destroys my chance of peace. I never could mix reverie with excitement; the battle must be over first, and the dead buried. Can you?’

Mrs. Devereux answered: ’Excitement? I am not sure that I know what it is. An Election does not excite me.’

‘There’s Nevil Beauchamp himself!’ Palmet sang out, and the ladies discerned Beauchamp under a fir-tree, down by the road, not alone. A man, increasing in length like a telescope gradually reaching its end for observation, and coming to the height of a

landmark, as if raised by ropes, was rising from the ground beside him. 'Shall we trot on, Miss Halkett?'

Cecilia said, 'No.'

'Now I see a third fellow,' said Palmet. 'It's the other fellow, the Denham-Shrapnel-Radical meeting . . . Lydiard's his name: writes books!

'We may as well ride on,' Mrs. Devereux remarked, and her horse fretted singularly.

Beauchamp perceived them, and lifted his hat. Palmet made demonstrations for the ladies. Still neither party moved nearer.

Page 2386

After some waiting, Cecilia proposed to turn back.

Mrs. Devereux looked into her eyes. ‘I’ll take the lead,’ she said, and started forward, pursued by Palmet. Cecilia followed at a sullen canter.

Before they came up to Beauchamp, the long-shanked man had stalked away townward. Lydiard held Beauchamp by the hand. Some last words, after the manner of instructions, passed between them, and then Lydiard also turned away.

‘I say, Beauchamp, Mrs. Devereux wants to hear who that man is,’ Palmet said, drawing up.

‘That man is Dr. Shrapnel,’ said Beauchamp, convinced that Cecilia had checked her horse at the sight of the doctor.

‘Dr. Shrapnel,’ Palmet informed Mrs. Devereux.

She looked at him to seek his wits, and returning Beauchamp’s admiring salutation with a little bow and smile, said, ’I fancied it was a gentleman we met in Spain.’

‘He writes books,’ observed Palmet, to jog a slow intelligence.

‘Pamphlets, you mean.’

‘I think he is not a pamphleteer’, Mrs. Devereux said.

‘Mr. Lydiard, then, of course; how silly I am! How can you pardon me!’ Beauchamp was contrite; he could not explain that a long guess he had made at Miss Halkett’s reluctance to come up to him when Dr. Shrapnel was with him had preoccupied his mind. He sent off Palmet the bearer of a pretext for bringing Lydiard back, and then said to Cecilia, ’You recognized Dr. Shrapnel?’

‘I thought it might be Dr. Shrapnel’, she was candid enough to reply. ’I could not well recognize him, not knowing him.’

’Here comes Mr. Lydiard; and let me assure you, if I may take the liberty of introducing him, he is no true Radical. He is a philosopher—one of the flirts, the butterflies of politics, as Dr. Shrapnel calls them.’

Beauchamp hummed over some improvized trifles to Lydiard, then introduced him cursorily, and all walked in the direction of Itchincope. It was really the Mr. Lydiard Mrs. Devereux had met in Spain, so they were left in the rear to discuss their travels. Much conversation did not go on in front. Cecilia was very reserved. By-and-by she said, ’I am glad you have come into the country early to-day.’

He spoke rapturously of the fresh air, and not too mildly of his pleasure in meeting her. Quite off her guard, she began to hope he was getting to be one of them again, until she heard him tell Lord Palmet that he had come early out of Bevisham for the walk with Dr. Shrapnel, and to call on certain rich tradesmen living near Itchincope. He mentioned the name of Dollikins.

'Dollikins?' Palmet consulted a perturbed recollection. Among the entangled list of new names he had gathered recently from the study of politics, Dollikins rang in his head. He shouted, 'Yes, Dollikins! to be sure. Lespel has him to lunch to-day;—calls him a gentleman-tradesman; odd fish! and told a fellow called—where is it now?—a name like brass or copper . . . Copperstone? Brasspot? . . . told him he'd do well to keep his Tory cheek out of sight. It 's the names of those fellows bother one so! All the rest's easy.'

Page 2387

‘You are evidently in a state of confusion, Lord Palmet,’ said Cecilia.

The tone of rebuke and admonishment was unperceived. ’Not about the facts,’ he rejoined. ’I ’m for fair play all round; no trickery. I tell Beauchamp all I know, just as I told you this morning, Miss Halkett. What I don’t like is Lespel turning Tory.’

Cecilia put a stop to his indiscretions by halting for Mrs. Devereux, and saying to Beauchamp, ’If your friend would return to Bevisham by rail, this is the nearest point to the station.’

Palmet, best-natured of men, though generally prompted by some of his peculiar motives, dismounted from his horse, leaving him to Beauchamp, that he might conduct Mr. Lydiard to the station, and perhaps hear a word of Miss Denham: at any rate be able to form a guess as to the secret of that art of his, which had in the space of an hour restored a happy and luminous vivacity to the languid Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.

CHAPTER XXI

The question as to the examination of the whigs, *and the fine blow struck by Mr*. *Everard Romfrey*

Itchincope was famous for its hospitality. Yet Beauchamp, when in the presence of his hostess, could see that he was both unexpected and unwelcome. Mrs. Lespel was unable to conceal it; she looked meaningly at Cecilia, talked of the house being very full, and her husband engaged till late in the afternoon. And Captain Baskelett had arrived on a sudden, she said. And the luncheon-table in the dining-room could not possibly hold more.

‘We three will sit in the library, anywhere,’ said Cecilia.

So they sat and lunched in the library, where Mrs. Devereux served unconsciously for an excellent ally to Cecilia in chatting to Beauchamp, principally of the writings of Mr. Lydiard.

Had the blinds of the windows been drawn down and candles lighted, Beauchamp would have been well contented to remain with these two ladies, and forget the outer world; sweeter society could not have been offered him: but glancing carelessly on to the lawn, he exclaimed in some wonderment that the man he particularly wished to see was there. ’It must be Dollikins, the brewer. I’ve had him pointed out to me in Bevisham, and I never can light on him at his brewery.’

No excuse for detaining the impetuous candidate struck Cecilia. She betook herself to Mrs. Lespel, to give and receive counsel in the emergency, while Beauchamp struck

across the lawn to Mr. Dollikins, who had the squire of Itchincope on the other side of him.

Late in the afternoon a report reached the ladies of a furious contest going on over Dollikins. Mr. Algy Borolick was the first to give them intelligence of it, and he declared that Beauchamp had wrested Dollikins from Grancey Lespel. This was contradicted subsequently by Mr. Stukely Culbrett. 'But there's heavy pulling between them,' he said.

Page 2388

‘It will do all the good in the world to Grancey,’ said Mrs. Lespel.

She sat in her little blue-room, with gentlemen congregating at the open window.

Presently Grancey Lespel rounded a projection of the house where the drawing-room stood out: ‘The maddest folly ever talked!’ he delivered himself in wrath. ‘The Whigs dead? You may as well say I’m dead.’

It was Beauchamp answering: ’Politically, you’re dead, if you call yourself a Whig. You couldn’t be a live one, for the party’s in pieces, blown to the winds. The country was once a chess-board for Whig and Tory: but that game’s at an end. There’s no doubt on earth that the Whigs are dead.’

‘But if there’s no doubt about it, how is it I have a doubt about it?’

’You know you’re a Tory. You tried to get that man Dollikins from me in the Tory interest.’

’I mean to keep him out of Radical clutches. Now that ‘s the truth.’

They came up to the group by the open window, still conversing hotly, indifferent to listeners.

‘You won’t keep him from me; I have him,’ said Beauchamp.

‘You delude yourself; I have his promise, his pledged word,’ said Grancey Lespel.

‘The man himself told you his opinion of renegade Whigs.’

‘Renegade!’

‘Renegade Whig is an actionable phrase,’ Mr. Culbrett observed.

He was unnoticed.

‘If you don’t like “renegade,” take “dead,"’ said Beauchamp. ’Dead Whig resurgent in the Tory. You are dead.’

‘It’s the stupid conceit of your party thinks that.’

’Dead, my dear Mr. Lespel. I’ll say for the Whigs, they would not be seen touting for Tories if they were not ghosts of Whigs. You are dead. There is no doubt of it.’

‘But,’ Grancey Lespel repeated, ’if there’s no doubt about it, how is it I have a doubt about it?’

‘The Whigs preached finality in Reform. It was their own funeral sermon.’

‘Nonsensical talk!’

’I don’t dispute your liberty of action to go over to the Tories, but you have no right to attempt to take an honest Liberal with you. And that I’ve stopped.’

’Aha! Beauchamp; the man’s mine. Come, you’ll own he swore he wouldn’t vote for a Shrapnelite.’

’Don’t you remember?—that’s how the Tories used to fight you; they stuck an epithet to you, and hooted to set the mob an example; you hit them off to the life,’ said Beauchamp, brightening with the fine ire of strife, and affecting a sadder indignation. ’You traded on the ignorance of a man prejudiced by lying reports of one of the noblest of human creatures.’

‘Shrapnel? There! I’ve had enough.’ Grancey Lespel bounced away with both hands outspread on the level of his ears.

‘Dead!’ Beauchamp sent the ghastly accusation after him.

Grancey faced round and said, ‘Bo!’ which was applauded for a smart retort. And let none of us be so exalted above the wit of daily life as to sneer at it. Mrs. Lespel remarked to Mr. Culbrett, ’Do you not see how much he is refreshed by the interest he takes in this election? He is ten years younger.’

Page 2389

Beauchamp bent to her, saying mock-dolefully, 'I'm sorry to tell you that if ever he was a sincere Whig, he has years of remorse before him.'

'Promise me, Captain Beauchamp,' she answered, 'promise you will give us no more politics to-day.'

'If none provoke me.'

'None shall.'

'And as to Bevisham,' said Mr. Culbrett, 'it's the identical borough for a Radical candidate, for every voter there demands a division of his property, and he should be the last to complain of an adoption of his principles.'

'Clever,' rejoined Beauchamp; 'but I am under government'; and he swept a bow to Mrs. Lespel.

As they were breaking up the group, Captain Baskelett appeared.

'Ah! Nevil,' said he, passed him, saluted Miss Halkett through the window, then cordially squeezed his cousin's hand. 'Having a holiday out of Bevisham? The baron expects to meet you at Mount Laurels to-morrow. He particularly wishes me to ask you whether you think all is fair in war.'

'I don't,' said Nevil.

'Not? The canvass goes on swimmingly.'

'Ask Palmet!

'Palmet gives you two-thirds of the borough. The poor old Tory tortoise is nowhere. They've been writing about you, Nevil.'

'They have. And if there 's a man of honour in the party I shall hold him responsible for it.'

'I allude to an article in the Bevisham Liberal paper; a magnificent eulogy, upon my honour. I give you my word, I have rarely read an article so eloquent. And what is the Conservative misdemeanour which the man of honour in the party is to pay for?'

'I'll talk to you about it by-and-by,' said Nevil.

He seemed to Cecilia too trusting, too simple, considering his cousin's undisguised tone of banter. Yet she could not put him on his guard. She would have had Mr. Culbrett do

so. She walked on the terrace with him near upon sunset, and said, 'The position Captain Beauchamp is in here is most unfair to him.'

'There's nothing unfair in the lion's den,' said Stukely Culbrett; adding, 'Now, observe, Miss Halkett; he talks for effect. He discovers that Lespel is a Torified Whig; but that does not make him a bit more alert. It's to say smart things. He speaks, but won't act, as if he were among enemies. He's getting too fond of his bow-wow. Here he is, and he knows the den, and he chooses to act the innocent. You see how ridiculous? That trick of the ingenu, or peculiarly heavenly messenger, who pretends that he ought never to have any harm done to him, though he carries the lighted match, is the way of young Radicals. Otherwise Beauchamp would be a dear boy. We shall see how he takes his thrashing.'

'You feel sure he will be beaten?'

'He has too strong a dose of fool's honesty to succeed—stands for the game laws with Radicals, for example. He's loaded with scruples and crotchets, and thinks more of them than of his winds and his tides. No public man is to be made out of that. His idea of the Whigs being dead shows a head that can't read the country. He means himself for mankind, and is preparing to be the benefactor of a country parish.'

Page 2390

‘But as a naval officer?’

‘Excellent.’

Cecilia was convinced that Mr. Culbrett underestimated Beauchamp. Nevertheless the confidence expressed in Beauchamp’s defeat reassured and pleased her. At midnight she was dancing with him in the midst of great matronly country vessels that raised a wind when they launched on the waltz, and exacted an anxious pilotage on the part of gentlemen careful of their partners; and why I cannot say, but contrasts produce quaint ideas in excited spirits, and a dancing politician appeared to her so absurd that at one moment she had to bite her lips not to laugh. It will hardly be credited that the waltz with Nevil was delightful to Cecilia all the while, and dancing with others a penance. He danced with none other. He led her to a three o’clock morning supper: one of those triumphant subversions of the laws and customs of earth which have the charm of a form of present deification for all young people; and she, while noting how the poor man’s advocate dealt with costly pasties and sparkling wines, was overjoyed at his hearty comrade’s manner with the gentlemen, and a leadership in fun that he seemed to have established. Cecil Baskelett acknowledged it, and complimented him on it. ’I give you my word, Nevil, I never heard you in finer trim. Here’s to our drive into Bevisham to-morrow! Do you drink it? I beg; I entreat.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Nevil.

‘Will you take a whip down there?’

‘If you’re all insured.’

’On my honour, old Nevil, driving a four-in-hand is easier than governing the country.’

‘I’ll accept your authority for what you know best,’ said Nevil.

The toast of the Drive into Bevisham was drunk.

Cecilia left the supper-table, mortified, and feeling disgraced by her participation in a secret that was being wantonly abused to humiliate Nevil, as she was made to think by her sensitiveness. All the gentlemen were against him, excepting perhaps that chattering pie Lord Palmet, who did him more mischief than his enemies. She could not sleep. She walked out on the terrace with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, in a dream, hearing that lady breathe remarks hardly less than sentimental, and an unwearied succession of shouts from the smoking-room.

‘They are not going to bed to-night,’ said Mrs. Devereux.

‘They are mystifying Captain Beauchamp,’ said Cecilia.

’My husband tells me they are going to drive him into the town to-morrow.’

Cecilia flushed: she could scarcely get her breath.

‘Is that their plot?’ she murmured.

Sleep was rejected by her, bed itself. The drive into Bevisham had been fixed for nine A.M. She wrote two lines on note-paper in her room: but found them overfervid and mysterious. Besides, how were they to be conveyed to Nevil’s chamber.

Page 2391

She walked in the passage for half an hour, thinking it possible she might meet him; not the most lady-like of proceedings, but her head was bewildered. An arm-chair in her room invited her to rest and think—the mask of a natural desire for sleep. At eight in the morning she was awakened by her maid, and at a touch exclaimed, ‘Have they gone?’ and her heart still throbbed after hearing that most of the gentlemen were in and about the stables. Cecilia was down-stairs at a quarter to nine. The breakfast-room was empty of all but Lord Palmet and Mr. Wardour-Devereux; one selecting a cigar to light out of doors, the other debating between two pipes. She beckoned to Palmet, and commissioned him to inform Beauchamp that she wished him to drive her down to Bevisham in her pony-carriage. Palmet brought back word from Beauchamp that he had an appointment at ten o’clock in the town. ‘I want to see him,’ she said; so Palmet ran out with the order. Cecilia met Beauchamp in the entrance-hall.

‘You must not go,’ she said bluntly.

‘I can’t break an appointment,’ said he—’for the sake of my own pleasure,’ was implied.

‘Will you not listen to me, Nevil, when I say you cannot go?’

A coachman’s trumpet blew.

’I shall be late. That’s Colonel Millington’s team. He starts first, then Wardour-Devereux, then Cecil, and I mount beside him; Palmet’s at our heels.’

’But can’t you even imagine a purpose for their driving into Bevisham so pompously?’

‘Well, men with drags haven’t commonly much purpose,’ he said.

’But on this occasion! At an Election time! Surely, Nevil, you can guess at a reason.’

A second trumpet blew very martially. Footmen came in search of Captain Beauchamp. The alternative of breaking her pledged word to her father, or of letting Nevil be burlesqued in the sight of the town, could no longer be dallied with.

Cecilia said, ‘Well, Nevil, then you shall hear it.’

Hereupon Captain Baskelett’s groom informed Captain Beauchamp that he was off.

‘Yes,’ Nevil said to Cecilia, ‘tell me on board the yacht.’

’Nevil, you will be driving into the town with the second Tory candidate of the borough.’

‘Which? who?’ Nevil ’asked.

‘Your cousin Cecil.’

‘Tell Captain Baskelett that I don’t drive down till an hour later,’ Nevil said to the groom. ’Cecilia, you’re my friend; I wish you were more. I wish we didn’t differ. I shall hope to change you—make you come half-way out of that citadel of yours. This is my uncle Everard! I might have made sure there’d be a blow from him! And Cecil! of all men for a politician! Cecilia, think of it! Cecil Baskelett! I beg Seymour Austin’s pardon for having suspected him . . .’

Now sounded Captain Baskelett’s trumpet.

Angry though he was, Beauchamp laughed. ’Isn’t it exactly like the baron to spring a mine of this kind?’

Page 2392

There was decidedly humour in the plot, and it was a lusty quarterstaff blow into the bargain. Beauchamp's head rang with it. He could not conceal the stunning effect it had on him. Gratitude and tenderness toward Cecilia for saving him, at the cost of a partial breach of faith that he quite understood, from the scandal of the public entry into Bevisham on the Tory coach-box, alternated with his interjections regarding his uncle Everard.

At eleven, Cecilia sat in her pony-carriage giving final directions to Mrs. Devereux where to look out for the Esperanza and the schooner's boat. 'Then I drive down alone,' Mrs. Devereux said.

The gentlemen were all off, and every available maid with them on the coach-boxes, a brilliant sight that had been missed by Nevil and Cecilia.

'Why, here's Lydiard!' said Nevil, supposing that Lydiard must be approaching him with tidings of the second Tory candidate. But Lydiard knew nothing of it. He was the bearer of a letter on foreign paper—marked urgent, in Rosamund's hand—and similarly worded in the well-known hand which had inscribed the original address of the letter to Steynham.

Beauchamp opened it and read:

Chateau Tourdestelle
'(Eure).

'Come. I give you three days—no more.

'*Renee*.'

The brevity was horrible. Did it spring from childish imperiousness or tragic peril?

Beauchamp could imagine it to be this or that. In moments of excited speculation we do not dwell on the possibility that there may be a mixture of motives.

'I fear I must cross over to France this evening,' he said to Cecilia.

She replied, 'It is likely to be stormy to-night. The steamboat may not run.'

'If there's a doubt of it, I shall find a French lugger. You are tired, from not sleeping last night.'

'No,' she answered, and nodded to Mrs. Devereux, beside whom Mr. Lydiard stood: 'You will not drive down alone, you see.'

For a young lady threatened with a tempest in her heart, as disturbing to her as the one gathering in the West for ships at sea, Miss Halkett bore herself well.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DRIVE INTO BEVISHAM

Beauchamp was requested by Cecilia to hold the reins. His fair companion in the pony-carriage preferred to lean back musing, and he had leisure to think over the blow dealt him by his uncle Everard with so sure an aim so ringingly on the head. And in the first place he made no attempt to disdain it because it was nothing but artful and heavy-handed, after the mediaeval pattern. Of old he himself had delighted in artfulness as well as boldness and the unmistakeable hit. Highly to prize generalship was in his blood, though latterly the very forces propelling him to his political warfare had forbidden the use of it to him. He saw the patient veteran laying his gun for a long shot—to give as good as he had received; and in realizing Everard Romfrey's perfectly placid bearing under provocation, such as he certainly would have maintained while preparing his reply to it, the raw fighting humour of the plot touched the sense of justice in Beauchamp enough to make him own that he had been the first to offend.

Page 2393

He could reflect also on the likelihood that other offended men of his uncle's age and position would have sulked or stormed, threatening the Parthian shot of the vindictive testator. If there was godlessness in turning to politics for a weapon to strike a domestic blow, manfulness in some degree signalized it. Beauchamp could fancy his uncle crying out, Who set the example? and he was not at that instant inclined to dwell on the occult virtues of the example he had set. To be honest, this elevation of a political puppet like Cecil Baskelett, and the starting him, out of the same family which Turbot, the journalist, had magnified, into Bevisham with such pomp and flourish in opposition to the serious young champion of popular rights and the Puritan style, was ludicrously effective. Conscienceless of course. But that was the way of the Old School.

Beauchamp broke the silence by thanking Cecilia once more for saving him from the absurd exhibition of the Radical candidate on the Tory coach-box, and laughing at the grimmish slyness of his uncle Everard's conspiracy a something in it that was half-smile half-sneer; not exactly malignant, and by no means innocent; something made up of the simplicity of a lighted match, and its proximity to powder, yet neither deadly, in spite of a wicked twinkle, nor at all pretending to be harmless: in short, a specimen of old English practical humour.

He laboured to express these or corresponding views of it, with tolerably natural laughter, and Cecilia rallied her spirits at his pleasant manner of taking his blow.

'I shall compliment the baron when I meet him tonight,' he said. 'What can we compare him to?'

She suggested the Commander of the Faithful, the Lord Haroun, who likewise had a turn for buffooneries to serve a purpose, and could direct them loftily and sovereignty.

'No: Everard Romfrey's a Northerner from the feet up,' said Beauchamp.

Cecilia compliantly offered him a sketch of the Scandinavian Troll: much nearer the mark, he thought, and exclaimed: 'Baron Troll! I'm afraid, Cecilia, you have robbed him of the best part of his fun. And you will owe it entirely to him if you should be represented in Parliament by my cousin Basketett.'

'Promise me, Nevit, that you will, when you meet Captain Baskelett, not forget I did you some service, and that I wish, I shall be so glad if you do not resent certain things . . . .Very objectionable, we all think.'

He released her from the embarrassing petition: 'Oh! now I know my man, you may be sure I won't waste a word on him. The fact is, he would not understand a word, and would require more—and that I don't do. When I fancied Mr. Austin was the responsible person, I meant to speak to him.'

Cecilia smiled gratefully.

The sweetness of a love-speech would not have been sweeter to her than this proof of civilized chivalry in Nevil.

Page 2394

They came to the fir-heights overlooking Bevisham. Here the breezy beginning of a South-western autumnal gale tossed the ponies' manes and made threads of Cecilia's shorter locks of beautiful auburn by the temples and the neck, blustering the curls that streamed in a thick involution from the silken band gathering them off her uncovered clear-swept ears.

Beauchamp took an impression of her side face. It seemed to offer him everything the world could offer of cultivated purity, intelligent beauty and attractiveness; and 'Wilt thou?' said the winged minute. Peace, a good repute in the mouths of men, home, and a trustworthy woman for mate, an ideal English lady, the rarest growth of our country, and friends and fair esteem, were offered. Last night he had waltzed with her, and the manner of this tall graceful girl in submitting to the union of the measure and reserving her individual distinction, had exquisitely flattered his taste, giving him an auspicious image of her in partnership, through the uses of life.

He looked ahead at the low dead-blue cloud swinging from across channel. What could be the riddle of Renee's letter! It chained him completely.

'At all events, I shall not be away longer than three days,' he said; paused, eyed Cecilia's profile, and added, 'Do we differ so much?'

'It may not be so much as we think,' said she.

'But if we do!'

'Then, Nevil, there is a difference between us.'

'But if we keep our lips closed?'

'We should have to shut our eyes as well!'

A lovely melting image of her stole over him; all the warmer for her unwittingness in producing it: and it awakened a tenderness toward the simple speaker.

Cecilia's delicate breeding saved her from running on figuratively. She continued: 'Intellectual differences do not cause wounds, except when very unintellectual sentiments are behind them:—my conceit, or your impatience, Nevil? "Noi veggiam come quei, che ha mala luce." . . . I can confess my sight to be imperfect: but will you ever do so?'

Her musical voice in Italian charmed his hearing.

'What poet was that you quoted?'

'The wisest: Dante.'

‘Dr. Shrapnel’s favourite! I must try to read him.’

‘He reads Dante?’ Cecilia threw a stress on the august name; and it was manifest that she cared not for the answer.

Contemptuous exclusiveness could not go farther.

‘He is a man of cultivation,’ Beauchamp said cursorily, trying to avoid dissension, but in vain. ’I wish I were half as well instructed, and the world half as charitable as he!—You ask me if I shall admit my sight to be imperfect. Yes; when you prove to me that priests and landlords are willing to do their duty by the people in preference to their churches and their property: but will you ever shake off prejudice?’

Here was opposition sounding again. Cecilia mentally reproached Dr. Shrapnel for it.

Page 2395

’Indeed, Nevil, really, must not—may I not ask you this?—must not every one feel the evil spell of some associations? And Dante and Dr. Shrapnel!’

‘You don’t know him, Cecilia.’

‘I saw him yesterday.’

‘You thought him too tall?’

‘I thought of his character.’

‘How angry I should be with you if you were not so beautiful!’

‘I am immensely indebted to my unconscious advocate.’

’You are clad in steel; you flash back; you won’t answer me out of the heart. I ‘m convinced it is pure wilfulness that makes you oppose me.’

’I fancy you must be convinced because you cannot imagine women to have any share of public spirit, Nevil.’

A grain of truth in that remark set Nevil reflecting.

‘I want them to have it,’ he remarked, and glanced at a Tory placard, probably the puppet’s fresh-printed address to the electors, on one of the wayside fir-trees. ’Bevisham looks well from here. We might make a North-western Venice of it, if we liked.’

‘Papa told you it would be money sunk in mud.’

’Did I mention it to him?—Thoroughly Conservative!—So he would leave the mud as it is. They insist on our not venturing anything—those Tories! exactly as though we had gained the best of human conditions, instead of counting crops of rogues, malefactors, egoists, noxious and lumbersome creatures that deaden the country. Your town down there is one of the ugliest and dirtiest in the kingdom: it might be the fairest.’

‘I have often thought that of Bevisham, Nevil.’

He drew a visionary sketch of quays, embankments, bridged islands, public buildings, magical emanations of patriotic architecture, with a practical air, an absence of that enthusiasm which struck her with suspicion when it was not applied to landscape or the Arts; and she accepted it, and warmed, and even allowed herself to appear hesitating when he returned to the similarity of the state of mud-begirt Bevisham and our great sluggish England.

Was he not perhaps to be pitied in his bondage to the Frenchwoman, who could have no ideas in common with him?

The rare circumstance that she and Nevil Beauchamp had found a subject of agreement, partially overcame the sentiment Cecilia entertained for the foreign lady; and having now one idea in common with him, she conceived the possibility that there might be more. There must be many, for he loved England, and she no less. She clung, however, to the topic of Bevisham, preferring to dream of the many more, rather than run risks. Undoubtedly the town was of an ignoble aspect; and it was declining in prosperity; and it was consequently over-populated. And undoubtedly (so she was induced to coincide for the moment) a Government, acting to any extent like a supervising head, should aid and direct the energies of towns and ports and trades, and not leave everything everywhere to chance: schools for the people, public morality,

Page 2396

should be the charge of Government. Cecilia had surrendered the lead to him, and was forced to subscribe to an equivalent of ‘undoubtedly’ the Tories just as little as the Liberals had done these good offices. Party against party, neither of them had a forethoughtful head for the land at large. They waited for the Press to spur a great imperial country to be but defensively armed, and they accepted the so-called volunteers, with a nominal one-month’s drill per annum, as a guarantee of defence!

Beauchamp startled her, actually kindled her mind to an activity of wonder and regret, with the statement of how much Government, acting with some degree of farsightedness, might have won to pay the public debt and remit taxation, by originally retaining the lines of railway, and fastening on the valuable land adjoining stations. Hundreds of millions of pounds!

She dropped a sigh at the prodigious amount, but inquired, ’Who has calculated it?’

For though perfectly aware that this kind of conversation was a special compliment paid to her by her friend Nevil, and dimly perceiving that it implied something beyond a compliment-in fact, that it was his manner of probing her for sympathy, as other men would have conducted the process preliminary to deadly flattery or to wooing, her wits fenced her heart about; the exercise of shrewdness was an instinct of self-preservation. She had nothing but her poor wits, daily growing fainter, to resist him with. And he seemed to know it, and therefore assailed them, never trying at the heart.

That vast army of figures might be but a phantom army conjured out of the Radical mists, might it not? she hinted. And besides, we cannot surely require a Government to speculate in the future, can we?

Possibly not, as Governments go, Beauchamp said.

But what think you of a Government of landowners decreeing the enclosure of millions of acres of common land amongst themselves; taking the property of the people to add to their own! Say, is not that plunder? Public property, observe; decreed to them by their own law-making, under the pretence that it was being reclaimed for cultivation, when in reality it has been but an addition to their pleasure-grounds: a flat robbery of pasture from the poor man’s cow and goose, and his right of cutting furze for firing. Consider that! Beauchamp’s eyes flashed democratic in reciting this injury to the objects of his warm solicitude—the man, the cow, and the goose. But so must he have looked when fronting England’s enemies, and his aspect of fervour subdued Cecilia. She confessed her inability to form an estimate of such conduct.

‘Are they doing it still?’ she asked.

’We owe it to Dr. Shrapnel foremost that there is now a watch over them to stop them. But for him, Grancey Lespel would have enclosed half of Northeden Heath. As it is, he has filched bits here and there, and he will have to put back his palings.’

Page 2397

However, now let Cecilia understand that we English, calling ourselves free, are under morally lawless rule. Government is what we require, and our means of getting it must be through universal suffrage. At present we have no Government; only shifting Party Ministries, which are the tools of divers interests, wealthy factions, to the sacrifice of the Commonwealth.

She listened, like Rosamund Culling overborne by Dr. Shrapnel, inwardly praying that she might discover a man to reply to him.

‘A Despotism, Nevil?’

He hoped not, declined the despot, was English enough to stand against the best of men in that character; but he cast it on Tory, Whig, and Liberal, otherwise the Constitutionalists, if we were to come upon the despot.

’They see we are close on universal suffrage; they’ve been bidding each in turn for “the people,” and that has brought them to it, and now they’re alarmed, and accuse one another of treason to the Constitution, and they don’t accept the situation: and there’s a fear, that to carry on their present system, they will be thwarting the people or corrupting them: and in that case we shall have our despot in some shape or other, and we shall suffer.’

‘Nevil,’ said Cecilia, ‘I am out of my depth.’

‘I’ll support you; I can swim for two,’ said he.

’You are very self-confident, but I find I am not fit for battle; at least not in the front ranks.’

’Nerve me, then: will you? Try to comprehend once for all what the battle is.’

’I am afraid I am too indifferent; I am too luxurious. That reminds me: you want to meet your uncle Everard and if you will sleep at Mount Laurels to-night, the Esperanza shall take you to France to-morrow morning, and can wait to bring you back.’

As she spoke she perceived a flush mounting over Nevil’s face. Soon it was communicated to hers.

The strange secret of the blood electrified them both, and revealed the burning undercurrent running between them from the hearts of each. The light that showed how near they were to one another was kindled at the barrier dividing them. It remained as good as a secret, unchallenged until they had separated, and after midnight Cecilia looked through her. chamber windows at the driving moon of a hurricane scud, and read clearly his honourable reluctance to be wafted over to his French love by her

assistance; and Beauchamp on board the tossing steamboat perceived in her sympathetic reddening that she had divined him.

This auroral light eclipsed the other events of the day. He drove into a town royally decorated, and still humming with the ravishment of the Tory entrance. He sailed in the schooner to Mount Laurels, in the society of Captain Baskelett and his friends, who, finding him tamer than they expected, bantered him in the cheerfullest fashion. He waited for his uncle Everard several hours at Mount Laurels, perused the junior Tory's address to the Electors,

Page 2398

throughout which there was not an idea—safest of addresses to canvass upon! perused likewise, at Captain Baskelett's request, a broad sheet of an article introducing the new candidate to Bevisham with the battle-axe Romfreys to back him, in high burlesque of Timothy Turbot upon Beauchamp: and Cecil hoped his cousin would not object to his borrowing a Romfrey or two for so pressing an occasion. All very funny, and no doubt the presence of Mr. Everard Romfrey would have heightened the fun from the fountain-head; but he happened to be delayed, and Beauchamp had to leave directions behind him in the town, besides the discussion of a whole plan of conduct with Dr. Shrapnel, so he was under the necessity of departing without seeing his uncle, really to his regret. He left word to that effect.

Taking leave of Cecilia, he talked of his return 'home' within three or four days as a certainty.

She said: 'Canvassing should not be neglected now.'

Her hostility was confused by what she had done to save him from annoyance, while his behaviour to his cousin Cecil increased her respect for him. She detected a pathetic meaning in his mention of the word home; she mused on his having called her beautiful: whither was she hurrying? Forgetful of her horror of his revolutionary ideas, forgetful of the elevation of her own, she thrilled secretly on hearing it stated by the jubilant young Tories at Mount Laurels, as a characteristic of Beauchamp, that he was clever in parrying political thrusts, and slipping from the theme; he who with her gave out unguardedly the thoughts deepest in him. And the thoughts!—were they not of generous origin? Where so true a helpmate for him as the one to whom his mind appealed? It could not be so with the Frenchwoman. Cecilia divined a generous nature by generosity, and set herself to believe that in honour he had not yet dared to speak to her from the heart, not being at heart quite free. She was at the same time in her remains of pride cool enough to examine and rebuke the weakness she succumbed to in now clinging to him by that which yesterday she hardly less than loathed, still deeply disliked.

CHAPTER XXIII

TOURDESTELLE

On the part of Beauchamp, his conversation with Cecilia during the drive into Bevisham opened out for the first time in his life a prospect of home; he had felt the word in speaking it, and it signified an end to the distractions produced by the sex, allegiance to one beloved respected woman, and also a basis of operations against the world. For she was evidently conquerable, and once matched with him would be the very woman to nerve and sustain him. Did she not listen to him? He liked her resistance. That element of the barbarous which went largely to form his emotional nature was overjoyed

in wresting such a woman from the enemy, and subduing her personally. She was a prize. She was a splendid prize, cut out from under the guns of the fort. He rendered all that was due to his eminently good cause for its part in so signal a success, but individual satisfaction is not diminished by the thought that the individual's discernment selected the cause thus beneficent to him.

Page 2399

Beauchamp's meditations were diverted by the sight of the coast of France dashed in rain-lines across a weed-strewn sea. The 'three days' granted him by Renee were over, and it scarcely troubled him that he should be behind the time; he detested mystery, holding it to be a sign of pretentious feebleness, often of imposture, it might be frivolity. Punctilious obedience to the mysterious brevity of the summons, and not to chafe at it, appeared to him as much as could be expected of a struggling man. This was the state of the case with him, until he stood on French earth, breathed French air, and chanced to hear the tongue of France twittered by a lady on the quay. The charm was instantaneous. He reminded himself that Renee, unlike her countrywomen, had no gift for writing letters. They had never corresponded since the hour of her marriage. They had met in Sicily, at Syracuse, in the presence of her father and her husband, and so inanimate was she that the meeting seemed like the conclusion of their history. Her brother Roland sent tidings of her by fits, and sometimes a conventional message from Tourdestelle. Latterly her husband's name had been cited as among the wildfires of Parisian quays, in journals more or less devoted to those unreclaimed spaces of the city. Well, if she was unhappy, was it not the fulfilment of his prophecy in Venice?

Renee's brevity became luminous. She needed him urgently, and knowing him faithful to the death, she, because she knew him, dispatched purely the words which said she needed him. Why, those brief words were the poetry of noble confidence! But what could her distress be? The lover was able to read that, 'Come; I give you three days,' addressed to him, was not language of a woman free of her yoke.

Excited to guess and guess, Beauchamp swept on to speculations of a madness that seized him bodily at last. Were you loved, Cecilia? He thought little of politics in relation to Renee; or of home, or of honour in the world's eye, or of labouring to pay the fee for his share of life. This at least was one of the forms of love which precipitate men: the sole thought in him was to be with her. She was Renee, the girl of whom he had prophetically said that she must come to regrets and tears. His vision of her was not at Tourdestelle, though he assumed her to be there awaiting him: she was under the sea-shadowing Alps, looking up to the red and gold-rosed heights of a realm of morning that was hers inviolably, and under which Renee was eternally his.

The interval between then and now was but the space of an unquiet sea traversed in the night, sad in the passage of it, but featureless—and it had proved him right! It was to Nevil Beauchamp as if the spirit of his old passion woke up again to glorious hopeful morning when he stood in Renee's France.

Page 2400

Tourdestelle enjoyed the aristocratic privilege of being twelve miles from the nearest railway station. Alighting here on an evening of clear sky, Beauchamp found an English groom ready to dismount for him and bring on his portmanteau. The man said that his mistress had been twice to the station, and was now at the neighbouring Chateau Dianet. Thither Beauchamp betook himself on horseback. He was informed at the gates that Madame la Marquise had left for Tourdestelle in the saddle only ten minutes previously. The lodge-keeper had been instructed to invite him to stay at Chateau Dianet in the event of his arriving late, but it would be possible to overtake madame by a cut across the heights at a turn of the valley. Beauchamp pushed along the valley for this visible projection; a towering mass of woodland, in the midst of which a narrow roadway, worn like the track of a torrent with heavy rain, wound upward. On his descent to the farther side, he was to spy directly below in the flat for Tourdestelle. He crossed the wooded neck above the valley, and began descending, peering into gulfs of the twilight dusk. Some paces down he was aided by a brilliant half-moon that divided the whole underlying country into sharp outlines of dark and fair, and while endeavouring to distinguish the chateau of Tourdestelle his eyes were attracted to an angle of the downward zigzag, where a pair of horses emerged into broad light swiftly; apparently the riders were disputing, or one had overtaken the other in pursuit. Riding-habit and plumed hat signalized the sex of one. Beauchamp sung out a gondolier's cry. He fancied it was answered.

He was heard, for the lady turned about, and as he rode down, still uncertain of her, she came cantering up alone, and there could be no uncertainty.

Moonlight is friendless to eyes that would make sure of a face long unseen. It was Renee whose hand he clasped, but the story of the years on her, and whether she was in bloom, or wan as the beams revealing her, he could not see.

Her tongue sounded to him as if it were loosened without a voice. 'You have come. That storm! You are safe!'

So phantom-like a sound of speech alarmed him. 'I lost no time. But you?'

'I am well.'

'Nothing hangs over you?'

'Nothing.'

'Why give me just three days?'

'Pure impatience. Have you forgotten me?'

Their horses walked on with them. They unlocked their hands.

‘You knew it was I?’ said he.

‘Who else could it be? I heard Venice,’ she replied.

Her previous cavalier was on his feet, all but on his knees, it appeared, searching for something that eluded him under the road-side bank. He sprang at it and waved it, leapt in the saddle, and remarked, as he drew up beside Renee: ’What one picks from the earth one may wear, I presume, especially when we can protest it is our property.’

Page 2401

Beauchamp saw him planting a white substance most carefully at the breast buttonhole of his coat. It could hardly be a flower. Some drooping exotic of the conservatory perhaps resembled it.

Renee pronounced his name: 'M. le Comte Henri d'Henriel.'

He bowed to Beauchamp with an extreme sweep of the hat.

'Last night, M. Beauchamp, we put up vows for you to the Marine God, beseeching an exemption from that horrible mal de mer. Thanks to the storm, I suppose, I have won. I must maintain, madame, that I won.'

'You wear your trophy,' said Renee, and her horse reared and darted ahead.

The gentleman on each side of her struck into a trot. Beauchamp glanced at M. d'Henriel's breast-decoration. Renee pressed the pace, and threading dense covers of foliage they reached the level of the valley, where for a couple of miles she led them, stretching away merrily, now in shadow, now in moonlight, between high land and meadow land, and a line of poplars in the meadows winding with the river that fed the vale and shot forth gleams of silvery disquiet by rustic bridge and mill.

The strangeness of being beside her, not having yet scanned her face, marvelling at her voice—that was like and unlike the Renee of old, full of her, but in another key, a mellow note, maturer—made the ride magical to Beauchamp, planting the past in the present like a perceptible ghost.

Renee slackened speed, saying: 'Tourdestelle spans a branch of our little river. This is our gate. Had it been daylight I would have taken you by another way, and you would have seen the black tower burnt in the Revolution; an imposing monument, I am assured. However, you will think it pretty beside the stream. Do you come with us, M. le Comte?'

His answer was inaudible to Beauchamp; he did not quit them.

The lamp at the lodge-gates presented the young man's face in full view, and Beauchamp thought him supremely handsome. He perceived it to be a lady's glove that M. d'Henriel wore at his breast.

Renee walked her horse up the park-drive, alongside the bright running water. It seemed that she was aware of the method of provoking or reproving M. d'Henriel. He endured some minutes of total speechlessness at this pace, and abruptly said adieu and turned back.

Renee bounded like a vessel free of her load. 'But why should we hurry?' said she, and checked her course to the walk again. 'I hope you like our Normandy, and my valley.

You used to love France, Nevil; and Normandy, they tell me, is cousin to the opposite coast of England, in climate, soil, people, it may be in manners too. A Beauchamp never can feel that he is a foreigner in Normandy. We claim you half French. You have grander parks, they say. We can give you sunlight.'

'And it was really only the wish to see me?' said Beauchamp.

'Only, and really. One does not live for ever—on earth; and it becomes a question whether friends should be shadows to one another before death. I wrote to you because I wished to see you: I was impatient because I am Renee.'

Page 2402

‘You relieve me!’

‘Evidently you have forgotten my character, Nevil.’

‘Not a feature of it.’

‘Ah!’ she breathed involuntarily.

‘Would you have me forget it?’

’When I think by myself, quite alone, yes, I would. Otherwise how can one hope that one’s friend is friendship, supposing him to read us as we are—minutely, accurately? And it is in absence that we desire our friends to be friendship itself. And . . . and I am utterly astray! I have not dealt in this language since I last thought of writing a diary, and stared at the first line. If I mistake not, you are fond of the picturesque. If moonlight and water will satisfy you, look yonder.’

The moon launched her fairy silver fleets on a double sweep of the little river round an island of reeds and two tall poplars.

‘I have wondered whether I should ever see you looking at that scene,’ said Renee.

He looked from it to her, and asked if Roland was well, and her father; then alluded to her husband; but the unlettering elusive moon, bright only in the extension of her beams, would not tell him what story this face, once heaven to him, wore imprinted on it. Her smile upon a parted mouth struck him as two-edged in replying: ’I have good news to give you of them all: Roland is in garrison at Rouen, and will come when I telegraph. My father is in Touraine, and greets you affectionately; he hopes to come. They are both perfectly happy. My husband is travelling.’

Beauchamp was conscious of some bitter taste; unaware of what it was, though it led him to say, undesigningly: ’How very handsome that M. d’Henriel is!—if I have his name correctly.’

Renee answered: ’He has the misfortune to be considered the handsomest young man in France.’

‘He has an Italian look.’

‘His mother was Provencale.’

She put her horse in motion, saying: ’I agree with you that handsome men are rarities. And, by the way, they do not set our world on fire quite as much as beautiful women do yours, my friend. Acknowledge so much in our favour.’

He assented indefinitely. He could have wished himself away canvassing in Bevisham. He had only to imagine himself away from her, to feel the flood of joy in being with her.

‘Your husband is travelling?’

‘It is his pleasure.’

Could she have intended to say that this was good news to give of him as well as of the happiness of her father and brother?

‘Now look on Tourdestelle,’ said Renee. ’You will avow that for an active man to be condemned to seek repose in so dull a place, after the fatigues of the season in Paris, it is considerably worse than for women, so I am here to dispense the hospitalities. The right wing of the chateau, on your left, is new. The side abutting the river is inhabited by Dame Philiberte, whom her husband imprisoned for attempting to take her pleasure in

Page 2403

travel. I hear upon authority that she dresses in white, and wears a black crucifix. She is many centuries old, and still she lives to remind people that she married a Rouaillout. Do you not think she should have come to me to welcome me? She never has; and possibly of ladies who are disembodied we may say that they know best. For me, I desire the interview—and I am a coward: I need not state it.' She ceased; presently continuing: 'The other inhabitants are my sister, Agnes d'Auffray, wife of a general officer serving in Afric—my sister by marriage, and my friend; the baronne d'Orbec, a relation by marriage; M. d'Orbec, her son, a guest, and a sportsman; M. Livret, an erudite. No young ladies: I can bear much, but not their presence; girls are odious to me. I knew one in Venice.'

They came within the rays of the lamp hanging above the unpretending entrance to the chateau. Renee's broad grey Longueville hat curved low with its black plume on the side farthest from him. He was favoured by the gallant lift of the brim on the near side, but she had overshadowed her eyes.

'He wears a glove at his breast,' said Beauchamp.

'You speak of M. d'Henriel. He wears a glove at his breast; yes, it is mine,' said Renee.

She slipped from her horse and stood against his shoulder, as if waiting to be questioned before she rang the bell of the chateau.

Beauchamp alighted, burning with his unutterable questions concerning that glove.

'Lift your hat, let me beg you; let me see you,' he said.

This was not what she had expected. With one heave of her bosom, and murmuring: 'I made a vow I would obey you absolutely if you came,' she raised the hat above her brows, and lightning would not have surprised him more; for there had not been a single vibration of her voice to tell him of tears running: nay, the absence of the usual French formalities in her manner of addressing him, had seemed to him to indicate her intention to put him at once on an easy friendly footing, such as would be natural to her, and not painful to him. Now she said:

'You perceive, monsieur, that I have my sentimental fits like others; but in truth I am not insensible to the picturesque or to gratitude, and I thank you sincerely for coming, considering that I wrote like a Sphinx—to evade writing comme une folle!'

She swept to the bell.

Standing in the arch of the entrance, she stretched her whip out to a black mass of prostrate timber, saying:

'It fell in the storm at two o'clock after midnight, and you on the sea!'

CHAPTER XXIV

HIS HOLIDAY

Page 2404

A single day was to be the term of his holiday at Tourdestelle; but it stood forth as one of those perfect days which are rounded by an evening before and a morning after, giving him two nights under the same roof with Renee, something of a resemblance to three days of her; anticipation and wonder filling the first, she the next, the adieu the last: every hour filled. And the first day was not over yet. He forced himself to calmness, that he might not fritter it, and walked up and down the room he was dressing in, examining its foreign decorations, and peering through the window, to quiet his nerves. He was in her own France with her! The country borrowed hues from Renee, and lent some. This chivalrous France framed and interlaced her image, aided in idealizing her, and was in turn transfigured. Not half so well would his native land have pleaded for the forgiveness of a British damsel who had wrecked a young man's immoderate first love. That glorified self-love requires the touch upon imagination of strangeness and an unaccustomed grace, to subdue it and make it pardon an outrage to its temples and altars, and its happy reading of the heavens, the earth too: earth foremost, we ought perhaps to say. It is an exacting heathen, best understood by a glance at what will appease it: beautiful, however, as everybody has proved; and shall it be decried in a world where beauty is not overcommon, though it would slaughter us for its angry satisfaction, yet can be soothed by a tone of colour, as it were by a novel inscription on a sweetmeat?

The peculiarity of Beauchamp was that he knew the slenderness of the thread which was leading him, and foresaw it twisting to a coil unless he should hold firm. His work in life was much above the love of a woman in his estimation, so he was not deluded by passion when he entered the chateau; it is doubtful whether he would not hesitatingly have sacrificed one of the precious votes in Bevisham for the pleasure of kissing her hand when they were on the steps. She was his first love and only love, married, and long ago forgiven:—married; that is to say, she especially among women was interdicted to him by the lingering shadow of the reverential love gone by; and if the anguish of the lover's worse than death survived in a shudder of memory at the thought of her not solely lost to him but possessed by another, it did but quicken a hunger that was three parts curiosity to see how she who had suffered this bore the change; how like or unlike she might be to the extinct Renee; what traces she kept of the face he had known. Her tears were startling, but tears tell of a mood, they do not tell the story of the years; and it was that story he had such eagerness to read in one brief revelation: an eagerness born only of the last few hours, and broken by fears of a tarnished aspect; these again being partly hopes of a coming disillusion that would restore him his independence and ask him only for pity. The slavery of the love of a woman

Page 2405

chained like Renee was the most revolting of prospects to a man who cherished his freedom that he might work to the end of his time. Moreover, it swung a thunder-cloud across his holiday. He recurred to the idea of the holiday repeatedly, and the more he did so the thinner it waned. He was exhausting the very air and spirit of it with a mind that ran incessantly forward and back; and when he and the lady of so much speculation were again together, an incapacity of observation seemed to have come over him. In reality it was the inability to reflect on his observations. Her presence resembled those dark sunsets throwing the spell of colour across the world; when there is no question with us of morning or of night, but of that sole splendour only.

Owing to their arrival late at the chateau, covers were laid for them in the boudoir of Madame la Marquise, where he had his hostess to himself, and certainly the opportunity of studying her. An English Navy List, solitary on a shelf, and laid within it an extract of a paper announcing the return of the Ariadne to port, explained the mystery of her knowing that he was in England, as well as the correctness of the superscription of her letter to him. 'You see, I follow you,' she said.

Beauchamp asked if she read English now.

'A little; but the paper was dispatched to me by M. Vivian Ducie, of your embassy in Paris. He is in the valley.'

The name of Ducie recalled Lord Palmet's description of the dark beauty of the fluttering pale gold ornaments. She was now dressed without one decoration of gold or jewel, with scarcely a wave in the silk, a modesty of style eloquent of the pride of her form.

Could those eyes fronting him under the lamp have recently shed tears? They were the living eyes of a brilliant unembarrassed lady; shields flinging light rather than well-depths inviting it.

Beauchamp tried to compare her with the Renee of Venice, and found himself thinking of the glove she had surrendered to the handsomest young man in France. The effort to recover the younger face gave him a dead creature, with the eyelashes of Renee, the cast of her mouth and throat, misty as a shape in a dream.

He could compare her with Cecilia, who never would have risked a glove, never have betrayed a tear, and was the statelier lady, not without language: but how much less vivid in feature and the gift of speech! Renee's gift of speech counted unnumbered strings which she played on with a grace that clothed the skill, and was her natural endowment—an art perfected by the education of the world. Who cannot talk!—but who can? Discover the writers in a day when all are writing! It is as rare an art as poetry, and in the mouths of women as enrapturing, richer than their voices in music.

Page 2406

This was the fascination Beauchamp felt weaving round him. Would you, that are separable from boys and mobs, and the object malignly called the Briton, prefer the celestial singing of a woman to her excellently talking? But not if it were given you to run in unison with her genius of the tongue, following her verbal ingenuities and feminine silk-flashes of meaning; not if she led you to match her fine quick perceptions with more or less of the discreet concordance of the violoncello accompanying the viol. It is not high flying, which usually ends in heavy falling. You quit the level of earth no more than two birds that chase from bush to bush to bill in air, for mutual delight to make the concert heavenly. Language flowed from Renee in affinity with the pleasure-giving laws that make the curves we recognize as beauty in sublimer arts. Accept companionship for the dearest of the good things we pray to have, and what equalled her! Who could be her rival!

Her girl's crown of irradiated Alps began to tremble over her dimly, as from moment to moment their intimacy warmed, and Beauchamp saw the young face vanishing out of this flower of womanhood. He did not see it appearing or present, but vanishing like the faint ray in the rosier. Nay, the blot of her faithlessness underwent a transformation: it affected him somewhat as the patch cunningly laid on near a liquid dimple in fair cheeks at once allures and evades a susceptible attention.

Unused in his French of late, he stumbled at times, and she supplied the needed phrase, taking no note of a blunder. Now men of sweet blood cannot be secretly accusing or criticizing a gracious lady. Domestic men are charged with thinking instantly of dark death when an ordinary illness befalls them; and it may be so or not: but it is positive that the gallant man of the world, if he is in the sensitive condition, and not yet established as the lord of her, feels paralyzed in his masculine sense of leadership the moment his lady assumes the initiative and directs him: he gives up at once; and thus have many nimble-witted dames from one clear start retained their advantage.

Concerning that glove: well! the handsomest young man in France wore the glove of the loveliest woman. The loveliest? The very loveliest in the purity of her French style —the woman to challenge England for a type of beauty to eclipse her. It was possible to conceive her country wagering her against all women.

If Renee had faults, Beauchamp thought of her as at sea breasting tempests, while Cecilia was a vessel lying safe in harbour, untried, however promising: and if Cecilia raised a steady light for him, it was over the shores he had left behind, while Renee had really nothing to do with warning or rescuing, or with imperilling; she welcomed him simply to a holiday in her society. He associated Cecilia strangely with the political labours she would have had him relinquish; and Renee with a pleasant state of indolence, that her lightest smile disturbed. Shun comparisons.

Page 2407

It is the tricksy heart which sets up that balance, to jump into it on one side or the other. Comparisons come of a secret leaning that is sure to play rogue under its mien of honest dealer: so Beauchamp suffered himself to be unjust to graver England, and lost the strength she would have given him to resist a bewitchment. The case with him was, that his apprenticeship was new; he had been trotting in harness as a veritable cab-horse of politics—he by blood a racer; and his nature craved for diversions, against his will, against his moral sense and born tenacity of spirit.

Not a word further of the glove. But at night, in his bed, the glove was a principal actor in events of extraordinary magnitude and inconsequence.

He was out in the grounds with the early morning light. Coffee and sweet French bread were brought out to him, and he was informed of the hours of reunion at the chateau, whose mistress continued invisible. She might be sleeping. He strolled about, within view of the windows, wondering at her subservience to sleep. Tourdestelle lay in one of those Norman valleys where the river is the mother of rich pasture, and runs hidden between double ranks of sallows, aspens and poplars, that mark its winding line in the arms of trenched meadows. The high land on either side is an unwatered flat up to the horizon, little varied by dusty apple-trees planted in the stubble here and there, and brown mud walls of hamlets; a church-top, a copse, an avenue of dwarf limes leading to the three-parts farm, quarter residence of an enriched peasant striking new roots, or decayed proprietor pinching not to be severed from ancient. Descending on the deep green valley in Summer is like a change of climes. The chateau stood square at a branch of the river, tossing three light bridges of pretty woodwork to park and garden. Great bouquets of swelling blue and pink hydrangia nestled at his feet on shaven grass. An open window showed a cloth of colour, as in a reminiscence of Italy.

Beauchamp heard himself addressed:—'You are looking for my sister-in-law, M. Beauchamp?'

The speaker was Madame d'Auffray, to whom he had been introduced overnight—a lady of the aquiline French outline, not ungentle.

Renee had spoken affectionately of her, he remembered. There was nothing to make him be on his guard, and he stated that he was looking for Madame de Rouaillout, and did not conceal surprise at the information that she was out on horseback.

'She is a tireless person,' Madame d'Auffray remarked. 'You will not miss her long. We all meet at twelve, as you know.'

'I grudge an hour, for I go to-morrow,' said Beauchamp.

The notification of so early a departure, or else his bluntness, astonished her. She fell to praising Renee's goodness. He kept her to it with lively interrogations, in the manner

of a, guileless boy urging for eulogies of his dear absent friend. Was it duplicity in him or artlessness?

Page 2408

‘Has she, do you think, increased in beauty?’ Madame d’Auffray inquired: an insidious question, to which he replied:

‘Once I thought it would be impossible.’

Not so bad an answer for an Englishman, in a country where speaking is fencing; the race being little famous for dialectical alertness: but was it artful or simple?

They skirted the chateau, and Beauchamp had the history of Dame Philiberte recounted to him, with a mixture of Gallic irony, innuendo, openness, touchingness, ridicule, and charity novel to his ears. Madame d’Auffray struck the note of intimacy earlier than is habitual. She sounded him in this way once or twice, carelessly perusing him, and waiting for the interesting edition of the Book of Man to summarize its character by showing its pages or remaining shut. It was done delicately, like the tap of a finger-nail on a vase. He rang clear; he had nothing to conceal; and where he was reserved, that is, in speaking of the developed beauty and grace of Renee, he was transparent. She read the sort of man he was; she could also hazard a guess as to the man’s present state. She ventured to think him comparatively harmless—for the hour: for she was not the woman to be hoodwinked by man’s dark nature because she inclined to think well of a particular man; nor was she one to trust to any man subject to temptation. The wisdom of the Frenchwoman’s fortieth year forbade it. A land where the war between the sexes is honestly acknowledged, and is full of instruction, abounds in precepts; but it ill becomes the veteran to practise rigorously what she would prescribe to young women. She may discriminate; as thus:—Trust no man. Still, this man may be better than that man; and it is bad policy to distrust a reasonably guileless member of the preying sex entirely, and so to lose his good services. Hawks have their uses in destroying vermin; and though we cannot rely upon the taming of hawks, one tied by the leg in a garden preserves the fruit.

‘There is a necessity for your leaving us to-morrow; M. Beauchamp?’

‘I regret to say, it is imperative, madame.’

’My husband will congratulate me on the pleasure I have, and have long desired, of making your acquaintance, and he will grieve that he has not been so fortunate; he is on service in Africa. My brother, I need not say, will deplore the mischance which has prevented him from welcoming you. I have telegraphed to him; he is at one of the Baths in Germany, and will come assuredly, if there is a prospect of finding you here. None? Supposing my telegram not to fall short of him, I may count on his being here within four days.’

Beauchamp begged her to convey the proper expressions of his regret to M. le Marquis.

’And M. de Croisnel? And Roland, your old comrade and brother-in-arms? What will be their disappointment!’ she said.

‘I intend to stop for an hour at Rouen on my way back,’ said Beauchamp.

Page 2409

She asked if her belle-soeur was aware of the short limitation of his visit.

He had not mentioned it to Madame la Marquise.

'Perhaps you may be moved by the grief of a friend: Renee may persuade you to stay.'

'I came imagining I could be of some use to Madame la Marquise. She writes as if she were telegraphing.'

'Perfectly true of her! For that matter, I saw the letter. Your looks betray a very natural jealousy; but seeing it or not it would have been the same: she and I have no secrets. She was, I may tell you, strictly unable to write more words in the letter. Which brings me to inquire what impression M. d'Henriel made on you yesterday evening.'

'He is particularly handsome.'

'We women think so. Did you take him to be . . . eccentric?'

Beauchamp gave a French jerk of the shoulders.

It confessed the incident of the glove to one who knew it as well as he: but it masked the weight he was beginning to attach to that incident, and Madame d'Auffray was misled. Truly, the Englishman may be just such an ex-lover, uninflammable by virtue of his blood's native coldness; endued with the frozen vanity called pride, which does not seek to be revenged. Under wary espionage, he might be a young woman's friend, though male friend of a half-abandoned wife should write himself down morally saint, mentally sage, medically incurable, if he would win our confidence.

This lady of sharp intelligence was the guardian of Renee during the foolish husband's flights about Paris and over Europe, and, for a proof of her consummate astuteness, Renee had no secrets and had absolute liberty. And hitherto no man could build a boast on her reputation. The liberty she would have had at any cost, as Madame d'Auffray knew; and an attempt to restrict it would have created secrets.

Near upon the breakfast-hour Renee was perceived by them going toward the chateau at a walking pace. They crossed one of the garden bridges to intercept her. She started out of some deep meditation, and raised her whip hand to Beauchamp's greeting. 'I had forgotten to tell you, monsieur, that I should be out for some hours in the morning.'

'Are you aware,' said Madame d'Auffray, 'that M. Beauchamp leaves us to-morrow?'

'So soon?' It was uttered hardly with a tone of disappointment.

The marquise alighted, crying hold, to the stables, caressed her horse, and sent him off with a smack on the smoking flanks to meet the groom.

’To-morrow? That is very soon; but M. Beauchamp is engaged in an Election, and what have we to induce him to stay?’

‘Would it not be better to tell M. Beauchamp why he was invited to come?’ rejoined Madame d’Auffray.

The sombre light in Renee’s eyes quickened through shadowy spheres of surprise and pain to resolution. She cried, ‘You have my full consent,’ and left them.

Page 2410

Madame d'Auffray smiled at Beauchamp, to excuse the childishness of the little story she was about to relate; she gave it in the essence, without a commencement or an ending. She had in fact but two or three hurried minutes before the breakfast-bell would ring; and the fan she opened and shut, and at times shaded her head with, was nearly as explicit as her tongue.

He understood that Renee had staked her glove on his coming within a certain number of hours to the briefest wording of invitation possible. Owing to his detention by the storm, M. d'Henriel had won the bet, and now insisted on wearing the glove. 'He is the privileged young madman our women make of a handsome youth,' said Madame d'Auffray.

Where am I? thought Beauchamp—in what land, he would have phrased it, of whirlwinds catching the wits, and whipping the passions? Calmer than they, but unable to command them, and guessing that Renee's errand of the morning, by which he had lost hours of her, pertained to the glove, he said quiveringly, 'Madame la Marquise objects?'

'We,' replied Madame d'Auffray, 'contend that the glove was not loyally won. The wager was upon your coming to the invitation, not upon your conquering the elements. As to his flaunting the glove for a favour, I would ask you, whom does he advertize by that? Gloves do not wear white; which fact compromises none but the wearer. He picked it up from the ground, and does not restore it; that is all. You see a boy who catches at anything to placard himself. There is a compatriot of yours, a M. Ducie, who assured us you must be with an uncle in your county of Sussex. Of course we ran the risk of the letter missing you, but the chance was worth a glove. Can you believe it, M. Beauchamp? it was I, old woman as I am, I who provoked the silly wager. I have long desired to meet you; and we have little society here, we are desperate with loneliness, half mad with our whims. I said, that if you were what I had heard of you, you would come to us at a word. They dared Madame la Marquise to say the same. I wished to see the friend of Frenchmen, as M. Roland calls you; not merely to see him—to know him, whether he is this perfect friend whose absolute devotion has impressed my dear sister Renee's mind. She respects you: that is a sentiment scarcely complimentary to the ideas of young men. She places you above human creatures: possibly you may not dislike to be worshipped. It is not to be rejected when one's influence is powerful for good. But you leave us to-morrow!'

'I' might stay . . .' Beauchamp hesitated to name the number of hours. He stood divided between a sense of the bubbling shallowness of the life about him, and a thought, grave as an eye dwelling on blood, of sinister things below it.

'I may stay another day or two,' he said, 'if I can be of any earthly service.'

Madame d'Auffray bowed as to a friendly decision on his part, saying, 'It would be a thousand pities to disappoint M. Roland; and it will be offering my brother an amicable chance. I will send him word that you await him; at least, that you defer your departure as long as possible. Ah! now you perceive, M. Beauchamp, now you have become aware of our purely infantile plan to bring you over to us, how very ostensible a punishment it would be were you to remain so short a period.'

Page 2411

Having no designs, he was neither dupe nor sceptic; but he felt oddly entangled, and the dream of his holiday had fled like morning's beams, as a self-deception will at a very gentle shaking.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ADVENTURE OF THE BOAT

Madame d'Auffray passed Renee, whispering on her way to take her seat at the breakfast-table.

Renee did not condescend to whisper. 'Roland will be glad,' she said aloud.

Her low eyelids challenged Beauchamp for a look of indifference. There was more for her to unbosom than Madame d'Auffray had revealed, but the comparative innocence of her position in this new light prompted her to meet him defiantly, if he chose to feel injured. He was attracted by a happy contrast of colour between her dress and complexion, together with a cavalierly charm in the sullen brows she lifted; and seeing the reverse of a look of indifference on his face, after what he had heard of her frivolousness, she had a fear that it existed.

'Are we not to have M. d'Henriel to-day? he amuses me,' the baronne d'Orbec remarked.

'If he would learn that he was fashioned for that purpose!' exclaimed little M. Livret.

'Do not ask young men for too much head, my friend; he would cease to be amusing.'

'D'Henriel should have been up in the fields at ten this morning,' said M. d'Orbec. 'As to his head, I back him for a clever shot.'

'Or a duelling-sword,' said Renee. 'It is a quality, count it for what we will. Your favourite, Madame la Baronne, is interdicted from presenting himself here so long as he persists in offending me.'

She was requested to explain, and, with the fair ingenuousness which outshines innocence, she touched on the story of the glove.

Ah! what a delicate, what an exciting, how subtle a question!

Had M. d'Henriel the right to possess it? and, having that, had he the right to wear it at his breast?

Beauchamp was dragged into the discussion of the case.

Renee waited curiously for his judgement.

Pleading an apology for the stormy weather, which had detained him, and for his ignorance that so precious an article was at stake, he held, that by the terms of the wager, the glove was lost; the claim to wear it was a matter of taste.

’Matters of taste, monsieur, are not, I think, decided by weapons in your country?’ said M. d’Orbec.

‘We have no duelling,’ said Beauchamp.

The Frenchman imagined the confession to be somewhat humbling, and generously added, ’But you have your volunteers—a magnificent spectacle of patriotism and national readiness for defence!’

A shrewd pang traversed Beauchamp’s heart, as he looked back on his country from the outside and the inside, thinking what amount of patriotic readiness the character of the volunteering signified, in the face of all that England has to maintain. Like a politic islander, he allowed the patriotic spectacle to be imagined; reflecting that it did a sort of service abroad, and had only to be unmasked at home.

Page 2412

‘But you surrendered the glove, marquise!’ The baronne d’Orbec spoke judicially.

‘I flung it to the ground: that made it neutral,’ said Renee.

‘Hum. He wears it with the dust on it, certainly.’

‘And for how long a time,’ M. Livret wished to know, ’does this amusing young man proclaim his intention of wearing the glove?’

‘Until he can see with us that his Order of Merit is utter kid,’ said Madame d’Auffray; and as she had spoken more or less neatly, satisfaction was left residing in the ear of the assembly, and the glove was permitted to be swept away on a fresh tide of dialogue.

The admirable candour of Renee in publicly alluding to M. d’Henriel’s foolishness restored a peep of his holiday to Beauchamp. Madame d’Auffray took note of the effect it produced, and quite excused her sister-in-law for intending to produce is; but that speaking out the half-truth that we may put on the mask of the whole, is no new trick; and believing as she did that Renee was in danger with the handsome Count Henri, the practice of such a kind of honesty on her part appeared alarming.

Still it is imprudent to press for confidences when our friend’s heart is manifestly trifling with sincerity. Who knows but that some foregone reckless act or word may have superinduced the healthy shame which cannot speak, which must disguise itself, and is honesty in that form, but roughly troubled would resolve to rank dishonesty? So thought the patient lady, wiser in that than in her perceptions.

Renee made a boast of not persuading her guest to stay, avowing that she would not willingly have him go. Praising him equably, she listened to praise of him with animation. She was dumb and statue-like when Count Henri’s name was mentioned. Did not this betray liking for one, subjection to the other? Indeed, there was an Asiatic splendour of animal beauty about M. d’Henriel that would be serpent with most women, Madame d’Auffray conceived; why not with the deserted Renee, who adored beauty of shape and colour, and was compassionate toward a rashness of character that her own unnatural solitariness and quick spirit made her emulous of?

Meanwhile Beauchamp’s day of adieu succeeded that of his holiday, and no adieu was uttered. The hours at Tourdestelle had a singular turn for slipping. Interlinked and all as one they swam by, brought evening, brought morning, never varied. They might have varied with such a division as when flame lights up the night or a tempest shades the day, had Renee chosen; she had that power over him. She had no wish to use it; perhaps she apprehended what it would cause her to forfeit. She wished him to respect her; felt that she was under the shadow of the glove, slight though it was while it was nothing but a tale of a lady and a glove; and her desire, like his, was that they should

meet daily and dream on, without a variation. He noticed how seldom she led him beyond the grounds of the chateau.

Page 2413

They were to make excursions when her brother came, she said. Roland de Croisnel's colonel, Coin de Grandchamp, happened to be engaged in a duel, which great business detained Roland. It supplied Beauchamp with an excuse for staying, that he was angry with himself for being pleased to have; so he attacked the practice of duelling, and next the shrug, wherewith M. Livret and M. d'Orbec sought at first to defend the foul custom, or apologize for it, or plead for it philosophically, or altogether cast it off their shoulders; for the literal interpretation of the shrug in argument is beyond human capacity; it is the point of speech beyond our treasury of language. He attacked the shrug, as he thought, very temperately; but in controlling his native vehemence he grew, perforce of repression, and of incompetency to deliver himself copiously in French, sarcastic. In fine, his contrast of the pretence of their noble country to head civilization, and its encouragement of a custom so barbarous, offended M. d'Orbec and irritated M. Livret.

The latter delivered a brief essay on Gallic blood; the former maintained that Frenchmen were the best judges of their own ways and deeds. Politeness reigned, but politeness is compelled to throw off cloak and jacket when it steps into the arena to meet the encounter of a bull. Beauchamp drew on their word 'solidaire' to assist him in declaring that no civilized nation could be thus independent. Imagining himself in the France of brave ideas, he contrived to strike out sparks of Legitimist ire around him, and found himself breathing the atmosphere of the most primitive nursery of Toryism. Again he encountered the shrug, and he would have it a verbal matter. M. d'Orbec gravely recited the programme of the country party in France. M. Livret carried the war across Channel. You English have retired from active life, like the exhausted author, to turn critic—the critic that sneers: unless we copy you abjectly we are execrable. And what is that sneer? Materially it is an acrid saliva, withering where it drops; in the way of fellowship it is a corpse-emanation. As to wit, the sneer is the cloak of clumsiness; it is the Pharisee's incense, the hypocrite's pity, the post of exaltation of the fat citizen, *etc*.; but, said M. Livret, the people using it should have a care that they keep powerful: they make no friends. He terminated with this warning to a nation not devoid of superior merit. M. d'Orbec said less, and was less consoled by his outburst.

In the opinion of Mr. Vivian Ducie, present at the discussion, Beauchamp provoked the lash; for, in the first place, a beautiful woman's apparent favourite should be particularly discreet in all that he says: and next, he should have known that the Gallic shrug over matters political is volcanic—it is the heaving of the mountain, and, like the proverbial Russ, leaps up Tartarly at a scratch. Our newspapers also had been flea-biting M. Livret and his countrymen

Page 2414

of late; and, to conclude, over in old England you may fly out against what you will, and there is little beyond a motherly smile, a nurse's rebuke, or a fool's rudeness to answer you. In quick-blooded France you have whip for whip, sneer, sarcasm, claw, fang, tussle, in a trice; and if you choose to comport yourself according to your insular notion of freedom, you are bound to march out to the measured ground at an invitation. To begin by saying that your principles are opposed to it, naturally excites a malicious propensity to try your temper.

A further cause, unknown to Mr. Ducie, of M. Livret's irritation was, that Beauchamp had vexed him on a subject peculiarly dear to him. The celebrated Chateau Dianet was about to be visited by the guests at Tourdestelle. In common with some French philosophers and English matrons, he cherished a sentimental sad enthusiasm for royal concubines; and when dilating upon one among them, the ruins of whose family's castle stood in the neighbourhood-Agrees, who was really a kindly soul, though not virtuous—-M. Livret had been traversed by Beauchamp with questions as to the condition of the people, the peasantry, that were sweated in taxes to support these lovely frailties. They came oddly from a man in the fire of youth, and a little old gentleman somewhat seduced by the melting image of his theme might well blink at him to ask, of what flesh are you, then? His historic harem was insulted. Personally too, the fair creature picturesquely soiled, intrepid in her amorousness, and ultimately absolved by repentance (a shuddering narrative of her sins under showers of salt drops), cried to him to champion her. Excited by the supposed cold critical mind in Beauchamp, M. Livret painted and painted this lady, tricked her in casuistical niceties, scenes of pomp and boudoir pathos, with many shifting sidelights and a risky word or two, until Renee cried out, 'Spare us the esprit Gaulois, M. Livret!' There was much to make him angry with this Englishman.

'The esprit Gaulois is the sparkle of crystal common sense, madame, and may we never abandon it for a Puritanism that hides its face to conceal its filthiness, like a stagnant pond,' replied M. Livret, flashing.

'It seems, then, that there are two ways of being objectionable,' said Renee.

'Ah! Madame la Marquise, your wit is French,' he breathed low; 'keep your heart so!'

Both M. Livret and M. d'Orbec had forgotten that when Count Henri d'Henriel was received at Tourdestelle, the arrival of the Englishman was pleasantly anticipated by them as an eclipse of the handsome boy; but a foreign interloper is quickly dispossessed of all means of pleasing save that one of taking his departure; and they now talked of Count Henri's disgrace and banishment in a very warm spirit of sympathy, not at all seeing why it should be made to depend upon the movements of this M. Beauchamp, as it appeared to be. Madame d'Auffray heard some of their dialogue, and hurried with a mouth full of comedy to Renee, who did not reproach them for silly beings, as would be done elsewhere. On the contrary, she appreciated a scene of such

absolute comedy, recognizing it instantly as a situation plucked out of human nature. She compared them to republicans that regretted the sovereign they had deposed for a pretender to start up and govern them.

Page 2415

‘Who hurries them round to the legitimate king again!’ said Madame d’Auffray.

Renee cast her chin up. ‘How, my dear?’

‘Your husband.’

‘What of him?’

‘He is returning.’

‘What brings him?’

’You should ask who, my Renee! I was sure he would not hear of M. Beauchamp’s being here, without an effort to return and do the honours of the chateau.’

Renee looked hard at her, saying, ’How thoughtful of you! You must have made use of the telegraph wires to inform him that M. Beauchamp was with us.’

‘More; I made use of them to inform him that M. Beauchamp was expected.’

’And that was enough to bring him! He pays M. Beauchamp a wonderful compliment.’

’Such as he would pay to no other man, my Renee. Virtually it is the highest of compliments to you. I say that to M. Beauchamp’s credit; for Raoul has met him, and, whatever his personal feeling may be, must know your friend is a man of honour.’

‘My friend is . . . yes, I have no reason to think otherwise,’ Renee replied. Her husband’s persistent and exclusive jealousy of Beauchamp was the singular point in the character of one who appeared to have no sentiment of the kind as regarded men that were much less than men of honour. ‘So, then, my sister Agnes,’ she said, ’you suggested the invitation of M. Beauchamp for the purpose of spurring my husband to return! Apparently he and I are surrounded by plotters.’

‘Am I so very guilty?’ said Madame d’Auffray.

’If that mad boy, half idiot, half panther, were by chance to insult M. Beauchamp, you would feel so.’

’You have taken precautions to prevent their meeting; and besides, M. Beauchamp does not fight.’

Renee flushed crimson.

Madame d’Auffray added, ’I do not say that he is other than a perfectly brave and chivalrous gentleman.’

‘Oh!’ cried Renee, ’do not say it, if ever you should imagine it. Bid Roland speak of him. He is changed, oppressed: I did him a terrible wrong . . . .’ She checked herself. ’But the chief thing to do is to keep M. d’Henriel away from him. I suspect M. d’Orbec of a design to make them clash: and you, my dear, will explain why, to flatter me. Believe me, I thirst for flattery; I have had none since M. Beauchamp came: and you, so acute, must have seen the want of it in my face. But you, so skilful, Agnes, will manage these men. Do you know, Agnes, that the pride of a woman so incredibly clever as you have shown me you are should resent their intrigues and overthrow them. As for me, I thought I could command M. d’Henriel, and I find he has neither reason in him nor obedience. Singular to say, I knew him just as well a week back as I do now, and then I liked him for his qualities—or the absence of any. But how shall we avoid him on the road to Dianet? He is aware that we are going.’

‘Take M. Beauchamp by boat,’ said Madame d’Auffray.

Page 2416

‘The river winds to within a five minutes’ walk of Dianet; we could go by boat,’ Renee said musingly. ’I thought of the boat. But does it not give the man a triumph that we should seem to try to elude him? What matter! Still, I do not like him to be the falcon, and Nevil Beauchamp the . . . little bird. So it is, because we began badly, Agnes!’

‘Was it my fault?’

‘Mine. Tell me: the legitimate king returns when?’

‘In two days or three.’

‘And his rebel subjects are to address him—how?’

Madame d’Auffray smote the point of a finger softly on her cheek.

‘Will they be pardoned?’ said Renee.

‘It is for him to kneel, my dearest.’

’Legitimacy kneeling for forgiveness is a painful picture, Agnes. Legitimacy jealous of a foreigner is an odd one. However, we are women, born to our lot. If we could rise en masse!—but we cannot. Embrace me.’

Madame d’Auffray embraced her, without an idea that she assisted in performing the farewell of their confidential intimacy.

When Renee trifled with Count Henri, it was playing with fire, and she knew it; and once or twice she bemoaned to Agnes d’Auffray her abandoned state, which condemned her, for the sake of the sensation of living, to have recourse to perilous pastimes; but she was revolted, as at a piece of treachery, that Agnes should have suggested the invitation of Nevil Beauchamp with the secret design of winning home her husband to protect her. This, for one reason, was because Beauchamp gave her no notion of danger; none, therefore, of requiring protection; and the presence of her husband could not but be hateful to him, an undeserved infliction. To her it was intolerable that they should be brought into contact. It seemed almost as hard that she should have to dismiss Beauchamp to preclude their meeting. She remembered, nevertheless, a certain desperation of mind, scarce imaginable in the retrospect, by which, trembling, fever-smitten, scorning herself, she had been reduced to hope for Nevil Beauchamp’s coming as for a rescue. The night of the storm had roused her heart. Since then his perfect friendliness had lulled, his air of thoughtfulness had interested it; and the fancy that he, who neither reproached nor sentimentalized, was to be infinitely compassionated, stirred up remorse. She could not tell her friend Agnes of these feelings while her feelings were angered against her friend. So she talked lightly of ‘the legitimate king,’ and they embraced: a situation of comedy quite as true as that presented by the humble admirers of the brilliant chatelaine.

Page 2417

Beauchamp had the pleasure of rowing Madame la Marquise to the short shaded walk separating the river from Chateau Dianet, whither M. d'Orbec went on horseback, and Madame d'Auffray and M. Livret were driven. The portrait of Diane of Dianet was praised for the beauty of the dame, a soft-fleshed acutely featured person, a fresh-of-the-toilette face, of the configuration of head of the cat, relieved by a delicately aquiline nose; and it could only be the cat of fairy metamorphosis which should stand for that illustration: brows and chin made an acceptable triangle, and eyes and mouth could be what she pleased for mice or monarchs. M. Livret did not gainsay the impeachment of her by a great French historian, tender to women, to frailties in particular—yes, she was cold, perhaps grasping: but dwell upon her in her character of woman; conceive her existing, to estimate the charm of her graciousness. Name the two countries which alone have produced *the woman*, the ideal woman, the woman of art, whose beauty, grace, and wit offer her to our contemplation in an atmosphere above the ordinary conditions of the world: these two countries are France and Greece! None other give you the perfect woman, the woman who conquers time, as she conquers men, by virtue of the divinity in her blood; and she, as little as illustrious heroes, is to be judged by the laws and standards of lesser creatures. In fashioning her, nature and art have worked together: in her, poetry walks the earth. The question of good or bad is entirely to be put aside: it is a rustic's impertinence—a bourgeois' vulgarity. She is preeminent, voila tout. Has she grace and beauty? Then you are answered: such possessions are an assurance that her influence in the aggregate must be for good. Thunder, destructive to insects, refreshes earth: so she. So sang the rhapsodist. Possibly a scholarly little French gentleman, going down the grey slopes of sixty to second childishness, recovers a second juvenility in these enthusiasms; though what it is that inspires our matrons to take up with them is unimaginable. M. Livret's ardour was a contrast to the young Englishman's vacant gaze at Diane, and the symbols of her goddesship running along the walls, the bed, the cabinets, everywhere that the chaste device could find frontage and a corner.

M. d'Orbec remained outside the chateau inspecting the fish-ponds. When they rejoined him he complimented Beauchamp semi-ironically on his choice of the river's quiet charms in preference to the dusty roads. Madame de Rouaillout said, 'Come, M. d'Orbec; what if you surrender your horse to M. Beauchamp, and row me back?' He changed colour, hesitated, and declined he had an engagement to call on M. d'Henriel.

'When did you see him?' said she.

He was confused. 'It is not long since, madame.'

'On the road?'

'Coming along-the road.'

'And our glove?'

’Madame la Marquise, if I may trust my memory, M. d’Henriel was not in official costume.’

Page 2418

Renee allowed herself to be reassured.

A ceremonious visit that M. Livret insisted on was paid to the chapel of Diane, where she had worshipped and laid her widowed ashes, which, said M. Livret, the fiends of the Revolution would not let rest.

He raised his voice to denounce them.

It was Roland de Croisnel that answered: ’The Revolution was our grandmother, monsieur, and I cannot hear her abused.’

Renee caught her brother by the hand. He stepped out of the chapel with Beauchamp to embrace him; then kissed Renee, and, remarking that she was pale, fetched flooding colour to her cheeks. He was hearty air to them after the sentimentalism they had been hearing. Beauchamp and he walked like loving comrades at school, questioning, answering, chattering, laughing,—a beautiful sight to Renee, and she looked at Agrnes d’Auffray to ask her whether ‘this Englishman’ was not one of them in his frankness and freshness.

Roland stopped to turn to Renee. ‘I met d’Henriel on my ride here,’ he said with a sharp inquisitive expression of eye that passed immediately.

‘You rode here from Tourdestelle, then,’ said Renee.

‘Has he been one of the company, marquise?’

‘Did he ride by you without speaking, Roland?’

‘Thus.’ Roland described a Spanish caballero’s formallest salutation, saying to Beauchamp, ’Not the best sample of our young Frenchman;—woman-spoiled! Not that the better kind of article need be spoiled by them—heaven forbid that! Friend Nevil,’ he spoke lower, ’do you know, you have something of the prophet in you? I remember: much has come true. An old spoiler of women is worse than one spoiled by them! Ah, well: and Madame Culling? and your seven-feet high uncle? And have you a fleet to satisfy Nevil Beauchamp yet? You shall see a trial of our new field-guns at Rouen.’

They were separated with difficulty.

Renee wished her brother to come in the boat; and he would have done so, but for his objection to have his Arab bestridden by a man unknown to him.

‘My love is a four-foot, and here’s my love,’ Roland said, going outside the gilt gate-rails to the graceful little beast, that acknowledged his ownership with an arch and swing of the neck round to him.

He mounted and called, ‘Au revoir, M. le Capitaine.’

‘Au revoir, M. le Commandant,’ cried Beauchamp.

‘Admiral and marshal, each of us in good season,’ said Roland. ’Thanks to your promotion, I had a letter from my sister. Advance a grade, and I may get another.’

Beauchamp thought of the strange gulf now between him and the time when he pined to be a commodore, and an admiral. The gulf was bridged as he looked at Renee petting Roland’s horse.

‘Is there in the world so lovely a creature?’ she said, and appealed fondlingly to the beauty that brings out beauty, and, bidding it disdain rivalry, rivalled it insomuch that in a moment of trance Beauchamp with his bodily vision beheld her, not there, but on the Lido of Venice, shining out of the years gone.

Page 2419

Old love reviving may be love of a phantom after all. We can, if it must revive, keep it to the limits of a ghostly love. The ship in the Arabian tale coming within the zone of the magnetic mountain, flies all its bolts and bars, and becomes sheer timbers, but that is the carelessness of the ship's captain; and hitherto Beauchamp could applaud himself for steering with prudence, while Renee's attractions warned more than they beckoned. She was magnetic to him as no other woman was. Then whither his course but homeward?

After they had taken leave of their host and hostess of Chateau Dianet, walking across a meadow to a line of charmilles that led to the river-side, he said, 'Now I have seen Roland I shall have to decide upon going.'

'Wantonly won is deservedly lost,' said Renee. 'But do not disappoint my Roland much because of his foolish sister. Is he not looking handsome? And he is young to be a commandant, for we have no interest at this Court. They kept him out of the last war! My father expects to find you at Tourdestelle, and how account to him for your hurried flight? save with the story of that which brought you to us!'

'The glove? I shall beg for the fellow to it before I depart, marquise.'

'You perceived my disposition to light-headedness, monsieur, when I was a girl.'

'I said that I—But the past is dust. Shall I ever see you in England?'

'That country seems to frown on me. But if I do not go there, nor you come here, except to imperious mysterious invitations, which will not be repeated, the future is dust as well as the past: for me, at least. Dust here, dust there!—if one could be like a silk-worm, and live lying on the leaf one feeds on, it would be a sort of answer to the riddle—living out of the dust, and in the present. I find none in my religion. No doubt, Madame de Breze did: why did you call Diane so to M. Livret?'

She looked at him smiling as they came out of the shadow of the clipped trees. He was glancing about for the boat.

'The boat is across the river,' Renee said, in a voice that made him seek her eyes for an explanation of the dead sound. She was very pale. 'You have perfect command of yourself? For my sake!' she said.

He looked round.

Standing up in the boat, against the opposite bank, and leaning with crossed legs on one of the sculls planted in the gravel of the river, Count Henri d'Henriel's handsome figure presented itself to Beauchamp's gaze.

With a dryness that smacked of his uncle Everard Romfrey, Beauchamp said of the fantastical posture of the young man, 'One can do that on fresh water.'

Renee did not comprehend the sailor-sarcasm of the remark; but she also commented on the statuesque appearance of Count Henri: 'Is the pose for photography or for sculpture?'

Neither of them showed a sign of surprise or of impatience.

M. d'Henriel could not maintain the attitude. He uncrossed his legs deliberately, drooped hat in hand, and came paddling over; apologized indolently, and said, 'I am not, I believe, trespassing on the grounds of Tourdestelle, Madame la Marquise!'

Page 2420

‘You happen to be in my boat, M. le Comte,’ said Renee.

‘Permit me, madame.’ He had set one foot on shore, with his back to Beauchamp, and reached a hand to assist her step into the boat.

Beauchamp caught fast hold of the bows while Renee laid a finger on Count Henri’s shoulder to steady herself.

The instant she had taken her seat, Count Henri dashed the scull’s blade at the bank to push off with her, but the boat was fast. His manoeuvre had been foreseen. Beauchamp swung on board like the last seaman of a launch, and crouched as the boat rocked away to the stream; and still Count Henri leaned on the scull, not in a chosen attitude, but for positive support. He had thrown his force into the blow, to push off triumphantly, and leave his rival standing. It occurred that the boat’s brief resistance and rocking away agitated his artificial equipoise, and, by the operation of inexorable laws, the longer he leaned across an extending surface the more was he dependent; so that when the measure of the water exceeded the length of his failing support on land, there was no help for it: he pitched in. His grimace of chagrin at the sight of Beauchamp securely established, had scarcely yielded to the grimness of feature of the man who feels he must go, as he took the plunge; and these two emotions combined to make an extraordinary countenance.

He went like a gallant gentleman; he threw up his heels to clear the boat, dropping into about four feet of water, and his first remark on rising was, ’I trust, madame, I have not had the misfortune to splash you.’

Then he waded to the bank, scrambled to his feet, and drew out his moustachios to their curving ends. Renee nodded sharply to Beauchamp to bid him row. He, with less of wisdom, having seized the floating scull abandoned by Count Henri, and got it ready for the stroke, said a word of condolence to the dripping man.

Count Henri’s shoulders and neck expressed a kind of negative that, like a wet dog’s shake of the head, ended in an involuntary whole length shudder, dog-like and deplorable to behold. He must have been conscious of this miserable exhibition of himself; he turned to Beauchamp: ’You are, I am informed, a sailor, monsieur. I compliment you on your naval tactics: our next meeting will be on land. Au revoir, monsieur. Madame la Marquise, I have the honour to salute you.’

With these words he retreated.

‘Row quickly, I beg of you,’ Renee said to Beauchamp. Her desire was to see Roland, and open her heart to her brother; for now it had to be opened. Not a minute must be lost to prevent further mischief. And who was guilty? she. Her heart clamoured of her guilt to waken a cry of innocence. A disdainful pity for the superb young savage just

made ludicrous, relieved him of blame, implacable though he was. He was nothing; an accident—a fool. But he might become a terrible instrument of punishment. The thought of that possibility

Page 2421

gave it an aspect of retribution, under which her cry of innocence was insufferable in its feebleness. It would have been different with her if Beauchamp had taken advantage of her fever of anxiety, suddenly appeased by the sight of him on the evening of his arrival at Tourdestelle after the storm, to attempt a renewal of their old broken love-bonds. Then she would have seen only a conflict between two men, neither of whom could claim a more secret right than the other to be called her lover, and of whom both were on a common footing, and partly despicable. But Nevil Beauchamp had behaved as her perfect true friend, in the character she had hoped for when she summoned him. The sense of her guilt lay in the recognition that he had saved her. From what? From the consequences of delirium rather than from love—surely delirium, founded on delusion; love had not existed. She had said to Count Henri, 'You speak to me of love. I was beloved when I was a girl, before my marriage, and for years I have not seen or corresponded with the man who loved me, and I have only to lift my finger now and he will come to me, and not once will he speak to me of love.' Those were the words originating the wager of the glove. But what of her, if Nevil Beauchamp had not come?

Her heart jumped, and she blushed ungovernably in his face,—as if he were seeing her withdraw her foot from the rock's edge, and had that instant rescued her. But how came it she had been so helpless? She could ask; she could not answer.

Thinking, talking to her heart, was useless. The deceiver simply feigned utter condemnation to make partial comfort acceptable. She burned to do some act of extreme self-abasement that should bring an unwonted degree of wrath on her externally, and so re-entitle her to consideration in her own eyes. She burned to be interrogated, to have to weep, to be scorned, abused, and forgiven, that she might say she did not deserve pardon. Beauchamp was too English, evidently too blind, for the description of judge-accuser she required; one who would worry her without mercy, until-disgraced by the excess of torture inflicted—he should reinstate her by as much as he had overcharged his accusation, and a little more. Reasonably enough, instinctively in fact, she shunned the hollow of an English ear. A surprise was in reserve for her.

Beauchamp gave up rowing. As he rested on the sculls, his head was bent and turned toward the bank. Renee perceived an over-swollen monster gourd that had strayed from a garden adjoining the river, and hung sliding heavily down the bank on one greenish yellow cheek, in prolonged contemplation of its image in the mirror below. Apparently this obese Narcissus enchained his attention.

She tapped her foot. 'Are you tired of rowing, monsieur?'

'It was exactly here,' said he, 'that you told me you expected your husband's return.'

She glanced at the gourd, bit her lip, and, colouring, said, 'At what point of the river did I request you to congratulate me on it?'

Page 2422

She would not have said that, if she had known the thoughts at work within him.

He set the boat swaying from side to side, and at once the hugeous reflection of that conceivably self-enamoured bulk quavered and distended, and was shattered in a thousand dancing fragments, to re-unite and recompose its maudlin air of imaged satisfaction.

She began to have a vague idea that he was indulging grotesque fancies.

Very strangely, the ridiculous thing, in the shape of an over-stretched likeness, that she never would have seen had he indicated it directly, became transfused from his mind to hers by his abstract, half-amused observation of the great dancing gourd—that capering antiquity, lumbering volatility, wandering, self-adored, gross bald Cupid, elatest of nondescripts! Her senses imagined the impressions agitating Beauchamp's, and exaggerated them beyond limit; and when he amazed her with a straight look into her eyes, and the words, 'Better let it be a youth—and live, than fall back to that!' she understood him immediately; and, together with her old fear of his impetuosity and downrightness, came the vivid recollection, like a bright finger pointing upon darkness, of what foul destiny, magnified by her present abhorrence of it, he would have saved her from in the days of Venice and Touraine, and unto what loathly example of the hideous grotesque she, in spite of her lover's foresight on her behalf, had become allied.

Face to face as they sat, she had no defence for her scarlet cheeks; her eyes wavered.

'We will land here; the cottagers shall row the boat up,' she said.

'Somewhere—anywhere,' said Beauchamp. 'But I must speak. I will tell you now. I do not think you to blame—barely; not in my sight; though no man living would have suffered as I should. Probably some days more and you would have been lost. You looked for me! Trust your instinct now I'm with you as well as when I'm absent. Have you courage? that 's the question. You have years to live. Can you live them in this place—with honour? and alive really?'

Renee's eyes grew wide; she tried to frown, and her brows merely twitched; to speak, and she was inarticulate. His madness, miraculous penetration, and the super-masculine charity in him, unknown to the world of young men in their treatment of women, excited, awed, and melted her. He had seen the whole truth of her relations with M. d'Henriel!—the wickedness of them in one light, the innocence in another; and without prompting a confession he forgave her. Could she believe it? This was love, and manly love.

She yearned to be on her feet, to feel the possibility of an escape from him.

Page 2423

She pointed to a landing. He sprang to the bank. 'It could end in nothing else,' he said, 'unless you beat cold to me. And now I have your hand, Renee! It's the hand of a living woman, you have no need to tell me that; but faithful to her comrade! I can swear it for her—faithful to a true alliance! You are not married, you are simply chained: and you are terrorized. What a perversion of you it is! It wrecks you. But with me? Am I not your lover? You and I are one life. What have we suffered for but to find this out and act on it? Do I not know that a woman lives, and is not the rooted piece of vegetation hypocrites and tyrants expect her to be? Act on it, I say; own me, break the chains, come to me; say, Nevil Beauchamp or death! And death for you? But you are poisoned and thwart-eddying, as you live now: worse, shaming the Renee I knew. Ah-Venice! But now we are both of us wiser and stronger: we have gone through fire. Who foretold it? This day, and this misery and perversion that we can turn to joy, if we will—if you will! No heart to dare is no heart to love!—answer that! Shall I see you cower away from me again? Not this time!'

He swept on in a flood, uttered mad things, foolish things, and things of an insight electrifying to her. Through the cottager's garden, across a field, and within the park gates of Tourdestelle it continued unceasingly; and deeply was she won by the rebellious note in all that he said, deeply too by his disregard of the vulgar arts of wooers: she detected none. He did not speak so much to win as to help her to see with her own orbs. Nor was it roughly or chidingly, though it was absolutely, that he stripped her of the veil a wavering woman will keep to herself from her heart's lord if she can.

They arrived long after the boat at Tourdestelle, and Beauchamp might believe he had prevailed with her, but for her forlorn repetition of the question he had put to her idly and as a new idea, instead of significantly, with a recollection and a doubt 'Have I courage, Nevil?'

The grain of common sense in cowardice caused her to repeat it when her reason was bedimmed, and passion assumed the right to show the way of right and wrong.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. BLACKBURN TUCKHAM

Some time after Beauchamp had been seen renewing his canvass in Bevisham a report reached Mount Laurels that he was lame of a leg. The wits of the opposite camp revived the *French marquees*, but it was generally acknowledged that he had come back without the lady: she was invisible. Cecilia Halkett rode home with her father on a dusky Autumn evening, and found the card of Commander Beauchamp awaiting her. He might have stayed to see her, she thought. Ladies are not customarily so very late in returning from a ride on chill evenings of Autumn. Only a quarter of an hour was between his visit and her

Page 2424

return. The shortness of the interval made it appear the deeper gulf. She noticed that her father particularly inquired of the man-servant whether Captain Beauchamp limped. It seemed a piece of kindly anxiety on his part. The captain was mounted, the man said. Cecilia was conscious of rumours being abroad relating to Nevil's expedition to France; but he had enemies, and was at war with them, and she held herself indifferent to tattle. This card bearing his name, recently in his hand, was much more insidious and precise. She took it to her room to look at it. Nothing but his name and naval title was inscribed; no pencilled line; she had not expected to discover one. The simple card was her dark light, as a handkerchief, a flower, a knot of riband, has been for men luridly illuminated by such small sparks to fling their beams on shadows and read the monstrous things for truths. Her purer virgin blood was, not inflamed. She read the signification of the card sadly as she did clearly. What she could not so distinctly imagine was, how he could reconcile the devotion to his country, which he had taught her to put her faith in, with his unhappy subjection to Madame de Rouaillout. How could the nobler sentiment exist side by side with one that was lawless? Or was the wildness characteristic of his political views proof of a nature inclining to disown moral ties? She feared so; he did not speak of the clergy respectfully. Reading in the dark, she was forced to rely on her social instincts, and she distrusted her personal feelings as much as she could, for she wished to know the truth of him; anything, pain and heartrending, rather than the shutting of the eyes in an unworthy abandonment to mere emotion and fascination. Cecilia's love could not be otherwise given to a man, however near she might be drawn to love—though she should suffer the pangs of love cruelly.

She placed his card in her writing-desk; she had his likeness there. Commander Beauchamp encouraged the art of photography, as those that make long voyages do, in reciprocating what they petition their friends for. Mrs. Rosamund Culling had a whole collection of photographs of him, equal to a visual history of his growth in chapters, from boyhood to midshipmanship and to manhood. The specimen possessed by Cecilia was one of a couple that Beauchamp had forwarded to Mrs. Grancey Lespel on the day of his departure for France, and was a present from that lady, purchased, like so many presents, at a cost Cecilia would have paid heavily in gold to have been spared, namely, a public blush. She was allowed to make her choice, and she chose the profile, repeating a remark of Mrs. Culling's, that it suggested an arrow-head in the upflight; whereupon Mr. Stukely Culbrett had said, 'Then there is the man, for he is undoubtedly a projectile'; nor were politically-hostile punsters on an arrow-head inactive. But Cecilia was thinking of the side-face she (less intently than Beauchamp at hers) had glanced at during the drive into Bevisham. At that moment, she fancied Madame de Rouaillout might be doing likewise; and oh that she had the portrait of the French lady as well!

Page 2425

Next day her father tossed her a photograph of another gentleman, coming out of a letter he had received from old Mrs. Beauchamp. He asked her opinion of it. She said, 'I think he would have suited Bevisham better than Captain Baskelett.' Of the original, who presented himself at Mount Laurels in the course of the week, she had nothing to say, except that he was very like the photograph, very unlike Nevil Beauchamp. 'Yes, there I'm of your opinion,' her father observed. The gentleman was Mr. Blackburn Tuckham, and it was amusing to find an exuberant Tory in one who was the reverse of the cavalier type. Nevil and he seemed to have been sorted to the wrong sides. Mr. Tuckham had a round head, square flat forehead, and ruddy face; he stood as if his feet claimed the earth under them for his own, with a certain shortness of leg that detracted from the majesty of his resemblance to our Eighth Harry, but increased his air of solidity; and he was authoritative in speaking. 'Let me set you right, sir,' he said sometimes to Colonel Halkett, and that was his modesty. 'You are altogether wrong,' Miss Halkett heard herself informed, which was his courtesy. He examined some of her water-colour drawings before sitting down to dinner, approved of them, but thought it necessary to lay a broad finger on them to show their defects. On the question of politics, 'I venture to state,' he remarked, in anything but the tone of a venture, 'that no educated man of ordinary sense who has visited our colonies will come back a Liberal.' As for a man of sense and education being a Radical, he scouted the notion with a pooh sufficient to awaken a vessel in the doldrums. He said carelessly of Commander Beauchamp, that he might think himself one. Either the Radical candidate for Bevisham stood self-deceived, or—the other supposition. Mr. Tuckham would venture to state that no English gentleman, exempt from an examination by order of the Commissioners of Lunacy, could be sincerely a Radical. 'Not a bit of it; nonsense,' he replied to Miss Halkett's hint at the existence of Radical views; 'that is, those views are out of politics; they are matters for the police. Dutch dykes are built to shut away the sea from cultivated land, and of course it's a part of the business of the Dutch Government to keep up the dykes,—and of ours to guard against the mob; but that is only a political consideration after the mob has been allowed to undermine our defences.'

'They speak,' said Miss Halkett, 'of educating the people to fit them—'

'They speak of commanding the winds and tides,' he cut her short, with no clear analogy; 'wait till we have a storm. It's a delusion amounting to dementedness to suppose, that with the people inside our defences, we can be taming them and tricking them. As for sending them to school after giving them power, it's like asking a wild beast to sit down to dinner with us—he wants the whole table and us too. The best education for the people is government. They're beginning to see that in Lancashire at last. I ran down to Lancashire for a couple of days on my landing, and I'm thankful to say Lancashire is preparing to take a step back. Lancashire leads the country. Lancashire men see what this Liberalism has done for the Labour-market.'

Page 2426

’Captain Beauchamp considers that the political change coming over the minds of the manufacturers is due to the large fortunes they have made,’ said Miss Halkett, maliciously associating a Radical prophet with him.

He was unaffected by it, and continued: ’Property is ballast as well as treasure. I call property funded good sense. I would give it every privilege. If we are to speak of patriotism, I say the possession of property guarantees it. I maintain that the lead of men of property is in most cases sure to be the safe one.’

‘I think so,’ Colonel Halkett interposed, and he spoke as a man of property.

Mr. Tuckham grew fervent in his allusions to our wealth and our commerce. Having won the race and gained the prize, shall we let it slip out of our grasp? Upon this topic his voice descended to tones of priestlike awe: for are we not the envy of the world? Our wealth is countless, fabulous. It may well inspire veneration. And we have won it with our hands, thanks (he implied it so) to our religion. We are rich in money and industry, in those two things only, and the corruption of an energetic industry is constantly threatened by the profusion of wealth giving it employment. This being the case, either your Radicals do not know the first conditions of human nature, or they do; and if they do they are traitors, and the Liberals opening the gates to them are fools: and some are knaves. We perish as a Great Power if we cease to look sharp ahead, hold firm together, and make the utmost of what we possess. The word for the performance of those duties is Toryism: a word with an older flavour than Conservatism, and Mr. Tuckham preferred it. By all means let workmen be free men but a man must earn his freedom daily, or he will become a slave in some form or another: and the way to earn it is by work and obedience to right direction. In a country like ours, open on all sides to the competition of intelligence and strength, with a Press that is the voice of all parties and of every interest; in a country offering to your investments three and a half and more per cent., secure as the firmament!

He perceived an amazed expression on Miss Halkett’s countenance; and ‘Ay,’ said he, ’that means the certainty of food to millions of mouths, and comforts, if not luxuries, to half the population. A safe percentage on savings is the basis of civilization.’

But he had bruised his eloquence, for though you may start a sermon from stones to hit the stars, he must be a practised orator who shall descend out of the abstract to take up a heavy lump of the concrete without unseating himself, and he stammered and came to a flat ending: ’In such a country—well, I venture to say, we have a right to condemn in advance disturbers of the peace, and they must show very good cause indeed for not being summarily held—to account for their conduct.’

The allocution was not delivered in the presence of an audience other than sympathetic, and Miss Halkett rightly guessed that it was intended to strike Captain Beauchamp by ricochet. He puffed at the mention of Beauchamp’s name. He had read a reported

speech or two of Beauchamp’s, and shook his head over a quotation of the stuff, as though he would have sprung at him like a lion, but for his enrolment as a constable.

Page 2427

Not a whit the less did Mr. Tuckham drink his claret relishingly, and he told stories incidental to his travels now and then, commended the fishing here, the shooting there, and in some few places the cookery, with much bright emphasis when it could be praised; it appeared to be an endearing recollection to him. Still, as a man of progress, he declared his belief that we English would ultimately turn out the best cooks, having indubitably the best material. 'Our incomprehensible political pusillanimity' was the one sad point about us: we had been driven from surrender to surrender.

'Like geese upon a common, I have heard it said,' Miss Halkett assisted him to Dr. Shrapnel's comparison.

Mr. Tuckham laughed, and half yawned and sighed, 'Dear me!'

His laughter was catching, and somehow more persuasive of the soundness of the man's heart and head than his remarks.

She would have been astonished to know that a gentleman so uncourtly, if not uncouth —judged by the standard of the circle she moved in—and so unskilled in pleasing the sight and hearing of ladies as to treat them like junior comrades, had raised the vow within himself on seeing her: You, or no woman!

The colonel delighted in him, both as a strong and able young fellow, and a refreshingly aggressive recruit of his party, who was for onslaught, and invoked common sense, instead of waving the flag of sentiment in retreat; a very horse-artillery man of Tories. Regretting immensely that Mr. Tuckham had not reached England earlier, that he might have occupied the seat for Bevisham, about to be given to Captain Baskelett, Colonel Halkett set up a contrast of Blackburn Tuckham and Nevil Beauchamp; a singular instance of unfairness, his daughter thought, considering that the distinct contrast presented by the circumstances was that of Mr. Tuckham and Captain Baskelett.

'It seems to me, papa,—that you are contrasting the idealist and the realist,' she said.

'Ah, well, we don't want the idealist in politics,' muttered the colonel.

Latterly he also had taken to shaking his head over Nevil: Cecilia dared not ask him why.

Mr. Tuckham arrived at Mount Laurels on the eve of the Nomination day in Bevisham. An article in the Bevisham Gazette calling upon all true Liberals to demonstrate their unanimity by a multitudinous show of hands, he ascribed to the writing of a child of Erin; and he was highly diverted by the Liberal's hiring of Paddy to 'pen and spout' for him. 'A Scotchman manages, and Paddy does the sermon for all their journals,' he said off-hand; adding: 'And the English are the compositors, I suppose.' You may take that for an instance of the national spirit of Liberal newspapers!

‘Ah!’ sighed the colonel, as at a case clearly demonstrated against them.

A drive down to Bevisham to witness the ceremony of the nomination in the town-hall sobered Mr. Tuckham’s disposition to generalize. Beauchamp had the show of hands, and to say with Captain Baskelett, that they were a dirty majority, was beneath Mr. Tuckham’s verbal antagonism. He fell into a studious reserve, noting everything, listening to everybody, greatly to Colonel Halkett’s admiration of one by nature a talker and a thunderer.

Page 2428

The show of hands Mr. Seymour Austin declared to be the most delusive of electoral auspices; and it proved so. A little later than four o'clock in the afternoon of the election-day, Cecilia received a message from her father telling her that both of the Liberals were headed; 'Beauchamp nowhere.'

Mrs. Grancey Lespel was the next herald of Beauchamp's defeat. She merely stated the fact that she had met the colonel and Mr. Blackburn Tuckham driving on the outskirts of the town, and had promised to bring Cecilia the final numbers of the poll. Without naming them, she unrolled the greater business in her mind.

'A man who in the middle of an Election goes over to France to fight a duel, can hardly expect to win; he has all the morality of an English borough opposed to him,' she said; and seeing the young lady stiffen: 'Oh! the duel is positive,' she dropped her voice. 'With the husband. Who else could it be? And returns invalided. That is evidence. My nephew Palmet has it from Vivian Ducie, and he is acquainted with her tolerably intimately, and the story is, she was overtaken in her flight in the night, and the duel followed at eight o'clock in the morning; but her brother insisted on fighting for Captain Beauchamp, and I cannot tell you how—but his place in it I can't explain—there was a beau jeune homme, and it's quite possible that he should have been the person to stand up against the marquis. At any rate, he insulted Captain Beauchamp, or thought your hero had insulted him, and the duel was with one or the other. It matters exceedingly little with whom, if a duel was fought, and you see we have quite established that.'

'I hope it is not true,' said Cecilia.

'My dear, that is the Christian thing to do,' said Mrs. Lespel. 'Duelling is horrible: though those Romfreys!—and the Beauchamps were just as bad, or nearly. Colonel Richard fought for a friend's wife or sister. But in these days duelling is incredible. It was an inhuman practice always, and it is now worse—it is a reach of manners. I would hope it is not true; and you may mean that I have it from Lord Palmet. But I know Vivian Ducie as well as I know my nephew, and if he distinctly mentions an occurrence, we may too surely rely on the truth of it; he is not a man to spread mischief. Are you unaware that he met Captain Beauchamp at the chateau of the marquise? The whole story was acted under his eyes. He had only to take up his pen. Generally he favours me with his French gossip. I suppose there were circumstances in this affair more suitable to Palmet than to me. He wrote a description of Madame de Rouaillout that set Palmet strutting about for an hour. I have no doubt she must be a very beautiful woman, for a Frenchwoman: not regular features; expressive, capricious. Vivian Ducie lays great stress on her eyes and eyebrows, and, I think, her hair. With a Frenchwoman's figure, that is enough to make men crazy. He says her husband

Page 2429

deserves—but what will not young men write? It is deeply to be regretted that Englishmen abroad—women the same, I fear—get the Continental tone in morals. But how Captain Beauchamp could expect to carry on an Election and an intrigue together, only a head like his can tell us. Grancey is in high indignation with him. It does not concern the Election, you can imagine. Something that man Dr. Shrapnel has done, which he says Captain Beauchamp could have prevented. Quarrels of men! I have instructed Palmet to write to Vivian Ducie for a photograph of Madame de Rouaillout. Do you know, one has a curiosity to see the face of the woman for whom a man ruins himself. But I say again, he ought to be married.'

'That there may be two victims?' Cecilia said it smiling.

She was young in suffering, and thought, as the unseasoned and inexperienced do, that a mask is a concealment.

'Married—settled; to have him bound in honour,' said Mrs. Lespel. 'I had a conversation with him when he was at Itchincope; and his look, and what I know of his father, that gallant and handsome Colonel Richard Beauchamp, would give one a kind of confidence in him; supposing always that he is not struck with one of those deadly passions that are like snakes, like magic. I positively believe in them. I have seen them. And if they end, they end as if the man were burnt out, and was ashes inside; as you see Mr. Stukely Culbrett, all cynicism. You would not now suspect him of a passion! It is true. Oh, I know it! That is what the men go to. The women die. Vera Winter died at twenty-three. Caroline Ormond was hardly older. You know her story; everybody knows it. The most singular and convincing case was that of Lord Alfred Burnley and Lady Susan Gardiner, wife of the general; and there was an instance of two similarly afflicted—a very rare case, most rare: they never could meet to part! It was almost ludicrous. It is now quite certain that they did not conspire to meet. At last the absolute fatality became so well understood by the persons immediately interested—-You laugh?'

'Do I laugh?' said Cecilia.

'We should all know the world, my dear, and you are a strong head. The knowledge is only dangerous for fools. And if romance is occasionally ridiculous, as I own it can be, humdrum, I protest, is everlastingly so. By-the-by, I should have told you that Captain Beauchamp was one hundred and ninety below Captain Baskelett when the state of the poll was handed to me. The gentleman driving with your father compared the Liberals to a parachute cut away from the balloon. Is he army or navy?'

'He is a barrister, and some cousin of Captain Beauchamp.'

'I should not have taken him for a Beauchamp,' said Mrs. Lespel; and, resuming her worldly sagacity, 'I should not like to be in opposition to that young man.'

She seemed to have a fancy unexpressed regarding Mr. Tuckham. Reminding herself that she might be behind time at Itchincope, where the guests would be numerous that evening, and the song of triumph loud, with Captain Baskelett to lead it, she kissed the young lady she had unintentionally been torturing so long, and drove away.

Page 2430

Cecilia hoped it was not true. Her heart sank heavily under the belief that it was. She imagined the world abusing Nevil and casting him out, as those electors of Bevisham had just done, and impulsively she pleaded for him, and became drowned in criminal blushes that forced her to defend herself with a determination not to believe the dreadful story, though she continued mitigating the wickedness of it; as if, by a singular inversion of the fact, her clear good sense excused, and it was her heart that condemned him. She dwelt fondly on an image of the 'gallant and handsome Colonel Richard Beauchamp,' conjured up in her mind from the fervour of Mrs. Lespel when speaking of Nevil's father, whose chivalry threw a light on the son's, and whose errors, condoned by time, and with a certain brilliancy playing above them, interceded strangely on behalf of Nevil.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SHORT SIDELOOK AT THE ELECTION

The brisk Election-day, unlike that wearisome but instructive canvass of the Englishman in his castle vicatim, teaches little; and its humours are those of a badly managed Christmas pantomime without a columbine—old tricks, no graces. Nevertheless, things hang together so that it cannot be passed over with a bare statement of the fact of the Liberal-Radical defeat in Bevisham: the day was not without fruit in time to come for him whom his commiserating admirers of the non-voting sex all round the borough called the poor dear commander. Beauchamp's holiday out of England had incited Dr. Shrapnel to break a positive restriction put upon him by Jenny Denham, and actively pursue the canvass and the harangue in person; by which conduct, as Jenny had foreseen, many temperate electors were alienated from Commander Beauchamp, though no doubt the Radicals were made compact: for they may be the skirmishing faction—poor scattered fragments, none of them sufficiently downright for the other; each outstripping each; rudimentary emperors, elementary prophets, inspired physicians, nostrum-devouring patients, whatsoever you will; and still here and there a man shall arise to march them in close columns, if they can but trust him; in perfect subordination, a model even for Tories while they keep shoulder to shoulder. And to behold such a disciplined body is intoxicating to the eye of a leader accustomed to count ahead upon vapourish abstractions, and therefore predisposed to add a couple of noughts to every tangible figure in his grasp. Thus will a realized fifty become five hundred or five thousand to him: the very sense of number is instinct with multiplication in his mind; and those years far on in advance, which he has been looking to with some fatigue to the optics, will suddenly and rollickingly roll up to him at the shutting of his eyes in a temporary fit of gratification. So, by looking and by not looking, he achieves his phantom victory—embraces his cloud.

Page 2431

Dr. Shrapnel conceived that the day was to be a Radical success; and he, a citizen aged and exercised in reverses, so rounded by the habit of them indeed as to tumble and recover himself on the wind of the blow that struck him, was, it must be acknowledged, staggered and cast down when he saw Beauchamp drop, knowing full well his regiment had polled to a man. Radicals poll early; they would poll at cockcrow if they might; they dance on the morning. As for their chagrin at noon, you will find descriptions of it in the poet's Inferno. They are for lifting our clay soil on a lever of Archimedes, and are not great mathematicians. They have perchance a foot of our earth, and perpetually do they seem to be producing an effect, perpetually does the whole land roll back on them. You have not surely to be reminded that it hurts them; the weight is immense. Dr. Shrapnel, however, speedily looked out again on his vast horizon, though prostrate. He regained his height of stature with no man's help. Success was but postponed for a generation or two. Is it so very distant? Gaze on it with the eye of our parent orb! 'I shall not see it here; you may,' he said to Jenny Denham; and he fortified his outlook by saying to Mr. Lydiard that the Tories of our time walked, or rather stuck, in the track of the Radicals of a generation back. Note, then, that Radicals, always marching to the triumph, never taste it; and for Tories it is Dead Sea fruit, ashes in their mouths! Those Liberals, those temporisers, compromisers, a concourse of atoms! glorify themselves in the animal satisfaction of sucking the juice of the fruit, for which they pay with their souls. They have no true cohesion, for they have no vital principle.

Mr. Lydiard being a Liberal, bade the doctor not to forget the work of the Liberals, who touched on Tory and Radical with a pretty steady swing, from side to side, in the manner of the pendulum of a clock, which is the clock's life, remember that. The Liberals are the professors of the practicable in politics.

'A suitable image for time-servers!' Dr. Shrapnel exclaimed, intolerant of any mention of the Liberals as a party, especially in the hour of Radical discomfiture, when the fact that compromisers should exist exasperates men of a principle. 'Your Liberals are the band of Pyrrhus, an army of bastards, mercenaries professing the practicable for pay. They know us the motive force, the Tories the resisting power, and they feign to aid us in battering our enemy, that they may stop the shock. We fight, they profit. What are they? Stranded Whigs, crotchetty manufacturers; dissentient religionists; the half-minded, the hare-hearted; the I would and I would-not—shifty creatures, with youth's enthusiasm decaying in them, and a purse beginning to jingle; fearing lest we do too much for safety, our enemy not enough for safety. They a party? Let them take action and see! We stand a thousand defeats; they not one! Compromise begat them. Once let them

Page 2432

leave sucking the teats of compromise, yea, once put on the air of men who fight and die for a cause, they fly to pieces. And whither the fragments? Chiefly, my friend, into the Tory ranks. Seriously so I say. You between future and past are for the present—-but with the hunted look behind of all godless livers in the present. You Liberals are Tories with foresight, Radicals without faith. You start, in fear of Toryism, on an errand of Radicalism, and in fear of Radicalism to Toryism you draw back. There is your pendulum-swing!'

Lectures to this effect were delivered by Dr. Shrapnel throughout the day, for his private spiritual solace it may be supposed, unto Lydiard, Turbot, Beauchamp, or whomsoever the man chancing to be near him, and never did Sir Oracle wear so extraordinary a garb. The favourite missiles of the day were flour-bags. Dr. Shrapnel's uncommon height, and his outrageous long brown coat, would have been sufficient to attract them, without the reputation he had for desiring to subvert everything old English. The first discharges gave him the appearance of a thawing snowman. Drenchings of water turned the flour to ribs of paste, and in colour at least he looked legitimately the cook's own spitted hare, escaped from her basting ladle, elongated on two legs. It ensued that whenever he was caught sight of, as he walked unconcernedly about, the young street-professors of the decorative arts were seized with a frenzy to add their share to the whitening of him, until he might have been taken for a miller that had gone bodily through his meal. The popular cry proclaimed him a ghost, and he walked like one, impassive, blanched, and silent amid the uproar of mobs of jolly ruffians, for each of whom it was a point of honour to have a shy at old Shrapnel.

Clad in this preparation of pie-crust, he called from time to time at Beauchamp's hotel, and renewed his monologue upon that Radical empire in the future which was for ever in the future for the pioneers of men, yet not the less their empire. 'Do we live in our bodies?' quoth he, replying to his fiery interrogation: 'Ay, the Tories! the Liberals!' They lived in their bodies. Not one syllable of personal consolation did he vouchsafe to Beauchamp. He did not imagine it could be required by a man who had bathed in the pure springs of Radicalism; and it should be remarked that Beauchamp deceived him by imitating his air of happy abstraction, or subordination of the faculties to a distant view, comparable to a ship's crew in difficulties receiving the report of the man at the masthead. Beauchamp deceived Miss Denham too, and himself, by saying, as if he cherished the philosophy of defeat, besides the resolution to fight on:

'It's only a skirmish lost, and that counts for nothing in a battle without end: it must be incessant.'

'But does incessant battling keep the intellect clear?' was her memorable answer.

Page 2433

He glanced at Lydiard, to indicate that it came of that gentleman's influence upon her mind. It was impossible for him to think that women thought. The idea of a pretty woman exercising her mind independently, and moreover moving him to examine his own, made him smile. Could a sweet-faced girl, the nearest to Renee in grace of manner and in feature of all women known to him, originate a sentence that would set him reflecting? He was unable to forget it, though he allowed her no credit for it.

On the other hand, his admiration of her devotedness to Dr. Shrapnel was unbounded. There shone a strictly feminine quality! according to the romantic visions of the sex entertained by Commander Beauchamp, and by others who would be the objects of it. But not alone the passive virtues were exhibited by Jenny Denham: she proved that she had high courage. No remonstrance could restrain Dr. Shrapnel from going out to watch the struggle, and she went with him as a matter of course on each occasion. Her dress bore witness to her running the gauntlet beside him.

'It was not thrown at me purposely,' she said, to quiet Beauchamp's wrath. She saved the doctor from being rough mobbed. Once when they were surrounded she fastened his arm under hers, and by simply moving on with an unswerving air of serenity obtained a passage for him. So much did she make herself respected, that the gallant rascals became emulous in dexterity to avoid powdering her, by loudly execrating any but dead shots at the detested one, and certain boys were maltreated for an ardour involving clumsiness. A young genius of this horde conceiving, in the spirit of the inventors of our improved modern ordnance, that it was vain to cast missiles which left a thing standing, hurled a stone wrapped in paper. It missed its mark. Jenny said nothing about it. The day closed with a comfortable fight or two in by-quarters of the town, probably to prove that an undaunted English spirit, spite of fickle Fortune, survived in our muscles.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOUCHING A YOUNG LADY'S HEART AND HER INTELLECT

Mr. Tuckham found his way to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to see his kinsman on the day after the election. There was a dinner in honour of the Members for Bevisham at Mount Laurels in the evening, and he was five minutes behind military time when he entered the restive drawing-room and stood before the colonel. No sooner had he stated that he had been under the roof of Dr. Shrapnel, than his unpunctuality was immediately overlooked in the burst of impatience evoked by the name.

'That pestilent fellow!' Colonel Halkett ejaculated. 'I understand he has had the impudence to serve a notice on Grancey Lespel about encroachments on common land.'

Some one described Dr. Shrapnel’s appearance under the flour storm.

‘He deserves anything,’ said the colonel, consulting his mantelpiece clock.

Page 2434

Captain Baskelett observed: 'I shall have my account to settle with Dr. Shrapnel.' He spoke like a man having a right to be indignant, but excepting that the doctor had bestowed nicknames upon him in a speech at a meeting, no one could discover the grounds for it. He nodded briefly. A Radical apple had struck him on the left cheekbone as he performed his triumphal drive through the town, and a slight disfigurement remained, to which his hand was applied sympathetically at intervals, for the cheek-bone was prominent in his countenance, and did not well bear enlargement. And when a fortunate gentleman, desiring to be still more fortunate, would display the winning amiability of his character, distension of one cheek gives him an afflictingly false look of sweetness.

The bent of his mind, nevertheless, was to please Miss Halkett. He would be smiling, and intimately smiling. Aware that she had a kind of pitiful sentiment for Nevil, he smiled over Nevil—poor Nevil! 'I give you my word, Miss Halkett, old Nevil was off his head yesterday. I daresay he meant to be civil. I met him; I called out to him, "Good day, cousin, I'm afraid you're beaten" and says he, "I fancy you've gained it, uncle." He didn't know where he was; all abroad, poor boy. Uncle!—to me!'

Miss Halkett would have accepted the instance for a proof of Nevil's distraction, had not Mr. Seymour Austin, who sat beside her, laughed and said to her: 'I suppose "uncle" was a chance shot, but it's equal to a poetic epithet in the light it casts on the story.' Then it seemed to her that Nevil had been keenly quick, and Captain Baskelett's impenetrability was a sign of his density. Her mood was to think Nevil Beauchamp only too quick, too adventurous and restless: one that wrecked brilliant gifts in a too general warfare; a lover of hazards, a hater of laws. Her eyes flew over Captain Baskelett as she imagined Nevil addressing him as uncle, and, to put aside a spirit of mockery rising within her, she hinted a wish to hear Seymour Austin's opinion of Mr. Tuckham. He condensed it in an interrogative tone: 'The other extreme?' The Tory extreme of Radical Nevil Beauchamp. She assented. Mr. Tuckham was at that moment prophesying the Torification of mankind; not as the trembling venturesome idea which we cast on doubtful winds, but as a ship is launched to ride the waters, with huzzas for a thing accomplished. Mr. Austin raised his shoulders imperceptibly, saying to Miss Halkett: 'The turn will come to us as to others—and go. Nothing earthly can escape that revolution. We have to meet it with a policy, and let it pass with measures carried and our hands washed of some of our party sins. I am, I hope, true to my party, but the enthusiasm of party I do not share. He is right, however, when he accuses the nation of cowardice for the last ten years. One third of the Liberals have been with us at heart, and dared not speak, and we dared not say what we wished. We accepted a compact

Page 2435

that satisfied us both—satisfied us better than when we were opposed by Whigs—that is, the Liberal reigned, and we governed: and I should add, a very clever juggler was our common chief. Now we have the consequences of hollow peacemaking, in a suffrage that bids fair to extend to the wearing of hats and boots for a qualification. The moral of it seems to be that cowardice is even worse for nations than for individual men, though the consequences come on us more slowly.'

'You spoke of party sins,' Miss Halkett said incredulously.

'I shall think we are the redoubtable party when we admit the charge.'

'Are you alluding to the landowners?'

'Like the land itself, they have rich veins in heavy matter. For instance, the increasing wealth of the country is largely recruiting our ranks; and we shall be tempted to mistake numbers for strength, and perhaps again be reading Conservatism for a special thing of our own—a fortification. That would be a party sin. Conservatism is a principle of government; the best because the safest for an old country; and the guarantee that we do not lose the wisdom of past experience in our struggle with what is doubtful. Liberalism stakes too much on the chance of gain. It is uncomfortably seated on half-a-dozen horses; and it has to feed them too, and on varieties of corn.'

'Yes,' Miss Halkett said, pausing, 'and I know you would not talk down to me, but the use of imagery makes me feel that I am addressed as a primitive intelligence.'

'That's the fault of my trying at condensation, as the hieroglyphists put an animal for a paragraph. I am incorrigible, you see; but the lecture in prose must be for by-and-by, if you care to have it.'

'If you care to read it to me. Did a single hieroglyphic figure stand for so much?'

'I have never deciphered one.'

'You have been speaking to me too long in earnest, Mr. Austin!'

'I accept the admonition, though it is wider than the truth. Have you ever consented to listen to politics before?'

Cecilia reddened faintly, thinking of him who had taught her to listen, and of her previous contempt of the subject.

A political exposition devoid of imagery was given to her next day on the sunny South-western terrace of Mount Laurels, when it was only by mentally translating it into imagery that she could advance a step beside her intellectual guide; and she was ashamed of the volatility of her ideas. She was constantly comparing Mr. Austin and

Nevil Beauchamp, seeing that the senior and the junior both talked to her with the familiar recognition of her understanding which was a compliment without the gross corporeal phrase. But now she made another discovery, that should have been infinitely more of a compliment, and it was bewildering, if not repulsive to her:—could it be credited? Mr. Austin was a firm believer in new and higher destinies for women. He went farther than she could concede

Page 2436

the right of human speculation to go; he was, in fact, as Radical there as Nevil Beauchamp politically; and would not the latter innovator stare, perchance frown conservatively, at a prospect of woman taking counsel, in council, with men upon public affairs, like the women in the Germania! Mr. Austin, if this time he talked in earnest, deemed that Englishwomen were on the road to win such a promotion, and would win it ultimately. He said soberly that he saw more certain indications of the reality of progress among women than any at present shown by men. And he was professedly temperate. He was but for opening avenues to the means of livelihood for them, and leaving it to their strength to conquer the position they might wish to win. His belief that they would do so was the revolutionary sign.

‘Are there points of likeness between Radicals and Tories?’ she inquired.

‘I suspect a cousinship in extremes,’ he answered.

‘If one might be present at an argument,’ said she.

‘We have only to meet to fly apart as wide as the Poles,’ Mr. Austin rejoined.

But she had not spoken of a particular person to meet him; and how, then, had she betrayed herself? She fancied he looked unwontedly arch as he resumed:

’The end of the argument would see us each entrenched in his party. Suppose me to be telling your Radical friend such truisms as that we English have not grown in a day, and were not originally made free and equal by decree; that we have grown, and must continue to grow, by the aid and the development of our strength; that ours is a fairly legible history, and a fair example of the good and the bad in human growth; that his landowner and his peasant have no clear case of right and wrong to divide them, one being the descendant of strong men, the other of weak ones; and that the former may sink, the latter may rise—there is no artificial obstruction; and if it is difficult to rise, it is easy to sink. Your Radical friend, who would bring them to a level by proclamation, could not adopt a surer method for destroying the manhood of a people: he is for doctoring wooden men, and I for not letting our stout English be cut down short as Laplanders; he would have them in a forcing house, and I in open air, as hitherto. Do you perceive a discussion? and you apprehend the nature of it. We have nerves. That is why it is better for men of extremely opposite opinions not to meet. I dare say Radicalism has a function, and so long as it respects the laws I am ready to encounter it where it cannot be avoided. Pardon my prosing.’

‘Recommend me some hard books to study through the Winter,’ said Cecilia, refreshed by a discourse that touched no emotions, as by a febrifuge. Could Nevil reply to it? She fancied him replying, with that wild head of his—wildest of natures. She fancied also that her wish was like Mr. Austin’s not to meet him. She was enjoying a little rest.

Page 2437

It was not quite generous in Mr. Austin to assume that 'her Radical friend' had been prompting her. However, she thanked him in her heart for the calm he had given her. To be able to imagine Nevil Beauchamp intellectually erratic was a tonic satisfaction to the proud young lady, ashamed of a bondage that the bracing and pointing of her critical powers helped her to forget. She had always preferred the society of men of Mr. Austin's age. How old was he? Her father would know. And why was he unmarried? A light frost had settled on the hair about his temples; his forehead was lightly wrinkled; but his mouth and smile, and his eyes, were lively as a young man's, with more in them. His age must be something less than fifty. O for peace! she sighed. When he stepped into his carriage, and stood up in it to wave adieu to her, she thought his face and figure a perfect example of an English gentleman in his prime.

Captain Baskelett requested the favour of five minutes of conversation with Miss Halkett before he followed Mr. Austin, on his way to Steynham.

She returned from that colloquy to her father and Mr. Tuckham. The colonel looked straight in her face, with an elevation of the brows. To these points of interrogation she answered with a placid fall of her eyelids. He sounded a note of approbation in his throat.

All the company having departed, Mr. Tuckham for the first time spoke of his interview with his kinsman Beauchamp. Yesterday evening he had slurred it, as if he had nothing to relate, except the finding of an old schoolfellow at Dr. Shrapnel's named Lydiard, a man of ability fool enough to have turned author on no income. But that which had appeared to Miss Halkett a want of observancy, became attributable to depth of character on its being clear that he had waited for the departure of the transient guests of the house, to pour forth his impressions without holding up his kinsman to public scorn. He considered Shrapnel mad and Beauchamp mad. No such grotesque old monster as Dr. Shrapnel had he seen in the course of his travels. He had never listened to a madman running loose who was at all up to Beauchamp. At a loss for words to paint him, he said: 'Beauchamp seems to have a head like a firework manufactory, he's perfectly pyrocephalic.' For an example of Dr. Shrapnel's talk: 'I happened,' said Mr. Tuckham, 'casually, meaning no harm, and not supposing I was throwing a lighted match on powder, to mention the word Providence. I found myself immediately confronted by Shrapnel—overtopped, I should say. He is a lank giant of about seven feet in height; the kind of show man that used to go about in caravans over the country; and he began rocking over me like a poplar in a gale, and cries out: "Stay there! away with that! Providence? Can you set a thought on Providence, not seeking to propitiate it? And have you not there the damning proof that you are at the foot of an Idol?"—The old idea about a special Providence, I suppose.

Page 2438

These fellows have nothing new but their trimmings. And he went on with: "Ay, invisible," and his arm chopping, "but an Idol! an Idol!"—I was to think of "nought but Laws." He admitted there might be one above the Laws. "To realize him is to fry the brains in their pan," says he, and struck his forehead—a slap: and off he walked down the garden, with his hands at his coat-tails. I venture to say it may be taken for a proof of incipient insanity to care to hear such a fellow twice. And Beauchamp holds him up for a sage and a prophet!'

'He is a very dangerous dog,' said Colonel Halkett.

'The best of it is—and I take this for the strongest possible proof that Beauchamp is mad—Shrapnel stands for an advocate of morality against him. I'll speak of it . . . .'

Mr. Tuckham nodded to the colonel, who said: 'Speak out. My daughter has been educated for a woman of the world.'

'Well, sir, it's nothing to offend a young lady's ears. Beauchamp is for socially enfranchising the sex—that is all. Quite enough. Not a whit politically. Love is to be the test: and if a lady ceases to love her husband . . . if she sets her fancy elsewhere, she's bound to leave him. The laws are tyrannical, our objections are cowardly. Well, this Dr. Shrapnel harangued about society; and men as well as women are to sacrifice their passions on that altar. If he could burlesque himself it would be in coming out as a cleric—the old Pagan!'

'Did he convince Captain Beauchamp?' the colonel asked, manifestly for his daughter to hear the reply; which was: 'Oh dear, no!'

'Were you able to gather from Captain Beauchamp's remarks whether he is much disappointed by the result of the election?' said Cecilia.

Mr. Tuckham could tell her only that Captain Beauchamp was incensed against an elector named Tomlinson for withdrawing a promised vote on account of lying rumours, and elated by the conquest of a Mr. Carpendike, who was reckoned a tough one to drag by the neck. 'The only sane people in the house are a Miss Denham and the cook: I lunched there,' Mr. Tuckham nodded approvingly. 'Lydiard must be mad. What he's wasting his time there for I can't guess. He says he's engaged there in writing a prefatory essay to a new publication of Harry Denham's poems—whoever that may be. And why wasting it there? I don't like it. He ought to be earning his bread. He'll be sure to be borrowing money by-and-by. We've got ten thousand too many fellows writing already, and they 've seen a few inches of the world, on the Continent! He can write. But it's all unproductive-dead weight on the country, these fellows with their writings! He says Beauchamp's praise of Miss Denham is quite deserved. He tells me, that at great peril to herself—and she nearly had her arm broken by a stone he saved Shrapnel from rough usage on the election-day.'

‘Hum!’ Colonel Halkett grunted significantly.

Page 2439

‘So I thought,’ Mr. Tuckham responded. ’One doesn’t want the man to be hurt, but he ought to be put down in some way. My belief is he’s a Fire-worshipper. I warrant I would extinguish him if he came before me. He’s an incendiary, at any rate.’

‘Do you think,’ said Cecilia, ’that Captain Beauchamp is now satisfied with his experience of politics?’

‘Dear me, no,’ said Mr. Tuckham. ’It’s the opening of a campaign. He’s off to the North, after he has been to Sussex and Bucks. He’s to be at it all his life. One thing he shows common sense in. If I heard him once I heard him say half-a-dozen times, that he must have money:—“I must have money!” And so he must if he ’s to head the Radicals. He wants to start a newspaper! Is he likely to get money from his uncle Romfrey?’

‘Not for his present plan of campaign.’ Colonel Halkett enunciated the military word sarcastically. ‘Let’s hope he won’t get money.’

‘He says he must have it.’

‘Who is to stand and deliver, then?’

’I don’t know; I only repeat what he says: unless he has an eye on my Aunt Beauchamp; and I doubt his luck there, if he wants money for political campaigning.’

‘Money!’ Colonel Halkett ejaculated.

That word too was in the heart of the heiress.

Nevil must have money! Could he have said it? Ordinary men might say or think it inoffensively; Captain Baskelett, for instance: but not Nevil Beauchamp.

Captain Baskelett, as she had conveyed the information to her father for his comfort in the dumb domestic language familiar between them on these occasions, had proposed to her unavailingly. Italian and English gentlemen were in the list of her rejected suitors: and hitherto she had seen them come and go, one might say, from a watchtower in the skies. None of them was the ideal she waited for: what their feelings were, their wishes, their aims, she had not reflected on. They dotted the landscape beneath the unassailable heights, busy after their fashion, somewhat quaint, much like the pigmy husbandmen in the fields were to the giant’s daughter, who had more curiosity than Cecilia. But Nevil Beauchamp had compelled her to quit her lofty station, pulled her low as the littlest of women that throb and flush at one man’s footstep: and being well able to read the nature and aspirations of Captain Baskelett, it was with the knowledge of her having been proposed to as heiress of a great fortune that she chanced to hear of Nevil’s resolve to have money. If he did say it! And was anything likelier? was anything unlikelier? His foreign love denied to him, why, now he devoted himself to money: money—the last consideration of a man so single-mindedly

generous as he! But he must have money to pursue his contest! But would he forfeit the truth in him for money for any purpose?

The debate on this question grew as incessant as the thought of him. Was it not to be supposed that the madness of the pursuit of his political chimaera might change his character?

Page 2440

She hoped he would not come to Mount Laurels, thinking she should esteem him less if he did; knowing that her defence of him, on her own behalf, against herself, depended now on an esteem lodged perhaps in her wilfulness. Yet if he did not come, what an Arctic world!

He came on a November afternoon when the woods glowed, and no sun. The day was narrowed in mist from earth to heaven: a moveless and possessing mist. It left space overhead for one wreath of high cloud mixed with touches of washed red upon moist blue, still as the mist, insensibly passing into it. Wet webs crossed the grass, chill in the feeble light. The last flowers of the garden bowed to decay. Dead leaves, red and brown and spotted yellow, fell straight around the stems of trees, lying thick. The glow was universal, and the chill.

Cecilia sat sketching the scene at a window of her study, on the level of the drawing-room, and he stood by outside till she saw him. He greeted her through the glass, then went round to the hall door, giving her time to recover, if only her heart had been less shaken.

Their meeting was like the features of the day she set her brush to picture: characteristic of a season rather than cheerless in tone, though it breathed little cheer. Is there not a pleasure in contemplating that which is characteristic? Her unfinished sketch recalled him after he had gone: he lived in it, to startle her again, and bid her heart gallop and her cheeks burn. The question occurred to her: May not one love, not craving to be beloved? Such a love does not sap our pride, but supports it; increases rather than diminishes our noble self-esteem. To attain such a love the martyrs writhed up to the crown of saints. For a while Cecilia revelled in the thought that she could love in this most saint-like manner. How they fled, the sordid ideas of him which accused him of the world's one passion, and were transferred to her own bosom in reproach that she should have imagined them existing in his! He talked simply and sweetly of his defeat, of time wasted away from the canvass, of loss of money: and he had little to spare, he said. The water-colour drawing interested him. He said he envied her that power of isolation, and the eye for beauty in every season. She opened a portfolio of Mr. Tuckham's water-colour drawings in every clime; scenes of Europe, Asia, and the Americas; and he was to be excused for not caring to look through them. His remark, that they seemed hard and dogged, was not so unjust, she thought, smiling to think of the critic criticized. His wonderment that a young man like his Lancastrian cousin should be 'an unmitigated Tory' was perhaps natural.

Page 2441

Cecilia said, ‘Yet I cannot discern in him a veneration for aristocracy.’ ‘That’s not wanted for modern Toryism,’ said Nevil. ’One may venerate old families when they show the blood of the founder, and are not dead wood. I do. And I believe the blood of the founder, though the man may have been a savage and a robber, had in his day finer elements in it than were common. But let me say at a meeting that I respect true aristocracy, I hear a growl and a hiss beginning: why? Don’t judge them hastily: because the people have seen the aristocracy opposed to the cause that was weak, and only submitting to it when it commanded them to resist at their peril; clinging to traditions, and not anywhere standing for humanity: much more a herd than the people themselves. Ah! well, we won’t talk of it now. I say that is no aristocracy, if it does not head the people in virtue—military, political, national: I mean the qualities required by the times for leadership. I won’t bother you with my ideas now. I love to see you paint-brush in hand.’

Her brush trembled on the illumination of a scarlet maple. ’In this country we were not originally made free and equal by decree, Nevil.’

‘No,’ said he, ‘and I cast no blame on our farthest ancestors.’

It struck her that this might be an outline of a reply to Mr. Austin.

‘So you have been thinking over it?’ he asked.

‘Not to conclusions,’ she said, trying to retain in her mind the evanescent suggestiveness of his previous remark, and vexed to find herself upon nothing but a devious phosphorescent trail there.

Her forehead betrayed the unwonted mental action. He cried out for pardon. ’What right have I to bother you? I see it annoys you. The truth is, I came for peace. I think of you when they talk of English homes.’

She felt then that he was comparing her home with another, a foreign home. After he had gone she felt that there had been a comparison of two persons. She remembered one of his observations: ’Few women seem to have courage’; when his look at her was for an instant one of scrutiny or calculation. Under a look like that we perceive that we are being weighed. She had no clue to tell her what it signified.

Glorious and solely glorious love, that has risen above emotion, quite independent of craving! That is to be the bird of upper air, poised on his wings. It is a home in the sky. Cecilia took possession of it systematically, not questioning whether it would last; like one who is too enamoured of the habitation to object to be a tenant-at-will. If it was cold, it was in recompense immeasurably lofty, a star-girdled place; and dwelling in it she could avow to herself the secret which was now working self-deception, and still

preserve her pride unwounded. Her womanly pride, she would have said in vindication of it: but Cecilia Halkett's pride went far beyond the merely womanly.

Page 2442

Thus she was assisted to endure a journey down to Wales, where Nevil would surely not be. She passed a Winter without seeing him. She returned to Mount Laurels from London at Easter, and went on a visit to Steynham, and back to London, having sight of him nowhere, still firm in the thought that she loved ethereally, to bless, forgive, direct, encourage, pray for him, impersonally. She read certain speeches delivered by Nevil at assemblies of Liberals or Radicals, which were reported in papers in the easy irony of the style of here and there a sentence, here and there a summary: salient quotations interspersed with running abstracts: a style terrible to friends of the speaker so reported, overwhelming if they differ in opinion: yet her charity was a match for it. She was obliged to have recourse to charity, it should be observed. Her father drew her attention to the spectacle of R. C. S. Nevil Beauchamp, Commander R.N., fighting those reporters with letters in the newspapers, and the dry editorial comment flanked by three stars on the left. He was shocked to see a gentleman writing such letters to the papers. 'But one thing hangs on another,' said he.

'But you seem angry with Nevil, papa,' said she.

'I do hate a turbulent, restless fellow, my dear,' the colonel burst out.

'Papa, he has really been unfairly reported.'

Cecilia laid three privately-printed full reports of Commander Beauchamp's speeches (very carefully corrected by him) before her father.

He suffered his eye to run down a page. 'Is it possible you read this?—this trash!—-dangerous folly, I call it.'

Cecilia's reply, 'In the interests of justice, I do,' was meant to express her pure impartiality. By a toleration of what is detested we expose ourselves to the keenness of an adverse mind.

'Does he write to you, too?' said the colonel.

She answered: 'Oh, no; I am not a politician.'

'He seems to have expected you to read those tracts of his, though.'

'Yes, I think he would convert me if he could,' said Cecilia.

'Though you're not a politician.'

'He relies on the views he delivers in public, rather than on writing to persuade; that was my meaning, papa.'

'Very well,' said the colonel, not caring to show his anxiety.

Mr. Tuckham dined with them frequently in London. This gentleman betrayed his accomplishments one by one. He sketched, and was no artist; he planted, and was no gardener; he touched the piano neatly, and was no musician; he sang, and he had no voice. Apparently he tried his hand at anything, for the privilege of speaking decisively upon all things. He accompanied the colonel and his daughter on a day's expedition to Mrs. Beauchamp, on the Upper Thames, and they agreed that he shone to great advantage in her society. Mrs. Beauchamp said she had seen her great-nephew Nevil, but without a comment on his

Page 2443

conduct or his person; grave silence. Reflecting on it, Cecilia grew indignant at the thought that Mr. Tuckham might have been acting a sinister part. Mrs. Beauchamp alluded to a newspaper article of her favourite great-nephew Blackburn, written, Cecilia knew through her father, to controvert some tremendous proposition of Nevil's. That was writing, Mrs. Beauchamp said. 'I am not in the habit of fearing a conflict, so long as we have stout defenders. I rather like it,' she said.

The colonel entertained Mrs. Beauchamp, while Mr. Tuckham led Miss Halkett over the garden. Cecilia considered that his remarks upon Nevil were insolent.

'Seriously, Miss Halkett, to take him at his best, he is a very good fellow, I don't doubt; I am told so; and a capital fellow among men, a good friend and not a bad boon-fellow, and for that matter, the smoking-room is a better test than the drawing-room; all he wants is emphatically school—school—school. I have recommended the simple iteration of that one word in answer to him at his meetings, and the printing of it as a foot-note to his letters.'

Cecilia's combative spirit precipitated her to say, 'I hear the mob in it shouting Captain Beauchamp down.'

'Ay,' said Mr. Tuckham, 'it would be setting the mob to shout wisely at last.'

'The mob is a wild beast.'

'Then we should hear wisdom coming out of the mouth of the wild beast.'

'Men have the phrase, "fair play."'

'Fair play, I say, is not applicable to a man who deliberately goes about to stir the wild beast. He is laughed at, plucked, hustled, and robbed, by those who deafen him with their "plaudits"—their roars. Did you see his advertisement of a great-coat, lost at some rapscallion gathering down in the North, near my part of the country? A great-coat and a packet of letters. He offers a reward of L10. But that's honest robbery compared with the bleeding he'll get.'

'Do you know Mr. Seymour Austin?' Miss Halkett asked him.

'I met him once at your father's table. Why?'

'I think you would like to listen to him.'

'Yes, my fault is not listening enough,' said Mr. Tuckham.

He was capable of receiving correction.

Her father told her he was indebted to Mr. Tuckham past payment in coin, for services rendered by him on a trying occasion among the miners in Wales during the first spring month. 'I dare say he can speak effectively to miners,' Cecilia said, outvying the contemptuous young man in superciliousness, but with effort and not with satisfaction.

She left London in July, two days before her father could be induced to return to Mount Laurels. Feverish, and strangely subject to caprices now, she chose the longer way round by Sussex, and alighted at the station near Steynham to call on Mrs. Culling, whom she knew to be at the Hall, preparing it for Mr. Romfrey's occupation. In imitation of her father she was Rosamund's fast friend, though she had never quite realized her position, and did not thoroughly understand her. Would it not please her father to hear that she had chosen the tedious route for the purpose of visiting this lady, whose champion he was?

Page 2444

So she went to Steynham, and for hours she heard talk of no one, of nothing, but her friend Nevil. Cecilia was on her guard against Rosamund's defence of his conduct in France. The declaration that there had been no misbehaviour at all could not be accepted; but the news of Mr. Romfrey's having installed Nevil in Holdesbury to manage that property, and of his having mooted to her father the question of an alliance between her and Nevil, was wonderful. Rosamund could not say what answer her father had made: hardly favourable, Cecilia supposed, since he had not spoken of the circumstance to her. But Mr. Romfrey's influence with him would certainly be powerful.

It was to be assumed, also, that Nevil had been consulted by his uncle. Rosamund said full-heartedly that this alliance had for years been her life's desire, and then she let the matter pass, nor did she once loop at Cecilia searchingly, or seem to wish to probe her. Cecilia disagreed with Rosamund on an insignificant point in relation to something Mr. Romfrey and Captain Baskelett had done, and, as far as she could recollect subsequently, there was a packet of letters, or a pocket-book containing letters of Nevil's which he had lost, and which had been forwarded to Mr. Romfrey; for the pocket-book was originally his, and his address was printed inside. But among these letters was one from Dr. Shrapnel to Nevil: a letter so horrible that Rosamund frowned at the reminiscence of it, holding it to be too horrible for the quotation of a sentence. She owned she had forgotten any three consecutive words. Her known dislike of Captain Baskelett, however, was insufficient to make her see that it was unjustifiable in him to run about London reading it, with comments of the cruellest. Rosamund's greater detestation of Dr. Shrapnel blinded her to the offence committed by the man she would otherwise have been very ready to scorn. So small did the circumstance appear to Cecilia, notwithstanding her gentle opposition at the time she listened to it, that she never thought of mentioning it to her father, and only remembered it when Captain Baskelett, with Lord Palmet in his company, presented himself at Mount Laurels, and proposed to the colonel to read to him 'a letter from that scoundrelly old Shrapnel to Nevil Beauchamp, upon women, wives, thrones, republics, British loyalty, et caetera,'—an et caetera that rolled a series of tremendous reverberations down the list of all things held precious by freeborn Englishmen.

She would have prevented the reading. But the colonel would have it.

'Read on,' said he. 'Mr. Romfrey saw no harm.'

Captain Baskelett held up Dr. Shrapnel's letter to Commander Beauchamp, at about half a yard's distance on the level of his chin, as a big-chested singer in a concert-room holds his music-scroll.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EPISTLE OF DR. SHRAPNEL TO COMMANDER BEAUCHAMP

Page 2445

Before we give ear to the recital of Dr. Shrapnel's letter to his pupil in politics by the mouth of Captain Baskelett, it is necessary to defend this gentleman, as he would handsomely have defended himself, from the charge that he entertained ultimate designs in regard to the really abominable scrawl, which was like a child's drawing of ocean with here and there a sail capsized, and excited his disgust almost as much as did the contents his great indignation. He was prepared to read it, and stood blown out for the task, but it was temporarily too much for him. 'My dear Colonel, look at it, I entreat you,' he said, handing the letter for exhibition, after fixing his eye-glass, and dropping it in repulsion. The common sentiment of mankind is offended by heterodoxy in mean attire; for there we see the self-convicted villain—the criminal caught in the act; we try it and convict it by instinct without the ceremony of a jury; and so thoroughly aware of our promptitude in this respect has our arch-enemy become since his mediaeval disgraces that his particular advice to his followers is now to scrupulously copy the world in externals; never to appear poorly clothed, nor to impart deceptive communications in bad handwriting. We can tell black from white, and our sagacity has taught him a lesson.

Colonel Halkett glanced at the detestable penmanship. Lord Palmet did the same, and cried, 'Why, it's worse than mine!'

Cecilia had protested against the reading of the letter, and she declined to look at the writing. She was entreated, adjured to look, in Captain Baskelett's peculiarly pursuing fashion; a 'nay, but you shall,' that she had been subjected to previously, and would have consented to run like a schoolgirl to escape from.

To resume the defence of him: he was a man incapable of forming plots, because his head would not hold them. He was an impulsive man, who could impale a character of either sex by narrating fables touching persons of whom he thought lightly, and that being done he was devoid of malice, unless by chance his feelings or his interests were so aggrieved that his original haphazard impulse was bent to embrace new circumstances and be the parent of a line of successive impulses, in the main resembling an extremely far-sighted plot, whereat he gazed back with fondness, all the while protesting sincerely his perfect innocence of anything of the kind. Circumstances will often interwind with the moods of simply irritated men. In the present instance he could just perceive what might immediately come of his reading out of this atrocious epistle wherein Nevil Beauchamp was displayed the dangling puppet of a mountebank wire-pulley, infidel, agitator, leveller, and scoundrel. Cognizant of Mr. Romfrey's overtures to Colonel Halkett, he traced them to that scheming woman in the house at Steynham, and he was of opinion that it was a friendly and good thing to do to let the old colonel and Cissy Halkett know Mr. Nevil through a bit of his correspondence. This, then, was a matter of business and duty that furnished an excuse for his going out of his, way to call at Mount Laurels on the old familiar footing, so as not to alarm the heiress.

Page 2446

A warrior accustomed to wear the burnished breastplates between London and Windsor has, we know, more need to withstand than to discharge the shafts of amorous passion; he is indeed, as an object of beauty, notoriously compelled to be of the fair sex in his tactics, and must practise the arts and whims of nymphs to preserve himself: and no doubt it was the case with the famous Captain Baskelett, in whose mind sweet ladies held the place that the pensive politician gives to the masses, dreadful in their hatred, almost as dreadful in their affection. But an heiress is a distinct species among women; he hungered for the heiress; his elevation to Parliament made him regard her as both the ornament and the prop of his position; and it should be added that his pride, all the habits of thought of a conqueror of women, had been shocked by that stupefying rejection of him, which Cecilia had intimated to her father with the mere lowering of her eyelids. Conceive the highest bidder at an auction hearing the article announce that it will not have him! Captain Baskelett talked of it everywhere for a month or so:—the girl could not know her own mind, for she suited him exactly! and he requested the world to partake of his astonishment. Chronicles of the season in London informed him that he was not the only fellow to whom the gates were shut. She could hardly be thinking of Nevil? However, let the epistle be read. 'Now for the Shrapnel shot,' he nodded finally to Colonel Halkett, expanded his bosom, or natural cuirass, as before-mentioned, and was vocable above the common pitch:—

'"*My brave Beauchamp*,—On with your mission, and never a summing of results in hand, nor thirst for prospects, nor counting upon harvests; for seed sown in faith day by day is the nightly harvest of the soul, and with the soul we work. With the soul we see."'

Captain Baskelett intervened: 'Ahem! I beg to observe that this delectable rubbish is underlined by old Nevil's pencil.' He promised to do a little roaring whenever it occurred, and continued with ghastly false accentuation, an intermittent sprightliness and depression of tone in the wrong places.

'"The soul," et caetera. Here we are!

> "Desires to realize our gains are akin to the passion of usury; these are tricks of the usurer to grasp his gold in act and imagination. Have none of them. Work at the people!"

—At them, remark!—

"Moveless do they seem to you? Why, so is the earth to the sowing husbandman, and though we cannot forecast a reaping season, we have in history durable testification that our seasons come in the souls of men, yea, as a planet that we have set in motion, and faster and faster are we spinning it, and firmer and firmer shall we set it to regularity of revolution. That means life!"

—Shrapnel roars: you will have Nevil in a minute.

Page 2447

“Recognize that now we have bare life; at best for the bulk of men the Saurian lizard’s broad back soaking and roasting in primeval slime; or say, in the so-called teachers of men, as much of life as pricks the frog in March to stir and yawn, and up on a flaccid leap that rolls him over some three inches nearer to the ditchwater besought by his instinct.”

‘I ask you, did you ever hear? The flaccid frog! But on we go.’

’"Professors, prophets, masters, each hitherto has had his creed and system to offer, good mayhap for the term; and each has put it forth for the truth everlasting, to drive the dagger to the heart of time, and put the axe to human growth!—that one circle of wisdom issuing of the experience and needs of their day, should act the despot over all other circles for ever!—so where at first light shone to light the yawning frog to his wet ditch, there, with the necessitated revolution of men’s minds in the course of ages, darkness radiates.”

’That’s old Nevil. Upon my honour, I haven’t a notion of what it all means, and I don’t believe the old rascal Shrapnel has himself. And pray be patient, my dear colonel. You will find him practical presently. I’ll skip, if you tell me to. Darkness radiates, does it!

’"The creed that rose in heaven sets below; and where we had an angel we have claw-feet and fangs. Ask how that is! The creed is much what it was when the followers diverged it from the Founder. But humanity is not where it was when that creed was food and guidance. Creeds will not die not fighting. We cannot root them up out of us without blood.”

‘He threatens blood!—’

’"Ours, my Beauchamp, is the belief that humanity advances beyond the limits of creeds, is to be tied to none. We reverence the Master in his teachings; we behold the limits of him in his creed— and that is not his work. We truly are his disciples, who see how far it was in him to do service; not they that made of his creed a strait-jacket for humanity. So, in our prayers we dedicate the world to God, not calling him great for a title, no—showing him we know him great in a limitless world, lord of a truth we tend to, have not grasped. I say Prayer is good. I counsel it to you again and again: in joy, in sickness of heart. The infidel will not pray; the creed-slave prays to the image in his box."’

‘I’ve had enough!’ Colonel Halkett ejaculated.

’"We,"’ Captain Baskelett put out his hand for silence with an ineffable look of entreaty, for here was Shrapnel’s hypocrisy in full bloom:

Page 2448

'"We make prayer a part of us, praying for no gifts, no interventions; through the faith in prayer opening the soul to the undiscerned. And take this, my Beauchamp, for the good in prayer, that it makes us repose on the unknown with confidence, makes us flexible to change, makes us ready for revolution—for life, then! He who has the fountain of prayer in him will not complain of hazards. Prayer is the recognition of laws; the soul's exercise and source of strength; its thread of conjunction with them. Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol; the resource of superstition. There you misread it, Beauchamp. We that fight the living world must have the universal for succour of the truth in it. Cast forth the soul in prayer, you meet the effluence of the outer truth, you join with the creative elements giving breath to you; and that crust of habit which is the soul's tomb; and custom, the soul's tyrant; and pride, our volcano-peak that sinks us in a crater; and fear, which plucks the feathers from the wings of the soul and sits it naked and shivering in a vault, where the passing of a common hodman's foot above sounds like the king of terrors coming,—you are free of them, you live in the day and for the future, by this exercise and discipline of the soul's faith. Me it keeps young everlastingly, like the fountain of . . .'"

'I say I cannot sit and hear any more of it!' exclaimed the colonel, chafing out of patience.

Lord Palmet said to Miss Halkett: 'Isn't it like what we used to remember of a sermon?'

Cecilia waited for her father to break away, but Captain Baskelett had undertaken to skip, and was murmuring in sing-song some of the phrases that warned him off:

'"History—Bible of Humanity; . . . Permanency—enthusiast's dream—despot's aim—-clutch of dead men's fingers in live flesh . . . Man animal; man angel; man rooted; man winged": . . . Really, all this is too bad. Ah! here we are: "At them with outspeaking, Beauchamp!" Here we are, colonel, and you will tell me whether you think it treasonable or not. "At them," et caetera: "We have signed no convention to respect their"—he speaks of Englishmen, Colonel Halkett—"their passive idolatries; a people with whom a mute conformity is as good as worship, but a word of dissent holds you up to execration; and only for the freedom won in foregone days their hate would be active. As we have them in their present stage,"—old Nevil's mark—"We are not parties to the tacit agreement to fill our mouths and shut our eyes. We speak because it is better they be roused to lapidate us than soused in their sty, with none to let them hear they live like swine, craving only not to be disturbed at the trough. The religion of this vast English middle-class ruling the land is Comfort. It is their central thought; their idea of necessity; their sole aim. Whatsoever ministers to Comfort, seems to belong to it, pretends to support it, they yield their passive worship to.

Page 2449

Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. There you get at their point of unity. They will pay for the security of Comfort, calling it national worship, or national defence, if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort: if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains. Have at them there. Speak. Moveless as you find them, they are not yet all gross clay, and I say again, the true word spoken has its chance of somewhere alighting and striking root. Look not to that. Seeds perish in nature; good men fail. Look to the truth in you, and deliver it, with no afterthought of hope, for hope is dogged by dread; we give our courage as hostage for the fulfilment of what we hope. Meditate on that transaction. Hope is for boys and girls, to whom nature is kind. For men to hope is to tremble. Let prayer—the soul's overflow, the heart's resignation—supplant it . . ."

'Pardon, colonel; I forgot to roar, but old Nevil marks all down that page for encomium,' said Captain Baskelett. 'Oh! here we are. English loyalty is the subject. Now, pray attend to this, colonel. Shrapnel communicates to Beauchamp that if ten Beauchamps were spouting over the country without intermission he might condescend to hope. So on—to British loyalty. We are, so long as our sovereigns are well-conducted persons, and we cannot unseat them—observe; he is eminently explicit, the old traitor!—we are to submit to the outward forms of respect, but we are frankly to say we are Republicans; he has the impudence to swear that England is a Republican country, and calls our thoroughgoing loyalty—yours and mine, colonel—disloyalty. Hark: "Where kings lead, it is to be supposed they are wanted. Service is the noble office on earth, and where kings do service let them take the first honours of the State: but"—hark at this—"the English middle-class, which has absorbed the upper, and despises, when it is not quaking before it, the lower, will have nothing above it but a ricketty ornament like that you see on a confectioner's twelfth-cake."'

'The man deserves hanging!' said Colonel Halkett.

'Further, my dear colonel, and Nevil marks it pretty much throughout: "This loyalty smacks of a terrible perfidy. Pass the lords and squires; they are old trees, old foundations, or joined to them, whether old or new; they naturally apprehend dislocation when a wind blows, a river rises, or a man speaks;—that comes of age or aping age: their hearts are in their holdings! For the loyalty of the rest of the land, it is the shopkeeper's loyalty, which is to be computed by the exact annual sum of his net profits. It is now at high tide. It will last with the prosperity of our commerce."—The insolent old vagabond!—"Let commercial disasters come on us, and what of the loyalty now paying its hundreds of thousands, and howling down questioners! In a day of bankruptcies, how much would you bid for the loyalty of a class shivering

Page 2450

under deprivation of luxuries, with its God Comfort beggared? Ay, my Beauchamp,"—-the most offensive thing to me is that "my Beauchamp," but old Nevil has evidently given himself up hand and foot to this ruffian—"ay, when you reflect that fear of the so-called rabble, *i.e*. the people, the unmoneyed class, which knows not Comfort, tastes not of luxuries, is the main component of their noisy frigid loyalty, and that the people are not with them but against, and yet that the people might be won by visible forthright kingly service to a loyalty outdoing theirs as the sun the moon; ay, that the people verily thirst to love and reverence; and that their love is the only love worth having, because it is disinterested love, and endures, and takes heat in adversity,—reflect on it and wonder at the inversion of things! So with a Church. It lives if it is at home with the poor. In the arms of enriched shopkeepers it rots, goes to decay in vestments—vestments! flakes of mummy-wraps for it! or else they use it for one of their political truncheons—to awe the ignorant masses: I quote them. So. Not much ahead of ancient Egyptians in spirituality or in priestcraft! They call it statesmanship. O for a word for it! Let Palsy and Cunning go to form a word. Deadmanship, I call it."—To quote my uncle the baron, this is lunatic dribble!—"Parsons and princes are happy with the homage of this huge passive fleshpot class. It is enough for them. Why not? The taxes are paid and the tithes. Whilst commercial prosperity lasts!"'

Colonel Halkett threw his arms aloft.

'"Meanwhile, note this: the people are the Power to come. Oppressed, unprotected, abandoned; left to the ebb and flow of the tides of the market, now taken on to work, now cast off to starve, committed to the shifting laws of demand and supply, slaves of Capital-the whited name for old accursed. Mammon: and of all the. ranked and black-uniformed host no pastor to come out of the association of shepherds, and proclaim before heaven and man the primary claim of their cause; they are, I say, the power, worth the seduction of by another Power not mighty in England now: and likely in time to set up yet another Power not existing in England now. What if a passive comfortable clergy hand them over to men on the models of Irish pastors, who will succour, console, enfold, champion them? what if, when they have learnt to use their majority, sick of deceptions and the endless pulling of interests, they raise *one* representative to force the current of action with an authority as little fictitious as their preponderance of numbers? The despot and the priest! There I see our danger, Beauchamp. You and I and some dozen labour to tie and knot them to manliness. We are few; they are many and weak. Rome offers them real comfort in return for their mites in coin, and—poor souls! mites in conscience, many of them. A Tyrant offers them to be directly their friend. Ask, Beauchamp, why they should not have comfort for pay as well as the big round—"'

Captain Baskelett stopped and laid the letter out for Colonel Halkett to read an unmentionable word, shamelessly marked by Nevil's pencil:

Page 2451

> "—belly-class!" Ask, too, whether the comfort they wish for is not approaching divine compared with the stagnant fleshliness of that fat shopkeeper's Comfort.

'"Warn the people of this. Ay, warn the clergy. It is not only the poor that are caught by ranters. Endeavour to make those accommodating shepherds understand that they stand a chance of losing rich as well as poor! It should awaken them. The helpless poor and the uneasy rich are alike open to the seductions of Romish priests and intoxicated ranters. I say so it will be if that band of forty thousand go on slumbering and nodding. They walk in a dream. The flesh is a dream. The soul only is life."

'Now for you, colonel.

'"No extension of the army—no! A thousand times no. Let India go, then! Good for India that we hold India? Ay, good: but not at such a cost as an extra tax, or compulsory service of our working man. If India is to be held for the good of India, throw open India to the civilized nations, that they help us in a task that overstrains us. At present India means utter perversion of the policy of England. Adrift India! rather than England red-coated. We dissent, Beauchamp! For by-and-by."

'That is,' Captain Baskelett explained, 'by-and-by Shrapnel will have old Nevil fast enough.'

'Is there more of it?' said Colonel Halkett, flapping his forehead for coolness.

'The impudence of this dog in presuming to talk about India!—eh, colonel? Only a paragraph or two more: I skip a lot . . . . Ah! here we are.' Captain Baskelett read to himself and laughed in derision: 'He calls our Constitution a compact unsigned by the larger number involved in it. What's this? "A band of dealers in fleshpottery." Do you detect a gleam of sense? He underscores it. Then he comes to this': Captain Baskelett requested Colonel Halkett to read for himself: 'The stench of the trail of Ego in our History.'

The colonel perused it with an unsavoury expression of his features, and jumped up.

'Oddly, Mr. Romfrey thought this rather clever,' said Captain Baskelett, and read rapidly:

'"Trace the course of Ego for them: first the king who conquers and can govern. In his egoism he dubs him holy; his family is of a selected blood; he makes the crown hereditary—Ego. Son by son the shame of egoism increases; valour abates; hereditary Crown, no hereditary qualities. The Barons rise. They in turn hold sway, and for their order—Ego. The traders overturn them: each class rides the classes under it while it can. It is ego—ego, the fountain cry, origin, sole source of war! Then death to ego, I say! If those traders had ruled for other than ego, power might have rested with them

on broad basis enough to carry us forward for centuries. The workmen have ever been too anxious to be ruled. Now comes on the workman's era. Numbers win in the end:

Page 2452

proof of small wisdom in the world. Anyhow, with numbers there is rough nature's wisdom and justice. With numbers ego is inter-dependent and dispersed; it is universalized. Yet these may require correctives. If so, they will have it in a series of despots and revolutions that toss, mix, and bind the classes together: despots, revolutions; panting alternations of the quickened heart of humanity."

'Marked by our friend Nevil in notes of admiration.'

'Mad as the writer,' groaned Colonel Halkett. 'Never in my life have I heard such stuff.'

'Stay, colonel; here's Shrapnel defending Morality and Society,' said Captain Baskelett.

Colonel Halkett vowed he was under no penal law to listen, and would not; but Captain Baskelett persuaded him: 'Yes, here it is: I give you my word. Apparently old Nevil has been standing up for every man's right to run away with . . . Yes, really! I give you my word; and here we have Shrapnel insisting on respect for the marriage laws. Do hear this; here it is in black and white:—

"Society is our one tangible gain, our one roofing and flooring in a world of most uncertain structures built on morasses. Toward the laws that support it men hopeful of progress give their adhesion. If it is martyrdom, what then? Let the martyrdom be. Contumacy is animalism. And attend to me," says Shrapnel, "the truer the love the readier for sacrifice! A thousand times yes. Rebellion against Society, and advocacy of Humanity, run counter. Tell me Society is the whited sepulchre, that it is blotched, hideous, hollow: and I say, add not another disfigurement to it; add to the purification of it. And you, if you answer, what can only one? I say that is the animal's answer, and applies also to politics, where the question, what can one? put in the relapsing tone, shows the country decaying in the individual. Society is the protection of the weaker, therefore a shield of women, who are our temple of civilization, to be kept sacred; and he that loves a woman will assuredly esteem and pity her sex, and not drag her down for another example of their frailty. Fight this out within you—!"

But you are right, colonel; we have had sufficient. I shall be getting a democratic orator's twang, or a crazy parson's, if I go on much further. He covers thirty-two pages of letter-paper. The conclusion is:—"Jenny sends you her compliments, respects, and best wishes, and hopes she may see you before she goes to her friend Clara Sherwin and the General."'

'Sherwin? Why, General Sherwin's a perfect gentleman,' Colonel Halkett interjected; and Lord Palmet caught the other name: 'Jenny? That's Miss Denham, Jenny Denham; an amazingly pretty girl: beautiful thick brown hair, real hazel eyes, and walks like a yacht before the wind.'

‘Perhaps, colonel, Jenny accounts for the defence of society,’ said Captain Baskelett. ’I have no doubt Shrapnel has a scheme for Jenny. The old communist and socialist!’ He folded up the letter: ’A curious composition, is it not, Miss Halkett?’

Page 2453

Cecilia was thinking that he tempted her to be the apologist of even such a letter.

‘One likes to know the worst, and what’s possible,’ said the colonel.

After Captain Baskelett had gone, Colonel Halkett persisted in talking of the letter, and would have impressed on his daughter that the person to whom the letter was addressed must be partly responsible for the contents of it. Cecilia put on the argumentative air of a Court of Equity to discuss the point with him.

‘Then you defend that letter?’ he cried.

Oh, no: she did not defend the letter; she thought it wicked and senseless. ‘But,’ said she, ’the superior strength of men to women seems to me to come from their examining all subjects, shrinking from none. At least, I should not condemn Nevil on account of his correspondence.’

‘We shall see,’ said her father, sighing rather heavily. ’I must have a talk with Mr. Romfrey about that letter.’

CHAPTER XXX

THE BAITING OF DR. SHRAPNEL

Captain Baskelett went down from Mount Laurels to Bevisham to arrange for the giving of a dinner to certain of his chief supporters in the borough, that they might know he was not obliged literally to sit in Parliament in order to pay a close attention to their affairs. He had not distinguished himself by a speech during the session, but he had stored a political precept or two in his memory, and, as he told Lord Palmet, he thought a dinner was due to his villains. ’The way to manage your Englishman, Palmet, is to dine him.’ As the dinner would decidedly be dull, he insisted on having Lord Palmet’s company.

They crossed over to the yachting island, where portions of the letter of Commander Beauchamp’s correspondent were read at the Club, under the verandah, and the question put, whether a man who held those opinions had a right to wear his uniform.

The letter was transmitted to Steynham in time to be consigned to the pocket-book before Beauchamp arrived there on one of his rare visits. Mr. Romfrey handed him the pocketbook with the frank declaration that he had read Shrapnel’s letter. ‘All is fair in war, Sir!’ Beauchamp quoted him ambiguously.

The thieves had amused Mr. Romfrey by their scrupulous honesty in returning what was useless to them, while reserving the coat: but subsequently seeing the advertized

reward, they had written to claim it; and, according to Rosamund Culling, he had been so tickled that he had deigned to reply to them, very briefly, but very comically.

Speaking of the matter with her, Beauchamp said (so greatly was he infatuated with the dangerous man) that the reading of a letter of Dr. Shrapnel's could do nothing but good to any reflecting human creature: he admitted that as the lost pocket-book was addressed to Mr. Romfrey, it might have been by mistake that he had opened it, and read the topmost letter lying open. But he pressed Rosamund to say whether that one only had been read.

Page 2454

‘Only Dr. Shrapnel’s letter,’ Rosamund affirmed. ’The letter from Normandy was untouched by him.’

‘Untouched by anybody?’

‘Unopened, Nevil. You look incredulous.’

‘Not if I have your word, ma’am.’

He glanced somewhat contemptuously at his uncle Everard’s anachronistic notions of what was fair in war.

To prove to him Mr. Romfrey’s affectionate interest in his fortunes, Rosamund mentioned the overtures which had been made to Colonel Halkett for a nuptial alliance between the two houses; and she said: ’Your uncle Everard was completely won by your manly way of taking his opposition to you in Bevisham. He pays for Captain Baskelett, but you and your fortunes are nearest his heart, Nevil.’

Beauchamp hung silent. His first remark was, ’Yes, I want money. I must have money.’ By degrees he seemed to warm to some sense of gratitude. ’It was kind of the baron,’ he said.

’He has a great affection for you, Nevil, though you know he spares no one who chooses to be antagonistic. All that is over. But do you not second him, Nevil? You admire her? You are not adverse?’

Beauchamp signified the horrid intermixture of yes and no, frowned in pain of mind, and Walked up and down. ’There’s no living woman I admire so much.’

‘She has refused the highest matches.’

‘I hold her in every way incomparable.’

’She tries to understand your political ideas, if she cannot quite sympathize with them, Nevil. And consider how hard it is for a young English lady, bred in refinement, to understand such things.’

‘Yes,’ Beauchamp nodded; yes. Well, more ‘s the pity for me!’

‘Ah! Nevil, that fatal Renee!’

’Ma’am, I acquit you of any suspicion of your having read her letter in this pocket-book. She wishes me to marry. You would have seen it written here. She wishes it.’

‘Fly, clipped wing!’ murmured Rosamund, and purposely sent a buzz into her ears to shut out his extravagant talk of Renee’s friendly wishes.

‘How is it you women will not believe in the sincerity of a woman!’ he exclaimed.

‘Nevil, I am not alluding to the damage done to your election.’

’To my candidature, ma’am. You mean those rumours, those lies of the enemy. Tell me how I could suppose you were alluding to them. You bring them forward now to justify your charge of “fatal” against her. She has one fault; she wants courage; she has none other, not one that is not excuseable. We won’t speak of France. What did her father say?’

’Colonel Halkett? I do not know. He and his daughter come here next week, and the colonel will expect to meet you here. That does not look like so positive an objection to you?’

‘To me personally, no,’ said Beauchamp. ’But Mr. Romfrey has not told me that I am to meet them.’

Page 2455

’Perhaps he has not thought it worth while. It is not his way. He has asked you to come. You and Miss Halkett will be left to yourselves. Her father assured Mr. Romfrey that he should not go beyond advising her. His advice might not be exactly favourable to you at present, but if you sued and she accepted—and she would, I am convinced she would; she was here with me, talking of you a whole afternoon, and I have eyes—-then he would not oppose the match, and then I should see you settled, the husband of the handsomest wife and richest heiress in England.’

A vision of Cecilia swam before him, gracious in stateliness.

Two weeks back Renee’s expression of a wish that he would marry had seemed to him an idle sentence in a letter breathing of her own intolerable situation. The marquis had been struck down by illness. What if she were to be soon suddenly free? But Renee could not be looking to freedom, otherwise she never would have written the wish for him to marry. She wrote perhaps hearing temptation whisper; perhaps wishing to save herself and him by the aid of a tie that would bring his honour into play and fix his loyalty. He remembered Dr. Shrapnel’s written words: ‘Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity run counter.’ They had a stronger effect on him than when he was ignorant of his uncle Everard’s plan to match him with Cecilia. He took refuge from them in the image of that beautiful desolate Renee, born to be beloved, now wasted, worse than trodden under foot—perverted; a life that looked to him for direction and resuscitation. She was as good as dead in her marriage. It was impossible for him ever to think of Renee without the surprising thrill of his enchantment with her, and tender pity that drew her closer to him by darkening her brightness.

Still a man may love his wife. A wife like Cecilia was not to be imagined coldly. Let the knot once be tied, it would not be regretted, could not be; hers was a character, and hers a smile, firmly assuring him of that.

He told Mr. Romfrey that he should be glad to meet Colonel Halkett and Cecilia. Business called him to Holdesbury. Thence he betook himself to Dr. Shrapnel’s cottage to say farewell to Jenny Denham previous to her departure for Switzerland with her friend Clara Sherwin. She had never seen a snow-mountain, and it was pleasant to him to observe in her eyes, which he had known weighing and balancing intellectual questions more than he quite liked, a childlike effort to conjure in imagination the glories of the Alps. She appeared very happy, only a little anxious about leaving Dr. Shrapnel with no one to take care of him for a whole month. Beauchamp promised he would run over to him from Holdesbury, only an hour by rail, as often as he could. He envied her the sight of the Alps, he said, and tried to give her an idea of them, from which he broke off to boast of a famous little Jersey bull that he had won from a rival, an American, deeply in love with

Page 2456

the bull; cutting him out by telegraph by just five minutes. The latter had examined the bull in the island and had passed on to Paris, not suspecting there would be haste to sell him. Beauchamp, seeing the bull advertized, took him on trust, galloped to the nearest telegraph station forthwith, and so obtained possession of him; and the bull was now shipped on the voyage. But for this precious bull, however, and other business, he would have been able to spend almost the entire month with Dr. Shrapnel, he said regretfully. Miss Denham on the contrary did not regret his active occupation. The story of his rush from the breakfast-table to the stables, and gallop away to the station, while the American Quaker gentleman soberly paced down a street in Paris on the same errand, in invisible rivalry, touched her risible fancy. She was especially pleased to think of him living in harmony with his uncle—that strange, lofty, powerful man, who by plot or by violence punished opposition to his will, but who must be kind at heart, as well as forethoughtful of his nephew's good; the assurance of it being, that when the conflict was at an end he had immediately installed him as manager of one of his estates, to give his energy play and make him practically useful.

The day before she left home was passed by the three in botanizing, some miles distant from Bevisham, over sand country, marsh and meadow; Dr. Shrapnel, deep in the science, on one side of her, and Beauchamp, requiring instruction in the names and properties of every plant and simple, on the other. It was a day of summer sweetness, gentle laughter, conversation, and the happiest homeliness. The politicians uttered barely a syllable of politics. The dinner basket was emptied heartily to make way for herb and flower, and at night the expedition homeward was crowned with stars along a road refreshed by mid-day thunder-showers and smelling of the rain in the dust, past meadows keenly scenting, gardens giving out their innermost balm and odour. Late at night they drank tea in Jenny's own garden. They separated a little after two in the morning, when the faded Western light still lay warm on a bow of sky, and on the level of the East it quickened. Jenny felt sure she should long for that yesterday when she was among foreign scenes, even among high Alps-those mysterious eminences which seemed in her imagination to know of heaven and have the dawn of a new life for her beyond their peaks.

Her last words when stepping into the railway carriage were to Beauchamp: 'Will you take care of him?' She flung her arms round Dr. Shrapnel's neck, and gazed at him under troubled eyelids which seemed to be passing in review every vision of possible harm that might come to him during her absence; and so she continued gazing, and at no one but Dr. Shrapnel until the bend of the line cut him from her sight. Beauchamp was a very secondary person on that occasion, and he was unused to being so in the society of women—unused to find himself entirely eclipsed by their interest in another. He speculated on it, wondering at her concentrated fervency; for he had not supposed her to possess much warmth.

Page 2457

After she was fairly off on her journey, Dr. Shrapnel mentioned to Beauchamp a case of a Steynham poacher, whom he had thought it his duty to supply with means of defence. It was a common poaching case.

Beauchamp was not surprised that Mr. Romfrey and Dr. Shrapnel should come to a collision; the marvel was that it had never occurred before, and Beauchamp said at once: 'Oh, my uncle Mr. Romfrey would rather see them stand their ground than not.' He was disposed to think well of his uncle. The Jersey bull called him away to Holdesbury.

Captain Baskelett heard of this poaching case at Steynham, where he had to appear in person when he was in want of cheques, and the Bevisham dinner furnished an excuse for demanding one. He would have preferred a positive sum annually. Mr. Romfrey, however, though he wrote his cheques out like the lord he was by nature, exacted the request for them; a system that kept the gallant gentleman on his good behaviour, probably at a lower cost than the regular stipend. In handing the cheque to Cecil Baskelett, Mr. Romfrey spoke of a poacher, of an old poaching family called the Dicketts, who wanted punishment and was to have it, but Mr. Romfrey's local lawyer had informed him that the man Shrapnel was, as usual, supplying the means of defence. For his own part, Mr. Romfrey said, he had no objection to one rascal's backing another, and Shrapnel might hit his hardest, only perhaps Nevil might somehow get mixed up in it, and Nevil was going on quietly now—he had in fact just done capitally in lassoing with a shot of the telegraph a splendid little Jersey bull that a Yankee was after: and on the whole it was best to try to keep him quiet, for he was mad about that man Shrapnel; Shrapnel was his joss: and if legal knocks came of this business Nevil might be thinking of interfering: 'Or he and I may be getting to exchange a lot of shindy letters,' Mr. Romfrey said. 'Tell him I take Shrapnel just like any other man, and don't want to hear apologies, and I don't mix him up in it. Tell him if he likes to have an explanation from me, I'll give it him when he comes here. You can run over to Holdesbury the morning after your dinner.'

Captain Baskelett said he would go. He was pleased with his cheque at the time, but hearing subsequently that Nevil was coming to Steynham to meet Colonel Halkett and his daughter, he became displeased, considering it a very silly commission. The more he thought of it the more ridiculous and unworthy it appeared. He asked himself and Lord Palmet also why he should have to go to Nevil at Holdesbury to tell him of circumstances that he would hear of two or three days later at Steynham. There was no sense in it. The only conclusion for him was that the scheming woman Culling had determined to bring down every man concerned in the Bevisham election, and particularly Mr. Romfrey, on his knees before Nevil. Holdesbury had been placed at his disposal, and the use of the house in London, which latter would have been extremely serviceable to Cecil as a place of dinners to the Parliament of Great Britain in lieu of the speech-making generally expected of Members, and not so effectively performed. One would think the baron had grown afraid of old Nevil! He had spoken as if he were.

Page 2458

Cecil railed unreservedly to Lord Palmet against that woman 'Mistress Culling,' as it pleased him to term her, and who could be offended by his calling her so? His fine wit revelled in bestowing titles that were at once batteries directed upon persons he hated, and entrenchments for himself.

At four o'clock on a sultry afternoon he sat at table with his Bevisham supporters, and pledged them correspondingly in English hotel champagne, sherry and claret. At seven he was rid of them, but parched and heated, as he deserved to be, he owned, for drinking the poison. It would be a good subject for Parliament if he could get it up, he reflected.

'And now,' said he to Palmet, 'we might be crossing over to the Club if I hadn't to go about that stupid business to Holdesbury to-morrow morning. We shall miss the race, or, at least, the start.'

The idea struck him: 'Ten to one old Nevil 's with Shrapnel,' and no idea could be more natural.

'We 'll call on Shrapnel,' said Palmet. 'We shall see Jenny Denham. He gives her out as his niece. Whatever she is she's a brimming little beauty. I assure you, Bask, you seldom see so pretty a girl.'

Wine, which has directed men's footsteps upon more marvellous adventures, took them to a chemist's shop for a cooling effervescent draught, and thence through the town to the address, furnished to them by the chemist, of Dr. Shrapnel on the common.

Bad wine, which is responsible for the fate of half the dismal bodies hanging from trees, weltering by rocks, grovelling and bleaching round the bedabbled mouth of the poet's Cave of Despair, had rendered Captain Baskelett's temper extremely irascible; so when he caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel walling in his garden, and perceived him of a giant's height, his eyes fastened on the writer of the abominable letter with an exultation peculiar to men having a devil inside them that kicks to be out. The sun was low, blazing among the thicker branches of the pollard forest trees, and through sprays of hawthorn. Dr. Shrapnel stopped, facing the visible master of men, at the end of his walk before he turned his back to continue the exercise and some discourse he was holding aloud either to the heavens or bands of invisible men.

'Ahem, Dr. Shrapnel!' He was accosted twice, the second time imperiously.

He saw two gentlemen outside the garden-hedge.

'I spoke, sir,' said Captain Baskelett.

'I hear you now, sir,' said the doctor, walking in a parallel line with them.

‘I desired to know, sir, if you are Dr. Shrapnel?’

‘I am.’

They arrived at the garden-gate.

‘You have a charming garden, Dr. Shrapnel,’ said Lord Palmet, very affably and loudly, with a steady observation of the cottage windows.

Dr. Shrapnel flung the gate open.

Lord Palmet raised his hat and entered, crying loudly, ’A very charming garden, upon my word!’

Page 2459

Captain Baskelett followed him, bowing stiffly.

‘I am,’ he said, ’Captain Beauchamp’s cousin. I am Captain Baskelett, one of the Members for the borough.’

The doctor said, ‘Ah.’

‘I wish to see Captain Beauchamp, sir. He is absent?’

‘I shall have him here shortly, sir.’

‘Oh, you will have him!’ Cecil paused.

‘Admirable roses!’ exclaimed Lord Palmet.

‘You have him, I think,’ said Cecil, ’if what we hear is correct. I wish to know, sir, whether the case you are conducting against his uncle is one you have communicated to Captain Beauchamp. I repeat, I am here to inquire if he is privy to it. You may hold family ties in contempt—Now, sir! I request you abstain from provocations with me.’

Dr. Shrapnel had raised his head, with something of the rush of a rocket, from the stooping posture to listen, and his frown of non-intelligence might be interpreted as the coming on of the fury Radicals are prone to, by a gentleman who believed in their constant disposition to explode.

Cecil made play with a pacifying hand. ’We shall arrive at no understanding unless you are good enough to be perfectly calm. I repeat, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is more or less at variance with his family, owing to these doctrines of yours, and your extraordinary Michael-Scott-the-wizard kind of spell you seem to have cast upon his common sense as a man of the world. You have him, as you say. I do not dispute it. I have no, doubt you have him fast. But here is a case demanding a certain respect for decency. Pray, if I may ask you, be still, be quiet, and hear me out if you can. I am accustomed to explain myself to the comprehension of most men who are at large, and I tell you candidly I am not to be deceived or diverted from my path by a show of ignorance.’

‘What is your immediate object, sir?’ said Dr. Shrapnel, chagrined by the mystification within him, and a fear that his patience was going.

‘Exactly,’ Cecil nodded. He was acute enough to see that he had established the happy commencement of fretfulness in the victim, which is equivalent to a hook well struck in the mouth of your fish, and with an angler’s joy he prepared to play his man. ’Exactly. I have stated it. And you ask me. But I really must decline to run over the whole ground again for you. I am here to fulfil a duty to my family; a highly disagreeable one to me. I may fail, like the lady who came here previous to the Election, for the result of which I

am assured I ought to thank your eminently disinterested services. I do. You recollect a lady calling on you?'

Dr. Shrapnel consulted his memory. 'I think I have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Oh! you think you have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Do you mean a lady connected with Captain Beauchamp?'

'A lady connected with Captain Beauchamp. You are not aware of the situation of the lady?'

Page 2460

’If I remember, she was a kind of confidential housekeeper, some one said, to Captain Beauchamp’s uncle.’

’A kind of confidential housekeeper! She is recognized in our family as a lady, sir. I can hardly expect better treatment at your hands than she met with, but I do positively request you to keep your temper whilst I am explaining my business to you. Now, sir! what now?’

A trifling breeze will set the tall tree bending, and Dr. Shrapnel did indeed appear to display the agitation of a full-driving storm when he was but harassed and vexed.

‘Will you mention your business concisely, if you Please?’ he said.

’Precisely; it is my endeavour. I supposed I had done so. To be frank, I would advise you to summon a member of your household, wife, daughter, housekeeper, any one you like, to whom you may appeal, and I too, whenever your recollections are at fault.’

‘I am competent,’ said the doctor.

‘But in justice to you,’ urged Cecil considerately.

Dr. Shrapnel smoothed his chin hastily. ‘Have you done?’

‘Believe me, the instant I have an answer to my question, I have done.’

‘Name your question.’

’Very well, sir. Now mark, I will be plain with you. There is no escape for you from this. You destroy my cousin’s professional prospects—I request you to listen—you blast his career in the navy; it was considered promising. He was a gallant officer and a smart seaman. Very well. You set him up as a politician, to be knocked down, to a dead certainty. You set him against his class; you embroil him with his family . . .’

‘On all those points,’ interposed Dr. Shrapnel, after dashing a hand to straighten his forelock; but Cecil vehemently entreated him to control his temper.

’I say you embroil him with his family, you cause him to be in everlasting altercation with his uncle Mr. Romfrey, materially to his personal detriment; and the question of his family is one that every man of sense would apprehend on the spot; for we, you should know, have, sir, an opinion of Captain Beauchamp’s talents and abilities forbidding us to think he could possibly be the total simpleton you make him appear, unless to the seductions of your political instructions, other seductions were added . . . . You apprehend me, I am sure.’

‘I don’t,’ cried the doctor, descending from his height and swinging about forlornly.

’Oh! yes, you do; you do indeed, you cannot avoid it; you quite apprehend me; it is admitted that you take my meaning: I insist on that. I have nothing to say but what is complimentary of the young lady, whoever she may turn out to be; bewitching, no doubt; and to speak frankly, Dr. Shrapnel, I, and I am pretty certain every honest man would think with me, I take it to be ten times more creditable to my cousin Captain Beauchamp that he should be under a lady’s influence than under yours. Come,

Page 2461

sir! I ask you. You must confess that a gallant officer and great admirer of the sex does not look such a donkey if he is led in silken strings by a beautiful creature. And mark—-stop! mark this, Dr. Shrapnel: I say, to the lady we can all excuse a good deal, and at the same time you are to be congratulated on first-rate diplomacy in employing so charming an agent. I wish, I really wish you did it generally, I assure you: only, mark this—I do beg you to contain yourself for a minute, if possible—I say, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is fair game to hunt, and there is no law to prevent the chase, only you must not expect us to be quiet spectators of your sport; and we have, I say, undoubtedly a right to lay the case before the lady, and induce her to be a peace-agent in the family if we can. Very well.'

'This garden is redolent of a lady's hand,' sighed Palmet, poetical in his dejection.

'Have you taken too much wine, gentlemen?' said Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil put this impertinence aside with a graceful sweep of his fingers. 'You attempt to elude me, sir.'

'Not I! You mention some lady.'

'Exactly. A young lady.'

'What is the name of the lady?'

'Oh! You ask the name of the lady. And I too. What is it? I have heard two or three names.'

'Then you have heard villanies.'

'Denham, Jenny Denham, Miss Jenny Denham,' said Palmet, rejoiced at the opportunity of trumpeting her name so that she should not fail to hear it.

'I stake my reputation I have heard her called Shrapnel—Miss Shrapnel,' said Cecil.

The doctor glanced hastily from one to the other of his visitors. 'The young lady is my ward; I am her guardian,' he said.

Cecil pursed his mouth. 'I have heard her called your niece.'

'Niece—ward; she is a lady by birth and education, in manners, accomplishments, and character; and she is under my protection,' cried Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil bowed. 'So you are for gentle birth? I forgot you are for morality too, and for praying; exactly; I recollect. But now let me tell you, entirely with the object of conciliation, my particular desire is to see the young lady, in your presence of course,

and endeavour to persuade her, as I have very little doubt I shall do, assuming that you give me fair play, to exercise her influence, on this occasion contrary to yours, and save my cousin Captain Beauchamp from a fresh misunderstanding with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. Now, sir; now, there!'

'You will not see Miss Denham with my sanction ever,' said Dr. Shrapnel.

'Oh! Then I perceive your policy. Mark, sir, my assumption was that the young lady would, on hearing my representations, exert herself to heal the breach between Captain Beauchamp and his family. You stand in the way. You treat me as you treated the lady who came here formerly to wrest your dupe from your clutches. If I mistake not, she saw the young lady you acknowledge to be your ward.'

Page 2462

Dr. Shrapnel flashed back: 'I acknowledge? Mercy and justice! is there no peace with the man? You walk here to me, I can't yet guess why, from a town where I have enemies, and every scandal flies touching me and mine; and you—' He stopped short to master his anger. He subdued it so far as to cloak it in an attempt to speak reasoningly, as angry men sometimes deceive themselves in doing, despite the good maxim for the wrathful—speak not at all. 'See,' said he, 'I was never married. My dear friend dies, and leaves me his child to protect and rear; and though she bears her father's name, she is most wrongly and foully made to share the blows levelled at her guardian. Ay, have at me, all of you, as much as you will! Hold off from her. Were it true, the cowardice would be not a whit the smaller. Why, casting a stone like that, were it the size of a pebble and the weight of a glance, is to toss the whole cowardly world on an innocent young girl. And why suspect evil? You talk of that lady who paid me a visit here once, and whom I treated becomingly, I swear. I never do otherwise. She was a handsome woman; and what was she? The housekeeper of Captain Beauchamp's uncle. Hear me, if you please! To go with the world, I have as good a right to suppose the worst of an attractive lady in that situation as you regarding my ward: better warrant for scandalizing, I think; to go with the world. But now—'

Cecil checked him, ejaculating, 'Thank you, Dr. Shrapnel; I thank you most cordially,' with a shining smile. 'Stay, sir! no more. I take my leave of you. Not another word. No "buts"! I recognize that conciliation is out of the question: you are the natural protector of poachers, and you will not grant me an interview with the young lady you call your ward, that I may represent to her, as a person we presume to have a chance of moving you, how easily—I am determined you shall hear me, Dr. Shrapnel!—how easily the position of Captain Beauchamp may become precarious with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. And let me add—"but" and "but" me till Doomsday, sir!—if you were—I do hear you, sir, and you shall hear me—if you were a younger man, I say, I would hold you answerable to me for your scandalous and disgraceful insinuations.'

Dr. Shrapnel was adroitly fenced and over-shouted. He shrugged, stuttered, swayed, wagged a bulrush-head, flapped his elbows, puffed like a swimmer in the breakers, tried many times to expostulate, and finding the effort useless, for his adversary was copious and commanding, relapsed, eyeing him as an object far removed.

Cecil rounded one of his perplexingly empty sentences and turned on his heel.

'War, then!' he said.

'As you like,' retorted the doctor.

'Oh! Very good. Good evening.' Cecil slightly lifted his hat, with the short projection of the head of the stately peacock in its walk, and passed out of the garden. Lord Palmet, deeply disappointed and mystified, went after him, leaving Dr. Shrapnel to shorten his garden walk with enormous long strides.

Page 2463

‘I’m afraid you didn’t manage the old boy,’ Palmet complained. ’They’re people who have tea in their gardens; we might have sat down with them and talked, the best friends in the world, and come again to-morrow might have called her Jenny in a week. She didn’t show her pretty nose at any of the windows.’

His companion pooh-poohed and said: ’Foh! I’m afraid I permitted myself to lose my self-command for a moment.’

Palmet sang out an amorous couplet to console himself. Captain Baskelett respected the poetic art for its magical power over woman’s virtue, but he disliked hearing verses, and they were ill-suited to Palmet. He abused his friend roundly, telling him it was contemptible to be quoting verses. He was irritable still.

He declared himself nevertheless much refreshed by his visit to Dr. Shrapnel. ’We shall have to sleep tonight in this unhallowed town, but I needn’t be off to Holdesbury in the morning; I’ve done my business. I shall write to the baron to-night, and we can cross the water to-morrow in time for operations.’

The letter to Mr. Romfrey was composed before midnight. It was a long one, and when he had finished it, Cecil remembered that the act of composition had been assisted by a cigar in his mouth, and Mr. Romfrey detested the smell of tobacco. There was nothing to be done but to write the letter over again, somewhat more briefly: it ran thus:

’Thinking to kill two birds at a blow, I went yesterday with Palmet after the dinner at this place to Shrapnel’s house, where, as I heard, I stood a chance of catching friend Nevil. The young person living under the man’s protection was absent, and so was the “poor dear commander,” perhaps attending on his bull. Shrapnel said he was expecting him. I write to you to confess I thought myself a cleverer fellow than I am. I talked to Shrapnel and tried hard to reason with him. I hope I can keep my temper under ordinary circumstances. You will understand that it required remarkable restraint when I make you acquainted with the fact that a lady’s name was introduced, which, as your representative in relation to her, I was bound to defend from a gratuitous and scoundrelly aspersion. Shrapnel’s epistle to “brave Beauchamp” is Church hymnification in comparison with his conversation. He is indubitably one of the greatest ruffians of his time.

’I took the step with the best of intentions, and all I can plead is that I am not a diplomatist of sixty. His last word was that he is for war with us. As far as we men are concerned it is of small importance. I should think that the sort of society he would scandalize a lady in is not much to be feared. I have given him his warning. He tops me by about a head, and loses his temper every two minutes. I could have drawn him out deliciously if he had not rather disturbed mine. By this time my equanimity is restored. The only thing I apprehend is your displeasure with me for having gone to the

Page 2464

man. I have done no good, and it prevents me from running over to Holdesbury to see Nevil, for if “shindy letters,” as you call them, are bad, shindy meetings are worse. I should be telling him my opinion of Shrapnel, he would be firing out, I should retort, he would yell, I should snap my fingers, and he would go into convulsions. I am convinced that a cattle-breeder ought to keep himself particularly calm. So unless I have further orders from you I refrain from going.

’The dinner was enthusiastic. I sat three hours among my Commons, they on me for that length of time—fatiguing, but a duty.’

Cecil subscribed his name with the warmest affection toward his uncle.

The brevity of the second letter had not brought him nearer to the truth in rescinding the picturesque accessories of his altercation with Dr. Shrapnel, but it veraciously expressed the sentiments he felt, and that was the palpable truth for him.

He posted the letter next morning.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOWING A CHIVALROUS GENTLEMAN SET IN MOTION

About noon the day following, on board the steam-yacht of the Countess of Menai, Cecil was very much astonished to see Mr. Romfrey descending into a boat hard by, from Grancey Lespel’s hired cutter. Steam was up, and the countess was off for a cruise in the Channel, as it was not a race-day, but seeing Mr. Romfrey’s hand raised, she spoke to Cecil, and immediately gave orders to wait for the boat. This lady was a fervent admirer of the knightly gentleman, and had reason to like him, for he had once been her champion. Mr. Romfrey mounted the steps, received her greeting, and beckoned to Cecil. He carried a gold-headed horsewhip under his arm. Lady Menai would gladly have persuaded him to be one of her company for the day’s voyage, but he said he had business in Bevisham, and moving aside with Cecil, put the question to him abruptly: ’What were the words used by Shrapnel?’

‘The identical words?’ Captain Baskelett asked. He could have tripped out the words with the fluency of ancient historians relating what great kings, ambassadors, or Generals may well have uttered on State occasions, but if you want the identical words, who is to remember them the day after they have been delivered? He said:

’Well, as for the identical words, I really, and I was tolerably excited, sir, and upon my honour, the identical words are rather difficult to....’ He glanced at the horsewhip, and pricked by the sight of it to proceed, thought it good to soften the matter if possible. ’I don’t quite recollect . . . I wrote off to you rather hastily. I think he said—but Palmet was there.’

‘Shrapnel spoke the words before Lord Palmet?’ said Mr. Romfrey austerely.

Captain Baskelett summoned Palmet to come near, and inquired of him what he had heard Shrapnel say, suggesting: ’He spoke of a handsome woman for a housekeeper, and all the world knew her character?’

Page 2465

Mr. Romfrey cleared his throat.

‘Or knew she had no character,’ Cecil pursued in a fit of gratified spleen, in scorn of the woman. ’Don’t you recollect his accent in pronouncing housekeeper?’

The menacing thunder sounded from Mr. Romfrey. He was patient in appearance, and waited for Cecil’s witness to corroborate the evidence.

It happened (and here we are in one of the circles of small things producing great consequences, which have inspired diminutive philosophers with ironical visions of history and the littleness of man), it happened that Lord Palmet, the humanest of young aristocrats, well-disposed toward the entire world, especially to women, also to men in any way related to pretty women, had just lit a cigar, and it was a cigar that he had been recommended to try the flavour of; and though he, having his wits about him, was fully aware that shipboard is no good place for a trial of the delicacy of tobacco in the leaf, he had begun puffing and sniffing in a critical spirit, and scarcely knew for the moment what to decide as to this particular cigar. He remembered, however, Mr. Romfrey’s objection to tobacco. Imagining that he saw the expression of a profound distaste in that gentleman’s more than usually serious face, he hesitated between casting the cigar into the water and retaining it. He decided upon the latter course, and held the cigar behind his back, bowing to Mr. Romfrey at about a couple of yards distance, and saying to Cecil, ’Housekeeper; yes, I remember hearing housekeeper. I think so. Housekeeper? yes, oh yes.’

‘And handsome housekeepers were doubtful characters,’ Captain Baskelett prompted him.

Palmet laughed out a single ‘Ha!’ that seemed to excuse him for lounging away to the forepart of the vessel, where he tugged at his fine specimen of a cigar to rekindle it, and discharged it with a wry grimace, so delicate is the flavour of that weed, and so adversely ever is it affected by a breeze and a moist atmosphere. He could then return undivided in his mind to Mr. Romfrey and Cecil, but the subject was not resumed in his presence.

The Countess of Menai steamed into Bevisham to land Mr. Romfrey there. ’I can be out in the Channel any day; it is not every day that I see you,’ she said, in support of her proposal to take him over.

They sat together conversing, apart from the rest of the company, until they sighted Bevisham, when Mr. Romfrey stood up, and a little crowd of men came round him to enjoy his famous racy talk. Captain Baskelett offered to land with him. He declined companionship. Dropping her hand in his, the countess asked him what he had to do in that town, and he replied, ‘I have to demand an apology.’

Answering the direct look of his eyes, she said, ’Oh, I shall not speak of it.’

In his younger days, if the rumour was correct, he had done the same on her account.

He stepped into the boat, and presently they saw him mount the pier-steps, with the riding-whip under his arm, his head more than commonly bent, a noticeable point in a man of his tall erect figure. The ladies and some of the gentlemen thought he was looking particularly grave, even sorrowful.

Page 2466

Lady Menai inquired of Captain Baskelett whether he knew the nature of his uncle's business in Bevisham, the town he despised.

What could Cecil say but no? His uncle had not imparted it to him.

She was flattered in being the sole confidante, and said no more.

The sprightly ingenuity of Captain Baskelett's mind would have informed him of the nature of his uncle's expedition, we may be sure, had he put it to the trial; for Mr. Romfrey was as plain to read as a rudimentary sum in arithmetic, and like the tracings of a pedigree-map his preliminary steps to deeds were seen pointing on their issue in lines of straight descent. But Cecil could protest that he was not bound to know, and considering that he was neither bound to know nor to speculate, he determined to stand on his right. So effectually did he accomplish the task, that he was frequently surprised during the evening and the night by the effervescence of a secret exultation rising imp-like within him, that was, he assured himself, perfectly unaccountable.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN EFFORT TO CONQUER CECILIA IN BEAUCHAMP'S FASHION

The day after Mr. Romfrey's landing in Bevisham a full South-wester stretched the canvas of yachts of all classes, schooner, cutter and yawl, on the lively green water between the island and the forest shore. Cecilia's noble schooner was sure to be out in such a ringing breeze, for the pride of it as well as the pleasure. She landed her father at the Club steps, and then bore away Eastward to sight a cutter race, the breeze beginning to stiffen. Looking back against sun and wind, she saw herself pursued by a saucy little 15-ton craft that had been in her track since she left the Otley river before noon, dipping and straining, with every inch of sail set; as mad a stern chase as ever was witnessed: and who could the man at the tiller, clad cap-A-pie in tarpaulin, be? She led him dancing away, to prove his resoluteness and laugh at him. She had the powerful wings, and a glory in them coming of this pursuit: her triumph was delicious, until the occasional sparkle of the tarpaulin was lost, the small boat appeared a motionless object far behind, and all ahead of her exceedingly dull, though the race hung there and the crowd of sail.

Cecilia's transient flutter of coquettry created by the animating air and her queenly flight was over. She fled splendidly and she came back graciously. But he refused her open hand, as it were. He made as if to stand across her tack, and, reconsidering it, evidently scorned his advantage and challenged the stately vessel for a beat up against the wind. It was as pretty as a Court minuet. But presently Cecilia stood too far on one tack, and returning to the centre of the channel, found herself headed by seamanship.

He waved an ironical salute with his sou’wester. Her retort consisted in bringing her vessel to the wind, and sending a boat for him.

Page 2467

She did it on the impulse; had she consulted her wishes she would rather have seen him at his post, where he seemed in his element, facing the spray and cunningly calculating to get wind and tide in his favour. Partly with regret she saw him, stripped of his tarpaulin, jump into her boat, as though she had once more to say farewell to sailor Nevil Beauchamp; farewell the bright youth, the hero, the true servant of his country!

That feeling of hers changed when he was on board. The stirring cordial day had put new breath in him.

‘Should not the flag be dipped?’ he said, looking up at the peak, where the white flag streamed.

‘Can you really mistake compassion for defeat?’ said she, with a smile.

‘Oh! before the wind of course I hadn’t a chance.’

’How could you be so presumptuous as to give chase? And who has lent you that little cutter?’

Beauchamp had hired her for a month, and he praised her sailing, and pretended to say that the race was not always to the strong in a stiff breeze.

‘But in point’ of fact I was bent on trying how my boat swims, and had no idea of overhauling you. To-day our salt-water lake is as fine as the Mediterranean.’

’Omitting the islands and the Mediterranean colour, it is. I have often told you how I love it. I have landed papa at the Club. Are you aware that we meet you at Steynham the day after to-morrow?’

’Well, we can ride on the downs. The downs between three and four of a summer’s morning are as lovely as anything in the world. They have the softest outlines imaginable . . . and remind me of a friend’s upper lip when she deigns to smile.’

’Is one to rise at that hour to behold the effect? And let me remind you further, Nevil, that the comparison of nature’s minor work beside her mighty is an error, if you will be poetical.’

She cited a well-known instance of degradation in verse.

But a young man who happens to be intimately acquainted with a certain ‘dark eye in woman’ will not so lightly be brought to consider that the comparison of tempestuous night to the flashing of those eyes of hers topples the scene headlong from grandeur. And if Beauchamp remembered rightly, the scene was the Alps at night.

He was prepared to contest Cecilia's judgement. At that moment the breeze freshened and the canvas lifted from due South the yacht swung her sails to drive toward the West, and Cecilia's face and hair came out golden in the sunlight. Speech was difficult, admiration natural, so he sat beside her, admiring in silence.

She said a good word for the smartness of his little yacht.

'This is my first trial of her,' said Beauchamp. 'I hired her chiefly to give Dr. Shrapnel a taste of salt air. I 've no real right to be idling about. His ward Miss Denham is travelling in Switzerland; the dear old man is alone, and not quite so well as I should wish. Change of scene will do him good. I shall land him on the French coast for a couple of days, or take him down Channel.'

Page 2468

Cecilia gazed abstractedly at a passing schooner.

‘He works too hard,’ said Beauchamp.

‘Who does?’

‘Dr. Shrapnel.’

Some one else whom we have heard of works too hard, and it would be happy for mankind if he did not.

Cecilia named the schooner; an American that had beaten our crack yachts. Beauchamp sprang up to spy at the American.

‘That’s the Corinne, is she!’

Yankee craftiness on salt water always excited his respectful attention as a spectator.

‘And what is the name of your boat, Nevil?’

’The fool of an owner calls her the Petrel. It’s not that I’m superstitious, but to give a boat a name of bad augury to sailors appears to me . . . however, I ’ve argued it with him and I will have her called the Curlew. Carrying Dr. Shrapnel and me, Petrel would be thought the proper title for her isn’t that your idea?’

He laughed and she smiled, and then he became overcast with his political face, and said, ’I hope—I believe—you will alter your opinion of him. Can it be an opinion when it’s founded on nothing? You know really nothing of him. I have in my pocket what I believe would alter your mind about him entirely. I do think so; and I think so because I feel you would appreciate his deep sincerity and real nobleness.’

‘Is it a talisman that you have, Nevil?’

‘No, it’s a letter.’

Cecilia’s cheeks took fire.

‘I should so much like to read it to you,’ said he.

‘Do not, please,’ she replied with a dash of supplication in her voice.

’Not the whole of it—an extract here and there? I want you so much to understand him.’

‘I am sure I should not.’

‘Let me try you!’

‘Pray do not.’

‘Merely to show you...’

‘But, Nevil, I do not wish to understand him.’

’But you have only to listen for a few minutes, and I want you to know what good reason I have to reverence him as a teacher and a friend.’

Cecilia looked at Beauchamp with wonder. A confused recollection of the contents of the letter declaimed at Mount Laurels in Captain Baskelett’s absurd sing-song, surged up in her mind revoltingly. She signified a decided negative. Something of a shudder accompanied the expression of it.

But he as little as any member of the Romfrey blood was framed to let the word no stand quietly opposed to him. And the no that a woman utters! It calls for wholesome tyranny. Those old, those hoar-old duellists, Yes and No, have rarely been better matched than in Beauchamp and Cecilia. For if he was obstinate in attack she had great resisting power. Twice to listen to that letter was beyond her endurance. Indeed it cast a shadow on him and disfigured him; and when, affecting to plead, he said: ’You must listen to it to please me, for my sake, Cecilia,’ she answered: ’It is for your sake, Nevil, I decline to.’

Page 2469

‘Why, what do you know of it?’ he exclaimed.

‘I know the kind of writing it would be.’

‘How do you know it?’

‘I have heard of some of Dr. Shrapnel’s opinions.’

’You imagine him to be subversive, intolerant, immoral, and the rest! all that comes under your word revolutionary.’

’Possibly; but I must defend myself from hearing what I know will be certain to annoy me.’

’But he is the reverse of immoral: and I intend to read you parts of the letter to prove to you that he is not the man you would blame, but I, and that if ever I am worthier . . . worthier of you, as I hope to become, it will be owing to this admirable and good old man.’

Cecilia trembled: she was touched to the quick. Yet it was not pleasant to her to be wooed obliquely, through Dr. Shrapnel.

She recognized the very letter, crowned with many stamps, thick with many pages, in Beauchamp’s hands.

’When you are at Steynham you will probably hear my uncle Everard’s version of this letter,’ he said. ’The baron chooses to think everything fair in war, and the letter came accidentally into his hands with the seal broken; well, he read it. And, Cecilia, you can fancy the sort of stuff he would make of it. Apart from that, I want you particularly to know how much I am indebted to Dr. Shrapnel. Won’t you learn to like him a little? Won’t you tolerate him?—I could almost say, for my sake! He and I are at variance on certain points, but taking him altogether, I am under deeper obligations to him than to any man on earth. He has found where I bend and waver.’

‘I recognize your chivalry, Nevil.’

’He has done his best to train me to be of some service. Where’s the chivalry in owning a debt? He is one of our true warriors; fearless and blameless. I have had my heroes before. You know how I loved Robert Hall: his death is a gap in my life. He is a light for fighting Englishmen—who fight with the sword. But the scale of the war, the cause, and the end in view, raise Dr. Shrapnel above the bravest I have ever had the luck to meet. Soldiers and sailors have their excitement to keep them up to the mark; praise and rewards. He is in his eight-and-sixtieth year, and he has never received anything but obloquy for his pains. Half of the small fortune he has goes in charities and subscriptions. Will that touch you? But I think little of that, and so does he. Charity is a

common duty. The dedication of a man's life and whole mind to a cause, there's heroism. I wish I were eloquent; I wish I could move you.'

Cecilia turned her face to him. 'I listen to you with pleasure, Nevil; but please do not read the letter.'

'Yes; a paragraph or two I must read.'

She rose.

He was promptly by her side. 'If I say I ask you for one sign that you care for me in some degree?'

'I have not for a moment ceased to be your friend, Nevil, since I was a child.'

Page 2470

’But if you allow yourself to be so prejudiced against my best friend that you will not hear a word of his writing, are you friendly?’

‘Feminine, and obstinate,’ said Cecilia.

’Give me your eyes an instant. I know you think me reckless and lawless: now is not that true? You doubt whether, if a lady gave me her hand I should hold to it in perfect faith. Or, perhaps not that: but you do suspect I should be capable of every sophism under the sun to persuade a woman to break her faith, if it suited me: supposing some passion to be at work. Men who are open to passion have to be taught reflection before they distinguish between the woman they should sue for love because she would be their best mate, and the woman who has thrown a spell on them. Now, what I beg you to let me read you in this letter is a truth nobly stated that has gone into my blood, and changed me. It cannot fail, too, in changeing your opinion of Dr. Shrapnel. It makes me wretched that you should be divided from me in your ideas of him. I, you see—and I confess I think it my chief title to honour—reverence him.’

‘I regret that I am unable to utter the words of Ruth,’ said Cecilia, in a low voice. She felt rather tremulously; opposed only to the letter and the writer of it, not at all to Beauchamp, except on account of his idolatry of the wicked revolutionist. Far from having a sense of opposition to Beauchamp; she pitied him for his infatuation, and in her lofty mental serenity she warmed to him for the seeming boyishness of his constant and extravagant worship of the man, though such an enthusiasm cast shadows on his intellect.

He was reading a sentence of the letter.

‘I hear nothing but the breeze, Nevil,’ she said.

The breeze fluttered the letter-sheets: they threatened to fly. Cecilia stepped two paces away.

‘Hark; there is a military band playing on the pier,’ said she. ’I am so fond of hearing music a little off shore.’

Beauchamp consigned the letter to his pocket.

‘You are not offended, Nevil?’

‘Dear me, no. You haven’t a mind for tonics, that’s all.’

‘Healthy persons rarely have,’ she remarked, and asked him, smiling softly, whether he had a mind for music.

His insensibility to music was curious, considering how impressionable he was to verse, and to songs of birds. He listened with an oppressed look, as to something the particular secret of which had to be reached by a determined effort of sympathy for those whom it affected. He liked it if she did, and said he liked it, reiterated that he liked it, clearly trying hard to comprehend it, as unmoved by the swell and sigh of the resonant brass as a man could be, while her romantic spirit thrilled to it, and was bountiful in glowing visions and in tenderness.

There hung her hand. She would not have refused to yield it. The hero of her childhood, the friend of her womanhood, and her hero still, might have taken her with half a word.

Page 2471

Beauchamp was thinking: She can listen to that brass band, and she shuts her ears to this letter:

The reading of it would have been a prelude to the opening of his heart to her, at the same time that it vindicated his dear and honoured master, as he called Dr. Shrapnel. To speak, without the explanation of his previous reticence which this letter would afford, seemed useless: even the desire to speak was absent, passion being absent.

‘I see papa; he is getting into a boat with some one,’ said Cecilia, and gave orders for the yacht to stand in toward the Club steps. ’Do you know, Nevil, the Italian common people are not so subject to the charm of music as other races? They have more of the gift, and I think less of the feeling. You do not hear much music in Italy. I remember in the year of Revolution there was danger of a rising in some Austrian city, and a colonel of a regiment commanded his band to play. The mob was put in good humour immediately.’

‘It’s a soporific,’ said Beauchamp.

‘You would not rather have had them rise to be slaughtered?’

‘Would you have them waltzed into perpetual servility?’

Cecilia hummed, and suggested: ‘If one can have them happy in any way?’

‘Then the day of destruction may almost be dated.’

‘Nevil, your terrible view of life must be false.’

’I make it out worse to you than to any one else, because I want our minds to be united.’

‘Give me a respite now and then.’

’With all my heart. And forgive me for beating my drum. I see what others don’t see, or else I feel it more; I don’t know; but it appears to me our country needs rousing if it’s to live. There ’s a division between poor and rich that you have no conception of, and it can’t safely be left unnoticed. I’ve done.’

He looked at her and saw tears on her under-lids.

‘My dearest Cecilia!’

‘Music makes me childish,’ said she.

Her father was approaching in the boat. Beside him sat the Earl of Lockrace, latterly classed among the suitors of the lady of Mount Laurels.

A few minutes remained to Beauchamp of his lost opportunity. Instead of seizing them with his usual promptitude, he let them slip, painfully mindful of his treatment of her last year after the drive into Bevisham, when she was England, and Renee holiday France.

This feeling he fervently translated into the reflection that the bride who would bring him beauty and wealth, and her especial gift of tender womanliness, was not yet so thoroughly mastered as to grant her husband his just prevalence with her, or even indeed his complete independence of action, without which life itself was not desireable.

Colonel Halkett stared at Beauchamp as if he had risen from the deep.

‘Have you been in that town this morning?’ was one of his first questions to him when he stood on board.

Page 2472

‘I came through it,’ said Beauchamp, and pointed to his little cutter labouring in the distance. ’She’s mine for a month; I came from Holdesbury to try her; and then he stated how he had danced attendance on the schooner for a couple of hours before any notice was taken of him, and Cecilia with her graceful humour held up his presumption to scorn.

Her father was eyeing Beauchamp narrowly, and appeared troubled.

‘Did you see Mr. Romfrey yesterday, or this morning?’ the colonel asked him, mentioning that Mr. Romfrey had been somewhere about the island yesterday, at which Beauchamp expressed astonishment, for his uncle Everard seldom visited a yachting station.

Colonel Halkett exchanged looks with Cecilia. Hers were inquiring, and he confirmed her side-glance at Beauchamp. She raised her brows; he nodded, to signify that there was gravity in the case. Here the signalling stopped short; she had to carry on a conversation with Lord Lockrace, one of those men who betray the latent despot in an exhibition of discontentment unless they have all a lady’s hundred eyes attentive to their discourse.

At last Beauchamp quitted the vessel.

When he was out of hearing, Colonel Halkett said to Cecilia: ’Grancey Lespel tells me that Mr. Romfrey called on the man Shrapnel yesterday evening at six o’clock.’

‘Yes, Papa?’

‘Now come and see the fittings below,’ the colonel addressed Lord Lockrace, and murmured to his daughter:

‘And soundly horsewhipped him!’

Cecilia turned on the instant to gaze after Nevil Beauchamp. She could have wept for pity. Her father’s emphasis on ‘soundly’ declared an approval of the deed, and she was chilled by a sickening abhorrence and dread of the cruel brute in men, such as, awakened by she knew not what, had haunted her for a year of her girlhood.

‘And he deserved it!’ the colonel pursued, on emerging from the cabin at Lord Lockrace’s heels. ’I’ve no doubt he richly deserved it. The writer of that letter we heard Captain Baskelett read the other day deserves the very worst he gets.’

’Baskelett bored the Club the other night with a letter of a Radical fellow,’ said Lord Lockrace. ’Men who write that stuff should be strung up and whipped by the common hangman.’

‘It was a private letter,’ said Cecilia.

‘Public or private, Miss Halkett.’

Her mind flew back to Seymour Austin for the sense of stedfastness when she heard such language as this, which, taken in conjunction with Dr. Shrapnel’s, seemed to uncloak our Constitutional realm and show it boiling up with the frightful elements of primitive societies.

‘I suppose we are but half civilized,’ she said.

‘If that,’ said the earl.

Colonel Halkett protested that he never could quite make out what Radicals were driving at.

‘The rents,’ Lord Lockrace observed in the conclusive tone of brevity. He did not stay very long.

Page 2473

The schooner was boarded subsequently by another nobleman, an Admiral of the Fleet and ex-minister of the Whig Government, Lord Croyston, who was a friend of Mr. Romfrey's, and thought well of Nevil Beauchamp as a seaman and naval officer, but shook an old head over him as a politician. He came to beg a passage across the water to his marine Lodge, an accident having happened early in the morning to his yacht, the Lady Violet. He was able to communicate the latest version of the horsewhipping of Dr. Shrapnel, from which it appeared that after Mr. Romfrey had handsomely flogged the man he flung his card on the prostrate body, to let men know who was responsible for the act. He expected that Mr. Romfrey would be subjected to legal proceedings. 'But if there's a pleasure worth paying for it's the trouncing of a villain,' said he; and he had been informed that Dr. Shrapnel was a big one. Lord Croyston's favourite country residence was in the neighbourhood of old Mrs. Beauchamp, on the Upper Thames. Speaking of Nevil Beauchamp a second time, he alluded to his relations with his great-aunt, said his prospects were bad, that she had interdicted her house to him, and was devoted to her other great-nephew.

'And so she should be,' said Colonel Halkett. 'That's a young man who's an Englishman without French gunpowder notions in his head. He works for us down at the mine in Wales a good part of the year, and has tided us over a threatening strike there: gratuitously: I can't get him to accept anything. I can't think why he does it.'

'He'll have plenty,' said Lord Croyston, levelling his telescope to sight the racing cutters.

Cecilia fancied she descried Nevil's Petrel, dubbed Curlew, to Eastward, and had a faint gladness in the thought that his knowledge of his uncle Everard's deed of violence would be deferred for another two or three hours.

She tried to persuade her father to wait for Nevil, and invite him to dine at Mount Laurels, and break the news to him gently. Colonel Halkett argued that in speaking of the affair he should certainly not commiserate the man who had got his deserts, and saying this he burst into a petty fury against the epistle of Dr. Shrapnel, which appeared to be growing more monstrous in proportion to his forgetfulness of the details, as mountains gather vastness to the eye at a certain remove. Though he could not guess the reason for Mr. Romfrey's visit to Bevisham, he was, he said, quite prepared to maintain that Mr. Romfrey had a perfect justification for his conduct.

Cecilia hinted at barbarism. The colonel hinted at high police duties that gentlemen were sometimes called on to perform for the protection of society. 'In defiance of its laws?' she asked; and he answered: 'Women must not be judging things out of their sphere,' with the familiar accent on 'women' which proves their inferiority. He was rarely guilty of it toward his daughter. Evidently he had resolved to back Mr. Romfrey blindly.

Page 2474

That epistle of Dr. Shrapnel's merited condign punishment and had met with it, he seemed to rejoice in saying: and this was his abstract of the same: 'An old charlatan who tells his dupe to pray every night of his life for the beheading of kings and princes, and scattering of the clergy, and disbanding the army, that he and his rabble may fall upon the wealthy, and show us numbers win; and he'll undertake to make them moral!'

'I wish we were not going to Steynham,' said Cecilia.

'So do I. Well, no, I don't,' the colonel corrected himself, 'no; it 's an engagement. I gave my consent so far. We shall see whether Nevil Beauchamp's a man of any sense.'

Her heart sank. This was as much as to let her know that if Nevil broke with his uncle, the treaty of union between the two families, which her father submitted to entertain out of consideration for Mr. Romfrey, would be at an end.

The wind had fallen. Entering her river, Cecilia gazed back at the smooth broad water, and the band of golden beams flung across it from the evening sun over the forest. No little cutter was visible. She could not write to Nevil to bid him come and concert with her in what spirit to encounter his uncle Everard at Steynham. And guests would be at Mount Laurels next day; Lord Lockrace, Lord Croyston, and the Lespels; she could not drive down to Bevisham on the chance of seeing him. Nor was it to be acknowledged even to herself that she so greatly desired to see him and advise him. Why not? Because she was one of the artificial creatures called women (with the accent) who dare not be spontaneous, and cannot act independently if they would continue to be admirable in the world's eye, and who for that object must remain fixed on shelves, like other marketable wares, avoiding motion to avoid shattering or tarnishing. This is their fate, only in degree less inhuman than that of Hellenic and Trojan princesses offered up to the Gods, or pretty slaves to the dealers. Their artificiality is at once their bane and their source of superior pride.

Seymour Austin might have reason for seeking to emancipate them, she thought, and blushed in thought that she could never be learning anything but from her own immediate sensations.

Of course it was in her power to write to Beauchamp, just as it had been in his to speak to her, but the fire was wanting in her blood and absent from his mood, so they were kept apart.

Her father knew as little as she what was the positive cause of Mr. Romfrey's chastisement of Dr. Shrapnel. 'Cause enough, I don't doubt,' he said, and cited the mephitic letter.

Cecilia was not given to suspicions, or she would have had them kindled by a certain wilfulness in his incessant reference to the letter, and exoneration, if not approval, of Mr. Romfrey's conduct.

Page 2475

How did that chivalrous gentleman justify himself for condescending to such an extreme as the use of personal violence? Was there a possibility of his justifying it to Nevil? She was most wretched in her reiteration of these inquiries, for, with a heart subdued, she had still a mind whose habit of independent judgement was not to be constrained, and while she felt that it was only by siding with Nevil submissively and blindly in this lamentable case that she could hope for happiness, she foresaw the likelihood of her not being able to do so as much as he would desire and demand. This she took for the protest of her pure reason. In reality, grieved though she was on account of that Dr. Shrapnel, her captive heart resented the anticipated challenge to her to espouse his cause or languish.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER AT STEYNHAM

The judge pronouncing sentence of condemnation on the criminal is proverbially a sorrowfully-minded man; and still more would he be so had he to undertake the part of executioner as well. This is equivalent to saying that the simple pleasures are no longer with us; it must be a personal enemy now to give us any satisfaction in chastising and slaying. Perhaps by-and-by that will be savourless: we degenerate. There is, nevertheless, ever (and let nature be praised for it) a strong sustainment in the dutiful exertion of our physical energies, and Mr. Everard Romfrey experienced it after he had fulfilled his double office on the person of Dr. Shrapnel by carrying out his own decree. His conscience approved him cheerlessly, as it is the habit of that secret monitor to do when we have no particular advantage coming of the act we have performed; but the righteous labour of his arm gave him high breathing and an appetite.

He foresaw that he and Nevil would soon be having a wrestle over the matter, hand and thigh; but a gentleman in the right engaged with a fellow in the wrong has nothing to apprehend; is, in fact, in the position of a game-preserver with a poacher. The nearest approach to gratification in that day's work which Mr. Romfrey knew was offered by the picture of Nevil's lamentable attitude above his dirty idol. He conceived it in the mock-mediaeval style of our caricaturists:—Shrapnel stretched at his length, half a league, in slashed yellows and blacks, with his bauble beside him, and prodigious pointed toes; Nevil in parti-coloured tights, on one leg, raising his fists in imprecation to a nose in the firmament.

Gentlemen of an unpractised imaginative capacity cannot vision for themselves exactly what they would, being unable to exercise authority over the proportions and the hues of the objects they conceive, which are very much at the mercy of their sportive caprices; and the state of mind of Mr. Romfrey is not to be judged by his ridiculous view of the pair. In the abstract he could be sorry for Shrapnel. As he knew himself magnanimous, he promised himself to be forbearing with Nevil.

Page 2476

Moreover, the month of September was drawing nigh; he had plenty to think of. The entire land (signifying all but all of those who occupy the situation of thinkers in it) may be said to have been exhaling the same thought in connection with September. Our England holds possession of a considerable portion of the globe, and it keeps the world in awe to see her bestowing so considerable a portion of her intelligence upon her recreations. To prosecute them with her whole heart is an ingenious exhibition of her power. Mr. Romfrey was of those who said to his countrymen, 'Go yachting; go cricketing; go boat-racing; go shooting; go horseracing, nine months of the year, while the other Europeans go marching and drilling.' Those occupations he considered good for us; and our much talking, writing, and thinking about them characteristic, and therefore good. And he was not one of those who do penance for that sweating indolence in the fits of desperate panic. Beauchamp's argument that the rich idler begets the idling vagabond, the rich wagerer the brutal swindler, the general thirst for a mad round of recreation a generally-increasing disposition to avoid serious work, and the unbraced moral tone of the country an indifference to national responsibility (an argument doubtless extracted from Shrapnel, talk tall as the very demagogue when he stood upright), Mr. Romfrey laughed at scornfully, affirming that our manufactures could take care of themselves. As for invasion, we are circled by the sea. Providence has done that for us, and may be relied on to do more in an emergency.—The children of wealth and the children of the sun alike believe that Providence is for them, and it would seem that the former can do without it less than the latter, though the former are less inclined to give it personification.

This year, however, the array of armaments on the Continent made Mr. Romfrey anxious about our navy. Almost his first topic in welcoming Colonel Halkett and Cecilia to Steynham was the rottenness of navy administration; for if Providence is to do anything for us it must have a sea-worthy fleet for the operation. How loudly would his contemptuous laughter have repudiated the charge that he trusted to supernatural agency for assistance in case of need! But so it was: and he owned to believing in English luck. Partly of course he meant that steady fire of combat which his countrymen have got heated to of old till fortune blessed them.

'Nevil is not here?' the colonel asked.

'No, I suspect he's gruelling and plastering a doctor of his acquaintance,' Mr. Romfrey said, with his nasal laugh composed of scorn and resignation.

'Yes, yes, I've heard,' said Colonel Halkett hastily.

He would have liked to be informed of Dr. Shrapnel's particular offence: he mentioned the execrable letter.

Mr. Romfrey complacently interjected: 'Drug-vomit!' and after an interval: 'Gallows!'

Page 2477

‘That man has done Nevil Beauchamp a world of mischief, Romfrey.’

‘We’ll hope for a cure, colonel.’

‘Did the man come across you?’

‘He did.’

Mr. Romfrey was mute on the subject. Colonel Halkett abstained from pushing his inquiries.

Cecilia could only tell her father when they were alone in the drawing-room a few minutes before dinner that Mrs. Culling was entirely ignorant of any cause to which Nevil’s absence might be attributed.

‘Mr. Romfrey had good cause,’ the colonel said, emphatically.

He repeated it next day, without being a bit wiser of the cause.

Cecilia’s happiness or hope was too sensitive to allow of a beloved father’s deceiving her in his opposition to it.

She saw clearly now that he had fastened on this miserable incident, expecting an imbroglio that would divide Nevil and his uncle, and be an excuse for dividing her and Nevil. O for the passionate will to make head against what appeared as a fate in this matter! She had it not.

Mr. and Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, Sir John and Lady Baskelett, and the Countess of Welshpool, another sister of Mr. Romfrey’s, arrived at Steynham for a day and a night. Lady Baskelett and Lady Welshpool came to see their brother, not to countenance his household; and Mr. Wardour-Devereux could not stay longer than a certain number of hours under a roof where tobacco was in evil odour. From her friend Louise, his wife, Cecilia learnt that Mr. Lydiard had been summoned to Dr. Shrapnel’s bedside, as Mrs. Devereux knew by a letter she had received from Mr. Lydiard, who was no political devotee of that man, she assured Cecilia, but had an extraordinary admiration for the Miss Denham living with him. This was kindly intended to imply that Beauchamp was released from his attendance on Dr. Shrapnel, and also that it was not he whom the Miss Denham attracted.

‘She is in Switzerland,’ said Cecilia.

‘She is better there,’ said Mrs. Devereux.

Mr. Stukely Culbrett succeeded to these visitors. He heard of the case of Dr. Shrapnel from Colonel Halkett, and of Beauchamp's missing of his chance with the heiress from Mr. Romfrey.

Rosamund Culling was in great perplexity about Beauchamp's prolonged absence; for he had engaged to come, he had written to her to say he would be sure to come; and she feared he was ill. She would have persuaded Mr. Culbrett to go down to Bevisham to see him: she declared that she could even persuade herself to call on Dr. Shrapnel a second time, in spite of her horror of the man. Her anger at the thought of his keeping Nevil away from good fortune and happiness caused her to speak in resentment and loathing of the man.

'He behaved badly when you saw him, did he?' said Stukely.

'Badly, is no word. He is detestable,' Rosamund replied.

'You think he ought to be whipped?'

She feigned an extremity of vindictiveness, and twisted her brows in comic apology for the unfeminine sentiment, as she said: 'I really do.'

Page 2478

The feminine gentleness of her character was known to Stukely, so she could afford to exaggerate the expression of her anger, and she did not modify it, forgetful that a woman is the representative of the sex with cynical men, and escapes from contempt at the cost of her sisterhood.

Looking out of an upper window in the afternoon she beheld Nevil Beauchamp in a group with his uncle Everard, the colonel and Cecilia, and Mr. Culbrett. Nevil was on his feet; the others were seated under the great tulip-tree on the lawn.

A little observation of them warned her that something was wrong. There was a vacant chair; Nevil took it in his hand at times, stamped it to the ground, walked away and sharply back fronting his uncle, speaking vehemently, she perceived, and vainly, as she judged by the cast of his uncle's figure. Mr. Romfrey's head was bent, and wagged slightly, as he screwed his brows up and shot his eyes, queerly at the agitated young man. Colonel Halkett's arms crossed his chest. Cecilia's eyelids drooped their, lashes. Mr. Culbrett was balancing on the hind-legs of his chair. No one appeared to be speaking but Nevil.

It became evident that Nevil was putting a series of questions to his uncle. Mechanical nods were given him in reply.

Presently Mr. Romfrey rose, thundering out a word or two, without a gesture.

Colonel Halkett rose.

Nevil flung his hand out straight to the house.

Mr. Romfrey seemed to consent; the colonel shook his head: Nevil insisted.

A footman carrying a tea-tray to Miss Halkett received some commission and swiftly disappeared, making Rosamund wonder whether sugar, milk or cream had been omitted.

She met him on the first landing, and heard that Mr. Romfrey requested her to step out on the lawn.

Expecting to hear of a piece of misconduct on the part of the household servants, she hurried forth, and found that she had to traverse the whole space of the lawn up to the tuliptree. Colonel Halkett and Mr. Romfrey had resumed their seats. The colonel stood up and bowed to her.

Mr. Romfrey said: 'One question to you, ma'am, and you shall not be detained. Did not that man Shrapnel grossly insult you on the day you called on him to see Captain Beauchamp about a couple of months before the Election?'

‘Look at me when you speak, ma’am,’ said Beauchamp.

Rosamund looked at him.

The whiteness of his face paralyzed her tongue. A dreadful levelling of his eyes penetrated and chilled her. Instead of thinking of her answer she thought of what could possibly have happened.

‘Did he insult you at all, ma’am?’ said Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey reminded him that he was not a cross-examining criminal barrister.

They waited for her to speak.

She hesitated, coloured, betrayed confusion; her senses telling her of a catastrophe, her conscience accusing her as the origin of it.

Page 2479

’Did Dr. Shrapnel, to your belief, intentionally hurt your feelings or your dignity?’ said Beauchamp, and made the answer easier:

‘Not intentionally, surely: not . . . I certainly do not accuse him.’

’Can you tell me you feel that he wounded you in the smallest degree? And if so, how? I ask you this, because he is anxious, if he lives, to apologize to you for any offence that he may have been guilty of: he was ignorant of it. I have his word for that, and his commands to me to bear it to you. I may tell you I have never known him injure the most feeble thing—anything alive, or wish to.’

Beauchamp’s voice choked. Rosamund saw tears leap out of the stern face of her dearest now in wrath with her.

‘Is he ill?’ she faltered.

‘He is. You own to a strong dislike of him, do you not?’

‘But not to desire any harm to him.’

‘Not a whipping,’ Mr. Culbrett murmured.

Everard Romfrey overheard it.

He had allowed Mrs. Culling to be sent for, that she might with a bare affirmative silence Nevil, when his conduct was becoming intolerable before the guests of the house.

‘That will do, ma’am,’ he dismissed her.

Beauchamp would not let her depart.

’I must have your distinct reply, and in Mr. Romfrey’s presence:—say, that if you accused him you were mistaken, or that they were mistaken who supposed you had accused him. I must have the answer before you go.’

‘Sir, will you learn manners!’ Mr. Romfrey said to him, with a rattle of the throat.

Beauchamp turned his face from-her.

Colonel Halkett offered her his arm to lead her away.

‘What is it? Oh, what is it?’ she whispered, scarcely able to walk, but declining the colonel’s arm.

‘You ought not to have been dragged out here,’ said he. ’Any one might have known there would be no convincing of Captain Beauchamp. That old rascal in Bevisham has

been having a beating; that's all. And a very beautiful day it is!—a little too hot, though. Before we leave, you must give me a lesson or two in gardening.'

'Dr. Shrapnel—Mr. Romfrey!' said Rosamund half audibly under the oppression of the more she saw than what she said.

The colonel talked of her renown in landscape-gardening. He added casually: 'They met the other day.'

'By accident?'

'By chance, I suppose. Shrapnel defends one of your Steynham poaching vermin.'

'Mr. Romfrey struck him?—for that? Oh, never!' Rosamund exclaimed.

'I suppose he had a long account to settle.'

She fetched her breath painfully. 'I shall never be forgiven.'

'And I say that a gentleman has no business with idols,' the colonel fumed as he spoke. 'Those letters of Shrapnel to Nevil Beauchamp are a scandal on the name of Englishman.'

'You have read that shocking one, Colonel Halkett?'

Page 2480

‘Captain Baskelett read it out to us.’

‘He? Oh! then . . .’ She stopped:—Then the author of this mischief is clear to me! her divining hatred of Cecil would have said, but her humble position did not warrant such speech. A consideration of the lowliness necessitating this restraint at a moment when loudly to denounce another’s infamy with triumphant insight would have solaced and supported her, kept Rosamund dumb.

She could not bear to think of her part in the mischief.

She was not bound to think of it, knowing actually nothing of the occurrence.

Still she felt that she was on her trial. She detected herself running in and out of her nature to fortify it against accusations rather than cleanse it for inspection. It was narrowing in her own sight. The prospect of her having to submit to a further interrogatory, shut it up entrenched in the declaration that Dr. Shrapnel had so far outraged her sentiments as to be said to have offended her: not insulted, perhaps, but certainly offended.

And this was a generous distinction. It was generous; and, having recognized the generosity, she was unable to go beyond it.

She was presently making the distinction to Miss Halkett. The colonel had left her at the door of the house: Miss Halkett sought admission to her private room on an errand of condolence, for she had sympathized with her very much in the semi-indignity Nevil had forced her to undergo: and very little indeed had she been able to sympathize with Nevil, who had been guilty of the serious fault of allowing himself to appear moved by his own commonplace utterances; or, in other words, the theme being hostile to his audience, he had betrayed emotion over it without first evoking the spirit of pathos.

‘As for me,’ Rosamund replied, to some comforting remarks of Miss Halkett’s, ’I do not understand why I should be mixed up in Dr. Shrapnel’s misfortunes: I really am quite unable to recollect his words to me or his behaviour: I have only a positive impression that I left his house, where I had gone to see Captain Beauchamp, in utter disgust, so repelled by his language that I could hardly trust myself to speak of the man to Mr. Romfrey when he questioned me. I did not volunteer it. I am ready to say that I believe Dr. Shrapnel did not intend to be insulting. I cannot say that he was not offensive.

You know, Miss Halkett, I would willingly, gladly have saved him from anything like punishment.’

‘You are too gentle to have thought of it,’ said Cecilia.

’But I shall never be forgiven by Captain Beauchamp. I see in his eyes that he accuses me and despises me.’

‘He will not be so unjust, Mrs. Culling.’

Rosamund begged that she might hear what Nevil had first said on his arrival.

Cecilia related that they had seen him walking swiftly across the park, and that Mr. Romfrey had hailed him, and held his hand out; and that Captain Beauchamp had overlooked it, saying he feared Mr. Romfrey’s work was complete. He had taken her father’s hand and hers and his touch was like ice.

Page 2481

‘His worship of that Dr. Shrapnel is extraordinary,’ quoth Rosamund. ’And how did Mr. Romfrey behave to him?’

‘My father thinks, very forbearingly.’

Rosamund sighed and made a semblance of wringing her hands. ’It seems to me that I anticipated ever since I heard of the man . . . or at least ever since I saw him and heard him, he would be the evil genius of us all: if I dare include myself. But I am not permitted to escape! And, Miss Halkett, can you tell me how it was that my name—that I became involved? I cannot imagine the circumstances which would bring me forward in this unhappy affair.’

Cecilia replied: ’The occasion was, that Captain Beauchamp so scornfully contrasted the sort of injury done by Dr. Shrapnel’s defence of a poacher on his uncle’s estate, with the severe chastisement inflicted by Mr. Romfrey in revenge for it. He would not leave the subject.’

‘I see him—see his eyes!’ cried Rosamund, her bosom heaving and sinking deep, as her conscience quavered within her. ’At last Mr. Romfrey mentioned me?’

‘He stood up and said you had been personally insulted by Dr. Shrapnel.’

Rosamund meditated in a distressing doubt of her conscientious truthfulness.

’Captain Beauchamp will be coming to me; and how can I answer him? Heaven knows I would have shielded the poor man, if possible—poor wretch! Wicked though he is, one has only to hear of him suffering! But what can I answer? I do recollect now that Mr. Romfrey compelled me from question to question to confess that the man had vexed me. Insulted, I never said. At the worst, I said vexed. I would not have said insulted, or even offended, because Mr. Romfrey . . . ah! we know him. What I did say, I forget. I have no guide to what I said but my present feelings, and they are pity for the unfortunate man much more than dislike.—Well, I must go through the scene with Nevil!’ Rosamund concluded her outcry of ostensible exculpation.

She asked in a cooler moment how it was that Captain Beauchamp had so far forgotten himself as to burst out on his uncle before the guests of the house. It appeared that he had wished his uncle to withdraw with him, and Mr. Romfrey had bidden him postpone private communications. Rosamund gathered from one or two words of Cecilia’s that Mr. Romfrey, until finally stung by Nevil, had indulged in his best-humoured banter.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FACE OF RENEE

Shortly before the ringing of the dinner-bell Rosamund knocked at Beauchamp's dressing-room door, the bearer of a telegram from Bevisham. He read it in one swift run of the eyes, and said: 'Come in, ma'am, I have something for you. Madame de Rouaillout sends you this.'

Rosamund saw her name written in a French hand on the back of the card.

'You stay with us, Nevil?'

'To-night and to-morrow, perhaps. The danger seems to be over.'

Page 2482

‘Has Dr. Shrapnel been in danger?’

‘He has. If it’s quite over now!’

‘I declare to you, Nevil . . .’

’Listen to me, ma’am; I’m in the dark about this murderous business:—an old man, defenceless, harmless as a child!—but I know this, that you are somewhere in it.’

‘Nevil, do you not guess at some one else?’

’He! yes, he! But Cecil Baskelett led no blind man to Dr. Shrapnel’s gate.’

‘Nevil, as I live, I knew nothing of it!’

’No, but you set fire to the train. You hated the old man, and you taught Mr. Romfrey to think that you had been insulted. I see it all. Now you must have the courage to tell him of your error. There’s no other course for you. I mean to take Mr. Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel, to save the honour of our family, as far as it can be saved.’

‘What? Nevil!’ exclaimed Rosamund, gaping.

’It seems little enough, ma’am. But he must go. I will have the apology spoken, and man to man.’

‘But you would never tell your uncle that?’

He laughed in his uncle’s manner.

’But, Nevil, my dearest, forgive me, I think of you—why are the Halketts here? It is not entirely with Colonel Halkett’s consent. It is your uncle’s influence with him that gives you your chance. Do you not care to avail yourself of it? Ever since he heard Dr. Shrapnel’s letter to you, Colonel Halkett has, I am sure, been tempted to confound you with him in his mind: ah! Nevil, but recollect that it is only Mr. Romfrey who can help to give you your Cecilia. There is no dispensing with him. Postpone your attempt to humiliate—I mean, that is, Oh! Nevil, whatever you intend to do to overcome your uncle, trust to time, be friends with him; be a little worldly! for her sake! to ensure her happiness!’

Beauchamp obtained the information that his cousin Cecil had read out the letter of Dr. Shrapnel at Mount Laurels.

The bell rang.

’Do you imagine I should sit at my uncle’s table if I did not intend to force him to repair the wrong he has done to himself and to us?’ he said.

‘Oh! Nevil, do you not see Captain Baskelett at work here?’

’What amends can Cecil Baskelett make? My uncle is a man of honour: it is in his power. There, I leave you to speak to him; you will do it to-night, after we break up in the drawing-room.’

Rosamund groaned: ’An apology to Dr. Shrapnel from Mr. Romfrey! It is an impossibility, Nevil! utter!’

‘So you say to sit idle: but do as I tell you.’

He went downstairs.

He had barely reproached her. She wondered at that; and then remembered his alien sad half-smile in quitting the room.

Rosamund would not present herself at her lord’s dinner-table when there were any guests at Steynham. She prepared to receive Miss Halkett in the drawing-room, as the guests of the house this evening chanced to be her friends.

Page 2483

Madame de Rouaillout's present to her was a photograph of M. de Croisnel, his daughter and son in a group. Rosamund could not bear to look at the face of Renee, and she put it out of sight. But she had looked. She was reduced to look again.

Roland stood beside his father's chair; Renee sat at his feet, clasping his right hand. M. de Croisnel's fallen eyelids and unshorn white chin told the story of the family reunion. He was dying: his two children were nursing him to the end.

Decidedly Cecilia was a more beautiful woman than Renee: but on which does the eye linger longest—which draws the heart? a radiant landscape, where the tall ripe wheat flashes between shadow and shine in the stately march of Summer, or the peep into dewy woodland on to dark water?

Dark-eyed Renee was not beauty but attraction; she touched the double chords within us which are we know not whether harmony or discord, but a divine discord if an uncertified harmony, memorable beyond plain sweetness or majesty. There are touches of bliss in anguish that superhumanize bliss, touches of mystery in simplicity, of the eternal in the variable. These two chords of poignant antiphony she struck throughout the range of the hearts of men, and strangely intervolved them in vibrating unison. Only to look at her face, without hearing her voice, without the charm of her speech, was to feel it. On Cecilia's entering the drawing-room sofa, while the gentlemen drank claret, Rosamund handed her the card of the photographic artist of Tours, mentioning no names.

'I should say the portrait is correct. A want of spirituality,' Rosamund said critically, using one of the insular commonplaces, after that manner of fastening upon what there is not in a piece of Art or nature.

Cecilia's avidity to see and study the face preserved her at a higher mark.

She knew the person instantly; had no occasion to ask who this was. She sat over the portrait blushing burningly: 'And that is a brother?' she said.

'That is her brother Roland, and very like her, except in complexion,' said Rosamund.

Cecilia murmured of a general resemblance in the features. Renee enchained her. Though but a sun-shadow, the vividness of this French face came out surprisingly; air was in the nostrils and speech flew from the tremulous mouth. The eyes? were they quivering with internal light, or were they set to seem so in the sensitive strange curves of the eyelids whose awakened lashes appeared to tremble on some borderland between lustreful significance and the mists? She caught at the nerves like certain aoristic combinations in music, like tones of a stringed instrument swept by the wind, enticing, unseizable. Yet she sat there at her father's feet gazing out into the world

indifferent to spectators, indifferent even to the common sentiment of gracefulness. Her left hand clasped his right, and she supported herself on the floor with the other

Page 2484

hand leaning away from him, to the destruction of conventional symmetry in the picture. None but a woman of consummate breeding dared have done as she did. It was not Southern suppleness that saved her from the charge of harsh audacity, but something of the kind of genius in her mood which has hurried the greater poets of sound and speech to impose their naturalness upon accepted laws, or show the laws to have been our meagre limitations.

The writer in this country will, however, be made safest, and the excellent body of self-appointed thongmen, who walk up and down our ranks flapping their leathern straps to terrorize us from experiments in imagery, will best be satisfied, by the statement that she was indescribable: a term that exacts no labour of mind from him or from them, for it flows off the pen as readily as it fills a vacuum.

That posture of Renee displeased Cecilia and fascinated her. In an exhibition of paintings she would have passed by it in pure displeasure: but here was Nevil's first love, the woman who loved him; and she was French. After a continued study of her Cecilia's growing jealousy betrayed itself in a conscious rivalry of race, coming to the admission that Englishwomen cannot fling themselves about on the floor without agonizing the graces: possibly, too, they cannot look singularly without risks in the direction of slyness and brazen archness; or talk animatedly without dipping in slang. Conventional situations preserve them and interchange dignity with them; still life befits them; pre-eminently that judicial seat from which in briefest speech they deliver their judgements upon their foreign sisters. Jealousy it was that plucked Cecilia from her majestic place and caused her to envy in Renee things she would otherwise have disapproved.

At last she had seen the French lady's likeness! The effect of it was a horrid trouble in Cecilia's cool blood, abasement, a sense of eclipse, hardly any sense of deserving worthiness: 'What am I but an heiress!' Nevil had once called her beautiful; his praise had given her beauty. But what is beauty when it is outshone! Ask the owners of gems. You think them rich; they are pining.

Then, too, this Renee, who looked electrical in repose, might really love Nevil with a love that sent her heart out to him in his enterprises, justifying and adoring him, piercing to the hero in his very thoughts. Would she not see that his championship of the unfortunate man Dr. Shrapnel was heroic?

Cecilia surrendered the card to Rosamund, and it was out of sight when Beauchamp stepped in the drawing-room. His cheeks were flushed; he had been one against three for the better part of an hour.

'Are you going to show me the downs to-morrow morning?' Cecilia said to him; and he replied, 'You will have to be up early.'

‘What’s that?’ asked the colonel, at Beauchamp’s heels.

He was volunteering to join the party of two for the early morning’s ride to the downs. Mr. Romfrey pressed his shoulder, saying, ’There’s no third horse can do it in my stables.’

Page 2485

Colonel Halkett turned to him.

'I had your promise to come over the kennels with me and see how I treat a cry of mad dog, which is ninety-nine times out of a hundred mad fool man,' Mr. Romfrey added.

By that the colonel knew he meant to stand by Nevil still and offer him his chance of winning Cecilia.

Having pledged his word not to interfere, Colonel Halkett submitted, and muttered, 'Ah! the kennels.' Considering however what he had been witnessing of Nevil's behaviour to his uncle, the colonel was amazed at Mr. Romfrey's magnanimity in not cutting him off and disowning him.

'Why the downs?' he said.

'Why the deuce, colonel?' A question quite as reasonable, and Mr. Romfrey laughed under his breath. To relieve an uncertainty in Cecilia's face, that might soon have become confusion, he described the downs fronting the paleness of earliest dawn, and then their arch and curve and dip against the pearly grey of the half-glow; and then, among their hollows, lo, the illumination of the East all around, and up and away, and a gallop for miles along the turfy thymy rolling billows, land to left, sea to right, below you. 'It's the nearest hit to wings we can make, Cecilia.' He surprised her with her Christian name, which kindled in her the secret of something he expected from that ride on the downs. Compare you the Alps with them? If you could jump on the back of an eagle, you might. The Alps have height. But the downs have swiftness. Those long stretching lines of the downs are greyhounds in full career. To look at them is to set the blood racing! Speed is on the downs, glorious motion, odorous air of sea and herb, exquisite as in the isles of Greece. And the Continental travelling ninnies leave England for health!—run off and forth from the downs to the steamboat, the railway, the steaming hotel, the tourist's shivering mountain-top, in search of sensations! There on the downs the finest and liveliest are at their bidding ready to fly through them like hosts of angels.

He spoke somewhat in that strain, either to relieve Cecilia or prepare the road for Nevil, not in his ordinary style; on the contrary, with a swing of enthusiasm that seemed to spring of ancient heartfelt fervours. And indeed soon afterward he was telling her that there on those downs, in full view of Steynham, he and his wife had first joined hands.

Beauchamp sat silent. Mr. Romfrey despatched orders to the stables, and Rosamund to the kitchen. Cecilia was rather dismayed by the formal preparations for the ride. She declined the early cup of coffee. Mr. Romfrey begged her to take it. 'Who knows the hour when you 'll be back?' he said. Beauchamp said nothing.

Page 2486

The room grew insufferable to Cecilia. She would have liked to be wafted to her chamber in a veil, so shamefully unveiled did she seem to be. But the French lady would have been happy in her place! Her father kissed her as fathers do when they hand the bride into the travelling-carriage. His ‘Good-night, my darling!’ was in the voice of a soldier on duty. For a concluding sign that her dim apprehensions pointed correctly, Mr. Romfrey kissed her on the forehead. She could not understand how it had come to pass that she found herself suddenly on this incline, precipitated whither she would fain be going, only less hurriedly, less openly, and with her secret merely peeping, like a dove in the breast.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RIDE IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

That pure opaque of the line of downs ran luminously edged against the pearly morning sky, with its dark landward face crepusculine yet clear in every combe, every dotting copse and furze-bush, every wavy fall, and the ripple, crease, and rill-like descent of the turf. Beauty of darkness was there, as well as beauty of light above.

Beauchamp and Cecilia rode forth before the sun was over the line, while the West and North-west sides of the rolling downs were stamped with such firmness of dusky feature as you see on the indentations of a shield of tarnished silver. The mounting of the sun behind threw an obscurer gloom, and gradually a black mask overcame them, until the rays shot among their folds and windings, and shadows rich as the black pansy, steady as on a dialplate rounded with the hour.

Mr. Everard Romfrey embraced this view from Steynham windows, and loved it. The lengths of gigantic ‘greyhound backs’ coursing along the South were his vision of delight; no image of repose for him, but of the life in swiftness. He had known them when the great bird of the downs was not a mere tradition, and though he owned conscientiously to never having beheld the bird, a certain mystery of holiness hung about the region where the bird had been in his time. There, too, with a timely word he had gained a wealthy and good wife. He had now sent Nevil to do the same.

This astute gentleman had caught at the idea of a ride of the young couple to the downs with his customary alacrity of perception as being the very best arrangement for hurrying them to the point. At Steynham Nevil was sure to be howling all day over his tumbled joss Shrapnel. Once away in the heart of the downs, and Cecilia beside him, it was a matter of calculation that two or three hours of the sharpening air would screw his human nature to the pitch. In fact, unless each of them was reluctant, they could hardly return unbetrothed. Cecilia’s consent was foreshadowed by her submission in going: Mr. Romfrey had noticed her fright at the suggestive formalities he cast round the expedition, and felt sure of her. Taking Nevil for a man who could smell the perfume

Page 2487

of a ripe affirmative on the sweetest of lips, he was pretty well sure of him likewise. And then a truce to all that Radical rageing and hot-pokering of the country! and lie in peace, old Shrapnel! and get on your legs when you can, and offend no more; especially be mindful not to let fly one word against a woman! With Cecilia for wife, and a year of marriage devoted to a son and heir, Nevil might be expected to resume his duties as a naval officer, and win an honourable name for the inheritance of the young one he kissed.

There was benevolence in these previsions of Mr. Romfrey, proving how good it is for us to bow to despotic authority, if only we will bring ourselves unquestioningly to accept the previous deeds of the directing hand.

Colonel Halkett gave up his daughter for lost when she did not appear at the breakfast-table: for yet more decidedly lost when the luncheon saw her empty place; and as time drew on toward the dinner-hour, he began to think her lost beyond hope, embarked for good and all with the madbrain. Some little hope of a dissension between the pair, arising from the natural antagonism of her strong sense to Nevil's extravagance, had buoyed him until it was evident that they must have alighted at an inn to eat, which signified that they had overleaped the world and its hurdles, and were as dreamy a leash of lovers as ever made a dreamland of hard earth. The downs looked like dreamland through the long afternoon. They shone as in a veil of silk-softly fair, softly dark. No spot of harshness was on them save where a quarry South-westward gaped at the evening sun.

Red light struck into that round chalk maw, and the green slopes and channels and half-circle hollows were brought a mile-stride higher Steynham by the level beams.

The poor old colonel fell to a more frequent repetition of the 'Well!' with which he had been unconsciously expressing his perplexed mind in the kennels and through the covers during the day. None of the gentlemen went to dress. Mr. Culbrett was indoors conversing with Rosamund Culling.

'What's come to them?' the colonel asked of Mr. Romfrey, who said shrugging, 'Something wrong with one of the horses.' It had happened to him on one occasion to set foot in the hole of a baked hedgehog that had furnished a repast, not without succulence, to some shepherd of the downs. Such a case might have recurred; it was more likely to cause an upset at a walk than at a gallop: or perhaps a shoe had been cast; and young people break no bones at a walking fall; ten to one if they do at their top speed. Horses manage to kill their seniors for them: the young are exempt from accident.

Colonel Halkett nodded and sighed: 'I daresay they're safe. It's that man Shrapnel's letter—that letter, Romfrey! A private letter, I know; but I've not heard Nevil disown the opinions expressed in it. I submit. It's no use resisting. I treat my daughter as a

woman capable of judging for herself. I repeat, I submit. I haven't a word against Nevil except on the score of his politics. I like him. All I have to say is, I don't approve of a republican and a sceptic for my son-in-law. I yield to you, and my daughter, if she . . . !'

Page 2488

’I think she does, colonel. Marriage ’ll cure the fellow. Nevil will slough his craze. Off! old coat. Cissy will drive him in strings. “My wife!” I hear him.’ Mr. Romfrey laughed quietly. ’It’s all “my country,” now. The dog’ll be uxorious. He wants fixing; nothing worse.’

‘How he goes on about Shrapnel!’

‘I shouldn’t think much of him if he didn’t.’

‘You’re one in a thousand, Romfrey. I object to seeing a man worshipped.’

‘It’s Nevil’s green-sickness, and Shrapnel’s the god of it.’

’I trust to heaven you’re right. It seems to me young fellows ought to be out of it earlier.’

‘They generally are.’ Mr. Romfrey named some of the processes by which they are relieved of brain-flightiness, adding philosophically, ’This way or that.’

His quick ear caught a sound of hoofs cantering down the avenue on the Northern front of the house.

He consulted his watch. ’Ten minutes to eight. Say a quarter-past for dinner. They’re here, colonel.’

Mr. Romfrey met Nevil returning from the stables. Cecilia had disappeared.

‘Had a good day?’ said Mr. Romfrey.

Beauchamp replied: ‘I’ll tell you of it after dinner,’ and passed by him.

Mr. Romfrey edged round to Colonel Halkett, conjecturing in his mind: They have not hit it; as he remarked: ’Breakfast and luncheon have been omitted in this day’s fare,’ which appeared to the colonel a confirmation of his worst fears, or rather the extinction of his last spark of hope.

He knocked at his daughter’s door in going upstairs to dress.

Cecilia presented herself and kissed him.

‘Well?’ said he.

‘By-and-by, papa,’ she answered. ’I have a headache. Beg Mr. Romfrey to excuse me.’

‘No news for me?’

She had no news.

Mrs. Culling was with her. The colonel stepped on mystified to his room.

When the door had closed Cecilia turned to Rosamund and burst into tears. Rosamund felt that it must be something grave indeed for the proud young lady so to betray a troubled spirit.

‘He is ill—Dr. Shrapnel is very ill,’ Cecilia responded to one or two subdued inquiries in as clear a voice as she could command.

‘Where have you heard of him?’ Rosamund asked.

‘We have been there.’

‘Bevisham? to Bevisham?’ Rosamund was considering the opinion Mr. Romfrey would form of the matter from the point of view of his horses.

‘It was Nevil’s wish,’ said Cecilia.

‘Yes? and you went with him,’ Rosamund encouraged her to proceed, gladdened at hearing her speak of Nevil by that name; ’you have not been on the downs at all?’

Page 2489

Cecilia mentioned a junction railway station they had ridden to; and thence, boxing the horses, by train to Bevisham. Rosamund understood that some haunting anxiety had fretted Nevil during the night; in the morning he could not withstand it, and he begged Cecilia to change their destination, apparently with a vehemence of entreaty that had been irresistible, or else it was utter affection for him had reduced her to undertake the distasteful journey. She admitted that she was not the most sympathetic companion Nevil could have had on the way, either going or coming. She had not entered Dr. Shrapnel's cottage. Remaining on horseback she had seen the poor man reclining in his garden chair. Mr. Lydiard was with him, and also his ward Miss Denham, who had been summoned by telegraph by one of the servants from Switzerland. And Cecilia had heard Nevil speak of his uncle to her, and too humbly, she hinted. Nor had the expression of Miss Denham's countenance in listening to him pleased her; but it was true that a heavily burdened heart cannot be expected to look pleasing. On the way home Cecilia had been compelled in some degree to defend Mr. Romfrey. Blushing through her tears at the remembrance of a past emotion that had been mixed with foresight, she confessed to Rosamund she thought it now too late to prevent a rupture between Nevil and his uncle. Had some one whom Nevil trusted and cared for taken counsel with him and advised him before uncle and nephew met to discuss this most unhappy matter, then there might have been hope. As it was, the fate of Dr. Shrapnel had gained entire possession of Nevil. Every retort of his uncle's in reference to it rose up in him: he used language of contempt neighbouring abhorrence: he stipulated for one sole thing to win back his esteem for his uncle; and that was, the apology to Dr. Shrapnel.

'And to-night,' Cecilia concluded, 'he will request Mr. Romfrey to accompany him to Bevisham to-morrow morning, to make the apology in person. He will not accept the slightest evasion. He thinks Dr. Shrapnel may die, and the honour of the family—what is it he says of it?' Cecilia raised her eyes to the ceiling, while Rosamund blinked in impatience and grief, just apprehending the alien state of the young lady's mind in her absence of recollection, as well as her bondage in the effort to recollect accurately.

'Have you not eaten any food to-day, Miss Halkett?' she said; for it might be the want of food which had broken her and changed her manner.

Cecilia replied that she had ridden for an hour to Mount Laurels.

'Alone? Mr. Romfrey must not hear of that,' said Rosamund.

Page 2490

Cecilia consented to lie down on her bed. She declined the dainties Rosamund pressed on her. She was feverish with a deep and unconcealed affliction, and behaved as if her pride had gone. But if her pride had gone she would have eased her heart by sobbing outright. A similar division harassed her as when her friend Nevil was the candidate for Bevisham. She condemned his extreme wrath with his uncle, yet was attracted and enchained by the fire of passionate attachment which aroused it: and she was conscious that she had but shown obedience to his wishes throughout the day, not sympathy with his feelings. Under cover of a patient desire to please she had nursed irritation and jealousy; the degradation of the sense of jealousy increasing the irritation. Having consented to the ride to Dr. Shrapnel, should she not, to be consistent, have dismounted there? O half heart! A whole one, though it be an erring, like that of the French lady, does at least live, and has a history, and makes music: but the faint and uncertain is jarred in action, jarred in memory, ever behind the day and in the shadow of it! Cecilia reviewed herself: jealous, disappointed, vexed, ashamed, she had been all day a graceless companion, a bad actress: and at the day's close she was loving Nevil the better for what had dissatisfied, distressed, and wounded her. She was loving him in emulation of his devotedness to another person: and that other was a revolutionary common people's doctor! an infidel, a traitor to his country's dearest interests! But Nevil loved him, and it had become impossible for her not to covet the love, or to think of the old offender without the halo cast by Nevil's attachment being upon him. So intensely was she moved by her intertwisting reflections that in an access of bodily fever she stood up and moved before the glass, to behold the image of the woman who could be the victim of these childish emotions: and no wonderful contrast struck her eyes; she appeared to herself as poor and small as they. How could she aspire to a man like Nevil Beauchamp? If he had made her happy by wooing her she would not have adored him as she did now. He likes my hair, she said, smoothing it out, and then pressing her temples, like one insane. Two minutes afterward she was telling Rosamund her head ached less.

'This terrible Dr. Shrapnel!' Rosamund exclaimed, but reported that no loud voices were raised in the dining-room.

Colonel Halkett came to see his daughter, full of anxiety and curiosity. Affairs had been peaceful below, for he was ignorant of the expedition to Bevisham. On hearing of it he frowned, questioned Cecilia as to whether she had set foot on that man's grounds, then said: 'Ah! well, we leave to-morrow: I must go, I have business at home; I can't delay it. I sanctioned no calling there, nothing of the kind. From Steynham to Bevisham? Goodness, it's rank madness. I'm not astonished you're sick and ill.'

Page 2491

He waited till he was assured Cecilia had no special matter to relate, and recommending her to drink the tea Mrs. Culling had made for her, and then go to bed and sleep, he went down to the drawing-room, charged with the worst form of hostility toward Nevil, the partly diplomatic.

Cecilia smiled at her father's mention of sleep. She was in the contest of the two men, however inanimately she might be lying overhead, and the assurance in her mind that neither of them would give ground, so similar were they in their tenacity of will, dissimilar in all else, dragged her this way and that till she swayed lifeless between them. One may be as a weed of the sea while one's fate is being decided. To love is to be on the sea, out of sight of land: to love a man like Nevil Beauchamp is to be on the sea in tempest. Still to persist in loving would be noble, and but for this humiliation of utter helplessness an enviable power. Her thoughts ran thus in shame and yearning and regret, dimly discerning where her heart failed in the strength which was Nevil's, though it was a full heart, faithful and not void of courage. But he never brooded, he never blushed from insufficiency-the faintness of a desire, the callow passion that cannot fly and feed itself: he never tottered; he walked straight to his mark. She set up his image and Renee's, and cowered under the heroical shapes till she felt almost extinct. With her weak limbs and head worthlessly paining, the little infantile I within her ceased to wail, dwindled beyond sensation. Rosamund, waiting on her in the place of her maid, saw two big drops come through her closed eyelids, and thought that if it could be granted to Nevil to look for a moment on this fair and proud young lady's loveliness in abandonment, it would tame, melt, and save him. The Gods presiding over custom do not permit such renovating sights to men.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Pursuit of the apology of Mr. *Romfrey to Dr*. *Shrapnel*

The contest, which was an alternation of hard hitting and close wrestling, had recommenced when Colonel Halkett stepped into the drawing-room.

'Colonel, I find they've been galloping to Bevisham and back,' said Mr. Romfrey.

'I've heard of it,' the colonel replied. Not perceiving a sign of dissatisfaction on his friend's face, he continued: 'To that man Shrapnel.'

'Cecilia did not dismount,' said Beauchamp.

'You took her to that man's gate. It was not with my sanction. You know my ideas of the man.'

'If you were to see him now, colonel, I don't think you would speak harshly of him.'

’We ’re not obliged to go and look on men who have, had their measure dealt them.’

‘Barbarously,’ said Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey in the most placid manner took a chair. ‘Windy talk, that!’ he said.

Page 2492

Colonel Halkett seated himself. Stukely Culbrett turned a sheet of manuscript he was reading.

Beauchamp began a caged lion's walk on the rug under the mantelpiece.

'I shall not spare you from hearing what I think of it, sir.'

'We 've had what you think of it twice over,' said Mr. Romfrey. 'I suppose it was the first time for information, the second time for emphasis, and the rest counts to keep it alive in your recollection.'

'This is what you have to take to heart, sir; that Dr. Shrapnel is now seriously ill.'

'I'm sorry for it, and I'll pay the doctor's bill.'

'You make it hard for me to treat you with respect.'

'Fire away. Those Radical friends of yours have to learn a lesson, and it's worth a purse to teach them that a lady, however feeble she may seem to them, is exactly of the strength of the best man of her acquaintance.'

'That's well said!' came from Colonel Halkett.

Beauchamp stared at him, amazed by the commendation of empty language.

'You acted in error; barbarously, but in error,' he addressed his uncle.

'And you have got a fine topic for mouthing,' Mr. Romfrey rejoined.

'You mean to sit still under Dr. Shrapnel's forgiveness?'

'He's taken to copy the Christian religion, has he?'

'You know you were deluded when you struck him.'

'Not a whit.'

'Yes, you know it now: Mrs. Culling—'

'Drag in no woman, Nevil Beauchamp!'

'She has confessed to you that Dr. Shrapnel neither insulted her nor meant to ruffle her.'

'She has done no such nonsense.'

'If she has not!—but I trust her to have done it.'

‘You play the trumpeter, you terrorize her.’

’Into opening her lips wider; nothing else. I’ll have the truth from her, and no mincing: and from Cecil Baskelett and Palmet.’

‘Give Cecil a second licking, if you can, and have him off to Shrapnel.’

‘You!’ cried Beauchamp.

At this juncture Stukely Culbrett closed the manuscript in his hands, and holding it out to Beauchamp, said:

’Here’s your letter, Nevil. It’s tolerably hard to decipher. It’s mild enough; it’s middling good pulpit. I like it.’

‘What have you got there?’ Colonel Halkett asked him.

’A letter of his friend Dr. Shrapnel on the Country. Read a bit, colonel.’

‘I? That letter! Mild, do you call it?’ The colonel started back his chair in declining to touch the letter.

‘Try it,’ said Stukely. ’It’s the letter they have been making the noise about. It ought to be printed. There’s a hit or two at the middle-class that I should like to see in print. It’s really not bad pulpit; and I suspect that what you object to, colonel, is only the dust of a well-thumped cushion. Shrapnel thumps with his fist. He doesn’t say much that’s new. If the parsons were men they’d be saying it every Sunday. If they did, colonel, I should hear you saying, amen.’

Page 2493

‘Wait till they do say it.’

’That’s a long stretch. They’re turn-cocks of one Water-company—to wash the greasy citizens!’

‘You’re keeping Nevil on the gape;’ said Mr. Romfrey, with a whimsical shrewd cast of the eye at Beauchamp, who stood alert not to be foiled, arrow-like in look and readiness to repeat his home-shot. Mr. Romfrey wanted to hear more of that unintelligible ‘You!’ of Beauchamp’s. But Stukely Culbrett intended that the latter should be foiled, and he continued his diversion from the angry subject.

‘We’ll drop the sacerdotals,’ he said. ’They’re behind a veil for us, and so are we for them. I’m with you, colonel; I wouldn’t have them persecuted; they sting fearfully when whipped. No one listens to them now except the class that goes to sleep under them, to “set an example” to the class that can’t understand them. Shrapnel is like the breeze shaking the turf-grass outside the church-doors; a trifle fresher. He knocks nothing down.’

‘He can’t!’ ejaculated the colonel.

‘He sermonizes to shake, that’s all. I know the kind of man.’

‘Thank heaven, it’s not a common species in England!’

‘Common enough to be classed.’

Beauchamp struck through the conversation of the pair: ’Can I see you alone to-night, sir, or to-morrow morning?’

‘You may catch me where you can,’ was Mr. Romfrey’s answer.

’Where’s that? It’s for your sake and mine, not for Dr. Shrapnel’s. I have to speak to you, and must. You have done your worst with him; you can’t undo it. You have to think of your honour as a gentleman. I intend to treat you with respect, but wolf is the title now, whether I say it or not.’

‘Shrapnel’s a rather long-legged sheep?’

‘He asks for nothing from you.’

‘He would have got nothing, at a cry of peccavi!’

’He was innocent, perfectly blameless; he would not lie to save himself.
You mistook that for—but you were an engine shot along a line of rails.
He does you the justice to say you acted in error.’

‘And you’re his parrot.’

‘He pardons you.’

‘Ha! t’ other cheek!’

’You went on that brute’s errand in ignorance. Will you keep to the character now you know the truth? Hesitation about it doubles the infamy. An old man! the best of men! the kindest and truest! the most unselfish!’

‘He tops me by half a head, and he’s my junior.’

Beauchamp suffered himself to give out a groan of sick derision: ‘Ah!’

‘And it was no joke holding him tight,’ said Mr. Romfrey, ’I ’d as lief snap an ash. The fellow (he leaned round to Colonel Halkett) must be a fellow of a fine constitution. And he took his punishment like a man. I’ve known worse: and far worse: gentlemen by birth. There’s the choice of taking it upright or fighting like a rabbit with a weasel in his hole. Leave him to think it over, he’ll come right. I think no harm of him, I’ve no animus. A man must have his lesson at some time of life. I did what I had to do.’

Page 2494

‘Look here, Nevil,’ Stukely Culbrett checked Beauchamp in season: ’I beg to inquire what Dr. Shrapnel means by “the people.” We have in our country the nobles and the squires, and after them, as I understand it, the people: that’s to say, the middle-class and the working-class—fat and lean. I’m quite with Shrapnel when he lashes the fleshpots. They want it, and they don’t get it from “their organ,” the Press. I fancy you and I agree about their organ; the dismallest organ that ever ground a hackneyed set of songs and hymns to madden the thoroughfares.’

‘The Press of our country!’ interjected Colonel Halkett in moaning parenthesis.

’It’s the week-day Parson of the middle-class, colonel. They have their thinking done for them as the Chinese have their dancing. But, Nevil, your Dr. Shrapnel seems to treat the traders as identical with the aristocracy in opposition to his “people.” The traders are the cursed middlemen, bad friends of the “people,” and infernally treacherous to the nobles till money hoists them. It’s they who pull down the country. They hold up the nobles to the hatred of the democracy, and the democracy to scare the nobles. One’s when they want to swallow a privilege, and the other’s when they want to ring-fence their gains. How is it Shrapnel doesn’t expose the trick? He must see through it. I like that letter of his. People is one of your Radical big words that burst at a query. He can’t mean Quince, and Bottom, and Starveling, Christopher Sly, Jack Cade, Caliban, and poor old Hodge? No, no, Nevil. Our clowns are the stupidest in Europe. They can’t cook their meals. They can’t spell; they can scarcely speak. They haven’t a jig in their legs. And I believe they’re losing their grin! They’re nasty when their blood’s up. Shakespeare’s Cade tells you what he thought of Radicalizing the people. “And as for your mother, I ’ll make her a duke”; that ’s one of their songs. The word people, in England, is a dyspeptic agitator’s dream when he falls nodding over the red chapter of French history. Who won the great liberties for England? My book says, the nobles. And who made the great stand later?—the squires. What have the middlemen done but bid for the people they despise and fear, dishonour us abroad and make a hash of us at home? Shrapnel sees that. Only he has got the word people in his mouth. The people of England, my dear fellow, want heading. Since the traders obtained power we have been a country on all fours. Of course Shrapnel sees it: I say so. But talk to him and teach him where to look for the rescue.’

Colonel Halkett said to Stukely: ’If you have had a clear idea in what you have just spoken, my head’s no place for it!’

Stukely’s unusually lengthy observations had somewhat heated him, and he protested with earnestness: ‘It was pure Tory, my dear colonel.’

But the habitually and professedly cynical should not deliver themselves at length: for as soon as they miss their customary incision of speech they are apt to aim to recover it in loquacity, and thus it may be that the survey of their ideas becomes disordered.

Page 2495

Mr. Culbrett endangered his reputation for epigram in a good cause, it shall be said.

These interruptions were torture to Beauchamp. Nevertheless the end was gained. He sank into a chair silent.

Mr. Romfrey wished to have it out with his nephew, of whose comic appearance as a man full of thunder, and occasionally rattling, yet all the while trying to be decorous and politic, he was getting tired. He foresaw that a tussle between them in private would possibly be too hot for his temper, admirably under control though it was.

'Why not drag Cecil to Shrapnel?' he said, for a provocation.

Beauchamp would not be goaded.

Colonel Halkett remarked that he would have to leave Steynham the next day. His host remonstrated with him. The colonel said: 'Early.' He had very particular business at home. He was positive, and declined every inducement to stay. Mr. Romfrey glanced at Nevil, thinking, You poor fool! And then he determined to let the fellow have five minutes alone with him.

This occurred at midnight, in that half-armoury, half-library, which was his private room.

Rosamund heard their voices below. She cried out to herself that it was her doing, and blamed her beloved, and her master, and Dr. Shrapnel, in the breath of her self-recrimination. The demagogue, the over-punctilious gentleman, the faint lover, surely it must be reason wanting in the three for each of them in turn to lead the other, by an excess of some sort of the quality constituting their men's natures, to wreck a calm life and stand in contention! Had Shrapnel been commonly reasonable he would have apologized to Mr. Romfrey, or had Mr. Romfrey, he would not have resorted to force to punish the supposed offender, or had Nevil, he would have held his peace until he had gained his bride. As it was; the folly of the three knocked at her heart, uniting to bring the heavy accusation against one poor woman, quite in the old way: the Who is she? of the mocking Spaniard at mention of a social catastrophe. Rosamund had a great deal of the pride of her sex, and she resented any slur on it. She felt almost superciliously toward Mr. Romfrey and Nevil for their not taking hands to denounce the plotter, Cecil Baskelett. They seemed a pair of victims to him, nearly as much so as the wretched man Shrapnel. It was their senselessness which made her guilty! And simply because she had uttered two or three exclamations of dislike of a revolutionary and infidel she was compelled to groan under her present oppression! Is there anything to be hoped of men? Rosamund thought bitterly of Nevil's idea of their progress. Heaven help them! But the unhappy creatures have ceased to look to a heaven for help.

We see the consequence of it in this Shrapnel complication.

Three men: and one struck down; the other defeated in his benevolent intentions; the third sacrificing fortune and happiness: all three owing their mischance to one or other of the vague ideas disturbing men's heads! Where shall we look for mother wit?—or say, common suckling's instinct? Not to men, thought Rosamund.

Page 2496

She was listening to the voices of Mr. Romfrey and Beauchamp in a fever. Ordinarily the lord of Steynham was not out of his bed later than twelve o'clock at night. His door opened at half-past one. Not a syllable was exchanged by the couple in the hall. They had fought it out. Mr. Romfrey came upstairs alone, and on the closing of his chamber-door she slipped down to Beauchamp and had a dreadful hour with him that subdued her disposition to sit in judgement upon men. The unavailing attempt to move his uncle had wrought him to the state in which passionate thoughts pass into speech like heat to flame. Rosamund strained her mental sight to gain a conception of his prodigious horror of the treatment of Dr. Shrapnel that she might think him sane: and to retain a vestige of comfort in her bosom she tried to moderate and make light of as much as she could conceive. Between the two efforts she had no sense but that of helplessness. Once more she was reduced to promise that she would speak the whole truth to Mr. Romfrey, even to the fact that she had experienced a common woman's jealousy of Dr. Shrapnel's influence, and had alluded to him jealously, spitefully, and falsely. There was no mercy in Beauchamp. He was for action at any cost, with all the forces he could gather, and without delays. He talked of Cecilia as his uncle's bride to him. Rosamund could hardly trust her ears when he informed her he had told his uncle of his determination to compel him to accomplish the act of penitence. 'Was it prudent to say it, Nevil?' she asked. But, as in his politics, he disdained prudence. A monstrous crime had been committed, involving the honour of the family. No subtlety of insinuation, no suggestion, could wean him from the fixed idea that the apology to Dr. Shrapnel must be spoken by his uncle in person.

'If one could only imagine Mr. Romfrey doing it!' Rosamund groaned.

'He shall: and you will help him,' said Beauchamp.

'If you loved a woman half as much as you do that man!'

'If I knew a woman as good, as wise, as noble as he!'

'You are losing her.'

'You expect me to go through ceremonies of courtship at a time like this! If she cares for me she will feel with me. Simple compassion—but let Miss Halkett be. I'm afraid I overtasked her in taking her to Bevisham. She remained outside the garden. Ma'am, she is unsullied by contact with a single shrub of Dr. Shrapnel's territory.'

'Do not be so bitterly ironical, Nevil. You have not seen her as I have.'

Rosamund essayed a tender sketch of the fair young lady, and fancied that she drew forth a sigh; she would have coloured the sketch, but he commanded her to hurry off to bed, and think of her morning's work.

A commission of which we feel we can accurately forecast the unsuccessful end is not likely to be undertaken with an ardour that might perhaps astound the presageing mind with unexpected issues. Rosamund fulfilled hers in the style of one who has learnt a lesson, and, exactly as she had anticipated, Mr. Romfrey accused her of coming to him from a conversation with that fellow Nevil overnight. He shrugged and left the house for his morning's walk across the fields.

Page 2497

Colonel Halkett and Cecilia beheld him from the breakfast-room returning with Beauchamp, who had waylaid him and was hammering his part in the now endless altercation. It could be descried at any distance; and how fine was Mr. Romfrey's bearing!—truly noble by contrast, as of a grave big dog worried by a small barking dog. There is to an unsympathetic observer an intense vexatiousness in the exhibition of such pertinacity. To a soldier accustomed at a glance to estimate powers of attack and defence, this repeated puny assailing of a, fortress that required years of siege was in addition ridiculous. Mr. Romfrey appeared impregnable, and Beauchamp mad. 'He's foaming again!' said the colonel, and was only ultra-pictorial. 'Before breakfast!' was a further slur on Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey was elevated by the extraordinary comicality of the notion of the proposed apology to heights of humour beyond laughter, whence we see the unbounded capacity of the general man for folly, and rather commiserate than deride him. He was quite untroubled. It demanded a steady view of the other side of the case to suppose of one whose control of his temper was perfect, that he could be in the wrong. He at least did not think so, and Colonel Halkett relied on his common sense. Beauchamp's brows were smouldering heavily, except when he had to talk. He looked paleish and worn, and said he had been up early. Cecilia guessed that he had not been to bed.

It was dexterously contrived by her host, in spite of the colonel's manifest anxiety to keep them asunder, that she should have some minutes with Beauchamp out in the gardens. Mr. Romfrey led them out, and then led the colonel away to offer him a choice of pups of rare breed.

'Nevil,' said Cecilia, 'you will not think it presumption in me to give you advice?'

Her counsel to him was, that he should leave Steynham immediately, and trust to time for his uncle to reconsider his conduct.

Beauchamp urged the counter-argument of the stain on the family honour.

She hinted at expediency; he frankly repudiated it.

The downs faced them, where the heavenly vast 'might have been' of yesterday wandered thinner than a shadow of to-day; weaving a story without beginning, crisis, or conclusion, flowerless and fruitless, but with something of infinite in it sweeter to brood on than the future of her life to Cecilia.

'If meanwhile Dr. Shrapnel should die, and repentance comes too late!' said Beauchamp.

She had no clear answer to that, save the hope of its being an unfounded apprehension. 'As far as it is in my power, Nevil, I will avoid injustice to him in my thoughts.'

He gazed at her thankfully. 'Well,' said he, 'that's like sighting the cliffs. But I don't feel home round me while the colonel is so strangely prepossessed. For a high-spirited gentleman like your father to approve, or at least accept, an act so barbarous is incomprehensible. Speak to him, Cecilia, will you? Let him know your ideas.'

Page 2498

She assented. He said instantly, 'Persuade him to speak to my uncle Everard.'

She was tempted to smile.

'I must do only what I think wise, if I am to be of service, Nevil.'

'True, but paint that scene to him. An old man, utterly defenceless, making no defence! a cruel error. The colonel can't, or he doesn't, clearly get it inside him, otherwise I'm certain it would revolt him: just as I am certain my uncle Everard is at this moment a stone-blind man. If he has done a thing, he can't question it, won't examine it. The thing becomes a part of him, as much as his hand or his head. He 's a man of the twelfth century. Your father might be helped to understand him first.'

'Yes,' she said, not very warmly, though sadly.

'Tell the colonel how it must have been brought about. For Cecil Baskelett called on Dr. Shrapnel two days before Mr. Romfrey stood at his gate.'

The name of Cecil caused her to draw in her shoulders in a half-shudder. 'It may indeed be Captain Baskelett who set this cruel thing in motion!'

'Then point that out to your father, said he, perceiving a chance of winning her to his views through a concrete object of her dislike, and cooling toward the woman who betrayed a vulgar characteristic of her sex; who was merely woman, unable sternly to recognize the doing of a foul wrong because of her antipathy, until another antipathy enlightened her.

He wanted in fact a ready-made heroine, and did not give her credit for the absence of fire in her blood, as well as for the unexercised imagination which excludes young women from the power to realize unwonted circumstances. We men walking about the world have perhaps no more imagination of matters not domestic than they; but what we have is quick with experience: we see the thing we hear of: women come to it how they can.

Cecilia was recommended to weave a narrative for her father, and ultimately induce him, if she could, to give a gentleman's opinion of the case to Mr. Romfrey.

Her sensitive ear caught a change of tone in the directions she received. 'Your father will say so and so: answer him with this and that.' Beauchamp supplied her with phrases. She was to renew and renew the attack; hammer as he did. Yesterday she had followed him: to-day she was to march beside him—hardly as an equal. Patience! was the word she would have uttered in her detection of the one frailty in his nature which this hurrying of her off her feet opened her eyes to with unusual perspicacity. Still she leaned to him sufficiently to admit that he had grounds for a deep disturbance of his feelings.

He said: 'I go to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage, and don't know how to hold up my head before Miss Denham. She confided him to me when she left for Switzerland!'

There was that to be thought of, certainly.

Colonel Halkett came round a box-bush and discovered them pacing together in a fashion to satisfy his paternal scrutiny.

Page 2499

‘I’ve been calling you several times, my dear,’ he complained. ’We start in seven minutes. Bustle, and bonnet at once. Nevil, I’m sorry for this business. Good-bye. Be a good boy, Nevil,’ he murmured kindheartedly, and shook Beauchamp’s hand with the cordiality of an extreme relief in leaving him behind.

The colonel and Mr. Romfrey and Beauchamp were standing on the hall-steps when Rosamund beckoned the latter and whispered a request for that letter of Dr. Shrapnel’s. ‘It is for Miss Halkett, Nevil.’

He plucked the famous epistle from his bulging pocketbook, and added a couple of others in the same handwriting.

‘Tell her, a first reading—it’s difficult to read at first,’ he said, and burned to read it to Cecilia himself: to read it to her with his comments and explanations appeared imperative. It struck him in a flash that Cecilia’s counsel to him to quit Steynham for awhile was good. And if he went to Bevisham he would be assured of Dr. Shrapnel’s condition: notes and telegrams from the cottage were too much tempered to console and deceive him.

‘Send my portmanteau and bag after me to Bevisham,’ he said Rosamund, and announced to the woefully astonish colonel that he would have the pleasure of journeying in his company as far as the town.

‘Are you ready? No packing?’ said the colonel.

‘It’s better to have your impediments in the rear of you, and march!’ said Mr. Romfrey.

Colonel Halkett declined to wait for anybody. He shouted for his daughter. The lady’s maid appeared, and then Cecilia with Rosamund.

‘We can’t entertain you, Nevil; we’re away to the island: I’m sorry,’ said the colonel; and observing Cecilia’s face in full crimson, he looked at her as if he had lost a battle by the turn of events at the final moment.

Mr. Romfrey handed Cecilia into the carriage. He exchanged a friendly squeeze with the colonel, and offered his hand to his nephew. Beauchamp passed him with a nod and ‘Good-bye, sir.’

‘Have ready at Holdesbury for the middle of the month,’ said Mr. Romfrey, unruffled, and bowed to Cecilia.

‘If you think of bringing my cousin Baskelett, give me warning, sir,’ cried Beauchamp.

‘Give me warning, if you want the house for Shrapnel,’ replied his uncle, and remarked to Rosamund, as the carriage wheeled round the mounded laurels to the avenue, ’He

mayn’t be quite cracked. The fellow seems to have a turn for catching his opportunity by the tail. He had better hold fast, for it’s his last.’

CHAPTER XXXVII

CECILIA CONQUERED

Page 2500

The carriage rolled out of the avenue and through the park, for some time parallel with the wavy downs. Once away from Steynham Colonel Halkett breathed freely, as if he had dropped a load: he was free of his bond to Mr. Romfrey, and so great was the sense of relief in him that he resolved to do battle against his daughter, supposing her still lively blush to be the sign of the enemy's flag run up on a surrendered citadel. His authority was now to be thought of: his paternal sanction was in his own keeping. Beautiful as she looked, it was hardly credible that a fellow in possession of his reason could have let slip his chance of such a prize; but whether he had or had not, the colonel felt that he occupied a position enabling him either to out-manoeuvre, or, if need were, interpose forcibly and punish him for his half-heartedness.

Cecilia looked the loveliest of women to Beauchamp's eyes, with her blush, and the letters of Dr. Shrapnel in her custody, at her express desire. Certain terms in the letters here and there, unsweet to ladies, began to trouble his mind.

'By the way, colonel,' he said, 'you had a letter of Dr. Shrapnel's read to you by Captain Baskelett.'

'Iniquitous rubbish!'

'With his comments on it, I dare say you thought it so. I won't speak of his right to make it public. He wanted to produce his impressions of it and me, and that is a matter between him and me. Dr. Shrapnel makes use of strong words now and then, but I undertake to produce a totally different impression on you by reading the letter myself —sparing you' (he turned to Cecilia) 'a word or two, common enough to men who write in black earnest and have humour.' He cited his old favourite, the black and bright lecturer on Heroes. 'You have read him, I know, Cecilia. Well, Dr. Shrapnel is another, who writes in his own style, not the leading-article style or modern pulpit stuff. He writes to rouse.'

'He does that to my temper,' said the colonel.

'Perhaps here and there he might offend Cecilia's taste,' Beauchamp pursued for her behoof. 'Everything depends on the mouthpiece. I should not like the letter to be read without my being by;—except by men: any just-minded man may read it: Seymour Austin, for example. Every line is a text to the mind of the writer. Let me call on you to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?' Colonel Halkett put on a thoughtful air. 'To-morrow we're off to the island for a couple of days; and there's Lord Croyston's garden party, and the Yacht Ball. Come this evening-dine with us. No reading of letters, please. I can't stand it, Nevil.'

The invitation was necessarily declined by a gentleman who could not expect to be followed by supplies of clothes and linen for evening wear that day.

‘Ah, we shall see you some day or other,’ said the colonel.

Cecilia was less alive to Beauchamp’s endeavour to prepare her for the harsh words in the letter than to her father’s insincerity. She would have asked her friend to come in the morning next day, but for the dread of deepening her blush.

Page 2501

‘Do you intend to start so early in the morning, papa?’ she ventured to say; and he replied, ‘As early as possible.’

’I don’t know what news I shall have in Bevisham, or I would engage to run over to the island,’ said Beauchamp, with a flattering persistency or singular obtuseness.

‘You will dance,’ he subsequently observed to Cecilia, out of the heart of some reverie. He had been her admiring partner on the night before the drive from Itchincope into Bevisham, and perhaps thought of her graceful dancing at the Yacht Ball, and the contrast it would present to his watch beside a sick man-struck down by one of his own family.

She could have answered, ‘Not if you wish me not to’; while smiling at the quaint sorrowfulness of his tone.

‘Dance!’ quoth Colonel Halkett, whose present temper discerned a healthy antagonism to misanthropic Radicals in the performance, ’all young people dance. Have you given over dancing?’

‘Not entirely, colonel.’

Cecilia danced with Mr. Tuckham at the Yacht Ball, and was vividly mindful of every slight incident leading to and succeeding her lover’s abrupt, ‘You will dance’ which had all passed by her dream-like up to that hour his attempt to forewarn her of the phrases she would deem objectionable in Dr. Shrapnel’s letter; his mild acceptation of her father’s hostility; his adieu to her, and his melancholy departure on foot from the station, as she drove away to Mount Laurels and gaiety. Why do I dance? she asked herself. It was not in the spirit of happiness. Her heart was not with Dr. Shrapnel, but very near him, and heavy as a chamber of the sick. She was afraid of her father’s favourite, imagining, from the colonel’s unconcealed opposition to Beauchamp, that he had designs in the interests of Mr. Tuckham. But the hearty gentleman scattered her secret terrors by his bluffness and openness. He asked her to remember that she had recommended him to listen to Seymour Austin, and he had done so, he said. Undoubtedly he was much improved, much less overbearing.

He won her confidence by praising and loving her father, and when she alluded to the wonderful services he had rendered on the Welsh estate, he said simply that her father’s thanks repaid him. He recalled his former downrightness only in speaking of the case of Dr. Shrapnel, upon which, both with the colonel and with her, he was unreservedly condemnatory of Mr. Romfrey. Colonel Halkett’s defence of the true knight and guardian of the reputation of ladies, fell to pieces in the presence of Mr. Tuckham. He had seen Dr. Shrapnel, on a visit to Mr. Lydiard, whom he described as hanging about Bevisham, philandering as a married man should not, though in truth he might soon expect to be released by the death of his crazy wife. The doctor, he said, had

been severely shaken by the monstrous assault made on him, and had been most unrighteously handled. The doctor was an inoffensive man in his private life, detestable and

Page 2502

dangerous though his teachings were. Outside politics Mr. Tuckham went altogether with Beauchamp. He promised also that old Mrs. Beauchamp should be accurately informed of the state of matters between Captain Beauchamp and Mr. Romfrey. He left Mount Laurels to go back in attendance on the venerable lady, without once afflicting Cecilia with a shiver of well-founded apprehension, and she was grateful to him almost to friendly affection in the vanishing of her unjust suspicion, until her father hinted that there was the man of his heart. Then she closed all avenues to her own.

A period of maidenly distress not previously unknown to her ensued. Proposals of marriage were addressed to her by two untitled gentlemen, and by the Earl of Lockrace: three within a fortnight. The recognition of the young heiress's beauty at the Yacht Ball was accountable for the bursting out of these fires. Her father would not have deplored her acceptance of the title of Countess of Lockrace. In the matter of rejections, however, her will was paramount, and he was on her side against relatives when the subject was debated among them. He called her attention to the fact impressively, telling her that she should not hear a syllable from him to persuade her to marry: the emphasis of which struck the unspoken warning on her intelligence: Bring no man to me of whom I do not approve!

'Worthier of you, as I hope to become,' Beauchamp had said. Cecilia lit on that part of Dr. Shrapnel's letter where 'Fight this out within you,' distinctly alluded to the unholy love. Could she think ill of the man who thus advised him? She shared Beauchamp's painful feeling for him in a sudden tremour of her frame; as it were through his touch. To the rest of the letter her judgement stood opposed, save when a sentence here and there reminded her of Captain Baskelett's insolent sing-song declamation of it: and that would have turned Sacred Writing to absurdity.

Beauchamp had mentioned Seymour Austin as one to whom he would willingly grant a perusal of the letter. Mr. Austin came to Mount Laurels about the close of the yachting season, shortly after Colonel Halkett had spent his customary days of September shooting at Steynham. Beauchamp's folly was the colonel's theme, for the fellow had dragged Lord Palmet there, and driven his uncle out of patience. Mr. Romfrey's monumental patience had been exhausted by him. The colonel boiled over with accounts of Beauchamp's behaviour toward his uncle, and Palmet, and Baskelett, and Mrs. Culling: how he flew at and worried everybody who seemed to him to have had a hand in the proper chastisement of that man Shrapnel. That pestiferous letter of Shrapnel's was animadverted on, of course; and, 'I should like you to have heard it, Austin,' the colonel said, 'just for you to have a notion of the kind of universal blow-up those men are scheming, and would hoist us with, if they could get a little more blasting-powder than they mill in their lunatic heads.'

Page 2503

Now Cecilia wished for Mr. Austin's opinion of Dr. Shrapnel; and as the delicate state of her inclinations made her conscious that to give him the letter covertly would be to betray them to him, who had once, not knowing it, moved her to think of a possible great change in her life, she mustered courage to say, 'Captain Beauchamp at my request lent me the letter to read; I have it, and others written by Dr. Shrapnel.'

Her father hummed to himself, and immediately begged Seymour Austin not to waste his time on the stuff, though he had no idea that a perusal of it could awaken other than the gravest reprehension in so rational a Tory gentleman.

Mr. Austin read the letter through. He asked to see the other letters mentioned by Cecilia, and read them calmly, without a frown or an interjection. She sat sketching, her father devouring newspaper columns.

'It's the writing of a man who means well,' Mr. Austin delivered his opinion.

'Why, the man's an infidel!' Colonel Halkett exclaimed.

'There are numbers.'

'They have the grace not to confess, then.'

'It's as well to know what the world's made of, colonel. The clergy shut their eyes. There's no treating a disease without reading it; and if we are to acknowledge a "vice," as Dr. Shrapnel would say of the so-called middle-class, it is the smirking over what they think, or their not caring to think at all. Too many time-servers rot the State. I can understand the effect of such writing on a mind like Captain Beauchamp's. It would do no harm to our young men to have those letters read publicly and lectured on-by competent persons. Half the thinking world may think pretty much the same on some points as Dr. Shrapnel; they are too wise or too indolent to say it: and of the other half, about a dozen members would be competent to reply to him. He is the earnest man, and flies at politics as uneasy young brains fly to literature, fancying they can write because they can write with a pen. He perceives a bad adjustment of things: which is correct. He is honest, and takes his honesty for a virtue: and that entitles him to believe in himself: and that belief causes him to see in all opposition to him the wrong he has perceived in existing circumstances: and so in a dream of power he invokes the people: and as they do not stir, he takes to prophecy. This is the round of the politics of impatience. The study of politics should be guided by some light of statesmanship, otherwise it comes to this wild preaching.

These men are theory-tailors, not politicians. They are the men who make the "strait-waistcoat for humanity." They would fix us to first principles like tethered sheep or hobbled horses. I should enjoy replying to him, if I had time. The whole letter is

composed of variations upon one idea. Still I must say the man interests me; I should like to talk to him.'

Page 2504

Mr. Austin paid no heed to the colonel's 'Dear me! dear me!' of amazement. He said of the style of the letters, that it was the puffing of a giant: a strong wind rather than speech: and begged Cecilia to note that men who labour to force their dreams on mankind and turn vapour into fact, usually adopt such a style. Hearing that this private letter had been deliberately read through by Mr. Romfrey, and handed by him to Captain Baskelett, who had read it out in various places, Mr. Austin said:

'A strange couple!' He appeared perplexed by his old friend's approval of them. 'There we decidedly differ,' said he, when the case of Dr. Shrapnel was related by the colonel, with a refusal to condemn Mr. Romfrey. He pronounced Mr. Romfrey's charges against Dr. Shrapnel, taken in conjunction with his conduct, to be baseless, childish, and wanton. The colonel would not see the case in that light; but Cecilia did. It was a justification of Beauchamp; and how could she ever have been blind to it?—scarcely blind, she remembered, but sensitively blinking her eyelids to distract her sight in contemplating it, and to preserve her repose. As to Beauchamp's demand of the apology, Mr. Austin considered that it might be an instance of his want of knowledge of men, yet could not be called silly, and to call it insane was the rhetoric of an adversary.

'I do call it insane,' said the colonel.

He separated himself from his daughter by a sharp division.

Had Beauchamp appeared at Mount Laurels, Cecilia would have been ready to support and encourage him, boldly. Backed by Mr. Austin, she saw some good in Dr. Shrapnel's writing, much in Beauchamp's devotedness. He shone clear to her reason, at last: partly because her father in his opposition to him did not, but was on the contrary unreasonable, cased in mail, mentally clouded. She sat with Mr. Austin and her father, trying repeatedly, in obedience to Beauchamp's commands, to bring the latter to a just contemplation of the unhappy case; behaviour on her part which rendered the colonel inveterate.

Beauchamp at this moment was occupied in doing secretary's work for Dr. Shrapnel. So Cecilia learnt from Mr. Lydiard, who came to pay his respects to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux at Mount Laurels. The pursuit of the apology was continued in letters to his uncle and occasional interviews with him, which were by no means instigated by the doctor, Mr. Lydiard informed the ladies. He described Beauchamp as acting in the spirit of a man who has sworn an oath to abandon every pleasure in life, that he may, as far as it lies in his power, indemnify his friend for the wrong done to him.

'Such men are too terrible for me,' said Mrs. Devereux.

Cecilia thought the reverse: Not for me! But she felt a strain upon her nature, and she was miserable in her alienation from her father. Kissing him one night, she laid her head on his breast, and begged his forgiveness. He embraced her tenderly. 'Wait, only

wait; you will see I am right,’ he said, and prudently said no more, and did not ask her to speak.

Page 2505

She was glad that she had sought the reconciliation from her heart's natural warmth, on hearing some time later that M. de Croisnel was dead, and that Beauchamp meditated starting for France to console his Renee. Her continual agitations made her doubtful of her human feelings: she clung to that instance of her filial stedfastness.

The day before Cecilia and her father left Mount Laurels for their season in Wales, Mr. Tuckham and Beauchamp came together to the house, and were closeted an hour with her father. Cecilia sat in the drawing-room, thinking that she did indeed wait, and had great patience. Beauchamp entered the room alone. He looked worn and thin, of a leaden colour, like the cloud that bears the bolt. News had reached him of the death of Lord Avonley in the hunting-field, and he was going on to Steynham to persuade his uncle to accompany him to Bevisham and wash the guilt of his wrong-doing off him before applying for the title. 'You would advise me not to go?' he said. 'I must. I should be dishonoured myself if I let a chance pass. I run the risk of being a beggar: I'm all but one now.'

Cecilia faltered: 'Do you see a chance?'

'Hardly more than an excuse for trying it,' he replied.

She gave him back Dr. Shrapnel's letters. 'I have read them,' was all she said. For he might have just returned from France, with the breath of Renee about him, and her pride would not suffer her to melt him in rivalry by saying what she had been led to think of the letters.

Hearing nothing from her, he silently put them in his pocket. The struggle with his uncle seemed to be souring him or deadening him.

They were not alone for long. Mr. Tuckham presented himself to take his leave of her. Old Mrs. Beauchamp was dying, and he had only come to Mount Laurels on special business. Beauchamp was just as anxious to hurry away.

Her father found her sitting in the solitude of a drawing-room at midday, pale-faced, with unoccupied fingers, not even a book in her lap.

He walked up and down the room until Cecilia, to say something, said: 'Mr. Tuckham could not stay.'

'No,' said her father; 'he could not. He has to be back as quick as he can to cut his legacy in halves!'

Cecilia looked perplexed.

'I'll speak plainly,' said the colonel. 'He sees that Nevil has ruined himself with his uncle. The old lady won't allow Nevil to visit her; in her condition it would be an

excitement beyond her strength to bear. She sent Blackburn to bring Nevil here, and give him the option of stating before me whether those reports about his misconduct in France were true or not. He demurred at first: however, he says they are not true. He would have run away with the Frenchwoman, and he would have fought the duel: but he did neither. Her brother ran ahead of him and fought for him: so he declares and she wouldn't run. So the reports are false. We shall know what Blackburn

Page 2506

makes of the story when we hear of the legacy. I have been obliged to write word to Mrs. Beauchamp that I believe Nevil to have made a true statement of the facts. But I distinctly say, and so I told Blackburn, I don't think money will do Nevil Beauchamp a farthing's worth of good. Blackburn follows his own counsel. He induced the old lady to send him; so I suppose he intends to let her share the money between them. I thought better of him; I thought him a wiser man.'

Gratitude to Mr. Tuckham on Beauchamp's behalf caused Cecilia to praise him, in the tone of compliments. The difficulty of seriously admiring two gentlemen at once is a feminine dilemma, with the maidenly among women.

'He has disappointed me,' said Colonel Halkett.

'Would you have had him allow a falsehood to enrich him and ruin Nevil, papa?'

'My dear child, I'm sick to death of romantic fellows. I took Blackburn for one of our solid young men. Why should he share his aunt's fortune?'

'You mean, why should Nevil have money?'

'Well, I do mean that. Besides, the story was not false as far as his intentions went: he confessed it, and I ought to have put it in a postscript. If Nevil wants money, let him learn to behave himself like a gentleman at Steynham.'

'He has not failed.'

'I'll say, then, behave himself, simply. He considers it a point of honour to get his uncle Everard to go down on his knees to Shrapnel. But he has no moral sense where I should like to see it: none: he confessed it.'

'What were his words, papa?'

'I don't remember words. He runs over to France, whenever it suits him, to carry on there . . .' The colonel ended in a hum and buzz.

'Has he been to France lately?' asked Cecilia.

Her breath hung for the answer, sedately though she sat.

'The woman's father is dead, I hear,' Colonel Halkett remarked.

'But he has not been there?'

'How can I tell? He's anywhere, wherever his passions whisk him.'

‘No!’

’I say, yes. And if he has money, we shall see him going sky-high and scattering it in sparks, not merely spending; I mean living immorally, infidelizing, republicanizing, scandalizing his class and his country.’

‘Oh no!’ exclaimed Cecilia, rising and moving to the window to feast her eyes on driving clouds, in a strange exaltation of mind, secretly sure now that her idea of Nevil’s having gone over to France was groundless; and feeling that she had been unworthy of him who strove to be ’worthier of her, as he hoped to become.’

Colonel Halkett scoffed at her ‘Oh no,’ and called it woman’s logic.

She could not restrain herself. ’Have you forgotten Mr. Austin, papa? It is Nevil’s perfect truthfulness that makes him appear worse to you than men who are timeservers. Too many time-servers rot the State, Mr. Austin said. Nevil is not one of them. I am not able to judge or speculate whether he has a great brain or is likely to distinguish himself out of his profession: I would rather he did not abandon it: but Mr. Austin said to me in talking of him . . .’

Page 2507

’That notion of Austin’s of screwing women’s minds up to the pitch of men’s!’ interjected the colonel with a despairing flap of his arm.

’He said, papa, that honestly active men in a country, who decline to practise hypocrisy, show that the blood runs, and are a sign of health.’

‘You misunderstood him, my dear.’

’I think I thoroughly understood him. He did not call them wise. He said they might be dangerous if they were not met in debate. But he said, and I presume to think truly, that the reason why they are decried is, that it is too great a trouble for a lazy world to meet them. And, he said, the reason why the honest factions agitate is because they encounter sneers until they appear in force. If they were met earlier, and fairly—I am only quoting him—they would not, I think he said, or would hardly, or would not generally, fall into professional agitation.’

‘Austin’s a speculative Tory, I know; and that’s his weakness,’ observed the colonel. ’But I’m certain you misunderstood him. He never would have called us a lazy people.’

‘Not in matters of business: in matters of thought.’

’My dear Cecilia! You’ve got hold of a language!.... a way of speaking! .... Who set you thinking on these things?’

’That I owe to Nevil Beauchamp!

Colonel Halkett indulged in a turn or two up and down the room. He threw open a window, sniffed the moist air, and went to his daughter to speak to her resolutely.

’Between a Radical and a Tory, I don’t know where your head has been whirled to, my dear. Your heart seems to be gone: more sorrow for us! And for Nevil Beauchamp to be pretending to love you while carrying on with this Frenchwoman!’

‘He has never said that he loved me.’

The splendour of her beauty in humility flashed on her father, and he cried out: ’You are too good for any man on earth! We won’t talk in the dark, my darling. You tell me he has never, as they say, made love to you?’

‘Never, papa.’

’Well, that proves the French story. At any rate, he ’s a man of honour. But you love him?’

‘The French story is untrue, papa.’

Cecilia stood in a blush like the burning cloud of the sunset.'

'Tell me frankly: I'm your father, your old dada, your friend, my dear girl! do you think the man cares for you, loves you?'

She replied: 'I know, papa, the French story is untrue.'

'But when I tell you, silly woman, he confessed it to me out of his own mouth!'

'It is not true now.'

'It's not going on, you mean? How do you know?'

'I know.'

'Has he been swearing it?'

'He has not spoken of it to me.'

'Here I am in a woman's web!' cried the colonel. 'Is it your instinct tells you it's not true? or what? what? You have not denied that you love the man.'

'I know he is not immoral.'

Page 2508

‘There you shoot again! Haven’t you a yes or a no for your father?’

Cecilia cast her arms round his neck, and sobbed.

She could not bring it to her lips to say (she would have shunned the hearing) that her defence of Beauchamp, which was a shadowed avowal of the state of her heart, was based on his desire to read to her the conclusion of Dr. Shrapnel’s letter touching a passion to be overcome; necessarily therefore a passion that was vanquished, and the fullest and bravest explanation of his shifting treatment of her: nor would she condescend to urge that her lover would have said he loved her when they were at Steynham, but for the misery and despair of a soul too noble to be diverted from his grief and sense of duty, and, as she believed, unwilling to speak to win her while his material fortune was in jeopardy.

The colonel cherished her on his breast, with one hand regularly patting her shoulder: a form of consolation that cures the disposition to sob as quickly as would the drip of water.

Cecilia looked up into his eyes, and said, ’We will not be parted, papa, ever.’

The colonel said absently: ‘No’; and, surprised at himself, added: ’No, certainly not. How can we be parted? You won’t run away from me? No, you know too well I can’t resist you. I appeal to your judgement, and I must accept what you decide. But he is immoral. I repeat that. He has no roots. We shall discover it before it’s too late, I hope.’

Cecilia gazed away, breathing through tremulous dilating nostrils.

‘One night after dinner at Steynham,’ pursued the colonel, ’Nevil was rattling against the Press, with Stukely Culbrett to prime him: and he said editors of papers were growing to be like priests, and as timid as priests, and arrogant: and for one thing, it was because they supposed themselves to be guardians of the national morality. I forget exactly what the matter was: but he sneered at priests and morality.’

A smile wove round Cecilia’s lips, and in her towering superiority to one who talked nonsense, she slipped out of maiden shame and said: ’Attack Nevil for his political heresies and his wrath with the Press for not printing him. The rest concerns his honour, where he is quite safe, and all are who trust him.’

‘If you find out you’re wrong?’

She shook her head.

‘But if you find out you’re wrong about him,’ her father reiterated piteously, ‘you won’t tear me to strips to have him in spite of it?’

‘No, papa, not I. I will not.’

‘Well, that’s something for me to hold fast to,’ said Colonel Halkett, sighing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LORD AVONLEY

Page 2509

Mr. Everard Romfrey was now, by consent, Lord Avonley, mounted on his direct heirship and riding hard at the earldom. His elevation occurred at a period of life that would have been a season of decay with most men; but the prolonged and lusty Autumn of the veteran took new fires from a tangible object to live for. His brother Craven's death had slightly stupefied, and it had grieved him: it seemed to him peculiarly pathetic; for as he never calculated on the happening of mortal accidents to men of sound constitution, the circumstance imparted a curious shake to his own solidity. It was like the quaking of earth, which tries the balance of the strongest. If he had not been raised to so splendid a survey of the actual world, he might have been led to think of the imaginary, where perchance a man may meet his old dogs and a few other favourites, in a dim perpetual twilight. Thither at all events Craven had gone, and goodnight to him! The earl was a rapidly lapsing invalid. There could be no doubt that Everard was to be the head of his House.

Outwardly he was the same tolerant gentleman who put aside the poor fools of the world to walk undisturbed by them in the paths he had chosen: in this aspect he knew himself: nor was the change so great within him as to make him cognizant of a change. It was only a secret turn in the bent of the mind, imperceptible as the touch of the cunning artist's brush on a finished portrait, which will alter the expression without discomposing a feature, so that you cannot say it is another face, yet it is not the former one. His habits were invariable, as were his meditations. He thought less of Romfrey Castle than of his dogs and his devices for trapping vermin; his interest in birds and beasts and herbs, 'what ninnies call Nature in books,' to quote him, was undiminished; imagination he had none to clap wings to his head and be off with it. He betrayed as little as he felt that the coming Earl of Romfrey was different from the cadet of the family.

A novel sharpness in the 'Stop that,' with which he crushed Beauchamp's affectedly gentle and unusually roundabout opening of the vexed Shrapnel question, rang like a shot in the room at Steynham, and breathed a different spirit from his customary easy pugnacity that welcomed and lured on an adversary to wild outhitting. Some sorrowful preoccupation is, however, to be expected in the man who has lost a brother, and some degree of irritability at the intrusion of past disputes. He chose to repeat a similar brief forbidding of the subject before they started together for the scene of the accident and Romfrey Castle. No notice was taken of Beauchamp's remark, that he consented to go though his duty lay elsewhere. Beauchamp had not the faculty of reading inside men, or he would have apprehended that his uncle was engaged in silently heaping aggravations to shoot forth one fine day a thundering and astonishing counterstroke.

He should have known his uncle Everard better.

Page 2510

In this respect he seemed to have no memory. But who has much that has given up his brains for a lodging to a single idea? It is at once a devouring dragon, and an intractable steamforce; it is a tyrant that has eaten up a senate, and a prophet with a message. Inspired of solitariness and gigantic size, it claims divine origin. The world can have no peace for it.

Cecilia had not pleased him; none had. He did not bear in mind that the sight of Dr. Shrapnel sick and weak, which constantly reanimated his feelings of pity and of wrath, was not given to the others of whom he demanded a corresponding energy of just indignation and sympathy. The sense that he was left unaided to the task of bending his tough uncle, combined with his appreciation of the righteousness of the task to embitter him and set him on a pedestal, from which he descended at every sign of an opportunity for striking, and to which he retired continually baffled and wrathful, in isolation.

Then ensued the dreadful division in his conception of his powers: for he who alone saw the just and right thing to do, was incapable of compelling it to be done. Lay on to his uncle as he would, that wrestler shook him off. And here was one man whom he could not move! How move a nation?

There came on him a thirst for the haranguing of crowds. They agree with you or they disagree; exciting you to activity in either case. They do not interpose cold Tory exclusiveness and inaccessibility. You have them in the rough; you have nature in them, and all that is hopeful in nature. You drive at, over, and through them, for their good; you plough them. You sow them too. Some of them perceive that it is for their good, and what if they be a minority? Ghastly as a minority is in an Election, in a lifelong struggle it is refreshing and encouraging. The young world and its triumph is with the minority. Oh to be speaking! Condemned to silence beside his uncle, Beauchamp chafed for a loosed tongue and an audience tossing like the well-whipped ocean, or open as the smooth sea-surface to the marks of the breeze. Let them be hostile or amicable, he wanted an audience as hotly as the humped Richard a horse.

At Romfrey Castle he fell upon an audience that became transformed into a swarm of chatterers, advisers, and reprovers the instant his lips were parted. The ladies of the family declared his pursuit of the Apology to be worse and vainer than his politics. The gentlemen said the same, but they were not so outspoken to him personally, and indulged in asides, with quotations of some of his uncle Everard's recent observations concerning him: as for example, 'Politically he's a mad harlequin jumping his tights and spangles when nobody asks him to jump; and in private life he's a mad dentist poking his tongs at my sound tooth:' a highly ludicrous image of the persistent fellow, and a reminder of situations in Moliere, as it was acted by Cecil Baskelett and Lord Welshpool. Beauchamp had to

Page 2511

a certain extent restored himself to favour with his uncle Everard by offering a fair suggestion on the fatal field to account for the accident, after the latter had taken measurements and examined the place in perplexity. His elucidation of the puzzle was referred to by Lord Avonley at Romfrey, and finally accepted as possible and this from a wiseacre who went quacking about the county, expecting to upset the order of things in England! Such a mixing of sense and nonsense in a fellow's noddle was never before met with, Lord Avonley said. Cecil took the hint. He had been unworried by Beauchamp: Dr. Shrapnel had not been mentioned: and it delighted Cecil to let it be known that he thought old Nevil had some good notions, particularly as to the duties of the aristocracy—that first war-cry of his when a midshipman. News of another fatal accident in the hunting-field confirmed Cecil's higher opinion of his cousin. On the day of Craven's funeral they heard at Romfrey that Mr. Wardour-Devereux had been killed by a fall from his horse. Two English gentlemen despatched by the same agency within a fortnight! 'He smoked,' Lord Avonley said of the second departure, to allay some perturbation in the bosoms of the ladies who had ceased to ride, by accounting for this particular mishap in the most reassuring fashion. Cecil's immediate reflection was that the unfortunate smoker had left a rich widow. Far behind in the race for Miss Halkett, and uncertain of a settled advantage in his other rivalry with Beauchamp, he fixed his mind on the widow, and as Beauchamp did not stand in his way, but on the contrary might help him—for she, like the generality of women, admired Nevil Beauchamp in spite of her feminine good sense and conservatism—Cecil began to regard the man he felt less opposed to with some recognition of his merits. The two nephews accompanied Lord Avonley to London, and slept at his town-house.

They breakfasted together the next morning on friendly terms. Half an hour afterward there was an explosion; uncle and nephews were scattered fragments: and if Cecil was the first to return to cohesion with his lord and chief, it was, he protested energetically, common policy in a man in his position to do so: all that he looked for being a decent pension and a share in the use of the town-house. Old Nevil, he related, began cross-examining him and entangling him with the cunning of the deuce, in my lord's presence, and having got him to make an admission, old Nevil flung it at the baron, and even crossed him and stood before him when he was walking out of the room. A furious wrangle took place. Nevil and the baron gave it to one another unmercifully. The end of it was that all three flew apart, for Cecil confessed to having a temper, and in contempt of him for the admission wrung out of him, Lord Avonley had pricked it. My lord went down to Steynham, Beauchamp to Holdesbury, and Captain Baskelett to his quarters; whence in a few days he repaired penitently to my lord—the most placable of men when a full submission was offered to him.

Page 2512

Beauchamp did nothing of the kind. He wrote a letter to Steynham in the form of an ultimatum.

This egregious letter was handed to Rosamund for a proof of her darling's lunacy. She in conversation with Stukely Culbrett unhesitatingly accused Cecil of plotting his cousin's ruin.

Mr. Culbrett thought it possible that Cecil had been a little more than humorous in the part he had played in the dispute, and spoke to him.

Then it came out that Lord Avonley had also delivered an ultimatum to Beauchamp.

Time enough had gone by for Cecil to forget his ruffling, and relish the baron's grandly comic spirit in appropriating that big word Apology, and demanding it from Beauchamp on behalf of the lady ruling his household. What could be funnier than the knocking of Beauchamp's blunderbuss out of his hands, and pointing the muzzle at him!

Cecil dramatized the fun to amuse Mr. Culbrett. Apparently Beauchamp had been staggered on hearing himself asked for the definite article he claimed. He had made a point of speaking of the Apology. Lord Avonley did likewise. And each professed to exact it for a deeply aggrieved person: each put it on the ground that it involved the other's rightful ownership of the title of gentleman.

"'An apology to the amiable and virtuous Mistress Culling?" says old Nevil: "an apology? what for?"—"For unbecoming and insolent behaviour," says my lord.'

'I am that lady's friend,' Stukely warned Captain Baskelett. 'Don't let us have a third apology in the field.'

'Perfectly true; you are her friend, and you know what a friend of mine she is,' rejoined Cecil. 'I could swear "that lady" flings the whole affair at me. I give you my word, old Nevil and I were on a capital footing before he and the baron broke up. I praised him for tickling the aristocracy. I backed him heartily; I do now; I'll do it in Parliament. I know a case of a noble lord, a General in the army, and he received an intimation that he might as well attend the Prussian cavalry manoeuvres last Autumn on the Lower Rhine or in Silesia—no matter where. He couldn't go: he was engaged to shoot birds! I give you my word. Now there I see old Nevil 's right. It 's as well we should know something about the Prussian and Austrian cavalry, and if our aristocracy won't go abroad to study cavalry, who is to? no class in the kingdom understands horses as they do. My opinion is, they're asleep. Nevil should have stuck to that, instead of trying to galvanize the country and turning against his class. But fancy old Nevil asked for the Apology! It petrified him. "I've told her nothing but the truth," says Nevil. "Telling the truth to women is an impertinence," says my lord. Nevil swore he'd have a revolution in the country before he apologized.'

Page 2513

Mr. Culbrett smiled at the absurdity of the change of positions between Beauchamp and his uncle Everard, which reminded him somewhat of the old story of the highwayman innkeeper and the market farmer who had been thoughtful enough to recharge his pistols after quitting the inn at midnight. A practical 'tu quoque' is astonishingly laughable, and backed by a high figure and manner it had the flavour of triumphant repartee. Lord Avonley did not speak of it as a retort upon Nevil, though he reiterated the word Apology amusingly. He put it as due to the lady governing his household; and his ultimatum was, that the Apology should be delivered in terms to satisfy him within three months of the date of the demand for it: otherwise blank; but the shadowy index pointed to the destitution of Nevil Beauchamp.

No stroke of retributive misfortune could have been severer to Rosamund than to be thrust forward as the object of humiliation for the man she loved. She saw at a glance how much more likely it was (remote as the possibility appeared) that her lord would perform the act of penitence than her beloved Nevil. And she had no occasion to ask herself why. Lord Avonley had done wrong, and Nevil had not. It was inconceivable that Nevil should apologize to her. It was horrible to picture the act in her mind. She was a very rational woman, quite a woman of the world, yet such was her situation between these two men that the childish tale of a close and consecutive punishment for sins, down to our little naughtinesses and naturalnesses, enslaved her intelligence, and amazed her with the example made of her, as it were to prove the tale true of our being surely hauled back like domestic animals learning the habits of good society, to the rueful contemplation of certain of our deeds, however wildly we appeal to nature to stand up for them.

But is it so with all of us? No, thought Rosamund, sinking dejectedly from a recognition of the heavenliness of the justice which lashed her and Nevil, and did not scourge Cecil Baskelett. That fine eye for celestially directed consequences is ever haunted by shadows of unfaith likely to obscure it completely when chastisement is not seen to fall on the person whose wickedness is evident to us. It has been established that we do not wax diviner by dragging down the Gods to our level.

Rosamund knew Lord Avonley too well to harass him with further petitions and explanations. Equally vain was it to attempt to persuade Beauchamp. He made use of the house in London, where he met his uncle occasionally, and he called at Steynham for money, that he could have obtained upon the one condition, which was no sooner mentioned than fiery words flew in the room, and the two separated. The leaden look in Beauchamp, noticed by Cecilia Halkett in their latest interview, was deepening, and was of itself a displeasure to Lord Avonley, who liked flourishing faces, and said: 'That fellow's getting the look of a sweating smith': presumptively in the act of heating his poker at the furnace to stir the country.

Page 2514

It now became an offence to him that Beauchamp should continue doing this in the speeches and lectures he was reported to be delivering; he stamped his foot at the sight of his nephew's name in the daily journals; a novel sentiment of social indignation was expressed by his crying out, at the next request for money: 'Money to prime you to turn the country into a rat-hole? Not a square inch of Pennsylvanian paper-bonds! What right have you to be lecturing and orationing? You've no knowledge. All you've got is your instincts, and that you show in your readiness to exhibit them like a monkey. You ought to be turned inside out on your own stage. You've lumped your brains on a point or two about Land, and Commonland, and the Suffrage, and you pound away upon them, as if you had the key of the difficulty. It's the Scotchman's metaphysics; you know nothing clear, and your working-classes know nothing at all; and you blow them with wind like an over-stuffed cow. What you're driving at is to get hob-nail boots to dance on our heads. Stukely says you should be off over to Ireland. There you'd swim in your element, and have speechifying from instinct, and howling and pummelling too, enough to last you out. I 'll hand you money for that expedition. You're one above the number wanted here. You've a look of bad powder fit only to flash in the pan. I saved you from the post of public donkey, by keeping you out of Parliament. You're braying and kicking your worst for it still at these meetings of yours. A naval officer preaching about Republicanism and parcelling out the Land!'

Beauchamp replied quietly, 'The lectures I read are Dr. Shrapnel's. When I speak I have his knowledge to back my deficiencies. He is too ill to work, and I consider it my duty to do as much of his work as I can undertake.'

'Ha! You're the old infidel's Amen clerk. It would rather astonish orthodox congregations to see clerks in our churches getting into the pulpit to read the sermon for sick clergymen,' said Lord Avonley. His countenance furrowed. 'I'll pay that bill,' he added.

'Pay down half a million!' thundered Beauchamp; and dropping his voice, 'or go to him.'

'You remind me,' his uncle observed. 'I recommend you to ring that bell, and have Mrs. Culling here.'

'If she comes she will hear what I think of her.'

'Then, out of the house!'

'Very well, sir. You decline to supply me with money?'

'I do.'

'I must have it!'

'I dare say. Money's a chain-cable for holding men to their senses.'

‘I ask you, my lord, how I am to carry on Holdesbury?’

‘Give it up.’

‘I shall have to,’ said Beauchamp, striving to be prudent.

‘There isn’t a doubt of it,’ said his uncle, upon a series of nods diminishing in their depth until his head assumed a droll interrogative fixity, with an air of ‘What next?’

CHAPTER XXXIX

Page 2515

BETWEEN BEAUCHAMP AND CECILIA

Beauchamp quitted the house without answering as to what next, and without seeing Rosamund.

In the matter of money, as of his physical health, he wanted to do too much at once; he had spent largely of both in his efforts to repair the injury done to Dr. Shrapnel. He was overworked, anxious, restless, craving for a holiday somewhere in France, possibly; he was all but leaping on board the boat at times, and, unwilling to leave his dear old friend who clung to him, he stayed, keeping his impulses below the tide-mark which leads to action, but where they do not yield peace of spirit. The tone of Renee's letters filled him with misgivings. She wrote word that she had seen M. d'Henriel for the first time since his return from Italy, and he was much changed, and inclined to thank Roland for the lesson he had received from him at the sword's point. And next she urged Beauchamp to marry, so that he and she might meet, as if she felt a necessity for it. 'I shall love your wife; teach her to think amiably of me,' she said. And her letter contained womanly sympathy for him in his battle with his uncle. Beauchamp thought of his experiences of Cecilia's comparative coldness. He replied that there was no prospect of his marrying; he wished there were one of meeting! He forbore from writing too fervently, but he alluded to happy days in Normandy, and proposed to renew them if she would say she had need of him. He entreated her to deal with him frankly; he reminded her that she must constantly look to him, as she had vowed she would, when in any kind of trouble; and he declared to her that he was unchanged. He meant, of an unchanged disposition to shield and serve her; but the review of her situation, and his knowledge of her quick blood, wrought him to some jealous lover's throbs, which led him to impress his unchangeableness upon her, to bind her to that standard.

She declined his visit: not now; 'not yet': and for that he presumed to chide her, half-sincerely. As far as he knew he stood against everybody save his old friend and Renee; and she certainly would have refreshed his heart for a day. In writing, however, he had an ominous vision of the morrow to the day; and, both for her sake and his own, he was not unrejoiced to hear that she was engaged day and night in nursing her husband. Pursuing his vision of the morrow of an unreproachful day with Renee, the madness of taking her to himself, should she surrender at last to a third persuasion, struck him sharply, now that he and his uncle were foot to foot in downright conflict, and money was the question. He had not much remaining of his inheritance—about fifteen hundred pounds. He would have to vacate Holdesbury and his uncle's town-house in a month. Let his passion be never so desperate, for a beggared man to think of running away with a wife, or of marrying one, the folly is as big as the worldly offence: no justification is to be imagined. Nay, and there

Page 2516

is no justification for the breach of a moral law. Beauchamp owned it, and felt that Renee's resistance to him in Normandy placed her above him. He remembered a saying of his moralist: 'We who interpret things heavenly by things earthly must not hope to juggle with them for our pleasures, and can look to no absolution of evil acts.' The school was a hard one. It denied him holidays; it cut him off from dreams. It ran him in heavy harness on a rough highroad, allowing no turnings to right or left, no wayside croppings; with the simple permission to him that he should daily get thoroughly tired. And what was it Jenny Denham had said on the election day? 'Does incessant battling keep the intellect clear?'

His mind was clear enough to put the case, that either he beheld a tremendous magnification of things, or else that other men did not attach common importance to them; and he decided that the latter was the fact.

An incessant struggle of one man with the world, which position usually ranks his relatives against him, does not conduce to soundness of judgement. He may nevertheless be right in considering that he is right in the main. The world in motion is not so wise that it can pretend to silence the outcry of an ordinarily generous heart even—the very infant of antagonism to its methods and establishments. It is not so difficult to be right against the world when the heart is really active; but the world is our book of humanity, and before insisting that his handwriting shall occupy the next blank page of it, the noble rebel is bound for the sake of his aim to ask himself how much of a giant he is, lest he fall like a blot on the page, instead of inscribing intelligible characters there.

Moreover, his relatives are present to assure him that he did not jump out of Jupiter's head or come of the doctor. They hang on him like an ill-conditioned prickly garment; and if he complains of the irritation they cause him, they one and all denounce his irritable skin.

Fretted by his relatives he cannot be much of a giant.

Beauchamp looked from Dr. Shrapnel in his invalid's chair to his uncle Everard breathing robustly, and mixed his uncle's errors with those of the world which honoured and upheld him. His remainder of equability departed; his impatience increased. His appetite for work at Dr. Shrapnel's writing-desk was voracious. He was ready for any labour, the transcribing of papers, writing from dictation, whatsoever was of service to Lord Avonley's victim: and he was not like the Spartan boy with the wolf at his vitals; he betrayed it in the hue his uncle Everard detested, in a visible nervousness, and indulgence in fits of scorn. Sharp epigrams and notes of irony provoked his laughter more than fun. He seemed to acquiesce in some of the current contemporary despair of our immoveable England, though he winced at a satire on his country, and attempted to show that the dull dominant class of moneymakers was the

Page 2517

ruin of her. Wherever he stood to represent Dr. Shrapnel, as against Mr. Grancey Lespel on account of the Itchincope encroachments, he left a sting that spread the rumour of his having become not only a black torch of Radicalism—our modern provincial estateholders and their wives bestow that reputation lightly—but a gentleman with the polish scratched off him in parts. And he, though individually he did not understand how there was to be game in the land if game-preserving was abolished, signed his name R. C. S. *Nevil Beauchamp* for Dr. *Shrapnel*, in the communications directed to solicitors of the persecutors of poachers.

His behaviour to Grancey Lespel was eclipsed by his treatment of Captain Baskelett. Cecil had ample reason to suppose his cousin to be friendly with him. He himself had forgotten Dr. Shrapnel, and all other dissensions, in a supremely Christian spirit. He paid his cousin the compliment to think that he had done likewise. At Romfrey and in London he had spoken to Nevil of his designs upon the widow: Nevil said nothing against it and it was under Mrs. Wardour-Devereux's eyes, and before a man named Lydiard, that, never calling to him to put him on his guard, Nevil fell foul of him with every capital charge that can be brought against a gentleman, and did so abuse, worry, and disgrace him as to reduce him to quit the house to avoid the scandal of a resort to a gentleman's last appeal in vindication of his character. Mrs. Devereux spoke of the terrible scene to Cecilia, and Lydiard to Miss Denham. The injured person communicated it to Lord Avonley, who told Colonel Halkett emphatically that his nephew Cecil deserved well of him in having kept command of his temper out of consideration for the family. There was a general murmur of the family over this incident. The widow was rich, and it ranked among the unwritten crimes against blood for one offshoot of a great house wantonly to thwart another in the wooing of her by humbling him in her presence, doing his utmost to expose him as a schemer, a culprit, and a poltroon.

Could it be that Beauchamp had reserved his wrath with his cousin to avenge Dr. Shrapnel upon him signally? Miss Denham feared her guardian was the cause. Lydiard was indefinitely of her opinion. The idea struck Cecilia Halkett, and as an example of Beauchamp's tenacity of purpose and sureness of aim it fascinated her. But Mrs. Wardour-Devereux did not appear to share it. She objected to Beauchamp's intemperateness and unsparingness, as if she was for conveying a sisterly warning to Cecilia; and that being off her mind, she added, smiling a little and colouring a little: 'We learn only from men what men are.' How the scene commenced and whether it was provoked, she failed to recollect. She described Beauchamp as very self-contained in manner throughout his tongue was the scorpion. Cecilia fancied he must have resembled his uncle Everard.

Cecilia was conquered, but unclaimed. While supporting and approving him in her heart she was dreading to receive some new problem of his conduct; and still while she blamed him for not seeking an interview with her, she liked him for this instance of delicacy in the present state of his relations with Lord Avonley.

Page 2518

A problem of her own conduct disturbed the young lady's clear conception of herself: and this was a ruffling of unfaithfulness in her love of Beauchamp, that was betrayed to her by her forgetfulness of him whenever she chanced to be with Seymour Austin. In Mr. Austin's company she recovered her forfeited repose, her poetry of life, her image of the independent Cecilia throned above our dust of battle, gazing on broad heaven. She carried the feeling so far that Blackburn Tuckham's enthusiasm for Mr. Austin gave him grace in her sight, and praise of her father's favourite from Mr. Austin's mouth made him welcome to her. The image of that grave capable head, dusty-grey about the temples, and the darkly sanguine face of the tried man, which was that of a seasoned warrior and inspired full trust in him, with his vivid look, his personal distinction, his plain devotion to the country's business, and the domestic solitude he lived in, admired, esteemed, loved perhaps, but unpartnered, was often her refuge and haven from tempestuous Beauchamp. She could see in vision the pride of Seymour Austin's mate. It flushed her reflectively. Conquered but not claimed, Cecilia was like the frozen earth insensibly moving round to sunshine in nature, with one white flower in her breast as innocent a sign of strong sweet blood as a woman may wear. She ascribed to that fair mate of Seymour Austin's many lofty charms of womanhood; above all, stateliness: her especial dream of an attainable superlative beauty in women. And supposing that lady to be accused of the fickle breaking of another love, who walked beside him, matched with his calm heart and one with him in counsel, would the accusation be repeated by them that beheld her husband? might it not rather be said that she had not deviated, but had only stepped higher? She chose no youth, no glistener, no idler: it was her soul striving upward to air like a seed in the earth that raised her to him: and she could say to the man once enchaining her: Friend, by the good you taught me I was led to this!

Cecilia's reveries fled like columns of mist before the gale when tidings reached her of a positive rupture between Lord Avonley and Nevil Beauchamp, and of the mandate to him to quit possession of Holdesbury and the London house within a certain number of days, because of his refusal to utter an apology to Mrs. Culling. Angrily on his behalf she prepared to humble herself to him. Louise Wardour-Devereux brought them to a meeting, at which Cecilia, with her heart in her hand, was icy. Mr. Lydiard, prompted by Mrs. Devereux, gave him better reasons for her singular coldness than Cecilia could give to herself, and some time afterward Beauchamp went to Mount Laurels, where Colonel Halkett mounted guard over his daughter, and behaved, to her thinking, cruelly. 'Now you have ruined yourself there's nothing ahead for you but to go to the Admiralty and apply for a ship,' he said, sugaring the unkindness with the remark that the country would be the gainer. He let fly a side-shot at London men calling themselves military men who sought to repair their fortunes by chasing wealthy widows, and complimented Beauchamp: 'You're not one of that sort.'

Page 2519

Cecilia looked at Beauchamp stedfastly. ‘Speak,’ said the look.

But he, though not blind, was keenly wounded.

‘Money I must have,’ he said, half to the colonel, half to himself.

Colonel Halkett shrugged. Cecilia waited for a directness in Beauchamp’s eyes.

Her father was too wary to leave them.

Cecilia’s intuition told her that by leading to a discussion of politics, and adopting Beauchamp’s views, she could kindle him. Why did she refrain? It was that the conquered young lady was a captive, not an ally. To touch the subject in cold blood, voluntarily to launch on those vexed waters, as if his cause were her heart’s, as much as her heart was the man’s, she felt to be impossible. He at the same time felt that the heiress, endowing him with money to speed the good cause, should be his match in ardour for it, otherwise he was but a common adventurer, winning and despoiling an heiress.

They met in London. Beauchamp had not vacated either Holdesbury or the town-house; he was defying his uncle Everard, and Cecilia thought with him that it was a wise temerity. She thought with him passively altogether. On this occasion she had not to wait for directness in his eyes; she had to parry it. They were at a dinner-party at Lady Elsea’s, generally the last place for seeing Lord Palmet, but he was present, and arranged things neatly for them, telling Beauchamp that he acted under Mrs. Wardour-Devereux’s orders. Never was an opportunity, more propitious for a desperate lover. Had it been Renee next him, no petty worldly scruples of honour would have held him back. And if Cecilia had spoken feelingly of Dr. Shrapnel, or had she simulated a thoughtful interest in his pursuits, his hesitations would have vanished. As it was, he dared to look what he did not permit himself to speak. She was nobly lovely, and the palpable envy of men around cried fool at his delays. Beggar and heiress he said in his heart, to vitalize the three-parts fiction of the point of honour which Cecilia’s beauty was fast submerging. When she was leaving he named a day for calling to see her. Colonel Halkett stood by, and she answered, ‘Come.’

Beauchamp kept the appointment. Cecilia was absent.

He was unaware that her father had taken her to old Mrs. Beauchamp’s death-bed. Her absence, after she had said, ‘Come,’ appeared a confirmation of her glacial manner when they met at the house of Mrs. Wardour-Devereux; and he charged her with waywardness. A wound of the same kind that we are inflicting is about the severest we can feel.

Beauchamp received intelligence of his venerable great-aunt's death from Blackburn Tuckham, and after the funeral he was informed that eighty thousand pounds had been bequeathed to him: a goodly sum of money for a gentleman recently beggared; yet, as the political enthusiast could not help reckoning (apart from a fervent sentiment of gratitude toward his benefactress), scarcely enough to do much more than start and push for three or more years a commanding daily newspaper, devoted to Radical interests, and to be entitled *the dawn*.

Page 2520

True, he might now conscientiously approach the heiress, take her hand with an open countenance, and retain it.

Could he do so quite conscientiously? The point of honour had been centred in his condition of beggary. Something still was in his way. A quick spring of his blood for air, motion, excitement, holiday freedom, sent his thoughts travelling whither they always shot away when his redoubtable natural temper broke loose.

In the case of any other woman than Cecilia Halkett he would not have been obstructed by the minor consideration as to whether he was wholly heart-free to ask her in marriage that instant; for there was no hindrance, and she was beautiful. She was exceedingly beautiful; and she was an unequalled heiress. She would be able with her wealth to float his newspaper, *the dawn*, so desired of Dr. Shrapnel!—the best restorative that could be applied to him! Every temptation came supplicating him to take the step which indeed he wished for: one feeling opposed. He really respected Cecilia: it is not too much to say that he worshipped her with the devout worship rendered to the ideal Englishwoman by the heart of the nation. For him she was purity, charity, the keeper of the keys of whatsoever is held precious by men; she was a midway saint, a light between day and darkness, in whom the spirit in the flesh shone like the growing star amid thin sanguine colour, the sweeter, the brighter, the more translucent the longer known. And if the image will allow it, the nearer down to him the holier she seemed.

How offer himself when he was not perfectly certain that he was worthy of her?

Some jugglery was played by the adept male heart in these later hesitations. Up to the extent of his knowledge of himself, the man was fairly sincere. Passion would have sped him to Cecilia, but passion is not invariably love; and we know what it can be.

The glance he cast over the water at Normandy was withdrawn. He went to Bevisham to consult with Dr. Shrapnel about the starting of a weekly journal, instead of a daily, and a name for it—a serious question: for though it is oftener weekly than daily that the dawn is visible in England, titles must not invite the public jest; and the glorious project of the daily *dawn* was prudently abandoned for by-and-by. He thought himself rich enough to put a Radical champion weekly in the field and this matter, excepting the title, was arranged in Bevisham. Thence he proceeded to Holdesbury, where he heard that the house, grounds, and farm were let to a tenant preparing to enter. Indifferent to the blow, he kept an engagement to deliver a speech at the great manufacturing town of Gunningham, and then went to London, visiting his uncle’s town-house for recent letters. Not one was from Renee: she had not written for six weeks, not once for his thrice! A letter from Cecil Baskelett informed him that ‘my lord’ had placed the town-house at his disposal. Returning to dress for dinner on a thick and murky evening of February, Beauchamp encountered his cousin on the steps. He said to Cecil, ’I sleep here to-night: I leave the house to you tomorrow.’

Page 2521

Cecil struck out his underjaw to reply: 'Oh! good. You sleep here to-night. You are a fortunate man. I congratulate you. I shall not disturb you. I have just entered on my occupation of the house. I have my key. Allow me to recommend you to go straight to the drawing-room. And I may inform you that the Earl of Romfrey is at the point of death. My lord is at the castle.'

Cecil accompanied his descent of the steps with the humming of an opera melody: Beauchamp tripped into the hall-passage. A young maid-servant held the door open, and she accosted him: 'If you please, there is a lady up-stairs in the drawing-room; she speaks foreign English, sir.'

Beauchamp asked if the lady was alone, and not waiting for the answer, though he listened while writing, and heard that she was heavily veiled, he tore a strip from his notebook, and carefully traced half-a-dozen telegraphic words to Mrs. Culling at Steynham. His rarely failing promptness, which was like an inspiration, to conceive and execute measures for averting peril, set him on the thought of possibly counteracting his cousin Cecil's malignant tongue by means of a message to Rosamund, summoning her by telegraph to come to town by the next train that night. He despatched the old woman keeping the house, as trustier than the young one, to the nearest office, and went up to the drawing-room, with a quick thumping heart that was nevertheless as little apprehensive of an especial trial and danger as if he had done nothing at all to obviate it. Indeed he forgot that he had done anything when he turned the handle of the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER XL

A TRIAL OF HIM

A low-burning lamp and fire cast a narrow ring on the shadows of the dusky London room. One of the window-blinds was drawn up. Beauchamp discerned a shape at that window, and the fear seized him that it might be Madame d'Auffray with evil news of Renee: but it was Renee's name he called. She rose from her chair, saying, 'I!'

She was trembling.

Beauchamp asked her whisperingly if she had come alone.

'Alone; without even a maid,' she murmured.

He pulled down the blind of the window exposing them to the square, and led her into the light to see her face.

The dimness of light annoyed him, and the miserable reception of her; this English weather, and the gloomy house! And how long had she been waiting for him? and what

was the mystery? Renee in England seemed magical; yet it was nothing stranger than an old dream realized. He wound up the lamp, holding her still with one hand. She was woefully pale; scarcely able to bear the increase of light.

‘It is I who come to you’: she was half audible.

‘This time!’ said he. ‘You have been suffering?’

‘No.’

Her tone was brief; not reassuring.

‘You came straight to me?’

Page 2522

‘Without a deviation that I know of.’

‘From Tourdestelle?’

‘You have not forgotten Tourdestelle, Nevil?’

The memory of it quickened his rapture in reading her features. It was his first love, his enchantress, who was here: and how? Conjectures shot through him like lightnings in the dark.

Irrationally, at a moment when reason stood in awe, he fancied it must be that her husband was dead. He forced himself to think it, and could have smiled at the hurry of her coming, one, without even a maid: and deeper down in him the devouring question burned which dreaded the answer.

But of old, in Normandy, she had pledged herself to join him with no delay when free, if ever free!

So now she was free.

One side of him glowed in illumination; the other was black as Winter night; but light subdues darkness; and in a situation like Beauchamp’s, the blood is livelier than the prophetic mind.

‘Why did you tell me to marry? What did that mean?’ said he. ’Did you wish me to be the one in chains? And you have come quite alone!—you will give me an account of everything presently:—You are here! in England! and what a welcome for you! You are cold.’

‘I am warmly clad,’ said Renee, suffering her hand to be drawn to his breast at her arm’s-length, not bending with it.

Alive to his own indirectness, he was conscious at once of the slight sign of reservation, and said: ‘Tell me . . .’ and swerved sheer away from his question: ‘how is Madame d’Auffray?’

‘Agnes? I left her at Tourdestelle,’ said Renee.

‘And Roland? He never writes to me.’

’Neither he nor I write much. He is at the military camp of instruction in the North.’

‘He will run over to us.’

‘Do not expect it.’

‘Why not?’

Renee sighed. ‘We shall have to live longer than I look for . . .’ she stopped. ’Why do you ask me why not? He is fond of us both, and sorry for us; but have you forgotten Roland that morning on the Adriatic?’

Beauchamp pressed her hand. The stroke of Then and Now rang in his breast like a bell instead of a bounding heart. Something had stunned his heart. He had no clear central feeling; he tried to gather it from her touch, from his joy in beholding her and sitting with her alone, from the grace of her figure, the wild sweetness of her eyes, and the beloved foreign lips bewitching him with their exquisite French and perfection of speech.

His nature was too prompt in responding to such a call on it for resolute warmth.

‘If I had been firmer then, or you one year older!’ he said.

‘That girl in Venice had no courage,’ said Renee.

She raised her head and looked about the room.

Her instinct of love sounded her lover through, and felt the deficiency or the contrariety in him, as surely as musical ears are pained by a discord that they require no touchstone to detect. Passion has the sensitiveness of fever, and is as cruelly chilled by a tepid air.

Page 2523

‘Yes, a London house after Venice and Normandy!’ said Beauchamp, following her look.

’Sicily: do not omit Syracuse; you were in your naval uniform: Normandy was our third meeting,’ said Renee. ’This is the fourth. I should have reckoned that.’

‘Why? Superstitiously?’

’We cannot be entirely wise when we have staked our fate. Sailors are credulous: you know them. Women are like them when they embark . . . Three chances! Who can boast of so many, and expect one more! Will you take me to my hotel, Nevil?’

The fiction of her being free could not be sustained.

’Take you and leave you? I am absolutely at your command. But leave you? You are alone: and you have told me nothing.’

What was there to tell? The desperate act was apparent, and told all.

Renee’s dark eyelashes lifted on him, and dropped.

‘Then things are as I left them in Normandy?’ said he.

She replied: ‘Almost.’

He quivered at the solitary word; for his conscience was on edge. It ran the shrewdest irony through him, inexplicably. ‘Almost’: that is, ’with this poor difference of one person, now finding herself worthless, subtracted from the list; no other; it should be little to them as it is little to you’: or, reversing it, the substance of the word became magnified and intensified by its humble slightness: ’Things are the same, but for the jewel of the province, a lustre of France, lured hither to her eclipse’—meanings various, indistinguishable, thrilling and piercing sad as the half-tones humming round the note of a strung wire, which is a blunt single note to the common ear.

Beauchamp sprang to his feet and bent above her: ’You have come to me, for the love of me, to give yourself to me, and for ever, for good, till death? Speak, my beloved Renee.’

Her eyes were raised to his: ‘You see me here. It is for you to speak.’

‘I do. There’s nothing I ask for now—if the step can’t be retrieved.’

‘The step retrieved, my friend? There is no step backward in life.’

‘I am thinking of you, Renee.’

‘Yes, I know,’ she answered hurriedly.

‘If we discover that the step is a wrong one?’ he pursued: ’why is there no step backward?’

‘I am talking of women,’ said Renee.

‘Why not for women?’

‘Honourable women, I mean,’ said Renee.

Beauchamp inclined to forget his position in finding matter to contest.

Yet it is beyond contest that there is no step backward in life. She spoke well; better than he, and she won his deference by it. Not only she spoke better: she was truer, distincter, braver: and a man ever on the look-out for superior qualities, and ready to bow to them, could not refuse her homage. With that a saving sense of power quitted him.

‘You wrote to me that you were unchanged, Nevil.’

Page 2524

‘I am.’

‘So, then, I came.’

His rejoinder was the dumb one, commonly eloquent and satisfactory.

Renee shut her eyes with a painful rigour of endurance. She opened them to look at him steadily.

The desperate act of her flight demanded immediate recognition from him in simple language and a practical seconding of it. There was the test.

‘I cannot stay in this house, Nevil; take me away.’

She named her hotel in her French English, and the sound of it penetrated him with remorseful pity. It was for him, and of his doing, that she was in an alien land and an outcast!

‘This house is wretched for you,’ said he: ’and you must be hungry. Let me . . .’

‘I cannot eat. I will ask you’: she paused, drawing on her energies, and keeping down the throbs of her heart: ‘this: do you love me?’

‘I love you with all my heart and soul.’

‘As in Normandy?’

‘Yes.’

‘In Venice?’

‘As from the first, Renee! That I can swear.’

’Oaths are foolish. I meant to ask you—my friend, there is no question in my mind of any other woman: I see you love me: I am so used to consider myself the vain and cowardly creature, and you the boldest and faithfullest of men, that I could not abandon the habit if I would: I started confiding in you, sure that I should come to land. But I have to ask you: to me you are truth: I have no claim on my lover for anything but the answer to this:—Am I a burden to you?’

His brows flew up in furrows. He drew a heavy breath, for never had he loved her more admiringly, and never on such equal terms. She was his mate in love and daring at least. A sorrowful comparison struck him, of a little boat sailing out to a vessel in deep seas and left to founder.

Without knotting his mind to acknowledge or deny the burden, for he could do neither, he stood silent, staring at her, not so much in weakness as in positive mental division. No, would be false; and Yes, not less false; and if the step was irretrievable, to say Yes would be to plunge a dagger in her bosom; but No was a vain deceit involving a double wreck. Assuredly a man standing against the world in a good cause, with a runaway wife on his hands, carries a burden, however precious it be to him.

A smile of her lips, parted in an anguish of expectancy, went to death over Renee's face. She looked at him tenderly. 'The truth,' she murmured to herself, and her eyelids fell.

'I am ready to bear anything,' said Beauchamp. 'I weigh what you ask me, that is all. You a burden to me? But when you ask me, you make me turn round and inquire how we stand before the world.'

'The world does not stone men,' said Renee.

'Can't I make you feel that I am not thinking of myself?' Beauchamp stamped in his extreme perplexity. He was gagged; he could not possibly talk to her, who had cast the die, of his later notions of morality and the world's dues, fees, and claims on us.

Page 2525

‘No, friend, I am not complaining.’ Renee put out her hand to him; with compassionate irony feigning to have heard excuses. ’What right have I to complain? I have not the sensation. I could not expect you to be everlastingly the sentinel of love. Three times I rejected you! Now that I have lost my father—Oh! poor father: I trifled with my lover, I tricked him that my father might live in peace. He is dead. I wished you to marry one of your own countrywomen, Nevil. You said it was impossible; and I, with my snake at my heart, and a husband grateful for nursing and whimpering to me for his youth like a beggar on the road, I thought I owed you this debt of body and soul, to prove to you I have some courage; and for myself, to reward myself for my long captivity and misery with one year of life: and adieu to Roland my brother! adieu to friends! adieu to France! Italy was our home. I dreamed of one year in Italy; I fancied it might be two; more than that was unimaginable. Prisoners of long date do not hope; they do not calculate: air, light, they say; to breathe freely and drop down! They are reduced to the instincts of the beasts. I thought I might give you happiness, pay part of my debt to you. Are you remembering Count Henri? That paints what I was! I could fly to that for a taste of life! a dance to death! And again you ask: Why, if I loved you then, not turn to you in preference? No, you have answered it yourself, Nevil;—on that day in the boat, when generosity in a man so surprised me, it seemed a miracle to me; and it was, in its divination. How I thank my dear brother Roland for saving me the sight of you condemned to fight, against your conscience! He taught poor M. d’Henriel his lesson. You, Nevil, were my teacher. And see how it hangs: there was mercy for me in not having drawn down my father’s anger on my heart’s beloved. He loved you. He pitied us. He reproached himself. In his last days he was taught to suspect our story: perhaps from Roland; perhaps I breathed it without speaking. He called heaven’s blessings on you. He spoke of you with tears, clutching my hand. He made me feel he would have cried out: “If I were leaving her with Nevil Beauchamp!” and “Beauchamp,” I heard him murmuring once: “take down Froissart”: he named a chapter. It was curious: if he uttered my name Renee, yours, “Nevil,” soon followed. That was noticed by Roland. Hope for us, he could not have had; as little as I! But we were his two: his children. I buried him—I thought he would know our innocence, and now pardon our love. I read your letters, from my name at the beginning, to yours at the end, and from yours back to mine, and between the lines, for any doubtful spot: and oh, rash! But I would not retrace the step for my own sake. I am certain of your love for me, though . . .’ She paused: ’Yes, I am certain of it. And if I am a burden to you?’

’About as much as the air, which I can’t do without since I began to breathe it,’ said Beauchamp, more clear-mindedly now that he supposed he was addressing a mind, and with a peril to himself that escaped his vigilance. There was a secret intoxication for him already in the half-certainty that the step could not be retraced. The idea that he might reason with her, made her seductive to the heart and head of him.

Page 2526

‘I am passably rich, Nevil,’ she said. ’I do not care for money, except that it gives wings. Roland inherits the chateau in Touraine. I have one in Burgundy, and rentes and shares, my notary informs me.’

‘I have money,’ said he. His heart began beating violently. He lost sight of his intention of reasoning. ‘Good God! if you were free!’

She faltered: ‘At Tourdestelle . . .’

‘Yes, and I am unchanged,’ Beauchamp cried out. ’Your life there was horrible, and mine’s intolerable.’ He stretched his arms cramped like the yawning of a wretch in fetters. That which he would and would not became so intervolved that he deemed it reasonable to instance their common misery as a ground for their union against the world. And what has that world done for us, that a joy so immeasurable should be rejected on its behalf? And what have we succeeded in doing, that the childish effort to move it should be continued at such a cost?

For years, down to one year back, and less—yesterday, it could be said—all human blessedness appeared to him in the person of Renee, given him under any condition whatsoever. She was not less adorable now. In her decision, and a courage that he especially prized in women, she was a sweeter to him than when he was with her in France: too sweet to be looked at and refused.

‘But we must live in England,’ he cried abruptly out of his inner mind.

‘Oh! not England, Italy, Italy!’ Renee exclaimed: ’Italy, or Greece: anywhere where we have sunlight. Mountains and valleys are my dream. Promise it, Nevil. I will obey you; but this is my wish. Take me through Venice, that I may look at myself and wonder. We can live at sea, in a yacht; anywhere with you but in England. This country frowns on me; I can hardly fetch my breath here, I am suffocated. The people all walk in lines in England. Not here, Nevil! They are good people, I am sure; and it is your country: but their faces chill me, their voices grate; I should never understand them; they would be to me like their fogs eternally; and I to them? O me! it would be like hearing sentence in the dampness of the shroud perpetually. Again I say I do not doubt that they are very good: they claim to be; they judge others; they may know how to make themselves happy in their climate; it is common to most creatures to do so, or to imagine it. Nevil! not England!’

Truly ‘the mad commander and his French marquise’ of the Bevisham Election ballad would make a pretty figure in England!

His friends of his own class would be mouthing it. The story would be a dogging shadow of his public life, and, quite as bad, a reflection on his party. He heard the

yelping tongues of the cynics. He saw the consternation and grief of his old Bevisham hero, his leader and his teacher.

‘Florence,’ he said, musing on the prospect of exile and idleness: ‘there’s a kind of society to be had in Florence.’

Page 2527

Renee asked him if he cared so much for society.

He replied that women must have it, just as men must have exercise.

‘Old women, Nevil; intriguers, tattlers.’

‘Young women, Renee.’

She signified no.

He shook the head of superior knowledge paternally.

Her instinct of comedy set a dimple faintly working in her cheek.

‘Not if they love, Nevil.’

‘At least,’ said he, ’a man does not like to see the woman he loves banished by society and browbeaten.’

‘Putting me aside, do you care for it, Nevil?’

‘Personally not a jot.’

‘I am convinced of that,’ said Renee.

She spoke suspiciously sweetly, appearing perfect candour.

The change in him was perceptible to her. The nature of the change was unfathomable.

She tried her wits at the riddle. But though she could be an actress before him with little difficulty, the torment of her situation roused the fever within her at a bare effort to think acutely. Scarlet suffused her face: her brain whirled.

’Remember, dearest, I have but offered myself: you have your choice. I can pass on. Yes, I know well I speak to Nevil Beauchamp; you have drilled me to trust you and your word as a soldier trusts to his officer—once a faint-hearted soldier! I need not remind you: fronting the enemy now, in hard truth. But I want your whole heart to decide. Give me no silly, compassion! Would it have been better to me to have written to you? If I had written I should have clipped my glorious impulse, brought myself down to earth with my own arrow. I did not write, for I believed in you.’

So firm had been her faith in him that her visions of him on the passage to England had resolved all to one flash of blood-warm welcome awaiting her: and it says much for her natural generosity that the savage delicacy of a woman placed as she now was, did not

take a mortal hurt from the apparent voidness of this home of his bosom. The passionate gladness of the lover was wanting: the chivalrous valiancy of manful joy.

Renee shivered at the cloud thickening over her new light of intrepid defiant life.

'Think it not improbable that I have weighed everything I surrender in quitting France,' she said.

Remorse wrestled with Beauchamp and flung him at her feet.

Renee remarked on the lateness of the hour.

He promised to conduct her to her hotel immediately.

'And to-morrow?' said Renee, simply, but breathlessly.

'To-morrow, let it be Italy! But first I telegraph to Roland and Tourdestelle. I can't run and hide. The step may be retrieved: or no, you are right; the step cannot, but the next to it may be stopped—that was the meaning I had! I 'll try. It 's cutting my hand off, tearing my heart out; but I will. O that you were free! You left your husband at Tourdestelle?'

Page 2528

‘I presume he is there at present: he was in Paris when I left.’

Beauchamp spoke hoarsely and incoherently in contrast with her composure: ’You will misunderstand me for a day or two, Renee. I say if you were free I should have my first love mine for ever. Don’t fear me: I have no right even to press your fingers. He may throw you into my arms. Now you are the same as if you were in your own home: and you must accept me for your guide. By all I hope for in life, I’ll see you through it, and keep the dogs from barking, if I can. Thousands are ready to give tongue. And if they can get me in the character of a law-breaker!—I hear them.’

’Are you imagining, Nevil, that there is a possibility of my returning to him?’

‘To your place in the world! You have not had to endure tyranny?’

’I should have had a certain respect for a tyrant, Nevil. At least I should have had an occupation in mocking him and conspiring against him. Tyranny! There would have been some amusement to me in that.’

‘It was neglect.’

’If I could still charge it on neglect, Nevil! Neglect is very endurable. He rewards me for nursing him . . . he rewards me with a little persecution: wives should be flattered by it: it comes late.’

‘What?’ cried Beauchamp, oppressed and impatient.

Renee sank her voice.

Something in the run of the unaccented French: ‘Son amour, mon ami’: drove the significance of the bitterness of the life she had left behind her burningly through him. This was to have fled from a dragon! was the lover’s thought: he perceived the motive of her flight: and it was a vindication of it that appealed to him irresistibly. The proposal for her return grew hideous: and this ever multiplying horror and sting of the love of a married woman came on him with a fresh throbbing shock, more venom.

He felt for himself now, and now he was full of feeling for her. Impossible that she should return! Tourdestelle shone to him like a gaping chasm of fire. And becoming entirely selfish he impressed his total abnegation of self upon Renee so that she could have worshipped him. A lover that was like a starry frost, froze her veins, bewildered her intelligence. She yearned for meridian warmth, for repose in a directing hand; and let it be hard as one that grasps a sword: what matter? unhesitatingness was the warrior virtue of her desire. And for herself the worst might happen if only she were borne along. Let her life be torn and streaming like the flag of battle, it must be forward to the end.

Page 2529

That was a quality of godless young heroism not unexhausted in Beauchamp's blood. Reanimated by him, she awakened his imagination of the vagrant splendours of existence and the rebel delights which have their own laws and 'nature' for an applauding mother. Radiant Alps rose in his eyes, and the morning born in the night suns that from mountain and valley, over sea and desert, called on all earth to witness their death. The magnificence of the contempt of humanity posed before him superbly satanesque, grand as thunder among the crags and it was not a sensual cry that summoned him from his pedlar labours, pack on back along the level road, to live and breathe deep, gloriously mated: Renee kindled his romantic spirit, and could strike the feeling into him that to be proud of his possession of her was to conquer the fretful vanity to possess. She was not a woman of wiles and lures.

Once or twice she consulted her watch: but as she professed to have no hunger, Beauchamp's entreaty to her to stay prevailed, and the subtle form of compliment to his knightly manliness in her remaining with him, gave him a new sense of pleasure that hung round her companionable conversation, deepening the meaning of the words, or sometimes contrasting the sweet surface commonplace with the undercurrent of strangeness in their hearts, and the reality of a tragic position. Her musical volubility flowed to entrance and divert him, as it did.

Suddenly Beauchamp glanced upward.

Renee turned from a startled contemplation of his frown, and beheld Mrs. Rosamund Culling in the room.

CHAPTER XLI

A LAME VICTORY

The intruder was not a person that had power to divide them; yet she came between their hearts with a touch of steel.

'I am here in obedience to your commands in your telegram of this evening,' Rosamund replied to Beauchamp's hard stare at her; she courteously spoke French, and acquitted herself demurely of a bow to the lady present.

Renee withdrew her serious eyes from Beauchamp. She rose and acknowledged the bow.

'It is my first visit to England, madame!

'I could have desired, Madame la marquise, more agreeable weather for you.'

‘My friends in England will dispel the bad weather for me, madame’; Renee smiled softly: ’I have been studying my French-English phrase-book, that I may learn how dialogues are conducted in your country to lead to certain ceremonies when old friends meet, and without my book I am at fault. I am longing to be embraced by you . . . if it will not be offending your rules?’

Rosamund succumbed to the seductive woman, whose gentle tooth bit through her tutored simplicity of manner and natural graciousness, administering its reproof, and eluding a retort or an excuse.

She gave the embrace. In doing so she fell upon her conscious awkwardness for an expression of reserve that should be as good as irony for irony, though where Madame de Rouaillout’s irony lay, or whether it was irony at all, our excellent English dame could not have stated, after the feeling of indignant prudery responding to it so guiltily had subsided.

Page 2530

Beauchamp asked her if she had brought servants with her; and it gratified her to see that he was no actor fitted to carry a scene through in virtue's name and vice's mask with this actress.

She replied, 'I have brought a man and a maid-servant. The establishment will be in town the day after tomorrow, in time for my lord's return from the Castle.'

'You can have them up to-morrow morning.'

'I could,' Rosamund admitted the possibility. Her idolatry of him was tried on hearing him press the hospitality of the house upon Madame de Rouaillout, and observing the lady's transparent feint of a reluctant yielding. For the voluble Frenchwoman scarcely found a word to utter: she protested languidly that she preferred the independence of her hotel, and fluttered a singular look at him, as if overcome by his vehement determination to have her in the house. Undoubtedly she had a taking face and style. His infatuation, nevertheless, appeared to Rosamund utter dementedness, considering this woman's position, and Cecilia Halkett's beauty and wealth, and that the house was no longer at his disposal. He was really distracted, to judge by his forehead, or else he was over-acting his part.

The absence of a cook in the house, Rosamund remarked, must prevent her from seconding Captain Beauchamp's invitation.

He turned on her witheringly. 'The telegraph will do that. You're in London; cooks can be had by dozens. Madame de Rouaillout is alone here; she has come to see a little of England, and you will do the honours of the house.'

'M. le marquis is not in London?' said Rosamund, disregarding the dumb imprecation she saw on Beauchamp's features.

'No, madame, my husband is not in London,' Renee rejoined collectedly.

'See to the necessary comforts of the house instantly,' said Beauchamp, and telling Renee, without listening to her, that he had to issue orders, he led Rosamund, who was out of breath at the effrontery of the pair, toward the door. 'Are you blind, ma'am? Have you gone foolish? What should I have sent for you for, but to protect her? I see your mind; and off with the prude, pray! Madame will have my room; clear away every sign of me there. I sleep out; I can find a bed anywhere. And bolt and chain the house-door to-night against Cecil Baskelett; he informs me that he has taken possession.'

Rosamund's countenance had become less austere.

'Captain Baskelett!' she exclaimed, leaning to Beauchamp's views on the side of her animosity to Cecil; 'he has been promised by his uncle the use of a set of rooms during the year, when the mistress of the house is not in occupation. I stipulated expressly that

he was to see you and suit himself to your convenience, and to let me hear that you and he had agreed to an arrangement, before he entered the house. He has no right to be here, and I shall have no hesitation in locking him out.'

Page 2531

Beauchamp bade her go, and not be away more than five minutes; and then he would drive to the hotel for the luggage.

She scanned him for a look of ingenuousness that might be trusted, and laughed in her heart at her credulity for expecting it of a man in such a case. She saw Renee sitting stonily, too proudly self-respecting to put on a mask of flippant ease. These lovers might be accomplices in deceiving her; they were not happy ones, and that appeared to her to be some assurance that she did well in obeying him.

Beauchamp closed the door on her. He walked back to Renee with a thoughtful air that was consciously acted; his only thought being—now she knows me!

Renee looked up at him once. Her eyes were unaccusing, unquestioning.

With the violation of the secresy of her flight she had lost her initiative and her intrepidity. The world of human eyes glared on her through the windows of the two she had been exposed to, paralyzing her brain and caging her spirit of revolt. That keen wakefulness of her self-defensive social instinct helped her to an understanding of her lover's plan to preserve her reputation, or rather to give her a corner of retreat in shielding the worthless thing—twice detested as her cloak of slavery coming from him! She comprehended no more. She was a house of nerves crowding in against her soul like fiery thorns, and had no space within her torture for a sensation of gratitude or suspicion; but feeling herself hurried along at lightning speed to some dreadful shock, her witless imagination apprehended it in his voice: not what he might say, only the sound. She feared to hear him speak, as the shrinking ear fears a thunder at the cavity; yet suspense was worse than the downward-driving silence.

The pang struck her when he uttered some words about Mrs. Culling, and protection, and Roland.

She thanked him.

So have common executioners been thanked by queenly ladies baring their necks to the axe.

He called up the pain he suffered to vindicate him; and it was really an agony of a man torn to pieces.

'I have done the best.'

This dogged and stupid piece of speech was pitiable to hear from Nevil Beauchamp.

'You think so?' said she; and her glass-like voice rang a tremour in its mildness that swelled through him on the plain submissive note, which was more assent than question.

‘I am sure of it. I believe it. I see it. At least I hope so.’

‘We are chiefly led by hope,’ said Renee.

‘At least, if not!’ Beauchamp cried. ’And it’s not too late. I have no right—I do what I can. I am at your mercy. Judge me later. If I am ever to know what happiness is, it will be with you. It’s not too late either way. There is Roland—my brother as much as if you were my wife!’

He begged her to let him have Roland’s exact address.

She named the regiment, the corps d’armee, the postal town, and the department.

Page 2532

‘Roland will come at a signal,’ he pursued; ’we are not bound to consult others.’

Renee formed the French word of ‘we’ on her tongue.

He talked of Roland and Roland, his affection for him as a brother and as a friend, and Roland’s love of them both.

‘It is true,’ said Renee.

‘We owe him this; he represents your father.’

‘All that you say is true, my friend.’

’Thus, you have come on a visit to madame, your old friend here—oh! your hand. What have I done?’

Renee motioned her hand as if it were free to be taken, and smiled faintly to make light of it, but did not give it.

‘If you had been widowed!’ he broke down to the lover again.

’That man is attached to the remnant of his life: I could not wish him dispossessed of it,’ said Rende.

‘Parted! who parts us? It’s for a night. Tomorrow!’

She breathed: ‘To-morrow.’

To his hearing it craved an answer. He had none. To talk like a lover, or like a man of honour, was to lie. Falsehood hemmed him in to the narrowest ring that ever statue stood on, if he meant to be stone.

‘That woman will be returning,’ he muttered, frowning at the vacant door. ’I could lay out my whole life before your eyes, and show you I am unchanged in my love of you since the night when Roland and I walked on the Piazzetta . . .’

‘Do not remind me; let those days lie black!’ A sympathetic vision of her maiden’s tears on the night of wonderful moonlight when, as it seemed to her now, San Giorgio stood like a dark prophet of her present abasement and chastisement, sprang tears of a different character, and weak as she was with her soul’s fever and for want of food, she was piteously shaken. She said with some calmness: ’It is useless to look back. I have no reproaches but for myself. Explain nothing to me. Things that are not comprehended by one like me are riddles I must put aside. I know where I am: I scarcely know more. Here is madame.’

The door had not opened, and it did not open immediately.

Beauchamp had time to say, ‘Believe in me.’ Even that was false to his own hearing, and in a struggle with the painful impression of insincerity which was denied and scorned by his impulse to fling his arms round her and have her his for ever, he found himself deferentially accepting her brief directions concerning her boxes at the hotel, with Rosamund Culling to witness.

She gave him her hand.

He bowed over the fingers. ‘Until to-morrow, madame.’

‘Adieu!’ said Renee.

CHAPTER XLII

THE TWO PASSIONS

The foggy February night refreshed his head, and the business of fetching the luggage from the hotel—a commission that necessitated the delivery of his card and some very commanding language—kept his mind in order. Subsequently he drove to his cousin Baskelett’s Club, where he left a short note to say the house was engaged for the night and perhaps a week further. Concise, but sufficient: and he stated a hope to his cousin that he would not be inconvenienced. This was courteous.

Page 2533

He had taken a bed at Renee's hotel, after wresting her boxes from the vanquished hotel proprietor, and lay there, hearing the clear sound of every little sentence of hers during the absence of Rosamund: her 'Adieu,' and the strange 'Do you think so?' and 'I know where I am; I scarcely know more.' Her eyes and their darker lashes, and the fitful little sensitive dimples of a smile without joy, came with her voice, but hardened to an aspect unlike her. Not a word could he recover of what she had spoken before Rosamund's intervention. He fancied she must have related details of her journey. Especially there must have been mention, he thought, of her drive to the station from Tourdestelle; and this flashed on him the scene of his ride to the chateau, and the meeting her on the road, and the white light on the branching river, and all that was Renee in the spirit of the place she had abandoned for him, believing in him. She had proved that she believed in him. What in the name of sanity had been the meaning of his language? and what was it between them that arrested him and caused him to mumble absurdly of 'doing best,' when in fact he was her bondman, rejoiced to be so, by his pledged word? and when she, for some reason that he was sure she had stated, though he could recollect no more than the formless hideousness of it, was debarred from returning to Tourdestelle?

He tossed in his bed as over a furnace, in the extremity of perplexity of one accustomed to think himself ever demonstrably in the right, and now with his whole nature in insurrection against that legitimate claim. It led him to accuse her of a want of passionate warmth, in her not having supplicated and upbraided him—not behaving theatrically, in fine, as the ranting pen has made us expect of emergent ladies that they will naturally do. Concerning himself, he thought commendingly, a tear would have overcome him. She had not wept. The kaleidoscope was shaken in his fragmentary mind, and she appeared thrice adorable for this noble composure, he brutish.

Conscience and reason had resolved to a dead weight in him, like an inanimate force, governing his acts despite the man, while he was with Renee. Now his wishes and waverings conjured up a semblance of a conscience and much reason to assure him that he had done foolishly as well as unkindly, most unkindly: that he was even the ghastly spectacle of a creature attempting to be more than he can be. Are we never to embrace our inclinations? Are the laws regulating an old dry man like his teacher and guide to be the same for the young and vigorous?

Is a good gift to be refused? And this was his first love! The brilliant Renee, many-hued as a tropic bird! his lady of shining grace, with her sole fault of want of courage devotedly amended! his pupil, he might say, of whom he had foretold that she must come to such a pass, at the same time prefixing his fidelity. And he was handing her over knowingly to one kind of wretchedness—'son amour, mon ami,' shot through him, lighting up the gulfs of a mind in wreck;—and one kind of happiness could certainly be promised her!

Page 2534

All these and innumerable other handsome pleadings of the simulacra of the powers he had set up to rule, were crushed at daybreak by the realities in a sense of weight that pushed him mechanically on. He telegraphed to Roland, and mentally gave chase to the message to recall it. The slumberer roused in darkness by the relentless insane-seeming bell which hales him to duty, melts at the charms of sleep, and feels that logic is with him in his preference of his pillow; but the tireless revolving world outside, nature's pitiless antagonist, has hung one of its balances about him, and his actions are directed by the state of the scales, wherein duty weighs deep and desireability swings like a pendant doll: so he throws on his harness, astounded, till his blood quickens with work, at the round of sacrifices demanded of nature: which is indeed curious considering what we are taught here and there as to the infallibility of our august mother. Well, the world of humanity had done this for Beauchamp. His afflicted historian is compelled to fling his net among prosaic similitudes for an illustration of one thus degradedly in its grip. If he had been off with his love like the rover! why, then the Muse would have loosened her lap like May showering flower-buds, and we might have knocked great nature up from her sleep to embellish his desperate proceedings with hurricanes to be danced over, to say nothing of imitative spheres dashing out into hurly-burly after his example.

Conscious rectitude, too, after the pattern of the well-behaved AEneas quitting the fair bosom of Carthage in obedience to the Gods, for an example to his Roman progeny, might have stiffened his backbone and put a crown upon his brows. It happened with him that his original training rather imposed the idea that he was a figure to be derided. The approval of him by the prudent was a disgust, and by the pious tasteless. He had not any consolation in reverting to Dr. Shrapnel's heavy Puritanism. On the contrary, such a general proposition as that of the sage of Bevisham could not for a moment stand against the pathetic special case of Renee: and as far as Beauchamp's active mind went, he was for demanding that Society should take a new position in morality, considerably broader, and adapted to very special cases.

Nevertheless he was hardly grieved in missing Renee at Rosamund's breakfast-table. Rosamund informed him that Madame de Rouaillout's door was locked. Her particular news for him was of a disgraceful alarum raised by Captain Baskelett in the night, to obtain admission; and of an interview she had with him in the early morning, when he subjected her to great insolence. Beauchamp's attention was drawn to her repetition of the phrase 'mistress of the house.' However, she did him justice in regard to Renee, and thoroughly entered into the fiction of Renee's visit to her as her guest: he passed over everything else.

To stop the mouth of a scandal-monger, he drove full speed to Cecil's Club, where he heard that the captain had breakfasted and had just departed for Romfrey Castle. He followed to the station. The train had started. So mischief was rolling in that direction.

Page 2535

Late at night Rosamund was allowed to enter the chill unlighted chamber, where the unhappy lady had been lying for hours in the gloom of a London Winter's daylight and gaslight.

'Madame de Rouaillout is indisposed with headache,' was her report to Beauchamp.

The conventional phraseology appeased him, though he saw his grief behind it.

Presently he asked if Renee had taken food.

'No: you know what a headache is,' Rosamund replied.

It is true that we do not care to eat when we are in pain.

He asked if she looked ill.

'She will not have lights in the room,' said Rosamund.

Piecemeal he gained the picture of Renee in an image of the death within which welcomed a death without.

Rosamund was impatient with him for speaking of medical aid. These men! She remarked very honestly:

'Oh, no; doctors are not needed.'

'Has she mentioned me?'

'Not once.'

'Why do you swing your watch-chain, ma'am?' cried Beauchamp, bounding off his chair.

He reproached her with either pretending to indifference or feeling it; and then insisted on his privilege of going up-stairs-accompanied by her, of course; and then it was to be only to the door; then an answer to a message was to satisfy him.

'Any message would trouble her: what message would you send?' Rosamund asked him.

The weighty and the trivial contended; no fitting message could be thought of.

'You are unused to real suffering—that is for women!—and want to be doing instead of enduring,' said Rosamund.

She was beginning to put faith in the innocence of these two mortally sick lovers. Beauchamp's outcries against himself gave her the shadows of their story. He stood in

tears—a thing to see to believe of Nevil Beauchamp; and plainly he did not know it, or else he would have taken her advice to him to leave the house at an hour that was long past midnight. Her method for inducing him to go was based on her intimate knowledge of him: she made as if to soothe and kiss him compassionately.

In the morning there was a flying word from Roland, on his way to England. Rosamund tempered her report of Renee by saying of her, that she was very quiet. He turned to the window.

‘Look, what a climate ours is!’ Beauchamp abused the persistent fog. ’Dull, cold, no sky, a horrible air to breathe! This is what she has come to! Has she spoken of me yet?’

‘No.’

‘Is she dead silent?’

‘She answers, if I speak to her.’

‘I believe, ma’am,’ said Beauchamp, ’that we are the coldest-hearted people in Europe.’

Rosamund did not defend us, or the fog. Consequently nothing was left for him to abuse but himself. In that she tried to moderate him, and drew forth a torrent of self-vituperation, after which he sank into the speechless misery he had been evading; until sophistical fancy, another evolution of his nature, persuaded him that Roland, seeing Renee, would for love’s sake be friendly to them.

Page 2536

‘I should have told you, Nevil, by the way, that the earl is dead,’ said Rosamund.

‘Her brother will be here to-day; he can’t be later than the evening,’ said Beauchamp. ’Get her to eat, ma’am; you must. Command her to eat. This terrible starvation!’

‘You ate nothing yourself, Nevil, all day yesterday.’

He surveyed the table. ’You have your cook in town, I see. Here’s a breakfast to feed twenty hungry families in Spitalfields. Where does the mass of meat go? One excess feeds another. You’re overdone with servants. Gluttony, laziness, and pilfering come of your host of unmanageable footmen and maids; you stuff them, and wonder they’re idle and immoral. If—I suppose I must call him the earl now, or Colonel Halkett, or any one of the army of rich men, hear of an increase of the income-tax, or some poor wretch hints at a sliding scale of taxation, they yell as if they were thumb-screwed: but five shillings in the pound goes to the kitchen as a matter of course—to puff those pompous idiots! and the parsons, who should be preaching against this sheer waste of food and perversion of the strength of the nation, as a public sin, are maundering about schism. There’s another idle army! Then we have artists, authors, lawyers, doctors—the honourable professions! all hanging upon wealth, all ageing the rich, and all bearing upon labour! it’s incubus on incubus. In point of fact, the rider’s too heavy for the horse in England.’

He began to nibble at bread.

Rosamund pushed over to him a plate of the celebrated Steynham pie, of her own invention, such as no douse in the county of Sussex could produce or imitate.

‘What would you have the parsons do?’ she said.

’Take the rich by the throat and show them in the kitchen-mirror that they’re swine running down to the sea with a devil in them.’ She had set him off again, but she had enticed him to eating. ’Pooh! it has all been said before. Stones are easier to move than your English. May I be forgiven for saying it! an invasion is what they want to bring them to their senses. I’m sick of the work. Why should I be denied—am I to kill the woman I love that I may go on hammering at them? Their idea of liberty is, an evasion of public duty. Dr. Shrapnel’s right—it’s a money-logged Island! Men like the Earl of Romfrey, who have never done work in their days except to kill bears and birds, I say they’re stifled by wealth: and he at least would have made an Admiral of mark, or a General: not of much value, but useful in case of need. But he, like a pretty woman, was under no obligation to contribute more than an ornamental person to the common good. As to that, we count him by tens of thousands now, and his footmen and maids by hundreds of thousands. The rich love the nation through their possessions; otherwise they have no country. If they loved the country they would care for the people. Their hearts are eaten

Page 2537

up by property. I am bidden to hold my tongue because I have no knowledge. When men who have this “knowledge” will go down to the people, speak to them, consult and argue with them, and come into suitable relations with them—I don’t say of lords and retainers, but of knowers and doers, leaders and followers—out of consideration for public safety, if not for the common good, I shall hang back gladly; though I won’t hear misstatements. My fault is, that I am too moderate. I should respect myself more if I deserved their hatred. This flood of luxury, which is, as Dr. Shrapnel says, the body’s drunkenness and the soul’s death, cries for execration. I’m too moderate. But I shall quit the country: I’ve no place here.’

Rosamund ahemed. ’France, Nevil? I should hardly think that France would please you, in the present state of things over there.’

Half cynically, with great satisfaction, she had watched him fretting at the savoury morsels of her pie with a fork like a sparrow-beak during the monologue that would have been so dreary to her but for her appreciation of the wholesome effect of the letting off of steam, and her admiration of the fire of his eyes. After finishing his plate he had less the look of a ship driving on to reef—some of his images of the country. He called for claret and water, sighing as he munched bread in vast portions, evidently conceiving that to eat unbuttered bread was to abstain from luxury. He praised passingly the quality of the bread. It came from Steynham, and so did the, milk and cream, the butter, chicken and eggs. He was good enough not to object to the expenditure upon the transmission of the accustomed dainties. Altogether the gradual act of nibbling had conduced to his eating remarkably well-royally. Rosamund’s more than half-cynical ideas of men, and her custom of wringing unanimous verdicts from a jury of temporary impressions, inclined her to imagine him a lover that had not to be so very much condoled with, and a politician less alarming in practice than in theory:—somewhat a gentleman of domestic tirades on politics: as it is observed of your generous young Radical of birth and fortune, that he will become on the old high road to a round Conservatism.

He pitched one of the morning papers to the floor in disorderly sheets, muttering: ‘So they’re at me!’

‘Is Dr. Shrapnel better?’ she asked. ’I hold to a good appetite as a sign of a man’s recovery.’

Beauchamp was confronting the fog at the window. He swung round: ’Dr. Shrapnel is better. He has a particularly clever young female cook.’

‘Ah! then . . .’

’Yes, then, naturally! He would naturally hasten to recover to partake of the viands, ma’am.’

Rosamund murmured of her gladness that he should be able to enjoy them.

‘Oddly enough, he is not an eater of meat,’ said Beauchamp.

‘A vegetarian!’

Page 2538

’I beg you not to mention the fact to my lord. You see, you yourself can scarcely pardon it. He does not exclude flesh from his table. Blackburn Tuckham dined there once. “You are a thorough revolutionist, Dr. Shrapnel,” he observed. The doctor does not exclude wine, but he does not drink it. Poor Tuckham went away entirely opposed to a Radical he could not even meet as a boon-fellow. I begged him not to mention the circumstances, as I have begged you. He pledged me his word to that effect solemnly; he correctly felt that if the truth were known, there would be further cause for the reprobation of the man who had been his host.’

‘And that poor girl, Nevil?’

’Miss Denham? She contracted the habit of eating meat at school, and drinking wine in Paris, and continues it, occasionally. Now run upstairs. Insist on food. Inform Madame de Rouaillout that her brother M. le comte de Croisnel will soon be here, and should not find her ill. Talk to her as you women can talk. Keep the blinds down in her room; light a dozen wax-candles. Tell her I have no thought but of her. It’s a lie: of no woman but of her: that you may say. But that you can’t say. You can say I am devoted—ha, what stuff! I’ve only to open my mouth!—say nothing of me: let her think the worst—unless it comes to a question of her life: then be a merciful good woman . . .’ He squeezed her fingers, communicating his muscular tremble to her sensitive woman’s frame, and electrically convincing her that he was a lover.

She went up-stairs. In ten minutes she descended, and found him pacing up and down the hall. ‘Madame de Rouaillout is much the same,’ she said. He nodded, looked up the stairs, and about for his hat and gloves, drew on the gloves, fixed the buttons, blinked at his watch, and settled his hat as he was accustomed to wear it, all very methodically, and talking rapidly, but except for certain precise directions, which were not needed by so careful a housekeeper and nurse as Rosamund was known to be, she could not catch a word of meaning. He had some appointment, it seemed; perhaps he was off for a doctor—a fresh instance of his masculine incapacity to understand patient endurance. After opening the housedoor, and returning to the foot of the stairs, listening and sighing, he disappeared.

It struck her that he was trying to be two men at once.

The litter of newspaper sheets in the morning-room brought his exclamation to her mind: ‘They’re at me!’ Her eyes ran down the columns, and were seized by the print of his name in large type. A leading article was devoted to Commander’s Beauchamp’s recent speech delivered in the great manufacturing town of Gunningham, at a meeting under the presidency of the mayor, and his replies to particular questions addressed to him; one being, what right did he conceive himself to have to wear the Sovereign’s uniform in professing Republican opinions? Rosamund winced for her darling during her first perusal of

Page 2539

the article. It was of the sarcastically caressing kind, masterly in ease of style, as the flourish of the executioner well may be with poor Bare-back hung up to a leisurely administration of the scourge. An allusion to ‘Jack on shore’ almost persuaded her that his uncle Everard had inspired the writer of the article. Beauchamp’s reply to the question of his loyalty was not quoted: he was, however, complimented on his frankness. At the same time he was assured that his error lay in a too great proneness to make distinctions, and that there was no distinction between sovereign and country in a loyal and contented land, which could thank him for gallant services in war, while taking him for the solitary example to be cited at the present period of the evils of a comparatively long peace.

’Doubtless the tedium of such a state to a man of the temperament of the gallant commander,’ *etc*., the termination of the article was indulgent. Rosamund recurred to the final paragraph for comfort, and though she loved Beauchamp, the test of her representative feminine sentiment regarding his political career, when personal feeling on his behalf had subsided, was, that the writer of the article must have received an intimation to deal both smartly and forbearingly with the offender: and from whom but her lord? Her notions of the conduct of the Press were primitive. In a summary of the article Beauchamp was treated as naughty boy, formerly brave boy, and likely by-and-by to be good boy. Her secret heart would have spoken similarly, with more emphasis on the flattering terms.

A telegram arrived from her lord. She was bidden to have the house clear for him by noon of the next day.

How could that be done?

But to write blankly to inform the Earl of Romfrey that he was excluded from his own house was another impossibility.

‘Hateful man!’ she apostrophized Captain Baskelett, and sat down, supporting her chin in a prolonged meditation.

The card of a French lady, bearing the name of Madame d’Auffray, was handed to her.

Beauchamp had gone off to his friend Lydiard, to fortify himself in his resolve to reply to that newspaper article by eliciting counsel to the contrary. Phrase by phrase he fought through the first half of his composition of the reply against Lydiard, yielding to him on a point or two of literary judgement, only the more vehemently to maintain his ideas of discretion, which were, that he would not take shelter behind a single subterfuge; that he would try this question nakedly, though he should stand alone; that he would stake his position on it, and establish his right to speak his opinions: and as for unseasonable times, he protested it was the cry of a gorged middle-class, frightened of further action, and making snug with compromise. Would it be a seasonable time when there was

uproar? Then it would be a time to be silent on such themes: they could be discussed calmly now, and without danger; and whether he was hunted or not, he cared nothing. He declined to consider the peculiar nature of Englishmen: they must hear truth or perish.

Page 2540

Knowing the difficulty once afflicting Beauchamp in the art of speaking on politics tersely, Lydiard was rather astonished at his well-delivered cannonade; and he fancied that his modesty had been displaced by the new acquirement; not knowing the nervous fever of his friend's condition, for which the rattle of speech was balm, and contention a native element, and the assumption of truth a necessity. Beauchamp hugged his politics like some who show their love of the pleasures of life by taking to them angrily. It was all he had: he had given up all for it. He forced Lydiard to lay down his pen and walk back to the square with him, and went on arguing, interjecting, sneering, thumping the old country, raising and oversetting her, treating her alternately like a disrespected grandmother, and like a woman anciently beloved; as a dead lump, and as a garden of seeds; reviewing prominent political men, laughing at the dwarf-giants; finally casting anchor on a Mechanics' Institute that he had recently heard of, where working men met weekly for the purpose of reading the British poets.

'That's the best thing I've heard of late,' he said, shaking Lydiard's hand on the door-steps.

'Ah! You're Commander Beauchamp; I think I know you. I've seen you on a platform,' cried a fresh-faced man in decent clothes, halting on his way along the pavement; 'and if you were in your uniform, you damned Republican dog! I'd strip you with my own hands, for the disloyal scoundrel you are, with your pimping Republicanism and capsizing everything in a country like Old England. It's the cat-o'-nine-tails you want, and the bosen to lay on; and I'd do it myself. And mind me, when next I catch sight of you in blue and gold lace, I'll compel you to show cause why you wear it, and prove your case, or else I'll make a Cupid of you, and no joke about it. I don't pay money for a nincompoop to outrage my feelings of respect and loyalty, when he's in my pay, d' ye hear? You're in my pay: and you do your duty, or I 'll kick ye out of it. It's no empty threat. You look out for your next public speech, if it's anywhere within forty mile of London. Get along.'

With a scowl, and a very ugly 'yah!' worthy of cannibal jaws, the man passed off.

Beauchamp kept eye on him. 'What class does a fellow like that come of?'

'He's a harmless enthusiast,' said Lydiard. 'He has been reading the article, and has got excited over it.'

'I wish I had the fellow's address.' Beauchamp looked wistfully at Lydiard, but he did not stimulate the generous offer to obtain it for him. Perhaps it was as well to forget the fellow.

'You see the effect of those articles,' he said.

'You see what I mean by unseasonable times,' Lydiard retorted.

‘He didn’t talk like a tradesman,’ Beauchamp mused.

‘He may be one, for all that. It’s better to class him as an enthusiast.’

‘An enthusiast!’ Beauchamp stamped: ‘for what?’

Page 2541

’For the existing order of things; for his beef and ale; for the titles he is accustomed to read in the papers. You don’t study your countrymen.’

‘I’d study that fellow, if I had the chance.’

’You would probably find him one of the emptiest, with a rather worse temper than most of them.’

Beauchamp shook Lydiard’s hand, saying, ‘The widow?’

‘There’s no woman like her!’

‘Well, now you’re free—why not? I think I put one man out of the field.’

‘Too early! Besides—’

‘Repeat that, and you may have to say too late.’

‘When shall you go down to Bevisham?’

’When? I can’t tell: when I’ve gone through fire. There never was a home for me like the cottage, and the old man, and the dear good girl—the best of girls! if you hadn’t a little spoilt her with your philosophy of the two sides of the case.’

‘I’ve not given her the brains.’

’She’s always doubtful of doing, doubtful of action: she has no will. So she is fatalistic, and an argument between us ends in her submitting, as if she must submit to me, because I’m overbearing, instead of accepting the fact.’

‘She feels your influence.’

’She’s against the publication of *the dawn*—for the present. It’s an “unseasonable time.” I argue with her: I don’t get hold of her mind a bit; but at last she says, “very well.” She has your head.’

And you have her heart, Lydiard could have rejoined.

They said good-bye, neither of them aware of the other’s task of endurance.

As they were parting, Beauchamp perceived his old comrade Jack Wilmore walking past.

‘Jack!’ he called.

Wilmore glanced round. ‘How do you do, Beauchamp?’

‘Where are you off to, Jack?’

‘Down to the Admiralty. I’m rather in a hurry; I have an appointment.’

‘Can’t you stop just a minute?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t. Good morning.’

It was incredible; but this old friend, the simplest heart alive, retreated without a touch of his hand, and with a sorely wounded air.

‘That newspaper article appears to have been generally read,’ Beauchamp said to Lydiard, who answered:

’The article did not put the idea of you into men’s minds, but gave tongue to it: you may take it for an instance of the sagacity of the Press.’

’You wouldn’t take that man and me to have been messmates for years! Old Jack Wilmore! Don’t go, Lydiard.’

Lydiard declared that he was bound to go: he was engaged to read Italian for an hour with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.

‘Then go, by all means,’ Beauchamp dismissed him.

He felt as if he had held a review of his friends and enemies on the door-step, and found them of one colour. If it was an accident befalling him in a London square during a space of a quarter of an hour, what of the sentiments of universal England? Lady Barbara’s elopement with Lord Alfred last year did not rouse much execration; hardly worse than gossip and compassion. Beauchamp drank a great deal of bitterness from his reflections.

Page 2542

They who provoke huge battles, and gain but lame victories over themselves, insensibly harden to the habit of distilling sour thoughts from their mischances and from most occurrences. So does the world they combat win on them.

‘For,’ says Dr. Shrapnel, ’the world and nature, which are opposed in relation to our vital interests, each agrees to demand of us a perfect victory, on pain otherwise of proving it a stage performance; and the victory over the world, as over nature, is over self: and this victory lies in yielding perpetual service to the world, and none to nature: for the world has to be wrought out, nature to be subdued.’

The interior of the house was like a change of elements to Beauchamp. He had never before said to himself, ‘I have done my best, and I am beaten!’ Outside of it, his native pugnacity had been stimulated; but here, within the walls where Renee lay silently breathing, barely breathing, it might be dying, he was overcome, and left it to circumstance to carry him to a conclusion. He went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where he beheld Madame d’Auffray in conversation with Rosamund.

‘I was assured by Madame la Comtesse that I should see you to-day,’ the French lady said as she swam to meet him; ‘it is a real pleasure’: and pressing his hand she continued, ’but I fear you will be disappointed of seeing my sister. She would rashly try your climate at its worst period. Believe me, I do not join in decrying it, except on her account: I could have forewarned her of an English Winter and early Spring. You know her impetuosity; suddenly she decided on accepting the invitation of Madame la Comtesse; and though I have no fears of her health, she is at present a victim of the inclement weather.’

‘You have seen her, madame?’ said Beauchamp. So well had the clever lady played the dupe that he forgot there was a part for him to play. Even the acquiescence of Rosamund in the title of countess bewildered him.

’Madame d’Auffray has been sitting for an hour with Madame de Rouaillout,’ said Rosamund.

He spoke of Roland’s coming.

‘Ah?’ said Madame d’Auffray, and turned to Rosamund: ’you have determined to surprise us: then you will have a gathering of the whole family in your hospitable house, Madame la Comtesse!

’If M. la Marquis will do it that honour, madame!

‘My brother is in London,’ Madame d’Auffray said to Beauchamp.

The shattering blow was merited by one who could not rejoice that he had acted rightly.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE EARL OF ROMFREY AND THE COUNTESS

An extraordinary telegraphic message, followed by a still more extraordinary letter the next morning, from Rosamund Culling, all but interdicted the immediate occupation of his house in town to Everard, now Earl of Romfrey. She begged him briefly not to come until after the funeral, and proposed to give him good reasons for her request at their meeting. 'I repeat, I pledge myself to satisfy you on this point,' she wrote. Her tone was that of one of your heroic women of history refusing to surrender a fortress.

Page 2543

Everard's wrath was ever of a complexion that could suffer postponements without his having to fear an abatement of it. He had no business to transact in London, and he had much at the Castle, so he yielded himself up to his new sensations, which are not commonly the portion of gentlemen of his years. He anticipated that Nevil would at least come down to the funeral, but there was no appearance of him, nor a word to excuse his absence. Cecil was his only supporter. They walked together between the double ranks of bare polls of the tenantry and peasantry, resembling in a fashion old Froissart engravings the earl used to dote on in his boyhood, representing bodies of manacled citizens, whose humbled heads looked like nuts to be cracked, outside the gates of captured French towns, awaiting the disposition of their conqueror, with his banner above him and prancing knights around. That was a glory of the past. He had no successor. The thought was chilling; the solitariness of childlessness to an aged man, chief of a most ancient and martial House, and proud of his blood, gave him the statue's outlook on a desert, and made him feel that he was no more than a whirl of the dust, settling to the dust.

He listened to the parson curiously and consentingly. We are ashes. Ten centuries had come to an end in him to prove the formula correct. The chronicle of the House would state that the last Earl of Romfrey left no heir.

Cecil was a fine figure walking beside him. Measured by feet, he might be a worthy holder of great lands. But so heartily did the earl despise this nephew that he never thought of trying strength with the fellow, and hardly cared to know what his value was, beyond his immediate uses as an instrument to strike with. Beauchamp of Romfrey had been his dream, not Baskelett: and it increased his disgust of Beauchamp that Baskelett should step forward as the man. No doubt Cecil would hunt the county famously: he would preserve game with the sleepless eye of a General of the Jesuits. These things were to be considered.

Two days after the funeral Lord Romfrey proceeded to London. He was met at the station by Rosamund, and informed that his house was not yet vacated by the French family.

'And where have you arranged for me to go, ma'am?' he asked her complacently.

She named an hotel where she had taken rooms for him.

He nodded, and was driven to the hotel, saying little on the road.

As she expected, he was heavily armed against her and Nevil.

'You're the slave of the fellow, ma'am. You are so infatuated that you second his amours, in my house. I must wait for a clearance, it seems.'

He cast a comical glance of disapprobation on the fittings of the hotel apartment, abhorring gilt.

‘They leave us the day after to-morrow,’ said Rosamund, out of breath with nervousness at the commencement of the fray, and skipping over the opening ground of a bold statement of facts. ’Madame de Rouaillout has been unwell. She is not yet recovered; she has just risen. Her sister-in-law has nursed her. Her husband seems much broken in health; he is perfect on the points of courtesy.’

Page 2544

‘That is lucky, ma’am.’

‘Her brother, Nevil’s comrade in the war, was there also.’

‘Who came first?’

’My lord, you have only heard Captain Baskelett’s version of the story.
She has been my guest since the first day of her landing in England.
There cannot possibly be an imputation on her.’

’Ma’am, if her husband manages to be satisfied, what on earth have I to do with it?’

‘I am thinking of Nevil, my lord.’

‘You’re never thinking of any one else, ma’am.’

’He sleeps here, at this hotel. He left the house to Madame de Rouaillout. I bear witness to that.’

‘You two seem to have made your preparations to stand a criminal trial.’

‘It is pure truth, my lord.’

‘Do you take me to be anxious about the fellow’s virtue?’

‘She is a lady who would please you.’

‘A scandal in my house does not please me.’

‘The only approach to a scandal was made by Captain Baskelett.’

’A poor devil locked out of his bed on a Winter’s night hullabaloos with pretty good reason. I suppose he felt the contrast.’

’My lord, this lady did me the honour to come to me on a visit. I have not previously presumed to entertain a friend. She probably formed no estimate of my exact position.’

The earl with a gesture implied Rosamund’s privilege to act the hostess to friends.

‘You invited her?’ he said.

‘That is, I had told her I hoped she would come to England.’

‘She expected you to be at the house in town on her arrival?’

‘It was her impulse to come.’

‘She came alone?’

’She may have desired to be away from her own people for a time: there may have been domestic differences. These cases are delicate.’

’This case appears to have been so delicate that you had to lock out a fourth party.’

’It is indelicate and base of Captain Baskelett to complain and to hint. Nevil had to submit to the same; and Captain Baskelett took his revenge on the housedoor and the bells. The house was visited by the police next morning.’

‘Do you suspect him to have known you were inside the house that night?’

She could not say so: but hatred of Cecil urged her past the bounds of habitual reticence to put it to her lord whether he, imagining the worst, would have behaved like Cecil.

To this he did not reply, but remarked, ’I am sorry he annoyed you, ma’am.’

’It is not the annoyance to me; it is the shocking, the unmanly insolence to a lady, and a foreign lady.’

‘That’s a matter between him and Nevil. I uphold him.’

‘Then, my lord, I am silent.’

Silent she remained; but Lord Romfrey was also silent: and silence being a weapon of offence only when it is practised by one out of two, she had to reflect whether in speaking no further she had finished her business.

Page 2545

‘Captain Baskelett stays at the Castle?’ she asked.

‘He likes his quarters there.’

’Nevil could not go down to Romfrey, my lord. He was obliged to wait, and see, and help me to entertain, her brother and her husband.’

’Why, ma’am? But I have no objection to his making the marquis a happy husband.’

’He has done what few men would have done, that she may be a self-respecting wife.’

‘The parson’s in that fellow!’ Lord Romfrey exclaimed. ’Now I have the story. She came to him, he declined the gift, and you were turned into the curtain for them. If he had only been off with her, he would have done the country good service. Here he’s a failure and a nuisance; he’s a common cock-shy for the journals. I’m tired of hearing of him; he’s a stench in our nostrils. He’s tired of the woman.’

‘He loves her.’

’Ma’am, you’re hoodwinked. If he refused to have her, there ’s a something he loves better. I don’t believe we’ve bred a downright lackadaisical donkey in our family: I know him. He’s not a fellow for abstract morality: I know him. It’s bargain against bargain with him; I’ll do him that justice. I hear he has ordered the removal of the Jersey bull from Holdesbury, and the beast is mine,’ Lord Romfrey concluded in a lower key.

‘Nevil has taken him.’

‘Ha! pull and pull, then!’

’He contends that he is bound by a promise to give an American gentleman the refusal of the bull, and you must sign an engagement to keep the animal no longer than two years.’

‘I sign no engagement. I stick to the bull.’

‘Consent to see Nevil to-night, my lord.’

‘When he has apologized to you, I may, ma’am.’

‘Surely he did more, in requesting me to render him a service.’

’There’s not a creature living that fellow wouldn’t get to serve him, if he knew the trick. We should all of us be marching on London at Shrapnel’s heels. The political mania is just as incurable as hydrophobia, and he’s bitten. That’s clear.’

’Bitten perhaps: but not mad. As you have always contended, the true case is incurable, but it is very rare: and is this one?’

’It’s uncommonly like a true case, though I haven’t seen him foam at the mouth, and shun water-as his mob does.’

Rosamund restrained some tears, betraying the effort to hide the moisture. ’I am no match for you, my lord. I try to plead on his behalf;—I do worse than if I were dumb. This I most earnestly say: he is the Nevil Beauchamp who fought for his country, and did not abandon her cause, though he stood there—we had it from Colonel Halkett—a skeleton: and he is the Nevil who—I am poorly paying my debt to him!—defended me from the aspersions of his cousin.’

‘Boys!’ Lord Romfrey ejaculated.

‘It is the same dispute between them as men.’

’Have you forgotten my proposal to shield you from liars and scandalmongers?’

Page 2546

‘Could I ever forget it?’ Rosamund appeared to come shining out of a cloud. ’Princeliest and truest gentleman, I thought you then, and I know you to be, my dear lord. I fancied I had lived the scandal down. I was under the delusion that I had grown to be past backbiting: and that no man could stand before me to insult and vilify me. But, for a woman in any so-called doubtful position, it seems that the coward will not be wanting to strike her. In quitting your service, I am able to affirm that only once during the whole term of it have I consciously overstepped the line of my duties: it was for Nevil: and Captain Baskelett undertook to defend your reputation, in consequence.’

‘Has the rascal been questioning your conduct?’ The earl frowned.

’Oh, no! not questioning: he does not question, he accuses: he never doubted: and what he went shouting as a boy, is plain matter of fact to him now. He is devoted to you. It was for your sake that he desired me to keep my name from being mixed up in a scandal he foresaw the occurrence of in your house.’

‘He permitted himself to sneer at you?’

’He has the art of sneering. On this occasion he wished to be direct and personal.’

‘What sort of hints were they?’

Lord Romfrey strode away from her chair that the answer might be easy to her, for she was red, and evidently suffering from shame as well as indignation.

‘The hints we call distinct.’ said Rosamund.

‘In words?’

‘In hard words.’

‘Then you won’t meet Cecil?’

Such a question, and the tone of indifference in which it came, surprised and revolted her so that the unreflecting reply leapt out:

‘I would rather meet a devil.’

Of how tremblingly, vehemently, and hastily she had said it, she was unaware. To her lord it was an outcry of nature, astutely touched by him to put her to proof.

He continued his long leisurely strides, nodding over his feet.

Rosamund stood up. She looked a very noble figure in her broad black-furred robe. ‘I have one serious confession to make, sir.’

‘What’s that?’ said he.

’I would avoid it, for it cannot lead to particular harm; but I have an enemy who may poison your ear in my absence. And first I resign my position. I have forfeited it.’

’Time goes forward, ma’am, and you go round. Speak to the point. Do you mean that you toss up the reins of my household?’

‘I do. You trace it to Nevil immediately?’

‘I do. The fellow wants to upset the country, and he begins with me.’

’You are wrong, my lord. What I have done places me at Captain Baskelett’s mercy. It is too loathsome to think of: worse than the whip; worse than your displeasure. It might never be known; but the thought that it might gives me courage. You have said that to protect a woman everything is permissible. It is your creed, my lord, and because the world, I have heard you say, is unjust and implacable to women. In some cases, I think so too. In reality I followed your instructions; I mean, your example. Cheap chivalry on my part! But it pained me not a little. I beg to urge that in my defence.’

Page 2547

’Well, ma’am, you have tied the knot tight enough; perhaps now you’ll cut it,’ said the earl.

Rosamund gasped softly. ’M. le Marquis is a gentleman who, after a life of dissipation, has been reminded by bad health that he has a young and beautiful wife.’

‘He dug his pit to fall into it:—he’s jealous?’

She shook her head to indicate the immeasurable.

’Senile jealousy is anxious to be deceived. He could hardly be deceived so far as to imagine that Madame la Marquise would visit me, such as I am, as my guest. Knowingly or not, his very clever sister, a good woman, and a friend to husband and wife—a Frenchwoman of the purest type—gave me the title. She insisted on it, and I presumed to guess that she deemed it necessary for the sake of peace in that home.’

Lord Romfrey appeared merely inquisitive; his eyebrows were lifted in permanence; his eyes were mild.

She continued: ’They leave England in a few hours. They are not likely to return. I permitted him to address me with the title of countess.’

‘Of Romfrey?’ said the earl.

Rosamund bowed.

His mouth contracted. She did not expect thunder to issue from it, but she did fear to hear a sarcasm, or that she would have to endure a deadly silence: and she was gathering her own lips in imitation of his, to nerve herself for some stroke to come, when he laughed in his peculiar close-mouthed manner.

‘I’m afraid you’ve dished yourself.’

‘You cannot forgive me, my lord?’

He indulged in more of his laughter, and abruptly summoning gravity, bade her talk to him of affairs. He himself talked of the condition of the Castle, and with a certain off-hand contempt of the ladies of the family, and Cecil’s father, Sir John. ‘What are they to me?’ said he, and he complained of having been called Last Earl of Romfrey.

‘The line ends undegenerate,’ said Rosamund fervidly, though she knew not where she stood.

‘Ends!’ quoth the earl.

‘I must see Stukely,’ he added briskly, and stooped to her: ’I beg you to drive me to my Club, countess.’

‘Oh! sir.’

‘Once a countess, always a countess!’

‘But once an impostor, my lord?’

‘Not always, we’ll hope.’

He enjoyed this little variation in the language of comedy; letting it drop, to say: ’Be here to-morrow early. Don’t chase that family away from the house. Do as you will, but not a word of Nevil to me: he’s a bad mess in any man’s porringer; it’s time for me to claim exemption of him from mine.’

She dared not let her thoughts flow, for to think was to triumph, and possibly to be deluded. They came in copious volumes when Lord Romfrey, alighting at his Club, called to the coachman: ‘Drive the countess home.’

Page 2548

They were not thoughts of triumph absolutely. In her cooler mind she felt that it was a bad finish of a gallant battle. Few women had risen against a tattling and pelting world so stedfastly; and would it not have been better to keep her own ground, which she had won with tears and some natural strength, and therewith her liberty, which she prized? The hateful Cecil, a reminder of whom set her cheeks burning and turned her heart to serpent, had forced her to it. So she honestly conceived, owing to the circumstance of her honestly disliking the pomps of life and not desiring to occupy any position of brilliancy. She thought assuredly of her hoard of animosity toward the scandalmongers, and of the quiet glance she would cast behind on them, and below. That thought came as a fruit, not as a reflection.

But if ever two offending young gentlemen, nephews of a long-suffering uncle, were circumvented, undermined, and struck to earth, with one blow, here was the instance. This was accomplished by Lord Romfrey's resolution to make the lady he had learnt to esteem his countess: and more, it fixed to him for life one whom he could not bear to think of losing: and still more, it might be; but what more was unwritten on his tablets.

Rosamund failed to recollect that Everard Romfrey never took a step without seeing a combination of objects to be gained by it.

CHAPTER XLIV

The nephews of the earl, *and another exhibition of the two passions in Beauchamp*

It was now the season when London is as a lighted tower to her provinces, and, among other gentlemen hurried thither by attraction, Captain Baskelett arrived. Although not a personage in the House of Commons, he was a vote; and if he never committed himself to the perils of a speech, he made himself heard. His was the part of chorus, which he performed with a fairly close imitation of the original cries of periods before parliaments were instituted, thus representing a stage in the human development besides the borough of Bevisham. He arrived in the best of moods for the emission of high-pitched vowel-sounds; otherwise in the worst of tempers. His uncle had notified an addition of his income to him at Romfrey, together with commands that he should quit the castle instantly: and there did that woman, Mistress Culling, do the honours to Nevil Beauchamp's French party. He assured Lord Palmet of his positive knowledge of the fact, incredible as the sanction of such immoral proceedings by the Earl of Romfrey must appear to that young nobleman. Additions to income are of course acceptable, but in the form of a palpable stipulation for silence, they neither awaken gratitude nor effect their purpose. Quite the contrary; they prick the moral mind to sit in judgement on the donor. It means, she fears me! Cecil confidently thought and said of the intriguing woman who managed his patron.

Page 2549

The town-house was open to him. Lord Romfrey was at Steynham. Cecil could not suppose that he was falling into a pit in entering it. He happened to be the favourite of the old housekeeper, who liked him for his haughtiness, which was to her thinking the sign of real English nobility, and perhaps it is the popular sign, and a tonic to the people. She raised lamentations over the shame of the locking of the door against him that awful night, declaring she had almost mustered courage to go down to him herself, in spite of Mrs. Calling's orders. The old woman lowered her voice to tell him that her official superior had permitted the French gentleman and ladies to call her countess. This she knew for a certainty, though she knew nothing of French; but the French lady who came second brought a maid who knew English a little, and she said the very words—the countess, and said also that her party took Mrs. Culling for the Countess of Romfrey. What was more, my lord's coachman caught it up, and he called her countess, and he had a quarrel about it with the footman Kendall; and the day after a dreadful affair between them in the mews, home drives madam, and Kendall is to go up to her, and down the poor man comes, and not a word to be got out of him, but as if he had seen a ghost. 'She have such power,' Cecil's admirer concluded.

'I wager I match her,' Cecil said to himself, pulling at his wristbands and letting his lower teeth shine out. The means of matching her were not so palpable as the resolution. First he took men into his confidence. Then he touched lightly on the story to ladies, with the question, 'What ought I to do?' In consideration for the Earl of Romfrey he ought not to pass it over, he suggested. The ladies of the family urged him to go to Steynham and boldly confront the woman. He was not prepared for that. Better, it seemed to him, to blow the rumour, and make it the topic of the season, until Lord Romfrey should hear of it. Cecil had the ear of the town for a month. He was in the act of slicing the air with his right hand in his accustomed style, one evening at Lady Elsea's, to protest how vast was the dishonour done to the family by Mistress Culling, when Stukely Culbrett stopped him, saying, 'The lady you speak of is the Countess of Romfrey. I was present at the marriage.'

Cecil received the shock in the attitude of those martial figures we see wielding two wooden swords in provincial gardens to tell the disposition of the wind: abruptly abandoned by it, they stand transfixed, one sword aloft, the other at their heels. The resemblance extended to his astonished countenance. His big chest heaved. Like many another wounded giant before him, he experienced the insufficiency of interjections to solace pain. For them, however, the rocks were handy to fling, the trees to uproot; heaven's concave resounded companionably to their bellowings. Relief of so concrete a kind is not to be obtained in crowded London assemblies.

Page 2550

‘You are jesting?—you are a jester,’ he contrived to say.

‘It was a private marriage, and I was a witness,’ replied Stukely.

‘Lord Romfrey has made an honest woman of her, has he?’

‘A peeress, you mean.’

Cecil bowed. ‘Exactly. I am corrected. I mean a peeress.’

He got out of the room with as high an air as he could command, feeling as if a bar of iron had flattened his head.

Next day it was intimated to him by one of the Steynham servants that apartments were ready for him at the residence of the late earl: Lord Romfrey’s house was about to be occupied by the Countess of Romfrey. Cecil had to quit, and he chose to be enamoured of that dignity of sulking so seductive to the wounded spirit of man.

Rosamund, Countess of Romfrey, had worse to endure from Beauchamp. He indeed came to the house, and he went through the formalities of congratulation, but his opinion of her step was unconcealed, that she had taken it for the title. He distressed her by reviving the case of Dr. Shrapnel, as though it were a matter of yesterday, telling her she had married a man with a stain on him; she should have exacted the Apology as a nuptial present; ay, and she would have done it if she had cared for the earl’s honour or her own. So little did he understand men! so tenacious was he of his ideas! She had almost forgotten the case of Dr. Shrapnel, and to see it shooting up again in the new path of her life was really irritating.

Rosamund did not defend herself.

‘I am very glad you have come, Nevil,’ she said; ’your uncle holds to the ceremony. I may be of real use to you now; I wish to be.’

‘You have only to prove it,’ said he. ’If you can turn his mind to marriage, you can send him to Bevisham.’

‘My chief thought is to serve you.’

‘I know it is, I know it is,’ he rejoined with some fervour. ’You have served me, and made me miserable for life, and rightly. Never mind, all’s well while the hand’s to the axe.’ Beauchamp smoothed his forehead roughly, trying hard to inspire himself with the tonic draughts of sentiments cast in the form of proverbs. ‘Lord Romfrey saw her, you say?’

‘He did, Nevil, and admired her.’

’Well, if I suffer, let me think of her! For courage and nobleness I shall never find her equal. Have you changed your ideas of Frenchwomen now? Not a word, you say, not a look, to show her disdain of me whenever my name was mentioned!’

‘She could scarcely feel disdain. She was guilty of a sad error.’

’Through trusting in me. Will nothing teach you where the fault lies? You women have no mercy for women. She went through the parade to Romfrey Castle and back, and she must have been perishing at heart. That, you English call acting. In history you have a respect for such acting up to the scaffold. Good-bye to her! There’s a story ended. One thing you must promise: you’re a peeress, ma’am: the story’s out, everybody has heard of it; that babbler has done his worst: if you have a becoming appreciation of your title, you will promise me honestly—no, give me your word as a woman I can esteem—that you will not run about excusing me. Whatever you hear said or suggested, say nothing yourself. I insist on your keeping silence. Press my hand.’

Page 2551

‘Nevil, how foolish!’

‘It’s my will.’

‘It is unreasonable. You give your enemies licence.’

’I know what’s in your head. Take my hand, and let me have your word for it.’

‘But if persons you like very much, Nevil, should hear?’

‘Promise. You are a woman not to break your word.’

‘If I decline?’

‘Your hand! I’ll kiss it.’

‘Oh! my darling.’ Rosamund flung her arms round him and strained him an instant to her bosom. ’What have I but you in the world? My comfort was the hope that I might serve you.’

’Yes! by slaying one woman as an offering to another. It would be impossible for you to speak the truth. Don’t you see, it would be a lie against her, and making a figure of me that a man would rather drop to the ground than have shown of him? I was to blame, and only I. Madame de Rouaillout was as utterly deceived by me as ever a trusting woman by a brute. I look at myself and hardly believe it ’s the same man. I wrote to her that I was unchanged—and I was entirely changed, another creature, anything Lord Romfrey may please to call me.’

‘But, Nevil, I repeat, if Miss Halkett should hear . . . ?’

‘She knows by this time.’

‘At present she is ignorant of it.’

‘And what is Miss Halkett to me?’

’More than you imagined in that struggle you underwent, I think, Nevil. Oh! if only to save her from Captain Baskelett! He gained your uncle’s consent when they were at the Castle, to support him in proposing for her. He is persistent. Women have been snared without loving. She is a great heiress. Reflect on his use of her wealth. You respect her, if you have no warmer feeling. Let me assure you that the husband of Cecilia, if he is of Romfrey blood, has the fairest chance of the estates. That man will employ every weapon. He will soon be here bowing to me to turn me to his purposes.’

‘Cecilia can see through Baskelett,’ said Beauchamp.

’Single-mindedly selfish men may be seen through and through, and still be dangerous, Nevil. The supposition is, that we know the worst of them. He carries a story to poison her mind. She could resist it, if you and she were in full confidence together. If she did not love you, she could resist it. She does, and for some strange reason beyond my capacity to fathom, you have not come to an understanding. Sanction my speaking to her, just to put her on her guard, privately: not to injure that poor lady, but to explain. Shall she not know the truth? I need say but very little. Indeed, all I can say is, that finding the marquise in London one evening, you telegraphed for me to attend on her, and I joined you. You shake your head. But surely it is due to Miss Halkett. She should be protected from what will certainly wound her deeply. Her father is afraid of you, on the score of your theories. I foresee it: he will hear the

Page 2552

scandal: he will imagine you as bad in morals as in politics. And you have lost your friend in Lord Romfrey—though he shall not be your enemy. Colonel Halkett and Cecilia called on us at Steynham. She was looking beautiful; a trifle melancholy. The talk was of your—that—I do not like it, but you hold those opinions—the Republicanism. She had read your published letters. She spoke to me of your sincerity. Colonel Halkett of course was vexed.

It is the same with all your friends. She, however, by her tone, led me to think that she sees you as you are, more than in what you do. They are now in Wales. They will be in town after Easter. Then you must expect that her feeling for you will be tried, unless but you will! You will let me speak to her, Nevil. My position allows me certain liberties I was previously debarred from. You have not been so very tender to your Cecilia that you can afford to give her fresh reasons for sorrowful perplexity. And why should you stand to be blackened by scandalmongers when a few words of mine will prove that instead of weak you have been strong, instead of libertine blameless? I am not using fine phrases: I would not. I would be as thoughtful of you as if you were present. And for her sake, I repeat, the truth should be told to her. I have a lock of her hair.'

'Cecilia's? Where?' said Beauchamp.

'It is at Steynham.' Rosamund primmed her lips at the success of her probing touch; but she was unaware of the chief reason for his doting on those fair locks, and how they coloured his imagination since the day of the drive into Bevisham.

'Now leave me, my dear Nevil,' she said. 'Lord Romfrey will soon be here, and it is as well for the moment that you should not meet him, if it can be avoided.'

Beauchamp left her, like a man out-argued and overcome. He had no wish to meet his uncle, whose behaviour in contracting a misalliance and casting a shadow on the family, in a manner so perfectly objectless and senseless, appeared to him to call for the reverse of compliments. Cecilia's lock of hair lying at Steynham hung in his mind. He saw the smooth flat curl lying secret like a smile.

The graceful head it had fallen from was dimmer in his mental eye. He went so far in this charmed meditation as to feel envy of the possessor of the severed lock: passingly he wondered, with the wonder of reproach, that the possessor should deem it enough to possess the lock, and resign it to a drawer or a desk. And as when life rolls back on us after the long ebb of illness, little whispers and diminutive images of the old joys and prizes of life arrest and fill our hearts; or as, to men who have been beaten down by storms, the opening of a daisy is dearer than the blazing orient which bids it open; so the visionary lock of Cecilia's hair became Cecilia's self to Beauchamp, yielding him as much of her as he could bear to think of, for his heart was shattered.

Page 2553

Why had she given it to his warmest friend? For the asking, probably.

This question was the first ripple of the breeze from other emotions beginning to flow fast.

He walked out of London, to be alone, and to think and from the palings of a road on a South-western run of high land, he gazed, at the great city—a place conquerable yet, with the proper appliances for subjugating it: the starting of his daily newspaper, *the dawn*, say, as a commencement. It began to seem a possible enterprise. It soon seemed a proximate one. If Cecilia! He left the exclamation a blank, but not an empty dash in the brain; rather like the shroud of night on a vast and gloriously imagined land.

Nay, the prospect was partly visible, as the unknown country becomes by degrees to the traveller's optics on the dark hill-tops. It is much, of course, to be domestically well-mated: but to be fortified and armed by one's wife with a weapon to fight the world, is rare good fortune; a rapturous and an infinite satisfaction. He could now support of his own resources a weekly paper. A paper published weekly, however, is a poor thing, out of the tide, behind the date, mainly a literary periodical, no foremost combatant in politics, no champion in the arena; hardly better than a commentator on the events of the six past days; an echo, not a voice. It sits on a Saturday bench and pretends to sum up. Who listens? The verdict knocks dust out of a cushion. It has no steady continuous pressure of influence. It is the organ of sleepers. Of all the bigger instruments of money, it is the feeblest, Beauchamp thought. His constant faith in the good effects of utterance naturally inclined him to value six occasions per week above one; and in the fight he was for waging, it was necessary that he should enter the ring and hit blow for blow sans intermission. A statement that he could call false must be challenged hot the next morning. The covert Toryism, the fits of flunkeyism, the cowardice, of the relapsing middle-class, which is now England before mankind, because it fills the sails of the Press, must be exposed. It supports the Press in its own interests, affecting to speak for the people. It belies the people. And this Press, declaring itself independent, can hardly walk for fear of treading on an interest here, an interest there. It cannot have a conscience. It is a bad guide, a false guardian; its abject claim to be our national and popular interpreter-even that is hollow and a mockery! It is powerful only while subservient. An engine of money, appealing to the sensitiveness of money, it has no connection with the mind of the nation. And that it is not of, but apart from, the people, may be seen when great crises come. Can it stop a war? The people would, and with thunder, had they the medium. But in strong gales the power of the Press collapses; it wheezes like a pricked pigskin of a piper. At its best Beauchamp regarded our lordly Press as a curiously diapered curtain and delusive mask, behind which the country struggles vainly to show an honest feature; and as a trumpet that deafened and terrorized the people; a mere engine of leaguers banded to keep a smooth face upon affairs, quite soullessly: he meanwhile having to be dumb.

Page 2554

But a Journal that should be actually independent of circulation and advertisements: a popular journal in the true sense, very lungs to the people, for them to breathe freely through at last, and be heard out of it, with well-paid men of mark to head and aid them; —the establishment of such a Journal seemed to him brave work of a life, though one should die early. The money launching it would be coin washed pure of its iniquity of selfish reproduction, by service to mankind. This *dawn* of his conception stood over him like a rosier Aurora for the country. He beheld it in imagination as a new light rising above hugeous London. You turn the sheets of *the dawn*, and it is the manhood of the land addressing you, no longer that alternately puling and insolent cry of the coffers. The health, wealth, comfort, contentment of the greater number are there to be striven for, in contempt of compromise and 'unseasonable times.'

Beauchamp's illuminated dream of the power of his *dawn* to vitalize old England, liberated him singularly from his wearing regrets and heart-sickness.

Surely Cecilia, who judged him sincere, might be bent to join hands with him for so good a work! She would bring riches to her husband: sufficient. He required the ablest men of the country to write for him, and it was just that they should be largely paid. They at least in their present public apathy would demand it. To fight the brewers, distillers, publicans, the shopkeepers, the parsons, the landlords, the law limpets, and also the indifferents, the logs, the cravens and the fools, high talent was needed, and an ardour stimulated by rates of pay outdoing the offers of the lucre-journals. A large annual outlay would therefore be needed; possibly for as long as a quarter of a century. Cecilia and her husband would have to live modestly. But her inheritance would be immense. Colonel Halkett had never spent a tenth of his income. In time he might be taught to perceive in *the dawn* the one greatly beneficent enterprise of his day. He might through his daughter's eyes, and the growing success of the Journal. Benevolent and gallant old man, patriotic as he was, and kind at heart, he might learn to see in *the dawn* a broader channel of philanthropy and chivalry than any we have yet had a notion of in England!—a school of popular education into the bargain.

Beauchamp reverted to the shining curl. It could not have been clearer to vision if it had lain under his eyes.

Ay, that first wild life of his was dead. He had slain it. Now for the second and sober life! Who can say? The Countess of Romfrey suggested it:—Cecilia may have prompted him in his unknown heart to the sacrifice of a lawless love, though he took it for simply barren iron duty. Brooding on her, he began to fancy the victory over himself less and less a lame one: for it waxed less and less difficult in his contemplation of it. He was looking forward instead of back.

Page 2555

Who cut off the lock? Probably Cecilia herself; and thinking at the moment that he would see it, perhaps beg for it. The lustrous little ring of hair wound round his heart; smiled both on its emotions and its aims; bound them in one.

But proportionately as he grew tender to Cecilia, his consideration for Renee increased; that became a law to him: pity nourished it, and glimpses of self-contempt, and something like worship of her high-heartedness.

He wrote to the countess, forbidding her sharply and absolutely to attempt a vindication of him by explanations to any persons whomsoever; and stating that he would have no falsehoods told, he desired her to keep to the original tale of the visit of the French family to her as guests of the Countess of Romfrey. Contradictory indeed. Rosamund shook her head over him. For a wilful character that is guilty of issuing contradictory commands to friends who would be friends in spite of him, appears to be expressly angling for the cynical spirit, so surely does it rise and snap at such provocation. He was even more emphatic when they next met. He would not listen to a remonstrance; and though, of course, her love of him granted him the liberty to speak to her in what tone he pleased, there were sensations proper to her new rank which his intemperateness wounded and tempted to revolt when he vexed her with unreason. She had a glimpse of the face he might wear to his enemies.

He was quite as resolute, too, about that slight matter of the Jersey bull. He had the bull in Bevisham, and would not give him up without the sign manual of Lord Romfrey to an agreement to resign him over to the American Quaker gentleman, after a certain term. Moreover, not once had he, by exclamation or innuendo, during the period of his recent grief for the loss of his first love, complained of his uncle Everard's refusal in the old days to aid him in suing for Renee. Rosamund had expected that he would. She thought it unloverlike in him not to stir the past, and to bow to intolerable facts. This idea of him, coming in conjunction with his present behaviour, convinced her that there existed a contradiction in his nature: whence it ensued that she lost her warmth as an advocate designing to intercede for him with Cecilia; and warmth being gone, the power of the scandal seemed to her unassailable. How she could ever have presumed to combat it, was an astonishment to her. Cecilia might be indulgent, she might have faith in Nevil. Little else could be hoped for.

The occupations, duties, and ceremonies of her new position contributed to the lassitude into which Rosamund sank. And she soon had a communication to make to her lord, the nature of which was more startling to herself, even tragic. The bondwoman is a free woman compared with the wife.

Page 2556

Lord Romfrey's friends noticed a glow of hearty health in the splendid old man, and a prouder animation of eye and stature; and it was agreed that matrimony suited him well. Luckily for Cecil he did not sulk very long. A spectator of the earl's first introduction to the House of Peers, he called on his uncle the following day, and Rosamund accepted his homage in her husband's presence. He vowed that my lord was the noblest figure in the whole assembly; that it had been to him the most moving sight he had ever witnessed; that Nevil should have been there to see it and experience what he had felt; it would have done old Nevil incalculable good! and as far as his grief at the idea and some reticence would let him venture, he sighed to think of the last Earl of Romfrey having been seen by him taking the seat of his fathers.

Lord Romfrey shouted 'Ha!' like a checked peal of laughter, and glanced at his wife.

CHAPTER XLV

A LITTLE PLOT AGAINST CECILIA

Some days before Easter week Seymour Austin went to Mount Laurels for rest, at an express invitation from Colonel Halkett. The working barrister, who is also a working member of Parliament, is occasionally reminded that this mortal machine cannot adapt itself in perpetuity to the long hours of labour by night in the House of Commons as well as by day in the Courts, which would seem to have been arranged by a compliant country for the purpose of aiding his particular, and most honourable, ambition to climb, while continuing to fill his purse. Mr. Austin broke down early in the year. He attributed it to a cold. Other representative gentlemen were on their backs, of whom he could admit that the protracted nightwork had done them harm, with the reservation that their constitutions were originally unsound. But the House cannot get on without lawyers, and lawyers must practise their profession, and if they manage both to practise all day and sit half the night, others should be able to do the simple late sitting; and we English are an energetic people, we must toil or be beaten: and besides, 'night brings counsel,' men are cooler and wiser by night. Any amount of work can be performed by careful feeders: it is the stomach that kills the Englishman. Brains are never the worse for activity; they subsist on it.

These arguments and citations, good and absurd, of a man more at home in his harness than out of it, were addressed to the colonel to stop his remonstrances and idle talk about burning the candle at both ends. To that illustration Mr. Austin replied that he did not burn it in the middle.

'But you don't want money, Austin.'

'No; but since I've had the habit of making it I have taken to like it.'

‘But you’re not ambitious.’

‘Very little; but I should be sorry to be out of the tideway.’

‘I call it a system of slaughter,’ said the colonel; and Mr. Austin said, ‘The world goes in that way—love and slaughter.’

Page 2557

‘Not suicide though,’ Colonel Halkett muttered.

‘No, that’s only incidental.’

The casual word ‘love’ led Colonel Halkett to speak to Cecilia of an old love-affair of Seymour Austin’s, in discussing the state of his health with her. The lady was the daughter of a famous admiral, handsome, and latterly of light fame. Mr. Austin had nothing to regret in her having married a man richer than himself.

‘I wish he had married a good woman,’ said the colonel.

‘He looks unwell, papa.’

‘He thinks you’re looking unwell, my dear.’

‘He thinks that of me?’

Cecilia prepared a radiant face for Mr. Austin.

She forgot to keep it kindled, and he suspected her to be a victim of one of the forms of youthful melancholy, and laid stress on the benefit to health of a change of scene.

‘We have just returned from Wales,’ she said.

He remarked that it was hardly a change to be within shot of our newspapers.

The colour left her cheeks. She fancied her father had betrayed her to the last man who should know her secret. Beauchamp and the newspapers were rolled together in her mind by the fever of apprehension wasting her ever since his declaration of Republicanism, and defence of it, and an allusion to one must imply the other, she feared: feared, but far from quailingly. She had come to think that she could read the man she loved, and detect a reasonableness in his extravagance. Her father had discovered the impolicy of attacking Beauchamp in her hearing. The fever by which Cecilia was possessed on her lover’s behalf, often overcame discretion, set her judgement in a whirl, was like a delirium. How it had happened she knew not. She knew only her wretched state; a frenzy seized her whenever his name was uttered, to excuse, account for, all but glorify him publicly. And the immodesty of her conduct was perceptible to her while she thus made her heart bare. She exposed herself once of late at Itchincope, and had tried to school her tongue before she went there. She felt that she should inevitably be seen through by Seymour Austin if he took the world’s view of Beauchamp, and this to her was like a descent on the rapids to an end one shuts eyes from.

He noticed her perturbation, and spoke of it to her father.

‘Yes, I’m very miserable about her,’ the colonel confessed. ’Girls don’t see . . . they can’t guess . . . they have no idea of the right kind of man for them. A man like Blackburn Tuckham, now, a man a father could leave his girl to, with confidence! He works for me like a slave; I can’t guess why. He doesn’t look as if he were attracted. There’s a man! but, no; harum-scarum fellows take their fancy.’

‘Is she that kind of young lady?’ said Mr. Austin.

’No one would have thought so. She pretends to have opinions upon politics now. It’s of no use to talk of it!’

But Beauchamp was fully indicated.

Page 2558

Mr. Austin proposed to Cecilia that they should spend Easter week in Rome.

Her face lighted and clouded.

‘I should like it,’ she said, negatively.

‘What’s the objection?’

’None, except that Mount Laurels in Spring has grown dear to me; and we have engagements in London. I am not quick, I suppose, at new projects. I have ordered the yacht to be fitted out for a cruise in the Mediterranean early in the Summer. There is an objection, I am sure—yes; papa has invited Mr. Tuckham here for Easter.’

‘We could carry him with us.’

‘Yes, but I should wish to be entirely under your tutelage in Rome.’

‘We would pair: your father and he; you and I.’

’We might do that. But Mr. Tuckham is like you, devoted to work; and, unlike you, careless of Antiquities and Art.’

’He is a hard and serious worker, and therefore the best of companions for a holiday. At present he is working for the colonel, who would easily persuade him to give over, and come with us.’

‘He certainly does love papa,’ said Cecilia.

Mr. Austin dwelt on that subject.

Cecilia perceived that she had praised Mr. Tuckham for his devotedness to her father without recognizing the beauty of nature in the young man who could voluntarily take service under the elder he esteemed, in simple admiration of him. Mr. Austin scarcely said so much, or expected her to see the half of it, but she wished to be extremely grateful, and could only see at all by kindling altogether.

‘He does himself injustice in his manner,’ said Cecilia.

‘That has become somewhat tempered,’ Mr. Austin assured her, and he acknowledged what it had been with a smile that she reciprocated.

A rough man of rare quality civilizing under various influences, and half ludicrous, a little irritating, wholly estimable, has frequently won the benign approbation of the sex. In addition, this rough man over whom she smiled was one of the few that never worried

her concerning her hand. There was not a whisper of it in him. He simply loved her father.

Cecilia welcomed him to Mount Laurels with grateful gladness. The colonel had hastened Mr. Tuckham's visit in view of the expedition to Rome, and they discoursed of it at the luncheon table. Mr. Tuckham let fall that he had just seen Beauchamp.

'Did he thank you for his inheritance?' Colonel Halkett inquired.

'Not he!' Tuckham replied jovially.

Cecilia's eyes, quick to flash, were dropped.

The colonel said: 'I suppose you told him nothing of what you had done for him?' and said Tuckham: 'Oh no: what anybody else would have done'; and proceeded to recount that he had called at Dr. Shrapnel's on the chance of an interview with his friend Lydiard, who used generally to be hanging about the cottage. 'But now he's free: his lunatic wife is dead, and I'm happy to think I was mistaken as to Miss

Page 2559

Denham. Men practising literature should marry women with money. The poor girl changed colour when I informed her he had been released for upwards of three months. The old Radical's not the thing in health. He's anxious about leaving her alone in the world; he said so to me. Beauchamp's for rigging out a yacht to give him a sail. It seems that salt water did him some good last year. They're both of them rather the worse for a row at one of their meetings in the North in support of that public nuisance, the democrat and atheist Roughleigh. The Radical doctor lost a hat, and Beauchamp almost lost an eye. He would have been a Nelson of politics, if he had been a monops, with an excuse for not seeing. It's a trifle to them; part of their education. They call themselves students. Rome will be capital, Miss Halkett. You're an Italian scholar, and I beg to be accepted as a pupil.'

'I fear we have postponed the expedition too long,' said Cecilia. She could have sunk with languor.

'Too long?' cried Colonel Halkett, mystified.

'Until too late, I mean, papa. Do you not think, Mr. Austin, that a fortnight in Rome is too short a time?'

'Not if we make it a month, my dear Cecilia.'

'Is not our salt air better for you? The yacht shall be fitted out.'

'I'm a poor sailor!'

'Besides, a hasty excursion to Italy brings one's anticipated regrets at the farewell too close to the pleasure of beholding it, for the enjoyment of that luxury of delight which I associate with the name of Italy.'

'Why, my dear child,' said her father, 'you were all for going, the other day.'

'I do not remember it,' said she. 'One plans agreeable schemes. At least we need not hurry from home so very soon after our return. We have been travelling incessantly. The cottage in Wales is not home. It is hardly fair to Mount Laurels to quit it without observing the changes of the season in our flowers and birds here. And we have visitors coming. Of course, papa, I would not chain you to England. If I am not well enough to accompany you, I can go to Louise for a few weeks.'

Was ever transparency so threadbare? Cecilia shrank from herself in contemplating it when she was alone; and Colonel Halkett put the question to Mr. Austin, saying to him privately, with no further reserve: 'It's that fellow Beauchamp in the neighbourhood; I'm not so blind. He'll be knocking at my door, and I can't lock him out. Austin, would you guess it was my girl speaking? I never in my life had such an example of intoxication before me. I 'm perfectly miserable at the sight. You. know her; she was the proudest

girl living. Her ideas were orderly and sound; she had a good intellect. Now she more than half defends him—a naval officer! good Lord!—for getting up in a public room to announce that he ’s a Republican, and writing heaps of mad letters to justify himself. He’s ruined in his profession: hopeless!

Page 2560

He can never get a ship: his career's cut short, he's a rudderless boat. A gentleman drifting to Bedlam, his uncle calls him. I call his treatment of Grancey Lespel anything but gentlemanly. This is the sort of fellow my girl worships! What can I do? I can't interdict the house to him: it would only make matters worse. Thank God, the fellow hangs fire somehow, and doesn't come to me. I expect it every day, either in a letter or the man in person. And I declare to heaven I'd rather be threading a Khyber Pass with my poor old friend who fell to a shot there.'

'She certainly has another voice,' Mr. Austin assented gravely.

He did not look on Beauchamp as the best of possible husbands for Cecilia.

'Let her see that you're anxious, Austin,' said the colonel. 'I'm her old opponent in this affair. She loves me, but she's accustomed to think me prejudiced: you she won't. You may have a good effect.'

'Not by speaking.'

'No, no; no assault: not a word, and not a word against him. Lay the wind to catch a gossamer. I've had my experience of blowing cold, and trying to run her down. He's at Shrapnel's. He'll be up here to-day, and I have an engagement in the town. Don't quit her side. Let her fancy you are interested in some discussion—Radicalism, if you like.'

Mr. Austin readily undertook to mount guard over her while her father rode into Bevisham on business.

The enemy appeared.

Cecilia saw him, and could not step to meet him for trouble of heart. It was bliss to know that he lived and was near.

A transient coldness following the fit of ecstasy enabled her to swin through the terrible first minutes face to face with him.

He folded her round like a mist; but it grew a problem to understand why Mr. Austin should be perpetually at hand, in the garden, in the woods, in the drawing-room, wheresoever she wakened up from one of her trances to see things as they were.

Yet Beauchamp, with a daring and cunning at which her soul exulted, and her feminine nature trembled, as at the divinely terrible, had managed to convey to her no less than if they had been alone together.

His parting words were: 'I must have five minutes with your father to-morrow.'

How had she behaved? What could be Seymour Austin's idea of her?

She saw the blind thing that she was, the senseless thing, the shameless; and vulture-like in her scorn of herself, she alighted on that disgraced Cecilia and picked her to pieces hungrily. It was clear: Beauchamp had meant nothing beyond friendly civility: it was only her abject greediness pecking at crumbs. No! he loved her. Could a woman's heart be mistaken? She melted and wept, thanking him: she offered him her remnant of pride, pitiful to behold.

Page 2561

And still she asked herself between-whiles whether it could be true of an English lady of our day, that she, the fairest stature under sun, was ever knowingly twisted to this convulsion. She seemed to look forth from a barred window on flower, and field, and hill. Quietness existed as a vision. Was it impossible to embrace it? How pass into it? By surrendering herself to the flames, like a soul unto death! For why, if they were overpowering, attempt to resist them? It flattered her to imagine that she had been resisting them in their present burning might ever since her lover stepped on the Esperanza's deck at the mouth of Otley River. How foolish, seeing that they are fatal! A thrill of satisfaction swept her in reflecting that her ability to reason was thus active. And she was instantly rewarded for surrendering; pain fled, to prove her reasoning good; the flames devoured her gently they cared not to torture so long as they had her to themselves.

At night, candle in hand, on the corridor, her father told her he had come across Grancey Lespel in Bevisham, and heard what he had not quite relished of the Countess of Romfrey. The glittering of Cecilia's eyes frightened him. Taking her for the moment to know almost as much as he, the colonel doubted the weight his communication would have on her; he talked obscurely of a scandalous affair at Lord Romfrey's house in town, and Beauchamp and that Frenchwoman. 'But,' said he, 'Mrs. Grancey will be here to-morrow.'

'So will Nevil, papa,' said Cecilia.

'Ah! he's coming, yes; well!' the colonel puffed. 'Well, I shall see him, of course, but I . . . I can only say that if his oath 's worth having, I . . . and I think you too, my dear, if you . . . but it's no use anticipating. I shall stand out for your honour and happiness. There, your cheeks are flushed. Go and sleep.'

Some idle tale! Cecilia murmured to herself a dozen times, undisturbed by the recurrence of it. Nevil was coming to speak to her father tomorrow! Adieu to doubt and division! Happy to-morrow! and dear Mount Laurels! The primroses were still fair in the woods: and soon the cowslips would come, and the nightingale; she lay lapt in images of everything innocently pleasing to Nevil. Soon the Esperanza would be spreading wings. She revelled in a picture of the yacht on a tumbling Mediterranean Sea, meditating on the two specks near the tiller,—who were blissful human creatures, blest by heaven and in themselves—with luxurious Olympian benevolence.

For all that, she awoke, starting up in the first cold circle of twilight, her heart in violent action. She had dreamed that the vessel was wrecked. 'I did not think myself so cowardly,' she said aloud, pressing her side and then, with the dream in her eyes, she gasped: 'It would be together!'

Strangely chilled, she tried to recover some fallen load. The birds of the dawn twittered, chirped, dived aslant her window, fluttered back. Instead of a fallen load, she fancied

presently that it was an expectation she was desiring to realize: but what? What could be expected at that hour? She quitted her bed, and paced up and down the room beneath a gold-starred ceiling. Her expectation, she resolved to think, was of a splendid day of the young Spring at Mount Laurels—a day to praise to Nevil.

Page 2562

She raised her window-blind at a window letting in sweet air, to gather indications of promising weather. Her lover stood on the grass-plot among the flower-beds below, looking up, as though it had been his expectation to see her which had drawn her to gaze out with an idea of some expectation of her own. So visionary was his figure in the grey solitariness of the moveless morning that she stared at the apparition, scarce putting faith in him as man, until he kissed his hand to her, and had softly called her name.

Impulsively she waved a hand from her lips.

Now there was no retreat for either of them!

She awoke to this conviction after a flight of blushes that burnt her thoughts to ashes as they sprang. Thoughts born blushing, all of the crimson colour, a rose-garden, succeeded, and corresponding with their speed her feet paced the room, both slender hands crossed at her throat under an uplifted chin, and the curves of her dark eyelashes dropped as in a swoon.

‘He loves me!’ The attestation of it had been visible. ‘No one but me!’ Was that so evident?

Her father picked up silly stories of him—a man who made enemies recklessly!

Cecilia was petrified by a gentle tapping at her door. Her father called to her, and she threw on her dressing-gown, and opened the door.

The colonel was in his riding-suit.

‘I haven’t slept a wink, and I find it’s the same with you,’ he said, paining her with his distressed kind eyes. ’I ought not to have hinted anything last night without proofs. Austin’s as unhappy as I am.’

‘At what, my dear papa, at what?’ cried Cecilia.

’I ride over to Steynham this morning, and I shall bring you proofs, my poor child, proofs. That foreign tangle of his . . .’

‘You speak of Nevil, papa?’

’It’s a common scandal over London. That Frenchwoman was found at Lord Romfrey’s house; Lady Romfrey cloaked it. I believe the woman would swear black’s white to make Nevil Beauchamp appear an angel; and he’s a desperately cunning hand with women. You doubt that.’

She had shuddered slightly.

’You won’t doubt if I bring you proofs. Till I come back from Steynham, I ask you not to see him alone: not to go out to him.’

The colonel glanced at her windows.

Cecilia submitted to the request, out of breath, consenting to feel like a tutored girl, that she might conceal her guilty knowledge of what was to be seen through the windows.

‘Now I’m off,’ said he, and kissed her.

‘If you would accept Nevil’s word!’ she murmured.

‘Not where women are concerned!’

He left her with this remark, which found no jealous response in her heart, yet ranged over certain dispersed inflammable grains, like a match applied to damp powder; again and again running in little leaps of harmless firm keeping her alive to its existence, and surprising her that it should not have been extinguished.

Page 2563

Beauchamp presented himself rather late in the afternoon, when Mr. Austin and Blackburn Tuckham were sipping tea in Cecilia's boudoir with that lady, and a cousin of her sex, by whom she was led to notice a faint discoloration over one of his eyes, that was, considering whence it came, repulsive to compassion. A blow at a Radical meeting! He spoke of Dr. Shrapnel to Tuckham, and assuredly could not complain that the latter was unsympathetic in regard to the old man's health, though when he said, 'Poor old man! he fears he will die!' Tuckham rejoined: 'He had better make his peace.'

'He fears he will die, because of his leaving Miss Denham unprotected,' said Beauchamp.

'Well, she's a good-looking girl: he'll be able to leave her something, and he might easily get her married, I should think,' said Tuckham.

'He's not satisfied with handing her to any kind of man.'

'If the choice is to be among Radicals and infidels, I don't wonder. He has come to one of the tests.'

Cecilia heard Beauchamp speaking of a newspaper. A great Radical Journal, unmatched in sincerity, superior in ability, soon to be equal in power, to the leader and exemplar of the lucre-Press, would some day see the light.

'You'll want money for that,' said Tuckham.

'I know,' said Beauchamp.

'Are you prepared to stand forty or fifty thousand a year?'

'It need not be half so much.,

'Counting the libels, I rate the outlay rather low.'

'Yes, lawyers, judges, and juries of tradesmen, dealing justice to a Radical print!'

Tuckham brushed his hand over his mouth and ahemed. 'It's to be a penny journal?'

'Yes, a penny. I'd make it a farthing—'

'Pay to have it read?'

'Willingly.'

Tuckham did some mental arithmetic, quaintly, with rapidly blinking eyelids and open mouth. 'You may count it at the cost of two paying mines,' he said firmly. 'That is, if it's

to be a consistently Radical Journal, at law with everybody all round the year. And by the time it has won a reputation, it will be undermined by a radicaller Radical Journal. That's how we've lowered the country to this level. That's an Inferno of Circles, down to the ultimate mire. And what on earth are you contending for?'

'Freedom of thought, for one thing.'

'We have quite enough free-thinking.'

'There's not enough if there's not perfect freedom.'

'Dangerous!' quoth Mr. Austin.

'But it's that danger which makes men, sir; and it's fear of the danger that makes our modern Englishman.'

'Oh! Oh!' cried Tuckham in the voice of a Parliamentary Opposition. 'Well, you start your paper, we'll assume it: what class of men will you get to write?'

'I shall get good men for the hire.'

'You won't get the best men; you may catch a clever youngster or two, and an old rogue of talent; you won't get men of weight. They're prejudiced, I dare say. The Journals which are commercial speculations give us a guarantee that they mean to be respectable; they must, if they wouldn't collapse. That's why the best men consent to write for them.'

Page 2564

‘Money will do it,’ said Beauchamp.

Mr. Austin disagreed with that observation.

‘Some patriotic spirit, I may hope, sir.’

Mr. Austin shook his head. ’We put different constructions upon patriotism.’

‘Besides—fiddle! nonsense!’ exclaimed Tuckham in the mildest interjections he could summon for a vent in society to his offended common sense; ’the better your men the worse your mark. You’re not dealing with an intelligent people.’

‘There’s the old charge against the people.’

’But they’re not. You can madden, you can’t elevate them by writing and writing. Defend us from the uneducated English! The common English are doltish; except in the North, where you won’t do much with them. Compare them with the Yankees for shrewdness, the Spaniards for sobriety, the French for ingenuity, the Germans for enlightenment, the Italians in the Arts; yes, the Russians for good-humour and obedience—where are they? They’re only worth something when they’re led. They fight well; there’s good stuff in them.’

‘I’ve heard all that before,’ returned Beauchamp, unruffled. ’You don’t know them. I mean to educate them by giving them an interest in their country. At present they have next to none. Our governing class is decidedly unintelligent, in my opinion brutish, for it’s indifferent. My paper shall render your traders justice for what they do, and justice for what they don’t do.’

’My traders, as you call them, are the soundest foundation for a civilized state that the world has yet seen.’

‘What is your paper to be called?’ said Cecilia.

‘The *dawn*,’ Beauchamp answered.

She blushed fiery red, and turned the leaves of a portfolio of drawings.

‘The *dawn*!’ ejaculated Tuckham. ’The grey-eyed, or the red? Extraordinary name for a paper, upon my word!’

’A paper that doesn’t devote half its columns to the vices of the rich—to money-getting, spending and betting—will be an extraordinary paper.’

’I have it before me now!—two doses of flattery to one of the whip. No, no; you haven’t hit the disease. We want union, not division. Turn your mind to being a moralist, instead of a politician.’

‘The distinction shouldn’t exist!’

‘Only it does!’

Mrs. Grancey Lespel’s entrance diverted their dialogue from a theme wearisome to Cecilia, for Beauchamp shone but darkly in it, and Mr. Austin did not join in it. Mrs. Grancey touched Beauchamp’s fingers. ‘Still political?’ she said. ’You have been seen about London with a French officer in uniform.’

‘It was M. le comte de Croisnel, a very old friend and comrade of mine,’ Beauchamp replied.

’Why do those Frenchmen everlastingly wear their uniforms?—tell me! Don’t you think it detestable style?’

‘He came over in a hurry.’

’Now, don’t be huffed. I know you, for defending your friends, Captain Beauchamp! Did he not come over with ladies?’

Page 2565

‘With relatives, yes.’

’Relatives of course. But when British officers travel with ladies, relatives or other, they prefer the simplicity of mufti, and so do I, as a question of taste, I must say.’

’It was quite by misadventure that M. de Croisnel chanced to come in his uniform.’

’Ah! I know you, for defending your friends, Captain Beauchamp. He was in too great a hurry to change his uniform before he started, or en route?’

‘So it happened.’

Mrs. Grancey let a lingering eye dwell maliciously on Beauchamp, who said, to shift the burden of it: ’The French are not so jealous of military uniforms as we are. M. de Croisnel lost his portmanteau.’

’Ah! lost it! Then of course he is excuseable, except to the naked eye. Dear me! you have had a bruise on yours. Was Monsieur votre ami in the Italian campaign?’

’No, poor fellow, he was not. He is not an Imperialist; he had to remain in garrison.’

’He wore a multitude of medals, I have been told. A cup of tea, Cecilia. And how long did he stay in England with his relatives?’

‘Two days.’

’Only two days! A very short visit indeed—singularly short. Somebody informed me of their having been seen at Romfrey Castle, which cannot have been true.’

She turned her eyes from Beauchamp silent to Cecilia’s hand on the teapot. ‘Half a cup,’ she said mildly, to spare the poor hand its betrayal of nervousness, and relapsed from her air of mistress of the situation to chatter to Mr. Austin.

Beauchamp continued silent. He took up a book, and presently a pencil from his pocket, then talked of the book to Cecilia’s cousin; and leaving a paper-cutter between the leaves, he looked at Cecilia and laid the book down.

She proceeded to conduct Mrs. Grancey Lespel to her room.

’I do admire Captain Beauchamp’s cleverness; he is as good as a French romance!’ Mrs. Grancey exclaimed on the stairs. ’He fibs charmingly. I could not help drawing him out. Two days! Why, my dear, his French party were a fortnight in the country. It was the marquise, you know—the old affair; and one may say he’s a constant man.’

‘I have not heard Captain Beauchamp’s cleverness much praised,’ said Cecilia. ‘This is your room, Mrs. Grancey.’

’Stay with me a moment. It is the room I like. Are we to have him at dinner?’

Cecilia did not suppose that Captain Beauchamp would remain to dine. Feeling herself in the clutches of a gossip, she would fain have gone.

‘I am just one bit glad of it, though I can’t dislike him personally,’ said Mrs. Grancey, detaining her and beginning to whisper. ’It was really too bad. There was a French party at the end, but there was only one at the commencement. The brother was got over for a curtain, before the husband arrived in pursuit. They say the trick Captain Beauchamp played his cousin Cecil, to get

Page 2566

him out of the house when he had made a discovery, was monstrous—fiendishly cunning. However, Lady Romfrey, as that woman appears to be at last, covered it all. You know she has one of those passions for Captain Beauchamp which completely blind women to right and wrong. He is her saint, let him sin ever so! The story's in everybody's mouth. By the way, Palmet saw her. He describes her pale as marble, with dark long eyes, the most innocent look in the world, and a walk, the absurd fellow says, like a statue set gliding. No doubt Frenchwomen do walk well. He says her eyes are terrible traitors; I need not quote Palmet. The sort of eyes that would look fondly on a stone, you know. What her reputation is in France I have only indistinctly heard. She has one in England by this time, I can assure you. She found her match in Captain Beauchamp for boldness. Where any other couple would have seen danger, they saw safety; and they contrived to accomplish it, according to those horrid talebearers. You have plenty of time to dress, my dear; I have an immense deal to talk about. There are half-a-dozen scandals in London already, and you ought to know them, or you will be behind the tittle-tattle when you go to town; and I remember, as a girl, I knew nothing so excruciating as to hear blanks, dashes, initials, and half words, without the key. Nothing makes a girl look so silly and unpalatable. Naturally, the reason why Captain Beauchamp is more talked about than the rest is the politics. Your grand reformer should be careful. Doubly heterodox will not do! It makes him interesting to women, if you like, but he won't soon hear the last of it, if he is for a public career. Grancey literally crowed at the story. And the wonderful part of it is, that Captain Beauchamp refused to be present at the earl's first ceremonial dinner in honour of his countess. Now, that, we all think, was particularly ungrateful: now, was it not?'

'If the countess—if ingratitude had anything to do with it,' said Cecilia.

She escaped to her room and dressed impatiently.

Her boudoir was empty: Beauchamp had departed. She recollected his look at her, and turned over the leaves of the book he had been hastily scanning, and had condescended to approve of. On the two pages where the paper-cutter was fixed she perceived small pencil dots under certain words. Read consecutively, with a participle termination struck out to convey his meaning, they formed the pathetically ungrammatical line:

'Hear: none: but: accused: false.'

Treble dots were under the word 'to-morrow.' He had scored the margin of the sentences containing his dotted words, as if in admiration of their peculiar wisdom.

She thought it piteous that he should be reduced to such means of communication. The next instant Cecilia was shrinking from the adept intriguer—French-taught!

In the course of the evening her cousin remarked:

Page 2567

’Captain Beauchamp must see merit in things undiscoverable by my poor faculties. I will show you a book he has marked.’

‘Did you see it? I was curious to examine it,’ interposed Cecilia; ’and I am as much at a loss as you to understand what could have attracted him. One sentence . . .’

’About the sheikh in the stables, where he accused the pretended physician? Yes, what was there in that?’

‘Where is the book?’ said Mrs. Grancey.

‘Not here, I think.’ Cecilia glanced at the drawing-room book-table, and then at Mr. Austin, the victim of an unhappy love in his youth, and unhappy about her, as her father had said. Seymour Austin was not one to spread the contagion of intrigue! She felt herself caught by it, even melting to feel enamoured of herself in consequence, though not loving Beauchamp the more.

‘This newspaper, if it’s not merely an airy project, will be ruination,’ said Tuckham. ’The fact is, Beauchamp has no bend in him. He can’t meet a man without trying a wrestle, and as long as he keeps his stiffness, he believes he has won. I’ve heard an oculist say that the eye that doesn’t blink ends in blindness, and he who won’t bend breaks. It’s a pity, for he’s a fine fellow. A Radical daily Journal of Shrapnel’s colour, to educate the people by giving them an interest in the country! Goodness, what a delusion! and what a waste of money! He’ll not be able to carry it on a couple of years. And there goes his eighty thousand!’

Cecilia’s heart beat fast. She had no defined cause for its excitement.

Colonel Halkett returned to Mount Laurels close upon midnight, very tired, coughing and complaining of the bitter blowing East. His guests shook hands with him, and went to bed.

‘I think I’ll follow their example,’ he said to Cecilia, after drinking a tumbler of mulled wine.

‘Have you nothing to tell me, dear papa?’ said she, caressing him timidly.

’A confirmation of the whole story from Lord Romfrey in person—that’s all. He says Beauchamp’s mad. I begin to believe it. You must use your judgement. I suppose I must not expect you to consider me. You might open your heart to Austin. As to my consent, knowing what I do, you will have to tear it out of me. Here’s a country perfectly contented, and that fellow at work digging up grievances to persuade the people they’re oppressed by us. Why should I talk of it? He can’t do much harm; unless he has money—money! Romfrey says he means to start a furious paper. He’ll make a bonfire of himself. I can’t stand by and see you in it too. I may die; I may be spared the sight.’

Cecilia flung her arms round his neck. ‘Oh! papa.’

Page 2568

’I don’t want to make him out worse than he is, my dear. I own to his gallantry—in the French sense as well as the English, it seems! It’s natural that Romfrey should excuse his wife. She’s another of the women who are crazy about Nevil Beauchamp. She spoke to me of the “pleasant visit of her French friends,” and would have enlarged on it, but Romfrey stopped her. By the way, he proposes Captain Baskelett for you, and we’re to look for Baskelett’s coming here, backed by his uncle. There’s no end to it; there never will be till you’re married: and no peace for me! I hope I shan’t find myself with a cold to-morrow.’

The colonel coughed, and perhaps exaggerated the premonitory symptoms of a cold.

‘Italy, papa, would do you good,’ said Cecilia.

‘It might,’ said he.

’If we go immediately, papa; to-morrow, early in the morning, before there is a chance of any visitors coming to the house.’

‘From Bevisham?’

‘From Steynham. I cannot endure a second persecution.’

‘But you have a world of packing, my dear.’

‘An hour before breakfast will be sufficient for me.’

’In that case, we might be off early, as you say, and have part of the Easter week in Rome.’

‘Mr. Austin wishes it greatly, papa, though he has not mentioned it.’

’Austin, my darling girl, is not one of your impatient men who burst with everything they have in their heads or their hearts.’

‘Oh! but I know him so well,’ said Cecilia, conjuring up that innocent enthusiasm of hers for Mr. Austin as an antidote to her sharp suffering. The next minute she looked on her father as the key of an enigma concerning Seymour Austin, whom, she imagined, possibly she had not hitherto known at all. Her curiosity to pierce it faded. She and her maid were packing through the night. At dawn she requested her maid to lift the window-blind and give her an opinion of the weather. ‘Grey, Miss,’ the maid reported. It signified to Cecilia: no one roaming outside.

The step she was taking was a desperate attempt at a cure; and she commenced it, though sorely wounded, with pity for Nevil’s disappointment, and a singularly clear-eyed perception of his aims and motives.—’I am rich, and he wants riches; he likes me, and

he reads my weakness.'—Jealousy shook her by fits, but she had no right to be jealous, nor any right to reproach him. Her task was to climb back to those heavenly heights she sat on before he distracted her and drew her down.

Beauchamp came to a vacated house that day.

CHAPTER XLVI

AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FORESEEN

It was in Italy that Cecilia's maiden dreams of life had opened. She hoped to recover them in Italy, and the calm security of a mind untainted. Italy was to be her reviving air.

Page 2569

While this idea of a specific for her malady endured travelling at speed to the ridges of the Italian frontier, across France—she simply remembered Nevil: he was distant; he had no place in the storied landscape, among the images of Art and the names of patient great men who bear, as they bestow, an atmosphere other than earth's for those adoring them. If at night, in her sleep, he was a memory that conducted her through scenes which were lightnings, the cool swift morning of her flight released her. France, too, her rival!—the land of France, personified by her instinctively, though she had no vivid imaginative gift, did not wound her with a poisoned dart.—'She knew him first: she was his first love.' The Alps, and the sense of having Italy below them, renewed Cecilia's lofty-perching youth. Then—I am in Italy! she sighed with rapture. The wine of delight and oblivion was at her lips.

But thirst is not enjoyment, and a satiated thirst that we insist on over-satisfying to drown the recollection of past anguish, is baneful to the soul. In Rome Cecilia's vision of her track to Rome was of a run of fire over a heath. She could scarcely feel common pleasure in Rome. It seemed burnt out.

Flung back on herself, she was condemned to undergo the bitter torment she had flown from: jealous love, and reproachful; and a shame in it like nothing she had yet experienced. Previous pains were but Summer lightnings, passing shadows. She could have believed in sorcery: the man had eaten her heart!

A disposition to mocking humour, foreign to her nature, gave her the notion of being off her feet, in the claws of a fabulous bird. It served to veil her dulness. An ultra-English family in Rome, composed, shocking to relate, of a baronet banker and his wife, two faint-faced girls, and a young gentleman of our country, once perhaps a light-limbed boy, chose to be followed by their footman in the melancholy pomp of state livery. Wherever she encountered them Cecilia talked Nevil Beauchamp. Even Mr. Tuckham perceived it. She was extremely uncharitable: she extended her ungenerous criticism to the institution of the footman: England, and the English, were lashed.

'These people are caricatures,' Tuckham said, in apology for poor England burlesqued abroad. 'You must not generalize on them. Footmen are footmen all the world over. The cardinals have a fine set of footmen.'

'They are at home. Those English sow contempt of us all over Europe. We cannot but be despised. One comes abroad foredoomed to share the sentiment. This is your middle-class! What society can they move in, that sanctions a vulgarity so perplexing? They have the air of ornaments on a cottager's parlour mantelpiece.'

Tuckham laughed. 'Something of that,' he said.

'Evidently they seek distinction, and they have it, of that kind,' she continued. 'It is not wonderful that we have so much satirical writing in England, with such objects of satire.

It may be as little wonderful that the satire has no effect. Immense wealth and native obtuseness combine to disfigure us with this aspect of overripeness, not to say monstrosity. I fall in love with the poor, and think they have a cause to be pleaded, when I look at those people. We scoff at the vanity of the French, but it is a graceful vanity; pardonable compared with ours.'

Page 2570

‘I’ve read all that a hundred times,’ quoth Tuckham bluntly.

’So have I. I speak of it because I see it. We scoff at the simplicity of the Germans.’

’The Germans live in simple fashion, because they’re poor. French vanity’s pretty and amusing. I don’t know whether it’s deep in them, for I doubt their depth; but I know it’s in their joints. The first spring of a Frenchman comes of vanity. That you can’t say of the English. Peace to all! but I abhor cosmopolitanism. No man has a firm foothold who pretends to it. None despises the English in reality. Don’t be misled, Miss Halkett. We’re solid: that is the main point. The world feels our power, and has confidence in our good faith. I ask for no more.’

’With Germans we are supercilious Celts; with Frenchmen we are sneering Teutons:—-Can we be loved, Mr. Tuckham?’

’That’s a quotation from my friend Lydiard. Loved? No nation ever was loved while it lived. As Lydiard says, it may be a good beast or a bad, but a beast it is. A nation’s much too big for refined feelings and affections. It must be powerful or out of the way, or down it goes. When a nation’s dead you may love it; but I don’t see the use of dying to be loved. My aim for my country is to have the land respected. For that purpose we must have power; for power wealth; for wealth industry; for industry internal peace: therefore no agitation, no artificial divisions. All’s plain in history and fact, so long as we do not obtrude sentimentalism. Nothing mixes well with that stuff—except poetical ideas!’

Contrary to her anticipation, Cecilia was thrown more into companionship with Mr. Tuckham than with Mr. Austin; and though it often vexed her, she acknowledged that she derived a benefit from his robust antagonism of opinion. And Italy had grown tasteless to her. She could hardly simulate sufficient curiosity to serve for a vacant echo to Mr. Austin’s historic ardour. Pliny the Younger might indeed be the model of a gentleman of old Rome; there might be a scholarly pleasure in calculating, as Mr. Austin did, the length of time it took Pliny to journey from the city to his paternal farm, or villa overlooking the lake, or villa overlooking the bay, and some abstruse fun in the tender ridicule of his readings of his poems to friends; for Mr. Austin smiled effusively in alluding to the illustrious Roman pleader’s foible of verse: but Pliny bore no resemblance to that island barbarian Nevil Beauchamp: she could not realize the friend of Trajan, orator, lawyer, student, statesman, benefactor of his kind, and model of her own modern English gentleman, though he was. ‘Yes!’ she would reply encouragingly to Seymour Austin’s fond brooding hum about his hero; and ‘Yes!’ conclusively: like an incarnation of stupidity dealing in monosyllables. She was unworthy of the society of a scholar. Nor could she kneel at the feet of her especial heroes: Dante, Raphael, Buonarotti: she was unworthy of them. She longed to be at Mount Laurels. Mr. Tuckham’s conversation was the nearest approach to it—as it were round by Greenland; but it was homeward.

Page 2571

She was really grieved to lose him. Business called him to England.

‘What business can it be, papa?’ she inquired: and the colonel replied briefly: ‘Ours.’

Mr. Austin now devoted much of his time to the instruction of her in the ancient life of the Eternal City. He had certain volumes of Livy, Niebuhr, and Gibbon, from which he read her extracts at night, shunning the scepticism and the irony of the moderns, so that there should be no jar on the awakening interest of his fair pupil and patient. A gentle cross-hauling ensued between them, that they grew conscious of and laughed over during their peregrinations in and out of Rome: she pulled for the Republic of the Scipios; his predilections were toward the Rome of the wise and clement emperors. To Cecilia’s mind Rome rocked at a period so closely neighbouring her decay: to him, with an imagination brooding on the fuller knowledge of it, the city breathed securely, the sky was clear; jurisprudence, rhetoric, statesmanship, then flourished supreme, and men eminent for culture: the finest flowers of our race, he thought them: and he thought their Age the manhood of Rome.

Struck suddenly by a feminine subtle comparison that she could not have framed in speech, Cecilia bowed to his views of the happiness and elevation proper to the sway of a sagacious and magnanimous Imperialism of the Roman pattern:—he rejected the French. She mused on dim old thoughts of the gracious dignity of a woman’s life under high governorship. Turbulent young men imperilled it at every step. The trained, the grave, the partly grey, were fitting lords and mates for women aspiring to moral beauty and distinction. Beside such they should be planted, if they would climb! Her walks and conversations with Seymour Austin charmed her as the haze of a summer evening charms the sight.

Upon the conclusion of her term of exile Cecilia would gladly have remained in Italy another month. An appointment of her father’s with Mr. Tuckham at Mount Laurels on a particular day she considered as of no consequence whatever, and she said so, in response to a meaningless nod. But Mr. Austin was obliged to return to work. She set her face homeward with his immediately, and he looked pleased: he did not try to dissuade her from accompanying him by affecting to think it a sacrifice: clearly he knew that to be near him was her greatest delight.

Thus do we round the perilous headland called love by wooing a good man for his friendship, and requiting him with faithful esteem for the grief of an ill-fortuned passion of his youth!

Cecilia would not suffer her fancy to go very far in pursuit of the secret of Mr. Austin’s present feelings. Until she reached Mount Laurels she barely examined her own. The sight of the house warned her instantly that she must have a defence: and then, in desperation but with perfect distinctness, she entertained the hope of hearing him speak the protecting words which could not be broken through when wedded to her consent.

Page 2572

If Mr. Austin had no intentions, it was at least strange that he did not part from her in London.

He whose coming she dreaded had been made aware of the hour of her return, as his card, with the pencilled line, ‘Will call on the 17th,’ informed her. The 17th was the morrow.

After breakfast on the morning of the 17th Seymour Austin looked her in the eyes longer than it is customary for ladies to have to submit to keen inspection.

‘Will you come into the library?’ he said.

She went with him into the library.

Was it to speak of his anxiousness as to the state of her father’s health that he had led her there, and that he held her hand? He alarmed her, and he pacified her alarm, yet bade her reflect on the matter, saying that her father, like other fathers, would be more at peace upon the establishment of his daughter. Mr. Austin remarked that the colonel was troubled.

’Does he wish for my pledge never to marry without his approval? I will give it,’ said Cecilia.

‘He would like you to undertake to marry the man of his choice.’ Cecilia’s features hung on an expression equivalent to:—I could almost do that.’

At the same time she felt it was not Seymour Austin’s manner of speaking. He seemed to be praising an unknown person—some gentleman who was rough, but of solid promise and singular strength of character.

The house-bell rang. Believing that Beauchamp had now come, she showed a painful ridging of the brows, and Mr. Austin considerately mentioned the name of the person he had in his mind.

She readily agreed with him regarding Mr. Tuckham’s excellent qualities—if that was indeed the name; and she hastened to recollect how little she had forgotten Mr. Tuckham’s generosity to Beauchamp, and confessed to herself it might as well have been forgotten utterly for the thanks he had received. While revolving these ideas she was listening to Mr. Austin; gradually she was beginning to understand that she was parting company with her original conjectures, but going at so swift a pace in so supple and sure a grasp, that, like the speeding train slipped on new lines of rails by the pointsman, her hurrying sensibility was not shocked, or the shock was imperceptible, when she heard him proposing Mr. Tuckham to her for a husband, by her father’s authority, and with his own warm seconding. He had not dropped her hand: he was very eloquent, a masterly advocate: he pleaded her father’s cause; it was not put to her

as Mr. Tuckham's: her father had set his heart on this union he was awaiting her decision.

'Is it so urgent?' she asked.

'It is urgent. It saves him from an annoyance. He requires a son-in-law whom he can confidently rely on to manage the estates, which you are woman of the world enough to know should be in strong hands. He gives you to a man of settled principles. It is urgent, because he may wish to be armed with your answer at any instant.'

Page 2573

Her father entered the library. He embraced her, and ‘Well?’ he said.

‘I must think, papa, I must think.’

She pressed her hand across her eyes. Disillusioned by Seymour Austin, she was utterly defenceless before Beauchamp: and possibly Beauchamp was in the house. She fancied he was, by the impatient brevity of her father’s voice.

Seymour Austin and Colonel Halkett left the room, and Blackburn Tuckham walked in, not the most entirely self-possessed of suitors, puffing softly under his breath, and blinking eyes as rapidly as a skylark claps wings on the ascent.

Half an hour later Beauchamp appeared. He asked to see the colonel, delivered himself of his pretensions and wishes to the colonel, and was referred to Cecilia; but Colonel Halkett declined to send for her. Beauchamp declined to postpone his proposal until the following day. He went outside the house and walked up and down the grass-plot.

Cecilia came to him at last.

‘I hear, Nevil, that you are waiting to speak to me.’

‘I’ve been waiting some weeks. Shall I speak here?’

‘Yes, here, quickly.’

‘Before the house? I have come to ask you for your hand.’

‘Mine? I cannot . . .’

‘Step into the park with me. I ask you to marry me.’

‘It is too late.’

CHAPTER XLVII

THE REFUSAL OF HIM

Passing from one scene of excitement to another, Cecilia was perfectly steeled for her bitter task; and having done that which separated her a sphere’s distance from Beauchamp, she was cold, inaccessible to the face of him who had swayed her on flood and ebb so long, incapable of tender pity, even for herself. All she could feel was a harsh joy to have struck off her tyrant’s fetters, with a determination to cherish it passionately lest she should presently be hating herself: for the shadow of such a

possibility fell within the narrow circle of her strung sensations. But for the moment her delusion reached to the idea that she had escaped from him into freedom, when she said, ‘It is too late.’ Those words were the sum and voice of her long term of endurance. She said them hurriedly, almost in a whisper, in the manner of one changeing a theme of conversation for subjects happier and livelier, though none followed.

The silence bore back on her a suspicion of a faint reproachfulness in the words; and perhaps they carried a poetical tone, still more distasteful.

‘You have been listening to tales of me,’ said Beauchamp.

‘Nevil, we can always be friends, the best of friends.’

Page 2574

’Were you astonished at my asking you for your hand? You said “mine?” as if you wondered. You have known my feelings for you. Can you deny that? I have reckoned on yours—too long?—But not falsely? No, hear me out. The truth is, I cannot lose you. And don’t look so resolute. Overlook little wounds: I was never indifferent to you. How could I be—with eyes in my head? The colonel is opposed to me of course: he will learn to understand me better: but you and I! we cannot be mere friends. It’s like daylight blotted out—or the eyes gone blind:—Too late? Can you repeat it? I tried to warn you before you left England: I should have written a letter to put you on your guard against my enemies:—I find I have some: but a letter is sure to stumble; I should have been obliged to tell you that I do not stand on my defence; and I thought I should see you the next day. You went: and not a word for me! You gave me no chance. If you have no confidence in me I must bear it. I may say the story is false. With your hand in mine I would swear it.’

‘Let it be forgotten,’ said Cecilia, surprised and shaken to think that her situation required further explanations; fascinated and unnerved by simply hearing him. ‘We are now—we are walking away from the house.’

‘Do you object to a walk with me?’

They had crossed the garden plot and were at the gate of the park leading to the Western wood. Beauchamp swung the gate open. He cast a look at the clouds coming up from the South-west in folds of grey and silver.

‘Like the day of our drive into Bevisham!—without the storm behind,’ he said, and doated on her soft shut lips, and the mild sun-rays of her hair in sunless light. ’There are flowers that grow only in certain valleys, and your home is Mount Laurels, whatever your fancy may be for Italy. You colour the whole region for me. When you were absent, you were here. I called here six times, and walked and talked with you.’

Cecilia set her face to the garden. Her heart had entered on a course of heavy thumping, like a sapper in the mine.

Pain was not unwelcome to her, but this threatened weakness.

What plain words could she use? If Mr. Tuckham had been away from the house, she would have found it easier to speak of her engagement; she knew not why. Or if the imperative communication could have been delivered in Italian or French, she was as little able to say why it should have slipped from her tongue without a critic shudder to arrest it. She was cold enough to revolve the words: betrothed, affianced, plighted: and reject them, pretty words as they are. Between the vulgarity of romantic language, and the baldness of commonplace, it seemed to her that our English gives us no choice; that we cannot be dignified in simplicity. And for some reason, feminine and remote,

she now detested her ‘hand’ so much as to be unable to bring herself to the metonymic mention of it. The lady’s

Page 2575

difficulty was peculiar to sweet natures that have no great warmth of passion; it can only be indicated. Like others of the kind, it is traceable to the most delicate of sentiments, and to the flattest:—for Mr. Blackburn's Tuckham's figure was (she thought of it with no personal objection) not of the graceful order, neither cavalierly nor kingly: and imagining himself to say, 'I am engaged,' and he suddenly appearing on the field, Cecilia's whole mind was shocked in so marked a way did he contrast with Beauchamp.

This was the effect of Beauchamp's latest words on her. He had disarmed her anger.

'We must have a walk to-day,' he said commandingly, but it had stolen into him that he and she were not walking on the same bank of the river, though they were side by side: a chill water ran between them. As in other days, there hung her hand: but not to be taken. Incredible as it was, the icy sense of his having lost her benumbed him. Her beautiful face and beautiful tall figure, so familiar to him that they were like a possession, protested in his favour while they snatched her from him all the distance of the words 'too late.'

'Will you not give me one half-hour?'

'I am engaged,' Cecilia plunged and extricated herself, 'I am engaged to walk with Mr. Austin and papa.'

Beauchamp tossed his head. Something induced him to speak of Mr. Tuckham. 'The colonel has discovered his Tory young man! It's an object as incomprehensible to me as a Tory working-man. I suppose I must take it that they exist. As for Blackburn Tuckham, I have nothing against him. He's an honourable fellow enough, and would govern Great Britain as men of that rich middle-class rule their wives—with a strict regard for ostensible humanity and what the law allows them. His manners have improved. Your cousin Mary seems to like him: it struck me when I saw them together. Cecilia! one half-hour! You refuse me: you have not heard me. You will not say too late.'

'Nevil, I have said it finally. I have no longer the right to conceive it unsaid.'

'So we speak! It's the language of indolence, temper, faint hearts. "Too late" has no meaning. Turn back with me to the park. I offer you my whole heart; I love you. There's no woman living who could be to me the wife you would be. I'm like your male nightingale that you told me of: I must have my mate to sing to—that is, work for and live for; and she must not delay too long. Did I? Pardon me if you think I did. You have known I love you. I have been distracted by things that kept me from thinking of myself and my wishes: and love's a selfish business while . . . while one has work in hand. It's clear I can't do two things at a time—make love and carry on my taskwork. I have been idle for weeks. I believed you were mine and wanted no lovemaking. There's no folly in

that, if you understand me at all. As for vanity about women, I ’ve outlived it. In comparison

Page 2576

with you I'm poor, I know:—you look distressed, but one has to allude to it:—I admit that wealth would help me. To see wealth supporting the cause of the people for once would —but you say, too late! Well, I don't renounce you till I see you giving your hand to a man who's not myself. You have been offended: groundlessly, on my honour! You are the woman of all women in the world to hold me fast in faith and pride in you. It's useless to look icy: you feel what I say.'

'Nevil, I feel grief, and beg you to cease. I am----It is-----'

'"Too late" has not a rag of meaning, Cecilia! I love your name. I love this too: this is mine, and no one can rob me of it.'

He drew forth a golden locket and showed her a curl of her hair.

Crimsoning, she said instantly: 'Language of the kind I used is open to misconstruction, I fear. I have not even the right to listen to you. I am . . . You ask me for what I have it no longer in my power to give. I am engaged.'

The shot rang through him and partly stunned him; but incredulity made a mocking effort to sustain him. The greater wounds do not immediately convince us of our fate, though we may be conscious that we have been hit.

'Engaged in earnest?' said he.

'Yes.'

'Of your free will?'

'Yes.'

Her father stepped out on the terrace, from one of the open windows, trailing a newspaper like a pocket-handkerchief. Cecilia threaded the flower-beds to meet him.

'Here's an accident to one of our ironclads,' he called to Beauchamp.

'Lives lost, sir?'

'No, thank heaven! but, upon my word, it's a warning. Read the telegram; it's the Hastings. If these are our defences, at a cost of half a million of money, each of them, the sooner we look to our land forces the better.'

‘The Shop will not be considered safe!’ said Beauchamp, taking in the telegram at a glance. ’Peppel’s a first-rate officer too: she couldn’t have had a better captain. Ship seriously damaged!’

He handed back the paper to the colonel.

Cecilia expected him to say that he had foreseen such an event.

He said nothing; and with a singular contraction of the heart she recollected how he had denounced our system of preparing mainly for the defensive in war, on a day when they stood together in the park, watching the slow passage of that very ship, the Hastings, along the broad water, distant below them. The ‘swarms of swift vessels of attack,’ she recollected particularly, and ’small wasps and rams under mighty steam-power,’ that he used to harp on when declaring that England must be known for the assailant in war: she was to ‘ray out’ her worrying fleets. ‘The defensive is perilous policy in war’: he had said it. She recollected also her childish ridicule of his excess of emphasis: he certainly had foresight.’

Page 2577

Mr. Austin and Mr. Tuckham came strolling in conversation round the house to the terrace. Beauchamp bowed to the former, nodded to the latter, scrutinizing him after he had done so, as if the flash of a thought were in his mind. Tuckham's radiant aspect possibly excited it: 'Congratulate me!' was the honest outcry of his face and frame. He was as over-flowingly rosy as a victorious candidate at the hustings commencing a speech. Cecilia laid her hand on an urn, in dread of the next words from either of the persons present. Her father put an arm in hers, and leaned on her. She gazed at her chamber window above, wishing to be wafted thither to her seclusion within. The trembling limbs of physical irresoluteness was a new experience to her.

'Anything else in the paper, colonel? I've not seen it to-day,' said Beauchamp, for the sake of speaking.

'No, I don't think there's anything,' Colonel Halkett replied. 'Our diplomatists haven't been shining much: that 's not our forte.'

'No: it's our field for younger sons.'

'Is it? Ah! There's an expedition against the hilltribes in India, and we're such a peaceful nation, eh? We look as if we were in for a complication with China.'

'Well, sir, we must sell our opium.'

'Of course we must. There's a man writing about surrendering Gibraltar!'

'I'm afraid we can't do that.'

'But where do you draw the line?' quoth Tuckham, very susceptible to a sneer at the colonel, and entirely ignorant of the circumstances attending Beauchamp's position before him. 'You defend the Chinaman; and it's questionable if his case is as good as the Spaniard's.'

'The Chinaman has a case against our traders. Gibraltar concerns our imperial policy.'

'As to the case against the English merchants, the Chinaman is for shutting up his millions of acres of productive land, and the action of commerce is merely a declaration of a universal public right, to which all States must submit.'

'Immorality brings its punishment, be sure of that. Some day we shall have enough of China. As to the Rock, I know the argument; I may be wrong. I've had the habit of regarding it as necessary to our naval supremacy.'

'Come! there we agree.'

'I'm not so certain.'

‘The counter-argument, I call treason.’

‘Well,’ said Beauchamp, ’there’s a broad policy, and a narrow. There’s the Spanish view of the matter—if you are for peace and harmony and disarmament.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Then strengthen your forces.’

‘Not a bit of it!’

’Then bully the feeble and truckle to the strong; consent to be hated till you have to stand your ground.’

‘Talk!’

‘It seems to me logical.’

‘That’s the French notion—c’est lodgique!’

Tuckham’s pronunciation caused Cecilia to level her eyes at him passingly.

Page 2578

‘By the way,’ said Colonel Halkett, ’there are lots of horrors in the paper to-day; wife kickings, and starvations—oh, dear me! and the murder of a woman: two columns to that.’

‘That, the Tory reaction is responsible for!’ said Tuckham, rather by way of a joke than a challenge.

Beauchamp accepted it as a challenge. Much to the benevolent amusement of Mr. Austin and Colonel Halkett, he charged the responsibility of every crime committed in the country, and every condition of misery, upon the party which declined to move in advance, and which therefore apologized for the perpetuation of knavery, villany, brutality, injustice, and foul dealing.

’Stick to your laws and systems and institutions, and so long as you won’t stir to amend them, I hold you accountable for that long newspaper list daily.’

He said this with a visible fire of conviction.

Tuckham stood bursting at the monstrousness of such a statement.

He condensed his indignant rejoinder to: ‘Madness can’t go farther!’

‘There’s an idea in it,’ said Mr. Austin.

‘It’s an idea foaming at the mouth, then.’

’Perhaps it has no worse fault than that of not marching parallel with the truth,’ said Mr. Austin, smiling. ’The party accusing in those terms . . . what do you say, Captain Beauchamp?—supposing us to be pleading before a tribunal?’

Beauchamp admitted as much as that he had made the case gigantic, though he stuck to his charge against the Tory party. And moreover: the Tories-and the old Whigs, now Liberals, ranked under the heading of Tories—those Tories possessing and representing the wealth of the country, yet had not started one respectable journal that a lady could read through without offence to her, or a gentleman without disgust! If there was not one English newspaper in existence independent of circulation and advertisements, and of the tricks to win them, the Tories were answerable for the vacancy. They, being the rich who, if they chose, could set an example to our Press by subscribing to maintain a Journal superior to the flattering of vile appetites—’all that nauseous matter,’ Beauchamp stretched his fingers at the sheets Colonel Halkett was holding, and which he had not read—’those Tories,’ he bowed to the colonel, ‘I’m afraid I must say you, sir, are answerable for it.’

‘I am very well satisfied with my paper,’ said the colonel.

Beauchamp sighed to himself. ‘We choose to be satisfied,’ he said. His pure and mighty *dawn* was in his thoughts: the unborn light of a day denied to earth!

One of the doctors of Bevisham, visiting a sick maid of the house, trotted up the terrace to make his report to her master of the state of her health. He hoped to pull her through with the aid of high feeding. He alluded cursorily to a young girl living on the outskirts of the town, whom he had been called in to see at the eleventh hour, and had lost, owing to the lowering of his patient from a prescription of a vegetable diet by a certain Dr. Shrapnel.

Page 2579

That ever-explosive name precipitated Beauchamp to the front rank of the defence.

‘I happen to be staying with Dr. Shrapnel,’ he observed. ’I don’t eat meat there because he doesn’t, and I am certain I take no harm by avoiding it. I think vegetarianism a humaner system, and hope it may be wise. I should like to set the poor practising it, for their own sakes; and I have half an opinion that it would be good for the rich—if we are to condemn gluttony.’

‘Ah? Captain Beauchamp!’ the doctor bowed to him. ’But my case was one of poor blood requiring to be strengthened. The girl was allowed to sink so low that stimulants were ineffective when I stepped in. There’s the point. It ’s all very well while you are in health. You may do without meat till your system demands the stimulant, or else—as with this poor girl! And, indeed, Captain Beauchamp, if I may venture the remark—I had the pleasure of seeing you during the last Election in our town—and if I may be so bold, I should venture to hint that the avoidance of animal food—to judge by appearances—-has not been quite wholesome for you.’

Eyes were turned on Beauchamp.

CHAPTER XLVIII

OF THE TRIAL AWAITING THE EARL OF ROMFREY

Cecilia softly dropped her father’s arm, and went into the house. The exceeding pallor of Beauchamp’s face haunted her in her room. She heard the controversy proceeding below, and an exclamation of Blackburn Tuckham’s: ‘Immorality of meat-eating? What nonsense are they up to now?’

Beauchamp was inaudible, save in a word or two. As usual, he was the solitary minority.

But how mournfully changed he was! She had not noticed it, agitated by her own emotions as she had been, and at one time three parts frozen. He was the ghost of the Nevil Beauchamp who had sprung on the deck of the Esperanza out of Lieutenant Wilmore’s boat, that sunny breezy day which was the bright first chapter of her new life—of her late life, as it seemed to her now, for she was dead to it, and another creature, the coldest of the women of earth. She felt sensibly cold, coveted warmth, flung a shawl on her shoulders, and sat in a corner of her room, hidden and shivering beside the open window, till long after the gentlemen had ceased to speak.

How much he must have suffered of late! The room she had looked to as a refuge from Nevil was now her stronghold against the man whom she had incredibly accepted. She remained there, the victim of a heart malady, under the term of headache. Feeling

entrapped, she considered that she must have been encircled and betrayed. She looked back on herself as a giddy figure falling into a pit: and in the pit she lay.

And how vile to have suspected of unfaithfulness and sordidness the generous and stedfast man of earth! He never abandoned a common friendship. His love of his country was love still, whatever the form it had taken. His childlike reliance on effort and outspeaking, for which men laughed at him, was beautiful.

Page 2580

Where am I? she cried amid her melting images of him, all dominated by his wan features. She was bound fast, imprisoned and a slave. Even Mr. Austin had conspired against him: for only she read Nevil justly. His defence of Dr. Shrapnel filled her with an envy that no longer maligned the object of it, but was humble, and like the desire of the sick to creep into sunshine.

The only worthy thing she could think of doing was (it must be mentioned for a revelation of her fallen state, and, moreover, she was not lusty of health at the moment) to abjure meat. The body loathed it, and consequently the mind of the invalided lady shrank away in horror of the bleeding joints, and the increasingly fierce scramble of Christian souls for the dismembered animals: she saw the innocent pasturing beasts, she saw the act of slaughter. She had actually sweeping before her sight a spectacle of the ludicrous-terrific, in the shape of an entire community pursuing countless herds of poor scampering animal life for blood: she, meanwhile, with Nevil and Dr. Shrapnel, stood apart contemning. For whoso would not partake of flesh in this kingdom of roast beef must be of the sparse number of Nevil's execrated minority in politics.

The example will show that she touched the borders of delirium. Physically, the doctor pronounces her bilious. She was in earnest so far as to send down to the library for medical books, and books upon diet. These, however, did not plead for the beasts. They treated the subject without question of man's taking that which he has conquered. Poets and philosophers did the same. Again she beheld Nevil Beauchamp solitary in the adverse rank to the world;—to his countrymen especially. But that it was no material cause which had wasted his cheeks and lined his forehead, she was sure: and to starve with him, to embark with him in his little boat on the seas he whipped to frenzy, would have been a dream of bliss, had she dared to contemplate herself in a dream as his companion.

It was not to be thought of.

No: but this was, and to be thought of seriously: Cecilia had said to herself for consolation that Beauchamp was no spiritual guide; he had her heart within her to plead for him, and the reflection came to her, like a bubble up from the heart, that most of our spiritual guides neglect the root to trim the flower: and thence, turning sharply on herself, she obtained a sudden view of her allurement and her sin in worshipping herself, and recognized that the aim at an ideal life closely approaches, or easily inclines, to self-worship; to which the lady was woman and artist enough to have had no objection, but that therein visibly she discerned the retributive vain longings, in the guise of high individual superiority and distinction, that had thwarted her with Nevil Beauchamp, never permitting her to love single-mindedly or whole-heartedly, but always in reclaiming her rights and sighing for the loss of her ideal; adoring her own image, in fact, when she pretended to cherish, and regret that she could not sufficiently cherish, the finer elements of nature. What was this ideal she had complained of losing? It was a broken mirror: she could think of it in no other form.

Page 2581

Dr. Shrapnel's 'Ego-Ego' yelped and gave chase to her through the pure beatitudes of her earlier days down to her present regrets. It hunted all the saints in the calendar till their haloes top-sided on their heads-her favourite St. Francis of Assisi excepted.

The doctor was called up from Bevisham next day, and pronounced her bilious. He was humorous over Captain Beauchamp, who had gone to the parents of the dead girl, and gathered the information that they were a consumptive family, to vindicate Dr. Shrapnel. 'The very family to require strong nourishment,' said the doctor.

Cecilia did not rest in her sick-room before, hunting through one book and another, she had found arguments on the contrary side; a waste of labour that heaped oppression on her chest, as with the world's weight. Apparently one had only to be in Beauchamp's track to experience that. She horrified her father by asking questions about consumption. Homoeopathy, hydropathy,—the revolutionaries of medicine attracted her. Blackburn Tuckham, a model for an elected lover who is not beloved, promised to procure all sorts of treatises for her: no man could have been so deferential to a diseased mind. Beyond calling her by her Christian name, he did nothing to distress her with the broad aspect of their new relations together. He and Mr. Austin departed from Mount Laurels, leaving her to sink into an agreeable stupor, like one deposited on a mudbank after buffeting the waves. She learnt that her father had seen Captain Baskelett, and remembered, marvelling, how her personal dread of an interview, that threatened to compromise her ideal of her feminine and peculiar dignity, had assisted to precipitate her where she now lay helpless, almost inanimate.

She was unaware of the passage of time save when her father spoke of a marriage-day. It told her that she lived and was moving. The fear of death is not stronger in us, nor the desire to put it off, than Cecilia's shunning of such a day. The naming of it numbed her blood like a snakebite. Yet she openly acknowledged her engagement; and, happily for Tuckham, his visits, both in London and at Mount Laurels, were few and short, and he inflicted no foretaste of her coming subjection to him to alarm her.

Under her air of calm abstraction she watched him rigorously for some sign of his ownership that should tempt her to revolt from her pledge, or at least dream of breaking loose: the dream would have sufficed. He was never intrusive, never pressing. He did not vex, because he absolutely trusted to the noble loyalty which made her admit to herself that she belonged irrevocably to him, while her thoughts were upon Beauchamp. With a respectful gravity he submitted to her perusal a collection of treatises on diet, classed pro and con., and paged and pencil-marked to simplify her study of the question. They sketched in company; she played music to him, he read poetry to her, and read it well. He seemed to feel the beauty of it sensitively, as she did critically. In other days the positions had been reversed. He invariably talked of Beauchamp with kindness, deploring only that he should be squandering his money on workmen's halls and other hazy projects down in Bevisham.

Page 2582

’Lydiard tells me he has a very sound idea of the value of money, and has actually made money by cattle breeding; but he has flung ten thousand pounds on a single building outside the town, and he’ll have to endow it to support it—a Club to educate Radicals. The fact is, he wants to jam the business of two or three centuries into a life-time. These men of their so-called progress are like the majority of religious minds: they can’t believe without seeing and touching. That is to say, they don’t believe in the abstract at all, but they go to work blindly by agitating, and proselytizing, and persecuting to get together a mass they can believe in. You see it in their way of arguing; it’s half done with the fist. Lydiard tells me he left him last in a horrible despondency about progress. Ha! ha! Beauchamp’s no Radical. He hasn’t forgiven the Countess of Romfrey for marrying above her rank. He may be a bit of a Republican: but really in this country Republicans are fighting with the shadow of an old hat and a cockhorse. I beg to state that I have a reverence for constituted authority: I speak of what those fellows are contending with.’

‘Right,’ said Colonel Halkett. ’But “the shadow of an old hat and a cockhorse”: what does that mean?’

‘That’s what our Republicans are hitting at, sir.’

‘Ah! so; yes,’ quoth the colonel. ’And I say this to Nevil Beauchamp, that what we’ve grown up well with, powerfully with, it’s base ingratitude and dangerous folly to throw over.’

He blamed Beauchamp for ingratitude to the countess, who had, he affirmed of his own knowledge, married Lord Romfrey to protect Beauchamp’s interests.

A curious comment on this allegation was furnished by the announcement of the earl’s expectations of a son and heir. The earl wrote to Colonel Halkett from Romfrey Castle inviting him to come and spend some time there.

‘Now, that’s brave news!’ the colonel exclaimed.

He proposed a cruise round by the Cornish coast to the Severn, and so to Romfrey Castle, to squeeze the old lord’s hand and congratulate him with all his heart. Cecilia was glad to acquiesce, for an expedition of any description was a lull in the storm that hummed about her ears in the peace of home, where her father would perpetually speak of the day to be fixed. Sailing the sea on a cruise was like the gazing at wonderful colours of a Western sky: an oblivion of earthly dates and obligations. What mattered it that there were gales in August? She loved the sea, and the stinging salt spray, and circling gull and plunging gannet, the sun on the waves, and the torn cloud. The revelling libertine open sea wedded her to Beauchamp in that veiled cold spiritual manner she could muse on as a circumstance out of her life.

Page 2583

Fair companies of racing yachts were left behind. The gales of August mattered frightfully to poor Blackburn Tuckham, who was to be dropped at a town in South Wales, and descended greenish to his cabin as soon as they had crashed on the first wall-waves of the chalk-race, a throw beyond the peaked cliffs edged with cormorants, and were really tasting sea. Cecilia reclined on deck, wrapped in shawl and waterproof. As the Alpine climber claims the upper air, she had the wild sea to herself through her love of it; quite to herself. It was delicious to look round and ahead, and the perturbation was just enough to preserve her from thoughts too deep inward in a scene where the ghost of Nevil was abroad.

The hard dry gale increased. Her father, stretched beside her, drew her attention to a small cutter under double-reefed main-sail and small jib on the Esperanza's weather bow—a gallant boat carefully handled. She watched it with some anxiety, but the Esperanza was bound for a Devon bay, and bore away from the black Dorsetshire headland, leaving the little cutter to run into haven if she pleased. The passing her was no event.—In a representation of the common events befalling us in these times, upon an appreciation of which this history depends, one turns at whiles a languishing glance toward the vast potential mood, pluperfect tense. For Nevil Beauchamp was on board the cutter, steering her, with Dr. Shrapnel and Lydiard in the well, and if an accident had happened to cutter or schooner, what else might not have happened? Cecilia gathered it from Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, whom, to her surprise and pleasure, she found at Romfrey Castle. Her friend Louise received a letter from Mr. Lydiard, containing a literary amateur seaman's log of a cruise of a fifteen-ton cutter in a gale, and a pure literary sketch of Beauchamp standing drenched at the helm from five in the morning up to nine at night, munching a biscuit for nourishment. The beautiful widow prepared the way for what was very soon to be publicly known concerning herself by reading out this passage of her correspondent's letter in the breakfast room.

'Yes, the fellow's a sailor!' said Lord Romfrey.

The countess rose from her chair and walked out.

'Now, was that abuse of the fellow?' the old lord asked Colonel Halkett. 'I said he was a sailor, I said nothing else. He is a sailor, and he's fit for nothing else, and no ship will he get unless he bends his neck never 's nearer it.'

He hesitated a moment, and went after his wife.

Cecilia sat with the countess, in the afternoon, at a window overlooking the swelling woods of Romfrey. She praised the loveliness of the view.

'It is fire to me,' said Rosamund.

Cecilia looked at her, startled. Rosamund said no more.

She was an excellent hostess, nevertheless, unpretending and simple in company; and only when it chanced that Beauchamp’s name was mentioned did she cast that quick supplicating nervous glance at the earl, with a shadow of an elevation of her shoulders, as if in apprehension of mordant pain.

Page 2584

We will make no mystery about it. I would I could. Those happy tales of mystery are as much my envy as the popular narratives of the deeds of bread and cheese people, for they both create a tide-way in the attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging our obese imagination to constitutional exercise. And oh, the refreshment there is in dealing with characters either contemptibly beneath us or supernaturally above! My way is like a Rhone island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the over-real, which delight mankind—honour to the conjurors! My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clock-work of the brain that they are directed to set in motion, and—poor troop of actors to vacant benches!—the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost: back I go to my wilderness, where, as you perceive, I have contracted the habit of listening to my own voice more than is good: The burden of a child in her bosom had come upon Rosamund with the visage of the Angel of Death fronting her in her path. She believed that she would die; but like much that we call belief, there was a kernel of doubt in it, which was lively when her frame was enlivened, and she then thought of the giving birth to this unloved child, which was to disinherit the man she loved, in whose interest solely (so she could presume to think, because it had been her motive reason) she had married the earl. She had no wish to be a mother; but that prospect, and the dread attaching to it at her time of life, she could have submitted to for Lord Romfrey's sake. It struck her like a scoffer's blow that she, the one woman on earth loving Nevil, should have become the instrument for dispossessing him. The revulsion of her feelings enlightened her so far as to suggest, without enabling her to fathom him, that instead of having cleverly swayed Lord Romfrey, she had been his dupe, or a blind accomplice; and though she was too humane a woman to think of punishing him, she had so much to forgive that the trifles daily and at any instant added to the load, flushed her resentment, like fresh lights showing new features and gigantic outlines. Nevil's loss of Cecilia she had anticipated; she had heard of it when she was lying in physical and mental apathy at Steynham. Lord Romfrey had repeated to her the nature of his replies to the searching parental questions of Colonel Halkett, and having foreseen it all, and what was more, foretold it, she was not aroused from her torpor. Latterly, with the return of her natural strength, she had shown herself incapable of hearing her husband speak of Nevil; nor was the earl tardy in taking the hint to spare the mother of his child allusions that vexed her. Now and then they occurred perforce. The presence of Cecilia exasperated Rosamund's peculiar sensitiveness.

Page 2585

It required Louise Wardour-Devereux's apologies and interpretations to account for what appeared to Cecilia strangely ill-conditioned, if not insane, in Lady Romfrey's behaviour. The most astonishing thing to hear was, that Lady Romfrey had paid Mrs. Devereux a visit at her Surrey house unexpectedly one Sunday in the London season, for the purpose, as it became evident, of meeting Mr. Blackburn Tuckham: and how she could have known that Mr. Tuckham would be there, Mrs. Devereux could not tell, for it was, Louise assured Cecilia, purely by chance that he and Mr. Lydiard were present: but the countess obtained an interview with him alone, and Mr. Tuckham came from it declaring it to have been more terrible than any he had ever been called upon to endure. The object of the countess was to persuade him to renounce his bride.

Louise replied to the natural inquiry—'Upon what plea?' with a significant evasiveness. She put her arms round Cecilia's neck: 'I trust you are not unhappy. You will get no release from him.'

'I am not unhappy,' said Cecilia, musically clear to convince her friend.

She was indeed glad to feel the stout chains of her anchor restraining her when Lady Romfrey talked of Nevil; they were like the safety of marriage without the dreaded ceremony, and with solitude to let her weep. Bound thus to a weaker man than Blackburn Tuckham, though he had been more warmly esteemed, her fancy would have drifted away over the deeps, perhaps her cherished loyalty would have drowned in her tears—for Lady Romfrey tasked it very severely: but he from whom she could hope for no release, gave her some of the firmness which her nature craved in this trial.

From saying quietly to her: 'I thought once you loved him,' when alluding to Nevil, Lady Romfrey passed to mournful exclamations, and by degrees on to direct entreaties. She related the whole story of Renee in England, and appeared distressed with a desperate wonderment at Cecilia's mildness after hearing it. Her hearer would have imagined that she had no moral sense, if it had not been so perceptible that the poor lady's mind was distempered on the one subject of Nevil Beauchamp. Cecilia's high conception of duty, wherein she was a peerless flower of our English civilization, was incommunicable: she could practise, not explain it. She bowed to Lady Romfrey's praises of Nevil, suffered her hands to be wrung, her heart to be touched, all but an avowal of her love of him to be wrested from her, and not the less did she retain her cold resolution to marry to please her father and fulfil her pledge. In truth, it was too late to speak of Renee to her now. It did not beseem Cecilia to remember that she had ever been a victim of jealousy; and while confessing to many errors, because she felt them, and gained a necessary strength from them—in the comfort of the consciousness of pain, for example, which she sorely needed, that the pain in her own breast might deaden her to Nevil's

Page 2586

jealousy, the meanest of the errors of a lofty soul, yielded no extract beyond the bare humiliation proper to an acknowledgement that it had existed: so she discarded the recollection of the passion which had wrought the mischief. Since we cannot have a peerless flower of civilization without artificial aid, it may be understood how it was that Cecilia could extinguish some lights in her mind and kindle others, and wherefore what it was not natural for her to do, she did. She had, briefly, a certain control of herself.

Our common readings in the fictitious romances which mark out a plot and measure their characters to fit into it, had made Rosamund hopeful of the effect of that story of Renee. A wooden young woman, or a galvanized (sweet to the writer, either of them, as to the reader—so moveable they are!) would have seen her business at this point, and have glided melting to reconciliation and the chamber where romantic fiction ends joyously. Rosamund had counted on it.

She looked intently at Cecilia. 'He is ruined, wasted, ill, unloved; he has lost you—I am the cause!' she cried in a convulsion of grief.

'Dear Lady Romfrey!' Cecilia would have consoled her. 'There is nothing to lead us to suppose that Nevil is unwell, and you are not to blame for anything: how can you be?'

'I spoke falsely of Dr. Shrapnel; I am the cause. It lies on me! it pursues me. Let me give to the poor as I may, and feel for the poor, as I do, to get nearer to Nevil—I cannot have peace! His heart has turned from me. He despises me. If I had spoken to Lord Romfrey at Steynham, as he commanded me, you and he—Oh! cowardice: he is right, cowardice is the chief evil in the world. He is ill; he is desperately ill; he will die.'

'Have you heard he is very ill, Lady Romfrey?'

'No! no!' Rosamund exclaimed; 'it is by not hearing that I know it!'

With the assistance of Louise Devereux, Cecilia gradually awakened to what was going on in the house. There had been a correspondence between Miss Denham and the countess. Letters from Bevisham had suddenly ceased. Presumably the earl had stopped them: and if so it must have been for a tragic reason.

Cecilia hinted some blame of Lord Romfrey to her father.

He pressed her hand and said: 'You don't know what that man suffers. Romfrey is fond of Nevil too, but he must guard his wife; and the fact is Nevil is down with fever. It 's in the papers now; he may be able to conceal it, and I hope he will. There'll be a crisis, and then he can tell her good news—a little illness and all right now! Of course,' the colonel continued buoyantly, 'Nevil will recover; he's a tough wiry young fellow, but poor Romfrey's fears are natural enough about the countess. Her mind seems to be haunted

by the doctor there—Shrapnel, I mean; and she's exciteable to a degree that threatens the worst—in case of any accident in Bevisham.'

Page 2587

‘Is it not a kind of cowardice to conceal it?’ Cecilia suggested.

‘It saves her from fretting,’ said the colonel.

’But she is fretting! If Lord Romfrey would confide in her and trust to her courage, papa, it would be best.’

Colonel Halkett thought that Lord Romfrey was the judge.

Cecilia wished to leave a place where this visible torture of a human soul was proceeding, and to no purpose. She pointed out to her father, by a variety of signs, that Lady Romfrey either knew or suspected the state of affairs in Bevisham, and repeated her remarks upon Nevil’s illness. But Colonel Halkett was restrained from departing by the earl’s constant request to him to stay. Old friendship demanded it of him. He began to share his daughter’s feelings at the sight of Lady Romfrey. She was outwardly patient and submissive; by nature she was a strong healthy woman; and she attended to all her husband’s prescriptions for the regulating of her habits, walked with him, lay down for the afternoon’s rest, appeared amused when he laboured to that effect, and did her utmost to subdue the worm devouring her heart but the hours of the delivery of the letter-post were fatal to her. Her woeful: ‘No letter for me!’ was piteous. When that was heard no longer, her silence and famished gaze chilled Cecilia. At night Rosamund eyed her husband expressionlessly, with her head leaning back in her chair, to the sorrow of the ladies beholding her. Ultimately the contagion of her settled misery took hold of Cecilia. Colonel Halkett was induced by his daughter and Mrs. Devereux to endeavour to combat a system that threatened consequences worse than those it was planned to avert. He by this time was aware of the serious character of the malady which had prostrated Nevil. Lord Romfrey had directed his own medical man to go down to Bevisham, and Dr. Gannet’s report of Nevil was grave. The colonel made light of it to his daughter, after the fashion he condemned in Lord Romfrey, to whom however he spoke earnestly of the necessity for partially taking his wife into his confidence to the extent of letting her know that a slight fever was running its course with Nevil.

‘There will be no slight fever in my wife’s blood,’ said the earl. ’I stand to weather the cape or run to wreck, and it won’t do to be taking in reefs on a lee-shore. You don’t see what frets her, colonel. For years she has been bent on Nevil’s marriage. It’s off: but if you catch Cecilia by the hand and bring her to us—I swear she loves the fellow!—that’s the medicine for my wife. Say: will you do it? Tell Lady Romfrey it shall be done. We shall stand upright again!’

‘I’m afraid that’s impossible, Romfrey,’ said the colonel.

Page 2588

’Play at it, then! Let her think it. You’re helping me treat an invalid. Colonel! my old friend! You save my house and name if you do that. It’s a hand round a candle in a burst of wind. There’s Nevil dragged by a woman into one of their reeking hovels—so that Miss Denham at Shrapnel’s writes to Lady Romfrey—because the woman’s drunken husband voted for him at the Election, and was kicked out of employment, and fell upon the gin-bottle, and the brats of the den died starving, and the man sickened of a fever; and Nevil goes in and sits with him! Out of that tangle of folly is my house to be struck down? It looks as if the fellow with his infernal “humanity,” were the bad genius of an old nurse’s tale. He’s a good fellow, colonel, he means well. This fever will cure him, they say it sobers like bloodletting. He’s a gallant fellow; you know that. He fought to the skeleton in our last big war. On my soul, I believe he’s good for a husband. Frenchwoman or not, that affair’s over. He shall have Steynham and Holdesbury. Can I say more? Now, colonel, you go in to the countess. Grasp my hand. Give me that help, and God bless you! You light up my old days. She’s a noble woman: I would not change her against the best in the land. She has this craze about Nevil. I suppose she’ll never get over it. But there it is: and we must feed her with the spoon.’

Colonel Halkett argued stutteringly with the powerful man: ’It’s the truth she ought to hear, Romfrey; indeed it is, if you ’ll believe me. It ‘s his life she is fearing for. She knows half.’

’She knows positively nothing, colonel. Miss Denham’s first letter spoke of the fellow’s having headaches, and staggering. He was out on a cruise, and saw your schooner pass, and put into some port, and began falling right and left, and they got him back to Shrapnel’s: and here it is—that if you go to him you’ll save him, and if you go to my wife you’ll save her: and there you have it: and I ask my old friend, I beg him to go to them both.’

’But you can’t surely expect me to force my daughter’s inclinations, my dear Romfrey?’

‘Cecilia loves the fellow!’

‘She is engaged to Mr. Tuckham.’

‘I’ll see the man Tuckham.’

‘Really, my dear lord!’

’Play at it, Halkett, play at it! Tide us over this! Talk to her: hint it and nod it. We have to round November. I could strangle the world till that month’s past. You’ll own,’ he added mildly after his thunder, ’I’m not much of the despot Nevil calls me. She has not a wish I don’t supply. I’m at her beck, and everything that’s mine. She’s a brave good woman. I don’t complain. I run my chance. But if we lose the child—good night! Boy or girl!—boy!’

Lord Romfrey flung an arm up. The child of his old age lived for him already: he gave it all the life he had. This miracle, this young son springing up on an earth decaying and dark, absorbed him. This reviver of his ancient line must not be lost. Perish every consideration to avert it! He was ready to fear, love, or hate terribly, according to the prospects of his child.

Page 2589

Colonel Halkett was obliged to enter into a consultation, of a shadowy sort, with his daughter, whose only advice was that they should leave the castle. The penetrable gloom there, and the growing apprehension concerning the countess and Nevil, tore her to pieces. Even if she could have conspired with the earl to hoodwink his wife, her strong sense told her it would be fruitless, besides base. Father and daughter had to make the stand against Lord Romfrey. He saw their departure from the castle gates, and kissed his hand to Cecilia, courteously, without a smile.

'He may well praise the countess, papa,' said Cecilia, while they were looking back at the castle and the moveless flag that hung in folds by the mast above it. 'She has given me her promise to avoid questioning him and to accept his view of her duty. She said to me that if Nevil should die she . . .'

Cecilia herself broke down, and gave way to sobs in her father's arms.

CHAPTER XLIX

A FABRIC OF BARONIAL DESPOTISM CRUMBLE

The earl's precautions did duty night and day in all the avenues leading to the castle and his wife's apartments; and he could believe that he had undertaken as good a defence as the mountain guarding the fertile vale from storms: but him the elements pelted heavily. Letters from acquaintances of Nevil, from old shipmates and from queer political admirers and opponents, hailed on him; things not to be frigidly read were related of the fellow.

Lord Romfrey's faith in the power of constitution to beat disease battled sturdily with the daily reports of his physician and friends, whom he had directed to visit the cottage on the common outside Bevisham, and with Miss Denham's intercepted letters to the countess. Still he had to calculate on the various injuries Nevil had done to his constitution, which had made of him another sort of man for a struggle of life and death than when he stood like a riddled flag through the war. That latest freak of the fellow's, the abandonment of our natural and wholesome sustenance in animal food, was to be taken in the reckoning. Dr. Gannet did not allude to it; the Bevisham doctor did; and the earl meditated with a fury of wrath on the dismal chance that such a folly as this of one old vegetable idiot influencing a younger noodle, might strike his House to the dust.

His watch over his wife had grown mechanical: he failed to observe that her voice was missing. She rarely spoke. He lost the art of observing himself: the wrinkling up and dropping of his brows became his habitual language. So long as he had not to meet inquiries or face tears, he enjoyed the sense of security. He never quitted his wife save to walk to the Southern park lodge, where letters and telegrams were piled awaiting

him; and she was forbidden to take the air on the castle terrace without his being beside her, lest a whisper, some accident

Page 2590

of the kind that donkeys who nod over their drowsy nose-length-ahead precautions call fatality, should rouse her to suspect, and in a turn of the hand undo his labour: for the race was getting terrible: Death had not yet stepped out of that evil chamber in Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to aim his javelin at the bosom containing the prized young life to come, but, like the smoke of waxing fire, he shadowed forth his presence in wreaths blacker and thicker day by day: and Everard Romfrey knew that the hideous beast of darkness had only to spring up and pass his guard to deal a blow to his House the direr from all he supposed himself to have gained by masking it hitherto. The young life he looked to for renewal swallowed him: he partly lost human feeling for his wife in the tremendous watch and strain to hurry her as a vessel round the dangerous headland. He was oblivious that his eyebrows talked, that his head was bent low, that his mouth was shut, and that where a doubt had been sown, silence and such signs are like revelations in black night to the spirit of a woman who loves.

One morning after breakfast Rosamund hung on his arm, eyeing him neither questioningly nor invitingly, but long. He kissed her forehead. She clung to him and closed her eyes, showing him a face of slumber, like a mask of the dead.

Mrs. Devereux was present. Cecilia had entreated her to stay with Lady Romfrey. She stole away, for the time had come which any close observer of the countess must have expected.

The earl lifted his wife, and carried her to her sitting-room. A sunless weltering September day whipped the window-panes and brought the roar of the beaten woods to her ears. He was booted and gaitered for his customary walk to the park lodge, and as he bent a knee beside her, she murmured: 'Don't wait; return soon.'

He placed a cord attached to the bellrope within her reach. This utter love of Nevil Beauchamp was beyond his comprehension, but there it was, and he had to submit to it and manoeuvre. His letters and telegrams told the daily tale. 'He's better,' said the earl, preparing himself to answer what his wife's look had warned him would come.

She was an image of peace, in the same posture on the couch where he had left her, when he returned. She did not open her eyes, but felt about for his hand, and touching it, she seemed to weigh the fingers.

At last she said: 'The fever should be at its height.'

'Why, my dear brave girl, what ails you?' said he.

'Ignorance.'

She raised her eyelids. His head was bent down over her, like a raven's watching, a picture of gravest vigilance.

Her bosom rose and sank. ‘What has Miss Denham written to-day?’

‘To-day?’ he asked her gently.

‘I shall bear it,’ she answered. ’You were my master before you were my husband. I bear anything you think is good for my government. Only, my ignorance is fever; I share Nevil’s.’

Page 2591

‘Have you been to my desk at all?’

’No. I read your eyes and your hands: I have been living on them. To-day I find that I have not gained by it, as I hoped I should. Ignorance kills me. I really have courage to bear to hear just at this moment I have.’

‘There’s no bad news, my love,’ said the earl.

‘High fever, is it?’

’The usual fever. Gannet’s with him. I sent for Gannet to go there, to satisfy you.’

‘Nevil is not dead?’

‘Lord! ma’am, my dear soul!’

‘He is alive?’

’Quite: certainly alive; as much alive as I am; only going a little faster, as fellows do in the jumps of a fever. The best doctor in England is by his bed. He ’s doing fairly. You should have let me know you were fretting, my Rosamund.’

‘I did not wish to tempt you to lie, my dear lord.’

’Well, there are times when a woman . . . as you are: but you’re a brave woman, a strong heart, and my wife. You want some one to sit with you, don’t you? Louise Devereux is a pleasant person, but you want a man to amuse you. I’d have sent to Stukely, but you want a serious man, I fancy.’

So much had the earl been thrown out of his plan for protecting his wife, that he felt helpless, and hinted at the aids and comforts of religion. He had not rejected the official Church, and regarding it now as in alliance with great Houses, he considered that its ministers might also be useful to the troubled women of noble families. He offered, if she pleased, to call in the rector to sit with her—the bishop of the diocese, if she liked.

‘But just as you like, my love,’ he added. ’You know you have to avoid fretting. I’ve heard my sisters talk of the parson doing them good off and on about the time of their being brought to bed. He elevated their minds, they said. I’m sure I’ve no objection. If he can doctor the minds of women he’s got a profession worth something.’

Rosamund smothered an outcry. ‘You mean that Nevil is past hope!’

’Not if he’s got a fair half of our blood in him. And Richard Beauchamp gave the fellow good stock. He has about the best blood in England. That’s not saying much when

they've taken to breed as they build—stuff to keep the plasterers at work; devil a thought of posterity!'

'There I see you and Nevil one, my dear lord,' said Rosamund. 'You think of those that are to follow us. Talk to me of him. Do not say, "the fellow." Say "Nevil." No, no; call him "the fellow." He was alive and well when you used to say it. But smile kindly, as if he made you love him down in your heart, in spite of you. We have both known that love, and that opposition to him; not liking his ideas, yet liking him so: we were obliged to laugh—I have seen you! as love does laugh! If I am not crying over his grave, Everard? Oh!'

The earl smoothed her forehead. All her suspicions were rekindled. 'Truth! truth! give me truth. Let me know what world I am in.'

Page 2592

’My dear, a ship’s not lost because she’s caught in a squall; nor a man buffeting the waves for an hour. He’s all right: he keeps up.’

‘He is delirious? I ask you—I have fancied I heard him.’

Lord Romfrey puffed from his nostrils: but in affecting to blow to the winds her foolish woman’s wildness of fancy, his mind rested on Nevil, and he said: ‘Poor boy! It seems he’s chattering hundreds to the minute.’

His wife’s looks alarmed him after he had said it, and he was for toning it and modifying it, when she gasped to him to help her to her feet; and standing up, she exclaimed: ’O heaven! now I hear you; now I know he lives. See how much better it is for me to know the real truth. It takes me to his bedside. Ignorance and suspense have been poison. I have been washed about like a dead body. Let me read all my letters now. Nothing will harm me now. You will do your best for me, my husband, will you not?’ She tore at her dress at her throat for coolness, panting and smiling. ’For me—us—yours—ours! Give me my letters, lunch with me, and start for Bevisham. Now you see how good it is for me to hear the very truth, you will give me your own report, and I shall absolutely trust in it, and go down with it if it’s false! But you see I am perfectly strong for the truth. It must be you or I to go. I burn to go; but your going will satisfy me. If you look on him, I look. I feel as if I had been nailed down in a coffin, and have got fresh air. I pledge you my word, sir, my honour, my dear husband, that I will think first of my duty. I know it would be Nevil’s wish. He has not quite forgiven me—he thought me ambitious—ah! stop: he said that the birth of our child would give him greater happiness than he had known for years: he begged me to persuade you to call a boy Nevil Beauchamp, and a girl Renee. He has never believed in his own long living.’

Rosamund refreshed her lord’s heart by smiling archly as she said: ’The boy to be educated to take the side of the people, of course! The girl is to learn a profession.’

‘Ha! bless the fellow!’ Lord Romfrey interjected. ’Well, I might go there for an hour. Promise me, no fretting! You have hollows in your cheeks, and your underlip hangs: I don’t like it. I haven’t seen that before.’

‘We do not see clearly when we are trying to deceive,’ said Rosamund. ’My letters! my letters!’

Lord Romfrey went to fetch them. They were intact in his desk. His wife, then, had actually been reading the facts through a wall! For he was convinced of Mrs. Devereux’s fidelity, as well as of the colonel’s and Cecilia’s. He was not a man to be disobeyed: nor was his wife the woman to court or to acquiesce in trifling acts of disobedience to him. He received the impression, consequently, that this matter of the visit to Nevil was one in which the poor loving soul might be allowed to guide him,

singular as the intensity of her love of Nevil Beauchamp was, considering that they were not of kindred blood.

Page 2593

He endeavoured to tone her mind for the sadder items in Miss Denham's letters.

'Oh!' said Rosamund, 'what if I shed the "screaming eyedrops," as you call them? They will not hurt me, but relieve. I was sure I should someday envy that girl! If he dies she will have nursed him and had the last of him.'

'He's not going to die!' said Everard powerfully.

'We must be prepared. These letters will do that for me. I have written out the hours of your trains. Stanton will attend on you. I have directed him to telegraph to the Dolphin in Bevisham for rooms for the night: that is to-morrow night. To-night you sleep at your hotel in London, which will be ready to receive you, and is more comfortable than the empty house. Stanton takes wine, madeira and claret, and other small necessaries. If Nevil should be very unwell, you will not leave him immediately. I shall look to the supplies. You will telegraph to me twice a day, and write once. We lunch at half-past twelve, so that you may hit the twenty-minutes-to-two o'clock train. And now I go to see that the packing is done.'

She carried off her letters to her bedroom, where she fell upon the bed, shutting her eyelids hard before she could suffer her eyes to be the intermediaries of that fever-chamber in Bevisham and her bursting heart. But she had not positively deceived her husband in the reassurance she had given him by her collectedness and by the precise directions she had issued for his comforts, indicating a mind so much more at ease. She was firmer to meet the peril of her beloved: and being indeed, when thrown on her internal resources, one among the brave women of earth, though also one who required a lift from circumstances to take her stand calmly fronting a menace to her heart, she saw the evidence of her influence with Lord Romfrey: the level she could feel that they were on together so long as she was courageous, inspirited her sovereignly.

He departed at the hour settled for him. Rosamund sat at her boudoir window, watching the carriage that was conducting him to the railway station. Neither of them had touched on the necessity of his presenting himself at the door of Dr. Shrapnel's house. That, and the disgust belonging to it, was a secondary consideration with Lord Romfrey, after he had once resolved on it as the right thing to do: and his wife admired and respected him for so supreme a loftiness. And fervently she prayed that it might not be her evil fate to disappoint his hopes. Never had she experienced so strong a sense of devotedness to him as when she saw the carriage winding past the middle oak-wood of the park, under a wet sky brightened from the West, and on out of sight.

CHAPTER L

AT THE COTTAGE ON THE COMMON

Page 2594

Rain went with Lord Romfrey in a pursuing cloud all the way to Bevisham, and across the common to the long garden and plain little green-shuttered, neat white cottage of Dr. Shrapnel. Carriages were driving from the door; idle men with hands deep in their pockets hung near it, some women pointing their shoulders under wet shawls, and boys. The earl was on foot. With no sign of discomposure, he stood at the half-open door and sent in his card, bearing the request for permission to visit his nephew. The reply failing to come to him immediately, he began striding to and fro. That garden gate where he had flourished the righteous whip was wide. Foot-farers over the sodden common were attracted to the gateway, and lingered in it, looking at the long, green-extended windows, apparently listening, before they broke away to exchange undertone speech here and there. Boys had pushed up through the garden to the kitchen area. From time to time a woman in a dripping bonnet whimpered aloud.

An air of a country churchyard on a Sunday morning when the curate has commenced the service prevailed. The boys were subdued by the moisture, as they are when they sit in the church aisle or organ-loft, before their members have been much cramped.

The whole scene, and especially the behaviour of the boys, betokened to Lord Romfrey that an event had come to pass.

In the chronicle of a sickness the event is death.

He bethought him of various means of stopping the telegraph and smothering the tale, if matters should have touched the worst here. He calculated abstrusely the practicable shortness of the two routes from Bevisham to Romfrey, by post-horses on the straightest line of road, or by express train on the triangle of railway, in case of an extreme need requiring him to hasten back to his wife and renew his paternal-despotic system with her. She had but persuaded him of the policy of a liberal openness and confidence for the moment's occasion: she could not turn his nature, which ran to strokes of craft and blunt decision whenever the emergency smote him and he felt himself hailed to show generalship.

While thus occupied in thoughtfulness he became aware of the monotony of a tuneless chant, as if, it struck him, an insane young chorister or canon were galloping straight on end hippomaniacally through the Psalms. There was a creak at intervals, leading him to think it a machine that might have run away with the winder's arm.

The earl's humour proposed the notion to him that this perhaps was one of the forms of Radical lamentation, ululation, possibly practised by a veteran impietist like Dr. Shrapnel for the loss of his youngster, his political cub—poor lad!

Deriding any such paganry, and aught that could be set howling, Lord Romfrey was presently moved to ask of the small crowd at the gate what that sound was.

‘It’s the poor commander, sir,’ said a wet-shawled woman, shivering.

Page 2595

‘He’s been at it twenty hours already, sir,’ said one of the boys.

’Twenty-foor hour he ‘ve been at it,’ said another.

A short dispute grew over the exact number of hours. One boy declared that thirty hours had been reached. ’Father heerd’n yesterday morning as he was aff to ’s work in the town afore six: that brings ’t nigh thirty and he ha’n’t stopped yet.’

The earl was invited to step inside the gate, a little way up to the house, and under the commander’s window, that he might obtain a better hearing.

He swung round, walked away, walked back, and listened.

If it was indeed a voice, the voice, he would have said, was travelling high in air along the sky.

Yesterday he had described to his wife Nevil’s chattering of hundreds to the minute. He had not realized the description, which had been only his manner of painting delirium: there had been no warrant for it. He heard the wild scudding voice imperfectly: it reminded him of a string of winter geese changeing waters. Shower gusts, and the wail and hiss of the rows of fir-trees bordering the garden, came between, and allowed him a moment’s incredulity as to its being a human voice. Such a cry will often haunt the moors and wolds from above at nightfall. The voice hied on, sank, seemed swallowed; it rose, as if above water, in a hush of wind and trees. The trees bowed their heads rageing, the voice drowned; once more to rise, chattering thrice rapidly, in a high-pitched key, thin, shrill, weird, interminable, like winds through a crazy chamber-door at midnight.

The voice of a broomstick-witch in the clouds could not be thinner and stranger: Lord Romfrey had some such thought.

Dr. Gannet was the bearer of Miss Denham’s excuses to Lord Romfrey for the delay in begging him to enter the house: in the confusion of the household his lordship’s card had been laid on the table below, and she was in the sick-room.

‘Is my nephew a dead man?’ said the earl.

The doctor weighed his reply. ’He lives. Whether he will, after the exhaustion of this prolonged fit of raving, I don’t dare to predict. In the course of my experience I have never known anything like it. He lives: there’s the miracle, but he lives.’

‘On brandy?’

‘That would soon have sped him.’

‘Ha. You have everything here that you want?’

‘Everything.’

‘He’s in your hands, Gannet.’

The earl was conducted to a sitting-room, where Dr. Gannet left him for a while.

Mindful that he was under the roof of his enemy, he remained standing, observing nothing.

The voice overheard was off at a prodigious rate, like the far sound of a yell ringing on and on.

Page 2596

The earl unconsciously sought a refuge from it by turning the leaves of a book upon the table, which was a complete edition of Harry Denham's Poems, with a preface by a man named Lydiard; and really, to read the preface one would suppose that these poets were the princes of the earth. Lord Romfrey closed the volume. It was exquisitely bound, and presented to Miss Denham by the Mr. Lydiard. 'The works of your illustrious father,' was written on the title-page. These writers deal queerly with their words of praise of one another. There is no law to restrain them. Perhaps it is the consolation they take for the poor devil's life they lead!

A lady addressing him familiarly, invited him to go upstairs.

He thanked her. At the foot of the stairs he turned; he had recognized Cecilia Halkett.

Seeing her there was more strange to him than being there himself; but he bowed to facts.

'What do you think?' he said.

She did not answer intelligibly.

He walked up.

The crazed gabbling tongue had entire possession of the house, and rang through it at an amazing pitch to sustain for a single minute.

A reflection to the effect that dogs die more decently than we men, saddened the earl. But, then, it is true, we shorten their pangs by shooting them.

A dismal figure loomed above him at the head of the stairs.

He distinguished it in the vast lean length he had once whipped and flung to earth.

Dr. Shrapnel was planted against the wall outside that raving chamber, at the salient angle of a common prop or buttress. The edge of a shoulder and a heel were the supports to him sideways in his distorted attitude. His wall arm hung dead beside his pendent frock-coat; the hair of his head had gone to wildness, like a field of barley whipped by tempest. One hand pressed his eyeballs: his unshaven jaw dropped.

Lord Romfrey passed him by.

The dumb consent of all present affirmed the creature lying on the bed to be Nevil Beauchamp.

Face, voice, lank arms, chicken neck: what a sepulchral sketch of him!

It was the revelry of a corpse.

Shudders of alarm for his wife seized Lord Romfrey at the sight. He thought the poor thing on the bed must be going, resolving to a cry, unwinding itself violently in its hurricane of speech, that was not speech nor exclamation, rather the tongue let loose to run to the death. It seemed to be out in mid-sea, up wave and down wave.

A nurse was at the pillow smoothing it. Miss Denham stood at the foot of the bed.

‘Is that pain?’ Lord Romfrey said low to Dr. Gannet.

‘Unconscious,’ was the reply.

Miss Denham glided about the room and disappeared.

Her business was to remove Dr. Shrapnel, that he might be out of the way when Lord Romfrey should pass him again: but Dr. Shrapnel heard one voice only, and moaned, ‘My Beauchamp!’ She could not get him to stir.

Page 2597

Miss Denham saw him start slightly as the earl stepped forth and, bowing to him, said: ‘I thank you, sir, for permitting me to visit my nephew.’

Dr. Shrapnel made a motion of the hand, to signify freedom of access to his house. He would have spoken the effort fetched a burst of terrible chuckles. He covered his face.

Lord Romfrey descended. The silly old wretch had disturbed his equanimity as a composer of fiction for the comfort and sustainment of his wife: and no sooner had he the front door in view than the calculation of the three strides requisite to carry him out of the house plucked at his legs, much as young people are affected by a dancing measure; for he had, without deigning to think of matters disagreeable to him in doing so, performed the duty imposed upon him by his wife, and now it behoved him to ward off the coming blow from that double life at Romfrey Castle.

He was arrested in his hasty passage by Cecilia Halkett.

She handed him a telegraphic message: Rosamund requested him to stay two days in Bevisham. She said additionally: ’Perfectly well. Shall fear to see you returning yet. Have sent to Tourdestelle. All his friends. Ni espoir, ni crainte, mais point de deceptions. Lumiere. Ce sont les tenebres qui tuent.’

Her nimble wits had spied him on the road he was choosing, and outrun him.

He resigned himself to wait a couple of days at Bevisham. Cecilia begged him to accept a bed at Mount Laurels. He declined, and asked her: ’How is it you are here?’

‘I called here,’ said she, compressing her eyelids in anguish at a wilder cry of the voice overhead, and forgetting to state why she had called at the house and what services she had undertaken. A heap of letters in her handwriting explained the nature of her task.

Lord Romfrey asked her where the colonel was.

’He drives me down in the morning and back at night, but they will give me a bed or a sofa here to-night—I can’t . . .’ Cecilia stretched her hand out, blinded, to the earl.

He squeezed her hand.

’These letters take away my strength: crying is quite useless, I know that,’ said she, glancing at a pile of letters that she had partly replied to. ’Some are from people who can hardly write. There were people who distrusted him! Some are from people who abused him and maltreated him. See those poor creatures out in the rain!’

Lord Romfrey looked through the venetian blinds of the parlour window.

‘It’s as good as a play to them,’ he remarked.

Cecilia lit a candle and applied a stick of black wax to the flame, saying: ’Envelopes have fallen short. These letters will frighten the receivers. I cannot help it.’

‘I will bring letter paper and envelopes in the afternoon,’ said Lord Romfrey. ‘Don’t use black wax, my dear.’

’I can find no other: I do not like to trouble Miss Denham. Letter paper has to be sealed. These letters must go by the afternoon post: I do not like to rob the poor anxious people of a little hope while he lives. Let me have note paper and envelopes quickly: not black-edged.’

Page 2598

‘Plain; that’s right,’ said Lord Romfrey.

Black appeared to him like the torch of death flying over the country.

‘There may be hope,’ he added.

She sighed: ‘Oh! yes.’

‘Gannet will do everything that man can do to save him.’

‘He will, I am sure.’

‘You don’t keep watch in the room, my dear, do you?’

’Miss Denham allows me an hour there in the day: it is the only rest she takes. She gives me her bedroom.’

‘Ha: well: women!’ ejaculated the earl, and paused. ’That sounded like him!’

‘At times,’ murmured Cecilia. ’All yesterday! all through the night! and to-day!’

‘He’ll be missed.’

Any sudden light of happier expectation that might have animated him was extinguished by the flight of chatter following the cry which had sounded like Beauchamp.

He went out into the rain, thinking that Beauchamp would be missed. The fellow had bothered the world, but the world without him would be heavy matter.

The hour was mid-day, workmen’s meal-time. A congregation of shipyard workmen and a multitude of children crowded near the door. In passing through them, Lord Romfrey was besought for the doctor’s report of Commander Beauchamp, variously named Beesham, Bosham, Bitcham, Bewsham. The earl heard his own name pronounced as he particularly disliked to hear it—Rumfree. Two or three men scowled at him.

It had not occurred to him ever before in his meditations to separate his blood and race from the common English; and he was not of a character to dwell on fantastical and purposeless distinctions, but the mispronunciation of his name and his nephew’s at an instant when he was thinking of Nevil’s laying down his life for such men as these gross excessive breeders, of ill shape and wooden countenance, pushed him to reflections on the madness of Nevil in endeavouring to lift them up and brush them up; and a curious tenderness for Nevil’s madness worked in his breast as he contrasted this much-abused nephew of his with our general English—the so-called nobles, who were sunk in the mud of the traders: the traders, who were sinking in the mud of the workmen: the

workmen, who were like harbour-flats at ebb tide round a stuck-fast fleet of vessels big and little.

Decidedly a fellow like Nevil would be missed by him!

These English, huddling more and more in flocks, turning to lumps, getting to be cut in a pattern and marked by a label—how they bark and snap to rend an obnoxious original! One may chafe at the botheration everlastingly raised by the fellow; but if our England is to keep her place she must have him, and many of him. Have him? He's gone!

Lord Romfrey reasoned himself into pathetic sentiment by degrees.

He purchased the note paper and envelopes in the town for Cecilia. Late in the afternoon he deposited them on the parlour table at Dr. Shrapnel's. Miss Denham received him. She was about to lie down for her hour of rest on the sofa. Cecilia was upstairs. He inquired if there was any change in his nephew's condition.

Page 2599

‘Not any,’ said Miss Denham.

The voice was abroad for proof of that.

He stood with a swelling heart.

Jenny flung out a rug to its length beside the sofa, and; holding it by one end, said: ‘I must have my rest, to be of service, my lord.’

He bowed. He was mute and surprised.

The young lady was like no person of her age and sex that he remembered ever to have met.

‘I will close the door,’ he said, retiring softly.

‘Do not, my lord.’

The rug was over her, up to her throat, and her eyes were shut. He looked back through the doorway in going out. She was asleep.

‘Some delirium. Gannet of good hope. All in the usual course’; he transmitted intelligence to his wife.

A strong desire for wine at his dinner-table warned him of something wrong with his iron nerves.

CHAPTER LI

IN THE NIGHT

The delirious voice haunted him. It came no longer accompanied by images and likenesses to this and that of animate nature, which were relieving and distracting; it came to him in its mortal nakedness—an afflicting incessant ringing peal, bare as death’s ribs in telling of death. When would it stop? And when it stopped, what would succeed? What ghastly silence!

He walked to within view of the lights of Dr. Shrapnel’s at night: then home to his hotel.

Miss Denham’s power of commanding sleep, as he could not, though contrary to custom he tried it on the right side and the left, set him thinking of her. He owned she was pretty. But that, he contended, was not the word; and the word was undiscoverable. Not Cecilia Halkett herself had so high-bred an air, for Cecilia had not her fineness of feature and full quick eyes, of which the thin eyelids were part of the

expression. And Cecilia sobbed, snifed, was patched about the face, reddish, bluish. This girl was pliable only to service, not to grief: she did her work for three-and-twenty hours, and fell to her sleep of one hour like a soldier. Lord Romfrey could not recollect anything in a young woman that had taken him so much as the girl's tossing out of the rug and covering herself, lying down and going to sleep under his nose, absolutely independent of his presence.

She had not betrayed any woman's petulance with him for his conduct to her uncle or guardian. Nor had she hypocritically affected the reverse, as ductile women do, when they feel wanting in force to do the other. She was not unlike Nevil's marquise in face, he thought: less foreign of course; looking thrice as firm. Both were delicately featured.

He had a dream.

It was of an interminable procession of that odd lot called the People. All of them were quarrelling under a deluge. One party was for umbrellas, one was against them: and sounding the dispute with a question or two, Everard held it logical that there should be protection from the wet: just as logical on the other hand that so frail a shelter should be discarded, considering the tremendous downpour. But as he himself was dry, save for two or three drops, he deemed them all lunatics. He requested them to gag their empty chatter-boxes, and put the mother upon that child's cry.

Page 2600

He was now a simple unit of the procession. Asking naturally whither they were going, he saw them point. ‘St. Paul’s,’ he heard. In his own bosom it was, and striking like the cathedral big bell.

Several ladies addressed him sorrowfully. He stood alone. It had become notorious that he was to do battle, and no one thought well of his chances. Devil an enemy to be seen! he muttered. Yet they said the enemy was close upon him. His right arm was paralyzed. There was the enemy hard in front, mailed, vizored, gauntleted. He tried to lift his right hand, and found it grasping an iron ring at the bottom of the deep Steynham well, sunk one hundred feet through the chalk. But the unexampled cunning of his left arm was his little secret; and, acting upon this knowledge, he telegraphed to his first wife at Steynham that Dr. Gannet was of good hope, and thereupon he re-entered the ranks of the voluminous procession, already winding spirally round the dome of St. Paul’s. And there, said he, is the tomb of Beauchamp. Everything occurred according to his predictions, and he was entirely devoid of astonishment. Yet he would fain have known the titles of the slain admiral’s naval battles. He protested he had a right to know, for he was the hero’s uncle, and loved him. He assured the stupid scowling people that he loved Nevil Beauchamp, always loved the boy, and was the staunchest friend the fellow had. And saying that, he certainly felt himself leaning up against the cathedral rails in the attitude of Dr. Shrapnel, and crying, ’Beauchamp! Beauchamp!’ And then he walked firmly out of Romfrey oakwoods, and, at a mile’s distance from her, related to his countess Rosamund that the burial was over without much silly ceremony, and that she needed to know nothing of it whatever.

Rosamund’s face awoke him. It was the face of a chalk-quarry, featureless, hollowed, appalling.

The hour was no later than three in the morning. He quitted the detestable bed where a dream—one of some half-dozen in the course of his life-had befallen him. For the maxim of the healthy man is: up, and have it out in exercise when sleep is for foisting base coin of dreams upon you! And as the healthy only are fit to live, their maxims should be law. He dressed and directed his leisurely steps to the common, under a black sky, and stars of lively brilliancy. The lights of a carriage gleamed on Dr. Shrapnel’s door. A footman informed Lord Romfrey that Colonel Halkett was in the house, and soon afterward the colonel appeared.

‘Is it over? I don’t hear him,’ said Lord Romfrey.

Colonel Halkett grasped his hand. ‘Not yet,’ he said. ’Cissy can’t be got away. It’s killing her. No, he’s alive. You may hear him now.’

Lord Romfrey bent his ear.

Page 2601

‘It’s weaker,’ the colonel resumed. ’By the way, Romfrey, step out with me. My dear friend, the circumstances will excuse me: you know I’m not a man to take liberties. I’m bound to tell you what your wife writes to me. She says she has it on her conscience, and can’t rest for it. You know women. She wants you to speak to the man here—-Shrapnel. She wants Nevil to hear that you and he were friendly before he dies; thinks it would console the poor dear fellow. That’s only an idea; but it concerns her, you see. I’m shocked to have to talk to you about it.’

‘My dear colonel, I have no feeling against the man,’ Lord Romfrey replied. ’I spoke to him when I saw him yesterday. I bear no grudges. Where is he? You can send to her to say I have spoken to him twice.’

‘Yes, yes,’ the colonel assented.

He could not imagine that Lady Romfrey required more of her husband. ’Well, I must be off. I leave Blackburn Tuckham here, with a friend of his; a man who seems to be very sweet with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.’

‘Ha! Fetch him to me, colonel; I beg you to do that,’ said Lord Romfrey.

The colonel brought out Lydiard to the earl.

‘You have been at my nephew’s bedside, Mr. Lydiard?’

‘Within ten minutes, my lord.’

‘What is your opinion of the case?’

‘My opinion is, the chances are in his favour.’

’Lay me under obligation by communicating that to Romfrey Castle at the first opening of the telegraph office to-morrow morning.’

Lydiard promised.

‘The raving has ended?’

‘Hardly, sir, but the exhaustion is less than we feared it would be.’

‘Gannet is there?’

‘He is in an arm-chair in the room.’

‘And Dr. Shrapnel?’

‘He does not bear speaking to; he is quiet.’

‘He is attached to my nephew?’

‘As much as to life itself.’

Lord Romfrey thanked Lydiard courteously. ’Let us hope, sir, that some day I shall have the pleasure of entertaining you, as well as another friend of yours.’

‘You are very kind, my lord.’

The earl stood at the door to see Colonel Halkett drive off: he declined to accompany him to Mount Laurels.

In the place of the carriage stood a man, who growled ’Where’s your horsewhip, butcher?’

He dogged the earl some steps across the common. Everard returned to his hotel and slept soundly during the remainder of the dark hours.

CHAPTER LII

QUESTION OF A PILGRIMAGE AND AN ACT OF PENANCE

Page 2602

Then came a glorious morning for sportsmen. One sniffed the dews, and could fancy fresh smells of stubble earth and dank woodland grass in the very streets of dirty Bevisham. Sound sleep, like hearty dining, endows men with a sense of rectitude, and sunlight following the former, as a pleasant spell of conversational ease or sweet music the latter, smiles a celestial approval of the performance: Lord Romfrey dismissed his anxieties. His lady slightly ruffled him at breakfast in a letter saying that she wished to join him. He was annoyed at noon by a message, wherein the wish was put as a request. And later arrived another message, bearing the character of an urgent petition. True, it might be laid to the account of telegraphic brevity.

He saw Dr. Shrapnel, and spoke to him, as before, to thank him for the permission to visit his nephew. Nevil he contemplated for the space of five minutes. He cordially saluted Miss Denham. He kissed Cecilia's hand.

'All here is going on so well that I am with you for a day or two to-morrow,' he despatched the message to his wife.

Her case was now the gravest. He could not understand why she desired to be in Bevisham. She must have had execrable dreams!—rank poison to mothers.

However, her constitutional strength was great, and his pride in the restoration of his House by her agency flourished anew, what with fair weather and a favourable report from Dr. Gannet: The weather was most propitious to the hopes of any soul bent on dispersing the shadows of death, and to sportsmen. From the windows of his railway carriage he beheld the happy sportsmen stalking afield. The birds whirred and dropped just where he counted on their dropping. The smoke of the guns threaded to dazzling silver in the sunshine. Say what poor old Nevil will, or did say, previous to the sobering of his blood, where is there a land like England? Everard rejoiced in his country temperately. Having Nevil as well,—of which fact the report he was framing in his mind to deliver to his wife assured him—he was rich. And you that put yourselves forward for republicans and democrats, do you deny the aristocracy of an oaklike man who is young upon the verge of eighty?

These were poetic flights, but he knew them not by name, and had not to be ashamed of them.

Rosamund met him in the hall of the castle. 'You have not deceived me, my dear lord,' she said, embracing him. 'You have done what you could for me. The rest is for me to do.'

He reciprocated her embrace warmly, in commendation of her fresher good looks.

She asked him, 'You have spoken to Dr. Shrapnel?'

He answered her, ‘Twice.’

The word seemed quaint. She recollected that he was quaint.

He repeated, ‘I spoke to him the first day I saw him, and the second.’

‘We are so much indebted to him,’ said Rosamund. ’His love of Nevil surpasses ours. Poor man! poor man! At least we may now hope the blow will be spared him which would have carried off his life with Nevil’s. I have later news of Nevil than you.’

Page 2603

‘Good, of course?’

‘Ah me! the pleasure of the absence of pain. He is not gone.’

Lord Romfrey liked her calm resignation.

‘There’s a Mr. Lydiard,’ he said, ’a friend of Nevil’s, and a friend of Louise Devereux’s.’

‘Yes; we hear from him every four hours,’ Rosamund rejoined. ’Mention him to her before me.’

‘That’s exactly what I was going to tell you to do before me,’ said her husband, smiling.

’Because, Everard, is it not so?—widows . . . and she loves this gentleman!’

’Certainly, my dear; I think with you about widows. The world asks them to practise its own hypocrisy. Louise Devereux was married to a pipe; she’s the widow of tobacco ash. We’ll make daylight round her.’

’How good, how kind you are, my lord! I did not think so shrewd! But benevolence is almost all-seeing: You said you spoke to Dr. Shrapnel twice. Was he . . . polite?’

‘Thoroughly upset, you know.’

‘What did he say?’

’What was it? “Beauchamp! Beauchamp!” the first time; and the second time he said he thought it had left off raining.’

‘Ah!’ Rosamund drooped her head.

She looked up. ’Here is Louise. My lord has had a long conversation with Mr. Lydiard.’

‘I trust he will come here before you leave us,’ added the earl.

Rosamund took her hand. ’My lord has been more acute than I, or else your friend is less guarded than you.’

‘What have you seen?’ said the blushing lady.

’Stay. I have an idea you are one of the women I promised to Cecil Baskelett,’ said the earl. ‘Now may I tell him there’s no chance?’

‘Oh! do.’

They spent so very pleasant an evening that the earl settled down into a comfortable expectation of the renewal of his old habits in the September and October season. Nevil's frightful cry played on his ear-drum at whiles, but not too affectingly. He conducted Rosamund to her room, kissed her, hoped she would sleep well, and retired to his good hard bachelor's bed, where he confidently supposed he would sleep. The sleep of a dyspeptic, with a wilder than the monstrous Bevisham dream, befell him, causing him to rise at three in the morning and proceed to his lady's chamber, to assure himself that at least she slept well. She was awake.

'I thought you might come,' she said.

He reproached her gently for indulging foolish nervous fears.

She replied, 'No, I do not; I am easier about Nevil. I begin to think he will live. I have something at my heart that prevents me from sleeping. It concerns me. Whether he is to live or die, I should like him to know he has not striven in vain—not in everything: not where my conscience tells me he was right, and we, I, wrong—utterly wrong, wickedly wrong.'

'My dear girl, you are exciting yourself.'

'No; feel my pulse. The dead of night brings out Nevil to me like the Writing on the Wall. It shall not be said he failed in everything. Shame to us if it could be said! He tried to make me see what my duty was, and my honour.'

Page 2604

‘He was at every man Jack of us.’

’I speak of one thing. I thought I might not have to go. Now I feel I must. I remember him at Steynham, when Colonel Halkett and Cecilia were there. But for me, Cecilia would now be his wife. Of that there is no doubt; that is not the point; regrets are fruitless. I see how the struggle it cost him to break with his old love—that endearing Madame de Rouaillout, his Renee—broke his heart; and then his loss of Cecilia Halkett. But I do believe, true as that I am lying here, and you hold my hand, my dear husband, those losses were not so fatal to him as his sufferings he went through on account of his friend Dr. Shrapnel. I will not keep you here.

Go and have some rest. What I shall beg of you tomorrow will not injure my health in the slightest: the reverse: it will raise me from a bitter depression. It shall not be said that those who loved him were unmoved by him. Before he comes back to life, or is carried to his grave, he shall know that I was not false to my love of him.’

‘My dear, your pulse is at ninety,’ said the earl.

’Look lenient, be kind, be just, my husband. Oh! let us cleanse our hearts. This great wrong was my doing. I am not only quite strong enough to travel to Bevisham, I shall be happy in going: and when I have done it—said: “The wrong was all mine,” I shall rejoice like the pure in spirit. Forgiveness does not matter, though I now believe that poor loving old man who waits outside his door weeping, is wrong-headed only in his political views. We women can read men by their power to love. Where love exists there is goodness. But it is not for the sake of the poor old man himself that I would go: it is for Nevil’s; it is for ours, chiefly for me, for my child’s, if ever . . . !’ Rosamund turned her head on her pillow.

The earl patted her cheek. ’We ‘ll talk it over in the morning,’ he said. ‘Now go to sleep.’

He could not say more, for he did not dare to attempt cajolery with her. Shading his lamp he stepped softly away to wrestle with a worse nightmare than sleep’s. Her meaning was clear: and she was a woman to insist on doing it. She was nevertheless a woman not impervious to reason, if only he could shape her understanding to perceive that the state of her nerves, incident to her delicate situation and the shock of that fellow Nevil’s illness—poor lad!—was acting on her mind, rendering her a victim of exaggerated ideas of duty, and so forth.

Naturally, apart from allowing her to undertake the journey by rail, he could not sanction his lady’s humbling of herself so egregiously and unnecessarily. Shrapnel had behaved unbecomingly, and had been punished for it. He had spoken to Shrapnel, and the affair was virtually at an end. With his assistance she would see that, when less excited. Her eternal brooding over Nevil was the cause of these mental vagaries.

Lord Romfrey was for postponing the appointed discussion in the morning after breakfast. He pleaded business engagements.

Page 2605

‘None so urgent as this of mine,’ said Rosamund.

‘But we have excellent news of Nevil: you have Gannet’s word for it,’ he argued. ‘There’s really nothing to distress you.’

‘My heart: I must be worthy of good news, to know happiness,’ she answered. ’I will say, let me go to Bevisham two, three, four days hence, if you like, but there is peace for me, and nowhere else.’

’My precious Rosamund! have you set your two eyes on it? What you are asking, is for permission to make an apology to Shrapnel!’

‘That is the word.’

‘That’s Nevil’s word.’

‘It is a prescription to me.’

‘An apology?’

The earl’s gorge rose. Why, such an act was comparable to the circular mission of the dog!

‘If I do not make the apology, the mother of your child is a coward,’ said Rosamund.

‘She’s not.’

‘I trust not.’

’You are a reasonable woman, my dear. Now listen the man insulted you. It’s past: done with. He insulted you . . .’

‘He did not.’

‘What?’

’He was courteous to me, hospitable to me, kind to me. He did not insult me. I belied him.’

‘My dear saint, you’re dreaming. He spoke insultingly of you to Cecil.’

’Is my lord that man’s dupe? I would stand against him before the throne of God, with what little I know of his interview with Dr. Shrapnel, to confront him and expose his lie. Do not speak of him. He stirs my evil passions, and makes me feel myself the creature I was when I returned to Steynham from my first visit to Bevisham, enraged with jealousy of Dr. Shrapnel’s influence over Nevil, spiteful, malicious: Oh! such a nest of

vileness as I pray to heaven I am not now, if it is granted me to give life to another. Nevil's misfortunes date from that,' she continued, in reply to the earl's efforts to soothe her. 'Not the loss of the Election: that was no misfortune, but a lesson. He would not have shone in Parliament: he runs too much from first principles to extremes. You see I am perfectly reasonable, Everard: 'I can form an exact estimate of character and things.' She smiled in his face. 'And I know my husband too: what he will grant; what he would not, and justly would not. I know to a certainty that vexatious as I must be to you now, you are conscious of my having reason for being so.'

'You carry it so far—fifty miles beyond the mark,' said he. 'The man roughed you, and I taught him manners.'

'No!' she half screamed her interposition. 'I repeat, he was in no way discourteous or disobliging to me. He offered me a seat at his table, and, heaven forgive me! I believe a bed in his house, that I might wait and be sure of seeing Nevil, because I was very anxious to see him.'

'All the same, you can't go to the man.'

'I should have said so too, before my destiny touched me.'

'A certain dignity of position, my dear, demands a corresponding dignity of conduct: you can't go.'

Page 2606

’If I am walking in the very eye of heaven, and feeling it shining on me where I go, there is no question for me of human dignity.’

Such flighty talk offended Lord Romfrey.

‘It comes to this: you’re in want of a parson.’

Rosamund was too careful to hint that she would have expected succour and seconding from one or other of the better order of clergymen.

She shook her head. ’To this, my dear lord: I have a troubled mind; and it is not to listen nor to talk, that I am in need of, but to act.’

’Yes, my dear girl, but not to act insanely. I do love soundness of head. You have it, only just now you’re a little astray. We’ll leave this matter for another time.’

Rosamund held him by the arm. ‘Not too long!’

Both of them applied privately to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux for her opinion and counsel on the subject of the proposal to apologize to Dr. Shrapnel. She was against it with the earl, and became Rosamund’s echo when with her. When alone, she was divided into two almost equal halves: deeming that the countess should not insist, and the earl should not refuse: him she condemned for lack of sufficient spiritual insight to perceive the merits of his wife’s request: her she accused of some vestige of something underbred in her nature, for putting such fervid stress upon the supplication: *i.e*. making too much of it—a trick of the vulgar: and not known to the languid.

She wrote to Lydiard for advice.

He condensed a paragraph into a line:

‘It should be the earl. She is driving him to it, intentionally or not.’

Mrs. Devereux doubted that the countess could have so false an idea of her husband’s character as to think it possible he would ever be bent to humble himself to the man he had castigated. She was right. It was by honestly presenting to his mind something more loathsome still, the humbling of herself, that Rosamund succeeded in awakening some remote thoughts of a compromise, in case of necessity. Better I than she!

But the necessity was inconceivable.

He had really done everything required of him, if anything was really required, by speaking to Shrapnel civilly. He had spoken to Shrapnel twice.

Besides, the castle was being gladdened by happier tidings of Beauchamp. Gannet now pledged his word to the poor fellow's recovery, and the earl's particular friends arrived, and the countess entertained them. October passed smoothly.

She said once: 'Ancestresses of yours, my lord, have undertaken pilgrimages as acts of penance for sin, to obtain heaven's intercession in their extremity.'

'I dare say they did,' he replied. 'The monks got round them.'

'It is not to be laughed at, if it eased their hearts.'

Timidly she renewed her request for permission to perform the pilgrimage to Bevisham.

'Wait,' said he, 'till Nevil is on his legs.'

Page 2607

‘Have you considered where I may then be, Everard?’

‘My love, you sleep well, don’t you?’

‘You see me every night.’

‘I see you sound asleep.’

‘I see you watching me.’

‘Let’s reason,’ said the earl; and again they went through the argument upon the apology to Dr. Shrapnel.

He was willing to indulge her in any amount of it: and she perceived why. Fox! she thought. Grand fox, but fox downright. For her time was shortening to days that would leave her no free-will.

On the other hand, the exercise of her free-will in a fast resolve, was growing all the more a privilege that he was bound to respect. As she became sacreder and doubly precious to him, the less would he venture to thwart her, though he should think her mad. There would be an analogy between his manner of regarding her and the way that superstitious villagers look on their crazy innocents, she thought sadly. And she bled for him too: she grieved to hurt his pride. But she had come to imagine that there was no avoidance of this deed of personal humiliation.

Nevil had scrawled a note to her. She had it in her hand one forenoon in mid November, when she said to her husband: ’I have ordered the carriage for two o’clock to meet the quarter to three train to London, and I have sent Stanton on to get the house ready for us tonight.’

Lord Romfrey levelled a marksman’s eye at her.

‘Why London? You know my wish that it should be here at the castle.’

‘I have decided to go to Bevisham. I have little time left.’

‘None, to my thinking.’

’Oh I yes; my heart will be light. I shall gain. You come with me to London?’

‘You can’t go.’

‘Don’t attempt to reason with me, please, please!’

‘I command, madam.’

‘My lord, it is past the hour of commanding.’

He nodded his head, with the eyes up amid the puckered brows, and blowing one of his long nasal expirations, cried, ’Here we are, in for another bout of argument.’

’No; I can bear the journey, rejoice in confessing my fault, but more argument I cannot bear. I will reason with you when I can: submit to me in this.’

‘Feminine reasoning!’ he interjected.

’I have nothing better to offer. It will be prudent to attend to me. Take my conduct for the portion I bring you. Before I put myself in God’s care I must be clean. I am unclean. Language like that offends you. I have no better. My reasoning has not touched you; I am helpless, except in this determination that my contrition shall be expressed to Dr. Shrapnel. If I am to have life, to be worthy of living and being a mother, it must be done. Now, my dear lord, see that, and submit. You’re but one voice: I am two.’

He jumped off his chair, frowning up his forehead, and staring awfully at the insulting prospect. ‘An apology to the man? By you? Away with it.’

Page 2608

’Make allowances for me if you can, my dear lord that is what I am going to do.’

‘My wife going there?’ He strode along furiously. ‘No!’

‘You will not stop her.’

‘There’s a palsy in my arm if I don’t.’

She plucked at her watch.

‘Why, ma’am, I don’t know you,’ he said, coming close to her. ’Let ’s reason. Perhaps you overshot it; you were disgusted with Shrapnel. Perhaps I was hasty; I get fired by an insult to a woman. There was a rascal kissed a girl once against her will, and I heard her cry out; I laid him on his back for six months; just to tell you; I’d do the same to lord or beggar. Very well, my dear heart, we’ll own I might have looked into the case when that dog Cecil . . . what’s the matter?’

‘Speak on, my dear husband,’ said Rosamund, panting.

‘But your making the journey to Bevisham is a foolish notion.’

‘Yes? well?’

‘Well, we’ll wait.’

‘Oh! have we to travel over it all again?’ she exclaimed in despair at the dashing out of a light she had fancied. ’You see the wrong. You know the fever it is in my blood, and you bid me wait.’

‘Drop a line to Nevil.’

’To trick my conscience! I might have done that, and done well, once. Do you think I dislike the task I propose to myself? It is for your sake that I would shun it. As for me, the thought of going there is an ecstasy. I shall be with Nevil, and be able to look in his face. And how can I be actually abasing you when I am so certain that I am worthier of you in what I do?’

Her exaltation swept her on. ’Hurry there, my lord, if you will. If you think it prudent that you should go in my place, go: you deprive me of a great joy, but I will not put myself in your way, and I consent. The chief sin was mine; remember that. I rank it viler than Cecil Baskelett’s. And listen: when—can you reckon?—when will he confess his wickedness? We separate ourselves from a wretch like that.’

‘Pooh,’ quoth the earl.

‘But you will go?’ She fastened her arms round the arm nearest: ’You or I! Does it matter which? We are one. You speak for me; I should have been forced to speak for you. You spare me the journey. I do not in truth suppose it would have injured me; but I would not run one unnecessary risk.’

Lord Romfrey sighed profoundly. He could not shake her off. How could he refuse her?

How on earth had it come about that suddenly he was expected to be the person to go?

She would not let him elude her; and her stained cheeks and her trembling on his arm pleaded most pressingly and masteringly. It might be that she spoke with a knowledge of her case. Positive it undoubtedly was that she meant to go if he did not. Perhaps the hopes of his House hung on it. Having admitted that a wrong had been done, he was not the man to leave it unamended; only he would have chosen his time, and the manner. Since Nevil’s illness, too, he had once or twice been clouded with a little bit of regret at the recollection of poor innocent old Shrapnel posted like a figure of total inebriation beside the doorway of the dreadful sickroom.

Page 2609

There had been women of the earl's illustrious House who would have given their hands to the axe rather than conceal a stain and have to dread a scandal. His Rosamund, after all, was of their pattern; even though she blew that conscience she prattled of into trifles, and swelled them, as women of high birth in this country, out of the clutches of the priests, do not do.

She clung to him for his promise to go.

He said: 'Well, well.'

'That means, you will,' said she.

His not denying it passed for the affirmative.

Then indeed she bloomed with love of him.

'Yet do say yes,' she begged.

'I'll go, ma'am,' shouted the earl. 'I'll go, my love,' he said softly.

CHAPTER LIII

THE APOLOGY TO DR. SHRAPNEL

'You and Nevil are so alike,' Lady Romfrey said to her lord, at some secret resemblance she detected and dwelt on fondly, when the earl was on the point of starting a second time for Bevisham to perform what she had prompted him to conceive his honourable duty, without a single intimation that he loathed the task, neither shrug nor grimace.

'Two ends of a stick are pretty much alike: they're all that length apart,' said he, very little in the humour for compliments, however well braced for his work.

His wife's admiring love was pleasant enough. He preferred to have it unspoken. Few of us care to be eulogized in the act of taking a nauseous medical mixture.

For him the thing was as good as done, on his deciding to think it both adviseable and right: so he shouldered his load and marched off with it. He could have postponed the right proceeding, even after the partial recognition of his error:—one drops a word or two by hazard, one expresses an anxiety to afford reparation, one sends a message, and so forth, for the satisfaction of one's conventionally gentlemanly feeling: but the adviseable proceeding under stress of peculiar circumstances, his clearly-awakened recognition of that, impelled him unhesitatingly. His wife had said it was the portion she brought him. Tears would not have persuaded him so powerfully, that he might prove to her he was glad of her whatever the portion she brought. She was a good wife, a brave

woman, likely to be an incomparable mother. At present her very virtues excited her to fancifulness nevertheless she was in his charge, and he was bound to break the neck of his will, to give her perfect peace of wind. The child suffers from the mother's mental agitation. It might be a question of a nervous or an idiot future Earl of Romfrey. Better death to the House than such a mockery of his line! These reflections reminded him of the heartiness of his whipping of that poor old tumbled signpost Shrapnel, in the name of outraged womankind. If there was no outrage?

Assuredly if there was no outrage, consideration for the state of his wife would urge him to speak the apology in the most natural manner possible. She vowed there was none.

Page 2610

He never thought of blaming her for formerly deceiving him, nor of blaming her for now expediting him.

In the presence of Colonel Halkett, Mr. Tuckham, and Mr. Lydiard, on a fine November afternoon, standing bareheaded in the fir-bordered garden of the cottage on the common, Lord Romfrey delivered his apology to Dr. Shrapnel, and he said:

'I call you to witness, gentlemen, I offer Dr. Shrapnel the fullest reparation he may think fit to demand of me for an unprovoked assault on him, that I find was quite unjustified, and for which I am here to ask his forgiveness.'

Speech of man could not have been more nobly uttered.

Dr. Shrapnel replied:

'To the half of that, sir—'tis over! What remains is done with the hand.'

He stretched his hand out.

Lord Romfrey closed his own on it.

The antagonists, between whom was no pretence of their being other after the performance of a creditable ceremony, bowed and exchanged civil remarks: and then Lord Romfrey was invited to go into the house and see Beauchamp, who happened to be sitting with Cecilia Halkett and Jenny Denham. Beauchamp was thin, pale, and quiet; but the sight of him standing and conversing after that scene of the skinny creature struggling with bareribbed obstruction on the bed, was an example of constitutional vigour and a compliment to the family very gratifying to Lord Romfrey. Excepting by Cecilia, the earl was coldly received. He had to leave early by special express for London to catch the last train to Romfrey. Beauchamp declined to fix a day for his visit to the castle with Lydiard, but proposed that Lydiard should accompany the earl on his return. Lydiard was called in, and at once accepted the earl's invitation, and quitted the room to pack his portmanteau.

A faint sign of firm-shutting shadowed the corners of Jenny's lips.

'You have brought my nephew to life,' Lord Romfrey said to her.

'My share in it was very small, my lord.'

'Gannet says that your share in it was very great.'

'And I say so, with the authority of a witness,' added Cecilia.

'And I, from my experience,' came from Beauchamp.

His voice had a hollow sound, unlike his natural voice.

The earl looked at him remembering the bright laughing lad he had once been, and said: 'Why not try a month of Madeira? You have only to step on board the boat.'

'I don't want to lose a month of my friend,' said Beauchamp.

'Take your friend with you. After these fevers our Winters are bad.'

'I've been idle too long.'

'But, Captain Beauchamp,' said Jenny, 'you proposed to do nothing but read for a couple of years.'

'Ay, there's the voyage!' sighed he, with a sailor-invalid's vision of sunny seas dancing in the far sky.

Page 2611

’You must persuade Dr. Shrapnel to come; and he will not come unless you come too, and you won’t go anywhere but to the Alps!’ She bent her eyes on the floor. Beauchamp remembered what had brought her home from the Alps. He cast a cold look on his uncle talking with Cecilia: granite, as he thought. And the reflux of that slight feeling of despair seemed to tear down with it in wreckage every effort he had made in life, and cry failure on him. Yet he was hoping that he had not been created for failure.

He touched his uncle’s hand indifferently: ’My love to the countess: let me hear of her, sir, if you please.’

‘You shall,’ said the earl. ’But, off to Madeira, and up Teneriffe: sail the Azores. I’ll hire you a good-sized schooner.’

‘There is the Esperanza,’ said Cecilia. ’And the vessel is lying idle, Nevil! Can you allow it?’

He consented to laugh at himself, and fell to coughing.

Jenny Denham saw a real human expression of anxiety cross the features of the earl at the sound of the cough.

Lord Romfrey said ‘Adieu,’ to her.

He offered her his hand, which she contrived to avoid taking by dropping a formal half-reverence.

’Think of the Esperanza; she will be coasting her nominal native land! and adieu for to-day,’ Cecilia said to Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham and he stood at the window to watch the leave-taking in the garden, for a distraction. They interchanged no remark of surprise at seeing the earl and Dr. Shrapnel hand-locked: but Jenny’s heart reproached her uncle for being actually servile, and Beauchamp accused the earl of aristocratic impudence.

Both were overcome with remorse when Colonel Halkett, putting his head into the room to say good-bye to Beauchamp and place the Esperanza at his disposal for a Winter cruise, chanced to mention in two or three half words the purpose of the earl’s visit, and what had occurred. He took it for known already.

To Miss Denham he remarked: ’Lord Romfrey is very much concerned about your health; he fears you have overdone it in nursing Captain Beauchamp!

‘I must be off after him,’ said Beauchamp, and began trembling so that he could not stir.

The colonel knew the pain and shame of that condition of weakness to a man who has been strong and swift, and said: 'Seven-league boots are not to be caught. You'll see him soon. Why, I thought some letter of yours had fetched him here! I gave you all the credit of it.'

'No, he deserves it all himself—all,' said Beauchamp and with a dubious eye on Jenny Denham: 'You see, we were unfair.'

The 'we' meant 'you' to her sensitiveness; and probably he did mean it for 'you': for as he would have felt, so he supposed that his uncle must have felt, Jenny's coldness was much the crueller. Her features, which in animation were summer light playing upon smooth water, could be exceedingly cold in repose: the icier to those who knew her, because they never expressed disdain. No expression of the baser sort belonged to them. Beauchamp was intimate with these delicately-cut features; he would have shuddered had they chilled on him. He had fallen in love with his uncle; he fancied she ought to have done so too; and from his excess of sympathy he found her deficient in it.

Page 2612

He sat himself down to write a hearty letter to his 'dear old uncle Everard.'

Jenny left him, to go to her chamber and cry.

CHAPTER LIV

THE FRUITS OF THE APOLOGY

This clear heart had cause for tears. Her just indignation with Lord Romfrey had sustained her artificially hitherto now that it was erased, she sank down to weep. Her sentiments toward Lydiard had been very like Cecilia Halkett's in favour of Mr. Austin; with something more to warm them on the part of the gentleman. He first had led her mind in the direction of balanced thought, when, despite her affection for Dr. Shrapnel, her timorous maiden wits, unable to contend with the copious exclamatory old politician, opposed him silently. Lydiard had helped her tongue to speak, as well as her mind to rational views; and there had been a bond of union in common for them in his admiration of her father's writings. She had known that he was miserably yoked, and had respected him when he seemed inclined for compassion without wooing her for tenderness. He had not trifled with her, hardly flattered; he had done no more than kindle a young girl's imaginative liking. The pale flower of imagination, fed by dews, not by sunshine, was born drooping, and hung secret in her bosom, shy as a bell of the frail wood-sorrel. Yet there was pain for her in the perishing of a thing so poor and lowly. She had not observed the change in Lydiard after Beauchamp came on the scene: and that may tell us how passionlessly pure the little maidenly sentiment was. For do but look on the dewy wood-sorrel flower; it is not violet or rose inviting hands to pluck it: still it is there, happy in the woods. And Jenny's feeling was that a foot had crushed it.

She wept, thinking confusedly of Lord Romfrey; trying to think he had made his amends tardily, and that Beauchamp prized him too highly for the act. She had no longer anything to resent: she was obliged to weep. In truth, as the earl had noticed, she was physically depressed by the strain of her protracted watch over Beauchamp, as well as rather heartsick.

But she had been of aid and use in saving him! She was not quite a valueless person; sweet, too, was the thought that he consulted her, listened to her, weighed her ideas. He had evidently taken to study her, as if dispersing some wonderment that one of her sex should have ideas. He had repeated certain of her own which had been forgotten by her. His eyes were often on her with this that she thought humorous intentness. She smiled. She had assisted in raising him from his bed of sickness, whereof the memory affrighted her and melted her. The difficulty now was to keep him indoors, and why he would not go even temporarily to a large house like Mount Laurels, whither Colonel Halkett was daily requesting him to go, she was unable to comprehend. His love of Dr. Shrapnel might account for it.

Page 2613

‘Own, Jenny,’ said Beauchamp, springing up to meet her as she entered the room where he and Dr. Shrapnel sat discussing Lord Romfrey’s bearing at his visit, ’own that my uncle Everard is a true nobleman. He has to make the round to the right mark, but he comes to it. I could not move him—and I like him the better for that. He worked round to it himself. I ought to have been sure he would. You’re right: I break my head with impatience.’

‘No; you sowed seed,’ said Dr. Shrapnel. ’Heed not that girl, my Beauchamp. The old woman’s in the Tory, and the Tory leads the young maid. Here’s a fable I draw from a Naturalist’s book, and we’ll set it against the dicta of Jenny Do-nothing, Jenny Discretion, Jenny Wait-for-the-Gods: Once upon a time in a tropical island a man lay sick; so ill that he could not rise to trouble his neighbours for help; so weak that it was lifting a mountain to get up from his bed; so hopeless of succour that the last spark of distraught wisdom perching on his brains advised him to lie where he was and trouble not himself, since peace at least he could command, before he passed upon the black highroad men call our kingdom of peace: ay, he lay there. Now it chanced that this man had a mess to cook for his nourishment. And life said, Do it, and death said, To what end? He wrestled with the stark limbs of death, and cooked the mess; and that done he had no strength remaining to him to consume it, but crept to his bed like the toad into winter. Now, meanwhile a steam arose from the mess, and he lay stretched. So it befel that the birds of prey of the region scented the mess, and they descended and thronged at that man’s windows. And the man’s neighbours looked up at them, for it was the sign of one who is fit for the beaks of birds, lying unburied. Fail to spread the pall one hour where suns are decisive, and the pall comes down out of heaven! They said, The man is dead within. And they went to his room, and saw him and succoured him. They lifted him out of death by the last uncut thread.

’Now, my Jenny Weigh-words, Jenny Halt-there! was it they who saved the man, or he that saved himself? The man taxed his expiring breath to sow seed of life. Lydiard shall put it into verse for a fable in song for our people. I say it is a good fable, and sung spiritedly may serve for nourishment, and faith in work, to many of our poor fainting fellows! Now you?’

Jenny said: ’I think it is a good fable of self-help. Does it quite illustrate the case? I mean, the virtue of impatience. But I like the fable and the moral; and I think it would do good if it were made popular, though it would be hard to condense it to a song.’

’It would be hard! ay, then we do it forthwith. And you shall compose the music. As for the “case of impatience,” my dear, you tether the soaring universal to your pet-lamb’s post, the special. I spoke of seed sown. I spoke of the fruits of energy and resolution. Cared I for an apology? I took the blows as I take hail from the clouds—which apologize to you the moment you are in shelter, if you laugh at them. So, good night to that matter! Are we to have rain this evening? I must away into Bevisham to the Workmen’s Hall, and pay the men.’

Page 2614

’There will not be rain; there will be frost, and you must be well wrapped if you must go,’ said Jenny. ’And tell them not to think of deputations to Captain Beauchamp yet.’

’No, no deputations; let them send Killick, if they want to say anything,’ said Beauchamp.

‘Wrong!’ the doctor cried; ’wrong! wrong! Six men won’t hurt you more than one. And why check them when their feelings are up? They burn to be speaking some words to you. Trust me, Beauchamp, if we shun to encounter the good warm soul of numbers, our hearts are narrowed to them. The business of our modern world is to open heart and stretch out arms to numbers. In numbers we have our sinews; they are our iron and gold. Scatter them not; teach them the secret of cohesion. Practically, since they gave you not their entire confidence once, you should not rebuff them to suspicions of you as aristocrat, when they rise on the effort to believe a man of, as ’tis called, birth their undivided friend. Meet them!’

‘Send them,’ said Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham fastened a vast cloak and a comforter on the doctor’s heedless shoulders and throat, enjoining on him to return in good time for dinner.

He put his finger to her cheek in reproof of such supererogatory counsel to a man famous for his punctuality.

The day had darkened.

Beauchamp begged Jenny to play to him on the piano.

‘Do you indeed care to have music?’ said she. ’I did not wish you to meet a deputation, because your strength is not yet equal to it. Dr. Shrapnel dwells on principles, forgetful of minor considerations.’

‘I wish thousands did!’ cried Beauchamp. ’When you play I seem to hear ideas. Your music makes me think.’

Jenny lit a pair of candles and set them on the piano. ‘Waltzes?’ she asked.

‘Call in a puppet-show at once!’

She smiled, turned over some leaves, and struck the opening notes of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, and made her selections.

At the finish he said: ’Now read me your father’s poem, “The Hunt of the Fates."’

She read it to him.

‘Now read, “The Ascent from the Inferno."’

That she read: and also ‘Soul and Brute,’ another of his favourites.

He wanted more, and told her to read ‘First Love—Last Love.’

‘I fear I have not the tone of voice for love-poems,’ Jenny said, returning the book to him.

‘I’ll read it,’ said he.

He read with more impressiveness than effect. Lydiard’s reading thrilled her: Beauchamp’s insisted too much on particular lines. But it was worth while observing him. She saw him always as in a picture, remote from herself. His loftier social station and strange character precluded any of those keen suspicions by which women learn that a fire is beginning to glow near them.

‘How I should like to have known your father!’ he said. ’I don’t wonder at Dr. Shrapnel’s love of him. Yes, he was one of the great men of his day! and it’s a higher honour to be of his blood than any that rank can give. You were ten years old when you lost him. Describe him to me.’

Page 2615

‘He used to play with me like a boy,’ said Jenny. She described her father from a child’s recollection of him.

’Dr. Shrapnel declares he would have been one of the first surgeons in Europe: and he was one of the first of poets,’ Beauchamp pursued with enthusiasm. ’So he was doubly great. I hold a good surgeon to be in the front rank of public benefactors—where they put rich brewers, bankers, and speculative manufacturers now. Well! the world is young. We shall alter that in time. Whom did your father marry?’

Jenny answered, ’My mother was the daughter of a London lawyer. She married without her father’s approval of the match, and he left her nothing.’

Beauchamp interjected: ‘Lawyer’s money!’

’It would have been useful to my mother’s household when I was an infant,’ said Jenny.

‘Poor soul! I suppose so. Yes; well,’ Beauchamp sighed. ’Money! never mind how it comes. We’re in such a primitive condition that we catch at anything to keep us out of the cold; dogs with a bone!—instead of living, as Dr. Shrapnel prophecies, for and, with one another. It’s war now, and money’s the weapon of war. And we’re the worst nation in Europe for that. But if we fairly recognize it, we shall be the first to alter our ways. There’s the point. Well, Jenny, I can look you in the face to-night. Thanks to my uncle Everard at last!’

‘Captain Beauchamp, you have never been blamed.’

’I am Captain Beauchamp by courtesy, in public. My friends call me Nevil. I think I have heard the name on your lips?’

‘When you were very ill.’

He stood closer to her, very close.

’Which was the arm that bled for me? May I look at it? There was a bruise.’

’Have you not forgotten that trifle? There is the faintest possible mark of it left.’

‘I wish to see.’

She gently defended the arm, but he made it so much a matter of earnest to see the bruise of the old Election missile on her fair arm, that, with a pardonable soft blush, to avoid making much of it herself, she turned her sleeve a little above the wrist. He took her hand.

‘It was for me!’

‘It was quite an accident: no harm was intended.’

‘But it was in my cause—for me!’

‘Indeed, Captain Beauchamp . . .’

‘Nevil, we say indoors.’

‘Nevil—but is it not wiser to say what comes naturally to us?’

’Who told you to-day that you had brought me to life? I am here to prove it true. If I had paid attention to your advice, I should not have gone into the cottage of those poor creatures and taken away the fever. I did no good there. But the man’s wife said her husband had been ruined by voting for me: and it was a point of honour to go in and sit with him. You are not to have your hand back: it is mine. Don’t you remember, Jenny, how you gave me your arm on the road when I staggered; two days before the fever knocked

Page 2616

me over? Shall I tell you what I thought then? I thought that he who could have you for a mate would have the bravest and helpfullest wife in all England. And not a mere beauty, for you have good looks: but you have the qualities I have been in search of. Why do your eyes look so mournfully at me? I am full of hope. We'll sail the Esperanza for the Winter: you and I, and our best friend with us. And you shall have a voice in the council, be sure.'

'If you are two to one?' Jenny said quickly, to keep from faltering.

Beauchamp pressed his mouth to the mark of the bruise on her arm. He held her fast.

'I mean it, if you will join me, that you and I should rejoice the heart of the dear old man—will you? He has been brooding over your loneliness here if you are unmarried, ever since his recovery. I owe my life to you, and every debt of gratitude to him. Now, Jenny!'

'Oh! Captain Beauchamp—Nevil, if you will . . . if I may have my hand. You exaggerate common kindness. He loves you. We both esteem you.'

'But you don't love me?'

'Indeed I have no fear that I shall be unable to support myself, if I am left alone.'

'But I want your help. I wake from illness with my eyes open. I must have your arm to lean on now and then.'

Jenny dropped a shivering sigh.

'Uncle is long absent!' she said.

Her hand was released. Beauchamp inspected his watch.

'He may have fallen! He may be lying on the common!'

'Oh!' cried Jenny, 'why did I let him go out without me?'

'Let me have his lantern; I'll go and search over the common.'

'You must not go out,' said she.

'I must. The old man may be perishing.'

'It will be death to you . . . Nevil!'

'That 's foolish. I can stand the air for a few minutes.'

’I ‘ll go,’ said Jenny.

‘Unprotected? No.’

‘Cook shall come with me.’

‘Two women!’

‘Nevil, if you care a little for me, be good, be kind, submit.’

’He is half an hour behind dinner-time, and he’s never late. Something must have happened to him. Way for me, my dear girl.’

She stood firm between him and the door. It came to pass that she stretched her hands to arrest him, and he seized the hands.

‘Rather than you should go out in this cold weather, anything!’ she said, in the desperation of physical inability to hold him back.

‘Ah!’ Beauchamp crossed his arms round her. ‘I’ll wait for five minutes.’

One went by, with Jenny folded, broken and sobbing, senseless, against his breast.

They had not heard Dr. Shrapnel quietly opening the hall door and hanging up his hat. He looked in.

‘Beauchamp!’ he exclaimed.

‘Come, doctor,’ said Beauchamp, and loosened his clasp of Jenny considerately.

She disengaged herself.

Page 2617

‘Beauchamp! now I die a glad man.’

’Witness, doctor, she ‘s mine by her own confession.’

‘Uncle!’ Jenny gasped. ’Oh! Captain Beauchamp, what an error! what delusion! . . . Forget it. I will. Here are more misunderstandings! You shall be excused. But be . . .’

‘Be you the blessedest woman alive on this earth, my Jenny!’ shouted Dr. Shrapnel. ’You have the choice man on all the earth for husband, sweetheart! Ay, of all the earth! I go with a message for my old friend Harry Denham, to quicken him in the grave; for the husband of his girl is Nevil Beauchamp! The one thing I dared not dream of thousands is established. Sunlight, my Jenny!’

Beauchamp kissed her hand.

She slipped away to her chamber, grovelling to find her diminished self somewhere in the mid-thunder of her amazement, as though it were to discover a pin on the floor by the flash of lightning. Where was she!

This ensued from the apology of Lord Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel.

CHAPTER LV

WITHOUT LOVE

At the end of November, Jenny Denham wrote these lines to Mr. Lydiard, in reply to his request that she should furnish the latest particulars of Nevil Beauchamp, for the satisfaction of the Countess of Romfrey:

’There is everything to reassure Lady Romfrey in the state of Captain Beauchamp’s health, and I have never seen him so placidly happy as he has been since the arrival, yesterday morning, of a lady from France, Madame la Marquise de Rouaillout, with her brother, M. le Comte de Croisnel. Her husband, I hear from M. de Croisnel, dreads our climate and coffee too much to attempt the voyage. I understand that she writes to Lady Romfrey to-day. Lady Romfrey’s letter to her, informing her of Captain Beauchamp’s alarming illness, went the round from Normandy to Touraine and Dauphiny, otherwise she would have come over earlier.

’Her first inquiry of me was, “Il est mort?” You would have supposed her disappointed by my answer. A light went out in her eyes, like that of a veilleuse in the dawn. She looked at me without speaking, while her beautiful eyes regained their natural expression. She shut them and sighed. “Tell him that M. de Croisnel and his sister are here.”

’This morning her wish to see Miss Halkett was gratified. You know my taste was formed in France; I agree with Captain Beauchamp in his more than admiration of Frenchwomen; ours, though more accomplished, are colder and less plastic. But Miss Halkett is surpassingly beautiful, very amiable, very generous, a perfect friend. She is our country at its best. Probably she is shy of speaking French; she frequently puts the Italian accent. Madame de Rouaillout begged to speak with her alone: I do not know what passed. Miss Halkett did not return to us.

’Dr. Shrapnel and Captain Beauchamp have recently been speculating on our becoming a nation of artists, and authorities in science and philosophy, by the time our coalfields and material wealth are exhausted. That, and the cataclysm, are their themes.

Page 2618

’They say, will things end utterly?—all our gains be lost? The question seems to me to come of that love of earth which is recognition of God: for if they cannot reconcile themselves to believe in extinction, to what must they be looking? It is a confirmation of your saying, that love leads to God, through art or in acts.

’You will regret to hear that the project of Captain Beauchamp’s voyage is in danger of being abandoned. A committee of a vacant Radical borough has offered to nominate him. My influence is weak; madame would have him go back with her and her brother to Normandy. My influence is weak, I suppose, because he finds me constantly leaning to expediency—I am your pupil. It may be quite correct that powder is intended for explosion we do not therefore apply a spark to the barrel. I ventured on that. He pitied me in the snares of simile and metaphor. He is the same, you perceive. How often have we not discussed what would have become of him, with that “rocket brain” of his, in less quiet times! Yet, when he was addressing a deputation of workmen the other day, he recommended patience to them as one of the virtues that count under wisdom. He is curiously impatient for knowledge. One of his reasons for not accepting Colonel Halkett’s offer of his yacht is, that he will not be able to have books enough on board. Definite instead of vast and hazy duties are to be desired for him, I think. Most fervently I pray that he will obtain a ship and serve some years. At the risk of your accusing me of “sententious posing,” I would say, that men who do not live in the present chiefly, but hamper themselves with giant tasks in excess of alarm for the future, however devoted and noble they may be—and he is an example of one that is—reduce themselves to the dimensions of pigmies; they have the cry of infants. You reply, Foresight is an element of love of country and mankind. But how often is not the foresight guess-work? ’He has not spoken of the *dawn* project. To-day he is repeating one of uncle’s novelties—“Sultry Tories.” The sultry Tory sits in the sun and prophecies woefully of storm, it appears. Your accusation that I am one at heart amuses me; I am not quite able to deny it. “Sultriness” I am not conscious of. But it would appear to be an epithet for the Conservatives of wealth. So that England, being very wealthy, we are to call it a sultry country? You are much wanted, for where there is no “middleman Liberal” to hold the scales for them, these two have it all their own way, which is not good for them.

Captain Beauchamp quotes you too. It seems that you once talked to him of a machine for measuring the force of blows delivered with the fist, and compared his efforts to those of one perpetually practising at it: and this you are said to have called “The case of the Constitutional Realm and the extreme Radical.” Elsewhere the Radical smites at iron or rotten wood; in England it is a cushion on springs. Did you say it? He quotes it as yours, half acquiescingly, and ruefully.

Page 2619

’For visitors, we have had Captain Baskelett for two minutes, and Lord Palmet, who stayed longer, and seems to intend to come daily. He attempts French with Madame de R., and amuses her a little: a silver foot and a ball of worsted. Mr. and Mrs. Grancey Lespel have called, and Lord and Lady Croyston. Colonel Halkett, Miss Halkett, and Mr. Tuckham come frequently. Captain Beauchamp spoke to her yesterday of her marriage. ’Madame de R. leaves us to-morrow. Her brother is a delightful, gay-tempered, very handsome boyish Frenchman—not her equal, to my mind, for I do not think Frenchmen comparable to the women of France; but she is exceedingly grave, with hardly a smile, and his high spirits excite Nevil’s, so it is pleasant to see them together.’

The letter was handed to Lady Romfrey. She read through it thoughtfully till she came to the name of Nevil, when she frowned. On the morrow she pronounced it a disingenuous letter. Renee had sent her these lines:

’I should come to you if my time were not restricted; my brother’s leave of absence is short. I have done here what lay in my power, to show you I have learnt something in the school of self-immolation. I have seen *Mlle*. Halkett. She is a beautiful young woman, deficient only in words, doubtless. My labour, except that it may satisfy you, was the vainest of tasks. She marries a ruddy monsieur of a name that I forget, and of the bearing of a member of the gardes du corps, without the stature. Enfin, madame, I have done my duty, and do not regret it, since I may hope that it will win for me some approbation and a portion of the esteem of a lady to whom I am indebted for that which is now the best of life to me: and I do not undervalue it in saying I would gladly have it stamped on brass and deposited beside my father’s. I have my faith. I would it were Nevil’s too—and yours, should you be in need of it.

’He will marry *Mlle*. Denham. If I may foretell events, she will steady him. She is a young person who will not feel astray in society of his rank; she possesses the natural grace we do not expect to see out of our country—from sheer ignorance of what is beyond it. For the moment she affects to consider herself unworthy; and it is excuseable that she should be slightly alarmed at her prospect. But Nevil must have a wife. I presume to think that he could not have chosen better. Above all, make him leave England for the Winter. Adieu, dear countess. Nevil promises me a visit after his marriage. I shall not set foot on England again: but you, should you ever come to our land of France, will find my heart open to you at the gates of undying grateful recollection. I am not skilled in writing. You have looked into me once; look now; I am the same. Only I have succeeded in bringing myself to a greater likeness to the dead, as it becomes a creature to be who is coupled with one of their body. Meanwhile I shall have news of you. I trust that soon I may be warranted in forwarding congratulations to Lord Romfrey.’

Page 2620

Rosamund handed the letters to her husband. Not only did she think Miss Denham disingenuous, she saw that the girl was not in love with Beauchamp: and the idea of a loveless marriage for him threw the mournfullest of Hecate's beams along the course of a career that the passionate love of a bride, though she were not well-born and not wealthy, would have rosily coloured.

'Without love!' she exclaimed to herself. She asked the earl's opinion of the startling intelligence, and of the character of that Miss Denham, who could pen such a letter, after engaging to give her hand to Nevil.

Lord Romfrey laughed in his dumb way. 'If Nevil must have a wife—and the marquise tells you so, and she ought to know—he may as well marry a girl who won't go all the way down hill with him at his pace. He'll be cogged.'

'You do not object to such an alliance?'

'I 'm past objection. There's no law against a man's marrying his nurse.'

'But she is not even in love with him!'

'I dare say not. He wants a wife: she accepts a husband. The two women who were in love with him he wouldn't have.'

Lady Romfrey sighed deeply: 'He has lost Cecilia! She might still have been his: but he has taken to that girl. And Madame de Rouaillout praises the girl because—oh! I see it—she has less to be jealous of in Miss Denham: of whose birth and blood we know nothing. Let that pass! If only she loved him! I cannot endure the thought of his marrying a girl who is not in love with him.'

'Just as you like, my dear.'

'I used to suspect Mr. Lydiard.'

'Perhaps he's the man.'

'Oh, what an end of so brilliant a beginning!'

'It strikes me, my dear,' said the earl, 'it's the proper common sense beginning that may have a fairish end.'

'No, but what I feel is that he—our Nevil!—has accomplished hardly anything, if anything!'

'He hasn't marched on London with a couple of hundred thousand men: no, he hasn't done that,' the earl said, glancing back in his mind through Beauchamp's career. 'And

he escapes what Stukely calls his nation's scourge, in the shape of a statue turned out by an English chisel. No: we haven't had much public excitement out of him. But one thing he did do: he got me down on my knees!'

Lord Romfrey pronounced these words with a sober emphasis that struck the humour of it sharply into Rosamund's heart, through some contrast it presented between Nevil's aim at the world and hit of a man: the immense deal thought of it by the earl, and the very little that Nevil would think of it—the great domestic achievement to be boasted of by an enthusiastic devotee of politics!

She embraced her husband with peals of loving laughter: the last laughter heard in Romfrey Castle for many a day.

CHAPTER LVI

THE LAST OF NEVIL BEAUCHAMP

Page 2621

Not before Beauchamp was flying with the Winter gales to warmer climes could Rosamund reflect on his career unshadowed by her feminine mortification at the thought that he was unloved by the girl he had decided to marry. But when he was away and winds blew, the clouds which obscured an embracing imagination of him—-such as, to be true and full and sufficient, should stretch like the dome of heaven over the humblest of lives under contemplation—broke, and revealed him to her as one who had other than failed: rather as one in mid career, in mid forest, who, by force of character, advancing in self-conquest, strikes his impress right and left around him, because of his aim at stars. He had faults, and she gloried to think he had; for the woman's heart rejoiced in his portion of our common humanity while she named their prince to men: but where was he to be matched in devotedness and in gallantry? and what man of blood fiery as Nevil's ever fought so to subject it? Rosamund followed him like a migratory bird, hovered over his vessel, perched on deck beside the helm, where her sailor was sure to be stationed, entered his breast, communed with him, and wound him round and round with her love. He has mine! she cried. Her craving that he should be blest in the reward, or flower-crown, of his wife's love of him lessened in proportion as her brooding spirit vividly realized his deeds. In fact it had been but an example of our very general craving for a climax, palpable and scenic. She was completely satisfied by her conviction that his wife would respect and must be subordinate to him. So it had been with her. As for love, let him come to his Rosamund for love, and appreciation, adoration!

Rosamund drew nigh to her hour of peril with this torch of her love of Beauchamp to illuminate her.

There had been a difficulty in getting him to go. One day Cecilia walked down to Dr. Shrapnel's with Mr. Tuckham, to communicate that the Esperanza awaited Captain Beauchamp, manned and provisioned, off the pier. Now, he would not go without Dr. Shrapnel, nor the doctor without Jenny; and Jenny could not hold back, seeing that the wish of her heart was for Nevil to be at sea, untroubled by political questions and prowling Radical deputies. So her consent was the seal of the voyage. What she would not consent to, was the proposal to have her finger ringed previous to the voyage, altogether in the manner of a sailor's bride. She seemed to stipulate for a term of courtship. Nevil frankly told the doctor that he was not equal to it; anything that was kind he was quite ready to say; and anything that was pretty: but nothing particularly kind and pretty occurred to him: he was exactly like a juvenile correspondent facing a blank sheet of letter paper:—he really did not know what to say, further than the uncomplicated exposition of his case, that he wanted a wife and had found the very woman. How, then, fathom Jenny's mood for delaying?

Page 2622

Dr. Shrapnel's exhortations were so worded as to induce her to comport herself like a Scriptural woman, humbly wakeful to the surpassing splendour of the high fortune which had befallen her in being so selected, and obedient at a sign. But she was, it appeared that she was, a maid of scaly vision, not perceptive of the blessedness of her lot. She could have been very little perceptive, for she did not understand his casual allusion to Beauchamp's readiness to overcome 'a natural repugnance,' for the purpose of making her his wife.

Up to the last moment, before Cecilia Halkett left the deck of the Esperanza to step on the pier, Jenny remained in vague but excited expectation of something intervening to bring Cecilia and Beauchamp together. It was not a hope; it was with pure suspense that she awaited the issue. Cecilia was pale. Beauchamp shook Mr. Tuckham by the hand, and said: 'I shall not hear the bells, but send me word of it, will you?' and he wished them both all happiness.

The sails of the schooner filled. On a fair frosty day, with a light wind ruffling from the North-west, she swept away, out of sight of Bevisham, and the island, into the Channel, to within view of the coast of France. England once below the water-line, alone with Beauchamp and Dr. Shrapnel, Jenny Denham knew her fate.

As soon as that grew distinctly visible in shape and colour, she ceased to be reluctant. All about her, in air and sea and unknown coast, was fresh and prompting. And if she looked on Beauchamp, the thought—my husband! palpitated, and destroyed and re-made her. Rapidly she underwent her transformation from doubtfully-minded woman to woman awakening clear-eyed, and with new sweet shivers in her temperate blood, like the tremulous light seen running to the morn upon a quiet sea. She fell under the charm of Beauchamp at sea.

In view of the island of Madeira, Jenny noticed that some trouble had come upon Dr. Shrapnel and Beauchamp, both of whom had been hilarious during the gales; but sailing into Summer they began to wear that look which indicated one of their serious deliberations. She was not taken into their confidence, and after awhile they recovered partially.

The truth was, they had been forced back upon old English ground by a recognition of the absolute necessity, for her sake, of handing themselves over to a parson. In England, possibly, a civil marriage might have been proposed to the poor girl. In a foreign island, they would be driven not simply to accept the services of a parson, but to seek him and solicit him: otherwise the knot, faster than any sailor's in binding, could not be tied. Decidedly it could not; and how submit? Neither Dr. Shrapnel nor Beauchamp were of a temper to deceive the clerical gentleman; only they had to think of Jenny's feelings. Alas for us!—this our awful baggage in the rear of humanity, these women who have not moved on their own feet one step since the primal

Page 2623

mother taught them to suckle, are perpetually pulling us backward on the march. Slaves of custom, forms, shows and superstitions, they are slaves of the priests. 'They are so in gratitude perchance, as the matter works,' Dr. Shrapnel admitted. For at one period the priests did cherish and protect the weak from animal man. But we have entered a broader daylight now, when the sun of high heaven has crowned our structure with the flower of brain, like him to scatter mists, and penetrate darkness, and shoot from end to end of earth; and must we still be grinning subserviently to ancient usages and stale forms, because of a baggage that it is, woe to us! too true, we cannot cut ourselves loose from? Lydiard might say we are compelling the priests to fight, and that they are compact foemen, not always passive. Battle, then!—The cry was valiant. Nevertheless, Jenny would certainly insist upon the presence of a parson, in spite of her bridegroom's 'natural repugnance.' Dr. Shrapnel offered to argue it with her, being of opinion that a British consul could satisfactorily perform the ceremony. Beauchamp knew her too well. Moreover, though tongue-tied as to love-making, he was in a hurry to be married. Jenny's eyes were lovely, her smiles were soft; the fair promise of her was in bloom on her face and figure. He could not wait; he must off to the parson.

Then came the question as to whether honesty and honour did not impose it on them to deal openly with that gentle, and on such occasions unobtrusive official, by means of a candid statement to him overnight, to the effect that they were the avowed antagonists of his Church, which would put him on his defence, and lead to an argument that would accomplish his overthrow. You parsons, whose cause is good, marshal out the poor of the land, that we may see the sort of army your stewardship has gained for you. What! no army? only women and hoary men? And in the rear rank, to support you as an institution, none but fanatics, cowards, white-eyeballed dogmatists, timeservers, money-changers, mockers in their sleeves? What is this?

But the prospect of so completely confounding the unfortunate parson warned Beauchamp that he might have a shot in his locker: the parson heavily trodden on will turn. 'I suppose we must be hypocrites,' he said in dejection. Dr. Shrapnel was even more melancholy. He again offered to try his persuasiveness upon Jenny. Beauchamp declined to let her be disturbed.

She did not yield so very lightly to the invitation to go before a parson. She had to be wooed after all; a Harry Hotspur's wooing. Three clergymen of the Established Church were on the island: 'And where won't they be, where there's fine scenery and comforts abound?' Beauchamp said to the doctor ungratefully.

'Whether a celibate clergy ruins the Faith faster than a non-celibate, I won't dispute,' replied the doctor; 'but a non-celibate interwinds with us, and is likely to keep up a one-storied edifice longer.'

Page 2624

Jenny hesitated. She was a faltering unit against an ardent and imperative two in the council. And Beauchamp had shown her a letter of Lady Romfrey's very clearly signifying that she and her lord anticipated tidings of the union. Marrying Beauchamp was no simple adventure. She feared in her bosom, and resigned herself.

She had a taste of what it was to be, at the conclusion of the service. Beauchamp thanked the good-natured clergyman, and spoke approvingly of him to his bride, as an agreeable well-bred gentlemanly person. Then, fronting her and taking both her hands: 'Now, my darling,' he said: 'you must pledge me your word to this: I have stooped my head to the parson, and I am content to have done that to win you, though I don't think much of myself for doing it. I can't look so happy as I am. And this idle ceremony—-however, I thank God I have you, and I thank you for taking me. But you won't expect me to give in to the parson again.'

'But, Nevil,' she said, fearing what was to come: 'they are gentlemen, good men.'

'Yes, yes.'

'They are educated men, Nevil.'

'Jenny! Jenny Beauchamp, they're not men, they're Churchmen. My experience of the priest in our country is, that he has abandoned—he 's dead against the only cause that can justify and keep up a Church: the cause of the poor—the people. He is a creature of the moneyed class. I look on him as a pretender. I go through his forms, to save my wife from annoyance, but there 's the end of it: and if ever I'm helpless, unable to resist him, I rely on your word not to let him intrude; he's to have nothing to do with the burial of me. He's against the cause of the people. Very well: I make my protest to the death against him. When he's a Christian instead of a Churchman, then may my example not be followed. It 's little use looking for that.'

Jenny dropped some tears on her bridal day. She sighed her submission. 'So long as you do not change,' said she.

'Change!' cried Nevil. 'That's for the parson. Now it's over: we start fair. My darling! I have you. I don't mean to bother you. I'm sure you'll see that the enemies of Reason are the enemies of the human race; you will see that. I can wait.'

'If we can be sure that we ourselves are using reason rightly, Nevil!—not prejudice.'

'Of course. But don't you see, my Jenny, we have no interest in opposing reason?'

'But have we not all grown up together? And is it just or wise to direct our efforts to overthrow a solid structure that is a part . . . ?'

He put his legal right in force to shut her mouth, telling her presently she might Lydiardize as much as she liked. While practising this mastery, he assured her he would always listen to her: yes, whether she Lydiardized, or what Dr. Shrapnel called Jenny-prated.

'That is to say, dear Nevil, that you have quite made up your mind to a toddling chattering little nursery wife?'

Page 2625

Very much the contrary to anything of the sort, he declared; and he proved his honesty by announcing an immediate reflection that had come to him: 'How oddly things are settled! Cecilia Halkett and Tuckham; you and I! Now, I know for certain that I have brought Cecilia Halkett out of her woman's Toryism, and given her at least liberal views, and she goes and marries an arrant Tory; while you, a bit of a Tory at heart, more than anything else, have married an ultra.'

'Perhaps we may hope that the conflict will be seasonable on both sides?—if you give me fair play, Nevil!'

As fair play as a woman's lord could give her, she was to have; with which, adieu to argumentation and controversy, and all the thanks in life to the parson! On a lovely island, free from the seductions of care, possessing a wife who, instead of starting out of romance and poetry with him to the supreme honeymoon, led him back to those forsaken valleys of his youth, and taught him the joys of colour and sweet companionship, simple delights, a sister mind, with a loveliness of person and nature unimagined by him, Beauchamp drank of a happiness that neither Renee nor Cecilia had promised. His wooing of Jenny Beauchamp was a flattery richer than any the maiden Jenny Denham could have deemed her due; and if his wonder in experiencing such strange gladness was quaintly ingenuous, it was delicious to her to see and know full surely that he who was at little pains to court, or please, independently of the agency of the truth in him, had come to be her lover through being her husband.

Here I would stop. It is Beauchamp's career that carries me on to its close, where the lanterns throw their beams off the mudbanks by the black riverside; when some few English men and women differed from the world in thinking that it had suffered a loss.

They sorrowed for the earl when tidings came to them of the loss of his child, alive one hour in his arms. Rosamund caused them to be deceived as to her condition. She survived; she wrote to Jenny, bidding her keep her husband cruising. Lord Romfrey added a brief word: he told Nevil that he would see no one for the present; hoped he would be absent a year, not a day less. To render it the more easily practicable, in the next packet of letters Colonel Halkett and Cecilia begged them not to bring the Esperanza home for the yachting season: the colonel said his daughter was to be married in April, and that bridegroom and bride had consented to take an old man off with them to Italy; perhaps in the autumn all might meet in Venice.

'And you've never seen Venice,' Beauchamp said to Jenny.

'Everything is new to me,' said she, penetrating and gladly joining the conspiracy to have him out of England.

Dr. Shrapnel was not so compliant as the young husband. Where he could land and botanize, as at Madeira, he let time fly and drum his wings on air, but the cities of priests

along the coast of Portugal and Spain roused him to a burning sense of that flight of time and the vacuity it told of in his labours. Greatly to his astonishment, he found that it was no longer he and Beauchamp against Jenny, but Jenny and Beauchamp against him.

Page 2626

‘What!’ he cried, ’to draw breath day by day, and not to pay for it by striking daily at the rock Iniquity? Are you for that, Beauchamp? And in a land where these priests walk with hats curled like the water-lily’s leaf without the flower? How far will you push indolent unreason to gain the delusion of happiness? There is no such thing: but there’s trance. That talk of happiness is a carrion clamour of the creatures of prey. Take it—and you’re helping tear some poor wretch to pieces, whom you might be constructing, saving perchance: some one? some thousands! You, Beauchamp, when I met you first, you were for England, England! for a breadth of the palm of my hand comparatively—the round of a copper penny, no wider! And from that you jumped at a bound to the round of this earth: you were for humanity. Ay, we sailed our planet among the icy spheres, and were at blood-heat for its destiny, you and I! And now you hover for a wind to catch you. So it is for a soul rejecting prayer. This wind and that has it: the well-springs within are shut down fast! I pardon my Jenny, my Harry Denham’s girl. She is a woman, and has a brain like a bell that rings all round to the tongue. It is her kingdom, of the interdicted untraversed frontiers. But what cares she, or any woman, that this Age of ours should lie like a carcase against the Sun? What cares any woman to help to hold up Life to him? He breeds divinely upon life, filthy upon stagnation. Sail you away, if you will, in your trance. I go. I go home by land alone, and I await you. Here in this land of moles upright, I do naught but execrate; I am a pulpit of curses. Counter-anathema, you might call me.’

‘Oh! I feel the comparison so, for England shining spiritually bright,’ said Jenny, and cut her husband adrift with the exclamation, and saw him float away to Dr. Shrapnel.

‘Spiritually bright!’

‘By comparison, Nevil.’

’There’s neither spiritual nor political brightness in England, but a common resolution to eat of good things and stick to them,’ said the doctor: ’and we two out of England, there’s barely a voice to cry scare to the feeders. I’m back! I’m home!’

They lost him once in Cadiz, and discovered him on the quay, looking about for a vessel. In getting him to return to the Esperanza, they nearly all three fell into the hands of the police. Beauchamp gave him a great deal of his time, reading and discussing with him on deck and in the cabin, and projecting future enterprises, to pacify his restlessness. A translation of Plato had become Beauchamp’s intellectual world. This philosopher singularly anticipated his ideas. Concerning himself he was beginning to think that he had many years ahead of him for work. He was with Dr. Shrapnel, as to the battle, and with Jenny as to the delay in recommencing it. Both the men laughed at the constant employment she gave them among the Greek islands in furnishing her severely accurate accounts of sea-fights and land-fights: and the scenes being before them they could neither of them protest that their task-work was an idle labour. Dr.

Shrapnel assisted in fighting Marathon and Salamis over again cordially—to shield Great Britain from the rule of a satrapy.

Page 2627

Beauchamp often tried to conjure words to paint his wife. On grave subjects she had the manner of speaking of a shy scholar, and between grave and playful, between smiling and serious, her clear head, her nobly poised character, seemed to him to have never had a prototype and to elude the art of picturing it in expression, until he heard Lydiard call her whimsically, ‘Portia disrobing’

Portia half in her doctor’s gown, half out of it. They met Lydiard and his wife Louise, and Mr. and Mrs. Tuckham, in Venice, where, upon the first day of October, Jenny Beauchamp gave birth to a son. The thrilling mother did not perceive on this occasion the gloom she cast over the father of the child and Dr. Shrapnel. The youngster would insist on his right to be sprinkled by the parson, to get a legal name and please his mother. At all turns in the history of our healthy relations with women we are confronted by the parson! ‘And, upon my word, I believe,’ Beauchamp said to Lydiard, ’those parsons—not bad creatures in private life: there was one in Madeira I took a personal liking to—but they’re utterly ignorant of what men feel to them—more ignorant than women!’ Mr. Tuckham and Mrs. Lydiard would not listen to his foolish objections; nor were they ever mentioned to Jenny. Apparently the commission of the act of marriage was to force Beauchamp from all his positions one by one.

‘The education of that child?’ Mrs. Lydiard said to her husband.

He considered that the mother would prevail.

Cecilia feared she would not.

‘Depend upon it, he’ll make himself miserable if he can,’ said Tuckham.

That gentleman, however, was perpetually coming fuming from arguments with Beauchamp, and his opinion was a controversialist’s. His common sense was much afflicted. ’I thought marriage would have stopped all those absurdities,’ he said, glaring angrily, laughing, and then frowning. ’I ’ve warned him I’ll go out of my way to come across him if he carries on his headlong folly. A man should accept his country for what it is when he’s born into it. Don’t tell me he’s a good fellow. I know he is, but there ’s an ass mounted on the good fellow. Talks of the parsons! Why, they’re men of education.’

‘They couldn’t steer a ship in a gale, though.’

‘Oh! he’s a good sailor. And let him go to sea,’ said Tuckham. ’His wife’s a prize. He’s hardly worthy of her. If she manages him she’ll deserve a monument for doing a public service.’

How fortunate it is for us that here and there we do not succeed in wresting our temporary treasure from the grasp of the Fates!

Page 2628

This good old commonplace reflection came to Beauchamp while clasping his wife's hand on the deck of the Esperanza, and looking up at the mountains over the Gulf of Venice. The impression of that marvellous dawn when he and Renee looked up hand-in-hand was ineffaceable, and pity for the tender hand lost to him wrought in his blood, but Jenny was a peerless wife; and though not in the music of her tongue, or in subtlety of delicate meaning did she excel Renee, as a sober adviser she did, and as a firm speaker; and she had homelier deep eyes, thoughtfuller brows. The father could speculate with good hope of Jenny's child. Cecilia's wealth, too, had gone over to the Tory party, with her incomprehensible espousal of Tuckham. Let it go; let all go for dowerless Jenny!

It was (she dared to recollect it in her anguish) Jenny's choice to go home in the yacht that decided her husband not to make the journey by land in company with the Lydiards.

The voyage was favourable. Beauchamp had a passing wish to land on the Norman coast, and take Jenny for a day to Tourdestelle. He deferred to her desire to land baby speedily, now they were so near home. They ran past Otley river, having sight of Mount Laurels, and on to Bevisham, with swelling sails. There they parted. Beauchamp made it one of his 'points of honour' to deliver the vessel where he had taken her, at her moorings in the Otley. One of the piermen stood before Beauchamp, and saluting him, said he had been directed to inform him that the Earl of Romfrey was with Colonel Halkett, expecting him at Mount Laurels. Beauchamp wanted his wife to return in the yacht. She turned her eyes to Dr. Shrapnel. It was out of the question that the doctor should think of going. Husband and wife parted. She saw him no more.

This is no time to tell of weeping. The dry chronicle is fittest. Hard on nine o'clock in the December darkness, the night being still and clear, Jenny's babe was at her breast, and her ears were awake for the return of her husband. A man rang at the door of the house, and asked to see Dr. Shrapnel. This man was Killick, the Radical Sam of politics. He said to the doctor: 'I 'm going to hit you sharp, sir; I've had it myself: please put on your hat and come out with me; and close the door. They mustn't hear inside. And here's a fly. I knew you'd be off for the finding of the body. Commander Beauchamp's drowned.'

Dr. Shrapnel drove round by the shore of the broad water past a great hospital and ruined abbey to Otley village. Killick had lifted him into the conveyance, and he lifted him out. Dr. Shrapnel had not spoken a word. Lights were flaring on the river, illuminating the small craft sombrely. Men, women, and children crowded the hard and landing-places, the marshy banks and the decks of colliers and trawlers. Neither Killick nor Dr. Shrapnel questioned them. The lights were torches and lanterns; the occupation of the boats moving in couples was the dragging for the dead.

Page 2629

‘O God, let’s find his body,’ a woman called out.

‘Just a word; is it Commander Beauchamp?’ Killick said to her.

She was scarcely aware of a question. ‘Here, this one,’ she said, and plucked a little boy of eight by the hand close against her side, and shook him roughly and kissed him.

An old man volunteered information. ’That’s the boy. That boy was in his father’s boat out there, with two of his brothers, larking; and he and another older than him fell overboard; and just then Commander Beauchamp was rowing by, and I saw him from off here, where I stood, jump up and dive, and he swam to his boat with one of them, and got him in safe: that boy: and he dived again after the other, and was down a long time. Either he burst a vessel or he got cramp, for he’d been rowing himself from the schooner grounded down at the river-mouth, and must have been hot when he jumped in: either way, he fetched the second up, and sank with him. Down he went.’

A fisherman said to Killick: ’Do you hear that voice thundering? That’s the great Lord Romfrey. He’s been directing the dragging since five o’ the evening, and will till he drops or drowns, or up comes the body.’

‘O God, let’s find the body!’ the woman with the little boy called out.

A torch lit up Lord Romfrey’s face as he stepped ashore. ’The flood has played us a trick,’ he said. ’We want more drags, or with the next ebb the body may be lost for days in this infernal water.’

The mother of the rescued boy sobbed, ‘Oh, my lord, my lord!’

The earl caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel, and went to him.

‘My wife has gone down to Mrs. Beauchamp,’ he said. ’She will bring her and the baby to Mount Laurels. The child will have to be hand-fed. I take you with me. You must not be alone.’

He put his arm within the arm of the heavily-breathing man whom he had once flung to the ground, to support him.

‘My lord! my lord!’ sobbed the woman, and dropped on her knees.

’What ‘s this?’ the earl said, drawing his hand away from the woman’s clutch at it.

‘She’s the mother, my lord,’ several explained to him.

‘Mother of what?’

‘My boy,’ the woman cried, and dragged the urchin to Lord Romfrey’s feet, cleaning her boy’s face with her apron.

‘It’s the boy Commander Beauchamp drowned to save,’ said a man.

All the lights of the ring were turned on the head of the boy. Dr. Shrapnel’s eyes and Lord Romfrey’s fell on the abashed little creature. The boy struck out both arms to get his fists against his eyelids.

This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp!

It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him.

Etext editor’s bookmark

Page 2630

A cloud of millinery shoots me off a mile from a woman
A kind of anchorage in case of indiscretion
A night that had shivered repose
A tear would have overcome him—She had not wept
A wound of the same kind that we are inflicting
A string of pearls: a woman who goes beyond that's in danger
A dash of conventionalism makes the whole civilized world kin
A bone in a boy's mind for him to gnaw and worry
Admires a girl when there's no married woman or widow in sight
Affectedly gentle and unusually roundabout opening
After forty, men have married their habits
Aimlessness of a woman's curiosity
Alike believe that Providence is for them
All concessions to the people have been won from fear
Am I thy master, or thou mine?
An instinct labouring to supply the deficiencies of stupidity
An old spoiler of women is worse than one spoiled by them!
And life said, Do it, and death said, To what end?
And never did a stroke of work in my life
And now came war, the purifier and the pestilence
And one gets the worst of it (in any bargain)
Anticipate opposition by initiating measures
Appealed to reason in them; he would not hear of convictions
Appetite to flourish at the cost of the weaker
Are we practical?' penetrates the bosom of an English audience
Art of speaking on politics tersely
As fair play as a woman's lord could give her
As to wit, the sneer is the cloak of clumsiness
As for titles, the way to defend them is to be worthy of them
Automatic creature is subject to the laws of its construction
Beauchamp's career
Beautiful servicelessness
Better for men of extremely opposite opinions not to meet
Boys are unjust
Braggadocioing in deeds is only next bad to mouthing it
Calm fanaticism of the passion of love
Canvassing means intimidation or corruption
Carry a scene through in virtue's name and vice's mask
Comfortable have to pay in occasional panics for the serenity
Compassionate sentiments veered round to irate amazement
Consult the family means—waste your time
Contemptuous exclusiveness could not go farther
Convict it by instinct without the ceremony of a jury

Convictions are generally first impressions
Cordiality of an extreme relief in leaving
Country can go on very well without so much speech-making
Cowardice is even worse for nations than for individual men
Crazy zigzag of policy in almost every stroke (of history)
Dark-eyed Renee was not beauty but attraction
Death within which welcomed a death without
Decline to practise hypocrisy
Despises the pomades and curling-irons of modern romance
Dialectical stiffness

Page 2631

Dignity of sulking so seductive to the wounded spirit of man
Discover the writers in a day when all are writing!
Disqualification of constantly offending prejudices
Dogs die more decently than we men
Dreads our climate and coffee too much to attempt the voyage
Effort to be reticent concerning Nevil, and communicative
Efforts to weary him out of his project were unsuccessful
Empty magnanimity which his uncle presented to him
Energy to something, that was not to be had in a market
Feigned utter condemnation to make partial comfort acceptable
Feminine pity, which is nearer to contempt than to tenderness
Fine eye for celestially directed consequences is ever haunted
Fit of Republicanism in the nursery
Forewarn readers of this history that there is no plot in it
Fretted by his relatives he cannot be much of a giant
Frozen vanity called pride, which does not seek to be revenged
Give our courage as hostage for the fulfilment of what we hope
Give our consciences to the keeping of the parsons
Given up his brains for a lodging to a single idea
Good maxim for the wrathful—speak not at all
Grief of an ill-fortuned passion of his youth
Had come to be her lover through being her husband
Half-truth that we may put on the mask of the whole
Hates a compromise
Haunted many pillows
He was too much on fire to know the taste of absurdity
He condensed a paragraph into a line
He runs too much from first principles to extremes
He bowed to facts
He lost the art of observing himself
He had expected romance, and had met merchandize
He smoked, Lord Avonley said of the second departure
He never calculated on the happening of mortal accidents
Heights of humour beyond laughter
Holding to his work after the strain’s over—That tells the man
Hopes of a coming disillusion that would restore him
How angry I should be with you if you were not so beautiful!
Humour preserved her from excesses of sentiment
I can confess my sight to be imperfect: but will you ever do so?
I do not think Frenchmen comparable to the women of France
I cannot say less, and will say no more

If there’s no doubt about it, how is it I have a doubt about it?
Immense wealth and native obtuseness combine to disfigure us
Impossible for him to think that women thought
Impudent boy’s fling at superiority over the superior
In India they sacrifice the widows, in France the virgins
Incessantly speaking of the necessity we granted it unknowingly
Infallibility of our august mother
Inflicted no foretaste of her coming subjection to him
Irony provoked his laughter more than fun

Page 2632

Irritability at the intrusion of past disputes
It would be hard! ay, then we do it forthwith
It is not high flying, which usually ends in heavy falling
Leader accustomed to count ahead upon vapourish abstractions
Led him to impress his unchangeableness upon her
Let none of us be so exalted above the wit of daily life
Levelling a finger at the taxpayer
Love, that has risen above emotion, quite independent of craving
Love's a selfish business one has work in hand
Made of his creed a strait-jacket for humanity
Making too much of it—a trick of the vulgar
Man owes a duty to his class
Mankind is offended by heterodoxy in mean attire
Mark of a fool to take everybody for a bigger fool than himself
Martyrs of love or religion are madmen
May not one love, not craving to be beloved?
Men had not pleased him of late
Mental and moral neuters
Money's a chain-cable for holding men to their senses
More argument I cannot bear
Never was a word fitter for a quack's mouth than "humanity"
Never pretend to know a girl by her face
No heart to dare is no heart to love!
No case is hopeless till a man consents to think it is
No stopping the Press while the people have an appetite for it
No man has a firm foothold who pretends to it
None but fanatics, cowards, white-eyeballed dogmatists
Oggler's genial piety made him shrink with nausea
On which does the eye linger longest—which draws the heart?
Once called her beautiful; his praise had given her beauty
Oratory will not work against the stream, or on languid tides
Parliament, is the best of occupations for idle men
Passion is not invariably love
Past fairness, vaguely like a snow landscape in the thaw
Peace-party which opposed was the actual cause of the war
Peculiar subdued form of laughter through the nose
People with whom a mute conformity is as good as worship
People is one of your Radical big words that burst at a query
Planting the past in the present like a perceptible ghost
Play the great game of blunders
Please to be pathetic on that subject after I am wrinkled

Pleasure-giving laws that make the curves we recognize as beauty
Politics as well as the other diseases
Practical or not, the good people affectingly wish to be
Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol
Press, which had kindled, proceeded to extinguished
Presumptuous belief
Protestant clergy the social police of the English middle-class
Push indolent unreason to gain the delusion of happiness
Ready is the ardent mind to take footing on the last thing done
Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity run counter

Page 2633

Reproof of such supererogatory counsel
Scotchman’s metaphysics; you know nothing clear
She was not, happily, one of the women who betray strong feeling
She had no longer anything to resent: she was obliged to weep
Shun comparisons
Shuns the statuesque pathetic, or any kind of posturing
Silence and such signs are like revelations in black night
Slaves of the priests
Small things producing great consequences
So the frog telleth tadpoles
Socially and politically mean one thing in the end
Story that she believed indeed, but had not quite sensibly felt
Straining for common talk, and showing the strain
Style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation
That a mask is a concealment
The girl could not know her own mind, for she suited him exactly
The critic that sneers
The religion of this vast English middle-class—Comfort
The slavery of the love of a woman chained
The turn will come to us as to others—and go
The language of party is eloquent
The defensive is perilous policy in war
The healthy only are fit to live
The system is cursed by nature, and that means by heaven
The world without him would be heavy matter
The weighty and the trivial contended
The rider’s too heavy for the horse in England
The greater wounds do not immediately convince us of our fate
The people always wait for the winner
The defensive is perilous policy in war
The family view is everlastingly the shopkeeper’s
The infant candidate delights in his honesty
The tragedy of the mirror is one for a woman to write
Their hearts are eaten up by property
Their not caring to think at all
There is no step backward in life
There may be women who think as well as feel; I don’t know them
There is no first claim
There’s nothing like a metaphor for an evasion
They may know how to make themselves happy in their climate
They have their thinking done for them

They’re always having to retire and always hissing
Thirst for the haranguing of crowds
This girl was pliable only to service, not to grief
Those whose humour consists of a readiness to laugh
Those happy men who enjoy perceptions without opinions
Threatened powerful drugs for weak stomachs
Times when an example is needed by brave men
To beg the vote and wink the bribe
Tongue flew, thought followed
Too many time-servers rot the State
Trust no man Still, this man may be better than that man
Unanimous verdicts from a jury of temporary impressions
Use your religion like a drug
Virtue of impatience
We do not see clearly when we are trying to deceive

Page 2634

We women can read men by their power to love
We could row and ride and fish and shoot, and breed largely
We dare not be weak if we would
We were unarmed, and the spectacle was distressing
We can’t hope to have what should be
We have a system, not planned but grown
We are chiefly led by hope
We’re treated like old-fashioned ornaments!
Welcomed and lured on an adversary to wild outhitting
Well, sir, we must sell our opium
What ninnies call Nature in books
When he’s a Christian instead of a Churchman
Where love exists there is goodness
Who cannot talk!—but who can?
Without a single intimation that he loathed the task
Wives are only an item in the list, and not the most important
Women don’t care uncommonly for the men who love them
Women must not be judging things out of their sphere
Won’t do to be taking in reefs on a lee-shore
Wonderment that one of her sex should have ideas
Wooing a good man for his friendship
World cannot pardon a breach of continuity
You are not married, you are simply chained
You’re talking to me, not to a gallery

THE EGOIST

A Comedy in Narrative

by *George Meredith*

This etext was prepared by Jim Tinsley jtinsley@pobox.com

PRELUDE

A CHAPTER OF WHICH THE LAST PAGE ONLY IS OF ANY IMPORTANCE

Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the

representation convincing. Credulity is not wooed through the impressionable senses; nor have we recourse to the small circular glow of the watchmaker's eye to raise in bright relief minutest grains of evidence for the routing of incredulity. The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech. For being a spirit, he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardour constitute his merit; he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in him. Follow and you will see. But there is a question of the value of a run at his heels.

Now the world is possessed of a certain big book, the biggest book on earth; that might indeed be called the Book of Earth; whose title is the Book of Egoism, and it is a book full of the world's wisdom. So full of it, and of such dimensions is this book, in which the generations have written ever since they took to writing, that to be profitable to us the Book needs a powerful compression.

Page 2635

Who, says the notable humourist, in allusion to this Book, who can studiously travel through sheets of leaves now capable of a stretch from the Lizard to the last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues dancing on their toes for cold, explorers tell us, and catching breath by good luck, like dogs at bones about a table, on the edge of the Pole? Inordinate unvaried length, sheer longinquity, staggers the heart, ages the very heart of us at a view. And how if we manage finally to print one of our pages on the crow-scalp of that solitary majestic outsider? We may get him into the Book; yet the knowledge we want will not be more present with us than it was when the chapters hung their end over the cliff you ken of at Dover, where sits our great lord and master contemplating the seas without upon the reflex of that within!

In other words, as I venture to translate him (humourists are difficult: it is a piece of their humour to puzzle our wits), the inward mirror, the embracing and condensing spirit, is required to give us those interminable milepost piles of matter (extending well-nigh to the very Pole) in essence, in chosen samples, digestibly. I conceive him to indicate that the realistic method of a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible, is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which, as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of sameness, our modern malady. We have the malady, whatever may be the cure or the cause. We drove in a body to Science the other day for an antidote; which was as if tired pedestrians should mount the engine-box of headlong trains; and Science introduced us to our o'er-hoary ancestry—them in the Oriental posture; whereupon we set up a primaeval chattering to rival the Amazon forest nigh nightfall, cured, we fancied. And before daybreak our disease was hanging on to us again, with the extension of a tail. We had it fore and aft. We were the same, and animals into the bargain. That is all we got from Science.

Art is the specific. We have little to learn of apes, and they may be left. The chief consideration for us is, what particular practice of Art in letters is the best for the perusal of the Book of our common wisdom; so that with clearer minds and livelier manners we may escape, as it were, into daylight and song from a land of fog-horns. Shall we read it by the watchmaker's eye in luminous rings eruptive of the infinitesimal, or pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence, which is the Comic Spirit? Wise men say the latter. They tell us that there is a constant tendency in the Book to accumulate excess of substance, and such repleteness, obscuring the glass it holds to mankind, renders us inexact in the recognition of our individual countenances: a perilous thing for civilization. And these wise

Page 2636

men are strong in their opinion that we should encourage the Comic Spirit, who is after all our own offspring, to relieve the Book. Comedy, they say, is the true diversion, as it is likewise the key of the great Book, the music of the Book. They tell us how it condenses whole sections of the book in a sentence, volumes in a character; so that a fair pan of a book outstripping thousands of leagues when unrolled may be compassed in one comic sitting.

For verily, say they, we must read what we can of it, at least the page before us, if we would be men. One, with an index on the Book, cries out, in a style pardonable to his fervency: The remedy of your frightful affliction is here, through the stillatory of Comedy, and not in Science, nor yet in Speed, whose name is but another for voracity. Why, to be alive, to be quick in the soul, there should be diversity in the companion throbs of your pulses. Interrogate them. They lump along like the old loblegs of Dobbin the horse; or do their business like cudgels of carpet-thwackers expelling dust or the cottage-clock pendulum teaching the infant hour over midnight simple arithmetic. This too in spite of Bacchus. And let them gallop; let them gallop with the God bestriding them; gallop to Hymen, gallop to Hades, they strike the same note. Monstrous monotonousness has enfolded us as with the arms of Amphitrite! We hear a shout of war for a diversion.—Comedy he pronounces to be our means of reading swiftly and comprehensively. She it is who proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and of the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. She is the ultimate civilizer, the polisher, a sweet cook. If, he says, she watches over sentimentalism with a birch-rod, she is not opposed to romance. You may love, and warmly love, so long as you are honest. Do not offend reason. A lover pretending too much by one foot's length of pretence, will have that foot caught in her trap. In Comedy is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter: an Ariel released by Prospero's wand from the fetters of the damned witch Sycorax. And this laughter of reason refreshed is floriferous, like the magical great gale of the shifty Spring deciding for Summer. You hear it giving the delicate spirit his liberty. Listen, for comparison, to an unleavened society: a low as of the udderful cow past milking hour! O for a titled ecclesiastic to curse to excommunication that unholy thing! —So far an enthusiast perhaps; but he should have a hearing.

Concerning pathos, no ship can now set sail without pathos; and we are not totally deficient of pathos; which is, I do not accurately know what, if not the ballast, reducible to moisture by patent process, on board our modern vessel; for it can hardly be the cargo, and the general water supply has other uses; and ships well charged with it seem to sail the stiffest:—there is a touch of pathos. The Egoist surely inspires pity. He who would desire to clothe himself at everybody's expense, and is of that desire condemned to strip himself stark naked, he, if pathos ever had a form, might be taken for the actual person. Only he is not allowed to rush at you, roll you over and squeeze your body for the briny drops. There is the innovation.

Page 2637

You may as well know him out of hand, as a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station; a not flexile figure, do what we may with him; the humour of whom scarcely dimples the surface and is distinguishable but by very penetrative, very wicked imps, whose fits of roaring below at some generally imperceptible stroke of his quality, have first made the mild literary angels aware of something comic in him, when they were one and all about to describe the gentleman on the heading of the records baldly (where brevity is most complimentary) as a gentleman of family and property, an idol of a decorous island that admires the concrete. Imps have their freakish wickedness in them to kindle detective vision: malignly do they love to uncover ridiculousness in imposing figures. Wherever they catch sight of Egoism they pitch their camps, they circle and squat, and forthwith they trim their lanterns, confident of the ludicrous to come. So confident that their grip of an English gentleman, in whom they have spied their game, never relaxes until he begins insensibly to frolic and antic, unknown to himself, and comes out in the native steam which is their scent of the chase. Instantly off they scour, Egoist and imps. They will, it is known of them, dog a great House for centuries, and be at the birth of all the new heirs in succession, diligently taking confirmatory notes, to join hands and chime their chorus in one of their merry rings round the tottering pillar of the House, when his turn arrives; as if they had (possibly they had) smelt of old date a doomed colossus of Egoism in that unborn, unconceived inheritor of the stuff of the family. They dare not be chuckling while Egoism is valiant, while sober, while socially valuable, nationally serviceable. They wait.

Aforetime a grand old Egoism built the House. It would appear that ever finer essences of it are demanded to sustain the structure; but especially would it appear that a reversion to the gross original, beneath a mask and in a vein of fineness, is an earthquake at the foundations of the House. Better that it should not have consented to motion, and have held stubbornly to all ancestral ways, than have bred that anachronic spectre. The sight, however, is one to make our squatting imps in circle grow restless on their haunches, as they bend eyes instantly, ears at full cock, for the commencement of the comic drama of the suicide. If this line of verse be not yet in our literature,

> Through very love of self himself he slew,

let it be admitted for his epitaph.

CHAPTER I

A MINOR INCIDENT SHOWING AN HEREDITARY APTITUDE IN THE USE OF THE KNIFE

Page 2638

There was an ominously anxious watch of eyes visible and invisible over the infancy of Willoughby, fifth in descent from Simon Patterne, of Patterne Hall, premier of this family, a lawyer, a man of solid acquirements and stout ambition, who well understood the foundation-work of a House, and was endowed with the power of saying No to those first agents of destruction, besieging relatives. He said it with the resonant emphasis of death to younger sons. For if the oak is to become a stately tree, we must provide against the crowding of timber. Also the tree beset with parasites prospers not. A great House in its beginning lives, we may truly say, by the knife. Soil is easily got, and so are bricks, and a wife, and children come of wishing for them, but the vigorous use of the knife is a natural gift and points to growth. Pauper Patternes were numerous when the fifth head of the race was the hope of his county. A Patterne was in the Marines.

The country and the chief of this family were simultaneously informed of the existence of one Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne, of the corps of the famous hard fighters, through an act of heroism of the unpretending cool sort which kindles British blood, on the part of the modest young officer, in the storming of some eastern riverain stronghold, somewhere about the coast of China. The officer's youth was assumed on the strength of his rank, perhaps likewise from the tale of his modesty: "he had only done his duty". Our Willoughby was then at College, emulous of the generous enthusiasm of his years, and strangely impressed by the report, and the printing of his name in the newspapers. He thought over it for several months, when, coming to his title and heritage, he sent Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne a cheque for a sum of money amounting to the gallant fellow's pay per annum, at the same time showing his acquaintance with the first, or chemical, principles of generosity, in the remark to friends at home, that "blood is thicker than water". The man is a Marine, but he is a Patterne. How any Patterne should have drifted into the Marines, is of the order of questions which are senselessly asked of the great dispensary. In the complimentary letter accompanying his cheque, the lieutenant was invited to present himself at the ancestral Hall, when convenient to him, and he was assured that he had given his relative and friend a taste for a soldier's life. Young Sir Willoughby was fond of talking of his "military namesake and distant cousin, young Patterne—the Marine". It was funny; and not less laughable was the description of his namesake's deed of valour: with the rescued British sailor inebriate, and the hauling off to captivity of the three braves of the black dragon on a yellow ground, and the tying of them together back to back by their pigtails, and driving of them into our lines upon a newly devised dying-top style of march that inclined to the oblique, like the astonished six eyes of the celestial prisoners,

Page 2639

for straight they could not go. The humour of gentlemen at home is always highly excited by such cool feats. We are a small island, but you see what we do. The ladies at the Hall, Sir Willoughby's mother, and his aunts Eleanor and Isabel, were more affected than he by the circumstance of their having a Patterne in the Marines. But how then! We English have ducal blood in business: we have, genealogists tell us, royal blood in common trades. For all our pride we are a queer people; and you may be ordering butcher's meat of a Tudor, sitting on the cane-bottom chairs of a Plantagenet. By and by you may . . . but cherish your reverence. Young Willoughby made a kind of shock-head or football hero of his gallant distant cousin, and wondered occasionally that the fellow had been content to dispatch a letter of effusive thanks without availing himself of the invitation to partake of the hospitalities of Patterne.

He was one afternoon parading between showers on the stately garden terrace of the Hall, in company with his affianced, the beautiful and dashing Constantia Durham, followed by knots of ladies and gentlemen vowed to fresh air before dinner, while it was to be had. Chancing with his usual happy fortune (we call these things dealt to us out of the great hidden dispensary, chance) to glance up the avenue of limes, as he was in the act of turning on his heel at the end of the terrace, and it should be added, discoursing with passion's privilege of the passion of love to Miss Durham, Sir Willoughby, who was anything but obtuse, experienced a presentiment upon espying a thick-set stumpy man crossing the gravel space from the avenue to the front steps of the Hall, decidedly not bearing the stamp of the gentleman "on his hat, his coat, his feet, or anything that was his," Willoughby subsequently observed to the ladies of his family in the Scriptural style of gentlemen who do bear the stamp. His brief sketch of the creature was repulsive. The visitor carried a bag, and his coat-collar was up, his hat was melancholy; he had the appearance of a bankrupt tradesman absconding; no gloves, no umbrella.

As to the incident we have to note, it was very slight. The card of Lieutenant Patterne was handed to Sir Willoughby, who laid it on the salver, saying to the footman, "Not at home."

He had been disappointed in the age, grossly deceived in the appearance of the man claiming to be his relative in this unseasonable fashion; and his acute instinct advised him swiftly of the absurdity of introducing to his friends a heavy unpresentable senior as the celebrated gallant Lieutenant of Marines, and the same as a member of his family! He had talked of the man too much, too enthusiastically, to be able to do so. A young subaltern, even if passably vulgar in figure, can be shuffled through by the aid of the heroical story humourously exaggerated in apology for his aspect. Nothing can be done with a mature and stumpy Marine of that rank. Considerateness dismisses him on the spot, without parley. It was performed by a gentleman supremely advanced at a very early age in the art of cutting.

Page 2640

Young Sir Willoughby spoke a word of the rejected visitor to Miss Durham, in response to her startled look: “I shall drop him a cheque,” he said, for she seemed personally wounded, and had a face of crimson.

The young lady did not reply.

Dating from the humble departure of Lieutenant Crossjay Patterne up the limes-avenue under a gathering rain-cloud, the ring of imps in attendance on Sir Willoughby maintained their station with strict observation of his movements at all hours; and were comparisons in quest, the sympathetic eagerness of the eyes of caged monkeys for the hand about to feed them, would supply one. They perceived in him a fresh development and very subtle manifestation of the very old thing from which he had sprung.

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG SIR WILLOUGHBY

These little scoundrel imps, who have attained to some respectability as the dogs and pets of the Comic Spirit, had been curiously attentive three years earlier, long before the public announcement of his engagement to the beautiful Miss Durham, on the day of Sir Willoughby’s majority, when Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson said her word of him. Mrs. Mountstuart was a lady certain to say the remembered, if not the right, thing. Again and again was it confirmed on days of high celebration, days of birth or bridal, how sure she was to hit the mark that rang the bell; and away her word went over the county: and had she been an uncharitable woman she could have ruled the county with an iron rod of caricature, so sharp was her touch. A grain of malice would have sent county faces and characters awry into the currency. She was wealthy and kindly, and resembled our mother Nature in her reasonable antipathies to one or two things which none can defend, and her decided preference of persons that shone in the sun. Her word sprang out of her. She looked at you, and forth it came: and it stuck to you, as nothing laboured or literary could have adhered. Her saying of Laetitia Dale: “Here she comes with a romantic tale on her eyelashes,” was a portrait of Laetitia. And that of Vernon Whitford: “He is a Phoebus Apollo turned fasting friar,” painted the sunken brilliancy of the lean long-walker and scholar at a stroke.

Of the young Sir Willoughby, her word was brief; and there was the merit of it on a day when he was hearing from sunrise to the setting of the moon salutes in his honour, songs of praise and Ciceronian eulogy. Rich, handsome, courteous, generous, lord of the Hall, the feast and the dance, he excited his guests of both sexes to a holiday of flattery. And, says Mrs. Mountstuart, while grand phrases were mouthing round about him, “You see he has a leg.”

Page 2641

That you saw, of course. But after she had spoken you saw much more. Mrs. Mountstuart said it just as others utter empty nothings, with never a hint of a stress. Her word was taken up, and very soon, from the extreme end of the long drawing-room, the circulation of something of Mrs. Mountstuart's was distinctly perceptible. Lady Patterne sent a little Hebe down, skirting the dancers, for an accurate report of it; and even the inappreciative lips of a very young lady transmitting the word could not damp the impression of its weighty truthfulness. It was perfect! Adulation of the young Sir Willoughby's beauty and wit, and aristocratic bearing and mien, and of his moral virtues, was common; welcome if you like, as a form of homage; but common, almost vulgar, beside Mrs. Mountstuart's quiet little touch of nature. In seeming to say infinitely less than others, as Miss Isabel Patterne pointed out to Lady Busshe, Mrs. Mountstuart comprised all that the others had said, by showing the needlessness of allusions to the saliently evident. She was the aristocrat reproving the provincial. "He is everything you have had the goodness to remark, ladies and dear sirs, he talks charmingly, dances divinely, rides with the air of a commander-in-chief, has the most natural grand pose possible without ceasing for a moment to be the young English gentleman he is. Alcibiades, fresh from a Louis *iv* perruquier, could not surpass him: whatever you please; I could outdo you in sublime comparisons, were I minded to pelt him. Have you noticed that he has a leg?"

So might it be amplified. A simple-seeming word of this import is the triumph of the spiritual, and where it passes for coin of value, the society has reached a high refinement: Arcadian by the aesthetic route. Observation of Willoughby was not, as Miss Eleanor Patterne pointed out to Lady Culmer, drawn down to the leg, but directed to estimate him from the leg upward. That, however, is prosaic. Dwell a short space on Mrs. Mountstuart's word; and whither, into what fair region, and with how decorously voluptuous a sensation, do not we fly, who have, through mournful veneration of the Martyr Charles, a coy attachment to the Court of his Merrie Son, where the leg was ribanded with love-knots and reigned. Oh! it was a naughty Court. Yet have we dreamed of it as the period when an English cavalier was grace incarnate; far from the boor now hustling us in another sphere; beautifully mannered, every gesture dulcet. And if the ladies were . . . we will hope they have been traduced. But if they were, if they were too tender, ah! gentlemen were gentlemen then—worth perishing for! There is this dream in the English country; and it must be an aspiration after some form of melodious gentlemanliness which is imagined to have inhabited the island at one time; as among our poets the dream of the period of a circle of chivalry here is encouraged for the pleasure of the imagination.

Page 2642

Mrs. Mountstuart touched a thrilling chord. “In spite of men’s hateful modern costume, you see he has a leg.”

That is, the leg of the born cavalier is before you: and obscure it as you will, dress degenerately, there it is for ladies who have eyes. You see it: or, you see he has it. Miss Isabel and Miss Eleanor disputed the incidence of the emphasis, but surely, though a slight difference of meaning may be heard, either will do: many, with a good show of reason, throw the accent upon leg. And the ladies knew for a fact that Willoughby’s leg was exquisite; he had a cavalier court-suit in his wardrobe. Mrs. Mountstuart signified that the leg was to be seen because it was a burning leg. There it is, and it will shine through! He has the leg of Rochester, Buckingham, Dorset, Suckling; the leg that smiles, that winks, is obsequious to you, yet perforce of beauty self-satisfied; that twinkles to a tender midway between imperiousness and seductiveness, audacity and discretion; between “You shall worship me”, and “I am devoted to you;” is your lord, your slave, alternately and in one. It is a leg of ebb and flow and high-tide ripples. Such a leg, when it has done with pretending to retire, will walk straight into the hearts of women. Nothing so fatal to them.

Self-satisfied it must be. Humbleness does not win multitudes or the sex. It must be vain to have a sheen. Captivating melodies (to prove to you the unavoidableness of self-satisfaction when you know that you have hit perfection), listen to them closely, have an inner pipe of that conceit almost ludicrous when you detect the chirp.

And you need not be reminded that he has the leg without the naughtiness. You see eminent in him what we would fain have brought about in a nation that has lost its leg in gaining a possibly cleaner morality. And that is often contested; but there is no doubt of the loss of the leg.

Well, footmen and courtiers and Scottish Highlanders, and the corps de ballet, draymen too, have legs, and staring legs, shapely enough. But what are they? not the modulated instrument we mean—simply legs for leg-work, dumb as the brutes. Our cavalier’s is the poetic leg, a portent, a valiance. He has it as Cicero had a tongue. It is a lute to scatter songs to his mistress; a rapier, is she obdurate. In sooth a leg with brains in it, soul.

And its shadows are an ambush, its lights a surprise. It blushes, it pales, can whisper, exclaim. It is a peep, a part revelation, just sufferable, of the Olympian god—Jove playing carpet-knight.

For the young Sir Willoughby’s family and his thoughtful admirers, it is not too much to say that Mrs. Mountstuart’s little word fetched an epoch of our history to colour the evening of his arrival at man’s estate. He was all that Merrie Charles’s court should have been, subtracting not a sparkle from what it was. Under this light he danced, and you may consider the effect of it on his company.

Page 2643

He had received the domestic education of a prince. Little princes abound in a land of heaped riches. Where they have not to yield military service to an Imperial master, they are necessarily here and there dainty during youth, sometimes unmanageable, and as they are bound in no personal duty to the State, each is for himself, with full present, and what is more, luxurious, prospective leisure for the practice of that allegiance. They are sometimes enervated by it: that must be in continental countries. Happily our climate and our brave blood precipitate the greater number upon the hunting-field, to do the public service of heading the chase of the fox, with benefit to their constitutions. Hence a manly as well as useful race of little princes, and Willoughby was as manly as any. He cultivated himself, he would not be outdone in popular accomplishments. Had the standard of the public taste been set in philosophy, and the national enthusiasm centred in philosophers, he would at least have worked at books. He did work at science, and had a laboratory. His admirable passion to excel, however, was chiefly directed in his youth upon sport; and so great was the passion in him, that it was commonly the presence of rivals which led him to the declaration of love.

He knew himself, nevertheless, to be the most constant of men in his attachment to the sex. He had never discouraged Laetitia Dale's devotion to him, and even when he followed in the sweeping tide of the beautiful Constantia Durham (whom Mrs. Mountstuart called "The Racing Cutter"), he thought of Laetitia, and looked at her. She was a shy violet.

Willoughby's comportment while the showers of adulation drenched him might be likened to the composure of Indian Gods undergoing worship, but unlike them he reposed upon no seat of amplitude to preserve him from a betrayal of intoxication; he had to continue tripping, dancing, exactly balancing himself, head to right, head to left, addressing his idolaters in phrases of perfect choiceness. This is only to say that it is easier to be a wooden idol than one in the flesh; yet Willoughby was equal to his task. The little prince's education teaches him that he is other than you, and by virtue of the instruction he receives, and also something, we know not what, within, he is enabled to maintain his posture where you would be tottering.

Urchins upon whose curly pates grave seniors lay their hands with conventional encomium and speculation, look older than they are immediately, and Willoughby looked older than his years, not for want of freshness, but because he felt that he had to stand eminently and correctly poised.

Hearing of Mrs. Mountstuart's word on him, he smiled and said, "It is at her service."

The speech was communicated to her, and she proposed to attach a dedicatory strip of silk. And then they came together, and there was wit and repartee suitable to the electrical atmosphere of the dancing-room, on the march to a magical hall of supper. Willoughby conducted Mrs. Mountstuart to the supper-table.

Page 2644

“Were I,” said she, “twenty years younger, I think I would marry you, to cure my infatuation.”

“Then let me tell you in advance, madam,” said he, “that I will do everything to obtain a new lease of it, except divorce you.”

They were infinitely wittier, but so much was heard and may be reported.

“It makes the business of choosing a wife for him superhumanly difficult!” Mrs. Mountstuart observed, after listening to the praises she had set going again when the ladies were weeded of us, in Lady Patterne’s Indian room, and could converse unhampered upon their own ethereal themes.

“Willoughby will choose a wife for himself,” said his mother.

CHAPTER III

CONSTANTIA DURHAM

The great question for the county was debated in many households, daughter-thronged and daughterless, long subsequent to the memorable day of Willoughby’s coming of age. Lady Busshe was for Constantia Durham. She laughed at Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson’s notion of Laetitia Dale. She was a little older than Mrs. Mountstuart, and had known Willoughby’s father, whose marriage into the wealthiest branch of the Whitford family had been strictly sagacious. “Patternes marry money; they are not romantic people,” she said. Miss Durham had money, and she had health and beauty: three mighty qualifications for a Patterne bride. Her father, Sir John Durham, was a large landowner in the western division of the county; a pompous gentleman, the picture of a father-in-law for Willoughby. The father of Miss Dale was a battered army surgeon from India, tenant of one of Sir Willoughby’s cottages bordering Patterne Park. His girl was portionless and a poetess. Her writing of the song in celebration of the young baronet’s birthday was thought a clever venture, bold as only your timid creatures can be bold. She let the cat out of her bag of verse before the multitude; she almost proposed to her hero in her rhymes. She was pretty; her eyelashes were long and dark, her eyes dark-blue, and her soul was ready to shoot like a rocket out of them at a look from Willoughby. And he looked, he certainly looked, though he did not dance with her once that night, and danced repeatedly with Miss Durham. He gave Laetitia to Vernon Whitford for the final dance of the night, and he may have looked at her so much in pity of an elegant girl allied to such a partner. The “Phoebus Apollo turned fasting friar” had entirely forgotten his musical gifts in motion. He crossed himself and crossed his bewildered lady, and crossed everybody in the figure, extorting shouts of cordial laughter from his cousin Willoughby. Be it said that the hour was four in the morning, when dancers must laugh at somebody, if only to refresh their feet, and the wit of the

hour administers to the wildest laughter. Vernon was likened to Theseus in the maze, entirely dependent upon his Ariadne; to a fly released from

Page 2645

a jam-pot; to a “salvage”, or green, man caught in a web of nymphs and made to go the paces. Willoughby was inexhaustible in the happy similes he poured out to Miss Durham across the lines of Sir Roger de Coverley, and they were not forgotten, they procured him a reputation as a convivial sparkler. Rumour went the round that he intended to give Laetitia to Vernon for good, when he could decide to take Miss Durham to himself; his generosity was famous; but that decision, though the rope was in the form of a knot, seemed reluctant for the conclusive close haul; it preferred the state of slackness; and if he courted Laetitia on behalf of his cousin, his cousinly love must have been greater than his passion, one had to suppose. He was generous enough for it, or for marrying the portionless girl himself.

There was a story of a brilliant young widow of our aristocracy who had very nearly snared him. Why should he object to marry into our aristocracy? Mrs. Mountstuart asked him, and he replied that the girls of that class have no money, and he doubted the quality of their blood. He had his eyes awake. His duty to his House was a foremost thought with him, and for such a reason he may have been more anxious to give the slim and not robust Laetitia to Vernon than accede to his personal inclination. The mention of the widow singularly offended him, notwithstanding the high rank of the lady named. “A widow?” he said. “I!” He spoke to a widow; an oldish one truly; but his wrath at the suggestion of his union with a widow led him to be for the moment oblivious of the minor shades of good taste. He desired Mrs. Mountstuart to contradict the story in positive terms. He repeated his desire; he was urgent to have it contradicted, and said again, “A widow!” straightening his whole figure to the erectness of the letter I. She was a widow unmarried a second time, and it has been known of the stedfast women who retain the name of their first husband, or do not hamper his title with a little new squire at their skirts, that they can partially approve the objections indicated by Sir Willoughby. They are thinking of themselves when they do so, and they will rarely say, “I might have married;” rarely within them will they avow that, with their permission, it might have been. They can catch an idea of a gentleman’s view of the widow’s cap. But a niceness that could feel sharply wounded by the simple rumour of his alliance with the young relict of an earl was mystifying. Sir Willoughby unbent. His military letter I took a careless glance at itself lounging idly and proudly at ease in the glass of his mind, decked with a wanton wreath, as he dropped a hint, generously vague, just to show the origin of the rumour, and the excellent basis it had for not being credited. He was chidden. Mrs. Mountstuart read him a lecture. She was however able to contradict the tale of the young countess. “There is no fear of his marrying her, my dears.”

Page 2646

Meanwhile there was a fear that he would lose his chance of marrying the beautiful Miss Durham.

The dilemmas of little princes are often grave. They should be dwelt on now and then for an example to poor struggling commoners, of the slings and arrows assailing fortune's most favoured men, that we may preach contentment to the wretch who cannot muster wherewithal to marry a wife, or has done it and trots the streets, pack-laden, to maintain the dame and troops of children painfully reared to fill subordinate stations. According to our reading, a moral is always welcome in a moral country, and especially so when silly envy is to be chastised by it, the restless craving for change rebuked. Young Sir Willoughby, then, stood in this dilemma:—a lady was at either hand of him; the only two that had ever, apart from metropolitan conquests, not to be recited, touched his emotions. Susceptible to beauty, he had never seen so beautiful a girl as Constantia Durham. Equally susceptible to admiration of himself, he considered Laetitia Dale a paragon of cleverness. He stood between the queenly rose and the modest violet. One he bowed to; the other bowed to him. He could not have both; it is the law governing princes and pedestrians alike. But which could he forfeit? His growing acquaintance with the world taught him to put an increasing price on the sentiments of Miss Dale. Still Constantia's beauty was of a kind to send away beholders aching. She had the glory of the racing cutter full sail on a whining breeze; and she did not court to win him, she flew. In his more reflective hour the attractiveness of that lady which held the mirror to his features was paramount. But he had passionate snatches when the magnetism of the flyer drew him in her wake. Further to add to the complexity, he loved his liberty; he was princelier free; he had more subjects, more slaves; he ruled arrogantly in the world of women; he was more himself. His metropolitan experiences did not answer to his liking the particular question, Do we bind the woman down to us idolatrously by making a wife of her?

In the midst of his deliberations, a report of the hot pursuit of Miss Durham, casually mentioned to him by Lady Busshe, drew an immediate proposal from Sir Willoughby. She accepted him, and they were engaged. She had been nibbled at, all but eaten up, while he hung dubitative; and though that was the cause of his winning her, it offended his niceness. She had not come to him out of cloistral purity, out of perfect radiancy. Spiritually, likewise, was he a little prince, a despotic prince. He wished for her to have come to him out of an egg-shell, somewhat more astonished at things than a chicken, but as completely enclosed before he tapped the shell, and seeing him with her sex's eyes first of all men. She talked frankly of her cousins and friends, young males. She could have replied to his bitter wish: "Had you asked me on the night of your twenty-first birthday,

Page 2647

Willoughby!" Since then she had been in the dust of the world, and he conceived his peculiar antipathy, destined to be so fatal to him, from the earlier hours of his engagement. He was quaintly incapable of a jealousy of individuals. A young Captain Oxford had been foremost in the swarm pursuing Constantia. Willoughby thought as little of Captain Oxford as he did of Vernon Whitford. His enemy was the world, the mass, which confounds us in a lump, which has breathed on her whom we have selected, whom we cannot, can never, rub quite clear of her contact with the abominated crowd. The pleasure of the world is to bowl down our soldierly letter I; to encroach on our identity, soil our niceness. To begin to think is the beginning of disgust of the world.

As soon the engagement was published all the county said that there had not been a chance for Laetitia, and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson humbly remarked, in an attitude of penitence, "I'm not a witch." Lady Busshe could claim to be one; she had foretold the event. Laetitia was of the same opinion as the county. She had looked up, but not hopefully. She had only looked up to the brightest, and, as he was the highest, how could she have hoped? She was the solitary companion of a sick father, whose inveterate prognostic of her, that she would live to rule at Patterne Hall, tortured the poor girl in proportion as he seemed to derive comfort from it. The noise of the engagement merely silenced him; recluse invalids cling obstinately to their ideas. He had observed Sir Willoughby in the society of his daughter, when the young baronet revived to a sprightly boyishness immediately. Indeed, as big boy and little girl, they had played together of old. Willoughby had been a handsome, fair boy. The portrait of him at the Hall, in a hat, leaning on his pony, with crossed legs, and long flaxen curls over his shoulders, was the image of her soul's most present angel; and, as a man, he had—she did not suppose intentionally—subjected her nature to bow to him; so submissive was she, that it was fuller happiness for her to think him right in all his actions than to imagine the circumstances different. This may appear to resemble the ecstasy of the devotee of Juggernaut, It is a form of the passion inspired by little princes, and we need not marvel that a conservative sex should assist to keep them in their lofty places. What were there otherwise to look up to? We should have no dazzling beacon-lights if they were levelled and treated as clod earth; and it is worth while for here and there a woman to be burned, so long as women's general adoration of an ideal young man shall be preserved. Purity is our demand of them. They may justly cry for attraction. They cannot have it brighter than in the universal bearing of the eyes of their sisters upon a little prince, one who has the ostensible virtues in his pay, and can practise them without injuring himself to make himself unsightly. Let the races of men be by-and-by astonished at their Gods, if they please. Meantime they had better continue to worship.

Page 2648

Laetitia did continue. She saw Miss Durham at Patterne on several occasions. She admired the pair. She had a wish to witness the bridal ceremony. She was looking forward to the day with that mixture of eagerness and withholding which we have as we draw nigh the disenchanting termination of an enchanting romance, when Sir Willoughby met her on a Sunday morning, as she crossed his park solitarily to church. They were within ten days of the appointed ceremony. He should have been away at Miss Durham's end of the county. He had, Laetitia knew, ridden over to her the day before; but there he was; and very unwontedly, quite surprisingly, he presented his arm to conduct Laetitia to the church-door, and talked and laughed in a way that reminded her of a hunting gentleman she had seen once rising to his feet, staggering from an ugly fall across hedge and fence into one of the lanes of her short winter walks. "All's well, all sound, never better, only a scratch!" the gentleman had said, as he reeled and pressed a bleeding head. Sir Willoughby chattered of his felicity in meeting her. "I am really wonderfully lucky," he said, and he said that and other things over and over, incessantly talking, and telling an anecdote of county occurrences, and laughing at it with a mouth that would not widen. He went on talking in the church porch, and murmuring softly some steps up the aisle, passing the pews of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson and Lady Busshe. Of course he was entertaining, but what a strangeness it was to Laetitia! His face would have been half under an antique bonnet. It came very close to hers, and the scrutiny he bent on her was most solicitous.

After the service, he avoided the great ladies by sauntering up to within a yard or two of where she sat; he craved her hand on his arm to lead her forth by the park entrance to the church, all the while bending to her, discoursing rapidly, appearing radiantly interested in her quiet replies, with fits of intentness that stared itself out into dim abstraction. She hazarded the briefest replies for fear of not having understood him.

One question she asked: "Miss Durham is well, I trust?"

And he answered "Durham?" and said, "There is no Miss Durham to my knowledge."

The impression he left with her was, that he might yesterday during his ride have had an accident and fallen on his head.

She would have asked that, if she had not known him for so thorough an Englishman, in his dislike to have it thought that accidents could hurt even when they happened to him.

He called the next day to claim her for a walk. He assured her she had promised it, and he appealed to her father, who could not testify to a promise he had not heard, but begged her to leave him to have her walk. So once more she was in the park with Sir Willoughby, listening to his raptures over old days. A word of assent from her sufficed him. "I am now myself," was one of the remarks he repeated this day. She dilated on the beauty of the park and the Hall to gratify him.

Page 2649

He did not speak of Miss Durham, and Laetitia became afraid to mention her name.

At their parting, Willoughby promised Laetitia that he would call on the morrow. He did not come; and she could well excuse him, after her hearing of the tale.

It was a lamentable tale. He had ridden to Sir John Durham's mansion, a distance of thirty miles, to hear, on his arrival, that Constantia had quitted her father's house two days previously on a visit to an aunt in London, and had just sent word that she was the wife of Captain Oxford, hussar, and messmate of one of her brothers. A letter from the bride awaited Willoughby at the Hall. He had ridden back at night, not caring how he used his horse in order to get swiftly home, so forgetful of himself was he under the terrible blow. That was the night of Saturday. On the day following, being Sunday, he met Laetitia in his park, led her to church, led her out of it, and the day after that, previous to his disappearance for some weeks, was walking with her in full view of the carriages along the road.

He had, indeed, you see, been very fortunately, if not considerately, liberated by Miss Durham. He, as a man of honour, could not have taken the initiative, but the frenzy of a jealous girl might urge her to such a course; and how little he suffered from it had been shown to the world. Miss Durham, the story went, was his mother's choice for him against his heart's inclinations; which had finally subdued Lady Patterne. Consequently, there was no longer an obstacle between Sir Willoughby and Miss Dale. It was a pleasant and romantic story, and it put most people in good humour with the county's favourite, as his choice of a portionless girl of no position would not have done without the shock of astonishment at the conduct of Miss Durham, and the desire to feel that so prevailing a gentleman was not in any degree pitiable. Constantia was called "that mad thing". Laetitia broke forth in novel and abundant merits; and one of the chief points of requisition in relation to Patterne—a Lady Willoughby who would entertain well and animate the deadness of the Hall, became a certainty when her gentleness and liveliness and exceeding cleverness were considered. She was often a visitor at the Hall by Lady Patterne's express invitation, and sometimes on these occasions Willoughby was there too, superintending the filling up of his laboratory, though he was not at home to the county; it was not expected that he should be yet. He had taken heartily to the pursuit of science, and spoke of little else. Science, he said, was in our days the sole object worth a devoted pursuit. But the sweeping remark could hardly apply to Laetitia, of whom he was the courteous, quiet wooer you behold when a man has broken loose from an unhappy tangle to return to the lady of his first and strongest affections.

Some months of homely courtship ensued, and then, the decent interval prescribed by the situation having elapsed, Sir Willoughby Patterne left his native land on a tour of the globe.

Page 2650

CHAPTER IV

LAETITIA DALE

That was another surprise to the county.

Let us not inquire into the feelings of patiently starving women; they must obtain some sustenance of their own, since, as you perceive, they live; evidently they are not in need of a great amount of nourishment; and we may set them down for creatures with a rush-light of animal fire to warm them. They cannot have much vitality who are so little exclamatory. A corresponding sentiment of patient compassion, akin to scorn, is provoked by persons having the opportunity for pathos, and declining to use it. The public bosom was open to Laetitia for several weeks, and had she run to it to bewail herself she would have been cherished in thankfulness for a country drama. There would have been a party against her, cold people, critical of her pretensions to rise from an unrecognized sphere to be mistress of Patterne Hall, but there would also have been a party against Sir Willoughby, composed of the two or three revolutionists, tired of the yoke, which are to be found in England when there is a stir; a larger number of born sympathetics, ever ready to yield the tear for the tear; and here and there a Samaritan soul prompt to succour poor humanity in distress. The opportunity passed undramatized. Laetitia presented herself at church with a face mildly devout, according to her custom, and she accepted invitations to the Hall, she assisted at the reading of Willoughby's letters to his family, and fed on dry husks of him wherein her name was not mentioned; never one note of the summoning call for pathos did this young lady blow.

So, very soon the public bosom closed. She had, under the fresh interpretation of affairs, too small a spirit to be Lady Willoughby of Patterne; she could not have entertained becomingly; he must have seen that the girl was not the match for him in station, and off he went to conquer the remainder of a troublesome first attachment, no longer extremely disturbing, to judge from the tenour of his letters; really incomparable letters! Lady Busshe and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson enjoyed a perusal of them. Sir Willoughby appeared as a splendid young representative island lord in these letters to his family, despatched from the principal cities of the United States of America. He would give them a sketch of "our democratic cousins", he said. Such cousins! They might all have been in the Marines. He carried his English standard over that continent, and by simply jotting down facts, he left an idea of the results of the measurement to his family and friends at home. He was an adept in the irony of incongruously grouping. The nature of the Equality under the stars and stripes was presented in this manner. Equality! Reflections came occasionally: "These cousins of ours are highly amusing. I am among the descendants of the Roundheads. Now and then an allusion to

Page 2651

old domestic differences, in perfect good temper. We go on in our way; they theirs, in the apparent belief that Republicanism operates remarkable changes in human nature. Vernon tries hard to think it does. The upper ten of our cousins are the Infernal of Paris. The rest of them is Radical England, as far as I am acquainted with that section of my country."—Where we compared, they were absurd; where we contrasted, they were monstrous. The contrast of Vernon's letters with Willoughby's was just as extreme. You could hardly have taken them for relatives travelling together, or Vernon Whitford for a born and bred Englishman. The same scenes furnished by these two pens might have been sketched in different hemispheres. Vernon had no irony. He had nothing of Willoughby's epistolary creative power, which, causing his family and friends to exclaim: "How like him that is!" conjured them across the broad Atlantic to behold and clap hands at his lordliness.

They saw him distinctly, as with the naked eye; a word, a turn of the pen, or a word unsaid, offered the picture of him in America, Japan, China, Australia, nay, the continent of Europe, holding an English review of his Maker's grotesques. Vernon seemed a sheepish fellow, without stature abroad, glad of a compliment, grateful for a dinner, endeavouring sadly to digest all he saw and heard. But one was a Patterne; the other a Whitford. One had genius; the other pottered after him with the title of student. One was the English gentleman wherever he went; the other was a new kind of thing, nondescript, produced in England of late, and not likely to come to much good himself, or do much good to the country.

Vernon's dancing in America was capitally described by Willoughby. "Adieu to our cousins!" the latter wrote on his voyage to Japan. "I may possibly have had some vogue in their ball-rooms, and in showing them an English seat on horseback: I must resign myself if I have not been popular among them. I could not sing their national song—if a congery of states be a nation—and I must confess I listened with frigid politeness to their singing of it. A great people, no doubt. Adieu to them. I have had to tear old Vernon away. He had serious thoughts of settling, means to correspond with some of them." On the whole, forgetting two or more "traits of insolence" on the part of his hosts, which he cited, Willoughby escaped pretty comfortably. The President had been, consciously or not, uncivil, but one knew his origin! Upon these interjections, placable flicks of the lionly tail addressed to Britannia the Ruler, who expected him in some mildish way to lash terga cauda in retiring, Sir Willoughby Patterne passed from a land of alien manners; and ever after he spoke of America respectfully and pensively, with a tail tucked in, as it were. His travels were profitable to himself. The fact is, that there are cousins who come to greatness and must be pacified, or they will prove annoying. Heaven forefend a collision between cousins!

Page 2652

Willoughby returned to his England after an absence of three years. On a fair April morning, the last of the month, he drove along his park palings, and, by the luck of things, Laetitia was the first of his friends whom he met. She was crossing from field to field with a band of school-children, gathering wild flowers for the morrow May-day. He sprang to the ground and seized her hand. “Laetitia Dale!” he said. He panted. “Your name is sweet English music! And you are well?” The anxious question permitted him to read deeply in her eyes. He found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let her go, saying: “I could not have prayed for a lovelier home-scene to welcome me than you and these children flower-gathering. I don’t believe in chance. It was decreed that we should meet. Do not you think so?”

Laetitia breathed faintly of her gladness.

He begged her to distribute a gold coin among the little ones; asked for the names of some of them, and repeated: “Mary, Susan, Charlotte—only the Christian names, pray! Well, my dears, you will bring your garlands to the Hall to-morrow morning; and mind, early! no slugabeds tomorrow; I suppose I am browned, Laetitia?” He smiled in apology for the foreign sun, and murmured with rapture: “The green of this English country is unsurpassed. It is wonderful. Leave England and be baked, if you would appreciate it. You can’t, unless you taste exile as I have done—for how many years? How many?”

“Three,” said Laetitia.

“Thirty!” said he. “It seems to me that length. At least, I am immensely older. But looking at you, I could think it less than three. You have not changed. You are absolutely unchanged. I am bound to hope so. I shall see you soon. I have much to talk of, much to tell you. I shall hasten to call on your father. I have specially to speak with him. I—what happiness this is, Laetitia! But I must not forget I have a mother. Adieu; for some hours—not for many!”

He pressed her hand again. He was gone.

She dismissed the children to their homes. Plucking primroses was hard labour now—a dusty business. She could have wished that her planet had not descended to earth, his presence agitated her so; but his enthusiastic patriotism was like a shower that, in the Spring season of the year, sweeps against the hard-binding East and melts the air and brings out new colours, makes life flow; and her thoughts recurred in wonderment to the behaviour of Constantia Durham. That was Laetitia’s manner of taking up her weakness once more. She could almost have reviled the woman who had given this beneficent magician, this pathetic exile, of the aristocratic sunburned visage and deeply scrutinizing eyes, cause for grief. How deeply his eyes could read! The starveling of patience awoke to the idea of a feast. The sense of hunger came with it, and hope came, and patience fled. She would have rejected hope to keep patience nigh her; but surely it can not always be Winter! said her reasoning blood, and we must excuse her

as best we can if she was assured, by her restored warmth that Willoughby came in the order of the revolving seasons, marking a long Winter past. He had specially to speak with her father, he had said. What could that mean? What, but—She dared not phrase it or view it.

Page 2653

At their next meeting she was “Miss Dale”.

A week later he was closeted with her father.

Mr. Dale, in the evening of that pregnant day, eulogized Sir Willoughby as a landlord. A new lease of the cottage was to be granted him on the old terms, he said. Except that Sir Willoughby had congratulated him in the possession of an excellent daughter, their interview was one of landlord and tenant, it appeared; and Laetitia said, “So we shall not have to leave the cottage?” in a tone of satisfaction, while she quietly gave a wrench to the neck of the young hope in her breast. At night her diary received the line: “This day I was a fool. To-morrow?”

To-morrow and many days afterwards there were dashes instead of words.

Patience travelled back to her sullenly. As we must have some kind of food, and she had nothing else, she took to that and found it dryer than of yore. It is a composing but a lean dietary. The dead are patient, and we get a certain likeness to them in feeding on it unintermittingly overlong. Her hollowed cheeks with the fallen leaf in them pleaded against herself to justify her idol for not looking down on one like her. She saw him when he was at the Hall. He did not notice any change. He was exceedingly gentle and courteous. More than once she discovered his eyes dwelling on her, and then he looked hurriedly at his mother, and Laetitia had to shut her mind from thinking, lest thinking should be a sin and hope a guilty spectre. But had his mother objected to her? She could not avoid asking herself. His tour of the globe had been undertaken at his mother’s desire; she was an ambitious lady, in failing health; and she wished to have him living with her at Patterne, yet seemed to agree that he did wisely to reside in London.

One day Sir Willoughby, in the quiet manner which was his humour, informed her that he had become a country gentleman; he had abandoned London, he loathed it as the burial-place of the individual man. He intended to sit down on his estates and have his cousin Vernon Whitford to assist him in managing them, he said; and very amusing was his description of his cousin’s shifts to live by literature, and add enough to a beggarly income to get his usual two months of the year in the Alps. Previous to his great tour, Willoughby had spoken of Vernon’s judgement with derision; nor was it entirely unknown that Vernon had offended his family pride by some extravagant act. But after their return he acknowledged Vernon’s talents, and seemed unable to do without him.

The new arrangement gave Laetitia a companion for her walks. Pedestrianism was a sour business to Willoughby, whose exclamation of the word indicated a willingness for any amount of exercise on horseback; but she had no horse, and so, while he hunted, Laetitia and Vernon walked, and the neighbourhood speculated on the circumstances, until the ladies Eleanor and Isabel Patterne engaged her more frequently for carriage exercise, and Sir Willoughby was observed riding beside them.

Page 2654

A real and sunny pleasure befell Laetitia in the establishment of young Crossjay Patterne under her roof; the son of the lieutenant, now captain, of Marines; a boy of twelve with the sprights of twelve boys in him, for whose board and lodgement Vernon provided by arrangement with her father. Vernon was one of your men that have no occupation for their money, no bills to pay for repair of their property, and are insane to spend. He had heard of Captain Patterne's large family, and proposed to have his eldest boy at the Hall, to teach him; but Willoughby declined to house the son of such a father, predicting that the boy's hair would be red, his skin eruptive, and his practices detestable. So Vernon, having obtained Mr. Dale's consent to accommodate this youth, stalked off to Devonport, and brought back a rosy-cheeked, round-bodied rogue of a boy, who fell upon meats and puddings, and defeated them, with a captivating simplicity in his confession that he had never had enough to eat in his life. He had gone through a training for a plentiful table. At first, after a number of helps, young Crossjay would sit and sigh heavily, in contemplation of the unfinished dish. Subsequently, he told his host and hostess that he had two sisters above his own age, and three brothers and two sisters younger than he: "All hungry!" said die boy.

His pathos was most comical. It was a good month before he could see pudding taken away from table without a sigh of regret that he could not finish it as deputy for the Devonport household. The pranks of the little fellow, and his revel in a country life, and muddy wildness in it, amused Laetitia from morning to night. She, when she had caught him, taught him in the morning; Vernon, favoured by the chase, in the afternoon. Young Crossjay would have enlivened any household. He was not only indolent, he was opposed to the acquisition of knowledge through the medium of books, and would say: "But I don't want to!" in a tone to make a logician thoughtful. Nature was very strong in him. He had, on each return of the hour for instruction, to be plucked out of the earth, rank of the soil, like a root, for the exercise of his big round headpiece on those tyrannous puzzles. But the habits of birds, and the place for their eggs, and the management of rabbits, and the tickling of fish, and poaching joys with combative boys of the district, and how to wheedle a cook for a luncheon for a whole day in the rain, he soon knew of his great nature. His passion for our naval service was a means of screwing his attention to lessons after he had begun to understand that the desert had to be traversed to attain midshipman's rank. He boasted ardently of his fighting father, and, chancing to be near the Hall as he was talking to Vernon and Laetitia of his father, he propounded a question close to his heart, and he put it in these words, following: "My father's the one to lead an army!" when he paused. "I say, Mr. Whitford, Sir Willoughby's kind to me, and gives me crown-pieces, why wouldn't he see my father, and my father came here ten miles in the rain to see him, and had to walk ten miles back, and sleep at an inn?"

Page 2655

The only answer to be given was, that Sir Willoughby could not have been at home. “Oh! my father saw him, and Sir Willoughby said he was not at home,” the boy replied, producing an odd ring in the ear by his repetition of “not at home” in the same voice as the apology, plainly innocent of malice. Vernon told Laetitia, however, that the boy never asked an explanation of Sir Willoughby.

Unlike the horse of the adage, it was easier to compel young Crossjay to drink of the waters of instruction than to get him to the brink. His heart was not so antagonistic as his nature, and by degrees, owing to a proper mixture of discipline and cajolery, he imbibed. He was whistling at the cook’s windows after a day of wicked truancy, on an April night, and reported adventures over the supper supplied to him. Laetitia entered the kitchen with a reproving forefinger. He jumped to kiss her, and went on chattering of a place fifteen miles distant, where he had seen Sir Willoughby riding with a young lady. The impossibility that the boy should have got so far on foot made Laetitia doubtful of his veracity, until she heard that a gentleman had taken him up on the road in a gig, and had driven him to a farm to show him strings of birds’ eggs and stuffed birds of every English kind, kingfishers, yaffles, black woodpeckers, goat-sucker owls, more mouth than head, with dusty, dark-spotted wings, like moths; all very circumstantial. Still, in spite of his tea at the farm, and ride back by rail at the gentleman’s expense, the tale seemed fictitious to Laetitia until Crossjay related how that he had stood to salute on the road to the railway, and taken off his cap to Sir Willoughby, and Sir Willoughby had passed him, not noticing him, though the young lady did, and looked back and nodded. The hue of truth was in that picture.

Strange eclipse, when the hue of truth comes shadowing over our bright ideal planet. It will not seem the planet’s fault, but truth’s. Reality is the offender; delusion our treasure that we are robbed of. Then begins with us the term of wilful delusion, and its necessary accompaniment of the disgust of reality; exhausting the heart much more than patient endurance of starvation.

Hints were dropping about the neighbourhood; the hedgeways twittered, the tree-tops cawed. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson was loud on the subject: “Patterne is to have a mistress at last, you say? But there never was a doubt of his marrying—he must marry; and, so long as he does not marry a foreign woman, we have no cause to complain. He met her at Cherriton. Both were struck at the same moment. Her father is, I hear, some sort of learned man; money; no land. No house either, I believe. People who spend half their time on the Continent. They are now for a year at Upton Park. The very girl to settle down and entertain when she does think of settling. Eighteen, perfect manners; you need not ask if a beauty. Sir Willoughby will have

Page 2656

his dues. We must teach her to make amends to him—but don't listen to Lady Busshe! He was too young at twenty-three or twenty-four. No young man is ever jilted; he is allowed to escape. A young man married is a fire-eater bound over to keep the peace; if he keeps it he worries it. At thirty-one or thirty-two he is ripe for his command, because he knows how to bend. And Sir Willoughby is a splendid creature, only wanting a wife to complete him. For a man like that to go on running about would never do. Soberly—no! It would soon be getting ridiculous. He has been no worse than other men, probably better—infinitely more excusable; but now we have him, and it was time we should. I shall see her and study her, sharply, you may be sure; though I fancy I can rely on his judgement."

In confirmation of the swelling buzz, the Rev. Dr. Middleton and his daughter paid a flying visit to the Hall, where they were seen only by the members of the Patterne family. Young Crossjay had a short conversation with Miss Middleton, and ran to the cottage full of her—she loved the navy and had a merry face. She had a smile of very pleasant humour according to Vernon. The young lady was outlined to Laetitia as tall, elegant, lively; and painted as carrying youth like a flag. With her smile of "very pleasant humour", she could not but be winning.

Vernon spoke more of her father, a scholar of high repute; happily, a scholar of an independent fortune. His maturer recollection of Miss Middleton grew poetic, or he described her in an image to suit a poetic end: "She gives you an idea of the Mountain Echo. Doctor Middleton has one of the grandest heads in England."

"What is her Christian name?" said Laetitia.

He thought her Christian name was Clara.

Laetitia went to bed and walked through the day conceiving the Mountain Echo the swift, wild spirit, Clara by name, sent fleeting on a far half circle by the voice it is roused to subserve; sweeter than beautiful, high above drawing-room beauties as the colours of the sky; and if, at the same time, elegant and of loveable smiling, could a man resist her? To inspire the title of Mountain Echo in any mind, a young lady must be singularly spiritualized. Her father doated on her, Vernon said. Who would not? It seemed an additional cruelty that the grace of a poetical attractiveness should be round her, for this was robbing Laetitia of some of her own little fortune, mystical though that might be. But a man like Sir Willoughby had claims on poetry, possessing as he did every manly grace; and to think that Miss Middleton had won him by virtue of something native to her likewise, though mystically, touched Laetitia with a faint sense of relationship to the chosen girl. "What is in me, he sees on her." It decked her pride to think so, as a wreath on the gravestone. She encouraged her imagination to brood over Clara, and invested her designedly with romantic charms, in spite of pain; the ascetic zealot hugs his share of Heaven—most bitter, most blessed—in his hair-shirt and scourge, and Laetitia's happiness was to glorify Clara. Through that chosen rival, through her

comprehension of the spirit of Sir Willoughby’s choice of one such as Clara, she was linked to him yet.

Page 2657

Her mood of ecstatic fidelity was a dangerous exaltation; one that in a desert will distort the brain, and in the world where the idol dwells will put him, should he come nigh, to its own furnace-test, and get a clear brain out of a burnt heart. She was frequently at the Hall, helping to nurse Lady Patterne. Sir Willoughby had hitherto treated her as a dear insignificant friend, to whom it was unnecessary that he should mention the object of his rides to Upton Park.

He had, however, in the contemplation of what he was gaining, fallen into anxiety about what he might be losing. She belonged to his brilliant youth; her devotion was the bride of his youth; he was a man who lived backward almost as intensely as in the present; and, notwithstanding Laetitia's praiseworthy zeal in attending on his mother, he suspected some unfaithfulness: hardly without cause: she had not looked paler of late; her eyes had not reproached him; the secret of the old days between them had been as little concealed as it was exposed. She might have buried it, after the way of woman, whose bosoms can be tombs, if we and the world allow them to be; absolutely sepulchres, where you lie dead, ghastly. Even if not dead and horrible to think of, you may be lying cold, somewhere in a corner. Even if embalmed, you may not be much visited. And how is the world to know you are embalmed? You are no better than a rotting wretch to the world that does not have peeps of you in the woman's breast, and see lights burning and an occasional exhibition of the services of worship. There are women—tell us not of her of Ephesus!—that have embalmed you, and have quitted the world to keep the tapers alight, and a stranger comes, and they, who have your image before them, will suddenly blow out the vestal flames and treat you as dust to fatten the garden of their bosoms for a fresh flower of love. Sir Willoughby knew it; he had experience of it in the form of the stranger; and he knew the stranger's feelings toward his predecessor and the lady.

He waylaid Laetitia, to talk of himself and his plans: the project of a run to Italy. Enviable? Yes, but in England you live the higher moral life. Italy boasts of sensual beauty; the spiritual is yours. "I know Italy well; I have often wished to act as a cicerone to you there. As it is, I suppose I shall be with those who know the land as well as I do, and will not be particularly enthusiastic:—if you are what you were?" He was guilty of this perplexing twist from one person to another in a sentence more than once. While he talked exclusively of himself it seemed to her a condescension. In time he talked principally of her, beginning with her admirable care of his mother; and he wished to introduce "a Miss Middleton" to her; he wanted her opinion of Miss Middleton; he relied on her intuition of character, had never known it err.

Page 2658

“If I supposed it could err, Miss Dale, I should not be so certain of myself. I am bound up in my good opinion of you, you see; and you must continue the same, or where shall I be?” Thus he was led to dwell upon friendship, and the charm of the friendship of men and women, “Platonism”, as it was called. “I have laughed at it in the world, but not in the depth of my heart. The world’s platonic attachments are laughable enough. You have taught me that the ideal of friendship is possible—when we find two who are capable of a disinterested esteem. The rest of life is duty; duty to parents, duty to country. But friendship is the holiday of those who can be friends. Wives are plentiful, friends are rare. I know how rare!”

Laetitia swallowed her thoughts as they sprang up. Why was he torturing her?—to give himself a holiday? She could bear to lose him—she was used to it—and bear his indifference, but not that he should disfigure himself; it made her poor. It was as if he required an oath of her when he said: “Italy! But I shall never see a day in Italy to compare with the day of my return to England, or know a pleasure so exquisite as your welcome of me. Will you be true to that? May I look forward to just another such meeting?”

He pressed her for an answer. She gave the best she could. He was dissatisfied, and to her hearing it was hardly in the tone of manliness that he entreated her to reassure him; he womanized his language. She had to say: “I am afraid I can not undertake to make it an appointment, Sir Willoughby,” before he recovered his alertness, which he did, for he was anything but obtuse, with the reply, “You would keep it if you promised, and freeze at your post. So, as accidents happen, we must leave it to fate. The will’s the thing. You know my detestation of changes. At least I have you for my tenant, and wherever I am, I see your light at the end of my park.”

“Neither my father nor I would willingly quit Ivy Cottage,” said Laetitia.

“So far, then,” he murmured. “You will give me a long notice, and it must be with my consent if you think of quitting?”

“I could almost engage to do that,” she said.

“You love the place?”

“Yes; I am the most contented of cottagers.”

“I believe, Miss Dale, it would be well for my happiness were I a cottager.”

“That is the dream of the palace. But to be one, and not to wish to be other, is quiet sleep in comparison.”

“You paint a cottage in colours that tempt one to run from big houses and households.”

“You would run back to them faster, Sir Willoughby.”

“You may know me,” said he, bowing and passing on contentedly. He stopped. “But I am not ambitious.”

“Perhaps you are too proud for ambition, Sir Willoughby.”

“You hit me to the life!”

He passed on regretfully. Clara Middleton did not study and know him like Laetitia Dale.

Page 2659

Laetitia was left to think it pleased him to play at cat and mouse. She had not “hit him to the life”, or she would have marvelled in acknowledging how sincere he was.

At her next sitting by the bedside of Lady Patterne she received a certain measure of insight that might have helped her to fathom him, if only she could have kept her feelings down.

The old lady was affectionately confidential in talking of her one subject, her son. “And here is another dashing girl, my dear; she has money and health and beauty; and so has he; and it appears a fortunate union; I hope and pray it may be; but we begin to read the world when our eyes grow dim, because we read the plain lines, and I ask myself whether money and health and beauty on both sides have not been the mutual attraction. We tried it before; and that girl Durham was honest, whatever we may call her. I should have desired an appreciative thoughtful partner for him, a woman of mind, with another sort of wealth and beauty. She was honest, she ran away in time; there was a worse thing possible than that. And now we have the same chapter, and the same kind of person, who may not be quite as honest; and I shall not see the end of it. Promise me you will always be good to him; be my son’s friend; his Egeria, he names you. Be what you were to him when that girl broke his heart, and no one, not even his mother, was allowed to see that he suffered anything. Comfort him in his sensitiveness. Willoughby has the most entire faith in you. Were that destroyed—I shudder! You are, he says, and he has often said, his image of the constant woman.”

Laetitia’s hearing took in no more. She repeated to herself for days: “His image of the constant woman!” Now, when he was a second time forsaking her, his praise of her constancy wore the painful ludicrousness of the look of a whimper on the face.

CHAPTER V

CLARA MIDDLETON

The great meeting of Sir Willoughby Patterne and Miss Middleton had taken place at Cherriton Grange, the seat of a county grandee, where this young lady of eighteen was first seen rising above the horizon. She had money and health and beauty, the triune of perfect starriness, which makes all men astronomers. He looked on her, expecting her to look at him. But as soon as he looked he found that he must be in motion to win a look in return. He was one of a pack; many were ahead of him, the whole of them were eager. He had to debate within himself how best to communicate to her that he was Willoughby Patterne, before her gloves were too much soiled to flatter his niceness, for here and there, all around, she was yielding her hand to partners—obscurant males whose touch leaves a stain. Far too generally gracious was Her Starriness to please him. The effect of it, nevertheless, was to hurry him with all his might into the heat of

the chase, while yet he knew no more of her than that he was competing for a prize, and Willoughby Patterne was only one of dozens to the young lady.

Page 2660

A deeper student of Science than his rivals, he appreciated Nature's compliment in the fair ones choice of you. We now scientifically know that in this department of the universal struggle, success is awarded to the bettermost. You spread a handsomer tail than your fellows, you dress a finer top-knot, you pipe a newer note, have a longer stride; she reviews you in competition, and selects you. The superlative is magnetic to her. She may be looking elsewhere, and you will see—the superlative will simply have to beckon, away she glides. She cannot help herself; it is her nature, and her nature is the guarantee for the noblest races of men to come of her. In complimenting you, she is a promise of superior offspring. Science thus—or it is better to say—an acquaintance with science facilitates the cultivation of aristocracy. Consequently a successful pursuit and a wresting of her from a body of competitors, tells you that you are the best man. What is more, it tells the world so.

Willoughby aired his amiable superlatives in the eye of Miss Middleton; he had a leg. He was the heir of successful competitors. He had a style, a tone, an artist tailor, an authority of manner; he had in the hopeful ardour of the chase among a multitude a freshness that gave him advantage; and together with his undeviating energy when there was a prize to be won and possessed, these were scarce resistible. He spared no pains, for he was adust and athirst for the winning-post. He courted her father, aware that men likewise, and parents pre-eminently, have their preference for the larger offer, the deeper pocket, the broader lands, the respectfuller consideration. Men, after their fashion, as well as women, distinguish the bettermost, and aid him to succeed, as Dr. Middleton certainly did in the crisis of the memorable question proposed to his daughter within a month of Willoughby's reception at Upton Park. The young lady was astonished at his whirlwind wooing of her, and bent to it like a sapling. She begged for time; Willoughby could barely wait. She unhesitatingly owned that she liked no one better, and he consented. A calm examination of his position told him that it was unfair so long as he stood engaged, and she did not. She pleaded a desire to see a little of the world before she plighted herself. She alarmed him; he assumed the amazing god of love under the subtlest guise of the divinity. Willingly would he obey her behests, resignedly languish, were it not for his mother's desire to see the future lady of Patterne established there before she died. Love shone cunningly through the mask of filial duty, but the plea of urgency was reasonable. Dr. Middleton thought it reasonable, supposing his daughter to have an inclination. She had no disinclination, though she had a maidenly desire to see a little of the world—grace for one year, she said. Willoughby reduced the year to six months, and granted that term, for which, in gratitude, she submitted to stand engaged; and that

Page 2661

was no light whispering of a word. She was implored to enter the state of captivity by the pronunciation of vows—a private but a binding ceremonial. She had health and beauty, and money to gild these gifts; not that he stipulated for money with his bride, but it adds a lustre to dazzle the world; and, moreover, the pack of rival pursuers hung close behind, yelping and raising their dolorous throats to the moon. Captive she must be.

He made her engagement no light whispering matter. It was a solemn plighting of a troth. Why not? Having said, I am yours, she could say, I am wholly yours, I am yours forever, I swear it, I will never swerve from it, I am your wife in heart, yours utterly; our engagement is written above. To this she considerately appended, “as far as I am concerned”; a piece of somewhat chilling generosity, and he forced her to pass him through love’s catechism in turn, and came out with fervent answers that bound him to her too indissolubly to let her doubt of her being loved. And I am loved! she exclaimed to her heart’s echoes, in simple faith and wonderment. Hardly had she begun to think of love ere the apparition arose in her path. She had not thought of love with any warmth, and here it was. She had only dreamed of love as one of the distant blessings of the mighty world, lying somewhere in the world’s forests, across wild seas, veiled, encompassed with beautiful perils, a throbbing secrecy, but too remote to quicken her bosom’s throbs. Her chief idea of it was, the enrichment of the world by love.

Thus did Miss Middleton acquiesce in the principle of selection.

And then did the best man of a host blow his triumphant horn, and loudly.

He looked the fittest; he justified the dictum of Science. The survival of the Patternes was assured. “I would,” he said to his admirer, Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, “have bargained for health above everything, but she has everything besides—lineage, beauty, breeding: is what they call an heiress, and is the most accomplished of her sex.” With a delicate art he conveyed to the lady’s understanding that Miss Middleton had been snatched from a crowd, without a breath of the crowd having offended his niceness. He did it through sarcasm at your modern young women, who run about the world nibbling and nibbled at, until they know one sex as well as the other, and are not a whit less cognizant of the market than men; pure, possibly; it is not so easy to say innocent; decidedly not our feminine ideal. Miss Middleton was different: she was the true ideal, fresh-gathered morning fruit in a basket, warranted by her bloom.

Women do not defend their younger sisters for doing what they perhaps have done—-lifting a veil to be seen, and peeping at a world where innocence is as poor a guarantee as a babe’s caul against shipwreck. Women of the world never think of attacking the sensual stipulation for perfect bloom, silver purity, which is redolent of the Oriental origin of the love-passion of their lords. Mrs. Mountstuart congratulated Sir Willoughby on the prize he had won in the fair western-eastern.

Page 2662

“Let me see her,” she said; and Miss Middleton was introduced and critically observed.

She had the mouth that smiles in repose. The lips met full on the centre of the bow and thinned along to a lifting dimple; the eyelids also lifted slightly at the outer corners, and seemed, like the lip into the limpid cheek, quickening up the temples, as with a run of light, or the ascension indicated off a shoot of colour. Her features were playfellows of one another, none of them pretending to rigid correctness, nor the nose to the ordinary dignity of governess among merry girls, despite which the nose was of a fair design, not acutely interrogative or inviting to gambols. Aspens imaged in water, waiting for the breeze, would offer a susceptible lover some suggestion of her face: a pure, smooth-white face, tenderly flushed in the cheeks, where the gentle dints, were faintly intermelting even during quietness. Her eyes were brown, set well between mild lids, often shadowed, not unwakeful. Her hair of lighter brown, swelling above her temples on the sweep to the knot, imposed the triangle of the fabulous wild woodland visage from brow to mouth and chin, evidently in agreement with her taste; and the triangle suited her; but her face was not significant of a tameless wildness or of weakness; her equable shut mouth threw its long curve to guard the small round chin from that effect; her eyes wavered only in humour, they were steady when thoughtfulness was awakened; and at such seasons the build of her winter-beechwood hair lost the touch of nymphlike and whimsical, and strangely, by mere outline, added to her appearance of studious concentration. Observe the hawk on stretched wings over the prey he spies, for an idea of this change in the look of a young lady whom Vernon Whitford could liken to the Mountain Echo, and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson pronounced to be “a dainty rogue in porcelain”.

Vernon’s fancy of her must have sprung from her prompt and most musical responsiveness. He preferred the society of her learned father to that of a girl under twenty engaged to his cousin, but the charm of her ready tongue and her voice was to his intelligent understanding wit, natural wit, crystal wit, as opposed to the paste-sparkle of the wit of the town. In his encomiums he did not quote Miss Middleton’s wit; nevertheless, he ventured to speak of it to Mrs. Mountstuart, causing that lady to say: “Ah, well, I have not noticed the wit. You may have the art of drawing it out.”

No one had noticed the wit. The corrupted hearing of people required a collision of sounds, Vernon supposed. For his part, to prove their excellence, he recollected a great many of Miss Middleton’s remarks; they came flying to him; and so long as he forbore to speak them aloud, they had a curious wealth of meaning. It could not be all her manner, however much his own manner might spoil them. It might be, to a certain degree, her quickness at catching the hue and shade

Page 2663

of evanescent conversation. Possibly by remembering the whole of a conversation wherein she had her place, the wit was to be tested; only how could any one retain the heavy portion? As there was no use in being argumentative on a subject affording him personally, and apparently solitarily, refreshment and enjoyment, Vernon resolved to keep it to himself. The eulogies of her beauty, a possession in which he did not consider her so very conspicuous, irritated him in consequence. To flatter Sir Willoughby, it was the fashion to exalt her as one of the types of beauty; the one providentially selected to set off his masculine type. She was compared to those delicate flowers, the ladies of the Court of China, on rice-paper. A little French dressing would make her at home on the sward by the fountain among the lutes and whispers of the bewitching silken shepherdesses who live though they never were. Lady Busshe was reminded of the favourite lineaments of the women of Leonardo, the angels of Luini. Lady Culmer had seen crayon sketches of demoiselles of the French aristocracy resembling her. Some one mentioned an antique statue of a figure breathing into a flute: and the mouth at the flutestop might have a distant semblance of the bend of her mouth, but this comparison was repelled as grotesque.

For once Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson was unsuccessful.

Her “dainty rogue in porcelain” displeased Sir Willoughby. “Why rogue?” he said. The lady’s fame for hitting the mark fretted him, and the grace of his bride’s fine bearing stood to support him in his objection. Clara was young, healthy, handsome; she was therefore fitted to be his wife, the mother of his children, his companion picture. Certainly they looked well side by side. In walking with her, in drooping to her, the whole man was made conscious of the female image of himself by her exquisite unlikeness. She completed him, added the softer lines wanting to his portrait before the world. He had wooed her rageingly; he courted her becomingly; with the manly self-possession enlivened by watchful tact which is pleasing to girls. He never seemed to undervalue himself in valuing her: a secret priceless in the courtship of young women that have heads; the lover doubles their sense of personal worth through not forfeiting his own. Those were proud and happy days when he rode Black Norman over to Upton Park, and his lady looked forth for him and knew him coming by the faster beating of her heart.

Her mind, too, was receptive. She took impressions of his characteristics, and supplied him a feast. She remembered his chance phrases; noted his ways, his peculiarities, as no one of her sex had done. He thanked his cousin Vernon for saying she had wit. She had it, and of so high a flavour that the more he thought of the epigram launched at her the more he grew displeased. With the wit to understand him, and the heart to worship, she had a dignity rarely seen in young ladies.

Page 2664

“Why rogue?” he insisted with Mrs. Mountstuart.

“I said—in porcelain,” she replied.

“Rogue perplexes me.”

“Porcelain explains it.”

“She has the keenest sense of honour.”

“I am sure she is a paragon of rectitude.”

“She has a beautiful bearing.”

“The carriage of a young princess!”

“I find her perfect.”

“And still she may be a dainty rogue in porcelain.”

“Are you judging by the mind or the person, ma’am?”

“Both.”

“And which is which?”

“There’s no distinction.”

“Rogue and mistress of Patterne do not go together.”

“Why not? She will be a novelty to our neighbourhood and an animation of the Hall.”

“To be frank, rogue does not rightly match with me.”

“Take her for a supplement.”

“You like her?”

“In love with her! I can imagine life-long amusement in her company. Attend to my advice: prize the porcelain and play with the rogue.”

Sir Willoughby nodded, unilluminated. There was nothing of rogue in himself, so there could be nothing of it in his bride. Elfishness, tricksiness, freakishness, were antipathetic to his nature; and he argued that it was impossible he should have chosen for his complement a person deserving the title. It would not have been sanctioned by his guardian genius. His closer acquaintance with Miss Middleton squared with his first

impressions; you know that this is convincing; the common jury justifies the presentation of the case to them by the grand jury; and his original conclusion that she was essentially feminine, in other words, a parasite and a chalice, Clara's conduct confirmed from day to day. He began to instruct her in the knowledge of himself without reserve, and she, as she grew less timid with him, became more reflective.

"I judge by character," he said to Mrs. Mountstuart.

"If you have caught the character of a girl," said she.

"I think I am not far off it."

"So it was thought by the man who dived for the moon in a well."

"How women despise their sex!"

"Not a bit. She has no character yet. You are forming it, and pray be advised and be merry; the solid is your safest guide; physiognomy and manners will give you more of a girl's character than all the divings you can do. She is a charming young woman, only she is one of that sort."

"Of what sort?" Sir Willoughby asked, impatiently.

"Rogues in porcelain."

"I am persuaded I shall never comprehend it."

"I cannot help you one bit further."

"The word rogue!"

"It was dainty rogue."

"Brittle, would you say?"

"I am quite unable to say."

"An innocent naughtiness?"

"Prettily moulded in a delicate substance."

"You are thinking of some piece of Dresden you suppose her to resemble."

Page 2665

“I dare say.”

“Artificial?”

“You would not have her natural?”

“I am heartily satisfied with her from head to foot, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart.”

“Nothing could be better. And sometimes she will lead, and generally you will lead, and everything will go well, my dear Sir Willoughby.”

Like all rapid phrasers, Mrs. Mountstuart detested the analysis of her sentence. It had an outline in vagueness, and was flung out to be apprehended, not dissected. Her directions for the reading of Miss Middleton’s character were the same that she practised in reading Sir Willoughby’s, whose physiognomy and manners bespoke him what she presumed him to be, a splendidly proud gentleman, with good reason.

Mrs. Mountstuart’s advice was wiser than her procedure, for she stopped short where he declined to begin. He dived below the surface without studying that index-page. He had won Miss Middleton’s hand; he believed he had captured her heart; but he was not so certain of his possession of her soul, and he went after it. Our enamoured gentleman had therefore no tally of Nature’s writing above to set beside his discoveries in the deeps. Now it is a dangerous accompaniment of this habit of driving, that where we do not light on the discoveries we anticipate, we fall to work sowing and planting; which becomes a disturbance of the gentle bosom. Miss Middleton’s features were legible as to the mainspring of her character. He could have seen that she had a spirit with a natural love of liberty, and required the next thing to liberty, spaciousness, if she was to own allegiance. Those features, unhappily, instead of serving for an introduction to the within, were treated as the mirror of himself. They were indeed of an amiable sweetness to tempt an accepted lover to angle for the first person in the second. But he had made the discovery that their minds differed on one or two points, and a difference of view in his bride was obnoxious to his repose. He struck at it recurringly to show her error under various aspects. He desired to shape her character to the feminine of his own, and betrayed the surprise of a slight disappointment at her advocacy of her ideas. She said immediately: “It is not too late, Willoughby,” and wounded him, for he wanted her simply to be material in his hands for him to mould her; he had no other thought. He lectured her on the theme of the infinity of love. How was it not too late? They were plighted; they were one eternally; they could not be parted. She listened gravely, conceiving the infinity as a narrow dwelling where a voice droned and ceased not. However, she listened. She became an attentive listener.

CHAPTER VI

HIS COURTSHIP

Page 2666

The world was the principal topic of dissension between these lovers. His opinion of the world affected her like a creature threatened with a deprivation of air. He explained to his darling that lovers of necessity do loathe the world. They live in the world, they accept its benefits, and assist it as well as they can. In their hearts they must despise it, shut it out, that their love for one another may pour in a clear channel, and with all the force they have. They cannot enjoy the sense of security for their love unless they fence away the world. It is, you will allow, gross; it is a beast. Formally we thank it for the good we get of it; only we two have an inner temple where the worship we conduct is actually, if you would but see it, an excommunication of the world. We abhor that beast to adore that divinity. This gives us our oneness, our isolation, our happiness. This is to love with the soul. Do you see, darling?

She shook her head; she could not see it. She would admit none of the notorious errors, of the world; its backbiting, selfishness, coarseness, intrusiveness, infectiousness. She was young. She might, Willoughby thought, have let herself be led; she was not docile. She must be up in arms as a champion of the world; and one saw she was hugging her dream of a romantic world, nothing else. She spoilt the secret bower-song he delighted to tell over to her. And how, Powers of Love! is love-making to be pursued if we may not kick the world out of our bower and wash our hands of it? Love that does not spurn the world when lovers curtain themselves is a love—is it not so?—that seems to the unwhipped, scoffing world to go slinking into basiation's obscurity, instead of on a glorious march behind the screen. Our hero had a strong sentiment as to the policy of scorning the world for the sake of defending his personal pride and (to his honour, be it said) his lady's delicacy.

The act of seeming put them both above the world, said retro Sathanas! So much, as a piece of tactics: he was highly civilized: in the second instance, he knew it to be the world which must furnish the dry sticks for the bonfire of a woman's worship. He knew, too, that he was prescribing poetry to his betrothed, practicable poetry. She had a liking for poetry, and sometimes quoted the stuff in defiance of his pursed mouth and pained murmur: "I am no poet;" but his poetry of the enclosed and fortified bower, without nonsensical rhymes to catch the ears of women, appeared incomprehensible to her, if not adverse. She would not burn the world for him; she would not, though a purer poetry is little imaginable, reduce herself to ashes, or incense, or essence, in honour of him, and so, by love's transmutation, literally be the man she was to marry. She preferred to be herself, with the egoism of women. She said it: she said: "I must be myself to be of any value to you, Willoughby." He was indefatigable in his lectures on the aesthetics of love. Frequently, for an indemnification to her (he had no desire that she should be a loser by ceasing to admire the world), he dwelt on his own youthful ideas; and his original fancies about the world were presented to her as a substitute for the theme.

Page 2667

Miss Middleton bore it well, for she was sure that he meant well. Bearing so well what was distasteful to her, she became less well able to bear what she had merely noted in observation before; his view of scholarship; his manner toward Mr. Vernon Whitford, of whom her father spoke warmly; the rumour concerning his treatment of a Miss Dale. And the country tale of Constantia Durham sang itself to her in a new key. He had no contempt for the world's praises. Mr. Whitford wrote the letters to the county paper which gained him applause at various great houses, and he accepted it, and betrayed a tingling fright lest he should be the victim of a sneer of the world he contemned. Recollecting his remarks, her mind was afflicted by the "something illogical" in him that we readily discover when our natures are no longer running free, and then at once we yearn for a disputation. She resolved that she would one day, one distant day, provoke it—upon what? The special point eluded her. The world is too huge a client, and too pervious, too spotty, for a girl to defend against a man. That "something illogical" had stirred her feelings more than her intellect to revolt. She could not constitute herself the advocate of Mr. Whitford. Still she marked the disputation for an event to come.

Meditating on it, she fell to picturing Sir Willoughby's face at the first accents of his bride's decided disagreement with him. The picture once conjured up would not be laid. He was handsome; so correctly handsome, that a slight unfriendly touch precipitated him into caricature. His habitual air of happy pride, of indignant contentment rather, could easily be overdone. Surprise, when he threw emphasis on it, stretched him with the tall eyebrows of a mask—limitless under the spell of caricature; and in time, whenever she was not pleased by her thoughts, she had that, and not his likeness, for the vision of him. And it was unjust, contrary to her deeper feelings; she rebuked herself, and as much as her naughty spirit permitted, she tried to look on him as the world did; an effort inducing reflections upon the blessings of ignorance. She seemed to herself beset by a circle of imps, hardly responsible for her thoughts.

He outshone Mr. Whitford in his behaviour to young Crossjay. She had seen him with the boy, and he was amused, indulgent, almost frolicsome, in contradistinction to Mr. Whitford's tutorly sharpness. He had the English father's tone of a liberal allowance for boys' tastes and pranks, and he ministered to the partiality of the genus for pocket-money. He did not play the schoolmaster, like bookworms who get poor little lads in their grasp.

Page 2668

Mr. Whitford avoided her very much. He came to Upton Park on a visit to her father, and she was not particularly sorry that she saw him only at table. He treated her by fits to a level scrutiny of deep-set eyes unpleasantly penetrating. She had liked his eyes. They became unbearable; they dwelt in the memory as if they had left a phosphorescent line. She had been taken by playmate boys in her infancy to peep into hedge-leaves, where the mother-bird brooded on the nest; and the eyes of the bird in that marvellous dark thickset home, had sent her away with worlds of fancy. Mr. Whitford's gaze revived her susceptibility, but not the old happy wondering. She was glad of his absence, after a certain hour that she passed with Willoughby, a wretched hour to remember. Mr. Whitford had left, and Willoughby came, bringing bad news of his mother's health. Lady Patterne was fast failing. Her son spoke of the loss she would be to him; he spoke of the dreadfulness of death. He alluded to his own death to come carelessly, with a philosophical air.

"All of us must go! our time is short."

"Very," she assented.

It sounded like want of feeling.

"If you lose me, Clara!"

"But you are strong, Willoughby."

"I may be cut off to-morrow."

"Do not talk in such a manner."

"It is as well that it should be faced."

"I cannot see what purpose it serves."

"Should you lose me, my love!"

"Willoughby!"

"Oh, the bitter pang of leaving you!"

"Dear Willoughby, you are distressed; your mother may recover; let us hope she will; I will help to nurse her; I have offered, you know; I am ready, most anxious. I believe I am a good nurse."

"It is this belief—that one does not die with death!"

"That is our comfort."

“When we love?”

“Does it not promise that we meet again?”

“To walk the world and see you perhaps—with another!”

“See me?—Where? Here?”

“Wedded . . . to another. You! my bride; whom I call mine; and you are! You would be still—in that horror! But all things are possible; women are women; they swim in infidelity, from wave to wave! I know them.”

“Willoughby, do not torment yourself and me, I beg you.”

He meditated profoundly, and asked her: “Could you be such a saint among women?”

“I think I am a more than usually childish girl.”

“Not to forget me?”

“Oh! no.”

“Still to be mine?”

“I am yours.”

“To plight yourself?”

“It is done.”

“Be mine beyond death?”

“Married is married, I think.”

Page 2669

“Clara! to dedicate your life to our love! Never one touch; not one whisper! not a thought, not a dream! Could you—it agonizes me to imagine . . . be inviolate? mine above?—mine before all men, though I am gone:—true to my dust? Tell me. Give me that assurance. True to my name!—Oh, I hear them. ‘His relict!’ Buzzings about Lady Patterne. ‘The widow.’ If you knew their talk of widows! Shut your ears, my angel! But if she holds them off and keeps her path, they are forced to respect her. The dead husband is not the dishonoured wretch they fancied him, because he was out of their way. He lives in the heart of his wife. Clara! my Clara! as I live in yours, whether here or away; whether you are a wife or widow, there is no distinction for love—I am your husband—say it—eternally. I must have peace; I cannot endure the pain. Depressed, yes; I have cause to be. But it has haunted me ever since we joined hands. To have you—to lose you!”

“Is it not possible that I may be the first to die?” said Miss Middleton.

“And lose you, with the thought that you, lovely as you are, and the dogs of the world barking round you, might . . . Is it any wonder that I have my feeling for the world? This hand!—the thought is horrible. You would be surrounded; men are brutes; the scent of unfaithfulness excites them, overjoys them. And I helpless! The thought is maddening. I see a ring of monkeys grinning. There is your beauty, and man’s delight in desecrating. You would be worried night and day to quit my name, to . . . I feel the blow now. You would have no rest for them, nothing to cling to without your oath.”

“An oath!” said Miss Middleton.

“It is no delusion, my love, when I tell you that with this thought upon me I see a ring of monkey faces grinning at me; they haunt me. But you do swear it! Once, and I will never trouble you on the subject again. My weakness! if you like. You will learn that it is love, a man’s love, stronger than death.”

“An oath?” she said, and moved her lips to recall what she might have said and forgotten. “To what? what oath?”

“That you will be true to me dead as well as living! Whisper it.”

“Willoughby, I shall be true to my vows at the altar.”

“To me! me!”

“It will be to you.”

“To my soul. No heaven can be for me—I see none, only torture, unless I have your word, Clara. I trust it. I will trust it implicitly. My confidence in you is absolute.”

“Then you need not be troubled.”

“It is for you, my love; that you may be armed and strong when I am not by to protect you.”

“Our views of the world are opposed, Willoughby.”

“Consent; gratify me; swear it. Say: ‘Beyond death.’ Whisper it. I ask for nothing more. Women think the husband’s grave breaks the bond, cuts the tie, sets them loose. They wed the flesh—pah! What I call on you for is nobility; the transcendent nobility of faithfulness beyond death. ‘His widow!’ let them say; a saint in widowhood.”

Page 2670

“My vows at the altar must suffice.”

“You will not? Clara!”

“I am plighted to you.”

“Not a word?—a simple promise? But you love me?”

“I have given you the best proof of it that I can.”

“Consider how utterly I place confidence in you.”

“I hope it is well placed.”

“I could kneel to you, to worship you, if you would, Clara!”

“Kneel to Heaven, not to me, Willoughby. I am—I wish I were able to tell what I am. I may be inconstant; I do not know myself. Think; question yourself whether I am really the person you should marry. Your wife should have great qualities of mind and soul. I will consent to hear that I do not possess them, and abide by the verdict.”

“You do; you do possess them!” Willoughby cried. “When you know better what the world is, you will understand my anxiety. Alive, I am strong to shield you from it; dead, helpless—that is all. You would be clad in mail, steel-proof, inviolable, if you would . . . But try to enter into my mind; think with me, feel with me. When you have once comprehended the intensity of the love of a man like me, you will not require asking. It is the difference of the elect and the vulgar; of the ideal of love from the coupling of the herds. We will let it drop. At least, I have your hand. As long as I live I have your hand. Ought I not to be satisfied? I am; only I see further than most men, and feel more deeply. And now I must ride to my mother’s bedside. She dies Lady Patterne! It might have been that she . . . But she is a woman of women! With a father-in-law! Just heaven! Could I have stood by her then with the same feelings of reverence? A very little, my love, and everything gained for us by civilization crumbles; we fall back to the first mortar-bowl we were bruised and stirred in. My thoughts, when I take my stand to watch by her, come to this conclusion, that, especially in women, distinction is the thing to be aimed at. Otherwise we are a weltering human mass. Women must teach us to venerate them, or we may as well be bleating and barking and bellowing. So, now enough. You have but to think a little. I must be off. It may have happened during my absence. I will write. I shall hear from you? Come and see me mount Black Norman. My respects to your father. I have no time to pay them in person. One!”

He took the one—love’s mystical number—from which commonly spring multitudes; but, on the present occasion, it was a single one, and cold. She watched him riding away on his gallant horse, as handsome a cavalier as the world could show, and the contrast of his recent language and his fine figure was a riddle that froze her blood. Speech so

foreign to her ears, unnatural in tone, unmanlike even for a lover (who is allowed a softer dialect), set her vainly sounding for the source and drift of it. She was glad of not having to encounter eyes like Mr. Vernon Whitford's.

Page 2671

On behalf of Sir Willoughby, it is to be said that his mother, without infringing on the degree of respect for his decisions and sentiments exacted by him, had talked to him of Miss Middleton, suggesting a volatility of temperament in the young lady that struck him as consentaneous with Mrs Mountstuart's "rogue in porcelain", and alarmed him as the independent observations of two world-wise women. Nor was it incumbent upon him personally to credit the volatility in order, as far as he could, to effect the soul-insurance of his bride, that he might hold the security of the policy. The desire for it was in him; his mother had merely tolled a warning bell that he had put in motion before. Clara was not a Constantia. But she was a woman, and he had been deceived by women, as a man fostering his high ideal of them will surely be. The strain he adopted was quite natural to his passion and his theme. The language of the primitive sentiments of men is of the same expression at all times, minus the primitive colours when a modern gentleman addresses his lady.

Lady Patterne died in the winter season of the new year. In April Dr Middleton had to quit Upton Park, and he had not found a place of residence, nor did he quite know what to do with himself in the prospect of his daughter's marriage and desertion of him. Sir Willoughby proposed to find him a house within a circuit of the neighbourhood of Patterne. Moreover, he invited the Rev. Doctor and his daughter to come to Patterne from Upton for a month, and make acquaintance with his aunts, the ladies Eleanor and Isabel Patterne, so that it might not be so strange to Clara to have them as her housemates after her marriage. Dr. Middleton omitted to consult his daughter before accepting the invitation, and it appeared, when he did speak to her, that it should have been done. But she said, mildly, "Very well, papa."

Sir Willoughby had to visit the metropolis and an estate in another county, whence he wrote to his betrothed daily. He returned to Patterne in time to arrange for the welcome of his guests; too late, however, to ride over to them; and, meanwhile, during his absence, Miss Middleton had bethought herself that she ought to have given her last days of freedom to her friends. After the weeks to be passed at Patterne, very few weeks were left to her, and she had a wish to run to Switzerland or Tyrol and see the Alps; a quaint idea, her father thought. She repeated it seriously, and Dr. Middleton perceived a feminine shuttle of indecision at work in her head, frightful to him, considering that they signified hesitation between the excellent library and capital wine-cellar of Patterne Hall, together with the society of that promising young scholar, Mr. Vernon Whitford, on the one side, and a career of hotels—equivalent to being rammed into monster artillery with a crowd every night, and shot off on a day's journey through space every morning—on the other.

"You will have your travelling and your Alps after the ceremony," he said.

Page 2672

“I think I would rather stay at home,” said she.

Dr Middleton rejoined: “I would.”

“But I am not married yet papa.”

“As good, my dear.”

“A little change of scene, I thought . . .”

“We have accepted Willoughby’s invitation. And he helps me to a house near you.”

“You wish to be near me, papa?”

“Proximate—at a remove: communicable.”

“Why should we separate?”

“For the reason, my dear, that you exchange a father for a husband.”

“If I do not want to exchange?”

“To purchase, you must pay, my child. Husbands are not given for nothing.”

“No. But I should have you, papa!”

“Should?”

“They have not yet parted us, dear papa.”

“What does that mean?” he asked, fussily. He was in a gentle stew already, apprehensive of a disturbance of the serenity precious to scholars by postponements of the ceremony and a prolongation of a father’s worries.

“Oh, the common meaning, papa,” she said, seeing how it was with him.

“Ah!” said he, nodding and blinking gradually back to a state of composure, glad to be appeased on any terms; for mutability is but another name for the sex, and it is the enemy of the scholar.

She suggested that two weeks of Patterne would offer plenty of time to inspect the empty houses of the district, and should be sufficient, considering the claims of friends, and the necessity of going the round of London shops.

“Two or three weeks,” he agreed, hurriedly, by way of compromise with that fearful prospect.

CHAPTER VII

THE BETROTHED

During the drive from Upton to Patterne, Miss Middleton hoped, she partly believed, that there was to be a change in Sir Willoughby's manner of courtship. He had been so different a wooer. She remembered with some half-conscious desperation of fervour what she had thought of him at his first approaches, and in accepting him. Had she seen him with the eyes of the world, thinking they were her own? That look of his, the look of "indignant contentment", had then been a most noble conquering look, splendid as a general's plume at the gallop. It could not have altered. Was it that her eyes had altered?

The spirit of those days rose up within her to reproach, her and whisper of their renewal: she remembered her rosy dreams and the image she had of him, her throbbing pride in him, her choking richness of happiness: and also her vain attempting to be very humble, usually ending in a carol, quaint to think of, not without charm, but quaint, puzzling.

Page 2673

Now men whose incomes have been restricted to the extent that they must live on their capital, soon grow relieved of the forethoughtful anguish wasting them by the hilarious comforts of the lap upon which they have sunk back, insomuch that they are apt to solace themselves for their intolerable anticipations of famine in the household by giving loose to one fit or more of reckless lavishness. Lovers in like manner live on their capital from failure of income: they, too, for the sake of stifling apprehension and piping to the present hour, are lavish of their stock, so as rapidly to attenuate it: they have their fits of intoxication in view of coming famine: they force memory into play, love retrospectively, enter the old house of the past and ravage the larder, and would gladly, even resolutely, continue in illusion if it were possible for the broadest honey-store of reminiscences to hold out for a length of time against a mortal appetite: which in good sooth stands on the alternative of a consumption of the hive or of the creature it is for nourishing. Here do lovers show that they are perishable. More than the poor clay world they need fresh supplies, right wholesome juices; as it were, life in the burst of the bud, fruits yet on the tree, rather than potted provender. The latter is excellent for by-and-by, when there will be a vast deal more to remember, and appetite shall have but one tooth remaining. Should their minds perchance have been saturated by their first impressions and have retained them, loving by the accountable light of reason, they may have fair harvests, as in the early time; but that case is rare. In other words, love is an affair of two, and is only for two that can be as quick, as constant in intercommunication as are sun and earth, through the cloud or face to face. They take their breath of life from one another in signs of affection, proofs of faithfulness, incentives to admiration. Thus it is with men and women in love's good season. But a solitary soul dragging a log must make the log a God to rejoice in the burden. That is not love.

Clara was the least fitted of all women to drag a log. Few girls would be so rapid in exhausting capital. She was feminine indeed, but she wanted comradeship, a living and frank exchange of the best in both, with the deeper feelings untroubled. To be fixed at the mouth of a mine, and to have to descend it daily, and not to discover great opulence below; on the contrary, to be chilled in subterranean sunlessness, without any substantial quality that she could grasp, only the mystery of the inefficient tallow-light in those caverns of the complacent-talking man: this appeared to her too extreme a probation for two or three weeks. How of a lifetime of it!

She was compelled by her nature to hope, expect and believe that Sir Willoughby would again be the man she had known when she accepted him. Very singularly, to show her simple spirit at the time, she was unaware of any physical coldness to him; she knew of nothing but her mind at work, objecting to this and that, desiring changes. She did not dream of being on the giddy ridge of the passive or negative sentiment of love, where one step to the wrong side precipitates us into the state of repulsion.

Page 2674

Her eyes were lively at their meeting—so were his. She liked to see him on the steps, with young Crossjay under his arm. Sir Willoughby told her in his pleasantest humour of the boy's having got into the laboratory that morning to escape his task-master, and blown out the windows. She administered a chiding to the delinquent in the same spirit, while Sir Willoughby led her on his arm across the threshold, whispering: "Soon for good!" In reply to the whisper, she begged for more of the story of young Crossjay. "Come into the laboratory," said he, a little less laughingly than softly; and Clara begged her father to come and see young Crossjay's latest pranks. Sir Willoughby whispered to her of the length of their separation, and his joy to welcome her to the house where she would reign as mistress very won. He numbered the weeks. He whispered: "Come." In the hurry of the moment she did not examine a lightning terror that shot through her. It passed, and was no more than the shadow which bends the summer grasses, leaving a ruffle of her ideas, in wonder of her having feared herself for something. Her father was with them. She and Willoughby were not yet alone.

Young Crossjay had not accomplished so fine a piece of destruction as Sir Willoughby's humour proclaimed of him. He had connected a battery with a train of gunpowder, shattering a window-frame and unsettling some bricks. Dr. Middleton asked if the youth was excluded from the library, and rejoiced to hear that it was a sealed door to him. Thither they went. Vernon Whitford was away on one of his long walks.

"There, papa, you see he is not so very faithful to you," said Clara.

Dr Middleton stood frowning over *Ms* notes on the table, in Vernon's handwriting. He flung up the hair from his forehead and dropped into a seat to inspect them closely. He was now immoveable. Clara was obliged to leave him there. She was led to think that Willoughby had drawn them to the library with the design to be rid of her protector, and she began to fear him. She proposed to pay her respects to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. They were not seen, and a footman reported in the drawing-room that they were out driving. She grasped young Crossjay's hand. Sir Willoughby dispatched him to Mrs. Montague, the housekeeper, for a tea of cakes and jam.

"Off!" he said, and the boy had to run.

Clara saw herself without a shield.

"And the garden!" she cried. "I love the garden; I must go and see what flowers are up with you. In spring I care most for wild flowers, and if you will show me daffodils and crocuses and anemones . . ."

"My dearest Clara! my bride!" said he.

"Because they are vulgar flowers?" she asked him, artlessly, to account for his detaining her.

Why would he not wait to deserve her!—no, not deserve—to reconcile her with her real position; not reconcile, but to repair the image of him in her mind, before he claimed his apparent right!

Page 2675

He did not wait. He pressed her to his bosom.

“You are mine, my Clara—utterly mine; every thought, every feeling. We are one: the world may do its worst. I have been longing for you, looking forward. You save me from a thousand vexations. One is perpetually crossed. That is all outside us. We two! With you I am secure! Soon! I could not tell you whether the world’s alive or dead. My dearest!”

She came out of it with the sensations of the frightened child that has had its dip in sea-water, sharpened to think that after all it was not so severe a trial. Such was her idea; and she said to herself immediately: What am I that I should complain? Two minutes earlier she would not have thought it; but humiliated pride falls lower than humbleness.

She did not blame him; she fell in her own esteem; less because she was the betrothed Clara Middleton, which was now palpable as a shot in the breast of a bird, than that she was a captured woman, of whom it is absolutely expected that she must submit, and when she would rather be gazing at flowers. Clara had shame of her sex. They cannot take a step without becoming bondwomen: into what a slavery! For herself, her trial was over, she thought. As for herself, she merely complained of a prematureness and crudity best unanalyzed. In truth, she could hardly be said to complain. She did but criticize him and wonder that a man was unable to perceive, or was not arrested by perceiving, unwillingness, discordance, dull compliance; the bondwoman’s due instead of the bride’s consent. Oh, sharp distinction, as between two spheres!

She meted him justice; she admitted that he had spoken in a lover-like tone. Had it not been for the iteration of “the world”, she would not have objected critically to his words, though they were words of downright appropriation. He had the right to use them, since she was to be married to him. But if he had only waited before playing the privileged lover!

Sir Willoughby was enraptured with her. Even so purely coldly, statue-like, Dian-like, would he have prescribed his bride’s reception of his caress. The suffusion of crimson coming over her subsequently, showing her divinely feminine in reflective bashfulness, agreed with his highest definitions of female character.

“Let me conduct you to the garden, my love,” he said.

She replied: “I think I would rather go to my room.”

“I will send you a wild-flower posy.”

“Flowers, no; I do not like them to be gathered.”

“I will wait for you on the lawn.”

“My head is rather heavy.”

His deep concern and tenderness brought him close.

She assured him sparklingly that she was well. She was ready to accompany him to the garden and stroll over the park.

“Headache it is not,” she added.

But she had to pay the fee for inviting a solicitous accepted gentleman’s proximity.

Page 2676

This time she blamed herself and him, and the world he abused, and destiny into the bargain. And she cared less about the probation; but she craved for liberty. With a frigidity that astonished her, she marvelled at the act of kissing, and at the obligation it forced upon an inanimate person to be an accomplice. Why was she not free? By what strange right was it that she was treated as a possession?

“I will try to walk off the heaviness,” she said.

“My own girl must not fatigue herself.”

“Oh, no; I shall not.”

“Sit with me. Your Willoughby is your devoted attendant.”

“I have a desire for the air.”

“Then we will walk out.”

She was horrified to think how far she had drawn away from him, and now placed her hand on his arm to appease her self-accusations and propitiate duty. He spoke as she had wished, his manner was what she had wished; she was his bride, almost his wife; her conduct was a kind of madness; she could not understand it.

Good sense and duty counselled her to control her wayward spirit.

He fondled her hand, and to that she grew accustomed; her hand was at a distance. And what is a hand? Leaving it where it was, she treated it as a link between herself and dutiful goodness. Two months hence she was a bondwoman for life! She regretted that she had not gone to her room to strengthen herself with a review of her situation, and meet him thoroughly resigned to her fate. She fancied she would have come down to him amicably. It was his present respectfulness and easy conversation that tricked her burning nerves with the fancy. Five weeks of perfect liberty in the mountains, she thought, would have prepared her for the days of bells. All that she required was a separation offering new scenes, where she might reflect undisturbed, feel clear again.

He led her about the flower-beds; too much as if he were giving a convalescent an airing. She chafed at it, and pricked herself with remorse. In contrition she expatiated on the beauty of the garden.

“All is yours, my Clara.”

An oppressive load it seemed to her! She passively yielded to the man in his form of attentive courtier; his mansion, estate, and wealth overwhelmed her. They suggested the price to be paid. Yet she recollected that on her last departure through the park she had been proud of the rolling green and spreading trees. Poison of some sort must be

operating in her. She had not come to him to-day with this feeling of sullen antagonism; she had caught it here.

“You have been well, my Clara?”

“Quite.”

“Not a hint of illness?”

“None.”

“My bride must have her health if all the doctors in the kingdom die for it! My darling!”

“And tell me: the dogs?”

“Dogs and horses are in very good condition.”

“I am glad. Do you know, I love those ancient French chateaux and farms in one, where salon windows look on poultry-yard and stalls. I like that homeliness with beasts and peasants.”

Page 2677

He bowed indulgently.

“I am afraid we can’t do it for you in England, my Clara.”

“No.”

“And I like the farm,” said he. “But I think our drawing-rooms have a better atmosphere off the garden. As to our peasantry, we cannot, I apprehend, modify our class demarcations without risk of disintegrating the social structure.”

“Perhaps. I proposed nothing.”

“My love, I would entreat you to propose if I were convinced that I could obey.”

“You are very good.”

“I find my merit nowhere but in your satisfaction.”

Although she was not thirsting for dulcet sayings, the peacefulness of other than invitations to the exposition of his mysteries and of their isolation in oneness, inspired her with such calm that she beat about in her brain, as if it were in the brain, for the specific injury he had committed. Sweeping from sensation to sensation, the young, whom sensations impel and distract, can rarely date their disturbance from a particular one; unless it be some great villain injury that has been done; and Clara had not felt an individual shame in his caress; the shame of her sex was but a passing protest, that left no stamp. So she conceived she had been behaving cruelly, and said, “Willoughby”; because she was aware of the omission of his name in her previous remarks.

His whole attention was given to her.

She had to invent the sequel. “I was going to beg you, Willoughby, do not seek to spoil me. You compliment me. Compliments are not suited to me. You think too highly of me. It is nearly as bad as to be slighted. I am . . . I am a . . .” But she could not follow his example; even as far as she had gone, her prim little sketch of herself, set beside her real, ugly, earnest feelings, rang of a mincing simplicity, and was a step in falseness. How could she display what she was?

“Do I not know you?” he said.

The melodious bass notes, expressive of conviction on that point, signified as well as the words that no answer was the right answer. She could not dissent without turning his music to discord, his complacency to amazement. She held her tongue, knowing that he did not know her, and speculating on the division made bare by their degrees of the knowledge, a deep cleft.

He alluded to friends in her neighbourhood and his own. The bridesmaids were mentioned.

“Miss Dale, you will hear from my aunt Eleanor, declines, on the plea of indifferent health. She is rather a morbid person, with all her really estimable qualities. It will do no harm to have none but young ladies of your own age; a bouquet of young buds: though one blowing flower among them . . . However, she has decided. My principal annoyance has been Vernon’s refusal to act as my best man.”

“Mr. Whitford refuses?”

“He half refuses. I do not take no from him. His pretext is a dislike to the ceremony.”

Page 2678

“I share it with him.”

“I sympathize with you. If we might say the words and pass from sight! There is a way of cutting off the world: I have it at times completely: I lose it again, as if it were a cabalistic phrase one had to utter. But with you! You give it me for good. It will be for ever, eternally, my Clara. Nothing can harm, nothing touch us; we are one another’s. Let the world fight it out; we have nothing to do with it.”

“If Mr. Whitford should persist in refusing?”

“So entirely one, that there never can be question of external influences. I am, we will say, riding home from the hunt: I see you awaiting me: I read your heart as though you were beside me. And I know that I am coming to the one who reads mine! You have me, you have me like an open book, you, and only you!”

“I am to be always at home?” Clara said, unheeded, and relieved by his not hearing.

“Have you realized it?—that we are invulnerable! The world cannot hurt us: it cannot touch us. Felicity is ours, and we are impervious in the enjoyment of it. Something divine! surely something divine on earth? Clara!—being to one another that between which the world can never interpose! What I do is right: what you do is right. Perfect to one another! Each new day we rise to study and delight in new secrets. Away with the crowd! We have not even to say it; we are in an atmosphere where the world cannot breathe.”

“Oh, the world!” Clara partly carolled on a sigh that sunk deep.

Hearing him talk as one exulting on the mountain-top, when she knew him to be in the abyss, was very strange, provocative of scorn.

“My letters?” he said, incitingly.

“I read them.”

“Circumstances have imposed a long courtship on us, my Clara; and I, perhaps lamenting the laws of decorum—I have done so!—still felt the benefit of the gradual initiation. It is not good for women to be surprised by a sudden revelation of man’s character. We also have things to learn—there is matter for learning everywhere. Some day you will tell me the difference of what you think of me now, from what you thought when we first . . . ?”

An impulse of double-minded acquiescence caused Clara to stammer as on a sob.

“I—I daresay I shall.”

She added, “If it is necessary.”

Then she cried out: “Why do you attack the world? You always make me pity it.”

He smiled at her youthfulness. “I have passed through that stage. It leads to my sentiment. Pity it, by all means.”

“No,” said she, “but pity it, side with it, not consider it so bad. The world has faults; glaciers have crevices, mountains have chasms; but is not the effect of the whole sublime? Not to admire the mountain and the glacier because they can be cruel, seems to me . . . And the world is beautiful.”

“The world of nature, yes. The world of men?”

Page 2679

“Yes.”

“My love, I suspect you to be thinking of the world of ballrooms.”

“I am thinking of the world that contains real and great generosity, true heroism. We see it round us.”

“We read of it. The world of the romance writer!”

“No: the living world. I am sure it is our duty to love it. I am sure we weaken ourselves if we do not. If I did not, I should be looking on mist, hearing a perpetual boom instead of music. I remember hearing Mr. Whitford say that cynicism is intellectual dandyism without the coxcomb’s feathers; and it seems to me that cynics are only happy in making the world as barren to others as they have made it for themselves.”

“Old Vernon!” ejaculated Sir Willoughby, with a countenance rather uneasy, as if it had been flicked with a glove. “He strings his phrases by the dozen.”

“Papa contradicts that, and says he is very clever and very simple.”

“As to cynics, my dear Clara, oh, certainly, certainly: you are right. They are laughable, contemptible. But understand me. I mean, we cannot feel, or if we feel we cannot so intensely feel, our oneness, except by dividing ourselves from the world.”

“Is it an art?”

“If you like. It is our poetry! But does not love shun the world? Two that love must have their sustenance in isolation.”

“No: they will be eating themselves up.”

“The purer the beauty, the more it will be out of the world.”

“But not opposed.”

“Put it in this way,” Willoughby condescended. “Has experience the same opinion of the world as ignorance?”

“It should have more charity.”

“Does virtue feel at home in the world?”

“Where it should be an example, to my idea.”

“Is the world agreeable to holiness?”

“Then, are you in favour of monasteries?”

He poured a little runlet of half laughter over her head, of the sound assumed by genial compassion.

It is irritating to hear that when we imagine we have spoken to the point.

“Now in my letters, Clara . . .”

“I have no memory, Willoughby!”

“You will, however, have observed that I am not completely myself in my letters . . .”

“In your letters to men you may be.”

The remark threw a pause across his thoughts. He was of a sensitiveness terribly tender. A single stroke on it reverberated swellingly within the man, and most, and infuriately searching, at the spots where he had been wounded, especially where he feared the world might have guessed the wound. Did she imply that he had no hand for love-letters? Was it her meaning that women would not have much taste for his epistolary correspondence? She had spoken in the plural, with an accent on “men”. Had she heard of Constantia? Had she formed her own judgement about the creature? The supernatural sensitiveness of Sir Willoughby shrieked a peal of affirmatives. He had often meditated on the moral obligation of his unfolding to Clara the whole truth of his conduct to Constantia; for whom, as for other suicides, there were excuses. He at least was bound to supply them. She had behaved badly; but had he not given her some cause? If so, manliness was bound to confess it.

Page 2680

Supposing Clara heard the world's version first! Men whose pride is their backbone suffer convulsions where other men are barely aware of a shock, and Sir Willoughby was taken with galvanic jumpings of the spirit within him, at the idea of the world whispering to Clara that he had been jilted.

"My letters to men, you say, my love?"

"Your letters of business."

"Completely myself in my letters of business?" He stared indeed.

She relaxed the tension of his figure by remarking: "You are able to express yourself to men as your meaning dictates. In writing to . . . to us it is, I suppose, more difficult."

"True, my love. I will not exactly say difficult. I can acknowledge no difficulty. Language, I should say, is not fitted to express emotion. Passion rejects it."

"For dumb-show and pantomime?"

"No; but the writing of it coldly."

"Ah, coldly!"

"My letters disappoint you?"

"I have not implied that they do."

"My feelings, dearest, are too strong for transcription. I feel, pen in hand, like the mythological Titan at war with Jove, strong enough to hurl mountains, and finding nothing but pebbles. The simile is a good one. You must not judge of me by my letters."

"I do not; I like them," said Clara.

She blushed, eyed him hurriedly, and seeing him complacent, resumed, "I prefer the pebble to the mountain; but if you read poetry you would not think human speech incapable of. . ."

"My love, I detest artifice. Poetry is a profession."

"Our poets would prove to you . . ."

"As I have often observed, Clara, I am no poet."

"I have not accused you, Willoughby."

“No poet, and with no wish to be a poet. Were I one, my life would supply material, I can assure you, my love. My conscience is not entirely at rest. Perhaps the heaviest matter troubling it is that in which I was least wilfully guilty. You have heard of a Miss Durham?”

“I have heard—yes—of her.”

“She may be happy. I trust she is. If she is not, I cannot escape some blame. An instance of the difference between myself and the world, now. The world charges it upon her. I have interceded to exonerate her.”

“That was generous, Willoughby.”

“Stay. I fear I was the primary offender. But I, Clara, I, under a sense of honour, acting under a sense of honour, would have carried my engagement through.”

“What had you done?”

“The story is long, dating from an early day, in the ’downy antiquity of my youth’, as Vernon says.”

“Mr. Whitford says that?”

“One of old Vernon’s odd sayings. It’s a story of an early fascination.”

“Papa tells me Mr. Whitford speaks at times with wise humour.”

“Family considerations—the lady’s health among other things; her position in the calculations of relatives—intervened. Still there was the fascination. I have to own it. Grounds for feminine jealousy.”

Page 2681

“Is it at an end?”

“Now? with you? my darling Clara! indeed at an end, or could I have opened my inmost heart to you! Could I have spoken of myself so unreservedly that in part you know me as I know myself! Oh, but would it have been possible to enclose you with myself in that intimate union? so secret, unassailable!”

“You did not speak to her as you speak to me?”

“In no degree.”

“What could have! . . .” Clara checked the murmured exclamation.

Sir Willoughby’s expoundings on his latest of texts would have poured forth, had not a footman stepped across the lawn to inform him that his builder was in the laboratory and requested permission to consult with him.

Clara’s plea of a horror of the talk of bricks and joists excused her from accompanying him. He had hardly been satisfied by her manner, he knew not why. He left her, convinced that he must do and say more to reach down to her female intelligence.

She saw young Crossjay, springing with pots of jam in him, join his patron at a bound, and taking a lift of arms, fly aloft, clapping heels. Her reflections were confused. Sir Willoughby was admirable with the lad. “Is he two men?” she thought; and the thought ensued, “Am I unjust?” She headed a run with young Crossjay to divert her mind.

CHAPTER VIII

A RUN WITH THE TRUANT; A WALK WITH THE MASTER

The sight of Miss Middleton running inflamed young Crossjay with the passion of the game of hare and hounds. He shouted a view-halloo, and flung up his legs. She was fleet; she ran as though a hundred little feet were bearing her onward smooth as water over the lawn and the sweeps of grass of the park, so swiftly did the hidden pair multiply one another to speed her. So sweet was she in her flowing pace, that the boy, as became his age, translated admiration into a dogged frenzy of pursuit, and continued pounding along, when far outstripped, determined to run her down or die. Suddenly her flight wound to an end in a dozen twittering steps, and she sank. Young Crossjay attained her, with just breath enough to say: “You are a runner!”

“I forgot you had been having your tea, my poor boy,” said she.

“And you don’t pant a bit!” was his encomium.

“Dear me, no; not more than a bird. You might as well try to catch a bird.”

Young Crossjay gave a knowing nod. “Wait till I get my second wind.”

“Now you must confess that girls run faster than boys.”

“They may at the start.”

“They do everything better.”

“They’re flash-in-the-pans.”

“They learn their lessons.”

“You can’t make soldiers or sailors of them, though.”

“And that is untrue. Have you never read of Mary Ambree? and Mistress Hannah Snell of Pondicherry? And there was the bride of the celebrated William Taylor. And what do you say to Joan of Arc? What do you say to Boadicea? I suppose you have never heard of the Amazons.”

Page 2682

“They weren’t English.”

“Then it is your own countrywomen you decry, sir!”

Young Crossjay betrayed anxiety about his false position, and begged for the stories of Mary Ambree and the others who were English.

“See, you will not read for yourself, you hide and play truant with Mr. Whitford, and the consequence is you are ignorant of your country’s history.”

Miss Middleton rebuked him, enjoying his wriggle between a perception of her fun and an acknowledgment of his peccancy. She commanded him to tell her which was the glorious Valentine’s day of our naval annals; the name of the hero of the day, and the name of his ship. To these questions his answers were as ready as the guns of the good ship Captain, for the Spanish four-decker.

“And that you owe to Mr. Whitford,” said Miss Middleton.

“He bought me the books,” young Crossjay growled, and plucked at grass blades and bit them, foreseeing dimly but certainly the termination of all this.

Miss Middleton lay back on the grass and said: “Are you going to be fond of me, Crossjay?”

The boy sat blinking. His desire was to prove to her that lie was immoderately fond of her already; and he might have flown at her neck had she been sitting up, but her recumbency and eyelids half closed excited wonder in him and awe. His young heart beat fast.

“Because, my dear boy,” she said, leaning on her elbow, “you are a very nice boy, but an ungrateful boy, and there is no telling whether you will not punish any one who cares for you. Come along with me; pluck me some of these cowslips, and the speedwells near them; I think we both love wild-flowers.” She rose and took his arm. “You shall row me on the lake while I talk to you seriously.”

It was she, however, who took the sculls at the boat-house, for she had been a playfellow with boys, and knew that one of them engaged in a manly exercise is not likely to listen to a woman.

“Now, Crossjay,” she said. Dense gloom overcame him like a cowl. She bent across her hands to laugh. “As if I were going to lecture you, you silly boy!” He began to brighten dubiously. “I used to be as fond of birdsnesting as you are. I like brave boys, and I like you for wanting to enter the Royal Navy. Only, how can you if you do not learn? You must get the captains to pass you, you know. Somebody spoils you: Miss Dale or Mr. Whitford.”

“Do they?” sung out young Crossjay.

“Sir Willoughby does?”

“I don’t know about spoil. I can come round him.”

“I am sure he is very kind to you. I dare say you think Mr. Whitford rather severe. You should remember he has to teach you, so that you may pass for the navy. You must not dislike him because he makes you work. Supposing you had blown yourself up to-day! You would have thought it better to have been working with Mr. Whitford.”

“Sir Willoughby says, when he’s married, you won’t let me hide.”

Page 2683

“Ah! It is wrong to pet a big boy like you. Does not he what you call tip you, Crossjay?”

“Generally half-crown pieces. I’ve had a crown-piece. I’ve had sovereigns.”

“And for that you do as he bids you? And he indulges you because you . . . Well, but though Mr. Whitford does not give you money, he gives you his time, he tries to get you into the navy.”

“He pays for me.”

“What do you say?”

“My keep. And, as for liking him, if he were at the bottom of the water here, I’d go down after him. I mean to learn. We’re both of us here at six o’clock in the morning, when it’s light, and have a swim. He taught me. Only, I never cared for schoolbooks.”

“Are you quite certain that Mr. Whitford pays for you.”

“My father told me he did, and I must obey him. He heard my father was poor, with a family. He went down to see my father. My father came here once, and Sir Willoughby wouldn’t see him. I know Mr. Whitford does. And Miss Dale told me he did. My mother says she thinks he does it to make up to us for my father’s long walk in the rain and the cold he caught coming here to Patterne.”

“So you see you should not vex him, Crossjay. He is a good friend to your father and to you. You ought to love him.”

“I like him, and I like his face.”

“Why his face?”

“It’s not like those faces! Miss Dale and I talk about him. She thinks that Sir Willoughby is the best-looking man ever born.”

“Were you not speaking of Mr. Whitford?”

“Yes; old Vernon. That’s what Sir Willoughby calls him,” young Crossjay excused himself to her look of surprise. “Do you know what he makes me think of?—his eyes, I mean. He makes me think of Robinson Crusoe’s old goat in the cavern. I like him because he’s always the same, and you’re not positive about some people. Miss Middleton, if you look on at cricket, in comes a safe man for ten runs. He may get more, and he never gets less; and you should hear the old farmers talk of him in the booth. That’s just my feeling.”

Miss Middleton understood that some illustration from the cricketing-field was intended to throw light on the boy's feeling for Mr. Whitford. Young Crossjay was evidently warming to speak from his heart. But the sun was low, she had to dress for the dinner-table, and she landed him with regret, as at a holiday over. Before they parted, he offered to swim across the lake in his clothes, or dive to the bed for anything she pleased to throw, declaring solemnly that it should not be lost.

She walked back at a slow pace, and sung to herself above her darker-flowing thoughts, like the reed-warbler on the branch beside the night-stream; a simple song of a lighthearted sound, independent of the shifting black and grey of the flood underneath.

A step was at her heels.

"I see you have been petting my scapegrace."

Page 2684

“Mr. Whitford! Yes; not petting, I hope. I tried to give him a lecture. He’s a dear lad, but, I fancy, trying.”

She was in fine sunset colour, unable to arrest the mounting tide. She had been rowing, she said; and, as he directed his eyes, according to his wont, penetratingly, she defended herself by fixing her mind on Robinson Crusoe’s old goat in the recess of the cavern.

“I must have him away from here very soon,” said Vernon. “Here he’s quite spoiled. Speak of him to Willoughby. I can’t guess at his ideas of the boy’s future, but the chance of passing for the navy won’t bear trifling with, and if ever there was a lad made for the navy, it’s Crossjay.”

The incident of the explosion in the laboratory was new to Vernon.

“And Willoughby laughed?” he said. “There are sea-port crammers who stuff young fellows for examination, and we shall have to pack off the boy at once to the best one of the lot we can find. I would rather have had him under me up to the last three months, and have made sure of some roots to what is knocked into his head. But he’s ruined here. And I am going. So I shall not trouble him for many weeks longer. Dr. Middleton is well?”

“My father is well, yes. He pounced like a falcon on your notes in the library.”

Vernon came out with a chuckle.

“They were left to attract him. I am in for a controversy.”

“Papa will not spare you, to judge from his look.”

“I know the look.”

“Have you walked far to-day?”

“Nine and a half hours. My Flibbertigibbet is too much for me at times, and I had to walk off my temper.”

She cast her eyes on him, thinking of the pleasure of dealing with a temper honestly coltish, and manfully open to a specific.

“All those hours were required?”

“Not quite so long.”

“You are training for your Alpine tour.”

“It’s doubtful whether I shall get to the Alps this year. I leave the Hall, and shall probably be in London with a pen to sell.”

“Willoughby knows that you leave him?”

“As much as Mont Blanc knows that he is going to be climbed by a party below. He sees a speck or two in the valley.”

“He has not spoken of it.”

“He would attribute it to changes . . .”

Vernon did not conclude the sentence.

She became breathless, without emotion, but checked by the barrier confronting an impulse to ask, what changes? She stooped to pluck a cowslip.

“I saw daffodils lower down the park,” she said. “One or two; they’re nearly over.”

“We are well off for wild flowers here,” he answered.

“Do not leave him, Mr. Whitford.”

“He will not want me.”

“You are devoted to him.”

“I can’t pretend that.”

“Then it is the changes you imagine you foresee . . . If any occur, why should they drive you away?”

Page 2685

“Well, I’m two and thirty, and have never been in the fray: a kind of nondescript, half scholar, and by nature half billman or bowman or musketeer; if I’m worth anything, London’s the field for me. But that’s what I have to try.”

“Papa will not like your serving with your pen in London: he will say you are worth too much for that.”

“Good men are at it; I should not care to be ranked above them.”

“They are wasted, he says.”

“Error! If they have their private ambition, they may suppose they are wasted. But the value to the world of a private ambition, I do not clearly understand.”

“You have not an evil opinion of the world?” said Miss Middleton, sick at heart as she spoke, with the sensation of having invited herself to take a drop of poison.

He replied: “One might as well have an evil opinion of a river: here it’s muddy, there it’s clear; one day troubled, another at rest. We have to treat it with common sense.”

“Love it?”

“In the sense of serving it.”

“Not think it beautiful?”

“Part of it is, part of it the reverse.”

“Papa would quote the ‘mulier formosa’”.

“Except that ‘fish’ is too good for the black extremity. ‘Woman’ is excellent for the upper.”

“How do you say that?—not cynically, I believe. Your view commends itself to my reason.”

She was grateful to him for not stating it in ideal contrast with Sir Willoughby’s view. If he had, so intensely did her youthful blood desire to be enamoured of the world, that she felt he would have lifted her off her feet. For a moment a gulf beneath had been threatening. When she said, “Love it?” a little enthusiasm would have wafted her into space fierily as wine; but the sober, “In the sense of serving it”, entered her brain, and was matter for reflection upon it and him.

She could think of him in pleasant liberty, uncorrected by her woman’s instinct of peril. He had neither arts nor graces; nothing of his cousin’s easy social front-face. She had

once witnessed the military precision of his dancing, and had to learn to like him before she ceased to pray that she might never be the victim of it as his partner. He walked heroically, his pedestrian vigour being famous, but that means one who walks away from the sex, not excelling in the recreations where men and women join hands. He was not much of a horseman either. Sir Willoughby enjoyed seeing him on horseback. And he could scarcely be said to shine in a drawingroom, unless when seated beside a person ready for real talk. Even more than his merits, his demerits pointed him out as a man to be a friend to a young woman who wanted one. His way of life pictured to her troubled spirit an enviable smoothness; and his having achieved that smooth way she considered a sign of strength; and she wished to lean in idea upon some friendly strength. His reputation for indifference to the frivolous charms of girls clothed

Page 2686

him with a noble coldness, and gave him the distinction of a far-seen solitary iceberg in Southern waters. The popular notion of hereditary titled aristocracy resembles her sentiment for a man that would not flatter and could not be flattered by her sex: he appeared superior almost to awfulness. She was young, but she had received much flattery in her ears, and by it she had been snared; and he, disdaining to practise the fowler's arts or to cast a thought on small fowls, appeared to her to have a pride founded on natural loftiness.

They had not spoken for awhile, when Vernon said abruptly, "The boy's future rather depends on you, Miss Middleton. I mean to leave as soon as possible, and I do not like his being here without me, though you will look after him, I have no doubt. But you may not at first see where the spoiling hurts him. He should be packed off at once to the crammer, before you are Lady Patterne. Use your influence. Willoughby will support the lad at your request. The cost cannot be great. There are strong grounds against my having him in London, even if I could manage it. May I count on you?"

"I will mention it: I will do my best," said Miss Middleton, strangely dejected.

They were now on the lawn, where Sir Willoughby was walking with the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, his maiden aunts.

"You seem to have coursed the hare and captured the hart." he said to his bride.

"Started the truant and run down the paedagogue," said Vernon.

"Ay, you won't listen to me about the management of that boy," Sir Willoughby retorted.

The ladies embraced Miss Middleton. One offered up an ejaculation in eulogy of her looks, the other of her healthfulness: then both remarked that with indulgence young Crossjay could be induced to do anything. Clara wondered whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes. She gazed from them to him, and feared him. But as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites. Though she had in fact been giving battle to it for several months, she had held her own too well to perceive definitely the character of the spirit opposing her.

She said to the ladies, "Ah, no! Mr. Whitford has chosen the only method for teaching a boy like Crossjay."

"I propose to make a man of him," said Sir Willoughby.

"What is to become of him if he learns nothing?"

"If he pleases me, he will be provided for. I have never abandoned a dependent."

Clara let her eyes rest on his and, without turning or dropping, shut them.

The effect was discomforting to him. He was very sensitive to the intentions of eyes and tones; which was one secret of his rigid grasp of the dwellers in his household. They were taught that they had to render agreement under sharp scrutiny. Studious eyes, devoid of warmth, devoid of the shyness of sex, that suddenly closed on their look, signified a want of comprehension of some kind, it might be hostility of understanding. Was it possible he did not possess her utterly? He frowned up.

Page 2687

Clara saw the lift of his brows, and thought, “My mind is my own, married or not.”

It was the point in dispute.

CHAPTER IX

CLARA AND LAETITIA MEET: THEY ARE COMPARED

An hour before the time for lessons next morning young Crossjay was on the lawn with a big bunch of wild flowers. He left them at the hall door for Miss Middleton, and vanished into bushes.

These vulgar weeds were about to be dismissed to the dustheap by the great officials of the household; but as it happened that Miss Middleton had seen them from the window in Crossjay’s hands, the discovery was made that they were indeed his presentation-bouquet, and a footman received orders to place them before her. She was very pleased. The arrangement of the flowers bore witness to fairer fingers than the boy’s own in the disposition of the rings of colour, red campion and anemone, cowslip and speedwell, primroses and wood-hyacinths; and rising out of the blue was a branch bearing thick white blossom, so thick, and of so pure a whiteness, that Miss Middleton, while praising Crossjay for soliciting the aid of Miss Dale, was at a loss to name the tree.

“It is a gardener’s improvement on the Vestal of the forest, the wild cherry,” said Dr. Middleton, “and in this case we may admit the gardener’s claim to be valid, though I believe that, with his gift of double blossom, he has improved away the fruit. Call this the Vestal of civilization, then; he has at least done something to vindicate the beauty of the office as well as the justness of the title.”

“It is Vernon’s Holy Tree the young rascal has been despoiling,” said Sir Willoughby merrily.

Miss Middleton was informed that this double-blossom wild cherry-tree was worshipped by Mr. Whitford.

Sir Willoughby promised he would conduct her to it.

“You,” he said to her, “can bear the trial; few complexions can; it is to most ladies a crueller test than snow. Miss Dale, for example, becomes old lace within a dozen yards of it. I should like to place her under the tree beside you.”

“Dear me, though; but that is investing the hamadryad with novel and terrible functions,” exclaimed Dr. Middleton.

Clara said: “Miss Dale could drag me into a superior Court to show me fading beside her in gifts more valuable than a complexion.”

“She has a fine ability,” said Vernon.

All the world knew, so Clara knew of Miss Dales romantic admiration of Sir Willoughby; she was curious to see Miss Dale and study the nature of a devotion that might be, within reason, imitable—for a man who could speak with such steely coldness of the poor lady he had fascinated? Well, perhaps it was good for the hearts of women to be beneath a frost; to be schooled, restrained, turned inward on their dreams. Yes, then, his coldness was desireable; it encouraged an ideal of him. It suggested and

Page 2688

seemed to propose to Clara's mind the divineness of separation instead of the deadly accuracy of an intimate perusal. She tried to look on him as Miss Dale might look, and while partly despising her for the dupery she envied, and more than criticizing him for the inhuman numbness of sentiment which offered up his worshipper to point a complimentary comparison, she was able to imagine a distance whence it would be possible to observe him uncritically, kindly, admiringly; as the moon a handsome mortal, for example.

In the midst of her thoughts, she surprised herself by saying: "I certainly was difficult to instruct. I might see things clearer if I had a fine ability. I never remember to have been perfectly pleased with my immediate lesson . . ."

She stopped, wondering whither her tongue was leading her; then added, to save herself, "And that may be why I feel for poor Crossjay."

Mr. Whitford apparently did not think it remarkable that she should have been set off gabbling of "a fine ability", though the eulogistic phrase had been pronounced by him with an impressiveness to make his ear aware of an echo.

Sir Willoughby dispersed her vapourish confusion. "Exactly," he said. "I have insisted with Vernon, I don't know how often, that you must have the lad by his affections. He won't bear driving. It had no effect on me. Boys of spirit kick at it. I think I know boys, Clara."

He found himself addressing eyes that regarded him as though he were a small speck, a pin's head, in the circle of their remote contemplation. They were wide; they closed.

She opened them to gaze elsewhere.

He was very sensitive.

Even then, when knowingly wounding him, or because of it, she was trying to climb back to that altitude of the thin division of neutral ground, from which we see a lover's faults and are above them, pure surveyors. She climbed unsuccessfully, it is true; soon despairing and using the effort as a pretext to fall back lower.

Dr. Middleton withdrew Sir Willoughby's attention from the imperceptible annoyance. "No, sir, no: the birch! the birch! Boys of spirit commonly turn into solid men, and the solider the men the more surely do they vote for Busby. For me, I pray he may be immortal in Great Britain. Sea-air nor mountain-air is half so bracing. I venture to say that the power to take a licking is better worth having than the power to administer one. Horse him and birch him if Crossjay runs from his books."

"It is your opinion, sir?" his host bowed to him affably, shocked on behalf of the ladies.

“So positively so, sir, that I will undertake, without knowledge of their antecedents, to lay my finger on the men in public life who have not had early Busby. They are ill-balanced men. Their seat of reason is not a concrete. They won’t take rough and smooth as they come. They make bad blood, can’t forgive, sniff right and left for approbation, and are excited to anger if an East wind does not flatter them. Why, sir, when they have grown to be seniors, you find these men mixed up with the nonsense of their youth; you see they are unthrashed. We English beat the world because we take a licking well. I hold it for a surety of a proper sweetness of blood.”

Page 2689

The smile of Sir Willoughby waxed ever softer as the shakes of his head increased in contradictoriness. “And yet,” said he, with the air of conceding a little after having answered the Rev. Doctor and convicted him of error, “Jack requires it to keep him in order. On board ship your argument may apply. Not, I suspect, among gentlemen. No.”

“Good-night to you, gentlemen!” said Dr. Middleton.

Clara heard Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel interchange remarks:

“Willoughby would not have suffered it!”

“It would entirely have altered him!”

She sighed and put a tooth on her under-lip. The gift of humourous fancy is in women fenced round with forbidding placards; they have to choke it; if they perceive a piece of humour, for instance, the young Willoughby grasped by his master,—and his horrified relatives rigid at the sight of preparations for the seed of sacrilege, they have to blindfold the mind’s eye. They are society’s hard-drilled soldiery. Prussians that must both march and think in step. It is for the advantage of the civilized world, if you like, since men have decreed it, or matrons have so read the decree; but here and there a younger woman, haply an uncorrected insurgent of the sex matured here and there, feels that her lot was cast with her head in a narrower pit than her limbs.

Clara speculated as to whether Miss Dale might be perchance a person of a certain liberty of mind. She asked for some little, only some little, free play of mind in a house that seemed to wear, as it were, a cap of iron. Sir Willoughby not merely ruled, he throned, he inspired: and how? She had noticed an irascible sensitiveness in him alert against a shadow of disagreement; and as he was kind when perfectly appeased, the sop was offered by him for submission. She noticed that even Mr. Whitford forbore to alarm the sentiment of authority in his cousin. If he did not breathe Sir Willoughby, like the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, he would either acquiesce in a syllable or be silent. He never strongly dissented. The habit of the house, with its iron cap, was on him, as it was on the servants, and would be, oh, shudders of the shipwrecked that see their end in drowning! on the wife.

“When do I meet Miss Dale?” she inquired.

“This very evening, at dinner,” replied Sir Willoughby.

Then, thought she, there is that to look forward to.

She indulged her morbid fit, and shut up her senses that she might live in the anticipation of meeting Miss Dale; and, long before the approach of the hour, her hope of encountering any other than another dull adherent of Sir Willoughby had fled. So she

was languid for two of the three minutes when she sat alone with Laetitia in the drawing-room before the rest had assembled.

“It is Miss Middleton?” Laetitia said, advancing to her. “My jealousy tells me; for you have won my boy Crossjay’s heart, and done more to bring him to obedience in a few minutes than we have been able to do in months.”

Page 2690

“His wild flowers were so welcome to me,” said Clara.

“He was very modest over them. And I mention it because boys of his age usually thrust their gifts in our faces fresh as they pluck them, and you were to be treated quite differently.”

“We saw his good fairy’s hand.”

“She resigns her office; but I pray you not to love him too well in return; for he ought to be away reading with one of those men who get boys through their examinations. He is, we all think, a born sailor, and his place is in the navy.”

“But, Miss Dale, I love him so well that I shall consult his interests and not my own selfishness. And, if I have influence, he will not be a week with you longer. It should have been spoke of to-day; I must have been in some dream; I thought of it, I know. I will not forget to do what may be in my power.”

Clara’s heart sank at the renewed engagement and plighting of herself involved in her asking a favour, urging any sort of petition. The cause was good. Besides, she was plighted already.

“Sir Willoughby is really fond of the boy,” she said.

“He is fond of exciting fondness in the boy,” said Miss Dale. “He has not dealt much with children. I am sure he likes Crossjay; he could not otherwise be so forbearing; it is wonderful what he endures and laughs at.”

Sir Willoughby entered. The presence of Miss Dale illuminated him as the burning taper lights up consecrated plate. Deeply respecting her for her constancy, esteeming her for a model of taste, he was never in her society without that happy consciousness of shining which calls forth the treasures of the man; and these it is no exaggeration to term unbounded, when all that comes from him is taken for gold.

The effect of the evening on Clara was to render her distrustful of her later antagonism. She had unknowingly passed into the spirit of Miss Dale, Sir Willoughby aiding; for she could sympathize with the view of his constant admirer on seeing him so cordially and smoothly gay; as one may say, domestically witty, the most agreeable form of wit. Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson discerned that he had a leg of physical perfection; Miss Dale distinguished it in him in the vital essence; and before either of these ladies he was not simply a radiant, he was a productive creature, so true it is that praise is our fructifying sun. He had even a touch of the romantic air which Clara remembered as her first impression of the favourite of the county; and strange she found it to observe this resuscitated idea confronting her experience. What if she had been captious, inconsiderate? Oh, blissful revival of the sense of peace! The happiness of pain

departing was all that she looked for, and her conception of liberty was to learn to love her chains, provided that he would spare her the caress. In this mood she sternly condemned Constantia. “We must try to do good; we must not be thinking of ourselves; we must make the

Page 2691

best of our path in life." She revolved these infantile precepts with humble earnestness; and not to be tardy in her striving to do good, with a remote but pleasurable glimpse of Mr. Whitford hearing of it, she took the opportunity to speak to Sir Willoughby on the subject of young Crossjay, at a moment when, alighting from horseback, he had shown himself to advantage among a gallant cantering company. He showed to great advantage on horseback among men, being invariably the best mounted, and he had a cavalierly style, possibly cultivated, but effective. On foot his raised head and half-dropped eyelids too palpably assumed superiority. "Willoughby, I want to speak," she said, and shrank as she spoke, lest he should immediately grant everything in the mood of courtship, and invade her respite; "I want to speak of that dear boy Crossjay. You are fond of him. He is rather an idle boy here, and wasting time . . ."

"Now you are here, and when you are here for good, my love for good . . ." he fluttered away in loverliness, forgetful of Crossjay, whom he presently took up. "The boy recognizes his most sovereign lady, and will do your bidding, though you should order him to learn his lessons! Who would not obey? Your beauty alone commands. But what is there beyond?—a grace, a hue divine, that sets you not so much above as apart, severed from the world."

Clara produced an active smile in duty, and pursued: "If Crossjay were sent at once to some house where men prepare boys to pass for the navy, he would have his chance, and the navy is distinctly his profession. His father is a brave man, and he inherits bravery, and he has a passion for a sailor's life; only he must be able to pass his examination, and he has not much time."

Sir Willoughby gave a slight laugh in sad amusement.

"My dear Clara, you adore the world; and I suppose you have to learn that there is not a question in this wrangling world about which we have not disputes and contests ad nauseam. I have my notions concerning Crossjay, Vernon has his. I should wish to make a gentleman of him. Vernon marks him for a sailor. But Vernon is the lad's protector, I am not. Vernon took him from his father to instruct him, and he has a right to say what shall be done with him. I do not interfere. Only I can't prevent the lad from liking me. Old Vernon seems to feel it. I assure you I hold entirely aloof. If I am asked, in spite of my disapproval of Vernon's plans for the boy, to subscribe to his departure, I can but shrug, because, as you see, I have never opposed. Old Vernon pays for him, he is the master, he decides, and if Crossjay is blown from the masthead in a gale, the blame does not fall on me. These, my dear, are matters of reason."

"I would not venture to intrude on them," said Clara, "if I had not suspected that money . . ."

Page 2692

“Yes,” cried Willoughby; “and it is a part. And let old Vernon surrender the boy to me, I will immediately relieve him of the burden on his purse. Can I do that, my dear, for the furtherance of a scheme I condemn? The point is thus: latterly I have invited Captain Patterne to visit me: just previous to his departure for the African Coast, where Government despatches Marines when there is no other way of killing them, I sent him a special invitation. He thanked me and curtly declined. The man, I may almost say, is my pensioner. Well, he calls himself a Patterne, he is undoubtedly a man of courage, he has elements of our blood, and the name. I think I am to be approved for desiring to make a better gentleman of the son than I behold in the father: and seeing that life from an early age on board ship has anything but made a gentleman of the father, I hold that I am right in shaping another course for the son.”

“Naval officers . . .” Clara suggested.

“Some,” said Willoughby. “But they must be men of birth, coming out of homes of good breeding. Strip them of the halo of the title of naval officers, and I fear you would not often say gentlemen when they step into a drawing-room. I went so far as to fancy I had some claim to make young Crossjay something different. It can be done: the Patterne comes out in his behaviour to you, my love; it can be done. But if I take him, I claim undisputed sway over him. I cannot make a gentleman of the fellow if I am to compete with this person and that. In fine, he must look up to me, he must have one model.”

“Would you, then, provide for him subsequently?”

“According to his behaviour.”

“Would not that be precarious for him?”

“More so than the profession you appear inclined to choose for him?”

“But there he would be under clear regulations.”

“With me he would have to respond to affection.”

“Would you secure to him a settled income? For an idle gentleman is bad enough; a penniless gentleman . . .”

“He has only to please me, my dear, and he will be launched and protected.”

“But if he does not succeed in pleasing you?”

“Is it so difficult?”

“Oh!” Clara fretted.

“You see, my love, I answer you,” said Sir Willoughby.

He resumed: “But let old Vernon have his trial with the lad. He has his own ideas. Let him carry them out. I shall watch the experiment.”

Clara was for abandoning her task in sheer faintness.

“Is not the question one of money?” she said, shyly, knowing Mr. Whitford to be poor.

“Old Vernon chooses to spend his money that way.” replied Sir Willoughby. “If it saves him from breaking his shins and risking his neck on his Alps, we may consider it well employed.”

“Yes,” Clara’s voice occupied a pause.

She seized her languor as it were a curling snake and cast it off. “But I understand that Mr. Whitford wants your assistance. Is he not—not rich? When he leaves the Hall to try his fortune in literature in London, he may not be so well able to support Crossjay and obtain the instruction necessary for the boy: and it would be generous to help him.”

Page 2693

“Leaves the Hall!” exclaimed Willoughby. “I have not heard a word of it. He made a bad start at the beginning, and I should have thought that would have tamed him: had to throw over his Fellowship; ahem. Then he received a small legacy some time back, and wanted to be off to push his luck in Literature: rank gambling, as I told him. Londonizing can do him no good. I thought that nonsense of his was over years ago. What is it he has from me?—about a hundred and fifty a year: and it might be doubled for the asking: and all the books he requires: and these writers and scholars no sooner think of a book than they must have it. And do not suppose me to complain. I am a man who will not have a single shilling expended by those who serve immediately about my person. I confess to exacting that kind of dependency. Feudalism is not an objectionable thing if you can be sure of the lord. You know, Clara, and you should know me in my weakness too, I do not claim servitude, I stipulate for affection. I claim to be surrounded by persons loving me. And with one? . . . dearest! So that we two can shut out the world; we live what is the dream of others. Nothing imaginable can be sweeter. It is a veritable heaven on earth. To be the possessor of the whole of you! Your thoughts, hopes, all.”

Sir Willoughby intensified his imagination to conceive more: he could not, or could not express it, and pursued: “But what is this talk of Vernon’s leaving me? He cannot leave. He has barely a hundred a year of his own. You see, I consider him. I do not speak of the ingratitude of the wish to leave. You know, my dear, I have a deadly abhorrence of partings and such like. As far as I can, I surround myself with healthy people specially to guard myself from having my feelings wrung; and excepting Miss Dale, whom you like—my darling does like her?”—the answer satisfied him; “with that one exception, I am not aware of a case that threatens to torment me. And here is a man, under no compulsion, talking of leaving the Hall! In the name of goodness, why? But why? Am I to imagine that the sight of perfect felicity distresses him? We are told that the world is ‘desperately wicked’. I do not like to think it of my friends; yet otherwise their conduct is often hard to account for.”

“If it were true, you would not punish Crossjay?” Clara feebly interposed.

“I should certainly take Crossjay and make a man of him after my own model, my dear. But who spoke to you of this?”

“Mr. Whitford himself. And let me give you my opinion, Willoughby, that he will take Crossjay with him rather than leave him, if there is a fear of the boy’s missing his chance of the navy.”

“Marines appear to be in the ascendant,” said Sir Willoughby, astonished at the locution and pleading in the interests of a son of one. “Then Crossjay he must take. I cannot accept half the boy. I am,” he laughed, “the legitimate claimant in the application for judgement before the wise king. Besides, the boy has a dose of my blood in him; he has none of Vernon’s, not one drop.”

Page 2694

“Ah!”

“You see, my love?”

“Oh, I do see; yes.”

“I put forth no pretensions to perfection,” Sir Willoughby continued. “I can bear a considerable amount of provocation; still I can be offended, and I am unforgiving when I have been offended. Speak to Vernon, if a natural occasion should spring up. I shall, of course, have to speak to him. You may, Clara, have observed a man who passed me on the road as we were cantering home, without a hint of a touch to his hat. That man is a tenant of mine, farming six hundred acres, Hoppner by name: a man bound to remember that I have, independently of my position, obliged him frequently. His lease of my ground has five years to run. I must say I detest the churlishness of our country population, and where it comes across me I chastise it. Vernon is a different matter: he will only require to be spoken to. One would fancy the old fellow laboured now and then under a magnetic attraction to beggary. My love,” he bent to her and checked their pacing up and down, “you are tired?”

“I am very tired to-day,” said Clara.

His arm was offered. She laid two fingers on it, and they dropped when he attempted to press them to his rib.

He did not insist. To walk beside her was to share in the stateliness of her walking.

He placed himself at a corner of the door-way for her to pass him into the house, and doated on her cheek, her ear, and the softly dusky nape of her neck, where this way and that the little lighter-coloured irreclaimable curls running truant from the comb and the knot—curls, half-curls, root-curls, vine-ringlets, wedding-rings, fledgling feathers, tufts of down, blown wisps—waved or fell, waved over or up or involutedly, or strayed, loose and downward, in the form of small silken paws, hardly any of them much thicker than a crayon shading, cunninger than long round locks of gold to trick the heart.

Laetitia had nothing to show resembling such beauty.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH SIR WILLOUGHBY CHANCES TO SUPPLY THE TITLE FOR HIMSELF

Now Vernon was useful to his cousin; he was the accomplished secretary of a man who governed his estate shrewdly and diligently, but had been once or twice unlucky in his judgements pronounced from the magisterial bench as a justice of the Peace, on which occasions a half column of trenchant English supported by an apposite classical

quotation impressed Sir Willoughby with the value of such a secretary in a controversy. He had no fear of that fiery dragon of scorching breath—the newspaper press—while Vernon was his right hand man; and as he intended to enter Parliament, he foresaw the greater need of him. Furthermore, he liked his cousin to date his own controversial writings, on classical subjects, from Patterne Hall. It caused his house to shine in a foreign field; proved the service of scholarship by giving it a flavour

Page 2695

of a bookish aristocracy that, though not so well worth having, and indeed in itself contemptible, is above the material and titular; one cannot quite say how. There, however, is the flavour. Dainty sauces are the life, the nobility, of famous dishes; taken alone, the former would be nauseating, the latter plebeian. It is thus, or somewhat so, when you have a poet, still better a scholar, attached to your household. Sir Willoughby deserved to have him, for he was above his county friends in his apprehension of the flavour bestowed by the man; and having him, he had made them conscious of their deficiency. His cook, M. Dehors, pupil of the great Godefroy, was not the only French cook in the county; but his cousin and secretary, the rising scholar, the elegant essayist, was an unparalleled decoration; of his kind, of course. Personally, we laugh at him; you had better not, unless you are fain to show that the higher world of polite literature is unknown to you. Sir Willoughby could create an abject silence at a county dinner-table by an allusion to Vernon “at work at home upon his Etruscans or his Dorians”; and he paused a moment to let the allusion sink, laughed audibly to himself over his eccentric cousin, and let him rest.

In addition, Sir Willoughby abhorred the loss of a familiar face in his domestic circle. He thought ill of servants who could accept their dismissal without petitioning to stay with him. A servant that gave warning partook of a certain fiendishness. Vernon’s project of leaving the Hall offended and alarmed the sensitive gentleman. “I shall have to hand Letty Dale to him at last!” he thought, yielding in bitter generosity to the conditions imposed on him by the ungenerousness of another. For, since his engagement to Miss Middleton, his electrically forethoughtful mind had seen in Miss Dale, if she stayed in the neighbourhood, and remained unmarried, the governess of his infant children, often consulting with him. But here was a prospect dashed out. The two, then, may marry, and live in a cottage on the borders of his park; and Vernon can retain his post, and Laetitia her devotion. The risk of her casting it of had to be faced. Marriage has been known to have such an effect on the most faithful of women that a great passion fades to naught in their volatile bosoms when they have taken a husband. We see in women especially the triumph of the animal over the spiritual. Nevertheless, risks must be run for a purpose in view.

Having no taste for a discussion with Vernon, whom it was his habit to confound by breaking away from him abruptly when he had delivered his opinion, he left it to both the persons interesting themselves in young Crossjay to imagine that he was meditating on the question of the lad, and to imagine that it would be wise to leave him to meditate; for he could be preternaturally acute in reading any of his fellow-creatures if they crossed the current of his feelings. And, meanwhile, he instructed the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to bring Laetitia Dale on a visit to the Hall, where dinner-parties were soon to be given and a pleasing talker would be wanted, where also a woman of intellect, steeped in a splendid sentiment, hitherto a miracle of female constancy, might stir a younger woman to some emulation. Definitely to resolve to bestow Laetitia upon Vernon was more than he could do; enough that he held the card.

Page 2696

Regarding Clara, his genius for perusing the heart which was not in perfect harmony with him through the series of responsive movements to his own, informed him of a something in her character that might have suggested to Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson her indefensible, absurd “rogue in porcelain”. Idea there was none in that phrase; yet, if you looked on Clara as a delicately inimitable porcelain beauty, the suspicion of a delicately inimitable ripple over her features touched a thought of innocent roguery, wildwood roguery; the likeness to the costly and lovely substance appeared to admit a fitness in the dubious epithet. He detested but was haunted by the phrase.

She certainly had at times the look of the nymph that has gazed too long on the faun, and has unwittingly copied his lurking lip and long sliding eye. Her play with young Crossjay resembled a return of the lady to the cat; she flung herself into it as if her real vitality had been in suspense till she saw the boy. Sir Willoughby by no means disapproved of a physical liveliness that promised him health in his mate; but he began to feel in their conversations that she did not sufficiently think of making herself a nest for him. Steely points were opposed to him when he, figuratively, bared his bosom to be taken to the softest and fairest. She reasoned: in other words, armed her ignorance. She reasoned against him publicly, and lured Vernon to support her. Influence is to be counted for power, and her influence over Vernon was displayed in her persuading him to dance one evening at Lady Culmer’s, after his melancholy exhibitions of himself in the art; and not only did she persuade him to stand up fronting her, she manoeuvred him through the dance like a clever boy cajoling a top to come to him without reeling, both to Vernon’s contentment and to Sir Willoughby’s; for he was the last man to object to a manifestation of power in his bride. Considering her influence with Vernon, he renewed the discourse upon young Crossjay; and, as he was addicted to system, he took her into his confidence, that she might be taught to look to him and act for him.

“Old Vernon has not spoken to you again of that lad?” he said.

“Yes, Mr. Whitford has asked me.”

“He does not ask me, my dear!”

“He may fancy me of greater aid than I am.”

“You see, my love, if he puts Crossjay on me, he will be off. He has this craze for ‘enlisting’ his pen in London, as he calls it; and I am accustomed to him; I don’t like to think of him as a hack scribe, writing nonsense from dictation to earn a pitiful subsistence; I want him here; and, supposing he goes, he offends me; he loses a friend; and it will not be the first time that a friend has tried me too far; but if he offends me, he is extinct.”

“Is what?” cried Clara, with a look of fright.

“He becomes to me at once as if he had never been. He is extinct.”

“In spite of your affection?”

Page 2697

“On account of it, I might say. Our nature is mysterious, and mine as much so as any. Whatever my regrets, he goes out. This is not a language I talk to the world. I do the man no harm; I am not to be named unchristian. But . . . !”

Sir Willoughby mildly shrugged, and indicated a spreading out of the arms.

“But do, do talk to me as you talk to the world, Willoughby; give me some relief!”

“My own Clara, we are one. You should know me at my worst, we will say, if you like, as well as at my best.”

“Should I speak too?”

“What could you have to confess?”

She hung silent; the wave of an insane resolution swelled in her bosom and subsided before she said, “Cowardice, incapacity to speak.”

“Women!” said he.

We do not expect so much of women; the heroic virtues as little as the vices. They have not to unfold the scroll of character.

He resumed, and by his tone she understood that she was now in the inner temple of him: “I tell you these things; I quite acknowledge they do not elevate me. They help to constitute my character. I tell you most humbly that I have in me much—too much of the fallen archangel’s pride.”

Clara bowed her head over a sustained in-drawn breath.

“It must be pride,” he said, in a reverie superinduced by her thoughtfulness over the revelation, and glorying in the black flames demoniacal wherewith he crowned himself.

“Can you not correct it?” said she.

He replied, profoundly vexed by disappointment: “I am what I am. It might be demonstrated to you mathematically that it is corrected by equivalents or substitutions in my character. If it be a failing—assuming that.”

“It seems one to me: so cruelly to punish Mr. Whitford for seeking to improve his fortunes.”

“He reflects on my share in his fortunes. He has had but to apply to me for his honorarium to be doubled.”

“He wishes for independence.”

“Independence of me!”

“Liberty!”

“At my expense!”

“Oh, Willoughby!”

“Ay, but this is the world, and I know it, my love; and beautiful as your incredulity may be, you will find it more comforting to confide in my knowledge of the selfishness of the world. My sweetest, you will?—you do! For a breath of difference between us is intolerable. Do you not feel how it breaks our magic ring? One small fissure, and we have the world with its muddy deluge!—But my subject was old Vernon. Yes, I pay for Crossjay, if Vernon consents to stay. I waive my own scheme for the lad, though I think it the better one. Now, then, to induce Vernon to stay. He has his ideas about staying under a mistress of the household; and therefore, not to contest it—he is a man of no argument; a sort of lunatic determination takes the place of it with old Vernon!—let him settle close by me, in one of my cottages; very well, and to settle him we must marry him.”

Page 2698

“Who is there?” said Clara, beating for the lady in her mind.

“Women,” said Willoughby, “are born match-makers, and the most persuasive is a young bride. With a man—and a man like old Vernon!— she is irresistible. It is my wish, and that arms you. It is your wish, that subjugates him. If he goes, he goes for good. If he stays, he is my friend. I deal simply with him, as with every one. It is the secret of authority. Now Miss Dale will soon lose her father. He exists on a pension; she has the prospect of having to leave the neighbourhood of the Hall, unless she is established near us. Her whole heart is in this region; it is the poor soul’s passion. Count on her agreeing. But she will require a little wooing: and old Vernon wooing! Picture the scene to yourself, my love. His notion of wooing. I suspect, will be to treat the lady like a lexicon, and turn over the leaves for the word, and fly through the leaves for another word, and so get a sentence. Don’t frown at the poor old fellow, my Clara; some have the language on their tongues, and some have not. Some are very dry sticks; manly men, honest fellows, but so cut away, so polished away from the sex, that they are in absolute want of outsiders to supply the silken filaments to attach them. Actually!” Sir Willoughby laughed in Clara’s face to relax the dreamy stoniness of her look. “But I can assure you, my dearest, I have seen it. Vernon does not know how to speak—as we speak. He has, or he had, what is called a sneaking affection for Miss Dale. It was the most amusing thing possible; his courtship!—the air of a dog with an uneasy conscience, trying to reconcile himself with his master! We were all in fits of laughter. Of course it came to nothing.”

“Will Mr. Whitford,” said Clara, “offend you to extinction if he declines?”

Willoughby breathed an affectionate “Tush!” to her silliness.

“We bring them together, as we best can. You see, Clara, I desire, and I will make some sacrifices to detain him.”

“But what do you sacrifice?—a cottage?” said Clara, combative at all points.

“An ideal, perhaps. I lay no stress on sacrifice. I strongly object to separations. And therefore, you will say, I prepare the ground for unions? Put your influence to good service, my love. I believe you could persuade him to give us the Highland fling on the drawing-room table.”

“There is nothing to say to him of Crossjay?”

“We hold Crossjay in reserve.”

“It is urgent.”

“Trust me. I have my ideas. I am not idle. That boy bids fair for a capital horseman. Eventualities might . . .” Sir Willoughby murmured to himself, and addressing his bride,

“The cavalry? If we put him into the cavalry, we might make a gentleman of him—not be ashamed of him. Or, under certain eventualities, the Guards. Think it over, my love. De Craye, who will, I suppose, act best man for me, supposing old Vernon

Page 2699

to pull at the collar, is a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Guards, a thorough gentleman—of the brainless class, if you like, but an elegant fellow; an Irishman; you will see him, and I should like to set a naval lieutenant beside him in a drawingroom, for you to compare them and consider the model you would choose for a boy you are interested in. Horace is grace and gallantry incarnate; fatuous, probably: I have always been too friendly with him to examine closely. He made himself one of my dogs, though my elder, and seemed to like to be at my heels. One of the few men's faces I can call admirably handsome;—with nothing behind it, perhaps. As Vernon says, 'a nothing picked by the vultures and bleached by the desert'. Not a bad talker, if you are satisfied with keeping up the ball. He will amuse you. Old Horace does not know how amusing he is!"

"Did Mr. Whitford say that of Colonel De Craye?"

"I forget the person of whom he said it. So you have noticed old Vernon's foible? Quote him one of his epigrams, and he is in motion head and heels! It is an infallible receipt for tuning him. If I want to have him in good temper, I have only to remark, 'as you said'. I straighten his back instantly."

"I," said Clara, "have noticed chiefly his anxiety concerning the boy; for which I admire him."

"Creditable, if not particularly far-sighted and sagacious. Well, then, my dear, attack him at once; lead him to the subject of our fair neighbour. She is to be our guest for a week or so, and the whole affair might be concluded far enough to fix him before she leaves. She is at present awaiting the arrival of a cousin to attend on her father. A little gentle pushing will precipitate old Vernon on his knees as far as he ever can unbend them; but when a lady is made ready to expect a declaration, you know, why, she does not—does she?—demand the entire formula?—though some beautiful fortresses . . ."

He enfolded her. Clara was growing hardened to it. To this she was fated; and not seeing any way to escape, she invoked a friendly frost to strike her blood, and passed through the minute unfeelingly. Having passed it, she reproached herself for making so much of it, thinking it a lesser endurance than to listen to him. What could she do?—-she was caged; by her word of honour, as she at one time thought; by her cowardice, at another; and dimly sensible that the latter was a stronger lock than the former, she mused on the abstract question whether a woman's cowardice can be so absolute as to cast her into the jaws of her aversion. Is it to be conceived? Is there not a moment when it stands at bay? But haggard-visaged Honour then starts up claiming to be dealt with in turn; for having courage restored to her, she must have the courage to break with honour, she must dare to be faithless, and not merely say, I will be brave, but be brave enough to be dishonourable. The cage of a plighted woman hungering for her disengagement has two keepers, a noble and a vile; where on earth is creature so dreadfully enclosed? It lies with her to overcome what degrades her, that she may win to liberty by overcoming what exalts.

Page 2700

Contemplating her situation, this idea (or vapour of youth taking the god-like semblance of an idea) sprang, born of her present sickness, in Clara's mind; that it must be an ill-constructed tumbling world where the hour of ignorance is made the creator of our destiny by being forced to the decisive elections upon which life's main issues hang. Her teacher had brought her to contemplate his view of the world.

She thought likewise: how must a man despise women, who can expose himself as he does to me!

Miss Middleton owed it to Sir Willoughby Patterne that she ceased to think like a girl. When had the great change begun? Glancing back, she could imagine that it was near the period we call in love the first—almost from the first. And she was led to imagine it through having become barred from imagining her own emotions of that season. They were so dead as not to arise even under the form of shadows in fancy. Without imputing blame to him, for she was reasonable so far, she deemed herself a person entrapped. In a dream somehow she had committed herself to a life-long imprisonment; and, oh terror! not in a quiet dungeon; the barren walls closed round her, talked, called for ardour, expected admiration.

She was unable to say why she could not give it; why she retreated more and more inwardly; why she invoked the frost to kill her tenderest feelings. She was in revolt, until a whisper of the day of bells reduced her to blank submission; out of which a breath of peace drew her to revolt again in gradual rapid stages, and once more the aspect of that singular day of merry blackness felled her to earth. It was alive, it advanced, it had a mouth, it had a song. She received letters of bridesmaids writing of it, and felt them as waves that hurl a log of wreck to shore. Following which afflicting sense of antagonism to the whole circle sweeping on with her, she considered the possibility of her being in a commencement of madness. Otherwise might she not be accused of a capriciousness quite as deplorable to consider? She had written to certain of these young ladies not very long since of this gentleman—how?—in what tone? And was it her madness then?—her recovery now? It seemed to her that to have written of him enthusiastically resembled madness more than to shudder away from the union; but standing alone, opposing all she has consented to set in motion, is too strange to a girl for perfect justification to be found in reason when she seeks it.

Sir Willoughby was destined himself to supply her with that key of special insight which revealed and stamped him in a title to fortify her spirit of revolt, consecrate it almost.

Page 2701

The popular physician of the county and famous anecdotal wit, Dr. Corney, had been a guest at dinner overnight, and the next day there was talk of him, and of the resources of his art displayed by Armand Dehors on his hearing that he was to minister to the tastes of a gathering of hommes d'esprit. Sir Willoughby glanced at Dehors with his customary benevolent irony in speaking of the persons, great in their way, who served him. "Why he cannot give us daily so good a dinner, one must, I suppose, go to French nature to learn. The French are in the habit of making up for all their deficiencies with enthusiasm. They have no reverence; if I had said to him, 'I want something particularly excellent, Dehors', I should have had a commonplace dinner. But they have enthusiasm on draught, and that is what we must pull at. Know one Frenchman and you know France. I have had Dehors under my eye two years, and I can mount his enthusiasm at a word. He took hommes d'esprit to denote men of letters. Frenchmen have destroyed their nobility, so, for the sake of excitement, they put up the literary man —not to worship him; that they can't do; it's to put themselves in a state of effervescence. They will not have real greatness above them, so they have sham. That they may justly call it equality, perhaps! Ay, for all your shake of the head, my good Vernon! You see, human nature comes round again, try as we may to upset it, and the French only differ from us in wading through blood to discover that they are at their old trick once more; 'I am your equal, sir, your born equal. Oh! you are a man of letters? Allow me to be in a bubble about you!' Yes, Vernon, and I believe the fellow looks up to you as the head of the establishment. I am not jealous. Provided he attends to his functions! There's a French philosopher who's for naming the days of the year after the birthdays of French men of letters. Voltaire-day, Rousseau-day, Racine-day, so on. Perhaps Vernon will inform us who takes April 1st."

"A few trifling errors are of no consequence when you are in the vein of satire," said Vernon. "Be satisfied with knowing a nation in the person of a cook."

"They may be reading us English off in a jockey!" said Dr. Middleton. "I believe that jockeys are the exchange we make for cooks; and our neighbours do not get the best of the bargain."

"No; but, my dear good Vernon, it's nonsensical," said Sir Willoughby; "why be bawling every day the name of men of letters?"

"Philosophers."

"Well, philosophers."

"Of all countries and times. And they are the benefactors of humanity."

"Bene—!" Sir Willoughby's derisive laugh broke the word. "There's a pretension in all that, irreconcilable with English sound sense. Surely you see it?"

“We might,” said Vernon, “if you like, give alternative titles to the days, or have alternating days, devoted to our great families that performed meritorious deeds upon such a day.”

Page 2702

The rebel Clara, delighting in his banter, was heard: “Can we furnish sufficient?”

“A poet or two could help us.”

“Perhaps a statesman,” she suggested.

“A pugilist, if wanted.”

“For blowy days,” observed Dr. Middleton, and hastily in penitence picked up the conversation he had unintentionally prostrated, with a general remark on new-fangled notions, and a word aside to Vernon; which created the blissful suspicion in Clara that her father was indisposed to second Sir Willoughby’s opinions even when sharing them.

Sir Willoughby had led the conversation. Displeased that the lead should be withdrawn from him, he turned to Clara and related one of the after-dinner anecdotes of Dr. Corney; and another, with a vast deal of human nature in it, concerning a valetudinarian gentleman, whose wife chanced to be desperately ill, and he went to the physicians assembled in consultation outside the sick-room, imploring them by all he valued, and in tears, to save the poor patient for him, saying: “She is everything to me, everything; and if she dies I am compelled to run the risks of marrying again; I must marry again; for she has accustomed me so to the little attentions of a wife, that in truth I can’t. I can’t lose her! She must be saved!” And the loving husband of any devoted wife wrung his hands.

“Now, there, Clara, there you have the Egoist,” added Sir Willoughby. “That is the perfect Egoist. You see what he comes to—and his wife! The man was utterly unconscious of giving vent to the grossest selfishness.”

“An Egoist!” said Clara.

“Beware of marrying an Egoist, my dear!” He bowed gallantly; and so blindly fatuous did he appear to her, that she could hardly believe him guilty of uttering the words she had heard from him, and kept her eyes on him vacantly till she came to a sudden full stop in the thoughts directing her gaze. She looked at Vernon, she looked at her father, and at the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. None of them saw the man in the word, none noticed the word; yet this word was her medical herb, her illuminating lamp, the key of him (and, alas, but she thought it by feeling her need of one), the advocate pleading in apology for her. Egoist! She beheld him—unfortunate, self-designated man that he was!—in his good qualities as well as bad under the implacable lamp, and his good were drenched in his first person singular. His generosity roared of I louder than the rest. Conceive him at the age of Dr. Corney’s hero: “Pray, save my wife for me. I shall positively have to get another if I lose her, and one who may not love me half so well, or understand the peculiarities of my character and appreciate my attitudes.” He was in his thirty-second year, therefore a young man, strong and healthy, yet his garrulous return to his principal

theme, his emphasis on I and me, lent him the seeming of an old man spotted with decaying youth.

“Beware of marrying an Egoist.”

Page 2703

Would he help her to escape? The idea of the scene ensuing upon her petition for release, and the being dragged round the walls of his egoism, and having her head knocked against the corners, alarmed her with sensations of sickness.

There was the example of Constantia. But that desperate young lady had been assisted by a gallant, loving gentleman; she had met a Captain Oxford.

Clara brooded on those two until they seemed heroic. She questioned herself. Could she . . . ? were one to come? She shut her eyes in languor, leaning the wrong way of her wishes, yet unable to say No.

Sir Willoughby had positively said beware! Marrying him would be a deed committed in spite of his express warning. She went so far as to conceive him subsequently saying: "I warned you." She conceived the state of marriage with him as that of a woman tied not to a man of heart, but to an obelisk lettered all over with hieroglyphics, and everlastingly hearing him expound them, relishing renewing his lectures on them.

Full surely this immovable stone-man would not release her. This petrifaction of egoism would from amazedly to austerely refuse the petition. His pride would debar him from understanding her desire to be released. And if she resolved on it, without doing it straightway in Constantia's manner, the miserable bewilderment of her father, for whom such a complication would be a tragic dilemma, had to be thought of. Her father, with all his tenderness for his child, would make a stand on the point of honour; though certain to yield to her, he would be distressed in a tempest of worry; and Dr. Middleton thus afflicted threw up his arms, he shunned books, shunned speech, and resembled a castaway on the ocean, with nothing between himself and his calamity. As for the world, it would be barking at her heels. She might call the man she wrenched her hand from, Egoist; jilt, the world would call her. She dwelt bitterly on her agreement with Sir Willoughby regarding the world, laying it to his charge that her garden had become a place of nettles, her horizon an unlighted fourth side of a square.

Clara passed from person to person visiting the Hall. There was universal, and as she was compelled to see, honest admiration of the host. Not a soul had a suspicion of his cloaked nature. Her agony of hypocrisy in accepting their compliments as the bride of Sir Willoughby Patterne was poorly moderated by contempt of them for their infatuation. She tried to cheat herself with the thought that they were right and that she was the foolish and wicked inconstant. In her anxiety to strangle the rebelliousness which had been communicated from her mind to her blood, and was present with her whether her mind was in action or not, she encouraged the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to magnify the fictitious man of their idolatry, hoping that she might enter into them imaginatively, that she might to some degree subdue herself to the necessity of her position. If she partly succeeded in stupefying her antagonism, five minutes of him undid the work.

Page 2704

He requested her to wear the Patterne pearls for a dinner-party of grand ladies, telling her that he would commission Miss Isabel to take them to her. Clara begged leave to decline them, on the plea of having no right to wear them. He laughed at her modish modesty. “But really it might almost be classed with affectation,” said he. “I give you the right. Virtually you are my wife.”

“No.”

“Before heaven?”

“No. We are not married.”

“As my betrothed, will you wear them, to please me?”

“I would rather not. I cannot wear borrowed jewels. These I cannot wear. Forgive me, I cannot. And, Willoughby,” she said, scorning herself for want of fortitude in not keeping to the simply blunt provocative refusal, “does one not look like a victim decked for the sacrifice?—the garlanded heifer you see on Greek vases, in that array of jewellery?”

“My dear Clara!” exclaimed the astonished lover, “how can you term them borrowed, when they are the Patterne jewels, our family heirloom pearls, unmatched, I venture to affirm, decidedly in my county and many others, and passing to the use of the mistress of the house in the natural course of things?”

“They are yours, they are not mine.”

“Prospectively they are yours.”

“It would be to anticipate the fact to wear them.”

“With my consent, my approval? at my request?”

“I am not yet . . . I never may be . . .”

“My wife?” He laughed triumphantly, and silenced her by manly smothering.

Her scruple was perhaps an honourable one, he said. Perhaps the jewels were safer in their iron box. He had merely intended a surprise and gratification to her.

Courage was coming to enable her to speak more plainly, when his discontinuing to insist on her wearing the jewels, under an appearance of deference of her wishes, disarmed her by touching her sympathies.

She said, however, “I fear we do not often agree, Willoughby.”

“When you are a little older!” was the irritating answer.

“It would then be too late to make the discovery.”

“The discovery, I apprehend, is not imperative, my love.”

“It seems to me that our minds are opposed.”

“I should,” said he, “have been awake to it at a single indication, be sure.”

“But I know,” she pursued, “I have learned that the ideal of conduct for women is to subject their minds to the part of an accompaniment.”

“For women, my love? my wife will be in natural harmony with me.”

“Ah!” She compressed her lips. The yawn would come. “I am sleepier here than anywhere.”

“Ours, my Clara, is the finest air of the kingdom. It has the effect of sea-air.”

“But if I am always asleep here?”

“We shall have to make a public exhibition of the Beauty.”

This dash of his liveliness defeated her.

Page 2705

She left him, feeling the contempt of the brain feverishly quickened and fine-pointed, for the brain chewing the cud in the happy pastures of unawakedness. So violent was the fever, so keen her introspection, that she spared few, and Vernon was not among them. Young Crossjay, whom she considered the least able of all to act as an ally, was the only one she courted with a real desire to please him, he was the one she affectionately envied; he was the youngest, the freest, he had the world before him, and he did not know how horrible the world was, or could be made to look. She loved the boy from expecting nothing of him. Others, Vernon Whitford, for instance, could help, and moved no hand. He read her case. A scrutiny so penetrating under its air of abstract thoughtfulness, though his eyes did but rest on her a second or two, signified that he read her line by line, and to the end—excepting what she thought of him for probing her with that sharp steel of insight without a purpose.

She knew her mind's injustice. It was her case, her lamentable case—the impatient panic-stricken nerves of a captured wild creature which cried for help. She exaggerated her sufferings to get strength to throw them off, and lost it in the recognition that they were exaggerated: and out of the conflict issued recklessness, with a cry as wild as any coming of madness; for she did not blush in saying to herself. "If some one loved me!" Before hearing of Constantia, she had mused upon liberty as a virgin Goddess—men were out of her thoughts; even the figure of a rescuer, if one dawned in her mind, was more angel than hero. That fair childish maidenliness had ceased. With her body straining in her dragon's grasp, with the savour of loathing, unable to contend, unable to speak aloud, she began to speak to herself, and all the health of her nature made her outcry womanly: "If I were loved!"—not for the sake of love, but for free breathing; and her utterance of it was to insure life and enduringness to the wish, as the yearning of a mother on a drowning ship is to get her infant to shore. "If some noble gentleman could see me as I am and not disdain to aid me! Oh! to be caught up out of this prison of thorns and brambles. I cannot tear my own way out. I am a coward. My cry for help confesses that. A beckoning of a finger would change me, I believe. I could fly bleeding and through hootings to a comrade. Oh! a comrade! I do not want a lover. I should find another Egoist, not so bad, but enough to make me take a breath like death. I could follow a soldier, like poor Sally or Molly. He stakes his life for his country, and a woman may be proud of the worst of men who do that. Constantia met a soldier. Perhaps she prayed and her prayer was answered. She did ill. But, oh, how I love her for it! His name was Harry Oxford. Papa would call him her Perseus. She must have felt that there was no explaining what she suffered. She had only to act, to plunge. First she fixed

Page 2706

her mind on Harry Oxford. To be able to speak his name and see him awaiting her, must have been relief, a reprieve. She did not waver, she cut the links, she signed herself over. Oh, brave girl! what do you think of me? But I have no Harry Whitford, I am alone. Let anything be said against women; we must be very bad to have such bad things written of us: only, say this, that to ask them to sign themselves over by oath and ceremony, because of an ignorant promise, to the man they have been mistaken in, is . . . it is—" the sudden consciousness that she had put another name for Oxford, struck her a buffet, drowning her in crimson.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOUBLE-BLOSSOM WILD CHERRY-TREE

Sir Willoughby chose a moment when Clara was with him and he had a good retreat through folding-windows to the lawn, in case of cogency on the enemy's part, to attack his cousin regarding the preposterous plot to upset the family by a scamper to London: "By the way, Vernon, what is this you've been mumbling to everybody save me, about leaving us to pitch yourself into the stew-pot and be made broth of? London is no better, and you are fit for considerably better. Don't, I beg you, continue to annoy me. Take a run abroad, if you are restless. Take two or three months, and join us as we are travelling home; and then think of settling, pray. Follow my example, if you like. You can have one of my cottages, or a place built for you. Anything to keep a man from destroying the sense of stability about one. In London, my dear old fellow, you lose your identity. What are you there? I ask you, what? One has the feeling of the house crumbling when a man is perpetually for shifting and cannot fix himself. Here you are known, you can study at your ease; up in London you are nobody; I tell you honestly, I feel it myself, a week of London literally drives me home to discover the individual where I left him. Be advised. You don't mean to go."

"I have the intention," said Vernon.

"Why?"

"I've mentioned it to you."

"To my face?"

"Over your shoulder is generally the only chance you give me."

"You have not mentioned it to me, to my knowledge. As to the reason, I might hear a dozen of your reasons, and I should not understand one. It's against your interests and against my wishes. Come, friend, I am not the only one you distress. Why, Vernon, you yourself have said that the English would be very perfect Jews if they could manage to live on the patriarchal system. You said it, yes, you said it!—but I recollect it clearly.

Oh, as for your double-meanings, you said the thing, and you jeered at the incapacity of English families to live together, on account of bad temper; and now you are the first to break up our union! I decidedly do not profess to be a perfect Jew, but I do . . .”

Sir Willoughby caught signs of a probably smiling commerce between his bride and his cousin. He raised his face, appeared to be consulting his eyelids, and resolved to laugh: “Well, I own it. I do like the idea of living patriarchally.” He turned to Clara. “The Rev. Doctor one of us!”

Page 2707

“My father?” she said.

“Why not?”

“Papa’s habits are those of a scholar.”

“That you might not be separated from him, my dear!”

Clara thanked Sir Willoughby for the kindness of thinking of her father, mentally analysing the kindness, in which at least she found no unkindness, scarcely egoism, though she knew it to be there.

“We might propose it,” said he.

“As a compliment?”

“If he would condescend to accept it as a compliment. These great scholars! . . . And if Vernon goes, our inducement for Dr. Middleton to stay . . . But it is too absurd for discussion . . . Oh, Vernon, about Master Crossjay; I will see to it.”

He was about to give Vernon his shoulder and step into the garden, when Clara said, “You will have Crossjay trained for the navy, Willoughby? There is not a day to lose.”

“Yes, yes; I will see to it. Depend on me for holding the young rascal in view.”

He presented his hand to her to lead her over the step to the gravel, surprised to behold how flushed she was.

She responded to the invitation by putting her hand forth from a bent elbow, with hesitating fingers. “It should not be postponed, Willoughby.”

Her attitude suggested a stipulation before she touched him.

“It’s an affair of money, as you know, Willoughby,” said Vernon. “If I’m in London, I can’t well provide for the boy for some time to come, or it’s not certain that I can.”

“Why on earth should you go?”

“That’s another matter. I want you to take my place with him.”

“In which case the circumstances are changed. I am responsible for him, and I have a right to bring him up according to my own prescription.”

“We are likely to have one idle lout the more.”

“I guarantee to make a gentleman of him.”

“We have too many of your gentlemen already.”

“You can’t have enough, my good Vernon.”

“They’re the national apology for indolence. Training a penniless boy to be one of them is nearly as bad as an education in a thieves’ den; he will be just as much at war with society, if not game for the police.”

“Vernon, have you seen Crossjay’s father, the now Captain of Marines? I think you have.”

“He’s a good man and a very gallant officer.”

“And in spite of his qualities he’s a cub, and an old cub. He is a captain now, but he takes that rank very late, you will own. There you have what you call a good man, undoubtedly a gallant officer, neutralized by the fact that he is not a gentleman. Holding intercourse with him is out of the question. No wonder Government declines to advance him rapidly. Young Crossjay does not bear your name. He bears mine, and on that point alone I should have a voice in the settlement of his career. And I say emphatically that a drawing-room approval of a young man is the best certificate for his general chances in life. I know of a City of London merchant of some sort, and I know a firm of lawyers, who will have none but University men at their office; at least, they have the preference.”

Page 2708

“Crossjay has a bullet head, fit neither for the University nor the drawing-room,” said Vernon; “equal to fighting and dying for you, and that’s all.”

Sir Willoughby contented himself with replying, “The lad is a favourite of mine.”

His anxiety to escape a rejoinder caused him to step into the garden, leaving Clara behind him. “My love!” said he, in apology, as he turned to her. She could not look stern, but she had a look without a dimple to soften it, and her eyes shone. For she had wagered in her heart that the dialogue she provoked upon Crossjay would expose the Egoist. And there were other motives, wrapped up and intertwisted, unrecognizable, sufficient to strike her with worse than the flush of her self-knowledge of wickedness when she detained him to speak of Crossjay before Vernon.

At last it had been seen that she was conscious of suffering in her association with this Egoist! Vernon stood for the world taken into her confidence. The world, then, would not think so ill of her, she thought hopefully, at the same time that she thought most evilly of herself. But self-accusations were for the day of reckoning; she would and must have the world with her, or the belief that it was coming to her, in the terrible struggle she foresaw within her horizon of self, now her utter boundary. She needed it for the inevitable conflict. Little sacrifices of her honesty might be made. Considering how weak she was, how solitary, how dismally entangled, daily disgraced beyond the power of any veiling to conceal from her fiery sensations, a little hypocrisy was a poor girl’s natural weapon. She crushed her conscientious mind with the assurance that it was magnifying trifles: not entirely unaware that she was thereby preparing it for a convenient blindness in the presence of dread alternatives; but the pride of laying such stress on small sins gave her purity a blush of pleasure and overcame the inner warning. In truth she dared not think evilly of herself for long, sailing into battle as she was. Nuns and anchorites may; they have leisure. She regretted the forfeits she had to pay for self-assistance, and, if it might be won, the world’s; regretted, felt the peril of the loss, and took them up and flung them.

“You see, old Vernon has no argument,” Willoughby said to her.

He drew her hand more securely on his arm to make her sensible that she leaned on a pillar of strength.

“Whenever the little brain is in doubt, perplexed, undecided which course to adopt, she will come to me, will she not? I shall always listen,” he resumed, soothingly. “My own! and I to you when the world vexes me. So we round our completeness. You will know me; you will know me in good time. I am not a mystery to those to whom I unfold myself. I do not pretend to mystery: yet, I will confess, your home—your heart’s—-Willoughby is not exactly identical with the Willoughby before the world. One must be armed against that rough beast.”

Page 2709

Certain is the vengeance of the young upon monotony; nothing more certain. They do not scheme it, but sameness is a poison to their systems; and vengeance is their heartier breathing, their stretch of the limbs, run in the fields; nature avenges them.

“When does Colonel De Craye arrive?” said Clara.

“Horace? In two or three days. You wish him to be on the spot to learn his part, my love?”

She had not flown forward to the thought of Colonel De Craye’s arrival; she knew not why she had mentioned him; but now she flew back, shocked, first into shadowy subterfuge, and then into the criminal’s dock.

“I do not wish him to be here. I do not know that he has a part to learn. I have no wish. Willoughby, did you not say I should come to you and you would listen?—will you listen? I am so commonplace that I shall not be understood by you unless you take my words for the very meaning of the words. I am unworthy. I am volatile. I love my liberty. I want to be free . . .”

“Flitch!” he called.

It sounded necromantic.

“Pardon me, my love,” he said. “The man you see yonder violates my express injunction that he is not to come on my grounds, and here I find him on the borders of my garden!”

Sir Willoughby waved his hand to the abject figure of a man standing to intercept him.

“Volatile, unworthy, liberty—my dearest!” he bent to her when the man had appeased him by departing, “you are at liberty within the law, like all good women; I shall control and direct your volatility; and your sense of worthiness must be re-established when we are more intimate; it is timidity. The sense of unworthiness is a guarantee of worthiness ensuing. I believe I am in the vein of a sermon! Whose the fault? The sight of that man was annoying. Flitch was a stable-boy, groom, and coachman, like his father before him, at the Hall thirty years; his father died in our service. Mr. Flitch had not a single grievance here; only one day the demon seizes him with the notion of bettering himself he wants his independence, and he presents himself to me with a story of a shop in our county town.—Flitch! remember, if you go you go for good.—Oh, he quite comprehended.—Very well; good-bye, Flitch;—the man was respectful: he looked the fool he was very soon to turn out to be. Since then, within a period of several years, I have had him, against my express injunctions, ten times on my grounds. It’s curious to calculate. Of course the shop failed, and Flitch’s independence consists in walking

about with his hands in his empty pockets, and looking at the Hall from some elevation near."

"Is he married? Has he children?" said Clara.

"Nine; and a wife that cannot cook or sew or wash linen."

"You could not give him employment?"

"After his having dismissed himself?"

"It might be overlooked."

"Here he was happy. He decided to go elsewhere, to be free—of course, of my yoke. He quitted my service against my warning. Flitch, we will say, emigrated with his wife and children, and the ship foundered. He returns, but his place is filled; he is a ghost here, and I object to ghosts."

Page 2710

“Some work might be found for him.”

“It will be the same with old Vernon, my dear. If he goes, he goes for good. It is the vital principle of my authority to insist on that. A dead leaf might as reasonably demand to return to the tree. Once off, off for all eternity! I am sorry, but such was your decision, my friend. I have, you see, Clara, elements in me—”

“Dreadful!”

“Exert your persuasive powers with Vernon. You can do well-nigh what you will with the old fellow. We have Miss Dale this evening for a week or two. Lead him to some ideas of her.—Elements in me, I was remarking, which will no more bear to be handled carelessly than gunpowder. At the same time, there is no reason why they should not be respected, managed with some degree of regard for me and attention to consequences. Those who have not done so have repented.”

“You do not speak to others of the elements in you,” said Clara.

“I certainly do not: I have but one bride,” was his handsome reply.

“Is it fair to me that you should show me the worst of you?”

“All myself, my own?”

His ingratiating droop and familiar smile rendered “All myself” so affectionately meaningful in its happy reliance upon her excess of love, that at last she understood she was expected to worship him and uphold him for whatsoever he might be, without any estimation of qualities: as indeed love does, or young love does: as she perhaps did once, before he chilled her senses. That was before her “little brain” had become active and had turned her senses to revolt.

It was on the full river of love that Sir Willoughby supposed the whole floating bulk of his personality to be securely sustained; and therefore it was that, believing himself swimming at his ease, he discoursed of himself.

She went straight away from that idea with her mental exclamation: “Why does he not paint himself in brighter colours to me!” and the question: “Has he no ideal of generosity and chivalry?”

But the unfortunate gentleman imagined himself to be loved, on Love’s very bosom. He fancied that everything relating to himself excited maidenly curiosity, womanly reverence, ardours to know more of him, which he was ever willing to satisfy by repeating the same things. His notion of women was the primitive black and white: there are good women, bad women; and he possessed a good one. His high opinion of himself fortified the belief that Providence, as a matter of justice and fitness, must

necessarily select a good one for him—or what are we to think of Providence? And this female, shaped by that informing hand, would naturally be in harmony with him, from the centre of his profound identity to the raying circle of his variations. Know the centre, you know the circle, and you discover that the variations are simply characteristics, but you must travel on the rays from the circle to get to the centre. Consequently Sir Willoughby put Miss Middleton on one or other of these converging lines from time to time. Us, too, he drags into the deeps, but when we have harpooned a whale and are attached to the rope, down we must go; the miracle is to see us rise again.

Page 2711

Women of mixed essences shading off the divine to the considerably lower were outside his vision of woman. His mind could as little admit an angel in pottery as a rogue in porcelain. For him they were what they were when fashioned at the beginning; many cracked, many stained, here and there a perfect specimen designed for the elect of men. At a whisper of the world he shut the prude's door on them with a slam; himself would have branded them with the letters in the hue of fire. Privately he did so; and he was constituted by his extreme sensitiveness and taste for ultra-feminine refinement to be a severe critic of them during the carnival of egoism, the love-season. Constantia . . . can it be told? She had been, be it said, a fair and frank young merchant with him in that season; she was of a nature to be a mother of heroes; she met the salute, almost half-way, ingenuously unlike the coming mothers of the regiments of marionettes, who retire in vapours, downcast, as by convention; ladies most flattering to the egoistical gentleman, for they proclaim him the "first". Constantia's offence had been no greater, but it was not that dramatic performance of purity which he desired of an affianced lady, and so the offence was great.

The love-season is the carnival of egoism, and it brings the touchstone to our natures. I speak of love, not the mask, and not of the flutings upon the theme of love, but of the passion; a flame having, like our mortality, death in it as well as life, that may or may not be lasting. Applied to Sir Willoughby, as to thousands of civilized males, the touchstone found him requiring to be dealt with by his betrothed as an original savage. She was required to play incessantly on the first reclaiming chord which led our ancestral satyr to the measures of the dance, the threading of the maze, and the setting conformably to his partner before it was accorded to him to spin her with both hands and a chirrup of his frisky heels. To keep him in awe and hold him enchained, there are things she must never do, dare never say, must not think. She must be cloistral. Now, strange and awful though it be to hear, women perceive this requirement of them in the spirit of the man; they perceive, too, and it may be gratefully, that they address their performances less to the taming of the green and prankish monsieur of the forest than to the pacification of a voracious aesthetic gluttony, craving them insatiably, through all the tenses, with shrieks of the lamentable letter "I" for their purity. Whether they see that it has its foundation in the sensual, and distinguish the ultra-refined but lineally great-grandson of the Hoof in this vast and dainty exacting appetite is uncertain. They probably do not; the more the damage; for in the appeasement of the glutton they have to practise much simulation; they are in their way losers like their ancient mothers. It is the palpable and material of them still which they are tempted to flourish, wherewith to invite

Page 2712

and allay pursuit: a condition under which the spiritual, wherein their hope lies, languishes. The capaciously strong in soul among women will ultimately detect an infinite grossness in the demand for purity infinite, spotless bloom. Earlier or later they see they have been victims of the singular Egoist, have worn a mask of ignorance to be named innocent, have turned themselves into market produce for his delight, and have really abandoned the commodity in ministering to the lust for it, suffered themselves to be dragged ages back in playing upon the fleshly innocence of happy accident to gratify his jealous greed of possession, when it should have been their task to set the soul above the fairest fortune and the gift of strength in women beyond ornamental whiteness. Are they not of nature warriors, like men?—men's mates to bear them heroes instead of puppets? But the devouring male Egoist prefers them as inanimate overwrought polished pure metal precious vessels, fresh from the hands of the artificer, for him to walk away with hugging, call all his own, drink of, and fill and drink of, and forget that he stole them.

This running off on a by-road is no deviation from Sir Willoughby Patterne and Miss Clara Middleton. He, a fairly intelligent man, and very sensitive, was blinded to what was going on within her visibly enough, by her production of the article he demanded of her sex. He had to leave the fair young lady to ride to his county-town, and his design was to conduct her through the covert of a group of laurels, there to revel in her soft confusion. She resisted; nay, resolutely returned to the lawn-sward. He contrasted her with Constantia in the amorous time, and rejoiced in his disappointment. He saw the goddess Modesty guarding Purity; and one would be bold to say that he did not hear the Precepts, Purity's aged grannams maternal and paternal, cawing approval of her over their munching gums. And if you ask whether a man, sensitive and a lover, can be so blinded, you are condemned to re-peruse the foregoing paragraph.

Miss Middleton was not sufficiently instructed in the position of her sex to know that she had plunged herself in the thick of the strife of one of their great battles. Her personal position, however, was instilling knowledge rapidly, as a disease in the frame teaches us what we are and have to contend with. Could she marry this man? He was evidently manageable. Could she condescend to the use of arts in managing him to obtain a placable life?—a horror of swampy flatness! So vividly did the sight of that dead heaven over an unvarying level earth swim on her fancy, that she shut her eyes in angry exclusion of it as if it were outside, assailing her; and she nearly stumbled upon young Crossjay.

"Oh, have I hurt you?" he cried.

"No," said she, "it was my fault. Lead me somewhere away from everybody."

Page 2713

The boy took her hand, and she resumed her thoughts; and, pressing his fingers and feeling warm to him both for his presence and silence, so does the blood in youth lead the mind, even cool and innocent blood, even with a touch, that she said to herself, “And if I marry, and then . . . Where will honour be then? I marry him to be true to my word of honour, and if then . . . !” An intolerable languor caused her to sigh profoundly. It is written as she thought it; she thought in blanks, as girls do, and some women. A shadow of the male Egoist is in the chamber of their brains overawing them.

“Were I to marry, and to run!” There is the thought; she is offered up to your mercy. We are dealing with a girl feeling herself desperately situated, and not a fool.

“I’m sure you’re dead tired, though,” said Crossjay.

“No, I am not; what makes you think so?” said Clara.

“I do think so.”

“But why do you think so?”

“You’re so hot.”

“What makes you think that?”

“You’re so red.”

“So are you, Crossjay.”

“I’m only red in the middle of the cheeks, except when I’ve been running. And then you talk to yourself, just as boys do when they are blown.”

“Do they?”

“They say: ‘I know I could have kept up longer’, or, ‘my buckle broke’, all to themselves, when they break down running.”

“And you have noticed that?”

“And, Miss Middleton, I don’t wish you were a boy, but I should like to live near you all my life and be a gentleman. I’m coming with Miss Dale this evening to stay at the Hall and be looked after, instead of stopping with her cousin who takes care of her father. Perhaps you and I’ll play chess at night.”

“At night you will go to bed, Crossjay.”

“Not if I have Sir Willoughby to catch hold of. He says I’m an authority on birds’ eggs. I can manage rabbits and poultry. Isn’t a farmer a happy man? But he doesn’t marry ladies. A cavalry officer has the best chance.”

“But you are going to be a naval officer.”

“I don’t know. It’s not positive. I shall bring my two dormice, and make them perform gymnastics on the dinnertable. They’re such dear little things. Naval officers are not like Sir Willoughby.”

“No, they are not,” said Clara, “they give their lives to their country.”

“And then they’re dead,” said Crossjay.

Clara wished Sir Willoughby were confronting her: she could have spoken.

She asked the boy where Mr. Whitford was. Crossjay pointed very secretly in the direction of the double-blossom wild-cherry. Coming within gaze of the stem, she beheld Vernon stretched at length, reading, she supposed; asleep, she discovered: his finger in the leaves of a book; and what book? She had a curiosity to know the title of the book he would read beneath these boughs, and grasping Crossjay’s hand fast she craned her neck, as one timorous of

Page 2714

a fall in peeping over chasms, for a glimpse of the page; but immediately, and still with a bent head, she turned her face to where the load of virginal blossom, whiter than summer-cloud on the sky, showered and drooped and clustered so thick as to claim colour and seem, like higher Alpine snows in noon-sunlight, a flush of white. From deep to deeper heavens of white, her eyes perched and soared. Wonder lived in her. Happiness in the beauty of the tree pressed to supplant it, and was more mortal and narrower. Reflection came, contracting her vision and weighing her to earth. Her reflection was: "He must be good who loves to be and sleep beneath the branches of this tree!" She would rather have clung to her first impression: wonder so divine, so unbounded, was like soaring into homes of angel-crowded space, sweeping through folded and on to folded white fountain-bow of wings, in innumerable columns; but the thought of it was no recovery of it; she might as well have striven to be a child. The sensation of happiness promised to be less short-lived in memory, and would have been had not her present disease of the longing for happiness ravaged every corner of it for the secret of its existence. The reflection took root. "He must be good . . . !" That reflection vowed to endure. Poor by comparison with what it displaced, it presented itself to her as conferring something on him, and she would not have had it absent though it robbed her.

She looked down. Vernon was dreamily looking up.

She plucked Crossjay hurriedly away, whispering that he had better not wake Mr. Whitford, and then she proposed to reverse their previous chase, and she be the hound and he the hare. Crossjay fetched a magnificent start. On his glancing behind he saw Miss Middleton walking listlessly, with a hand at her side.

"There's a regular girl!" said he in some disgust; for his theory was, that girls always have something the matter with them to spoil a game.

CHAPTER XII

MISS MIDDLETON AND MR. VERNON WHITFORD

Looking upward, not quite awakened out of a transient doze, at a fair head circled in dazzling blossom, one may temporize awhile with common sense, and take it for a vision after the eyes have regained direction of the mind. Vernon did so until the plastic vision interwound with reality alarmingly. This is the embrace of a Melusine who will soon have the brain if she is encouraged. Slight dalliance with her makes the very diminutive seem as big as life. He jumped to his feet, rattled his throat, planted firmness on his brows and mouth, and attacked the dream-giving earth with tremendous long strides, that his blood might be lively at the throne of understanding. Miss Middleton and young Crossjay were within hail: it was her face he had seen, and still the idea of a

vision, chased from his reasonable wits, knocked hard and again for readmission. There was little

Page 2715

for a man of humble mind toward the sex to think of in the fact of a young lady's bending rather low to peep at him asleep, except that the poise of her slender figure, between an air of spying and of listening, vividly recalled his likening of her to the Mountain Echo. Man or maid sleeping in the open air provokes your tiptoe curiosity. Men, it is known, have in that state cruelly been kissed; and no rights are bestowed on them, they are teased by a vapourish rapture; what has happened to them the poor fellows barely divine: they have a crazy step from that day. But a vision is not so distracting; it is our own, we can put it aside and return to it, play at rich and poor with it, and are not to be summoned before your laws and rules for secreting it in our treasury. Besides, it is the golden key of all the possible; new worlds expand beneath the dawn it brings us. Just outside reality, it illumines, enriches and softens real things;—and to desire it in preference to the simple fact is a damning proof of enervation.

Such was Vernon's winding up of his brief drama of fantasy. He was aware of the fantastical element in him and soon had it under. Which of us who is of any worth is without it? He had not much vanity to trouble him, and passion was quiet, so his task was not gigantic. Especially be it remarked, that he was a man of quick pace, the sovereign remedy for the dispersing of the mental fen-mist. He had tried it and knew that nonsense is to be walked off.

Near the end of the park young Crossjay overtook him, and after acting the pumped one a trifle more than needful, cried: "I say, Mr. Whitford, there's Miss Middleton with her handkerchief out."

"What for, my lad?" said Vernon.

"I'm sure I don't know. All of a sudden she bumped down. And, look what fellows girls are!—here she comes as if nothing had happened, and I saw her feel at her side."

Clara was shaking her head to express a denial. "I am not at all unwell," she said, when she came near. "I guessed Crossjay's business in running up to you; he's a good-for-nothing, officious boy. I was tired, and rested for a moment."

Crossjay peered at her eyelids. Vernon looked away and said: "Are you too tired for a stroll?"

"Not now."

"Shall it be brisk?"

"You have the lead."

He led at a swing of the legs that accelerated young Crossjay's to the double, but she with her short, swift, equal steps glided along easily on a fine by his shoulder, and he

groaned to think that of all the girls of earth this one should have been chosen for the position of fine lady.

“You won’t tire me,” said she, in answer to his look.

“You remind me of the little Piedmontese Bersaglieri on the march.”

“I have seen them trotting into Como from Milan.”

“They cover a quantity of ground in a day, if the ground’s flat. You want another sort of step for the mountains.”

Page 2716

“I should not attempt to dance up.”

“They soon tame romantic notions of them.”

“The mountains tame luxurious dreams, you mean. I see how they are conquered. I can plod. Anything to be high up!”

“Well, there you have the secret of good work: to plod on and still keep the passion fresh.”

“Yes, when we have an aim in view.”

“We always have one.”

“Captives have?”

“More than the rest of us.”

Ignorant man! What of wives miserably wedded? What aim in view have these most woeful captives? Horror shrouds it, and shame reddens through the folds to tell of innermost horror.

“Take me back to the mountains, if you please, Mr. Whitford,” Miss Middleton said, fallen out of sympathy with him. “Captives have death in view, but that is not an aim.”

“Why may not captives expect a release?”

“Hardly from a tyrant.”

“If you are thinking of tyrants, it may be so. Say the tyrant dies?”

“The prison-gates are unlocked and out comes a skeleton. But why will you talk of skeletons! The very name of mountain seems life in comparison with any other subject.”

“I assure you,” said Vernon, with the fervour of a man lighting on an actual truth in his conversation with a young lady, “it’s not the first time I have thought you would be at home in the Alps. You would walk and climb as well as you dance.”

She liked to hear Clara Middleton talked of, and of her having been thought of, and giving him friendly eyes, barely noticing that he was in a glow, she said: “If you speak so encouragingly I shall fancy we are near an ascent.”

“I wish we were,” said he.

“We can realize it by dwelling on it, don’t you think?”

“We can begin climbing.”

“Oh!” she squeezed herself shadowily.

“Which mountain shall it be?” said Vernon, in the right real earnest tone.

Miss Middleton suggested a lady’s mountain first, for a trial. “And then, if you think well enough of me—if I have not stumbled more than twice, or asked more than ten times how far it is from the top, I should like to be promoted to scale a giant.”

They went up to some of the lesser heights of Switzerland and Styria, and settled in South Tyrol, the young lady preferring this district for the strenuous exercise of her climbing powers because she loved Italian colour; and it seemed an exceedingly good reason to the genial imagination she had awakened in Mr. Whitford. “Though,” said he, abruptly, “you are not so much Italian as French.”

She hoped she was English, she remarked.

“Of course you are English; . . . yes.” He moderated his ascent with the halting affirmative.

She inquired wonderingly why he spoke in apparent hesitation.

“Well, you have French feet, for example: French wits, French impatience,” he lowered his voice, “and charm”

Page 2717

“And love of compliments.”

“Possibly. I was not conscious of paying them”

“And a disposition to rebel?”

“To challenge authority, at least.”

“That is a dreadful character.”

“At all events, it is a character.”

“Fit for an Alpine comrade?”

“For the best of comrades anywhere.”

“It is not a piece of drawing-room sculpture: that is the most one can say for it!” she dropped a dramatic sigh.

Had he been willing she would have continued the theme, for the pleasure a poor creature long gnawing her sensations finds in seeing herself from the outside. It fell away. After a silence, she could not renew it; and he was evidently indifferent, having to his own satisfaction dissected and stamped her a foreigner. With it passed her holiday. She had forgotten Sir Willoughby: she remembered him and said. “You knew Miss Durham, Mr. Whitford?”

He answered briefly, “I did.”

“Was she? . . .” some hot-faced inquiry peered forth and withdrew.

“Very handsome,” said Vernon.

“English?”

“Yes; the dashing style of English.”

“Very courageous.”

“I dare say she had a kind of courage.”

“She did very wrong.”

“I won’t say no. She discovered a man more of a match with herself; luckily not too late. We’re at the mercy . . .”

“Was she not unpardonable?”

“I should be sorry to think that of any one.”

“But you agree that she did wrong.”

“I suppose I do. She made a mistake and she corrected it. If she had not, she would have made a greater mistake.”

“The manner. . .”

“That was bad—as far as we know. The world has not much right to judge. A false start must now and then be made. It’s better not to take notice of it, I think.”

“What is it we are at the mercy of?”

“Currents of feeling, our natures. I am the last man to preach on the subject: young ladies are enigmas to me; I fancy they must have a natural perception of the husband suitable to them, and the reverse; and if they have a certain degree of courage, it follows that they please themselves.”

“They are not to reflect on the harm they do?” said Miss Middleton.

“By all means let them reflect; they hurt nobody by doing that.”

“But a breach of faith!”

“If the faith can be kept through life, all’s well.”

“And then there is the cruelty, the injury!”

“I really think that if a young lady came to me to inform me she must break our engagement—I have never been put to the proof, but to suppose it:—I should not think her cruel.”

“Then she would not be much of a loss.”

“And I should not think so for this reason, that it is impossible for a girl to come to such a resolution without previously showing signs of it to her . . . the man she is engaged to. I think it unfair to engage a girl for longer than a week or two, just time enough for her preparations and publications.”

Page 2718

“If he is always intent on himself, signs are likely to be unheeded by him,” said Miss Middleton.

He did not answer, and she said, quickly:

“It must always be a cruelty. The world will think so. It is an act of inconstancy.”

“If they knew one another well before they were engaged.”

“Are you not singularly tolerant?” said she.

To which Vernon replied with airy cordiality:—

“In some cases it is right to judge by results; we’ll leave severity to the historian, who is bound to be a professional moralist and put pleas of human nature out of the scales. The lady in question may have been to blame, but no hearts were broken, and here we have four happy instead of two miserable.”

His persecuting geniality of countenance appealed to her to confirm this judgement by results, and she nodded and said: “Four,” as the awe-stricken speak.

From that moment until young Crossjay fell into the green-rutted lane from a tree, and was got on his legs half stunned, with a hanging lip and a face like the inside of a flayed eel-skin, she might have been walking in the desert, and alone, for the pleasure she had in society.

They led the fated lad home between them, singularly drawn together by their joint ministrations to him, in which her delicacy had to stand fire, and sweet good-nature made naught of any trial. They were hand in hand with the little fellow as physician and professional nurse.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST EFFORT AFTER FREEDOM

Crossjay’s accident was only another proof, as Vernon told Miss Dale, that the boy was but half monkey.

“Something fresh?” she exclaimed on seeing him brought into the Hall, where she had just arrived.

“Simply a continuation,” said Vernon. “He is not so prehensile as he should be. He probably in extremity relies on the tail that has been docked. Are you a man, Crossjay?”

“I should think I was!” Crossjay replied, with an old man’s voice, and a ghastly twitch for a smile overwhelmed the compassionate ladies.

Miss Dale took possession of him. “You err in the other direction,” she remarked to Vernon.

“But a little bracing roughness is better than spoiling him.” said Miss Middleton.

She did not receive an answer, and she thought: “Whatever Willoughby does is right, to this lady!”

Clara’s impression was renewed when Sir Willoughby sat beside Miss Dale in the evening; and certainly she had never seen him shine so picturesquely as in his bearing with Miss Dale. The sprightly sallies of the two, their rallyings, their laughter, and her fine eyes, and his handsome gestures, won attention like a fencing match of a couple keen with the foils to display the mutual skill. And it was his design that she should admire the display; he was anything but obtuse; enjoying the match as he did and necessarily did to act so excellent a part in it, he meant the observer to see the man he was with a lady not of raw understanding. So it went on from day to day for three days.

Page 2719

She fancied once that she detected the agreeable stirring of the brood of jealousy, and found it neither in her heart nor in her mind, but in the book of wishes, well known to the young where they write matter which may sometimes be independent of both those volcanic albums. Jealousy would have been a relief to her, a dear devil's aid. She studied the complexion of jealousy to delude herself with the sense of the spirit being in her, and all the while she laughed, as at a vile theatre whereof the imperfection of the stage machinery rather than the performance is the wretched source of amusement.

Vernon had deeply depressed her. She was hunted by the figure 4. Four happy instead of two miserable. He had said it, involving her among the four; and so it must be, she considered, and she must be as happy as she could; for not only was he incapable of perceiving her state, he was unable to imagine other circumstances to surround her. How, to be just to him, were they imaginable by him or any one?

Her horrible isolation of secrecy in a world amiable in unsuspectingness frightened her. To fling away her secret, to conform, to be unrebellious, uncritical, submissive, became an impatient desire; and the task did not appear so difficult since Miss Dale's arrival. Endearments had been rare, more formal; living bodily untroubled and unashamed, and, as she phrased it, having no one to care for her, she turned insensibly in the direction where she was due; she slightly imitated Miss Dale's colloquial responsiveness. To tell truth, she felt vivacious in a moderate way with Willoughby after seeing him with Miss Dale. Liberty wore the aspect of a towering prison-wall; the desperate undertaking of climbing one side and dropping to the other was more than she, unaided, could resolve on; consequently, as no one cared for her, a worthless creature might as well cease dreaming and stipulating for the fulfilment of her dreams; she might as well yield to her fate; nay, make the best of it.

Sir Willoughby was flattered and satisfied. Clara's adopted vivacity proved his thorough knowledge of feminine nature; nor did her feebleness in sustaining it displease him. A steady look of hers had of late perplexed the man, and he was comforted by signs of her inefficiency where he excelled. The effort and the failure were both of good omen.

But she could not continue the effort. He had overweighted her too much for the mimicry of a sentiment to harden and have an apparently natural place among her impulses; and now an idea came to her that he might, it might be hoped, possibly see in Miss Dale, by present contrast, the mate he sought; by contrast with an unanswering creature like herself, he might perhaps realize in Miss Dale's greater accomplishments and her devotion to him the merit of suitability; he might be induced to do her justice. Dim as the loop-hole was, Clara fixed her mind on it till it gathered light. And as a prelude to action,

Page 2720

she plunged herself into a state of such profound humility, that to accuse it of being simulated would be venturesome, though it was not positive. The tempers of the young are liquid fires in isles of quicksand; the precious metals not yet cooled in a solid earth. Her compassion for Laetitia was less forced, but really she was almost as earnest in her self-abasement, for she had not latterly been brilliant, not even adequate to the ordinary requirements of conversation. She had no courage, no wit, no diligence, nothing that she could distinguish save discontentment like a corroding acid, and she went so far in sincerity as with a curious shift of feeling to pity the man plighted to her. If it suited her purpose to pity Sir Willoughby, she was not moved by policy, be assured; her needs were her nature, her moods her mind; she had the capacity to make anything serve her by passing into it with the glance which discerned its usefulness; and this is how it is that the young, when they are in trouble, without approaching the elevation of scientific hypocrites, can teach that able class lessons in hypocrisy.

“Why should not Willoughby be happy?” she said; and the exclamation was pushed forth by the second thought: “Then I shall be free!” Still that thought came second.

The desire for the happiness of Willoughby was fervent on his behalf and wafted her far from friends and letters to a narrow Tyrolean valley, where a shallow river ran, with the indentations of a remotely seen army of winding ranks in column, topaz over the pebbles to hollows of ravishing emerald. There sat Liberty, after her fearful leap over the prison-wall, at peace to watch the water and the falls of sunshine on the mountain above, between descending pine-stem shadows. Clara’s wish for his happiness, as soon as she had housed herself in the imagination of her freedom, was of a purity that made it seem exceedingly easy for her to speak to him.

The opportunity was offered by Sir Willoughby. Every morning after breakfast Miss Dale walked across the park to see her father, and on this occasion Sir Willoughby and Miss Middleton went with her as far as the lake, all three discoursing of the beauty of various trees, birches, aspens, poplars, beeches, then in their new green. Miss Dale loved the aspen, Miss Middleton the beech, Sir Willoughby the birch, and pretty things were said by each in praise of the favoured object, particularly by Miss Dale. So much so that when she had gone on he recalled one of her remarks, and said: “I believe, if the whole place were swept away to-morrow, Laetitia Dale could reconstruct it and put those aspens on the north of the lake in number and situation correctly where you have them now. I would guarantee her description of it in absence correct.”

“Why should she be absent?” said Clara, palpitating.

Page 2721

“Well, why!” returned Sir Willoughby. “As you say, there is no reason why. The art of life, and mine will be principally a country life—town is not life, but a tornado whirling atoms—the art is to associate a group of sympathetic friends in our neighbourhood; and it is a fact worth noting that if ever I feel tired of the place, a short talk with Laetitia Dale refreshes it more than a month or two on the Continent. She has the well of enthusiasm. And there is a great advantage in having a cultivated person at command, with whom one can chat of any topic under the sun. I repeat, you have no need of town if you have friends like Laetitia Dale within call. My mother esteemed her highly.”

“Willoughby, she is not obliged to go.”

“I hope not. And, my love, I rejoice that you have taken to her. Her father’s health is poor. She would be a young spinster to live alone in a country cottage.”

“What of your scheme?”

“Old Vernon is a very foolish fellow.”

“He has declined?”

“Not a word on the subject! I have only to propose it to be snubbed, I know.”

“You may not be aware how you throw him into the shade with her.”

“Nothing seems to teach him the art of dialogue with ladies.”

“Are not gentlemen shy when they see themselves outshone?”

“He hasn’t it, my love: Vernon is deficient in the lady’s tongue.”

“I respect him for that.”

“Outshone, you say? I do not know of any shining—save to one, who lights me, path and person!”

The identity of the one was conveyed to her in a bow and a soft pressure.

“Not only has he not the lady’s tongue, which I hold to be a man’s proper accomplishment,” continued Sir Willoughby, “he cannot turn his advantages to account. Here has Miss Dale been with him now four days in the house. They are exactly on the same footing as when she entered it. You ask? I will tell you. It is this: it is want of warmth. Old Vernon is a scholar—and a fish. Well, perhaps he has cause to be shy of matrimony; but he is a fish.”

“You are reconciled to his leaving you?”

“False alarm! The resolution to do anything unaccustomed is quite beyond old Vernon.”

“But if Mr. Oxford—Whitford . . . your swans coming sailing up the lake, how beautiful they look when they are indignant! I was going to ask you, surely men witnessing a marked admiration for some one else will naturally be discouraged?”

Sir Willoughby stiffened with sudden enlightenment.

Though the word jealousy had not been spoken, the drift of her observations was clear. Smiling inwardly, he said, and the sentences were not enigmas to her: “Surely, too, young ladies . . . a little?—Too far? But an old friendship! About the same as the fitting of an old glove to a hand. Hand and glove have only to meet. Where there is natural harmony you would not have discord. Ay, but you have it if you check the harmony. My dear girl! You child!”

Page 2722

He had actually, in this parabolic, and commendable, obscureness, for which she thanked him in her soul, struck the very point she had not named and did not wish to hear named, but wished him to strike; he was anything but obtuse. His exultation, of the compressed sort, was extreme, on hearing her cry out:

“Young ladies may be. Oh! not I, not I. I can convince you. Not that. Believe me, Willoughby. I do not know what it is to feel that, or anything like it. I cannot conceive a claim on any one’s life—as a claim: or the continuation of an engagement not founded on perfect, perfect sympathy. How should I feel it, then? It is, as you say of Mr. Ox—-Whitford, beyond me.”

Sir Willoughby caught up the Ox—Whitford.

Bursting with laughter in his joyful pride, he called it a portrait of old Vernon in society. For she thought a trifle too highly of Vernon, as here and there a raw young lady does think of the friends of her plighted man, which is waste of substance properly belonging to him, as it were, in the loftier sense, an expenditure in genuflexions to wayside idols of the reverence she should bring intact to the temple. Derision instructs her.

Of the other subject—her jealousy—he had no desire to hear more. She had winced: the woman had been touched to smarting in the girl: enough. She attempted the subject once, but faintly, and his careless parrying threw her out. Clara could have bitten her tongue for that reiterated stupid slip on the name of Whitford; and because she was innocent at heart she persisted in asking herself how she could be guilty of it.

“You both know the botanic titles of these wild flowers,” she said.

“Who?” he inquired.

“You and Miss Dale.”

Sir Willoughby shrugged. He was amused.

“No woman on earth will grace a barouche so exquisitely as my Clara.”

“Where?” said she.

“During our annual two months in London. I drive a barouche there, and venture to prophesy that my equipage will create the greatest excitement of any in London. I see old Horace De Craye gazing!”

She sighed. She could not drag him to the word, or a hint of it necessary to her subject.

But there it was; she saw it. She had nearly let it go, and blushed at being obliged to name it.

“Jealousy, do you mean. Willoughby? the people in London would be jealous?—-Colonel De Craye? How strange! That is a sentiment I cannot understand.”

Sir Willoughby gesticulated the “Of course not” of an established assurance to the contrary.

“Indeed, Willoughby, I do not.”

“Certainly not.”

He was now in her trap. And he was imagining himself to be anatomizing her feminine nature.

Page 2723

“Can I give you a proof, Willoughby? I am so utterly incapable of it that—listen to me—-were you to come to me to tell me, as you might, how much better suited to you Miss Dale has appeared than I am—and I fear I am not; it should be spoken plainly; unsuited altogether, perhaps—I would, I beseech you to believe—you must believe me—give you . . . give you your freedom instantly; most truly; and engage to speak of you as I should think of you. Willoughby, you would have no one to praise you in public and in private as I should, for you would be to me the most honest, truthful, chivalrous gentleman alive. And in that case I would undertake to declare that she would not admire you more than I; Miss Dale would not; she would not admire you more than I; not even Miss Dale.”

This, her first direct leap for liberty, set Clara panting, and so much had she to say that the nervous and the intellectual halves of her dashed like cymbals, dazing and stunning her with the appositeness of things to be said, and dividing her in indecision as to the cunningest to move him of the many pressing.

The condition of feminine jealousy stood revealed.

He had driven her farther than he intended.

“Come, let me allay these . . .” he soothed her with hand and voice, while seeking for his phrase; “these magnified pinpoints. Now, my Clara! on my honour! and when I put it forward in attestation, my honour has the most serious meaning speech can have; ordinarily my word has to suffice for bonds, promises, or asseverations; on my honour! not merely is there, my poor child! no ground of suspicion, I assure you, I declare to you, the fact of the case is the very reverse. Now, mark me; of her sentiments I cannot pretend to speak; I did not, to my knowledge, originate, I am not responsible for them, and I am, before the law, as we will say, ignorant of them; that is, I have never heard a declaration of them, and I, am, therefore, under pain of the stigma of excessive fatuity, bound to be non-cognizant. But as to myself I can speak for myself and, on my honour! Clara—to be as direct as possible, even to baldness, and you know I loathe it—I could not, I repeat, I could not marry Laetitia Dale! Let me impress it on you. No flatteries—-we are all susceptible more or less—no conceivable condition could bring it about; no amount of admiration. She and I are excellent friends; we cannot be more. When you see us together, the natural concord of our minds is of course misleading. She is a woman of genius. I do not conceal, I profess my admiration of her. There are times when, I confess, I require a Laetitia Dale to bring me out, give and take. I am indebted to her for the enjoyment of the duet few know, few can accord with, fewer still are allowed the privilege of playing with a human being. I am indebted, I own, and I feel deep gratitude; I own to a lively friendship for Miss Dale, but if she is displeasing in the sight of my bride by . . . by the breadth of an eyelash, then . . .”

Page 2724

Sir Willoughby's arm waved Miss Dale off away into outer darkness in the wilderness.

Clara shut her eyes and rolled her eyeballs in a frenzy of unuttered revolt from the Egoist.

But she was not engaged in the colloquy to be an advocate of Miss Dale or of common humanity.

"Ah!" she said, simply determining that the subject should not drop.

"And, ah!" he mocked her tenderly. "True, though! And who knows better than my Clara that I require youth, health, beauty, and the other undefinable attributes fitting with mine and beseeming the station of the lady called to preside over my household and represent me? What says my other self? my fairer? But you are! my love, you are! Understand my nature rightly, and you . . . "

"I do! I do!" interposed Clara; "if I did not by this time I should be idiotic. Let me assure you, I understand it. Oh! listen to me: one moment. Miss Dale regards me as the happiest woman on earth. Willoughby, if I possessed her good qualities, her heart and mind, no doubt I should be. It is my wish—you must hear me, hear me out—my wish, my earnest wish, my burning prayer, my wish to make way for her. She appreciates you: I do not—to my shame, I do not. She worships you: I do not, I cannot. You are the rising sun to her. It has been so for years. No one can account for love; I daresay not for the impossibility of loving . . . loving where we should; all love bewilders me. I was not created to understand it. But she loves you, she has pined. I believe it has destroyed the health you demand as one item in your list. But you, Willoughby, can restore that. Travelling, and . . . and your society, the pleasure of your society would certainly restore it. You look so handsome together! She has unbounded devotion! as for me, I cannot idolize. I see faults: I see them daily. They astonish and wound me. Your pride would not bear to hear them spoken of, least of all by your wife. You warned me to beware—that is, you said, you said something."

Her busy brain missed the subterfuge to cover her slip of the tongue.

Sir Willoughby struck in: "And when I say that the entire concatenation is based on an erroneous observation of facts, and an erroneous deduction from that erroneous observation!—? No, no. Have confidence in me. I propose it to you in this instance, purely to save you from deception. You are cold, my love? you shivered."

"I am not cold," said Clara. "Some one, I suppose, was walking over my grave."

The gulf of a caress hove in view like an enormous billow hollowing under the curled ridge.

She stooped to a buttercup; the monster swept by.

“Your grave!” he exclaimed over her head; “my own girl!”

“Is not the orchid naturally a stranger in ground so far away from the chalk, Willoughby?”

“I am incompetent to pronounce an opinion on such important matters. My mother had a passion for every description of flower. I fancy I have some recollection of her scattering the flower you mention over the park.”

Page 2725

“If she were living now!”

“We should be happy in the blessing of the most estimable of women, my Clara.”

“She would have listened to me. She would have realized what I mean.”

“Indeed, Clara—poor soul!” he murmured to himself, aloud; “indeed you are absolutely in error. If I have seemed—but I repeat, you are deceived. The idea of ‘fitness’ is a total hallucination. Supposing you—I do it even in play painfully—entirely out of the way, unthought of. . .”

“Extinct,” Clara said low.

“Non-existent for me,” he selected a preferable term. “Suppose it; I should still, in spite of an admiration I have never thought it incumbent on me to conceal, still be—I speak emphatically—utterly incapable of the offer of my hand to Miss Dale. It may be that she is embedded in my mind as a friend, and nothing but a friend. I received the stamp in early youth. People have noticed it—we do, it seems, bring one another out, reflecting, counter-reflecting.”

She glanced up at him with a shrewd satisfaction to see that her wicked shaft had stuck.

“You do; it is a common remark,” she said. “The instantaneous difference when she comes near, any one might notice.”

“My love,” he opened the iron gate into the garden, “you encourage the naughty little suspicion.”

“But it is a beautiful sight, Willoughby. I like to see you together. I like it as I like to see colours match.”

“Very well. There is no harm then. We shall often be together. I like my fair friend. But the instant!—you have only to express a sentiment of disapprobation.”

“And you dismiss her.”

“I dismiss her. That is, as to the word, I constitute myself your echo, to clear any vestige of suspicion. She goes.”

“That is a case of a person doomed to extinction without offending.”

“Not without: for whoever offends my bride, my wife, my sovereign lady, offends me: very deeply offends me.”

“Then the caprices of your wife . . .” Clara stamped her foot imperceptibly on the lawn-sward, which was irresponsively soft to her fretfulness. She broke from the inconsequent meaningless mild tone of irony, and said: “Willoughby, women have their honour to swear by equally with men:—girls have: they have to swear an oath at the altar; may I to you now? Take it for uttered when I tell you that nothing would make me happier than your union with Miss Dale. I have spoken as much as I can. Tell me you release me.”

With the well-known screw-smile of duty upholding weariness worn to inanition, he rejoined: “Allow me once more to reiterate, that it is repulsive, inconceivable, that I should ever, under any mortal conditions, bring myself to the point of taking Miss Dale for my wife. You reduce me to this perfectly childish protestation—pitiably childish! But, my love, have I to remind you that you and I are plighted, and that I am an honourable man?”

Page 2726

“I know it, I feel it—release me!” cried Clara.

Sir Willoughby severely reprehended his short-sightedness for seeing but the one proximate object in the particular attention he had bestowed on Miss Dale. He could not disavow that they had been marked, and with an object, and he was distressed by the unwonted want of wisdom through which he had been drawn to overshoot his object. His design to excite a touch of the insane emotion in Clara’s bosom was too successful, and, “I was not thinking of her,” he said to himself in his candour, contrite.

She cried again: “Will you not, Willoughby—release me?”

He begged her to take his arm.

To consent to touch him while petitioning for a detachment, appeared discordant to Clara, but, if she expected him to accede, it was right that she should do as much as she could, and she surrendered her hand at arm’s length, disdaining the imprisoned fingers. He pressed them and said: “Dr Middleton is in the library. I see Vernon is at work with Crossjay in the West-room—the boy has had sufficient for the day. Now, is it not like old Vernon to drive his books at a cracked head before it’s half mended?”

He signalled to young Crossjay, who was up and out through the folding windows in a twinkling.

“And you will go in, and talk to Vernon of the lady in question,” Sir Willoughby whispered to Clara. “Use your best persuasions in our joint names. You have my warrant for saying that money is no consideration; house and income are assured. You can hardly have taken me seriously when I requested you to undertake Vernon before. I was quite in earnest then as now. I prepare Miss Dale. I will not have a wedding on our wedding-day; but either before or after it, I gladly speed their alliance. I think now I give you the best proof possible, and though I know that with women a delusion may be seen to be groundless and still be cherished, I rely on your good sense.”

Vernon was at the window and stood aside for her to enter. Sir Willoughby used a gentle insistence with her. She bent her head as if she were stepping into a cave. So frigid was she, that a ridiculous dread of calling Mr. Whitford Mr. Oxford was her only present anxiety when Sir Willoughby had closed the window on them.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR WILLOUGHBY AND LAETITIA

“I prepare Miss Dale.”

Sir Willoughby thought of his promise to Clara. He trifled awhile with young Crossjay, and then sent the boy flying, and wrapped himself in meditation. So shall you see standing many a statue of statesmen who have died in harness for their country.

In the hundred and fourth chapter of the thirteenth volume of the Book of Egoism it is written: Possession without obligation to the object possessed approaches felicity.

Page 2727

It is the rarest condition of ownership. For example: the possession of land is not without obligation both to the soil and the tax-collector; the possession of fine clothing is oppressed by obligation; gold, jewelry, works of art, enviable household furniture, are positive fetters; the possession of a wife we find surcharged with obligation. In all these cases possession is a gentle term for enslavement, bestowing the sort of felicity attained to by the helot drunk. You can have the joy, the pride, the intoxication of possession; you can have no free soul.

But there is one instance of possession, and that the most perfect, which leaves us free, under not a shadow of obligation, receiving ever, never giving, or if giving, giving only of our waste; as it were (sauf votre respect), by form of perspiration, radiation, if you like; unconscious poral bountifulness; and it is a beneficent process for the system. Our possession of an adoring female's worship is this instance.

The soft cherishable Parsee is hardly at any season other than prostrate. She craves nothing save that you continue in being—her sun: which is your firm constitutional endeavour: and thus you have a most exact alliance; she supplying spirit to your matter, while at the same time presenting matter to your spirit, verily a comfortable apposition. The Gods do bless it.

That they do so indeed is evident in the men they select for such a felicitous crown and aureole. Weak men would be rendered nervous by the flattery of a woman's worship; or they would be for returning it, at least partially, as though it could be bandied to and fro without emulgence of the poetry; or they would be pitiful, and quite spoil the thing. Some would be for transforming the beautiful solitary vestal flame by the first effort of the multiplication-table into your hearth-fire of slippered affection. So these men are not they whom the Gods have ever selected, but rather men of a pattern with themselves, very high and very solid men, who maintain the crown by holding divinely independent of the great emotion they have sown.

Even for them a pass of danger is ahead, as we shall see in our sample of one among the highest of them.

A clear approach to felicity had long been the portion of Sir Willoughby Patterne in his relations with Laetitia Dale. She belonged to him; he was quite unshackled by her. She was everything that is good in a parasite, nothing that is bad. His dedicated critic she was, reviewing him with a favour equal to perfect efficiency in her office; and whatever the world might say of him, to her the happy gentleman could constantly turn for his refreshing balsamic bath. She flew to the soul in him, pleasingly arousing sensations of that inhabitant; and he allowed her the right to fly, in the manner of kings, as we have heard, consenting to the privileges acted on by cats. These may not address their Majesties, but they may stare; nor will it be contested that the attentive circular eyes of the humble domestic creatures are an embellishment to Royal pomp and grandeur, such truly as should one day gain for them an inweaving and figurement—in the place

of bees, ermine tufts, and their various present decorations—upon the august great robes back-flowing and foaming over the gaspy page-boys.

Page 2728

Further to quote from the same volume of The Book: There is pain in the surrendering of that we are fain to relinquish.

The idea is too exquisitely attenuate, as are those of the whole body-guard of the heart of Egoism, and will slip through you unless you shall have made a study of the gross of volumes of the first and second sections of The Book, and that will take you up to senility; or you must make a personal entry into the pages, perchance; or an escape out of them. There was once a venerable gentleman for whom a white hair grew on the cop of his nose, laughing at removals. He resigned himself to it in the end, and lastingly contemplated the apparition. It does not concern us what effect was produced on his countenance and his mind; enough that he saw a fine thing, but not so fine as the idea cited above; which has been between the two eyes of humanity ever since women were sought in marriage. With yonder old gentleman it may have been a ghostly hair or a disease of the optic nerves; but for us it is a real growth, and humanity might profitably imitate him in his patient speculation upon it.

Sir Willoughby Patterne, though ready in the pursuit of duty and policy (an oft-united couple) to cast Miss Dale away, had to consider that he was not simply, so to speak, casting her over a hedge, he was casting her for a man to catch her; and this was a much greater trial than it had been on the previous occasion, when she went over bump to the ground. In the arms of a husband, there was no knowing how soon she might forget her soul's fidelity. It had not hurt him to sketch the project of the conjunction; benevolence assisted him; but he winced and smarted on seeing it take shape. It sullied his idea of Laetitia.

Still, if, in spite of so great a change in her fortune, her spirit could be guaranteed changeless, he, for the sake of pacifying his bride, and to keep two serviceable persons near him, at command, might resolve to join them. The vision of his resolution brought with it a certain pallid contempt of the physically faithless woman; no wonder he betook himself to The Book, and opened it on the scorching chapters treating of the sex, and the execrable wiles of that foremost creature of the chase, who runs for life. She is not spared in the Biggest of Books. But close it.

The writing in it having been done chiefly by men, men naturally receive their fortification from its wisdom, and half a dozen of the popular sentences for the confusion of women (cut in brass worn to a polish like sombre gold), refreshed Sir Willoughby for his undertaking.

An examination of Laetitia's faded complexion braced him very cordially.

His Clara, jealous of this poor leaf!

Page 2729

He could have desired the transfusion of a quality or two from Laetitia to his bride; but you cannot, as in cookery, obtain a mixture of the essences of these creatures; and if, as it is possible to do, and as he had been doing recently with the pair of them at the Hall, you stew them in one pot, you are far likelier to intensify their little birthmarks of individuality. Had they a tendency to excellence it might be otherwise; they might then make the exchanges we wish for; or scientifically concocted in a harem for a sufficient length of time by a sultan anything but obtuse, they might. It is, however, fruitless to dwell on what was only a glimpse of a wild regret, like the crossing of two express trains along the rails in Sir Willoughby's head.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel were sitting with Miss Dale, all three at work on embroideries. He had merely to look at Miss Eleanor. She rose. She looked at Miss Isabel, and rattled her chatelaine to account for her departure. After a decent interval Miss Isabel glided out. Such was the perfect discipline of the household.

Sir Willoughby played an air on the knee of his crossed leg.

Laetitia grew conscious of a meaning in the silence. She said, "You have not been vexed by affairs to-day?"

"Affairs," he replied, "must be peculiarly vexatious to trouble me. Concerning the country or my personal affairs?"

"I fancy I was alluding to the country."

"I trust I am as good a patriot as any man living," said he; "but I am used to the follies of my countrymen, and we are on board a stout ship. At the worst it's no worse than a rise in rates and taxes; soup at the Hall gates, perhaps; license to fell timber in one of the outer copses, or some dozen loads of coal. You hit my feudalism."

"The knight in armour has gone," said Laetitia, "and the castle with the draw-bridge. Immunity for our island has gone too since we took to commerce."

"We bartered independence for commerce. You hit our old controversy. Ay, but we do not want this overgrown population! However, we will put politics and sociology and the pack of their modern barbarous words aside. You read me intuitively. I have been, I will not say annoyed, but ruffled. I have much to do, and going into Parliament would make me almost helpless if I lose Vernon. You know of some absurd notion he has?—literary fame, and bachelor's chambers, and a chop-house, and the rest of it."

She knew, and thinking differently in the matter of literary fame, she flushed, and, ashamed of the flush, frowned.

He bent over to her with the perusing earnestness of a gentleman about to trifle.

“You cannot intend that frown?”

“Did I frown?”

“You do.”

“Now?”

“Fiercely.”

“Oh!”

“Will you smile to reassure me?”

“Willingly, as well as I can.”

A gloom overcame him. With no woman on earth did he shine so as to recall to himself seigneur and dame of the old French Court as he did with Laetitia Dale. He did not wish the period revived, but reserved it as a garden to stray into when he was in the mood for displaying elegance and brightness in the society of a lady; and in speech Laetitia helped him to the nice delusion. She was not devoid of grace of bearing either.

Page 2730

Would she preserve her beautiful responsiveness to his ascendency? Hitherto she had, and for years, and quite fresh. But how of her as a married woman? Our souls are hideously subject to the conditions of our animal nature! A wife, possibly mother, it was within sober calculation that there would be great changes in her. And the hint of any change appeared a total change to one of the lofty order who, when they are called on to relinquish possession instead of aspiring to it, say, All or nothing!

Well, but if there was danger of the marriage-tie effecting the slightest alteration of her character or habit of mind, wherefore press it upon a tolerably hardened spinster!

Besides, though he did once put her hand in Vernon's for the dance, he remembered acutely that the injury then done by his generosity to his tender sensitiveness had sickened and tarnished the effulgence of two or three successive anniversaries of his coming of age. Nor had he altogether yet got over the passion of greed for the whole group of the well-favoured of the fair sex, which in his early youth had made it bitter for him to submit to the fickleness, not to say the modest fickleness, of any handsome one of them in yielding her hand to a man and suffering herself to be led away. Ladies whom he had only heard of as ladies of some beauty incurred his wrath for having lovers or taking husbands. He was of a vast embrace; and do not exclaim, in covetousness;—for well he knew that even under Moslem law he could not have them all—but as the enamoured custodian of the sex's purity, that blushes at such big spots as lovers and husbands; and it was unbearable to see it sacrificed for others. Without their purity what are they!—what are fruiterer's plums?—unsaleable. O for the bloom on them!

"As I said, I lose my right hand in Vernon," he resumed, "and I am, it seems, inevitably to lose him, unless we contrive to fasten him down here. I think, my dear Miss Dale, you have my character. At least, I should recommend my future biographer to you—-with a caution, of course. You would have to write selfishness with a dash under it. I cannot endure to lose a member of my household—not under any circumstances; and a change of feeling toward me on the part of any of my friends because of marriage, I think hard. I would ask you, how can it be for Vernon's good to quit an easy pleasant home for the wretched profession of Literature?—wretchedly paying, I mean," he bowed to the authoress. "Let him leave the house, if he imagines he will not harmonize with its young mistress. He is queer, though a good fellow. But he ought, in that event, to have an establishment. And my scheme for Vernon—men, Miss Dale, do not change to their old friends when they marry—my scheme, which would cause the alteration in his system of life to be barely perceptible, is to build him a poetical little cottage, large enough for a couple, on the borders of my park. I have the spot in my eye. The point is, can he live alone there? Men, I say, do not change. How is it that we cannot say the same of women?"

Page 2731

Laetitia remarked: “The generic woman appears to have an extraordinary faculty for swallowing the individual.”

“As to the individual, as to a particular person, I may be wrong. Precisely because it is her case I think of, my strong friendship inspires the fear: unworthy of both, no doubt, but trace it to the source. Even pure friendship, such is the taint in us, knows a kind of jealousy; though I would gladly see her established, and near me, happy and contributing to my happiness with her incomparable social charm. Her I do not estimate generically, be sure.”

“If you do me the honour to allude to me, Sir Willoughby,” said Laetitia, “I am my father’s housemate.”

“What wooer would take that for a refusal? He would beg to be a third in the house and sharer of your affectionate burden. Honestly, why not? And I may be arguing against my own happiness; it may be the end of me!”

“The end?”

“Old friends are captious, exacting. No, not the end. Yet if my friend is not the same to me, it is the end to that form of friendship: not to the degree possibly. But when one is used to the form! And do you, in its application to friendship, scorn the word ‘use’? We are creatures of custom. I am, I confess, a poltroon in my affections; I dread changes. The shadow of the tenth of an inch in the customary elevation of an eyelid!—to give you an idea of my susceptibility. And, my dear Miss Dale, I throw myself on your charity, with all my weakness bare, let me add, as I could do to none but you. Consider, then, if I lose you! The fear is due to my pusillanimity entirely. High-souled women may be wives, mothers, and still reserve that home for their friend. They can and will conquer the viler conditions of human life. Our states, I have always contended, our various phases have to be passed through, and there is no disgrace in it so long as they do not levy toll on the quintessential, the spiritual element. You understand me? I am no adept in these abstract elucidations.”

“You explain yourself clearly,” said Laetitia.

“I have never pretended that psychology was my forte,” said he, feeling overshadowed by her cold commendation: he was not less acutely sensitive to the fractional divisions of tones than of eyelids, being, as it were, a melody with which everything was out of tune that did not modestly or mutely accord; and to bear about a melody in your person is incomparably more searching than the best of touchstones and talismans ever invented. “Your father’s health has improved latterly?”

“He did not complain of his health when I saw him this morning. My cousin Amelia is with him, and she is an excellent nurse.”

“He has a liking for Vernon.”

“He has a great respect for Mr. Whitford.”

“You have?”

“Oh, yes; I have it equally.”

“For a foundation, that is the surest. I would have the friends dearest to me begin on that. The headlong match is—how can we describe it? By its finale I am afraid. Vernon’s abilities are really to be respected. His shyness is his malady. I suppose he reflected that he was not a capitalist. He might, one would think, have addressed himself to me; my purse is not locked.”

Page 2732

“No, Sir Willoughby!” Laetitia said, warmly, for his donations in charity were famous.

Her eyes gave him the food he enjoyed, and basking in them, he continued:

“Vernon’s income would at once have been regulated commensurately with a new position requiring an increase. This money, money, money! But the world will have it so. Happily I have inherited habits of business and personal economy. Vernon is a man who would do fifty times more with a companion appreciating his abilities and making light of his little deficiencies. They are palpable, small enough. He has always been aware of my wishes:—when perhaps the fulfilment might have sent me off on another tour of the world, homebird though I am. When was it that our friendship commenced? In my boyhood, I know. Very many years back.”

“I am in my thirtieth year,” said Laetitia.

Surprised and pained by a baldness resembling the deeds of ladies (they have been known, either through absence of mind, or mania, to displace a wig) in the deadly intimacy which slaughters poetic admiration, Sir Willoughby punished her by deliberately reckoning that she did not look less.

“Genius,” he observed, “is unacquainted with wrinkles”; hardly one of his prettiest speeches; but he had been wounded, and he never could recover immediately. Coming on him in a mood of sentiment, the wound was sharp. He could very well have calculated the lady’s age. It was the jarring clash of her brazen declaration of it upon his low rich flute-notes that shocked him.

He glanced at the gold cathedral-clock on the mantel-piece, and proposed a stroll on the lawn before dinner. Laetitia gathered up her embroidery work.

“As a rule,” he said, “authoresses are not needle-women.”

“I shall resign the needle or the pen if it stamps me an exception,” she replied.

He attempted a compliment on her truly exceptional character. As when the player’s finger rests in distraction on the organ, it was without measure and disgusted his own hearing. Nevertheless, she had been so good as to diminish his apprehension that the marriage of a lady in her thirtieth year with his cousin Vernon would be so much of a loss to him; hence, while parading the lawn, now and then casting an eye at the window of the room where his Clara and Vernon were in council, the schemes he indulged for his prospective comfort and his feelings of the moment were in such striving harmony as that to which we hear orchestral musicians bringing their instruments under the process called tuning. It is not perfect, but it promises to be so soon. We are not angels, which have their dulcimers ever on the choral pitch. We are mortals attaining the celestial accord with effort, through a stage of pain. Some degree of pain was

necessary to Sir Willoughby, otherwise he would not have seen his generosity confronting him. He grew, therefore, tenderly inclined to Laetitia once more, so far as to say within himself. “For conversation she would be a valuable wife”. And this valuable wife he was presenting to his cousin.

Page 2733

Apparently, considering the duration of the conference of his Clara and Vernon, his cousin required strong persuasion to accept the present.

CHAPTER XV

THE PETITION FOR A RELEASE

Neither Clara nor Vernon appeared at the mid-day table. Dr. Middleton talked with Miss Dale on classical matters, like a good-natured giant giving a child the jump from stone to stone across a brawling mountain ford, so that an unedified audience might really suppose, upon seeing her over the difficulty, she had done something for herself. Sir Willoughby was proud of her, and therefore anxious to settle her business while he was in the humour to lose her. He hoped to finish it by shooting a word or two at Vernon before dinner. Clara's petition to be set free, released from him, had vaguely frightened even more than it offended his pride.

Miss Isabel quitted the room.

She came back, saying: "They decline to lunch."

"Then we may rise," remarked Sir Willoughby.

"She was weeping," Miss Isabel murmured to him.

"Girlish enough," he said.

The two elderly ladies went away together. Miss Dale, pursuing her theme with the Rev. Doctor, was invited by him to a course in the library. Sir Willoughby walked up and down the lawn, taking a glance at the West-room as he swung round on the turn of his leg. Growing impatient, he looked in at the window and found the room vacant.

Nothing was to be seen of Clara and Vernon during the afternoon. Near the dinner-hour the ladies were informed by Miss Middleton's maid that her mistress was lying down on her bed, too unwell with headache to be present. Young Crossjay brought a message from Vernon (delayed by birds' eggs in the delivery), to say that he was off over the hills, and thought of dining with Dr. Corney.

Sir Willoughby despatched condolences to his bride. He was not well able to employ his mind on its customary topic, being, like the dome of a bell, a man of so pervading a ring within himself concerning himself, that the recollection of a doubtful speech or unpleasant circumstance touching him closely deranged his inward peace; and as dubious and unpleasant things will often occur, he had great need of a worshipper, and was often compelled to appeal to her for signs of antidotal idolatry. In this instance, when the need of a worshipper was sharply felt, he obtained no signs at all. The Rev.

Doctor had fascinated Miss Dale; so that, both within and without, Sir Willoughby was uncomforted. His themes in public were those of an English gentleman; horses, dogs, game, sport, intrigue, scandal, politics, wines, the manly themes; with a condescension to ladies' tattle, and approbation of a racy anecdote. What interest could he possibly take in the Athenian Theatre and the girl whose flute-playing behind the scenes, imitating the nightingale, enraptured a Greek audience! He would have suspected a motive in Miss Dale's eager attentiveness, if the motive could have been conceived. Besides, the ancients were not decorous; they did not, as we make our moderns do, write for ladies. He ventured at the dinner-table to interrupt Dr. Middleton once:—

Page 2734

“Miss Dale will do wisely, I think, sir, by confining herself to your present edition of the classics.”

“That,” replied Dr. Middleton, “is the observation of a student of the dictionary of classical mythology in the English tongue.”

“The Theatre is a matter of climate, sir. You will grant me that.”

“If quick wits come of climate, it is as you say, sir.”

“With us it seems a matter of painful fostering, or the need of it,” said Miss Dale, with a question to Dr. Middleton, excluding Sir Willoughby, as though he had been a temporary disturbance of the flow of their dialogue.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel, previously excellent listeners to the learned talk, saw the necessity of coming to his rescue; but you cannot converse with your aunts, inmates of your house, on general subjects at table; the attempt increased his discomposure; he considered that he had ill-chosen his father-in-law; that scholars are an impolite race; that young or youngish women are devotees of power in any form, and will be absorbed by a scholar for a variation of a man; concluding that he must have a round of dinner-parties to friends, especially ladies, appreciating him, during the Doctor’s visit. Clara’s headache above, and Dr. Middleton’s unmannerliness below, affected his instincts in a way to make him apprehend that a stroke of misfortune was impending; thunder was in the air. Still he learned something, by which he was to profit subsequently. The topic of wine withdrew the doctor from his classics; it was magical on him. A strong fraternity of taste was discovered in the sentiments of host and guest upon particular wines and vintages; they kindled one another by naming great years of the grape, and if Sir Willoughby had to sacrifice the ladies to the topic, he much regretted a condition of things that compelled him to sin against his habit, for the sake of being in the conversation and probing an elderly gentleman’s foible.

Late at night he heard the house-bell, and meeting Vernon in the hall, invited him to enter the laboratory and tell him Dr. Corney’s last. Vernon was brief, Corney had not let fly a single anecdote, he said, and lighted his candle.

“By the way, Vernon, you had a talk with Miss Middleton?”

“She will speak to you to-morrow at twelve.”

“To-morrow at twelve?”

“It gives her four-and-twenty hours.”

Sir Willoughby determined that his perplexity should be seen; but Vernon said good-night to him, and was shooting up the stairs before the dramatic exhibition of surprise had yielded to speech.

Page 2735

Thunder was in the air and a blow coming. Sir Willoughby's instincts were awake to the many signs, nor, though silenced, were they hushed by his harping on the frantic excesses to which women are driven by the passion of jealousy. He believed in Clara's jealousy because he really had intended to rouse it; under the form of emulation, feebly. He could not suppose she had spoken of it to Vernon. And as for the seriousness of her desire to be released from her engagement, that was little credible. Still the fixing of an hour for her to speak to him after an interval of four-and-twenty hours, left an opening for the incredible to add its weight to the suspicious mass; and who would have fancied Clara Middleton so wild a victim of the intemperate passion! He muttered to himself several assuaging observations to excuse a young lady half demented, and rejected them in a lump for their nonsensical inapplicability to Clara. In order to obtain some sleep, he consented to blame himself slightly, in the style of the enamoured historian of erring beauties alluding to their peccadilloes. He had done it to edify her. Sleep, however, failed him. That an inordinate jealousy argued an overpowering love, solved his problem until he tried to fit the proposition to Clara's character. He had discerned nothing southern in her. Latterly, with the blushing Day in prospect, she had contracted and frozen. There was no reading either of her or of the mystery.

In the morning, at the breakfast-table, a confession of sleeplessness was general. Excepting Miss Dale and Dr. Middleton, none had slept a wink. "I, sir," the Doctor replied to Sir Willoughby, "slept like a lexicon in your library when Mr. Whitford and I are out of it."

Vernon incidentally mentioned that he had been writing through the night.

"You fellows kill yourselves," Sir Willoughby reproved him. "For my part, I make it a principle to get through my work without self-slaughter."

Clara watched her father for a symptom of ridicule. He gazed mildly on the systematic worker. She was unable to guess whether she would have in him an ally or a judge. The latter, she feared. Now that she had embraced the strife, she saw the division of the line where she stood from that one where the world places girls who are affianced wives; her father could hardly be with her; it had gone too far. He loved her, but he would certainly take her to be moved by a maddish whim; he would not try to understand her case. The scholar's detestation of a disarrangement of human affairs that had been by miracle contrived to run smoothly, would of itself rank him against her; and with the world to back his view of her, he might behave like a despotic father. How could she defend herself before him? At one thought of Sir Willoughby, her tongue made ready, and feminine craft was alert to prompt it; but to her father she could imagine herself opposing only dumbness and obstinacy.

Page 2736

“It is not exactly the same kind of work,” she said.

Dr Middleton rewarded her with a bushy eyebrow’s beam of his revolting humour at the baronet’s notion of work.

So little was needed to quicken her that she sunned herself in the beam, coaxing her father’s eyes to stay with hers as long as she could, and beginning to hope he might be won to her side, if she confessed she had been more in the wrong than she felt; owned to him, that is, her error in not earlier disturbing his peace.

“I do not say it is the same,” observed Sir Willoughby, bowing to their alliance of opinion. “My poor work is for the day, and Vernon’s, no doubt, for the day to come. I contend, nevertheless, for the preservation of health as the chief implement of work.”

“Of continued work; there I agree with you,” said Dr. Middleton, cordially.

Clara’s heart sunk; so little was needed to deaden her.

Accuse her of an overweening antagonism to her betrothed; yet remember that though the words had not been uttered to give her good reason for it, nature reads nature; captives may be stript of everything save that power to read their tyrant; remember also that she was not, as she well knew, blameless; her rage at him was partly against herself.

The rising from table left her to Sir Willoughby. She swam away after Miss Dale, exclaiming: “The laboratory! Will you have me for a companion on your walk to see your father? One breathes earth and heaven to-day out of doors. Isn’t it Summer with a Spring Breeze? I will wander about your garden and not hurry your visit, I promise.”

“I shall be very happy indeed. But I am going immediately,” said Laetitia, seeing Sir Willoughby hovering to snap up his bride.

“Yes; and a garden-hat and I am on the march.”

“I will wait for you on the terrace.”

“You will not have to wait.”

“Five minutes at the most,” Sir Willoughby said to Laetitia, and she passed out, leaving them alone together.

“Well, and my love!” he addressed his bride almost huggingly; “and what is the story? and how did you succeed with old Vernon yesterday? He will and he won’t? He’s a very woman in these affairs. I can’t forgive him for giving you a headache. You were found weeping.”

“Yes, I cried,” said Clara.

“And now tell me about it. You know, my dear girl, whether he does or doesn’t, our keeping him somewhere in the neighbourhood—perhaps not in the house—that is the material point. It can hardly be necessary in these days to urge marriages on. I’m sure the country is over . . . Most marriages ought to be celebrated with the funeral knell!”

“I think so,” said Clara.

“It will come to this, that marriages of consequence, and none but those, will be hailed with joyful peals.”

“Do not say such things in public, Willoughby.”

“Only to you, to you! Don’t think me likely to expose myself to the world. Well, and I sounded Miss Dale, and there will be no violent obstacle. And now about Vernon?”

Page 2737

“I will speak to you, Willoughby, when I return from my walk with Miss Dale, soon after twelve.”

“Twelve!” said he

“I name an hour. It seems childish. I can explain it. But it is named, I cannot deny, because I am a rather childish person perhaps, and have it prescribed to me to delay my speaking for a certain length of time. I may tell you at once that Mr. Whitford is not to be persuaded by me, and the breaking of our engagement would not induce him to remain.”

“Vernon used those words?”

“It was I.”

“‘The breaking of our engagement!’ Come into the laboratory, my love.”

“I shall not have time.”

“Time shall stop rather than interfere with our conversation! ’The breaking . . .’! But it’s a sort of sacrilege to speak of it.”

“That I feel; yet it has to be spoken of”

“Sometimes? Why? I can’t conceive the occasion. You know, to me, Clara, plighted faith, the affiancing of two lovers, is a piece of religion. I rank it as holy as marriage; nay, to me it is holier; I really cannot tell you how; I can only appeal to you in your bosom to understand me. We read of divorces with comparative indifference. They occur between couples who have rubbed off all romance.”

She could have asked him in her fit of ironic iciness, on hearing him thus blindly challenge her to speak out, whether the romance might be his piece of religion.

He propitiated the more unwarlike sentiments in her by ejaculating, “Poor souls! let them go their several ways. Married people no longer lovers are in the category of the unnameable. But the hint of the breaking of an engagement—our engagement!—-between us? Oh!”

“Oh!” Clara came out with a swan’s note swelling over mechanical imitation of him to dolorousness illimitable. “Oh!” she breathed short, “let it be now. Do not speak till you have heard me. My head may not be clear by-and-by. And two scenes—twice will be beyond my endurance. I am penitent for the wrong I have done you. I grieve for you. All the blame is mine. Willoughby, you must release me. Do not let me hear a word of that word; jealousy is unknown to me . . . Happy if I could call you friend and see you with a worthier than I, who might by-and-by call me friend! You have my plighted

troth . . . given in ignorance of my feelings. Reprobate a weak and foolish girl's ignorance. I have thought of it, and I cannot see wickedness, though the blame is great, shameful. You have none. You are without any blame. You will not suffer as I do. You will be generous to me? I have no respect for myself when I beg you to be generous and release me."

"But was this the . . ." Willoughby preserved his calmness, "this, then, the subject of your interview with Vernon?"

"I have spoken to him. I did my commission, and I spoke to him."

"Of me?"

"Of myself. I see how I hurt you; I could not avoid it. Yes, of you, as far as we are related. I said I believed you would release me. I said I could be true to my plighted word, but that you would not insist. Could a gentleman insist? But not a step beyond; not love; I have none. And, Willoughby, treat me as one perfectly worthless; I am. I should have known it a year back. I was deceived in myself. There should be love."

Page 2738

“Should be!” Willoughby’s tone was a pungent comment on her.

“Love, then, I find I have not. I think I am antagonistic to it. What people say of it I have not experienced. I find I was mistaken. It is lightly said, but very painful. You understand me, that my prayer is for liberty, that I may not be tied. If you can release and pardon me, or promise ultimately to pardon me, or say some kind word, I shall know it is because I am beneath you utterly that I have been unable to give you the love you should have with a wife. Only say to me, go! It is you who break the match, discovering my want of a heart. What people think of me matters little. My anxiety will be to save you annoyance.”

She waited for him; he seemed on the verge of speaking.

He perceived her expectation; he had nothing but clownish tumult within, and his dignity counselled him to disappoint her.

Swaying his head, like the oriental palm whose shade is a blessing to the perfervid wanderer below, smiling gravely, he was indirectly asking his dignity what he could say to maintain it and deal this mad young woman a bitterly compassionate rebuke. What to think, hung remoter. The thing to do struck him first.

He squeezed both her hands, threw the door wide open, and said, with countless blinkings: “In the laboratory we are uninterrupted. I was at a loss to guess where that most unpleasant effect on the senses came from. They are always ‘guessing’ through the nose. I mean, the remainder of breakfast here. Perhaps I satirized them too smartly—if you know the letters. When they are not ‘calculating’. More offensive than debris of a midnight banquet! An American tour is instructive, though not so romantic. Not so romantic as Italy, I mean. Let us escape.”

She held back from his arm. She had scattered his brains; it was pitiable: but she was in the torrent and could not suffer a pause or a change of place.

“It must be here; one minute more—I cannot go elsewhere to begin again. Speak to me here; answer my request. Once; one word. If you forgive me, it will be superhuman. But, release me.”

“Seriously,” he rejoined, “tea-cups and coffee-cups, breadcrumbs. egg-shells, caviare, butter, beef, bacon! Can we? The room reeks.”

“Then I will go for my walk with Miss Dale. And you will speak to me when I return?”

“At all seasons. You shall go with Miss Dale. But, my dear! my love! Seriously, where are we? One hears of lover’s quarrels. Now I never quarrel. It is a characteristic of mine. And you speak of me to my cousin Vernon! Seriously, plighted faith signifies plighted faith, as much as an iron-cable is iron to hold by. Some little twist of the mind?

To Vernon, of all men! Tush! she has been dreaming of a hero of perfection, and the comparison is unfavourable to her Willoughby. But, my Clara, when I say to you, that bride is bride, and you are mine, mine!”

Page 2739

“Willoughby, you mentioned them,—those separations of two married. You said, if they do not love . . . Oh! say, is it not better—instead of later?”

He took advantage of her modesty in speaking to exclaim. “Where are we now? Bride is bride, and wife is wife, and affianced is, in honour, wedded. You cannot be released. We are united. Recognize it; united. There is no possibility of releasing a wife!”

“Not if she ran . . . ?”

This was too direct to be histrionically misunderstood. He had driven her to the extremity of more distinctly imagining the circumstance she had cited, and with that cleared view the desperate creature gloried in launching such a bolt at the man’s real or assumed insensibility as must, by shivering it, waken him.

But in a moment she stood in burning rose, with dimmed eyesight. She saw his horror, and, seeing, shared it; shared just then only by seeing it; which led her to rejoice with the deepest of sighs that some shame was left in her.

“Ran? ran? ran?” he said as rapidly as he blinked. “How? where? what idea . . . ?”

Close was he upon an explosion that would have sullied his conception of the purity of the younger members of the sex hauntingly.

That she, a young lady, maiden, of strictest education, should, and without his teaching, know that wives ran!—know that by running they compelled their husbands to abandon pursuit, surrender possession!—and that she should suggest it of herself as a wife!—-that she should speak of running!

His ideal, the common male Egoist ideal of a waxwork sex, would have been shocked to fragments had she spoken further to fill in the outlines of these awful interjections.

She was tempted: for during the last few minutes the fire of her situation had enlightened her understanding upon a subject far from her as the ice-fields of the North a short while before; and the prospect offered to her courage if she would only outstare shame and seem at home in the doings of wickedness, was his loathing and dreading so vile a young woman. She restrained herself; chiefly, after the first bridling of maidenly timidity, because she could not bear to lower the idea of her sex even in his esteem.

The door was open. She had thoughts of flying out to breathe in an interval of truce.

She reflected on her situation hurriedly askance:

“If one must go through this, to be disentangled from an engagement, what must it be to poor women seeking to be free of a marriage?”

Had she spoken it, Sir Willoughby might have learned that she was not so iniquitously wise of the things of this world as her mere sex's instinct, roused to the intemperateness of a creature struggling with fetters, had made her appear in her dash to seize a weapon, indicated moreover by him.

Clara took up the old broken vow of women to vow it afresh: "Never to any man will I give my hand."

Page 2740

She replied to Sir Willoughby, “I have said all. I cannot explain what I have said.”

She had heard a step in the passage. Vernon entered.

Perceiving them, he stated his mission in apology: “Doctor Middleton left a book in this room. I see it; it’s a Heinsius.”

“Ha! by the way, a book; books would not be left here if they were not brought here, with my compliments to Doctor Middleton, who may do as he pleases, though, seriously, order is order,” said Sir Willoughby. “Come away to the laboratory, Clara. It’s a comment on human beings that wherever they have been there’s a mess, and you admirers of them,” he divided a sickly nod between Vernon and the stale breakfast-table, “must make what you can of it. Come, Clara.”

Clara protested that she was engaged to walk with Miss Dale.

“Miss Dale is waiting in the hall,” said Vernon.

“Miss Dale is waiting?” said Clara.

“Walk with Miss Dale; walk with Miss Dale,” Sir Willoughby remarked, pressingly. “I will beg her to wait another two minutes. You shall find her in the hall when you come down.”

He rang the bell and went out.

“Take Miss Dale into your confidence; she is quite trustworthy,” Vernon said to Clara.

“I have not advanced one step,” she replied.

“Recollect that you are in a position of your own choosing; and if, after thinking over it, you mean to escape, you must make up your mind to pitched battles, and not be dejected if you are beaten in all of them; there is your only chance.”

“Not my choosing; do not say choosing, Mr. Whitford. I did not choose. I was incapable of really choosing. I consented.”

“It’s the same in fact. But be sure of what you wish.”

“Yes,” she assented, taking it for her just punishment that she should be supposed not quite to know her wishes. “Your advice has helped me to-day.”

“Did I advise?”

“Do you regret advising?”

“I should certainly regret a word that intruded between you and him.”

“But you will not leave the Hall yet? You will not leave me without a friend? If papa and I were to leave to-morrow, I foresee endless correspondence. I have to stay at least some days, and wear through it, and then, if I have to speak to my poor father, you can imagine the effect on him.”

Sir Willoughby came striding in, to correct the error of his going out.

“Miss Dale awaits you, my dear. You have bonnet, hat?—No? Have you forgotten your appointment to walk with her?”

“I am ready,” said Clara, departing.

The two gentlemen behind her separated in the passage. They had not spoken.

She had read of the reproach upon women, that they divide the friendships of men. She reproached herself but she was in action, driven by necessity, between sea and rock. Dreadful to think of! she was one of the creatures who are written about.

Page 2741

CHAPTER XVI

CLARA AND LAETITIA

In spite of his honourable caution, Vernon had said things to render Miss Middleton more angrily determined than she had been in the scene with Sir Willoughby. His counting on pitched battles and a defeat for her in all of them, made her previous feelings appear slack in comparison with the energy of combat now animating her. And she could vehemently declare that she had not chosen; she was too young, too ignorant to choose. He had wrongly used that word; it sounded malicious; and to call consenting the same in fact as choosing was wilfully unjust. Mr. Whitford meant well; he was conscientious, very conscientious. But he was not the hero descending from heaven bright-sworded to smite a woman's fetters of her limbs and deliver her from the yawning mouth-abyss.

His logical coolness of expostulation with her when she cast aside the silly mission entrusted to her by Sir Willoughby and wept for herself, was unheroic in proportion to its praiseworthiness. He had left it to her to do everything she wished done, stipulating simply that there should be a pause of four-and-twenty hours for her to consider of it before she proceeded in the attempt to extricate herself. Of consolation there had not been a word. Said he, "I am the last man to give advice in such a case". Yet she had by no means astonished him when her confession came out. It came out, she knew not how. It was led up to by his declining the idea of marriage, and her congratulating him on his exemption from the prospect of the yoke, but memory was too dull to revive the one or two fiery minutes of broken language when she had been guilty of her dire misconduct.

This gentleman was no flatterer, scarcely a friend. He could look on her grief without soothing her. Supposing he had soothed her warmly? All her sentiments collected in her bosom to dash in reprobation of him at the thought. She nevertheless condemned him for his excessive coolness; his transparent anxiety not to be compromised by a syllable; his air of saying, "I guessed as much, but why plead your case to me?" And his recommendation to her to be quite sure she did know what she meant, was a little insulting. She exonerated him from the intention; he treated her as a girl. By what he said of Miss Dale, he proposed that lady for imitation.

"I must be myself or I shall be playing hypocrite to dig my own pitfall," she said to herself, while taking counsel with Laetitia as to the route for their walk, and admiring a becoming curve in her companion's hat.

Sir Willoughby, with many protestations of regret that letters of business debarred him from the pleasure of accompanying them, remarked upon the path proposed by Miss Dale, "In that case you must have a footman."

“Then we adopt the other,” said Clara, and they set forth.

“Sir Willoughby,” Miss Dale said to her, “is always in alarm about our unprotectedness.”

Page 2742

Clara glanced up at the clouds and closed her parasol. She replied, “It inspires timidity.”

There was that in the accent and character of the answer which warned Laetitia to expect the reverse of a quiet chatter with Miss Middleton.

“You are fond of walking?” She chose a peaceful topic.

“Walking or riding; yes, of walking,” said Clara. “The difficulty is to find companions.”

“We shall lose Mr. Whitford next week.”

“He goes?”

“He will be a great loss to me, for I do not ride,” Laetitia replied to the off-hand inquiry.

“Ah!”

Miss Middleton did not fan conversation when she simply breathed her voice.

Laetitia tried another neutral theme.

“The weather to-day suits our country,” she said.

“England, or Patterne Park? I am so devoted to mountains that I have no enthusiasm for flat land.”

“Do you call our country flat, Miss Middleton? We have undulations, hills, and we have sufficient diversity, meadows, rivers, copses, brooks, and good roads, and pretty by-paths.”

“The prettiness is overwhelming. It is very pretty to see; but to live with, I think I prefer ugliness. I can imagine learning to love ugliness. It’s honest. However young you are, you cannot be deceived by it. These parks of rich people are a part of the prettiness. I would rather have fields, commons.”

“The parks give us delightful green walks, paths through beautiful woods.”

“If there is a right-of-way for the public.”

“There should be,” said Miss Dale, wondering; and Clara cried: “I chafe at restraint: hedges and palings everywhere! I should have to travel ten years to sit down contented among these fortifications. Of course I can read of this rich kind of English country with pleasure in poetry. But it seems to me to require poetry. What would you say of human beings requiring it?”

“That they are not so companionable but that the haze of distance improves the view.”

“Then you do know that you are the wisest?”

Laetitia raised her dark eyelashes; she sought to understand. She could only fancy she did; and if she did, it meant that Miss Middleton thought her wise in remaining single.

Clara was full of a sombre preconception that her “jealousy” had been hinted to Miss Dale.

“You knew Miss Durham?” she said.

“Not intimately.”

“As well as you know me?”

“Not so well.”

“But you saw more of her?”

“She was more reserved with me.”

“Oh! Miss Dale, I would not be reserved with you.”

The thrill of the voice caused Laetitia to steal a look. Clara’s eyes were bright, and she had the readiness to run to volubility of the fever-stricken; otherwise she did not betray excitement.

“You will never allow any of these noble trees to be felled, Miss Middleton?”

Page 2743

“The axe is better than decay, do you not think?”

“I think your influence will be great and always used to good purpose.”

“My influence, Miss Dale? I have begged a favour this morning and can not obtain the grant.”

It was lightly said, but Clara’s face was more significant, and “What?” leaped from Laetitia’s lips.

Before she could excuse herself, Clara had answered: “My liberty.”

In another and higher tone Laetitia said, “What?” and she looked round on her companion; she looked in the doubt that is open to conviction by a narrow aperture, and slowly and painfully yields access. Clara saw the vacancy of her expression gradually filling with woefulness.

“I have begged him to release me from my engagement, Miss Dale.”

“Sir Willoughby?”

“It is incredible to you. He refuses. You see I have no influence.”

“Miss Middleton, it is terrible!”

“To be dragged to the marriage service against one’s will? Yes.”

“Oh! Miss Middleton!”

“Do you not think so?”

“That cannot be your meaning.”

“You do not suspect me of trifling? You know I would not. I am as much in earnest as a mouse in a trap.”

“No, you will not misunderstand me! Miss Middleton, such a blow to Sir Willoughby would be shocking, most cruel! He is devoted to you.”

“He was devoted to Miss Durham.”

“Not so deeply: differently.”

“Was he not very much courted at that time? He is now; not so much: he is not so young. But my reason for speaking of Miss Durham was to exclaim at the strangeness of a girl winning her freedom to plunge into wedlock. Is it comprehensible to you? She

flies from one dungeon into another. These are the acts which astonish men at our conduct, and cause them to ridicule and, I dare say, despise us."

"But, Miss Middleton, for Sir Willoughby to grant such a request, if it was made . . ."

"It was made, and by me, and will be made again. I throw it all on my unworthiness, Miss Dale. So the county will think of me, and quite justly. I would rather defend him than myself. He requires a different wife from anything I can be. That is my discovery; unhappily a late one. The blame is all mine. The world cannot be too hard on me. But I must be free if I am to be kind in my judgements even of the gentleman I have injured."

"So noble a gentleman!" Laetitia sighed.

"I will subscribe to any eulogy of him," said Clara, with a penetrating thought as to the possibility of a lady experienced in him like Laetitia taking him for noble. "He has a noble air. I say it sincerely, that your appreciation of him proves his nobility." Her feeling of opposition to Sir Willoughby pushed her to this extravagance, gravely perplexing Laetitia. "And it is," added Clara, as if to support what she had said, "a withering rebuke to me; I know him less, at least have not had so long an experience of him."

Page 2744

Laetitia pondered on an obscurity in these words which would have accused her thick intelligence but for a glimmer it threw on another most obscure communication. She feared it might be, strange though it seemed, jealousy, a shade of jealousy affecting Miss Middleton, as had been vaguely intimated by Sir Willoughby when they were waiting in the hall. “A little feminine ailment, a want of comprehension of a perfect friendship;” those were his words to her: and he suggested vaguely that care must be taken in the eulogy of her friend.

She resolved to be explicit.

“I have not said that I think him beyond criticism, Miss Middleton.”

“Noble?”

“He has faults. When we have known a person for years the faults come out, but custom makes light of them; and I suppose we feel flattered by seeing what it would be difficult to be blind to! A very little flatters us! Now, do you not admire that view? It is my favourite.”

Clara gazed over rolling richness of foliage, wood and water, and a church-spire, a town and horizon hills. There sung a sky-lark.

“Not even the bird that does not fly away!” she said; meaning, she had no heart for the bird satisfied to rise and descend in this place.

Laetitia travelled to some notion, dim and immense, of Miss Middleton’s fever of distaste. She shrunk from it in a kind of dread lest it might be contagious and rob her of her one ever-fresh possession of the homely picturesque; but Clara melted her by saying, “For your sake I could love it . . . in time; or some dear old English scene. Since . . . since this . . . this change in me, I find I cannot separate landscape from associations. Now I learn how youth goes. I have grown years older in a week.—Miss Dale, if he were to give me my freedom? if he were to cast me off? if he stood alone?”

“I should pity him.”

“Him—not me! Oh! right! I hoped you would; I knew you would.”

Laetitia’s attempt to shift with Miss Middleton’s shiftiness was vain; for now she seemed really listening to the language of Jealousy:—jealous of the ancient Letty Dale—and immediately before the tone was quite void of it.

“Yes,” she said, “but you make me feel myself in the dark, and when I do I have the habit of throwing myself for guidance upon such light as I have within. You shall know me, if you will, as well as I know myself. And do not think me far from the point when I say I have a feeble health. I am what the doctors call anaemic; a rather bloodless

creature. The blood is life, so I have not much life. Ten years back—eleven, if I must be precise, I thought of conquering the world with a pen! The result is that I am glad of a fireside, and not sure of always having one: and that is my achievement. My days are monotonous, but if I have a dread, it is that there will be an alteration in them. My father has very little money. We subsist on what private income he has,

Page 2745

and his pension: he was an army doctor. I may by-and-by have to live in a town for pupils. I could be grateful to any one who would save me from that. I should be astonished at his choosing to have me burden his household as well.—Have I now explained the nature of my pity? It would be the pity of common sympathy, pure lymph of pity, as nearly disembodied as can be. Last year's sheddings from the tree do not form an attractive garland. Their merit is, that they have not the ambition. I am like them. Now, Miss Middleton, I cannot make myself more bare to you. I hope you see my sincerity."

"I do see it," Clara said.

With the second heaving of her heart, she cried: "See it, and envy you that humility! proud if I could ape it! Oh, how proud if I could speak so truthfully true!—You would not have spoken so to me without some good feeling out of which friends are made. That I am sure of. To be very truthful to a person, one must have a liking. So I judge by myself. Do I presume too much?"

Kindness was on Laetitia's face.

"But now," said Clara, swimming on the wave in her bosom, "I tax you with the silliest suspicion ever entertained by one of your rank. Lady, you have deemed me capable of the meanest of our vices!—Hold this hand, Laetitia; my friend, will you? Something is going on in me."

Laetitia took her hand, and saw and felt that something was going on.

Clara said, "You are a woman."

It was her effort to account for the something.

She swam for a brilliant instant on tears, and yielded to the overflow.

When they had fallen, she remarked upon her first long breath quite coolly: "An encouraging picture of a rebel, is it not?"

Her companion murmured to soothe her.

"It's little, it's nothing," said Clara, pained to keep her lips in line.

They walked forward, holding hands, deep-hearted to one another.

"I like this country better now," the shaken girl resumed. "I could lie down in it and ask only for sleep. I should like to think of you here. How nobly self-respecting you must be, to speak as you did! Our dreams of heroes and heroines are cold glitter beside the reality. I have been lately thinking of myself as an outcast of my sex, and to have a

good woman liking me a little . . . loving? Oh, Laetitia, my friend, I should have kissed you, and not made this exhibition of myself—and if you call it hysterics, woe to you! for I bit my tongue to keep it off when I had hardly strength to bring my teeth together—if that idea of jealousy had not been in your head. You had it from him."

"I have not alluded to it in any word that I can recollect."

"He can imagine no other cause for my wish to be released. I have noticed, it is his instinct to reckon on women as constant by their nature. They are the needles, and he the magnet. Jealousy of you, Miss Dale! Laetitia, may I speak?"

Page 2746

“Say everything you please.”

“I could wish:—Do you know my baptismal name?”

“Clara.”

“At last! I could wish . . . that is, if it were your wish. Yes, I could wish that. Next to independence, my wish would be that. I risk offending you. Do not let your delicacy take arms against me. I wish him happy in the only way that he can be made happy. There is my jealousy.”

“Was it what you were going to say just now?”

“No.”

“I thought not.”

“I was going to say—and I believe the rack would not make me truthful like you, Laetitia—well, has it ever struck you: remember, I do see his merits; I speak to his faithfullest friend, and I acknowledge he is attractive, he has manly tastes and habits; but has it never struck you . . . I have no right to ask; I know that men must have faults, I do not expect them to be saints; I am not one; I wish I were.”

“Has it never struck me . . . ?” Laetitia prompted her.

“That very few women are able to be straightforwardly sincere in their speech, however much they may desire to be?”

“They are differently educated. Great misfortune brings it to them.”

“I am sure your answer is correct. Have you ever known a woman who was entirely an Egoist?”

“Personally known one? We are not better than men.”

“I do not pretend that we are. I have latterly become an Egoist, thinking of no one but myself, scheming to make use of every soul I meet. But then, women are in the position of inferiors. They are hardly out of the nursery when a lasso is round their necks; and if they have beauty, no wonder they turn it to a weapon and make as many captives as they can. I do not wonder! My sense of shame at my natural weakness and the arrogance of men would urge me to make hundreds captive, if that is being a coquette. I should not have compassion for those lofty birds, the hawks. To see them with their wings clipped would amuse me. Is there any other way of punishing them?”

“Consider what you lose in punishing them.”

“I consider what they gain if we do not.”

Laetitia supposed she was listening to discursive observations upon the inequality in the relations of the sexes. A suspicion of a drift to a closer meaning had been lulled, and the colour flooded her swiftly when Clara said: “Here is the difference I see; I see it; I am certain of it: women who are called coquettes make their conquests not of the best of men; but men who are Egoists have good women for their victims; women on whose devoted constancy they feed; they drink it like blood. I am sure I am not taking the merely feminine view. They punish themselves too by passing over the one suitable to them, who could really give them what they crave to have, and they go where they . . .” Clara stopped. “I have not your power to express ideas,” she said.

“Miss Middleton, you have a dreadful power,” said Laetitia.

Page 2747

Clara smiled affectionately. “I am not aware of any. Whose cottage is this?”

“My father’s. Will you not come in? into the garden?”

Clara took note of ivied windows and roses in the porch. She thanked Laetitia and said: “I will call for you in an hour.”

“Are you walking on the road alone?” said Laetitia, incredulously, with an eye to Sir Willoughby’s dismay.

“I put my trust in the high-road,” Clara replied, and turned away, but turned back to Laetitia and offered her face to be kissed.

The “dreadful power” of this young lady had fervently impressed Laetitia, and in kissing her she marvelled at her gentleness and girlishness.

Clara walked on, unconscious of her possession of power of any kind.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PORCELAIN VASE

During the term of Clara’s walk with Laetitia, Sir Willoughby’s shrunken self-esteem, like a garment hung to the fire after exposure to tempestuous weather, recovered some of the sleekness of its velvet pile in the society of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, who represented to him the world he feared and tried to keep sunny for himself by all the arts he could exercise. She expected him to be the gay Sir Willoughby, and her look being as good as an incantation summons, he produced the accustomed sprite, giving her sally for sally. Queens govern the polite. Popularity with men, serviceable as it is for winning favouritism with women, is of poor value to a sensitive gentleman, anxious even to prognostic apprehension on behalf of his pride, his comfort and his prevalence. And men are grossly purchasable; good wines have them, good cigars, a goodfellow air: they are never quite worth their salt even then; you can make head against their ill looks. But the looks of women will at one blow work on you the downright difference which is between the cock of lordly plume and the moulting. Happily they may be gained: a clever tongue will gain them, a leg. They are with you to a certainty if Nature is with you; if you are elegant and discreet: if the sun is on you, and they see you shining in it; or if they have seen you well-stationed and handsome in the sun. And once gained they are your mirrors for life, and far more constant than the glass. That tale of their caprice is absurd. Hit their imaginations once, they are your slaves, only demanding common courtier service of you. They will deny that you are ageing, they will cover you from scandal, they will refuse to see you ridiculous. Sir Willoughby’s instinct, or skin, or outfloating feelers, told him of these mysteries of the influence of the sex; he had as little need to study them as a lady breathed on.

Page 2748

He had some need to know them in fact; and with him the need of a protection for himself called it forth; he was intuitively a conjurer in self-defence, long-sighted, wanting no directions to the herb he was to suck at when fighting a serpent. His dulness of vision into the heart of his enemy was compensated by the agile sensitiveness obscuring but rendering him miraculously active, and, without supposing his need immediate, he deemed it politic to fascinate Mrs. Mountstuart and anticipate ghastly possibilities in the future by dropping a hint; not of Clara's fickleness, you may be sure; of his own, rather; or, more justly, of an altered view of Clara's character. He touched on the rogue in porcelain.

Set gently laughing by his relishing humour. "I get nearer to it," he said.

"Remember I'm in love with her," said Mrs. Mountstuart.

"That is our penalty."

"A pleasant one for you."

He assented. "Is the 'rogue' to be eliminated?"

"Ask when she's a mother, my dear Sir Willoughby."

"This is how I read you:—"

"I shall accept any interpretation that is complimentary."

"Not one will satisfy me of being sufficiently so, and so I leave it to the character to fill out the epigram."

"Do. What hurry is there? And don't be misled by your objection to rogue; which would be reasonable if you had not secured her."

The door of a hollow chamber of horrible reverberation was opened within him by this remark.

He tried to say in jest, that it was not always a passionate admiration that held the rogue fast; but he muddled it in the thick of his conscious thunder, and Mrs. Mountstuart smiled to see him shot from the smooth-flowing dialogue into the cataracts by one simple reminder to the lover of his luck. Necessarily, after a fall, the pitch of their conversation relaxed.

"Miss Dale is looking well," he said.

"Fairly: she ought to marry," said Mrs. Mountstuart.

He shook his head. “Persuade her.”

She nodded. “Example may have some effect.”

He looked extremely abstracted. “Yes, it is time. Where is the man you could recommend for her complement? She has now what was missing before, a ripe intelligence in addition to her happy disposition—romantic, you would say. I can’t think women the worse for that.”

“A dash of it.”

“She calls it ’leafage’.”

“Very pretty. And have you relented about your horse Achmet?”

“I don’t sell him under four hundred.”

“Poor Johnny Busshe! You forget that his wife doles him out his money. You’re a hard bargainer, Sir Willoughby.”

“I mean the price to be prohibitive.”

“Very well; and ‘leafage’ is good for hide-and-seek; especially when there is no rogue in ambush. And that’s the worst I can say of Laetitia Dale. An exaggerated devotion is the scandal of our sex. They say you’re the hardest man of business in the county too, and I can believe it; for at home and abroad your aim is to get the best of everybody. You see I’ve no leafage, I am perfectly matter-of-fact, bald.”

Page 2749

“Nevertheless, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart, I can assure you that conversing with you has much the same exhilarating effect on me as conversing with Miss Dale.”

“But, leafage! leafage! You hard bargainers have no compassion for devoted spinsters.”

“I tell you my sentiments absolutely.”

“And you have mine moderately expressed.”

She recollected the purpose of her morning’s visit, which was to engage Dr. Middleton to dine with her, and Sir Willoughby conducted her to the library-door. “Insist,” he said.

Awaiting her reappearance, the refreshment of the talk he had sustained, not without point, assisted him to distinguish in its complete abhorrent orb the offence committed against him by his bride. And this he did through projecting it more and more away from him, so that in the outer distance it involved his personal emotions less, while observation was enabled to compass its vastness, and, as it were, perceive the whole spherical mass of the wretched girl’s guilt impudently turning on its axis.

Thus to detach an injury done to us, and plant it in space, for mathematical measurement of its weight and bulk, is an art; it may also be an instinct of self-preservation; otherwise, as when mountains crumble adjacent villages are crushed, men of feeling may at any moment be killed outright by the iniquitous and the callous. But, as an art, it should be known to those who are for practising an art so beneficent, that circumstances must lend their aid. Sir Willoughby’s instinct even had sat dull and crushed before his conversation with Mrs. Mountstuart. She lifted him to one of his ideals of himself. Among gentlemen he was the English gentleman; with ladies his aim was the Gallican courtier of any period from Louis Treize to Louis Quinze. He could doat on those who led him to talk in that character—backed by English solidity, you understand. Roast beef stood eminent behind the souffle and champagne. An English squire excelling his fellows at hazardous leaps in public, he was additionally a polished whisperer, a lively dialoguer, one for witty bouts, with something in him—capacity for a drive and dig or two—beyond mere wit, as they soon learned who called up his reserves, and had a bosom for pinking. So much for his ideal of himself. Now, Clara not only never evoked, never responded to it, she repelled it; there was no flourishing of it near her. He considerately overlooked these facts in his ordinary calculations; he was a man of honour and she was a girl of beauty; but the accidental blooming of his ideal, with Mrs. Mountstuart, on the very heels of Clara’s offence, restored him to full command of his art of detachment, and he thrust her out, quite apart from himself, to contemplate her disgraceful revolutions.

Deeply read in the Book of Egoism that he was, he knew the wisdom of the sentence: An injured pride that strikes not out will strike home. What was he to strike with? Ten years younger, Laetitia might have been the instrument. To think of her now was

preposterous. Beside Clara she had the hue of Winter under the springing bough. He tossed her away, vexed to the very soul by an ostentatious decay that shrank from comparison with the blooming creature he had to scourge in self-defence, by some agency or other.

Page 2750

Mrs. Mountstuart was on the step of her carriage when the silken parasols of the young ladies were descried on a slope of the park, where the yellow green of May-clothed beeches flowed over the brown ground of last year's leaves.

"Who's the cavalier?" she inquired.

A gentleman escorted them.

"Vernon? No! he's pegging at Crossjay," quoth Willoughby.

Vernon and Crossjay came out for the boy's half-hour's run before his dinner. Crossjay spied Miss Middleton and was off to meet her at a bound. Vernon followed him leisurely.

"The rogue has no cousin, has she?" said Mrs. Mountstuart.

"It's a family of one son or one daughter for generations," replied Willoughby.

"And Letty Dale?"

"Cousin!" he exclaimed, as if wealth had been imputed to Miss Dale; adding: "No male cousin."

A railway station fly drove out of the avenue on the circle to the hall-entrance. Flitch was driver. He had no right to be there, he was doing wrong, but he was doing it under cover of an office, to support his wife and young ones, and his deprecating touches of the hat spoke of these apologies to his former master with dog-like pathos.

Sir Willoughby beckoned to him to approach.

"So you are here," he said. "You have luggage."

Flitch jumped from the box and read one of the labels aloud: "Lieutenant-Colonel H. De Craye."

"And the colonel met the ladies? Overtook them?"

Here seemed to come dismal matter for Flitch to relate.

He began upon the abstract origin of it: he had lost his place in Sir Willoughby's establishment, and was obliged to look about for work where it was to be got, and though he knew he had no right to be where he was, he hoped to be forgiven because of the mouths he had to feed as a flyman attached to the railway station, where this gentleman, the colonel, hired him, and he believed Sir Willoughby would excuse him for driving a friend, which the colonel was, he recollected well, and the colonel recollected

him, and he said, not noticing how he was rigged: “What! Flitch! back in your old place? Am I expected?” and he told the colonel his unfortunate situation. “Not back, colonel; no such luck for me” and Colonel De Craye was a very kind-hearted gentleman, as he always had been, and asked kindly after his family. And it might be that such poor work as he was doing now he might be deprived of, such is misfortune when it once harpoons a man; you may dive, and you may fly, but it sticks in you, once do a foolish thing. “May I humbly beg of you, if you’ll be so good, Sir Willoughby,” said Flitch, passing to evidence of the sad mishap. He opened the door of the fly, displaying fragments of broken porcelain.

“But, what, what! what’s the story of this?” cried Sir Willoughby.

“What is it?” said Mrs. Mountstuart, pricking up her ears.

“It was a vaws,” Flitch replied in elegy.

Page 2751

“A porcelain vase!” interpreted Sir Willoughby.

“China!” Mrs. Mountstuart faintly shrieked.

One of the pieces was handed to her inspection.

She held it close, she held it distant. She sighed horribly.

“The man had better have hanged himself,” said she.

Flitch bestirred his misfortune-sodden features and members for a continuation of the doleful narrative.

“How did this occur?” Sir Willoughby peremptorily asked him.

Flitch appealed to his former master for testimony that he was a good and a careful driver.

Sir Willoughby thundered: “I tell you to tell me how this occurred.”

“Not a drop, my lady! not since my supper last night, if there’s any truth in me!” Flitch implored succour of Mrs Mountstuart.

“Drive straight,” she said, and braced him.

His narrative was then direct.

Near Piper’s mill, where the Wicker brook crossed the Rebdon road, one of Hoppner’s wagons, overloaded as usual, was forcing the horses uphill, when Flitch drove down at an easy pace, and saw himself between Hoppner’s cart come to a stand and a young lady advancing: and just then the carter smacks his whip, the horses pull half mad. The young lady starts behind the cart, and up jumps the colonel, and, to save the young lady, Flitch dashed ahead and did save her, he thanked Heaven for it, and more when he came to see who the young lady was.

“She was alone?” said Sir Willoughby in tragic amazement, staring at Flitch.

“Very well, you saved her, and you upset the fly,” Mountstuart jogged him on.

“Bardett, our old head-keeper, was a witness, my lady, had to drive half up the bank, and it’s true—over the fly did go; and the vaws it shoots out against the twelfth mile-stone, just as though there was the chance for it! for nobody else was injured, and knocked against anything else, it never would have flown all to pieces, so that it took Bardett and me ten minutes to collect every one, down to the smallest piece there was;

and he said, and I can't help thinking myself, there was a Providence in it, for we all come together so as you might say we was made to do as we did."

"So then Horace adopted the prudent course of walking on with the ladies instead of trusting his limbs again to this capsizing fly," Sir Willoughby said to Mrs. Mountstuart; and she rejoined: "Lucky that no one was hurt."

Both of them eyed the nose of poor Flitch, and simultaneously they delivered a verdict in "Humph!"

Mrs. Mountstuart handed the wretch a half-crown from her purse. Sir Willoughby directed the footman in attendance to unload the fly and gather up the fragments of porcelain carefully, bidding Flitch be quick in his departing.

"The colonel's wedding-present! I shall call to-morrow." Mrs. Mountstuart waved her adieu.

"Come every day!—Yes, I suppose we may guess the destination of the vase." He bowed her off, and she cried:

Page 2752

“Well, now, the gift can be shared, if you’re either of you for a division.” In the crash of the carriage-wheels he heard, “At any rate there was a rogue in that porcelain.”

These are the slaps we get from a heedless world.

As for the vase, it was Horace De Craye’s loss. Wedding-present he would have to produce, and decidedly not in chips. It had the look of a costly vase, but that was no question for the moment:—What was meant by Clara being seen walking on the high-road alone?—What snare, traceable ad inferas, had ever induced Willoughby Patterne to make her the repository and fortress of his honour!

CHAPTER XVIII

COLONEL DE CRAYE

Clara came along chatting and laughing with Colonel De Craye, young Crossjay’s hand under one of her arms, and her parasol flashing; a dazzling offender; as if she wished to compel the spectator to recognize the dainty rogue in porcelain; really insufferably fair: perfect in height and grace of movement; exquisitely tressed; red-lipped, the colour striking out to a distance from her ivory skin; a sight to set the woodland dancing, and turn the heads of the town; though beautiful, a jury of art critics might pronounce her not to be. Irregular features are condemned in beauty. Beautiful figure, they could say. A description of her figure and her walking would have won her any praises: and she wore a dress cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about it, in the spirit of a Summer’s day. Calypso-clad, Dr. Middleton would have called her. See the silver birch in a breeze: here it swells, there it scatters, and it is puffed to a round and it streams like a pennon, and now gives the glimpse and shine of the white stem’s line within, now hurries over it, denying that it was visible, with a chatter along the sweeping folds, while still the white peeps through. She had the wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky. To-day the art was ravishingly companionable with her sweet-lighted face: too sweet, too vividly meaningful for pretty, if not of the strict severity for beautiful. Millinery would tell us that she wore a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff, trimmed with deep rose. She carried a grey-silk parasol, traced at the borders with green creepers, and across the arm devoted to Crossjay a length of trailing ivy, and in that hand a bunch of the first long grasses. These hues of red rose and pale green ruffled and pouted in the billowy white of the dress ballooning and valleying softly, like a yacht before the sail bends low; but she walked not like one blown against; resembling rather the day of the South-west driving the clouds, gallantly firm in commotion; interfusing colour and varying in her features from laugh to smile and look of settled pleasure, like the heavens above the breeze.

Page 2753

Sir Willoughby, as he frequently had occasion to protest to Clara, was no poet: he was a more than commonly candid English gentleman in his avowed dislike of the poet's nonsense, verbiage, verse; not one of those latterly terrorized by the noise made about the fellow into silent contempt; a sentiment that may sleep, and has not to be defended. He loathed the fellow, fought the fellow. But he was one with the poet upon that prevailing theme of verse, the charms of women. He was, to his ill-luck, intensely susceptible, and where he led men after him to admire, his admiration became a fury. He could see at a glance that Horace De Craye admired Miss Middleton. Horace was a man of taste, could hardly, could not, do other than admire; but how curious that in the setting forth of Clara and Miss Dale, to his own contemplation and comparison of them, Sir Willoughby had given but a nodding approbation of his bride's appearance! He had not attached weight to it recently.

Her conduct, and foremost, if not chiefly, her having been discovered, positively met by his friend Horace, walking on the high-road without companion or attendant, increased a sense of pain so very unusual with him that he had cause to be indignant. Coming on this condition, his admiration of the girl who wounded him was as bitter a thing as a man could feel. Resentment, fed from the main springs of his nature, turned it to wormwood, and not a whit the less was it admiration when he resolved to chastise her with a formal indication of his disdain. Her present gaiety sounded to him like laughter heard in the shadow of the pulpit.

"You have escaped!" he said to her, while shaking the hand of his friend Horace and cordially welcoming him. "My dear fellow! and, by the way, you had a squeak for it, I hear from Flitch."

"I, Willoughby? not a bit," said the colonel; "we get into a fly to get, out of it; and Flitch helped me out as well as in, good fellow; just dusting my coat as he did it. The only bit of bad management was that Miss Middleton had to step aside a trifle hurriedly."

"You knew Miss Middleton at once?"

"Flitch did me the favour to introduce me. He first precipitated me at Miss Middleton's feet, and then he introduced me, in old oriental fashion, to my sovereign."

Sir Willoughby's countenance was enough for his friend Horace. Quarter-wheeling to Clara, he said: "'Tis the place I'm to occupy for life, Miss Middleton, though one is not always fortunate to have a bright excuse for taking it at the commencement."

Clara said: "Happily you were not hurt, Colonel De Craye."

"I was in the hands of the Loves. Not the Graces, I'm afraid; I've an image of myself. Dear, no! My dear Willoughby, you never made such a headlong declaration as that. It

would have looked like a magnificent impulse, if the posture had only been choicer. And Miss Middleton didn’t laugh. At least I saw nothing but pity.”

Page 2754

“You did not write,” said Willoughby.

“Because it was a toss-up of a run to Ireland or here, and I came here not to go there; and, by the way, fetched a jug with me to offer up to the gods of ill-luck; and they accepted the propitiation.”

“Wasn’t it packed in a box?”

“No, it was wrapped in paper, to show its elegant form. I caught sight of it in the shop yesterday and carried it off this morning, and presented it to Miss Middleton at noon, without any form at all.”

Willoughby knew his friend Horace’s mood when the Irish tongue in him threatened to wag.

“You see what may happen,” he said to Clara.

“As far as I am in fault I regret it,” she answered.

“Flitch says the accident occurred through his driving up the bank to save you from the wheels.”

“Flitch may go and whisper that down the neck of his empty whisky-flask,” said Horace De Craye. “And then let him cork it.”

“The consequence is that we have a porcelain vase broken. You should not walk on the road alone, Clara. You ought to have a companion, always. It is the rule here.”

“I had left Miss Dale at the cottage.”

“You ought to have had the dogs.”

“Would they have been any protection to the vase?”

Horace De Craye crowed cordially.

“I’m afraid not, Miss Middleton. One must go to the witches for protection to vases; and they’re all in the air now, having their own way with us, which accounts for the confusion in politics and society, and the rise in the price of broomsticks, to prove it true, as they tell us, that every nook and corner wants a mighty sweeping. Miss Dale looks beaming,” said De Craye, wishing to divert Willoughby from his anger with sense as well as nonsense.

“You have not been visiting Ireland recently?” said Sir Willoughby.

“No, nor making acquaintance with an actor in an Irish part in a drama cast in the Green Island. ’Tis Flitch, my dear Willoughby, has been and stirred the native in me, and we’ll present him to you for the like good office when we hear after a number of years that you’ve not wrinkled your forehead once at your liege lady. Take the poor old dog back home, will you? He’s crazed to be at the Hall. I say, Willoughby, it would be a good bit of work to take him back. Think of it; you’ll do the popular thing, I’m sure. I’ve a superstition that Flitch ought to drive you from the church-door. If I were in luck, I’d have him drive me.”

“The man’s a drunkard, Horace.”

“He fuddles his poor nose. ’Tis merely unction to the exile. Sober struggles below. He drinks to rock his heart, because he has one. Now let me intercede for poor Flitch.”

“Not a word of him. He threw up his place.”

“To try his fortune in the world, as the best of us do, though livery runs after us to tell us there’s no being an independent gentleman, and comes a cold day we haul on the metal-button coat again, with a good ha! of satisfaction. You’ll do the popular thing. Miss Middleton joins in the pleading.”

Page 2755

“No pleading!”

“When I’ve vowed upon my eloquence, Willoughby, I’d bring you to pardon the poor dog?”

“Not a word of him!”

“Just one!”

Sir Willoughby battled with himself to repress a state of temper that put him to marked disadvantage beside his friend Horace in high spirits. Ordinarily he enjoyed these fits of Irish of him, which were Horace’s fun and play, at times involuntary, and then they indicated a recklessness that might embrace mischief. De Craye, as Willoughby had often reminded him, was properly Norman. The blood of two or three Irish mothers in his line, however, was enough to dance him, and if his fine profile spoke of the stiffer race, his eyes and the quick run of the lip in the cheek, and a number of his qualities, were evidence of the maternal legacy.

“My word has been said about the man,” Willoughby replied.

“But I’ve wagered on your heart against your word, and cant afford to lose; and there’s a double reason for revoking for you!”

“I don’t see either of them. Here are the ladies.”

“You’ll think of the poor beast, Willoughby.”

“I hope for better occupation.”

“If he drives a wheelbarrow at the Hall he’ll be happier than on board a chariot at large. He’s broken-hearted.”

“He’s too much in the way of breakages, my dear Horace.”

“Oh, the vase! the bit of porcelain!” sung De Craye. “Well, we’ll talk him over by and by.”

“If it pleases you; but my rules are never amended.”

“Inalterable, are they?—like those of an ancient people, who might as well have worn a jacket of lead for the comfort they had of their boast. The beauty of laws for human creatures is their adaptability to new stitchings.”

Colonel De Craye walked at the heels of his leader to make his bow to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel.

Sir Willoughby had guessed the person who inspired his friend Horace to plead so pertinaciously and inopportunely for the man Flitch: and it had not improved his temper or the pose of his rejoinders; he had winced under the contrast of his friend Horace's easy, laughing, sparkling, musical air and manner with his own stiffness; and he had seen Clara's face, too, scanning the contrast—he was fatally driven to exaggerate his discontentment, which did not restore him to serenity. He would have learned more from what his abrupt swing round of the shoulder precluded his beholding. There was an interchange between Colonel De Craye and Miss Middleton; spontaneous on both sides. His was a look that said: "You were right"; hers: "I knew it". Her look was calmer, and after the first instant clouded as by wearifulness of sameness; his was brilliant, astonished, speculative, and admiring, pitiful: a look that poised over a revelation, called up the hosts of wonder to question strange fact.

Page 2756

It had passed unseen by Sir Willoughby. The observer was the one who could also supply the key of the secret. Miss Dale had found Colonel De Craye in company with Miss Middleton at her gateway. They were laughing and talking together like friends of old standing, De Craye as Irish as he could be: and the Irish tongue and gentlemanly manner are an irresistible challenge to the opening steps of familiarity when accident has broken the ice. Flitch was their theme; and: "Oh, but if we go tip to Willoughby hand in hand; and bob a courtesy to 'm and beg his pardon for Mister Flitch, won't he melt to such a pair of suppliants? of course he will!" Miss Middleton said he would not. Colonel De Craye wagered he would; he knew Willoughby best. Miss Middleton looked simply grave; a way of asserting the contrary opinion that tells of rueful experience. "We'll see," said the colonel. They chatted like a couple unexpectedly discovering in one another a common dialect among strangers. Can there be an end to it when those two meet? They prattle, they fill the minutes, as though they were violently to be torn asunder at a coming signal, and must have it out while they can; it is a meeting of mountain brooks; not a colloquy, but a chasing, impossible to say which flies, which follows, or what the topic, so interlinguistic are they and rapidly counterchanging. After their conversation of an hour before, Laetitia watched Miss Middleton in surprise at her lightness of mind. Clara bathed in mirth. A boy in a summer stream shows not heartier refreshment of his whole being. Laetitia could now understand Vernon's idea of her wit. And it seemed that she also had Irish blood. Speaking of Ireland, Miss Middleton said she had cousins there, her only relatives.

"The laugh told me that," said Colonel De Craye.

Laetitia and Vernon paced up and down the lawn. Colonel De Craye was talking with English sedateness to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. Clara and young Crossjay strayed.

"If I might advise, I would say, do not leave the Hall immediately, not yet," Laetitia said to Vernon.

"You know, then?"

"I cannot understand why it was that I was taken into her confidence."

"I counselled it."

"But it was done without an object that I can see."

"The speaking did her good."

"But how capricious! how changeful!"

"Better now than later."

“Surely she has only to ask to be released?—to ask earnestly: if it is her wish.”

“You are mistaken.”

“Why does she not make a confidant of her father?”

“That she will have to do. She wished to spare him.”

“He cannot be spared if she is to break the engagement.”

She thought of sparing him the annoyance. “Now there’s to be a tussle, he must share in it.”

“Or she thought he might not side with her?”

“She has not a single instinct of cunning. You judge her harshly.”

Page 2757

“She moved me on the walk out. Coming home I felt differently.”

Vernon glanced at Colonel De Craye.

“She wants good guidance,” continued Laetitia.

“She has not an idea of treachery.”

“You think so? It may be true. But she seems one born devoid of patience, easily made reckless. There is a wildness . . . I judge by her way of speaking; that at least appeared sincere. She does not practise concealment. He will naturally find it almost incredible. The change in her, so sudden, so wayward, is unintelligible to me. To me it is the conduct of a creature untamed. He may hold her to her word and be justified.”

“Let him look out if he does!”

“Is not that harsher than anything I have said of her?”

“I’m not appointed to praise her. I fancy I read the case; and it’s a case of opposition of temperaments. We never can tell the person quite suited to us; it strikes us in a flash.”

“That they are not suited to us? Oh, no; that comes by degrees.”

“Yes, but the accumulation of evidence, or sentience, if you like, is combustible; we don’t command the spark; it may be late in falling. And you argue in her favour. Consider her as a generous and impulsive girl, outwearied at last.”

“By what?”

“By anything; by his loftiness, if you like. He flies too high for her, we will say.”

“Sir Willoughby an eagle?”

“She may be tired of his eyrie.”

The sound of the word in Vernon’s mouth smote on a consciousness she had of his full grasp of Sir Willoughby and her own timid knowledge, though he was not a man who played on words.

If he had eased his heart in stressing the first syllable, it was only temporary relief. He was heavy-browed enough.

“But I cannot conceive what she expects me to do by confiding her sense of her position to me,” said Laetitia.

“We none of us know what will be done. We hang on Willoughby, who hangs on whatever it is that supports him: and there we are in a swarm.”

“You see the wisdom of staying, Mr. Whitford.”

“It must be over in a day or two. Yes, I stay.”

“She inclines to obey you.”

“I should be sorry to stake my authority on her obedience. We must decide something about Crossjay, and get the money for his crammer, if it is to be got. If not, I may get a man to trust me. I mean to drag the boy away. Willoughby has been at him with the tune of gentleman, and has laid hold of him by one ear. When I say ‘her obedience,’ she is not in a situation, nor in a condition to be led blindly by anybody. She must rely on herself, do everything herself. It’s a knot that won’t bear touching by any hand save hers.”

“I fear . . .” said Laetitia.

“Have no such fear.”

“If it should come to his positively refusing.”

“He faces the consequences.”

Page 2758

“You do not think of her.”

Vernon looked at his companion.

CHAPTER XIX

COLONEL DE CRAYE AND CLARA MIDDLETON

Miss Middleton finished her stroll with Crossjay by winding her trailer of ivy in a wreath round his hat and sticking her bunch of grasses in the wreath. She then commanded him to sit on the ground beside a big rhododendron, there to await her return. Crossjay had informed her of a design he entertained to be off with a horde of boys nesting in high trees, and marking spots where wasps and hornets were to be attacked in Autumn: she thought it a dangerous business, and as the boy’s dinner-bell had very little restraint over him when he was in the flush of a scheme of this description, she wished to make tolerably sure of him through the charm she not unreadily believed she could fling on lads of his age. “Promise me you will not move from here until I come back, and when I come I will give you a kiss.” Crossjay promised. She left him and forgot him.

Seeing by her watch fifteen minutes to the ringing of the bell, a sudden resolve that she would speak to her father without another minute’s delay had prompted her like a superstitious impulse to abandon her aimless course and be direct. She knew what was good for her; she knew it now more clearly than in the morning. To be taken away instantly! was her cry. There could be no further doubt. Had there been any before? But she would not in the morning have suspected herself of a capacity for evil, and of a pressing need to be saved from herself. She was not pure of nature: it may be that we breed saintly souls which are: she was pure of will: fire rather than ice. And in beginning to see the elements she was made of she did not shuffle them to a heap with her sweet looks to front her. She put to her account some strength, much weakness; she almost dared to gaze unblinking at a perilous evil tendency. The glimpse of it drove her to her father.

“He must take me away at once; to-morrow!”

She wished to spare her father. So unsparing of herself was she, that, in her hesitation to speak to him of her change of feeling for Sir Willoughby, she would not suffer it to be attributed in her own mind to a daughter’s anxious consideration about her father’s loneliness; an idea she had indulged formerly. Acknowledging that it was imperative she should speak, she understood that she had refrained, even to the inflicting upon herself of such humiliation as to run dilating on her woes to others, because of the silliest of human desires to preserve her reputation for consistency. She had heard women abused for shallowness and flightiness: she had heard her father denounce

them as veering weather-vanes, and his oft-repeated quid femina possit: for her sex's sake, and also to appear an exception to her sex, this reasoning creature desired to be thought consistent.

Page 2759

Just on the instant of her addressing him, saying: “Father,” a note of seriousness in his ear, it struck her that the occasion for saying all had not yet arrived, and she quickly interposed: “Papa”; and helped him to look lighter. The petition to be taken away was uttered.

“To London?” said Dr. Middleton. “I don’t know who’ll take us in.”

“To France, papa?”

“That means hotel-life.”

“Only for two or three weeks.”

“Weeks! I am under an engagement to dine with Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson five days hence: that is, on Thursday.”

“Could we not find an excuse?”

“Break an engagement? No, my dear, not even to escape drinking a widow’s wine.”

“Does a word bind us?”

“Why, what else should?”

“I think I am not very well.”

“We’ll call in that man we met at dinner here: Corney: a capital doctor; an old-fashioned anecdotal doctor. How is it you are not well, my love? You look well. I cannot conceive your not being well.”

“It is only that I want change of air, papa.”

“There we are—a change! semper eadem! Women will be wanting a change of air in Paradise; a change of angels too, I might surmise. A change from quarters like these to a French hotel would be a descent!—’this the seat, this mournful gloom for that celestial light.’ I am perfectly at home in the library here. That excellent fellow Whitford and I have real days: and I like him for showing fight to his elder and better.”

“He is going to leave.”

“I know nothing of it, and I shall append no credit to the tale until I do know. He is headstrong, but he answers to a rap.”

Clara’s bosom heaved. The speechless insurrection threatened her eyes.

A South-west shower lashed the window-panes and suggested to Dr. Middleton shuddering visions of the Channel passage on board a steamer.

“Corney shall see you: he is a sparkling draught in person; probably illiterate, if I may judge from one interruption of my discourse when he sat opposite me, but lettered enough to respect Learning and write out his prescription: I do not ask more of men or of physicians.” Dr. Middleton said this rising, glancing at the clock and at the back of his hands. “’Quod autem secundum litteras difficillimum esse artificium?’ But what after letters is the more difficult practice? ‘Ego puto medicum.’ The medicus next to the scholar: though I have not to my recollection required him next me, nor ever expected child of mine to be crying for that milk. Daughter she is—of the unexplained sex: we will send a messenger for Corney. Change, my dear, you will speedily have, to satisfy the most craving of women, if Willoughby, as I suppose, is in the neoteric fashion of spending a honeymoon on a railway: apt image, exposition and perpetuation of the state of mania conducting to the institution! In my time we lay by to brood on happiness; we had no thought of chasing it over a continent, mistaking hurly-burly clothed in dust for the divinity we sought. A smaller generation sacrifices to excitement. Dust and hurly-burly must perforce be the issue. And that is your modern world. Now, my dear, let us go and wash our hands. Midday-bells expect immediate attention. They know of no anteroom of assembly.”

Page 2760

Clara stood gathered up, despairing at opportunity lost. He had noticed her contracted shape and her eyes, and had talked magisterially to smother and overbear the something disagreeable prefigured in her appearance.

“You do not despise your girl, father?”

“I do not; I could not; I love her; I love my girl. But you need not sing to me like a gnat to propound that question, my dear.”

“Then, father, tell Willoughby to-day we have to leave tomorrow. You shall return in time for Mrs. Mountstuart’s dinner. Friends will take us in, the Darletons, the Erpinghams. We can go to Oxford, where you are sure of welcome. A little will recover me. Do not mention doctors. But you see I am nervous. I am quite ashamed of it; I am well enough to laugh at it, only I cannot overcome it; and I feel that a day or two will restore me. Say you will. Say it in First-Lesson-Book language; anything above a primer splits my foolish head to-day.”

Dr Middleton shrugged, spreading out his arms.

“The office of ambassador from you to Willoughby, Clara? You decree me to the part of ball between two bats. The Play being assured, the prologue is a bladder of wind. I seem to be instructed in one of the mysteries of erotic esotery, yet on my word I am no wiser. If Willoughby is to hear anything from you, he will hear it from your lips.”

“Yes, father, yes. We have differences. I am not fit for contests at present; my head is giddy. I wish to avoid an illness. He and I . . . I accuse myself.”

“There is the bell!” ejaculated Dr. Middleton. “I’ll debate on it with Willoughby.”

“This afternoon?”

“Somewhen, before the dinner-bell. I cannot tie myself to the minute-hand of the clock, my dear child. And let me direct you, for the next occasion when you shall bring the vowels I and A, in verbally detached letters, into collision, that you do not fill the hiatus with so pronounced a Y. It is the vulgarization of our tongue of which I accuse you. I do not like my girl to be guilty of it.”

He smiled to moderate the severity of the correction, and kissed her forehead.

She declared her inability to sit and eat; she went to her room, after begging him very earnestly to send her the assurance that he had spoken. She had not shed a tear, and she rejoiced in her self-control; it whispered to her of true courage when she had given herself such evidence of the reverse.

Shower and sunshine alternated through the half-hours of the afternoon, like a procession of dark and fair holding hands and passing. The shadow came, and she was chill; the light yellow in moisture, and she buried her face not to be caught up by cheerfulness. Believing that her head ached, she afflicted herself with all the heavy symptoms, and oppressed her mind so thoroughly that its occupation was to speculate on Laetitia Dale’s modest enthusiasm for rural pleasures, for this place especially, with its rich

Page 2761

foliage and peeps of scenic peace. The prospect of an escape from it inspired thoughts of a loveable round of life where the sun was not a naked ball of fire, but a friend clothed in woodland; where park and meadow swept to well-known features East and West; and distantly circling hills, and the hearts of poor cottagers too—sympathy with whom assured her of goodness—were familiar, homely to the dweller in the place, morning and night. And she had the love of wild flowers, the watchful happiness in the seasons; poets thrilled her, books absorbed. She dwelt strongly on that sincerity of feeling; it gave her root in our earth; she needed it as she pressed a hand on her eyeballs, conscious of acting the invalid, though the reasons she had for languishing under headache were so convincing that her brain refused to disbelieve in it and went some way to produce positive throbs. Otherwise she had no excuse for shutting herself in her room. Vernon Whitford would be sceptical. Headache or none, Colonel De Craye must be thinking strangely of her; she had not shown him any sign of illness. His laughter and his talk sung about her and dispersed the fiction; he was the very sea-wind for bracing unstrung nerves. Her ideas reverted to Sir Willoughby, and at once they had no more cohesion than the foam on a torrent-water.

But soon she was undergoing a variation of sentiment. Her maid Barclay brought her this pencilled line from her father:

“Factum est; laetus est; amantium irae, *etc*.”

That it was done, that Willoughby had put on an air of glad acquiescence, and that her father assumed the existence of a lovers’ quarrel, was wonderful to her at first sight, simple the succeeding minute. Willoughby indeed must be tired of her, glad of her going. He would know that it was not to return. She was grateful to him for perhaps hinting at the amantium irae, though she rejected the folly of the verse. And she gazed over dear homely country through her windows now. Happy the lady of the place, if happy she can be in her choice! Clara Middleton envied her the double-blossom wild cherry-tree, nothing else. One sprig of it, if it had not faded and gone to dust-colour like crusty Alpine snow in the lower hollows, and then she could depart, bearing away a memory of the best here! Her fiction of the headache pained her no longer. She changed her muslin dress for silk; she was contented with the first bonnet Barclay presented. Amicable toward every one in the house, Willoughby included, she threw up her window, breathed, blessed mankind; and she thought: “If Willoughby would open his heart to nature, he would be relieved of his wretched opinion of the world.” Nature was then sparkling refreshed in the last drops of a sweeping rain-curtain, favourably disposed for a background to her joyful optimism. A little nibble of hunger within, real hunger, unknown to her of late, added to this healthy view, without precipitating her to appease it; she was more inclined to foster it, for the sake of the sinewy activity of mind and limb it gave her; and in the style of young ladies very light of heart, she went downstairs like a cascade, and like the meteor observed in its vanishing trace she alighted close to Colonel De Craye and entered one of the rooms off the hall.

Page 2762

He cocked an eye at the half-shut door.

Now you have only to be reminded that it is the habit of the sportive gentleman of easy life, bewildered as he would otherwise be by the tricks, twists, and windings of the hunted sex, to parcel out fair women into classes; and some are flyers and some are runners; these birds are wild on the wing, those exposed their bosoms to the shot. For him there is no individual woman. He grants her a characteristic only to enroll her in a class. He is our immortal dunce at learning to distinguish her as a personal variety, of a separate growth.

Colonel De Craye's cock of the eye at the door said that he had seen a rageing coquette go behind it. He had his excuse for forming the judgement. She had spoken strangely of the fall of his wedding-present, strangely of Willoughby; or there was a sound of strangeness in an allusion to her appointed husband: and she had treated Willoughby strangely when they met. Above all, her word about Flitch was curious. And then that look of hers! And subsequently she transferred her polite attentions to Willoughby's friend. After a charming colloquy, the sweetest give and take rattle he had ever enjoyed with a girl, she developed headache to avoid him; and next she developed blindness, for the same purpose.

He was feeling hurt, but considered it preferable to feel challenged.

Miss Middleton came out of another door. She had seen him when she had passed him and when it was too late to convey her recognition; and now she addressed him with an air of having bowed as she went by.

"No one?" she said. "Am I alone in the house?"

"There is a figure naught," said he, "but it's as good as annihilated, and no figure at all, if you put yourself on the wrong side of it, and wish to be alone in the house."

"Where is Willoughby?"

"Away on business."

"Riding?"

"Achmet is the horse, and pray don't let him be sold, Miss Middleton. I am deputed to attend on you."

"I should like a stroll."

"Are you perfectly restored?"

"Perfectly."

“Strong?”

“I was never better.”

“It was the answer of the ghost of the wicked old man’s wife when she came to persuade him he had one chance remaining. Then, says he, I’ll believe in heaven if ye’ll stop that bottle, and hurls it; and the bottle broke and he committed suicide, not without suspicion of her laying a trap for him. These showers curling away and leaving sweet scents are divine, Miss Middleton. I have the privilege of the Christian name on the nuptial-day. This park of Willoughby’s is one of the best things in England. There’s a glimpse over the lake that smokes of a corner of Killarney; tempts the eye to dream, I mean.” De Craye wound his finger spirally upward, like a smoke-wreath. “Are you for Irish scenery?”

“Irish, English, Scottish.”

Page 2763

“All’s one so long as it’s beautiful: yes, you speak for me. Cosmopolitanism of races is a different affair. I beg leave to doubt the true union of some; Irish and Saxon, for example, let Cupid be master of the ceremonies and the dwelling-place of the happy couple at the mouth of a Cornucopia. Yet I have seen a flower of Erin worn by a Saxon gentleman proudly; and the Hibernian courting a Rowena! So we’ll undo what I said, and consider it cancelled.”

“Are you of the rebel party, Colonel De Craye?”

“I am Protestant and Conservative, Miss Middleton.”

“I have not a head for politics.”

“The political heads I have seen would tempt me to that opinion.”

“Did Willoughby say when he would be back?”

“He named no particular time. Doctor Middleton and Mr. Whitford are in the library upon a battle of the books.”

“Happy battle!”

“You are accustomed to scholars. They are rather intolerant of us poor fellows.”

“Of ignorance perhaps; not of persons.”

“Your father educated you himself, I presume?”

“He gave me as much Latin as I could take. The fault is mine that it is little.”

“Greek?”

“A little Greek.”

“Ah! And you carry it like a feather.”

“Because it is so light.”

“Miss Middleton, I could sit down to be instructed, old as I am. When women beat us, I verily believe we are the most beaten dogs in existence. You like the theatre?”

“Ours?”

“Acting, then.”

“Good acting, of course.”

“May I venture to say you would act admirably?”

“The venture is bold, for I have never tried.”

“Let me see; there is Miss Dale and Mr. Whitford; you and I; sufficient for a two-act piece. *The Irishman in Spain* would do.” He bent to touch the grass as she stepped on it. “The lawn is wet.”

She signified that she had no dread of wet, and said: “English women afraid of the weather might as well be shut up.”

De Craye proceeded: “Patrick O’Neill passes over from Hibernia to Iberia, a disinherited son of a father in the claws of the lawyers, with a letter of introduction to Don Beltran d’Arragon, a Grandee of the First Class, who has a daughter Dona Seraphina (Miss Middleton), the proudest beauty of her day, in the custody of a duenna (Miss Dale), and plighted to Don Fernan, of the Guzman family (Mr. Whitford). There you have our dramatis personae.”

“You are Patrick?”

“Patrick himself. And I lose my letter, and I stand on the Prado of Madrid with the last portrait of Britannia in the palm of my hand, and crying in the purest brogue of my native land: ’It’s all through dropping a letter I’m here in Iberia instead of Hibernia, worse luck to the spelling!’”

“But Patrick will be sure to aspirate the initial letter of Hibernia.”

Page 2764

“That is clever criticism, upon my word, Miss Middleton! So he would. And there we have two letters dropped. But he’d do it in a groan, so that it wouldn’t count for more than a ghost of one; and everything goes on the stage, since it’s only the laugh we want on the brink of the action. Besides you are to suppose the performance before a London audience, who have a native opposite to the aspirate and wouldn’t bear to hear him spoil a joke, as if he were a lord or a constable. It’s an instinct of the English democracy. So with my bit of coin turning over and over in an undecided way, whether it shall commit suicide to supply me a supper, I behold a pair of Spanish eyes like violet lightning in the black heavens of that favoured clime. Won’t you have violet?”

“Violet forbids my impersonation.”

“But the lustre on black is dark violet blue.”

“You remind me that I have no pretension to black.”

Colonel De Craye permitted himself to take a flitting gaze at Miss Middleton’s eyes. “Chestnut,” he said. “Well, and Spain is the land of chestnuts.”

“Then it follows that I am a daughter of Spain.”

“Clearly.”

“Logically?”

“By positive deduction.”

“And do I behold Patrick?”

“As one looks upon a beast of burden.”

“Oh!”

Miss Middleton’s exclamation was louder than the matter of the dialogue seemed to require. She caught her hands up.

In the line of the outer extremity of the rhododendron, screened from the house windows, young Crossjay lay at his length, with his head resting on a doubled arm, and his ivy-wreathed hat on his cheek, just where she had left him, commanding him to stay. Half-way toward him up the lawn, she saw the poor boy, and the spur of that pitiful sight set her gliding swiftly. Colonel De Craye followed, pulling an end of his moustache.

Crossjay jumped to his feet.

“My dear, dear Crossjay!” she addressed him and reproached him. “And how hungry you must be! And you must be drenched! This is really too had.”

“You told me to wait here,” said Crossjay, in shy self-defence.

“I did, and you should not have done it, foolish boy! I told him to wait for me here before luncheon, Colonel De Craye, and the foolish, foolish boy!—he has had nothing to eat, and he must have been wet through two or three times:—because I did not come to him!”

“Quite right. And the lava might overflow him and take the mould of him, like the sentinel at Pompeii, if he’s of the true stuff.”

“He may have caught cold, he may have a fever.”

“He was under your orders to stay.”

“I know, and I cannot forgive myself. Run in, Crossjay, and change your clothes. Oh, run, run to Mrs. Montague, and get her to give you a warm bath, and tell her from me to prepare some dinner for you. And change every garment you have. This is unpardonable of me. I said—’not for politics!’—I begin to think I have not a head for anything. But could it be imagined that Crossjay would not move for the dinner-bell! through all that rain! I forgot you, Crossjay. I am so sorry; so sorry! You shall make me pay any forfeit you like. Remember, I am deep, deep in your debt. And now let me see you run fast. You shall come in to dessert this evening.”

Page 2765

Crossjay did not run. He touched her hand.

“You said something?”

“What did I say, Crossjay?”

“You promised.”

“What did I promise?”

“Something.”

“Name it, my dear boy.”

He mumbled, “. . . kiss me.”

Clara plumped down on him, enveloped him and kissed him.

The affectionately remorseful impulse was too quick for a conventional note of admonition to arrest her from paying that portion of her debt. When she had sped him off to Mrs Montague, she was in a blush.

“Dear, dear Crossjay!” she said, sighing.

“Yes, he’s a good lad,” remarked the colonel. “The fellow may well be a faithful soldier and stick to his post, if he receives promise of such a solde. He is a great favourite with you.”

“He is. You will do him a service by persuading Willoughby to send him to one of those men who get boys through their naval examination. And, Colonel De Craye, will you be kind enough to ask at the dinner-table that Crossjay may come in to dessert?”

“Certainly,” said he, wondering.

“And will you look after him while you are here? See that no one spoils him. If you could get him away before you leave, it would be much to his advantage. He is born for the navy and should be preparing to enter it now.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said De Craye, wondering more.

“I thank you in advance.”

“Shall I not be usurping . . .”

“No, we leave to-morrow.”

“For a day?”

“For longer.”

“Two?”

“It will be longer.”

“A week? I shall not see you again?”

“I fear not.”

Colonel De Craye controlled his astonishment; he smothered a sensation of veritable pain, and amiably said: “I feel a blow, but I am sure you would not willingly strike. We are all involved in the regrets.”

Miss Middleton spoke of having to see Mrs. Montague, the housekeeper, with reference to the bath for Crossjay, and stepped off the grass. He bowed, watched her a moment, and for parallel reasons, running close enough to hit one mark, he commiserated his friend Willoughby. The winning or the losing of that young lady struck him as equally lamentable for Willoughby.

CHAPTER XX

AN AGED AND A GREAT WINE

The leisurely promenade up and down the lawn with ladies and deferential gentlemen, in anticipation of the dinner-bell, was Dr. Middleton’s evening pleasure. He walked as one who had formerly danced (in Apollo’s time and the young god Cupid’s), elastic on the muscles of the calf and foot, bearing his broad iron-grey head in grand elevation. The hard labour of the day approved the cooling exercise and the crowning refreshments of French cookery and wines of known vintages. He was happy at that hour in dispensing wisdom or nugae to his hearers,

Page 2766

like the Western sun whose habit it is, when he is fairly treated, to break out in quiet splendours, which by no means exhaust his treasury. Blessed indeed above his fellows, by the height of the bow-winged bird in a fair weather sunset sky above the pecking sparrow, is he that ever in the recurrent evening of his day sees the best of it ahead and soon to come. He has the rich reward of a youth and manhood of virtuous living. Dr. Middleton misdoubted the future as well as the past of the man who did not, in becoming gravity, exult to dine. That man he deemed unfit for this world and the next.

An example of the good fruit of temperance, he had a comfortable pride in his digestion, and his political sentiments were attuned by his veneration of the Powers rewarding virtue. We must have a stable world where this is to be done.

The Rev. Doctor was a fine old picture; a specimen of art peculiarly English; combining in himself piety and epicurism, learning and gentlemanliness, with good room for each and a seat at one another's table: for the rest, a strong man, an athlete in his youth, a keen reader of facts and no reader of persons, genial, a giant at a task, a steady worker besides, but easily discomposed. He loved his daughter and he feared her. However much he liked her character, the dread of her sex and age was constantly present to warn him that he was not tied to perfect sanity while the damsel Clara remained unmarried. Her mother had been an amiable woman, of the poetical temperament nevertheless, too enthusiastic, imaginative, impulsive, for the repose of a sober scholar; an admirable woman, still, as you see, a woman, a fire-work. The girl resembled her. Why should she wish to run away from Patterne Hall for a single hour? Simply because she was of the sex born mutable and explosive. A husband was her proper custodian, justly relieving a father. With demagogues abroad and daughters at home, philosophy is needed for us to keep erect. Let the girl be Cicero's Tullia: well, she dies! The choicest of them will furnish us examples of a strange perversity.

Miss Dale was beside Dr. Middleton. Clara came to them and took the other side.

"I was telling Miss Dale that the signal for your subjection is my enfranchisement," he said to her, sighing and smiling. "We know the date. The date of an event to come certifies to it as a fact to be counted on."

"Are you anxious to lose me?" Clara faltered.

"My dear, you have planted me on a field where I am to expect the trumpet, and when it blows I shall be quit of my nerves, no more."

Clara found nothing to seize on for a reply in these words. She thought upon the silence of Laetitia.

Sir Willoughby advanced, appearing in a cordial mood.

“I need not ask you whether you are better,” he said to Clara, sparkled to Laetitia, and raised a key to the level of Dr. Middleton’s breast, remarking, “I am going down to my inner cellar.”

Page 2767

“An inner cellar!” exclaimed the doctor.

“Sacred from the butler. It is interdicted to Stoneman. Shall I offer myself as guide to you? My cellars are worth a visit.”

“Cellars are not catacombs. They are, if rightly constructed, rightly considered, cloisters, where the bottle meditates on joys to bestow, not on dust misused! Have you anything great?”

“A wine aged ninety.”

“Is it associated with your pedigree that you pronounce the age with such assurance?”

“My grandfather inherited it.”

“Your grandfather, Sir Willoughby, had meritorious offspring, not to speak of generous progenitors. What would have happened had it fallen into the female line! I shall be glad to accompany you. Port? Hermitage?”

“Port.”

“Ah! We are in England!”

“There will just be time,” said Sir Willoughby, inducing Dr. Middleton to step out.

A chirrup was in the reverend doctor’s tone: “Hocks, too, have compassed age. I have tasted senior Hocks. Their flavours are as a brook of many voices; they have depth also. Senatorial Port! we say. We cannot say that of any other wine. Port is deep-sea deep. It is in its flavour deep; mark the difference. It is like a classic tragedy, organic in conception. An ancient Hermitage has the light of the antique; the merit that it can grow to an extreme old age; a merit. Neither of Hermitage nor of Hock can you say that it is the blood of those long years, retaining the strength of youth with the wisdom of age. To Port for that! Port is our noblest legacy! Observe, I do not compare the wines; I distinguish the qualities. Let them live together for our enrichment; they are not rivals like the Idaean Three. Were they rivals, a fourth would challenge them. Burgundy has great genius. It does wonders within its period; it does all except to keep up in the race; it is short-lived. An aged Burgundy runs with a beardless Port. I cherish the fancy that Port speaks the sentences of wisdom, Burgundy sings the inspired Ode. Or put it, that Port is the Homeric hexameter, Burgundy the pindaric dithyramb. What do you say?”

“The comparison is excellent, sir.”

“The distinction, you would remark. Pindar astounds. But his elder brings us the more sustaining cup. One is a fountain of prodigious ascent. One is the unsounded purple sea of marching billows.”

“A very fine distinction.”

“I conceive you to be now commending the similes. They pertain to the time of the first critics of those poets. Touch the Greeks, and you can nothing new; all has been said: ’Graiis . . . praeter, laudem nullius avaris.’ Genius dedicated to Fame is immortal. We, sir, dedicate genius to the cloacaline floods. We do not address the unforgetting gods, but the popular stomach.”

Sir Willoughby was patient. He was about as accordantly coupled with Dr. Middleton in discourse as a drum duetting with a bass-viol; and when he struck in he received correction from the paedagogue-instrument. If he thumped affirmative or negative, he was wrong. However, he knew scholars to be an unmannered species; and the doctor’s learnedness would be a subject to dilate on.

Page 2768

In the cellar, it was the turn for the drum. Dr. Middleton was tongue-tied there. Sir Willoughby gave the history of his wine in heads of chapters; whence it came to the family originally, and how it had come down to him in the quantity to be seen. "Curiously, my grandfather, who inherited it, was a water-drinker. My father died early."

"Indeed! Dear me!" the doctor ejaculated in astonishment and condolence. The former glanced at the contrariety of man, the latter embraced his melancholy destiny.

He was impressed with respect for the family. This cool vaulted cellar, and the central square block, or enceinte, where the thick darkness was not penetrated by the intruding lamp, but rather took it as an eye, bore witness to forethoughtful practical solidity in the man who had built the house on such foundations. A house having a great wine stored below lives in our imaginations as a joyful house, fast and splendidly rooted in the soil. And imagination has a place for the heir of the house. His grandfather a water-drinker, his father dying early, present circumstances to us arguing predestination to an illustrious heirship and career. Dr Middleton's musings were coloured by the friendly vision of glasses of the great wine; his mind was festive; it pleased him, and he chose to indulge in his whimsical, robustious, grandiose-airy style of thinking: from which the festive mind will sometimes take a certain print that we cannot obliterate immediately. Expectation is grateful, you know; in the mood of gratitude we are waxen. And he was a self-humouring gentleman.

He liked Sir Willoughby's tone in ordering the servant at his heels to take up "those two bottles": it prescribed, without overdoing it, a proper amount of caution, and it named an agreeable number.

Watching the man's hand keenly, he said:

"But here is the misfortune of a thing super-excellent:—not more than one in twenty will do it justice."

Sir Willoughby replied: "Very true, sir; and I think we may pass over the nineteen."

"Women, for example; and most men."

"This wine would be a scaled book to them."

"I believe it would. It would be a grievous waste."

"Vernon is a claret man; and so is Horace De Craye. They are both below the mark of this wine. They will join the ladies. Perhaps you and I, sir, might remain together."

"With the utmost good-will on my part."

"I am anxious for your verdict, sir."

“You shall have it, sir, and not out of harmony with the chorus preceding me, I can predict. Cool, not frigid.” Dr. Middleton summed the attributes of the cellar on quitting it. “North side and South. No musty damp. A pure air. Everything requisite. One might lie down one’s self and keep sweet here.”

Page 2769

Of all our venerable British of the two Isles professing a suckling attachment to an ancient port-wine, lawyer, doctor, squire, rosy admiral, city merchant, the classic scholar is he whose blood is most nuptial to the webbed bottle. The reason must be, that he is full of the old poets. He has their spirit to sing with, and the best that Time has done on earth to feed it. He may also perceive a resemblance in the wine to the studious mind, which is the obverse of our mortality, and throws off acids and crusty particles in the piling of the years, until it is fulgent by clarity. Port hymns to his conservatism. It is magical: at one sip he is off swimming in the purple flood of the ever-youthful antique.

By comparison, then, the enjoyment of others is brutish; they have not the soul for it; but he is worthy of the wine, as are poets of Beauty. In truth, these should be severally apportioned to them, scholar and poet, as his own good thing. Let it be so.

Meanwhile Dr. Middleton sipped.

After the departure of the ladies, Sir Willoughby had practised a studied curtness upon Vernon and Horace.

“You drink claret,” he remarked to them, passing it round. “Port, I think, Doctor Middleton? The wine before you may serve for a preface. We shall have your wine in five minutes.”

The claret jug empty, Sir Willoughby offered to send for more. De Craye was languid over the question. Vernon rose from the table.

“We have a bottle of Doctor Middleton’s port coming in,” Willoughby said to him.

“Mine, you call it?” cried the doctor.

“It’s a royal wine, that won’t suffer sharing,” said Vernon.

“We’ll be with you, if you go into the billiard-room, Vernon.”

“I shall hurry my drinking of good wine for no man,” said the Rev. Doctor.

“Horace?”

“I’m beneath it, ephemeral, Willoughby. I am going to the ladies.”

Vernon and De Craye retired upon the arrival of the wine; and Dr. Middleton sipped. He sipped and looked at the owner of it.

“Some thirty dozen?” he said.

“Fifty.”

The doctor nodded humbly.

“I shall remember, sir,” his host addressed him, “whenever I have the honour of entertaining you, I am cellarer of that wine.”

The Rev. Doctor set down his glass. “You have, sir, in some sense, an enviable post. It is a responsible one, if that be a blessing. On you it devolves to retard the day of the last dozen.”

“Your opinion of the wine is favourable, sir?”

“I will say this:—shallow souls run to rhapsody:—I will say, that I am consoled for not having lived ninety years back, or at any period but the present, by this one glass of your ancestral wine.”

“I am careful of it,” Sir Willoughby said, modestly; “still its natural destination is to those who can appreciate it. You do, sir.”

“Still my good friend, still! It is a charge; it is a possession, but part in trusteeship. Though we cannot declare it an entailed estate, our consciences are in some sort pledged that it shall be a succession not too considerably diminished.”

Page 2770

“You will not object to drink it, sir, to the health of your grandchildren. And may you live to toast them in it on their marriage-day!”

“You colour the idea of a prolonged existence in seductive hues. Ha! It is a wine for Tithonus. This wine would speed him to the rosy Morning—aha!”

“I will undertake to sit you through it up to morning,” said Sir Willoughby, innocent of the Bacchic nuptiality of the allusion.

Dr Middleton eyed the decanter. There is a grief in gladness, for a premonition of our mortal state. The amount of wine in the decanter did not promise to sustain the starry roof of night and greet the dawn. “Old wine, my friend, denies us the full bottle!”

“Another bottle is to follow.”

“No!”

“It is ordered.”

“I protest.”

“It is uncorked.”

“I entreat.”

“It is decanted.”

“I submit. But, mark, it must be honest partnership. You are my worthy host, sir, on that stipulation. Note the superiority of wine over Venus!—I may say, the magnanimity of wine; our jealousy turns on him that will not share! But the corks, Willoughby. The corks excite my amazement.”

“The corking is examined at regular intervals. I remember the occurrence in my father’s time. I have seen to it once.”

“It must be perilous as an operation for tracheotomy; which I should assume it to resemble in surgical skill and firmness of hand, not to mention the imminent gasp of the patient.”

A fresh decanter was placed before the doctor.

He said: “I have but a girl to give!” He was melted.

Sir Willoughby replied: “I take her for the highest prize this world affords.”

“I have beaten some small stock of Latin into her head, and a note of Greek. She contains a savour of the classics. I hoped once . . . But she is a girl. The nymph of the woods is in her. Still she will bring you her flower-cup of Hippocrene. She has that aristocracy—the noblest. She is fair; a Beauty, some have said, who judge not by lines. Fair to me, Willoughby! She is my sky. There were applicants. In Italy she was besought of me. She has no history. You are the first heading of the chapter. With you she will have her one tale, as it should be. ‘Mulier tum bene olet’, you know. Most fragrant she that smells of naught. She goes to you from me, from me alone, from her father to her husband. ‘Ut flos in septis secretus nascitur hortis.’” He murmured on the lines to, “‘Sic virgo, dum . . .’ I shall feel the parting. She goes to one who will have my pride in her, and more. I will add, who will be envied. Mr. Whitford must write you a Carmen Nuptiale.”

The heart of the unfortunate gentleman listening to Dr. Middleton set in for irregular leaps. His offended temper broke away from the image of Clara, revealing her as he had seen her in the morning beside Horace De Craye, distressingly sweet; sweet with the breezy radiance of an English soft-breathing day; sweet with sharpness of young sap. Her eyes, her lips, her fluttering dress that played happy mother across her bosom, giving peeps of the veiled twins; and her laughter, her slim figure, peerless carriage, all her terrible sweetness touched his wound to the smarting quick.

Page 2771

Her wish to be free of him was his anguish. In his pain he thought sincerely. When the pain was easier he muffled himself in the idea of her jealousy of Laetitia Dale, and deemed the wish a fiction. But she had expressed it. That was the wound he sought to comfort; for the double reason, that he could love her better after punishing her, and that to meditate on doing so masked the fear of losing her—the dread abyss she had succeeded in forcing his nature to shudder at as a giddy edge possibly near, in spite of his arts of self-defence.

“What I shall do to-morrow evening!” he exclaimed. “I do not care to fling a bottle to Colonel De Craye and Vernon. I cannot open one for myself. To sit with the ladies will be sitting in the cold for me. When do you bring me back my bride, sir?”

“My dear Willoughby!” The Rev. Doctor puffed, composed himself, and sipped. “The expedition is an absurdity. I am unable to see the aim of it. She had a headache, vapours. They are over, and she will show a return of good sense. I have ever maintained that nonsense is not to be encouraged in girls. I can put my foot on it. My arrangements are for staying here a further ten days, in the terms of your hospitable invitation. And I stay.”

“I applaud your resolution, sir. Will you prove firm?”

“I am never false to my engagement, Willoughby.”

“Not under pressure?”

“Under no pressure.”

“Persuasion, I should have said.”

“Certainly not. The weakness is in the yielding, either to persuasion or to pressure. The latter brings weight to bear on us; the former blows at our want of it.”

“You gratify me, Doctor Middleton, and relieve me.”

“I cordially dislike a breach in good habits, Willoughby. But I do remember—was I wrong?—informing Clara that you appeared light-hearted in regard to a departure, or gap in a visit, that was not, I must confess, to my liking.”

“Simply, my dear doctor, your pleasure was my pleasure; but make my pleasure yours, and you remain to crack many a bottle with your son-in-law.”

“Excellently said. You have a courtly speech, Willoughby. I can imagine you to conduct a lovers’ quarrel with a politeness to read a lesson to well-bred damsels. Aha?”

“Spare me the futility of the quarrel.”

“All’s well?”

“Clara,” replied Sir Willoughby, in dramatic epigram, “is perfection.”

“I rejoice,” the Rev. Doctor responded; taught thus to understand that the lovers’ quarrel between his daughter and his host was at an end.

Page 2772

He left the table a little after eleven o'clock. A short dialogue ensued upon the subject of the ladies. They must have gone to bed? Why, yes; of course they must. It is good that they should go to bed early to preserve their complexions for us. Ladies are creation's glory, but they are anti-climax, following a wine of a century old. They are anti-climax, recoil, cross-current; morally, they are repentance, penance; imagerially, the frozen North on the young brown buds bursting to green. What know they of a critic in the palate, and a frame all revelry! And mark you, revelry in sobriety, containment in exultation; classic revelry. Can they, dear though they be to us, light up candelabras in the brain, to illuminate all history and solve the secret of the destiny of man? They cannot; they cannot sympathize with them that can. So therefore this division is between us; yet are we not turbaned Orientals, nor are they inmates of the harem. We are not Moslem. Be assured of it in the contemplation of the table's decanter.

Dr Middleton said: "Then I go straight to bed."

"I will conduct you to your door, sir," said his host.

The piano was heard. Dr. Middleton laid his hand on the banisters, and remarked: "The ladies must have gone to bed?"

Vernon came out of the library and was hailed, "Fellow-student!"

He waved a good-night to the Doctor, and said to Willoughby: "The ladies are in the drawing-room."

"I am on my way upstairs," was the reply.

"Solitude and sleep, after such a wine as that; and forefend us human society!" the Doctor shouted. "But, Willoughby!"

"Sir."

"One to-morrow."

"You dispose of the cellar, sir."

"I am fitter to drive the horses of the sun. I would rigidly counsel, one, and no more. We have made a breach in the fiftieth dozen. Daily one will preserve us from having to name the fortieth quite so unseasonably. The couple of bottles per diem prognosticates disintegration, with its accompanying recklessness. Constitutionally, let me add, I bear three. I speak for posterity."

During Dr. Middleton's allocution the ladies issued from the drawing-room, Clara foremost, for she had heard her father's voice, and desired to ask him this in reference to their departure: "Papa, will you tell me the hour to-morrow?"

She ran up the stairs to kiss him, saying again: “When will you be ready to-morrow morning?”

Dr Middleton announced a stoutly deliberative mind in the bugle-notes of a repeated ahem. He bethought him of replying in his doctorial tongue. Clara’s eager face admonished him to brevity: it began to look starved. Intruding on his vision of the houris couched in the inner cellar to be the reward of valiant men, it annoyed him. His brows joined. He said: “I shall not be ready to-morrow morning.”

“In the afternoon?”

“Nor in the afternoon.”

Page 2773

“When?”

“My dear, I am ready for bed at this moment, and know of no other readiness. Ladies,” he bowed to the group in the hall below him, “may fair dreams pay court to you this night!”

Sir Willoughby had hastily descended and shaken the hands of the ladies, directed Horace De Craye to the laboratory for a smoking-room, and returned to Dr. Middleton. Vexed by the scene, uncertain of his temper if he stayed with Clara, for whom he had arranged that her disappointment should take place on the morrow, in his absence, he said: “Good-night, good-night,” to her, with due fervour, bending over her flaccid finger-tips; then offered his arm to the Rev. Doctor.

“Ay, son Willoughby, in friendliness, if you will, though I am a man to bear my load,” the father of the stupefied girl addressed him. “Candles, I believe, are on the first landing. Good-night, my love. Clara!”

“Papa!”

“Good-night.”

“Oh!” she lifted her breast with the interjection, standing in shame of the curtained conspiracy and herself, “good night”.

Her father wound up the stairs. She stepped down.

“There was an understanding that papa and I should go to London to-morrow early,” she said, unconcernedly, to the ladies, and her voice was clear, but her face too legible. De Craye was heartily unhappy at the sight.

CHAPTER XXI

CLARA’S MEDITATIONS

Two were sleepless that night: Miss Middleton and Colonel De Craye.

She was in a fever, lying like stone, with her brain burning. Quick natures run out to calamity in any little shadow of it flung before. Terrors of apprehension drive them. They stop not short of the uttermost when they are on the wings of dread. A frown means tempest, a wind wreck; to see fire is to be seized by it. When it is the approach of their loathing that they fear, they are in the tragedy of the embrace at a breath; and then is the wrestle between themselves and horror, between themselves and evil, which promises aid; themselves and weakness, which calls on evil; themselves and the better part of them, which whispers no beguilement.

The false course she had taken through sophistical cowardice appalled the girl; she was lost. The advantage taken of it by Willoughby put on the form of strength, and made her feel abject, reptilious; she was lost, carried away on the flood of the cataract. He had won her father for an ally. Strangely, she knew not how, he had succeeded in swaying her father, who had previously not more than tolerated him. “Son Willoughby” on her father’s lips meant something that scenes and scenes would have to struggle with, to the out-wearying of her father and herself. She revolved the “Son Willoughby” through moods of stupefaction, contempt, revolt, subjection. It meant that she was vanquished. It meant that her father’s esteem for her was forfeited. She saw him a gigantic image of discomposure.

Page 2774

Her recognition of her cowardly feebleness brought the brood of fatalism. What was the right of so miserable a creature as she to excite disturbance, let her fortunes be good or ill? It would be quieter to float, kinder to everybody. Thank heaven for the chances of a short life! Once in a net, desperation is graceless. We may be brutes in our earthly destinies: in our endurance of them we need not be brutish.

She was now in the luxury of passivity, when we throw our burden on the Powers above, and do not love them. The need to love them drew her out of it, that she might strive with the unbearable, and by sheer striving, even though she were graceless, come to love them humbly. It is here that the seed of good teaching supports a soul, for the condition might be mapped, and where kismet whispers us to shut eyes, and instruction bids us look up, is at a well-marked cross-road of the contest.

Quick of sensation, but not courageously resolved, she perceived how blunderingly she had acted. For a punishment, it seemed to her that she who had not known her mind must learn to conquer her nature, and submit. She had accepted Willoughby; therefore she accepted him. The fact became a matter of the past, past debating.

In the abstract this contemplation of circumstances went well. A plain duty lay in her way. And then a disembodied thought flew round her, comparing her with Vernon to her discredit. He had for years borne much that was distasteful to him, for the purpose of studying, and with his poor income helping the poorer than himself. She dwelt on him in pity and envy; he had lived in this place, and so must she; and he had not been dishonoured by his modesty: he had not failed of self-control, because he had a life within. She was almost imagining she might imitate him when the clash of a sharp physical thought, “The difference! the difference!” told her she was woman and never could submit. Can a woman have an inner life apart from him she is yoked to? She tried to nestle deep away in herself: in some corner where the abstract view had comforted her, to flee from thinking as her feminine blood directed. It was a vain effort. The difference, the cruel fate, the defencelessness of women, pursued her, strung her to wild horses’ backs, tossed her on savage wastes. In her case duty was shame: hence, it could not be broadly duty. That intolerable difference proscribed the word.

But the fire of a brain burning high and kindling everything lighted up herself against herself.—Was one so volatile as she a person with a will?—Were they not a multitude of flitting wishes that she took for a will? Was she, feather-headed that she was, a person to make a stand on physical pride?—If she could yield her hand without reflection (as she conceived she had done, from incapacity to conceive herself doing it reflectively) was she much better than purchaseable stuff that has nothing to say to the bargain?

Page 2775

Furthermore, said her incandescent reason, she had not suspected such art of cunning in Willoughby. Then might she not be deceived altogether—might she not have misread him? Stronger than she had fancied, might he not be likewise more estimable? The world was favourable to him; he was prized by his friends.

She reviewed him. It was all in one flash. It was not much less intentionally favourable than the world's review and that of his friends, but, beginning with the idea of them, she recollected—heard Willoughby's voice pronouncing his opinion of his friends and the world; of Vernon Whitford and Colonel De Craye for example, and of men and women. An undefined agreement to have the same regard for him as his friends and the world had, provided that he kept at the same distance from her, was the termination of this phase, occupying about a minute in time, and reached through a series of intensely vivid pictures:—his face, at her petition to be released, lowering behind them for a background and a comment.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she cried, aloud; and it struck her that her repulsion was a holy warning. Better be graceless than a loathing wife: better appear inconsistent. Why should she not appear such as she was?

Why? We answer that question usually in angry reliance on certain superb qualities, injured fine qualities of ours undiscovered by the world, not much more than suspected by ourselves, which are still our fortress, where pride sits at home, solitary and impervious as an octogenarian conservative. But it is not possible to answer it so when the brain is rageing like a pine-torch and the devouring illumination leaves not a spot of our nature covert. The aspect of her weakness was unrelieved, and frightened her back to her loathing. From her loathing, as soon as her sensations had quickened to realize it, she was hurled on her weakness. She was graceless, she was inconsistent, she was volatile, she was unprincipled, she was worse than a prey to wickedness—capable of it; she was only waiting to be misled. Nay, the idea of being misled suffused her with languor; for then the battle would be over and she a happy weed of the sea no longer suffering those tugs at the roots, but leaving it to the sea to heave and contend. She would be like Constantia then: like her in her fortunes: never so brave, she feared.

Perhaps very like Constantia in her fortunes!

Poor troubled bodies waking up in the night to behold visually the spectre cast forth from the perplexed machinery inside them, stare at it for a space, till touching consciousness they dive down under the sheets with fish-like alacrity. Clara looked at her thought, and suddenly headed downward in a crimson gulf.

Page 2776

She must have obtained absolution, or else it was oblivion, below. Soon after the plunge her first object of meditation was Colonel De Craye. She thought of him calmly: he seemed a refuge. He was very nice, he was a holiday character. His lithe figure, neat firm footing of the stag, swift intelligent expression, and his ready frolicsomeness, pleasant humour, cordial temper, and his Irishry, whereon he was at liberty to play, as on the emblem harp of the Isle, were soothing to think of. The suspicion that she tricked herself with this calm observation of him was dismissed. Issuing out of torture, her young nature eluded the irradiating brain in search of refreshment, and she luxuriated at a feast in considering him—shower on a parched land that he was! He spread new air abroad. She had no reason to suppose he was not a good man: she could securely think of him. Besides he was bound by his prospective office in support of his friend Willoughby to be quite harmless. And besides (you are not to expect logical sequences) the showery refreshment in thinking of him lay in the sort of assurance it conveyed, that the more she thought, the less would he be likely to figure as an obnoxious official—that is, as the man to do by Willoughby at the altar what her father would, under the supposition, be doing by her. Her mind reposed on Colonel De Craye.

His name was Horace. Her father had worked with her at Horace. She knew most of the Odes and some of the Satires and Epistles of the poet. They reflected benevolent beams on the gentleman of the poet's name. He too was vivacious, had fun, common sense, elegance; loved rusticity, he said, sighed for a country life, fancied retiring to Canada to cultivate his own domain; "modus agri non ita magnus:" a delight. And he, too, when in the country, sighed for town. There were strong features of resemblance. He had hinted in fun at not being rich. "Quae virtus et quanta sit vivere parvo." But that quotation applied to and belonged to Vernon Whitford. Even so little disarranged her meditations.

She would have thought of Vernon, as her instinct of safety prompted, had not his exactions been excessive. He proposed to help her with advice only. She was to do everything for herself, do and dare everything, decide upon everything. He told her flatly that so would she learn to know her own mind; and flatly, that it was her penance. She had gained nothing by breaking down and pouring herself out to him. He would have her bring Willoughby and her father face to face, and be witness of their interview —herself the theme. What alternative was there?—obedience to the word she had pledged. He talked of patience, of self-examination and patience. But all of her—she was all marked urgent. This house was a cage, and the world—her brain was a cage, until she could obtain her prospect of freedom.

As for the house, she might leave it; yonder was the dawn.

Page 2777

She went to her window to gaze at the first colour along the grey. Small satisfaction came of gazing at that or at herself. She shunned glass and sky. One and the other stamped her as a slave in a frame. It seemed to her she had been so long in this place that she was fixed here: it was her world, and to imagine an Alp was like seeking to get back to childhood. Unless a miracle intervened here she would have to pass her days. Men are so little chivalrous now that no miracle ever intervenes. Consequently she was doomed.

She took a pen and began a letter to a dear friend, Lucy Darleton, a promised bridesmaid, bidding her countermand orders for her bridal dress, and purposing a tour in Switzerland. She wrote of the mountain country with real abandonment to imagination. It became a visioned loophole of escape. She rose and clasped a shawl over her night-dress to ward off chillness, and sitting to the table again, could not produce a word. The lines she had written were condemned: they were ludicrously inefficient. The letter was torn to pieces. She stood very clearly doomed.

After a fall of tears, upon looking at the scraps, she dressed herself, and sat by the window and watched the blackbird on the lawn as he hopped from shafts of dewy sunlight to the long-stretched dewy tree-shadows, considering in her mind that dark dews are more meaningful than bright, the beauty of the dews of woods more sweet than meadow-dews. It signified only that she was quieter. She had gone through her crisis in the anticipation of it. That is how quick natures will often be cold and hard, or not much moved, when the positive crisis arrives, and why it is that they are prepared for astonishing leaps over the gradations which should render their conduct comprehensible to us, if not excuseable. She watched the blackbird throw up his head stiffly, and peck to right and left, dangling the worm on each side his orange beak. Specklebreasted thrushes were at work, and a wagtail that ran as with Clara's own rapid little steps. Thrush and blackbird flew to the nest. They had wings. The lovely morning breathed of sweet earth into her open window, and made it painful, in the dense twitter, chirp, cheep, and song of the air, to resist the innocent intoxication. O to love! was not said by her, but if she had sung, as her nature prompted, it would have been. Her war with Willoughby sprang of a desire to love repelled by distaste. Her cry for freedom was a cry to be free to love: she discovered it, half shuddering: to love, oh! no—no shape of man, nor impalpable nature either: but to love unselfishness, and helpfulness, and planted strength in something. Then, loving and being loved a little, what strength would be hers! She could utter all the words needed to Willoughby and to her father, locked in her love: walking in this world, living in that.

Page 2778

Previously she had cried, despairing: If I were loved! Jealousy of Constantia's happiness, envy of her escape, ruled her then: and she remembered the cry, though not perfectly her plain-speaking to herself: she chose to think she had meant: If Willoughby were capable of truly loving! For now the fire of her brain had sunk, and refuges and subterfuges were round about it. The thought of personal love was encouraged, she chose to think, for the sake of the strength it lent her to carve her way to freedom. She had just before felt rather the reverse, but she could not exist with that feeling; and it was true that freedom was not so indistinct in her fancy as the idea of love.

Were men, when they were known, like him she knew too well?

The arch-tempter's question to her was there.

She put it away. Wherever she turned it stood observing her. She knew so much of one man, nothing of the rest: naturally she was curious. Vernon might be sworn to be unlike. But he was exceptional. What of the other in the house?

Maidens are commonly reduced to read the masters of their destinies by their instincts; and when these have been edged by over-activity they must hoodwink their maidenliness to suffer themselves to read; and then they must dupe their minds, else men would soon see they were gifted to discern. Total ignorance being their pledge of purity to men, they have to expunge the writing of their perceptives on the tablets of the brain: they have to know not when they do know. The instinct of seeking to know, crossed by the task of blotting knowledge out, creates that conflict of the natural with the artificial creature to which their ultimately revealed double-face, complained of by ever-dissatisfied men, is owing. Wonder in no degree that they indulge a craving to be fools, or that many of them act the character. Jeer at them as little for not showing growth. You have reared them to this pitch, and at this pitch they have partly civilized you. Supposing you to want it done wholly, you must yield just as many points in your requisitions as are needed to let the wits of young women reap their due harvest and be of good use to their souls. You will then have a fair battle, a braver, with better results.

Clara's inner eye traversed Colonel De Craye at a shot.

She had immediately to blot out the vision of Captain Oxford in him, the revelation of his laughing contempt for Willoughby, the view of mercurial principles, the scribbled histories of light love-passages.

She blotted it out, kept it from her mind: so she knew him, knew him to be a sweeter and a variable Willoughby, a generous kind of Willoughby, a Willoughby-butterfly, without having the free mind to summarize him and picture him for a warning. Scattered features of him, such as the instincts call up, were not sufficiently impressive. Besides, the clouded mind was opposed to her receiving impressions.

Page 2779

Young Crossjay's voice in the still morning air came to her cars. The dear guileless chatter of the boy's voice. Why, assuredly it was young Crossjay who was the man she loved. And he loved her. And he was going to be an unselfish, sustaining, true, strong man, the man she longed for, for anchorage. Oh, the dear voice! woodpecker and thrush in one. He never ceased to chatter to Vernon Whitford walking beside him with a swinging stride off to the lake for their morning swim. Happy couple! The morning gave them both a freshness and innocence above human. They seemed to Clara made of morning air and clear lake water. Crossjay's voice ran up and down a diatonic scale with here and there a query in semitone and a laugh on a ringing note. She wondered what he could have to talk of so incessantly, and imagined all the dialogue. He prattled of his yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, which did not imply past and future, but his vivid present. She felt like one vainly trying to fly in hearing him; she felt old. The consolation she arrived at was to feel maternal. She wished to hug the boy.

Trot and stride, Crossjay and Vernon entered the park, careless about wet grass, not once looking at the house. Crossjay ranged ahead and picked flowers, bounding back to show them. Clara's heart beat at a fancy that her name was mentioned. If those flowers were for her she would prize them.

The two bathers dipped over an undulation.

Her loss of them rattled her chains.

Deeply dwelling on their troubles has the effect upon the young of helping to forgetfulness; for they cannot think without imagining, their imaginations are saturated with their Pleasures, and the collision, though they are unable to exchange sad for sweet, distills an opiate.

"Am I solemnly engaged?" she asked herself. She seemed to be awakening.

She glanced at her bed, where she had passed the night of ineffectual moaning, and out on the high wave of grass, where Crossjay and his good friend had vanished.

Was the struggle all to be gone over again?

Little by little her intelligence of her actual position crept up to submerge her heart.

"I am in his house!" she said. It resembled a discovery, so strangely had her opiate and power of dreaming wrought through her tortures. She said it gasping. She was in his house, his guest, his betrothed, sworn to him. The fact stood out cut in steel on the pitiless daylight.

That consideration drove her to be an early wanderer in the wake of Crossjay.

Her station was among the beeches on the flank of the boy's return; and while waiting there the novelty of her waiting to waylay anyone—she who had played the contrary part!—told her more than it pleased her to think. Yet she could admit that she did desire to speak with Vernon, as with a counsellor, harsh and curt, but wholesome.

The bathers reappeared on the grass-ridge, racing and flapping wet towels.

Page 2780

Some one hailed them. A sound of the galloping hoof drew her attention to the avenue. She saw Willoughby dash across the park level, and dropping a word to Vernon, ride away. Then she allowed herself to be seen.

Crossjay shouted. Willoughby turned his head, but not his horse's head. The boy sprang up to Clara. He had swum across the lake and back; he had raced Mr. Whitford —and beaten him! How he wished Miss Middleton had been able to be one of them!

Clara listened to him enviously. Her thought was: We women are nailed to our sex!

She said: "And you have just been talking to Sir Willoughby."

Crossjay drew himself up to give an imitation of the baronet's hand-moving in adieu.

He would not have done that had he not smelled sympathy with the performance.

She declined to smile. Crossjay repeated it, and laughed. He made a broader exhibition of it to Vernon approaching: "I say. Mr. Whitford, who's this?"

Vernon doubled to catch him. Crossjay fled and resumed his magnificent air in the distance.

"Good-morning, Miss Middleton; you are out early," said Vernon, rather pale and stringy from his cold swim, and rather hard-eyed with the sharp exercise following it.

She had expected some of the kindness she wanted to reject, for he could speak very kindly, and she regarded him as her doctor of medicine, who would at least present the futile drug.

"Good morning," she replied.

"Willoughby will not be home till the evening."

"You could not have had a finer morning for your bath."

"No."

"I will walk as fast as you like."

"I'm perfectly warm."

"But you prefer fast walking."

"Out."

"Ah! yes, that I understand. The walk back! Why is Willoughby away to-day?"

“He has business.”

After several steps she said: “He makes very sure of papa.”

“Not without reason, you will find,” said Vernon.

“Can it be? I am bewildered. I had papa’s promise.”

“To leave the Hall for a day or two.”

“It would have been . . .”

“Possibly. But other heads are at work as well as yours. If you had been in earnest about it you would have taken your father into your confidence at once. That was the course I ventured to propose, on the supposition.”

“In earnest! I cannot imagine that you doubt it. I wished to spare him.”

“This is a case in which he can’t be spared.”

“If I had been bound to any other! I did not know then who held me a prisoner. I thought I had only to speak to him sincerely.”

“Not many men would give up their prize for a word, Willoughby the last of any.”

“Prize” rang through her thrillingly from Vernon’s mouth, and soothed her degradation.

She would have liked to protest that she was very little of a prize; a poor prize; not one at all in general estimation; only one to a man reckoning his property; no prize in the true sense.

Page 2781

The importunity of pain saved her.

“Does he think I can change again? Am I treated as something won in a lottery? To stay here is indeed more than I can bear. And if he is calculating—Mr. Whitford, if he calculates on another change, his plotting to keep me here is inconsiderate, not very wise. Changes may occur in absence.”

“Wise or not, he has the right to scheme his best to keep you.”

She looked on Vernon with a shade of wondering reproach.

“Why? What right?”

“The right you admit when you ask him to release you. He has the right to think you deluded; and to think you may come to a better mood if you remain—a mood more agreeable to him, I mean. He has that right absolutely. You are bound to remember also that you stand in the wrong. You confess it when you appeal to his generosity. And every man has the right to retain a treasure in his hand if he can. Look straight at these facts.”

“You expect me to be all reason!”

“Try to be. It’s the way to learn whether you are really in earnest.”

“I will try. It will drive me to worse!”

“Try honestly. What is wisest now is, in my opinion, for you to resolve to stay. I speak in the character of the person you sketched for yourself as requiring. Well, then, a friend repeats the same advice. You might have gone with your father: now you will only disturb him and annoy him. The chances are he will refuse to go.”

“Are women ever so changeable as men, then? Papa consented; he agreed; he had some of my feeling; I saw it. That was yesterday. And at night! He spoke to each of us at night in a different tone from usual. With me he was hardly affectionate. But when you advise me to stay, Mr. Whitford, you do not perhaps reflect that it would be at the sacrifice of all candour.”

“Regard it as a probational term.”

“It has gone too far with me.”

“Take the matter into the head: try the case there.”

“Are you not counselling me as if I were a woman of intellect?”

The crystal ring in her voice told him that tears were near to flowing.

He shuddered slightly. “You have intellect,” he said, nodded, and crossed the lawn, leaving her. He had to dress.

She was not permitted to feel lonely, for she was immediately joined by Colonel De Craye.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RIDE

Crossjay darted up to her a nose ahead of the colonel.

“I say, Miss Middleton, we’re to have the whole day to ourselves, after morning lessons. Will you come and fish with me and see me bird’s-nest?”

“Not for the satisfaction of beholding another cracked crown, my son,” the colonel interposed: and bowing to Clara: “Miss Middleton is handed over to my exclusive charge for the day, with her consent?”

“I scarcely know,” said she, consulting a sensation of languor that seemed to contain some reminiscence. “If I am here. My father’s plans are uncertain. I will speak to him. If I am here, perhaps Crossjay would like a ride in the afternoon.”

Page 2782

“Oh, yes,” cried the boy; “out over Bournden, through Mewsey up to Closharn Beacon, and down on Aspenwell, where there’s a common for racing. And ford the stream!”

“An inducement for you,” De Craye said to her.

She smiled and squeezed the boy’s hand.

“We won’t go without you, Crossjay.”

“You don’t carry a comb, my man, when you bathe?”

At this remark of the colonel’s young Crossjay conceived the appearance of his matted locks in the eyes of his adorable lady. He gave her one dear look through his redness, and fled.

“I like that boy,” said De Craye.

“I love him,” said Clara.

Crossjay’s troubled eyelids in his honest young face became a picture for her.

“After all, Miss Middleton, Willoughby’s notions about him are not so bad, if we consider that you will be in the place of a mother to him.”

“I think them bad.”

“You are disinclined to calculate the good fortune of the boy in having more of you on land than he would have in crown and anchor buttons!”

“You have talked of him with Willoughby.”

“We had a talk last night.”

Of how much? thought she.

“Willoughby returns?” she said.

“He dines here, I know; for he holds the key of the inner cellar, and Doctor Middleton does him the honour to applaud his wine. Willoughby was good enough to tell me that he thought I might contribute to amuse you.”

She was brooding in stupefaction on her father and the wine as she requested Colonel De Craye to persuade Willoughby to take the general view of Crossjay’s future and act on it.

“He seems fond of the boy, too,” said De Craye, musingly.

“You speak in doubt?”

“Not at all. But is he not—men are queer fish!—make allowance for us—a trifle tyrannical, pleasantly, with those he is fond of?”

“If they look right and left?”

It was meant for an interrogation; it was not with the sound of one that the words dropped. “My dear Crossjay!” she sighed. “I would willingly pay for him out of my own purse, and I will do so rather than have him miss his chance. I have not mustered resolution to propose it.”

“I may be mistaken, Miss Middleton. He talked of the boy’s fondness of him.”

“He would.”

“I suppose he is hardly peculiar in liking to play Pole-star.”

“He may not be.”

“For the rest, your influence should be all-powerful.”

“It is not.”

De Craye looked with a wandering eye at the heavens.

“We are having a spell of weather perfectly superb. And the odd thing is, that whenever we have splendid weather at home we’re all for rushing abroad. I’m booked for a Mediterranean cruise—postponed to give place to your ceremony.”

“That?” she could not control her accent.

“What worthier?”

She was guilty of a pause.

Page 2783

De Craye saved it from an awkward length. “I have written half an essay on Honeymoons, Miss Middleton.”

“Is that the same as a half-written essay, Colonel De Craye?”

“Just the same, with the difference that it’s a whole essay written all on one side.”

“On which side?”

“The bachelor’s.”

“Why does he trouble himself with such topics?”

“To warm himself for being left out in the cold.”

“Does he feel envy?”

“He has to confess it.”

“He has liberty.”

“A commodity he can’t tell the value of if there’s no one to buy.”

“Why should he wish to sell?”

“He’s bent on completing his essay.”

“To make the reading dull.”

“There we touch the key of the subject. For what is to rescue the pair from a monotony multiplied by two? And so a bachelor’s recommendation, when each has discovered the right sort of person to be dull with, pushes them from the churchdoor on a round of adventures containing a spice of peril, if ’tis to be had. Let them be in danger of their lives the first or second day. A bachelor’s loneliness is a private affair of his own; he hasn’t to look into a face to be ashamed of feeling it and inflicting it at the same time; ’tis his pillow; he can punch it an he pleases, and turn it over t’other side, if he’s for a mighty variation; there’s a dream in it. But our poor couple are staring wide awake. All their dreaming’s done. They’ve emptied their bottle of elixir, or broken it; and she has a thirst for the use of the tongue, and he to yawn with a crony; and they may converse, they’re not aware of it, more than the desert that has drunk a shower. So as soon as possible she’s away to the ladies, and he puts on his Club. That’s what your bachelor sees and would like to spare them; and if he didn’t see something of the sort he’d be off with a noose round his neck, on his knees in the dew to the morning milkmaid.”

“The bachelor is happily warned and on his guard,” said Clara, diverted, as he wished her to be. “Sketch me a few of the adventures you propose.”

“I have a friend who rowed his bride from the Houses of Parliament up the Thames to the Severn on into North Wales. They shot some pretty weirs and rapids.”

“That was nice.”

“They had an infinity of adventures, and the best proof of the benefit they derived is, that they forgot everything about them except that the adventures occurred.”

“Those two must have returned bright enough to please you.”

“They returned, and shone like a wrecker’s beacon to the mariner. You see, Miss Middleton, there was the landscape, and the exercise, and the occasional bit of danger. I think it’s to be recommended. The scene is always changing, and not too fast; and ’tis not too sublime, like big mountains, to tire them of their everlasting big Ohs. There’s the difference between going

Page 2784

into a howling wind and launching among zephyrs. They have fresh air and movement, and not in a railway carriage; they can take in what they look on. And she has the steering ropes, and that's a wise commencement. And my lord is all day making an exhibition of his manly strength, bowing before her some sixty to the minute; and she, to help him, just inclines when she's in the mood. And they're face to face in the nature of things, and are not under the obligation of looking the unutterable, because, you see, there's business in hand; and the boat's just the right sort of third party, who never interferes, but must be attended to. And they feel they're labouring together to get along, all in the proper proportion; and whether he has to labour in life or not, he proves his ability. What do you think of it, Miss Middleton?"

"I think you have only to propose it, Colonel De Craye."

"And if they capsize, why, 'tis a natural ducking!"

"You forgot the lady's dressing-bag."

"The stain on the metal for a constant reminder of his prowess in saving it! Well, and there's an alternative to that scheme, and a finer:—This, then: they read dramatic pieces during courtship, to stop the saying of things over again till the drum of the car becomes nothing but a drum to the poor head, and a little before they affix their signatures to the fatal Registry-book of the vestry, they enter into an engagement with a body of provincial actors to join the troop on the day of their nuptials, and away they go in their coach and four, and she is Lady Kitty Caper for a month, and he Sir Harry Highflyer. See the honeymoon spinning! The marvel to me is that none of the young couples do it. They could enjoy the world, see life, amuse the company, and come back fresh to their own characters, instead of giving themselves a dose of Africa without a savage to diversify it: an impression they never get over, I'm told. Many a character of the happiest auspices has irreparable mischief done it by the ordinary honeymoon. For my part, I rather lean to the second plan of campaign."

Clara was expected to reply, and she said: "Probably because you are fond of acting. It would require capacity on both sides."

"Miss Middleton, I would undertake to breathe the enthusiasm for the stage and the adventure."

"You are recommending it generally."

"Let my gentleman only have a fund of enthusiasm. The lady will kindle. She always does at a spark."

"If he has not any?"

"Then I'm afraid they must be mortally dull."

She allowed her silence to speak; she knew that it did so too eloquently, and could not control the personal adumbration she gave to the one point of light revealed in, “if he has not any”. Her figure seemed immediately to wear a cap and cloak of dulness.

Page 2785

She was full of revolt and anger, she was burning with her situation; if sensible of shame now at anything that she did, it turned to wrath and threw the burden on the author of her desperate distress. The hour for blaming herself had gone by, to be renewed ultimately perhaps in a season of freedom. She was bereft of her insight within at present, so blind to herself that, while conscious of an accurate reading of Willoughby's friend, she thanked him in her heart for seeking simply to amuse her and slightly succeeding. The afternoon's ride with him and Crossjay was an agreeable beguilement to her in prospect.

Laetitia came to divide her from Colonel De Craye. Dr. Middleton was not seen before his appearance at the breakfast-table, where a certain air of anxiety in his daughter's presence produced the semblance of a raised map at intervals on his forehead. Few sights on earth are more deserving of our sympathy than a good man who has a troubled conscience thrust on him.

The Rev. Doctor's perturbation was observed. The ladies Eleanor and Isabel, seeing his daughter to be the cause of it, blamed her, and would have assisted him to escape, but Miss Dale, whom he courted with that object, was of the opposite faction. She made way for Clara to lead her father out. He called to Vernon, who merely nodded while leaving the room by the window with Crossjay.

Half an eye on Dr. Middleton's pathetic exit in captivity sufficed to tell Colonel De Craye that parties divided the house. At first he thought how deplorable it would be to lose Miss Middleton for two days or three: and it struck him that Vernon Whitford and Laetitia Dale were acting oddly in seconding her, their aim not being discernible. For he was of the order of gentlemen of the obscurely-clear in mind who have a predetermined acuteness in their watch upon the human play, and mark men and women as pieces of a bad game of chess, each pursuing an interested course. His experience of a section of the world had educated him—as gallant, frank, and manly a comrade as one could wish for—up to this point. But he soon abandoned speculations, which may be compared to a shaking anemometer that will not let the troubled indicator take station. Reposing on his perceptions and his instincts, he fixed his attention on the chief persons, only glancing at the others to establish a postulate, that where there are parties in a house the most bewitching person present is the origin of them. It is ever Helen's achievement. Miss Middleton appeared to him bewitching beyond mortal; sunny in her laughter, shadowy in her smiling; a young lady shaped for perfect music with a lover.

She was that, and no less, to every man's eye on earth. High breeding did not freeze her lovely girlishness.—But Willoughby did. This reflection intervened to blot luxurious picturings of her, and made itself acceptable by leading him back to several instances of an evident want of harmony of the pair.

Page 2786

And now (for purely undirected impulse all within us is not, though we may be eye-bandaged agents under direction) it became necessary for an honourable gentleman to cast vehement rebukes at the fellow who did not comprehend the jewel he had won. How could Willoughby behave like so complete a donkey! De Craye knew him to be in his interior stiff, strange, exacting: women had talked of him; he had been too much for one woman—the dashing Constantia: he had worn one woman, sacrificing far more for him than Constantia, to death. Still, with such a prize as Clara Middleton, Willoughby's behaviour was past calculating in its contemptible absurdity. And during courtship! And courtship of that girl! It was the way of a man ten years after marriage.

The idea drew him to picture her doatingly in her young matronly bloom ten years after marriage: without a touch of age, matronly wise, womanly sweet: perhaps with a couple of little ones to love, never having known the love of a man.

To think of a girl like Clara Middleton never having at nine-and-twenty, and with two fair children! known the love of a man or the loving of a man, possibly, became torture to the Colonel.

For a pacification he had to reconsider that she was as yet only nineteen and unmarried.

But she was engaged, and she was unloved. One might swear to it, that she was unloved. And she was not a girl to be satisfied with a big house and a high-nosed husband.

There was a rapid alteration of the sad history of Clara the unloved matron solaced by two little ones. A childless Clara tragically loving and beloved flashed across the dark glass of the future.

Either way her fate was cruel.

Some astonishment moved De Craye in the contemplation of the distance he had stepped in this morass of fancy. He distinguished the choice open to him of forward or back, and he selected forward. But fancy was dead: the poetry hovering about her grew invisible to him: he stood in the morass; that was all he knew; and momently he plunged deeper; and he was aware of an intense desire to see her face, that he might study her features again: he understood no more.

It was the clouding of the brain by the man's heart, which had come to the knowledge that it was caught.

A certain measure of astonishment moved him still. It had hitherto been his portion to do mischief to women and avoid the vengeance of the sex. What was there in Miss Middleton's face and air to ensnare a veteran handsome man of society numbering six-

and-thirty years, nearly as many conquests? “Each bullet has got its commission.” He was hit at last. That accident effected by Mr. Flitch had fired the shot. Clean through the heart, does not tell us of our misfortune, till the heart is asked to renew its natural beating. It fell into the condition of the porcelain vase over a thought of Miss Middleton standing above his prostrate

Page 2787

form on the road, and walking beside him to the Hall. Her words? What have they been? She had not uttered words, she had shed meanings. He did not for an instant conceive that he had charmed her: the charm she had cast on him was too thrilling for coxcombry to lift a head; still she had enjoyed his prattle. In return for her touch upon the Irish fountain in him, he had manifestly given her relief And could not one see that so sprightly a girl would soon be deadened by a man like Willoughby? Deadened she was: she had not responded to a compliment on her approaching marriage. An allusion to it killed her smiling. The case of Mr. Flitch, with the half wager about his reinstation in the service of the Hall, was conclusive evidence of her opinion of Willoughby.

It became again necessary that he should abuse Willoughby for his folly. Why was the man worrying her? In some way he was worrying her.

What if Willoughby as well as Miss Middleton wished to be quit of the engagement? . . .

For just a second, the handsome, woman-flattered officer proved his man's heart more whole than he supposed it. That great organ, instead of leaping at the thought, suffered a check.

Bear in mind that his heart was not merely man's, it was a conqueror's. He was of the race of amorous heroes who glory in pursuing, overtaking, subduing: wresting the prize from a rival, having her ripe from exquisitely feminine inward conflicts, plucking her out of resistance in good old primitive fashion. You win the creature in her delicious flutterings. He liked her thus, in cooler blood, because of society's admiration of the capturer, and somewhat because of the strife, which always enhances the value of a prize, and refreshes our vanity in recollection.

Moreover, he had been matched against Willoughby: the circumstance had occurred two or three times. He could name a lady he had won, a lady he had lost. Willoughby's large fortune and grandeur of style had given him advantages at the start. But the start often means the race—with women, and a bit of luck.

The gentle check upon the galloping heart of Colonel De Craye endured no longer than a second—a simple side-glance in a headlong pace. Clara's enchantingness for a temperament like his, which is to say, for him specially, in part through the testimony her conquest of himself presented as to her power of sway over the universal heart known as man's, assured him she was worth winning even from a hand that dropped her.

He had now a double reason for exclaiming at the folly of Willoughby. Willoughby's treatment of her showed either temper or weariness. Vanity and judgement led De Craye to guess the former. Regarding her sentiments for Willoughby, he had come to his own conclusion. The certainty of it caused him to assume that he possessed an absolute knowledge of her character: she was an angel, born supple; she was a heavenly soul, with half a dozen of the tricks of earth. Skittish filly was among his

phrases; but she had a bearing and a gaze that forbade the dip in the common gutter for wherewithal to paint the creature she was.

Page 2788

Now, then, to see whether he was wrong for the first time in his life! If not wrong, he had a chance.

There could be nothing dishonourable in rescuing a girl from an engagement she detested. An attempt to think it a service to Willoughby faded midway. De Craye dismissed that chicanery. It would be a service to Willoughby in the end, without question. There was that to soothe his manly honour. Meanwhile he had to face the thought of Willoughby as an antagonist, and the world looking heavy on his honour as a friend.

Such considerations drew him tenderly close to Miss Middleton. It must, however, be confessed that the mental ardour of Colonel De Craye had been a little sobered by his glance at the possibility of both of the couple being of one mind on the subject of their betrothal. Desirable as it was that they should be united in disagreeing, it reduced the romance to platitude, and the third person in the drama to the appearance of a stick. No man likes to play that part. Memoirs of the favourites of Goddesses, if we had them, would confirm it of men's tastes in this respect, though the divinest be the prize. We behold what part they played.

De Craye chanced to be crossing the hall from the laboratory to the stables when Clara shut the library-door behind her. He said something whimsical, and did not stop, nor did he look twice at the face he had been longing for.

What he had seen made him fear there would be no ride out with her that day. Their next meeting reassured him; she was dressed in her riding-habit, and wore a countenance resolutely cheerful. He gave himself the word of command to take his tone from her.

He was of a nature as quick as Clara's. Experience pushed him farther than she could go in fancy; but experience laid a sobering finger on his practical steps, and bade them hang upon her initiative. She talked little. Young Crossjay cantering ahead was her favourite subject. She was very much changed since the early morning: his liveliness, essayed by him at a hazard, was unsuccessful; grave English pleased her best. The descent from that was naturally to melancholy. She mentioned a regret she had that the Veil was interdicted to women in Protestant countries. De Craye was fortunately silent; he could think of no other veil than the Moslem, and when her meaning struck his witless head, he admitted to himself that devout attendance on a young lady's mind stupefies man's intelligence. Half an hour later, he was as foolish in supposing it a confidence. He was again saved by silence.

In Aspenwell village she drew a letter from her bosom and called to Crossjay to post it. The boy sang out, "Miss Lucy Darleton! What a nice name!"

Clara did not show that the name betrayed anything.

She said to De Craye. “It proves he should not be here thinking of nice names.”

Her companion replied, “You may be right.” He added, to avoid feeling too subservient: “Boys will.”

Page 2789

“Not if they have stern masters to teach them their daily lessons, and some of the lessons of existence.”

“Vernon Whitford is not stern enough?”

“Mr. Whitford has to contend with other influences here.”

“With Willoughby?”

“Not with Willoughby.”

He understood her. She touched the delicate indication firmly. The man’s, heart respected her for it; not many girls could be so thoughtful or dare to be so direct; he saw that she had become deeply serious, and he felt her love of the boy to be maternal, past maiden sentiment.

By this light of her seriousness, the posting of her letter in a distant village, not entrusting it to the Hall post-box, might have import; not that she would apprehend the violation of her private correspondence, but we like to see our letter of weighty meaning pass into the mouth of the public box.

Consequently this letter was important. It was to suppose a sequency in the conduct of a variable damsel. Coupled with her remark about the Veil, and with other things, not words, breathing from her (which were the breath of her condition), it was not unreasonably to be supposed. She might even be a very consistent person. If one only had the key of her!

She spoke once of an immediate visit to London, supposing that she could induce her father to go. De Craye remembered the occurrence in the Hall at night, and her aspect of distress.

They raced along Aspenwell Common to the ford; shallow, to the chagrin of young Crossjay, between whom and themselves they left a fitting space for his rapture in leading his pony to splash up and down, lord of the stream.

Swiftness of motion so strikes the blood on the brain that our thoughts are lightnings, the heart is master of them.

De Craye was heated by his gallop to venture on the angling question: “Am I to hear the names of the bridesmaids?”

The pace had nerved Clara to speak to it sharply: “There is no need.”

“Have I no claim?”

She was mute.

“Miss Lucy Darleton, for instance; whose name I am almost as much in love with as Crossjay.”

“She will not be bridesmaid to me.”

“She declines? Add my petition, I beg.”

“To all? or to her?”

“Do all the bridesmaids decline?”

“The scene is too ghastly.”

“A marriage?”

“Girls have grown sick of it.”

“Of weddings? We’ll overcome the sickness.”

“With some.”

“Not with Miss Darleton? You tempt my eloquence.”

“You wish it?”

“To win her consent? Certainly.”

“The scene?”

“Do I wish that?”

“Marriage!” exclaimed Clara, dashing into the ford, fearful of her ungovernable wildness and of what it might have kindled.—You, father! you have driven me to unmaidenliness! —She forgot Willoughby, in her father, who would not quit a comfortable house for her all but prostrate beseeching; would not bend his mind to her explanations, answered her with the horrid iteration of such deaf misunderstanding as may be associated with a tolling bell.

Page 2790

De Craye allowed her to catch Crossjay by herself. They entered a narrow lane, mysterious with possible birds' eggs in the May-green hedges. As there was not room for three abreast, the colonel made up the rear-guard, and was consoled by having Miss Middleton's figure to contemplate; but the readiness of her joining in Crossjay's pastime of the nest-hunt was not so pleasing to a man that she had wound to a pitch of excitement. Her scornful accent on "Marriage" rang through him. Apparently she was beginning to do with him just as she liked, herself entirely unconcerned.

She kept Crossjay beside her till she dismounted, and the colonel was left to the procession of elephantine ideas in his head, whose ponderousness he took for natural weight. We do not with impunity abandon the initiative. Men who have yielded it are like cavalry put on the defensive; a very small force with an ictus will scatter them.

Anxiety to recover lost ground reduced the dimensions of his ideas to a practical standard.

Two ideas were opposed like duellists bent on the slaughter of one another. Either she amazed him by confirming the suspicions he had gathered of her sentiments for Willoughby in the moments of his introduction to her; or she amazed him as a model for coquettes—the married and the widow might apply to her for lessons.

These combatants exchanged shots, but remained standing; the encounter was undecided. Whatever the result, no person so seductive as Clara Middleton had he ever met. Her cry of loathing, "Marriage!" coming from a girl, rang faintly clear of an ancient virginal aspiration of the sex to escape from their coil, and bespoke a pure, cold, savage pride that transplanted his thirst for her to higher fields.

CHAPTER XXIII

TREATS OF THE UNION OF TEMPER AND POLICY

Sir Willoughby meanwhile was on a line of conduct suiting his appreciation of his duty to himself. He had deluded himself with the simple notion that good fruit would come of the union of temper and policy.

No delusion is older, none apparently so promising, both parties being eager for the alliance. Yet, the theorist upon human nature will say, they are obviously of adverse disposition. And this is true, inasmuch as neither of them win submit to the yoke of an established union; as soon as they have done their mischief, they set to work tugging for a divorce. But they have attractions, the one for the other, which precipitate them to embrace whenever they meet in a breast; each is earnest with the owner of it to get him to officiate forthwith as wedding-priest. And here is the reason: temper, to warrant its

appearance, desires to be thought as deliberative as policy, and policy, the sooner to prove its shrewdness, is impatient for the quick blood of temper.

Page 2791

It will be well for men to resolve at the first approaches of the amorous but fickle pair upon interdicting even an accidental temporary junction: for the astonishing sweetness of the couple when no more than the ghosts of them have come together in a projecting mind is an intoxication beyond fermented grapejuice or a witch's brewage; and under the guise of active wits they will lead us to the parental meditation of antics compared with which a Pagan Saturnalia were less impious in the sight of sanity. This is full-mouthed language; but on our studious way through any human career we are subject to fits of moral elevation; the theme inspires it, and the sage residing in every civilized bosom approves it.

Decide at the outset, that temper is fatal to policy: hold them with both hands in division. One might add, be doubtful of your policy and repress your temper: it would be to suppose you wise. You can, however, by incorporating two or three captains of the great army of truisms bequeathed to us by ancient wisdom, fix in your service those veteran old standfasts to check you. They will not be serviceless in their admonitions to your understanding, and they will so contrive to reconcile with it the natural caperings of the wayward young sprig Conduct, that the latter, who commonly learns to walk upright and straight from nothing softer than raps of a bludgeon on his crown, shall foot soberly, appearing at least wary of dangerous corners.

Now Willoughby had not to be taught that temper is fatal to policy; he was beginning to see in addition that the temper he encouraged was particularly obnoxious to the policy he adopted; and although his purpose in mounting horse after yesterday frowning on his bride was definite, and might be deemed sagacious, he bemoaned already the fatality pushing him ever farther from her in chase of a satisfaction impossible to grasp.

But the bare fact that her behaviour demanded a line of policy crossed the grain of his temper: it was very offensive.

Considering that she wounded him severely, her reversal of their proper parts, by taking the part belonging to him, and requiring his watchfulness, and the careful dealings he was accustomed to expect from others, and had a right to exact of her, was injuriously unjust. The feelings of a man hereditarily sensitive to property accused her of a trespassing imprudence, and knowing himself, by testimony of his household, his tenants, and the neighbourhood, and the world as well, amiable when he received his dues, he contemplated her with an air of stiff-backed ill-treatment, not devoid of a certain sanctification of martyrdom.

His bitterest enemy would hardly declare that it was he who was in the wrong.

Clara herself had never been audacious enough to say that. Distaste of his person was inconceivable to the favourite of society. The capricious creature probably wanted a whipping to bring her to the understanding of the principle called mastery, which is in man.

Page 2792

But was he administering it? If he retained a hold on her, he could undoubtedly apply the scourge at leisure; any kind of scourge; he could shun her, look on her frigidly, unbend to her to find a warmer place for sarcasm, pityingly smile, ridicule, pay court elsewhere. He could do these things if he retained a hold on her; and he could do them well because of the faith he had in his renowned amiability; for in doing them, he could feel that he was other than he seemed, and his own cordial nature was there to comfort him while he bestowed punishment. Cordial indeed, the chills he endured were flung from the world. His heart was in that fiction: half the hearts now beating have a mild form of it to keep them merry: and the chastisement he desired to inflict was really no more than righteous vengeance for an offended goodness of heart. Clara figuratively, absolutely perhaps, on her knees, he would raise her and forgive her. He yearned for the situation. To let her understand how little she had known him! It would be worth the pain she had dealt, to pour forth the stream of re-established confidences, to paint himself to her as he was; as he was in the spirit, not as he was to the world: though the world had reason to do him honour.

First, however, she would have to be humbled.

Something whispered that his hold on her was lost.

In such a case, every blow he struck would set her flying farther, till the breach between them would be past bridging.

Determination not to let her go was the best finish to this perpetually revolving round which went like the same old wheel-planks of a water mill in his head at a review of the injury he sustained. He had come to it before, and he came to it again. There was his vengeance. It melted him, she was so sweet! She shone for him like the sunny breeze on water. Thinking of her caused a catch of his breath.

The dreadful young woman had a keener edge for the senses of men than sovereign beauty.

It would be madness to let her go.

She affected him like an outlook on the great Patterne estate after an absence, when his welcoming flag wept for pride above Patterne Hall!

It would be treason to let her go.

It would be cruelty to her.

He was bound to reflect that she was of tender age, and the foolishness of the wretch was excusable to extreme youth.

We toss away a flower that we are tired of smelling and do not wish to carry. But the rose—young woman—is not cast off with impunity. A fiend in shape of man is always behind us to appropriate her. He that touches that rejected thing is larcenous. Willoughby had been sensible of it in the person of Laetitia: and by all the more that Clara's charms exceeded the faded creature's, he felt it now. Ten thousand Furies thickened about him at a thought of her lying by the road-side without his having crushed all bloom and odour out of her which might tempt even the curiosity of the fiend, man.

Page 2793

On the other hand, supposing her to be there untouched, universally declined by the sniffling, sagacious dog-fiend, a miserable spinster for years, he could conceive notions of his remorse. A soft remorse may be adopted as an agreeable sensation within view of the wasted penitent whom we have struck a trifle too hard. Seeing her penitent, he certainly would be willing to surround her with little offices of compromising kindness. It would depend on her age. Supposing her still youngish, there might be captivating passages between them, as thus, in a style not unfamiliar:

“And was it my fault, my poor girl? Am I to blame, that you have passed a lonely, unloved youth?”

“No, Willoughby! The irreparable error was mine, the blame is mine, mine only. I live to repent it. I do not seek, for I have not deserved, your pardon. Had I it, I should need my own self-esteem to presume to clasp it to a bosom ever unworthy of you.”

“I may have been impatient, Clara: we are human!”

“Never be it mine to accuse one on whom I laid so heavy a weight of forbearance!”

“Still, my old love!—for I am merely quoting history in naming you so—I cannot have been perfectly blameless.”

“To me you were, and are.”

“Clara!”

“Willoughby!”

“Must I recognize the bitter truth that we two, once nearly one! so nearly one! are eternally separated?”

“I have envisaged it. My friend—I may call you friend; you have ever been my friend, my best friend! oh, that eyes had been mine to know the friend I had!—Willoughby, in the darkness of night, and during days that were as night to my soul, I have seen the inexorable finger pointing my solitary way through the wilderness from a Paradise forfeited by my most wilful, my wanton, sin. We have met. It is more than I have merited. We part. In mercy let it be for ever. Oh, terrible word! Coined by the passions of our youth, it comes to us for our sole riches when we are bankrupt of earthly treasures, and is the passport given by Abnegation unto Woe that prays to quit this probationary sphere. Willoughby, we part. It is better so.”

“Clara! one—one only—one last—one holy kiss!”

“If these poor lips, that once were sweet to you . . .”

The kiss, to continue the language of the imaginative composition of his time, favourite readings in which had inspired Sir Willoughby with a colloquy so pathetic, was imprinted.

Ay, she had the kiss, and no mean one. It was intended to swallow every vestige of dwindling attractiveness out of her, and there was a bit of scandal springing of it in the background that satisfactorily settled her business, and left her ’enshrined in memory, a divine recollection to him,’ as his popular romances would say, and have said for years.

Unhappily, the fancied salute of her lips encircled him with the breathing Clara. She rushed up from vacancy like a wind summoned to wreck a stately vessel.

Page 2794

His reverie had thrown him into severe commotion. The slave of a passion thinks in a ring, as hares run: he will cease where he began. Her sweetness had set him off, and he whirled back to her sweetness: and that being incalculable and he insatiable, you have the picture of his torments when you consider that her behaviour made her as a cloud to him.

Riding slack, horse and man, in the likeness of those two ajog homeward from the miry hunt, the horse pricked his cars, and Willoughby looked down from his road along the bills on the race headed by young Crossjay with a short start over Aspenwell Common to the ford. There was no mistaking who they were, though they were well-nigh a mile distant below. He noticed that they did not overtake the boy. They drew rein at the ford, talking not simply face to face, but face in face. Willoughby's novel feeling of he knew not what drew them up to him, enabling him to fancy them bathing in one another's eyes. Then she sprang through the ford, De Craye following, but not close after—and why not close? She had flicked him with one of her peremptorily saucy speeches when she was bold with the gallop. They were not unknown to Willoughby. They signified intimacy.

Last night he had proposed to De Craye to take Miss Middleton for a ride the next afternoon. It never came to his mind then that he and his friend had formerly been rivals. He wished Clara to be amused. Policy dictated that every thread should be used to attach her to her residence at the Hall until he could command his temper to talk to her calmly and overwhelm her, as any man in earnest, with command of temper and a point of vantage, may be sure to whelm a young woman. Policy, adulterated by temper, yet policy it was that had sent him on his errand in the early morning to beat about for a house and garden suitable to Dr. Middleton within a circuit of five, six, or seven miles of Patterne Hall. If the Rev. Doctor liked the house and took it (and Willoughby had seen the place to suit him), the neighbourhood would be a chain upon Clara: and if the house did not please a gentleman rather hard to please (except in a venerable wine), an excuse would have been started for his visiting other houses, and he had that response to his importunate daughter, that he believed an excellent house was on view. Dr. Middleton had been prepared by numerous hints to meet Clara's black misreading of a lovers' quarrel, so that everything looked full of promise as far as Willoughby's exercise of policy went.

But the strange pang traversing him now convicted him of a large adulteration of profitless temper with it. The loyalty of De Craye to a friend, where a woman walked in the drama, was notorious. It was there, and a most flexible thing it was: and it soon resembled reason manipulated by the sophists. Not to have reckoned on his peculiar loyalty was proof of the blindness cast on us by temper.

And De Craye had an Irish tongue; and he had it under control, so that he could talk good sense and airy nonsense at discretion. The strongest overboiling of English Puritan contempt of a gabbler, would not stop women from liking it. Evidently Clara did

like it, and Willoughby thundered on her sex. Unto such brainless things as these do we, under the irony of circumstances, confide our honour!

Page 2795

For he was no gabbler. He remembered having rattled in earlier days; he had rattled with an object to gain, desiring to be taken for an easy, careless, vivacious, charming fellow, as any young gentleman may be who gaily wears the golden dish of Fifty thousand pounds per annum, nailed to the back of his very saintly young pate. The growth of the critical spirit in him, however, had informed him that slang had been a principal component of his rattling; and as he justly supposed it a betraying art for his race and for him, he passed through the prim and the yawning phases of affected indifference, to the pine Puritanism of a leaden contempt of gabblers.

They snare women, you see—girls! How despicable the host of girls!—at least, that girl below there!

Married women understood him: widows did. He placed an exceedingly handsome and flattering young widow of his acquaintance, Lady Mary Lewison, beside Clara for a comparison, involuntarily; and at once, in a flash, in despite of him (he would rather it had been otherwise), and in despite of Lady Mary's high birth and connections as well, the silver lustre of the maid sicklied the poor widow.

The effect of the luckless comparison was to produce an image of surpassingness in the features of Clara that gave him the final, or mace-blow. Jealousy invaded him.

He had hitherto been free of it, regarding jealousy as a foreign devil, the accursed familiar of the vulgar. Luckless fellows might be victims of the disease; he was not; and neither Captain Oxford, nor Vernon, nor De Craye, nor any of his compeers, had given him one shrewd pinch: the woman had, not the man; and she in quite a different fashion from his present wallowing anguish: she had never pulled him to earth's level, where jealousy gnaws the grasses. He had boasted himself above the humiliating visitation.

If that had been the case, we should not have needed to trouble ourselves much about him. A run or two with the pack of imps would have satisfied us. But he desired Clara Middleton manfully enough at an intimation of rivalry to be jealous; in a minute the foreign devil had him, he was flame: flaming verdigris, one might almost dare to say, for an exact illustration; such was actually the colour; but accept it as unsaid.

Remember the poets upon jealousy. It is to be haunted in the heaven of two by a Third; preceded or succeeded, therefore surrounded, embraced, bugged by this infernal Third: it is Love's bed of burning marl; to see and taste the withering Third in the bosom of sweetness; to be dragged through the past and find the fair Eden of it sulphurous; to be dragged to the gates of the future and glory to behold them blood: to adore the bitter creature trebly and with treble power to clutch her by the windpipe: it is to be cheated, derided, shamed, and abject and supplicating, and consciously demoniacal in treacherousness, and victoriously self-justified in revenge.

Page 2796

And still there is no change in what men feel, though in what they do the modern may be judicious.

You know the many paintings of man transformed to rageing beast by the curse: and this, the fieriest trial of our egoism, worked in the Egoist to produce division of himself from himself, a concentration of his thoughts upon another object, still himself, but in another breast, which had to be looked at and into for the discovery of him. By the gaping jaw-chasm of his greed we may gather comprehension of his insatiate force of jealousy. Let her go? Not though he were to become a mark of public scorn in strangling her with the yoke! His concentration was marvellous. Unused to the exercise of imaginative powers, he nevertheless conjured her before him visually till his eyeballs ached. He saw none but Clara, hated none, loved none, save the intolerable woman. What logic was in him deduced her to be individual and most distinctive from the circumstance that only she had ever wrought these pangs. She had made him ready for them, as we know. An idea of De Craye being no stranger to her when he arrived at the Hall, dashed him at De Craye for a second: it might be or might not be that they had a secret;—Clara was the spell. So prodigiously did he love and hate, that he had no permanent sense except for her. The soul of him writhed under her eyes at one moment, and the next it closed on her without mercy. She was his possession escaping; his own gliding away to the Third.

There would be pangs for him too, that Third! Standing at the altar to see her fast-bound, soul and body, to another, would be good roasting fire.

It would be good roasting fire for her too, should she be averse. To conceive her aversion was to burn her and devour her. She would then be his!—what say you? Burned and devoured! Rivals would vanish then. Her reluctance to espouse the man she was plighted to would cease to be uttered, cease to be felt.

At last he believed in her reluctance. All that had been wanted to bring him to the belief was the scene on the common; such a mere spark, or an imagined spark! But the presence of the Third was necessary; otherwise he would have had to suppose himself personally distasteful.

Women have us back to the conditions of primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as we please. Let them tell us what we are to them: for us, they are our back and front of life: the poet's Lesbia, the poet's Beatrice; ours is the choice. And were it proved that some of the bright things are in the pay of Darkness, with the stamp of his coin on their palms, and that some are the very angels we hear sung of, not the less might we say that they find us out; they have us by our leanings. They are to us what we hold of best or worst within. By their state is our civilization judged: and if it is hugely animal still, that is because primitive men abound and will

Page 2797

have their pasture. Since the lead is ours, the leaders must bow their heads to the sentence. Jealousy of a woman is the primitive egoism seeking to refine in a blood gone to savagery under apprehension of an invasion of rights; it is in action the tiger threatened by a rifle when his paw is rigid on quick flesh; he tears the flesh for rage at the intruder. The Egoist, who is our original male in giant form, had no bleeding victim beneath his paw, but there was the sex to mangle. Much as he prefers the well-behaved among women, who can worship and fawn, and in whom terror can be inspired, in his wrath he would make of Beatrice a Lesbia Quadrantaria.

Let women tell us of their side of the battle. We are not so much the test of the Egoist in them as they to us. Movements of similarity shown in crowned and undiademed ladies of intrepid independence, suggest their occasional capacity to be like men when it is given to them to hunt. At present they fly, and there is the difference. Our manner of the chase informs them of the creature we are.

Dimly as young women are informed, they have a youthful ardour of detestation that renders them less tolerant of the Egoist than their perceptive elder sisters. What they do perceive, however, they have a redoubtable grasp of, and Clara's behaviour would be indefensible if her detective feminine vision might not sanction her acting on its direction. Seeing him as she did, she turned from him and shunned his house as the antre of an ogre. She had posted her letter to Lucy Darleton. Otherwise, if it had been open to her to dismiss Colonel De Craye, she might, with a warm kiss to Vernon's pupil, have seriously thought of the next shrill steam-whistle across yonder hills for a travelling companion on the way to her friend Lucy; so abhorrent was to her the putting of her horse's head toward the Hall. Oh, the breaking of bread there! It had to be gone through for another day and more; that is to say, forty hours, it might be six-and-forty hours; and no prospect of sleep to speed any of them on wings!

Such were Clara's inward interjections while poor Willoughby burned himself out with verdigris flame having the savour of bad metal, till the hollow of his breast was not unlike to a corroded old cuirass, found, we will assume, by criminal lantern-beams in a digging beside green-mantled pools of the sullen soil, lumped with a strange adhesive concrete. How else picture the sad man?—the cavity felt empty to him, and heavy; sick of an ancient and mortal combat, and burning; deeply dinted too:

> With the starry hole
> Whence fled the soul:

very sore; important for aught save sluggish agony; a specimen and the issue of strife.

Page 2798

Measurelessly to loathe was not sufficient to save him from pain: he tried it: nor to despise; he went to a depth there also. The fact that she was a healthy young woman returned to the surface of his thoughts like the murdered body pitched into the river, which will not drown, and calls upon the elements of dissolution to float it. His grand hereditary desire to transmit his estates, wealth and name to a solid posterity, while it prompted him in his loathing and contempt of a nature mean and ephemeral compared with his, attached him desperately to her splendid healthiness. The council of elders, whose descendant he was, pointed to this young woman for his mate. He had wooed her with the idea that they consented. O she was healthy! And he likewise: but, as if it had been a duel between two clearly designated by quality of blood to bid a House endure, she was the first who taught him what it was to have sensations of his mortality.

He could not forgive her. It seemed to him consequently politic to continue frigid and let her have a further taste of his shadow, when it was his burning wish to strain her in his arms to a flatness provoking his compassion.

“You have had your ride?” he addressed her politely in the general assembly on the lawn.

“I have had my ride, yes,” Clara replied.

“Agreeable, I trust?”

“Very agreeable.”

So it appeared. Oh, blushless!

The next instant he was in conversation with Laetitia, questioning her upon a dejected droop of her eyelashes.

“I am, I think,” said she, “constitutionally melancholy.”

He murmured to her: “I believe in the existence of specifics, and not far to seek, for all our ailments except those we bear at the hands of others.”

She did not dissent.

De Craye, whose humour for being convinced that Willoughby cared about as little for Miss Middleton as she for him was nourished by his immediate observation of them, dilated on the beauty of the ride and his fair companion’s equestrian skill.

“You should start a travelling circus,” Willoughby rejoined. “But the idea’s a worthy one! —There’s another alternative to the expedition I proposed, Miss Middleton,” said De Craye. “And I be clown? I haven’t a scruple of objection. I must read up books of jokes.”

“Don’t,” said Willoughby.

“I’d spoil my part! But a natural clown won’t keep up an artificial performance for an entire month, you see; which is the length of time we propose. He’ll exhaust his nature in a day and be bowled over by the dullest regular donkey-engine with paint on his cheeks and a nodding topknot.”

“What is this expedition ‘we’ propose?”

De Craye was advised in his heart to spare Miss Middleton any allusion to honeymoons.

“Merely a game to cure dulness.”

“Ah!” Willoughby acquiesced. “A month, you said?”

“One’d like it to last for years.”

Page 2799

“Ah! You are driving one of Mr. Merriman’s witticisms at me, Horace; I am dense.”

Willoughby bowed to Dr. Middleton, and drew him from Vernon, filially taking his turn to talk with him closely.

De Craye saw Clara’s look as her father and Willoughby went aside thus linked.

It lifted him over anxieties and casuistries concerning loyalty. Powder was in the look to make a warhorse breathe high and shiver for the signal.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONTAINS AN INSTANCE OF THE GENEROSITY OF WILLOUGHBY

Observers of a gathering complication and a character in action commonly resemble gleaners who are intent only on picking up the cars of grain and huddling their store. Disinterestedly or interestedly they wax over-eager for the little trifles, and make too much of them. Observers should begin upon the precept, that not all we see is worth hoarding, and that the things we see are to be weighed in the scale with what we know of the situation, before we commit ourselves to a measurement. And they may be accurate observers without being good judges. They do not think so, and their bent is to glean hurriedly and form conclusions as hasty, when their business should be sift at each step, and question.

Miss Dale seconded Vernon Whitford in the occupation of counting looks and tones, and noting scraps of dialogue. She was quite disinterested; he quite believed that he was; to this degree they were competent for their post; and neither of them imagined they could be personally involved in the dubious result of the scenes they witnessed. They were but anxious observers, diligently collecting. She fancied Clara susceptible to his advice: he had fancied it, and was considering it one of his vanities. Each mentally compared Clara’s abruptness in taking them into her confidence with her abstention from any secret word since the arrival of Colonel De Craye. Sir Willoughby requested Laetitia to give Miss Middleton as much of her company as she could; showing that he was on the alert. Another Constantia Durham seemed beating her wings for flight. The suddenness of the evident intimacy between Clara and Colonel De Craye shocked Laetitia; their acquaintance could be computed by hours. Yet at their first interview she had suspected the possibility of worse than she now supposed to be; and she had begged Vernon not immediately to quit the Hall, in consequence of that faint suspicion. She had been led to it by meeting Clara and De Craye at her cottage-gate, and finding them as fluent and laughter-breathing in conversation as friends. Unable to realize the rapid advance to a familiarity, more ostensible than actual, of two lively natures, after such an introduction as they had undergone: and one of the two pining in a drought of

liveliness: Laetitia listened to their wager of nothing at all—a no against a yes—in the case of poor Flitch; and Clara's, "Willoughby

Page 2800

will not forgive"; and De Craye's "Oh, he's human": and the silence of Clara and De Craye's hearty cry, "Flitch shall be a gentleman's coachman in his old seat or I haven't a tongue!" to which there was a negative of Clara's head: and it then struck Laetitia that this young betrothed lady, whose alienated heart acknowledged no lord an hour earlier, had met her match, and, as the observer would have said, her destiny. She judged of the alarming possibility by the recent revelation to herself of Miss Middleton's character, and by Clara's having spoken to a man as well (to Vernon), and previously. That a young lady should speak on the subject of the inner holies to a man, though he were Vernon Whitford, was incredible to Laetitia; but it had to be accepted as one of the dread facts of our inexplicable life, which drag our bodies at their wheels and leave our minds exclaiming. Then, if Clara could speak to Vernon, which Laetitia would not have done for a mighty bribe, she could speak to De Craye, Laetitia thought deductively: this being the logic of untrained heads opposed to the proceeding whereby their condemnatory deduction hangs.—Clara must have spoken to De Craye!

Laetitia remembered how winning and prevailing Miss Middleton could be in her confidences. A gentleman hearing her might forget his duty to his friend, she thought, for she had been strangely swayed by Clara: ideas of Sir Willoughby that she had never before imagined herself to entertain had been sown in her, she thought; not asking herself whether the searchingness of the young lady had struck them and bidden them rise from where they lay imbedded. Very gentle women take in that manner impressions of persons, especially of the worshipped person, wounding them; like the new fortifications with embankments of soft earth, where explosive missiles bury themselves harmlessly until they are plucked out; and it may be a reason why those injured ladies outlive a Clara Middleton similarly battered.

Vernon less than Laetitia took into account that Clara was in a state of fever, scarcely reasonable. Her confidences to him he had excused, as a piece of conduct, in sympathy with her position. He had not been greatly astonished by the circumstances confided; and, on the whole, as she was excited and unhappy, he excused her thoroughly; he could have extolled her: it was natural that she should come to him, brave in her to speak so frankly, a compliment that she should condescend to treat him as a friend. Her position excused her widely. But she was not excused for making a confidential friend of De Craye. There was a difference.

Page 2801

Well, the difference was, that De Craye had not the smarting sense of honour with women which our meditator had: an impartial judiciary, it will be seen: and he discriminated between himself and the other justly: but sensation surging to his brain at the same instant, he reproached Miss Middleton for not perceiving that difference as clearly, before she betrayed her position to De Craye, which Vernon assumed that she had done. Of course he did. She had been guilty of it once: why, then, in the mind of an offended friend, she would be guilty of it twice. There was evidence. Ladies, fatally predestined to appeal to that from which they have to be guarded, must expect severity when they run off their railed highroad: justice is out of the question: man's brains might, his blood cannot administer it to them. By chilling him to the bone they may get what they cry for. But that is a method deadening to their point of appeal.

I the evening, Miss Middleton and the colonel sang a duet. She had of late declined to sing. Her voice was noticeably firm. Sir Willoughby said to her, "You have recovered your richness of tone, Clara." She smiled and appeared happy in pleasing him. He named a French ballad. She went to the music-rack and gave the song unasked. He should have been satisfied, for she said to him at the finish, "Is that as you like it?" He broke from a murmur to Miss Dale, "Admirable." Some one mentioned a Tuscan popular canzone. She waited for Willoughby's approval, and took his nod for a mandate.

Traitress! he could have bellowed.

He had read of this characteristic of caressing obedience of the women about to deceive. He had in his time profited by it.

"Is it intuitively or by their experience that our neighbours across Channel surpass us in the knowledge of your sex?" he said to Miss Dale, and talked through Clara's apostrophe to the 'Santissinia Virgine Maria,' still treating temper as a part of policy, without any effect on Clara; and that was matter for sickly green reflections. The lover who cannot wound has indeed lost anchorage; he is woefully adrift: he stabs air, which is to stab himself. Her complacent proof-armour bids him know himself supplanted.

During the short conversational period before the ladies retired for the night, Miss Eleanor alluded to the wedding by chance. Miss Isabel replied to her, and addressed an interrogation to Clara. De Craye foiled it adroitly. Clara did not utter a syllable. Her bosom lifted to a wavering height and sank. Subsequently she looked at De Craye vacantly, like a person awakened, but she looked. She was astonished by his readiness, and thankful for the succour. Her look was cold, wide, unfixed, with nothing of gratitude or of personal in it. The look, however, stood too long for Willoughby's endurance.

Page 2802

Ejaculating “Porcelain!” he uncrossed his legs; a signal for the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to retire. Vernon bowed to Clara as she was rising. He had not been once in her eyes, and he expected a partial recognition at the good-night. She said it, turning her head to Miss Isabel, who was condoling once more with Colonel De Craye over the ruins of his wedding-present, the porcelain vase, which she supposed to have been in Willoughby’s mind when he displayed the signal. Vernon walked off to his room, dark as one smitten blind: bile tumet jecur: her stroke of neglect hit him there where a blow sends thick obscuration upon eyeballs and brain alike.

Clara saw that she was paining him and regretted it when they were separated. That was her real friend! But he prescribed too hard a task. Besides, she had done everything he demanded of her, except the consenting to stay where she was and wear out Willoughby, whose dexterity wearied her small stock of patience. She had vainly tried remonstrance and supplication with her father hoodwinked by his host, she refused to consider how; through wine?—the thought was repulsive.

Nevertheless, she was drawn to the edge of it by the contemplation of her scheme of release. If Lucy Darleton was at home; if Lucy invited her to come: if she flew to Lucy: oh! then her father would have cause for anger. He would not remember that but for hateful wine! . . .

What was there in this wine of great age which expelled reasonableness, fatherliness? He was her dear father: she was his beloved child: yet something divided them; something closed her father’s ears to her: and could it be that incomprehensible seduction of the wine? Her dutifulness cried violently no. She bowed, stupefied, to his arguments for remaining awhile, and rose clear-headed and rebellious with the reminiscence of the many strong reasons she had urged against them.

The strangeness of men, young and old, the little things (she regarded a grand wine as a little thing) twisting and changing them, amazed her. And these are they by whom women are abused for variability! Only the most imperious reasons, never mean trifles, move women, thought she. Would women do an injury to one they loved for oceans of that—ah, pah!

And women must respect men. They necessarily respect a father. “My dear, dear father!” Clara said in the solitude of her chamber, musing on all his goodness, and she endeavoured to reconcile the desperate sentiments of the position he forced her to sustain, with those of a venerating daughter. The blow which was to fall on him beat on her heavily in advance. “I have not one excuse!” she said, glancing at numbers and a mighty one. But the idea of her father suffering at her hands cast her down lower than self-justification. She sought to imagine herself sparing him. It was too fictitious.

The sanctuary of her chamber, the pure white room so homely to her maidenly feelings, whispered peace, only to follow the whisper with another that went through her swelling

to a roar, and leaving her as a suing of music unkindly smitten. If she stayed in this house her chamber would no longer be a sanctuary. Dolorous bondage! Insolent death is not worse. Death's worm we cannot keep away, but when he has us we are numb to dishonour, happily senseless.

Page 2803

Youth weighed her eyelids to sleep, though she was quivering, and quivering she awoke to the sound of her name beneath her window. “I can love still, for I love him,” she said, as she luxuriated in young Crossjay’s boy’s voice, again envying him his bath in the lake waters, which seemed to her to have the power to wash away grief and chains. Then it was that she resolved to let Crossjay see the last of her in this place. He should be made gleeful by doing her a piece of service; he should escort her on her walk to the railway station next morning, thence be sent flying for a long day’s truancy, with a little note of apology on his behalf that she would write for him to deliver to Vernon at night.

Crossjay came running to her after his breakfast with Mrs Montague, the housekeeper, to tell her he had called her up.

“You won’t to-morrow: I shall be up far ahead of you,” said she; and musing on her father, while Crossjay vowed to be up the first, she thought it her duty to plunge into another expostulation.

Willoughby had need of Vernon on private affairs. Dr. Middleton betook himself as usual to the library, after answering “I will ruin you yet,” to Willoughby’s liberal offer to despatch an order to London for any books he might want.

His fine unruffled air, as of a mountain in still morning beams, made Clara not indisposed to a preliminary scene with Willoughby that might save her from distressing him, but she could not stop Willoughby; as little could she look an invitation. He stood in the Hall, holding Vernon by the arm. She passed him; he did not speak, and she entered the library.

“What now, my dear? what is it?” said Dr. Middleton, seeing that the door was shut on them.

“Nothing, papa,” she replied, calmly.

“You’ve not locked the door, my child? You turned something there: try the handle.”

“I assure you, papa, the door is not locked.”

“Mr. Whitford will be here instantly. We are engaged on tough matter. Women have not, and opinion is universal that they never will have, a conception of the value of time.”

“We are vain and shallow, my dear papa.”

“No, no, not you, Clara. But I suspect you to require to learn by having work in progress how important is . . . is a quiet commencement of the day’s task. There is not a scholar who will not tell you so. We must have a retreat. These invasions!—So you intend to have another ride to-day? They do you good. To-morrow we dine with Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, an estimable person indeed, though I do not perfectly

understand our accepting.—You have not to accuse me of sitting over wine last night, my Clara! I never do it, unless I am appealed to for my judgement upon a wine."

"I have come to entreat you to take me away, papa."

Page 2804

In the midst of the storm aroused by this renewal of perplexity, Dr Middleton replaced a book his elbow had knocked over in his haste to dash the hair off his forehead, crying: “Whither? To what spot? That reading of guide-books, and idle people’s notes of Travel, and picturesque correspondence in the newspapers, unsettles man and maid. My objection to the living in hotels is known. I do not hesitate to say that I do cordially abhor it. I have had penitentially to submit to it in your dear mother’s time, [Greek], up to the full ten thousand times. But will you not comprehend that to the older man his miseries are multiplied by his years? But is it utterly useless to solicit your sympathy with an old man, Clara?”

“General Darleton will take us in, papa.”

“His table is detestable. I say nothing of that; but his wine is poison. Let that pass—I should rather say, let it not pass!—but our political views are not in accord. True, we are not under the obligation to propound them in presence, but we are destitute of an opinion in common. We have no discourse. Military men have produced, or diverged in, noteworthy epicures; they are often devout; they have blossomed in lettered men: they are gentlemen; the country rightly holds them in honour; but, in fine, I reject the proposal to go to General Darleton.—Tears?”

“No, papa.”

“I do hope not. Here we have everything man can desire; without contest, an excellent host. You have your transitory tea-cup tempests, which you magnify to hurricanes, in the approved historic manner of the book of Cupid. And all the better; I repeat, it is the better that you should have them over in the infancy of the alliance. Come in!” Dr. Middleton shouted cheerily in response to a knock at the door.

He feared the door was locked: he had a fear that his daughter intended to keep it locked.

“Clara!” he cried.

She reluctantly turned the handle, and the ladies Eleanor and Isabel came in, apologizing with as much coherence as Dr. Middleton ever expected from their sex. They wished to speak to Clara, but they declined to take her away. In vain the Rev. Doctor assured them she was at their service; they protested that they had very few words to say, and would not intrude one moment further than to speak them.

Like a shy deputation of young scholars before the master, these very words to come were preceded by none at all; a dismal and trying cause; refreshing however to Dr. Middleton, who joyfully anticipated that the ladies could be induced to take away Clara when they had finished.

“We may appear to you a little formal,” Miss Isabel began, and turned to her sister.

“We have no intention to lay undue weight on our mission, if mission it can be called,” said Miss Eleanor.

“Is it entrusted to you by Willoughby?” said Clara.

“Dear child, that you may know it all the more earnest with us, and our personal desire to contribute to your happiness: therefore does Willoughby entrust the speaking of it to us.”

Page 2805

Hereupon the sisters alternated in addressing Clara, and she gazed from one to the other, piecing fragments of empty signification to get the full meaning when she might.

“—And in saying your happiness, dear Clara, we have our Willoughby’s in view, which is dependent on yours.”

“—And we never could sanction that our own inclinations should stand in the way.”

“—No. We love the old place; and if it were only our punishment for loving it too idolatrously, we should deem it ground enough for our departure.”

“—Without, really, an idea of unkindness; none, not any.”

“—Young wives naturally prefer to be undisputed queens of their own establishment.”

“—Youth and age!”

“But I,” said Clara, “have never mentioned, never had a thought . . .”

“—You have, dear child, a lover who in his solicitude for your happiness both sees what you desire and what is due to you.”

“—And for us, Clara, to recognize what is due to you is to act on it.”

“—Besides, dear, a sea-side cottage has always been one of our dreams.”

“—We have not to learn that we are a couple of old maids, incongruous associates for a young wife in the government of a great house.”

“—With our antiquated notions, questions of domestic management might arise, and with the best will in the world to be harmonious!”

“—So, dear Clara, consider it settled.”

“—From time to time gladly shall we be your guests.”

“—Your guests, dear, not censorious critics.”

“And you think me such an Egoist!—dear ladies! The suggestion of so cruel a piece of selfishness wounds me. I would not have had you leave the Hall. I like your society; I respect you. My complaint, if I had one, would be, that you do not sufficiently assert yourselves. I could have wished you to be here for an example to me. I would not have allowed you to go. What can he think of me! Did Willoughby speak of it this morning?”

It was hard to distinguish which was the completer dupe of these two echoes of one another in worship of a family idol.

“Willoughby,” Miss Eleanor presented herself to be stamped with the title hanging ready for the first that should open her lips, “our Willoughby is observant—he is ever generous—and he is not less forethoughtful. His arrangement is for our good on all sides.”

“An index is enough,” said Miss Isabel, appearing in her turn the monster dupe.

“You will not have to leave, dear ladies. Were I mistress here I should oppose it.”

“Willoughby blames himself for not reassuring you before.”

“Indeed we blame ourselves for not undertaking to go.”

“Did he speak of it first this morning?” said Clara; but she could draw no reply to that from them. They resumed the duet, and she resigned herself to have her cars boxed with nonsense.

Page 2806

“So, it is understood?” said Miss Eleanor.

“I see your kindness, ladies.”

“And I am to be Aunt Eleanor again?”

“And I Aunt Isabel?”

Clara could have wrung her hands at the impediment which prohibited her delicacy from telling them why she could not name them so as she had done in the earlier days of Willoughby’s courtship. She kissed them warmly, ashamed of kissing, though the warmth was real.

They retired with a flow of excuses to Dr. Middleton for disturbing him. He stood at the door to bow them out, and holding the door for Clara, to wind up the procession, discovered her at a far corner of the room.

He was debating upon the advisability of leaving her there, when Vernon Whitford crossed the hall from the laboratory door, a mirror of himself in his companion air of discomposure.

That was not important, so long as Vernon was a check on Clara; but the moment Clara, thus baffled, moved to quit the library, Dr. Middleton felt the horror of having an uncomfortable face opposite.

“No botheration, I hope? It’s the worst thing possible to work on. Where have you been? I suspect your weak point is not to arm yourself in triple brass against bother and worry, and no good work can you do unless you do. You have come out of that laboratory.”

“I have, sir.—Can I get you any book?” Vernon said to Clara.

She thanked him, promising to depart immediately.

“Now you are at the section of Italian literature, my love,” said Dr Middleton. “Well, Mr. Whitford, the laboratory—ah!—where the amount of labour done within the space of a year would not stretch an electric current between this Hall and the railway station: say, four miles, which I presume the distance to be. Well, sir, and a dilettantism costly in time and machinery is as ornamental as foxes’ tails and deers’ horns to an independent gentleman whose fellows are contented with the latter decorations for their civic wreath. Willoughby, let me remark, has recently shown himself most considerate for my girl. As far as I could gather—I have been listening to a dialogue of ladies—he is as generous as he is discreet. There are certain combats in which to be the one to succumb is to claim the honours;—and that is what women will not learn. I doubt their seeing the glory of it.”

“I have heard of it; I have been with Willoughby,” Vernon said, hastily, to shield Clara from her father’s allusive attacks. He wished to convey to her that his interview with Willoughby had not been profitable in her interests, and that she had better at once, having him present to support her, pour out her whole heart to her father. But how was it to be conveyed? She would not meet his eyes, and he was too poor an intriguer to be ready on the instant to deal out the verbal obscurities which are transparencies to one.

“I shall regret it, if Willoughby has annoyed you, for he stands high in my favour,” said Dr. Middleton.

Page 2807

Clara dropped a book. Her father started higher than the nervous impulse warranted in his chair. Vernon tried to win a glance, and she was conscious of his effort, but her angry and guilty feelings, prompting her resolution to follow her own counsel, kept her eyelids on the defensive.

“I don’t say he annoys me, sir. I am here to give him my advice, and if he does not accept it I have no right to be annoyed. Willoughby seems annoyed that Colonel De Craye should talk of going to-morrow or next day.”

“He likes his friends about him. Upon my word, a man of a more genial heart you might march a day without finding. But you have it on the forehead, Mr. Whitford.”

“Oh! no, sir.”

“There,” Dr. Middleton drew his finger along his brows.

Vernon felt along his own, and coined an excuse for their blackness; not aware that the direction of his mind toward Clara pushed him to a kind of clumsy double meaning, while he satisfied an inward and craving wrath, as he said: “By the way, I have been racking my head; I must apply to you, sir. I have a line, and I am uncertain of the run of the line. Will this pass, do you think?

‘In Asination’s tongue he asinates’;

signifying that he excels any man of us at donkey-dialect.”

After a decent interval for the genius of criticism to seem to have been sitting under his frown, Dr. Middleton rejoined with sober jocularity: “No, sir, it will not pass; and your uncertainty in regard to the run of the line would only be extended were the line centipedal. Our recommendation is, that you erase it before the arrival of the ferule. This might do:

‘In Assignation’s name he assignats’;

signifying that he pre-eminently flourishes hypothetical promises, to pay by appointment. That might pass. But you will forbear to cite me for your authority.”

“The line would be acceptable if I could get it to apply,” said Vernon.

“Or this . . .” Dr. Middleton was offering a second suggestion, but Clara fled, astonished at men as she never yet had been. Why, in a burning world they would be exercising their minds in absurdities! And those two were scholars, learned men! And both knew they were in the presence of a soul in a tragic fever!

A minute after she had closed the door they were deep in their work. Dr. Middleton forgot his alternative line.

“Nothing serious?” he said in reproof of the want of honourable clearness on Vernon’s brows.

“I trust not, sir; it’s a case for common sense.”

“And you call that not serious?”

“I take Hermann’s praise of the versus dochmiachus to be not only serious but unexaggerated,” said Vernon.

Dr. Middleton assented and entered on the voiceful ground of Greek metres, shoving your dry dusty world from his elbow.

CHAPTER XXV

Page 2808

THE FLIGHT IN WILD WEATHER

The morning of Lucy Darleton's letter of reply to her friend Clara was fair before sunrise, with luminous colours that are an omen to the husbandman. Clara had no weather-eye for the rich Eastern crimson, nor a quiet space within her for the beauty. She looked on it as her gate of promise, and it set her throbbing with a revived belief in radiant things which she had once dreamed of to surround her life, but her accelerated pulses narrowed her thoughts upon the machinery of her project. She herself was metal, pointing all to her one aim when in motion. Nothing came amiss to it, everything was fuel; fibs, evasions, the serene battalions of white lies parallel on the march with dainty rogue falsehoods. She had delivered herself of many yesterday in her engagements for to-day. Pressure was put on her to engage herself, and she did so liberally, throwing the burden of deceitfulness on the extraordinary pressure. "I want the early part of the morning; the rest of the day I shall be at liberty." She said it to Willoughby, Miss Dale, Colonel De Craye, and only the third time was she aware of the delicious double meaning. Hence she associated it with the colonel.

Your loudest outcry against the wretch who breaks your rules is in asking how a tolerably conscientious person could have done this and the other besides the main offence, which you vow you could overlook but for the minor objections pertaining to conscience, the incomprehensible and abominable lies, for example, or the brazen coolness of the lying. Yet you know that we live in an undisciplined world, where in our seasons of activity we are servants of our design, and that this comes of our passions, and those of our position. Our design shapes us for the work in hand, the passions man the ship, the position is their apology: and now should conscience be a passenger on board, a merely seeming swiftness of our vessel will keep him dumb as the unwilling guest of a pirate captain scudding from the cruiser half in cloven brine through rocks and shoals to save his black flag. Beware the false position.

That is easy to say: sometimes the tangle descends on us like a net of blight on a rose-bush. There is then an instant choice for us between courage to cut loose, and desperation if we do not. But not many men are trained to courage; young women are trained to cowardice. For them to front an evil with plain speech is to be guilty of effrontery and forfeit the waxen polish of purity, and therewith their commanding place in the market. They are trained to please man's taste, for which purpose they soon learn to live out of themselves, and look on themselves as he looks, almost as little disturbed as he by the undiscovered. Without courage, conscience is a sorry guest; and if all goes well with the pirate captain, conscience will be made to walk the plank for being of no service to either party.

Page 2809

Clara's fibs and evasions disturbed her not in the least that morning. She had chosen desperation, and she thought herself very brave because she was just brave enough to fly from her abhorrence. She was light-hearted, or, more truly, drunken-hearted. Her quick nature realized the out of prison as vividly and suddenly as it had sunk suddenly and leadenly under the sense of imprisonment. Vernon crossed her mind: that was a friend! Yes, and there was a guide; but he would disapprove, and even he, thwarting her way to sacred liberty, must be thrust aside.

What would he think? They might never meet, for her to know. Or one day in the Alps they might meet, a middle-aged couple, he famous, she regretful only to have fallen below his lofty standard. "For, Mr. Whitford," says she, very earnestly, "I did wish at that time, believe me or not, to merit your approbation." The brows of the phantom Vernon whom she conjured up were stern, as she had seen them yesterday in the library.

She gave herself a chiding for thinking of him when her mind should be intent on that which he was opposed to.

It was a livelier relaxation to think of young Crossjay's shame-faced confession presently, that he had been a laggard in bed while she swept the dews. She laughed at him, and immediately Crossjay popped out on her from behind a tree, causing her to clap hand to heart and stand fast. A conspirator is not of the stuff to bear surprises. He feared he had hurt her, and was manly in his efforts to soothe: he had been up "hours", he said, and had watched her coming along the avenue, and did not mean to startle her: it was the kind of fun he played with fellows, and if he had hurt her, she might do anything to him she liked, and she would see if he could not stand to be punished. He was urgent with her to inflict corporal punishment on him.

"I shall leave it to the boatswain to do that when you're in the navy," said Clara.

"The boatswain daren't strike an officer! so now you see what you know of the navy," said Crossjay.

"But you could not have been out before me, you naughty boy, for I found all the locks and bolts when I went to the door."

"But you didn't go to the back door, and Sir Willoughby's private door: you came out by the hall door; and I know what you want, Miss Middleton, you want not to pay what you've lost."

"What have I lost, Crossjay?"

"Your wager."

"What was that?"

“You know.”

“Speak.”

“A kiss.”

“Nothing of the sort. But, dear boy, I don’t love you less for not kissing you. All that is nonsense: you have to think only of learning, and to be truthful. Never tell a story: suffer anything rather than be dishonest.” She was particularly impressive upon the silliness and wickedness of falsehood, and added: “Do you hear?”

“Yes: but you kissed me when I had been out in the rain that day.”

Page 2810

“Because I promised.”

“And, Miss Middleton, you betted a kiss yesterday.”

“I am sure, Crossjay—no, I will not say I am sure: but can you say you are sure you were out first this morning? Well, will you say you are sure that when you left the house you did not see me in the avenue? You can’t: ah!”

“Miss Middleton, I do really believe I was dressed first.”

“Always be truthful, my dear boy, and then you may feel that Clara Middleton will always love you.”

“But, Miss Middleton, when you’re married you won’t be Clara Middleton.”

“I certainly shall, Crossjay.”

“No, you won’t, because I’m so fond of your name!”

She considered, and said: “You have warned me, Crossjay, and I shall not marry. I shall wait,” she was going to say, “for you,” but turned the hesitation to a period. “Is the village where I posted my letter the day before yesterday too far for you?”

Crossjay howled in contempt. “Next to Clara, my favourite’s Lucy,” he said.

“I thought Clara came next to Nelson,” said she; “and a long way off too, if you’re not going to be a landlubber.”

“I’m not going to be a landlubber. Miss Middleton, you may be absolutely positive on your solemn word.”

“You’re getting to talk like one a little now and then, Crossjay.”

“Then I won’t talk at all.”

He stuck to his resolution for one whole minute.

Clara hoped that on this morning of a doubtful though imperative venture she had done some good.

They walked fast to cover the distance to the village post-office, and back before the breakfast hour: and they had plenty of time, arriving too early for the opening of the door, so that Crossjay began to dance with an appetite, and was despatched to besiege a bakery. Clara felt lonely without him: apprehensively timid in the shuttered, unmoving village street. She was glad of his return. When at last her letter was handed to her, on

the testimony of the postman that she was the lawful applicant, Crossjay and she put out on a sharp trot to be back at the Hall in good time. She took a swallowing glance of the first page of Lucy's writing:

"Telegraph, and I will meet you. I will supply you with everything you can want for the two nights, if you cannot stop longer."

That was the gist of the letter. A second, less voracious, glance at it along the road brought sweetness:—Lucy wrote:

"Do I love you as I did? my best friend, you must fall into unhappiness to have the answer to that."

Clara broke a silence.

"Yes, dear Crossjay, and if you like you shall have another walk with me after breakfast. But, remember, you must not say where you have gone with me. I shall give you twenty shillings to go and buy those bird's eggs and the butterflies you want for your collection; and mind, promise me, to-day is your last day of truancy. Tell Mr. Whitford how ungrateful you know you have been, that he may have some hope of you. You know the way across the fields to the railway station?"

Page 2811

“You save a mile; you drop on the road by Combline’s mill, and then there’s another five-minutes’ cut, and the rest’s road.”

“Then, Crossjay, immediately after breakfast run round behind the pheasantry, and there I’ll find you. And if any one comes to you before I come, say you are admiring the plumage of the Himalaya—the beautiful Indian bird; and if we’re found together, we run a race, and of course you can catch me, but you mustn’t until we’re out of sight. Tell Mr. Vernon at night—tell Mr. Whitford at night you had the money from me as part of my allowance to you for pocket-money. I used to like to have pocket-money, Crossjay. And you may tell him I gave you the holiday, and I may write to him for his excuse, if he is not too harsh to grant it. He can be very harsh.”

“You look right into his eyes next time, Miss Middleton. I used to think him awful till he made me look at him. He says men ought to look straight at one another, just as we do when he gives me my boxing-lesson, and then we won’t have quarrelling half so much. I can’t recollect everything he says.”

“You are not bound to, Crossjay.”

“No, but you like to hear.”

“Really, dear boy. I can’t accuse myself of having told you that.”

“No, but, Miss Middleton, you do. And he’s fond of your singing and playing on the piano, and watches you.”

“We shall be late if we don’t mind,” said Clara, starting to a pace close on a run.

They were in time for a circuit in the park to the wild double cherry-blossom, no longer all white. Clara gazed up from under it, where she had imagined a fairer visible heavenliness than any other sight of earth had ever given her. That was when Vernon lay beneath. But she had certainly looked above, not at him. The tree seemed sorrowful in its withering flowers of the colour of trodden snow.

Crossjay resumed the conversation.

“He says ladies don’t like him much.”

“Who says that?”

“Mr. Whitford.”

“Were those his words?”

“I forget the words: but he said they wouldn’t be taught by him, like me, ever since you came; and since you came I’ve liked him ten times more.”

“The more you like him the more I shall like you, Crossjay.”

The boy raised a shout and scampered away to Sir Willoughby, at the appearance of whom Clara felt herself nipped and curling inward. Crossjay ran up to him with every sign of pleasure. Yet he had not mentioned him during the walk; and Clara took it for a sign that the boy understood the entire satisfaction Willoughby had in mere shows of affection, and acted up to it. Hardly blaming Crossjay, she was a critic of the scene, for the reason that youthful creatures who have ceased to love a person, hunger for evidence against him to confirm their hard animus, which will seem to them sometimes, when he is not immediately irritating them, brutish, because they can not analyze it and reduce

Page 2812

it to the multitude of just antagonisms whereof it came. It has passed by large accumulation into a sombre and speechless load upon the senses, and fresh evidence, the smallest item, is a champion to speak for it. Being about to do wrong, she grasped at this eagerly, and brooded on the little of vital and truthful that there was in the man and how he corrupted the boy. Nevertheless, she instinctively imitated Crossjay in an almost sparkling salute to him.

“Good-morning, Willoughby; it was not a morning to lose: have you been out long?”

He retained her hand. “My dear Clara! and you, have you not overfatigued yourself? Where have you been?”

“Round—everywhere! And I am certainly not tired.”

“Only you and Crossjay? You should have loosened the dogs.”

“Their barking would have annoyed the house.”

“Less than I am annoyed to think of you without protection.”

He kissed her fingers: it was a loving speech.

“The household . . .” said Clara, but would not insist to convict him of what he could not have perceived.

“If you outstrip me another morning, Clara, promise me to take the dogs; will you?”

“Yes.”

“To-day I am altogether yours.”

“Are you?”

“From the first to the last hour of it!—So you fall in with Horace’s humour pleasantly?”

“He is very amusing.”

“As good as though one had hired him.”

“Here comes Colonel De Craye.”

“He must think we have hired him!”

She noticed the bitterness of Willoughby’s tone. He sang out a good-morning to De Craye, and remarked that he must go to the stables.

“Darleton? Darleton, Miss Middleton?” said the colonel, rising from his bow to her: “a daughter of General Darleton? If so, I have had the honour to dance with her. And have not you?—practised with her, I mean; or gone off in a triumph to dance it out as young ladies do? So you know what a delightful partner she is.”

“She is!” cried Clara, enthusiastic for her succouring friend, whose letter was the treasure in her bosom.

“Oddly, the name did not strike me yesterday, Miss Middleton. In the middle of the night it rang a little silver bell in my ear, and I remembered the lady I was half in love with, if only for her dancing. She is dark, of your height, as light on her feet; a sister in another colour. Now that I know her to be your friend . . . !”

“Why, you may meet her, Colonel De Craye.”

“It’ll be to offer her a castaway. And one only meets a charming girl to hear that she’s engaged! ’Tis not a line of a ballad, Miss Middleton, but out of the heart.”

“Lucy Darleton . . . You were leading me to talk seriously to you, Colonel De Craye.”

Page 2813

“Will you one day?—and not think me a perpetual tumbler! You have heard of melancholy clowns. You will find the face not so laughable behind my paint. When I was thirteen years younger I was loved, and my dearest sank to the grave. Since then I have not been quite at home in life; probably because of finding no one so charitable as she. ’Tis easy to win smiles and hands, but not so easy to win a woman whose faith you would trust as your own heart before the enemy. I was poor then. She said. ‘The day after my twenty-first birthday’; and that day I went for her, and I wondered they did not refuse me at the door. I was shown upstairs, and I saw her, and saw death. She wished to marry me, to leave me her fortune!”

“Then, never marry,” said Clara, in an underbreath.

She glanced behind.

Sir Willoughby was close, walking on turf.

“I must be cunning to escape him after breakfast,” she thought.

He had discarded his foolishness of the previous days, and the thought in him could have replied: “I am a dolt if I let you out of my sight.”

Vernon appeared, formal as usual of late. Clara begged his excuse for withdrawing Crossjay from his morning swim. He nodded.

De Craye called to Willoughby for a book of the trains.

“There’s a card in the smoking-room; eleven, one, and four are the hours, if you must go,” said Willoughby.

“You leave the Hall, Colonel De Craye?”

“In two or three days, Miss Middleton.”

She did not request him to stay: his announcement produced no effect on her. Consequently, thought he—well, what? nothing: well, then, that she might not be minded to stay herself. Otherwise she would have regretted the loss of an amusing companion: that is the modest way of putting it. There is a modest and a vain for the same sentiment; and both may be simultaneously in the same breast; and each one as honest as the other; so shy is man’s vanity in the presence of here and there a lady. She liked him: she did not care a pin for him—how could she? yet she liked him: O, to be able to do her some kindling bit of service! These were his consecutive fancies, resolving naturally to the exclamation, and built on the conviction that she did not love Willoughby, and waited for a spirited lift from circumstances. His call for a book of the trains had been a sheer piece of impromptu, in the mind as well as on the mouth. It sprang, unknown to him, of conjectures he had indulged yesterday and the day before.

This morning she would have an answer to her letter to her friend, Miss Lucy Darleton, the pretty dark girl, whom De Craye was astonished not to have noticed more when he danced with her. She, pretty as she was, had come to his recollection through the name and rank of her father, a famous general of cavalry, and tactician in that arm. The colonel despised himself for not having been devoted to Clara Middleton's friend.

Page 2814

The morning's letters were on the bronze plate in the hall. Clara passed on her way to her room without inspecting them. De Craye opened an envelope and went upstairs to scribble a line. Sir Willoughby observed their absence at the solemn reading to the domestic servants in advance of breakfast. Three chairs were unoccupied. Vernon had his own notions of a mechanical service—and a precious profit he derived from them! but the other two seats returned the stare Willoughby cast at their backs with an impudence that reminded him of his friend Horace's calling for a book of the trains, when a minute afterward he admitted he was going to stay at the Hall another two days, or three. The man possessed by jealousy is never in need of matter for it: he magnifies; grass is jungle, hillocks are mountains. Willoughby's legs crossing and uncrossing audibly, and his tight-folded arms and clearing of the throat, were faint indications of his condition.

"Are you in fair health this morning, Willoughby?" Dr. Middleton said to him after he had closed his volumes.

"The thing is not much questioned by those who know me intimately," he replied.

"Willoughby unwell!" and, "He is health incarnate!" exclaimed the ladies Eleanor and Isabel.

Laetitia grieved for him. Sun-rays on a pest-stricken city, she thought, were like the smile of his face. She believed that he deeply loved Clara, and had learned more of her alienation.

He went into the ball to look into the well for the pair of malefactors; on fire with what he could not reveal to a soul.

De Craye was in the housekeeper's room, talking to young Crossjay, and Mrs. Montague just come up to breakfast. He had heard the boy chattering, and as the door was ajar he peeped in, and was invited to enter. Mrs. Montague was very fond of hearing him talk: he paid her the familiar respect which a lady of fallen fortunes, at a certain period after the fall, enjoys as a befittingly sad souvenir, and the respectfulness of the lord of the house was more chilling.

She bewailed the boy's trying his constitution with long walks before he had anything in him to walk on.

"And where did you go this morning, my lad?" said De Craye.

"Ah, you know the ground, colonel," said Crossjay. "I am hungry! I shall eat three eggs and some bacon, and buttered cakes, and jam, then begin again, on my second cup of coffee."

“It’s not braggadocio,” remarked Mrs. Montague. “He waits empty from five in the morning till nine, and then he comes famished to my table, and cats too much.”

“Oh! Mrs. Montague, that is what the country people call roemancing. For, Colonel De Craye, I had a bun at seven o’clock. Miss Middleton forced me to go and buy it”

“A stale bun, my boy?”

“Yesterday’s: there wasn’t much of a stopper to you in it, like a new bun.”

“And where did you leave Miss Middleton when you went to buy the bun? You should never leave a lady; and the street of a country town is lonely at that early hour. Crossjay, you surprise me.”

Page 2815

“She forced me to go, colonel. Indeed she did. What do I care for a bun! And she was quite safe. We could hear the people stirring in the post-office, and I met our postman going for his letter-bag. I didn’t want to go: bother the bun!—but you can’t disobey Miss Middleton. I never want to, and wouldn’t.”

“There we’re of the same mind,” said the colonel, and Crossjay shouted, for the lady whom they exalted was at the door.

“You will be too tired for a ride this morning,” De Craye said to her, descending the stairs.

She swung a bonnet by the ribands. “I don’t think of riding to-day.”

“Why did you not depute your mission to me?”

“I like to bear my own burdens, as far as I can.”

“Miss Darleton is well?”

“I presume so.”

“Will you try her recollection for me?”

“It will probably be quite as lively as yours was.”

“Shall you see her soon?”

“I hope so.”

Sir Willoughby met her at the foot of the stairs, but refrained from giving her a hand that shook.

“We shall have the day together,” he said.

Clara bowed.

At the breakfast-table she faced a clock.

De Craye took out his watch. “You are five and a half minutes too slow by that clock, Willoughby.”

“The man omitted to come from Rendon to set it last week, Horace. He will find the hour too late here for him when he does come.”

One of the ladies compared the time of her watch with De Craye’s, and Clara looked at hers and gratefully noted that she was four minutes in arrear.

She left the breakfast-room at a quarter to ten, after kissing her father. Willoughby was behind her. He had been soothed by thinking of his personal advantages over De Craye, and he felt assured that if he could be solitary with his eccentric bride and fold her in himself, he would, cutting temper adrift, be the man he had been to her not so many days back. Considering how few days back, his temper was roused, but he controlled it.

They were slightly dissenting as De Craye stepped into the hall.

“A present worth examining,” Willoughby said to her: “and I do not dwell on the costliness. Come presently, then. I am at your disposal all day. I will drive you in the afternoon to call on Lady Busshe to offer your thanks: but you must see it first. It is laid out in the laboratory.”

“There is time before the afternoon,” said Clara.

“Wedding presents?” interposed De Craye.

“A porcelain service from Lady Busshe, Horace.”

“Not in fragments? Let me have a look at it. I’m haunted by an idea that porcelain always goes to pieces. I’ll have a look and take a hint. We’re in the laboratory, Miss Middleton.”

He put his arm under Willoughby’s. The resistance to him was momentary: Willoughby had the satisfaction of the thought that De Craye being with him was not with Clara; and seeing her giving orders to her maid Barclay, he deferred his claim on her company for some short period.

Page 2816

De Craye detained him in the laboratory, first over the China cups and saucers, and then with the latest of London—tales of youngest Cupid upon subterranean adventures, having high titles to light him. Willoughby liked the tale thus illuminated, for without the title there was no special savour in such affairs, and it pulled down his betters in rank. He was of a morality to reprobate the erring dame while he enjoyed the incidents. He could not help interrupting De Craye to point at Vernon through the window, striding this way and that, evidently on the hunt for young Crossjay. “No one here knows how to manage the boy except myself But go on, Horace,” he said, checking his contemptuous laugh; and Vernon did look ridiculous, out there half-drenched already in a white rain, again shuffled off by the little rascal. It seemed that he was determined to have his runaway: he struck up the avenue at full pedestrian racing pace.

“A man looks a fool cutting after a cricket-ball; but, putting on steam in a storm of rain to catch a young villain out of sight, beats anything I’ve witnessed,” Willoughby resumed, in his amusement.

“Aiha!” said De Craye, waving a hand to accompany the melodious accent, “there are things to beat that for fun.”

He had smoked in the laboratory, so Willoughby directed a servant to transfer the porcelain service to one of the sitting-rooms for Clara’s inspection of it.

“You’re a bold man,” De Craye remarked. “The luck may be with you, though. I wouldn’t handle the fragile treasure for a trifle.”

“I believe in my luck,” said Willoughby.

Clara was now sought for. The lord of the house desired her presence impatiently, and had to wait. She was in none of the lower rooms. Barclay, her maid, upon interrogation, declared she was in none of the upper. Willoughby turned sharp on De Craye: he was there.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel and Miss Dale were consulted. They had nothing to say about Clara’s movements, more than that they could not understand her exceeding restlessness. The idea of her being out of doors grew serious; heaven was black, hard thunder rolled, and lightning flushed the battering rain. Men bearing umbrellas, shawls, and cloaks were dispatched on a circuit of the park. De Craye said: “I’ll be one.”

“No,” cried Willoughby, starting to interrupt him, “I can’t allow it.”

“I’ve the scent of a hound, Willoughby; I’ll soon be on the track.”

“My dear Horace, I won’t let you go.”

“Adieu, dear boy! and if the lady’s discoverable, I’m the one to find her.”

He stepped to the umbrella-stand. There was then a general question whether Clara had taken her umbrella. Barclay said she had. The fact indicated a wider stroll than round inside the park: Crossjay was likewise absent. De Craye nodded to himself.

Willoughby struck a rattling blow on the barometer.

Page 2817

“Where’s Pollington?” he called, and sent word for his man Pollington to bring big fishing-boots and waterproof wrappers.

An urgent debate within him was in progress.

Should he go forth alone on his chance of discovering Clara and forgiving her under his umbrella and cloak? or should he prevent De Craye from going forth alone on the chance he vaunted so impudently?

“You will offend me, Horace, if you insist,” he said.

“Regard me as an instrument of destiny, Willoughby,” replied De Craye.

“Then we go in company.”

“But that’s an addition of one that cancels the other by conjunction, and’s worse than simple division: for I can’t trust my wits unless I rely on them alone, you see.”

“Upon my word, you talk at times most unintelligible stuff, to be frank with you, Horace. Give it in English.”

“’Tis not suited, perhaps, to the genius of the language, for I thought I talked English.”

“Oh, there’s English gibberish as well as Irish, we know!”

“And a deal foolisher when they do go at it; for it won’t bear squeezing, we think, like Irish.”

“Where!” exclaimed the ladies, “where can she be! The storm is terrible.”

Laetitia suggested the boathouse.

“For Crossjay hadn’t a swim this morning!” said De Craye.

No one reflected on the absurdity that Clara should think of taking Crossjay for a swim in the lake, and immediately after his breakfast: it was accepted as a suggestion at least that she and Crossjay had gone to the lake for a row.

In the hopefulness of the idea, Willoughby suffered De Craye to go on his chance unaccompanied. He was near chuckling. He projected a plan for dismissing Crossjay and remaining in the boathouse with Clara, luxuriating in the prestige which would attach to him for seeking and finding her. Deadly sentiments intervened. Still he might expect to be alone with her where she could not slip from him.

The throwing open of the hall-doors for the gentlemen presented a framed picture of a deluge. All the young-leaved trees were steely black, without a gradation of green, drooping and pouring, and the song of rain had become an inveterate hiss.

The ladies beholding it exclaimed against Clara, even apostrophized her, so dark are trivial errors when circumstances frown. She must be mad to tempt such weather: she was very giddy; she was never at rest. Clara! Clara! how could you be so wild! Ought we not to tell Dr. Middleton?

Laetitia induced them to spare him.

“Which way do you take?” said Willoughby, rather fearful that his companion was not to be got rid of now.

“Any way,” said De Craye. “I chuck up my head like a halfpenny, and go by the toss.”

This enraging nonsense drove off Willoughby. De Craye saw him cast a furtive eye at his heels to make sure he was not followed, and thought, “Jove! he may be fond of her. But he’s not on the track. She’s a determined girl, if I’m correct. She’s a girl of a hundred thousand. Girls like that make the right sort of wives for the right men. They’re the girls to make men think of marrying. To-morrow! only give me a chance. They stick to you fast when they do stick.”

Page 2818

Then a thought of her flower-like drapery and face caused him fervently to hope she had escaped the storm.

Calling at the West park-lodge he heard that Miss Middleton had been seen passing through the gate with Master Crossjay; but she had not been seen coming back. Mr. Vernon Whitford had passed through half an hour later.

“After his young man!” said the colonel.

The lodge-keeper’s wife and daughter knew of Master Crossjay’s pranks; Mr. Whitford, they said, had made inquiries about him and must have caught him and sent him home to change his dripping things; for Master Crossjay had come back, and had declined shelter in the lodge; he seemed to be crying; he went away soaking over the wet grass, hanging his head. The opinion at the lodge was that Master Crossjay was unhappy.

“He very properly received a wigging from Mr. Whitford, I have no doubt,” said Colonel Do Craye.

Mother and daughter supposed it to be the case, and considered Crossjay very wilful for not going straight home to the Hall to change his wet clothes; he was drenched.

Do Craye drew out his watch. The time was ten minutes past eleven. If the surmise he had distantly spied was correct, Miss Middleton would have been caught in the storm midway to her destination. By his guess at her character (knowledge of it, he would have said), he judged that no storm would daunt her on a predetermined expedition. He deduced in consequence that she was at the present moment flying to her friend, the charming brunette Lucy Darleton.

Still, as there was a possibility of the rain having been too much for her, and as he had no other speculation concerning the route she had taken, he decided upon keeping along the road to Rendon, with a keen eye at cottage and farmhouse windows.

CHAPTER XXVI

VERNON IN PURSUIT

The lodge-keeper had a son, who was a chum of Master Crossjay’s, and errant-fellow with him upon many adventures; for this boy’s passion was to become a gamekeeper, and accompanied by one of the head-gamekeeper’s youngsters, he and Crossjay were in the habit of rangeing over the country, preparing for a profession delightful to the tastes of all three. Crossjay’s prospective connection with the mysterious ocean bestowed the title of captain on him by common consent; he led them, and when missing for lessons he was generally in the society of Jacob Croom or Jonathan Fernaway. Vernon made sure of Crossjay when he perceived Jacob Croom sitting on a

stool in the little lodge-parlour. Jacob's appearance of a diligent perusal of a book he had presented to the lad, he took for a decent piece of trickery. It was with amazement that he heard from the mother and daughter, as well as Jacob, of Miss Middleton's going through the gate before ten o'clock with Crossjay beside her, the latter too hurried to spare a nod to Jacob. That she, of all on earth, should be encouraging Crossjay to truancy was incredible. Vernon had to fall back upon Greek and Latin aphoristic shots at the sex to believe it.

Page 2819

Rain was universal; a thick robe of it swept from hill to hill; thunder rumbled remote, and between the ruffled roars the downpour pressed on the land with a great noise of eager gobbling, much like that of the swine's trough fresh filled, as though a vast assembly of the hungered had seated themselves clamorously and fallen to on meats and drinks in a silence, save of the chaps. A rapid walker poetically and humourously minded gathers multitudes of images on his way. And rain, the heaviest you can meet, is a lively companion when the resolute pacer scorns discomfort of wet clothes and squealing boots. South-western rain-clouds, too, are never long sullen: they enfold and will have the earth in a good strong glut of the kissing overflow; then, as a hawk with feathers on his beak of the bird in his claw lifts head, they rise and take veiled feature in long climbing watery lines: at any moment they may break the veil and show soft upper cloud, show sun on it, show sky, green near the verge they spring from, of the green of grass in early dew; or, along a travelling sweep that rolls asunder overhead, heaven's laughter of purest blue among titanic white shoulders: it may mean fair smiling for awhile, or be the lightest interlude; but the watery lines, and the drifting, the chasing, the upsoaring, all in a shadowy fingering of form, and the animation of the leaves of the trees pointing them on, the bending of the tree-tops, the snapping of branches, and the hurrahings of the stubborn hedge at wrestle with the flaws, yielding but a leaf at most, and that on a fling, make a glory of contest and wildness without aid of colour to inflame the man who is at home in them from old association on road, heath, and mountain. Let him be drenched, his heart will sing. And thou, trim cockney, that jeerest, consider thyself, to whom it may occur to be out in such a scene, and with what steps of a nervous dancing-master it would be thine to play the hunted rat of the elements, for the preservation of the one imagined dryspot about thee, somewhere on thy luckless person! The taking of rain and sun alike befits men of our climate, and he who would have the secret of a strengthening intoxication must court the clouds of the South-west with a lover's blood.

Vernon's happy recklessness was dashed by fears for Miss Middleton. Apart from those fears, he had the pleasure of a gull wheeling among foam-streaks of the wave. He supposed the Swiss and Tyrol Alps to have hidden their heads from him for many a day to come, and the springing and chiming South-west was the next best thing. A milder rain descended; the country expanded darkly defined underneath the moving curtain; the clouds were as he liked to see them, scaling; but their skirts dragged. Torrents were in store, for they coursed streamingly still and had not the higher lift, or eagle ascent, which he knew for one of the signs of fairness, nor had the hills any belt of mist-like vapour.

Page 2820

On a step of the stile leading to the short-cut to Rendon young Crossjay was espied. A man-tramp sat on the top-bar.

“There you are; what are you doing there? Where’s Miss Middleton?” said Vernon. “Now, take care before you open your mouth.”

Crossjay shut the mouth he had opened.

“The lady has gone away over to a station, sir,” said the tramp.

“You fool!” roared Crossjay, ready to fly at him.

“But ain’t it now, young gentleman? Can you say it ain’t?”

“I gave you a shilling, you ass!”

“You give me that sum, young gentleman, to stop here and take care of you, and here I stopped.”

“Mr. Whitford!” Crossjay appealed to his master, and broke of in disgust. “Take care of me! As if anybody who knows me would think I wanted taking care of! Why, what a beast you must be, you fellow!”

“Just as you like, young gentleman. I chaunted you all I know, to keep up your downcast spirits. You did want comforting. You wanted it rarely. You cried like an infant.”

“I let you ‘chaunt’, as you call it, to keep you from swearing.”

“And why did I swear, young gentleman? because I’ve got an itchy coat in the wet, and no shirt for a lining. And no breakfast to give me a stomach for this kind of weather. That’s what I’ve come to in this world! I’m a walking moral. No wonder I swears, when I don’t strike up a chaunt.”

“But why are you sitting here wet through, Crossjay! Be off home at once, and change, and get ready for me.”

“Mr. Whitford, I promised, and I tossed this fellow a shilling not to go bothering Miss Middleton.”

“The lady wouldn’t have none o” the young gentleman, sir, and I offered to go pioneer for her to the station, behind her, at a respectful distance.”

“As if!—you treacherous cur!” Crossjay ground his teeth at the betrayer. “Well, Mr. Whitford, and I didn’t trust him, and I stuck to him, or he’d have been after her whining

about his coat and stomach, and talking of his being a moral. He repeats that to everybody."

"She has gone to the station?" said Vernon.

Not a word on that subject was to be won from Crossjay.

"How long since?" Vernon partly addressed Mr. Tramp.

The latter became seized with shivers as he supplied the information that it might be a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. "But what's time to me, sir? If I had reglar meals, I should carry a clock in my inside. I got the rheumatics instead."

"Way there!" Vernon cried, and took the stile at a vault.

"That's what gentlemen can do, who sleeps in their beds warm," moaned the tramp. "They've no joints."

Vernon handed him a half-crown piece, for he had been of use for once.

"Mr. Whitford, let me come. If you tell me to come I may. Do let me come," Crossjay begged with great entreaty. "I sha'n't see her for . . ."

Page 2821

“Be off, quick!” Vernon cut him short and pushed on.

The tramp and Crossjay were audible to him; Crossjay spurning the consolations of the professional sad man.

Vernon spun across the fields, timing himself by his watch to reach Rendon station ten minutes before eleven, though without clearly questioning the nature of the resolution which precipitated him. Dropping to the road, he had better foothold than on the slippery field-path, and he ran. His principal hope was that Clara would have missed her way. Another pelting of rain agitated him on her behalf. Might she not as well be suffered to go?—and sit three hours and more in a railway-carriage with wet feet!

He clasped the visionary little feet to warm them on his breast.—But Willoughby’s obstinate fatuity deserved the blow!—But neither she nor her father deserved the scandal. But she was desperate. Could reasoning touch her? if not, what would? He knew of nothing. Yesterday he had spoken strongly to Willoughby, to plead with him to favour her departure and give her leisure to sound her mind, and he had left his cousin, convinced that Clara’s best measure was flight: a man so cunning in a pretended obtuseness backed by senseless pride, and in petty tricks that sprang of a grovelling tyranny, could only be taught by facts.

Her recent treatment of him, however, was very strange; so strange that he might have known himself better if he had reflected on the bound with which it shot him to a hard suspicion. De Craye had prepared the world to hear that he was leaving the Hall. Were they in concert? The idea struck at his heart colder than if her damp little feet had been there.

Vernon’s full exoneration of her for making a confidant of himself, did not extend its leniency to the young lady’s character when there was question of her doing the same with a second gentleman. He could suspect much: he could even expect to find De Craye at the station.

That idea drew him up in his run, to meditate on the part he should play; and by drove little Dr. Corney on the way to Rendon and hailed him, and gave his cheerless figure the nearest approach to an Irish bug in the form of a dry seat under an umbrella and water-proof covering.

“Though it is the worst I can do for you, if you decline to supplement it with a dose of hot brandy and water at the Dolphin,” said he: “and I’ll see you take it, if you please. I’m bound to ease a Rendon patient out of the world. Medicine’s one of their superstitions, which they cling to the harder the more useless it gets. Pill and priest launch him happy between them.—’And what’s on your conscience, Pat?—It’s whether your blessing, your Riverence, would disagree with another drop. Then put the horse before the cart, my son, and you shall have the two in harmony, and God speed ye!’—Rendon station, did

you say, Vernon? You shall have my prescription at the Railway Arms, if you're hurried. You have the look. What is it? Can I help?"

Page 2822

“No. And don’t ask.”

“You’re like the Irish Grenadier who had a bullet in a humiliating situation. Here’s Rendon, and through it we go with a spanking clatter. Here’s Doctor Corney’s dog-cart post-haste again. For there’s no dying without him now, and Repentance is on the death-bed for not calling him in before. Half a charge of humbug hurts no son of a gun, friend Vernon, if he’d have his firing take effect. Be tender to’t in man or woman, particularly woman. So, by goes the meteoric doctor, and I’ll bring noses to window-panes, you’ll see, which reminds me of the sweetest young lady I ever saw, and the luckiest man. When is she off for her bridal trousseau? And when are they spliced? I’ll not call her perfection, for that’s a post, afraid to move. But she’s a dancing sprig of the tree next it. Poetry’s wanted to speak of her. I’m Irish and inflammable, I suppose, but I never looked on a girl to make a man comprehend the entire holy meaning of the word rapturous, like that one. And away she goes! We’ll not say another word. But you’re a Grecian, friend Vernon. Now, couldn’t you think her just a whiff of an idea of a daughter of a peccadillo-Goddess?”

“Deuce take you, Corney, drop me here; I shall be late for the train,” said Vernon, laying hand on the doctor’s arm to check him on the way to the station in view.

Dr Corney had a Celtic intelligence for a meaning behind an illogical tongue. He drew up, observing. “Two minutes run won’t hurt you.”

He slightly fancied he might have given offence, though he was well acquainted with Vernon and had a cordial grasp at the parting.

The truth must be told that Vernon could not at the moment bear any more talk from an Irishman. Dr. Corney had succeeded in persuading him not to wonder at Clara Middleton’s liking for Colonel de Craye.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE RAILWAY STATION

Clara stood in the waiting-room contemplating the white rails of the rain-swept line. Her lips parted at the sight of Vernon.

“You have your ticket?” said he.

She nodded, and breathed more freely; the matter-of-fact question was reassuring.

“You are wet,” he resumed; and it could not be denied.

“A little. I do not feel it.”

“I must beg you to come to the inn hard by—half a dozen steps. We shall see your train signalled. Come.”

She thought him startlingly authoritative, but he had good sense to back him; and depressed as she was by the dampness, she was disposed to yield to reason if he continued to respect her independence. So she submitted outwardly, resisted inwardly, on the watch to stop him from taking any decisive lead.

“Shall we be sure to see the signal, Mr. Whitford?”

“I’ll provide for that.”

He spoke to the station-clerk, and conducted her across the road.

Page 2823

“You are quite alone, Miss Middleton?”

“I am: I have not brought my maid.”

“You must take off boots and stockings at once, and have them dried. I’ll put you in the hands of the landlady.”

“But my train!”

“You have full fifteen minutes, besides fair chances of delay.”

He seemed reasonable, the reverse of hostile, in spite of his commanding air, and that was not unpleasant in one friendly to her adventure. She controlled her alert distrustfulness, and passed from him to the landlady, for her feet were wet and cold, the skirts of her dress were soiled; generally inspecting herself, she was an object to be shuddered at, and she was grateful to Vernon for his inattention to her appearance.

Vernon ordered Dr. Corney’s dose, and was ushered upstairs to a room of portraits, where the publican’s ancestors and family sat against the walls, flat on their canvas as weeds of the botanist’s portfolio, although corpulency was pretty generally insisted on, and there were formidable battalions of bust among the females. All of them had the aspect of the national energy which has vanquished obstacles to subside on its ideal. They all gazed straight at the guest. “Drink, and come to this!” they might have been labelled to say to him. He was in the private Walhalla of a large class of his countrymen. The existing host had taken forethought to be of the party in his prime, and in the central place, looking fresh-fattened there and sanguine from the performance. By and by a son would shove him aside; meanwhile he shelved his parent, according to the manners of energy.

One should not be a critic of our works of Art in uncomfortable garments. Vernon turned from the portraits to a stuffed pike in a glass case, and plunged into sympathy with the fish for a refuge.

Clara soon rejoined him, saying: “But you, you must be very wet. You were without an umbrella. You must be wet through, Mr. Whitford.”

“We’re all wet through, to-day,” said Vernon. “Crossjay’s wet through, and a tramp he met.”

“The horrid man! But Crossjay should have turned back when I told him. Cannot the landlord assist you? You are not tied to time. I begged Crossjay to turn back when it began to rain: when it became heavy I compelled him. So you met my poor Crossjay?”

“You have not to blame him for betraying you. The tramp did that. I was thrown on your track quite by accident. Now pardon me for using authority, and don’t be alarmed, Miss

Middleton; you are perfectly free for me; but you must not run a risk to your health. I met Doctor Corney coming along, and he prescribed hot brandy and water for a wet skin, especially for sitting in it. There's the stuff on the table; I see you have been aware of a singular odour; you must consent to sip some, as medicine; merely to give you warmth."

"Impossible, Mr. Whitford: I could not taste it. But pray, obey Dr. Corney, if he ordered it for you."

Page 2824

“I can’t, unless you do.”

“I will, then: I will try.”

She held the glass, attempted, and was baffled by the reek of it.

“Try: you can do anything,” said Vernon.

“Now that you find me here, Mr. Whitford! Anything for myself it would seem, and nothing to save a friend. But I will really try.”

“It must be a good mouthful.”

“I will try. And you will finish the glass?”

“With your permission, if you do not leave too much.”

They were to drink out of the same glass; and she was to drink some of this infamous mixture: and she was in a kind of hotel alone with him: and he was drenched in running after her:—all this came of breaking loose for an hour!

“Oh! what a misfortune that it should be such a day, Mr. Whitford!”

“Did you not choose the day?”

“Not the weather.”

“And the worst of it is, that Willoughby will come upon Crossjay wet to the bone, and pump him and get nothing but shufflings, blank lies, and then find him out and chase him from the house.”

Clara drank immediately, and more than she intended. She held the glass as an enemy to be delivered from, gasping, uncertain of her breath.

“Never let me be asked to endure such a thing again!”

“You are unlikely to be running away from father and friends again.”

She panted still with the fiery liquid she had gulped: and she wondered that it should belie its reputation in not fortifying her, but rendering her painfully susceptible to his remarks.

“Mr. Whitford, I need not seek to know what you think of me.”

“What I think? I don’t think at all; I wish to serve you if I can.”

“Am I right in supposing you a little afraid of me? You should not be. I have deceived no one. I have opened my heart to you, and am not ashamed of having done so.”

“It is an excellent habit, they say.”

“It is not a habit with me.”

He was touched, and for that reason, in his dissatisfaction with himself, not unwilling to hurt. “We take our turn, Miss Middleton. I’m no hero, and a bad conspirator, so I am not of much avail.”

“You have been reserved—but I am going, and I leave my character behind. You condemned me to the poison-bowl; you have not touched it yourself”

“In vino veritas: if I do I shall be speaking my mind.”

“Then do, for the sake of mind and body.”

“It won’t be complimentary.”

“You can be harsh. Only say everything.”

“Have we time?”

They looked at their watches.

“Six minutes,” Clara said.

Vernon’s had stopped, penetrated by his total drenching.

She reproached herself. He laughed to quiet her. “My dies solemnes are sure to give me duckings; I’m used to them. As for the watch, it will remind me that it stopped when you went.”

Page 2825

She raised the glass to him. She was happier and hoped for some little harshness and kindness mixed that she might carry away to travel with and think over.

He turned the glass as she had given it, turned it round in putting it to his lips: a scarce perceptible manoeuvre, but that she had given it expressly on one side.

It may be hoped that it was not done by design. Done even accidentally, without a taint of contrivance, it was an affliction to see, and coiled through her, causing her to shrink and redden.

Fugitives are subject to strange incidents; they are not vessels lying safe in harbour. She shut her lips tight, as if they had stung. The realizing sensitiveness of her quick nature accused them of a loss of bloom. And the man who made her smart like this was formal as a railway official on a platform.

“Now we are both pledged in the poison-bowl,” said he. “And it has the taste of rank poison, I confess. But the doctor prescribed it, and at sea we must be sailors. Now, Miss Middleton, time presses: will you return with me?”

“No! no!”

“Where do you propose to go?”

“To London; to a friend—Miss Darleton.”

“What message is there for your father?”

“Say I have left a letter for him in a letter to be delivered to you.”

“To me! And what message for Willoughby?”

“My maid Barclay will hand him a letter at noon.”

“You have sealed Crossjay’s fate.”

“How?”

“He is probably at this instant undergoing an interrogation. You may guess at his replies. The letter will expose him, and Willoughby does not pardon.”

“I regret it. I cannot avoid it. Poor boy! My dear Crossjay! I did not think of how Willoughby might punish him. I was very thoughtless. Mr. Whitford, my pin-money shall go for his education. Later, when I am a little older, I shall be able to support him.”

“That’s an encumbrance; you should not tie yourself to drag it about. You are unalterable, of course, but circumstances are not, and as it happens, women are more subject to them than we are.”

“But I will not be!”

“Your command of them is shown at the present moment.”

“Because I determine to be free?”

“No: because you do the contrary; you don’t determine: you run away from the difficulty, and leave it to your father and friends to bear. As for Crossjay, you see you destroy one of his chances. I should have carried him off before this, if I had not thought it prudent to keep him on terms with Willoughby. We’ll let Crossjay stand aside. He’ll behave like a man of honour, imitating others who have had to do the same for ladies.”

“Have spoken falsely to shelter cowards, you mean, Mr. Whitford. Oh, I know.—I have but two minutes. The die is cast. I cannot go back. I must get ready. Will you see me to the station? I would rather you should hurry home.”

Page 2826

“I will see the last of you. I will wait for you here. An express runs ahead of your train, and I have arranged with the clerk for a signal; I have an eye on the window.”

“You are still my best friend, Mr. Whitford.”

“Though?”

“Well, though you do not perfectly understand what torments have driven me to this.”

“Carried on tides and blown by winds?”

“Ah! you do not understand.”

“Mysteries?”

“Sufferings are not mysteries, they are very simple facts.”

“Well, then, I don’t understand. But decide at once. I wish you to have your free will.”

She left the room.

Dry stockings and boots are better for travelling in than wet ones, but in spite of her direct resolve, she felt when drawing them on like one that has been tripped. The goal was desirable, the ardour was damped. Vernon’s wish that she should have her free will compelled her to sound it: and it was of course to go, to be liberated, to cast off incubus and hurt her father? injure Crossjay? distress her friends? No, and ten times no!

She returned to Vernon in haste, to shun the reflex of her mind.

He was looking at a closed carriage drawn up at the station door.

“Shall we run over now, Mr. Whitford?”

“There’s no signal. Here it’s not so chilly.”

“I ventured to enclose my letter to papa in yours, trusting you would attend to my request to you to break the news to him gently and plead for me.”

“We will all do the utmost we can.”

“I am doomed to vex those who care for me. I tried to follow your counsel.”

“First you spoke to me, and then you spoke to Miss Dale; and at least you have a clear conscience.”

“No.”

“What burdens it?”

“I have done nothing to burden it.”

“Then it’s a clear conscience.”

“No.”

Vernon’s shoulders jerked. Our patience with an innocent duplicity in women is measured by the place it assigns to us and another. If he had liked he could have thought: “You have not done but meditated something to trouble conscience.” That was evident, and her speaking of it was proof too of the willingness to be dear. He would not help her. Man’s blood, which is the link with women and responsive to them on the instant for or against, obscured him. He shrugged anew when she said: “My character would have been degraded utterly by my staying there. Could you advise it?”

“Certainly not the degradation of your character,” he said, black on the subject of De Craye, and not lightened by feelings which made him sharply sensible of the beggarly dependant that he was, or poor adventuring scribbler that he was to become.

“Why did you pursue me and wish to stop me, Mr. Whitford?” said Clara, on the spur of a wound from his tone.

He replied: “I suppose I’m a busybody; I was never aware of it till now.”

Page 2827

“You are my friend. Only you speak in irony so much. That was irony, about my clear conscience. I spoke to you and to Miss Dale: and then I rested and drifted. Can you not feel for me, that to mention it is like a scorching furnace? Willoughby has entangled papa. He schemes incessantly to keep me entangled. I fly from his cunning as much as from anything. I dread it. I have told you that I am more to blame than he, but I must accuse him. And wedding-presents! and congratulations! And to be his guest!”

“All that makes up a plea in mitigation,” said Vernon.

“Is it not sufficient for you?” she asked him timidly.

“You have a masculine good sense that tells you you won’t be respected if you run. Three more days there might cover a retreat with your father.”

“He will not listen to me. He confuses me; Willoughby has bewitched him.”

“Commission me: I will see that he listens.”

“And go back? Oh, no! To London! Besides, there is the dining with Mrs. Mountstuart this evening; and I like her very well, but I must avoid her. She has a kind of idolatry . . . And what answers can I give? I supplicate her with looks. She observes them, my efforts to divert them from being painful produce a comic expression to her, and I am a charming ‘rogue’, and I am entertained on the topic she assumes to be principally interesting me. I must avoid her. The thought of her leaves me no choice. She is clever. She could tattoo me with epigrams.”

“Stay . . . there you can hold your own.”

“She has told me you give me credit for a spice of wit. I have not discovered my possession. We have spoken of it; we call it your delusion. She grants me some beauty; that must be hers.”

“There’s no delusion in one case or the other, Miss Middleton. You have beauty and wit; public opinion will say, wildness: indifference to your reputation will be charged on you, and your friends will have to admit it. But you will be out of this difficulty.”

“Ah—to weave a second?”

“Impossible to judge until we see how you escape the first. And I have no more to say. I love your father. His humour of sententiousness and doctorial stilts is a mask he delights in, but you ought to know him and not be frightened by it. If you sat with him an hour at a Latin task, and if you took his hand and told him you could not leave him, and no tears!—he would answer you at once. It would involve a day or two further; disagreeable to you, no doubt: preferable to the present mode of escape, as I think.

But I have no power whatever to persuade. I have not the ‘lady’s tongue’. My appeal is always to reason.”

“It is a compliment. I loathe the ’lady’s tongue’.”

“It’s a distinctly good gift, and I wish I had it. I might have succeeded instead of failing, and appearing to pay a compliment.”

“Surely the express train is very late, Mr. Whitford?”

Page 2828

“The express has gone by.”

“Then we will cross over.”

“You would rather not be seen by Mrs. Mountstuart. That is her carriage drawn up at the station, and she is in it.”

Clara looked, and with the sinking of her heart said: “I must brave her!”

“In that case I will take my leave of you here, Miss Middleton.”

She gave him her hand. “Why is Mrs. Mountstuart at the station to-day?”

“I suppose she has driven to meet one of the guests for her dinner-party. Professor Crooklyn was promised to your father, and he may be coming by the down-train.”

“Go back to the Hall!” exclaimed Clara. “How can I? I have no more endurance left in me. If I had some support!—if it were the sense of secretly doing wrong, it might help me through. I am in a web. I cannot do right, whatever I do. There is only the thought of saving Crossjay. Yes, and sparing papa.—Good-bye, Mr. Whitford. I shall remember your kindness gratefully. I cannot go back.”

“You will not?” said he, tempting her to hesitate.

“No.”

“But if you are seen by Mrs. Mountstuart, you must go back. I’ll do my best to take her away. Should she see you, you must patch up a story and apply to her for a lift. That, I think, is imperative.”

“Not to my mind,” said Clara.

He bowed hurriedly, and withdrew. After her confession, peculiar to her, of possibly finding sustainment in secretly doing wrong, her flying or remaining seemed to him a choice of evils: and whilst she stood in bewildered speculation on his reason for pursuing her—which was not evident—he remembered the special fear inciting him, and so far did her justice as to have at himself on that subject. He had done something perhaps to save her from a cold: such was his only consolatory thought. He had also behaved like a man of honour, taking no personal advantage of her situation; but to reflect on it recalled his astonishing dryness. The strict man of honour plays a part that he should not reflect on till about the fall of the curtain, otherwise he will be likely sometimes to feel the shiver of foolishness at his good conduct.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RETURN

Posted in observation at a corner of the window Clara saw Vernon cross the road to Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson's carriage, transformed to the leanest pattern of himself by narrowed shoulders and raised coat-collar. He had such an air of saying, "Tom's a-cold", that her skin crept in sympathy.

Presently he left the carriage and went into the station: a bell had rung. Was it her train? He approved her going, for he was employed in assisting her to go: a proceeding at variance with many things he had said, but he was as full of contradiction to-day as women are accused of being. The train came up. She trembled: no signal had appeared, and Vernon must have deceived her.

Page 2829

He returned; he entered the carriage, and the wheels were soon in motion. Immediately thereupon, Flitch's fly drove past, containing Colonel De Craye.

Vernon could not but have perceived him!

But what was it that had brought the colonel to this place? The pressure of Vernon's mind was on her and foiled her efforts to assert her perfect innocence, though she knew she had done nothing to allure the colonel hither. Excepting Willoughby, Colonel De Craye was the last person she would have wished to encounter.

She had now a dread of hearing the bell which would tell her that Vernon had not deceived her, and that she was out of his hands, in the hands of some one else.

She bit at her glove; she glanced at the concentrated eyes of the publican's family portraits, all looking as one; she noticed the empty tumbler, and went round to it and touched it, and the silly spoon in it.

A little yielding to desperation shoots us to strange distances!

Vernon had asked her whether she was alone. Connecting that inquiry, singular in itself, and singular in his manner of putting it, with the glass of burning liquid, she repeated: "He must have seen Colonel De Craye!" and she stared at the empty glass, as at something that witnessed to something: for Vernon was not your supple cavalier assiduously on the smirk to pin a gallantry to commonplaces. But all the doors are not open in a young lady's consciousness, quick of nature though she may be: some are locked and keyless, some will not open to the key, some are defended by ghosts inside. She could not have said what the something witnessed to. If we by chance know more, we have still no right to make it more prominent than it was with her. And the smell of the glass was odious; it disgraced her. She had an impulse to pocket the spoon for a memento, to show it to grandchildren for a warning. Even the prelude to the morality to be uttered on the occasion sprang to her lips: "Here, my dears, is a spoon you would be ashamed to use in your teacups, yet it was of more value to me at one period of my life than silver and gold in pointing out, *etc*.": the conclusion was hazy, like the conception; she had her idea.

And in this mood she ran down-stairs and met Colonel De Craye on the station steps.

The bright illumination of his face was that of the confident man confirmed in a risky guess in the crisis of doubt and dispute.

"Miss Middleton!" his joyful surprise predominated; the pride of an accurate forecast, adding: "I am not too late to be of service?"

She thanked him for the offer.

“Have you dismissed the fly, Colonel De Craye?”

“I have just been getting change to pay Mr. Flitch. He passed me on the road. He is interwound with our fates to a certainty. I had only to jump in; I knew it, and rolled along like a magician commanding a genie.”

“Have I been . . .”

Page 2830

“Not seriously, nobody doubts you being under shelter. You will allow me to protect you? My time is yours.”

“I was thinking of a running visit to my friend Miss Darleton.”

“May I venture? I had the fancy that you wished to see Miss Darleton to-day. You cannot make the journey unescorted.”

“Please retain the fly. Where is Willoughby?”

“He is in jack-boots. But may I not, Miss Middleton? I shall never be forgiven if you refuse me.”

“There has been searching for me?”

“Some hallooing. But why am I rejected? Besides, I don’t require the fly; I shall walk if I am banished. Flitch is a wonderful conjurer, but the virtue is out of him for the next four-and-twenty hours. And it will be an opportunity to me to make my bow to Miss Darleton!”

“She is rigorous on the conventionalities, Colonel De Craye.”

“I’ll appear before her as an ignoramus or a rebel, whichever she likes best to take in leading-strings. I remember her. I was greatly struck by her.”

“Upon recollection!”

“Memory didn’t happen to be handy at the first mention of the lady’s name. As the general said of his ammunition and transport, there’s the army!—but it was leagues in the rear. Like the footman who went to sleep after smelling fire in the house, I was thinking of other things. It will serve me right to be forgotten—if I am. I’ve a curiosity to know: a remainder of my coxcombry. Not that exactly: a wish to see the impression I made on your friend.—None at all? But any pebble casts a ripple.”

“That is hardly an impression,” said Clara, pacifying her irresoluteness with this light talk.

“The utmost to be hoped for by men like me! I have your permission?—one minute—I will get my ticket.”

“Do not,” said Clara.

“Your man-servant entreats you!”

She signified a decided negative with the head, but her eyes were dreamy. She breathed deep: this thing done would cut the cord. Her sensation of languor swept over her.

De Craye took a stride. He was accosted by one of the railway-porters. Flitch's fly was in request for a gentleman. A portly old gentleman bothered about luggage appeared on the landing.

"The gentleman can have it," said De Craye, handing Flitch his money.

"Open the door." Clara said to Flitch.

He tugged at the handle with enthusiasm. The door was open: she stepped in.

"Then mount the box and I'll jump up beside you," De Craye called out, after the passion of regretful astonishment had melted from his features.

Clara directed him to the seat fronting her; he protested indifference to the wet; she kept the door unshut. His temper would have preferred to buffet the angry weather. The invitation was too sweet.

Page 2831

She heard now the bell of her own train. Driving beside the railway embankment she met the train: it was eighteen minutes late, by her watch. And why, when it flung up its whale-spouts of steam, she was not journeying in it, she could not tell. She had acted of her free will: that she could say. Vernon had not induced her to remain; assuredly her present companion had not; and her whole heart was for flight: yet she was driving back to the Hall, not devoid of calmness. She speculated on the circumstance enough to think herself incomprehensible, and there left it, intent on the scene to come with Willoughby.

“I must choose a better day for London,” she remarked.

De Craye bowed, but did not remove his eyes from her.

“Miss Middleton, you do not trust me.”

She answered: “Say in what way. It seems to me that I do.”

“I may speak?”

“If it depends on my authority.”

“Fully?”

“Whatever you have to say. Let me stipulate, be not very grave. I want cheering in wet weather.”

“Miss Middleton, Flitch is charioteer once more. Think of it. There’s a tide that carries him perpetually to the place where he was cast forth, and a thread that ties us to him in continuity. I have not the honour to be a friend of long standing: one ventures on one’s devotion: it dates from the first moment of my seeing you. Flitch is to blame, if any one. Perhaps the spell would be broken, were he reinstated in his ancient office.”

“Perhaps it would,” said Clara, not with her best of smiles. Willoughby’s pride of relentlessness appeared to her to be receiving a blow by rebound, and that seemed high justice.

“I am afraid you were right; the poor fellow has no chance,” De Craye pursued. He paused, as for decorum in the presence of misfortune, and laughed sparklingly: “Unless I engage him, or pretend to! I verily believe that Flitch’s melancholy person on the skirts of the Hall completes the picture of the Eden within.—Why will you not put some trust in me, Miss Middleton?”

“But why should you not pretend to engage him then, Colonel De Craye?”

“We’ll plot it, if you like. Can you trust me for that?”

“For any act of disinterested kindness, I am sure.”

“You mean it?”

“Without reserve. You could talk publicly of taking him to London.”

“Miss Middleton, just now you were going. My arrival changed your mind. You distrust me: and ought I to wonder? The wonder would be all the other way. You have not had the sort of report of me which would persuade you to confide, even in a case of extremity. I guessed you were going. Do you ask me how? I cannot say. Through what they call sympathy, and that’s inexplicable. There’s natural sympathy, natural antipathy. People have to live together to discover how deep it is!”

Clara breathed her dumb admission of his truth.

Page 2832

The fly jolted and threatened to lurch.

“Flitch, my dear man!” the colonel gave a murmuring remonstrance; “for,” said he to Clara, whom his apostrophe to Flitch had set smiling, “we’re not safe with him, however we make believe, and he’ll be jerking the heart out of me before he has done.—But if two of us have not the misfortune to be united when they come to the discovery, there’s hope. That is, if one has courage and the other has wisdom. Otherwise they may go to the yoke in spite of themselves. The great enemy is Pride, who has them both in a coach and drives them to the fatal door, and the only thing to do is to knock him off his box while there’s a minute to spare. And as there’s no pride like the pride of possession, the deadliest wound to him is to make that doubtful. Pride won’t be taught wisdom in any other fashion. But one must have the courage to do it!”

De Craye trifled with the window-sash, to give his words time to sink in solution.

Who but Willoughby stood for Pride? And who, swayed by languor, had dreamed of a method that would be surest and swiftest to teach him the wisdom of surrendering her?

“You know, Miss Middleton, I study character,” said the colonel.

“I see that you do,” she answered.

“You intend to return?”

“Oh, decidedly.”

“The day is unfavourable for travelling, I must say.”

“It is.”

“You may count on my discretion in the fullest degree. I throw myself on your generosity when I assure you that it was not my design to surprise a secret. I guessed the station, and went there, to put myself at your disposal.”

“Did you,” said Clara, reddening slightly, “chance to see Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson’s carriage pass you when you drove up to the station?”

De Craye had passed a carriage. “I did not see the lady. She was in it?”

“Yes. And therefore it is better to put discretion on one side: we may be certain she saw you.”

“But not you, Miss Middleton.”

“I prefer to think that I am seen. I have a description of courage, Colonel De Craye, when it is forced on me.”

“I have not suspected the reverse. Courage wants training, as well as other fine capacities. Mine is often rusty and rheumatic.”

“I cannot hear of concealment or plotting.”

“Except, pray, to advance the cause of poor Flitch!”

“He shall be excepted.”

The colonel screwed his head round for a glance at his coachman’s back.

“Perfectly guaranteed to-day!” he said of Flitch’s look of solidity. “The convulsion of the elements appears to sober our friend; he is only dangerous in calms. Five minutes will bring us to the park-gates.”

Clara leaned forward to gaze at the hedgeways in the neighbourhood of the Hall strangely renewing their familiarity with her. Both in thought and sensation she was like a flower beaten to earth, and she thanked her feminine mask for not showing how nerveless and languid she was. She could have accused Vernon of a treacherous cunning for imposing it on her free will to decide her fate.

Page 2833

Involuntarily she sighed.

“There is a train at three,” said De Craye, with splendid promptitude.

“Yes, and one at five. We dine with Mrs. Mountstuart tonight. And I have a passion for solitude! I think I was never intended for obligations. The moment I am bound I begin to brood on freedom.”

“Ladies who say that, Miss Middleton!. . .”

“What of them?”

“They’re feeling too much alone.”

She could not combat the remark: by her self-assurance that she had the principle of faithfulness, she acknowledged to herself the truth of it:—there is no freedom for the weak. Vernon had said that once. She tried to resist the weight of it, and her sheer inability precipitated her into a sense of pitiful dependence.

Half an hour earlier it would have been a perilous condition to be traversing in the society of a closely scanning reader of fair faces. Circumstances had changed. They were at the gates of the park.

“Shall I leave you?” said De Craye.

“Why should you?” she replied.

He bent to her gracefully.

The mild subservience flattered Clara’s languor. He had not compelled her to be watchful on her guard, and she was unaware that he passed it when she acquiesced to his observation, “An anticipatory story is a trap to the teller.”

“It is,” she said. She had been thinking as much.

He threw up his head to consult the brain comically with a dozen little blinks.

“No, you are right, Miss Middleton, inventing beforehand never prospers; ’t is a way to trip our own cleverness. Truth and mother-wit are the best counsellors: and as you are the former, I’ll try to act up to the character you assign me.”

Some tangle, more prospective than present, seemed to be about her as she reflected. But her intention being to speak to Willoughby without subterfuge, she was grateful to her companion for not tempting her to swerve. No one could doubt his talent for elegant fibbing, and she was in the humour both to admire and adopt the art, so she was glad to

be rescued from herself. How mother-wit was to second truth she did not inquire, and as she did not happen to be thinking of Crossjay, she was not troubled by having to consider how truth and his tale of the morning would be likely to harmonize.

Driving down the park, she had full occupation in questioning whether her return would be pleasing to Vernon, who was the virtual cause of it, though he had done so little to promote it: so little that she really doubted his pleasure in seeing her return.

CHAPTER XXIX

In which the sensitiveness of sir Willoughby is explained: *And he receives much instruction*

Page 2834

The Hall-dock over the stables was then striking twelve. It was the hour for her flight to be made known, and Clara sat in a turmoil of dim apprehension that prepared her nervous frame for a painful blush on her being asked by Colonel De Craye whether she had set her watch correctly. He must, she understood, have seen through her at the breakfast table: and was she not cruelly indebted to him for her evasion of Willoughby? Such perspicacity of vision distressed and frightened her; at the same time she was obliged to acknowledge that he had not presumed on it. Her dignity was in no way the worse for him. But it had been at a man's mercy, and there was the affliction.

She jumped from the fly as if she were leaving danger behind. She could at the moment have greeted Willoughby with a conventionally friendly smile. The doors were thrown open and young Crossjay flew out to her. He hung and danced on her hand, pressed the hand to his mouth, hardly believing that he saw and touched her, and in a lingo of dashes and asterisks related how Sir Willoughby had found him under the boathouse eaves and pumped him, and had been sent off to Hoppner's farm, where there was a sick child, and on along the road to a labourer's cottage: "For I said you're so kind to poor people, Miss Middleton; that's true, now that is true. And I said you wouldn't have me with you for fear of contagion!" This was what she had feared.

"Every crack and bang in a boys vocabulary," remarked the colonel, listening to him after he had paid Flitch.

The latter touched his hat till he had drawn attention to himself, when he exclaimed, with rosy melancholy: "Ah! my lady, ah! colonel, if ever I lives to drink some of the old port wine in the old Hall at Christmastide!" Their healths would on that occasion be drunk, it was implied. He threw up his eyes at the windows, humped his body and drove away.

"Then Mr. Whitford has not come back?" said Clara to Crossjay.

"No, Miss Middleton. Sir Willoughby has, and he's upstairs in his room dressing."

"Have you seen Barclay?"

"She has just gone into the laboratory. I told her Sir Willoughby wasn't there."

"Tell me, Crossjay, had she a letter?"

"She had something."

"Run: say I am here; I want the letter, it is mine."

Crossjay sprang away and plunged into the arms of Sir Willoughby.

"One has to catch the fellow like a football," exclaimed the injured gentleman, doubled across the boy and holding him fast, that he might have an object to trifle with, to give

himself countenance: he needed it. “Clara, you have not been exposed to the weather?”

“Hardly at all.”

“I rejoice. You found shelter?”

“Yes.”

“In one of the cottages?”

“Not in a cottage; but I was perfectly sheltered. Colonel De Craye passed a fly before he met me . . .”

Page 2835

“Flitch again!” ejaculated the colonel.

“Yes, you have luck, you have luck,” Willoughby addressed him, still clutching Crossjay and treating his tugs to get loose as an invitation to caresses. But the foil barely concealed his livid perturbation.

“Stay by me, sir,” he said at last sharply to Crossjay, and Clara touched the boy’s shoulder in admonishment of him.

She turned to the colonel as they stepped into the hall: “I have not thanked you, Colonel De Craye.” She dropped her voice to its lowest: “A letter in my handwriting in the laboratory.”

Crossjay cried aloud with pain.

“I have you!” Willoughby rallied him with a laugh not unlike the squeak of his victim.

“You squeeze awfully hard, sir.”

“Why, you milksop!”

“Am I! But I want to get a book.”

“Where is the book?”

“In the laboratory.”

Colonel De Craye, sauntering by the laboratory door, sung out: “I’ll fetch you your book. What is it? *Early navigators*? *Infant hymns*? I think my cigar-case is in here.”

“Barclay speaks of a letter for me,” Willoughby said to Clara, “marked to be delivered to me at noon!”

“In case of my not being back earlier; it was written to avert anxiety,” she replied.

“You are very good.”

“Oh, good! Call me anything but good. Here are the ladies. Dear ladies!” Clara swam to meet them as they issued from a morning-room into the hall, and interjections reigned for a couple of minutes.

Willoughby relinquished his grasp of Crossjay, who darted instantaneously at an angle to the laboratory, whither he followed, and he encountered De Craye coming out, but passed him in silence.

Crossjay was rangeing and peering all over the room. Willoughby went to his desk and the battery-table and the mantelpiece. He found no letter. Barclay had undoubtedly informed him that she had left a letter for him in the laboratory, by order of her mistress after breakfast.

He hurried out and ran upstairs in time to see De Craye and Barclay breaking a conference.

He beckoned to her. The maid lengthened her upper lip and beat her dress down smooth: signs of the apprehension of a crisis and of the getting ready for action.

“My mistress’s bell has just rung, Sir Willoughby.”

“You had a letter for me.”

“I said . . .”

“You said when I met you at the foot of the stairs that you had left a letter for me in the laboratory.”

“It is lying on my mistress’s toilet-table.”

“Get it.”

Barclay swept round with another of her demure grimaces. It was apparently necessary with her that she should talk to herself in this public manner.

Willoughby waited for her; but there was no reappearance of the maid.

Page 2836

Struck by the ridicule of his posture of expectation, and of his whole behaviour, he went to his bedroom suite, shut himself in, and paced the chambers, amazed at the creature he had become. Agitated like the commonest of wretches, destitute of self-control, not able to preserve a decent mask, be, accustomed to inflict these emotions and tremours upon others, was at once the puppet and dupe of an intriguing girl. His very stature seemed lessened. The glass did not say so, but the shrunken heart within him did, and wailfully too. Her compunction—'Call me anything but good'—coming after her return to the Hall beside De Craye, and after the visible passage of a secret between them in his presence, was a confession: it blew at him with the fury of a furnace-blast in his face. Egoist agony wrung the outcry from him that dupery is a more blessed condition. He desired to be deceived.

He could desire such a thing only in a temporary transport; for above all he desired that no one should know of his being deceived; and were he a dupe the deceiver would know it, and her accomplice would know it, and the world would soon know of it: that world against whose tongue he stood defenceless. Within the shadow of his presence he compressed opinion, as a strong frost binds the springs of earth, but beyond it his shivering sensitiveness ran about in dread of a stripping in a wintry atmosphere. This was the ground of his hatred of the world: it was an appalling fear on behalf of his naked eidolon, the tender infant Self swaddled in his name before the world, for which he felt as the most highly civilized of men alone can feel, and which it was impossible for him to stretch out hands to protect. There the poor little loveable creature ran for any mouth to blow on; and frostnipped and bruised, it cried to him, and he was of no avail! Must we not detest a world that so treats us? We loathe it the more, by the measure of our contempt for them, when we have made the people within the shadow-circle of our person slavish.

And he had been once a young prince in popularity: the world had been his possession. Clara's treatment of him was a robbery of land and subjects. His grander dream had been a marriage with a lady of so glowing a fame for beauty and attachment to her lord that the world perforce must take her for witness to merits which would silence detraction and almost, not quite (it was undesireable), extinguish envy. But for the nature of women his dream would have been realized. He could not bring himself to denounce Fortune. It had cost him a grievous pang to tell Horace De Craye he was lucky; he had been educated in the belief that Fortune specially prized and cherished little Willoughby: hence of necessity his maledictions fell upon women, or he would have forfeited the last blanket of a dream warm as poets revel in.

Page 2837

But if Clara deceived him, he inspired her with timidity. There was matter in that to make him wish to be deceived. She had not looked him much in the face: she had not crossed his eyes: she had looked deliberately downward, keeping her head up, to preserve an exterior pride. The attitude had its bewitchingness: the girl's physical pride of stature scorning to bend under a load of conscious guilt, had a certain black-angel beauty for which he felt a hugging hatred: and according to his policy when these fits of amorous meditation seized him, he burst from the present one in the mood of his more favourable conception of Clara, and sought her out.

The quality of the mood of hugging hatred is, that if you are disallowed the hug, you do not hate the fiercer.

Contrariwise the prescription of a decorous distance of two feet ten inches, which is by measurement the delimitation exacted of a rightly respectful deportment, has this miraculous effect on the great creature man, or often it has: that his peculiar hatred returns to the reluctant admiration begetting it, and his passion for the hug falls prostrate as one of the Faithful before the shrine; he is reduced to worship by fasting.

(For these mysteries, consult the sublime chapter in the *great book*, the Seventy-first on *love*, wherein nothing is written, but the Reader receives a Lanthorn, a Powder-cask and a Pick-axe, and therewith pursues his yellow-dusking path across the rubble of preceding excavators in the solitary quarry: a yet more instructive passage than the overscrawled Seventieth, or French Section, whence the chapter opens, and where hitherto the polite world has halted.)

The hurry of the hero is on us, we have no time to spare for mining works: he hurried to catch her alone, to wreak his tortures on her in a bitter semblance of bodily worship, and satiated, then comfortably to spurn. He found her protected by Barclay on the stairs.

"That letter for me?" he said.

"I think I told you, Willoughby, there was a letter I left with Barclay to reassure you in case of my not returning early," said Clara. "It was unnecessary for her to deliver it."

"Indeed? But any letter, any writing of yours, and from you to me! You have it still?"

"No, I have destroyed it."

"That was wrong."

"It could not have given you pleasure."

"My dear Clara, one line from you!"

"There were but three."

Barclay stood sucking her lips. A maid in the secrets of her mistress is a purchaseable maid, for if she will take a bribe with her right hand she will with her left; all that has to be calculated is the nature and amount of the bribe: such was the speculation indulged by Sir Willoughby, and he shrank from the thought and declined to know more than that he was on a volcanic hillside where a thin crust quaked over lava. This was a new condition with him, representing Clara's gain in their combat. Clara did not fear his questioning so much as he feared her candour.

Page 2838

Mutually timid, they were of course formally polite, and no plain speaking could have told one another more distinctly that each was defensive. Clara stood pledged to the fib; packed, scaled and posted; and he had only to ask to have it, supposing that he asked with a voice not exactly peremptory.

She said in her heart, “It is your fault: you are relentless and you would ruin Crossjay to punish him for devoting himself to me, like the poor thoughtless boy he is! and so I am bound in honour to do my utmost for him.”

The reciprocal devotedness, moreover, served two purposes: it preserved her from brooding on the humiliation of her lame flight, and flutter back, and it quieted her mind in regard to the precipitate intimacy of her relations with Colonel De Craye. Willoughby’s boast of his implacable character was to blame. She was at war with him, and she was compelled to put the case in that light. Crossjay must be shielded from one who could not spare an offender, so Colonel De Craye quite naturally was called on for his help, and the colonel’s dexterous aid appeared to her more admirable than alarming.

Nevertheless, she would not have answered a direct question falsely. She was for the fib, but not the lie; at a word she could be disdainful of subterfuges. Her look said that. Willoughby perceived it. She had written him a letter of three lines: “There were but three”: and she had destroyed the letter. Something perchance was repented by her? Then she had done him an injury! Between his wrath at the suspicion of an injury, and the prudence enjoined by his abject coveting of her, he consented to be fooled for the sake of vengeance, and something besides.

“Well! here you are, safe; I have you!” said he, with courtly exultation: “and that is better than your handwriting. I have been all over the country after you.”

“Why did you? We are not in a barbarous land,” said Clara.

“Crossjay talks of your visiting a sick child, my love:—you have changed your dress?”

“You see.”

“The boy declared you were going to that farm of Hoppner’s, and some cottage. I met at my gates a tramping vagabond who swore to seeing you and the boy in a totally contrary direction.”

“Did you give him money?”

“I fancy so.”

“Then he was paid for having seen me.”

Willoughby tossed his head: it might be as she suggested; beggars are liars.

“But who sheltered you, my dear Clara? You had not been heard of at Hoppner’s.”

“The people have been indemnified for their pains. To pay them more would be to spoil them. You disperse money too liberally. There was no fever in the place. Who could have anticipated such a downpour! I want to consult Miss Dale on the important theme of a dress I think of wearing at Mrs Mountstuart’s to-night.”

“Do. She is unerring.”

“She has excellent taste.”

Page 2839

“She dresses very simply herself.”

“But it becomes her. She is one of the few women whom I feel I could not improve with a touch.”

“She has judgement.”

He reflected and repeated his encomium.

The shadow of a dimple in Clara’s cheek awakened him to the idea that she had struck him somewhere: and certainly he would never again be able to put up the fiction of her jealousy of Laetitia. What, then, could be this girl’s motive for praying to be released? The interrogation humbled him: he fled from the answer.

Willoughby went in search of De Craye. That sprightly intriguer had no intention to let himself be caught solus. He was undiscoverable until the assembly sounded, when Clara dropped a public word or two, and he spoke in perfect harmony with her. After that, he gave his company to Willoughby for an hour at billiards, and was well beaten.

The announcement of a visit of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson took the gentlemen to the drawing-room, rather suspecting that something stood in the way of her dinner-party. As it happened, she was lamenting only the loss of one of the jewels of the party: to wit, the great Professor Crooklyn, invited to meet Dr. Middleton at her table; and she related how she had driven to the station by appointment, the professor being notoriously a bother-headed traveller: as was shown by the fact that he had missed his train in town, for he had not arrived; nothing had been seen of him. She cited Vernon Whitford for her authority that the train had been inspected, and the platform scoured to find the professor.

“And so,” said she, “I drove home your Green Man to dry him; he was wet through and chattering; the man was exactly like a skeleton wrapped in a sponge, and if he escapes a cold he must be as invulnerable as he boasts himself. These athletes are terrible boasters.”

“They climb their Alps to crow,” said Clara, excited by her apprehension that Mrs. Mountstuart would speak of having seen the colonel near the station.

There was a laugh, and Colonel De Craye laughed loudly as it flashed through him that a quick-witted impressionable girl like Miss Middleton must, before his arrival at the Hall, have speculated on such obdurate clay as Vernon Whitford was, with humourous despair at his uselessness to her. Glancing round, he saw Vernon standing fixed in a stare at the young lady.

“You heard that, Whitford?” he said, and Clara’s face betokening an extremer contrition than he thought was demanded, the colonel rallied the Alpine climber for striving to be

the tallest of them—Signor Excelsior!—and described these conquerors of mountains pancaked on the rocks in desperate embraces, bleached here, burned there, barked all over, all to be able to say they had been up “so high”—had conquered another mountain! He was extravagantly funny and self-satisfied: a conqueror of the sex having such different rewards of enterprise.

Page 2840

Vernon recovered in time to accept the absurdities heaped on him.

“Climbing peaks won’t compare with hunting a wriggler,” said he.

His allusion to the incessant pursuit of young Crossjay to pin him to lessons was appreciated.

Clara felt the thread of the look he cast from herself to Colonel De Craye. She was helpless, if he chose to misjudge her. Colonel De Craye did not!

Crossjay had the misfortune to enter the drawing-room while Mrs. Mountstuart was compassionating Vernon for his ducking in pursuit of the wriggler; which De Craye likened to “going through the river after his eel:” and immediately there was a cross-questioning of the boy between De Craye and Willoughby on the subject of his latest truancy, each gentleman trying to run him down in a palpable fib. They were succeeding brilliantly when Vernon put a stop to it by marching him off to hard labour. Mrs. Mountstuart was led away to inspect the beautiful porcelain service, the present of Lady Busshe. “Porcelain again!” she said to Willoughby, and would have signalled to the “dainty rogue” to come with them, had not Clara been leaning over to Laetitia, talking to her in an attitude too graceful to be disturbed. She called his attention to it, slightly wondering at his impatience. She departed to meet an afternoon train on the chance that it would land the professor. “But tell Dr. Middleton,” said she, “I fear I shall have no one worthy of him! And,” she added to Willoughby, as she walked out to her carriage, “I shall expect you to do the great-gunnery talk at table.”

“Miss Dale keeps it up with him best,” said Willoughby.

“She does everything best! But my dinner-table is involved, and I cannot count on a young woman to talk across it. I would hire a lion of a menagerie, if one were handy, rather than have a famous scholar at my table, unsupported by another famous scholar. Doctor Middleton would ride down a duke when the wine is in him. He will terrify my poor flock. The truth is, we can’t leaven him: I foresee undigested lumps of conversation, unless you devote yourself.”

“I will devote myself,” said Willoughby.

“I can calculate on Colonel De Craye and our porcelain beauty for any quantity of sparkles, if you promise that. They play well together. You are not to be one of the gods to-night, but a kind of Jupiter’s cup-bearer;—Juno’s, if you like; and Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer, and all your admirers shall know subsequently what you have done. You see my alarm. I certainly did not rank Professor Crooklyn among the possibly faithless, or I never would have ventured on Doctor Middleton at my table. My dinner-parties have hitherto been all successes. Naturally I feel the greater anxiety about this one. For a single failure is all the more conspicuous. The exception is everlastingly

cited! It is not so much what people say, but my own sentiments. I hate to fail. However, if you are true, we may do."

Page 2841

“Whenever the great gun goes off I will fall on my face, madam!”

“Something of that sort,” said the dame, smiling, and leaving him to reflect on the egoism of women. For the sake of her dinner-party he was to be a cipher in attendance on Dr. Middleton, and Clara and De Craye were to be encouraged in sparkling together! And it happened that he particularly wished to shine. The admiration of his county made him believe he had a flavour in general society that was not yet distinguished by his bride, and he was to relinquish his opportunity in order to please Mrs. Mountstuart! Had she been in the pay of his rival, she could not have stipulated for more.

He remembered young Crossjay’s instant quietude, after struggling in his grasp, when Clara laid her hand on the boy: and from that infinitesimal circumstance he deduced the boy’s perception of a differing between himself and his bride, and a transfer of Crossjay’s allegiance from him to her. She shone; she had the gift of female beauty; the boy was attracted to it. That boy must be made to feel his treason. But the point of the cogitation was, that similarly were Clara to see her affianced shining, as shine he could when lighted up by admirers, there was the probability that the sensation of her littleness would animate her to take aim at him once more. And then was the time for her chastisement.

A visit to Dr. Middleton in the library satisfied him that she had not been renewing her entreaties to leave Patterne. No, the miserable coquette had now her pastime, and was content to stay. Deceit was in the air: he heard the sound of the shuttle of deceit without seeing it; but, on the whole, mindful of what he had dreaded during the hours of her absence, he was rather flattered, witheringly flattered. What was it that he had dreaded? Nothing less than news of her running away. Indeed a silly fancy, a lover’s fancy! yet it had led him so far as to suspect, after parting with De Craye in the rain, that his friend and his bride were in collusion, and that he should not see them again. He had actually shouted on the rainy road the theatric call “Fooled!” one of the stage-cries which are cries of nature! particularly the cry of nature with men who have driven other men to the cry.

Constantia Durham had taught him to believe women capable of explosions of treason at half a minute’s notice. And strangely, to prove that women are all of a pack, she had worn exactly the same placidity of countenance just before she fled, as Clara yesterday and to-day; no nervousness, no flushes, no twitches of the brows, but smoothness, ease of manner—an elegant sisterliness, one might almost say: as if the creature had found a midway and borderline to walk on between cruelty and kindness, and between repulsion and attraction; so that up to the verge of her breath she did forcefully attract, repelling at one foot’s length with her armour of chill serenity. Not with any disdain, with no passion:

Page 2842

such a line as she herself pursued she indicated to him on a neighbouring parallel. The passion in her was like a place of waves evaporated to a crust of salt. Clara's resemblance to Constantia in this instance was ominous. For him whose tragic privilege it had been to fold each of them in his arms, and weigh on their eyelids, and see the dissolving mist-deeps in their eyes, it was horrible. Once more the comparison overcame him. Constantia he could condemn for revealing too much to his manly sight: she had met him almost half-way: well, that was complimentary and sanguine: but her frankness was a baldness often rendering it doubtful which of the two, lady or gentleman, was the object of the chase—an extreme perplexity to his manly soul. Now Clara's inner spirit was shyer, shy as a doe down those rose-tinged abysses; she allured both the lover and the hunter; forests of heavenliness were in her flitting eyes. Here the difference of these fair women made his present fate an intolerable anguish. For if Constantia was like certain of the ladies whom he had rendered unhappy, triumphed over, as it is queerly called, Clara was not. Her individuality as a woman was a thing he had to bow to. It was impossible to roll her up in the sex and bestow a kick on the travelling bundle. Hence he loved her, though she hurt him. Hence his wretchedness, and but for the hearty sincerity of his faith in the Self he loved likewise and more, he would have been hangdog abject.

As for De Craye, Willoughby recollected his own exploits too proudly to put his trust in a man. That fatal conjunction of temper and policy had utterly thrown him off his guard, or he would not have trusted the fellow even in the first hour of his acquaintance with Clara. But he had wished her to be amused while he wove his plans to retain her at the Hall:—partly imagining that she would weary of his neglect: vile delusion! In truth he should have given festivities, he should have been the sun of a circle, and have revealed himself to her in his more dazzling form. He went near to calling himself foolish after the tremendous reverberation of "Fooled!" had ceased to shake him.

How behave? It slapped the poor gentleman's pride in the face to ask. A private talk with her would rouse her to renew her supplications. He saw them flickering behind the girl's transparent calmness. That calmness really drew its dead ivory hue from the suppression of them: something as much he guessed; and he was not sure either of his temper or his policy if he should hear her repeat her profane request.

An impulse to address himself to Vernon and discourse with him jocularly on the childish whim of a young lady, moved perhaps by some whiff of jealousy, to shun the yoke, was checked. He had always taken so superior a pose with Vernon that he could not abandon it for a moment: on such a subject too! Besides, Vernon was one of your men who entertain the ideas about women of fellows that have never conquered

Page 2843

one: or only one, we will say in his case, knowing his secret history; and that one no flag to boast of. Densely ignorant of the sex, his nincompoopish idealizations, at other times preposterous, would now be annoying. He would probably presume on Clara's inconceivable lapse of dignity to read his master a lecture: he was quite equal to a philippic upon woman's rights. This man had not been afraid to say that he talked common sense to women. He was an example of the consequence!

Another result was that Vernon did not talk sense to men. Willoughby's wrath at Clara's exposure of him to his cousin dismissed the proposal of a colloquy so likely to sting his temper, and so certain to diminish his loftiness. Unwilling to speak to anybody, he was isolated, yet consciously begirt by the mysterious action going on all over the house, from Clara and De Craye to Laetitia and young Crossjay, down to Barclay the maid. His blind sensitiveness felt as we may suppose a spider to feel when plucked from his own web and set in the centre of another's. Laetitia looked her share in the mystery. A burden was on her eyelashes. How she could have come to any suspicion of the circumstances, he was unable to imagine. Her intense personal sympathy, it might be; he thought so with some gentle pity for her—of the paternal pat-back order of pity. She adored him, by decree of Venus; and the Goddess had not decreed that he should find consolation in adoring her. Nor could the temptings of prudent counsel in his head induce him to run the risk of such a total turnover as the incurring of Laetitia's pity of himself by confiding in her. He checked that impulse also, and more sovereignly. For him to be pitied by Laetitia seemed an upsetting of the scheme of Providence. Providence, otherwise the discriminating dispensation of the good things of life, had made him the beacon, her the bird: she was really the last person to whom he could unbosom. The idea of his being in a position that suggested his doing so, thrilled him with fits of rage; and it appalled him. There appeared to be another Power. The same which had humiliated him once was menacing him anew. For it could not be Providence, whose favourite he had ever been. We must have a couple of Powers to account for discomfort when Egoism is the kernel of our religion. Benevolence had singled him for uncommon benefits: malignancy was at work to rob him of them. And you think well of the world, do you!

Of necessity he associated Clara with the darker Power pointing the knife at the quick of his pride. Still, he would have raised her weeping: he would have stanched her wounds bleeding: he had an infinite thirst for her misery, that he might ease his heart of its charitable love. Or let her commit herself, and be cast off. Only she must commit herself glaringly, and be cast off by the world as well. Contemplating her in the form of a discarded weed, he had a catch of the breath: she was fair. He implored his Power that Horace De Craye might not be the man! Why any man? An illness, fever, fire, runaway horses, personal disfigurement, a laming, were sufficient. And then a formal and noble offer on his part to keep to the engagement with the unhappy wreck: yes, and to lead the limping thing to the altar, if she insisted. His imagination conceived it, and the world's applause besides.

Page 2844

Nausea, together with a sense of duty to his line, extinguished that loathsome prospect of a mate, though without obscuring his chivalrous devotion to his gentleman's word of honour, which remained in his mind to compliment him permanently.

On the whole, he could reasonably hope to subdue her to admiration. He drank a glass of champagne at his dressing; an unaccustomed act, but, as he remarked casually to his man Pollington, for whom the rest of the bottle was left, he had taken no horse-exercise that day.

Having to speak to Vernon on business, he went to the schoolroom, where he discovered Clara, beautiful in full evening attire, with her arm on young Crossjay's shoulder, and heard that the hard task-master had abjured Mrs. Mountstuart's party, and had already excused himself, intending to keep Crossjay to the grindstone. Willoughby was for the boy, as usual, and more sparklingly than usual. Clara looked at him in some surprise. He rallied Vernon with great zest, quite silencing him when he said: "I bear witness that the fellow was here at his regular hour for lessons, and were you?" He laid his hand on Crossjay, touching Clara's.

"You will remember what I told you, Crossjay," said she, rising from the seat gracefully to escape the touch. "It is my command."

Crossjay frowned and puffed.

"But only if I'm questioned," he said.

"Certainly," she replied.

"Then I question the rascal," said Willoughby, causing a start. "What, sir, is your opinion of Miss Middleton in her robe of state this evening?"

"Now, the truth, Crossjay!" Clara held up a finger; and the boy could see she was playing at archness, but for Willoughby it was earnest. "The truth is not likely to offend you or me either," he murmured to her.

"I wish him never, never, on any excuse, to speak anything else."

"I always did think her a Beauty," Crossjay growled. He hated the having to say it.

"There!" exclaimed Sir Willoughby, and bent, extending an arm to her. "You have not suffered from the truth, my Clara!"

Her answer was: "I was thinking how he might suffer if he were taught to tell the reverse."

"Oh! for a fair lady!"

“That is the worst of teaching, Willoughby.”

“We’ll leave it to the fellow’s instinct; he has our blood in him. I could convince you, though, if I might cite circumstances. Yes! But yes! And yes again! The entire truth cannot invariably be told. I venture to say it should not.”

“You would pardon it for the ’fair lady’?”

“Applaud, my love.”

He squeezed the hand within his arm, contemplating her.

She was arrayed in a voluminous robe of pale blue silk vapourous with trimmings of light gauze of the same hue, gaze de Chambery, matching her fair hair and dear skin for the complete overthrow of less inflammable men than Willoughby.

Page 2845

“Clara!” sighed be.

“If so, it would really be generous,” she said, “though the teaching h bad.”

“I fancy I can be generous.”

“Do we ever know?”

He turned his head to Vernon, issuing brief succinct instructions for letters to be written, and drew her into the hall, saying: “Know? There are people who do not know themselves and as they are the majority they manufacture the axioms. And it is assumed that we have to swallow them. I may observe that I think I know. I decline to be engulphed in those majorities. ‘Among them, but not of them.’ I know this, that my aim in life is to be generous.”

“Is it not an impulse or disposition rather than an aim?”

“So much I know,” pursued Willoughby, refusing to be tripped. But she rang discordantly in his ear. His “fancy that he could be generous” and his “aim at being generous” had met with no response. “I have given proofs,” he said, briefly, to drop a subject upon which he was not permitted to dilate; and he murmured, “People acquainted with me . . . !” She was asked if she expected him to boast of generous deeds. “From childhood!” she heard him mutter; and she said to herself, “Release me, and you shall be everything!”

The unhappy gentleman ached as he talked: for with men and with hosts of women to whom he was indifferent, never did he converse in this shambling, third-rate, sheepish manner, devoid of all highness of tone and the proper precision of an authority. He was unable to fathom the cause of it, but Clara imposed it on him, and only in anger could he throw it off. The temptation to an outburst that would flatter him with the sound of his authoritative voice had to be resisted on a night when he must be composed if he intended to shine, so he merely mentioned Lady Busshe’s present, to gratify spleen by preparing the ground for dissension, and prudently acquiesced in her anticipated slipperiness. She would rather not look at it now, she said.

“Not now; very well,” said he.

His immediate deference made her regretful. “There is hardly time, Willoughby.”

“My dear, we shall have to express our thanks to her.”

“I cannot.”

His arm contracted sharply. He was obliged to be silent.

Dr Middleton, Laetitia, and the ladies Eleanor and Isabel joining them in the hall, found two figures linked together in a shadowy indication of halves that have fallen apart and hang on the last thread of junction. Willoughby retained her hand on his arm; he held to it as the symbol of their alliance, and oppressed the girl's nerves by contact, with a frame labouring for breath. De Craye looked on them from overhead. The carriages were at the door, and Willoughby said, "Where's Horace? I suppose he's taking a final shot at his Book of Anecdotes and neat collection of Irishisms."

"No," replied the colonel, descending. "That's a spring works of itself and has discovered the secret of continuous motion, more's the pity!—unless you'll be pleased to make it of use to Science."

Page 2846

He gave a laugh of good-humour.

“Your laughter, Horace, is a capital comment on your wit.”

Willoughby said it with the air of one who has flicked a whip.

“’Tis a genial advertisement of a vacancy,” said De Craye.

“Precisely: three parts auctioneer to one for the property.”

“Oh, if you have a musical quack, score it a point in his favour, Willoughby, though you don’t swallow his drug.”

“If he means to be musical, let him keep time.”

“Am I late?” said De Craye to the ladies, proving himself an adept in the art of being gracefully vanquished, and so winning tender hearts.

Willoughby had refreshed himself. At the back of his mind there was a suspicion that his adversary would not have yielded so flatly without an assurance of practically triumphing, secretly getting the better of him; and it filled him with venom for a further bout at the next opportunity: but as he had been sarcastic and mordant, he had shown Clara what he could do in a way of speaking different from the lamentable cooing stuff, gasps and feeble protestations to which, he knew not how, she reduced him. Sharing the opinion of his race, that blunt personalities, or the pugilistic form, administered directly on the salient features, are exhibitions of mastery in such encounters, he felt strong and solid, eager for the successes of the evening. De Craye was in the first carriage as escort to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. Willoughby, with Clara, Laetitia, and Dr. Middleton, followed, all silent, for the Rev. Doctor was ostensibly pondering; and Willoughby was damped a little when he unlocked his mouth to say:

“And yet I have not observed that Colonel de Craye is anything of a Celtiberian Egnatius meriting fustigation for an untimely display of well-whitened teeth, sir: ’quicquid est, ubicunque est, quodcunque agit, renidet:’:—ha? a morbus neither charming nor urbane to the general eye, however consolatory to the actor. But this gentleman does not offend so, or I am so strangely prepossessed in his favour as to be an incompetent witness.”

Dr Middleton’s persistent ha? eh? upon an honest frown of inquiry plucked an answer out of Willoughby that was meant to be humourously scornful, and soon became apologetic under the Doctor’s interrogatively grasping gaze.

“These Irishmen,” Willoughby said, “will play the professional jester as if it were an office they were born to. We must play critic now and then, otherwise we should have them deluging us with their Joe Millerisms.”

“With their O’Millerisms you would say, perhaps?”

Page 2847

Willoughby did his duty to the joke, but the Rev. Doctor, though he wore the paternal smile of a man that has begotten hilarity, was not perfectly propitiated, and pursued: “Nor to my apprehension is ’the man’s laugh the comment on his wit’ unchallengeably new: instances of cousinship germane to the phrase will recur to you. But it has to be noted that it was a phrase of assault; it was ostentatiously battery; and I would venture to remind you, friend, that among the elect, considering that it is as fatally facile to spring the laugh upon a man as to deprive him of his life, considering that we have only to condescend to the weapon, and that the more popular necessarily the more murderous that weapon is,—among the elect, to which it is your distinction to aspire to belong, the rule holds to abstain from any employment of the obvious, the percoct, and likewise, for your own sake, from the epitonic, the overstrained; for if the former, by readily assimilating with the understandings of your audience, are empowered to commit assassination on your victim, the latter come under the charge of unseemliness, inasmuch as they are a description of public suicide. Assuming, then, manslaughter to be your pastime, and hari-kari not to be your bent, the phrase, to escape criminality, must rise in you as you would have it fall on him, ex improviso. Am I right?”

“I am in the habit of thinking it impossible, sir, that you can be in error,” said Willoughby.

Dr Middleton left it the more emphatic by saying nothing further.

Both his daughter and Miss Dale, who had disapproved the waspish snap at Colonel De Craye, were in wonderment of the art of speech which could so soothingly inform a gentleman that his behaviour had not been gentlemanly.

Willoughby was damped by what he comprehended of it for a few minutes. In proportion as he realized an evening with his ancient admirers he was restored, and he began to marvel greatly at his folly in not giving banquets and Balls, instead of making a solitude about himself and his bride. For solitude, thought he, is good for the man, the man being a creature consumed by passion; woman’s love, on the contrary, will only be nourished by the reflex light she catches of you in the eyes of others, she having no passion of her own, but simply an instinct driving her to attach herself to whatsoever is most largely admired, most shining. So thinking, he determined to change his course of conduct, and he was happier. In the first gush of our wisdom drawn directly from experience there is a mental intoxication that cancels the old world and establishes a new one, not allowing us to ask whether it is too late.

CHAPTER XXX

TREATING OF THE DINNER-PARTY AT MRS. MOUNTSTUART JENKINSON’S

Page 2848

Vernon and young Crossjay had tolerably steady work together for a couple of hours, varied by the arrival of a plate of meat on a tray for the master, and some interrogations put to him from time to time by the boy in reference to Miss Middleton. Crossjay made the discovery that if he abstained from alluding to Miss Middleton's beauty he might water his dusty path with her name nearly as much as he liked. Mention of her beauty incurred a reprimand. On the first occasion his master was wistful. "Isn't she glorious!" Crossjay fancied he had started a sovereign receipt for blessed deviations. He tried it again, but paedagogue-thunder broke over his head.

"Yes, only I can't understand what she means, Mr. Whitford," he excused himself "First I was not to tell; I know I wasn't, because she said so; she quite as good as said so. Her last words were: 'Mind, Crossjay, you know nothing about me', when I stuck to that beast of a tramp, who's a 'walking moral,' and gets money out of people by snuffling it."

"Attend to your lesson, or you'll be one," said Vernon.

"Yes, but, Mr. Whitford, now I am to tell. I'm to answer straight out to every question."

"Miss Middleton is anxious that you should be truthful."

"Yes; but in the morning she told me not to tell."

"She was in a hurry. She has it on her conscience that you may have misunderstood her, and she wishes you never to be guilty of an untruth, least of all on her account."

Crossjay committed an unspoken resolution to the air in a violent sigh: "Ah!" and said: "If I were sure!"

"Do as she bids you, my boy."

"But I don't know what it is she wants."

"Hold to her last words to you."

"So I do. If she told me to run till I dropped, on I'd go."

"She told you to study your lessons; do that."

Crossjay buckled to his book, invigorated by an imagination of his liege lady on the page.

After a studious interval, until the impression of his lady had subsided, he resumed: "She's so funny. She's just like a girl, and then she's a lady, too. She's my idea of a princess. And Colonel De Craye! Wasn't he taught dancing! When he says something funny he ducks and seems to be setting to his partner. I should like to be as clever as

her father. That is a clever man. I dare say Colonel De Craye will dance with her tonight. I wish I was there."

"It's a dinner-party, not a dance," Vernon forced himself to say, to dispel that ugly vision.

"Isn't it, sir? I thought they danced after dinner-parties, Mr. Whitford, have you ever seen her run?"

Vernon pointed him to his task.

They were silent for a lengthened period.

"But does Miss Middleton mean me to speak out if Sir Willoughby asks me?" said Crossjay.

"Certainly. You needn't make much of it. All's plain and simple."

Page 2849

“But I’m positive, Mr. Whitford, he wasn’t to hear of her going to the post-office with me before breakfast. And how did Colonel De Craye find her and bring her back, with that old Flitch? He’s a man and can go where he pleases, and I’d have found her, too, give me the chance. You know. I’m fond of Miss Dale, but she—I’m very fond of her—but you can’t think she’s a girl as well. And about Miss Dale, when she says a thing, there it is, clear. But Miss Middleton has a lot of meanings. Never mind; I go by what’s inside, and I’m pretty sure to please her.”

“Take your chin off your hand and your elbow off the book, and fix yourself,” said Vernon, wrestling with the seduction of Crossjay’s idolatry, for Miss Middleton’s appearance had been preternaturally sweet on her departure, and the next pleasure to seeing her was hearing of her from the lips of this passionate young poet.

“Remember that you please her by speaking truth,” Vernon added, and laid himself open to questions upon the truth, by which he learnt, with a perplexed sense of envy and sympathy, that the boy’s idea of truth strongly approximated to his conception of what should be agreeable to Miss Middleton.

He was lonely, bereft of the bard, when he had tucked Crossjay up in his bed and left him. Books he could not read; thoughts were disturbing. A seat in the library and a stupid stare helped to pass the hours, and but for the spot of sadness moving meditation in spite of his effort to stun himself, he would have borne a happy resemblance to an idiot in the sun. He had verily no command of his reason. She was too beautiful! Whatever she did was best. That was the refrain of the fountain-song in him; the burden being her whims, variations, inconsistencies, wiles; her tremblings between good and naughty, that might be stamped to noble or to terrible; her sincereness, her duplicity, her courage, cowardice, possibilities for heroism and for treachery. By dint of dwelling on the theme, he magnified the young lady to extraordinary stature. And he had sense enough to own that her character was yet liquid in the mould, and that she was a creature of only naturally youthful wildness provoked to freakishness by the ordeal of a situation shrewd as any that can happen to her sex in civilized life. But he was compelled to think of her extravagantly, and he leaned a little to the discrediting of her, because her actual image ummanned him and was unbearable; and to say at the end of it: “She is too beautiful! whatever she does is best,” smoothed away the wrong he did her. Had it been in his power he would have thought of her in the abstract—the stage contiguous to that which he adopted: but the attempt was luckless; the Stagyrite would have faded in it. What philosopher could have set down that face of sun and breeze and nymph in shadow as a point in a problem?

The library door was opened at midnight by Miss Dale. She dosed it quietly. “You are not working, Mr. Whitford? I fancied you would wish to hear of the evening. Professor Crooklyn arrived after all! Mrs. Mountstuart is bewildered: she says she expected you, and that you did not excuse yourself to her, and she cannot comprehend, et caetera.

That is to say, she chooses bewilderment to indulge in the exclamatory. She must be very much annoyed. The professor did come by the train she drove to meet!”

Page 2850

“I thought it probable,” said Vernon.

“He had to remain a couple of hours at the Railway Inn; no conveyance was to be found for him. He thinks he has caught a cold, and cannot stifle his fretfulness about it. He may be as learned as Doctor Middleton; he has not the same happy constitution. Nothing more unfortunate could have occurred; he spoilt the party. Mrs. Mountstuart tried petting him, which drew attention to him, and put us all in his key for several awkward minutes, more than once. She lost her head; she was unlike herself I may be presumptuous in criticizing her, but should not the president of a dinner-table treat it like a battlefield, and let the guest that sinks descend, and not allow the voice of a discordant, however illustrious, to rule it? Of course, it is when I see failures that I fancy I could manage so well: comparison is prudently reserved in the other cases. I am a daring critic, no doubt, because I know I shall never be tried by experiment. I have no ambition to be tried.”

She did not notice a smile of Vernon’s, and continued: “Mrs Mountstuart gave him the lead upon any subject he chose. I thought the professor never would have ceased talking of a young lady who had been at the inn before him drinking hot brandy and water with a gentleman!”

“How did he hear of that?” cried Vernon, roused by the malignity of the Fates.

“From the landlady, trying to comfort him. And a story of her lending shoes and stockings while those of the young lady were drying. He has the dreadful snappish humourous way of recounting which impresses it; the table took up the subject of this remarkable young lady, and whether she was a lady of the neighbourhood, and who she could be that went abroad on foot in heavy rain. It was painful to me; I knew enough to be sure of who she was.”

“Did she betray it?”

“No.”

“Did Willoughby look at her?”

“Without suspicion then.”

“Then?”

“Colonel De Craye was diverting us, and he was very amusing. Mrs. Mountstuart told him afterward that he ought to be paid salvage for saving the wreck of her party. Sir Willoughby was a little too cynical; he talked well; what he said was good, but it was not good-humoured; he has not the reckless indifference of Colonel De Craye to uttering nonsense that amusement may come of it. And in the drawing-room he lost such gaiety as he had. I was close to Mrs. Mountstuart when Professor Crooklyn approached her

and spoke in my hearing of that gentleman and that young lady. They were, you could see by his nods, Colonel De Craye and Miss Middleton."

"And she at once mentioned it to Willoughby?"

"Colonel De Craye gave her no chance, if she sought it. He courted her profusely. Behind his rattle he must have brains. It ran in all directions to entertain her and her circle."

"Willoughby knows nothing?"

"I cannot judge. He stood with Mrs. Mountstuart a minute as we were taking leave. She looked strange. I heard her say: 'The rogue!' He laughed. She lifted her shoulders. He scarcely opened his mouth on the way home."

Page 2851

“The thing must run its course,” Vernon said, with the philosophical air which is desperation rendered decorous. “Willoughby deserves it. A man of full growth ought to know that nothing on earth tempts Providence so much as the binding of a young woman against her will. Those two are mutually attracted: they’re both . . . They meet, and the mischief’s done: both are bright. He can persuade with a word. Another might discourse like an angel and it would be useless. I said everything I could think of, to no purpose. And so it is: there are those attractions!—just as, with her, Willoughby is the reverse, he repels. I’m in about the same predicament—or should be if she were plighted to me. That is, for the length of five minutes; about the space of time I should require for the formality of handing her back her freedom. How a sane man can imagine a girl like that . . . ! But if she has changed, she has changed! You can’t conciliate a withered affection. This detaining her, and tricking, and not listening, only increases her aversion; she learns the art in turn. Here she is, detained by fresh plots to keep Dr. Middleton at the Hall. That’s true, is it not?” He saw that it was. “No, she’s not to blame! She has told him her mind; he won’t listen. The question then is, whether she keeps to her word, or breaks it. It’s a dispute between a conventional idea of obligation and an injury to her nature. Which is the more dishonourable thing to do? Why, you and I see in a moment that her feelings guide her best. It’s one of the few cases in which nature may be consulted like an oracle.”

“Is she so sure of her nature?” said Miss Dale.

“You may doubt it; I do not. I am surprised at her coming back. De Craye is a man of the world, and advised it, I suppose. He—well, I never had the persuasive tongue, and my failing doesn’t count for much.”

“But the suddenness of the intimacy!”

“The disaster is rather famous ‘at first sight’. He came in a fortunate hour . . . for him. A pigmy’s a giant if he can manage to arrive in season. Did you not notice that there was danger, at their second or third glance? You counselled me to hang on here, where the amount of good I do in proportion to what I have to endure is microscopic.”

“It was against your wishes, I know,” said Laetitia, and when the words were out she feared that they were tentative. Her delicacy shrank from even seeming to sound him in relation to a situation so delicate as Miss Middleton’s.

The same sentiment guarded him from betraying himself, and he said: “Partly against. We both foresaw the possible—because, like most prophets, we knew a little more of circumstances enabling us to see the fatal. A pigmy would have served, but De Craye is a handsome, intelligent, pleasant fellow.”

“Sir Willoughby’s friend!”

“Well, in these affairs! A great deal must be charged on the goddess.”

Page 2852

“That is really Pagan fatalism!”

“Our modern word for it is Nature. Science condescends to speak of natural selection. Look at these! They are both graceful and winning and witty, bright to mind and eye, made for one another, as country people say. I can’t blame him. Besides, we don’t know that he’s guilty. We’re quite in the dark, except that we’re certain how it must end. If the chance should occur to you of giving Willoughby a word of counsel—it may—you might, without irritating him as my knowledge of his plight does, hint at your eyes being open. His insane dread of a detective world makes him artificially blind. As soon as he fancies himself seen, he sets to work spinning a web, and he discerns nothing else. It’s generally a clever kind of web; but if it’s a tangle to others it’s the same to him, and a veil as well. He is preparing the catastrophe, he forces the issue. Tell him of her extreme desire to depart. Treat her as mad, to soothe him. Otherwise one morning he will wake a second time . . . ! It is perfectly certain. And the second time it will be entirely his own fault. Inspire him with some philosophy.”

“I have none.”

“I if I thought so, I would say you have better. There are two kinds of philosophy, mine and yours. Mine comes of coldness, yours of devotion.”

“He is unlikely to choose me for his confidante.”

Vernon meditated. “One can never quite guess what he will do, from never knowing the heat of the centre in him which precipitates his actions: he has a great art of concealment. As to me, as you perceive, my views are too philosophical to let me be of use to any of them. I blame only the one who holds to the bond. The sooner I am gone!—in fact, I cannot stay on. So Dr. Middleton and the Professor did not strike fire together?”

“Doctor Middleton was ready, and pursued him, but Professor Crooklyn insisted on shivering. His line of blank verse, ’A Railway platform and a Railway inn!’ became pathetic in repetition. He must have suffered.”

“Somebody has to!”

“Why the innocent?”

“He arrives a propos. But remember that Fridolin sometimes contrives to escape and have the guilty scorched. The Professor would not have suffered if he had missed his train, as he appears to be in the habit of doing. Thus his unaccustomed good-fortune was the cause of his bad.”

“You saw him on the platform?”

“I am unacquainted with the professor. I had to get Mrs Mountstuart out of the way.”

“She says she described him to you. ’Complexion of a sweetbread, consistency of a quenelle, grey, and like a Saint without his dish behind the head.’”

“Her descriptions are strikingly accurate, but she forgot to sketch his back, and all that I saw was a narrow sloping back and a broad hat resting the brim on it. My report to her spoke of an old gentleman of dark complexion, as the only traveller on the platform. She has faith in the efficiency of her descriptive powers, and so she was willing to drive off immediately. The intention was a start to London. Colonel De Craye came up and effected in five minutes what I could not compass in thirty.”

Page 2853

“But you saw Colonel De Craye pass you?”

“My work was done; I should have been an intruder. Besides I was acting wet jacket with Mrs. Mountstuart to get her to drive off fast, or she might have jumped out in search of her Professor herself.”

“She says you were lean as a fork, with the wind whistling through the prongs.”

“You see how easy it is to deceive one who is an artist in phrases. Avoid them, Miss Dale; they dazzle the penetration of the composer. That is why people of ability like Mrs Mountstuart see so little; they are so bent on describing brilliantly. However, she is kind and charitable at heart. I have been considering to-night that, to cut this knot as it is now, Miss Middleton might do worse than speak straight out to Mrs. Mountstuart. No one else would have such influence with Willoughby. The simple fact of Mrs. Mountstuart’s knowing of it would be almost enough. But courage would be required for that. Good-night, Miss Dale.”

“Good-night, Mr. Whitford. You pardon me for disturbing you?”

Vernon pressed her hand reassuringly. He had but to look at her and review her history to think his cousin Willoughby punished by just retribution. Indeed, for any maltreatment of the dear boy Love by man or by woman, coming under your cognizance, you, if you be of common soundness, shall behold the retributive blow struck in your time.

Miss Dale retired thinking how like she and Vernon were to one another in the toneless condition they had achieved through sorrow. He succeeded in masking himself from her, owing to her awe of the circumstances. She reproached herself for not having the same devotion to the cold idea of duty as he had; and though it provoked inquiry, she would not stop to ask why he had left Miss Middleton a prey to the sparkling colonel. It seemed a proof of the philosophy he preached.

As she was passing by young Crossjay’s bedroom door a face appeared. Sir Willoughby slowly emerged and presented himself in his full length, beseeching her to banish alarm.

He said it in a hushed voice, with a face qualified to create sentiment.

“Are you tired? sleepy?” said he.

She protested that she was not: she intended to read for an hour.

He begged to have the hour dedicated to him. “I shall be relieved by conversing with a friend.”

No subterfuge crossed her mind; she thought his midnight visit to the boy's bedside a pretty feature in him; she was full of pity, too; she yielded to the strange request, feeling that it did not become "an old woman" to attach importance even to the public discovery of midnight interviews involving herself as one, and feeling also that she was being treated as an old friend in the form of a very old woman. Her mind was bent on arresting any recurrence to the project she had so frequently outlined in the tongue of innuendo, of which, because of her repeated tremblings under it, she thought him a master.

Page 2854

He conducted her along the corridor to the private sitting-room of the ladies Eleanor and Isabel.

“Deceit!” he said, while lighting the candles on the mantelpiece.

She was earnestly compassionate, and a word that could not relate to her personal destinies refreshed her by displacing her apprehensive antagonism and giving pity free play.

CHAPTER XXXI

SIR WILLOUGHBY ATTEMPTS AND ACHIEVES PATHOS

Both were seated. Apparently he would have preferred to watch her dark downcast eyelashes in silence under sanction of his air of abstract meditation and the melancholy superinducing it. Blood-colour was in her cheeks; the party had inspirited her features. Might it be that lively company, an absence of economical solicitudes, and a flourishing home were all she required to make her bloom again? The supposition was not hazardous in presence of her heightened complexion.

She raised her eyes. He could not meet her look without speaking.

“Can you forgive deceit?”

“It would be to boast of more charity than I know myself to possess, were I to say that I can, Sir Willoughby. I hope I am able to forgive. I cannot tell. I should like to say yes.”

“Could you live with the deceiver?”

“No.”

“No. I could have given that answer for you. No semblance of union should be maintained between the deceiver and ourselves. Laetitia!”

“Sir Willoughby?”

“Have I no right to your name?”

“If it pleases you to . . .”

“I speak as my thoughts run, and they did not know a Miss Dale so well as a dear Laetitia: my truest friend! You have talked with Clara Middleton?”

“We had a conversation.”

Her brevity affrighted him. He flew off in a cloud.

“Reverting to that question of deceivers: is it not your opinion that to pardon, to condone, is to corrupt society by passing off as pure what is false? Do we not,” he wore the smile of haggard playfulness of a convalescent child the first day back to its toys, “Laetitia, do we not impose a counterfeit on the currency?”

“Supposing it to be really deception.”

“Apart from my loathing of deception, of falseness in any shape, upon any grounds, I hold it an imperious duty to expose, punish, off with it. I take it to be one of the forms of noxiousness which a good citizen is bound to extirpate. I am not myself good citizen enough, I confess, for much more than passive abhorrence. I do not forgive: I am at heart serious and I cannot forgive:—there is no possible reconciliation, there can be only an ostensible truce, between the two hostile powers dividing this world.”

She glanced at him quickly.

“Good and evil!” he said.

Her face expressed a surprise relapsing on the heart.

He spelt the puckers of her forehead to mean that she feared he might be speaking unchristianly.

Page 2855

“You will find it so in all religions, my dear Laetitia: the Hindoo, the Persian, ours. It is universal; an experience of our humanity. Deceit and sincerity cannot live together. Truth must kill the lie, or the lie will kill truth. I do not forgive. All I say to the person is, go!”

“But that is right! that is generous!” exclaimed Laetitia, glad to approve him for the sake of escaping her critical soul, and relieved by the idea of Clara’s difficulty solved.

“Capable of generosity, perhaps,” he mused, aloud.

She wounded him by not supplying the expected enthusiastic asseveration of her belief in his general tendency to magnanimity.

He said, after a pause: “But the world is not likely to be impressed by anything not immediately gratifying it. People change, I find: as we increase in years we cease to be the heroes we were. I myself am insensible to change: I do not admit the charge. Except in this we will say: personal ambition. I have it no more. And what is it when we have it? Decidedly a confession of inferiority! That is, the desire to be distinguished is an acknowledgement of insufficiency. But I have still the craving for my dearest friends to think well of me. A weakness? Call it so. Not a dishonourable weakness!”

Laetitia racked her brain for the connection of his present speech with the preceding dialogue. She was baffled, from not knowing “the heat of the centre in him”, as Vernon opaquely phrased it in charity to the object of her worship.

“Well,” said he, unappeased, “and besides the passion to excel, I have changed somewhat in the heartiness of my thirst for the amusements incident to my station. I do not care to keep a stud—I was once tempted: nor hounds. And I can remember the day when I determined to have the best kennels and the best breed of horses in the kingdom. Puerile! What is distinction of that sort, or of any acquisition and accomplishment? We ask! one’s self is not the greater. To seek it, owns to our smallness, in real fact; and when it is attained, what then? My horses are good, they are admired, I challenge the county to surpass them: well? These are but my horses; the praise is of the animals, not of me. I decline to share in it. Yet I know men content to swallow the praise of their beasts and be semi-equine. The littleness of one’s fellows in the mob of life is a very strange experience! One may regret to have lost the simplicity of one’s forefathers, which could accept those and other distinctions with a cordial pleasure, not to say pride. As, for instance, I am, as it is called, a dead shot. ’Give your acclamations, gentlemen, to my ancestors, from whom I inherited a steady hand and quick sight.’ They do not touch me. Where I do not find myself—that I am essentially I—no applause can move me. To speak to you as I would speak to none, admiration—you know that in my early youth I swam in flattery—I had to swim to avoid

Page 2856

drowning!—admiration of my personal gifts has grown tasteless. Changed, therefore, inasmuch as there has been a growth of spirituality. We are all in submission to mortal laws, and so far I have indeed changed. I may add that it is unusual for country gentlemen to apply themselves to scientific researches. These are, however, in the spirit of the time. I apprehended that instinctively when at College. I forsook the classics for science. And thereby escaped the vice of domineering self-sufficiency peculiar to classical men, of which you had an amusing example in the carriage, on the way to Mrs. Mountstuart's this evening. Science is modest; slow, if you like; it deals with facts, and having mastered them, it masters men; of necessity, not with a stupid, loud-mouthed arrogance: words big and oddly garbed as the Pope's body-guard. Of course, one bows to the Infallible; we must, when his giant-mercenaries level bayonets."

Sir Willoughby offered Miss Dale half a minute that she might in gentle feminine fashion acquiesce in the implied reproof of Dr. Middleton's behaviour to him during the drive to Mrs. Mountstuart's. She did not.

Her heart was accusing Clara of having done it a wrong and a hurt. For while he talked he seemed to her to justify Clara's feelings and her conduct: and her own reawakened sensations of injury came to the surface a moment to look at him, affirming that they pardoned him, and pitied, but hardly wondered.

The heat of the centre in him had administered the comfort he wanted, though the conclusive accordant notes he loved on woman's lips, that subservient harmony of another instrument desired of musicians when they have done their solo-playing, came not to wind up the performance: not a single bar. She did not speak. Probably his Laetitia was overcome, as he had long known her to be when they conversed; nerve-subdued, unable to deploy her mental resources or her musical. Yet ordinarily she had command of the latter.—Was she too condoling? Did a reason exist for it? Had the impulsive and desperate girl spoken out to Laetitia to the fullest?—shameless daughter of a domineering sire that she was! Ghastlier inquiry (it struck the centre of him with a sounding ring), was Laetitia pitying him overmuch for worse than the pain of a little difference between lovers—for treason on the part of his bride? Did she know of a rival? know more than he?

When the centre of him was violently struck he was a genius in penetration. He guessed that she did know: and by this was he presently helped to achieve pathos.

"So my election was for Science," he continued; "and if it makes me, as I fear, a rara avis among country gentlemen, it unites me, puts me in the main, I may say, in the only current of progress—a word sufficiently despicable in their political jargon.—You enjoyed your evening at Mrs. Mountstuart's?"

"Very greatly."

“She brings her Professor to dine here the day after tomorrow. Does it astonish you? You started.”

Page 2857

“I did not hear the invitation.”

“It was arranged at the table: you and I were separated—cruelly, I told her: she declared that we see enough of one another, and that it was good for me that we should be separated; neither of which is true. I may not have known what is the best for me: I do know what is good. If in my younger days I egregiously erred, that, taken of itself alone, is, assuming me to have sense and feeling, the surer proof of present wisdom. I can testify in person that wisdom is pain. If pain is to add to wisdom, let me suffer! Do you approve of that, Laetitia?”

“It is well said.”

“It is felt. Those who themselves have suffered should know the benefit of the resolution.”

“One may have suffered so much as to wish only for peace.”

“True: but you! have you?”

“It would be for peace, if I prayed for any earthly gift.”

Sir Willoughby dropped a smile on her. “I mentioned the Pope’s parti-coloured body-guard just now. In my youth their singular attire impressed me. People tell me they have been re-uniformed: I am sorry. They remain one of my liveliest recollections of the Eternal City. They affected my sense of humour, always alert in me, as you are aware. We English have humour. It is the first thing struck in us when we land on the Continent: our risible faculties are generally active all through the tour. Humour, or the clash of sense with novel examples of the absurd, is our characteristic. I do not condescend to boisterous displays of it. I observe, and note the people’s comicalities for my correspondence. But you have read my letters—most of them, if not all?”

“Many of them.”

“I was with you then!—I was about to say—that Swiss-guard reminded me—you have not been in Italy. I have constantly regretted it. You are the very woman, you have the soul for Italy. I know no other of whom I could say it, with whom I should not feel that she was out of place, discordant with me. Italy and Laetitia! often have I joined you together. We shall see. I begin to have hopes. Here you have literally stagnated. Why, a dinner-party refreshes you! What would not travel do, and that heavenly climate! You are a reader of history and poetry. Well, poetry! I never yet saw the poetry that expressed the tenth part of what I feel in the presence of beauty and magnificence, and when I really meditate—profoundly. Call me a positive mind. I feel: only I feel too intensely for poetry. By the nature of it, poetry cannot be sincere. I will have sincerity. Whatever touches our emotions should be spontaneous, not a craft. I know you are in

favour of poetry. You would win me, if any one could. But history! there I am with you. Walking over ruins: at night: the arches of the solemn black amphitheatre pouring moonlight on us—the moonlight of Italy!”

“You would not laugh there, Sir Willoughby?” said Laetitia, rousing herself from a stupor of apprehensive amazement, to utter something and realize actual circumstances.

Page 2858

“Besides, you, I think, or I am mistaken in you”—he deviated from his projected speech —“you are not a victim of the sense of association and the ludicrous.”

“I can understand the influence of it: I have at least a conception of the humourous, but ridicule would not strike me in the Coliseum of Rome. I could not bear it, no, Sir Willoughby!”

She appeared to be taking him in very strong earnest, by thus petitioning him not to laugh in the Coliseum, and now he said: “Besides, you are one who could accommodate yourself to the society of the ladies, my aunts. Good women, Laetitia! I cannot imagine them de trop in Italy, or in a household. I have of course reason to be partial in my judgement.”

“They are excellent and most amiable ladies; I love them,” said Laetitia, fervently; the more strongly excited to fervour by her enlightenment as to his drift.

She read it that he designed to take her to Italy with the ladies: —after giving Miss Middleton her liberty; that was necessarily implied. And that was truly generous. In his boyhood he had been famous for his bountifulness in scattering silver and gold. Might he not have caused himself to be misperused in later life?

Clara had spoken to her of the visit and mission of the ladies to the library: and Laetitia daringly conceived herself to be on the certain track of his meaning, she being able to enjoy their society as she supposed him to consider that Miss Middleton did not, and would not either abroad or at home.

Sir Willoughby asked her: “You could travel with them?”

“Indeed I could!”

“Honestly?”

“As affirmatively as one may protest. Delightedly.”

“Agreed. It is an undertaking.” He put his hand out.

“Whether I be of the party or not! To Italy, Laetitia! It would give me pleasure to be with you, and it will, if I must be excluded, to think of you in Italy.”

His hand was out. She had to feign inattention or yield her own. She had not the effrontery to pretend not to see, and she yielded it. He pressed it, and whenever it shrunk a quarter inch to withdraw, he shook it up and down, as an instrument that had been lent him for due emphasis to his remarks. And very emphatic an amorous orator can make it upon a captive lady.

“I am unable to speak decisively on that or any subject. I am, I think you once quoted, ‘tossed like a weed on the ocean.’ Of myself I can speak: I cannot speak for a second person. I am infinitely harassed. If I could cry, ‘To Italy tomorrow!’ Ah! . . . Do not set me down for complaining. I know the lot of man. But, Laetitia, deceit! deceit! It is a bad taste in the mouth. It sickens us of humanity. I compare it to an earthquake: we lose all our reliance on the solidity of the world. It is a betrayal not simply of the person; it is a betrayal of humankind. My friend! Constant friend! No, I will not despair. Yes, I have faults; I will remember them. Only, forgiveness is another question. Yes, the injury I can forgive; the falseness never. In the interests of humanity, no. So young, and such deceit!”

Page 2859

Laetitia's bosom rose: her hand was detained: a lady who has yielded it cannot wrestle to have it back; those outworks which protect her treacherously shelter the enemy aiming at the citadel when he has taken them. In return for the silken armour bestowed on her by our civilization, it is exacted that she be soft and civil nigh up to perishing-point. She breathed tremulously high, saying on her top-breath: "If it—it may not be so; it can scarcely. . ." A deep sigh intervened. It saddened her that she knew so much.

"For when I love I love," said Sir Willoughby; "my friends and my servants know that. There can be no medium: not with me. I give all, I claim all. As I am absorbed, so must I absorb. We both cancel and create, we extinguish and we illumine one another. The error may be in the choice of an object: it is not in the passion. Perfect confidence, perfect abandonment. I repeat, I claim it because I give it. The selfishness of love may be denounced: it is a part of us. My answer would be, it is an element only of the noblest of us! Love, Laetitia! I speak of love. But one who breaks faith to drag us through the mire, who betrays, betrays and hands us over to the world, whose prey we become identically because of virtues we were educated to think it a blessing to possess: tell me the name for that!—Again, it has ever been a principle with me to respect the sex. But if we see women false, treacherous . . . Why indulge in these abstract views, you would ask! The world presses them on us, full as it is of the vilest specimens. They seek to pluck up every rooted principle: they sneer at our worship: they rob us of our religion. This bitter experience of the world drives us back to the antidote of what we knew before we plunged into it: of one . . . of something we esteemed and still esteem. Is that antidote strong enough to expel the poison? I hope so! I believe so! To lose faith in womankind is terrible."

He studied her. She looked distressed: she was not moved.

She was thinking that, with the exception of a strain of haughtiness, he talked excellently to men, at least in the tone of the things he meant to say; but that his manner of talking to women went to an excess in the artificial tongue—the tutored tongue of sentimental deference of the towering male: he fluted exceedingly; and she wondered whether it was this which had wrecked him with Miss Middleton.

His intuitive sagacity counselled him to strive for pathos to move her. It was a task; for while he perceived her to be not ignorant of his plight, he doubted her knowing the extent of it, and as his desire was merely to move her without an exposure of himself, he had to compass being pathetic as it were under the impediments of a mailed and gauntletted knight, who cannot easily heave the bosom, or show it heaving.

Moreover, pathos is a tide: often it carries the awakener of it off his feet, and whirls him over and over armour and all in ignominious attitudes of helpless prostration, whereof he may well be ashamed in the retrospect. We cannot quite preserve our dignity when we stoop to the work of calling forth tears. Moses had probably to take a nimble jump away from the rock after that venerable Law-giver had knocked the water out of it.

Page 2860

However, it was imperative in his mind that he should be sure he had the power to move her.

He began; clumsily at first, as yonder gauntletted knight attempting the briny handkerchief.

“What are we! We last but a very short time. Why not live to gratify our appetites? I might really ask myself why. All the means of satiating them are at my disposal. But no: I must aim at the highest:—at that which in my blindness I took for the highest. You know the sportsman’s instinct, Laetitia; he is not tempted by the stationary object. Such are we in youth, toying with happiness, leaving it, to aim at the dazzling and attractive.”

“We gain knowledge,” said Laetitia.

“At what a cost!”

The exclamation summoned self-pity to his aid, and pathos was handy.

“By paying half our lives for it and all our hopes! Yes, we gain knowledge, we are the wiser; very probably my value surpasses now what it was when I was happier. But the loss! That youthful bloom of the soul is like health to the body; once gone, it leaves cripples behind. Nay, my friend and precious friend, these four fingers I must retain. They seem to me the residue of a wreck: you shall be released shortly: absolutely, Laetitia, I have nothing else remaining—We have spoken of deception; what of being undeceived?—when one whom we adored is laid bare, and the wretched consolation of a worthy object is denied to us. No misfortune can be like that. Were it death, we could worship still. Death would be preferable. But may you be spared to know a situation in which the comparison with your inferior is forced on you to your disadvantage and your loss because of your generously giving up your whole heart to the custody of some shallow, light-minded, self—! . . . We will not deal in epithets. If I were to find as many bad names for the serpent as there are spots on his body, it would be serpent still, neither better nor worse. The loneliness! And the darkness! Our luminary is extinguished. Self-respect refuses to continue worshipping, but the affection will not be turned aside. We are literally in the dust, we grovel, we would fling away self-respect if we could; we would adopt for a model the creature preferred to us; we would humiliate, degrade ourselves; we cry for justice as if it were for pardon . . .”

“For pardon! when we are straining to grant it!” Laetitia murmured, and it was as much as she could do. She remembered how in her old misery her efforts after charity had twisted her round to feel herself the sinner, and beg forgiveness in prayer: a noble sentiment, that filled her with pity of the bosom in which it had sprung. There was no similarity between his idea and hers, but her idea had certainly been roused by his word “pardon”, and he had the benefit of it in the moisture of her eyes. Her lips trembled, tears fell.

He had heard something; he had not caught the words, but they were manifestly favourable; her sign of emotion assured him of it and of the success he had sought. There was one woman who bowed to him to all eternity! He had inspired one woman with the mysterious, man-desired passion of self-abandonment, self-immolation! The evidence was before him. At any instant he could, if he pleased, fly to her and command her enthusiasm.

Page 2861

He had, in fact, perhaps by sympathetic action, succeeded in striking the same springs of pathos in her which animated his lively endeavour to produce it in himself.

He kissed her hand; then released it, quitting his chair to bend above her soothingly.

“Do not weep, Laetitia, you see that I do not; I can smile. Help me to bear it; you must not unman me.”

She tried to stop her crying, but self-pity threatened to rain all her long years of grief on her head, and she said: “I must go . . . I am unfit . . . good-night, Sir Willoughby.”

Fearing seriously that he had sunk his pride too low in her consideration, and had been carried farther than he intended on the tide of pathos, he remarked: “We will speak about Crossjay to-morrow. His deceitfulness has been gross. As I said, I am grievously offended by deception. But you are tired. Good-night, my dear friend.”

“Good-night, Sir Willoughby.”

She was allowed to go forth.

Colonel De Craye coming up from the smoking-room, met her and noticed the state of her eyelids, as he wished her goodnight. He saw Willoughby in the room she had quitted, but considerately passed without speaking, and without reflecting why he was considerate.

Our hero’s review of the scene made him, on the whole, satisfied with his part in it. Of his power upon one woman he was now perfectly sure:—Clara had agonized him with a doubt of his personal mastery of any. One was a poor feast, but the pangs of his flesh during the last few days and the latest hours caused him to snatch at it, hungrily if contemptuously. A poor feast, she was yet a fortress, a point of succour, both shield and lance; a cover and an impetus. He could now encounter Clara boldly. Should she resist and defy him, he would not be naked and alone; he foresaw that he might win honour in the world’s eye from his position—a matter to be thought of only in most urgent need. The effect on him of his recent exercise in pathos was to compose him to slumber. He was for the period well satisfied.

His attendant imps were well satisfied likewise, and danced around about his bed after the vigilant gentleman had ceased to debate on the question of his unveiling of himself past forgiveness of her to Laetitia, and had surrendered to sleep the present direction of his affairs.

CHAPTER XXXII

LAETITIA DALE DISCOVERS A SPIRITUAL CHANGE AND DR MIDDLETON A PHYSICAL

Clara tripped over the lawn in the early morning to Laetitia to greet her. She broke away from a colloquy with Colonel De Craye under Sir Willoughby's windows. The colonel had been one of the bathers, and he stood like a circus-driver flicking a wet towel at Crossjay capering.

"My dear, I am very unhappy!" said Clara.

"My dear, I bring you news," Laetitia replied.

Page 2862

“Tell me. But the poor boy is to be expelled! He burst into Crossjay’s bedroom last night and dragged the sleeping boy out of bed to question him, and he had the truth. That is one comfort: only Crossjay is to be driven from the Hall, because he was untruthful previously—for me; to serve me; really, I feel it was at my command. Crossjay will be out of the way to-day, and has promised to come back at night to try to be forgiven. You must help me, Laetitia.”

“You are free, Clara! If you desire it, you have but to ask for your freedom.”

“You mean . . .”

“He will release you.”

“You are sure?”

“We had a long conversation last night.”

“I owe it to you?”

“Nothing is owing to me. He volunteered it.”

Clara made as if to lift her eyes in apostrophe. “Professor Crooklyn! Professor Crooklyn! I see. I did not guess that.”

“Give credit for some generosity, Clara; you are unjust!”

“By and by: I will be more than just by and by. I will practise on the trumpet: I will lecture on the greatness of the souls of men when we know them thoroughly. At present we do but half know them, and we are unjust. You are not deceived, Laetitia? There is to be no speaking to papa? no delusions? You have agitated me. I feel myself a very small person indeed. I feel I can understand those who admire him. He gives me back my word simply? clearly? without—Oh, that long wrangle in scenes and letters? And it will be arranged for papa and me to go not later than to-morrow? Never shall I be able to explain to any one how I fell into this! I am frightened at myself when I think of it. I take the whole blame: I have been scandalous. And, dear Laetitia! you came out so early in order to tell me?”

“I wished you to hear it.”

“Take my heart.”

“Present me with a part—but for good.”

“Fie! But you have a right to say it.”

“I mean no unkindness; but is not the heart you allude to an alarmingly searching one?”

“Selfish it is, for I have been forgetting Crossjay. If we are going to be generous, is not Crossjay to be forgiven? If it were only that the boy’s father is away fighting for his country, endangering his life day by day, and for a stipend not enough to support his family, we are bound to think of the boy! Poor dear silly lad! with his ’I say, Miss Middleton, why wouldn’t (some one) see my father when he came here to call on him, and had to walk back ten miles in the rain?’—I could almost fancy that did me mischief. . . But we have a splendid morning after yesterday’s rain. And we will be generous. Own, Laetitia, that it is possible to gild the most glorious day of creation.”

“Doubtless the spirit may do it and make its hues permanent,” said Laetitia.

“You to me, I to you, he to us. Well, then, if he does, it shall be one of my heavenly days. Which is for the probation of experience. We are not yet at sunset.”

Page 2863

“Have you seen Mr. Whitford this morning?”

“He passed me.”

“Do not imagine him ever ill-tempered.”

“I had a governess, a learned lady, who taught me in person the picturesqueness of grumpiness. Her temper was ever perfect, because she was never in the wrong, but I being so, she was grumpy. She carried my iniquity under her brows, and looked out on me through it. I was a trying child.”

Laetitia said, laughing: “I can believe it!”

“Yet I liked her and she liked me: we were a kind of foreground and background: she threw me into relief and I was an apology for her existence.”

“You picture her to me.”

“She says of me now that I am the only creature she has loved. Who knows that I may not come to say the same of her?”

“You would plague her and puzzle her still.”

“Have I plagued and puzzled Mr. Whitford?”

“He reminds you of her?”

“You said you had her picture.”

“Ah! do not laugh at him. He is a true friend.”

“The man who can be a friend is the man who will presume to be a censor.”

“A mild one.”

“As to the sentence he pronounces, I am unable to speak, but his forehead is Rhadamanthine condemnation.”

“Dr Middleton!”

Clara looked round. “Who? I? Did you hear an echo of papa? He would never have put Rhadamanthus over European souls, because it appears that Rhadamanthus judged only the Asiatic; so you are wrong, Miss Dale. My father is infatuated with Mr. Whitford. What can it be? We women cannot sound the depths of scholars, probably because their pearls have no value in our market; except when they deign to chasten an impertinent; and Mr. Whitford stands aloof from any notice of small fry. He is deep,

studious, excellent; and does it not strike you that if he descended among us he would be like a Triton ashore?”

Laetitia’s habit of wholly subservient sweetness, which was her ideal of the feminine, not yet conciliated with her acuter character, owing to the absence of full pleasure from her life—the unhealed wound she had sustained and the cramp of a bondage of such old date as to seem iron—induced her to say, as if consenting: “You think he is not quite at home in society?” But she wished to defend him strenuously, and as a consequence she had to quit the self-imposed ideal of her daily acting, whereby—the case being unwonted, very novel to her—the lady’s intelligence became confused through the process that quickened it; so sovereign a method of hoodwinking our bright selves is the acting of a part, however naturally it may come to us! and to this will each honest autobiographical member of the animated world bear witness.

Page 2864

She added: “You have not found him sympathetic? He is. You fancy him brooding, gloomy? He is the reverse, he is cheerful, he is indifferent to personal misfortune. Dr. Corney says there is no laugh like Vernon Whitford’s, and no humour like his. Latterly he certainly . . . But it has not been your cruel word grumpiness. The truth is, he is anxious about Crossjay: and about other things; and he wants to leave. He is at a disadvantage beside very lively and careless gentlemen at present, but your ‘Triton ashore’ is unfair, it is ugly. He is, I can say, the truest man I know.”

“I did not question his goodness, Laetitia.”

“You threw an accent on it.”

“Did I? I must be like Crossjay, who declares he likes fun best.”

“Crossjay ought to know him, if anybody should. Mr. Whitford has defended you against me, Clara, even since I took to calling you Clara. Perhaps when you supposed him so like your ancient governess, he was meditating how he could aid you. Last night he gave me reasons for thinking you would do wisely to confide in Mrs. Mountstuart. It is no longer necessary. I merely mention it. He is a devoted friend.”

“He is an untiring pedestrian.”

“Oh!”

Colonel De Craye, after hovering near the ladies in the hope of seeing them divide, now adopted the system of making three that two may come of it.

As he joined them with his glittering chatter, Laetitia looked at Clara to consult her, and saw the face rosy as a bride’s.

The suspicion she had nursed sprung out of her arms a muscular fact on the spot.

“Where is my dear boy?” Clara said.

“Out for a holiday,” the colonel answered in her tone.

“Advise Mr. Whitford not to waste his time in searching for Crossjay, Laetitia. Crossjay is better out of the way to-day. At least, I thought so just now. Has he pocket-money, Colonel De Craye?”

“My lord can command his inn.”

“How thoughtful you are!”

Laetitia's bosom swelled upon a mute exclamation, equivalent to: "Woman! woman! snared ever by the sparkling and frivolous! undiscerning of the faithful, the modest and beneficent!"

In the secret musings of moralists this dramatic rhetoric survives.

The comparison was all of her own making, and she was indignant at the contrast, though to what end she was indignant she could not have said, for she had no idea of Vernon as a rival of De Craye in the favour of a plighted lady. But she was jealous on behalf of her sex: her sex's reputation seemed at stake, and the purity of it was menaced by Clara's idle preference of the shallower man. When the young lady spoke so carelessly of being like Crossjay, she did not perhaps know that a likeness, based on a similarity of their enthusiasms, loves, and appetites, had been established between women and boys. Laetitia had formerly chafed at it, rejecting it utterly, save when now and then in a season of bitterness she handed here and there a volatile young lady (none but the young) to be stamped with the degrading brand. Vernon might be as philosophical as he pleased. To her the gaiety of these two, Colonel De Craye and Clara Middleton, was distressingly musical: they harmonized painfully. The representative of her sex was hurt by it.

Page 2865

She had to stay beside them: Clara held her arm. The colonel's voice dropped at times to something very like a whisper. He was answered audibly and smoothly. The quickwitted gentleman accepted the correction: but in immediately paying assiduous attentions to Miss Dale, in the approved intriguer's fashion, he showed himself in need of another amounting to a reproof. Clara said: "We have been consulting, Laetitia, what is to be done to cure Professor Crooklyn of his cold." De Craye perceived that he had taken a wrong step, and he was mightily surprised that a lesson in intrigue should be read to him of all men. Miss Middleton's audacity was not so astonishing: he recognized grand capabilities in the young lady. Fearing lest she should proceed further and cut away from him his vantage-ground of secrecy with her, he turned the subject and was adroitly submissive.

Clara's manner of meeting Sir Willoughby expressed a timid disposition to friendliness upon a veiled inquiry, understood by none save Laetitia, whose brain was racked to convey assurances to herself of her not having misinterpreted him. Could there be any doubt? She resolved that there could not be; and it was upon this basis of reason that she fancied she had led him to it. Legitimate or not, the fancy sprang from a solid foundation. Yesterday morning she could not have conceived it. Now she was endowed to feel that she had power to influence him, because now, since the midnight, she felt some emancipation from the spell of his physical mastery. He did not appear to her as a different man, but she had grown sensible of being a stronger woman. He was no more the cloud over her, nor the magnet; the cloud once heaven-suffused, the magnet fatally compelling her to sway round to him. She admired him still: his handsome air, his fine proportions, the courtesy of his bending to Clara and touching of her hand, excused a fanatical excess of admiration on the part of a woman in her youth, who is never the anatomist of the hero's lordly graces. But now she admired him piecemeal. When it came to the putting of him together, she did it coldly. To compassionate him was her utmost warmth. Without conceiving in him anything of the strange old monster of earth which had struck the awakened girl's mind of Miss Middleton, Laetitia classed him with other men; he was "one of them". And she did not bring her disenchantment as a charge against him. She accused herself, acknowledged the secret of the change to be, and her youthfulness was dead:—-otherwise could she have given him compassion, and not herself have been carried on the flood of it? The compassion was fervent, and pure too. She supposed he would supplicate; she saw that Clara Middleton was pleasant with him only for what she expected of his generosity. She grieved. Sir Willoughby was fortified by her sorrowful gaze as he and Clara passed out together to the laboratory arm in arm.

Laetitia had to tell Vernon of the uselessness of his beating the house and grounds for Crossjay. Dr. Middleton held him fast in discussion upon an overnight's classical wrangle with Professor Crooklyn, which was to be renewed that day. The Professor had appointed to call expressly to renew it. "A fine scholar," said the Rev. Doctor, "but crotchety, like all men who cannot stand their Port."

Page 2866

“I hear that he had a cold,” Vernon remarked. “I hope the wine was good, sir.”

As when the foreman of a sentimental jury is commissioned to inform an awful Bench exact in perspicuous English, of a verdict that must of necessity be pronounced in favour of the hanging of the culprit, yet would fain attenuate the crime of a palpable villain by a recommendation to mercy, such foreman, standing in the attentive eye of a master of grammatical construction, and feeling the weight of at least three sentences on his brain, together with a prospect of Judicial interrogation for the discovery of his precise meaning, is oppressed, himself is put on trial, in turn, and he hesitates, he recapitulates, the fear of involution leads him to be involved; as far as a man so posted may, he on his own behalf appeals for mercy; entreats that his indistinct statement of preposterous reasons may be taken for understood, and would gladly, were permission to do it credible, throw in an imploring word that he may sink back among the crowd without for the one imperishable moment publicly swinging in his lordship’s estimation: —much so, moved by chivalry toward a lady, courtesy to the recollection of a hostess, and particularly by the knowledge that his hearer would expect with a certain frigid rigour charity of him, Dr. Middleton paused, spoke and paused: he stammered. Ladies, he said, were famous poisoners in the Middle Ages. His opinion was, that we had a class of manufacturing wine merchants on the watch for widows in this country. But he was bound to state the fact of his waking at his usual hour to the minute unassailed by headache. On the other hand, this was a condition of blessedness unanticipated when he went to bed. Mr. Whitford, however, was not to think that he entertained rancour toward the wine. It was no doubt dispensed with the honourable intention of cheering. In point of flavour execrable, judging by results it was innocuous.

“The test of it shall be the effect of it upon Professor Crooklyn, and his appearance in the forenoon according to promise,” Dr. Middleton came to an end with his perturbed balancings. “If I hear more of the eight or twelve winds discharged at once upon a railway platform, and the young lady who dries herself of a drenching by drinking brandy and water with a gentleman at a railway inn, I shall solicit your sanction to my condemnation of the wine as anti-Bacchic and a counterfeit presentment. Do not misjudge me. Our hostess is not responsible. But widows should marry.”

“You must contrive to stop the Professor, sir, if he should attack his hostess in that manner,” said Vernon.

“Widows should marry!” Dr. Middleton repeated.

He murmured of objecting to be at the discretion of a butler; unless, he was careful to add, the aforesaid functionary could boast of an University education; and even then, said he, it requires a line of ancestry to train a man’s taste.

Page 2867

The Rev. Doctor smothered a yawn. The repression of it caused a second one, a real monster, to come, big as our old friend of the sea advancing on the chained-up Beauty.

Disconcerted by this damning evidence of indigestion, his countenance showed that he considered himself to have been too lenient to the wine of an unhusbanded hostess. He frowned terribly.

In the interval Laetitia told Vernon of Crossjay's flight for the day, hastily bidding the master to excuse him: she had no time to hint the grounds of excuse. Vernon mentally made a guess.

Dr Middleton took his arm and discharged a volley at the crotchetty scholarship of Professor Crooklyn, whom to confute by book, he directed his march to the library. Having persuaded himself that he was dyspeptic, he had grown irascible. He denounced all dining out, eulogized Patterne Hall as if it were his home, and remembered he had dreamed in the night—a most humiliating sign of physical disturbance. "But let me find a house in proximity to Patterne, as I am induced to suppose I shall," he said, "and here only am I to be met when I stir abroad."

Laetitia went to her room. She was complacently anxious enough to prefer solitude and be willing to read. She was more seriously anxious about Crossjay than about any of the others. For Clara would be certain to speak very definitely, and how then could a gentleman oppose her? He would supplicate, and could she be brought to yield? It was not to be expected of a young lady who had turned from Sir Willoughby. His inferiors would have had a better chance. Whatever his faults, he had that element of greatness which excludes the intercession of pity. Supplication would be with him a form of condescension. It would be seen to be such. His was a monumental pride that could not stoop. She had preserved this image of the gentleman for a relic in the shipwreck of her idolatry. So she mused between the lines of her book, and finishing her reading and marking the page, she glanced down on the lawn. Dr. Middleton was there, and alone; his hands behind his back, his head bent. His meditative pace and unwonted perusal of the turf proclaimed that a non-sentimental jury within had delivered an unmitigated verdict upon the widow's wine.

Laetitia hurried to find Vernon.

He was in the hall. As she drew near him, the laboratory door opened and shut.

"It is being decided," said Laetitia.

Vernon was paler than the hue of perfect calmness.

"I want to know whether I ought to take to my heels like Crossjay, and shun the Professor," he said.

They spoke in under-tones, furtively watching the door.

“I wish what she wishes, I am sure; but it will go badly with the boy,” said Laetitia.

“Oh, well, then I’ll take him,” said Vernon, “I would rather. I think I can manage it.”

Again the laboratory door opened. This time it shut behind Miss Middleton. She was highly flushed. Seeing them, she shook the storm from her brows, with a dead smile; the best piece of serenity she could put on for public wear.

Page 2868

She took a breath before she moved.

Vernon strode out of the house.

Clara swept up to Laetitia.

“You were deceived!”

The hard sob of anger barred her voice.

Laetitia begged her to come to her room with her.

“I want air: I must be by myself,” said Clara, catching at her garden-hat.

She walked swiftly to the portico steps and turned to the right, to avoid the laboratory windows.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN WHICH THE COMIC MUSE HAS AN EYE ON TWO GOOD SOULS

Clara met Vernon on the bowling-green among the laurels. She asked him where her father was.

“Don’t speak to him now,” said Vernon.

“Mr. Whitford, will you?”

“It is not advisable just now. Wait.”

“Wait? Why not now?”

“He is not in the right humour.”

She choked. There are times when there is no medicine for us in sages, we want slaves; we scorn to temporize, we must overbear. On she sped, as if she had made the mistake of exchanging words with a post.

The scene between herself and Willoughby was a thick mist in her head, except the burden and result of it, that he held to her fast, would neither assist her to depart nor disengage her.

Oh, men! men! They astounded the girl; she could not define them to her understanding. Their motives, their tastes, their vanity, their tyranny, and the domino on their vanity, the baldness of their tyranny, clinched her in feminine antagonism to brute

power. She was not the less disposed to rebellion by a very present sense of the justice of what could be said to reprove her. She had but one answer: “Anything but marry him!” It threw her on her nature, our last and headlong advocate, who is quick as the flood to hurry us from the heights to our level, and lower, if there be accidental gaps in the channel. For say we have been guilty of misconduct: can we redeem it by violating that which we are and live by? The question sinks us back to the luxuriousness of a sunny relinquishment of effort in the direction against tide. Our nature becomes ingenious in devices, penetrative of the enemy, confidently citing its cause for being frankly elvish or worse. Clara saw a particular way of forcing herself to be surrendered. She shut her eyes from it: the sight carried her too violently to her escape; but her heart caught it up and huzzaed. To press the points of her fingers at her bosom, looking up to the sky as she did, and cry: “I am not my own; I am his!” was instigation sufficient to make her heart leap up with all her body’s blush to urge it to recklessness. A despairing creature then may say she has addressed the heavens and has had no answer to restrain her.

Happily for Miss Middleton, she had walked some minutes in her chafing fit before the falcon eye of Colonel De Craye spied her away on one of the beech-knots.

Page 2869

Vernon stood irresolute. It was decidedly not a moment for disturbing Dr. Middleton's composure. He meditated upon a conversation, as friendly as possible, with Willoughby. Round on the front-lawn, he beheld Willoughby and Dr. Middleton together, the latter having halted to lend attentive ear to his excellent host. Unnoticed by them or disregarded, Vernon turned back to Laetitia, and sauntered, talking with her of things current for as long as he could endure to listen to praise of his pure self-abnegation; proof of how well he had disguised himself, but it smacked unpleasantly to him. His humourous intimacy with men's minds likened the source of this distaste to the gallant all-or-nothing of the gambler, who hates the little when he cannot have the much, and would rather stalk from the tables clean-picked than suffer ruin to be tickled by driblets of the glorious fortune he has played for and lost. If we are not to be beloved, spare us the small coin of compliments on character; especially when they compliment only our acting. It is partly endurable to win eulogy for our stately fortitude in losing, but Laetitia was unaware that he flung away a stake; so she could not praise him for his merits.

"Willoughby makes the pardoning of Crossjay conditional," he said, "and the person pleading for him has to grant the terms. How could you imagine Willoughby would give her up! How could he! Who! . . . He should, is easily said. I was no witness of the scene between them just now, but I could have foretold the end of it; I could almost recount the passages. The consequence is, that everything depends upon the amount of courage she possesses. Dr. Middleton won't leave Patterne yet. And it is of no use to speak to him to-day. And she is by nature impatient, and is rendered desperate."

"Why is it of no use to speak to Dr. Middleton today?" cried Laetitia.

"He drank wine yesterday that did not agree with him; he can't work. To-day he is looking forward to Patterne Port. He is not likely to listen to any proposals to leave to-day."

"Goodness!"

"I know the depth of that cry!"

"You are excluded, Mr. Whitford."

"Not a bit of it; I am in with the rest. Say that men are to be exclaimed at. Men have a right to expect you to know your own minds when you close on a bargain. You don't know the world or yourselves very well, it's true; still the original error is on your side, and upon that you should fix your attention. She brought her father here, and no sooner was he very comfortably established than she wished to dislocate him."

"I cannot explain it; I cannot comprehend it," said Laetitia.

"You are Constancy."

“No.” She coloured. “I am ‘in with rest’. I do not say I should have done the same. But I have the knowledge that I must not sit in judgement on her. I can waver.”

Page 2870

She coloured again. She was anxious that he should know her to be not that stupid statue of Constancy in a corner doating on the antic Deception. Reminiscences of the interview overnight made it oppressive to her to hear herself praised for always pointing like the needle. Her newly enfranchised individuality pressed to assert its existence. Vernon, however, not seeing this novelty, continued, to her excessive discomfort, to baste her old abandoned image with his praises. They checked hers; and, moreover, he had suddenly conceived an envy of her life-long, uncomplaining, almost unaspiring, constancy of sentiment. If you know lovers when they have not reason to be blissful, you will remember that in this mood of admiring envy they are given to fits of uncontrollable maundering. Praise of constancy, moreover, smote shadowily a certain inconstant, enough to seem to ruffle her smoothness and do no hurt. He found his consolation in it, and poor Laetitia writhed. Without designing to retort, she instinctively grasped at a weapon of defence in further exalting his devotedness; which reduced him to cast his head to the heavens and implore them to partially enlighten her. Nevertheless, maunder he must; and he recurred to it in a way so utterly unlike himself that Laetitia stared in his face. She wondered whether there could be anything secreted behind this everlasting theme of constancy. He took her awakened gaze for a summons to asseverations of sincerity, and out they came. She would have fled from him, but to think of flying was to think how little it was that urged her to fly, and yet the thought of remaining and listening to praises undeserved and no longer flattering, was a torture.

“Mr. Whitford, I bear no comparison with you.”

“I do and must set you for my example, Miss Dale.”

“Indeed, you do wrongly; you do not know me.”

“I could say that. For years . . .”

“Pray, Mr. Whitford!”

“Well, I have admired it. You show us how self can be smothered.”

“An echo would be a retort on you!”

“On me? I am never thinking of anything else.”

“I could say that.”

“You are necessarily conscious of not swerving.”

“But I do; I waver dreadfully; I am not the same two days running.”

“You are the same, with ‘ravishing divisions’ upon the same.”

“And you without the ‘divisions.’ I draw such support as I have from you.”

“From some simulacrum of me, then. And that will show you how little you require support.”

“I do not speak my own opinion only.”

“Whose?”

“I am not alone.”

“Again let me say, I wish I were like you!”

“Then let me add, I would willingly make the exchange!”

“You would be amazed at your bargain.”

“Others would be!”

“Your exchange would give me the qualities I’m in want of, Miss Dale.”

Page 2871

“Negative, passive, at the best, Mr. Whitford. But I should have . . .”

“Oh!—pardon me. But you inflict the sensations of a boy, with a dose of honesty in him, called up to receive a prize he has won by the dexterous use of a crib.”

“And how do you suppose she feels who has a crown of Queen o’ the May forced on her head when she is verging on November?”

He rejected her analogy, and she his. They could neither of them bring to light the circumstances which made one another’s admiration so unbearable. The more he exalted her for constancy, the more did her mind become bent upon critically examining the object of that imagined virtue; and the more she praised him for possessing the spirit of perfect friendliness, the fiercer grew the passion in him which disdained the imputation, hissing like a heated iron-bar that flings the waterdrops to steam. He would none of it; would rather have stood exposed in his profound foolishness.

Amiable though they were, and mutually affectionate, they came to a stop in their walk, longing to separate, and not seeing how it was to be done, they had so knit themselves together with the pelting of their interlaudation.

“I think it is time for me to run home to my father for an hour,” said Laetitia.

“I ought to be working,” said Vernon.

Good progress was made to the disgarlanding of themselves thus far; yet, an acutely civilized pair, the abruptness of the transition from floweriness to commonplace affected them both, Laetitia chiefly, as she had broken the pause, and she remarked:—“I am really Constancy in my opinions.”

“Another title is customary where stiff opinions are concerned. Perhaps by and by you will learn your mistake, and then you will acknowledge the name for it.”

“How?” said she. “What shall I learn?”

“If you learn that I am a grisly Egoist?”

“You? And it would not be egoism,” added Laetitia, revealing to him at the same instant as to herself that she swung suspended on a scarce credible guess.

“—Will nothing pierce your ears, Mr. Whitford?”

He heard the intruding voice, but he was bent on rubbing out the cloudy letters Laetitia had begun to spell, and he stammered, in a tone of matter-of-fact: “Just that and no better”; then turned to Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson.

“—Or are you resolved you will never see Professor Crooklyn when you look on him?” said the great lady.

Vernon bowed to the Professor and apologized to him shufflingly and rapidly, incoherently, and with a red face; which induced Mrs. Mountstuart to scan Laetitia’s.

After lecturing Vernon for his abandonment of her yesterday evening, and flouting his protestations, she returned to the business of the day. “We walked from the lodge-gates to see the park and prepare ourselves for Dr. Middleton. We parted last night in the middle of a controversy and are rageing to resume it. Where is our redoubtable antagonist?”

Page 2872

Mrs. Mountstuart wheeled Professor Crooklyn round to accompany Vernon.

“We,” she said, “are for modern English scholarship, opposed to the champion of German.”

“The contrary,” observed Professor Crooklyn.

“Oh! We,” she corrected the error serenely, “are for German scholarship opposed to English.”

“Certain editions.”

“We defend certain editions.”

“Defend is a term of imperfect application to my position, ma’am.”

“My dear Professor, you have in Dr. Middleton a match for you in conscientious pugnacity, and you will not waste it upon me. There, there they are; there he is. Mr. Whitford will conduct you. I stand away from the first shock.”

Mrs. Mountstuart fell back to Laetitia, saying: “He pores over a little inexactitude in phrases, and pecks at it like a domestic fowl.”

Professor Crooklyn’s attitude and air were so well described that Laetitia could have laughed.

“These mighty scholars have their flavour,” the great lady hastened to add, lest her younger companion should be misled to suppose that they were not valuable to a governing hostess: “their shadow-fights are ridiculous, but they have their flavour at a table. Last night, no: I discard all mention of last night. We failed: as none else in this neighbourhood could fail, but we failed. If we have among us a cormorant devouring young lady who drinks up all the—ha!—brandy and water—of our inns and occupies all our flys, why, our condition is abnormal, and we must expect to fail: we are deprived of accommodation for accidental circumstances. How Mr. Whitford could have missed seeing Professor Crooklyn! And what was he doing at the station, Miss Dale?”

“Your portrait of Professor Crooklyn was too striking, Mrs Mountstuart, and deceived him by its excellence. He appears to have seen only the blank side of the slate.”

“Ah! He is a faithful friend of his cousin, do you not think?”

“He is the truest of friends.”

“As for Dr. Middleton,” Mrs. Mountstuart diverged from her inquiry, “he will swell the letters of my vocabulary to gigantic proportions if I see much of him: he is contagious.”

“I believe it is a form of his humour.”

“I caught it of him yesterday at my dinner-table in my distress, and must pass it off as a form of mine, while it lasts. I talked Dr. Middleton half the dreary night through to my pillow. Your candid opinion, my dear, come! As for me, I don’t hesitate. We seemed to have sat down to a solitary performance on the bass-viol. We were positively an assembly of insects during thunder. My very soul thanked Colonel De Craye for his diversions, but I heard nothing but Dr. Middleton. It struck me that my table was petrified, and every one sat listening to bowls played overhead.”

“I was amused.”

Page 2873

“Really? You delight me. Who knows but that my guests were sincere in their congratulations on a thoroughly successful evening? I have fallen to this, you see! And I know, wretched people! that as often as not it is their way of condoling with one. I do it myself: but only where there have been amiable efforts. But imagine my being congratulated for that!—Good-morning, Sir Willoughby.—The worst offender! and I am in no pleasant mood with him,” Mrs. Mountstuart said aside to Laetitia, who drew back, retiring.

Sir Willoughby came on a step or two. He stopped to watch Laetitia’s figure swimming to the house.

So, as, for instance, beside a stream, when a flower on the surface extends its petals drowning to subside in the clear still water, we exercise our privilege to be absent in the charmed contemplation of a beautiful natural incident.

A smile of pleased abstraction melted on his features.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. MOUNTSTUART AND SIR WILLOUGHBY

“Good morning, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart,” Sir Willoughby wakened himself to address the great lady. “Why has she fled?”

“Has any one fled?”

“Laetitia Dale.”

“Letty Dale? Oh, if you call that flying. Possibly to renew a close conversation with Vernon Whitford, that I cut short. You frightened me with your ‘Shepherds-tell-me’ air and tone. Lead me to one of your garden-seats: out of hearing to Dr. Middleton, I beg. He mesmerizes me, he makes me talk Latin. I was curiously susceptible last night. I know I shall everlastingly associate him with an abortive entertainment and solos on big instruments. We were flat.”

“Horace was in good vein.”

“You were not.”

“And Laetitia—Miss Dale talked well, I thought.”

“She talked with you, and no doubt she talked well. We did not mix. The yeast was bad. You shot darts at Colonel De Craye: you tried to sting. You brought Dr. Middleton

down on you. Dear me, that man is a reverberation in my head. Where is your lady and love?"

"Who?"

"Am I to name her?"

"Clara? I have not seen her for the last hour. Wandering, I suppose."

"A very pretty summer bower," said Mrs. Mountstuart, seating herself "Well, my dear Sir Willoughby, preferences, preferences are not to be accounted for, and one never knows whether to pity or congratulate, whatever may occur. I want to see Miss Middleton."

"Your 'dainty rogue in porcelain' will be at your beck—you lunch with us?—before you leave."

"So now you have taken to quoting me, have you?"

"But 'a romantic tale on her eyelashes' is hardly descriptive any longer."

"Descriptive of whom? Now you are upon Laetitia Dale!"

"I quote you generally. She has now a graver look."

"And well may have!"

Page 2874

“Not that the romance has entirely disappeared.”

“No; it looks as if it were in print.”

“You have hit it perfectly, as usual, ma’am.”

Sir Willoughby mused.

Like one resuming his instrument to take up the melody in a concerted piece, he said: “I thought Laetitia Dale had a singularly animated air last night.”

“Why!—” Mrs. Mountstuart mildly gaped.

“I want a new description of her. You know, I collect your mottoes and sentences.”

“It seems to me she is coming three parts out of her shell, and wearing it as a hood for convenience.”

“Ready to issue forth at an invitation? Admirable! exact!”

“Ay, my good Sir Willoughby, but are we so very admirable and exact? Are we never to know our own minds?”

He produced a polysyllabic sigh, like those many-jointed compounds of poets in happy languages, which are copious in a single expression: “Mine is known to me. It always has been. Cleverness in women is not uncommon. Intellect is the pearl. A woman of intellect is as good as a Greek statue; she is divinely wrought, and she is divinely rare.”

“Proceed,” said the lady, confiding a cough to the air.

“The rarity of it: and it is not mere intellect, it is a sympathetic intellect; or else it is an intellect in perfect accord with an intensely sympathetic disposition;—the rarity of it makes it too precious to be parted with when once we have met it. I prize it the more the older I grow.”

“Are we on the feminine or the neuter?”

“I beg pardon?”

“The universal or the individual?”

He shrugged. “For the rest, psychological affinities may exist coincident with and entirely independent of material or moral prepossessions, relations, engagements, ties.”

“Well, that is not the raving of passion, certainly,” said Mrs Mountstuart, “and it sounds as if it were a comfortable doctrine for men. On that plea, you might all of you be having

Aspasia and a wife. We saw your fair Middleton and Colonel de Craye at a distance as we entered the park. Professor Crooklyn is under some hallucination."

"What more likely?"

The readiness and the double-bearing of the reply struck her comic sense with awe.

"The Professor must hear that. He insists on the fly, and the inn, and the wet boots, and the warming mixture, and the testimony of the landlady and the railway porter."

"I say, what more likely?"

"Than that he should insist?"

"If he is under the hallucination!"

"He may convince others."

"I have only to repeat. . ."

"'What more likely?' It's extremely philosophical. Coincident with a pursuit of the psychological affinities."

"Professor Crooklyn will hardly descend, I suppose, from his classical altitudes to lay his hallucinations before Dr. Middleton?"

Page 2875

“Sir Willoughby, you are the pink of chivalry!”

By harping on Laetitia, he had emboldened Mrs. Mountstuart to lift the curtain upon Clara. It was offensive to him, but the injury done to his pride had to be endured for the sake of his general plan of self-protection.

“Simply desirous to save my guests from annoyance of any kind”, he said. “Dr Middleton can look ‘Olympus and thunder’, as Vernon calls it.”

“Don’t. I see him. That look! It is Dictionary-bitten! Angry, homed Dictionary!—an apparition of Dictionary in the night—to a dunce!”

“One would undergo a good deal to avoid the sight.”

“What the man must be in a storm! Speak as you please of yourself: you are a true and chivalrous knight to dread it for her. But now, candidly, how is it you cannot condescend to a little management? Listen to an old friend. You are too lordly. No lover can afford to be incomprehensible for half an hour. Stoop a little. Sermonizings are not to be thought of. You can govern unseen. You are to know that I am one who disbelieves in philosophy in love. I admire the look of it, I give no credit to the assumption. I rather like lovers to be out at times: it makes them picturesque, and it enlivens their monotony. I perceived she had a spot of wildness. It’s proper that she should wear it off before marriage.”

“Clara? The wildness of an infant!” said Willoughby, paternally, musing over an inward shiver. “You saw her at a distance just now, or you might have heard her laughing. Horace diverts her excessively.”

“I owe him my eternal gratitude for his behaviour last night. She was one of my bright faces. Her laughter was delicious; rain in the desert! It will tell you what the load on me was, when I assure you those two were merely a spectacle to me—points I scored in a lost game. And I know they were witty.”

“They both have wit; a kind of wit,” Willoughby assented.

“They struck together like a pair of cymbals.”

“Not the highest description of instrument. However, they amuse me. I like to hear them when I am in the vein.”

“That vein should be more at command with you, my friend. You can be perfect, if you like.”

“Under your tuition.”

Willoughby leaned to her, bowing languidly. He was easier in his pain for having hoodwinked the lady. She was the outer world to him; she could tune the world's voice; prescribe which of the two was to be pitied, himself or Clara; and he did not intend it to be himself, if it came to the worst. They were far away from that at present, and he continued:

"Probably a man's power of putting on a face is not equal to a girl's. I detest petty dissensions. Probably I show it when all is not quite smooth. Little fits of suspicion vex me. It is a weakness, not to play them off, I know. Men have to learn the arts which come to women by nature. I don't sympathize with suspicion, from having none myself."

Page 2876

His eyebrows shot up. That ill-omened man Flitch had sidled round by the bushes to within a few feet of him. Flitch primarily defended himself against the accusation of drunkenness, which was hurled at him to account for his audacity in trespassing against the interdict; but he admitted that he had taken “something short” for a fortification in visiting scenes where he had once been happy—at Christmastide, when all the servants, and the butler at head, grey old Mr. Chessington, sat in rows, toasting the young heir of the old Hall in the old port wine! Happy had he been then, before ambition for a shop, to be his own master and an independent gentleman, had led him into his quagmire:—to look back envying a dog on the old estate, and sigh for the smell of Patterne stables: sweeter than Arabia, his drooping nose appeared to say.

He held up close against it something that imposed silence on Sir Willoughby as effectively as a cunning exordium in oratory will enchain mobs to swallow what is not complimenting them; and this he displayed secure in its being his licence to drivel his abominable pathos. Sir Willoughby recognized Clara’s purse. He understood at once how the must have come by it: he was not so quick in devising a means of stopping the tale. Flitch foiled him. “Intact,” he replied to the question: “What have you there?” He repeated this grand word. And then he turned to Mrs. Mountstuart to speak of Paradise and Adam, in whom he saw the prototype of himself: also the Hebrew people in the bondage of Egypt, discoursed of by the clergymen, not without a likeness to him.

“Sorrows have done me one good, to send me attentive to church, my lady,” said Flitch, “when I might have gone to London, the coachman’s home, and been driving some honourable family, with no great advantage to my morals, according to what I hear of. And a purse found under the seat of a fly in London would have a poor chance of returning intact to the young lady losing it.”

“Put it down on that chair; inquiries will be made, and you will see Sir Willoughby,” said Mrs. Mountstuart. “Intact, no doubt; it is not disputed.”

With one motion of a finger she set the man rounding.

Flitch halted; he was very regretful of the termination of his feast of pathos, and he wished to relate the finding of the purse, but he could not encounter Mrs. Mountstuart’s look; he slouched away in very close resemblance to the ejected Adam of illustrated books.

“It’s my belief that naturalness among the common people has died out of the kingdom,” she said.

Willoughby charitably apologized for him. “He has been fuddling himself.”

Her vigilant considerateness had dealt the sensitive gentleman a shock, plainly telling him she had her ideas of his actual posture. Nor was he unhurt by her superior acuteness and her display of authority on his grounds.

He said, boldly, as he weighed the purse, half tossing it: “It’s not unlike Clara’s.”

Page 2877

He feared that his lips and cheeks were twitching, and as he grew aware of a glassiness of aspect that would reflect any suspicion of a keen-eyed woman, he became bolder still!

“Laetitia’s, I know it is not. Hers is an ancient purse.”

“A present from you!”

“How do you hit on that, my dear lady?”

“Deductively.”

“Well, the purse looks as good as new in quality, like the owner.”

“The poor dear has not much occasion for using it.”

“You are mistaken: she uses it daily.”

“If it were better filled, Sir Willoughby, your old scheme might be arranged. The parties do not appear so unwilling. Professor Crooklyn and I came on them just now rather by surprise, and I assure you their heads were close, faces meeting, eyes musing.”

“Impossible.”

“Because when they approach the point, you won’t allow it! Selfish!”

“Now,” said Willoughby, very animatedly, “question Clara. Now, do, my dear Mrs. Mountstuart, do speak to Clara on that head; she will convince you I have striven quite recently against myself, if you like. I have instructed her to aid me, given her the fullest instructions, carte blanche. She cannot possibly have a doubt. I may look to her to remove any you may entertain from your mind on the subject. I have proposed, seconded, and chorussed it, and it will not be arranged. If you expect me to deplore that fact, I can only answer that my actions are under my control, my feelings are not. I will do everything consistent with the duties of a man of honour perpetually running into fatal errors because he did not properly consult the dictates of those feelings at the right season. I can violate them: but I can no more command them than I can my destiny. They were crushed of old, and so let them be now. Sentiments we won’t discuss; though you know that sentiments have a bearing on social life: are factors, as they say in their later jargon. I never speak of mine. To you I could. It is not necessary. If old Vernon, instead of flattening his chest at a desk, had any manly ambition to take part in public affairs, she would be the woman for him. I have called her my Egeria. She would be his Cornelia. One could swear of her that she would have noble offspring!—-But old Vernon has had his disappointment, and will moan over it up to the end. And she? So it appears. I have tried; yes, personally: without effect. In other matters I may have influence with her: not in that one. She declines. She will live and die Laetitia

Dale. We are alone: I confess to you, I love the name. It's an old song in my ears. Do not be too ready with a name for me. Believe me—I speak from my experience hitherto—there is a fatality in these things. I cannot conceal from my poor girl that this fatality exists . . ."

"Which is the poor girl at present?" said Mrs. Mountstuart, cool in a mystification.

"And though she will tell you that I have authorized and Clara Middleton—done as much as man can to institute the union you suggest, she will own that she is conscious of the presence of this—fatality, I call it for want of a better title between us. It drives her in one direction, me in another—or would, if I submitted to the pressure. She is not the first who has been conscious of it."

Page 2878

“Are we laying hold of a third poor girl?” said Mrs. Mountstuart. “Ah! I remember. And I remember we used to call it playing fast and loose in those days, not fatality. It is very strange. It may be that you were unblushingly courted in those days, and excusable; and we all supposed . . . but away you went for your tour.”

“My mother’s medical receipt for me. Partially it succeeded. She was for grand marriages: not I. I could make, I could not be, a sacrifice. And then I went in due time to Dr. Cupid on my own account. She has the kind of attraction. . . But one changes! On revient toujours. First we begin with a liking; then we give ourselves up to the passion of beauty: then comes the serious question of suitableness of the mate to match us; and perhaps we discover that we were wiser in early youth than somewhat later. However, she has beauty. Now, Mrs Mountstuart, you do admire her. Chase the idea of the ‘dainty rogue’ out of your view of her: you admire her: she is captivating; she has a particular charm of her own, nay, she has real beauty.”

Mrs. Mountstuart fronted him to say: “Upon my word, my dear Sir Willoughby, I think she has it to such a degree that I don’t know the man who could hold out against her if she took the field. She is one of the women who are dead shots with men. Whether it’s in their tongues or their eyes, or it’s an effusion and an atmosphere—whatever it is, it’s a spell, another fatality for you!”

“Animal; not spiritual!”

“Oh, she hasn’t the head of Letty Dale.”

Sir Willoughby allowed Mrs. Mountstuart to pause and follow her thoughts.

“Dear me!” she exclaimed. “I noticed a change in Letty Dale last night; and to-day. She looked fresher and younger; extremely well: which is not what I can say for you, my friend. Fatalizing is not good for the complexion.”

“Don’t take away my health, pray,” cried Willoughby, with a snapping laugh.

“Be careful,” said Mrs. Mountstuart. “You have got a sentimental tone. You talk of ‘feelings crushed of old’. It is to a woman, not to a man that you speak, but that sort of talk is a way of making the ground slippery. I listen in vain for a natural tongue; and when I don’t hear it, I suspect plotting in men. You show your under-teeth too at times when you draw in a breath, like a condemned high-caste Hindoo my husband took me to see in a jail in Calcutta, to give me some excitement when I was pining for England. The creature did it regularly as he breathed; you did it last night, and you have been doing it to-day, as if the air cut you to the quick. You have been spoilt. You have been too much anointed. What I’ve just mentioned is a sign with me of a settled something on the brain of a man.”

“The brain?” said Sir Willoughby, frowning.

“Yes, you laugh sourly, to look at,” said she. “Mountstuart told me that the muscles of the mouth betray men sooner than the eyes, when they have cause to be uneasy in their minds.”

Page 2879

“But, ma’am, I shall not break my word; I shall not, not; I intend, I have resolved to keep it. I do not fatalize, let my complexion be black or white. Despite my resemblance to a high-caste malefactor of the Calcutta prison-wards . . .”

“Friend! friend! you know how I chatter.”

He saluted her finger-ends. “Despite the extraordinary display of teeth, you will find me go to execution with perfect calmness; with a resignation as good as happiness.”

“Like a Jacobite lord under the Georges.”

“You have told me that you wept to read of one: like him, then. My principles have not changed, if I have. When I was younger, I had an idea of a wife who would be with me in my thoughts as well as aims: a woman with a spirit of romance, and a brain of solid sense. I shall sooner or later dedicate myself to a public life; and shall, I suppose, want the counsellor or comforter who ought always to be found at home. It may be unfortunate that I have the ideal in my head. But I would never make rigorous demands for specific qualities. The cruellest thing in the world is to set up a living model before a wife, and compel her to copy it. In any case, here we are upon the road: the die is cast. I shall not reprieve myself. I cannot release her. Marriage represents facts, courtship fancies. She will be cured by-and-by of that coveting of everything that I do, feel, think, dream, imagine . . . ta-ta-ta-ta ad infinitum. Laetitia was invited here to show her the example of a fixed character—solid as any concrete substance you would choose to build on, and not a whit the less feminine.”

“Ta-ta-ta-ta ad infinitum. You need not tell me you have a design in all that you do, Willoughby Patterne.”

“You smell the autocrat? Yes, he can mould and govern the creatures about him. His toughest rebel is himself! If you see Clara . . . You wish to see her, I think you said?”

“Her behaviour to Lady Busshe last night was queer.”

“If you will. She makes a mouth at porcelain. Toujours la porcelaine! For me, her pettishness is one of her charms, I confess it. Ten years younger, I could not have compared them.”

“Whom?”

“Laetitia and Clara.”

“Sir Willoughby, in any case, to quote you, here we are all upon the road, and we must act as if events were going to happen; and I must ask her to help me on the subject of my wedding-present, for I don’t want to have her making mouths at mine, however pretty—and she does it prettily.”

"'Another dedicatory offering to the rogue in me!' she says of porcelain."

"Then porcelain it shall not be. I mean to consult her; I have come determined upon a chat with her. I think I understand. But she produces false impressions on those who don't know you both. 'I shall have that porcelain back,' says Lady Busshe to me, when we were shaking hands last night: 'I think,' says she, 'it should have been the Willow Pattern.' And she really said: 'He's in for being jilted a second time!'"

Page 2880

Sir Willoughby restrained a bound of his body that would have sent him up some feet into the air. He felt his skull thundered at within.

“Rather than that it should fan upon her!” ejaculated he, correcting his resemblance to the high-caste culprit as soon as it recurred to him.

“But you know Lady Busshe,” said Mrs. Mountstuart, genuinely solicitous to ease the proud man of his pain. She could see through him to the depth of the skin, which his fencing sensitiveness vainly attempted to cover as it did the heart of him. “Lady Busshe is nothing without her flights, fads, and fancies. She has always insisted that you have an unfortunate nose. I remember her saying on the day of your majority, it was the nose of a monarch destined to lose a throne.”

“Have I ever offended Lady Busshe?”

“She trumpets you. She carries Lady Culmer with her too, and you may expect a visit of nods and hints and pots of alabaster. They worship you: you are the hope of England in their eyes, and no woman is worthy of you: but they are a pair of fatalists, and if you begin upon Letty Dale with them, you might as well forbid your banns. They will be all over the country exclaiming on predestination and marriages made in heaven.”

“Clara and her father!” cried Sir Willoughby.

Dr Middleton and his daughter appeared in the circle of shrubs and flowers.

“Bring her to me, and save me from the polyglot,” said Mrs Mountstuart, in afright at Dr. Middleton’s manner of pouring forth into the ears of the downcast girl.

The leisure he loved that he might debate with his genius upon any next step was denied to Willoughby: he had to place his trust in the skill with which he had sown and prepared Mrs Mountstuart’s understanding to meet the girl—beautiful abhorred that she was! detested darling! thing to squeeze to death and throw to the dust, and mourn over!

He had to risk it; and at an hour when Lady Busshe’s prognostic grievously impressed his intense apprehensiveness of nature.

As it happened that Dr. Middleton’s notion of a disagreeable duty in colloquy was to deliver all that he contained, and escape the listening to a syllable of reply, Willoughby withdrew his daughter from him opportunely.

“Mrs. Mountstuart wants you, Clara.”

“I shall be very happy,” Clara replied, and put on a new face. An imperceptible nervous shrinking was met by another force in her bosom, that pushed her to advance without a sign of reluctance. She seemed to glitter.

She was handed to Mrs. Mountstuart.

Dr Middleton laid his hand over Willoughby's shoulder, retiring on a bow before the great lady of the district. He blew and said: "An opposition of female instincts to masculine intellect necessarily creates a corresponding antagonism of intellect to instinct."

"Her answer, sir? Her reasons? Has she named any?"

Page 2881

“The cat,” said Dr. Middleton, taking breath for a sentence, “that humps her back in the figure of the letter H, or a Chinese bridge has given the dog her answer and her reasons, we may presume: but he that undertakes to translate them into human speech might likewise venture to propose an addition to the alphabet and a continuation of Homer. The one performance would be not more wonderful than the other. Daughters, Willoughby, daughters! Above most human peccancies, I do abhor a breach of faith. She will not be guilty of that. I demand a cheerful fulfilment of a pledge: and I sigh to think that I cannot count on it without administering a lecture.”

“She will soon be my care, sir.”

“She shall be. Why, she is as good as married. She is at the altar. She is in her house. She is—why, where is she not? She has entered the sanctuary. She is out of the market. This maenad shriek for freedom would happily entitle her to the Republican cap—the Phrygian—in a revolutionary Parisian procession. To me it has no meaning; and but that I cannot credit child of mine with mania, I should be in trepidation of her wits.”

Sir Willoughby’s livelier fears were pacified by the information that Clara had simply emitted a cry. Clara had once or twice given him cause for starting and considering whether to think of her sex differently or condemningly of her, yet he could not deem her capable of fully unbosoming herself even to him, and under excitement. His idea of the cowardice of girls combined with his ideal of a waxwork sex to persuade him that though they are often (he had experienced it) wantonly desperate in their acts, their tongues are curbed by rosy prudency. And this was in his favour. For if she proved speechless and stupid with Mrs. Mountstuart, the lady would turn her over, and beat her flat, beat her angular, in fine, turn her to any shape, despising her, and cordially believe him to be the model gentleman of Christendom. She would fill in the outlines he had sketched to her of a picture that he had small pride in by comparison with his early vision of a fortune-favoured, triumphing squire, whose career is like the sun’s, intelligibly lordly to all comprehensions. Not like your model gentleman, that has to be expounded—a thing for abstract esteem! However, it was the choice left to him. And an alternative was enfolded in that. Mrs. Mountstuart’s model gentleman could marry either one of two women, throwing the other overboard. He was bound to marry: he was bound to take to himself one of them: and whichever one he selected would cast a lustre on his reputation. At least she would rescue him from the claws of Lady Busshe, and her owl’s hoot of “Willow Pattern”, and her hag’s shriek of “twice jilted”. That flying infant Willoughby—his unprotected little incorporeal omnipresent Self (not thought of so much as passionately felt for)—would not be scoffed at as the luckless with women. A fall indeed from his original conception of his name of fame abroad! But Willoughby had the high consolation of knowing that others have fallen lower. There is the fate of the devils to comfort us, if we are driven hard. “For one of your pangs another bosom is racked by ten”, we read in the solacing Book.

Page 2882

With all these nice calculations at work, Willoughby stood above himself, contemplating his active machinery, which he could partly criticize but could not stop, in a singular wonderment at the aims and schemes and tremours of one who was handsome, manly, acceptable in the world's eyes: and had he not loved himself most heartily he would have been divided to the extent of repudiating that urgent and excited half of his being, whose motions appeared as those of a body of insects perpetually erecting and repairing a structure of extraordinary pettiness. He loved himself too seriously to dwell on the division for more than a minute or so. But having seen it, and for the first time, as he believed, his passion for the woman causing it became surcharged with bitterness, atrabiliar.

A glance behind him, as he walked away with Dr. Middleton, showed Clara, cunning creature that she was, airily executing her malicious graces in the preliminary courtesies with Mrs. Mountstuart.

CHAPTER XXXV

MISS MIDDLETON AND MRS. MOUNTSTUART

"Sit beside me, fair Middleton," said the great lady.

"Gladly," said Clara, bowing to her title.

"I want to sound you, my dear."

Clara presented an open countenance with a dim interrogation on the forehead. "Yes?" she said, submissively.

"You were one of my bright faces last night. I was in love with you. Delicate vessels ring sweetly to a finger-nail, and if the wit is true, you answer to it; that I can see, and that is what I like. Most of the people one has at a table are drums. A ruba-dub-dub on them is the only way to get a sound. When they can be persuaded to do it upon one another, they call it conversation."

"Colonel De Craye was very funny."

"Funny, and witty too."

"But never spiteful."

"These Irish or half Irishmen are my taste. If they're not politicians, mind; I mean Irish gentlemen. I will never have another dinner-party without one. Our men's tempers are uncertain. You can't get them to forget themselves. And when the wine is in them the nature comes out, and they must be buffetting, and up start politics, and good-bye to

harmony! My husband, I am sorry to say, was one of those who have a long account of ruined dinners against them. I have seen him and his friends red as the roast and white as the boiled with wrath on a popular topic they had excited themselves over, intrinsically not worth a snap of the fingers. In London!" exclaimed Mrs. Mountstuart, to aggravate the charge against her lord in the Shades. "But town or country, the table should be sacred. I have heard women say it is a plot on the side of the men to teach us our littleness. I don't believe they have a plot. It would be to compliment them on a talent. I believe they fall upon one another blindly, simply because they are full; which is, we are told, the preparation for the fighting Englishman. They cannot eat and keep a truce. Did you notice that dreadful Mr. Capes?"

Page 2883

“The gentleman who frequently contradicted papa? But Colonel De Craye was good enough to relieve us.”

“How, my dear?”

“You did not hear him? He took advantage of an interval when Mr. Capes was breathing after a paean to his friend, the Governor—I think—of one of the presidencies, to say to the lady beside him: ’He was a wonderful administrator and great logician; he married an Anglo-Indian widow, and soon after published a pamphlet in favour of Suttee.’”

“And what did the lady say?”

“She said: ‘Oh.’”

“Hark at her! And was it heard?”

“Mr. Capes granted the widow, but declared he had never seen the pamphlet in favour of Suttee, and disbelieved in it. He insisted that it was to be named Sati. He was vehement.”

“Now I do remember:—which must have delighted the colonel. And Mr. Capes retired from the front upon a repetition of ‘in toto, in toto’. As if ‘in toto’ were the language of a dinner-table! But what will ever teach these men? Must we import Frenchmen to give them an example in the art of conversation, as their grandfathers brought over marquises to instruct them in salads? And our young men too! Women have to take to the hunting-field to be able to talk with them, and be on a par with their grooms. Now, there was Willoughby Patterne, a prince among them formerly. Now, did you observe him last night? did you notice how, instead of conversing, instead of assisting me—as he was bound to do doubly owing to the defection of Vernon Whitford: a thing I don’t yet comprehend—there he sat sharpening his lower lip for cutting remarks. And at my best man! at Colonel De Craye! If he had attacked Mr. Capes, with his Governor of Bomby, as the man pronounces it, or Colonel Wildjohn and his Protestant Church in Danger, or Sir Wilson Pettifer harping on his Monarchical Republic, or any other! No, he preferred to be sarcastic upon friend Horace, and he had the worst of it. Sarcasm is so silly! What is the gain if he has been smart? People forget the epigram and remember the other’s good temper. On that field, my dear, you must make up your mind to be beaten by ‘friend Horace’. I have my prejudices and I have my prepossessions, but I love good temper, and I love wit, and when I see a man possessed of both, I set my cap at him, and there’s my flat confession, and highly unfeminine it is.”

“Not at all!” cried Clara.

“We are one, then.”

Clara put up a mouth empty of words: she was quite one with her. Mrs. Mountstuart pressed her hand. “When one does get intimate with a dainty rogue!” she said. “You forgive me all that, for I could vow that Willoughby has betrayed me.”

Clara looked soft, kind, bright, in turns, and clouded instantly when the lady resumed: “A friend of my own sex, and young, and a close neighbour, is just what I would have prayed for. And I’ll excuse you, my dear, for not being so anxious about the friendship of an old woman. But I shall be of use to you, you will find. In the first place, I never tap for secrets. In the second, I keep them. Thirdly, I have some power. And fourth, every young married woman has need of a friend like me. Yes, and Lady Patterne heading all the county will be the stronger for my backing. You don’t look so mighty well pleased, my dear. Speak out.”

Page 2884

“Dear Mrs. Mountstuart!”

“I tell you, I am very fond of Willoughby, but I saw the faults of the boy and see the man’s. He has the pride of a king, and it’s a pity if you offend it. He is prodigal in generosity, but he can’t forgive. As to his own errors, you must be blind to them as a Saint. The secret of him is, that he is one of those excessively civilized creatures who aim at perfection: and I think he ought to be supported in his conceit of having attained it; for the more men of that class, the greater our influence. He excels in manly sports, because he won’t be excelled in anything, but as men don’t comprehend his fineness, he comes to us; and his wife must manage him by that key. You look down at the idea of managing. It has to be done. One thing you may be assured of, he will be proud of you. His wife won’t be very much enamoured of herself if she is not the happiest woman in the world. You will have the best horses, the best dresses, the finest jewels in England; and an incomparable cook. The house will be changed the moment you enter it as Lady Patterne. And, my dear, just where he is, with all his graces, deficient of attraction, yours will tell. The sort of Othello he would make, or Leontes, I don’t know, and none of us ever needs to know. My impression is, that if even a shadow of a suspicion flitted across him, he is a sort of man to double-dye himself in guilt by way of vengeance in anticipation of an imagined offence. Not uncommon with men. I have heard strange stories of them: and so will you in your time to come, but not from me. No young woman shall ever be the sourer for having been my friend. One word of advice now we are on the topic: never play at counter-strokes with him. He will be certain to out-stroke you, and you will be driven further than you meant to go. They say we beat men at that game; and so we do, at the cost of beating ourselves. And if once we are started, it is a race-course ending on a precipice—over goes the winner. We must be moderately slavish to keep our place; which is given us in appearance; but appearances make up a remarkably large part of life, and far the most comfortable, so long as we are discreet at the right moment. He is a man whose pride, when hurt, would run his wife to perdition to solace it. If he married a troublesome widow, his pamphlet on Suttee would be out within the year. Vernon Whitford would receive instructions about it the first frosty moon. You like Miss Dale?”

“I think I like her better than she likes me,” said Clara.

“Have you never warmed together?”

“I have tried it. She is not one bit to blame. I can see how it is that she misunderstands me: or justly condemns me, perhaps I should say.”

“The hero of two women must die and be wept over in common before they can appreciate one another. You are not cold?”

“No.”

“You shuddered, my dear.”

“Did I?”

Page 2885

“I do sometimes. Feet will be walking over ones grave, wherever it lies. Be sure of this: Willoughby Patterne is a man of unimpeachable honour.”

“I do not doubt it.”

“He means to be devoted to you. He has been accustomed to have women hanging around him like votive offerings.”

“I . . .!”

“You cannot: of course not: any one could see that at a glance. You are all the sweeter to me for not being tame. Marriage cures a multitude of indispositions.”

“Oh! Mrs. Mountstuart, will you listen to me?”

“Presently. Don’t threaten me with confidences. Eloquence is a terrible thing in woman. I suspect, my dear, that we both know as much as could be spoken.”

“You hardly suspect the truth, I fear.”

“Let me tell you one thing about jealous men—when they are not blackamoors married to disobedient daughters. I speak of our civil creature of the drawing-rooms: and lovers, mind, not husbands: two distinct species, married or not:—they’re rarely given to jealousy unless they are flighty themselves. The jealousy fixes them. They have only to imagine that we are for some fun likewise and they grow as deferential as my footman, as harmless as the sportsman whose gun has burst. Ah! my fair Middleton, am I pretending to teach you? You have read him his lesson, and my table suffered for it last night, but I bear no rancour.”

“You bewilder me, Mrs. Mountstuart.”

“Not if I tell you that you have driven the poor man to try whether it would be possible for him to give you up.”

“I have?”

“Well, and you are successful.”

“I am?”

“Jump, my dear!”

“He will?”

“When men love stale instead of fresh, withered better than blooming, excellence in the abstract rather than the palpable. With their idle prate of feminine intellect, and a grotto nymph, and a mother of Gracchi! Why, he must think me dazed with admiration of him to talk to me! One listens, you know. And he is one of the men who cast a kind of physical spell on you while he has you by the ear, until you begin to think of it by talking to somebody else. I suppose there are clever people who do see deep into the breast while dialogue is in progress. One reads of them. No, my dear, you have very cleverly managed to show him that it isn’t at all possible: he can’t. And the real cause for alarm, in my humble opinion, is lest your amiable foil should have been a trifle, as he would say, deceived, too much in earnest, led too far. One may reprove him for not being wiser, but men won’t learn without groaning that they are simply weapons taken up to be put down when done with. Leave it to me to compose him.—Willoughby can’t give you up. I’m certain he has tried; his pride has been horridly wounded. You were shrewd, and he has had his lesson. If these little rufflings don’t come before marriage they come after; so it’s not time lost; and it’s good to be able to look back on them. You are very white, my child.”

Page 2886

“Can you, Mrs. Mountstuart, can you think I would be so heartlessly treacherous?”

“Be honest, fair Middleton, and answer me: Can you say you had not a corner of an idea of producing an effect on Willoughby?”

Clara checked the instinct of her tongue to defend her reddening cheeks, with a sense that she was disintegrating and crumbling, but she wanted this lady for a friend, and she had to submit to the conditions, and be red and silent.

Mrs. Mountstuart examined her leisurely.

“That will do. Conscience blushes. One knows it by the conflagration. Don’t be hard on yourself . . . there you are in the other extreme. That blush of yours would count with me against any quantity of evidence—all the Crooklyns in the kingdom. You lost your purse.”

“I discovered that it was lost this morning.”

“Flitch has been here with it. Willoughby has it. You will ask him for it; he will demand payment: you will be a couple of yards’ length or so of cramoisy: and there ends the episode, nobody killed, only a poor man melancholy-wounded, and I must offer him my hand to mend him, vowing to prove to him that Suttee was properly abolished. Well, and now to business. I said I wanted to sound you. You have been overdone with porcelain. Poor Lady Busshe is in despair at your disappointment. Now, I mean my wedding-present to be to your taste.”

“Madam!”

“Who is the madam you are imploring?”

“Dear Mrs. Mountstuart!”

“Well?”

“I shall fall in your esteem. Perhaps you will help me. No one else can. I am a prisoner: I am compelled to continue this imposture. Oh, I shun speaking much: you object to it and I dislike it: but I must endeavour to explain to you that I am unworthy of the position you think a proud one.”

“Tut-tut; we are all unworthy, cross our arms, bow our heads; and accept the honours. Are you playing humble handmaid? What an old organ-tune that is! Well? Give me reasons.”

“I do not wish to marry.”

“He’s the great match of the county!”

“I cannot marry him.”

“Why, you are at the church door with him! Cannot marry him?”

“It does not bind me.”

“The church door is as binding as the altar to an honourable girl. What have you been about? Since I am in for confidences, half ones won’t do. We must have honourable young women as well as men of honour. You can’t imagine he is to be thrown over now, at this hour? What have you against him? come!”

“I have found that I do not . . .”

“What?”

“Love him.”

Mrs. Mountstuart grimaced transiently. “That is no answer. The cause!” she said. “What has he done?”

“Nothing.”

“And when did you discover this nothing?”

“By degrees: unknown to myself; suddenly.”

“Suddenly and by degrees? I suppose it’s useless to ask for a head. But if all this is true, you ought not to be here.”

Page 2887

“I wish to go; I am unable.”

“Have you had a scene together?”

“I have expressed my wish.”

“In roundabout?—girl’s English?”

“Quite clearly; oh, very clearly.”

“Have you spoken to your father?”

“I have.”

“And what does Dr. Middleton say?”

“It is incredible to him.”

“To me too! I can understand little differences, little whims, caprices: we don’t settle into harness for a tap on the shoulder as a man becomes a knight: but to break and bounce away from an unhappy gentleman at the church door is either madness or it’s one of the things without a name. You think you are quite sure of yourself?”

“I am so sure, that I look back with regret on the time when I was not.”

“But you were in love with him.”

“I was mistaken.”

“No love?”

“I have none to give.”

“Dear me!—Yes, yes, but that tone of sorrowful conviction is often a trick, it’s not new: and I know that assumption of plain sense to pass off a monstrosity.” Mrs. Mountstuart struck her lap. “Soh! but I’ve had to rack my brain for it: feminine disgust? You have been hearing imputations of his past life? moral character? No? Circumstances might make him behave unkindly, not unhandsomely: and we have no claim over a man’s past, or it’s too late to assert it. What is the case?”

“We are quite divided.”

“Nothing in the way of . . . nothing green-eyed?”

“Far from that!”

“Then name it.”

“We disagree.”

“Many a very good agreement is founded on disagreeing. It’s to be regretted that you are not portionless. If you had been, you would have made very little of disagreeing. You are just as much bound in honour as if you had the ring on your finger.”

“In honour! But I appeal to his, I am no wife for him.”

“But if he insists, you consent?”

“I appeal to reason. Is it, madam . . .”

“But, I say, if he insists, you consent?”

“He will insist upon his own misery as well as mine.”

Mrs. Mountstuart rocked herself “My poor Sir Willoughby! What a fate!—And I took you for a clever girl! Why, I have been admiring your management of him! And here am I bound to take a lesson from Lady Busshe. My dear good Middleton, don’t let it be said that Lady Busshe saw deeper than I! I put some little vanity in it, I own: I won’t conceal it. She declares that when she sent her present—I don’t believe her—she had a premonition that it would come back. Surely you won’t justify the extravagances of a woman without common reverence:—for anatomize him as we please to ourselves, he is a splendid man (and I did it chiefly to encourage and come at you). We don’t often behold such a lordly-looking man: so conversable too when he feels at home; a picture of an English gentleman! The very man we want married for our

Page 2888

neighbourhood! A woman who can openly talk of expecting him to be twice jilted! You shrink. It is repulsive. It would be incomprehensible: except, of course, to Lady Busshe, who rushed to one of her violent conclusions, and became a prophetess. Conceive a woman's imagining it could happen twice to the same man! I am not sure she did not send the identical present that arrived and returned once before: you know, the Durham engagement. She told me last night she had it back. I watched her listening very suspiciously to Professor Crooklyn. My dear, it is her passion to foretell disasters—her passion! And when they are confirmed, she triumphs, of course. We shall have her domineering over us with sapient nods at every trifle occurring. The county will be unendurable. Unsay it, my Middleton! And don't answer like an oracle because I do all the talking. Pour out to me. You'll soon come to a stop and find the want of reason in the want of words. I assure you that's true. Let me have a good gaze at you. No," said Mrs. Mountstuart, after posturing herself to peruse Clara's features, "brains you have; one can see it by the nose and the mouth. I could vow you are the girl I thought you; you have your wits on tiptoe. How of the heart?"

"None," Clara sighed.

The sigh was partly voluntary, though unforced; as one may with ready sincerity act a character that is our own only through sympathy.

Mrs. Mountstuart felt the extra weight in the young lady's falling breath. There was no necessity for a deep sigh over an absence of heart or confession of it. If Clara did not love the man to whom she was betrothed, sighing about it signified what? some pretence; and a pretence is the cloak of a secret. Girls do not sigh in that way with compassion for the man they have no heart for, unless at the same time they should be oppressed by the knowledge or dread of having a heart for some one else. As a rule, they have no compassion to bestow on him: you might as reasonably expect a soldier to bewail the enemy he strikes in action: they must be very disengaged to have it. And supposing a show of the thing to be exhibited, when it has not been worried out of them, there is a reserve in the background: they are pitying themselves under a mask of decent pity of their wretch.

So ran Mrs. Mountstuart's calculations, which were like her suspicion, coarse and broad, not absolutely incorrect, but not of an exact measure with the truth. That pin's head of the truth is rarely hit by design. The search after it of the professionally penetrative in the dark of a bosom may bring it forth by the heavy knocking all about the neighbourhood that we call good guessing, but it does not come out clean; other matter adheres to it; and being more it is less than truth. The unadulterate is to be had only by faith in it or by waiting for it.

A lover! thought the sagacious dame. There was no lover: some love there was: or, rather, there was a preparation of the chamber, with no lamp yet lighted.

Page 2889

“Do you positively tell me you have no heart for the position of first lady of the county?” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

Clara’s reply was firm: “None whatever.”

“My dear, I will believe you on one condition. Look at me. You have eyes. If you are for mischief, you are armed for it. But how much better, when you have won a prize, to settle down and wear it! Lady Patterne will have entire occupation for her flights and whimsies in leading the county. And the man, surely the man—he behaved badly last night: but a beauty like this,” she pushed a finger at Clara’s cheek, and doated a half instant, “you have the very beauty to break in an ogre’s temper. And the man is as governable as he is presentable. You have the beauty the French call—no, it’s the beauty of a queen of elves: one sees them lurking about you, one here, one there. Smile—they dance: be doleful—they hang themselves. No, there’s not a trace of satanic; at least, not yet. And come, come, my Middleton, the man is a man to be proud of. You can send him into Parliament to wear off his humours. To my thinking, he has a fine style: conscious? I never thought so before last night. I can’t guess what has happened to him recently. He was once a young Grand Monarque. He was really a superb young English gentleman. Have you been wounding him?”

“It is my misfortune to be obliged to wound him,” said Clara.

“Quite needlessly, my child, for marry him you must.”

Clara’s bosom rose: her shoulders rose too, narrowing, and her head fell slight back.

Mrs. Mountstuart exclaimed: “But the scandal! You would never, never think of following the example of that Durham girl?—whether she was provoked to it by jealousy or not. It seems to have gone so astonishingly far with you in a very short time, that one is alarmed as to where you will stop. Your look just now was downright revulsion.”

“I fear it is. It is. I am past my own control. Dear madam, you have my assurance that I will not behave scandalously or dishonourably. What I would entreat of you is to help me. I know this of myself . . . I am not the best of women. I am impatient, wickedly. I should be no good wife. Feelings like mine teach me unhappy things of myself.”

“Rich, handsome, lordly, influential, brilliant health, fine estates,” Mrs. Mountstuart enumerated in petulant accents as there started across her mind some of Sir Willoughby’s attributes for the attraction of the soul of woman. “I suppose you wish me to take you in earnest?”

“I appeal to you for help.”

“What help?”

“Persuade him of the folly of pressing me to keep my word.”

“I will believe you, my dear Middleton, on one condition: your talk of no heart is nonsense. A change like this, if one is to believe in the change, occurs through the heart, not because there is none. Don’t you see that? But if you want me for a friend, you must not sham stupid. It’s bad enough in itself: the imitation’s horrid. You have to be honest with me, and answer me right out. You came here on this visit intending to marry Willoughby Patterne.”

Page 2890

“Yes.”

“And gradually you suddenly discovered, since you came here, that you did not intend it, if you could find a means of avoiding it.”

“Oh, madam, yes, it is true.”

“Now comes the test. And, my lovely Middleton, your flaming cheeks won’t suffice for me this time. The old serpent can blush like an innocent maid on occasion. You are to speak, and you are to tell me in six words why that was: and don’t waste one on ‘madam’, or ’Oh! Mrs. Mountstuart’ Why did you change?”

“I came—When I came I was in some doubt. Indeed I speak the truth. I found I could not give him the admiration he has, I dare say, a right to expect. I turned—it surprised me; it surprises me now. But so completely! So that to think of marrying him is . . .”

“Defer the simile,” Mrs. Mountstuart interposed. “If you hit on a clever one, you will never get the better of it. Now, by just as much as you have outstripped my limitation of words to you, you show me you are dishonest.”

“I could make a vow.”

“You would forswear yourself.”

“Will you help me?”

“If you are perfectly ingenuous, I may try.”

“Dear lady, what more can I say?”

“It may be difficult. You can reply to a catechism.”

“I shall have your help?”

“Well, yes; though I don’t like stipulations between friends. There is no man living to whom you could willingly give your hand? That is my question. I cannot possibly take a step unless I know. Reply briefly: there is or there is not.” Clara sat back with bated breath, mentally taking the leap into the abyss, realizing it, and the cold prudence of abstention, and the delirium of the confession. Was there such a man? It resembled freedom to think there was: to avow it promised freedom.

“Oh, Mrs. Mountstuart!”

“Well?”

“You will help me?”

“Upon my word, I shall begin to doubt your desire for it.”

“Willingly give my hand, madam?”

“For shame! And with wits like yours, can’t you perceive where hesitation in answering such a question lands you?”

“Dearest lady, will you give me your hand? may I whisper?”

“You need not whisper; I won’t look.”

Clara’s voice trembled on a tense chord.

“There is one . . . compared with him I feel my insignificance. If I could aid him.”

“What necessity have you to tell me more than that there is one?”

“Ah, madam, it is different: not as you imagine. You bid me be scrupulously truthful: I am: I wish you to know the different kind of feeling it is from what might be suspected from . . . a confession. To give my hand, is beyond any thought I have ever encouraged. If you had asked me whether there is one whom I admire—yes, I do. I cannot help admiring a beautiful and brave self-denying nature. It is one whom you must pity, and to pity casts you beneath him: for you pity him because it is his nobleness that has been the enemy of his fortunes. He lives for others.”

Page 2891

Her voice was musically thrilling in that low muted tone of the very heart, impossible to deride or disbelieve.

Mrs. Mountstuart set her head nodding on springs.

“Is he clever?”

“Very.”

“He talks well?”

“Yes.”

“Handsome?”

“He might be thought so.”

“Witty?”

“I think he is.”

“Gay, cheerful?”

“In his manner.”

“Why, the man would be a mountebank if he adopted any other. And poor?”

“He is not wealthy.”

Mrs. Mountstuart preserved a lengthened silence, but nipped Clara’s fingers once or twice to reassure her without approving. “Of course he’s poor,” she said at last; “directly the reverse of what you could have, it must be. Well, my fair Middleton, I can’t say you have been dishonest. I’ll help you as far as I’m able. How, it is quite impossible to tell. We’re in the mire. The best way seems to me to get this pitiable angel to cut some ridiculous capers and present you another view of him. I don’t believe in his innocence. He knew you to be a plighted woman.”

“He has not once by word or sign hinted a disloyalty.”

“Then how do you know.”

“I do not know.”

“He is not the cause of your wish to break your engagement?”

“No.”

“Then you have succeeded in just telling me nothing. What is?”

“Ah! madam!”

“You would break your engagement purely because the admirable creature is in existence?”

Clara shook her head: she could not say she was dizzy. She had spoken out more than she had ever spoken to herself, and in doing so she had cast herself a step beyond the line she dared to contemplate.

“I won’t detain you any longer,” said Mrs. Mountstuart. “The more we learn, the more we are taught that we are not so wise as we thought we were. I have to go to school to Lady Busshe! I really took you for a very clever girl. If you change again, you will notify the important circumstance to me, I trust.”

“I will,” said Clara, and no violent declaration of the impossibility of her changing again would have had such an effect on her hearer.

Mrs. Mountstuart scanned her face for a new reading of it to match with her later impressions.

“I am to do as I please with the knowledge I have gained?”

“I am utterly in your hands, madam.”

“I have not meant to be unkind.”

“You have not been unkind; I could embrace you.”

“I am rather too shattered, and kissing won’t put me together. I laughed at Lady Busshe! No wonder you went off like a rocket with a disappointing bouquet when I told you you had been successful with poor Sir Willoughby and he could not give you up. I noticed that. A woman like Lady Busshe, always prying for the lamentable, would have required no further enlightenment. Has he a temper?”

Page 2892

Clara did not ask her to signalize the person thus abruptly obtruded.

“He has faults,” she said.

“There’s an end to Sir Willoughby, then! Though I don’t say he will give you up even when he hears the worst, if he must hear it, as for his own sake he should. And I won’t say he ought to give you up. He’ll be the pitiable angel if he does. For you—but you don’t deserve compliments; they would be immoral. You have behaved badly, badly, badly. I have never had such a right-about-face in my life. You will deserve the stigma: you will be notorious: you will be called Number Two. Think of that! Not even original! We will break the conference, or I shall twaddle to extinction. I think I heard the luncheon bell.”

“It rang.”

“You don’t look fit for company, but you had better come.”

“Oh, yes; every day it’s the same.”

“Whether you’re in my hands or I’m in yours, we’re a couple of arch-conspirators against the peace of the family whose table we’re sitting at, and the more we rattle the viler we are, but we must do it to ease our minds.”

Mrs. Mountstuart spread the skirts of her voluminous dress, remarking further: “At a certain age our teachers are young people: we learn by looking backward. It speaks highly for me that I have not called you mad.—Full of faults, goodish-looking, not a bad talker, cheerful, poorish;—and she prefers that to this!” the great lady exclaimed in her reverie while emerging from the circle of shrubs upon a view of the Hall. Colonel De Craye advanced to her; certainly good-looking, certainly cheerful, by no means a bad talker, nothing of a Croesus, and variegated with faults.

His laughing smile attacked the irresolute hostility of her mien, confident as the sparkle of sunlight in a breeze. The effect of it on herself angered her on behalf of Sir Willoughby’s bride.

“Good-morning, Mrs. Mountstuart; I believe I am the last to greet you.”

“And how long do you remain here, Colonel De Craye?”

“I kissed earth when I arrived, like the Norman William, and consequently I’ve an attachment to the soil, ma’am.”

“You’re not going to take possession of it, I suppose?”

“A handful would satisfy me.”

“You play the Conqueror pretty much, I have heard. But property is held more sacred than in the times of the Norman William.”

“And speaking of property, Miss Middleton, your purse is found.” he said.

“I know it is,” she replied as unaffectedly as Mrs. Mountstuart could have desired, though the ingenuous air of the girl incensed her somewhat.

Clara passed on.

“You restore purses,” observed Mrs. Mountstuart.

Her stress on the word and her look thrilled De Craye; for there had been a long conversation between the young lady and the dame.

“It was an article that dropped and was not stolen,” said he.

Page 2893

“Barely sweet enough to keep, then!”

“I think I could have felt to it like poor Flitch, the flyman, who was the finder.”

“If you are conscious of these temptations to appropriate what is not your own, you should quit the neighbourhood.”

“And do it elsewhere? But that’s not virtuous counsel.”

“And I’m not counselling in the interests of your virtue, Colonel De Craye.”

“And I dared for a moment to hope that you were, ma’am,” he said, ruefully drooping.

They were close to the dining-room window, and Mrs Mountstuart preferred the terminating of a dialogue that did not promise to leave her features the austerely iron cast with which she had commenced it. She was under the spell of gratitude for his behaviour yesterday evening at her dinner-table; she could not be very severe.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANIMATED CONVERSATION AT A LUNCHEON-TABLE

Vernon was crossing the hall to the dining-room as Mrs Mountstuart stepped in. She called to him: “Are the champions reconciled?”

He replied: “Hardly that, but they have consented to meet at an altar to offer up a victim to the gods in the shape of modern poetic imitations of the classical.”

“That seems innocent enough. The Professor has not been anxious about his chest?”

“He recollects his cough now and then.”

“You must help him to forget it.”

“Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer are here,” said Vernon, not supposing it to be a grave announcement until the effect of it on Mrs. Mountstuart admonished him.

She dropped her voice: “Engage my fair friend for one of your walks the moment we rise from table. You may have to rescue her; but do. I mean it.”

“She’s a capital walker.” Vernon remarked in simpleton style.

“There’s no necessity for any of your pedestrian feats,” Mrs Mountstuart said, and let him go, turning to Colonel De Craye to pronounce an encomium on him: “The most open-minded man I know! Warranted to do perpetual service, and no mischief. If you

were all . . . instead of catching at every prize you covet! Yes, you would have your reward for unselfishness, I assure you. Yes, and where you seek it! That is what none of you men will believe."

"When you behold me in your own livery!" cried the colonel.

"Do I?" said she, dallying with a half-formed design to be confidential. "How is it one is always tempted to address you in the language of innuendo? I can't guess."

"Except that as a dog doesn't comprehend good English we naturally talk bad to him."

The great lady was tickled. Who could help being amused by this man? And after all, if her fair Middleton chose to be a fool there could be no gainsaying her, sorry though poor Sir Willoughby's friends must feel for him.

She tried not to smile.

Page 2894

“You are too absurd. Or a baby, you might have added.”

“I hadn’t the daring.”

“I’ll tell you what, Colonel De Craye, I shall end by falling in love with you; and without esteeming you, I fear.”

“The second follows as surely as the flavour upon a draught of Bacchus, if you’ll but toss off the glass, ma’am.”

“We women, sir, think it should be first.”

“’Tis to transpose the seasons, and give October the blossom and April the apple, and no sweet one! Esteem’s a mellow thing that comes after bloom and fire, like an evening at home; because if it went before it would have no father and couldn’t hope for progeny; for there’d be no nature in the business. So please, ma’am, keep to the original order, and you’ll be nature’s child, and I the most blessed of mankind.”

“Really, were I fifteen years younger. I am not so certain . . . I might try and make you harmless.”

“Draw the teeth of the lamb so long as you pet him!”

“I challenged you, colonel, and I won’t complain of your pitch. But now lay your wit down beside your candour, and descend to an every-day level with me for a minute.”

“Is it innuendo?”

“No; though I daresay it would be easier for you to respond to if it were.”

“I’m the straightforwardest of men at a word of command.”

“This is a whisper. Be alert, as you were last night. Shuffle the table well. A little liveliness will do it. I don’t imagine malice, but there’s curiosity, which is often as bad, and not so lightly foiled. We have Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer here.”

“To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky!”

“Well, then, can you fence with broomsticks?”

“I have had a bout with them in my time.”

“They are terribly direct.”

“They ‘give point’, as Napoleon commanded his cavalry to do.”

“You must help me to ward it.”

“They will require variety in the conversation.”

“Constant. You are an angel of intelligence, and if I have the judgeing of you, I’m afraid you’ll be allowed to pass, in spite of the scandal above. Open the door; I don’t unbonnet.”

De Craye threw the door open.

Lady Busshe was at that moment saying, “And are we indeed to have you for a neighbour, Dr. Middleton?”

The Rev. Doctor’s reply was drowned by the new arrivals.

“I thought you had forsaken us,” observed Sir Willoughby to Mrs. Mountstuart.

“And run away with Colonel De Craye? I’m too weighty, my dear friend. Besides, I have not looked at the wedding-presents yet.”

“The very object of our call!” exclaimed Lady Culmer.

“I have to confess I am in dire alarm about mine,” Lady Busshe nodded across the table at Clara. “Oh! you may shake your head, but I would rather hear a rough truth than the most complimentary evasion.”

“How would you define a rough truth, Dr. Middleton?” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

Page 2895

Like the trained warrior who is ready at all hours for the trumpet to arms, Dr. Middleton waked up for judicial allocution in a trice.

“A rough truth, madam, I should define to be that description of truth which is not imparted to mankind without a powerful impregnation of the roughness of the teller.”

“It is a rough truth, ma’am, that the world is composed of fools, and that the exceptions are knaves,” Professor Crooklyn furnished that example avoided by the Rev. Doctor.

“Not to precipitate myself into the jaws of the foregone definition, which strikes me as being as happy as Jonah’s whale, that could carry probably the most learned man of his time inside without the necessity of digesting him,” said De Craye, “a rough truth is a rather strong charge of universal nature for the firing off of a modicum of personal fact.”

“It is a rough truth that Plato is Moses atticizing,” said Vernon to Dr. Middleton, to keep the diversion alive.

“And that Aristotle had the globe under his cranium,” rejoined the Rev. Doctor.

“And that the Moderns live on the Ancients.”

“And that not one in ten thousand can refer to the particular treasury he filches.”

“The Art of our days is a revel of rough truth,” remarked Professor Crooklyn.

“And the literature has laboriously mastered the adjective, wherever it may be in relation to the noun,” Dr. Middleton added.

“Orson’s first appearance at court was in the figure of a rough truth, causing the Maids of Honour, accustomed to Tapestry Adams, astonishment and terror,” said De Craye. That he might not be left out of the sprightly play, Sir Willoughby levelled a lance at the quintain, smiling on Laetitia: “In fine, caricature is rough truth.”

She said, “Is one end of it, and realistic directness is the other.”

He bowed. “The palm is yours.”

Mrs. Mountstuart admired herself as each one trotted forth in turn characteristically, with one exception unaware of the aid which was being rendered to a distressed damsel wretchedly incapable of decent hypocrisy. Her intrepid lead had shown her hand to the colonel and drawn the enemy at a blow.

Sir Willoughby’s “in fine”, however, did not please her: still less did his lackadaisical Lothario-like bowing and smiling to Miss Dale: and he perceived it and was hurt. For how, carrying his tremendous load, was he to compete with these unhandicapped men

in the game of nonsense she had such a fondness for starting at a table? He was further annoyed to hear Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel Patterne agree together that “caricature” was the final word of the definition. Relatives should know better than to deliver these awards to us in public.

“Well?” quoth Lady Busshe, expressive of stupefaction at the strange dust she had raised.

“Are they on view, Miss Middleton?” inquired Lady Culmer.

“There’s a regiment of us on view and ready for inspection.” Colonel De Craye bowed to her, but she would not be foiled.

Page 2896

“Miss Middleton’s admirers are always on view.” said he.

“Are they to be seen?” said Lady Busshe.

Clara made her face a question, with a laudable smoothness.

“The wedding-presents,” Lady Culmer explained.

“No.”

“Otherwise, my dear, we are in danger of duplicating and triplicating and quadruplicating, not at all to the satisfaction of the bride.”

“But there’s a worse danger to encounter in the ‘on view’, my lady,” said De Craye; “and that’s the magnetic attraction a display of wedding-presents is sure to have for the ineffable burglar, who must have a nuptial soul in him, for wherever there’s that collection on view, he’s never a league off. And ’tis said he knows a lady’s dressing-case presented to her on the occasion fifteen years after the event.”

“As many as fifteen?” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

“By computation of the police. And if the presents are on view, dogs are of no use, nor bolts, nor bars:—he’s worse than Cupid. The only protection to be found, singular as it may be thought, is in a couple of bottles of the oldest Jamaica rum in the British isles.”

“Rum?” cried Lady Busshe.

“The liquor of the Royal Navy, my lady. And with your permission, I’ll relate the tale in proof of it. I had a friend engaged to a young lady, niece of an old sea-captain of the old school, the Benbow school, the wooden leg and pigtail school; a perfectly salt old gentleman with a pickled tongue, and a dash of brine in every deed he committed. He looked rolled over to you by the last wave on the shore, sparkling: he was Neptune’s own for humour. And when his present to the bride was opened, sure enough there lay a couple of bottles of the oldest Jamaica rum in the British Isles, born before himself, and his father to boot. ’Tis a fabulous spirit I beg you to believe in, my lady, the sole merit of the story being its portentous veracity. The bottles were tied to make them appear twins, as they both had the same claim to seniority. And there was a label on them, telling their great age, to maintain their identity. They were in truth a pair of patriarchal bottles rivalling many of the biggest houses in the kingdom for antiquity. They would have made the donkey that stood between the two bundles of hay look at them with obliquity: supposing him to have, for an animal, a rum taste, and a turn for hilarity. Wonderful old bottles! So, on the label, just over the date, was written large: *Uncle Benjamin’s wedding present to his niece Bessy*. Poor Bessy shed tears of disappointment and indignation enough to float the old gentleman on his native element, ship and all. She vowed it was done curmudgeonly to vex her, because her uncle hated

wedding-presents and had grunted at the exhibition of cups and saucers, and this and that beautiful service, and epergnes and inkstands, mirrors, knives and forks, dressing-cases,

Page 2897

and the whole mighty category. She protested, she flung herself about, she declared those two ugly bottles should not join the exhibition in the dining-room, where it was laid out for days, and the family ate their meals where they could, on the walls, like flies. But there was also Uncle Benjamin's legacy on view, in the distance, so it was ruled against her that the bottles should have their place. And one fine morning down came the family after a fearful row of the domestics; shouting, screaming, cries for the police, and murder topping all. What did they see? They saw two prodigious burglars extended along the floor, each with one of the twin bottles in his hand, and a remainder of the horror of the midnight hanging about his person like a blown fog, sufficient to frighten them whilst they kicked the rascals entirely intoxicated. Never was wilder disorder of wedding-presents, and not one lost!—owing, you'll own, to Uncle Benjy's two bottles of ancient Jamaica rum."

Colonel De Craye concluded with an asseveration of the truth of the story.

"A most provident, far-sighted old sea-captain!" exclaimed Mrs. Mountstuart, laughing at Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer. These ladies chimed in with her gingerly.

"And have you many more clever stories, Colonel De Craye?" said Lady Busshe.

"Ah! my lady, when the tree begins to count its gold 'tis nigh upon bankruptcy."

"Poetic!" ejaculated Lady Culmer, spying at Miss Middleton's rippled countenance, and noting that she and Sir Willoughby had not interchanged word or look.

"But that in the case of your Patterne Port a bottle of it would outvalue the catalogue of nuptial presents, Willoughby, I would recommend your stationing some such constabulary to keep watch and ward." said Dr. Middleton, as he filled his glass, taking Bordeaux in the middle of the day, under a consciousness of virtue and its reward to come at half-past seven in the evening.

"The rascals would require a dozen of that, sir," said De Craye.

"Then it is not to be thought of. Indeed one!" Dr. Middleton negatived the idea.

"We are no further advanced than when we began," observed Lady Busshe.

"If we are marked to go by stages," Mrs. Mountstuart assented.

"Why, then, we shall be called old coaches," remarked the colonel.

"You," said Lady Culmer, "have the advantage of us in a closer acquaintance with Miss Middleton. You know her tastes, and how far they have been consulted in the little souvenirs already grouped somewhere, although not yet for inspection. I am at sea. And here is Lady Busshe in deadly alarm. There is plenty of time to effect a change—-

though we are drawing on rapidly to the fatal day, Miss Middleton. We are, we are very near it. Oh! yes. I am one who thinks that these little affairs should be spoken of openly, without that ridiculous bourgeois affectation, so that we may be sure of giving satisfaction. It is a transaction like everything else in life. I, for my part, wish to be remembered favourably. I put it as a test of breeding to speak of these things as plain matter-of-fact. You marry; I wish you to have something by you to remind you of me. What shall it be?—useful or ornamental. For an ordinary household the choice is not difficult. But where wealth abounds we are in a dilemma."

Page 2898

“And with persons of decided tastes,” added Lady Busshe.

“I am really very unhappy,” she protested to Clara.

Sir Willoughby dropped Laetitia; Clara’s look of a sedate resolution to preserve silence on the topic of the nuptial gifts made a diversion imperative.

“Your porcelain was exquisitely chosen, and I profess to be a connoisseur,” he said. “I am poor in Old Saxony, as you know; I can match the country in Savres, and my inheritance of China will not easily be matched in the country.”

“You may consider your Dragon vases a present from young Crossjay,” said De Craye.

“How?”

“Hasn’t he abstained from breaking them? the capital boy! Porcelain and a boy in the house together is a case of prospective disaster fully equal to Flitch and a fly.”

“You should understand that my friend Horace—whose wit is in this instance founded on another tale of a boy—brought us a magnificent piece of porcelain, destroyed by the capsizing of his conveyance from the station,” said Sir Willoughby to Lady Busshe.

She and Lady Culmer gave out lamentable Ohs, while Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel Patterne sketched the incident. Then the lady visitors fixed their eyes in united sympathy upon Clara: recovering from which, after a contemplation of marble, Lady Busshe emphasized, “No, you do not love porcelain, it is evident, Miss Middleton.”

“I am glad to be assured of it,” said Lady Culmer.

“Oh, I know that face: I know that look,” Lady Busshe affected to remark rallyingly: “it is not the first time I have seen it.”

Sir Willoughby smarted to his marrow. “We will rout these fancies of an overscrupulous generosity, my dear Lady Busshe.”

Her unwonted breach of delicacy in speaking publicly of her present, and the vulgar persistency of her sticking to the theme, very much perplexed him. And if he mistook her not, she had just alluded to the demoniacal Constantia Durham.

It might be that he had mistaken her: he was on guard against his terrible sensitiveness. Nevertheless it was hard to account for this behaviour of a lady greatly his friend and admirer, a lady of birth. And Lady Culmer as well!—likewise a lady of birth. Were they in collusion? had they a suspicion? He turned to Laetitia’s face for the antidote to his pain.

“Oh, but you are not one yet, and I shall require two voices to convince me,” Lady Busshe rejoined, after another stare at the marble.

“Lady Busshe, I beg you not to think me ungrateful,” said Clara.

“Fiddle!—gratitude! it is to please your taste, to satisfy you. I care for gratitude as little as for flattery.”

“But gratitude is flattering,” said Vernon.

“Now, no metaphysics, Mr. Whitford.”

“But do care a bit for flattery, my lady,” said De Craye. “’Tis the finest of the Arts; we might call it moral sculpture. Adepts in it can cut their friends to any shape they like by practising it with the requisite skill. I myself, poor hand as I am, have made a man act Solomon by constantly praising his wisdom. He took a sagacious turn at an early period of the dose. He weighed the smallest question of his daily occasions with a deliberation truly oriental. Had I pushed it, he’d have hired a baby and a couple of mothers to squabble over the undivided morsel.”

Page 2899

“I shall hope for a day in London with you,” said Lady Culmer to Clara.

“You did not forget the Queen of Sheba?” said Mrs. Mountstuart to De Craye.

“With her appearance, the game has to be resigned to her entirely,” he rejoined.

“That is,” Lady Culmer continued, “if you do not despise an old woman for your comrade on a shopping excursion.”

“Despise whom we fleece!” exclaimed Dr. Middleton. “Oh, no, Lady Culmer, the sheep is sacred.”

“I am not so sure,” said Vernon.

“In what way, and to what extent, are you not so sure?” said Dr. Middleton.

“The natural tendency is to scorn the fleeced.”

“I stand for the contrary. Pity, if you like: particularly when they bleat.”

“This is to assume that makers of gifts are a fleeced people: I demur,” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

“Madam, we are expected to give; we are incited to give; you have dubbed it the fashion to give; and the person refusing to give, or incapable of giving, may anticipate that he will be regarded as benignly as a sheep of a drooping and flaccid wool by the farmer, who is reminded by the poor beast’s appearance of a strange dog that worried the flock. Even Captain Benjamin, as you have seen, was unable to withstand the demand on him. The hymeneal pair are licensed freebooters levying blackmail on us; survivors of an uncivilized period. But in taking without mercy, I venture to trust that the manners of a happier era instruct them not to scorn us. I apprehend that Mr. Whitford has a lower order of latrons in his mind.”

“Permit me to say, sir, that you have not considered the ignoble aspect of the fleeced,” said Vernon. “I appeal to the ladies: would they not, if they beheld an ostrich walking down a Queen’s Drawing Room, clean-plucked, despise him though they were wearing his plumes?”

“An extreme supposition, indeed,” said Dr. Middleton, frowning over it; “scarcely legitimately to be suggested.”

“I think it fair, sir, as an instance.”

“Has the circumstance occurred, I would ask?”

“In life? a thousand times.”

“I fear so,” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

Lady Busshe showed symptoms of a desire to leave a profitless table.

Vernon started up, glancing at the window.

“Did you see Crossjay?” he said to Clara.

“No; I must, if he is there,” said she.

She made her way out, Vernon after her. They both had the excuse.

“Which way did the poor boy go?” she asked him.

“I have not the slightest idea,” he replied. “But put on your bonnet, if you would escape that pair of inquisitors.”

“Mr. Whitford, what humiliation!”

“I suspect you do not feel it the most, and the end of it can’t be remote,” said he.

Thus it happened that when Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer quitted the dining-room, Miss Middleton had spirited herself away from summoning voice and messenger.

Page 2900

Sir Willoughby apologized for her absence. “If I could be jealous, it would be of that boy Crossjay.”

“You are an excellent man, and the best of cousins,” was Lady Busshe’s enigmatical answer.

The exceedingly lively conversation at his table was lauded by Lady Culmer.

“Though,” said she, “what it all meant, and what was the drift of it, I couldn’t tell to save my life. Is it every day the same with you here?”

“Very much.”

“How you must enjoy a spell of dulness!”

“If you said simplicity and not talking for effect! I generally cast anchor by Laetitia Dale.”

“Ah!” Lady Busshe coughed. “But the fact is, Mrs. Mountstuart is made for cleverness!”

“I think, my lady, Laetitia Dale is to the full as clever as any of the stars Mrs. Mountstuart assembles, or I.”

“Talkative cleverness, I mean.”

“In conversation as well. Perhaps you have not yet given her a chance.”

“Yes, yes, she is clever, of course, poor dear. She is looking better too.”

“Handsome, I thought,” said Lady Culmer.

“She varies,” observed Sir Willoughby.

The ladies took seat in their carriage and fell at once into a close-bonnet colloquy. Not a single allusion had they made to the wedding-presents after leaving the luncheon-table. The cause of their visit was obvious.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CONTAINS CLEVER FENCING AND INTIMATIONS OF THE NEED FOR IT

That woman, Lady Busshe, had predicted, after the event, Constantia Durham’s defection. She had also, subsequent to Willoughby’s departure on his travels, uttered sceptical things concerning his rooted attachment to Laetitia Dale. In her bitter vulgarity, that beaten rival of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson for the leadership of the county had taken his nose for a melancholy prognostic of his fortunes; she had recently played on

his name: she had spoken the hideous English of his fate. Little as she knew, she was alive to the worst interpretation of appearances. No other eulogy occurred to her now than to call him the best of cousins, because Vernon Whitford was housed and clothed and fed by him. She had nothing else to say for a man she thought luckless! She was a woman barren of wit, stripped of style, but she was wealthy and a gossip—a forge of showering sparks—and she carried Lady Culmer with her. The two had driven from his house to spread the malignant rumour abroad; already they blew the biting world on his raw wound. Neither of them was like Mrs. Mountstuart, a witty woman, who could be hoodwinked; they were dull women, who steadily kept on their own scent of the fact, and the only way to confound such inveterate forces was to be ahead of them, and seize and transform the expected fact, and astonish them, when they came up to him, with a totally unanticipated fact.

“You see, you were in error, ladies.”

Page 2901

“And so we were, Sir Willoughby, and we acknowledge it. We never could have guessed that!”

Thus the phantom couple in the future delivered themselves, as well they might at the revelation. He could run far ahead.

Ay, but to combat these dolts, facts had to be encountered, deeds done, in groaning earnest. These representatives of the pig-sconces of the population judged by circumstances: airy shows and seems had no effect on them. Dexterity of fence was thrown away.

A flying peep at the remorseless might of dulness in compelling us to a concrete performance counter to our inclinations, if we would deceive its terrible instinct, gave Willoughby for a moment the survey of a sage. His intensity of personal feeling struck so vivid an illumination of mankind at intervals that he would have been individually wise, had he not been moved by the source of his accurate perceptions to a personal feeling of opposition to his own sagacity. He loathed and he despised the vision, so his mind had no benefit of it, though he himself was whipped along. He chose rather (and the choice is open to us all) to be flattered by the distinction it revealed between himself and mankind.

But if he was not as others were, why was he discomfited, solicitous, miserable? To think that it should be so, ran dead against his conqueror’s theories wherein he had been trained, which, so long as he gained success awarded success to native merit, grandeur to the grand in soul, as light kindles light: nature presents the example. His early training, his bright beginning of life, had taught him to look to earth’s principal fruits as his natural portion, and it was owing to a girl that he stood a mark for tongues, naked, wincing at the possible malignity of a pair of harridans. Why not whistle the girl away?

Why, then he would be free to enjoy, careless, younger than his youth in the rebound to happiness!

And then would his nostrils begin to lift and sniff at the creeping up of a thick pestiferous vapour. Then in that volume of stench would he discern the sullen yellow eye of malice. A malarious earth would hunt him all over it. The breath of the world, the world’s view of him, was partly his vital breath, his view of himself. The ancestry of the tortured man had bequeathed him this condition of high civilization among their other bequests. Your withered contracted Egoists of the hut and the grot reck not of public opinion; they crave but for liberty and leisure to scratch themselves and soothe an excessive scratch. Willoughby was expansive, a blooming one, born to look down upon a tributary world, and to exult in being looked to. Do we wonder at his consternation in the prospect of that world’s blowing foul on him? Princes have their obligations to teach them they are mortal, and the brilliant heir of a tributary world is equally enchained by

the homage it brings him;—more, inasmuch as it is immaterial, elusive, not gathered by the tax, and he cannot capitally punish the treasonable recusants. Still must he be brilliant; he must court his people. He must ever, both in his reputation and his person, aching though he be, show them a face and a leg.

Page 2902

The wounded gentleman shut himself up in his laboratory, where he could stride to and fro, and stretch out his arms for physical relief, secure from observation of his fantastical shapes, under the idea that he was meditating. There was perhaps enough to make him fancy it in the heavy fire of shots exchanged between his nerves and the situation; there were notable flashes. He would not avow that he was in an agony: it was merely a desire for exercise.

Quintessence of worldliness, Mrs. Mountstuart appeared through his farthest window, swinging her skirts on a turn at the end of the lawn, with Horace De Craye smirking beside her. And the woman's vaunted penetration was unable to detect the histrionic Irishism of the fellow. Or she liked him for his acting and nonsense; nor she only. The voluble beast was created to snare women. Willoughby became smitten with an adoration of stedfastness in women. The incarnation of that divine quality crossed his eyes. She was clad in beauty. A horrible nondescript convulsion composed of yawn and groan drove him to his instruments, to avert a renewal of the shock; and while arranging and fixing them for their unwonted task, he compared himself advantageously with men like Vernon and De Craye, and others of the county, his fellows in the hunting-field and on the Magistrate's bench, who neither understood nor cared for solid work, beneficial practical work, the work of Science.

He was obliged to relinquish it: his hand shook.

"Experiments will not advance much at this rate," he said, casting the noxious retardation on his enemies.

It was not to be contested that he must speak with Mrs Mountstuart, however he might shrink from the trial of his facial muscles. Her not coming to him seemed ominous: nor was her behaviour at the luncheon-table quite obscure. She had evidently instigated the gentlemen to cross and counterchatter Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer. For what purpose?

Clara's features gave the answer.

They were implacable. And he could be the same.

In the solitude of his room he cried right out: "I swear it, I will never yield her to Horace De Craye! She shall feel some of my torments, and try to get the better of them by knowing she deserves them." He had spoken it, and it was an oath upon the record.

Desire to do her intolerable hurt became an ecstasy in his veins, and produced another stretching fit that terminated in a violent shake of the body and limbs; during which he was a spectacle for Mrs. Mountstuart at one of the windows. He laughed as he went to her, saying: "No, no work to-day; it won't be done, positively refuses."

“I am taking the Professor away,” said she; “he is fidgety about the cold he caught.”

Sir Willoughby stepped out to her. “I was trying at a bit of work for an hour, not to be idle all day.”

“You work in that den of yours every day?”

Page 2903

“Never less than an hour, if I can snatch it.”

“It is a wonderful resource!”

The remark set him throbbing and thinking that a prolongation of his crisis exposed him to the approaches of some organic malady, possibly heart-disease.

“A habit,” he said. “In there I throw off the world.”

“We shall see some results in due time.”

“I promise none: I like to be abreast of the real knowledge of my day, that is all.”

“And a pearl among country gentlemen!”

“In your gracious consideration, my dear lady. Generally speaking, it would be more advisable to become a chatterer and keep an anecdotal note-book. I could not do it, simply because I could not live with my own emptiness for the sake of making an occasional display of fireworks. I aim at solidity. It is a narrow aim, no doubt; not much appreciated.”

“Laetitia Dale appreciates it.”

A smile of enforced ruefulness, like a leaf curling in heat, wrinkled his mouth.

Why did she not speak of her conversation with Clara?

“Have they caught Crossjay?” he said.

“Apparently they are giving chase to him.”

The likelihood was, that Clara had been overcome by timidity.

“Must you leave us?”

“I think it prudent to take Professor Crooklyn away.”

“He still . . . ?”

“The extraordinary resemblance!”

“A word aside to Dr. Middleton will dispel that.”

“You are thoroughly good.”

This hateful encomium of commiseration transfixed him. Then she knew of his calamity!

“Philosophical,” he said, “would be the proper term, I think.”

“Colonel De Craye, by the way, promises me a visit when he leaves you.”

“To-morrow?”

“The earlier the better. He is too captivating; he is delightful. He won me in five minutes. I don’t accuse him. Nature gifted him to cast the spell. We are weak women, Sir Willoughby.”

She knew!

“Like to like: the witty to the witty, ma’am.”

“You won’t compliment me with a little bit of jealousy?”

“I forbear from complimenting him.”

“Be philosophical, of course, if you have the philosophy.”

“I pretend to it. Probably I suppose myself to succeed because I have no great requirement of it; I cannot say. We are riddles to ourselves.”

Mrs. Mountstuart pricked the turf with the point of her parasol. She looked down and she looked up.

“Well?” said he to her eyes.

“Well, and where is Laetitia Dale?”

He turned about to show his face elsewhere.

When he fronted her again, she looked very fixedly, and set her head shaking.

“It will not do, my dear Sir Willoughby!”

“What?”

“I never could solve enigmas.”

“Playing ta-ta-ta-ta ad infinitum, then. Things have gone far. All parties would be happier for an excursion. Send her home.”

Page 2904

“Laetitia? I can’t part with her.”

Mrs. Mountstuart put a tooth on her under lip as her head renewed its brushing negative.

“In what way can it be hurtful that she should be here, ma’am?” he ventured to persist.

“Think.”

“She is proof.”

“Twice!”

The word was big artillery. He tried the affectation of a staring stupidity. She might have seen his heart thump, and he quitted the mask for an agreeable grimace.

“She is inaccessible. She is my friend. I guarantee her, on my honour. Have no fear for her. I beg you to have confidence in me. I would perish rather. No soul on earth is to be compared with her.”

Mrs. Mountstuart repeated “Twice!”

The low monosyllable, musically spoken in the same tone of warning of a gentle ghost, rolled a thunder that maddened him, but he dared not take it up to fight against it on plain terms.

“Is it for my sake?” he said.

“It will not do, Sir Willoughby.”

She spurred him to a frenzy.

“My dear Mrs. Mountstuart, you have been listening to tales. I am not a tyrant. I am one of the most easy-going of men. Let us preserve the forms due to society: I say no more. As for poor old Vernon, people call me a good sort of cousin; I should like to see him comfortably married; decently married this time. I have proposed to contribute to his establishment. I mention it to show that the case has been practically considered. He has had a tolerably souring experience of the state; he might be inclined if, say, you took him in hand, for another venture. It’s a demoralizing lottery. However, Government sanctions it.”

“But, Sir Willoughby, what is the use of my taking him in hand when, as you tell me, Laetitia Dale holds back?”

“She certainly does.”

“Then we are talking to no purpose, unless you undertake to melt her.”

He suffered a lurking smile to kindle to some strength of meaning.

“You are not over-considerate in committing me to such an office.”

“You are afraid of the danger?” she all but sneered.

Sharpened by her tone, he said, “I have such a love of stedfastness of character, that I should be a poor advocate in the endeavour to break it. And frankly, I know the danger. I saved my honour when I made the attempt: that is all I can say.”

“Upon my word,” Mrs. Mountstuart threw back her head to let her eyes behold him summarily over their fine aquiline bridge, “you have the art of mystification, my good friend.”

“Abandon the idea of Laetitia Dale.”

“And marry your cousin Vernon to whom? Where are we?”

Page 2905

“As I said, ma’am, I am an easy-going man. I really have not a spice of the tyrant in me. An intemperate creature held by the collar may have that notion of me, while pulling to be released as promptly as it entered the noose. But I do strictly and sternly object to the scandal of violent separations, open breaches of solemn engagements, a public rupture. Put it that I am the cause, I will not consent to a violation of decorum. Is that clear? It is just possible for things to be arranged so that all parties may be happy in their way without much hubbub. Mind, it is not I who have willed it so. I am, and I am forced to be, passive. But I will not be obstructive.”

He paused, waving his hand to signify the vanity of the more that might be said.

Some conception of him, dashed by incredulity, excited the lady’s intelligence.

“Well!” she exclaimed, “you have planted me in the land of conjecture. As my husband used to say, I don’t see light, but I think I see the lynx that does. We won’t discuss it at present. I certainly must be a younger woman than I supposed, for I am learning hard. —Here comes the Professor, buttoned up to the ears, and Dr. Middleton flapping in the breeze. There will be a cough, and a footnote referring to the young lady at the station, if we stand together, so please order my carriage.”

“You found Clara complacent? roguish?”

“I will call to-morrow. You have simplified my task, Sir Willoughby, very much; that is, assuming that I have not entirely mistaken you. I am so far in the dark that I have to help myself by recollecting how Lady Busshe opposed my view of a certain matter formerly. Scepticism is her forte. It will be the very oddest thing if after all . . . ! No, I shall own, romance has not departed. Are you fond of dupes?”

“I detest the race.”

“An excellent answer. I could pardon you for it.” She refrained from adding, “If you are making one of me.”

Sir Willoughby went to ring for her carriage.

She knew. That was palpable: Clara had betrayed him.

“The earlier Colonel De Craye leaves Patterne Hall the better:” she had said that: and, “all parties would be happier for an excursion.” She knew the position of things and she guessed the remainder. But what she did not know, and could not divine, was the man who fenced her. He speculated further on the witty and the dull. These latter are the redoubtable body. They will have facts to convince them: they had, he confessed it to himself, precipitated him into the novel sphere of his dark hints to Mrs. Mountstuart; from which the utter darkness might allow him to escape, yet it embraced him singularly, and even pleasantly, with the sense of a fact established.

It embraced him even very pleasantly. There was an end to his tortures. He sailed on a tranquil sea, the husband of a stedfast woman—no rogue. The exceeding beauty of stedfastness in women clothed Laetitia in graces Clara could not match. A tried stedfast woman is the one jewel of the sex. She points to her husband like the sunflower; her love illuminates him; she lives in him, for him; she testifies to his worth; she drags the world to his feet; she leads the chorus of his praises; she justifies him in his own esteem. Surely there is not on earth such beauty!

Page 2906

If we have to pass through anguish to discover it and cherish the peace it gives to clasp it, calling it ours, is a full reward. Deep in his reverie, he said his adieus to Mrs. Mountstuart, and strolled up the avenue behind the carriage-wheels, unwilling to meet Laetitia till he had exhausted the fresh savour of the cud of fancy.

Supposing it done!—

It would be generous on his part. It would redound to his credit.

His home would be a fortress, impregnable to tongues. He would have divine security in his home.

One who read and knew and worshipped him would be sitting there star-like: sitting there, awaiting him, his fixed star.

It would be marriage with a mirror, with an echo; marriage with a shining mirror, a choric echo.

It would be marriage with an intellect, with a fine understanding; to make his home a fountain of repeatable wit: to make his dear old Patterne Hall the luminary of the county.

He revolved it as a chant: with anon and anon involuntarily a discordant animadversion on Lady Busshe. Its attendant imps heard the angry inward cry.

Forthwith he set about painting Laetitia in delectable human colours, like a miniature of the past century, reserving her ideal figure for his private satisfaction. The world was to bow to her visible beauty, and he gave her enamel and glow, a taller stature, a swimming air, a transcendency that exorcized the image of the old witch who had driven him to this.

The result in him was, that Laetitia became humanly and avowedly beautiful. Her dark eyelashes on the pallor of her cheeks lent their aid to the transformation, which was a necessity to him, so it was performed. He received the waxen impression.

His retinue of imps had a revel. We hear wonders of men, and we see a lifting up of hands in the world. The wonders would be explained, and never a hand need to interject, if the mystifying man were but accompanied by that monkey-eyed confraternity. They spy the heart and its twists.

The heart is the magical gentleman. None of them would follow where there was no heart. The twists of the heart are the comedy.

“The secret of the heart is its pressing love of self “, says the Book.

By that secret the mystery of the organ is legible: and a comparison of the heart to the mountain rillet is taken up to show us the unbaffled force of the little channel in seeking to swell its volume, strenuously, sinuously, ever in pursuit of self; the busiest as it is the most single-aiming of forces on our earth. And we are directed to the sinuosities for posts of observation chiefly instructive.

Few maintain a stand there. People see, and they rush away to interchange liftings of hands at the sight, instead of patiently studying the phenomenon of energy.

Page 2907

Consequently a man in love with one woman, and in all but absolute consciousness, behind the thinnest of veils, preparing his mind to love another, will be barely credible. The particular hunger of the forceful but adaptable heart is the key of him. Behold the mountain rillet, become a brook, become a torrent, how it inarms a handsome boulder: yet if the stone will not go with it, on it hurries, pursuing self in extension, down to where perchance a dam has been raised of a sufficient depth to enfold and keep it from inordinate restlessness. Laetitia represented this peaceful restraining space in prospect.

But she was a faded young woman. He was aware of it; and systematically looking at himself with her upturned orbs, he accepted her benevolently as a God grateful for worship, and used the divinity she imparted to paint and renovate her. His heart required her so. The heart works the springs of imagination; imagination received its commission from the heart, and was a cunning artist.

Cunning to such a degree of seductive genius that the masterpiece it offered to his contemplation enabled him simultaneously to gaze on Clara and think of Laetitia. Clara came through the park-gates with Vernon, a brilliant girl indeed, and a shallow one: a healthy creature, and an animal; attractive, but capricious, impatient, treacherous, foul; a woman to drag men through the mud. She approached.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN WHICH WE TAKE A STEP TO THE CENTRE OF EGOISM

They met; Vernon soon left them.

“You have not seen Crossjay?” Willoughby inquired.

“No,” said Clara. “Once more I beg you to pardon him. He spoke falsely, owing to his poor boy’s idea of chivalry.”

“The chivalry to the sex which commences in lies ends by creating the woman’s hero, whom we see about the world and in certain courts of law.”

His ability to silence her was great: she could not reply to speech like that.

“You have,” said he, “made a confidante of Mrs. Mountstuart.”

“Yes.”

“This is your purse.”

“I thank you.”

“Professor Crooklyn has managed to make your father acquainted with your project. That, I suppose, is the railway ticket in the fold of the purse. He was assured at the station that you had taken a ticket to London, and would not want the fly.”

“It is true. I was foolish.”

“You have had a pleasant walk with Vernon—turning me in and out?”

“We did not speak of you. You allude to what he would never consent to.”

“He’s an honest fellow, in his old-fashioned way. He’s a secret old fellow. Does he ever talk about his wife to you?”

Clara dropped her purse, and stooped and picked it up.

“I know nothing of Mr. Whitford’s affairs,” she said, and she opened the purse and tore to pieces the railway ticket.

Page 2908

“The story’s a proof that romantic spirits do not furnish the most romantic history. You have the word ‘chivalry’ frequently on your lips. He chivalrously married the daughter of the lodging-house where he resided before I took him. We obtained information of the auspicious union in a newspaper report of Mrs. Whitford’s drunkenness and rioting at a London railway terminus—probably the one whither your ticket would have taken you yesterday, for I heard the lady was on her way to us for supplies, the connubial larder being empty.”

“I am sorry; I am ignorant; I have heard nothing; I know nothing,” said Clara.

“You are disgusted. But half the students and authors you hear of marry in that way. And very few have Vernon’s luck.”

“She had good qualities?” asked Clara.

Her under lip hung.

It looked like disgust; he begged her not indulge the feeling.

“Literary men, it is notorious, even with the entry to society, have no taste in women. The housewife is their object. Ladies frighten and would, no doubt, be an annoyance and hindrance to them at home.”

“You said he was fortunate.”

“You have a kindness for him.”

“I respect him.”

“He is a friendly old fellow in his awkward fashion; honourable, and so forth. But a disreputable alliance of that sort sticks to a man. The world will talk. Yes, he was fortunate so far; he fell into the mire and got out of it. Were he to marry again . . .”

“She . . .”

“Died. Do not be startled; it was a natural death. She responded to the sole wishes left to his family. He buried the woman, and I received him. I took him on my tour. A second marriage might cover the first: there would be a buzz about the old business: the woman’s relatives write to him still, try to bleed him, I dare say. However, now you understand his gloominess. I don’t imagine he regrets his loss. He probably sentimentalizes, like most men when they are well rid of a burden. You must not think the worse of him.”

“I do not,” said Clara.

“I defend him whenever the matter’s discussed.”

“I hope you do.”

“Without approving his folly. I can’t wash him clean.”

They were at the Hall-doors. She waited for any personal communications he might be pleased to make, and as there was none, she ran upstairs to her room.

He had tossed her to Vernon in his mind, not only painlessly, but with a keen acid of satisfaction. The heart is the wizard.

Next he bent his deliberate steps to Laetitia.

The mind was guilty of some hesitation; the feet went forward.

She was working at an embroidery by an open window. Colonel De Craye leaned outside, and Willoughby pardoned her air of demure amusement, on hearing him say: “No, I have had one of the pleasantest half-hours of my life, and would rather idle here, if idle you will have it, than employ my faculties on horse-back,”

Page 2909

“Time is not lost in conversing with Miss Dale,” said Willoughby.

The light was tender to her complexion where she sat in partial shadow.

De Craye asked whether Crossjay had been caught.

Laetitia murmured a kind word for the boy. Willoughby examined her embroidery.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel appeared.

They invited her to take carriage exercise with them.

Laetitia did not immediately answer, and Willoughby remarked: “Miss Dale has been reproving Horace for idleness and I recommend you to enlist him to do duty, while I relieve him here.”

The ladies had but to look at the colonel. He was at their disposal, if they would have him. He was marched to the carriage.

Laetitia plied her threads.

“Colonel De Craye spoke of Crossjay,” she said. “May I hope you have forgiven the poor boy, Sir Willoughby?”

He replied: “Plead for him.”

“I wish I had eloquence.”

“In my opinion you have it.”

“If he offends, it is never from meanness. At school, among comrades, he would shine. He is in too strong a light; his feelings and his moral nature are over-excited.”

“That was not the case when he was at home with you.”

“I am severe; I am stern.”

“A Spartan mother!”

“My system of managing a boy would be after that model: except in this: he should always feet that he could obtain forgiveness.”

“Not at the expense of justice?”

“Ah! young creatures are not to be arraigned before the higher Courts. It seems to me perilous to terrify their imaginations. If we do so, are we not likely to produce the very

evil we are combating? The alternations for the young should be school and home: and it should be in their hearts to have confidence that forgiveness alternates with discipline. They are of too tender an age for the rigours of the world; we are in danger of hardening them. I prove to you that I am not possessed of eloquence. You encouraged me to speak, Sir Willoughby."

"You speak wisely, Laetitia."

"I think it true. Will not you reflect on it? You have only to do so to forgive him. I am growing bold indeed, and shall have to beg forgiveness for myself."

"You still write? you continue to work with your pen?" said Willoughby.

"A little; a very little."

"I do not like you to squander yourself, waste yourself, on the public. You are too precious to feed the beast. Giving out incessantly must end by attenuating. Reserve yourself for your friends. Why should they be robbed of so much of you? Is it not reasonable to assume that by lying fallow you would be more enriched for domestic life? Candidly, had I authority I would confiscate your pen: I would 'away with that bauble'. You will not often find me quoting Cromwell, but his words apply in this instance. I would say rather, that lancet. Perhaps it is the more correct term. It bleeds you, it wastes you. For what? For a breath of fame!"

Page 2910

“I write for money.”

“And there—I would say of another—you subject yourself to the risk of mental degradation. Who knows?—moral! Trafficking the brains for money must bring them to the level of the purchasers in time. I confiscate your pen, Laetitia.”

“It will be to confiscate your own gift, Sir Willoughby.”

“Then that proves—will you tell me the date?”

“You sent me a gold pen-holder on my sixteenth birthday.”

“It proves my utter thoughtlessness then, and later. And later!”

He rested an elbow on his knee, and covered his eyes, murmuring in that profound hollow which is haunted by the voice of a contrite past: “And later!”

The deed could be done. He had come to the conclusion that it could be done, though the effort to harmonize the figure sitting near him, with the artistic figure of his purest pigments, had cost him labour and a blinking of the eyelids. That also could be done. Her pleasant tone, sensible talk, and the light favouring her complexion, helped him in his effort. She was a sober cup; sober and wholesome. Deliriousness is for adolescence. The men who seek intoxicating cups are men who invite their fates.

Curiously, yet as positively as things can be affirmed, the husband of this woman would be able to boast of her virtues and treasures abroad, as he could not—impossible to say why not—boast of a beautiful wife or a blue-stocking wife. One of her merits as a wife would be this extraordinary neutral merit of a character that demanded colour from the marital hand, and would take it.

Laetitia had not to learn that he had much to distress him. Her wonder at his exposure of his grief counteracted a fluttering of vague alarm. She was nervous; she sat in expectation of some burst of regrets or of passion.

“I may hope that you have pardoned Crossjay?” she said.

“My friend,” said he, uncovering his face, “I am governed by principles. Convince me of an error, I shall not obstinately pursue a premeditated course. But you know me. Men who have not principles to rule their conduct are—well, they are unworthy of a half hour of companionship with you. I will speak to you to-night. I have letters to dispatch. To-night: at twelve: in the room where we spoke last. Or await me in the drawing-room. I have to attend to my guests till late.”

He bowed; he was in a hurry to go.

The deed could be done. It must be done; it was his destiny.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IN THE HEART OF THE EGOIST

Page 2911

But already he had begun to regard the deed as his executioner. He dreaded meeting Clara. The folly of having retained her stood before him. How now to look on her and keep a sane resolution unwavering? She tempted to the insane. Had she been away, he could have walked through the performance composed by the sense of doing a duty to himself; perhaps faintly hating the poor wretch he made happy at last, kind to her in a manner, polite. Clara's presence in the house previous to the deed, and, oh, heaven! after it, threatened his wits. Pride? He had none; he cast it down for her to trample it; he caught it back ere it was trodden on. Yes; he had pride: he had it as a dagger in his breast: his pride was his misery. But he was too proud to submit to misery. "What I do is right." He said the words, and rectitude smoothed his path, till the question clamoured for answer: Would the world countenance and endorse his pride in Laetitia? At one time, yes. And now? Clara's beauty ascended, laid a beam on him. We are on board the labouring vessel of humanity in a storm, when cries and countercries ring out, disorderliness mixes the crew, and the fury of self-preservation divides: this one is for the ship, that one for his life. Clara was the former to him, Laetitia the latter. But what if there might not be greater safety in holding tenaciously to Clara than in casting her off for Laetitia? No, she had done things to set his pride throbbing in the quick. She had gone bleeding about first to one, then to another; she had betrayed him to Vernon, and to Mrs. Mountstuart; a look in the eyes of Horace De Craye said, to him as well: to whom not? He might hold to her for vengeance; but that appetite was short-lived in him if it ministered nothing to his purposes. "I discard all idea of vengeance," he said, and thrilled burningly to a smart in his admiration of the man who could be so magnanimous under mortal injury; for the more admirable he, the more pitiable. He drank a drop or two of self-pity like a poison, repelling the assaults of public pity. Clara must be given up. It must be seen by the world that, as he felt, the thing he did was right. Laocoon of his own serpents, he struggled to a certain magnificence of attitude in the muscular net of constrictions he flung around himself. Clara must be given up. Oh, bright Abominable! She must be given up: but not to one whose touch of her would be darts in the blood of the yielder, snakes in his bed: she must be given up to an extinguisher; to be the second wife of an old-fashioned semi-recluse, disgraced in his first. And were it publicly known that she had been cast off, and had fallen on old Vernon for a refuge, and part in spite, part in shame, part in desperation, part in a fit of good sense under the circumstances, espoused him, her beauty would not influence the world in its judgement. The world would know what to think. As the instinct of self-preservation whispered to Willoughby, the

Page 2912

world, were it requisite, might be taught to think what it assuredly would not think if she should be seen tripping to the altar with Horace De Craye. Self-preservation, not vengeance, breathed that whisper. He glanced at her iniquity for a justification of it, without any desire to do her a permanent hurt: he was highly civilized: but with a strong intention to give her all the benefit of a scandal, supposing a scandal, or ordinary tattle.

“And so he handed her to his cousin and secretary, Vernon Whitford, who opened his mouth and shut his eyes.”

You hear the world? How are we to stop it from chattering? Enough that he had no desire to harm her. Some gentle anticipations of her being tarnished were imperative; they came spontaneously to him; otherwise the radiance of that bright Abominable in loss would have been insufferable; he could not have borne it; he could never have surrendered her. Moreover, a happy present effect was the result. He conjured up the anticipated chatter and shrug of the world so vividly that her beauty grew hectic with the stain, bereft of its formidable magnetism. He could meet her calmly; he had steeled himself. Purity in women was his principal stipulation, and a woman puffed at, was not the person to cause him tremours.

Consider him indulgently: the Egoist is the Son of Himself. He is likewise the Father. And the son loves the father, the father the son; they reciprocate affection through the closest of ties; and shall they view behaviour unkindly wounding either of them, not for each other’s dear sake abhorring the criminal? They would not injure you, but they cannot consent to see one another suffer or crave in vain. The two rub together in sympathy besides relationship to an intenser one. Are you, without much offending, sacrificed by them, it is on the altar of their mutual love, to filial piety or paternal tenderness: the younger has offered a dainty morsel to the elder, or the elder to the younger. Absorbed in their great example of devotion do they not think of you. They are beautiful.

Yet is it most true that the younger has the passions of youth: whereof will come division between them; and this is a tragic state. They are then pathetic. This was the state of Sir Willoughby lending ear to his elder, until he submitted to bite at the fruit proposed to him—with how wry a mouth the venerable senior chose not to mark. At least, as we perceive, a half of him was ripe of wisdom in his own interests. The cruder half had but to be obedient to the leadership of sagacity for his interests to be secured, and a filial disposition assisted him; painfully indeed; but the same rare quality directed the good gentleman to swallow his pain. That the son should bewail his fate were a dishonour to the sire. He reverenced, and submitted. Thus, to say, consider him indulgently, is too much an appeal for charity on behalf of one requiring but initial anatomy—a slicing in halves—to

Page 2913

exonerate, perchance exalt him. The Egoist is our fountain-head, primeval man: the primitive is born again, the elemental reconstituted. Born again, into new conditions, the primitive may be highly polished of men, and forfeit nothing save the roughness of his original nature. He is not only his own father, he is ours; and he is also our son. We have produced him, he us. Such were we, to such are we returning: not other, sings the poet, than one who toilfully works his shallop against the tide, “si brachia forte remisit":—let him haply relax the labour of his arms, however high up the stream, and back he goes, “in pejus”, to the early principle of our being, with seeds and plants, that are as carelessly weighed in the hand and as indiscriminately husbanded as our humanity.

Poets on the other side may be cited for an assurance that the primitive is not the degenerate: rather is he a sign of the indestructibility of the race, of the ancient energy in removing obstacles to individual growth; a sample of what we would be, had we his concentrated power. He is the original innocent, the pure simple. It is we who have fallen; we have melted into Society, diluted our essence, dissolved. He stands in the midst monumentally, a land-mark of the tough and honest old Ages, with the symbolic alphabet of striking arms and running legs, our early language, scrawled over his person, and the glorious first flint and arrow-head for his crest: at once the spectre of the Kitchen-midden and our ripest issue.

But Society is about him. The occasional spectacle of the primitive dangling on a rope has impressed his mind with the strength of his natural enemy: from which uncongenial sight he has turned shuddering hardly less to behold the blast that is blown upon a reputation where one has been disrespectful of the many. By these means, through meditation on the contrast of circumstances in life, a pulse of imagination has begun to stir, and he has entered the upper sphere or circle of spiritual Egoism: he has become the civilized Egoist; primitive still, as sure as man has teeth, but developed in his manner of using them.

Degenerate or not (and there is no just reason to suppose it) Sir Willoughby was a social Egoist, fiercely imaginative in whatsoever concerned him. He had discovered a greater realm than that of the sensual appetites, and he rushed across and around it in his conquering period with an Alexander’s pride. On these wind-like journeys he had carried Constantia, subsequently Clara; and however it may have been in the case of Miss Durham, in that of Miss Middleton it is almost certain she caught a glimpse of his interior from sheer fatigue in hearing him discourse of it. What he revealed was not the cause of her sickness: women can bear revelations—they are exciting: but the monotonousness. He slew imagination. There is no direr disaster in love than the death of imagination. He dragged her through the labyrinths of his penetralia, in his hungry coveting to be loved more and still more, more still, until imagination gave up the ghost, and he talked to her plain hearing like a monster. It must have been that; for the spell of the primitive upon women is masterful up to the time of contact.

Page 2914

“And so he handed her to his cousin and secretary, Vernon Whitford, who opened his mouth and shut his eyes.”

The urgent question was, how it was to be accomplished. Willoughby worked at the subject with all his power of concentration: a power that had often led him to feel and say, that as a barrister, a diplomatist, or a general, he would have won his grades: and granting him a personal interest in the business, he might have achieved eminence: he schemed and fenced remarkably well.

He projected a scene, following expressions of anxiety on account of old Vernon and his future settlement: and then Clara maintaining her doggedness, to which he was now so accustomed that he could not conceive a change in it—says he: “If you determine on breaking I give you back your word on one condition.” Whereupon she starts: he insists on her promise: she declines: affairs resume their former footing; she frets: she begs for the disclosure: he flatters her by telling her his desire to keep her in the family: she is unilluminated, but strongly moved by curiosity: he philosophizes on marriage “What are we? poor creatures! we must get through life as we can, doing as much good as we can to those we love; and think as you please, I love old Vernon. Am I not giving you the greatest possible proof of it?” She will not see. Then flatly out comes the one condition. That and no other. “Take Vernon and I release you.” She refuses. Now ensues the debate, all the oratory being with him. “Is it because of his unfortunate first marriage? You assured me you thought no worse of him,” *etc*. She declares the proposal revolting. He can distinguish nothing that should offend her in a proposal to make his cousin happy if she will not him. Irony and sarcasm relieve his emotions, but he convinces her he is dealing plainly and intends generosity. She is confused; she speaks in maiden fashion. He touches again on Vernon’s early escapade. She does not enjoy it. The scene closes with his bidding her reflect on it, and remember the one condition of her release. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, now reduced to believe that he burns to be free, is then called in for an interview with Clara. His aunts Eleanor and Isabel besiege her. Laetitia in passionate earnest besieges her. Her father is wrought on to besiege her. Finally Vernon is attacked by Willoughby and Mrs. Mountstuart:—-and here, Willoughby chose to think, was the main difficulty. But the girl has money; she is agreeable; Vernon likes her; she is fond of his “Alps”, they have tastes in common, he likes her father, and in the end he besieges her. Will she yield? De Craye is absent. There is no other way of shunning a marriage she is incomprehensibly but frantically averse to. She is in the toils. Her father will stay at Patterne Hall as long as his host desires it. She hesitates, she is overcome; in spite of a certain nausea due to Vernon’s preceding alliance, she yields.

Page 2915

Willoughby revolved the entire drama in Clara's presence. It helped him to look on her coolly. Conducting her to the dinner-table, he spoke of Crossjay, not unkindly; and at table, he revolved the set of scenes with a heated animation that took fire from the wine and the face of his friend Horace, while he encouraged Horace to be flowingly Irish. He nipped the fellow good-humouredly once or twice, having never felt so friendly to him since the day of his arrival; but the position of critic is instinctively taken by men who do not flow: and Patterne Port kept Dr Middleton in a benevolent reserve when Willoughby decided that something said by De Craye was not new, and laughingly accused him of failing to consult his anecdotal notebook for the double-cross to his last sprightly sally. "Your sallies are excellent, Horace, but spare us your Aunt Sallies!" De Craye had no repartee, nor did Dr. Middleton challenge a pun. We have only to sharpen our wits to trip your seductive rattler whenever we may choose to think proper; and evidently, if we condescended to it, we could do better than he. The critic who has hatched a witticism is impelled to this opinion. Judging by the smiles of the ladies, they thought so, too.

Shortly before eleven o'clock Dr. Middleton made a Spartan stand against the offer of another bottle of Port. The regulation couple of bottles had been consumed in equal partnership, and the Rev. Doctor and his host were free to pay a ceremonial visit to the drawing-room, where they were not expected. A piece of work of the elder ladies, a silken boudoir sofa-rug, was being examined, with high approval of the two younger. Vernon and Colonel De Craye had gone out in search of Crossjay, one to Mr. Dale's cottage, the other to call at the head and under-gamekeeper's. They were said to be strolling and smoking, for the night was fine. Willoughby left the room and came back with the key of Crossjay's door in his pocket. He foresaw that the delinquent might be of service to him.

Laetitia and Clara sang together. Laetitia was flushed, Clara pale. At eleven they saluted the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. Willoughby said "Good-night" to each of them, contrasting as he did so the downcast look of Laetitia with Clara's frigid directness. He divined that they were off to talk over their one object of common interest, Crossjay. Saluting his aunts, he took up the rug, to celebrate their diligence and taste; and that he might make Dr. Middleton impatient for bed, he provoked him to admire it, held it out and laid it out, and caused the courteous old gentleman some confusion in hitting on fresh terms of commendation.

Page 2916

Before midnight the room was empty. Ten minutes later Willoughby paid it a visit, and found it untenanted by the person he had engaged to be there. Vexed by his disappointment, he paced up and down, and chanced abstractedly to catch the rug in his hand; for what purpose, he might well ask himself; admiration of ladies' work, in their absence, was unlikely to occur to him. Nevertheless, the touch of the warm, soft silk was meltingly feminine. A glance at the mantel-piece clock told him Laetitia was twenty minutes behind the hour. Her remissness might endanger all his plans, alter the whole course of his life. The colours in which he painted her were too lively to last; the madness in his head threatened to subside. Certain it was that he could not be ready a second night for the sacrifice he had been about to perform.

The clock was at the half hour after twelve. He flung the silken thing on the central ottoman, extinguished the lamps, and walked out of the room, charging the absent Laetitia to bear her misfortune with a consciousness of deserving it.

CHAPTER XL

Midnight: *Sir Willoughby and Laetitia*: *With young Crossjay under* A *coverlet*

Young Crossjay was a glutton at holidays and never thought of home till it was dark. The close of the day saw him several miles away from the Hall, dubious whether he would not round his numerous adventures by sleeping at an inn; for he had lots of money, and the idea of jumping up in the morning in a strange place was thrilling. Besides, when he was shaken out of sleep by Sir Willoughby, he had been told that he was to go, and not to show his face at Patterne again. On the other hand, Miss Middleton had bidden him come back. There was little question with him which person he should obey: he followed his heart.

Supper at an inn, where he found a company to listen to his adventures, delayed him, and a short cut, intended to make up for it, lost him his road. He reached the Hall very late, ready to be in love with the horrible pleasure of a night's rest under the stars, if necessary. But a candle burned at one of the back windows. He knocked, and a kitchen-maid let him in. She had a bowl of hot soup prepared for him. Crossjay tried a mouthful to please her. His head dropped over it. She roused him to his feet, and he pitched against her shoulder. The dry air of the kitchen department had proved too much for the tired youngster. Mary, the maid, got him to step as firmly as he was able, and led him by the back-way to the hall, bidding him creep noiselessly to bed. He understood his position in the house, and though he could have gone fast to sleep on the stairs, he took a steady aim at his room and gained the door cat-like. The door resisted. He was appalled and unstrung in a minute. The door was locked. Crossjay felt as if he were

Page 2917

in the presence of Sir Willoughby. He fled on ricketty legs, and had a fall and bumps down half a dozen stairs. A door opened above. He rushed across the hall to the drawing-room, invitingly open, and there staggered in darkness to the ottoman and rolled himself in something sleek and warm, soft as hands of ladies, and redolent of them; so delicious that he hugged the folds about his head and heels. While he was endeavouring to think where he was, his legs curled, his eyelids shut, and he was in the thick of the day's adventures, doing yet more wonderful things.

He heard his own name: that was quite certain. He knew that he heard it with his ears, as he pursued the fleetest dreams ever accorded to mortal. It did not mix: it was outside him, and like the danger-pole in the ice, which the skater shooting hither and yonder comes on again, it recurred; and now it marked a point in his career, how it caused him to relax his pace; he began to circle, and whirled closer round it, until, as at a blow, his heart knocked, he tightened himself, thought of bolting, and lay dead-still to throb and hearken.

"Oh! Sir Willoughby," a voice had said.

The accents were sharp with alarm.

"My friend! my dearest!" was the answer.

"I came to speak of Crossjay."

"Will you sit here on the ottoman?"

"No, I cannot wait. I hoped I had heard Crossjay return. I would rather not sit down. May I entreat you to pardon him when he comes home?"

"You, and you only, may do so. I permit none else. Of Crossjay to-morrow."

"He may be lying in the fields. We are anxious."

"The rascal can take pretty good care of himself."

"Crossjay is perpetually meeting accidents."

"He shall be indemnified if he has had excess of punishment."

"I think I will say good-night, Sir Willoughby."

"When freely and unreservedly you have given me your hand."

There was hesitation.

“To say good-night?”

“I ask you for your hand.”

“Good-night, Sir Willoughby.”

“You do not give it. You are in doubt? Still? What language must I use to convince you? And yet you know me. Who knows me but you? You have always known me. You are my home and my temple. Have you forgotten your verses of the day of my majority?

’The dawn-star has arisen
In plenitude of light . . .’”

“Do not repeat them, pray!” cried Laetitia, with a gasp.

“I have repeated them to myself a thousand times: in India, America, Japan: they were like our English skylark, carolling to me.

’My heart, now burst thy prison
With proud aerial flight!’”

“Oh, I beg you will not force me to listen to nonsense that I wrote when I was a child. No more of those most foolish lines! If you knew what it is to write and despise one’s writing, you would not distress me. And since you will not speak of Crossjay to-night, allow me to retire.”

Page 2918

“You know me, and therefore you know my contempt for verses, as a rule, Laetitia. But not for yours to me. Why should you call them foolish? They expressed your feelings—hold them sacred. They are something religious to me, not mere poetry. Perhaps the third verse is my favourite . . .”

“It will be more than I can bear!”

“You were in earnest when you wrote them?”

“I was very young, very enthusiastic, very silly.”

“You were and are my image of constancy!”

“It is an error, Sir Willoughby; I am far from being the same.”

“We are all older, I trust wiser. I am, I will own; much wiser. Wise at last! I offer you my hand.”

She did not reply. “I offer you my hand and name, Laetitia.”

No response.

“You think me bound in honour to another?”

She was mute.

“I am free. Thank Heaven! I am free to choose my mate—the woman I have always loved! Freely and unreservedly, as I ask you to give your hand, I offer mine. You are the mistress of Patterne Hall; my wife.”

She had not a word.

“My dearest! do you not rightly understand? The hand I am offering you is disengaged. It is offered to the lady I respect above all others. I have made the discovery that I cannot love without respecting; and as I will not marry without loving, it ensues that I am free—I am yours. At last?—your lips move: tell me the words. Have always loved, I said. You carry in your bosom the magnet of constancy, and I, in spite of apparent deviations, declare to you that I have never ceased to be sensible of the attraction. And now there is not an impediment. We two against the world! we are one. Let me confess to an old foible—perfectly youthful, and you will ascribe it to youth: once I desired to absorb. I mistrusted; that was the reason: I perceive it. You teach me the difference of an alliance with a lady of intellect. The pride I have in you, Laetitia, definitely cures me of that insane passion—call it an insatiable hunger. I recognize it as a folly of youth. I have, as it were, gone the tour, to come home to you—at last?—and live our manly life of comparative equals. At last, then! But remember that in the

younger man you would have had a despot—perhaps a jealous despot. Young men, I assure you, are orientally inclined in their ideas of love. Love gets a bad name from them. We, my Laetitia, do not regard love as a selfishness. If it is, it is the essence of life. At least it is our selfishness rendered beautiful. I talk to you like a man who has found a compatriot in a foreign land. It seems to me that I have not opened my mouth for an age. I certainly have not unlocked my heart. Those who sing for joy are not unintelligible to me. If I had not something in me worth saying I think I should sing. In every sense you reconcile me to men and the world, Laetitia. Why press you to speak? I will be the speaker. As surely as you know me, I know you: and . . .”

Page 2919

Laetitia burst forth with: “No!”

“I do not know you?” said he, searchingly mellifluous.

“Hardly.”

“How not?”

“I am changed.”

“In what way?”

“Deeply.”

“Sedater?”

“Materially.”

“Colour will come back: have no fear; I promise it. If you imagine you want renewing, I have the specific, I, my love, I!”

“Forgive me—will you tell me, Sir Willoughby, whether you have broken with Miss Middleton?”

“Rest satisfied, my dear Laetitia. She is as free as I am. I can do no more than a man of honour should do. She releases me. To-morrow or next day she departs. We, Laetitia, you and I, my love, are home birds. It does not do for the home bird to couple with the migratory. The little imperceptible change you allude to, is nothing. Italy will restore you. I am ready to stake my own health—never yet shaken by a doctor of medicine:—I say medicine advisedly, for there are doctors of divinity who would shake giants:—that an Italian trip will send you back—that I shall bring you home from Italy a blooming bride. You shake your head—despondently? My love, I guarantee it. Cannot I give you colour? Behold! Come to the light, look in the glass.”

“I may redden,” said Laetitia. “I suppose that is due to the action of the heart. I am changed. Heart, for any other purpose, I have not. I am like you, Sir Willoughby, in this: I could not marry without loving, and I do not know what love is, except that it is an empty dream.”

“Marriage, my dearest. . .”

“You are mistaken.”

“I will cure you, my Laetitia. Look to me, I am the tonic. It is not common confidence, but conviction. I, my love, I!”

“There is no cure for what I feel, Sir Willoughby.”

“Spare me the formal prefix, I beg. You place your hand in mine, relying on me. I am pledge for the remainder. We end as we began: my request is for your hand—your hand in marriage.”

“I cannot give it.”

“To be my wife!”

“It is an honour; I must decline it.”

“Are you quite well, Laetitia? I propose in the plainest terms I can employ, to make you Lady Patterne—mine.”

“I am compelled to refuse.”

“Why? Refuse? Your reason!”

“The reason has been named.”

He took a stride to inspirit his wits.

“There’s a madness comes over women at times, I know. Answer me, Laetitia:—by all the evidence a man can have, I could swear it:—but answer me; you loved me once?”

“I was an exceedingly foolish, romantic girl.”

Page 2920

“You evade my question: I am serious. Oh!” he walked away from her booming a sound of utter repudiation of her present imbecility, and hurrying to her side, said: “But it was manifest to the whole world! It was a legend. To love like Laetitia Dale, was a current phrase. You were an example, a light to women: no one was your match for devotion. You were a precious cameo, still gazing! And I was the object. You loved me. You loved me, you belonged to me, you were mine, my possession, my jewel; I was prouder of your constancy than of anything else that I had on earth. It was a part of the order of the universe to me. A doubt of it would have disturbed my creed. Why, good heaven! where are we? Is nothing solid on earth? You loved me!”

“I was childish, indeed.”

“You loved me passionately!”

“Do you insist on shaming me through and through, Sir Willoughby? I have been exposed enough.”

“You cannot blot out the past: it is written, it is recorded. You loved me devotedly, silence is no escape. You loved me.”

“I did.”

“You never loved me, you shallow woman! ‘I did!’ As if there could be a cessation of a love! What are we to reckon on as ours? We prize a woman’s love; we guard it jealously, we trust to it, dream of it; there is our wealth; there is our talisman! And when we open the casket it has flown!—barren vacuity!—we are poorer than dogs. As well think of keeping a costly wine in potter’s clay as love in the heart of a woman! There are women—women! Oh, they are all of a stamp coin! Coin for any hand! It’s a fiction, an imposture—they cannot love. They are the shadows of men. Compared with men, they have as much heart in them as the shadow beside the body. Laetitia!”

“Sir Willoughby.”

“You refuse my offer?”

“I must.”

“You refuse to take me for your husband?”

“I cannot be your wife.”

“You have changed? . . . you have set your heart? . . . you could marry? . . . there is a man? . . . you could marry one! I will have an answer, I am sick of evasions. What was in the mind of Heaven when women were created, will be the riddle to the end of the world! Every good man in turn has made the inquiry. I have a right to know who robs

me—We may try as we like to solve it.—Satan is painted laughing!—I say I have a right to know who robs me. Answer me."

"I shall not marry."

"That is not an answer."

"I love no one."

"You loved me.—You are silent?—but you confessed it. Then you confess it was a love that could die! Are you unable to perceive how that redounds to my discredit? You loved me, you have ceased to love me. In other words you charge me with incapacity to sustain a woman's love. You accuse me of inspiring a miserable passion that cannot last a lifetime! You let the world see that I am a man to be aimed at for a temporary mark! And simply because I happen to

Page 2921

be in your neighbourhood at an age when a young woman is impressionable! You make a public example of me as a for whom women may have a caprice, but that is all; he cannot enchain them; he fascinates passingly; they fall off. Is it just, for me to be taken up and cast down at your will? Reflect on that scandal! Shadows? Why, a man's shadow is faithful to him at least. What are women? There is not a comparison in nature that does not tower above them! not one that does not hoot at them! I, throughout my life, guided by absolute deference to their weakness—paying them politeness, courtesy—whatever I touch I am happy in, except when I touch women! How is it? What is the mystery? Some monstrous explanation must exist. What can it be? I am favoured by fortune from my birth until I enter into relations with women. But will you be so good as to account for it in your defence of them? Oh! were the relations dishonourable, it would be quite another matter. Then they . . . I could recount . . . I disdain to chronicle such victories. Quite another matter. But they are flies, and I am something more stable. They are flies. I look beyond the day; I owe a duty to my line. They are flies. I foresee it, I shall be crossed in my fate so long as I fail to shun them—-flies! Not merely born for the day, I maintain that they are spiritually ephemeral—Well, my opinion of your sex is directly traceable to you. You may alter it, or fling another of us men out on the world with the old bitter experience. Consider this, that it is on your head if my ideal of women is wrecked. It rests with you to restore it. I love you. I discover that you are the one woman I have always loved. I come to you, I sue you, and suddenly—you have changed! 'I have changed: I am not the same.' What can it mean? 'I cannot marry: I love no one.' And you say you do not know what love is—-avowing in the same breath that you did love me! Am I the empty dream? My hand, heart, fortune, name, are yours, at your feet; you kick them hence. I am here—you reject me. But why, for what mortal reason am I here other than my faith in your love? You drew me to you, to repel me, and have a wretched revenge."

"You know it is not that, Sir Willoughby."

"Have you any possible suspicion that I am still entangled, not, as I assure you I am, perfectly free in fact and in honour?"

"It is not that."

"Name it; for you see your power. Would you have me kneel to you, madam?"

"Oh, no; it would complete my grief."

"You feel grief? Then you believe in my affection, and you hurl it away. I have no doubt that as a poetess you would say, love is eternal. And you have loved me. And you tell me you love me no more. You are not very logical, Laetitia Dale."

"Poetesses rarely are: if I am one, which I little pretend to be for writing silly verses. I have passed out of that delusion, with the rest."

Page 2922

“You shall not wrong those dear old days, Laetitia. I see them now; when I rode by your cottage and you were at your window, pen in hand, your hair straying over your forehead. Romantic, yes; not foolish. Why were you foolish in thinking of me? Some day I will commission an artist to paint me that portrait of you from my description. And I remember when we first whispered . . . I remember your trembling. You have forgotten—I remember. I remember our meeting in the park on the path to church. I remember the heavenly morning of my return from my travels, and the same Laetitia meeting me, stedfast and unchangeable. Could I ever forget? Those are ineradicable scenes; pictures of my youth, interwound with me. I may say, that as I recede from them, I dwell on them the more. Tell me, Laetitia, was there not a certain prophecy of your father’s concerning us two? I fancy I heard of one. There was one.”

“He was an invalid. Elderly people nurse illusions.”

“Ask yourself Laetitia, who is the obstacle to the fulfilment of his prediction?—truth, if ever a truth was foreseen on earth. You have not changed so far that you would feel no pleasure in gratifying him? I go to him to-morrow morning with the first light.”

“You will compel me to follow, and undeceive him.”

“Do so, and I denounce an unworthy affection you are ashamed to avow.”

“That would be idle, though it would be base.”

“Proof of love, then! For no one but you should it be done, and no one but you dare accuse me of a baseness.”

“Sir Willoughby, you will let my father die in peace.”

“He and I together will contrive to persuade you.”

“You tempt me to imagine that you want a wife at any cost.”

“You, Laetitia, you.”

“I am tired,” she said. “It is late, I would rather not hear more. I am sorry if I have caused you pain. I suppose you to have spoken with candour. I defend neither my sex nor myself. I can only say I am a woman as good as dead: happy to be made happy in my way, but so little alive that I cannot realize any other way. As for love, I am thankful to have broken a spell. You have a younger woman in your mind; I am an old one: I have no ambition and no warmth. My utmost prayer is to float on the stream—a purely physical desire of life: I have no strength to swim. Such a woman is not the wife for you, Sir Willoughby. Good night.”

“One final word. Weigh it. Express no conventional regrets. Resolutely you refuse?”

“Resolutely I do.”

“You refuse?”

“Yes.”

“I have sacrificed my pride for nothing! You refuse?”

“Yes.”

“Humbled myself! And this is the answer! You do refuse?”

“I do.”

“Good night, Laetitia Dale.”

He gave her passage.

“Good night, Sir Willoughby.”

“I am in your power,” he said, in a voice between supplication and menace that laid a claw on her, and she turned and replied:

Page 2923

“You will not be betrayed.”

“I can trust you . . . ?”

“I go home to-morrow before breakfast.”

“Permit me to escort you upstairs.”

“If you please: but I see no one here either to-night or tomorrow.”

“It is for the privilege of seeing the last of you.”

They withdrew.

Young Crossjay listened to the drumming of his head. Somewhere in or over the cavity a drummer rattled tremendously.

Sir Willoughby’s laboratory door shut with a slam.

Crossjay tumbled himself off the ottoman. He stole up to the unclosed drawing-room door, and peeped. Never was a boy more thoroughly awakened. His object was to get out of the house and go through the night avoiding everything human, for he was big with information of a character that he knew to be of the nature of gunpowder, and he feared to explode. He crossed the hall. In the passage to the scullery he ran against Colonel De Craye.

“So there you are,” said the colonel, “I’ve been hunting you.”

Crossjay related that his bedroom door was locked and the key gone, and Sir Willoughby sitting up in the laboratory.

Colonel De Craye took the boy to his own room, where Crossjay lay on a sofa, comfortably covered over and snug in a swelling pillow; but he was restless; he wanted to speak, to bellow, to cry; and he bounced round to his left side, and bounced to his right, not knowing what to think, except that there was treason to his adored Miss Middleton.

“Why, my lad, you’re not half a campaigner,” the colonel called out to him; attributing his uneasiness to the material discomfort of the sofa: and Crossjay had to swallow the taunt, bitter though it was. A dim sentiment of impropriety in unburdening his overcharged mind on the subject of Miss Middleton to Colonel De Craye restrained him from defending himself; and so he heaved and tossed about till daybreak. At an early hour, while his hospitable friend, who looked very handsome in profile half breast and head above the sheets, continued to slumber, Crossjay was on his legs and away. “He says I’m not half a campaigner, and a couple of hours of bed are enough for me,” the

boy thought proudly, and snuffed the springing air of the young sun on the fields. A glance back at Patterne Hall dismayed him, for he knew not how to act, and he was immoderately combustible, too full of knowledge for self-containment; much too zealously excited on behalf of his dear Miss Middleton to keep silent for many hours of the day.

CHAPTER XLI

THE REV. DR. MIDDLETON, CLARA, AND SIR WILLOUGHBY

When Master Crossjay tumbled down the stairs, Laetitia was in Clara's room, speculating on the various mishaps which might have befallen that battered youngster; and Clara listened anxiously after Laetitia had run out, until she heard Sir Willoughby's voice; which in some way satisfied her that the boy was not in the house.

Page 2924

She waited, expecting Miss Dale to return; then undressed, went to bed, tried to sleep. She was tired of strife. Strange thoughts for a young head shot through her: as, that it is possible for the sense of duty to counteract distaste; and that one may live a life apart from one's admirations and dislikes: she owned the singular strength of Sir Willoughby in outwearying: she asked herself how much she had gained by struggling:—every effort seemed to expend her spirit's force, and rendered her less able to get the clear vision of her prospects, as though it had sunk her deeper: the contrary of her intention to make each further step confirm her liberty. Looking back, she marvelled at the things she had done. Looking round, how ineffectual they appeared! She had still the great scene of positive rebellion to go through with her father.

The anticipation of that was the cause of her extreme discouragement. He had not spoken to her since he became aware of her attempted flight: but the scene was coming; and besides the wish not to inflict it on him, as well as to escape it herself, the girl's peculiar unhappiness lay in her knowledge that they were alienated and stood opposed, owing to one among the more perplexing masculine weaknesses, which she could not hint at, dared barely think of, and would not name in her meditations. Diverting to other subjects, she allowed herself to exclaim, "Wine, wine!" in renewed wonder of what there could be in wine to entrap venerable men and obscure their judgements. She was too young to consider that her being very much in the wrong gave all the importance to the cordial glass in a venerable gentleman's appreciation of his dues. Why should he fly from a priceless wine to gratify the caprices of a fantastical child guilty of seeking to commit a breach of faith? He harped on those words. Her fault was grave. No doubt the wine coloured it to him, as a drop or two will do in any cup: still her fault was grave.

She was too young for such considerations. She was ready to expatiate on the gravity of her fault, so long as the humiliation assisted to her disentanglement: her snared nature in the toils would not permit her to reflect on it further. She had never accurately perceived it: for the reason perhaps that Willoughby had not been moving in his appeals: but, admitting the charge of waywardness, she had come to terms with conscience, upon the understanding that she was to perceive it and regret it and do penance for it by-and-by:—by renouncing marriage altogether? How light a penance!

In the morning, she went to Laetitia's room, knocked, and had no answer.

She was informed at the breakfast-table of Miss Dale's departure. The ladies Eleanor and Isabel feared it to be a case of urgency at the cottage. No one had seen Vernon, and Clara requested Colonel De Craye to walk over to the cottage for news of Crossjay. He accepted the commission, simply to obey and be in her service: assuring her, however, that there was no need to be disturbed about the boy. He would have told her more, had not Dr. Middleton led her out.

Page 2925

Sir Willoughby marked a lapse of ten minutes by his watch. His excellent aunts had ventured a comment on his appearance that frightened him lest he himself should be the person to betray his astounding discomfiture. He regarded his conduct as an act of madness, and Laetitia's as no less that of a madwoman—happily mad! Very happily mad indeed! Her rejection of his ridiculously generous proposal seemed to show an intervening hand in his favour, that sent her distraught at the right moment. He entirely trusted her to be discreet; but she was a miserable creature, who had lost the one last chance offered her by Providence, and furnished him with a signal instance of the mediocrity of woman's love.

Time was flying. In a little while Mrs. Mountstuart would arrive. He could not fence her without a design in his head; he was destitute of an armoury if he had no scheme: he racked the brain only to succeed in rousing phantasmal vapours. Her infernal "Twice!" would cease now to apply to Laetitia; it would be an echo of Lady Busshe. Nay, were all in the secret, Thrice jilted! might become the universal roar. And this, he reflected bitterly, of a man whom nothing but duty to his line had arrested from being the most mischievous of his class with women! Such is our reward for uprightness!

At the expiration of fifteen minutes by his watch, he struck a knuckle on the library door. Dr. Middleton held it open to him.

"You are disengaged, sir?"

"The sermon is upon the paragraph which is toned to awaken the clerk," replied the Rev. Doctor.

Clara was weeping.

Sir Willoughby drew near her solicitously.

Dr Middleton's mane of silvery hair was in a state bearing witness to the vehemence of the sermon, and Willoughby said: "I hope, sir, you have not made too much of a trifle."

"I believe, sir, that I have produced an effect, and that was the point in contemplation."

"Clara! my dear Clara!" Willoughby touched her.

"She sincerely repents her conduct, I may inform you," said Dr. Middleton.

"My love!" Willoughby whispered. "We have had a misunderstanding. I am at a loss to discover where I have been guilty, but I take the blame, all the blame. I implore you not to weep. Do me the favour to look at me. I would not have had you subjected to any interrogation whatever."

"You are not to blame," Clara said on a sob.

“Undoubtedly Willoughby is not to blame. It was not he who was bound on a runaway errand in flagrant breach of duty and decorum, nor he who inflicted a catarrh on a brother of my craft and cloth,” said her father.

“The clerk, sir, has pronounced Amen,” observed Willoughby.

“And no man is happier to hear an ejaculation that he has laboured for with so much sweat of his brow than the parson, I can assure you,” Dr. Middleton mildly groaned. “I have notions of the trouble of Abraham. A sermon of that description is an immolation of the parent, however it may go with the child.”

Page 2926

Willoughby soothed his Clara.

“I wish I had been here to share it. I might have saved you some tears. I may have been hasty in our little dissensions. I will acknowledge that I have been. My temper is often irascible.”

“And so is mine!” exclaimed Dr. Middleton. “And yet I am not aware that I made the worse husband for it. Nor do I rightly comprehend how a probably justly excitable temper can stand for a plea in mitigation of an attempt at an outrageous breach of faith.”

“The sermon is over, sir.”

“Reverberations!” the Rev. Doctor waved his arm placably. “Take it for thunder heard remote.”

“Your hand, my love,” Willoughby murmured.

The hand was not put forth.

Dr. Middleton remarked the fact. He walked to the window, and perceiving the pair in the same position when he faced about, he delivered a cough of admonition.

“It is cruel!” said Clara.

“That the owner of your hand should petition you for it?” inquired her father.

She sought refuge in a fit of tears.

Willoughby bent above her, mute.

“Is a scene that is hardly conceivable as a parent’s obligation once in a lustrum, to be repeated within the half hour?” shouted her father.

She drew up her shoulders and shook; let them fall and dropped her head.

“My dearest! your hand!” fluted Willoughby.

The hand surrendered; it was much like the icicle of a sudden thaw.

Willoughby squeezed it to his ribs.

Dr. Middleton marched up and down the room with his arms locked behind him. The silence between the young people seemed to denounce his presence.

He said, cordially: “Old Hiems has but to withdraw for buds to burst. ‘Jam ver egelidos refert tepores.’ The equinoctial fury departs. I will leave you for a term.”

Clara and Willoughby simultaneously raised their faces with opposing expressions.

“My girl!” Her father stood by her, laying gentle hand on her.

“Yes, papa, I will come out to you,” she replied to his apology for the rather heavy weight of his vocabulary, and smiled.

“No, sir, I beg you will remain,” said Willoughby.

“I keep you frost-bound.”

Clara did not deny it.

Willoughby emphatically did.

Then which of them was the more lover-like? Dr. Middleton would for the moment have supposed his daughter.

Clara said: “Shall you be on the lawn, papa?”

Willoughby interposed. “Stay, sir; give us your blessing.”

“That you have.” Dr. Middleton hastily motioned the paternal ceremony in outline.

“A few minutes, papa,” said Clara.

“Will she name the day?” came eagerly from Willoughby.

“I cannot!” Clara cried in extremity.

“The day is important on its arrival,” said her father; “but I apprehend the decision to be of the chief importance at present. First prime your piece of artillery, my friend.”

Page 2927

“The decision is taken, sir.”

“Then I will be out of the way of the firing. Hit what day you please.”

Clara checked herself on an impetuous exclamation. It was done that her father might not be detained.

Her astute self-compression sharpened Willoughby as much as it mortified and terrified him. He understood how he would stand in an instant were Dr. Middleton absent. Her father was the tribunal she dreaded, and affairs must be settled and made irrevocable while he was with them. To sting the blood of the girl, he called her his darling, and half enwound her, shadowing forth a salute.

She strung her body to submit, seeing her father take it as a signal for his immediate retirement.

Willoughby was upon him before he reached the door.

“Hear us out, sir. Do not go. Stay, at my entreaty. I fear we have not come to a perfect reconcilement.”

“If that is your opinion,” said Clara, “it is good reason for not distressing my father.”

“Dr Middleton, I love your daughter. I wooed her and won her; I had your consent to our union, and I was the happiest of mankind. In some way, since her coming to my house, I know not how—she will not tell me, or cannot—I offended. One may be innocent and offend. I have never pretended to impeccability, which is an admission that I may very naturally offend. My appeal to her is for an explanation or for pardon. I obtain neither. Had our positions been reversed, oh, not for any real offence—not for the worst that can be imagined—I think not—I hope not—could I have been tempted to propose the dissolution of our engagement. To love is to love, with me; an engagement a solemn bond. With all my errors I have that merit of utter fidelity—to the world laughable! I confess to a multitude of errors; I have that single merit, and am not the more estimable in your daughter’s eyes on account of it, I fear. In plain words, I am, I do not doubt, one of the fools among men; of the description of human dog commonly known as faithful—-whose destiny is that of a tribe. A man who cries out when he is hurt is absurd, and I am not asking for sympathy. Call me luckless. But I abhor a breach of faith. A broken pledge is hateful to me. I should regard it myself as a form of suicide. There are principles which civilized men must contend for. Our social fabric is based on them. As my word stands for me, I hold others to theirs. If that is not done, the world is more or less a carnival of counterfeits. In this instance—Ah! Clara, my love! and you have principles: you have inherited, you have been indoctrinated with them: have I, then, in my ignorance, offended past penitence, that you, of all women? . . . And without being able to name my sin!—Not only for what I lose by it, but in the abstract, judicially—apart

from the sentiment of personal interest, grief, pain, and the possibility of my having to endure that which no temptation would induce me to commit:—judicially;—I fear, sir, I am a poor forensic orator . . .”

Page 2928

“The situation, sir, does not demand a Cicero: proceed,” said Dr. Middleton, balked in his approving nods at the right true things delivered.

“Judicially, I am bold to say, though it may appear a presumption in one suffering acutely, I abhor a breach of faith.”

Dr. Middleton brought his nod down low upon the phrase he had anticipated. “And I,” said he, “personally, and presently, abhor a breach of faith. Judicially? Judicially to examine, judicially to condemn: but does the judicial mind detest? I think, sir, we are not on the bench when we say that we abhor: we have unseated ourselves. Yet our abhorrence of bad conduct is very certain. You would signify, impersonally: which suffices for this exposition of your feelings.”

He peered at the gentleman under his brows, and resumed:

“She has had it, Willoughby; she has had it in plain Saxon and in uncompromising Olympian. There is, I conceive, no necessity to revert to it.”

“Pardon me, sir, but I am still unforgiven.”

“You must babble out the rest between you. I am about as much at home as a turkey with a pair of pigeons.”

“Leave us, father,” said Clara.

“First join our hands, and let me give you that title, sir.”

“Reach the good man your hand, my girl; forthright, from the shoulder, like a brave boxer. Humour a lover. He asks for his own.”

“It is more than I can do, father.”

“How, it is more than you can do? You are engaged to him, a plighted woman.”

“I do not wish to marry.”

“The apology is inadequate.”

“I am unworthy. . .”

“Chatter! chatter!”

“I beg him to release me.”

“Lunacy!”

“I have no love to give him.”

“Have you gone back to your cradle, Clara Middleton?”

“Oh, leave us, dear father!”

“My offence, Clara, my offence! What is it? Will you only name it?”

“Father, will you leave us? We can better speak together . . .”

“We have spoken, Clara, how often!” Willoughby resumed, “with what result?—that you loved me, that you have ceased to love me: that your heart was mine, that you have withdrawn it, plucked it from me: that you request me to consent to a sacrifice involving my reputation, my life. And what have I done? I am the same, unchangeable. I loved and love you: my heart was yours, and is, and will be yours forever. You are my affianced—that is, my wife. What have I done?”

“It is indeed useless,” Clara sighed.

“Not useless, my girl, that you should inform this gentleman, your affianced husband, of the ground of the objection you conceived against him.”

“I cannot say.”

“Do you know?”

“If I could name it, I could hope to overcome it.”

Dr. Middleton addressed Sir Willoughby.

Page 2929

“I verily believe we are directing the girl to dissect a caprice. Such things are seen large by these young people, but as they have neither organs, nor arteries, nor brains, nor membranes, dissection and inspection will be alike profitlessly practised. Your inquiry is natural for a lover, whose passion to enter into relations with the sex is ordinarily in proportion to his ignorance of the stuff composing them. At a particular age they traffic in whims: which are, I presume, the spiritual of hysterics; and are indubitably preferable, so long as they are not pushed too far. Examples are not wanting to prove that a flighty initiative on the part of the male is a handsome corrective. In that case, we should probably have had the roof off the house, and the girl now at your feet. Ha!”

“Despise me, father. I am punished for ever thinking myself the superior of any woman,” said Clara.

“Your hand out to him, my dear, since he is for a formal reconciliation; and I can’t wonder.”

“Father! I have said I do not . . . I have said I cannot . . .”

“By the most merciful! what? what? the name for it, words for it!”

“Do not frown on me, father. I wish him happiness. I cannot marry him. I do not love him.”

“You will remember that you informed me aforetime that you did love him.”

“I was ignorant . . . I did not know myself. I wish him to be happy.”

“You deny him the happiness you wish him!”

“It would not be for his happiness were I to wed him.”

“Oh!” burst from Willoughby.

“You hear him. He rejects your prediction, Clara Middleton.” She caught her clasped hands up to her throat. “Wretched, wretched, both!”

“And you have not a word against him, miserable girl.”

“Miserable! I am.”

“It is the cry of an animal!”

“Yes, father.”

“You feel like one? Your behaviour is of that shape. You have not a word?”

“Against myself, not against him.”

“And I, when you speak so generously, am to yield you? give you up?” cried Willoughby. “Ah! my love, my Clara, impose what you will on me; not that. It is too much for man. It is, I swear it, beyond my strength.”

“Pursue, continue the strain; ’tis in the right key,” said Dr. Middleton, departing.

Willoughby wheeled and waylaid him with a bound.

“Plead for me, sir; you are all-powerful. Let her be mine, she shall be happy, or I will perish for it. I will call it on my head.—Impossible! I cannot lose her. Lose you, my love? it would be to strip myself of every blessing of body and soul. It would be to deny myself possession of grace, beauty, wit, all the incomparable charms of loveliness of mind and person in woman, and plant myself in a desert. You are my mate, the sum of everything I call mine. Clara, I should be less than man to submit to such a loss. Consent to it? But I love you! I worship you! How can I consent to lose you . . . ?”

Page 2930

He saw the eyes of the desperately wily young woman slink sideways. Dr. Middleton was pacing at ever shorter lengths closer by the door.

“You hate me?” Willoughby sunk his voice.

“If it should turn to hate!” she murmured.

“Hatred of your husband?”

“I could not promise,” she murmured, more softly in her wiliness.

“Hatred?” he cried aloud, and Dr. Middleton stopped in his walk and flung up his head: “Hatred of your husband? of the man you have vowed to love and honour? Oh, no! Once mine, it is not to be feared. I trust to my knowledge of your nature; I trust in your blood, I trust in your education. Had I nothing else to inspire confidence, I could trust in your eyes. And, Clara, take the confession: I would rather be hated than lose you. For if I lose you, you are in another world, out of this one holding me in its death-like cold; but if you hate me we are together, we are still together. Any alliance, any, in preference to separation!”

Clara listened with critical ear. His language and tone were new; and comprehending that they were in part addressed to her father, whose phrase: “A breach of faith”: he had so cunningly used, disdain of the actor prompted the extreme blunder of her saying —frigidly though she said it:

“You have not talked to me in this way before.”

“Finally,” remarked her father, summing up the situation to settle it from that little speech, “he talks to you in this way now; and you are under my injunction to stretch your hand out to him for a symbol of union, or to state your objection to that course. He, by your admission, is at the terminus, and there, failing the why not, must you join him.”

Her head whirled. She had been severely flagellated and weakened previous to Willoughby’s entrance. Language to express her peculiar repulsion eluded her. She formed the words, and perceived that they would not stand to bear a breath from her father. She perceived too that Willoughby was as ready with his agony of supplication as she with hers. If she had tears for a resource, he had gestures quite as eloquent; and a cry of her loathing of the union would fetch a countervailing torrent of the man’s love.—What could she say? he is an Egoist? The epithet has no meaning in such a scene. Invent! shrieked the hundred-voiced instinct of dislike within her, and alone with her father, alone with Willoughby, she could have invented some equivalent, to do her heart justice for the injury it sustained in her being unable to name the true and immense objection: but the pair in presence paralyzed her. She dramatized them each springing forward by turns, with crushing rejoinders. The activity of her mind revelled in

giving them a tongue, but would not do it for herself. Then ensued the inevitable consequence of an incapacity to speak at the heart's urgent dictate: heart and mind became divided. One throbbed hotly,

Page 2931

the other hung aloof, and mentally, while the sick inarticulate heart kept clamouring, she answered it with all that she imagined for those two men to say. And she dropped poison on it to still its reproaches: bidding herself remember her fatal postponements in order to preserve the seeming of consistency before her father; calling it hypocrite; asking herself, what was she! who loved her! And thus beating down her heart, she completed the mischief with a piercing view of the foundation of her father's advocacy of Willoughby, and more lamentably asked herself what her value was, if she stood bereft of respect for her father.

Reason, on the other hand, was animated by her better nature to plead his case against her: she clung to her respect for him, and felt herself drowning with it: and she echoed Willoughby consciously, doubling her horror with the consciousness, in crying out on a world where the most sacred feelings are subject to such lapses. It doubled her horror, that she should echo the man: but it proved that she was no better than be: only some years younger. Those years would soon be outlived: after which, he and she would be of a pattern. She was unloved: she did no harm to any one by keeping her word to this man; she had pledged it, and it would be a breach of faith not to keep it. No one loved her. Behold the quality of her father's love! To give him happiness was now the principal aim for her, her own happiness being decently buried; and here he was happy: why should she be the cause of his going and losing the poor pleasure he so much enjoyed?

The idea of her devotedness flattered her feebleness. She betrayed signs of hesitation; and in hesitating, she looked away from a look at Willoughby, thinking (so much against her nature was it to resign herself to him) that it would not have been so difficult with an ill-favoured man. With one horribly ugly, it would have been a horrible exultation to cast off her youth and take the fiendish leap.

Unfortunately for Sir Willoughby, he had his reasons for pressing impatience; and seeing her deliberate, seeing her hasty look at his fine figure, his opinion of himself combined with his recollection of a particular maxim of the Great Book to assure him that her resistance was over: chiefly owing, as he supposed, to his physical perfections.

Frequently indeed, in the contest between gentlemen and ladies, have the maxims of the Book stimulated the assailant to victory. They are rosy with blood of victims. To bear them is to hear a horn that blows the mort: has blown it a thousand times. It is good to remember how often they have succeeded, when, for the benefit of some future Lady Vauban, who may bestir her wits to gather maxims for the inspiriting of the Defence, the circumstance of a failure has to be recorded.

Willoughby could not wait for the melting of the snows. He saw full surely the dissolving process; and sincerely admiring and coveting her as he did, rashly this ill-fated gentleman attempted to precipitate it, and so doing arrested.

Page 2932

Whence might we draw a note upon yonder maxim, in words akin to these: Make certain ere a breath come from thee that thou be not a frost.

“Mine! She is mine!” he cried: “mine once more! mine utterly! mine eternally!” and he followed up his devouring exclamations in person as she, less decidedly, retreated. She retreated as young ladies should ever do, two or three steps, and he would not notice that she had become an angry Dian, all arrows: her maidenliness in surrendering pleased him. Grasping one fair hand, he just allowed her to edge on the outer circle of his embrace, crying: “Not a syllable of what I have gone through! You shall not have to explain it, my Clara. I will study you more diligently, to be guided by you, my darling. If I offend again, my wife will not find it hard to speak what my bride withheld—I do not ask why: perhaps not able to weigh the effect of her reticence: not at that time, when she was younger and less experienced, estimating the sacredness of a plighted engagement. It is past, we are one, my dear sir and father. You may leave us now.”

“I profoundly rejoice to hear that I may,” said Dr. Middleton. Clara writhed her captured hand.

“No, papa, stay. It is an error, an error. You must not leave me. Do not think me utterly, eternally, belonging to any one but you. No one shall say I am his but you.”

“Are you quicksands, Clara Middleton, that nothing can be built on you? Whither is a flighty head and a shifty will carrying the girl?”

“Clara and I, sir,” said Willoughby.

“And so you shall,” said the Doctor, turning about.

“Not yet, papa:” Clara sprang to him.

“Why, you, you, you, it was you who craved to be alone with Willoughby!” her father shouted; “and here we are rounded to our starting-point, with the solitary difference that now you do not want to be alone with Willoughby. First I am bidden go; next I am pulled back; and judging by collar and coat-tag, I suspect you to be a young woman to wear an angel’s temper threadbare before you determine upon which one of the tides driving him to and fro you intend to launch on yourself, Where is your mind?”

Clara smoothed her forehead.

“I wish to please you, papa.”

“I request you to please the gentleman who is your appointed husband.”

“I am anxious to perform my duty.”

“That should be a satisfactory basis for you, Willoughby; as girls go!”

“Let me, sir, simply entreat to have her hand in mine before you.”

“Why not, Clara?”

“Why an empty ceremony, papa?”

“The implication is, that she is prepared for the important one, friend Willoughby.”

“Her hand, sir; the reassurance of her hand in mine under your eyes:—after all that I have suffered, I claim it, I think I claim it reasonably, to restore me to confidence.”

“Quite reasonably; which is not to say, necessarily; but, I will add, justifiably; and it may be, sagaciously, when dealing with the volatile.”

Page 2933

“And here,” said Willoughby, “is my hand.”

Clara recoiled.

He stepped on. Her father frowned. She lifted both her hands from the shrinking elbows, darted a look of repulsion at her pursuer, and ran to her father, crying: “Call it my mood! I am volatile, capricious, flighty, very foolish. But you see that I attach a real meaning to it, and feel it to be binding: I cannot think it an empty ceremony, if it is before you. Yes, only be a little considerate to your moody girl. She will be in a fitter state in a few hours. Spare me this moment; I must collect myself. I thought I was free; I thought he would not press me. If I give my hand hurriedly now, I shall, I know, immediately repent it. There is the picture of me! But, papa, I mean to try to be above that, and if I go and walk by myself, I shall grow calm to perceive where my duty lies . . .”

“In which direction shall you walk?” said Willoughby.

“Wisdom is not upon a particular road,” said Dr. Middleton.

“I have a dread, sir, of that one which leads to the railway-station.”

“With some justice!” Dr. Middleton sighed over his daughter.

Clara coloured to deep crimson: but she was beyond anger, and was rather gratified by an offence coming from Willoughby.

“I will promise not to leave his grounds, papa.”

“My child, you have threatened to be a breaker of promises.”

“Oh!” she wailed. “But I will make it a vow to you.”

“Why not make it a vow to me this moment, for this gentleman’s contentment, that he shall be your husband within a given period?”

“I will come to you voluntarily. I burn to be alone.”

“I shall lose her,” exclaimed Willoughby, in heartfelt earnest.

“How so?” said Dr. Middleton. “I have her, sir, if you will favour me by continuing in abeyance.—You will come within an hour voluntarily, Clara; and you will either at once yield your hand to him or you will furnish reasons, and they must be good ones, for withholding it.”

“Yes, papa.”

“You will?”

“I will.”

“Mind, I say reasons.”

“Reasons, papa. If I have none . . .”

“If you have none that are to my satisfaction, you implicitly and instantly, and cordially obey my command.”

“I will obey.”

“What more would you require?” Dr. Middleton bowed to Sir Willoughby in triumph.

“Will she. . .”

“Sir! Sir!”

“She is your daughter, sir. I am satisfied.”

“She has perchance wrestled with her engagement, as the aboriginals of a land newly discovered by a crew of adventurous colonists do battle with the garments imposed on them by our considerate civilization;— ultimately to rejoice with excessive dignity in the wearing of a battered cocked-hat and trowsers not extending to the shanks: but she did not break her engagement, sir; and we will anticipate that, moderating a young woman’s native wildness, she may, after the manner of my comparison, take a similar pride in her fortune in good season.”

Page 2934

Willoughby had not leisure to sound the depth of Dr. Middleton's compliment. He had seen Clara gliding out of the room during the delivery; and his fear returned on him that, not being won, she was lost.

"She has gone." Her father noticed her absence. "She does not waste time in her mission to procure that astonishing product of a shallow soil, her reasons; if such be the object of her search. But no: it signifies that she deems herself to have need of composure—nothing more. No one likes to be turned about; we like to turn ourselves about; and in the question of an act to be committed, we stipulate that it shall be our act—girls and others. After the lapse of an hour, it will appear to her as her act. Happily, Willoughby, we do not dine away from Patterne to-night."

"No, sir."

"It may be attributable to a sense of deserving, but I could plead guilty to a weakness for old Port to-day."

"There shall be an extra bottle, sir."

"All going favourably with you, as I have no cause to doubt," said Dr Middleton, with the motion of wafting his host out of the library.

CHAPTER XLII

SHOWS THE DIVINING ARTS OF A PERCEPTIVE MIND

Starting from the Hall a few minutes before Dr. Middleton and Sir Willoughby had entered the drawing-room overnight, Vernon parted company with Colonel De Craye at the park-gates, and betook himself to the cottage of the Dales, where nothing had been heard of his wanderer; and he received the same disappointing reply from Dr. Corney, out of the bedroom window of the genial physician, whose astonishment at his covering so long a stretch of road at night for news of a boy like Crossjay—gifted with the lives of a cat—became violent and rapped Punch-like blows on the window-sill at Vernon's refusal to take shelter and rest. Vernon's excuse was that he had "no one but that fellow to care for", and he strode off, naming a farm five miles distant. Dr. Corney howled an invitation to early breakfast to him, in the event of his passing on his way back, and retired to bed to think of him. The result of a variety of conjectures caused him to set Vernon down as Miss Middleton's knight, and he felt a strong compassion for his poor friend. "Though," thought he, "a hopeless attachment is as pretty an accompaniment to the tune of life as a gentleman might wish to have, for it's one of those big doses of discord which make all the minor ones fit in like an agreeable harmony, and so he shuffles along as pleasantly as the fortune-favoured, when they come to compute!"

Page 2935

Sir Willoughby was the fortune-favoured in the little doctor's mind; that high-stepping gentleman having wealth, and public consideration, and the most ravishing young lady in the world for a bride. Still, though he reckoned all these advantages enjoyed by Sir Willoughby at their full value, he could imagine the ultimate balance of good fortune to be in favour of Vernon. But to do so, he had to reduce the whole calculation to the extreme abstract, and feed his lean friend, as it were, on dew and roots; and the happy effect for Vernon lay in a distant future, on the borders of old age, where he was to be blessed with his lady's regretful preference, and rejoice in the fruits of good constitutional habits. The reviewing mind was Irish. Sir Willoughby was a character of man profoundly opposed to Dr. Corney's nature; the latter's instincts bristled with antagonism—not to his race, for Vernon was of the same race, partly of the same blood, and Corney loved him: the type of person was the annoyance. And the circumstance of its prevailing successfulness in the country where he was placed, while it held him silent as if under a law, heaped stores of insurgency in the Celtic bosom. Corney contemplating Sir Willoughby, and a trotting kern governed by Strongbow, have a point of likeness between them; with the point of difference, that Corney was enlightened to know of a friend better adapted for eminent station, and especially better adapted to please a lovely lady—could these high-bred Englishwomen but be taught to conceive another idea of manliness than the formal carved-in-wood idol of their national worship!

Dr Corney breakfasted very early, without seeing Vernon. He was off to a patient while the first lark of the morning carolled above, and the business of the day, not yet fallen upon men in the shape of cloud, was happily intermixed with nature's hues and pipings. Turning off the high-road tip a green lane, an hour later, he beheld a youngster prying into a hedge head and arms, by the peculiar strenuous twist of whose hinder parts, indicative of a frame plunged on the pursuit in hand, he clearly distinguished young Crossjay. Out came eggs. The doctor pulled up.

"What bird?" he bellowed.

"Yellowhammer," Crossjay yelled back.

"Now, sir, you'll drop a couple of those eggs in the nest."

"Don't order me," Crossjay was retorting. "Oh, it's you, Doctor Corney. Good morning. I said that, because I always do drop a couple back. I promised Mr. Whitford I would, and Miss Middleton too."

"Had breakfast?"

"Not yet."

"Not hungry?"

“I should be if I thought about it.”

“Jump up.”

“I think I’d rather not, Doctor Corney.”

“And you’ll just do what Doctor Corney tells you; and set your mind on rashers of curly fat bacon and sweetly smoking coffee, toast, hot cakes, marmalade, and damson-jam. Wide go the fellow’s nostrils, and there’s water at the dimples of his mouth! Up, my man.”

Page 2936

Crossjay jumped up beside the doctor, who remarked, as he touched his horse: "I don't want a man this morning, though I'll enlist you in my service if I do. You're fond of Miss Middleton?"

Instead of answering, Crossjay heaved the sigh of love that bears a burden.

"And so am I," pursued the doctor: "You'll have to put up with a rival. It's worse than fond: I'm in love with her. How do you like that?"

"I don't mind how many love her," said Crossjay.

"You're worthy of a gratuitous breakfast in the front parlour of the best hotel of the place they call Arcadia. And how about your bed last night?"

"Pretty middling."

"Hard, was it, where the bones haven't cushion?"

"I don't care for bed. A couple of hours, and that's enough for me."

"But you're fond of Miss Middleton anyhow, and that's a virtue."

To his great surprise, Dr. Corney beheld two big round tears force their way out of this tough youngster's eyes, and all the while the boy's face was proud.

Crossjay said, when he could trust himself to disjoin his lips:

"I want to see Mr. Whitford."

"Have you got news for him?"

"I've something to ask him. It's about what I ought to do."

"Then, my boy, you have the right name addressed in the wrong direction: for I found you turning your shoulders on Mr. Whitford. And he has been out of his bed hunting you all the unholy night you've made it for him. That's melancholy. What do you say to asking my advice?"

Crossjay sighed. "I can't speak to anybody but Mr. Whitford."

"And you're hot to speak to him?"

"I want to."

"And I found you running away from him. You're a curiosity, Mr. Crossjay Patterne."

“Ah! so’d anybody be who knew as much as I do,” said Crossjay, with a sober sadness that caused the doctor to treat him seriously.

“The fact is,” he said, “Mr. Whitford is beating the country for you. My best plan will be to drive you to the Hall.”

“I’d rather not go to the Hall,” Crossjay spoke resolutely.

“You won’t see Miss Middleton anywhere but at the Hall.”

“I don’t want to see Miss Middleton, if I can’t be a bit of use to her.”

“No danger threatening the lady, is there?”

Crossjay treated the question as if it had not been put.

“Now, tell me,” said Dr. Corney, “would there be a chance for me, supposing Miss Middleton were disengaged?”

The answer was easy. “I’m sure she wouldn’t.”

“And why, sir, are you so cock sure?”

There was no saying; but the doctor pressed for it, and at last Crossjay gave his opinion that she would take Mr. Whitford.

The doctor asked why; and Crossjay said it was because Mr. Whitford was the best man in the world. To which, with a lusty “Amen to that,” Dr. Corney remarked: “I should have fancied Colonel De Craye would have had the first chance: he’s more of a lady’s man.”

Page 2937

Crossjay surprised him again by petulantly saying: “Don’t.”

The boy added: “I don’t want to talk, except about birds and things. What a jolly morning it is! I saw the sun rise. No rain to-day. You’re right about hungry, Doctor Corney!”

The kindly little man swung his whip. Crossjay informed him of his disgrace at the Hall, and of every incident connected with it, from the tramp to the baronet, save Miss Middleton’s adventure and the night scene in the drawing-room. A strong smell of something left out struck Dr. Corney, and he said: “You’ll not let Miss Middleton know of my affection. After all, it’s only a little bit of love. But, as Patrick said to Kathleen, when she owned to such a little bit, ’that’s the best bit of all!’ and he was as right as I am about hungry.”

Crossjay scorned to talk of loving, he declared. “I never tell Miss Middleton what I feel. Why, there’s Miss Dale’s cottage!”

“It’s nearer to your empty inside than my mansion,” said the doctor, “and we’ll stop just to inquire whether a bed’s to be had for you there to-night, and if not, I’ll have you with me, and bottle you, and exhibit you, for you’re a rare specimen. Breakfast you may count on from Mr. Dale. I spy a gentleman.”

“It’s Colonel De Craye.”

“Come after news of you.”

“I wonder!”

“Miss Middleton sends him; of course she does.”

Crossjay turned his full face to the doctor. “I haven’t seen her for such a long time! But he saw me last night, and he might have told her that, if she’s anxious.—Good-morning, colonel. I’ve had a good walk, and a capital drive, and I’m as hungry as the boat’s crew of Captain Bligh.”

He jumped down.

The colonel and the doctor saluted, smiling.

“I’ve rung the bell,” said De Craye.

A maid came to the gate, and upon her steps appeared Miss Dale, who flung herself at Crossjay, mingling kisses and reproaches. She scarcely raised her face to the colonel more than to reply to his greeting, and excuse the hungry boy for hurrying indoors to breakfast.

“I’ll wait,” said De Craye. He had seen that she was paler than usual. So had Dr. Corney; and the doctor called to her concerning her father’s health. She reported that he had not yet risen, and took Crossjay to herself.

“That’s well,” said the doctor, “if the invalid sleeps long. The lady is not looking so well, though. But ladies vary; they show the mind on the countenance, for want of the punching we meet with to conceal it; they’re like military flags for a funeral or a gala; one day furled, and next day streaming. Men are ships’ figure-heads, about the same for a storm or a calm, and not too handsome, thanks to the ocean. It’s an age since we encountered last, colonel: on board the Dublin boat, I recollect, and a night it was.”

“I recollect that you set me on my legs, doctor.”

Page 2938

“Ah! and you’ll please to notify that Corney’s no quack at sea, by favour of the monks of the Chartreuse, whose elixir has power to still the waves. And we hear that miracles are done with!”

“Roll a physician and a monk together, doctor!”

“True: it’ll be a miracle if they combine. Though the cure of the soul is often the entire and total cure of the body: and it’s maliciously said that the body given over to our treatment is a signal to set the soul flying. By the way, colonel, that boy has a trifle on his mind.”

“I suppose he has been worrying a farmer or a gamekeeper.”

“Try him. You’ll find him tight. He’s got Miss Middleton on the brain. There’s a bit of a secret; and he’s not so cheerful about it.”

“We’ll see,” said the colonel.

Dr Corney nodded. “I have to visit my patient here presently. I’m too early for him: so I’ll make a call or two on the lame birds that are up,” he remarked, and drove away.

De Craye strolled through the garden. He was a gentleman of those actively perceptive wits which, if ever they reflect, do so by hops and jumps: upon some dancing mirror within, we may fancy. He penetrated a plot in a flash; and in a flash he formed one; but in both cases, it was after long hovering and not over-eager deliberation, by the patient exercise of his quick perceptives. The fact that Crossjay was considered to have Miss Middleton on the brain, threw a series of images of everything relating to Crossjay for the last forty hours into relief before him: and as he did not in the slightest degree speculate on any one of them, but merely shifted and surveyed them, the falcon that he was in spirit as well as in his handsome face leisurely allowed his instinct to direct him where to strike. A reflective disposition has this danger in action, that it commonly precipitates conjecture for the purpose of working upon probabilities with the methods and in the tracks to which it is accustomed: and to conjecture rashly is to play into the puzzles of the maze. He who can watch circling above it awhile, quietly viewing, and collecting in his eye, gathers matter that makes the secret thing discourse to the brain by weight and balance; he will get either the right clue or none; more frequently none; but he will escape the entanglement of his own cleverness, he will always be nearer to the enigma than the guesser or the calculator, and he will retain a breadth of vision forfeited by them. He must, however, to have his chance of success, be acutely besides calmly perceptive, a reader of features, audacious at the proper moment.

De Craye wished to look at Miss Dale. She had returned home very suddenly, not, as it appeared, owing to her father’s illness; and he remembered a redness of her eyelids when he passed her on the corridor one night. She sent Crossjay out to him as soon as

the boy was well filled. He sent Crossjay back with a request. She did not yield to it immediately. She stepped to the front door reluctantly, and seemed disconcerted. De Craye begged for a message to Miss Middleton. There was none to give. He persisted. But there was really none at present, she said.

Page 2939

“You won’t entrust me with the smallest word?” said he, and set her visibly thinking whether she could dispatch a word. She could not; she had no heart for messages.

“I shall see her in a day or two, Colonel De Craye.”

“She will miss you severely.”

“We shall soon meet.”

“And poor Willoughby!”

Laetitia coloured and stood silent.

A butterfly of some rarity allured Crossjay.

“I fear he has been doing mischief,” she said. “I cannot get him to look at me.”

“His appetite is good?”

“Very good indeed.”

De Craye nodded. A boy with a noble appetite is never a hopeless lock.

The colonel and Crossjay lounged over the garden.

“And now,” said the colonel, “we’ll see if we can’t arrange a meeting between you and Miss Middleton. You’re a lucky fellow, for she’s always thinking of you.”

“I know I’m always thinking of her,” said Crossjay.

“If ever you’re in a scrape, she’s the person you must go to.”

“Yes, if I know where she is!”

“Why, generally she’ll be at the Hall.”

There was no reply: Crossjay’s dreadful secret jumped to his throat. He certainly was a weaker lock for being full of breakfast.

“I want to see Mr. Whitford so much,” he said.

“Something to tell him?”

“I don’t know what to do: I don’t understand it!” The secret wriggled to his mouth. He swallowed it down. “Yes, I want to talk to Mr. Whitford.”

“He’s another of Miss Middleton’s friends.”

“I know he is. He’s true steel.”

“We’re all her friends, Crossjay. I flatter myself I’m a Toledo when I’m wanted. How long had you been in the house last night before you ran into me?”

“I don’t know, sir; I fell asleep for some time, and then I woke! . . .”

“Where did you find yourself?”

“I was in the drawing-room.”

“Come, Crossjay, you’re not a fellow to be scared by ghosts? You looked it when you made a dash at my midriff.”

“I don’t believe there are such things. Do you, colonel? You can’t!”

“There’s no saying. We’ll hope not; for it wouldn’t be fair fighting. A man with a ghost to back him’d beat any ten. We couldn’t box him or play cards, or stand a chance with him as a rival in love. Did you, now, catch a sight of a ghost?”

“They weren’t ghosts!” Crossjay said what he was sure of, and his voice pronounced his conviction.

“I doubt whether Miss Middleton is particularly happy,” remarked the colonel. “Why? Why, you upset her, you know, now and then.”

The boy swelled. “I’d do . . . I’d go . . . I wouldn’t have her unhappy . . . It’s that! that’s it! And I don’t know what I ought to do. I wish I could see Mr. Whitford.”

“You get into such headlong scrapes, my lad.”

“I wasn’t in any scrape yesterday.”

Page 2940

“So you made yourself up a comfortable bed in the drawing-room? Luckily Sir Willoughby didn’t see you.”

“He didn’t, though!”

“A close shave, was it?”

“I was under a covering of something silk.”

“He woke you?”

“I suppose he did. I heard him.”

“Talking?”

“He was talking.”

“What! talking to himself?”

“No.”

The secret threatened Crossjay to be out or suffocate him. De Craye gave him a respite.

“You like Sir Willoughby, don’t you?”

Crossjay produced a still-born affirmative.

“He’s kind to you,” said the colonel; “he’ll set you up and look after your interests.”

“Yes, I like him,” said Crossjay, with his customary rapidity in touching the subject; “I like him; he’s kind and all that, and tips and plays with you, and all that; but I never can make out why he wouldn’t see my father when my father came here to see him ten miles, and had to walk back ten miles in the rain, to go by rail a long way, down home, as far as Devonport, because Sir Willoughby wouldn’t see him, though he was at home, my father saw. We all thought it so odd: and my father wouldn’t let us talk much about it. My father’s a very brave man.”

“Captain Patterne is as brave a man as ever lived,” said De Craye.

“I’m positive you’d like him, colonel.”

“I know of his deeds, and I admire him, and that’s a good step to liking.”

He warmed the boy’s thoughts of his father.

“Because, what they say at home is, a little bread and cheese, and a glass of ale, and a rest, to a poor man—lots of great houses will give you that, and we wouldn’t have asked for more than that. My sisters say they think Sir Willoughby must be selfish. He’s awfully proud; and perhaps it was because my father wasn’t dressed well enough. But what can we do? We’re very poor at home, and lots of us, and all hungry. My father says he isn’t paid very well for his services to the Government. He’s only a marine.”

“He’s a hero!” said De Craye.

“He came home very tired, with a cold, and had a doctor. But Sir Willoughby did send him money, and mother wished to send it back, and my father said she was not like a woman—with our big family. He said he thought Sir Willoughby an extraordinary man.”

“Not at all; very common; indigenous,” said De Craye. “The art of cutting is one of the branches of a polite education in this country, and you’ll have to learn it, if you expect to be looked on as a gentleman and a Patterne, my boy. I begin to see how it is Miss Middleton takes to you so. Follow her directions. But I hope you did not listen to a private conversation. Miss Middleton would not approve of that.”

“Colonel De Craye, how could I help myself? I heard a lot before I knew what it was. There was poetry!”

“Still, Crossjay, if it was important—was it?”

Page 2941

The boy swelled again, and the colonel asked him, “Does Miss Dale know of your having played listener?”

“She!” said Crossjay. “Oh, I couldn’t tell her.”

He breathed thick; then came a threat of tears. “She wouldn’t do anything to hurt Miss Middleton. I’m sure of that. It wasn’t her fault. She—There goes Mr. Whitford!” Crossjay bounded away.

The colonel had no inclination to wait for his return. He walked fast up the road, not perspicuously conscious that his motive was to be well in advance of Vernon Whitford: to whom, after all, the knowledge imparted by Crossjay would be of small advantage. That fellow would probably trot of to Willoughby to row him for breaking his word to Miss Middleton! There are men, thought De Craye, who see nothing, feel nothing.

He crossed a stile into the wood above the lake, where, as he was in the humour to think himself signally lucky, espying her, he took it as a matter of course that the lady who taught his heart to leap should be posted by the Fates. And he wondered little at her power, for rarely had the world seen such union of princess and sylph as in that lady’s figure. She stood holding by a beech-branch, gazing down on the water.

She had not heard him. When she looked she flushed at the spectacle of one of her thousand thoughts, but she was not startled; the colour overflowed a grave face.

“And ’tis not quite the first time that Willoughby has played this trick!” De Craye said to her, keenly smiling with a parted mouth.

Clara moved her lips to recall remarks introductory to so abrupt and strange a plunge.

He smiled in that peculiar manner of an illuminated comic perception: for the moment he was all falcon; and he surprised himself more than Clara, who was not in the mood to take surprises. It was the sight of her which had animated him to strike his game; he was down on it.

Another instinct at work (they spring up in twenties oftener than in twos when the heart is the hunter) prompted him to directness and quickness, to carry her on the flood of the discovery.

She regained something of her mental self-possession as soon as she was on a level with a meaning she had not yet inspected; but she had to submit to his lead, distinctly perceiving where its drift divided to the forked currents of what might be in his mind and what was in hers.

“Miss Middleton, I bear a bit of a likeness to the messenger to the glorious despot—my head is off if I speak not true! Everything I have is on the die. Did I guess wrong your

wish?—I read it in the dark, by the heart. But here's a certainty: Willoughby sets you free."

"You have come from him?" she could imagine nothing else, and she was unable to preserve a disguise; she trembled.

"From Miss Dale."

"Ah!" Clara drooped. "She told me that once."

"'Tis the fact that tells it now."

Page 2942

“You have not seen him since you left the house?”

“Darkly: clear enough: not unlike the hand of destiny—through a veil. He offered himself to Miss Dale last night, about between the witching hours of twelve and one.”

“Miss Dale . . .”

“Would she other? Could she? The poor lady has languished beyond a decade. She’s love in the feminine person.”

“Are you speaking seriously, Colonel De Craye?”

“Would I dare to trifle with you, Miss Middleton?”

“I have reason to know it cannot be.”

“If I have a head, it is a fresh and blooming truth. And more—I stake my vanity on it!”

“Let me go to her.” She stepped.

“Consider,” said he.

“Miss Dale and I are excellent friends. It would not seem indelicate to her. She has a kind of regard for me, through Crossjay.—Oh, can it be? There must be some delusion. You have seen—you wish to be of service to me; you may too easily be deceived. Last night?—he last night . . .? And this morning!”

“’Tis not the first time our friend has played the trick, Miss Middleton.”

“But this is incredible, that last night . . . and this morning, in my father’s presence, he presses! . . . You have seen Miss Dale? Everything is possible of him: they were together, I know. Colonel De Craye, I have not the slightest chance of concealment with you. I think I felt that when I first saw you. Will you let me hear why you are so certain?”

“Miss Middleton, when I first had the honour of looking on you, it was in a posture that necessitated my looking up, and morally so it has been since. I conceived that Willoughby had won the greatest prize of earth. And next I was led to the conclusion that he had won it to lose it. Whether he much cares, is the mystery I haven’t leisure to fathom. Himself is the principal consideration with himself, and ever was.”

“You discovered it!” said Clara.

“He uncovered it,” said De Craye. “The miracle was, that the world wouldn’t see. But the world is a piggy-wiggy world for the wealthy fellow who fills a trough for it, and that

he has always very sagaciously done. Only women besides myself have detected him. I have never exposed him; I have been an observer pure and simple; and because I apprehended another catastrophe—making something like the fourth, to my knowledge, one being public . . .”

“You knew Miss Durham?”

“And Harry Oxford too. And they’re a pair as happy as blackbirds in a cherry-tree, in a summer sunrise, with the owner of the garden asleep. Because of that apprehension of mine, I refused the office of best man till Willoughby had sent me a third letter. He insisted on my coming. I came, saw, and was conquered. I trust with all my soul I did not betray myself, I owed that duty to my position of concealing it. As for entirely hiding that I had used my eyes, I can’t say: they must answer for it.”

Page 2943

The colonel was using his eyes with an increasing suavity that threatened more than sweetness.

“I believe you have been sincerely kind,” said Clara. “We will descend to the path round the lake.”

She did not refuse her hand on the descent, and he let it escape the moment the service was done. As he was performing the admirable character of the man of honour, he had to attend to the observance of details; and sure of her though he was beginning to feel, there was a touch of the unknown in Clara Middleton which made him fear to stamp assurance; despite a barely resistible impulse, coming of his emotions and approved by his maxims. He looked at the hand, now a free lady’s hand. Willoughby settled, his chance was great. Who else was in the way? No one. He counselled himself to wait for her; she might have ideas of delicacy. Her face was troubled, speculative; the brows clouded, the lips compressed.

“You have not heard this from Miss Dale?” she said.

“Last night they were together: this morning she fled. I saw her this morning distressed. She is unwilling to send you a message: she talks vaguely of meeting you some days hence. And it is not the first time he has gone to her for his consolation.”

“That is not a proposal,” Clara reflected. “He is too prudent. He did not propose to her at the time you mention. Have you not been hasty, Colonel De Craye?”

Shadows crossed her forehead. She glanced in the direction of the house and stopped her walk.

“Last night, Miss Middleton, there was a listener.”

“Who?”

“Crossjay was under that pretty silk coverlet worked by the Miss Patternes. He came home late, found his door locked, and dashed downstairs into the drawing-room, where he snuggled up and dropped asleep. The two speakers woke him; they frightened the poor dear lad in his love for you, and after they had gone, he wanted to run out of the house, and I met him just after I had come back from my search, bursting, and took him to my room, and laid him on the sofa, and abused him for not lying quiet. He was restless as a fish on a bank. When I woke in the morning he was off. Doctor Corney came across him somewhere on the road and drove him to the cottage. I was ringing the bell. Corney told me the boy had you on his brain, and was miserable, so Crossjay and I had a talk.”

“Crossjay did not repeat to you the conversation he had heard?” said Clara.

“No.”

She smiled rejoicingly, proud of the boy, as she walked on.

“But you’ll pardon me, Miss Middleton—and I’m for him as much as you are—if I was guilty of a little angling.”

“My sympathies are with the fish.”

“The poor fellow had a secret that hurt him. It rose to the surface crying to be hooked, and I spared him twice or thrice, because he had a sort of holy sentiment I respected, that none but Mr. Whitford ought to be his father confessor.”

Page 2944

“Crossjay!” she cried, hugging her love of the boy.

“The secret was one not to be communicated to Miss Dale of all people.”

“He said that?”

“As good as the very words. She informed me, too, that she couldn’t induce him to face her straight.”

“Oh, that looks like it. And Crossjay was unhappy? Very unhappy?”

“He was just where tears are on the brim, and would have been over, if he were not such a manly youngster.”

“It looks. . .” She reverted in thought to Willoughby, and doubted, and blindly stretched hands to her recollection of the strange old monster she had discovered in him. Such a man could do anything.

That conclusion fortified her to pursue her walk to the house and give battle for freedom. Willoughby appeared to her scarce human, unreadable, save by the key that she could supply. She determined to put faith in Colonel De Craye’s marvellous divination of circumstances in the dark. Marvels are solid weapons when we are attacked by real prodigies of nature. Her countenance cleared. She conversed with De Craye of the polite and the political world, throwing off her personal burden completely, and charming him.

At the edge of the garden, on the bridge that crossed the haha from the park, he had a second impulse, almost a warning within, to seize his heavenly opportunity to ask for thanks and move her tender lowered eyelids to hint at his reward. He repressed it, doubtful of the wisdom.

Something like “heaven forgive me” was in Clara’s mind, though she would have declared herself innocent before the scrutator.

CHAPTER XLIII

In which sir Willoughby is led to think that the elements have conspired against him

Clara had not taken many steps in the garden before she learned how great was her debt of gratitude to Colonel De Craye. Willoughby and her father were awaiting her. De Craye, with his ready comprehension of circumstances, turned aside unseen among the shrubs. She advanced slowly.

“The vapours, we may trust, have dispersed?” her father hailed her.

“One word, and these discussions are over, we dislike them equally,” said Willoughby.

“No scenes,” Dr. Middleton added. “Speak your decision, my girl, pro forma, seeing that he who has the right demands it, and pray release me.”

Clara looked at Willoughby.

“I have decided to go to Miss Dale for her advice.”

There was no appearance in him of a man that has been shot.

“To Miss Dale?—for advice?”

Dr Middleton invoked the Furies. “What is the signification of this new freak?”

“Miss Dale must be consulted, papa.”

“Consulted with reference to the disposal of your hand in marriage?”

Page 2945

“She must be.”

“Miss Dale, do you say?”

“I do, Papa.”

Dr Middleton regained his natural elevation from the bend of body habitual with men of an established sanity, paedagogues and others, who are called on at odd intervals to inspect the magnitude of the infinitesimally absurd in human nature: small, that is, under the light of reason, immense in the realms of madness.

His daughter profoundly confused him. He swelled out his chest, remarking to Willoughby: “I do not wonder at your scared expression of countenance, my friend. To discover yourself engaged to a girl mad as Cassandra, without a boast of the distinction of her being sun-struck, can be no specially comfortable enlightenment. I am opposed to delays, and I will not have a breach of faith committed by daughter of mine.”

“Do not repeat those words,” Clara said to Willoughby. He started. She had evidently come armed. But how, within so short a space? What could have instructed her? And in his bewilderment he gazed hurriedly above, gulped air, and cried: “Scared, sir? I am not aware that my countenance can show a scare. I am not accustomed to sue for long: I am unable to sustain the part of humble supplicant. She puts me out of harmony with creation—We are plighted, Clara. It is pure waste of time to speak of soliciting advice on the subject.”

“Would it be a breach of faith for me to break my engagement?” she said.

“You ask?”

“It is a breach of sanity to propound the interrogation,” said her father.

She looked at Willoughby. “Now?”

He shrugged haughtily.

“Since last night?” she said.

“Last night?”

“Am I not released?”

“Not by me.”

“By your act.”

“My dear Clara!”

“Have you not virtually disengaged me?”

“I who claim you as mine?”

“Can you?”

“I do and must.”

“After last night?”

“Tricks! shufflings! jabber of a barbarian woman upon the evolutions of a serpent!” exclaimed Dr. Middleton. “You were to capitulate, or to furnish reasons for your refusal. You have none. Give him your hand, girl, according to the compact. I praised you to him for returning within the allotted term, and now forbear to disgrace yourself and me.”

“Is he perfectly free to offer his? Ask him, papa.”

“Perform your duty. Do let us have peace!”

“Perfectly free! as on the day when I offered it first.” Willoughby frankly waved his honourable hand.

His face was blanched: enemies in the air seemed to have whispered things to her: he doubted the fidelity of the Powers above.

“Since last night?” said she.

“Oh! if you insist, I reply, since last night.”

“You know what I mean, Sir Willoughby.”

“Oh! certainly.”

“You speak the truth?”

Page 2946

"'Sir Willoughby!'" her father ejaculated in wrath. "But will you explain what you mean, epitome that you are of all the contradictions and mutabilities ascribed to women from the beginning! 'Certainly', he says, and knows no more than I. She begs grace for an hour, and returns with a fresh store of evasions, to insult the man she has injured. It is my humiliation to confess that our share in this contract is rescued from public ignominy by his generosity. Nor can I congratulate him on his fortune, should he condescend to bear with you to the utmost; for instead of the young woman I supposed myself to be bestowing on him, I see a fantastical planguncula enlivened by the wanton tempers of a nursery chit. If one may conceive a meaning in her, in miserable apology for such behaviour, some spirit of jealousy informs the girl."

"I can only remark that there is no foundation for it," said Willoughby. "I am willing to satisfy you, Clara. Name the person who discomposes you. I can scarcely imagine one to exist: but who can tell?"

She could name no person. The detestable imputation of jealousy would be confirmed if she mentioned a name: and indeed Laetitia was not to be named.

He pursued his advantage: "Jealousy is one of the fits I am a stranger to,—I fancy, sir, that gentlemen have dismissed it. I speak for myself.—But I can make allowances. In some cases, it is considered a compliment; and often a word will soothe it. The whole affair is so senseless! However, I will enter the witness-box, or stand at the prisoner's bar! Anything to quiet a distempered mind."

"Of you, sir," said Dr. Middleton, "might a parent be justly proud."

"It is not jealousy; I could not be jealous!" Clara cried, stung by the very passion; and she ran through her brain for a suggestion to win a sign of meltingness if not esteem from her father. She was not an iron maiden, but one among the nervous natures which live largely in the moment, though she was then sacrificing it to her nature's deep dislike. "You may be proud of me again, papa."

She could hardly have uttered anything more impolitic.

"Optume; but deliver yourself ad rem," he rejoined, alarmingly pacified. "Firmavit fidem. Do you likewise, and double on us no more like puss in the field."

"I wish to see Miss Dale," she said.

Up flew the Rev. Doctor's arms in wrathful despair resembling an imprecation.

"She is at the cottage. You could have seen her," said Willoughby.

Evidently she had not.

“Is it untrue that last night, between twelve o’clock and one, in the drawing-room, you proposed marriage to Miss Dale?” He became convinced that she must have stolen down-stairs during his colloquy with Laetitia, and listened at the door.

“On behalf of old Vernon?” he said, lightly laughing. “The idea is not novel, as you know. They are suited, if they could see it.—Laetitia Dale and my cousin Vernon Whitford, sir.”

Page 2947

“Fairly schemed, my friend, and I will say for you, you have the patience, Willoughby, of a husband!”

Willoughby bowed to the encomium, and allowed some fatigue to be visible. He half yawned: “I claim no happier title, sir,” and made light of the weariful discussion.

Clara was shaken: she feared that Crossjay had heard incorrectly, or that Colonel De Craye had guessed erroneously. It was too likely that Willoughby should have proposed Vernon to Laetitia.

There was nothing to reassure her save the vision of the panic amazement of his face at her persistency in speaking of Miss Dale. She could have declared on oath that she was right, while admitting all the suppositions to be against her. And unhappily all the Delicacies (a doughty battalion for the defence of ladies until they enter into difficulties and are shorn of them at a blow, bare as dairymaids), all the body-guard of a young gentlewoman, the drawing-room sylphides, which bear her train, which wreathe her hair, which modulate her voice and tone her complexion, which are arrows and shield to awe the creature man, forbade her utterance of what she felt, on pain of instant fulfilment of their oft-repeated threat of late to leave her to the last remnant of a protecting sprite. She could not, as in a dear melodrama, from the aim of a pointed finger denounce him, on the testimony of her instincts, false of speech, false in deed. She could not even declare that she doubted his truthfulness. The refuge of a sullen fit, the refuge of tears, the pretext of a mood, were denied her now by the rigour of those laws of decency which are a garment to ladies of pure breeding.

“One more respite, papa,” she implored him, bitterly conscious of the closer tangle her petition involved, and, if it must be betrayed of her, perceiving in an illumination how the knot might become so woefully Gordian that haply in a cloud of wild events the intervention of a gallant gentleman out of heaven, albeit in the likeness of one of earth, would have to cut it: her cry within, as she succumbed to weakness, being fervider, “Anything but marry this one!” She was faint with strife and dejected, a condition in the young when their imaginative energies hold revel uncontrolled and are projectively desperate.

“No respite!” said Willoughby, genially.

“And I say, no respite!” observed her father. “You have assumed a position that has not been granted you, Clara Middleton.”

“I cannot bear to offend you, father.”

“Him! Your duty is not to offend him. Address your excuses to him. I refuse to be dragged over the same ground, to reiterate the same command perpetually.”

“If authority is deputed to me, I claim you,” said Willoughby.

“You have not broken faith with me?”

“Assuredly not, or would it be possible for me to press my claim?”

Page 2948

“And join the right hand to the right,” said Dr. Middleton; “no, it would not be possible. What insane root she has been nibbling, I know not, but she must consign herself to the guidance of those whom the gods have not abandoned, until her intellect is liberated. She was once . . . there: I look not back—if she it was, and no simulacrum of a reasonable daughter. I welcome the appearance of my friend Mr. Whitford. He is my sea-bath and supper on the beach of Troy, after the day’s battle and dust.”

Vernon walked straight up to them: an act unusual with him, for he was shy of committing an intrusion.

Clara guessed by that, and more by the dancing frown of speculative humour he turned on Willoughby, that he had come charged in support of her. His forehead was curiously lively, as of one who has got a surprise well under, to feed on its amusing contents.

“Have you seen Crossjay, Mr. Whitford?” she said.

“I’ve pounced on Crossjay; his bones are sound.”

“Where did he sleep?”

“On a sofa, it seems.”

She smiled, with good hope—Vernon had the story.

Willoughby thought it just to himself that he should defend his measure of severity.

“The boy lied; he played a double game.”

“For which he should have been reasoned with at the Grecian portico of a boy,” said the Rev. Doctor.

“My system is different, sir. I could not inflict what I would not endure myself”

“So is Greek excluded from the later generations; and you leave a field, the most fertile in the moralities in youth, unplowed and unsown. Ah! well. This growing too fine is our way of relapsing upon barbarism. Beware of over-sensitiveness, where nature has plainly indicated her alternative gateway of knowledge. And now, I presume, I am at liberty.”

“Vernon will excuse us for a minute or two.”

“I hold by Mr. Whitford now I have him.”

“I’ll join you in the laboratory, Vernon,” Willoughby nodded bluntly.

“We will leave them, Mr. Whitford. They are at the time-honoured dissension upon a particular day, that, for the sake of dignity, blushes to be named.”

“What day?” said Vernon, like a rustic.

“*The* day, these people call it.”

Vernon sent one of his vivid eyeshots from one to the other. His eyes fixed on Willoughby’s with a quivering glow, beyond amazement, as if his humour stood at furnace-heat, and absorbed all that came.

Willoughby motioned to him to go.

“Have you seen Miss Dale, Mr. Whitford?” said Clara.

He answered, “No. Something has shocked her.”

“Is it her feeling for Crossjay?”

“Ah!” Vernon said to Willoughby, “your pocketing of the key of Crossjay’s bedroom door was a master-stroke!”

The celestial irony suffused her, and she bathed and swam in it, on hearing its dupe reply: “My methods of discipline are short. I was not aware that she had been to his door.”

Page 2949

“But I may hope that Miss Dale will see me,” said Clara. “We are in sympathy about the boy.”

“Mr. Dale might be seen. He seems to be of a divided mind with his daughter,” Vernon rejoined. “She has locked herself up in her room.”

“He is not the only father in that unwholesome predicament,” said Dr Middleton.

“He talks of coming to you, Willoughby.”

“Why to me?” Willoughby chastened his irritation: “He will be welcome, of course. It would be better that the boy should come.”

“If there is a chance of your forgiving him,” said Clara. “Let the Dales know I am prepared to listen to the boy, Vernon. There can be no necessity for Mr. Dale to drag himself here.”

“How are Mr. Dale and his daughter of a divided mind, Mr. Whitford?” said Clara.

Vernon simulated an uneasiness. With a vacant gaze that enlarged around Willoughby and was more discomforting than intentness, he replied: “Perhaps she is unwilling to give him her entire confidence, Miss Middleton.”

“In which respect, then, our situations present their solitary point of unlikeness in resemblance, for I have it in excess,” observed Dr. Middleton.

Clara dropped her eyelids for the wave to pass over. “It struck me that Miss Dale was a person of the extremest candour.”

“Why should we be prying into the domestic affairs of the Dales?” Willoughby interjected, and drew out his watch, merely for a diversion; he was on tiptoe to learn whether Vernon was as well instructed as Clara, and hung to the view that he could not be, while drenching in the sensation that he was:—and if so, what were the Powers above but a body of conspirators? He paid Laetitia that compliment. He could not conceive the human betrayal of the secret. Clara’s discovery of it had set his common sense adrift.

“The domestic affairs of the Dales do not concern me,” said Vernon.

“And yet, my friend,” Dr. Middleton balanced himself, and with an air of benevolent slyness the import of which did not awaken Willoughby, until too late, remarked: “They might concern you. I will even add, that there is a probability of your being not less than the fount and origin of this division of father and daughter, though Willoughby in the drawingroom last night stands accusably the agent.”

“Favour me, sir, with an explanation,” said Vernon, seeking to gather it from Clara.

Dr Middleton threw the explanation upon Willoughby.

Clara, communicated as much as she was able in one of those looks of still depth which say, Think! and without causing a thought to stir, takes us into the pellucid mind.

Page 2950

Vernon was enlightened before Willoughby had spoken. His mouth shut rigidly, and there was a springing increase of the luminous wavering of his eyes. Some star that Clara had watched at night was like them in the vivid wink and overflow of its light. Yet, as he was perfectly sedate, none could have suspected his blood to be chasing wild with laughter, and his frame strung to the utmost to keep it from volleying. So happy was she in his aspect, that her chief anxiety was to recover the name of the star whose shining beckons and speaks, and is in the quick of spirit-fire. It is the sole star which on a night of frost and strong moonlight preserves an indomitable fervency: that she remembered, and the picture of a hoar earth and a lean Orion in flooded heavens, and the star beneath Eastward of him: but the name! the name!—She heard Willoughby indistinctly.

“Oh, the old story; another effort; you know my wish; a failure, of course, and no thanks on either side, I suppose I must ask your excuse.—They neither of them see what’s good for them, sir.”

“Manifestly, however,” said Dr. Middleton, “if one may opine from the division we have heard of, the father is disposed to back your nominee.”

“I can’t say; as far as I am concerned, I made a mess of it.” Vernon withstood the incitement to acquiesce, but he sparkled with his recognition of the fact.

“You meant well, Willoughby.”

“I hope so, Vernon.”

“Only you have driven her away.”

“We must resign ourselves.”

“It won’t affect me, for I’m off to-morrow.”

“You see, sir, the thanks I get.”

“Mr. Whitford,” said Dr. Middleton, “You have a tower of strength in the lady’s father.”

“Would you have me bring it to bear upon the lady, sir?”

“Wherefore not?”

“To make her marriage a matter of obedience to her father?”

“Ay, my friend, a lusty lover would have her gladly on those terms, well knowing it to be for the lady’s good. What do you say, Willoughby?”

“Sir! Say? What can I say? Miss Dale has not plighted her faith. Had she done so, she is a lady who would never dishonour it.”

“She is an ideal of constancy, who would keep to it though it had been broken on the other side,” said Vernon, and Clara thrilled.

“I take that, sir, to be a statue of constancy, modelled upon which a lady of our flesh may be proclaimed as graduating for the condition of idiocy,” said Dr. Middleton.

“But faith is faith, sir.”

“But the broken is the broken, sir, whether in porcelain or in human engagements; and all that one of the two continuing faithful, I should rather say, regretful, can do, is to devote the remainder of life to the picking up of the fragments; an occupation properly to be pursued, for the comfort of mankind, within the enclosure of an appointed asylum.”

“You destroy the poetry of sentiment, Dr. Middleton.”

Page 2951

“To invigorate the poetry of nature, Mr. Whitford.”

“Then you maintain, sir, that when faith is broken by one, the engagement ceases, and the other is absolutely free?”

“I do; I am the champion of that platitude, and sound that knell to the sentimental world; and since you have chosen to defend it, I will appeal to Willoughby, and ask him if he would not side with the world of good sense in applauding the nuptials of man or maid married within a month of a jilting?” Clara slipped her arm under her father’s.

“Poetry, sir,” said Willoughby, “I never have been hypocrite enough to pretend to understand or care for.”

Dr. Middleton laughed. Vernon too seemed to admire his cousin for a reply that rung in Clara’s ears as the dullest ever spoken. Her arm grew cold on her father’s. She began to fear Willoughby again.

He depended entirely on his agility to elude the thrusts that assailed him. Had he been able to believe in the treachery of the Powers above, he would at once have seen design in these deadly strokes, for his feelings had rarely been more acute than at the present crisis; and he would then have led away Clara, to wrangle it out with her, relying on Vernon’s friendliness not to betray him to her father: but a wrangle with Clara promised no immediate fruits, nothing agreeable; and the lifelong trust he had reposed in his protecting genii obscured his intelligence to evidence he would otherwise have accepted on the spot, on the faith of his delicate susceptibility to the mildest impressions which wounded him. Clara might have stooped to listen at the door: she might have heard sufficient to create a suspicion. But Vernon was not in the house last night; she could not have communicated it to him, and he had not seen Laetitia, who was, besides trustworthy, an admirable if a foolish and ill-fated woman.

Preferring to consider Vernon a pragmatical moralist played upon by a sententious drone, he thought it politic to detach them, and vanquish Clara while she was in the beaten mood, as she had appeared before Vernon’s vexatious arrival.

“I’m afraid, my dear fellow, you are rather too dainty and fussy for a very successful wooer,” he said. “It’s beautiful on paper, and absurd in life. We have a bit of private business to discuss. We will go inside, sir, I think. I will soon release you.” Clara pressed her father’s arm.

“More?” said he.

“Five minutes. There’s a slight delusion to clear, sir. My dear Clara, you will see with different eyes.”

“Papa wishes to work with Mr. Whitford.”

Her heart sunk to hear her father say: “No, ’tis a lost morning. I must consent to pay tax of it for giving another young woman to the world. I have a daughter! You will, I hope, compensate me, Mr. Whitford, in the afternoon. Be not downcast. I have observed you meditative of late. You will have no clear brain so long as that stuff is on the mind. I could venture to propose to do some pleading for you, should it be needed for the prompter expedition of the affair.”

Page 2952

Vernon briefly thanked him, and said:

“Willoughby has exerted all his eloquence, and you see the result: you have lost Miss Dale and I have not won her. He did everything that one man can do for another in so delicate a case: even to the repeating of her famous birthday verses to him, to flatter the poetess. His best efforts were foiled by the lady’s indisposition for me.”

“Behold,” said Dr. Middleton, as Willoughby, electrified by the mention of the verses, took a sharp stride or two, “you have in him an advocate who will not be rebuffed by one refusal, and I can affirm that he is tenacious, pertinacious as are few. Justly so. Not to believe in a lady’s No is the approved method of carrying that fortress built to yield. Although unquestionably to have a young man pleading in our interests with a lady, counts its objections. Yet Willoughby being notoriously engaged, may be held to enjoy the privileges of his elders.”

“As an engaged man, sir, he was on a level with his elders in pleading on my behalf with Miss Dale,” said Vernon. Willoughby strode and muttered. Providence had grown mythical in his thoughts, if not malicious: and it is the peril of this worship that the object will wear such an alternative aspect when it appears no longer subservient.

“Are we coming, sir?” he said, and was unheeded. The Rev. Doctor would not be defrauded of rolling his billow.

“As an honourable gentleman faithful to his own engagement and desirous of establishing his relatives, he deserves, in my judgement, the lady’s esteem as well as your cordial thanks; nor should a temporary failure dishearten either of you, notwithstanding the precipitate retreat of the lady from Patterne, and her seclusion in her sanctum on the occasion of your recent visit.”

“Supposing he had succeeded,” said Vernon, driving Willoughby to frenzy, “should I have been bound to marry?” Matter for cogitation was offered to Dr. Middleton.

“The proposal was without your sanction?”

“Entirely.”

“You admire the lady?”

“Respectfully.”

“You do not incline to the state?”

“An inch of an angle would exaggerate my inclination.”

“How long are we to stand and hear this insufferable nonsense you talk?” cried Willoughby.

“But if Mr. Whitford was not consulted . . .” Dr. Middleton said, and was overborne by Willoughby’s hurried, “Oblige me, sir.—Oblige me, my good fellow!” He swept his arm to Vernon, and gestured a conducting hand to Clara.

“Here is Mrs. Mountstuart!” she exclaimed.

Willoughby stared. Was it an irruption of a friend or a foe? He doubted, and stood petrified between the double question. Clara had seen Mrs. Mountstuart and Colonel De Craye separating: and now the great lady sailed along the sward like a royal barge in festival trim.

She looked friendly, but friendly to everybody, which was always a frost on Willoughby, and terribly friendly to Clara.

Page 2953

Coming up to her she whispered: “News, indeed! Wonderful! I could not credit his hint of it yesterday. Are you satisfied?”

“Pray, Mrs. Mountstuart, take an opportunity to speak to papa,” Clara whispered in return.

Mrs. Mountstuart bowed to Dr. Middleton, nodded to Vernon, and swam upon Willoughby, with, “Is it? But is it? Am I really to believe? You have? My dear Sir Willoughby? Really?” The confounded gentleman heaved on a bare plank of wreck in mid sea.

He could oppose only a paralyzed smile to the assault.

His intuitive discretion taught him to fall back a step while she said, “So!” the plummet word of our mysterious deep fathoms; and he fell back further saying, “Madam?” in a tone advising her to speak low.

She recovered her volubility, followed his partial retreat, and dropped her voice,—

“Impossible to have imagined it as an actual fact! You were always full of surprises, but this! this! Nothing manlier, nothing more gentlemanly has ever been done: nothing: nothing that so completely changes an untenable situation into a comfortable and proper footing for everybody. It is what I like: it is what I love:—sound sense! Men are so selfish: one cannot persuade them to be reasonable in such positions. But you, Sir Willoughby, have shown wisdom and sentiment: the rarest of all combinations in men.”

“Where have you? . . .” Willoughby contrived to say.

“Heard? The hedges, the housetops, everywhere. All the neighbourhood will have it before nightfall. Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer will soon be rushing here, and declaring they never expected anything else, I do not doubt. I am not so pretentious. I beg your excuse for that ‘twice’ of mine yesterday. Even if it hurt my vanity, I should be happy to confess my error: I was utterly out. But then I did not reckon on a fatal attachment, I thought men were incapable of it. I thought we women were the only poor creatures persecuted by a fatality. It is a fatality! You tried hard to escape, indeed you did. And she will do honour to your final surrender, my dear friend. She is gentle, and very clever, very: she is devoted to you: she will entertain excellently. I see her like a flower in sunshine. She will expand to a perfect hostess. Patterne will shine under her reign; you have my warrant for that. And so will you. Yes, you flourish best when adored. It must be adoration. You have been under a cloud of late. Years ago I said it was a match, when no one supposed you could stoop. Lady Busshe would have it was a screen, and she was deemed high wisdom. The world will be with you. All the women will be: excepting, of course, Lady Busshe, whose pride is in prophecy; and she will soon be too glad to swell the host. There, my friend, your sincerest and oldest admirer

congratulates you. I could not contain myself; I was compelled to pour forth. And now I must go and be talked to by Dr. Middleton. How does he take it? They leave?”

Page 2954

“He is perfectly well,” said Willoughby, aloud, quite distraught.

She acknowledged his just correction of her for running on to an extreme in low-toned converse, though they stood sufficiently isolated from the others. These had by this time been joined by Colonel De Craye, and were all chatting in a group—of himself, Willoughby horribly suspected.

Clara was gone from him! Gone! but he remembered his oath and vowed it again: not to Horace de Craye! She was gone, lost, sunk into the world of waters of rival men, and he determined that his whole force should be used to keep her from that man, the false friend who had supplanted him in her shallow heart, and might, if he succeeded, boast of having done it by simply appearing on the scene.

Willoughby intercepted Mrs. Mountstuart as she was passing over to Dr Middleton. “My dear lady! spare me a minute.”

De Craye sauntered up, with a face of the friendliest humour:

“Never was man like you, Willoughby, for shaking new patterns in a kaleidoscope.”

“Have you turned punster, Horace?” Willoughby replied, smarting to find yet another in the demon secret, and he draw Dr. Middleton two or three steps aside, and hurriedly begged him to abstain from prosecuting the subject with Clara.

“We must try to make her happy as we best can, sir. She may have her reasons—a young lady’s reasons!” He laughed, and left the Rev. Doctor considering within himself under the arch of his lofty frown of stupefaction.

De Craye smiled slyly and winningly as he shadowed a deep droop on the bend of his head before Clara, signifying his absolute devotion to her service, and this present good fruit for witness of his merits.

She smiled sweetly though vaguely. There was no concealment of their intimacy.

“The battle is over,” Vernon said quietly, when Willoughby had walked some paces beside Mrs. Mountstuart, adding: “You may expect to see Mr. Dale here. He knows.”

Vernon and Clara exchanged one look, hard on his part, in contrast with her softness, and he proceeded to the house. De Craye waited for a word or a promising look. He was patient, being self-assured, and passed on.

Clara linked her arm with her father’s once more, and said, on a sudden brightness: “Sirius, papa!” He repeated it in the profoundest manner: “Sirius! And is there,” he asked, “a feminine scintilla of sense in that?”

“It is the name of the star I was thinking of, dear papa.”

“It was the star observed by King Agamemnon before the sacrifice in Aulis. You were thinking of that? But, my love, my Iphigenia, you have not a father who will insist on sacrificing you.”

“Did I hear him tell you to humour me, papa?”

Dr Middleton humphed.

“Verily the dog-star rages in many heads,” he responded.

CHAPTER XLIV

Page 2955

DR MIDDLETON: THE LADIES ELEANOR AND ISABEL: AND MR. DALE

Clara looked up at the flying clouds. She travelled with them now, and tasted freedom, but she prudently forbore to vex her father; she held herself in reserve.

They were summoned by the midday bell.

Few were speakers at the meal, few were eaters. Clara was impelled to join it by her desire to study Mrs. Mountstuart's face. Willoughby was obliged to preside. It was a meal of an assembly of mutes and plates, that struck the ear like the well-known sound of a collection of offerings in church after an impressive exhortation from the pulpit. A sally of Colonel De Craye's met the reception given to a charity-boy's muffled burst of animal spirits in the silence of the sacred edifice. Willoughby tried politics with Dr. Middleton, whose regular appetite preserved him from uncongenial speculations when the hour for appeasing it had come; and he alone did honour to the dishes, replying to his host:

"Times are bad, you say, and we have a Ministry doing with us what they will. Well, sir, and that being so, and opposition a manner of kicking them into greater stability, it is the time for wise men to retire within themselves, with the steady determination of the seed in the earth to grow. Repose upon nature, sleep in firm faith, and abide the seasons. That is my counsel to the weaker party."

The counsel was excellent, but it killed the topic.

Dr. Middleton's appetite was watched for the signal to rise and breathe freely; and such is the grace accorded to a good man of an untroubled conscience engaged in doing his duty to himself, that he perceived nothing of the general restlessness; he went through the dishes calmly, and as calmly he quoted Milton to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, when the company sprung up all at once upon his closing his repast. Vernon was taken away from him by Willoughby. Mrs Mountstuart beckoned covertly to Clara. Willoughby should have had something to say to him, Dr. Middleton thought: the position was not clear. But the situation was not disagreeable; and he was in no serious hurry, though he wished to be enlightened.

"This," Dr. Middleton said to the spinster aunts, as he accompanied them to the drawing-room, "shall be no lost day for me if I may devote the remainder of it to you."

"The thunder, we fear, is not remote," murmured one.

"We fear it is imminent," sighed the other.

They took to chanting in alternation.

"—We are accustomed to peruse our Willoughby, and we know him by a shadow."

“—From his infancy to his glorious youth and his established manhood.”

“—He was ever the soul of chivalry.”

“—Duty: duty first. The happiness of his family. The well-being of his dependants.”

“—If proud of his name it was not an overweening pride; it was founded in the conscious possession of exalted qualities. He could be humble when occasion called for it.”

Page 2956

Dr Middleton bowed to the litany, feeling that occasion called for humbleness from him.

“Let us hope . . . !” he said, with unassumed penitence on behalf of his inscrutable daughter.

The ladies resumed:—

“—Vernon Whitford, not of his blood, is his brother!”

“—A thousand instances! Laetitia Dale remembers them better than we.”

“—That any blow should strike him!”

“—That another should be in store for him!”

“—It seems impossible he can be quite misunderstood!”

“Let us hope . . . !” said Dr. Middleton.

“—One would not deem it too much for the dispenser of goodness to expect to be a little looked up to!”

“—When he was a child he one day mounted a chair, and there he stood in danger, would not let us touch him because he was taller than we, and we were to gaze. Do you remember him, Eleanor? ’I am the sun of the house!’ It was inimitable!”

“—Your feelings; he would have your feelings! He was fourteen when his cousin Grace Whitford married, and we lost him. They had been the greatest friends; and it was long before he appeared among us. He has never cared to see her since.”

“—But he has befriended her husband. Never has he failed in generosity. His only fault is—”

“—His sensitiveness. And that is—”

“—His secret. And that—”

“—You are not to discover! It is the same with him in manhood. No one will accuse Willoughby Patterne of a deficiency of manlinesss: but what is it?—he suffers, as none suffer, if he is not loved. He himself is inalterably constant in affection.”

“—What it is no one can say. We have lived with him all his life, and we know him ready to make any sacrifice; only, he does demand the whole heart in return. And if he doubts, he looks as we have seen him to-day.”

“—Shattered: as we have never seen him look before.”

“We will hope,” said Dr. Middleton, this time hastily. He tingled to say, “what it was”: he had it in him to solve perplexity in their inquiry. He did say, adopting familiar speech to suit the theme, “You know, ladies, we English come of a rough stock. A dose of rough dealing in our youth does us no harm, braces us. Otherwise we are likely to feel chilly: we grow too fine where tenuity of stature is necessarily buffetted by gales, namely, in our self-esteem. We are barbarians, on a forcing soil of wealth, in a conservatory of comfortable security; but still barbarians. So, you see, we shine at our best when we are plucked out of that, to where hard blows are given, in a state of war. In a state of war we are at home, our men are high-minded fellows, Scipios and good legionaries. In the state of peace we do not live in peace: our native roughness breaks out in unexpected places, under extraordinary aspects—tyrannies, extravagances, domestic exactions: and if we have not had sharp early training . . . within and

Page 2957

without . . . the old-fashioned island-instrument to drill into us the civilization of our masters, the ancients, we show it by running here and there to some excess. Ahem. Yet," added the Rev. Doctor, abandoning his effort to deliver a weighty truth obscurely for the comprehension of dainty spinster ladies, the superabundance of whom in England was in his opinion largely the cause of our decay as a people, "Yet I have not observed this ultra-sensitiveness in Willoughby. He has borne to hear more than I, certainly no example of the frailty, could have endured."

"He concealed it," said the ladies. "It is intense."

"Then is it a disease?"

"It bears no explanation; it is mystic."

"It is a cultus, then, a form of self-worship."

"Self!" they ejaculated. "But is not Self indifferent to others? Is it Self that craves for sympathy, love, and devotion?"

"He is an admirable host, ladies."

"He is admirable in all respects."

"Admirable must he be who can impress discerning women, his life-long housemates, so favourably. He is, I repeat, a perfect host."

"He will be a perfect husband."

"In all probability."

"It is a certainty. Let him be loved and obeyed, he will be guided. That is the secret for her whom he so fatally loves. That, if we had dared, we would have hinted to her. She will rule him through her love of him, and through him all about her. And it will not be a rule he submits to, but a love he accepts. If she could see it!"

"If she were a metaphysician!" sighed Dr. Middleton.

"—But a sensitiveness so keen as his might—"

"—Fretted by an unsympathizing mate—"

"—In the end become, for the best of us is mortal—"

"—Callous!"

"—He would feel perhaps as much—"

“—Or more!—”

“—He would still be tender—”

“—But he might grow outwardly hard!”

Both ladies looked up at Dr. Middleton, as they revealed the dreadful prospect.

“It is the story told of corns!” he said, sad as they.

The three stood drooping: the ladies with an attempt to digest his remark; the Rev. Doctor in dejection lest his gallantry should no longer continue to wrestle with his good sense.

He was rescued.

The door opened and a footman announced:—

“Mr. Dale.”

Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel made a sign to one another of raising their hands.

They advanced to him, and welcomed him.

“Pray be seated, Mr. Dale. You have not brought us bad news of our Laetitia?”

“So rare is the pleasure of welcoming you here, Mr. Dale, that we are in some alarm, when, as we trust, it should be matter for unmixed congratulation.”

“Has Doctor Corney been doing wonders?”

“I am indebted to him for the drive to your house, ladies,” said Mr. Dale, a spare, close-buttoned gentleman, with an Indian complexion deadened in the sick-chamber. “It is unusual for me to stir from my precincts.”

Page 2958

“The Rev. Dr. Middleton.”

Mr. Dale bowed. He seemed surprised.

“You live in a splendid air, sir,” observed the Rev. Doctor.

“I can profit little by it, sir,” replied Mr. Dale. He asked the ladies: “Will Sir Willoughby be disengaged?”

They consulted. “He is with Vernon. We will send to him.”

The bell was rung.

“I have had the gratification of making the acquaintance of your daughter, Mr. Dale, a most estimable lady,” said Dr. Middleton.

Mr. Dale bowed. “She is honoured by your praises, sir. To the best of my belief—I speak as a father—she merits them. Hitherto I have had no doubts.”

“Of Laetitia?” exclaimed the ladies; and spoke of her as gentleness and goodness incarnate.

“Hitherto I have devoutly thought so,” said Mr. Dale.

“Surely she is the very sweetest nurse, the most devoted of daughters.”

“As far as concerns her duty to her father, I can say she is that, ladies.”

“In all her relations, Mr. Dale!”

“It is my prayer,” he said.

The footman appeared. He announced that Sir Willoughby was in the laboratory with Mr. Whitford, and the door locked.

“Domestic business,” the ladies remarked. “You know Willoughby’s diligent attention to affairs, Mr. Dale.”

“He is well?” Mr. Dale inquired.

“In excellent health.”

“Body and mind?”

“But, dear Mr. Dale, he is never ill.”

“Ah! for one to hear that who is never well! And Mr. Whitford is quite sound?”

“Sound? The question alarms me for myself,” said Dr. Middleton. “Sound as our Constitution, the Credit of the country, the reputation of our Prince of poets. I pray you to have no fears for him.”

Mr. Dale gave the mild little sniff of a man thrown deeper into perplexity.

He said: “Mr. Whitford works his head; he is a hard student; he may not be always, if I may so put it, at home on worldly affairs.”

“Dismiss that defamatory legend of the student, Mr. Dale; and take my word for it, that he who persistently works his head has the strongest for all affairs.”

“Ah! Your daughter, sir, is here?”

“My daughter is here, sir, and will be most happy to present her respects to the father of her friend, Miss Dale.”

“They are friends?”

“Very cordial friends.”

Mr. Dale administered another feebly pacifying sniff to himself.

“Laetitia!” he sighed, in apostrophe, and swept his forehead with a hand seen to shake.

The ladies asked him anxiously whether he felt the heat of the room; and one offered him a smelling-bottle.

He thanked them. “I can hold out until Sir Willoughby comes.”

“We fear to disturb him when his door is locked, Mr. Dale; but, if you wish it, we will venture on a message. You have really no bad news of our Laetitia? She left us hurriedly this morning, without any leave-taking, except a word to one of the maids, that your condition required her immediate presence.”

Page 2959

“My condition! And now her door is locked to me! We have spoken through the door, and that is all. I stand sick and stupefied between two locked doors, neither of which will open, it appears, to give me the enlightenment I need more than medicine.”

“Dear me!” cried Dr. Middleton, “I am struck by your description of your position, Mr. Dale. It would aptly apply to our humanity of the present generation; and were these the days when I sermonized, I could propose that it should afford me an illustration for the pulpit. For my part, when doors are closed I try not their locks; and I attribute my perfect equanimity, health even, to an uninquiring acceptation of the fact that they are closed to me. I read my page by the light I have. On the contrary, the world of this day, if I may presume to quote you for my purpose, is heard knocking at those two locked doors of the secret of things on each side of us, and is beheld standing sick and stupefied because it has got no response to its knocking. Why, sir, let the world compare the diverse fortunes of the beggar and the postman: knock to give, and it is opened unto you: knock to crave, and it continues shut. I say, carry a letter to your locked door, and you shall have a good reception: but there is none that is handed out. For which reason . . .”

Mr. Dale swept a perspiring forehead, and extended his hand in supplication. “I am an invalid, Dr. Middleton,” he said. “I am unable to cope with analogies. I have but strength for the slow digestion of facts.”

“For facts, we are bradypeptics to a man, sir. We know not yet if nature be a fact or an effort to master one. The world has not yet assimilated the first fact it stepped on. We are still in the endeavour to make good blood of the fact of our being.” Pressing his hands at his temples, Mr. Dale moaned: “My head twirls; I did unwisely to come out. I came on an impulse; I trust, honourable. I am unfit—I cannot follow you, Dr. Middleton. Pardon me.”

“Nay, sir, let me say, from my experience of my countrymen, that if you do not follow me and can abstain from abusing me in consequence, you are magnanimous,” the Rev. Doctor replied, hardly consenting to let go the man he had found to indemnify him for his gallant service of acquiescing as a mute to the ladies, though he knew his breathing robustfulness to be as an East wind to weak nerves, and himself an engine of punishment when he had been torn for a day from his books.

Miss Eleanor said: “The enlightenment you need, Mr. Dale? Can we enlighten you?”

“I think not,” he answered, faintly. “I think I will wait for Sir Willoughby . . . or Mr. Whitford. If I can keep my strength. Or could I exchange—I fear to break down—two words with the young lady who is, was . . .”

“Miss Middleton, my daughter, sir? She shall be at your disposition; I will bring her to you.” Dr. Middleton stopped at the window. “She, it is true, may better know the mind of

Miss Dale than I. But I flatter myself I know the gentleman better. I think, Mr. Dale, addressing you as the lady's father, you will find me a persuasive, I could be an impassioned, advocate in his interests."

Page 2960

Mr. Dale was confounded; the weakly sapling caught in a gust falls back as he did.

“Advocate?” he said. He had little breath.

“His impassioned advocate, I repeat; for I have the highest opinion of him. You see, sir, I am acquainted with the circumstances. I believe,” Dr. Middleton half turned to the ladies, “we must, until your potent inducements, Mr. Dale, have been joined to my instances, and we overcome what feminine scruples there may be, treat the circumstances as not generally public. Our Strephon may be chargeable with shyness. But if for the present it is incumbent on us, in proper consideration for the parties, not to be nominally precise, it is hardly requisite in this household that we should be. He is now for protesting indifference to the state. I fancy we understand that phase of amatory frigidity. Frankly, Mr. Dale, I was once in my life myself refused by a lady, and I was not indignant, merely indifferent to the marriage-tie.”

“My daughter has refused him, sir?”

“Temporarily it would appear that she has declined the proposal.”

“He was at liberty? . . . he could honourably? . . .”

“His best friend and nearest relative is your guarantee.”

“I know it; I hear so; I am informed of that: I have heard of the proposal, and that he could honourably make it. Still, I am helpless, I cannot move, until I am assured that my daughter’s reasons are such as a father need not underline.”

“Does the lady, perchance, equivocate?”

“I have not seen her this morning; I rise late. I hear an astounding account of the cause for her departure from Patterne, and I find her door locked to me—no answer.”

“It is that she had no reasons to give, and she feared the demand for them.”

“Ladies!” dolorously exclaimed Mr. Dale.

“We guess the secret, we guess it!” they exclaimed in reply; and they looked smilingly, as Dr. Middleton looked.

“She had no reasons to give?” Mr. Dale spelled these words to his understanding. “Then, sir, she knew you not adverse?”

“Undoubtedly, by my high esteem for the gentleman, she must have known me not adverse. But she would not consider me a principal. She could hardly have conceived me an obstacle. I am simply the gentleman’s friend. A zealous friend, let me add.”

Mr. Dale put out an imploring hand; it was too much for him.

“Pardon me; I have a poor head. And your daughter the same, sir?”

“We will not measure it too closely, but I may say, my daughter the same, sir. And likewise—may I not add—these ladies.”

Mr. Dale made sign that he was overfilled. “Where am I! And Laetitia refused him?”

“Temporarily, let us assume. Will it not partly depend on you, Mr. Dale?”

Page 2961

“But what strange things have been happening during my daughter’s absence from the cottage!” cried Mr. Dale, betraying an elixir in his veins. “I feel that I could laugh if I did not dread to be thought insane. She refused his hand, and he was at liberty to offer it? My girl! We are all on our heads. The fairy-tales were right and the lesson-books were wrong. But it is really, it is really very demoralizing. An invalid—and I am one, and no momentary exhilaration will be taken for the contrary—clings to the idea of stability, order. The slightest disturbance of the wonted course of things unsettles him. Why, for years I have been prophesying it! and for years I have had everything against me, and now when it is confirmed, I am wondering that I must not call myself a fool!”

“And for years, dear Mr. Dale, this union, in spite of counter-currents and human arrangements, has been our Willoughby’s constant preoccupation,” said Miss Eleanor.

“His most cherished aim,” said Miss Isabel.

“The name was not spoken by me,” said Dr. Middleton.

“But it is out, and perhaps better out, if we would avoid the chance of mystifications. I do not suppose we are seriously committing a breach of confidence, though he might have wished to mention it to you first himself. I have it from Willoughby that last night he appealed to your daughter, Mr. Dale—not for the first time, if I apprehend him correctly; and unsuccessfully. He despairs. I do not: supposing, that is, your assistance vouchsafed to us. And I do not despair, because the gentleman is a gentleman of worth, of acknowledged worth. You know him well enough to grant me that. I will bring you my daughter to help me in sounding his praises.”

Dr Middleton stepped through the window to the lawn on an elastic foot, beaming with the happiness he felt charged to confer on his friend Mr. Whitford.

“Ladies! it passes all wonders,” Mr. Dale gasped.

“Willoughby’s generosity does pass all wonders,” they said in chorus.

The door opened; Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer were announced.

CHAPTER XLV

The Patterne ladies: *Mr*. *Dale*: *Lady Busshe and lady Culmer*: *With Mrs*. *Mountstuart Jenkinson*

Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer entered spying to right and left. At the sight of Mr. Dale in the room Lady Busshe murmured to her friend: “Confirmation!”

Lady Culmer murmured: “Corney is quite reliable.”

“The man is his own best tonic.”

“He is invaluable for the country.”

Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel greeted them.

The amiability of the Patterne ladies combined with their total eclipse behind their illustrious nephew invited enterprising women of the world to take liberties, and they were not backward.

Page 2962

Lady Busshe said: “Well? the news! we have the outlines. Don’t be astonished: we know the points: we have heard the gun. I could have told you as much yesterday. I saw it. And I guessed it the day before. Oh, I do believe in fatalities now. Lady Culmer and I agree to take that view: it is the simplest. Well, and are you satisfied, my dears?”

The ladies grimaced interrogatively: “With what?”

“With it? with all! with her! with him!”

“Our Willoughby?”

“Can it be possible that they require a dose of Corney?” Lady Busshe remarked to Lady Culmer.

“They play discretion to perfection,” said Lady Culmer. “But, my dears, we are in the secret.”

“How did she behave?” whispered Lady Busshe. “No high flights and flutters, I do hope. She was well-connected, they say; though I don’t comprehend what they mean by a line of scholars—one thinks of a row of pinafores: and she was pretty.”

“That is well enough at the start. It never will stand against brains. He had the two in the house to contrast them, and . . . the result! A young woman with brains—in a house—beats all your beauties. Lady Culmer and I have determined on that view. He thought her a delightful partner for a dance, and found her rather tiresome at the end of the gallopade. I saw it yesterday, clear as daylight. She did not understand him, and he did understand her. That will be our report.”

“She is young: she will learn,” said the ladies uneasily, but in total ignorance of her meaning.

“And you are charitable, and always were. I remember you had a good word for that girl Durham.”

Lady Busshe crossed the room to Mr. Dale, who was turning over leaves of a grand book of the heraldic devices of our great Families.

“Study it,” she said, “study it, my dear Mr. Dale; you are in it, by right of possessing a clever and accomplished daughter. At page 300 you will find the Patterne crest. And mark me, she will drag you into the peerage before she has done—relatively, you know. Sir Willoughby and wife will not be contented to sit down and manage the estates. Has not Laetitia immense ambition? And very creditable, I say.”

Mr. Dale tried to protest something. He shut the book, examining the binding, flapped the cover with a finger, hoped her ladyship was in good health, alluded to his own and the strangeness of the bird out of the cage.

“You will probably take up your residence here, in a larger and handsomer cage. Mr. Dale.”

He shook his head. “Do I apprehend . . .” he said.

“I know,” said she.

“Dear me, can it be?”

Mr. Dale gazed upward, with the feelings of one awakened late to see a world alive in broad daylight.

Lady Busshe dropped her voice. She took the liberty permitted to her with an inferior in station, while treating him to a tone of familiarity in acknowledgment of his expected rise; which is high breeding, or the exact measurement of social dues.

Page 2963

“Laetitia will be happy, you may be sure. I love to see a long and faithful attachment rewarded—love it! Her tale is the triumph of patience. Far above Grizzel! No woman will be ashamed of pointing to Lady Patterne. You are uncertain? You are in doubt? Let me hear—as low as you like. But there is no doubt of the new shifting of the scene? —no doubt of the proposal? Dear Mr. Dale! a very little louder. You are here because —? of course you wish to see Sir Willoughby. She? I did not catch you quite. She? . . . it seems, you say . . . ?”

Lady Culmer said to the Patterne ladies:—

“You must have had a distressing time. These affairs always mount up to a climax, unless people are very well bred. We saw it coming. Naturally we did not expect such a transformation of brides: who could? If I had laid myself down on my back to think, I should have had it. I am unerring when I set to speculating on my back. One is cooler: ideas come; they have not to be forced. That is why I am brighter on a dull winter afternoon, on the sofa, beside my tea-service, than at any other season. However, your trouble is over. When did the Middletons leave?”

“The Middletons leave?” said the ladies.

“Dr. Middleton and his daughter.”

“They have not left us.”

“The Middletons are here?”

“They are here, yes. Why should they have left Patterne?”

“Why?”

“Yes. They are likely to stay some days longer.”

“Goodness!”

“There is no ground for any report to the contrary, Lady Culmer.”

“No ground!”

Lady Culmer called out to Lady Busshe.

A cry came back from that startled dame.

“She has refused him!”

“Who?”

“She has.”

“She?—Sir Willoughby?”

“Refused!—declines the honour.”

“Oh, never! No, that carries the incredible beyond romance. But is he perfectly at . . .”

“Quite, it seems. And she was asked in due form and refused.”

“No, and no again!”

“My dear, I have it from Mr. Dale.”

“Mr. Dale, what can be the signification of her conduct?”

“Indeed, Lady Culmer,” said Mr. Dale, not unpleasantly agitated by the interest he excited, in spite of his astonishment at a public discussion of the matter in this house, “I am in the dark. Her father should know, but I do not. Her door is locked to me; I have not seen her. I am absolutely in the dark. I am a recluse. I have forgotten the ways of the world. I should have supposed her father would first have been addressed.”

“Tut-tut. Modern gentlemen are not so formal; they are creatures of impulse and take a pride in it. He spoke. We settle that. But where did you get this tale of a refusal?”

“I have it from Dr. Middleton.”

“From Dr. Middleton?” shouted Lady Busshe.

“The Middletons are here,” said Lady Culmer.

Page 2964

“What whirl are we in?” Lady Busshe got up, ran two or three steps and seated herself in another chair. “Oh! do let us proceed upon system. If not we shall presently be rageing; we shall be dangerous. The Middletons are here, and Dr. Middleton himself communicates to Mr. Dale that Laetitia Dale has refused the hand of Sir Willoughby, who is ostensibly engaged to his own daughter! And pray, Mr. Dale, how did Dr. Middleton speak of it? Compose yourself; there is no violent hurry, though our sympathy with you and our interest in all the parties does perhaps agitate us a little. Quite at your leisure—speak!”

“Madam . . . Lady Busshe.” Mr. Dale gulped a ball in his throat. “I see no reason why I should not speak. I do not see how I can have been deluded. The Miss Patternes heard him. Dr. Middleton began upon it, not I. I was unaware, when I came, that it was a refusal. I had been informed that there was a proposal. My authority for the tale was positive. The object of my visit was to assure myself of the integrity of my daughter’s conduct. She had always the highest sense of honour. But passion is known to mislead, and there was this most strange report. I feared that our humblest apologies were due to Dr. Middleton and his daughter. I know the charm Laetitia can exercise. Madam, in the plainest language, without a possibility of my misapprehending him, Dr. Middleton spoke of himself as the advocate of the suitor for my daughter’s hand. I have a poor head. I supposed at once an amicable rupture between Sir Willoughby and Miss Middleton, or that the version which had reached me of their engagement was not strictly accurate. My head is weak. Dr. Middleton’s language is trying to a head like mine; but I can speak positively on the essential points: he spoke of himself as ready to be the impassioned advocate of the suitor for my daughter’s hand. Those were his words. I understood him to entreat me to intercede with her. Nay, the name was mentioned. There was no concealment. I am certain there could not be a misapprehension. And my feelings were touched by his anxiety for Sir Willoughby’s happiness. I attributed it to a sentiment upon which I need not dwell. Impassioned advocate, he said.”

“We are in a perfect maelstrom!” cried Lady Busshe, turning to everybody.

“It is a complete hurricane!” cried Lady Culmer.

A light broke over the faces of the Patterne ladies. They exchanged it with one another.

They had been so shocked as to be almost offended by Lady Busshe, but their natural gentleness and habitual submission rendered them unequal to the task of checking her.

“Is it not,” said Miss Eleanor, “a misunderstanding that a change of names will rectify?”

“This is by no means the first occasion,” said Miss Isabel, “that Willoughby has pleaded for his cousin Vernon.”

“We deplore extremely the painful error into which Mr. Dale has fallen.”

Page 2965

“It springs, we now perceive, from an entire misapprehension of Dr. Middleton.”

“Vernon was in his mind. It was clear to us.”

“Impossible that it could have been Willoughby!”

“You see the impossibility, the error!”

“And the Middletons here!” said Lady Busshe. “Oh! if we leave unilluminated we shall be the laughing-stock of the county. Mr. Dale, please, wake up. Do you see? You may have been mistaken.”

“Lady Busshe,” he woke up; “I may have mistaken Dr. Middleton; he has a language that I can compare only to a review-day of the field forces. But I have the story on authority that I cannot question: it is confirmed by my daughter’s unexampled behaviour. And if I live through this day I shall look about me as a ghost to-morrow.”

“Dear Mr. Dale!” said the Patterne ladies, compassionately. Lady Busshe murmured to them: “You know the two did not agree; they did not get on: I saw it; I predicted it.”

“She will understand him in time,” said they.

“Never. And my belief is, they have parted by consent, and Letty Dale wins the day at last. Yes, now I do believe it.”

The ladies maintained a decided negative, but they knew too much not to feel perplexed, and they betrayed it, though they said: “Dear Lady Busshe! is it credible, in decency?”

“Dear Mrs. Mountstuart!” Lady Busshe invoked her great rival appearing among them: “You come most opportunely; we are in a state of inextricable confusion: we are bordering on frenzy. You, and none but you, can help us. You know, you always know; we hang on you. Is there any truth in it? a particle?”

Mrs. Mountstuart seated herself regally “Ah, Mr. Dale!” she said, inclining to him. “Yes, dear Lady Busshe, there is a particle.”

“Now, do not roast us. You can; you have the art. I have the whole story. That is, I have a part. I mean, I have the outlines, I cannot be deceived, but you can fill them in, I know you can. I saw it yesterday. Now, tell us, tell us. It must be quite true or utterly false. Which is it?”

“Be precise.”

“His fatality! you called her. Yes, I was sceptical. But here we have it all come round again, and if the tale is true, I shall own you infallible. Has he?—and she?”

“Both.”

“And the Middletons here? They have not gone; they keep the field. And more astounding, she refuses him. And to add to it, Dr. Middleton intercedes with Mr. Dale for Sir Willoughby.”

“Dr. Middleton intercedes!” This was rather astonishing to Mrs. Mountstuart.

“For Vernon,” Miss Eleanor emphasized.

“For Vernon Whitford, his cousin.” said Miss Isabel, still more emphatically.

“Who,” said Mrs. Mountstuart, with a sovereign lift and turn of her head, “speaks of a refusal?”

“I have it from Mr. Dale,” said Lady Busshe.

“I had it, I thought, distinctly from Dr. Middleton,” said Mr. Dale.

Page 2966

“That Willoughby proposed to Laetitia for his cousin Vernon, Doctor Middleton meant,” said Miss Eleanor.

Her sister followed: “Hence this really ridiculous misconception! —sad, indeed,” she added, for balm to Mr. Dale.

“Willoughby was Vernon’s proxy. His cousin, if not his first, is ever the second thought with him.”

“But can we continue . . . ?”

“Such a discussion!”

Mrs. Mountstuart gave them a judicial hearing. They were regarded in the county as the most indulgent of nonentities, and she as little as Lady Busshe was restrained from the burning topic in their presence. She pronounced:

“Each party is right, and each is wrong.”

A dry: “I shall shriek!” came from Lady Busshe.

“Cruel!” groaned Lady Culmer.

“Mixed, you are all wrong. Disentangled, you are each of you right. Sir Willoughby does think of his cousin Vernon; he is anxious to establish him; he is the author of a proposal to that effect.”

“We know it!” the Patterne ladies exclaimed. “And Laetitia rejected poor Vernon once more!”

“Who spoke of Miss Dale’s rejection of Mr. Whitford?”

“Is he not rejected?” Lady Culmer inquired.

“It is in debate, and at this moment being decided.”

“Oh! do he seated, Mr. Dale,” Lady Busshe implored him, rising to thrust him back to his chair if necessary. “Any dislocation, and we are thrown out again! We must hold together if this riddle is ever to be read. Then, dear Mrs. Mountstuart, we are to say that there is-no truth in the other story?”

“You are to say nothing of the sort, dear Lady Busshe.”

“Be merciful! And what of the fatality?”

“As positive as the Pole to the needle.”

“She has not refused him?”

“Ask your own sagacity.”

“Accepted?”

“Wait.”

“And all the world’s ahead of me! Now, Mrs. Mountstuart, you are oracle. Riddles, if you like, only speak. If we can’t have corn, why, give us husks.”

“Is any one of us able to anticipate events, Lady Busshe?”

“Yes, I believe that you are. I bow to you. I do sincerely. So it’s another person for Mr. Whitford? You nod. And it is our Laetitia for Sir Willoughby? You smile. You would not deceive me? A very little, and I run about crazed and howl at your doors. And Dr. Middleton is made to play blind man in the midst? And the other person is—now I see day! An amicable rupture, and a smooth new arrangement. She has money; she was never the match for our hero; never; I saw it yesterday, and before, often; and so he hands her over—tuthe-rum-tum-tum, tuthe-rum-tum-tum,” Lady Busshe struck a quick march on her knee. “Now isn’t that clever guessing? The shadow of a clue for me. And because I know human nature. One peep, and I see the combination in a minute. So he keeps the money in the family, becomes a benefactor to his cousin by getting rid of the girl, and succumbs to his fatality. Rather a pity he let it ebb and flow so long. Time counts the tides, you know. But it improves the story. I defy any other county in the kingdom to produce one fresh and living to equal it. Let me tell you I suspected Mr. Whitford, and I hinted it yesterday.”

Page 2967

“Did you indeed!” said Mrs. Mountstuart, humouring her excessive acuteness.

“I really did. There is that dear good man on his feet again. And looks agitated again.”

Mr. Dale had been compelled both by the lady’s voice and his interest in the subject to listen. He had listened more than enough; he was exceedingly nervous. He held on by his chair, afraid to quit his moorings, and “Manners!” he said to himself unconsciously aloud, as he cogitated on the libertine way with which these chartered great ladies of the district discussed his daughter. He was heard and unnoticed. The supposition, if any, would have been that he was admonishing himself. At this juncture Sir Willoughby entered the drawing-room by the garden window, and simultaneously Dr. Middleton by the door.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE SCENE OF SIR WILLOUGHBY’S GENERALSHIP

History, we may fear, will never know the qualities of leadership inherent in Sir Willoughby Patterne to fit him for the post of Commander of an army, seeing that he avoided the fatigues of the service and preferred the honours bestowed in his country upon the quiet administrators of their own estates: but his possession of particular gifts, which are military, and especially of the proleptic mind, which is the stamp and sign-warrant of the heaven-sent General, was displayed on every urgent occasion when, in the midst of difficulties likely to have extinguished one less alert than he to the threatening aspect of disaster, he had to manoeuvre himself.

He had received no intimation of Mr. Dale’s presence in his house, nor of the arrival of the dreaded women Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer: his locked door was too great a terror to his domestics. Having finished with Vernon, after a tedious endeavour to bring the fellow to a sense of the policy of the step urged on him, he walked out on the lawn with the desire to behold the opening of an interview not promising to lead to much, and possibly to profit by its failure. Clara had been prepared, according to his directions, by Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, as Vernon had been prepared by him. His wishes, candidly and kindly expressed both to Vernon and Mrs Mountstuart, were, that since the girl appeared disinclined to make him a happy man, she would make one of his cousin. Intimating to Mrs. Mountstuart that he would be happier without her, he alluded to the benefit of the girl’s money to poor old Vernon, the general escape from a scandal if old Vernon could manage to catch her as she dropped, the harmonious arrangement it would be for all parties. And only on the condition of her taking Vernon would he consent to give her up. This he said imperatively, adding that such was the meaning of the news she had received relating to Laetitia Dale. From what quarter had she received it? he asked. She shuffled in her reply, made a gesture to signify that it was in

Page 2968

the air, universal, and fell upon the proposed arrangement. He would listen to none of Mrs. Mountstuart's woman-of-the-world instances of the folly of pressing it upon a girl who had shown herself a girl of spirit. She foretold the failure. He would not be advised; he said: "It is my scheme"; and perhaps the look of mad benevolence about it induced the lady to try whether there was a chance that it would hit the madness in our nature, and somehow succeed or lead to a pacification. Sir Willoughby condescended to arrange things thus for Clara's good; he would then proceed to realize his own. Such was the face he put upon it. We can wear what appearance we please before the world until we are found out, nor is the world's praise knocking upon hollowness always hollow music; but Mrs Mountstuart's laudation of his kindness and simplicity disturbed him; for though he had recovered from his rebuff enough to imagine that Laetitia could not refuse him under reiterated pressure, he had let it be supposed that she was a submissive handmaiden throbbing for her elevation; and Mrs Mountstuart's belief in it afflicted his recent bitter experience; his footing was not perfectly secure. Besides, assuming it to be so, he considered the sort of prize he had won; and a spasm of downright hatred of a world for which we make mighty sacrifices to be repaid in a worn, thin, comparatively valueless coin, troubled his counting of his gains. Laetitia, it was true, had not passed through other hands in coming to him, as Vernon would know it to be Clara's case: time only had worn her: but the comfort of the reflection was annoyed by the physical contrast of the two. Hence an unusual melancholy in his tone that Mrs. Mountstuart thought touching. It had the scenic effect on her which greatly contributes to delude the wits. She talked of him to Clara as being a man who had revealed an unsuspected depth.

Vernon took the communication curiously. He seemed readier to be in love with his benevolent relative than with the lady. He was confused, undisguisedly moved, said the plan was impossible, out of the question, but thanked Willoughby for the best of intentions, thanked him warmly. After saying that the plan was impossible, the comical fellow allowed himself to be pushed forth on the lawn to see how Miss Middleton might have come out of her interview with Mrs. Mountstuart. Willoughby observed Mrs. Mountstuart meet him, usher him to the place she had quitted among the shrubs, and return to the open turf-spaces. He sprang to her.

"She will listen." Mrs. Mountstuart said: "She likes him, respects him, thinks he is a very sincere friend, clever, a scholar, and a good mountaineer; and thinks you mean very kindly. So much I have impressed on her, but I have not done much for Mr. Whitford."

"She consents to listen," said Willoughby, snatching at that as the death-blow to his friend Horace.

"She consents to listen, because you have arranged it so that if she declined she would be rather a savage."

Page 2969

“You think it will have no result?”

“None at all.”

“Her listening will do.”

“And you must be satisfied with it.”

“We shall see.”

“‘Anything for peace’, she says: and I don’t say that a gentleman with a tongue would not have a chance. She wishes to please you.”

“Old Vernon has no tongue for women, poor fellow! You will have us be spider or fly, and if a man can’t spin a web all he can hope is not to be caught in one. She knows his history, too, and that won’t be in his favour. How did she look when you left them?”

“Not so bright: like a bit of china that wants dusting. She looked a trifle gauche, it struck me; more like a country girl with the hoyden taming in her than the well-bred creature she is. I did not suspect her to have feeling. You must remember, Sir Willoughby, that she has obeyed your wishes, done her utmost: I do think we may say she has made some amends; and if she is to blame she repents, and you will not insist too far.”

“I do insist,” said he.

“Beneficent, but a tyrant!”

“Well, well.” He did not dislike the character.

They perceived Dr. Middleton wandering over the lawn, and Willoughby went to him to put him on the wrong track: Mrs. Mountstuart swept into the drawing-room. Willoughby quitted the Rev. Doctor, and hung about the bower where he supposed his pair of dupes had by this time ceased to stutter mutually:—or what if they had found the word of harmony? He could bear that, just bear it. He rounded the shrubs, and, behold, both had vanished. The trellis decorated emptiness. His idea was, that they had soon discovered their inability to be turtles: and desiring not to lose a moment while Clara was fretted by the scene, he rushed to the drawing-room with the hope of lighting on her there, getting her to himself, and finally, urgently, passionately offering her the sole alternative of what she had immediately rejected. Why had he not used passion before, instead of limping crippled between temper and policy? He was capable of it: as soon as imagination in him conceived his personal feelings unwounded and unimperiled, the might of it inspired him with heroical confidence, and Clara grateful, Clara softly moved, led him to think of Clara melted. Thus anticipating her he burst into the room.

One step there warned him that he was in the jaws of the world. We have the phrase, that a man is himself under certain trying circumstances. There is no need to say it of Sir Willoughby: he was thrice himself when danger menaced, himself inspired him. He could read at a single glance the Polyphemus eye in the general head of a company. Lady Busshe, Lady Culmer, Mrs. Mountstuart, Mr. Dale, had a similarity in the variety of their expressions that made up one giant eye for him perfectly, if awfully, legible. He discerned the fact that his demon secret was abroad, universal. He ascribed it to fate. He was in the jaws of the world, on the world's teeth. This time he thought Laetitia must have betrayed him, and bowing to Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer, gallantly pressing their fingers and responding to their becks and archnesses, he ruminated on his defences before he should accost her father. He did not want to be alone with the man, and he considered how his presence might be made useful.

Page 2970

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Dale. Pray, be seated. Is it nature asserting her strength? or the efficacy of medicine? I fancy it can’t be both. You have brought us back your daughter?”

Mr. Dale sank into a chair, unable to resist the hand forcing him.

“No, Sir Willoughby, no. I have not; I have not seen her since she came home this morning from Patterne.”

“Indeed? She is unwell?”

“I cannot say. She secludes herself.”

“Has locked herself in,” said Lady Busshe.

Willoughby threw her a smile. It made them intimate.

This was an advantage against the world, but an exposure of himself to the abominable woman.

Dr. Middleton came up to Mr. Dale to apologize for not presenting his daughter Clara, whom he could find neither in nor out of the house.

“We have in Mr. Dale, as I suspected,” he said to Willoughby, “a stout ally.”

“If I may beg two minutes with you, Sir Willoughby,” said Mr. Dale.

“Your visits are too rare for me to allow of your numbering the minutes,” Willoughby replied. “We cannot let Mr. Dale escape us now that we have him, I think, Dr. Middleton.”

“Not without ransom,” said the Rev. Doctor.

Mr. Dale shook his head. “My strength, Sir Willoughby, will not sustain me long.”

“You are at home, Mr. Dale.”

“Not far from home, in truth, but too far for an invalid beginning to grow sensible of weakness.”

“You will regard Patterne as your home, Mr. Dale,” Willoughby repeated for the world to hear.

“Unconditionally?” Dr. Middleton inquired, with a humourous air of dissenting.

Willoughby gave him a look that was coldly courteous, and then he looked at Lady Busshe. She nodded imperceptibly. Her eyebrows rose, and Willoughby returned a similar nod.

Translated, the signs ran thus:

"—Pestered by the Rev. gentleman:—I see you are. Is the story I have heard correct? —Possibly it may err in a few details."

This was fettering himself in loose manacles.

But Lady Busshe would not be satisfied with the compliment of the intimate looks and nods. She thought she might still be behind Mrs. Mountstuart; and she was a bold woman, and anxious about him, half-crazed by the riddle of the pot she was boiling in, and having very few minutes to spare. Not extremely reticent by nature, privileged by station, and made intimate with him by his covert looks, she stood up to him. "One word to an old friend. Which is the father of the fortunate creature? I don't know how to behave to them." No time was afforded him to be disgusted with her vulgarity and audacity.

He replied, feeling her rivet his gyves: "The house will be empty to-morrow."

"I see. A decent withdrawal, and very well cloaked. We had a tale here of her running off to decline the honour, afraid, or on her dignity or something."

Page 2971

How was it that the woman was ready to accept the altered posture of affairs in his house—if she had received a hint of them? He forgot that he had prepared her in self-defence.

“From whom did you have that?” he asked.

“Her father. And the lady aunts declare it was the cousin she refused!” Willoughby’s brain turned over. He righted it for action, and crossed the room to the ladies Eleanor and Isabel. His ears tingled. He and his whole story discussed in public! Himself unroofed! And the marvel that he of all men should be in such a tangle, naked and blown on, condemned to use his cunningest arts to unwind and cover himself, struck him as though the lord of his kind were running the gauntlet of a legion of imps. He felt their lashes.

The ladies were talking to Mrs. Mountstuart and Lady Culmer of Vernon and the suitableness of Laetitia to a scholar. He made sign to them, and both rose.

“It is the hour for your drive. To the cottage! Mr. Dale is in. She must come. Her sick father! No delay, going or returning. Bring her here at once.”

“Poor man!” they sighed; and “Willoughby,” said one, and the other said: “There is a strange misconception you will do well to correct.”

They were about to murmur what it was. He swept his hand round, and excusing themselves to their guests, obediently they retired.

Lady Busshe at his entreaty remained, and took a seat beside Lady Culmer and Mrs. Mountstuart.

She said to the latter: “You have tried scholars. What do you think?”

“Excellent, but hard to mix,” was the reply.

“I never make experiments,” said Lady Culmer.

“Some one must!” Mrs. Mountstuart groaned over her dull dinner-party.

Lady Busshe consoled her. “At any rate, the loss of a scholar is no loss to the county.”

“They are well enough in towns,” Lady Culmer said.

“And then I am sure you must have them by themselves.”

“We have nothing to regret.”

“My opinion.”

The voice of Dr. Middleton in colloquy with Mr. Dale swelled on a melodious thunder: “For whom else should I plead as the passionate advocate I proclaimed myself to you, sir? There is but one man known to me who would move me to back him upon such an adventure. Willoughby, join me. I am informing Mr. Dale . . .”

Willoughby stretched his hands out to Mr. Dale to support him on his legs, though he had shown no sign of a wish to rise.

“You are feeling unwell, Mr. Dale.”

“Do I look very ill, Sir Willoughby?”

“It will pass. Laetitia will be with us in twenty minutes.” Mr. Dale struck his hands in a clasp. He looked alarmingly ill, and satisfactorily revealed to his host how he could be made to look so.

Page 2972

“I was informing Mr. Dale that the petitioner enjoys our concurrent good wishes: and mine in no degree less than yours, Willoughby,” observed Dr. Middleton, whose billows grew the bigger for a check. He supposed himself speaking confidentially. “Ladies have the trick, they have, I may say, the natural disposition for playing enigma now and again. Pressure is often a sovereign specific. Let it be tried upon her all round from every radiating line of the circle. You she refuses. Then I venture to propose myself to appeal to her. My daughter has assuredly an esteem for the applicant that will animate a woman’s tongue in such a case. The ladies of the house will not be backward. Lastly, if necessary, we trust the lady’s father to add his instances. My prescription is, to fatigue her negatives; and where no rooted objection exists, I maintain it to be the unfailing receipt for the conduct of the siege. No woman can say No forever. The defence has not such resources against even a single assailant, and we shall have solved the problem of continuous motion before she will have learned to deny in perpetuity. That I stand on.”

Willoughby glanced at Mrs. Mountstuart.

“What is that?” she said. “Treason to our sex, Dr. Middleton?”

“I think I heard that no woman can say No forever!” remarked Lady Busshe.

“To a loyal gentleman, ma’am: assuming the field of the recurring request to be not unholy ground; consecrated to affirmatives rather.”

Dr Middleton was attacked by three angry bees. They made him say yes and no alternately so many times that he had to admit in men a shiftier yieldingness than women were charged with.

Willoughby gesticulated as mute chorus on the side of the ladies; and a little show of party spirit like that, coming upon their excitement under the topic, inclined them to him genially. He drew Mr. Dale away while the conflict subsided in sharp snaps of rifles and an interval rejoinder of a cannon. Mr. Dale had shown by signs that he was growing fretfully restive under his burden of doubt.

“Sir Willoughby, I have a question. I beg you to lead me where I may ask it. I know my head is weak.”

“Mr. Dale, it is answered when I say that my house is your home, and that Laetitia will soon be with us.”

“Then this report is true?”

“I know nothing of reports. You are answered.”

“Can my daughter be accused of any shadow of falseness, dishonourable dealing?”

“As little as I.”

Mr. Dale scanned his face. He saw no shadow.

“For I should go to my grave bankrupt if that could be said of her; and I have never yet felt poor, though you know the extent of a pensioner’s income. Then this tale of a refusal . . . ?”

“Is nonsense.”

“She has accepted?”

“There are situations, Mr. Dale, too delicate to be clothed in positive definitions.”

Page 2973

“Ah, Sir Willoughby, but it becomes a father to see that his daughter is not forced into delicate situations. I hope all is well. I am confused. It may be my head. She puzzles me. You are not . . . Can I ask it here? You are quite . . . ? Will you moderate my anxiety? My infirmities must excuse me.”

Sir Willoughby conveyed by a shake of the head and a pressure of Mr. Dale’s hand, that he was not, and that he was quite.

“Dr Middleton?” said Mr. Dale.

“He leaves us to-morrow.”

“Really!” The invalid wore a look as if wine had been poured into him. He routed his host’s calculations by calling to the Rev. Doctor. “We are to lose you, sir?”

Willoughby attempted an interposition, but Dr. Middleton crashed through it like the lordly organ swallowing a flute.

“Not before I score my victory, Mr. Dale, and establish my friend upon his rightful throne.”

“You do not leave to-morrow, sir?”

“Have you heard, sir, that I leave to-morrow?”

Mr. Dale turned to Sir Willoughby.

The latter said: “Clara named to-day. To-morrow I thought preferable.”

“Ah!” Dr. Middleton towered on the swelling exclamation, but with no dark light. He radiated splendidly. “Yes, then, to-morrow. That is, if we subdue the lady.”

He advanced to Willoughby, seized his hand, squeezed it, thanked him, praised him. He spoke under his breath, for a wonder; but: “We are in your debt lastingly, my friend”, was heard, and he was impressive, he seemed subdued, and saying aloud: “Though I should wish to aid in the reduction of that fortress”, he let it be seen that his mind was rid of a load.

Dr. Middleton partly stupefied Willoughby by his way of taking it, but his conduct was too serviceable to allow of speculation on his readiness to break the match. It was the turning-point of the engagement.

Lady Busshe made a stir.

“I cannot keep my horses waiting any longer,” she said, and beckoned. Sir Willoughby was beside her immediately.

“You are admirable! perfect! Don’t ask me to hold my tongue. I retract, I recant. It is a fatality. I have resolved upon that view. You could stand the shot of beauty, not of brains. That is our report. There! And it’s delicious to feel that the county wins you. No tea. I cannot possibly wait. And, oh! here she is. I must have a look at her. My dear Laetitia Dale!”

Willoughby hurried to Mr. Dale.

“You are not to be excited, sir: compose yourself. You will recover and be strong to-morrow: you are at home; you are in your own house; you are in Laetitia’s drawing-room. All will be clear to-morrow. Till to-morrow we talk riddles by consent. Sit, I beg. You stay with us.”

He met Laetitia and rescued her from Lady Busshe, murmuring, with the air of a lover who says, “my love! my sweet!” that she had done rightly to come and come at once. Her father had been thrown into the proper condition of clammy nervousness to create the impression. Laetitia’s anxiety sat prettily on her long eyelashes as she bent over him in his chair.

Page 2974

Hereupon Dr. Corney appeared; and his name had a bracing effect on Mr. Dale. “Corney has come to drive me to the cottage,” he said. “I am ashamed of this public exhibition of myself, my dear. Let us go. My head is a poor one.”

Dr. Corney had been intercepted. He broke from Sir Willoughby with a dozen little nods of accurate understanding of him, even to beyond the mark of the communications. He touched his patient’s pulse lightly, briefly sighed with professional composure, and pronounced: “Rest. Must not be moved. No, no, nothing serious,” he quieted Laetitia’s fears, “but rest, rest. A change of residence for a night will tone him. I will bring him a draught in the course of the evening. Yes, yes, I’ll fetch everything wanted from the cottage for you and for him. Repose on Corney’s forethought.”

“You are sure, Dr. Corney?” said Laetitia, frightened on her father’s account and on her own.

“Which aspect will be the best for Mr. Dale’s bedroom?” the hospitable ladies Eleanor and Isabel inquired.

“Southeast, decidedly: let him have the morning sun: a warm air, a vigorous air, and a bright air, and the patient wakes and sings in his bed.”

Still doubtful whether she was in a trap, Laetitia whispered to her father of the privacy and comforts of his home. He replied to her that he thought he would rather be in his own home.

Dr Corney positively pronounced No to it.

Laetitia breathed again of home, but with the sigh of one overborne.

The ladies Eleanor and Isabel took the word from Willoughby, and said: “But you are at home, my dear. This is your home. Your father will be at least as well attended here as at the cottage.”

She raised her eyelids on them mournfully, and by chance diverted her look to Dr. Middleton, quite by chance.

It spoke eloquently to the assembly of all that Willoughby desired to be imagined.

“But there is Crossjay,” she cried. “My cousin has gone, and the boy is left alone. I cannot have him left alone. If we, if, Dr. Corney, you are sure it is unsafe for papa to be moved to-day, Crossjay must . . . he cannot be left.”

“Bring him with you, Corney,” said Sir Willoughby; and the little doctor heartily promised that he would, in the event of his finding Crossjay at the cottage, which he thought a distant probability.

“He gave me his word he would not go out till my return,” said Laetitia.

“And if Crossjay gave you his word,” the accents of a new voice vibrated close by, “be certain that he will not come back with Dr. Corney unless he has authority in your handwriting.”

Clara Middleton stepped gently to Laetitia, and with a manner that was an embrace, as much as kissed her for what she was doing on behalf of Crossjay. She put her lips in a pouting form to simulate saying: “Press it.”

“He is to come,” said Laetitia.

Page 2975

“Then write him his permit.”

There was a chatter about Crossjay and the sentinel true to his post that he could be, during which Laetitia distressfully scribbled a line for Dr. Corney to deliver to him. Clara stood near. She had rebuked herself for want of reserve in the presence of Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer, and she was guilty of a slightly excessive containment when she next addressed Laetitia. It was, like Laetitia’s look at Dr. Middleton, opportune: enough to make a man who watched as Willoughby did a fatalist for life: the shadow of a difference in her bearing toward Laetitia sufficed to impute acting either to her present coolness or her previous warmth. Better still, when Dr. Middleton said: “So we leave to-morrow, my dear, and I hope you have written to the Darletons,” Clara flushed and beamed, and repressed her animation on a sudden, with one grave look, that might be thought regretful, to where Willoughby stood.

Chance works for us when we are good captains.

Willoughby’s pride was high, though he knew himself to be keeping it up like a fearfully dexterous juggler, and for an empty reward: but he was in the toils of the world.

“Have you written? The post-bag leaves in half an hour,” he addressed her.

“We are expected, but I will write,” she replied: and her not having yet written counted in his favour.

She went to write the letter. Dr. Corney had departed on his mission to fetch Crossjay and medicine. Lady Busshe was impatient to be gone. “Corney,” she said to Lady Culmer, “is a deadly gossip.”

“Inveterate,” was the answer.

“My poor horses!”

“Not the young pair of bays?”

“Luckily they are, my dear. And don’t let me hear of dining to-night!”

Sir Willoughby was leading out Mr. Dale to a quiet room, contiguous to the invalid gentleman’s bedchamber. He resigned him to Laetitia in the hall, that he might have the pleasure of conducting the ladies to their carriage.

“As little agitation as possible. Corney will soon be back,” he said, bitterly admiring the graceful subservience of Laetitia’s figure to her father’s weight on her arm.

He had won a desperate battle, but what had he won?

What had the world given him in return for his efforts to gain it? Just a shirt, it might be said: simple scanty clothing, no warmth. Lady Busshe was unbearable; she gabbled; she was ill-bred, permitted herself to speak of Dr. Middleton as ineligible, no loss to the county. And Mrs. Mountstuart was hardly much above her, with her inevitable stroke of caricature:—"You see Doctor Middleton's pulpit scampering after him with legs!" Perhaps the Rev. Doctor did punish the world for his having forsaken his pulpit, and might be conceived as haunted by it at his heels, but Willoughby was in the mood to abhor comic images; he hated the perpetrators of them and the grinners. Contempt of this laughing

Page 2976

empty world, for which he had performed a monstrous immolation, led him to associate Dr. Middleton in his mind, and Clara too, with the desireable things he had sacrificed—a shape of youth and health; a sparkling companion; a face of innumerable charms; and his own veracity; his inner sense of his dignity; and his temper, and the limpid frankness of his air of scorn, that was to him a visage of candid happiness in the dim retrospect. Haply also he had sacrificed more: he looked scientifically into the future: he might have sacrificed a nameless more. And for what? he asked again. For the favourable looks and tongues of these women whose looks and tongues he detested!

“Dr Middleton says he is indebted to me: I am deeply in his debt,” he remarked.

“It is we who are in your debt for a lovely romance, my dear Sir Willoughby,” said Lady Busshe, incapable of taking a correction, so thoroughly had he imbued her with his fiction, or with the belief that she had a good story to circulate. Away she drove, rattling her tongue to Lady Culmer.

“A hat and horn, and she would be in the old figure of a post-boy on a hue-and-cry sheet,” said Mrs. Mountstuart.

Willoughby thanked the great lady for her services, and she complimented the polished gentleman on his noble self-possession. But she complained at the same time of being defrauded of her “charmer” Colonel De Craye, since luncheon. An absence of warmth in her compliment caused Willoughby to shrink and think the wretched shirt he had got from the world no covering after all: a breath flapped it.

“He comes to me to-morrow, I believe,” she said, reflecting on her superior knowledge of facts in comparison with Lady Busshe, who would presently be hearing of something novel, and exclaiming: “So, that is why you patronized the colonel!” And it was nothing of the sort, for Mrs. Mountstuart could honestly say she was not the woman to make a business of her pleasure.

“Horace is an enviable fellow,” said Willoughby, wise in The Book, which bids us ever, for an assuagement to fancy our friend’s condition worse than our own, and recommends the deglutition of irony as the most balsamic for wounds in the whole moral pharmacopoeia.

“I don’t know,” she replied, with a marked accent of deliberation.

“The colonel is to have you to himself to-morrow!”

“I can’t be sure of what I shall have in the colonel!”

“Your perpetual sparkler?”

Mrs. Mountstuart set her head in motion. She left the matter silent.

“I’ll come for him in the morning,” she said, and her carriage whirled her off. Either she had guessed it, or Clara had confided to her the treacherous passion of Horace De Craye.

However, the world was shut away from Patterne for the night.

CHAPTER XLVII

SIR WILLOUGHBY AND HIS FRIEND HORACE DE CRAYE

Page 2977

Willoughby shut himself up in his laboratory to brood awhile after the conflict. Sounding through himself, as it was habitual with him to do, for the plan most agreeable to his taste, he came on a strange discovery among the lower circles of that microcosm. He was no longer guided in his choice by liking and appetite: he had to put it on the edge of a sharp discrimination, and try it by his acutest judgement before it was acceptable to his heart: and knowing well the direction of his desire, he was nevertheless unable to run two strides on a wish. He had learned to read the world: his partial capacity for reading persons had fled. The mysteries of his own bosom were bare to him; but he could comprehend them only in their immediate relation to the world outside. This hateful world had caught him and transformed him to a machine. The discovery he made was, that in the gratification of the egoistic instinct we may so beset ourselves as to deal a slaughtering wound upon Self to whatsoever quarter we turn.

Surely there is nothing stranger in mortal experience. The man was confounded. At the game of Chess it is the dishonour of our adversary when we are stale-mated: but in life, combatting the world, such a winning of the game questions our sentiments.

Willoughby's interpretation of his discovery was directed by pity: he had no other strong emotion left in him. He pitied himself, and he reached the conclusion that he suffered because he was active; he could not be quiescent. Had it not been for his devotion to his house and name, never would he have stood twice the victim of womankind. Had he been selfish, he would have been the happiest of men! He said it aloud. He schemed benevolently for his unborn young, and for the persons about him: hence he was in a position forbidding a step under pain of injury to his feelings. He was generous: otherwise would he not in scorn of soul, at the outset, straight off have pitched Clara Middleton to the wanton winds? He was faithful in his affection: Laetitia Dale was beneath his roof to prove it. Both these women were examples of his power of forgiveness, and now a tender word to Clara might fasten shame on him—such was her gratitude! And if he did not marry Laetitia, laughter would be devilish all around him—such was the world's! Probably Vernon would not long be thankful for the chance which varied the monotony of his days. What of Horace? Willoughby stripped to enter the ring with Horace: he cast away disguise. That man had been the first to divide him in the all but equal slices of his egoistic from his amatory self: murder of his individuality was the crime of Horace De Craye. And further, suspicion fixed on Horace (he knew not how, except that The Book bids us be suspicious of those we hate) as the man who had betrayed his recent dealings with Laetitia.

Page 2978

Willoughby walked the thoroughfares of the house to meet Clara and make certain of her either for himself, or, if it must be, for Vernon, before he took another step with Laetitia Dale. Clara could reunite him, turn him once more into a whole and an animated man; and she might be willing. Her willingness to listen to Vernon promised it. "A gentleman with a tongue would have a chance", Mrs. Mountstuart had said. How much greater the chance of a lover! For he had not yet supplicated her: he had shown pride and temper. He could woo, he was a torrential wooer. And it would be glorious to swing round on Lady Busshe and the world, with Clara nestling under an arm, and protest astonishment at the erroneous and utterly unfounded anticipations of any other development. And it would righteously punish Laetitia.

Clara came downstairs, bearing her letter to Miss Darleton.

"Must it be posted?" Willoughby said, meeting her in the hall.

"They expect us any day, but it will be more comfortable for papa," was her answer. She looked kindly in her new shyness.

She did not seem to think he had treated her contemptuously in flinging her to his cousin, which was odd.

"You have seen Vernon?"

"It was your wish."

"You had a talk?"

"We conversed."

"A long one?"

"We walked some distance."

"Clara, I tried to make the best arrangement I could."

"Your intention was generous."

"He took no advantage of it?"

"It could not be treated seriously."

"It was meant seriously."

"There I see the generosity."

Willoughby thought this encomium, and her consent to speak on the subject, and her scarcely embarrassed air and richness of tone in speaking, very strange: and strange was her taking him quite in earnest. Apparently she had no feminine sensation of the unwontedness and the absurdity of the matter!

“But, Clara, am I to understand that he did not speak out?”

“We are excellent friends.”

“To miss it, though his chance were the smallest!”

“You forget that it may not wear that appearance to him.”

“He spoke not one word of himself?”

“No.”

“Ah! the poor old fellow was taught to see it was hopeless—chilled. May I plead? Will you step into the laboratory for a minute? We are two sensible persons . . .”

“Pardon me, I must go to papa.”

“Vernon’s personal history, perhaps . . .”

“I think it honourable to him.”

“Honourable!—’hem!”

“By comparison.”

“Comparison with what?”

“With others.”

He drew up to relieve himself of a critical and condemnatory expiration of a certain length. This young lady knew too much. But how physically exquisite she was!

“Could you, Clara, could you promise me—I hold to it. I must have it, I know his shy tricks—promise me to give him ultimately another chance? Is the idea repulsive to you?”

Page 2979

“It is one not to be thought of.”

“It is not repulsive?”

“Nothing could be repulsive in Mr. Whitford.”

“I have no wish to annoy you, Clara.”

“I feel bound to listen to you, Willoughby. Whatever I can do to please you, I will. It is my life-long duty.”

“Could you, Clara, could you conceive it, could you simply conceive it—give him your hand?”

“As a friend. Oh, yes.”

“In marriage.”

She paused. She, so penetrative of him when he opposed her, was hoodwinked when he softened her feelings: for the heart, though the clearest, is not the most constant instructor of the head; the heart, unlike the often obtuser head, works for itself and not for the commonwealth.

“You are so kind . . . I would do much . . .” she said.

“Would you accept him—marry him? He is poor.”

“I am not ambitious of wealth.”

“Would you marry him?”

“Marriage is not in my thoughts.”

“But could you marry him?”

Willoughby expected no. In his expectation of it he hung inflated.

She said these words: “I could engage to marry no one else.” His amazement breathed without a syllable.

He flapped his arms, resembling for the moment those birds of enormous body which attempt a rise upon their wings and achieve a hop.

“Would you engage it?” he said, content to see himself stepped on as an insect if he could but feel the agony of his false friend Horace—their common pretensions to win her were now of that comparative size.

“Oh! there can be no necessity. And an oath—no!” said Clara, inwardly shivering at a recollection.

“But you could?”

“My wish is to please you.”

“You could?”

“I said so.”

It has been known to the patriotic mountaineer of a hoary pile of winters, with little life remaining in him, but that little on fire for his country, that by the brink of the precipice he has flung himself on a young and lusty invader, dedicating himself exultingly to death if only he may score a point for his country by extinguishing in his country’s enemy the stronger man. So likewise did Willoughby, in the blow that deprived him of hope, exult in the toppling over of Horace De Craye. They perished together, but which one sublimely relished the headlong descent? And Vernon taken by Clara would be Vernon simply tolerated. And Clara taken by Vernon would be Clara previously touched, smirched. Altogether he could enjoy his fall.

It was at least upon a comfortable bed, where his pride would be dressed daily and would never be disagreeably treated.

He was henceforth Laetitia’s own. The bell telling of Dr. Corney’s return was a welcome sound to Willoughby, and he said good-humouredly: “Wait, Clara, you will see your hero Crossjay.”

Crossjay and Dr. Corney tumbled into the hall. Willoughby caught Crossjay under the arms to give him a lift in the old fashion pleasing to Clara to see. The boy was heavy as lead.

Page 2980

“I had work to hook him and worse to net him,” said Dr. Corney. “I had to make him believe he was to nurse every soul in the house, you among them, Miss Middleton.”

Willoughby pulled the boy aside.

Crossjay came back to Clara heavier in looks than his limbs had been. She dropped her letter in the hall-box, and took his hand to have a private hug of him. When they were alone, she said: “Crossjay, my dear, my dear! you look unhappy.”

“Yes, and who wouldn’t be, and you’re not to marry Sir Willoughby!” his voice threatened a cry. “I know you’re not, for Dr. Corney says you are going to leave.”

“Did you so very much wish it, Crossjay?”

“I should have seen a lot of you, and I sha’n’t see you at all, and I’m sure if I’d known I wouldn’t have—And he has been and tipped me this.”

Crossjay opened his fist in which lay three gold pieces.

“That was very kind of him,” said Clara.

“Yes, but how can I keep it?”

“By handing it to Mr. Whitford to keep for you.”

“Yes, but, Miss Middleton, oughtn’t I to tell him? I mean Sir Willoughby.”

“What?”

“Why, that I”—Crossjay got close to her—“why, that I, that I—you know what you used to say. I wouldn’t tell a lie, but oughtn’t I, without his asking . . . and this money! I don’t mind being turned out again.”

“Consult Mr. Whitford,” said Clara.

“I know what you think, though.”

“Perhaps you had better not say anything at present, dear boy.”

“But what am I to do with this money?”

Crossjay held the gold pieces out as things that had not yet mingled with his ideas of possession.

“I listened, and I told of him,” he said. “I couldn’t help listening, but I went and told; and I don’t like being here, and his money, and he not knowing what I did. Haven’t you

heard? I'm certain I know what you think, and so do I, and I must take my luck. I'm always in mischief, getting into a mess or getting out of it. I don't mind, I really don't, Miss Middleton, I can sleep in a tree quite comfortably. If you're not going to be here, I'd just as soon be anywhere. I must try to earn my living some day. And why not a cabin-boy? Sir Cloudesley Shovel was no better. And I don't mind his being wrecked at last, if you're drowned an admiral. So I shall go and ask him to take his money back, and if he asks me I shall tell him, and there. You know what it is: I guessed that from what Dr. Corney said. I'm sure I know you're thinking what's manly. Fancy me keeping his money, and you not marrying him! I wouldn't mind driving a plough. I shouldn't make a bad gamekeeper. Of course I love boats best, but you can't have everything."

"Speak to Mr. Whitford first," said Clara, too proud of the boy for growing as she had trained him, to advise a course of conduct opposed to his notions of manliness, though now that her battle was over she would gladly have acquiesced in little casuistic compromises for the sake of the general peace.

Page 2981

Some time later Vernon and Dr. Corney were arguing upon the question. Corney was dead against the sentimental view of the morality of the case propounded by Vernon as coming from Miss Middleton and partly shared by him. "If it's on the boy's mind," Vernon said, "I can't prohibit his going to Willoughby and making a clean breast of it, especially as it involves me, and sooner or later I should have to tell him myself."

Dr. Corney said no at all points. "Now hear me," he said, finally. "This is between ourselves, and no breach of confidence, which I'd not be guilty of for forty friends, though I'd give my hand from the wrist-joint for one—my left, that's to say. Sir Willoughby puts me one or two searching interrogations on a point of interest to him, his house and name. Very well, and good night to that, and I wish Miss Dale had been ten years younger, or had passed the ten with no heartrisings and sinkings wearing to the tissues of the frame and the moral fibre to boot. She'll have a fairish health, with a little occasional doctoring; taking her rank and wealth in right earnest, and shying her pen back to Mother Goose. She'll do. And, by the way, I think it's to the credit of my sagacity that I fetched Mr. Dale here fully primed, and roused the neighbourhood, which I did, and so fixed our gentleman, neat as a prodded eel on a pair of prongs—namely, the positive fact and the general knowledge of it. But, mark me, my friend. We understand one another at a nod. This boy, young Squire Crossjay, is a good stiff hearty kind of a Saxon boy, out of whom you may cut as gallant a fellow as ever wore epaulettes. I like him, you like him, Miss Dale and Miss Middleton like him; and Sir Willoughby Patterne, of Patterne Hall and other places, won't be indisposed to like him mightily in the event of the sun being seen to shine upon him with a particular determination to make him appear a prominent object, because a solitary, and a Patterne." Dr. Corney lifted his chest and his finger: "Now mark me, and verbum sap: Crossjay must not offend Sir Willoughby. I say no more. Look ahead. Miracles happen, but it's best to reckon that they won't. Well, now, and Miss Dale. She'll not be cruel."

"It appears as if she would," said Vernon, meditating on the cloudy sketch Dr. Corney had drawn.

"She can't, my friend. Her position's precarious; her father has little besides a pension. And her writing damages her health. She can't. And she likes the baronet. Oh, it's only a little fit of proud blood. She's the woman for him. She'll manage him—give him an idea he's got a lot of ideas. It'd kill her father if she were obstinate. He talked to me, when I told him of the business, about his dream fulfilled, and if the dream turns to vapour, he'll be another example that we hang more upon dreams than realities for nourishment, and medicine too. Last week I couldn't have got him out of his house with all my art and science. Oh, she'll come round. Her father prophesied this, and I'll prophesy that. She's fond of him."

Page 2982

“She was.”

“She sees through him?”

“Without quite doing justice to him now,” said Vernon. “He can be generous—in his way.”

“How?” Corney inquired, and was informed that he should hear in time to come.

Meanwhile Colonel De Craye, after hovering over the park and about the cottage for the opportunity of pouncing on Miss Middleton alone, had returned crest-fallen for once, and plumped into Willoughby’s hands.

“My dear Horace,” Willoughby said, “I’ve been looking for you all the afternoon. The fact is—I fancy you’ll think yourself lured down here on false pretences: but the truth is, I am not so much to blame as the world will suppose. In point of fact, to be brief, Miss Dale and I . . . I never consult other men how they would have acted. The fact of the matter is, Miss Middleton . . . I fancy you have partly guessed it.”

“Partly,” said De Craye.

“Well, she has a liking that way, and if it should turn out strong enough, it’s the best arrangement I can think of,” The lively play of the colonel’s features fixed in a blank inquiry.

“One can back a good friend for making a good husband,” said Willoughby. “I could not break with her in the present stage of affairs without seeing to that. And I can speak of her highly, though she and I have seen in time that we do not suit one another. My wife must have brains.”

“I have always thought it,” said Colonel De Craye, glistening, and looking hungry as a wolf through his wonderment.

“There will not be a word against her, you understand. You know my dislike of tattle and gossip. However, let it fall on me; my shoulders are broad. I have done my utmost to persuade her, and there seems a likelihood of her consenting. She tells me her wish is to please me, and this will please me.”

“Certainly. Who’s the gentleman?”

“My best friend, I tell you. I could hardly have proposed another. Allow this business to go on smoothly just now.” There was an uproar within the colonel to blind his wits, and Willoughby looked so friendly that it was possible to suppose the man of projects had mentioned his best friend to Miss Middleton.

And who was the best friend?

Not having accused himself of treachery, the quick-eyed colonel was duped.

“Have you his name handy, Willoughby?”

“That would be unfair to him at present, Horace—ask yourself—and to her. Things are in a ticklish posture at present. Don’t be hasty.”

“Certainly. I don’t ask. Initials’ll do.”

“You have a remarkable aptitude for guessing, Horace, and this case offers you no tough problem—if ever you acknowledged toughness. I have a regard for her and for him—for both pretty equally; you know I have, and I should be thoroughly thankful to bring the matter about.”

“Lordly!” said De Craye.

“I don’t see it. I call it sensible.”

Page 2983

“Oh, undoubtedly. The style, I mean. Tolerably antique?”

“Novel, I should say, and not the worse for that. We want plain practical dealings between men and women. Usually we go the wrong way to work. And I loathe sentimental rubbish.”

De Craye hummed an air. “But the lady?” said he.

“I told you, there seems a likelihood of her consenting.”

Willoughby’s fish gave a perceptible little leap now that he had been taught to exercise his aptitude for guessing.

“Without any of the customary preliminaries on the side of the gentleman?” he said.

“We must put him through his paces, friend Horace. He’s a notorious blunderer with women; hasn’t a word for them, never marked a conquest.”

De Craye crested his plumes under the agreeable banter. He presented a face humourously sceptical.

“The lady is positively not indisposed to give the poor fellow a hearing?”

“I have cause to think she is not,” said Willoughby, glad of acting the indifference to her which could talk of her inclinations.

“Cause?”

“Good cause.”

“Bless us!”

“As good as one can have with a woman.”

“Ah?”

“I assure you.”

“Ah! Does it seem like her, though?”

“Well, she wouldn’t engage herself to accept him.”

“Well, that seems more like her.”

“But she said she could engage to marry no one else.”

The colonel sprang up, crying: “Clara Middleton said it?” He curbed himself “That’s a bit of wonderful compliancy.”

“She wishes to please me. We separate on those terms. And I wish her happiness. I’ve developed a heart lately and taken to think of others.”

“Nothing better. You appear to make cock sure of the other party—our friend?”

“You know him too well, Horace, to doubt his readiness.”

“Do you, Willoughby?”

“She has money and good looks. Yes, I can say I do.”

“It wouldn’t be much of a man who’d want hard pulling to that lighted altar!”

“And if he requires persuasion, you and I, Horace, might bring him to his senses.”

“Kicking, ’t would be!”

“I like to see everybody happy about me,” said Willoughby, naming the hour as time to dress for dinner.

The sentiment he had delivered was De Craye’s excuse for grasping his hand and complimenting him; but the colonel betrayed himself by doing it with an extreme fervour almost tremulous.

“When shall we hear more?” he said.

“Oh, probably to-morrow,” said Willoughby. “Don’t be in such a hurry.”

“I’m an infant asleep!” the colonel replied, departing.

He resembled one, to Willoughby’s mind: or a traitor drugged.

“There is a fellow I thought had some brains!”

Who are not fools to beset spinning if we choose to whip them with their vanity! it is the consolation of the great to watch them spin. But the pleasure is loftier, and may comfort our unmerited misfortune for a while, in making a false friend drunk.

Page 2984

Willoughby, among his many preoccupations, had the satisfaction of seeing the effect of drunkenness on Horace De Craye when the latter was in Clara's presence. He could have laughed. Cut in keen epigram were the marginal notes added by him to that chapter of The Book which treats of friends and a woman; and had he not been profoundly preoccupied, troubled by recent intelligence communicated by the ladies, his aunts, he would have played the two together for the royal amusement afforded him by his friend Horace.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE LOVERS

The hour was close upon eleven at night. Laetitia sat in the room adjoining her father's bedchamber. Her elbow was on the table beside her chair, and two fingers pressed her temples. The state between thinking and feeling, when both are molten and flow by us, is one of our natures coming after thought has quieted the fiery nerves, and can do no more. She seemed to be meditating. She was conscious only of a struggle past.

She answered a tap at the door, and raised her eyes on Clara. Clara stepped softly. "Mr. Dale is asleep?"

"I hope so."

"Ah! dear friend."

Laetitia let her hand be pressed.

"Have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Mr. Whitford and papa have gone to the library."

"Colonel De Craye has been singing?"

"Yes—with a voice! I thought of you upstairs, but could not ask him to sing piano."

"He is probably exhilarated."

"One would suppose it: he sang well."

"You are not aware of any reason?"

"It cannot concern me."

Clara was in rosy colour, but could meet a steady gaze.

“And Crossjay has gone to bed?”

“Long since. He was at dessert. He would not touch anything.”

“He is a strange boy.”

“Not very strange, Laetitia.”

“He did not come to me to wish me good-night.”

“That is not strange.”

“It is his habit at the cottage and here; and he professes to like me.”

“Oh, he does. I may have wakened his enthusiasm, but you he loves.”

“Why do you say it is not strange, Clara?”

“He fears you a little.”

“And why should Crossjay fear me?”

“Dear, I will tell you. Last night—You will forgive him, for it was by accident: his own bed-room door was locked and he ran down to the drawing-room and curled himself up on the ottoman, and fell asleep, under that padded silken coverlet of the ladies—boots and all, I am afraid!”

Laetitia profited by this absurd allusion, thanking Clara in her heart for the refuge.

“He should have taken off his boots,” she said.

“He slept there, and woke up. Dear, he meant no harm. Next day he repeated what he had heard. You will blame him. He meant well in his poor boy’s head. And now it is over the county. Ah! do not frown.”

Page 2985

“That explains Lady Busshe!” exclaimed Laetitia.

“Dear, dear friend,” said Clara. “Why—I presume on your tenderness for me; but let me: to-morrow I go—why will you reject your happiness? Those kind good ladies are deeply troubled. They say your resolution is inflexible; you resist their entreaties and your father’s. Can it be that you have any doubt of the strength of this attachment? I have none. I have never had a doubt that it was the strongest of his feelings. If before I go I could see you . . . both happy, I should be relieved, I should rejoice.”

Laetitia said, quietly: “Do you remember a walk we had one day together to the cottage?”

Clara put up her hands with the motion of intending to stop her ears.

“Before I go!” said she. “If I might know this was to be, which all desire, before I leave, I should not feel as I do now. I long to see you happy . . . him, yes, him too. Is it like asking you to pay my debt? Then, please! But, no; I am not more than partly selfish on this occasion. He has won my gratitude. He can be really generous.”

“An Egoist?”

“Who is?”

“You have forgotten our conversation on the day of our walk to the cottage?”

“Help me to forget it—that day, and those days, and all those days! I should be glad to think I passed a time beneath the earth, and have risen again. I was the Egoist. I am sure, if I had been buried, I should not have stood up seeing myself more vilely stained, soiled, disfigured—oh! Help me to forget my conduct, Laetitia. He and I were unsuited—and I remember I blamed myself then. You and he are not: and now I can perceive the pride that can be felt in him. The worst that can be said is that he schemes too much.”

“Is there any fresh scheme?” said Laetitia.

The rose came over Clara’s face.

“You have not heard? It was impossible, but it was kindly intended. Judging by my own feeling at this moment, I can understand his. We love to see our friends established.”

Laetitia bowed. “My curiosity is piqued, of course.”

“Dear friend, to-morrow we shall be parted. I trust to be thought of by you as a little better in grain than I have appeared, and my reason for trusting it is that I know I have been always honest—a boorish young woman in my stupid mad impatience: but not

insincere. It is no lofty ambition to desire to be remembered in that character, but such is your Clara, she discovers. I will tell you. It is his wish . . . his wish that I should promise to give my hand to Mr. Whitford. You see the kindness."

Laetitia's eyes widened and fixed:

"You think it kindness?"

"The intention. He sent Mr. Whitford to me, and I was taught to expect him."

"Was that quite kind to Mr. Whitford?"

"What an impression I must have made on you during that walk to the cottage, Laetitia! I do not wonder; I was in a fever."

Page 2986

“You consented to listen?”

“I really did. It astonishes me now, but I thought I could not refuse.”

“My poor friend Vernon Whitford tried a love speech?”

“He? no: Oh! no.”

“You discouraged him?”

“I? No.”

“Gently, I mean.”

“No.”

“Surely you did not dream of trifling? He has a deep heart.”

“Has he?”

“You ask that: and you know something of him.”

“He did not expose it to me, dear; not even the surface of the mighty deep.”

Laetitia knitted her brows.

“No,” said Clara, “not a coquette: she is not a coquette, I assure you.”

With a laugh, Laetitia replied: “You have still the ‘dreadful power’ you made me feel that day.”

“I wish I could use it to good purpose!”

“He did not speak?”

“Of Switzerland, Tyrol, the Iliad, Antigone.”

“That was all?”

“No, Political Economy. Our situation, you will own, was unexampled: or mine was. Are you interested in me?”

“I should be if I knew your sentiments.”

“I was grateful to Sir Willoughby: grieved for Mr. Whitford.”

“Real grief?”

“Because the task unposed on him of showing me politely that he did not enter into his cousin’s ideas was evidently very great, extremely burdensome.”

“You, so quick-eyed in some things, Clara!”

“He felt for me. I saw that in his avoidance of. . . And he was, as he always is, pleasant. We rambled over the park for I know not how long, though it did not seem long.”

“Never touching that subject?”

“Not ever neighbouring it, dear. A gentleman should esteem the girl he would ask . . . certain questions. I fancy he has a liking for me as a volatile friend.”

“If he had offered himself?”

“Despising me?”

“You can be childish, Clara. Probably you delight to tease. He had his time of it, and it is now my turn.”

“But he must despise me a little.”

“Are you blind?”

“Perhaps, dear, we both are, a little.”

The ladies looked deeper into one another.

“Will you answer me?” said Laetitia.

“Your if? If he had, it would have been an act of condescension.”

“You are too slippery.”

“Stay, dear Laetitia. He was considerate in forbearing to pain me.”

“That is an answer. You allowed him to perceive that it would have pained you.”

“Dearest, if I may convey to you what I was, in a simile for comparison: I think I was like a fisherman’s float on the water, perfectly still, and ready to go down at any instant, or up. So much for my behaviour.”

“Similes have the merit of satisfying the finder of them, and cheating the hearer,” said Laetitia. “You admit that your feelings would have been painful.”

“I was a fisherman’s float: please admire my simile; any way you like, this way or that, or so quiet as to tempt the eyes to go to sleep. And suddenly I might have disappeared in the depths, or flown in the air. But no fish bit.”

Page 2987

“Well, then, to follow you, supposing the fish or the fisherman, for I don’t know which is which . . . Oh! no, no: this is too serious for imagery. I am to understand that you thanked him at least for his reserve.”

“Yes.”

“Without the slightest encouragement to him to break it?”

“A fisherman’s float, Laetitia!”

Baffled and sighing, Laetitia kept silence for a space. The simile chafed her wits with a suspicion of a meaning hidden in it.

“If he had spoken?” she said.

“He is too truthful a man.”

“And the railings of men at pussy women who wind about and will not be brought to a mark, become intelligible to me.”

“Then Laetitia, if he had spoken, if, and one could have imagined him sincere . . .”

“So truthful a man?”

“I am looking at myself If!—why, then, I should have burnt to death with shame. Where have I read?—some story—of an inextinguishable spark. That would have been shot into my heart.”

“Shame, Clara? You are free.”

“As much as remains of me.”

“I could imagine a certain shame, in such a position, where there was no feeling but pride.”

“I could not imagine it where there was no feeling but pride.”

Laetitia mused. “And you dwell on the kindness of a proposition so extraordinary!” Gaining some light, impatiently she cried: “Vernon loves you.”

“Do not say it!”

“I have seen it.”

“I have never had a sign of it.”

“There is the proof.”

“When it might have been shown again and again!”

“The greater proof!”

“Why did he not speak when he was privileged?—strangely, but privileged.”

“He feared.”

“Me?”

“Feared to wound you—and himself as well, possibly. Men may be pardoned for thinking of themselves in these cases.”

“But why should he fear?”

“That another was dearer to you?”

“What cause had I given . . . Ah I see! He could fear that; suspect it! See his opinion of me! Can he care for such a girl? Abuse me, Laetitia. I should like a good round of abuse. I need purification by fire. What have I been in this house? I have a sense of whirling through it like a madwoman. And to be loved, after it all!—No! we must be hearing a tale of an antiquary prizing a battered relic of the battle-field that no one else would look at. To be loved, I see, is to feel our littleness, hollowness—feel shame. We come out in all our spots. Never to have given me one sign, when a lover would have been so tempted! Let me be incredulous, my own dear Laetitia. Because he is a man of honour, you would say! But are you unconscious of the torture you inflict? For if I am —you say it—loved by this gentleman, what an object it is he loves—that has gone clamouring about more immodestly than women will bear to hear of, and she herself to think of! Oh, I have seen my own heart. It is a frightful spectre. I have seen a weakness in me that would have carried me anywhere. And truly I shall be charitable to women—I have gained that. But loved! by Vernon Whitford! The miserable little me to be taken up and loved after tearing myself to pieces! Have you been simply speculating? You have no positive knowledge of it! Why do you kiss me?”

Page 2988

“Why do you tremble and blush so?”

Clara looked at her as clearly as she could. She bowed her head. “It makes my conduct worse!”

She received a tenderer kiss for that. It was her avowal, and it was understood: to know that she had loved or had been ready to love him, shadowed her in the retrospect.

“Ah! you read me through and through,” said Clara, sliding to her for a whole embrace.

“Then there never was cause for him to fear?” Laetitia whispered.

Clara slid her head more out of sight. “Not that my heart . . . But I said I have seen it; and it is unworthy of him. And if, as I think now, I could have been so rash, so weak, wicked, unpardonable—such thoughts were in me!—then to hear him speak would make it necessary for me to uncover myself and tell him—incredible to you, yes!—that while . . . yes, Laetitia, all this is true: and thinking of him as the noblest of men, I could have welcomed any help to cut my knot. So there,” said Clara, issuing from her nest with winking eyelids, “you see the pain I mentioned.”

“Why did you not explain it to me at once?”

“Dearest, I wanted a century to pass.”

“And you feel that it has passed?”

“Yes; in Purgatory—with an angel by me. My report of the place will be favourable. Good angel, I have yet to say something.”

“Say it, and expiate.”

“I think I did fancy once or twice, very dimly, and especially to-day . . . properly I ought not to have had any idea: but his coming to me, and his not doing as another would have done, seemed . . . A gentleman of real nobleness does not carry the common light for us to read him by. I wanted his voice; but silence, I think, did tell me more: if a nature like mine could only have had faith without bearing the rattle of a tongue.”

A knock at the door caused the ladies to exchange looks. Laetitia rose as Vernon entered.

“I am just going to my father for a few minutes,” she said.

“And I have just come from yours.” Vernon said to Clara. She observed a very threatening expression in him. The sprite of contrariety mounted to her brain to

indemnify her for her recent self-abasement. Seeing the bedroom door shut on Laetitia, she said: “And of course papa has gone to bed”; implying, “otherwise . . .”

“Yes, he has gone. He wished me well.”

“His formula of good-night would embrace that wish.”

“And failing, it will be good-night for good to me!”

Clara’s breathing gave a little leap. “We leave early tomorrow.”

“I know. I have an appointment at Bregenz for June.”

“So soon? With papa?”

“And from there we break into Tyrol, and round away to the right, Southward.”

“To the Italian Alps! And was it assumed that I should be of this expedition?”

“Your father speaks dubiously.”

“You have spoken of me, then?”

Page 2989

“I ventured to speak of you. I am not over-bold, as you know.”

Her lovely eyes troubled the lids to hide their softness.

“Papa should not think of my presence with him dubiously.”

“He leaves it to you to decide.”

“Yes, then: many times: all that can be uttered.”

“Do you consider what you are saying?”

“Mr. Whitford, I shut my eyes and say Yes.”

“Beware. I give you one warning. If you shut your eyes . . .”

“Of course,” she flew from him, “big mountains must be satisfied with my admiration at their feet.”

“That will do for a beginning.”

“They speak encouragingly.”

“One of them.” Vernon’s breast heaved high.

“To be at your feet makes a mountain of you?” said she.

“With the heart of a mouse if that satisfies me!”

“You tower too high; you are inaccessible.”

“I give you a second warning. You may be seized and lifted.”

“Some one would stoop, then.”

“To plant you like the flag on the conquered peak!”

“You have indeed been talking to papa, Mr. Whitford.”

Vernon changed his tone.

“Shall I tell you what he said?”

“I know his language so well.”

“He said—”

“But you have acted on it?”

“Only partly. He said—”

“You will teach me nothing.”

“He said . . .”

“Vernon, no! oh! not in this house!”

That supplication coupled with his name confessed the end to which her quick vision perceived she was being led, where she would succumb.

She revived the same shrinking in him from a breath of their great word yet: not here; somewhere in the shadow of the mountains.

But he was sure of her. And their hands might join. The two hands thought so, or did not think, behaved like innocents.

The spirit of Dr. Middleton, as Clara felt, had been blown into Vernon, rewarding him for forthright outspeaking. Over their books, Vernon had abruptly shut up a volume and related the tale of the house. “Has this man a spice of religion in him?” the Rev. Doctor asked midway. Vernon made out a fair general case for his cousin in that respect. “The complemental dot on his i of a commonly civilized human creature!” said Dr. Middleton, looking at his watch and finding it too late to leave the house before morning. The risky communication was to come. Vernon was proceeding with the narrative of Willoughby’s generous plan when Dr. Middleton electrified him by calling out: “He whom of all men living I should desire my daughter to espouse!” and Willoughby rose in the Rev. Doctor’s esteem: he praised that sensibly minded gentleman, who could acquiesce in the turn of mood of a little maid, albeit Fortune had withheld from him a taste of the switch at school. The father of the little maid’s appreciation of her volatility was exhibited in his

Page 2990

exhortation to Vernon to be off to her at once with his authority to finish her moods and assure him of peace in the morning. Vernon hesitated. Dr. Middleton remarked upon being not so sure that it was not he who had done the mischief. Thereupon Vernon, to prove his honesty, made his own story bare. “Go to her,” said Dr. Middleton. Vernon proposed a meeting in Switzerland, to which Dr. Middleton assented, adding: “Go to her”: and as he appeared a total stranger to the decorum of the situation, Vernon put his delicacy aside, and taking his heart up, obeyed. He too had pondered on Clara’s consent to meet him after she knew of Willoughby’s terms, and her grave sweet manner during the ramble over the park. Her father’s breath had been blown into him; so now, with nothing but the faith lying in sensation to convince him of his happy fortune (and how unconvincing that may be until the mind has grasped and stamped it, we experience even then when we acknowledge that we are most blessed), he held her hand. And if it was hard for him, for both, but harder for the man, to restrain their particular word from a flight to heaven when the cage stood open and nature beckoned, he was practised in self-mastery, and she loved him the more.

Laetitia was a witness of their union of hands on her coming back to the room.

They promised to visit her very early in the morning, neither of them conceiving that they left her to a night of storm and tears.

She sat meditating on Clara’s present appreciation of Sir Willoughby’s generosity.

CHAPTER XLIX

LAETITIA AND SIR WILLOUGHBY

We cannot be abettors of the tribes of imps whose revelry is in the frailties of our poor human constitution. They have their place and their service, and so long as we continue to be what we are now, they will hang on to us, restlessly plucking at the garments which cover our nakedness, nor ever ceasing to twitch them and strain at them until they have stripped us for one of their horrible Walpurgis nights: when the laughter heard is of a character to render laughter frightful to the ears of men throughout the remainder of their days. But if in these festival hours under the beam of Hecate they are uncontrollable by the Comic Muse, she will not flatter them with her presence during the course of their insane and impious hilarities, whereof a description would out-Brocken Brockens and make Graymalkin and Paddock too intimately our familiars.

It shall suffice to say that from hour to hour of the midnight to the grey-eyed morn, assisted at intervals by the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, and by Mr. Dale awakened and re-awakened—hearing the vehemence of his petitioning outcry to soften her obduracy—Sir Willoughby pursued Laetitia with solicitations to espouse him, until the inveteracy

of his wooing wore the aspect of the life-long love he raved of aroused to a state of mania. He appeared, he departed,

Page 2991

he returned; and all the while his imps were about him and upon him, riding him, prompting, driving, inspiring him with outrageous pathos, an eloquence to move any one but the dead, which its object seemed to be in her torpid attention. He heard them, he talked to them, caressed them; he flung them off, and ran from them, and stood vanquished for them to mount him again and swarm on him. There are men thus imp-haunted. Men who, setting their minds upon an object, must have it, breed imps. They are noted for their singularities, as their converse with the invisible and amazing distractions are called. Willoughby became aware of them that night. He said to himself, upon one of his dashes into solitude: I believe I am possessed! And if he did not actually believe it, but only suspected it, or framed speech to account for the transformation he had undergone into a desperately beseeching creature, having lost acquaintance with his habitual personality, the operations of an impish host had undoubtedly smitten his consciousness.

He had them in his brain: for while burning with an ardour for Laetitia, that incited him to frantic excesses of language and comportment, he was aware of shouts of the names of Lady Busshe and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, the which, freezing him as they did, were directly the cause of his hurrying to a wilder extravagance and more headlong determination to subdue before break of day the woman he almost dreaded to behold by daylight, though he had now passionately persuaded himself of his love of her. He could not, he felt, stand in the daylight without her. She was his morning. She was, he raved, his predestinated wife. He cried, “Darling!” both to her and to solitude. Every prescription of his ideal of demeanour as an example to his class and country, was abandoned by the enamoured gentleman. He had lost command of his countenance. He stooped so far as to kneel, and not gracefully. Nay, it is in the chronicles of the invisible host around him, that in a fit of supplication, upon a cry of “Laetitia!” twice repeated, he whimpered.

Let so much suffice. And indeed not without reason do the multitudes of the servants of the Muse in this land of social policy avoid scenes of an inordinate wantonness, which detract from the dignity of our leaders and menace human nature with confusion. Sagacious are they who conduct the individual on broad lines, over familiar tracks, under well-known characteristics. What men will do, and amorously minded men will do, is less the question than what it is politic they should be shown to do.

The night wore through. Laetitia was bent, but had not yielded. She had been obliged to say—and how many times she could not bear to recollect: “I do not love you; I have no love to give”; and issuing from such a night to look again upon the face of day, she scarcely felt that she was alive.

The contest was renewed by her father with the singing of the birds. Mr. Dale then produced the first serious impression she had received. He spoke of their circumstances, of his being taken from her and leaving her to poverty, in weak health; of

the injury done to her health by writing for bread; and of the oppressive weight he would be relieved of by her consenting.

Page 2992

He no longer implored her; he put the case on common ground.

And he wound up: “Pray do not be ruthless, my girl.”

The practical statement, and this adjuration incongruously to conclude it, harmonized with her disordered understanding, her loss of all sentiment and her desire to be kind. She sighed to herself. “Happily, it is over!”

Her father was too weak to rise. He fell asleep. She was bound down to the house for hours; and she walked through her suite, here at the doors, there at the windows, thinking of Clara’s remark “of a century passing”. She had not wished it, but a light had come on her to show her what she would have supposed a century could not have effected: she saw the impossible of overnight a possible thing: not desireable, yet possible, wearing the features of the possible. Happily, she had resisted too firmly to be again besought.

Those features of the possible once beheld allured the mind to reconsider them. Wealth gives us the power to do good on earth. Wealth enables us to see the world, the beautiful scenes of the earth. Laetitia had long thirsted both for a dowering money-bag at her girdle, and the wings to fly abroad over lands which had begun to seem fabulous in her starved imagination. Then, moreover, if her sentiment for this gentleman was gone, it was only a delusion gone; accurate sight and knowledge of him would not make a woman the less helpful mate. That was the mate he required: and he could be led. A sentimental attachment would have been serviceless to him. Not so the woman allied by a purely rational bond: and he wanted guiding. Happily, she had told him too much of her feeble health and her lovelessness to be reduced to submit to another attack.

She busied herself in her room, arranging for her departure, so that no minutes might be lost after her father had breakfasted and dressed.

Clara was her earliest visitor, and each asked the other whether she had slept, and took the answer from the face presented to her. The rings of Laetitia’s eyes were very dark. Clara was her mirror, and she said: “A singular object to be persecuted through a night for her hand! I know these two damp dead leaves I wear on my cheeks to remind me of midnight vigils. But you have slept well, Clara.”

“I have slept well, and yet I could say I have not slept at all, Laetitia. I was with you, dear, part in dream and part in thought: hoping to find you sensible before I go.”

“Sensible. That is the word for me.”

Laetitia briefly sketched the history of the night; and Clara said, with a manifest sincerity that testified of her gratitude to Sir Willoughby: “Could you resist him, so earnest as he is?” Laetitia saw the human nature, without sourness: and replied, “I hope, Clara, you

will not begin with a large stock of sentiment, for there is nothing like it for making you hard, matter-of-fact, worldly, calculating.”

Page 2993

The next visitor was Vernon, exceedingly anxious for news of Mr. Dale. Laetitia went into her father's room to obtain it for him. Returning, she found them both with sad visages, and she ventured, in alarm for them, to ask the cause.

"It's this," Vernon said: "Willoughby will everlastingly tease that boy to be loved by him. Perhaps, poor fellow, he had an excuse last night. Anyhow, he went into Crossjay's room this morning, woke him up and talked to him, and set the lad crying, and what with one thing and another Crossjay got a berry in his throat, as he calls it, and poured out everything he knew and all he had done. I needn't tell you the consequence. He has ruined himself here for good, so I must take him."

Vernon glanced at Clara. "You must indeed," said she. "He is my boy as well as yours. No chance of pardon?"

"It's not likely."

"Laetitia!"

"What can I do?"

"Oh! what can you not do?"

"I do not know."

"Teach him to forgive!"

Laetitia's brows were heavy and Clara forbore to torment her.

She would not descend to the family breakfast-table. Clara would fain have stayed to drink tea with her in her own room, but a last act of conformity was demanded of the liberated young lady. She promised to run up the moment breakfast was over. Not unnaturally, therefore, Laetitia supposed it to be she to whom she gave admission, half an hour later, with a glad cry of, "Come in, dear."

The knock had sounded like Clara's.

Sir Willoughby entered.

He stepped forward. He seized her hands. "Dear!" he said.

"You cannot withdraw that. You call me dear. I am, I must be dear to you. The word is out, by accident or not, but, by heaven, I have it and I give it up to no one. And love me or not—marry me, and my love will bring it back to you. You have taught me I am not so strong. I must have you by my side. You have powers I did not credit you with."

“You are mistaken in me, Sir Willoughby.” Laetitia said feebly, outworn as she was.

“A woman who can resist me by declining to be my wife, through a whole night of entreaty, has the quality I need for my house, and I will batter at her ears for months, with as little rest as I had last night, before I surrender my chance of her. But I told you last night I want you within the twelve hours. I have staked my pride on it. By noon you are mine: you are introduced to Mrs. Mountstuart as mine, as the lady of my life and house. And to the world! I shall not let you go.”

“You will not detain me here, Sir Willoughby?”

“I will detain you. I will use force and guile. I will spare nothing.”

He raved for a term, as he had done overnight.

On his growing rather breathless, Laetitia said: “You do not ask me for love?”

“I do not. I pay you the higher compliment of asking for you, love or no love. My love shall be enough. Reward me or not. I am not used to be denied.”

Page 2994

“But do you know what you ask for? Do you remember what I told you of myself? I am hard, materialistic; I have lost faith in romance, the skeleton is present with me all over life. And my health is not good. I crave for money. I should marry to be rich. I should not worship you. I should be a burden, barely a living one, irresponsive and cold. Conceive such a wife, Sir Willoughby!”

“It will be you!”

She tried to recall how this would have sung in her cars long back. Her bosom rose and fell in absolute dejection. Her ammunition of arguments against him had been expended overnight.

“You are so unforgiving,” she said.

“Is it I who am?”

“You do not know me.”

“But you are the woman of all the world who knows me, Laetitia.”

“Can you think it better for you to be known?”

He was about to say other words: he checked them. “I believe I do not know myself. Anything you will, only give me your hand; give it; trust to me; you shall direct me. If I have faults, help me to obliterate them.”

“Will you not expect me to regard them as the virtues of meaner men?”

“You will be my wife!”

Laetitia broke from him, crying: “Your wife, your critic! Oh, I cannot think it possible. Send for the ladies. Let them hear me.”

“They are at hand,” said Willoughby, opening the door.

They were in one of the upper rooms anxiously on the watch.

“Dear ladies,” Laetitia said to them, as they entered. “I am going to wound you, and I grieve to do it: but rather now than later, if I am to be your housemate. He asks me for a hand that cannot carry a heart, because mine is dead. I repeat it. I used to think the heart a woman’s marriage portion for her husband. I see now that she may consent, and he accept her, without one. But it is right that you should know what I am when I consent. I was once a foolish, romantic girl; now I am a sickly woman, all illusions vanished. Privation has made me what an abounding fortune usually makes of others —I am an Egoist. I am not deceiving you. That is my real character. My girl’s view of

him has entirely changed; and I am almost indifferent to the change. I can endeavour to respect him, I cannot venerate."

"Dear child!" the ladies gently remonstrated.

Willoughby motioned to them.

"If we are to live together, and I could very happily live with you," Laetitia continued to address them, "you must not be ignorant of me. And if you, as I imagine, worship him blindly, I do not know how we are to live together. And never shall you quit this house to make way for me. I have a hard detective eye. I see many faults."

"Have we not all of us faults, dear child?"

"Not such as he has; though the excuses of a gentleman nurtured in idolatry may be pleaded. But he should know that they are seen, and seen by her he asks to be his wife, that no misunderstanding may exist, and while it is yet time he may consult his feelings. He worships himself."

Page 2995

“Willoughby?”

“He is vindictive!”

“Our Willoughby?”

“That is not your opinion, ladies. It is firmly mine. Time has taught it me. So, if you and I are at such variance, how can we live together? It is an impossibility.”

They looked at Willoughby. He nodded imperiously.

“We have never affirmed that our dear nephew is devoid of faults, if he is offended . . . And supposing he claims to be foremost, is it not his rightful claim, made good by much generosity? Reflect, dear Laetitia. We are your friends too.”

She could not chastise the kind ladies any further.

“You have always been my good friends.”

“And you have no other charge against him?”

Laetitia was milder in saying, “He is unpardoning.”

“Name one instance, Laetitia.”

“He has turned Crossjay out of his house, interdicting the poor boy ever to enter it again.”

“Crossjay,” said Willoughby, “was guilty of a piece of infamous treachery.”

“Which is the cause of your persecuting me to become your wife!”

There was a cry of “Persecuting!”

“No young fellow behaving so basely can come to good,” said Willoughby, stained about the face with flecks of redness at the lashings he received.

“Honestly,” she retorted. “He told of himself: and he must have anticipated the punishment he would meet. He should have been studying with a master for his profession. He has been kept here in comparative idleness to be alternately petted and discarded: no one but Vernon Whitford, a poor gentleman doomed to struggle for a livelihood by literature—I know something of that struggle—too much for me!—no one but Mr. Whitford for his friend.”

“Crossjay is forgiven,” said Willoughby.

“You promise me that?”

“He shall be packed off to a crammer at once.”

“But my home must be Crossjay’s home.”

“You are mistress of my house, Laetitia.”

She hesitated. Her eyelashes grew moist. “You can be generous.”

“He is, dear child!” the ladies cried. “He is. Forget his errors, in his generosity, as we do.”

“There is that wretched man Flitch.”

“That sot has gone about the county for years to get me a bad character,” said Willoughby.

“It would have been generous in you to have offered him another chance. He has children.”

“Nine. And I am responsible for them?”

“I speak of being generous.”

“Dictate.” Willoughby spread out his arms.

“Surely now you should be satisfied, Laetitia?” said the ladies.

“Is he?”

Willoughby perceived Mrs. Mountstuart’s carriage coming down the avenue.

“To the full.” He presented his hand.

She raised hers with the fingers catching back before she ceased to speak and dropped it:—

“Ladies. You are witnesses that there is no concealment, there has been no reserve, on my part. May Heaven grant me kinder eyes than I have now. I would not have you change your opinion of him; only that you should see how I read him. For the rest, I vow to do my duty by him. Whatever is of worth in me is at his service. I am very tired. I feel I must yield or break. This is his wish, and I submit.”

Page 2996

“And I salute my wife,” said Willoughby, making her hand his own, and warming to his possession as he performed the act.

Mrs. Mountstuart’s indecent hurry to be at the Hall before the departure of Dr. Middleton and his daughter, afflicted him with visions of the physical contrast which would be sharply perceptible to her this morning of his Laetitia beside Clara.

But he had the lady with brains! He had: and he was to learn the nature of that possession in the woman who is our wife.

CHAPTER L

UPON WHICH THE CURTAIN FALLS

“Plain sense upon the marriage question is my demand upon man and woman, for the stopping of many a tragedy.”

These were Dr. Middleton’s words in reply to Willoughby’s brief explanation.

He did not say that he had shown it parentally while the tragedy was threatening, or at least there was danger of a precipitate descent from the levels of comedy. The parents of hymeneal men and women he was indisposed to consider as dramatis personae. Nor did he mention certain sympathetic regrets he entertained in contemplation of the health of Mr. Dale, for whom, poor gentleman, the proffer of a bottle of the Patterne Port would be an egregious mockery. He paced about, anxious for his departure, and seeming better pleased with the society of Colonel De Craye than with that of any of the others. Colonel De Craye assiduously courted him, was anecdotal, deferential, charmingly vivacious, the very man the Rev. Doctor liked for company when plunged in the bustle of the preliminaries to a journey.

“You would be a cheerful travelling comrade, sir,” he remarked, and spoke of his doom to lead his daughter over the Alps and Alpine lakes for the Summer months.

Strange to tell, the Alps, for the Summer months, was a settled project of the colonel’s.

And thence Dr. Middleton was to be hauled along to the habitable quarters of North Italy in high Summer-tide.

That also had been traced for a route on the map of Colonel De Craye.

“We are started in June, I am informed,” said Dr. Middleton.

June, by miracle, was the month the colonel had fixed upon.

“I trust we shall meet, sir,” said he.

“I would gladly reckon it in my catalogue of pleasures,” the Rev. Doctor responded; “for in good sooth it is conjecturable that I shall be left very much alone.”

“Paris, Strasburg, Basle?” the colonel inquired.

“The Lake of Constance, I am told,” said Dr. Middleton. Colonel De Craye spied eagerly for an opportunity of exchanging a pair of syllables with the third and fairest party of this glorious expedition to come.

Page 2997

Willoughby met him, and rewarded the colonel's frankness in stating that he was on the look-out for Miss Middleton to take his leave of her, by furnishing him the occasion. He conducted his friend Horace to the Blue Room, where Clara and Laetitia were seated circling a half embrace with a brook of chatter, and contrived an excuse for leading Laetitia forth. Some minutes later Mrs. Mountstuart called aloud for the colonel, to drive him away. Willoughby, whose good offices were unabated by the services he performed to each in rotation, ushered her into the Blue Room, hearing her say, as she stood at the entrance: "Is the man coming to spend a day with me with a face like that?"

She was met and detained by Clara.

De Craye came out.

"What are you thinking of?" said Willoughby.

"I was thinking," said the colonel, "of developing a heart, like you, and taking to think of others."

"At last!"

"Ay, you're a true friend, Willoughby, a true friend. And a cousin to boot!"

"What! has Clara been communicative?"

"The itinerary of a voyage Miss Middleton is going to make."

"Do you join them?"

"Why, it would be delightful, Willoughby, but it happens I've got a lot of powder I want to let off, and so I've an idea of shouldering my gun along the sea-coast and shooting gulls: which'll be a harmless form of committing patricide and matricide and fratricide—-for there's my family, and I come of it!—the gull! And I've to talk lively to Mrs. Mountstuart for something like a matter of twelve hours, calculating that she goes to bed at midnight: and I wouldn't bet on it; such is the energy of ladies of that age!"

Willoughby scorned the man who could not conceal a blow, even though he joked over his discomfiture.

"Gull!" he muttered.

"A bird that's easy to be had, and better for stuffing than for eating," said De Craye. "You'll miss your cousin."

"I have," replied Willoughby, "one fully equal to supplying his place."

There was confusion in the hall for a time, and an assembly of the household to witness the departure of Dr. Middleton and his daughter. Vernon had been driven off by Dr. Corney, who further recommended rest for Mr. Dale, and promised to keep an eye for Crossjay along the road.

“I think you will find him at the station, and if you do, command him to come straight back here,” Laetitia said to Clara. The answer was an affectionate squeeze, and Clara’s hand was extended to Willoughby, who bowed over it with perfect courtesy, bidding her adieu.

So the knot was cut. And the next carriage to Dr. Middleton’s was Mrs. Mountstuart’s, conveying the great lady and Colonel De Craye.

“I beg you not to wear that face with me,” she said to him.

“I have had to dissemble, which I hate, and I have quite enough to endure, and I must be amused, or I shall run away from you and enlist that little countryman of yours, and him I can count on to be professionally restorative. Who can fathom the heart of a girl! Here is Lady Busshe right once more! And I was wrong. She must be a gambler by nature. I never should have risked such a guess as that. Colonel De Craye, you lengthen your face preternaturally, you distort it purposely.”

Page 2998

“Ma’am,” returned De Craye, “the boast of our army is never to know when we are beaten, and that tells of a great-hearted soldiery. But there’s a field where the Briton must own his defeat, whether smiling or crying, and I’m not so sure that a short howl doesn’t do him honour.”

“She was, I am certain, in love with Vernon Whitford all along. Colonel De Craye!”

“Ah!” the colonel drank it in. “I have learnt that it was not the gentleman in whom I am chiefly interested. So it was not so hard for the lady to vow to friend Willoughby she would marry no one else?”

“Girls are unfathomable! And Lady Busshe—I know she did not go by character—shot one of her random guesses, and she triumphs. We shall never hear the last of it. And I had all the opportunities. I’m bound to confess I had.”

“Did you by chance, ma’am,” De Craye said, with a twinkle, “drop a hint to Willoughby of her turn for Vernon Whitford?”

“No,” said Mrs. Mountstuart, “I’m not a mischief-maker; and the policy of the county is to keep him in love with himself, or Patterne will be likely to be as dull as it was without a lady enthroned. When his pride is at ease he is a prince. I can read men. Now, Colonel De Craye, pray, be lively.”

“I should have been livelier, I’m afraid, if you had dropped a bit of a hint to Willoughby. But you’re the magnanimous person, ma’am, and revenge for a stroke in the game of love shows us unworthy to win.”

Mrs. Mountstuart menaced him with her parasol. “I forbid sentiments, Colonel De Craye. They are always followed by sighs.”

“Grant me five minutes of inward retirement, and I’ll come out formed for your commands, ma’am,” said he.

Before the termination of that space De Craye was enchanting Mrs. Mountstuart, and she in consequence was restored to her natural wit.

So, and much so universally, the world of his dread and his unconscious worship wagged over Sir Willoughby Patterne and his change of brides, until the preparations for the festivities of the marriage flushed him in his county’s eyes to something of the splendid glow he had worn on the great day of his majority. That was upon the season when two lovers met between the Swiss and Tyrol Alps over the Lake of Constance. Sitting beside them the Comic Muse is grave and sisterly. But taking a glance at the others of her late company of actors, she compresses her lips.

THE TRAGIC COMEDIANS

A STUDY IN A WELL-KNOWN STORY

By George Meredith

1892

BOOK 1.

The word ‘fantastical’ is accentuated in our tongue to so scornful an utterance that the constant good service it does would make it seem an appointed instrument for reviewers of books of imaginative matter distasteful to those expository pens. Upon examination, claimants to the epithet will be found outside of books and of poets, in many quarters, Nature being one of the prominent, if not the foremost. Wherever she can get to drink her fill of sunlight she pushes forth fantastically. As for that wandering ship of the drunken pilot, the mutinous crew and the angry captain, called Human Nature, ‘fantastical’ fits it no less completely than a continental baby’s skull-cap the stormy infant.

Page 2999

Our sympathies, one may fancy, will be broader, our critical acumen shrewder, if we at once accept the thing as a part of us and worthy of study.

The pair of tragic comedians of whom there will be question pass under this word as under their banner and motto. Their acts are incredible: they drank sunlight and drove their bark in a manner to eclipse historical couples upon our planet. Yet they do belong to history, they breathed the stouter air than fiction's, the last chapter of them is written in red blood, and the man pouring out that last chapter, was of a mighty nature not unheroical, a man of the active grappling modern brain which wrestles with facts, to keep the world alive, and can create them, to set it spinning.

A Faust-like legend might spring from him: he had a devil. He was the leader of a host, the hope of a party, venerated by his followers, well hated by his enemies, respected by the intellectual chiefs of his time, in the pride of his manhood and his labours when he fell. And why this man should have come to his end through love, and the woman who loved him have laid her hand in the hand of the slayer, is the problem we have to study, nothing inventing, in the spirit and flesh of both. To ask if it was love is useless. Love may be celestial fire before it enters into the systems of mortals. It will then take the character of its place of abode, and we have to look not so much for the pure thing as for the passion. Did it move them, hurry them, animating the giants and gnomes of one, the elves and sprites of the other, and putting animal nature out of its fashionable front rank? The bare railway-line of their story tells of a passion honest enough to entitle it to be related. Nor is there anything invented, because an addition of fictitious incidents could never tell us how she came to do this, he to do that; or how the comic in their natures led by interplay to the tragic issue. They are real creatures, exquisitely fantastical, strangely exposed to the world by a lurid catastrophe, who teach us, that fiction, if it can imagine events and persons more agreeable to the taste it has educated, can read us no such furrowing lesson in life.

THE TRAGIC COMEDIANS

CHAPTER I

An unresisted lady-killer is probably less aware that he roams the pastures in pursuit of a coquette, than is the diligent Arachne that her web is for the devouring lion. At an early age Clotilde von Rudiger was dissatisfied with her conquests, though they were already numerous in her seventeenth year, for she began precociously, having at her dawn a lively fancy, a womanly person, and singular attractions of colour, eyes, and style. She belonged by birth to the small aristocracy of her native land. Nature had disposed her to coquettry, which is a pastime counting among the arts of fence, and often innocent, often serviceable, though sometimes

Page 3000

dangerous, in the centres of polished barbarism known as aristocratic societies, where nature is not absent, but on the contrary very extravagant, tropical, by reason of her idle hours for the imbibing of copious draughts of sunlight. The young lady of charming countenance and sprightly manners is too much besought to choose for her choice to be decided; the numbers beseeching prevent her from choosing instantly, after the fashion of holiday schoolboys crowding a buffet of pastry. These are not coquettish, they clutch what is handy: and little so is the starved damsel of the sequestered village, whose one object of the worldly picturesque is the passing curate; her heart is his for a nod. But to be desired ardently of trooping hosts is an incentive to taste to try for yourself. Men (the jury of householders empanelled to deliver verdicts upon the ways of women) can almost understand that. And as it happens, tasting before you have sounded the sense of your taste will frequently mislead by a step or two difficult to retrieve: the young coquette must then be cruel, as necessarily we kick the waters to escape drowning: and she is not in all cases dealing with simple blocks or limp festoons, she comes upon veteran tricksters that have a knowledge of her sex, capable of outfencing her nascent individuality. The more imagination she has, for a source of strength in the future days, the more is she a prey to the enemy in her time of ignorance.

Clotilde's younger maiden hours and their love episodes are wrapped in the mists Diana considerately drops over her adventurous favourites. She was not under a French mother's rigid supervision. In France the mother resolves that her daughter shall be guarded from the risks of that unequal rencounter between foolish innocence and the predatory. Vigilant foresight is not so much practised where the world is less accurately comprehended. Young people of Clotilde's upper world everywhere, and the young women of it especially, are troubled by an idea drawn from what they inhale and guess at in the spirituous life surrounding them, that the servants of the devil are the valiant host, this world's elect, getting and deserving to get the best it can give in return for a little dashing audacity, a flavour of the Fronde in their conduct; they sin, but they have the world; and then they repent perhaps, but they have had the world. The world is the golden apple. Thirst for it is common during youth: and one would think the French mother worthy of the crown of wisdom if she were not so scrupulously provident in excluding love from the calculations on behalf of her girl.

Page 3001

Say (for Diana's mists are impenetrable and freeze curiosity) that Clotilde was walking with Count Constantine, the brilliant Tartar trained in Paris, when first she met Prince Marko Romaris, at the Hungarian Baths on the borders of the Styrian highlands. The scene at all events is pretty, and weaves a fable out of a variety of floating threads. A stranger to the Baths, dressed in white and scarlet, sprang from his carriage into a group of musical gypsies round an inn at the arch of the chestnut avenue, after pulling up to listen to them for a while. The music had seized him. He snatched bow and fiddle from one of the ring, and with a few strokes kindled their faces. Then seating himself, on a bench he laid the fiddle on his knee, and pinched the strings and flung up his voice, not ceasing to roll out the spontaneous notes when Clotilde and her cavalier, and other couples of the party, came nigh; for he was on the tide of the song, warm in it, and loved it too well to suffer intruders to break the flow, or to think of them. They were close by when the last of it rattled (it was a popular song of a fiery tribe) to its finish: He rose and saluted Clotilde, smiled and jumped back to his carriage, sending a cry of adieu to the swarthy, lank-locked, leather-hued circle, of which his dark oriental eyes and skin of burnished walnut made him look an offshoot, but one of the celestial branch.

He was in her father's reception-room when she reached home: he was paying a visit of ceremony on behalf of his family to General von Rudiger; which helped her to remember that he had been expected, and also that his favourite colours were known to be white and scarlet. In those very colours, strange to tell, Clotilde was dressed; Prince Marko had recognized her by miraculous divination, he assured her he could have staked his life on the guess as he bowed to her. Adieu to Count Constantine. Fate had interposed the prince opportunely, we have to suppose, for she received a strong impression of his coming straight from her invisible guardian; and the stroke was consequently trenchant which sent the conquering Tartar raving of her fickleness. She struck, like fate, one blow. She discovered that the prince, in addition to his beauty and sweet manners and gift of song, was good; she fell in love with goodness, whereof Count Constantine was not an example: so she set her face another way, soon discovering that there may be fragility in goodness. And now first her imagination conceived the hero who was to subdue her. Could Prince Marko be he, soft as he was, pliable, a docile infant, burning to please her, enraptured in obeying?—the hero who would wrestle with her, overcome and hold her bound? Siegfried could not be dreamed in him, or a Siegfried's baby son-in-arms. She caught a glorious image of the woman rejecting him and his rival, and it informed her that she, dissatisfied with an Adonis, and more than a match for a famous conqueror, was a woman of

Page 3002

decisive and independent, perhaps unexampled, force of character. Her idea of a spiritual superiority that could soar over those two men, the bad and the good—the bad because of his vileness, the good because of his frailness—whispered to her of deserving, possibly of attracting, the best of men: the best, that is, in the woman's view of us—the strongest, the great eagle of men, lord of earth and air.

One who will dominate me, she thought.

Now when a young lady of lively intelligence and taking charm has brought her mind to believe that she possesses force of character, she persuades the rest of the world easily to agree with her, and so long as her pretensions are not directly opposed to their habits of thought, her parents will be the loudest in proclaiming it, fortifying so the maid's presumption, which is ready to take root in any shadow of subserviency. Her father was a gouty general of infantry in the diplomatic service, disinclined to unnecessary disputes, out of consideration for his vehement irritability when roused. Her mother had been one of the beauties of her set, and was preserving an attenuated reign, through the conversational arts, to save herself from fading into the wall. Her brothers and sisters were not of an age to contest her lead. The temper of the period was revolutionary in society by reflection of the state of politics, and juniors were sturdy democrats, letting their elders know that they had come to their inheritance, while the elders, confused by the impudent topsy-turvy, put on the gaping mask (not unfamiliar to history) of the disestablished conservative, whose astounded state paralyzes his wrath.

Clotilde maintained a decent measure in the liberty she claimed, and it was exercised in wildness of dialogue rather than in capricious behaviour. If her flowing tongue was imperfectly controlled, it was because she discoursed by preference to men upon our various affairs and tangles, and they encouraged her with the tickled wonder which bids the bold advance yet farther into bogland. Becoming the renowned original of her society, wherever it might be, in Germany, Italy, Southern France, she grew chillily sensible of the solitude decreed for their heritage to our loftiest souls. Her Indian Bacchus, as a learned professor supplied Prince Marko's title for her, was a pet, not a companion. She to him was what she sought for in another. As much as she pitied herself for not lighting on the predestined man, she pitied him for having met the woman, so that her tenderness for both inspired many signs of warm affection, not very unlike the thing it moaned secretly the not being. For she could not but distinguish a more poignant sorrow in the seeing of the object we yearn to vainly than in vainly yearning to one unseen. Dressed, to delight him, in Prince Marko's colours, the care she bestowed on her dressing was for the one absent, the shrouded comer: so she pleased the prince to be pleasing to her soul's

Page 3003

lord, and this, owing to an appearance of satisfactory deception that it bore, led to her thinking guiltily. We may ask it: an eagle is expected, and how is he to declare his eagleship save by breaking through our mean conventional systems, tearing links asunder, taking his own in the teeth of vulgar ordinances? Clotilde's imagination drew on her reading for the knots it tied and untied, and its ideas of grandeur. Her reading was an interfusion of philosophy skimmed, and realistic romances deep-sounded. She tried hard, but could get no other terrible tangle for her hero's exhibition of flaming azure divineness than the vile one of the wedded woman. Further thinking of it, she revived and recovered; she despised the complication, yet without perceiving how else he was to manifest himself legitimately in a dull modern world. The rescuing her from death would be a poor imitation of worn-out heroes. His publication of a trumpeting book fell appallingly flat in her survey. Deeds of gallantry done as an officer in war (defending his country too) distinguished the soldier, but failed to add the eagle feather to the man. She had a mind of considerable soaring scope, and eclectic: it analyzed a Napoleon, and declined the position of his empress. The man must be a gentleman. Poets, princes, warriors, potentates, marched before her speculative fancy unselected.

So far, as far as she can be portrayed introductorily, she is not without exemplars in the sex. Young women have been known to turn from us altogether, never to turn back, so poor and shrunken, or so fleshly-bulgy have we all appeared in the fairy jacket they wove for the right one of us to wear becomingly. But the busy great world was round Clotilde while she was malleable, though she might be losing her fresh ideas of the hammer and the block, and that is a world of much solicitation to induce a vivid girl to merge an ideal in a living image. Supposing, when she has accomplished it, that men justify her choice, the living will retain the colours of the ideal. We have it on record that he may seem an eagle.

'You talk curiously like Alvan, do you know,' a gentleman of her country said to her as they were descending the rock of Capri, one day. He said it musingly.

He belonged to a circle beneath her own: the learned and artistic. She had not heard of this Alvan, or had forgotten him; but professing universal knowledge, especially of celebrities, besides having an envious eye for that particular circle, which can pretend to be the choicest of all, she was unwilling to betray her ignorance, and she dimpled her cheek, as one who had often heard the thing said to her before. She smiled musingly.

CHAPTER II

'Who is the man they call Alvan?' She put the question at the first opportunity to an aunt of hers.

Up went five-fingered hands. This violent natural sign of horror was comforting: she saw that he was a celebrity indeed.

Page 3004

’Alvan! My dear Clotilde! What on earth can you want to know about a creature who is the worst of demagogues, a disreputable person, and a Jew!’

Clotilde remarked that she had asked only who he was. ‘Is he clever?’

’He is one of the basest of those wretches who are for upsetting the Throne and Society to gratify their own wicked passions: that is what he is.’

‘But is he clever?’

’Able as Satan himself, they say. He is a really dangerous, bad man. You could not have been curious about a worse one.’

‘Politically, you mean.’

‘Of course I do.’

The lady had not thought of any other kind of danger from a man of that station.

The likening of one to Satan does not always exclude meditation upon him. Clotilde was anxious to learn in what way her talk resembled Alvan’s. He being that furious creature, she thought of herself at her wildest, which was in her estimation her best; and consequently, she being by no means a furious creature, though very original, she could not meditate on him without softening the outlines given him by report; all because of the likeness between them; and, therefore, as she had knowingly been taken for furious by very foolish people, she settled it that Alvan was also a victim of the prejudices he scorned. It had pleased her at times to scorn our prejudices and feel the tremendous weight she brought on herself by the indulgence. She drew on her recollections of the Satanic in her bosom when so situated, and never having admired herself more ardently than when wearing that aspect, she would have admired the man who had won the frightful title in public, except for one thing—he was a Jew.

The Jew was to Clotilde as flesh of swine to the Jew. Her parents had the same abhorrence of Jewry. One of the favourite similes of the family for whatsoever grunted in grossness, wriggled with meanness, was Jew: and it was noteworthy from the fact that a streak of the blood was in the veins of the latest generation and might have been traced on the maternal side.

Now a meanness that clothes itself in the Satanic to terrify cowards is the vilest form of impudence venturing at insolence; and an insolent impudence with Jew features, the Jew nose and lips, is past endurance repulsive. She dismissed her contemplation of Alvan. Luckily for the gentleman who had compared her to the Jew politician, she did not meet him again in Italy.

She had meanwhile formed an idea of the Alvanesque in dialogue; she summoned her forces to take aim at it, without becoming anything Jewish, still remaining clean and Christian; and by her astonishing practice of the art she could at any time blow up a company—scatter mature and seasoned dames, as had they been balloons on a wind, ay, and give our stout sex a shaking.

Clotilde rejected another aspirant proposed by her parents, and falling into disgrace at home, she went to live for some months with an ancient lady who was her close relative residing in the capital city where the brain of her race is located. There it occurred that a dashing officer of social besides military rank, dancing with her at a ball, said, for a comment on certain boldly independent remarks she had been making: 'I see you know Alvan.'

Page 3005

Alvan once more.

‘Indeed I do not,’ she said, for she was addressing an officer high above Alvan in social rank; and she shrugged, implying that she was almost past contradiction of the charge.

‘Surely you must,’ said he; ’where is the lady who could talk and think as you do without knowing Alvan and sharing his views!’

Clotilde was both startled and nettled.

’But I do not know him at all; I have never met him, never seen him. I am unlikely to meet the kind of person,’ she protested; and she was amazed yet secretly rejoiced on hearing him, a noble of her own circle, and a dashing officer, rejoin: ’Come, come, let us be honest. That is all very well for the little midges floating round us to say of Alvan, but we two can clasp hands and avow proudly that we both know and love the man.’

’Were it true, I would own it at once, but I repeat, that he is a total stranger to me,’ she said, seeing the Jew under quite a different illumination.

‘Actually?’

‘In honour.’

‘You have never met, never seen him, never read any of his writings?’

‘Never. I have heard his name, that is all.’

‘Then,’ the officer’s voice was earnest, ’I pity him, and you no less, while you remain strangers, for you were made for one another. Those ideas you have expressed, nay, the very words, are Alvan’s: I have heard him use them. He has just the same original views of society and history as yours; they’re identical; your features are not unlike . . . you talk alike: I could fancy your voice the sister of his. You look incredulous? You were speaking of Pompeius, and you said “Plutarch’s Pompeius,” and more for it is almost incredible under the supposition that you do not know and have never listened to Alvan—you said that Pompeius appeared to have been decorated with all the gifts of the Gods to make the greater sacrifice of him to Caesar, who was not personally worth a pretty woman’s “bite.” Come, now—you must believe me: at a supper at Alvan’s table the other night, the talk happened to be of a modern Caesar, which led to the real one, and from him to “Plutarch’s Pompeius,” as Alvan called him; and then he said of him what you have just said, absolutely the same down to the allusion to the bite. I assure you. And you have numbers of little phrases in common: you are partners in aphorisms: Barriers are for those who cannot fly: that is Alvan’s. I could multiply them if I could remember; they struck me as you spoke.’

‘I must be a shameless plagiarist,’ said Clotilde.

‘Or he,’ said Count Kollin.

Page 3006

It is here the place of the Chorus to state that these: ideas were in the air at the time; sparks of the Vulcanic smithy at work in politics and pervading literature: which both Alvan and Clotilde might catch and give out as their own, in the honest belief that the epigram was, original to them. They were not members of a country where literature is confined to its little paddock, without, influence on the larger field (part lawn, part marsh) of the social world: they were readers in sympathetic action with thinkers and literary artists. Their saying in common, 'Plutarch's Pompeius,' may be traceable to a reading of some professorial article on the common portrait-painting of the sage of Chaeroneia. The dainty savageness in the 'bite' Plutarch mentions, evidently struck on a similarity of tastes in both, as it has done with others. And in regard to Caesar, Clotilde thought much of Caesar; she had often wished that Caesar (for the additional pleasure in thinking of him) had been endowed with the beauty of his rival: one or two of Plutarch's touches upon the earlier history of Pompeius had netted her fancy, faintly (your generosity must be equal to hearing it) stung her blood; she liked the man; and if he had not been beaten in the end, she would have preferred him femininely. His name was not written Pompey to her, as in English, to sound absurd: it was a note of grandeur befitting great and lamentable fortunes, which the young lady declined to share solely because of her attraction to the victor, her compulsion to render unto the victor the sunflower's homage. She rendered it as a slave: the splendid man beloved to ecstasy by the flower of Roman women was her natural choice.

Alvan could not be even a Caesar in person, he was a Jew. Still a Jew of whom Count Kollin spoke so warmly must be exceptional, and of the exceptional she dreamed. He might have the head of a Caesar. She imagined a huge head, the cauldron of a boiling brain, anything but bright to the eye, like a pot always on the fire, black, greasy, encrusted, unkempt: the head of a malicious tremendous dwarf. Her hungry inquiries in a city where Alvan was well known, brought her full information of one who enjoyed a highly convivial reputation besides the influence of his political leadership; but no description of his aspect accompanied it, for where he was nightly to be met somewhere about the city, none thought of describing him, and she did not push that question because she had sketched him for herself, and rather wished, the more she heard of his genius, to keep him repulsive. It appeared that his bravery was as well proved as his genius, and a brilliant instance of it had been given in the city not long since. He had her ideas, and he won multitudes with them: he was a talker, a writer, and an orator; and he was learned, while she could not pretend either to learning or to a flow of rhetoric. She could prattle deliciously, at times pointedly, relying on her intuition to tell

Page 3007

her more than we get from books, and on her sweet impudence for a richer original strain. She began to appreciate now a reputation for profound acquirements. Learned professors of jurisprudence and history were as enthusiastic for Alvan in their way as Count Kollin. She heard things related of Alvan by the underbreath. That circle below her own, the literary and artistic, idolized him; his talk, his classic breakfasts and suppers, his undisguised ambition, his indomitable energy, his dauntlessness and sway over her sex, were subjects of eulogy all round her; and she heard of an enamoured baroness. No one blamed Alvan. He had shown his chivalrous valour in defending her. The baroness was not a young woman, and she was a hardbound Blue. She had been the first to discover the prodigy, and had pruned, corrected, and published him; he was one of her political works, promising to be the most successful. An old affair apparently; but the association of a woman's name with Alvan's, albeit the name of a veteran, roused the girl's curiosity, leading her to think his mental and magnetic powers must be of the very highest, considering his physical repulsiveness, for a woman of rank to yield him such extreme devotion. She commissioned her princely serving-man, who had followed and was never far away from her, to obtain precise intelligence of this notorious Alvan.

Prince Marko did what he could to please her; he knew something of the rumours about Alvan and the baroness. But why should his lady trouble herself for particulars of such people, whom it could scarcely be supposed she would meet by accident? He asked her this. Clotilde said it was common curiosity. She read him a short lecture on the dismal narrowness of their upper world; and on the advantage of taking an interest in the world below them and more enlightened; a world where ideas were current and speech was wine. The prince nodded; if she had these opinions, it must be good for him to have them too, and he shared them, as it were, by the touch of her hand, and for the length of time that he touched her hand, as an electrical shock may be taken by one far removed from the battery, susceptible to it only through the link; he was capable of thinking all that came to him from her a blessing—shocks, wounds and disruptions. He did not add largely to her stock of items, nor did he fetch new colours. The telegraph wire was his model of style. He was more or less a serviceless Indian Bacchus, standing for sign of the beauty and vacuity of their world: and how dismally narrow that world was, she felt with renewed astonishment at every dive out of her gold-fish pool into the world of tides below; so that she was ready to scorn the cultivation of the graces, and had, when not submitting to the smell, fanciful fits of a liking for tobacco smoke—the familiar incense of those homes where speech was wine.

Page 3008

At last she fell to the asking of herself whether, in the same city with him, often among his friends, hearing his latest intimate remarks—things homely redolent of him as hot bread of the oven—she was ever to meet this man upon whom her thoughts were bent to the eclipse of all others. She desired to meet him for comparison's sake, and to criticize a popular hero. It was inconceivable that any one popular could approach her standard, but she was curious; flame played about him; she had some expectation of easing a spiteful sentiment created by the recent subjection of her thoughts to the prodigious little Jew; and some feeling of closer pity for Prince Marko she had, which urged her to be rid of her delusion as to the existence of a wonder-working man on our earth, that she might be sympathetically kind to the prince, perhaps compliant, and so please her parents, be good and dull, and please everybody, and adieu to dreams, good night, and so to sleep with the beasts! . . .

Calling one afternoon on a new acquaintance of the flat table-land she liked tripping down to from her heights, Clotilde found the lady in supreme toilette, glowing, bubbling: 'Such a breakfast, my dear!' The costly profusion, the anecdotes, the wit, the fun, the copious draughts of the choicest of life—was there ever anything to match it? Never in that lady's recollection, or her husband's either, she exclaimed. And where was the breakfast? Why, at Alvan's, to be sure; where else could such a breakfast be?

'And you know Alvan!' cried Clotilde, catching excitement from the lady's flush.

'Alvan is one of my husband's closest friends'

Clotilde put on the playful frenzy; she made show of wringing her hands: 'Oh! happy you! you know Alvan? And everybody is to know him except me? why? I proclaim it unjust. Because I am unmarried? I'll take a husband to-morrow morning to be entitled to meet Alvan in the evening.'

The playful frenzy is accepted in its exact innocent signification of 'this is my pretty wilful will and way,' and the lady responded to it cordially; for it is pleasant to have some one to show, and pleasant to assist some one eager to see: besides, many had petitioned her for a sight of Alvan; she was used to the request.

'You're not obliged to wait for to-morrow,' she said. 'Come to one of our gatherings to-night. Alvan will be here.'

'You invite me?'

'Distinctly. Pray, come. He is sure to be here. We have his promise, and Alvan never fails. Was it not Frau v. Crestow who did us the favour of our introduction? She will bring you.'

Page 3009

The Frau v. Crestow was a cousin of Clotilde's by marriage, sentimental, but strict in her reading of the proprieties. She saw nothing wrong in undertaking to conduct Clotilde to one of those famous gatherings of the finer souls of the city and the race; and her husband agreed to join them after the sitting of the Chamber upon a military-budget vote. The whole plan was nicely arranged and went well. Clotilde dressed carefully, letting her gold-locks cloud her fine forehead carelessly, with finishing touches to the negligence, for she might be challenged to take part in disputations on serious themes, and a handsome young woman who has to sustain an argument against a man does wisely when she forearms her beauties for a reserve, to carry out flanking movements if required. The object is to beat him.

CHAPTER III

Her hostess met her at the entrance of the rooms, murmuring that Alvan was present, and was there: a direction of a nod that any quick-witted damsel must pretend to think sufficient, so Clotilde slipped from her companion and gazed into the recess of a doorless inner room, where three gentlemen stood, backed by book cases, conversing in blue vapours of tobacco. They were indistinct; she could see that one of them was of good stature. One she knew; he was the master of the house, mildly Jewish. The third was distressingly branded with the slum and gutter signs of the Ahasuerus race. Three hats on his head could not have done it more effectively. The vindictive caricatures of the God Pan, executed by priests of the later religion burning to hunt him out of worship in the semblance of the hairy, hoofy, snouty Evil One, were not more loathsome. She sank on a sofa. That the man? Oh! Jew, and fifty times over Jew! nothing but Jew!

The three stepped into the long saloon, and she saw how veritably magnificent was the first whom she had noticed.

She sat at her lamb's-wool work in the little ivory frame, feeding on the contrast. This man's face was the born orator's, with the light-giving eyes, the forward nose, the animated mouth, all stamped for speechfulness and enterprise, of Cicero's rival in the forum before he took the headship of armies and marched to empire.

The gifts of speech, enterprise, decision, were marked on his features and his bearing, but with a fine air of lordly mildness. Alas, he could not be other than Christian, so glorious was he in build! One could vision an eagle swooping to his helm by divine election. So vigorously rich was his blood that the swift emotion running with the theme as he talked pictured itself in passing and was like the play of sheet lightning on the variations of the uninterrupted and many-glancing outpour. Looking on him was listening. Yes, the looking on him sufficed. Here was an image of the beauty of a new order of godlike men, that drained an Indian Bacchus of his thin seductions at a breath-reduced him to the state of nursery plaything, spangles and wax, in the contemplation of

a girl suddenly plunged on the deeps of her womanhood. She shrank to smaller and smaller as she looked.

Page 3010

Be sure that she knew who he was. No, says she. But she knew. It terrified her soul to think he was Alvan. She feared scarcely less that it might not be he. Between these dreads of doubt and belief she played at cat and mouse with herself, escaped from cat, persecuted mouse, teased herself, and gloated. It is he! not he! he! not he! most certainly! impossible!—And then it ran: If he, oh me! If another, woe me! For she had come to see Alvan. Alvan and she shared ideas. They talked marvellously alike, so as to startle Count Kollin: and supposing he was not Alvan, it would be a bitter disappointment. The supposition that he was, threatened her with instant and life-long bondage.

Then again, could that face be the face of a Jew? She feasted. It was a noble profile, an ivory skin, most lustrous eyes. Perchance a Jew of the Spanish branch of the exodus, not the Polish. There is the noble Jew as well as the bestial Gentile. There is not in the sublimest of Gentiles a majesty comparable to that of the Jew elect. He may well think his race favoured of heaven, though heaven chastise them still. The noble Jew is grave in age, but in his youth he is the arrow to the bow of his fiery eastern blood, and in his manhood he is—ay, what you see there! a figure of easy and superb preponderance, whose fire has mounted to inspirit and be tempered by the intellect.

She was therefore prepared all the while for the surprise of learning that the gentleman so unlike a Jew was Alvan; and she was prepared to express her recordation of the circumstance in her diary with phrases of very eminent surprise. Necessarily it would be the greatest of surprises.

The three, this man and his two of the tribe, upon whom Clotilde's attention centred, with a comparison in her mind too sacred to be other than profane (comparisons will thrust themselves on minds disordered), dropped to the cushions of the double-seated sofa, by one side of which she cowered over her wool-work, willing to dwindle to a pin's head if her insignificance might enable her to hear the words of the speaker. He pursued his talk: there was little danger of not hearing him. There was only the danger of feeling too deeply the spell of his voice. His voice had the mellow fulness of the clarionet. But for the subject, she could have fancied a noontide piping of great Pan by the sedges. She had never heard a continuous monologue so musical, so varied in music, amply flowing, vivacious, interwovenly the brook, the stream, the torrent: a perfect natural orchestra in a single instrument. He had notes less pastorally imageable, notes that fired the blood, with the ranging of his theme. The subject became clearer to her subjugated wits, until the mental vivacity he roused on certain impetuous phrases of assertion caused her pride to waken up and rebel as she took a glance at herself, remembering that she likewise was a thinker, deemed in her society an original thinker, an intrepid thinker and talker, not so very much beneath this man in audacity of brain, it might be. He kindled her thus, and the close-shut but expanded and knew the fretting desire to breathe out the secret within it, and be appreciated in turn.

Page 3011

The young flower of her sex burned to speak, to deliver an opinion. She was unaccustomed to yield a fascinated ear. She was accustomed rather to dictate and be the victorious performer, and though now she was not anxious to occupy the pulpit—-being too strictly bred to wish for a post publicly in any of the rostra—and meant still less to dispossess the present speaker of the place he filled so well, she yearned to join him: and as that could not be done by a stranger approving, she panted to dissent. A young lady cannot so well say to an unknown gentleman: 'You have spoken truly, sir,' as, 'That is false!' for to speak in the former case would be gratuitous, and in the latter she is excused by the moral warmth provoking her. Further, dissent rings out finely, and approval is a feeble murmur—a poor introduction of oneself. Her moral warmth was ready and waiting for the instigating subject, but of course she was unconscious of the goad within. Excitement wafted her out of herself, as we say, or out of the conventional vessel into the waves of her troubled nature. He had not yet given her an opportunity for dissenting; she was compelled to agree, dragged at his chariot-wheels in headlong agreement.

His theme was Action; the political advantages of Action; and he illustrated his view with historical examples, to the credit of the French, the temporary discredit of the German and English races, who tend to compromise instead. Of the English he spoke as of a power extinct, a people 'gone to fat,' who have gained their end in a hoard of gold and shut the door upon bandit ideas. Action means life to the soul as to the body. Compromise is virtual death: it is the pact between cowardice and comfort under the title of expediency. So do we gather dead matter about us. So are we gradually self-stifled, corrupt. The war with evil in every form must be incessant; we cannot have peace. Let then our joy be in war: in uncompromising Action, which need not be the less a sagacious conduct of the war . . . . Action energizes men's brains, generates grander capacities, provokes greatness of soul between enemies, and is the guarantee of positive conquest for the benefit of our species. To doubt that, is to doubt of good being to be had for the seeking. He drew pictures of the healthy Rome when turbulent, the doomed quiescent. Rome struggling grasped the world. Rome stagnant invited Goth and Vandal. So forth: alliterative antitheses of the accustomed pamphleteer. At last her chance arrived.

His opposition sketch of Inaction was refreshed by an analysis of the character of Hamlet. Then he reverted to Hamlet's promising youth. How brilliantly endowed was the Prince of Denmark in the beginning!

'Mad from the first!' cried Clotilde.

She produced an effect not unlike that of a sudden crack of thunder. The three made chorus in a noise of boots on the floor.

Her hero faced about and stood up, looking at her fulgently. Their eyes engaged without wavering on either side. Brave eyes they seemed, each pair of them, for his

were fastened on a comely girl, and she had strung herself to her gallantest to meet the crisis.

Page 3012

His friends quitted him at a motion of the elbows. He knelt on the sofa, leaning across it, with clasped hands.

'You are she!—So, then, is a contradiction of me to be the commencement?'

'After the apparition of Hamlet's father the prince was mad,' said Clotilde hurriedly, and she gazed for her hostess, a paroxysm of alarm succeeding that of her boldness.

'Why should we two wait to be introduced?' said he. 'We know one another. I am Alvan. You are she of whom I heard from Kollin: who else? Lucretia the gold-haired; the gold-crested serpent, wise as her sire; Aurora breaking the clouds; in short, Clotilde!'

Her heart exulted to hear him speak her name. She laughed with a radiant face. His being Alvan, and his knowing her and speaking her name, all was like the happy reading of a riddle. He came round to her, bowing, and his hand out. She gave hers: she could have said, if asked, 'For good!' And it looked as though she had given it for good.

CHAPTER IV

'Hamlet in due season,' said he, as they sat together. 'I shall convince you.'

She shook her head.

'Yes, yes, an opinion formed by a woman is inflexible; I know that: the fact is not half so stubborn. But at present there are two more important actors: we are not at Elsinore. You are aware that I hoped to meet you?'

'Is there a periodical advertisement of your hopes?—or do they come to us by intuition?'

'Kollin was right!—the ways of the serpent will be serpentine. I knew we must meet. It is no true day so long as the goddess of the morning and the sun-god are kept asunder. I speak of myself, by what I have felt since I heard of you.'

'You are sure of your divinity?'

'Through my belief in yours!'

They bowed smiling at the courtly exchanges.

'And tell me,' said he, 'as to meeting me . . . ?'

She replied: 'When we are so like the rest of the world we may confess our weakness.'

‘Unlike! for the world and I meet and part: not we two.’

Clotilde attempted an answer: it would not come. She tried to be revolted by his lording tone, and found it strangely inoffensive. His lording presence and the smile that was like a waving feather on it compelled her so strongly to submit to hear, as to put her in danger of appearing to embrace this man’s rapid advances.

She said: ‘I first heed of you at Capri.’

‘And I was at Capri seven days after you had left.’

‘You knew my name then?’

’Be not too curious with necromancers. Here is the date—March 15th. You departed on the 8th.’

‘I think I did. That is a year from now.’

Page 3013

’Then we missed: now we meet. It is a year lost. A year is a great age! Reflect on it and what you owe me. How I wished for a comrade at Capri! Not a “young lady,” and certainly no man. The understanding Feminine, was my desire—a different thing from the feminine understanding, usually. I wanted my comrade young and fair, necessarily of your sex, but with heart and brain: an insane request, I fancied, until I heard that you were the person I wanted. In default of you I paraded the island with Tiberius, who is my favourite tyrant. We took the initiative against the patricians, at my suggestion, and the Annals were written by a plebeian demagogue, instead of by one of that party, whose account of my extinction by command of the emperor was pathetic. He apologized in turn for my imperial master and me, saying truly, that the misunderstanding between us was past cement: for each of us loved the man but hated his office; and as the man is always more in his office than he is in himself, clearly it was the lesser portion of our friend that each of us loved. So, I, as the weaker, had to perish, as he would have done had I been the stronger; I admitted it, and sent my emperor my respectful adieux, with directions for the avoiding of assassins. Mademoiselle, by delaying your departure seven days you would have saved me from death. You see, the official is the artificial man, and I ought to have known there is no natural man left in us to weigh against the artificial. I counted on the emperor’s personal affection, forgetting that princes cannot be our friends.’

‘You died bravely?’

Clotilde entered into the extravagance with a happy simulation of zest.

’Simply, we will say. My time had come, and I took no sturdy pose, but let the life-stream run its course for a less confined embankment. Sapphire sea, sapphire sky: one believes in life there, thrills with it, when life is ebbing: ay, as warmly as when life is at the flow in our sick and shrivelled North—the climate for dried fish! Verily the second death of hearing that a gold-haired Lucretia had been on the island seven days earlier, was harder to bear. Tell me frankly—the music in Italy?’

‘Amorous and martial, brainless and monotonous.’

‘Excellent!’ his eyes flashed delightedly. ’O comrade of comrades! that year lost to me will count heavily as I learn to value those I have gained. Yes, brainless! There, in music, we beat them, as politically France beats us. No life without brain! The brainless in Art and in Statecraft are nothing but a little more obstructive than the dead. It is less easy to cut a way through them. But it must be done, or the Philistine will be as the locust in his increase, and devour the green blades of the earth. You have been trained to shudder at the demagogue?’

‘I do not shudder,’ said Clotilde.

Page 3014

’A diamond from the lapidary!—Your sentences have many facets. Well, you are conversing with a demagogue, an avowed one: a demagogue and a Jew. You take it as a matter of course: you should exhibit some sparkling incredulity. The Christian is like the politician in supposing the original obverse of him everlastingly the same, after the pattern of the monster he was originally taught to hate. But the Jew has been a little christianized, and we have a little bejewed the Christian. So with demagogues: as we see the conservative crumbling, we grow conservatived. Try to think individually upon what you have to learn collectively—that is your task. You are of the few who will be equal to it. We are not men of blood, believe me. I am not. For example, I detest and I decline the duel. I have done it, and proved myself a man of metal notwithstanding. To say nothing of the inhumanity, the senselessness of duelling revolts me. ’Tis a folly, so your nobles practise it, and your royal wiseacre sanctions. No blood for me: and yet I tell you that whatever opposes me, I will sweep away. How? With the brain. If we descend to poor brute strength or brutal craft, it is from failing in the brain: we quit the leadership of our forces, and the descent is the beast’s confession. Do I say how? Perhaps by your aid.—You do not start and cry: “Mine!” That is well. I have not much esteem for non-professional actresses. They are numerous and not entertaining.—You leave it to me to talk.’

‘Could I do better?’

‘You listen sweetly.’

‘It is because I like to hear.’

‘You have the pearly little ear of a shell on the sand.’

‘With the great sea sounding near it!’

Alvan drew closer to her.

’I look into your eyes and perceive that one may listen to you and speak to you. Heart to heart, then! Yes, a sea to lull you, a sea to win you—temperately, let us hope; by storm, if need be. My prize is found! The good friend who did the part of Iris for us came bounding to me: “I have discovered the wife for you, Alvan.” I had previously heard of her from another as having touched the islet of Capri. “But,” said Kollin, “she is a gold-crested serpent—slippery!” Is she? That only tells me of a little more to be mastered. I feel my future now. Hitherto it has been a land without sunlight. Do you know how the look of sunlight on a land calms one? It signifies to the eye possession and repose, the end gained—not the end to labour, just heaven! but peace to the heart’s craving, which is the renewal of strength for work, the fresh dip in the waters of life. Conjure up your vision of Italy. Remember the meaning of Italian light and colour: the clearness, the luminous fulness, the thoughtful shadows. Mountain and wooded headland are solid, deep to the eye, spirit-speaking to the mind. They throb. You carve

shapes of Gods out of that sky, the sea, those peaks. They live with you. How they satiate the vacant

Page 3015

soul by influx, and draw forth the troubled from its prickly nest!—Well, and you are my sunlighted land. And you will have to be fought for. And I see not the less repose in the prospect! Part of you may be shifty-sand. The sands are famous for their golden shining—as you shine. Well, then, we must make the quicksands concrete. I have a perfect faith in you, and in the winning of you. Clearly you will have to be fought for. I should imagine it a tough battle to come. But as I doubt neither you nor myself, I see beyond it.—We use phrases in common, and aphorisms, it appears. Why? but that our minds act in unison. What if I were to make a comparison of you with Paris?—the city of Paris, Lutetia.'

'Could you make it good?' said Clotilde.

He laughed and postponed it for a series of skimming discussions, like swallow-flights from the nest beneath the eaves to the surface of the stream, perpetually reverting to her, and provoking spirited replies, leading her to fly with him in expectation of a crowning compliment that must be singular and was evidently gathering confirmation in his mind from the touchings and probings of her character on these flights.

She was like a lady danced off her sense of fixity, to whom the appearance of her whirling figure in the mirror is both wonderful and reassuring; and she liked to be discussed, to be compared to anything, for the sake of being the subject, so as to be sure it was she that listened to a man who was a stranger, claiming her for his own; sure it was she that by not breaking from him implied consent, she that went speeding in this magical rapid round which slung her more and more out of her actual into her imagined self, compelled her to proceed, denied her the right to faint and call upon the world for aid, and catch at it, though it was close by and at a signal would stop the terrible circling. The world was close by and had begun to stare. She half apprehended that fact, but she was in the presence of the irresistible. In the presence of the irresistible the conventional is a crazy structure swept away with very little creaking of its timbers on the flood. When we feel its power we are immediately primitive creatures, flying anywhere in space, indifferent to nakedness. And after trimming ourselves for it, the sage asks your permission to add, it will be the thing we are most certain some day to feel. Had not she trimmed herself?—so much that she had won fame for an originality mistaken by her for the independent mind, and perilously, for courage. She had trimmed herself and Alvan too—herself to meet it, and Alvan to be it. Her famous originality was a trumpet blown abroad proclaiming her the prize of the man who sounded as loudly his esteem for the quality—in a fair young woman of good breeding. Each had evoked the other. Their common anticipations differed in this, that he had expected comeliness, she the reverse—an Esau of the cities; and seeing superb manly beauty in the place of the thick-featured sodden satyr of her miscreating fancy, the irresistible was revealed to her on its divinest whirlwind.

Page 3016

They both desired beauty; they had each stipulated for beauty before captivity could be acknowledged; and he beholding her very attractive comeliness, walked into the net, deeming the same a light thing to wear, and rather a finishing grace to his armoury; but she, a trained disciple of the conventional in social behaviour (as to the serious points and the extremer trifles), fluttered exceedingly; she knew not what she was doing, where her hand was, how she looked at him, how she drank in his looks on her. Her woman's eyes had no guard they had scarcely speculation. She saw nothing in its passing, but everything backward, under haphazard flashes. The sight of her hand disengaged told her it had been detained; a glance at the company reminded her that those were men and women who had been other than phantoms; recollections of the words she listened to, assented to, replied to, displayed the gulfs she had crossed. And nevertheless her brain was as quick as his to press forward to pluck the themes which would demonstrate her mental vividness and at least indicate her force of character. The splendour of the man quite extinguished, or over-brightened, her sense of personal charm; she set fire to her brain to shine intellectually, treating the tale of her fair face as a childish tale that might have a grain of truth in it, some truth, a very little, and that little nearly worthless, merely womanly, a poor charm of her sex. The intellectual endowment was rarer: still rarer the moral audacity. O, to match this man's embracing discursiveness! his ardour, his complacent energy, the full strong sound he brought out of all subjects! He struck, and they rang. There was a bell in everything for him; Nature gave out her cry, and significance was on all sides of the universe; no dead stuff, no longer any afflicting lumpishness. His brain was vivifying light. And how humane he was! how supremely tolerant! Where she had really thought instead of flippantly tapping at the doors of thought, or crying vagrantly for an echo, his firm footing in the region thrilled her; and where she had felt deeper than fancifully, his wise tenderness overwhelmed. Strange to consider: with all his precious gifts, which must make the gift of life thrice dear to him, he was fearless. Less by what he said than by divination she discerned that he knew not fear. If for only that, she would have hung to him like his shadow. She could have detected a brazen pretender. A meaner mortal vaunting his great stores she would have written down coxcomb. Her social training and natural perception raised her to a height to measure the bombastical and distinguish it from the eloquently lofty. He spoke of himself, as the towering Alp speaks out at a first view, bidding that which he was be known. Fearless, confident, able, he could not but be, as he believed himself, indomitable. She who was this man's mate would consequently wed his possessions, including courage. Clotilde at once reached the conclusion of her having it in

Page 3017

an equal degree. Was she not displaying it? The worthy people of the company stared, as she now perceived, and she was indifferent; her relatives were present without disturbing her exaltation. She wheeled above their heads in the fiery chariot beside her sun-god. It could not but be courage, active courage, superior to her previous tentative steps—the verbal temerities she had supposed so dauntless. For now she was in action, now she was being tried to match the preacher and incarnation of the virtues of action!

Alvan shaped a comparison of her with Paris, his beloved of cities—the symbolized goddess of the lightning brain that is quick to conceive, eager to realize ideas, impassioned for her hero, but ever putting him to proof, graceful beyond all rhyme, colloquial as never the Muse; light in light hands, yet valiant unto death for a principle; and therefore not light, anything but light in strong hands, very stedfast rather: and oh! constantly entertaining.

The comparison had to be strained to fit the living lady's shape. Did he think it, or a dash of something like it?

His mood was luxurious. He had found the fair and youthful original woman of refinement and station desired by him. He had good reason to wish to find her. Having won a name, standing on firm ground, with promise of a great career, chief of what was then taken for a growing party and is not yet a collapsed, nor will be, though the foot on it is iron, his youth had flown under the tutelage of an extraordinary Mentor, whom to call Athene robs the goddess of her personal repute for wisdom in conduct, but whose head was wise, wise as it was now grey. Verily she was original; and a grey original should seem remarkable above a blooming blonde. If originality in woman were our prime request, the grey should bear the palm. She has gone through the battle, retaining the standard she carried into it, which is a victory. Alas, that grey, so spirit-touching in Art, should be so wintry in reality!

The discovery of a feminine original breathing Spring, softer, warmer than the ancient one, gold instead of snowcrested, and fully as intrepid as devoted, was an immense joy to Alvan. He took it luxuriously because he believed in his fortune, a kind of natal star, the common heritage of the adventurous, that brought him his good things in time, in return for energetic strivings in a higher direction apart from his natural longings.

Fortune had delayed, he had wintered long. All the sweeter was the breath of the young Spring. That exquisite new sweetness robed Clotilde in the attributes of the person dreamed of for his mate; and deductively assuming her to possess them, he could not doubt his power of winning her. Barriers are for those who cannot fly. The barriers were palpable about a girl of noble Christian birth: so was the courage in her which would give her wings, he thought, coming to that judgement through the mixture of his knowledge of himself and his perusal of her exterior. He saw that she could take an

impression deeply enough to express it sincerely, and he counted on it, sympathetically endowing her with his courage to support the originality she was famed for.

Page 3018

They were interrupted between-whiles by weariful men running to Alvan for counsel on various matters—how to play their game, or the exact phrasing of some pregnant sentence current in politics or literature. He satisfied them severally and shouldered them away, begging for peace that night. Clotilde corroborated his accurate recital of the lines of a contested verse of the incomparable Heinrich, and they fell to capping verses of the poet-lucid metheglin, with here and there no dubious flavour of acid, and a lively sting in the tail of the honey. Sentiment, cynicism, and satin impropriety and scabrous, are among those verses, where pure poetry has a recognized voice; but the lower elements constitute the popularity in a cultivated society inclining to wantonness out of bravado as well as by taste. Alvan, looking indolently royal and royally roguish, quoted a verse that speaks of the superfluousness of a faithless lady's vowing bite:

> 'The kisses were in the course of things,
> The bite was a needless addition.'

Clotilde could not repress her reddening—Count Kollin had repeated too much! She dropped her eyes, with a face of sculpture, then resumed their chatter. He spared her the allusion to Pompeius. She convinced him of her capacity for reserve besides intrepidity, and flattered him too with her blush. She could dare to say to Kollin what her scarlet sensibility forbade her touching on with him: not that she would not have had an airy latitude with him to touch on what she pleased: he liked her for her boldness and the cold peeping of the senses displayed in it: he liked also the distinction she made.

The cry to supper conduced to a further insight of her adaptation to his requirements in a wife. They marched to the table together, and sat together, and drank a noble Rhine wine together—true Rauenthal. His robustness of body and soul inspired the wish that his well-born wife might be, in her dainty fashion, yet honestly and without mincing, his possible boonfellow: he and she, glass in hand, thanking the bountiful heavens, blessing mankind in chorus. It belonged to his hearty dream of the wife he would choose, were she to be had. The position of interpreter of heaven's benevolence to mankind through his own enjoyment of the gifts, was one that he sagaciously demanded for himself, sharing it with the Philistine unknowingly; and to have a wife no less wise than he on this throne of existence was a rosy exaltation. Clotilde kindled to the hint of his festival mood of Solomon at the banquet. She was not devoid of a discernment of flavours; she had heard grave judges at her father's board profoundly deliver their verdicts upon this and that vineyard and vintage; and it is a note of patriotism in her country to be enthusiastic for wine of the Rhine: she was, moreover, thirsty from much talking and excitement. She drank her glass relishingly, declaring the wine princely. Alvan smacked his hands in a rapture: 'You are not for the extract of raisin our people have taken to copy from French Sauternes, to suit a female predilection for sugar?'

Page 3019

‘No, no, the grape for me!’ said she: ’the Rhine grape with the elf in it, and the silver harp and the stained legend!’

‘Glorious!’

He toasted the grape. ’Wine of the grape is the young bride—the young sun-bride! divine, and never too sweet, never cloying like the withered sun-dried, with its one drop of concentrated sugar, that becomes ten of gout. No raisin-juice for us! None of their too-long-on-the-stem clusters! We are for the blood of the grape in her youth, her heaven-kissing ardour. I have a cellar charged with the bravest of the Rhine. We—will we not assail it, bleed it in the gallant days to come? we two!’ The picture of his bride and him drinking the sun down after a day of savage toil was in the shout—a burst unnoticed in the incessantly verbalizing buzz of a continental supper-table. Clotilde acquiesced: she chimed to it like a fair boonfellow of the rollicking faun. She was realizing fairyland.

They retired to the divan-corner where it was you-and-I between them as with rivulets meeting and branching, running parallel, uniting and branching again, divided by the theme, but unending in the flow of the harmony. So ran their chirping arguments and diversions. The carrying on of a prolonged and determined you-and-I in company intimates to those undetermined floating atoms about us that a certain sacred something is in process of formation, or has formed; and people looked; and looked hard at the pair, and at one another afterward: none approached them. The Signor conjuror who has a thousand arts for conjuring with nature was generally considered to have done that night his most ancient and reputedly fabulous trick—the dream of poets, rarely witnessed anywhere, and almost too wonderful for credence in a haunt of our later civilization. Yet there it was: the sudden revelation of the intense divinity to a couple fused in oneness by his apparition, could be perceived of all having man and woman in them; love at first sight, was visible. ‘Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?’ And if nature, character, circumstance, and a maid clever at dressing her mistress’s golden hair, did prepare them for Love’s lightning-match, not the less were they proclaimingly alight and in full blaze. Likewise, Time, imperious old gentleman though we know him to be, with his fussy reiterations concerning the hour for bed and sleep, bowed to the magical fact of their condition, and forbore to warn them of his passing from night to day. He had to go, he must, he has to be always going, but as long as he could he left them on their bank by the margin of the stream, where a shadow-cycle of the eternal wound a circle for them and allowed them to imagine they had thrust that old driver of the dusty high-road quietly out of the way. They were ungrateful, of course, when the performance of his duties necessitated his pulling them up beside him pretty smartly, but he uttered no prophecy of ever intending to rob them of the celestial moments they had cut from him and meant to keep between them ‘for ever,’ and fresh.

Page 3020

The hour was close on the dawn of a March morning. Alvan assisted at the cloaking and hooding of Clotilde. Her relatives were at hand; they hung by while he led her to the stairs and down into a spacious moonlight that laid the traceries of the bare tree-twigs clear-black on grass and stone.

‘A night to head the Spring!’ said Alvan. ‘Come.’

He lifted her off the steps and set her on the ground, as one who had an established right to the privilege and she did not contest it, nor did her people, so kingly was he, arrayed in the thunder of the bolt which had struck the pair. These things, and many things that islands know not of, are done upon continents, where perhaps traditions of the awfulness of Love remain more potent in society; or it may be, that an island atmosphere dispossesses the bolt of its promptitude to strike, or the breastplates of the islanders are strengthened to resist the bolt, or no tropical heat is there to create and launch it, or nothing is to be seen of it for the haziness, or else giants do not walk there. But even where he walked, amid a society intellectually fostering sentiment, in a land bowing to see the simplicity of the mystery paraded, Alvan’s behaviour was passing heteroclite. He needed to be the kingly fellow he was, crowned by another kingly fellow—the lord of hearts—to impose it uninterruptedly. ‘She is mine; I have won her this night!’ his bearing said; and Clotilde’s acquiesced; and the worthy couple following them had to exhibit a copy of the same, much wondering. Partly by habit, and of his natural astuteness, Alvan peremptorily usurped a lead that once taken could not easily be challenged, and would roll him on a good tideway strong in his own passion and his lady’s up against the last defences—her parents. A difficulty with them was foreseen. What is a difficulty!—a gate in the hunting-field: an opponent on a platform: a knot beneath a sword: the dam to waters that draw from the heavens. Not desiring it in this case—it would have been to love the difficulty better than the woman—he still enjoyed the bracing prospect of a resistance, if only because it was a portion of the dowry she brought him. Good soldiers (who have won their grades) are often of a peaceful temper and would not raise an invocation to war, but a view of the enemy sets their pugnacious forces in motion, the bugle fills their veins with electrical fire, till they are as racers on the race-course.—His inmost hearty devil was glad of a combat that pertained to his possession of her, for battle gives the savour of the passion to win, and victory dignifies a prize: he was, however, resolved to have it, if possible, according to the regular arrangement of such encounters, formal, without snatchings, without rash violence; a victory won by personal ascendancy, reasoning eloquence.

He laughed to hear her say, in answer to a question as to her present feelings: ‘I feel that I am carried away by a centaur!’ The comparison had been used or implied to him before.

Page 3021

‘No!’ said he, responding to a host of memories, to shake them off, ’no more of the quadruped man! You tempt him—may I tell you that? Why, now, this moment, at the snap of my fingers, what is to hinder our taking the short cut to happiness, centaur and nymph? One leap and a gallop, and we should be into the morning, leaving night to grope for us, parents and friends to run about for the wits they lose in running. But no! No more scandals. That silver moon invites us by its very spell of bright serenity, to be mad: just as, when you drink of a reverie, the more prolonged it is the greater the readiness for wild delirium at the end of the draught. But no!’ his voice deepened—’the handsome face of the orb that lights us would be well enough were it only a gallop between us two. Dearest, the orb that lights us two for a lifetime must be taken all round, and I have been on the wrong side of the moon.

I have seen the other face of it—a visage scored with regrets, dead dreams, burnt passions, bald illusions, and the like, the like!—sunless, waterless, without a flower! It is the old volcano land: it grows one bitter herb: if ever you see my mouth distorted you will know I am revolving a taste of it; and as I need the antidote you give, I will not be the centaur to win you, for that is the land where he stables himself; yes, there he ends his course, and that is the herb he finishes by pasturing on. You have no dislike of metaphors and parables? We Jews are a parable people.’

‘I am sure I do understand . . .’ said Clotilde, catching her breath to be conscientious, lest he should ask her for an elucidation.

’Provided always that the metaphor be not like the metaphysician’s treatise on Nature: a torch to see the sunrise!—You were going to add?’

’I was going to say, I think I understand, but you run away with me still.’

‘May the sensation never quit you!’

‘It will not.’

‘What a night!’ Alvan raised his head: ’A night cast for our first meeting and betrothing! You are near home?’

‘The third house yonder in the moonlight.’

‘The moonlight lays a white hand on it!’

‘That is my window sparkling.’

‘That is the vestal’s cresset. Shall I blow it out?’

‘You are too far. And it is a celestial flame, sir!’

’Celestial in truth! My hope of heaven! Dian’s crescent will be ever on that house for me, Clotilde. I would it were leagues distant, or the door not forbidden!’

‘I could minister to a good knight humbly.’

Alvan bent to her, on a sudden prompting:

‘When do father and mother arrive?’

‘To-morrow.’

He took her hand. ‘To-morrow, then! The worst of omens is delay.’

Clotilde faintly gasped. Could he mean it?—he of so evil a name in her family and circle!

Her playfulness and pleasure in the game of courtliness forsook her.

Page 3022

‘Tell me the hour when it will be most convenient to them to receive me,’ said Alvan.

She stopped walking in sheer fright.

‘My father—my mother?’ she said, imaging within her the varied horror of each and the commotion.

’To-morrow or the day after—not later. No delays! You are mine, we are one; and the sooner my cause is pleaded the better for us both. If I could step in and see them this instant, it would be forestalling mischances. Do you not see, that time is due to us, and the minutes are our gold slipping away?’

She shrank her hand back: she did not wish to withdraw the hand, only to shun the pledge it signified. He opened an abyss at her feet, and in deadly alarm of him she exclaimed: ‘Oh! not yet; not immediately.’ She trembled, she made her petition dismal by her anguish of speechlessness. ’There will be such . . . not yet! Perhaps later. They must not be troubled yet—at present. I am . . . I cannot—pray, delay!’

‘But you are mine!’ said Alvan. ’You feel it as I do. There can be no real impediment?’

She gave an empty sigh that sought to be a run of entreaties. In fear of his tongue she caught at words to baffle it, senseless of their imbecility: ’Do not insist: yes, in time: they will—they—they may. My father is not very well . . . my mother: she is not very well. They are neither of them very well: not at present!—Spare them at present.’

To avoid being carried away, she flung herself from the centaur’s back to the disenchanting earth; she separated herself from him in spirit, and beheld him as her father and mother and her circle would look on this pretender to her hand, with his lordly air, his Jew blood, and his hissing reputation—for it was a reputation that stirred the snakes and the geese of the world. She saw him in their eyes, quite coldly: which imaginative capacity was one of the remarkable feats of cowardice, active and cold of brain even while the heart is active and would be warm.

He read something of her weakness. ’And supposing I decide that it must be?’

‘How can I supplicate you!’ she replied with a shiver, feeling that she had lost her chance of slipping from his grasp, as trained women of the world, or very sprightly young wits know how to do at the critical moment: and she had lost it by being too sincere. Her cowardice appeared to her under that aspect.

‘Now I perceive that the task is harder,’ said Alvan, seeing her huddled in a real dismay. ’Why will you not rise to my level and fear nothing! The way is clear: we have only to take the step. Have you not seen tonight that we are fated for one another? It is your destiny, and trifling with destiny is a dark business. Look at me. Do you doubt my

having absolute control of myself to bear whatever they put on me to bear, and hold firmly to my will to overcome them! Oh! no delays.'

'Yes!' she cried; 'yes, there must be.'

Page 3023

‘You say it?’

The courage to repeat her cry was wanting.

She trembled visibly: she could more readily have bidden him bear her hence than have named a day for the interview with her parents; but desperately she feared that he would be the one to bid; and he had this of the character of destiny about him, that she felt in him a maker of facts. He was her dream in human shape, her eagle of men, and she felt like a lamb in the air; she had no resistance, only terror of his power, and a crushing new view of the nature of reality.

‘I see!’ said he, and his breast fell. Her timid inability to join with him for instant action reminded him that he carried many weights: a bad name among her people and class, and chains in private. He was old enough to strangle his impulses, if necessary, or any of the brood less fiery than the junction of his passions. ’Well, well!—but we might so soon have broken through the hedge into the broad highroad! It is but to determine to do it—to take the bold short path instead of the wearisome circuit. Just a little lightning in the brain and tightening of the heart. Battles are won in that way: not by tender girls! and she is a girl, and the task is too much for her. So, then, we are in your hands, child! Adieu, and let the gold-crested serpent glide to her bed, and sleep, dream, and wake, and ask herself in the morning whether she is not a wedded soul. Is she not a serpent? gold-crested, all the world may see; and with a mortal bite, I know. I have had the bite before the kisses. That is rather an unjust reversal of the order of things. Apropos, Hamlet was poisoned—ghost-poisoned.’

‘Mad, he was mad!’ said Clotilde, recovering and smiling.

’He was born bilious; he partook of the father’s constitution, not the mother’s. High-thoughted, quick-nerved to follow the thought, reflective, if an interval yawned between his hand and the act, he was by nature two-minded: as full of conscience as a nursing mother that sleeps beside her infant:—she hears the silent beginning of a cry. Before the ghost walked he was an elementary hero; one puff of action would have whiffed away his melancholy. After it, he was a dizzy moralizer, waiting for the winds to blow him to his deed-ox out. The apparition of his father to him poisoned a sluggish run of blood, and that venom in the blood distracted a head steeped in Wittenberg philosophy. With metaphysics in one and poison in the other, with the outer world opened on him and this world stirred to confusion, he wore the semblance of madness; he was throughout sane; sick, but never with his reason dethroned.’

‘Nothing but madness excuses his conduct to Ophelia!’

‘Poison in the blood is a pretty good apology for infidelity to a lady.’

‘No!’

‘Well, to an Ophelia of fifty?’ said Alvan.

Clotilde laughed, not perfectly assured of the wherefore, but pleased to be able to laugh. Her friends were standing at the house door, farewells were spoken, Alvan had gone. And then she thought of the person that Ophelia of fifty might be, who would have to find a good apology for him in his dose of snake-bite, or love of a younger woman whom he termed gold-crested serpent.

Page 3024

He was a lover, surely a lover: he slid off to some chance bit of likeness to himself in every subject he discussed with her.

And she? She speeded recklessly on the back of the centaur when he had returned to the state of phantom and the realities he threatened her with were no longer imminent.

CHAPTER V

Clotilde was of the order of the erring who should by rights have a short sermon to preface an exposure of them, administering the whip to her own sex and to ours, lest we scorn too much to take an interest in her. The exposure she had done for herself, and she has not had the art to frame her apology. The day after her meeting, with her eagle, Alvan, she saw Prince Marko. She was gentle to him, in anticipation of his grief; she could hardly be ungentle on account of his obsequious beauty, and when her soft eyes and voice had thrilled him to an acute sensibility to the blow, honourably she inflicted it.

'Marko, my friend, you know that I cannot be false; then let me tell you I yesterday met the man who has but to lift his hand and I go to him, and he may lead me whither he will.'

The burning eyes of her Indian Bacchus fixed on her till their brightness moistened and flashed.

Whatever was for her happiness he bowed his head to, he said. He knew the man.

Her duty was thus performed; she had plighted herself. For the first few days she was in dread of meeting, seeing, or hearing of Alvan. She feared the mention of a name that rolled the world so swiftly. Her parents had postponed their coming, she had no reason for instant alarm; it was his violent earnestness, his imperial self-confidence that she feared, as nervous people shrink from cannon: and neither meeting, seeing, nor hearing of him, she began to yearn, like the child whose curiosity is refreshed by a desire to try again the startling thing which frightened it. Her yearning grew, the illusion of her courage flooded back; she hoped he would present himself to claim her, marvelled that he did not, reproached him; she could almost have scorned him for listening to the hesitations of the despicable girl so little resembling what she really was —a poor untried girl, anxious only on behalf of her family to spare them a sudden shock. Remembering her generous considerations in their interests, she thought he should have known that the creature he called a child would have yielded upon supplication to fly with him. Her considerateness for him too, it struck her next, was the cause of her seeming cowardly, and the man ought to have perceived it and put it aside. He should have seen that she could be brave, and was a mate for him. And if his shallow experience of her wrote her down nerveless, his love should be doing.

Page 3025

Was it love? Her restoration to the belief in her possessing a decided will whispered of high achievements she could do in proof of love, had she the freedom of a man. She would not have listened (it was quite true) to a silly supplicating girl; she would not have allowed an interval to yawn after the first wild wooing of her. Prince Marko loved. Yes, that was love! It failed in no sign of the passion. She set herself to study it in Marko, and was moved by many sentiments, numbering among them pity, thankfulness, and the shiver of a feeling between admiration and pathetic esteem, like that the musician has for a precious instrument giving sweet sound when shattered. He served her faithfully, in spite of his distaste for some of his lady's commissions. She had to get her news of Alvan through Marko. He brought her particulars of the old trial of Alvan, and Alvan's oration in defence of himself for a lawless act of devotion to the baroness; nothing less than the successfully scheming to wrest by force from that lady's enemy a document precious to her lawful interests. It was one of those cases which have a really high gallant side as well as a bad; an excellent case for rhetoric. Marko supplied the world's opinion of the affair, bravely owning it to be not unfavourable. Her worthy relatives, the Frau v. Crestow and husband, had very properly furnished a report to the family of the memorable evening; and the hubbub over it, with the epithets applied to Alvan, intimated how he would have been received on a visit to demand her in marriage. There was no chance of her being allowed to enter houses where this 'rageing demagogue and popular buffoon' was a guest; his name was banished from her hearing, so she was compelled to have recourse to Marko. Unable to take such services without rewarding him, she fondled: it pained her to see him suffer. Those who toss crumbs to their domestic favourites will now and then be moved to toss meat, which is not so good for them, but the dumb mendicant's delight in it is winning, and a little cannot hurt. Besides, if any one had a claim on her it was the prince; and as he was always adoring, never importunate, he restored her to the pedestal she had been really rudely shaken from by that other who had caught her up suddenly into the air, and dropped her! A hand abandoned to her slave rewarded him immeasurably. A heightening of the reward almost took his life. In the peacefulness of dealing with a submissive love that made her queenly, the royal, which plucked her from throne to footstool, seemed predatory and insolent. Thus, after that scene of 'first love,' in which she had been actress, she became almost (with an inward thrill or two for the recovering of him) reconciled to the not seeing of the noble actor; for nothing could erase the scene —it was historic; and Alvan would always be thought of as a delicious electricity. She and Marko were together on the summer excursion of her people, and quite sisterly,

Page 3026

she could say, in her delicate scorn of his advantages and her emotions. True gentlemen are imperfectly valued when they are under the shadow of giants; but still Clotilde's experience of a giant's manners was favourable to the liberty she could enjoy in a sisterly intimacy of this kind, rather warmer than her word for it would imply. She owned that she could better live the poetic life—that is, trifle with fire and reflect on its charms in the society of Marko. He was very young, he was little more than an adolescent, and safely timid; a turn of her fingers would string or slacken him. One could play on him securely, thinking of a distant day—and some shipwreck of herself for an interlude—when he might be made happy.

Her strangest mood of the tender cruelty was when the passion to anatomize him beset her. The ground of it was, that she found him in her likeness, adoring as she adored, and a similar loftiness; now grovelling, now soaring; the most radiant of beings, the most abject; and the pleasure she had of the sensational comparison was in an alteregoistic home she found in him, that allowed of her gathering a picked self-knowledge, and of her saying: 'That is like me: that is very like me: that is terribly like': up to the point where the comparison wooed her no longer with an agreeable lure of affinity, but nipped her so shrewdly as to force her to say: 'That is he, not I': and the vivisected youth received the caress which quickened him to wholeness at a touch. It was given with impulsive tenderness, in pity of him. Anatomy is the title for the operation, because the probing of herself in another, with the liberty to cease probing as soon as it hurt her, allowed her while unhurt to feel that she prosecuted her researches in a dead body. The moment her strong susceptibility to the likeness shrank under a stroke of pain, she abstained from carving, and simultaneously conscious that he lived, she was kind to him.

'This love of yours, Marko—is it so deep?'

'I love you.'

'You think me the highest and best?'

'You are.'

'So deep that you could bear anything from me?'

'Try me!'

'Unfaithfulness?'

'You would be you!'

'Do you not say that because you cannot suspect evil of me?'

'Let me only see you!'

‘You are sure that happiness would not smother it?’

‘Has it done so yet?’

‘Though you know I am a serpent to that man’s music?’

‘Ah, heaven! Oh!—do not say music. Yes! though anything!’

‘And if ever you were to witness the power of his just breathing to me?’

‘I would . . . . Ah!’

’What? If you saw his music working the spell?—even the first notes of his prelude!’

‘I would wait’

‘It might be for long.’

‘I would eat my heart.’

‘Bitter! bitter!’

‘I would wait till he flung you off, and kneel to you.’

Page 3027

She had a seizure of the nerves.

The likeness between them was, she felt, too flamingly keen to be looked at further. She reached to the dim idea of some such nauseous devotion, and took a shot in her breast as she did so, and abjured it, and softened to her victim. Clotilde opened her arms, charming away her wound, as she soothed him, both by the act of soothing and the reflection that she could not be so very like one whom she pitied and consoled.

She was charitably tender. If it be thought that she was cruel to excess, plead for her the temptation to simple human nature at sight of a youth who could be precipitated into the writhings of dissolution, and raised out of it by a smile. This young man's responsive spirit acted on her as the discovery of specifics for restoring soundness to the frame excites the brilliant empiric: he would slay us with benevolent soul to show the miracle of our revival. Worship provokes the mortal goddess to a manifestation of her powers; and really the devotee is full half to blame.

She had latterly been thinking of Alvan's rejection of the part of centaur; and his phrase, the quadruped man, breathed meaning. He was to gain her lawfully after dominating her utterly. That was right, but it levelled imagination. There is in the sentimental kingdom of Love a form of reasoning, by which a lady of romantic notions who is dominated utterly, will ask herself why she should be gained lawfully: and she is moved to do so by the consideration that if the latter, no necessity can exist for the former: and the reverse. In the union of the two conditions she sees herself slavishly domesticated. With her Indian Bacchus imagination rose, for he was pliant: she had only to fancy, and he was beside her.—Quick to the saddle, away! The forest of terrors is ahead; they are at the verge of it; a last hamlet perches on its borders; the dwellers have haunted faces; the timbers of their huts lean to an upright in wry splinters; warnings are moaned by men and women with the voice of a night-wind; but on and on! the forest cannot be worse than a world defied. They drain a cup of milk apiece and they spur, for this is the way to the golden Indian land of the planted vine and the lover's godship.—Ludicrous! There is no getting farther than the cup of milk with Marko. They curvet and caper to be forward unavailingly. It should be Alvan to bring her through the forest to the planted vine in sunland. Her splendid prose Alvan could do what the sprig of poetry can but suggest. Never would malicious fairy in old woman's form have offered Alvan a cup of milk to paralyze his bride's imagination of him confronting perils. Yet, O shameful contrariety of the fates! he who could, will not; he who would, is incapable. Let it not be supposed that the desire of her bosom was to be run away with in person. Her simple human nature wished for the hero to lift her insensibly over the difficult opening chapter of the romance—through

Page 3028

‘the forest,’ or half imagined: that done, she felt bold enough to meet the unimagined, which, as there was no picture of it to terrify her, seemed an easy gallop into sunland. —Yes, but in the grasp of a great prose giant, with the poetic departed! Naturally she turned to caress the poetic while she had it beside her. And it was a wonder to observe the young prince’s heavenly sensitiveness to every variation of her moods. He knew without hearing when she had next seen Alvan, though it had not been to speak to him. He looked, and he knew. The liquid darkness of his large eastern eyes cast a light that brought her heart out: she confessed it, and she comforted him. The sweetest in the woman caused her double-dealing.

Now she was aware that Alvan moved behind the screen concealing him. A common friend of Alvan and her family talked to her of him. He was an eminent professor, a middleaged, grave and honourable man, not ignorant that her family entertained views opposed to the pretensions of such a man as the demagogue and Jew. Nevertheless Alvan could persuade him to abet the scheme for his meeting Clotilde; nay, to lead to it; ultimately to allow his own house to be their place of meeting. Alvan achieved the first of the steps unassisted. Whether or not his character stood well with a man of the world, his force of character, backed by solid attainments in addition to brilliant gifts, could win a reputable citizen and erudite to support him. Rhetoric in a worthy cause has good chances of carrying the gravest, and the cause might reasonably seem excellent to the professor when one promising fair to be the political genius of his time, but hitherto not the quietest of livers, could make him believe that marriage with this girl would be his clear salvation. The second step was undesignedly Clotilde’s.

She was on the professor’s arm at one of the great winter balls of her conductor’s brethren in the law, and he said: ‘Alvan is here.’ She answered: ’No, he has not yet come.’—How could she tell that he was not present in the crowd?

‘Has he come now?’ said the professor.

‘No.’

And no Alvan was discernible.

‘Now?’

‘Not yet.’

The professor stared about. She waited.

‘Now he has come; he is in the room now,’ said Clotilde.

Alvan was perceived. He stood in the centre of the throng surrounding him to buzz about some recent pamphlet.

She could well play at faith in his magnetization of her, for as by degrees she made herself more nervously apprehensive by thinking of him, it came to an overclouding and then a panic; and that she took for the physical sign of his presence, and by that time, the hour being late, Alvan happened to have arrived. The touch of his hand, the instant naturalness in their speaking together after a long separation, as if there had not been an interval, confirmed her notion of his influence

Page 3029

on her, almost to the making it planetary. And a glance at the professor revealed how picturesque it was. Alvan and he murmured aside. They spoke of it: What wonder that Alvan, though he saw Prince Marko whirl her in the dance, and keep her to the measure—dancing like a song of the limbs in his desperate poor lover's little flitting eternity of the possession of her—should say, after she had been led back to her friends: 'That is he, then! one of the dragons guarding my apple of the Hesperides, whom I must brush away.'

'He?' replied Clotilde, sincerely feeling Marko to be of as fractional a weight as her tone declared him. 'Oh, he is my mute, harmless, he does not count among the dragons.'

But there had been, notwithstanding the high presumption of his remark, a manful thickness of voice in Alvan's 'That is he!' The rivals had fastened a look on one another, wary, strong, and summary as the wrestlers' first grapple. In fire of gaze, Marko was not outdone.

'He does not count? With those eyes of his?' Alvan exclaimed. He knew something of the sex, and spied from that point of knowledge into the character of Clotilde; not too venturesomely, with the assistance of rumour, hazarding the suspicion which he put forth as a certainty, and made sharply bitter to himself in proportion to the belief in it that his vehemence engendered: 'I know all—without exception; all, everything; all! I repeat. But what of it, if I win you? as I shall—only aid me a little.'

She slightly surprised the man by not striving to attenuate the import of the big and surcharged All: but her silence bore witness to his penetrative knowledge. Dozens of amorous gentlemen, lovers, of excellent substance, have before now prepared this peculiar dose for themselves—the dose of the lady silent under a sort of pardoning grand accusation; and they have had to drink it, and they have blinked over the tonic draught with such power of taking a bracing as their constitutions could summon. At no moment of their quaint mutual history are the sexes to be seen standing more acutely divided. Well may the lady be silent; her little sins are magnified to herself to the proportion of the greatness of heart forgiving her; and that, with his mysterious penetration and a throb of her conscience, holds her tongue-tied. She does not imagine the effect of her silence upon the magnanimous wretch. Some of these lovers, it has to be stated in sadness for the good name of man, have not preserved an attitude that said so nobly, 'Child, thou art human—thou art woman!' They have undone it and gone to pieces with an injured lover's babble of persecuting inquiries for confessions. Some, on the contrary, retaining the attitude, have been unable to digest the tonic; they did not prepare their systems as they did their dose, possibly thinking the latter a supererogatory heavy thump on a trifle, the which was performed by them artfully for a means of swallowing and getting that obnoxious trifle well down. These are ever after love's dyspeptics. Very few indeed continue at heart in harmony with their opening note to the silent fair, because in truth the general anticipation is of her proclaiming, if not

angelical innocence, a softly reddened or blush-rose of it, where the little guiltiness lies pathetic on its bed of white.

Page 3030

Alvan's robustness of temper, as a conqueror pleased with his capture, could inspirit him to feel as he said it:

'I know all; what matters that to me?' Even her silence, extending the 'all' beyond limits, as it did to the over-knowing man, who could number these indicative characteristics of the young woman: impulsive, without will, readily able to lie: her silence worked no discord in him. He would have remarked, that he was not looking out for a saint, but rather for a sprightly comrade, perfectly feminine, thoroughly mastered, young, graceful, comely, and a lady of station. Once in his good keeping, her lord would answer for her. And this was a manfully generous view of the situation. It belongs to the robustness of the conqueror's mood. But how of his opinion of her character in the fret of a baffling, a repulse, a defeat? Supposing the circumstances not to have helped her to shine as a heroine, while he was reduced to appear no hero to himself! Wise are the mothers who keep vigilant personal watch over their girls, were it only to guard them at present, from the gentleman's condescending generosity, until he has become something more than robust in his ideas of the sex—say, for lack of the ringing word, fraternal.

Clotilde never knew, and Alvan would have been unable to date, the origin of the black thing flung at her in time to come—when the man was frenzied, doubtless, but it was in his mind, and more than froth of madness.

After the night of the ball they met beneath the sanctioning roof of the amiable professor; and on one occasion the latter, perhaps waxing anxious, and after bringing about the introduction of Clotilde to the sister of Alvan, pursued his prudent measures bypassing the pair through a demi-ceremony of betrothal. It sprang Clotilde astride nearer to reality, both actually and in feeling; and she began to show the change at home. A rebuff that came of the coupling of her name with Alvan's pushed her back as far below the surface as she had ever been. She waited for him to take the step she had again implored him not yet to take; she feared that he would, she marvelled at his abstaining; the old wheel revolved, as it ever does with creatures that wait for circumstances to bring the change they cannot work for themselves; and once more the two fell asunder. She had thoughts of the cloister. Her venerable relative died joining her hand to Prince Marko's; she was induced to think of marriage. An illness laid her prostrate; she contemplated the peace of death.

Shortly before she fell sick the prince was a guest of her father's, and had won the household by his perfect amiability as an associate. The grace and glow, and some of the imaginable accomplishments of an Indian Bacchus were native to him. In her convalescence, she asked herself what more she could crave than the worship of a godlike youth, whom she in return might cherish, strengthening his frail health

Page 3031

with happiness. For she had seen how suffering ate him up; he required no teaching in the Spartan virtue of suffering, wolf-gnawed, silently. But he was a flower in sunshine to happiness, and he looked to her for it. Why should she withhold from him a thing so easily given? The convalescent is receptive and undesiring, or but very faintly desiring: the new blood coming into the frame like first dawn of light has not stirred the old passions; it is infant nature, with a tinge of superadded knowledge that is not cloud across it and lends it only a tender wistfulness.

Her physician sentenced her to the Alps, whither a friend, a daughter of our island, whose acquaintance she had made in Italy, was going, and at an invitation Clotilde accompanied her, and she breathed Alpine air. Marko sank into the category of dreams during sickness. There came a letter from the professor mentioning that Alvan was on one of the kingly Alpine heights in view, and the new blood running through her veins became a torrent. He there! So near! Could he not be reached?

He had a saying: Two wishes make a will.

The wishes of two lovers, he meant. A prettier sentence for lovers, and one more intoxicating to them, was never devised. It chirrups of the dear silly couple. Well, this was her wish. Was it his? Young health on the flow of her leaping blood cried out that it could not be other than Alvan's wish; she believed in his wishing it. Then as he wished and she wished, she had the will immediately, and it was all the more her own for being his as well. She hurried her friend and her friend's friends on horseback off to the heights where the wounded eagle lodged overlooking mountain and lake. The professor reported him outwearied with excess of work. Alvan lived the lives of three; the sins of thirty were laid to his charge. Do you judge of heroes as of lesser men? Her reckless defence of him, half spoken, half in her mind, helped her to comprehend his dealings with her, and how it was that he stormed her and consented to be beaten. He had a thousand occupations, an ambition out of the world of love, chains to break, temptations, leanings . . . tut, tut! She had not lived in her circle of society, and listened to the tales of his friends and enemies, and been the correspondent of flattering and flattered men of learning, without understanding how a man like Alvan found diversions when forbidden to act in a given direction: and now that her healthful new blood inspired the courage to turn two wishes to a will, she saw both herself and him very clearly, enough at least to pardon the man more than she did herself. She had perforce of her radiant new healthfulness arrived at an exact understanding of him. Where she was deluded was in supposing that she would no longer dread his impetuous disposition to turn rosy visions into facts. But she had the revived convalescent's ardour to embrace things positive while they were not knocking at the door; dreams were abhorrent to her, tasteless and innutritious; she cast herself on the flood, relying on his towering strength and mastery of men and events to bring her to some safe landing—-the dream of hearts athirst for facts.

Page 3032

CHAPTER VI

Alvan was at his writing-table doing stout gladiator's work on paper in a chamber of one of the gaunt hotels of the heights, which are Death's Heads there in Winter and have the tongues in Summer, when a Swiss lad entered with a round grin to tell him that a lady on horseback below had asked for him—Dr. Alvan. Who could the lady be? He thought of too many. The thought of Clotilde was dismissed in its dimness. Issuing and beholding her, his face became illuminated as by a stroke of sunlight.

'Clotilde! by all the holiest!'

She smiled demurely, and they greeted.

She admired the look of rich pleasure shining through surprise in him. Her heart thanked him for appearing so handsome before her friends.

'I was writing,' said he. 'Guess to whom?—I had just finished my political stuff, and fell on a letter to the professor and another for an immediate introduction to your father.'

'True?'

'The truth, as you shall see. So, you have come, you have found me! This time if I let you slip, may I be stamped slack-fingered!'

'"Two wishes make a will," you say.'

He answered her with one of his bursts of brightness.

Her having sought him he read for the frank surrender which he was ready to match with a loyal devotion to his captive. Her coming cleared everything.

Clotilde introduced him to her friends, and he was enrolled a member of the party. His appearance was that of a man to whom the sphinx has whispered. They ascended to the topmost of the mountain stages, to another caravanserai of tourists, whence the singular people emerge in morning darkness night-capped and blanketed, and behold the great orb of day at his birth—he them.

Walking slowly beside Clotilde on the mountain way, Alvan said: 'Two wishes! Mine was in your breast. You wedded yours to it. At last!—and we are one. Not a word more of time lost. My wish is almost a will in itself—was it not?—and has been wooing yours all this while!—till the sleeper awakened, the well-spring leapt up from the earth; and our two wishes united dare the world to divide them. What can? My wish was your destiny, yours is mine. We are one.' He poetized on his passion, and dramatized it: 'Stood you at the altar, I would pluck you from the man holding your hand! There is no escape for

you. Nay, into the vaults, were you to grow pale and need my vital warmth—down to the vaults! Speak—or no: look! That will do. You hold a Titan in your eyes, like metal in the furnace, to turn him to any shape you please, liquid or solid. You make him a god: he is the river Alvan or the rock Alvan: but fixed or flowing, he is lord of you. That is the universal penalty: you must, if you have this creative soul, be the slave of your creature: if you raise him to heaven, you must be his! Ay, look! I know the eyes! They can melt granite, they can freeze fire. Pierce me, sweet eyes! And now flutter, for there is that in me to make them.'

Page 3033

‘Consider!’ Clotilde flutteringly entreated him.

’The world? you dear heaven of me! Looking down on me does not compromise you, and I am not ashamed of my devotions. I sat in gloom: you came: I saw my goddess and worshipped. The world, Lutece, the world is a variable monster; it rends the weak whether sincere or false; but those who weld strength with sincerity may practise their rites of religion publicly, and it fawns to them, and bellows to imitate. Nay, I say that strength in love is the sole sincerity, and the world knows it, muffs it in the air about us, and so we two are privileged. Politically also we know that strength is the one reality: the rest is shadow. Behind the veil of our human conventions power is constant as ever, and to perceive the fact is to have the divining rod-to walk clear of shams. He is the teacher who shows where power exists: he is the leader who wakens and forms it. Why have I unfailingly succeeded?—I never doubted! The world voluntarily opens a path to those who step determinedly. You—to your honour?—I won’t decide—but you have the longest in my experience resisted. I have a Durandal to hew the mountain walls; I have a voice for ears, a net for butterflies, a hook for fish, and desperation to plunge into marshes: but the feu follet will not be caught. One must wait—wait till her desire to have a soul bids her come to us. She has come! A soul is hers: and see how, instantly, the old monster, the world, which has no soul—not yet: we are helping it to get one—becomes a shadow, powerless to stop or overawe. For I do give you a soul, think as you will of it. I give you strength to realize, courage to act. It is the soul that does things in this life—the rest is vapour. How do we distinguish love?—as we do music by the pure note won from resolute strings. The tense chord is music, and it is love. This higher and higher mountain air, with you beside me, sweeps me like a harp.’

‘Oh! talk on, talk on! talk ever! do not cease talking to me!’ exclaimed Clotilde.

‘You feel the mountain spirit?’

‘I feel that you reveal it.’

‘Tell me the books you have been reading.’

‘Oh, light literature-poor stuff.’

’When we two read together you will not say that. Light literature is the garden and the orchard, the fountain, the rainbow, the far view; the view within us as well as without. Our blood runs through it, our history in the quick. The Philistine detests it, because he has no view, out or in. The dry confess they are cut off from the living tree, peeled and sapless, when they condemn it. The vulgar demand to have their pleasures in their own likeness—and let them swamp their troughs! they shall not degrade the fame of noble fiction. We are the choice public, which will have good writing for light reading. Poet, novelist, essayist, dramatist, shall be ranked honourable in my Republic. I am neither, but a man of law,

Page 3034

a student of the sciences, a politician, on the road to government and statecraft: and yet I say I have learnt as much from light literature as from heavy-as much, that is, from the pictures of our human blood in motion as from the clever assortment of our forefatherly heaps of bones. Shun those who cry out against fiction and have no taste for elegant writing. For to have no sympathy with the playful mind is not to have a mind: it is a test. But name the books.'

She named one or two.

'And when does Dr. Alvan date the first year of his Republic?'

'Clotilde!' he turned on her.

'My good sir?'

'These worthy good people who are with you: tell me-to-morrow we leave them!'

'Leave them?'

'You with me. No more partings. The first year, the first day shall be dated from to-morrow. You and I proclaim our Republic on these heights. All the ceremonies to follow. We will have a reaping of them, and make a sheaf to present to the world with compliments. To-morrow!'

'You do not speak seriously?'

'I jest as little as the Talmud. Decide at once, in the happy flush of this moment.'

'I cannot listen to you, dear sir!'

'But your heart beats!'

'I am not mistress of it.'

'Call me master of it. I make ready for to-morrow.'

'No! no! no! A thousand times no! You have been reading too much fiction and verse. Properly I should spurn you.'

'Will you fail me, play feu follet, ward me off again?'

'I must be won by rules, brave knight!'

'Will you be won?'

'And are you he—the Alvan who would not be centaur?'

’I am he who chased a marsh-fire, and encountered a retiarius, and the meshes are on my head and arms. I fancied I dealt with a woman; a woman needing protection! She has me fast—I am netted, centaur or man. That is between us two. But think of us facing the world, and trust me; take my hand, take the leap; I am the best fighter in that fight. Trust it to me, and all your difficulties are at an end. To fly solves the problem.’

‘Indeed, indeed, I have more courage than I had,’ said Clotilde.

His eyes dilated, steadied, speculated, weighed her.

‘Put it to proof while you can believe in it!’

‘How is it every one but you thinks me bold?’ she complained.

’Because I carry a touchstone that brings out the truth. I am your reality: all others are phantoms. You can impose on them, not on me. Courage for one inspired plunge you may have, and it will be your salvation:—southward, over to Italy, that is the line of flight, and the subsequent struggle will be mine: you will not have to face it. But the courage for daily contention at home, standing alone, while I am distant and maligned—can you fancy your having that? No! be wise of what you really are; cast the die for love, and mount away tomorrow.’

Page 3035

‘Then,’ said Clotilde, with elvish cunning, ’do you doubt your ability to win me without a scandal?’

‘Back me, and I win you!’ he replied in a tone of unwonted humility: a sudden droop.

She let her hand fall. He grasped it.

‘Gradations appear to be unknown to you,’ she said.

He cried out: ’Count the years of life, span them, think of the work to be done, and ask yourself whether time and strength should run to waste in retarding the inevitable? Pottering up steps that can be taken at one bound is very well for peasant pilgrims whose shrine is their bourne, and their kneecaps the footing stumps. But for us two life begins up there. Onward, and everywhere around, when we two are together, is our shrine. I have worked, and wasted life; I have not lived, and I thirst to live.’

She murmured, in a fervour, ‘You shall!’ and slipped behind her defences. ’To-morrow morning we shall wander about; I must have a little time; all to-morrow morning we can discuss plans.’

‘You know you command me,’ said he, and gazed at her.

She was really a child compared with him in years, and if it was an excuse for taking her destiny into his hands, she consenting,—it was also a reason why he dared not press his whole weight to win her to the step.

She had the pride of the secret knowledge of her command of this giant at the long table of the guests at dinner, where, after some play of knife and fork among notable professors, Prussian officers, lively Frenchmen and Italians, and the usual over-supply of touring English of both sexes, not encouraging to conversation in their look of pallid disgust of the art, Alvan started general topics and led them. The lead came to him naturally, because he was a natural speaker, of a mind both stored and effervescent; and he was genial, interested in every growth of life. She did not wonder at his popularity among men of all classes and sets, or that he should be famed for charming women. Her friend was enraptured with him. Friendly questions pressed in an evening chatter between the ladies, and Clotilde fenced, which is half a confession.

‘But you are not engaged?’ said the blunt Englishwoman.

According to the explanation, Clotilde was hardly engaged. It was not an easy thing to say how she stood definitely. She had obeyed her dying relative and dearest on earth by joining her hand to Prince Marko’s, and had pleased her parents by following it up with the kindest attentions to the prince. It had been done, however, for the sake of peace; and chiefly for his well-being. She had reserved her full consent: the plighting was incomplete. Prince Marko knew that there was another, a magical person, a genius

of the ring, irresistible. He had been warned, that should the other come forth to claim her . . . . And she was about to write to him this very night to tell him . . . tell him fully . . . . In truth, she

Page 3036

loved both, but each so differently! And both loved her! And she had to make her choice of one, and tell the prince she did love him, but . . . Dots are the best of symbols for rendering cardisophistical subtleties intelligible, and as they are much used in dialogue, one should have now and then permission to print them. Especially feminine dialogue referring to matters of the uncertain heart takes assistance from troops of dots; and not to understand them at least as well as words, when words have as it were conducted us to the brink of expression, and shown us the precipice, is to be dull, bucolic of the marketplace.

Sunless rose the morning. The blanketed figures went out to salute a blanketed sky. Drizzling they returned, images of woefulness in various forms, including laughter's. Alvan frankly declared himself the disappointed showman; he had hoped for his beloved to see the sight long loved by him of golden chariot and sun-steeds crossing the peaks and the lakes; and his disappointment became consternation on hearing Clotilde's English friend (after objection to his pagan clothing of the solemn reality of sunrise, which destroyed or minimized by too materially defining a grandeur that derived its essence from mystery, she thought) announce the hour for her departure. He promised her a positive sunrise if she would delay. Her child lay recovering from an illness in the town below, and she could not stay. But Clotilde had coughed in the damp morning air, and it would, he urged, be dangerous for her to be exposed to it. Had not the lady heard her cough? She had, but personally she was obliged to go; with her child lying ill she could not remain. 'But, madam, do you hear that cough again? Will you drag her out with such a cough as that?' The lady repeated 'My child!' Clotilde said it had been agreed they should descend this day; her friend must be beside her child. Alvan thundered an 'Impossible!' The child was recovering; Clotilde was running into danger: he argued with the senseless woman, opposing reason to the feminine sentiment of the maternal, and of course he was beaten. He was compelled to sit and gnaw his eloquence. Clotilde likened his appearance to a strangled roar. 'Mothers and their children are too much for me!' he said, penitent for his betrayal of over-urgency, as he helped to wrap her warmly, and counselled her very mode of breathing in the raw mountain atmosphere.

'I admire you for knowing when to yield,' said she.

He groaned, with frown and laugh: 'You know what I would beg!'

She implored him to have some faith in her.

The missiles of the impassioned were discharged at the poor English: a customary volley in most places where they intrude after quitting their shores, if they diverge from the avenue of hotel-keepers and waiters: but Clotilde pointed out to him that her English friend was not showing coldness in devoting herself to her child.

Page 3037

‘No, they attend to their duties,’ he assented generally, desperately just.

‘And you owe it to her that you have seen me.’

‘I do,’ he said, and forthwith courted the lady to be forgiven.

Clotilde was taken from him in a heavy downpour and trailing of mists.

At the foot of the mountain a boy handed her a letter from Alvan—a burning flood, rolled out of him like lava after they had separated on the second plateau, and confided to one who knew how to outstrip pathfarers. She entered her hotel across the lake, and met a telegram. At night the wires flashed ‘Sleep well’ to her; on her awakening, ’Good morning.’ A lengthened history of the day was telegraphed for her amusement. Again at night there was a ‘God guard you!’

‘Who can resist him?’ sighed Clotilde, excited, nervous, flattered, happy, but yearning to repose and be curtained from the buzz of the excess of life that he put about her. This time there was no prospect of his courtship relapsing.

‘He is a wonderful, an ideal lover!’ replied her friend.

‘If he were only that!’ said Clotilde, musing expressively. ’If, dear Englishwoman, he were only that, he might be withstood. But Alvan mounts high over such lovers: he is a wonderful and ideal man: so great, so generous, heroical, giant-like, that what he wills must be.’

The Englishwoman was quick enough to seize an indication difficult to miss—more was expected to be said of him.

‘You see the perfect gentleman in Dr. Alvan,’ she remarked, for she had heard him ordering his morning bath at the hotel, and he had also been polite to her under vexation.

Clotilde nodded hurriedly; she saw something infinitely greater, and disliked the bringing of that island microscope to bear upon a giant. She found it repugnant to hear a word of Alvan as a perfect gentleman. Justly, however, she took him for a splendid nature, and assuming upon good authority that the greater contains the lesser, she supposed the lesser to be a chiselled figure serviceably alive in the embrace.

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VII

He was down on the plains to her the second day, and as usual when they met, it was as if they had not parted; his animation made it seem so. He was like summer's morning sunlight, his warmth striking instantly through her blood dispersed any hesitating strangeness that sometimes gathers during absences, caused by girlish dread of a step to take, or shame at the step taken, when coldish gentlemen rather create these backflowings and gaps in the feelings. She had grown reconciled to the perturbation of his messages, and would have preferred to have him startling and thrilling her from a distance; but seeing him, she welcomed him, and feeling in his bright presence not the faintest chill of the fit of shyness, she took her bravery of heart for a sign that she had reached his level, and might own it by speaking of the practical measures to lead to their union. On one subject sure to be raised against him by her parents, she had a right to be inquisitive: the baroness.

Page 3038

She asked to see a photograph of her.

Alvan gave her one out of his pocketbook, and watched her eyelids in profile as she perused those features of the budless grey woman. The eyelids in such scrutinies reveal the critical mind; Clotilde's drooped till they almost closed upon their lashes—-deadly criticism.

'Think of her age,' said Alvan, colouring. He named a grandmaternal date for the year of the baroness's birth.

Her eyebrows now stood up; her contemplation of those disenchanting lineaments came to an abrupt finish.

She returned the square card to him, slowly shaking her head, still eyeing earth as her hand stretched forth the card laterally. He could not contest the woeful verdict.

'Twenty years back!' he murmured, writhing. The baroness was a woman fair to see in the days twenty years back, though Clotilde might think it incredible: she really was once.

Clotilde resumed her doleful shaking of the head; she sighed. He shrugged; she looked at him, and he blinked a little. For the first time since they had come together she had a clear advantage, and as it was likely to be a rare occasion, she did not let it slip. She sighed again. He was wounded by her underestimate of his ancient conquest.

'Yes—now,' he said, impatiently.

'I cannot feel jealousy, I cannot feel rivalry,' said she, sad of voice.

The humour of her tranced eyes in the shaking head provoked him to defend the baroness for her goodness of heart, her energy of brain.

Clotilde 'tolled' her naughty head.

'But it is a strong face,' she said, 'a strong face—a strong jaw, by Lavater! You were young—and daringly adventurous; she was captivating in her distress. Now she is old—and you are friends.'

'Friends, yes,' Alvan replied, and praised the girl, as of course she deserved to be praised for her open mind.

'We are friends!' he said, dropping a deep-chested breath. The title this girl scornfully supplied was balm to the vanity she had stung, and his burnt skin was too eager for a covering of any sort to examine the mood of the giver. She had positively humbled him so far as with a single word to relieve him; for he had seen bristling chapters in her look

at the photograph. Yet for all the natural sensitiveness of the man's vanity, he did not seek to bury the subject at the cost of a misconception injurious in the slightest degree to the sentiments he entertained toward the older lady as well as the younger. 'Friends! you are right; good friends; only you should know that it is just a little—a trifle different. The fact is, I cannot kill the past, and I would not. It would try me sharply to break the tie connecting us, were it possible to break it. I am bound to her by gratitude. She is old now; and were she twice that age, I should retain my feeling for her. You raise your eyes, Clotilde! Well, when I was much younger I found

Page 3039

this lady in desperate ill-fortune, and she honoured me with her confidence. Young man though I was, I defended her; I stopped at no measure to defend her: against a powerful husband, remember—the most unscrupulous of foes, who sought to rob her of every right she possessed. And what I did then I again would do. I was vowed to her interests, to protect a woman shamefully wronged; I did not stick at trifles, as you know; you have read my speech in defence of myself before the court. By my interpretation of the case, I was justified; but I estranged my family and made the world my enemy. I gave my time and money, besides the forfeit of reputation, to the case, and reasonably there was an arrangement to repay me out of the estate reserved for her, so that the baroness should not be under the degradation of feeling herself indebted. You will not think that out of the way: men of the world do not. As for matters of the heart between us, we're as far apart as the Poles.'

He spoke hurriedly. He had said all that could be expected of him.

They were in a wood, walking through lines of spruce firs of deep golden green in the yellow beams. One of these trees among its well-robed fellows fronting them was all lichen-smitten. From the low sweeping branches touching earth to the plumed top, the tree was dead-black as its shadow; a vision of blackness.

'I will compose a beautiful, dutiful, modest, oddest, beseeching, screeching, mildish, childish epistle to her, and you shall read it, and if you approve it, we shall despatch it,' said Clotilde.

'There speaks my gold-crested serpent at her wisest!' replied Alvan. 'And now for my visit to your family: I follow you in a day. En avant! contre les canons! A run to Lake Leman brings us to them in the afternoon. I shall see you in the evening. So our separation won't be for long this time. All the auspices are good. We shall not be rich —nor poor.'

Clotilde reminded him that a portion of money would be brought to the store by her.

'We don't count it,' said he. 'Not rich, certainly. And you will not expect me to make money by my pen. Above all things I detest the writing for money. Fiction and verse appeal to a besotted public, that judges of the merit of the work by the standard of its taste: avaunt! And journalism for money is Egyptian bondage. No slavery is comparable to the chains of hired journalism. My pen is my fountain—the key of me; and I give my self, I do not sell. I write when I have matter in me and in the direction it presses for, otherwise not one word!'

'I would never ask you to sell yourself,' said Clotilde. 'I would rather be in want of common comforts.'

He squeezed her wrist. They were again in front of the black-draped blighted tree. It was the sole tree of the host clad thus in scurf bearing a semblance of livid metal. They looked at it as having seen it before, and passed on.

Page 3040

‘But the wife of Sigismund Alvan will not be poor in renown!’ he resumed, radiating his full bloom on her.

‘My highest ambition is to be Sigismund Alvan’s wife!’ she exclaimed.

To hear her was as good as wine, and his heart came out on a genial chuckle. ’Ay, the choice you have made is not, by heaven, so bad. Sigismund Alvan’s wife shall take the foremost place of all. Look at me.’ He lifted his head to the highest on his shoulders, widening his eagle eyes. He was now thoroughly restored and in his own upper element, expansive after the humiliating contraction of his man’s vanity under the glances of a girl. ’Do you take me for one who could be content with the part of second? I will work and do battle unceasingly, but I will have too the prize of battle to clasp it, savour it richly. I was not fashioned to be the lean meek martyr of a cause, not I. I carry too decisive a weight in the balance to victory. I have a taste for fruits, my fairest! And Republics, my bright Lutetia, can give you splendid honours.’ He helped her to realize this with the assuring splendour of his eyes.

’"Bride of the Elect of the People!" is not that as glorious a title, think you, as queen of an hereditary sovereign mumbling of God’s grace on his worm-eaten throne? I win that seat by service, by the dedication of this brain to the people’s interests. They have been ground to the dust, and I lift them, as I did a persecuted lady in my boyhood. I am the soldier of justice against the army of the unjust. But I claim my reward. If I live to fight, I live also to enjoy. I will have my station. I win it not only because I serve, but because also I have seen, have seen ahead, seen where all is dark, read the unwritten —because I am soldier and prophet. The brain of man is Jove’s eagle and his lightning on earth—the title to majesty henceforth. Ah! my fairest; entering the city beside me, and the people shouting around, she would not think her choice a bad one?’

Clotilde made sign and gave some earnest on his arm of ecstatic hugging.

’We may have hard battles, grim deceptions, to go through before that day comes,’ he continued after a while. ’The day is coming, but we must wait for it, work on. I have the secret of how to head the people—to put a head to their movement and make it irresistible, as I believe it will be beneficent. I set them moving on the lines of the law of things. I am no empty theorizer, no phantasmal speculator; I am the man of science in politics. When my system is grasped by the people, there is but a step to the realization of it. One step. It will be taken in my time, or acknowledged later. I stand for index to the people of the path they should take to triumph—must take, as triumph they must sooner or later: not by the route of what is called Progress—pooh! That is a middle-class invention to effect a compromise. With the people the matter rests with their intelligence! meanwhile my star is bright and shines reflected.’

Page 3041

‘I notice,’ she said, favouring him with as much reflection as a splendid lover could crave for, ’that you never look down, you never look on the ground, but always either up or straight before you.’

‘People have remarked it,’ said he, smiling. ’Here we are at this funereal tree again. All roads lead to Rome, and ours appears to conduct us perpetually to this tree. It ‘s the only dead one here.’

He sighted the plumed black top and along the swelling branches decorously clothed in decay: a salted ebon moss when seen closely; the small grey particles giving a sick shimmer to the darkness of the mass. It was very witch-like, of a witch in her incantation-smoke.

‘Not a single bare spot! but dead, dead as any peeled and fallen!’ said Alvan, fingering a tuft of the sooty snake-lichen. ’This is a tree for a melancholy poet—eh, Clotilde?—for him to come on it by moonlight, after a scene with his mistress, or tales of her! By the way and by the way, my fair darling, let me never think of your wearing this kind of garb for me, should I be ordered off the first to join the dusky army below. Women who put on their dead husbands in public are not well-mannered women, though they may be excellent professional widows, excellent!’

He snapped the lichen-dust from his fingers, observing that he was not sure the contrast of the flourishing and blighted was not more impressive in sunlight: and then he looked from the tree to his true love’s hair. The tree at a little distance seemed run over with sunless lizards: her locks were golden serpents.

‘Shall I soon see your baroness?’ Clotilde asked him.

‘Not in advance of the ceremony,’ he answered. ’In good time. You understand—an old friend making room for a new one, and that one young and beautiful, with golden tresses; at first . . . ! But her heart is quite sound. Have no fear! I guarantee it; I know her to the roots. She desires my welfare, she does my behests. If I am bound to her by gratitude, so, and in a greater degree, is she to me. The utmost she will demand is that my bride shall be worthy of me—a good mate for me in the fight to come; and I have tested my bride and found her half my heart; therefore she passes the examination with the baroness.’

They left the tree behind them.

‘We will take good care not to return this way again,’ said Alvan, without looking back. ’That tree belongs to a plantation of the under world; its fellows grow in the wood across Acheron, and that tree has looked into the ghastliness of the flood and seen itself. Hecate and Hermes know about it. Phoebus cannot light it. That tree stands for Death blooming. We think it sinister, but down there it is a homely tree. Down there! When

do we go? The shudder in that tree is the air exchanging between Life and Death—the ghosts going and coming: it's on the border line. I just felt the creep. I think you did. The reason is—there is always a material reason—that you were warm, and a bit of chill breeze took you as you gazed; while for my part I was imagining at that very moment what of all possible causes might separate us, and I acknowledged that death could do the trick. But death, my love, is far from us two!'

Page 3042

‘Does she look as grimmish as she does in the photograph?’ said Clotilde.

‘Who? the baroness?’ Alvan laughed. The baroness was not so easily defended from a girl as from her husband, it appeared. ’She is the best of comrades, best of friends. She has her faults; may not relish the writ announcing her final deposition, but be you true to me, and as true as she has unfailingly been to me, she will be to you. That I can promise. My poor Lucie! She is winter, if you will. It is not the winter of the steppes; you may compare her to winter in a noble country; a fine landscape of winter. The outlines of her face . . . . She has a great brain. How much I owe that woman for instruction! You meet now and then men who have the woman in them without being womanized; they are the pick of men. And the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength. And she is one; man’s brain, woman’s heart. I thought her unique till I heard of you. And how do I stand between you two? She has the only fault you can charge me with; she is before me in time, as I am before you. Shall I spoil you as she spoilt me? No, no! Obedience to a boy is the recognition of the heir-apparent, and I respect the salique law as much as I love my love. I do not offer obedience to a girl, but succour, support. You will not rule me, but you will invigorate, and if you are petted, you shall not be spoilt. Do not expect me to show like that undertakerly tree till my years are one hundred. Even then it will be dangerous to repose beneath my branches in the belief that I am sapless because I have changed colour. We Jews have a lusty blood. We are strong of the earth. We serve you, but you must minister to us. Sensual? We have truly excellent appetites. And why not? Heroical too! Soldiers, poets, musicians; the Gentile’s masters in mental arithmetic—keenest of weapons: surpassing him in common sense and capacity for brotherhood. Ay, and in charity; or what stores of vengeance should we not have nourished! Already we have the money-bags. Soon we shall hold the chief offices. And when the popular election is as unimpeded as the coursing of the blood in a healthy body, the Jew shall be foremost and topmost, for he is pre-eminently by comparison the brain of these latter-day communities. But that is only my answer to the brutish contempt of the Jew. I am no champion of a race. I am for the world, for man!’

Clotilde remarked that he had many friends, all men of eminence, and a large following among the people.

He assented: ’Yes: Tresten, Retka, Kehlen, the Nizzian. Yes, if I were other than for legality:—if it came to a rising, I could tell off able lieutenants.’

‘Tell me of your interview with Ironsides,’ she said proudly and fondly.

Page 3043

‘Would this ambitious little head know everything?’ said Alvan, putting his lips among the locks. ’Well, we met: he requested it. We agreed that we were on neutral ground for the moment: that he might ultimately have to decapitate me, or I to banish him, but temporarily we could compare our plans for governing. He showed me his hand. I showed him mine. We played open-handed, like two at whist. He did not doubt my honesty, and I astonished him by taking him quite in earnest. He has dealt with diplomatists, who imagine nothing but shuffling: the old Ironer! I love him for his love of common sense, his contempt of mean deceit. He will outwit you, but his dexterity is a giant’s—a simple evolution rapidly performed: and nothing so much perplexes pygmies! Then he has them, bagsful of them! The world will see; and see giant meet giant, I suspect. He and I proposed each of us in the mildest manner contrary schemes—schemes to stiffen the hair of Europe! Enough that we parted with mutual respect. He is a fine fellow: and so was my friend the Emperor Tiberius, and so was Richelieu. Napoleon was a fine engine:—there is a difference. Yes, Ironsides is a fine fellow! but he and I may cross. His ideas are not many. The point to remember is that he is iron on them: he can drive them hard into the density of the globe. He has quick nerves and imagination: he can conjure up, penetrate, and traverse complications—an enemy’s plans, all that the enemy will be able to combine, and the likeliest that he will do. Good. We opine that we are equal to the same. He is for kingcraft to mask his viziercraft—and save him the labour of patiently attempting oratory and persuasion, which accomplishment he does not possess:—it is not in iron. We think the more precious metal will beat him when the broader conflict comes. But such an adversary is not to be underrated. I do not underrate him: and certainly not he me. Had he been born with the gifts of patience and a fluent tongue, and not a petty noble, he might have been for the people, as knowing them the greater power. He sees that their knowledge of their power must eventually come to them. In the meantime his party is forcible enough to assure him he is not fighting a losing game at present: and he is, no doubt, by lineage and his traditions monarchical. He is curiously simple, not really cynical. His apparent cynicism is sheer irritability. His contemptuous phrases are directed against obstacles: against things, persons, nations that oppose him or cannot serve his turn against his king, if his king is restive; but he respects his king: against your friends’ country, because there is no fixing it to a line of policy, and it seems to have collapsed; but he likes that country the best in Europe after his own. He is nearest to contempt in his treatment of his dupes and tools, who are dropped out of his mind when he has quite squeezed them for his occasion; to be taken up again when they are of use to him.

Page 3044

Hence he will have no following. But let me die to-morrow, the party I have created survives. In him you see the dam, in me the stream. Judge, then, which of them gains the future!—admitting that, in the present he may beat me. He is a Prussian, stoutly defined from a German, and yet again a German stoutly defined from our borderers: and that completes him. He has as little the idea of humanity as the sword of our Hermann, the cannon-ball of our Frederick. Observe him. What an eye he has! I watched it as we were talking: and he has, I repeat, imagination; he can project his mind in front of him as far as his reasoning on the possible allows: and that eye of his flashes; and not only flashes, you see it hurling a bolt; it gives me the picture of a Balearic slinger about to whizz the stone for that eye looks far, and is hard, and is dead certain of its mark-within his practical compass, as I have said. I see farther, and I fancy I proved to him that I am not a dreamer. In my opinion, when we cross our swords I stand a fair chance of not being worsted. We shall: you shrink? Figuratively, my darling have no fear! Combative as we may be, both of us, we are now grave seniors, we have serious business: a party looks to him, my party looks to me. Never need you fear that I shall be at sword or pistol with any one. I will challenge my man, whoever he as that needs a lesson, to touch buttons on a waistcoat with the button on the foil, or drill fiver and eights in cards at twenty paces: but I will not fight him though he offend me, for I am stronger than my temper, and as I do not want to take his nip of life, and judge it to be of less value than mine, the imperilling of either is an absurdity.'

'Oh! because I know you are incapable of craven fear,' cried Clotilde, answering aloud the question within herself of why she so much admired, why she so fondly loved him. To feel his courage backing his high good sense was to repose in security, and her knowledge that an astute self-control was behind his courage assured her he was invincible. It seemed to her, therefore, as they walked side by side, and she saw their triumphant pair of figures in her fancy, natural that she should instantly take the step to prepare her for becoming his Republican Princess. She walked an equal with the great of the earth, by virtue of her being the mate of the greatest of the great; she trod on some, and she thrilled gratefully to the man who sustained her and shielded her on that eminence. Elect of the people he! and by a vaster power than kings can summon through the trumpet! She could surely pass through the trial with her parents that she might step to the place beside him! She pressed his arm to be physically a sharer of his glory. Was it love? It was as lofty a stretch as her nature could strain to.

She named the city on the shores of the great Swiss lake where her parents were residing; she bade him follow her thither, and name the hotel where he was to be found, the hour when he was to arrive. 'Am I not precise as an office clerk?' she said, with a pleasant taste of the reality her preciseness pictured.

Page 3045

‘Practical as the head of a State department,’ said he, in good faith.

‘I shall not keep you waiting,’ she resumed.

’The sooner we are together after the action opens the better for our success, my golden crest!’

’Have no misgivings, Sigismund. You have transformed me. A spark of you is in my blood. Come. I shall send word to your hotel when you are to appear. But you will come, you will be there, I know. I know you so entirely.’

’As a rule, Lutetia, women know no more than half of a man even when they have married him. At least you ought to know me. You know that if I were to exercise my will firmly now—it would not waver if I called it forth—I could carry you off and spare you the flutter you will have to go through during our interlude with papa and mama.’

‘I almost wish you would,’ said she. She looked half imploringly, biting her lip to correct the peeping wish.

Alvan pressed a finger on one of her dimples: ’Be brave. Flight and defiance are our last resource. Now that I see you resolved I shun the scandal, and we will leave it to them to insist on it, if it must be. How can you be less than resolved after I have poured my influence into your veins? The other day on the heights—had you consented then? Well! it would have been very well, but not so well. We two have a future, and are bound to make the opening chapters good sober reading, for an example, if we can. I take you from your father’s house, from your mother’s arms, from the “God speed” of your friends. That is how Alvan’s wife should be presented to the world.’

Clotilde’s epistle to the baroness was composed, approved, and despatched. To a frigid eye it read as more hypocritical than it really was; for supposing it had to be written, the language of the natural impulse called up to write it was necessarily in request, and that language is easily overdone, so as to be discordant with the situation, while it is, as the writer feels, a fairly true and well-formed expression of the pretty impulse. But wiser is it always that the star in the ascendant should not address the one waning. Hardly can a word be uttered without grossly wounding. She would not do it to a younger rival: the letter strikes on the recipient’s age! She babbles of a friendship: she plays at childish ninny! The display of her ingenuous happiness causes feminine nature’s bosom to rise in surges. The declarations of her devotedness to the man waken comparisons with a deeper, a longer-tried suffering. Actually the letter of the rising star assumes personal feeling to have died out of the abandoned luminary, and personal feeling is chafed to its acutest edge by the perusal; contempt also of one who can stupidly simulate such innocence, is roused.

Page 3046

Among Alvan's gifts the understanding of women did not rank high. He was too robust, he had been too successful. Your very successful hero regards them as nine-pins destined to fall, the whole tuneful nine, at a peculiar poetical twist of the bowler's wrist, one knocking down the other—figuratively, for their scruples, or for their example with their sisters. His tastes had led him into the avenues of success, and as he had not encountered grand resistances, he entertained his opinion of their sex. The particular maxim he cherished was, to stake everything on his making a favourable first impression: after which single figure, he said, all your empty naughts count with women for hundreds, thousands, millions: noblest virtues are but sickly units. He would have stared like any Philistine at the tale of their capacity to advance to a likeness unto men in their fight with the world. Women for him were objects to be chased, the politician's relaxation, taken like the sportsman's business, with keen relish both for the pursuit and the prey, and a view of the termination of his pastime. Their feelings he could appreciate during the time when they flew and fell, perhaps a little longer; but the change in his own feelings withdrew him from the communion of sentiment. This is the state of men who frequent the avenues of success. At present he was thinking of a wife, and he approved the epistle to the baroness cordially.

'I do think it a nice kind of letter, and quite humble enough,' said Clotilde.

He agreed, 'Yes, yes: she knows already that this is really serious with me.'

So much for the baroness.

Now for their parting. A parting that is no worse than the turning of a page to a final meeting is made light of, but felt. Reason is all in our favour, and yet the gods are jealous of the bliss of mortals; the slip between the cup and the lip is emotionally watched for, even though it be not apprehended, when the cup trembles for very fulness. Clotilde required reassuring and comforting: 'I am certain you will prevail; you must; you cannot be resisted; I stand to witness to the fact,' she sighed in a languor: 'only, my people are hard to manage. I see more clearly now, that I have imposed on them; and they have given away by a sort of compact so long as I did nothing decisive. That I see. But, then again, have I not your spirit in me now? What has ever resisted you?—Then, as I am Alvan's wife, I share his heart with his fortunes, and I do not really dread the scenes from anticipating failure, still-the truth is, I fear I am three parts an actress, and the fourth feels itself a shivering morsel to face reality. No, I do not really feel it, but press my hand, I shall be true—I am so utterly yours: and because I have such faith in you. You never, yet have failed'

'Never: and it is impossible for me to conceive it,' said Alvan thoughtfully.

His last word to her on her departure was 'Courage!' Hers to him was conveyed by the fondest of looks. She had previously said 'To-morrow!' to remind him of his appointment to be with her on the morrow, and herself that she would not long stand alone. She did

not doubt of her courage while feasting on the beauty of one of the acknowledged strong men of earth. She kissed her hand, she flung her heart to him from the waving fingers.

Page 3047

CHAPTER VIII

Alvan, left to himself, had a quiet belief in the subjugation of his tricksy Clotilde, and the inspiriting he had given her. All the rest to come was mere business matter of the conflict, scarcely calling for a plan of action. Who can hold her back when a woman is decided to move? Husbands have tried it vainly, and parents; and though the husband and the parents are not dealing with the same kind of woman, you see the same elemental power in her under both conditions of rebel wife and rebel daughter to break conventional laws, and be splendidly irrational. That is, if she can be decided: in other words, aimed at a mark and inflamed to fly the barriers intercepting. He fancied he had achieved it. Alvan thanked his fortune that he had to treat with parents. The consolatory sensation of a pure intent soothed his inherent wildness, in the contemplation of the possibility that the latter might be roused by those people, her parents, to upset his honourable ambition to win a wife after the fashion of orderly citizens. It would be on their heads! But why vision mischance? An old half-jesting prophecy of his among his friends, that he would not pass his fortieth year, rose upon his recollection without casting a shadow. Lo, the reckless prophet about to marry!

No dark bride, no skeleton, no colourless thing, no lichened tree, was she. Not Death, my friends, but Life, is the bride of this doomed fortieth year! Was animation ever vivider in contrast with obstruction? Her hair would kindle the frosty shades to a throb of vitality: it would be sunshine in the subterranean sphere. The very thinking of her dispersed that realm of the poison hue, and the eternally inviting phosphorescent, still, curved forefinger, which says, ‘Come.’

To think of her as his vernal bride, while the snowy Alps were a celestial garden of no sunset before his eyes, was to have the taste of mortal life in the highest. He wondered how it was that he could have waited so long for her since the first night of their meeting, and he just distinguished the fact that he lived with the pulses of the minutes, much as she did, only more fierily. The ceaseless warfare called politics must have been the distraction: he forgot any other of another kind. He was a bridegroom for whom the rosed Alps rolled out, a panorama of illimitable felicity. And there were certain things he must overcome before he could name his bride his own, so that his innate love of contention, which had been constantly flattered by triumph, brought, his whole nature into play with the prospect of the morrow: not much liking it either. There is a nerve, in brave warriors that does not like the battle before, the crackle of musketry is heard, and the big artillery.

Page 3048

Methodically, according to his habit, he jotted down the hours of the trains, the hotel mentioned by Clotilde, the address of her father; he looked to his card-case, his writing materials, his notes upon Swiss law; considering that the scene would be in Switzerland, and he was a lawyer bent on acting within and up to the measure of the law as well as pleading eloquently. The desire to wing a telegram to her he thought it wise to repress, and he found himself in consequence composing verses, turgid enough, even to his own judgement. Poets would have failed at such a time, and he was not one, but an orator enamoured. He was a wild man, cased in the knowledge of jurisprudence, and wishing to enter the ranks of the soberly blissful. These he could imagine that he complimented by the wish. Then why should he doubt of his fortune? He did not.

The night passed, the morning came, and carried him on his journey. Late in the afternoon he alighted at the hotel he called Clotilde's. A letter was handed to him. His eyes all over the page caught the note of it for her beginning of the battle and despair at the first repulse. 'And now my turn!' said he, not overjoyously. The words Jew and demagogue and baroness, quoted in the letter, were old missiles hurling again at him. But Clotilde's parents were yet to learn that this Jew, demagogue, and champion of an injured lady, was a gentleman respectful to their legal and natural claims upon their child while maintaining his own: they were to know him and change their tone.

As he was reading the letter upstairs by sentences, his door opened at the answer to a tap. He started; his face was a shield's welcome to the birdlike applicant for admission. Clotilde stood hesitating.

He sent the introducing waiter speeding on his most kellnerish legs, and drew her in.

'Alvan, I have come.'

She was like a bird in his hands, palpitating to extinction.

He bent over her: 'What has happened?'

Trembling, and very pale, hard in her throat she said, 'The worst.'

'You have spoken to them both subsequent to this?' he shook the letter.

'It is hopeless.'

'Both to father and mother?'

'Both. They will not hear your name; they will not hear me speak. I repeat, it is past all hope, all chance of moving them. They hate—hate you, hate me for thinking of you. I had no choice; I wrote at once and followed my letter; I ran through the streets; I pant for want of breath, not want of courage. I prove I have it, Alvan; I have done all I can do.

She was enfolded; she sank on the nest, dropping her eyelids.

But he said nothing. She looked up at him. Her strained pale eyes provoked a closer embrace.

‘This would be the home for you if we were flying,’ said he, glancing round at the room, with a sensation like a shudder, ’Tell me what there is to be told.’

Page 3049

’Alvan, I have; that is all. They will not listen; they loathe Oh! what possesses them!’

‘They have not met me yet!’

‘They will not, will not ever—no!’

‘They must.’

’They refuse. Their child, for daring to say she loves you, is detested. Take me—take me away!’

‘Run?—facing the enemy?’ His countenance was the fiery laugh of a thirster for strife. ‘They have to be taught the stuff Alvan is made of!’

Clotilde moaned to signify she was sure he nursed an illusion. ’I found them celebrating the betrothal of my sister Lotte with the Austrian Count Walburg; I thought it favourable for us. I spoke of you to my mother. Oh, that scene! What she said I cannot recollect: it was a hiss. Then my father. Your name changed his features and his voice. They treated me as impure for mentioning it. You must have deadly enemies. I was unable to recognize either father or mother—they have become transformed. But you see I am here. Courage! you said; and I determined I would show it, and be worthy of you. But I am pursued, I am sure. My father is powerful in this place; we shall barely have time to escape.’

Alvan’s resolution was taken.

’Some friend—a lady living in the city here—name her, quick!—one you can trust,’ he said, and fondled her hastily, much as a gentle kind of drillmaster straightens a fair pupil’s shoulders. ’Yes, you have shown courage. Now it must be submission to me. You shall be no runaway bride, but honoured at the altar. Out of this hotel is the first point. You know some such lady?’

Clotilde tried to remonstrate and to suggest. She could have prophesied certain evil from any evasion of the straight line of flight; she was so sure of it because of her intuition that her courage had done its utmost in casting her on him, and that the remainder within her would be a drawing back. She could not get the word or even the look to encounter his close and warm imperiousness; and, hesitating, she noticed where they were together alone. She could not refuse the protection he offered in a person of her own sex; and now, flushing with the thought of where they were together alone, feminine modesty shrivelled at the idea of entreating a man to bear her off, though feminine desperation urged to it. She felt herself very bare of clothing, and she named a lady, a Madame Emerly, living near the hotel. Her heart sank like a stone. ’It is for you!’ cried Alvan, keenly sensible of his loss and his generosity in temporarily resigning her—for a subsequent triumph. ’But my wife shall not be snatched by a thief in the

night. Are you not my wife—my golden bride? And you may give me this pledge of it, as if the vows had just been uttered . . . and still I resign you till we speak the vows. It shall not be said of Alvan's wife, in the days of her glory, that she ran to her nuptials through rat-passages.'

Page 3050

His pride in his prevailingness thrilled her. She was cooled by her despondency sufficiently to perceive where the centre of it lay, but that centre of self was magnificent; she recovered some of her enthusiasm, thinking him perhaps to be acting rightly; in any case they were united, her step was irrevocable. Her having entered the hotel, her being in this room, certified to that. It seemed to her while she was waiting for the carriage he had ordered that she was already half a wife. She was not conscious of a blush. The sprite in the young woman's mind whispered of fire not burning when one is in the heart of it. And undoubtedly, contemplated from the outside, this room was the heart of fire. An impulse to fall on Alvan's breast and bless him for his chivalrousness had to be kept under lest she should wreck the thing she praised. Otherwise she was not ill at ease. Alvan summoned his gaiety, all his homeliness of tone, to give her composure, and on her quitting the room she was more than ever bound to him, despite her gloomy foreboding. A maid of her household, a middle-aged woman, gabbling of devotion to her, ran up the steps of the hotel. Her tale was, that the General had roused the city in pursuit of his daughter; and she heard whither Clotilde was going.

Within half an hour, Clotilde was in Madame Emerly's drawing-room relating her desperate history of love and parental tyranny, assisted by the lover whom she had introduced. Her hostess promised shelter and exhibited sympathy. The whole Teutonic portion of the Continent knew Alvan by reputation. He was insurrectionally notorious in morals and menacingly in politics; but his fine air, handsome face, flowing tongue, and the signal proof of his respect for the lady of his love and deference toward her family, won her personally. She promised the best help she could give them. They were certainly in a romantic situation, such as few women could see and decline their aid to the lovers.

Madame Emerly proved at least her sincerity before many minutes had passed.

Chancing to look out into the street, she saw Clotilde's mother and her betrothed sister stepping up to the house. What was to be done? And was the visit accidental? She announced it, and Clotilde cried out, but Alvan cried louder: 'Heaven-directed! and so, let me see her and speak to her—nothing could be better.'

Madame Emerly took mute counsel of Clotilde, shaking her own head premonitorily; and then she said: 'I think indeed it will be safer, if I am asked, to say you are not here, and I know not where you are.'

'Yes! yes!' Clotilde replied: 'Oh! do that.'

She half turned to Alvan, rigid with an entreaty that hung on his coming voice.

'No!' said Alvan, shocked in both pride and vanity. 'Plain-dealing; no subterfuge! Begin with foul falsehood? No. I would not have you burdened, madame, with the shadow of a conventional untruth on our account. And when it would be bad policy? . . . Oh, no,

worse than the sin! as the honest cynic says. We will go down to Madame von Rudiger, and she shall make acquaintance with the man who claims her daughter's hand.'

Page 3051

Clotilde rocked in an agony. Her friend was troubled. Both ladies knew what there would be to encounter better than he. But the man, strong in his belief in himself, imposed his will on them.

Alvan and Clotilde clasped hands as they went downstairs to Madame Emerly's reception room. She could hardly speak: 'Do not forsake me.'

'Is this forsaking?' He could ask it in the deeply questioning tone which supplies the answer.

'Oh, Alvan!' She would have said: 'Be warned.'

He kissed her fingers. 'Trust to me.'

She had to wrap her shivering spirit in a blind reliance and utter leaning on him.

She could almost have said: 'Know me better'; and she would, sincere as her passion in its shallow vessel was, have been moved to say it for a warning while yet there was time to leave the house instead of turning into that room, had not a remainder of her first exaltation (rapidly degenerating to desperation) inspired her with the thought of her being a part of this handsome, undaunted, triumph-flashing man.

Such a state of blind reliance and utter leaning, however, has a certain tendency to disintegrate the will, and by so doing it prepares the spirit to be a melting prize of the winner.

Men and women alike, who renounce their own individuality by cowering thus abjectly under some other before the storm, are in reality abjuring their idea of that other, and offering themselves up to the genius of Power in whatsoever direction it may chance to be manifested, in whatsoever person. We no sooner shut our eyes than we consent to be prey, we lose the soul of election.

Mark her as she proceeds. For should her hero fail, and she be suffering through his failure and her reliance on him, the blindness of it will seem to her to have been an infinite virtue, anything but her deplorable weakness crouching beneath his show of superhuman strength. And it will seem to her, so long as her sufferings endure, that he deceived her just expectations, and was a vain pretender to the superhuman:—for it was only a superhuman Jew and democrat whom she could have thought of espousing. The pusillanimous are under a necessity to be self-consoled when they are not self-justified: it is their instinctive manner of putting themselves in the right to themselves. The love she bore him, because it was the love his high conceit exacted, hung on success she was ready to fly with him and love him faithfully but not without some reason (where reason, we will own, should not quite so coldly obtrude) will it seem to her, that the man who would not fly, and would try the conflict, insisted to stake

her love on the issue he provoked. He roused the tempest, he angered the Fates, he tossed her to them; and reason, coldest reason, close as it ever is to the craven's heart in its hour of trial, whispers that he was prompted to fling the gambler's die by the swollen conceit in his fortune rather than by his desire for the prize.

Page 3052

That frigid reason of the craven has red-hot perceptions. It spies the spot of truth. Were the spot revealed in the man the whole man, then, so unerring is the eyeshot at him, we should have only to transform ourselves into cowards fronting a crisis to read him through and topple over the Sphinx of life by presenting her the sum of her most mysterious creature in an epigram. But there was as much more in Alvan than any faint-hearted thing, seeing however keenly, could see, as there is more in the world than the epigrams aimed at it contain.

‘Courage!’ said he: and she tremblingly: ‘Be careful!’ And then they were in the presence of her mother and sister.

Her sister was at the window, hanging her head low, a poor figure. Her mother stood in the middle of the room, and met them full face, with a woman’s combative frown of great eyes, in which the stare is a bolt.

‘Away with that man! I will not suffer him near me,’ she cried.

Alvan advanced to her: ’Tell me, madame, in God’s name, what you have against me.’

She swung her back on him. ’Go, sir! my husband will know how to deal with one like you. Out of my sight, I say!’

The brutality of this reception of Alvan nerved Clotilde. She went up to him, and laying her hand on his arm, feeling herself almost his equal, said: ’Let us go: come. I will not bear to hear you so spoken to. No one shall treat you like that when I am near.’

She expected him to give up the hopeless task, after such an experience of the commencement. He did but clasp her hand, assuring the Frau von Rudiger that no word of hers could irritate him. ’Nothing can make me forget that you are Clotilde’s mother. You are the mother of the lady I love, and may say what you will to me, madame. I bear it.’

’A man spotted with every iniquity the world abhors, and I am to see him holding my daughter by the hand!—it is too abominable! And because there is no one present to chastise him, he dares to address me and talk of his foul passion for my daughter. I repeat: that which you have to do is to go. My ears are shut. You can annoy, you can insult, you cannot move me. Go.’ She stamped: her aspect spat.

Alvan bowed. Under perfect self-command, he said: ’I will go at once to Clotilde’s father. I may hope, that with a reasonable man I shall speedily come to an understanding.’

She retorted: ’Enter his house, and he will have you driven out by his lacqueys.’

‘Hardly: I am not of those men who are driven from houses,’ Alvan said, smiling. ’But, madame, I will act on your warning, and spare her father, for all sakes, the attempt; seeing he does not yet know whom he deals with. I will write to him.’

’Letters from you will be flung back unopened.

‘It may, of course, be possible to destroy even my patience, madame.’

‘Mine, sir, is at an end.’

‘You reduce us to rely on ourselves; it is the sole alternative.’

Page 3053

‘You have not waited for that,’ rejoined Frau von Rudiger. ’You have already destroyed my daughter’s reputation by inducing her to leave her father’s house and hesitate to return. Oh! you are known. You are known for your dealings with women as well as men. We know you. We have, we pray to God, little more to learn of you. You! ah—-thief!’

‘Thief!’ Alvan’s voice rose on hers like the clapping echo of it. She had up the whole angry pride of the man in arms, and could discern that she had struck the wound in his history; but he was terrible to look at, so she made the charge supportable by saying:

‘You have stolen my child from me!’

Clotilde raised her throat, shrewish in excitement. ’False! He did not. I went to him of my own will, to run from your heartlessness, mother—that I call mother!—and be out of hearing of my father’s curses and threats. Yes, to him I fled, feeling that I belonged more to him than to you. And never will I return to you. You have killed my love; I am this man’s own because I love him only; him ever! him you abuse, as his partner in life for all it may give!—as his wife! Trample on him, you trample on me. Make black brows at your child for choosing the man, of all men alive, to worship and follow through the world. I do. I am his. I glory in him.’

Her gaze on Alvan said: ‘Now!’ Was she not worthy of him now? And would they not go forth together now? Oh! now!

Her gaze was met by nothing like the brilliant counterpart she merited. It was as if she had offered her beauty to a glass, and found a reflection in dull metal. He smiled calmly from her to her mother. He said:

’You accuse me of stealing your child, madame. You shall acknowledge that you have wronged me. Clotilde, my Clotilde! may I count on you to do all and everything for me? Is there any sacrifice I could ask that would be too hard for you? Will you at one sign from me go or do as I request you?’

She replied, in an anguish over the chilling riddle of his calmness: ’I will,’ but sprang out of that obedient consent, fearful of over-acting her part of slave to him before her mother, in a ghastly apprehension of the part he was for playing to the same audience. ’Yes, I will do all, all that you command. I am yours. I will go with you. Bid me do whatever you can think of, all except bid me go back to the people I have hitherto called mine:—not that!’

‘And that is what I have to request of you,’ said he, with his calm smile brightening and growing more foreign, histrionic, unreadable to her. ’And this greatest sacrifice that you can perform for me, are you prepared to do it? Will you?’

She tried to decipher the mask he wore: it was proof against her imploring eyes. ‘If you can ask me—if you can positively wish it—yes,’ she said. ’But think of what you are doing. Oh! Alvan, not back to them! Think!’

He smiled insufferably. He was bent on winning a parent-blest bride, an unimpeachable wife, a lady handed to him instead of taken, one of the world’s polished silver vessels.

Page 3054

‘Think that you are doing this for me!’ said he. ’It is for my sake. And now, madame, I give you back your daughter. You see she is mine to give, she obeys me, and I—-though it can be only for a short time—give her back to you. She goes with you purely because it is my wish: do not forget that. And so, madame, I have the honour,’ he bowed profoundly.

He turned to Clotilde and drew her within his arm. ’What you have done in obedience to my wish, my beloved, shall never be forgotten. Never can I sufficiently thank you. I know how much it has cost you. But here is the end of your trials. All the rest is now my task. Rely on me with your whole heart. Let them not misuse you: otherwise do their bidding. Be sure of my knowing how you are treated, and at the slightest act of injustice I shall be beside you to take you to myself. Be sure of that, and be not unhappy. They shall not keep you from me for long. Submit a short while to the will of your parents: mine you will find the stronger. Resolve it in your soul that I, your lover, cannot fail, for it is impossible to me to waver. Consider me as the one fixed light in your world, and look to me. Soon, then! Have patience, be true, and we are one!’

He kissed cold lips, he squeezed an inanimate hand. The horribly empty sublimity of his behaviour appeared to her in her mother’s contemptuous face.

His eyes were on her as he released her and she stood alone. She seemed a dead thing; but the sense of his having done gloriously in mastering himself to give these worldly people of hers a lesson and proof that he could within due measure bow to their laws and customs, dispelled the brief vision of her unfitness to be left. The compressed energy of the man under his conscious display of a great-minded deference to the claims of family ties and duties, intoxicated him. He thought but of the present achievement and its just effect: he had cancelled a bad reputation among these people, from whom he was about to lead forth a daughter for Alvan’s wife, and he reasoned by the grandeur of his exhibition of generosity—which was brought out in strong relief when he delivered his retiring bow to the Frau von Rudiger’s shoulder—that the worst was over; he had to deal no more with silly women: now for Clotilde’s father! Women were privileged to oppose their senselessness to the divine fire: men could not retreat behind such defences; they must meet him on the common ground of men, where this constant battler had never yet encountered a reverse.

Clotilde’s cold staring gaze, a little livelier to wonderment than to reflection, observed him to be scrupulous of the formalities in the diverse character of his parting salutations to her mother, her sister; and the lady of the house. He was going—he could actually go and leave her! She stretched herself to him faintly; she let it be seen that she did so as much as she had force to make it visible. She saw him smiling incomprehensibly, like a winner of the field to be left to the enemy. She could get nothing from him but that insensible round smile, and she took the ebbing of her poor effort for his rebuff.

Page 3055

’You that offered yourself in flight to him who once proposed it, he had the choice of you and he abjured you. He has cast you off!’

She phrased it in speech to herself. It was incredible, but it was clear: he had gone.

The room was vacant; the room was black and silent as a dungeon.

’He will not have you: he has handed you back to them the more readily to renounce you.’

She framed the words half aloud in a moan as she glanced at her mother heaving in stern triumph, her sister drooping, Madame Emerly standing at the window.

The craven’s first instinct for safety, quick as the cavern lynx for light, set her on the idea that she was abandoned: it whispered of quietness if she submitted.

And thus she reasoned: Had Alvan taken her, she would not have been guilty of more than a common piece of love-desperation in running to him, the which may be love’s glory when marriage crowns it. By his rejecting her and leaving her, he rendered her not only a runaway, but a castaway. It was not natural that he should leave her; ’not natural in him to act his recent part; but he had done it; consequently she was at the mercy of those who might pick her up. She was, in her humiliation and dread, all of the moment, she could see to no distance; and judging of him, feeling for herself, within that contracted circle of sensation—sure, from her knowledge of her cowardice, that he had done unwisely—she became swayed about like a castaway in soul, until her distinguishing of his mad recklessness in the challenge of a power greater than his own grew present with her as his personal cruelty to the woman who had flung off everything, flung herself on the tempestuous deeps, on his behalf. And here she was, left to float or founder! Alvan had gone. The man rageing over the room, abusing her ’infamous lover, the dirty Jew, the notorious thief, scoundrel, gallowsbird,’ *etc*., *etc*., frightful epithets, not to be transcribed—was her father. He had come, she knew not how. Alvan had tossed her to him.

Abuse of a lover is ordinarily retorted on in the lady’s heart by the brighter perception of his merits; but when the heart is weak, the creature suffering shame, her lover the cause of it, and seeming cruel, she is likely to lose all perception and bend like a flower pelted. Her cry to him: ‘If you had been wiser, this would not have been!’ will sink to the inward meditation: ’If he had been truer!’—and though she does not necessarily think him untrue for charging him with it, there is already a loosening of the bonds where the accusation has begun. They are not broken because they are loosened: still the loosening of them makes it possible to cut them with less of a snap and less pain.

Page 3056

Alvan had relinquished her he loved to brave the tempest in a frail small boat, and he certainly could not have apprehended the furious outbreak she was exposed to. She might so far have exonerated him had she been able to reflect; but she whom he had forced to depend on him in blind reliance, now opened her eyes on an opposite power exercising material rigours. After having enjoyed extraordinary independence for a young woman, she was treated as a refractory child, literally marched through the streets in the custody of her father, who clutched her by the hair-Alvan's beloved golden locks!—and held her under terror of a huge forester's weapon, that he had seized at the first tidings of his daughter's flight to the Jew. He seemed to have a grim indifference to exposure; contempt, with a sense of the humour of it: and this was a satisfaction to him, founded on his practical observance of two or three maxims quite equal to the fullest knowledge of women for rightly managing them: preferable, inasmuch as they are simpler, and, by merely cracking a whip, bring her back to the post, instead of wasting time by hunting her as she likes to run. Police were round his house. The General chattered and shouted of the desperate lawlessness and larcenies of that Jew —the things that Jew would attempt. He dragged her indoors, muttering of his policy in treating her at last to a wholesome despotism.

This was the medicine for her—he knew her! Whether he did or not, he knew the potency of his physic. He knew that osiers can be made to bend. With a frightful noise of hammering, he himself nailed up the window-shutters of the room she was locked in hard and fast, and he left her there and roared across the household that any one holding communication with the prisoner should be shot like a dog. This was a manifestation of power in a form more convincing than the orator's.

She was friendless, abused, degraded, benighted in broad daylight; abandoned by her lover. She sank on the floor of the room, conceiving with much strangeness of sentiment under these hard stripes of misfortune, that reality had come. The monster had hold of her. She was isolated, fed like a dungeoned captive. She had nothing but our natural obstinacy to hug, or seem to do so when wearifulness reduced her to cling to the semblance of it only. 'I marry Alvan!' was her iterated answer to her father, on his visits to see whether he had yet broken her; and she spoke with the desperate firmness of weak creatures that strive to nail themselves to the sound of it. He listened and named his time for returning. The tug between rigour and endurance continued for about forty hours. She then thought, in an exhaustion: 'Strange that my father should be so fiercely excited against this man! Can he have reasons I have not heard of?' Her father's unwonted harshness suggested the question in her quailing nature, which was beginning to have a movement to kiss the whip. The question set her thinking of the reasons

Page 3057

she knew. She saw them involuntarily from the side of parents, and they wore a sinister appearance; in reality her present scourging was due to them as well as to Alvan's fatal decision. Her misery was traceable to his conduct and his judgement—both bad. And yet all this while he might be working to release her, near upon rescuing! She swung round to the side of her lover against these executioner parents, and scribbled to him as well as she could under the cracks in her windowshutters, urging him to appear. She spent her heart on it. A note to her friend, the English lady, protested her love for Alvan, but with less abandonment, with a frozen resignation to the loss of him—all around her was so dark! By-and-by there was a scratching at her door. The maid whom she trusted brought her news of Alvan: outside the door and in, the maid and mistress knelt. Hope flickered up in the bosom of Clotilde: the whispers were exchanged through the partition.

'Where is he?'

'Gone.'

'But where?'

'He has left the city.'

Clotilde pushed the letter for her friend under the door: that one for Alvan she retained, stung by his desertion of her, and thinking practically that it was useless to aim a letter at a man without an address. She did not ask herself whether the maid's information was honest, for she wanted to despair, as the exhausted want to lie down.

She wept through the night. It was one of those nights of the torrents of tears which wash away all save the adamantine within us, if there be ought of that besides the breathing structure. The reason why she wept with so delirious a persistency was, that her nature felt the necessity for draining her of her self-pitifulness, knowing that it nourished the love whereby she was tormented. They do not weep thus who have a heart for the struggle. In the morning she was a dried channel of tears, no longer self-pitiful; careless of herself, as she thought: in other words, unable any further to contend.

Reality was too strong! This morning her sisters came to her room imploring her to yield:—if she married Alvan, what could be their prospects as the sisters-in law of such a man?—her betrothed sister Lotte could not hope to espouse Count Walburg: Alvan's name was infamous in society; their house would be a lazar-house, they would be condemned to seclusion. A favourite brother followed, with sympathy that set her tears running again, and arguments she could not answer: how could he hold up his head in his regiment as the relative of the scandalous Jew democrat? He would have to leave the service, or be duelling with his brother officers every other day of his life, for rightly or wrongly Alvan was abhorred, and his connection would be fatal to them all, perhaps

to her father's military and diplomatic career principally: the head of their house would be ruined. She was compelled to weep again by having no other reply. The tears were now mixed drops of pity for her absent lover and her family; she was already disunited from him when she shed them, feeling that she was dry rock to herself, heartless as many bosoms drained of self-pity will become.

Page 3058

Incapable of that any further, she leaned still in that direction and had a languid willingness to gain outward comfort. To be caressed a little by her own kindred before she ceased to live was desireable after her heavy scourging. She wished for the touches of affection, knowing them to be selfish, but her love of life and hard view of its reality made them seem a soft reminder of what life had been. Alvan had gone. Her natural blankness of imagination read his absence as an entire relinquishment; it knelled in a vacant chamber. He had gone; he had committed an irretrievable error, he had given up a fight of his own vain provoking, that was too severe for him: he was not the lover he fancied himself, or not the lord of men she had fancied him. Her excessive misery would not suffer a picture of him, not one clear recollection of him, to stand before her. He who should have been at hand, had gone, and she was fearfully beset, almost lifeless; and being abandoned, her blank night of imagination felt that there was nothing left for her save to fall upon those nearest.

She gave her submission to her mother. In her mind, during the last wrestling with a weakness that was alternately her love, and her cowardice, the interpretation of the act ran: 'He may come, and I am his if he comes: and if not, I am bound to my people.' He had taught her to rely on him blindly, and thus she did it inanimately while cutting herself loose from him. In a similar mood, the spiritual waverer vows to believe if the saint will appear. However, she submitted. Then there was joy in the family, and she tasted their caresses.

CHAPTER IX

After his deed of loftiness Alvan walked to his hotel, where the sight of the room Clotilde had entered that morning caught his breath. He proceeded to write his first letter to General von Rudiger, repressing his heart's intimations that he had stepped out of the friendly path, and was on a strange and tangled one. The sense of power in him was leonine enough to promise the forcing of a way whithersoever the path: yet did that ghost of her figure across the room haunt him with searching eyes. They set him spying over himself at an actor who had not needed to be acting his part, brilliant though it was. He crammed his energy into his idea of the part, to carry it forward victoriously. Before the world, it would without question redound to his credit, and he heard the world acclaiming him:

'Alvan's wife was honourably won, as became the wife of a Doctor of Law, from the bosom of her family, when he could have had her in the old lawless fashion, for a call to a coachman! Alvan, the republican, is eminently a citizen. Consider his past life by that test of his character.'

He who had many times defied the world in hot rebellion, had become, through his desire to cherish a respectable passion, if not exactly slavish to it, subservient, as we see royal personages, that are happy to be on bowing terms with the multitude bowing

lower. Lower, of course, the multitude must bow, to inspire an august serenity; but the nod they have in exchange for it is not an independent one. Ceasing to be a social rebel, he conceived himself as a recognized dignitary, and he passed under the bondage of that position.

Page 3059

Clotilde had been in this room; she had furnished proof that she could be trusted now. She had committed herself, perished as a maiden of society, and her parents, even the senseless mother, must see it and decide by it. The General would bring her to reason: General von Rudiger was a man of the world. An honourable son-in-law could not but be acceptable to him—now, at least. And such a son-in-law would ultimately be the pride of his house. 'A flower from thy garden, friend, and my wearing it shall in good time be cause for some parental gratification.'

The letter despatched, Alvan paced his chamber with the ghost of Clotilde. He was presently summoned to meet Count Walburg and another intimate of the family, in the hotel downstairs. These gentlemen brought no message from General von Rudiger: their words were directed to extract a promise from him that he would quit his pursuit of Clotilde, and of course he refused; they hinted that the General might have official influence to get him expelled the city, and he referred them to the proof; but he looked beyond the words at a new something of extraordinary and sinister aspect revealed to him in their manner of treating his pretensions to the hand of the lady.

He had not yet perfectly seen the view the world took of him, because of his armed opposition to the world; nor could he rightly reflect on it yet, being too anxious to sign the peace. He felt as it were a blow startling him from sleep. His visitors tasked themselves to be strictly polite; they did not undervalue his resources for commanding respect between man and man. The strange matter was behind their bearing, which indicated the positive impossibility of the union of Clotilde with one such as he, and struck at the curtain covering his history. He could not raise it to thunder his defence of himself, or even allude to the implied contempt of his character: with a boiling gorge he was obliged to swallow both the history and the insult, returning them the equivalent of their courtesies, though it was on his lips to thunder heavily.

A second endeavour, in an urgent letter before nightfall to gain him admission to head-quarters, met the same repulse as the foregoing. The bearer of it was dismissed without an answer.

Alvan passed a night of dire disturbance. The fate of the noble Genoese conspirator, slipping into still harbour water on the step from boat to boat, and borne down by the weight of his armour in the moment of the ripeness of his plot at midnight, when the signal for action sparkled to lighten across the ships and forts, had touched him in his boy's readings, and he found a resemblance of himself to Fiesco, stopped as he was by a base impediment, tripped ignominiously, choked by the weight of the powers fitting him for battle. A man such as Alvan, arrested on his career by an opposition to his enrolment of a bride!—think of it! What was this girl in a life like his?

Page 3060

But, oh! the question was no sooner asked than the thought that this girl had been in this room illuminated the room, telling him she might have been his own this instant, confounding him with an accusation of madness for rejecting her. Why had he done it? Surely women, weak women, must be at times divinely inspired. She warned him against the step. But he, proud of his armoury, went his way. He choked, he suffered the torture of the mailed Genoese going under; worse, for the drowner's delirium swirls but a minute in the gaping brain, while he had to lie all, night at the mercy of the night.

He was only calmer when morning came. Night has little mercy for the self-reproachful, and for a strong man denouncing the folly of his error, it has none. The bequest of the night was a fever of passion; and upon that fever the light of morning cleared his head to weigh the force opposing him. He gnawed the paradox, that it was huge because it was petty, getting a miserable sour sustenance out of his consciousness of the position it explained. Great enemies, great undertakings, would have revived him as they had always revived and fortified. But here was a stolid small obstacle, scarce assailable on its own level; and he had chosen that it should be attacked through its own laws and forms. By shutting a door, by withholding an answer to his knocks, the thing reduced him to hesitation. And the thing had weapons to shoot at him; his history, his very blood, stood open to its shafts; and the sole quality of a giant, which he could show to front it, was the breath of one for a mark.

These direct perceptions of the circumstances were played on by the fever he drew from his Fiesco bed. Accuracy of vision in our crises is not so uncommon as the proportionate equality of feeling: we do indeed. frequently see with eyes of just measurement while we are conducting ourselves like madmen. The facts are seen, and yet the spinning nerves will change their complexion; and without enlarging or minimizing, they will alternate their effect on us immensely through the colour presenting them now sombre, now hopeful: doing its work of extravagance upon perceptibly plain matter. The fitful colour is the fever. He must win her, for he never yet had failed—he had lost her by his folly! She was his—she was torn from him! She would come at his bidding—she would cower to her tyrants! The thought of her was life and death in his frame, bright heaven and the abyss. At one beat of the heart she swam to his arms, at another he was straining over darkness. And whose the fault?

Page 3061

He rose out of his amazement crying it with a roar, and foreignly beholding himself. He pelted himself with epithets; his worst enemies could not have been handier in using them. From Alvan to Alvan, they signified such an earthquake in a land of splendid structures as shatters to dust the pride of the works of men. He was down among them, lower than the herd, rolling in vulgar epithets that, attached to one like him, became of monstrous distortion. O fool! dolt! blind ass! tottering idiot! drunken masquerader! miserable Jack Knave, performing suicide with that blessed coxcomb air of curling a lock!—Clotilde! Clotilde! Where has one read the story of a man who had the jewel of jewels in his hand, and flung in into the deeps, thinking that he flung a pebble? Fish, fool, fish! and fish till Doomsday! There's nothing but your fool's face in the water to be got to bite at the bait you throw, fool! Fish for the flung-away beauty, and hook your shadow of a Bottom's head! What impious villain was it refused the gift of the gods, that he might have it bestowed on him according to his own prescription of the ceremonies! They laugh! By Orcus! how they laugh! The laughter of the gods is the lightning of death's irony over mortals. Can they have a finer subject than a giant gone fool?

Tears burst from him: tears of rage, regret, selflashing. O for yesterday! He called aloud for the recovery of yesterday, bellowed, groaned. A giant at war with pigmies, having nought but their weapons, having to fight them on his knees, to fight them with the right hand while smiting himself with the left, has too much upon him to keep his private dignity in order. He was the same in his letters—a Cyclops hurling rocks and raising the seas to shipwreck. Dignity was cast off; he came out naked. Letters to Clotilde, and to the baroness, to the friend nearest him just then, Colonel von Tresten, calling them to him, were dashed to paper in this naked frenzy, and he could rave with all the truth of life, that to have acted the idiot, more than the loss of the woman, was the ground of his anguish. Each antecedent of his career had been a step of strength and success departed. The woman was but a fragment of the tremendous wreck; the woman was utterly diminutive, yet she was the key of the reconstruction; the woman won, he would be himself once more: and feeling that, his passion for her swelled to full tide and she became a towering splendour whereat his eyeballs ached, she became a melting armful that shook him to big bursts of tears.

The feeling of the return of strength was his love in force. The giant in him loved her warmly. Her sweetness, her archness, the opening of her lips, their way of holding closed, and her brightness of wit, her tender eyelashes, her appreciating looks, her sighing, the thousand varying shades of her motions and her features interflowing like a lighted water, swam to him one by one like so many handmaiden messengers

Page 3062

distinctly beheld of the radiant indistinct whom he adored with more of spirit in his passion than before this tempest. A giant going through a giant's contortions, fleshly as the race of giants, and gross, coarse, dreadful, likely to be horrible when whipped and stirred to the dregs, Alvan was great-hearted: he could love in his giant's fashion, love and lay down life for the woman he loved, though the nature of the passion was not heavenly; or for the friend who would have to excuse him often; or for the public cause —which was to minister to his appetites. He was true man, a native of earth, and if he could not quit his huge personality to pipe spiritual music during a storm of trouble, being a soul wedged in the gnarled wood of the standing giant oak, and giving mighty sound of timber at strife rather than the angelical cry, he suffered, as he loved, to his depths.

We have not to plumb the depths; he was not heroic, but hugely man. Love and man sometimes meet for noble concord; the strings of the hungry instrument are not all so rough that Love's touch on them is indistinguishable from the rattling of the wheels within; certain herald harmonies have been heard. But Love, which purifies and enlarges us, and sets free the soul, Love visiting a fleshly frame must have time and space, and some help of circumstance, to give the world assurance that the man is a temple fit for the rites. Out of romances, he is not melodiously composed. And in a giant are various giants to be slain, or thoroughly subdued, ere this divinity is taken for leader. It is not done by miracle.

As it happened cruelly for Alvan, the woman who had become the radiant indistinct in his desiring mind was one whom he knew to be of a shivery stedfastness. His plucking her from another was neither wonderful nor indefensible; they two were suited as no other two could be; the handsome boy who had gone through a form of plighting with her was her slave, and she required for her mate a master: she felt it and she sided to him quite naturally, moved by the sacred direction of the acknowledgement of a mutual fitness. Twice, however, she had relapsed on the occasions of his absence, and owning his power over her when they were together again, she sowed the fatal conviction that he held her at present, and that she was a woman only to be held at present, by the palpable grasp of his physical influence. Partly it was correct, not entirely, seeing that she kept the impression of a belief in him even when she drifted away through sheer weakness, but it was the single positive view he had of her, and it was fatal, for it begat a devil of impatience.

'They are undermining her now—now—now!'

Page 3063

He started himself into busy frenzies to reach to her, already indifferent to the means, and waxing increasingly reckless as he fed on his agitation. Some faith in her, even the little she deserved, would have arrested him: unhappily he had less than she, who had enough to nurse the dim sense of his fixity, and sank from him only in her heart's faintness, but he, when no longer flattered by the evidence of his mastery, took her for sand. Why, then, had he let her out of his grasp? The horrid echoed interrogation flashed a hideous view of the woman. But how had he come to be guilty of it? he asked himself again; and, without answering him, his counsellors to that poor wisdom set to work to complete it: Giant Vanity urged Giant Energy to make use of Giant Duplicity. He wrote to Clotilde, with one voice quoting the law in their favour, with another commanding her to break it. He gathered and drilled a legion of spies, and showered his gold in bribes and plots to get the letter to her, to get an interview—one human word between them.

CHAPTER X

His friend Colonel von Tresten was beside him when he received the enemy's counter-stroke. Count Walburg and his companion brought a letter from Clotilde—no reply; a letter renouncing him.

Briefly, in cold words befitting the act, she stated that the past must be dead between them; for the future she belonged to her parents; she had left the city. She knew not where he might be, her letter concluded, but henceforward he should know that they were strangers.

Alvan held out the deadly paper when he had read the contents; he smote a forefinger on it and crumpled it in his hand. That was the dumb oration of a man shocked by the outrage upon passionate feeling to the state of brute. His fist, outstretched to the length of his arm, shook the reptile letter under a terrible frown.

Tresten saw that he supposed himself to be perfectly master of his acts because he had not spoken, and had managed to preserve the ordinary courtesies.

'You have done your commission,' the colonel said to Count Walburg, whose companion was not disposed to go without obtaining satisfactory assurances, and pressed for them.

Alvan fastened on him. 'You adopt the responsibility of this?' He displayed the letter.

'I do.'

'It lies.'

Tresten remarked to Count Walburg: 'These visits are provocations.'

‘They are not so intended,’ said the count, bowing pacifically. His friend was not a man of the sword, and was not under the obligation to accept an insult. They left the letter to do its work.

Page 3064

Big natures in their fits of explosiveness must be taken by flying shots, as dwarfs peep on a monster, or the Scythian attacked a phalanx. Were we to hear all the roarings of the shirted Heracles, a world of comfortable little ones would doubt the unselfishness of his love of Dejaneira. Yes, really; they would think it was not a chivalrous love: they would consider that he thought of himself too much. They would doubt, too, of his being a gentleman! Partial glimpses of him, one may fear, will be discomposing to simple natures. There was a short black eruption. Alvan controlled it, to ask hastily what the baroness thought and what she had heard of Clotilde. Tresten made sign that it was nothing of the best.

'See! my girl has hundreds of enemies, and I, only I, know her and can defend her—-weak, base shallow trickster, traitress that she is!' cried Alvan, and came down in a thundershower upon her: 'Yesterday—the day before—when? just now, here, in this room; gave herself—and now!' He bent, and immediately straightening his back, addressed Colonel von Tresten as her calumniator, 'Say your worst of her, and I say I will make of that girl the peerless woman of earth! I! in earnest! it's no dream. She can be made . . . . O God! the beast has turned tail! I knew she could. There 's three of beast to one of goddess in her, and set her alone, and let her be hunted and I not by, beast it is with her! cowardly skulking beast—the noblest and very bravest under my wing! Incomprehensible to you, Tresten? But who understands women! You hate her. Do not. She 's a riddle, but no worse than the rest of the tangle. She gives me up? Pooh! She writes it. She writes anything. And that vilest, I say, I will make more enviable, more Clotilde! he thundered her signature in an amazement, broken suddenly by the sight of her putting her name to the letter. She had done that, written her name to the renunciation of him! No individual could bear the sight of such a crime, and no suffering man could be appeased by a single victim to atone for it. Her sex must be slaughtered; he raged against the woman; she became that ancient poisonous thing, the woman; his fury would not distinguish her as Clotilde, though the name had started him, and it was his knowledge of the particular sinner which drew down his curses on the sex. He twisted his body, hugging at his breast as if he had her letter sticking in his ribs. The letter was up against his ribs, and he thumped it, crushed it, patted it; he kissed it, and flung it, stamped on it, and was foul-mouthed. Seeing it at his feet, he bent to it like a man snapped in two, lamenting, bewailing himself, recovering sight of her fragmentarily. It stuck in his ribs, and in scorn of the writer, and sceptical of her penning it, he tugged to pull it out, and broke the shaft, but left the rankling arrow-head: —she had traced the lines, and though tyranny racked her to do that thing, his agony followed her hand over the paper to her name, which fixed and bit in him like the deadly-toothed arrow-head called asp, and there was no uprooting it. The thing lived; her deed was the woman; there was no separating them: witness it in love murdered.

Page 3065

O that woman! She has murdered love. She has blotted love completely out. She is the arch-thief and assassin of mankind—the female Apollyon. He lost sight of her in the prodigious iniquity covering her sex with a cowl of night, and it was what women are, what women will do, the one and all alike simpering simulacra that men find them to be, soulless, clogs on us, bloodsuckers! until a feature of the particular sinner peeped out on him, and brought the fresh agony of a reminder of his great-heartedness. 'For that woman—Tresten, you know me—I would have sacrificed for that woman fortune and life, my hope, my duty, my immortality. She knew it, and she—look!' he unwrinkled the letter carefully for it to be legible, and clenched it in a ball.' Signs her name, signs her name, her name!—God of heaven! it would be incredible in a holy chronicle—signs her name to the infamous harlotry! See: "Clotilde von Rudiger." It's her writing; that's her signature: "Clotilde" in full. You'd hardly fancy that, now? But look!' the colonel's eyelids were blinking, and Alvan dinted his finger-nail under her name: 'there it is: Clotilde: signed shamelessly. Just as she might have written to one of her friends about bonnets, and balls, and books! Henceforward strangers, she and I?'

His laughter, even to Tresten, a man of camps, sounded profane as a yell beneath a cathedral dome. 'Why, the woman has been in my hands—I released her, spared her, drilled brain and blood, ransacked all the code, to do her homage and honour in every mortal way; and we two strangers! Do you hear that, Tresten? Why, if you had seen her!—she was lost, and I, this man she now pierces with ice, kept hell down under bolt and bar-worse, I believe, broke a good woman's heart! that never a breath should rise that could accuse her on suspicion, or in malice, or by accident, justly, or with a shadow of truth. "I think it best for us both." So she thinks for me! She not only decides, she thinks; she is the active principle; 'tis mine to submit.—A certain presumption was in that girl always. Ha! do you hear me? Her letter may sting, it shall not dupe. Strangers? Poor fool! You see plainly she was nailed down to write the thing. This letter is a flat lie. She can lie—Oh! born to the art! born to it!—lies like a Saint tricking Satan! But she says she has left the city. Now to find her!'

He began marching about the room with great strides. 'I 'll have the whole Continent up; her keepers shall have no rest; I 'll have them by the Law Courts; and by stratagem, and, if law and cunning fail, force. I have sworn it. I have done all that honour can ask of a man; more than any man, to my knowledge, would have done, and now it's war. I declare war on them. They will have it! I mean to take that girl from them—snatch or catch! The girl is my girl, and if there are laws against my having my own, to powder with the laws! Well, and do you suppose me likely to be beaten? Then Cicero was a fiction, and Caesar a people's legend. Not if they are history, and eloquence and commandership have power over the blood and souls of men. First, I write to her!'

Page 3066

His friend suggested that he knew not where she was. But already the pen was at work, the brain pouring as from a pitcher.

Writing was blood-letting, and the interminable pages drained him of his fever. As he wrote, she grew more radiant, more indistinct, more fiercely desired. The concentration of his active mind directed his whole being on the track of Clotilde, idealizing her beyond human. That last day when he had seen her appeared to him as the day of days. That day was Clotilde herself, she in person; he saw it as the woman, and saw himself translucent in the great luminousness; and behind it all was dark, as in front. That one day was the sun of his life. It had been a day of rain, and he beheld it in memory just as it had been, with the dark threaded air, the dripping streets; and he glorified it past all daily radiance. His letter was a burning hymn to the day. His moral grandeur on the day made him live as part of the splendour. Was it possible for the woman who had seen him then to be faithless to him? The swift deduction from his own feelings cleansed her of a suspicion to the contrary, and he became lighthearted. He hummed an air when he had finished his letter to her.

Councils with his adherents and couriers were held, and some were despatched to watch the house and slip the letter to her maid; others were told off to bribe and hound their way on the track of Clotilde. His gold rained into their hands with the directions.

Colonel von Tresten was the friend of his attachment to the baroness; a friend of both, and a warm one. Men coming into contact with Alvan took their shape of friend or enemy sharply, for he was friend or enemy of no dubious feature, devoted to them he loved, and a battery on them he opposed. The colonel had been the confidant of the baroness's grief over this love-passion of Alvan's, and her resignation. He shared her doubts of Clotilde's nobility of character: the reports were not favourable to the young lady. But the baroness and he were of one opinion, that Alvan in love was not likely to be governable by prudent counsel. He dropped a word of the whispers of Clotilde's volatility.

Alvan nodded his perfect assent. 'She is that, she is anything you like; you cannot exaggerate her for good or evil. She is matchless, colour her as you please.' Adopting the tone of argument, he said: 'She writes that letter. Well? It is her writing, and the moment, I am sure of it as hers, I would not have it unwritten. I love it!' He looked maddish with his love of the horrible thing, and resumed soberly: 'The point is, that she has the charm for me. She is plastic in my hands. Other men would waste the treasure. I make of her what I will, and she knows it, and knows that she hangs on me to flourish worthily. I breathe the very soul of the woman into her. As for that letter of hers—' it burnt him this time to speak of the letter: 'she may write and write! She's weak,

Page 3067

thin, a reed; she—let her be! Say of her when she plays beast—she is absent from Alvan! I can forgive. The letter's nothing; it means nothing—except "Thou fool, Alvan, to let me go." Yes, that! Her people are acting tyrant with her—as legally they have no right to do in this country, and I shall prove it to them. When I have gained admission to her—and I soon shall: it can't be refused: I am off to the head of her father's office to-morrow, and I have only to represent the state of affairs to the Minister in my language to obtain his authority to demand admission to her:—then, friend, you will see! I lift my finger, and you will see! At my request she went back to her mother. I have but to beckon.'

He had cooled to the happy assurance of his authority over her, all the giants of his system being well in action, and when that is the case with a big nature it is at rest, or such is the condition of repose granted it in life.

On the morrow he was off to batter at doors which would have expected rather the summons of an armed mob at his heels than the strange cry of the Radical man maltreated by love.

CHAPTER XI

The story of Clotilde's departure from the city, like that of Alvan's, communicated to her by her maid, was an anticipation of the truth, disseminated by her parents. She was removed when the swarm of spies and secret letter-bearers were attaining a position of dignity through the rumour of legal gentlemen about to direct the movements of the besieging army.

A stir seemed to her to prognosticate a rescue and she went not unwillingly. To be in motion, to see roadside faces, pricked her senses with some hope. She had gained the peace she needed, and in that state her heart began to be agitated by a fresh awakening, luxurious at first rather than troublesome. She had sunk so low that the light of Alvan seemed too distant for a positive expectation of him; but few approached her whom she did not fancy under strange disguises: the gentlemen were servants, the blouses were gentlemen; she looked wistfully at old women bearing baskets, for the forbidden fruit to peep out in the form of an envelope. All passed her blankly, noticing her eyes.

The journey was short; she was taken to a place a little beyond the head of the lake, and there, though she had liberty to breathe the air, fast fixed within the walls of a daily sameness that became gradually the hum of voices accusing Alvan of one in excess of the many sins laid against him by his enemies. Was he not possibly an empty pretender to power—a mere great talker?

Page 3068

Her bit of liberty increased her chafing at the deadly monotony of this existence, and envenomed the accusation by seeming to push her forth quite half way to meet him, if he would but come or show sign! She impetuously vindicated him from the charge of crediting the sincerity of any words she might have committed to paper at the despotic dictation of her father. Oh, no; Alvan could not be guilty of such folly as that; he could not; it would be to suppose him unacquainted with her, ignorant of the nature of women. He would know that she wrote the words—why? She could not perfectly recollect how she had come to write them, and found it easier to extinguish the act of having written them at all, which was done by the angry recurrence to his failure to intervene now when the drama cried for his godlike appearance. Perhaps he was really unacquainted with her thought her stronger than she was! The idea reflected a shadow on his intelligence. She was not in a situation that could bear of her blaming herself.

While she was thus devoured by the legions of her enfeebled wits, Clotilde was assiduously courted by her family, and her father from time to time brought pen and paper for her to write anew from his dictation. He was pleased to hail her as his fair secretary, and when the letters were unimportant she wrote flowingly, happy to be praised. They were occasionally addressed to friends; she discovered herself writing one to the professor, in which he was about to be informed that she had resolved to banish Alvan from her mind for ever. She stopped; her heart stopped; the pen fell from her hand, in loathing. Her father warily bade her proceed. She could not; she signified it choking. Only a few days before she had written to the professor exultingly of her engagement. She refused to belie herself in such a manner; retrospectively her rapid contradictions appeared impossible; the picture of her was not human, and she gave out a negative of her whole frame convulsed, whereat the General was not slow to remind her of the scourgings she had undergone by a sudden burst of his wrath. He knew the proper physic. 'You girls want the lesson we read to skittish recruits; you shall have it. Write: "He is now as nothing to me." You shall write that you hate him, if you hesitate! Why, you unreasonable slut, you have given him up; you have told him you have given him up, and what objection can you have to telling others now you have done it?'

'I was forced to it, body and soul!' cried Clotilde, sobbing and bursting into desperation out of a weak show of petulance that she had put on to propitiate him. 'If I have to tell, I will tell how it was. For that my heart is unchanged, and Alvan is, and will be, my lord, all the world may see. I would rather write that I hate him.'

'You write, the man is now as nothing to me!' said her father, dashing his finger in a fiery zig-zag along the line for her pen to follow. 'Or else, my girl, you've been playing us a pretty farce!' He strung himself for a mad gallop of wrath, gave her a shudder, and relapsed. 'No, no, you're wiser, you're a better girl than that. Write it. I must have it written-here, come! The worst is over; the rest is child's play. Come, take the pen, I'll guide your hand.'

Page 3069

The pen was fixed in her hand, and the first words formed. They looked such sprawling skeletons that Clotilde had the comfort of feeling sure they would be discerned as the work of compulsion. So she wrote on mechanically, solacing herself for what she did with vows of future revolt. Alvan had a saying, that want of courage is want of sense; and she remembered his illustration of how sense would nourish courage by scattering the fear of death, if we would only grasp the thought that we sink to oblivion gladly at night, and, most of us, quit it reluctantly in the morning. She shut her eyes while writing; she fancied death would be welcome; and as she certainly had sense, she took it for the promise of courage. She flattered herself by believing, therefore, that she who did not object to die was only awaiting the cruelly-delayed advent of her lover to be almost as brave as he—the feminine of him. With these ideas in her head much clearer than when she wrote the couple of lines to Alvan—for then her head was reeling, she was then beaten and prostrate—she signed her name to a second renunciation of him, and was aware of a flush of self-reproach at the simple suspicion of his being deceived by it; it was an insult to his understanding. Full surely the professor would not be deceived, and a lover with a heart to reach to her and read her could never be hoodwinked by so palpable a piece of slavishness. She was indeed slavish; the apology necessitated the confession. But that promise of courage, coming of her ownership of sense, vindicated her prospectively; she had so little of it that she embraced it as a present possession, and she made it Alvan's task to put it to the trial. Hence it became Alvan's offence if, owing to his absence, she could be charged with behaving badly. Her generosity pardoned him his inexplicable delay to appear in his might: 'But see what your continued delay causes!' she said, and her tone was merely sorrowful.

She had forgotten her signature to the letter to the professor when his answer arrived. The sight of the handwriting of one of her lover's faithfullest friends was like a peal of bells to her, and she tore the letter open, and began to blink and spell at a strange language, taking the frosty sentences piecemeal. He begged her to be firm in her resolution, give up Alvan and obey her parents! This man of high intelligence and cultivation wrote like a provincial schoolmistress moralizing. Though he knew the depth of her passion for Alvan, and had within the month received her lark-song of her betrothal, he, this man—if living man he could be thought—counselled her to endeavour to deserve the love and respect of her parents, alluded to Alvan's age and her better birth, approved her resolve to consult the wishes of her family, and in fine was as rank a traitor to friendship as any chronicled. Out on him! She swept him from earth.

And she had built some of her hopes on the professor. 'False friend!' she cried.

Page 3070

She wept over Alvan for having had so false a friend.

There remained no one that could be expected to intervene with a strong arm save the baroness. The professor's emphasized approval of her resolve to consult the wishes of her family was a shocking hypocrisy, and Clotilde thought of the contrast to it in her letter to the baroness. The tripping and stumbling, prettily awkward little tone of gosling innocent new from its egg, throughout the letter, was a triumph of candour. She repeated passages, paragraphs, of the letter, assuring herself that such affectionately reverential prattle would have moved her, and with the strongest desire to cast her arms about the writer: it had been composed to be moving to a woman, to any woman. The old woman was entreated to bestow her blessing on the young one, all in Arcadia, and let the young one nestle to the bosom she had not an idea of robbing. She could not have had the idea, else how could she have made the petition? And in order to compliment a venerable dame on her pure friendship for a gentleman, it was imperative to reject the idea. Besides, after seeing the photograph of the baroness, common civility insisted on the purity of her friendship. Nay, in mercy to the poor gentleman, friendship it must be.

A letter of reply from that noble lady was due. Possibly she had determined not to write, but to act. She was a lady of exalted birth, a lady of the upper aristocracy, who could, if she would, bring both a social and official pressure upon the General: and it might be in motion now behind the scenes, Clotilde laid hold of her phantom baroness, almost happy under the phantom's whisper that she need not despair. 'You have been a little weak,' the phantom said to her, and she acquiesced with a soft sniffle, adding: 'But, dearest, honoured lady, you are a woman, and know what our trials are when we are so persecuted. O that I had your beautiful sedateness! I do admire it, madam. I wish I could imitate.' She carried her dramatic ingenuousness farthel still by saying: 'I have seen your photograph'; implying that the inimitable, the much coveted air of composure breathed out of yonder presentment of her features. 'For I can't call you good looking,' she said within herself, for the satisfaction of her sense of candour, of her sense of contrast as well. And shutting her eyes, she thought of the horrid penitent a harsh-faced woman in confession must be:

The picture sent her swimmingly to the confessional, where sat a man with his head in a hood, and he soon heard enough of mixed substance to dash his hood, almost his head, off. Beauty may be immoderately frank in soul to the ghostly. The black page comprised a very long list. 'But put this on the white page,' says she to the surging father inside his box—'I loved Alvan!' A sentence or two more fetches the Alvanic man jumping out of the priest: and so closely does she realize it that she has to hunt herself into a corner with the question, whether she shall tell him she guessed him to be no other than her lover. 'How could you expect a girl, who is not a Papist, to come kneeling here?' she says. And he answers with no matter what of a gallant kind.

Page 3071

In this manner her natural effervescence amused her sorrowful mind while gazing from her chamber window at the mountain sides across the valley, where tourists, in the autumnal season, sweep up and down like a tidal river. She had ceased to weep; she had outwept the colour of her eyes and the consolation of weeping. Dressed in black to the throat, she sat and waited the arrival of her phantom friend, the baroness—that angel! who proved her goodness in consenting to be the friend of Alvan's beloved, because she was the true friend of Alvan! How cheap such a way of proving goodness, Clotilde did not consider. She wanted it so.

The mountain heights were in dusty sunlight. She had seen them day after day thinly lined on the dead sky, inviting thunder and doomed to sultriness. She looked on the garden of the house, a desert under bee and butterfly. Looking beyond the garden she perceived her father on the glaring road, and one with him, the sight of whom did not flush her cheek or spring her heart to a throb, though she pitied the poor boy: he was useless to her, utterly.

Soon her Indian Bacchus was in her room, and alone with her, and at her feet. Her father had given him hope. He came bearing eyes that were like hope's own; and kneeling, kissing her hands, her knees, her hair, he seemed unaware that she was inanimate.

There was nothing imaginable in which he could be of use.

He was only another dust-cloud of the sultry sameness. She had been expecting a woman, a tempest choral with sky and mountain and valley-hollows, as the overture to Alvan's appearance.

But he roused her. With Marko she had never felt her cowardice, and his passionately beseeching, trembling, 'Will you have me?' called up the tiger in the girl; in spite of pity for his voice she retorted on her parents:

'Will I have you? I? You ask me what is my will? It sounds oddly from you, seeing that I wrote to you in Lucerne what I would have, and nothing has changed in me since then, nothing! My feeling for him is unaltered, and everything you have heard of me was wrung out of me by my unhappiness. The world is dead to me, and all in it that is not. Sigismund Alvan. To you I am accustomed to speak every thought of my soul, and I tell you the world and all it has is dead to me, even my parents—I hate them.'

Marko pressed her hands. If he loved her slavishly, it was generously. The wild thing he said was one of the frantic leaps of generosity in a heart that was gone to impulse: 'I see it, they have martyrized you. I know you so well, Clotilde! So, then, come to me, come with me, let me cherish you. I will take you and rescue you from your people, and should it be your positive wish to meet Alvan again, I myself will take you to him, and then you may choose between us.'

The generosity was evident. There was nevertheless, to a young woman realizing the position foreshadowed by such a project, the suspicion of a slavish hope nestling among the circumstances in the background, and this she was taught by the dangerous emotion of gratitude gaining on her, and melting her to him.

Page 3072

She too had a slavish hope that was athirst and sinking, and it flew at the throat of Marko's, eager to satiate its vengeance for these long delays in the destroying of a weaker.

She left her chair and cried: 'As you will. What is it to me? Take me, if you please. Take that glove; it is the shape of my hand. You have as much of me as is there. My life is gone. You or another! But take this warning and my oath with it. I swear to you, that wherever I see Sigismund Alvan I go straight to him, though the way be over you, all of you, lying dead beneath me.'

The lift of incredulous horror in Marko's large black eyes excited her to a more savage imagination: 'Rejoice! I should rejoice to see you, all of you, dead, that I might walk across you safe from disturbance to get to him I love. Be under no delusion. I love him better than the lives of any dear to me, or my own. I am his. He is my faith, my worship. I am true to him, I am, I am. You force my hand from me, you take this miserable body, but my soul is free to love him and to go to him when God gives me sight of him. I am Alvan's eternally. All your laws are mockeries. You, and my people, and your priests, and your law-makers, are shadows, brain-vapours. Let him beckon! —So you have your warning. Do what I may, I cannot be called untrue. And now let me be; I want repose; my head breaks; I have been on the rack and I am in pieces!'

Marko clung to her hand, said she was terrible and pitiless, but clung.

The hand was nerveless: it was her dear hand. Had her tongue been more venomous in wildness than the encounter with a weaker than herself made it be, the holding of her hand would have been his antidote. In him there was love for two.

Clotilde allowed him to keep the hand, assuring herself she was unconscious he did so. He brought her peace, he brought her old throning self back to her, and he was handsome and tame as a leopard-skin at her feet.

If she was doomed to reach to Alvan through him, at least she had warned him. The vision of the truthfulness of her nature threw a celestial wan beam on her guilty destiny.

She patted his head and bade him leave her, narrowing her shoulders on the breast to let it be seen that the dark household within was locked and shuttered.

He went. He was good, obedient, humane; he was generous, exquisitely bred; he brought her peace, and he had been warned. It is difficult in affliction to think of one who belongs to us as one to whom we owe a duty. The unquestionably sincere and devoted lover is also in his candour a featureless person; and though we would not punish him for his goodness, we have the right to anticipate that it will be equal to every trial. Perhaps, for the sake of peace . . . after warning him . . . her meditations tottered in dots.

Page 3073

But when the heart hungers behind such meditations, that thinking without language is a dangerous habit; for there will suddenly come a dash usurping the series of tentative dots, which is nothing other than the dreadful thing resolved on, as of necessity, as naturally as the adventurous bow-legged infant pitches back from an excursion of two paces to mother's lap; and not much less innocently within the mind, it would appear. The dash is a haven reached that would not be greeted if it stood out in words. Could we live without ourselves letting our animal do our thinking for us legibly? We live with ourselves agreeably so long as his projects are phrased in his primitive tongue, even though we have clearly apprehended what he means, and though we sufficiently well understand the whither of our destination under his guidance. No counsel can be saner than that the heart should be bidden to speak out in plain verbal speech within us. For want of it, Clotilde's short explorations in Dot-and-Dash land were of a kind to terrify her, and yet they seemed not only unavoidable, but foreshadowing of the unavoidable to come. Or possibly—the thought came to her—Alvan would keep his word, and save her from worse by stepping to the altar between her and Marko, there calling on her to decide and quit the prince; and his presence would breathe courage into her to go to him. It set her looking to the altar as a prospect of deliverance.

Her mother could not fail to notice a change in Clotilde's wintry face now that Marko was among them; her inference tallied with his report of their interview, so she supposed the girl to have accepted more or less heartily Marko's forgiveness. For him the girl's eyes were soft and kind; her gaze was through the eyelashes, as one seeing a dream on a far horizon. Marko spoke of her cheerfully, and was happy to call her his own, but would not have her troubled by any ceremonial talk of their engagement, so she had much to thank him for, and her consciousness of the signal instance of ingratitude lying ahead in the darkness, like a house mined beneath the smiling slumberer, made her eager to show the real gratefulness and tenderness of her feelings. This had the appearance of renewed affection; consequently her parents lost much of their fear of the besieger outside, and she was removed to the city. Two parties were in the city, one favouring Alvan, and one abhorring the audacious Jew. Together they managed to spread incredible reports of his doings, which required little exaggeration to convince an enemy that he was a man with whom hostility could not be left to sleep. The General heard of the man's pleading his cause in all directions to get pressure put upon him, showing something like a devilish persuasiveness, Jew and demagogue though he was; for there seemed to be a feeling abroad that the interview this howling lover claimed with Clotilde ought to be granted. The latest report spoke of him as off to the General's Court for an audience of his official chief. General von Rudiger looked to his defences, and he had sufficient penetration to see that the weakest point of them might be a submissive daughter.

Page 3074

A letter to Clotilde from the baroness was brought to the house by a messenger. The General thought over it. The letter was by no means a seductive letter for a young lady to receive from such a person, yet he did not anticipate the whole effect it would produce when ultimately he decided to give it to her, being of course unaware of the noble style of Clotilde's address to the baroness. He stipulated that there must be no reply to it except through him, and Clotilde had the coveted letter in her hands at last. Here was the mediatrix—the veritable goddess with the sword to cut the knot! Here was the manifestation of Alvan!

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XII

She ran out to the shade of the garden walls to be by herself and in the air, and she read; and instantly her own letter to the baroness crashed sentence upon sentence, in retort, springing up with the combative instinct of a beast, to make discord of the stuff she read, and deride it. Twice she went over the lines with this defensive accompaniment; then they laid octopus-limbs on her. The writing struck chill as a glacier cave. Oh, what an answer to that letter of fervid respectfulness, of innocent supplication for maternal affection, for some degree of benignant friendship!

The baroness coldly stated, that she had arrived in the city to do her best in assisting to arrange matters which had come to a most unfortunate and impracticable pass. She alluded to her established friendship for Alvan, but it was chiefly in the interests of Clotilde that the latter was requested to perceive the necessity for bringing her relations with Dr. Alvan to an end in the discreetest manner now possible to the circumstances. This, the baroness pursued, could only be done by her intervention, and her friendship for Dr. Alvan had caused her to undertake the little agreeable office. For which purpose, promising her an exemption from anything in the nature of tragedy scenes, the baroness desired Clotilde to call on her the following day between certain specified hours of the afternoon.

That was all.

The girl in her letter to the baroness had constrained herself to write, and therefore to think, in so beautiful a spirit of ignorant innocence, that the vileness of an answer thus brutally throwing off the mask of personal disinterestedness appeared to her both an abominable piece of cynicism on the part of a scandalous old woman, and an insulting rejection of the cover of decency proposed to the creature by a daisy-minded maiden.

She scribbled a single line in receipt of the letter and signed her initials.

Page 3075

‘The woman is hateful!’ she said to her father; she was ready to agree with him about the woman and Alvan. She was ashamed to have hoped anything of the woman, and stamped down her disappointment under a vehement indignation, that disfigured the man as well. He had put the matter into the hands of this most detestable of women, to settle it as she might think best! He and she!—the miserable old thing with her ancient arts and cajoleries had lured him back! She had him fast again, in spite of—for who could tell? perhaps by reason of her dirty habits: she smoked dragoon cigars! All day she was emitting tobacco-smoke; it was notorious, Clotilde had not to learn it from her father; but now she saw the filthy rag that standard of female independence was—that petticoated Unfeminine, fouler than masculine! Alvan preferred the lichen-draped tree to the sunny flower, it was evident, for never a letter from Alvan had come to her. She thought in wrath, nothing but the thoughts of wrath, and ran her wits through every reasonable reflection like a lighted brand that flings its colour, if not fire, upon surrounding images. Contempt of the square-jawed withered woman was too great for Clotilde to have a sensation of her driving jealousy until painful glimpses of the man made jealousy so sharp that she flew for refuge to contempt of the pair. That beldam had him back: she had him fast. Oh! let her keep him! Was he to be regretted who could make that choice?

Her father did not let the occasion slip to speak insistingly as the world opined of Alvan and his baroness. He forced her to swallow the calumny, and draw away with her family against herself through strong disgust.

Out of a state of fire Clotilde passed into solid frigidity. She had neither a throb nor a passion. Wishing seemed to her senseless as life was. She could hear without a thrill of her frame that Alvan was in the city, without a question whether it was true. He had not written, and he had handed her over to the baroness! She did not ask herself how it was that she had no letter from him, being afraid to think about it, because, if a letter had been withheld by her father, it was a part of her whipping; if none had been written, there was nothing to hope for. Her recent humiliation condemned him by the voice of her sufferings for his failure to be giant, eagle, angel, or any of the prodigious things he had taught her to expect; and as he had thus deceived her, the glorious lover she had imaged in her mind was put aside with some of the angry disdain she bestowed upon the woman by whom she had been wounded. He ceased to be a visioned Alvan, and became an obscurity; her principal sentiment in relation to him was, that he threatened her peace. But for him she would never have been taught to hate her parents; she would have enjoyed the quiet domestic evenings with her people, when Marko sang, and her sisters knitted, and the betrothed sister wore a look very enviable in the abstract; she would be seeing a future instead of a black iron gate! But for him she certainly would never have had, that letter from the baroness!

Page 3076

On the morning after the information of Alvan's return, her father, who deserved credit as a tactician, came to her to say that Alvan had sent to demand his letters and presents. The demand was unlike what her stunned heart recollected of Alvan; but a hint that the baroness was behind it, and that a refusal would bring the baroness down on her with another piece of insolence, was effective. She dealt out the letters, arranged the presents, made up the books, pamphlets, trinkets, amulet coins, lock of black hair, and worn post-marked paper addressed in his hand to Clotilde von Rudiger, carefully; and half as souvenir, half with the forlorn yearning of the look of lovers when they break asunder—or of one of them—she signed inside the packet not 'Clotilde,' but the gentlest title he had bestowed on her, trusting to the pathos of the word 'child' to tell him that she was enforced and still true, if he should be interested in knowing it. Weak souls are much moved by having the pathos on their side. They are consoled too.

Time passed, whole days: the tender reminder had no effect on him! It had been her last appeal: she reflected that she had really felt when he had not been feeling at all: and this marks a division.

She was next requested to write a letter to Alvan, signifying his release by the notification of her engagement to Prince Marko. She was personally to deliver it to a gentleman who was of neither party, and who would give her a letter from Alvan in exchange, which, while assuring the gentleman she was acting with perfect freedom, she was to be under her oath not to read, and dutifully to hand to Marko, her betrothed. Her father assumed the fact of her renewed engagement to the prince, as her whole family did; strangely, she thought: it struck her as a fatality. He said that Alvan was working him great mischief, doing him deadly injury in his position, and for no just reason, inasmuch as he—a bold, bad man striving to ruin the family on a point of pride—had declared that he simply considered himself bound in honour to her, only a little doubtful of her independent action at present; and a release of him, accompanied by her plain statement of her being under no compulsion, voluntarily the betrothed of another, would solve the difficulty. A certain old woman, it seemed, was anxious to have him formally released.

With the usual dose for such a patient, of cajoleries and threats, the General begged her to comply, pulling the hands he squeezed in a way to strongly emphasize his affectionate entreaty.

She went straight to Marko, consenting that he should have Alvan's letter unopened (she cared not to read it, she said), on his promise to give it up to her within a stated period. There was a kind of prohibited pleasure, sweet acid, catching discord, in the idea of this lover's keeping the forbidden thing she could ask for when she was curious about the other, which at present she was not; dead rather;

Page 3077

anxious to please her parents, and determined to be no rival of the baroness. Marko promised it readily, adding: 'Only let the storm roll over, that we may have more liberty, and I myself, when we two are free, will lead you to Alvan, and leave it to you to choose between us. Your happiness, beloved, is my sole thought. Submit for the moment.' He spoke sweetly, with his dearest look, touching her luxurious nature with a belief that she could love him; untroubled by another, she could love and be true to him: her maternal inner nature yearned to the frailbodied youth.

She made a comparison in her mind of Alvan's love and Marko's, and of the lives of the two men. There was no grisly baroness attached to the prince's life.

She wrote the letter to Alvan, feeling in the words that said she was plighted to Prince Marko, that she said, and clearly said, the baroness is now relieved of a rival, and may take you! She felt it so acutely as to feel that she said nothing else.

Severances are accomplished within the heart stroke by stroke; within the craven's heart each new step resulting from a blow is temporarily an absolute severance. Her letter to Alvan written, she thought not tenderly of him but of the prince, who had always loved a young woman, and was unhampered by an old one. The composition of the letter, and the sense that the thing was done, made her stony to Alvan.

On the introduction of Colonel von Tresten, whose name she knew, but was dull to it, she delivered him her letter with unaffected composure, received from him Alvan's in exchange, left the room as if to read it, and after giving it unopened to Marko, composedly reappeared before the colonel to state, that the letter could make no difference, and all was to be as she had written it.

The colonel bowed stiffly.

It would have comforted her to have been allowed to say: 'I cease to be the rival of that execrable harridan!'

The delivery of so formidable a cat-screech not being possible, she stood in an attitude of mild resignation, revolving thoughts of her father's praises of his noble daughter, her mother's kiss, the caresses of her sisters, and the dark bright eyes of Marko, the peace of the domestic circle. This was her happiness! And still there was time, still hope for Alvan to descend and cut the knot. She conceived it slowly, with some flush of the brain like a remainder of fever, but no throbs of her pulses. She had been swayed to act against him by tales which in her heart she did not credit exactly, therefore did not take within herself, though she let them influence her by the goad of her fears and angers; and these she could conjure up at will for the defence of her conduct, aware of their shallowness, and all the while trusting him to come in the end and hear her reproaches for his delay. He seemed to her now to have the character of a storm outside a household wrapped in comfortable monotony. Her natural spiritedness

Page 3078

detested the monotony, her craven soul fawned for the comfort. After her many recent whippings the comfort was immensely desireable, but a glance at the monotony gave it the look of a burial, and standing in her attitude of resignation under Colonel von Tresten's hard military stare she could have shrieked for Alvan to come, knowing that she would have cowered and trembled at the scene following his appearance. Yet she would have gone to him; without any doubt his presence and the sense of his greater power declared by his coming would have lifted her over to him. The part of her nature adoring storminess wanted only a present champion to outweigh the other part which cuddled security. Colonel von Tresten, however, was very far from offering himself in such a shape to a girl that had jilted the friend he loved, insulted the woman he esteemed; and he stood there like a figure of soldierly complacency in marble. Her pencilled acknowledgement of the baroness's letter, and her reply to it almost as much, was construed as an intended insult to that lady, whose champion Tresten was. He had departed before Clotilde heard a step.

Immediately thereupon it came: to her mind that Tresten was one of Alvan's bosom friends. How, then, could he be of neither party? And her father spoke of him as an upright rational man, who, although, strangely enough, he entertained, as it appeared, something like a profound reverence for the baroness, could see and confess the downright impossibility of the marriage Alvan proposed. Tresten, her father said, talked of his friend Alvan as wild and eccentric, but now becoming convinced that such a family as hers could never tolerate him—considering his age, his birth, his blood, his habits, his politics, his private entanglements and moral reputation, it was partly hinted.

She shuddered at this false Tresten. He and the professor might be strung together for examples of perfidy! His reverence of the baroness gave his cold blue eyes the iciness of her loathed letter. Alvan, she remembered, used to exalt him among the gallantest of the warriors dedicating their swords to freedom. The dedication of the sword, she felt sure, was an accident: he was a man of blood. And naturally, she must be hated by the man reverencing the baroness. If ever man had executioner stamped on his face, it was he! Like the professor, nay, like Alvan himself, he would not see that she was the victim of tyranny: none of her signs would they see. They judged of her by her inanimate frame in the hands of her torturers breaking her on the wheel. She called to mind a fancy that she had looked at Tresten out of her deadness earnestly for just one instant: more than an instant she could not, beneath her father's vigilant watch and into those repellant cold blue butcher eyes. Tresten might clearly have understood the fleeting look. What were her words! what her deeds!

Page 3079

The look was the truth revealed-her soul. It begged for life like an infant; and the man's face was an iron rock in reply! No wonder—he worshipped the baroness! So great was Clotilde's hatred of him that it overflooded the image of Alvan, who called him friend, and deputed him to act as friend. Such blindness, weakness, folly, on the part of one of Alvan's pretensions, incurred a shade of her contempt. She had not ever thought of him coldly: hitherto it would have seemed a sacrilege; but now she said definitely, the friend of Tresten cannot be the man I supposed him! and she ascribed her capacity for saying it, and for perceiving and adding up Alvan's faults of character, to the freezing she had taken from that most antipathetic person. She confessed to sensations of spite which would cause her to reject and spurn even his pleadings for Alvan, if they were imaginable as actual. Their not being imaginable allowed her to indulge her naughtiness harmlessly, for the gratification of the idea of wounding some one, though it were her lover, connected with this Tresten.

The letter of the baroness and the visit of the woman's admirer had vitiated Clotilde's blood. She was not only not mistress of her thoughts, she was undirected either in thinking or wishing by any desires, except that the people about her should caress and warm her, until, with no gaze backward, she could say good-bye to them, full of meaning as a good-bye to the covered grave, as unreluctantly as the swallow quits her eaves-nest in autumn: and they were to learn that they were chargeable with the sequel of the history. There would be a sequel, she was sure, if it came only to punish them for the cruelty which thwarted her timid anticipation of it by pressing on her natural instinct at all costs to bargain for an escape from pain, and making her simulate contentment to cheat her muffled wound and them.

CHAPTER XIII

His love meantime was the mission and the burden of Alvan, and he was not ashamed to speak of it and plead for it; and the pleading was not done troubadourishly, in soft flute-notes, as for easement of tuneful emotions beseeching sympathy. He was liker to a sturdy beggar demanding his crust, to support life, of corporations that can be talked into admitting the rights of man; and he vollied close logical argumentation, on the basis of the laws, in defence of his most natural hunger, thunder in his breast and bright new heavenly morning alternating or clashing while the electric wires and post smote him with evil tidings of Clotilde, and the success of his efforts caught her back to him. Daily many times he reached to her and lost her, had her in his arms and his arms withered with emptiness. The ground he won quaked under him. All the evidence opposed it, but he was in action, and his reason swore that he had her fast. He had seen and felt his power over her; his reason told

Page 3080

him by what had been that it must be. Could he doubt? He battled for his reason. Doubt was an extinguishing wave, and he clung to his book of the Law, besieging Church and State with it, pointing to texts of the law which proved her free to choose her lord and husband for herself, expressing his passionate love by his precise interpretation of the law: and still with the cold sentience gaining on him, against the current of his tumultuous blood and his hurried intelligence, of her being actually what he had named her in moments of playful vision—slippery, a serpent, a winding hare; with the fear that she might slip from him, betray, deny him, deliver him to ridicule, after he had won his way to her over every barrier. During his proudest exaltations in success, when his eyes were sparkling, there was a wry twitch inward upon his heart of hearts.

But if she was a hare, he was a hunter, little inclining to the chase now for mere physical recreation. She had roused the sportsman's passion as well as the man's; he meant to hunt her down, and was not more scrupulous than our ancient hunters, who hunted for a meal and hunted to kill, with none of the later hesitations as to circumventing, trapping, snaring by devices, and the preservation of the animal's coat spotless. Let her be lured from her home, or plucked from her home, and if reluctant, disgraced, that she may be dependent utterly on the man stooping to pick her up! He was equal to the projecting of a scheme socially infamous, with such fanatical intensity did the thought of his losing the woman harass him, and the torrent of his passion burst restraint to get to her to enfold her—this in the same hour of the original wild monster's persistent and sober exposition of the texts of the law with the voice of a cultivated modern gentleman; and, let it be said, with a modern gentleman's design to wed a wife in honour. All means were to be tried. His eye burned on his prize, mindless of what she was dragged through, if there was resistance, or whether by the hair of her head or her skirts, or how she was obtained. His interpretation of the law was for the powers of earth, and other plans were to propitiate the powers under the earth, and certain distempered groanings wrenched from him at intervals he addressed (after they were out of him, reflectively) to the powers above, so that nothing of him should be lost which might get aid of anything mundane, infernal, or celestial.

Thus it is when Venus bites a veritable ancient male. She puts her venom in a magnificent beast, not a pathetic Phaedra. She does it rarely, for though to be loved by a bitten giant is one of the dreams of woman, the considerate Mother of Love knows how needful it is to protect the sentiment of the passion and save them from an exhibition of the fires of that dragon's breath. Do they not fly shrieking when they behold it? Barely are they able to read of it. Men, too, accustomed to minor doses of the goddess, which moderate, soften, counteract, instead of inflicting the malady, abhor and have no brotherhood with its turbulent victim.

Page 3081

It was justly matter for triumph, due to an extraordinary fervour of pleading upon a plain statement of the case, that Alvan should return from his foray bringing with him an emissary deputed by General von Rudiger's official chief to see that the young lady, so passionately pursued by the foremost of his time in political genius and oratory, was not subjected to parental tyranny, but stood free to exercise her choice. Of the few who would ever have thought of attempting, a diminished number would have equalled that feat. Alvan was no vain boaster; he could gain the ears of grave men as well as mobs and women. The interview with Clotilde was therefore assured to him, and the distracting telegrams and letters forwarded to him by Tresten during his absence were consequently stabs already promising to heal. They were brutal stabs—her packet of his letters and presents on his table made them bleed afresh, and the odd scrawl of the couple of words on the paper set him wondering at the imbecile irony of her calling herself 'The child' in accompaniment to such an act, for it reminded him of his epithet for her, while it dealt him a tremendous blow; it seemed senselessly malign, perhaps flippant, as she could be, he knew. She could be anything weak and shallow when out of his hands; she had recently proved it still, in view of the interview, and on the tide of his labours to come to that wished end, he struck his breast to brave himself with a good hopeful spirit. 'Once mine!' he said.

Moreover, to the better account, Clotilde's English friend had sent him the lines addressed to her, in which the writer dwelt on her love of him with a whimper of the voice of love. That was previous to her perjury by little, by a day-eighteen hours. How lurid a satire was flung on events by the proximity of the dates! But the closeness of the time between this love-crooning and the denying of him pointed to a tyrannous intervention. One could detect it. Full surely the poor craven was being tyrannized and tutored to deny him! though she was a puss of the fields too, as the mounted sportsman was not unwilling to think.

Before visiting his Mentor, Alvan applied for an audience of General von Rudiger, who granted it at once to a man coming so well armed to claim the privilege. Tresten walked part of the way to the General's house with him, and then turned aside to visit the baroness.

Lucie, Baroness von Crefeldt, was one of those persons who, after a probationary term in the character of woman, have become men, but of whom offended man, amazed by the flowering up of that hard rough jaw from the tender blooming promise of a petticoat, finds it impossible to imagine they had once on a sweet Spring time the sex's gentleness and charm of aspect. Mistress Flanders, breeched and hatted like a man, pulling at the man's short pipe and heartily invoking frouzy deities, committing a whole sackful of unfeminine etcaetera, is an impenetrable

Page 3082

wall to her maiden past; yet was there an opening day when nothing of us moustached her. She was a clear-faced girl and mother of young blushes before the years were at their work of transformation upon her countenance and behind her bosom. The years were rough artists: perhaps she was combative, and fought them for touching her ungallantly; and that perhaps was her first manly step. Baroness Lucie was of high birth, a wife openly maltreated, a woman of breeding, but with a man's head, capable of inspiring man-like friendships, and of entertaining them. She was radically-minded, strongly of the Radical profession of faith, and a correspondent of revolutionary chiefs; both the trusted adviser and devoted slave of him whose future glorious career she measured by his abilities. Rumour blew out a candle and left the wick to smoke in relation to their former intercourse. The Philistines revenged themselves on an old aristocratic Radical and a Jew demagogue with the weapon that scandal hands to virtue. They are virtuous or nothing, and they must show that they are so when they can; and best do they show it by publicly dishonouring the friendship of a man and a woman; for to be in error in malice does not hurt them, but they profoundly feel that they are fools if they are duped.

She was aware of the recent course of events; she had as she protested, nothing to accuse herself of, and she could hardly part her lips without a self-exculpation.

'It will fall on me!' she said to Tresten, in her emphatic tone. 'He will have his interview with the girl. He will subdue the girl. He will manacle himself in the chains he makes her wear. She will not miss her chance! I am the object of her detestation. I am the price paid for their reconcilement. She will seize her opportunity to vilipend me, and I shall be condemned by the kind of court-martial which hurries over the forms of a brial to sign the execution-warrant that makes it feel like justice. You will see. She cannot forgive me for not pretending to enter into her enthusiasm. She will make him believe I conspired against her. Men in love are children with their mistresses—the greatest of them; their heads are under the woman's feet. What have I not done to aid him! At his instance, I went to the archbishop, to implore one of the princes of the Church for succour. I knelt to an ecclesiastic. I did a ludicrous and a shameful thing, knowing it in advance to be a barren farce. I obeyed his wish. The tale will be laughable. I obeyed him. I would not have it on my conscience that the commission of any deed ennomic, however unwonted, was refused by me to serve Alvan. You are my witness, Tresten, that for a young woman of common honesty I was ready to pack and march. Qualities of mind-mind! They were out of the question. He had a taste for a wife. If he had hit on a girl commonly honest, she might not have harmed him—the contrary; cut his talons. What is this girl?

Page 3083

Exactly what one might be sure his appreciation, in woman-flesh, would lead him to fix on; a daughter of the Philistines, naturally, and precisely the one of all on earth likely to confound him after marriage as she has played fast and loose with him before it. He has never understood women—cannot read them. Could a girl like that keep a secret? She's a Cressida—a creature of every camp! Not an idea of the cause he is vowed to! not a sentiment in harmony with it! She is viler than any of those Berlin light o' loves on the eve of Jena. Stable as a Viennese dancing slut home from Mariazell! This is the girl-transparent to the whole world! But his heart is on her, and he must have her, I suppose; and I shall have to bear her impertinences, or sign my demission and cease to labour for the cause at least in conjunction with Alvan. And how other wise? He is the life of it, and I am doomed to uselessness.'

Tresten nodded a protesting assent.

'Not quite so bad,' he said, with the encouraging smile which could persuade a friend to put away bilious visions. 'Of the two, if you two are divisible, we could better dispense with him. She'll slip him, she's an eel. I have seen eels twine on a prong of the fork that prods them; but she's an actress, a slippery one through and through, with no real embrace in her, not even a common muscular contraction. Of every camp! as you say. She was not worth carrying off. I consented to try it to quiet him. He sets no bounds to his own devotion to friendship, and we must take pattern by him. It's a mad love.'

'A Titan's love!' the baroness exclaimed, groaning. 'The woman!—no matter how or at what cost! I can admire that primal barbarism of a great man's passion, which counts for nothing the stains and accidents fraught with extinction for it to meaner men. It reads ill, it sounds badly, but there is grand stuff in it. See the royalty of the man, for whom no degradation of the woman can be, so long as it brings her to him! He—that great he—covers all. He burns her to ashes, and takes the flame—the pure spirit of her—to himself. Were men like him!—they would have less to pardon. We must, as I have ever said, be morally on alpine elevations to comprehend Alvan; he is Mont Blanc above his fellows. Do not ask him to be considerate of her. She has planted him in a storm, and the bigger the mountain, the more savage, monstrous, cruel—yes, but she blew up the tourmente! That girl is the author of his madness. It is the snake's nature of the girl which distracts him; she is in his blood. Had she come to me, I would have helped her to cure him; or had you succeeded in carrying her off, I would have stood by their union; or were she a different creature, and not the shifty thing she is, I could desire him to win her. A peasant girl, a workman's daughter, a tradesman's, a professional singer, actress, artist—I would have given my hand to one of these in good faith, thankful to her! As it is, I have acted in obedience to his wishes, without idle remonstrances—I know him too well; and with as much cordiality as I could put into an evil service. She will drag him down, down, Tresten!'

Page 3084

‘They are not joined yet,’ said the colonel.

’She has him by the worst half of him. Her correspondence with me—her letter to excuse her insolence, which she does like a prim chit—throws a light on the girl she is. She will set him aiming at power to trick her out in the decorations. She will not keep him to his labours to consolidate the power. She will pervert the aesthetic in him, through her hold on his material nature, his vanity, his luxuriousness. She is one of the young women who begin timidly, and when they see that they enjoy comparative impunity, grow intrepid in dissipation, and that palling, they are ravenously ambitious. She will drive him at his mark before the time is ripe—ruin-him. He is a Titan, not a god, though god-like he seems in comparison with men. He would be fleshly enough in any hands. This girl will drain him of all his nobler fire.’

‘She shows mighty little of the inclination,’ said the colonel.

‘To you. But when they come together? I know his voice!’

The colonel protested his doubts of their coming together.

‘Ultimately?’ the baroness asked, and brooded. ’But she will have to see him; and then will she resist him? I shall change one view of her if she does.’

‘She will shirk the interview,’ Tresten remarked. ’Supposing they meet: I don’t think much will come of it, unless they meet on a field, and he has an hour’s grace to catch her up and be off with her. She’s as calm as the face of a clock, and wags her Yes and No about him just as unconcernedly as a clock’s pendulum. I’ve spoken to many a sentinel outpost who wasn’t deader on the subject in monosyllables than mademoiselle. She has a military erectness, and answers you and looks you straight at the eyes, perfectly unabashed by your seeing “the girl she is,” as you say. She looked at me downright defying me to despise her. Alvan has been tricked by her colour: she’s icy. She has no passion. She acts up to him when they’re together, and that deceives him. I doubt her having blood—there’s no heat in it, if she has.’

‘And he cajoled Count Hollinger to send an envoy to see him righted!’ the baroness ejaculated. ’Hollinger is not a sentimental person, I assure you, and not likely to have taken a step apparently hostile to the Rudigers, if he had not been extraordinarily shaken by Alvan. What character of man is this Dr. Storchel?’

Tresten described Count Hollinger’s envoy, so quaintly deputed to act the part of legal umpire in a family business, as a mild man of law with no ideas or interests outside the law; spectacled, nervous, formal, a stranger to the passions; and the baroness was amused to hear of Storchel and Alvan’s placid talk together upon themes of law, succeeded by the little advocate’s bewildered fright at one of Alvan’s gentler

explosions. Tresten sketched it. The baroness realized it, and shut her lips tight for a laugh of essential humour.

Page 3085

CHAPTER HIV

Late in the day Alvan was himself able to inform her that he had overcome Clotilde's father after a struggle of hours. The General had not consented to everything: he had granted enough, evidently in terror of the man who had captured Count Hollinger; and it way arranged that Tresten and Storchel were to wait on Clotilde next morning, and hear from her mouth whether she yielded or not to Alvan's request to speak with her alone before the official interview in the presence of the notary, when she was publicly to state her decision and freedom of choice, according to Count Hollinger's amicable arrangement through his envoy.

'She will see me-and the thing is done!' said Alvan. 'But I have worked for it—I have worked! I have been talking to-day for six hours uninterruptedly at a stretch to her father, who reminds me of a caged bear I saw at a travelling menagerie, and the beast would perform none of his evolutions for the edification of us lads till his keeper touched a particular pole, and the touch of it set him to work like the, winding of a key. Hollinger's name was my magic wand with the General. I could get no sense from him, nor any acquiescence in sense, till I called up Hollinger, when the General's alacrity was immediately that of the bear, or a little boy castigated for his share of original sin. They have been hard at her, the whole family! and I shall want the two hours I stipulated for to the full. What do you say?—come, I wager I do it within one hour! They have stockaded her pretty closely, and it will be some time before I shall get her to have a clear view of me behind her defences; but an hour's an age with a woman. Clotilde? I wager I have her on her knees in half an hour! These notions of duty, and station, and her fiddle-de-dee betrothal to that Danube osier with Indian-idol eyes, count for so much mist. She was and is mine. I swear to strike to her heart in ten minutes! But, madam, if not, you may pronounce me incapable of conquering any woman, or of taking an absolute impression of facts. I say I will do it! I am insane if I may not judge from antecedents that my voice, my touch, my face, will draw her to me at one signal—at a look! I am prepared to stake my reason on her running to me before I speak a word:—-and I will not beckon. I promise to fold my arms and simply look.'

'Your task of two hours, then, will be accomplished, I compute, in about half a minute—-but it is on the assumption that she consents to see you alone,' said the baroness.

Alvan opened his eyes. He perceived in his deep sagaciousness woman at the bottom of her remark, and replied: 'You will know Clotilde in time. She points to me straight; but of course if you agitate the compass the needle's all in a tremble: and the vessel is weak, I admit, but the instinct's positive. To doubt it would upset my understanding. I have had three distinct experiences of my influence over her, and each time, curiously each time exactly in proportion to my degree of resolve—but, baroness, I tell you it was minutely in proportion to it; weighed down to the grain!—each time did that girl respond

to me with a similar degree of earnestness. As I waned, she waned; as I heated, so did she, and from spark-heat to flame and to furnace-heat!'

Page 3086

‘A refraction of the rays according to the altitude of the orb,’ observed the baroness in a tone of assent, and she smiled to herself at the condition of the man who could accept it for that.

He did not protest beyond presently a transient frown as at a bad taste on his tongue, and a rather petulant objection to her use of analogies, which he called the sapping of language. She forbore to remind him in retort of his employment of metaphor when the figure served his purpose.

‘Marvellously,’ cried Alvan, ’marvellously that girl answered to my lead! and to-morrow —you’ll own me right—I must double the attraction. I shall have to hand her back to her people for twenty-four hours, and the dose must be doubled to keep her fast and safe. You see I read her flatly. I read and am charitable. I have a perfect philosophical tolerance. I’m in the mood to-day of Horace hymning one of his fair Greeks.’

‘No, no that is a comparison past my endurance,’ interposed the baroness. ’Friend Sigismund, you have no philosophy, you never had any; and the small crow and croon of Horace would be the last you could take up. It is the chanted philosophy of comfortable stipendiaries, retired merchants, gouty patients on a restricted allowance of the grape, old men who have given over thinking, and young men who never had feeling—the philosophy of swine grunting their carmen as they turn to fat in the sun. Horace avaunt! You have too much poetry in you to quote that unsanguine sensualist for your case. His love distressed his liver, and gave him a jaundice once or twice, but where his love yields its poor ghost to his philosophy, yours begins its labours. That everlasting Horace! He is the versifier of the cushioned enemy, not of us who march along flinty ways: the piper of the bourgeois in soul, poet of the conforming unbelievers!’

‘Pyrrha, Lydia, Lalage, Chloe, Glycera,’ Alvan murmured, amorous of the musical names. ’Clotilde is a Greek of one of the Isles, an Ionian. I see her in the Horatian ode as in one of those old round shield-mirrors which give you a speck of the figure on a silver-solar beam, brilliant, not much bigger than a dewdrop. And so should a man’s heart reflect her! Take her on the light in it, she is perfection. We won’t take her in the shady part or on your flat looking-glasses. There never was necessity for accuracy of line in the portraiture of women. The idea of them is all we want: it’s the best of them. You will own she’s Greek; she’s a Perinthian, Andrian, Olythian, Saurian, Messenian. One of those delicious girls in the New Comedy, I remember, was called *the postponer*, *the deferrer*, or, as we might say, *the to*-MORROWER. There you have Clotilde: she’s a *to*-MORROWER. You climb the peak of to-morrow, and to see her at all you must see her on the next peak: but she leaves you her promise to hug on every yesterday, and that keeps you going. Ay, so we have patience! Feeding on a young woman’s promises of yesterday in one’s fortieth year!—it must end to-morrow, though I kill something.’

Page 3087

Kill, he meant, the aerial wild spirit he could admire as her character, when he had the prospect of extinguishing it in his grasp.

‘What do you meditate killing?’ said the baroness.

‘The fool of the years behind me,’ he replied, ’and entering on my forty-first a sage.’

‘To be the mate and equal of your companion?’

’To prove I have had good training under the wisest to act as her guide and master.’

‘If she—’ the baroness checked her exclamation, saying: ’She declined to come to me. I would have plumbed her for some solid ground, something to rest one’s faith on. Your Pyrrhas, Glyceras, and others of the like, were not stable persons for a man of our days to bind his life to one of them. Harness is harness, and a light yoke-fellow can make a proud career deviate.’

‘But I give her a soul!’ said Alvan. ’I am the wine, and she the crystal cup. She has avowed it again and again. You read her as she is when away from me. Then she is a reed, a weed, what you will; she is unfit to contend when she stands alone. But when I am beside her, when we are together—the moment I have her at arms’ length she will be part of me by the magic I have seen each time we encountered. She knows it well.’

‘She may know it too well.’

‘For what?’ He frowned.

‘For the chances of your meeting.’

‘You think it possible she will refuse?’

A blackness passing to lividness crossed his face. He fetched a big breath.

’Then finish my history, shut up the book; I am a phantom of a man, and everything written there is imposture! I can account for all that she has done hitherto, but not that she should refuse to see me. Not that she should refuse to see me now when I come armed to demand it! Refuse? But I have done my work, done what I said I would do. I stand in my order of battle, and she refuses? No! I stake my head on it! I have not a clod’s perception, I have not a spark of sense to distinguish me from a flat-headed Lapp, if she refuses:—call me a mountebank who has gained his position by clever tumbling; a lucky gamester; whatever plays blind with chance.’

He started up in agitation. ’Lucie! I am a grinning skull without a brain if that girl refuses! She will not.’ He took his hat to leave, adding, to seem rational to the cool understanding he addressed: ’She will not refuse; I am bound to think so in common

respect for myself; I have done tricks to make me appear a rageing ape if she—oh! she cannot, she will not refuse. Never! I have eyes, I have wits, I am not tottering yet on my grave—or it's blindly, if I am. I have my clear judgement, I am not an imbecile. It seems to me a foolish suspicion that she can possibly refuse. Her manners are generally good; freakish, but good in the main. Perhaps she takes a sting . . . but there is no sting here. It would be bad manners to refuse; to say nothing of . . . she has a heart! Well, then,

Page 3088

good manners and right feeling forbid her to refuse. She is an exceedingly intelligent girl, and I half fear I have helped you to a wrong impression of her. You will really appreciate her wit; you will indeed; believe me, you will. We pardon nonsense in a girl. Married, she will put on the matron with becoming decency, and I am responsible for her then; I stand surety for her then; when I have her with me I warrant her mine and all mine, head and heels, at a whistle, like the Cossack's horse. I fancy that at forty I am about as young as most young men. I promise her another forty manful working years. Are you dubious of that?'

'I nod to you from the palsied summit of ninety,' said the baroness.

Alvan gave a short laugh and stammered excuses for his naked egoism, comparing himself to a forester who has sharpened such an appetite in toiling to slay his roe that he can think of nothing but the fire preparing the feast.

'Hymen and things hymenaeal!' he said, laughing at himself for resuming the offence on the apology for it. 'I could talk with interest of a trousseau. I have debated in my mind with parliamentary acrimony about a choice of wedding-presents. As she is legally free to bestow her hand on me—and only a brute's horns could contest the fact—she may decide to be married the day after to-morrow, and get the trousseau in Paris. She has a turn for startling. I can imagine that if I proposed a run for it she would be readier to spring to be on the road with me than in acquiescing in a quiet arrangement about a ceremonial day; partly because, in the first case, she would throw herself and the rest of the adventure on me, at no other cost than the enjoyment of one of her impulses; and in the second, because she is a girl who would require a full band of the best Berlin orchestra in perpetual play to keep up her spirits among her people during the preparations for espousing a democrat, demagogue, and Jew, of a presumed inferior station by birth to her own. Give Momus a sister, Clotilde is the lady! I know her. I would undertake to put a spell on her and keep her contented on a frontier—not Russian, any barbarous frontier where there is a sun. She must have sun. One might wrap her in sables, but sun is best. She loves it best, though she looks remarkably well in sables. Never shall I forget . . . she is frileuse, and shivers into them! There are Frenchmen who could paint it—only Frenchmen. Our artists, no. She is very French. Born in France she would have been a matchless Parisienne. Oh! she's a riddle of course. I don't pretend to spell every letter of her. The returning of my presents is odd. No, I maintain that she is a coward acting under domination, and there's no other way of explaining the puzzle. I was out of sight, they bullied her, and she yielded—-bewilderingly, past comprehension it seems—cat!—until you remember what she's made of: she's a reed. Now I reappear armed with powers to give

Page 3089

her a free course, and she, that abject whom you beheld recently renouncing me, is, you will see, the young Aurora she was when she came striking at my door on the upper Alp. That was a morning! That morning is Clotilde till my eyes turn over! She is all young heaven and the mountains for me! She's the filmy light above the mountains that weds white snow and sky. By the way, I dreamt last night she was half a woman, half a tree, and her hair was like a dead yewbough, which is as you know of a brown burnt-out colour, suitable to the popular conception of widows. She stood, and whatever turning you took, you struck back on her. Whether my widow, I can't say: she must first be my wife. Oh, for tomorrow!'

'What sort of evening is it?' said the baroness.

'A Mont Blanc evening: I saw him as I came along,' Alvan replied, and seized his hat to be out to look on the sovereign mountain again. They touched hands. He promised to call in the forenoon next day.

'Be cool,' she counselled him.

'Oh!' He flung back his head, making light of the crisis. 'After all, it's only a girl. But, you know, what I set myself to win! . . . The thing's too small—I have been at such pains about it that I should be ridiculous if I allowed myself to be beaten. There is no other reason for the trouble we 're at, except that, as I have said a thousand times, she suits me. No man can be cooler than I.'

'Keep so,' said the baroness.

He walked to where the strenuous blue lake, finding outlet, propels a shoulder, like a bright-muscled athlete in action, and makes the Rhone-stream. There he stood for an hour, disfevered by the limpid liquid tumult, inspirited by the glancing volumes of a force that knows no abatement, and is the skiey Alps behind, the great historic citied plains ahead.

His meditation ended with a resolution half in the form of a prayer (to mixed deities undefined) never to ask for a small thing any more if this one were granted him!

He had won it, of course, having brought all his powers to bear on the task; and he rejoiced in winning it: his heart leapt, his imagination spun radiant webs of colour: but he was a little ashamed of his frenzies, though he did not distinctly recall them; he fancied he had made some noise, loud or not, because his intentions were so pure that it was infamous to thwart them. At a certain age honest men made sacrifice of their liberty to society, and he had been ready to perform the duty of husbanding a woman. A man should have a wife and rear children, not to be forgotten in the land, and to help mankind by transmitting to future times qualities he has proved priceless: he thought of

the children, and yearned to the generations of men physically and morally through them.

This was his apology to the world for his distantly-recollected excesses of temper.

Page 3090

Was she so small a thing? Not if she succumbed. She was petty, vexatious, irritating, stinging, while she resisted: she cast an evil beam on his reputation, strength and knowledge of himself, and roused the giants of his nature to discharge missiles at her, justified as they were by his pure intentions and the approbation of society. But he had a broad full heart for the woman who would come to him, forgiving her, uplifting her, richly endowing her. No meanness of heart was in him. He lay down at night thinking of Clotilde in an abandonment of tenderness. 'Tomorrow! you bird of to-morrow!' he let fly his good-night to her.

CHAPTER XV

He slept. Near upon morning he roused with his tender fit strong on him, but speechless in the waking as it had been dreamless in sleep. It was a happy load on his breast, a life about to be born, and he thought that a wife beside him would give it language. She should have, for she would call out, his thousand flitting ideas now dropped on barren ground for want of her fair bosom to inspire, to vivify, to receive. Poetry laid a hand on him: his desire of the wife, the children, the citizen's good name —of these our simple civilized ambitions—was lowly of the earth, throbbing of earth, and at the same time magnified beyond scope of speech in vast images and emblems resembling ranges of Olympian cloud round the blue above earth, all to be decipherable, all utterable, when she was by. What commoner word!—yet wife seemed to him the word most reverberating of the secret sought after by man, fullest at once of fruit and of mystery, or of that light in the heart of mystery which makes it magically fruitful.

He felt the presence of Clotilde behind the word; but in truth the delicate sensations breeding these half-thoughts of his, as he lay between sleeping and waking, shrank from conjuring up the face of the woman who had wounded them, and a certain instinct to preserve and be sure of his present breathing-space of luxurious tranquillity kept her veiled. Soon he would see her as his wife, and then she would be she, unveiled ravishingly, the only she, the only wife! He knew the cloud he clasped for Clotilde enough to be at pains to shun a possible prospect of his execrating it. Oh, the only she, the only wife! the wild man's reclaimer! the sweet abundant valley and channel of his river of existence henceforward! Doubting her in the slightest was doubting her human. It is the brain, the satanic brain which will ever be pressing to cast its shadows: the heart is clearer and truer.

He multiplied images, projected visions, nestled in his throbs to drug and dance his brain. He snatched at the beauty of a day that outrolled the whole Alpine hand-in-hand of radiant heaven-climbers for an assurance of predestined celestial beneficence; and again, shadowily thoughtful of the littleness of the thing he exalted and claimed, he staked his reason on the positive blessing to come to him before nightfall, telling himself calmly that he did so because there would be madness in expecting it otherwise: he

asked for so little! Since he asked for so little, to suppose that it would not be granted was irrational. None but a very coward could hesitate to stake his all on the issue.

Page 3091

Singularly small indeed the other aims in life appeared by comparison with this one, but his intellect, in the act of pleading excuses for his impatience, distinguished why it should be so. The crust, which is not much, is everything to the starving beggar; and he was eager for the crust that he might become sound and whole again, able to give their just proportion to things, as at present he acknowledged himself hardly able to do. He could not pursue two thoughts on a political question, or grasp the idea of a salutary energy in the hosts animated by his leadership. There would have to be an end of it speedily, else men might name him worthless dog!

Morning swam on the lake in her beautiful nakedness, a wedding of white and blue, of purest white and bluest blue. Alvan crossed the island bridges when the sun had sprung on his shivering fair prey, to make the young fresh Morning rosy, and was glittering along the smooth lake-waters. Workmen only were abroad, and Alvan was glad to be out with them to feel with them as one of them. Close beside him the vivid genius of the preceding century, whose love of workmen was a salt of heaven in his human corruptness, looked down on the lake in marble. Alvan cherished a worship of him as of one that had first thrilled him with the feeling of our common humanity, with the tenderness for the poor, with the knowledge of our frailty. Him, as well as the great Englishman and a Frenchman, his mind called Father, and his conscience replied to that progenitor's questioning of him, but said 'You know the love of woman: He loved indeed, but he was not an amatory trifler. He too was a worker, a champion worker. He doated on the prospect of plunging into his work; the vision of jolly giant labours told of peace obtained, and there could be no peace without his prize.

He listened to the workmen's foot-falls. The solitary sound and steady motion of their feet were eloquent of early morning in a city, not less than the changes of light in heaven above the roofs. With the golden light came numbers, workmen still. Their tread on the stones roused some of his working thoughts, like an old tune in his head, and he watched the scattered files passing on, disciplined by their daily necessities, easily manageable if their necessities are but justly considered. These numbers are the brute force of earth, which must have the earth in time, as they had it in the dawn of our world, and then they entered into bondage for not knowing how to use it. They will have it again: they have it partially, at times, in the despot, who is only the reflex of their brute force, and can give them only a shadow of their claim. They will have it all, when they have illumination to see and trust to the leadership of a greater force than they—in force of brain, in the spiritual force of ideas; ideas founded on justice; and not the justice of these days of the governing few whose wits are bent to steady our column of civilized humanity by a combination

Page 3092

of props and jugglers' arts, but a justice coming of the recognized needs of majorities, which will base the column on a broad plinth for safety-broad as the base of yonder mountain's towering white immensity—and will be the guarantee for the solid uplifting of our civilization at last. 'Right, thou!' he apostrophized—the old Ironer, at a point of his meditation. 'And right, thou! more largely right!' he thought, further advanced in it, of the great Giuseppe, the Genoese. 'And right am I too, between that metal-rail of a politician and the deep dreamer, each of them incomplete for want of an element of the other!' Practically and in vision right was Alvan, for those two opposites met fusing in him: like the former, he counted on the supremacy of might; like the latter, he distinguished where it lay in perpetuity.

During his younger years he had been like neither in the moral curb they could put on themselves—particularly the southern-blooded man. He had resembled the naturally impatient northerner most, though not so supple for business as he. But now he possessed the calmness of the Genoese; he had strong self-command now; he had the principle that life is too short for the indulgence of public fretfulness or of private quarrels; too valuable for fruitless risks; too sacred, one may say, for the shedding of blood on personal grounds. Oh! he had himself well under, fear not.

He could give and take from opposition. And rightly so, seeing that he confessed to his own bent for sarcastically stinging: he was therefore bound to endure a retort. Speech for speech, pamphlet for pamphlet, he could be temperate. Nay, he defied an adversary to produce in him the sensation of intemperateness; so there would not be much danger of his being excited to betray it. Shadowily he thought of the hard words hurled at him by the Rudigers, and of the injury Clotilde's father did him by plotting to rob him of his daughter. But how had an Alvan replied?—with the arts of peaceful fence victoriously. He conceived of no temptation to his repressed irascibility save the political. A day might come for him and the vehement old Ironer to try their mettle in a tussle. On that day he would have to be wary, but, as Alvan felt assured, he would be more master of himself than his antagonist. He was for the young world, in the brain of a new order of things; the other based his unbending system on the visions of a feudal chief, and would win a great step perchance, but there he would stop: he was not with the future!

This immediate prospect of a return to serenity after his recent charioteering, had set him thinking of himself and his days to come, which hung before him in a golden haze that was tranquillizing. He had a name, he had a station: he wanted power and he saw it approaching.

Page 3093

He wanted a wife too. Colonel von Tresten took coffee with him previous to the start with Dr. Storchel to General von Rudiger's house. Alvan consequently was unable any longer to think of a wife in the abstract. He wanted Clotilde. Here was a man going straight to her, going to see her, positively to see her and hear her voice!—almost instantly to hear her voice, and see her eyes and hair, touch her hand. Oh! and rally her, rouse her wit; and be able to tell him the flower she wore for the day, and where she wore it—at her temples, or sliding to the back hair, or in her bosom, or at her waist! She had innumerable tricks of indication in these shifty pretty ways of hers, and was full of varying speech to the cunning reader of her.

'But keep her to seriousness,' Alvan said. 'Our meeting must be early to-day—early in the afternoon. She is not unlikely to pretend to trifle. She has not seen me for some time, and will probably enough play at emancipation and speak of the "singular impatience of the seigneur Alvan." Don't you hear her? I swear to those very words! She "loves her liberty," and she curves her fan and taps her foot. "The seigneur Alvan appears pressed for time:" She has "letters to write to friends to-day." Stop that! I can't join in play: to-morrow, if she likes; not to-day. Or not till I have her by the hand. She shall be elf and fairy, French coquette, whatever she pleases to-morrow, and I'll be satisfied. All I beg is for plain dealing on a business matter. This is a business matter, a business meeting. I thoroughly know the girl's heart, and know that in winning the interview I win her. Only'—he pressed his friend's arm—'but, my dear Tresten, you understand. You're a luckier fellow than I—for the time, at all events. Make it as short as you can. You'll find me here. I shall take a book—one of the Pandects. I don't suppose I shall work. I feel idle. Any book handy; anything will interest me. I should walk or row on the lake, but I would rather be sure of readiness for your return. You meet Storchel at the General's house?'

'The appointment was at the house,' Tresten said.

'I have not seen him this morning. I know of nothing to prepare him for. You see, it was invariable with her: as soon as she met me she had twice her spirit: and that she knows;—she was a new woman, ten times the happier for having some grains of my courage. So she'll be glad to come to terms and have me by to support her. Press it, if necessary; otherwise she might be disappointed, my dear fellow. Storchel looks on, and observes, and that 's about all he can do, or need do. Up Mont Blanc to-day, Tresten! It's the very day for an ascent:—one of the rare crystalline jewels coming in a Swiss August; we should see the kingdoms of the earth—and a Republic! But I could climb with all my heart in a snowstorm to-day. Andes on Himalayas! as high as you like. The Republic by the way, small enough in the ring

Page 3094

of empires and monarchies, if you measure it geometrically! You remember the laugh at the exact elevation of Mount Olympus? But Zeus's eagle sat on it, and top me Olympus, after you have imagined the eagle aloft there! after Homer, is the meaning. That will be one of the lessons for our young Republicans—to teach them not to give themselves up to the embrace of dead materialism because, as they fancy, they have had to depend on material weapons for carving their way, and have had no help from other quarters. A suicidal delusion! The spiritual weapon has done most, and always does. They are sons of an idea. They deny their parentage when they scoff at idealism. It's a tendency we shall have to guard against; it leads back to the old order of things, if we do not trim our light. She is waiting for you! Go. You will find me here. And don't forget my instructions. Appoint for the afternoon—not late. Too near night will seem like Orpheus going below, and I hope to meet a living woman, not a ghost—ha! coloured like a lantern in a cavern, good Lord! Covered with lichen! Say three o'clock, not later. The reason is, I want to have it over early and be sure of what I am doing; I'm bothered by it; I shall have to make arrangements . . . a thousand little matters . . . telegraph to Paris, I daresay; she's fond of Paris, and I must learn who's there to meet her. Now start. I'll walk a dozen steps with you. I think of her as if, since we parted, she had been sitting on a throne in Erebus, and must be ghastly. I had a dream of a dead tree that upset me. In fact, you see I must have it over. The whole affair makes me feel too young.'

Tresten advised him to spend an hour with the baroness.

'I can't; she makes me feel too old,' said Alvan. 'She talks. She listens, but I don't want to speak. Dead silence!—let it be a dash of the pen till you return. As for these good people hurrying to their traffic, and tourists and loungers, they have a trick for killing time without hurting him. I wish I had. I try to smother a minute, and up the old fellow jumps quivering all over and threatening me body and soul. They don't appear as if they had news on their faces this morning. I've not seen a newspaper and won't look at one. Here we separate. Be formal in mentioning me to her but be particularly civil. I know you have the right tone: she's a critical puss. Days like these are the days for her to be out. There goes a parasol like one I 've seen her carry. Stay—no! Don't forget my instructions. Paris for a time. It may be the Pyrenees. Paris on our way back. She would like the Pyrenees. It's not too late for society at Luchon and Cauterets. She likes mountains, she mounts well: in any case, plenty of mules can be had. Paris to wind up with. Paris will be fuller about the beginning of October.'

Page 3095

He had quitted Tresten, and was talking to himself, cheating' himself, not discordantly at all. The poet of the company within him claimed the word and was allowed by the others to dilate on Clotilde's likings, and the honeymoon or post-honeymoon amusements to be provided for her in Pyrenean valleys, and Parisian theatres and salons. She was friande of chocolates, bon-bons: she enjoyed fine pastry, had a real relish of good wine. She should have the best of everything; he knew the spots of the very best that Paris could supply, in confiseurs and restaurants, and in millinery likewise. A lively recollection of the prattle of Parisian ladies furnished names and addresses likely to prove invaluable to Clotilde. He knew actors and actresses, and managers of theatres, and mighty men in letters. She should have the cream of Paris. Does she hint at rewarding him for his trouble? The thought of her indebted lips, half closed, asking him how to repay him, sprang his heart to his throat.

CHAPTER XVI

Then he found himself saying: 'At the age I touch!' . . .

At the age of forty, men that love love rootedly. If the love is plucked from them, the life goes with it.

He backed on his physical pride, a stout bulwark. His forty years—the forty, the fifty, the sixty of Alvan, matched the twenties and thirties of other men.

Still it was true that he had reached an age when the desire to plant his affections in a dear fair bosom fixedly was natural. Fairer, dearer than she was never one on earth! He stood bareheaded for coolness, looking in the direction Tresten had taken, his forehead shining and eyes charged with the electrical activity of the mind, reading intensely all who passed him, without a thought upon any of these objects in their passage. The people were read, penetrated, and flung off as from a whirring of wheels; to cut their place in memory sharp as in steel when imagination shall by and by renew the throbbing of that hour, if the wheels be not stilled. The world created by the furnaces of vitality inside him absorbed his mind; and strangely, while receiving multitudinous vivid impressions, he did not commune with one, was unaware of them. His thick black hair waved and glistened over the fine aquiline of his face. His throat was open to the breeze. His great breast and head were joined by a massive column of throat that gave volume for the coursing of the blood to fire the battery of thought, perchance in a tempest overflood it, extinguish it. His fortieth year was written on his complexion and presence: it was the fortieth of a giant growth that will bend at the past eightieth as little as the rock-pine, should there come no uprooting tempest. It said manhood, and breathed of settled strength of muscle, nerve, and brain.

Page 3096

Of the people passing, many knew him not, but marked him; some knew him by repute, one or two his person. To all of them he was a noticeable figure; even those of sheeplike nature, having an inclination to start upon the second impulse in the flanks of curious sheep when their first had been arrested by the appearance of one not of their kind, acknowledged the eminence of his bearing. There may have been a passenger in the street who could tell the double tale of the stick he swung in his hand, showing a gleam of metal, whereon were engraved names of the lurid historic original owner, and of the donor and the recipient. According to the political sentiments of the narrator would his tale be coloured, and a simple walking-stick would be clothed in Tarquin guilt for striking off heads of the upper ranks of Frenchmen till the blood of them topped the handle, or else wear hues of wonder, seem very memorable; fit at least for a museum. If the Christian aristocrat might shrink from it in terror and loathing, the Paynim Republican of deep dye would be ready to kiss it with veneration. But, assuming them to have a certain bond of manliness, both agree in pronouncing the deed a right valiant and worthy one, which caused this instrument to be presented to Alvan by a famous doctor, who, hearing of his repudiation of the duel, and of his gallant and triumphant defence of himself against a troop of ruffians, enemies or scum of their city, at night, by the aid of a common stout pedestrian stick, alone in a dark alley of the public park, sent him, duly mounted and engraved, an illustrious fellow to the weapon of defence, as a mode of commemorating his just abhorrence of bloodshed and his peaceful bravery.

Observers of him would probably speculate on his features and the carriage of his person as he went by them; with a result in their minds that can be of no import to us, men’s general speculations being directed by their individual aims and their moods, their timidities, prejudices, envies, rivalries; but none could contest that he was a potential figure. If to know him the rising demagogue of the time dressed him in such terrors as to make him appear an impending Attila of the voracious hordes which live from hand to mouth, without intervention of a banker and property to cry truce to the wolf, he would have shone under a different aspect enough to send them to the poets to solve their perplexity, had the knowledge been subjoined that this terrific devastator swinging the sanguinary stick was a slave of love, who staked his all upon his love, loved up to his capacity desperately, loved a girl, and hung upon her voice to hear whether his painful knocking at a door should gain him admittance to the ranks of the orderly citizens of the legitimately-satiated passions, or else—the voice of a girl annihilate him.

Page 3097

He loved like the desert-bred Eastern, as though his blood had never ceased to be steeped in its fountain Orient; loved barbarously, but with a compelling resolve to control his blood and act and be the civilized man, sober by virtue of his lady's gracious aid. In fact, it was the civilized man in him that had originally sought the introduction to her, with a bribe to the untameable. The former had once led, and hoped to lead again. Alvan was a revolutionist in imagination, the workman's friend in rational sympathy, their leader upon mathematical calculation, but a lawyer, a reasoner in law, and therefore of necessity a cousin germane, leaning to become an ally, of the Philistines—the founders and main supporters of his book of the Law. And so, between the nature of his blood, and the inclination of his mind, Alvan set his heart on a damsel of the Philistines, endowed with their trained elegancies and governed by some of their precepts, but suitable to his wildness in her reputation for originality, suiting him in her cultivated liveliness and her turn for luxury. Only the Philistines breed these choice beauties, put forth these delicate fresh young buds of girls; and only here and there among them is there an exquisite, eccentric, yet passably decorous Clotilde. What his brother politicians never discovered in him, and the baroness partly suspected, through her interpretation of things opposing her sentiments, Clotilde uncloaks. Catching and mastering her, his wilder animation may be appeased, but his political life is threatened with a diversion of its current, for he will be uxorious, impassioned to gratify the tastes and whims of a youthful wife; the Republican will be in danger of playing prematurely for power to seat her beside him high: while at the same time, children, perchance, and his hardening lawyer's head are secretly Philistinizing the demagogue, blunting the fine edge of his Radicalism, turning him into a slow-stepping Liberal, otherwise your half-Conservative in his convictions. Can she think it much to have married that drab-coloured unit? Power must be grasped . . . .

His watch told him that Tresten was now beholding her, or just about to. The stillness of the heavens was remarkable. The hour held breath. She delayed her descent from her chamber. He saw how she touched at her hair, more distinctly than he saw the lake before his eyes. He watched her, and the growl of a coming roar from him rebuked her tricky deliberateness. Deciding at last, she slips down the stairs like a waterfall, and is in the room, erect, composed—if you do not lay ear against her bosom. Tresten stares at her, owns she is worth a struggle. Love does this, friend Tresten! Love, that stamps out prejudice and bids inequality be smooth. Tresten stares and owns she is worth heavier labours, worse than his friend has endured. Love does it! Love, that hallows a stranger's claim to the flower of a proud garden: Love has won her the freedom to suffer herself to be chosen

Page 3098

by the stranger. What matters which of them toiled to bring them to so sweet an end! It was not either of them, but Love. By and by, after acting serenest innocent, suddenly broken, she will be copious of sad confessions. That will be in their secresy: in the close and boundless together of clasped hands. Deep eyes, that give him in realms of light within light all that he has dreamed of rapturousness and blessedness, you are threatened with a blinding kiss if you look abashed:—if her voice shall dare repeat another of those foolish self-reproaches, it shall be construed as a petition for further kisses. Silence! he said to her, imagining that he had been silent, and enjoying silence with a perfect quietude beyond the trouble of a thought of her kisses and his happiness. His full heart craved for the infinity of silence.

Another moment and he was counting to her the days, hours, minutes, which had been the gulf of torture between then and now—the separation and the reunion: he was voluble, living to speak, and a pause was only for the drawing of most blissful breath.

His watch went slowly. She was beginning to drop her eyelids in front of Tresten. Oh! he knew her so well. He guessed the length of her acting, and the time for her earnestness. She would have to act a coquette at first to give herself a countenance; and who would not pardon the girl for putting on a mask? who would fail to see the mask? But he knew her so well: she would not trifle very long: his life on it, that she will soon falter! her bosom will lift, lift and check: a word from Tresten then, if he is a friend, and she melts to the truth in her. Alvan heard her saying: 'I will see him yes, to-day. Let him appoint. He may come when he likes—come at once'

'My life on it!' he swore by his unerring knowledge of her, the certainty that she loved him.

He had walked into a quarter of the town strange to him, he thought; he had no recollection of the look of the street. A friend came up and put him in the right way, walking back with him. This was General Leczel, a famous leader of one of the heroical risings whose passage through blood and despair have led to the broader law men ask for when they name freedom devotedly. Alvan stated the position of his case to Leczel with continental frankness regarding a natural theme, and then pursued the talk on public affairs, to the note of: 'What but knocks will ever open the Black-Yellow Head to the fact that we are no longer in the first years of the eighteenth century!'

Leczel left him at his hotel steps, promising to call on him before night. Tresten had not returned, neither he nor the advocate, and he had been absent fully an hour. He was not in sight right or left. Alvan went to his room, looked at his watch, and out of the window, incapable of imagining any event. He began to breathe as if an atmosphere thick as water were pressing round him. Unconsciously he had

Page 3099

staked his all on the revelation the moment was to bring. So little a thing! His intellect weighed the littleness of it, but he had become level with it; he magnified it with the greatness of his desire, and such was his nature that the great desire of a thing withheld from him and his own, as he could think, made the world a whirlpool till he had it. He waited, figureable by nothing so much as a wild horse in captivity sniffing the breeze, when the flanks of the quivering beast are like a wind-struck barley-field, and his nerves are cords, and his nostrils trumpet him: he is flame kept under and straining to rise.

CHAPTER XVII

The baroness expected to see Alvan in the morning, for he kept appointments, and he had said he would come. She conceived that she was independent of personal wishes on the subject of Clotilde; the fury of his passion prohibited her forming any of the wishes we send up to destiny when matters interesting us are in suspense, whether we have liberated minds or not. She thought the girl would grant the interview; was sure the creature would yield in his presence; and then there was an end to the shining of Alvan! Supposing the other possibility, he had shown her such fierce illuminations of eye and speech that she foresaw it would be a blazing of the insurrectionary beacon-fires of hell with him. He was a man of angels and devils. The former had long been conquering, but the latter were far from extinct. His passion for this shallow girl had consigned him to the lower host. Let him be thwarted, his desperation would be unlikely to stop at legal barriers. His lawyer's head would be up and armed astoundingly to oppose the law; he would read, argue, and act with hot conviction upon the reverse of every text of law. She beheld him storming the father's house to have out Clotilde, reluctant or conniving; and he harangued the people, he bore off his captive, he held her firmly as he had sworn he would; he defied authority, he was a public rebel—he with his detected little secret aim, which he nursed like a shamed mother of an infant, fond but afraid to be proud of it! She had seen that he aimed at standing well with the world and being one with it honourably: holding to his principles of course: but a disposition that way had been perceived, and the vision of him in open rebellion because of his shy catching at the thread of an alliance with the decorous world, carved an ironic line on her jaw.

Full surely he would not be baffled without smiting the world on the face. And he might suffer for it; the Rudigers would suffer likewise.

Page 3100

She considered them very foolish people. Her survey of the little nobility beneath her station had previously enabled her to account for their disgust of such a suitor as Alvan, and maintain that they would oppose him tooth and nail. Owing to his recent success, the anticipation of a peaceful surrender to him seemed now on the whole to carry most weight. This girl gives Alvan her hand and her family repudiate her. Volatile, flippant, shallow as she is, she must have had some turn for him; a physical spell was on her once, and it will be renewed when they meet. It sometimes inspires a semblance of courage; she may determine; she may be stedfast long enough for him to take his measures to bear her away. And the Brocken witches congratulate him on his prize!

Almost better would it be, she thought, that circumstance should thwart him and kindle his own demon element.

The forenoon, the noon, the afternoon, went round.

Late in the evening her door was flung wide for Colonel von Tresten.

She looked her interrogative ‘Well?’ His features were not used to betray the course of events.

‘How has it gone?’ she said.

He replied: ‘As I told you. I fancied I gauged the hussy pretty closely.’

‘She will not see him?’

‘Not she.’

The baroness crossed her arms.

‘And Alvan?’

The colonel shrugged. It was not done to tease a tremulous woman, for she was calm. It painted the necessary consequence of the refusal: an explosion of AEtna, and she saw it.

‘Where is he now?’ said she.

‘At his hotel.’

‘Alone?’

‘Leczel is with him.’

‘That looks like war.’

Tresten shrugged again. 'It might have been foreseen by everybody concerned in the affair. The girl does not care for him one corner of an eye! She stood up before us cool as at a dancing-lesson, swore she had never committed herself to an oath to him, sneered at him. She positively sneered. Her manner to me assures me without question that if he had stood in my place she would have insulted him:

'Scarcely. She would do in his absence what she would not do under his eyes,' remarked the baroness. 'It's decided, then?'

'Quite.'

'Will he be here to-night?'

'I think not.'

'Was she really insolent?'

'For a girl in her position, she was.'

'Did you repeat her words to him?'

'Some of them.'

'What description of insolence?'

'She spoke of his vanity . . . .'

'Proceed.'

'It was more her manner to me, as the one of the two appearing as his friend. She was tolerably civil to Storchel: and the difference of behaviour must have been designed, for she not only looked at Storchel in a way to mark the difference, she addressed him rather eagerly before we turned on our heels, to tell him she would write to him, and let him have her reply in a letter. He will get some coquettish rigmarole.'

Page 3101

‘That seems monstrous!—if one could be astonished by her,’ said the baroness. ‘When is she to write?’

‘She may write: the letter will find no receiver,’ said Tresten, significantly raising his eyebrows. ’The legal gentleman is gone—blown from a gun! He’s off home. He informed me that he should write to the General, throwing up his office, and an end to his share in the business.’

‘There was no rudeness to the poor man?’

’Dear me, no. But imagine a quiet little advocate, very precise and silky—you’ve had a hint of him—and all of a sudden the client he has by the ear swells into a tremendous beast—a combination of lion and elephant—bellows and shakes the room, stops and stamps before him, discharging an unintelligible flood of racy vernacular punctuated in thunder. You hear him and see him! Alvan lost his head—some of his hair too. The girl is not worth a lock. But he’s past reason.’

‘He takes it so,’ said the baroness, musing. ’It will be the sooner over. She never cared for him a jot. And there’s the sting. He has called up the whole world in an amphitheatre to see a girl laugh him to scorn. Hard for any man to bear!—Alvan of all men! Why does he not come here? He might rage at me for a day and a night, and I would rock him to sleep in the end. However, he has done nothing?’

That was the point. The baroness perceived it to be a serious point, and repeated the question sharply. ‘Has he been to the house?—no?—writing?’

Tresten dropped a nod.

‘Not to the girl, I suppose. To the father?’ said she.

‘He has written to the General.’

‘You should have stopped it.’

’Tell a vedette to stop cavalry. You’re not thinking of the man. He’s in a white frenzy.’

‘I will go to him.’

’You will do wrong. Leave him to spout the stuff and get rid of his poison. I remember a sister of poor Nuciotti’s going to him after he had let his men walk into a trap—and that was through a woman: and he was quieted; and the chief overlooked it; and two days after, Nuciotti blew his brains out. He’d have been alive now if he had been left alone. Furious cursing is a natural relief to some men, like women’s weeping. He has written a savage letter to her father, sending the girl to the deuce with the name she deserves, and challengeing the General.’

‘That letter is despatched?’

‘Rudiger has it by this time.’

The baroness fixed her eyes on Tresten: she struck her lap. ’Alvan! Is it he? But the General is old, gouty, out of the lists. There can be no fighting. He apologized to you for his daughter’s insolence to me. He will not fight, be sure.’

‘Perhaps not,’ Tresten said.

’As for the girl, Alvan has the fullest right to revile her: it cannot be too widely known. I could cry: “What wisdom there is in men when they are mad!” We must allow it to counterbalance breaches of ordinary courtesy. “With the name—she deserves,” you say?

Page 3102

He pitched the very name at her character plainly?—called her what she is?'

The baroness could have borne to hear it: she had no feminine horror of the staining epithet for that sex. But a sense of the distinction between camps and courts restrained the soldier. He spoke of a discharge of cuttlefish ink at the character of the girl, and added: 'The bath's a black one for her, and they had better keep it private. Regrettable, no doubt, but it 's probably true, and he 's out of his mind. It would be dangerous to check him: he'd force his best friend to fight. Leczel is with him and gives him head. It 's about time for me to go back to him, for there may be business.'

The baroness thought it improbable. She was hoping that with Alvan's eruption the drop-scene would fall.

Tresten spoke of the possibility. He knew the contents of the letter, and knew further that a copy of it, with none of the pregnant syllables expunged, had been forwarded to Prince Marko. He counselled calm waiting for a certain number of hours. The baroness committed herself to a promise to wait. Now that Alvan had broken off from the baleful girl, the worst must have been passed, she thought.

He had broken with the girl: she reviewed him under the light of that sole fact. So the edge of the cloud obscuring him was lifted, and he would again be the man she prized and hoped much of! How thickly he had been obscured was visible to her through a retreating sensation of scorn of him for his mad excesses, which she had not known herself to entertain while he was writhing in the toils, and very bluntly and dismissingly felt now that his madness was at its climax. An outrageous lunatic fit, that promised to release him from his fatal passion, seemed, on the contrary, respectable in essence if not in the display. Wives he should have by fifties and hundreds if he wanted them, she thought in her great-heartedness, reflecting on the one whose threatened pretensions to be his mate were slain by the title flung at her, and merited. The word (she could guess it) was an impassable gulf, a wound beyond healing. It pronounced in a single breath the girl's right name and his pledge of a return to sanity. For it was the insanest he could do; it uttered anathema on his love of her; it painted his white glow of unreason and fierce ire at the scorn which her behaviour flung upon every part of his character that was tenderest with him. After speaking such things a man comes to his senses or he dies. So thought the baroness, and she was not more than commonly curious to hear how the Rudigers had taken the insult they had brought on themselves, and not unwilling to wait to see Alvan till he was cool. His vanity, when threatening to bleed to the death, would not be civil to the surgeon before the second or third dressing of his wound.

CHAPTER XVIII

In the house of the Rudigers there was commotion. Clotilde sat apart from it, locked in her chamber. She had performed her crowning act of obedience to her father by declining the interview with Alvan, and as a consequence she was full of grovelling revolt.

Page 3103

Two things had helped her to carry out her engagement to submit in this final instance of dutifulness—one was the sight of that hateful rigid face and glacier eye of Tresten; the other was the loophole she left for subsequent insurgency by engaging to write to Count Hollinger's envoy, Dr. Storchel. She had gazed most earnestly at him, that he might not mistake her meaning, and the little man's pair of spectacles had, she fancied, been dim. He was touched. Here was a friend! Here was the friend she required, the external aid, the fresh evasion, the link with Alvan! Now to write to him to bind him to his beautiful human emotion. By contrast with the treacherous Tresten, whose iciness roused her to defiance, the nervous little advocate seemed an emissary of the skies, and she invoked her treasure-stores of the craven's craftiness in revolt to compose a letter that should move him, melt the good angel to espouse her cause. He was to be taught to understand—nay, angelically he would understand at once—why she had behaved apparently so contradictorily. Fettered, cruelly constrained by threats and wily sermons upon her duty to her family, terrorized, a prisoner 'beside this blue lake, in sight of the sublimest scenery of earth,' and hating his associate—hating him, she repeated and underscored—she had belied herself; she was willing to meet Alvan, she wished to meet him. She could open her heart to Alvan's true friend—his only true friend. He would instantly discern her unhappy plight. In the presence of his associate she could explain nothing, do nothing but what she had done. He had frozen her. She had good reason to know that man for her enemy. She could prove him a traitor to Alvan. Certain though she was from the first moment of Dr. Storchel's integrity and kindness of heart, she had stood petrified before him, as if affected by some wicked spell. She owned she had utterly belied herself; she protested she had been no free agent.

The future labours in her cause were thrown upon Dr. Storchel's shoulders, but with such compliments to him on his mission from above as emissary angels are presumed to be sensibly affected by.

The letter was long, involved, rather eloquent when she forgot herself and wrote herself, and intentionally very feminine, after the manner of supplicatory ladies appealing to lawyers, whom they would sway by the feeble artlessness of a sex that must confide in their possession of a heart, their heads being too awful.

She was directing the letter when Marko Romaris gave his name outside her door. He was her intimate, her trustiest ally; he was aware of her design to communicate with Dr. Storchel, and came to tell her it would be a waste of labour. He stood there singularly pale and grave, unlike the sprightly slave she petted on her search for a tyrant. 'Too late,' he said, pointing to the letter she held. 'Dr. Storchel has gone.'

She could not believe it, for Storchel had informed her that he would remain three days. Her powers of belief were more heavily taxed when Marko said: 'Alvan has challenged your father to fight him.' With that he turned on his heel; he had to assist in the deliberations of the family.

Page 3104

She clasped her temples. The collision of ideas driven together by Alvan and a duel—-Alvan challengeing her father—Alvan, the contemner of the senseless appeal to arms for the settlement ’of personal disputes!—darkened her mind. She ran about the house plying all whom she met for news and explanations; but her young brother was absent, her sisters were ignorant, and her parents were closeted in consultation with the gentleman. At night Marko sent her word that she might sleep in peace, for things would soon be arranged and her father had left the city.

She went to her solitude to study the hard riddle of her shattered imagination of Alvan. The fragments would not suffer joining, they assailed her in huge heaps; and she did not ask herself whether she had ever known him, but what disruption it was that had unsettled the reason of the strongest man alive. At times he came flashing through the scud of her thoughts magnificently in person, and how to stamp that splendid figure of manhood on a madman’s conduct was the task she supposed herself to be attempting while she shrank from it, and worshipped the figure, abhorred the deed. She could not unite them. He was like some great cathedral organ foully handled in the night by demons. He, whose lucent reason was an unclouded sky over every complexity of our sphere, he to crave to fight! to seek the life-blood of the father of his beloved! More unintelligible than this was it to reflect that he must know the challenge to be of itself a bar to his meeting his Clotilde ever again. She led her senses round to weep, and produced a state of mental drowning for a truce to the bitter riddle.

Quiet reigned in the household next day, and for the length of the day. Her father had departed, her mother treated her vixenishly, snubbing her for a word, but the ugly business of yesterday seemed a matter settled and dismissed. Alvan, then, had been appeased. He was not a man of blood: he was the humanest of men. She was able to reconstruct him under the beams of his handsome features and his kingly smile. She could occasionally conjure them up in their vividness; but had she not in truth been silly to yield to spite and send him back the photographs of him with his presents, so that he should have the uttermost remnant of the gifts he asked for? Had he really asked to have anything back? She inclined to doubt all that had been done and said since their separation—if only it were granted her to look on a photograph showing him as he was actually before their misunderstanding! The sun-tracing would not deceive, as her own tricks of imageing might do: seeing him as he was then, the hour would be revived,—-she would certainly feel him as he lived and breathed now. Thus she fancied, on the effort to get him to her heart after the shock he had dealt it, for he had become almost a stranger, as a god that has taken human shape and character.

Page 3105

Next to the sight of Alvan her friend Marko was welcome. The youth visited her in the evening, and with the glitter of his large black eyes bent to her, and began talking incomprehensibly of leave-taking and farewell, until she cried aloud that she had riddles enough: one was too much. What had he to say? She gave him her hand to encourage him. She listened, and soon it was her hand that mastered his in the grasp, though she was putting questions incredulously, with an understanding duller than her instinct. Or how if the frightful instinct while she listened shot lightnings in her head, whose revelations were too intelligible to be looked at? We think it devilish when our old nature is incandescent to talk to us in this way, kindled by its vilest in hoping, hungering, and fearing; and we call on the civilized mind to disown it. The tightened grasp of her hand confessed her understanding of the thing she pressed to hear repeated, for the sake of seeming to herself to repudiate it under an accumulating horror, at the same time that the repetition doubly and trebly confirmed it, so as to exonerate her criminal sensations by casting the whole burden on the material fact.

Marko, with her father's consent and the approval of the friends of the family, had taken up Alvan's challenge! That was the tale. She saw him dead in the act of telling it.

'What?' she cried: 'what?' and then: 'You?' and her fingers were bonier in their clutch: 'Let me hear. It can't be!' She snapped at herself for not pitying him more but a sword had flashed to cut her gordian knot: she her saw him dead, the obstacle removed, the man whom her parents opposed to Alvan swept away: she saw him as a black gate breaking to a flood of light. She had never invoked it, never wished, never dreamed it, but if it was to be? . . . 'Oh! impossible. One of us is crazy. You to fight? . . . they put it upon you? You fight him? But it is cruel, it is abominable. Incredible! You have accepted the challenge, you say?'

He answered that he had, and gazed into her eyes for love.

She blinked over them, crying out against parents and friends for their heartlessness in permitting him to fight.

'This is positive? This is really true?' she said, burning and dreading to realize the magical change it pointed on, and touching him with her other hand, loathing herself, loathing parents and friends who had brought her to the plight of desiring some terrible event in sheer necessity. Not she, it was the situation they had created which was guilty! By dint of calling out on their heartlessness, and a spur of conscience, she roused the feeling of compassion:

'But, Marko! Marko! poor child! you cannot fight; you have never fired a pistol or a gun in your life. Your health was always too delicate for these habits of men; and you could not pull a trigger taking aim, do you not know?'

'I have been practising for a couple of hours to-day,' he said.

Page 3106

Compassion thrilled her. 'A couple of hours! Unhappy boy! But do you not know that he is a dead shot? He is famous for his aim. He never misses. He can do all the duellist's wonders both with sword and pistol, and that is why he was respected when he refused the duel because he—before these parents of mine drove him . . . and me! I think we are both mad—he despised duelling. He! He! Alvan! who has challenged my father! I have heard him speak of duelling as cowardly. But what is he? what has he changed to? And it would be cowardly to kill you, Marko.'

'I take my chance,' Marko said.

'You have no chance. His aim is unerring.' She insisted on the deadliness of his aim, and dwelt on it with a gloating delight that her conscience approved, for she was persuading the youth to shun his fatal aim.

If you stood against him he would not spare you—perhaps not; I fear he would not, as far as I know him now. He can be terrible in wrath. I think he would warn you; but two men face to face! and he suspecting that you cross his path! Find some way of avoiding him. Do, I entreat you. By your love of me! Oh! no blood. I do not want to lose you. I could not bear it.'

'Would you regret me?' said he.

Her eyes fell on his, and the beauty of those great dark eyes made her fondness for him legible. He caused her a spasm of anguish, foreknowing him doomed. She thought that haply this devoted heart was predestined to be the sacrifice which should bring her round to Alvan. She murmured phrases of dissuasion until her hollow voice broke; she wept for being speechless, and turned upon Providence and her parents, in railing at whom a voice of no ominous empty sound was given her; and still she felt more warmly than railing expressed, only her voice shrank back from a tone of feeling. She consoled herself with the reflection that utterance was inadequate. Besides, her active good sense echoed Marko ringingly when he cited the usages of their world and the impossibility of his withdrawing or wishing to withdraw from the line of a challenge accepted. It was destiny. She bowed her head lower and lower, oppressed without and within, unwilling to look at him. She did not look when he left her.

The silence of him encouraged her head to rise. She stared about: his phantom seemed present, and for a time she beheld him both upright in life and stretched in death. It could not be her fault that he should die! it was the fatality. How strange it was! Providence, after bitterly misusing her, offered this reparation through the death of Marko.

Possibly she ought to run out and beseech Alvan to spare the innocent youth. She stood up trembling on her legs. She called to Alvan. 'Do not put blood between us. Oh! I love you more than ever. Why did you let that horrible man you take for a friend

come here? I hate him, and cannot feel my love of you when I see him. He chills me to the bone. He made me say the reverse of what was in my heart. But spare poor Marko! You have no cause for jealousy. You would be above it, if you had. Do not aim; fire in the air. Do not let me kiss that hand and think . . .'

Page 3107

She sank to her chair, exclaiming: ‘I am a prisoner!’ She could not walk two steps; she was imprisoned by the interdict of the house and the paralysis of her limbs. Providence decreed that she must abide the result. Dread Power! To be dragged to her happiness through a river of blood was indeed dreadful, but the devotional sense of reliance upon hidden wisdom in the direction of human affairs when it appears considerate of our wishes, inspirited her to be ready for what Providence was about to do, mysterious in its beneficence that it was! It is the dark goddess Fortune to the craven. The craven with desires will offer up bloody sacrifices to it submissively. The craven, with desires expecting to be blest, is a zealot of the faith which ascribes the direction of events to the outer world. Her soul was in full song to that contriving agency, and she with the paralyzed limbs became practically active, darting here and there over the room, burning letters, packing a portable bundle of clothes, in preparation for the domestic confusion of the morrow when the body of Marko would be driven to their door, and amid the wailing and the hubbub she would escape unnoticed to Alvan, Providence-guided! Out of the house would then signify assuredly to Alvan’s arms.

The prospect might have seemed too heavenly to be realizable had she not been sensible of paying heavily for it; and thus, as he would wish to be, was Marko of double service to her; for she was truly fond of the beautiful and chivalrous youth, and far from wishing to lose him. His blood was on the heads of those who permitted him to face the danger! She would have felt for him still more tenderly if it were permitted to a woman’s heart to enfold two men at a time. This, it would seem, she cannot do: she is compelled by the painful restriction sadly to consent that one of them should be swept away.

Night passed dragging and galloping. In the very early light she thought of adding some ornaments to her bundle of necessaries. She learnt of the object of her present faith to be provident on her own behalf, and dressed in two of certain garments which would have swollen her bundle too much.

This was the day of Providence: she had strung herself to do her part in it and gone through the pathos of her fatalism above stairs in her bedroom before Marko took his final farewell of her, so she could speak her ‘Heaven be with you!’ unshaken, though sadly. Her father had returned. To be away from him, and close to her bundle, she hurried to her chamber and awaited the catastrophe, like one expecting to be raised from the vaults. Carriage, wheels would give her the first intimation of it. Slow, very slow, would imply badly wounded, she thought: dead, if the carriage stopped some steps from the house and one of the seconds of the poor boy descended to make the melancholy announcement. She could not but apprehend the remorselessness of the decree. Death, it would probably be! Alvan had resolved

Page 3108

to sweep him off the earth. She could not blame Alvan for his desperate passion, though pitying the victim of it. In any case the instant of the arrival of the carriage was her opportunity marked by the finger of Providence rendered visible, and she sat rocking her parcel on her lap. Her love of Alvan now was mixed with an alluring terror of him as an immediate death-dealer who stood against red-streaked heavens, more grandly satanic in his angry mightiness than she had ever realized that figure, and she, trembled and shuddered, fearing to meet him, yearning to be taken to him, to close her eyes on his breast in blindest happiness. She gave the very sob for the occasion.

A carriage drove at full speed to the door. Full speed could not be the pace for a funeral load. That was a visitor to her father on business. She waited for fresh wheels, telling herself she would be patient and must be ready.

Her pathos ways ready and scarcely controllable. The tear thickened on her eyelid as she projected her mind on the grief she would soon be undergoing for Marko: or at least she would undergo it subsequently; she would certainly mourn for him. She dared not proceed to an accumulated enumeration of his merits, as her knowledge of the secret of pathos knew to be most moving, in an extreme fear that she might weaken her required energies for action at the approaching signal.

Feet came rushing up the stairs: her door was thrown open, and the living Marko, stranger than a dead, stood present. He had in his look an expectation that she would be glad to behold him, and he asked her, and she said: 'Oh, yes, she was glad, of course.' She was glad that Alvan had pardoned him for his rashness; she was vexed that her projected confusion of the household had been thwarted: vexed, petrified with astonishment.

'But how if I tell you that Alvan is wounded?' he almost wept to say.

Clotilde informs the world that she laughed on hearing this. She was unaware of her ground for laughing: It was the laugh of the tragic comedian.

Could one believe in a Providence capable of letting such a sapling and weakling strike down the most magnificent stature upon earth?

'You—him!' she said, in the tremendous compression of her contempt.

She laughed. The world is upside down—a world without light, or pointing finger, or affection for special favourites, and therefore bereft of all mysterious and attractive wisdom, a crazy world, a corpse of a world—if this be true!

But it can still be disbelieved.

He stood by her dejectedly, and she sent him flying with a repulsive, ‘Leave me!’ The youth had too much on his conscience to let him linger. His manner of going smote her brain.

Was it credible? Was it possible to think of Alvan wounded?—the giant laid on his back and in the hands of the leech? Assuredly it was a mockery of all calculations. She could not conjure up the picture of him, and her emotions were merely struck and stunned. If this be true!

Page 3109

But it can be resolutely disbelieved.

We can put it before Providence to cleanse itself of this thing, or suffer the consequence that we now and for ever quit our worship, lose our faith in it and our secret respect. She heard Marko's tale confirmed, whispers of leaden import, physicians' rumours, and she doubted. She clung insanely to her incredulity. Laughter had been slain, but not her belief in the invincibility of Alvan; she could not imagine him overthrown in a conflict —and by a hand that she had taken and twisted in her woman's hand subduingly! He, the unerring shot, laid low by one who had never burnt powder till the day before the duel! It was easier to remain incredulous notwithstanding the gradational distinctness of the whispers. She dashed her 'Impossible!' at Providence, conceived the tale in wilful and almost buoyant self-deception to be a conspiracy in the family to hide from her Alvan's magnanimous dismissal of poor Marko from the field of strife. That was the most evident fact. She ran through delusion and delusion, exhausting each and hugging it after the false life was out.

So violent was the opposition to reason in the idea of Alvans descending to the duel and falling by the hand of Marko, that it cried to be rebutted by laughter: and she could not, she could laugh no more, nor imagine laughing, though she could say of the people of the house, 'They act it well!' and hate them for the serious whispering air, and the dropping of medical terms and weights of drugs, which robbed her of what her instinct told her was the surest weapon for combating deception. Them, however, and their acting she could have with stood enough to silently discredit them through sheer virulence of a hatred that proved them to be duly credited. But her savage wilfulness could not resist the look of Marko. She had to yield up her breast to the truth, and stimulate further unbelief lest her loaded heart should force her to run to the wounded lion's bedside, and hear his reproaches. She had to cheat her heart, and the weak thing consented to it, loathing her for the imposture. Seeing Marko too, assured of it by his broken look, the terrible mournfulness less than the horrible irony of the truth gnawed within her. It spoke to her in metal, not in flesh. It haunted her feelings and her faint imaginations alienly. It discoloured, it scorned the earth, and earth's teachings, and the understanding of life. Rational clearness at all avenues was blurred by it. The thought that Alvan lay wounded and in danger, was one thought: that Marko had stretched him there, was quite another, and was a livid eclipsing thought through which her grief had to work its way to get to heat and a state of burning. She knew not in truth what to feel: the craven's dilemma when yet feeling much. Anger at Providence—rose uppermost. She had so shifted and wound about, and so pulled her heart to pieces, that she could no longer sanely and with wholeness encounter a shock: she had no sensation firm enough to be stamped by a signet.

Page 3110

Even on the fatal third day, when Marko, white as his shrouded antagonist, led her to the garden of the house, and there said the word of death, an execrating amazement, framing the thought 'Why is it not Alvan who speaks?' rose beside her gaping conception of her loss. She framed it as an earnest interrogation for the half minute before misery had possession of her, coming down like a cloud. Providence then was too shadowy a thing to upbraid. She could not blame herself, for the intensity of her suffering testified to the bitter realness of her love of the dead man. Her craven's instinct to make a sacrifice of others flew with claws of hatred at her parents. These she offered up, and the spirit presiding in her appears to have accepted them as proper substitutes for her conscience.

CHAPTER XIX

Alvan was dead. The shot of his adversary, accidentally well-directed, had struck him mortally. He died on the morning of the third day after the duel. There had been no hope that he could survive, and his agonies made a speedy dissolution desirable by those most wishing him to live.

The baroness had her summons to hurry to him after his first swoon. She was his nurse and late confidante a tearless woman, rigid in service. Death relaxed his hold in her hand. He met his fate like the valiant soul he was. Haply if he had lingered without the sweats of bodily tortures to stay reflectiveness, he, also, in the strangeness of his prostration, might have cast a thought on the irony of the fates felling a man like him by a youngster's hand and for a shallow girl! He might have fathered some jest at life, with rueful relish of the flavour: for such is our manner of commenting on ourselves when we come to shipwreck through unseaworthy pretensions. There was no interval on his passage from anguish to immobility.

Silent was that house of many chambers. That mass of humanity profusely mixed of good and evil, of generous ire and mutinous, of the passion for the future of mankind and vanity of person, magnanimity and sensualism, high judgement, reckless indiscipline, chivalry, savagery, solidity, fragmentariness, was dust.

The two men composing it, the untamed and the candidate for citizenship, in mutual dissension pulled it down. He perished of his weakness, but it was a strong man that fell. If his end was unheroic, the blot does not overshadow his life. His end was a derision because the animal in him ran him unchained and bounding to it. A stormy blood made wreck of a splendid intelligence. Yet they that pronounce over him the ordinary fatalistic epitaph of the foregone and done, which is the wisdom of men measuring the dead by the last word of a lamentable history, should pause to think whether fool or madman is the title for one who was a zealous worker, respected by great heads of his time, acknowledged the head of the voluminous coil of the working people, and who, as we have seen,

Page 3111

insensibly though these wrought within him, was getting to purer fires through his coarser when the final intemperateness drove him to ruin. As little was he the vanished God whom his working people hailed deploringly on the long procession of his remains from city to city under charge of the baroness. That last word of his history ridicules the eulogy of partisan and devotee, and to commit the excess of worshipping is to conjure up by contrast a vulgar giant: for truth will have her just proportions, and vindicates herself upon a figure over-idealized by bidding it grimace, leaving appraisers to get the balance of the two extremes. He was neither fool nor madman, nor man to be adored: his last temptation caught him in the season before he had subdued his blood, and amid the multitudinously simple of this world, stamped him a tragic comedian: that is, a grand pretender, a self-deceiver, one of the lividly ludicrous, whom we cannot laugh at, but must contemplate, to distinguish where their character strikes the note of discord with life; for otherwise, in the reflection of their history, life will seem a thing demoniacally inclined by fits to antic and dive into gulfs. The characters of the hosts of men are of the simple order of the comic; not many are of a stature and a complexity calling for the junction of the two Muses to name them.

While for his devotees he lay still warm in the earth, that other, the woman, poor Clotilde, astonished her compatriots by passing comedy and tragic comedy with the gift of her hand to the hand which had slain Alvan. In sooth, the explanation is not so hard when we recollect our knowledge of her. It was a gentle youth; her parents urged her to it: a particular letter, the letter of the challenge to her father, besliming her, was shown; —a hideous provocation pushed to the foullest. Who can blame Prince Marko? who had ever given sign of more noble bravery than he? He had stood to defend her name and fame. He was very love, the never extinguished torch of love. And he hung on her for the little of life appearing to remain to him. Before heaven he was guiltless. He was good. Her misery had shrunk her into nothingness, and she rose out of nothingness cold and bloodless, bearing a thought that she might make a good youth happy, or nurse him sinking—be of that use. Besides he was a refuge from the roof of her parents. She shut her eyes on the past, sure of his goodness; goodness, on her return to some sense of being, she prized above other virtues, and perhaps she had a fancy that to be allied to it was to be doing good. After a few months she buried him. From that day, or it may be, on her marriage day, her heart was Alvan’s. Years later she wrote her version of the story, not sparing herself so much as she supposed. Providence and her parents were not forgiven. But as we are in her debt for some instruction, she may now be suffered to go.

Etext editor’s bookmarks

Page 3112

A tragic comedian: that is, a grand pretender, a self-deceiver
Above all things I detest the writing for money
At the age of forty, men that love love rootedly
Barriers are for those who cannot fly
Be good and dull, and please everybody
Beginning to have a movement to kiss the whip
Centres of polished barbarism known as aristocratic societies
Clotilde fenced, which is half a confession
Comparisons will thrust themselves on minds disordered
Compromise is virtual death
Conservative, whose astounded state paralyzes his wrath
Creatures that wait for circumstances to bring the change
Dignitary, and he passed under the bondage of that position
Dissent rings out finely, and approval is a feeble murmur
Do you judge of heroes as of lesser men?
Empanelled to deliver verdicts upon the ways of women
Fantastical
Finishing touches to the negligence
Giant Vanity urged Giant Energy to make use of Giant Duplicity
Gone to pieces with an injured lover’s babble
Gradations appear to be unknown to you
He had to go, he must, he has to be always going
He stormed her and consented to be beaten
Hesitating strangeness that sometimes gathers during absences
His violent earnestness, his imperial self-confidence
His apparent cynicism is sheer irritability
Hosts of men are of the simple order of the comic
I give my self, I do not sell
I have learnt as much from light literature as from heavy
I would wait till he flung you off, and kneel to you
If you have this creative soul, be the slave of your creature
Imagination she has, for a source of strength in the future days
Looking on him was listening
Love the difficulty better than the woman
Men in love are children with their mistresses
Metaphysician’s treatise on Nature: a torch to see the sunrise
Music in Italy? Amorous and martial, brainless and monotonous
Night has little mercy for the self-reproachful
Not much esteem for non-professional actresses
Not in a situation that could bear of her blaming herself
O for yesterday!
Pact between cowardice and comfort under the title of expediency
Philosophy skimmed, and realistic romances deep-sounded

Polished barbarism
Professional widows
Providence and her parents were not forgiven
Scorned him for listening to the hesitations (hers)
Self-consoled when they are not self-justified
She ran through delusion and delusion, exhausting each
She felt in him a maker of facts
Strength in love is the sole sincerity
The worst of omens is delay
The way is clear: we have only to take the step
The brainless in Art and in Statecraft

Page 3113

Time is due to us, and the minutes are our gold slipping away
Time and strength run to waste in retarding the inevitable
To have no sympathy with the playful mind is not to have a mind
Trick for killing time without hurting him
Two wishes make a will
Venerated by his followers, well hated by his enemies
Want of courage is want of sense
We shall not be rich—nor poor
Weak souls are much moved by having the pathos on their side
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?
Win you—temperately, let us hope; by storm, if need be
Work of extravagance upon perceptibly plain matter
World voluntarily opens a path to those who step determinedly

DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS

By George Meredith

1897

CONTENTS

Book 1.
I. *Of diaries and Diarists touching the heroine*
ii. *An Irish ball*
III. *The interior of Mr*. *Redworth and the exterior of Mr*. *Sullivan smith*
iv. *Containing hints of Diana's experiences and of what they led to*
V. *Concerning the scrupulous gentleman who came too late*
vi. *The couple*
VII. *The crisis*
viii. *In which is exhibited how* A *practical man and* A *divining woman learn to respect one another*

Book 2.
IX. *Shows how* A *position of delicacy for* A *lady and gentleman was met in simple fashion without hurt to either*.
X. *The conflict of the night*
xi. *Recounts the journey in* A *chariot*, *with* A *certain amount of dialogue*, *and* A *small incident on the road*

XII. *Between Emma and Diana*
XIII. *Touching the first days of her probation*
xiv. *Giving glimpses of Diana under her cloud before the world and of her further apprenticeship*
XV. *Introduces the Hon*. *Percy Dacier*
XVI. *Treats of* A *midnight bell*, *and of* A *scene of early morning*
xvii. *The princess Egeria*

Page 3114

Book 3.
XVIII. *The authoress*
XIX. A *drive in sunlight and* A *drive in moonlight*
XX. *Diana's night-watch in the chamber of death*
XXI. *The young minister of state*
XXII. *Between Diana and Dacier* : *The wind east over bleak land*
XXIII. *Records* A *visit to Diana from one of the world's good women*
XXIV. *Indicates* A *soul prepared for desperation*
XXV. *Once more the crossways and* A *change of turnings*
XXVI. *In which* A *disappointed lover receives* A *multitude of lessons*

Book 5.
XXXVI. *Is conclusive as to the heartlessness of women with brains*
XXXVII. *An exhibition of some champions of the stricken lady*
XXXVIII. *Convalescence of* A *healthy mind distraught*
XXXIX. *Of nature with one of her cultivated daughters and* A *short excursion in anti-climax*
XL. *In which we see nature making of* A *woman* A *maid again*, *and* A *thrice whimsical*
XLI. *Contains* A *revelation of the origin of the tigress in Diana*
XLII. *The penultimate* : *Showing* A *final struggle for liberty and run into harness*
XLIII. *Nuptial chapter*: *And of how* A *barely willing woman was led to bloom with nuptial sentiment*

A lady of high distinction for wit and beauty, the daughter of an illustrious Irish House, came under the shadow of a calumny. It has latterly been examined and exposed as baseless. The story of Diana of the Crossways is to be read as fiction.

CHAPTER I

OF DIARIES AND DIARISTS TOUCHING THE HEROINE

Page 3115

Among the Diaries beginning with the second quarter of our century, there is frequent mention of a lady then becoming famous for her beauty and her wit: ‘an unusual combination,’ in the deliberate syllables of one of the writers, who is, however, not disposed to personal irony when speaking of her. It is otherwise in his case and a general fling at the sex we may deem pardonable, for doing as little harm to womankind as the stone of an urchin cast upon the bosom of mother Earth; though men must look some day to have it returned to them, which is a certainty; and indeed full surely will our idle-handed youngster too, in his riper season; be heard complaining of a strange assault of wanton missiles, coming on him he knows not whence; for we are all of us distinctly marked to get back what we give, even from the thing named inanimate nature.

The ‘*leaves from the diary of Henry Wilmers*’ are studded with examples of the dinner-table wit of the time, not always worth quotation twice; for smart remarks have their measured distances, many requiring to be a brule pourpoint, or within throw of the pistol, to make it hit; in other words, the majority of them are addressed directly to our muscular system, and they have no effect when we stand beyond the range. On the contrary, they reflect sombrely on the springs of hilarity in the generation preceding us; with due reserve of credit, of course, to an animal vivaciousness that seems to have wanted so small an incitement. Our old yeomanry farmers—returning to their beds over ferny commons under bright moonlight from a neighbour’s harvest-home, eased their bubbling breasts with a ready roar not unakin to it. Still the promptness to laugh is an excellent progenitorial foundation for the wit to come in a people; and undoubtedly the diarial record of an imputed piece of wit is witness to the spouting of laughter. This should comfort us while we skim the sparkling passages of the ‘Leaves.’ When a nation has acknowledged that it is as yet but in the fisticuff stage of the art of condensing our purest sense to golden sentences, a readier appreciation will be extended to the gift: which is to strike not the dazzled eyes, the unanticipating nose, the ribs, the sides, and stun us, twirl us, hoodwink, mystify, tickle and twitch, by dexterities of lingual sparring and shuffling, but to strike roots in the mind, the Hesperides of good things. We shall then set a price on the ‘unusual combination.’ A witty woman is a treasure; a witty Beauty is a power. Has she actual beauty, actual wit?—not simply a tidal material beauty that passes current any pretty flippancy or staggering pretentiousness? Grant. the combination, she will appear a veritable queen of her period, fit for homage; at least meriting a disposition to believe the best of her, in the teeth of foul rumour; because the well of true wit is truth itself, the gathering of the precious drops of right

Page 3116

reason, wisdom's lightning; and no soul possessing and dispensing it can justly be a target for the world, however well armed the world confronting her. Our temporary world, that Old Credulity and stone-hurling urchin in one, supposes it possible for a woman to be mentally active up to the point of spiritual clarity and also fleshly vile; a guide to life and a biter at the fruits of death; both open mind and hypocrite. It has not yet been taught to appreciate a quality certifying to sound citizenship as authoritatively as acres of land in fee simple, or coffers of bonds, shares and stocks, and a more imperishable guarantee. The multitudes of evil reports which it takes for proof, are marshalled against her without question of the nature of the victim, her temptress beauty being a sufficiently presumptive delinquent. It does not pretend to know the whole, or naked body of the facts; it knows enough for its furry dubiousness; and excepting the sentimental of men, a rocket-headed horde, ever at the heels of fair faces for ignition, and up starring away at a hint of tearfulness; excepting further by chance a solid champion man, or some generous woman capable of faith in the pelted solitary of her sex, our temporary world blows direct East on her shivering person. The scandal is warrant for that; the circumstances of the scandal emphasize the warrant. And how clever she is! Cleverness is an attribute of the selecter missionary lieutenants of Satan. We pray to be defended from her cleverness: she flashes bits of speech that catch men in their unguarded corner. The wary stuff their ears, the stolid bid her best sayings rebound on her reputation. Nevertheless the world, as Christian, remembers its professions, and a portion of it joins the burly in morals by extending to her a rough old charitable mercifulness; better than sentimental ointment, but the heaviest blow she has to bear, to a character swimming for life.

That the lady in question was much quoted, the Diaries and Memoirs testify. Hearsay as well as hearing was at work to produce the abundance; and it was a novelty in England, where (in company) the men are the pointed talkers, and the women conversationally fair Circassians. They are, or they know that they should be; it comes to the same. Happily our civilization has not prescribed the veil to them. The mutes have here and there a sketch or label attached to their names: they are 'strikingly handsome'; they are 'very good-looking'; occasionally they are noted as 'extremely entertaining': in what manner, is inquired by a curious posterity, that in so many matters is left unendingly to jump the empty and gaping figure of interrogation over its own full stop. Great ladies must they be, at the web of politics, for us to hear them cited discoursing. Henry Wilmers is not content to quote the beautiful Mrs. Warwick, he attempts a portrait. Mrs. Warwick is 'quite Grecian.' She might 'pose for a statue.' He presents her in carpenter's lines, with a dab of school-box colours, effective to those whom the Keepsake fashion can stir. She has a straight nose, red lips, raven hair, black eyes, rich complexion, a remarkably fine bust, and she walks well, and has an agreeable voice; likewise 'delicate extremities.' The writer was created for popularity, had he chosen to bring his art into our literary market.

Page 3117

Perry Wilkinson is not so elaborate: he describes her in his ‘Recollections’ as a splendid brune, eclipsing all the blondes coming near her: and ‘what is more, the beautiful creature can talk.’ He wondered, for she was young, new to society. Subsequently he is rather ashamed of his wonderment, and accounts for it by ’not having known she was Irish.’ She ‘turns out to be Dan Merion’s daughter.’

We may assume that he would have heard if she had any whiff of a brogue. Her sounding of the letter R a trifle scrupulously is noticed by Lady Pennon: ’And last, not least, the lovely Mrs. Warwick, twenty minutes behind the dinner-hour, and r-r-really fearing she was late.’

After alluding to the soft influence of her beauty and ingenuousness on the vexed hostess, the kindly old marchioness adds, that it was no wonder she was late, ’for just before starting from home she had broken loose from her husband for good, and she entered the room absolutely houseless!’ She was not the less ‘astonishingly brilliant.’ Her observations were often ‘so unexpectedly droll I laughed till I cried.’ Lady Pennon became in consequence one of the stanch supporters of Mrs. Warwick.

Others were not so easily won. Perry Wilkinson holds a balance when it goes beyond a question of her wit and beauty. Henry Wilmers puts the case aside, and takes her as he finds her. His cousin, the clever and cynical Dorset Wilmers, whose method of conveying his opinions without stating them was famous, repeats on two occasions when her name appears in his pages, ‘handsome, lively, witty’; and the stressed repetition of calculated brevity while a fiery scandal was abroad concerning the lady, implies weighty substance—the reservation of a constable’s truncheon, that could legally have knocked her character down to the pavement. We have not to ask what he judged. But Dorset Wilmers was a political opponent of the eminent Peer who yields the second name to the scandal, and politics in his day flushed the conceptions of men. His short references to ‘that Warwick-Dannisburgh affair’ are not verbally malicious. He gets wind of the terms of Lord Dannisburgh’s will and testament, noting them without comment. The oddness of the instrument in one respect may have served his turn; we have no grounds for thinking him malignant. The death of his enemy closes his allusions to Mrs. Warwick. He was growing ancient, and gout narrowed the circle he whirled in. Had he known this ‘handsome, lively, witty’ apparition as a woman having political and social views of her own, he would not, one fancies, have been so stingless. Our England exposes a sorry figure in his Reminiscences. He struck heavily, round and about him, wherever he moved; he had by nature a tarnishing eye that cast discolouration. His unadorned harsh substantive statements, excluding the adjectives, give his Memoirs the appearance of a body of facts, attractive to the historic Muse, which has learnt to esteem those brawny sturdy giants marching club on shoulder, independent of henchman, in preference to your panoplied knights with their puffy squires, once her favourites, and wind-filling to her columns, ultimately found indigestible.

Page 3118

His exhibition of his enemy Lord Dannisburgh, is of the class of noble portraits we see swinging over inn-portals, grossly unlike in likeness. The possibility of the man's doing or saying this and that adumbrates the improbability: he had something of the character capable of it, too much good sense for the performance. We would think so, and still the shadow is round our thoughts. Lord Dannisburgh was a man of ministerial tact, official ability, Pagan morality; an excellent general manager, if no genius in statecraft. But he was careless of social opinion, unbuttoned, and a laugher. We know that he could be chivalrous toward women, notwithstanding the perplexities he brought on them, and this the Dorset-Diary does not show.

His chronicle is less mischievous as regards Mrs. Warwick than the paragraphs of Perry Wilkinson, a gossip presenting an image of perpetual chatter, like the waxen-faced street advertizements of light and easy dentistry. He has no belief, no disbelief; names the pro-party and the con; recites the case, and discreetly, over-discreetly; and pictures the trial, tells the list of witnesses, records the verdict: so the case went, and some thought one thing, some another thing: only it is reported for positive that a miniature of the incriminated lady was cleverly smuggled over to the jury, and juries sitting upon these eases, ever since their bedazzlement by Phryne, as you know . . . . And then he relates an anecdote of the husband, said to have been not a bad fellow before he married his Diana; and the naming of the Goddess reminds him that the second person in the indictment is now everywhere called 'The elderly shepherd';—but immediately after the bridal bells this husband became sour and insupportable, and either she had the trick of putting him publicly in the wrong, or he lost all shame in playing the churlish domestic tyrant. The instances are incredible of a gentleman. Perry Wilkinson gives us two or three; one on the authority of a personal friend who witnessed the scene; at the Warwick whist-table, where the fair Diana would let loose her silvery laugh in the intervals. She was hardly out of her teens, and should have been dancing instead of fastened to a table. A difference of fifteen years in the ages of the wedded pair accounts poorly for the husband's conduct, however solemn a business the game of whist. We read that he burst out at last, with bitter mimicry, 'yang—yang—yang!' and killed the bright laugh, shot it dead. She had outraged the decorum of the square-table only while the cards were making. Perhaps her too-dead ensuing silence, as of one striving to bring back the throbs to a slain bird in her bosom, allowed the gap between the wedded pair to be visible, for it was dated back to prophecy as soon as the trumpet proclaimed it.

Page 3119

But a multiplication of similar instances, which can serve no other purpose than that of an apology, is a miserable vindication of innocence. The more we have of them the darker the inference. In delicate situations the chatterer is noxious. Mrs. Warwick had numerous apologists. Those trusting to her perfect rectitude were rarer. The liberty she allowed herself in speech and action must have been trying to her defenders in a land like ours; for here, and able to throw its shadow on our giddy upper-circle, the rigour of the game of life, relaxed though it may sometimes appear, would satisfy the staidest whist-player. She did not wish it the reverse, even when claiming a space for laughter: 'the breath of her soul,' as she called it, and as it may be felt in the early youth of a lively nature. She, especially, with her multitude of quick perceptions and imaginative avenues, her rapid summaries, her sense of the comic, demanded this aerial freedom.

We have it from Perry Wilkinson that the union of the divergent couple was likened to another union always in a Court of Law. There was a distinction; most analogies will furnish one; and here we see England and Ireland changeing their parts, until later, after the breach, when the Englishman and Irishwoman resumed a certain resemblance to the yoked Islands.

Henry Wilmers, I have said, deals exclusively with the wit and charm of the woman. He treats the scandal as we might do in like manner if her story had not to be told. But these are not reporting columns; very little of it shall trouble them. The position is faced, and that is all. The position is one of the battles incident to women, their hardest. It asks for more than justice from men, for generosity, our civilization not being yet of the purest. That cry of hounds at her disrobing by Law is instinctive. She runs, and they give tongue; she is a creature of the chase. Let her escape unmangled, it will pass in the record that she did once publicly run, and some old dogs will persist in thinking her cunninger than the virtuous, which never put themselves in such positions, but ply the distaff at home. Never should reputation of woman trail a scent! How true! and true also that the women of waxwork never do; and that the women of happy marriages do not; nor the women of holy nunneries; nor the women lucky in their arts. It is a test of the civilized to see and hear, and add no yapping to the spectacle.

Thousands have reflected on a Diarist's power to cancel our Burial Service. Not alone the cleric's good work is upset by him; but the sexton's as well. He howks the grave, and transforms the quiet worms, busy on a single poor peaceable body, into winged serpents that disorder sky and earth with a deadly flight of zig-zags, like military rockets, among the living. And if these are given to cry too much, to have their tender sentiments considered, it cannot be said that History requires the flaying of them. A gouty Diarist, a sheer gossip Diarist, may thus, in the bequest of a trail of reminiscences, explode our temples (for our very temples have powder in store), our treasuries, our homesteads, alive with dynamitic stuff; nay, disconcert our inherited veneration, dislocate the intimate connexion between the tugged flaxen forelock and a title.

Page 3120

No similar blame is incurred by Henry Wilmers. No blame whatever, one would say, if he had been less, copious, or not so subservient, in recording the lady's utterances; for though the wit of a woman may be terse, quite spontaneous, as this lady's assuredly was here and there, she is apt to spin it out of a museful mind, at her toilette, or by the lonely fire, and sometimes it is imitative; admirers should beware of holding it up to the withering glare of print: she herself, quoting an obscure maximmonger, says of these lapidary sentences, that they have merely 'the value of chalk-eggs, which lure the thinker to sit,' and tempt the vacuous to strain for the like, one might add; besides flattering the world to imagine itself richer than it is in eggs that are golden. Henry Wilmers notes a multitude of them. 'The talk fell upon our being creatures of habit, and how far it was good: She said:—It is there that we see ourselves crutched between love grown old and indifference ageing to love.' Critic ears not present at the conversation catch an echo of maxims and aphorisms overchannel, notwithstanding a feminine thrill in the irony of 'ageing to love.' The quotation ranks rather among the testimonies to her charm.

She is fresher when speaking of the war of the sexes. For one sentence out of many, though we find it to be but the clever literary clothing of a common accusation: 'Men may have rounded Seraglio Point: they have not yet doubled Cape Turk.'

It is war, and on the male side, Ottoman war: her experience reduced her to think so positively. Her main personal experience was in the social class which is primitively venatorial still, canine under its polish.

She held a brief for her beloved Ireland. She closes a discussion upon Irish agitation by saying rather neatly: 'You have taught them it is English as well as common human nature to feel an interest in the dog that has bitten you.'

The dog periodically puts on madness to win attention; we gather then that England, in an angry tremour, tries him with water-gruel to prove him sane.

Of the Irish priest (and she was not of his retinue), when he was deemed a revolutionary, Henry Wilmers notes her saying: 'Be in tune with him; he is in the key-note for harmony. He is shepherd, doctor, nurse, comforter, anecdotist and fun-maker to his poor flock; and you wonder they see the burning gateway of their heaven in him? Conciliate the priest.'

It has been partly done, done late, when the poor flock have found their doctoring and shepherding at other hands: their 'bulb-food and fiddle,' that she petitioned for, to keep them from a complete shaving off their patch of bog and scrub soil, without any perception of the tremulous transatlantic magnification of the fiddle, and the splitting discord of its latest inspiriting jig.

And she will not have the consequences of the ’weariful old Irish duel between Honour and Hunger judged by bread and butter juries.’

Page 3121

She had need to be beautiful to be tolerable in days when Englishmen stood more openly for the strong arm to maintain the Union. Her troop of enemies was of her summoning.

Ordinarily her topics were of wider range, and those of a woman who mixed hearing with reading, and observation with her musings. She has no doleful ejaculatory notes, of the kind peculiar to women at war, containing one-third of speculative substance to two of sentimental—a feminine plea for comprehension and a squire; and it was probably the reason (as there is no reason to suppose an emotional cause) why she exercised her evident sway over the mind of so plain and straightforward an Englishman as Henry Wilmers. She told him that she read rapidly, 'a great deal at one gulp,' and thought in flashes—a way with the makers of phrases. She wrote, she confessed, laboriously. The desire to prune, compress, overcharge, was a torment to the nervous woman writing under a sharp necessity for payment. Her songs were shot off on the impulsion; prose was the heavy task. 'To be pointedly rational,' she said, 'is a greater difficulty for me than a fine delirium.' She did not talk as if it would have been so, he remarks. One is not astonished at her appearing an 'actress' to the flat-minded. But the basis of her woman's nature was pointed flame: In the fulness of her history we perceive nothing histrionic. Capricious or enthusiastic in her youth, she never trifled with feeling; and if she did so with some showy phrases and occasionally proffered commonplaces in gilt, as she was much excited to do, her moods of reflection were direct, always large and honest, universal as well as feminine.

Her saying that 'A woman in the pillory restores the original bark of brotherhood to mankind,' is no more than a cry of personal anguish. She has golden apples in her apron. She says of life: 'When I fail to cherish it in every fibre the fires within are waning,' and that drives like rain to the roots. She says of the world, generously, if with tapering idea: 'From the point of vision of the angels, this ugly monster, only half out of slime, must appear our one constant hero.' It can be read maliciously, but abstain.

She says of Romance: 'The young who avoid that region escape the title of Fool at the cost of a celestial crown.' Of Poetry: 'Those that have souls meet their fellows there.'

But she would have us away with sentimentalism. Sentimental people, in her phrase, 'fiddle harmonics on the strings of sensualism,' to the delight of a world gaping for marvels of musical execution rather than for music. For our world is all but a sensational world at present, in maternal travail of a soberer, a braver, a brighter-eyed. Her reflections are thus to be interpreted, it seems to me. She says, 'The vices of the world's nobler half in this day are feminine.' We have to guard against 'half-conceptions of wisdom, hysterical goodness, an impatient charity'—against

Page 3122

the elementary state of the altruistic virtues, distinguishable as the sickness and writhings of our egoism to cast its first slough. Idea is there. The funny part of it is our finding it in books of fiction composed for payment. Manifestly this lady did not 'chameleon' her pen from the colour of her audience: she was not of the uniformed rank and file marching to drum and fife as gallant interpreters of popular appetite, and going or gone to soundlessness and the icy shades.

Touches inward are not absent: 'To have the sense of the eternal in life is a short flight for the soul. To have had it, is the soul's vitality.' And also: 'Palliation of a sin is the hunted creature's refuge and final temptation. Our battle is ever between spirit and flesh. Spirit must brand the flesh, that it may live.'

You are entreated to repress alarm. She was by preference light-handed; and her saying of oratory, that 'It is always the more impressive for the spice of temper which renders it untrustworthy,' is light enough. On Politics she is rhetorical and swings: she wrote to spur a junior politician: 'It is the first business of men, the school to mediocrity, to the covetously ambitious a sty, to the dullard his amphitheatre, arms of Titans to the desperately enterprising, Olympus to the genius.' What a woman thinks of women, is the test of her nature. She saw their existing posture clearly, yet believed, as men disincline to do, that they grow. She says, that 'In their judgements upon women men are females, voices of the present (sexual) dilemma.' They desire to have 'a still woman; who can make a constant society of her pins and needles.' They create by stoppage a volcano, and are amazed at its eruptiveness. 'We live alone, and do not much feel it till we are visited.' Love is presumably the visitor. Of the greater loneliness of women, she says: 'It is due to the prescribed circumscription of their minds, of which they become aware in agitation. Were the walls about them beaten down, they would understand that solitariness is a common human fate and the one chance of growth, like space for timber.' As to the sensations of women after the beating down of the walls, she owns that the multitude of the timorous would yearn in shivering affright for the old prison-nest, according to the sage prognostic of men; but the flying of a valiant few would form a vanguard. And we are informed that the beginning of a motive life with women must be in the head, equally with men (by no means a truism when she wrote). Also that 'men do not so much fear to lose the hearts of thoughtful women as their strict attention to their graces.' The present market is what men are for preserving: an observation of still reverberating force. Generally in her character of the feminine combatant there is a turn of phrase, like a dimple near the lips showing her knowledge that she was uttering but a tart measure of the truth. She had always too much lambent humour to be the dupe of the passion wherewith, as she says, 'we lash ourselves into the persuasive speech distinguishing us from the animals.'

Page 3123

The instances of her drollery are rather hinted by the Diarists for the benefit of those who had met her and could inhale the atmosphere at a word. Drolleries, humours, reputed witticisms, are like odours of roast meats, past with the picking of the joint. Idea is the only vital breath. They have it rarely, or it eludes the chronicler. To say of the great erratic and forsaken Lady A****, after she had accepted the consolations of Bacchus, that her name was properly signified in asterisks 'as she was now nightly an Ariadne in heaven through her God,' sounds to us a roundabout, with wit somewhere and fun nowhere. Sitting at the roast we might have thought differently. Perry Wilkinson is not happier in citing her reply to his compliment on the reviewers' unanimous eulogy of her humour and pathos:—the 'merry clown and poor pantaloon demanded of us in every work of fiction,' she says, lamenting the writer's compulsion to go on producing them for applause until it is extremest age that knocks their knees. We are informed by Lady Pennon of 'the most amusing description of the first impressions of a pretty English simpleton in Paris'; and here is an opportunity for ludicrous contrast of the French and English styles of pushing flatteries—'piping to the charmed animal,' as Mrs. Warwick terms it in another place: but Lady Pennon was acquainted with the silly woman of the piece, and found her amusement in the 'wonderful truth' of that representation.

Diarists of amusing passages are under an obligation to paint us a realistic revival of the time, or we miss the relish. The odour of the roast, and more, a slice of it is required, unless the humorous thing be preternaturally spirited to walk the earth as one immortal among a number less numerous than the mythic Gods. 'He gives good dinners,' a candid old critic said, when asked how it was that he could praise a certain poet. In an island of chills and fogs, coelum crebris imbribus ac nebulis foedum, the comic and other perceptions are dependent on the stirring of the gastric juices. And such a revival by any of us would be impolitic, were it a possible attempt, before our systems shall have been fortified by philosophy. Then may it be allowed to the Diarist simply to relate, and we can copy from him.

Then, ah! then, moreover, will the novelist's Art, now neither blushless infant nor executive man, have attained its majority. We can then be veraciously historical, honestly transcriptive. Rose-pink and dirty drab will alike have passed away. Philosophy is the foe of both, and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantasm falseness reigns, will no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife. Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that instead of everlastingly shifting those

Page 3124

barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight. Do but perceive that we are coming to philosophy, the stride toward it will be a giant's—a century a day. And imagine the celestial refreshment of having a pure decency in the place of sham; real flesh; a soul born active, wind-beaten, but ascending. Honourable will fiction then appear; honourable, a fount of life, an aid to life, quick with our blood. Why, when you behold it you love it—and you will not encourage it?—or only when presented by dead hands? Worse than that alternative dirty drab, your recurring rose-pink is rebuked by hideous revelations of the filthy foul; for nature will force her way, and if you try to stifle her by drowning, she comes up, not the fairest part of her uppermost! Peruse your Realists—really your castigators for not having yet embraced Philosophy. As she grows in the flesh when discreetly tended, nature is unimpeachable, flower-eke, yet not too decoratively a flower; you must have her with the stem, the thorns, the roots, and the fat bedding of roses. In this fashion she grew, says historical fiction; thus does she flourish now, would say the modern transcript, reading the inner as well as exhibiting the outer.

And how may you know that you have reached to Philosophy? You touch her skirts when you share her hatred of the sham decent, her derision of sentimentalism. You are one with her when—but I would not have you a thousand years older! Get to her, if in no other way, by the sentimental route:—that very winding path, which again and again brings you round to the point of original impetus, where you have to be unwound for another whirl; your point of original impetus being the grossly material, not at all the spiritual. It is most true that sentimentalism springs from the former, merely and badly aping the latter,—fine flower, or pinnacle flame-spire, of sensualism that it is, could it do other? and accompanying the former it traverses tracts of desert here and there couching in a garden, catching with one hand at fruits, with another at colours; imagining a secret ahead, and goaded by an appetite, sustained by sheer gratifications. Fiddle in harmonics as it may, it will have these gratifications at all costs. Should none be discoverable, at once you are at the Cave of Despair, beneath the funereal orb of Glaucoma, in the thick midst of poniarded, slit-throat, rope-dependant figures, placarded across the bosom Disillusioned, Infidel, Agnostic, Miserrimus. That is the sentimental route to advancement. Spirituality does not light it; evanescent dreams: are its oil-lamps, often with wick askant in the socket.

Page 3125

A thousand years! You may count full many a thousand by this route before you are one with divine Philosophy. Whereas a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the senses, Reality's infinite sweetness; for these things are in philosophy; and the fiction which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy's elect handmaiden. To such an end let us bend our aim to work, knowing that every form of labour, even this flimsiest, as you esteem it, should minister to growth. If in any branch of us we fail in growth, there is, you are aware, an unfailing aboriginal democratic old monster that waits to pull us down; certainly the branch, possibly the tree; and for the welfare of Life we fall. You are acutely conscious of yonder old monster when he is mouthing at you in politics. Be wary of him in the heart; especially be wary of the disrelish of brainstuff. You must feed on something. Matter that is not nourishing to brains can help to constitute nothing but the bodies which are pitched on rubbish heaps. Brainstuff is not lean stuff;—the brainstuff of fiction is internal history, and to suppose it dull is the profoundest of errors; how deep, you will understand when I tell you that it is the very football of the holiday-afternoon imps below. They kick it for pastime; they are intelligences perverted. The comic of it, the adventurous, the tragic, they make devilish, to kindle their Ogygian hilarity. But—-sharply comic, adventurous, instructively tragic, it is in the interwinding with human affairs, to give a flavour of the modern day reviving that of our Poet, between whom and us yawn Time's most hollow jaws. Surely we owe a little to Time, to cheer his progress; a little to posterity, and to our country. Dozens of writers will be in at yonder yawning breach, if only perusers will rally to the philosophic standard. They are sick of the woodeny puppetry they dispense, as on a race-course to the roaring frivolous. Well, if not dozens, half-dozens; gallant pens are alive; one can speak of them in the plural. I venture to say that they would be satisfied with a dozen for audience, for a commencement. They would perish of inanition, unfed, unapplauded, amenable to the laws perchance for an assault on their last remaining pair of ears or heels, to hold them fast. But the example is the thing; sacrifices must be expected. The example might, one hopes, create a taste. A great modern writer, of clearest eye and head, now departed, capable in activity of presenting thoughtful women, thinking men, groaned over his puppetry, that he dared not animate them, flesh though they were, with the fires of positive brainstuff. He could have done it, and he is of the departed! Had he dared, he would (for he was Titan enough) have raised the Art in dignity on a level with History; to an interest surpassing the narrative of public deeds

Page 3126

as vividly as man's heart and brain in their union excel his plain lines of action to eruption. The everlasting pantomime, suggested by Mrs. Warwick in her exclamation to Perry Wilkinson, is derided, not unrighteously, by our graver seniors. They name this Art the pasture of idiots, a method for idiotizing the entire population which has taken to reading; and which soon discovers that it can write likewise, that sort of stuff at least. The forecast may be hazarded, that if we do not speedily embrace Philosophy in fiction, the Art is doomed to extinction, under the shining multitude of its professors. They are fast capping the candle. Instead, therefore, of objurgating the timid intrusions of Philosophy, invoke her presence, I pray you. History without her is the skeleton map of events: Fiction a picture of figures modelled on no skeleton-anatomy. But each, with Philosophy in aid, blooms, and is humanly shapely. To demand of us truth to nature, excluding Philosophy, is really to bid a pumpkin caper. As much as legs are wanted for the dance, Philosophy is required to make our human nature credible and acceptable. Fiction implores you to heave a bigger breast and take her in with this heavenly preservative helpmate, her inspiration and her essence. You have to teach your imagination of the feminine image you have set up to bend your civilized knees to, that it must temper its fastidiousness, shun the grossness of the over-dainty. Or, to speak in the philosophic tongue, you must turn on yourself, resolutely track and seize that burrower, and scrub and cleanse him; by which process, during the course of it, you will arrive at the conception of the right heroical woman for you to worship: and if you prove to be of some spiritual stature, you may reach to an ideal of the heroical feminine type for the worship of mankind, an image as yet in poetic outline only, on our upper skies.

'So well do we know ourselves, that we one and all determine to know a purer,' says the heroine of my columns. Philosophy in fiction tells, among various other matters, of the perils of this intimate acquaintance with a flattering familiar in the 'purer'—a person who more than ceases to be of else to us after his ideal shall have led up men from their flint and arrowhead caverns to intercommunicative daylight. For when the fictitious creature has performed that service of helping to civilize the world, it becomes the most dangerous of delusions, causing first the individual to despise the mass, and then to join the mass in crushing the individual. Wherewith let us to our story, the froth being out of the bottle.

CHAPTER II

AN IRISH BALL

Page 3127

In the Assembly Rooms of the capital city of the Sister Island there was a public Ball, to celebrate the return to Erin of a British hero of Irish blood, after his victorious Indian campaign; a mighty struggle splendidly ended; and truly could it be said that all Erin danced to meet him; but this was the pick of the dancing, past dispute the pick of the supping. Outside those halls the supping was done in Lazarus fashion, mainly through an excessive straining of the organs of hearing and vision, which imparted the readiness for more, declared by physicians to be the state inducing to sound digestion. Some one spied the figure of the hero at the window and was fed; some only to hear the tale chewed the cud of it; some told of having seen him mount the steps; and sure it was that at an hour of the night, no matter when, and never mind a drop or two of cloud, he would come down them again, and have an Irish cheer to freshen his pillow. For 'tis Ireland gives England her soldiers, her generals too. Farther away, over field and bogland, the whiskies did their excellent ancient service of watering the dry and drying the damp, to the toast of 'Lord Larrian, God bless him! he's an honour to the old country!' and a bit of a sigh to follow, hints of a story, and loud laughter, a drink, a deeper sigh, settling into conversation upon the brave Lord Larrian's deeds, and an Irish regiment he favoured—had no taste for the enemy without the backing of his 'boys.' Not he. Why, he'd never march to battle and they not handy; because when he struck he struck hard, he said. And he has a wound on the right hip and two fingers off his left hand; has bled for England, to show her what Irishmen are when they're well treated.

The fine old warrior standing at the upper end of the long saloon, tall, straight, grey-haired, martial in his aspect and decorations, was worthy to be the flag-pole for enthusiasm. His large grey eyes lightened from time to time as he ranged them over the floating couples, and dropped a word of inquiry to his aide, Captain Sir Lukin Dunstane, a good model of a cavalry officer, though somewhat a giant, equally happy with his chief in passing the troops of animated ladies under review. He named as many as were known to him. Reviewing women exquisitely attired for inspection, all variously and charmingly smiling, is a relief after the monotonous regiments of men. Ireland had done her best to present the hero of her blood an agreeable change; and he too expressed a patriotic satisfaction on hearing that the faces most admired by him were of the native isle. He looked upon one that came whirling up to him on a young officer's arm and swept off into the crowd of tops, for a considerable while before he put his customary question. She was returning on the spin when he said,

'Who is she?'

Sir Lukin did not know. 'She 's a new bird; she nodded to my wife; I'll ask.'

He manoeuvred a few steps cleverly to where his wife reposed. The information he gathered for the behoof of his chief was, that the handsome creature answered to the name of Miss Merion; Irish; aged somewhere between eighteen and nineteen; a dear friend of his wife's, and he ought to have remembered her; but she was a child when he saw her last.

Page 3128

‘Dan Merion died, I remember, about the day of my sailing for India,’ said the General. ‘She may be his daughter.’

The bright cynosure rounded up to him in the web of the waltz, with her dark eyes for Lady Dunstane, and vanished again among the twisting columns.

He made his way, handsomely bumped by an apologetic pair, to Lady Dunstane, beside whom a seat was vacated for him; and he trusted she had not over-fatigued herself.

‘Confess,’ she replied, ’you are perishing to know more than Lukin has been able to tell you. Let me hear that you admire her: it pleases me; and you shall hear what will please you as much, I promise you, General.’

‘I do. Who wouldn’t?’ said he frankly.

’She crossed the Channel expressly to dance here tonight at the public Ball in honour of you.’

’Where she appears, the first person falls to second rank, and accepts it humbly.’

‘That is grandly spoken.’

‘She makes everything in the room dust round a blazing jewel.’

’She makes a poet of a soldier. Well, that you may understand how pleased I am, she is my dearest friend, though she is younger than I, as may be seen; she is the only friend I have. I nursed her when she was an infant; my father and Mr. Dan Merion were chums. We were parted by my marriage and the voyage to India. We have not yet exchanged a syllable: she was snapped up, of course, the moment she entered the room. I knew she would be a taking girl: how lovely, I did not guess. You are right, she extinguishes the others. She used to be the sprightliest of living creatures, and to judge by her letters, that has not faded. She ’s in the market, General.’

Lord Larrian nodded to everything he heard, concluding with a mock doleful shake of the head. ‘My poorest subaltern!’ he sighed, in the theatrical but cordially melancholy style of green age viewing Cytherea’s market.

His poorest subaltern was richer than he in the wherewithal to bid for such prizes.

‘What is her name in addition to Merion?’

‘Diana Antonia Merion. Tony to me, Diana to the world.’

‘She lives over there?’

’In England, or anywhere; wherever she is taken in. She will live, I hope, chiefly with me.’

‘And honest Irish?’

‘Oh, she’s Irish.’

‘Ah!’ the General was Irish to the heels that night.

Before further could be said the fair object of the dialogue came darting on a trip of little runs, both hands out, all her face one tender sparkle of a smile; and her cry proved the quality of her blood: ’Emmy! Emmy! my heart!’

’My dear Tony!

I should not have come but for the hope of seeing you here.’

Lord Larrian rose and received a hurried acknowledgement of his courtesy from the usurper of his place.

’Emmy! we might kiss and hug; we’re in Ireland. I burn to! But you’re not still ill, dear? Say no! That Indian fever must have gone. You do look a dash pale, my own; you’re tired.’

Page 3129

‘One dance has tired me. Why were you so late?’

’To give the others a chance? To produce a greater impression by suspense? No and no. I wrote you I was with the Pettigrews. We caught the coach, we caught the boat, we were only two hours late for the Ball; so we did wonders. And good Mrs. Pettigrew is, pining somewhere to complete her adornment. I was in the crush, spying for Emmy, when Mr. Mayor informed me it was the duty of every Irishwoman to dance her toes off, if she ’d be known for what she is. And twirl! a man had me by the waist, and I dying to find you.’

‘Who was the man?’

‘Not to save these limbs from the lighted stake could I tell you!’

‘You are to perform a ceremonious bow to Lord Larrian.’

‘Chatter first! a little!’

The plea for chatter was disregarded. It was visible that the hero of the night hung listening and in expectation. He and the Beauty were named to one another, and they chatted through a quadrille. Sir Lukin introduced a fellow-Harrovian of old days, Mr. Thomas Redworth, to his wife.

‘Our weather-prophet, meteorologist,’ he remarked, to set them going; ’you remember, in India, my pointing to you his name in a newspaper—letter on the subject. He was generally safe for the cricketing days.’

Lady Dunstane kindly appeared to call it to mind, and she led upon the them-queried at times by an abrupt ‘Eh?’ and ‘I beg pardon,’ for manifestly his gaze and one of his ears, if not the pair, were given to the young lady discoursing with Lord Larrian. Beauty is rare; luckily is it rare, or, judging from its effect on men, and the very stoutest of them, our world would be internally more distracted planet than we see, to the perversion of business, courtesy, rights of property, and the rest. She perceived an incipient victim, of the hundreds she anticipated, and she very tolerantly talked on: ’The weather and women have some resemblance they say. Is it true that he who reads the one can read the other?’

Lord Larrian here burst into a brave old laugh, exclaiming, ‘Oh! good!’

Mr. Redworth knitted his thick brows. ’I beg pardon? Ah! women! Weather and women? No; the one point more variable in women makes all the difference.’

‘Can you tell me what the General laughed at?’

The honest Englishman entered the trap with promptitude. 'She said:—who is she, may I ask you?'

Lady Dunstane mentioned her name.

Daughter of the famous Dan Merion? The young lady merited examination for her father's sake. But when reminded of her laughter-moving speech, Mr. Redworth bungled it; he owned he spoilt it, and candidly stated his inability to see the fun. 'She said, St. George's Channel in a gale ought to be called St. Patrick's—something—I missed some point. That quadrille-tune, the Pastourelle, or something . . .'

'She had experience of the Channel last night,' Lady Dunstane pursued, and they both, while in seeming converse, caught snatches from their neighbours, during a pause of the dance.

Page 3130

The sparkling Diana said to Lord Larrian, 'You really decline to make any of us proud women by dancing to-night?'

The General answered: 'I might do it on two stilts; I can't on one.' He touched his veteran leg.

'But surely,' said she, 'there's always an inspiration coming to it from its partner in motion, if one of them takes the step.'

He signified a woeful negative. 'My dear young lady, you say dark things to grey hairs!'

She rejoined: 'If we were over in England, and you fixed on me the stigma of saying dark things, I should never speak without being thought obscure.'

'It's because you flash too brightly for them.'

'I think it is rather the reminiscence of the tooth that received a stone when it expected candy.'

Again the General laughed; he looked pleased and warmed. 'Yes, that 's their way, that 's their way!' and he repeated her words to himself, diminishing their importance as he stamped them on his memory, but so heartily admiring the lovely speaker, that he considered her wit an honour to the old country, and told her so. Irish prevailed up to boiling-point.

Lady Dunstane, not less gratified, glanced up at Mr. Redworth, whose brows bore the knot of perplexity over a strong stare. He, too, stamped the words on his memory, to see subsequently whether they had a vestige of meaning. Terrifically precocious, he thought her. Lady Dunstane, in her quick sympathy with her friend, read the adverse mind in his face. And her reading of the mind was right, wrong altogether her deduction of the corresponding sentiment.

Music was resumed to confuse the hearing of the eavesdroppers.

They beheld a quaint spectacle: a gentleman, obviously an Englishman, approached, with the evident intention of reminding the Beauty of the night of her engagement to him, and claiming her, as it were, in the lion's jaws. He advanced a foot, withdrew it, advanced, withdrew; eager for his prize, not over-enterprising; in awe of the illustrious General she entertained—presumeably quite unaware of the pretender's presence; whereupon a voice was heard: 'Oh! if it was minuetting you meant before the lady, I'd never have disputed your right to perform, sir.' For it seemed that there were two claimants in the field, an Irishman and an Englishman; and the former, having a livelier sense of the situation, hung aloof in waiting for her eye; the latter directed himself to strike bluntly at his prey; and he continued minuetting, now rapidly blinking, flushed, angry, conscious of awkwardness and a tangle, incapable of extrication. He began to

blink horribly under the raillery of his rival. The General observed him, but as an object remote and minute, a fly or gnat. The face of the brilliant Diana was entirely devoted to him she amused.

Lady Dunstane had the faint lines of a decorous laugh on her lips, as she said: 'How odd it is that our men show to such disadvantage in a Ball-room. I have seen them in danger, and there they shine first of any, and one is proud of them. They should always be facing the elements or in action.' She glanced at the minuet, which had become a petrified figure, still palpitating, bent forward, an interrogative reminder.

Page 3131

Mr. Redworth reserved his assent to the proclamation of any English disadvantage. A whiff of Celtic hostility in the atmosphere put him on his mettle. ‘Wherever the man is tried,’ he said.

‘My lady!’ the Irish gentleman bowed to Lady Dunstane. ’I had the honour . . . Sullivan Smith . . . at the castle . . .’

She responded to the salute, and Mr. Sullivan Smith proceeded to tell her, half in speech, half in dots most luminous, of a civil contention between the English gentleman and himself, as to the possession of the loveliest of partners for this particular ensuing dance, and that they had simultaneously made a rush from the Lower Courts, namely, their cards, to the Upper, being the lady; and Mr. Sullivan Smith partly founded his preferable claim on her Irish descent, and on his acquaintance with her eminent defunct father—one of the ever-radiating stars of his quenchless country.

Lady Dunstane sympathized with him for his not intruding his claim when the young lady stood pre-engaged, as well as in humorous appreciation of his imaginative logic.

‘There will be dancing enough after supper,’ she said.

’If I could score one dance with her, I’d go home supperless and feasted,’ said he. ’And that’s not saying much among the hordes of hungry troopers tip-toe for the signal to the buffet. See, my lady, the gentleman, as we call him; there he is working his gamut perpetually up to da capo. Oh! but it’s a sheep trying to be wolf; he ’s sheep-eyed and he ’s wolf-fanged, pathetic and larcenous! Oh, now! who’d believe it!—the man has dared . . . I’d as soon think of committing sacrilege in a cathedral!’

The man was actually; to quote his indignant rival, ’breaching the fortress,’ and pointing out to Diana Merion ’her name on his dirty scrap of paper’: a shocking sight when the lady’s recollection was the sole point to be aimed at, and the only umpire. ’As if all of us couldn’t have written that, and hadn’t done it!’ Mr. Sullivan Smith groaned disgusted. He hated bad manners, particularly in cases involving ladies; and the bad manners of a Saxon fired his antagonism to the race; individual members of which he boasted of forgiving and embracing, honouring. So the man blackened the race for him, and the race was excused in the man. But his hatred of bad manners was vehement, and would have extended to a fellow-countryman. His own were of the antecedent century, therefore venerable.

Diana turned from her pursuer with a comic woeful lifting of the brows at her friend. Lady Dunstane motioned her fan, and Diana came, bending head.

‘Are you bound in honour?’

’I don’t think I am. And I do want to go on talking with the General. He is so delightful and modest—my dream of a true soldier!—telling me of his last big battle, bit by bit, to my fishing.’

’Put off this person for a square dance down the list, and take out Mr. Redworth—Miss Diana Merlon, Mr. Redworth: he will bring you back to the General, who must not totally absorb you, or he will forfeit his popularity.’

Page 3132

Diana instantly struck a treaty with the pertinacious advocate of his claims, to whom, on his relinquishing her, Mr. Sullivan Smith remarked: 'Oh! sir, the law of it, where a lady's concerned! You're one for evictions, I should guess, and the anti-human process. It's that letter of the law that stands between you and me and mine and yours. But you've got your congee, and my blessing on ye!'

'It was a positive engagement,' said the enemy.

Mr. Sullivan Smith derided him. 'And a pretty partner you've pickled for yourself when she keeps her positive engagement!'

He besought Lady Dunstane to console him with a turn. She pleaded weariness. He proposed to sit beside her and divert her. She smiled, but warned him that she was English in every vein. He interjected: 'Irish men and English women! though it's putting the cart before the horse—the copper pennies where the gold guineas should be. So here's the gentleman who takes the oyster, like the lawyer of the fable. English is he? But we read, the last shall be first. And English women and Irish men make the finest coupling in the universe.'

'Well, you must submit to see an Irish woman led out by an English man,' said Lady Dunstane, at the same time informing the obedient Diana, then bestowing her hand on Mr. Redworth to please her friend, that he was a schoolfellow of her husband's.

'Favour can't help coming by rotation, except in very extraordinary circumstances, and he was ahead of me with you, and takes my due, and 'twould be hard on me if I weren't thoroughly indemnified.' Mr. Sullivan Smith bowed. 'You gave them just the start over the frozen minute for conversation; they were total strangers, and he doesn't appear a bad sort of fellow for a temporary mate, though he's not perfectly sure of his legs. And that we'll excuse to any man leading out such a fresh young beauty of a Bright Eyes—-like the stars of a winter's night in the frosty season over Columkill, or where you will, so that's in Ireland, to be sure of the likeness to her.'

'Her mother was half English.'

'Of course she was. And what was my observation about the coupling? Dan Merion would make her Irish all over. And she has a vein of Spanish blood in her; for he had; and she's got the colour.—But you spoke of their coupling—or I did. Oh, a man can hold his own with an English roly-poly mate: he's not stifled! But a woman hasn't his power of resistance to dead weight. She's volatile, she's frivolous, a rattler and gabbler—haven't I heard what they say of Irish girls over there? She marries, and it's the end of her sparkling. She must choose at home for a perfect harmonious partner.'

Lady Dunstane expressed her opinion that her couple danced excellently together.

’It’d be a bitter thing to see, if the fellow couldn’t dance, after leading her out!’ sighed Mr. Sullivan Smith. ’I heard of her over there. They, call her the Black Pearl, and the Irish Lily—because she’s dark. They rack their poor brains to get the laugh of us.’

Page 3133

‘And I listen to you,’ said Lady Dunstane.

’Ah! if all England, half, a quarter, the smallest piece of the land were like you, my lady, I’d be loyal to the finger-nails. Now, is she engaged?—when I get a word with her?’

’She is nineteen, or nearly, and she ought to have five good years of freedom, I think.’

‘And five good years of serfdom I’d serve to win her!’

A look at him under the eyelids assured Lady Dunstane that there would be small chance for Mr. Sullivan Smith; after a life of bondage, if she knew her Diana, in spite of his tongue, his tact, his lively features, and breadth of shoulders.

Up he sprang. Diana was on Mr. Redworth’s arm. ‘No refreshments,’ she said; and ‘this is my refreshment,’ taking the seat of Mr. Sullivan Smith, who ejaculated,

‘I must go and have that gentleman’s name.’ He wanted a foe.

’You know you are ready to coquette with the General at any moment, Tony,’ said her friend.

‘Yes, with the General!’

‘He is a noble old man.’

’Superb. And don’t say “old man.” With his uniform and his height and his grey head, he is like a glorious October day just before the brown leaves fall.’

Diana hummed a little of the air of Planxty Kelly, the favourite of her childhood, as Lady Dunstane well remembered, they smiled together at the scenes and times it recalled.

‘Do you still write verses, Tony?’

’I could about him. At one part of the fight he thought he would be beaten. He was overmatched in artillery, and it was a cavalry charge he thundered on them, riding across the field to give the word of command to the couple of regiments, riddled to threads, that gained the day. That is life—when we dare death to live! I wonder at men, who are men, being anything but soldiers! I told you, madre, my own Emmy, I forgave you for marrying, because it was a soldier.’

’Perhaps a soldier is to be the happy man. But you have not told me a word of yourself. What has been done with the old Crossways?’

’The house, you know, is mine. And it’s all I have: ten acres and the house, furnished, and let for less than two hundred a year. Oh! how I long to evict the tenants! They can’t

have my feeling for the place where I was born. They're people of tolerably good connections, middling wealthy, I suppose, of the name of Warwick, and, as far as I can understand, they stick there to be near the Sussex Downs, for a nephew, who likes to ride on them. I've a half engagement, barely legible, to visit them on an indefinite day, and can't bear the idea of strangers masters in the old house. I must be driven there for shelter, for a roof, some month. And I could make a pilgrimage in rain or snow just to doat on the outside of it. That's your Tony.'

'She's my darling.'

'I hear myself speak! But your voice or mine, madre, it's one soul. Be sure I am giving up the ghost when I cease to be one soul with you, dear and dearest! No secrets, never a shadow of a deception, or else I shall feel I am not fit to live. Was I a bad correspondent when you were in India?'

Page 3134

‘Pretty well. Copious letters when you did write.’

’I was shy. I knew I should be writing, to Emmy and another, and only when I came to the flow could I forget him. He is very finely built; and I dare say he has a head. I read of his deeds in India and quivered. But he was just a bit in the way. Men are the barriers to perfect naturalness, at least, with girls, I think. You wrote to me in the same tone as ever, and at first I had a struggle to reply. And I, who have such pride in being always myself!’

Two staring semi-circles had formed, one to front the Hero; the other the Beauty. These half moons imperceptibly dissolved to replenish, and became a fixed obstruction.

‘Yes, they look,’ Diana made answer to Lady Dunstane’s comment on the curious impertinence. She was getting used to it, and her friend had a gratification in seeing how little this affected her perfect naturalness.

‘You are often in the world—dinners, dances?’ she said.

‘People are kind.’

‘Any proposals?’

‘Nibbles.’

‘Quite heart-free?’

‘Absolutely.’

Diana’s unshadowed bright face defied all menace of an eclipse.

The block of sturdy gazers began to melt. The General had dispersed his group of satellites by a movement with the Mayoress on his arm, construed as the signal for procession to the supper-table.

CHAPTER III

THE INTERIOR OF MR. REDWORTH, AND THE EXTERIOR OF MR. SULLIVAN SMITH

’It may be as well to take Mr. Redworth’s arm; you will escape the crush for you,’ said Lady Dunstane to Diana. ’I don’t sup. Yes! go! You must eat, and he is handiest to conduct you.’

Diana thought of her chaperon and the lateness of the hour. She murmured, to soften her conscience, ‘Poor Mrs. Pettigrew!’

And once more Mr. Redworth, outwardly imperturbable, was in the maelstrom of a happiness resembling tempest. He talked, and knew not what he uttered. To give this matchless girl the best to eat and drink was his business, and he performed it. Oddly, for a man who had no loaded design, marshalling the troops in his active and capacious cranium, he fell upon calculations of his income, present and prospective, while she sat at the table and he stood behind her. Others were wrangling for places, chairs, plates, glasses, game-pie, champagne: she had them; the lady under his charge to a certainty would have them; so far good; and he had seven hundred pounds per annum—seven hundred and fifty, in a favourable aspect, at a stretch . . . .

’Yes, the pleasantest thing to me after working all day is an opera of Carini’s,’ she said, in full accord with her taste, ’and Tellio for tenor, certainly.’

—A fair enough sum for a bachelor: four hundred personal income, and a prospect of higher dividends to increase it; three hundred odd from his office, and no immediate prospects of an increase there; no one died there, no elderly martyr for the advancement of his juniors could be persuaded to die; they were too tough to think of retiring. Say, seven hundred and fifty . . . . eight hundred, if the commerce of the country fortified the Bank his property was embarked in; or eight-fifty or nine ten. . . .

Page 3135

‘I could call him my poet also,’ Mr. Redworth agreed with her taste in poets. ’His letters are among the best ever written—or ever published: the raciest English I know. Frank, straight out: capital descriptions. The best English letter-writers are as good as the French—

You don’t think so?—in their way, of course. I dare’ say we don’t sufficiently cultivate the art. We require the supple tongue a closer intercourse of society gives.’

—Eight or ten hundred. Comfortable enough for a man in chambers. To dream of entering as a householder on that sum, in these days, would be stark nonsense: and a man two removes from a baronetcy has no right to set his reckoning on deaths:—if he does, he becomes a sort of meditative assassin. But what were the Fates about when they planted a man of the ability of Tom Redworth in a Government office! Clearly they intended him to remain a bachelor for life. And they sent him over to Ireland on inspection duty for a month to have sight of an Irish Beauty . . . .

‘Think war the finest subject for poets?’ he exclaimed. ’Flatly no: I don’t think it. I think exactly the reverse. It brings out the noblest traits in human character? I won’t own that even. It brings out some but under excitement, when you have not always the real man. —Pray don’t sneer at domestic life. Well, there was a suspicion of disdain.—Yes, I can respect the hero, military or civil; with this distinction, that the military hero aims at personal reward—’

‘He braves wounds and death,’ interposed Diana.

‘Whereas the civilian hero—’

‘Pardon me, let me deny that the soldier-hero aims at a personal reward,’ she again interposed.

‘He gets it.’

‘If he is not beaten.’

‘And then he is no longer a hero.’

‘He is to me.’

She had a woman’s inveterate admiration of the profession of aims. Mr. Redworth endeavoured to render practicable an opening in her mind to reason. He admitted the grandeur of the poetry of Homer. We are a few centuries in advance of Homer. We do not slay damsels for a sacrifice to propitiate celestial wrath; nor do we revel in details of slaughter. He reasoned with her; he repeated stories known to him of civilian heroes, and won her assent to the heroical title for their deeds, but it was languid, or not so bright as the deeds deserved—or as the young lady could look; and he insisted on the

civilian hero, impelled by some unconscious motive to make her see the thing he thought, also the thing he was—his plain mind and matter-of-fact nature. Possibly she caught a glimpse of that. After a turn of fencing, in which he was impressed by the vibration of her tones when speaking of military heroes, she quitted the table, saying: 'An argument between one at supper and another handing plates, is rather unequal if eloquence is needed. As Pat said to the constable, when his hands were tied, You beat me with the fists, but my spirit is towering and kicks freely.'

Page 3136

—Eight hundred? a thousand a year, two thousand, are as nothing in the calculation of a householder who means that the mistress of the house shall have the choicest of the fruits and flowers of the Four Quarters; and Thomas Redworth had vowed at his first outlook on the world of women, that never should one of the sisterhood coming under his charge complain of not having them in profusion. Consequently he was a settled bachelor. In the character of disengaged and unaspiring philosophical bachelor, he reviewed the revelations of her character betrayed by the beautiful virgin devoted to the sanguine coat. The thrill of her voice in speaking of soldier-heroes shot him to the yonder side of a gulf. Not knowing why, for he had no scheme, desperate or other, in his head, the least affrighted of men was frightened by her tastes, and by her aplomb, her inoffensiveness in freedom of manner and self-sufficiency—sign of purest breeding: and by her easy, peerless vivacity, her proofs of descent from the blood of Dan Merion —a wildish blood. The candour of the look of her eyes in speaking, her power of looking forthright at men, and looking the thing she spoke, and the play of her voluble lips, the significant repose of her lips in silence, her weighing of the words he uttered, for a moment before the prompt apposite reply, down to her simple quotation of Pat, alarmed him; he did not ask himself why. His manly self was not intruded on his cogitations. A mere eight hundred or thousand per annum had no place in that midst. He beheld her quietly selecting the position of dignity to suit her: an eminent military man, or statesman, or wealthy nobleman: she had but to choose. A war would offer her the decorated soldier she wanted. A war! Such are women of this kind! The thought revolted him, and pricked his appetite for supper. He did service by Mrs. Pettigrew, to which lady Miss Merion, as she said, promoted him, at the table, and then began to refresh in person, standing.

‘Malkin! that’s the fellow’s name’ he heard close at his ear.

Mr. Sullivan Smith had drained a champagne-glass, bottle in hand, and was priming the successor to it. He cocked his eye at Mr. Redworth’s quick stare. ‘Malkin!’ And now we’ll see whether the interior of him is grey, or black, or tabby, or tortoise-shell, or any other colour of the Malkin breed.’

He explained to Mr. Redworth that he had summoned Mr. Malkin to answer to him as a gentleman for calling Miss Merion a jilt. ’The man, sir, said in my hearing, she jilted him, and that’s to call the lady a jilt. There’s not a point of difference, not a shade. I overheard him. I happened by the blessing of Providence to be by when he named her publicly jilt. And it’s enough that she’s a lady to have me for her champion. The same if she had been an Esquimaux squaw. I’ll never live to hear a lady insulted.’

‘You don’t mean to say you’re the donkey to provoke a duel!’ Mr. Redworth burst out gruffly, through turkey and stuffing.

Page 3137

‘And an Irish lady, the young Beauty of Erin!’ Mr. Sullivan Smith was flowing on. He became frigid, he politely bowed: ’Two, sir, if you haven’t the grace to withdraw the offensive term before it cools and can’t be obliterated.’

‘Fiddle! and go to the deuce!’ Mr. Redworth cried.

‘Would a soft slap o’ the cheek persuade you, sir?’

’Try it outside, and don’t bother me with nonsense of that sort at my supper. If I’m struck, I strike back. I keep my pistols for bandits and law-breakers. Here,’ said Mr. Redworth, better inspired as to the way of treating an ultra of the isle; ’touch glasses: you’re a gentleman, and won’t disturb good company. By-and-by.’

The pleasing prospect of by-and-by renewed in Mr. Sullivan Smith his composure. They touched the foaming glasses: upon which, in a friendly manner, Mr. Sullivan Smith proposed that they should go outside as soon as Mr. Redworth had finished supper-quite finished supper: for the reason that the term ‘donkey’ affixed to him was like a minster cap of schooldays, ringing bells on his topknot, and also that it stuck in his gizzard.

Mr. Redworth declared the term to be simply hypothetical. ’If you fight, you’re a donkey for doing it. But you won’t fight.’

‘But I will fight.’

‘He won’t fight.’

’Then for the honour of your country you must. But I’d rather have him first, for I haven’t drunk with him, and it should be a case of necessity to put a bullet or a couple of inches of steel through the man you’ve drunk with. And what’s in your favour, she danced with ye. She seemed to take to ye, and the man she has the smallest sugar-melting for is sacred if he’s not sweet to me. If he retracts!’

‘Hypothetically, No.’

‘But supposititiously?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then we grasp hands on it. It’s Malkin or nothing!’ said Mr. Sullivan Smith, swinging his heel moodily to wander in search of the foe. How one sane man could name another a donkey for fighting to clear an innocent young lady’s reputation, passed his rational conception.

Sir Lukin hastened to Mr. Redworth to have a talk over old schooldays and fellows.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ said the civilian, ’There are Irishmen and Irishmen. I’ve met cool heads and long heads among them, and you and I knew Jack Derry, who was good at most things. But the burlesque Irishman can’t be caricatured. Nature strained herself in a ’fit of absurdity to produce him, and all that Art can do is to copy.’

This was his prelude to an account of Mr. Sullivan Smith, whom, as a specimen, he rejoiced to have met.

‘There’s a chance of mischief,’ said Sir Lukin. ’I know nothing of the man he calls Malkin. I’ll inquire presently.’

He talked of his prospects, and of the women. Fair ones, in his opinion, besides Miss Merion were parading; he sketched two or three of his partners with a broad brush of epithets.

Page 3138

‘It won’t do for Miss Merion’s name to be mixed up in a duel,’ said Redworth.

‘Not if she’s to make her fortune in England,’ said Sir Lukin. ’It’s probably all smoke.’

The remark had hardly escaped him when a wreath of metaphorical smoke, and fire, and no mean report, startled the company of supping gentlemen. At the pitch of his voice, Mr. Sullivan Smith denounced Mr. Malkin in presence for a cur masquerading as a cat.

‘And that is not the scoundrel’s prime offence. For what d’ ye think? He trumps up an engagement to dance with a beautiful lady, and because she can’t remember, binds her to an oath for a dance to come, and then, holding her prisoner to ’m, he sulks, the dirty dogcat goes and sulks, and he won’t dance and won’t do anything but screech up in corners that he’s jilted. He said the word. Dozens of gentlemen heard the word. And I demand an apology of Misterr Malkin—or . . ! And none of your guerrier nodding and bravado, Mister Malkin, at me, if you please. The case is for settlement between gentlemen.’

The harassed gentleman of the name of Malkin, driven to extremity by the worrying, stood in braced preparation for the English attitude of defence. His tormentor drew closer to him.

’Mind, I give you warning, if you lay a finger on me I’ll knock you down,’ said he.

Most joyfully Mr. Sullivan Smith uttered a low melodious cry. ’For a specimen of manners, in an assembly of ladies and gentlemen . . . I ask ye!’ he addressed the ring about him, to put his adversary entirely in the wrong before provoking the act of war. And then, as one intending gently to remonstrate, he was on the point of stretching out his finger to the shoulder of Mr. Malkin, when Redworth seized his arm, saying: ’I ‘m your man: me first: you’re due to me.’

Mr. Sullivan Smith beheld the vanishing of his foe in a cloud of faces. Now was he wroth on patently reasonable grounds. He threatened Saxondom. Man up, man down, he challenged the race of short-legged, thickset, wooden-gated curmudgeons: and let it be pugilism if their white livers shivered at the notion of powder and ball. Redworth, in the struggle to haul him away, received a blow from him. ’And you’ve got it! you would have it!’ roared the Celt.

‘Excuse yourself to the company for a misdirected effort,’ Redworth said; and he observed generally: ’No Irish gentleman strikes a blow in good company.’

’But that’s true as Writ! And I offer excuses—if you’ll come along with me and a couple of friends. The thing has been done before by torchlight—and neatly.’

‘Come along, and come alone,’ said Redworth.

A way was cleared for them. Sir Lukin hurried up to Redworth, who had no doubt of his ability to manage Mr. Sullivan Smith.

He managed that fine-hearted but purely sensational fellow so well that Lady Dunstane and Diana, after hearing in some anxiety of the hubbub below, beheld them entering the long saloon amicably, with the nods and looks of gentlemen quietly accordant.

Page 3139

A little later, Lady Dunstane questioned Redworth, and he smoothed her apprehensions, delivering himself, much to her comfort, thus: 'In no case would any lady's name have been raised. The whole affair was nonsensical. He's a capital fellow of a kind, capable of behaving like a man of the world and a gentleman. Only he has, or thinks he has, like lots of his countrymen, a raw wound—something that itches to be grazed. Champagne on that! . . . Irishmen, as far as I have seen of them, are, like horses, bundles of nerves; and you must manage them, as you do with all nervous creatures, with firmness, but good temper. You must never get into a fury of the nerves yourself with them. Spur and whip they don't want; they'll be off with you in a jiffy if you try it.

They want the bridle-rein. That seems to me the secret of Irish character. We English are not bad horsemen. It's a wonder we blunder so in our management of such a people.'

'I wish you were in a position to put your method to the proof,' said she.

He shrugged. 'There's little chance of it!'

To reward him for his practical discretion, she contrived that Diana should give him a final dance; and the beautiful gill smiled quickly responsive to his appeal. He was, moreover, sensible in her look and speech that he had advanced in her consideration to be no longer the mere spinning stick, a young lady's partner. By which he humbly understood that her friend approved him. A gentle delirium enfolded his brain. A householder's life is often begun on eight hundred a year: on less: on much less:—-sometimes on nothing but resolution to make a fitting income, carving out a fortune. Eight hundred may stand as a superior basis. That sum is a distinct point of vantage. If it does not mean a carriage and Parisian millinery and a station for one of the stars of society, it means at any rate security; and then, the heart of the man being strong and sound . . .

'Yes,' he replied to her, 'I like my experience of Ireland and the Irish; and better than I thought I should. St. George's Channel ought to be crossed oftener by both of us.'

'I'm always glad of the signal,' said Diana.

He had implied the people of the two islands. He allowed her interpretation to remain personal, for the sake of a creeping deliciousness that it carried through his blood.

'Shall you soon be returning to England?' he ventured to ask.

'I am Lady Dunstane's guest for some months.'

'Then you will. Sir Lukin has an estate in Surrey. He talks of quitting the Service.'

'I can't believe it!'

His thrilled blood was chilled. She entertained a sentiment amounting to adoration for the profession of arms!

Page 3140

Gallantly had the veteran General and Hero held on into the night, that the festivity might not be dashed by his departure; perhaps, to a certain degree, to prolong his enjoyment of a flattering scene. At last Sir Lukin had the word from him, and came to his wife. Diana slipped across the floor to her accommodating chaperon, whom, for the sake of another five minutes with her beloved Emma, she very agreeably persuaded to walk in the train of Lord Larrian, and forth they trooped down a pathway of nodding heads and curtsies, resembling oak and birch-trees under a tempered gale, even to the shedding of leaves, for here a turban was picked up by Sir Lukin, there a jewelled ear-ring by the self-constituted attendant, Mr. Thomas Redworth. At the portico rang a wakening cheer, really worth hearing. The rain it rained, and hats were formless,' as in the first conception of the edifice, backs were damp, boots liquidly musical, the pipe of consolation smoked with difficulty, with much pulling at the stem, but the cheer arose magnificently, and multiplied itself, touching at the same moment the heavens and Diana's heart-at least, drawing them together; for she felt exalted, enraptured, as proud of her countrymen as of their hero.

'That's the natural shamrock, after the artificial!' she heard Mr. Redworth say, behind her.

She turned and sent one of her brilliant glances flying over him, in gratitude for a timely word well said. And she never forgot the remark, nor he the look.

CHAPTER IV

CONTAINING HINTS OF DIANA'S EXPERIENCES AND OF WHAT THEY LED TO

A fortnight after this memorable Ball the principal actors of both sexes had crossed the Channel back to England, and old Ireland was left to her rains from above and her undrained bogs below; her physical and her mental vapours; her ailments and her bog-bred doctors; as to whom the governing country trusted they would be silent or discourse humorously.

The residence of Sir Lukin Dunstane, in the county of Surrey, inherited by him during his recent term of Indian services, was on the hills, where a day of Italian sky, or better, a day of our breezy South-west, washed from the showery night, gives distantly a tower to view, and a murky web, not without colour: the ever-flying banner of the metropolis, the smoke of the city's chimneys, if you prefer plain language. At a first inspection of the house, Lady Dunstane did not like it, and it was advertized to be let, and the auctioneer proclaimed it in his dialect. Her taste was delicate; she had the sensitiveness of an invalid: twice she read the stalking advertizement of the attractions of Copsley, and hearing Diana call it 'the plush of speech,' she shuddered; she decided that a place where her husband's family had lived ought not to stand forth meretriciously spangled and daubed, like a show-booth at a fair, for a bait; though the grandiloquent man of

advertizing letters assured Sir Lukin that a public agape for the big and gaudy mouthful is in no milder way to be caught; as it is apparently the case. She withdrew the trumpeting placard. Retract we likewise ‘banner of the metropolis.’ That plush of speech haunts all efforts to swell and illuminate citizen prose to a princely poetic.

Page 3141

Yet Lady Dunstane herself could name the bank of smoke, when looking North-eastward from her summerhouse, the flag of London: and she was a person of the critical mind, well able to distinguish between the simple metaphor and the superobese. A year of habitation induced her to conceal her dislike of the place in love: cat's love, she owned. Here, she confessed to Diana, she would wish to live to her end. It seemed remote, where an invigorating upper air gave new bloom to her cheeks; but she kept one secret from her friend.

Copsley was an estate of nearly twelve hundred acres, extending across the ridge of the hills to the slopes North and South. Seven counties rolled their backs under this commanding height, and it would have tasked a pigeon to fly within an hour the stretch of country visible at the Copsley windows. Sunrise to right, sunset leftward, the borders of the grounds held both flaming horizons. So much of the heavens and of earth is rarely granted to a dwelling. The drawback was the structure, which had no charm, scarce a face. 'It is written that I should live in barracks,' Lady Dunstane said. The colour of it taught white to impose a sense of gloom. Her cat's love of the familiar inside corners was never able to embrace the outer walls. Her sensitiveness, too, was racked by the presentation of so pitiably ugly a figure to the landscape. She likened it to a coarse-featured country wench, whose cleaning and decorating of her countenance makes complexion grin and ruggedness yawn. Dirty, dilapidated, hung with weeds and parasites, it would have been more tolerable. She tried the effect of various creepers, and they were as a staring paint. What it was like then, she had no heart to say.

One may, however, fall on a pleasurable resignation in accepting great indemnities, as Diana bade her believe, when the first disgust began to ebb. 'A good hundred over there would think it a Paradise for an asylum': she signified London. Her friend bore such reminders meekly. They were readers of books of all sorts, political, philosophical, economical, romantic; and they mixed the diverse readings in thought, after the fashion of the ardently youthful. Romance affected politics, transformed economy, irradiated philosophy. They discussed the knotty question, Why things were not done, the things being confessedly to do; and they cut the knot: Men, men calling themselves statesmen, declined to perform that operation, because, forsooth, other men objected to have it performed on them. And common humanity declared it to be for the common weal! If so, then it is clearly indicated as a course of action: we shut our eyes against logic and the vaunted laws of economy. They are the knot we cut; or would cut, had we the sword. Diana did it to the tune of Garryowen or Planxty Kelly. O for a despot! The cry was for a beneficent despot, naturally: a large-minded benevolent despot. In short, a despot to obey their bidding. Thoughtful young people who think through the heart soon come to this conclusion. The heart is the beneficent despot they would be. He cures those miseries; he creates the novel harmony. He sees all difficulties through his own sanguine hues. He is the musical poet of the problem, demanding merely to have it solved that he may sing: clear proof of the necessity for solving it immediately.

Page 3142

Thus far in their pursuit of methods for the government of a nation, to make it happy, Diana was leader. Her fine ardour and resonance, and more than the convincing ring of her voice, the girl's impassioned rapidity in rushing through any perceptible avenue of the labyrinth, or beating down obstacles to form one, and coming swiftly to some solution, constituted her the chief of the pair of democratic rebels in questions that clamoured for instant solution. By dint of reading solid writers, using the brains they possessed, it was revealed to them gradually that their particular impatience came perhaps of the most earnest desire to get to a comfortable termination of the inquiry: the heart aching for mankind sought a nest for itself. At this point Lady Dunstane took the lead. Diana had to be tugged to follow. She could not accept a 'perhaps' that cast dubiousness on her disinterested championship. She protested a perfect certainty of the single aim of her heart outward. But she reflected. She discovered that her friend had gone ahead of her.

The discovery was reached, and even acknowledged, before she could persuade herself to swallow the repulsive truth. O self! self! self! are we eternally masking in a domino that reveals your hideous old face when we could be most positive we had escaped you? Eternally! the desolating answer knelled. Nevertheless the poor, the starving, the overtaxed in labour, they have a right to the cry of Now! now! They have; and if a cry could conduct us to the secret of aiding, healing, feeding, elevating them, we might swell the cry. As it is, we must lay it on our wits patiently to track and find the secret; and meantime do what the individual with his poor pittance can. A miserable contribution! sighed the girl. Old Self was perceived in the sigh. She was haunted.

After all, one must live one's life. Placing her on a lower pedestal in her self-esteem, the philosophy of youth revived her; and if the abatement of her personal pride was dispiriting, she began to see an advantage in getting inward eyes.

'It's infinitely better I should know it, Emmy—I'm a reptile! Pleasure here, pleasure there, I'm always thinking of pleasure. I shall give up thinking and take to drifting. Neither of us can do more than open purses; and mine's lean. If the old Crossways had no tenant, it would be a purse all mouth. And charity is haunted, like everything we do. Only I say with my whole strength yes, I am sure, in spite of the men professing that they are practical, the rich will not move without a goad. I have and hold—you shall hunger and covet, until you are strong enough to force my hand:—that 's the speech of the wealthy. And they are Christians. In name. Well, I thank heaven I'm at war, with myself.'

'You always manage to strike out a sentence worth remembering, Tony,' said Lady Dunstane. 'At war with ourselves, means the best happiness we can have.'

Page 3143

It suited her, frail as her health was, and her wisdom striving to the spiritual of happiness. War with herself was far from happiness in the bosom of Diana. She wanted external life, action, fields for energies, to vary the struggle. It fretted and rendered her ill at ease. In her solitary rides with Sir Lukin through a long winter season, she appalled that excellent but conventionally-minded gentleman by starting, nay supporting, theories next to profane in the consideration of a land-owner. She spoke of Reform: of the Repeal of the Corn Laws as the simple beginning of the grants due to the people. She had her ideas, of course, from that fellow Redworth, an occasional visitor at Copsley; and a man might be a donkey and think what he pleased, since he had a vocabulary to back his opinions. A woman, Sir Lukin held, was by nature a mute in politics. Of the thing called a Radical woman, he could not believe that she was less than monstrous: 'with a nose,' he said; and doubtless, horse teeth, hatchet jaws, slatternly in the gown, slipshod, awful. As for a girl, an unmarried, handsome girl, admittedly beautiful, her interjections, echoing a man, were ridiculous, and not a little annoying now and them, for she could be piercingly sarcastic. Her vocabulary in irony was a quiverful. He admired her and liked her immensely; complaining only of her turn for unfeminine topics. He pardoned her on the score of the petty difference rankling between them in reference to his abandonment of his Profession, for here she was patriotically wrong-headed. Everybody knew that he had sold out in order to look after his estates of Copsley and Dunena, secondly: and in the first place, to nurse and be a companion to his wife. He had left her but four times in five months; he had spent just three weeks of that time away from her in London. No one could doubt of his having kept his pledge, although his wife occupied herself with books and notions and subjects foreign to his taste—his understanding, too, he owned. And Redworth had approved of his retirement, had a contempt for soldiering. 'Quite as great as yours for civilians, I can tell you,' Sir Lukin said, dashing out of politics to the vexatious personal subject. Her unexpressed disdain was ruffling.

'Mr. Redworth recommends work: he respects the working soldier,' said Diana.

Sir Lukin exclaimed that he had been a working soldier; he was ready to serve if his country wanted him. He directed her to anathematize Peace, instead of scorning a fellow for doing the duties next about him: and the mention of Peace fetched him at a bound back to politics. He quoted a distinguished Tory orator, to the effect, that any lengthened term of peace bred maggots in the heads of the people.

'Mr. Redworth spoke of it: he translated something from Aristophanes for a retort,' said Diana.

'Well, we're friends, eh?' Sir Lukin put forth a hand.

She looked at him surprised at the unnecessary call for a show, of friendship; she touched his hand with two tips of her fingers, remarking, 'I should think so, indeed.'

Page 3144

He deemed it prudent to hint to his wife that Diana Merion appeared to be meditating upon Mr. Redworth.

‘That is a serious misfortune, if true,’ said Lady Dunstane. She thought so for two reasons: Mr. Redworth generally disagreed in opinion with Diana, and contradicted her so flatly as to produce the impression of his not even sharing the popular admiration of her beauty; and, further, she hoped for Diana to make a splendid marriage. The nibbles threatened to be snaps and bites. There had been a proposal, in an epistle, a quaint effusion, from a gentleman avowing that he had seen her, and had not danced with her on the night of the Irish ball. He was rejected, but Diana groaned over the task of replying to the unfortunate applicant, so as not to wound him. ‘Shall I have to do this often, I wonder?’ she said.

‘Unless you capitulate,’ said her friend.

Diana’s exclamation: ‘May I be heart-free for another ten years!’ encouraged Lady Dunstane to suppose her husband quite mistaken.

In the Spring Diana, went on a first pilgrimage to her old home, The Crossways, and was kindly entertained by the uncle and aunt of a treasured nephew, Mr. Augustus Warwick. She rode with him on the Downs. A visit of a week humanized her view of the intruders. She wrote almost tenderly of her host and hostess to Lady Dunstane; they had but ’the one fault—of spoiling their nephew.’ Him she described as a ’gentlemanly official,’ a picture of him. His age was thirty-four. He seemed ’fond of her scenery.’ Then her pen swept over the Downs like a flying horse. Lady Dunstane thought no more of the gentlemanly official. He was a barrister who did not practise: in nothing the man for Diana. Letters came from the house of the Pettigrews in Kent; from London; from Halford Manor in Hertfordshire; from Lockton Grange in Lincolnshire: after which they ceased to be the thrice weekly; and reading the latest of them, Lady Dunstane imagined a flustered quill. The letter succeeding the omission contained no excuse, and it was brief. There was a strange interjection, as to the wearifulness of constantly wandering, like a leaf off the tree. Diana spoke of looking for a return of the dear winter days at Copsley. That was her station. Either she must have had some disturbing experience, or Copsley was dear for a Redworth reason, thought the anxious peruser; musing, dreaming, putting together divers shreds of correspondence and testing them with her intimate knowledge of Diana’s character, Lady Dunstane conceived that the unprotected beautiful girl had suffered a persecution, it might be an insult. She spelt over the names of the guests at the houses. Lord Wroxeter was of evil report: Captain Rampan, a Turf captain, had the like notoriety. And it is impossible in a great house for the hostess to spread her aegis to cover every dame and damsel present. She has to depend on the women being discreet, the men civilized.

Page 3145

‘How brutal men can be!’ was one of Diana’s incidental remarks, in a subsequent letter, relating simply to masculine habits. In those days the famous ancestral plea of ‘the passion for his charmer’ had not been altogether socially quashed down among the provinces, where the bottle maintained a sort of sway, and the beauty which inflamed the sons of men was held to be in coy expectation of violent effects upon their boiling blood. There were, one hears that there still are, remnants of the pristine male, who, if resisted in their suing, conclude that they are scorned, and it infuriates them: some also whose ’passion for the charmer’ is an instinct to pull down the standard of the sex, by a bully imposition of sheer physical ascendancy, whenever they see it flying with an air of gallant independence: and some who dedicate their lives to a study of the arts of the Lord Of Reptiles, until they have worked the crisis for a display of him in person. Assault or siege, they have achieved their triumphs; they have dominated a frailer system of nerves, and a young woman without father, or brother, or husband, to defend her, is cryingly a weak one, therefore inviting to such an order of heroes. Lady Dunstane was quick-witted and had a talkative husband; she knew a little of the upper social world of her time. She was heartily glad to have Diana by her side again.

Not a word of any serious experience was uttered. Only on one occasion while they conversed, something being mentioned of her tolerance, a flush of swarthy crimson shot over Diana, and she frowned, with the outcry ’Oh! I have discovered that I can be a tigress!’

Her friend pressed her hand, saying, ‘The cause a good one!’

‘Women have to fight.’

Diana said no more. There had been a bad experience of her isolated position in the world.

Lady Dunstane now indulged a partial hope that Mr. Redworth might see in this unprotected beautiful girl a person worthy of his esteem. He had his opportunities, and evidently he liked her. She appeared to take more cordially to him. She valued the sterling nature of the man. But they were a hopeless couple, they were so friendly. Both ladies noticed in him an abstractedness of look, often when conversing, as of a man in calculation; they put it down to an ambitious mind. Yet Diana said then, and said always, that it was he who had first taught her the art of observing. On the whole, the brilliant marriage seemed a fairer prospect for her; how reasonable to anticipate, Lady Dunstane often thought when admiring the advance of Diana’s beauty in queenliness, for never did woman carry her head more grandly, more thrillingly make her presence felt; and if only she had been an actress showing herself nightly on a London stage, she would before now have met the superb appreciation, melancholy to reflect upon!

Page 3146

Diana regained her happy composure at Copsley. She had, as she imagined, no ambition. The dulness of the place conveyed a charm to a nature recovering from disturbance to its clear smooth flow. Air, light, books, and her friend, these good things she had; they were all she wanted. She rode, she walked, with Sir Lukin or Mr. Redworth, for companion; or with Saturday and Sunday guests, Lord Larrian, her declared admirer, among them. 'Twenty years younger!' he said to her, shrugging, with a merry smile drawn a little at the corners to sober sourness; and she vowed to her friend that she would not have had the heart to refuse him. 'Though,' said she, 'speaking generally, I cannot tell you what a foreign animal a husband would appear in my kingdom.' Her experience had wakened a sexual aversion, of some slight kind, enough to make her feminine pride stipulate for perfect independence, that she might have the calm out of which imagination spreads wing. Imagination had become her broader life, and on such an earth, under such skies, a husband who is not the fountain of it, certainly is a foreign animal: he is a discordant note. He contracts the ethereal world, deadens radiancy. He is gross fact, a leash, a muzzle, harness, a hood; whatever is detestable to the free limbs and senses. It amused Lady Dunstane to hear Diana say, one evening when their conversation fell by hazard on her future, that the idea of a convent was more welcome to her than the most splendid marriage. 'For,' she added, 'as I am sure I shall never know anything of this love they rattle about and rave about, I shall do well to keep to my good single path; and I have a warning within me that a step out of it will be a wrong one—for me, dearest!'

She wished her view of the yoke to be considered purely personal, drawn from no examples and comparisons. The excellent Sir Lukin was passing a great deal of his time in London. His wife had not a word of blame for him; he was a respectful husband, and attentive when present; but so uncertain, owing to the sudden pressure of engagements, that Diana, bound on a second visit to The Crossways, doubted whether she would be able to quit her friend, whose condition did not allow of her being left solitary at Copsley. He came nevertheless a day before Diana's appointed departure on her round of visits. She was pleased with him, and let him see it, for the encouragement of a husband in the observance of his duties. One of the horses had fallen lame, so they went out for a walk, at Lady Dunstane's request. It was a delicious afternoon of Spring, with the full red disk of sun dropping behind the brown beech-twigs. She remembered long afterward the sweet simpleness of her feelings as she took in the scent of wild flowers along the lanes and entered the woods jaws of another monstrous and blackening experience. He fell into the sentimental vein, and a man coming from that heated London life to these glorified woods, might be excused for doing

Page 3147

so, though it sounded to her just a little ludicrous in him. She played tolerantly second to it; she quoted a snatch of poetry, and his whole face was bent to her, with the petition that she would repeat the verse. Much struck was this giant ex-dragoon. Ah! how fine! grand! He would rather hear that than any opera: it was diviner! 'Yes, the best poetry is,' she assented. 'On your lips,' he said. She laughed. 'I am not a particularly melodious reciter.' He vowed he could listen to her eternally, eternally. His face, on a screw of the neck and shoulders, was now perpetually three-quarters fronting. Ah! she was going to leave. 'Yes, and you will find my return quite early enough,' said Diana, stepping a trifle more briskly. His fist was raised on the length of the arm, as if in invocation. 'Not in the whole of London is there a woman worthy to fasten your shoe-buckles! My oath on it! I look; I can't spy one.' Such was his flattering eloquence.

She told him not to think it necessary to pay her compliments. 'And here, of all places!' They were in the heart of the woods. She found her hand seized—her waist. Even then, so impossible is it to conceive the unimaginable even when the apparition of it smites us, she expected some protesting absurdity, or that he had seen something in her path.—What did she hear? And from her friend's husband!

If stricken idiotic, he was a gentleman; the tigress she had detected in her composition did not require to be called forth; half-a-dozen words, direct, sharp as fangs and teeth, with the eyes burning over them, sufficed for the work of defence. 'The man who swore loyalty to Emma!' Her reproachful repulsion of eyes was unmistakeable, withering; as masterful as a superior force on his muscles.—What thing had he been taking her for? —She asked it within: and he of himself, in a reflective gasp. Those eyes of hers appeared as in a cloud, with the wrath above: she had: the look of a Goddess in anger. He stammered, pleaded across her flying shoulder—Oh! horrible, loathsome, pitiable to hear! . . . 'A momentary aberration . . . her beauty . . . he deserved to be shot! . . . could not help admiring . . . quite lost his head . . on his honour! never again!'

Once in the roadway, and Copsley visible, she checked her arrowy pace for breath, and almost commiserated the dejected wretch in her thankfulness to him for silence. Nothing exonerated him, but at least he had the grace not to beg secresy. That would have been an intolerable whine of a poltroon, adding to her humiliation. He abstained; he stood at her mercy without appealing.

Page 3148

She was not the woman to take poor vengeance. But, Oh! she was profoundly humiliated, shamed through and through. The question, was I guilty of any lightness—-anything to bring this on me? would not be laid. And how she pitied her friend! This house, her heart's home, was now a wreck to her: nay, worse, a hostile citadel. The burden of the task of meeting Emma with an open face, crushed her like very guilt. Yet she succeeded. After an hour in her bedchamber she managed to lock up her heart and summon the sprite of acting to her tongue and features: which ready attendant on the suffering female host performed his liveliest throughout the evening, to Emma's amusement, and to the culprit ex-dragoon's astonishment; in whom, to tell the truth of him, her sparkle and fun kindled the sense of his being less criminal than he had supposed, with a dim vision of himself as the real proven donkey for not having been a harmless dash more so. But, to be just as well as penetrating, this was only the effect of her personal charm on his nature. So it spurred him a moment, when it struck this doleful man that to have secured one kiss of those fresh and witty sparkling lips he would endure forfeits, pangs, anything save the hanging of his culprit's head before his Emma. Reflection washed him clean. Secresy is not a medical restorative, by no means a good thing for the baffled amorously-adventurous cavalier, unless the lady's character shall have been firmly established in or over his hazy wagging noddle. Reflection informed him that the honourable, generous, proud girl spared him for the sake of the house she loved. After a night of tossing, he rose right heartily repentant. He showed it in the best manner, not dramatically. On her accepting his offer to drive her down to the valley to meet the coach, a genuine illumination of pure gratitude made a better man of him, both to look at and in feeling. She did not hesitate to consent; and he had half expected a refusal. She talked on the way quite as usual, cheerfully, if not altogether so spiritedly. A flash of her matchless wit now and then reduced him to that abject state of man beside the fair person he has treated high cavalierly, which one craves permission to describe as pulp. He was utterly beaten.

The sight of Redworth on the valley road was a relief to them both. He had slept in one of the houses of the valley, and spoke of having had the intention to mount to Copsley. Sir Lukin proposed to drive him back. He glanced at Diana, still with that calculating abstract air of his; and he was rallied. He confessed to being absorbed in railways, the new lines of railways projected to thread the land and fast mapping it.

'You 'ye not embarked money in them?' said Sir Lukin.

The answer was: 'I have; all I possess.' And Redworth for a sharp instant set his eyes on Diana, indifferent to Sir Lukin's bellow of stupefaction at such gambling on the part of a prudent fellow.

Page 3149

He asked her where she was to be met, where written to, during the Summer, in case of his wishing to send her news.

She replied: ’Copsley will be the surest. I am always in communication with Lady Dunstane.’ She coloured deeply. The recollection of the change of her feeling for Copsley suffused her maiden mind.

The strange blush prompted an impulse in Redworth to speak to her at once of his venture in railways. But what would she understand of them, as connected with the mighty stake he was playing for? He delayed. The coach came at a trot of the horses, admired by Sir Lukin, round a corner. She entered it, her maid followed, the door banged, the horses trotted. She was off.

Her destiny of the Crossways tied a knot, barred a gate, and pointed to a new direction of the road on that fine spring morning, when beech-buds were near the burst, cowslips yellowed the meadow-flats, and skylarks quivered upward.

For many long years Redworth had in his memory, for a comment on procrastination and excessive scrupulousness in his calculating faculty, the blue back of a coach.

He declined the vacated place beside Sir Lukin, promising to come and spend a couple of days at Copsley in a fortnight—Saturday week. He wanted, he said, to have a talk with Lady Dunstane. Evidently he had railways on the brain, and Sir Lukin warned his wife to be guarded against the speculative mania, and advise the man, if she could.

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING THE SCRUPULOUS GENTLEMAN WHO CAME TOO LATE

On the Saturday of his appointment Redworth arrived at Copsley, with a shade deeper of the calculating look under his thick brows, habitual to him latterly. He found Lady Dunstane at her desk, pen in hand, the paper untouched; and there was an appearance of trouble about her somewhat resembling his own, as he would have observed, had he been open-minded enough to notice anything, except that she was writing a letter. He begged her to continue it; he proposed to read a book till she was at leisure.

‘I have to write, and scarcely know how,’ said she, clearing her face to make the guest at home, and taking a chair by the fire, ’I would rather chat for half an hour.’

She spoke of the weather, frosty, but tonic; bad for the last days of hunting, good for the farmer and the country, let us hope.

Redworth nodded assent. It might be surmised that he was brooding over those railways, in which he had embarked his fortune. Ah! those railways! She was not long

coming to the wailful exclamation upon them, both to express her personal sorrow at the disfigurement of our dear England, and lead to a little, modest, offering of a woman's counsel to the rash adventurer; for thus could she serviceably put aside her perplexity awhile. Those railways! When would there be peace in the land? Where one single nook of shelter and escape from them! And

Page 3150

the English, blunt as their senses are to noise and hubbub, would be revelling in hisses, shrieks, puffings and screeches, so that travelling would become an intolerable affliction. ‘I speak rather as an invalid,’ she admitted; ’I conjure up all sorts of horrors, the whistle in the night beneath one’s windows, and the smoke of trains defacing the landscape; hideous accidents too. They will be wholesale and past help. Imagine a collision! I have borne many changes with equanimity, I pretend to a certain degree of philosophy, but this mania for cutting up the land does really cause me to pity those who are to follow us. They will not see the England we have seen. It will be patched and scored, disfigured . . . a sort of barbarous Maori visage—England in a New Zealand mask. You may call it the sentimental view. In this case, I am decidedly sentimental: I love my country. I do love quiet, rural England. Well, and I love beauty, I love simplicity. All that will be destroyed by the refuse of the towns flooding the land—-barring accidents, as Lukin says. There seems nothing else to save us.’

Redworth acquiesced. ‘Nothing.’

‘And you do not regret it?’ he was asked.

’Not a bit. We have already exchanged opinions on the subject. Simplicity must go, and the townsman meet his equal in the countryman. As for beauty, I would sacrifice that to circulate gumption. A bushelful of nonsense is talked pro and con: it always is at an innovation. What we are now doing, is to take a longer and a quicker stride, that is all.’

‘And establishing a new field for the speculator.’

’Yes, and I am one, and this is the matter I wanted to discuss with you, Lady Dunstane,’ said Redworth, bending forward, the whole man devoted to the point of business.

She declared she was complimented; she felt the compliment, and trusted her advice might be useful, faintly remarking that she had a woman’s head: and ‘not less’ was implied as much as ‘not more,’ in order to give strength to her prospective opposition.

All his money, she heard, was down on the railway table. He might within a year have a tolerable fortune: and, of course, he might be ruined. He did not expect it; still he fronted the risks. ‘And now,’ said he, ’I come to you for counsel. I am not held among my acquaintances to be a marrying man, as it’s called.’

He paused. Lady Dunstane thought it an occasion to praise him for his considerateness.

‘You involve no one but yourself, you mean?’ Her eyes shed approval. ’Still the day may come . . . I say only that it may: and the wish to marry is a rosy colouring . . .

equal to a flying chariot in conducting us across difficulties and obstructions to the deed. And then one may have to regret a previous rashness.'

These practical men are sometimes obtuse: she dwelt on that vision of the future.

He listened, and resumed: 'My view of marriage is, that no man should ask a woman to be his wife unless he is well able to support her in the comforts, not to say luxuries, she is accustomed to.' His gaze had wandered to the desk; it fixed there. 'That is Miss Merion's writing,' he said.

Page 3151

‘The letter?’ said Lady Dunstane, and she stretched out her hand to press down a leaf of it. ‘Yes; it is from her.’

‘Is she quite well?’

‘I suppose she is. She does not speak of her health.’

He looked pertinaciously in the direction of the letter, and it was not rightly mannered. That letter, of all others, was covert and sacred to the friend. It contained the weightiest of secrets.

‘I have not written to her,’ said Redworth.

He was astonishing: ’To whom? To Diana? You could very well have done so, only I fancy she knows nothing, has never given a thought to railway stocks and shares; she has a loathing for speculation.’

‘And speculators too, I dare say!’

‘It is extremely probable.’ Lady Dunstane spoke with an emphasis, for the man liked Diana, and would be moved by the idea of forfeiting her esteem.

‘She might blame me if I did anything dishonourable!’

‘She certainly would.’

‘She will have no cause.’

Lady Dunstane began to look, as at a cloud charged with remote explosions: and still for the moment she was unsuspecting. But it was a flitting moment. When he went on, and very singularly droning to her ear: ’The more a man loves a woman, the more he should be positive, before asking her, that she will not have to consent to a loss of position, and I would rather lose her than fail to give her all—not be sure, as far as a man can be sure, of giving her all I think she’s worthy of’: then the cloud shot a lightning flash, and the doors of her understanding swung wide to the entry of a great wonderment. A shock of pain succeeded it. Her sympathy was roused so acutely that she slipped over the reflective rebuke she would have addressed to her silly delusion concerning his purpose in speaking of his affairs to a woman. Though he did not mention Diana by name, Diana was clearly the person. And why had he delayed to speak to her?—Because of this venture of his money to make him a fortune, for the assurance of her future comfort! Here was the best of men for the girl, not displeasing to her; a good, strong, trustworthy man, pleasant to hear and to see, only erring in being a trifle too scrupulous in love: and a fortnight back she would have imagined he had no chance; and now she knew that the chance was excellent in those days, with this revelation in Diana’s letter, which said that all chance was over.

‘The courtship of a woman,’ he droned away, ’is in my mind not fair to her until a man has to the full enough to sanction his asking her to marry him. And if he throws all he possesses on a stake . . . to win her—give her what she has a right to claim, he ought . . . . Only at present the prospect seems good . . . . He ought of course to wait. Well, the value of the stock I hold has doubled, and it increases. I am a careful watcher of the market. I have friends—brokers and railway Directors. I can rely on them.’

Page 3152

‘Pray,’ interposed Lady Dunstane, ’specify—I am rather in a mist—the exact point upon which you do me the honour to consult me.’ She ridiculed herself for having imagined that such a man would come to consult her upon a point of business.

‘It is,’ he replied, ’this: whether, as affairs now stand with me—I have an income from my office, and personal property . . . say between thirteen and fourteen hundred a year to start with—whether you think me justified in asking a lady to share my lot?’

‘Why not? But will you name the lady?’

’Then I may write at once? In your judgement. . . . Yes, the lady. I have not named her. I had no right. Besides, the general question first, in fairness to the petitioner. You might reasonably stipulate for more for a friend. She could make a match, as you have said . . .’ he muttered of ‘brilliant,’ and ‘the highest’; and his humbleness of the honest man enamoured touched Lady Dunstane. She saw him now as the man of strength that she would have selected from a thousand suitors to guide her dear friend.

She caught at a straw: ‘Tell me, it is not Diana?’

‘Diana Merion!’

As soon as he had said it he perceived pity, and he drew himself tight for the stroke. ‘She’s in love with some one?’

‘She is engaged.’

He bore it well. He was a big-chested fellow, and that excruciating twist within of the revolution of the wheels of the brain snapping their course to grind the contrary to that of the heart, was revealed in one short lift and gasp, a compression of the tremendous change he underwent.

‘Why did you not speak before?’ said Lady Dunstane. Her words were tremulous.

‘I should have had no justification!’

‘You might have won her!’ She could have wept; her sympathy and her self-condolence under disappointment at Diana’s conduct joined to swell the feminine flood.

The poor fellow’s quick breathing and blinking reminded her of cruelty in a retrospect. She generalized, to ease her spirit of regret, by hinting it without hurting: ’Women really are not puppets. They are not so excessively luxurious. It is good for young women in the early days of marriage to rough it a little.’ She found herself droning, as he had done.

He had ears for nothing but the fact.

‘Then I am too late!’

‘I have heard it to-day.’

‘She is engaged! Positively?’

Lady Dunstane glanced backward at the letter on her desk. She had to answer the strangest of letters that had ever come to her, and it was from her dear Tony, the baldest intimation of the weightiest piece of intelligence which a woman can communicate to her heart’s friend. The task of answering it was now doubled. ‘I fear so, I fancy so,’ she said, and she longed to cast eye over the letter again, to see if there might possibly be a loophole behind the lines.

‘Then I must make my mind up to it,’ said Redworth. ’I think I’ll take a walk.’

Page 3153

She smiled kindly. ‘It will be our secret.’

‘I thank you with all my heart, Lady Dunstane.’

He was not a weaver of phrases in distress. His blunt reserve was eloquent of it to her, and she liked him the better; could have thanked him, too, for leaving her promptly.

When she was alone she took in the contents of the letter at a hasty glimpse. It was of one paragraph, and fired its shot like a cannon with the muzzle at her breast:—

’*My own Emmy*,—I have been asked in marriage by Mr. Warwick, and have accepted him. Signify your approval, for I have decided that it is the wisest thing a waif can do. We are to live at The Crossways for four months of the year, so I shall have Dada in his best days and all my youngest dreams, my sunrise and morning dew, surrounding me; my old home for my new one. I write in haste, to you first, burning to hear from you. Send your blessing to yours in life and death, through all transformations,

‘*Tony*.’

That was all. Not a word of the lover about to be decorated with the title of husband. No confession of love, nor a single supplicating word to her friend, in excuse for the abrupt decision to so grave a step. Her previous description of, him, as a ‘gentlemanly official’ in his appearance, conjured him up most distastefully. True, she might have made a more lamentable choice; a silly lordling, or a hero of scandals; but if a gentlemanly official was of stabler mould, he failed to harmonize quite so well with the idea of a creature like Tony. Perhaps Mr. Redworth also failed in something. Where was the man fitly to mate her! Mr. Redworth, however, was manly and trustworthy, of the finest Saxon type in build and in character. He had great qualities, and his excess of scrupulousness was most pitiable.

She read: ‘The wisest thing a waif can do.’ It bore a sound of desperation. Avowedly Tony had accepted him without being in love. Or was she masking the passion? No: had it been a case of love, she would have written very differently to her friend.

Lady Dunstane controlled the pricking of the wound inflicted by Diana’s novel exercise in laconics where the fullest flow was due to tenderness, and despatched felicitations upon the text of the initial line: ’Wonders are always happening.’ She wrote to hide vexation beneath surprise; naturally betraying it. ’I must hope and pray that you have not been precipitate.’ Her curiosity to inspect the happiest of men, the most genuine part of her letter, was expressed coldly.

Page 3154

When she had finished the composition she perused it, and did not recognize herself in her language, though she had been so guarded to cover the wound her Tony dealt their friendship—in some degree injuring their sex. For it might now, after such an example, verily seem that women are incapable of a translucent perfect confidence: their impulses, caprices, desperations, tricks of concealment, trip a heart-whole friendship. Well, to-morrow, if not to-day, the tripping may be expected! Lady Dunstane resigned herself sadly to a lowered view of her Tony's character. This was her unconscious act of reprisal. Her brilliant beloved Tony, dazzling but in beauty and the gifted mind, stood as one essentially with the common order of women. She wished to be settled, Mr. Warwick proposed, and for the sake of living at The Crossways she accepted him—she, the lofty scorner of loveless marriages! who had said—how many times! that nothing save love excused it! She degraded their mutual high standard of womankind. Diana was in eclipse, full three parts. The bulk of the gentlemanly official she had chosen obscured her. But I have written very carefully, thought Lady Dunstane, dropping her answer into the post-bag. She had, indeed, been so care ful, that to cloak her feelings, she had written as another person. Women with otiose husbands have a task to preserve friendship.

Redworth carried his burden through the frosty air at a pace to melt icicles in Greenland. He walked unthinkingly, right ahead, to the red West, as he discovered when pausing to consult his watch. Time was left to return at the same pace and dress for dinner; he swung round and picked up remembrances of sensations he had strewn by the way. She knew these woods; he was walking in her footprints; she was engaged to be married. Yes, his principle, never to ask a woman to marry him, never to court her, without bank-book assurance of his ability to support her in cordial comfort, was right. He maintained it, and owned himself a donkey for having stuck to it. Between him and his excellent principle there was war, without the slightest division. Warned of the danger of losing her, he would have done the same again, confessing himself donkey for his pains. The principle was right, because it was due to the woman. His rigid adherence to the principle set him belabouring his donkey-ribs, as the proper due to himself. For he might have had a chance, all through two Winters. The opportunities had been numberless. Here, in this beech wood; near that thornbush; on the juniper slope; from the corner of chalk and sand in junction, to the corner of clay and chalk; all the length of the wooded ridge he had reminders of her presence and his priceless chances: and still the standard of his conduct said No, while his heart bled.

Page 3155

He felt that a chance had been. More sagacious than Lady Dunstane, from his not nursing a wound, he divined in the abruptness of Diana's resolution to accept a suitor, a sober reason, and a fitting one, for the wish that she might be settled. And had he spoken!—If he had spoken to her, she might have given her hand to him, to a dishonourable brute! A blissful brute. But a worse than donkey. Yes, his principle was right, and he lashed with it, and prodded with it, drove himself out into the sour wilds where bachelordom crops noxious weeds without a hallowing luminary, and clung to it, bruised and bleeding though he was.

The gentleness of Lady Dunstane soothed him during the term of a visit that was rather like purgatory sweetened by angelical tears. He was glad to go, wretched in having gone. She diverted the incessant conflict between his insubordinate self and his castigating, but avowedly sovereign, principle. Away from her, he was the victim of a flagellation so dire that it almost drove him to revolt against the lord he served, and somehow the many memories at Copsley kept him away. Sir Lukin, when speaking of Diana's 'engagement to that fellow Warwick,' exalted her with an extraordinary enthusiasm, exceedingly hard for the silly beast who had lost her to bear. For the present the place dearest to Redworth of all places on earth was unendurable.

Meanwhile the value of railway investments rose in the market, fast as asparagus-heads for cutting: a circumstance that added stings to reflection. Had he been only a little bolder, a little less the fanatical devotee of his rule of masculine honour, less the slave to the letter of success . . . . But why reflect at all? Here was a goodly income approaching, perhaps a seat in Parliament; a station for the airing of his opinions—and a social status for the wife now denied to him. The wife was denied to him; he could conceive of no other. The tyrant-ridden, reticent, tenacious creature had thoroughly wedded her in mind; her view of things had a throne beside his own, even in their differences. He perceived, agreeing or disagreeing, the motions of her brain, as he did with none other of women; and this it is which stamps character on her, divides her from them, upraises and enspheres. He declined to live with any other of the sex.

Before he could hear of the sort of man Mr. Warwick was—a perpetual object of his quest—the bridal bells had rung, and Diana Antonia Merion lost her maiden name. She became the Mrs. Warwick of our footballing world.

Why she married, she never told. Possibly, in amazement at herself subsequently, she forgot the specific reason. That which weighs heavily in youth, and commits us to desperate action, will be a trifle under older eyes, to blunter senses, a more enlightened understanding. Her friend Emma probed for the reason vainly. It was partly revealed to Redworth, by guess-work and a putting together of pieces, yet quite luminously, as it were by touch of tentacle-feelers—one evening that he passed with Sir Lukin Dunstane, when the lachrymose ex-dragoon and son of Idlesse, had rather more than dined.

Page 3156

CHAPTER VI

THE COUPLE

Six months a married woman, Diana came to Copsley to introduce her husband. They had run over Italy: 'the Italian Peninsula,' she quoted him in a letter to Lady Dunstane: and were furnishing their London house. Her first letters from Italy appeared to have a little bloom of sentiment. Augustus was mentioned as liking this and that in the land of beauty. He patronized Art, and it was a pleasure to hear him speak upon pictures and sculptures; he knew a great deal about them. 'He is an authority.' Her humour soon began to play round the fortunate man, who did not seem, to the reader's mind, to bear so well a sentimental clothing. His pride was in being very English on the Continent, and Diana's instances of his lofty appreciations of the garden of Art and Nature, and statuesque walk through it, would have been more amusing if her friend could have harmonized her idea of the couple. A description of 'a bit of a wrangle between us' at Lucca, where an Italian post-master on a journey of inspection, claimed a share of their carriage and audaciously attempted entry, was laughable, but jarred. Would she some day lose her relish for ridicule, and see him at a distance? He was generous, Diana, said she saw fine qualities in him. It might be that he was lavish on his bridal tour. She said he was unselfish, kind, affable with his equals; he was cordial to the acquaintances he met. Perhaps his worst fault was an affected superciliousness before the foreigner, not uncommon in those days. 'You are to know, dear Emmy, that we English are the aristocracy of Europeans.' Lady Dunstane inclined to think we were; nevertheless, in the mouth of a 'gentlemanly official' the frigid arrogance added a stroke of caricature to his deportment. On the other hand, the reports of him gleaned by Sir Lukin sounded favourable. He was not taken to be preternaturally stiff, nor bright, but a goodish sort of fellow; good horseman, good shot, good character. In short, the average Englishman, excelling as a cavalier, a slayer, and an orderly subject. That was a somewhat elevated standard to the patriotic Emma. Only she would never have stipulated for an average to espouse Diana. Would he understand her, and value the best in her? Another and unanswered question was, how could she have condescended to wed with an average? There was transparently some secret not confided to her friend.

He appeared. Lady Dunstane's first impression of him recurred on his departure. Her unanswered question drummed at her ears, though she remembered that Tony's art in leading him out had moderated her rigidly judicial summary of the union during a greater part of the visit. But his requiring to be led out, was against him. Considering the subjects, his talk was passable. The subjects treated of politics, pictures, Continental travel, our manufactures, our wealth and the reasons for it—excellent reasons well-weighed. He was handsome, as men go; rather tall, not too stout, precise in the modern fashion of his dress, and the pair of whiskers encasing a colourless depression up to a long, thin, straight nose, and closed lips indicating an aperture. The contraction of his mouth expressed an intelligence in the attitude of the firmly negative.

Page 3157

The lips opened to smile, the teeth were faultless; an effect was produced, if a cold one —the colder for the unparticipating northern eyes; eyes of that half cloud and blue, which make a kind of hueless grey, and are chiefly striking in an authoritative stage. Without contradicting, for he was exactly polite, his look signified a person conscious of being born to command: in fine, an aristocrat among the 'aristocracy of Europeans.' His differences of opinion were prefaced by a 'Pardon me,' and pausing smile of the teeth; then a succinctly worded sentence or two, a perfect settlement of the dispute. He disliked argumentation. He said so, and Diana remarked it of him, speaking as, a wife who merely noted a characteristic. Inside his boundary, he had neat phrases, opinions in packets. Beyond it, apparently the world was void of any particular interest. Sir Lukin, whose boundary would have shown a narrower limitation had it been defined, stood no chance with him. Tory versus Whig, he tried a wrestle, and was thrown. They agreed on the topic of Wine. Mr. Warwick had a fine taste in wine. Their after-dinner sittings were devoted to this and the alliterative cognate theme, equally dear to the gallant ex-dragoon, from which it resulted that Lady Dunstane received satisfactory information in a man's judgement of him. 'Warwick is a clever fellow, and a thorough man of the world, I can tell you, Emmy.' Sir Lukin further observed that he was a gentlemanly fellow. 'A gentlemanly official!' Diana's primary dash of portraiture stuck to him, so true it was! As for her, she seemed to have forgotten it. Not only did she strive to show him to advantage by leading him out; she played second to him; subserviently, fondly; she quite submerged herself, content to be dull if he might shine; and her talk of her husband in her friend's blue-chamber boudoir of the golden stars, where they had discussed the world and taken counsel in her maiden days, implied admiration of his merits. He rode superbly: he knew Law: he was prepared for any position: he could speak really eloquently; she had heard him at a local meeting. And he loved the old Crossways almost as much as she did. 'He has promised me he will never ask me to sell it,' she said, with a simpleness that could hardly have been acted.

When she was gone, Lady Dunstane thought she had worn a mask, in the natural manner of women trying to make the best of their choice; and she excused her poor Tony for the artful presentation of him at her own cost. But she could not excuse her for having married the man. Her first and her final impression likened him to a house locked up and empty: a London house conventionally furnished and decorated by the upholsterer, and empty of inhabitants. How a brilliant and beautiful girl could have committed this rashness, was the perplexing riddle: the knottier because the man was idle: and Diana had ambition; she despised and dreaded idleness in men. Empty of inhabitants even to the ghost! Both human and spiritual were wanting. The mind contemplating him became reflectively stagnant.

Page 3158

I must not be unjust! Lady Dunstane hastened to exclaim, at a whisper that he had at least proved his appreciation of Tony; whom he preferred to call Diana, as she gladly remembered: and the two were bound together for a moment warmly by her recollection of her beloved Tony's touching little petition: 'You will invite us again?' and then there had flashed in Tony's dear dark eyes the look of their old love drowning. They were not to be thought of separately. She admitted that the introduction to a woman of her friend's husband is crucially trying to him: he may well show worse than he is. Yet his appreciation of Tony in espousing her, was rather marred by Sir Lukin's report of him as a desperate admirer of beautiful woman. It might be for her beauty only, not for her spiritual qualities! At present he did not seem aware of their existence. But, to be entirely just, she had hardly exhibited them or a sign of them during the first interview: and sitting with his hostess alone, he had seized the occasion to say, that he was the happiest of men. He said it with the nearest approach to fervour she had noticed. Perhaps the very fact of his not producing a highly favourable impression, should be set to plead on his behalf. Such as he was, he was himself, no simulator. She longed for Mr. Redworth's report of him.

Her compassion for Redworth's feelings when beholding the woman he loved another man's wife, did not soften the urgency of her injunction that he should go speedily, and see as much of them as he could. 'Because,' she gave her reason, 'I wish Diana to know she has not lost a single friend through her marriage, and is only one the richer.'

Redworth buckled himself to the task. He belonged to the class of his countrymen who have a dungeon-vault for feelings that should not be suffered to cry abroad, and into this oubliette he cast them, letting them feed as they might, or perish. It was his heart down below, and in no voluntary musings did he listen to it, to sustain the thing. Grimly lord of himself, he stood emotionless before the world. Some worthy fellows resemble him, and they are called deep-hearted. He was dungeon-deep. The prisoner underneath might clamour and leap; none heard him or knew of him; nor did he ever view the day. Diana's frank: 'Ah, Mr. Redworth, how glad I am to see you!' was met by the calmest formalism of the wish for her happiness. He became a guest at her London house, and his report of the domesticity there, and notably of the lord of the house, pleased Lady Dunstane more than her husband's. He saw the kind of man accurately, as far as men are to be seen on the surface; and she could say assentingly, without anxiety: 'Yes, yes,' to his remarks upon Mr. Warwick, indicative of a man of capable head in worldly affairs, commonplace beside his wife. The noble gentleman for Diana was yet unborn, they tacitly agreed. Meantime one must not put a mortal husband to the fiery ordeal of his wife's deserts,

Page 3159

they agreed likewise. ’You may be sure she is a constant friend,’ Lady Dunstane said for his comfort; and she reminded herself subsequently of a shade of disappointment at his imperturbable rejoinder: ‘I could calculate on it.’ For though not at all desiring to witness the sentimental fit, she wished to see that he held an image of Diana:—surely a woman to kindle poets and heroes, the princes of the race; and it was a curious perversity that the two men she had moved were merely excellent, emotionless, ordinary men, with heads for business. Elsewhere, out of England, Diana would have been a woman for a place in song, exalted to the skies. Here she had the destiny to inflame Mr. Redworth and Mr. Warwick, two railway Directors, bent upon scoring the country to the likeness of a child’s lines of hop-scotch in a gravel-yard.

As with all invalids, the pleasure of living backward was haunted by the tortures it evoked, and two years later she recalled this outcry against the Fates. She would then have prayed for Diana to inflame none but such men as those two. The original error was; of course, that rash and most inexplicable marriage, a step never alluded to by the driven victim of it. Lady Dunstane heard rumours of dissensions. Diana did not mention them. She spoke of her husband as unlucky in railway ventures, and of a household necessity for money, nothing further. One day she wrote of a Government appointment her husband had received, ending the letter: ’So there is the end of our troubles.’ Her friend rejoiced, and afterward looking back at her satisfaction, saw the dire beginning of them.

Lord Dannisburgh’s name, as one of the admirers of Mrs. Warwick, was dropped once or twice by Sir Lukin. He had dined with the Warwicks, and met the eminent member of the Cabinet at their table. There is no harm in admiration, especially on the part of one of a crowd observing a star. No harm can be imputed when the husband of a beautiful woman accepts an appointment from the potent Minister admiring her. So Lady Dunstane thought, for she was sure of Diana to her inmost soul. But she soon perceived in Sir Lukin that the old Dog-world was preparing to yelp on a scent. He of his nature belonged to the hunting pack, and with a cordial feeling for the quarry, he was quite with his world in expecting to see her run, and readiness to join the chase. No great scandal had occurred for several months. The world was in want of it; and he, too, with a very cordial feeling for the quarry, piously hoping she would escape, already had his nose to ground, collecting testimony in the track of her. He said little to his wife, but his world was getting so noisy that he could not help half pursing his lips, as with the soft whistle of an innuendo at the heels of it. Redworth was in America, engaged in carving up that hemisphere. She had no source of information but her husband’s chance gossip; and London was death to her; and Diana, writing faithfully twice

Page 3160

a week, kept silence as to Lord Dannisburgh, except in naming him among her guests. She wrote this, which might have a secret personal signification: 'We women are the verbs passive of the alliance; we have to learn, and if we take to activity, with the best intentions, we conjugate a frightful disturbance. We are to run on lines, like the steam-trains, or we come to no station, dash to fragments. I have the misfortune to know I was born an active. I take my chance.'

Once she coupled the names of Lord Larrian and Lord Dannisburgh, remarking that she had a fatal attraction for antiques.

The death of her husband's uncle and illness of his aunt withdrew her to The Crossways, where she remained nursing for several months, reading diligently, as her letters showed, and watching the approaches of the destroyer. She wrote like her former self, subdued by meditation in the presence of that inevitable. The world ceased barking. Lady Dunstane could suppose Mr. Warwick to have now a reconciling experience of his wife's noble qualities. He probably did value them more. He spoke of her to Sir Lukin in London with commendation. 'She is an attentive nurse.' He inherited a considerable increase of income when he and his wife were the sole tenants of The Crossways, but disliking the house, for reasons hard to explain by a man previously professing to share her attachment to it, he wished to sell or let the place, and his wife would do neither. She proposed to continue living in their small London house rather than be cut off from The Crossways, which, he said, was ludicrous: people should live up to their position; and he sneered at the place, and slightly wounded her, for she was open to a wound when the cold fire of a renewed attempt at warmth between them was crackling and showing bits of flame, after she had given proof of her power to serve. Service to himself and his relatives affected him. He deferred to her craze for The Crossways, and they lived in a larger London house, 'up to their position,' which means ever a trifle beyond it, and gave choice dinner-parties to the most eminent. His jealousy slumbered. Having ideas of a seat in Parliament at this period, and preferment superior to the post he held, Mr. Warwick deemed it sagacious to court the potent patron Lord Dannisburgh could be; and his wife had his interests at heart, the fork-tongued world said. The cry revived. Stories of Lord D. and Mrs. W. whipped the hot pursuit. The moral repute of the great Whig lord and the beauty of the lady composed inflammable material.

'Are you altogether cautious?' Lady Dunstane wrote to Diana; and her friend sent a copious reply: 'You have the fullest right to ask your Tony anything, and I will answer as at the Judgement bar. You allude to Lord Dannisburgh. He is near what Dada's age would have been, and is, I think I can affirm, next to my dead father and my Emmy, my dearest friend. I love him. I could say

Page 3161

it in the streets without shame; and you do not imagine me shameless. Whatever his character in his younger days, he can be honestly a woman's friend, believe me. I see straight to his heart; he has no disguise; and unless I am to suppose that marriage is the end of me, I must keep him among my treasures. I see him almost daily; it is not possible to think I can be deceived; and as long as he does me the honour to esteem my poor portion of brains by coming to me for what he is good enough to call my counsel, I shall let the world wag its tongue. Between ourselves, I trust to be doing some good. I know I am of use in various ways. No doubt there is a danger of a woman's head being turned, when she reflects that a powerful Minister governing a kingdom has not considered her too insignificant to advise him; and I am sensible of it. I am, I assure you, dearest, on my guard against it. That would not attach me to him, as his homely friendliness does. He is the most amiable, cheerful, benignant of men; he has no feeling of an enemy, though naturally his enemies are numerous and venomous. He is full of observation and humour. How he would amuse you! In many respects accord with you. And I should not have a spark of jealousy. Some day I shall beg permission to bring him to Copsley. At present, during the Session, he is too busy, as you know. Me—his "crystal spring of wisdom"—he can favour with no more than an hour in the afternoon, or a few minutes at night. Or I get a pencilled note from the benches of the House, with an anecdote, or news of a Division. I am sure to be enlivened.

'So I have written to you fully, simply, frankly. Have perfect faith in your Tony, who would, she vows to heaven; die rather than disturb it and her heart's beloved.'

The letter terminated with one of Lord Dannisburgh's anecdotes, exciting to merriment in the season of its freshness;—and a postscript of information: 'Augustus expects a mission—about a month; uncertain whether I accompany him.'

Mr. Warwick departed on his mission. Diana remained in London. Lady Dunstane wrote entreating her to pass the month—her favourite time of the violet yielding to the cowslip—at Copsley. The invitation could not be accepted, but the next day Diana sent word that she had a surprise for the following Sunday, and would bring a friend to lunch, if Sir Lukin would meet them at the corner of the road in the valley leading up to the heights, at a stated hour.

Lady Dunstane gave the listless baronet his directions, observing: 'It's odd, she never will come alone since her marriage.'

'Queer,' said he of the serenest absence of conscience; and that there must be something not, entirely right going on, he strongly inclined to think.

CHAPTER VII

THE CRISIS

Page 3162

It was a confirmed suspicion when he beheld Lord Dannisburgh on the box of a four-in-hand, and the peerless Diana beside him, cockaded lackeys in plain livery and the lady's maid to the rear. But Lord Dannisburgh's visit was a compliment, and the freak of his driving down under the beams of Aurora on a sober Sunday morning capital fun; so with a gaiety that was kept alive for the invalid Emma to partake of it, they rattled away to the heights, and climbed them, and Diana rushed to the arms of her friend, whispering and cooing for pardon if she startled her, guilty of a little whiff of blarney:—-Lord Dannisburgh wanted so much to be introduced to her, and she so much wanted her to know him, and she hoped to be graciously excused for thus bringing them together, 'that she might be chorus to them!' Chorus was a pretty fiction on the part of the thrilling and topping voice. She was the very radiant Diana of her earliest opening day, both in look and speech, a queenly comrade, and a spirit leaping and shining like a mountain water. She did not seduce, she ravished. The judgement was taken captive and flowed with her. As to the prank of the visit, Emma heartily enjoyed it and hugged it for a holiday of her own, and doating on the beautiful, darkeyed, fresh creature, who bore the name of the divine Huntress, she thought her a true Dian in stature, step, and attributes, the genius of laughter superadded. None else on earth so sweetly laughed, none so spontaneously, victoriously provoked the healthful openness. Her delicious chatter, and her museful sparkle in listening, equally quickened every sense of life. Adorable as she was to her friend Emma at all times, she that day struck a new fountain in memory. And it was pleasant to see the great lord's admiration of this wonder. One could firmly believe in their friendship, and his winning ideas from the abounding bubbling well. A recurrent smile beamed on his face when hearing and observing her. Certain dishes provided at the table were Diana's favourites, and he relished them, asking for a second help, and remarking that her taste was good in that as in all things. They lunched, eating like boys. They walked over the grounds of Copsley, and into the lanes and across the meadows of the cowslip, rattling, chatting, enlivening the frosty air, happy as children biting to the juices of ripe apples off the tree. But Tony was the tree, the dispenser of the rosy gifts. She had a moment of reflection, only a moment, and Emma felt the pause as though a cloud had shadowed them and a spirit had been shut away. Both spoke of their happiness at the kiss of parting. That melancholy note at the top of the wave to human hearts conscious of its enforced decline was repeated by them, and Diana's eyelids blinked to dismiss a tear.

'You have no troubles?' Emma said.

'Only the pain of the good-bye to my beloved,' said Diana. 'I have never been happier —never shall be! Now you know him you think with me? I knew you would. You have seen him as he always is—except when he is armed for battle. He is the kindest of souls. And soul I say. He is the one man among men who gives me notions of a soul in men.'

Page 3163

The eulogy was exalted. Lady Dunstane made a little mouth for Oh, in correction of the transcendental touch, though she remembered their foregone conversations upon men —strange beings that they are!—and understood Diana's meaning.

'Really! really! honour!' Diana emphasized her extravagant praise, to print it fast. 'Hear him speak of Ireland.'

'Would he not speak of Ireland in a tone to catch the Irishwoman?'

'He is past thoughts of catching, dearest. At that age men are pools of fish, or what you will: they are not anglers. Next year, if you invite us, we will come again.'

'But you will come to stay in the Winter?'

'Certainly. But I am speaking of one of my holidays.'

They kissed fervently. The lady mounted; the grey and portly lord followed her; Sir Lukin flourished his whip, and Emma was left to brood over her friend's last words: 'One of my holidays.' Not a hint to the detriment of her husband had passed. The stray beam balefully illuminating her marriage slipped from her involuntarily. Sir Lukin was troublesome with his ejaculations that evening, and kept speculating on the time of the arrival of the four-in-hand in London; upon which he thought a great deal depended. They had driven out of town early, and if they drove back late they would not be seen, as all the cacklers were sure then to be dressing for dinner, and he would not pass the Clubs. 'I couldn't suggest it,' he said. 'But Dannisburgh's an old hand. But they say he snaps his fingers at tattle, and laughs. Well, it doesn't matter for him, perhaps, but a game of two . . . . Oh! it'll be all right. They can't reach London before dusk. And the cat's away.'

'It's more than ever incomprehensible to me how she could have married that man,' said his wife.

'I've long since given it up,' said he.

Diana wrote her thanks for the delightful welcome, telling of her drive home to smoke and solitude, with a new host of romantic sensations to keep her company. She wrote thrice in the week, and the same addition of one to the ordinary number next week. Then for three weeks not a line. Sir Lukin brought news from London that Warwick had returned, nothing to explain the silence. A letter addressed to The Crossways was likewise unnoticed. The supposition that they must be visiting on a round, appeared rational; but many weeks elapsed, until Sir Lukin received a printed sheet in the superscription of a former military comrade, who had marked a paragraph. It was one of those journals, now barely credible, dedicated to the putrid of the upper circle, wherein initials raised sewer-lamps, and Asmodeus lifted a roof, leering hideously.

Thousands detested it, and fattened their crops on it. Domesticated beasts of superior habits to the common will indulge themselves with a luxurious roll in carrion, for a revival of their original instincts. Society was largely a purchaser.

Page 3164

The ghastly thing was dreaded as a scourge, hailed as a refreshment, nourished as a parasite. It professed undaunted honesty, and operated in the fashion of the worms bred of decay. Success was its boasted justification. The animal world, when not rigorously watched, will always crown with success the machine supplying its appetites. The old dog-world took signal from it. The one-legged devil-god waved his wooden hoof, and the creatures in view, the hunt was uproarious. Why should we seem better than we are? down with hypocrisy, cried the censor morum, spicing the lamentable derelictions of this and that great person, male and female. The plea of corruption of blood in the world, to excuse the public chafing of a grievous itch, is not less old than sin; and it offers a merry day of frisky truant running to the animal made unashamed by another and another stripped, branded, and stretched flat. Sir Lukin read of Mr. and Mrs. W. and a distinguished Peer of the realm. The paragraph was brief; it had a flavour. Promise of more to come, pricked curiosity. He read it enraged, feeling for his wife; and again indignant, feeling for Diana. His third reading found him out: he felt for both, but as a member of the whispering world, much behind the scenes, he had a longing for the promised insinuations, just to know what they could say, or dared say. The paper was not shown to Lady Dunstane. A run to London put him in the tide of the broken dam of gossip. The names were openly spoken and swept from mouth to mouth of the scandalmongers, gathering matter as they flew. He knocked at Diana's door, where he was informed that the mistress of the house was absent. More than official gravity accompanied the announcement. Her address was unknown. Sir Lukin thought it now time to tell his wife. He began with a hesitating circumlocution, in order to prepare her mind for bad news. She divined immediately that it concerned Diana, and forcing him to speak to the point, she had the story jerked out to her in a sentence. It stopped her heart.

The chill of death was tasted in that wavering ascent from oblivion to recollection. Why had not Diana come to her, she asked herself, and asked her husband; who, as usual, was absolutely unable to say. Under compulsory squeezing, he would have answered, that she did not come because she could not fib so easily to her bosom friend: and this he thought, notwithstanding his personal experience of Diana's generosity. But he had other personal experiences of her sex, and her sex plucked at the bright star and drowned it.

The happy day of Lord Dannisburgh's visit settled in Emma's belief as the cause of Mr. Warwick's unpardonable suspicions and cruelty. Arguing from her own sensations of a day that had been like the return of sweet health to her frame, she could see nothing but the loveliest freakish innocence in Diana's conduct, and she recalled her looks, her words, every fleeting gesture, even to the ingenuousness of the

Page 3165

noble statesman's admiration of her, for the confusion of her unmanly and unworthy husband. And Emma was nevertheless a thoughtful person; only her heart was at the head of her thoughts, and led the file, whose reasoning was accurate on erratic tracks. All night her heart went at fever pace. She brought the repentant husband to his knees, and then doubted, strongly doubted, whether she would, whether in consideration for her friend she could, intercede with Diana to forgive him. In the morning she slept heavily. Sir Lukin had gone to London early for further tidings. She awoke about midday, and found a letter on her pillow. It was Diana's. Then while her fingers eagerly tore it open, her heart, the champion rider over-night, sank. It needed support of facts, and feared them: not in distrust of that dear persecuted soul, but because the very bravest of hearts is of its nature a shivering defender, sensitive in the presence of any hostile array, much craving for material support, until the mind and spirit displace it, depute it to second them instead of leading.

She read by a dull November fog-light a mixture of the dreadful and the comforting, and dwelt upon the latter in abandonment, hugged it, though conscious of evil and the little that there was to veritably console.

The close of the letter struck the blow. After bluntly stating that Mr. Warwick had served her with a process, and that he had no case without suborning witnesses, Diana said: 'But I leave the case, and him, to the world. Ireland, or else America, it is a guiltless kind of suicide to bury myself abroad. He has my letters. They are such as I can own to you; and ask you to kiss me—and kiss me when you have heard all the evidence, all that I can add to it, kiss me. You know me too well to think I would ask you to kiss criminal lips. But I cannot face the world. In the dock, yes. Not where I am expected to smile and sparkle, on pain of incurring suspicion if I show a sign of oppression. I cannot do that. I see myself wearing a false grin—your Tony! No, I do well to go. This is my resolution; and in consequence,—my beloved! my only truly loved on earth! I do not come to you, to grieve you, as I surely should. Nor would it soothe me, dearest. This will be to you the best of reasons. It could not soothe me to see myself giving pain to Emma. I am like a pestilence, and let me swing away to the desert, for there I do no harm. I know I am right. I have questioned myself—it is not cowardice. I do not quail. I abhor the part of actress. I should do it well—too well; destroy my soul in the performance. Is a good name before such a world as this worth that sacrifice? A convent and self-quenching;—cloisters would seem to me like holy dew. But that would be sleep, and I feel the powers of life. Never have I felt them so mightily. If it were not for being called on to act and mew, I would stay, fight, meet a bayonet-hedge of charges and rebut them. I have my natural weapons and my cause. It must be confessed that I have also more knowledge of men and the secret contempt—it must be—the best of them entertain for us. Oh! and we confirm it if we trust them. But they have been at a wicked school.

Page 3166

’I will write. From whatever place, you shall have letters, and constant. I write no more now. In my present mood I find no alternative between rageing and drivelling. I am henceforth dead to the world. Never dead to Emma till my breath is gone—poor flame! I blow at a bed-room candle, by which I write in a brown fog, and behold what I am—-though not even serving to write such a tangled scrawl as this. I am of no mortal service. In two days I shall be out of England. Within a week you shall hear where. I long for your heart on mine, your dear eyes. You have faith in me, and I fly from you!—I must be mad. Yet I feel calmly reasonable. I know that this is the thing to do. Some years hence a grey woman may return, to hear of a butterfly Diana, that had her day and disappeared. Better than a mewing and courtseying simulacrum of the woman—I drivel again. Adieu. I suppose I am not liable to capture and imprisonment until the day when my name is cited to appear. I have left London. This letter and I quit the scene by different routes—I would they were one. My beloved! I have an ache—I think I am wronging you. I am not mistress of myself, and do as something within me, wiser, than I, dictates.—You will write kindly. Write your whole heart. It is not compassion I want, I want you. I can bear stripes from you. Let me hear Emma’s voice—the true voice. This running away merits your reproaches. It will look like—. I have more to confess: the tigress in me wishes it were! I should then have a reckless passion to fold me about, and the glory infernal, if you name it so, and so it would be—of suffering for and with some one else. As it is, I am utterly solitary, sustained neither from above nor below, except within myself, and that is all fire and smoke, like their new engines.—I kiss this miserable sheet of paper. Yes, I judge that I have run off a line—and what a line! which hardly shows a trace for breathing things to follow until they feel the transgression in wreck. How immensely nature seems to prefer men to women!—But this paper is happier than the writer.

‘Your *Tony*.’

That was the end. Emma kissed it in tears. They had often talked of the possibility of a classic friendship between women, the alliance of a mutual devotedness men choose to doubt of. She caught herself accusing Tony of the lapse from friendship. Hither should the true friend have flown unerringly.

The blunt ending of the letter likewise dealt a wound. She reperused it, perused and meditated. The flight of Mrs. Warwick! She heard that cry-fatal! But she had no means of putting a hand on her. ‘Your Tony.’ The coldness might be set down to exhaustion: it might, yet her not coming to her friend for counsel and love was a positive weight in the indifferent scale. She read the letter backwards, and by snatches here and there; many perusals and hours passed before the scattered creature exhibited in its pages came to her out of

Page 3167

the flying threads of the web as her living Tony, whom she loved and prized and was ready to defend gainst the world. By that time the fog had lifted; she saw the sky on the borders of milky cloudfolds. Her invalid's chill sensitiveness conceived a sympathy in the baring heavens, and lying on her sofa in the drawing-room she gained strength of meditative vision, weak though she was to help, through ceasing to brood on her wound and herself. She cast herself into her dear Tony's feelings; and thus it came, that she imagined Tony would visit The Crossways, where she kept souvenirs of her father, his cane, and his writing-desk, and a precious miniature of him hanging above it, before leaving England forever. The fancy sprang to certainty; every speculation confirmed it.

Had Sir Lukin been at home she would have despatched him to The Crossways at once. The West wind blew, and gave her a view of the Downs beyond the Weald from her southern window. She thought it even possible to drive there and reach the place, on the chance of her vivid suggestion, some time after nightfall; but a walk across the room to try her forces was too convincing of her inability. She walked with an ebony silver-mounted stick, a present from Mr. Redworth. She was leaning on it when the card of Thomas Redworth was handed to her.

CHAPTER VIII

In which is exhibited how A *practical man and* A *divining woman learn to respect one another*

'You see, you are my crutch,' Lady Dunstane said to him,—raising the stick in reminder of the present.

He offered his arm and hurriedly informed her, to dispose of dull personal matter, that he had just landed. She looked at the clock. 'Lukin is in town. You know the song: "Alas, I scarce can go or creep While Lukin is away." I do not doubt you have succeeded in your business over there. Ah! Now I suppose you have confidence in your success. I should have predicted it, had you come to me.' She stood, either musing or in weakness, and said abruptly: 'Will you object to lunching at one o'clock?'

'The sooner the better,' said Redworth. She had sighed: her voice betrayed some agitation, strange in so serenely-minded a person.

His partial acquaintance with the Herculean Sir Lukin's reputation in town inspired a fear of his being about to receive admission to the distressful confidences of the wife, and he asked if Mrs. Warwick was well. The answer sounded ominous, with its accompaniment of evident pain: 'I think her health is good.'

Had they quarrelled? He said he had not heard a word of Mrs. Warwick for several months.

Page 3168

‘I—heard from her this morning,’ said Lady Dunstane, and motioned him to a chair beside the sofa, where she half reclined, closing her eyes. The sight of tears on the eyelashes frightened him. She roused herself to look at the clock. ‘Providence or accident, you are here,’ she said. ’I could not have prayed for the coming of a truer’ man. Mrs. Warwick is in great danger . . . . You know our love. She is the best of me, heart and soul. Her husband has chosen to act on vile suspicions—baseless, I could hold my hand in the fire and swear. She has enemies, or the jealous fury is on the man—I know little of him. He has commenced an action against her. He will rue it. But she . . . you understand this of women at least;—they are not cowards in all things!—but the horror of facing a public scandal: my poor girl writes of the hatefulness of having to act the complacent—put on her accustomed self! She would have to go about, a mark for the talkers, and behave as if nothing were in the air-full of darts! Oh, that general whisper!—it makes a coup de massue—a gale to sink the bravest vessel: and a woman must preserve her smoothest front; chat, smile—or else!—Well, she shrinks from it. I should too. She is leaving the country.’

‘Wrong!’ cried Redworth.

’Wrong indeed. She writes, that in two days she will be out of it. Judge her as I do, though you are a man, I pray. You have seen the hunted hare. It is our education—we have something of the hare in us when the hounds are full cry. Our bravest, our best, have an impulse to run. “By this, poor Wat far off upon a hill.” Shakespeare would have the divine comprehension. I have thought all round it and come back to him. She is one of Shakespeare’s women: another character, but one of his own:—another Hermione! I dream of him—seeing her with that eye of steady flame. The bravest and best of us at bay in the world need an eye like his, to read deep and not be baffled by inconsistencies.’

Insensibly Redworth blinked. His consciousness of an exalted compassion for the lady was heated by these flights of advocacy to feel that he was almost seated beside the sovereign poet thus eulogized, and he was of a modest nature.

‘But you are practical,’ pursued Lady Dunstane, observing signs that she took for impatience. ’You are thinking of what can be done. If Lukin were here I would send him to The Crossways without a moment’s delay, on the chance, the mere chance:—it shines to me! If I were only a little stronger! I fear I might break down, and it would be unfair to my husband. He has trouble enough with my premature infirmities already. I am certain she will go to The Crossways. Tony is one of the women who burn to give last kisses to things they love. And she has her little treasures hoarded there. She was born there. Her father died there. She is three parts Irish—superstitious in affection. I know her so well. At this moment I see her there. If not, she has grown unlike herself.’

Page 3169

‘Have you a stout horse in the stables?’ Redworth asked.

‘You remember the mare Bertha; you have ridden her.’

‘The mare would do, and better than a dozen horses.’ He consulted his watch. ’Let me mount Bertha, I engage to deliver a letter at The Crossways to-night.’

Lady Dunstane half inclined to act hesitation in accepting the aid she sought, but said: ‘Will you find your way?’

He spoke of three hours of daylight and a moon to rise. ’She has often pointed out to me from your ridges where The Crossways lies, about three miles from the Downs, near a village named Storling, on the road to Brasted.

The house has a small plantation of firs behind it, and a bit of river—rare for Sussex—to the right. An old straggling red brick house at Crossways, a stone’s throw from a fingerpost on a square of green: roads to Brasted, London, Wickford, Riddlehurst. I shall find it. Write what you have to say, my lady, and confide it to me. She shall have it to-night, if she’s where you suppose. I ’ll go, with your permission, and take a look at the mare. Sussex roads are heavy in this damp weather, and the frost coming on won’t improve them for a tired beast. We haven’t our rails laid down there yet.’

‘You make me admit some virtues in the practical,’ said Lady Dunstane; and had the poor fellow vollied forth a tale of the everlastingness of his passion for Diana, it would have touched her far less than his exact memory of Diana’s description of her loved birthplace.

She wrote:

’I trust my messenger to tell you how I hang on you. I see my ship making for the rocks. You break your Emma’s heart. It will be the second wrong step. I shall not survive it. The threat has made me incapable of rushing to you, as I might have had strength to do yesterday. I am shattered, and I wait panting for Mr. Redworth’s return with you. He has called, by accident, as we say. Trust to him. If ever heaven was active to avert a fatal mischance it is to-day. You will not stand against my supplication. It is my life I cry for. I have no more time. He starts. He leaves me to pray— like the mother seeing her child on the edge of the cliff. Come. This is your breast, my Tony? And your soul warns you it is right to come. Do rightly. Scorn other counsel—the coward’s. Come with our friend—the one man known to me who can be a friend of women.

‘Your *Emma*.’

Redworth was in the room. ’The mare ‘ll do it well,’ he said. ’She has had her feed, and in five minutes will be saddled at the door.’

‘But you must eat, dear friend,’ said the hostess.

’I’ll munch at a packet of sandwiches on the way. There seems a chance, and the time for lunching may miss it.’

‘You understand . . . ?’

‘Everything, I fancy.’

‘If she is there!’

‘One break in the run will turn her back.’

Page 3170

The sensitive invalid felt a blow in his following up the simile of the hunted hare for her friend, but it had a promise of hopefulness. And this was all that could be done by earthly agents, under direction of spiritual, as her imagination encouraged her to believe.

She saw him start, after fortifying him with a tumbler of choice Bordeaux, thinking how Tony would have said she was like a lady arming her knight for battle. On the back of the mare he passed her window, after lifting his hat, and he thumped at his breast-pocket, to show her where the letter housed safely. The packet of provision bulged on his hip, absurdly and blessedly to her sight, not unlike the man, in his combination of robust serviceable qualities, as she reflected during the later hours, until the sun fell on smouldering November woods, and sensations of the frost he foretold bade her remember that he had gone forth riding like a huntsman. His great-coat lay on a chair in the hall, and his travelling-bag was beside it. He had carried it up from the valley, expecting hospitality, and she had sent him forth half naked to weather a frosty November night! She called in the groom, whose derision of a great-coat for any gentleman upon Bertha, meaning work for the mare, appeased her remorsefulness. Brisby, the groom, reckoned how long the mare would take to do the distance to Storling, with a rider like Mr. Redworth on her back. By seven, Brisby calculated, Mr. Redworth would be knocking at the door of the Three Ravens Inn, at Storling, when the mare would have a decent grooming, and Mr. Redworth was not the gentleman to let her be fed out of his eye. More than that, Brisby had some acquaintance with the people of the inn. He begged to inform her ladyship that he was half a Sussex man, though not exactly born in the county; his parents had removed to Sussex after the great event; and the Downs were his first field of horse-exercise, and no place in the world was like them, fair weather or foul, Summer or Winter, and snow ten feet deep in the gullies. The grandest air in England, he had heard say.

His mistress kept him to the discourse, for the comfort of hearing hard bald matter-of-fact; and she was amused and rebuked by his assumption that she must be entertaining an anxiety about master's favourite mare. But, ah! that Diana had delayed in choosing a mate; had avoided her disastrous union with perhaps a more imposing man, to see the true beauty of masculine character in Mr. Redworth, as he showed himself to-day. How could he have doubted succeeding? One grain more of faith in his energy, and Diana might have been mated to the right husband for her—an open-minded clear-faced English gentleman. Her speculative ethereal mind clung to bald matter-of-fact to-day. She would have vowed that it was the sole potentially heroical. Even Brisby partook of the reflected rays, and he was very benevolently considered by her. She dismissed him only when his recounting of the stages of Bertha's journey began to fatigue her and deaden the medical efficacy of him and his like. Stretched on the sofa, she watched the early sinking sun in South-western cloud, and the changes from saffron to intensest crimson, the crown of a November evening, and one of frost.

Page 3171

Redworth struck on a southward line from chalk-ridge to sand, where he had a pleasant footing in familiar country, under beeches that browned the ways, along beside a meadowbrook fed by the heights, through pines and across deep sand-ruts to full view of weald and Downs. Diana had been with him here in her maiden days. The coloured back of a coach put an end to that dream. He lightened his pocket, surveying the land as he munched. A favourable land for rails: and she had looked over it: and he was now becoming a wealthy man: and she was a married woman straining the leash. His errand would not bear examination, it seemed such a desperate long shot. He shut his inner vision on it, and pricked forward. When the burning sunset shot waves above the juniper and yews behind him, he was far on the weald, trotting down an interminable road. That the people opposing railways were not people of business, was his reflection, and it returned persistently: for practical men, even the most devoted among them, will think for themselves; their army, which is the rational, calls them to its banners, in opposition to the sentimental; and Redworth joined it in the abstract, summoning the horrible state of the roads to testify against an enemy wanting almost in common humaneness. A slip of his excellent stepper in one of the half-frozen pits of the highway was the principal cause of his confusion of logic; she was half on her knees. Beyond the market town the roads were so bad that he quitted them, and with the indifference of an engineer, struck a line of his own Southeastward over fields and ditches, favoured by a round horizon moon on his left. So for a couple of hours he went ahead over rolling fallow land to the meadow-flats and a pale shining of freshets; then hit on a lane skirting the water, and reached an amphibious village; five miles from Storling, he was informed, and a clear traverse of lanes, not to be mistaken, ‘if he kept a sharp eye open.’ The sharpness of his eyes was divided between the sword-belt of the starry Hunter and the shifting lanes that zig-tagged his course below. The Downs were softly illumined; still it amazed him to think of a woman like Diana Warwick having an attachment to this district, so hard of yield, mucky, featureless, fit but for the rails she sided with her friend in detesting. Reasonable women, too! The moon, stood high on her march as he entered Storling. He led his good beast to the stables of The Three Ravens, thanking her and caressing her. The ostler conjectured from the look of the mare that he had been out with the hounds and lost his way. It appeared to Redworth singularly, that near the ending of a wild goose chase, his plight was pretty well described by the fellow. However, he had to knock at the door of The Crossways now, in the silent night time, a certainly empty house, to his fancy. He fed on a snack of cold meat and tea, standing, and set forth, clearly directed, ‘if he kept a sharp eye open.’ Hitherto he had

Page 3172

proved his capacity, and he rather smiled at the repetition of the formula to him, of all men. A turning to the right was taken, one to the left, and through the churchyard, out of the gate, round to the right, and on. By this route, after an hour, he found himself passing beneath the bare chestnuts of the churchyard wall of Storling, and the sparkle of the edges of the dead chestnut-leaves at his feet reminded him of the very ideas he had entertained when treading them. The loss of an hour strung him to pursue the chase in earnest, and he had a beating of the heart as he thought that it might be serious. He recollected thinking it so at Copsley. The long ride, and nightfall, with nothing in view, had obscured his mind to the possible behind the thick obstruction of the probable; again the possible waved its marsh-light. To help in saving her from a fatal step, supposing a dozen combinations of the conditional mood, became his fixed object, since here he was—of that there was no doubt; and he was not here to play the fool, though the errand were foolish. He entered the churchyard, crossed the shadow of the tower, and hastened along the path, fancying he beheld a couple of figures vanishing before him. He shouted; he hoped to obtain directions from these natives: the moon was bright, the gravestones legible; but no answer came back, and the place appeared to belong entirely to the dead. 'I've frightened them,' he thought. They left a queerish sensation in his frame. A ride down to Sussex to see ghosts would be an odd experience; but an undigested dinner of tea is the very grandmother of ghosts; and he accused it of confusing him, sight and mind. Out of the gate, now for the turning to the right, and on. He turned. He must have previously turned wrongly somewhere—and where? A light in a cottage invited him to apply for the needed directions. The door was opened by a woman, who had never heard tell of The Crossways, nor had her husband, nor any of the children crowding round them. A voice within ejaculated: 'Crassways!' and soon upon the grating of a chair, an old man, whom the woman named her lodger, by way of introduction, presented himself with his hat on, saying: 'I knows the spot they calls Crassways,' and he led. Redworth understood the intention that a job was to be made of it, and submitting, said: 'To the right, I think.' He was bidden to come along, if he wanted 'they Crassways,' and from the right they turned to the left, and further sharp round, and on to a turn, where the old man, otherwise incommunicative, said: 'There, down thik theer road, and a post in the middle.'

'I want a house, not a post!' roared Redworth, spying a bare space.

The old man despatched a finger travelling to his nob. 'Naw, there's ne'er a house. But that's crassways for four roads, if it 's crassways, you wants.'

They journeyed backward. They were in such a maze of lanes that the old man was master, and Redworth vowed to be rid of him at the first cottage. This, however, they were long in reaching, and the old man was promptly through the garden-gate, hailing the people and securing 'information, before Redworth could well hear. He smiled at the dogged astuteness of a dense-headed old creature determined to establish a claim to his fee. They struck a lane sharp to the left.

Page 3173

‘You’re Sussex?’ Redworth asked him, and was answered: ‘Naw; the Sheers.’

Emerging from deliberation, the old man said: ‘Ah’m a Hampshireman.’

‘A capital county!’

‘Heigh!’ The old man heaved his chest. ‘Once!’

‘Why, what has happened to it?’

’Once it were a capital county, I say. Hah! you asks me what have happened to it. You take and go and look at it now. And down heer’ll be no better soon, I tells ’em. When ah was a boy, old Hampshire was a proud country, wi’ the old coaches and the old squires, and Harvest Homes, and Christmas merryings.—Cutting up the land! There’s no pride in livin’ theer, nor anywhere, as I sees, now.’

‘You mean the railways.’

‘It’s the Devil come up and abroad ower all England!’ exclaimed the melancholy ancient patriot.

A little cheering was tried on him, but vainly. He saw with unerring distinctness the triumph of the Foul Potentate, nay his personal appearance ‘in they theer puffin’ engines.’ The country which had produced Andrew Hedger, as he stated his name to be, would never show the same old cricketing commons it did when he was a boy. Old England, he declared, was done for.

When Redworth applied to his watch under the brilliant moonbeams, he discovered that he had been listening to this natural outcry of a decaying and shunted class full three-quarters of an hour, and The Crossways was not in sight. He remonstrated. The old man plodded along. ‘We must do as we’re directed,’ he said.

Further walking brought them to a turn. Any turn seemed hopeful. Another turn offered the welcome sight of a blazing doorway on a rise of ground off the road. Approaching it, the old man requested him to ‘bide a bit,’ and stalked the ascent at long strides. A vigorous old fellow. Redworth waited below, observing how he joined the group at the lighted door, and, as it was apparent, put his question of the whereabout of The Crossways. Finally, in extreme impatience, he walked up to the group of spectators. They were all, and Andrew Hedger among them, the most entranced and profoundly reverent, observing the dissection of a pig.

Unable to awaken his hearing, Redworth jogged his arm, and the shake was ineffective until it grew in force.

‘I’ve no time to lose; have they told you the way?’

Andrew Hedger yielded his arm. He slowly withdrew his intent fond gaze from the fair outstretched white carcase, and with drooping eyelids, he said: ‘Ah could eat hog a solid hower!’

He had forgotten to ask the way, intoxicated by the aspect of the pig; and when he did ask it, he was hard of understanding, given wholly to his last glimpses.

Redworth got the directions. He would have dismissed Mr. Andrew Hedger, but there was no doing so. ‘I’ll show ye on to The Crossways House,’ the latter said, implying that he had already earned something by showing him The Crossways post.

Page 3174

‘Hog’s my feed,’ said Andrew Hedger. The gastric springs of eloquence moved him to discourse, and he unburdened himself between succulent pauses. ’They’ve killed him early. He ‘s fat; and he might ha’ been fatter. But he’s fat. They’ve got their Christmas ready, that they have. Lord! you should see the chitterlings, and—the sausages hung up to and along the beams. That’s a crown for any dwellin’! They runs ’em round the top of the room—it’s like a May-day wreath in old times. Home-fed hog! They’ve a treat in store, they have. And snap your fingers at the world for many a long day. And the hams! They cure their own hams at that house. Old style! That’s what I say of a hog. He’s good from end to end, and beats a Christian hollow. Everybody knows it and owns it.’

Redworth was getting tired. In sympathy with current conversation, he said a word for the railways: they would certainly make the flesh of swine cheaper, bring a heap of hams into the market. But Andrew Hedger remarked with contempt that he had not much opinion of foreign hams: nobody, knew what they fed on. Hog, he said, would feed on anything, where there was no choice they had wonderful stomachs for food. Only, when they had a choice, they left the worst for last, and home-fed filled them with stuff to make good meat and fat ‘what we calls prime bacon.’ As it is not right to damp a native enthusiasm, Redworth let him dilate on his theme, and mused on his boast to eat hog a solid hour, which roused some distant classic recollection:—an odd jumble.

They crossed the wooden bridge of a flooded stream.

‘Now ye have it,’ said the hog-worshipper; ’that may be the house, I reckon.’

A dark mass of building, with the moon behind it, shining in spires through a mound of firs, met Redworth’s gaze. The windows all were blind, no smoke rose from the chimneys. He noted the dusky square of green, and the finger-post signalling the centre of the four roads. Andrew Hedger repeated that it was The Crossways house, ne’er a doubt. Redworth paid him his expected fee, whereupon Andrew, shouldering off, wished him a hearty good night, and forthwith departed at high pedestrian pace, manifestly to have a concluding look at the beloved anatomy.

There stood the house. Absolutely empty! thought Redworth. The sound of the gate-bell he rang was like an echo to him. The gate was unlocked. He felt a return of his queer churchyard sensation when walking up the garden-path, in the shadow of the house. Here she was born: here her father died: and this was the station of her dreams, as a girl at school near London and in Paris. Her heart was here. He looked at the windows facing the Downs with dead eyes. The vivid idea of her was a phantom presence, and cold, assuring him that the bodily Diana was absent. Had Lady Dunstane guessed rightly, he might perhaps have been of service!

Page 3175

Anticipating the blank silence, he rang the house-bell. It seemed to set wagging a weariful tongue in a corpse. The bell did its duty to the last note, and one thin revival stroke, for a finish, as in days when it responded livingly to the guest. He pulled, and had the reply, just the same, with the faint terminal touch, resembling exactly a ‘There!’ at the close of a voluble delivery in the negative. Absolutely empty. He pulled and pulled. The bell wagged, wagged. This had been a house of a witty host, a merry girl, junketting guests; a house of hilarious thunders, lightnings of fun and fancy. Death never seemed more voiceful than in that wagging of the bell.

For conscience’ sake, as became a trusty emissary, he walked round to the back of the house, to verify the total emptiness. His apprehensive despondency had said that it was absolutely empty, but upon consideration he supposed the house must have some guardian: likely enough, an old gardener and his wife, lost in deafness double-shotted by sleep! There was no sign of them. The night air waxed sensibly crisper. He thumped the backdoors. Blank hollowness retorted on the blow. He banged and kicked. The violent altercation with wood and wall lasted several minutes, ending as it had begun.

Flesh may worry, but is sure to be worsted in such an argument.

’Well, my dear lady!’—Redworth addressed Lady Dunstane aloud, while driving his hands into his pockets for warmth—’we’ve done what we could. The next best thing is to go to bed and see what morning brings us.’

The temptation to glance at the wild divinings of dreamy-witted women from the point of view of the practical man, was aided by the intense frigidity of the atmosphere in leading him to criticize a sex not much used to the exercise of brains. ‘And they hate railways!’ He associated them, in the matter of intelligence, with Andrew Hedger and Company. They sank to the level of the temperature in his esteem—as regarded their intellects. He approved their warmth of heart. The nipping of the victim’s toes and finger-tips testified powerfully to that.

Round to the front of the house at a trot, he stood in moonlight. Then, for involuntarily he now did everything running, with a dash up the steps he seized the sullen pendant bell-handle, and worked it pumpwise, till he perceived a smaller bell-knob beside the door, at which he worked piston-wise. Pump and piston, the hurly-burly and the tinkler created an alarm to scare cat and mouse and Cardinal spider, all that run or weave in desolate houses, with the good result of a certain degree of heat to his frame. He ceased, panting. No stir within, nor light. That white stare of windows at the moon was undisturbed.

The Downs were like a wavy robe of shadowy grey silk. No wonder that she had loved to look on them!

And it was no wonder that Andrew Hedger enjoyed prime bacon. Bacon frizzling, fat rashers of real homefed on the fire-none of your foreign-suggested a genial refreshment and resistance to antagonistic elements. Nor was it, granting health, granting a sharp night—the temperature at least fifteen below zero—an excessive boast for a man to say he could go on eating for a solid hour.

Page 3176

These were notions darting through a half nourished gentleman nipped in the frame by a severely frosty night. Truly a most beautiful night! She would have delighted to see it here. The Downs were like floating islands, like fairy-laden vapours; solid, as Andrew Hedger's hour of eating; visionary, as too often his desire!

Redworth muttered to himself, after taking the picture of the house and surrounding country from the sward, that he thought it about the sharpest night he had ever encountered in England. He was cold, hungry, dispirited, and astoundingly stricken with an incapacity to separate any of his thoughts from old Andrew Hedger. Nature was at her pranks upon him.

He left the garden briskly, as to the legs, and reluctantly. He would have liked to know whether Diana had recently visited the house, or was expected. It could be learnt in the morning; but his mission was urgent and he on the wings of it. He was vexed and saddened.

Scarcely had he closed the garden-gate when the noise of an opening window arrested him, and he called. The answer was in a feminine voice, youngish, not disagreeable, though not Diana's.

He heard none of the words, but rejoined in a bawl: 'Mrs. Warwick!—Mr. Redworth!'

That was loud enough for the deaf or the dead.

The window closed. He went to the door and waited. It swung wide to him; and O marvel of a woman's divination of a woman! there stood Diana.

CHAPTER IX

Shows how A *position of delicacy for* A *lady and gentleman was met in simple fashion without hurt to either*

Redworth's impulse was to laugh for very gladness of heart, as he proffered excuses for his tremendous alarums and in doing so, the worthy gentleman imagined he must have persisted in clamouring for admission because he suspected, that if at home, she would require a violent summons to betray herself. It was necessary to him to follow his abashed sagacity up to the mark of his happy animation.

'Had I known it was you!' said Diana, bidding him enter the passage. She wore a black silk mantilla and was warmly covered.

She called to her maid Danvers, whom Redworth remembered: a firm woman of about forty, wrapped, like her mistress, in head-covering, cloak, scarf and shawl. Telling her to

scour the kitchen for firewood, Diana led into a sitting-room. ‘I need not ask—you have come from Lady Dunstane,’ she said. ‘Is she well?’

‘She is deeply anxious.’

’You are cold. Empty houses are colder than out of doors. You shall soon have a fire.’

She begged him to be seated.

The small glow of candle-light made her dark rich colouring orange in shadow.

‘House and grounds are open to a tenant,’ she resumed. ’I say good-bye to them to-morrow morning. The old couple who are in charge sleep in the village to-night. I did not want them here. You have quitted the Government service, I think?’

Page 3177

‘A year or so since.’

‘When did you return from America?’

‘Two days back.’

‘And paid your visit to Copsley immediately?’

‘As early as I could.’

‘That was true friendliness. You have a letter for me?’

‘I have.’

He put his hand to his pocket for the letter.

‘Presently,’ she said. She divined the contents, and nursed her resolution to withstand them. Danvers had brought firewood and coal. Orders were given to her, and in spite of the opposition of the maid and intervention of the gentleman, Diana knelt at the grate, observing:

‘Allow me to do this. I can lay and light a fire.’

He was obliged to look on: she was a woman who spoke her meaning. She knelt, handling paper, firewood and matches, like a housemaid. Danvers proceeded on her mission, and Redworth eyed Diana in the first fire-glow. He could have imagined a Madonna on an old black Spanish canvas.

The act of service was beautiful in gracefulness, and her simplicity in doing the work touched it spiritually. He thought, as she knelt there, that never had he seen how lovely and how charged with mystery her features were; the dark large eyes full on the brows; the proud line of a straight nose in right measure to the bow of the lips; reposeful red lips, shut, and their curve of the slumber-smile at the corners. Her forehead was broad; the chin of a sufficient firmness to sustain: that noble square; the brows marked by a soft thick brush to the temples; her black hair plainly drawn along her head to the knot, revealed by the mantilla fallen on her neck.

Elegant in plainness, the classic poet would have said of her hair and dress. She was of the women whose wits are quick in everything they do. That which was proper to her position, complexion, and the hour, surely marked her appearance. Unaccountably this night, the fair fleshly presence over-weighted her intellectual distinction, to an observer bent on vindicating her innocence. Or rather, he saw the hidden in the visible.

Owner of such a woman, and to lose her! Redworth pitied the husband.

The crackling flames reddened her whole person. Gazing, he remembered Lady Dunstane saying of her once, that in anger she had the nostrils of a war-horse. The nostrils now were faintly alive under some sensitive impression of her musings. The olive cheeks, pale as she stood in the doorway, were flushed by the fire-beams, though no longer with their swarthy central rose, tropic flower of a pure and abounding blood, as it had seemed. She was now beset by battle. His pity for her, and his eager championship, overwhelmed the spirit of compassion for the foolish wretched husband. Dolt, the man must be, Redworth thought; and he asked inwardly, Did the miserable tyrant suppose of a woman like this, that she would be content to shine as a candle in a grated lanthorn? The generosity

Page 3178

of men speculating upon other men's possessions is known. Yet the man who loves a woman has to the full the husband's jealousy of her good name. And a lover, that without the claims of the alliance, can be wounded on her behalf, is less distracted in his homage by the personal luminary, to which man's manufacture of balm and incense is mainly drawn when his love is wounded. That contemplation of her incomparable beauty, with the multitude of his ideas fluttering round it, did somewhat shake the personal luminary in Redworth. He was conscious of pangs. The question bit him: How far had she been indiscreet or wilful? and the bite of it was a keen acid to his nerves. A woman doubted by her husband, is always, and even to her champions in the first hours of the noxious rumour, until they had solidified in confidence through service, a creature of the wilds, marked for our ancient running. Nay, more than a cynical world, these latter will be sensible of it. The doubt casts her forth, the general yelp drags her down; she runs like the prey of the forest under spotting branches; clear if we can think so, but it has to be thought in devotedness: her character is abroad. Redworth bore a strong resemblance to, his fellowmen, except for his power of faith in this woman. Nevertheless it required the superbness of her beauty and the contrasting charm of her humble posture of kneeling by the fire, to set him on his right track of mind. He knew and was sure of her. He dispersed the unhallowed fry in attendance upon any stirring of the reptile part of us, to look at her with the eyes of a friend. And if . . . !—a little mouse of a thought scampered out of one of the chambers of his head and darted along the passages, fetching a sweat to his brows. Well, whatsoever the fact, his heart was hers! He hoped he could be charitable to women.

She rose from her knees and said: 'Now, please, give me the letter.'

He was entreated to excuse her for consigning him to firelight when she left the room.

Danvers brought in a dismal tallow candle, remarking that her mistress had not expected visitors: her mistress had nothing but tea and bread and butter to offer him. Danvers uttered no complaint of her sufferings; happy in being the picture of them. 'I'm not hungry,' said he.

A plate of Andrew Hedger's own would not have tempted him. The foolish frizzle of bacon sang in his ears as he walked from end to end of the room; an illusion of his fancy pricked by a frost-edged appetite. But the anticipated contest with Diana checked and numbed the craving.

Was Warwick a man to proceed to extremities on a mad suspicion?—What kind of proof had he?

Redworth summoned the portrait of Mr. Warwick before him, and beheld a sweeping of close eyes in cloud, a long upper lip in cloud; the rest of him was all cloud. As usual with these conjurations of a face, the index of the nature conceived by him displayed itself, and no more; but he took it for the whole physiognomy, and pronounced of the

husband thus delineated, that those close eyes of the long upper lip would both suspect and proceed madly.

Page 3179

He was invited by Danvers to enter the dining-room.

There Diana joined him.

'The best of a dinner on bread and butter is, that one is ready for supper soon after it,' she said, swimming to the tea-tray. 'You have dined?'

'At the inn,' he replied.

'The Three Ravens! When my father's guests from London flooded The Crossways, The Three Ravens provided the overflow with beds. On nights like this I have got up and scraped the frost from my window-panes to see them step into the old fly, singing some song of his. The inn had a good reputation for hospitality in those days. I hope they treated you well?'

'Excellently,' said Redworth, taking an enormous mouthful, while his heart sank to see that she who smiled to encourage his eating had been weeping. But she also consumed her bread and butter.

'That poor maid of mine is an instance of a woman able to do things against the grain,' she said. 'Danvers is a foster-child of luxury. She loves it; great houses, plentiful meals, and the crowd of twinkling footmen's calves. Yet you see her here in a desolate house, consenting to cold, and I know not what, terrors of ghosts! poor soul. I have some mysterious attraction for her. She would not let me come alone. I should have had to hire some old Storling grannam, or retain the tattling keepers of the house. She loves her native country too, and disdains the foreigner. My tea you may trust.'

Redworth had not a doubt of it. He was becoming a tea-taster. The merit of warmth pertained to the beverage. 'I think you get your tea from Scoppin's, in the City,' he said.

That was the warehouse for Mrs. Warwick's tea. They conversed of Teas; the black, the green, the mixtures; each thinking of the attack to come, and the defence. Meantime, the cut bread and butter having flown, Redwerth attacked the loaf. He apologized.

'Oh! pay me a practical compliment,' Diana said, and looked really happy at his unfeigned relish of her simple fare.

She had given him one opportunity in speaking of her maid's love of native country. But it came too early.

'They say that bread and butter is fattening,' he remarked.

'You preserve the mean,' said she.

He admitted that his health was good. For some little time, to his vexation at the absurdity, she kept him talking of himself. So flowing was she, and so sweet the motion of her mouth in utterance, that he followed her lead, and he said odd things and corrected them. He had to describe his ride to her.

‘Yes! the view of the Downs from Dewhurst,’ she exclaimed. ’Or any point along the ridge. Emma and I once drove there in Summer, with clotted cream from her dairy, and we bought fresh-plucked wortleberries, and stewed them in a hollow of the furzes, and ate them with ground biscuits and the clotted cream iced, and thought it a luncheon for seraphs. Then you dropped to the road round under the sand-heights—and meditated railways!’

Page 3180

‘Just a notion or two.’

‘You have been very successful in America?’

’Successful; perhaps; we exclude extremes in our calculations of the still problematical.’

‘I am sure,’ said she, ‘you always have faith in your calculations.’

Her innocent archness dealt him a stab sharper than any he had known since the day of his hearing of her engagement. He muttered of his calculations being human; he was as much of a fool as other men—more!

‘Oh! no,’ said she.

‘Positively.’

‘I cannot think it.’

‘I know it.’

‘Mr. Redworth, you will never persuade me to believe it.’

He knocked a rising groan on the head, and rejoined ’I hope I may not have to say so to-night.’

Diana felt the edge of the dart. ’And meditating railways, you scored our poor land of herds and flocks; and night fell, and the moon sprang up, and on you came. It was clever of you to find your way by the moonbeams.’

‘That’s about the one thing I seem fit for!’

’But what delusion is this, in the mind of a man succeeding in everything he does!’ cried Diana, curious despite her wariness. ’Is there to be the revelation of a hairshirt ultimately?—a Journal of Confessions? You succeeded in everything you aimed at, and broke your heart over one chance miss?’

‘My heart is not of the stuff to break,’ he said, and laughed off her fortuitous thrust straight into it. ‘Another cup, yes. I came . . .’

‘By night,’ said she, ’and cleverly found your way, and dined at The Three Ravens, and walked to The Crossways, and met no ghosts.’

‘On the contrary—or at least I saw a couple.’

’Tell me of them; we breed them here. We sell them periodically to the newspapers!’

’Well, I started them in their natal locality. I saw them, going down the churchyard, and bellowed after them with all my lungs. I wanted directions to The Crossways; I had missed my way at some turning. In an instant they were vapour.’

Diana smiled. ’It was indeed a voice to startle delicate apparitions! So do roar Hyrcanean tigers. Pyramus and Thisbe—slaying lions! One of your ghosts carried a loaf of bread, and dropped it in fright; one carried a pound of fresh butter for home consumption. They were in the churchyard for one in passing to kneel at her father’s grave and kiss his tombstone.’

She bowed her head, forgetful of her guard.

The pause presented an opening. Redworth left his chair and walked to the mantelpiece. It was easier to him to speak, not facing her.

‘You have read Lady Dunstane’s letter,’ he began.

She nodded. ‘I have.’

‘Can you resist her appeal to you?’

‘I must.’

’She is not in a condition to bear it well. You will pardon me, Mrs. Warwick . . .’

‘Fully! Fully!’

’I venture to offer merely practical advice. You have thought of it all, but have not felt it. In these cases, the one thing to do is to make a stand. Lady Dunstane has a clear head. She sees what has to be endured by you. Consider: she appeals to me to bring you her letter. Would she have chosen me, or any man, for her messenger, if it had not appeared to her a matter of life and death? You count me among your friends.’

Page 3181

‘One of the truest.’

’Here are two, then, and your own good sense. For I do not believe it to be a question of courage.’

‘He has commenced. Let him carry it out,’ said Diana.

Her desperation could have added the cry—And give me freedom! That was the secret in her heart. She had struck on the hope for the detested yoke to be broken at any cost.

’I decline to meet his charges. I despise them. If my friends have faith in me—and they may!—I want nothing more.’

‘Well, I won’t talk commonplaces about the world,’ said Redworth. ’We can none of us afford to have it against us. Consider a moment: to your friends you are the Diana Merion they knew, and they will not suffer an injury to your good name without a struggle. But if you fly? You leave the dearest you have to the whole brunt of it.

‘They will, if they love me.’

‘They will. But think of the shock to her. Lady Dunstane reads you—’

‘Not quite. No, not if she even wishes me to stay!’ said Diana.

He was too intent on his pleading to perceive a signification.

‘She reads you as clearly in the dark as if you were present with her.’

‘Oh! why am I not ten years older!’ Diana cried, and tried to face round to him, and stopped paralyzed. ’Ten years older, I could discuss my situation, as an old woman of the world, and use my wits to defend myself.’

‘And then you would not dream of flight before it!’

’No, she does not read me: no! She saw that I might come to The Crossways. She—-no one but myself can see the wisdom of my holding aloof, in contempt of this baseness.’

’And of allowing her to sink under that which your presence would arrest. Her strength will not support it.’

‘Emma! Oh, cruel!’ Diana sprang up to give play to her limbs. She dropped on another chair. ’Go I must, I cannot turn back. She saw my old attachment to this place. It was not difficult to guess . . . Who but I can see the wisest course for me!’

’It comes to this, that the blow aimed at you in your absence will strike her, and mortally,’ said Redworth.

‘Then I say it is terrible to have a friend,’ said Diana, with her bosom heaving.

‘Friendship, I fancy, means one heart between two.’

His unstressed observation hit a bell in her head, and set it reverberating. She and Emma had spoken, written, the very words. She drew forth her Emma’s letter from under her left breast, and read some half-blinded lines.

Redworth immediately prepared to leave her to her feelings—trustier guides than her judgement in this crisis.

‘Adieu, for the night, Mrs. Warwick,’ he said, and was guilty of eulogizing the judgement he thought erratic for the moment. ’Night is a calm adviser. Let me presume to come again in the morning. I dare not go back without you.’

She looked up. As they faced together each saw that the other had passed through a furnace, scorching enough to him, though hers was the delicacy exposed. The reflection had its weight with her during the night.

Page 3182

‘Danvers is getting ready a bed for you; she is airing linen,’ Diana, said. But the bed was declined, and the hospitality was not pressed. The offer of it seemed to him significant of an unwary cordiality and thoughtlessness of tattlers that might account possibly for many things—supposing a fool or madman, or malignants, to interpret them.

‘Then, good night,’ said she.

They joined hands. He exacted no promise that she would be present in the morning to receive him; and it was a consolation to her desire for freedom, until she reflected on the perfect confidence it implied, and felt as a quivering butterfly impalpably pinned.

CHAPTER X

THE CONFLICT OF THE NIGHT

Her brain was a steam-wheel throughout the night; everything that could be thought of was tossed, nothing grasped.

The unfriendliness of the friends who sought to retain her recurred. For look—to fly could not be interpreted as a flight. It was but a stepping aside, a disdain of defending herself, and a wrapping herself in her dignity. Women would be with her. She called on the noblest of them to justify the course she chose, and they did, in an almost audible murmur.

And O the rich reward. A black archway-gate swung open to the glittering fields of freedom.

Emma was not of the chorus. Emma meditated as an invalid. How often had Emma bewailed to her that the most, grievous burden of her malady was her fatal tendency to brood sickly upon human complications! She could not see the blessedness of the prospect of freedom to a woman abominably yoked. What if a miserable woman were dragged through mire to reach it! Married, the mire was her portion, whatever she might do. That man—but pass him!

And that other—the dear, the kind, careless, high-hearted old friend. He could honestly protest his guiltlessness, and would smilingly leave the case to go its ways. Of this she was sure, that her decision and her pleasure would be his. They were tied to the stake. She had already tasted some of the mortal agony. Did it matter whether the flames consumed her?

Reflecting on the interview with Redworth, though she had performed her part in it placidly, her skin burned. It was the beginning of tortures if she stayed in England.

By staying to defend herself she forfeited her attitude of dignity and lost all chance of her reward. And name the sort of world it is, dear friends, for which we are to sacrifice our one hope of freedom, that we may preserve our fair fame in it!

Diana cried aloud, ‘My freedom!’ feeling as a butterfly flown out of a box to stretches of sunny earth beneath spacious heavens. Her bitter marriage, joyless in all its chapters, indefensible where the man was right as well as where insensately wrong, had been imprisonment. She excused him down to his last madness, if only the bonds were broken. Here, too, in this very house of her happiness with her father, she had bound herself to the man voluntarily, quite inexplicably. Voluntarily, as we say. But there must be a spell upon us at times. Upon young women there certainly is.

Page 3183

The wild brain of Diana, armed by her later enlightenment as to the laws of life and nature, dashed in revolt at the laws of the world when she thought of the forces, natural and social, urging young women to marry and be bound to the end.

It should be a spotless world which is thus ruthless.

But were the world impeccable it would behave more generously.

The world is ruthless, dear friends, because the world is hypocrite! The world cannot afford to be magnanimous, or even just.

Her dissensions with her husband, their differences of opinion, and puny wranglings, hoistings of two standards, reconciliations for the sake of decency, breaches of the truce, and his detested meanness, the man behind the mask; and glimpses of herself too, the half-known, half-suspected, developing creature claiming to be Diana, and unlike her dreamed Diana, deformed by marriage, irritable, acerb, rebellious, constantly justifiable against him, but not in her own mind, and therefore accusing him of the double crime of provoking her and perverting her—these were the troops defiling through her head while she did battle with the hypocrite world.

One painful sting was caused by the feeling that she could have loved—whom? An ideal. Had he, the imagined but unvisioned, been her yoke-fellow, would she now lie raising caged-beast cries in execration of the yoke? She would not now be seeing herself as hare, serpent, tigress! The hypothesis was reviewed in negatives: she had barely a sense of softness, just a single little heave of the bosom, quivering upward and leadenly sinking, when she glanced at a married Diana heartily mated. The regrets of the youthful for a life sailing away under medical sentence of death in the sad eyes of relatives resemble it. She could have loved. Good-bye to that!

A woman’s brutallest tussle with the world was upon her. She was in the arena of the savage claws, flung there by the man who of all others should have protected her from them. And what had she done to deserve it? She listened to the advocate pleading her case; she primed him to admit the charges, to say the worst, in contempt of legal prudence, and thereby expose her transparent honesty. The very things awakening a mad suspicion proved her innocence. But was she this utterly simple person? Oh, no! She was the Diana of the pride in her power of fencing with evil—by no means of the order of those ninny young women who realize the popular conception of the purely innocent. She had fenced and kept her guard. Of this it was her angry glory to have the knowledge. But she had been compelled to fence. Such are men in the world of facts, that when a woman steps out of her domestic tangle to assert, because it is a tangle, her rights to partial independence, they sight her for their prey, or at least they complacently suppose her accessible. Wretched at home, a woman ought to bury herself in her wretchedness, else may she be assured that not the cleverest, wariest guard will cover her character.

Page 3184

Against the husband her cause was triumphant. Against herself she decided not to plead it, for this reason, that the preceding Court, which was the public and only positive one, had entirely and justly exonerated her. But the holding of her hand by the friend half a minute too long for friendship, and the over-friendliness of looks, letters, frequency of visits, would speak within her. She had a darting view of her husband's estimation of them in his present mood. She quenched it; they were trifles, things that women of the world have to combat. The revelation to a fair-minded young woman of the majority of men being naught other than men, and some of the friendliest of men betraying confidence under the excuse of temptation, is one of the shocks to simplicity which leave her the alternative of misanthropy or philosophy. Diana had not the heart to hate her kind, so she resigned herself to pardon, and to the recognition of the state of duel between the sexes-active enough in her sphere of society. The circle hummed with it; many lived for it. Could she pretend to ignore it? Her personal experience might have instigated a less clear and less intrepid nature to take advantage of the opportunity for playing the popular innocent, who runs about with astonished eyes to find herself in so hunting a world, and wins general compassion, if not shelter in unsuspected and unlicenced places. There is perpetually the inducement to act the hypocrite before the hypocrite world, unless a woman submits to be the humbly knitting housewife, unquestioningly worshipful of her lord; for the world is ever gracious to an hypocrisy that pays homage to the mask of virtue by copying it; the world is hostile to the face of an innocence not conventionally simpering and quite surprised; the world prefers decorum to honesty. 'Let me be myself, whatever the martyrdom!' she cried, in that phase of young sensation when, to the blooming woman; the putting on of a mask appears to wither her and reduce her to the show she parades. Yet, in common with her sisterhood, she owned she had worn a sort of mask; the world demands it of them as the price of their station. That she had never worn it consentingly, was the plea for now casting it off altogether, showing herself as she was, accepting martyrdom, becoming the first martyr of the modern woman's cause—a grand position! and one imaginable to an excited mind in the dark, which does not conjure a critical humour, as light does, to correct the feverish sublimity. She was, then, this martyr, a woman capable of telling the world she knew it, and of, confessing that she had behaved in disdain of its rigider rules, according to her own ideas of her immunities. O brave!

But was she holding the position by flight? It involved the challenge of consequences, not an evasion of them.

She moaned; her mental steam-wheel stopped; fatigue brought sleep.

She had sensationally led her rebellious wits to The Crossways, distilling much poison from thoughts on the way; and there, for the luxury of a still seeming indecision, she sank into oblivion.

Page 3185

CHAPTER XI

Recounts the journey in A *chariot*, *with* A *certain amount of dialogue*, *and* A *small incident on the road*

In the morning the fight was over. She looked at the signpost of The Crossways whilst dressing, and submitted to follow, obediently as a puppet, the road recommended by friends, though a voice within, that she took for the intimations of her reason, protested that they were wrong, that they were judging of her case in the general, and unwisely—-disastrously for her.

The mistaking of her desires for her reasons was peculiar to her situation.

‘So I suppose I shall some day see The Crossways again,’ she said, to conceive a compensation in the abandonment of freedom. The night’s red vision of martyrdom was reserved to console her secretly, among the unopened lockers in her treasury of thoughts. It helped to sustain her; and she was too conscious of things necessary for her sustainment to bring it to the light of day and examine it. She had a pitiful bit of pleasure in the gratification she imparted to Danvers, by informing her that the journey of the day was backward to Copsley.

‘If I may venture to say so, ma’am, I am very glad,’ said her maid.

‘You must be prepared for the questions of lawyers, Danvers.’

’Oh, ma’am! they’ll get nothing out of me, and their wigs won’t frighten me.’

‘It is usually their baldness that is most frightening, my poor Danvers.’

‘Nor their baldness, ma’am,’ said the literal maid; ’I never cared for their heads, or them. I’ve been in a Case before.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed her mistress; and she had a chill.

Danvers mentioned a notorious Case, adding, ‘They got nothing out of me.’

‘In my Case you will please to speak the truth,’ said Diana, and beheld in the looking-glass the primming of her maid’s mouth. The sight shot a sting.

’Understand that there is to be no hesitation about telling the truth of what you know of me,’ said Diana; and the answer was, ‘No, ma’am.’

For Danvers could remark to herself that she knew little, and was not a person to hesitate. She was a maid of the world, with the quality of faithfulness, by nature, to a good mistress.

Redworth's further difficulties were confined to the hiring of a conveyance for the travellers, and hot-water bottles, together with a postillion not addicted to drunkenness. He procured a posting-chariot, an ancient and musty, of a late autumnal yellow unrefreshed by paint; the only bottles to be had were Dutch Schiedam. His postillion, inspected at Storling, carried the flag of habitual inebriation on his nose, and he deemed it adviseable to ride the mare in accompaniment as far as Riddlehurst, notwithstanding the postillion's

Page 3186

vows upon his honour that he was no drinker. The emphasis, to a gentleman acquainted with his countrymen, was not reassuring. He had hopes of enlisting a trustier fellow at Riddlehurst, but he was disappointed; and while debating upon what to do, for he shrank from leaving two women to the conduct of that inflamed troughsnout, Brisby, despatched to Storling by an afterthought of Lady Dunstane's, rushed out of the Riddlehurst inn taproom, and relieved him of the charge of the mare. He was accommodated with a seat on a stool in the chariot. 'My triumphal car,' said his captive. She was very amusing about her postillion; Danvers had to beg pardon for laughing. 'You are happy,' observed her mistress. But Redworth laughed too, and he could not boast of any happiness beyond the temporary satisfaction, nor could she who sprang the laughter boast of that little. She said to herself, in the midst of the hilarity, 'Wherever I go now, in all weathers, I am perfectly naked!' And remembering her readings of a certain wonderful old quarto book in her father's library, by an eccentric old Scottish nobleman, wherein the wearing of garments and sleeping in houses is accused as the cause of human degeneracy, she took a forced merry stand on her return to the primitive healthful state of man and woman, and affected scorn of our modern ways of dressing and thinking. Whence it came that she had some of her wildest seizures of iridescent humour. Danvers attributed the fun to her mistress's gladness in not having pursued her bent to quit the country. Redworth saw deeper, and was nevertheless amazed by the airy hawk-poise and pounce-down of her wit, as she ranged high and low, now capriciously generalizing, now dropping bolt upon things of passage—the postillion jogging from rum to gin, the rustics baconly agape, the horse-kneed ostlers. She touched them to the life in similes and phrases; and next she was aloft, derisively philosophizing, but with a comic afflatus that dispersed the sharpness of her irony in mocking laughter. The afternoon refreshments at the inn of the county market-town, and the English idea of public hospitality, as to manner and the substance provided for wayfarers, were among the themes she made memorable to him. She spoke of everything tolerantly, just naming it in a simple sentence, that fell with a ring and chimed: their host's ready acquiescence in receiving, orders, his contemptuous disclaimer of stuff he did not keep, his flat indifference to the sheep he sheared, and the phantom half-crown flickering in one eye of the anticipatory waiter; the pervading and confounding smell of stale beer over all the apartments; the prevalent, notion of bread, butter, tea, milk, sugar, as matter for the exercise of a native inventive genius—these were reviewed in quips of metaphor.

'Come, we can do better at an inn or two known to me,' said Redworth.

'Surely this is the best that can be done for us, when we strike them with the magic wand of a postillion?' said she.

Page 3187

‘It depends, as elsewhere, on the individuals entertaining us.’

’Yet you admit that your railways are rapidly “polishing off” the individual.’

‘They will spread the metropolitan idea of comfort.’

’I fear they will feed us on nothing but that big word. It booms—a curfew bell—for every poor little light that we would read by.’

Seeing their beacon-nosed postillion preparing too mount and failing in his jump, Redworth was apprehensive, and questioned the fellow concerning potation.

’Lord, sir, they call me half a horse, but I can’t ‘bids water,’ was the reply, with the assurance that he had not ‘taken a pailful.’

Habit enabled him to gain his seat.

’It seems to us unnecessary to heap on coal when the chimney is afire; but he may know the proper course,’ Diana said, convulsing Danvers; and there was discernibly to Redworth, under the influence of her phrases, a likeness of the flaming ‘half-horse,’ with the animals all smoking in the frost, to a railway engine. ‘Your wrinkled centaur,’ she named the man. Of course he had to play second to her, and not unwillingly; but he reflected passingly on the instinctive push of her rich and sparkling voluble fancy to the initiative, which women do not like in a woman, and men prefer to distantly admire. English women and men feel toward the quick-witted of their species as to aliens, having the demerits of aliens-wordiness, vanity, obscurity, shallowness, an empty glitter, the sin of posturing. A quick-witted woman exerting her wit is both a foreigner and potentially a criminal. She is incandescent to a breath of rumour. It accounted for her having detractors; a heavy counterpoise to her enthusiastic friends. It might account for her husband’s discontent-the reduction of him to a state of mere masculine antagonism. What is the husband of a vanward woman? He feels himself but a diminished man. The English husband of a voluble woman relapses into a dreary mute. Ah, for the choice of places! Redworth would have yielded her the loquent lead for the smallest of the privileges due to him who now rejected all, except the public scourging of her. The conviction was in his mind that the husband of this woman sought rather to punish than be rid of her. But a part of his own emotion went to form the judgement.

Furthermore, Lady Dunstane’s allusion to her ‘enemies’ made him set down her growing crops of backbiters to the trick she had of ridiculing things English. If the English do it themselves, it is in a professionally robust, a jocose, kindly way, always with a glance at the other things, great things, they excel in; and it is done to have the credit of doing it. They are keen to catch an inimical tone; they will find occasion to chastise the presumptuous individual, unless it be the leader of a party, therefore a power; for they

respect a power. Redworth knew their quaintnesses; without overlooking them he winced

Page 3188

at the acid of an irony that seemed to spring from aversion, and regretted it, for her sake. He had to recollect that she was in a sharp-strung mood, bitterly surexcited; moreover he reminded himself of her many and memorable phrases of enthusiasm for England—Shakespeareland, as she would sometimes perversely term it, to sink the country in the poet. English fortitude, English integrity, the English disposition to do justice to dependents, adolescent English ingenuousness, she was always ready to laud. Only her enthusiasm required rousing by circumstances; it was less at the brim than her satire. Hence she made enemies among a placable people.

He felt that he could have helped her under happier conditions. The beautiful vision she had been on the night of the Irish Ball swept before him, and he looked at her, smiling.

‘Why do you smile?’ she said.

‘I was thinking of Mr. Sullivan Smith.’

‘Ah! my dear compatriot! And think, too, of Lord Larrian.’

She caught her breath. Instead of recreation, the names brought on a fit of sadness. It deepened; shy neither smiled nor rattled any more. She gazed across the hedgeways at the white meadows and bare-twigged copses showing their last leaves in the frost.

’I remember your words: “Observation is the most, enduring of the pleasures of life”; and so I have found it,’ she said. There was a brightness along her under-eyelids that caused him to look away.

The expected catastrophe occurred on the descent of a cutting in the sand, where their cordial postillion at a trot bumped the chariot against the sturdy wheels of a waggon, which sent it reclining for support upon a beech-tree’s huge intertwisted serpent roots, amid strips of brown bracken and pendant weeds, while he exhibited one short stump of leg, all boot, in air. No one was hurt. Diana disengaged herself from the shoulder of Danvers, and mildly said:

‘That reminds me, I forgot to ask why we came in a chariot.’

Redworth was excited on her behalf, but the broken glass had done no damage, nor had Danvers fainted. The remark was unintelligible to him, apart from the comforting it had been designed to give. He jumped out, and held a hand for them to do the same. ’I never foresaw an event more positively,’ said he.

‘And it was nothing but a back view that inspired you all the way,’ said Diana.

A waggoner held the horses, another assisted Redworth to right the chariot. The postillion had hastily recovered possession of his official seat, that he might as soon as possible feel himself again where he was most intelligent, and was gay in stupidity,

indifferent to what happened behind him. Diana heard him counselling the waggoner as to the common sense of meeting small accidents with a cheerful soul.

‘Lord!’ he cried, ’I been pitched a Somerset in my time, and taken up for dead, and that didn’t beat me!’

Page 3189

Disasters of the present kind could hardly affect such a veteran. But he was painfully disconcerted by Redworth's determination not to entrust the ladies any farther to his guidance. Danvers had implored for permission to walk the mile to the town, and thence take a fly to Copsley. Her mistress rather sided with the postillion; who begged them to spare him the disgrace of riding in and delivering a box at the Red Lion.

'What'll they say? And they know Arthur Dance well there,' he groaned. 'What! Arthur! chariotin' a box! And me a better man to his work now than I been for many a long season, fit for double the journey! A bit of a shake always braces me up. I could read a newspaper right off, small print and all. Come along, sir, and hand the ladies in.'

Danvers vowed her thanks to Mr. Redworth for refusing. They walked ahead; the postillion communicated his mixture of professional and human feelings to the waggoners, and walked his horses in the rear, meditating on the weak-heartedness of gentryfolk, and the means for escaping being chaffed out of his boots at the Old Red Lion, where he was to eat, drink, and sleep that night. Ladies might be fearsome after a bit of a shake; he would not have supposed it of a gentleman. He jogged himself into an arithmetic of the number of nips of liquor he had taken to soothe him on the road, in spite of the gentleman. 'For some of 'em are sworn enemies of poor men, as yonder one, ne'er a doubt.'

Diana enjoyed her walk beneath the lingering brown-red of the frosty November sunset, with the scent of sand-earth strong in the air.

'I had to hire a chariot because there was no two-horse carriage,' said Redworth, 'and I wished to reach Copsley as early as possible.'

She replied, smiling, that accidents were fated. As a certain marriage had been! The comparison forced itself on her reflections.

'But this is quite an adventure,' said she, reanimated by the brisker flow of her blood. 'We ought really to be thankful for it, in days when nothing happens.'

Redworth accused her of getting that idea from the perusal of romances.

'Yes, our lives require compression, like romances, to be interesting, and we object to the process,' she said. 'Real happiness is a state of dulness. When we taste it consciously it becomes mortal—a thing of the Seasons. But I like my walk. How long these November sunsets burn, and what hues they have! There is a scientific reason, only don't tell it me. Now I understand why you always used to choose your holidays in November.'

She thrilled him with her friendly recollection of his customs.

'As to happiness, the looking forward is happiness,' he remarked.

‘Oh, the looking back! back!’ she cried.

‘Forward! that is life.’

’And backward, death, if you will; and still at is happiness. Death, and our postillion!’

‘Ay; I wonder why the fellow hangs to the rear,’ said Redworth, turning about.

Page 3190

’It’s his cunning strategy, poor creature, so that he may be thought to have delivered us at the head of the town, for us to make a purchase or two, if we go to the inn on foot,’ said Diana. ’We ’ll let the manoeuvre succeed.’

Redworth declared that she had a head for everything, and she was flattered to hear him.

So passing from the southern into the western road, they saw the town-lights beneath an amber sky burning out sombrely over the woods of Copsley, and entered the town, the postillion following.

CHAPTER XII

BETWEEN EMMA AND DIANA

Diana was in the arms of her friend at a late hour of the evening, and Danvers breathed the amiable atmosphere of footmen once more, professing herself perished. This maid of the world, who could endure hardships and loss of society for the mistress to whom she was attached, no sooner saw herself surrounded by the comforts befitting her station, than she indulged in the luxury of a wailful dejectedness, the better to appreciate them. She was unaffectedly astonished to find her outcries against the cold and the journeyings to and fro interpreted as a serving-woman’s muffled comments on her mistress’s behaviour. Lady Dunstane’s maid Bartlett, and Mrs. Bridges the housekeeper, and Foster the butler, contrived to let her know that they could speak an if they would; and they expressed their pity of her to assist her to begin the speaking. She bowed in acceptance of Fosters offer of a glass of wine after supper, but treated him and the other two immediately as though they had been interrogating bigwigs.

‘They wormed nothing out of me,’ she said to her mistress at night, undressing her. ’But what a set they are! They’ve got such comfortable places, they’ve all their days and hours for talk of the doings of their superiors. They read the vilest of those town papers, and they put their two and two together of what is happening in and about. And not one of the footmen thinks of staying, because it ’s so dull; and they and the maids object—-did one ever hear?—to the three uppers retiring, when they ‘ve done dining, to the private room to dessert.’

‘That is the custom?’ observed her mistress.

’Foster carries the decanter, ma’am, and Mrs. Bridges the biscuits, and Bartlett the plate of fruit, and they march out in order.’

‘The man at the head of the procession, probably.’

’Oh yes. And the others, though they have everything except the wine and dessert, don’t like it. When I was here last they were new, and hadn’t a word against it. Now they say it’s invidious! Lady Dunstane will be left without an under-servant at Copsley soon. I was asked about your boxes, ma’am, and the moment I said they were at Dover, that instant all three peeped. They let out a mouse to me. They do love to talk!’

Her mistress could have added, ‘And you too, my good Danvers!’ trustworthy though she knew the creature to be in the main.

Page 3191

‘Now go, and be sure you have bedclothes enough before you drop asleep,’ she said; and Danvers directed her steps to gossip with Bartlett.

Diana wrapped herself in a dressing-gown Lady Dunstane had sent her, and sat by the fire, thinking of the powder of tattle stored in servants’ halls to explode beneath her: and but for her choice of roads she might have been among strangers. The liking of strangers best is a curious exemplification of innocence.

‘Yes, I was in a muse,’ she said, raising her head to Emma, whom she expected and sat armed to meet, unaccountably iron-nerved. ’I was questioning whether I could be quite as blameless as I fancy, if I sit and shiver to be in England. You will tell me I have taken the right road. I doubt it. But the road is taken, and here I am. But any road that leads me to you is homeward, my darling!’ She tried to melt, determining to be at least open with her.

‘I have not praised you enough for coming,’ said Emma, when they had embraced again.

’Praise a little your “truest friend of women.” Your letter gave the tug. I might have resisted it.’

‘He came straight from heaven! But, cruel Tony where is your love?’

’It is unequal to yours, dear, I see. I could have wrestled with anything abstract and distant, from being certain. But here I am.’

’But, my own dear girl, you never could have allowed this infamous charge to be undefended?’

’I think so. I’ve an odd apathy as to my character; rather like death, when one dreams of flying the soul. What does it matter? I should have left the flies and wasps to worry a corpse. And then-good-bye gentility! I should have worked for my bread. I had thoughts of America. I fancy I can write; and Americans, one hears, are gentle to women.’

‘Ah, Tony! there’s the looking back. And, of all women, you!’

’Or else, dear-well, perhaps once on foreign soil, in a different air, I might—might have looked back, and seen my whole self, not shattered, as I feel it now, and come home again compassionate to the poor persecuted animal to defend her. Perhaps that was what I was running away for. I fled on the instinct, often a good thing to trust.’

‘I saw you at The Crossways.’

’I remembered I had the dread that you would, though I did not imagine you would reach me so swiftly. My going there was an instinct, too. I suppose we are all instinct when we have the world at our heels. Forgive me if I generalize without any longer the right to be included in the common human sum. “Pariah” and “taboo” are words we borrow from barbarous tribes; they stick to me.’

‘My Tony, you look as bright as ever, and you speak despairingly.’

‘Call me enigma. I am that to myself, Emmy.’

‘You are not quite yourself to your friend.’

’Since the blow I have been bewildered; I see nothing upright. It came on me suddenly; stunned me. A bolt out of a clear sky, as they say. He spared me a scene: There had been threats, and yet the sky was clear, or seemed. When we have a man for arbiter, he is our sky.’

Page 3192

Emma pressed her Tony's unresponsive hand, feeling strangely that her friend ebbed from her.

'Has he . . . to mislead him?' she said, colouring at the breach in the question.

'Proofs? He has the proofs he supposes.'

'Not to justify suspicion?'

'He broke open my desk and took my letters.'

'Horrible! But the letters?' Emma shook with a nervous revulsion.

'You might read them.'

'Basest of men! That is the unpardonable cowardice!', exclaimed Emma.

'The world will read them, dear,' said Diana, and struck herself to ice. She broke from the bitter frigidity in fury. 'They are letters—none very long—sometimes two short sentences—he wrote at any spare moment. On my honour, as a woman, I feel for him most. The letters—I would bear any accusation rather than that exposure. Letters of a man of his age to a young woman he rates too highly!

The world reads them. Do you hear it saying it could have excused her for that fiddle-faddle with a younger—a young lover? And had I thought of a lover! . . . I had no thought of loving or being loved. I confess I was flattered. To you, Emma, I will confess . . . . You see the public ridicule!—and half his age, he and I would have appeared a romantic couple! Confess, I said. Well, dear, the stake is lighted for a trial of its effect on me. It is this: he was never a dishonourable friend; but men appear to be capable of friendship with women only for as long as we keep out of pulling distance of that line where friendship ceases. They may step on it; we must hold back a league. I have learnt it. You will judge whether he disrespects me. As for him, he is a man; at his worst, not one of the worst; at his best, better than very many. There, now, Emma, you have me stripped and burning; there is my full confession. Except for this—yes, one thing further—that I do rage at the ridicule, and could choose, but for you, to have given the world cause to revile me, or think me romantic. Something or somebody to suffer for would really be agreeable. It is a singular fact, I have not known what this love is, that they talk about. And behold me marched into Smithfield!—society's heretic, if you please. I must own I think it hard.'

Emma chafed her cold hand softly.

'It is hard; I understand it,' she murmured. 'And is your Sunday visit to us in the list of offences?'

‘An item.’

‘You gave me a happy day.’

‘Then it counts for me in heaven.’

‘He set spies on you?’

‘So we may presume.’

Emma went through a sphere of tenuious reflections in a flash.

’He will rue it. Perhaps now . . . he may now be regretting his wretched frenzy. And Tony could pardon; she has the power of pardoning in her heart.’

’Oh! certainly, dear. But tell me why it is you speak to-night rather unlike the sedate, philosophical Emma; in a tone-well, tolerably sentimental?’

Page 3193

‘I am unaware of it,’ said Emma, who could have retorted with a like reproach. ’I am anxious, I will not say at present for your happiness, for your peace; and I have a hope that possibly a timely word from some friend—Lukin or another—might induce him to consider.’

‘To pardon me, do you mean?’ cried Diana, flushing sternly.

‘Not pardon. Suppose a case of faults on both sides.’

’You address a faulty person, my dear. But do you know that you are hinting at a reconcilement?’

‘Might it not be?’

’Open your eyes to what it involves. I trust I can pardon. Let him go his ways, do his darkest, or repent. But return to the roof of the “basest of men,” who was guilty of “the unpardonable cowardice”? You expect me to be superhuman. When I consent to that, I shall be out of my woman’s skin, which he has branded. Go back to him!’ She was taken with a shudder of head and limbs. ’No; I really have the power of pardoning, and I am bound to; for among my debts to him, this present exemption, that is like liberty dragging a chain, or, say, an escaped felon wearing his manacles, should count. I am sensible of my obligation. The price I pay for it is an immovable patch-attractive to male idiots, I have heard, and a mark of scorn to females. Between the two the remainder of my days will be lively. “Out, out, damned spot!” But it will not. And not on the hand—on the forehead! We’ll talk of it no longer. I have sent a note, with an enclosure, to my lawyers. I sell The Crossways, if I have the married woman’s right to any scrap of property, for money to scatter fees.’

‘My purse, dear Tony!’ exclaimed Emma. ’My house! You will stay with me? Why do you shake your head? With me you are safe.’ She spied at the shadows in her friend’s face. ’Ever since your marriage, Tony, you have been strange in your trick of refusing to stay with me. And you and I made our friendship the pledge of a belief in eternity! We vowed it. Come, I do talk sentimentally, but my heart is in it. I beg you—all the reasons are with me—to make my house your home. You will. You know I am rather lonely.’

Diana struggled to keep her resolution from being broken by tenderness. And doubtless poor Sir Lukin had learnt his lesson; still, her defensive instincts could never quite slumber under his roof; not because of any further fear that they would have to be summoned; it was chiefly owing to the consequences of his treacherous foolishness. For this half-home with her friend thenceforward denied to her, she had accepted a protector, called husband—rashly, past credence, in the retrospect; but it had been her propelling motive; and the loathings roused by her marriage helped to sicken her at the idea of a lengthened stay where she had suffered the shock precipitating her to an act of insanity.

’I do not forget you were an heiress, Emmy, and I will come to you if I need money to keep my head up. As for staying, two reasons are against it. If I am to fight my battle, I must be seen; I must go about—wherever I am received. So my field is London. That is obvious. And I shall rest better in a house where my story is not known.’

Page 3194

Two or three questions ensued. Diana had to fortify her fictitious objection by alluding to her maid's prattle of the household below; and she excused the hapless, overfed, idle people of those regions.

To Emma it seemed a not unnatural sensitiveness. She came to a settled resolve in her thoughts, as she said, 'They want a change. London is their element.'

Feeling that she deceived this true heart, however lightly and necessarily, Diana warmed to her, forgiving her at last for having netted and dragged her back to front the enemy; an imposition of horrors, of which the scene and the travelling with Redworth, the talking of her case with her most intimate friend as well, had been a distempering foretaste.

They stood up and kissed, parting for the night.

An odd world, where for the sin we have not participated in we must fib and continue fibbing, she reflected. She did not entirely cheat her clearer mind, for she perceived that her step in flight had been urged both by a weak despondency and a blind desperation; also that the world of a fluid civilization is perforce artificial. But her mind was in the background of her fevered senses, and when she looked in the glass and mused on uttering the word, 'Liar!' to the lovely image, her senses were refreshed, her mind somewhat relieved, the face appeared so sovereignly defiant of abasement.

Thus did a nature distraught by pain obtain some short lull of repose. Thus, moreover, by closely reading herself, whom she scourged to excess that she might in justice be comforted, she gathered an increasing knowledge of our human constitution, and stored matter for the brain.

CHAPTER XIII

TOUCHING THE FIRST DAYS OF HER PROBATION

The result of her sleeping was, that Diana's humour, locked up overnight, insisted on an excursion, as she lay with half-buried head and open eyelids, thinking of the firm of lawyers she had to see; and to whom, and to the legal profession generally, she would be, under outward courtesies, nothing other than 'the woman Warwick.' She pursued the woman Warwick unmercifully through a series of interviews with her decorous and crudely-minded defenders; accurately perusing them behind their senior staidness. Her scorching sensitiveness sharpened her intelligence in regard to the estimate of discarded wives entertained by men of business and plain men of the world, and she drove the woman Warwick down their ranks, amazed by the vision of a puppet so unlike to herself in reality, though identical in situation. That woman, reciting her side of the case, gained a gradual resemblance to Danvers; she spoke primly; perpetually the

creature aired her handkerchief; she was bent on softening those sugarloaves, the hard business-men applying to her for facts. Facts were treated as unworthy of her; mere stuff of the dustheap, mutton-bones, old shoes; she swam above them in a cocoon of her spinning,

Page 3195

sylphidine, unseizable; and between perplexing and mollifying the slaves of facts, she saw them at their heels, a tearful fry, abjectly imitative of her melodramatic performances. The spectacle was presented of a band of legal gentlemen vociferating mightily for swords and the onset, like the Austrian empress's Magyars, to vindicate her just and holy cause. Our Law-courts failing, they threatened Parliament, and for a last resort, the country! We are not going to be the woman Warwick without a stir, my brethren.

Emma, an early riser that morning, for the purpose of a private consultation with Mr. Redworth, found her lying placidly wakeful, to judge by appearances.

'You have not slept, my dear child?'

'Perfectly,' said Diana, giving her hand and offering the lips. 'I'm only having a warm morning bath in bed,' she added, in explanation of a chill moisture that the touch of her exposed skin betrayed; for whatever the fun of the woman Warwick, there had been sympathetic feminine horrors in the frame of the sentient woman.

Emma fancied she kissed a quiet sufferer. A few remarks very soon set her wildly laughing. Both were laughing when Danvers entered the room, rather guilty, being late; and the sight of the prim-visaged maid she had been driving among the lawyers kindled Diana's comic imagination to such a pitch that she ran riot in drolleries, carrying her friend headlong on the tide.

'I have not laughed so much since you were married,' said Emma.

'Nor I, dear; proving that the bar to it was the ceremony,' said Diana.

She promised to remain at Copsley three days. 'Then for the campaign in Mr. Redworth's metropolis. I wonder whether I may ask him to get me lodgings: a sitting-room and two bedrooms. The Crossways has a board up for letting. I should prefer to be my own tenant; only it would give me a hundred pounds more to get a substitute's money. I should like to be at work writing instantly. Ink is my opium, and the pen my nigger, and he must dig up gold for me. It is written. Danvers, you can make ready to dress me when I ring.'

Emma helped the beautiful woman to her dressing-gown and the step from her bed. She had her thoughts, and went down to Redworth at the breakfast-table, marvelling that any husband other than a madman could cast such a jewel away. The material loveliness eclipses intellectual qualities in such reflections.

'He must be mad,' she said, compelled to disburden herself in a congenial atmosphere; which, however, she infrigidated by her overflow of exclamatory wonderment—a curtain

that shook voluminous folds, luring Redworth to dreams of the treasure forfeited. He became rigidly practical.

'Provision will have to be made for her. Lukin must see Mr. Warwick. She will do wisely to stay with friends in town, mix in company. Women are the best allies for such cases. Who are her solicitors?'

Page 3196

‘They are mine: Braddock, Thorpe, and Simnel.’

’A good firm. She is in safe hands with them. I dare say they may come to an arrangement.’

‘I should wish it. She will never consent.’

Redworth shrugged. A woman’s ‘never’ fell far short of outstripping the sturdy pedestrian Time, to his mind.

Diana saw him drive off to catch the coach in the valley, regulated to meet the train, and much though she liked him, she was not sorry that he had gone. She felt the better clad for it. She would have rejoiced to witness the departure on wings of all her friends, except Emma, to whom her coldness overnight had bound her anew warmly in contrition. And yet her friends were well-beloved by her; but her emotions were distraught.

Emma told her that Mr. Redworth had undertaken to hire a suite of convenient rooms, and to these she looked forward, the nest among strangers, where she could begin to write, earning bread: an idea that, with the pride of independence, conjured the pleasant morning smell of a bakery about her.

She passed three peaceable days at Copsley, at war only with the luxury of the house. On the fourth, a letter to Lady Dunstane from Redworth gave the address of the best lodgings he could find, and Diana started for London.

She had during a couple of weeks, besides the first fresh exercising of her pen, as well as the severe gratification of economy, a savage exultation in passing through the streets on foot and unknown. Save for the plunges into the office of her solicitors, she could seem to herself a woman who had never submitted to the yoke. What a pleasure it was, after finishing a number of pages, to start Eastward toward the lawyer-regions, full of imaginary cropping incidents, and from that churchyard Westward, against smoky sunsets, or in welcome fogs, an atom of the crowd! She had an affection for the crowd. They clothed her. She laughed at the gloomy forebodings of Danvers concerning the perils environing ladies in the streets after dark alone. The lights in the streets after dark and the quick running of her blood, combined to strike sparks of fancy and inspirit the task of composition at night. This new, strange, solitary life, cut off from her adulatory society, both by the shock that made the abyss and by the utter foreignness, threw her in upon her natural forces, recasting her, and thinning away her memory of her past days, excepting girlhood, into the remote. She lived with her girlhood as with a simple little sister. They were two in one, and she corrected the dreams of the younger, protected and counselled her very sagely, advising her to love Truth and look always to Reality for her refreshment. She was ready to say, that no habitable spot on our planet was healthier and pleasanter than London. As to the perils haunting the head of

Danvers, her experiences assured her of a perfect immunity from them; and the maligned thoroughfares of a great city, she was ready to affirm, contrasted favourably with certain hospitable halls.

Page 3197

The long-suffering Fates permitted her for a term to enjoy the generous delusion. Subsequently a sweet surprise alleviated the shock she had sustained. Emma Dunstane's carriage was at her door, and Emma entered her sitting-room, to tell her of having hired a house in the neighbourhood, looking on the park. She begged to have her for guest, sorrowfully anticipating the refusal. At least they were to be near one another.

'You really like this life in lodgings?' asked Emma, to whom the stiff furniture and narrow apartments were a dreariness, the miserably small fire of the sitting-room an aspect of cheerless winter.

'I do,' said Diana; 'yes,' she added with some reserve, and smiled at her damped enthusiasm, 'I can eat when I like, walk, work—and I am working! My legs and my pen demand it. Let me be independent! Besides, I begin to learn something of the bigger world outside the one I know, and I crush my mincing tastes. In return for that, I get a sense of strength I had not when I was a drawing-room exotic. Much is repulsive. But I am taken with a passion for reality.'

They spoke of the lawyers, and the calculated period of the trial; of the husband too, in his inciting belief in the falseness of his wife. 'That is his excuse,' Diana said, her closed mouth meditatively dimpling the comers over thoughts of his grounds for fury. He had them, though none for the incriminating charge. The Sphinx mouth of the married woman at war and at bay must be left unriddled. She and the law differed in their interpretation of the dues of wedlock.

But matters referring to her case were secondary with Diana beside the importance of her storing impressions. Her mind required to hunger for something, and this Reality which frequently she was forced to loathe, she forced herself proudly to accept, despite her youthfulness. Her philosophy swallowed it in the lump, as the great serpent his meal; she hoped to digest it sleeping likewise. Her visits of curiosity to the Law Courts, where she stood spying and listening behind a veil, gave her a great deal of tough substance to digest. There she watched the process of the tortures to be applied to herself, and hardened her senses for the ordeal. She saw there the ribbed and shanked old skeleton world on which our fair fleshly is moulded. After all, your Fool's Paradise is not a garden to grow in. Charon's ferry-boat is not thicker with phantoms. They do not live in mind or soul. Chiefly women people it: a certain class of limp men; women for the most part: they are sown there. And put their garden under the magnifying glass of intimacy, what do we behold? A world not better than the world it curtains, only foolisher.

Her conversations with Lady Dunstane brought her at last to the point of her damped enthusiasm. She related an incident or two occurring in her career of independence, and they discussed our state of civilization plainly and gravely, save for the laughing peals her phrases occasionally provoked; as when she named the intruders and

disturbers of solitarily-faring ladies, ‘Cupid’s footpads.’ Her humour was created to swim on waters where a prescribed and cultivated prudery should pretend to be drowning.

Page 3198

’I was getting an exalted idea of English gentlemen, Emmy. “Rich and rare were the gems she wore.” I was ready to vow that one might traverse the larger island similarly respected. I praised their chivalry. I thought it a privilege to live in such a land. I cannot describe to you how delightful it was to me to walk out and home generally protected. I might have been seriously annoyed but that one of the clerks-"articled,” he called himself—of our lawyers happened to be by. He offered to guard me, and was amusing with his modest tiptoe air. No, I trust to the English common man more than ever. He is a man of honour. I am convinced he is matchless in any other country, except Ireland. The English gentleman trades on his reputation.’

He was condemned by an afflicted delicacy, the sharpest of critical tribunals.

Emma bade her not to be too sweeping from a bad example.

‘It is not a single one,’ said Diana. ’What vexes me and frets me is, that I must be a prisoner, or allow Danvers to mount guard. And I can’t see the end of it. And Danvers is no magician. She seems to know her countrymen, though. She warded one of them off, by saying to me: “This is the crossing, my lady.” He fled.’

Lady Dunstane affixed the popular title to the latter kind of gentleman. She was irritated on her friend’s behalf, and against the worrying of her sisterhood, thinking in her heart, nevertheless, that the passing of a face and figure like Diana’s might inspire honourable emotions, pitiable for being hapless.

‘If you were with me, dear, you would have none of these annoyances,’ she said, pleading forlornly.

Diana smiled to herself. ’No! I should relapse into softness. This life exactly suits my present temper. My landlady is respectful and attentive; the little housemaid is a willing slave; Danvers does not despise them pugnaciously; they make a home for me, and I am learning daily. Do you know, the less ignorant I become, the more considerate I am for the ignorance of others—I love them for it.’ She squeezed Emma’s hand with more meaning than her friend apprehended. ’So I win my advantage from the trifles I have to endure. They are really trifles, and I should once have thought them mountains!’

For the moment Diana stipulated that she might not have to encounter friends or others at Lady Dunstane’s dinner-table, and the season not being favourable to those gatherings planned by Lady Dunstane in her project of winning supporters, there was a respite, during which Sir Lukin worked manfully at his three Clubs to vindicate Diana’s name from the hummers and hawers, gaining half a dozen hot adherents, and a body of lukewarm, sufficiently stirred to be desirous to see the lady. He worked with true champion zeal, although an interview granted him by the husband settled his opinion as to any possibility of the two ever coming to terms. Also it struck him that if he by misadventure had been a woman and the wife

Page 3199

of such a fellow, by Jove! . . .his apostrophe to the father of the gods of pagandom signifying the amount of matter Warwick would have had reason to complain of in earnest. By ricochet his military mind rebounded from his knowledge of himself to an ardent, faith in Mrs. Warwick's innocence; for, as there was no resemblance between them, there must, he deduced, be a difference in their capacity for enduring the perpetual company of a prig, a stick, a petrified poser. Moreover, the novel act of advocacy, and the nature of the advocacy, had effect on him. And then he recalled the scene in the winter beech-woods, and Diana's wild-deer eyes; her, perfect generosity to a traitor and fool. How could he have doubted her? Glimpses of the corrupting cause for it partly penetrated his density: a conqueror of ladies, in mid-career, doubts them all. Of course he had meant no harm, nothing worse than some petty philandering with the loveliest woman of her time. And, by Jove! it was worth the rebuff to behold the Beauty in her wrath.

The reflections of Lothario, however much tending tardily to do justice to a particular lady, cannot terminate wholesomely. But he became a gallant partisan. His portrayal of Mr. Warwick to his wife and his friends was fine caricature. 'The fellow had his hand up at my first word—stood like a sentinel under inspection. "Understand, Sir Lukin, that I receive you simply as an acquaintance. As an intermediary, permit me to state that you are taking superfluous trouble. The case must proceed. It is final. She is at liberty, in the meantime, to draw on my bankers for the provision she may need, at the rate of five hundred pounds per annum." He spoke of "the lady now bearing my name." He was within an inch of saying "dishonouring." I swear I heard the "dis," and he caught himself up. He "again declined any attempt towards reconciliation." It could "only be founded on evasion of the truth to be made patent on the day of trial." Half his talk was lawyers' lingo. The fellow's teeth looked like frost. If Lot's wife had a brother, his name's Warwick. How Diana Merion, who could have had the pick of the best of us, ever came to marry a fellow like that, passes my comprehension, queer creatures as women are! He can ride; that's about all he can do. I told him Mrs. Warwick had no thought of reconciliation. "Then, Sir Lukin, you will perceive that we have no standpoint for a discussion." I told him the point was, for a man of honour not to drag his wife before the public, as he had no case to stand on—less than nothing. You should have seen the fellow's face. He shot a sneer up to his eyelids, and flung his head back. So I said, "Good-day." He marches me to the door, "with his compliments to Lady Dunstane." I could have floored him for that. Bless my soul, what fellows the world is made of, when here's a man, calling himself a gentleman, who, just because he gets in a rage with his wife for one thing or another—and past all competition the handsomest woman of her day, and the cleverest, the nicest, the best of the whole boiling—has her out for a public horsewhipping, and sets all the idiots of the kingdom against her! I tried to reason with him. He made as if he were going to sleep standing.'

Page 3200

Sir Lukin gratified Lady Dunstane by his honest championship of Diana. And now, in his altered mood (the thrice indebted rogue was just cloudily conscious of a desire to propitiate his dear wife by serving her friend), he began a crusade against the scandal-newspapers, going with an Irish military comrade straight to the editorial offices, and leaving his card and a warning that the chastisement for print of the name of the lady in their columns would be personal and condign. Captain Carew Mahony, albeit unacquainted with Mrs. Warwick, had espoused her cause. She was a woman, she was an Irishwoman, she was a beautiful woman. She had, therefore, three positive claims on him as a soldier and a man. Other Irish gentlemen, animated by the same swelling degrees, were awaking to the intimation that they might be wanted. Some words were dropped here and there by General Lord Larrian: he regretted his age and infirmities. A goodly regiment for a bodyguard might have been selected to protect her steps in the public streets; when it was bruited that the General had sent her a present of his great Newfoundland dog, Leander, to attend on her and impose a required respect. But as it chanced that her address was unknown to the volunteer constabulary, they had to assuage their ardour by thinking the dog luckier than they.

The report of the dog was a fact. He arrived one morning at Diana's lodgings, with a soldier to lead him, and a card to introduce:—the Hercules of dogs, a very ideal of the species, toweringly big, benevolent, reputed a rescuer of lives, disdainful of dog-fighting, devoted to his guardian's office, with a majestic paw to give and the noblest satisfaction in receiving caresses ever expressed by mortal male enfolded about the head, kissed, patted, hugged, snuggled, informed that he was his new mistress's one love and darling.

She despatched a thrilling note of thanks to Lord Larrian, sure of her touch upon an Irish heart.

The dog Leander soon responded to the attachment of a mistress enamoured of him. 'He is my husband,' she said to Emma, and started a tear in the eyes of her smiling friend; 'he promises to trust me, and never to have the law of me, and to love my friends as his own; so we are certain to agree.' In rain, snow, sunshine, through the parks and the streets, he was the shadow of Diana, commanding, on the whole, apart from some desperate attempts to make him serve as introducer, a civilized behaviour in the legions of Cupid's footpads. But he helped, innocently enough, to create an enemy.

CHAPTER XIV

Giving glimpses of Diana under her cloud before the world and of her further apprenticeship

Page 3201

As the day of her trial became more closely calculable, Diana's anticipated alarms receded with the deadening of her heart to meet the shock. She fancied she had put on proof-armour, unconscious that it was the turning of the inward flutterer to steel, which supplied her cuirass and shield. The necessity to brave society, in the character of honest Defendant, caused but a momentary twitch of the nerves. Her heart beat regularly, like a serviceable clock; none of her faculties abandoned her save songfulness, and none belied her, excepting a disposition to tartness almost venomous in the sarcastic shafts she let fly at friends interceding with Mr. Warwick to spare his wife, when she had determined to be tried. A strange fit of childishness overcame her powers of thinking, and was betrayed in her manner of speaking, though—to herself her dwindled humour allowed her to appear the towering Britomart. She pouted contemptuously on hearing that a Mr. Sullivan Smith (a remotely recollected figure) had besought Mr. Warwick for an interview, and gained it, by stratagem, 'to bring the man to his senses': but an ultra-Irishman did not compromise her battle-front, as the busybody supplications of a personal friend like Mr. Redworth did; and that the latter, without consulting her, should be 'one of the plaintive crew whining about the heels of the Plaintiff for a mercy she disdained and rejected' was bitter to her taste.

'He does not see that unless I go through the fire there is no justification for this wretched character of mine!' she exclaimed. Truce, treaty, withdrawal, signified publicly pardon, not exoneration by any means; and now that she was in armour she had no dread of the public. So she said. Redworth's being then engaged upon the canvass of a borough, added to the absurdity of his meddling with the dilemmas of a woman. 'Dear me, Emma! think of stepping aside from the parliamentary road to entreat a husband to relent, and arrange the domestic alliance of a contrary couple! Quixottry is agreeable reading, a silly performance.' Lady Dunstane pleaded his friendship. She had to quit the field where such darts were showering.

The first dinner-party was aristocratic, easy to encounter. Lord and Lady Crane, Lady Pennon, Lord and Lady Esquart, Lord Larrian, Mr. and Mrs. Montvert of Halford Manor, Lady Singleby, Sir Walter Capperston friends, admirers of Diana; patrons, in the phrase of the time, of her father, were the guests. Lady Pennon expected to be amused, and was gratified, for Diana had only to open her mouth to set the great lady laughing. She petitioned to have Mrs. Warwick at her table that day week, because the marquis was dying to make her acquaintance, and begged to have all her sayings repeated to him; vowed she must be salt in the desert. 'And remember, I back you through thick and thin,' said Lady Pennon. To which Diana replied: 'If I am salt in the desert, you are the spring'; and the old lady protested

Page 3202

she must put that down for her book. The witty Mrs. Warwick, of whom wit was expected, had many incitements to be guilty of cheap wit; and the beautiful Mrs. Warwick, being able to pass anything she uttered, gave good and bad alike, under the impulsion to give out something, that the stripped and shivering Mrs. Warwick might find a cover in applause. She discovered the social uses of cheap wit; she laid ambushes for anecdotes, a telling form of it among a people of no conversational interlocution, especially in the circles depending for dialogue upon perpetual fresh supplies of scandal; which have plentiful crops, yet not sufficient. The old dinner and supper tables at The Crossways furnished her with an abundant store; and recollection failing, she invented. Irish anecdotes are always popular in England, as promoting, besides the wholesome shake of the sides, a kindly sense of superiority. Anecdotes also are portable, unlike the lightning flash, which will not go into the pocket; they can be carried home, they are disbursable at other tables. These were Diana's weapons. She was perforce the actress of her part.

In happier times, when light of heart and natural, her vogue had not been so enrapturing. Doubtless Cleopatra in her simple Egyptian uniform would hardly have won such plaudits as her stress of barbaric Oriental splendours evoked for her on the swan and serpent Nile-barge—not from posterity at least. It is a terrible decree, that all must act who would prevail; and the more extended the audience, the greater need for the mask and buskin.

From Lady Pennon's table Diana passed to Lady Crane's, Lady Esquart's, Lady Singleby's, the Duchess of Raby's, warmly clad in the admiration she excited. She appeared at Princess Therese Paryli's first ball of the season, and had her circle, not of worshippers only. She did not dance. The princess, a fair Austrian, benevolent to her sisterhood, an admirer of Diana's contrasting complexion, would have had her dance once in a quadrille of her forming, but yielded to the mute expression of the refusal. Wherever Mrs. Warwick went, her arts of charming were addressed to the women. Men may be counted on for falling bowled over by a handsome face and pointed tongue; women require some wooing from their ensphered and charioted sister, particularly if she is clouded; and old women—excellent buttresses—must be suavely courted. Now, to woo the swimming matron and court the settled dowager, she had to win forgiveness for her beauty; and this was done, easily done, by forbearing to angle with it in the press of nibblers. They ranged about her, individually unnoticed. Seeming unaware of its effect where it kindled, she smote a number of musical female chords, compassion among them. A general grave affability of her eyes and smiles was taken for quiet pleasure in the scene. Her fitful intentness of look when conversing with the older ladies told of the mind within at work upon

Page 3203

what they said, and she was careful that plain dialogue should make her comprehensible to them. Nature taught her these arts, through which her wit became extolled entirely on the strength of her reputation, and her beauty did her service by never taking aim abroad. They are the woman's arts of self-defence, as legitimately and honourably hers as the manful use of the fists with a coarser sex. If it had not been nature that taught her the practice of them in extremity, the sagacious dowagers would have seen brazenness rather than innocence—or an excuseable indiscretion—in the part she was performing. They are not lightly duped by one of their sex. Few tasks are more difficult than for a young woman under a cloud to hoodwink old women of the world. They are the prey of financiers, but Time has presented them a magic ancient glass to scan their sex in.

At Princess Paryli's Ball two young men of singular elegance were observed by Diana, little though she concentered her attention on any figures of the groups. She had the woman's faculty (transiently bestowed by perfervid jealousy upon men) of distinguishing minutely in the calmest of indifferent glances. She could see without looking; and when her eyes were wide they had not to dwell to be detective. It did not escape her that the Englishman of the two hurried for the chance of an introduction, nor that he suddenly, after putting a question to a man beside him, retired. She spoke of them to Emma as they drove home. 'The princess's partner in the first quadrille . . . Hungarian, I suppose? He was like a Tartar modelled by a Greek: supple as the Scythian's bow, braced as the string! He has the air of a born horseman, and valses perfectly. I won't say he was handsomer than a young Englishman there, but he had the advantage of soldierly training. How different is that quick springy figure from our young men's lounging style! It comes of military exercise and discipline.'

'That was Count Jochany, a cousin of the princess, and a cavalry officer,' said Emma. 'You don't know the other? I am sure the one you mean must be Percy Dacier.'

His retiring was explained: the Hon. Percy Dacier was the nephew of Lord Dannisburgh, often extolled to her as the promising youngster of his day, with the reserve that he wasted his youth: for the young gentleman was decorous and studious; ambitious, according to report; a politician taking to politics much too seriously and exclusively to suit his uncle's pattern for the early period of life. Uncle and nephew went their separate ways, rarely meeting, though their exchange of esteem was cordial.

Thinking over his abrupt retirement from the crowded semicircle, Diana felt her position pinch her, she knew not why.

Page 3204

Lady Dunstane was as indefatigable by day as by night in the business of acting goddess to her beloved Tony, whom she assured that the service, instead of exhausting, gave her such healthfulness as she had imagined herself to have lost for ever. The word was passed, and invitations poured in to choice conversational breakfasts, private afternoon concerts, all the humming season's assemblies. Mr. Warwick's treatment of his wife was taken by implication for lunatic; wherever she was heard or seen, he had no case; a jury of some hundreds of both sexes, ready to be sworn, pronounced against him. Only the personal enemies of the lord in the suit presumed to doubt, and they exercised the discretion of a minority.

But there is an upper middle class below the aristocratic, boasting an aristocracy of morals, and eminently persuasive of public opinion, if not commanding it. Previous to the relaxation, by amendment, of a certain legal process, this class was held to represent the austerity of the country. At present a relaxed austerity is represented; and still the bulk of the members are of fair repute, though not quite on the level of their pretensions. They were then, while more sharply divided from the titular superiors they are socially absorbing, very powerful to brand a woman's character, whatever her rank might be; having innumerable agencies and avenues for that high purpose, to say nothing of the printing-press. Lady Dunstane's anxiety to draw them over to the cause of her friend set her thinking of the influential Mrs. Cramborne Wathin, with whom she was distantly connected; the wife of a potent serjeant-at-law fast mounting to the Bench and knighthood; the centre of a circle, and not strangely that, despite her deficiency in the arts and graces, for she had wealth and a cook, a husband proud of his wine-cellar, and the ambition to rule; all the rewards, together with the expectations, of the virtuous. She was a lady of incisive features bound in stale parchment. Complexion she had none, but she had spotlessness of skin, and sons and daughters just resembling her, like cheaper editions of a precious quarto of a perished type. You discerned the imitation of the type, you acknowledged the inferior compositor. Mr. Cramborne Wathin was by birth of a grade beneath his wife; he sprang (behind a curtain of horror) from tradesmen. The Bench was in designation for him to wash out the stain, but his children suffered in large hands and feet, short legs, excess of bone, prominences misplaced. Their mother inspired them carefully with the religion she opposed to the pretensions of a nobler blood, while instilling into them that the blood they drew from her was territorial, far above the vulgar. Her appearance and her principles fitted her to stand for the Puritan rich of the period, emerging by the aid of an extending wealth into luxurious worldliness, and retaining the maxims of their forefathers for the discipline of the poor and erring.

Page 3205

Lady Dunstane called on her, ostensibly to let her know she had taken a house in town for the season, and in the course of the chat Mrs. Cramborne Wathin was invited to dinner. 'You will meet my dear friend, Mrs. Warwick,' she said, and the reply was: 'Oh, I have heard of her.'

The formal consultation with Mr. Cramborne Wathin ended in an agreement to accept Lady Dunstane's kind invitation.

Considering her husband's plenitude of old legal anecdotes, and her own diligent perusal of the funny publications of the day, that she might be on the level of the wits and celebrities she entertained, Mrs. Cramborne Wathin had a right to expect the leading share in the conversation to which she was accustomed. Every honour was paid to them; they met aristocracy in the persons of Lord Larrian, of Lady Rockden, Colonel Purlby, the Pettigrews, but neither of them held the table for a moment; the topics flew, and were no sooner up than down; they were unable to get a shot. They had to eat in silence, occasionally grinning, because a woman labouring under a stigma would rattle-rattle, as if the laughter of the company were her due, and decency beneath her notice. Some one alluded to a dog of Mrs. Warwick's, whereupon she trips out a story of her dog's amazing intelligence.

'And pray,' said Mrs. Cramborne Wathin across the table, merely to slip in a word, 'what is the name of this wonderful dog?'

'His name is Leander,' said Diana.

'Oh, Leander. I don't think I hear myself calling to a dog in a name of three syllables. Two at the most.'

No, so I call Hero! if I want him to come immediately,' said Diana, and the gentlemen, to Mrs. Cramborne Wathin's astonishment, acclaimed it. Mr. Redworth, at her elbow, explained the point, to her disgust. . .

That was Diana's offence.

If it should seem a small one, let it be remembered that a snub was intended, and was foiled; and foiled with an apparent simplicity, enough to exasperate, had there been no laughter of men to back the countering stroke. A woman under a cloud, she talked, pushed to shine; she would be heard, would be applauded. Her chronicler must likewise admit the error of her giving way to a petty sentiment of antagonism on first beholding Mrs. Cramborne Wathin, before whom she at once resolved to be herself, for a holiday, instead of acting demurely to conciliate. Probably it was an antagonism of race, the shrinking of the skin from the burr. But when Tremendous Powers are invoked, we should treat any simple revulsion of our blood as a vice. The Gods of this world's contests demand it of us, in relation to them, that the mind, and not the instincts,

shall be at work. Otherwise the course of a prudent policy is never to invoke them, but avoid.

Page 3206

The upper class was gained by her intrepidity, her charm, and her elsewhere offending wit, however the case might go. It is chivalrous, but not, alas, inflammable in support of innocence. The class below it is governed in estimates of character by accepted patterns of conduct; yet where innocence under persecution is believed to exist, the members animated by that belief can be enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is a heaven-sent steeplechaser, and takes a flying leap of the ordinary barriers; it is more intrusive than chivalry, and has a passion to communicate its ardour. Two letters from stranger ladies reached Diana, through her lawyers and Lady Dunstane. Anonymous letters, not so welcome, being male effusions, arrived at her lodgings, one of them comical almost over the verge to pathos in its termination: 'To me you will ever be the Goddess Diana —my faith in woman!'

He was unacquainted with her!

She had not the heart to think the writers donkeys. How they obtained her address was a puzzle; they stole in to comfort her slightly. They attached her to her position of Defendant by the thought of what would have been the idea of her character if she had flown—a reflection emanating from inexperience of the resources of sentimentalists.

If she had flown! She was borne along by the tide like a butterfly that a fish may gobble unless a friendly hand shall intervene. And could it in nature? She was past expectation of release. The attempt to imagine living with any warmth of blood in her vindicated character, for the sake of zealous friends, consigned her to a cold and empty house upon a foreign earth. She had to set her mind upon the mysterious enshrouded Twelve, with whom the verdict would soon be hanging, that she might prompt her human combativeness to desire the vindication at such a price as she would have to pay for it. When Emma Dunstane spoke to her of the certainty of triumphing, she suggested a possible dissentient among the fateful Twelve, merely to escape the drumming sound of that hollow big word. The irreverent imp of her humour came to her relief by calling forth the Twelve, in the tone of the clerk of the Court, and they answered to their names of trades and crafts after the manner of Titania's elves, and were questioned as to their fitness, by education, habits, enlightenment, to pronounce decisively upon the case in dispute, the case being plainly stated. They replied, that the long habit of dealing with scales enabled them to weigh the value of evidence the most delicate. Moreover, they were Englishmen, and anything short of downright bullet facts went to favour the woman. For thus we light the balance of legal injustice toward the sex: we conveniently wink, ma'am. A rough, old-fashioned way for us! Is it a Breach of Promise?—She may reckon on her damages: we have daughters of our own. Is it a suit for Divorce?—Well, we have wives of our own, and we can lash, or we can spare; that's as it may be; but we'll keep

Page 3207

the couple tied, let 'em hate as they like, if they can't furnish pork-butchers' reasons for sundering; because the man makes the money in this country.—My goodness! what a funny people, sir!—It 's our way of holding the balance, ma'am.—But would it not be better to rectify the law and the social system, dear sir?—Why, ma'am, we find it comfortabler to take cases as they come, in the style of our fathers.—But don't you see, my good man, that you are offering scapegoats for the comfort of the majority?—Well, ma'am, there always were scapegoats, and always will be; we find it comes round pretty square in the end.

'And I may be the scapegoat, Emmy! It is perfectly possible. The grocer, the pork-butcher, drysalter, stationer, tea-merchant, et caetera—they sit on me. I have studied the faces of the juries, and Mr. Braddock tells me of their composition. And he admits that they do justice roughly—a rough and tumble country! to quote him—though he says they are honest in intention.'

'More shame to the man who drags you before them—if he persists!' Emma rejoined.

'He will. I know him. I would not have him draw back now,' said Diana, catching her breath. 'And, dearest, do not abuse him; for if you do, you set me imagining guiltiness. Oh, heaven!—suppose me publicly pardoned! No, I have kinder feelings when we stand opposed. It is odd, and rather frets my conscience, to think of the little resentment I feel. Hardly any! He has not cause to like his wife. I can own it, and I am sorry for him, heartily. No two have ever come together so naturally antagonistic as we two. We walked a dozen steps in stupefied union, and hit upon crossways. From that moment it was tug and tug; he me, I him. By resisting, I made him a tyrant; and he, by insisting, made me a rebel. And he was the maddest of tyrants—a weak one. My dear, he was also a double-dealer. Or no, perhaps not in design. He was moved at one time by his interests; at another by his idea of his honour. He took what I could get for him, and then turned and drubbed me for getting it.'

'This is the creature you try to excuse!' exclaimed indignant Emma.

'Yes, because—but fancy all the smart things I said being called my "sallies"!—can a woman live with it?—because I behaved . . . I despised him too much, and I showed it. He is not a contemptible man before the world; he is merely a very narrow one under close inspection. I could not—or did not—conceal my feeling. I showed it not only to him, to my friend. Husband grew to mean to me stifler, lung-contractor, iron mask, inquisitor, everything anti-natural. He suffered under my "sallies": and it was the worse for him when he did not perceive their drift. He is an upright man; I have not seen marked meanness. One might build up a respectable figure in negatives. I could add a row of noughts to the single number he cherishes, enough to make a millionnaire of him; but strike away the first,

Page 3208

the rest are wind. Which signifies, that if you do not take his estimate of himself, you will think little of his: negative virtues. He is not eminently, that is to say, not saliently, selfish; not rancorous, not obtrusive—tata-ta-ta. But dull!—dull as a woollen nightcap over eyes and ears and mouth. Oh! an executioner's black cap to me. Dull, and suddenly staring awake to the idea of his honour. I "rendered" him ridiculous—I had caught a trick of "using men's phrases." Dearest, now that the day of trial draws nigh—-you have never questioned me, and it was like you to spare me pain—but now I can speak of him and myself.' Diana dropped her voice. Here was another confession. The proximity of the trial acted like fire on her faded recollection of incidents. It may be that partly the shame of alluding to them had blocked her woman's memory. For one curious operation of the charge of guiltiness upon the nearly guiltless is to make them paint themselves pure white, to the obliteration of minor spots, until the whiteness being acknowledged, or the ordeal imminent, the spots recur and press upon their consciences. She resumed, in a rapid undertone: 'You know that a certain degree of independence had been, if not granted by him, conquered by me. I had the habit of it. Obedience with him is imprisonment—he is a blind wall. He received a commission, greatly to his advantage, and was absent. He seems to have received information of some sort. He returned unexpectedly, at a late hour, and attacked me at once, middling violent. My friend—and that he is! was coming from the House for a ten minutes' talk, as usual, on his way home, to refresh him after the long sitting and bear-baiting he had nightly to endure. Now let me confess: I grew frightened; Mr. Warwick was "off his head," as they say-crazy, and I could not bear the thought of those two meeting. While he raged I threw open the window and put the lamp near it, to expose the whole interior—cunning as a veteran intriguer: horrible, but it had to be done to keep them apart. He asked me what madness possessed me, to sit by an open window at midnight, in view of the public, with a damp wind blowing. I complained of want of air and fanned my forehead. I heard the steps on the pavement; I stung him to retort loudly, and I was relieved; the steps passed on. So the trick succeeded—the trick! It was the worst I was guilty of, but it was a trick, and it branded me trickster. It teaches me to see myself with an abyss in my nature full of infernal possibilities. I think I am hewn in black rock. A woman who can do as I did by instinct, needs to have an angel always near her, if she has not a husband she reveres.'

Page 3209

’We are none of us better than you, dear Tony; only some are more fortunate, and many are cowards,’ Emma said. ’You acted prudently in a wretched situation, partly of your own making, partly of the circumstances. But a nature like yours could not sit still and moan. That marriage was to blame! The English notion of women seems to be that we are born white sheep or black; circumstances have nothing to do with our colour. They dread to grant distinctions, and to judge of us discerningly is beyond them. Whether the fiction, that their homes are purer than elsewhere, helps to establish the fact, I do not know: there is a class that does live honestly; and at any rate it springs from a liking for purity; but I am sure that their method of impressing it on women has the dangers of things artificial. They narrow their understanding of human nature, and that is not the way to improve the breed.’

’I suppose we women are taken to be the second thoughts of the Creator; human nature’s fringes, mere finishing touches, not a part of the texture,’ said Diana; ’the pretty ornamentation. However, I fancy I perceive some tolerance growing in the minds of the dominant sex. Our old lawyer Mr. Braddock, who appears to have no distaste for conversations with me, assures me he expects the day to come when women will be encouraged to work at crafts and professions for their independence. That is the secret of the opinion of us at present—our dependency. Give us the means of independence, and we will gain it, and have a turn at judging you, my lords! You shall behold a world reversed. Whenever I am distracted by existing circumstances, I lay my finger on the material conditions, and I touch the secret. Individually, it may be moral with us; collectively, it is material-gross wrongs, gross hungers. I am a married rebel, and thereof comes the social rebel. I was once a dancing and singing girl: You remember the night of the Dublin Ball. A Channel sea in uproar, stirred by witches, flows between.’

‘You are as lovely as you were then—I could say, lovelier,’ said Emma.

’I have unconquerable health, and I wish I could give you the half of it, dear. I work late into the night, and I wake early and fresh in the morning. I do not sing, that is all. A few days more, and my character will be up before the Bull’s Head to face him in the arena. The worst of a position like mine is, that it causes me incessantly to think and talk of myself. I believe I think less than I talk, but the subject is growing stale; as those who are long dying feel, I dare say—if they do not take it as the compensation for their departure.’

The Bull’s Head, or British Jury of Twelve, with the wig on it, was faced during the latter half of a week of good news. First, Mr. Thomas Redworth was returned to Parliament by a stout majority for the Borough of Orrybridge: the Hon. Percy Dacier delivered a brilliant speech in the House of Commons, necessarily pleasing to his uncle: Lord Larrian obtained the command of the Rock: the house of The Crossways was let to a tenant approved by Mr. Braddock: Diana received the opening proof-sheets of her little volume, and an instalment of the modest honorarium: and finally, the Plaintiff in the suit involving her name was adjudged to have not proved his charge.

Page 3210

She heard of it without a change of countenance.

She could not have wished it the reverse; she was exonerated. But she was not free; far from that; and she revenged herself on the friends who made much of her triumph and overlooked her plight, by showing no sign of satisfaction. There was in her bosom a revolt at the legal consequences of the verdict—or blunt acquiescence of the Law in the conditions possibly to be imposed on her unless she went straight to the relieving phial; and the burden of keeping it under, set her wildest humour alight, somewhat as Redworth remembered of her on the journey from The Crossways to Copsley. This ironic fury, coming of the contrast of the outer and the inner, would have been indulged to the extent of permanent injury to her disposition had not her beloved Emma, immediately after the tension of the struggle ceased, required her tenderest aid. Lady Dunstane chanted victory, and at night collapsed. By the advice of her physician she was removed to Copsley, where Diana's labour of anxious nursing restored her through love to a saner spirit. The hopefulness of life must bloom again in the heart whose prayers are offered for a life dearer than its own to be preserved. A little return of confidence in Sir Lukin also refreshed her when she saw that the poor creature did honestly, in his shaggy rough male fashion, reverence and cling to the flower of souls he named as his wife. His piteous groans of self-accusation during the crisis haunted her, and made the conduct and nature of men a bewilderment to her still young understanding. Save for the knot of her sensations (hardly a mental memory, but a sullen knot) which she did not disentangle to charge him with his complicity in the blind rashness of her marriage, she might have felt sisterly, as warmly as she compassionated him.

It was midwinter when Dame Gossip, who keeps the exotic world alive with her fanning whispers, related that the lovely Mrs. Warwick had left England on board the schooner-yacht Clarissa, with Lord and Lady Esquart, for a voyage in the Mediterranean: and (behind her hand) that the reason was urgent, inasmuch as she fled to escape the meshes of the terrific net of the marital law brutally whirled to capture her by the man her husband.

CHAPTER XV

INTRODUCES THE HON. PERCY DACIER

The Gods of this world's contests, against whom our poor stripped individual is commonly in revolt, are, as we know, not miners, they are reapers; and if we appear no longer on the surface, they cease to bruise us: they will allow an arena character to be cleansed and made presentable while enthusiastic friends preserve discretion. It is of course less than magnanimity; they are not proposed to you for your worship; they are little Gods, temporary as that great wave, their parent human mass of the hour. But they have one worshipful element in them, which is, the divine insistency upon there

being two sides to a case—to every case. And the People so far directed by them may boast of healthfulness. Let the individual shriek, the innocent, triumphant, have in honesty to admit the fact. One side is vanquished, according to decree of Law, but the superior Council does not allow it to be extinguished.

Page 3211

Diana's battle was fought shadowily behind her for the space of a week or so, with some advocates on behalf of the beaten man; then it became a recollection of a beautiful woman, possibly erring, misvalued by a husband, who was neither a man of the world nor a gracious yokefellow, nor anything to match her. She, however, once out of the public flames, had to recall her scorchings to be gentle with herself. Under a defeat, she would have been angrily self-vindicated. The victory of the ashen laurels drove her mind inward to gird at the hateful yoke, in compassion for its pair of victims. Quite earnestly by such means, yet always bearing a comical eye on her subterfuges, she escaped the extremes of personal blame. Those advocates of her opponent in and out of court compelled her honest heart to search within and own to faults. But were they not natural faults? It was her marriage; it was marriage in the abstract: her own mistake and the world's clumsy machinery of civilization: these were the capital offenders: not the wife who would laugh ringingly, and would have friends of the other sex, and shot her epigrams at the helpless despot, and was at times—yes, vixenish; a nature driven to it, but that was the word. She was too generous to recount her charges against the vanquished. If his wretched jealousy had ruined her, the secret high tribunal within her bosom, which judged her guiltless for putting the sword between their marriage tie when they stood as one, because a quarrelling couple could not in honour play the embracing, pronounced him just pardonable. She distinguished that he could only suppose, manlikely, one bad cause for the division.

To this extent she used her unerring brains, more openly than on her night of debate at The Crossways. The next moment she was off in vapour, meditating grandly on her independence of her sex and the passions. Love! she did not know it, she was not acquainted with either the criminal or the domestic God, and persuaded herself that she never could be. She was a Diana of coldness, preferring friendship; she could be the friend of men. There was another who could be the friend of women. Her heart leapt to Redworth. Conjuring up his clear trusty face, at their grasp of hands when parting, she thought of her visions of her future about the period of the Dublin Ball, and acknowledged, despite the erratic step to wedlock, a gain in having met and proved so true a friend. His face, figure, character, lightest look, lightest word, all were loyal signs of a man of honour, cold as she; he was the man to whom she could have opened her heart for inspection. Rejoicing in her independence of an emotional sex, the impulsive woman burned with a regret that at their parting she had not broken down conventional barriers and given her cheek to his lips in the antiinsular fashion with a brotherly friend. And why not when both were cold? Spirit to spirit, she did, delightfully refreshed by her capacity to do so without a throb.

Page 3212

He had held her hands and looked into her eyes half a minute, like a dear comrade; as little arousing her instincts of defensiveness as the clearing heavens; and sisterly love for it was his due, a sister's kiss. He needed a sister, and should have one in her. Emma's recollected talk of 'Tom Redworth' painted him from head to foot, brought the living man over the waters to the deck of the yacht. A stout champion in the person of Tom Redworth was left on British land; but for some reason past analysis, intermixed, that is, among a swarm of sensations, Diana named her champion to herself with the formal prefix: perhaps because she knew a man's Christian name to be dangerous handling. They differed besides frequently in opinion, when the habit of thinking of him as Mr. Redworth would be best. Women are bound to such small observances, and especially the beautiful of the sisterhood, whom the world soon warns that they carry explosives and must particularly guard against the ignition of petty sparks. She was less indiscreet in her thoughts than in her acts, as is the way with the reflective daughter of impulse; though she had fine mental distinctions: what she could offer to do 'spirit to spirit,' for instance, held nothing to her mind of the intimacy of calling the gentleman plain Tom in mere contemplation of him. Her friend and champion was a volunteer, far from a mercenary, and he deserved the reward, if she could bestow it unalarmed. They were to meet in Egypt. Meanwhile England loomed the home of hostile forces ready to shock, had she been a visible planet, and ready to secrete a virus of her past history, had she been making new.

She was happily away, borne by a whiter than swan's wing on the sapphire Mediterranean. Her letters to Emma were peeps of splendour for the invalid: her way of life on board the yacht, and sketches of her host and hostess as lovers in wedlock on the other side of our perilous forties; sketches of the bays, the towns, the people-priests, dames, cavaliers, urchins, infants, shifting groups of supple southerners-flashed across the page like a web of silk, and were dashed off, redolent of herself, as lightly as the silvery spray of the blue waves she furrowed; telling, without allusions to the land behind her, that she had dipped in the wells of blissful oblivion. Emma Dunstane, as is usual with those who receive exhilarating correspondence from makers of books, condemned the authoress in comparison, and now first saw that she had the gift of writing. Only one cry: 'Italy, Eden of exiles!' betrayed the seeming of a moan. She wrote of her poet and others immediately. Thither had they fled; with adieu to England!

Page 3213

How many have waved the adieu! And it is England nourishing, England protecting them, England clothing them in the honours they wear. Only the posturing lower natures, on the level of their buskins, can pluck out the pocket-knife of sentimental spite to cut themselves loose from her at heart in earnest. The higher, bleed as they may, too pressingly feel their debt. Diana had the Celtic vivid sense of country. In England she was Irish, by hereditary, and by wilful opposition. Abroad, gazing along the waters, observing, comparing, reflecting, above all, reading of the struggles at home, the things done and attempted, her soul of generosity made her, though not less Irish, a daughter of Britain. It is at a distance that striving countries should be seen if we would have them in the pure idea; and this young woman of fervid mind, a reader of public speeches and speculator on the tides of politics (desirous, further, to feel herself rather more in the pure idea), began to yearn for England long before her term of holiday exile had ended. She had been flattered by her friend, her ‘wedded martyr at the stake,’ as she named him, to believe that she could exercise a judgement in politics—could think, even speak acutely, on public affairs. The reports of speeches delivered by the men she knew or knew of, set her thrilling; and she fancied the sensibility to be as independent of her sympathy with the orators as her political notions were sovereignty above a sex devoted to trifles, and the feelings of a woman who had gone through fire. She fancied it confidently, notwithstanding a peculiar intuition that the plunge into the nobler business of the world would be a haven of safety for a woman with blood and imagination, when writing to Emma: ’Mr. Redworth’s great success in Parliament is good in itself, whatever his views of present questions; and I do not heed them when I look to what may be done by a man of such power in striking at unjust laws, which keep the really numerically better-half of the population in a state of slavery. If he had been a lawyer! It must be a lawyer’s initiative—a lawyer’s Bill. Mr. Percy Dacier also spoke well, as might have been expected, and his uncle’s compliment to him was merited. Should you meet him sound him. He has read for the Bar, and is younger than Mr. Redworth. The very young men and the old are our hope. The middleaged are hard and fast for existing facts. We pick our leaders on the slopes, the incline and decline of the mountain—not on the upper table-land midway, where all appears to men so solid, so tolerably smooth, save for a few excrescences, roughnesses, gradually to be levelled at their leisure; which induces one to protest that the middle-age of men is their time of delusion. It is no paradox. They may be publicly useful in a small way. I do not deny it at all. They must be near the gates of life—the opening or the closing—for their minds to be accessible to the urgency of the greater questions.

Page 3214

Otherwise the world presents itself to them under too settled an aspect—unless, of course, Vesuvian Revolution shakes the land. And that touches only their nerves. I dream of some old Judge! There is one—if having caught we could keep him. But I dread so tricksy a pilot. You have guessed him—the ancient Puck! We have laughed all day over the paper telling us of his worrying the Lords. Lady Esquart congratulates her husband on being out of it. Puck 'biens ride' and bewigged might perhaps—except that at the critical moment he would be sure to plead allegiance to Oberon. However, the work will be performed by some one: I am prophetic:—when maidens are grandmothers!—when your Tony is wearing a perpetual laugh in the unhusbanded regions where there is no institution of the wedding-tie.'

For the reason that she was not to participate in the result of the old Judge's or young hero's happy championship of the cause of her sex, she conceived her separateness high aloof, and actually supposed she was a contemplative, simply speculative political spirit, impersonal albeit a woman. This, as Emma, smiling at the lines, had not to learn, was always her secret pride of fancy—the belief in her possession of a disengaged intellect.

The strange illusion, so clearly exposed to her correspondent, was maintained through a series of letters very slightly descriptive, dated from the Piraeus, the Bosphorus, the coasts of the Crimea, all more or less relating to the latest news of the journals received on board the yacht, and of English visitors fresh from the country she now seemed fond of calling 'home.' Politics, and gentle allusions to the curious exhibition of 'love in marriage' shown by her amiable host and hostess: 'these dear Esquarts, who are never tired of one another, but courtly courting, tempting me to think it possible that a fortunate selection and a mutual deference may subscribe to human happiness:—filled the paragraphs. Reviews of her first literary venture were mentioned once: 'I was well advised by Mr. Redworth in putting *Antonia* for authoress. She is a buff jerkin to the stripes, and I suspect that the signature of D. E. M., written in full, would have cawed woefully to hear that her style is affected, her characters nullities, her cleverness forced, *etc*., *etc*. As it is, I have much the same contempt for poor Antonia's performance. Cease penning, little fool! She writes, "with some comprehension of the passion of love." I know her to be a stranger to the earliest cry. So you see, dear, that utter ignorance is the mother of the Art. Dialogues "occasionally pointed." She has a sister who may do better.—But why was I not apprenticed to a serviceable profession or a trade? I perceive now that a hanger-on of the market had no right to expect a happier fate than mine has been.'

Page 3215

On the Nile, in the winter of the year, Diana met the Hon. Percy Dacier. He was introduced to her at Cairo by Redworth. The two gentlemen had struck up a House of Commons acquaintanceship, and finding themselves bound for the same destination, had grown friendly. Redworth's arrival had been pleasantly expected. She remarked on Dacier's presence to Emma, without sketch or note of him as other than much esteemed by Lord and Lady Esquart. These, with Diana, Redworth, Dacier, the German Eastern traveller Schweizerbarth, and the French Consul and Egyptologist Duriette, composed a voyaging party up the river, of which expedition Redworth was Lady Dunstane's chief writer of the records. His novel perceptiveness and shrewdness of touch made them amusing; and his tenderness to the Beauty's coquettry between the two foreign rivals, moved a deeper feeling. The German had a guitar, the Frenchman a voice; Diana joined them in harmony. They complained apart severally of the accompaniment and the singer. Our English criticized them apart; and that is at any rate to occupy a post, though it contributes nothing to entertainment. At home the Esquarts had sung duets; Diana had assisted Redworth's manly chest-notes at the piano. Each of them declined to be vocal. Diana sang alone for the credit of the country, Italian and French songs, Irish also. She was in her mood of Planxty Kelly and Garryowen all the way. 'Madame est Irlandaise?' Redworth heard the Frenchman say, and he owned to what was implied in the answering tone of the question. 'We should be dull dogs without the Irish leaven!' So Tony in exile still managed to do something for her darling Erin. The solitary woman on her heights at Copsley raised an exclamation of, 'Oh! that those two had been or could be united!' She was conscious of a mystic symbolism in the prayer.

She was not apprehensive of any ominous intervention of another. Writing from Venice, Diana mentioned Mr. Percy Dacier as being engaged to an heiress; 'A Miss Asper, niece of a mighty shipowner, Mr. Quintin Manx, Lady Esquart tells me: money fabulous, and necessary to a younger son devoured with ambition. The elder brother, Lord Creedmore, is a common Nimrod, always absent in Hungary, Russia, America, hunting somewhere. Mr. Dacier will be in the Cabinet with the next Ministry.' No more of him. A new work by *Antonia* was progressing.

The Summer in South Tyrol passed like a royal procession before young eyes for Diana, and at the close of it, descending the Stelvio, idling through the Valtelline, Como Lake was reached, Diana full of her work, living the double life of the author. At Bellagio one afternoon Mr. Percy Dacier appeared. She remembered subsequently a disappointment she felt in not beholding Mr. Redworth either with him or displacing him. If engaged to a lady, he was not an ardent suitor; nor was he a pointedly complimentary acquaintance. His enthusiasm was reserved for Italian scenery.

Page 3216

She had already formed a sort of estimate of his character, as an indifferent observer may do, and any woman previous to the inflaming of her imagination, if that is in store for her; and she now fell to work resetting the puzzle it became as soon her positive conclusions had to be shaped again. ‘But women never can know young men,’ she wrote to Emma, after praising his good repute as one of the brotherhood. ’He drops pretty sentences now and then: no compliments; milky nuts. Of course he has a head, or he would not be where he is—and that seems always to me the most enviable place a young man can occupy.’ She observed in him a singular conflicting of a buoyant animal nature with a curb of studiousness, as if the fardels of age were piling on his shoulders before youth had quitted its pastures.

His build of limbs and his features were those of the finely-bred English; he had the English taste for sports, games, manly diversions; and in the bloom of life, under thirty, his head was given to bend. The head bending on a tall upright figure, where there was breadth of chest, told of weights working. She recollected his open look, larger than inquiring, at the introduction to her; and it recurred when she uttered anything specially taking. What it meant was past a guess, though comparing it with the frank directness of Redworth’s eyes, she saw the difference between a look that accepted her and one that dilated on two opinions.

Her thought of the gentleman was of a brilliant young charioteer in the ruck of the race, watchful for his chance to push to the front; and she could have said that a dubious consort might spoil a promising career. It flattered her to think that she sometimes prompted him, sometimes illumined. He repeated sentences she had spoken. ’I shall be better able to describe Mr. Dacier when you and I sit together, my Emmy, and a stroke here and there completes the painting. Set descriptions are good for puppets. Living men and women are too various in the mixture fashioning them—even the “external presentment”—to be livingly rendered in a formal sketch. I may tell you his eyes are pale blue, his features regular, his hair silky, brownish, his legs long, his head rather stooping (only the head), his mouth commonly closed; these are the facts, and you have seen much the same in a nursery doll. Such literary craft is of the nursery. So with landscapes. The art of the pen (we write on darkness) is to rouse the inward vision, instead of labouring with a Drop-scene brush, as if it were to the eye; because our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description. That is why the poets, who spring imagination with a word or a phrase, paint lasting pictures. The Shakespearian, the Dantesque, are in a line, two at most. He lends an attentive ear when I speak, agrees or has a quaint pucker of the eyebrows dissenting inwardly. He lacks mental liveliness—cheerfulness, I should say, and is thankful to have it imparted. One suspects

Page 3217

he would be a dull domestic companion. He has a veritable thirst for hopeful views of the world, and no spiritual distillery of his own. He leans to depression. Why! The broken reed you call your Tony carries a cargo, all of her manufacture—she reeks of secret stills; and here is a young man—a sapling oak—inclined to droop. His nature has an air of imploring me que je d'arrose! I begin to perform Mrs. Dr. Pangloss on purpose to brighten him—the mind, the views. He is not altogether deficient in conversational gaiety, and he shines in exercise. But the world is a poor old ball bounding down a hill—to an Irish melody in the evening generally, by request. So far of Mr. Percy Dacier, of whom I have some hopes—distant, perhaps delusive—that he may be of use to our cause. He listens. It is an auspicious commencement.'

Lugano is the Italian lake most lovingly encircled by mountain arms, and every height about it may be scaled with esce. The heights have their nest of waters below for a home scene, the southern Swiss peaks, with celestial Monta Rosa, in prospect. It was there that Diana reawakened, after the trance of a deadly draught, to the glory of the earth and her share in it. She wakened like the Princess of the Kiss; happily not to kisses; to no sign, touch or call that she could trace backward. The change befell her without a warning. After writing deliberately to her friend Emma, she laid down her pen and thought of nothing; and into this dreamfulness a wine passed, filling her veins, suffusing her mind, quickening her soul: and coming whence? out of air, out of the yonder of air. She could have imagined a seraphic presence in the room, that bade her arise and live; take the cup of the wells of youth arrested at her lips by her marriage; quit her wintry bondage for warmth, light, space, the quick of simple being. And the strange pure ecstasy was not a transient electrification; it came in waves on a continuous tide; looking was living; walking flying. She hardly knew that she slept. The heights she had seen rosy at eve were marked for her ascent in the dawn. Sleep was one wink, and fresh as the dewy field and rockflowers on her way upward, she sprang to more and more of heaven, insatiable, happily chirruping over her possessions. The threading of the town among the dear common people before others were abroad, was a pleasure and pleasant her solitariness threading the gardens at the base of the rock, only she astir; and the first rough steps of the winding footpath, the first closed buds, the sharper air, the uprising of the mountain with her ascent; and pleasant too was her hunger and the nibble at a little loaf of bread. A linnet sang in her breast, an eagle lifted her feet. The feet were verily winged, as they are in a season of youth when the blood leaps to light from the pressure of the under forces, like a source at the wellheads, and the whole creature blooms, vital in every energy as a spirit. To be a girl again was magical. She could fancy her having risen from the dead. And to be a girl, with a woman's broader vision and receptiveness of soul, with knowledge of evil, and winging to ethereal happiness, this was a revelation of our human powers.

Page 3218

She attributed the change to the influences of nature's beauty and grandeur. Nor had her woman's consciousness to play the chrysalis in any shy recesses of her heart; she was nowhere veiled or torpid; she was illumined, like the Salvatore she saw in the evening beams and mounted in the morning's; and she had not a spot of seeresy; all her nature flew and bloomed; she was bird, flower, flowing river, a quivering sensibility unweighted, enshrouded. Desires and hopes would surely have weighted and shrouded her. She had none, save for the upper air, the eyes of the mountain.

Which was the dream—her past life or this ethereal existence? But this ran spontaneously, and the other had often been stimulated—her vivaciousness on the Nile-boat, for a recent example. She had not a doubt that her past life was the dream, or deception: and for the reason that now she was compassionate, large of heart toward all beneath her. Let them but leave her free, they were forgiven, even to prayers for their well-being! The plural number in the case was an involuntary multiplying of the single, coming of her incapacity during this elevation and rapture of the senses to think distinctly of that One who had discoloured her opening life. Freedom to breathe, gaze, climb, grow with the grasses, fly with the clouds, to muse, to sing, to be an unclaimed self, dispersed upon earth, air, sky, to find a keener transfigured self in that radiation—-she craved no more.

Bear in mind her beauty, her charm of tongue, her present state of white simplicity in fervour: was there ever so perilous a woman for the most guarded and clearest-eyed of young men to meet at early morn upon a mountain side?

CHAPTER XVI

TREATS OF A MIDNIGHT BELL, AND OF A SCENE OF EARLY MORNING

On a round of the mountains rising from Osteno, South eastward of Lugano, the Esquart party rose from the natural grotto and headed their carriages up and down the defiles, halting for a night at Rovio, a little village below the Generoso, lively with waterfalls and watercourses; and they fell so in love with the place, that after roaming along the flowery borderways by moonlight, they resolved to rest there two or three days and try some easy ascents. In the diurnal course of nature, being pleasantly tired, they had the avowed intention of sleeping there; so they went early to their beds, and carelessly wished one another good-night, none of them supposing slumber to be anywhere one of the warlike arts, a paradoxical thing you must battle for and can only win at last when utterly beaten. Hard by their inn, close enough for a priestly homily to have been audible, stood a church campanile, wherein hung a Bell, not ostensibly communicating with the demons of the pit; in daylight rather a merry comrade. But at night, when the children of nerves lay stretched, he threw off the mask. As soon as they had fairly

Page 3219

nestled, he smote their pillows a shattering blow, loud for the retold preluding quarters, incredibly clanging the number ten. Then he waited for neighbouring campanili to box the ears of slumber's votaries in turn; whereupon, under pretence of excessive conscientiousness, or else oblivious of his antecedent, damnable misconduct, or perhaps in actual league and trapdoor conspiracy with the surging goblin hosts beneath us, he resumed his blaring strokes, a sonorous recapitulation of the number; all the others likewise. It was an alarum fit to warn of Attila or Alaric; and not, simply the maniacal noise invaded the fruitful provinces of sleep like Hun and Vandal, the irrational repetition ploughed the minds of those unhappy somnivolents, leaving them worse than sheared by barbarians, disrupt, as by earthquake, with the unanswerable question to Providence, Why!—Why twice?

Designing slumberers are such infants. When they have undressed and stretched themselves, flat, it seems that they have really gone back to their mothers' breasts, and they fret at whatsoever does not smack of nature, or custom. The cause of a repetition so senseless in its violence, and so unnecessary, set them querying and kicking until the inevitable quarters recommenced. Then arose an insurgent rabble in their bosoms, it might be the loosened imps of darkness, urging them to speculate whether the proximate monster about to dole out the eleventh hour in uproar would again forget himself and repeat his dreary arithmetic a second time; for they were unaware of his religious obligation, following the hour of the district, to inform them of the tardy hour of Rome. They waited in suspense, curiosity enabling them to bear the first crash callously. His performance was the same. And now they took him for a crazy engine whose madness had infected the whole neighbourhood. Now was the moment to fight for sleep in contempt of him, and they began by simulating an entry into the fortress they were to defend, plunging on their pillows, battening down their eyelids, breathing with a dreadful regularity. Alas! it came to their knowledge that the Bell was in possession and they the besiegers. Every resonant quarter was anticipated up to the blow, without averting its murderous abruptness; and an executioner Midnight that sounded, in addition to the reiterated quarters, four and twenty ringing hammerstrokes, with the aching pause between the twelves, left them the prey of the legions of torturers which are summed, though not described, in the title of a sleepless night.

From that period the curse was milder, but the victims raged. They swam on vasty deeps, they knocked at rusty gates, they shouldered all the weapons of black Insomnia's armoury and became her soldiery, doing her will upon themselves. Of her originally sprang the inspired teaching of the doom of men to excruciation in endlessness. She is the fountain of the infinite ocean whereon the exceedingly sensitive soul is tumbled everlastingly, with the diversion of hot pincers to appease its appetite for change.

Page 3220

Dacier was never the best of sleepers. He had taken to exercise his brains prematurely, not only in learning, but also in reflection; and a reflectiveness that is indulged before we have a rigid mastery of the emotions, or have slain them, is apt to make a young man more than commonly a child of nerves: nearly as much so as the dissipated, with the difference that they are hilarious while wasting their treasury, which he is not; and he may recover under favouring conditions, which is a point of vantage denied to them. Physically he had stout reserves, for he had not disgraced the temple. His intemperateness lay in the craving to rise and lead: a precocious ambition. This apparently modest young man started with an aim—and if in the distance and with but a slingstone, like the slender shepherd fronting the Philistine, all his energies were in his aim—at Government. He had hung on the fringe of an Administration. His party was out, and he hoped for higher station on its return to power. Many perplexities were therefore buzzing about his head; among them at present one sufficiently magnified and voracious to swallow the remainder. He added force to the interrogation as to why that Bell should sound its inhuman strokes twice, by asking himself why he was there to hear it! A strange suspicion of a bewitchment might have enlightened him if he had been a man accustomed to yield to the peculiar kind of sorcery issuing from that sex. He rather despised the power of women over men: and nevertheless he was there, listening to that Bell, instead of having obeyed the call of his family duties, when the latter were urgent. He had received letters at Lugano, summoning him home, before he set forth on his present expedition. The noisy alarum told him he floundered in quags, like a silly creature chasing a marsh-lamp. But was it so? Was it not, on the contrary, a serious pursuit of the secret of a woman's character?—Oh, a woman and her character! Ordinary women and their characters might set to work to get what relationship and likeness they could. They had no secret to allure. This one had: she had the secret of lake waters under rock, unfathomable in limpidness. He could not think of her without shooting at nature, and nature's very sweetest and subtlest, for comparison. As to her sex, his active man's contempt of the petticoated secret attractive to boys and graylings, made him believe that in her he hunted the mind and the spirit: perchance a double mind, a twilighted spirit; but not a mere woman. She bore no resemblance to the bundle of women. Well, she was worth studying; she had ideas, and could give ear to ideas. Furthermore, a couple of the members of his family inclined to do her injustice. At least, they judged her harshly, owing, he thought, to an inveterate opinion they held regarding Lord Dannisburgh's obliquity in relation to women. He shared it, and did not concur in, their verdict upon the woman implicated. That is to say, knowing something of her now, he could see the possibility of her innocence in the special charm that her mere sparkle of features and speech, and her freshness would have for a man like his uncle. The possibility pleaded strongly on her behalf, while the darker possibility weighted by his uncle's reputation plucked at him from below.

Page 3221

She was delightful to hear, delightful to see; and her friends loved her and had faith in her. So clever a woman might be too clever for her friends! . . .

The circle he moved in hummed of women, prompting novices as well as veterans to suspect that the multitude of them, and notably the fairest, yet more the cleverest, concealed the serpent somewhere.

She certainly had not directed any of her arts upon him. Besides he was half engaged. And that was a burning perplexity; not because of abstract scruples touching the necessity for love in marriage. The young lady, great heiress though she was, and willing, as she allowed him to assume; graceful too, reputed a beauty; struck him cold. He fancied her transparent, only Arctic. Her transparency displayed to him all the common virtues, and a serene possession of the inestimable and eminent one outweighing all; but charm, wit, ardour, intercommunicative quickness, and kindling beauty, airy grace, were qualities that a man, it seemed, had to look for in women spotted by a doubt of their having the chief and priceless.

However, he was not absolutely plighted. Nor did it matter to him whether this or that woman concealed the tail of the serpent and trail, excepting the singular interest this woman managed to excite, and so deeply as set him wondering how that Resurrection Bell might be affecting her ability to sleep. Was she sleeping?—or waking? His nervous imagination was a torch that alternately lighted her lying asleep with the innocent, like a babe, and tossing beneath the overflow of her dark hair, hounded by haggard memories. She fluttered before him in either aspect; and another perplexity now was to distinguish within himself which was the aspect he preferred. Great Nature brought him thus to drink of her beauty, under the delusion that the act was a speculation on her character.

The Bell, with its clash, throb and long swoon of sound, reminded him of her name: Diana!—An attribute? or a derision?

It really mattered nothing to him, save for her being maligned; and if most unfairly, then that face of the varying expressions, and the rich voice, and the remembered gentle and taking words coming from her, appealed to him with a supplicating vividness that pricked his heart to leap.

He was dozing when the Bell burst through the thin division between slumber and wakefulness, recounting what seemed innumerable peals, hard on his cranium. Gray daylight blanched the window and the bed: his watch said five of the morning. He thought of the pleasure of a bath beneath some dashing spray-showers; and jumped up to dress, feeling a queer sensation of skin in his clothes, the sign of a feverish night; and yawning he went into the air. Leftward the narrow village street led to the footway along which he could make for the mountain-wall. He cast one look at the head of the

campanile, silly as an owlish roysterer’s glazed stare at the young Aurora, and hurried his feet to check the yawns coming alarmingly fast, in the place of ideas.

Page 3222

His elevation above the valley was about the kneecap of the Generoso. Waters of past rain-clouds poured down the mountain-sides like veins of metal, here and there flinging off a shower on the busy descent; only dubiously animate in the lack lustre of the huge bulk piled against a yellow East that wafted fleets of pinky cloudlets overhead. He mounted his path to a level with inviting grassmounds where water circled, running from scoops and cups to curves and brook-streams, and in his fancy calling to him to hear them. To dip in them was his desire. To roll and shiver braced by the icy flow was the spell to break that baleful incantation of the intolerable night; so he struck across a ridge of boulders, wreck of a landslip from the height he had hugged, to the open space of shadowed undulations, and soon had his feet on turf. Heights to right and to left, and between them, aloft, a sky the rosy wheelcourse of the chariot of morn, and below, among the knolls, choice of sheltered nooks where waters whispered of secresy to satisfy Diana herself. They have that whisper and waving of secresy in secret scenery; they beckon to the bath; and they conjure classic visions of the pudency of the Goddess irate or unsighted. The semi-mythological state of mind, built of old images and favouring haunts, was known to Dacier. The name of Diana, playing vaguely on his consciousness, helped to it. He had no definite thought of the mortal woman when the highest grass-roll near the rock gave him view of a bowered source and of a pool under a chain of cascades, bounded by polished shelves and slabs. The very spot for him, he decided at the first peep; and at the second, with fingers instinctively loosening his waist-coat buttons for a commencement, he shouldered round and strolled away, though not at a rapid pace, nor far before he halted.

That it could be no other than she, the figure he had seen standing beside the pool, he was sure. Why had he turned? Thoughts thick and swift as a blush in the cheeks of seventeen overcame him; and queen of all, the thought bringing the picture of this mountain-solitude to vindicate a woman shamefully assailed.—She who found her pleasure in these haunts of nymph and Goddess, at the fresh cold bosom of nature, must be clear as day. She trusted herself to the loneliness here, and to the honour of men, from a like irreflective sincereness. She was unable to imagine danger where her own impelling thirst was pure. . .

The thoughts, it will be discerned, were but flashes of a momentary vivid sensibility. Where a woman’s charm has won half the battle, her character is an advancing standard and sings victory, let her do no more than take a quiet morning walk before breakfast.

But why had he turned his back on her? There was nothing in his presence to alarm, nothing in her appearance to forbid. The motive and the movement were equally quaint; incomprehensible to him; for after putting himself out of sight, he understood the absurdity of the supposition that she would seek the secluded sylvan bath for the same purpose as he. Yet now he was, debarred from going to meet her. She might have an impulse to bathe her feet. Her name was Diana . . . .

Page 3223

Yes, and a married woman; and a proclaimed one!

And notwithstanding those brassy facts, he was ready to side with the evidence declaring her free from stain; and further, to swear that her blood was Diana's!

Nor had Dacier ever been particularly poetical about women. The present Diana had wakened his curiosity, had stirred his interest in her, pricked his admiration, but gradually, until a sleepless night with its flock of raven-fancies under that dominant Bell, ended by colouring her, the moment she stood in his eyes, as freshly as the morning heavens. We are much influenced in youth by sleepless nights: they disarm, they predispose us to submit to soft occasion; and in our youth occasion is always coming.

He heard her voice. She had risen up the grass-mound, and he hung brooding half-way down. She was dressed in some texture of the hue of lavender. A violet scarf loosely knotted over the bosom opened on her throat. The loop of her black hair curved under a hat of gray beaver. Memorably radiant was her face.

They met, exchanged greetings, praised the beauty of the morning, and struck together on the Bell. She laughed: 'I heard it at ten; I slept till four. I never wake later. I was out in the air by half-past. Were you disturbed?'

He alluded to his troubles with the Bell.

'It sounded like a felon's heart in skeleton ribs,' he said.

'Or a proser's tongue in a hollow skull,' said she.

He bowed to her conversible readiness, and at once fell into the background, as he did only with her, to perform accordant bass in their dialogue; for when a woman lightly caps our strained remarks, we gallantly surrender the leadership, lest she should too cuttingly assert her claim.

Some sweet wild cyclamen flowers were at her breast. She held in her left hand a bunch of buds and blown cups of the pale purple meadow-crocus. He admired them. She told him to look round. He confessed to not having noticed them in the grass: what was the name? Colchicum, in Botany, she said.

'These are plucked to be sent to a friend; otherwise I'm reluctant to take the life of flowers for a whim. Wild flowers, I mean. I am not sentimental about garden flowers: they are cultivated for decoration, grown for clipping.'

'I suppose they don't carry the same signification,' said Dacier, in the tone of a pupil to such themes.

‘They carry no feeling,’ said she. ’And that is my excuse for plucking these, where they seem to spring like our town-dream of happiness. I believe they are sensible of it too; but these must do service to my invalid friend, who cannot travel. Are you ever as much interested in the woes of great ladies as of country damsels? I am not—not unless they have natural distinction. You have met Lady Dunstane?’

The question sounded artless. Dacier answered that he thought he had seen her somewhere once, and Diana shut her lips on a rising under-smile.

Page 3224

’She is the coeur d’or of our time; the one soul I would sacrifice these flowers to.’

‘A bit of a blue-stocking, I think I have heard said.’

’She might have been admitted to the Hotel Rambouillet, without being anything of a Precieuse. She is the woman of the largest heart now beating.’

‘Mr. Redworth talked of her.’

‘As she deserved, I am sure.’

‘Very warmly.’

‘He would!’

‘He told me you were the Damon and Pythias of women.’

’Her one fault is an extreme humility that makes her always play second to me; and as I am apt to gabble, I take the lead; and I am froth in comparison. I can reverence my superiors even when tried by intimacy with them. She is the next heavenly thing to heaven that I know. Court her, if ever you come across her. Or have you a man’s horror of women with brains?’

‘Am I expressing it?’ said he.

‘Do not breathe London or Paris here on me.’ She fanned the crocuses under her chin. ’The early morning always has this—I wish I had a word!—touch . . . whisper . . . gleam . . . beat of wings—I envy poets now more than ever!—of Eden, I was going to say. Prose can paint evening and moonlight, but poets are needed to sing the dawn. That is because prose is equal to melancholy stuff. Gladness requires the finer language. Otherwise we have it coarse—anything but a reproduction. You politicians despise the little distinctions “twixt tweedledum and tweedledee,” I fancy.’

Of the poetic sort, Dacier’s uncle certainly did. For himself he confessed to not having thought much on them.

‘But how divine is utterance!’ she said. ’As we to the brutes, poets are to us.’

He listened somewhat with the head of the hanged. A beautiful woman choosing to rhapsodize has her way, and is not subjected to the critical commentary within us. He wondered whether she had discoursed in such a fashion to his uncle.

‘I can read good poetry,’ said he.

’If you would have this valley—or mountain-cleft, one should call it—described, only verse could do it for you,’ Diana pursued, and stopped, glanced at his face, and smiled. She had spied the end of a towel peeping out of one of his pockets. ’You came out for a bath! Go back, by all means, and mount that rise of grass where you first saw me; and down on the other side, a little to the right, you will find the very place for a bath, at a corner of the rock—a natural fountain; a bubbling pool in a ring of brushwood, with falling water, so tempting that I could have pardoned a push: about five feet deep. Lose no time.’

He begged to assure her that he would rather stroll with her: it had been only a notion of bathing by chance when he pocketed the towel.

‘Dear me,’ she cried, ’if I had been a man I should have scurried off at a signal of release, quick as a hare I once woke up in a field with my foot on its back.’

Page 3225

Dacier's eyebrows knotted a trifle over her eagerness to dismiss him: he was not used to it, but rather to be courted by women, and to condescend.

'I shall not long, I'm afraid, have the pleasure of walking beside you and hearing you. I had letters at Lugano. My uncle is unwell, I hear.'

'Lord Dannisburgh?'

The name sprang from her lips unhesitatingly.

His nodded affirmative altered her face and her voice.

'It is not a grave illness?'

'They rather fear it.'

'You had the news at Lugano?'

He answered the implied reproach: 'I can be of no, service.'

'But surely!'

'It's even doubtful that he would be bothered to receive me. We hold no views in common—excepting one.'

'Could I?' she exclaimed. 'O that I might! If he is really ill! But if it is actually serious he would perhaps have a wish . . . I can nurse. I know I have the power to cheer him. You ought indeed to be in England.'

Dacier said he had thought it better to wait for later reports. 'I shall drive to Lugano this afternoon, and act on the information I get there. Probably it ends my holiday.'

'Will you do me the favour to write me word?—and especially tell me if you think he would like to have me near him,' said Diana. 'And let him know that if he wants nursing or cheerful companionship, I am at any moment ready to come.'

The flattery of a beautiful young woman to wait on him would be very agreeable to Lord Dannisburgh, Dacier conceived. Her offer to go was possibly purely charitable. But the prudence of her occupation of the post obscured whatever appeared admirable in her devotedness. Her choice of a man like Lord Dannisburgh for the friend to whom she could sacrifice her good name less falteringly than she gathered those field-flowers was inexplicable; and she herself a darker riddle at each step of his reading.

He promised curtly to write. 'I will do my best to hit a flying address.'

’Your Club enables me to hit a permanent one that will establish the communication,’ said Diana. ’We shall not sleep another night at Rovio. Lady Esquart is the lightest of sleepers, and if you had a restless time, she and her husband must have been in purgatory. Besides, permit me to say, you should be with your party. The times are troublous—not for holidays! Your holiday has had a haunted look, creditably to your conscience as a politician. These Corn Law agitations!’

‘Ah, but no politics here!’ said Dacier.

’Politics everywhere!—in the Courts of Faery! They are not discord to me.’

‘But not the last day—the last hour!’ he pleaded.

’Well! only do not forget your assurance to me that you would give some thoughts to Ireland—and the cause of women. Has it slipped from your memory?’

‘If I see the chance of serving you, you may trust to me.’

Page 3226

She sent up an interjection on the misfortune of her not having been born a man.

It was to him the one smart of sourness in her charm as a woman.

Among the boulder-stones of the ascent to the path, he ventured to propose a little masculine assistance in a hand stretched mutely. Although there was no great need for help, her natural kindliness checked the inclination to refuse it. When their hands disjoined she found herself reddening. She cast it on the exertion. Her heart was throbbing. It might be the exertion likewise.

He walked and talked much more airily along the descending pathway, as if he had suddenly become more intimately acquainted with her.

She listened, trying to think of the manner in which he might be taught to serve that cause she had at heart; and the colour deepened on her cheeks till it set fire to her underlying consciousness: blood to spirit. A tremour of alarm ran through her.

His request for one of the crocuses to keep as a souvenir of the morning was refused. 'They are sacred; they were all devoted to my friend when I plucked them.'

He pointed to a half-open one, with the petals in disparting pointing to junction, and compared it to the famous tiptoe ballet-posture, arms above head and fingers like swallows meeting in air, of an operatic danseuse of the time.

'I do not see it, because I will not see it,' she said, and she found a personal cooling and consolement in the phrase.—We have this power of resisting invasion of the poetic by the commonplace, the spirit by the blood, if we please, though you men may not think that we have! Her alarmed sensibilities bristled and made head against him as an enemy. She fancied (for the aforesaid reason—because she chose) that it was on account of the offence to her shy morning pleasure by his Londonizing. At any other moment her natural liveliness and trained social ease would have taken any remark on the eddies of the tide of converse; and so she told herself, and did not the less feel wounded, adverse, armed. He seemed somehow—to have dealt a mortal blow to the happy girl she had become again. The woman she was protested on behalf of the girl, while the girl in her heart bent lowered sad eyelids to the woman; and which of them was wiser of the truth she could not have said, for she was honestly not aware of the truth, but she knew she was divided in halves, with one half pitying the other, one rebuking: and all because of the incongruous comparison of a wild flower to an opera dancer! Absurd indeed. We human creatures are the silliest on earth, most certainly.

Page 3227

Dacier had observed the blush, and the check to her flowing tongue did not escape him as they walked back to the inn down the narrow street of black rooms, where the women gossiped at the fountain and the cobbler threaded on his doorstep. His novel excitement supplied the deficiency, sweeping him past minor reflections. He was, however, surprised to hear her tell Lady Esquart, as soon as they were together at the breakfast-table, that he had the intention of starting for England; and further surprised, and slightly stung too, when on the poor lady's, moaning over her recollection of the midnight Bell, and vowing she could not attempt to sleep another night in the place, Diana declared her resolve to stay there one day longer with her maid, and explore the neighbourhood for the wild flowers in which it abounded. Lord and Lady Esquart agreed to anything agreeable to her, after excusing themselves for the necessitated flight, piteously relating the story of their sufferings. My lord could have slept, but he had remained awake to comfort my lady.

'True knightliness!' Diana said, in praise of these long married lovers; and she asked them what they had talked of during the night.

'You, my dear, partly,' said Lady Esquart.

'For an opiate?'

'An invocation of the morning,' said Dacier.

Lady Esquart looked at Diana and, at him. She thought it was well that her fair friend should stay. It was then settled for Diana to rejoin them the next evening at Lugano, thence to proceed to Luino on the Maggiore.

'I fear it is good-bye for me,' Dacier said to her, as he was about to step into the carriage with the Esquarts.

'If you have not better news of your uncle, it must be,' she replied, and gave him her hand promptly and formally, hardly diverting her eyes from Lady Esquart to grace the temporary gift with a look. The last of her he saw was a waving of her arm and finger pointing triumphantly at the Bell in the tower. It said, to an understanding unpractised in the feminine mysteries: 'I can sleep through anything.' What that revealed of her state of conscience and her nature, his efforts to preserve the lovely optical figure blocked his guessing. He was with her friends, who liked her the more they knew her, and he was compelled to lean to their view of the perplexing woman.

'She is a riddle to the world,' Lady Esquart said, 'but I know that she is good. It is the best of signs when women take to her and are proud to be her friend.'

My lord echoed his wife. She talked in this homely manner to stop any notion of philandering that the young gentleman might be disposed to entertain in regard to a lady

so attractive to the pursuit as Diana's beauty and delicate situation might make her seem.

'She is an exceedingly clever person, and handsomer than report, which is uncommon,' said Dacier, becoming voluble on town-topics, Miss Asper incidentally among them. He denied Lady Esquart's charge of an engagement; the matter hung.

Page 3228

His letters at Lugano summoned him to England instantly.

‘I have taken leave of Mrs. Warwick, but tell her I regret, et caetera,’ he said; ’and by the way, as my uncle’s illness appears to be serious, the longer she is absent the better, perhaps.’

‘It would never do,’ said Lady Esquart, understanding his drift immediately. ’We winter in Rome. She will not abandon us—I have her word for it. Next Easter we are in Paris; and so home, I suppose. There will be no hurry before we are due at Cowes. We seem to have become confirmed wanderers; for two of us at least it is likely to be our last great tour.’

Dacier informed her that he had pledged his word to write to Mrs. Warwick of his uncle’s condition, and the several appointed halting-places of the Esquarts between the lakes and Florence were named to him. Thus all things were openly treated; all had an air of being on the surface; the communications passing between Mrs. Warwick and the Hon. Percy Dacier might have been perused by all the world. None but that portion of it, sage in suspiciousness, which objects to such communications under any circumstances, could have detected in their correspondence a spark of coming fire or that there was common warmth. She did not feel it, nor did he. The position of the two interdicted it to a couple honourably sensible of social decencies; and who were, be it added, kept apart. The blood is the treacherous element in the story of the nobly civilized, of which secret Diana, a wife and no wife, a prisoner in liberty, a blooming woman imagining herself restored to transcendent maiden ecstacies—the highest youthful poetic—had received some faint intimation when the blush flamed suddenly in her cheeks and her heart knelled like the towers of a city given over to the devourer. She had no wish to meet him again. Without telling herself why, she would have shunned the meeting. Disturbers that thwarted her simple happiness in sublime scenery were best avoided. She thought so the more for a fitful blur to the simplicity of her sensations, and a task she sometimes had in restoring and toning them, after that sweet morning time in Rovio.

CHAPTER XVII

‘*The princess Egeria*’

London, say what we will of it, is after all the head of the British giant, and if not the liveliest in bubbles, it is past competition the largest broth-pot of brains anywhere simmering on the hob: over the steadiest of furnaces too. And the oceans and the continents, as you know, are perpetual and copious contributors, either to the heating apparatus or to the contents of the pot. Let grander similes besought. This one fits for the smoky receptacle cherishing millions, magnetic to tens of millions more, with its caked outside of grime, and the inward substance incessantly kicking the lid, prankish,

but never casting it off. A good stew, you perceive; not a parlous boiling. Weak as we may be in our domestic cookery, our political has been sagaciously adjusted as yet to catch the ardours of the furnace without being subject to their volcanic activities.

Page 3229

That the social is also somewhat at fault, we have proof in occasional outcries over the absence of these or those particular persons famous for inspiriting. It sticks and clogs. The improvising songster is missed, the convivial essayist, the humorous Dean, the travelled cynic, and he, the one of his day, the iridescent Irishman, whose remembered repartees are a feast, sharp and ringing, at divers tables descending from the upper to the fat citizen's, where, instead of coming in the sequence of talk, they are exposed by blasting, like fossil teeth of old Deluge sharks in monotonous walls of our chalk-quarries. Nor are these the less welcome for the violence of their introduction among a people glad to be set burning rather briskly awhile by the most unexpected of digs in the ribs. Dan Merion, to give an example. That was Dan Merion's joke with the watchman: and he said that other thing to the Marquis of Kingsbury, when the latter asked him if he had ever won a donkey-race. And old Dan is dead, and we are the duller for it! which leads to the question: Is genius hereditary? And the affirmative and negative are respectively maintained, rather against the Yes is the dispute, until a member of the audience speaks of Dan Merion's having left a daughter reputed for a sparkling wit not much below the level of his own. Why, are you unaware that the Mrs. Warwick of that scandal case of Warwick versus Dannisburgh was old Dan Merion's girl—and his only child? It is true; for a friend had it from a man who had it straight from Mr. Braddock, of the firm of Braddock, Thorpe and Simnel, her solicitors in the action, who told him he could sit listening to her for hours, and that she was as innocent as day; a wonderful combination of a good woman and a clever woman and a real beauty. Only her misfortune was to have a furiously jealous husband, and they say he went mad after hearing the verdict.

Diana was talked of in the London circles. A witty woman is such salt that where she has once been tasted she must perforce be missed more than any of the absent, the dowering heavens not having yet showered her like very plentifully upon us. Then it was first heard that Percy Dacier had been travelling with her. Miss Asper heard of it. Her uncle, Mr. Quintin Manx, the millionnaire, was an acquaintance of the new Judge and titled dignitary, Sir Cramborne Wathin, and she visited Lady Wathin, at whose table the report in the journals of the Nile-boat party was mentioned. Lady Wathin's table could dispense with witty women, and, for that matter, witty men. The intrusion of the spontaneous on the stereotyped would have clashed. She preferred, as hostess, the old legal anecdotes sure of their laugh, and the citations from the manufactories of fun in the Press, which were current and instantly intelligible to all her guests. She smiled suavely on an impromptu pun, because her experience of the humorous appreciation of it by her guests bade her welcome the upstart.

Page 3230

Nothing else impromptu was acceptable. Mrs. Warwick therefore was not missed by Lady Wathin. 'I have met her,' she said. 'I confess I am not one of the fanatics about Mrs. Warwick. She has a sort of skill in getting men to clamour. If you stoop to tickle them, they will applaud. It is a way of winning a reputation.' When the ladies were separated from the gentlemen by the stream of Claret, Miss Asper heard Lady Wathin speak of Mrs. Warwick again. An allusion to Lord Dannisburgh's fit of illness in the House of Lords led to her saying that there was no doubt he had been fascinated, and that, in her opinion, Mrs. Warwick was a dangerous woman. Sir Cramborne knew something of Mr. Warwick; 'Poor man!' she added. A lady present put a question concerning Mrs. Warwick's beauty. 'Yes,' Lady Wathin said, 'she has good looks to aid her. Judging from what I hear and have seen, her thirst is for notoriety. Sooner or later we shall have her making a noise, you may be certain. Yes, she has the secret of dressing well—in the French style.'

A simple newspaper report of the expedition of a Nileboat party could stir the Powers to take her up and turn her on their wheel in this manner.

But others of the sons and daughters of London were regretting her prolonged absence. The great and exclusive Whitmonby, who had dined once at Lady Wathin's table, and vowed never more to repeat that offence to his patience, lamented bitterly to Henry Wilmers that the sole woman worthy of sitting at a little Sunday evening dinner with the cream of the choicest men of the time was away wasting herself in that insane modern chase of the picturesque! He called her a perverted Celimene.

Redworth had less to regret than the rest of her male friends, as he was receiving at intervals pleasant descriptive letters, besides manuscript sheets of *Antonia's* new piece of composition, to correct the proofs for the press, and he read them critically, he thought. He read them with a watchful eye to guard them from the critics. *Antonia*, whatever her faults as a writer, was not one of the order whose Muse is the Public Taste. She did at least draw her inspiration from herself, and there was much to be feared in her work, if a sale was the object. Otherwise Redworth's highly critical perusal led him flatly to admire. This was like her, and that was like her, and here and there a phrase gave him the very play of her mouth, the flash of her eyes. Could he possibly wish, or bear, to, have anything altered? But she had reason to desire an extended sale of the work. Her aim, in the teeth of her independent style, was at the means of independence—a feminine method of attempting to conciliate contraries; and after despatching the last sheets to the printer, he meditated upon the several ways which might serve to, assist her; the main way running thus in his mind:—We have a work of genius. Genius is good for the public. What is good for the public should be recommended by

Page 3231

the critics. It should be. How then to come at them to, get it done? As he was not a member of the honourable literary craft, and regarded its arcana altogether externally, it may be confessed of him that he deemed the Incorruptible corruptible;—not, of course, with filthy coin slid into sticky palms. Critics are human, and exceedingly, beyond the common lot, when touched; and they are excited by mysterious hints of loftiness in authorship; by rumours of veiled loveliness; whispers, of a general anticipation; and also Editors can jog them. Redworth was rising to be a Railway King of a period soon to glitter with rails, iron in the concrete, golden in the visionary. He had already his Court, much against his will. The powerful magnetic attractions of those who can help the world to fortune, was exercised by him in spite of his disgust of sycophants. He dropped words to right and left of a coming work by *Antonia*. And who was *Antonia*?—Ah! there hung the riddle.—An exalted personage?—So much so that he dared not name her even in confidence to ladies; he named the publishers. To men he said he was at liberty to speak of her only as the most beautiful woman of her time. His courtiers of both sexes were recommended to read the new story, *the princess Egeria*.

Oddly, one great lady of his Court had heard a forthcoming work of this title spoken of by Percy Dacier, not a man to read silly fiction, unless there was meaning behind the lines: that is, rich scandal of the aristocracy, diversified by stinging epigrams to the address of discernible personages. She talked of *the princess Egeria*: nay, laid her finger on the identical Princess. Others followed her. Dozens were soon flying with the torch: a new work immediately to be published from the pen of the Duchess of Stars!—And the Princess who lends her title to the book is a living portrait of the Princess of Highest Eminence, the Hope of all Civilization.—Orders for copies of *the princess Egeria* reached the astonished publishers before the book was advertized.

Speaking to editors, Redworth complimented them with friendly intimations of the real authorship of the remarkable work appearing. He used a certain penetrative mildness of tone in saying that 'he hoped the book would succeed': it deserved to; it was original; but the originality might tell against it. All would depend upon a favourable launching of such a book. 'Mrs. Warwick? Mrs. Warwick?' said the most influential of editors, Mr. Marcus Tonans; 'what! that singularly handsome woman? . . The Dannisburgh affair? . . . She's Whitmonby's heroine. If she writes as cleverly as she talks, her work is worth trumpeting.' He promised to see that it went into good hands for the review, and a prompt review—an essential point; none of your long digestions of the contents.

Page 3232

Diana's indefatigable friend had fair assurances that her book would be noticed before it dropped dead to the public appetite for novelty. He was anxious next, notwithstanding his admiration of the originality of the conception and the cleverness of the writing, lest the Literary Reviews should fail 'to do it justice': he used the term; for if they wounded her, they would take the pleasure out of success; and he had always present to him that picture of the beloved woman kneeling at the fire-grate at The Crossways, which made the thought of her suffering any wound his personal anguish, so crucially sweet and saintly had her image then been stamped on him. He bethought him, in consequence, while sitting in the House of Commons; engaged upon the affairs of the nation, and honestly engaged, for he was a vigilant worker—that the Irish Secretary, Charles Raiser, with whom he stood in amicable relations, had an interest, to the extent of reputed ownership, in the chief of the Literary Reviews. He saw Raiser on the benches, and marked him to speak for him. Looking for him shortly afterward, the man was gone. 'Off to the Opera, if he's not too late for the drop,' a neighbour said, smiling queerly, as though he ought to know; and then Redworth recollected current stories of Raiser's fantastical devotion to the popular prima donna of the angelical voice.—He hurried to the Opera and met the vomit, and heard in the crushroom how divine she had been that night. A fellow member of the House, tolerably intimate with Raiser, informed him, between frightful stomachic roulades of her final aria, of the likeliest place where Raiser might be found when the Opera was over: not at his Club, nor at his chambers: on one of the bridges—Westminster, he fancied.

There was no need for Redworth to run hunting the man at so late an hour, but he was drawn on by the similarity in dissimilarity of this devotee of a woman, who could worship her at a distance, and talk of her to everybody. Not till he beheld Raiser's tall figure cutting the bridge-parapet, with a star over his shoulder, did he reflect on the views the other might entertain of the nocturnal solicitation to see 'justice done' to a lady's new book in a particular Review, and the absurd outside of the request was immediately smothered by the natural simplicity and pressing necessity of its inside.

He crossed the road and said, 'Ah?' in recognition. 'Were you at the Opera this evening?'

'Oh, just at the end,' said Raiser, pacing forward. 'It's a fine night. Did you hear her?'

'No; too late.'

Raiser pressed ahead, to meditate by himself, as was his wont. Finding Redworth beside him, he monologuized in his depths: 'They'll kill her. She puts her soul into it, gives her blood. There 's no failing of the voice. You see how it wears her. She's doomed. Half a year's rest on Como . . . somewhere . . . she might be saved! She won't refuse to work.'

Page 3233

‘Have you spoken to her?’ said Redworth.

’And next to Berlin! Vienna! A horse would be . . . .

I? I don’t know her,’ Raiser replied. ’Some of their women stand it. She’s delicately built. You can’t treat a lute like a drum without destroying the instrument. We look on at a murder!’

The haggard prospect from that step of the climax checked his delivery.

Redworth knew him to be a sober man in office, a man with a head for statecraft: he had made a weighty speech in the House a couple of hours back. This Opera cantatrice, no beauty, though gentle, thrilling, winning, was his corner of romance.

‘Do you come here often?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I can’t sleep.’

‘London at night, from the bridge, looks fine. By the way . . .’

’It ‘s lonely here, that’s the advantage,’ said Rainer; ’I keep silver in my pocket for poor girls going to their homes, and I’m left in peace. An hour later, there’s the dawn down yonder.’

‘By the way,’ Redworth interposed, and was told that after these nights of her singing she never slept till morning. He swallowed the fact, sympathized, and resumed: ‘I want a small favour.’

‘No business here, please!’

’Not a bit of it. You know Mrs. Warwick. . . . You know of her. She ’s publishing a book. I want you to use your influence to get it noticed quickly, if you can.’

’Warwick? Oh, yes, a handsome woman. Ah, yes; the Dannisburgh affair, yes. What did I hear!—They say she ’s thick with Percy Dacier at present. Who was talking of her! Yes, old Lady Dacier. So she ’s a friend of yours?’

‘She’s an old friend,’ said Redworth, composing himself; for the dose he had taken was not of the sweetest, and no protestations could be uttered by a man of the world to repel a charge of tattlers. ’The truth is, her book is clever. I have read the proofs. She must have an income, and she won’t apply to her husband, and literature should help her, if she ’s fairly treated. She ’s Irish by descent; Merion’s daughter, witty as her father. It’s odd you haven’t met her. The mere writing of the book is extraordinarily good. If it ’s put into capable hands for review! that’s all it requires. And full of life . . . bright dialogue

. . capital sketches. The book's a piece of literature. Only it must have competent critics!'

So he talked while Rainer ejaculated: 'Warwick? Warwick?' in the irritating tone of dozens of others. 'What did I hear of her husband? He has a post . . . . Yes, yes. Some one said the verdict in that case knocked him over—heart disease, or something.'

He glanced at the dark Thames water. 'Take my word for it, the groves of Academe won't compare with one of our bridges at night, if you seek philosophy. You see the London above and the London below: round us the sleepy city, and the stars in the water looking like souls of suicides. I caught a girl with a bad fit on her once. I had to lecture her! It's when we become parsons we find out our cousinship with these poor peripatetics, whose "last philosophy" is a jump across the parapet. The bridge at night is a bath for a public man. But choose another; leave me mine.'

Page 3234

Redworth took the hint. He stated the title of Mrs. Warwick's book, and imagined from the thoughtful cast of Rainer's head, that he was impressing *the princess Egeria* On his memory.

Rainer burst out, with clenched fists: 'He beats her! The fellow lives on her and beats her; strikes that woman! He drags her about to every Capital in Europe to make money for him, and the scoundrel pays her with blows.'

In the course of a heavy tirade against the scoundrel, Redworth apprehended that it was the cantatrice's husband. He expressed his horror and regret; paused, and named *the princess Egeria* and a certain Critical Review. Another outburst seemed to be in preparation. Nothing further was to be done for the book at that hour. So, with a blunt 'Good night,' he left Charles Rainer pacing, and thought on his walk home of the strange effects wrought by women unwittingly upon men (Englishmen); those women, or some of them, as little knowing it as the moon her traditional influence upon the tides. He thought of Percy Dacier too. In his bed he could have wished himself peregrinating a bridge.

The *princess Egeria* appeared, with the reviews at her heels, a pack of clappers, causing her to fly over editions clean as a doe the gates and hedges—to quote Mr. Sullivan Smith, who knew not a sentence of the work save what he gathered of it from Redworth, at their chance meeting on Piccadilly pavement, and then immediately he knew enough to blow his huntsman's horn in honour of the sale. His hallali rang high. 'Here's another Irish girl to win their laurels! 'Tis one of the blazing successes. A most enthralling work, beautifully composed. And where is she now, Mr. Redworth, since she broke away from that husband of hers, that wears the clothes of the worst tailor ever begotten by a thread on a needle, as I tell every soul of 'em in my part of the country?'

'You have seen him?' said Redworth.

'Why, sir, wasn't he on show at the Court he applied to for relief and damages? as we heard when we were watching the case daily, scarce drawing our breath for fear the innocent—and one of our own blood, would be crushed. Sure, there he stood; ay, and looking the very donkey for a woman to flip off her fingers, like the dust from my great uncle's prise of snuff! She's a glory to the old country. And better you than another, I'd say, since it wasn't an Irishman to have her: but what induced the dear lady to take him, is the question we 're all of us asking! And it's mournful to think that somehow you contrive to get the pick of us in the girls! If ever we 're united, 'twill be by a trick of circumvention of that sort, pretty sure. There's a turn in the market when they shut their eyes and drop to the handiest: and London's a vortex that poor dear dull old Dublin can't compete with. I 'll beg you for the address of the lady her friend, Lady Dunstane.'

Page 3235

Mr. Sullivan Smith walked with Redworth through the park to the House of Commons, discoursing of Rails and his excellent old friend's rise to the top rung of the ladder and Beanstalk land, so elevated that one had to look up at him with watery eyes, as if one had flung a ball at the meridian sun. Arrived at famed St. Stephen's, he sent in his compliments to the noble patriot and accepted an invitation to dinner.

'And mind you read *the princess Egeria*,' said Redworth.

'Again and again, my friend. The book is bought.' Sullivan Smith slapped his breastpocket.

'There's a bit of Erin in it.'

'It sprouts from Erin.'

'Trumpet it.'

'Loud as cavalry to the charge!'

Once with the title stamped on his memory, the zealous Irishman might be trusted to become an ambulant advertizer. Others, personal friends, adherents, courtiers of Redworth's, were active. Lady Pennon and Henry Wilmers, in the upper circle; Whitmonby and Westlake, in the literary; spread the fever for this new book. The chief interpreter of public opinion caught the way of the wind and headed the gale.

Editions of the book did really run like fires in summer furze; and to such an extent that a simple literary performance grew to be respected in Great Britain, as representing Money.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AUTHORESS

The effect of a great success upon Diana, at her second literary venture, was shown in the transparent sedateness of a letter she wrote to Emma Dunstane, as much as in her immediate and complacent acceptance of the magical change of her fortunes. She spoke one thing and acted another, but did both with a lofty calm that deceived the admiring friend who clearly saw the authoress behind her mask, and feared lest she should be too confidently trusting to the powers of her pen to support an establishment.

'If the public were a perfect instrument to strike on, I should be tempted to take the wonderful success of my *princess* at her first appearance for a proof of natural aptitude in composition, and might think myself the genius. I know it to be as little a Stradivarius as I am a Paganini. It is an eccentric machine, in tune with me for the moment,

because I happen to have hit it in the ringing spot. The book is a new face appealing to a mirror of the common surface emotions; and the kitchen rather than the dairy offers an analogy for the real value of that “top-skim.” I have not seen what I consider good in the book once mentioned among the laudatory notices—except by your dear hand, my Emmy. Be sure I will stand on guard against the “vaporous generalizations,” and other “tricks” you fear. Now that you are studying Latin for an occupation—how good and wise it was of Mr. Redworth to propose it!—I look upon you with awe as a classic authority and critic. I wish I had leisure to study with you. What I do is nothing like so solid and durable.

Page 3236

‘*The princess Egeria*’ originally (I must have written word of it to you—I remember the evening off Palermo!) was conceived as a sketch; by gradations she grew into a sort of semi-Scudery romance, and swelled to her present portliness. That was done by a great deal of piecing, not to say puffing, of her frame. She would be healthier and have a chance of living longer if she were reduced by a reversal of the processes. But how would the judicious clippings and prickings affect our “pensive public”? Now that I have furnished a house and have a fixed address, under the paws of creditors, I feel I am in the wizard-circle of my popularity and subscribe to its laws or waken to incubus and the desert. Have I been rash? You do not pronounce. If I have bound myself to pipe as others please, it need not be entirely; and I can promise you it shall not be; but still I am sensible when I lift my “little quill” of having forced the note of a woodland wren into the popular nightingale’s—which may end in the daw’s, from straining; or worse, a toy-whistle.

’That is, in the field of literature. Otherwise, within me deep, I am not aware of any transmutation of the celestial into coined gold. I sound myself, and ring clear. Incessant writing is my refuge, my solace—escape out of the personal net. I delight in it, as in my early morning walks at Lugano, when I went threading the streets and by the lake away to “the heavenly mount,” like a dim idea worming upward in a sleepy head to bright wakefulness.

’My anonymous critic, of whom I told you, is intoxicating with eulogy. The signature “Apollonius” appears to be of literary-middle indication. He marks passages approved by you. I have also had a complimentary letter from Mr. Dacier:

’For an instance of this delight I have in writing, so strong is it that I can read pages I have written, and tear the stuff to strips (I did yesterday), and resume, as if nothing had happened. The waves within are ready for any displacement. That must be a good sign. I do not doubt of excelling my *princess*; and if she received compliments, the next may hope for more. Consider, too, the novel pleasure of earning money by the labour we delight in. It is an answer to your question whether I am happy. Yes, as the savage islander before the ship entered the bay with the fire-water. My blood is wine, and I have the slumbers of an infant. I dream, wake, forget my dream, barely dress before the pen is galloping; barely breakfast; no toilette till noon. A savage in good sooth! You see, my Emmy, I could not house with the “companionable person” you hint at. The poles can never come together till the earth is crushed. She would find my habits intolerable, and I hers contemptible, though we might both be companionable persons. My dear, I could not even live with myself. My blessed little quill, which helps me divinely to live out of myself, is and must continue to be my one companion. It is my mountain height, morning light, wings, cup from the springs, my horse, my goal, my lancet and replenisher, my key of communication with the highest, grandest, holiest between earth and heaven-the vital air connecting them.

Page 3237

’In justice let me add that I have not been troubled by hearing of any of the mysterious legal claims, et caetera. I am sorry to hear bad reports of health. I wish him entire felicity—no step taken to bridge division! The thought of it makes me tigrish.

’A new pianist playing his own pieces (at Lady Singleby’s concert) has given me exquisite pleasure’ and set me composing songs—not to his music, which could be rendered only by sylphs moving to “soft recorders” in the humour of wildness, languor, bewitching caprices, giving a new sense to melody. How I wish you had been with me to hear him! It was the most AEolian thing ever caught from a night-breeze by the soul of a poet.

’But do not suppose me having headlong tendencies to the melting mood. (The above, by the way, is a Pole settled in Paris, and he is to be introduced to me at Lady Pennon’s.)—What do you say to my being invited by Mr. Whitmonby to aid him in writing leading articles for the paper he is going to conduct! “write as you talk and it will do,” he says. I am choosing my themes. To write—of politics—as I talk, seems to me like an effort to jump away from my shadow. The black dog of consciousness declines to be shaken off. If some one commanded me to talk as I write! I suspect it would be a way of winding me up to a sharp critical pitch rapidly.

’Not good news of Lord D. I have had messages. Mr. Dacier conceals his alarm. The *princess* gave great gratification. She did me her best service there. Is it not cruel that the interdict of the censor should force me to depend for information upon such scraps as I get from a gentleman passing my habitation on his way to the House? And he is not, he never has been, sympathetic in that direction. He sees my grief, and assumes an undertakerly air, with some notion of acting in concert, one supposes little imagining how I revolt from that crape-hatband formalism of sorrow!

’One word of her we call our inner I. I am not drawing upon her resources for my daily needs; not wasting her at all, I trust; certainly not walling her up, to deafen her voice. It would be to fall away from you. She bids me sign myself, my beloved, ever, ever your Tony.’

The letter had every outward show of sincereness in expression, and was endowed to wear that appearance by the writer’s impulse to protest with so resolute a vigour as to delude herself. Lady Dunstane heard of Mr. Dacier’s novel attendance at concerts. The world made a note of it; for the gentleman was notoriously without ear for music.

Diana’s comparison of her hours of incessant writing to her walks under the dawn at Lugano, her boast of the similarity of her delight in both, deluded her uncorrupted conscience to believe that she was now spiritually as free: as in that fair season of the new spring in her veins. She, was not an investigating physician, nor was Lady Dunstane, otherwise they would have examined the material points

Page 3238

of her conduct—indicators of the spiritual secret always. What are the patient's acts? The patient's, mind was projected too far beyond them to see the fore finger they stretched at her; and the friend's was not that of a prying doctor on the look out for betraying symptoms. Lady Dunstane did ask herself why Tony should have incurred the burden of a costly household—a very costly: Sir Lukin had been at one of Tony's little' dinners: but her wish to meet the world on equal terms, after a long dependency, accounted for it in seeming to excuse. The guests on the occasion were Lady Pennon. Lady Singleby, Mr. Whitmonby, Mr. Percy Dacier, Mr. Tonans;—'Some other woman,' Sir Lukin said, and himself. He reported the cookery as matching the: conversation, and that was princely; the wines not less—an extraordinary fact to note of a woman. But to hear Whitmonby and Diana Warwick! How he told a story, neat as a postman's knock, and she tipped it with a remark and ran to a second, drawing in Lady Pennon, and then Dacier, 'and me!' cried Sir Lukin; 'she made us all toss the ball from hand to hand, and all talk up to the mark; and none of us noticed that we all went together to the drawing-room, where we talked for another hour, and broke up fresher than we began.'

'That break between the men and the women after dinner was Tony's aversion, and I am glad she has instituted a change,' said Lady Dunstane.

She heard also from Redworth of the unexampled concert of the guests at Mrs. Warwick's dinner parties. He had met on one occasion the Esquarts, the Pettigrews, Mr. Percy Dacier, and a Miss Paynham. Redworth had not a word to say of the expensive household. Whatever Mrs. Warwick did was evidently good to him. On another evening the party was composed of Lady Pennon, Lord Larrian, Miss Paynham, a clever Mrs. Wollasley, Mr. Henry Wilmers, and again Mr. Percy Dacier.

When Diana came to Copsley, Lady Dunstane remarked on the recurrence of the name of Miss Paynham in the list of her guests.

'And Mr. Percy Dacier's too,' said Diana, smiling. 'They are invited each for specific reasons. It pleases Lord Dannisburgh to hear that a way has been found to enliven his nephew; and my little dinners are effective, I think. He wakes. Yesterday evening he capped flying jests with Mr. Sullivan Smith. But you speak of Miss. Paynham.' Diana lowered her voice on half a dozen syllables, till the half-tones dropped into her steady look. 'You approve, Emmy?'

The answer was: 'I do—true or not.'

'Between us two, dear, I fear! . . . In either case, she has been badly used. Society is big engine enough to protect itself. I incline with British juries to do rough justice to the victims. She has neither father nor brother. I have had no confidences: but it wears the look of a cowardly business. With two words in his ear, I could arm an Irishman to do some work of chastisement: he would select the rascal's necktie for a cause of quarrel and lords have to stand their ground as well as commoners. They measure the same

number of feet when stretched their length. However, vengeance with the heavens! though they seem tardy. Lady Pennon has been very kind about it; and the Esquarts invite her to Lockton. Shoulder to shoulder, the tide may be stemmed.'

Page 3239

‘She would have gone under, but for you, dear Tony!’ said Emma’ folding arms round her darling’s neck anal kissing her. ’Bring her here some day.’

Diana did not promise it. She had her vision of Sir Lukin in his fit of lunacy.

‘I am too weak for London now,’ Emma resumed. ’I should like to be useful. Is she pleasant?’

‘Sprightly by nature. She has worn herself with fretting.’

’Then bring her to stay with me, if I cannot keep you. She will talk of you to me.’

‘I will bring her for a couple of days,’ Diana said. ’I am too busy to remain longer. She paints portraits to amuse herself. She ought to be pushed, wherever she is received about London, while the season is warm. One season will suffice to establish her. She is pretty, near upon six and twenty: foolish, of course:—she pays for having had a romantic head. Heavy payment, Emmy! I drive at laws, but hers is an instance of the creatures wanting simple human kindness.’

’The good law will come with a better civilization; but before society can be civilized it has to be debarbarized,’ Emma remarked, and Diana sighed over the task and the truism.

I should have said in younger days, because it will not look plainly on our nature and try to reconcile it with our conditions. But now I see that the sin is cowardice. The more I know of the world the more clearly I perceive that its top and bottom sin is cowardice, physically and morally alike. Lord Larrian owns to there being few heroes in an army. We must fawn in society. What is the meaning of that dread of one example of tolerance? O my dear! let us give it the right name. Society is the best thing we have, but it is a crazy vessel worked by a crew that formerly practised piracy, and now, in expiation, professes piety, fearful of a discovered Omnipotence, which is in the image of themselves and captain. Their old habits are not quite abandoned, and their new one is used as a lash to whip the exposed of us for a propitiation of the capricious potentate whom they worship in the place of the true God.’

Lady Dunstane sniffed. ‘I smell the leading article.’

Diana joined with her smile, ‘No, the style is rather different.’

‘Have you not got into a trick of composing in speaking, at times?’

Diana confessed, ’I think I have at times. Perhaps the daily writing of all kinds and the nightly talking . . . I may be getting strained.’

’No, Tony; but longer visits in the country to me would refresh you. I miss your lighter touches. London is a school, but, you know it, not a school for comedy nor for philosophy; that is gathered on my hills, with London distantly in view, and then occasional descents on it well digested.’

‘I wonder whether it is affecting me!’ said Diana, musing. ’A metropolitan hack! and while thinking myself free, thrice harnessed; and all my fun gone. Am I really as dull as a tract, my dear? I must be, or I should be proving the contrary instead of asking. My pitfall is to fancy I have powers equal to the first look-out of the eyes of the morning. Enough of me. We talked of Mary Paynham. If only some right good man would marry her!’

Page 3240

Lady Dunstane guessed at the right good man in Diana's mind. 'Do you bring them together?'

Diana nodded, and then shook doleful negatives to signify no hope.

'None whatever—if we mean the same person,' said Lady Dunstane, bethinking her, in the spirit of wrath she felt at such a scheme being planned by Diana to snare the right good man, that instead of her own true lover Redworth, it might be only Percy Dacier. So filmy of mere sensations are these little ideas as they flit in converse, that she did not reflect on her friend's ignorance of Redworth's love of her, or on the unlikely choice of one in Dacier's high station to reinstate a damsel.

They did not name the person.

'Passing the instance, which is cruel, I will be just to society thus far,' said Diana. 'I was in a boat at Richmond last week, and Leander was revelling along the mud-banks, and took it into his head to swim out to me, and I was moved to take him on board. The ladies in the boat objected, for he was not only wet but very muddy. I was forced to own that their objections were reasonable. My sentimental humaneness had no argument against muslin dresses, though my dear dog's eyes appealed pathetically, and he would keep swimming after us. The analogy excuses the world for protecting itself in extreme cases; nothing, nothing excuses its insensibility to cases which may be pleaded. You see the pirate crew turned pious-ferocious in sanctity.' She added, half laughing: 'I am reminded by the boat, I have unveiled my anonymous critic, and had a woeful disappointment. He wrote like a veteran; he is not much more than a boy. I received a volume of verse, and a few lines begging my acceptance. I fancied I knew the writing, and wrote asking him whether I had not to thank him, and inviting him to call. He seems a nice lad of about two and twenty, mad for literature; and he must have talent. Arthur Rhodes by name. I may have a chance of helping him. He was an articled clerk of Mr. Braddock's, the same who valiantly came to my rescue once. He was with us in the boat.'

'Bring him to me some day,' said Lady Dunstane.

Miss Paynham's visit to Copsley was arranged, and it turned out a failure. The poor young lady came in a flutter, thinking that the friend of Mrs. Warwick would expect her to discourse cleverly. She attempted it, to Diana's amazement. Lady Dunstane's opposingly corresponding stillness provoked Miss Paynham to expatiate, for she had sprightliness and some mental reserves of the common order. Clearly, Lady Dunstane mused while listening amiably, Tony never could have designed this gabbler for the mate of Thomas Redworth!

Percy Dacier seemed to her the more likely one, in that light, and she thought so still, after Sir Lukin had introduced him at Copsley for a couple of days of the hunting

season. Tony's manner with him suggested it; she had a dash of leadership. They were not intimate in look or tongue.

Page 3241

But Percy Dacier also was too good for Miss Paynham, if that was Tony's plan for him, Lady Dunstane thought, with the relentlessness of an invalid and recluse's distaste. An aspect of penitence she had not demanded, but the silly gabbier under a stigma she could not pardon.

Her opinion of Miss Paynham was diffused in her silence.

Speaking of Mr. Dacier, she remarked, 'As you say of him, Tony, he can brighten, and when you give him a chance he is entertaining. He has fine gifts. If I were a member of his family I should beat about for a match for him. He strikes me as one of the young men who would do better married.'

'He is doing very well, but the wonder is that he doesn't marry,' said Diana. 'He ought to be engaged. Lady Esquart told me that he was. A Miss Asper—great heiress; and the Daciers want money. However, there it is.'

Not many weeks later Diana could not have spoken of Mr. Percy Dacier with this air of indifference without corruption of her inward guide.

CHAPTER XIX

A DRIVE IN SUNLIGHT AND A DRIVE IN MOONLIGHT

The fatal time to come for her was in the Summer of that year.

Emma had written her a letter of unwonted bright spirits, contrasting strangely with an inexplicable oppression of her own that led her to imagine her recent placid life the pause before thunder, and to sharp the mood of her solitary friend she flew to Copsley, finding Sir Lukin absent, as usual. They drove out immediately after breakfast, on one of those high mornings of the bared bosom of June when distances are given to our eyes, and a soft air fondles leaf and grass-blade, and beauty and peace are overhead, reflected, if we will. Rain had fallen in the night. Here and there hung a milk-white cloud with folded sail. The South-west left it in its bay of blue, and breathed below. At moments the fresh scent of herb and mould swung richly in warmth. The young beech-leaves glittered, pools of rain-water made the roadways laugh, the grass-banks under hedges rolled their interwoven weeds in cascades of many-shaded green to right and left of the pair of dappled ponies, and a squirrel crossed ahead, a lark went up a little way to ease his heart, closing his wings when the burst was over, startled black-birds, darting with a clamour like a broken cockcrow, looped the wayside woods from hazel to oak-scrub; short flights, quick spirts everywhere, steady sunshine above.

Diana held the reins. The whip was an ornament, as the plume of feathers to the general officer. Lady Dunstane's ponies were a present from Redworth, who always chose the pick of the land for his gifts. They joyed in their trot, and were the very love-

birds of the breed for their pleasure of going together, so like that Diana called them the Dromios. Through an old gravel-cutting a gateway led to the turf of the down, springy turf bordered on a long line, clear

Page 3242

as a racecourse, by golden gorse covers, and leftward over the gorse the dark ridge of the fir and heath country ran companionably to the Southwest, the valley between, with undulations of wood and meadow sunned or shaded, clumps, mounds, promontories, away to broad spaces of tillage banked by wooded hills, and dimmer beyond and farther, the faintest shadowiness of heights, as a veil to the illimitable. Yews, junipers, radiant beeches, and gleams of the service-tree or the white-beam spotted the semicircle of swelling green Down black and silver. The sun in the valley sharpened his beams on squares of buttercups, and made a pond a diamond.

'You see, Tony,' Emma said, for a comment on the scene, 'I could envy Italy for having you, more than you for being in Italy.'

'Feature and colour!' said Diana. 'You have them here, and on a scale that one can embrace. I should like to build a hut on this point, and wait for such a day to return. It brings me to life.' She lifted her eyelids on her friend's worn sweet face, and knowing her this friend up to death, past it in her hopes, she said bravely, 'It is the Emma of days and scenes to me! It helps me to forget myself, as I do when I think of you, dearest; but the subject has latterly been haunting me, I don't know why, and ominously, as if my nature were about to horrify my soul. But I am not sentimentalizing, you are really this day and scene in my heart.'

Emma smiled confidingly. She spoke her reflection: 'The heart must be troubled a little to have the thought. The flower I gather here tells me that we may be happy in privation and suffering if simply we can accept beauty. I won't say expel the passions, but keep passion sober, a trotter in harness.'

Diana caressed the ponies' heads with the droop of her whip: 'I don't think I know him!' she said.

Between sincerity and a suspicion so cloaked and dull that she did not feel it to be the opposite of candour, she fancied she was passionless because she could accept the visible beauty, which was Emma's prescription and test; and she forced herself to make much of it, cling to it, devour it; with envy of Emma's contemplative happiness, through whose grave mind she tried to get to the peace in it, imagining that she succeeded. The cloaked and dull suspicion weighed within her nevertheless. She took it for a mania to speculate on herself. There are states of the crimson blood when the keenest wits are childish, notably in great-hearted women aiming at the majesty of their sex and fearful of confounding it by the look direct and the downright word. Yet her nature compelled her inwardly to phrase the sentence: 'Emma is a wife!' The character of her husband was not considered, nor was the meaning of the exclamation pursued.

They drove through the gorse into wild land of heath and flowering hawthorn, and along by tracts of yew and juniper to another point, jutting on a furzy sand-mound, rich with the mild splendour of English scenery, which Emma stamped on her friend's mind by

saying: ’A cripple has little to envy in you who can fly when she has feasts like these at her doors.’

Page 3243

They had an inclination to boast on the drive home of the solitude they had enjoyed; and just then, as the road in the wood wound under great beeches, they beheld a London hat. The hat was plucked from its head. A clear-faced youth, rather flushed, dusty at the legs, addressed Diana.

‘Mr. Rhodes!’ she said, not discouragingly.

She was petitioned to excuse him; he thought she would wish to hear the news in town last night as early as possible; he hesitated and murmured it.

Diana turned to Emma: ‘Lord Dannisburgh!’ her paleness told the rest.

Hearing from Mr. Rhodes that he had walked the distance from town, and had been to Copsley, Lady Dunstane invited him to follow the pony-carriage thither, where he was fed and refreshed by a tea-breakfast, as he preferred walking on tea, he said. ’I took the liberty to call at Mrs. Warwick’s house,’ he informed her; ’the footman said she was at Copsley. I found it on the map—I knew the directions—and started about two in the morning. I wanted a walk.’

It was evident to her that he was one of the young squires bewitched whom beautiful women are constantly enlisting. There was no concealment of it, though he stirred a sad enviousness in the invalid lady by descanting on the raptures of a walk out of London in the youngest light of day, and on the common objects he had noticed along the roadside, and through the woods, more sustaining, closer with nature than her compulsory feeding on the cream of things.

‘You are not fatigued?’ she inquired, hoping for that confession at least; but she pardoned his boyish vaunting to walk the distance back without any fatigue at all.

He had a sweeter reward for his pains; and if the business of the chronicler allowed him to become attached to pure throbbing felicity wherever it is encountered, he might be diverted by the blissful unexpectedness of good fortune befalling Mr. Arthur Rhodes in having the honour to conduct Mrs. Warwick to town. No imagined happiness, even in the heart of a young man of two and twenty, could have matched it. He was by her side, hearing and seeing her, not less than four hours. To add to his happiness, Lady Dunstane said she would be glad to welcome him again. She thought him a pleasant specimen of the self-vowed squire.

Diana was sure that there would be a communication for her of some sort at her house in London; perhaps a message of farewell from the dying lord, now dead. Mr. Rhodes had only the news of the evening journals, to the effect that Lord Dannisburgh had expired at his residence, the Priory, Hallowmere, in Hampshire. A message of farewell from him, she hoped for: knowing him as she did, it seemed a certainty; and she

hungered for that last gleam of life in her friend. She had no anticipation of the burden of the message awaiting her.

Page 3244

A consultation as to the despatching of the message, had taken place among the members of Lord Dannisburgh's family present at his death. Percy Dacier was one of them, and he settled the disputed point, after some time had been spent in persuading his father to take the plain view of obligation in the matter, and in opposing the dowager countess, his grandmother, by stating that he had already sent a special messenger to London. Lord Dannisburgh on his death-bed had expressed a wish that Mrs. Warwick would sit with him for an hour one night before the nails were knocked in his coffin. He spoke of it twice, putting it the second time to Percy as a formal request to be made to her, and Percy had promised him that Mrs. Warwick should have the message. He had done his best to keep his pledge, aware of the disrelish of the whole family for the lady's name, to say nothing of her presence.

'She won't come,' said the earl.

'She'll come,' said old Lady Dacier.

'If the woman respects herself she'll hold off it,' the earl insisted because of his desire that way. He signified in mutterings that the thing was improper and absurd, a piece of sentiment, sickly senility, unlike Lord Dannisburgh. Also that Percy had been guilty of excessive folly.

To which Lady Dacier nodded her assent, remarking, 'The woman is on her mettle. From what I've heard of her, she's not a woman to stick at trifles. She'll take it as a sort of ordeal by touch, and she 'll come.'

They joined in abusing Percy, who had driven away to another part of the country. Lord Creedmore, the heir of the house, was absent, hunting in America, or he might temporarily have been taken into favour by contrast. Ultimately they agreed that the woman must be allowed to enter the house, but could not be received. The earl was a widower; his mother managed the family, and being hard to convince, she customarily carried her point, save when it involved Percy's freedom of action. She was one of the veterans of her sex that age to toughness; and the 'hysterical fuss' she apprehended in the visit of this woman to Lord Dannisburgh's death-bed and body, did not alarm her. For the sake of the household she determined to remain, shut up in her room. Before night the house was empty of any members of the family excepting old Lady Dacier and the outstretched figure on the bed.

Dacier fled to escape the hearing of the numberless ejaculations re-awakened in the family by his uncle's extraordinary dying request. They were an outrage to the lady, of whom he could now speak as a privileged champion; and the request itself had an air of proving her stainless, a white soul and efficacious advocate at the celestial gates (reading the mind of the dying man). So he thought at one moment: he had thought so when charged with the message to her; had even thought it a natural wish that she should look once on the face she would see no more, and say farewell

Page 3245

to it, considering that in life it could not be requested. But the susceptibility to sentimental emotion beside a death-bed, with a dying man's voice in the ear, requires fortification if it is to be maintained;' and the review of his uncle's character did not tend to make this very singular request a proof that the lady's innocence was honoured in it. His epicurean uncle had no profound esteem for the kind of innocence. He had always talked of Mrs. Warwick—with warm respect for her: Dacier knew that he had bequeathed her a sum of money. The inferences were either way. Lord Dannisburgh never spoke evilly of any woman, and he was perhaps bound to indemnify her materially as well as he could for what she had suffered.—On the other hand, how easy it was to be the dupe of a woman so handsome and clever.—Unlikely too that his uncle would consent to sit at the Platonic banquet with her.—Judging by himself, Dacier deemed it possible for man. He was not quick to kindle, and had lately seen much of her, had found her a Lady Egeria, helpful in counsel, prompting, inspiriting, reviving as well-waters, and as temperately cool: not one sign of native slipperiness. Nor did she stir the mud in him upon which proud man is built. The shadow of the scandal had checked a few shifty sensations rising now and then of their own accord, and had laid them, with the lady's benign connivance. This was good proof in her favour, seeing that she must have perceived of late the besetting thirst he had for her company; and alone or in the medley equally. To see her, hear, exchange ideas with her; and to talk of new books, try to listen to music at the opera and at concerts, and admire her playing of hostess, were novel pleasures, giving him fresh notions of life, and strengthening rather than disturbing the course of his life's business.

At any rate, she was capable of friendship. Why not resolutely believe that she had been his uncle's true and simple friend! He adopted the resolution, thanking her for one recognized fact:—he hated marriage, and would by this time have been in the yoke, but for the agreeable deviation of his path to her society. Since his visit to Copsley, moreover, Lady Dunstane's idolizing, of her friend had influenced him. Reflecting on it, he recovered from the shock which his uncle's request had caused.

Certain positive calculations were running side by side with the speculations in vapour. His messenger would reach her house at about four of the afternoon. If then at home, would she decide to start immediately?—Would she come? That was a question he did not delay to answer. Would she defer the visit? Death replied to that. She would not delay it.

She would be sure to come at once. And what of the welcome she would meet? Leaving the station at London at six in the evening, she might arrive at the Priory, all impediments counted, between ten and eleven at night. Thence, coldly greeted, or not greeted, to the chamber of death.

Page 3246

A pitiable and cruel reception for a woman upon such a mission!

His mingled calculations and meditations reached that exclamatory terminus in feeling, and settled on the picture of Diana, about as clear as light to blinking eyes, but enough for him to realize her being there and alone, woefully alone. The supposition of an absolute loneliness was most possible. He had intended to drive back the next day, when the domestic storm would be over, and take the chances of her coming. It seemed now a piece of duty to return at night, a traverse of twenty rough up and down miles from Itchenford to the heath-land rolling on the chalk wave of the Surrey borders, easily done after the remonstrances of his host were stopped.

Dacier sat in an open carriage, facing a slip of bright moon. Poetical impressions, emotions, any stirrings of his mind by the sensational stamp on it, were new to him, and while he swam in them, both lulled and pricked by his novel accessibility to nature's lyrical touch, he asked himself whether, if he were near the throes of death, the thought of having Diana Warwick to sit beside his vacant semblance for an hour at night would be comforting. And why had his uncle specified an hour of the night? It was a sentiment, like the request: curious in a man so little sentimental. Yonder crescent running the shadowy round of the hoop roused comparisons. Would one really wish to have her beside one in death? In life—ah! But suppose her denied to us in life. Then the desire for her companionship appears passingly comprehensible. Enter into the sentiment, you see that the hour of darkness is naturally chosen. And would even a grand old Pagan crave the presence beside his dead body for an hour of the night of a woman he did not esteem? Dacier answered no. The negative was not echoed in his mind. He repeated it, and to the same deadness.

He became aware that he had spoken for himself, and he had a fit of sourness. For who can say he is not a fool before he has been tried by a woman! Dacier's wretched tendency under vexation to conceive grotesque analogies, anti-poetic, not to say cockney similes, which had slightly chilled Diana at Rovio, set him looking at yonder crescent with the hoop, as at the shape of a white cat climbing a wheel. Men of the northern blood will sometimes lend their assent to poetical images, even to those that do not stun the mind lie bludgeons and imperatively, by much repetition, command their assent; and it is for a solid exchange and interest in usury with soft poetical creatures when they are so condescending; but they are seized by the grotesque. In spite of efforts to efface or supplant it, he saw the white cat, nothing else, even to thinking that she had jumped cleverly to catch the wheel. He was a true descendant of practical hard-grained fighting Northerners, of gnarled dwarf imaginations, chivalrous though they were, and heroes to have serviceable and valiant gentlemen for issue. Without at all tracing back to its origin his detestable image of the white cat on the dead circle, he kicked at the links between his uncle and Diana Warwick, whatever they had been; particularly at the present revival of them. Old Lady Dacier's blunt speech, and his father's fixed opinion, hissed in his head.

Page 3247

They were ignorant of his autumnal visit to the Italian Lakes, after the winter's Nile-boat expedition; and also of the degree of his recent intimacy with Mrs. Warwick; or else, as he knew, he would have heard more hissing things. Her patronage of Miss Paynham exposed her to attacks where she was deemed vulnerable; Lady Dacier muttered old saws as to the flocking of birds; he did not accurately understand it, thought it indiscreet, at best. But in regard to his experience, he could tell himself that a woman more guileless of luring never drew breath. On the contrary, candour said it had always been he who had schemed and pressed for the meeting. He was at liberty to do it, not being bound in honour elsewhere. Besides, despite his acknowledgement of her beauty, Mrs. Warwick was not quite his ideal of the perfectly beautiful woman.

Constance Asper came nearer to it. He had the English taste for red and white, and for cold outlines: he secretly admired a statuesque demeanour with a statue's eyes. The national approbation of a reserved haughtiness in woman, a tempered disdain in her slightly lifted small upperlip and drooped eyelids, was shared by him; and Constance Asper, if not exactly aristocratic by birth, stood well for that aristocratic insular type, which seems to promise the husband of it a casket of all the trusty virtues, as well as the security of frigidity in the casket. Such was Dacier's native taste; consequently the attractions of Diana Warwick for him were, he thought, chiefly mental, those of a Lady Egeria. She might or might not be good, in the vulgar sense. She was an agreeable woman, an amusing companion, very suggestive, inciting, animating; and her past history must be left as her own. Did it matter to him? What he saw was bright, a silver crescent on the side of the shadowy ring. Were it a question of marrying her!—That was out of the possibilities. He remembered, moreover, having heard from a man, who professed to know, that Mrs. Warwick had started in married life by treating her husband cavalierly to an intolerable degree: 'Such as no Englishman could stand,' the portly old informant thundered, describing it and her in racy vernacular. She might be a devil of a wife. She was a pleasant friend; just the soft bit sweeter than male friends which gave the flavour of sex without the artful seductions. He required them strong to move him.

He looked at last on the green walls of the Priory, scarcely supposing a fair watcher to be within; for the contrasting pale colours of dawn had ceased to quicken the brilliancy of the crescent, and summer daylight drowned it to fainter than a silver coin in water. It lay dispieced like a pulled rag. Eastward, over Surrey, stood the full rose of morning. The Priory clock struck four. When the summons of the bell had gained him admittance, and he heard that Mrs. Warwick had come in the night, he looked back through the doorway at the rosy colour, and congratulated

Page 3248

himself to think that her hour of watching was at an end. A sleepy footman was his informant. Women were in my lord's dressing-room, he said. Upstairs, at the death-chamber, Dacier paused. No sound came to him. He hurried to his own room, paced about, and returned. Expecting to see no one but the dead, he turned the handle, and the two circles of a shaded lamp, on ceiling and on table, met his gaze.

CHAPTER XX

DIANA A NIGHT-WATCH IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH

He stepped into the room, and thrilled to hear the quiet voice beside the bed: 'Who is it?'

Apologies and excuses were on his tongue. The vibration of those grave tones checked them.

'It is you,' she said.

She sat in shadow, her hands joined on her lap. An unopened book was under the lamp.

He spoke in an underbreath: 'I have just come. I was not sure I should find you here. Pardon.'

'There is a chair.'

He murmured thanks and entered into the stillness, observing her.

'You have been watching . . . . You must be tired.'

'No.'

'An hour was asked, only one.'

'I could not leave him.'

'Watchers are at hand to relieve you'

'It is better for him to have me.'

The chord of her voice told him of the gulf she had sunk in during the night. The thought of her endurance became a burden.

He let fall his breath for patience, and tapped the floor with his foot.

He feared to discompose her by speaking. The silence grew more fearful, as the very speech of Death between them.

’You came. I thought it right to let you know instantly. I hoped you would come to-morrow’

‘I could not delay.’

‘You have been sitting alone here since eleven!’

‘I have not found it long.’

‘You must want some refreshment . . . tea?’

‘I need nothing.’

‘It can be made ready in a few minutes.’

‘I could not eat or drink.’

He tried to brush away the impression of the tomb in the heavily-curtained chamber by thinking of the summer-morn outside; he spoke of it, the rosy sky, the dewy grass, the piping birds. She listened, as one hearing of a quitted sphere.

Their breathing in common was just heard if either drew a deeper breath. At moments his eyes wandered and shut. Alternately in his mind Death had vaster meanings and doubtfuller; Life cowered under the shadow or outshone it. He glanced from her to the figure in the bed, and she seemed swallowed.

He said: ’It is time for you to have rest. You know your room. I will stay till the servants are up.’

She replied: ‘No, let this night with him be mine.’

‘I am not intruding . . .?’

‘If you wish to remain . . .’

No traces of weeping were on her face. The lampshade revealed it colourless, and lustreless her eyes. She was robed in black. She held her hands clasped.

Page 3249

‘You have not suffered?’

‘Oh, no.’

She said it without sighing: nor was her speech mournful, only brief.

‘You have seen death before?’

’I sat by my father four nights. I was a girl then. I cried till I had no more tears.’

He felt a burning pressure behind his eyeballs.

‘Death is natural,’ he said.

‘It is natural to the aged. When they die honoured . . .’

She looked where the dead man lay. ’To sit beside the young, cut off from their dear opening life . . . !’ A little shudder swept over her. ’Oh! that!’

’You were very good to come. We must all thank you for fulfilling his wish.’

‘He knew it would be my wish.’

Her hands pressed together.

‘He lies peacefully!’

’I have raised the lamp on him, and wondered each time. So changeless he lies. But so like a sleep that will wake. We never see peace but in the features of the dead. Will you look? They are beautiful. They have a heavenly sweetness.’

The desire to look was evidently recurrent with her. Dacier rose.

Their eyes fell together on the dead man, as thoughtfully as Death allows to the creatures of sensation.

‘And after?’ he said in low tones.

‘I trust to my Maker,’ she replied. ’Do you see a change since he breathed his last?’

‘Not any.’

‘You were with him?’

‘Not in the room. Two minutes later.’

‘Who . . .?’

‘My father. His niece, Lady Cathairn.’

’If our lives are lengthened we outlive most of those we would have to close our eyes. He had a dear sister.’

‘She died some years back.’

‘I helped to comfort him for that loss.’

‘He told me you did.’

The lamp was replaced on the table.

’For a moment, when I withdraw the light from him, I feel sadness. As if the light we lend to anything were of value to him now!’

She bowed her head deeply. Dacier left her meditation undisturbed. The birds on the walls outside were audible, tweeting, chirping.

He went to the window-curtains and tried the shutter-bars. It seemed to him that daylight would be cheerfuller for her. He had a thirst to behold her standing bathed in daylight.

‘Shall I open them?’ he asked her.

‘I would rather the lamp,’ she said.

They sat silently until she drew her watch from her girdle. ’My train starts at half-past six. It is a walk of thirty-five minutes to the station. I did it last night in that time.’

‘You walked here in the dark alone?’

’There was no fly to be had. The station-master sent one of his porters with me. We had a talk on the road. I like those men.’

Dacier read the hour by the mantelpiece clock. ’If you must really go by the early train, I will drive you.’

‘No, I will walk; I prefer it.’

Page 3250

‘I will order your breakfast at once.’

He turned on his heel. She stopped him. ’No, I have no taste for eating or drinking.’

‘Pray . . .’ said he, in visible distress.

She shook her head. ’I could not. I have twenty minutes longer. I can find my way to the station; it is almost a straight road out of the park-gates.’

His heart swelled with anger at the household for they treatment she had been subjected to, judging by her resolve not to break bread in the house.

They resumed their silent sitting. The intervals for a word to pass between them were long, and the ticking of the time-piece fronting the death-bed ruled the chamber, scarcely varied.

The lamp was raised for the final look, the leave-taking.

Dacier buried his face, thinking many things—the common multitude in insurrection.

‘A servant should be told to come now,’ she said. ’I have only to put on my bonnet and I am ready.’

‘You will take no . . . ?’

‘Nothing.’

‘It is not too late for a carriage to be ordered.’

‘No—the walk!’

They separated.

He roused the two women in the dressing-room, asleep with heads against the wall. Thence he sped to his own room for hat and overcoat, and a sprinkle of cold water. Descending the stairs, he beheld his companion issuing from the chamber of death. Her lips were shut, her eyelids nervously tremulous.

They were soon in the warm sweet open air, and they walked without an interchange of a syllable through the park into the white hawthorn lane, glad to breathe. Her nostrils took long draughts of air, but of the change of, scene she appeared scarcely sensible.

At the park-gates, she said: ‘There is no necessity four your coming.’

His answer was: ’I think of myself. I gain something every step I walk with you.’

‘To-day is Thursday,’ said she. ‘The funeral is . . . ?’

’Monday has been fixed. According to his directions, he will lie in the churchyard of his village—not in the family vault.’

‘I know,’ she said hastily. ’They are privileged who follow him and see the coffin lowered. He spoke of this quiet little resting-place.’

’Yes, it’s a good end. I do not wonder at his wish for the honour you have done him. I could wish it too. But more living than dead—that is a natural wish.’

‘It is not to be called an honour.’

‘I should feel it so-an honour to me.’

’It is a friend’s duty. The word is too harsh; it was his friend’s desire. He did not ask it so much as he sanctioned it. For to him what has my sitting beside him been!’

‘He had the prospective happiness.’

’He knew well that my soul would be with him—as it was last night. But he knew it would be my poor human happiness to see him with my eyes, touch him with my hand, before he passed from our sight.’

Page 3251

Dacier exclaimed: ‘How you can love!’

‘Is the village church to be seen?’ she asked.

’To the right of those elms; that is the spire. The black spot below is a yew. You love with the whole heart when you love.’

‘I love my friends,’ she replied.

‘You tempt me to envy those who are numbered among them.’

‘They are not many.’

‘They should be grateful!’

‘You have some acquaintance with them all.’

‘And an enemy? Had you ever one? Do you know of one?’

’Direct and personal designedly? I think not. We give that title to those who are disinclined to us and add a dash of darker colour to our errors. Foxes have enemies in the dogs; heroines of melodramas have their persecuting villains. I suppose that conditions of life exist where one meets the original complexities. The bad are in every rank. The inveterately malignant I have not found. Circumstances may combine to make a whisper as deadly as a blow, though not of such evil design. Perhaps if we lived at a Court of a magnificent despot we should learn that we are less highly civilized than we imagine ourselves; but that is a fire to the passions, and the extreme is not the perfect test. Our civilization counts positive gains—unless you take the melodrama for the truer picture of us. It is always the most popular with the English.—And look, what a month June is! Yesterday morning I was with Lady Dunstane on her heights, and I feel double the age. He was fond of this wild country. We think it a desert, a blank, whither he has gone, because we will strain to see in the utter dark, and nothing can come of that but the bursting of the eyeballs.’

Dacier assented: ‘There’s no use in peering beyond the limits.’

‘No,’ said she; ’the effect is like the explaining of things to a dull head—the finishing stroke to the understanding! Better continue to brood. We get to some unravelment if we are left to our own efforts. I quarrel with no priest of any denomination. That they should quarrel among themselves is comprehensible in their wisdom, for each has the specific. But they show us their way of solving the great problem, and we ought to thank them, though one or the other abominate us. You are advised to talk with Lady Dunstane on these themes.

She is perpetually in the antechamber of death, and her soul is perennially sunshine.—-See the pretty cottage under the laburnum curls! Who lives there?'

'His gamekeeper, Simon Rofe.'

'And what a playground for the children, that bit of common by their garden-palings! and the pond, and the blue hills over the furzes. I hope those people will not be turned out.'

Dacier could not tell. He promised to do his best for them.

'But,' said she, 'you are the lord here now.'

'Not likely to be the tenant. Incomes are wanted to support even small estates.'

Page 3252

‘The reason is good for courting the income.’

He disliked the remark; and when she said presently:

‘Those windmills make the landscape homely,’ he rejoined: ’They remind one of our wheeling London gamins round the cab from the station.’

‘They remind you,’ said she, and smiled at the chance discordant trick he had, remembering occasions when it had crossed her.

‘This is homelier than Rovio,’ she said; ‘quite as nice in its way.’

‘You do not gather flowers here.’

‘Because my friend has these at her feet.’

‘May one petition without a rival, then, for a souvenir?’

‘Certainly, if you care to have a common buttercup.’

They reached the station, five minutes in advance of the train. His coming manoeuvre was early detected, and she drew from her pocket the little book he had seen lying unopened on the table, and said: ’I shall have two good hours for reading.’

’You will not object? . . . I must accompany you to town. Permit it, I beg. You shall not be worried to talk.’

‘No; I came alone and return alone.’

’Fasting and unprotected! Are you determined to take away the worst impression of us? Do not refuse me this favour.’

’As to fasting, I could not eat: and unprotected no woman is in England, if she is a third-class traveller. That is my experience of the class; and I shall return among my natural protectors—the most unselfishly chivalrous to women in the whole world.’

He had set his heart on going with her, and he attempted eloquence in pleading, but that exposed him to her humour; he was tripped.

‘It is not denied that you belong to the knightly class,’ she said; ’and it is not necessary that you should wear armour and plumes to proclaim it; and your appearance would be ample protection from the drunken sailors travelling, you say, on this line; and I may be deplorably mistaken in imagining that I could tame them. But your knightliness is due elsewhere; and I commit myself to the fortune of war. It is a battle for women

everywhere; under the most favourable conditions among my dear common English. I have not my maid with me, or else I should not dare.'

She paid for a third-class ticket, amused by Dacier's look of entreaty and trouble.

'Of course I obey,' he murmured.

'I have the habit of exacting it in matters concerning my independence,' she said; and it arrested some rumbling notions in his head as to a piece of audacity on the starting of the train. They walked up and down the platform till the bell rang and the train came rounding beneath an arch.

'Oh, by the way, may I ask?'—he said: 'was it your article in Whitmonby's journal on a speech of mine last week?'

'The guilty writer is confessed.'

'Let me thank you.'

'Don't. But try to believe it written on public grounds—if the task is not too great.'

Page 3253

‘I may call?’

‘You will be welcome.’

‘To tell you of the funeral—the last of him.’

‘Do not fail to come.’

She could have laughed to see him jumping on the steps of the third-class carriages one after another to choose her company for her. In those pre-democratic blissful days before the miry Deluge, the opinion of the requirements of poor English travellers entertained by the Seigneur Directors of the class above them, was that they differed from cattle in stipulating for seats. With the exception of that provision to suit their weakness, the accommodation extended to them resembled pens, and the seats were emphatically seats of penitence, intended to grind the sitter for his mean pittance payment and absence of aspiration to a higher state. Hard angular wood, a low roof, a shabby square of window aloof, demanding of him to quit the seat he insisted on having, if he would indulge in views of the passing scenery,—such was the furniture of dens where a refinement of castigation was practised on villain poverty by denying leathers to the windows, or else buttons to the leathers, so that the windows had either to be up or down, but refused to shelter and freshen simultaneously.

Dacier selected a compartment occupied by two old women, a mother and babe and little maid, and a labouring man. There he installed her, with an eager look that she would not notice.

‘You will want the window down,’ he said.

She applied to her fellow-travellers for the permission; and struggling to get the window down, he was irritated to animadvert on ’these carriages’ of the benevolent railway Company.

‘Do not forget that the wealthy are well treated, or you may be unjust,’ said she, to pacify him.

His mouth sharpened its line while he tried arts and energies on the refractory window. She told him to leave it. ’You can’t breathe this atmosphere!’ he cried, and called to a porter, who did the work, remarking that it was rather stiff.

The door was banged and fastened. Dacier had to hang on the step to see her in the farewell. From the platform he saw the top of her bonnet; and why she should have been guilty of this freak of riding in an unwholesome carriage, tasked his power of guessing. He was too English even to have taken the explanation, for he detested the distinguishing of the races in his country, and could not therefore have comprehended

her peculiar tenacity of the sense of injury as long as enthusiasm did not arise to obliterate it. He required a course of lessons in Irish.

Sauntering down the lane, he called at Simon Rofe's cottage, and spoke very kindly to the gamekeeper's wife. That might please Diana. It was all he could do at present.

CHAPTER XXI

'*The young minister of state*'

Page 3254

Descriptions in the newspapers of the rural funeral of Lord Dannisburgh had the effect of rousing flights of tattlers with a twittering of the disused name of Warwick; our social Gods renewed their combat, and the verdict of the jury was again overhauled, to be attacked and maintained, the carpers replying to the champions that they held to their view of it: as heads of bull-dogs are expected to do when they have got a grip of one. It is a point of muscular honour with them never to relax their hold. They will tell you why:—they formed that opinion from the first. And but for the swearing of a particular witness, upon whom the plaintiff had been taught to rely, the verdict would have been different—to prove their soundness of judgement. They could speak from private positive information of certain damnatory circumstances, derived from authentic sources. Visits of a gentleman to the house of a married lady in the absence of the husband? Oh!—The British Lucretia was very properly not legally at home to the masculine world of that day. She plied her distaff in pure seclusion, meditating on her absent lord; or else a fair proportion of the masculine world, which had not yet, has not yet, 'doubled Cape Turk,' approved her condemnation to the sack.

There was talk in the feminine world, at Lady Wathin's assemblies. The elevation of her husband had extended and deepened her influence on the levels where it reigned before, but without, strange as we may think it now, assisting to her own elevation, much aspired for, to the smooth and lively upper pavement of Society, above its tumbled strata. She was near that distinguished surface, not on it. Her circle was practically the same as it was previous to the coveted nominal rank enabling her to trample on those beneath it. And women like that Mrs. Warwick, a woman of no birth, no money, not even honest character, enjoyed the entry undisputed, circulated among the highest:—-because people took her rattle for wit!—and because also our nobility, Lady Wathin feared, had no due regard for morality. Our aristocracy, brilliant and ancient though it was, merited rebuke. She grew severe upon aristocratic scandals, whereof were plenty among the frolicsome host just overhead, as vexatious as the drawing-room party to the lodger in the floor below, who has not received an invitation to partake of the festivities and is required to digest the noise. But if ambition is oversensitive, moral indignation is ever consolatory, for it plants us on the Judgement Seat. There indeed we may, sitting with the very Highest, forget our personal disappointments in dispensing reprobation for misconduct, however eminent the offenders.

Page 3255

She was Lady Wathin, and once on an afternoon's call to see poor Lady Dunstane at her town-house, she had been introduced to Lady Pennon, a patroness of Mrs. Warwick, and had met a snub—an icy check-bow of the aristocratic head from the top of the spinal column, and not a word, not a look; the half-turn of a head devoid of mouth and eyes! She practised that forbidding checkbow herself to perfection, so the endurance of it was horrible. A noli me tangere, her husband termed it, in his ridiculous equanimity; and he might term it what he pleased—it was insulting. The solace she had was in hearing that hideous Radical Revolutionary things were openly spoken at Mrs. Warwick's evenings with her friends:—impudently named 'the elect of London.' Pleasing to reflect upon Mrs. Warwick as undermining her supporters, to bring them some day down with a crash! Her 'elect of London' were a queer gathering, by report of them! And Mr. Whitmonby too, no doubt a celebrity, was the right-hand man at these dinner-parties of Mrs. Warwick. Where will not men go to be flattered by a pretty woman! He had declined repeated, successive invitations to Lady Wathin's table. But there of course he would not have had 'the freedom': that is, she rejoiced in thinking defensively and offensively, a moral wall enclosed her topics. The Hon. Percy Dacier had been brought to her Thursday afternoon by. Mr. Quintin Manx, and he had one day dined with her; and he knew Mrs. Warwick—a little, he said. The opportunity was not lost to convey to him, entirely in the interest of sweet Constance Asper, that the moral world entertained a settled view of the very clever woman Mrs. Warwick certainly was. He had asked Diana, on their morning walk to the station, whether she had an enemy: so prone are men, educated by the Drama and Fiction in the belief that the garden of civilized life must be at the mercy of the old wild devourers, to fancy 'villain whispers' an indication of direct animosity. Lady Wathin had no sentiment of the kind.

But she had become acquainted with the other side of the famous Dannisburgh case—-the unfortunate plaintiff; and compassion as well as morality moved her to put on a speaking air when Mr. Warwick's name was mentioned. She pictured him to the ladies of her circle as 'one of our true gentlemen in his deportment and his feelings.' He was, she would venture to say, her ideal of an English gentleman. 'But now,' she added commiseratingly, 'ruined; ruined in his health and in his prospects.' A lady inquired if it was the verdict that had thus affected him. Lady Wathin's answer was reported over moral, or substratum, London: 'He is the victim of a fatal passion for his wife; and would take her back to-morrow were she to solicit his forgiveness.' Morality had something to say against this active marital charity, attributable, it was to be feared, to weakness of character on the part of the husband. Still Mrs. Warwick undoubtedly was one of those women (of Satanic construction) who

Page 3256

have the art of enslaving the men unhappy enough to cross their path. The nature of the art was hinted, with the delicacy of dainty feet which have to tread in mire to get to safety. Men, alas! are snared in this way. Instances too numerous for the good repute of the swinish sex, were cited, and the question of how Morality was defensible from their grossness passed without a tactical reply. There is no defence: Those women come like the Cholera Morbus—and owing to similar causes. They will prevail until the ideas of men regarding women are purified. Nevertheless the husband who could forgive, even propose to forgive, was deemed by consent generous, however weak. Though she might not have been wholly guilty, she had bitterly offended. And he despatched an emissary to her?—The theme, one may, in their language, 'fear,' was relished as a sugared acid. It was renewed in the late Autumn of the year, when *Antonia* published her new book, entitled *the young minister* of *state*. The signature of the authoress was now known; and from this resurgence of her name in public, suddenly a radiation of tongues from the circle of Lady Wathin declared that the repentant Mrs. Warwick had gone back to her husband's bosom and forgiveness! The rumour spread in spite of sturdy denials at odd corners, counting the red-hot proposal of Mr. Sullivan Smith to eat his head and boots for breakfast if it was proved correct. It filled a yawn of the Clubs for the afternoon. Soon this wanton rumour was met and stifled by another of more morbific density, heavily charged as that which led the sad Eliza to her pyre.

ANTONIA's hero was easily identified. *The young minister* of *state* could be he only who was now at all her parties, always meeting her; had been spied walking with her daily in the park near her house, on his march down to Westminster during the session; and who positively went to concerts and sat under fiddlers to be near her. It accounted moreover for his treatment of Constance Asper. What effrontery of the authoress, to placard herself with him in a book! The likeness of the hero to Percy Dacier once established became striking to glaringness—a proof of her ability, and more of her audacity; still more of her intention to flatter him up to his perdition. By the things written of him, one would imagine the conversations going on behind the scenes. She had the wiles of a Cleopatra, not without some of the Nilene's experiences. A youthful Antony Dacier would be little likely to escape her toils. And so promising a young man! The sigh, the tear for weeping over his destruction, almost fell, such vivid realizing of the prophesy appeared in its pathetic pronouncement.

Page 3257

This low rumour, or malaria, began blowing in the winter, and did not travel fast; for strangely, there was hardly a breath of it in the atmosphere of Dacier, none in Diana's. It rose from groups not so rapidly and largely mixing, and less quick to kindle; whose crazy sincereness battened on the smallest morsel of fact and collected the fictitious by slow absorption. But as guardians of morality, often doing good duty in their office, they are persistent. When Parliament assembled, Mr. Quintin Manx, a punctual member of the House, if nothing else, arrived in town. He was invited to dine with Lady Wathin. After dinner she spoke to him of the absent Constance, and heard of her being well, and expressed a great rejoicing at that. Whereupon the burly old shipowner frowned and puffed. Constance, he said, had plunged into these new spangle, candle and high singing services; was all for symbols, harps, effigies, what not. Lady Wathin's countenance froze in hearing of it. She led Mr. Quintin to a wall-sofa, and said: 'Surely the dear child must have had a disappointment, for her to have taken to those foolish displays of religion! It is generally a sign.'

'Well, ma'am-my lady—I let girls go their ways in such things. I don't interfere. But it's that fellow, or nobody, with her. She has fixed her girl's mind on him, and if she can't columbine as a bride, she will as a nun. Young people must be at some harlequinade.'

'But it is very shocking. And he?'

'He plays last and loose, warm and cold. I'm ready to settle twenty times a nobleman's dowry on my niece and she's a fine girl, a handsome girl, educated up to the brim, fit to queen it in any drawing-room. He holds her by some arts that don't hold him, it seems. He's all for politics.'

'Constance can scarcely be his dupe so far, I should think.'

'How do you mean?'

'Everything points to one secret of his conduct.'

'A woman?'

Lady Wathin's head shook for her sex's pained affirmative.

Mr. Quintin in the same fashion signified the downright negative. 'The fellow's as cold as a fish.'

'Flattery will do anything. There is, I fear, one.'

'Widow? wife? maid?'

'Married, I regret to say.'

‘Well, if he’d get over with it,’ said Quintin, in whose notions the seductiveness of a married woman could be only temporary, for all the reasons pertaining to her state. At the same time his view of Percy Dacier was changed in thinking it possible that a woman could divert him from his political and social interests. He looked incredulous.

‘You have heard of a Mrs. Warwick?’ said Lady Wathin.

’Warwick! I have. I’ve never seen her. At my broker’s in the City yesterday I saw the name on a Memorandum of purchase of Shares in a concern promising ten per cent., and not likely to carry the per annum into the plural. He told me she was a grand kind of woman, past advising.’

Page 3258

‘For what amount’

‘Some thousands, I think it was.’

‘She has no money’: Lady Wathin corrected her emphasis: ’or ought to have none.’

‘She can’t have got it from him.’

‘Did you notice her Christian name?’

‘I don’t recollect it, if I did. I thought the woman a donkey.’

’Would you consider me a busybody were I to try to mitigate this woman’s evil influence? I love dear Constance, and should be happy to serve her.’

‘I want my girl married,’ said old Quintin. ’He’s one of my Parliamentary chiefs, with first-rate prospects; good family, good sober fellow—at least I thought so; by nature, I mean; barring your incantations. He suits me, she liking him.’

‘She admires him, I am sure.’

‘She’s dead on end for the fellow!’

Lady Wathin felt herself empowered by Quintin Manx to undertake the release of sweet Constance Asper’s knight from the toils of his enchantress. For this purpose she had first an interview with Mr. Warwick, and next she hurried to Lady Dunstane at Copsley. There, after jumbling Mr. Warwick’s connubial dispositions and Mrs. Warwick’s last book, and Mr. Percy Dacier’s engagement to the great heiress in a gossipy hotch-potch, she contrived to gather a few items of fact, as that *the young minister* was probably modelled upon Mr. Percy Dacier. Lady Dunstane made no concealment of it as soon as she grew sensible of the angling. But she refused her help to any reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Warwick. She declined to listen to Lady Wathin’s entreaties. She declined to give her reasons.—These bookworm women, whose pride it is to fancy that they can think for themselves, have a great deal of the heathen in them, as morality discovers when it wears the enlistment ribands and applies yo them to win recruits for a service under the direct blessing of Providence.

Lady Wathin left some darts behind her, in the form of moral exclamations; and really intended morally. For though she did not like Mrs. Warwick, she had no wish to wound, other than by stopping her further studies of the Young Minister, and conducting him to the young lady loving him, besides restoring a bereft husband to his own. How sadly pale and worn poor Mr. Warwick appeared? The portrayal of his withered visage to Lady Dunstane had quite failed to gain a show of sympathy. And so it is ever with your book-worm women pretending to be philosophical! You sound them vainly for a

manifestation of the commonest human sensibilities, They turn over the leaves of a Latin book on their laps while you are supplicating them to assist in a work of charity!

Lady Wathin's interjectory notes haunted Emma's ear. Yet she had seen nothing in Tony to let her suppose that there was trouble of her heart below the surface; and her Tony when she came to Copsley shone in the mood of the day of Lord Dannisburgh's drive down from London with her. She was running on a fresh work; talked of composition as a trifle.

Page 3259

‘I suppose the *young minister* is Mr. Percy Dacier?’ said Emma.

‘Between ourselves he is,’ Diana replied, smiling at a secret guessed. ‘You know my model and can judge of the likeness.’

‘You write admiringly of him, Tony.’

’And I do admire him. So would you, Emmy, if you knew him as well as I do now. He pairs with Mr. Redworth; he also is the friend of women. But he lifts us to rather a higher level of intellectual friendship. When the ice has melted—and it is thick at first—-he pours forth all his ideas without reserve; and they are deep and noble. Ever since Lord Dannisburgh’s death and our sitting together, we have been warm friends—-intimate, I would say, if it could be said of one so self-contained. In that respect, no young man was ever comparable with him. And I am encouraged to flatter myself that he unbends to me more than to others.’

‘He is engaged, or partly, I hear; why does he not marry?’

‘I wish he would!’ Diana said, with a most brilliant candour of aspect.

Emma read in it, that it would complete her happiness, possibly by fortifying her sense of security; and that seemed right. Her own meditations, illumined by the beautiful face in her presence, referred to the security of Mr. Dacier.

‘So, then, life is going smoothly,’ said Emma.

’Yes, at a good pace and smoothly: not a torrent—Thames-like, “without o’erflowing full.” It is not Lugano and the Salvatore. Perhaps it is better: as action is better than musing.’

‘No troubles whatever?’

’None. Well, except an “adorer” at times. I have to take him as my portion. An impassioned Caledonian has a little bothered me. I met him at Lady Pennon’s, and have been meeting him, as soon as I put foot out of my house, ever since. If I could impress and impound him to marry Mary Paynham, I should be glad. By the way, I have consented to let her try at a portrait of me. No, I have no troubles. I have friends, the choicest of the nation; I have health, a field for labour, fairish success with it; a mind alive, such as it is. I feel like that midsummer morning of our last drive out together, the sun high, clearish, clouded enough to be cool. And still I envy Emmy on her sofa, mastering Latin, biting at Greek. What a wise recommendation that was of Mr. Redworth’s! He works well in the House. He spoke excellently the other night.’

‘He runs over to Ireland this Easter.’

’He sees for himself, and speaks with authority. He sees and feels. Englishmen mean well, but they require an extremity of misery to waken their feelings.’

‘It is coming, he says; and absit omen!’

’Mr. Dacier says he is the one Englishman who may always be sure of an Irish hearing; and he does not cajole them, you know. But the English defect is really not want of feeling so much as want of foresight. They will not look ahead. A famine ceasing, a rebellion crushed, they jog on as before, with their Dobbin trot and blinker confidence in “Saxon energy.” They should study the Irish: I think it was Mr. Redworth who compared the governing of the Irish to the management of a horse: the rider should not grow restive when the steed begins to kick: calmer; firm, calm, persuasive.’

Page 3260

‘Does Mr. Dacier agree?’

’Not always. He has the inveterate national belief that Celtic blood is childish, and the consequently illogical disregard of its hold of impressions. The Irish—for I have them in my heart, though I have not been among them for long at a time—must love you to serve you, and will hate you if you have done them injury and they have not wiped it out—they with a treble revenge, or you with cordial benefits. I have told him so again and again: ventured to suggest measures.’

‘He listens to you, Tony?’

‘He says I have brains. It ends in a compliment.’

‘You have inspired Mr. Redworth.’

‘If I have, I have lived for some good.’

Altogether her Tony’s conversation proved to Emma that her perusal of the model of *the young minister of state* was an artist’s, free, open, and not discoloured by the personal tincture. Her heart plainly was free and undisturbed. She had the same girl’s love of her walks where wildflowers grew; if possible, a keener pleasure. She hummed of her happiness in being at Copsley, singing her Planxty Kelly and The Puritani by turns. She stood on land: she was not on the seas. Emma thought so with good reason.

She stood on land, it was true, but she stood on a cliff of the land, the seas below and about her; and she was enabled to hoodwink her friend because the assured sensation of her firm footing deceived her own soul, even while it took short flights to the troubled waters. Of her firm footing she was exultingly proud. She stood high, close to danger, without giddiness. If at intervals her soul flew out like lightning from the rift (a mere shot of involuntary fancy, it seemed to her), the suspicion of instability made her draw on her treasury of impressions of the mornings at Lugano—her loftiest, purest, dearest; and these reinforced her. She did not ask herself why she should have to seek them for aid. In other respects her mind was alert and held no sly covers, as the fiction of a perfect ignorant innocence combined with common intelligence would have us to suppose that the minds of women can do. She was honest as long as she was not directly questioned, pierced to the innermost and sanctum of the bosom. She could honestly summon bright light to her eyes in wishing the man were married. She did not ask herself why she called it up. The remorseless progressive interrogations of a Jesuit Father in pursuit of the bosom’s verity might have transfixed it and shown her to herself even then a tossing vessel as to the spirit, far away from that firm land she trod so bravely.

Page 3261

Descending from the woody heights upon London, Diana would have said that her only anxiety concerned young Mr. Arthur Rhodes, whose position she considered precarious, and who had recently taken a drubbing for venturing to show a peep of his head, like an early crocus, in the literary market. Her *Antonia's* last book had been reviewed obediently to smart taps from the then commanding baton of Mr. Tonans, and Mr. Whitmonby's choice picking of specimens down three columns of his paper. A Literary Review (Charles Rainer's property) had suggested that perhaps 'the talented authoress might be writing too rapidly'; and another, actuated by the public taste of the period for our 'vigorous homely Saxon' in one and two syllable words, had complained of a 'tendency to polysyllabic phraseology.' The remainder, a full majority, had sounded eulogy with all their band-instruments, drum, trumpet, fife, trombone. Her foregoing work had raised her to Fame, which is the Court of a Queen when the lady has beauty and social influence, and critics are her dedicated courtiers, gaping for the royal mouth to be opened, and reserving the kicks of their independent manhood for infamous outsiders, whom they hoist in the style and particular service of pitchforks. They had fallen upon a little volume of verse, 'like a body of barn-door hens on a stranger chick,' Diana complained; and she chid herself angrily for letting it escape her forethought to propitiate them on the author's behalf. Young Rhodes was left with scarce a feather; and what remained to him appeared a preposterous ornament for the decoration of a shivering and welted poet. He laughed, or tried the mouth of laughter. ANTONIA's literary conscience was vexed at the different treatment she had met and so imperatively needed that the reverse of it would have threatened the smooth sailing of her costly household. A merry-go-round of creditors required a corresponding whirligig of receipts.

She felt mercenary, debased by comparison with the well-scourged verse-mason, Orpheus of the untenanted city, who had done his publishing ingenuously for glory: a good instance of the comic-pathetic. She wrote to Emma, begging her to take him in at Copsley for a few days: 'I told you I had no troubles. I am really troubled about this poor boy. He has very little money and has embarked on literature. I cannot induce any of my friends to lend him a hand. Mr. Redworth gruffly insists on his going back to his law-clerk's office and stool, and Mr. Dacier says that no place is vacant. The reality of Lord Dannisburgh's death is brought before me by my helplessness. He would have made him an assistant private Secretary, pending a Government appointment, rather than let me plead in vain.'

Page 3262

Mr. Rhodes with his travelling bag was packed off to Copsley, to enjoy a change of scene after his run of the gauntlet. He was very heartily welcomed by Lady Dunstane, both for her Tony's sake and his own modest worship of that luminary, which could permit of being transparent; but chiefly she welcomed him as the living proof of Tony's disengagement from anxiety, since he was her one spot of trouble, and could easily be comforted by reading with her, and wandering through the Spring woods along the heights. He had a happy time, midway in air between his accomplished hostess and his protecting Goddess. His bruises were soon healed. Each day was radiant to him, whether it rained or shone; and by his looks and what he said of himself Lady Dunstane understood that he was in the highest temper of the human creature tuned to thrilling accord with nature. It was her generous Tony's work. She blessed it, and liked the youth the better.

During the stay of Mr. Arthur Rhodes at Copsley, Sir Lukin came on a visit to his wife. He mentioned reports in the scandal-papers: one, that Mr. P. D. would shortly lead to the altar the lovely heiress Miss A., Percy Dacier and Constance Asper:—another, that a reconciliation was to be expected between the beautiful authoress Mrs. W. and her husband. 'Perhaps it's the best thing she can do,' Sir Lukin added.

Lady Dunstane pronounced a woman's unforgiving: 'Never.' The revolt of her own sensations assured her of Tony's unconquerable repugnance. In conversation subsequently with Arthur Rhodes, she heard that he knew the son of Mr. Warwick's attorney, a Mr. Fern; and he had gathered from him some information of Mr. Warwick's condition of health. It had been alarming; young Fern said it was confirmed heart-disease. His father frequently saw Mr. Warwick, and said he was fretting himself to death.

It seemed just a possibility that Tony's natural compassionateness had wrought on her to immolate herself and nurse to his end the man who had wrecked her life. Lady Dunstane waited for the news. At last she wrote, touching the report incidentally. There was no reply. The silence ensuing after such a question responded forcibly.

CHAPTER XXII

BETWEEN DIANA AND DACIER: THE WIND EAST OVER BLEAK LAND

On the third day of the Easter recess Percy Dacier landed from the Havre steamer at Caen and drove straightway for the sandy coast, past fields of colza to brine-blown meadows of coarse grass, and then to the low dunes and long stretching sands of the ebb in semicircle: a desolate place at that season; with a dwarf fishing-village by the shore; an East wind driving landward in streamers every object that had a scrap to fly. He made head to the inn, where the first person he encountered in the passage was Diana's maid Danvers, who relaxed from the dramatic exaggeration of her surprise at

the sight of a real English gentleman in these woebegone regions, to inform him that her mistress might be found walking somewhere along the sea-shore, and had her dog to protect her. They were to stay here a whole week, Danvers added, for a conveyance of her private sentiments. Second thoughts however whispered to her shrewdness that his arrival could only be by appointment. She had been anticipating something of the sort for some time.

Page 3263

Dacier butted against the stringing wind, that kept him at a rocking incline to his left for a mile. He then discerned in what had seemed a dredger's dot on the sands, a lady's figure, unmistakably she, without the corroborating testimony of Leander paw-deep in the low-tide water. She was out at a distance on the ebb-sands, hurtled, gyred, beaten to all shapes, in rolls, twists, volumes, like a blown banner-flag, by the pressing wind. A kerchief tied her bonnet under her chin. Bonnet and breast-ribands rattled rapidly as drummer-sticks. She stood near the little running ripple of the flat sea-water, as it hurried from a long streaked back to a tiny imitation of spray. When she turned to the shore she saw him advancing, but did not recognize; when they met she merely looked with wide parted lips. This was no appointment.

'I had to see you,' Dacier said.

She coloured to a deeper red than the rose-conjuring wind had whipped in her cheeks. Her quick intuition of the reason of his coming barred a mental evasion, and she had no thought of asking either him or herself what special urgency had brought him.

'I have been here four days.'

'Lady Esquart spoke of the place.'

'Lady Esquart should not have betrayed me.'

'She did it inadvertently, without an idea of my profiting by it.'

Diana indicated the scene in a glance. 'Dreary country, do you think?'

'Anywhere!'—said he.

They walked up the sand-heap. The roaring Easter with its shrieks and whistles at her ribands was not favourable to speech. His 'Anywhere!' had a penetrating significance, the fuller for the break that left it vague.

Speech between them was commanded; he could not be suffered to remain. She descended upon a sheltered pathway running along a ditch, the border of pastures where cattle cropped, raised heads, and resumed their one comforting occupation.

Diana gazed on them, smarting from the buffets of the wind she had met.

'No play of their tails to-day'; she said, as she slackened her steps. 'You left Lady Esquart well?'

'Lady Esquart . . . I think was well. I had to see you. I thought you would be with her in Berkshire. She told me of a little sea-side place close to Caen.'

‘You had to see me?’

‘I miss you now if it’s a day!’

‘I heard a story in London . . .’

’In London there are many stories. I heard one. Is there a foundation for it?’

‘No.’

He breathed relieved. ’I wanted to see you once before . . . if it was true. It would have made a change in my life-a gap.’

‘You do me the honour to like my Sunday evenings?’

‘Beyond everything London can offer.’

‘A letter would have reached me.’

‘I should have had to wait for the answer. There is no truth in it?’

Her choice was to treat the direct assailant frankly or imperil her defence by the ordinary feminine evolutions, which might be taken for inviting: poor pranks always.

Page 3264

‘There have been overtures,’ she said.

‘Forgive me; I have scarcely the right to ask . . . speak of it!’

‘My friends may use their right to take an interest in my fortunes.’

’I thought I might, on my way to Paris, turn aside . . . coming by this route.’

‘If you determined not to lose much of your time.’

The coolness of her fencing disconcerted a gentleman conscious of his madness. She took instant advantage of any circuitous move; she gave him no practicable point. He was little skilled in the arts of attack, and felt that she checked his impetuousness; respected her for it, chafed at it, writhed with the fervours precipitating him here, and relapsed on his pleasure in seeing her face, hearing her voice.

‘Your happiness, I hope, is the chief thought in such a case,’ he said.

‘I am sure you would consider it.’

‘I can’t quite forget my own.’

‘You compliment an ambitious hostess.’

Dacier glanced across the pastures, ’What was it that tempted you to this place?’

’A poet would say it looks like a figure in the shroud. It has no features; it has a sort of grandeur belonging to death. I heard of it as the place where I might be certain of not meeting an acquaintance.’

‘And I am the intruder.’

‘An hour or two will not give you that title.’

‘Am I to count the minutes by my watch?’

’By the sun. We will supply you an omelette and piquette, and send you back sobered and friarly—to Caen for Paris at sunset.’

’Let the fare be Spartan. I could take my black broth with philosophy every day of the year under your auspices. What I should miss . . .’

‘You bring no news of the world or the House?’

’None. You know as much as I know. The Irish agitation is chronic. The Corn-law threatens to be the same.’

‘And your Chief—in personal colloquy?’

’He keeps a calm front. I may tell you: there is nothing I would not confide to you: he has let fall some dubious words in private. I don’t know what to think of them.’

‘But if he should waver?’

‘It’s not wavering. It’s the openness of his mind.’

’Ah! the mind. We imagine it free. The House and the country are the sentient frame governing the mind of the politician more than his ideas. He cannot think independently of them:—nor I of my natural anatomy. You will test the truth of that after your omelette and piquette, and marvel at the quitting of your line of route for Paris. As soon as the mind attempts to think independently, it is like a kite with the cord cut, and performs a series of darts and frisks, that have the look of wildest liberty till you see it fall flat to earth. The openness of his mind is most honourable to him.’

‘Ominous for his party.’

‘Likely to be good for his country.’

‘That is the question.’

Page 3265

’Prepare to encounter it. In politics I am with the active minority on behalf of the inert but suffering majority. That is my rule. It leads, unless you have a despotism, to the conquering side. It is always the noblest. I won’t say, listen to me; only do believe my words have some weight. This is a question of bread.’

‘It involves many other questions.’

’And how clearly those leaders put their case! They are admirable debaters. If I were asked to write against them, I should have but to quote them to confound my argument. I tried it once, and wasted a couple of my precious hours.’

‘They are cogent debaters,’ Dacier assented. ’They make me wince now and then, without convincing me: I own it to you. The confession is not agreeable, though it’s a small matter.’

’One’s pride may feel a touch with the foils as keenly as the point of a rapier,’ said Diana.

The remark drew a sharp look of pleasure from him.

’Does the Princess Egeria propose to dismiss the individual she inspires, when he is growing most sensible of her wisdom?’

’A young Minister of State should be gleaning at large when holiday is granted him.’

Dacier coloured. ‘May I presume on what is currently reported?’

‘Parts, parts; a bit here, a bit there,’ she rejoined. ’Authors find their models where they can, and generally hit on the nearest.’

‘Happy the nearest!’

’If you run to interjections I shall cite you a sentence, from your latest speech in the House.’

He asked for it, and to school him she consented to flatter with her recollection of his commonest words:

’"Dealing with subjects of this nature emotionally does, not advance us a calculable inch."’

‘I must have said that in relation to hard matter of business.’

’It applies. There is my hostelry, and the spectral form of Danvers, utterly depaysee. Have you spoken to the poor soul? I can never discover the links of her attachment to my service.’

’She knows a good mistress.—I have but a few minutes, if you are relentless. May I . . ., shall I ever be privileged to speak your Christian name?’

’My Christian name! It is Pagan. In one sphere I am Hecate. Remember that.’

‘I am not among the people who so regard you.’

‘The time may come.’

‘Diana!’

‘Constance!’

‘I break no tie. I owe no allegiance whatever to the name.’

’Keep to the formal title with me. We are Mrs. Warwick and Mr. Dacier. I think I am two years younger than you; socially therefore ten in seniority; and I know how this flower of friendship is nourished and may be withered. You see already what you have done? You have cast me on the discretion of my maid. I suppose her trusty, but I am at her mercy, and a breath from her to the people beholding me as Hecate queen of Witches! . . . I have a sensation of the scirocco it would blow.’

Page 3266

‘In that event, the least I can offer is my whole life.’

‘We will not conjecture the event.’

‘The best I could hope for!’

’I see I shall have to revise the next edition of *the young minister*, and make an emotional curate of him. Observe Danvers. The woman is wretched; and now she sees me coming she pretends to be using her wits in studying the things about her, as I have directed. She is a riddle. I have the idea that any morning she may explode; and yet I trust her and sleep soundly. I must be free, though I vex the world’s watchdogs.—-So, Danvers, you are noticing how thoroughly Frenchwomen do their work.’

Danvers replied with a slight mincing: ’They may, ma’am; but they chatter chatter so.’

’The result proves that it is not a waste of energy. They manage their fowls too.’

‘They’ve no such thing as mutton, ma’am.’

Dacier patriotically laughed.

‘She strikes the apology for wealthy and leisurely landlords,’ Diana said.

Danvers remarked that the poor fed meagrely in France. She was not convinced of its being good for them by hearing that they could work on it sixteen hours out of the four and twenty.

Mr. Percy Dacier’s repast was furnished to him half an hour later. At sunset Diana, taking Danvers beside her, walked with him to the line of the country road bearing on Caen. The wind had sunk. A large brown disk paused rayless on the western hills.

’A Dacier ought to feel at home in Normandy; and you may have sprung from this neighbourhood,’ said she, simply to chat. ’Here the land is poorish, and a mile inland rich enough to bear repeated crops of colza, which tries the soil, I hear. As for beauty, those blue hills you see, enfold charming valleys. I meditate an expedition to Harcourt before I return. An English professor of his native tongue at the Lycee at Caen told me on my way here that for twenty shillings a week you may live in royal ease round about Harcourt. So we have our bed and board in prospect if fortune fails us, Danvers!

‘I would rather die in England, ma’am,’ was the maid’s reply.

Dacier set foot on his carriage-step. He drew a long breath to say a short farewell, and he and Diana parted.

They parted as the plainest of sincere good friends, each at heart respecting the other for the repression of that which their hearts craved; any word of which might have carried them headlong, bound together on a Mazeppa-race, with scandal for the hounding wolves, and social ruin for the rocks and torrents.

Page 3267

Dacier was the thankfuller, the most admiring of the two; at the same time the least satisfied. He saw the abyss she had aided him in escaping; and it was refreshful to look abroad after his desperate impulse. Prominent as he stood before the world, he could not think without a shudder of behaving like a young frenetic of the passion. Those whose aim is at the leadership of the English people know, that however truly based the charges of hypocrisy, soundness of moral fibre runs throughout the country and is the national integrity, which may condone old sins for present service; but will not have present sins to flout it. He was in tune with the English character. The passion was in him nevertheless, and the stronger for a slow growth that confirmed its union of the mind and heart. Her counsel fortified him, her suggestions opened springs; her phrases were golden-lettered in his memory; and more, she had worked an extraordinary change in his views of life and aptitude for social converse: he acknowledged it with genial candour. Through her he was encouraged, led, excited to sparkle with the witty, feel new gifts, or a greater breadth of nature; and thanking her, he became thirstily susceptible to her dark beauty; he claimed to have found the key of her, and he prized it. She was not passionless: the blood flowed warm. Proud, chaste, she was nobly spirited; having an intellectual refuge from the besiegings of the blood; a rockfortress. The ‘wife no wife’ appeared to him, striking the higher elements of the man, the commonly masculine also.—Would he espouse her, had he the chance?—to-morrow! this instant! With her to back him, he would be doubled in manhood, doubled in brain and heart-energy. To call her wife, spring from her and return, a man might accept his fate to fight Trojan or Greek, sure of his mark on the enemy.

But if, after all, this imputed Helen of a decayed Paris passed, submissive to the legitimate solicitor, back to her husband?

The thought shot Dacier on his legs for a look at the blank behind him. He vowed she had promised it should not be. Could it ever be, after the ruin the meanly suspicious fellow had brought upon her?—Diana voluntarily reunited to the treacherous cur?

He sat, resolving sombrely that if the debate arose he would try what force he had to save her from such an ignominy, and dedicate his life to her, let the world wag its tongue. So the knot would be cut.

Men unaccustomed to a knot in their system find the prospect of cutting it an extreme relief, even when they know that the cut has an edge to wound mortally as well as pacify. The wound was not heavy payment for the rapture of having so incomparable a woman his own. He reflected wonderingly on the husband, as he had previously done, and came again to the conclusion that it was a poor creature, abjectly jealous of a wife, he could neither master, nor equal, nor attract. And thinking of jealousy, Dacier felt none; none of individuals, only of facts: her marriage, her bondage. Her condemnation to perpetual widowhood angered him, as at an unrighteous decree. The sharp sweet bloom of her beauty, fresh in swarthiness, under the whipping Easter, cried out against that loathed inhumanity. Or he made it cry.

Page 3268

Being a stranger to the jealousy of men, he took the soft assurance that he was preferred above them all. Competitors were numerous: not any won her eyes as he did. She revealed nothing of the same pleasures in the shining of the others touched by her magical wand. Would she have pardoned one of them the 'Diana!' bursting from his mouth?

She was not a woman for trifling, still less for secresy. He was as little the kind of lover. Both would be ready to take up their burden, if the burden was laid on them. Diana had thus far impressed him.

Meanwhile he faced the cathedral towers of the ancient Norman city, standing up in the smoky hues of the West; and a sentence out of her book seemed fitting to the scene and what he felt. He rolled it over luxuriously as the next of delights to having her beside him.—She wrote of; 'Thoughts that are bare dark outlines, coloured by some odd passion of the soul, like towers of a distant city seen in the funeral waste of day.'—His bluff English anti-poetic training would have caused him to shrug at the stuff coming from another pen: he might condescendingly have criticized it, with a sneer embalmed in humour. The words were hers; she had written them; almost by a sort of anticipation, he imagined; for he at once fell into the mood they suggested, and had a full crop of the 'bare dark outlines' of thoughts coloured by his particular form of passion.

Diana had impressed him powerfully when she set him swallowing and assimilating a sentence ethereally thin in substance of mere sentimental significance, that he would antecedently have read aloud in a drawing-room, picking up the book by hazard, as your modern specimen of romantic vapouring. Mr. Dacier however was at the time in observation of the towers of Caen, fresh from her presence, animated to some conception of her spirit. He drove into the streets, desiring, half determining, to risk a drive back on the morrow.

The cold light of the morrow combined with his fear of distressing her to restrain him. Perhaps he thought it well not to risk his gains. He was a northerner in blood. He may have thought it well not further to run the personal risk immediately.

CHAPTER XXIII

RECORDS A VISIT TO DIANA FROM ONE OF THE WORLD'S GOOD WOMEN

Pure disengagement of contemplativeness had selected. Percy Dacier as the model of her *young minister of state*, Diana supposed. Could she otherwise have dared to sketch him? She certainly would not have done it now.

That was a reflection similar to what is entertained by one who has dropped from a precipice to the midway ledge over the abyss, where caution of the whole sensitive

being is required for simple self-preservation. How could she have been induced to study and portray him! It seemed a form of dementia.

Page 3269

She thought this while imagining the world to be interrogating her. When she interrogated herself, she flew to Lugano and her celestial Salvatore, that she might be defended from a charge of the dreadful weakness of her sex. Surely she there had proof of her capacity for pure disengagement. Even in recollection the springs of spiritual happiness renewed the bubbling crystal play. She believed that a divineness had wakened in her there, to strengthen her to the end, ward her from any complicity in her sex's culprit blushing.

Dacier's cry of her name was the cause, she chose to think, of the excessive circumspection she must henceforth practise; precariously footing, embracing hardest earth, the plainest rules, to get back to safety. Not that she was personally endangered, or at least not spiritually; she could always fly in soul to her heights. But she had now to be on guard, constantly in the fencing attitude. And watchful of herself as well. That was admitted with a ready frankness, to save it from being a necessitated and painful confession: for the voluntary-acquiescence, if it involved her in her sex, claimed an individual exemption. 'Women are women, and I am a woman but I am I, and unlike them: I see we are weak, and weakness tempts: in owning the prudence of guarded steps, I am armed. It is by dissembling, feigning immunity, that we are imperilled.' She would have phrased it so, with some anger at her feminine nature as well as at the subjection forced on her by circumstances.

Besides, her position and Percy Dacier's threw the fancied danger into remoteness. The world was her stepmother, vigilant to become her judge; and the world was his taskmaster, hopeful of him, yet able to strike him down for an offence. She saw their situation as he did. The course of folly must be bravely taken, if taken at all: Disguise degraded her to the reptiles.

This was faced. Consequently there was no fear of it.

She had very easily proved that she had skill and self-possession to keep him rational, and therefore they could continue to meet. A little outburst of frenzy to a reputably handsome woman could be treated as the froth of a passing wave. Men have the trick, infants their fevers.

Diana's days were spent in reasoning. Her nights were not so tuneable to the superior mind. When asleep she was the sport of elves that danced her into tangles too deliciously unravelled, and left new problems for the wise-eyed and anxious morning. She solved them with the thought that in sleep it was the mere ordinary woman who fell a prey to her tormentors; awake, she dispersed the swarm, her sky was clear. Gradually the persecution ceased, thanks to her active pen.

A letter from her legal adviser, old Mr. Braddock, informed her that no grounds existed for apprehending marital annoyance, and late in May her household had resumed its customary round.

Page 3270

She examined her accounts. The Debit and Credit sides presented much of the appearance of male and female in our jog-trot civilization. They matched middling well; with rather too marked a tendency to strain the leash and run frolic on the part of friend Debit (the wanton male), which deepened the blush of the comparison. Her father had noticed the same funny thing in his effort to balance his tugging accounts: 'Now then for a look at Man and Wife': except that he made Debit stand for the portly frisky female, Credit the decorous and contracted other half, a prim gentleman of a constitutionally lean habit of body, remonstrating with her. 'You seem to forget that we are married, my dear, and must walk in step or bundle into the Bench,' Dan Merion used to say.

Diana had not so much to rebuke in Mr. Debit; or not at the first reckoning. But his ways were curious. She grew distrustful of him, after dismissing him with a quiet admonition and discovering a series of ambush bills, which he must have been aware of when he was allowed to pass as an honourable citizen. His answer to her reproaches pleaded the necessitousness of his purchases and expenditure: a capital plea; and Mrs. Credit was requested by him, in a courteous manner, to drive her pen the faster, so that she might wax to a corresponding size and satisfy the world's idea of fitness in couples. She would have costly furniture, because it pleased her taste; and a French cook, for a like reason, in justice to her guests; and trained servants; and her tribe of pensioners; flowers she would have profuse and fresh at her windows and over the rooms; and the pictures and engravings on the walls were (always for the good reason mentioned) choice ones; and she had a love of old lace, she loved colours as she loved cheerfulness, and silks, and satin hangings, Indian ivory carvings, countless mirrors, Oriental woods, chairs and desks with some feature or a flourish in them, delicate tables with antelope legs, of approved workmanship in the chronology of European upholstery, and marble clocks of cunning device to symbol Time, mantelpiece decorations, illustrated editions of her favourite authors; her bed-chambers, too, gave the nest for sleep a dainty cosiness in aerial draperies. Hence, more or less directly, the peccant bills. Credit was reduced to reckon to a nicety the amount she could rely on positively: her fixed income from her investments and the letting of The Crossways: the days of half-yearly payments that would magnify her to some proportions beside the alarming growth of her partner, who was proud of it, and referred her to the treasures she could summon with her pen, at a murmur of dissatisfaction. His compliments were sincere; they were seductive. He assured her that she had struck a rich vein in an inexhaustible mine; by writing only a very little faster she could double her income; counting a broader popularity, treble it; and so on a tide of success down the widening river to a sea sheer golden. Behold how it sparkles! Are we then to stint our winged hours of youth for want of courage to realize the riches we can command? Debit was eloquent, he was unanswerable.

Page 3271

Another calculator, an accustomed and lamentably-scrupulous arithmetician, had been at work for some time upon a speculative summing of the outlay of Diana's establishment, as to its chances of swamping the income. Redworth could guess pretty closely the cost of a house hold, if his care for the holder set him venturing on aver ages. He knew nothing of her ten per cent. investment and considered her fixed income a beggarly regiment to marshal against the invader. He fancied however, in his ignorance of literary profits, that a popular writer, selling several editions, had come to an El Dorado. There was the mine. It required a diligent worker. Diana was often struck by hearing Redworth ask her when her next book might be expected. He appeared to have an eagerness in hurrying her to produce, and she had to say that she was not a nimble writer. His flattering impatience was vexatious. He admired her work, yet he did his utmost to render it little admirable. His literary taste was not that of young Arthur Rhodes, to whom she could read her chapters, appearing to take counsel upon them while drinking the eulogies: she suspected him of prosaic ally wishing her to make money, and though her exchequer was beginning to know the need of it, the author's lofty mind disdained such sordidness: to be excused, possibly, for a failing productive energy. She encountered obstacles to imaginative composition. With the pen in her hand, she would fall into heavy musings; break a sentence to muse, and not on the subject. She slept unevenly at night, was drowsy by day, unless the open air was about her, or animating friends. Redworth's urgency to get her to publish was particularly annoying when she felt how greatly *the young minister of state* would have been improved had she retained the work to brood over it, polish, re-write passages, perfect it. Her musings embraced long dialogues of that work, never printed; they sprang up, they passed from memory; leaving a distaste for her present work: *The cantatrice*: far more poetical than the preceding, in the opinion of Arthur Rhodes; and the story was more romantic; modelled on a Prima Donna she had met at the musical parties of Henry Wilmers, after hearing Redworth tell of Charles Rainer's quaint passion for the woman, or the idea of the woman. Diana had courted her, studied and liked her. The picture she was drawing of the amiable and gifted Italian, of her villain Roumanian husband, and of the eccentric, high-minded, devoted Englishman, was good in a fashion; but considering the theme, she had reasonable apprehension that her *cantatrice* would not repay her for the time and labour bestowed on it. No clever transcripts of the dialogue of the day occurred; no hair-breadth 'scapes, perils by sea and land, heroisms of the hero, fine shrieks of the heroine; no set scenes of catching pathos and humour; no distinguishable points of social satire—equivalent to a

Page 3272

smacking of the public on the chaps, which excites it to grin with keen discernment of the author's intention. She did not appeal to the senses nor to a superficial discernment. So she had the anticipatory sense of its failure; and she wrote her best, in perverseness; of course she wrote slowly; she wrote more and more realistically of the characters and the downright human emotions, less of the wooden supernumeraries of her story, labelled for broad guffaw or deluge tears—the grappling natural links between our public and an author. Her feelings were aloof. They flowed at a hint of a scene of *the young minister*. She could not put them into *the cantatrice*. And Arthur Rhodes pronounced this work poetical beyond its predecessors, for the reason that the chief characters were alive and the reader felt their pulses. He meant to say, they were poetical inasmuch as they were creations.

The slow progress of a work not driven by the author's feelings necessitated frequent consultations between Debit and Credit, resulting in altercations, recriminations, discord of the yoked and divergent couple. To restore them to their proper trot in harness, Diana reluctantly went to her publisher for an advance item of the sum she was to receive, and the act increased her distaste. An idea came that she would soon cease to be able to write at all. What then? Perhaps by selling her invested money, and ultimately The Crossways, she would have enough for her term upon earth. Necessarily she had to think that short, in order to reckon it as nearly enough. 'I am sure,' she said to herself, 'I shall not trouble the world very long.' A strange languor beset her; scarcely melancholy, for she conceived the cheerfulness of life and added to it in company; but a nervelessness, as though she had been left by the stream on the banks, and saw beauty and pleasure sweep along and away, while the sun that primed them dried her veins. At this time she was gaining her widest reputation for brilliancy of wit. Only to welcome guests were her evenings ever spent at home. She had no intimate understanding of the deadly wrestle of the conventional woman with her nature which she was undergoing below the surface. Perplexities she acknowledged, and the prudence of guardedness. 'But as I am sure not to live very long, we may as well meet.' Her meetings with Percy Dacier were therefore hardly shunned; and his behaviour did not warn her to discountenance them. It would have been cruel to exclude him from her select little dinners of eight. Whitmonby, Westlake, Henry Wilmers and the rest, she perhaps aiding, schooled him in the conversational art. She heard it said of him, that the courted discarder of the sex, hitherto a mere politician, was wonderfully humanized. Lady Pennon fell to talking of him hopefully. She declared him to be one of the men who unfold tardily, and only await the mastering passion. If the passion had come, it was controlled. His command of himself

Page 3273

melted Diana. How could she forbid his entry to the houses she frequented? She was glad to see him. He showed his pleasure in seeing her. Remembering his tentative indiscretion on those foreign sands, she reflected that he had been easily checked: and the like was not to be said of some others. Beautiful women in her position provoke an intemperateness that contrasts touchingly with the self-restraint of a particular admirer. Her 'impassioned Caledonian' was one of a host, to speak of whom and their fits of lunacy even to her friend Emma, was repulsive. She bore with them, foiled them, passed them, and recovered her equanimity; but the contrast called to her to dwell on it, the self-restraint whispered of a depth of passion . . . .

She was shocked at herself for a singular tremble 'she experienced, without any beating of the heart, on hearing one day that the marriage of Percy Dacier and Miss Asper was at last definitely fixed. Mary Paynham brought her the news. She had it from a lady who had come across Miss Asper at Lady Wathin's assemblies, and considered the great heiress extraordinarily handsome.

'A golden miracle,' Diana gave her words to say. 'Good looks and gold together are rather superhuman. The report may be this time true.' Next afternoon the card of Lady Wathin requested Mrs. Warwick to grant her a private interview.

Lady Wathin, as one of the order of women who can do anything in a holy cause, advanced toward Mrs. Warwick, unabashed by the burden of her mission, and spinally prepared, behind benevolent smilings, to repay dignity of mien with a similar erectness of dignity. They touched fingers and sat. The preliminaries to the matter of the interview were brief between ladies physically sensible of antagonism and mutually too scornful of subterfuges in one another's presence to beat the bush.

Lady Wathin began. 'I am, you are aware, Mrs. Warwick, a cousin of your friend Lady Dunstane.'

'You come to me on business?' Diana said.

'It may be so termed. I have no personal interest in it. I come to lay certain facts before you which I think you should know. We think it better that an acquaintance, and one of your sex, should state the case to you, instead of having recourse to formal intermediaries, lawyers—'

'Lawyers?'

'Well, my husband is a lawyer, it is true. In the course of his professional vocations he became acquainted with Mr. Warwick. We have latterly seen a good deal of him. He is, I regret to say, seriously unwell.'

'I have heard of it.'

’He has no female relations, it appears. He needs more care than he can receive from hirelings.’

‘Are you empowered by him, Lady Wathin?’

’I am, Mrs. Warwick. We will not waste time in apologies. He is most anxious for a reconciliation. It seems to Sir Cramborne and to me the most desireable thing for all parties concerned, if you can be induced to regard it in that light. Mr. Warwick may or may not live; but the estrangement is quite undoubtedly the cause of his illness. I touch on nothing connected with it. I simply wish that you should not be in ignorance of his proposal and his condition.’

Page 3274

Diana bowed calmly. 'I grieve at his condition. His proposal has already been made and replied to.'

'Oh, but, Mrs. Warwick, an immediate and decisive refusal of a proposal so fraught with consequences . . . !'

'Ah, but, Lady Wathin, you are now outstepping the limits prescribed by the office you have undertaken.'

'You will not lend ear to an intercession?'

'I will not.'

'Of course, Mrs. Warwick, it is not for me to hint at things that lawyers could say on the subject.'

'Your forbearance is creditable, Lady Wathin.'

'Believe me, Mrs. Warwick, the step is—I speak in my husband's name as well as my own—strongly to be advised.'

'If I hear one word more of it, I leave the country.'

'I should be sorry indeed at any piece of rashness depriving your numerous friends of your society. We have recently become acquainted with Mr. Redworth, and I know the loss you would be to them. I have not attempted an appeal to your feelings, Mrs. Warwick.'

'I thank you warmly, Lady Wathin, for what you have not done.'

The aristocratic airs of Mrs. Warwick were annoying to Lady Wathin when she considered that they were borrowed, and that a pattern morality could regard the woman as ostracized: nor was it agreeable to be looked at through eyelashes under partially lifted brows. She had come to appeal to the feelings of the wife; at any rate, to discover if she had some and was better than a wild adventuress.

'Our life below is short!' she said. To which Diana tacitly assented.

'We have our little term, Mrs. Warwick. It is soon over.'

'On the other hand, the platitudes concerning it are eternal.'

Lady Wathin closed her eyes, that the like effect might be produced on her ears. 'Ah! they are the truths. But it is not my business to preach. Permit me to say that I feel deeply for your husband.'

‘I am glad of Mr. Warwick’s having friends; and they are many, I hope.’

‘They cannot behold him perishing, without an effort on his behalf.’

A chasm of silence intervened. Wifely pity was not sounded in it.

‘He will question me, Mrs. Warwick.’

‘You can report to him the heads of our conversation, Lady Wathin.’

’Would you—it is your husband’s most earnest wish; and our house is open to his wife and to him for the purpose; and it seems to us that . . . indeed it might avert a catastrophe you would necessarily deplore:—would you consent to meet him at my house?’

‘It has already been asked, Lady Wathin, and refused.’

‘But at my house-under our auspices!’

Diana glanced at the clock. ‘Nowhere.’

‘Is it not—pardon me—a wife’s duty, Mrs. Warwick, at least to listen?’

‘Lady Wathin, I have listened to you.’

’In the case of his extreme generosity so putting it, for the present, Mrs. Warwick, that he asks only to be heard personally by his wife! It may preclude so much.’

Page 3275

Diana felt a hot wind across her skin.

She smiled and said: 'Let me thank you for bringing to an end a mission that must have been unpleasant to you.'

'But you will meditate on it, Mrs. Warwick, will you not? Give me that assurance!'

'I shall not forget it,' said Diana.

Again the ladies touched fingers, with an interchange of the social grimace of cordiality. A few words of compassion for poor Lady Dunstane's invalided state covered Lady Wathin's retreat.

She left, it struck her ruffled sentiments, an icy libertine, whom any husband caring for his dignity and comfort was well rid of; and if only she could have contrived allusively to bring in the name of Mr. Percy Dacier, just to show these arrant coquettes, or worse, that they were not quite so privileged to pursue their intrigues obscurely as they imagined, it would have soothed her exasperation.

She left a woman the prey of panic.

Diana thought of Emma and Redworth, and of their foolish interposition to save her character and keep her bound. She might now have been free! The struggle with her manacles reduced her to a state of rebelliousness, from which issued vivid illuminations of the one means of certain escape; an abhorrent hissing cavern, that led to a place named Liberty, her refuge, but a hectic place.

Unable to write, hating the house which held her a fixed mark for these attacks, she had an idea of flying straight to her beloved Lugano lake, and there hiding, abandoning her friends, casting off the slave's name she bore, and living free in spirit. She went so far as to reckon the cost of a small household there, and justify the violent step by an exposition of retrenchment upon her large London expenditure. She had but to say farewell to Emma, no other tie to cut! One morning on the Salvatore heights would wash her clear of the webs defacing and entangling her.

CHAPTER XXIV

INDICATES A SOUL PREPARED FOR DESPERATION

The month was August, four days before the closing of Parliament, and Diana fancied it good for Arthur Rhodes to run down with her to Copsley. He came to her invitation joyfully, reminding her of Lady Dunstane's wish to hear some chapters of *the cantatrice*, and the *Ms*. was packed. They started, taking rail and fly, and winding up the distance on foot. August is the month of sober maturity and majestic foliage, songless, but a

crowned and royal-robed queenly month; and the youngster's appreciation of the homely scenery refreshed Diana; his delight in being with her was also pleasant. She had no wish to exchange him for another; and that was a strengthening thought.

Page 3276

At Copsley the arrival of their luggage had prepared the welcome. Warm though it was, Diana perceived a change in Emma, an unwonted reserve, a doubtfulness of her eyes, in spite of tenderness; and thus thrown back on herself, thinking that if she had followed her own counsel (as she called her impulse) in old days, there would have been no such present misery, she at once, and unconsciously, assumed a guarded look. Based on her knowledge of her honest footing, it was a little defiant. Secretly in her bosom it was sharpened to a slight hostility by the knowledge that her mind had been straying. The guilt and the innocence combined to clothe her in mail, the innocence being positive, the guilt so vapoury. But she was armed only if necessary, and there was no requirement for armour. Emma did not question at all. She saw the alteration in her Tony: she was too full of the tragic apprehensiveness, overmastering her to speak of trifles. She had never confided to Tony the exact nature and the growth of her malady, thinking it mortal, and fearing to alarm her dearest.

A portion of the manuscript was read out by Arthur Rhodes in the evening; the remainder next morning. Redworth perceptibly was the model of the English hero; and as to his person, no friend could complain of the sketch; his clear-eyed heartiness, manliness, wholesomeness—a word of Lady Dunstane's regarding him,—and his handsome braced figure, were well painted. Emma forgave the: insistance on a certain bluntness of the nose, in consideration of the fond limning of his honest and expressive eyes, and the 'light on his temples,' which they had noticed together. She could not so easily forgive the realistic picture of the man: an exaggeration, she thought, of small foibles, that even if they existed, should not have been stressed. The turn for 'calculating' was shown up ridiculously; Mr. Cuthbert Dering was calculating in his impassioned moods as well as in his cold. His head was a long division of ciphers. He had statistics for spectacles, and beheld the world through them, and the mistress he worshipped.

'I see,' said Emma, during a pause; 'he is a Saxon. You still affect to have the race en grippe, Tony.'

'I give him every credit for what he is,' Diana replied. 'I admire the finer qualities of the race as much as any one. You want to have them presented to you in enamel, Emmy.'

But the worst was an indication that the mania for calculating in and out of season would lead to the catastrophe destructive of his happiness. Emma could not bear that. Without asking herself whether it could be possible that Tony knew the secret, or whether she would have laid it bare, her sympathy for Redworth revolted at the exposure. She was chilled. She let it pass; she merely said: 'I like the writing.'

Diana understood that her story was condemned.

She put on her robes of philosophy to cloak discouragement. 'I am glad the writing pleases you.'

Page 3277

‘The characters are as true as life!’ cried Arthur Rhodes. ’The Cantatrice drinking porter from the pewter at the slips after harrowing the hearts of her audience, is dearer to me than if she had tottered to a sofa declining sustenance; and because her creatrix has infused such blood of life into her that you accept naturally whatever she does. She was exhausted, and required the porter, like a labourer in the cornfield.’

Emma looked at him, and perceived the poet swamped by the admirer. Taken in conjunction with Mr. Cuthbert Dering’s frenzy for calculating, she disliked the incident of the porter and the pewter.

’While the Cantatrice swallowed her draught, I suppose Mr. Dering counted the cost?’ she said.

‘It really might be hinted,’ said Diana.

The discussion closed with the accustomed pro and con upon the wart of Cromwell’s nose, Realism rejoicing in it, Idealism objecting.

Arthur Rhodes was bidden to stretch his legs on a walk along the heights in the afternoon, and Emma was further vexed by hearing Tony complain of Redworth’s treatment of the lad, whom he would not assist to any of the snug little posts he was notoriously able to dispense.

‘He has talked of Mr. Rhodes to me,’ said Emma. ’He thinks the profession of literature a delusion, and doubts the wisdom of having poets for clerks.’

‘John-Bullish!’ Diana exclaimed. ’He speaks contemptuously of the poor boy.’

’Only inasmuch as the foolishness of the young man in throwing up the Law provokes his practical mind to speak.’

’He might take my word for the “young man’s” ability. I want him to have the means of living, that he may write. He has genius.’

’He may have it. I like him, and have said so. If he were to go back to his law-stool, I have no doubt that Redworth would manage to help him.’

’And make a worthy ancient Braddock of a youth of splendid promise! Have I sketched him too Saxon?’

‘It is the lens, and hot the tribe, Tony.’

The cantatrice was not alluded to any more; but Emma’s disapproval blocked the current of composition, already subject to chokings in the brain of the author. Diana

stayed three days at Copsley, one longer than she had intended, so that Arthur Rhodes might have his fill of country air.

‘I would keep him, but I should be no companion for him,’ Emma said.

’I suspect the gallant squire is only to be satisfied by landing me safely,’ said Diana, and that small remark grated, though Emma saw the simple meaning. When they parted, she kissed her Tony many times. Tears were in her eyes. It seemed to Diana that she was anxious to make amends for the fit of alienation, and she was kissed in return warmly, quite forgiven, notwithstanding the deadly blank she had caused in the imagination of the writer for pay, distracted by the squabbles of Debit and Credit.

Page 3278

Diana chatted spiritedly to young Rhodes on their drive to the train. She was profoundly discouraged by Emma's disapproval of her work. It wanted but that one drop to make a recurrence to the work impossible. There it must lie! And what of the aspects of her household?—Perhaps, after all, the Redworths of the world are right, and Literature as a profession is a delusive pursuit. She did not assent to it without hostility to the world's Redworths.—'They have no sensitiveness, we have too much. We are made of bubbles that a wind will burst, and as the wind is always blowing, your practical Redworths have their crow of us.'

She suggested advice to Arthur Rhodes upon the prudence of his resuming the yoke of the Law.

He laughed at such a notion, saying that he had some expectations of money to come.

'But I fear,' said he, 'that Lady Dunstane is very very ill. She begged me to keep her informed of your address.'

Diana told him he was one of those who should know it whithersoever she went. She spoke impulsively, her sentiments of friendliness for the youth being temporarily brightened by the strangeness of Emma's conduct in deputing it to him to fulfil a duty she had never omitted. 'What can she think I am going to do!'

On her table at home lay, a letter from Mr. Warwick. She read it hastily in the presence of Arthur Rhodes, having at a glance at the handwriting anticipated the proposal it contained and the official phrasing.

Her gallant squire was invited to dine with her that evening, costume excused.

They conversed of Literature as a profession, of poets dead and living, of politics, which he abhorred and shied at, and of his prospects. He wrote many rejected pages, enjoyed an income of eighty pounds per annum, and eked out a subsistence upon the modest sum his pen procured him; a sum extremely insignificant; but great Nature was his own, the world was tributary to him, the future his bejewelled and expectant bride. Diana envied his youthfulness. Nothing is more enviable, nothing richer to the mind, than the aspect of a cheerful poverty. How much nobler it was, contrasted with Redworth's amassing of wealth!

When alone, she went to her bedroom and tried to write, tried to sleep. Mr. Warwick's letter was looked at. It seemed to indicate a threat; but for the moment it did not disturb her so much as the review of her moral prostration. She wrote some lines to her lawyers, quoting one of Mr. Warwick's sentences. That done, his letter was dismissed. Her intolerable languor became alternately a defeating drowsiness and a fever. She succeeded in the effort to smother the absolute cause: it was not suffered to show a front; at the cost of her knowledge of a practised self-deception. 'I wonder whether the

world is as bad as a certain class of writers tell us!' she sighed in weariness, and mused on their soundings and probings of poor humanity,

Page 3279

which the world accepts for the very bottom truth if their dredge brings up sheer refuse of the abominable. The world imagines those to be at our nature's depths who are impudent enough to expose its muddy shallows. She was in the mood for such a kind of writing: she could have started on it at once but that the theme was wanting; and it may count on popularity, a great repute for penetration. It is true of its kind, though the dredging of nature is the miry form of art. When it flourishes we may be assured we have been overenamelling the higher forms. She felt, and shuddered to feel, that she could draw from dark stores. Hitherto in her works it had been a triumph of the good. They revealed a gaping deficiency of the subtle insight she now possessed. 'Exhibit humanity as it is, wallowing, sensual, wicked, behind the mask,' a voice called to her; she was allured by the contemplation of the wide-mouthed old dragon Ego, whose portrait, decently painted, establishes an instant touch of exchange between author and public, the latter detected and confessing. Next to the pantomime of Humour and Pathos, a cynical surgical knife at the human bosom seems the surest talisman for this agreeable exchange; and she could cut. She gave herself a taste of her powers. She cut at herself mercilessly, and had to bandage the wound in a hurry to keep in life.

Metaphors were her refuge. Metaphorically she could allow her mind to distinguish the struggle she was undergoing, sinking under it. The banished of Eden had to put on metaphors, and the common use of them has helped largely to civilize us. The sluggish in intellect detest them, but our civilization is not much indebted to that major faction. Especially are they needed by the pedestalled woman in her conflict with the natural. Diana saw herself through the haze she conjured up. 'Am I worse than other women?' was a piercing twithought. Worse, would be hideous isolation. The not worse, abased her sex. She could afford to say that the world was bad: not that women were.

Sinking deeper, an anguish of humiliation smote her to a sense of drowning. For what of the poetic ecstasy on her Salvatore heights had not been of origin divine? had sprung from other than spiritual founts? had sprung from the reddened sources she was compelled to conceal? Could it be? She would not believe it. But there was matter to clip her wings, quench her light, in the doubt.

She fell asleep like the wrecked flung ashore.

Danvers entered her room at an early hour for London to inform her that
Mr. Percy Dacier was below, and begged permission to wait.

Diana gave orders for breakfast to be proposed to him. She lay staring at the wall until it became too visibly a reflection of her mind.

CHAPTER XXV

ONCE MORE THE CROSSWAYS AND A CHANGE OF TURNINGS

The suspicion of his having come to impart the news of his proximate marriage ultimately endowed her with sovereign calmness. She had need to think it, and she did. Tea was brought to her while she dressed; she descended the stairs revolving phrases of happy congratulation and the world's ordinary epigrams upon the marriage-tie, neatly mixed.

Page 3280

They read in one another's faces a different meaning from the empty words of excuse and welcome. Dacier's expressed the buckling of a strong set purpose; but, grieved by the look of her eyes, he wasted a moment to say: 'You have not slept. You have heard . . . ?'

'What?' said she, trying to speculate; and that was a sufficient answer.

'I hadn't the courage to call last night; I passed the windows. Give me your hand, I beg.'

She gave her hand in wonderment, and more wonderingly felt it squeezed. Her heart began the hammerthump. She spoke an unintelligible something; saw herself melting away to utter weakness-pride, reserve, simple prudence, all going; crumbled ruins where had stood a fortress imposing to men. Was it love? Her heart thumped shiveringly.

He kept her hand, indifferent to the gentle tension.

'This is the point: I cannot live without you: I have gone on . . . Who was here last night? Forgive me.'

'You know Arthur Rhodes.'

'I saw him leave the door at eleven. Why do you torture me? There's no time to lose now. You will be claimed. Come, and let us two cut the knot. It is the best thing in the world for me—the only thing. Be brave! I have your hand. Give it for good, and for heaven's sake don't play the sex. Be yourself. Dear soul of a woman! I never saw the soul in one but in you. I have waited: nothing but the dread of losing you sets me speaking now. And for you to be sacrificed a second time to that—! Oh, no! You know you can trust me. On my honour, I take breath from you. You are my better in everything—guide, goddess, dearest heart! Trust me; make me master of your fate.'

'But my friend!' the murmur hung in her throat. He was marvellously transformed; he allowed no space for the arts of defence and evasion.

'I wish I had the trick of courting. There's not time; and I 'm a simpleton at the game. We can start this evening. Once away, we leave it to them to settle the matter, and then you are free, and mine to the death.'

'But speak, speak! What is it?' Diana said.

'That if we delay, I 'm in danger of losing you altogether.'

Her eyes lightened: 'You mean that you have heard he has determined—?'

’There’s a process of the law. But stop it. Just this one step, and it ends. Whether intended or not, it hangs over you, and you will be perpetually tormented. Why waste your whole youth?—and mine as well! For I am bound to you as much as if we had stood at the altar—where we will stand together the instant you are free.’

’But where have you heard . . .?

’From an intimate friend. I will tell you—sufficiently intimate—from Lady Wathin. Nothing of a friend, but I see this woman at times. She chose to speak of it to me it doesn’t matter why. She is in his confidence, and pitched me a whimpering tale. Let those people chatter. But it ’s exactly for those people that you are hanging in chains, all your youth shrivelling. Let them shout their worst! It’s the bark of a day; and you won’t hear it; half a year, and it will be over, and I shall bring you back—the husband of the noblest bride in Christendom! You don’t mistrust me?’

Page 3281

‘It is not that,’ said she. ‘But now drop my hand. I am imprisoned.’

’It’s asking too much. I’ve lost you—too many times. I have the hand and I keep it. I take nothing but the hand. It’s the hand I want. I give you mine. I love you. Now I know what love is!—and the word carries nothing of its weight. Tell me you do not doubt my honour.’

’Not at all. But be rational. I must think, and I cannot while you keep my hand.’

He kissed it. ‘I keep my own against the world.’

A cry of rebuke swelled to her lips at his conqueror’s tone. It was not uttered, for directness was in his character and his wooing loyal—save for bitter circumstances, delicious to hear; and so narrow was the ring he had wound about her senses, that her loathing of the circumstances pushed her to acknowledge within her bell of a heart her love for him.

He was luckless enough to say: ‘Diana!’

It rang horridly of her husband. She drew her hand to loosen it, with repulsing brows. ‘Not that name!’

Dacier was too full of his honest advocacy of the passionate lover to take a rebuff. There lay his unconscious mastery, where the common arts of attack would have tripped him with a quick-witted woman, and where a man of passion, not allowing her to succumb in dignity, would have alarmed her to the breaking loose from him.

‘Lady Dunstane calls you Tony.’

‘She is my dearest and oldest friend.’

’You and I don’t count by years. You are the dearest to me on earth, Tony!’

She debated as to forbidding that name.

The moment’s pause wrapped her in a mental hurricane, out of which she came with a heart stopped, her olive cheeks ashen-hued. She had seen that the step was possible.

‘Oh! Percy, Percy, are we mad?’

’Not mad. We take what is ours. Tell me, have I ever, ever disrespected you? You were sacred to me; and you are, though now the change has come. Look back on it—it is time lost, years that are dust. But look forward, and you cannot imagine our separation. What I propose is plain sense for us two. Since Rovio, I have been at your feet. Have I not some just claim for recompense? Tell me! Tony!’

The sweetness of the secret name, the privileged name, in his mouth stole through her blood, melting resistance.

She had consented. The swarthy flaming of her face avowed it even more than the surrender of her hand. He gained much by claiming little: he respected her, gave her no touches of fright and shame; and it was her glory to fall with pride. An attempt at a caress would have awakened her view of the whitherward: but she was treated as a sovereign lady rationally advised.

‘Is it since Rovio, Percy?’

‘Since the morning when you refused me one little flower.’

‘If I had given it, you might have been saved!’

‘I fancy I was doomed from the beginning.’

Page 3282

‘I was worth a thought?’

‘Worth a life! worth ten thousand!’

’You have reckoned it all like a sane man:—family, position, the world, the scandal?’

’All. I have long known that you were the mate for me. You have to weather a gale, Tony. It won’t last. My dearest! it won’t last many months. I regret the trial for you, but I shall be with you, burning for the day to reinstate you and show you the queen you are.’

‘Yes, we two can have no covert dealings, Percy,’ said Diana. They would be hateful—-baseness! Rejecting any baseness, it seemed to her that she stood in some brightness. The light was of a lurid sort. She called on her heart to glory in it as the light of tried love, the love that defied the world. Her heart rose. She and he would at a single step give proof of their love for one another—and this kingdom of love—how different from her recent craven languors!—this kingdom awaited her, was hers for one word; and beset with the oceans of enemies, it was unassailable. If only they were true to the love they vowed, no human force could subvert it: and she doubted him as little as of herself. This new kingdom of love, never entered by her, acclaiming her, was well-nigh unimaginable, in spite of the many hooded messengers it had despatched to her of late. She could hardly believe that it had come.

‘But see me as I am,’ she said; she faltered it through her direct gaze on him.

‘With chains to strike off? Certainly; it is done,’ he replied.

’Rather heavier than those of the slave-market! I am the deadest of burdens. It means that your enemies, personal—if you have any, and political—you have numbers; will raise a cry . . . . Realize it. You may still be my friend. I forgive the bit of wildness.’

She provoked a renewed kissing of her hand; for magnammity in love is an overflowing danger; and when he said: ’The burden you have to bear outweighs mine out of all comparison. What is it to a man—a public man or not! The woman is always the victim. That’s why I have held myself in so long:—her strung frame softened. She half yielded to the tug on her arm.

‘Is there no talking for us without foolishness?’ she murmured. The foolishness had wafted her to sea, far from sight of land. ’Now sit, and speak soberly. Discuss the matter.—Yes, my hand, but I must have my wits. Leave me free to use them till we choose our path. Let it be the brains between us, as far as it can. You ask me to join my fate to yours. It signifies a sharp battle for you, dear friend; perhaps the blighting of the most promising life in England. One question is, can I countervail the burden I shall be, by such help to you as I can afford? Burden, is no word—I rake up a buried fever. I

have partially lived it down, and instantly I am covered with spots. The old false charges and this plain offence make a monster of me.'

'And meanwhile you are at the disposal of the man who falsely charged you and armed the world against you,' said Dacier.

Page 3283

‘I can fly. The world is wide.’

’Time slips. Your youth is wasted. If you escape the man, he will have triumphed in keeping you from me. And I thirst for you; I look to you for aid and counsel; I want my mate. You have not to be told how you inspire me? I am really less than half myself without you. If I am to do anything in the world, it must be with your aid, you beside me. Our hands are joined: one leap! Do you not see that after . . . well, it cannot be friendship. It imposes rather more on me than I can bear. You are not the woman to trifle; nor I; Tony, the man for it with a woman like you. You are my spring of wisdom. You interdict me altogether—can you?—or we unite our fates, like these hands now. Try to get yours away!’

Her effort ended in a pressure. Resistance, nay, to hesitate at the joining of her life with his after her submission to what was a scorching fire in memory, though it was less than an embrace, accused her of worse than foolishness.

‘Well, then,’ said she, ’wait three days. Deliberate. Oh! try to know yourself, for your clear reason to guide you. Let us be something better than the crowd abusing us, not simple creatures of impulse—as we choose to call the animal. What if we had to confess that we took to our heels the moment the idea struck us! Three days. We may then pretend to a philosophical resolve. Then come to me: or write to me.’

‘How long is it since the old Rovio morning, Tony?’

‘An age.’

‘Date my deliberations from that day.’

The thought of hers having to be dated possibly from an earlier day, robbed her of her summit of feminine isolation, and she trembled, chilled and flushed; she lost all anchorage.

‘So it must be to-morrow,’ said he, reading her closely, ’not later. Better at once. But women are not to be hurried.’

‘Oh! don’t class me, Percy, pray! I think of you, not of myself.’

‘You suppose that in a day or two I might vary?’

She fixed her eyes on him, expressing certainty of his unalterable stedfastness. The look allured. It changed: her head shook. She held away and said: ’No, leave me; leave me, dear, dear friend. Percy, my dearest! I will not “play the sex.” I am yours if . . . if it is your wish. It may as well be to-morrow. Here I am useless; I cannot write, not screw a thought from my head. I dread that “process of the Law” a second time. To-morrow, if it must be. But no impulses. Fortune is blind; she may be kind to us. The

blindness of Fortune is her one merit, and fools accuse her of it, and they profit by it! I fear we all of us have our turn of folly: we throw the stake for good luck. I hope my sin is not very great. I know my position is desperate. I feel a culprit. But I am sure I have courage, perhaps brains to help. At any rate, I may say this: I bring no burden to my lover that he does not know of.'

Page 3284

Dacier pressed her hand. 'Money we shall have enough. My uncle has left me fairly supplied.'

'What would he think?' said Diana, half in a glimpse of meditation.

'Think me the luckiest of the breeched. I fancy I hear him thanking you for "making a man" of me.'

She blushed. Some such phrase might have been spoken by Lord Dannisburgh.

'I have but a poor sum of money,' she said. 'I may be able to write abroad. Here I cannot—if I am to be persecuted.'

'You shall write, with a new pen!' said Dacier. 'You shall live, my darling Tony. You have been held too long in this miserable suspension, neither maid nor wife, neither woman nor stockfish. Ah! shameful. But we 'll right it. The step, for us, is the most reasonable that could be considered. You shake your head. But the circumstances make it so. Courage, and we come to happiness! And that, for you and me, means work. Look at the case of Lord and Lady Dulac. It's identical, except that she is no match beside you: and I do not compare her antecedents with yours. But she braved the leap, and forced the world to swallow it, and now, you see, she's perfectly honoured. I know a place on a peak of the Maritime Alps, exquisite in summer, cool, perfectly solitary, no English, snow round us, pastures at our feet, and the Mediterranean below. There! my Tony. To-morrow night we start. You will meet me-shall I call here?—well, then at the railway station, the South-Eastern, for Paris: say, twenty minutes to eight. I have your pledge? You will come?'

She sighed it, then said it firmly, to be worthy of him. Kind Fortune, peeping under the edge of her bandaged eyes, appeared willing to bestow the beginning of happiness upon one who thought she had a claim to a small taste of it before she died. It seemed distinguishingly done, to give a bite of happiness to the starving!

'I fancied when you were announced that you came for congratulations upon your approaching marriage, Percy.'

'I shall expect to hear them from you to-morrow evening at the station, dear Tony,' said he.

The time was again stated, the pledge repeated. He forbore entreaties for privileges, and won her gratitude.

They named once more the place of meeting and the hour: more significant to them than phrases of intensest love and passion. Pressing hands sharply for pledge of good faith, they sundered.

She still had him in her eyes when he had gone. Her old world lay shattered; her new world was up without a dawn, with but one figure, the sun of it, to light the swinging strangeness.

Was ever man more marvellously transformed? or woman more wildly swept from earth into the clouds? So she mused in the hum of her tempest of heart and brain, forgetful of the years and the conditions preparing both of them for this explosion.

She had much to do: the arrangements to dismiss her servants, write to house-agents and her lawyer, and write fully to Emma, write the enigmatic farewell to the Esquarts and Lady Pennon, Mary Paynham, Arthur Rhodes, Whitmonby (stanch in friendship, but requiring friendly touches), Henry Wilmers, and Redworth. He was reserved to the last, for very enigmatical adieux: he would hear the whole story from Emma; must be left to think as he liked.

Page 3285

The vague letters were excellently well composed: she was going abroad, and knew not when she would return; bade her friends think the best they could of her in the meantime. Whitmonby was favoured with an anecdote, to be read as an apologue by the light of subsequent events. But the letter to Emma tasked Diana. Intending to write fully, her pen committed the briefest sentences: the tenderness she felt for Emma wakening her heart to sing that she was loved, loved, and knew love at last; and Emma's foreseen antagonism to the love and the step it involved rendered her pleadings in exculpation a stammered confession of guiltiness, ignominious, unworthy of the pride she felt in her lover. 'I am like a cartridge rammed into a gun, to be discharged at a certain hour tomorrow,' she wrote; and she sealed a letter so frigid that she could not decide to post it. All day she imagined hearing a distant cannonade. The light of the day following was not like earthly light. Danvers assured her there was no fog in London.

'London is insupportable; I am going to Paris, and shall send for you in a week or two,' said Diana.

'Allow me to say, ma'am, that you had better take me with you,' said Danvers.

'Are you afraid of travelling by yourself, you foolish creature?'

'No, ma'am, but I don't like any hands to undress and dress my mistress but my own.'

'I have not lost the art,' said Diana, chafing for a magic spell to extinguish the woman, to whom, immediately pitying her, she said: 'You are a good faithful soul. I think you have never kissed me. Kiss me on the forehead.'

Danvers put her lips to her mistress's forehead, and was asked: 'You still consider yourself attached to my fortunes?'

'I do, ma'am, at home or abroad; and if you will take me with you . . .'

'Not for a week or so.'

'I shall not be in the way, ma'am.'

They played at shutting eyes. The petition of Danvers was declined; which taught her the more; and she was emboldened to say: 'Wherever my mistress goes, she ought to have her attendant with her.' There was no answer to it but the refusal.

The hours crumbled slowly, each with a blow at the passages of retreat. Diana thought of herself as another person, whom she observed, not counselling her, because it was a creature visibly pushed by the Fates. In her own mind she could not perceive a stone of solidity anywhere, nor a face that had the appearance of our common life. She heard the cannon at intervals. The things she said set Danvers laughing, and she wondered

at the woman's mingled mirth and stiffness. Five o'clock struck. Her letters were sent to the post. Her boxes were piled from stairs to door. She read the labels, for her good-bye to the hated name of Warwick:—why ever adopted! Emma might well have questioned why! Women are guilty of such unreasoning acts! But this was the close to that chapter. The hour of six went by. Between six and seven came a sound of knocker and bell at the street-door. Danvers rushed into the sitting-room to announce that it was Mr. Redworth. Before a word could be mustered, Redworth was in the room. He said: 'You must come with me at once!'

Page 3286

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH A DISAPPOINTED LOVER RECEIVES A MULTITUDE OF LESSONS

Dacier welted at the station, a good figure of a sentinel over his luggage and a spy for one among the inpouring passengers. Tickets had been confidently taken, the private division of the carriages happily secured. On board the boat she would be veiled. Landed on French soil, they threw off disguises, breasted the facts. And those? They lightened. He smarted with his eagerness.

He had come well in advance of the appointed time, for he would not have had her hang about there one minute alone.

Strange as this adventure was to a man of prominent station before the world, and electrical as the turning-point of a destiny that he was given to weigh deliberately and far-sightedly, Diana's image strung him to the pitch of it. He looked nowhere but ahead, like an archer putting hand for his arrow.

Presently he compared his watch and the terminus clock. She should now be arriving. He went out to meet her and do service. Many cabs and carriages were peered into, couples inspected, ladies and their maids, wives and their husbands—an August exodus to the Continent. Nowhere the starry she. But he had a fund of patience. She was now in some block of the streets. He was sure of her, sure of her courage. Tony and recreancy could not go together. Now that he called her Tony, she was his close comrade, known; the name was a caress and a promise, breathing of her, as the rose of sweetest earth. He counted it to be a month ere his family would have wind of the altered position of his affairs, possibly a year to the day of his making the dear woman his own in the eyes of the world. She was dear past computation, womanly, yet quite unlike the womanish woman, unlike the semi-males courteously called dashing, unlike the sentimental. His present passion for her lineaments, declared her surpassingly beautiful, though his critical taste was rather for the white statue that gave no warmth. She had brains and ardour, she had grace and sweetness, a playful petulancy enlivening our atmosphere, and withal a refinement, a distinction, not to be classed; and justly might she dislike the being classed. Her humour was a perennial refreshment, a running well, that caught all the colours of light; her wit studded the heavens of the recollection of her. In his heart he felt that it was a stepping down for the brilliant woman to give him her hand; a condescension and an act of valour. She who always led or prompted when they conversed, had now in her generosity abandoned the lead and herself to him, and she deserved his utmost honouring.

But where was she? He looked at his watch, looked at the clock. They said the same: ten minutes to the moment of the train's departure.

Page 3287

A man may still afford to dwell on the charms and merits of his heart's mistress while he has ten minutes to spare. The dropping minutes, however, detract one by one from her individuality and threaten to sink her in her sex entirely. It is the inexorable clock that says she is as other women. Dacier began to chafe. He was unaccustomed to the part he was performing:—and if she failed him? She would not. She would be late, though. No, she was in time! His long legs crossed the platform to overtake a tall lady veiled and dressed in black. He lifted his hat; he heard an alarmed little cry and retired. The clock said, Five minutes: a secret chiromancy in addition indicating on its face the word Fool. An odd word to be cast at him! It rocked the icy pillar of pride in the background of his nature. Certainly standing solos at the hour of eight P.M., he would stand for a fool. Hitherto he had never allowed a woman to chance to posture him in that character. He strode out, returned, scanned every lady's shape, and for a distraction watched the veiled lady whom he had accosted. Her figure suggested pleasant features. Either she was disappointed or she was an adept. At the shutting of the gates she glided through, not without a fearful look around and at him. She disappeared. Dacier shrugged. His novel assimilation to the rat-rabble of amatory intriguers tapped him on the shoulder unpleasantly. A luckless member of the fraternity too! The bell, the clock and the train gave him his title. 'And I was ready to fling down everything for the woman!' The trial of a superb London gentleman's resources in the love-passion could not have been much keener. No sign of her.

He who stands ready to defy the world, and is baffled by the absence of his fair assistant, is the fool doubled, so completely the fool that he heads the universal shout; he does not spare himself. The sole consolation he has is to revile the sex. Women! women! Whom have they not made a fool of! His uncle as much as any—and professing to know them. Him also! the man proud of escaping their wiles. 'For this woman . . . !' he went on saying after he had lost sight of her in her sex's trickeries. The nearest he could get to her was to conceive that the arrant coquette was now laughing at her utter subjugation and befooling of the man popularly supposed invincible. If it were known of him! The idea of his being a puppet fixed for derision was madly distempering. He had only to ask the affirmative of Constance Asper to-morrow! A vision of his determination to do it, somewhat comforted him.

Dacier walked up and down the platform, passing his pile of luggage, solitary and eloquent on the barrow. Never in his life having been made to look a fool, he felt the red heat of the thing, as a man who has not blessedly become acquainted with the swish in boyhood finds his untempered blood turn to poison at a blow; he cannot healthily take a licking. But then it had been so splendid an insanity when he urged Diana to fly with him. Any one but a woman would have appreciated the sacrifice.

Page 3288

His luggage had to be removed. He dropped his porter a lordly fee and drove home. From that astonished solitude he strolled to his Club. Curiosity mastering the wrath it was mixed with, he left his Club and crossed the park southward in the direction of Diana's house, abusing her for her inveterate attachment to the regions of Westminster. There she used to receive Lord Dannisburgh; innocently, no doubt-assuredly quite innocently; and her husband had quitted the district. Still it was rather childish for a woman to-be always haunting the seats of Parliament. Her disposition to imagine that she was able to inspire statesmen came in for a share of ridicule; for when we know ourselves to be ridiculous, a retort in kind, unjust upon consideration, is balm. The woman dragged him down to the level of common men; that was the peculiar injury, and it swept her undistinguished into the stream of women. In appearance, as he had proved to the fellows at his Club, he was perfectly self-possessed, mentally distracted and bitter, hating himself for it, snapping at the cause of it. She had not merely disappointed, she had slashed his high conceit of himself, curbed him at the first animal dash forward, and he champed the bit with the fury of a thwarted racer.

Twice he passed her house. Of course no light was shown at her windows. They were scanned malignly.

He held it due to her to call and inquire whether there was any truth in the report of Mrs. Warwick's illness. Mrs. Warwick! She meant to keep the name.

A maid-servant came to the door with a candle in her hand revealing red eyelids. She was not aware that her mistress was unwell. Her mistress had left home some time after six o'clock with a gentleman. She was unable to tell him the gentleman's name. William, the footman, had opened the door to him. Her mistress's maid Mrs. Danvers had gone to the Play—with William. She thought that Mrs. Danvers might know who the gentleman was. The girl's eyelids blinked, and she turned aside. Dacier consoled her with a piece of gold, saying he would come and see Mrs. Danvers in the morning.

His wrath was partially quieted by the new speculations offered up to it. He could not conjure a suspicion of treachery in Diana Warwick; and a treachery so foully cynical! She had gone with a gentleman. He guessed on all sides; he struck at walls, as in complete obscurity.

The mystery of her conduct troubling his wits for the many hours was explained by Danvers. With a sympathy that she was at pains to show, she informed him that her mistress was not at all unwell, and related of how Mr. Redworth had arrived just when her mistress was on the point of starting for Paris and the Continent; because poor Lady Dunstane was this very day to undergo an operation under the surgeons at Copsley, and she did not wish her mistress to be present, but Mr. Redworth thought her mistress ought to be there, and he had gone down thinking she was there, and then came back in hot haste to fetch her, and was just in time, as it happened, by two or three minutes.

Page 3289

Dacier rewarded the sympathetic woman for her intelligence, which appeared to him to have shot so far as to require a bribe. Gratitude to the person soothing his unwontedly ruffled temper was the cause of the indiscretion in the amount he gave.

It appeared to him that he ought to proceed to Copsley for tidings of Lady Dunstane. Thither he sped by the handy railway and a timely train. He reached the parkgates at three in the afternoon, telling his flyman to wait. As he advanced by short cuts over the grass, he studied the look of the rows of windows. She was within, and strangely to his clouded senses she was no longer Tony, no longer the deceptive woman he could in justice abuse. He and she, so close to union, were divided. A hand resembling the palpable interposition of Fate had swept them asunder. Having the poorest right—not any—to reproach her, he was disarmed, he felt himself a miserable intruder; he summoned his passion to excuse him, and gained some unsatisfied repose of mind by contemplating its devoted sincerity; which roused an effort to feel for the sufferer—-Diana Warwick's friend. With the pair of surgeons named, the most eminent of their day, in attendance, the case must be serious. To vindicate the breaker of her pledge, his present plight likewise assured him of that, and nearing the house he adopted instinctively the funeral step and mood, just sensible of a novel smallness. For the fortifying testimony of his passion had to be put aside, he was obliged to disavow it for a simpler motive if he applied at the door. He stressed the motive, produced the sentiment, and passed thus naturally into hypocrisy, as lovers precipitated by their blood among the crises of human conditions are often forced to do. He had come to inquire after Lady Dunstane. He remembered that it had struck him as a duty, on hearing of her dangerous illness.

The door opened before he touched the bell. Sir Lukin knocked against him and stared.

'Ah!—who—?—you?' he said, and took him by the arm and pressed him on along the gravel. 'Dacier, are you? Redworth's in there. Come on a step, come! It's the time for us to pray. Good God! There's mercy for sinners. If ever there was a man! . . . But, oh, good God! she's in their hands this minute. My saint is under the knife.'

Dacier was hurried forward by a powerful hand. 'They say it lasts about five minutes, four and a half—or more! My God! When they turned me out of her room, she smiled to keep me calm. She said: "Dear husband": the veriest wretch and brutallest husband ever poor woman . . . and a saint! a saint on earth! Emmy!' Tears burst from him.

He pulled forth his watch and asked Dacier for the time.

'A minute's gone in a minute. It's three minutes and a half. Come faster. They're at their work! It's life or death. I've had death about me. But for a woman! and your wife! and that brave soul! She bears it so. Women are the bravest creatures afloat. If they make her shriek, it'll be only if she thinks I 'm out of hearing. No: I see her. She bears

it!—They mayn’t have begun yet. It may all be over! Come into the wood. I must pray. I must go on my knees.’

Page 3290

Two or three steps in the wood, at the mossed roots of a beech, he fell kneeling, muttering, exclaiming.

The tempest of penitence closed with a blind look at his watch, which he left dangling. He had to talk to drug his thoughts.

‘And mind you,’ said he, when he had rejoined Dacier and was pushing his arm again, rounding beneath the trees to a view of the house, ’for a man steeped in damnable iniquity! She bears it all for me, because I begged her, for the chance of her living. It’s my doing—this knife! Macpherson swears there is a chance. Thomson backs him. But they’re at her, cutting! . . . The pain must be awful—the mere pain! The gentlest creature ever drew breath! And women fear blood—and her own! And a head! She ought to have married the best man alive, not a—! I can’t remember her once complaining of me—not once. A common donkey compared to her! All I can do is to pray. And she knows the beast I am, and has forgiven me. There isn’t a blessed text of Scripture that doesn’t cry out in praise of her. And they cut and hack . . . !’ He dropped his head. The vehement big man heaved, shuddering. His lips worked fast.

‘She is not alone with them, unsupported?’ said Dacier.

Sir Lukin moaned for relief. He caught his watch swinging and stared at it. ’What a good fellow you were to come! Now ’s the time to know your friends. There’s Diana Warwick, true as steel. Redworth came on her tiptoe for the Continent; he had only to mention . . . Emmy wanted to spare her. She would not have sent—wanted to spare her the sight. I offered to stand by . . . Chased me out. Diana Warwick’s there:—worth fifty of me! Dacier, I’ve had my sword-blade tried by Indian horsemen, and I know what true as steel means. She’s there. And I know she shrinks from the sight of blood. My oath on it, she won’t quiver a muscle! Next to my wife, you may take my word for it, Dacier, Diana Warwick is the pick of living women. I could prove it. They go together. I could prove it over and over. She ’s the loyallest woman anywhere. Her one error was that marriage of hers, and how she ever pitched herself into it, none of us can guess.’ After a while, he said: ‘Look at your watch.’

‘Nearly twenty minutes gone.’

‘Are they afraid to send out word? It’s that window!’ He covered his eyes, and muttered, sighed. He became abruptly composed in appearance. ’The worst of a black sheep like me is, I’m such an infernal sinner, that Providence! . . . But both surgeons gave me their word of honour that there was a chance. A chance! But it’s the end of me if Emmy . . . . Good God! no! the knife’s enough; don’t let her be killed! It would be murder. Here am I talking! I ought to be praying. I should have sent for the parson to help me; I can’t get the proper words—bellow like a rascal trooper strung up for the cat. It must be twenty-five minutes now. Who’s alive now!’

Page 3291

Dacier thought of the Persian Queen crying for news of the slaughtered, with her mind on her lord and husband: 'Who is not dead?' Diana exalted poets, and here was an example of the truth of one to nature, and of the poor husband's depth of feeling. They said not the same thing, but it was the same cry de profundis.

He saw Redworth coming at a quick pace.

Redworth raised his hand. Sir Lukin stopped. 'He's waving!'

'It's good,' said Dacier.

'Speak! are you sure?'

'I judge by the look.'

Redworth stepped unfalteringly.

'It's over, all well,' he said. He brushed his forehead and looked sharply cheerful.

'My dear fellow! my dear fellow!' Sir Lukin grasped his hand. 'It's more than I deserve. Over? She has borne it! She would have gone to heaven and left me!

Is she safe?'

'Doing well.'

'Have you seen the surgeons?'

'Mrs. Warwick.'

'What did she say?'

'A nod of the head.'

'You saw her?'

'She came to the stairs.'

'Diana Warwick never lies. She wouldn't lie, not with a nod! They've saved Emmy—do you think?'

'It looks well.'

My girl has passed the worst of it?'

'That's over.'

Sir Lukin gazed glassily. The necessity of his agony was to lean to the belief, at a beckoning, that Providence pardoned him, in tenderness for what would have been his loss. He realized it, and experienced a sudden calm: testifying to the positive pardon.

'Now, look here, you two fellows, listen half a moment,' he addressed Redworth and Dacier; 'I've been the biggest scoundrel of a husband unhung, and married to a saint; and if she's only saved to me; I'll swear to serve her faithfully, or may a thunderbolt knock me to perdition! and thank God for his justice! Prayers are answered, mind you, though a fellow may be as black as a sweep. Take a warning from me. I've had my lesson.'

Dacier soon after talked of going. The hope of seeing Diana had abandoned him, the desire was almost extinct.

Sir Lukin could not let him go. He yearned to preach to him or any one from his personal text of the sinner honourably remorseful on account of and notwithstanding the forgiveness of Providence, and he implored Dacier and Redworth by turns to be careful when they married of how they behaved to—the sainted women their wives; never to lend ear to the devil, nor to believe, as he had done, that there is no such thing as a devil, for he had been the victim of him, and he knew. The devil, he loudly proclaimed, has a multiplicity of lures, and none more deadly than when he baits with a petticoat. He had been hooked, and had found the devil in person. He begged them urgently to keep his example in memory. By following this and that wildfire he had stuck himself in a bog—a common result with those who

Page 3292

would not see the devil at work upon them; and it required his dear suffering saint to be at death's doors, cut to pieces and gasping, to open his eyes. But, thank heaven, they were opened at last! Now he saw the beast he was: a filthy beast! unworthy of tying his wife's shoestring. No confessions could expose to them the beast he was. But let them not fancy there was no such thing as an active *devil* about the world.

Redworth divined that the simply sensational man abased himself before Providence and heaped his gratitude on the awful Power in order to render it difficult for the promise of the safety of his wife to be withdrawn.

He said: 'There is good hope'; and drew an admonition upon himself.

'Ah! my dear good Redworth,' Sir Lukin sighed from his elevation of outspoken penitence: 'you will see as I do some day. It is the devil, think as you like of it. When you have pulled down all the Institutions of the Country, what do you expect but ruins? That Radicalism of yours has its day. You have to go through a wrestle like mine to understand it. You say, the day is fine, let's have our game. Old England pays for it! Then you'll find how you love the old land of your birth—the noblest ever called a nation! —with your Corn Law Repeals!—eh, Dacier?—You 'll own it was the devil tempted you. I hear you apologizing. Pray God, it mayn't be too late!'

He looked up at the windows. 'She may be sinking!'

'Have no fears,' Redworth said; 'Mrs. Warwick would send for you.'

'She would. Diana Warwick would be sure to send. Next to my wife, Diana Warwick's . . . she'd send, never fear. I dread that room. I'd rather go through a regiment of sabres—though it 's over now. And Diana Warwick stood it. The worst is over, you told me. By heaven! women are wonderful creatures. But she hasn't a peer for courage. I could trust her—most extraordinary thing; that marriage of hers!—not a soul has ever been able to explain it:—trust her to the death.'

Redworth left them, and Sir Lukin ejaculated on the merits of Diana Warwick to Dacier. He laughed scornfully: 'And that's the woman the world attacks for want of virtue! Why, a fellow hasn't a chance with her, not a chance. She comes out in blazing armour if you unmask a battery. I don't know how it might be if she were in love with a fellow. I doubt her thinking men worth the trouble. I never met the man. But if she were to take fire, Troy 'd be nothing to it. I wonder whether we might go in: I dread the house.'

Dacier spoke of departing.

'No, no, wait,' Sir Lukin begged him. 'I was talking about women. They are the devil—- or he makes most use of them: and you must learn to see the cloven foot under their petticoats, if you're to escape them. There's no protection in being in love with your

wife; I married for love; I am, I always have been, in love with her; and I went to the deuce. The music struck up

Page 3293

and away I waltzed. A woman like Diana Warwick might keep a fellow straight, because she,'s all round you; she's man and woman in brains; and legged like a deer, and breasted like a swan, and a regular sheaf of arrows—in her eyes. Dark women—ah! But she has a contempt for us, you know. That's the secret of her.—Redworth 's at the door. Bad? Is it bad? I never was particularly fond of that house—hated it. I love it now for Emmy's sake. I couldn't live in another—though I should be haunted. Rather her ghost than nothing—though I'm an infernal coward about the next world. But if you're right with religion you needn't fear. What I can't comprehend in Redworth is his Radicalism, and getting richer and richer.'

'It's not a vow of poverty,' said Dacier.

'He'll find they don't coalesce, or his children will. Once the masses are uppermost! It's a bad day, Dacier, when we 've no more gentlemen in the land. Emmy backs him, so I hold my tongue. To-morrow's a Sunday. I wish you were staying here; I 'd take you to church with me-we shirk it when we haven't a care. It couldn't do you harm. I've heard capital sermons. I've always had the good habit of going to church, Dacier. Now 's the time for remembering them. Ah, my dear fellow, I 'm not a parson. It would have been better for me if I had been.'

And for you too! his look added plainly. He longed to preach; he was impelled to chatter.

Redworth reported the patient perfectly quiet, breathing calmly.

'Laudanum?' asked Sir Lukin. 'Now there's a poison we've got to bless! And we set up in our wisdom for knowing what is good for us!'

He had talked his hearers into a stupefied assent to anything he uttered.

'Mrs. Warwick would like to see you in two or three minutes; she will come down,' Redworth said to Dacier.

'That looks well, eh? That looks bravely,' Sir Lukin cried. 'Diana, Warwick wouldn't leave the room without a certainty. I dread the look of those men; I shall have to shake their hands! And so I do, with all my heart: only—But God bless them! But we must go in, if she's coming down.'

They entered the house, and sat in the drawing-room, where Sir Lukin took up from the table one of his wife's Latin books, a Persius, bearing her marginal notes. He dropped his head on it, with sobs.

The voice of Diana recalled him to the present. She counselled him to control himself; in that case he might for one moment go to the chamber-door and assure himself by the

silence that his wife was resting. She brought permission from the surgeons and doctor, on his promise to be still.

Redworth supported Sir Lukin tottering out.

Dacier had risen. He was petrified by Diana's face, and thought of her as whirled from him in a storm, bearing the marks of it. Her underlip hung for short breaths; the big drops of her recent anguish still gathered on her brows; her eyes were tearless, lustreless; she looked ancient in youth, and distant by a century, like a tall woman of the vaults, issuing white-ringed, not of our light.

Page 3294

She shut her mouth for strength to speak to him.

He said: ‘You are not ill? You are strong?’

’I? Oh, strong. I will sit. I cannot be absent longer than two minutes. The trial of her strength is to come. If it were courage, we might be sure. The day is fine?’

‘A perfect August day.’

’I held her through it. I am thankful to heaven it was no other hand than mine. She wished to spare me. She was glad of her Tony when the time came. I thought I was a coward—I could have changed with her to save her; I am a strong woman, fit to submit to that work. I should not have borne it as she did. She expected to sink under it. All her dispositions were made for death-bequests to servants and to . . . to friends: every secret liking they had, thought of!’

Diana clenched her hands.

‘I hope!’ Dacier said.

’You shall hear regularly. Call at Sir William’s house to-morrow. He sleeps here to-night. The suspense must last for days. It is a question of vital power to bear the shock. She has a mind so like a flying spirit that, just before the moment, she made Mr. Lanyan Thomson smile by quoting some saying of her Tony’s.’

‘Try by-and-by to recollect it,’ said Dacier.

’And you were with that poor man! How did he pass the terrible time? I pitied him.’

‘He suffered; he prayed.’

’It was the best he could do. Mr. Redworth was as he always is at the trial, a pillar. Happy the friend who knows him for one! He never thinks of himself in a crisis. He is sheer strength to comfort and aid. They will drive you to the station with Mr. Thomson. He returns to relieve Sir William to-morrow. I have learnt to admire the men of the knife! No profession equals theirs in self-command and beneficence. Dr. Bridgenorth is permanent here.’

‘I have a fly, and go back immediately,’ said Dacier.

‘She shall hear of your coming. Adieu.’

Diana gave him her hand. It was gently pressed.

A wonderment at the utter change of circumstances took Dacier passingly at the sight of her vanishing figure.

He left the house, feeling he dared have no personal wishes. It had ceased to be the lover's hypocrisy with him.

The crisis of mortal peril in that house enveloped its inmates, and so wrought in him as to enshroud the stripped outcrying husband, of whom he had no clear recollection, save of the man's agony. The two women, striving against death, devoted in friendship, were the sole living images he brought away; they were a new vision of the world and our life.

He hoped with Diana, bled with her. She rose above him high, beyond his transient human claims. He envied Redworth the common friendly right to be near her. In reflection, long after, her simplicity of speech, washed pure of the blood-emotions, for token of her great nature, during those two minutes of their sitting together, was, dearer, sweeter to the lover than if she had shown by touch or word that a faint allusion to their severance was in her mind; and this despite a certain vacancy it created.

Page 3295

He received formal information of Lady Dunstane's progress to convalescence. By degrees the simply official tone of Diana's letters combined with the ceasing of them and the absence of her personal charm to make a gentleman not remarkable for violence in the passion so calmly reasonable as to think the dangerous presence best avoided for a time. Subject to fits of the passion, he certainly was, but his position in the world was a counselling spouse, jealous of his good name. He did not regret his proposal to take the leap; he would not have regretted it if taken. On the safe side of the abyss, however, it wore a gruesome look to his cool blood.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONTAINS MATTER FOR SUBSEQUENT EXPLOSION

Among the various letters inundating Sir Lukin Dunstane upon the report of the triumph of surgical skill achieved by Sir William Macpherson and Mr. Lanyan Thomson, was one from Lady Wathin, dated Adlands, an estate of Mr. Quintin Manx's in Warwickshire, petitioning for the shortest line of reassurance as to the condition of her dear cousin, and an intimation of the period when it might be deemed possible for a relative to call and offer her sincere congratulations: a letter deserving a personal reply, one would suppose. She received the following, in a succinct female hand corresponding to its terseness; every 't' righteously crossed, every 'i' punctiliously dotted, as she remarked to Constance Asper, to whom the communication was transferred for perusal:

'*Dear lady Wathin*,—Lady Dunstane is gaining strength. The measure of her pulse indicates favourably. She shall be informed in good time of your solicitude for her recovery. The day cannot yet be named for visits of any kind. You will receive information as soon as the house is open.

'I have undertaken the task of correspondence, and beg you to
believe me,

'Very truly yours,
'D. A. *Warwick*.'

Miss Asper speculated on the handwriting of her rival. She obtained permission to keep the letter, with the intention of transmitting it per post to an advertising interpreter of character in caligraphy.

Such was the character of the fair young heiress, exhibited by her performances much more patently than the run of a quill would reveal it.

She said, 'It is rather a pretty hand, I think.'

‘Mrs. Warwick is a practised writer,’ said Lady Wathin. ’Writing is her profession, if she has any. She goes to nurse my cousin. Her husband says she is an excellent nurse. He says what he can for her. But you must be in the last extremity, or she is ice. His appeal to her has been totally disregarded. Until he drops down in the street, as his doctor expects him to do some day, she will continue her course; and even then . . .’ An adventuress desiring her freedom! Lady Wathin looked. She was too devout a woman to say what she thought. But she knew the world to be very wicked. Of Mrs. Warwick, her opinion was formed. She would not have charged the individual creature with a criminal design; all she did was to stuff the person her virtue abhorred with the wickedness of the world, and that is a common process in antipathy.

Page 3296

She sympathized, moreover, with the beautiful devotedness of the wealthy heiress to her ideal of man. It had led her to make the acquaintance of old Lady Dacier, at the house in town, where Constance Asper had first met Percy; Mrs. Grafton Winstanley's house, representing neutral territory or debateable land for the occasional intercourse of the upper class and the climbing in the professions or in commerce; Mrs. Grafton Winstanley being on the edge of aristocracy by birth, her husband, like Mr. Quintin Manx, a lord of fleets. Old Lady Dacier's bluntness in speaking of her grandson would have shocked Lady Wathin as much as it astonished, had she been less of an ardent absorber of aristocratic manners. Percy was plainly called a donkey, for hanging off and on with a handsome girl of such expectations as Miss Asper. 'But what you can't do with a horse, you can't hope to do with a donkey.' She added that she had come for the purpose of seeing the heiress, of whose points of person she delivered a judgement critically appreciative as a horsefancier's on the racing turf. 'If a girl like that holds to it, she's pretty sure to get him at last. It 's no use to pull his neck down to the water.'

Lady Wathin delicately alluded to rumours of an entanglement, an admiration he had, ahem.

'A married woman,' the veteran nodded. 'I thought that was off? She must be a clever intriguer to keep him so long.'

'She is undoubtedly clever,' said Lady Wathin, and it was mumbled in her hearing: 'The woman seems to have a taste for our family.'

They agreed that they could see nothing to be done. The young lady must wither, Mrs. Warwick have her day. The veteran confided her experienced why to Lady Wathin: 'All the tales you tell of a woman of that sort are sharp sauce to the palates of men.'

They might be, to the men of the dreadful gilded idle class!

Mrs. Warwick's day appeared indefinitely prolonged, judging by Percy Dacier's behaviour to Miss Asper. Lady Wathin watched them narrowly when she had the chance, a little ashamed of her sex, or indignant rather at his display of courtliness in exchange for her open betrayal of her preference. It was almost to be wished that she would punish him by sacrificing herself to one of her many brilliant proposals of marriage. But such are women!—precisely because of his holding back he tightened the cord attaching him to her tenacious heart. This was the truth. For the rest, he was gracefully courteous; an observer could perceive the charm he exercised. He talked with a ready affability, latterly with greater social ease; evidently not acting the indifferent conqueror, or so consummately acting it as to mask the air. And yet he was ambitious, and he was not rich. Notoriously was he ambitious, and with wealth to back him, a great entertaining house, troops of adherents, he would gather influence, be propelled to leadership. The vexation of a constant itch to speak to him on the subject, and the

recognition, that he knew it all as well as she, tormented Lady Wathin. He gave her comforting news of her dear cousin in the Winter.

Page 3297

‘You have heard from Mrs. Warwick?’ she said.

He replied, ‘I had the latest from Mr. Redworth.’

‘Mrs. Warwick has relinquished her post?’

’When she does, you may be sure that Lady Dunstane is, perfectly reestablished.’

‘She is an excellent nurse.’

‘The best, I believe.’

‘It is a good quality in sickness.’

‘Proof of good all through.’

’Her husband might have the advantage of it. His state is really pathetic. If she has feeling, and could only be made aware, she might perhaps be persuaded to pass from the friendly to the wifely duty.’

Mr. Dacier bent his head to listen, and he bowed.

He was fast in the toils; and though we have assurance that evil cannot triumph in perpetuity, the aspect of it throning provokes a kind of despair. How strange if ultimately the lawyers once busy about the uncle were to take up the case of the nephew, and this time reverse the issue, by proving it! For poor Mr. Warwick was emphatic on the question of his honour. It excited him dangerously. He was long-suffering, but with the slightest clue terrible. The unknotting of the entanglement might thus happen—and Constance Asper would welcome her hero still.

Meanwhile there was actually nothing to be done: a deplorable absence of motive villainy; apparently an absence of the beneficent Power directing events to their proper termination. Lady Wathin heard of her cousin’s having been removed to Cowes in May, for light Solent and Channel voyages on board Lord Esquart’s yacht. She heard also of heavy failures and convulsions in the City of London, quite unconscious that the Fates, or agents of the Providence she invoked to precipitate the catastrophe, were then beginning cavernously their performance of the part of villain in Diana’s history.

Diana and Emma enjoyed happy quiet sailings under May breezes on the many-coloured South-western waters, heart in heart again; the physical weakness of the one, the moral weakness of the other, creating that mutual dependency which makes friendship a pulsating tie. Diana’s confession had come of her letter to Emma. When the latter was able to examine her correspondence, Diana brought her the heap for perusal, her own sealed scribble, throbbing with all the fatal might-have-been, under her eyes. She could have concealed and destroyed it. She sat beside her friend, awaiting

her turn, hearing her say at the superscription: ’Your writing, Tony?’ and she nodded. She was asked: ‘Shall I read it?’ She answered: ‘Read.’ They were soon locked in an embrace. Emma had no perception of coldness through those brief dry lines; her thought was of the matter.

‘The danger is over now?’ she said.

‘Yes, that danger is over now.’

‘You have weathered it?’

‘I love him.’

Page 3298

Emma dropped a heavy sigh in pity of her, remotely in compassion for Redworth, the loving and unbeloved. She was too humane and wise of our nature to chide her Tony for having her sex's heart. She had charity to bestow on women; in defence of them against men and the world, it was a charity armed with the weapons of battle. The wife madly stripped before the world by a jealous husband, and left chained to the rock, her youth wasting, her blood arrested, her sensibilities chilled and assailing her under their multitudinous disguises, and for whom the world is merciless, called forth Emma's tenderest commiseration; and that wife being Tony, and stricken with the curse of love, in other circumstances the blessing, Emma bled for her.

'But nothing desperate?' she said.

'No; you have saved me.'

'I would knock at death's doors again, and pass them, to be sure of that.'

'Kiss me; you may be sure. I would not put my lips to your cheek if there were danger of my faltering.'

'But you love him.'

'I do: and because I love him I will not let him be fettered to me.'

'You will see him.'

'Do not imagine that his persuasions undermined your Tony. I am subject to panics.'

'Was it your husband?'

'I had a visit from Lady Wathin. She knows him. She came as peacemaker. She managed to hint at his authority. Then came a letter from him—of supplication, interpenetrated with the hint: a suffused atmosphere. Upon that; unexpected by me, my—let me call him so once, forgive me!—lover came. Oh! he loves me, or did then. Percy! He had been told that I should be claimed. I felt myself the creature I am—a wreck of marriage. But I fancied I could serve him:—I saw golden. My vanity was the chief traitor. Cowardice of course played a part. In few things that we do, where self is concerned, will cowardice not be found. And the hallucination colours it to seem a lovely heroism. That was the second time Mr. Redworth arrived. I am always at crossways, and he rescues me; on this occasion unknowingly.'

'There's a divinity . . .' said Emma. 'When I think of it I perceive that Patience is our beneficent fairy godmother, who brings us our harvest in the long result.'

'My dear, does she bring us our labourers' rations, to sustain us for the day?' said Diana.'

‘Poor fare, but enough.’

‘I fear I was born godmotherless.’

’You have stores of patience, Tony; only now and then fits of desperation.’

’My nature’s frailty, the gap in it: we will give it no fine names—they cover our pitfalls. I am open to be carried on a tide of unreasonableness when the coward cries out. But I can say, dear, that after one rescue, a similar temptation is unlikely to master me. I do not subscribe to the world’s decrees for love of the monster, though I am beginning to understand the dues of allegiance. We have ceased to write letters. You may have faith in me.’

Page 3299

‘I have, with my whole soul,’ said Emma.

So the confession closed; and in the present instance there were not any forgotten chambers to be unlocked and ransacked for addenda confessions.

The subjects discoursed of by the two endeared the hours to them. They were aware that the English of the period would have laughed a couple of women to scorn for venturing on them, and they were not a little hostile in consequence, and shot their epigrams profusely, applauding the keener that appeared to score the giant bulk of their intolerant enemy, who holds the day, but not the morrow. Us too he holds for the day, to punish us if we have temporal cravings. He scatters his gifts to the abject; tossing to us rebels bare dog-biscuit. But the life of the spirit is beyond his region; we have our morrow in his day when we crave nought of him. Diana and Emma delighted to discover that they were each the rebel of their earlier and less experienced years; each a member of the malcontent minor faction, the salt of earth, to whom their salt must serve for nourishment, as they admitted, relishing it determinedly, not without gratification.

Sir Lukin was busy upon his estate in Scotland. They summoned young Arthur Rhodes to the island, that he might have a taste of the new scenes. Diana was always wishing for his instruction and refreshment; and Redworth came to spend a Saturday and Sunday with them, and showed his disgust of the idle boy, as usual, at the same time consulting them on the topic of furniture for the Berkshire mansion he had recently bought, rather vaunting the Spanish pictures his commissioner in Madrid was transmitting. The pair of rebels, vexed by his treatment of the respectful junior, took him for an incarnation of their enemy, and pecked and worried the man astonishingly. He submitted to it like the placable giant. Yes, he was a Liberal, and furnishing and decorating the house in the stability of which he trusted. Why not? We must accept the world as it is, try to improve it by degrees.—Not so: humanity will not wait for you, the victims are shrieking beneath the bricks of your enormous edifice, behind the canvas of your pictures. ’But you may really say that luxurious yachting is an odd kind of insurgency,’ avowed Diana. ’It’s the tangle we are in.’

’It’s the coat we have to wear; and why fret at it for being comfortable?’

‘I don’t half enough, when I think of my shivering neighbours.’

‘Money is of course a rough test of virtue,’ said Redworth. ’We have no other general test.’

Money! The ladies proclaimed it a mere material test; Diana, gazing on sunny sea, with an especial disdain. And name us your sort of virtue. There is more virtue in poverty, He denied that. Inflexibly British, he declared money, and also the art of getting money,

to be hereditary virtues, deserving of their reward. The reward a superior wealth and its fruits? Yes, the power to enjoy and spread

Page 3300

enjoyment: and let idleness envy both! He abused idleness, and by implication the dilettante insurgency fostering it. However, he was compensatingly heterodox in his view of the Law's persecution of women; their pertinacious harpings on the theme had brought him to that; and in consideration of the fact, as they looked from yacht to shore, of their being rebels participating largely in the pleasures of the tyrant's court, they allowed him to silence them, and forgave him.

Thoughts upon money and idleness were in confusion with Diana. She had a household to support in London, and she was not working; she could not touch *the cantatrice* while Emma was near. Possibly, she again ejaculated, the Redworths of the world were right: the fruitful labours were with the mattock and hoe, or the mind directing them. It was a crushing invasion of materialism, so she proposed a sail to the coast of France, and thither they flew, touching Cherbourg, Alderney, Sark, Guernsey, and sighting the low Brittany rocks. Memorable days to Arthur Rhodes. He saw perpetually the one golden centre in new scenes. He heard her voice, he treasured her sayings; her gestures, her play of lip and eyelid, her lift of head, lightest movements, were imprinted on him, surely as the heavens are mirrored in the quiet seas, firmly and richly as earth answers to the sprinkled grain. For he was blissfully athirst, untroubled by a hope. She gave him more than she knew of: a present that kept its beating heart into the future; a height of sky, a belief in nobility, permanent through manhood down to age. She was his foam-born Goddess of those leaping waters; differently hued, crescented, a different influence. He had a happy week, and it charmed Diana to hear him tell her so. In spite of Redworth, she had faith in the fruit-bearing powers of a time of simple happiness, and shared the youth's in reflecting it. Only the happiness must be simple, that of the glass to the lovely face: no straining of arms to retain, no heaving of the bosom in vacancy.

His poverty and capacity for pure enjoyment led her to think of him almost clingingly when hard news reached her from the quaint old City of London, which despises poverty and authorcraft and all mean adventurers, and bows to the lordly merchant, the mighty financier, Redworth's incarnation of the virtues. Happy days on board the yacht Clarissa! Diana had to recall them with effort. They who sow their money for a promising high percentage have built their habitations on the sides of the most eruptive mountain in Europe. AEtna supplies more certain harvests, wrecks fewer vineyards and peaceful dwellings. The greed of gain is our volcano. Her wonder leapt up at the slight inducement she had received to embark her money in this Company: a South-American mine, collapsed almost within hearing of the trumpets of prospectus, after two punctual payments of the half-yearly interest. A Mrs. Ferdinand Cherson,

Page 3301

an elder sister of the pretty Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett, had talked to her of the cost of things one afternoon at Lady Singleby's garden-party, and spoken of the City as the place to help to swell an income, if only you have an acquaintance with some of the chief City men. The great mine was named, and the rush for allotments. She knew a couple of the Directors. They vowed to her that ten per cent. was a trifle; the fortune to be expected out of the mine was already clearly estimable at forties and fifties. For their part they anticipated cent. per cent. Mrs. Cherson said she wanted money, and had therefore invested in the mine. It seemed so consequent, the cost of things being enormous! She and her sister Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett owned husbands who did their bidding, because of their having the brains, it might be understood. Thus five thousand pounds invested would speedily bring five thousand pounds per annum. Diana had often dreamed of the City of London as the seat of magic; and taking the City's contempt for authorcraft and the intangible as, from its point of view, justly founded, she had mixed her dream strangely with an ancient notion of the City's probity. Her broker's shaking head did not damp her ardour for shares to the full amount of her ability to purchase. She remembered her satisfaction at the allotment; the golden castle shot up from this fountain mine. She had a frenzy for mines and fished in some English with smaller sums. 'I am now a miner,' she had exclaimed, between dismay at her audacity and the pride of it. Why had she not consulted Redworth? He would peremptorily have stopped the frenzy in its first intoxicating effervescence. She, like Mrs. Cherson, like all women who have plunged upon the cost of things, wanted money. She naturally went to the mine. Address him for counsel in the person of dupe, she could not; shame was a barrier. Could she tell him that the prattle of a woman, spendthrift as Mrs. Cherson, had induced her to risk her money? Latterly the reports of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett were not of the flavour to make association of their names agreeable to his hearing.

She had to sit down in the buzz of her self-reproaches and amazement at the behaviour of that reputable City, shrug, and recommence the labour of her pen. Material misfortune had this one advantage; it kept her from speculative thoughts of her lover, and the meaning of his absence and, silence.

Diana's perusal of the incomplete *cantatrice* was done with the cold critical eye interpreting for the public. She was forced to write on nevertheless, and exactly in the ruts of the foregoing matter. It propelled her. No longer perversely, of necessity she wrote her best, convinced that the work was doomed to unpopularity, resolved that it should be at least a victory in style. A fit of angry cynicism now and then set her composing phrases as baits for the critics to quote, condemnatory of the attractiveness of the work. Her mood was bad. In addition,

Page 3302

she found Whitmonby cool; he complained of the coolness of her letter of adieu; complained of her leaving London so long. How could she expect to be his Queen of the London Salon if she lost touch of the topics? He made no other allusion. They were soon on amicable terms, at the expense of flattering arts that she had not hitherto practised. But Westlake revealed unimagined marvels of the odd corners of the masculine bosom. He was the man of her circle the neatest in epigram, the widest of survey, an Oriental traveller, a distinguished writer, and if not personally bewitching, remarkably a gentleman of the world. He was wounded; he said as much. It came to this: admitting that he had no claims, he declared it to be unbearable for him to see another preferred. The happier was unmentioned, and Diana scraped his wound by rallying him. He repeated that he asked only to stand on equal terms with the others; her preference of one was past his tolerance. She told him that since leaving Lady Dunstane she had seen but Whitmonby, Wilmers, and him. He smiled sarcastically, saying he had never had a letter from her, except the formal one of invitation.

‘Powers of blarney, have you forsaken a daughter of Erin?’ cried Diana. ’Here is a friend who has a craving for you, and I talk sense to him. I have written to none of my set since I last left London.’

She pacified him by doses of cajolery new to her tongue. She liked him, abhorred the thought of losing any of her friends, so the cajoling sentences ran until Westlake betrayed an inflammable composition, and had to be put out, and smoked sullenly. Her resources were tried in restoring him to reason. The months of absence from London appeared to have transformed her world. Tonans was moderate. The great editor rebuked her for her prolonged absence from London, not so much because it discrowned her as Queen of the Salon, but candidly for its rendering her service less to him. Everything she knew of men and affairs was to him stale.

‘How do you get to the secrets?’ she asked.

‘By sticking to the centre of them,’ he said.

‘But how do you manage to be in advance and act the prophet?’

‘Because I will have them at any price, and that is known.’

She hinted at the peccant City Company.

‘I think I have checked the mining mania, as I did the railway,’ said he; ‘and so far it was a public service. There’s no checking of maniacs.’

She took her whipping within and without. ’On another occasion I shall apply to you, Mr. Tonans.’

‘Ah, there was a time when you could have been a treasure to me,’ he rejoined; alluding of course to the Dannisburgh days.

In dejection, as she mused on those days, and on her foolish ambition to have a London house where her light might burn, she advised herself, with Redworth’s voice, to quit the house, arrest expenditure, and try for happiness by burning and shining in the spirit: devoting herself, as Arthur Rhodes did, purely to literature. It became almost a decision.

Page 3303

Percy she had still neither written to nor heard from, and she dared not hope to meet him. She fancied a wish to have tidings of his marriage: it would be peace; if in desolation. Now that she had confessed and given her pledge to Emma, she had so far broken with him as to render the holding him chained a cruelty, and his reserve whispered of a rational acceptance of the end between them. She thanked him for it; an act whereby she was: instantly melted to such softness that a dread of him haunted her. Coward, take up your burden for armour! she called to her poor dungeoned self wailing to have common nourishment. She knew how prodigiously it waxed on crumbs; nay, on the imagination of small morsels. By way of chastizing it, she reviewed her life, her behaviour to her husband, until she sank backward to a depth deprived of air and light. That life with her husband was a dungeon to her nature deeper than any imposed by present conditions. She was then a revolutionary to reach to the breath of day. She had now to be, only not a coward, and she could breathe as others did. 'Women who sap the moral laws pull down the pillars of the temple on their sex,' Emma had said. Diana perceived something of her personal debt to civilization. Her struggles passed into the doomed *cantatrice* occupying days and nights under pressure for immediate payment; the silencing of friend Debit, ridiculously calling himself Credit, in contempt of sex and conduct, on the ground, that he was he solely by virtue of being she. He had got a trick of singing operatic solos in the form and style of the delightful tenor Tellio, and they were touching in absurdity, most real in unreality. Exquisitely trilled, after Tellio's manner,

> 'The tradesmen all beseech ye,
> The landlord, cook and maid,
> Complete *the cantatrice*,
> That they may soon be paid.'

provoked her to laughter in pathos. He approached, posturing himself operatically, with perpetual new verses, rhymes to Danvers, rhymes to Madame Sybille, the cook. Seeing Tellio at one of Henry Wilmers' private concerts, Diana's lips twitched to dimples at the likeness her familiar had assumed. She had to compose her countenance to talk to him; but the moment of song was the trial. Lady Singleby sat beside her, and remarked:

'You have always fun going on in you!' She partook of the general impression that Diana Warwick was too humorous to nurse a downright passion.

Before leaving, she engaged Diana to her annual garden-party of the closing season, and there the meeting with Percy occurred, not unobserved. Had they been overheard, very little to implicate them would have been gathered. He walked in full view across the lawn to her, and they presented mask to mask.

'The beauty of the day tempts you at last, Mrs. Warwick.'

‘I have been finishing a piece of work.’

Lovely weather, beautiful dresses: agreed. Diana wore a yellow robe with a black bonnet, and he commented on the becoming hues; for the first time, he noticed her dress! Lovely women? Dacier hesitated. One he saw. But surely he must admire Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett? And who steps beside her, transparently fascinated, with visage at three-quarters to the rays within her bonnet? Can it be Sir Lukin Dunstane? and beholding none but his charmer!

Page 3304

Dacier withdrew his eyes thoughtfully from the spectacle, and moved to woo Diana to a stroll. She could not restrain her feet; she was out of the ring of her courtiers for the moment. He had seized his opportunity.

‘It is nearly a year!’ he said.

‘I have been nursing nearly all the time, doing the work I do best.’

‘Unaltered?’

‘A year must leave its marks.’

‘Tony!’

’You speak of a madwoman, a good eleven months dead. Let her rest. Those are the conditions.’

‘Accepted, if I may see her.’

‘Honestly accepted?’

’Imposed fatally, I have to own. I have felt with you: you are the wiser. But, admitting that, surely we can meet. I may see you?’

‘My house has not been shut.’

‘I respected the house. I distrusted myself.’

‘What restores your confidence?’

‘The strength I draw from you.’

One of the Beauties at a garden-party is lucky to get as many minutes as had passed in quietness. Diana was met and captured. But those last words of Percy’s renewed her pride in him by suddenly building a firm faith in herself. Noblest of lovers! she thought, and brooded on the little that had been spoken, the much conveyed, for a proof of perfect truthfulness.

The world had watched them. It pronounced them discreet if culpable; probably cold to the passion both. Of Dacier’s coldness it had no doubt, and Diana’s was presumed from her comical flights of speech. She was given to him because of the known failure of her other adorers. He in the front rank of politicians attracted her with the lustre of his ambition; she him with her mingling of talent and beauty. An astute world; right in the main, owing to perceptions based upon brute nature; utterly astray in particulars, for the reason that it takes no count of the soul of man or woman. Hence its glee at a

catastrophe; its poor stock of mercy. And when no catastrophe follows, the prophet, for the honour of the profession, must decry her as cunning beyond aught yet revealed of a serpent sex.

Save for a word or two, the watchman might have overheard and trumpeted his report of their interview at Diana's house. After the first pained breathing, when they found themselves alone in that room where they had plighted their fortunes, they talked allusively to define the terms imposed on them by Reason. The thwarted step was unmentioned; it was a past madness. But Wisdom being recognized, they could meet. It would be hard if that were denied! They talked very little of their position; both understood the mutual acceptance of it; and now that he had seen her and was again under the spell, Dacier's rational mind, together with his delight in her presence, compelled him honourably to bow to the terms. Only, as these were severe upon lovers, the innocence of their meetings demanded indemnification in frequency.

'Come whenever you think I can be useful,' said Diana.

Page 3305

They pressed hands at parting, firmly and briefly, not for the ordinary dactylology of lovers, but in sign of the treaty of amity.

She soon learnt that she had tied herself to her costly household.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Dialogue round the subject of A *portrait*, *with some indications of the task for Diana*

An enamoured Egeria who is not a princess in her worldly state nor a goddess by origin has to play one of those parts which strain the woman's faculties past naturalness. She must never expose her feelings to her lover; she must make her counsel weighty—-otherwise she is little his nymph of the pure wells, and what she soon may be, the world will say. She has also, most imperatively, to dazzle him without the betrayal of artifice, where simple spontaneousness is beyond conjuring. But feelings that are constrained becloud the judgement besides arresting the fine jet of delivery wherewith the mastered lover is taught through his ears to think himself prompted, and submit to be controlled, by a creature super-feminine. She must make her counsel so weighty in poignant praises as to repress impulses that would rouse her own; and her betraying impulsiveness was a subject of reflection to Diana after she had given Percy Dacier, metaphorically, the key of her house. Only as true Egeria could she receive him. She was therefore grateful, she thanked and venerated this noblest of lovers for his not pressing to the word of love, and so strengthening her to point his mind, freshen his moral energies and inspirit him. His chivalrous acceptance of the conditions of their renewed intimacy was a radiant knightliness to Diana, elevating her with a living image for worship:—he so near once to being the absolute lord of her destinies! How to reward him, was her sole dangerous thought. She prayed and strove that she might give him of her best, to practically help him; and she had reason to suppose she could do it, from the visible effect of her phrases. He glistened in repeating them; he had fallen into the habit; before witnesses too; in the presence of Miss Paynham, who had taken earnestly to the art of painting, and obtained her dear Mrs. Warwick's promise of a few sittings for the sketch of a portrait, near the close of the season. 'A very daring thing to attempt,' Miss Paynham said, when he was comparing her first outlines and the beautiful breathing features. 'Even if one gets the face, the lips will seem speechless, to those who know her.'

'If they have no recollection,' said Dacier.

'I mean, the endeavour should be to represent them at the moment of speaking.'

'Put it into the eyes.' He looked at the eyes.

She looked at the mouth. 'But it is the mouth, more than the eyes.'

He looked at the face. 'Where there is character, you have only to study it to be sure of a likeness.'

Page 3306

‘That is the task, with one who utters jewels, Mr. Dacier.’

‘Bright wit, I fear, is above the powers of your art.’

‘Still I feel it could be done. See—now—that!’

Diana’s lips had opened to say: ’Confess me a model model: I am dissected while I sit for portrayal. I must be for a moment like the frog of the two countrymen who were disputing as to the manner of his death, when he stretched to yawn, upon which they agreed that he had defeated the truth for both of them. I am not quite inanimate.’

‘Irish countrymen,’ said Dacier.

’The story adds, that blows were arrested; so confer the nationality as you please.’

Diana had often to divert him from a too intent perusal of her features with sparkles and stories current or invented to serve the immediate purpose.

Miss Paynham was Mrs. Warwick’s guest for a fortnight, and observed them together. She sometimes charitably laid down her pencil and left them, having forgotten this or that. They were conversing of general matters with their usual crisp precision on her return, and she was rather like the two countrymen, in debating whether it was excess of coolness or discreetness; though she was convinced of their inclinations, and expected love some day to be leaping up. Diana noticed that she had no reminder for leaving the room when it was Mr. Redworth present. These two had become very friendly, according to her hopes; and Miss Paynham was extremely solicitous to draw suggestions from Mr. Redworth and win his approval.

‘Do I appear likely to catch the mouth now, do you think, Mr. Redworth?’

He remarked, smiling at Diana’s expressive dimple, that the mouth was difficult to catch. He did not gaze intently. Mr. Redworth was the genius of friendship, ‘the friend of women,’ Mrs. Warwick had said of him. Miss Paynham discovered it, as regarded herself. The portrait was his commission to her, kindly proposed, secretly of course, to give her occupation and the chance of winning a vogue with the face of a famous Beauty. So many, however, were Mrs. Warwick’s visitors, and so lively the chatter she directed, that accurate sketching was difficult to an amateurish hand. Whitmonby, Sullivan Smith, Westlake, Henry Wilmers, Arthur Rhodes, and other gentlemen, literary and military, were almost daily visitors when it became known that the tedium of the beautiful sitter required beguiling and there was a certainty of finding her at home. On Mrs. Warwick’s Wednesday numerous ladies decorated the group. Then was heard such a rillet of dialogue without scandal or politics, as nowhere else in Britain; all vowed it subsequently; for to the remembrance it seemed magical. Not a breath of scandal, and yet the liveliest flow. Lady Pennon came attended by a Mr. Alexander Hepburn, a

handsome Scot, at whom Dacier shot one of his instinctive keen glances, before seeing that the hostess had mounted a transient colour. Mr. Hepburn, in settling himself on his chair rather too briskly, contrived the next minute to break a precious bit of China standing by his elbow; and Lady Pennon cried out, with sympathetic anguish: 'Oh, my dear, what a trial for you!'

Page 3307

‘Brittle is foredoomed,’ said Diana, unruffled.

She deserved compliments, and would have had them if she had not wounded the most jealous and petulant of her courtiers.

‘Then the Turk is a sapient custodian!’ said Westlake, vexed with her flush at the entrance of the Scot.

Diana sedately took his challenge. ’We, Mr. Westlake, have the philosophy of ownership.’

Mr. Hepburn penitentially knelt to pick up the fragments, and Westlake murmured over his head: ‘As long as it is we who are the cracked.’

‘Did we not start from China?’

‘We were consequently precipitated to Stamboul.’

‘You try to elude the lesson.’

’I remember my first paedagogue telling me so when he rapped the book on my cranium.’

‘The mark of the book is not a disfigurement.’

It was gently worded, and the shrewder for it. The mark of the book, if not a disfigurement, was a characteristic of Westlake’s fashion of speech. Whitmonby nodded twice, for signification of a palpable hit in that bout; and he noted within him the foolishness of obtruding the remotest allusion to our personality when crossing the foils with a woman. She is down on it like the lightning, quick as she is in her contracted circle, politeness guarding her from a riposte.

Mr. Hepburn apologized very humbly, after regaining his chair. Diana smiled and said: ’Incidents in a drawing-room are prize-shots at Dulness.’

‘And in a dining-room too,’ added Sullivan Smith. ’I was one day at a dinner-party, apparently of undertakers hired to mourn over the joints and the birds in the dishes, when the ceiling came down, and we all sprang up merry as crickets. It led to a pretty encounter and a real prize-shot.’

‘Does that signify a duel?’ asked Lady Pennon.

’’Twould be the vulgar title, to bring it into discredit with the populace, my lady.’

’Rank me one of the populace then! I hate duelling and rejoice that it is discountenanced.’

‘The citizens, and not the populace, I think Mr. Sullivan Smith means,’ Diana said. ’The citizen is generally right in morals. My father also was against the practice, when it raged at its “prettiest.” I have heard him relate a story of a poor friend of his, who had to march out for a trifle, and said, as he accepted the invitation, “It’s all nonsense!” and walking to the measured length, “It’s all nonsense, you know!” and when lying on the ground, at his last gasp, “I told you it was all nonsense!"’

Sullivan Smith leaned over to Whitmonby and Dacier amid the ejaculations, and whispered: ’A lady’s way of telling the story!—and excuseable to her:—she had to Jonah the adjective. What the poor fellow said was—’ He murmured the sixty-pounder adjective, as in the belly of the whale, to rightly emphasize his noun.

Whitmonby nodded to the superior relish imparted by the vigour of masculine veracity in narration. ‘A story for its native sauce piquante,’ he said.

Page 3308

‘Nothing without it!’

They had each a dissolving grain of contempt for women compelled by their delicacy to spoil that kind of story which demands the piquant accompaniment to flavour it racily and make it passable. For to see insipid mildness complacently swallowed as an excellent thing, knowing the rich smack of savour proper to the story, is your anecdotal gentleman’s annoyance. But if the anecdote had supported him, Sullivan Smith would have let the expletive rest.

Major Carew Mahoney capped Mrs. Warwick’s tale of the unfortunate duellist with another, that confessed the practice absurd, though he approved of it; and he cited Lord Larrian’s opinion: ’It keeps men braced to civil conduct.’

’I would not differ with the dear old lord; but no! the pistol is the sceptre of the bully,’ said Diana.

Mr. Hepburn, with the widest of eyes on her in perpetuity, warmly agreed; and the man was notorious among men for his contrary action.

’Most righteously our Princess Egeria distinguishes her reign by prohibiting it,’ said Lady Singleby.

‘And how,’ Sullivan Smith sighed heavily, ’how, I’d ask, are ladies to be protected from the bully?’

He was beset: ’So it was all for us? all in consideration for our benefit?’

He mournfully exclaimed: ‘Why, surely!’

’That is the funeral apology of the Rod, at the close of every barbarous chapter,’ said Diana.

’Too fine in mind, too fat in body; that is a consequence with men, dear madam. The conqueror stands to his weapons, or he loses his possessions.’

’Mr. Sullivan Smith jumps at his pleasure from the special to the general, and will be back, if we follow him, Lady Pennon. It is the trick men charge to women, showing that they can resemble us.’

Lady Pennon thumped her knee. ’Not a bit. There’s no resemblance, and they know nothing of us.’

‘Women are a blank to them, I believe,’ said Whitmonby, treacherously bowing;—and Westlake said:

’Traces of a singular scrawl have been observed when they were held in close proximity to the fire.’

‘Once, on the top of a coach,’ Whitmonby resumed, ’I heard a comely dame of the period when summers are ceasing threatened by her husband with a divorce, for omitting to put sandwiches in their luncheon-basket. She made him the inscrutable answer: “Ah, poor man! you will go down ignorant to your grave!” We laughed, and to this day I cannot tell you why.’

’That laugh was from a basket lacking provision; and I think we could trace our separation to it,’ Diana said to Lady Pennon, who replied: ‘They expose themselves; they get no nearer to the riddle.’

Miss Courtney, a rising young actress, encouraged by a smile from Mrs. Warwick, remarked: ‘On the stage, we have each our parts equally.’

‘And speaking parts; not personae mutae.’

‘The stage has advanced in verisimilitude,’ Henry Wilmers added slyly; and Diana rejoined: ’You recognize a verisimilitude of the mirror when it is in advance of reality. Flatter the sketch, Miss Paynham, for a likeness to be seen. Probably there are still Old Conservatives who would prefer the personation of us by boys.’

Page 3309

‘I don’t know,’ Westlake affected dubiousness. ’I have heard that a step to the riddle is gained by a serious contemplation of boys.’

‘Serious?’

‘That is the doubt.’

‘The doubt throws its light on the step!’

‘I advise them not to take any leap from their step,’ said Lady Pennon.

’It would be a way of learning that we are no wiser than our sires; but perhaps too painful a way,’ Whitmonby observed. ’Poor Mountford Wilts boasted of knowing women; and—he married. To jump into the mouth of the enigma, is not to read it.’

‘You are figures of conceit when you speculate on us, Mr. Whitmonby.’

‘An occupation of our leisure, my lady, for your amusement.’

’The leisure of the humming-top, a thousand to the minute, with the pretence that it sleeps!’ Diana said.

’The sacrilegious hand to strip you of your mystery is withered as it stretches,’ exclaimed Westlake. ’The sage and the devout are in accord for once.’

’And whichever of the two I may be, I’m one of them, happy to do my homage blindfold!’ Sullivan Smith waved the sign of it.

Diana sent her eyes over him and Mr. Hepburn, seeing Dacier. ’That rosy mediaevalism seems the utmost we can expect.’ An instant she saddened, foreboding her words to be ominous, because of suddenly thirsting for a modern cry from him, the silent. She quitted her woman’s fit of earnestness, and took to the humour that pleased him. ’Aslauga’s knight, at his blind man’s buff of devotion, catches the hem of the tapestry and is found by his lady kissing it in a trance of homage five hours long! Sir Hilary of Agincourt, returned from the wars to his castle at midnight, hears that the chitellaine is away dancing, and remains with all his men mounted in the courtyard till the grey morn brings her back! Adorable! We had a flag flying in those days. Since men began to fret the riddle, they have hauled it down half-mast. Soon we shall behold a bare pole and hats on around it. That is their solution.’

A smile circled at the hearing of Lady Singleby say: ’Well, I am all for our own times, however literal the men.’

‘We are two different species!’ thumped Lady Pennon, swimming on the theme. ‘I am sure, I read what they write of women! And their heroines!’

Lady Esquart acquiesced: ‘We are utter fools or horrid knaves.’

’Nature’s original hieroglyphs—which have that appearance to the peruser,’ Westlake assented.

’And when they would decipher us, and they hit on one of our “arts,” the literary pirouette they perform is memorable.’ Diana looked invitingly at Dacier. ‘But I for one discern a possible relationship and a likeness.’

‘I think it exists—behind a curtain,’ Dacier replied.

’Before the era of the Nursery. Liberty to grow; independence is the key of the secret.’

‘And what comes after the independence?’ he inquired.

Page 3310

Whitmonby, musing that some distraction of an earnest incentive spoilt Mrs. Warwick's wit, informed him: 'The two different species then break their shallow armistice and join the shock of battle for possession of the earth, and we are outnumbered and exterminated, to a certainty. So I am against independence.'

'Socially a Mussulman, subject to explosions!' Diana said. 'So the eternal duel between us is maintained, and men will protest that they are for civilization. Dear me, I should like to write a sketch of the women of the future—don't be afraid!—the far future. What a different earth you will see!'

And very different creatures! the gentlemen unanimously surmised. Westlake described the fairer portion, no longer the weaker; frightful hosts.

Diana promised him a sweeter picture, if ever she brought her hand to paint it.

'You would be offered up to the English national hangman, Jehoiachim Sneer,' interposed Arthur Rhodes, evidently firing a gun too big for him, of premeditated charging, as his patroness perceived; but she knew him to be smarting under recent applications of the swish of Mr. Sneer, and that he rushed to support her. She covered him by saying: 'If he has to be encountered, he kills none but the cripple,' wherewith the dead pause ensuing from a dose of outlandish speech in good company was bridged, though the youth heard Westlake mutter unpleasantly: 'Jehoiachim,' and had to endure a stare of Dacier's, who did not conceal his want of comprehension of the place he occupied in Mrs. Warwick's gatherings.

'They know nothing of us whatever!' Lady Pennon harped on her dictum.

'They put us in a case and profoundly study the captive creature,' said Diana: 'but would any man understand this . . . ?' She dropped her voice and drew in the heads of Lady Pennon, Lady Singleby, Lady Esquart and Miss Courtney: 'Real woman's nature speaks. A maid of mine had a "follower." She was a good girl; I was anxious about her and asked her if she could trust him. "Oh, yes, ma'am," she replied, "I can; he's quite like a female." I longed to see the young man, to tell him he had received the highest of eulogies.'

The ladies appreciatingly declared that such a tale was beyond the understandings of men. Miss Paynham primmed her mouth, admitting to herself her inability to repeat such a tale; an act that she deemed not 'quite like a lady.' She had previously come to the conclusion that Mrs. Warwick, with all her generous qualities, was deficient in delicate sentiment—owing perhaps to her coldness of temperament. Like Dacier also, she failed to comprehend the patronage of Mr. Rhodes: it led to suppositions; indefinite truly, and not calumnious at all; but a young poet, rather good-looking and well built, is not the same kind of wing-chick as a young actress, like Miss Courtney—Mrs.

Warwick’s latest shieldling: he is hardly enrolled for the reason that was assumed to sanction

Page 3311

Mrs. Warwick's maid in the encouragement of her follower. Miss Paynham sketched on, with her thoughts in her bosom: a damsel castigatingly pursued by the idea of sex as the direct motive of every act of every person surrounding, her; deductively therefore that a certain form of the impelling passion, mild or terrible, or capricious, or it might be less pardonable, was unceasingly at work among the human couples up to decrepitude. And she too frequently hit the fact to doubt her gift of reading into them. Mr. Dacier was plain, and the state of young Mr. Rhodes; and the Scottish gentleman was at least a vehement admirer. But she penetrated the breast of Mr. Thomas Redworth as well, mentally tore his mask of friendship to shreds. He was kind indeed in commissioning her to do the portrait. His desire for it, and his urgency to have the features exactly given, besides the infrequency of his visits of late, when a favoured gentleman was present, were the betraying signs. Deductively, moreover, the lady who inspired the passion in numbers of gentlemen and set herself to win their admiration with her lively play of dialogue, must be coquettish; she could hold them only by coldness. Anecdotes, epigrams, drolleries, do not bubble to the lips of a woman who is under an emotional spell: rather they prove that she has the spell for casting. It suited Mr. Dacier, Miss Paynham thought: it was cruel to Mr. Redworth; at whom, of all her circle, the beautiful woman looked, when speaking to him, sometimes tenderly.

'Beware the silent one of an assembly!' Diana had written. She did not think of her words while Miss Paynham continued mutely sketching. The silent ones, with much conversation around them, have their heads at work, critically perforce; the faster if their hands are occupied; and the point they lean to do is the pivot of their thoughts. Miss Paynham felt for Mr. Redworth.

Diana was unaware of any other critic present than him she sought to enliven, not unsuccessfully, notwithstanding his English objection to the pitch of the converse she led, and a suspicion of effort to support it:—just a doubt, with all her easy voluble run, of the possibility of naturalness in a continuous cleverness. But he signified pleasure, and in pleasing him she was happy: in the knowledge that she dazzled, was her sense of safety. Percy hated scandal; he heard none. He wanted stirring, cheering; in her house he had it. He came daily, and as it was her wish that new themes, new flights of converse, should delight him and show her exhaustless, to preserve her ascendancy, she welcomed him without consulting the world. He was witness of Mr. Hepburn's presentation of a costly China vase, to repair the breach in her array of ornaments, and excuse a visit. Judging by the absence of any blow within, he saw not a sign of coquettry. Some such visit had been anticipated by the prescient woman, so there was no reddening. She brought about an exchange of sentences between him and her furious admirer, sparing either of them a glimpse of which was the sacrifice to the other, amusing them both. Dacier could allow Mr. Hepburn to outsit him; and he left them, proud of his absolute confidence in her.

Page 3312

She was mistaken in imagining that her social vivacity, mixed with comradeship of the active intellect, was the charm which kept Mr. Percy Dacier temperate when he well knew her to distinguish him above her courtiers. Her powers of dazzling kept him tame; they did not stamp her mark on him. He was one of the order of highly polished men, ignorant of women, who are impressed for long terms by temporary flashes, that hold them bound until a fresh impression comes, to confirm or obliterate the preceding. Affairs of the world he could treat competently; he had a head for high politics and the management of men; the feminine half of the world was a confusion and a vexation to his intelligence, characterless; and one woman at last appearing decipherable, he fancied it must be owing to her possession of character, a thing prized the more in women because of his latent doubt of its existence. Character, that was the mark he aimed at; that moved him to homage as neither sparkling wit nor incomparable beauty, nor the unusual combination, did. To be distinguished by a woman of character (beauty and wit for jewellery), was his minor ambition in life, and if Fortune now gratified it, he owned to the flattery. It really seemed by every test that she had the quality. Since the day when he beheld her by the bedside of his dead uncle, and that one on the French sea-sands, and again at Copsley, ghostly white out of her wrestle with death, bleeding holy sweat of brow for her friend, the print of her features had been on him as an index of depth of character, imposing respect and admiration—a sentiment imperilled by her consent to fly with him. Her subsequent reserve until they met—by an accident that the lady at any rate was not responsible for, proved the quality positively. And the nature of her character, at first suspected, vanquished him more, by comparison, than her vivid intellect, which he originally, and still lingeringly, appreciated in condescension, as a singular accomplishment, thrilling at times, now and then assailably feminine. But, after her consent to a proposal that caused him retrospective worldly shudders, and her composed recognition of the madness, a character capable of holding him in some awe was real majesty, and it rose to the clear heights, with her mental attributes for satellites. His tendency to despise women was wholesomely checked by the experience to justify him in saying, Here is a worthy one! She was health to him, as well as trusty counsel. Furthermore, where he respected, he was a governed man, free of the common masculine craze to scale fortresses for the sake of lowering flags. Whilst under his impression of her character, he submitted honourably to the ascendancy of a lady whose conduct suited him and whose preference flattered; whose presence was very refreshing; whose letters were a stimulant. Her letters were really running well-waters, not a lover’s delusion of the luminous mind of his lady. They sparkled in review and

Page 3313

preserved their integrity under critical analysis. The reading of them hurried him in pursuit of her from house to house during the autumn; and as she did not hint at the shadow his coming cast on her, his conscience was easy. Regarding their future, his political anxieties were a mountainous defile, curtaining the outlook. They met at Lockton, where he arrived after a recent consultation with his Chief, of whom, and the murmurs of the Cabinet, he spoke to Diana openly, in some dejection.

'They might see he has been breaking with his party for the last four years,' she said. 'The plunge to be taken is tremendous.'

'But will he? He appears too despondent for a header.'

'We cannot dance on a quaking floor.'

'No; it 's exactly that quake of the floor which gives "much qualms," to me as well,' said Dacier.

'A treble Neptune's power!' she rejoined, for his particular delectation. 'Enough if he hesitates. I forgive him his nausea. He awaits the impetus, and it will reach him, and soon. He will not wait for the mob at his heels, I am certain. A Minister who does that, is a post, and goes down with the first bursting of the dam. He has tried compromise and discovered that it does not appease the Fates; is not even a makeshift-mending at this hour. He is a man of nerves, very sensitively built; as quick—quicker than a woman, I could almost say, to feel the tremble of the air-forerunner of imperative changes.'

Dacier brightened fondly. 'You positively describe him; paint him to the life, without knowing him!'

'I have seen him; and if I paint, whose are the colours?'

'Sometimes I repeat you to him, and I get all the credit,' said Dacier.

'I glow with pride to think of speaking anything that you repeat,' said Diana, and her eyes were proudly lustreful.

Their love was nourished on these mutual flatteries. Thin food for passion! The innocence of it sanctioned the meetings and the appointments to meet. When separated they were interchanging letters, formally worded in the apostrophe and the termination, but throbbingly full: or Diana thought so of Percy's letters, with grateful justice; for his manner of opening his heart in amatory correspondence was to confide important, secret matters, up to which mark she sprang to reply in counsel. He proved his affection by trusting her; his respect by his tempered style: 'A Greenland style of writing,' she had said of an unhappy gentleman's epistolary compositions resembling it;

and now the same official baldness was to her mind Italianly rich; it called forth such volumes.

Flatteries that were thin food for passion appeared the simplest exchanges of courtesy, and her meetings with her lover, judging by the nature of the discourse they held, so, consequent to their joint interest in the great crisis anticipated, as to rouse her indignant surprise and a turn for downright rebellion when the Argus world signified the fact of its having one eye, or more, wide open.

Page 3314

Debit and Credit, too, her buzzing familiars, insisted on an audience at each ear, and at the house-door, on her return to London.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHOWS THE APPROACHES OF THE POLITICAL AND THE DOMESTIC CRISIS IN COMPANY

There was not much talk of Diana between Lady Dunstane and her customary visitor Tom Redworth now. She was shy in speaking of the love-stricken woman, and more was in his mind for thought than for speech. She some times wondered how much he might know, ending with the reflection that little passing around was unknown to him. He had to shut his mind against thought, against all meditation upon Mrs. Warwick; it was based scientifically when speculating and calculating, on the material element—a talisman. Men and women crossing the high seas of life he had found most readable under that illuminating inquiry, as to their means. An inspector of sea worthy ships proceeds in like manner. Whence would the money come? He could not help the bent of his mind; but he could avoid subjecting her to the talismanic touch. The girl at the Dublin Ball, the woman at the fire-grate of The Crossways, both in one were his Diana. Now and then, hearing an ugly whisper, his manful sympathy with the mere woman in her imprisoned liberty, defended her desperately from charges not distinctly formulated within him:—'She's not made of stone.' That was a height of self-abnegation to shake the poor fellow to his roots; but, then, he had no hopes of his own; and he stuck to it. Her choice of a man like Dacier, too, of whom Redworth judged highly, showed nobility. She irradiated the man; but no baseness could be in such an alliance. If allied, they were bound together for good. The tie—supposing a villain world not wrong—was only not the sacred tie because of impediments. The tie!—he deliberated, and said stoutly —No. Men of Redworth's nature go through sharp contests, though the duration of them is short, and the tussle of his worship of this woman with the materialistic turn of his mind was closed by the complete shutting up of the latter under lock and bar; so that a man, very little of an idealist, was able to sustain her in the pure imagination—where she did almost belong to him. She was his, in a sense, because she might have been his—but for an incredible extreme of folly. The dark ring of the eclipse cast by some amazing foolishness round the shining crescent perpetually in secret claimed the whole sphere of her, by what might have been, while admitting her lost to him in fact. To Thomas Redworth's mind the lack of perfect sanity in his conduct at any period of manhood, was so entirely past belief that he flew at the circumstances confirming the charge, and had wrestles with the angel of reality, who did but set him dreaming backward, after flinging him.

Page 3315

He heard at Lady Wathin's that Mrs. Warwick was in town for the winter. 'Mr. Dacier is also in town,' Lady Wathin said, with an acid indication of the needless mention of it. 'We have not seen him.' She invited Redworth to meet a few friends at dinner. 'I think you admire Miss Asper: in my idea a very saint among young women;—and you know what the young women of our day are. She will be present. She is, you are aware, England's greatest heiress. Only yesterday, hearing of that poor man Mr. Warwick's desperate attack of illness—heart!—and of his having no relative or friend to soothe his pillow,—he is lying in absolute loneliness,—she offered to go and nurse him! Of course it could not be done. It is not her place. The beauty of the character of a dear innocent young girl, with every gratification at command, who could make the offer, strikes me as unparalleled. She was perfectly sincere—she is sincerity. She asked at once, Where is he? She wished me to accompany her on a first visit. I saw a tear.'

Redworth had called at Lady Wathin's for information of the state of Mr. Warwick, concerning which a rumour was abroad. No stranger to the vagrant compassionateness of sentimentalists;—rich, idle, conscience-pricked or praise-catching;—he was unmoved by the tale that Miss Asper had proposed to go to Mr. Warwick's sick-bed in the uniform of a Sister of Charity.—'Speaking French!' Lady Wathin exclaimed; and his head rocked, as he said:

'An Englishman would not be likely to know better.'

'She speaks exquisite French—all European languages, Mr. Redworth. She does not pretend to wit. To my thinking, depth of sentiment is a far more feminine accomplishment. It assuredly will be found a greater treasure.'

The modest man (modest in such matters) was led by degrees to fancy himself sounded regarding Miss Asper: a piece of sculpture glacially decorative of the domestic mansion in person, to his thinking; and as to the nature of it—not a Diana, with all her faults!

If Diana had any faults, in a world and a position so heavily against her! He laughed to himself, when alone, at the neatly implied bitter reproach cast on the wife by the forsaken young lady, who proposed to nurse the abandoned husband of the woman bereaving her of the man she loved. Sentimentalists enjoy these tricks, the conceiving or the doing of them—the former mainly, which are cheaper, and equally effective. Miss Asper might be deficient in wit; this was a form of practical wit, occasionally exhibited by creatures acting on their instincts. Warwick he pitied, and he put compulsion on himself to go and see the poor fellow, the subject of so sublime a generosity. Mr. Warwick sat in an arm-chair, his legs out straight on the heels, his jaw dragging hollow cheeks, his hands loosely joined; improving in health, he said. A demure woman of middle age was in attendance. He did not speak of his wife. Three times he said disconnectedly, 'I hear reports,' and his eyelids worked. Redworth talked of general affairs, without those consolatory efforts, useless between men, which are neither medicine nor good honest

water:—he judged by personal feelings. In consequence, he left an invalid the sourer for his visit.

Page 3316

Next day he received a briefly-worded summons from Mrs. Warwick.

Crossing the park on the line to Diana's house, he met Miss Paynham, who grieved to say that Mrs. Warwick could not give her a sitting; and in a still mournfuller tone, imagined he would find her at home, and alone by this time. 'I left no one but Mr. Dacier there,' she observed.

'Mrs. Warwick will be disengaged to-morrow, no doubt,' he said consolingly.

Her head performed the negative. 'They talk politics, and she becomes animated, loses her pose. I will persevere, though I fear I have undertaken a task too much for me.'

'I am deeply indebted to you for the attempt.' Redworth bowed to her and set his face to the Abbey-towers, which wore a different aspect in the smoked grey light since his two minutes of colloquy. He had previously noticed that meetings with Miss Paynham produced a similar effect on him, a not so very impressionable man. And how was it done? She told him nothing he did not know or guess.

Diana was alone. Her manner, after the greeting, seemed feverish. She had not to excuse herself for abruptness when he heard the nature of the subject. Her counsellor and friend was informed, in feminine style, that she had, requested him to call, for the purpose of consulting him with regard to a matter she had decided upon; and it was, the sale of The Crossways. She said that it would have gone to her heart once; she supposed she had lost her affection for the place, or had got the better of her superstitions. She spoke lamely as well as bluntly. The place was hers, she said; her own property. Her husband could not interdict a sale.

Redworth addressed himself to her smothered antagonism. 'Even if he had rights, as they are termed . . . I think you might count on their not being pressed.'

'I have been told of illness.' She tapped her foot on the floor.

'His present state of health is unequal to his ordinary duties.'

'Emma Dunstane is fully supplied with the latest intelligence, Mr. Redworth. You know the source.'

'I mention it simply . . .'

'Yes, yes. What I have to protest is, that in this respect I am free. The Law has me fast, but leaves me its legal view of my small property. I have no authority over me. I can do as I please, in this, without a collision, or the dread of one. It is the married woman's perpetual dread when she ventures a step. Your Law originally presumed her a China-footed animal. And more, I have a claim for maintenance.'

She crimsoned angrily.

Redworth showed a look of pleasure, hard to understand. 'The application would be sufficient, I fancy,' he said.

'It should have been offered.'

'Did you not decline it?'

Page 3317

’I declined to apply for it. I thought—But, Mr. Redworth, another thing, concerning us all: I want very much to hear your ideas of the prospects of the League; because I know you have ideas. The leaders are terrible men; they fascinate me. They appear to move with an army of facts. They are certainly carrying the country. I am obliged to think them sincere. Common agitators would not hold together, as they do. They gather strength each year. If their statistics are not illusory—an army of phantoms instead of one of facts; and they knock at my head without admission, I have to confess; they must win.’

‘Ultimately, it is quite calculable that they will win,’ said Redworth; and he was led to discourse of rates and duties and prohibitive tariffs to a woman surprisingly athirst, curious for every scrap of intelligence relating to the power, organization, and schemes of the League. ’Common sense is the secret of every successful civil agitation,’ he said. ’Rap it unremittingly on crowds of the thickest of human heads, and the response comes at last to sweep all before it. You may reckon that the country will beat the landlords—for that is our question. Is it one of your political themes?’

‘I am not presumptuous to such a degree:—a poor scholar,’ Diana replied. ‘Women striving to lift their heads among men deserve the sarcasm.’

He denied that any sarcasm was intended, and the lesson continued. When she had shaped in her mind some portion of his knowledge of the subject, she reverted casually to her practical business. Would he undertake to try to obtain a purchaser of The Crossways, at the price he might deem reasonable? She left the price entirely to his judgement. And now she had determined to part with the old place, the sooner the better! She said that smiling; and Redworth smiled, outwardly and inwardly. Her talk of her affairs was clearer to him than her curiosity for the mysteries of the League. He gained kind looks besides warm thanks by the promise to seek a purchaser; especially by his avoidance of prying queries. She wanted just this excellent automaton fac-totum; and she referred him to Mr. Braddock for the title-deeds, et caetera—the chirping phrase of ladies happily washing their hands of the mean details of business.

‘How of your last work?’ he asked her.

Serenest equanimity rejoined: ’As I anticipated, it is not popular. The critics are of one mind with the public. You may have noticed, they rarely flower above that rocky surface. *The cantatrice* sings them a false note. My next will probably please them less.’

Her mobile lips and brows shot the faint upper-wreath of a smile hovering. It was designed to display her philosophy.

‘And what is the name of your next?’ said he.

‘I name it *the man of two minds*, if you can allow that to be in nature.’

‘Contra-distinguished from the woman?’

Page 3318

‘Oh! you must first believe the woman to have one.’

‘You are working on it?’

’By fits. And I forgot, Mr. Redworth: I have mislaid my receipts, and must ask you for the address of your wine-merchant;—or, will you? Several dozen of the same wines. I can trust him to be in awe of you, and the good repute of my table depends on his honesty.’

Redworth took the definite order for a large supply of wine.

She gave him her hand: a lost hand, dear to hold, needing to be guided, he feared. For him, it was merely a hand, cut off from the wrist; and he had performed that executive part! A wiser man would now have been the lord of it . . . . So he felt, with his burning wish to protect and cherish the beloved woman, while saying: ’If we find a speedy bidder for The Crossways, you will have to thank our railways.’

‘You!’ said Diana, confident in his ability to do every-thing of the practical kind.

Her ingenuousness tickled him. He missed her comic touches upon men and things, but the fever shown by her manner accounted for it.

As soon as he left her, she was writing to the lover who had an hour previously been hearing her voice; the note of her theme being Party; and how to serve it, when to sacrifice it to the Country. She wrote, carolling bars of the Puritani marches; and such will passion do, that her choice of music was quite in harmony with her theme. The martially-amorous melodies of Italian Opera in those days fostered a passion challenged to intrepidity from the heart of softness; gliding at the same time, and putting warm blood even into dull arithmetical figures which might be important to her lover, her hero fronting battle. She condensed Redworth’s information skilfully, heartily giving it and whatever she had imbibed, as her own, down to the remark: ’Common sense in questions of justice, is a weapon that makes way into human heads and wins the certain majority, if we strike with it incessantly.’ Whether anything she wrote was her own, mattered little: the savour of Percy’s praise, which none could share with her, made it instantly all her own. Besides she wrote to strengthen him; she naturally laid her friends and the world under contribution; and no other sort of writing was possible. Percy had not a common interest in fiction; still less for high comedy. He liked the broad laugh when he deigned to open books of that sort; puns and strong flavours and harlequin surprises; and her work would not admit of them, however great her willingness to force her hand for his amusement: consequently her inventiveness deadened. She had to cease whipping it. ‘My poor old London cabhorse of a pen shall go to grass!’ she sighed, looking to the sale of The Crossways for money; looking no farther.

Page 3319

Those marshalled battalions of Debit and Credit were in hostile order, the weaker simply devoted to fighting for delay, when a winged messenger bearing the form of old Mr. Braddock descended to her with the reconciling news that a hermit bachelor, an acquaintance of Mr. Redworth's—both of whom wore a gloomy hue in her mind immediately—had offered a sum for the purchase of The Crossways. Considering the out-of-the-way district, Mr. Braddock thought it an excellent price to get. She thought the reverse, but confessed that double the sum would not have altered her opinion. Double the sum scarcely counted for the service she required of it for much more than a year. The money was paid shortly after into her Bank, and then she enjoyed the contemptuous felicity of tossing meat to her lions, tigers, wolves, and jackals, who, but for the fortunate intervention, would have been feeding on her. These menagerie beasts of prey were the lady's tradesmen, Debit's hungry-brood. She had a rapid glimpse of a false position in regarding that legitimate band so scornfully: another glimpse likewise of a day to come when they might not be stopped at the door. She was running a race with something; with what? It was unnamed; it ran in a shroud.

At times she surprised her heart violently beating when there had not been a thought to set it in motion. She traced it once to the words, 'next year,' incidentally mentioned. 'Free,' was a word that checked her throbs, as at a question of life or death. Her solitude, excepting the hours of sleep, if then, was a time of irregular breathing. The something unnamed, running beside her, became a dreadful familiar; the race between them past contemplation for ghastliness. 'But this is your Law!' she cried to the world, while blinding her eyes against a peep of the shrouded features.

Singularly, she had but to abandon hope, and the shadowy figure vanished, the tragic race was ended. How to live and think, and not to hope: the slave of passion had this problem before her.

Other tasks were supportable, though one seemed hard at moments and was not passive; it attacked her. The men and women of her circle derisively, unanimously, disbelieved in an innocence that forfeited reputation. Women were complimentarily assumed to be not such gaping idiots. And as the weeks advanced, a change came over Percy. The gentleman had grown restless at covert congratulations, hollow to his knowledge, however much caressing vanity, and therefore secretly a wound to it. One day, after sitting silent, he bluntly proposed to break 'this foolish trifling'; just in his old manner, though not so honourably; not very definitely either. Her hand was taken.

'I feared that dumbness!' Diana said, letting her hand go, but keeping her composure. 'My friend Percy, I am not a lion-tamer, and if you are of those animals, we break the chapter. Plainly you think that where there appears to be a choice of fools, the woman is distinctly designed for the person. Drop my hand, or I shall repeat the fable of the Goose with the Golden Eggs.'

Page 3320

‘Fables are applicable only in the school-room,’ said he; and he ventured on ‘Tony!’

’I vowed an oath to my dear Emma—as good as to the heavens! and that of itself would stay me from being insane again.’ She released herself. ’Signor Percy, you teach me to suspect you of having an idle wish to pluck your plaything to pieces:—to boast of it? Ah! my friend, I fancied I was of more value to you. You must come less often; even to not at all, if you are one of those idols with feet of clay which leave the print of their steps in a room; or fall and crush the silly idolizer.’

‘But surely you know . . .’ said he. ‘We can’t have to wait long.’ He looked full of hopeful meanings.

‘A reason . . . !’ She kept down her breath. A longdrawn sigh followed, through parted lips. She had a sensation of horror. ’And I cannot propose to nurse him—Emma will not hear of it,’ she said. ’I dare not. Hypocrite to that extreme? Oh, no! But I must hear nothing. As it is, I am haunted. Now let this pass. Tony me no Tonies; I am stony to such whimpering business now we are in the van of the struggle. All round us it sounds like war. Last night I had Mr. Tonans dining here;—he wished to meet you; and you must have a private meeting with Mr. Whitmonby: he will be useful; others as well. You are wrong in affecting contempt of the Press. It perches you on a rock; but the swimmer in politics knows what draws the tides. Your own people, your set, your class, are a drag to you, like inherited superstitions to the wakening brain. The greater the glory! For you see the lead you take? You are saving your class. They should lead, and will, if they prove worthy in the crisis. Their curious error is to believe in the stability of a monumental position.’

‘Perfectly true!’ cried Dacier; and the next minute, heated by approbation, was begging for her hand earnestly. She refused it.

‘But you say things that catch me!’ he pleaded. ’Remember, it was nearly mine. It soon will be mine. I heard yesterday from Lady Wathin . . . well, if it pains you!’

‘Speak on,’ said Diana, resigned to her thirsty ears.

‘He is not expected to last through the autumn.’

‘The calculation is hers?’

‘Not exactly:—judging from the symptoms.’

Diana flashed a fiery eye into Dacier’s, and rose. She was past danger of melting, with her imagination darkened by the funeral image; but she craved solitude, and had to act the callous, to dismiss him.

’Good. Enough for the day. Now leave me, if you please. When we meet again, stifle that raven’s croak. I am not a “Sister of Charity,” but neither am I a vulture hovering for the horse in the desert to die. A poor simile!—when it is my own and not another’s breath that I want. Nothing in nature, only gruesome German stories will fetch comparisons for the yoke of this Law of yours. It seems the nightmare dream following an ogre’s supper.’

Page 3321

She was not acting the shiver of her frame.

To-morrow was open to him, and prospect of better fortune, so he departed, after squeezing the hand she ceremoniously extended.

But her woman's intuition warned her that she had not maintained the sovereign impression which was her security. And hope had become a flame in her bosom that would no longer take the common extinguisher. The race she ran was with a shrouded figure no more, but with the figure of the shroud; she had to summon paroxysms of a pity hard to feel, images of sickness, helplessness, the vaults, the last human silence for the stilling of her passionate heart. And when this was partly effected, the question, Am I going to live? renewed her tragical struggle. Who was it under the vaults, in the shroud, between the planks? and with human sensibility to swell the horror! Passion whispered of a vaster sorrow needed for herself; and the hope conjuring those frightful complexities was needed to soothe her. She pitied the man, but she was an enamoured woman. Often of late she had been sharply stung, relaxed as well, by the observations of Danvers assisting at her toilette. Had she beauty and charm, beauty and rich health in the young summer blooming of her days?—and all doomed to waste? No insurgency of words arose in denunciation of the wrong done to her nature. An undefined heavy feeling of wrong there was, just perceptive enough to let her know, without gravely shaming, that one or another must be slain for peace to come; for it is the case in which the world of the Laws overloading her is pitiless to women, deaf past ear-trumpets, past intercession; detesting and reviling them for a feeble human cry, and for one apparent step of revolt piling the pelted stones on them. It will not discriminate shades of hue, it massacres all the shadowed. They are honoured, after a fashion, at a certain elevation. Descending from it, and purely to breathe common air (thus in her mind), they are scourged and outcast. And alas! the very pleading for them excites a sort of ridicule in their advocate. How? She was utterly, even desperately, nay personally, earnest, and her humour closed her lips; though comical views of the scourged and outcast coming from the opposite party—the huge bully world—she would not have tolerated. Diana raged at a prevailing strength on the part of that huge bully world, which seemed really to embrace the atmosphere. Emma had said: 'The rules of Christian Society are a blessed Government for us women. We owe it so much that there is not a brick of the fabric we should not prop.' Emma's talk of obedience to the Laws, being Laws, was repeated by the rebel, with an involuntary unphrased comparison of the vessel in dock and the vessel at sea.

When Dacier next called to see Mrs. Warwick, he heard that she had gone to Copsley for a couple of weeks. The lesson was emphasized by her not writing:—and was it the tricky sex, or the splendid character of the woman, which dealt him this punishment? Knowing how much Diana forfeited for him, he was moved to some enthusiasm, despite his inclination to be hurt.

Page 3322

She, on her return to London, gained a considerable increase of knowledge as to her position in the eye of the world; and unlike the result of her meditations derived from the clamouring tradesmen, whom she could excuse, she was neither illuminated nor cautioned by that dubious look; she conscientiously revolted. Lady Pennon hinted a word for her Government. 'A good deal of what you so capitally call "Green tea talk" is going on, my dear.' Diana replied, without pretending to misunderstand.

'Gossip is a beast of prey that does not wait for the death of the creature it devours. They are welcome to my shadow, if the liberty I claim casts one, and it feeds them.' To which the old lady rejoined: 'Oh! I am with you through thick and thin. I presented you at Court, and I stand by you. Only, walk carefully. Women have to walk with a train. You are too famous not to have your troops of watchers.'

'But I mean to prove,' said Diana, 'that a woman can walk with her train independent of the common reserves and artifices.'

'Not on highways, my dear!'

Diana, praising the speaker, referred the whole truth in that to the material element of her metaphor.

She was more astonished by Whitmonby's candid chiding; but with him she could fence, and men are easily diverted. She had sent for him, to bring him and Percy Dacier together to a conference. Unaware of the project, he took the opportunity of their privacy to speak of the great station open to her in London being imperilled; and he spoke of 'tongues,' and ahem! A very little would have induced him to fill that empty vocable with a name.

She had to pardon the critic in him for an unpleasant review of her hapless *cantatrice*; and as a means of evasion, she mentioned the poor book and her slaughter of the heroine, that he had complained of.

'I killed her; I could not let her live. You were unjust in accusing the authoress of heartlessness.'

'If I did, I retract,' said he. 'She steers too evidently from the centre of the vessel. She has the organ in excess.'

'Proof that it is not squandered.'

'The point concerns direction.'

'Have I made so bad a choice of my friends?'

’It is the common error of the sprightly to suppose that in parrying a thrust they blind our eyes.’

‘The world sees always what it desires to see, Mr. Whitmonby.’

’The world, my dear Mrs. Warwick, is a blundering machine upon its own affairs, but a cruel sleuth-hound to rouse in pursuit.’

‘So now you have me chased by sight and scent. And if I take wing?’

’Shots! volleys!—You are lawful game. The choice you have made of your friends, should oblige you to think of them.’

‘I imagine I do. Have I offended any, or one?’

’I will not say that. You know the commotion in a French kitchen when the guests of the house declined a particular dish furnished them by command. The cook and his crew were loyal to their master, but, for the love of their Art, they sent him notice. It is ill serving a mad sovereign.’

Page 3323

Diana bowed to the compact little apologue.

'I will tell you another story, traditional in our family from my great-grandmother, a Spanish woman,' she said. 'A cavalier serenaded his mistress, and rascal mercenaries fell upon him before he could draw sword. He battered his guitar on their pates till the lattice opened with a cry, and startled them to flight. "Thrice blessed and beloved!" he called to her above, in reference to the noise, "it was merely a diversion of the accompaniment." Now there was loyal service to a sovereign!'

'You are certainly an angel!' exclaimed Whitmonby. 'I swallow the story, and leave it to digestion to discover the appositeness. Whatever tuneful instrument one of your friends possesses shall solace your slumbers or batter the pate of your enemy. But discourage the habitual serenader.'

'The musician you must mean is due here now, by appointment to meet you,' said Diana, and set him momentarily agape with the name of Mr. Percy Dacier.

That was the origin of the alliance between the young statesman and a newspaper editor. Whitmonby, accepting proposals which suited him, quitted the house, after an hour of political talk, no longer inclined to hint at the 'habitual serenader,' but very ready to fall foul of those who did, as he proved when the numbers buzzed openly. Times were masculine; the excitement on the eve of so great a crisis, and Diana's comprehension of it and fine heading cry, put that weak matter aside. Moreover, he was taught to suppose himself as welcome a guest as Dacier; and the cook could stand criticism; the wines—wonderful to say of a lady's table—were trusty; the talk, on the political evenings and the social and anecdotal supper-nights, ran always in perfect accord with his ideal of the conversational orchestra: an improvized harmony, unmatched elsewhere. She did not, he considered, so perfectly assort her dinner-guests; that was her one fault. She had therefore to strain her adroitness to cover their deficiencies and fuse them. But what other woman could have done it! She led superbly. If an Irishman was present, she kept him from overflooding, managed to extract just the flavour of him, the smack of salt. She did even, at Whitmonby's table, on a red-letter Sunday evening, in concert with him and the Dean, bring down that cataract, the Bodleian, to the levels of interchanging dialogue by seasonable touches, inimitably done, and never done before. Sullivan Smith, unbridled in the middle of dinner, was docile to her. 'Irishmen;' she said, pleading on their behalf to Whitmonby, who pronounced the race too raw for an Olympian feast, 'are invaluable if you hang them up to smoke and cure'; and the master of social converse could not deny that they were responsive to her magic. The supper-nights were mainly devoted to Percy's friends. He brought as many as he pleased, and as often as it pleased him; and it was her pride to provide Cleopatra banquets for the lover whose anxieties were soothed by them, and to whom she sacrificed her name willingly in return for a generosity that certain chance whispers of her heart elevated to the pitch of measureless.

Page 3324

So they wore through the Session and the Autumn, clouds heavier, the League drumming, the cry of Ireland ‘ominously Banshee,’ as she wrote to Emma.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH THERE IS A TASTE OF A LITTLE DINNER AND AN AFTERTASTE

‘But Tony lives!’ Emma Dunstane cried, on her solitary height, with the full accent of envy marking the verb; and when she wrote enviously to her friend of the life among bright intelligences, and of talk worth hearing, it was a happy signification that health, frail though it might be, had grown importunate for some of the play of life. Diana sent her word to name her day, and she would have her choicest to meet her dearest. They were in the early days of December, not the best of times for improvized gatherings. Emma wanted, however, to taste them as they cropped; she was also, owing to her long isolation, timid at a notion of encountering the pick of the London world, prepared by Tony to behold ’a wonder more than worthy of them,’ as her friend unadvisedly wrote. That was why she came unexpectedly, and for a mixture of reasons, went to an hotel. Fatality designed it so. She was reproached, but she said: ’You have to write or you entertain at night; I should be a clog and fret you. My hotel is Maitland’s; excellent; I believe I am to lie on the pillow where a crowned head reposed! You will perceive that I am proud as well as comfortable. And I would rather meet your usual set of guests.’

’The reason why I have been entertaining at night is, that Percy is harassed and requires enlivening,’ said Diana. ’He brings his friends. My house is open to them, if it amuses him. What the world says, is past a thought. I owe him too much.’

Emma murmured that the world would soon be pacified.

Diana shook her head. ’The poor man is better; able to go about his affairs; and I am honestly relieved. It lays a spectre. As for me, I do not look ahead. I serve as a kind of secretary to Percy. I labour at making abstracts by day, and at night preside at my suppertable. You would think it monotonous; no incident varies the course we run. I have no time to ask whether it is happiness. It seems to bear a resemblance.’

Emma replied: ’He may be everything you tell me. He should not have chosen the last night of the Opera to go to your box and sit beside you till the fall of the curtain. The presence at the Opera of a man notoriously indifferent to music was enough in itself.’

Diana smiled with languor. ’You heard of that? But the Opera was The Puritani, my favourite. And he saw me sitting in Lady Pennon’s box alone. We were compromised neck-deep already. I can kiss you, my own Emmy, till I die; ’but what the world says, is what the wind says. Besides he has his hopes.... If I am blackened ever so thickly, he

can make me white. Dear me! if the world knew that he comes here almost nightly! It will; and does it matter? I am his in soul; the rest is waste-paper—a half-printed sheet.'

Page 3325

‘Provided he is worthy of such devotion!’

’He is absolute worthiness. He is the prince of men: I dread to say, mine! for fear. But Emmy will not judge him to-morrow by contrast with more voluble talkers.—I can do anything but read poetry now. That kills me!—See him through me. In nature, character, intellect, he has no rival. Whenever I despond—and it comes now and then—I rebuke myself with this one admonition.

Simply to have known him! Admit that for a woman to find one who is worthy among the opposite creatures, is a happy termination of her quest, and in some sort dismisses her to the Shades, an uncomplaining ferry-bird. If my end were at hand I should have no cause to lament it. We women miss life only when we have to confess we have never met the man to reverence.’

Emma had to hear a very great deal of Mr. Percy. Diana’s comparison of herself to ‘the busy bee at a window-pane,’ was more in her old manner; and her friend would have hearkened to the marvels of the gentle man less unrefreshed, had it not appeared to her that her Tony gave in excess for what was given in return. She hinted her view. . .

‘It is expected of our sex,’ Diana said.

The work of busy bee at a window-pane had at any rate not spoilt her beauty, though she had voluntarily, profitlessly, become this man’s drudge, and her sprightly fancy, her ready humour and darting look all round in discussion, were rather deadened.

But the loss was not perceptible in the circle of her guests. Present at a dinner little indicating the last, were Whitmonby, in lively trim for shuffling, dealing, cutting, trumping or drawing trumps; Westlake, polishing epigrams under his eyelids; Henry Wilmers, who timed an anecdote to strike as the passing hour without freezing the current; Sullivan Smith, smoked, cured and ready to flavour; Percy Dacier, pleasant listener, measured speaker; and young Arthur Rhodes, the neophyte of the hostess’s training; of whom she had said to Emma, ’The dear boy very kindly serves to frank an unlicenced widow’; and whom she prompted and made her utmost of, with her natural tact. These she mixed and leavened. The talk was on high levels and low; an enchantment to Emma Dunstane: now a story; a question opening new routes, sharp sketches of known personages; a paradox shot by laughter as soon as uttered; and all so smoothly; not a shadow of the dominant holder-forth or a momentary prospect of dead flats; the mellow ring of appositeness being the concordant note of deliveries running linked as they flashed, and a tolerant philosophy of the sage in the world recurrently the keynote.

Page 3326

Once only had Diana to protect her nurseling. He cited a funny line from a recent popular volume of verse, in perfect A propos, looking at Sullivan Smith; who replied, that the poets had become too many for him, and he read none now. Diana said: 'There are many Alexanders, but Alexander of Macedon is not dwarfed by the number.' She gave him an opening for a smarter reply, but he lost it in a comment—against Whitmonby's cardinal rule: 'The neatest turn of the wrist that ever swung a hero to crack a crown!' and he bowed to young Rhodes: 'I 'll read your versicler to-morrow morning early.' The latter expressed a fear that the hour was too critical for poetry.

'I have taken the dose at a very early hour,' said Whitmonby, to bring conversation to the flow again, 'and it effaced the critical mind completely.'

'But did not silence the critical nose,' observed Westlake.

Wilmers named the owner of the longest nose in Europe.

'Potentially, indeed a critic!' said Diana.

'Nights beside it must be fearful, and good matter for a divorce, if the poor dear lady could hale it to the doors of the Vatican!' Sullivan Smith exclaimed. 'But there's character in noses.'

'Calculable by inches?' Dacier asked.

'More than in any other feature,' said Lady Dunstane. 'The Riffords are all prodigiously gifted and amusing: suspendens omnia naso. It should be prayed for in families.'

'Totum ut to faciant, Fabulle, nasum,' rejoined Whitmonby. 'Lady Isabella was reading the tale of the German princess, who had a sentinel stationed some hundred yards away to whisk off the flies, and she owned to me that her hand instinctively travelled upward.'

'Candour is the best concealment, when one has to carry a saddle of absurdity,' said Diana. 'Touchstone's "poor thing, but mine own," is godlike in its enveloping fold.'

'The most comforting sermon ever delivered on property in poverty,' said Arthur Rhodes.

Westlake assented. 'His choice of Audrey strikes me as an exhibition of the sure instinct for pasture of the philosophical jester in a forest.'

'With nature's woman, if he can find her, the urban seems equally at home,' said Lady Dunstane.

‘Baron Pawle is an example,’ added Whitmonby. ’His cook is a pattern wife to him. I heard him say at table that she was responsible for all except the wines. “I wouldn’t have them on my conscience, with a Judge!” my lady retorted.’

‘When poor Madame de Jacquieres was dying,’ said Wilmers, ’her confessor sat by her bedside, prepared for his ministrations. “Pour commencer, mon ami, jamais je n’ai fait rien hors nature."’

Lord Wadaster had uttered something tolerably similar: ’I am a sinner, and in good society.’ Sir Abraham Hartiston, a minor satellite of the Regent, diversified this: ‘I am a sinner, and go to good society.’ Madame la Comtesse de la Roche-Aigle, the cause of many deaths, declared it unwomanly to fear anything save ‘les revenants.’ Yet the countess could say the pretty thing: ‘Foot on a flower, then think of me!’

Page 3327

‘Sentimentality puts up infant hands for absolution,’ said Diana.

‘But tell me,’ Lady Dunstane inquired generally, ’why men are so much happier than women in laughing at their spouses?’

They are humaner, was one dictum; they are more frivolous, ironically another.

’It warrants them for blowing the bugle-horn of masculine superiority night and morning from the castle-walls,’ Diana said.

’I should imagine it is for joy of heart that they still have cause to laugh!’ said Westlake.

On the other hand, are women really pained by having to laugh at their lords? Curious little speeches flying about the great world, affirmed the contrary. But the fair speakers were chartered libertines, and their laugh admittedly had a biting acid. The parasite is concerned in the majesty of the tree.

‘We have entered Botany Bay,’ Diana said to Emma; who answered: ’A metaphor is the Deus ex machine, of an argument’; and Whitmonby, to lighten a shadow of heaviness, related allusively an anecdote of the Law Courts. Sullivan Smith begged permission to ‘black cap’ it with Judge FitzGerald’s sentence upon a convicted criminal: ’Your plot was perfect but for One above.’ Dacier cited an execrable impromptu line of the Chief of the Opposition in Parliament. The Premier, it was remarked, played him like an angler his fish on the hook; or say, Mr. Serjeant Rufus his witness in the box.

‘Or a French journalist an English missionary,’ said Westlake; and as the instance was recent it was relished.

The talk of Premiers offered Whitmonby occasion for a flight to the Court of Vienna and Kaunitz. Wilmers told a droll story of Lord Busby’s missing the Embassy there. Westlake furnished a sample of the tranquil sententiousness of Busby’s brother Robert during a stormy debate in the House of Commons.

‘I remember,’ Dacier was reminded, ’hearing him say, when the House resembled a Chartist riot, “Let us stand aside and meditate on Life. If Youth could know, in the season of its reaping of the Pleasures, that it is but sowing Doctor’s bills!"’

Latterly a malady had supervened, and Bob Busby had retired from the universal to the special;—his mysterious case.

’Assure him, that is endemic. He may be cured of his desire for the exposition of it,’ said Lady Dunstane.

Westlake chimed with her: ’Yes, the charm in discoursing of one’s case is over when the individual appears no longer at odds with Providence.’

‘But then we lose our Tragedy,’ said Whitmonby.

‘Our Comedy too,’ added Diana. ’We must consent to be Busbied for the sake of the instructive recreations.’

‘A curious idea, though,’ said Sullivan Smith, ’that some of the grand instructive figures were in their day colossal bores!’

‘So you see the marvel of the poet’s craft at last?’ Diana smiled on him, and he vowed: ‘I’ll read nothing else for a month!’ Young Rhodes bade him beware of a deluge in proclaiming it.

Page 3328

They rose from table at ten, with the satisfaction of knowing that they had not argued, had not wrangled, had never stagnated, and were digestingly refreshed; as it should be among grown members of the civilized world, who mean to practise philosophy, making the hour of the feast a balanced recreation and a regeneration of body and mind.

‘Evenings like these are worth a pilgrimage,’ Emma said, embracing Tony outside the drawing-room door. ’I am so glad I came: and if I am strong enough, invite me again in the Spring. To-morrow early I start for Copsley, to escape this London air. I shall hope to have you there soon.’

She was pleased by hearing Tony ask her whether she did not think that Arthur Rhodes had borne himself well; for it breathed of her simply friendly soul.

The gentlemen followed Lady Dunstane in a troop, Dacier yielding perforce the last adieu to young Rhodes.

Five minutes later Diana was in her dressing-room, where she wrote at night, on the rare occasions now when she was left free for composition. Beginning to dwell on *the man of two minds*, she glanced at the woman likewise divided, if not similarly; and she sat brooding. She did not accuse her marriage of being the first fatal step: her error was the step into Society without the wherewithal to support her position there. Girls of her kind, airing their wings above the sphere of their birth, are cryingly adventuresses. As adventuresses they are treated.

Vain to be shrewish with the world! Rather let us turn and scold our nature for irreflectively rushing to the cream and honey! Had she subsisted on her small income in a country cottage, this task of writing would have been holiday. Or better, if, as she preached to Mary Paynham, she had apprenticed herself to some productive craft. The simplicity of the life of labour looked beautiful. What will not look beautiful contrasted with the fly in the web? She had chosen to be one of the flies of life.

Instead of running to composition, her mind was eloquent with a sermon to Arthur Rhodes, in Redworth’s vein; more sympathetically, of course. ’For I am not one of the lecturing Mammonites!’ she could say.

She was far from that. Penitentially, in the thick of her disdain of the arrogant money-Betters, she pulled out a drawer where her bank-book lay, and observed it contemplatively; jotting down a reflection before the dread book of facts was opened: ’Gaze on the moral path you should have taken, you are asked for courage to commit a sanctioned suicide, by walking back to it stripped—a skeleton self.’ She sighed forth: ’But I have no courage: I never had!’ The book revealed its tale in a small pencilled computation of the bank-clerk’s; on the peccant side. Credit presented many pages blanks. She seemed to have withdrawn from the struggle with such a partner.

It signified an immediate appeal to the usurers, unless the publisher could be persuaded, with three parts of the book in his hands, to come to the rescue. Work! roared old Debit, the sinner turned slavedriver.

Page 3329

Diana smoothed her wrists, compressing her lips not to laugh at the simulation of an attitude of combat. She took up her pen.

And strange to think, she could have flowed away at once on the stuff that Danvers delighted to read!—wicked princes, rogue noblemen, titled wantons, daisy and lily innocents, traitorous marriages, murders, a gallows dangling a corpse dotted by a moon, and a woman bowed beneath. She could have written, with the certainty that in the upper and the middle as well as in the lower classes of the country, there would be a multitude to read that stuff, so cordially, despite the gaps between them, are they one in their literary tastes. And why should they not read it? Her present mood was a craving for excitement; for incident, wild action, the primitive machinery of our species; any amount of theatrical heroics, pathos, and clown-gabble. A panorama of scenes came sweeping round her.

She was, however, harnessed to a different kind of vehicle, and had to drag it. The sound of the house-door shutting, imagined perhaps, was a fugitive distraction. Now to animate The Man of Two Minds!

He is courting, but he is burdened with the task of tasks. He has an ideal of womanhood and of the union of couples: a delicacy extreme as his attachment: and he must induce the lady to school herself to his ideal, not allowing her to suspect him less devoted to her person; while she, an exacting idol, will drink any quantity of idealization as long as he starts it from a full acceptance of her acknowledged qualities. Diana could once have tripped the scene along airily. She stared at the opening sentence, a heavy bit of moralized manufacture, fit to yoke beside that on her view of her bank-book.

‘It has come to this—I have no head,’ she cried.

And is our public likely to muster the slightest taste for comic analysis that does not tumble to farce? The doubt reduced her whole *Ms*. to a leaden weight, composed for sinking. Percy’s addiction to burlesque was a further hindrance, for she did not perceive how her comedy could be strained to gratify it.

There was a knock, and Danvers entered. ’You have apparently a liking for late hours,’ observed her mistress. ‘I told you to go to bed.’ ’It is Mr. Dacier,’ said Danvers. ‘He wishes to see me?’ ’Yes, ma’am. He apologized for disturbing you.’ ‘He must have some good reason.’ What could it be! Diana’s glass approved her appearance. She pressed the black swell of hair above her temples, rather amazed, curious, inclined to a beating of the heart.

CHAPTER XXXI

A *chapter containing great political news and therewith an intrusion of the love-god*

Dacier was pacing about the drawing-room, as in a place too narrow for him.

Diana stood at the door. 'Have you forgotten to tell me anything I ought to know?'

Page 3330

He came up to her and shut the door softly behind her, holding her hand. 'You are near it. I returned . . But tell me first:—You were slightly under a shadow this evening, dejected.'

'Did I show it?'

She was growing a little suspicious, but this cunning touch of lover-like interest dispersed the shade.

'To me you did.'

'It was unpardonable to let it be seen.'

'No one else could have observed it.'

Her woman's heart was thrilled; for she had concealed the dejection from Emma.

'It was nothing,' she said; 'a knot in the book I am writing. We poor authors are worried now and then. But you?'

His face rippled by degrees brightly, to excite a reflection in hers.

'Shall I tune you with good news? I think it will excuse me for coming back.'

'Very good news?'

'Brave news, as far as it goes.'

'Then it concerns you!'

'Me, you, the country.'

'Oh! do I guess?' cried Diana. 'But speak, pray; I burn.'

'What am I to have for telling it?'

'Put no price. You know my heart. I guess—or fancy. It relates to your Chief?'

Dacier smiled in a way to show the lock without the key; and she was insensibly drawn nearer to him, speculating on the smile.

'Try again,' said he, keenly appreciating the blindness to his motive of her studious dark eyes, and her open-lipped breathing.

'Percy! I must be right.'

‘Well, you are. He has decided!’

‘Oh! that is the bravest possible. When did you hear?’

‘He informed me of his final decision this afternoon.’

’And you were charged with the secret all the evening, and betrayed not a sign! I compliment the diplomatic statesman. But when will it be public?’

‘He calls Parliament together the first week of next month.’

‘The proposal is—? No more compromises!’

‘Total!’

Diana clapped hands; and her aspect of enthusiasm was intoxicating. ’He is a wise man and a gallant Minister! And while you were reading me through, I was blind to you,’ she added meltingly.

‘I have not made too much of it?’ said he.

‘Indeed you have not.’

She was radiant with her dark lightnings, yet visibly subject to him under the spell of the news he had artfully lengthened out to excite and overbalance her:—and her enthusiasm was all pointed to his share in the altered situation, as he well knew and was flattered in knowing.

’So Tony is no longer dejected? I thought I could freshen you and get my excuse.’

’Oh! a high wind will make a dead leaf fly like a bird. I soar. Now I do feel proud. I have longed for it—to have you leading the country: not tugged at like a waggon with a treble team uphill. We two are a month in advance of all England. You stand by him?—only to hear it, for I am sure of it!’

Page 3331

‘We stand or fall together.’

Her glowing look doated on the faithful lieutenant.

’And if the henchman is my hero, I am but a waiting-woman. But I must admire his leader.’

‘Tony!’

‘Ah! no,’ she joined her hands, wondering whither her armed majesty had fled; ’no softness! no payments! Flatter me by letting me think you came to a head not a silly woman’s heart, with one name on it, as it has not to betray. I have been frank; you need no proofs . . .’ The supplicating hands left her figure an easy prey to the storm, and were crushed in a knot on her bosom. She could only shrink. ’Ah! Percy . . you undo my praise of you—my pride in receiving you.’

They were speechless perforce.

‘You see, Tony, my dearest, I am flesh and blood after all.’

‘You drive me to be ice and door-bolts!’

Her eyes broke over him reproachfully.

‘It is not so much to grant,’ he murmured.

‘It changes everything between us.’

‘Not me. It binds me the faster.’

‘It makes me a loathsome hypocrite.’

‘But, Tony! is it so much?’

‘Not if you value it low.’

‘But how long do you keep me in this rag-puppet’s state of suspension?’

‘Patience.’

‘Dangling and swinging day and night!’

’The rag-puppet shall be animated and repaid if I have life. I wish to respect my hero. Have a little mercy. Our day will come: perhaps as wonderfully as this wonderful news. My friend, drop your hands. Have you forgotten who I am? I want to think, Percy!’

‘But you are mine.’

‘You are abasing your own.’

‘No, by heaven!’

’Worse, dear friend; you are lowering yourself to the woman who loves you.’

‘You must imagine me superhuman.’

‘I worship you—or did.’

’Be reasonable, Tony. What harm! Surely a trifle of recompense? Just to let me feel I live! You own you love me. Then I am your lover.’

’My dear friend Percy, when I have consented to be your paramour, this kind of treatment of me will not want apologies.’

The plain speaking from the wound he dealt her was effective with a gentleman who would never have enjoyed his privileges had he been of a nature unsusceptible to her distinct wish and meaning.

He sighed. ’You know how my family bother me. The woman I want, the only woman I could marry, I can’t have.’

‘You have her in soul.’

‘Body and soul, it must be! I believe you were made without fire.’

’Perhaps. The element is omitted with some of us happily, some think. Now we can converse. There seems to be a measurement of distances required before men and women have a chance with their brains:—or before a man will understand that he can be advised and seconded. When will the Cabinet be consulted?’

‘Oh, a few days. Promise me . . .’

Page 3332

‘Any honourable promise!’

‘You will not keep me waiting longer than the end of the Session?’

‘Probably there will be an appeal to the country.’

‘In any case, promise me: have some compassion.’

’Ah, the compassion! You do not choose your words, Percy, or forget who is the speaker.’

’It is Tony who forgets the time she has kept her lover dangling. Promise, and I will wait.’

‘You hurt my hand, sir.’

‘I could crack the knuckles. Promise!’

‘Come to me to-morrow.’

’To-morrow you are in your armour-triple brass! All creation cries out for now. We are mounted on barbs and you talk of ambling.’

‘Arthur Rhodes might have spoken that.’

‘Rhodes!’ he shook off the name in disgust. ’Pet him as much as you like; don’t . . .’ he was unable to phrase his objection.

She cooled him further with eulogies of the chevaleresque manner of speaking which young Mr. Rhodes could assume; till for very wrath of blood—not jealousy: he had none of any man, with her; and not passion; the little he had was a fitful gust—he punished her coldness by taking what hastily could be gathered.

Her shape was a pained submission; and she thought: Where is the woman who ever knows a man!—as women do think when one of their artifices of evasion with a lover, or the trick of imposingness, has apparently been subduing him. But the pain was less than previously, for she was now mistress of herself, fearing no abysses.

Dacier released her quickly, saying: ’If I come tomorrow, shall I have the promise?’

She answered: ‘Be sure I shall not lie.’

‘Why not let me have it before I go?’

‘My friend, to tell you the truth, you have utterly distracted me.’

‘Forgive me if I did hurt your hand.’

‘The hand? You might strike it off.’

‘I can’t be other than a mortal lover, Tony. There’s the fact.’

’No; the fault is mine when I am degraded. I trust you: there’s the error.’

The trial for Dacier was the sight of her quick-lifting; bosom under the mask of cold language: an attraction and repulsion in union; a delirium to any lover impelled to trample on weak defences. But the evident pain he inflicted moved his pity, which helped to restore his conception of the beauty of her character. She stood so nobly meek. And she was never prudish, only self-respecting. Although the great news he imparted had roused an ardent thirst for holiday and a dash out of harness, and he could hardly check it, he yielded her the lead.

‘Trust me you may,’ he said. ’But you know—we are one. The world has given you to me, me to you. Why should we be asunder? There’s no reason in it.’

She replied: ’But still I wish to burn a little incense in honour of myself, or else I cannot live. It is the truth. You make Death my truer friend, and at this moment I would willingly go out. You would respect me more dead than alive. I could better pardon you too.’

Page 3333

He pleaded for the red mouth's pardon, remotely irritated by the suspicion that she swayed him overmuch: and he had deserved the small benevolences and donations of love, crumbs and heavenly dews!

'Not a word of pardon,' said Diana. 'I shall never count an iota against you "in the dark backward and abysm of Time." This news is great, and I have sunk beneath it. Come tomorrow. Then we will speak upon whatever you can prove rational. The hour is getting late.'

Dacier took a draught of her dark beauty with the crimson he had kindled over the cheeks. Her lips were firmly closed, her eyes grave; dry, but seeming to waver tearfully in their heavy fulness. He could not doubt her love of him; and although chafing at the idea that she swayed him absurdly—beyond the credible in his world of wag-tongues—-he resumed his natural soberness, as a garment, not very uneasily fitting: whence it ensued—for so are we influenced by the garb we put on us—that his manly sentiment of revolt in being condemned to play second, was repressed by the refreshment breathed on him from her lofty character, the pure jewel proffered to his, inward ownership.

'Adieu for the night,' he said, and she smiled. He pressed for a pressure of her hand. She brightened her smile instead, and said only: 'Good night, Percy.'

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEREIN WE BEHOLD A GIDDY TURN AT THE SPECTRAL CROSSWAYS

Danvers accompanied Mr. Dacier to the house-door. Climbing the stairs, she found her mistress in the drawing-room still.

'You must be cold, ma'am,' she said, glancing at the fire-grate.

'Is it a frost?' said Diana.

'It's midnight and midwinter, ma'am.'

'Has it struck midnight?'

The mantel-piece clock said five minutes past.

'You had better go to bed, Danvers, or you will lose your bloom. Stop; you are a faithful soul. Great things are happening and I am agitated. Mr. Dacier has told me news. He came back purposely.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Danvers. 'He had a great deal to tell?'

‘Well, he had.’ Diana coloured at the first tentative impertinence she had heard from her maid. ’What is the secret of you, Danvers? What attaches you to me?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know, ma’am. I’m romantic.’

‘And you think me a romantic object?’

’I’m sure I can’t say, ma’am. I’d rather serve you than any other lady; and I wish you was happy.’

‘Do you suppose I am unhappy?’

’I’m sure—but if I may speak, ma’am: so handsome and clever a lady! and young! I can’t bear to see it.’

’Tush, you silly woman. You read your melting tales, and imagine. I must go and write for money: it is my profession. And I haven’t an idea in my head. This news disturbs me. Ruin if I don’t write; so I must.—I can’t!’

Diana beheld the ruin. She clasped the great news for succour. Great indeed: and known but to her of all the outer world. She was ahead of all—ahead of Mr. Tonans!

Page 3334

The visionary figure of Mr. Tonans petrified by the great news, drinking it, and confessing her ahead of him in the race for secrets, arose toweringly. She had not ever seen the Editor in his den at midnight. With the rumble of his machinery about him, and fresh matter arriving and flying into the printing-press, it must be like being in the very furnace-hissing of Events: an Olympian Council held in Vulcan's smithy. Consider the bringing to the Jove there news of such magnitude as to stupefy him! He, too, who had admonished her rather sneeringly for staleness in her information. But this news, great though it was, and throbbing like a heart plucked out of a breathing body, throbbed but for a brief term, a day or two; after which, great though it was, immense, it relapsed into a common organ, a possession of the multitude, merely historically curious.

'You are not afraid of the streets at night?' Diana said to her maid, as they were going upstairs.

'Not when we're driving, ma'am,' was the answer.

The man of two minds faced his creatrix in the dressing-room, still delivering that most ponderous of sentences—a smothering pillow!

I have mistaken my vocation, thought Diana: I am certainly the flattest proser who ever penned a line.

She sent Dangers into the bedroom on a trifling errand, unable to bear the woman's proximity, and oddly unwilling to dismiss her.

She pressed her hands on her eyelids. Would Percy have humiliated her so if he had respected her? He took advantage of the sudden loss of her habitual queenly initiative at the wonderful news to debase and stain their intimacy. The lover's behaviour was judged by her sensations: she felt humiliated, plucked violently from the throne where she had long been sitting securely, very proudly. That was at an end. If she was to be better than the loathsomest of hypocrites, she must deny him his admission to the house. And then what was her life!

Something that was pressing her low, she knew not how, and left it unquestioned, incited her to exaggerate the indignity her pride had suffered. She was a dethroned woman. Deeper within, an unmasked actress, she said. Oh, she forgave him! But clearly he took her for the same as other women consenting to receive a privileged visitor. And sounding herself to the soul, was she so magnificently better? Her face flamed. She hugged her arms at her breast to quiet the beating, and dropped them when she surprised herself embracing the memory. He had brought political news, and treated her as—name the thing! Not designedly, it might be: her position invited it. 'The world had given her to him.' The world is always a prophet of the mire; but the world is no longer an utterly mistaken world. She shook before it.

She asked herself why Percy or the world should think highly of an adventuress, who was a denounced wife, a wretched author, and on the verge of bankruptcy. She was an adventuress. When she held The Crossways she had at least a bit of solid footing: now gone. An adventuress without an idea in her head: witness her dullard, The Man of Two Minds, at his work of sermonizing his mistress.

Page 3335

The tremendous pressure upon our consciousness of the material cause, when we find ourselves cast among the breakers of moral difficulties and endeavour to elude that mudvisaged monster, chiefly by feigning unconsciousness, was an experience of Diana's, in the crisis to which she was wrought. Her wits were too acute, her nature too direct, to permit of a lengthened confusion. She laid the scourge on her flesh smartly. —I gave him these privileges because I am weak as the weakest, base as my enemies proclaim me. I covered my woman's vile weakness with an air of intellectual serenity that he, choosing his moment, tore away, exposing me to myself, as well as to him, the most ordinary of reptiles. I kept up a costly household for the sole purpose of seeing him and having him near me. Hence this bitter need of money!—Either it must be money or disgrace. Money would assist her quietly to amend and complete her work. Yes, and this want of money, in a review of the last two years, was the material cause of her recklessness. It was, her revived and uprising pudency declared, the principal; the only cause. Mere want of money.

And she had a secret worth thousands! The secret of a day, no more: anybody's secret after some four and twenty hours.

She smiled at the fancied elongation and stare of the features of Mr. Tonans in his editorial midnight den.

What if he knew it and could cap it with something novel and stranger? Hardly. But it was an inciting suggestion.

She began to tremble as a lightning-flash made visible her fortunes recovered, disgrace averted, hours of peace for composition stretching before her: a summer afternoon's vista.

It seemed a duel between herself and Mr. Tonans, and she sure of her triumph—Diana victrix!

'Danvers!' she called.

'Is it to undress, ma'am?' said the maid, entering to her.

'You are not afraid of the streets, you tell me. I have to go down to the City, I think. It is urgent. Yes, I must go. If I were to impart the news to you, your head would be a tolling bell for a month.'

'You will take a cab, ma'am.'

'We must walk out to find one. I must go, though I should have to go on foot. Quick with bonnet and shawl; muffle up warmly. We have never been out so late: but does it matter? You're a brave soul, I'm sure, and you shall have your fee.'

‘I don’t care for money, ma’am.’

‘When we get home you shall kiss me.’

Danvers clothed her mistress in furs and rich wrappings: Not paid for! was Diana’s desperate thought, and a wrong one; but she had to seem the precipitated bankrupt and succeeded. She was near being it. The boiling of her secret carried her through the streets rapidly and unobservantly except of such small things as the glow of the lights on the pavements and the hushed cognizance of the houses, in silence to a thoroughfare where a willing cabman was met. The destination named, he nodded alertly he had driven gentlemen there at night from the House of Commons, he said.

Page 3336

‘Our Parliament is now sitting, and you drive ladies,’ Diana replied.

‘I hope I know one, never mind the hour,’ said he of the capes.

He was bidden to drive rapidly.

‘Complexion a tulip: you do not often see a pale cabman,’ she remarked to Danvers, who began laughing, as she always expected to do on an excursion with her mistress.

’Do you remember, ma’am, the cabman taking us to the coach, when you thought of going to the continent?’

‘And I went to The Crossways? I have forgotten him.’

’He declared you was so beautiful a lady he would drive you to the end of England for nothing.’

’It must have been when I was paying him. Put it out of your mind, Danvers, that there are individual cabmen. They are the painted flowers of our metropolitan thoroughfares, and we gather them in rows.’

‘They have their feelings, ma’am.’

‘Brandied feelings are not pathetic to me.’

‘I like to think kindly of them,’ Danvers remarked, in reproof of her inhumanity; adding: ‘They may overturn us!’ at which Diana laughed. Her eyes were drawn to a brawl of women and men in the street. ’Ah! that miserable sight!’ she cried. ‘It is the everlasting nightmare of London.’

Danvers humped, femininely injured by the notice of it. She wondered her mistress should deign to.

Rolling on between the blind and darkened houses, Diana transferred her sensations to them, and in a fit of the nerves imagined them beholding a funeral convoy without followers.

They came in view of the domed cathedral, hearing, in a pause of the wheels, the bell of the hour. ‘Faster—faster! my dear man,’ Diana murmured, and they entered a small still square of many lighted windows.

‘This must be where the morrow is manufactured,’ she said. ’Tell the man to wait.—Or rather it’s the mirror of yesterday: we have to look backward to see forward in life.’

She talked her cool philosophy to mask her excitement from herself. Her card, marked: 'Imperative-two minutes,' was taken up to Mr. Tonans. They ascended to the editorial ante-room. Doors opened and shut, hasty feet traversed the corridors, a dull hum in dumbness told of mighty business at work. Diana received the summons to the mighty head of the establishment. Danvers was left to speculate. She heard the voice of Mr. Tonans: 'Not more than two!' This was not a place for compliments. Men passed her, hither and yonder, cursorily noticing the presence of a woman. She lost, very strangely to her, the sense of her sex and became an object—a disregarded object. Things of more importance were about. Her feminine self-esteem was troubled; all idea of attractiveness expired. Here was manifestly a spot where women had dropped from the secondary to the cancelled stage of their extraordinary career in a world either blowing them aloft like soap-bubbles or quietly shelving them as supernumeraries.

Page 3337

A gentleman—sweet vision!—shot by to the editor's door, without even looking cursorily. He knocked. Mr. Tonans appeared and took him by the arm, dictating at a great rate; perceived Danvers, frowned at the female, and requested him to wait in the room, which the gentleman did, not once casting eye upon a woman. At last her mistress returned to her, escorted so far by Mr. Tonans, and he refreshingly bent his back to bow over her hand: so we have the satisfaction of knowing that we are not such poor creatures after all! Suffering in person, Danvers was revived by the little show of homage to her sex.

They descended the stairs.

'You are not an Editor of a paper, but you may boast that you have been near the nest of one,' Diana said, when they resumed their seats in the cab. She breathed deeply from time to time, as if under a weight, or relieved of it, but she seemed animated, and she dropped now and again a funny observation of the kind that tickled Danvers and caused the maid to boast of her everywhere as better than a Play.

At home, Danvers busied her hands to supply her mistress a cup of refreshing tea and a plate of biscuits.

Diana had stunned herself with the strange weight of the expedition, and had not a thought. In spite of tea at that hour, she slept soundly through the remainder of the night, dreamlessly till late into the morning.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EXHIBITS THE SPRINGING OF A MINE IN A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

The powers of harmony would seem to be tried to their shrewdest pitch when Politics and Love are planted together in a human breast. This apparently opposite couple can nevertheless chant a very sweet accord, as was shown by Dacier on his homeward walk from Diana's house. Let Love lead, the God will make music of any chamber-comrade. He was able to think of affairs of State while feeling the satisfied thirst of the lover whose pride, irritated by confidential wild eulogies of the beautiful woman, had recently clamoured for proofs of his commandership. The impression she stamped on him at Copsley remained, but it could not occupy the foreground for ever. He did not object to play second to her sprightly wits in converse, if he had some warm testimony to his mastery over her blood. For the world had given her to him, enthusiastic friends had congratulated him: she had exalted him for true knightliness; and he considered the proofs well earned, though he did not value them low. They were little by comparison. They lighted, instead of staining, her unparalleled high character.

Page 3338

She loved him. Full surely did she love him, or such a woman would never have consented to brave the world; once in their project of flight, and next, even more endearingly when contemplated, in the sacrifice of her good name; not omitting that fervent memory of her pained submission, but a palpitating submission, to his caress. She was in his arms again at the thought of it. He had melted her, and won the confession of her senses by a surprise, and he owned that never had woman been so vigilantly self-guarded or so watchful to keep her lover amused and aloof. Such a woman deserved long service. But then the long service deserved its time of harvest. Her surging look of reproach in submission pointed to the golden time, and as he was a man of honour, pledged to her for life, he had no remorse, and no scruple in determining to exact her dated promise, on this occasion deliberately. She was the woman to be his wife; she was his mind's mate: they had hung apart in deference to mere scruples too long. During the fierce battle of the Session she would be his help, his fountain of counsel; and she would be the rosy gauze-veiled more than cold helper and adviser, the being which would spur her womanly intelligence to acknowledge, on this occasion deliberately, the wisdom of the step. They had been so close to it! She might call it madness then: now it was wisdom. Each had complete experience of the other, and each vowed the step must be taken. As to the secret communicated, he exulted in the pardonable cunning of the impulse turning him back to her house after the guests had gone, and the dexterous play of his bait on the line, tempting her to guess and quit her queenly guard. Though it had not been distinctly schemed, the review of it in that light added to the enjoyment. It had been dimly and richly conjectured as a hoped result. Small favours from her were really worth, thrice worth, the utmost from other women. They tasted the sweeter for the winning of them artfully—an honourable thing in love. Nature, rewarding the lover's ingenuity and enterprise, inspires him with old Greek notions of right and wrong: and love is indeed a fluid mercurial realm, continually shifting the principles of rectitude and larceny. As long as he means nobly, what is there to condemn him? Not she in her heart. She was the presiding divinity.

And she, his Tony, that splendid Diana, was the woman the world abused! Whom will it not abuse?

The slough she would have to plunge in before he could make her his own with the world's consent, was already up to her throat. She must, and without further hesitation, be steeped, that he might drag her out, washed of the imputed defilement, and radiant, as she was in character. Reflection now said this; not impulse. Her words rang through him. At every meeting she said things to confound his estimate of the wits of women, or be remembered for some spirited ring they had: A high wind will make a dead leaf fly like a bird. He murmured it and flew with her. She quickened a vein of imagination that gave him entrance to a strangely brilliant sphere, above his own, where, she sustaining, he too could soar; and he did, scarce conscious of walking home, undressing, falling asleep.

Page 3339

The act of waking was an instantaneous recovery of his emotional rapture of the overnight; nor was it a bar to graver considerations. His Chief had gone down to a house in the country; his personal business was to see and sound the followers of their party—after another sight of his Tony. She would be sure to counsel sagaciously; she always did. She had a marvellous intuition of the natures of the men he worked with, solely from his chance descriptions of them; it was as though he started the bird and she transfixed it. And she should not have matter to rule her smooth brows: that he swore to. She should sway him as she pleased, be respected after her prescribed manner. The promise must be exacted; nothing besides, promise.—You see, Tony, you cannot be less than Tony to me now, he addressed the gentle phantom of her. Let me have your word, and I am your servant till the Session ends.—Tony blushes her swarthy crimson: Diana, fluttering, rebukes her; but Diana is the appeasable Goddess; Tony is the woman, and she loves him. The glorious Goddess need not cut them adrift; they can show her a book of honest pages.

Dacier could truthfully say he had worshipped, done knightly service to the beloved woman, homage to the aureole encircling her. Those friends of his, covertly congratulating him on her preference, doubtless thought him more privileged than he was; but they did not know Diana; and they were welcome, if they would only believe, to the knowledge that he was at the feet of this most sovereign woman. He despised the particular Satyr-world which, whatever the nature or station of the woman, crowns the desecrator, and bestows the title of Fool on the worshipper. He could have answered veraciously that she had kept him from folly.

Nevertheless the term to service must come. In the assurance of the approaching term he stood braced against a blowing world; happy as men are when their muscles are strung for a prize they pluck with the energy and aim of their whole force.

Letters and morning papers were laid for him to peruse in his dressing-room. He read his letters before the bath. Not much public news was expected at the present season. While dressing, he turned over the sheets of Whitmonby's journal. Dull comments on stale things. Foreign news. Home news, with the leaders on them, identically dull. Behold the effect of Journalism: a witty man, sparkling overnight, gets into his pulpit and proses; because he must say something, and he really knows nothing.

Journalists have an excessive overestimate of their influence. They cannot, as Diana said, comparing them with men on the Parliamentary platform, cannot feel they are aboard the big vessel; they can only strive to raise a breeze, or find one to swell; and they cannot measure the stoutness or the greatness of the good ship England. Dacier's personal ambition was inferior to his desire to extend and strengthen his England. Parliament was the field, Government the office. How many conversations had passed between him and Diana on that patriotic dream! She had often filled his drooping sails; he owned it proudly:—and while the world, both the hoofed and the rectilinear portions,

were biting at her character! Had he fretted her self-respect? He blamed himself, but a devoted service must have its term.

Page 3340

The paper of Mr. Tonans was reserved for perusal at breakfast. He reserved it because Tonans was an opponent, tricksy and surprising now and then, amusing too; unlikely to afford him serious reflections. The recent endeavours of his journal to whip the Government-team to a right-about-face were annoying, preposterous. Dacier had admitted to Diana that Tonans merited the thanks of the country during 'the discreditable Railway mania, when his articles had a fine exhortative and prophetic twang, and had done marked good. Otherwise, as regarded the Ministry, the veering gusts of Tonans were objectionable: he 'raised the breeze' wantonly as well as disagreeably. Any one can whip up the populace if he has the instruments; and Tonans frequently intruded on the Ministry's prerogative to govern. The journalist was bidding against the statesman. But such is the condition of a rapidly Radicalizing country! We must take it as it is.

With a complacent, What now, Dacier fixed his indifferent eyes on the first column of the leaders. He read, and his eyes grew horny. He jerked back at each sentence, electrified, staring. The article was shorter than usual. Total Repeal was named; the precise date when the Minister intended calling Parliament together to propose it. The 'Total Repeal' might be guess-work—an Editor's bold stroke; but the details, the date, were significant of positive information. The Minister's definite and immediate instructions were exactly stated.

Where could the fellow have got hold of that? Dacier asked the blank ceiling.

He frowned at vacant corners of the room in an effort to conjure some speculation indicative of the source.

Had his Chief confided the secret to another and a traitor? Had they been overheard in his library when the project determined on was put in plain speech?

The answer was no, impossible, to each question.

He glanced at Diana. She? But it was past midnight when he left her. And she would never have betrayed him, never, never. To imagine it a moment was an injury to her.

Where else could he look? It had been specially mentioned in the communication as a secret by his Chief, who trusted him and no others. Up to the consultation with the Cabinet, it was a thing to be guarded like life itself. Not to a soul except Diana would Dacier have breathed syllable of any secret—and one of this weight!

He ran down the article again. There were the facts; undeniable facts; and they detonated with audible roaring and rounding echoes of them over England. How did they come there? As well inquire how man came on the, face of the earth.

He had to wipe his forehead perpetually. Think as he would in exaltation of Diana to shelter himself, he was the accused. He might not be the guilty, but he had opened his

mouth; and though it was to her only, and she, as Dunstane had sworn, true as steel, he could not escape condemnation. He had virtually betrayed his master. Diana would never betray her lover, but the thing was in the air as soon as uttered: and off to the printing-press! Dacier's grotesque fancy under annoyance pictured a stream of small printer's devils in flight from his babbling lips.

Page 3341

He consumed bits of breakfast, with a sour confession that a newspaper-article had hit him at last, and stunningly.

Hat and coat were called for. The state of aimlessness in hot perplexity demands a show of action. Whither to go first was as obscure as what to do. Diana said of the Englishman's hat and coat, that she supposed they were to make him a walking presentment of the house he had shut up behind him. A shot of the eye at the glass confirmed the likeness, but with a ruefully wry-faced repudiation of it internally:—Not so shut up! the reverse of that-a common babbler.

However, there was no doubt of Diana. First he would call on her. The pleasantest dose in perturbations of the kind is instinctively taken first. She would console, perhaps direct him to guess how the secret had leaked. But so suddenly, immediately! It was inexplicable.

Sudden and immediate consequences were experienced. On the steps of his house his way was blocked by the arrival of Mr. Quintin Manx, who jumped out of a cab, bellowing interjections and interrogations in a breath. Was there anything in that article? He had read it at breakfast, and it had choked him. Dacier was due at a house and could not wait: he said, rather sharply, he was not responsible for newspaper articles. Quintin Manx, a senior gentleman and junior landowner, vowed that no Minister intending to sell the country should treat him as a sheep. The shepherd might go; he would not carry his flock with him. But was there a twinkle of probability in the story? . . . that article! Dacier was unable to inform him; he was very hurried, had to keep an appointment.

'If I let you go, will you come and lunch with me at two?' said Quintin.

To get rid of him, Dacier nodded and agreed.

'Two o'clock, mind!' was bawled at his heels as he walked off with his long stride, unceremoniously leaving the pursy gentleman of sixty to settle with his cabman far to the rear.

CHAPTER XXXIV

In which it is darkly seen how the criminal's judge may be love's criminal

When we are losing balance on a precipice we do not think much of the thing we have clutched for support. Our balance is restored and we have not fallen; that is the comfortable reflection: we stand as others do, and we will for the future be warned to avoid the dizzy stations which cry for resources beyond a common equilibrium, and where a slip precipitates us to ruin.

When, further, it is a woman planted in a burning blush, having to idealize her feminine weakness, that she may not rebuke herself for grovelling, the mean material acts by which she sustains a tottering position are speedily swallowed in the one pervading flame. She sees but an ashen curl of the path she has traversed to safety, if anything.

Page 3342

Knowing her lover was to come in the morning, Diana's thoughts dwelt wholly upon the way to tell him, as tenderly as possible without danger to herself, that her time for entertaining was over until she had finished her book; indefinitely, therefore. The apprehension of his complaining pricked the memory that she had something to forgive. He had sunk her in her own esteem by compelling her to see her woman's softness. But how high above all other men her experience of him could place him notwithstanding! He had bowed to the figure of herself, dearer than herself, that she set before him: and it was a true figure to the world; a too fictitious to any but the most knightly of lovers. She forgave; and a shudder seized her.—Snake! she rebuked the delicious run of fire through her veins; for she was not like the idol women of imperishable type, who are never for a twinkle the prey of the blood: statues created by man's common desire to impress upon the sex his possessing pattern of them as domestic decorations.

When she entered the room to Dacier and they touched hands, she rejoiced in her coolness, without any other feeling or perception active. Not to be unkind, not too kind: this was her task. She waited for the passage of commonplaces.

'You slept well, Percy?'

'Yes; and you?'

'I don't think I even dreamed.'

They sat. She noticed the cloud on him and waited for his allusion to it, anxious concerning him simply.

Dacier flung the hair off his temples. Words of Titanic formation were hurling in his head at journals and journalists. He muttered his disgust of them.

'Is there anything to annoy you in the papers to-day?' she asked, and thought how handsome his face was in anger.

The paper of Mr. Tonans was named by him. 'You have not seen it?

'I have not opened it yet.'

He sprang up. 'The truth is, those fellows can now afford to buy right and left, corrupt every soul alive! There must have been a spy at the keyhole. I'm pretty certain—I could swear it was not breathed to any ear but mine; and there it is this morning in black and white.'

'What is?' cried Diana, turning to him on her chair.

'The thing I told you last night.'

Her lips worked, as if to spell the thing. ‘Printed, do you say?’ she rose.

’Printed. In a leading article, loud as a trumpet; a hue and cry running from end to end of the country. And my Chief has already had the satisfaction of seeing the secret he confided to me yesterday roared in all the thoroughfares this morning. They’ve got the facts: his decision to propose it, and the date—the whole of it! But who could have betrayed it?’

For the first time since her midnight expedition she felt a sensation of the full weight of the deed. She heard thunder.

She tried to disperse the growing burden by an inward summons to contempt of the journalistic profession, but nothing would come. She tried to minimize it, and her brain succumbed. Her views of the deed last night and now throttled reason in two contending clutches. The enormity swelled its dimensions, taking shape, and pointing magnetically at her. She stood absolutely, amazedly, bare before it.

Page 3343

‘Is it of such very great importance?’ she said, like one supplicating him to lessen it.

’A secret of State? If you ask whether it is of great importance to me, relatively it is of course. Nothing greater. Personally my conscience is clear. I never mentioned it—-couldn’t have mentioned it—to any one but you. I’m not the man to blab secrets. He spoke to me because he knew he could trust me. To tell you the truth, I’m brought to a dead stop. I can’t make a guess.

I’m certain, from what he said, that he trusted me only with it: perfectly certain. I know him well. He was in his library, speaking in his usual conversational tone, deliberately, nor overloud. He stated that it was a secret between us.’

‘Will it affect him?’

’This article? Why, naturally it will. You ask strange questions. A Minister coming to a determination like that! It affects him vitally. The members of the Cabinet are not so devoted . . . . It affects us all—the whole Party; may split it to pieces! There’s no reckoning the upset right and left. If it were false, it could be refuted; we could despise it as a trick of journalism. It’s true. There’s the mischief. Tonans did not happen to call here last night?—absurd! I left later than twelve.’

‘No, but let me hear,’ Diana said hurriedly, for the sake of uttering the veracious negative and to slur it over. ‘Let me hear . . .’ She could not muster an idea.

Her delicious thrilling voice was a comfort to him. He lifted his breast high and thumped it, trying to smile. ’After all, it’s pleasant being with you, Tony. Give me your hand—you may: I ’m bothered—confounded by this morning surprise. It was like walking against the muzzle of a loaded cannon suddenly unmasked. One can’t fathom the mischief it will do. And I shall be suspected, and can’t quite protest myself the spotless innocent. Not even to my heart’s mistress! to the wife of the bosom! I suppose I’m no Roman. You won’t give me your hand? Tony, you might, seeing I am rather . . .’

A rush of scalding tears flooded her eyes.

‘Don’t touch me,’ she said, and forced her sight to look straight at him through the fiery shower. ‘I have done positive mischief?’

‘You, my dear Tony?’ He doated on her face. ’I don’t blame you, I blame myself. These things should never be breathed. Once in the air, the devil has hold of them. Don’t take it so much to heart. The thing’s bad enough to bear as it is. Tears! Let me have the hand. I came, on my honour, with the most honest intention to submit to your orders: but if I see you weeping in sympathy!’

‘Oh! for heaven’s sake,’ she caught her hands away from him, ’don’t be generous. Whip me with scorpions. And don’t touch me,’ cried Diana. ’Do you understand? You did not

name it as a secret. I did not imagine it to be a secret of immense, immediate importance.'

'But—what?' shouted Dacier, stiffening.

Page 3344

He wanted her positive meaning, as she perceived, having hoped that it was generally taken and current, and the shock to him over.

‘I had . . . I had not a suspicion of doing harm, Percy.’

‘But what harm have you done? No riddles!’

His features gave sign of the break in their common ground, the widening gulf.

’I went . . . it was a curious giddiness: I can’t account for it. I thought . . .’

‘Went? You went where?’

’Last night. I would speak intelligibly: my mind has gone. Ah! you look. It is not so bad as my feeling.’

‘But where did you go last night? What!—to Tonans?’

She drooped her head: she saw the track of her route cleaving the darkness in a demoniacal zig-zag and herself in demon’s grip.

‘Yes,’ she confronted him. ‘I went to Mr. Tonans.’

‘Why?’

‘I went to him—’

‘You went alone?’

‘I took my maid.’

‘Well?’

‘It was late when you left me . . .’

‘Speak plainly!’

‘I am trying: I will tell you all.’

‘At once, if you please.’

’I went to him—why? There is no accounting for it. He sneered constantly at my stale information.’

‘You gave him constant information?’

’No: in our ordinary talk. He railed at me for being “out of it.” I must be childish: I went to show him—oh! my vanity! I think I must have been possessed.’

She watched the hardening of her lover’s eyes. They penetrated, and through them she read herself insufferably.

But it was with hesitation still that he said: ‘Then you betrayed me?’

‘Percy! I had not a suspicion of mischief.’

‘You went straight to this man?’

‘Not thinking . . .’

‘You sold me to a journalist!’

’I thought it was a secret of a day. I don’t think you—no, you did not tell me to keep it secret. A word from you would have been enough. I was in extremity.’

Dacier threw his hands up and broke away. He had an impulse to dash from the room, to get a breath of different air. He stood at the window, observing tradesmen’s carts, housemaids, blank doors, dogs, a beggar fifer. Her last words recurred to him. He turned: ’You were in extremity, you said. What is the meaning of that? What extremity?’

Her large dark eyes flashed powerlessly; her shape appeared to have narrowed; her tongue, too, was a feeble penitent.

‘You ask a creature to recall her acts of insanity.’

‘There must be some signification in your words, I suppose.’

’I will tell you as clearly as I can. You have the right to be my judge. I was in extremity —that is, I saw no means . . . I could not write: it was ruin coming.’

‘Ah?—you took payment for playing spy?’

’I fancied I could retrieve . . . Now I see the folly, the baseness. I was blind.’

Page 3345

‘Then you sold me to a journalist for money?’

The intolerable scourge fetched a stifled scream from her and drove her pacing, but there was no escape; she returned to meet it.

The room was a cage to both of them, and every word of either was a sting.

’Percy, I did not imagine he would use it—make use of it as he has done.’

‘Not? And when he paid for it?’

‘I fancied it would be merely of general service—if any.’

‘Distributed; I see: not leading to the exposure of the communicant!’

‘You are harsh; but I would not have you milder.’

The meekness of such a mischief-doer was revolting and called for the lash.

’Do me the favour to name the sum. I am curious to learn what my imbecility was counted worth.’

‘No sum was named.’

‘Have I been bought for a song?’

‘It was a suggestion—no definite . . . nothing stipulated.’

‘You were to receive money!’

’Leave me a bit of veiling! No, you shall behold me the thing I am. Listen . . . I was poor . . .’

‘You might have applied to me.’

’For money! That I could not do:

‘Better than betraying me, believe me.’

’I had no thought of betraying. I hope I could have died rather than consciously betray.’

‘Money! My whole fortune was at your, disposal.’

’I was beset with debts, unable to write, and, last night when you left me, abject. It seemed to me that you disrespected me . . .’

‘Last night!’ Dacier cried with lashing emphasis.

’It is evident to me that I have the reptile in me, Percy. Or else I am subject to lose my reason. I went . . . I went like a bullet: I cannot describe it; I was mad. I need a strong arm, I want help. I am given to think that I do my best and can be independent; I break down. I went blindly—now I see it—for the chance of recovering my position, as the gambler casts; and he wins or loses. With me it is the soul that is lost. No exact sum was named; thousands were hinted.’

‘You are hardly practical on points of business.’

‘I was insane.’

‘I think you said you slept well after it,’ Dacier remarked.

’I had so little the idea of having done evilly, that I slept without a dream.’

He shrugged:—the consciences of women are such smooth deeps, or running shallows.

‘I have often wondered how your newspaper men got their information,’ he said, and muttered: ‘Money-women!’ adding: ’Idiots to prime them! And I one of the leaky vessels! Well, we learn. I have been rather astonished at times of late at the scraps of secret knowledge displayed by Tonans. If he flourishes his thousands! The wonder is, he doesn’t corrupt the Ministers’ wives. Perhaps he does. Marriage will become a danger-sign to Parliamentary members. Foreign women do these tricks . . . women of a well-known stamp. It is now a full year, I think, since I began to speak to you of secret matters—and congratulated myself, I recollect, on your thirst for them.’

Page 3346

’Percy, if you suspect that I have uttered one word before last night, you are wrong. I cannot paint my temptation or my loss of sense last night. Previously I was blameless. I thirsted, yes; but in the hope of helping you.’

He looked at her. She perceived how glitteringly loveless his eyes had grown. It was her punishment; and though the enamoured woman’s heart protested it excessive, she accepted it.

‘I can never trust you again,’ he said.

‘I fear you will not,’ she replied.

His coming back to her after the departure of the guests last night shone on him in splendid colours of single-minded loverlike devotion. ’I came to speak to my own heart. I thought it would give you pleasure; thought I could trust you utterly. I had not the slightest conception I was imperilling my honour . . . !’

He stopped. Her bloodless fixed features revealed an intensity of anguish that checked him. Only her mouth, a little open for the sharp breath, appeared dumbly beseeching. Her large eyes met his like steel to steel, as of one who would die fronting the weapon.

He strangled a loathsome inclination to admire.

‘So good bye,’ he said.

She moved her lips.

He said no more. In half a minute he was gone.

To her it was the plucking of life out of her breast.

She pressed her hands where heart had been. The pallor and cold of death took her body.

CHAPTER XXXV

Reveals how the true heroine of romance comes finally to her, *time of triumph*

The shutting of her house-door closed for Dacier that woman’s history in connection with himself. He set his mind on the consequences of the act of folly—the trusting a secret to a woman. All were possibly not so bad: none should be trusted.

The air of the street fanned him agreeably as he revolved the horrible project of confession to the man who had put faith in him. Particulars might be asked. She would be unnamed, but an imagination of the effect of naming her placarded a notorious woman in fresh paint: two members of the same family her victims!

And last night, no later than last night, he had swung round at this very corner of the street to give her the fullest proof of his affection. He beheld a dupe trotting into a carefully-laid pitfall. She had him by the generosity of his confidence in her. Moreover, the recollection of her recent feeble phrasing, when she stood convicted of the treachery, when a really clever woman would have developed her resources, led him to doubt her being so finely gifted. She was just clever enough to hoodwink. He attributed the dupery to a trick of imposing the idea of her virtue upon men. Attracted by her good looks and sparkle, they entered the circle of her charm, became delightfully

Page 3347

intimate, suffered a rebuff, and were from that time prepared to serve her purpose. How many other wretched dupes had she dangling? He spied at Westlake, spied at Redworth, at old Lord Larrian, at Lord Dannisburgh, at Arthur Rhodes, dozens. Old and young were alike to her if she saw an end to be gained by keeping them hooked. Tonans too, and Whitmonby. Newspaper editors were especially serviceable. Perhaps 'a young Minister of State' held the foremost rank in that respect: if completely duped and squeezeable, he produced more substantial stuff.

The background of ice in Dacier's composition was brought to the front by his righteous contempt of her treachery. No explanation of it would have appeased him. She was guilty, and he condemned her. She stood condemned by all the evil likely to ensue from her misdeed. Scarcely had he left her house last night when she was away to betray him!—He shook her from him without a pang. Crediting her with the one merit she had —that of not imploring for mercy—he the more easily shook her off. Treacherous, she had not proved theatrical. So there was no fuss in putting out her light, and it was done. He was justified by the brute facts. Honourable, courteous, kindly gentleman, highly civilized, an excellent citizen and a patriot, he was icy at an outrage to his principles, and in the dominion of Love a sultan of the bow-string and chopper period, sovereignly endowed to stretch a finger for the scimitared Mesrour to make the erring woman head and trunk with one blow: and away with those remnants! This internally he did. Enough that the brute facts justified him.

St. James's park was crossed, and the grass of the Green park, to avoid inquisitive friends. He was obliged to walk; exercise, action of any sort, was imperative, and but for some engagement he would have gone to his fencing-rooms for a bout with the master. He remembered his engagement and grew doubly embittered. He had absurdly pledged himself to lunch with Quintin Manx; that was, to pretend to eat while submitting to be questioned by a political dullard strong on his present right to overhaul and rail at his superiors. The house was one of a block along the North-Western line of Hyde park. He kicked at the subjection to go there, but a promise was binding, though he gave it when stunned. He could have silenced Mr. Manx with the posing interrogation: Why have I so long consented to put myself at the mercy of a bore? For him, he could not answer it, though Manx, as leader of the Shipping interest, was influential. The man had to be endured, like other doses in politics.

Dacier did not once think of the great ship-owner's niece till Miss Constance Asper stepped into her drawing-room to welcome him. She was an image of repose to his mind. The calm pure outline of her white features refreshed him as the Alps the Londoner newly alighted at Berne; smoke, wrangle, the wrestling city's wickedness, behind him.

Page 3348

‘My uncle is very disturbed,’ she said. ’Is the news—if I am not very indiscreet in inquiring?’

‘I have a practice of never paying attention to newspaper articles,’ Dacier replied.

‘I am only affected by living with one who does,’ Miss Asper observed, and the lofty isolation of her head above politics gave her a moral attractiveness in addition to physical beauty. Her water-colour sketches were on her uncle’s walls: the beautiful in nature claimed and absorbed her. She dressed with a pretty rigour, a lovely simplicity, picturesque of the nunnery. She looked indeed a high-born young lady-abbess.

‘It’s a dusty game for ladies,’ Dacier said, abhorring the women defiled by it.

And when one thinks of the desire of men to worship women, there is a pathos in a man’s discovery of the fair young creature undefiled by any interest in public affairs, virginal amid her bower’s environments.

The angelical beauty of a virgin mind and person captivated him, by contrast. His natural taste was to admire it, shunning the lures and tangles of the women on high seas, notably the married: who, by the way, contrive to ensnare us through wonderment at a cleverness caught from their traffic with the masculine world: often—if we did but know!—a parrot-repetition of the last male visitor’s remarks. But that which the fair maiden speaks, though it may be simple, is her own.

She too is her own: or vowed but to one. She is on all sides impressive in purity. The world worships her as its perfect pearl: and we are brought refreshfully to acknowledge that the world is right.

By contrast, the white radiation of Innocence distinguished Constance Asper celestially. As he was well aware, she had long preferred him—the reserved among many pleading pressing suitors. Her steady faithfulness had fed on the poorest crumbs.

He ventured to express the hope that she was well.

‘Yes,’ she answered, with eyelids lifted softly to thank him for his concern in so humble a person.

‘You look a little pale,’ he said.

She coloured like a sea-water shell. ’I am inclined to paleness by nature.’

Her uncle disturbed them. Lunch was ready. He apologized for the absence of Mrs. Markland, a maternal aunt of Constance, who kept house for them. Quintin Manx fell upon the meats, and then upon the Minister. Dacier found himself happily surprised by the accession of an appetite. He mentioned it, to escape from the worrying of his host,

as unusual with him at midday: and Miss Asper, supporting him in that effort, said benevolently: 'Gentlemen should eat; they have so many fatigues and troubles.' She herself did not like to be seen eating in public. Her lips opened to the morsels, as with a bird's bill, though with none of the pecking eagerness we complacently observe in poultry.

'But now, I say, positively, how about that article?' said Quintin.

Page 3349

Dacier visibly winced, and Constance immediately said ’Oh! spare us politics, dear uncle.’

Her intercession was without avail, but by contrast with the woman implicated in the horrible article, it was a carol of the seraphs.

‘Come, you can say whether there’s anything in it,’ Dacier’s host pushed him.

‘I should not say it if I could,’ he replied.

The mild sweetness of Miss Asper’s look encouraged him.

He was touched to the quick by hearing her say: ’You ask for Cabinet secrets, uncle. All secrets are holy, but secrets of State are under a seal next to divine.’

Next to divine! She was the mouthpiece of his ruling principle.

’I ‘m not, prying into secrets,’ Quintin persisted; ’all I want to know is, whether there ’s any foundation for that article—all London’s boiling about it, I can tell you—or it’s only newspaper’s humbug.’

‘Clearly the oracle for you is the Editor’s office,’ rejoined Dacier.

‘A pretty sort of answer I should get.’

‘It would at least be complimentary.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘The net was cast for you—and the sight of a fish in it!’

Miss Asper almost laughed. ‘Have you heard the choir at St. Catherine’s?’ she asked.

Dacier had not. He repented of his worldliness, and drinking persuasive claret, said he would go to hear it next Sunday.

‘Do,’ she murmured.

‘Well, you seem to be a pair against me,’ her uncle grumbled. ’Anyhow I think it’s important. People have been talking for some time, and I don’t want to be taken unawares; I won’t be a yoked ox, mind you.’

‘Have you been sketching lately?’ Dacier asked Miss Asper.

She generally filled a book in the autumn, she said.

‘May I see it?’

‘If you wish.’

They had a short tussle with her uncle and escaped. He was conducted to a room midway upstairs: an heiress’s conception of a saintly little room; and more impresive in purity, indeed it was, than a saint’s, with the many crucifixes, gold and silver emblems, velvet prie-Dieu chairs, jewel-clasped sacred volumes: every invitation to meditate in luxury on an ascetic religiousness.

She depreciated her sketching powers. ’I am impatient with my imperfections. I am therefore doomed not to advance.’

‘On the contrary, that is the state guaranteeing ultimate excellence,’ he said, much disposed to drone about it.

She sighed: ‘I fear not.’

He turned the leaves, comparing her modesty with the performance. The third of the leaves was a subject instantly recognized by him. It represented the place he had inherited from Lord Dannisburgh.

He named it.

She smiled: ’You are good enough to see a likeness? My aunt and I were passing it last October, and I waited for a day, to sketch.’

‘You have taken it from my favourite point of view.’

Page 3350

‘I am glad.’

‘How much I should like a copy!’

‘If you will accept that?’

‘I could not rob you.’

‘I can make a duplicate.’

‘The look of the place pleases you?’

’Oh! yes; the pines behind it; the sweet little village church; even the appearance of the rustics;—it is all impressively old English. I suppose you are very seldom there?’

‘Does it look like a home to you?’

‘No place more!’

‘I feel the loneliness.’

‘Where I live I feel no loneliness!’

‘You have heavenly messengers near you.’

‘They do not always come.’

‘Would you consent to make the place less lonely to me?’

Her bosom rose. In deference to her maidenly understanding, she gazed inquiringly.

‘If you love it!’ said he.

‘The place?’ she said, looking soft at the possessor.

‘Constance!’

‘Is it true?’

‘As you yourself. Could it be other than true? This hand is mine?’

‘Oh! Percy.’

Borrowing the world’s poetry to describe them, the long prayed-for Summer enveloped the melting snows.

So the recollection of Diana's watch beside his uncle's death-bed was wiped out. Ay, and the hissing of her treachery silenced. This maidenly hand put him at peace with the world, instead of his defying it for a worthless woman—who could not do better than accept the shelter of her husband's house, as she ought to be told, if her friends wished her to save her reputation.

Dacier made his way downstairs to Quintin Manx, by whom he was hotly congratulated and informed of the extent of the young lady's fortune: on the strength of which it was expected that he would certainly speak a private word in elucidation of that newspaper article.

'I know nothing of it,' said Dacier, but promised to come and dine. Alone in her happiness Constance Asper despatched various brief notes under her gold-symbolled crest to sisterly friends; one to Lady Wathin, containing the, single line:

'Your prophesy is confirmed.'

Dacier was comfortably able to face his Club after the excitement of a proposal, with a bride on his hands. He was assaulted concerning the article, and he parried capitally. Say that her lips were rather cold: at any rate, they invigorated him. Her character was guaranteed—not the hazy idea of a dupe. And her fortune would be enormous: a speculation merely due to worldly prudence and prospective ambition.

At the dinner-table of four, in the evening, conversation would have seemed dull to him, by contrast, had it not, been for the presiding grace of his bride, whose habitually eminent feminine air of superiority to the repast was throned by her appreciative receptiveness of his looks and utterances. Before leaving her, he won her consent to a very early marriage; on the plea of a possibly approaching Session, and also that they had waited long. The consent, notwithstanding the hurry of preparations, it involved, besides the annihilation of her desire to meditate on so solemn a change in her life and savour the congratulations of her friends and have the choir of St. Catherine's rigorously drilled in her favourite anthems was beautifully yielded to the pressure of circumstances.

Page 3351

There lay on his table at night a letter; a bulky letter. No need to tear it open for sight of the signature: the superscription was redolent of that betraying woman. He tossed it unopened into the fire.

As it was thick, it burned sullenly, discolouring his name on the address, as she had done, and still offering him a last chance of viewing the contents. She fought on the consuming fire to have her exculpation heard.

But was she not a shameless traitor? She had caught him by his love of his country and hope to serve it. She had wound into his heart to bleed him of all he knew and sell the secrets for money. A wonderful sort of eloquence lay there, on those coals, no doubt. He felt a slight movement of curiosity to glance at two or three random sentences: very slight. And why read them now? They were valueless to him, mere outcries. He judged her by the brute facts. She and her slowly-consuming letter were of a common blackness. Moreover, to read them when he was plighted to another woman would be senseless. In the discovery of her baseness, she had made a poor figure. Doubtless during the afternoon she had trimmed her intuitive Belial art of making 'the worse appear the better cause': queer to peruse, and instructive in an unprofitable department of knowledge-the tricks of the sex.

He said to himself, with little intuition of the popular taste: She wouldn't be a bad heroine of Romance! He said it derisively of the Romantic. But the right worshipful heroine of Romance was the front-face female picture he had won for his walls. Poor Diana was the flecked heroine of Reality: not always the same; not impeccable; not an ignorant-innocent, nor a guileless: good under good leading; devoted to the death in a grave crisis; often wrestling with her terrestrial nature nobly; and a growing soul; but not one whose purity was carved in marble for the assurance to an Englishman that his possession of the changeless thing defies time and his fellows, is the pillar of his home and universally enviable. Your fair one of Romance cannot suffer a mishap without a plotting villain, perchance many of them; to wreak the dread iniquity: she cannot move without him; she is the marble block, and if she is to have a feature, he is the sculptor; she depends on him for life, and her human history at least is married to him far more than to the rescuing lover. No wonder, then, that men should find her thrice cherishable featureless, or with the most moderate possible indication of a countenance. Thousands of the excellent simple creatures do; and every reader of her tale. On the contrary, the heroine of Reality is that woman whom you have met or heard of once in your course of years, and very probably despised for bearing in her composition the motive principle; at best, you say, a singular mixture of good and bad; anything but the feminine ideal of man. Feature to some excess, you think, distinguishes her. Yet she furnishes not any of the sweet sensual excitement pertaining to her spotless rival pursued by villany. She knocks at the doors of the mind, and the mind must open to be interested in her. Mind and heart must be wide open to excuse her sheer descent from the pure ideal of man.

Page 3352

Dacier's wandering reflections all came back in crowds to the judicial Bench of the Black Cap. He felt finely, apart from the treason, that her want of money degraded her: him too, by contact. Money she might have had to any extent: upon application for it, of course. How was he to imagine that she wanted money! Smilingly as she welcomed him and his friends, entertaining them royally, he was bound to think she had means. A decent propriety bound him not to think of the matter at all. He naturally supposed she was capable of conducting her affairs. And—money! It soiled his memory: though the hour at Rovio was rather pretty, and the scene at Copsley touching: other times also, short glimpses of the woman, were taking. The flood of her treachery effaced them. And why reflect? Constance called to him to look her way.

Diana's letter died hard. The corners were burnt to black tissue, with an edge or two of discoloured paper. A small frayed central heap still resisted, and in kindness to the necessity for privacy, he impressed the fire-tongs to complete the execution. After which he went to his desk and worked, under the presidency of Constance.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IS CONCLUSIVE AS TO THE HEARTLESSNESS OF WOMEN WITH BRAINS

Hymenaeal rumours are those which might be backed to run a victorious race with the tale of evil fortune; and clearly for the reason that man's livelier half is ever alert to speed them. They travel with an astonishing celerity over the land, like flames of the dry beacon-faggots of old time in announcement of the invader or a conquest, gathering as they go: wherein, to say nothing of their vastly wider range, they surpass the electric wires. Man's nuptial half is kindlingly concerned in the launch of a new couple; it is the business of the fair sex: and man himself (very strangely, but nature quickens him still) lends a not unfavouring eye to the preparations of the matrimonial vessel for its oily descent into the tides, where billows will soon be rising, captain and mate soon discussing the fateful question of who is commander. We consent, it appears, to hope again for mankind; here is another chance! Or else, assuming the happiness of the pair, that pomp of ceremonial, contrasted with the little wind-blown candle they carry between them, catches at our weaker fibres.

After so many ships have foundered, some keel up, like poisoned fish, at the first drink of water, it is a gallant spectacle, let us avow; and either the world perpetuating it is heroical or nature incorrigible in the species. Marriages are unceasing. Friends do it, and enemies; the unknown contractors of this engagement, or armistice, inspire an interest. It certainly is both exciting and comforting to hear that man and woman are ready to join in a mutual affirmative, say Yes together again. It sounds like the end of the war.

Page 3353

The proclamation of the proximate marriage of a young Minister of State and the greatest heiress of her day; notoriously 'The young Minister of State' of a famous book written by the beautiful, now writhing, woman madly enamoured of him—and the heiress whose dowry could purchase a Duchy; this was a note to make the gossips of England leap from their beds at the midnight hour and wag tongues in the market-place. It did away with the political hubbub over the Tonans article, and let it noise abroad like nonsense. The Hon. Percy Dacier espouses Miss Asper; and she rescues him from the snares of a siren, he her from the toils of the Papists. She would have gone over to them, she was going when, luckily for the Protestant Faith, Percy Dacier intervened with his proposal. Town and country buzzed the news; and while that dreary League trumpeted about the business of the nation, a people suddenly become Oriental chattered of nothing but the blissful union to be celebrated in princely state, with every musical accessory, short of Operatic.

Lady Wathin was an active agent in this excitement. The excellent woman enjoyed marriages of High Life: which, as there is presumably wealth to support them, are manifestly under sanction: and a marriage that she could consider one of her own contrivance, had a delicate flavour of a marriage in the family; not quite equal to the seeing a dear daughter of her numerous progeny conducted to the altar, but excelling it in the pomp that bids the heavens open. She and no other spread the tidings of Miss Asper's debating upon the step to Rome at the very instant of Percy Dacier's declaration of his love; and it was a beautiful struggle, that of the half-dedicated nun and her deep-rooted earthly passion, love prevailing! She sent word to Lady Dunstane: 'You know the interest I have always taken in dear Constance Aspen' *etc*.; inviting her to come on a visit a week before the end of the month, that she might join in the ceremony of a wedding 'likely to be the grandest of our time.' Pitiful though it was, to think of the bridal pair having but eight or ten days at the outside, for a honeymoon, the beauty of their 'mutual devotion to duty' was urged by Lady Wathin upon all hearers.

Lady Dunstane declined the invitation. She waited to hear from her friend, and the days went by; she could only sorrow for her poor Tony, divining her state. However little of wrong in the circumstances, they imposed a silence on her decent mind, and no conceivable shape of writing would transmit condolences. She waited, with a dull heartache: by no means grieving at Dacier's engagement to the heiress; until Redworth animated her, as the bearer of rather startling intelligence, indirectly relating to the soul she loved. An accident in the street had befallen Mr. Warwick. Redworth wanted to know whether Diana should be told of it, though he had no particulars to give; and somewhat to his disappointment,

Page 3354

Lady Dunstane said she would write. She delayed, thinking the accident might not be serious; and the information of it to Diana surely would be so. Next day at noon her visitor was Lady Wathin, evidently perturbed and anxious to say more than she dared: but she received no assistance. After beating the air in every direction, especially dwelling on the fond reciprocal affection of the two devoted lovers, to be united within three days' time, Lady Wathin said at last: 'And is it not shocking! I talk of a marriage and am appalled by a death. That poor man died last night in the hospital. I mean poor Mr. Warwick. He was recovering, getting strong and well, and he was knocked down at a street-crossing and died last night. It is a warning to us!'

'Mr. Redworth happened to hear of it at his Club, near which the accident occurred, and he called at the hospital. Mr. Warwick was then alive,' said Lady Dunstane; adding: 'Well, if prevention is better than cure, as we hear! Accidents are the specific for averting the maladies of age, which are a certain crop!'

Lady Wathin's eyelids worked and her lips shut fast at the cold-hearted remark void of meaning.

She sighed. 'So ends a life of misery, my dear!'

'You are compassionate.'

'I hope so. But . . . Indeed I must speak, if you will let me. I think of the living.'

Lady Dunstane widened her eyes. 'Of Mrs. Warwick?'

'She has now the freedom she desired. I think of others. Forgive me, but Constance Asper is to me as a daughter. I have perhaps no grounds for any apprehension. Love so ardent, so sincere, was never shown by bridegroom elect: and it is not extraordinary to those acquainted with dear Constance. But—one may be a worshipped saint and experience defection. The terrible stories one hears of a power of fascination almost . . . !' Lady Wathin hung for the word.

'Infernal,' said Lady Dunstane, whose brows had been bent inquiringly. 'Have no fear. The freedom you allude to will not be used to interfere with any entertainment in prospect. It was freedom my friend desired. Now that her jewel is restored to her, she is not the person to throw it away, be sure. And pray, drop the subject.'

'One may rely . . . you think?'

'Oh! Oh!'

'This release coming just before the wedding . . . !'

'I should hardly suppose the man to be the puppet you depict, or indicate.'

’It is because men—so many—are not puppets that one is conscious of alarm.’

‘Your previous remark,’ said Lady Dunstane, ’sounded superstitious. Your present one has an antipodal basis. But, as for your alarm, check it: and spare me further. My friend has acknowledged powers. Considering that, she does not use them, you should learn to respect her.’

Lady Wathin bowed stiffly. She refused to partake of lunch, having, she said, satisfied her conscience by the performance of a duty and arranged with her flyman to catch a train. Her cousin Lady Dunstane smiled loftily at everything she uttered, and she felt that if a woman like this Mrs. Warwick could put division between blood-relatives, she could do worse, and was to be dreaded up to the hour of the nuptials.

Page 3355

‘I meant no harm in coming,’ she said, at the shaking of hands.

‘No, no; I understand,’ said her hostess: ’you are hen-hearted over your adopted brood. The situation is perceptible and your intention creditable.’

As one of the good women of the world, Lady Wathin in departing was indignant at the tone and dialect of a younger woman not modestly concealing her possession of the larger brain. Brains in women she both dreaded and detested; she believed them to be devilish. Here were instances:—they had driven poor Sir Lukin to evil courses, and that poor Mr. Warwick straight under the wheels of a cab. Sir Lukin’s name was trotting in public with a naughty Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett’s: Mrs. Warwick might still trim her arts to baffle the marriage. Women with brains, moreover, are all heartless: they have no pity for distress, no horror of catastrophes, no joy in the happiness of the deserving. Brains in men advance a household to station; but brains in women divide it and are the wrecking of society. Fortunately Lady Wathin knew she could rally a powerful moral contingent, the aptitude of which for a one-minded cohesion enabled it to crush those fractional daughters of mischief. She was a really good woman of the world, heading a multitude; the same whom you are accustomed to hear exalted; lucky in having had a guided girlhood, a thick-curtained prudence; and in having stock in the moral funds, shares in the sentimental tramways. Wherever the world laid its hoards or ran its lines, she was found, and forcible enough to be eminent; though at fixed hours of the day, even as she washed her hands, she abjured worldliness: a performance that cleansed her. If she did not make morality appear loveable to the objects of her dislike, it was owing to her want of brains to see the origin, nature and right ends of morality. But a world yet more deficient than she, esteemed her cordially for being a bulwark of the present edifice; which looks a solid structure when the microscope is not applied to its components.

Supposing Percy Dacier a dishonourable tattler as well as an icy lover, and that Lady Wathin, through his bride, had become privy to the secret between him and Diana? There is reason to think that she would have held it in terror over the baneful woman, but not have persecuted her: for she was by no means the active malignant of theatrical plots. No, she would have charged it upon the possession of brains by women, and have had a further motive for inciting the potent dignitary her husband to employ his authority to repress the sex’s exercise of those fell weapons, hurtful alike to them and all coming near them.

So extreme was her dread of Mrs. Warwick, that she drove from the London railway station to see Constance and be reassured by her tranquil aspect.

Sweet Constance and her betrothed Percy were together, examining a missal.

Page 3356

Lady Dunstane despatched a few words of the facts to Diana. She hoped to hear from her; rather hoped, for the moment, not to see her. No answer came. The great day of the nuptials came and passed. She counted on her husband's appearance the next morning, as the good gentleman made a point of visiting her, to entertain the wife he adored, whenever he had a wallet of gossip that would overlay the blank of his absence. He had been to the church of the wedding—he did not say with whom: all the world was there; and he rapturously described the ceremony, stating that it set women weeping and caused him to behave like a fool.

'You are impressionable,' said his wife.

He murmured something in praise of the institution of marriage—when celebrated impressively, it seemed.

'Tony calls the social world "the theatre of appetites," as we have it at present,' she said; 'and the world at a wedding is, one may reckon, in the second act of the hungry tragicomedy.'

'Yes, there's the breakfast,' Sir Lukin assented. Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was much more intelligible to him: in fact, quite so, as to her speech.

Emma's heart now yearned to her Tony: Consulting her strength, she thought she might journey to London, and on the third morning after the Dacier-Asper marriage, she started.

Diana's door was open to Arthur Rhodes when Emma reached it.

'Have you seen her?' she asked him.

His head shook dolefully. 'Mrs. Warwick is unwell; she has been working too hard.'

'You also, I'm afraid.'

'No.' He could deny that, whatever the look of him.

'Come to me at Copsley soon,' said she, entering to Danvers in the passage.

'My mistress is upstairs, my lady,' said Danvers. 'She is lying on her bed.'

'She is ill?'

'She has been lying on her bed ever since.'

'Since what?' Lady Dunstane spoke sharply.

Danvers retrieved her indiscretion. 'Since she heard of the accident, my lady.'

'Take my name to her. Or no: I can venture.'

'I am not allowed to go in and speak to her. You will find the room quite dark, my lady, and very cold. It is her command. My mistress will not let me light the fire; and she has not eaten or drunk of anything since . . . She will die, if you do not persuade her to take nourishment: a little, for a beginning. It wants the beginning.'

Emma went upstairs, thinking of the enigmatical maid, that she must be a good soul after all. Diana's bedroom door was opened slowly.

'You will not be able to see at first, my lady,' Danvers whispered. 'The bed is to the left, and a chair. I would bring in a candle, but it hurts her eyes. She forbids it.'

Emma stepped in. The chill thick air of the unlighted London room was cavernous. She almost forgot the beloved of her heart in the thought that a living woman had been lying here more than two days and nights, fasting. The proof of an uttermost misery revived the circumstances within her to render her friend's presence in this desert of darkness credible. She found the bed by touch, silently, and distinguished a dark heap on the bed; she heard no breathing. She sat and listened; then she stretched out her hand and met her Tony's. It lay open. It was the hand of a drowned woman.

Page 3357

Shutters and curtains and the fireless grate gave the room an appalling likeness to the vaults.

So like to the home of death it seemed, that in a few minutes the watcher had lost count of time and kept but a wormy memory of the daylight. She dared not speak, for some fear of startling; for the worse fear of never getting answer. Tony's hand was lifeless. Her clasp of it struck no warmth.

She stung herself with bitter reproaches for having let common mundane sentiments, worthy of a Lady Wathin, bar her instant offer of her bosom to the beloved who suffered in this depth of mortal agony. Tony's love of a man, as she should have known, would be wrought of the elements of our being: when other women named Happiness, she said Life; in division, Death. Her body lying still upon the bed here was a soul borne onward by the river of Death.

The darkness gave sight after a while, like a curtain lifting on a veil: the dead light of the underworld. Tony lay with her face up, her underlip dropped; straight from head to feet. The outline of her face, without hue of it, could be seen: sign of the hapless women that have souls in love. Hateful love of men! Emma thought, and was; moved to feel at the wrist for her darling's pulse. He has, killed her! the thought flashed, as, with pangs chilling her frame, the pressure at the wrist continued insensible of the faintest beat. She clasped it, trembling, in pain to stop an outcry.

'It is Emmy,' said the voice.

Emma's heart sprang to heaven on a rush of thanks.

'My Tony,' she breathed softly.

She hung for a further proof of life in the motionless body. 'Tony!' she said.

The answer was at her hand, a thread-like return of her clasp.

'It is Emmy come to stay with you, never to leave you.'

The thin still answer was at her hand a moment; the fingers fell away. A deep breath was taken twice to say:

'Don't talk to me.'

Emma retained the hand. She was warned not to press it by the deadness following its effort to reply.

But Tony lived; she had given proof of life. Over this little wavering taper in the vaults Emma cowered, cherishing the hand, silently hoping for the voice.

It came: ‘Winter.’

‘It is a cold winter, Tony.’

‘My dear will be cold.’

‘I will light the fire.’

Emma lost no time in deciding to seek the match-box. The fire was lit and it flamed; it seemed a revival in the room. Coming back to the bedside, she discerned her Tony’s lacklustre large dark eyes and her hollow cheeks: her mouth open to air as to the drawing-in of a sword; rather as to the releaser than the sustainer. Her feet were on the rug her maid had placed to cover them. Emma leaned across the bed to put them to her breast, beneath her fur mantle, and held them there despite the half-animate tug of the limbs and the shaft of iciness they sent to her very heart. When she had restored them to some warmth, she threw aside her bonnet and lying beside Tony, took her in her arms, heaving now and then a deep sigh.

Page 3358

She kissed her cheek.

‘It is Emmy.’

‘Kiss her.’

‘I have no strength.’

Emma laid her face on the lips. They were cold; even the breath between them cold.

‘Has Emmy been long . . .?’

‘Here, dear? I think so. I am with my darling.’

Tony moaned. The warmth and the love were bringing back her anguish.

She said: ‘I have been happy. It is not hard to go.’

Emma strained to her. ’Tony will wait for her soul’s own soul to go, the two together.’

There was a faint convulsion in the body. ‘If I cry, I shall go in pain.’

‘You are in Emmy’s arms, my beloved.’

Tony’s eyes closed for forgetfulness under that sensation. A tear ran down from her, but the pain was lag and neighboured sleep, like the pleasure.

So passed the short winter day, little spoken.

Then Emma bethought her of a way of leading Tony to take food, and she said: ’I shall stay with you; I shall send for clothes; I am rather hungry. Don’t stir, dear. I will be mistress of the house.’

She went below to the kitchen, where a few words in the ear of a Frenchwoman were sufficient to waken immediate comprehension of what was wanted, and smart service: within ten minutes an appetizing bouillon sent its odour over the bedroom. Tony, days back, had said her last to the act of eating; but Emma sipping at the spoon and expressing satisfaction, was a pleasant picture. The bouillon smelt pleasantly.

‘Your servants love you,’ Emma said.

‘Ah, poor good souls.’

’They crowded up to me to hear of you. Madame of course at the first word was off to her pots. And we English have the habit of calling ourselves the practical people!—This

bouillon is consummate.—However, we have the virtues of barbarians; we can love and serve for love. I never tasted anything so good. I could become a glutton.'

'Do,' said Tony.

'I should be ashamed to "drain the bowl" all to myself: a solitary toper is a horrid creature, unless he makes a song of it.'

'Emmy makes a song of it to me.'

'But "pledge me" is a noble saying, when you think of humanity's original hunger for the whole. It is there that our civilizing commenced, and I am particularly fond of hearing the call. It is grandly historic. So pledge me, Tony. We two can feed from one spoon; it is a closer, bond than the loving cup. I want you just to taste it and excuse my gluttony.'

Tony murmured, 'No.' The spoon was put to her mouth. She sighed to resist. The stronger will compelled her to move her lips. Emma fed her as a child, and nature sucked for life.

The first effect was a gush of tears.

Emma lay with her that night, when the patient was, the better sleeper. But during the night at intervals she had the happiness of feeling Tony's hand travelling to make sure of her.

Page 3359

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN EXHIBITION OF SOME CHAMPIONS OF THE STRICKEN LADY

Close upon the hour of ten every morning the fortuitous meeting of two gentlemen at Mrs. Warwick's housedoor was a signal for punctiliously stately greetings, the salutation of the raised hat and a bow of the head from a position of military erectness, followed by the remark: 'I trust you are well, sir': to which the reply: 'I am very well, sir, and trust you are the same,' was deemed a complimentary fulfilment of their mutual obligation in presence. Mr. Sullivan Smith's initiative imparted this exercise of formal manners to Mr. Arthur Rhodes, whose renewed appearance, at the minute of his own arrival, he viewed, as he did not conceal, with a disappointed and a reproving eye. The inquiry after the state of Mrs. Warwick's health having received its tolerably comforting answer from the footman, they left their cards in turn, then descended the doorsteps, faced for the performance of the salute, and departed their contrary ways.

The pleasing intelligence refreshed them one morning, that they would be welcomed by Lady Dunstane. Thereupon Mr. Sullivan Smith wheeled about to Mr. Arthur Rhodes and observed to him: 'Sir, I might claim, by right of seniority, to be the foremost of us two in offering my respects to the lady, but the way is open to you.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Arthur Rhodes, 'permit me to defer to your many superior titles to that distinction.'

'The honour, sir, lies rather in the bestowing than in the taking.'

'I venture to think, sir, that though I cannot speak pure Castilian, I require no lesson from a Grandee of Spain in acknowledging the dues of my betters.'

'I will avow myself conquered, sir, by your overpowering condescension;' said Mr. Sullivan Smith; 'and I entreat you—to ascribe my acceptance of your brief retirement to the urgent character of the business I have at heart.'

He laid his fingers on the panting spot, and bowed.

Mr. Arthur Rhodes, likewise bowing, deferentially fell to rearward.

'If I mistake not,' said the Irish gentleman, 'I am indebted to Mr. Rhodes; and we have been joint participators in the hospitality of Mrs. Warwick's table.'

The English gentleman replied: 'It was there that I first had the pleasure of an acquaintance which is graven on my memory, as the words of the wise king on tablets of gold and silver.'

Mr. Sullivan Smith gravely smiled at the unwonted match he had found in ceremonious humour, in Saxonland, and saying: 'I shall not long detain you, Mr. Rhodes,' he passed through the doorway.

Arthur waited for him, pacing up and down, for a quarter of an hour, when a totally different man reappeared in the same person, and was the Sullivan Smith of the rosy beaming features and princely heartiness. He was accosted: 'Now, my dear boy, it's your turn to try if you have a chance, and good luck go with ye. I've said what I could on your behalf, for you're one of ten thousand in this country, you are.'

Page 3360

Mr. Sullivan Smith had solemnified himself to proffer a sober petition within the walls of the newly widowed lady's house; namely, for nothing less than that sweet lady's now unfettered hand: and it had therefore been perfectly natural to him, until his performance ended with the destruction of his hopes, to deliver himself in the high Castilian manner. Quite unexpected, however, was the reciprocal loftiness of tone spontaneously adopted by the young English squire, for whom, in consequence, he conceived a cordial relish; and as he paced in the footsteps of Arthur, anxious to quiet his curiosity by hearing how it had fared with one whom he had to suppose the second applicant, he kept ejaculating: 'Not a bit! The fellow can't be Saxon! And she had a liking for him. She's nigh coming of the age when a woman takes to the chicks. Better he than another, if it's to be any one. For he's got fun in him; he carries his own condiments, instead of borrowing from the popular castors, as is their way over here. But I might have known there 's always sure to be salt and savour in the man she covers with her wing. Excepting, if you please, my dear lady, a bad shot you made at a rascal cur, no more worthy of you than Beelzebub of Paradise. No matter! The daughters' of Erin must share the fate of their mother Isle, that their tears may shine in the burst of sun to follow. For personal and patriotic motives, I would have cheered her and been like a wild ass combed and groomed and tamed by the adorable creature. But her friend says there 's not a whisk of a chance for me, and I must roam the desert, kicking up, and worshipping the star I hail brightest. They know me not, who think I can't worship. Why, what were I without my star? At best a pickled porker.'

Sullivan Smith became aware of a ravishing melodiousness in the soliloquy, as well as a clean resemblance in the simile. He would certainly have proceeded to improvize impassioned verse, if he had not seen Arthur Rhodes on the pavement. 'So, here's the boy. Query, the face he wears.'

'How kind of you to wait,' said Arthur.

'We'll call it sympathy, for convenience,' rejoined Sullivan Smith. 'Well, and what next?'

'You know as much as I do. Thank heaven, she is recovering.'

'Is that all?'

'Why, what more?'

Arthur was jealously, inspected.

'You look open-hearted, my dear boy.' Sullivan Smith blew the sound of a reflected ahem. 'Excuse me for cornemusing in your company,' he said. 'But seriously, there was only one thing to pardon your hurrying to the lady's door at such a season, when the wind tells tales to the world. She's down with a cold, you know.'

‘An influenza,’ said Arthur.

The simplicity of the acquiescence was vexatious to a champion desirous of hostilities, to vindicate the lady, in addition to his anxiety to cloak her sad plight.

Page 3361

’She caught it from contact with one of the inhabitants of this country. ’Tis the fate of us Irish, and we’re condemned to it for the sin of getting tired of our own. I begin to sneeze when I land at Holyhead. Unbutton a waistcoat here, in the hope of meeting a heart, and you’re lucky in escaping a pulmonary attack of no common severity, while the dog that infected you scampers off, to celebrate his honeymoon mayhap. Ah, but call at her house in shoals, the world ’ll soon be saying it’s worse than a coughing cold. If you came to lead her out of it in triumph, the laugh ‘d be with you, and the lady well covered. D’ ye understand?’

The allusion to the dog’s honeymoon had put Arthur Rhodes on the track of the darting cracker-metaphor.

‘I think I do,’ he said. ’She will soon be at Copsley—Lady Dunstane’s house, on the hills—and there we can see her.’

’And that’s next to the happiness of consoling—if only it had been granted! She’s not an ordinary widow, to be caught when the tear of lamentation has opened a practicable path or water-way to the poor nightcapped jewel within. So, and you’re a candid admirer, Mr. Rhodes! Well, and I’ll be one with you; for there’s not a star in the firmament more deserving of homage than that lady.’

‘Let’s walk in the park and talk of her,’ said Arthur. ’There’s no sweeter subject to me.’

His boyish frankness rejoiced Sullivan Smith. ’As long as you like!—nor to me!’ he exclaimed. ’And that ever since I first beheld her on the night of a Ball in Dublin: before I had listened to a word of her speaking: and she bore her father’s Irish name:—none of your Warwicks and your . . . But let the cur go barking. He can’t tell what he’s lost; perhaps he doesn’t care. And after inflicting his hydrophobia on her tender fame! Pooh, sir; you call it a civilized country, where you and I and dozens of others are ready to start up as brothers of the lady, to defend her, and are paralyzed by the Law. ’Tis a law they’ve instituted for the protection of dirty dogs—their majority!’

‘I owe more to Mrs. Warwick than to any soul I know,’ said Arthur.

’Let ‘s hear,’ quoth Sullivan Smith; proceeding: ’She’s the Arabian Nights in person, that’s sure; and Shakespeare’s Plays, tragic and comic; and the Book of Celtic History; and Erin incarnate—down with a cold, no matter where; but we know where it was caught. So there’s a pretty library for who’s to own her now she’s enfranchized by circumstances; and a poetical figure too!’

He subsided for his companion to rhapsodize.

Arthur was overcharged with feeling, and could say only: ’It would be another world to me if I lost her.’

‘True; but what of the lady?’

‘No praise of mine could do her justice.’

’That may be, but it’s negative of yourself, and not a portrait of the object. Hasn’t she the brain of Socrates—or better, say Minerva, on the bust of Venus, and the remainder of her finished off to an exact resemblance of her patronymic Goddess of the bow and quiver?’

Page 3362

‘She has a wise head and is beautiful.’

‘And chaste.’

Arthur reddened: he was prepared to maintain it, could not speak it.

’She is to us in this London, what the run of water was to Theocritus in Sicily: the nearest to the visibly divine,’ he said, and was applauded.

’Good, and on you go. Top me a few superlatives on that, and I ’m your echo, my friend. Isn’t the seeing and listening to her like sitting under the silvery canopy of a fountain in high Summer?’

‘All the comparisons are yours,’ Arthur said enviously.

’Mr. Rhodes, you are a poet, I believe, and all you require to loosen your tongue is a drop of Bacchus, so if you will do me the extreme honour to dine with me at my Club this evening, we’ll resume the toast that should never be uttered dry. You reprove me justly, my friend.’

Arthur laughed and accepted. The Club was named, and the hour, and some items of the little dinner: the birds and the year of the wines.

It surprised him to meet Mr. Redworth at the table of his host. A greater surprise was the partial thaw in Redworth’s bearing toward him. But, as it was partial, and he a youth and poor, not even the genial influences of Bacchus could lift him to loosen his tongue under the repressing presence of the man he knew to be his censor, though Sullivan Smith encouraged him with praises and opportunities. He thought of the many occasions when Mrs. Warwick’s art of management had produced a tacit harmony between them. She had no peer. The dinner failed of the pleasure he had expected from it. Redworth’s bluntness killed the flying metaphors, and at the end of the entertainment he and Sullivan Smith were drumming upon politics.

‘Fancies he has the key of the Irish difficulty!’ said the latter, clapping hand on his shoulder, by way of blessing, as they parted at the Club-steps.

Redworth asked Arthur Rhodes the way he was going, and walked beside him.

‘I suppose you take exercise; don’t get colds and that kind of thing,’ he remarked in the old bullying fashion; and changed it abruptly. ’I am glad to have met you this evening. I hope you’ll dine with me one day next week. Have you seen Mrs. Warwick lately?’

‘She is unwell; she has been working too hard,’ said Arthur.

‘Seriously unwell, do you mean?’

‘Lady Dunstane is at her house, and speaks of her recovering.’

‘Ah. You’ve not seen her?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Well, good-night.’

Redworth left him, and only when moved by gratitude to the lad for his mention of Mrs. Warwick’s ‘working too hard,’ as the cause of her illness, recollected the promised dinner and the need for having his address.

Page 3363

He had met Sullivan Smith accidentally in the morning and accepted the invitation to meet young Rhodes, because these two, of all men living, were for the moment dearest to him, as Diana Warwick's true and simple champions; and he had intended a perfect cordiality toward them both; the end being a semi-wrangle with the patriot, and a patronizing bluntness with the boy; who, by the way, would hardly think him sincere in the offer of a seat at his table. He owned himself incomplete. He never could do the thing he meant, in the small matters not leading to fortune. But they led to happiness! Redworth was guilty of a sigh: for now Diana Warwick stood free; doubly free, he was reduced to reflect in a wavering dubiousness. Her more than inclination for Dacier, witnessed by him, and the shot of the world, flying randomly on the subject, had struck this cuirassier, making light of his armour, without causing any change of his habitual fresh countenance. As for the scandal, it had never shaken his faith in her nature. He thought of the passion. His heart struck at Diana's, and whatever might by chance be true in the scandal affected him little, if but her heart were at liberty. That was the prize he coveted, having long read the nature of the woman and wedded his spirit to it. She would complete him.

Of course, infatuated men argue likewise, and scandal does not move them. At a glance, the lower instincts and the higher spirit appear equally to have the philosophy of overlooking blemishes. The difference between appetite and love is shown when a man, after years of service, can hear and see, and admit the possible, and still desire in worship; knowing that we of earth are begrimed and must be cleansed for presentation daily on our passage through the miry ways, but that our souls, if flame of a soul shall have come of the agony of flesh, are beyond the baser mischances: partaking of them indeed, but sublimely. Now Redworth believed in the soul of Diana. For him it burned, and it was a celestial radiance about her, unquenched by her shifting fortunes, her wilfulnesses and, it might be, errors. She was a woman and weak; that is, not trained for strength. She was a soul; therefore perpetually pointing to growth in purification. He felt it, and even discerned it of her, if he could not have phrased it. The something sovereignty characteristic that aspired in Diana enchained him. With her, or rather with his thought of her soul, he understood the right union of women and men, from the roots to the flowering heights of that rare graft. She gave him comprehension of the meaning of love: a word in many mouths, not often explained. With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth; the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction. In Booth, a happy prospect for the sons and daughters of Earth, divinely indicating more than happiness: the speeding of us, compact of what we are, between the ascetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools, to the creation of certain nobler races, now very dimly imagined.

Page 3364

Singularly enough, the man of these feelings was far from being a social rebel. His Diana conjured them forth in relation to her, but was not on his bosom to enlighten him generally. His notions of citizenship tolerated the female Pharisees, as ladies offering us an excellent social concrete where quicksands abound, and without quite justifying the Lady Wathins and Constance Aspers of the world, whose virtues he could set down to accident or to acid blood, he considered them supportable and estimable where the Mrs. Fryar-Gunnetts were innumerable, threatening to become a majority; as they will constantly do while the sisterhood of the chaste are wattled in formalism and throned in sourness.

Thoughts of Diana made phantoms of the reputable and their reverse alike. He could not choose but think of her. She was free; and he too; and they were as distant as the horizon sail and the aft-floating castaway. Her passion for Dacier might have burnt out her heart. And at present he had no claim to visit her, dared not intrude. He would have nothing to say, if he went, save to answer questions upon points of business: as to which, Lady Dunstane would certainly summon him when he was wanted.

Riding in the park on a frosty morning, he came upon Sir Lukin, who looked gloomy and inquired for news of Diana Warwick, saying that his wife had forbidden him to call at her house just yet. 'She's got a cold, you know,' said Sir Lukin; adding, 'confoundedly hard on women!—eh? Obliged to keep up a show. And I'd swear, by all that's holy, Diana Warwick hasn't a spot, not a spot, to reproach herself with. I fancy I ought to know women by this time. And look here, Redworth, last night—that is, I mean yesterday evening, I broke with a woman—a lady of my acquaintance, you know, because she would go on scandal-mongering about Diana Warwick. I broke with her. I told her I'd have out any man who abused Diana Warwick, and I broke with her. By Jove! Redworth, those women can prove spitfires. They've bags of venom under their tongues, barley-sugar though they look—and that's her colour. But I broke with her for good. I doubt if I shall ever call on her again. And in point of fact, I won't.'

Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was described in the colouring of the lady.

Sir Lukin, after some further remarks, rode on, and Redworth mused on a moral world that allows a woman of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett's like to hang on to it, and to cast a stone at Diana; forgetful, in his championship, that Diana was not disallowed a similar licence.

When he saw Emma Dunstane, some days later, she was in her carriage driving, as she said, to Lawyerland, for an interview with old Mr. Braddock, on her friend's affairs. He took a seat beside her. 'No, Tony is not well,' she replied to his question, under the veil of candour. 'She is recovering, but she—you can understand—suffered a shock. She is not able to attend to business, and certain things have to be done.'

Page 3365

‘I used to be her man of business,’ Redworth observed.

‘She speaks of your kind services. This is mere matter for lawyers.’

‘She is recovering?’

’You may see her at Copsley next week. You can come down on Wednesdays or Saturdays?’

‘Any day. Tell her I want her opinion upon the state of things.’

‘It will please her; but you will have to describe the state of things.’

Emma feared she had said too much. She tried candour again for concealment. ’My poor Tony has been struck down low. I suppose it is like losing a diseased limb:—she has her freedom, at the cost of a blow to the system.’

‘She may be trusted for having strength,’ said Redworth.’

‘Yes.’ Emma’s mild monosyllable was presently followed by an exclamation: ‘One has to experience the irony of Fate to comprehend how cruel it is!’ Then she remembered that such language was peculiarly abhorrent to him.

‘Irony of Fate!’ he echoed her. ’I thought you were above that literary jargon.’

’And I thought I was: or thought it would be put in a dialect practically explicable,’ she answered, smiling at the lion roused.

‘Upon my word,’ he burst out, ’I should like to write a book of Fables, showing how donkeys get into grinding harness, and dogs lose their bones, and fools have their sconces cracked, and all run jabbering of the irony of Fate, to escape the annoyance of tracing the causes. And what are they? nine times out of ten, plain want of patience, or some debt for indulgence. There’s a subject:—let some one write, Fables in illustration of the irony of Fate: and I’ll undertake to tack-on my grandmother’s maxims for a moral to teach of ’em. We prate of that irony when we slink away from the lesson—the rod we conjure. And you to talk of Fate! It’s the seed we sow, individually or collectively. I’m bound-up in the prosperity of the country, and if the ship is wrecked, it ruins my fortune, but not me, unless I’m bound-up in myself. At least I hope that’s my case.’

He apologized for intruding Mr. Thomas Redworth.

His hearer looked at him, thinking he required a more finely pointed gift of speech for the ironical tongue, but relishing the tonic directness of his faculty of reason while she considered that the application of the phrase might be brought home to him so as to render ’my Grandmother’s moral’ a conclusion less comfortingly, if quite intelligibly,

summary. And then she thought of Tony's piteous instance; and thinking with her heart, the tears insisted on that bitter irony of the heavens, which bestowed the long-withheld and coveted boon when it was empty of value or was but as a handful of spices to a shroud.

Perceiving the moisture in her look, Redworth understood that it was foolish to talk rationally. But on her return to her beloved, the real quality of the man had overcome her opposing state of sentiment, and she spoke of him with an iteration and throb in the voice that set a singular query whirring round Diana's ears. Her senses were too heavy for a suspicion.

Page 3366

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONVALESCENCE OF A HEALTHY MIND DISTRAUGHT

From an abandonment that had the last pleasure of life in a willingness to yield it up, Diana rose with her friend's help in some state of fortitude, resembling the effort of her feet to bear the weight of her body. She plucked her courage out of the dust to which her heart had been scattered, and tasked herself to walk as the world does. But she was indisposed to compassionate herself in the manner of the burdened world. She lashed the creature who could not raise a head like others, and made the endurance of torture a support, such as the pride of being is to men. She would not have seen any similarity to pride in it; would have deemed it the reverse. It was in fact the painful gathering of the atoms composing pride. For she had not only suffered; she had done wrongly: and when that was acknowledged, by the light of her sufferings the wrong-doing appeared gigantic, chorussing eulogies of the man she had thought her lover: and who was her lover once, before the crime against him. In the opening of her bosom to Emma, he was painted a noble figure; one of those that Romance delights to harass for the sake of ultimately the more exquisitely rewarding. He hated treachery: she had been guilty of doing what he most hated. She glorified him for the incapacity to forgive; it was to her mind godlike. And her excuses of herself?

At the first confession, she said she had none, and sullenly maintained that there was none to exonerate. Little by little her story was related—her version of the story: for not even as woman to woman, friend to great-hearted friend, pure soul to soul, could Diana tell of the state of shivering abjection in which Dacier had left her on the fatal night; of the many causes conducing to it, and of the chief. That was an unutterable secret, bound by all the laws of feminine civilization not to be betrayed. Her excessive self-abasement and exaltation of him who had struck her down, rendered it difficult to be understood; and not till Emma had revolved it and let it ripen in the mind some days could she perceive with any clearness her Tony's motives, or mania. The very word Money thickened the riddle: for Tony knew that her friend's purse was her own to dip in at her pleasure; yet she, to escape so small an obligation, had committed the enormity for which she held the man blameless in spurning her.

'You see what I am, Emmy,' Diana said.

'What I do not see, is that he had grounds for striking so cruelly.'

'I proved myself unworthy of him.'

But does a man pretending to love a woman cut at one blow, for such a cause, the ties uniting her to him? Unworthiness of that kind, is not commonly the capital offence in love. Tony's deep prostration and her resplendent picture of her judge and executioner,

kept Emma questioning within herself. Gradually she became enlightened enough to distinguish in the man a known, if not common, type of the externally soft and polished, internally hard and relentless, who are equal to the trials of love only as long as favouring circumstances and seemings nurse the fair object of their courtship.

Page 3367

Her thoughts recurred to the madness driving Tony to betray the secret; and the ascent unhelped to get a survey of it and her and the conditions, was mountainous. She toiled up but to enter the regions of cloud; sure nevertheless that the obscurity was penetrable and excuses to be discovered somewhere. Having never wanted money herself, she was unable perfectly to realize the urgency of the need: she began however to comprehend that the very eminent gentleman, before whom all human creatures were to bow in humility, had for an extended term considerably added to the expenses of Tony's household, by inciting her to give those little dinners to his political supporters, and bringing comrades perpetually to supper-parties, careless of how it might affect her character and her purse. Surely an honourable man was bound to her in honour? Tony's remark: 'I have the reptile in me, dear,' her exaggeration of the act, in her resigned despair,—was surely no justification for his breaking from her, even though he had discovered a vestige of the common 'reptile,' to leave her with a stain on her name? —There would not have been a question about it if Tony had not exalted him so loftily, refusing, in visible pain, to hear him blamed.

Danvers had dressed a bed for Lady Dunstane in her mistress's chamber, where often during the night Emma caught a sound of stifled weeping or the long falling breath of wakeful grief. One night she asked whether Tony would like to have her by her side.

'No, dear,' was the answer in the dark; 'but you know my old pensioners, the blind fifer and his wife; I've been thinking of them.'

'They were paid as they passed down the street yesterday, my love.'

'Yes, dear, I hope so. But he flourishes his tune so absurdly. I've been thinking, that is the part I have played, instead of doing the female's duty of handing round the tin-cup for pennies. I won't cry any more.'

She sighed and turned to sleep, leaving Emma to disburden her heart in tears.

For it seemed to her that Tony's intellect was weakened. She not merely abased herself and exalted Dacier preposterously, she had sunk her intelligence in her sensations: a state that she used to decry as the sin of mankind, the origin of error and blood.

Strangely too, the proposal came from her, or the suggestion of it, notwithstanding her subjectedness to the nerves, that she should show her face in public. She said: 'I shall have to run about, Emmy, when I can fancy I am able to rattle up to the old mark. At present, I feel like a wrestler who has had a fall. As soon as the stiffness is over, it's best to make an appearance, for the sake of one's backers, though I shall never be in the wrestling ring again.'

'That is a good decision—when you feel quite yourself, dear Tony,' Emma replied.

’I dare say I have disgraced my sex, but not as they suppose. I feel my new self already, and can make the poor brute go through fire on behalf of the old. What is the task?—merely to drive a face!’

Page 3368

‘It is not known.’

‘It will be known.’

‘But this is a sealed secret.’

’Nothing is a secret that has been spoken. It ’s in the air, and I have to breathe to live by it. And I would rather it were out. “She betrayed him.” Rather that, than have them think—anything! They will exclaim, How could she! I have been unable to answer it to you—my own heart. How? Oh! our weakness is the swiftest dog to hunt us; we cannot escape it. But I have the answer for them, that I trust with my whole soul none of them would have done the like.’

‘None, my Tony, would have taken it to the soul as you do.’

’I talk, dear. If I took it honestly, I should be dumb, soon dust. The moment we begin to speak, the guilty creature is running for cover. She could not otherwise exist. I am sensible of evasion when I open my lips.’

‘But Tony has told me all.’

‘I think I have. But if you excuse my conduct, I am certain I have not.’

‘Dear girl, accounting for it, is not the same as excusing.’

’Who can account for it! I was caught in a whirl—Oh! nothing supernatural: my weakness; which it pleases me to call a madness—shift the ninety-ninth! When I drove down that night to Mr. Tonans, I am certain I had my clear wits, but I felt like a bolt. I saw things, but at too swift a rate for the conscience of them. Ah! let never Necessity draw the bow of our weakness: it is the soul that is winged to its perdition. I remember I was writing a story, named *the man of two minds*. I shall sign it, By the Woman of Two Natures. If ever it is finished. Capacity for thinking should precede the act of writing. It should; I do not say that it does. Capacity for assimilating the public taste and reproducing it, is the commonest. The stuff is perishable, but it pays us for our labour, and in so doing saves us from becoming tricksters. Now I can see that Mr. Redworth had it in that big head of his—the authoress outliving her income!’

‘He dared not speak.’

‘Why did he not dare?’

‘Would it have checked you?’

’I was a shot out of a gun, and I am glad he did not stand in my way. What power charged the gun, is another question. Dada used to say, that it is the devil’s

masterstroke to get us to accuse him. “So fare ye well, old Nickie Ben.” My dear, I am a black sheep; a creature with a spotted reputation; I must wash and wash; and not with water—with sulphur-flames.’ She sighed. ’I am down there where they burn. You should have let me lie and die. You were not kind. I was going quietly.’

‘My love!’ cried Emma, overborne by a despair that she traced to the woman’s concealment of her bleeding heart, ’you live for me. Do set your mind on that. Think of what you are bearing, as your debt to Emma. Will you?’

Tony bowed her head mechanically.

‘But I am in love with King Death, and must confess it,’ she said. ’That hideous eating you forced on me, snatched me from him. And I feel that if I had gone, I should have been mercifully forgiven by everybody.’

Page 3369

‘Except by me,’ said Emma, embracing her. ’Tony would have left her friend for her last voyage in mourning. And my dearest will live to know happiness.’

‘I have no more belief in it, Emmy.’

‘The mistake of the world is to think happiness possible to the senses.’

’Yes; we distil that fine essence through the senses; and the act is called the pain of life. It is the death of them. So much I understand of what our existence must be. But I may grieve for having done so little.’

’That is the sound grief, with hope at the core—not in love with itself and wretchedly mortal, as we find self is under every shape it takes; especially the chief one.’

‘Name it.’

‘It is best named Amor.’

There was a writhing in the frame of the hearer, for she did want Love to be respected; not shadowed by her misfortune. Her still-flushed senses protested on behalf of the eternalness of the passion, and she was obliged to think Emma’s cold condemnatory intellect came of the no knowledge of it.

A letter from Mr. Tonans, containing an enclosure, was a sharp trial of Diana’s endurance of the irony of Fate. She had spoken of the irony in allusion to her freedom. Now that, according to a communication from her lawyers, she was independent of the task of writing, the letter which paid the price of her misery bruised her heavily.

‘Read it and tear it all to strips,’ she said in an abhorrence to Emma, who rejoined: ‘Shall I go at once and see him?’

’Can it serve any end? But throw it into the fire. Oh! no simulation of virtue. There was not, I think, a stipulated return for what I did. But I perceive clearly—I can read only by events—that there was an understanding. You behold it. I went to him to sell it. He thanks me, says I served the good cause well. I have not that consolation. If I had thought of the cause—of anything high, it would have arrested me. On the fire with it!’

The letter and square slip were consumed. Diana watched the blackening papers.

So they cease their sinning, Emmy; and as long as I am in torment, I may hope for grace. We talked of the irony. It means, the pain of fire.’

‘I spoke of the irony to Redworth,’ said Emma; ‘incidentally, of course.’

‘And he fumed?’

’He is really not altogether the Mr. Cuthbert Dering of your caricature. He is never less than acceptably rational. I won’t repeat his truisms; but he said, or I deduced from what he said, that a grandmother’s maxims would expound the enigma.’

‘Probably the simple is the deep, in relation to the mysteries of life,’ said Diana, whose wits had been pricked to a momentary activity by the letter. ’He behaves wisely; so perhaps we are bound to take his words for wisdom. Much nonsense is talked and written, and he is one of the world’s reserves, who need no more than enrolling, to make a sturdy phalanx of common sense. It’s a pity they are not enlisted and drilled to express themselves.’ She relapsed. ’But neither he nor any of them could understand my case.’

Page 3370

‘He puts the idea of an irony down to the guilt of impatience, Tony.’

’Could there be a keener irony than that? A friend of Dada’s waited patiently for a small fortune, and when it arrived, he was a worn-out man, just assisted to go decently to his grave.’

‘But he may have gained in spirit by his patient waiting.’

’Oh! true. We are warmer if we travel on foot sunward, but it is a discovery that we are colder if we take to ballooning upward. The material good reverses its benefits the more nearly we clasp it. All life is a lesson that we live to enjoy but in the spirit. I will brood on your saying.’

’It is your own saying, silly Tony, as the only things worth saying always, are!’ exclaimed Emma, as she smiled happily to see her friend’s mind reviving, though it was faintly and in the dark.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Of nature with one of her cultivated daughters and A *short excursion in anti-climax*

A mind that after a long season of oblivion in pain returns to wakefulness without a keen edge for the world, is much in danger of souring permanently. Diana’s love of nature saved her from the dire mischance during a two months’ residence at Copsley, by stupefying her senses to a state like the barely conscious breathing on the verge of sleep. February blew South-west for the pairing of the birds. A broad warm wind rolled clouds of every ambiguity of form in magnitude over peeping azure, or skimming upon lakes of blue and lightest green, or piling the amphitheatre for majestic sunset. Or sometimes those daughters of the wind flew linked and low, semi-purple, threatening the shower they retained and teaching gloom to rouse a songful nest in the bosom of the viewer. Sometimes they were April, variable to soar with rain-skirts and sink with sunshafts. Or they drenched wood and field for a day and opened on the high South-western star. Daughters of the wind, but shifty daughters of this wind of the dropping sun, they have to be watched to be loved in their transformations.

Diana had Arthur Rhodes and her faithful Leander for walking companions. If Arthur said: ’Such a day would be considered melancholy by London people,’ she thanked him in her heart, as a benefactor who had revealed to her things of the deepest. The simplest were her food. Thus does Nature restore us, by drugging the brain and making her creature confidingly animal for its new growth. She imagined herself to have lost the power to think; certainly she had not the striving or the wish. Exercise of her limbs to reach a point of prospect, and of her ears and eyes to note what bird had piped, what

flower was out on the banks, and the leaf of what tree it was that lay beneath the budding, satiated her daily desires. She gathered unknowingly a sheaf of landscapes,

Page 3371

images, keys of dreamed horizons, that opened a world to her at any chance breath altering shape or hue: a different world from the one of her old ambition. Her fall had brought her renovatingly to earth, and the saving naturalness of the woman recreated her childlike, with shrouded recollections of her strange taste of life behind her; with a tempered fresh blood to enjoy aimlessly, and what would erewhile have been a barrenness to her sensibilities.

In time the craving was evolved for positive knowledge, and shells and stones and weeds were deposited on the library-table at Copsley, botanical and geological books comparingly examined, Emma Dunstane always eager to assist; for the samples wafted her into the heart of the woods. Poor Sir Lukin tried three days of their society, and was driven away headlong to Club-life. He sent down Redworth, with whom the walks of the zealous inquirers were profitable, though Diana, in acknowledging it to herself, reserved a decided preference for her foregone ethereal mood, larger, and untroubled by the presence of a man. The suspicion Emma had sown was not excited to an alarming activity; but she began to question: could the best of men be simply—a woman's friend?—was not long service rather less than a proof of friendship? She could be blind when her heart was on fire for another. Her passion for her liberty, however, received no ominous warning to look to the defences. He was the same blunt speaker, and knotted his brows as queerly as ever at Arthur, in a transparent calculation of how this fellow meant to gain his livelihood. She wilfully put it to the credit of Arthur's tact that his elder was amiable, without denying her debt to the good man for leaving her illness and her appearance unmentioned. He forbore even to scan her features. Diana's wan contemplativeness, in which the sparkle of meaning slowly rose to flash, as we see a bubble rising from the deeps of crystal waters, caught at his heart while he talked his matter-of-fact. But her instinct of a present safety was true. She and Arthur discovered —and it set her first meditating whether she did know the man so very accurately—that he had printed, for private circulation, when at Harrow School, a little book, a record of his observations in nature. Lady Dunstane was the casual betrayer. He shrugged at the nonsense of a boy's publishing; anybody's publishing he held for a doubtful proof of sanity. His excuse was, that he had not published opinions. Let us observe, and assist in our small sphere; not come mouthing to the footlights!

'We retire,' Diana said, for herself and Arthur.

'The wise thing, is to avoid the position that enforces publishing,' said he, to the discomposure of his raw junior.

Page 3372

In the fields he was genially helpful; commending them to the study of the South-west wind, if they wanted to forecast the weather and understand the climate of our country. 'We have no Seasons, or only a shuffle of them. Old calendars give seven months of the year to the Southwest, and that's about the average. Count on it, you may generally reckon what to expect. When you don't have the excess for a year or two, you are drenched the year following.' He knew every bird by its flight and its pipe, habits, tricks, hints of sagacity homely with the original human; and his remarks on the sensitive life of trees and herbs were a spell to his thirsty hearers. Something of astronomy he knew; but in relation to that science, he sank his voice, touchingly to Diana, who felt drawn to kinship with him when he had a pupil's tone. An allusion by Arthur to the poetical work of Aratus, led to a memorably pleasant evening's discourse upon the long reading of the stars by these our mortal eyes. Altogether the mind of the practical man became distinguishable to them as that of a plain brother of the poetic. Diana said of him to Arthur: 'He does not supply me with similes; he points to the source of them.' Arthur, with envy of the man of positive knowledge, disguised an unstrung heart in agreeing.

Redworth alluded passingly to the condition of public affairs. Neither of them replied. Diana was wondering how one who perused the eternal of nature should lend a thought to the dusty temporary of the world. Subsequently she reflected that she was asking him to confine his great male appetite to the nibble of bread which nourished her immediate sense of life. Her reflections were thin as mist, coming and going like the mist, with no direction upon her brain, if they sprang from it. When he had gone, welcome though Arthur had seen him to be, she rebounded to a broader and cheerfuller liveliness. Arthur was flattered by an idea of her casting off incubus—a most worthy gentleman, and a not perfectly sympathetic associate. Her eyes had their lost light in them, her step was brisker; she challenged him to former games of conversation, excursions in blank verse here and there, as the mood dictated. They amused themselves, and Emma too. She revelled in seeing Tony's younger face and hearing some of her natural outbursts. That Dacier never could have been the man for her, would have compressed and subjected her, and inflicted a further taste of bondage in marriage, she was assured. She hoped for the day when Tony would know it, and haply that another, whom she little comprehended, was her rightful mate.

Page 3373

March continued South-westerly and grew rainier, as Redworth had foretold, bidding them look for gales and storm, and then the change of wind. It came, after wettings of a couple scorning the refuge of dainty townsfolk under umbrellas, and proud of their likeness to dripping wayside wildflowers. Arthur stayed at Copsley for a week of the crisp North-easter; and what was it, when he had taken his leave, that brought Tony home from her solitary walk in dejection? It could not be her seriously regretting the absence of the youthful companion she had parted with gaily, appointing a time for another meeting on the heights, and recommending him to repair idle hours with strenuous work. The fit passed and was not explained. The winds are sharp with memory. The hard shrill wind crowed to her senses of an hour on the bleak sands of the French coast; the beginning of the curtained misery, inscribed as her happiness. She was next day prepared for her term in London with Emma, who promised her to make an expedition at the end of it by way of holiday, to see The Crossways, which Mr. Redworth said was not tenanted.

‘You won’t go through it like a captive?’ said Emma.

‘I don’t like it, dear,’ Diana put up a comic mouth. ’The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay. That is the discovery of advancing age: and I used to imagine it was quite the other way. But they are the debts of honour, imperative. I shall go through it grandly, you will see. If I am stopped at my first recreancy and turned directly the contrary way, I think I have courage.’

‘You will not fear to meet . . . any one?’ said Emma.

’The world and all it contains! I am robust, eager for the fray, an Amazon, a brazen-faced hussy. Fear and I have parted. I shall not do you discredit. Besides you intend to have me back here with you? And besides again, I burn to make a last brave appearance. I have not outraged the world, dear Emmy, whatever certain creatures in it may fancy.’

She had come out of her dejectedness with a shrewder view of Dacier; equally painful, for it killed her romance, and changed the garden of their companionship in imagination to a waste. Her clearing intellect prompted it, whilst her nature protested, and reviled her to uplift him. He had loved her. ‘I shall die knowing that a man did love me once,’ she said to her widowed heart, and set herself blushing and blanching. But the thought grew inveterate: ‘He could not bear much.’ And in her quick brain it shot up a crop of similitudes for the quality of that man’s love. She shuddered, as at a swift cleaving of cold steel. He had not given her a chance; he had not replied to her letter written with the pen dipped in her heart’s blood; he must have gone straight away to the woman he married. This after almost justifying the scandalous world:—after . . . She realized her sensations of that night when the house-door had closed on him; her feeling

Page 3374

of lost sovereignty, degradation, feminine danger, friendliness: and she was unaware, and never knew, nor did the world ever know, what cunning had inspired the frosty Cupid to return to her and be warmed by striking a bargain for his weighty secret. She knew too well that she was not of the snows which do not melt, however high her conceit of herself might place her. Happily she now stood out of the sun, in a bracing temperature, Polar; and her compassion for women was deeply sisterly in tenderness and understanding. She spoke of it to Emma as her gain.

‘I have not seen that you required to suffer to be considerate,’ Emma said.

’It is on my conscience that I neglected Mary Paynham, among others—and because you did not take to her, Emmy.’

‘The reading of it appears to me, that she has neglected you.’

’She was not in my confidence, and so I construe it as delicacy. One never loses by believing the best.’

‘If one is not duped.’

’Expectations dupe us, not trust. The light of every soul burns upward. Of course, most of them are candles in the wind. Let us allow for atmospheric disturbance. Now I thank you, dear, for bringing me back to life. I see that I was really a selfish suicide, because I feel I have power to do some good, and belong to the army. When we are beginning to reflect, as I do now, on a recovered basis of pure health, we have the world at the dawn and know we are young in it, with great riches, great things gained and greater to achieve. Personally I behold a queer little wriggling worm for myself; but as one, of the active world I stand high and shapely; and the very thought of doing work, is like a draught of the desert-springs to me. Instead of which, I have once more to go about presenting my face to vindicate my character. Mr. Redworth would admit no irony in that! At all events, it is anti-climax.’

‘I forgot to tell you, Tony, you have been proposed for,’ said Emma; and there was a rush of savage colour over Tony’s cheeks.

Her apparent apprehensions were relieved by hearing the name of Mr. Sullivan Smith.

’My poor dear countryman! And he thought me worthy, did he? Some day, when we are past his repeating it, I’ll thank him.’

The fact of her smiling happily at the narration of Sullivan Smith’s absurd proposal by mediatrix, proved to Emma how much her nature thirsted for the smallest support in her self-esteem.

The second campaign of London was of bad augury at the commencement, owing to the ridiculous intervention of a street-organ, that ground its pipes in a sprawling roar of one of the Puritani marches, just as the carriage was landing them at the door of her house. The notes were harsh, dissonant, drunken, interlocked and horribly torn asunder, intolerable to ears not keen to extract the tune through dreadful memories. Diana sat startled and paralyzed. The melody crashed a revival of her days with Dacier, as in gibes;

Page 3375

and yet it reached to her heart. She imagined a Providence that was trying her on the threshold, striking at her feebleness. She had to lock herself in her room for an hour of deadly abandonment to misery, resembling the run of poison through her blood, before she could bear to lift eyes on her friend; to whom subsequently she said: 'Emmy, there are wounds that cut sharp as the enchanter's sword, and we don't know we are in halves till some rough old intimate claps us on the back, merely to ask us how we are! I have to join myself together again, as well as I can. It's done, dear; but don't notice the cement.'

'You will be brave,' Emma petitioned.

'I long to show you I will.'

The meeting with those who could guess a portion of her story, did not disconcert her. To Lady Pennon and Lady Singleby, she was the brilliant Diana of her nominal luminary issuing from cloud. Face and tongue, she was the same; and once in the stream, she soon gathered its current topics and scattered her arrowy phrases. Lady Pennon ran about with them, declaring that the beautiful speaker, if ever down, was up, and up to her finest mark. Mrs. Fryar-Gannett had then become the blazing regnant antisocial star; a distresser of domesticity, the magnetic attraction in the spirituous flames of that wild snapdragon bowl, called the Upper class; and she was angelically blonde, a straw-coloured Beauty. 'A lovely wheat sheaf, if the head were ripe,' Diana said of her.

'Threshed, says her fame, my dear,' Lady Pennon replied, otherwise allusive.

'A wheatsheaf of contention for the bread of wind,' said Diana, thinking of foolish Sir Lukin; thoughtless of talking to a gossip.

She would have shot a lighter dart, had she meant it to fly and fix.

Proclaim, ye classics, what minor Goddess, or primal, Iris or Ate, sped straight away on wing to the empty wheatsheaf-ears of the golden-visaged Amabel Fryar-Gunnett, daughter of Demeter in the field to behold, of Aphrodite in her rosy incendiarism for the many of men; filling that pearly concave with a perversion of the uttered speech, such as never lady could have repeated, nor man, if less than a reaping harvester: which verily for women to hear, is to stamp a substantial damnatory verification upon the delivery of the saying:—

'Mrs. Warwick says of you, that you're a bundle of straws for everybody and bread for nobody.'

Or, stranger speculation, through what, and what number of conduits, curious, and variously colouring, did it reach the fair Amabel of the infant-in-cradle smile, in that deformation of the original utterance! To pursue the thing, would be to enter the subter-

sensual perfumed caverns of a Romance of Fashionable Life, with no hope of coming back to light, other than by tail of lynx, like the great Arabian seaman, at the last page of the final chapter. A prospectively popular narrative indeed! and coin to reward it, and

Page 3376

applause. But I am reminded that a story properly closed on the marriage of the heroine Constance and her young Minister of State, has no time for conjuring chemists' bouquet of aristocracy to lure the native taste. When we have satisfied English sentiment, our task is done, in every branch of art, I hear: and it will account to posterity for the condition of the branches. Those yet wakeful eccentrics interested in such a person as Diana, to the extent of remaining attentive till the curtain falls, demand of me to gather-up the threads concerning her: which my gardener sweeping his pile of dead leaves before the storm and night, advises me to do speedily. But it happens that her resemblance to her sex and species of a civilized period plants the main threads in her bosom. Rogues and a policeman, or a hurried change of front of all the actors, are not a part of our slow machinery.

Nor is she to show herself to advantage. Only those who read her woman's blood and character with the head, will care for Diana of the Crossways now that the knot of her history has been unravelled. Some little love they must have for her likewise: and how it can be quickened on behalf of a woman who never sentimentalizes publicly, and has no dolly-dolly compliance, and muses on actual life, and fatigues with the exercise of brains, and is in sooth an alien: a princess of her kind and time, but a foreign one, speaking a language distinct from the mercantile, trafficking in ideas:—this is the problem. For to be true to her, one cannot attempt at propitiation. She said worse things of the world than that which was conveyed to the boxed ears of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett. Accepting the war declared against her a second time, she performed the common mental trick in adversity of setting her personally known innocence to lessen her generally unknown error—but anticipating that this might become known, and the other not; and feeling that the motives of the acknowledged error had served to guard her from being the culprit of the charge she writhed under, she rushed out of a meditation compounded of mind and nerves, with derision of the world's notion of innocence and estimate of error. It was a mood lasting through her stay in London, and longer, to the discomfort of one among her friends; and it was worthy of The Anti-climax Expedition, as she called it.

For the rest, her demeanour to the old monster world exacting the servility of her, in repayment for its tolerating countenance, was faultless. Emma beheld the introduction to Mrs. Warwick of his bride, by Mr. Percy Dacier. She had watched their approach up the Ball-room, thinking, how differently would Redworth and Tony have looked. Differently, had it been Tony and Dacier: but Emma could not persuade herself of a possible harmony between them, save at the cost of Tony's expiation of the sin of the greater heart in a performance equivalent to Suttee. Perfectly an English gentleman of the higher order,

Page 3377

he seemed the effigy of a tombstone one, fixed upright, and civilly proud of his effigy bride. So far, Emma considered them fitted. She perceived his quick eye on her corner of the room; necessarily, for a man of his breeding, without a change of expression. An emblem pertaining to her creed was on the heroine's neck; also dependant at her waist. She was white from head to foot; a symbol of purity. Her frail smile appeared deeply studied in purity. Judging from her look and her reputation, Emma divined that the man was justly mated with a devious filmy sentimentalist, likely to 'fiddle harmonics on the sensual strings' for him at a mad rate in the years to come. Such fiddling is indeed the peculiar diversion of the opulent of a fatly prosperous people; who take it, one may concede to them, for an inspired elimination of the higher notes of life: the very highest. That saying of Tony's ripened with full significance to Emma now. Not sensualism, but sham spiritualism, was the meaning; and however fine the notes, they come skilfully evoked of the under-brute in us. Reasoning it so, she thought it a saying for the penetration of the most polished and deceptive of the later human masks. She had besides, be it owned, a triumph in conjuring a sentence of her friend's, like a sword's edge, to meet them; for she was boiling angrily at the ironical destiny which had given to those Two a beclouding of her beloved, whom she could have rebuked in turn for her insane caprice of passion.

But when her beloved stood-up to greet Mrs. Percy Dacier, all idea save tremulous admiration of the valiant woman, who had been wounded nigh to death, passed from Emma's mind. Diana tempered her queenliness to address the favoured lady with smiles and phrases of gentle warmth, of goodness of nature; and it became a halo rather than a personal eclipse that she cast.

Emma looked at Dacier. He wore the prescribed conventional air, subject in half a minute to a rapid blinking of the eyelids. His wife could have been inimically imagined fascinated and dwindling. A spot of colour came to her cheeks. She likewise began to blink.

The happy couple bowed, proceeding; and Emma had Dacier's back for a study. We score on that flat slate of man, unattractive as it is to hostile observations, and unprotected, the device we choose. Her harshest, was the positive thought that he had taken the woman best suited to him. Doubtless, he was a man to prize the altar-candle above the lamp of day. She fancied the back-view of him shrunken and straitened: perhaps a mere hostile fancy: though it was conceivable that he should desire as little of these meetings as possible. Eclipses are not courted.

Page 3378

The specially womanly exultation of Emma Dunstane in her friend's noble attitude, seeing how their sex had been struck to the dust for a trifling error, easily to be overlooked by a manful lover, and had asserted its dignity in physical and moral splendour, in self-mastery and benignness, was unshared by Diana. As soon as the business of the expedition was over, her orders were issued for the sale of the lease of her house and all it contained. 'I would sell Danvers too,' she said, 'but the creature declines to be treated as merchandize. It seems I have a faithful servant; very much like my life, not quite to my taste; the one thing out of the wreck!—with my dog!'

Before quitting her house for the return to Copsley, she had to grant Mr. Alexander Hepburn, post-haste from his Caledonia, a private interview. She came out of it noticeably shattered. Nothing was related to Emma, beyond the remark: 'I never knew till this morning the force of No in earnest.' The weighty little word—woman's native watchdog and guardian, if she calls it to her aid in earnest—had encountered and withstood a fiery ancient host, astonished at its novel power of resistance.

Emma contented herself with the result. 'Were you much supplicated?'

'An Operatic Fourth-Act,' said Diana, by no means; feeling so flippantly as she spoke.

She received, while under the impression of this man's, honest, if primitive, ardour of courtship, or effort to capture, a characteristic letter from Westlake, choicely phrased, containing presumeably an application for her hand, in the generous offer of his own. Her reply to a pursuer of that sort was easy. Comedy, after the barbaric attack, refreshed her wits and reliance on her natural fencing weapons. To Westlake, the unwritten No was conveyed in a series of kindly ironic subterfuges, that, played it like an impish flea across the pages, just giving the bloom of the word; and rich smiles come to Emma's life in reading the dexterous composition: which, however, proved so thoroughly to Westlake's taste, that a second and a third exercise in the comedy of the negative had to be despatched to him from Copsley.

CHAPTER XL

In which we see nature making of A *woman* A *maid again*, *and* A *thrice whimsical*

On their way from London, after leaving the station, the drive through the valley led them past a field, where cricketers were at work bowling and batting under a vertical sun: not a very comprehensible sight to ladies, whose practical tendencies, as observers of the other sex, incline them to question the gain of such an expenditure of energy. The dispersal of the alphabet over a printed page is not less perplexing to the illiterate. As soon as Emma Dunstane discovered the Copsley head-gamekeeper at one wicket, and, actually,

Page 3379

Thomas Redworth facing him, bat in hand, she sat up, greatly interested. Sir Lukin stopped the carriage at the gate, and reminded his wife that it was the day of the year for the men of his estate to encounter a valley Eleven. Redworth, like the good fellow he was, had come down by appointment in the morning out of London, to fill the number required, Copsley being weak this year. Eight of their wickets had fallen for a lament able figure of twenty-nine runs; himself clean-bowled the first ball. But Tom Redworth had got fast hold of his wicket, and already scored fifty to his bat. 'There! grand hit!' Sir Lukin cried, the ball flying hard at the rails. 'Once a cricketer, always a cricketer, if you've legs to fetch the runs. And Pullen's not doing badly. His business is to stick. We shall mark them a hundred yet. I do hate a score on our side without the two 00's.' He accounted for Redworth's mixed colours by telling the ladies he had lent him his flannel jacket; which, against black trousers, looked odd but not ill.

Gradually the enthusiasm of the booth and bystanders converted the flying of a leather ball into a subject of honourable excitement.

'And why are you doing nothing?' Sir Lukin was asked; and he explained:

'My stumps are down: I'm married.' He took his wife's hand prettily.

Diana had a malicious prompting. She smothered the wasp, and said: 'Oh! look at that!'

'Grand hit again! Oh! good! good!' cried Sir Lukin, clapping to it, while the long-hit-off ran spinning his legs into one for an impossible catch; and the batsmen were running and stretching bats, and the ball flying away, flying back, and others after it, and still the batsmen running, till it seemed that the ball had escaped control and was leading the fielders on a coltish innings of its own, defiant of bowlers.

Diana said merrily: 'Bravo our side!'

'Bravo, old Tom Redworth'; rejoined Sir Lukin. 'Four, and a three! And capital weather, haven't we: Hope we shall have same sort day next month—return match, my ground. I've seen Tom Redworth score—old days—over two hundred t' his bat. And he used to bowl too. But bowling wants practice. And, Emmy, look at the old fellows lining the booth, pipe in mouth and cheering. They do enjoy a day like this. We'll have a supper for fifty at Copsley's:—it's fun. By Jove! we must have reached up to near the hundred.'

He commissioned a neighbouring boy to hie to the booth for the latest figures, and his emissary taught lightning a lesson.

Diana praised the little fellow.

'Yes, he's a real English boy,' said Emma.

’We ’ve thousands of ’em, thousands, ready to your hand,’ exclaimed Sir Lukin, ‘and a confounded Radicalized country . . .’ he murmured gloomily of ’lets us be kicked! . . . any amount of insult, meek as gruel! . . . making of the finest army the world has ever seen! You saw the papers this morning? Good heaven! how a nation with an atom of self-respect can go on standing that sort of bullying from foreigners! We do. We’re insulted and we’re threatened, and we call for a hymn!—Now then, my man, what is it?’

Page 3380

The boy had flown back. 'Ninety-two marked, sir; ninety-nine runs; one more for the hundred.'

'Well reckoned; and mind you're up at Copsley for the return match.—And Tom Redworth says, they may bite their thumbs to the bone—they don't hurt us. I tell him, he has no sense of national pride. He says, we're not prepared for war: We never are! And whose the fault? Says, we're a peaceful people, but 'ware who touches us! He doesn't feel a kick.—Oh! clever snick! Hurrah for the hundred!—Two-three. No, don't force the running, you fools!—though they 're wild with the ball: ha!—no?—all right!' The wicket stood. Hurrah!

The heat of the noonday sun compelled the ladies to drive on.

'Enthusiasm has the privilege of not knowing monotony,' said Emma. 'He looks well in flannels.'

'Yes, he does,' Diana replied, aware of the reddening despite her having spoken so simply. 'I think the chief advantage men have over us is in their amusements.'

'Their recreations.'

'That is the better word.' Diana fanned her cheeks and said she was warm. 'I mean, the permanent advantage. For you see that age does not affect them.'

'Tom Redworth is not a patriarch, my dear.'

'Well, he is what would be called mature.'

'He can't be more than thirty-two or three; and that, for a man of his constitution, means youth.'

'Well, I can imagine him a patriarch playing cricket.'

'I should imagine you imagine the possible chances. He is the father who would play with his boys.'

'And lock up his girls in the nursery.' Diana murmured of the extraordinary heat.

Emma begged her to remember her heterodox views of the education for girls.

'He bats admirably,' said Diana. 'I wish I could bat half as well.'

'Your batting is with the tongue.'

’Not so good. And a solid bat, or bludgeon, to defend the poor stumps, is surer. But there is the difference of cricket:—when your stumps are down, you are idle, at leisure; not a miserable prisoner.’

‘Supposing all marriages miserable.’

‘To the mind of me,’ said Diana, and observed Emma’s rather saddened eyelids for a proof that schemes to rob her of dear liberty were certainly planned.

They conversed of expeditions to Redworth’s Berkshire mansion, and to The Crossways, untenanted at the moment, as he had informed Emma, who fancied it would please Tony to pass a night in the house she loved; but as he was to be of the party she coldly acquiesced.

The woman of flesh refuses pliancy when we want it of her, and will not, until it is her good pleasure, be bent to the development called a climax, as the puppet-woman, mother of Fiction and darling of the multitude! ever amiably does, at a hint of the Nuptial Chapter. Diana in addition sustained the weight of brains. Neither with waxen optics nor with subservient jointings did she go through her pathways

Page 3381

of the world. Her direct individuality rejected the performance of simpleton, and her lively blood, the warmer for its containment quickened her to penetrate things and natures; and if as yet, in justness to the loyal male friend, she forbore to name him conspirator, she read both him and Emma, whose inner bosom was revealed to her, without an effort to see. But her characteristic chasteness of mind, not coldness of the 'blood,—which had supported an arduous conflict, past all existing rights closely to depict, and which barbed her to pierce to the wishes threatening her freedom, deceived her now to think her flaming blushes came of her relentless divination on behalf of her recovered treasure: whereby the clear reading of others distracted the view of herself. For one may be the cleverest alive, and still hoodwinked while blood is young and warm.

The perpetuity of the contrast presented to her reflections, of Redworth's healthy, open, practical, cheering life, and her own freakishly interwinding, darkly penetrative, simulacrum of a life, cheerless as well as useless, forced her humiliated consciousness by degrees, in spite of pride, to the knowledge that she was engaged in a struggle with him; and that he was the stronger;—it might be, the worthier: she thought him the handsomer. He throve to the light of day, and she spun a silly web that meshed her in her intricacies. Her intuition of Emma's wishes led to this; he was constantly before her. She tried to laugh at the image of the concrete cricketer, half-flannelled, and red of face: the 'lucky calculator,' as she named him to Emma, who shook her head, and sighed. The abstract, healthful and powerful man, able to play besides profitably working, defied those poor efforts. Consequently, at once she sent up a bubble to the skies, where it became a spheral realm, of far too fine an atmosphere for men to breathe in it; and thither she transported herself at will, whenever the contrast, with its accompanying menace of a tyrannic subjugation, overshadowed her. In the above, the kingdom composed of her shattered romance of life and her present aspirings, she was free and safe. Nothing touched her there—nothing that Redworth did. She could not have admitted there her ideal of a hero. It was the sublimation of a virgin's conception of life, better fortified against the enemy. She peopled it with souls of the great and pure, gave it illimitable horizons, dreamy nooks, ravishing landscapes, melodies of the poets of music. Higher and more-celestial than the Salvatore, it was likewise, now she could assure herself serenely, independent of the horrid blood-emotions. Living up there, she had not a feeling.

The natural result of this habit of ascending to a superlunary home, was the loss of an exact sense of how she was behaving below. At the Berkshire mansion, she wore a supercilious air, almost as icy as she accused the place of being. Emma knew she must have seen in the library a row of her literary ventures, exquisitely bound; but there was no allusion to the books. Mary Paynham's portrait of Mrs. Warwick hung staring over the fireplace, and was criticized, as though its occupancy of that position had no significance.

Page 3382

‘He thinks she has a streak of genius,’ Diana said to Emma.

‘It may be shown in time,’ Emma replied, for a comment on the work. ’He should know, for the Spanish pictures are noble acquisitions.’

‘They are, doubtless, good investments.’

He had been foolish enough to say, in Diana’s hearing, that he considered the purchase of the Berkshire estate a good investment. It had not yet a name. She suggested various titles for Emma to propose: ‘The Funds’; or ‘Capital Towers’; or ‘Dividend Manor’; or ‘Railholm’; blind to the evidence of inflicting pain. Emma, from what she had guess concerning the purchaser of The Crossways, apprehended a discovery there which might make Tony’s treatment of him unkinder, seeing that she appeared actuated contrariously; and only her invalid’s new happiness in the small excursions she was capable of taking to a definite spot, of some homely attractiveness, moved her to follow her own proposal for the journey. Diana pleaded urgently, childishly in tone, to have Arthur Rhodes with them, ’so as to be sure of a sympathetic companion for a walk on the Downs.’ At The Crossways, they were soon aware that Mr. Redworth’s domestics were in attendance to serve them. Manifestly the house was his property, and not much of an investment! The principal bed-room, her father’s once, and her own, devoted now to Emma’s use, appalled her with a resemblance to her London room. She had noticed some of her furniture at ‘Dividend Manor,’ and chosen to consider it in the light of a bargain from a purchase at the sale of her goods. Here was her bed, her writing-table, her chair of authorship, desks, books, ornaments, water-colour sketches. And the drawing-room was fitted with her brackets and etageres, holding every knickknack she had possessed and scattered, small bronzes, antiques, ivory junks, quaint ivory figures Chinese and Japanese, bits of porcelain, silver incense-urns, dozens of dainty sundries. She had a shamed curiosity to spy for an omission of one of them; all were there. The Crossways had been turned into a trap.

Her reply to this blunt wooing, conspired, she felt justifled in thinking, between him and Emma, was emphatic in muteness. She treated it as if unobserved. At night, in bed, the scene of his mission from Emma to her under this roof, barred her customary ascent to her planetary kingdom. Next day she took Arthur after breakfast for a walk on the Downs and remained absent till ten minutes before the hour of dinner. As to that young gentleman, he was near to being caressed in public. Arthur’s opinions, his good sayings, were quoted; his excellent companionship on really poetical walks, and perfect sympathy, praised to his face. Challenged by her initiative to a kind of language that threw Redworth out, he declaimed: ‘We pace with some who make young morning stale.’

‘Oh! stale as peel of fruit long since consumed,’ she chimed.

And go they proceeded; and they laughed, Emma smiled a little, Redworth did the same beneath one of his questioning frowns—a sort of fatherly grimace.

Page 3383

A suspicion that this man, when infatuated, was able to practise the absurdest benevolence, the burlesque of chivalry, as a man-admiring sex esteems it, stirred very naughty depths of the woman in Diana, labouring under her perverted mood. She put him to proof, for the chance of arming her wickedest to despise him. Arthur was petted, consulted, cited, flattered all round; all but caressed. She played, with a reserve, the maturish young woman smitten by an adorable youth; and enjoyed doing it because she hoped for a visible effect—more paternal benevolence—and could do it so dispassionately. Coquettry, Emma thought, was most unworthily shown; and it was of the worst description. Innocent of conspiracy, she had seen the array of Tony's lost household treasures she wondered at a heartlessness that would not even utter common thanks to the friendly man for the compliment of prizing her portrait and the things she had owned; and there seemed an effort to wound him.

The invalided woman, charitable with allowances for her erratic husband, could offer none for the woman of a long widowhood, that had become a trebly sensitive maidenhood; abashed by her knowledge of the world, animated by her abounding blood; cherishing her new freedom, dreading the menacer; feeling that though she held the citadel, she was daily less sure of its foundations, and that her hope of some last romance in life was going; for in him shone not a glimpse. He appeared to Diana as a fatal power, attracting her without sympathy, benevolently overcoming: one of those good men, strong men, who subdue and do not kindle. The enthralment revolted a nature capable of accepting subjection only by burning. In return for his moral excellence, she gave him the moral sentiments: esteem, gratitude, abstract admiration, perfect faith. But the man? She could not now say she had never been loved; and a flood of tenderness rose in her bosom, swelling from springs that she had previously reproved with a desperate severity: the unhappy, unsatisfied yearning to be more than loved, to love. It was alive, out of the wreck of its first trial. This, the secret of her natural frailty, was bitter to her pride: chastely-minded as she was, it whelmed her. And then her comic imagination pictured Redworth dramatically making love. And to a widow! It proved him to be senseless of romance. Poetic men take aim at maidens. His devotedness to a widow was charged against him by the widow's shudder at antecedents distasteful to her soul, a discolouration of her life. She wished to look entirely forward, as upon a world washed clear of night, not to be cast back on her antecedents by practical wooings or words of love; to live spiritually; free of the shower at her eyelids attendant on any idea of her loving. The woman who talked of the sentimentalist's 'fiddling harmonics,' herself stressed the material chords, in her attempt to escape out of herself and away from her pursuer.

Page 3384

Meanwhile she was as little conscious of what she was doing as of how she appeared. Arthur went about with the moony air of surcharged sweetness, and a speculation on it, alternately tiptoe and prostrate. More of her intoxicating wine was administered to him, in utter thoughtlessness of consequences to one who was but a boy and a friend, almost of her own rearing. She told Emma, when leaving The Crossways, that she had no desire to look on the place again: she wondered at Mr. Redworth's liking such a solitude. In truth, the look back on it let her perceive that her husband haunted it, and disfigured the man, of real generosity, as her heart confessed, but whom she accused of a lack of prescient delicacy, for not knowing she would and must be haunted there. Blaming him, her fountain of colour shot up, at a murmur of her unjustness and the poor man's hopes.

A week later, the youth she publicly named 'her Arthur' came down to Copsley with news of his having been recommended by Mr. Redworth for the post of secretary to an old Whig nobleman famous for his patronage of men of letters. And besides, he expected to inherit, he said, and gazed in a way to sharpen her instincts. The wine he had drunk of late from her flowing vintage was in his eyes. They were on their usual rambles out along the heights. 'Accept, by all means, and thank Mr. Redworth,' said she, speeding her tongue to intercept him. 'Literature is a good stick and a bad horse. Indeed, I ought to know. You can always write; I hope you will.'

She stepped fast, hearing: 'Mrs. Warwick—Diana! May I take your hand?'

This was her pretty piece of work! 'Why should you? If you speak my Christian name, no: you forfeit any pretext. And pray, don't loiter. We are going at the pace of the firm of Potter and Dawdle, and you know they never got their shutters down till it was time to put them up again.'

Nimble-footed as she was, she pressed ahead too fleetly for amorous eloquence to have a chance. She heard 'Diana!' twice, through the rattling of her discourse and flapping of her dress.

'Christian names are coin that seem to have an indifferent valuation of the property they claim,' she said in the Copsley garden; 'and as for hands, at meeting and parting, here is the friendliest you could have. Only don't look rueful. My dear Arthur, spare me that, or I shall blame myself horribly.'

His chance had gone, and he composed his face. No hope in speaking had nerved him; merely the passion to speak. Diana understood the state, and pitied the naturally modest young fellow, and chafed at herself as a senseless incendiary, who did mischief right and left, from seeking to shun the apparently inevitable. A sidethought intruded, that he would have done his wooing poetically—not in the burly storm, or bull-Saxon, she apprehended. Supposing it imperative with her to choose? She looked up, and the bird of broader wing darkened the whole sky, bidding her know that she had no choice.

Page 3385

Emma was requested to make Mr. Redworth acquainted with her story, all of it:—'So that this exalted friendship of his may be shaken to a common level. He has an unbearably high estimate of me, and it hurts me. Tell him all; and more than even you have known:—but for his coming to me, on the eve of your passing under the surgeon's hands, I should have gone—flung the world my glove! A matter of minutes. Ten minutes later! The train was to start for France at eight, and I was awaited. I have to thank heaven that the man was one of those who can strike icily. Tell Mr. Redworth what I say. You two converse upon every subject. One may be too loftily respected—in my case. By and by—for he is a tolerant reader of life and women, I think—we shall be humdrum friends of the lasting order.'

Emma's cheeks were as red as Diana's. 'I fancy Tom Redworth has not much to learn concerning any person he cares for,' she said. 'You like him? I have lost touch of you, my dear, and ask.'

'I like him: that I can say. He is everything I am not. But now I am free, the sense of being undeservedly over-esteemed imposes fetters, and I don't like them. I have been called a Beauty. Rightly or other, I have had a Beauty's career; and a curious caged beast's life I have found it. Will you promise me to speak to him? And also, thank him for helping Arthur Rhodes to a situation.'

At this, the tears fell from her. And so enigmatical had she grown to Emma, that her bosom friend took them for a confessed attachment to the youth.

Diana's wretched emotion shamed her from putting any inquiries whether Redworth had been told. He came repeatedly, and showed no change of face, always continuing in the form of huge hovering griffin; until an idea, instead of the monster bird, struck her. Might she not, after all, be cowering under imagination? The very maidenly idea wakened her womanliness—to reproach her remainder of pride, not to see more accurately. It was the reason why she resolved, against Emma's extreme entreaties, to take lodgings in the South valley below the heights, where she could be independent of fancies and perpetual visitors, but near her beloved at any summons of urgency; which Emma would not habitually send because of the coming of a particular gentleman. Dresses were left at Copsley for dining and sleeping there upon occasion, and poor Danvers, despairing over the riddle of her mistress, was condemned to the melancholy descent.

'It's my belief,' she confided to Lady Dunstane's maid Bartlett, 'she'll hate men all her life after that Mr. Dacier.'

If women were deceived, and the riddle deceived herself, there is excuse for a plain man like Redworth in not having the slightest clue to the daily shifting feminine maze he beheld. The strange thing was, that during her maiden time she had never been shifty or flighty, invariably limpid and direct.

CHAPTER XLI

Page 3386

CONTAINS A REVELATION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE TIGRESS IN DIANA

An afternoon of high summer blazed over London through the City's awning of smoke, and the three classes of the population, relaxed by the weariful engagement with what to them was a fruitless heat, were severally bathing their ideas in dreams of the contrast possible to embrace: breezy seas or moors, aerial Alps, cool beer. The latter, if confessedly the lower comfort, is the readier at command; and Thomas Redworth, whose perspiring frame was directing his inward vision to fly for solace to a trim new yacht, built on his lines, beckoning from Southampton Water, had some of the amusement proper to things plucked off the levels, in the conversation of a couple of journeymen close ahead of him, as he made his way from a quiet street of brokers' offices to a City Bank. One asked the other if he had ever tried any of that cold stuff they were now selling out of barrows, with cream. His companion answered, that he had not got much opinion of stuff of the sort; and what was it like?

'Well, it's cheap, it ain't bad; it's cooling. But it ain't refreshing.'

'Just what I reckoned all that newfangle rubbish.'

Without a consultation, the conservatives in beverage filed with a smart turn about, worthy of veterans at parade on the drill-ground, into a public-house; and a dialogue chiefly remarkable for absence of point, furnished matter to the politician's head of the hearer. Provided that their beer was unadulterated! Beer they would have; and why not, in weather like this? But how to make the publican honest! And he was not the only trickster preying on the multitudinous poor copper crowd, rightly to be protected by the silver and the golden. Revelations of the arts practised to plump them with raw-earth and minerals in the guise of nourishment, had recently knocked at the door of the general conscience and obtained a civil reply from the footman. Repulsive as the thought was to one still holding to Whiggish Liberalism, though flying various Radical kites, he was caught by the decisive ultratorrent, and whirled to amid the necessity for the interference of the State, to stop the poisoning of the poor. Upper classes have never legislated systematically in their interests; and quid . . . rabidae tradis ovile lupae? says one of the multitude. We may be seeing fangs of wolves where fleeces waxed. The State that makes it a vital principle to concern itself with the helpless poor, meets instead of waiting for Democracy; which is a perilous flood but when it is dammed. Or else, in course of time, luxurious yachting, my friend, will encounter other reefs and breakers than briny ocean's! Capital, whereat Diana Warwick aimed her superbest sneer, has its instant duties. She theorized on the side of poverty, and might do so: he had no right to be theorizing on the side of riches. Across St. George's Channel, the cry for humanity in Capital was an agony. He ought to be there, doing, not cogitating. The post of Irish Secretary must be won by real service founded on absolute local knowledge. Yes, and sympathy, if you like; but sympathy is for proving, not prating . . . .

Page 3387

These were the meditations of a man in love; veins, arteries, headpiece in love, and constantly brooding at a solitary height over the beautiful coveted object; only too bewildered by her multifarious evanescent feminine evasions, as of colours on a ruffle water, to think of pouncing for he could do nothing to soften, nothing that seemed to please her: and all the while, the motive of her mind impelled him in reflection beyond practicable limits: even pointing him to apt quotations! Either he thought within her thoughts, or his own were at her disposal. Nor was it sufficient for him to be sensible of her influence, to restrain the impetus he took from her. He had already wedded her morally, and much that he did, as well as whatever he debated, came of Diana; more than if they had been coupled, when his downright practical good sense could have spoken. She held him suspended, swaying him in that posture; and he was not a whit ashamed of it. The beloved woman was throned on the very highest of the man.

Furthermore, not being encouraged, he had his peculiar reason for delay, though now he could offer her wealth. She had once in his hearing derided the unpleasant hiss of the ungainly English matron's title of Mrs. There was no harm in the accustomed title, to his taste; but she disliking it, he did the same, on her special behalf; and the prospect, funereally draped, of a title sweeter-sounding to her ears, was above his horizon. Bear in mind, that he underwent the reverse of encouragement. Any small thing to please her was magnified, and the anticipation of it nerved the modest hopes of one who deemed himself and any man alive deeply her inferior.

Such was the mood of the lover condemned to hear another malignant scandal defiling the name of the woman he worshipped. Sir Lukin Dunstane, extremely hurried, bumped him on the lower step of the busy Bank, and said:

'Pardon!' and 'Ha! Redwarth! making money?'

'Why, what are you up to down here?' he was asked, and he answered: 'Down to the Tower, to an officer quartered there. Not bad quarters, but an infernal distance. Business.'

Having cloaked his expedition to the distance with the comprehensive word, he repeated it; by which he feared he had rendered it too significant, and he said: 'No, no; nothing particular'; and that caused the secret he contained to swell in his breast rebelliously, informing the candid creature of the fact of his hating to lie: whereupon thus he poured himself out, in the quieter bustle of an alley, off the main thoroughfare. 'You're a friend of hers. I 'm sure you care for her reputation; you 're an old friend of hers, and she's my wife's dearest friend; and I'm fond of her too; and I ought to be, and ought to know, and do know:—pure? Strike off my fist if there's a spot on her character! And a scoundrel like that fellow Wroxeter! Damnedest rage I ever was in!—-Swears . . . down at Lockton . . . when she was a girl. Why, Redworth, I can tell you, when Diana Warwick was a girl!'

Page 3388

Redworth stopped him. ‘Did he say it in your presence?’

Sir Lukin was drawn-up by the harsh question. ‘Well, no; not exactly.’ He tried to hesitate, but he was in the hot vein of a confidence and he wanted advice. ’The cur said it to a woman—hang the woman! And she hates Diana Warwick: I can’t tell why—-a regular snake’s hate. By Jove! how women carp hate!’

‘Who is the woman?’ said Redworth.

Sir Lukin complained of the mob at his elbows. ’I don’t like mentioning names here.’

A convenient open door of offices invited him to drag his receptacle, and possible counsellor, into the passage, where immediately he bethought him of a postponement of the distinct communication; but the vein was too hot. ’I say, Redworth, I wish you’d dine with me. Let’s drive up to my Club.—Very well, two words. And I warn you, I shall call him out, and make it appear it ’s about another woman, who’ll like nothing so much, if I know the Jezebel. Some women are hussies, let ’em be handsome as houris. And she’s a fire-ship; by heaven, she is! Come, you’re a friend of my wife’s, but you’re a man of the world and my friend, and you know how fellows are tempted, Tom Redworth. —Cur though he is, he’s likely to step out and receive a lesson.—Well, he’s the favoured cavalier for the present . . . h’m . . . Fryar-Gannett. Swears he told her, circumstantially; and it was down at Lockton, when Diana Warwick was a girl. Swears she’ll spit her venom at her, so that Diana Warwick shan’t hold her head up in London Society, what with that cur Wroxeter, Old Dannisburgh, and Dacier. And it does count a list, doesn’t it? confound the handsome hag! She’s jealous of a dark rival. I’ve been down to Colonel Hartswood at the Tower, and he thinks Wroxeter deserves horsewhipping, and we may manage it. I know you ’re dead against duelling; and so am I, on my honour. But you see there are cases where a lady must be protected; and anything new, left to circulate against a lady who has been talked of twice—Oh, by Jove! it must be stopped. If she has a male friend on earth, it must be stopped on the spot.’

Redworth eyed Sir Lukin curiously through his wrath.

‘We’ll drive up to your Club,’ he said.

‘Hartswood dines with me this evening, to confer,’ rejoined Sir Lukin. ‘Will you meet him?’

‘I can’t,’ said Redworth, ’I have to see a lady, whose affairs I have been attending to in the City; and I ’m engaged for the evening. You perceive, my good fellow,’ he resumed, as they rolled along, ’this is a delicate business. You have to consider your wife. Mrs. Warwick’s, name won’t come up, but another woman’s will.’

’I meet Wroxeter at a gambling-house he frequents, and publicly call him cheat—slap his face, if need be.’

‘Sure to!’ repeated Redworth. ’No stupid pretext will quash the woman’s name. Now, such a thing as a duel would give pain enough.’

‘Of course; I understand,’ Sir Lukin nodded his clear comprehension. ’But what is it you advise, to trounce the scoundrel, and silence him?’

Page 3389

’Leave it to me for a day. Let me have your word that you won’t take a step: positively—neither you nor Colonel Hartswood. I’ll see you by appointment at your Club.’ Redworth looked up over the chimneys. ’We ’re going to have a storm and a gale, I can tell you.’

‘Gale and storm!’ cried Sir Lukin; ‘what has that got to do with it?’

‘Think of something else for, a time.’

’And that brute of a woman—deuced handsome she is!—if you care for fair women, Redworth:—she’s a Venus, jumped slap out of the waves, and the Devil for sire—that you learn: running about, sowing her lies. She’s a yellow witch. Oh! but she’s a shameless minx. And a black-leg cur like Wroxeter! Any woman intimate with a fellow like that, stamps herself. I loathe her. Sort of woman who swears in the morning you’re the only man on earth; and next day—that evening-engaged!—fee to Polly Hopkins—-and it’s a gentleman, a nobleman, my lord!—been going on behind your back half the season!—and she isn’t hissed when she abuses a lady, a saint in comparison! You know the world, old fellow:—Brighton, Richmond, visits to a friend as deep in the bog. How Fryar-Gunnett—a man, after all—can stand it! And drives of an afternoon for an airing-by heaven! You’re out of that mess, Redworth: not much taste for the sex; and you’re right, you’re lucky. Upon my word, the corruption of society in the present day is awful; it’s appalling.—I rattled at her: and oh! dear me, perks on her hind heels and defies me to prove: and she’s no pretender, but hopes she’s as good as any of my “chaste Dianas.” My dear old friend, it’s when you come upon women of that kind you have a sickener. And I’m bound by the best there is in a man-honour, gratitude, all the’ list—to defend Diana Warwick.’

’So, you see, for your wife’s sake, your name can’t be hung on a woman of that kind,’ said Redworth. ’I’ll call here the day after to-morrow at three P.M.’

Sir Lukin descended and vainly pressed Redworth to run up into his Club for refreshment. Said he roguishly:

’Who ‘s the lady?’

The tone threw Redworth on his frankness.

’The lady I ‘ve been doing business for in the City, is Miss Paynham.’

‘I saw her once at Copsley; good-looking. Cleverish?’

‘She has ability.’

Entering his Club, Sir Lukin was accosted in the reading-room by a cavalry officer, a Colonel Launay, an old Harrovian, who stood at the window and asked him whether it

was not Tom Redworth in the cab. Another, of the same School, standing squared before a sheet of one of the evening newspapers, heard the name and joined them, saying: 'Tom Redworth is going to be married, some fellow told me.'

'He'll make a deuced good husband to any woman—if it's true,' said Sir Lukin, with Miss Paynham ringing in his head. 'He's a cold-blooded old boy, and likes women for their intellects.'

Colonel Launay hummed in meditative emphasis. He stared at vacancy with a tranced eye, and turning a similar gaze on Sir Lukin, as if through him, burst out: 'Oh, by George, I say, what a hugging that woman 'll get!'

Page 3390

The cocking of ears and queries of Sir Lukin put him to the test of his right to the remark; for it sounded of occult acquaintance with interesting subterranean facts; and there was a communication, in brief syllables and the dot language, crudely masculine. Immensely surprised, Sir Lukin exclaimed: 'Of course! when fellows live quietly and are careful of themselves. Ah! you may think you know a man for years, and you don't: you don't know more than an inch or two of him. Why, of course, Tom Redworth would be uxorious—the very man! And tell us what has become of the Firefly now? One never sees her. Didn't complain?'

'Very much the contrary.'

Both gentlemen were grave, believing their knowledge in the subterranean world of a wealthy city to give them a positive cognizance of female humanity; and the substance of Colonel Launay's communication had its impressiveness for them.

'Well, it's a turn right-about-face for me,' said Sir Lukin. 'What a world we live in! I fancy I've hit on the woman he means to marry;—had an idea of another woman once; but he's one of your friendly fellows with women. That's how it was I took him for a fish. Great mistake, I admit. But Tom Redworth 's a man of morals after all; and when those men do break loose for a plunge—ha! Have you ever boxed with him? Well, he keeps himself in training, I can tell you.'

Sir Lukin's round of visits drew him at night to Lady Singleby's, where he sighted the identical young lady of his thoughts, Miss Paynham, temporarily a guest of the house; and he talked to her of Redworth, and had the satisfaction to spy a blush, a rageing blush: which avowal presented her to his view as an exceedingly good-looking girl; so that he began mentally to praise Redworth for a manly superiority to small trifles and the world's tattle.

'You saw him to-day,' he said.

She answered: 'Yes. He goes down to Copsley tomorrow.'

'I think not,' said Sir Lukin.'

'I have it from him.' She closed her eyelids in speaking.

'He and I have some rather serious business in town.'

'Serious?'

'Don't be alarmed: not concerning him.'

'Whom, then? You have told me so much—I have a right to know.'

‘Not an atom of danger, I assure you?’

‘It concerns Mrs. Warwick!’ said she.

Sir Lukin thought the guess extraordinary. He preserved an impenetrable air. But he had spoken enough to set that giddy head spinning.

Nowhere during the night was Mrs. Fryar-Gannett visible. Earlier than usual, she was riding next day in the Row, alone for perhaps two minutes, and Sir Lukin passed her, formally saluting. He could not help the look behind him, she sat so bewitchingly on horseback! He looked, and behold, her riding-whip was raised erect from the elbow. It was his horse that wheeled; compulsorily he was borne at a short canter to her side.

Page 3391

‘Your commands?’

The handsome Amabel threw him a sombre glance from the corners of her uplifted eyelids; and snakish he felt it; but her colour and the line of her face went well with sullenness; and, her arts of fascination cast aside, she fascinated him more in seeming homelier, girlish. If the trial of her beauty of a woman in a temper can bear the strain, she has attractive lures indeed; irresistible to the amorous idler: and when, in addition, being the guilty person, she plays the injured, her show of temper on the taking face pitches him into perplexity with his own emotions, creating a desire to strike and be stricken, howl and set howling, which is of the happiest augury for tender reconcilement, on the terms of the gentleman on his kneecap.

‘You’ve been doing a pretty thing!’ she said, and briefly she named her house and half an hour, and flew. Sir Lukin was left to admire the figure of the horsewoman. Really, her figure had an air of vindicating her successfully, except for the poison she spat at Diana Warwick. And what pretty thing had he been doing? He reviewed dozens of speculations until the impossibility of seizing one determined him to go to Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett at the end of the half-hour—’Just to see what these women have to say for themselves.’

Some big advance drops of Redworth’s thunderstorm drawing gloomily overhead, warned him to be quick and get his horse into stables. Dismounted, the sensational man was irresolute, suspecting a female trap. But curiosity, combined with the instinctive turning of his nose in the direction of the lady’s house, led him thither, to an accompaniment of celestial growls, which impressed him, judging by that naughty-girl face of hers and the woman’s tongue she had, as a likely prelude to the scene to come below.

CHAPTER XLII

The penultimate: *Showing* A *final struggle for liberty and run into harness*

The prophet of the storm had forgotten his prediction; which, however, was of small concern to him, apart from the ducking he received midway between the valley and the heights of Copsley; whither he was bound, on a mission so serious that, according to his custom in such instances, he chose to take counsel of his active legs: an adviseable course when the brain wants clearing and the heart fortifying. Diana’s face was clearly before him through the deluge; now in ogle features, the dimple running from her mouth, the dark bright eyes and cut of eyelids, and nostrils alive under their lightning; now inkier whole radiant smile, or musefully listening, nursing a thought. Or she was obscured, and he felt the face. The individuality of it had him by the heart, beyond his powers of visioning. On his arrival, he stood in the hall, adrip like one of the trees of the lawn, laughing at Lady Dunstane’s anxious exclamations. His portmanteau

had come and he was expected; she hurried out at the first ringing of the bell, to greet and reproach him for walking in such weather.

Page 3392

‘Diana has left me,’ she said, when he reappeared in dry clothing. ’We are neighbours; she has taken cottage-lodgings at Selshall, about an hour’s walk:—one of her wild dreams of independence. Are you disappointed?’

‘I am,’ Redworth confessed.

Emma coloured. ’She requires an immense deal of humouring at present. The fit will wear off; only we must wait for it. Any menace to her precious liberty makes her prickly. She is passing the day with the Pettigrews, who have taken a place near her village for a month. She promised to dine and sleep here, if she returned in time. What is your news?’

‘Nothing; the world wags on.’

‘You have nothing special to tell her?’

‘Nothing’; he hummed; ‘nothing, I fancy, that she does not know.’

‘You said you were disappointed.’

‘It’s always a pleasure to see her.’

‘Even in her worst moods, I find it so.’

‘Oh! moods!’ quoth Redworth.

‘My friend, they are to be reckoned, with women.’

‘Certainly; what I meant was, that I don’t count them against women.’

’Good: but my meaning was . . . I think I remember your once comparing them and the weather; and you spoke of the “one point more variable in women.” You may forestall your storms. There is no calculating the effect of a few little words at a wrong season.’

’With women! I suppose not. I have no pretension to a knowledge of the sex.’

Emma imagined she had spoken plainly enough, if he had immediate designs; and she was not sure of that, and wished rather to shun his confidences while Tony was in her young widowhood, revelling in her joy of liberty. By and by, was her thought: perhaps next year. She dreaded Tony’s refusal of the yoke, and her iron-hardness to the dearest of men proposing it; and moreover, her further to be apprehended holding to the refusal, for the sake of consistency, if it was once uttered. For her own sake, she shrank from hearing intentions, that distressing the good man, she would have to discountenance. His candour in confessing disappointment, and his open face, his excellent sense too, gave her some assurance of his not being foolishly impetuous. After he had read to her

for an hour, as his habit was on evenings and wet days, their discussion of this and that in the book lulled any doubts she had of his prudence, enough to render it even a dubious point whether she might be speculating upon a wealthy bachelor in the old-fashioned ultra-feminine manner; the which she so abhorred that she rejected the idea. Consequently, Redworth's proposal to walk down to the valley for Diana, and bring her back, struck her as natural when a shaft of western sunshine from a whitened edge of raincloud struck her windows. She let him go without an intimated monition or a thought of one; thinking simply that her Tony would be more likely to come, having him for escort. Those are silly women who are always imagining designs and intrigues and future palpitations in the commonest actions of either sex. Emma Dunstane leaned to the contrast between herself and them.

Page 3393

Danvers was at the house about sunset, reporting her mistress to be on her way, with Mr. Redworth. The maid's tale of the dreadful state of the lanes, accounted for their tardiness; and besides the sunset had been magnificent. Diana knocked at Emma's bedroom door, to say, outside, hurriedly in passing, how splendid the sunset had been, and beg for an extra five minutes. Taking full fifteen, she swam into the drawing-room, lively with kisses on Emma's cheeks, and excuses, referring her misconduct in being late to the seductions of 'Sol' in his glory. Redworth said he had rarely seen so wonderful a sunset. The result of their unanimity stirred Emma's bosom to match-making regrets; and the walk of the pair together, alone under the propitious laming heavens, appeared to her now as an opportunity lost. From sisterly sympathy, she fancied she could understand Tony's liberty-loving reluctance: she had no comprehension of the backwardness of the man beholding the dear woman handsomer than in her maiden or her married time: and sprightlier as well. She chatted deliciously, and drew Redworth to talk his best on his choicer subjects, playing over them like a fide-wisp, determined at once to flounder him and to make him shine. Her tender esteem for the man was transparent through it all; and Emma, whose evening had gone happily between them, said to her, in their privacy, before parting: 'You seemed to have been inspired by "Sol," my dear. You do like him, don't you?'

Diana vowed she adored him; and with a face of laughter in rosy suffusion, put Sol for Redworth, Redworth for Sol; but, watchful of Emma's visage, said finally: 'If you mean the mortal man, I think him up to almost all your hyperboles—as far as men go; and he departed to his night's rest, which I hope will be good, like a king. Not to admire him, would argue me senseless, heartless. I do; I have reason to.'

'And you make him the butt of your ridicule, Tony.'

'No; I said "like a king"; and he is one. He has, to me, morally the grandeur of your Sol sinking, Caesar stabbed, Cato on the sword-point. He is Roman, Spartan, Imperial; English, if you like, the pick, of the land. It is an honour to call him friend, and I do trust he will choose the pick among us, to make her a happy woman—if she's for running in harness. There, I can't say more.'

Emma had to be satisfied with it, for the present.

They were astonished at breakfast by seeing Sir Lukin ride past the windows. He entered with the veritable appetite of a cavalier who had ridden from London fasting; and why he had come at that early hour, he was too hungry to explain. The ladies retired to read their letters by the morning's post; whereupon Sir Lukin called to Redworth; 'I met that woman in the park yesterday, and had to stand a volley. I went beating about London for you all the afternoon and evening. She swears you rated her like a scullery wench, and threatened to ruin Wroxeter. Did you see him? She says, the story's true in one particular, that he did snatch a kiss, and got mauled. Not so much to pay for it! But what a ruffian—eh?'

Page 3394

‘I saw him,’ said Redworth. ’He ’s one of the new set of noblemen who take bribes to serve as baits for transactions in the City. They help to the ruin of their order, or are signs of its decay. We won’t judge it by him. He favoured me with his “word of honour” that the thing you heard was entirely a misstatement, and so forth:—apologized, I suppose. He mumbled something.’

‘A thorough cur!’

‘He professed his readiness to fight, if either of us was not contented.’

’He spoke to the wrong man. I’ve half a mind to ride back and have him out for that rascal “osculation” and the lady unwilling!—and she a young one, a girl, under the protection of the house! By Jove! Redworth, when you come to consider the scoundrels men can be, it stirs a fellow’s bile. There’s a deal of that sort of villany going —and succeeding sometimes! He deserves the whip or a bullet.’

‘A sermon from Lukin Dunstane might punish him.’

’Oh! I’m a sinner, I know. But, go and tell one woman of another woman, and that a lie! That’s beyond me.’

’The gradations of the deeps are perhaps measurable to those who are in them.’

‘The sermon’s at me—pop!’ said Sir Lukin. ’By the way, I’m coming round to think Diana Warwick was right when she used to jibe at me for throwing up my commission. Idleness is the devil—or mother of him. I manage my estates; but the truth is, it doesn’t occupy my mind.’

‘Your time.’

‘My mind, I say.’

‘Whichever you please.’

’You’re crusty to-day, Redworth. Let me tell you, I think—and hard too, when the fit’s on me. However, you did right in stopping—I’ll own—a piece of folly, and shutting the mouths of those two; though it caused me to come in for a regular drencher. But a pretty woman in a right-down termagant passion is good theatre; because it can’t last, at that pace; and you’re sure of your agreeable tableau. Not that I trust her ten minutes out of sight—or any woman, except one or two; my wife and Diana Warwick. Trust those you’ve tried, old boy. Diana Warwick ought to be taught to thank you; though I don’t know how it’s to be done.’

‘The fact of it is,’ Redworth frowned and rose, ’I’ve done mischief. I had no right to mix myself in it. I’m seldom caught off my feet by an impulse; but I was. I took the fever from you.’

He squared his figure at the window, and looked up on a driving sky.

‘Come, let’s play open cards, Tom Redworth,’ said Sir Lukin, leaving the table and joining his friend by the window. ’You moral men are doomed to be marrying men, always; and quite right. Not that one doesn’t hear a roundabout thing or two about you: no harm. Very much the contrary:—as the world goes. But you’re the man to marry a wife; and if I guess the lady, she’s a sensible girl and won’t be jealous. I ’d swear she only waits for asking.’

‘Then you don’t guess the lady,’ said Redworth.

Page 3395

‘Mary Paynham?’

The desperate half-laugh greeting the name convinced more than a dozen denials.

Sir Lukin kept edging round for a full view of the friend who shunned inspection. ’But is it? . . . can it be? it must be, after all! . . . why, of course it is! But the thing staring us in the face is just what we never see. Just the husband for her!—and she’s the wife! Why, Diana Warwick ’s the very woman, of course! I remember I used to think so before she was free to wed.’

‘She is not of that opinion.’ Redworth blew a heavy breath; and it should be chronicled as a sigh; but it was hugely masculine.

’Because you didn’t attack, the moment she was free; that ’s what upset my calculations,’ the sagacious gentleman continued, for a vindication of his acuteness: then seizing the reply: ’Refuses? you don’t mean to say you’re the man to take a refusal? and from a green widow in the blush? Did you see her cheeks when she was peeping at the letter in her hand? She colours at half a word—takes the lift of a finger for Hymen coming. And lots of fellows are after her; I know it from Emmy. But you’re not the man to be refused. You’re her friend—her champion. That woman Fryar-Gunnett would have it you were the favoured lover, and sneered at my talk of old friendship. Women are always down dead on the facts; can’t put them off a scent!’

‘There’s the mischief!’ Redworth blew again. ’I had no right to be championing Mrs. Warwick’s name. Or the world won’t give it, at all events. I’m a blundering donkey. Yes, she wishes to keep her liberty. And, upon my soul, I’m in love with everything she wishes! I’ve got the habit.’

‘Habit be hanged!’ cried Sir Lukin. ’You’re in love with the woman. I know a little more of you now, Mr. Tom. You’re a fellow in earnest about what you do. You’re feeling it now, on the rack, by heaven! though you keep a bold face. Did she speak positively? —sort of feminine of “you’re the monster, not the man”? or measured little doctor’s dose of pity?—worse sign.’ You ‘re not going?’

‘If you’ll drive me down in half an hour,’ said Redworth.

‘Give me an hour,’ Sir Lukin replied, and went straight to his wife’s blue-room.

Diana was roused from a meditation on a letter she held, by the entrance of Emma in her bed-chamber, to whom she said: ’I have here the very craziest bit of writing!—but what is disturbing you, dear?’

Emma sat beside her, panting and composing her lips to speak. ’Do you, love me? I throw policy to the winds, if only, I can batter at you for your heart and find it! Tony, do you love me? But don’t answer: give me your hand. You have rejected him!’

‘He has told you?’

’No. He is not the man to cry out for a wound. He heard in London—Lukin has had the courage to tell me, after his fashion:—Tom Redworth heard an old story, coming from one of the baser kind of women: grossly false, he knew. I mention only Lord Wroxeter and Lockton. He went to man and woman both, and had it refuted, and stopped their tongues, on peril; as he of all men is able to do when he wills it.’

Page 3396

Observing the quick change in Tony's eyes, Emma exclaimed: 'How you looked disdain when you asked whether he had told me! But why are you the handsome tigress to him, of all men living! The dear fellow, dear to me at least! since the day he first saw you, has worshipped you and striven to serve you:—and harder than any Scriptural service to have the beloved woman to wife. I know nothing to compare with it, for he is a man of warmth. He is one of those rare men of honour who can command their passion; who venerate when they love: and those are the men that women select for punishment! Yes, you! It is to the woman he loves that he cannot show himself as he is, because he is at her feet. You have managed to stamp your spirit on him; and as a consequence, he defends you now, for flinging him off. And now his chief regret is, that he has caused his name to be coupled with yours. I suppose he had some poor hope, seeing you free. Or else the impulse to protect the woman of his heart and soul was too strong. I have seen what he suffered, years back, at the news of your engagement.'

'Oh, for God's sake, don't,' cried Tony, tears running over, and her dream of freedom, her visions of romance, drowning.

'It was like the snapping of the branch of an oak, when the trunk stands firm,' Emma resumed, in her desire to scourge as well as to soften. 'But similes applied to him will strike you as incongruous.' Tony swayed her body, for a negative, very girlishly and consciously. 'He probably did not woo you in a poetic style, or the courtly by prescription.' Again Tony swayed; she had to hug herself under the stripes, and felt as if alone at sea, with her dear heavens pelting. 'You have sneered at him for his calculating—to his face: and it was when he was comparatively poor that he calculated—to his cost! that he dared not ask you to marry a man who could not offer you a tithe of what he considered fit for the peerless woman. Peerless, I admit. There he was not wrong. But if he had valued you half a grain less, he might have won you. You talk much of chivalry; you conceive a superhuman ideal, to which you fit a very indifferent wooden model, while the man of all the world the most chivalrous! . . . He is a man quite other from what you think him: anything but a "Cuthbert Dering" or a "Man of Two Minds." He was in the drawing-room below, on the day I received your last maiden letter from The Crossways—now his property, in the hope of making it yours.'

'I behaved abominably there!' interposed Tony, with a gasp.

'Let it pass. At any rate, that was the prick of a needle, not the blow of a sword.'

'But marriage, dear Emmy! marriage! Is marriage to be the end of me?'

'What amazing apotheosis have you in prospect? And are you steering so particularly well by yourself?'

'Miserably! But I can dream. And the thought of a husband cuts me from any dreaming. It's all dead flat earth at once!'

Page 3397

‘Would, you lave rejected him when you were a girl?’

‘I think so.’

‘The superior merits of another . . .?’

’Oh, no, no, no, no! I might have accepted him: and I might not have made him happy. I wanted a hero, and the jewelled garb and the feather did not suit him.’

’No; he is not that description of lay-figure. You have dressed it, and gemmed it, and—-made your discovery. Here is a true man; and if you can find me any of your heroes to match him, I will thank you. He came on the day I speak of, to consult me as to whether, with the income he then had . . . Well, I had to tell him you were engaged. The man has never wavered in his love of you since that day. He has had to bear something.’

This was an electrical bolt into Tony’s bosom, shaking her from self-pity and shame to remorseful pity of the suffering lover; and the tears ran in streams, as she said:

‘He bore it, Emmy, he bore it.’ She sobbed out: ’And he went on building a fortune and batting! Whatever he undertakes he does perfectly-approve of the pattern or not. Oh! I have no doubt he had his nest of wish piping to him all the while: only it seems quaint, dear, quaint, and against everything we’ve been reading of lovers! Love was his bread and butter!’ Her dark eyes showered. ’And to tell you what you do not know of him, his way of making love is really,’ she sobbed, ’pretty. It . . . it took me by surprise; I was expecting a bellow and an assault of horns; and if, dear:—you will say, what boarding-school girl have you got with you! and I feel myself getting childish:—if Sol in his glory had not been so m . . . majestically m . . . magnificent, nor seemed to show me the king . . . kingdom of my dreams, I might have stammered the opposite word to the one he heard. Last night, when he took my hand kindly before going to bed I had a fit for dropping on my knees to him. I saw him bleed, and he held himself right royally. I told you he did;—Sol in his moral grandeur! How infinitely above the physical monarch—is he not, Emmy? What one dislikes, is the devotion of all that grandeur to win a widow. It should be a maiden princess. You feel it so, I am sure. And here am I, as if a maiden princess were I, demanding romantic accessories of rubious vapour in the man condescending to implore the widow to wed him. But, tell me, does he know everything of his widow—everything? I shall not have to go through the frightful chapter?’

’He is a man with his eyes awake; he knows as much as any husband could require to know,’ said Emma; adding: ’My darling! he trusts you. It is the soul of the man that loves you, as it is mine. You will not tease him? Promise me. Give yourself frankly. You see it clearly before you.’

’I see compulsion, my dear. What I see, is a regiment of Proverbs, bearing placards instead of guns, and each one a taunt at women, especially at widows. They march; they form square; they enclose me in the middle, and I have their inscriptions to digest. Read that crazy letter from Mary Paynham while I am putting on my bonnet. I perceive I have been crying like a raw creature in her teens. I don’t know myself. An advantage of the darker complexions is our speedier concealment of the traces.’

Page 3398

Emma read Miss Paynham's letter, and returned it with the comment: 'Utterly crazy.' Tony said: 'Is it not? I am to "Pause before I trifle with a noble heart too long." She is to "have her happiness in the constant prayer for ours"; and she is "warned by one of those intimations never failing her, that he runs a serious danger." It reads like a Wizard's Almanack. And here "Homogeneity of sentiment the most perfect, is unable to contend with the fatal charm, which exercised by an indifferent person, must be ascribed to original predestination." She should be under the wing of Lady Wathin. There is the mother for such chicks! But I'll own to you, Emmy, that after the perusal, I did ask myself a question as to my likeness of late to the writer. I have drivelled . . . I was shuddering over it when you came in. I have sentimentalized up to thin smoke. And she tells a truth when she says I am not to "count social cleverness"—she means volubility—"as a warrant for domineering a capacious intelligence": because of the gentleman's modesty. Agreed: I have done it; I am contrite. I am going into slavery to make amends for presumption. Banality, thy name is marriage!'

'Your business is to accept life as we have it,' said Emma; and Tony shrugged. She was precipitate in going forth to her commonplace fate, and scarcely looked at the man requested by Emma to escort her to her cottage. After their departure, Emma fell into laughter at the last words with the kiss of her cheeks: 'Here goes old Ireland!' But, from her look and from what she had said upstairs, Emma could believe that the singular sprite of girlishness invading and governing her latterly, had yielded place to the woman she loved.

CHAPTER XLIII

Nuptial chapter; *and of how* A *barely willing woman was led to bloom with the nuptial sentiment*

Emma watched them on their way through the park, till they rounded the beechwood, talking, it could be surmised, of ordinary matters; the face of the gentleman turning at times to his companion's, which steadily fronted the gale. She left the ensuing to a prayer for their good direction, with a chuckle at Tony's evident feeling of a ludicrous posture, and the desperate rush of her agile limbs to have it over. But her prayer throbbed almost to a supplication that the wrong done to her beloved by Dacier—the wound to her own sisterly pride rankling as an injury to her sex, might be cancelled through the union of the woman noble in the sight of God with a more manlike man.

Meanwhile the feet of the couple were going faster than their heads to the end of the journey. Diana knew she would have to hoist the signal-and how? The prospect was dumb-foundering. She had to think of appeasing her Emma. Redworth, for his part; actually supposed she had accepted his escorting in proof of the plain friendship offered him overnight.

Page 3399

‘What do your “birds” do in weather like this?’ she said.

’Cling to their perches and wait patiently. It’s the bad time with them when you don’t hear them chirp.’

‘Of course you foretold the gale.’

‘Oh, well, it did not require a shepherd or a skipper for that.’

‘Your grand gift will be useful to a yachtsman.’

’You like yachting. When I have tried my new schooner in the Channel, she is at your command for as long as you and Lady Dunstane please.’

‘So you acknowledge that birds—things of nature—have their bad time?’

’They profit ultimately by the deluge and the wreck. Nothing on earth is “tucked-up” in perpetuity.’

‘Except the dead. But why should the schooner be at our command?’

‘I shall be in Ireland.’

He could not have said sweeter to her ears or more touching.

‘We shall hardly feel safe without the weatherwise on board.’

’You may count on my man Barnes; I have proved him. He is up to his work even when he’s bilious: only, in that case, occurring about once a fortnight, you must leave him to fight it out with the elements.’

‘I rather like men of action to have a temper.’

‘I can’t say much for a bilious temper.’

The weather to-day really seemed of that kind, she remarked. He assented, in the shrug manner—not to dissent: she might say what she would. He helped nowhere to a lead; and so quick are the changes of mood at such moments that she was now far from him under the failure of an effort to come near. But thoughts of Emma pressed.

‘The name of the new schooner? Her name is her picture to me.’

‘I wanted you to christen her.’

‘Launched without a name?’

‘I took a liberty.’

Needless to ask, but she did. ‘With whom?’

‘I named her Diana.’

’May the Goddess of the silver bow and crescent protect her! To me the name is ominous of mischance.’

‘I would commit my fortunes and life . . . !’ He checked his tongue, ejaculating: ‘Omens!’

She had veered straight away from her romantic aspirations to the blunt extreme of thinking that a widow should be wooed in unornamented matter-of-fact, as she is wedded, with a ‘wilt thou,’ and ‘I will,’ and no decorative illusions. Downright, for the unpoetic creature, if you please! So she rejected the accompaniment of the silver Goddess and high seas for an introduction of the crisis.

’This would be a thunderer on our coasts. I had a trial of my sailing powers in the Mediterranean.’

As she said it, her musings on him then, with the contract of her position toward him now, fierily brushed her cheeks; and she wished him the man to make one snatch at her poor lost small butterfly bit of freedom, so that she might suddenly feel in haven, at peace with her expectant Emma. He could have seen the inviting consciousness, but he was absurdly watchful lest the flying sprays of border trees should strike her. He mentioned his fear, and it became an excuse for her seeking protection of her veil. ‘It is our natural guardian,’ she said.

Page 3400

‘Not much against timber,’ said he.

The worthy creature’s anxiety was of the pattern of cavaliers escorting dames—an exaggeration of honest zeal; a present example of clownish goodness, it might seem; until entering the larch and firwood along the beaten heights, there was a rocking and straining of the shallow-rooted trees in a tremendous gust that quite pardoned him for curving his arm in a hoop about her and holding a shoulder in front. The veil did her positive service.

He was honourably scrupulous not to presume. A right good unimpulsive gentleman: the same that she had always taken him for and liked.

‘These firs are not taproots,’ he observed, by way of apology.

Her dress volumed and her ribands rattled and chirruped on the verge of the slope. ‘I will take your arm here,’ she said.

Redworth received the little hand, saying: ‘Lean to me.’

They descended upon great surges of wind piping and driving every light surface-atom as foam; and they blinked and shook; even the man was shaken. But their arms were interlinked and they grappled; the battering enemy made them one. It might mean nothing, or everything: to him it meant the sheer blissful instant.

At the foot of the hill, he said: ’It’s harder to keep to, the terms of yesterday.’

‘What were they?’ said she, and took his breath more than the fury of the storm had done.

‘Raise the veil, I beg.’

‘Widows do not wear it.’

The look revealed to him was a fugitive of the wilds, no longer the glittering shooter of arrows.

‘Have you . . .?’ changed to me, was the signification understood. ’Can you?—for life’. Do you think you can?’

His poverty in the pleading language melted her.

’What I cannot do, my best of friends, is to submit to be seated on a throne, with you petitioning. Yes, as far as concerns this hand of mine, if you hold it worthy of you. We will speak of that. Now tell me the name of the weed trailing along the hedge there!

He knew it well; a common hedgerow weed; but the placid diversion baffled him. It was clematis, he said.

'It drags in the dust when it has no firm arm to cling to. I passed it beside you yesterday with a flaunting mind and not a suspicion of a likeness. How foolish I was! I could volubly sermonize; only it should be a young maid to listen. Forgive me the yesterday.'

'You have never to ask. You withdraw your hand—was I rough?'

'No,' she smiled demurely; 'it must get used to the shackles: but my cottage is in sight. I have a growing love for the place. We will enter it like plain people—if you think of coming in.'

Page 3401

As she said it she had a slight shock of cowering under eyes tolerably hawkish in their male glitter; but her coolness was not disturbed; and without any apprehensions she reflected on what has been written of the silly division and war of the sexes:—which two might surely enter on an engagement to live together amiably, unvexed by that barbarous old fowl and falcon interlude. Cool herself, she imagined the same of him, having good grounds for the delusion; so they passed through the cottage-garden and beneath the low porchway, into her little sitting-room, where she was proceeding to speak composedly of her preference for cottages, while untying her bonnet-strings:—'If I had begun my life in a cottage!'—when really a big storm-wave caught her from shore and whirled her to mid-sea, out of every sensibility but the swimming one of her loss of self in the man.

'You would not have been here!' was all he said. She was up at his heart, fast-locked, undergoing a change greater than the sea works; her thoughts one blush, her brain a fire-fount. This was not like being seated on a throne.

'There,' said he, loosening his hug, 'now you belong to me! I know you from head to foot. After that, my darling, I could leave you for years, and call you wife, and be sure of you. I could swear it for you—my life on it! That 's what I think of you. Don't wonder that I took my chance—the first:—I have waited!'

Truer word was never uttered, she owned, coming into some harmony with man's kiss on her mouth: the man violently metamorphozed to a stranger, acting on rights she had given him. And who was she to dream of denying them? Not an idea in her head! Bound verily to be thankful for such love, on hearing that it dated from the night in Ireland . . . . 'So in love with you that, on my soul, your happiness was my marrow—-whatever you wished; anything you chose. It's reckoned a fool's part. No, it's love: the love of a woman—the one woman! I was like the hand of a clock to the springs. I taught this old watch-dog of a heart to keep guard and bury the bones you tossed him.'

'Ignorantly, admit,' said she, and could have bitten her tongue for the empty words that provoked: 'Would you have flung him nothing?' and caused a lowering of her eyelids and shamed glimpses of recollections. 'I hear you have again been defending me. I told you, I think, I wished I had begun my girl's life in a cottage. All that I have had to endure! . . or so it seems to me: it may be my way of excusing myself:—I know my cunning in that peculiar art. I would take my chance of mixing among the highest and the brightest.'

'Naturally.'

'Culpably.'

'It brings you to me.'

‘Through a muddy channel.’

‘Your husband has full faith in you, my own.’

’The faith has to be summoned and is buffeted, as we were just now on the hill. I wish he had taken me from a cottage.’

Page 3402

‘You pushed for the best society, like a fish to its native sea.’

‘Pray say, a salmon to the riverheads.’

‘Better,’ Redworth laughed joyfully, between admiration of the tongue that always outflew him, and of the face he reddened.

By degrees her apter and neater terms of speech helped her to a notion of regaining some steps of her sunken ascendancy, under the weight of the novel masculine pressure on her throbbing blood; and when he bent to her to take her lord’s farewell of her, after agreeing to go and delight Emma with a message, her submission and her personal pride were not so much at variance: perhaps because her buzzing head had no ideas. ’Tell Emma you have undertaken to wash the blackamoor as white as she can be,’ she said perversely, in her spite at herself for not coming, as it were, out of the dawn to the man she could consent to wed: and he replied: ’I shall tell her my dark girl pleads for a fortnight’s grace before she and I set sail for the West coast of Ireland’: conjuring a picture that checked any protest against the shortness of time:—and Emma would surely be his ally.

They talked of the Dublin Ball: painfully to some of her thoughts. But Redworth kissed that distant brilliant night as freshly as if no belabouring years rolled in the chasm: which led her to conceive partly, and wonderingly, the nature of a strong man’s passion; and it subjugated the woman knowing of a contrast. The smart of the blow dealt her by him who had fired the passion in her became a burning regret for the loss of that fair fame she had sacrificed to him, and could not bring to her truer lover: though it was but the outer view of herself—the world’s view; only she was generous and of honest conscience, and but for the sake of her truer lover, she would mentally have allowed the world to lash and abuse her, without a plea of material purity. Could it be named? The naming of it in her clear mind lessened it to accidental:—By good fortune, she was no worse!—She said to Redworth, when finally dismissing him; ’I bring no real disgrace to you, my friend.’—To have had this sharp spiritual battle at such a time, was proof of honest conscience, rarer among women, as the world has fashioned them yet, than the purity demanded of them.—His answer: ‘You are my wife!’ rang in her hearing.

When she sat alone at last, she was incapable, despite her nature’s imaginative leap to brightness, of choosing any single period, auspicious or luminous or flattering, since the hour of her first meeting this man, rather than the grey light he cast on her, promising helpfulness, and inspiring a belief in her capacity to help. Not the Salvatore high raptures nor the nights of social applause could appear preferable: she strained her shattered wits to try them. As for her superlunary sphere, it was in fragments; and she mused on the singularity, considering that she was not deeply enamoured. Was she so at all?

Page 3403

The question drove her to embrace the dignity of being reasonable—under Emmy's guidance. For she did not stand firmly alone; her story confessed it. Marriage might be the archway to the road of good service, even as our passage through the flesh may lead to the better state. She had thoughts of the kind, and had them while encouraging herself to deplore the adieu to her little musk-scented sitting-room, where a modest freedom breathed, and her individuality had seemed pointing to a straighter growth.

She nodded subsequently to the truth of her happy Emma's remark: 'You were created for the world, Tony.' A woman of blood and imagination in the warring world, without a mate whom she can revere, subscribes to a likeness with those independent minor realms between greedy mighty neighbours, which conspire and undermine when they do not openly threaten to devour. So, then, this union, the return to the wedding yoke, received sanction of grey-toned reason. She was not enamoured she could say it to herself. She had, however, been surprised, both by the man and her unprotesting submission; surprised and warmed, unaccountably warmed. Clearness of mind in the woman chaste by nature, however little ignorant it allowed her to be in the general review of herself, could not compass the immediately personal, with its acknowledgement of her subserviency to touch and pressure—and more, stranger, her readiness to kindle. She left it unexplained. Unconsciously the image of Dacier was effaced. Looking backward, her heart was moved to her long-constant lover with most pitying tender wonderment—stormy man, as her threatened senses told her that he was. Looking at him, she had to mask her being abashed and mastered. And looking forward, her soul fell in prayer for this true man's never repenting of his choice. Sure of her now, Mr. Thomas Redworth had returned to the station of the courtier, and her feminine sovereignty was not ruffled to make her feel too feminine. Another revelation was his playful talk when they were more closely intimate. He had his humour as well as his hearty relish of hers.

'If all Englishmen were like him!' she chimed with Emma Dunstane's eulogies, under the influence.

'My dear,' the latter replied, 'we should simply march over the Four Quarters and be blessed by the nations! Only, avoid your trick of dashing headlong to the other extreme. He has his faults.'

'Tell me of them,' Diana cooed for an answer. 'Do. I want the flavour. A girl would be satisfied with superhuman excellence. A widow asks for feature.'

'To my thinking, the case is, that if it is a widow who sees the superhuman excellence in a man, she may be very well contented to cross the bridge with him,' rejoined Emma. . . .

'Suppose the bridge to break, and for her to fall into the water, he rescuing her—then perhaps!'

‘But it has been happening!’

’But piecemeal, in extension, so slowly. I go to him a derelict, bearing a story of the sea; empty of ideas. I remember sailing out of harbour passably well freighted for commerce.’

Page 3404

’When Tom Redworth has had command of the “derelict” a week, I should like to see her!’

The mention of that positive captaincy drowned Diana in morning colours. She was dominated, physically and morally, submissively too. What she craved, in the absence of the public whiteness which could have caused her to rejoice in herself as a noble gift, was the spring of enthusiasm. Emma touched a quivering chord of pride with her hint at the good augury, and foreshadowing of the larger Union, in the Irishwoman’s bestowal of her hand on the open-minded Englishman she had learned to trust. The aureole glimmered transiently: she could neither think highly of the woman about to be wedded, nor poetically of the man; nor, therefore, rosily of the ceremony, nor other than vacuously of life. And yet, as she avowed to Emma, she had gathered the three rarest good things of life: a faithful friend, a faithful lover, a faithful servant: the two latter exposing an unimagined quality of emotion. Danvers, on the night of the great day for Redworth, had undressed her with trembling fingers, and her mistress was led to the knowledge that the maid had always been all eye; and on reflection to admit that it came of a sympathy she did not share.

But when Celtic brains are reflective on their emotional vessel they shoot direct as the arrow of logic. Diana’s glance at the years behind lighted every moving figure to a shrewd transparency, herself among them. She was driven to the conclusion that the granting of any of her heart’s wild wishes in those days would have lowered her—or frozen. Dacier was a coldly luminous image; still a tolling name; no longer conceivably her mate. Recollection rocked, not she. The politician and citizen was admired: she read the man;—more to her own discredit than to his, but she read him, and if that is done by the one of two lovers who was true to love, it is the God of the passion pronouncing a final release from the shadow of his chains.

Three days antecedent to her marriage, she went down the hill over her cottage chimneys with Redworth, after hearing him praise and cite to Emma Dunstane sentences of a morning’s report of a speech delivered by Dacier to his constituents. She alluded to it, that she might air her power of speaking of the man coolly to him, or else for the sake of stirring afresh some sentiment he had roused; and he repeated his high opinion of the orator’s political wisdom: whereby was revived in her memory a certain reprehensible view, belonging to her period of mock-girlish naughtiness—too vile!—as to his paternal benevolence, now to clear vision the loftiest manliness. What did she do? She was Irish; therefore intuitively decorous in amatory challenges and interchanges. But she was an impulsive woman, and foliage was thick around, only a few small birds and heaven seeing; and penitence and admiration sprang the impulse. It had to be this or a burst of weeping:—she put a kiss upon his arm.

Page 3405

She had omitted to think that she was dealing with a lover a man of smothered fire, who would be electrically alive to the act through a coat-sleeve. Redworth had his impulse. He kept it under,—she felt the big breath he drew in. Imagination began busily building a nest for him, and enthusiasm was not sluggish to make a home of it. The impulse of each had wedded; in expression and repression; her sensibility told her of the stronger.

She rose on the morning of her marriage day with his favourite Planxty Kelly at her lips, a natural bubble of the notes. Emma drove down to the cottage to breakfast and superintend her bride's adornment, as to which, Diana had spoken slightingly; as well as of the ceremony, and the institution, and this life itself:—she would be married out of her cottage, a widow, a cottager, a woman under a cloud; yes, a sober person taking at last a right practical step, to please her two best friends. The change was marked. She wished to hide it, wished to confide it. Emma was asked: 'How is he this morning?' and at the answer, describing his fresh and spirited looks, and his kind ways with Arthur Rhodes, and his fun with Sullivan Smith, and the satisfaction with the bridegroom declared by Lord Larrian (invalided from his Rock and unexpectingly informed of the wedding), Diana forgot that she had kissed her, and this time pressed her lips, in a manner to convey the secret bridally.

'He has a lovely day.'

'And bride,' said Emma.

'If you two think so! I should like to agree with my dear old lord and bless him for the prize he takes, though it feels itself at present rather like a Christmas bon-bon—a piece of sugar in the wrap of a rhymed motto. He is kind to Arthur, you say?'

'Like a cordial elder brother.'

'Dear love, I have it at heart that I was harsh upon Mary Paynham for her letter. She meant well—and I fear she suffers. And it may have been a bit my fault. Blind that I was! When you say "cordial elder brother," you make him appear beautiful to me. The worst of that is, one becomes aware of the inability to match him.'

'Read with his eyes when you meet him this morning, my Tony.'

The secret was being clearly perceived by Emma, whose pride in assisting to dress the beautiful creature for her marriage—with the man of men had a tinge from the hymenaeal brand, exulting over Dacier, and in the compensation coming to her beloved for her first luckless footing on this road.

'How does he go down to the church?' said Diana.

'He walks down. Lukin and his Chief drive. He walks, with your Arthur and Mr. Sullivan Smith. He is on his way now.'

Diana looked through the window in the direction of the hill. ’That is so like him, to walk to his wedding!’

Page 3406

Emma took the place of Danvers in the office of the robing, for the maid, as her mistress managed to hint, was too steeped 'in the colour of the occasion' to be exactly tasteful, and had the art, no doubt through sympathy, of charging permissible common words with explosive meanings:—she was in an amorous palpitation, of the reflected state. After several knockings and enterings of the bedchamber-door, she came hurriedly to say: 'And your pillow, ma'am? I had almost forgotten it!' A question that caused her mistress to drop the gaze of a moan on Emma, with patience trembling. Diana preferred a hard pillow, and usually carried her own about. 'Take it,' she had to reply.

The friends embraced before descending to step into the fateful carriage. 'And tell me,' Emma said, 'are not your views of life brighter to-day?'

'Too dazzled to know! It may be a lamp close to the eyes or a radiance of sun. I hope they are.'

'You are beginning to think hopefully again?'

'Who can really think, and not think hopefully? You were in my mind last night, and you brought a little boat to sail me past despondency of life and the fear of extinction. When we despair or discolour things, it is our senses in revolt, and they have made the sovereign brain their drudge. I heard you whisper; with your very breath in my ear: "There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by." That is Emma's history. With that I sail into the dark; it is my promise of the immortal: teaches me to see immortality for us. It comes from you, my Emmy.'

If not a great saying, it was in the heart of deep thoughts: proof to Emma that her Tony's mind had resumed its old clear high-aiming activity; therefore that her nature was working sanely, and that she accepted her happiness, and bore love for a dower to her husband. No blushing confession of the woman's love of the man would have told her so much as the return to mental harmony with the laws of life shown in her darling's pellucid little sentence.

She revolved it long after the day of the wedding. To Emma, constantly on the dark decline of the unillumined verge, between the two worlds, those words were a radiance and a nourishment. Had they waned she would have trimmed them to feed her during her soul-sister's absence. They shone to her of their vitality. She was lying along her sofa, facing her South-western window, one afternoon of late November, expecting Tony from her lengthened honeymoon trip, while a sunset in the van of frost, not without celestial musical reminders of Tony's husband, began to deepen; and as her friend was coming, she mused on the scenes of her friend's departure, and how Tony, issuing from her cottage porch had betrayed her feelings in the language of her sex by stooping to lift above her head and kiss the smallest of her landlady's children ranged up the garden-path to bid her farewell over their strewing of flowers;—and of

Page 3407

her murmur to Tony, entering the churchyard, among the grave-mounds: 'Old Ireland won't repent it!' and Tony's rejoinder, at the sight of the bridegroom advancing, beaming: 'A singular transformation of Old England!'—and how, having numberless ready sources of laughter and tears down the run of their heart-in-heart intimacy, all spouting up for a word in the happy tremour of the moment, they had both bitten their lips and blinked on a moisture of the eyelids. Now the dear woman was really wedded, wedded and mated. Her letters breathed, in their own lively or thoughtful flow, of the perfect mating. Emma gazed into the depths of the waves of crimson, where brilliancy of colour came out of central heaven preternaturally near on earth, till one shade less brilliant seemed an ebbing away to boundless remoteness. Angelical and mortal mixed, making the glory overhead a sign of the close union of our human conditions with the ethereal and psychically divined. Thence it grew that one thought in her breast became a desire for such extension of days as would give her the blessedness to clasp in her lap—if those kind heavens would grant it!—a child of the marriage of the two noblest of human souls, one the dearest; and so have proof at heart that her country and our earth are fruitful in the good, for a glowing future. She was deeply a woman, dumbly a poet. True poets and true women have the native sense of the divineness of what the world deems gross material substance. Emma's exaltation in fervour had not subsided when she held her beloved in her arms under the dusk of the withdrawing redness. They sat embraced, with hands locked, in the unlighted room, and Tony spoke of the splendid sky. 'You watched it knowing I was on my way to you?'

'Praying, dear.'

'For me?'

'That I might live long enough to be a godmother.'

There was no reply: there was an involuntary little twitch of Tony's fingers.

Etext editor's bookmarks

A witty woman is a treasure; a witty Beauty is a power
A high wind will make a dead leaf fly like a bird
A kindly sense of superiority
Accidents are the specific for averting the maladies of age
Accounting for it, is not the same as excusing
Assist in our small sphere; not come mouthing to the footlights
At war with ourselves, means the best happiness we can have
Avoid the position that enforces publishing
Beautiful women in her position provoke an intemperateness
Beauty is rare; luckily is it rare
Between love grown old and indifference ageing to love
Beware the silent one of an assembly!

Brittle is foredoomed
But they were a hopeless couple, they were so friendly
By resisting, I made him a tyrant
Capacity for thinking should precede the act of writing
Capricious potentate whom they worship

Page 3408

Carry explosives and must particularly guard against sparks
Charitable mercifulness; better than sentimental ointment
Chaste are wattled in formalism and throned in sourness
Circumstances may combine to make a whisper as deadly as a blow
Common sense is the secret of every successful civil agitation
Compared the governing of the Irish to the management of a horse
Could have designed this gabbler for the mate
Could the best of men be simply—a woman’s friend?
Debit was eloquent, he was unanswerable
Dedicated to the putrid of the upper circle
Depending for dialogue upon perpetual fresh supplies of scandal
Dose he had taken was not of the sweetest
Dreaded as a scourge, hailed as a refreshment (Scandalsheet)
Elderly martyr for the advancement of his juniors
Enthusiasm has the privilege of not knowing monotony
Envy of the man of positive knowledge
Expectations dupe us, not trust
Explaining of things to a dull head
Externally soft and polished, internally hard and relentless
Favour can’t help coming by rotation
Fiddle harmonics on the sensual strings
Flashes bits of speech that catch men in their unguarded corner
For ’tis Ireland gives England her soldiers, her generals too
Friendship, I fancy, means one heart between two
Get back what we give
Goodish sort of fellow; good horseman, good shot, good character
Grossly unlike in likeness (portraits)
Happy in privation and suffering if simply we can accept beauty
He was not a weaver of phrases in distress
He had by nature a tarnishing eye that cast discolouration
He gained much by claiming little
He, by insisting, made me a rebel
He had neat phrases, opinions in packets
He was the maddest of tyrants—a weak one
He’s good from end to end, and beats a Christian hollow (a hog)
Heart to keep guard and bury the bones you tossed him
Her peculiar tenacity of the sense of injury
Her feelings—trustier guides than her judgement in this crisis
Her final impression likened him to a house locked up and empty
Herself, content to be dull if he might shine
His gaze and one of his ears, if not the pair, were given

His ridiculous equanimity
Holding to the refusal, for the sake of consistency
How immensely nature seems to prefer men to women!
Human nature to feel an interest in the dog that has bitten you
I wanted a hero
I do not see it, because I will not see it
I never knew till this morning the force of No in earnest
I have and hold—you shall hunger and covet
I don't count them against women (moods)
I'm in love with everything she wishes! I've got the habit
Idea is the only vital

Page 3409

breath
- If I’m struck, I strike back
- If he had valued you half a grain less, he might have won you
- Inclined to act hesitation in accepting the aid she sought
- Inducement to act the hypocrite before the hypocrite world
- Infatuated men argue likewise, and scandal does not move them
- Insistency upon there being two sides to a case—to every case
- Intrusion of the spontaneous on the stereotyped would clash
- Irony that seemed to spring from aversion
- It is the best of signs when women take to her
- It is the devil’s masterstroke to get us to accuse him
- Its glee at a catastrophe; its poor stock of mercy
- Keep passion sober, a trotter in harness
- Lengthened term of peace bred maggots in the heads of the people
- Let never Necessity draw the bow of our weakness
- Literature is a good stick and a bad horse
- Loathing for speculation
- Mare would do, and better than a dozen horses
- Material good reverses its benefits the more nearly we clasp it
- Matter that is not nourishing to brains
- Mistake of the world is to think happiness possible to the sense
- Mistaking of her desires for her reasons
- Money is of course a rough test of virtue
- Moral indignation is ever consolatory
- Music was resumed to confuse the hearing of the eavesdroppers
- Mutual deference
- Needed support of facts, and feared them
- Never fell far short of outstripping the sturdy pedestrian Time
- Nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by
- Nothing is a secret that has been spoken
- Now far from him under the failure of an effort to come near
- O self! self! self!
- Observation is the most, enduring of the pleasures of life
- Omnipotence, which is in the image of themselves
- One might build up a respectable figure in negatives
- Openly treated; all had an air of being on the surface
- Or where you will, so that’s in Ireland
- Our weakness is the swiftest dog to hunt us
- Our bravest, our best, have an impulse to run
- Owner of such a woman, and to lose her!
- Paint themselves pure white, to the obliteration of minor spots
- Perused it, and did not recognize herself in her language
- Pride in being always myself

Procrastination and excessive scrupulousness
Question the gain of such an expenditure of energy
Quixottry is agreeable reading, a silly performance
Rare men of honour who can command their passion
Read with his eyes when you meet him this morning
Read deep and not be baffled by inconsistencies
Real happiness is a state of dulness
Reluctant to take the life of flowers for a whim
Rewards, together with the expectations, of the virtuous
Salt of earth, to whom their salt must serve for nourishment

Page 3410

Sentimentality puts up infant hands for absolution
Service of watering the dry and drying the damp (Whiskey)
Sham spiritualism
She had sunk her intelligence in her sensations
She marries, and it’s the end of her sparkling
She herself did not like to be seen eating in public
She had a fatal attraction for antiques
Sleepless night
Slightest taste for comic analysis that does not tumble to farce
Smart remarks have their measured distances
Smoky receptacle cherishing millions
Something of the hare in us when the hounds are full cry
Strain to see in the utter dark, and nothing can come of that
Swell and illuminate citizen prose to a princely poetic
Sympathy is for proving, not prating
Tendency to polysyllabic phraseology
Terrible decree, that all must act who would prevail
That is life—when we dare death to live!
That’s the natural shamrock, after the artificial
The man had to be endured, like other doses in politics
The burlesque Irishman can’t be caricatured
The greed of gain is our volcano
The debts we owe ourselves are the hardest to pay
The well of true wit is truth itself
The blindness of Fortune is her one merit
They have no sensitiveness, we have too much
They create by stoppage a volcano
This love they rattle about and rave about
Tooth that received a stone when it expected candy
Top and bottom sin is cowardice
Touch him with my hand, before he passed from our sight
Trial of her beauty of a woman in a temper
Vagrant compassionateness of sentimentalists
Vowed never more to repeat that offence to his patience
Was not one of the order whose Muse is the Public Taste
We live alone, and do not much feel it till we are visited
We never see peace but in the features of the dead
We must fawn in society
We don’t know we are in halves
We’re a peaceful people, but ’ware who touches us
Weather and women have some resemblance they say

Weighty little word—woman’s native watchdog and guardian (No!)
What might have been
What the world says, is what the wind says
What a woman thinks of women, is the test of her nature
When we despair or discolour things, it is our senses in revolt
Where she appears, the first person falls to second rank
Who can really think, and not think hopefully?
Who venerate when they love
Wife and no wife, a prisoner in liberty
With that I sail into the dark
Without those consolatory efforts, useless between men
Women are taken to be the second thoughts of the Creator
Women with brains, moreover, are all heartless
World is ruthless, dear friends, because the world is hypocrite
World prefers decorum to honesty
Yawns coming alarmingly fast, in the place of ideas
You beat me with the fists, but my spirit is towering
You are entreated to repress alarm

Page 3411

ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS, Complete

By George Meredith

1897

CONTENTS:

Book 1.
I. *Across London bridge*
ii. *Through the vague to the infinitely little*
III. *Old Veuve*
iv. *The second bottle*
V. *The London walk westward*
vi. *Nataly*
VII. *Between* A *general man of the world and* A *professional*
viii. *Some familiar guests*.
IX. *An inspection of Lakelands*
X. *Skepsey in motion*
xi. *Wherein we behold the couple justified of love having sight of their scourge*

Book 2.
XII. *Treats of the dumbness possible with members of* A *household having one heart*
XIII. *The latest of Mrs*. *Burman*
xiv. *Discloses* A *stage on the drive to Paris*
XV. A *patriot abroad*
XVI. *Accounts for Skepsey's misconduct*, *showing how it affected Nataly*
xvii. *Chiefly upon the theme of* A *young maid's imaginings*
XVIII. *Suitors for the hand of Nesta Victoria*

Book 3.
XIX. *Treats of nature and circumstance and the dissension between them and of* A *satirist's malignity in the direction of his country*
XX. *The great assembly at Lakeland*
XXI. *Dartrey Fenellan*
XXII. *Concerns the intrusion of Jarniman*
XXIII. *Treats of the ladies' lapdog Tasso for an instance of momentous*

effects produced by very minor causes

XXIV. *Nesta's engagement*

Page 3412

Book 4.
XXV. *Nataly in action*
XXVI. *In which we see* A *conventional gentle man endeavouring to examine* A *spectre of himself*
XXVII. *Contains what is* A *small thing or* A *great*, *as the soul of the chief actor may decide*
XXVIII. *Mrs*. *Marsett*
XXIX. *Shows one of the shadows of the world crossing* A *virgin's mind*
XXX. *The burden upon Nesta*
XXXI. *Shows how the squires in* A *conqueror's service have at times to do knightly conquest of themselves*
XXXII. *Shows how temper may kindle temper and an indignant woman get her weapon*
XXXIII. A *pair of wooers*
XXXIV. *Contains deeds unrelated and expositions of feelings*
XXXV. *In which again we make use of the old lamps for lighting an abysmal darkness*

Book 5.
XXXVI. *Nesta and her father*
XXXVII. *The mother—the daughter*
XXXVIII. *Nataly*, *Nesta*, *and Dartrey Fenellan*
XXXIX. A *chapter in the shadow of Mrs*. *Marsett*
XL. *An expiation*
XLI. *The night of the great undelivered speech*
XLII. *The last*

CHAPTER I

ACROSS LONDON BRIDGE

A gentleman, noteworthy for a lively countenance and a waistcoat to match it, crossing London Bridge at noon on a gusty April day, was almost magically detached from his conflict with the gale by some sly strip of slipperiness, abounding in that conduit of the markets, which had more or less adroitly performed the trick upon preceding passengers, and now laid this one flat amid the shuffle of feet, peaceful for the moment as the uncomplaining who have gone to Sabrina beneath the tides. He was unhurt, quite sound, merely astonished, he remarked, in reply to the inquiries of the first kind helper at his elbow; and it appeared an acceptable statement of his condition. He laughed, shook his coat-tails, smoothed the back of his head rather thoughtfully, thankfully received his

Page 3413

runaway hat, nodded bright beams to right and left, and making light of the muddy stigmas imprinted by the pavement, he scattered another shower of his nods and smiles around, to signify, that as his good friends would wish, he thoroughly felt his legs and could walk unaided. And he was in the act of doing it, questioning his familiar behind the waistcoat amazedly, to tell him how such a misadventure could have occurred to him of all men, when a glance below his chin discomposed his outward face. 'Oh, confound the fellow!' he said, with simple frankness, and was humorously ruffled, having seen absurd blots of smutty knuckles distributed over the maiden waistcoat.

His outcry was no more than the confidential communication of a genial spirit with that distinctive article of his attire. At the same time, for these friendly people about him to share the fun of the annoyance, he looked hastily brightly back, seeming with the contraction of his brows to frown, on the little band of observant Samaritans; in the centre of whom a man who knew himself honourably unclean, perhaps consequently a bit of a political jewel, hearing one of their number confounded for his pains, and by the wearer of a superfine dashing-white waistcoat, was moved to take notice of the total deficiency of gratitude in this kind of gentleman's look and pocket. If we ask for nothing for helping gentlemen to stand upright on their legs, and get it, we expect civility into the bargain. Moreover, there are reasons in nature why we choose to give sign of a particular surliness when our wealthy superiors would have us think their condescending grins are cordials.

The gentleman's eyes were followed on a second hurried downward grimace, the necessitated wrinkles of which could be stretched by malevolence to a semblance of haughty disgust; reminding us, through our readings in journals, of the wicked overblown Prince Regent and his Court, together with the view taken of honest labour in the mind of supercilious luxury, even if indebted to it freshly for a trifle; and the hoar-headed nineteenth-century billow of democratic ire craved the word to be set swelling.

'Am I the fellow you mean, sir?' the man said.

He was answered, not ungraciously: 'All right, my man.'

But the balance of our public equanimity is prone to violent antic bobbings on occasions when, for example, an ostentatious garment shall appear disdainful our class and ourself, and coin of the realm has not usurped command of one of the scales: thus a fairly pleasant answer, cast in persuasive features, provoked the retort:

'There you're wrong; nor wouldn't be.'

'What's that?' was the gentleman's musical inquiry.

'That's flat, as you was half a minute ago,' the man rejoined.

‘Ah, well, don’t be impudent,’ the gentleman said, by way of amiable remonstrance before a parting.

‘And none of your dam punctilio,’ said the man.

Page 3414

Their exchange rattled smartly, without a direct hostility, and the gentleman stepped forward.

It was observed in the crowd, that after a few paces he put two fingers on the back of his head.

They might suppose him to be condoling with his recent mishap. But, in fact, a thing had occurred to vex him more than a descent upon the pavement or damage to his waistcoat's whiteness: he abominated the thought of an altercation with a member of the mob; he found that enormous beat comprehensible only when it applauded him; and besides he wished it warmly well; all that was good for it; plentiful dinners, country excursions, stout menagerie bars, music, a dance, and to bed: he was for patting, stroking, petting the mob, for tossing it sops, never for irritating it to show an eye-tooth, much less for causing it to exhibit the grinders: and in endeavouring to get at the grounds of his dissension with that dirty-fisted fellow, the recollection of the word punctilio shot a throb of pain to the spot where his mishap had rendered him susceptible. Headache threatened—and to him of all men! But was there ever such a word for drumming on a cranium? Puzzles are presented to us now and then in the course of our days; and the smaller they are the better for the purpose, it would seem; and they come in rattle-boxes, they are actually children's toys, for what they contain, but not the less do they buzz at our understandings and insist that they break or we, and, in either case, to show a mere foolish idle rattle in hollowness. Or does this happen to us only after a fall?

He tried a suspension of his mental efforts, and the word was like the clapper of a disorderly bell, striking through him, with reverberations, in the form of interrogations, as to how he, of all men living, could by any chance have got into a wrangle, in a thoroughfare, on London Bridge, of all places in the world!—he, so popular, renowned for his affability, his amiability; having no dislike to common dirty dogs, entirely the reverse, liking them and doing his best for them; and accustomed to receive their applause. And in what way had he offered a hint to bring on him the charge of punctilio?

'But I am treating it seriously!' he said, and jerked a dead laugh while fixing a button of his coat.

That he should have treated it seriously, furnished next the subject of cogitation; and here it was plainly suggested, that a degradation of his physical system, owing to the shock of the fall, must be seen and acknowledged; for it had become a perverted engine, to pull him down among the puerilities, and very soon he was worrying at punctilio anew, attempting to read the riddle of the application of it to himself, angry that he had allowed it to be the final word, and admitting it a famous word for the closing of a controversy:—it banged the door and rolled drum-notes; it deafened reason. And was it

a London cockney crow-word of the day, or a word that had stuck in the fellow’s head from the perusal of his pothouse newspaper columns?

Page 3415

Furthermore, the plea of a fall, and the plea of a shock from a fall, required to account for the triviality of the mind, were humiliating to him who had never hitherto missed a step, or owned to the shortest of collapses. This confession of deficiency in explosive repartee—using a friend's term for the ready gift—was an old and a rueful one with Victor Radnor. His godmother Fortune denied him that. She bestowed it on his friend Fenellan, and little else. Simeon Fenellan could clap the halter on a coltish mob; he had positively caught the roar of cries and stilled it, by capping the cries in turn, until the people cheered him; and the effect of the scene upon Victor Radnor disposed him to rank the gift of repartee higher than a certain rosily oratorical that he was permitted to tell himself he possessed, in bottle if not on draught. Let it only be explosive repartee: the well-fused bomb, the bubble to the stone, echo round the horn. Fenellan, would have discharged an extinguisher on punctilio in emission. Victor Radnor was unable to cope with it reflectively.

No, but one doesn't like being beaten by anything! he replied to an admonishment of his better mind, as he touched his two fingers, more significantly dubious than the whole hand, at the back of his head, and checked or stemmed the current of a fear. For he was utterly unlike himself; he was dwelling on a trifle, on a matter discernibly the smallest, an incident of the streets; and although he refused to feel a bump or any responsive notification of a bruise, he made a sacrifice of his native pride to his intellectual, in granting that he must have been shaken, so childishly did he continue thinking.

Yes, well, and if a tumble distorts our ideas of life, and an odd word engrosses our speculations, we are poor creatures, he addressed another friend, from whom he stood constitutionally in dissent naming him Colney; and under pressure of the name, reviving old wrangles between them upon man's present achievements and his probable destinies: especially upon England's grandeur, vitality, stability, her intelligent appreciation of her place in the universe; not to speak of the historic dignity of London City. Colney had to be overcome afresh, and he fled, but managed, with two or three of his bitter phrases, to make a cuttle-fish fight of it, that oppressively shadowed his vanquisher:

The Daniel Lambert of Cities: the Female Annuitant of Nations:—and such like, wretched stuff, proper to Colney Durance, easily dispersed and out-laughed when we have our vigour. We have as much as we need of it in summoning a contemptuous Pooh to our lips, with a shrug at venomous dyspepsia.

Page 3416

Nevertheless, a malignant sketch of Colney's, in the which Hengist and Horsa, our fishy Saxon originals, in modern garb of liveryman and gaitered squire, flat-headed, paunchy, assiduously servile, are shown blacking Ben-Israel's boots and grooming the princely stud of the Jew, had come so near to Victor Radnor's apprehensions of a possible, if not an impending, consummation, that the ghastly vision of the Jew Dominant in London City, over England, over Europe, America, the world (a picture drawn in literary sepia by Colney: with our poor hang neck population uncertain about making a bell-rope of the forelock to the Satyr-snouty master; and the Norman Lord de Warenne handing him for a lump sum son and daughter, both to be Hebraized in their different ways), fastened on the most mercurial of patriotic men, and gave him a whole-length plunge into despondency.

It lasted nearly a minute. His recovery was not in this instance due to the calling on himself for the rescue of an ancient and glorious country; nor altogether to the spectacle of the shipping, over the parapet, to his right: the hundreds of masts rising out of the merchant river; London's unrivalled mezzotint and the City' rhetorician's inexhaustible argument: he gained it rather from the imperious demand of an animated and thirsty frame for novel impressions. Commonly he was too hot with his business, and airy fancies above it when crossing the bridge, to reflect in freshness on its wonders; though a phrase could spring him alive to them; a suggestion of the Foreigner, jealous, condemned to admire in despair of outstripping, like Satan worsted; or when a Premier's fine inflation magnified the scene at City banquets—exciting while audible, if a waggery in memory; or when England's cherished Bard, the Leading Article, blew bellows, and wind primed the lieges.

That a phrase on any other subject was of much the same effect, in relation to it, may be owned; he was lightly kindled. The scene, however, had a sharp sparkle of attractiveness at the instant. Down went the twirling horizontal pillars of a strong tide from the arches of the bridge, breaking to wild water at a remove; and a reddish Northern cheek of curdling pipeing East, at shrilly puffs between the Tower and the Custom House, encountered it to whip and ridge the flood against descending tug and long tail of stern-ajerk empty barges; with a steamer slowly noseing round off the wharf-cranes, preparing to swirl the screw; and half-bottom-upward boats dancing harpooner beside their whale; along an avenue, not fabulously golden, of the deputy masts of all nations, a wintry woodland, every rag aloft curling to volume; and here the spouts and the mounds of steam, and rolls of brown smoke there, variously undulated, curved to vanish; cold blue sky ashift with the whirl and dash of a very Tartar cavalry of cloud overhead.

Surely a scene pretending to sublimity?

Page 3417

Gazeing along that grand highway of the voyageing forest, your London citizen of good estate has reproached his country's poets for not pouring out, succinctly and melodiously, his multitudinous larvae of notions begotten by the scene. For there are times when he would, pay to have them sung; and he feels them big; he thinks them human in their bulk; they are Londinensian; they want but form and fire to get them scored on the tablets of the quotable at festive boards. This he can promise to his poets. As for otherwhere than at the festive, Commerce invoked is a Goddess that will have the reek of those boards to fill her nostrils, and poet and alderman alike may be dedicate to the sublime, she leads them, after two sniffs of an idea concerning her, for the dive into the turtle-tureen. Heels up they go, poet first—a plummet he!

And besides it is barely possible for our rounded citizen, in the mood of meditation, to direct his gaze off the bridge along the waterway North-eastward without beholding as an eye the glow of whitebait's bow-window by the riverside, to the front of the summer sunset, a league or so down stream; where he sees, in memory savours, the Elysian end of Commerce: frontispiece of a tale to fetch us up the out-wearied spectre of old Apicius; yea, and urge Crispinus to wheel his purse into the market for the purchase of a costlier mullet!

But is the Jew of the usury gold becoming our despot-king of Commerce?

In that case, we do not ask our country's poets to compose a single stanza of eulogy's rhymes—far from it. Far to the contrary, we bid ourselves remember the sons of whom we are; instead of revelling in the fruits of Commerce, we shoot scornfully past those blazing bellied windows of the aromatic dinners, and beyond Thames, away to the fishermen's deeps, Old England's native element, where the strenuous ancestry of a race yet and ever manful at the stress of trial are heard around and aloft whistling us back to the splendid strain of muscle, and spray fringes cloud, and strong heart rides the briny scoops and hillocks, and Death and Man are at grip for the haul.

There we find our nationality, our poetry, no Hebrew competing.

We do: or there at least we left it. Whether to recover it when wanted, is not so certain. Humpy Hengist and dumpy Horsa, quitting ledger and coronet, might recur to their sea bowlegs and red-stubble chins, might take to their tarpaulins again; they might renew their manhood on the capture of cod; headed by Harald and Hardiknut, they might roll surges to whelm a Dominant Jew clean gone to the fleshpots and effeminacy. Aldermen of our ancient conception, they may teach him that he has been backsliding once more, and must repent in ashes, as those who are for jewels, titles, essences, banquets, for wallowing in slimy spawn of lucre, have ever to do. They dispossess him of his greedy gettings.

And how of the Law?

But the Law is always, and must ever be, the Law of the stronger.

Page 3418

—Ay, but brain beats muscle, and what if the Jew should prove to have superior power of brain? A dreaded hypothesis! Why, then you see the insurgent Saxon seamen (of the names in two syllables with accent on the first), and their Danish captains, and it may be but a remnant of high-nosed old Norman Lord de Warenne beside them, in the criminal box: and presently the Jew smoking a giant regalia cigar on a balcony giving view of a gallows-tree. But we will try that: on our side, to back a native pugnacity, is morality, humanity, fraternity—nature's rights, aha! and who withstands them? on his, a troop of mercenaries!

And that lands me in Red Republicanism, a hop and a skip from Socialism! said Mr. Radnor, and chuckled ironically at the natural declivity he had come to. Still, there was an idea in it . . . .

A short run or attempt at running after the idea, ended in pain to his head near the spot where the haunting word punctilio caught at any excuse for clamouring.

Yet we cannot relinquish an idea that was ours; we are vowed to the pursuit of it. Mr. Radnor lighted on the tracks, by dint of a thought flung at his partner Mr. Inchling's dread of the Jews. Inchling dreaded Scotchmen as well, and Americans, and Armenians, and Greeks: latterly Germans hardly less; but his dread of absorption in Jewry, signifying subjection, had often precipitated a deplorable shrug, in which Victor Radnor now perceived the skirts of his idea, even to a fancy that something of the idea must have struck Inchling when he shrugged: the idea being . . . he had lost it again. Definition seemed to be an extirpation enemy of this idea, or she was by nature shy. She was very feminine; coming when she willed and flying when wanted. Not until nigh upon the close of his history did she return, full-statured and embraceable, to Victor Radnor.

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE VAGUE TO THE INFINITELY LITTLE

The fair dealing with readers demands of us, that a narrative shall not proceed at slower pace than legs of a man in motion; and we are still but little more than midway across London Bridge. But if a man's mind is to be taken as a part of him, the likening of it, at an introduction, to an army on the opening march of a great campaign, should plead excuses for tardy forward movements, in consideration of the large amount of matter you have to review before you can at all imagine yourselves to have made his acquaintance. This it is not necessary to do when you are set astride the enchanted horse of the Tale, which leaves the man's mind at home while he performs the deeds befitting him: he can indeed be rapid. Whether more active, is a question asking for your notions of the governing element in the composition of man, and of hid present

business here. The Tale inspirits one’s earlier ardours, when we sped without baggage, when the Impossible was wings to imagination, and heroic sculpture the

Page 3419

simplest act of the chisel. It does not advance, 'tis true; it drives the whirligig circle round and round the single existing central point; but it is enriched with applause of the boys and girls of both ages in this land; and all the English critics heap their honours on its brave old Simplicity: our national literary flag, which signalizes us while we float, subsequently to flap above the shallows. One may sigh for it. An ill-fortuned minstrel who has by fateful direction been brought to see with distinctness, that man is not as much comprised in external features as the monkey, will be devoted to the task of the fuller portraiture.

After his ineffectual catching at the volatile idea, Mr. Radnor found repose in thoughts of his daughter and her dear mother. They had begged him to put on an overcoat this day of bitter wind, or a silken kerchief for the throat. Faithful to the Spring, it had been his habit since boyhood to show upon his person something of the hue of the vernal month, the white of the daisied meadow, and although he owned a light overcoat to dangle from shoulders at the Opera crush, he declined to wear it for protection. His gesture of shaking and expanding whenever the tender request was urged on him, signified a physical opposition to the control of garments. Mechanically now, while doating in fancy over the couple beseeching him, he loosened the button across his defaced waistcoat, exposed a large measure of chest to flaws of a wind barbed on Norwegian peaks by the brewers of cough and catarrh—horrid women of the whistling clouts, in the pay of our doctors. He braved them; he starved the profession. He was that man in fifty thousand who despises hostile elements and goes unpunished, calmly erect among a sneezing and tumbled host, as a lighthouse overhead of breezy fleets. The coursing of his blood was by comparison electrical; he had not the sensation of cold, other than that of an effort of the elements to arouse him; and so quick was he, through this fine animation, to feel, think, act, that the three successive tributaries of conduct appeared as an irreflective flash and a gamester's daring in the vein to men who had no deep knowledge of him and his lightning arithmetic for measuring, sounding, and deciding.

Naturally he was among the happiest of human creatures; he willed it so, with consent of circumstances; a boisterous consent, as when votes are reckoned for a favourite candidate: excepting on the part of a small band of black dissentients in a corner, a minute opaque body, devilish in their irreconcilability, who maintain their struggle to provoke discord, with a cry disclosing the one error of his youth, the sole bad step chargeable upon his antecedents. But do we listen to them? Shall we not have them turned out? He gives the sign for it; and he leaves his buoying constituents to outroar them: and he tells a friend that it was not, as one may say, an error, although an erratic step: but let us explain to our bosom friend; it was a step quite unregretted, gloried in; a step deliberately marked, to be done again, were the time renewed: it was a step necessitated (emphatically) by a false preceding step; and having youth to plead for it, in the first instance, youth and ignorance; and secondly, and O how deeply truly! Love. Deep true love, proved by years, is the advocate.

Page 3420

He tells himself at the same time, after lending ear to the advocate's exordium and a favourite sentence, that, judged by the Powers (to them only can he expose the whole skeleton-cupboard of the case), judged by those clear-sighted Powers, he is exonerated.

To be exonerated by those awful Powers, is to be approved.

As to that, there is no doubt: whom they, all-seeing, discerning as they do, acquit they justify.

Whom they justify, they compliment.

They, seeing all the facts, are not unintelligent of distinctions, as the world is.

What, to them, is the spot of the error?—admitting it as an error. They know it for a thing of convention, not of Nature. We stand forth to plead it in proof of an adherence to Nature's laws: we affirm, that far from a defilement, it is an illumination and stamp of nobility. On the beloved who shares it with us, it is a stamp of the highest nobility. Our world has many ways for signifying its displeasure, but it cannot brand an angel.

This was another favourite sentence of Love's grand oration for the defence. So seductive was it to the Powers who sat in judgement on the case, that they all, when the sentence came, turned eyes upon the angel, and they smiled.

They do not smile on the condemnable.

She, then, were he rebuked, would have strength to uplift him. And who, calling her his own, could be placed in second rank among the blissful!

Mr. Radnor could rationally say that he was made for happiness; he flew to it, he breathed, dispensed it. How conceive the clear-sighted celestial Powers as opposing his claim to that estate? Not they. He knew, for he had them safe in the locked chamber of his breast, to yield him subservient responses. The world, or Puritanic members of it, had pushed him to the trial once or twice—or had put on an air of doing so; creating a temporary disturbance, ending in a merry duet with his daughter Nesta Victoria: a glorious trio when her mother Natalia, sweet lily that she was, shook the rainwater from her cup and followed the good example to shine in the sun.

He had a secret for them.

Nesta's promising soprano, and her mother's contralto, and his baritone—a true baritone, not so well trained as their accurate notes—should be rising in spirited union with the curtain of that secret: there was matter for song and concert, triumph and gratulation in it. And during the whole passage of the bridge, he had not once cast thought on a secret so palpitating, the cause of the morning's expedition and a long

year’s prospect of the present day! It seemed to have been knocked clean out of it—-punctilioed out, Fenellan might say. Nor had any combinations upon the theme of business displaced it. Just before the fall, the whole drama of the unfolding of that secret was brilliant to his eyes as a scene on a stage.

He refused to feel any sensible bruise on his head, with the admission that he perhaps might think he felt one which was virtually no more than the feeling of a thought;—what his friend Dr. Peter Yatt would define as feeling a rotifer astir in the curative compartment of a homoeopathic globule: and a playful fancy may do that or anything. Only, Sanity does not allow the infinitely little to disturb us.

Page 3421

Mr. Radnor had a quaint experience of the effects of the infinitely little while threading his way to a haberdasher's shop for new white waistcoats. Under the shadow of the representative statue of City Corporations and London's majesty, the figure of Royalty, worshipful in its marbled redundancy, fronting the bridge, on the slope where the seas of fish and fruit below throw up a thin line of their drift, he stood contemplating the not unamiable, reposefully-jolly, Guelphic countenance, from the loose jowl to the bent knee, as if it were a novelty to him; unwilling to trust himself to the roadway he had often traversed, equally careful that his hesitation should not be seen. A trifle more impressible, he might have imagined the smoky figure and magnum of pursiness barring the City against him. He could have laughed aloud at the hypocrisy behind his quiet look of provincial wonderment at London's sculptor's art; and he was partly tickled as well by the singular fit of timidity enchaining him. Cart, omnibus, cab, van, barrow, donkey-tray, went by in strings, broken here and there, and he could not induce his legs to take advantage of the gaps; he listened to a warning that he would be down again if he tried it, among those wheels; and his nerves clutched him, like a troop of household women, to keep him from the hazard of an exposure to the horrid crunch, pitiless as tiger's teeth; and we may say truly, that once down, or once out of the rutted line, you are food for lion and jackal—the forces of the world will have you in their mandibles.

An idea was there too; but it would not accept pursuit.

'A pretty scud overheard?' said a voice at his ear.

'For fine!—to-day at least,' Mr. Radnor affably replied to a stranger; and gazing on the face of his friend Fenellan, knew the voice, and laughed: 'You?' He straightened his back immediately to cross the road, dismissing nervousness as a vapour, asking, between a cab and a van: 'Anything doing in the City?' For Mr. Fenellan's proper station faced Westward.

The reply was deferred until they had reached the pavement, when Mr. Fenellan said: 'I'll tell you,' and looked a dubious preface, to his friend's thinking.

But it was merely the mental inquiry following a glance at mud-spots on the coat.

'We'll lunch; lunch with me, I must eat, tell me then,' said Mr. Radnor, adding within himself: 'Emptiness! want of food!' to account for recent ejaculations and qualms. He had not eaten for a good four hours.

Fenellan's tone signified to his feverish sensibility of the moment, that the matter was personal; and the intimation of a touch on domestic affairs caused sinkings in his vacuity, much as though his heart were having a fall.

He mentioned the slip on the bridge, to explain his: need to visit a haberdasher's shop, and pointed at the waistcoat.

Mr. Fenellan was compassionate over the ‘Poor virgin of the smoky city!’

Page 3422

’They have their ready-made at these shops—last year’s: perhaps, never mind, do for the day,’ said Mr. Radnor, impatient for eating, now that he had spoken of it. ’A basin of turtle; I can’t wait. A brush of the coat; mud must be dry by this time. Clear turtle, I think, with a bottle of the Old Veuve. Not bad news to tell? You like that Old Veuve?’

‘Too well to tell bad news of her,’ said Mr. Fenellan in a manner to reassure his friend, as he intended. ’You wouldn’t credit it for the Spring of the year, without the spotless waistcoat?’

‘Something of that, I suppose.’ And so saying, Mr. Radnor entered the shop of his quest, to be complimented by the shopkeeper, while the attendants climbed the ladder to upper stages for white-waistcoat boxes, on his being; the first bird of the season; which it pleased him to hear; for the smallest of our gratifications in life could give a happy tone to this brightly-constituted gentleman.

CHAPTER III

OLD VEUVE

They were known at the house of the turtle and the attractive Old Veuve: a champagne of a sobered sweetness, of a great year, a great age, counting up to the extremer maturity attained by wines of stilly depths; and their worthy comrade, despite the wanton sparkles, for the promoting of the state of reverential wonderment in rapture, which an ancient wine will lead to, well you wot. The silly girly sugary crudity his given way to womanly suavity, matronly composure, with yet the sparkles; they ascend; but hue and flavour tell of a soul that has come to a lodgement there. It conducts the youthful man to temples of dusky thought: philosophers partaking of it are drawn by the arms of garlanded nymphs about their necks into the fathomless of inquiries. It presents us with a sphere, for the pursuit of the thing we covet most. It bubbles over mellowness; it has, in the marriage with Time, extracted a spice of individuality from the saccharine: by miracle, one would say, were it not for our knowledge of the right noble issue of Time when he and good things unite. There should be somewhere legends of him and the wine-flask. There must be meanings to that effect in the Mythology, awaiting unravelment. For the subject opens to deeper than cellars, and is a tree with vast ramifications of the roots and the spreading growth, whereon half if not all the mythic Gods, Inferior and Superior, Infernal and Celestial, might be shown sitting in concord, performing in concert, harmoniously receiving sacrificial offerings of the black or the white; and the black not extinguishing the fairer fellow. Tell us of a certainty that Time has embraced the wine-flask, then may it be asserted (assuming the great year for the wine, *i.e*. combinations above) that a speck of the white within us who drink will conquer, to rise in main ascension over volumes of the black. It may, at a greater venture, but confidently, be said in plain speech, that the Bacchus of auspicious birth induces ever to the worship of the loftier Deities.

Page 3423

Think as you will; forbear to come hauling up examples of malarious men, in whom these pourings of the golden rays of life breed fogs; and be moved, since you are scarcely under an obligation to hunt the meaning, in tolerance of some dithyrambic inebriety of narration (quiverings of the reverent pen) when we find ourselves entering the circle of a most magnetic polarity. Take it for not worse than accompanying choric flourishes, in accord with Mr. Victor Radnor and Mr. Simeon Fenellan at their sipping of the venerable wine.

Seated in a cosy corner, near the grey City window edged with a sooty maze, they praised the wine, in the neuter and in the feminine; that for the glass, this for the widow-branded bottle: not as poets hymning; it was done in the City manner, briefly, part pensively, like men travelling to the utmost bourne of flying flavour (a dell in infinite nether), and still masters of themselves and at home.

Such a wine, in its capturing permeation of us, insists on being for a time a theme.

‘I wonder!’ said Mr. Radnor, completely restored, eyeing his half-emptied second glass and his boon-fellow.

‘Low!’ Mr. Fenellan shook his head.

‘Half a dozen dozen left?’

‘Nearer the half of that. And who’s the culprit?’

‘Old days! They won’t let me have another dozen out of the house now.’

’They’ll never hit on such another discovery in their cellar, unless they unearth a fifth corner.’

‘I don’t blame them for making the price prohibitive. And sound as ever!’

Mr. Radnor watched the deliberate constant ascent of bubbles through their rose-topaz transparency. He drank. That notion of the dish of turtle was an inspiration of the right: he ought always to know it for the want of replenishment when such a man as he went quaking. His latest experiences of himself were incredible; but they passed, as the dimples of the stream. He finished his third glass. The bottle, like the cellar-wine, was at ebb: unlike the cellar-wine, it could be set flowing again: He prattled, in the happy ignorance of compulsion:

’Fenellan, remember, I had a sort of right to the wine—to the best I could get; and this Old Veuve, more than any other, is a bridal wine! We heard of Giulia Sanfredini’s marriage to come off with the Spanish Duke, and drank it to the toast of our little Nesta’s godmother. I ’ve told you. We took the girl to the Opera, when quite a little one—that high:—and I declare to you, it was marvellous! Next morning after breakfast, she plants

herself in the middle of the room, and strikes her attitude for song, and positively, almost with the Sanfredini's voice—illusion of it, you know,—trills us out more than I could have believed credible to be recollected by a child. But I've told you the story. We called her Fredi from that day. I sent the diva, with excuses and compliments, a nuptial present-necklace,

Page 3424

Roman goldwork, locket-pendant, containing sunny curl, and below a fine pearl; really pretty; telling her our grounds for the liberty. She replied, accepting the responsible office; touching letter—we found it so; framed in Fredi's room, under her godmother's photograph. Fredi has another heroine now, though she worships her old one still; she never abandons her old ones. You've heard the story over and over!'

Mr. Fenellan nodded; he had a tenderness for the garrulity of Old Veuve, and for the damsel. Chatter on that subject ran pleasantly with their entertainment.

Mr. Radnor meanwhile scribbled, and despatched a strip of his Note-book, bearing a scrawl of orders, to his office. He was now fully himself, benevolent, combative, gay, alert for amusement or the probeing of schemes to the quick, weighing the good and the bad in them with his fine touch on proportion.

'City dead flat? A monotonous key; but it's about the same as fetching a breath after a run; only, true, it lasts too long—not healthy! Skepsey will bring me my letters. I was down in the country early this morning, looking over the house, with Taplow, my architect; and he speaks fairly well of the contractors. Yes, down at Lakelands; and saw my first lemon butterfly in a dell of sunshine, out of the wind, and had half a mind to catch it for Fredi,—and should have caught it myself, if I had! The truth is, we three are country born and bred; we pine in London. Good for a season; you know my old feeling. They are to learn the secret of Lakelands to-morrow. It 's great fun; they think I don't see they've had their suspicion for some time. You said—somebody said—"the eye of a needle for what they let slip of their secrets, and the point of it for penetrating yours":—women. But no; my dear souls didn't prick and bother. And they dealt with a man in armour. I carry them down to Lakelands to-morrow, if the City's flat.'

'Keeping a secret's the lid on a boiling pot with you,' Mr. Fenellan said; and he mused on the profoundness of the flavour at his lips.

'I do it.'

'You do: up to bursting at the breast.'

'I keep it from Colney!'

'As Vesuvius keeps it from Palmieri when shaking him.'

'Has old Colney an idea of it?'

'He has been foretelling an eruption of an edifice.'

The laugh between them subsided to pensiveness.

Mr. Fenellan's delay in the delivery of his news was eloquent to reveal the one hateful topic; and this being seen, it waxed to such increase of size with the passing seconds, that prudence called for it.

'Come!' said Mr. Radnor.

The appeal was understood.

'Nothing very particular. I came into the City to look at a warehouse they want to mount double guard on. Your idea of the fireman's night-patrol and wires has done wonders for the office.'

'I guarantee the City if all my directions are followed.'

Page 3425

Mr. Fenellan's remark, that he had nothing very particular to tell, reduced it to the mere touch upon a vexatious matter, which one has to endure in the ears at times; but it may be postponed. So Mr. Radnor encouraged him to talk of an Insurance Office Investment. Where it is all bog and mist, as in the City to-day, the maxim is, not to take a step, they agreed. Whether it was attributable to an unconsumed glut of the markets, or apprehension of a panic, had to be considered. Both gentlemen were angry with the Birds on the flags of foreign nations, which would not imitate a sawdust Lion to couch reposefully. Incessantly they scream and sharpen talons.

'They crack the City bubbles and bladders, at all events,' Mr. Fenellan said. 'But if we let our journals go on making use of them, in the shape of sham hawks overhead, we shall pay for their one good day of the game with our loss of the covey. An unstable London's no world's market-place.'

'No, no; it's a niggardly national purse, not the journals,' Mr. Radnor said. 'The journals are trading engines. Panics are grist to them; so are wars; but they do their duty in warning the taxpayer and rousing Parliament. Dr. Schlesien's right: we go on believing that our God Neptune will do everything for us, and won't see that Steam has paralyzed his Trident: good! You and Colney are hard on Schlesien—or at him, I should say. He's right: if we won't learn that we have become Continentals, we shall be marched over. Laziness, cowardice, he says.'

'Oh, be hanged!' interrupted Fenellan. 'As much of the former as you like. He 's right about our "individualismus" being another name for selfishness, and showing the usual deficiency in external features; it's an individualism of all of a pattern, as when a mob cuts its lucky, each fellow his own way. Well, then, conscript them, and they'll be all of a better pattern. The only thing to do, and the cheapest. By heaven! it's the only honourable thing to do.'

Mr. Radnor disapproved. 'No conscription here.'

'Not till you've got the drop of poison in your blood, in the form of an army landed. That will teach you to catch at the drug.'

'No, Fenellan! Besides they've got to land. I guarantee a trusty army and navy under a contract, at two-thirds of the present cost. We'll start a National Defence Insurance Company after the next panic.'

'During,' said Mr. Fenellan, and there was a flutter of laughter at the unobtrusive hint for seizing Dame England in the mood.

Both dropped a sigh.

‘But you must try and run down with us to Lakelands to-morrow,’ Mr. Radnor resumed on a cheerfuller theme. ’You have not yet seen all I ’ve done there. And it ’s a castle with a drawbridge: no exchangeing of visits, as we did at Craye Farm and at Creckholt; we are there for country air; we don’t court neighbours at all—perhaps the elect; it will depend on Nataly’s wishes.

Page 3426

We can accommodate our Concert-set, and about thirty or forty more, for as long as they like. You see, that was my intention—to be independent of neighbouring society. Madame Callet guarantees dinners or hot suppers for eighty—and Armandine is the last person to be recklessly boasting.—When was it I was thinking last of Armandine?' He asked himself that, as he rubbed at the back of his head.

Mr. Fenellan was reading his friend's character by the light of his remarks and in opposition to them, after the critical fashion of intimates who know as well as hear: but it was amiably and trippingly, on the dance of the wine in his veins.

His look, however, was one that reminded; and Mr. Radnor cried: 'Now! whatever it is!'

'I had an interview: I assure you,' Mr. Fenellan interposed to pacify: 'the smallest of trifles, and to be expected: I thought you ought to know it:—an interview with her lawyer; office business, increase of Insurance on one of her City warehouses.'

'Speak her name, speak the woman's name; we're talking like a pair of conspirators,' exclaimed Mr. Radnor.

'He informed me that Mrs. Burman has heard of the new mansion.'

'My place at Lakelands?'

Mr. Radnor's clear-water eyes hardened to stony as their vision ran along the consequences of her having heard it.

'Earlier this time!' he added, thrummed on the table, and thumped with knuckles. 'I make my stand at Lakelands for good! Nothing mortal moves me!'

'That butler of hers—'

'Jarniman, you mean: he's her butler, yes, the scoundrel—h'm-pah! Heaven forgive me! she's an honest woman at least; I wouldn't rob her of her little: fifty-nine or sixty next September, fifteenth of the month! with the constitution of a broken drug-bottle, poor soul! She hears everything from Jarniman: he catches wind of everything. All foreseen, Fenellan, foreseen. I have made my stand at Lakelands, and there's my flag till it's hauled down over Victor Radnor. London kills Nataly as well as Fredi—and me: that is—I can use the words to you—I get back to primal innocence in the country. We all three have the feeling. You're a man to understand. My beasts, and the wild flowers, hedge-banks, and stars. Fredi's poetess will tell you. Quiet waters reflecting. I should feel it in Paris as well, though they have nightingales in their Bois. It's the rustic I want to bathe me; and I had the feeling at school, biting at Horace. Well, this is my Sabine Farm, rather on a larger scale, for the sake of friends. Come, and pure air, water from the springs, walks and rides in lanes, high sand-lanes; Nataly loves them; Fredi worships the old roots of trees: she calls them the faces of those weedy sandy lanes.

And the two dear souls on their own estate, Fenellan! And their poultry, cows, cream. And a certain influence one has in the country socially. I make my stand on a home—-not empty punctilio.’

Page 3427

Mr. Fenellan repeated, in a pause, ‘Punctilio,’ and not emphatically.

‘Don’t bawl the word,’ said Mr. Radnor, at the drum of whose ears it rang and sang. ‘Here in the City the woman’s harmless; and here,’ he struck his breast. ’But she can shoot and hit another through me. Ah, the witch!—poor wretch! poor soul! Only, she’s malignant. I could swear! But Colney ’s right for once in something he says about oaths—“dropping empty buckets,” or something.’

’"Empty buckets to haul up impotent demons, whom we have to pay as heavily as the ready devil himself,"’ Mr. Fenellan supplied the phrase. ’Only, the moment old Colney moralizes, he’s what the critics call sententious. We’ve all a parlous lot too much pulpit in us.’

‘Come, Fenellan, I don’t think . . .’

‘Oh, yes, but it’s true of me too.’

‘You reserve it for your enemies.’

’I ’d like to distract it a bit from the biggest of ’em.’ He pointed finger at the region of the heart.

‘Here we have Skepsey,’ said Mr. Radnor, observing the rapid approach of a lean small figure, that in about the time of a straight-aimed javelin’s cast, shot from the doorway to the table.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND BOTTLE

This little dart of a man came to a stop at a respectful distance from his master, having the look of an arrested needle in mechanism. His lean slip of face was an illumination of vivacious grey from the quickest of prominent large eyes. He placed his master’s letters legibly on the table, and fell to his posture of attention, alert on stiff legs, the hands like sucking-cubs at play with one another.

Skepsey waited for Mr. Fenellan to notice him.

‘How about the Schools for Boxing?’ that gentleman said.

Deploring in motion the announcement he had to make, Skepsey replied: ’I have a difficulty in getting the plan treated seriously: a person of no station:—it does not appear of national importance. Ladies are against. They decline their signatures; and ladies have great influence; because of the blood; which we know is very slight, rather

healthy than not; and it could be proved for the advantage of the frailer sex. They seem to be unaware of their own interests—ladies. The contention all around us is with ignorance. My plan is written; I have shown it, and signatures of gentlemen, to many of our City notables favourable in most cases: gentlemen of the Stock Exchange highly. The clergy and the medical profession are quite with me.'

'The surgical, perhaps you mean?'

'Also, sir. The clergy strongly.'

'On the grounds of—what, Skepsey?'

'Morality. I have fully explained to them:—after his work at the desk all day, the young City clerk wants refreshment. He needs it, must have it. I propose to catch him on his way to his music-halls and other places, and take him to one of our establishments. A short term of instruction, and he would find a pleasure in the gloves; it would delight him more than excesses-beer and tobacco. The female in her right place, certainly.' Skepsey supplicated honest interpretation of his hearer, and pursued,

Page 3428

’It would improve his physical strength, at the same time add to his sense of personal dignity.’

‘Would you teach females as well—to divert them from their frivolities?’

’That would have to be thought over, sir. It would be better for them than using their nails.’

‘I don’t know, Skepsey: I’m rather a Conservative there.’

’Yes; with regard to the female, sir: I confess, my scheme does not include them. They dance; that is a healthy exercise. One has only to say, that it does not add to the national force, in case of emergency. I look to that. And I am particular in proposing an exercise independent of—I have to say—sex. Not that there is harm in sex. But we are for training. I hope my meaning is clear?’

’Quite. You would have boxing with the gloves to be a kind of monastic recreation.’

‘Recreation is the word, sir; I have often admired it,’ said Skepsey, blinking, unsure of the signification of monastic.

‘I was a bit of a boxer once,’ Mr. Fenellan said, conscious of height and breadth in measuring the wisp of a figure before him.

‘Something might be done with you still, sir.’

Skepsey paid him the encomium after a respectful summary of his gifts in a glimpse. Mr. Fenellan bowed to him.

Mr. Radnor raised head from the notes he was pencilling upon letters perused.

’Skepsey’s craze: regeneration of the English race by boxing—nucleus of a national army?’

’To face an enemy at close quarters—it teaches that, sir. I have always been of opinion, that courage may be taught. I do not say heroism. And setting aside for a moment thoughts of an army, we create more valuable citizens. Protection to the weak in streets and by-places—shocking examples of ruffians maltreating women, in view of a crowd.’

‘One strong man is an overmatch for your mob,’ said Mr. Fenellan.

Skepsey toned his assent to the diminishing thinness where a suspicion of the negative begins to wind upon a distant horn.

’Knowing his own intentions; and before an ignorant mob:—strong, you say, sir? I venture my word that a, decent lad, with science, would beat him. It is a question of the study and practice of first principles.’

‘If you were to see a rascal giant mishandling a woman?’ Skepsey conjured the scene by bending his head and peering abstractedly, as if over spectacles.

‘I would beg him to abstain, for his own sake.’

Mr. Fenellan knew that the little fellow was not boasting.

’My brother Dartrey had a lesson or two from you in the first principles, I think?’

’Captain Dartrey is an athlete, sir: exceedingly quick and clever; a hard boxer to beat.’

’You will not call him captain when you see him; he has dismissed the army.’

’I much regret it, sir, much, that we have lost him. Captain Dartrey Fenellan was a beautiful fencer. He gave me some instruction; unhappily, I have to acknowledge, too late. It is a beautiful art. Captain Dartrey says, the French excel at it. But it asks for a weapon, which nature has not given: whereas the fists . . .’

Page 3429

‘So,’ Mr. Radnor handed notes and papers to Skepsey: ‘No sign of life?’

‘It is not yet seen in the City, sir.’

’The first principles of commercial activity have retreated to earth’s maziest penetralia, where no tides are! is it not so, Skepsey?’ said Mr. Fenellan, whose initiative and exuberance in loquency had been restrained by a slight oppression, known to guests; especially to the guest in the earlier process of his magnification and illumination by virtue of a grand old wine; and also when the news he has to communicate may be a stir to unpleasant heaps. The shining lips and eyes of his florid face now proclaimed speech, with his Puckish fancy jack-o’-lanterning over it. ’Business hangs to swing at every City door, like a ragshop Doll, on the gallows of overproduction. Stocks and Shares are hollow nuts not a squirrel of the lot would stop to crack for sight of the milky kernel mouldered to beard.

Percentage, like a cabman without a fare, has gone to sleep inside his vehicle. Dividend may just be seen by tiptoe: stockholders, twinkling heels over the far horizon. Too true!—and our merchants, brokers, bankers, projectors of Companies, parade our City to remind us of the poor steamed fellows trooping out of the burst-boiler-room of the big ship Leviathan, in old years; a shade or two paler than the crowd o’ the passengers, apparently alive and conversible, but corpses, all of them to lie their length in fifteen minutes.’

‘And you, Fenellan?’ cried his host, inspired for a second bottle by the lovely nonsense of a voluble friend wound up to the mark.

‘Doctor of the ship! with this prescription!’ Mr. Fenellan held up his glass.

‘Empty?’

Mr. Fenellan made it completely so. ‘Confident!’ he affirmed.

An order was tossed to the waiter, and both gentlemen screwed their lips in relish of his heavy consent to score off another bottle from the narrow list.

‘At the office in forty minutes,’ Skepsey’s master nodded to him and shot him forth, calling him back: ’By the way, in case a man named Jarniman should ask to see me, you turn him to the rightabout.’

Skepsey repeated: ‘Jarniman!’ and flew.

‘A good servant,’ Mr. Radnor said. ’Few of us think of our country so much, whatever may be said of the specific he offers. Colney has impressed him somehow immensely: he studies to write too; pushes to improve himself; altogether a worthy creature.’

The second bottle appeared. The waiter, in sincerity a reluctant executioner, heightened his part for the edification of the admiring couple.

‘Take heart, Benjamin,’ said Mr. Fenellan; ’it’s only the bottle dies; and we are the angels above to receive the spirit.’

‘I’m thinking of the house,’ Benjamin replied. He told them that again.

’It ’s the loss of the fame of having the wine, that he mourns. But, Benjamin,’ said Mr. Fenellan, ’the fame enters into the partakers of it, and we spread it, and perpetuate it for you.’

Page 3430

‘That don’t keep a house upright,’ returned Benjamin.

Mr. Fenellan murmured to himself: ’True enough, it ’s elegy—though we perform it through a trumpet; and there’s not a doubt of our being down or having knocked the world down, if we’re loudly praised.’

Benjamin waited to hear approval sounded on the lips uncertain as a woman is a wine of ticklish age. The gentlemen nodded, and he retired.

A second bottle, just as good as the first, should, one thoughtlessly supposes, procure us a similar reposeful and excursive enjoyment, as of men lying on their backs and flying imagination like a kite. The effect was quite other. Mr. Radnor drank hastily and spoke with heat: ’You told me All? tell me that!’

Mr. Fenellan gathered himself together; he sipped, and relaxed his bracing. But there really was a bit more to tell: not much, was it? Not likely to puff a gale on the voluptuous indolence of a man drawn along by Nereids over sunny sea-waves to behold the birth of the Foam-Goddess? ’According to Carling, her lawyer; that is, he hints she meditates a blow.’

‘Mrs. Burman means to strike a blow?’

‘The lady.’

’Does he think I fear any—does he mean a blow with a weapon? Is it a legal . . . ? At last? Fenellan!’

‘So I fancied I understood.’

’But can the good woman dream of that as a blow to strike and hurt, for a punishment? —that’s her one aim.’

‘She may have her hallucinations.’

’But a blow—what a word for it! But it’s life to us life! It’s the blow we’ve prayed for. Why, you know it! Let her strike, we bless her. We’ve never had an ill feeling to the woman; utterly the contrary—pity, pity, pity! Let her do that, we’re at her feet, my Nataly and I. If you knew what my poor girl suffers! She ’s a saint at the stake. Chiefly on behalf of her family. Fenellan, you may have a sort of guess at my fortune: I’ll own to luck; I put in a claim to courage and calculation.’

‘You’ve been a bulwark to your friends.’

’All, Fenellan, all-stocks, shares, mines, companies, industries at home and—abroad—-all, at a sweep, to have the woman strike that blow! Cheerfully would I begin to build a

fortune over again—singing! Ha! the woman has threatened it before. It's probably feline play with us.'

His chin took support, he frowned.

'You may have touched her.'

'She won't be touched, and she won't be driven. What 's the secret of her? I can't guess, I never could. She's a riddle.'

'Riddles with wigs and false teeth have to be taken and shaken for the ardently sought secret to reveal itself,' said Mr. Fenellan.

His picture, with the skeleton issue of any shaking, smote Mr. Radnor's eyes, they turned over. 'Oh!—her charms! She had a desperate belief in her beauty. The woman 's undoubtedly charitable; she's not without a mind—sort of mind: well, it shows no crack till it's put to use. Heart! yes, against me she has plenty of it. They say she used to be courted; she talked of it: "my courtiers, Mr. Victor!" There, heaven forgive me, I wouldn't mock at her to another.'

Page 3431

‘It looks as if she were only inexorably human,’ said Mr. Fenellan, crushing a delicious gulp of the wine, that foamed along the channel to flavour. ’We read of the tester of a bandit-bed; and it flattened unwary recumbents to pancakes. An escape from the like of that seems pleadable, should be: none but the drowsy would fail to jump out and run, or the insane.’

Mr. Radnor was taken with the illustration of his case. ’For the sake of my sanity, it was! to preserve my . . . . but any word makes nonsense of it. Could—I must ask you—could any sane man—you were abroad in those days, horrible days! and never met her: I say, could you consent to be tied—I admit the vow, ceremony, so forth-tied to—I was barely twenty-one: I put it to you, Fenellan, was it in reason an engagement—which is, I take it, a mutual plight of faith, in good faith; that is, with capacity on both sides to keep the engagement: between the man you know I was in youth and a more than middle-aged woman crazy up to the edge of the cliff—as Colney says half the world is, and she positively is when her spite is roused. No, Fenellan, I have nothing on my conscience with regard to the woman. She had wealth: I left her not one penny the worse for—but she was not one to reckon it, I own. She could be generous, was, with her money. If she had struck this blow—I know she thought of it: or if she would strike it now, I could not only forgive her, I could beg forgiveness.’

A sight of that extremity fetched prickles to his forehead.

‘You’ve borne your part bravely, my friend.’

‘I!’ Mr. Radnor shrugged at mention of his personal burdens. ’Praise my Nataly if you like! Made for one another, if ever two in this world! You know us both, and do you doubt it? The sin would have been for us two to meet and—but enough when I say, that I am she, she me, till death and beyond it: that’s my firm faith. Nataly teaches me the religion of life, and you may learn what that is when you fall in love with a woman. Eighteen-nineteen-twenty years!’

Tears fell from him, two drops. He blinked, bugled in his throat, eyed his watch, and smiled: ’The finishing glass! We should have had to put Colney to bed. Few men stand their wine. You and I are not lamed by it; we can drink and do business: my first experience in the City was, that the power to drink—keeping a sound head—conduces to the doing of business.’

‘It’s a pleasant way of instructing men to submit to their conqueror.’

‘If it doubles the energies, mind.’

’Not if it fiddles inside. I confess to that effect upon me. I’ve a waltz going on, like the snake with the tail in his mouth, eternal; and it won’t allow of a thought upon Investments.’

‘Consult me to-morrow,’ said Mr. Radnor, somewhat pained for having inconsiderately misled the man he had hitherto helpfully guided. ’You’ve looked at the warehouse?’

‘That’s performed.’

Page 3432

’Make a practice of getting over as much of your business in the early morning as you well can.’

Mr. Radnor added hints of advice to a frail humanity he was indulgent, the giant spoke in good fellowship. It would have been to have strained his meaning, for purposes of sarcasm upon him, if one had taken him to boast of a personal exemption from our common weakness.

He stopped, and laughed: ’Now I ’m pumping my pulpit-eh? You come with us to Lakelands. I drive the ladies down to my office, ten A.M.: if it’s fine; train half-past. We take a basket. By the way, I had no letter from Dartrey last mail.’

‘He has buried his wife. It happens to some men.’

Mr. Radnor stood gazing. He asked for the name of the place of the burial. He heard without seizing it. A simulacrum spectre-spark of hopefulness shot up in his imagination, glowed and quivered, darkening at the utterance of the Dutch syllables, leaving a tinge of witless envy. Dartrey—Fenellan had buried the wife whose behaviour vexed and dishonoured him: and it was in Africa! One would have to go to Africa to be free of the galling. But Dartrey had gone, and he was free!—The strange faint freaks of our sensations when struck to leap and throw off their load after a long affliction, play these disorderly pranks on the brain; and they are faint, but they come in numbers, they are recurring, always in ambush. We do not speak of them: we have not words to stamp the indefinite things; generally we should leave them unspoken if we had the words; we know them as out of reason: they haunt us, pluck at us, fret us, nevertheless.

Dartrey free, he was relieved of the murderous drama incessantly in the mind of shackled men.

It seemed like one of the miracles of a divine intervention, that Dartrey should be free, suddenly free; and free while still a youngish man. He was in himself a wonderful fellow, the pick of his country for vigour, gallantry, trustiness, high-mindedness; his heavenly good fortune decked him as a prodigy.

‘No harm to the head from that fall of yours?’ Mr. Fenellan said.

‘None.’ Mr. Radnor withdrew his hand from head to hat, clapped it on and cried cheerily: ‘Now to business’; as men may, who have confidence in their ability to concentrate an instant attention upon the substantial. ’You dine with us. The usual Quartet: Peridon, Pempton, Colney, Yatt, or Catkin: Priscilla Graves and Nataly—the Rev. Septimus; Cormyn and his wife: Young Dudley Sowerby and I—flutes: he has precision, as naughty Fredi said, when some one spoke of expression. In the course of the evening, Lady Grace, perhaps: you like her.’

‘Human nature in the upper circle is particularly likeable.’

‘Fenellan,’ said Mr. Radnor, emboldened to judge hopefully of his fortunes by mere pressure of the thought of Dartrey’s, ’I put it to you: would you say, that there is anything this time behind your friend Carling’s report?’

Page 3433

Although it had not been phrased as a report, Mr. Fenellan's answering look and gesture, and a run of indiscriminate words, enrolled it in that form, greatly to the inspiriting of Mr. Radnor.

Old Veuve in one, to the soul of Old Veuve in the other, they recalled a past day or two, touched the skies; and merriment or happiness in the times behind them held a mirror to the present: or the hour of the reverse of happiness worked the same effect by contrast: so that notions of the singular election of us by Dame Fortune, sprang like vinous bubbles. For it is written, that however powerful you be, you shall not take the Winegod on board to entertain him as a simple passenger; and you may captain your vessel, you may pilot it, and keep to your reckonings, and steer for all the ports you have a mind to, even to doing profitable exchange with Armenian and Jew, and still you shall do the something more, which proves that the Winegod is on board: he is the pilot of your blood if not the captain of your thoughts.

Mr. Fenellan was unused to the copious outpouring of Victor Radnor's confidences upon his domestic affairs; and the unwonted excitement of Victor's manner of speech would have perplexed him, had there not been such a fiddling of the waltz inside him.

Payment for the turtle and the bottles of Old Veuve was performed apart with Benjamin, while Simeon Fenellan strolled out of the house, questioning a tumbled mind as to what description of suitable entertainment, which would be dancing and flirting and fal-lallery in the season of youth, London City could provide near meridian hours for a man of middle age carrying his bottle of champagne, like a guest of an old-fashioned wedding-breakfast. For although he could stand his wine as well as his friend, his friend's potent capacity martially after the feast to buckle to business at a sign of the clock, was beyond him. It pointed to one of the embodied elements, hot from Nature's workshop. It told of the endurance of powers, that partly explained the successful, astonishing career of his friend among a people making urgent, if unequal, demands perpetually upon stomach and head.

CHAPTER V

THE LONDON WALK WESTWARD

In that nationally interesting Poem, or Dramatic Satire, once famous, *the rajah in London* (London, Limbo and Sons, 1889), now obliterated under the long wash of Press-matter, the reflection—not unknown to philosophical observers, and natural perhaps in the mind of an Oriental Prince—produced by his observation of the march of London citizens Eastward at morn, Westward at eve, attributes their practice to a survival of the Zoroastrian form of worship. His Minister, favourable to the people or for the sake of fostering an idea in his Master's head, remarks, that they show more than the fidelity of the sunflower to her God. The Rajah, it would

Page 3434

appear, frowns interrogatively, in the princely fashion, accusing him of obscureness of speech:—princes and the louder members of the grey public are fraternally instant to spurn at the whip of that which they do not immediately comprehend. It is explained by the Minister: not even the flower, he says, would hold constant, as they, to the constantly unseen—a trebly cataphractic Invisible. The Rajah professes curiosity to know how it is that the singular people nourish their loyalty, since they cannot attest to the continued being of the object in which they put their faith. He is informed by his prostrate servant of a settled habit they have of diligently seeking their Divinity, hidden above, below; and of copiously taking inside them doses of what is denied to their external vision: thus they fortify credence chemically on an abundance of meats and liquors; fire they eat, and they drink fire; they become consequently instinct with fire. Necessarily therefore they believe in fire. Believing, they worship. Worshipping, they march Eastward at morn, Westward at eve. For that way lies the key, this way the cupboard, of the supplies, their fuel.

According to Stage directions, *the rajah and his minister* Enter a Gin-Palace.—It is to witness a service that they have learnt to appreciate as Anglicanly religious.

On the step of the return to their Indian clime, they speak of the hatted sect, which is most, or most commercially, succoured and fattened by our rule there: they wave adieu to the conquering Islanders, as to 'Parsees beneath a cloud.'

The two are seen last on the deck of the vessel, in perusal of a medical pamphlet composed of statistics and sketches, traceries, horrid blots, diagrams with numbers referring to notes, of the various maladies caused by the prolonged prosecution of that form of worship.

'But can they suffer so and live?' exclaims the Rajah, vexed by the physical sympathetic twinges which set him wincing.

'Science,' his Minister answers, 'took them up where Nature, in pity of their martyrdom, dropped them. They do not live; they are engines, insensible things of repairs and patches; insteamed to pursue their infuriate course, to the one end of exhausting supplies for the renewing of them, on peril of an instant suspension if they deviate a step or stop: nor do they.'

The Rajah is of opinion, that he sails home with the key of the riddle of their power to vanquish. In some apparent allusion to an Indian story of a married couple who successfully made their way, he accounts for their solid and resistless advance, resembling that of—

> The doubly-wedded man and wife,
> Pledged to each other and against the world
> With mutual union.

Page 3435

One would like to think of the lengthened tide-flux of pedestrian citizens facing South-westward, as being drawn by devout attraction to our nourishing luminary: at the hour, mark, when the Norland cloud-king, after a day of wild invasion, sits him on his restful bank of bluefish smack-o'-cheek red above Whitechapel, to spy where his last puff of icy javelins pierces and dismembers the vapoury masses in cluster about the circle of flame descending upon the greatest and most elevated of Admirals at the head of the Strand, with illumination of smoke-plumed chimneys, house-roofs, window-panes, weather-vanes, monument and pedimental monsters, and omnibus umbrella. One would fair believe that they advance admireing; they are assuredly made handsome by the beams. No longer mere concurrent atoms of the furnace of business (from coal-dust to sparks, rushing, as it were, on respiratory blasts of an enormous engine's centripetal and centrifugal energy), their step is leisurely to meet the rosy Dinner, which is ever a see-saw with the God of Light in his fall; the mask of the noble human visage upon them is not roughened, as at midday, by those knotted hard ridges of the scrambler's hand seen from forehead down to jaw; when indeed they have all the appearance of sour scientific productions. And unhappily for the national portrait, in the Poem quoted, the Rajah's Minister chose an hour between morning and meridian, or at least before an astonished luncheon had come to composure inside their persons, for drawing his Master's attention to the quaint similarity of feature in the units of the busy antish congregates they had travelled so far to visit and to study:

> These Britons wear
> The driven and perplexed look of men
> Begotten hastily 'twixt business hours

It could not have been late afternoon.

These Orientals should have seen them, with Victor Radnor among them, fronting the smoky splendours of the sunset. In April, the month of piled and hurried cloud, it is a Rape of the Sabines overhead from all quarters, either one of the winds brawnily larcenous; and London, smoking royally to the open skies, builds images of a dusty epic fray for possession of the portly dames. There is immensity, swinging motion, collision, dusky richness of colouring, to the sight; and to the mind idea. London presents it. If we can allow ourselves a moment for not inquireing scrupulously (you will do it by inhaling the aroma of the ripe kitchen hour), here is a noble harmony of heaven and the earth of the works of man, speaking a grander tongue than barren sea or wood or wilderness. Just a moment; it goes; as, when a well-attuned barrel-organ in a street has drawn us to recollections of the Opera or Italy, another harshly crashes, and the postman knocks at doors, and perchance a costermonger cries his mash of fruit, a beggar woman wails her hymn. For the pinched are here, the dinnerless, the weedy, the gutter-growths, the forces

Page 3436

repressing them. That grand tongue of the giant City inspires none human to Bardic eulogy while we let those discords be. An embittered Muse of Reason prompts her victims to the composition of the adulatory Essay and of the Leading Article, that she may satiate an angry irony 'upon those who pay fee for their filling with the stuff. Song of praise she does not permit. A moment of satisfaction in a striking picture is accorded, and no more. For this London, this England, Europe, world, but especially this London, is rather a thing for hospital operations than for poetic rhapsody; in aspect, too, streaked scarlet and pock-pitted under the most cumbrous of jewelled tiaras; a Titanic work of long-tolerated pygmies; of whom the leaders, until sorely discomforted in body and doubtful in soul, will give gold and labour, will impose restrictions upon activity, to maintain a conservatism of diseases. Mind is absent, or somewhere so low down beneath material accumulations that it is inexpressive, powerless to drive the ponderous bulk to such excisings, purgeings, purifyings as might—as may, we will suppose, render it acceptable, for a theme of panegyric, to the Muse of Reason; ultimately, with her consent, to the Spirit of Song.

But first there must be the cleansing. When Night has fallen upon London, the Rajah remarks:

> Monogamic Societies present
> A decent visage and a hideous rear.

His Minister (satirically, or in sympathetic Conservatism) would have them not to move on, that they may preserve among beholders the impression of their handsome frontage. Night, however, will come; and they, adoreing the decent face, are moved on, made to expose what the Rajah sees. Behind his courteousness, he is an antagonistic observer of his conquerors; he pushes his questions farther than the need for them; his Minister the same; apparently to retain the discountenanced people in their state of exposure. Up to the time of the explanation of the puzzle on board the departing vessel (on the road to Windsor, at the Premier's reception, in the cell of the Police, in the presence of the Magistrate-whose crack of a totally inverse decision upon their case, when he becomes acquainted with the titles and station of these imputedly peccant, refreshes them), they hold debates over the mysterious contrarieties of a people professing in one street what they confound in the next, and practising by day a demureness that yells with the cat of the tiles at night.

Granting all that, it being a transient novelist's business to please the light-winged hosts which live for the hour, and give him his only chance of half of it, let him identify himself with them, in keeping to the quadrille on the surface and shirking the disagreeable.

Page 3437

Clouds of high colour above London City are as the light of the Goddess to lift the angry heroic head over human. They gloriously transfigure. A Murillo beggar is not more precious than sight of London in any of the streets admitting coloured cloud-scenes; the cunning of the sun's hand so speaks to us. And if haply down an alley some olive mechanic of street-organs has quickened little children's legs to rhythmic footing, they strike on thoughts braver than pastoral. Victor Radnor, lover of the country though he was, would have been the first to say it. He would indeed have said it too emphatically. Open London as a theme, to a citizen of London ardent for the clear air out of it, you have roused an orator; you have certainly fired a magazine, and must listen to his reminiscences of one of its paragraphs or pages.

The figures of the hurtled fair ones in sky were wreathing Nelson's cocked hat when Victor, distinguishably bright-faced amid a crowd of the irradiated, emerged from the tideway to cross the square, having thoughts upon Art, which were due rather to the suggestive proximity of the National Gallery than to the Flemish mouldings of cloud-forms under Venetian brushes. His purchases of pictures had been his unhappiest ventures. He had relied and reposed on the dicta of newspaper critics; who are sometimes unanimous, and are then taken for guides, and are fatal. He was led to the conclusion that our modern-lauded pictures do not ripen. They have a chance of it, if abused. But who thinks of buying the abused? Exalted by the critics, they have, during the days of Exhibition, a glow, a significance or a fun, abandoning them where examination is close and constant, and the critic's trumpet-note dispersed to the thinness of the fee for his blowing. As to foreign pictures, classic pictures, Victor had known his purse to leap for a Raphael with a history in stages of descent from the Master, and critics to swarm: a Raphael of the dealers, exposed to be condemned by the critics, universally derided. A real Raphael in your house is aristocracy to the roof-tree. But the wealthy trader will reach to title before he may hope to get the real Raphael or a Titian. Yet he is the one who would, it may be, after enjoyment of his prize, bequeath it to the nation—*presented to the nation by victor Montgomery Radnor*. There stood the letters in gilt; and he had a thrill of his generosity; for few were the generous acts he could not perform; and if an object haunted the deed, it came of his trader's habit of mind.

He revelled in benevolent projects of gifts to the nation, which would coat a sensitive name. Say, an ornamental City Square, flowers, fountains, afternoon bands of music—-comfortable seats in it, and a shelter, and a ready supply of good cheap coffee or tea. Tobacco? why not rolls of honest tobacco! nothing so much soothes the labourer. A volume of plans for the benefit of London smoked out of each ascending pile in his brain. London is at night a moaning outcast round the policeman's' legs. What of an all-night-long, cosy, brightly lighted, odoriferous coffee-saloon for rich or poor, on the model of the hospitable Paduan? Owner of a penny, no soul among us shall be rightly an outcast . . . .

Page 3438

Dreams of this kind are taken at times by wealthy people as a cordial at the bar of benevolent intentions. But Victor was not the man to steal his refreshments in that known style. He meant to make deeds of them, as far as he could, considering their immense extension; and except for the sensitive social name, he was of single-minded purpose.

Turning to the steps of a chemist's shop to get a prescription made up for his Nataly's doctoring of her domestics, he was arrested by a rap on his elbow; and no one was near; and there could not be a doubt of the blow—a sharp hard stroke, sparing the funny-bone, but ringing. His head, at the punctilio bump, throbbed responsively—owing to which or indifference to the prescription, as of no instant requirement, he pursued his course, resembling mentally the wanderer along a misty beach, who hears cannon across the waters.

He certainly had felt it. He remembered the shock: he could not remember much of pain. How about intimations? His asking caused a smile.

Very soon the riddle answered itself. He had come into view of the diminutive marble cavalier of the infantile cerebellum; recollecting a couplet from the pen of the disrespectful Satirist Peter, he thought of a fall: his head and his elbow responded simultaneously to the thought.

All was explained save his consequent rightabout from the chemist's shop: and that belongs to the minor involutions of circumstances and the will. It passed like a giver's wrinkle. He read the placards of the Opera; reminding himself of the day when it was the single Opera-house; and now we have two-or three. We have also a distracting couple of Clowns and Pantaloons in our Pantomimes: though Colney says that the multiplication of the pantaloon is a distinct advance to representative truth—and bother Colney! Two Columbines also. We forbear to speak of men, but where is the boy who can set his young heart upon two Columbines at once! Victor felt the boy within him cold to both: and in his youth he had doated on the solitary twirling spangled lovely Fairy. The tale of a delicate lady dancer leaping as the kernel out of a nut from the arms of Harlequin to the legalized embrace of a wealthy brewer, and thenceforth living, by repute, with unagitated legs, as holy a matron, despite her starry past, as any to be shown in a country breeding the like abundantly, had always delighted him. It seemed a reconcilement of opposing stations, a defeat of Puritanism. Ay, and poor women!—-women in the worser plight under the Puritan's eye. They may be erring and good: yes, finding the man to lift them the one step up! Read the history of the error. But presently we shall teach the Puritan to act by the standards of his religion. All is coming right—-must come right. Colney shall be confounded.

Hereupon Victor hopped on to Fenellan's hint regarding the designs of Mrs. Burman.

His Nataly might have to go through a short sharp term of scorching—Godiva to the gossips.

Page 3439

She would come out of it glorified. She would be reconciled with her family. With her story of her devotion to the man loving her, the world would know her for the heroine she was: a born lady, in appearance and manner an empress among women. It was a story to be pleaded in any court, before the sternest public. Mrs. Burman had thrown her into temptation's way. It was a story to touch the heart, as none other ever written of over all the earth was there a woman equalling his Nataly!

And their Nesta would have a dowry to make princesses envious:—she would inherit . . . he ran up an arithmetical column, down to a line of figures in addition, during three paces of his feet. Dartrey Fenellan had said of little Nesta once, that she had a nature pure and sparkling as mid-sea foam. Happy he who wins her! But she was one of the young women who are easily pleased and hardly enthralled. Her father strained his mind for the shape of the man to accomplish the feat. Whether she had an ideal of a youth in her feminine head, was beyond his guessing. She was not the damsel to weave a fairy waistcoat for the identical prince, and try it upon all comers to discover him: as is done by some; excuseably, if we would be just. Nesta was of the elect, for whom excuses have not to be made. She would probably like a flute-player best; because her father played the flute, and she loved him—laughably a little maiden's reason! Her father laughed at her.

Along the street of Clubs, where a bruised fancy may see black balls raining, the narrow way between ducal mansions offers prospect of the sweep of greensward, all but touching up to the sunset to draw it to the dance.

Formerly, in his very early youth, he clasped a dream of gaining way to an alliance with one of these great surrounding houses; and he had a passion for the acquisition of money as a means. And it has to be confessed, he had sacrificed in youth a slice of his youth, to gain it without labour—usually a costly purchase. It had ended disastrously: or say, a running of the engine off the rails, and a speedy re-establishment of traffic. Could it be a loss, that had led to the winning of his Nataly? Can we really loathe the first of the steps when the one in due sequence, cousin to it, is a blessedness? If we have been righted to health by a medical draught, we are bound to be respectful to our drug. And so we are, in spite of Nature's wry face and shiver at a mention of what we went through during those days, those horrible days:—hide them!

The smothering of them from sight set them sounding he had to listen. Colney Durance accused him of entering into bonds with somebody's grandmother for the simple sake of browsing on her thousands: a picture of himself too abhorrent to Victor to permit of any sort of acceptance. Consequently he struck away to the other extreme of those who have a choice in mixed motives: he protested that compassion

Page 3440

had been the cause of it. Looking at the circumstance now, he could see, allowing for human frailty-perhaps a wish to join the ranks of the wealthy compassion for the woman as the principal motive. How often had she not in those old days praised his generosity for allying his golden youth to her withered age—Mrs. Burman's very words! And she was a generous woman or had been: she was generous in saying that. Well, and she was generous in having a well-born, well-bred beautiful young creature like Nataly for her companion, when it was a case of need for the dear girl; and compassionately insisting, against remonstrances: they were spoken by him, though they were but partial. How, then, had she become—at least, how was it that she could continue to behave as the vindictive Fury who persecuted remorselessly, would give no peace, poisoned the wells round every place where he and his dear one pitched their tent!

But at last she had come to charity, as he could well believe. Not too late! Victor's feeling of gratitude to Mrs. Burman assured him it was genuine because of his genuine conviction, that she had determined to end her incomprehensibly lengthened days in reconcilement with him: and he had always been ready to 'forget and forgive.' A truly beautiful old phrase! It thrilled off the most susceptible of men.

His well-kept secret of the spacious country-house danced him behind a sober demeanour from one park to another; and along beside the drive to view of his townhouse—unbeloved of the inhabitants, although by acknowledgement it had, as Fredi funnily drawled, to express her sense of justice in depreciation, 'good accommodation.' Nataly was at home, he was sure. Time to be dressing: sun sets at six-forty, he said, and glanced at the stained West, with an accompanying vision of outspread primroses flooding banks of shadowy fields near Lakelands.

He crossed the road and rang.

Upon the opening of the door, there was a cascade of muslin downstairs.
His darling Fredi stood out of it, a dramatic Undine.

CHAPTER VI

NATALY

'Il segreto!' the girl cried commandingly, with a forefinger at his breast.

He crossed arms, toning in similar recitative, with anguish, 'Dove volare!'

They joined in half a dozen bars of operatic duet.

She flew to him, embraced and kissed.

’I must have it, my papa! unlock. I’ve been spying the bird on its hedgerow nest so long! And this morning, my own dear cunning papa, weren’t you as bare as winter twigs? “Tomorrow perhaps we will have a day in the country.” To go and see the nest? Only, please, not a big one. A real nest; where mama and I can wear dairymaid’s hat and apron all day—the style you like; and strike roots. We’ve been torn away two or three times: twice, I know.’

‘Fixed, this time; nothing shall tear us up,’ said her father, moving on to the stairs, with an arm about her.

Page 3441

‘So, it is . . . ?’

‘She’s amazed at her cleverness!’

‘A nest for three?’

‘We must have a friend or two.’

‘And pretty country?’

‘Trust her papa for that.’

‘Nice for walking and running over fields? No rich people?’

’How escape that rabble in England! as Colney says. It’s a place for being quite independent of neighbours, free as air.’

‘Oh! bravo!’

’And Fredi will have her horse, and mama her pony-carriage; and Fredi can have a swim every Summer morning.’

‘A swim?’ Her note was dubious. ‘A river?’

’A good long stretch—fairish, fairish. Bit of a lake; bathing-shed; the Naiad’s bower: pretty water to see.’

‘Ah. And has the house a name?’

‘Lakelands. I like the name.’

‘Papa gave it the name!’

’There’s nothing he can conceal from his girl. Only now and then a little surprise.’

’And his girl is off her head with astonishment. But tell me, who has been sharing the secret with you?’

’Fredi strikes home! And it is true, you dear; I must have a confidant: Simeon Fenellan.’

‘Not Mr. Durance?’

He shook out a positive negative. ’I leave Col to his guesses. He’d have been prophesying fire the works before the completion.’

‘Then it is not a dear old house, like Craye and Creckholt?’

‘Wait and see to-morrow.’

He spoke of the customary guests for concert practice; the music, instrumental and vocal; quartet, duet, solo; and advising the girl to be quick, as she had but twenty-five minutes, he went humming and trilling into his dressing-room.

Nesta signalled at her mother’s door for permission to enter. She slipped in, saw that the maid was absent, and said: ’Yes, mama; and prepare, I feared it; I was sure.’

Her mother breathed a little moan: ‘Not a cottage?’

‘He has not mentioned it to Mr. Durance.’

‘Why not?’

‘Mr. Fenellan has been his confidant.’

’My darling, we did wrong to let it go on, without speaking. You don’t know for certain yet?’

‘It’s a large estate, mama, and a big new house.’

Nataly’s bosom sank. ’Ah me! here’s misery! I ought to have known. And too late now it has gone so far! But I never imagined he would be building.’

She caught herself languishing at her toilette-glass, as, if her beauty were at stake; and shut her eyelids angrily. To be looking in that manner, for a mere suspicion, was too foolish. But Nesta’s divinations were target-arrows; they flew to the mark. Could it have been expected that Victor would ever do anything on a small scale? O the dear little lost lost cottage! She thought of it with a strain of the arms of womanhood’s longing in the unblessed wife for a babe. For the secluded modest cottage would not rack her with the old anxieties, beset her with suspicions. . . .

Page 3442

‘My child, you won’t possibly have time before the dinner-hour,’ she said to Nesta, dismissing her and taking her kiss of comfort with a short and straining look out of the depths.

Those bitter doubts of the sentiments of neighbours are an incipient dislike, when one’s own feelings to the neighbours are kind, could be affectionate. We are distracted, perverted, made strangers to ourselves by a false position.

She heard his voice on a carol. Men do not feel this doubtful position as women must. They have not the same to endure; the world gives them land to tread, where women are on breaking seas. Her Nesta knew no more than the pain of being torn from a home she loved. But now the girl was older, and if once she had her imagination awakened, her fearful directness would touch the spot, question, bring on the scene to-come, necessarily to come, dreaded much more than death by her mother. But if it might be postponed till the girl was nearer to an age of grave understanding, with some knowledge of our world, some comprehension of a case that could be pleaded!

He sang: he never acknowledged a trouble, he dispersed it; and in her present wrestle with the scheme of a large country estate involving new intimacies, anxieties, the courtship of rival magnates, followed by the wretched old cloud, and the imposition upon them to bear it in silence though they knew they could plead a case, at least before charitable and discerning creatures or before heaven, the despondent lady could have asked whether he was perfectly sane.

Who half so brilliantly!—Depreciation of him, fetched up at a stroke the glittering armies of her enthusiasm. He had proved it; he proved it daily in conflicts and in victories that dwarfed emotional troubles like hers: yet they were something to bear, hard to bear, at times unbearable.

But those were times of weakness. Let anything be doubted rather than the good guidance of the man who was her breath of life! Whither he led, let her go, not only submissively, exultingly.

Thus she thought, under pressure of the knowledge, that unless rushing into conflicts bigger than conceivable, she had to do it, and should therefore think it.

This was the prudent woman’s clear deduction from the state wherein she found herself, created by the one first great step of the mad woman. Her surrender then might be likened to the detachment of a flower on the river’s bank by swell of flood: she had no longer root of her own; away she sailed, through beautiful scenery, with occasionally a crashing fall, a turmoil, emergence from a vortex, and once more the sunny whirling surface. Strange to think, she had not since then power to grasp in her abstract mind a notion of stedfastness without or within.

But, say not the mad, say the enamoured woman. Love is a madness, having heaven's wisdom in it—a spark. But even when it is driving us on the breakers, call it love: and be not unworthy of it, hold to it. She and Victor had drunk of a cup. The philtre was in her veins, whatever the directions of the rational mind.

Page 3443

Exulting or regretting, she had to do it, as one in the car with a racing charioteer. Or up beside a more than Titanically audacious balloonist. For the charioteer is bent on a goal; and Victor's course was an ascension from heights to heights. He had ideas, he mastered Fortune. He conquered Nataly and held her subject, in being above his ambition; which was now but an occupation for his powers, while the aim of his life was at the giving and taking of simple enjoyment. In spite of his fits of unreasonableness in the means—and the woman loving him could trace them to a breath of nature—his gentle good friendly innocent aim in life was of this very simplest; so wonderful, by contrast with his powers, that she, assured of it as she was by experience of him, was touched, in a transfusion of her feelings through lucent globes of admiration and of tenderness, to reverence. There had been occasions when her wish for the whole world to have proof and exhibition of his greatness, goodness, and simplicity amid his gifts, prompted her incitement of him to stand forth eminently: ('lead a kingdom,' was the phrase behind the curtain within her shy bosom;) and it revealed her to herself, upon reflection, as being still the Nataly who drank the cup with him, to join her fate with his.

And why not? Was that regretted? Far from it. In her maturity, the woman was unable to send forth any dwelling thought or more than a flight of twilight fancy, that cancelled the deed of her youth, and therewith seemed to expunge near upon the half—of her term of years. If it came to consideration of her family and the family's opinion of her conduct, her judgement did not side with them or with herself, it whirled, swam to a giddiness and subsided.

Of course, if she and Victor were to inhabit a large country-house, they might as well have remained at Craye Farm or at Creckholt; both places dear to them in turn. Such was the plain sense of the surface question. And how strange it was to her, that he, of the most quivering sensitiveness on her behalf; could not see, that he threw her into situations where hard words of men and women threatened about her head; where one or two might on a day, some day, be heard; and where, in the recollection of two years back, the word 'Impostor' had smacked her on both cheeks from her own mouth.

Now once more they were to run the same round of alarms, undergo the love of the place, with perpetual apprehensions of having to leave it: alarms, throbbing suspicions, like those of old travellers through the haunted forest, where whispers have intensity of meaning, and unseeing we are seen, and unaware awaited.

Nataly shook the rolls of her thick brown hair from her forehead; she took strength from a handsome look of resolution in the glass. She could always honestly say, that her courage would not fail him.

Victor tapped at the door; he stepped into the room, wearing his evening white flower over a more open white waistcoat; and she was composed and uninquiring. Their Nesta was heard on the descent of the stairs, with a rattle of Donizetti's Il segreto to the skylights.

Page 3444

He performed his never-omitted lover's homage.

Nataly enfolded him in a homely smile. 'A country-house? We go and see it to-morrow?'

'And you've been pining for a country home, my dear soul.'

'After the summer six weeks, the house in London does not seem a home to return to.'

'And next day, Nataly draws five thousand pounds for the first sketch of the furniture.'

'There is the Creckholt . . .' she had a difficulty in saying.

'Part of it may do. Lakelands requires—but you will see to-morrow.'

After a close shutting of her eyes, she rejoined: 'It is not a cottage?'

'Well, dear, no: when the Slave of the Lamp takes to building, he does not run up cottages. And we did it without magic, all in a year; which is quite as good as a magical trick in a night.' He drew her close to him. 'When was it my dear girl guessed me at work?'

'It was the other dear girl. Nesta is the guesser.'

'You were two best of souls to keep from bothering me; and I might have had to fib; and we neither of us like that.' He noticed a sidling of her look. 'More than the circumstances oblige:—to be frank. But now we can speak of them. Wait—and the change comes; and opportunely, I have found. It's true we have waited long; my darling has had her worries. However, it 's here at last. Prepare yourself. I speak positively. You have to brace up for one sharp twitch—the woman's portion! as Natata says—and it's over.' He looked into her eyes for comprehension; and not finding inquiry, resumed: 'Just in time for the entry into Lakelands. With the pronouncement of the decree, we present the licence . . . at an altar we've stood before, in spirit . . . one of the ladies of your family to support you:—why not? Not even then?'

'No, Victor; they have cast me off.'

'Count on my cousins, the Duvidney ladies. Then we can say, that those two good old spinsters are less narrow than the Dreightons. I have to confess I rather think I was to blame for leaving Creckholt. Only, if I see my girl wounded, I hate the place that did the mischief. You and Fredi will clap hands for the country about Lakelands.'

'Have you heard from her . . . of her . . . is it anything, Victor?' Nataly asked him shyly; with not much of hope, but some readiness to be inflated. The prospect of an entry into

the big new house, among a new society, begirt by the old nightmares and fretting devils, drew her into staring daylight or furnace-light.

He answered: ’Mrs. Burman has definitely decided. In pity of us?—to be free herself?—who can say! She ’s a woman with a conscience—of a kind: slow, but it brings her to the point at last. You know her, know her well. Fenellan has it from her lawyer—her lawyer! a Mr. Carting; a thoroughly trustworthy man—’

‘Fenellan, as a reporter?’

’Thoroughly to be trusted on serious matters. I understand that Mrs. Burman:—her health is awful: yes, yes; poor woman! poor woman! we feel for her:—she has come to perceive her duty to those she leaves behind. Consider: she *has* used the rod. She must be tired out—if human. And she is. One remembers traits.’

Page 3445

Victor sketched one or two of the traits allusively to the hearer acquainted with them. They received strong colouring from midday's Old Veuve in his blood. His voice and words had a swing of conviction: they imparted vinousness to a heart athirst.

The histrionic self-deceiver may be a persuasive deceiver of another, who is again, though not ignorant of his character, tempted to swallow the nostrums which have made so gallant a man of him: his imperceptible sensible playing of the part, on a substratum of sincereness, induces fascinatingly to the like performance on our side, that we may be armed as he is for enjoying the coveted reality through the partial simulation of possessing it. And this is not a task to us when we have looked our actor in the face, and seen him bear the look, knowing that he is not intentionally untruthful; and when we incline to be captivated by his rare theatrical air of confidence; when it seems as an outside thought striking us, that he may not be altogether deceived in the present instance; when suddenly an expectation of the thing desired is born and swims in a credible featureless vagueness on a misty scene: and when we are being kissed and the blood is warmed. In fine, here as everywhere along our history, when the sensations are spirited up to drown the mind, we become drift-matter of tides, metal to magnets. And if we are women, who commonly allow the lead to men, getting it for themselves only by snaky cunning or desperate adventure, credulity—the continued trust in the man—is the alternative of despair.

'But, Victor, I must ask,' Nataly said: 'you have it through Simeon Fenellan; you have not yourself received the letter from her lawyer?'

'My knowledge of what she would do near the grave—poor soul, yes! I shall soon be hearing.'

'You do not, propose to enter this place until—until it is over?'

'We enter this place, my love, without any sort of ceremony. We live there independently, and we can we have quarters there for our friends. Our one neighbour is London—there! And at Lakelands we are able to entertain London and wife;—our friends, in short; with some, what we have to call, satellites. You inspect the house and grounds to-morrow—sure to be fair. Put aside all but the pleasant recollections of Craye and Creckholt. We start on a different footing. Really nothing can be simpler. Keeping your town-house, you are now and then in residence at Lakelands, where you entertain your set, teach them to feel the charm of country life: we have everything about us; could have had our own milk and cream up to London the last two months. Was it very naughty?—I should have exploded my surprise! You will see, you will see to-morrow.'

Nataly nodded, as required. 'Good news from the mines?' she said.

He answered: ’Dartrey is—yes, poor fellow! Dartrey is confident, from the yield of stones, that the value of our claim counts in a number of millions. The same with the gold. But gold-mines are lodgeings, not homes.’

Page 3446

’Oh, Victor! if money . . . ! But why did you say “poor fellow” of Dartrey Fenellan?’

‘You know how he’s . . .’

‘Yes, yes,’ she said hastily. ’But has that woman been causing fresh anxiety?’

‘And Natata’s chief hero on earth is not to be named a poor fellow,’ said he, after a negative of the head on a subject they neither of them liked to touch.

Then he remembered that Dartrey Fenellan was actually a lucky fellow; and he would have mentioned the circumstance confided to him by Simeon, but for a downright dread of renewing his painful fit of envy. He had also another, more distant, very faint idea, that it had better not be mentioned just yet, for a reason entirely undefined.

He consulted his watch. The maid had come in for the robeing of her mistress. Nataly’s mind had turned to the little country cottage which would have given her such great happiness. She raised her eyes to him; she could not check their filling; they were like a river carrying moonlight on the smooth roll of a fall.

He loved the eyes, disliked the water in them. With an impatient, ’There, there!’ and a smart affectionate look, he retired, thinking in our old satirical vein of the hopeless endeavour to satisfy a woman’s mind without the intrusion of hard material statements, facts. Even the best of women, even the most beautiful, and in their moments of supremest beauty, have this gross ravenousness for facts. You must not expect to appease them unless you administer solids. It would almost appear that man is exclusively imaginative and poetical; and that his mate, the fair, the graceful, the bewitching, with the sweetest and purest of natures, cannot help being something of a groveller.

Nataly had likewise her thoughts.

CHAPTER VII

BETWEEN A GENERAL MAN OF THIN WORLD AND A PROFESSIONAL

Rather earlier in the afternoon of that day, Simeon Fenellan, thinking of the many things which are nothing, and so melancholy for lack of amusements properly to follow Old Veuve, that he could ask himself whether he had not done a deed of night, to be blinking at his fellow-men like an owl all mad for the reveller’s hoots and flights and mice and moony roundels behind his hypocritical judex air of moping composure, chanced on Mr. Carling, the solicitor, where Lincoln’s Inn pumps lawyers into Fleet Street through the drain-pipe of Chancery Lane. He was in the state of the wine when a shake will rouse the sluggish sparkles to foam. Sight of Mrs. Burman’s legal adviser had instantly this effect upon him: his bubbling friendliness for Victor Radnor, and the desire of the

voice in his bosom for ears to hear, combined like the rush of two waves together, upon which he may be figured as the boat: he caught at Mr. Carling's hand more heartily than their acquaintanceship quite sanctioned; but his grasp and his look of overflowing were immediately privileged; Mr. Carling, enjoying this anecdotal gentleman's conversation as he did, liked the warmth, and was flattered during the squeeze with a prospect of his wife and friends partaking of the fun from time to time.

Page 3447

’I was telling my wife yesterday your story of the lady contrabandist: I don’t think she has done laughing since,’ Mr. Calling said.

Fenellan fluted: ‘Ah?’ He had scent, in the eulogy of a story grown flat as Election hats, of a good sort of man in the way of men, a step or two behind the man of the world. He expressed profound regret at not having heard the silvery ring of the lady’s laughter.

Carling genially conceived a real gratification to be conferred on his wife. ‘Perhaps you will some day honour us?’

‘You spread gold-leaf over the days to come, sir.’

‘Now, if I might name the day?’

’You lump the gold and make it current coin;—says the blushing bride, who ought not to have delivered herself so boldly, but she had forgotten her bashful part and spoilt the scene, though, luckily for the damsel, her swain was a lover of nature, and finding her at full charge, named the very next day of the year, and held her to it, like the complimentary tyrant he was.’

‘To-morrow, then!’ said Carling intrepidly, on a dash of enthusiasm, through a haggard thought of his wife and the cook and the netting of friends at short notice. He urged his eagerness to ask whether he might indeed have the satisfaction of naming to-morrow.

‘With happiness,’ Fenellan responded.

Mrs. Carling was therefore in for it.

’To-morrow, half-past seven: as for company to meet you, we will do what we can. You go Westward?’

‘To bed with the sun,’ said the reveller.

‘Perhaps by Covent Garden? I must give orders there.’

’Orders given in Covent Garden, paint a picture for bachelors of the domestic Paradise an angel must help them to enter! Ah, dear me! Is there anything on earth to compare with the pride of a virtuous life?’

‘I was married at four and twenty,’ said Carling, as one taking up the expository second verse of a poem; plain facts, but weighty and necessary: ’my wife was in her twentieth year: we have five children; two sons, three daughters, one married, with a baby. So we are grandfather and mother, and have never regretted the first step, I may say for both of us.’

’Think of it! Good luck and sagacity joined hands overhead on the day you proposed to the lady: and I’d say, that all the credit is with her, but that it would seem to be at the expense of her sex.’

‘She would be the last to wish it, I assure you.’

’True of all good women! You encourage me, touching a matter of deep interest, not unknown to you. The lady’s warm heart will be with us. Probably she sees Mrs. Burman?’

‘Mrs. Burman Radnor receives no one.’

A comic severity in the tone of the correction was deferentially accepted by Fenellan.

’Pardon. She flies her flag, with her captain wanting; and she has, queerly, the right. So, then, the worthy dame who receives no one, might be treated, it struck us, conversationally, as a respectable harbour-hulk, with more history than top-honours. But she has the indubitable legal right to fly them—to proclaim it; for it means little else.’

Page 3448

‘You would have her, if I follow you, divest herself of the name?’

’Pin me to no significations, if you please, O shrewdest of the legal sort! I have wit enough to escape you there. She is no doubt an estimable person.’

‘Well, she is; she is in her way a very good woman.’

’Ah. You see, Mr. Carling, I cannot bring myself to rank her beside another lady, who has already claimed the title of me; and you will forgive me if I say, that your word “good” has a look of being stuck upon the features we know of her, like a coquette’s naughty patch; or it’s a jewel of an eye in an ebony idol: though I’ve heard tell she performs her charities.’

‘I believe she gives away three parts of her income and that is large.’

‘Leaving the good lady a fine fat fourth.’

‘Compare her with other wealthy people.’

’And does she outshine the majority still with her personal attractions.

Carling was instigated by the praise he had bestowed on his wife to separate himself from a female pretender so ludicrous; he sought Fenellan’s nearest ear, emitting the sound of ‘hum.’

‘In other respects, unimpeachable!’

‘Oh! quite!’

’There was a fishfag of classic Billingsgate, who had broken her husband’s nose with a sledgehammer fist, and swore before the magistrate, that the man hadn’t a crease to complain of in her character. We are condemned, Mr. Carling, sometimes to suffer in the flesh for the assurance we receive of the inviolability of those moral fortifications.’

’Character, yes, valuable—I do wish you had named to-night for doing me the honour of dining with me!’ said the lawyer impulsively, in a rapture of the appetite for anecdotes. ’I have a ripe Pichon Longueville, ‘65.’

’A fine wine. Seductive to hear of. I dine with my friend Victor Radnor. And he knows wine.—There are good women in the world, Mr. Carling, whose characters . . .’

’Of course, of course there are; and I could name you some. We lawyers . . . . !’

‘You encounter all sorts.’

‘Between ourselves,’ Carling sank his tones to the indiscriminate, where it mingled with the roar of London.

‘You do?’ Fenellan hazarded a guess at having heard enlightened liberal opinions regarding the sex. ‘Right!’

‘Many!’

‘I back you, Mr. Carling.’

The lawyer pushed to yet more confidential communication, up to the verge of the clearly audible: he spoke of examples, experiences. Fenellan backed him further.

‘Acting on behalf of clients, you understand, Mr. Fenellan.’

‘Professional, but charitable; I am with you.’

‘Poor things! we—if we have to condemn—we owe them something.’

’A kind word for poor Polly Venus, with all the world against her! She doesn’t hear it often.’

‘A real service,’ Carling’s voice deepened to the legal ’without prejudice,’—’I am bound to say it—a service to Society.’

Page 3449

‘Ah, poor wench! And the kind of reward she gets?’

’We can hardly examine . . . mysterious dispensations . . . here we are to make the best we can of it.’

’For the creature Society’s indebted to? True. And am I to think there’s a body of legal gentlemen to join with you, my friend, in founding an Institution to distribute funds to preach charity over the country, and win compassion for her, as one of the principal persons of her time, that Society’s indebted to for whatever it’s indebted for?’

‘Scarcely that,’ said Carling, contracting.

’But you ‘re for great Reforms?’

‘Gradual.’

‘Then it’s for Reformatories, mayhap.’

‘They would hardly be a cure.’

’You ‘re in search of a cure?’

‘It would be a blessed discovery.’

‘But what’s to become of Society?’

‘It’s a puzzle to the cleverest.’

’All through History, my dear Mr. Carling, we see that.

‘Establishments must have their sacrifices. Beware of interfering: eh?’

‘By degrees, we may hope . . . .’

’Society prudently shuns the topic; and so ’ll we. For we might tell of one another, in a fit of distraction, that t’ other one talked of it, and we should be banished for an offence against propriety. You should read my friend Durance’s Essay on Society. Lawyers are a buttress of Society. But, come: I wager they don’t know what they support until they read that Essay.’

Carling had a pleasant sense of escape, in not being personally asked to read the Essay, and not hearing that a copy of it should be forwarded to him.

He said: ‘Mr. Radnor is a very old friend?’

’Our fathers were friends; they served in the same regiment for years. I was in India when Victor Radnor took the fatal!’

‘Followed by a second, not less . . . ?’

’In the interpretation of a rigid morality arming you legal gentlemen to make it so!’

‘The Law must be vindicated.’

‘The law is a clumsy bludgeon.’

’We think it the highest effort of human reason—the practical instrument.’

’You may compare it to a rustic’s finger on a fiddlestring, for the murdered notes you get out of the practical instrument.

‘I am bound to defend it, clumsy bludgeon or not.’

’You are one of the giants to wield it, and feel humanly, when, by chance, down it comes on the foot an inch off the line.—Here’s a peep of Old London; if the habit of old was not to wash windows. I like these old streets!’

‘Hum,’ Carling hesitated. ’I can remember when the dirt at the windows was appalling.’

’Appealing to the same kind of stuff in the passing youngster’s green-scum eye: it was. And there your Law did good work.—You’re for Bordeaux. What is your word on Burgundy?’

‘Our Falernian!’

Page 3450

’Victor Radnor has the oldest in the kingdom. But he will have the best of everything. A Romanee! A Musigny! Sip, my friend, you embrace the Goddess of your choice above. You are up beside her at a sniff of that wine.—And lo, venerable Drury! we duck through the court, reminded a bit by our feelings of our first love, who hadn’t the cleanest of faces or nicest of manners, but she takes her station in memory because we were boys then, and the golden halo of youth is upon her.’

Carling, as a man of the world, acquiesced in souvenirs he did not share. He said urgently: ’Understand me; you speak of Mr. Radnor; pray, believe I have the greatest respect for Mr. Radnor’s abilities. He is one of our foremost men . . . proud of him. Mr. Radnor has genius; I have watched him; it is genius; he shows it in all he does; one of the memorable men of our times. I can admire him, independent of—well, misfortune of that kind . . . a mistaken early step. Misfortune, it is to be named. Between ourselves —we are men of the world—if one could see the way! She occasionally . . . as I have told you. I have ventured suggestions. As I have mentioned, I have received an impression . . .’

’But still, Mr. Carling, if the lady doesn’t release him and will keep his name, she might stop her cowardly persecutions.’

‘Can you trace them?’

‘Undisguised!’

’Mrs. Burman Radnor is devout. I should not exactly say revengeful. We have to discriminate. I gather, that her animus is, in all honesty, directed at the—I quote—state of sin. We are mixed, you know.’

The Winegod in the blood of Fenellan gave a leap. ’But, fifty thousand times more mixed, she might any moment stop the state of sin, as she calls it, if it pleased her.’

’She might try. Our Judges look suspiciously on long delayed actions. And there are, too, women who regard the marriage-tie as indissoluble. She has had to combat that scruple.’

’Believer in the renewing of the engagement overhead!—well. But put a by-word to Mother Nature about the state of sin. Where, do you imagine, she would lay it? You’ll say, that Nature and Law never agreed. They ought.’

‘The latter deferring to the former?’

’Moulding itself on her swelling proportions. My dear dear sir, the state of sin was the continuing to live in defiance of, in contempt of, in violation of, in the total degradation of, Nature.’

‘He was under no enforcement to take the oath at the altar.’

’He was a small boy tempted by a varnished widow, with pounds of barley sugar in her pockets;—and she already serving as a test-vessel or mortar for awful combinations in druggery! Gilt widows are equal to decrees of Fate to us young ones. Upon my word, the cleric who unites, and the Law that sanctions, they’re the criminals. Victor Radnor is the noblest of fellows, the very best friend a man can have. I will tell you: he saved me,

Page 3451

after I left the army, from living on the produce of my pen—which means, if there is to be any produce, the prostrating of yourself to the level of the round middle of the public: saved me from that! Yes, Mr. Carling, I have trotted our thoroughfares a poor Polly of the pen; and it is owing to Victor Radnor that I can order my thoughts as an individual man again before I blacken paper. Owing to him, I have a tenderness for mercenaries; having been one of them and knowing how little we can help it. He is an Olympian—-who thinks of them below. The lady also is an admirable woman at all points. The pair are a mated couple, such as you won't find in ten households over Christendom. Are you aware of the story?'

Carling replied: 'A story under shadow of the Law, has generally two very distinct versions.'

'Hear mine.—And, by Jove! a runaway cab. No, all right. But a crazy cab it is, and fit to do mischief in narrow Drury. Except that it's sheer riff-raff here to knock over.'

'Hulloa?—come!' quoth the wary lawyer.

'There's the heart I wanted to rouse to hear me! One may be sure that the man for old Burgundy has it big and sound, in spite of his legal practices; a dear good spherical fellow! Some day, we'll hope, you will be sitting with us over a magnum of Victor Radnor's Romance Conti aged thirty-one: a wine, you'll say at the second glass, High Priest for the celebration of the uncommon nuptials between the body and the soul of man.'

'You hit me rightly,'said Carting, tickled and touched; sensually excited by the bouquet of Victor Radnor's hospitality and companionship, which added flavour to Fenellan's compliments. These came home to him through his desire to be the 'good spherical fellow'; for he, like modern diplomatists in the track of their eminent Berlinese New Type of the time, put on frankness as an armour over wariness, holding craft in reserve: his aim was at the refreshment of honest fellowship: by no means to discover that the coupling of his native bias with his professional duty was unprofitable nowadays. Wariness, however, was not somnolent, even when he said: 'You know, I am never the lawyer out of my office. Man of the world to men of the world; and I have not lost by it. I am Mrs. Barman Radnor's legal adviser: you are Mr. Victor Radnor's friend. They are, as we see them, not on the best of terms. I would rather—at its lowest, as a matter of business—be known for having helped them to some kind of footing than send in a round bill to my client—or another. I gain more in the end. Frankly, I mean to prove, that it's a lawyer's interest to be human.'

'Because, now, see!' said Fenellan, 'here's the case. Miss Natalia Dreighton, of a good Yorkshire family—a large one, reads an advertisement for the post of companion to a lady, and answers it, and engages herself, previous to the appearance of the young husband. Miss Dreighton is one of the finest young women alive. She has a glorious

contralto voice. Victor and she are encouraged by Mrs. Barman to sing duets together. Well?

Page 3452

Why, Euclid would have theorem'd it out for you at a glance at the trio. You have only to look on them, you chatter out your three Acts of a Drama without a stop. If Mrs. Barman cares to practise charity, she has only to hold in her Fury-forked tongue, or her Jarniman I think 's the name.'

Carting shrugged.

'Let her keep from striking, if she's Christian,' pursued Fenetlan, 'and if kind let her resume the name of her first lord, who did a better thing for himself than for her, when he shook off his bars of bullion, to rise the lighter, and left a wretched female soul below, with the devil's own testimony to her attractions—thousands in the Funds, houses in the City. She threw the young couple together. And my friend Victor Radnor is of a particularly inflammable nature. Imagine one of us in such a situation, Mr. Carting!'

'Trying!' said the lawyer.

'The dear fellow was as nigh death as a man can be and know the sweetness of a woman's call to him to live. And here's London's garden of pines, bananas, oranges; all the droppings of the Hesperides here! We don't reflect on it, Mr. Carling.'

'Not enough, not enough.'

'I feel such a spout of platitudes that I could out With a Leading Article on a sheet of paper on your back while you're bending over the baskets. I seem to have got circularly round again to Eden when I enter a garden. Only, here we have to pay for the fruits we pluck. Well, and just the same there; and no end to the payment either. We're always paying! By the way, Mrs. Victor Radnor's dinner-table's a spectacle. Her taste in flowers equals her lord's in wine. But age improves the wine and spoils the flowers, you'll say. Maybe you're for arguing that lovely women show us more of the flower than the grape, in relation to the course of time. I pray you not to forget the terrible intoxicant she is. We reconcile it, Mr. Carling, with the notion that the grape's her spirit, the flower her body. Or is it the reverse? Perhaps an intertwining. But look upon bouquets and clusters, and the idea of woman springs up at once, proving she's composed of them. I was about to remark, that with deference to the influence of Mrs. Burman's legal adviser, an impenitent or penitent sinner's pastor, the Reverend gentleman ministering to her spiritual needs, would presumptively exercise it, in this instance, in a superior degree.'

Carling murmured: 'The Rev. Groseman Buttermore'; and did so for something of a cover, to continue a run of internal reflections: as, that he was assuredly listening to vinous talk in the streets by day; which impression placed him on a decorous platform above the amusing gentleman; to whom, however, he grew cordial, in recognizing consequently, that his exuberant flow could hardly be a mask; and that an indication here and there of a trap in his talk, must have been due rather to excess of wariness,

habitual in the mind of a long-headed man, whose incorrigibly impulsive fits had necessarily to be rectified by a vigilant dexterity.

Page 3453

‘Buttermore!’ ejaculated Fenellan: ’Groseman Buttermore! Mrs. Victor’s Father Confessor is the Rev. Septimus Barmby. Groseman Buttermore—Septimus Barmby. Is there anything in names? Truly, unless these clerical gentlemen take them up at the crossing of the roads long after birth, the names would appear the active parts of them, and themselves mere marching supports, like the bearers of street placard-advertisements. Now, I know a Septimus Barmby, and you a Groseman Buttermore, and beyond the fact that Reverend starts up before their names without mention, I wager it’s about all we do know of them. They’re Society’s trusty rock-limpets, no doubt.’

‘My respect for the cloth is extreme.’ Carling’s short cough prepared the way for deductions. ‘Between ourselves, they are men of the world.’

Fenellan eyed benevolently the worthy attorney, whose innermost imp burst out periodically, like a Dutch clocksentry, to trot on his own small grounds for thinking himself of the community of the man of the world. ‘You lawyers dress in another closet,’ he said. ’The Rev. Groseman has the ear of the lady?’

‘He has:—one ear.’

‘Ah? She has the other open for a man of the world, perhaps.’

’Listens to him, listens to me, listens to Jarniman; and we neither of us guide her. She’s very curious—a study. You think you know her—next day she has eluded you. She’s emotional, she’s hard; she’s a woman, she’s a stone. Anything you like; but don’t count on her. And another thing—I’m bound to say it of myself,’ Carling claimed close hearing of Fenellan over a shelf of saladstuff, ’no one who comes near her has any real weight with her in this matter.’

‘Probably you mix cream in your salad of the vinegar and oil,’ said Fenellan. ’Try jelly of mutton.’—’You give me a new idea. Latterly, fond as I am of salads, I’ve had rueful qualms. We’ll try it.’

‘You should dine with Victor Radnor.’

‘French cook, of course!’

‘Cordon bleu.’

‘I like to be sure of my cutlet.’

‘I like to be sure of a tastiness in my vegetables.’

‘And good sauces!’

’And pretty pastry. I said, Cordon bleu. The miracle is, it ’s a woman that Victor Radnor has trained: French, but a woman; devoted to him, as all who serve him are. Do I say “but” a woman? There’s not a Frenchman alive to match her. Vatel awaits her in Paradise with his arms extended; and may he wait long!’

Carling indulged his passion for the genuine by letting a flutter of real envy be seen. ’My wife would like to meet such a Frenchwoman. It must be a privilege to dine with him—to know him. I know what he has done for English Commerce, and to build a colossal fortune: genius, as I said: and his donations to Institutions. Odd, to read his name and Mrs. Burman Radnor’s at separate places in the lists! Well, we’ll hope. It’s a case for a compromise of sentiments and claims.’

Page 3454

’A friend of mine, spiced with cynic, declares that there’s always an amicable way out of a dissension, if we get rid of Lupus and Vulpus.’

Carling spied for a trap in the citation of Lupus and Vulpus; he saw none, and named the square of his residence on the great Russell property, and the number of the house, the hour of dinner next day. He then hung silent, breaking the pause with his hand out and a sharp ‘Well?’ that rattled a whirligig sound in his head upward. His leave of people was taken in this laughing falsetto, as of one affected by the curious end things come to.

Fenellan thought of him for a moment or two, that he was a better than the common kind of lawyer; who doubtless knew as much of the wrong side of the world as lawyers do, and held his knowledge for the being a man of the world:—as all do, that have not Alpine heights in the mind to mount for a look out over their own and the world’s pedestrian tracks. I could spot the lawyer in your composition, my friend, to the exclusion of the man he mused. But you’re right in what you mean to say of yourself: you’re a good fellow, for a lawyer, and together we may manage somehow to score a point of service to Victor Radnor.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME FAMILIAR GUESTS

Nesta read her mother’s face when Mrs. Victor entered the drawing-room to receive the guests. She saw a smooth fair surface, of the kind as much required by her father’s eyes as innocuous air by his nostrils: and it was honest skin, not the deceptive feminine veiling, to make a dear man happy over his volcano. Mrs. Victor was to meet the friends with whom her feelings were at home, among whom her musical gifts gave her station: they liked her for herself; they helped her to feel at home with herself and be herself: a rarer condition with us all than is generally supposed. So she could determine to be cheerful in the anticipation of an evening that would at least be restful to the outworn sentinel nerve of her heart, which was perpetually alert and signalling to the great organ; often colouring the shows and seems of adverse things for an apeing of reality with too cruel a resemblance. One of the scraps of practical wisdom gained by hardened sufferers is, to keep from spying at horizons when they drop into a pleasant dingle. Such is the comfort of it, that we can dream, and lull our fears, and half think what we wish: and it is a heavenly truce with the fretful mind divided from our wishes.

Nesta wondered at her mother’s complacent questions concerning this Lakelands: the house, the county, the kind of people about, the features of the country. Physically unable herself to be regretful under a burden three parts enrapturing her, the girl expected her mother to display a shadowy vexation, with a proud word or two, that would summon her thrilling sympathy in regard to the fourth part: namely, the

aristocratic iciness of country magnates, who took them up and cast them off; as they had done, she thought, at Craye Farm and at Creckholt: she remembered it, of the latter place, wincingly, insurgently, having loved the dear home she had been expelled from by her pride of the frosty surrounding people—or no, not all, but some of them. And what had roused their pride?

Page 3455

Striking for a reason, her inexperience of our modern England, supplemented by readings in the England of a preceding generation, had hit on her father's profession of merchant. It accounted to her for the behaviour of the haughty territorial and titled families. But certain of the minor titles headed City Firms, she had heard; certain of the families were avowedly commercial. 'They follow suit,' her father said at Creckholt, after he had found her mother weeping, and decided instantly to quit and fly once more. But if they followed suit in such a way, then Mr. Durance must be right when he called the social English the most sheepy of sheep:—and Nesta could not consent to the cruel verdict, she adored her compatriots. Incongruities were pacified for her by the suggestion of her quick wits, that her father, besides being a merchant, was a successful speculator; and perhaps the speculator is not liked by merchants; or they were jealous of him; or they did not like his being both.

She pardoned them with some tenderness, on a suspicion that a quaint old high-frilled bleached and puckered Puritanical rectitude (her thoughts rose in pictures) possibly condemned the speculator as a description of gambler. An erratic severity in ethics is easily overlooked by the enthusiast for things old English. She was consciously ahead of them in the knowledge that her father had been, without the taint of gambling, a beneficent speculator. The Montgomery colony in South Africa, and his dealings with the natives in India, and his Railways in South America, his establishment of Insurance Offices, which were Savings Banks, and the Stores for the dispensing of sound goods to the poor, attested it. O and he was hospitable, the kindest, helpfullest of friends, the dearest, the very brightest of parents: he was his girl's playmate. She could be critic of him, for an induction to the loving of him more justly: yet if he had an excessive desire to win the esteem of people, as these keen young optics perceived in him, he strove to deserve it; and no one could accuse him of laying stress on the benefits he conferred. Designedly, frigidly to wound a man so benevolent, appeared to her as an incomprehensible baseness. The dropping of acquaintanceship with him, after the taste of its privileges, she ascribed, in the void of any better elucidation, to a mania of aristocratic conceit. It drove her, despite her youthful contempt of politics, into a Radicalism that could find food in the epigrams of Mr. Colney Durance, even when they passed her understanding; or when he was not too distinctly seen by her to be shooting at all the parties of her beloved England, beneath the wicked semblance of shielding each by turns.

Page 3456

The young gentleman introduced to the Radnor Concert-parties by Lady Grace Halley as the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, had to bear the sins of his class. Though he was tall, straight-featured, correct in costume, appearance, deportment, second son of a religious earl and no scandal to the parentage, he was less noticed by Nesta than the elderly and the commoners. Her father accused her of snubbing him. She reproduced her famous copy of the sugared acid of Mr. Dudley Sowerby's closed mouth: a sort of sneer in meekness, as of humility under legitimate compulsion; deploring Christianly a pride of race that stamped it for this cowled exhibition: the wonderful mimicry was a flash thrown out by a born mistress of the art, and her mother was constrained to laugh, and so was her father; but he wilfully denied the likeness. He charged her with encouraging Colney Durance to drag forth the sprig of nobility, in the nakedness of evicted shell-fish, on themes of the peril to England, possibly ruin, through the loss of that ruling initiative formerly possessed, in the days of our glory, by the titular nobles of the land. Colney spoke it effectively, and the Hon. Dudley's expressive lineaments showed print of the heaving word Alas, as when a target is penetrated, centrally. And he was not a particularly dull fellow 'for his class and country,' Colney admitted; adding: 'I hit his thought and out he came.' One has, reluctantly with Victor Radnor, to grant, that when a man's topmost unspoken thought is hit, he must be sharp on his guard to keep from coming out:—we have won a right to him.

'Only, it's too bad; it 's a breach of hospitality,' Victor said, both to Nesta and to Nataly, alluding to several instances of Colney's ironic handling of their guests, especially of this one, whom Nesta would attack, and Nataly would not defend.

They were alive at a signal to protect the others. Miss Priscilla Graves, an eater of meat, was ridiculous in her ant'alcoholic exclusiveness and scorn: Mr. Pempton, a drinker of wine, would laud extravagantly the more transparent purity of vegetarianism. Dr. Peter Yatt jeered at globules: Dr. John Cormyn mourned over human creatures treated as cattle by big doses. The Rev. Septimus Barmby satisfactorily smoked: Mr. Peridon traced mortal evil to that act. Dr. Schlesien had his German views, Colney Durance his ironic, Fenellan his fanciful and free-lance. And here was an optimist, there a pessimist; and the rank Radical, the rigid Conservative, were not wanting. All of them were pointedly opposed, extraordinarily for so small an assembly: absurdly, it might be thought: but these provoked a kind warm smile, with the exclamation: 'They are dears!' They were the dearer for their fads and foibles.

Page 3457

Music harmonized them. Music, strangely, put the spell on Colney Durance, the sayer of bitter things, manufacturer of prickly balls, in the form of Discord's apples of whom Fenellan remarked, that he took to his music like an angry little boy to his barley-sugar, with a growl and a grunt. All these diverse friends could meet and mix in Victor's Concert-room with an easy homely recognition of one another's musical qualities, at times enthusiastic; and their natural divergencies and occasional clashes added a salient tastiness to the group of whom Nesta could say: 'Mama, was there ever such a collection of dear good souls with such contrary minds?' Her mother had the deepest of reasons for loving them, so as not to wish to see the slightest change in their minds, that the accustomed features making her nest of homeliness and real peace might be retained, with the humour of their funny silly antagonisms and the subsequent march in concord; excepting solely as regarded the perverseness of Priscilla Graves in her open contempt of Mr. Pempton's innocent two or three wine-glasses. The vegetarian gentleman's politeness forbore to direct attention to the gobbets of meat Priscilla consumed, though he could express disapproval in general terms; but he entertained sentiments as warlike to the lady's habit of 'drinking the blood of animals.' The mockery of it was, that Priscilla liked Mr. Pempton and admired his violoncello-playing, and he was unreserved in eulogy of her person and her pure soprano tones. Nataly was a poetic match-maker. Mr. Peridon was intended for Mademoiselle de Seilles, Nesta's young French governess; a lady of a courtly bearing, with placid speculation in the eyes she cast on a foreign people, and a voluble muteness shadowing at intervals along the line of her closed lips.

The one person among them a little out of tune with most, was Lady Grace Halley. Nataly's provincial gentlewoman's traditions of the manners indicating conduct, reproved unwonted licences assumed by Lady Grace; who, in allusion to Hymen's weaving of a cousinship between the earldom of Southweare and that of Cantor, of which Mr. Sowerby sprang, set her mouth and fan at work to delineate total distinctions, as it were from the egg to the empyrean. Her stature was rather short, all of it conversational, at the eyebrows, the shoulders, the finger-tips, the twisting shape; a ballerina's expressiveness; and her tongue dashed half sentences through and among these hieroglyphs, loosely and funnily candid. Anybody might hear that she had gone gambling into the City, and that she had got herself into a mess, and that by great good luck she had come across Victor Radnor, who, with two turns of the wrist, had plucked her out of the mire, the miraculous man! And she had vowed to him, never again to run doing the like without his approval.

Page 3458

The cause of her having done it, was related with the accompaniments; brows twitching, flitting smiles, shrugs, pouts, shifts of posture: she was married to a centaur; out of the saddle a man of wood, 'an excellent man.' For the not colloquial do not commit themselves. But one wants a little animation in a husband. She called on bell-motion of the head to toll forth the utter nightcap negative. He had not any: out of the saddle, he was asleep:—'next door to the Last Trump,' Colney Durance assisted her to describe the soundest of sleep in a husband, after wooing her to unbosom herself. She was awake to his guileful arts, and sailed along with him, hailing his phrases, if he shot a good one; prankishly exposing a flexible nature, that took its holiday thus in a grinding world, among maskers, to the horrification of the prim. So to refresh ourselves, by having publicly a hip-bath in the truth while we shock our hearers enough to be discredited for what we reveal, was a dexterous merry twist, amusing to her; but it was less a cynical malice than her nature that she indulged, 'A woman must have some excitement.' The most innocent appeared to her the Stock Exchange. The opinions of husbands who are not summoned to pay are hardly important; they vary.

Colney helped her now and then to step the trifle beyond her stride, but if he was humorous, she forgave; and if together they appalled the decorous, it was great gain. Her supple person, pretty lips, the style she had, gave a pass to the wondrous confidings, which were for masculine ears, whatever the sex. Nataly might share in them, but women did not lead her to expansiveness; or not the women of the contracted class: Miss Graves, Mrs. Cormyn, and others at the Radnor Concerts. She had a special consideration for Mademoiselle de Seilles, owing to her exquisite French, as she said; and she may have liked it, but it was the young Frenchwoman's air of high breeding that won her esteem. Girls were spring frosts to her. Fronting Nesta, she put on her noted smile, or wood-cut of a smile, with its label of indulgence; except when the girl sang. Music she loved. She said it was the saving of poor Dudley. It distinguished him in the group of the noble Evangelical Cantor Family; and it gave him a subject of assured discourse in company; and oddly, it contributed to his comelier air. Flute [This would be the German Blockeflute or our Recorder. D.W.] in hand, his mouth at the blow-stop was relieved of its pained updraw by the form for puffing; he preserved a gentlemanly high figure in his exercises on the instrument, out of ken of all likeness to the urgent insistency of Victor Radnor's punctuating trunk of the puffing frame at almost every bar—an Apollo brilliancy in energetic pursuit of the nymph of sweet sound. Too methodical one, too fiery the other.

Page 3459

In duets of Hauptmann's, with Nesta at the piano, the contrast of dull smoothness and overstressed significance was very noticeable beside the fervent accuracy of her balanced fingering; and as she could also flute, she could criticize; though latterly, the flute was boxed away from lips that had devoted themselves wholly to song: song being one of the damsel's present pressing ambitions. She found nothing to correct in Mr. Sowerby, and her father was open to all the censures; but her father could plead vitality, passion. He held his performances cheap after the vehement display; he was a happy listener, whether to the babble of his 'dear old Corelli,' or to the majesty of the rattling heavens and swaying forests of Beethoven.

His air of listening was a thing to see; it had a look of disembodiment; the sparkle conjured up from deeps, and the life in the sparkle, as of a soul at holiday. Eyes had been given this man to spy the pleasures and reveal the joy of his pasture on them: gateways to the sunny within, issues to all the outer Edens. Few of us possess that double significance of the pure sparkle. It captivated Lady Grace. She said a word of it to Fenellan: 'There is a man who can feel rapture!' He had not to follow the line of her sight: she said so on a previous evening, in a similar tone; and for a woman to repeat herself, using the very emphasis, was quaint. She could feel rapture; but her features and limbs were in motion to designate it, between simply and wilfully; she had the instinct to be dimpling, and would not for a moment control it, and delighted in its effectiveness: only when observing that winged sparkle of eyes did an idea of envy, hardly a consciousness, inform her of being surpassed; and it might be in the capacity to feel besides the gift to express. Such a reflection relating to a man, will make women mortally sensible that they are the feminine of him.

'His girl has the look,' Fenellan said in answer.

She cast a glance at Nesta, then at Nataly.

And it was true, that the figure of a mother, not pretending to the father's vividness, eclipsed it somewhat in their child. The mother gave richness of tones, hues and voice, and stature likewise, and the thick brown locks, which in her own were threads of gold along the brush from the temples: she gave the girl a certain degree of the composure of manner which Victor could not have bestowed; she gave nothing to clash with his genial temper; she might be supposed to have given various qualities, moral if you like. But vividness was Lady Grace's admirable meteor of the hour: she was unable to perceive, so as to compute, the value of obscurer lights. Under the charm of Nataly's rich contralto during a duet with Priscilla Graves, she gesticulated ecstasies, and uttered them, and genuinely; and still, when reduced to meditations, they would have had no weight, they would hardly have seemed an apology for language, beside Victor's gaze of pleasure in the noble forthroll of the notes.

Page 3460

Nataly heard the invitation of the guests of the evening to Lakelands next day.

Her anxieties were at once running about to gather provisions for the baskets. She spoke of them at night. But Victor had already put the matter in the hands of Madame Callet; and all that could be done, would be done by Armandine, he knew. 'If she can't muster enough at home, she'll be off to her Piccadilly shop by seven A.M. Count on plenty for twice the number.'

Nataly was reposing on the thought that they were her friends, when Victor mentioned his having in the afternoon despatched a note to his relatives, the Duvidney ladies, inviting them to join him at the station to-morrow, for a visit of inspection to the house of his building on his new estate. He startled her. The Duvidney ladies were, to his knowledge, of the order of the fragile minds which hold together by the cement of a common trepidation for the support of things established, and have it not in them to be able to recognize the unsanctioned. Good women, unworldly of the world, they were perforce harder than the world, from being narrower and more timorous.

'But, Victor, you were sure they would refuse!'

He answered: 'They may have gone back to Tunbridge Wells. By the way, they have a society down there I want for Fredi. Sure, do you say, my dear? Perfectly sure. But the accumulation of invitations and refusals in the end softens them, you will see. We shall and must have them for Fredi.'

She was used to the long reaches of his forecasts, his burning activity on a project; she found it idle to speak her thought, that his ingenuity would have been needless in a position dictated by plain prudence, and so much happier for them.

They talked of Mrs. Burman until she had to lift a prayer to be saved from darker thoughts, dreadfully prolific, not to be faced. Part of her prayer was on behalf of Mrs. Burman, for life to be extended to her, if the poor lady clung to life—if it was really humane to wish it for her: and heaven would know: heaven had mercy on the afflicted.

Nataly heard the snuffle of hypocrisy in her prayer. She had to cease to pray.

CHAPTER IX

AN INSPECTION OF LAKELANDS

One may not have an intention to flourish, and may be pardoned for a semblance of it, in exclaiming, somewhat royally, as creator and owner of the place: 'There you see Lakelands.'

The conveyances from the railway station drew up on a rise of road fronting an undulation, where our modern English architect's fantasia in crimson brick swept from central gables to flying wings, over pents, crooks, curves, peaks, cowled porches, balconies, recesses, projections, away to a red village of stables and dependent cottages; harmonious in irregularity; and coloured homely with the greensward about it, the pines beside it, the clouds above it. Not many palaces

Page 3461

would be reckoned as larger. The folds and swells and stream of the building along the roll of ground, had an appearance of an enormous banner on the wind. Nataly looked. Her next look was at Colney Durance. She sent the expected nods to Victor's carriage. She would have given the whole prospect for the covering solitariness of her chamber. A multitude of clashing sensations, and a throat-thickening hateful to her, compelled her to summon so as to force herself to feel a groundless anger, directed against none, against nothing, perfectly crazy, but her only resource for keeping down the great wave surgent at her eyes.

Victor was like a swimmer in morning sea amid the exclamations encircling him. He led through the straight passage of the galleried hall, offering two fair landscapes at front door and at back, down to the lake, Fredi's lake; a good oblong of water, notable in a district not abounding in the commodity. He would have it a feature of the district; and it had been deepened and extended; up rose the springs, many ran the ducts. Fredi's pretty little bathshed or bower had a space of marble on the three-feet shallow it overhung with a shade of carved woodwork; it had a diving-board for an eight-feet plunge; a punt and small row-boat of elegant build hard by. Green ran the banks about, and a beechwood fringed with birches curtained the Northward length: morning sun and evening had a fair face of water to paint. Saw man ever the like for pleasing a poetical damsel? So was Miss Fredi, the coldest of the party hitherto, and dreaming a preference of 'old places' like Creckholt and Craye Farm, 'captured to be enraptured,' quite according to man's ideal of his beneficence to the sex. She pressed the hand of her young French governess, Louise de Seilles. As in everything he did for his girl, Victor pointed boastfully to his forethought of her convenience and her tastes: the pine-panels of the interior, the shelves for her books, pegs to hang her favourite drawings, and the couch-bunk under a window to conceal the summerly recliner while throwing full light on her book; and the hearth-square for logs, when she wanted fire: because Fredi bathed in any weather: the oaken towel-coffer; the wood-carvings of doves, tits, fishes; the rod for the flowered silken hangings she was to choose, and have shy odalisque peeps of sunny water from her couch.

'Fredi's Naiad retreat, when she wishes to escape Herr Strauscher or Signor Ruderi,' said Victor, having his grateful girl warm in an arm; 'and if they head after her into the water, I back her to leave them puffing; she's a dolphin. That water has three springs and gets all the drainage of the upland round us. I chose the place chiefly on account of it and the pines. I do love pines!'

'But, excellent man! what do you not love?' said Lady Grace, with the timely hit upon the obvious, which rings.

'It saves him from accumulation of tissue,' said Colney.

Page 3462

‘What does?’ was eagerly asked by the wife of the homoeopathic Dr. John Cormyn, a sentimental lady beset with fears of stoutness.

Victor cried: ‘Tush; don’t listen to Colney, pray.’

But she heard Colney speak of a positive remedy; more immediately effective than an abjuration of potatoes and sugar. She was obliged by her malady to listen, although detesting the irreverent ruthless man, who could direct expanding frames, in a serious tone, to love; love everybody, everything; violently and universally love; and so without intermission pay out the fat created by a rapid assimilation of nutriment. Obeseness is the most sensitive of our ailments: probably as being aware, that its legitimate appeal to pathos is ever smothered in its pudding-bed of the grotesque. She was pained, and showed it, and was ashamed of herself for showing it; and that very nearly fetched the tear.

‘Our host is an instance in proof,’ Colney said. He waved hand at the house. His meaning was hidden; evidently he wanted victims. Sight of Lakelands had gripped him with the fell satiric itch; and it is a passion to sting and tear, on rational grounds. His face meanwhile, which had points of the handsome, signified a smile asleep, as if beneath a cloth. Only those who knew him well were aware of the claw-like alertness under the droop of eyelids.

Admiration was the common note, in the various keys. The station selected for the South-eastward aspect of the dark-red gabled pile on its white shell-terrace, backed by a plantation of tall pines, a mounded and full-plumed company, above the left wing, was admired, in files and in volleys. Marvellous, effectively miraculous, was the tale of the vow to have the great edifice finished within one year: and the strike of workmen, and the friendly colloquy with them, the good reasoning, the unanimous return to duty; and the doubling, the trebling of the number of them; and the most glorious of sights—O the grand old English working with a will! as Englishmen do when they come at last to heat; and they conquer, there is then nothing that they cannot conquer. So the conqueror said.—And admirable were the conservatories running three long lines, one from the drawing-room, to a central dome for tropical growths. And the parterres were admired; also the newly-planted Irish junipers bounding the West-walk; and the three tiers of stately descent from the three green terrace banks to the grassy slopes over the lake. Again the lake was admired, the house admired. Admiration was evoked for great orchid-houses ‘over yonder,’ soon to be set up.

Page 3463

Off we go to the kitchen-garden. There the admiration is genial, practical. We admire the extent of the beds marked out for asparagus, and the French disposition of the planting at wide intervals; and the French system of training peach, pear, and plum trees on the walls to win length and catch sun, we much admire. We admire the gardener. We are induced temporarily to admire the French people. They are sagacious in fruit-gardens. They have not the English Constitution, you think rightly; but in fruit-gardens they grow for fruit, and not, as Victor quotes a friend, for wood, which the valiant English achieve. We hear and we see examples of sagacity; and we are further brought round to the old confession, that we cannot cook; Colney Durance has us there; we have not studied herbs and savours; and so we are shocked backward step by step until we retreat precipitately into the nooks where waxen tapers, carefully tended by writers on the Press, light-up mysterious images of our national selves for admiration. Something surely we do, or we should not be where we are. But what is it we do (excepting cricket, of course) which others cannot do? Colney asks; and he excludes cricket and football.

An acutely satiric man in an English circle, that does not resort to the fist for a reply to him, may almost satiate the excessive fury roused in his mind by an illogical people of a provocative prosperity, mainly tongueless or of leaden tongue above the pressure of their necessities, as he takes them to be. They give him so many opportunities. They are angry and helpless as the log hissing to the saw. Their instinct to make use of the downright in retort, restrained as it is by a buttoned coat of civilization, is amusing, inviting. Colney Durance allured them to the quag's edge and plunged them in it, to writhe patriotically; and although it may be said, that they felt their situation less than did he the venom they sprang in his blood, he was cruel; he caused discomfort. But these good friends about him stood for the country, an illogical country; and as he could not well attack his host Victor Radnor, an irrational man, he selected the abstract entity for the discharge of his honest spite.

The irrational friend was deeper at the source of his irritation than the illogical old motherland. This house of Lakelands, the senselessness of his friend in building it and designing to live in it, after experiences of an incapacity to stand in a serene contention with the world he challenged, excited Colney's wasp. He was punished, half way to frenzy behind his placable demeanour, by having Dr. Schlesien for chorus. And here again, it was the unbefitting, not the person, which stirred his wrath. A German on English soil should remember the dues of a guest. At the same time, Colney said things to snare the acclamation of an observant gentleman of that race, who is no longer in his first enthusiasm for English beef and the complexion of the women. 'Ah, ya, it is true, what you say: "The English grow as fast as odders, but they grow to corns instead of brains." They are Bull. Quaat true.' He bellowed on a laugh the last half of the quotation.

Page 3464

Colney marked him. His encounters with Fenellan were enlivening engagements and left no malice; only a regret, when the fencing passed his guard, that Fenellan should prefer to flash for the minute. He would have met a pert defender of England, in the person of Miss Priscilla Graves, if she had not been occupied with observation of the bearing of Lady Grace Halley toward Mr. Victor Radnor; which displeased her on behalf of Mrs. Victor; she was besides hostile by race and class to an aristocratic assumption of licence. Sparing Colney, she with some scorn condemned Mr. Pempton for allowing his country to be ridiculed without a word. Mr. Pempton believed that the Vegetarian movement was more progressive in England than in other lands, but he was at the disadvantage with the fair Priscilla, that eulogy of his compatriots on this account would win her coldest approval. 'Satire was never an argument,' he said, too evasively.

The Rev. Septimus Barmby received the meed of her smile, for saying in his many-fathom bass, with an eye on Victor: 'At least we may boast of breeding men, who are leaders of men.'

The announcement of luncheon, by Victor's butler Arlington, opportunely followed and freighted the remark with a happy recognition of that which comes to us from the hands of conquerors. Dr. Schlesien himself, no antagonist to England, but like Colney Durance, a critic, speculated in view of the spread of pic-nic provision beneath the great glass dome, as to whether it might be, that these English were on another start out of the dust in vigorous commercial enterprise, under leadership of one of their chance masterly minds-merchant, in this instance: and be debated within, whether Genius, occasionally developed in a surprising superior manner by these haphazard English, may not sometimes wrest the prize from Method; albeit we count for the long run, that Method has assurance of success, however late in the race to set forth.

Luncheon was a merry meal, with Victor and Nataly for host and hostess; Fenellan, Colney Durance, and Lady Grace Halley for the talkers. A gusty bosom of sleet overhung the dome, rattled on it, and rolling Westward, became a radiant mountain-land, partly worthy of Victor's phrase: 'A range of Swiss Alps in air.'

'With periwigs Louis Quatorze for peaks,' Colney added.

And Fenellan improved on him: 'Or a magnified Bench of Judges at the trial of your caerulean Phryne.'

The strip of white cloud flew on a whirl from the blue, to confirm it.

But Victor and Lady Grace rejected any play of conceits upon nature. Violent and horrid interventions of the counterfeit, such mad similes appeared to them, when pure coin was offered. They loathed the Rev. Septimus Barmby for proclaiming, that he had seen 'Chapters of Hebrew History in the grouping of clouds.'

Page 3465

His gaze was any one of the Chapters upon Nesta. The clerical gentleman's voice was of a depth to claim for it the profoundest which can be thought or uttered; and Nesta's tender youth had taken so strong an impression of sacredness from what Fenellan called 'his chafer tones,' that her looks were often given him in gratitude, for the mere sound. Nataly also had her sense of safety in acquiescing to such a voice coming from such a garb. Consequently, whenever Fenellan and Colney were at him, drawing him this way and that for utterances cathedral in sentiment and sonorousness, these ladies shed protecting beams; insomuch that he was inspired to the agreeable conceptions whereof frequently rash projects are an issue.

Touching the neighbours of Lakelands, they were principally enriched merchants, it appeared; a snippet or two of the fringe of aristocracy lay here and there among them; and one racy-of-the-soil old son of Thames, having the manners proper to last century's yeoman. Mr. Pempton knew something of this quaint Squire of Hefferstone, Beaves Urmsing by name; a ruddy man, right heartily Saxon; a still glowing brand amid the ashes of the Heptarchy hearthstone; who had a song, The Marigolds, which he would troll out for you anywhere, on any occasion. To have so near to the metropolis one from the centre of the venerable rotundity of the country, was rare. Victor exclaimed 'Come!' in ravishment over the picturesqueness of a neighbour carrying imagination away to the founts of England; and his look at Nataly proposed. Her countenance was inapprehensive. He perceived resistance, and said: 'I have met two or three of them in the train: agreeable men: Gladding, the banker; a General Fanning; that man Blathenoy, great billbroker. But the fact is, close on London, we're independent of neighbours; we mean to be. Lakelands and London practically join.'

'The mother city becoming the suburb,' murmured Colney, in report of the union.

'You must expect to be invaded, sir,' said Mr. Sowerby; and Victor shrugged: 'We are pretty safe.'

'The lock of a door seems a potent security until some one outside is heard fingering the handle nigh midnight,' Fenellan threw out his airy nothing of a remark.

It struck on Nataly's heart. 'So you will not let us be lonely here,' she said to her guests.

The Rev. Septimus Barmby was mouthpiece for congregations. Sound of a subterranean roar, with a blast at the orifice, informed her of their 'very deep happiness in the privilege.'

He comforted her. Nesta smiled on him thankfully.

'Don't imagine, Mrs. Victor, that you can be shut off from neighbours, in a house like this; and they have a claim,' said Lady Grace, quitting the table.

Fenellan and Colney thought so:

‘Like mice at a cupboard.’

‘Beetles in a kitchen.’

‘No, no-no, no!’ Victor shook head, pitiful over the good people likened to things unclean, and royally upraising them: in doing which, he scattered to vapour the leaden incubi they had been upon his flatter moods of late. ‘No, but it’s a rapture to breathe the air here!’ His lifted chest and nostrils were for the encouragement of Nataly to soar beside him.

Page 3466

She summoned her smile and nodded.

He spoke aside to Lady Grace: 'The dear soul wants time to compose herself after a grand surprise.'

She replied: 'I think I could soon be reconciled. How much land?'

'In treaty for some hundred and eighty or ninety acres . . . in all at present three hundred and seventy, including plantations, lake, outhouses.'

'Large enough; land paying as it does—that is, not paying. We shall be having to gamble in the City systematically for subsistence.'

'You will not so much as jest on the subject.'

Coming from such a man, that was clear sky thunder. The lady played it off in a shadowy pout and shrug while taking a stamp of his masterfulness, not so volatile.

She said to Nataly: 'Our place in Worcestershire is about half the size, if as much. Large enough when we're not crowded out with gout and can open to no one. Some day you will visit us, I hope.'

'You we count on here, Lady Grace.'

It was an over-accentuated response; unusual with this well-bred woman; and a bit of speech that does not flow, causes us to speculate. The lady resumed: 'I value the favour. We're in a horsey-doggy-foxy circle down there. We want enlivening. If we had your set of musicians and talkers!'

Nataly smiled in vacuous kindness, at a loss for the retort of a compliment to a person she measured. Lady Grace also was an amiable hostile reviewer. Each could see, to have cited in the other, defects common to the lower species of the race, admitting a superior personal quality or two; which might be pleaded in extenuation; and if the apology proved too effective, could be dispersed by insistence upon it, under an implied appeal to benevolence. When we have not a liking for the creature whom we have no plain cause to dislike, we are minutely just.

During the admiratory stroll along the ground-floor rooms, Colney Durance found himself beside Dr. Schlesien; the latter smoking, striding, emphasizing, but bearable, as the one of the party who was not perpetually at the gape in laudation. Colney was heard to say: 'No doubt: the German is the race the least mixed in Europe: it might challenge aboriginals for that. Oddly, it has invented the Cyclopaedia for knowledge, the sausage for nutrition! How would you explain it?'

Dr. Schlesien replied with an Atlas shrug under fleabite to the insensately infantile interrogation.

He in turn was presently heard.

’But, my good sir! you quote me your English Latin. I must beg of you you write it down. It is orally incomprehensible to Continentals.’

‘We are Islanders!’ Colney shrugged in languishment.

‘Oh, you do great things . . .’ Dr. Schlesien rejoined in kindness, making his voice a musical intimation of the smallness of the things.

‘We build great houses, to employ our bricks’

‘No, Colney, to live in,’ said Victor.

Page 3467

‘Scarcely long enough to warm them.’

‘What do you . . . fiddle!’

‘They are not Hohenzollerns!’

‘It is true,’ Dr. Schlesien called. ’No, but you learn discipline; you build. I say wid you, not Hohenzollerns you build! But you shall look above: Eyes up. Ire necesse est. Good, but mount; you come to something. Have ideas.’

‘Good, but when do we reach your level?’

’Sir, I do not say more than that we do not want instruction from foreigners.’

’Pupil to paedagogue indeed. You have the wreath in Music, in Jurisprudence, Chemistry, Scholarship, Beer, Arms, Manners.’

Dr. Schlesien puffed a tempest of tobacco and strode.

‘He is chiselling for wit in the Teutonic block,’ Colney said, falling back to Fenellan.

Fenellan observed: ’You might have credited him with the finished sculpture.’

‘They’re ahead of us in sticking at the charge of wit.’

‘They’ve a widening of their swallow since Versailles.’

‘Manners?’

’Well, that’s a tight cravat for the Teutonic thrapple! But he’s off by himself to loosen it.’

Victor came on the couple testily. ’What are you two concocting! I say, do keep the peace, please. An excellent good fellow; better up in politics than any man I know; understands music; means well, you can see. You two hate a man at all serious. And he doesn’t bore with his knowledge. A scholar too.’

’If he’ll bring us the atmosphere of the groves of Academe, he may swing his ferule pickled in himself, and welcome,’ said Fenellan.

‘Yes!’ Victor nodded at a recognized antagonism in Fenellan; ’but Colney’s always lifting the Germans high above us.’

‘It’s to exercise his muscles.’

Victor headed to the other apartments, thinking that the Rev. Septimus and young Sowerby, Old England herself, were spared by the diversion of these light skirmishing

shots from their accustomed victims to the 'masculine people of our time. His friends would want a drilling to be of aid to him in his campaign to come. For it was one, and a great one. He remembered his complete perception of the plan, all the elements of it, the forward whirling of it, just before the fall on London Bridge. The greatness of his enterprise laid such hold of him that the smallest of obstacles had a villanous aspect; and when, as anticipated, Colney and Fenellan were sultry flies for whomsoever they could fret, he was blind to the reading of absurdities which caused Fredi's eyes to stream and Lady Grace beside him to stand awhile and laugh out her fit. Young Sowerby appeared forgiving enough—he was a perfect gentleman: but Fredi's appalling sense of fun must try him hard. And those young fellows are often more wounded by a girl's thoughtless laughter than by a man's contempt. Nataly should have protected him. Her face had the air of a smiling general satisfaction; sign of a pleasure below the mark required; sign too of a sleepy partner for a battle. Even in the wonderful kitchen, arched and pillared (where the explanation came to Nesta of Madame Callet's frequent leave of absence of late, when an inferior dinner troubled her father in no degree), even there his Nataly listened to the transports of the guests with benign indulgence.

Page 3468

‘Mama!’ said Nesta, ready to be entranced by kitchens in her bubbling animation: she meant the recalling of instances of the conspirator her father had been.

‘You none of you guessed Armandine’s business!’ Victor cried, in a glee that pushed to make the utmost of this matter and count against chagrin. ’She was off to Paris; went to test the last inventions:—French brains are always alert:—and in fact, those kitchen-ranges, gas and coal, and the apparatus for warming plates and dishes, the whole of the battery is on the model of the Duc d’Ariane’s—finest in Europe. Well,’ he agreed with Colney, ‘to say France is enough.’

Mr. Pempton spoke to Miss Graves of the task for a woman to conduct a command so extensive. And, as when an inoffensive wayfarer has chanced to set foot near a wasp’s nest, out on him came woman and her champions, the worthy and the sham, like a blast of powder.

Victor ejaculated: ‘Armandine!’ Whoever doubted her capacity, knew not Armandine; or not knowing Armandine, knew not the capacity in women.

With that utterance of her name, he saw the orangey spot on London Bridge, and the sinking Tower and masts and funnels, and the rising of them, on his return to his legs; he recollected, that at the very edge of the fall he had Armandine strongly in his mind. She was to do her part: Fenellan and Colney on the surface, she below: and hospitality was to do its part, and music was impressed—the innocent Concerts; his wealth, all his inventiveness were to serve;—and merely to attract and win the tastes of people, for a social support to Lakelands! Merely that? Much more:—if Nataly’s coldness to the place would but allow him to form an estimate of how much. At the same time, being in the grasp of his present disappointment, he perceived a meanness in the result, that was astonishing and afflicting. He had not ever previously felt imagination starving at the vision of success. Victor had yet to learn, that the man with a material object in aim, is the man of his object; and the nearer to his mark, often the farther is he from a sober self; he is more the arrow of his bow than bow to his arrow. This we pay for scheming: and success is costly; we find we have pledged the better half of ourselves to clutch it; not to be redeemed with the whole handful of our prize! He was, however, learning after his leaping fashion. Nataly’s defective sympathy made him look at things through the feelings she depressed. A shadow of his missed Idea on London Bridge seemed to cross him from the close flapping of a wing within reach. He could say only, that it would, if caught, have been an answer to the thought disturbing him.

Nataly drew Colney Durance with her eyes to step beside her, on the descent to the terrace. Little Skepsey hove in sight, coming swift as the point of an outrigger over the flood.

CHAPTER X

Page 3469

SKEPSEY IN MOTION

The bearer of his master's midday letters from London shot beyond Nataly as soon as seen, with an apparent snap of his body in passing. He steamed to the end of the terrace and delivered the packet, returning at the same rate of speed, to do proper homage to the lady he so much respected. He had left the railway-station on foot instead of taking a fly, because of a calculation that he would save three minutes; which he had not lost for having to come through the raincloud. 'Perhaps the contrary,' Skepsey said: it might be judged to have accelerated his course: and his hat dripped, and his coat shone, and he soaped his hands, cheerful as an ouzel-cock when the sun is out again.

'Many cracked crowns lately, in the Manly Art?' Colney inquired of him. And Skepsey answered with precision of statement: 'Crowns, no, sir; the nose, it may happen; but it cannot be said to be the rule.'

'You are of opinion, that the practice of Scientific Pugilism offers us compensation for the broken bridge of a nose?'

'In an increase of manly self-esteem: I do, sir, yes.'

Skepsey was shy of this gentleman's bite; and he fancied his defence had been correct. Perceiving a crumple of the lips of Mr. Durance, he took the attitude of a watchful dubiety.

'But, my goodness, you are wet through!' cried Nataly, reproaching herself for the tardy compassion; and Nesta ran up to them and heaped a thousand pities on her 'poor dear Skip,' and drove him in beneath the glass-dome to the fragments of pic-nic, and poured champagne for him, 'lest his wife should have to doctor him for a cold,' and poured afresh, when he had obeyed her: 'for the toasting of Lakelands, dear Skepsey!' impossible to resist: so he drank, and blinked; and was then told, that before using his knife and fork he must betake himself to some fire of shavings and chips, where coffee was being made, for the purpose of drying his clothes. But this he would not hear of: he was pledged to business, to convey his master's letters, and he might have to catch a train by the last quarter-minute, unless it was behind the time-tables; he must hold himself ready to start. Entreated, adjured, commanded, Skepsey commiseratingly observed to Colney Durance, 'The ladies do not understand, sir!' For Turk of Constantinople had never a more haremed opinion of the unfitness of women in the brave world of action. The persistence of these ladies endeavouring to obstruct him in the course of his duty, must have succeeded save that for one word of theirs he had two, and twice the promptitude of motion. He explained to them, as to good children, that the loss of five minutes might be the loss of a Post, the loss of thousands of pounds, the loss of the character of a Firm; and he was away to the terrace. Nesta headed him and waved him back. She and her mother rebuked him: they called him

unreasonable; wherein they resembled the chief example of the sex to him, in a wife he had at home, who levelled that charge against her husband when most she needed discipline: the woman laid hand on the very word legitimately his own for the justification of his process with her.

Page 3470

‘But, Skips! if you are ill and we have to nurse you!’ said Nesta.

She forgot the hospital, he told her cordially, and laughed at the notion of a ducking producing a cold or a cold a fever, or anything consumption, with him. So the ladies had to keep down their anxious minds and allow him to stand in wet clothing to eat his cold pie and salad.

Miss Priscilla Graves entering to them, became a witness that they were seductresses for inducing him to drink wine—and a sparkling wine.

‘It is to warm him,’ they pleaded; and she said: ’He must be warm from his walk’; and they said: ‘But he is wet’; and said she, without a show of feeling: ‘Warm water, then’; and Skepsey writhed, as if in the grasp of anatomists, at being the subject of female contention or humane consideration. Miss Graves caught signs of the possible proselyte in him; she remarked encouragingly:

‘I am sure he does not like it; he still has a natural taste.’

She distressed his native politeness, for the glass was in his hand, and he was fully aware of her high-principled aversion; and he profoundly bowed to principles, believing his England to be pillared on them; and the lady looked like one who bore the standard of a principle; and if we slap and pinch and starve our appetites, the idea of a principle seems entering us to support. Subscribing to a principle, our energies are refreshed; we have a faith in the country that was not with us before the act; and of a real well-founded faith come the glowing thoughts which we have at times: thoughts of England heading the nations; when the smell of an English lane under showers challenges Eden, and the threading of a London crowd tunes discords to the swell of a cathedral organ. It may be, that by the renunciation of any description of alcohol, a man will stand clearer-headed to serve his country. He may expect to have a clearer memory, for certain: he will not be asking himself, unable to decide, whether his master named a Mr. Journeyman or a Mr. Jarniman, as the person he declined to receive. Either of the two is repulsed upon his application, owing to the guilty similarity of sounds but what we are to think of is, our own sad state of inefficiency in failing to remember; which accuses our physical condition, therefore our habits.—Thus the little man debated, scarcely requiring more than to hear the right word, to be a convert and make him a garland of the proselyte’s fetters.

Destructively for the cause she advocated, Miss Priscilla gestured the putting forth of an abjuring hand, with the recommendation to him, so to put aside temptation that instant; and she signified in a very ugly jerk of her features, the vilely filthy stuff Morality thought it, however pleasing it might be to a palate corrupted by indulgence of the sensual appetites.

But the glass had been handed to him by the lady he respected, who looked angelical in offering it, divinely other than ugly; and to her he could not be discourteous; not even to pay his homage to the representative of a principle. He bowed to Miss Graves, and drank, and rushed forth; hearing shouts behind him.

Page 3471

His master had a packet of papers ready, easy for the pocket.

‘By the way, Skepsey,’ he said, ’if a man named Jarniman should call at the office, I will see him.’

Skepsey’s grey eyes came out.

Or was it Journeyman, that his master would not see; and Jarniman that he would?

His habit of obedience, pride of apprehension, and the time to catch the train, forbade inquiry. Besides he knew of himself of old, that his puzzles were best unriddled running.

The quick of pace are soon in the quick of thoughts.

Jarniman, then, was a man whom his master, not wanting to see, one day, and wanting to see, on another day, might wish to conciliate: a case of policy. Let Jarniman go. Journeyman, on the other hand, was nobody at all, a ghost of the fancy. Yet this Journeyman was as important an individual, he was a dread reality; more important to Skepsey in the light of patriot: and only in that light was he permitted of a scrupulous conscience and modest mind to think upon himself when the immediate subject was his master’s interests. For this Journeyman had not an excuse for existence in Mr. Radnor’s pronunciation: he was born of the buzz of a troubled ear, coming of a disordered brain, consequent necessarily upon a disorderly stomach, that might protest a degree of comparative innocence, but would be shamed utterly under inspection of the eye of a lady of principle.

What, then, was the value to his country of a servant who could not accurately recollect his master’s words! Miss Graves within him asked the rapid little man, whether indeed his ideas were his own after draughts of champagne.

The ideas, excited to an urgent animation by his racing trot, were a quiverful in flight over an England terrible to the foe and dancing on the green. Right so: but would we keep up the dance, we must be red iron to touch: and the fighter for conquering is the one who can last and has the open brain;—and there you have a point against alcohol. Yes, and Miss Graves, if she would press it, with her natural face, could be pleasant and persuasive: and she ought to be told she ought to marry, for the good of the country. Women taking liquor: Skepsey had a vision of his wife with rheumy peepers and miauly mouth, as he had once beheld the creature:—Oh! they need discipline not such would we have for the mothers of our English young. Decidedly the women of principle are bound to enter wedlock; they should be bound by law. Whereas, in the opposing case —the binding of the unprincipled to a celibate state—such a law would have saved Skepsey from the necessitated commission of deeds of discipline with one of the female sex, and have rescued his progeny from a likeness to the corn-stalk reverting to weed. He had but a son for England’s defence; and the frame of his boy might be set quaking

by a thump on the wind of a drum; the courage of William Barlow Skepsey would not stand against a sheep; it would wind-up hares to have a run at him out in the field. Offspring of a woman of principle! . . . but there is no rubbing out in life: why dream of it? Only that one would not have one's country the loser!

Page 3472

Dwell a moment on the reverse—and first remember the lesson of the Captivity of the Jews and the outcry of their backsliding and repentance:—see a nation of the honourably begotten; muscular men disdaining the luxuries they will occasionally condescend to taste, like some tribe in Greece; boxers, rowers, runners, climbers; braced, indomitable; magnanimous, as only the strong can be; an army at word, winning at a stroke the double battle of the hand and the heart: men who can walk the paths through the garden of the pleasures. They receive fitting mates, of a build to promise or aid in ensuring depth of chest and long reach of arm for their progeny.

Down goes the world before them.

And we see how much would be due for this to a corps of ladies like Miss Graves, not allowed to remain too long on the stalk of spinsterhood. Her age might count twenty-eight: too long! She should be taught that men can, though truly ordinary women cannot, walk these orderly paths through the garden. An admission to women, hinting restrictions, on a ticket marked ‘in moderation’ (meaning, that they may pluck a flower or fruit along the pathway border to which they are confined), speedily, alas, exhibits them at a mad scramble across the pleasure-beds. They know not moderation. Neither for their own sakes nor for the sakes of Posterity will they hold from excess, when they are not pledged to shun it.

The reason is, that their minds cannot conceive the abstract, as men do.

But there are grounds for supposing that the example before them of a sex exercising self-control in freedom, would induce women to pledge themselves to a similar abnegation, until they gain some sense of touch upon the impalpable duty to the generations coming after us thanks to the voluntary example we set them.

The stupendous task, which had hitherto baffled Skepsey in the course of conversational remonstrances with his wife;—that of getting the Idea of Posterity into the understanding of its principal agent, might then be mastered.

Therefore clearly men have to begin the salutary movement: it manifestly devolves upon them. Let them at once take to rigorous physical training. Women under compulsion, as vessels: men in their magnanimity, patriotically, voluntarily.

Miss Graves must have had an intimation for him; he guessed it; and it plunged him into a conflict with her, that did not suffer him to escape without ruefully feeling the feebleness of his vocabulary: and consequently he made a reluctant appeal to figures, and it hung upon the bolder exhibition of lists and tables as to whether he was beaten; and if beaten, he was morally her captive; and this being the case, nothing could be more repulsive to Skepsey; seeing that he, unable of his nature passively or partially to undertake a line of conduct, beheld himself wearing a detestable ‘ribbon,’ for sign of an

oath quite needlessly sworn (simply to satisfy the lady overcoming him with nimbler tongue), and blocking the streets, marching in bands beneath banners, howling hymns.

Page 3473

Statistics, upon which his master and friends, after exchanging opinions in argument, always fell back, frightened him. As long as they had no opponents of their own kind, they swept the field, they were intelligible, as the word ‘principle’ had become. But the appearance of one body of Statistics invariably brought up another; and the strokes and counterstrokes were like a play of quarter-staff on the sconce, to knock all comprehension out of Skepsey. Otherwise he would not unwillingly have inquired to-morrow into the Statistics of the controversy between the waters of the wells and of the casks, prepared to walk over to the victorious, however objectionable that proceeding. He hoped to question his master some day except that his master would very naturally have a tendency to sum-up in favour of wine—good wine, in moderation; just as Miss Graves for the cup of tea—not so thoughtfully stipulating that it should be good and not too copious. Statistics are according to their conjurors; they are not independent bodies, with native colours; they needs must be painted by the different hands they pass through, and they may be multiplied; a nought or so counts for nothing with the teller. Skepsey saw that. Yet they can overcome: even as fictitious battalions, they can overcome. He shrank from the results of a ciphering match having him for object, and was ashamed of feeling to Statistics as women to giants; nevertheless he acknowledged that the badge was upon him, if Miss Graves should beat her master in her array of figures, to insist on his wearing it, as she would, she certainly would. And against his internal conviction perhaps; with the knowledge that the figures were an unfortified display, and his oath of bondage an unmanly servility, the silliest of ceremonies! He was shockingly feminine to Statistics.

Mr. Durance despised them: he called them, arguing against Mr. Radnor, ‘those emotional things,’ not comprehensibly to Skepsey. But Mr. Durance, a very clever gentleman, could not be right in everything. He made strange remarks upon his country. Dr. Yatt attributed them to the state of ’his digestion.

And Mr. Fenellan had said of Mr. Durance that, as ’a barrister wanting briefs, the speech in him had been bottled too long and was an overripe wine dripping sour drops through the rotten cork.’ Mr. Fenellan said it laughing, he meant no harm. Skepsey was sure he had the words. He heard no more than other people hear; he remembered whole sentences, and many: on one of his runs, this active little machine, quickened by motion to fire, revived the audible of years back; whatever suited his turn of mind at the moment rushed to the rapid wheels within him. His master’s business and friends, his country’s welfare and advancement, these, with records, items, anticipations, of the manlier sports to decorate, were his current themes; all being chopped and tossed and mixed in salad accordance by his fervour of velocity. And if you would like

Page 3474

a further definition of Genius, think of it as a form of swiftness. It is the lively young great-grandson, in the brain, of the travelling force which mathematicians put to paper, in a row of astounding ciphers, for the motion of earth through space; to the generating of heat, whereof is multiplication, whereof deposited matter, and so your chaos, your half-lighted labyrinth, your, ceaseless pressure to evolvement; and then Light, and so Creation, order, the work of Genius. What do you say?

Without having a great brain, the measure of it possessed by Skepsey was alive under strong illumination. In his heart, while doing penance for his presumptuousness, he believed that he could lead regiments of men. He was not the army's General, he was the General's Lieutenant, now and then venturing to suggest a piece of counsel to his Chief. On his own particular drilled regiments, his Chief may rely; and on his knowledge of the country of the campaign, roads, morasses, masking hills, dividing rivers. He had mapped for himself mentally the battles of conquerors in his favourite historic reading; and he understood the value of a plan, and the danger of sticking to it, and the advantage of a big army for flanking; and he manoeuvred a small one cunningly to make it a bolt at the telling instant. Dartrey Fenellan had explained to him Frederick's oblique attack, Napoleon's employment of the artillery arm preparatory to the hurling of the cataract on the spot of weakness, Wellington's parallel march with Marmont up to the hour of the decisive cut through the latter at Salamanca; and Skepsey treated his enemy to the like, deferentially reporting the engagement to a Chief whom his modesty kept in eminence, for the receiving of the principal honours. As to his men, of all classes and sorts, they are so supple with training that they sustain a defeat like the sturdy pugilist a knock off his legs, and up smiling a minute after—one of the truly beautiful sights on this earth! They go at the double half a day, never sounding a single pair of bellows among them. They have their appetites in full control, to eat when they can, or cheerfully fast. They have healthy frames, you see; and as the healthy frame is not artificially heated, it ensues that, under any title you like, they profess the principles —into the bog we go, we have got round to it!—the principles of those horrible marching and chanting people!

Then, must our England, to be redoubtable to the enemy, be a detestable country for habitation?

Here was a knot.

Skepsey's head dropped lower, he went as a ram. The sayings of Mr. Durance about his dear England: that 'her remainder of life is in the activity of her diseases'—that 'she has so fed upon Pap of Compromise as to be unable any longer to conceive a muscular resolution': that 'she is animated only as the carcase to the blow-fly'; and so forth:—-charged on him during his wrestle with his problem. And

Page 3475

the gentlemen had said, had permitted himself to say, that our England's recent history was a provincial apothecary's exhibition of the battle of bane and antidote. Mr. Durance could hardly mean it. But how could one answer him when he spoke of the torpor of the people, and of the succeeding Governments as a change of lacqueys—or the purse-string's lacqueys? He said, that Old England has taken to the arm-chair for good, and thinks it her whole business to pronounce opinions and listen to herself; and that, in the face of an armed Europe, this great nation is living on sufferance. Oh!

Skepsey had uttered the repudiating exclamation.

'Feel quite up to it?' he was asked by his neighbour.

The mover of armed hosts for the defence of the country sat in a third-class carriage of the train, approaching the first of the stations on the way to town. He was instantly up to the level of an external world, and fell into give and take with a burly broad communicative man; located in London, but born in the North, in view of Durham cathedral, as he thanked his Lord; who was of the order of pork-butcher; which succulent calling had carried him down to near upon the borders of Surrey and Sussex, some miles beyond the new big house of a Mister whose name he had forgotten, though he had heard it mentioned by an acquaintance interested in the gentleman's doings. But his object was to have a look at a rare breed of swine, worth the journey; that didn't run to fat so much as to flavour, had longer legs, sharp snouts to plump their hams; over from Spain, it seemed; and the gentleman owning them was for selling them, finding them wild past correction. But the acquaintance mentioned, who was down to visit t' other gentleman's big new edifice in workmen's hands, had a mother, who had been cook to a family, and was now widow of a cook's shop; ham, beef, and sausages, prime pies to order; and a good specimen herself; and if ever her son saw her spirit at his bedside, there wouldn't be room for much else in that chamber—-supposing us to keep our shapes. But he was the right sort of son, anxious to push his mother's shop where he saw a chance, and do it cheap; and those foreign pigs, after a disappointment to their importer, might be had pretty cheap, and were accounted tasty.

Skepsey's main thought was upon war: the man had discoursed of pigs.

He informed the man of his having heard from a scholar, that pigs had been the cause of more bloody battles than any other animal.

How so? the pork-butcher asked, and said he was not much of a scholar, and pigs might be provoking, but he had not heard they were a cause of strife between man and man. For possession of them, Skepsey explained. Oh! possession! Why, we've heard of bloody battles for the possession of women! Men will fight for almost anything they care to get or call their own, the pork-butcher said; and he praised Old England for avoiding war. Skepsey nodded. How if war is forced on us? Then we fight. Suppose we are not prepared?—We soon get that up. Skepsey requested him to state the

degree of resistance he might think he could bring against a pair of skilful fists, in a place out of hearing of the police.

Page 3476

‘Say, you!’ said the pork-butcher, and sharply smiled, for he was a man of size.

‘I would give you two minutes,’ rejoined Skepsey, eyeing him intently and kindly: insomuch that it could be seen he was not in the conundrum vein.

‘Rather short allowance, eh, master?’ said the bigger man. ‘Feel here’; he straightened out his arm and doubled it, raising a proud bridge of muscle.

Skepsey performed the national homage to muscle.

‘Twice that, would not help without the science,’ he remarked, and let his arm be gripped in turn.

The pork-butcher’s throat sounded, as it were, commas and colons, punctuations in his reflections, while he tightened fingers along the iron lump. ‘Stringy. You’re a wiry one, no mistake.’ It was encomium. With the ingrained contempt of size for a smallness that has not yet taught it the prostrating lesson, he said: ‘Weight tells.’

‘In a wrestle,’ Skepsey admitted. ’Allow me to say, you would not touch me.’

‘And how do you know I’m not a trifle handy with the maulers myself?’

‘You will pardon me for saying, it would be worse for you if you were.’

The pork-butcher was flung backward. ’Are you a Professor, may I inquire?’

Skepsey rejected the title. ’I can engage to teach young men, upon a proper observance of first principles.’

‘They be hanged!’ cried the ruffled pork-butcher. ’Our best men never got it out of books. Now, you tell me—you’ve got a spiflicating style of talk about you—no brag, you tell me—course, the best man wins, if you mean that: now, if I was one of ’em, and I fetches you a bit of a flick, how then? Would you be ready to step out with a real Professor?’

‘I should claim a fair field,’ was the answer, made in modesty.

‘And you’d expect to whop me with they there principles of yours?’

‘I should expect to.’

‘Bang me!’ was roared. After a stare at the mild little figure with the fitfully dead-levelled large grey eyes in front of him, the pork-butcher resumed: ’Take you for the man you say you be, you’re just the man for my friend Jam and me. He dearly loves to see a set-to, self the same. What prettier? And if you would be so obliging some day as to favour

us with a display, we'd head a cap conformably, whether you'd the best of it, according to your expectations, or t' other way:—For there never was shame in a jolly good licking as the song says: that is, if you take it and make it appear jolly good. And find you an opponent meet and fit, never doubt. Ever had the worse of an encounter, sir?'

'Often, Sir.'

'Well, that's good. And it didn't destroy your confidence?'

'Added to it, I hope.'

At this point, it became a crying necessity for Skepsey to escape from an area of boastfulness, into which he had fallen inadvertently; and he hastened to apologize 'for his personal reference,' that was intended for an illustration of our country caught unawares by a highly trained picked soldiery, inferior in numbers to the patriotic levies, but sharp at the edge and knowing how to strike. Measure the axe, measure the tree; and which goes down first?

Page 3477

‘Invasion, is it?—and you mean, we’re not to hit back?’ the pork-butcher bellowed, and presently secured a murmured approbation from an audience of three, that had begun to comprehend the dialogue, and strengthened him in a manner to teach Skepsey the foolishness of ever urging analogies of too extended a circle to close sharply on the mark. He had no longer a chance, he was overborne, identified with the fated invader, rolled away into the chops of the Channel, to be swallowed up entire, and not a rag left of him, but John Bull tucking up his shirtsleeves on the shingle beach, ready for a second or a third; crying to them to come on.

Warmed by his Bullish victory, and friendly to the vanquished, the pork-butcher told Skepsey he should like to see more of him, and introduced himself on a card Benjamin Shaplow, not far from the Bank.

They parted at the Terminus, where three shrieks of an engine, sounding like merry messages of the damned to their congeners in the anticipatory stench of the cab-droppings above, disconnected sane hearing; perverted it, no doubt. Or else it was the stamp of a particular name on his mind, which impressed Skepsey, as he bored down the street and across the bridge, to fancy in recollection, that Mr. Shaplow, when reiterating the wish for self and friend to witness a display of his cunning with the fists, had spoken the name of Jarniman. An unusual name yet more than one Jarniman might well exist. And unlikely that a friend of the pork-butcher would be the person whom Mr. Radnor first prohibited and then desired to receive. It hardly mattered:—-considering that the Dutch Navy did really, incredible as it seems now, come sailing a good way up the River Thames, into the very main artery of Old England. And what thought the Tower of it? Skepsey looked at the Tower in sympathy, wondering whether the Tower had seen those impudent Dutch a nice people at home, he had heard. Mr. Shaplow’s Jarniman might actually be Mr. Radnor’s, he inclined to think. At any rate he was now sure of the name.

CHAPTER XI

Wherein we behold the couple justified of love having sight of their scourge

Fenellan, in a musing exclamation, that was quite spontaneous, had put a picture on the departing Skepsey, as observed from an end of the Lakelands upper terrace-walk.

‘Queer little water-wagtail it is!’ And Lady Grace Halley and Miss Graves and Mrs. Cormyn, snugly silken dry ones, were so taken with the pretty likeness after hearing Victor call the tripping dripping creature the happiest man in England, that they nursed it in their minds for a Bewick tailpiece to the chapter of a pleasant rural day. It imbedded the day in an idea that it had been rural.

Page 3478

We are indebted almost for construction to those who will define us briefly: we are but scattered leaves to the general comprehension of us until such a work of binding and labelling is done. And should the definition be not so correct as brevity pretends to make it at one stroke, we are at least rendered portable; thus we pass into the conceptions of our fellows, into the records, down to posterity. Anecdotes of England's happiest man were related, outlines of his personal history requested. His nomination in chief among the traditionally very merry Islanders was hardly borne out by the tale of his enchainment with a drunken yokefellow—unless upon the Durance version of the felicity of his countrymen; still, the water-wagtail carried it, Skepsey trotted into memories. Heroes conducted up Fame's temple-steps by ceremonious historians, who are studious, when the platform is reached, of the art of setting them beneath the flambeau of a final image, before thrusting them inside to be rivetted on their pedestals, have an excellent chance of doing the same, let but the provident narrators direct that image to paint the thing a moth-like humanity desires, in the thing it shrinks from. Miss Priscilla Graves now fastened her meditations upon Skepsey; and it was important to him.

Tobacco withdrew the haunting shadow of the Rev. Septimus Barmby from Nesta. She strolled beside Louise de Seilles, to breathe sweet-sweet in the dear friend's ear and tell her she loved her. The presence of the German had, without rousing animosity, damped the young Frenchwoman, even to a revulsion when her feelings had been touched by hearing praise of her France, and wounded by the subjects of the praise. She bore the national scar, which is barely skin-clothing of a gash that will not heal since her country was overthrown and dismembered. Colney Durance could excuse the unreasonableness in her, for it had a dignity, and she controlled it, and quietly suffered, trusting to the steady, tireless, concentrated aim of her France. In the Gallic mind of our time, France appears as a prematurely buried Glory, that heaves the mound oppressing breath and cannot cease; and calls hourly, at times keenly, to be remembered, rescued from the pain and the mould-spots of that foul sepulture. Mademoiselle and Colney were friends, partly divided by her speaking once of revanche; whereupon he assumed the chair of the Moralist, with its right to lecture, and went over to the enemy; his talk savoured of a German. Our holding of the balance, taking two sides, is incomprehensible to a people quivering with the double wound to body and soul. She was of Breton blood. Cymric enough was in Nesta to catch any thrill from her and join to her mood, if it hung out a colour sad or gay, and was noble, as any mood of this dear Louise would surely be.

Page 3479

Nataly was not so sympathetic. Only the Welsh and pure Irish are quick at the feelings of the Celtic French. Nataly came of a Yorkshire stock; she had the bravery, humaneness and generous temper of our civilized North, and a taste for mademoiselle's fine breeding, with a distaste for the singular air of superiority in composure which it was granted to mademoiselle to wear with an unassailable reserve when the roughness of the commercial boor was obtrusive. She said of her to Colney, as they watched the couple strolling by the lake below: 'Nesta brings her out of her frosts. I suppose it's the presence of Dr. Schlesien. I have known it the same after an evening of Wagner's music.'

'Richard Wagner Germanized ridicule of the French when they were down,' said Colney. 'She comes of a blood that never forgives.'

'"Never forgives" is horrible to think of! I fancied you liked your "Kelts," as you call them.'

Colney seized on a topic that shelved a less agreeable one that he saw coming. 'You English won't descend to understand what does not resemble you. The French are in a state of feverish patriotism. You refuse to treat them for a case of fever. They are lopped of a limb: you tell them to be at rest!'

'You know I am fond of them.'

'And the Kelts, as they are called, can't and won't forgive injuries; look at Ireland, look at Wales, and the Keltic Scot. Have you heard them talk? It happened in the year 1400: it's alive to them as if it were yesterday. Old History is as dead to the English as their first father. They beg for the privilege of pulling the forelock to the bearers of the titles of the men who took their lands from them and turn them to the uses of cattle. The Saxon English had, no doubt, a heavier thrashing than any people allowed to subsist ever received: you see it to this day; the crick of the neck at the name of a lord is now concealed and denied, but they have it and betray the effects; and it's patent in their Journals, all over their literature. Where it's not seen, another blood's at work. The Kelt won't accept the form of slavery. Let him be servile, supple, cunning, treacherous, and to appearance time-serving, he will always remember his day of manly independence and who robbed him: he is the poetic animal of the races of modern men.'

'You give him Pagan colours.'

'Natural colours. He does not offer the other cheek or turn his back to be kicked after a knock to the ground. Instead of asking him to forgive, which he cannot do, you must teach him to admire. A mercantile community guided by Political Economy from the ledger to the banquet presided over by its Dagon Capital, finds that difficult. However, there 's the secret of him; that I respect in him. His admiration of an enemy or

oppressor doing great deeds, wins him entirely. He is an active spirit, not your negative passive letter-of-Scripture Insensible. And his faults, short of ferocity, are amusing.'

Page 3480

‘But the fits of ferocity!’

’They are inconscient, real fits. They come of a hot nerve. He is manageable, sober too, when his mind is charged. As to the French people, they are the most mixed of any European nation; so they are packed with contrasts: they are full of sentiment, they are sharply logical; free-thinkers, devotees; affectionate, ferocious; frivolous, tenacious; the passion of the season operating like sun or moon on these qualities; and they can reach to ideality out of sensualism. Below your level, they’re above it: a paradox is at home with them!’

‘My friend, you speak seriously—an unusual compliment,’ Nataly said, and ungratefully continued: ’You know what is occupying me. I want your opinion. I guess it. I want to hear—a mean thirst perhaps, and you would pay me any number of compliments to avoid the subject; but let me hear:—this house!’

Colney shrugged in resignation. ‘Victor works himself out,’ he replied.

‘We are to go through it all again?’

‘If you have not the force to contain him.’

‘How contain him?’

Up went Colney’s shoulders.

‘You may see it all before you,’ he said, ’straight as the Seine chaussee from the hill of La Roche Guyon.’

He looked for her recollection of the scene.

‘Ah, the happy ramble that year!’ she cried. ’And my Nesta just seven. We had been six months at Craye. Every day of our life together looks happy to me, looking back, though I know that every day had the same troubles. I don’t think I’m deficient in courage; I think I could meet .... But the false position so cruelly weakens me. I am no woman’s equal when I have to receive or visit. It seems easier to meet the worst in life-danger, death, anything. Pardon me for talking so. Perhaps we need not have left Craye or Creckholt . . . ?’ she hinted an interrogation. ’Though I am not sorry; it is not good to be where one tastes poison. Here it may be as deadly, worse. Dear friend, I am so glad you remember La Roche Guyon. He was popular with the dear French people.’

‘In spite of his accent.’

‘It is not so bad?’

‘And that you’ll defend!’

‘Consider: these neighbours we come among; they may have heard . . .’

‘Act on the assumption.’

’You forget the principal character. Victor promises; he may have learnt a lesson at Creckholt. But look at this house he has built. How can I—any woman—contain him! He must have society.’

‘Paraitre!’

‘He must be in the front. He has talked of Parliament.’

Colney’s liver took the thrust of a skewer through it. He spoke as in meditative encomium: ’His entry into Parliament would promote himself and family to a station of eminence naked over the Clock Tower of the House.’

Page 3481

She moaned. ’At the vilest, I cannot regret my conduct—bear what I may. I can bear real pain: what kills me is, the suspicion. And I feel it like a guilty wretch! And I do not feel the guilt! I should do the same again, on reflection. I do believe it saved him. I do; oh! I do, I do. I cannot expect my family to see with my eyes. You know them—my brother and sisters think I have disgraced them; they put no value on my saving him. It sounds childish; it is true. He had fallen into a terrible black mood.’

‘He had an hour of gloom.’

‘An hour!’

‘But an hour, with him! It means a good deal.’

’Ah, friend, I take your words. He sinks terribly when he sinks at all.—Spare us a little while.—We have to judge of what is good in the circumstances: I hear your reply! But the principal for me to study is Victor. You have accused me of being the voice of the enamoured woman. I follow him, I know; I try to advise; I find it is wisdom to submit. My people regard my behaviour as a wickedness or a madness. I did save him. I joined my fate with his. I am his mate, to help, and I cannot oppose him, to distract him. I do my utmost for privacy. He must entertain. Believe me, I feel for them—sisters and brother. And now that my sisters are married . . . My brother has a man’s hardness.’

‘Colonel Dreighton did not speak harshly, at our last meeting.’

‘He spoke of me?’

‘He spoke in the tone of a brother.’

’Victor promises—I won’t repeat it. Yes, I see the house! There appears to be a prospect, a hope—I cannot allude to it. Craye and Creckholt may have been some lesson to him. Selwyn spoke of me kindly? Ah, yes, it is the way with my people to pretend that Victor has been the ruin of me, that they may come round to family sentiments. In the same way, his relatives, the Duvidney ladies, have their picture of the woman misleading him. Imagine me the naughty adventuress!’—Nataly falsified the thought insurgent at her heart, in adding: ’I do not say I am blameless.’ It was a concession to the circumambient enemy, of whom even a good friend was apart, and not better than a respectful emissary. The dearest of her friends belonged to that hostile world. Only Victor, no other, stood with her against the world. Her child, yes; the love of her child she had; but the child’s destiny was an alien phantom, looking at her with harder eyes than she had vision of in her family. She did not say she was blameless, did not affect the thought. She would have wished to say, for small encouragement she would have said, that her case could be pleaded.

Colney's features were not inviting, though the expression was not repellent. She sighed deeply; and to count on something helpful by mentioning it, reverted to the 'prospect' which there appeared to be. 'Victor speaks of the certainty of his release.'

His release! Her language pricked a satirist's gallbladder. Colney refrained from speaking to wound, and enjoyed a silence that did it.

Page 3482

‘Do you see any possibility?—you knew her,’ she said coldly.

’Counting the number of times he has been expecting the release, he is bound to believe it near at hand.’

‘You don’t?’ she asked: her bosom was up in a crisis of expectation for the answer: and on a pause of half-a-minute, she could have uttered the answer herself.

He perceived the insane eagerness through her mask, and despised it, pitying the woman. ‘And you don’t,’ he said. ’You catch at delusions, to excuse the steps you consent to take. Or you want me to wear the blinkers, the better to hoodwink your own eyes. You see it as well as I: If you enter that house, you have to go through the same as at Creckholt:—and he’ll be the first to take fright.’

’He finds you in tears: he is immensely devoted; he flings up all to protect “his Nataly."’

’No: you are unjust to him. He would fling up all:’—

‘But his Nataly prefers to be dragged through fire? As you please!’

She bowed to her chastisement. One motive in her consultation with him came of the knowledge of his capacity to inflict it and his honesty in the act, and a thirst she had to hear the truth loud-tongued from him; together with a feeling that he was excessive and satiric, not to be read by the letter of his words: and in consequence, she could bear the lash from him, and tell her soul that he overdid it, and have an unjustly-treated self to cherish.—But in very truth she was a woman who loved to hear the truth; she was formed to love the truth her position reduced her to violate; she esteemed the hearing it as medical to her; she selected for counsellor him who would apply it: so far she went on the straight way; and the desire for a sustaining deception from the mouth of a trustworthy man set her hanging on his utterances with an anxious hope of the reverse of what was to come and what she herself apprehended, such as checked her pulses and iced her feet and fingers. The reason being, not that she was craven or absurd or paradoxical, but that, living at an intenser strain upon her nature than she or any around her knew, her strength snapped, she broke down by chance there where Colney was rendered spiteful in beholding the display of her inconsequent if not puling sex.

She might have sought his counsel on another subject, if a paralyzing chill of her frame in the foreview of it had allowed her to speak: she felt grave alarms in one direction, where Nesta stood in the eye of her father; besides an unformed dread that the simplicity in generosity of Victor’s nature was doomed to show signs of dross ultimately, under the necessity he imposed upon himself to run out his forecasts, and scheme, and defensively compel the world to serve his ends, for the protection of those dear to him.

Page 3483

At night he was particularly urgent with her for the harmonious duet in praise of Lakelands; and plied her with questions all round and about it, to bring out the dulcet accord. He dwelt on his choice of costly marbles, his fireplace and mantelpiece designs, the great hall, and suggestions for imposing and beautiful furniture; concordantly enough, for the large, the lofty and rich of colour won her enthusiasm; but overwhelmingly to any mood of resistance; and strangely in a man who had of late been adopting, as if his own, a modern tone, or the social and literary hints of it, relating to the right uses of wealth, and the duty as well as the delight of living simply.

‘Fredi was pleased.’

‘Yes, she was, dear.’

’She is our girl, my love. “I could live and die here!” Live, she may. There’s room enough.’

Nataly saw the door of a covert communication pointed at in that remark. She gathered herself for an effort to do battle.

‘She’s quite a child, Victor.’

’The time begins to run. We have to look forward now:—I declare, it’s I who seem the provident mother for Fredi!’

’Let our girl wait; don’t hurry her mind to . . . She is happy with her father and mother. She is in the happiest time of her life, before those feelings distract.’

‘If we see good fortune for her, we can’t let it pass her.’

A pang of the resolution now to debate the case with Victor, which would be of necessity to do the avoided thing and roll up the forbidden curtain opening on their whole history past and prospective, was met in Nataly’s bosom by the more bitter immediate confession that she was not his match. To speak would be to succumb; and shamefully after the effort; and hopelessly after being overborne by him. There was not the anticipation of a set contest to animate the woman’s naturally valiant heart; he was too strong: and his vividness in urgency overcame her in advance, fascinated her sensibility through recollection; he fanned an inclination, lighted it to make it a passion, a frenzied resolve—she remembered how and when. She had quivering cause to remember the fateful day of her step, in a letter received that morning from a married sister, containing no word of endearment or proposal for a meeting. An unregretted day, if Victor would think of the dues to others; that is, would take station with the world to see his reflected position, instead of seeing it through their self-justifying knowledge of the honourable truth of their love, and pressing to claim and snatch at whatsoever the world bestows on its orderly subjects.

Page 3484

They had done evil to no one as yet. Nataly thought that; not-withstanding the outcry of the ancient and withered woman who bore Victor Radnor's name: for whom, in consequence of the rod the woman had used, this tenderest of hearts could summon no emotion. If she had it, the thing was not to be hauled up to consciousness. Her feeling was, that she forgave the wrinkled Malignity: pity and contrition dissolving in the effort to produce the placable forgiveness. She was frigid because she knew rightly of herself, that she in the place of power would never have struck so meanly. But the mainspring of the feeling in an almost remorseless bosom drew from certain chance expressions of retrospective physical distaste on Victor's part;—hard to keep from a short utterance between the nuptial two, of whom the unshamed exuberant male has found the sweet reverse in his mate, a haven of heavenliness, to delight in:—these conjoined with a woman's unspoken pleading ideas of her own, on her own behalf, had armed her jealously in vindication of Nature.

Now, as long as they did no palpable wrong about them, Nataly could argue her case in her conscience—deep down and out of hearing, where women under scourge of the laws they have not helped decree may and do deliver their minds. She stood in that subterranean recess for Nature against the Institutions of Man: a woman little adapted for the post of revel; but to this, by the agency of circumstances, it had come; she who was designed by nature to be an ornament of those Institutions opposed them and when thinking of the rights and the conduct of the decrepit Legitimate—virulent in a heathen vindictiveness declaring itself holy—she had Nature's logic, Nature's voice, for self-defence. It was eloquent with her, to the deafening of other voices in herself, even to the convincing of herself, when she was wrought by the fires within to feel elementally. The other voices within her issued of the acknowledged dues to her family and to the world—the civilization protecting women: sentences thereanent in modern books and Journals. But the remembrance of moods of fiery exaltation, when the Nature she called by name of Love raised the chorus within to stop all outer buzzing, was, in a perpetual struggle with a whirlpool, a constant support while she and Victor were one at heart. The sense of her standing alone made her sway; and a thought of differences with him caused frightful apprehensions of the abyss.

Luxuriously she applied to his public life for witness that he had governed wisely as well as affectionately so long; and he might therefore, with the chorussing of the world of public men, expect a woman blindfold to follow his lead. But no; we may be rebels against our time and its Laws: if we are really for Nature, we are not lawless. Nataly's untutored scruples, which came side by side with her ability to plead for her acts, restrained her from complicity in the ensnaring of a young man of social rank to

Page 3485

espouse the daughter of a couple socially insurgent-stained, to common thinking, should denunciation come. The Nature upholding her fled at a vision of a stranger entangled. Pitiable to reflect, that he was not one of the adventurer-lords of prey who hunt and run down shadowed heiresses and are congratulated on their luck in a tolerating country! How was the young man to be warned? How, under the happiest of suppositions, propitiate his family! And such a family, if consenting with knowledge, would consent only for the love of money. It was angling with as vile a bait as the rascal lord's. Humiliation hung on the scheme; it struck to scorching in the contemplation of it. And it darkened her reading of Victor's character.

She did not ask for the specification of a 'good fortune that might pass'; wishing to save him from his wonted twists of elusiveness, and herself with him from the dread discussion it involved upon one point.

'The day was pleasant to all, except perhaps poor mademoiselle,' she said.

'Peridon should have come?'

'Present or absent, his chances are not brilliant, I fear.'

'And Pempton and Priscy!'

'They are growing cooler!'

'With their grotesque objections to one another's habits at table!'

'Can we ever hope to get them over it?'

'When Priscy drinks Port and Pempton munches beef, Colney says.'

'I should say, when they feel warmly enough to think little of their differences.'

'Fire smoothes the creases, yes; and fire is what they're both wanting in. Though Priscy has Concert-pathos in her voice:—couldn't act a bit! And Pempton's 'cello tones now and then have gone through me—simply from his fiddle-bow, I believe. Don't talk to me of feeling in a couple, within reach of one another and sniffing objections.—Good, then, for a successful day to-day so far?'

He neared her, wooing her; and she assented, with a franker smile than she had worn through the day.

The common burden on their hearts—the simple discussion to come of the task of communicating dire actualities to their innocent Nesta—was laid aside.

CHAPTER XII

Treats of the dumbness possible with members of A *household having one heart*

Two that live together in union are supposed to be intimate on every leaf. Particularly when they love one another and the cause they have at heart is common to them in equal measure, the uses of a cordial familiarity forbid reserves upon important matters between them, as we think; not thinking of an imposed secretiveness, beneath the false external of submissiveness, which comes of an experience of repeated inefficiency to maintain a case in opposition, on the part of the loquently weaker of the pair. In Constitutional

Page 3486

Kingdoms a powerful Government needs not to be tyrannical to lean oppressively; it is more serviceable to party than agreeable to country; and where the alliance of men and women binds a loving couple, of whom one is a torrent of persuasion, their differings are likely to make the other resemble a log of the torrent. It is borne along; it dreams of a distant corner of the way for a determined stand; it consents to its whirling in anticipation of an undated hour when it will no longer be neutral.

There may be, moreover, while each has the key of the fellow breast, a mutually sensitive nerve to protest against intrusion of light or sound. The cloud over the name of their girl could now strike Nataly and Victor dumb in their taking of counsel. She divined that his hint had encouraged him to bring the crisis nearer, and he that her comprehension had become tremblingly awake. They shrank, each of them, the more from an end drawing closely into view. All subjects glooming off or darkening up to it were shunned by them verbally, and if they found themselves entering beneath that shadow, conversation passed to an involuntary gesture, more explicit with him, significant of the prohibited, though not acknowledging it.

All the stronger was it Victor's purpose, leaping in his fashion to the cover of action as an escape from perplexity, to burn and scheme for the wedding of their girl—the safe wedding of that dearest, to have her protected, secure, with the world warm about her. And he well knew why his Nataly had her look of a closed vault (threatening, if opened, to thunder upon Life) when he dropped his further hints. He chose to call it feminine inconsistency, in a woman who walked abroad with a basket of marriage-ties for the market on her arm. He knew that she would soon have to speak the dark words to their girl; and the idea of any doing of it, caught at his throat. Reasonably she dreaded the mother's task; pardonably indeed. But it is for the mother to do, with a girl. He deputed it lightly to the mother because he could see himself stating the facts to a son. 'And, my dear boy, you will from this day draw your five thousand a year, and we double it on the day of your marriage, living at Lakelands or where you will.'

His desire for his girl's protection by the name of one of our great Families, urged him to bind Nataly to the fact, with the argument, that it was preferable for the girl to hear their story during her green early youth, while she reposed her beautiful blind faith in the discretion of her parents, and as an immediate step to the placing of her hand in a husband's. He feared that her mother required schooling to tell the story vindicatingly and proudly, in a manner to distinguish instead of degrading or temporarily seeming to accept degradation.

The world would weigh on her confession of the weight of the world on her child; she would want inciting and strengthening, if one judged of her capacity to meet the trial by her recent bearing; and how was he to do it! He could not imagine himself encountering the startled, tremulous, nascent intelligence in those pure brown darklashed eyes of Nesta; he pitied the poor mother. Fancifully directing her to say this and that to the girl, his tongue ran till it was cut from his heart and left to wag dead colourless words.

Page 3487

The prospect of a similar business of exposition, certainly devolving upon the father in treaty with the fortunate youth, gripped at his vitals a minute, so intense was his pride in appearing woundless and scarless, a shining surface, like pure health's, in the sight of men. Nevertheless he skimmed the story, much as a lecturer strikes his wand on the prominent places of a map, that is to show us how he arrived at the principal point, which we are all agreed to find chiefly interesting. This with Victor was the naming of Nesta's bridal endowment. He rushed to it. 'My girl will have ten thousand a year settled on her the day of her marriage.' Choice of living at Lakelands was offered.

It helped him over the unpleasant part of that interview. At the same time, it moved him to a curious contempt of the youth. He had to conjure-up an image of the young man in person, to correct the sentiment:—and it remained as a kind of bruise only half cured.

Mr. Dudley Sowerby was not one of the youths whose presence would rectify such an abstract estimate of the genus pursuer. He now came frequently of an evening, to practise a duet for flutes with Victor;—a Mercadante, honeyed and flowing; too honeyed to suit a style that, as Fenellan characterized it to Nataly, went through the music somewhat like an inquisitive tourist in a foreign town, conscientious to get to the end of the work of pleasure; until the notes had become familiar, when it rather resembled a constable's walk along the midnight streets into collision with a garlanded roysterer; and the man of order and the man of passion, true to the measure though they were, seeming to dissent, almost to wrangle, in their different ways of winding out the melody, on to the last movement; which was plainly a question between home to the strayed reveller's quarters or off to the lockup. Victor was altogether the younger of the two. But his vehement accompaniment was a tutorship; Mr. Sowerby improved; it was admitted by Nesta and mademoiselle that he gained a show of feeling; he had learnt that feeling was wanted. Passion, he had not a notion of: otherwise he would not be delaying; the interview, dramatized by the father of the young bud of womanhood, would be taking place, and the entry into Lakelands calculable, for Nataly's comfort, as under the aegis of the Cantor earldom. Gossip flies to a wider circle round the members of a great titled family, is inaudible; or no longer the diptherian whisper the commonalty hear of the commonalty: and so we see the social uses of our aristocracy survive. We do not want the shield of any family; it is the situation that wants it; Nataly ought to be awake to the fact. One blow and we have silenced our enemy: Nesta's wedding-day has relieved her parents.

Page 3488

Victor's thoughts upon the instrument for striking that, blow, led him to suppose Mr. Sowerby might be meditating on the extent of the young lady's fortune. He talked randomly of money, in a way to shatter Nataly's conception of him. He talked of City affairs at table, as it had been his practice to shun the doing; and hit the resounding note on mines, which have risen in the market like the crest of a serpent, casting a certain spell upon the mercantile understanding. 'Fredi's diamonds from her own mine, or what once was—and she still reserves a share,' were to be shown to Mr. Sowerby.

Nataly respected the young fellow for not displaying avidity at the flourish of the bait, however it might be affecting him; and she fancied that he did laboriously, in his way earnestly, study her girl, to sound for harmony between them, previous to a wooing. She was a closer reader of social character than Victor; from refraining to run on the broad lines which are but faintly illustrative of the individual one in being common to all —unless we have hit by chance on an example of the downright in roguery or folly or simple goodness. Mr. Sowerby'g bearing to Nesta was hardly warmed by the glitter of diamonds. His next visit showed him livelier in courtliness, brighter, fresher; but that was always his way at the commencement of every visit, as if his reflections on the foregone had come to a satisfactory conclusion; and the labours of the new study of the maiden ensued again in due course to deaden him.

Gentleman he was. In the recognition of his quality as a man of principle and breeding, Nataly was condemned by thoughts of Nesta's future to question whether word or act of hers should, if inclination on both sides existed, stand between her girl and a true gentleman. She counselled herself, as if the counsel were in requisition, to be passive; and so doing, she more acutely than Victor—save in his chance flashes—discerned the twist of her very nature caused by their false position. And her panacea for ills, the lost little cottage, would not have averted it: she would there have had the same coveting desire to name a man of breeding, honour, station, for Nesta's husband. Perhaps in the cottage, choosing at leisure, her consent to see the brilliant young creature tied to the best of dull men would have been unready, without the girl to push it. For the Hon. Dudley was lamentably her pupil in liveliness; he took the second part, as it is painful for a woman with the old-fashioned ideas upon the leading of the sexes to behold; resembling in his look the deaf, who constantly require to have an observation repeated; resembling the most intelligent of animals, which we do not name, and we reprove ourselves for seeing likeness.

Page 3489

Yet the likeness or apparent likeness would suggest that we have not so much to fear upon the day of the explanation to him. Some gain is there. Shameful thought! Nataly hastened her mind to gather many instances or indications testifying to the sterling substance in young Mr. Sowerby, such as a mother would pray for her son-in-law to possess. She discovered herself feeling as the burdened mother, not providently for her girl, in the choice of a mate. The perception was clear, and not the less did she continue working at the embroidery of Mr. Sowerby on the basis of his excellent moral foundations, all the while hoping, praying, that he might not be lured on to the proposal for Nesta. But her subservience to the power of the persuasive will in Victor—which was like the rush of a conflagration—compelled her to think realizingly of any scheme he allowed her darkly to read.

Opposition to him, was comparable to the stand of blocks of timber before flame. Colney Durance had done her the mischief we take from the pessimist when we are overweighted: in darkening the vision of external aid from man or circumstance to one who felt herself mastered. Victor could make her treacherous to her wishes, in revolt against them, though the heart protested. His first conquest of her was in her blood, to weaken a spirit of resistance. For the precedent of submission is a charm upon the faint-hearted through love: it unwinds, unwills them. Nataly resolved fixedly, that there must be a day for speaking; and she had her moral sustainment in the resolve; she had also a tormenting consciousness of material support in the thought, that the day was not present, was possibly distant, might never arrive. Would Victor's release come sooner? And that was a prospect bearing resemblance to hopes of the cure of a malady through a sharp operation.

These were matters going on behind the curtain; as wholly vital to her, and with him at times almost as dominant, as the spiritual in memory, when flesh has left but its shining track in dust of a soul outwritten; and all their talk related to the purchase of furniture, the expeditions to Lakelands, music, public affairs, the pardonable foibles of friends created to amuse their fellows, operatic heroes and heroines, exhibitions of pictures, the sorrows of Crowned Heads, so serviceable ever to mankind as an admonition to the ambitious, a salve to the envious!—in fine, whatsoever can entertain or affect the most social of couples, domestically without a care to appearance. And so far they partially —dramatically—deceived themselves by imposing on the world while they talked and duetted; for the purchase of furniture from a flowing purse is a cheerful occupation; also a City issuing out of hospital, like this poor City of London, inspires good citizens to healthy activity. But the silence upon what they were most bent on, had the sinister effect upon Victor, of obscuring his mental hold of the beloved woman, drifting her away from

Page 3490

him. In communicating Fenellan's news through the lawyer Carling of Mrs. Burman's intentions, he was aware that there was an obstacle to his being huggingly genial, even candidly genial with her, until he could deal out further news, corroborative and consecutive, to show the action of things as progressive. Fenellan had sunk into his usual apathy:—and might plead the impossibility of his moving faster than the woman professing to transform herself into, beneficence out of malignity;—one could hear him saying the words! Victor had not seen him since last Concert evening, and he deemed it as well to hear the words Fenellan's mouth had to say. He called at an early hour of the Westward tidal flow at the Insurance Office looking over the stormy square of the first of Seamen.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LATEST OF MRS. BURMAN

After cursory remarks about the business of the Office and his friend's contributions to periodical literature, in which he was interested for as long as he had assurance that the safe income depending upon official duties was not endangered by them, Victor kicked his heels to and fro. Fenellan waited for him to lead.

'Have you seen that man, her lawyer, again?'

'I have dined with Mr. Carling:—capital claret.'

Emptiness was in the reply.

Victor curbed himself and said: 'By the way, you're not likely to have dealings with Blathenoy. The fellow has a screw to the back of a shifty eye; I see it at work to fix the look for business. I shall sit on the Board of my Bank. One hears things. He lives in style at Wrensham. By the way, Fredi has little Mab Mountney from Creckholt staying with her. You said of little Mabsy—"Here she comes into the room all pink and white, like a daisy." She's the daisy still; reminds us of our girl at that age.—So, then, we come to another dead block!'

'Well, no; it's a chemist's shop, if that helps us on,' said Fenellan, settling to a new posture in his chair. 'She's there of an afternoon for hours.'

'You mean it's she?'

'The lady. I 'll tell you. I have it from Carling, worthy man; and lawyers can be brought to untruss a point over a cup of claret. He's a bit of a "Mackenzie Man," as old aunts of mine used to say at home—a Man of Feeling. Thinks he knows the world, from having sifted and sorted a lot of our dustbins; as the modern Realists imagine it's an exposition of positive human nature when they've pulled down our noses to the worst parts—if

there’s a worse where all are useful: but the Realism of the dogs is to have us by the nose:—excite it and befoul it, and you’re fearfully credible! You don’t read that olfactory literature. However, friend Carling is a conciliatory carle. Three or four days of the week the lady, he says, drives to her chemist’s, and there she sits in the shop; round the corner, as you enter; and sees

Page 3491

all Charing in the shop looking-glass at the back; herself a stranger spectacle, poor lady, if Carling's picture of her is not overdone; with her fashionable no-bonnet striding the contribution chignon on the crown, and a huge square green shade over her forehead. Sits hours long, and cocks her ears at orders of applicants for drugs across the counter, and sometimes catches wind of a prescription, and consults her chemist, and thinks she 'll try it herself. It's a basket of medicine bottles driven to Regent's Park pretty well every day.'

'Ha! Regent's Park!' exclaimed Victor, and shook at recollections of the district and the number of the house, dismal to him. London buried the woman deep until a mention of her sent her flaring over London. 'A chemist's shop! She sits there?'

'Mrs. Burman. We pass by the shop.'

'She had always a turn for drugs.—Not far from here, did you say? And every day! under a green shade?'

'Dear fellow, don't be suggesting ballads; we'll go now,' said Fenellan. 'It 's true it's like sitting on the banks of the Stygian waters.'

He spied at an obsequious watch, that told him it was time to quit the office.

'You've done nothing?' Victor asked in a tone of no expectation.

'Only to hear that her latest medical man is Themison.'

'Where did you hear?'

'Across the counter of Boyle and Luckwort, the lady's chemists. I called the day before yesterday, after you were here at our last Board Meeting.'

'The Themison?'

'The great Dr. Themison; who kills you kindlier than most, and is much in request for it.'

'There's one of your echoes of Colney!' Victor cried. 'One gets dead sick of that worn-out old jibeing at doctors. They don't kill, you know very well. It 's not to their interest to kill. They may take the relish out of life; and upon my word, I believe that helps to keep the patient living!'

Fenellan sent an eye of discreet comic penetration travelling through his friend.

'The City's mending; it's not the weary widow woman of the day when we capsized the diurnal with your royal Old Veuve,' he said, as they trod the pavement. 'Funny people, the English! They give you all the primeing possible for amusement and jollity, and devil

a sentry-box for the exercise of it; and if you shake a leg publicly, partner or not, you're marched off to penitence. I complain, that they have no philosophical appreciation of human nature.'

'We pass the shop?' Victor interrupted him.

'You're in view of it in a minute. And what a square, for recreative dancing! And what a people, to be turning it into a place of political agitation! And what a country, where from morning to night it's an endless wrangle about the first conditions of existence! Old Colney seems right now and then: they 're the offspring of pirates, and they 've got the manners and tastes

Page 3492

of their progenitors, and the trick of quarrelling everlastingly over the booty. I 'd have band-music here for a couple of hours, three days of the week at the least; and down in the East; and that forsaken North quarter of London; and the Baptist South too. But just as those omnibus-wheels are the miserable music of this London of ours, it 's only too sadly true that the people are in the first rumble of the notion of the proper way to spend their lives. Now you see the shop: Boyle and Luckwort: there.'

Victor looked. He threw his coat open, and pulled the waistcoat, and swelled it, ahemming. 'That shop?' said he. And presently: 'Fenellan, I'm not superstitious, I think. Now listen; I declare to you, on the day of our drinking Old Veuve together last—-you remember it,—I walked home up this way across the square, and I was about to step into that identical shop, for some household prescription in my pocket, having forgotten Nataly's favourite City chemists Fenbird and Jay, when—I'm stating a fact—I distinctly—I 'm sure of the shop—felt myself plucked back by the elbow; pulled back the kind of pull when you have to put a foot backward to keep your equilibrium.'

So does memory inspired by the sensations contribute an additional item for the colouring of history.

He touched the elbow, showed a flitting face of crazed amazement in amusement, and shrugged and half-laughed, dismissing the incident, as being perhaps, if his hearer chose to have it so, a gem of the rubbish tumbled into the dustcart out of a rather exceptional householder's experience.

Fenellan smiled indulgently. 'Queer things happen. I recollect reading in my green youth of a clergyman, who mounted a pulpit of the port where he was landed after his almost solitary rescue from a burning ship at midnight in mid-sea, to inform his congregation, that he had overnight of the catastrophe a personal Warning right in his ear from a Voice, when at his bed or bunk-side, about to perform the beautiful ceremony of undressing: and the Rev. gentleman was to lie down in his full uniform, not so much as to relieve himself of his boots, the Voice insisted twice; and he obeyed it, despite the discomfort to his poor feet; and he jumped up in his boots to the cry of Fire, and he got them providentially over the scuffling deck straight at the first rush into the boat awaiting them, and had them safe on and polished the day he preached the sermon of gratitude for the special deliverance. There was a Warning! and it might well be called, as he called it, from within. We're cared for, never doubt. Aide-toi. Be ready dressed to help yourself in a calamity, or you'll not stand in boots at your next Sermon, contrasting with the burnt. That sounds like the moral.'

'She could have seen me,' Victor threw out an irritable suggestion. The idea of the recent propinquity set hatred in motion.

'Scarcely likely. I'm told she sits looking on her lap, under the beetling shade, until she hears an order for tinctures or powders, or a mixture that strikes her fancy. It's possible

to do more suicidal things than sit the afternoons in a chemist’s shop and see poor creatures get their different passports to Orcus.’

Page 3493

Victor stepped mutely beneath the windows of the bellied glass-urns of chemical wash. The woman might be inside there now! She might have seen his figure in the shop-mirror! And she there! The wonder of it all seemed to be, that his private history was not walking the streets. The thinness of the partition concealing it, hardly guaranteed a day's immunity: because this woman would live in London, in order to have her choice of a central chemist's shop, where she could feed a ghastly imagination on the various recipes . . . and while it would have been so much healthier for her to be living in a recess of the country!

He muttered: 'Diseases—drugs!'

Those were the corresponding two strokes of the pendulum which kept the woman going.

'And deadly spite.' That was the emanation of the monotonous horrible conflict, for which, and by which, the woman lived.

In the neighbourhood of the shop, he could not but think of her through the feelings of a man scorched by a furnace.

A little further on, he said: 'Poor soul!' He confessed to himself, that latterly he had, he knew not why, been impatient with her, rancorous in thought, as never before. He had hitherto aimed at a picturesque tolerance of her vindictiveness; under suffering, both at Craye and Creckholt; and he had been really forgiving. He accused her of dragging him down to humanity's lowest.

But if she did that, it argued the possession of a power of a sort.

Her station in the chemist's shop he passed almost daily, appeared to him as a sudden and a terrific rush to the front; though it was only a short drive from the house in Regent's Park; but having shaken-off that house, he had pushed it back into mists, obliterated it. The woman certainly had a power.

He shot away to the power he knew of in himself; his capacity for winning men in bodies, the host of them, when it came to an effort of his energies: men and, individually, women. Individually, the women were to be counted on as well; warm supporters.

It was the admission of a doubt that he might expect to enroll them collectively. Eyeing the men, he felt his command of them. Glancing at congregated women, he had a chill. The Wives and Spinsters in ghostly judicial assembly: that is, the phantom of the offended collective woman: that is, the regnant Queen Idea issuing from our concourse of civilized life to govern Society, and pronounce on the orderly, the tolerable, the legal, and banish the rebellious: these maintained an aspect of the stand against him.

Did Nataly read the case: namely, that the crowned collective woman is not to be subdued? And what are we to say of the indefinite but forcible Authority, when we see it upholding Mrs. Burman to crush a woman like Nataly!

Page 3494

Victor's novel exercises in reflection were bringing him by hard degrees to conceive it to be the impalpable which has prevailing weight. Not many of our conquerors have scored their victories on the road of that index: nor has duration been granted them to behold the minute measure of value left even tangible after the dust of the conquest subsides. The passing by a shop where a broken old woman might be supposed to sit beneath her green forehead-shade—Venetian-blind of a henbane-visage!—had precipitated him into his first real grasp of the abstract verity: and it opens on to new realms, which are a new world to the practical mind. But he made no advance. He stopped in a fever of sensibility, to contemplate the powerful formless vapour rolling from a source that was nothing other than yonder weak lonely woman.

In other words, the human nature of the man was dragged to the school of its truancy by circumstances, for him to learn the commonest of sums done on a slate, in regard to payment of debts and the unrelaxing grip of the creditor on the defaulter. Debtors are always paying like those who are guilty of the easiest thing in life, the violation of Truth, they have made themselves bondmen to pay, if not in substance, then in soul; and the nipping of the soul goes on for as long as the concrete burden is undischarged. You know the Liar; you must have seen him diminishing, until he has become a face without features, withdrawn to humanity's preliminary sketch (some half-dozen frayed threads of woeful outline on our original tapestry-web); and he who did the easiest of things, he must from such time sweat in being the prodigy of inventive nimbleness, up to the day when he propitiates Truth by telling it again. There is a repentance that does reconstitute! It may help to the traceing to springs of a fable whereby men have been guided thus far out of the wood.

Victor would have said truly that he loved Truth; that he paid every debt with a scrupulous exactitude: money, of course; and prompt apologies for a short brush of his temper. Nay, he had such a conscience for the smallest eruptions of a transient irritability, that the wish to say a friendly mending word to the Punctilio donkey of London Bridge, softened his retrospective view of the fall there, more than once. Although this man was a presentation to mankind of the force in Nature which drives to unresting speed, which is the vitality of the heart seen at its beating after a plucking of it from the body, he knew himself for the reverse of lawless; he inclined altogether to good citizenship. So social a man could not otherwise incline. But when it came to the examination of accounts between Mrs. Burman and himself, spasms of physical revulsion, loathings, his excessive human nature, put her out of Court. To men, it was impossible for him to speak the torments of those days of the monstrous alliance. The heavens were cognizant. He pleaded his case in their accustomed hearing:—a

Page 3495

youngster tempted by wealth, attracted, besought, snared, revolted, *etc*. And Mrs. Burman, when roused to jealousy, had shown it by teazing him for a confession of his admiration of splendid points in the beautiful Nataly, the priceless fair woman living under their roof, a contrast of very life, with the corpse and shroud; and she seen by him daily, singing with him, her breath about him, her voice incessantly upon every chord of his being!

He pleaded successfully. But the silence following the verdict was heavy; the silence contained an unheard thunder. It was the sound, as when out of Court the public is dissatisfied with a verdict. Are we expected to commit a social outrage in exposing our whole case to the public?—Imagine it for a moment as done. Men are ours at a word —or at least a word of invitation. Women we woo; fluent smooth versions of our tortures, mixed with permissible courtship, win the individual woman. And that unreasoning collective woman, icy, deadly, condemns the poor racked wretch who so much as remembers them! She is the enemy of Nature.—Tell us how? She is the slave of existing conventions.—And from what cause? She is the artificial production of a state that exalts her so long as she sacrifices daily and hourly to the artificial.

Therefore she sides with Mrs. Burman—the foe of Nature: who, with her arts and gold lures, has now possession of the Law (the brass idol worshipped by the collective) to drive Nature into desolation.

He placed himself to the right of Mrs. Burman, for the world to behold the couple: and he lent the world a sigh of disgust.

What he could not do, as in other matters he did, was to rise above the situation, in a splendid survey and rapid view of the means of reversing it. He was too social to be a captain of the socially insurgent; imagination expired.

But having a courageous Nataly to second him!—how then? It was the succour needed. Then he would have been ready to teach the world that Nature—honest Nature—is more to be prized than Convention: a new Era might begin.

The thought was tonic for an instant and illuminated him springingly. It sank, excused for the flaccidity by Nataly's want of common adventurous daring. She had not taken to Lakelands; she was purchasing furniture from a flowing purse with a heavy heart—-unfeminine, one might say; she preferred to live obscurely; she did not, one had to think —but it was unjust: and yet the accusation, that she did not cheerfully make a strain and spurt on behalf of her child, pressed to be repeated.

Page 3496

These short glimpses at reflection in Victor were like the verberant twang of a musical instrument that has had a smart blow, and wails away independent of the player's cunning hand. He would have said, that he was more his natural self when the cunning hand played on him, to make him praise and uplift his beloved: mightily would it have astonished him to contemplate with assured perception in his own person the Nature he invoked. But men invoking Nature, do not find in her the Holy Mother she in such case becomes to her daughters, whom she so persecutes. Men call on her for their defence, as a favourable witness: she is a note of their rhetoric. They are not bettered by her sustainment; they have not, as women may have, her enaemic aid at a trying hour. It is not an effort at epigram to say, that whom she scourges most she most supports.

An Opera-placard drew his next remark to Fenellan.

'How Wagner seems to have stricken the Italians! Well, now, the Germans have their Emperor to head their armies, and I say that the German emperor has done less for their lasting fame and influence than Wagner has done. He has affected the French too; I trace him in Gounod's Romeo et Juliette—and we don't gain by it; we have a poor remuneration for the melody gone; think of the little shepherd's pipeing in Mireille; and there's another in Sapho-delicious. I held out against Wagner as long as I could. The Italians don't much more than Wagnerize in exchange for the loss of melody. They would be wiser in going back to Pergolese, Campagnole. The Mefistofole was good—of the school of the foreign master. Aida and Otello, no. I confess to a weakness for the old barleysugar of Bellini or a Donizetti-Serenade. Aren't you seduced by cadences? Never mind Wagner's tap of his paedagogue's baton—a cadence catches me still. Early taste for barley-sugar, perhaps! There's a march in Verdi's Attila and I Lombardi, I declare I'm in military step when I hear them, as in the old days, after leaving the Opera. Fredi takes little Mab Mountney to her first Opera to-night. Enough to make us old ones envious! You remember your first Opera, Fenellan? Sonnambula, with me. I tell you, it would task the highest poetry—say, require, if you like—showing all that's noblest, splendidest, in a young man, to describe its effect on me. I was dreaming of my box at the Opera for a year after. The Huguenots to-night. Not the best suited for little Mabsy; but she'll catch at the Rataplan. Capital Opera; we used to think it the best, before we had Tannhauser and Lohengrin and the Meistersinger.'

Page 3497

Victor hinted notes of the Conspiration Scene closing the Third Act of the Huguenots. That sombre Chorus brought Mrs. Burman before him. He drummed the Rataplan, which sent her flying. The return of a lively disposition for dinner and music completed his emancipation from the yoke of the baleful creature sitting half her days in the chemist's shop; save that a thought of drugs brought the smell, and the smell the picture; she threatened to be an apparition at any moment pervading him through his nostrils. He spoke to Fenellan of hunger for dinner, a need for it; singular in one whose appetite ran to the stroke of the hour abreast with Armandine's kitchen-clock. Fenellan proposed a glass of sherry and bitters at his Club over the way. He had forgotten a shower of black-balls (attributable to the conjurations of old Ate) on a certain past day. Without word of refusal, Victor entered a wine-merchant's office, where he was unknown, and stating his wish for bitters and dry sherry, presently received the glass, drank, nodded to the administering clerk, named the person whom he had obliged and refreshed, and passed out, remarking to Fenellan: 'Colney on Clubs! he's right; they're the mediaeval in modern times, our Baron's castles, minus the Baron; dead against public life and social duties. Business excuses my City Clubs; but I shall take my name off my Club up West.'

'More like monasteries, with a Committee for Abbot, and Whist for the services,' Fenellan said. 'Or tabernacles for the Chosen, and Grangousier playing Divinity behind the veil. Well, they're social.'

'Sectionally social, means anything but social, my friend. However—and the monastery had a bell for the wanderer! Say, I'm penniless or poundless, up and down this walled desert of a street, I feel, I must feel, these palaces—if we're Christian, not Jews: not that the Jews are uncharitable; they set an: example, in fact . . . . '

He rambled, amusingly to the complacent hearing of Fenellan, who thought of his pursuit of wealth and grand expenditure.

Victor talked as a man having his mind at leaps beyond the subject. He was nearing to the Idea he had seized and lost on London Bridge.

The desire for some good news wherewith to inspirit Nataly, withdrew him from his ineffectual chase. He had nought to deliver; on the contrary, a meditation concerning her comfort pledged him to concealment which was the no step, or passive state, most abhorrent to him.

He snatched at the name of Themison.

With Dr. Themison fast in his grasp, there was a report of progress to be made to Nataly; and not at all an empty report.

Themison, then: he leaned on Themison. The woman's doctor should have an influence approaching to authority with her.

Land-values in the developing Colonies, formed his theme of discourse to Fenellan: let Banks beware.

Fenellan saw him shudder and rub the back of his head. 'Feel the wind?' he said.

Page 3498

Victor answered him with that humane thrill of the deep tones, which at times he had: 'No: don't be alarmed; I feel the devil. If one has wealth and a desperate wish, he will speak. All he does, is to make me more charitable to those who give way to him. I believe in a devil.'

'Horns and tail?'

'Bait and hook.'

'I haven't wealth, and I wish only for dinner,' Fenellan said.

'You know that Armandine is never two minutes late. By the way, you haven't wealth—-you have me.'

'And I thank God for you!' said Fenellan, acutely reminiscent of his having marked the spiritual adviser of Mrs. Burman, the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, as a man who might be useful to his friend.

CHAPTER XIV

DISCLOSES A STAGE ON THE DRIVE TO PARIS

A fortnight later, an extremely disconcerting circumstance occurred: Armandine was ten minutes behind the hour with her dinner. But the surprise and stupefaction expressed by Victor, after glances at his watch, were not so profound as Fenellan's, on finding himself exchangeing the bow with a gentleman bearing the name of Dr. Themison. His friend's rapidity in pushing the combinations he conceived, was known: Fenellan's wonder was not so much that Victor had astonished him again, as that he should be called upon again to wonder at his astonishment. He did; and he observed the doctor and Victor and Nataly: aided by dropping remarks. Before the evening was over, he gathered enough of the facts, and had to speculate only on the designs. Dr. Themison had received a visit from the husband of Mrs. Victor Radnor concerning her state of health. At an interview with the lady, laughter greeted him; he was confused by her denial of the imputation of a single ailment: but she, to recompose him, let it be understood, that she was anxious about her husband's condition, he being certainly overworked; and the husband's visit passed for a device on the part of the wife. She admitted a willingness to try a change of air, if it was deemed good for her husband. Change of air was prescribed to each for both. 'Why not drive to Paris?' the doctor said, and Victor was taken with the phrase.

He told Fenellan at night that Mrs. Burman, he had heard, was by the sea, on the South coast. Which of her maladies might be in the ascendant, he did not know. He knew little. He fancied that Dr. Themison was unsuspicious of the existence of a relationship between him and Mrs. Burman: and Fenellan opined, that there had been no

communication upon private affairs. What, then, was the object in going to Dr. Themison? He treated her body merely; whereas the Rev. Groseman Buttermore could be expected to impose upon her conduct. Fenellan appreciated his own discernment of the superior uses to which a spiritual adviser may be put, and he too agreeably flattered himself for the corrective reflection

Page 3499

to ensue, that he had not done anything. It disposed him to think a happy passivity more sagacious than a restless activity. We should let Fortune perform her part at the wheel in working out her ends, should we not?—for, ten to one, nine times out of ten we are thwarting her if we stretch out a hand. And with the range of enjoyments possessed by Victor, why this unceasing restlessness? Why, when we are not near drowning, catch at apparent straws, which may be instruments having sharp edges? Themison, as Mrs. Burman's medical man, might tell the lady tales that would irritate her bag of venom.

Rarely though Fenellan was the critic on his friend, the shadow cast over his negligent hedonism by Victor's boiling pressure, drove him into the seat of judgement. As a consequence, he was rather a dull table-guest in the presence of Dr. Themison, whom their host had pricked to anticipate high entertainment from him. He did nothing to bridge the crevasse and warm the glacier air at table when the doctor, anecdotal intentionally to draw him out, related a decorous but pungent story of one fair member of a sweet new sisterhood in agitation against the fixed establishment of our chain-mail marriage-tie. An anecdote of immediate diversion was wanted, expected: and Fenellan sat stupidly speculating upon whether the doctor knew of a cupboard locked. So that Dr. Themison was carried on by Lady Grace Halley's humourous enthusiasm for the subject to dilate and discuss and specify, all in the irony of a judicial leaning to the side of the single-minded social adventurers, under an assumed accord with his audience; concluding: 'So there's an end of Divorce.'

'By the trick of multiplication,' Fenellan, now reassured, was content to say. And that did not extinguish the cracker of a theme; handled very carefully, as a thing of fire, it need scarce be remarked, three young women being present.

Nataly had eyes on her girl, and was pleased at an alertness shown by Mr. Sowerby to second her by crossing the dialogue. As regarded her personal feelings, she was hardened, so long as the curtains were about her to keep the world from bending black brows of inquisition upon one of its culprits. But her anxiety was vigilant to guard her girl from an infusion of any of the dread facts of life not coming through the mother's lips: and she was a woman having the feminine mind's pudency in that direction, which does not consent to the revealing of much. Here was the mother's dilemma: her girl—-Victor's girl, as she had to think in this instance,—the most cloudless of the young women of earth, seemed, and might be figured as really, at the falling of a crumb off the table of knowledge, taken by the brain to shoot up to terrific heights of surveyal; and there she rocked; and only her youthful healthiness brought her down to grass and flowers. She had once or twice received the electrical stimulus, to feel and be as lightning, from a seizure of facts in infinitesimal

Page 3500

doses, guesses caught off maternal evasions or the circuitous explanation of matters touching sex in here and there a newspaper, harder to repress completely than sewer-gas in great cities: and her mother had seen, with an apprehensive pang of anguish, how witheringly the scared young intelligence of the innocent creature shocked her sensibility. She foresaw the need to such a flameful soul, as bride, wife, woman across the world, of the very princeliest of men in gifts of strength, for her sustainer and guide. And the provident mother knew this peerless gentleman: but he had his wife.

Delusions and the pain of the disillusioning were to be feared for the imaginative Nesta; though not so much as that on some future day of a perchance miserable yokemating—a subjection or an entanglement—the nobler passions might be summoned to rise for freedom, and strike a line to make their logically estimable sequence from a source not honourable before the public. Constantly it had to be thought, that the girl was her father's child.

At present she had no passions; and her bent to the happiness she could so richly give, had drawn her sailing smoothly over the harbour-bar of maidenhood; where many of her sisters are disconcerted to the loss of simplicity. If Nataly with her sleepless watchfulness and forecasts partook of the French mother, Nesta's Arcadian independence likened her somewhat in manner to the Transatlantic version of the English girl. Her high physical animation and the burden of themes it plucked for delivery carried her flowing over impediments of virginal self-consciousness, to set her at her ease in the talk with men; she had not gone through the various Nursery exercises in dissimulation; she had no appearance of praying forgiveness of men for the original sin of being woman; and no tricks of lips or lids, or traitor scarlet on the cheeks, or assumptions of the frigid mask, or indicated reserve-cajoleries. Neither ignorantly nor advisedly did she play on these or other bewitching strings of her sex, after the fashion of the stamped innocents, who are the boast of Englishmen and matrons, and thrill societies with their winsome ingenuousness; and who sometimes when unguarded meet an artful serenader, that is a cloaked bandit, and is provoked by their performances, and knows anthropologically the nature behind the devious show; a scientific rascal; as little to be excluded from our modern circles as Eve's own old deuce from Eden's garden whereupon, opportunity inviting, both the fool and the cunning, the pure donkey princess of insular eulogy, and the sham one, are in a perilous pass.

Page 3501

Damsels of the swiftness of mind of Nesta cannot be ignorant utterly amid a world where the hints are hourly scattering seed of the inklings; when vileness is not at work up and down our thoroughfares, proclaiming its existence with tableau and trumpet. Nataly encountered her girl's questions, much as one seeks to quiet an enemy. The questions had soon ceased. Excepting repulsive and rejected details, there is little to be learnt when a little is known: in populous communities, density only will keep the little out. Only stupidity will suppose that it can be done for the livelier young. English mothers forethoughtful for their girls, have to take choice of how to do battle with a rough-and-tumble Old England, that lumbers bumping along, craving the precious things, which can be had but in semblance under the conditions allowed by laziness to subsist, and so curst of its shifty inconsequence as to worship in the concrete an hypocrisy it abhors in the abstract. Nataly could smuggle or confiscate here and there a newspaper; she could not interdict or withhold every one of them, from a girl ardent to be in the race on all topics of popular interest: and the newspapers are occasionally naked savages; the streets are imperfectly garmented even by day; and we have our stumbling social anecdotist, our spot-mouthed young man, our eminently silly woman; our slippery one; our slimy one, the Rahab of Society; not to speak of Mary the maid and the footman William. A vigilant mother has to contend with these and the like in an increasing degree. How best?

There is a method: one that Colney Durance advocated. The girl's intelligence and sweet blood invited a trial of it. Since, as he argued, we cannot keep the poisonous matter out, mothers should prepare and strengthen young women for the encounter with it, by lifting the veil, baring the world, giving them knowledge to arm them for the fight they have to sustain; and thereby preserve them further from the spiritual collapse which follows the nursing of a false ideal of our life in youth:—this being, Colney said, the prominent feminine disease of the time, common to all our women; that is, all having leisure to shine in the sun or wave in the wind as flowers of the garden.

Whatever there was of wisdom in his view, he spoilt it for English hearing, by making use of his dry compressed sentences. Besides he was a bachelor; therefore but a theorist. And his illustrations of his theory were grotesque; meditation on them extracted a corrosive acid to consume, in horrid derision, the sex, the nation, the race of man. The satirist too devotedly loves his lash to be a persuasive teacher. Nataly had excuses to cover her reasons for not listening to him.

Page 3502

One reason was, as she discerned through her confusion at the thought, that the day drew near for her speaking fully to Nesta; when, between what she then said and what she said now, a cruel contrast might strike the girl and in toneing revelations now, to be more consonant with them then;—in softening and shading the edges of social misconduct, it seemed painfully possible to be sowing in the girl's mind something like the reverse of moral precepts, even to smoothing the way to a rebelliousness partly or wholly similar to her own. But Nataly's chief and her appeasing reason for pursuing the conventional system with this exceptional young creature, referred to the sentiments on that subject of the kind of young man whom a mother elects from among those present and eligible, as perhaps next to worthy to wed the girl, by virtue of good promise in the moral department. She had Mr. Dudley Sowerby under view; far from the man of her choice and still the practice of decorum, discretion, a pardonable fastidiousness, appears, if women may make any forecast of the behaviour of young men or may trust the faces they see, to, promise a future stability in the husband. Assuredly a Dudley Sowerby would be immensely startled to find in his bride a young woman more than babily aware of the existence of one particular form of naughtiness on earth.

Victor was of no help: he had not an idea upon the right education of the young of the sex. Repression and mystery, he considered wholesome for girls; and he considered the enlightening of them—to some extent—a prudential measure for their defence; and premature instruction is a fire-water to their wild-in-woods understanding; and histrionic innocence is no doubt the bloom on corruption; also the facts of current human life, in the crude of the reports or the cooked of the sermon in the newspapers, are a noxious diet for our daughters; whom nevertheless we cannot hope to be feeding always on milk: and there is a time when their adorable pretty ignorance, if credibly it exists out of noodledom, is harmful:—but how beautiful the shining simplicity of our dear young English girls! He was one of the many men to whose minds women come in pictures and are accepted much as they paint themselves. Like his numerous fellows, too, he required a conflict with them, and a worsting at it, to be taught, that they are not the mere live stock we scheme to dispose of for their good: unless Love should interpose, he would have exclaimed. He broke from his fellows in his holy horror of a father's running counter to love. Nesta had only to say, that she loved another, for Dudley Sowerby to be withdrawn into the background of aspirants. But love was unknown to the girl.

Page 3503

Outwardly, the plan of the Drive to Paris had the look of Victor's traditional hospitality. Nataly smiled at her incorrigibly lagging intelligence of him, on hearing that he had invited a company: 'Lady Grace, for gaiety; Peridon and Catkin, fiddles; Dudley Sowerby and myself, flutes; Barmby, intonation; in all, nine of us; and by the dear old Normandy route, for the sake of the voyage, as in old times; towers of Dieppe in the morning-light; and the lovely road to the capital! Just three days in Paris, and home by any of the other routes. It's the drive we want. Boredom in wet weather, we defy; we have our Concert—an hour at night and we're sure of sleep.' It had a sweet simple air, befitting him; as when in bygone days they travelled with the joy of children. For travelling shook Nataly out of her troubles and gave her something of the child's inheritance of the wisdom of life—the living ever so little ahead of ourselves; about as far as the fox in view of the hunt. That is the soul of us out for novelty, devouring as it runs, an endless feast; and the body is eagerly after it, recording the pleasures, a daily chase. Remembrance of them is almost a renewal, anticipation a revival. She enraptured Victor with glimpses of the domestic fun she had ceased to show sign of since the revelation of Lakelands. Her only regret was on account of the exclusion of Colney Durance from the party, because of happy memories associating him with the Seine-land, and also that his bilious criticism of his countrymen was moderated by a trip to the Continent. Fenellan reported Colney to be 'busy in the act of distilling one of his Prussic acid essays.' Fenellan would have jumped to go. He informed Victor, as a probe, that the business of the Life Insurance was at periods 'fearfully necrological! Inexplicably, he was not invited. Did it mean, that he was growing dull? He looked inside instead of out, and lost the clue.

His behaviour on the evening of the departure showed plainly what would have befallen Mr. Sowerby on the expedition, had not he as well as Colney been excluded. Two carriages and a cab conveyed the excursionists, as they merrily called themselves, to the terminus. They were Victor's guests; they had no trouble, no expense, none of the nipper reckonings which dog our pleasures; the state of pure bliss. Fenellan's enviousness drove him at the Rev. Mr. Barmby until the latter jumped to the seat beside Nesta in her carriage, Mademoiselle de Seilles and Mr. Sowerby facing them. Lady Grace Halley, in the carriage behind, heard Nesta's laugh; which Mr. Barmby had thought vacuous, beseeming little girls, that laugh at nothings. She questioned Fenellan.

'Oh,' said he, 'I merely mentioned that the Rev. gentleman carries his musical instrument at the bottom of his trunk.'

She smiled: 'And who are in the cab?'

'Your fiddles are in the cab, in charge of Peridon and Catkin. Those two would have writhed like head and tail of a worm, at a division on the way to the station. Point a finger at Peridon, you run Catkin through the body. They're a fabulous couple.'

Page 3504

Victor cut him short. ‘I deny that those two are absurd.’

‘And Catkin’s toothache is a galvanic battery upon Peridon.’

Nataly strongly denied it. Peridon and Catkin pertained to their genial picture of the dear sweet nest in life; a dale never traversed by the withering breath they dreaded.

Fenellan then, to prove that he could be as bad in his way as Colney, fell to work on the absent Miss Priscilla Graves and Mr. Pempton, with a pitchfork’s exaltation of the sacred attachment of the divergently meritorious couple, and a melancholy reference to implacable obstacles in the principles of each. The pair were offending the amatory corner in the generous good sense of Nataly and Victor; they were not to be hotly protected, though they were well enough liked for their qualities, except by Lady Grace, who revelled in the horrifying and scandalizing of Miss Graves. Such a specimen of the Puritan middle English as Priscilla Graves, was eastwind on her skin, nausea to her gorge. She wondered at having drifted into the neighbourhood of a person resembling in her repellent formal chill virtuousness a windy belfry tower, down among those districts of suburban London or appalling provincial towns passed now and then with a shudder, where the funereal square bricks-up the Church, that Arctic hen-mother sits on the square, and the moving dead are summoned to their round of penitential exercise by a monosyllabic tribulation-bell. Fenellan’s graphic sketch of the teetotaller woman seeing her admirer pursued by Eumenides flagons—abominations of emptiness—to the banks of the black river of suicides, where the one most wretched light is Inebriation’s nose; and of the vegetarian violoncello’s horror at his vision of the long procession of the flocks and herds into his lady’s melodious Ark of a mouth, excited and delighted her antipathy. She was amused to transports at the station, on hearing Mr. Barmby, in a voice all ophicleide, remark: ’No, I carry no instrument.’ The habitation of it at the bottom of his trunk, was not forgotten when it sounded.

Reclining in warmth on the deck of the vessel at night, she said, just under Victor’s ear: ‘Where are those two?’

‘Bid me select the couple,’ said he.

She rejoined: ‘Silly man’; and sleepily gave him her hand for good night, and so paralyzed his arm, that he had to cover the continued junction by saying more than he intended: ‘If they come to an understanding!’

‘Plain enough on one side.’

‘You think it suitable?’

‘Perfection; and well-planned to let them discover it.’ ’This is really my favourite route; I love the saltwater and the night on deck.’

‘Go on.’

‘How?’

‘Number your loves. It would tax your arithmetic.’

‘I can hate.’

‘Not me?’

Page 3505

Positively the contrary, an impulsive squeeze of fingers declared it; and they broke the link, neither of them sensibly hurt; though a leaf or two of the ingenuities, which were her thoughts, turned over in the phantasies of the lady; and the gentleman was taught to feel that a never so slightly lengthened compression of the hand female shoots within us both straight and far and round the corners. There you have Nature, if you want her naked in her elements, for a text. He loved his Nataly truly, even fervently, after the twenty years of union; he looked about at no other woman; it happened only that the touch of one, the chance warm touch, put to motion the blind forces of our mother so remarkably surcharging him. But it was without kindling. The lady, the much cooler person, did nurse a bit of flame. She had a whimsical liking for the man who enjoyed simple things when commanding the luxuries; and it became a fascination, by extreme contrast, at the reminder of his adventurous enterprises in progress while he could so childishly enjoy. Women who dance with the warrior-winner of battles, and hear him talk his ball-room trifles to amuse, have similarly a smell of gunpowder to intoxicate them.

For him, a turn on the deck brought him into new skies. Nataly lay in the cabin. She used to be where Lady Grace was lying. A sort of pleadable, transparent, harmless hallucination of the renewal of old service induced him to refresh and settle the fair semi-slumberer's pillow, and fix the tarpaulin over her silks and wraps; and bend his head to the soft mouth murmuring thanks. The women who can dare the nuit blanche, and under stars; and have a taste for holiday larks after their thirtieth, are rare; they are precious. Nataly nevertheless was approved for guarding her throat from the nightwind. And a softer southerly breath never crossed Channel! The very breeze he had wished for! Luck was with him.

Nesta sat by the rails of the vessel beside her Louise. Mr. Sowerby in passing, exchanged a description of printed agreement with her, upon the beauty of the night—a good neutral topic for the encounter of the sexes not that he wanted it neutral; it furnished him with a vocabulary. Once he perceptibly washed his hands of dutiful politeness, in addressing Mademoiselle de Seilles, likewise upon the beauty of the night; and the French lady, thinking—too conclusively from the breath on the glass at the moment, as it is the Gallic habit—that if her dear Nesta must espouse one of the uninteresting creatures called men in her native land, it might as well be this as another, agreed that the night was very beautiful.

'He speaks grammatical French,' Nesta commented on his achievement. 'He contrives in his walking not to wet his boots,' mademoiselle rejoined.

Page 3506

Mr. Peridon was a more welcome sample of the islanders, despite an inferior pretension to accent. He burned to be near these ladies, and he passed them but once. His enthusiasm for Mademoiselle de Seilles was notorious. Gratefully the compliment was acknowledged by her, in her demure fashion; with a reserve of comic intellectual contempt for the man who could not see that women, or Frenchwomen, or eminently she among them, must have their enthusiasm set springing in the breast before they can be swayed by the most violent of outer gales. And say, that she is uprooted;—he does but roll a log. Mr. Peridon's efforts to perfect himself in the French tongue touched her.

A night of May leaning on June, is little more than a deliberate wink of the eye of light. Mr. Barmby, an exile from the ladies by reason of an addiction to tobacco, quitted the forepart of the vessel at the first greying. Now was the cloak of night worn threadbare, and grey astir for the heralding of gold, day visibly ready to show its warmer throbs. The gentle waves were just a stronger grey than the sky, perforce of an interfusion that shifted gradations; they were silken, in places oily grey; cold to drive the sight across their playful monotonousness for refuge on any far fisher-sail.

Miss Radnor was asleep, eyelids benignly down, lips mildly closed. The girl's cheeks held colour to match a dawn yet unawakened though born. They were in a nest shading amid silks of pale blue, and there was a languid flutter beneath her chin to the catch of the morn-breeze. Bacchanal threads astray from a disorderly front-lock of rich brown hair were alive over an eyebrow showing like a seal upon the lightest and securest of slumbers.

Mr. Barmby gazed, and devoutly. Both the ladies were in their oblivion; the younger quite saintly; but the couple inseparably framed, elevating to behold; a reproach to the reminiscence of pipes. He was near; and quietly the eyelids of mademoiselle lifted on him. Her look was grave, straight, uninquiring, soon accurately perusing; an arrow of Artemis for penetration. He went by, with the sound in the throat of a startled bush-bird taking to wing; he limped off some nail of the deck, as if that young Frenchwoman had turned the foot to a hoof. Man could not be more guiltless, yet her look had perturbed him; nails conspired; in his vexation, he execrated tobacco. And ask not why, where reason never was.

Nesta woke babbling on the subject she had relinquished for sleep. Mademoiselle touched a feathery finger at her hair and hood during their silvery French chimes.

Mr. Sowerby presented the risen morning to them, with encomiums, after they had been observing every variation in it. He spoke happily of the pleasant passage, and of the agreeable night; particularly of the excellent idea of the expedition by this long route at night; the prospect of which had disfigured him with his grimace of speculation—-apparently a sourness that did not exist. Nesta had a singular notion, coming of a girl's mingled observation and intuition, that the impressions upon this gentleman were in

arrear, did not strike him till late. Mademoiselle confirmed it when it was mentioned; she remembered to have noticed the same in many small things. And it was a pointed perception.

Page 3507

Victor sent his girl down to Nataly, with a summons to hurry up and see sunlight over the waters. Nataly came; she looked, and the outer wakened the inner, she let the light look in on her, her old feelings danced to her eyes like a, string of bubbles in ascent. 'Victor, Victor, it seems only yesterday that we crossed, twelve years back—was it?—and in May, and saw the shoal of porpoises, and five minutes after, Dieppe in view. Dear French people! I share your love for France.'

'Home of our holidays!—the "drives"; and they may be the happiest. And fifty minutes later we were off the harbour; and Natata landed, a stranger; and at night she was the heroine of the town.'

Victor turned to a stately gentleman and passed his name to Nataly: 'Sir Rodwell Balchington, a neighbour of Lakelands! She understood that Lady Grace Halley was acquainted with Sir Rodwell:—hence this dash of brine to her lips while she was drinking of happy memories, and Victor evidently was pluming himself upon his usual luck in the fortuitous encounter with an influential neighbour of Lakelands. He told Sir Rodwell the story of how they had met in the salle a manger of the hotel the impresario of a Concert in the town, who had in his hand the doctor's certificate of the incapacity of the chief cantatrice to appear, and waved it, within a step of suicide. 'Well, to be brief, my wife—"noble dame Anglaise," as the man announced her on the Concert platform, undertook one of the songs, and sang another of her own-pure contralto voice, as you will say; with the result that there was a perfect tumult of enthusiasm. Next day, the waiters of the hotel presented her with a bouquet of Spring flowers, white, and central violets. It was in the Paris papers, under the heading: Une amie d'outre Manche—I think that was it?' he asked Nataly.

'I forget,' said she.

He glanced at her: a cloud had risen. He rallied her, spoke of the old Norman silver cross which the manager of the Concert had sent, humbly imploring her to accept the small memento of his gratitude. She nodded an excellent artificial brightness.

And there was the coast of France under young sunlight over the waters. Once more her oft-petitioning wish through the years, that she had entered the ranks of professional singers, upon whom the moral scrutiny is not so microscopic, invaded her, resembling a tide-swell into rock-caves, which have been filled before and left to emptiness, and will be left to emptiness again. Nataly had the intimation visiting us when, in a decline of physical power, the mind's ready vivacity to conjure illusions forsakes us; and it was, of a wall ahead, and a force impelling her against it, and no hope of deviation. And this is the featureless thing, Destiny; not without eyes, if we have a conscience to throw them into it to look at us.

Counsel to her to live in the hour, came, as upon others on the vessel, from an active breath of the salt prompting to healthy hunger; and hardly less from the splendour of the

low full sunlight on the waters, the skimming and dancing of the thousands of golden shells away from under the globe of fire.

Page 3508

CHAPTER XV

A PATRIOT ABROAD

Nine days after his master's departure, Daniel Skepsey, a man of some renown of late, as a subject of reports and comments in the newspapers, obtained a passport, for the identification, if need were, of his missing or misapprehended person in a foreign country, of the language of which three unpronounceable words were knocking about his head to render the thought of the passport a staff of safety; and on the morning that followed he was at speed through Normandy, to meet his master rounding homeward from Paris, at a town not to be spoken as it is written, by reason of the custom of the good people of the country, with whom we would fain live on neighbourly terms:—yes, and they had proof of it, not so very many years back, when they were enduring the worst which can befall us—though Mr. Durance, to whom he was indebted for the writing of the place of his destination large on a card, and the wording of the French sound beside it, besides the jotting down of trains and the station for the change of railways, Mr. Durance could say, that the active form of our sympathy consisted in the pouring of cheeses upon them when they were prostrate and unable to resist!

A kind gentleman, Mr. Durance, as Daniel Skepsey had recent cause to know, but often exceedingly dark; not so patriotic as desireable, it was to be feared; and yet, strangely indeed, Mr. Durance had said cogent things on the art of boxing and on manly exercises, and he hoped—he was emphatic in saying he hoped—we should be regenerated. He must have meant, that boxing—on a grand scale would contribute to it. He said, that a blow now and then was wholesome for us all. He recommended a monthly private whipping for old gentlemen who decline the use of the gloves, to disperse their humours; not excluding Judges and Magistrates: he could hardly be in earnest. He spoke in a clergyman's voice, and said it would be payment of good assurance money, beneficial to their souls: he seemed to mean it. He said, that old gentlemen were bottled vapours, and it was good for them to uncork them periodically. He said, they should be excused half the strokes if they danced nightly—they resented motion. He seemed sadly wanting in veneration.

But he might not positively intend what he said. Skepsey could overlook everything he said, except the girding at England. For where is a braver people, notwithstanding appearances! Skepsey knew of dozens of gallant bruisers, ready for the cry to strip to the belt; worthy, with a little public encouragement, to rank beside their grandfathers of the Ring, in the brilliant times when royalty and nobility countenanced the manly art, our nursery of heroes, and there was not the existing unhappy division of classes. He still trusted to convince Mr. Durance, by means of argument and happy instances, historical and immediate, that the English may justly consider themselves the elect of nations, for reasons better than their accumulation of the piles of gold-better than 'usurers' reasons,' as Mr. Durance called them. Much that Mr. Durance had said at intervals was, although

remembered almost to the letter of the phrase, beyond his comprehension, and he put it aside, with penitent blinking at his deficiency.

Page 3509

All the while, he was hearing a rattle of voluble tongues around him, and a shout of stations, intelligible as a wash of pebbles, and blocks in a torrent. Generally the men slouched when they were not running. At Dieppe he had noticed muscular fellows; he admitted them to be nimbler on the legs than ours; and that may count both ways, he consoled a patriotic vanity by thinking; instantly rebuking the thought; for he had read chapters of Military History. He sat eyeing the front row of figures in his third-class carriage, musing on the kind of soldiers we might, heaven designing it, have to face, and how to beat them; until he gazed on Rouen, knowing by the size of it and by what Mr. Durance had informed him of the city on the river, that it must be the very city of Rouen, not so many years back a violated place, at the mercy of a foreign foe. Strong pity laid hold of Skepsey. He fortified the heights for defence, but saw at a glance that it was the city for modern artillery to command, crush and enter. He lost idea of these afflicted people as foes, merely complaining of their attacks on England, and their menaces in their Journals and pamphlets; and he renounced certain views of the country to be marched over on the road by this route to Paris, for the dictation of terms of peace at the gates of the French capital, sparing them the shameful entry; and this after the rout of their attempt at an invasion of the Island!

A man opposite him was looking amicably on his lively grey eyes. Skepsey handed a card from his pocket. The man perused it, and crying: ‘Dreux?’ waved out of the carriage-window at a westerly distance, naming Rouen as not the place, not at all, totally other. Thus we are taught, that a foreign General, ignorant of the language, must confine himself to defensive operations at home; he would be a child in the hands of the commonest man he meets. Brilliant with thanks in signs, Skepsey drew from his friend a course of instruction in French names, for our necessities on a line of march. The roads to Great Britain’s metropolis, and the supplies of forage and provision at every stage of a march on London, are marked in the military offices of these people; and that, with their barking Journals, is a piece of knowledge to justify a belligerent return for it. Only we pray to be let live peacefully.

Fervently we pray it when this good man, a total stranger to us, conducts an ignorant foreigner from one station to another through the streets of Rouen, after a short stoppage at the buffet and assistance in the identification of coins; then, lifting his cap to us, retires.

And why be dealing wounds and death? It is a more blessed thing to keep the Commandments. But how is it possible to keep the Commandments if you have a vexatious wife?

Page 3510

Martha Skepsey had given him a son to show the hereditary energy in his crying and coughing; and it was owing, he could plead, to her habits and her tongue, that he sometimes, that he might avoid the doing of worse—for she wanted correction and was improved by it—courted the excitement of a short exhibition of skill, man to man, on publicans' first floors. He could have told the magistrates so, in part apology for the circumstances dragging him the other day, so recently, before his Worship; and he might have told it, if he had not remembered Captain Dartrey Fenellan's words about treating women chivalrously which was interpreted by Skepsey as correcting them, when called upon to do it, but never exposing them only, if allowed to account for the circumstances pushing us into the newspapers, we should not present so guilty a look before the public.

Furthermore, as to how far it is the duty of a man to serve his master, there is likewise question: whether is he, while receiving reproof and punishment for excess of zeal in the service of his master, not to mention the welfare of the country, morally—without establishing it as a principle—exonerated? Miss Graves might be asked save that one would not voluntarily trouble a lady on such subjects. But supposing, says the opposing counsel, now at work in Skepsey's conscience, supposing this act, for which, contraveneing the law of the land, you are reproved and punished, to be agreeable to you, how then? We answer, supposing it—and we take uncomplainingly the magistrate's reproof and punishment—morally justified can it be expected of us to have the sense of guilt, although we wear and know we wear a guilty look before the public?

His master and the dear ladies would hear of it; perhaps they knew of it now; with them would rest the settlement of the distressing inquiry. The ladies would be shocked ladies cannot bear any semblance of roughness, not even with the gloves:—and knowing, as they must, that our practise of the manly art is for their protection.

Skepsey's grievous prospect of the hour to come under judgement of a sex that was ever a riddle unread, clouded him on the approach to Dreux. He studied the country and the people eagerly; he forbore to conduct great military operations. Mr. Durance had spoken of big battles round about the town of Dreux; also of a wonderful Mausoleum there, not equally interesting. The little man was in deeper gloom than a day sobering on crimson dusk when the train stopped and his quick ear caught the sound of the station, as pronounced by his friend at Rouen.

He handed his card to the station-master. A glance, and the latter signalled to a porter, saying: 'Paradis'; and the porter laid hold of Skepsey's bag. Skepsey's grasp was firm; he pulled, the porter pulled. Skepsey heard explanatory speech accompanying a wrench. He wrenched back with vigour, and in his own tongue exclaimed, that he held to the bag because his master's

Page 3511

letters were in the bag, all the way from England. For a minute, there was a downright trial of muscle and will: the porter appeared furiously excited, Skepsey had a look of cooled steel. Then the Frenchman, requiring to shrug, gave way to the Englishman's eccentric obstinacy, and signified that he was his guide. Quite so, and Skepsey showed alacrity and confidence in following; he carried his bag. But with the remembrance of the kindly serviceable man at Rouen, he sought to convey to the porter, that the terms of their association were cordial. A waving of the right hand to the heavens ratified the treaty on the French side. Nods and smiles and gesticulations, with across-Channel vocables, as it were Dover cliffs to Calais sands and back, pleasantly beguiled the way down to the Hotel du Paradis, under the Mausoleum heights, where Skepsey fumbled at his pocket for coin current; but the Frenchman, all shaken by a tornado of negation, clapped him on the shoulder, and sang him a quatrain. Skepsey had in politeness to stand listening, and blinking, plunged in the contrition of ignorance, eclipsed. He took it to signify something to the effect, that money should not pass between friends. It was the amatory farewell address of Henri *iv*. to his Charmante Gabrielle; and with

'Perce de mille lords,
L'honneur m'appelle
Au champ de Mars,'

the Frenchman, in a backing of measured steps, apologized for his enforced withdrawal from the stranger who had captured his heart.

Skepsey's card was taken in the passage of the hotel. A clean-capped maid, brave on the legs, like all he had seen of these people, preceded him at quick march to an upper chamber. When he descended, bag in hand, she flung open the salon-door of a table d'hote, where a goodly number were dining and chattering; waiters drew him along to the section occupied by his master's party. A chair had been kept vacant for him; his master waved a hand, his dear ladies graciously smiled; he struck the bag in front of a guardian foot, growing happy. He could fancy they had not seen the English newspapers. And his next observation of the table showed him wrecked and lost: Miss Nesta's face was the oval of a woeful O at his wild behaviour in England during their absence. She smiled. Skepsey had nevertheless to consume his food—excellent, very tasty soup-with the sour sauce of the thought that he must be tongue-tied in his defence for the time of the dinner.

'No, dear Skips, please! you are to enjoy yourself,' said Nesta.

He answered confusedly, trying to assure her that he was doing so, and he choked.

His master had fixed his arrival for twenty minutes earlier. Skepsey spoke through a cough of long delays at stations. The Rev. Septimus Barmby, officially peacemaker, sounded the consequent excuse for a belated comer. It was final; such is the power of sound. Looks were cast from the French section of the table at the owner of the

prodigious organ. Some of the younger men, intent on the charms of Albion's daughters, expressed in a, sign and a word or two alarm at what might be beneath the flooring: and 'Pas encore Lui!' and 'Son avant-courrier!' and other flies of speech passed on a whiff, under politest of cover, not to give offence. But prodigies, claim attention.

Page 3512

Our English, at the close of the dinner, consented to say it was good, without specifying a dish, because a selection of this or that would have seemed to italicize, and commit, them, in the presence of ladies, to a notice of the matter of-course, beneath us, or the confession of a low sensual enjoyment; until Lady Grace Halley named the particular dressing of a tete de veau approvingly to Victor; and he stating, that he had offered a suggestion for the menu of the day, Nataly exclaimed, that she had suspected it: upon which Mr. Sowerby praised the menu, Mr. Barmby, Peridon and Catkin named other dishes, there was the right after-dinner ring in Victor's ears, thanks to the woman of the world who had travelled round to nature and led the shackled men to deliver themselves heartily. One tap, and they are free. That is, in the moments after dinner, when nature is at the gates with them. Only, it must be a lady and a prevailing lady to give the tap. They need (our English) and will for the ages of the process of their transformation need a queen.

Skepsey, bag in hand, obeyed the motion of his master's head and followed him.

He was presently back, to remain with the ladies during his master's perusal of letters. Nataly had decreed that he was not to be troubled; so Nesta and mademoiselle besought him for a recital of his French adventures; and strange to say, he had nothing to tell. The journey, pregnant at the start, exciting in the course of it, was absolutely blank at the termination. French people had been very kind; he could not say more. But there was more; there was a remarkable fulness, if only he could subordinate it to narrative. The little man did not know, that time was wanted for imagination to make the roadway or riverway of a true story, unless we press to invent; his mind had been too busy on the way for him to clothe in speech his impressions of the passage of incidents at the call for them. Things had happened, numbers of interesting minor things, but they all slipped as water through the fingers; and he being of the band of honest creatures who will not accept a lift from fiction, drearily he sat before the ladies, confessing to an emptiness he was far from feeling.

Nesta professed excessive disappointment. 'Now, if it had been in England, Skips!' she said, under her mother's gentle gloom of brows.

He made show of melancholy submission.

'There, Skepsey, you have a good excuse, we are sure,' Nataly said.

And women, when they are such ladies as these, are sent to prove to us that they can be a blessing; instead of the dreadful cry to Providence for the reason of the spread of the race of man by their means! He declared his readiness, rejecting excuses, to state his case to them, but for his fear of having it interpreted as an appeal for their kind aid in obtaining his master's forgiveness. Mr. Durance had very considerately promised to intercede. Skepsey dropped a hint or two of his naughty proceedings drily aware that their untutored antipathy to the manly art would not permit of warmth.

Page 3513

Nesta said: ’Do you know, Skips, we saw a grand exhibition of fencing in Paris.’

He sighed. ’Ladies can look on at fencing! foils and masks! Captain Dartrey Fenellan has shown me, and says, the French are our masters at it.’ He bowed constrainedly to mademoiselle.

‘You box, M. Skepsey!’ she said.

His melancholy increased: ’Much discouragement from Government, Society! If ladies . . . but I do not venture. They are not against Games. But these are not a protection . . . to them, when needed; to the country. The country seems asleep to its position. Mr. Durance has remarked on it:—though I would not always quote Mr. Durance . . . indeed, he says, that England has invested an Old Maid’s All in the Millennium, and is ruined if it delays to come. “Old Maid,” I do not see. I do not—if I may presume to speak of myself in the same breath with so clever a gentleman, agree with Mr. Durance in everything. But the chest-measurement of recruits, the stature of the men enlisted, prove that we are losing the nursery of our soldiers.’

’We are taking them out of the nursery, Skips, if you ’re for quoting Captain Dartrey,’ said Nesta. ’We’ll never haul down our flag, though, while we have him!’

‘Ah! Captain Dartrey!’ Skepsey was refreshed by the invocation of the name.

A summons to his master’s presence cut short something he was beginning to say about Captain Dartrey.

CHAPTER XVI

ACCOUNTS FOR SKEPSEY’S MISCONDUCT, SHOWING HOW IT AFFECTED NATALY

His master opened on the bristling business.

’What’s this, of your name in the papers, your appearing before a magistrate, and a fine? Tell the tale shortly.’

Skepsey fell upon his attitude for dialectical defence the modest form of the two hands at rolling play and the head deferentially sidecast. But knowing that he had gratified his personal tastes in the act of serving his master’s interests, an interfusion of sentiments plunged him into self-consciousness; an unwonted state with him, clogging to a simple story.

’First, sir, I would beg you to pardon the printing of your name beside mine . . .’

‘Tush: on with you.’

’Only to say, necessitated by the circumstances of the case. I read, that there was laughter in the court at my exculpation of my conduct—as I have to call it; and there may have been. I may have expressed myself . . . . I have a strong feeling for the welfare of the country.’

’So, it seems, you said to the magistrate. Do you tell me, that the cause of your gross breach of the law, was a consideration for the welfare of the country? Run on the facts.’

‘The facts—I must have begun badly, sir.’ Skepsey rattled the dry facts in his head to right them. From his not having begun well, they had become dry as things underfoot. It was an error to have led off with the sentiments. ’Two very, two very respectable persons—respectable—were desirous to witness a short display of my, my system, I would say; of my science, they call it.’

Page 3514

’Don’t be nervous. To the point; you went into a field five miles out of London, in broad day, and stood in a ring, the usual Tiff-raff about you!’

’With the gloves: and not for money, Sir: for the trial of skill; not very many people. I cannot quite see the breach of the law.’

’So you told the magistrate. You were fined for your inability to quite see. And you had to give security.’

’Mr. Durance was kindly responsible for me, sir: an acquaintance of the magistrate.’

’This boxing of yours is a positive mania, Skepsey. You must try to get the better of it—-must! And my name too! I’m to be proclaimed, as having in my service an inveterate pugilist—who breaks the law from patriotism! Male or female, these very respectable persons—the people your show was meant for?’

‘Male, sir. Females! . . . that is, not the respectable ones.’

’Take the opinion of the respectable ones for your standard of behaviour in future.’

’It was a mere trial of skill, sir, to prove to one of the spectators, that I could be as good as my word. I wished I may say, to conciliate him, partly. He would not—he judged by size—credit me with . . . he backed my adversary Jerry Scroom—a sturdy boxer, without the knowledge of the first principles.’

‘You beat him?’

’I think I taught the man that I could instruct, sir; he was complimentary before we parted. He thought I could not have lasted. After the second round, the police appeared.’

‘And you ran!’

‘No, sir; I had nothing on my conscience.’

’Why not have had your pugilistic display in a publican’s room in town, where you could have hammer-nailed and ding-donged to your heart’s content for as long as you liked!’

’That would have been preferable, from the point of view of safety from intrusion, I can admit-speaking humbly. But one of the parties—I had a wish to gratify him—is a lover of old English times and habits and our country scenes. He wanted it to take place on green grass. We drove over Hampstead in three carts and a gig, as a company of pleasure—as it was. A very beautiful morning. There was a rest at a public-house. Mr. Shaplow traces the misfortune to that. Mr. Jarniman, I hear, thinks it what he calls a traitor in the camp. I saw no sign; we were all merry and friendly.’

‘Jarniman?’ said Victor sharply. ‘Who is the Jarniman?’

’Mr. Jarniman is, I am to understand from the acquaintance introducing us—a Mr. Shaplow I met in the train from Lakelands one day, and again at the corner of a street near Drury Lane, a ham and beef shop kept by a Mrs. Jarniman, a very stout lady, who does the chief carving in the shop, and is the mother of Mr. Jarniman: he is in a confidential place, highly trusted.’ Skepsey looked up from the hands he soaped: ’He is a curious mixture; he has true enthusiasm for boxing, he believes in ghosts. He mourns for the lost days of prize-fighting, he thinks that spectres are on the increase. He has a very large appetite, depressed spirits. Mr. Shaplow informs me he is a man of substance, in the service of a wealthy lady in poor health, expecting a legacy and her appearance to him. He has the look—Mr. Shaplow assures me he does not drink to excess: he is a slow drinker.’

Page 3515

Victor straightened: ‘Bad way of health, you said?’

’Mr. Jarniman spoke of his expectations, as being immediate: he put it, that he expected her spirit to be out for him to meet it any day—or night. He desires it. He says, she has promised it—on oath, he says, and must feel that she must do her duty to him before she goes, if she is to appear to him with any countenance after. But he is anxious for her in any case to show herself, and says, he should not have the heart to reproach her. He has principles, a tear for suffering; he likes to be made to cry. Mrs. Jarniman, his mother, he is not married, is much the same so far, except ghosts; she will not have them; except after strong tea, they come, she says, come to her bed. She is foolish enough to sleep in a close-curtained bed. But the poor lady is so exceedingly stout that a puff of cold would carry her off, she fears.’

Victor stamped his foot. ’This man Jarniman serves a lady now in a—serious, does he say? Was he precise?’

’Mr. Jarniman spoke of a remarkable number of diseases; very complicated, he says. He has no opinion of doctors. He says, that the lady’s doctor and the chemist—she sits in a chemist’s shop and swallows other people’s prescriptions that take her fancy. He says, her continuing to live is wonderful. He has no reason to hurry her, only for the satisfaction of a natural curiosity.’

‘He mentioned her name?’

‘No name, sir.’

Skepsey’s limpid grey eyes confirmed the negative to Victor, who was assured that the little man stood clean of any falsity.

’You are not on equal terms. You and the magistrate have helped him to know who it is you serve, Skepsey.’

‘Would you please to direct me, sir.’

’Another time. Now go and ease your feet with a run over the town. We have music in half an hour. That you like, I know. See chiefly to amusing yourself.’

Skepsey turned to go; he murmured, that he had enjoyed his trip.

Victor checked him: it was to ask whether this Jarniman had specified one, any one of the numerous diseases afflicting his aged mistress.

Now Jarniman had shocked Skepsey with his blunt titles for a couple of the foremost maladies assailing the poor lady’s decayed constitution: not to be mentioned, Skepsey’s thought, in relation to ladies; whose organs and functions we, who pay them

a proper homage by restricting them to the sphere so worthily occupied by their mothers up to the very oldest date, respectfully curtain; their accepted masters are chivalrous to them, deploring their need at times for the doctors and drugs. He stood looking most unhappy. 'She was to appear, sir, in a few—perhaps a week, a month.'

A nod dismissed him.

Page 3516

The fun of the expedition (and Dudley Sowerby had wound himself up to relish it) was at night in the towns, when the sound of instrumental and vocal music attracted crowds beneath the windows of the hotel, and they heard zon, zon, violon, fete et basse; not bad fluting, excellent fiddling, such singing as a maestro, conducting his own Opera, would have approved. So Victor said of his darlings' voices. Nesta's and her mother's were a perfect combination; Mr. Barmby's trompe in union, sufficiently confirmed the popular impression, that they were artistes. They had been ceremoniously ushered to their carriages, with expressions of gratitude, at the departure from Rouen; and the Boniface at Gisors had entreated them to stay another night, to give an entertainment. Victor took his pleasure in letting it be known, that they were a quiet English family, simply keeping-up the habits they practiced in Old England: all were welcome to hear them while they were doing it; but they did not give entertainments.

The pride of the pleasure of reversing the general idea of English dulness among our neighbours, was perceived to have laid fast hold of Dudley Sowerby at Dreux. He was at the window from time to time, counting heads below. For this reason or a better, he begged Nesta to supplant the flute duet with the soprano and contralto of the Helena section of the Mefistofele, called the Serenade: La Luna immobile. She consulted her mother, and they sang it. The crowds below, swollen to a block of the street, were dead still, showing the instinctive good manners of the people. Then mademoiselle astonished them with a Provencal or Cevennes air, Huguenot, though she was Catholic; but it suited her mezzo-soprano tones; and it rang massively of the martial-religious. To what heights of spiritual grandeur might not a Huguenot France have marched! Dudley Sowerby, heedlessly, under an emotion that could be stirred in him with force, by the soul of religion issuing through music, addressed his ejaculation to Lady Grace Halley. She did nor shrug or snub him, but rejoined: 'I could go to battle with that song in the ears.' She liked seeing him so happily transformed; and liked the effect of it on Nesta when his face shone in talking. He was at home with the girl's eyes, as he had never been. A song expressing in one of the combative and devotional, went to the springs of his blood; for he was of an old warrior race, beneath the thick crust of imposed peaceful maxims and commercial pursuits and habitual stiff correctness. As much as wine, will music bring out the native bent of the civilized man: endow him with language too. He was as if unlocked; he met Nesta's eyes and ran in a voluble interchange, that gave him flattering after-thoughts; and at the moment sensibly a new and assured, or to some extent assured, station beside a girl so vivid; by which the young lady would be helped to perceive his unvoiced solider gifts.

Page 3517

Nataly observed them, thinking of Victor's mastering subtlety. She had hoped (having clearly seen the sheep's eye in the shepherd) that Mr. Barmby would be watchful to act as a block between them; and therefore she had stipulated for his presence on the journey. She remembered Victor's rapid look of readiness to consent:—he reckoned how naturally Mr. Barmby would serve as a foil to any younger man. Mr. Barmby had tried all along to perform his part: he had always been thwarted; notably once at Gisors, where by some cunning management he and mademoiselle found themselves in the cell of the prisoner's Nail-wrought work while Nesta had to take Sowerby's hand for help at a passage here and there along the narrow outer castle-walls. And Mr. Barmby, upon occasions, had set that dimple in Nesta's cheek quivering, though Simeon Fenellan was not at hand, and there was no telling how it was done, beyond the evidence that Victor willed it so.

From the day of the announcement of Lakelands, she had been brought more into contact with his genius of dexterity and foresight than ever previously: she had bent to the burden of it more; had seen herself and everybody else outstripped—herself, of course; she did not count in a struggle with him. But since that red dawn of Lakelands, it was almost as if he had descended to earth from the skies. She now saw his mortality in the miraculous things he did. The reason of it was, that through the perceptible various arts and shifts on her level, an opposing spirit had plainer view of his aim, to judge it. She thought it a mean one.

The power it had to hurry her with the strength of a torrent to an end she dreaded, impressed her physically; so far subduing her mind, in consequence, as to keep the idea of absolute resistance obscure, though her bosom heaved with the breath; but what was her own of a mind hung hovering above him, criticizing; and involuntarily, discomfortingly. She could have prayed to be led blindly or blindly dashed on: she could trust him for success; and her critical mind seemed at times a treachery. Still she was compelled to judge.

When he said to her at night, pressing both her hands: 'This is the news of the day, my love! It's death at last. We shall soon be thanking heaven for freedom'; her fingers writhed upon his and gripped them in a torture of remorse on his behalf. A shattering throb of her heart gave her sight of herself as well. For so it is with the woman who loves in subjection, she may be a critic of the man, she is his accomplice.'

'You have a letter, Victor?'

'Confirmation all round: Fenellan, Themison, and now Skepsey.'

He told her the tale of Skepsey and Jarniman, colouring it, as any interested animated conduit necessarily will. Neither of them smiled.

The effort to think soberly exhausted and rolled her back on credulity.

It might not be to-day or next week or month: but so much testimony pointed to a day within the horizon, surely!

Page 3518

She bowed her head to heaven for forgiveness. The murderous hope stood up, stood out in forms and pictures. There was one of a woman at her ease at last in the reception of guests; contrasting with an ironic haunting figure of the woman of queenly air and stature under a finger of scorn for a bold-faced impostor. Nataly's lips twitched at the remembrance of quaint whimpers of complaint to the Fates, for directing that a large instead of a rather diminutive woman should be the social offender fearing exposure. Majesty in the criminal's dock, is a confounding spectacle. To the bosom of the majestic creature, all her glorious attributes have become the executioner's implements. She must for her soul's health believe that a day of release and exoneration approaches.

'Barmby!—if my dear girl would like him best,' Victor said, in tenderest undertones, observing the shadowing variations of her face; and pierced her cruelly, past explanation or understanding;—not that she would have objected to the Rev. Septimus as officiating clergyman.

She nodded. Down rolled the first big tear.

We cry to women; Land, ho!—a land of palms after storms at sea; and at once they inundate us with a deluge of eye-water.

'Half a minute, dear Victor, not longer,' Nataly said, weeping, near on laughing over his look of wanton abandonment to despair at sight of her tears. 'Don't mind me. I am rather like Fenellan's laundress, the tearful woman whose professional apparatus was her soft heart and a cake of soap. Skepsey has made his peace with you?'

Victor answered: 'Yes, yes; I see what he has been about. We're a mixed lot, all of us-the best! You've noticed, Skepsey has no laugh: however absurd the thing he tells you, not a smile!'

'But you trust his eyes; you look fathoms into them. Captain Dartrey thinks him one of the men most in earnest of any of his country.'

'So Nataly of course thinks the same. And he's a worthy little velocipede, as Fenellan calls him. One wishes Colney had been with us. Only Colney!—pity one can't cut his talons for the space before they grow again.'

Ay, and in the presence of Colney Durance, Victor would not have been so encouraging, half boyishly caressing, with Dudley Sowerby! It was the very manner to sow seed of imitativeness in the girl, devoted as she was to her father. Nataly sighed, foreseeing evil, owning it a superstition, feeling it a certainty. We are easily prophets, sure of being justified, when the cleverness of schemes devoted to material ends appears most delicately perfect. History, the tales of households, the tombstone, are with us to inspire. In Nataly's bosom, the reproof of her inefficiency for offering counsel where

Victor for his soul’s sake needed it, was beginning to thunder at whiles as a reproach of unfittingness in his mate, worse than a public denunciation of the sin against Society.

Page 3519

It might be decreed that she and Society were to come to reconcilement. A pain previously thought of, never previously so realized, seized her at her next sight of Nesta. She had not taken in her front mind the contrast of the innocent one condemned to endure the shadow from which the guilty was by a transient ceremony released. Nature could at a push be eloquent to defend the guilty. Not a word of vindicating eloquence rose up to clear the innocent. Nothing that she could do; no devotedness, not any sacrifice, and no treaty of peace, no possible joy to come, nothing could remove the shadow from her child. She dreamed of the succour in eloquence, to charm the ears of chosen juries while a fact spoke over the population, with a relentless rolling out of its one hard word. But eloquence, powerful on her behalf, was dumb when referred to Nesta. It seemed a cruel mystery. How was it permitted by the Merciful Disposer! . . . . Nataly's intellect and her reverence clashed. They clash to the end of time if we persist in regarding the Spirit of Life as a remote Externe, who plays the human figures, to bring about this or that issue, instead of being beside us, within us, our breath, if we will; marking on us where at each step we sink to the animal, mount to the divine, we and ours who follow, offspring of body or mind. She was in her error, from judgeing of the destiny of man by the fate of individuals. Chiefly her error was, to try to be thinking at all amid the fevered tangle of her sensations.

A darkness fell upon the troubled woman, and was thicker overhead when her warm blood had drawn her to some acceptance of the philosophy of existence, in a savour of gratification at the prospect of her equal footing with the world while yet she lived. She hated herself for taking pleasure in anything to be bestowed by a world so hap-hazard, ill-balanced, unjust; she took it bitterly, with such naturalness as not to be aware that it was irony and a poisonous irony moving her to welcome the restorative ceremony because her largeness of person had a greater than common need of the protection.

CHAPTER XVII

CHIEFLY UPON THE THEME OF A YOUNG MAID'S IMAGININGS

That Mausoleum at Dreux may touch to lift us. History, pleads for the pride of the great discrowned Family giving her illumination there. The pride is reverently postured, the princely mourning-cloak it wears becomingly braided at the hem with fair designs of our mortal humility in the presence of the vanquisher; against whom, acknowledgeing a visible conquest of the dust, it sustains a placid contention in coloured glass and marbles.

Mademoiselle de Seilles, a fervid Orleanist, was thanked for having advised the curvature of the route homeward to visit 'the spot of so impressive a monument': as it, was phrased by the Rev. Septimus Barmby; whose exposition to Nesta of the beautiful stained-glass pictures of incidents in the life of the crusading St. Louis, was toned to be likewise impressive:—Colney Durance not being at hand to bewail the pathos of his

exhaustless ‘whacking of the platitudes’; which still retain their tender parts, but cry unheard when there is no cynic near. Mr. Barmby laid-on solemnly.

Page 3520

Professional devoutness is deemed more righteous on such occasions than poetic fire. It robes us in the cloak of the place, as at a funeral. Generally, Mr. Barmby found, and justly, that it is in superior estimation among his countrymen of all classes. They are shown by example how to look, think, speak; what to do. Poets are disturbing; they cannot be comfortably imitated, they are unsafe, not certainly the metal, unless you have Laureates, entitled to speak by their pay and decorations; and these are but one at a time-and a quotation may remind us of a parody, to convulse the sacred dome! Established plain prose officials do better for our English. The audience moved round with heads of undertakers.

Victor called to recollection Fenellan's 'Rev. Glendoveer' while Mr. Barmby pursued his discourse, uninterrupted by tripping wags. And those who have schemes, as well as those who are startled by the criticism in laughter to discover that they have cause for shunning it, rejoice when wits are absent. Mr. Sowerby and Nesta interchanged a comment on Mr. Barmby's remarks: The Fate of Princes! The Paths of Glory! St. Louis was a very distant Roman Catholic monarch; and the young gentleman of Evangelical education could admire him as a Crusader. St. Louis was for Nesta a figure in the rich hues of royal Saintship softened to homeliness by tears. She doated on a royalty crowned with the Saint's halo, that swam down to us to lift us through holy human showers. She listened to Mr. Barmby, hearing few sentences, lending his eloquence all she felt: he rolled forth notes of a minster organ, accordant with the devotional service she was holding mutely. Mademoiselle upon St. Louis: 'Worthy to be named King of Kings!' swept her to a fount of thoughts, where the thoughts are not yet shaped, are yet in the breast of the mother emotions. Louise de Seilles had prepared her to be strangely and deeply moved. The girl had a heart of many strings, of high pitch, open to be musical to simplest wandering airs or to the gales. This crypt of the recumbent sculptured figures and the coloured series of acts in the passage of the crowned Saint thrilled her as with sight of flame on an altar-piece of History. But this King in the lines of the Crucifixion leading, gave her a lesson of life, not a message from death. With such a King, there would be union of the old order and the new, cessation to political turmoil: Radicalism, Socialism, all the monster names of things with heads agape in these our days to gobble-up the venerable, obliterate the beautiful, leave a stoniness of floods where field and garden were, would be appeased, transfigured. She hoped, she prayed for that glorious leader's advent.

Page 3521

On one subject, conceived by her only of late, and not intelligibly, not communicably: a subject thickly veiled; one which struck at her through her sex and must, she thought, ever be unnamed (the ardent young creature saw it as a very thing torn by the winds to show hideous gleams of a body rageing with fire behind the veil): on this one subject, her hopes and prayers were dumb in her bosom. It signified shame. She knew not the how, for she had no power to contemplate it: there was a torment of earth and a writhing of lurid dust-clouds about it at a glimpse. But if the new crusading Hero were to come attacking that—if some born prince nobly man would head the world to take away the withering scarlet from the face of women, she felt she could kiss the print of his feet upon the ground. Meanwhile she had enjoyment of her plunge into the inmost forest-well of mediaeval imaginativeness, where youthful minds of good aspiration through their obscurities find much akin to them.

She had an eye for little Skepsey too: unaware that these French Princes had hurried him off to Agincourt, for another encounter with them and the old result—poor dear gentlemen, with whom we do so wish to be friendly! What amused her was, his evident fatigue in undergoing the slow parade, and sheer deference to his betters, as to the signification of a holiday on arrested legs. Dudley Sowerby's attention to him, in elucidating the scenes with historical scraps, greatly pleased her. The Rev. Septimus of course occupied her chiefly.

Mademoiselle was always near, to receive his repeated expressions of gratitude for the route she had counselled. Without personal objections to a well-meaning orderly man, whose pardonable error it was to be aiming too considerably higher than his head, she did but show him the voluble muteness of a Frenchwoman's closed lips; not a smile at all, and certainly no sign of hostility; when bowing to his reiterated compliment in the sentence of French. Mr. Barmby had noticed (and a strong sentiment rendered him observant, unwontedly) a similar alert immobility of her lips, indicating foreign notions of this kind or that, in England: an all but imperceptible shortening or loss of corners at the mouth, upon mention of marriages of his clergy: particularly once, at his reading of a lengthy report in a newspaper of a Wedding Ceremony involving his favourite Bishop for bridegroom: a report to make one glow like Hymen rollicking the Torch after draining the bumper to the flying slipper. He remembered the look, and how it seemed to intensify on the slumbering features, at a statement, that his Bishop was a widower, entering into nuptials in his fifty-fourth year. Why not? But we ask it of Heaven and Man, why not? Mademoiselle was pleasant: she was young or youngish; her own clergy were celibates, and—no, he could not argue the matter with a young or youngish person of her sex. Could it be a reasonable woman—a woman!—who, disapproved the holy nuptials of the pastors of the flocks? But we are forbidden to imagine the conducting of an argument thereon with a lady.

Page 3522

Luther . . . but we are not in Luther's time:—Nature . . . no, nor can there possibly be allusions to Nature. Mr. Barmby wondered at Protestant parents taking a Papistical governess for their young flower of English womanhood. However, she venerated St. Louis; he cordially also; there they met; and he admitted, that she had, for a Frenchwoman, a handsome face, and besides an agreeably artificial ingenuousness in the looks which could be so politely dubious as to appear only dubiously adverse.

The spell upon Nesta was not blown away on English ground; and when her father and mother were comparing their impressions, she could not but keep guard over the deeper among her own. At the Chateau de Gisors, leftward off Vernon on Seine, it had been one of romance and wonderment, with inquisitive historic soundings of her knowledge and mademoiselle's, a reverence for the prisoner's patient holy work, and picturings of his watchful waiting daily, Nail in hand, for the heaven-sent sunlight on the circular dungeon-wall through the slits of the meurtrieres. But the Mausoleum at Dreux spake religiously; it enfolded Mr. Barmby, his voice re-edified it. The fact that he had discoursed there, though not a word of the discourse was remembered, allied him to the spirit of a day rather increasing in sacredness as it receded and left her less the possessor of it, more the worshipper.

Mademoiselle had to say to herself: 'Impossible!' after seeing the drift of her dear Nesta's eyes in the wake of the colossal English clergyman. She fed her incredulousness indignantly on the evidence confounding it. Nataly was aware of unusual intonations, treble-stressed, in the Bethesda and the Galilee of Mr. Barmby on Concert evenings: as it were, the towering wood-work of the cathedral organ in quake under emission of its multitudinous outroar. The 'Which?' of the Rev. Septimus, addressed to Nesta, when song was demanded of him; and her 'Either'; and his gentle hesitation, upon a gaze at her for the directing choice, could not be unnoticed by women.

Did he know a certain thing?—and dream of urging the suit, as an indulgent skipper of parental pages?

Such haunting interrogations were the conspirators' daggers out at any instant, or leaping in sheath, against Nataly's peace of mind. But she trusted her girl's laughing side to rectify any little sentimental overbalancing. She left the ground where maternal meditations are serious, at an image of Mr. Barmby knocking at Nesta's heart as a lover. Was it worth inquiry?

A feminine look was trailed across the eyes of mademoiselle, with mention of Mr. Barmby's name.

Mademoiselle rippled her shoulders. 'We are at present much enamoured of Bethesda.'

That watchfullest showing no alarm, the absurdity of the suspicion smothered it.

Nataly had moreover to receive startling new guests:

Page 3523

Lady Rodwell Blachington: Mrs. Fanning, wife of the General: young Mrs. Blathenoy, wife of the great bill-broker: ladies of Wrensham and about. And it was a tasking of her energies equal to the buffeting of recurrent waves on deep sea. The ladies were eager for her entry into Lakelands. She heard that Victor had appointed Lady Blachington's third son to the coveted post of clerk in the Indian house of Inchling and Radnor. These are the deluge days when even aristocracy will cry blessings on the man who procures a commercial appointment for one of its younger sons offended and rebutted by the barrier of Examinations for the Civil Service. 'To have our Adolphus under Mr. Victor Radnor's protection, is a step!' Lady Blachington said. Nataly was in an atmosphere of hints and revealings. There were City Dinners, to which one or other of the residents about Lakelands had been taken before he sat at Victor's London table. He was already winning his way, apparently without effort, to be the popular man of that neighbourhood. A subterranean tide or a slipping of earth itself seemed bearing her on. She had his promise indeed, that he would not ask of her to enter Lakelands until the day of his freedom had risen; but though she could trust to his word, the heart of the word went out of it when she heard herself thanked by Lady Blachington (who could so well excuse her at such a time of occupation for not returning her call, that she called in a friendly way a second time, warmly to thank her) for throwing open the Concert room at Lakelands in August, to an Entertainment in assistance of the funds for the purpose of erecting an East of London Clubhouse, where the children of the poor by day could play, and their parents pass a disengaged evening. Doubtless a worthy Charity. Nataly was alive to the duties of wealth. Had it been simply a demand for a donation, she would not have shown that momentary pucker of the brows, which Lady Blachington read as a contrast with the generous vivacity of the husband.

Nataly read a leaf of her fate in this announcement. Nay, she beheld herself as the outer world wexedly beholds a creature swung along to the doing of things against the better mind. An outer world is thoughtless of situations which prepare us to meet the objectionable with a will benumbed;—if we do not, as does that outer world, belong to the party of the readily heroical. She scourged her weakness: and the intimation of the truth stood over her, more than ever manifest, that the deficiency affecting her character lay in her want of language. A tongue to speak and contend, would have helped her to carve a clearer way. But then again, the tongue to speak must be one which could reproach, and strike at errors; fence, and continually summon resources to engage the electrical vitality of a man like Victor. It was an exultation of their life together, a mark of his holiness for them both, that they had never breathed a reproach upon one another.

Page 3524

She dropped away from ideas of remonstrance; faintly seeing, in her sigh of submission, that the deficiency affecting her character would have been supplied by a greater force of character, pressing either to speech or acts. The confession of a fated inevitable in the mind, is weakness prostrate. She knew it: but she could point to the manner of man she was matched with; and it was not a poor excuse.

Mr. Barmby, she thought, deserved her gratitude in some degree for stepping between Mr. Sowerby and Nesta. The girl not having inclinations, and the young gentleman being devoid of stratagem, they were easily kept from the dangerous count of two.

Mademoiselle would have said, that the shepherd also had rarely if ever a minute quite alone with her lamb. Incredulously she perceived signs of a shock. The secret following the signs was betrayed by Nesta in return for a tender grasp of hands and a droll flutter of eyelids. Out it came, on a nod first; then a dreary mention of a date, and an incident, to bring it nearer to comprehension. Mr. Barmby—and decide who will whether it is that Love was made to elude or that curates impelled by his fires are subtle as nether—had outwitted French watchfulness by stealing minutes enough on a day at Lakelands to declare himself. And no wonder the girl looked so forlorn: he had shivered her mediaeval forest-palace of illuminated glass, to leave her standing like a mountain hind, that sniffs the tainted gale off the crag of her first quick leap from hounds; her instincts alarmed, instead of rich imagination colouring and fostering.

She had no memory for his words; so, and truly, she told her Louise: meaning that she had only a spiceless memory; especially for the word love in her ears from the mouth of a man.

There had been a dream of it; with the life-awakening marvel it would be, the humbleness it would bring to her soul beneath the golden clothing of her body: one of those faint formless dreams, which are as the bend of grasses to the breath of a still twilight. She lived too spiritedly to hang on any dream; and had moreover a muffled dread-shadow-sister to the virginal desire—of this one, as of a fateful power that might drag her down, disorder, discolour. But now she had heard it: the word, the very word itself! in her own ears! addressed to her! in a man’s voice! The first utterance had been heard, and it was over; the chapter of the book of bulky promise of the splendours and mysteries;—the shimmering woods and bushy glades, and the descent of the shape celestial, and the recognition—the mutual cry of affinity; and overhead the crimson outrolling of the flag of beneficent enterprises hand in hand, all was at an end. These, then, are the deceptions our elders tell of! That masculine voice should herald a new world to the maiden. The voice she had heard did but rock to ruin the world she had been living in.

Mademoiselle prudently forbore from satirical remarks on his person or on his conduct. Nesta had nothing to defend: she walked in a bald waste.

Page 3525

‘Can I have been guilty of leading him to think . . .?’ she said, in a tone that writhed, at a second discussion of this hapless affair.

‘They choose to think,’ mademoiselle replied. ’It is he or another. My dear and dearest, you have entered the field where shots fly thick, as they do to soldiers in battle; and it is neither your fault nor any one’s, if you are hit.’

Nesta gazed at her, with a shy supplicating cry of ‘Louise.’

Mademoiselle immediately answered the tone of entreaty. ’Has it happened to me? I am of the age of eight and twenty; passable, to look at: yes, my dear, I have gone through it. To spare you the questions tormenting you, I will tell you, that perhaps our experience of our feelings comes nigh on a kind of resemblance. The first gentleman who did me the honour to inform me of his passion, was a hunchback.’

Nesta cried ‘Oh!’ in a veritable pang of sympathy, and clapped hands to her ears, to shut out Mr. Barmby’s boom of the terrific word attacking Louise from that deformed one.

Her disillusionment became of the sort which hears derision. A girl of quick blood and active though unregulated intellect, she caught at the comic of young women’s hopes and experiences, in her fear of it.

’My own precious poor dear Louise! what injustice there is in the world for one like my Louise to have a hunchback to be the first . . . !’

‘But, my dear, it did me no harm.’

‘But if it had been known!’

‘But it was known!’

Nesta controlled a shuddering: ’It is the knowledge of it in ourselves—that it has ever happened;—you dear Louise, who deserve so much better! And one asks—Oh, why are we not left in peace! And do look at the objects it makes of us!’ Mademoiselle: could see, that the girl’s desperation had got hold of her humour for a life-buoy. ’It is really worse to have it unknown—when you are compelled to be his partner in sharing the secret, and feel as if it were a dreadful doll you conceal for fear that everybody will laugh at its face.’

She resumed her seriousness: ’I find it so hard to be vexed with him and really really like him. For he is a good man; but he will not let one shake him off. He distresses: because we can’t quite meet as we did. Last Wednesday Concert evening, he kept away; and I am annoyed that I was glad.’

’Moths have to pass through showers, and keep their pretty patterns from damage as best they can,’ said mademoiselle.

Nesta transformed herself into a disciple of Philosophy on the spot. ’Yes, all these feelings of ours are moth-dust! One feels them. I suppose they pass. They must. But tell me, Louise, dear soul, was your poor dear good little afflicted suitor—was he kindly pitied?’

’Conformably with the regulations prescribed to young damsels who are in request to surrender the custody of their hands. It is easy to commit a dangerous excess in the dispensing of that article they call pity of them.’

Page 3526

‘And he—did he?—vowed to you he could not take No for an answer?’

At this ingenuous question, woefully uttered, mademoiselle was pricked, to smile pointedly. Nesta had a tooth on her under-lip. Then, shaking vapours to the winds, she said: ’It is an honour, to be asked; and we cannot be expected to consent. So I shall wear through it.—Only I do wish that Mr. Fenellan would not call him The Inchcape Bell!’ She murmured this to herself.

Mr. Barmby was absent for two weeks. ‘Can anything have offended him?’ Victor inquired, in some consternation, appreciating the man’s worth, and the grand basso he was; together with the need for him at the Lakelands Concert in August.

Nataly wrote Mr. Barmby a direct invitation. She had no reply. Her speculations were cut short by Victor, who handed her a brief note addressed to him and signed by the Rev. Septimus, petitioning for a private interview.

The formality of the request incensed Victor. ’Now, dear love, you see Colney’s meaning, when he says, there are people who have no intimacy in them. Here’s a man who visits me regularly once a week or more, has been familiar for years—four, at least; and he wants to speak to me, and must obtain the “privilege” by special appointment! What can be the meaning of it?’

‘You will hear to-morrow afternoon,’ Nataly said, seeing one paved way to the meaning—a too likely meaning. . . ’He hasn’t been . . . nothing about Fredi, surely!’

‘I have had no information.’

’Impossible! Barmby has good sense; Bottesini can’t intend to come scraping on that string. But we won’t lose him; he’s one of us. Barmby counts for more at a Charity Concert than all the catalogue, and particularly in the country. But he’s an excellent fellow—eh?’

‘That he is,’ Nataly agreed.

Victor despatched a cheerful curt consent to see Mr. Barmby privately on the late afternoon of the day to follow.

Nesta, returning home from the park at that hour of the interview, ignorant of Mr. Barmby’s purpose though she was, had her fires extinguished by the rolling roar of curfew along the hall-passage, out of the library.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUITORS FOR THE HAND OF NESTA VICTORIA

When, upon the well-known quest, the delightful singer Orpheus took that downward way, coming in sight of old Cerberus centiceps, he astutely feigned inattention to the hostile appearances of the multiple beast, and with a wave of his plectrum over the responsive lyre, he at the stroke raised voice. This much you know. It may be communicated to you, that there was then beheld the most singular spectacle ever exhibited on the dizzy line of division between the living and the dead. For those unaccustomed musical tones in the last thin whiff of our sustaining air were so smartingly persuasive as to pierce to the vitals of the faithful Old Dog before his offended sentiments

Page 3527

had leisure to rouse their heads against a beggar of a mortal. The terrible sugariness which poured into him worked like venom to cause an encounter and a wrestling: his battery of jaws expressed it. They gaped. At the same time, his eyeballs gave up. All the Dog, that would have barked the breathing intruder an hundredfold back to earth, was one compulsory centurion yawn. Tears, issue of the frightful internal wedding of the dulcet and the sour (a ravishing rather of the latter by the former), rolled off his muzzles.

Now, if you are not for insisting that a magnificent simile shall be composed of exactly the like notes in another octave, you will catch the fine flavour of analogy and be wafted in a beat of wings across the scene of the application of the Rev. Septimus Barmby to Mr. Victor Radnor, that he might enter the house in the guise of suitor for the hand of Nesta Victoria. It is the excelling merit of similes and metaphors to spring us to vault over gaps and thickets and dreary places. But, as with the visits of Immortals, we must be ready to receive them. Beware, moreover, of examining them too scrupulously: they have a trick of wearing to vapour if closely scanned. Let it be gratefully for their aid.

So far the comparison is absolute, that Mr. Barmby passed: he was at liberty to pursue his quest.

Victor could not explain how he had been brought to grant it. He was at pains to conceal the bewilderment Mr. Barmby had cast on him, and make Nataly see the smallness of the grant:—both of them were unwilling to lose Barmby; there was not the slightest fear about Fredi, he said; and why should not poor Barmby have his chance with the others in the race!—and his Nataly knew that he hated to speak unkindly: he could cry the negative like a crack of thunder in the City. But such matters as these! and a man pleading merely for the right to see the girl!—and pleading in a tone . . . 'I assure you, my love, he touched chords.'

'Did he allude to advantages in the alliance with him?' Nataly asked smoothly.

'His passion—nothing else. Candid enough. And he had a tone—he has a tone, you know. It 's not what he said. Some allusion to belief in a favourable opinion of him . . . encouragement . . . on the part of the mama. She would have him travelling with us! I foresaw it.'

'You were astonished when it came.'

'We always are.'

Victor taunted her softly with having encouraged Mr. Barmby.

She had thought in her heart—not seriously; on a sigh of despondency—that Mr. Barmby espousing the girl would smooth a troubled prospect: and a present resentment at her weakness rendered her shrewd to detect Victor's cunning to cover his

own: a thing imaginable of him previously in sentimental matters, yet never accurately and so legibly printed on her mind. It did not draw her to read him with a novel familiarity; it drew her to be more

Page 3528

sensible of foregone intimations of the man he was—irresistible in attack, not impregnably defensive. Nor did he seem in this instance humanely considerate: if mademoiselle's estimate of the mind of the girl was not wrong, then Mr. Barmby's position would be both a ridiculous and a cruel one. She had some silly final idea that the poor man might now serve permanently to check the more dreaded applicant: a proof that her ordinary reflectiveness was blunted.

Nataly acknowledged, after rallying Victor for coming to have his weakness condoned, a justice in his counter-accusation, of a loss of her natural cheerfulness, and promised amendment, with a steely smile, that his lips mimicked fondly; and her smile softened. To strengthen the dear soul's hopes, he spoke, as one who had received the latest information, of Dr. Themison and surgeons; little conscious of the tragic depths he struck or of the burden he gave her heart to bear. Her look alarmed him. She seemed to be hugging herself up to the tingling scalp, and was in a moment marble to sight and touch. She looked like the old engravings of martyrs taking the bite of the jaws of flame at the stake.

He held her embraced, feeling her body as if it were in the awful grip of fingers from the outside of life.

The seizure was over before it could be called ominous. When it was once over, and she had smiled again and rebuked him for excessive anxiety, his apprehensions no longer troubled him, but subsided sensationally in wrath at the crippled woman who would not obey the dictate of her ailments instantly to perish and spare this dear one annoyance.

Subsequently, later than usual, he performed his usual mental penance for it. In consequence, the wrath, and the wish, and the penitence, haunted him, each swelling to possession of him in turn; until they united to head a plunge into retrospects; which led to his reviewing the army of charges against Mrs. Burman.

And of this he grew ashamed, attributing it to the morbid indulgence in reflection: a disease never afflicting him anterior to the stupid fall on London Bridge. He rubbed instinctively for the punctilio-bump, and could cheat his fancy to think a remainder of it there, just below, half an inch to the right of, the spot where a phrenologist, invited by Nataly in old days, had marked philo-progenitiveness on his capacious and enviable cerebrum. He knew well it was a fancy. But it was a fact also, that since the day of the fall (never, save in merest glimpses, before that day), he had taken to look behind him, as though an eye had been knocked in the back of his head.

Then, was that day of the announcement of Lakelands to Nataly, to be accounted a gloomy day? He would not have it so.

Page 3529

She was happily occupied with her purchases of furniture, Fredi with her singing lessons, and he with his business; a grasp of many ribands, reining-in or letting loose; always enjoyable in the act. Recently only had he known when at home, a relaxation, a positive pleasure in looking forward to the hours of the City office. This was odd, but so it was; and looking homeward from the City, he had a sense of disappointment when it was not Concert evening. The Cormyns, the Yatts, and Priscilla Graves, and Pempton, foolish fellow, and that bothering Barmby, and Peridon and Catkin, were the lineing of his nest. Well, and so they had been before Lakelands rose. What had induced! . . . he suddenly felt foreign to himself. The shrouded figure of his lost Idea on London Bridge went by.

A peep into the folds of the shroud was granted him:—Is it a truth, that if we are great owners of money, we are so swollen with a force not native to us, as to be precipitated into acts the downright contrary of our tastes?

He inquired it of his tastes, which have the bad habit of unmeasured phrasing when they are displeased, and so they yield no rational answer. Still he gave heed to violent extraneous harpings against money. Epigrams of Colney's; abuse of it and the owners of it by Socialist orators reported in some newspaper corner; had him by the ears.

They ceased in the presence of Lady Grace Halley, who entered his office to tell him she was leaving town for Whinfold, her husband's family-seat, where the dear man lay in evil case. She signified her resignation to the decrees from above, saying generously:

'You look troubled, my friend. Any bad City news?'

'I look troubled?' Victor said laughing, and bethought him of what the trouble might be. 'City news would not cause the look. Ah, yes;—I was talking in the street to a friend of mine on horseback the other day, and he kept noticing his horse's queer starts. We spied half a dozen children in the gutter, at the tail of the horse, one of them plucking at a hair. "Please, sir, may I have a hair out of your horse's tail?" said the mite. We patted the poor horse that grew a tail for urchins to pluck at. Men come to the fathers about their girls. It's my belief that mothers more easily say no. If they learn the word as maids, you'll say! However, there's no fear about my girl. Fredi's hard to snare. And what brings you Cityward?'

'I want to know whether I shall do right in selling out of the Tiddler mine.'

'You have multiplied your investment by ten.'

'If it had been thousands!'

'Clearly, you sell; always jump out of a mounted mine, unless you're at the bottom of it.'

’There are City-articles against the mine this morning—or I should have been on my way to Whinfold at this moment. The shares are lower.’

’The merry boys are at work to bring your balloon to the ground, that you may quit it for them to ascend. Tiddler has enemies, like the best of mines: or they may be named lovers, if you like. And mines that have gone up, go down for a while before they rise again; it’s an affair of undulations; rocket mines are not so healthy. The stories are false, for the time. I had the latest from Dartrey Fenellan yesterday. He’s here next month; some time in August.’

Page 3530

‘He is married, is he not?’

‘Was.’

Victor’s brevity sounded oddly to Lady Grace.

‘Is he not a soldier?’ she said.

‘Soldiers and parsons!’ Victor interjected.

Now she saw. She understood the portent of Mr. Barmby’s hovering offer of the choice of songs, and the recent tremulousness of the welling Bethesda.

But she had come about her own business; and after remarking, that when there is a prize there must be competition, or England will have to lower her flag, she declared her resolve to stick to Tiddler, exclaiming: ’It’s only in mines that twenty times the stake is not a dream of the past!’

‘The Riviera green field on the rock is always open to you,’ said Victor.

She put out her hand to be taken. ’Not if you back me here. It really is not gambling when yours is the counsel I follow. And if I’m to be a widow, I shall have to lean on a friend, gifted like you. I love adventure, danger;—well, if we two are in it; just to see my captain in a storm. And if the worst happens, we go down together. It ’s the detestation of our deadly humdrum of modern life; some inherited love of fighting.’

‘Say, brandy.’

‘Does not Mr. Durance accuse you of an addiction to the brandy novel?’

’Colney may call it what he pleases. If I read fiction, let it be fiction; airier than hard fact. If I see a ballet, my troop of short skirts must not go stepping like pavement policemen. I can’t read dull analytical stuff or “stylists” when I want action—if I’m to give my mind to a story. I can supply the reflections. I’m English—if Colney ’s right in saying we always come round to the story with the streak of supernaturalism.

I don’t ask for bloodshed: that’s what his “brandy” means.’

’But Mr. Durance is right, we require a shedding; I confess I expect it where there’s love; it’s part of the balance, and justifies one’s excitement. How otherwise do you get any real crisis? I must read and live something unlike this flat life around us.’

’There’s the Adam life and the Macadam life, Fenellan says. Pass it in books, but in life we can have quite enough excitement coming out of our thoughts. No brandy there! And no fine name for personal predilections or things done in domino!’ Victor said, with

his very pleasant face, pressing her hand, to keep the act of long holding it in countenance and bring it to a well-punctuated conclusion: thinking involuntarily of the other fair woman, whose hand was his, and who betrayed a beaten visage despite—or with that poor kind of—trust in her captain. But the thought was not guilty of drawing comparisons. 'This is one that I could trust, as captain or mate,' he pressed the hand again before dropping it.

'You judge entirely by the surface, if you take me for a shifty person at the trial,' said Lady Grace.

Skepsey entered the room with one of his packets, and she was reminded of trains and husbands.

Page 3531

She left Victor uncomfortably rufed: and how? for she had none of the physical charms appealing peculiarly to the man who was taken with grandeur of shape. She belonged rather to the description physically distasteful to him.

It is a critical comment on a civilization carelessly distilled from the jealous East, when visits of fair women to City offices can have this effect. If the sexes are separated for an hour, the place where one is excluded or not common to see, becomes inflammable to that appearing spark. He does outrage to a bona Dea: she to the monasticism of the Court of Law: and he and she awaken unhallowed emotions. Supposing, however, that western men were to de-orientalize their gleeful notions of her, and dis-Turk themselves by inviting the woman's voluble tongue to sisterly occupation there in the midst of the pleading Court, as in the domestic circle: very soon would her eyes be harmless: unless directed upon us with intent.

That is the burning core of the great Question, our Armageddon in Morality: Is she moral? Does she mean to be harmless? Is she not untamable Old Nature? And when once on an equal footing with her lordly half, would not the spangled beauty, in a turn, like the realistic transformation-trick of a pantomime, show herself to be that wanton old thing—the empress of disorderliness? You have to recollect, as the Conservative acutely suggests, that her timidities, at present urging her to support Establishments, pertain to her state of dependence. The party views of Conservatism are, must be, founded, we should remember, on an intimate acquaintance with her in the situations where she is almost unrestrictedly free and her laughter rings to confirm the sentences of classical authors and Eastern sages. Conservatives know what they are about when they refuse to fling the last lattice of an ancient harem open to air and sun-the brutal dispersers of mystery, which would despoil an ankle of its flying wink.

Victor's opinions were those of the entrenched majority; objecting to the occult power of women, as we have the women now, while legislating to maintain them so; and forbidding a step to a desperately wicked female world lest the step should be to wickeder. His opinions were in the background, rarely stirred; but the lady had brought them forward; and he fretted at his restlessness, vexed that it should be due to the intrusion of the sex instead of to the charms of the individual. No sting of the sort had bothered him, he called to mind, on board the Channel boat-nothing to speak of. 'Why does she come here! Why didn't she go to her husband! She gets into the City scramble blindfold, and catches at the nearest hand to help her out! Nice woman enough.' Yes, but he was annoyed with her for springing sensations that ran altogether heartless to the object, at the same time that they were disloyal to the dear woman their natural divinity. And between him and that dear woman, since the communication made by Skepsey in the town of Dreux, nightly the dividing spirit of Mrs. Burman lay cold as a corpse. They both felt her there. They kissed coldly, pressed a hand, said good night.

Page 3532

Next afternoon the announcement by Skepsey of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, surprised Victor's eyebrows at least, and caused him genially to review the visit of Lady Grace.

Whether or not Colney Durance drew his description of a sunken nobility from the 'sick falcon' distinguishing the handsome features of Mr. Sowerby, that beaked invalid was particularly noticeable to Victor during the statement of his case, although the young gentleman was far from being one, in Colney's words, to enliven the condition of domestic fowl with an hereditary turn for 'preying'; eminently the reverse; he was of good moral repute, a worker, a commendable citizen. But there was the obligation upon him to speak—it is expected in such cases, if only as a formality—of his 'love': hard to do even in view and near to the damsel's reddening cheeks: it perplexed him. He dropped a veil on the bashful topic; his tone was the same as when he reverted to the material points; his present income, his position in the great Bank of Shotts and Co., his prospects, the health of the heir to the Cantor earldom. He considered that he spoke to a member of the City merchants, whose preference for the plain positive, upon the question of an alliance between families by marriage, lends them for once a resemblance to lords. When a person is not read by character, the position or profession is called on to supply raised print for the finger-ends to spell.

Hard on poor Fredi! was Victor's thought behind the smile he bent on this bald Cupid. She deserved a more poetical lover! His paternal sympathies for the girl besought in love, revived his past feelings as a wooer; nothing but a dread of the influence of Mr. Barmby's toned eloquence upon the girl, after her listening to Dudley Sowerby's addresses, checked his contempt for the latter. He could not despise the suitor he sided with against another and seemingly now a more dangerous. Unable quite to repress the sentiment, he proceeded immediately to put it to his uses. For we have no need to be scrupulously formal and precise in the exposition of circumstances to a fellow who may thank the stars if such a girl condescends to give him a hearing. He had this idea through the conception of his girl's generosity. And furthermore, the cognizant eye of a Lucretian Alma Mater having seat so strongly in Victor, demanded as a right an effusion of the promising amorous graces on the part of the acceptable applicant to the post of husband of that peerless. These being absent, evidently non-existent, it seemed sufficient for the present, after the fashion of the young gentleman, to capitulate the few material matters briefly.

Page 3533

They were dotted along with a fine disregard of the stateliness of the sum to be settled on Nesta Victoria, and with a distant but burning wish all the while, that the suitor had been one to touch his heart and open it, inspiriting it—as could have been done—to disclose for good and all the things utterable. Victor loved clear honesty, as he loved light: and though he hated to be accused of not showing a clean face in the light, he would have been moved and lifted to confess to a spot by the touch at his heart. Dudley Sowerby's deficiencies, however, were outweighed by the palpable advantages of his birth, his prospects, and his good repute for conduct; add thereto his gentlemanly manners. Victor sighed again over his poor Fredi; and in telling Mr. Sowerby that the choice must be left to her, he had the regrets of a man aware of his persuasive arts and how they would be used, to think that he was actually making the choice.

Observe how fatefully he who has a scheme is the engine of it; he is no longer the man of his tastes or of his principles; he is on a line of rails for a terminus; and he may cast languishing eyes across waysides to right and left, he has doomed himself to proceed, with a self-devouring hunger for the half desired; probably manhood gone at the embrace of it. This may be or not, but Nature has decreed to him the forfeit of pleasure. She bids us count the passage of a sober day for the service of the morrow; that is her system; and she would have us adopt it, to keep in us the keen edge for cutting, which is the guarantee of enjoyment: doing otherwise, we lose ourselves in one or other of the furious matrix instincts; we are blunt to all else.

Young Dudley fully agreed that the choice must be with Miss Radnor; he alluded to her virtues, her accomplishments. He was waxing to fervidness. He said he must expect competitors; adding, on a start, that he was to say, from his mother, she, in the case of an intention to present Miss Radnor at Court . . . .

Victor waved hand for a finish, looking as though, his head had come out of hot water. He sacrificed Royalty to his necessities, under a kind of sneer at its functions: 'Court! my girl? But the arduous duties are over for the season. We are a democratic people retaining the seductions of monarchy, as a friend says; and of course a girl may like to count among the flowers of the kingdom for a day, in the list of Court presentations; no harm. Only there's plenty of time . . . very young girls have their heads turned—though I don't say, don't imagine, my girl would. By and by perhaps.'

Page 3534

Dudley was ushered into Mr. Inchling's room and introduced to the figure-head of the Firm of Inchling, Pennergate, and Radnor: a respectable City merchant indeed, whom Dudley could read-off in a glimpse of the downright contrast to his partner. He had heard casual remarks on the respectable City of London merchant from Colney Durance. A short analytical gaze at him, helped to an estimate of the powers of the man who kept him up. Mr. Inchling was a florid City-feaster, descendant of a line of City merchants, having features for a wife to identify; as drovers, they tell us, can single one from another of their round-bellied beasts. Formerly the leader of the Firm, he was now, after dreary fits of restiveness, kickings, false prophecies of ruin, Victor's obedient cart-horse. He sighed in set terms for the old days of the Firm, when, like trouts in the current, the Firm had only to gape for shoals of good things to fatten it: a tale of English prosperity in quiescence; narrated interjectorily among the by-ways of the City, and wanting only metre to make it our national Poem.

Mr. Inchling did not deny that grand mangers of golden oats were still somehow constantly allotted to him. His wife believed in Victor, and deemed the loss of the balancing Pennergate a gain. Since that lamentable loss, Mr. Inchling, under the irony of circumstances the Tory of Commerce, had trotted and gallopped whither driven, racing like mad against his will and the rival nations now in the field to force the pace; a name for enterprise; the close commercial connection of a man who speculated—who, to put it plainly, lived on his wits; hurried onward and onward; always doubting, munching, grumbling at satisfaction, in perplexity of the gratitude which is apprehensive of black Nemesis at a turn of the road,—to confound so wild a whip as Victor Radnor. He had never forgiven the youth's venture in India of an enormous purchase of Cotton many years back, and which he had repudiated, though not his share of the hundreds of thousands realized before the refusal to ratify the bargain had come to Victor. Mr. Inchling dated his first indigestion from that disquieting period. He assented to the praise of Victor's genius, admitting benefits; his heart refused to pardon, and consequently his head wholly to trust, the man who robbed him of his quondam comfortable feeling of security. And if you will imagine the sprite of the aggregate English Taxpayer personifying Steam as the malignant who has despoiled him of the blessed Safety-Assurance he once had from his God Neptune against invaders, you will comprehend the state of Mr. Inchling's mind in regard to his terrific and bountiful, but very disturbing partner.

Page 3535

He thanked heaven to his wife often, that he had nothing to do with North American or South American mines and pastures or with South Africa and, gold and diamonds: and a wife must sometimes listen, mastering her inward comparisons. Dr. Schlesien had met and meditated on this example of the island energy. Mr. Inchling was not permitted by his wife to be much the guest of the Radnor household, because of the frequent meeting there with Colney Durance; Colney's humour for satire being instantly in bristle at sight of his representative of English City merchants: 'over whom,' as he wrote of the venerable body, 'the disciplined and instructed Germans not deviously march; whom acute and adventurous Americans, with half a cock of the eye in passing, compassionately outstrip.' He and Dr. Schlesien agreed upon Mr. Inchling. Meantime the latter gentleman did his part at the tables of the wealthier City Companies, and retained his appearance of health; he was beginning to think, upon a calculation of the increased treasures of those Companies and the country, that we, the Taxpayer, ought not to leave it altogether to Providence to defend them; notwithstanding the watchful care of us hitherto shown by our briny Providence, to save us from anxiety and expense. But there are, he said, 'difficulties'; and the very word could stop him, as commonly when our difficulty lies in the exercise of thinking.

Victor's African room, containing large wall-maps of auriferous regions, was inspected; and another, where clerks were busy over miscellaneous Continents. Dudley Sowerby hoped he might win the maiden.

He and Victor walked in company Westward. The shop of Boyle and Luckwort, chemists, was not passed on this occasion. Dudley grieved that he had to be absent from the next Concert for practise, owing to his engagement to his mother to go down to the family seat near Tunbridge Wells. Victor mentioned his relatives, the Duvidney maiden ladies, residing near the Wells. They measured the distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge, the two houses, as for half an hour on horseback.

Nesta told her father at home that the pair of them had been observed confidentially arm in arm, and conversing so profoundly.

'Who, do you think, was the topic?' Victor asked.

She would not chase the little blue butterfly of a guess.

CHAPTER XIX

Treats of nature and circumstance and the dissension between them and of A satirist's malignity in the direction of his country

Page 3536

There is at times in the hearts of all men of active life a vivid wild moment or two of dramatic dialogue between the veteran antagonists, Nature and Circumstance, when they, whose business it should be to be joyfully one, furiously split; and the Dame is up with her shrillest querulousness to inquire of her offspring, for the distinct original motive of his conduct. Why did he bring her to such a pass! And what is the gain? If he be not an alienated issue of the great Mother, he will strongly incline to her view, that he put himself into harness to join with a machine going the dead contrary way of her welfare; and thereby wrote himself donkey, for his present reading. Soldiers, heroes, even the braided, even the wearers of the gay cock's feathers, who get the honours and the pocket-pieces, know the moment of her electrical eloquence. They have no answer for her, save an index at the machine pushing them on yet farther under the enemy's line of fire, where they pluck the golden wreath or the livid, and in either case listen no more. They glorify her topping wisdom while on the march to confound it. She is wise in her way. But, it is asked by the disputant, If we had followed her exclusively, how far should we have travelled from our starting-point? We of the world and its prizes and duties must do her an injury to make her tongue musical to us, and her argument worthy of attention. So it seems. How to keep the proper balance between those two testy old wranglers, that rarely pull the right way together, is as much the task for men in the grip of the world, as for the wanton youthful fry under dominion of their instincts; and probably, when it is done, man will have attained the golden age of his retirement from service.

Why be scheming? Victor asked. Unlike the gallant soldiery, his question was raised in the blush of a success, from an examination of the quality of the thing won; although it had not changed since it was first coveted; it was demonstrably the same: and an astonishing dry stick he held, as a reward for perpetual agitations and perversions of his natural tastes. Here was a Dudley Sowerby, the direct issue of the conception of Lakelands; if indeed they were not conceived together in one; and the young gentleman had moral character, good citizen substance, and station, rank, prospect of a title; and the grasp of him was firm. Yet so far was it from hearty, that when hearing a professed satirist like Colney Durance remark on the decorous manner of Dudley's transparent courtship of the girl, under his look of an awakened approval of himself, that he appeared to be asking everybody:—Do you not think I bid fair for an excellent father of Philistines?—Victor had a nip of spite at the thought of Dudley's dragging him bodily to be the grandfather. Poor Fredi, too!—necessarily the mother: condemned by her hard fate to feel proud of Philistine babies! Though women soon get reconciled to it! Or do they? They did once. What if his Fredi turned out one of the modern young women, who have drunk of ideas? He caught himself speculating on that, as on a danger. The alliance with Dudley really seemed to set him facing backward.

Page 3537

Colney might not have been under prompting of Nataly when he derided Dudley; but Victor was at war with the picture of her, in her compression of a cruel laugh, while her eyelids were hard shut, as if to exclude the young patriarch of Philistines' ridiculous image.

He hearkened to the Nature interrogating him, why had he stepped on a path to put division between himself and his beloved?—the smallest of gaps; and still the very smallest between nuptial lovers is a division—and that may become a mortal wound to their one-life. Why had he roused a slumbering world? Glimpses of the world's nurse-like, old-fashioned, mother-nightcap benevolence to its kicking favourites; its long-suffering tolerance for the heroic breakers of its rough-cast laws, while the decent curtain continues dropped, or lifted only ankle-high; together with many scenes, lively suggestions, of the choice of ways he liked best, told of things, which were better things, incomprehensibly forfeited. So that the plain sense of value insisted on more than one weighing of the gain in hand: a dubious measure.

He was as little disposed to reject it as to stop his course at a goal of his aim. Nevertheless, a gain thus poorly estimated, could not command him to do a deed of humiliation on account of it. The speaking to this dry young Dudley was not imperative at present. A word would do in the day to come.

Nataly was busy with her purchases of furniture, and the practise for the great August Concert. He dealt her liberal encouragements, up to the verge of Dr. Themison's latest hummed words touching Mrs. Burman, from which he jumped in alarm lest he should paralyze her again: the dear soul's dreaded aspect of an earthy pallor was a spectre behind her cheeks, ready to rush forth. Fenellan brought Carling to dine with him; and Themison was confirmed by Carting, with incidents in proof; Caning by Jarniman, also with incidents; one very odd one—or so it seemed, in the fury of the first savour of it:—she informed Jarniman, Skepsey said his friend Jarniman said, that she had dreamed of making her appearance to him on the night of the 23rd August, and of setting the date on the calendar over his desk, when she entered his room: 'Sitting-room, not bedroom; she was always quite the lady,' Skepsey reported his Jarniman. Mrs. Burman, as a ghost, would respect herself; she would keep to her character. Jarniman quite expected the dream to be verified; she was a woman of her word: he believed she had received a revelation of the approaching fact: he was preparing for the scene.

Victor had to keep silent and discourse of general prosperity. His happy vivaciousness assisted him to feel it by day. Nataly heard him at night, on a moan: 'Poor soul!' and loudly once while performing an abrupt demi-vault from back to side: 'Perhaps now!' in a voice through doors. She schooled herself to breathe equably.

Page 3538

Not being allowed to impart the distressing dose of comfort he was charged with, he swallowed it himself; and these were the consequences. And an uneasy sleep was traditionally a matter for grave debate in the Radnor family. The Duvidney ladies, Dorothea and Virginia, would have cited ancestral names, showing it to be the worst of intimations. At night, lying on his back beneath a weight of darkness, one heavily craped figure, distinguishable through the gloom, as a blot on a black pad, accused the answering darkness within him, until his mind was dragged to go through the whole case by morning light; and the compassionate man appealed to common sense, to stamp and pass his delectable sophistries; as, that it was his intense humaneness, which exposed him to an accusation of inhumanity; his prayer for the truly best to happen, which anticipated Mrs. Burman's expiry. They were simple sophistries, fabricated to suit his needs, readily taking and bearing the imprimatur of common sense. They refreshed him, as a chemical scent a crowded room.

All because he could not open his breast to Nataly, by reason of her feebleness; or feel enthusiasm in the possession of young Dudley! A dry stick indeed beside him on the walk Westward. Good quality wood, no doubt, but dry, varnished for conventional uses. Poor dear Fredi would have to crown it like the May-day posy of the urchins of Craye Farm and Creckholt!

Dudley wished the great City-merchant to appreciate him as a diligent student of commercial matters: rivalries of Banks; Foreign and Municipal Loans, American Rails, and Argentine; new Companies of wholesome appearance or sinister; or starting with a dram in the stomach, or born to bleat prostrate, like sheep on their backs in a ditch; Trusts and Founders; Breweries bursting vats upon the markets, and England prone along the gutters, gobbling, drunk for shares, and sober in the possession of certain of them. But when, as Colney says, a grateful England has conferred the Lordship on her Brewer, he gratefully hands-over the establishment to his country; and both may disregard the howls of a Salvation Army of shareholders.—Beaten by the Germans in Brewery, too! Dr. Schlesien has his right to crow. We were ahead of them, and they came and studied us, and they studied Chemistry as well; while we went on down our happy-go-lucky old road; and then had to hire their young Professors, and then to import their beer.

Have the Germans more brains than we English? Victor's blood up to the dome of his cranium knocked the patriotic negative. But, as old Colney says (and bother him, for constantly intruding!), the comfortably successful have the habit of sitting, and that dulls the brain yet more than it eases the person: hence are we outpaced; we have now to know we are racing. Victor scored a mark for one of his projects. A well-conducted Journal of the sharpest pens in the land might, at a sacrifice of money grandly sunk, expose to his English how and

Page 3539

to what degree their sports, and their fierce feastings, and their opposition to ideas, and their timidity in regard to change, and their execration of criticism applied to themselves, and their unanimous adoption of it for a weapon against others, are signs of a prolonged indulgence in the cushioned seat. Victor saw it. But would the people he loved? He agreed with Colney, forgetting the satirist's venom: to-wit; that the journalists should be close under their editor's rod to put it in sound bold English;—no metaphors, no similes, nor flowery insubstantiality: but honest Saxon manger stuff: and put it repeatedly, in contempt of the disgust of iteration; hammering so a soft place on the Anglican skull, which is rubbed in consequence, and taught at last through soreness to reflect.—A Journal?—with Colney Durance for Editor?—and called conformably *the whipping-top*? Why not, if it exactly hits the signification of the Journal and that which it would have the country do to itself, to keep it going and truly topping? For there is no vulgarity in a title strongly signifying the intent. Victor wrote it at night, naming Colney for Editor, with a sum of his money to be devoted to the publication, in a form of memorandum; and threw it among the papers in his desk.

Young Dudley had a funny inquisitiveness about Dartrey Fenellan; owing to Fredi's reproduction or imitation of her mother's romantic sentiment for Dartrey, doubtless: a bit of jealousy, indicating that the dry fellow had his feelings. Victor touched—off an outline of Dartrey's history and character:—the half-brother of Simeon, considerably younger, and totally different. 'Dartrey's mother was Lady Charlotte Kiltorne, one of the Clanconans; better mother than wife, perhaps; and no reproach on her, not a shadow; only she made the General's Bank-notes fly black paper. And—if you 're for heredity—-the queer point is, that Simeon, whose mother was a sober-minded woman, has always been the spendthrift. Dartrey married one of the Hennen women, all an odd lot, all handsome. I met her once. Colney said, she came up here with a special commission from the Prince of Darkness. There are women who stir the unholy in men—whether they mean it or not, you know.'

Dudley pursed to remark, that he could not say he did know. And good for Fredi if he did not know, and had his objections to the knowledge! But he was like the men who escape colds by wrapping in comforters instead of trusting to the spin of the blood.

'She played poor Dartrey pranks before he buried—he, behaved well to her; and that says much for him; he has: a devil of a temper. I 've seen the blood in his veins, mount to cracking. But there's the man: because she was a woman, he never let it break out with her. And, by heaven, he had cause. She couldn't be left. She tricked him, and she loved him-passionately, I believe. You don't understand women loving the husband they drag through the mire?'

Page 3540

Dudley did not. He sharpened his mouth.

‘Buried, you said, sir?—a widower?’

‘I’ve no positive information; we shall hear when he: comes back,’ Victor replied hurriedly. ’He got a drenching of all the damns in the British service from his. Generalissimo one day at a Review, for a trooper’s negligence-button or stock missing, or something; and off goes Dartrey to his hut, and breaks his sword, and sends in his resignation. Good soldier lost. And I can’t complain; he has been a right-hand man to me over in Africa. But a man ought to have some control of his temper, especially a soldier.’

Dudley put emphasis into his acquiescence.

’Worse than that temper of Dartrey’s, he can’t forgive an injury. He bears a grudge against his country. You’ve heard Colney Durance abuse old England. It’s three parts factitious-literary exercise. It ’s milk beside the contempt of Dartrey’s shrug. He thinks we’re a dead people, if a people; “subsisting on our fat,” as Colney says.’

‘I am not of opinion that we show it,’ observed Dudley.

‘We don’t,’ Victor agreed. He disrelished his companion’s mincing tone of a monumental security, and yearned for Dartrey or Simeon or Colney to be at his elbow rather than this most commendable of orderly citizens, who little imagined the treacherous revolt from him in the bosom of the gentleman cordially signifying full agreement. But Dudley was not gifted to read behind words and looks.

They were in the Park of the dwindling press of carriages, and here was this young Dudley saying, quite commendably: ’It’s a pity we seem to have no means of keeping our parks select.’

Victor flung Simeon Fenellan at him in thought. He remembered a fable of Fenellan’s, about a Society of the Blest, and the salt it was to them to discover an intruder from below, and the consequent accelerated measure in their hymning.

‘Have you seen anything offensive to you?’ he asked.

‘One sees notorious persons.’

Dudley spoke aloof from them—’out of his cold attics,’ Fenellan would have said.

Victor approved: with the deadened feeling common to us when first in sad earnest we consent to take life as it is.

He perceived, too, the comicality of his having to resign himself to the fatherly embrace of goodness.

Lakelands had him fast, and this young Dudley was the kernel of Lakelands. If he had only been intellectually a little flexible in his morality! But no; he wore it cap a pie, like a mediaeval knight his armour. One had to approve. And there was no getting away from him. He was good enough to stay in town for the practise of the opening overture of the amateurs, and the flute-duet, when his family were looking for him at Tunbridge Wells; and almost every day Victor was waylaid by him at a corner of the Strand.

Page 3541

Occasionally, Victor appeared at the point of interception armed with Colney Durance, for whom he had called in the Temple, bent on self-defence, although Colney was often as bitter to his taste as to Dudley's. Latterly the bitter had become a tonic. We rejoice in the presence of goodness, let us hope; and still an impersonation of conventional, goodness perpetually about us depresses. Dudley drove him to Colney for relief. Besides it pleased Nataly that he should be bringing Colney home; it looked to her as if he were subjecting Dudley to critical inspection before he decided a certain question much, and foolishly, dreaded by the dear soul. That quieted her. And another thing, she liked him to be with Colney, for a clog on him; as it were, a tuning-fork for the wild airs he started. A little pessimism, also, she seemed to like; probably as an appeasement after hearing, and having to share, high flights. And she was, in her queer woman's way, always reassured by his endurance of Colney's company:—she read it to mean, that he could bear Colney's perusal of him, and satiric stings. Victor had seen these petty matters among the various which were made to serve his double and treble purposes; now, thanks to the operation of young Dudley within him, he felt them. Preferring Fenellan's easy humour to Colney's acid, he was nevertheless braced by the latter's antidote to Dudley, while reserving his entire opposition in the abstract.

For Victor Radnor and Colney Durance were the Optimist and Pessimist of their society. They might have headed those tribes in the country. At a period when the omnibus of the world appears to its quaint occupants to be going faster, men are shaken into the acceptation, if not performance, of one part or the other as it is dictated to them by their temperaments. Compose the parts, and you come nigh to the meaning of the Nineteenth Century: the mother of these gosling affirmatives and negatives divorced from harmony and awakened by the slight increase of incubating motion to vitality. Victor and Colney had been champion duellists for the rosy and the saturnine since the former cheerfully slaved for a small stipend in the City of his affection, and the latter entered on an inheritance counted in niggard hundreds, that withdrew a briefless barrister disposed for scholarship from the forlornest of seats in the Courts. They had foretold of one another each the unfulfilled; each claimed the actual as the child of his prediction. Victor was to have been ruined long back; Colney the prey of independent bachelors. Colney had escaped his harpy, and Victor could be called a millionaire and more. Prophesy was crowned by Colney's dyspepsia, by Victor's ticklish domestic position. Their pity for one another, their warm regard, was genuine; only, they were of different temperaments; and we have to distinguish, that in many estimable and some gifted human creatures, it is the quality of the blood which directs the current of opinion.

Page 3542

Victor played-off Colney upon Dudley, for his internal satisfaction, and to lull Nataly and make her laugh; but he could not, as she hoped he was doing, take Colney into his confidence; inasmuch as the Optimist, impelled by his exuberant anticipatory trustfulness, is an author, and does things; whereas the Pessimist is your chaired critic, with the delivery of a censor, generally an undoer of things. Our Optimy has his instinct to tell him of the cast of Pessimy's countenance at the confession of a dilemma-foreseen! He hands himself to Pessimy, as it were a sugar-cane, for the sour brute to suck the sugar and whack with the wood. But he cannot perform his part in return; he gets no compensation: Pessimy is invulnerable. You waste your time in hurling a common 'tu-quoque' at one who hugs the worst.

The three walking in the park, with their bright view, and black view, and neutral view of life, were a comical trio. They had come upon the days of the unfanned electric furnace, proper to London's early August when it is not pipeing March. Victor complacently bore heat as well as cold: but young Dudley was a drought, and Colney a drug to refresh it; and why was he stewing in London? It was for this young Dudley, who resembled a London of the sparrowy roadways and wearisome pavements and blocks of fortress mansions, by chance a water-cart spirting a stale water: or a London of the farewell dinner-parties, where London's professed anecdotist lays the dust with his ten times told: Why was not Nataly relieved of her dreary round of the purchases of furniture! They ought all now to be in Switzerland or Tyrol. Nesta had of late been turning over leaves of an Illustrated book of Tyrol, dear to her after a run through the Innthal to the Dolomites one splendid August; and she and Nataly had read there of Hofer, Speckbacker, Haspinger; and wrath had filled them at the meanness of the Corsican, who posed after it as victim on St. Helena's rock; the scene in grey dawn on Mantua's fortress-walls blasting him in the Courts of History, when he strikes for his pathetic sublime.

Victor remembered how he had been rhetorical, as the mouthpiece of his darlings. But he had in memory prominently now the many glorious pictures of that mountain-land beckoning to him, waving him to fly forth from the London oven:—lo, the Tyrolese limestone crags with livid peaks and snow lining shelves and veins of the crevices; and folds of pinewood undulations closed by a shoulder of snow large on the blue; and a dazzling pinnacle rising over green pasture-Alps, the head of it shooting aloft as the blown billow, high off a broken ridge, and wide-armed in its pure white shroud beneath; tranced, but all motion in immobility, to the heart in the eye; a splendid image of striving, up to crowned victory. And see the long valley-sweeps of the hanging meadows and maize, and lower vineyards and central tall green spires! Walking beside young Dudley, conversing, observing too, Victor followed the trips and twists of a rill, that was lured a little further down through scoops, ducts, and scaffolded channels to serve a wainwright.

Page 3543

He heard the mountain-song of the joyful water: a wren-robin-thrush on the dance down of a faun; till it was caught and muted, and the silver foot slid along the channel, swift as moonbeams through a cloud, with an air of ‘Whither you will, so it be on’; happy for service as in freedom. Then the yard of the inn below, and the rillwater twirling rounded through the trout-trough, subdued, still lively for its beloved onward: dues to business, dues to pleasure; a wedding of the two, and the wisest on earth:-eh? like some one we know, and Nataly has made the comparison. Fresh forellen for lunch: rhyming to Fenellan, he had said to her; and that recollection struck the day to blaze; for his friend was a ruined military captain living on a literary quill at the time; and Nataly’s tender pleading, ’Could you not help to give him another chance, dear Victor?’—-signifying her absolute trust in his ability to do that or more or anything, had actually set him thinking of the Insurance Office; which he started to prosperity, and Fenellan in it, previously an untutored rill of the mountains, if ever was one.

Useless to be dwelling on holiday pictures: Lakelands had hold of him!

Colney or somebody says, that the greater our successes, the greater the slaves we become.—But we must have an aim, my friend, and success must be the aim of any aim!—Yes, and, says Colney, you are to rejoice in the disappointing miss, which saved you from being damned by your bullet on the centre.—You’re dead against Nature, old Colney.—That is to carry the flag of Liberty.—By clipping a limb!

Victor overcame the Pessimist in his own royal cranium-Court. He entertained a pronounced dissension with bachelors pretending to independence. It could not be argued publicly, and the more the pity:—for a slight encouragement, he would have done it: his outlook over the waves of bachelors and (by present conditions mostly constrained) spinsters—and another outlook, midnight upon Phlegethon to the thoughts of men, made him deem it urgent. And it helped the plea in his own excuse, as Colney pointed out to the son of Nature. That, he had to admit, was true. He charged it upon Mrs. Burman, for twisting the most unselfish and noblest of his thoughts; and he promised himself it was to cease on the instant when the circumstance, which Nature was remiss in not bringing about to-day or to-morrow, had come to pass. He could see his Nataly’s pained endurance beneath her habitual submission. Her effort was a poor one, to conceal her dread of the day of the gathering at Lakelands.

On the Sunday previous to the day, Dr. Themison accompanied the amateurs by rail to Wrensham, to hear ‘trial of the acoustics’ of the Concert-hall. They were a goodly company; and there was fun in the railway-carriage over Colney’s description of Fashionable London’s vast octopus Malady-monster, who was letting the doctor fly to the tether of its longest filament for an hour, plying suckers on him

Page 3544

the while. He had the look, to general perception, of a man but half-escaped: and as when the notes of things taken by the vision in front are being set down upon tablets in the head behind. Victor observed his look at Nataly. The look was like a door aswing, revealing in concealing. She was not or did not appear struck by it; perhaps, if observant, she took it for a busy professional gentleman's holiday reckoning of the hours before the return train to his harness, and his arrangements for catching it. She was, as she could be on a day of trial, her enchanting majestic self again—defying suspicions. She was his true mate for breasting a world honoured in uplifting her.

Her singing of a duet with Nesta, called forth Dr. Themison's very warm applause. He named the greatest of contraltos. Colney did better service than Fenellan at the luncheon-table: he diverted Nataly and captured Dr. Themison's ear with the narrative of his momentous expedition of European Emissaries, to plead the cause of their several languages at the Court of Japan: a Satiric Serial tale, that hit incidentally the follies of the countries of Europe, and intentionally, one had to think, those of Old England. Nesta set him going. Just when he was about to begin, she made her father laugh by crying out in a rapture, 'Oh! Delphica!' For she was naughtily aware of Dudley Sowerby's distaste for the story and disgust with the damsel Delphica.

Nesta gave Dr. Themison the preliminary sketch of the grand object of the expedition: indeed one of the eminent ones of the world; matter for an Epic; though it is to be feared, that our part in it will not encourage a Cis-Atlantic bard. To America the honours from beginning to end belong.

So, then, Japan has decided to renounce its language, for the adoption of the language it may choose among the foremost famous European tongues. Japan becomes the word for miraculous transformations of a whole people at the stroke of a wand; and let our English enrol it as the most precious of the powerful verbs. An envoy visits the principal Seats of Learning in Europe. He is of a gravity to match that of his unexampled and all but stupefying mission. A fluent linguist, yet an Englishman, the slight American accent contracted during a lengthened residence in the United States is no bar to the patriotism urging him to pay his visit of exposition and invitation from the Japanese Court to the distinguished Doctor of Divinity Dr. Bouthoin. The renown of Dr. Bouthoin among the learned of Japan has caused the special invitation to him; a scholar endowed by an ample knowledge and persuasive eloquence to cite and instance as well as illustrate the superior advantages to Japan and civilization in the filial embrace of mother English. 'For to this it must come predestinated,' says the astonishing applicant. 'We seem to see a fitness in it,' says the cogitative Rev. Doctor. 'And an Island England in those waters, will do wonders for Commerce,' adds the former. 'We think of things more pregnant,' concludes the latter, with a dry gleam of ecclesiastical knowingness. And let the Editor of the Review upon his recent pamphlet, and let the prelate reprimanding him, and let the newspapers criticizing his pure Saxon, have a care!

Page 3545

Funds, universally the most convincing of credentials, are placed at Dr. Bouthoin's disposal: only it is requested, that for the present the expedition be secret. 'Better so,' says pure Saxon's champion. On a day patented for secresy, and swearing-in the whole American Continent through the cables to keep the secret by declaring the patent, the Rev. Dr. Bouthoin, accompanied by his curate, the Rev. Mancate Semhians, stumbling across portmanteaux crammed with lexicons and dictionaries and other tubes of the voice of Hermes, takes possession of berths in the ship Polypheme, bound, as they mutually conceive, for the biggest adventure ever embarked on by a far-thoughted, high-thoughted, patriotic pair speaking pure Saxon or other.

Colney, with apologies to his hearers, avoided the custom of our period (called the Realistic) to create, when casual opportunity offers, a belief in the narrative by promoting nausea in the audience. He passed under veil the Rev. Doctor's acknowledgement of Neptune's power, and the temporary collapse of Mr. Semhians. Proceeding at once to the comments of these high-class missionaries on the really curious inquisitiveness of certain of the foreign passengers on board, he introduced to them the indisputably learned, the very argumentative, crashing, arrogant, pedantic, dogmatic, philological German gentleman, Dr. Gannius, reeking of the Teutonic Professor, as a library volume of its leather. With him is his fairhaired artless daughter Delphica. An interesting couple for the beguilement of a voyage: she so beautifully moderates his irascible incisiveness! Yet there is a strange tone that they have. What, then, of the polite, the anecdotic Gallic M. Falarique, who studiously engages the young lady in colloquy when Mr. Semhians is agitating outside them to say a word? What of that outpouring, explosive, equally voluble, uncontrolled M. Bobinikine, a Mongol Russian, shaped, featured, hued like the pot-boiled, round and tight young dumpling of our primitive boyhood, which smokes on the dish from the pot? And what of another, hitherto unnoticed, whose nose is of the hooked vulturine, whose name transpires as Pisistratus Mytharete? He hears Dr. Bouthoin declaim some lines of Homer, and beseeches him for the designation of that language. Greek, is it? Greek of the Asiatic ancient days of the beginning of the poetic chants? Dr. Gannius crashes cachinnation. Dr. Bouthoin caps himself with the offended Don. Mr. Semhians opens half an eye and a whole mouth. There must be a mystery, these two exclaim to one another in privacy. Delphica draws Mr. Semhians aside.

Blushing over his white necktie, like the coast of Labrador at the transient wink of its Jack-in-the-box Apollo, Mr. Semhians faintly tells of a conversation he has had with the ingenuous fair one; and she ardent as he for the throning of our incomparable Saxon English in the mouths of the races of mankind. Strange!—she partly suspects the Frenchman, the Russian, the attentive silent Greek, to be all of them bound for the Court of Japan. Concurrents? Can it be? We are absolutely to enter on a contention with rivals? Dr. Bouthoin speaks to Dr. Gannius. He is astonished, he says; he could not have imagined it!

Page 3546

‘Have you ever imagined anything?’ Dr. Gannius asks him. Entomologist, botanist, palaeontologist, philologist, and at sound of horn a ready regimental corporal, Dr. Gannius wears good manners as a pair of bath-slippers, to rally and kick his old infant of an Englishman; who, in awe of his later renown and manifest might, makes it a point of discretion to be ultra-amiable; for he certainly is not in training, he has no alliances, and he must diplomatize; and the German is a strong one; a relative too; he is the Saxon’s cousin, to say the least. This German has the habit of pushing past politeness to carry his argumentative war into the enemy’s country: and he presents on all sides a solid rampart of recent great deeds done, and mailed readiness for the doing of more, if we think of assailing him in that way. We are really like the poor beasts which have cast their shells or cases, helpless flesh to his beak. So we are cousinly.

Whether more amused than amazed, we know not, Dr. Gannius hears from ’our simpleton of the pastures,’ as he calls the Rev. Doctor to his daughter, that he and Mr. Semhians have absolutely pushed forth upon this most mighty of enterprises naked of any backing from their Government! Babes in the Wood that they are! ‘a la grace de dieu’ at every turn that cries for astutia, they show no sign or symbol of English arms behind them, to support—and with the grandest of national prizes in view!—the pleading oration before the Court of the elect, erudites, we will call them, of an intelligent, yet half barbarous, people; hesitating, these, between eloquence and rival eloquence, cunning and rival cunning. Why, in such a case, the shadow-nimbus of Force is needed to decide the sinking of the scale. But have these English never read their Shakespeare, that they show so barren an acquaintance with human, to say nothing of semi-barbaric, nature? But it is here that we Germans prove our claim to being the sons of his mind. —Dr. Gannius, in contempt, throws off the mask: he also is a concurrent. And not only is he the chosen by election of the chief Universities of his land, he has behind him, as Athene dilating Achilles, the clenched fist of the Prince of thunder and lightning of his time. German, Japan shall be! he publicly swears before them all. M. Falarique damascenes his sharpest smile; M. Bobinikine double-dimples his puddingest; M. Mytharete rolls a forefinger over his beak; Dr. Bouthoin enlarges his eye on a sunny mote. And such is the masterful effect of a frank diplomacy, that when one party shows his hand, the others find the reverse of concealment in hiding their own.

Page 3547

Dr. Bouthoin and Mr. Semhians are compelled to suspect themselves to be encompassed with rivals, presumptively supported by their Governments. The worthy gentlemen had hoped to tumble into good fortune, as in the blessed old English manner. 'It has even been thus with us: unhelped we do it!' exclaims the Rev. Doctor. He is roused from dejection by hearing Mr. Semhians shyly (he has published verse) tell of the fairtressed Delphica's phosphorial enthusiasm for our galaxy of British Poets. Assisted by Mr. Semhians, he begins to imagine, that he has, in the person of this artless devotee an ally, who will, through her worship of our poets (by treachery to her sire-a small matter) sacrifice her guttural tongue, by enabling him (through the exercise of her arts, charms, intrigues—also a small matter) to obtain the first audience of the Japanese erudites. Delphica, with each of the rivals in turn, is very pretty Comedy. She is aware that M. Falarique is her most redoubtable adversary, by the time that the vast fleet of steamboats (containing newspaper reporters) is beheld from the decks of the Polypheme puffing past Sandy Hook.

There Colney left them, for the next instalment of the serial.

Nesta glanced at Dudley Sowerby. She liked him for his pained frown at the part his countrymen were made to play, but did wish that he would keep from expressing it in a countenance that suggested a worried knot; and mischievously she said: 'Do you take to Delphica?'

He replied, with an evident sincerity, 'I cannot say I do.'

Had Mr. Semhians been modelled on him?

'One bets on the German, of course—with Colney Durance,' Victor said to Dr. Themison, leading him over the grounds of Lakelands.

'In any case, the author teaches us to feel an interest in the rivals. I want to know what comes of it,' said the doctor.

'There's a good opportunity, one sees. But, mark me, it will all end in satire upon poor Old England. According to Colney, we excel in nothing.'

'I do not think there is a country that could offer the entertainment for which I am indebted to you to-day.'

'Ah, my friend, and you like their voices? The contralto?'

'Exquisite.'

Dr. Themison had not spoken the name of Radnor.

‘Shall we see you at our next Concert-evening in town?’ said Victor; and hearing ‘the privilege’ mentioned, his sharp bright gaze cleared to limpid. ‘You have seen how it stands with us here!’ At once he related what indeed Dr. Themison had begun speculatively to think might be the case.

Page 3548

Mrs. Burman Radnor had dropped words touching a husband, and of her desire to communicate with him, in the event of her being given over to the surgeons: she had said, that her husband was a greatly gifted man; setting her head in a compassionate swing. This revelation of the husband soon after, was filling. And this Mr. Radnor's comrade's manner of it, was winning: a not too self-justifying tone; not void of feeling for the elder woman; with a manly eulogy of the younger, who had flung away the world for him and borne him their one dear child. Victor took the blame wholly upon himself. 'It is right that you should know,' he said to the doctor's thoughtful posture; and he stressed the blame; and a flame shot across his eyeballs. He brought home to his hearer the hurricane of a man he was in the passion: indicating the subjection of such a temperament as this Victor Radnor's to trials of the moral restraints beyond his human power.

Dr. Themison said: 'Would you—we postpone that as long as we can: but supposing the poor lady . . . ?'

Victor broke in: 'I see her wish: I will.'

The clash of his answer rang beside Dr. Themison's faltering query.

We are grateful when spared the conclusion of a sentence born to stammer. If for that only, the doctor pressed Victor's hand warmly.

'I may, then, convey some form of assurance, that a request of the kind will be granted?' he said.

'She has but to call me to her,' said Victor, stiffening his back.

CHAPTER XX

THE GREAT ASSEMBLY AT LAKELANDS

Round the neighbourhood of Lakelands it was known that the day of the great gathering there had been authoritatively foretold as fine, by Mr. Victor Radnor; and he delivered his prophecy in the teeth of the South-western gale familiar to our yachting month; and he really inspired belief or a kind of trust; some supposing him to draw from reserves of observation, some choosing to confide in the singularly winged sparkle of his eyes. Lady Rodwell Blachington did; and young Mrs. Blathenoy; and Mrs. Fanning; they were enamoured of it. And when women stand for Hope, and any worshipped man for Promise, nothing less than redoubled confusion of him dissolves the union. Even then they cling to it, under an ejaculation, that it might and should have been otherwise; fancy partly has it otherwise, in her caerulean home above the weeping. So it is good at all points to prophecy with the aspect of the radiant day foretold.

A storm, bearing battle overhead, tore the night to pieces. Nataly's faith in the pleasant prognostic wavered beneath the crashes. She had not much power of heart to desire anything save that which her bosom disavowed. Uproar rather appeased her, calmness agitated. She wished her beloved to be spared from a disappointment, thinking he deserved all successes, because of the rigours inflicted by

Page 3549

her present tonelessness of blood and being. Her unresponsive manner with him was not due to lack of fire in the blood or a loss of tenderness. The tender feeling, under privations unwillingly imposed, though willingly shared, now suffused her reflections, owing to a gratitude induced by a novel experience of him; known, as it may chance, and as it does not always chance, to both sexes in wedded intimacy here and there; known to women whose mates are proved quick to compliance with delicate intuitions of their moods of nature. A constant, almost visible, image of the dark thing she desired, and was bound not to desire, and was remorseful for desiring, oppressed her; a perpetual consequent warfare of her spirit and the nature subject to the thousand sensational hypocrisies invoked for concealment of its reviled brutish baseness, held the woman suspended from her emotions. She coldly felt that a caress would have melted her, would have been the temporary rapture. Coldly she had the knowledge that the considerate withholding of it helped her spirit to escape a stain. Less coldly, she thanked at heart her beloved, for being a gentleman in their yoke. It plighted them over flesh.

He talked to her on the pillow, just a few sentences; and, unlike himself, a word of City affairs: 'That fellow Blathenoy, with his increasing multitude of bills at the Bank: must watch him there, sit there regularly. One rather likes his wife. By the way, if you see him near me to-morrow, praise the Spanish climate; don't forget. He heads the subscription list of Lady Blachington's Charity.'

Victor chuckled at Colney's humping of shoulders and mouth, while the tempest seemed echoing a sulphurous pessimist. 'If old Colney had listened to me, when India gave proof of the metal and South Africa began heaving, he'd have been a fairly wealthy man by now . . . ha! it would have genialized him. A man may be a curmudgeon with money: the rule is for him to cuddle himself and take a side, instead of dashing at his countrymen all round and getting hated. Well, Colney popular, can't be imagined; but entertaining guests would have diluted his acid. He has the six hundred or so a year he started old bachelor on; add his miserable pay for Essays. Literature! Of course, he sours. But don't let me hear of bachelors moralists. There he sits at his Temple Chambers hatching epigrams . . . pretends to have the office of critic! Honest old fellow, as far as his condition permits. I tell him it will be fine to-morrow.'

'You are generally right, dear,' Nataly said.

Her dropping breath was audible.

Victor smartly commended her to slumber, with heaven's blessing on her and a dose of soft nursery prattle.

He squeezed her hand. He kissed her lips by day. She heard him sigh settling himself into the breast of night for milk of sleep, like one of the world's good children. She could have turned to him, to show him she was in harmony with the holy night and loving

world, but for the fear founded on a knowledge of the man he was; it held her frozen to the semblance of a tombstone lady beside her lord, in the aisle where horror kindles pitchy blackness with its legions at one movement. Verily it was the ghost of Mrs. Burman come to the bed, between them.

Page 3550

Meanwhile the sun of Victor Radnor's popularity was already up over the extended circle likely to be drenched by a falsification of his daring augury, though the scud flew swift, and the beeches raved, and the oaks roared and snarled, and pine-trees fell their lengths. Fine tomorrow, to a certainty! he had been heard to say. The doubt weighed for something; the balance inclined with the gentleman who had become so popular: for he had done the trick so suddenly, like a stroke of the wizard; and was a real man, not one of your spangled zodiacs selling for sixpence and hopping to a lucky hit, laughed at nine times out of ten. The reasoning went—and it somewhat affected the mansion as well as the cottage,—that if he had become popular in this astonishing fashion, after making one of the biggest fortunes of modern times, he might, he must, have secret gifts. 'You can't foretell weather!' cried a pothouse sceptic. But the workmen at Lakelands declared that he had foretold it. Sceptics among the common folk were quaintly silenced by other tales of him, being a whiff from the delirium attending any mention of his name.

How had he become suddenly so popular as to rouse in the mind of Mr. Caddis, the sitting Member for the division of the county (said to have the seat in his pocket), a particular inquisitiveness to know the bearing of his politics? Mr. Radnor was rich, true: but these are days when wealthy men, ambitious of notoriety, do not always prove faithful to their class; some of them are cunning to bid for the suffrages of the irresponsible, recklessly enfranchised, corruptible masses. Mr. Caddis, if he had the seat in his pocket, had it from the support of a class trusting him to support its interests: he could count on the landowners, on the clergy, on the retired or retiring or comfortably cushioned merchants resident about Wrensham, on the many obsequious among electoral shopmen; annually he threw open his grounds, and he subscribed, patronized, did what was expected; and he was not popular; he was unpopular. Why? But why was the sun of this 23rd August, shining from its rise royally upon pacified, enrolled and liveried armies of cloud, more agreeable to earth's populations than his pinched appearance of the poor mopped red nose and melancholic rheumy eyelets on a January day! Undoubtedly Victor Radnor risked his repute of prophet. Yet his popularity would have survived the continuance of the storm and deluge. He did this:—-and the mystery puzzling the suspicious was nothing wonderful: in addition to a transparent benevolence, he spread a sort of assurance about him, that he thought the better of the people for their thinking well of themselves. It came first from the workmen at his house. 'The right sort, and no humbug: likes you to be men.' Such a report made tropical soil for any new seed.

Page 3551

Now, it is a postulate, to strengthen all poor commoners, that not even in comparison with the highest need we be small unless we yield to think it of ourselves. Do but stretch a hand to the touch of earth in you, and you spring upon combative manhood again, from the basis where all are equal. Humanity's historians, however, tell us, that the exhilaration bringing us consciousness of a stature, is gas which too frequently has to be administered. Certes the cocks among men do not require the process; they get it off the sight of the sun arising or a simple hen submissive: but we have our hibernating bears among men, our yoked oxen, cab horses, beaten dogs; we have on large patches of these Islands, a Saxon population, much wanting assistance, if they are not to feel themselves beaten, driven, caught by the neck, yoked and heavyheaded. Blest, then, is he who gives them a sense of the pride of standing on legs. Beer, ordinarily their solitary helper beneath the iron canopy of wealth, is known to them as a bitter usurer; it knocks them flat in their persons and their fortunes, for the short spell of recreative exaltation. They send up their rough glory round the name of the gentleman—a stranger, but their friend: and never is friend to be thought of as a stranger—who manages to get the holiday for Wrensham and thereabout, that they may hurl away for one jolly day the old hat of a doddered humbleness, and trip to the strains of the internal music he has unwound.

Says he: Is it a Charity Concert? Charity begins at home, says he: and if I welcome you gentry on behalf of the poor of London, why, it follows you grant me the right to make a beginning with the poor of our parts down here. He puts it so, no master nor mistress neither could refuse him. Why, the workmen at his house were nigh pitching the contractors all sprawling on a strike, and Mr. Radnor takes train, harangues 'em and rubs 'em smooth; ten minutes by the clock, they say; and return train to his business in town; by reason of good sense and feeling, it was; poor men don't ask for more. A working man, all the world over, asks but justice and a little relaxation—just a collar of fat to his lean.

Mr. Caddis, M.P., pursuing the riddle of popularity, which irritated and repelled as constantly as it attracted him, would have come nearer to an instructive presentment of it, by listening to these plain fellows, than he was in the line of equipages, at a later hour of the day. The remarks of the comfortably cushioned and wheeled, though they be eulogistic to extravagance, are vapourish when we court them for nourishment; substantially, they are bones to the cynical. He heard enumerations of Mr. Radnor's riches, eclipsing his own past compute. A merchant, a holder of mines, Director of a mighty Bank, projector of running rails, a princely millionaire, and determined to be popular—what was the aim of the man? It is the curse of modern times, that we never can

Page 3552

be sure of our Parliamentary seat; not when we have it in our pockets! The Romans have left us golden words with regard to the fickleness of the populace; we have our Horace, our Juvenal, we have our Johnson; and in this vaunted age of reason it is, that we surrender ourselves into the hands of the populace! Panem et circenses! Mr. Caddis repeated it, after his fathers; his fathers and he had not headed them out of that original voracity. There they were, for moneyed legislators to bewail their appetites. And it was an article of his legislation, to keep them there.

Pedestrian purchasers of tickets for the Charity Concert, rather openly, in an envelope of humour, confessed to the bait of the Radnor bread with bit of fun. Savoury rumours were sweeping across Wrensham. Mr. Radnor had borrowed footmen of the principal houses about. Cartloads of provisions had been seen to come. An immediate reward of a deed of benevolence, is a thing sensibly heavenly; and the five-shilling tickets were paid for as if for a packet on the counter. Unacquainted with Mr. Radnor, although the reports of him struck a summons to their gastric juices, resembling in its effect a clamorous cordiality, they were chilled, on their steps along the halfrolled new gravel-roads to the house, by seeing three tables of prodigious length, where very evidently a feast had raged: one to plump the people—perhaps excessively courted by great gentlemen of late; shopkeepers, the villagers, children. These had been at it for two merry hours. They had risen. They were beef and pudding on legs; in some quarters, beer amiably manifest, owing to the flourishes of a military band. Boys, who had shaken room through their magical young corporations for fresh stowage, darted out of a chasing circle to the crumbled cornucopia regretfully forsaken fifteen minutes back, and buried another tart. Plenty still reigned: it was the will of the Master that it should.

We divert our attention, resigned in stoic humour, to the bill of the Concert music, handed us with our tickets at the park-gates: we have no right to expect refreshment; we came for the music, to be charitable. Signora Bianca Luciani: of whom we have read almost to the hearing her; enough to make the mistake at times. The grand violinist Durandarte: forcibly detained on his way to America. Mr. Radnor sent him a blank cheque:—no!—so Mr. Radnor besought him in person: he is irresistible; a great musician himself; it is becoming quite the modern style. We have now English noblemen who play the horn, the fife—the drum, some say! We may yet be Merrie England again, with our nobles taking the lead.

England’s nobles as a musical band at the head of a marching and dancing population, pictured happily an old Conservative country, that retained its members of aristocracy in the foremost places while subjecting them to downright uses. Their ancestors, beholding them there, would be satisfied on the point of honour; perhaps enlivened by hearing them at fife and drum.

Page 3553

But middle-class pedestrians, having paid five shillings for a ticket to hear the music they love, and not having full assurance of refreshment, are often, latterly, satirical upon their superiors; and, over this country at least, require the refreshment, that the democratic sprouts in them may be reconciled with aristocracy. Do not listen to them further on the subject. They vote safely enough when the day comes, if there is no praetematurally strong pull the other way.

They perceive the name of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, fourth down the Concert-bill; marked for a flute-duet with Mr. Victor Radnor, Miss Nesta Victoria Radnor accompanying at the piano. It may mean? . . . do you want a whisper to suggest to you what it may mean? The father's wealth is enormous; the mother is a beautiful majestic woman in her prime. And see, she sings: a wonderful voice. And lower down, a duet with her daughter: violins and clarionet; how funny; something Hungarian. And in the Second Part, Schubert's Ave Maria—Oh! when we hear that, we dissolve. She was a singer before he married her, they say: a lady by birth one of the first County families. But it was a gift, and she could not be kept from it, and was going, when they met—and it was love! the most perfect duet. For him she abandoned the Stage. You must remember, that in their young days the Stage was many stages beneath the esteem entertained for it now. Domestic Concerts are got up to gratify her: a Miss Fredericks: good old English name. Mr. Radnor calls his daughter, Freddy; so Mr. Taplow, the architect, says. They are for modern music and ancient. Tannhauser, Wagner, you see. Pergolese.

Flute-duet, Mercadante. Here we have him! O—Durandarte: Air Basque, variations—-his own. Again, Senor Durandarte, Mendelssohn. Encore him, and he plays you a national piece. A dark little creature a Life-guardsman could hold-up on his outstretched hand for the fifteen minutes of the performance; but he fills the hall and thrills the heart, wafts you to heaven; and does it as though he were conversing with his Andalusian lady-love in easy whispers about their mutual passion for Spanish chocolate all the while: so the musical critic of the Tirra-Lirra says. Express trains every half hour from London; all the big people of the city. Mr. Radnor commands them, like Royalty. Totally different from that old figure of the wealthy City merchant; young, vigorous, elegant, a man of taste, highest culture, speaks the languages of Europe, patron of the Arts, a perfect gentleman. His mother was one of the Montgomerys, Mr. Taplow says.

And it was General Radnor, a most distinguished officer, dying knighted. But Mr. Victor Radnor would not take less than a Barony—and then only with descent of title to his daughter, in her own right.

Mr. Taplow had said as much as Victor Radnor chose that he should say.

Page 3554

Carriages were in flow for an hour: pedestrians formed a wavy coil. Judgeing by numbers, the entertainment was a success; would the hall contain them? Marvels were told of the hall. Every ticket entered and was enfolded; almost all had a seat. Chivalry stood. It is a breeched abstraction, sacrificeing voluntarily and genially to the Fair, for a restoring of the balance between the sexes, that the division of good things be rather in the fair ones' favour, as they are to think: with the warning to them, that the establishment of their claim for equality puts an end to the priceless privileges of petticoats. Women must be mad, to provoke such a warning; and the majority of them submissively show their good sense. They send up an incense of perfumery, all the bouquets of the chemist commingled; most nourishing to the idea of woman in the nose of man. They are a forest foliage—rustle of silks and muslins, magic interweaving, or the mythology, if you prefer it. See, hear, smell, they are Juno, Venus, Hebe, to you. We must have poetry with them; otherwise they are better in the kitchen. Is there—but there is not; there is not present one of the chivalrous breeched who could prefer the shocking emancipated gristly female, which imposes propriety on our sensations and inner dreams, by petrifying in the tender bud of them.

Colonel Corfe is the man to hear on such a theme. He is a colonel of Companies. But those are his diversion, as the British Army has been to the warrior. Puellis idoneus, he is professedly a lady's man, a rose-beetle, and a fine specimen of a common kind: and he has been that thing, that shining delight of the lap of ladies, for a spell of years, necessitating a certain sparkle of the saccharine crystals preserving him, to conceal the muster. He has to be fascinating, or he would look outworn, forlorn. On one side of him is Lady Carmine; on the other, Lady Swanage; dames embedded in the blooming maturity of England's conservatory. Their lords (an Earl, a Baron) are of the lords who go down to the City to sow a title for a repair of their poor incomes, and are to be commended for frankly accepting the new dispensation while they retain the many advantages of the uncancelled ancient. Thus gently does a maternal Old England let them down. Projectors of Companies, Directors, Founders; Railway magnates, actual kings and nobles (though one cannot yet persuade old reverence to do homage with the ancestral spontaneity to the uncrowned, uncoroneted, people of our sphere); holders of Shares in gold mines, Shares in Afric's blue mud of the glittering teeth we draw for English beauty to wear in the ear, on the neck, at the wrist; Bankers and wives of Bankers. Victor passed among them, chatting right and left.

Lady Carmine asked him: 'Is Durandarte counted on?'

He answered: 'I made sure of the Luciani.'

She serenely understood. Artistes are licenced people, with a Bohemian instead of the titular glitter for the bewildering of moralists; as paste will pass for diamonds where the mirror is held up to Nature by bold supernumeraries.

Page 3555

He wished to introduce Nesta. His girl was on the raised orchestral flooring. Nataly held her fast to a music-scroll.

Mr. Peridon, sad for the absence and cause of absence of Louise de Seilles,—-summoned in the morning abruptly to Bourges, where her brother lay with his life endangered by an accident at Artillery practise,—Mr. Peridon was generally conductor. Victor was to lead the full force of amateurs in the brisk overture to Zampa. He perceived a movement of Nataly, Nesta, and Peridon. 'They have come,' he said; he jumped on the orchestra boards and hastened to greet the Luciani with Durandarte in the retiring-room.

His departure raised the whisper that he would wield the baton. An opinion was unuttered. His name for the flute-duet with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby had not provoked the reserve opinion; it seemed, on the whole, a pretty thing in him to condescend to do: the sentiment he awakened was not flustered by it. But the act of leading, appeared as an official thing to do. Our soufe of sentiment will be seen subsiding under a breath, without a repressive word to send it down. Sir Rodwell Blachington would have preferred Radnor's not leading or playing either. Colonel Corfe and Mr. Caddis declined to consider such conduct English, in a man of station . . . notwithstanding Royal Highnesses, who are at least partly English: partly, we say, under our breath, remembering our old ideal of an English gentleman, in opposition to German tastes. It is true, that the whole country is changeing, decomposing!

The colonel fished for Lady Carmine's view. And Lady Swanage too? Both of the distinguished ladies approved of Mr. Radnor's leading—for a leading off. Women are pleased to see their favourite in the place of prominence—as long as Fortune swims him unbuffeted, or one should say, unbattered, up the mounting wave. Besides these ladies had none of the colonel's remainder of juvenile English sense of the manly, his adolescent's intolerance of the eccentric, suspicion and contempt of any supposed affectation, which was not ostentatiously, stalkingly practised to subdue the sex. And you cannot wield a baton without looking affected. And at one of the Colonel's Clubs in town, only five years back, an English musical composer, who had not then made his money—now by the mystery of events knighted!—had been (he makes now fifteen thousand a year) black-balled. 'Fiddler? no; can't admit a Fiddler to associate on equal terms with gentlemen.' Only five years back: and at present we are having the Fiddler everywhere.

A sprinkling of the minor ladies also would have been glad if Mr. Radnor had kept himself somewhat more exclusive. Dr. Schlesien heard remarks, upon which his weighty Teutonic mind sat crushingly. Do these English care one bit for music?—for anything finer than material stuffs?—what that man Durance calls, 'their beef, their beer, and their pew in eternity'? His wrath at their babble and petty brabble doubted that they did.

Page 3556

But they do. Art has a hold of them. They pay for it; and the thing purchased grapples. It will get to their bosoms to breathe from them in time: entirely overcoming the taste for feudalism, which still a little objects to see their born gentleman acting as leader of musicians. A people of slow movement, developing tardily, their country is wanting in the distincter features, from being always in the transitional state, like certain sea-fish rolling head over-you know not head from tail. Without the Welsh, Irish, Scot; in their composition, there would not be much of the yeasty ferment: but it should not be forgotten that Welsh, Irish, Scot, are now largely of their numbers; and the taste for elegance, and for spiritual utterance, for Song, nay, for Ideas, is there among them, though it does not everywhere cover a rocky surface to bewitch the eyes of aliens;—like Louise de Seilles and Dr. Schlesien, for example; aliens having no hostile disposition toward the people they were compelled to criticize; honourably granting, that this people has a great history. Even such has the Lion, with Homer for the transcriber of his deeds. But the gentle aliens would image our emergence from wildness as the unsocial spectacle presented by the drear menagerie Lion, alone or mated; with hardly an animated moment save when the raw red joint is beneath his paw, reminding him of the desert's pasture.

Nevertheless, where Strength is, there is hope:—it may be said more truly than of the breath of Life; which is perhaps but the bucket of breath, muddy with the sediment of the well: whereas we have in Strength a hero, if a malefactor; whose muscles shall haul him up to the light he will prove worthy of, when that divinity has shown him his uncleanness. And when Strength is not exercising, you are sure to see Satirists jump on his back. Dozens, foreign and domestic, are on the back of Old England; a tribute to our quality if at the same time an irritating scourge. The domestic are in excess; and let us own that their view of the potentate, as an apathetic beast of power, who will neither show the power nor woo the graces; pretending all the while to be eminently above the beast, and posturing in an inefficient mimicry of the civilized, excites to satire. Colney Durance had his excuses. He could point to the chief creative minds of the country for generations, as beginning their survey genially, ending venomously, because of an exasperating unreason and scum in the bubble of the scenes, called social, around them. Viola under his chin, he gazed along the crowded hall, which was to him a rich national pudding of the sycophants, the hypocrites, the burlies, the idiots; dregs of the depths and froth of the surface; bowing to one, that they may scorn another; instituting a Charity, for their poorer fawning fellows to relieve their purses and assist them in tricking the world and their Maker: and so forth, a tiresome tirade: and as it was not on his lips, but in the stomach of the painful creature, let him grind that hurdy-gurdy for himself. His friend Victor set it stirring: Victor had here what he aimed at!

Page 3557

How Success derides Ambition! And for this he imperilled the happiness of the worthy woman he loved! Exposed her to our fen-fogs and foul snakes—of whom one or more might be in the assembly now: all because of his insane itch to be the bobbing cork on the wave of the minute! Colney's rapid interjections condensed upon the habitual shrug at human folly, just when Victor, fronting the glassy stare of Colonel Corfe, tapped to start his orchestra through the lively first bars of the overture to Zampa.

We soon perceive that the post Mr. Radnor fills he thoroughly fills, whatever it may be. Zampa takes horse from the opening. We have no amateur conductor riding ahead: violins, 'cellos, piano, wind-stops: Peridon, Catkin, Pempton, Yatt, Cormyn, Colney, Mrs. Cormyn, Dudley Sowerby: they are spirited on, patted, subdued, muted, raised, rushed anew, away, held in hand, in both hands. Not earnestness worn as a cloak, but issuing, we see; not simply a leader of musicians, a leader of men. The halo of the millionaire behind, assures us of a development in the character of England's merchant princes. The homage we pay him flatters us. A delightful overture, masterfully executed; ended too soon; except that the programme forbids the ordinary interpretation of prolonged applause. Mr. Radnor is one of those who do everything consummately. And we have a monition within, that a course of spiritual enjoyment will rouse the call for bodily refreshment. His genial nod and laugh and word of commendation to his troop persuade us oddly, we know not how, of provision to come. At the door of the retiring-room, see, he is congratulated by Luciani and Durandarte. Miss Priscilla Graves is now to sing a Schumann. Down later, it is a duet with the Rev. Septimus Barmby. We have nothing to be ashamed of in her, before an Italian Operatic singer! Ices after the first part is over.

CHAPTER XXI

DARTREY FENELLAN

Had Nataly and Nesta known who was outside helping Skepsey to play ball with the boys, they would not have worked through their share of the performance with so graceful a composure. Even Simeon Fenellan was unaware that his half-brother Dartrey had landed in England. Dartrey went first to Victor's office, where he found Skepsey packing the day's letters and circulars into the bag for the delivery of them at Lakelands. They sprang a chatter, and they missed the last of the express trains which did, not greatly signify, Skepsey said, 'as it was a Concert.' To hear his hero talk, was the music for him; and he richly enjoyed the pacing along the railway-platform.

Page 3558

Arrived on the grounds, they took opposite sides in a game of rounders, at that moment tossing heads or tails for innings. These boys were slovenly players, and were made unhappy by Skepsey's fussy instructions to them in smartness. They had a stupid way of feeding the stick, and they ran sprawling; it concerned Great Britain for them to learn how to use their legs. It was pitiful for the country to see how lumpish her younger children were. Dartrey knew his little man and laughed, after warning him that his English would want many lessons before they stomached the mixture of discipline and pleasure. So it appeared: the pride of the boys in themselves, their confidence, enjoyment of the game, were all gone; and all were speedily out but Skepsey; who ran for the rounder, with his coat off, sharp as a porpoise, and would have got it, he had it in his grasp, when, at the jump, just over the line of the goal, a clever fling, if ever was, caught him a crack on that part of the human frame where sound is best achieved. Then were these young lumps transformed to limber, lither, merry fellows. They rejoiced Skepsey's heart; they did everything better, ran and dodged and threw in a style to win the nod from the future official inspector of Games and Amusements of the common people; a deputy of the Government, proposed by Skepsey to his hero with a deferential eagerness. Dartrey clapped him on the shoulder, softly laughing.

'System—Mr. Durance is right—they must have system, if they are to appreciate a holiday,' Skepsey said; and he sent a wretched gaze around, at the justification of some of the lurid views of Mr. Durance, in signs of the holiday wasted;—impoverishing the country's manhood in a small degree, it may be argued, but we ask, can the country afford it, while foreign nations are drilling their youth, teaching them to be ready to move in squads or masses, like the fist of a pugilist. Skepsey left it to his look to speak his thought. He saw an enemy in tobacco. The drowsiness of beer had stretched various hulks under trees. Ponderous cricket lumbered half-alive. Flabby fun knocked-up a yell. And it was rather vexatious to see girls dancing in good time to the band-music. One had a male-partner, who hopped his loutish burlesque of the thing he could not do.

Apparently, too certainly, none but the girls had a notion of orderly muscular exercise. Of what use are girls! Girls have their one mission on earth; and let them be healthy by all means, for the sake of it; only, they should not seem to prove that old England is better represented on the female side. Skepsey heard, with a nip of spite at his bosom, a small body of them singing in chorus as they walked in step, arm in arm, actually marched: and to the rearward, none of these girls heeding; there were the louts at their burlesque of jigs and fisticuffs! 'Cherry Ripe,' was the song.

'It's delightful to hear them!' said Dartrey.

Page 3559

Skepsey muttered jealously of their having been trained.

The song, which drew Dartrey Fenellan to the quick of an English home, planted him at the same time in Africa to hear it. Dewy on a parched forehead it fell, England the shedding heaven.

He fetched a deep breath, as of gratitude for vital refreshment. He had his thoughts upon the training of our English to be something besides the machinery of capitalists, and upon the country as a blessed mother instead of the most capricious of maudlin step-dames.

He flicked his leg with the stick he carried, said: 'Your master's the man to make a change among them, old friend!' and strolled along to a group surrounding two fellows who shammed a bout at single-stick. Vacuity in the attack on either side, contributed to the joint success of the defense. They paused under inspection; and Dartrey said: 'You're burning to give them a lesson, Skepsey.'

Skepsey had no objection to his hero's doing so, though at his personal cost.

The sticks were handed to them; the crowd increased; their rounders boys had spied them, and came trooping to the scene. Skepsey was directed to hit in earnest. His defensive attitude flashed, and he was at head and right and left leg, and giving point, recovering, thrusting madly, and again at shoulder and thigh, with bravos for reward of a man meaning business; until a topper on his hat, a cut over the right thigh, and the stick in his middlerib, told the spectators of a scientific adversary; and loudly now the gentleman was cheered. An undercurrent of warm feeling ran for the plucky little one at it hot again in spite of the strokes, and when he fetched his master a handsome thud across the shoulder, and the gentleman gave up and complimented him, Skepsey had applause.

He then begged his hero to put the previous couple in position, through a few of the opening movements. They were horribly sheepish at first. Meantime two boys had got hold of sticks, and both had gone to work in Skepsey's gallant style; and soon one was howling. He excused himself, because of the funny-bone, situated, in his case, higher than usual up the arm. And now the pair of men were giving and taking cuts to make a rhinoceros caper.

'Very well; begin that way; try what you can bear,' said Dartrey.

Skepsey watched them, in felicity for love of the fray, pained by the disregard of science.

Comments on the pretty play, indicating a reminiscent acquaintance with it, and the capacity for critical observations, were started. Assaults, wonderful tricks of a slashing

Life-Guardsman, one spectator had witnessed at an exhibition in a London hall. Boxing too. You may see displays of boxing still in places. How about a prizefight?—With money on it?—Eh, but you don't expect men to stand up to be knocked into rumpsteaks for nothing?—No, but it's they there bets!—Right, and that's a game gone to ruin along of outsiders.—But it always was and it always will be popular with Englishmen!

Page 3560

Great English names of young days, before the wintry shadow of the Law had blighted them, received their withered laurels. Emulous boys were in the heroic posture. Good! sparring does no hurt: Skepsey seized a likely lad, Dartrey another. Nature created the Ring for them. Now then, arms and head well up, chest hearty, shoulders down, out with the right fist, just below the level of the chin; out with the left fist farther, right out, except for that bit of curve; so, and draw it slightly back for wary-pussy at the spring. Firm you stand, feeling the muscles of both legs, left half a pace ahead, right planted, both stringy. None of your milk-pail looks; show us jaw, you bulldogs. Now then, left from the shoulder, straight at right of head.—Good, and alacrity called on vigour in Skepsey's pupil; Dartrey's had the fist on his mouth before he could parry right arm up. 'Foul blow!' Dartrey cried. Skepsey vowed to the contrary. Dartrey reiterated his charge. Skepsey was a figure of negation, gesticulating and protesting. Dartrey appealed tempestuously to the Ring; Skepsey likewise, in a tone of injury. He addressed a remonstrance to Captain Dartrey.

'Hang your captain, sir! I call you a coward; come on,' said the resolute gentleman, already in ripe form for the attack. His blue eyes were like the springing sunrise over ridges of the seas; and Skepsey jumped to his meaning.

Boys and men were spectators of a real scientific set-to, a lovely show. They were half puzzled, it seemed so deadly. And the little one got in his blows at the gentleman, who had to be hopping. Only, the worse the gentleman caught it, the friendlier his countenance became. That was the wonder, and that gave them the key. But it was deliciously near to the real thing.

Dartrey and Skepsey shook hands.

'And now, you fellows, you're to know, that this is one of the champions; and you take your lesson from him and thank him,' Dartrey said, as he turned on his heel to strike and greet the flow from the house.

'Dartrey come!' Victor, Fenellan, Colney, had him by the hand in turn. Pure sweetness of suddenly awakened joy sat in Nataly's eyes as she swam to welcome him, Nesta moved a step, seemed hesitating, and she tripped forward. 'Dear Captain Dartrey!'

He did not say: 'But what a change in you!'

'It is blue-butterfly, all the same,' Nataly spoke to his look.

Victor hurriedly pronounced the formal introduction between the Hon. Dudley Sowerby and Captain Dartrey Fenellan. The bronze face and the milky bowed to one another ceremoniously; the latter faintly flushing.

'So here you are at last,' Victor said. 'You stay with us.'

‘To-morrow or later, if you’ll have me. I go down to my people to-night.’

‘But you stay in England now?’ Nataly’s voice wavered on the question.

’There’s a chance of my being off to Upper Burmah before the week’s ended.’

Page 3561

‘Ah, dear, dear!’ sighed Fenellan; ’and out of good comes evil!—as grandfather Deucalion exclaimed, when he gallantly handed up his dripping wife from the mud of the Deluge waters. Do you mean to be running and Dewing it on for ever, with only a nod for friends, Dart?’

‘Lord, Simmy, what a sound of home there is in your old nonsense!’ Dartrey said.

His eyes of strong dark blue colour and the foreign swarthiness of his brows and cheeks and neck mixed the familiar and the strange, in the sight of the women who knew him.

The bill-broker’s fair-tressed young wife whispered of curiosity concerning him to Nataly. He dressed like a sailor, he stood like a soldier: and was he married? Yes, he was married.

Mrs. Blathenoy imagined a something in Mrs. Radnor’s tone. She could account for it; not by the ordinary reading of the feminine in the feminine, but through a husband who professed to know secrets. She was young in years and experience, ten months wedded, disappointedly awakened, enlivened by the hour, kindled by a novel figure of man, fretful for a dash of imprudence. This Mrs. Radnor should be the one to second her very innocent turn for a galopade; her own position allowed of any little diverting jig or reel, or plunge in a bath—she required it, for the domestic Jacob Blathenoy was a dry chip: proved such, without a day’s variation during the whole of the ten wedded months. Nataly gratified her spoken wish. Dartrey Fenellan bowed to the lady, and she withdrew him, seeing composedly that other and greater ladies had the wish ungratified. Their husbands were not so rich as hers, and their complexions would hardly have pleased the handsome brown-faced officer so well.

Banquet, equal to a blast of trumpet, was the detaining word for the multitude. It circulated, one knows not how. Eloquent as the whiffs to the sniffs (and nowhere is eloquence to match it, when the latter are sharpened from within to without), the word was very soon over the field. Mr. Carling may have helped; he had it from Fenellan; and he was among the principal groups, claiming or making acquaintances, as a lawyer should do. The Concert was complimentarily a topic: Durandarte divine!—did not everybody think so? Everybody did, in default of a term for overtopping it. Our language is poor at hyperbole; our voices are stronger. Gestures and heaven-sent eyeballs invoke to display the ineffable. Where was Durandarte now? Gone; already gone; off with the Luciani for evening engagements; he came simply to oblige his dear friend Mr. Radnor. Cheque fifty guineas: hardly more on both sides than an exchange of smiles. Ah, these merchant-princes! What of Mr. Radnor’s amateur instrumentalists? Amateurs, they are not to be named: perfect musicians. Mr. Radnor is the perfection of a host. Yes, yes; Mrs. Radnor; Miss Radnor too: delicious voices; but what is it about Mr. Radnor so captivating! He is not quite English, yet he is not at all foreign. Is he very adventurous in business, as they say?

Page 3562

‘Soundest head in the City of London,’ Mr. Blathenoy remarked.

Sir Rodwell Blachington gave his nod.

The crowd interjected, half-sighing. We ought to be proud of such a man! Perhaps we are a trifle exaggerating, says its heart. But that we are wholly grateful to him, is a distinct conclusion. And he may be one of the great men of his time: he has a quite individual style of dress.

Lady Rodwell Blachington observed to Colney Durance:

‘Mr. Radnor bids fair to become the idol of the English people.’

’If he can prove himself to be sufficiently the dupe of the English people,’ said Colney.

‘Idol—dupe?’ interjected Sir Rodwell, and his eyebrows fixed at the perch of Colney’s famous ‘national interrogation’ over vacancy of understanding, as if from the pull of a string. He had his audience with him; and the satirist had nothing but his inner gush of acids at sight of a planted barb.

Colney was asked to explain. He never explained. He performed a series of astonishing leaps, like the branchy baboon above the traveller’s head in the tropical forest, and led them into the trap they assisted him to prepare for them. ‘No humour, do you say? The English have no humour?’ a nephew of Lady Blachington’s inquired of him, with polite pugnacity, and was cordially assured, that ‘he vindicated them.’

‘And Altruistic! another specimen of the modern coinage,’ a classical Church dignitary, in grammarian disgust, remarked to a lady, as they passed.

Colney pricked-up his ears. It struck him that he might fish for suggestions in aid of the Grand Argument before the Elders of the Court of Japan. Dr. Wardan, whose recognition he could claim, stated to him, that the lady and he were enumerating words of a doubtfully legitimate quality now being inflicted upon the language.

‘The slang from below is perhaps preferable?’ said Colney.

‘As little-less.’

’But a pirate-tongue, cut-off from its roots, must continue to practise piracy, surely, or else take reinforcements in slang, otherwise it is inexpressive of new ideas.’

‘Possibly the new ideas are best expressed in slang.’

’If insular. They will consequently be incommunicable to foreigners. You would, then, have us be trading with tokens instead of a precious currency? Yet I cannot perceive

the advantage of letting our ideas be clothed so racy of the obscener soil; considering the pretensions of the English language to become the universal. If we refuse additions from above, they force themselves on us from below.'

Dr. Wardan liked the frame of the observations, disliked the substance.

'One is to understand that the English language has these pretensions?' he said:—he minced in his manner, after the well-known mortar-board and tassel type; the mouthing of a petrifaction: clearly useless to the pleadings of the patriotic Dr. Bouthoin and his curate.

Page 3563

He gave no grip to Colney, who groaned at cheap Donnish sarcasm, and let him go, after dealing him a hard pellet or two in a cracker-covering.

There was Victor all over the field netting his ephemerae! And he who feeds on them, to pay a price for their congratulations and flatteries, he is one of them himself!

Nesta came tripping from the Rev. Septimus Barmby. 'Dear Mr. Durance, where is Captain Dartrey?'

Mrs. Blathenoy had just conducted her husband through a crowd, for an introduction of him to Captain Dartrey. That was perceptible.

Dudley Sowerby followed Nesta closely: he struck across the path of the Rev. Septimus: again he had the hollow of her ear at his disposal.

'Mr. Radnor was excellent. He does everything consummately: really, we are all sensible of it. I am. He must lead us in a symphony. These light "champagne overtures" of French composers, as Mr. Fenellan calls them, do not bring out his whole ability:—Zampa, Le Pre aux clercs, Masaniello, and the like.'

'Your duet together went well.'

'Thanks to you—to you. You kept us together.'

'Papa was the runaway or strain-the-leash, if there was one.'

'He is impetuous, he is so fervent. But, Miss Radnor, I could not be the runaway-with you . . . with you at the piano. Indeed, I . . . shall we stroll down? I love the lake.'

'You will hear the bell for your cold dinner very soon.'

'I am not hungry. I would so much rather talk—hear you. But you are hungry? You have been singing twice: three times! Opera singers, they say, eat hot suppers; they drink stout. And I never heard your voice more effective. Yours is a voice that . . . something of the feeling one has in hearing cathedral voices: carry one up. I remember, in Dresden, once, a Fraulein Kuhnstreich, a prodigy, very young, considering her accomplishments. But it was not the same.'

Nesta wondered at Dartrey Fenellan for staying so long with Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy.

'Ah, Mr. Sowerby, if I am to have flattery, I cannot take it as a milliner's dumb figure wears the beautiful dress; I must point out my view of some of my merits.'

'Oh! do, I beg, Miss . . . You have a Christian name and I too: and once . . . not Mr. Sowerby: yes, it was Dudley!

‘Quite accidentally, and a world of pardons entreated.’

‘And Dudley begged Dudley might be Dudley always!’

He was deepening to the Barmby intonation—apparently Cupid’s; but a shade more airily Pagan, not so fearfully clerical.

Her father had withdrawn Dartrey Fenellan from Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy. Dr. Schlesien was bowing with Dartrey.

’And if Durandarte would only—but you are one with Miss Graves to depreciate my Durandarte, in favour of the more classical Jachimo; whom we all admire; but you shall be just,’ said she, and she pouted. She had seen her father plant Dartrey Fenellan in the midst of a group of City gentlemen.

Page 3564

Simeon touched among them to pluck at his brother. He had not a chance; he retired, and swam into the salmon-net of seductive Mrs. Blathenoy's broad bright smile.

'It's a matter of mines, and they're hovering in the attitude of the query, like corkscrews over a bottle, profoundly indifferent to blood-relationships,' he said to her.

'Pray, stay and be consoled by me,' said the fair young woman. 'You are to point me out all the distinguished people. Is it true, that your brother has left the army?'

'Dartrey no longer wears the red. Here comes Colonel Corfe, who does. England has her army still!'

'His wife persuaded him?'

'You see he is wearing the black.'

'For her? How very very sad! Tell me—what a funnily dressed woman meeting that gentleman!'

'Hush—a friend of the warrior. Splendid weather, Colonel Corfe.'

'Superb toilettes!' The colonel eyed Mrs. Blathenoy dilatingly, advanced, bowed, and opened the siege.

She decided a calculation upon his age, made a wall of it, smilingly agreed with his encomium of the Concert, and toned her voice to Fenellan's comprehension: 'Did it occur recently?'

'Months; in Africa; I haven't the date.'

'Such numbers of people one would wish to know! Who are those ladies holding a Court, where Mr. Radnor is?'

'Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage—if it is your wish?' interposed the colonel.

She dealt him a forgiving smile. 'And that pleasant-looking old gentleman?'

Colonel Corfe drew-up. Fenellan said: 'Are we veterans at forty or so?'

'Well, it 's the romance, perhaps!' She raised her shoulders.

The colonel's intelligence ran a dog's nose for a lady's interjections. 'The romance? . . . at forty, fifty? gone? Miss Julinks, the great heiress and a beauty; has chosen him over the heads of all the young men of his time. Cranmer Lotsdale. Most romantic history!'

'She's in love with that, I suppose.'

‘Now you direct my attention to him,’ said Fenellan, ’the writing of the romantic history has made the texture look a trifle thready. You have a terrible eye.’

It was thrown to where the person stood who had first within a few minutes helped her to form critical estimates of men, more consciously to read them.

‘Your brother stays in England?’

‘The fear is, that he’s off again.’

‘Annoying for you. If I had a brother, I would not let him go.’

‘How would you detain him?’

’Locks and bolts, clock wrong, hands and arms, kneeling—the fourth act of the Huguenots!’

‘He went by way of the window, I think. But that was a lover.’

‘Oh! well!’ she flushed. She did not hear the ’neglected and astonished colonel speak, and she sought diversion in saying to Fenellan: ’So many people of distinction are assembled here to-day! Tell me, who is that pompous gentleman, who holds his arms up doubled, as he walks?’

Page 3565

’Like flappers of a penguin: and advances in jerks: he is head of the great Firm of Quatley Brothers: Sir Abraham: finances or farms one of the South American Republics: we call him, Pride of Port. He consumes it and he presents it.’

‘And who is that little man, who stops everybody?’

’People of distinction indeed! That little man—is your upper lip underrateing him? . . . When a lady’s lip is erratically disdainful, it suggests a misuse of a copious treasury, deserving to be mulcted, punished—how?—who can say?—that little man, now that little man, with a lift of his little finger, could convulse the Bacon Market!’

Mrs. Blathenoy shook. Hearing Colonel Corfe exclaim:

‘Bacon Market!’ she let fly a peal. Then she turned to a fresh satellite, a round and a ruddy, ‘at her service ever,’ Mr. Beaves Urmsing, and repeated Fenellan’s words. He, in unfeigned wonderment at such unsuspected powers, cried: ‘Dear me!’ and stared at the little man, making the pretty lady’s face a twinkling dew.

He had missed the Concert. Was it first-rate? Ecstasy answered in the female voice.

‘Hem’d fool I am to keep appointments!’ he muttered.

She reproved him: ’Fie, Mr. Urmsing; it’s the making of them, not the keeping!’

’Ah, my dear ma’am, if I’d had Blathenoy’s luck when he made a certain appointment. And he was not so much older than me? The old ones get the prizes!’

Mr. Beaves Urmsing prompted Colonel Corfe to laugh in triumph. The colonel’s eyebrows were up in fixity over sleepy lids. He brightened to propose the conducting of the pretty woman to the banquet.

‘We shall see them going in,’ said she. ’Mr. Radnor has a French cook, who does wonders. But I heard him asking for Mr. Beaves Urmsing. I’m sure he expected The Marigolds at his Concert.’

‘Anything to oblige the company,’ said the rustic ready chorister, clearing his throat.

The lady’s feet were bent in the direction of a grassy knoll, where sunflowers, tulips, dahlias, peonies, of the sex eclipsed at a distance its roses and lilies. Fenellan saw Dartrey, still a centre of the merchantmen, strolling thither.

’And do you know, your brother is good enough to dine with us next week, Thursday, down here,’ she murmured. ’I could venture to command?—if you are not induced.’

‘Whichever word applies to a faithful subject.’

‘I do so wish your brother had not left the army!’

‘You have one son of Mars.’

Her eyes took the colonel up to cast him down: he was not the antidote. She said to him: ‘Luciani’s voice wears better than her figure.’

The colonel replied: ‘I remember,’ and corrected himself, ’at Eton, in jackets: she was not so particularly slim; never knew how to dress. You beat Italians there! She moved one as a youngster.’

‘Eton boys are so susceptible!’

Page 3566

’Why, hulloa, don’t I remember her coming out!—and do you mean to tell me,’ Mr. Beaves Urmsing brutally addressed the colonel, ’that you were at Eton when . . . why, what age do you give the poor woman, then!’ He bellowed, ‘Eh?’ as it were a bull crowing.

The colonel retreated to one of his defensive corners. ’I am not aware that I meant to tell you anything.’

Mr. Beaves Urmsing turned square-breasted on Fenellan: ’Fellow’s a born donkey!’

‘And the mother lived?’ said Fenellan.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing puffed with wrath at the fellow.

Five minutes later, in the midst of the group surrounding and felicitating Victor, he had sight of Fenellan conversing with fair ones, and it struck a light in him; he went three steps backward, with shouts. ’Dam funny fellow! eh? who is he? I must have that man at my table. Worth fifty Colonel Jackasses! And I ’ve got a son in the Guards: and as much laugh in him, he ’s got, as a bladder. But we’ll make a party, eh, Radnor? with that friend o’ yours. Dam funny fellow! and precious little of it going on now among the young lot. They’re for seeing ghosts and gaping their jaws; all for the quavers instead of the capers.’

He sounded and thrummed his roguish fling-off for the capers. A second glimpse of Fenellan agitated the anecdote, as he called it, seizing Victor’s arm, to have him out of earshot of the ladies. Delivery, not without its throes, was accomplished, but imperfectly, owing to sympathetic convulsions, under which Mr. Beaves Urmsing’s countenance was crinkled of many colours, as we see the Spring rhubarb-leaf. Unable to repeat the brevity of Fenellan’s rejoinder, he expatiated on it to convey it, swearing that it was the kind of thing done in the old days, when men were witty dogs:—’pat! and pat back! as in the pantomime.’

‘Repartee!’ said Victor. ’He has it. You shall know him. You’re the man for him.’

’He for me, that he is!—“Hope the mother’s doing well? My card":—eh? Grave as an owl! Look, there goes the donkey, lady to right and left, all ears for him—ha! ha! I must have another turn with your friend. “Mother lived, did she?” Dam funny fellow, all of the olden time! And a dinner, bachelor dinner, six of us, at my place, next week, say Wednesday, half-past six, for a long evening—flowing bowl—eh, shall it be?’

Nesta came looking to find her Captain Dartrey.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing grew courtly of the olden time. He spied Colonel Corfe anew, and ‘Donkey!’ rose to split the roar at his mouth, and full of his anecdote, he pursued some

congenial acquaintances, crying to his host: ‘Wednesday, mind! eh? by George, your friend’s gizzarded me for the day!’

Page 3567

Plumped with the rich red stream of life, this last of the squires of old England thumped along among the guests, a very tuning-fork to keep them at their pitch of enthusiasm. He encountered Mr. Caddis, and it was an encounter. Mr. Caddis represented his political opinions; but here was this cur of a Caddis whineing his niminy note from his piminy nob, when he was asked for his hearty echo of the praises of this jolly good fellow come to waken the neighbourhood, to be a blessing, a blazing hearth, a fall of manna:—and thank the Lord for him, you desertdog! 'He 's a merchant prince, and he's a prince of a man, if you're for titles. Eh? you "assent to my encomiums." You'll be calling me Mr. Speaker next. Hang me, Caddis, if those Parliamentary benches of yours aren't freezing you from your seat up, and have got to your jaw—my belief!'

Mr. Caddis was left reflecting, that we have, in the dispensations of Providence, when we have a seat, to submit to castigations from butcherly men unaccountably commissioned to solidify the seat. He could have preached a discourse upon Success, to quiet the discontentment of the unseated. And our world of seats oddly gained, quaintly occupied, maliciously beset, insensately envied, needs the discourse. But it was not delivered, else would it have been here written down without mercy, as a medical prescript, one of the grand specifics. He met Victor, and, between his dread of him and the counsels of a position subject to stripes, he was a genial thaw. Victor beamed; for Mr. Caddis had previously stood eminent as an iceberg of the Lakelands' party. Mr. Inchling and Mr. Caddis were introduced. The former in Commerce, the latter in Politics, their sustaining boast was, the being our stable Englishmen; and at once, with cousinly minds, they fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously. Colney Durance forsook a set of ladies for fatter prey, and listened to them. What he said, Victor did not hear. The effect was always to be seen, with Inchling under Colney. Fenellan did better service, really good service.

Nataly played the heroine she was at heart. Why think of her as having to act a character! Twice had Carling that afternoon, indirectly and directly, stated Mrs. Burman to be near the end we crape a natural, a defensible, satisfaction to hear of:—not wishing it—poor woman!—but pardonably, before man and all the angels, wishing, praying for the beloved one to enter into her earthly peace by the agency of the other's exit into her heavenly.

Fenellan and Colney came together, and said a word apiece of their friend.

'In his element! The dear old boy has the look of a goldfish, king of his globe.'

'The dear old boy has to me the look of a pot on the fire, with a loose lid.'

Page 3568

I may have the summons from Themison to-morrow, Victor thought. The success of the day, was a wine that rocked the soberest of thoughts. For, strange to confess, ever since the fall on London Bridge, his heart, influenced in some degree by Nataly's depression perhaps, had been shadowed by doubts of his infallible instinct for success. Here, at a stroke, and before entering the house, he had the whole neighbourhood about him: he could feel that he and Nataly stood in the minds of the worthy people variously with the brightness if not with the warmth distinguishable in the bosom of Beaves Urmsing—the idea of whom gave Lakelands an immediate hearth-glow.

Armandine was thirteen minutes, by his watch, behind the time she had named. Small blame to her. He excused her to Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage, Lady Blachington, Mrs. Fanning, Sir Abraham Quatley, Mr. Danny (of Bacon fame) and the rest of the group surrounding Nataly on the mound leftward of the white terraces descending to the lake; where she stood beating her foot fretfully at the word brought by Nesta, that Dartrey Fenellan had departed. It was her sunshine departed. But she went through her task of conversing amiably. Colney, for a wonder, consented to be useful in assisting Fenellan to relate stories of French Cooks; which were, like the Royal Hanoverian oyster, of an age for offering acceptable flavour to English hearers. Nesta drew her mother's attention to Priscilla Graves and Skepsey; the latter bending head and assenting. Nataly spoke of the charm of Priscilla's voice that day, in her duet with the Rev. Septimus. Mr. Pempton looked; he saw that Priscilla was proselytizing. She was perfection to him but for one blotting thing. With grief on his eyelids, he said to Nataly or to himself: 'Meat!'

'Dear friend, don't ride your hobby over us,' she replied.

'But it's with that object they mount it,' said Victor.

The greater ladies of the assembly were quite ready to accuse the sections, down to the individuals, of the social English (reserving our elect) of an itch to be tyrants.

Colney was apologizing for them, with his lash: 'It's merely the sensible effect of a want of polish of the surface when they rub together.'

And he heard Carling exclaim to Victor: 'How comes the fellow here!'

Skepsey had rushed across an open space to intercept a leisurely progressive man, whose hat was of the shape Victor knew; and the man wore the known black gaiters. In appearance, he had the likeness of a fallen parson.

Carling and Victor crossed looks that were questions carrying their answers.

Nataly's eyes followed Victor's. 'Who is the man?' she said; and she got no reply beyond a perky sparkle in his gaze.

Others were noticing the man, who was trying to pass by Skepsey, now on his right side, now on his left.

‘There’ll be no stopping him,’ Carling said, and he slipped to the rear.’

Page 3569

At this juncture, Armandine's mellow bell proclaimed her readiness.

Victor rubbed the back of his head. Nataly asked him: 'Dear, is it that man?'

He nodded scantly: 'Expected, expected. I think we have our summons from Armandine. One moment—poor soul! poor soul! Lady Carmine—Sir Abraham Quatley. Will you lead? Lady Blachington, I secure you. One moment.'

He directed Nataly to pair a few of the guests; he hurried down the slope of sward.

Nataly applied to Colney Durance. 'Do you know the man?—is it that man?'

Colney rejoined: 'The man's name is Jarniman.'

Armandine's bell swung melodiously. The guests had grouped, thickening for the stream to procession. Mrs. Blathenoy claimed Fenellan; she requested him to tell her whether he had known Mrs. Victor Radnor many years. She mused. 'You like her?'

'One likes one's dearest of friends among women, does one not?'

The lady nodded to his response. 'And your brother?'

'Dartrey is devoted to her.'

'I am sure,' said she, 'your brother is a chivalrous gentleman. I like her too.' She came to her sentiment through the sentiment of the chivalrous gentleman. Sinking from it, she remarked that Mr. Radnor was handsome still. Fenellan commended the subject to her, as one to discourse of when she met Dartrey. A smell of a trap-hatch, half-open, afflicted and sharpened him. It was Blathenoy's breath: husbands of young wives do these villanies, for the sake of showing their knowledge. Fenellan forbore to praise Mrs. Victor: he laid his colours on Dartrey. The lady gave ear till she reddened. He meant no harm, meant nothing but good; and he was lighting the most destructive of our lower fires.

Visibly, that man Jarniman was disposed of with ease. As in the street-theatres of crowing Punch, distance enlisted pantomime to do the effective part of the speeches. Jarniman's hat was off, he stood bent, he delivered his message. He was handed over to Skepsey's care for the receiving of meat and drink. Victor returned; he had Lady Blachington's hand on his arm; he was all hers, and in the heart of his company of guests at the same time. Eyes that had read him closely for years, were unable to spell a definite signification on his face, below the overflowing happiness of the hospitable man among contented guests. He had in fact something within to enliven him; and that was the more than suspicion, amounting to an odour of certainty, that Armandine intended one of her grand surprises for her master, and for the hundred and fifty or so to be seated at her tables in the unwarmed house of Lakelands.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCERNS THE INTRUSION OF JARNIMAN

Armandine did her wonders. There is not in the wide range of the Muses a more responsive instrument than man to his marvellous cook; and if his notes were but as flowing as his pedals are zealous, we should be carried on the tale of the enthusiasm she awakened, away from the rutted highroad, where History now thinks of tightening her girdle for an accelerated pace.

Page 3570

The wonders were done: one hundred and seventy guests plenteously fed at tables across the great Concert Hall, down a length of the conservatory-glass, on soups, fish, meats, and the kitchen-garden, under play of creative sauces, all in the persuasive steam of savouriness; every dish, one may say, advancing, curtseying, swimming to be your partner, instead of passively submitting to the eye of appetite, consenting to the teeth, as that rather melancholy procession of the cold, resembling established spinsters thrice-corseted in decorum, will appear to do. Whether Armandine had the thought or that she simply acted in conformity with a Frenchwoman's direct good sense, we do require to smell a sort of animation in the meats we consume. We are still perhaps traceably related to the Adamite old-youngster just on his legs, who betrayed at every turn his Darwinian beginnings, and relished a palpitating unwillingness in the thing refreshing him; only we young-oldsters cherish the milder taste for willingness, with a throb of the vanquished in it. And a seeming of that we get from the warm roast. The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke, should send out a breath to meet us. Victor's crowded saloon-carriage was one voice of eulogy, to raise Armandine high as the finale rockets bursting over Wrensham Station at the start Londonward. How had she managed? We foolishly question the arts of magicians.

Mr. Pempton was an apparent dissentient, as the man must be who is half a century ahead of his fellows in humaneness, and saddened by the display of slaughtered herds and their devourers. He had picked out his vegetable and farinaceous morsels, wherever he could get them uncontaminated; enough for sustenance; and the utmost he could show was, that he did not complain. When mounted and ridden by the satirist, in wrath at him for systematically feasting the pride of the martyr on the maceration of his animal part, he put on his martyr's pride, which assumed a perfect contentment in the critical depreciation of opposing systems: he was drawn to state, as he had often done, that he considered our animal part shamefully and dangerously over nourished, and that much of the immorality of the world was due to the present excessive indulgence in meats. 'Not in drink?' Miss Graves inquired. 'No,' he said boldly; 'not equally; meats are more insidious. I say nothing of taking life—of fattening for that express purpose: diseases of animals: bad blood made: cruelty superinduced: it will be seen to be, it will be looked back on, as a form of, a second stage of, cannibalism. Let that pass. I say, that for excess in drinking, the penalty is paid instantly, or at least on the morrow.'

'Paid by the drunkard's wife, you should say.'

'Whereas intemperance in eating, corrupts constitutionally, more spiritually vitiates, we think: on the whole, gluttony is the least-generous of the vices.'

Page 3571

Colney lured Mr. Pempton through a quagmire of the vices to declare, that it brutalized; and stammeringly to adopt the suggestion, that our breeding of English ladies—those lights of the civilized world—can hardly go with a feeding upon flesh of beasts. Priscilla regretted that champagne should have to be pleaded in excuse of impertinences to her sex. They were both combative, nibbed for epigram, edged to inflict wounds; and they were set to shudder openly at one another's practises; they might have exposed to Colney which of the two maniacal sections of his English had the vaster conceit of superiority in purity; they were baring themselves, as it were with a garment flung-off at each retort. He reproached them for undermineing their countrymen; whose Falstaff panics demanded blood of animals to restore them; and their periods of bragging, that they should brandify their wits to imagine themselves Vikings.

Nataly interposed. She was vexed with him. He let his eyelids drop: but the occasion for showing the prickliness of the bristly social English, could not be resisted. Dr. Peter Yatt was tricked to confess, that small annoyances were, in his experience, powerful on the human frame; and Dr. John Cormyn was very neatly brought round to assure him he was mistaken if he supposed the homoeopathic doctor who smoked was exercising a destructive influence on the efficacy of the infinitesimal doses he prescribed; Dr. Yatt chuckled a laugh at globules; Dr. Cormyn at patients treated as horses; while Mr. Catkin was brought to praise the smoke of tobacco as our sanctuary from the sex; and Mr. Peridon quietly denied, that the taking of it into his nostrils from the puffs of his friend caused him sad silences: Nesta flew to protect the admirer of her beloved Louise. Her subsiding young excitement of the day set her Boating on that moony melancholy in Mr. Peridon.

No one could understand the grounds for Colney's more than usual waspishness. He trotted out the fulgent and tonal Church of the Rev. Septimus; the skeleton of worship, so truly showing the spirit, in that of Dudley Sowerby's family; maliciously admiring both; and he had a spar with Fenellan, ending in a snarl and a shout. Victor said to him: 'Yes, here, as much as you like, old Colney, but I tell you, you've staggered that poor woman Lady Blachington to-day, and her husband too; and I don't know how many besides. What the pleasure of it can be, I can't guess.'

'Nor I,' said Fenellan, 'but I'll own I feel envious; like the girl among a family of boys I knew, who were all of them starved in their infancy by a miserly father, that gave them barely a bit of Graves to eat and not a drop of Pempton to drink; and on the afternoon of his funeral, I found them in the drawing-room, four lank fellows, heels up, walking on their hands, from long practice; and the girl informed me, that her brothers were able so to send the little blood they had in their bodies to their brains, and always felt quite cheerful for it, happy, and empowered to deal with the problems of the universe; as they couldn't on their legs; but she, poor thing, was forbidden to do the same! And I'm like her. I care for decorum too much to get the brain to act on Colney's behaviour; but I see it enraptures him and may be comprehensible to the topsy-turvy.'

Page 3572

Victor rubbed hands. It was he who filled Colney's bag of satiric spite. In addition to the downright lunacy of the courting of country society, by means of the cajolements witnessed this day, a suspicion that Victor was wearing a false face over the signification—of Jarniman's visit and meant to deceive the trustful and too-devoted loving woman he seemed bound to wreck, irritated the best of his nature. He had a resolve to pass an hour with the couple, and speak and insist on hearing plain words before the night had ended. But Fenellan took it out of him. Victor's show of a perfect contentment emulating Pempton's, incited Colney to some of his cunning rapier-thrusts with his dancing adversary; and the heat which is planted in us for the composition: of those cool epigrams, will not allow plain words to follow. Or, handing him over to the police of the Philistines, you may put it, that a habit of assorting spices will render an earnest simplicity distasteful. He was invited by Nataly to come home with them; her wish for his presence, besides personal, was moved by an intuition, that his counsel might specially benefit them. He shrugged; he said he had work at his chambers.

'Work!' Victor ejaculated: he never could reach to a right comprehension of labour, in regard to the very unremunerative occupation of literature. Colney he did not want, and he let him go, as Nataly noticed, without a sign of the reluctance he showed when the others, including Fenellan, excused themselves.

'So! we're alone?' he said, when the door of the hall had closed on them. He kept Nesta talking of the success of the day until she, observing her mother's look, simulated the setting-in of a frenzied yawn. She was kissed, and she tripped to her bed.

'Now we are alone,' Nataly said.

'Well, dear, and the day was, you must own . . . ' he sought to trifle with her heavy voice; but she recalled him: 'Victor!' and the naked anguish in her cry of his name was like a foreign world threatening the one he filled.

'Ah, yes; that man, that Jarniman. You saw him, I remember. You recollected him?—-stouter than he was. In her service ever since. Well, a little drop of bitter, perhaps: no harm, tonic.'

'Victor, is she very ill?'

'My love, don't feel at your side: she is ill, ill, not the extreme case: not yet: old and ill. I told Skepsey to give the man refreshment: he had to do his errand.'

'What? why did he come?'

'Curious; he made acquaintance with Skepsey, and appears to have outwitted poor Skepsey, as far as I see it. But if that woman thinks of intimidating me now—!' His eyes brightened; he had sprung from evasions. 'Living in flagrant sin, she says: you and I!

She will not have it; warns me. Heard this day at noon of company at Lakelands. Jarniman off at once. Are to live in obscurity;—you and I! if together! Dictates from her death-bed-I suppose her death-bed.'

Page 3573

‘Dearest,’ Nataly pressed hand on her left breast, ’may we not think that she may be right?’

’An outrageous tyranny of a decrepit woman naming herself wife when she is only a limpet of vitality, with drugs for blood, hanging-on to blast the healthy and vigorous! I remember old Colney’s once, in old days, calling that kind of marriage a sarcophagus. It was to me. There I lay—see myself lying! wasting! Think what you can good of her, by all means! From her bed! despatches that Jarniman to me from her bedside, with the word, that she cannot in her conscience allow—what imposition was it I practised? . . . flagrant sin?—it would have been an infinitely viler . . . . She is the cause of suffering enough: I bear no more from her; I’ve come to the limit. She has heard of Lakelands: she has taken one of her hatreds to the place. She might have written, might have sent me a gentleman, privately. No: it must be done in dramatic style-for effect: her confidential—lawyer?—doctor?—butler! Perhaps to frighten me:—the boy she knew, and—poor soul! I don’t mean to abuse her: but such conduct as this is downright brutal. I laugh at it, I snap my fingers. I can afford to despise it. Only I do say it deserves to be called abominable.’

‘Victor, has she used a threat?’

’Am I brought to listen to any of her threats!—Funny thing, I ’m certain that woman never can think of me except as the boy she knew. I saw her first when she was first a widow. She would keep talking to me of the seductions of the metropolis—kept informing me I was a young man . . . shaking her head. I ’ve told you. She—well, I know we are mixtures, women as well as men. I can, I hope, grant the same—I believe I can—allowances to women as to men; we are poor creatures, all of using one sense: though I won’t give Colney his footing; there’s a better way of reading us. I hold fast to Nature. No violation of Nature, my good Colney! We can live the lives of noble creatures; and I say that happiness was meant for us:—just as, when you sit down to your dinner, you must do it cheerfully, and you make good blood: otherwise all’s wrong. There’s the right answer to Colney! But when a woman like that . . . . and marries a boy: well, twenty-one—not quite that: and an innocent, a positive innocent—it may seem incredible, after a term of school-life: it was a fact: I can hardly understand it myself when I look back. Marries him! And then sets to work to persecute him, because he has blood in his veins, because he worships beauty; because he seeks a real marriage, a real mate. And, I say it! let the world take its own view, the world is wrong! because he preferred a virtuous life to the kind of life she would, she must—why, necessarily!—have driven him to, with a mummy’s grain of nature in his body. And I am made of flesh, I admit it.’

‘Victor, dearest, her threat concerns only your living at Lakelands.’

Page 3574

‘Pray, don’t speak excitedly, my love,’ he replied to the woman whose tones had been subdued to scarce more than waver. ’You see how I meet it: water off a duck’s back, or Indian solar beams on the skin of a Hindoo! I despise it hardly worth contempt;—But, come: our day was a good one. Fenellan worked well. Old Colney was Colney Durance, of course. He did no real mischief.’

‘And you will not determine to enter Lakelands—not yet, dear?’ said Nataly.

‘My own girl, leave it all to me.’

‘But, Victor, I must, must know.’

’See the case. You have lots of courage. We can’t withdraw. Her intention is mischief. I believe the woman keeps herself alive for it: we’ve given her another lease!—though it can only be for a very short time; Themison is precise; Carling too. If we hold back—I have great faith in Themison—the woman’s breath on us is confirmed. We go down, then; complete the furnishing, quite leisurely; accept—listen—accept one or two invitations: impossible to refuse!—but they are accepted!—and we defy her: a crazy old creature: imagines herself the wife of the ex-Premier, widow of Prince Le Boo, engaged to the Chinese Ambassador, et caetera. Leave the tussle with that woman to me. No, we don’t repeat the error of Crayc Farm and Creckholt. And here we have stout friends. Not to speak of Beaver Urmsing: a picture of Old Christmas England! You took to him?—must have taken to Beaver Urmsing! The Marigolds! And Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington are altogether above the mark of Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil, and those half and half Mountneys. There’s a warm centre of home in Lakelands. But I know my Nataly: she is thinking of our girl. Here is the plan: we stand our ground: my dear soul won’t forsake me only there’s the thought of Fredi, in the event . . . improbable enough. I lift Fredi out of the atmosphere awhile; she goes to my cousins the Duvidney ladies.’

Nataly was hit by a shot. ‘Can you imagine it, Victor?’

‘Regard it as done.’

‘They will surely decline!’

‘Their feeling for General Radnor is a worship.’

‘All the more . . . ?’

’The son inherits it. He goes to them personally. Have you ever known me personally fail? Fredi stays at Moorsedge for a month or two. Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney will give her a taste of a new society; good for the girl. All these little shiftings can be turned to good. Meantime, I say, we stand our ground: but you are not to be worried; for though we have gone too far to recede, we need not and we will not make the entry into

Lakelands until—you know: that is, auspiciously, to suit you in every way. Thus I provide to meet contingencies. What one may really fancy is, that the woman did but threaten. There's her point of view to be considered: silly, crazy; but one sees it. We are not sure that she struck a blow at Craye or Creckholt. I wonder she never wrote. She was frightened, when she came to manage her property, of signing her name to anything. Absurd, that sending of Jarniman! However, it's her move; we make a corresponding disposition of our chessmen.'

Page 3575

‘And I am to lose my Nesta for a month?’ Nataly said, after catching here and there at the fitful gleams of truce or comfort dropped from his words. And simultaneously, the reproach of her mind to her nature for again and so constantly yielding to the domination of his initiative: unable to find the words, even the ideas, to withstand him, —brought big tears. Angry at herself both for the internal feebleness and the exhibition of it, she blinked and begged excuse. There might be nothing that should call her to resist him. She could not do much worse than she had done to-day. The reflection, that to-day she had been actually sustained by the expectation of a death to come, diminished her estimate of to-morrow’s burden on her endurance, in making her seem a less criminal woman, who would have no such expectation: which was virtually a stab at a fellow creature’s future. Her head was acute to work in the direction of the casuistries and the sensational webs and films. Facing Victor, it was a block.

But the thought came: how could she meet those people about Lakelands, without support of the recent guilty whispers! She said coldly, her heart shaking her: ‘You think there has been a recovery?’

’Invalids are up and down. They are—well, no; I should think she dreads the . . .’ he kept ‘surgeon’ out of hearing. ’Or else she means this for the final stroke: “though I’m lying here, I can still make him feel.” That, or—poor woman—she has her notions of right and wrong.’

‘Could we not now travel for a few weeks, Victor?’

’Certainly, dear; we will, after we have kept our engagements to dine—I accepted—with the Blathenoys, the Blachingtons, Beaver Urmsing.’

Nataly’s vision of the peaceful lost little dairy cottage swelled to brilliance, like the large tear at the fall; darkening under her present effort to comprehend the necessity it was for him to mix and be foremost with the world. Unable to grasp it perfectly in mind, her compassionate love embraced it: she blamed herself, for being the obstruction to him.

‘Very well,’ she said on a sigh. ’Then we shall not have to let our girl go from us?’

’Just a few weeks. In the middle of dinner, I scribbled a telegram to the Duvidneys, for Skepsey to take.’

‘Speaking of Nesta?’

’Of my coming to-morrow. They won’t stop me. I dine with them, sleep at the Wells; hotel for a night. We are to be separated for a night.’

She laid her hand in his and gave him a passing view of her face: ’For two, dear. I am . . . that man’s visit—rather shaken: I shall have a better chance of sleeping if I know I am not disturbing you.’

She was firm; and they kissed and parted. Each had an unphrased speculation upon the power of Mrs. Burman to put division between them.

CHAPTER XXIII

Treats of the ladies' lapdog Tasso for an instance of momentous effects produced by very minor causes

Page 3576

The maiden ladies Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney were thin—sweet old-fashioned grey gentlewomen, demurely conscious of their excellence and awake to the temptation in the consciousness, who imposed a certain reflex primness on the lips of the world when addressing them or when alluding to them. For their appearance was picturesque of the ancestral time, and their ideas and scrupulousness of delivery suggested the belated in ripeness; orchard apples under a snow-storm; or any image that will ceremoniously convey the mind's profound appreciation together with the tooth's panic dread of tartness. They were by no means tart; only, as you know, the tooth is apprehensively nervous; an uninviting sign will set it on edge. Even the pen which would sketch them has a spell on it and must don its coat of office, walk the liveried footman behind them.

Their wealth, their deeds of charity, their modesty, their built grey locks, their high repute; a 'Chippendale elegance' in a quaintly formal correctness, that they had, as Colney Durance called it; gave them some queenliness, and allowed them to claim the ear as an oracle and banish rebellious argument. Intuitive knowledge, assisted by the Rev. Stuart Rem and the Rev. Abram Posterley, enabled them to pronounce upon men and things; not without effect; their country owned it; the foreigner beheld it. Nor were they corrupted by the servility of the surrounding ear. They were good women, striving to be humbly good. They might, for all the little errors they nightly unrolled to then perceptions, have stood before the world for a study in the white of our humanity. And this may be but a washed wall, it is true: revolutionary sceptics are measuring the depths of it. But the hue refreshes, the world admires; and we know it an object of aim to the bettermost of the wealthy. If, happily, complacent circumstances have lifted us to the clean paved platform out of grip of puddled clay and bespattering wheeltracks, we get our chance of coming to it.

Possessing, for example, nine thousand pounds per annum in Consols, and not expending the whole of it upon our luxuries, we are, without further privation, near to kindling the world's enthusiasm for whiteness. Yet there, too, we find, that character has its problems to solve; there are shades in salt. We must be charitable, but we should be just; we give to the poor of the land, but we are eminently the friends of our servants; duty to mankind diverts us not from the love we bear to our dog; and with a pathetic sorrow for silt, we discard it from sight and hearing. We hate dirt. Having said so much, having shown it, by sealing the mouth of Mr. Stuart Rem and iceing the veins of Mr. Abram Posterley, in relation to a dreadful public case and a melancholy private, we have a pleased sense of entry into the world's ideal.

At the same time, we protest our unworthiness. Acknowledgeing that they were not purely spotless, these ladies genuinely took the tiny fly-spot for a spur to purification; and they viewed it as a patch to raise in relief their goodness. They gazed on it, saw themselves in it, and veiled it: warned of the cunning of an oft-defeated Tempter.

Page 3577

To do good and sleep well, was their sowing and their reaping. Uneasy consciences could not have slept. The sleeping served for proof of an accurate reckoning and an expungeing of the day's debits. They differed in opinion now and then, as we see companion waves of the river, blown by a gust, roll a shadow between them; and almost equally transient were their differences with a world that they condemned when they could not feel they (as an embodiment of their principles) were leading it. The English world at times betrayed a restiveness in the walled pathway of virtue; for, alas, it closely neighbours the French; only a Channel, often dangerously smooth, to divide: but it is not perverted for long; and the English Funds are always constant and a tower. Would they be suffered to be so, if libertinism were in the ascendant?

Colney Durance was acquainted with the Duvidney ladies. Hearing of the journey to them and the purport of it, he said, with the mask upon glee: 'Then Victor has met his match!' Nataly had sent for him to dine with her in Victor's absence: she was far from grieved, as to the result, by his assurance to her, that Victor had not a chance. Colney thought so. 'Just like him! to be off gaily to try and overcome or come over the greatest power in England.' They were England herself; the squat old woman she has become by reason of her overlapping numbers of the comfortable fund-holder annuitants: a vast body of passives and negatives, living by precept, according to rules of precedent, and supposing themselves to be righteously guided because of their continuing undisturbed. Them he branded, as hypocritical materialists, and the country for pride in her sweetmeat plethora of them:—mixed with an ancient Hebrew fear of offence to an inscrutable Lord, eccentrically appeasable through the dreary iteration of the litany of sinfulness. He was near a truth; and he had the heat of it on him.

Satirists in their fervours might be near it to grasp it, if they could be moved to moral distinctness, mental intention, with a preference of strong plain speech over the crack of their whips. Colney could not or would not praise our modern adventurous, experimental, heroic, tramping active, as opposed to yonder pursy passives and negatives; he had occasions for flicking the fellow sharply: and to speak of the Lord as our friend present with us, palpable to Reason, perceptible to natural piety solely through the reason, which justifies punishment; that would have stopped his mouth upon the theme of God-forsaken creatures. Our satirist is an executioner by profession, a moralist in excuse, or at the tail of it; though he thinks the position reversed, when he moralizes angrily to have his angry use of the scourge condoned. Nevertheless, he fills a serviceable place; and certainly he is not happy in his business. Colney suffered as heavily as he struck. If he had been no more than a mime in the motley of satire, he would have sucked compensation from the acid of his phrases, for the failure to prick and goad, and work amendment.

Page 3578

He dramatized to Nataly some of the scene going on at the Wells: Victor's petition; his fugue in urgency of it; the brief reply of Miss Dorothea and her muted echo Miss Virginia. He was rather their apologist for refusing. But, as when, after himself listening to their 'views,' he had deferentially withdrawn from the ladies of Moorsedge, and had then beheld their strangely-hatted lieutenants and the regiments of the toneless respectable on the pantiles and the mounts, the curse upon the satirist impelled him to generalize. The quiet good ladies were multiplied: they were 'the thousands of their sisters, petticoated or long-coated or buck-skinned; comfortable annuitants under clerical shepherding, close upon outnumbering the labourers they paralyze at home and stultify abroad.' Colney thumped away. The country's annuitants had for type 'the figure with the helmet of the Owl-Goddess and the trident of the Earth-shaker, seated on a wheel, at the back of penny-pieces; in whom you see neither the beauty of nakedness nor the charm of drapery; not the helmet's dignity or the trident's power; but she has patently that which stops the wheel; and poseing for representative of an imperial nation, she helps to pass a penny.' So he passed his epigram, heedless of the understanding or attention of his hearer; who temporarily misjudged him for a man impelled by the vanity of literary point and finish, when indeed it was hot satiric spite, justified of its aim, which crushed a class to extract a drop of scathing acid, in the interests of the country, mankind as well. Nataly wanted a picture painted, colours and details, that she might get a vision of the scene at Moorsedge. She did her best to feel an omen and sound it, in his question 'whether the yearly increasing army of the orderly annuitants and their parasites does not demonstrate the proud old country as a sheath for pith rather than of the vital run of sap.'

Perhaps it was patriotic to inquire; and doubtless she was the weakest of women; she could follow no thought; her heart was beating blindly beside Victor, hopeing for the refusal painful to her through his disappointment.

'You think me foolish,' she made answer to one of Colney's shrugs; 'and it has come to that pitch with me, that I cannot be sensible of a merit except in being one with him—-obeying, is the word. And I have never yet known him fail. That terrible Lakelands wears a different look to me, when I think of what he can do; though I would give half my days to escape it.'

She harped on the chord of feverish extravagance; the more hateful to Colney because of his perceiving, that she simulated a blind devotedness to stupefy her natural pride; and he was divided between stamping on her for an imbecile and dashing at Victor for a maniac. But her situation rendered her pitiable. 'You will learn tomorrow what Victor has done,' he said, and thought how the simple words carried the bitterness.

Page 3579

That was uttered within a few minutes of midnight, when the ladies of Moorsedge themselves, after an exhausting resistance to their dearest relative, were at the hall-door of the house with Victor, saying the good-night, to which he responded hurriedly, cordially, dumbly, a baffled man. They clasped hands. Miss Dorothea said:

‘You, Victor, always.’ Miss Virginia said: ‘You will be sure of welcome.’ He walked out upon the moonless night; and for lack of any rounded object in the smothering darkness to look at, he could nowhere take moorings to gather himself together and define the man who had undergone so portentous a defeat. He was glad of quarters at an hotel, a solitary bed, absence from his Nataly.

For their parts, the ladies were not less shattered. They had no triumph in their victory: the weight of it bore them down. They closed, locked, shot the bolts and fastened the chain of the door. They had to be reminded by the shaking of their darling dog Tasso’s curly silky coat, that he had not taken his evening’s trot to notify malefactors of his watchfulness and official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one. Without consultation, they unbolted the door, and Tasso went forth, to ‘compose his vesper hymn,’ as Mr. Posterley once remarked amusingly.

Though not pretending to the Muse’s crown so far, the little dog had qualities to entrance the spinster sex. His mistresses talked of him; of his readiness to go forth; of the audible first line of his hymn or sonnet; of his instinct telling him that something was wrong in the establishment. For most of the servants at Moorsedge were prostrated by a fashionable epidemic; a slight attack, the doctor said; but Montague, the butler, had withdrawn for the nursing of his wife; Perrin, the footman, was confined to his chamber; Manton, the favourite maid, had appeared in the morning with a face that caused her banishment to bed; and the cook, Mrs. Bannister, then sighingly agreed to send up cold meat for the ladies’ dinner. Hence their melancholy inhospitality to their cousin Victor, who had, in spite of his errors, the right to claim his place at their table, was ‘of the blood,’ they said. He was recognized as the living prince of it. His every gesture, every word, recalled the General. The trying scene with him had withered them, they did not speak of it; each had to the other the look of a vessel that has come out of a gale. Would they sleep? They scarcely dared ask it of themselves. They had done rightly; silence upon that reflection seemed best. It was the silence of an inward agitation; still they knew the power of good consciences to summon sleep.

Page 3580

Tasso was usually timed for five minutes. They were astonished to discover by the clock, that they had given him ten. He was very quiet: if so, and for whatever he did, he had his reason, they said: he was a dog endowed with reason: endowed—and how they wished that Mr. Stuart Rem would admit it!—with, their love of the little dog believed (and Mr. Posterley acquiesced), a soul. Do but think it of dear animals, and any form of cruelty to them becomes an impossibility, Mr. Stuart Rem! But he would not be convinced: ungenerously indeed he named Mr. Posterley a courtier. The ladies could have retorted, that Mr. Posterley had not a brother who was the celebrated surgeon Sir Nicholas Rem.

Usually Tasso came running in when the hall-door was opened to him. Not a sound of him could be heard. The ladies blew his familiar whistle. He trotted back to a third appeal, and was, unfortunately for them, not caressed; he received reproaches from two forefingers directed straight at his reason. He saw it and felt it. The hug of him was deferred to the tender good-night to him in his basket at the foot of the ladies' beds.

On entering their spacious bed-chamber, they were so fatigued that sleep appeared to their minds the compensating logical deduction. Miss Dorothea suppressed a yawn, and inflicted it upon Miss Virginia, who returned it, with an apology, and immediately had her sister's hand on her shoulder, for, an attempted control of one of the irresistibles; a specacle imparting bitter shudders and shots to the sympathetic jawbones of an observer. Hand at mouth, for not in privacy would they have been guilty of exposing a grimace, they signified, under an interim smile, their maidenly submission to the ridiculous force of nature: after which, Miss Virginia retired to the dressing-room, absorbed in woeful recollection of the resolute No they had been compelled to reiterate, in response to the most eloquent and, saving for a single instance, admirable man, their cousin, the representative of 'the blood,' supplicating them. A recreant thankfulness coiled within her bosom at the thought, that Dorothea, true to her office of speaker, had tasked herself with the cruel utterance and repetition of the word. Victor's wonderful eyes, his voice, yet more than his urgent pleas; and also, in the midst of his fiery flood of speech, his gentleness, his patience, pathos, and a man's tone through it all; were present to her.

Disrobed, she knocked at the door.

'I have called to you twice,' Dorothea said; and she looked a motive for the call.

'What is it?' said Virginia, with faltering sweetness, with a terrible divination.

The movement of a sigh was made. 'Are you aware of anything, dear?'

Virginia was taken with the contrary movement of a sniff. But the fear informing it prevented it from being venturesome. Doubt of the pure atmosphere of their bed-chamber, appeared to her as too heretic even for the positive essay. In affirming, that

she was not aware of anything, her sight fell on Tasso. His eyeballs were those of a little dog that has been awfully questioned.

Page 3581

‘It is more than a suspicion,’ said Dorothea; and plainly now, while open to the seductions of any pleasing infidel testimony, her nose in repugnance convicted him absolutely.

Virginia’s nose was lowered a few inches; it inhaled and stopped midway. ’You must be mistaken, dear. He never . . . ’

‘But are you insensible to the . . .’ Dorothea’s eyelids fainted.

Virginia dismissed the forlornest of efforts at incredulity. A whiff of Tasso had smitten her. ‘Ah!’ she exclaimed and fell away. ’Is it Tasso! How was it you noticed nothing before undressing, dear?’

’Thinking of what we have gone through to-night! I forgot him. At last the very strange . . . The like of it I have not ever! . . . And upon that thick coat! And, dear, it is late. We are in the morning hours.’

‘But, my dear-Oh, dear, what is to be done with him?’

That was the crucial point for discussion. They had no servant to give them aid; Manton, they could not dream of disturbing. And Tasso’s character was in the estimate; he hated washing; it balefully depraved his temper; and not only, creature of habit that he was, would he decline to lie down anywhere save in their bedroom, he would lament, plead, insist unremittingly, if excluded; terrifying every poor invalid of the house. Then again, were they at this late hour to dress themselves, and take him downstairs, and light a fire in the kitchen, and boil sufficient water to give him a bath and scrubbing? Cold water would be death to him. Besides, he would ring out his alarum for the house to hear, pour out all his poetry, poor dear, as Mr. Posterley called it, at a touch of cold water. The catastrophe was one to weep over, the dilemma a trial of the strongest intelligences.

In addition to reviews of their solitary alternative-the having of a befouled degraded little dog in their chamber through the night, they were subjected to a conflict of emotions when eyeing him: and there came to them the painful, perhaps irreverent, perhaps uncharitable, thought:—that the sinner who has rolled in the abominable, must cleanse him and do things to polish him and perfume before again embraced even by the mind: if indeed we can ever have our old sentiment for him again! Mr. Stuart Rem might decide it for them. Nay, before even the heart embraces him, he must completely purify himself. That is to say, the ordinary human sinner—save when a relative. Contemplating Tasso, the hearts of the ladies gushed out in pity of an innocent little dog, knowing not evil, dependent on his friends for help to be purified;—necessarily kept at a distance: the very look of him prescribed extreme separation, as far as practicable. But they had proof of a love almost greater than it was previous to the offence, in the tender precautions they took to elude repulsion.

Page 3582

He was rolling on the rug, communicating contagion. Flasks of treble-distilled lavender water, and their favourite, traditional in the family, eau d'Arquebusade, were on the toilet-table. They sprinkled his basket, liberally sprinkled the rug and the little dog. Perfume-pastilles were in one of the sitting-rooms below; and Virginia would have gone down softly to fetch a box, but Dorothea restrained her, in pity for the servants, with the remark: 'It would give us a nightmare of a Roman Catholic Cathedral!' A bit of the window was lifted by Dorothea, cautiously, that prowling outsiders might not be attracted. Tasso was wooed to his basket. He seemed inquisitive; the antidote of his naughtiness excited him; his tail circled after his muzzle several times; then he lay. A silken scarf steeped in eau d'Arquebusade was flung across him.

Their customary devout observances concluded, lights were extinguished, and the ladies kissed, and entered their beds.

Their beds were not homely to them. Dorothea thought that Virginia was long in settling herself. Virginia did not like the sound of Dorothea's double sigh. Both listened anxiously for the doings of Tasso. He rested.

He was uneasy; he was rounding his basket once more; unaware of the exaggeration of his iniquitous conduct, poor innocent, he shook that dreadful coat of his! He had displaced the prophylactic cover of the scarf.

He drove them in a despair to speculate on the contention between the perfume and the stench in junction, with such a doubt of the victory of which of the two, as drags us to fear our worst. It steals into our nostrils, possesses them. As the History of Mankind has informed us, we were led up to our civilization by the nose. But Philosophy warns us on that eminence; to beware of trusting exclusively to our conductor, lest the mind of us at least be plunged back into barbarism. The ladies hated both the cause and the consequence, they had a revulsion from the object, of the above contention. But call it not a contention: there is nobility in that. This was a compromise, a degrading union, with very sickening results. Whether they came of an excess of the sprinkling, could not well be guessed. The drenching at least was righteously intended.

Beneath their shut eyelids, they felt more and more the oppression of a darkness not laden with slumber. They saw it insolidity; themselves as restless billows, driven dashing to the despondent sigh. Sleep was denied them.

Tasso slept. He had sinned unknowingly, and that is not a spiritual sin; the chastisement confers the pardon.

But why was this ineffable blessing denied to them? Was it that they might have a survey of all the day's deeds and examine them under the cruel black beams of Insomnia?

Virginia said: ‘You are wakeful.’

‘Thoughtful,’ was the answer.

A century of the midnight rolled on.

Page 3583

Dorothea said: ‘He behaved very beautifully.’

‘I looked at the General’s portrait while he besought us,’ Virginia replied.

‘One sees him in Victor, at Victor’s age. Try to sleep.’

‘I do. I pray that you may.’

Silence courted slumber. Their interchange of speech from the posture of bodies on their backs, had been low and deliberate, in the tone of the vaults. Dead silence recalled the strangeness of it. The night was breathless; their open window a peril bestowing no boon. They were mutually haunted by sound of the gloomy query at the nostrils of each when drawing the vital breath. But for that, they thought they might have slept.

Bed spake to bed:

‘The words of Mr. Stuart Rem last Sunday!’ ’He said: “Be just.” Could one but see direction!’

‘In obscurity, feeling is a guide.’

‘The heart.’

‘It may sometimes be followed.’

‘When it concerns the family.’

‘He would have the living, who are seeking peace, be just.’

‘Not to assume the seat of justice.’

Again they lay as tombstone effigies, that have committed the passage of affairs to another procession of the Ages.

There was a gentle sniff, in hopeless confirmation of the experience of its predecessors. A sister to it ensued.

’Could Victor have spoken so, without assurance in his conscience, that his entreaty was righteously addressed to us? that we . . .’

‘And no others!’

‘I think of his language. He loves the child.’

‘In heart as in mind, he is eminently gifted; acknowledgeing error.’

‘He was very young.’

The huge funereal minutes conducted their sonorous hearse, the hour.

It struck in the bed-room: Three.

No more than three of the clock, it was the voice telling of half the precious restorative night-hours wasted.

Now, as we close our eyelids when we would go to sleep, so must we, in expectation of the peace of mind granting us the sweet oblivion, preliminarily do something which invokes, that we may obtain it.

‘Dear,’ Dorothea said.

‘I know indeed,’ said Virginia.

‘We may have been!’

‘Not designingly.’

’Indeed not. But harsh it may be named, if the one innocent is to be the sufferer.’

‘The child can in no sense be adjudged guilty.’

‘It is Victor’s child.’

‘He adores the child.’

Wheels were in mute motion within them; and presently the remark was tossed-up:

‘In his coming to us, it is possible to see paternal solicitude’

Thence came fruit of reflection:

‘To be instrumental as guides to a tender young life!’

Reflection heated with visions:

‘Once our dream!’

Page 3584

They had the happier feeling of composure, though Tasso possessed the room. Not Tasso, but a sublimated offensiveness, issue of the antagonistically combined, dispersed to be the more penetrating; insomuch that it seemed to them they could not ever again make use of eau d'Arquebusade without the vitiating reminder. So true were the words of Mr. Stuart Rem: 'Half measures to purification are the most delusive of our artifices.' Fatigue and its reflections helped to be peacefuller. Their souls were mounting to a serenity above the nauseating degradation, to which the poor little dog had dragged them.

'Victor gave his promise.'

'At least, concession would not imply contact with the guilty.'

Both sighed as they took up the burden of the vaporous Tasso to drop him; with the greater satisfaction in the expelling of their breath.

'It might be said, dear, that concession to his entreaty does not in any way countenance the sin.'

'I can see, dear, how it might be read as a reproof.'

Their exchange of sentences followed meditative pauses; Dorothea leading.

'To one so sensitive as Victor!'

'A month or two of our society for the child!'

'It is not the length of time.'

'The limitation assures against maternal claims.'

'She would not dare.'

'He used the words: "her serious respect" for us. I should not wish to listen to him often.'

'We listen to a higher.'

'It may really be, that the child is like him.'

'Not resembling Mr. Stuart Rem's Clementina!'

'A week of that child gave us our totally sleepless night.' 'One thinks more hopefully of a child of Victor's.'

'He would preponderate.'

‘He would.’

They sighed; but it was now with the relief of a lightened oppression.

’If, dear, in truth the father’s look is in the child, he has the greater reason to desire for her a taste of our atmosphere.’

‘Do not pursue it. Sleep.’

‘One prayer!’

’Your mention of our atmosphere, dear, destroys my power to frame one. Do you, for two. But I would cleanse my heart.’

‘There is none purer.’

‘Hush.’

Virginia spoke a more fervent word of praise of her sister, and had not the hushing response to it. She heard the soft regular breathing. Her own was in downy fellowship with it a moment later.

At the hour of nine, in genial daylight, sitting over the crumbs of his hotel breakfast, Victor received a little note that bore the handwriting of Dorothea Duvidney.

> ’Dear Victor, we are prepared to receive the child for a month.
> In haste, before your train. Our love. D. and V.’

His face flashed out of cloud.

Page 3585

A more precious document had never been handed to him. It chased back to midnight the doubt hovering over his belief in himself;—phrased to say, that he was no longer the Victor Radnor known to the world. And it extinguished a corpse-like recollection of a baleful dream in the night. Here shone radiant witness of his being the very man; save for the spot of his recent confusion in distinguishing his identity or in feeling that he stood whole and solid.—Because of two mature maiden ladies? Yes, because of two maiden ladies, my good fellow. And friend Colney, you know the ladies, and what the getting round them for one's purposes really means.

The sprite of Colney Durance had struck him smartly overnight. Victor's internal crow was over Colney now. And when you have the optimist and pessimist acutely opposed in a mixing group, they direct lively conversations at one another across the gulf of distance, even of time. For a principle is involved, besides the knowledge of the other's triumph or dismay. The couple are scales of a balance; and not before last night had Victor ever consented to think of Colney ascending while he dropped low to graze the pebbles.

He left his hotel for the station, singing the great aria of the fourth Act of the Favorita: neglected since that mighty German with his Rienzi, and Tannhauser, and Tristan and Isolda, had mastered him, to the displacement of his boyhood's beloved sugary -inis and -antes and -zettis; had clearly mastered, not beguiled, him; had wafted him up to a new realm, invigorating if severer. But now his youth would have its voice. He travelled up to town with Sir Abraham Quatley and talked, and took and gave hints upon City and Commercial affairs, while the honeyed Italian of the conventional, gloriously animal, stress and flutter had a revel in his veins, now and then mutedly ebullient at the mouth: honeyed, golden, rich in visions;—having surely much more of Nature's encouragement to her children?

CHAPTER XXIV

NESTA'S ENGAGEMENT

A word in his ear from Fenellan, touching that man Blathenoy, set the wheels of Victor's brain at work upon his defences, for a minute, on the walk Westward. Who knew?—-who did not know! He had a torpid consciousness that he cringed to the world, with an entreaty to the great monster to hold off in ignorance; and the next instant, he had caught its miserable spies by the lurcher neck and was towering. He dwelt on his contempt of them, to curtain the power they could stir.

'The little woman, you say, took to Dartrey?'

Fenellan, with the usual apologetic moderation of a second statement, thought 'there was the look of it.'

’Well, we must watch over her. Dartrey!—but Dartrey’s an honest fellow with women. But men are men. Very few men spare a woman when the mad fit is on her. A little woman-pretty little woman!—wife to Jacob Blathenoy! She mustn’t at her age have any close choosing—under her hand. And Dartrey’s just the figure to strike a spark in a tinder-box head.’

Page 3586

‘With a husband who’d reduce Minerva’s to tinder, after a month of him!’

‘He spent his honeymoon at his place at Wrensham; told me so.’ Blathenoy had therefore then heard of the building of Lakelands by the Victor Radnor of the City; and had then, we guess—in the usual honeymoon boasting of a windbag with his bride—-wheezed the foul gossip, to hide his emptiness and do duty for amusement of the pretty little caged bird. Probably so. But Victor knew that Blathenoy needed him and feared him. Probably the wife had been enjoined to keep silence; for the Blachingtons, Fannings and others were, it could be sworn, blank and unscratched folio sheets on the subject:—as yet; unless Mrs. Burman had dropped venom.

‘One pities the little woman, eh, Fenellan?’

’Dartrey won’t be back for a week or so; and they’re off to Switzerland, after the dinner they give. I heard from him this morning; one of the Clanconans is ill.

’Lucky. But wherever Blathenoy takes her, he must be the same “arid bore,” as old Colney says.’

‘A domestic simoom,’ said Fenellan, booming it: and Victor had a shudder.

’Awful thing, marriage, to some women! We chain them to that domestic round; most of them haven’t the means of independence or a chance of winning it; and all that’s open to them, if they’ve made a bad cast for a mate—and good Lord! how are they to know before it’s too late!—they haven’t a choice except to play tricks or jump to the deuce or sit and “drape in blight,” as Colney has it; though his notion of the optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years!—if he means it. You never know, with him. It sounds like another squirt of savage irony. It’s donkey nonsense, eh?’

‘The very hee-haw of nonsense,’ Fenellan acquiesced.

‘Come, come; read your Scriptures; donkeys have shown wisdom,’ Victor said, rather leaning to the theme of a fretfulness of women in the legal yoke. ’They’re donkeys till we know them for prophets. Who can tell! Colney may be hailed for one fifty years hence.’

Fenellan was not invited to enter the house, although the loneliness of his lodgeings was known, and also, that he played whist at his Club. Victor had grounds for turning to him at the door and squeezing his hand warmly, by way of dismissal. In ascribing them to a weariness at Fenellan’s perpetual acquiescence, he put the cover on them, and he stamped it with a repudiation of the charge, that Colney’s views upon the great Marriage Question were the ‘very hee-haw of nonsense.’ They were not the hee-haw; in fact, viewing the host of marriages, they were for discussion; there was no bray about them. He could not feel them to be absurd while Mrs. Burman’s tenure of existence barred the

ceremony. Anything for a phrase! he murmured of Fenellan's talk; calling him, Dear old boy, to soften the slight.

Nataly had not seen Fenellan or heard from Dartrey; so she continued to be uninformed of her hero's release; and that was in the order of happy accidents. She had hardly to look her interrogation for the news; it radiated. But he stated such matter-of-course briefly. 'The good ladies are ready to receive our girl.'

Page 3587

Her chagrin resolved to a kind of solace of her draggled pride, in the idea, that he who tamed everybody to submission, might well have command of her.

The note, signed D. and V., was shown.

There stood the words. And last night she had been partly of the opinion of Colney Durance. She sank down among the unreasoning abject;—not this time with her perfect love of him, but with a resistance and a dubiety under compression. For she had not quite comprehended why Nesta should go. This readiness of the Duvidney ladies to receive the girl, stopped her mental inquiries.

She begged for a week's delay; 'before the parting'; as her dear old silly mother's pathos whimpered it, of the separation for a month! and he smiled and hummed pleasantly at any small petition, thinking her in error to expect Dartrey's return to town before the close of a week; and then wondering at women, mildly denouncing in his heart the mothers who ran risk of disturbing their daughters' bosoms with regard to particular heroes married or not. Dartrey attracted women: he was one of the men who do it without effort. Victor's provident mind blamed the mother for the indiscreetness of her wish to have him among them. But Dudley had been making way bravely of late; he improved; he began to bloom, like a Spring flower of the garden protected from frosts under glass; and Fredi was the sheltering and nourishing bestower of the lessons. One could see, his questions and other little points revealed, that he had a certain lover's dread of Dartrey Fenellan; a sort of jealousy: Victor understood the feeling. To love a girl, who has her ideal of a man elsewhere in another; though she may know she never can wed the man, and has not the hope of it; is torment to the lover quailing, as we do in this terrible season of the priceless deliciousness, stripped against all the winds that blow; skinless at times. One gets up a sympathy for the poor shy dependent shivering lover. Nevertheless, here was young Dudley waking, visibly becoming bolder. As in the flute-duets, he gained fire from concert. The distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge was two miles and a quarter.

Instead of the delay of a whole week, Victor granted four days, which embraced a musical evening at Mrs. John Cormyn's on the last of the days, when Nesta was engaged to sing with her mother a duet of her own composition, the first public fruit of her lessons in counterpoint from rigid Herr Strauscher, who had said what he had said, in letting it pass: eulogy, coming from him. So Victor heard, and he doated am the surprise to come for him, in a boyish anticipation. The girl's little French ballads under tutelage of Louise de Seilles promised, though they were imitative. If Strauscher let this pass . . . Victor saw Grand Opera somewhere to follow; England's claim to be a creative musical nation vindicated; and the genius of the fair sex as well.

Page 3588

He heard the duet at Mrs. Cormyn's; and he imagined a hearing of his Fredi's Opera, and her godmother's delight in it; the once famed Sanfredini's consent to be the diva at a rehearsal, and then her compelling her hidalgo duque to consent further: an event not inconceivable. For here was downright genius; the flowering aloe of the many years in formation; and Colney admitted the song to have a streak of genius; though he would pettishly and stupidly say, that our modern newspaper Press is able now to force genius for us twenty or so to the month, excluding Sundays-our short pauses for the incubation of it. Real rare genius was in that song, nothing forced; and exquisite melody; one of those melodies which fling gold chains about us and lead us off, lead us back into Eden. Victor hummed at bars of it on the drive homeward. His darlings had to sing it again in the half-lighted drawing-room. The bubble-happiness of the three was vexed only by tidings heard from Colney during the evening of a renewed instance of Skepsey's misconduct. Priscilla Graves had hurried away to him at the close of Mr. John Cormyn's Concert, in consequence; in grief and in sympathy. Skepsey was to appear before the magistrate next morning, for having administered physical chastisement to his wife during one of her fits of drunkenness. Colney had seen him. His version of the story was given, however, in the objectionable humorous manner: none could gather from it of what might be pleaded for Skepsey. His 'lesson to his wife in the art of pugilism, before granting her Captain's rank among the Defensive Amazons of Old England,' was the customary patent absurdity. But it was odd, that Skepsey always preferred his appeal for help to Colney Durance. Nesta proposed following Priscilla that night. She had hinted her wish, on the way home; she was urgent, beseeching, when her father lifted praises of her: she had to start with her father by the train at seven in the morning, and she could not hear of poor Skepsey for a number of hours. She begged a day's delay; which would enable her, she said, to join them in dining at the Blachingtons', and seeing dear Lakelands again. 'I was invited, you know.' She spoke in childish style, and under her eyes she beheld her father and mother exchange looks. He had a fear that Nataly might support the girl's petition. Nataly read him to mean, possible dangers among the people at Wrensham. She had seemed hesitating. After meeting Victor's look, her refusal was firm. She tried to make it one of distress for the use of the hard word to her own dear girl. Nesta spied beneath.

But what was it? There was a reason for her going! She had a right to stay, and see and talk with Captain Dartrey, and she was to be deported!

So now she set herself to remember little incidents at Creckholt: particularly a conversation in a very young girl's hearing, upon Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil's behaviour to the speakers, her parents. She had then, and she now had, an extraordinary feeling, as from a wind striking upon soft summer weather off regions of ice, that she was in her parents' way. How? The feeling was irrational; it could give her no reply, or only the multitudinous which are the question violently repeated. She slept on it.

Page 3589

She and her father breakfasted by the London birds' first twitter. They talked of Skepsey. She spoke of her going as exile. 'No,' said he, 'you're sure to meet friends.'

Her cheeks glowed. It came wholly through the suddenness of the recollection, that the family-seat of one among the friends was near the Wells.

He was allowed to fancy, as it suited him to fancy, that a vivid secret pleasure laid the colour on those ingenuous fair cheeks.

'A solitary flute for me, for a month! I shall miss my sober comrade: got the habit of duetting: and he's gentle, bears with me.'

Tears lined her eyelids. 'Who would not be, dearest dada! But there is nothing to bear except the honour.'

'You like him? You and I always have the same tastes, Fredi.'

Now there was a reddening of the sun at the mount; all the sky aflame. How could he know that it was not the heart in the face! She reddened because she had perused his wishes; had detected a scheme striking off from them, and knew a man to be the object of it; and because she had at the same time the sense of a flattery in her quick divination; and she was responsively emotional, her blood virginal; often it was a tropical lightning.

It looked like the heart doing rich painter's work on maiden features. Victor was naturally as deceived as he wished to be.

From his being naturally so, his remarks on Dudley had an air of embracing him as one of the family. 'His manner to me just hits me.'

'I like to see him with you,' she said.

Her father let his tongue run: 'One of the few young men I feel perfectly at home with! I do like dealing with a gentleman. I can confide in a gentleman: honour, heart, whatever I hold dearest.'

There he stopped, not too soon. The girl was mute, fully agreeing, slightly hardening. She had a painful sense of separation from her dear Louise. And it was now to be from her mother as well: she felt the pain when kissing her mother in bed. But this was moderated by the prospect of a holiday away out of reach of Mr. Barmby's pursuing voice, whom her mother favoured: and her mother was concealing something from her; so she could not make the confidante of her mother. Nataly had no forewarnings. Her simple regrets filled her bosom. All night she had been taking her chastisement, and in the morning it seemed good to her, that she should be denuded, for her girl to learn the felicity of having relatives.

For some reason, over which Nataly mused in the succeeding hours, the girl had not spoken of any visit her mother was to pay to the Duvidney ladies or they to her. Latterly she had not alluded to her mother's family. It might mean, that the beloved and dreaded was laying finger on a dark thing in the dark; reading syllables by touch; keeping silence over the communications to a mind not yet actively speculative, as it is a way with young women. 'With young women

Page 3590

educated for the market, to be timorous, consequently secretive, rather snaky,' Colney Durance had said. Her Nesta was not one of the 'framed and glazed' description, cited by him, for an example of the triumph of the product; 'exactly harmonious with the ninny male's ideal of female innocence.' No; but what if the mother had opened her heart to her girl? It had been of late her wish or a dream, shaping hourly to a design, now positively to go through that furnace. Her knowledge of Victor's objection, restrained an impulse that had not won spring enough to act against his counsel or vivify an intelligence grown dull in slavery under him, with regard to the one seeming right course. The adoption of it would have wounded him—therefore her. She had thought of him first; she had also thought of herself, and she blamed herself now. She went so far as to think, that Victor was guilty of the schemer's error of counting human creatures arithmetically, in the sum, without the estimate of distinctive qualities and value here and there. His return to a shivering sensitiveness on the subject of his girl's enlightenment 'just yet,' for which Nataly pitied and loved him, sharing it, with humiliation for doing so, became finally her excuse. We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life.

Skepsey's case appeared in the evening papers. He confessed, 'frankly,' he said, to the magistrate, that, 'acting under temporary exasperation, he had lost for a moment a man's proper self-command.' He was as frank in stating, that he 'occupied the prisoner's place before his Worship a second time, and was a second time indebted to the gentleman, Mr. Colney Durance, who so kindly stood by him.' There was hilarity in the Court at his quaint sententious envelopment of the idiom of the streets, which he delivered with solemnity: 'He could only plead, not in absolute justification—an appeal to human sentiments—the feelings of a man of the humbler orders, returning home in the evening, and his thoughts upon things not without their importance, to find repeatedly the guardian of his household beastly drunk, and destructive.' Colney made the case quite intelligible to the magistrate; who gravely robed a strain of the idiomatic in the officially awful, to keep in tune with his delinquent. No serious harm had been done to the woman. Skepsey was admonished and released. His wife expressed her willingness to forgive him, now he had got his lesson; and she hoped he would understand, that there was no need for a woman to learn pugilism. Skepsey would have explained; but the case was over, he was hustled out.

Page 3591

However, a keen young reporter present smelt fun for copy; he followed the couple; and in a particular evening Journal, laughable matter was printed concerning Skepsey's view of the pugilism to be imparted to women for their physical-protection in extremity, and the distinction of it from the blow conveying the moral lesson to them; his wife having objected to the former, because it annoyed her and he pestered her; and she was never, she said, ready to stand up to him for practice, as he called it, except when she had taken more than he thought wholesome for her: he had no sense. There was a squabble between them, because he chose to scour away to his master's office instead of conducting her home with the honours. Nesta read the young reporter's version, with shrieks. She led the ladies of Moorsedge to discover amusement in it.

At first, as her letter to her mother described them, they were like a pair of pieces of costly China, with the settled smile, and cold. She saw but the outside of them, and she continued reporting the variations, which steadily determined the warmth. On the night of the third day, they kissed her tenderly; they were human figures.

No one could be aware of the trial undergone by the good ladies in receiving her: Victor's child; but, as their phrase would have run, had they dared to give it utterance to one another, a child of sin. How foreign to them, in that character, how strange, when she was looked on as an inhabitant of their house, they hardly dared to estimate; until the timorous estimation, from gradually swelling, suddenly sank; nature invaded them; they could discard the alienating sense of the taint; and not only did they no longer fear the moment when Mr. Stuart Rem or Mr. Posterley might call for evening tea, but they consulted upon inviting the married one of those gentlemen, to 'divert dear Nesta.' Every night she slept well. In all she did, she proved she was 'of the blood.' She had Victor's animated eyes; she might have, they dreaded to think, his eloquence. They put it down to his eloquence entirely, that their resistance to his petition had been overcome, for similarly with the treatment of the private acts of royal personages by lacquey History, there is, in the minds of the ultra-civilized, an insistance, that any event having a consequence in matters personal to them, be at all hazards recorded with the utmost nicety in decency. By such means, they preserve the ceremonial self-respect, which is a necessity of their existence; and so they maintain the regal elevation over the awe-struck subjects of their interiors; who might otherwise revolt, pull down, scatter, dishonour, expose for a shallow fiction the holiest, the most vital to them. A democratic evil spirit is abroad, generated among congregations, often perilously communicating its wanton laughter to the desperate wickedness they know (not solely through the monition of Mr. Stuart Rem) to lurk within. It has to be excluded: on certain points they must not think. The night of Tasso was darkly clouded in the minds of the pure ladies: a rift would have seized their half-slumbering sense of smell, to revive the night, perhaps disorder the stately march of their intelligences.

Page 3592

Victor's eloquence, Victor's influence, Victor's child he carried them as a floodstream, insomuch, that their reception of this young creature of the blot on her birth, was regarded by them in the unmentioned abstract, and the child's presence upon earth seen with the indulgence (without the naughty curiosity) of the loyal moral English for the numerous offspring of the peccadillos of their monarchs. These things pass muster from being 'Britannically cocooned in the purple,' says our irreverent satirist; and the maiden ladies' passion of devotion to 'the blood' helped to blind them; but still more so did the imperious urgency to curtain closely the night of Tasso, throwing all its consequences upon Victor's masterful tongue. Whence it ensued (and here is the danger for illogical individuals as well as vast communities, who continue to batten upon fiction when the convenience of it has taken the place of pleasure), that they had need to exalt his eloquence, for a cloak to their conduct; and doing it, they fell into a habit of yielding to him; they disintegrated under him; rules, principles, morality, were shaken to some confusion. And still proceeding thus, they now and then glanced back, more wonderingly than convicted sinners upon their days of early innocence, at the night when successfully they withstood him. They who had doubted of the rightness of letting Victor's girl come into collision with two clerical gentlemen, one of whom was married, permitted him now to bring the Hon. Dudley Sowerby to their house, and make appointments to meet Mr. Dudley Sowerby under a roof that sheltered a young lady, evidently the allurement to the scion of aristocracy; of whose family Mr. Stuart Rem had spoken in the very kindling hushed tones, proper to the union of a sacerdotal and an English citizen's veneration.

How would it end? And if some day this excellent Mr. Dudley Sowerby reproached them! He could not have a sweeter bride, one more truly a lady in education and manners; but the birth! the child's name! Their trouble was emitted in a vapour of interjections. Very perplexing was it for the good ladies of strict principles to reflect, as dimly they did, that the concrete presence of dear Nesta silenced and overcame objections to her being upon earth. She seemed, as it were, a draught of redoubtable Nature inebriating morality. But would others be similarly affected? Victor might get his release, to do justice to the mother: it would not cover the child. Prize as they might the quality of the Radnor blood (drawn from the most ancient of original Britain's princes), there was also the Cantor blood for consideration; and it was old, noble, proud. Would it be satisfied in matching itself with great wealth, a radiant health, and the good looks of a young flower? For the sake of the dear girl, the ladies hoped that it would; and they enlarged the outline of their wedding present, while, in their minds, the noble English family which could be satisfied so, was lowered, partaking of the taint they had personally ceased to recognize.

Page 3593

Of one thing they were sure, and it enlisted them: the gentleman loved the girl. Her love of him, had it been prominent to view, would have stirred a feminine sigh; not more, except a feminine lecture to follow. She was quite uninflamed, fresh and cool as a spring. His ardour had no disguise. They measured him by the favourite fiction's heroes of their youth, and found him to gaze, talk, comport himself, according to the prescription; correct grammar, finished sentences, all that is expected of a gentleman enamoured; and ever with the watchful intentness for his lady's faintest first dawn of an inclining to a wish. Mr. Dudley Sowerby's eye upon Nesta was really an apprentice. There is in Love's young season a magnanimity in the male kind. Their superior strength and knowledge are made subservient to the distaff of the weaker and shallower: they crown her queen; her look is their mandate. So was it when Sir Charles and Sir Rupert and the estimable Villiers Davenant touched maidenly hearts to throb: so is it now, with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Very haltingly, the ladies were guilty of a suggestion to Victor. 'Oh! Fredi?' said he; 'admires her, no doubt; and so do I, so we all do; she's one of the nice girls; but as to Cupid's darts, she belongs to the cucumber family, and he shoots without fireing. We shall do the mischief if we put an interdict. Don't you remember the green days when obstacles were the friction to light that match?' Their pretty nod of assent displayed the virgin pride of the remembrance: they dreamed of having once been exceedingly wilful; it refreshed their nipped natures; and dwelling on it, they forgot to press their suggestion. Incidentally, he named the sum his Fredi would convey to her husband; with, as was calculable, the further amount his only child would inherit. A curious effect was produced on them. Though they were not imaginatively mercenary, as the creatures tainted with wealth commonly are, they talked of the sum over and over in the solitude of their chamber. 'Dukes have married for less.' Such an heiress, they said, might buy up a Principality. Victor had supplied them with something of an apology to the gentleman proposing to Nesta in their house.

The chronicle of it is, that Dudley Sowerby did this on the fifteenth day of September; and that it was not known to the damsel's parents before the twenty-third; as they were away on an excursion in South Tyrol:—away, flown, with just a word of the hurried departure to their envious, exiled girl; though they did not tell her of new constructions at the London house partly causing them to fly. Subject to their consent, she wrote, she had given hers. The letter was telegramic on the essential point. She wrote of Mr. Barmby's having visited Mr. Posterley at the Wells, and she put it just as flatly. Her principal concern, to judge by her writing, was, to know what Mr. Durance had done, during her absence, with the group of emissary-advocates of the various tongues of Europe on board the steam-Liner conducting them the first stage of their journey to the Court of Japan.

Page 3594

Mr. Simeon Fenellan had written his opinion, that all these delegates of the different European nationalities were nothing other than dupes of a New-York Syndicate of American Humorists, not without an eye on the mainchance; and he was sure they would be set to debate publicly, before an audience of high-priced tickets, in the principal North American Cities, previous to the embarcation for Japan at San Francisco. Mr. Fenellan eulogized the immense astuteness of Dr. Gannius in taking his daughter Delphica with him. Dr. Gannius had singled forth poor Dr. Bouthoin for the object of his attacks; but Nesta was chiefly anxious to hear of Delphica's proceedings; she was immensely interested in Delphica, and envied her; and the girl's funny speculations over the play of Delphica's divers arts upon the Greek, and upon the Russian, and upon the English curate Mr. Semhians, and upon M. Falarique—set Gallically pluming and crowing out of an Alsace-Lorraine growl—were clever. Only, in such a letter, they were amazing.

Nataly received it at Campiglio, when about to start for an excursion down the Sarca Valley to Arco. Her letter of reply was delayed. One to Victor from Dudley Sowerby, awaited them, on their return. 'Confirms Fredi,' he said, showing it, and praising it as commendable, properly fervid. She made pretence to read, she saw the words.

Her short beat of wings was over. She had joined herself with Victor's leap for a change, thirsting for the scenery of the white peaks in heaven, to enjoy through his enjoyment, if her own capacity was dead: and she had found it revive, up to some recovery of her old songful readiness for invocations of pleasure. Escape and beauty beckoned ahead; behind were the chains. These two letters of the one fact plucked her back. The chained body bore the fluttering spirit: or it was the spirit in bonds, that dragged the body. Both were abashed before the image of her girl. Out of the riddle of her strange Nesta, one thing was clear: she did not love the man: and Nataly tasted gladness in that, from the cup of poisonous regrets at the thought. Her girl's heart would not be broken. But if he so strongly loved her, as to hold to this engagement? . . . It might then be worse. She dropped a plumb-line into the young man, sounding him by what she knew of him and judged. She had to revert to Nesta's charm, for the assurance of his anchored attachment.

Her holiday took the burden of her trouble, and amid the beauty of a disenchanted scene, she resumed the London incubus.

'You told him of her being at the Wells? in the neighbourhood, Victor?'

'Didn't you know, my dear, the family-seat is Cronidge, two miles out from the Wells?—-and particularly pretty country.'

'I had forgotten, if I ever heard. You will not let him be in ignorance?'

’My dear love, you are pale about it. This is a matter between men. I write, thanking for the honour and so forth; and I appoint an interview; and I show him my tablets. He must be told, necessarily. Incidents of this kind come in their turn. If Dudley does not account himself the luckiest young fellow in the kingdom, he’s not worthy of his good fortune. I wish they were both here now, honeymooning among these peaks, seeing the crescent over one, as we did last night!’

Page 3595

‘Have you an idea, in reading Nesta’s letter?’

’Seems indifferent?—mere trick to hide the blushes. And I, too, I’m interested in Delphica. Delphica and Falarique will be fine stage business. Of course, Dr. Bouthoin and his curate!—we know what Old England has to expect from Colney.’

’At any rate, Mr. Durance hurts no one. You will, in your letter, appoint the day of the interview?’

’Hurts himself! Yes, dearest; appoint for—ten days homeward—eleventh day from to-day. And you to Fredi: a bit of description—as you can, my Nataly! Happy to be a dolomite, to be painted by Nataly’s pen.’

The sign is evil, when we have a vexatious ringing in the ear of some small piece of familiar domestic chatter, and subject it to scrutiny, hang on it, worry and magnify it. What will not creatures under sway of the sensational life, catch at to emphasize and strengthen distaste, until distaste shall have a semblance of reason, in the period of the mind’s awakening to revolt! Nataly shrank from the name of dolomite, detested the name, though the scenes regained their beauty or something of it beneath her showery vision. Every time Victor spoke of dolomites on the journey homeward, she had at heart an accusation of her cowardice, her duplicity, frailty, treachery to the highest of her worship and sole support of her endurance in the world: not much blaming him: but the degrading view of herself sank them both. On a shifty soil, down goes the idol. For him she could plead still, for herself she could not.

The smell of the Channel brine inspirited her sufficiently to cast off the fit and make it seem, in the main, a bodily depression; owing to causes, of which she was beginning to have an apprehensive knowledge: and they were not so fearful to her as the gloom they displaced.

CHAPTER XXV

NATALY IN ACTION

A ticket of herald newspapers told the world of Victor’s returning to his London. Pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was Nataly’s first afternoon visitor, and was graciously received; no sign of inquiry for the cause of the lady’s alacrity to greet her being shown. Colney Durance came in, bringing the rumour of an Australian cantatrice to kindle Europe; Mr. Peridon, a seeker of tidings from the city of Bourges; Miss Priscilla Graves, reporting of Skepsey, in a holiday Sunday tone, that his alcoholic partner might at any moment release him; Mr. Septimus Barmby, with a hanged heavy look, suggestive of a wharfside crane swinging the ponderous thing he had to say. ‘I have seen Miss Radnor.’

‘She was well?’ the mother asked, and the grand basso pitched forth an affirmative.

‘Dear sweet girl she is!’ Mrs. Blathenoy exclaimed to Colney.

He bowed. ’Very sweet. And can let fly on you, like a haggis, for a scratch.’

She laughed, glad of an escape from the conversational formalities imposed on her by this Mrs. Victor Radnor’s mighty manner. ’But what girl worth anything! . . .

Page 3596

We all can do that, I hope, for a scratch!'

Mr. Barmby's Profession dissented.

Mr. Catkin appeared; ten minutes after his Peridon. He had met Victor near the Exchange, and had left him humming the non fu sogno of ERNANI.

'Ah, when Victor takes to Verdi, it's a flat City, and wants a burst of drum and brass,' Colney said; and he hummed a few bars of the march in Attila, and shrugged. He and Victor had once admired that blatancy.

Mr. Pempton appeared, according to anticipation. He sat himself beside Priscilla. Entered Mrs. John Cormyn, voluminous; Mrs. Peter Yatt, effervescent; Nataly's own people were about her and she felt at home.

Mrs. Blathenoy pushed a small thorn into it, by speaking of Captain Fenellan, and aside, as if sharing him with her. Nataly heard that Dartrey had been the guest of these Blathenoys. Even Dartrey was but a man!

Rather lower under her voice, the vain little creature asked: 'You knew her?'

'Her?'

The cool counter-interrogation was disregarded. 'So sad! In the desert! a cup of pure water worth more than barrow-loads of gold! Poor woman!'

'Who?'

'His wife.'

'Wife!'

'They were married?'

Nataly could have cried: Snake! Her play at brevity had certainly been foiled. She nodded gravely. A load of dusky wonders and speculations pressed at her bosom. She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her.

Mrs. Blathenoy, resolving, that despite the jealousy she excited, she would have her friend in Captain Fenellan, whom she liked—liked, she was sure, quite as innocently as any other woman of his acquaintance did, departed and she hugged her innocence defiantly, with the mournful pride which will sometimes act as a solvent.

A remark or two passed among the company upon her pretty face.

Nataly murmured to Colney: ‘Is there anything of Dartrey’s wife?’

‘Dead,’ he answered.

‘When?’

‘Months back. I had it from Simeon. You didn’t hear?’

She shook her head. Her ears buzzed. If he had it from Simeon Fenellan, Victor must have known it.

Her duties of hostess were conducted with the official smile.

As soon as she stood alone, she dropped on a chair, like one who has taken a shot in the heart, and that hideous tumult of wild cries at her ears blankly ceased. Dartrey, Victor, Nesta, were shifting figures of the might-have-been for whom a wretched erring woman, washed clean of her guilt by death, in a far land, had gone to her end: vainly gone: and now another was here, a figure of wood, in man’s shape, conjured up by one of the three, to divide the two others; likely to be fatal to her or to them: to her, she hoped, if the choice was to be: and beneath the leaden hope, her heart set to a rapid beating, a fainter, a chill at the core.

She snatched for breath. She shut her eyes, and with open lips, lay waiting; prepared to thank the kindness about to hurry her hence, out of the seas of pain, without pain.

Page 3597

Then came sighs. The sad old servant in her bosom was resuming his labours.

But she had been near it—very near it? A gush of pity for Victor, overwhelmed her hardness of mind.

Unreflectingly, she tried her feet to support her, and tottered to the door, touched along to the stairs, and descended them, thinking strangely upon such a sudden weakness of body, when she would no longer have thought herself the weak woman. Her aim was to reach the library. She sat on the stairs midway, pondering over the length of her journey: and now her head was clearer; for she was travelling to get Railway-guides, and might have had them from the hands of a footman, and imagined that she had considered it prudent to hide her investigation of those books: proofs of an understanding fallen backward to the state of infant and having to begin our drear ascent again.

A slam of the kitchen stair-door restored her. She betrayed no infirmity of footing as she walked past Arlington in the hall; and she was alive to the voice of Skepsey presently on the door-steps. Arlington brought her a note.

Victor had written: 'My love, I dine with Blathenoy in the City, at the Walworth. Business. Skepsey for clothes. Eight of us. Formal. A thousand embraces. Late.'

Skepsey was ushered in. His wife had expired at noon, he said; and he postured decorously the grief he could not feel, knowing that a lady would expect it of him. His wife had fallen down stone steps; she died in hospital. He wished to say, she was no loss to the country; but he was advised within of the prudence of abstaining from comment and trusting to his posture, and he squeezed a drop of conventional sensibility out of it, and felt improved.

Nataly sent a line to Victor: 'Dearest, I go to bed early, am tired. Dine well. Come to me in the morning.'

She reproached herself for coldness to poor Skepsey, when he had gone. The prospect of her being alone until the morning had been so absorbing a relief.

She found a relief also in work at the book of the trains. A walk to the telegraph-station strengthened her. Especially after despatching a telegram to Mr. Dudley Sowerby at Cronidge, and one to Nesta at Moorsedge, did she become stoutly nerved. The former was requested to meet her at Penhurst station at noon. Nesta was to be at the station for the Wells at three o'clock.

From the time of the flying of these telegrams, up to the tap of Victor's knuckle on her bed-room door next morning, she was not more reflectively conscious than a packet

travelling to its destination by pneumatic tube. Nor was she acutely impressionable to the features and the voice she loved.

‘You know of Skepsey?’ she said.

‘Ah, poor Skepsey!’ Victor frowned and heaved.

‘One of us ought to stand beside him at the funeral.’

‘Colney or Fenellan?’

‘I will ask Mr. Durance.’

Page 3598

‘Do, my darling.’

‘Victor, you did not tell me of Dartrey’s wife.’

’There again! They all get released! Yes, Dartrey! Dartrey has his luck too.’

She closed her eyes, with the desire to be asleep.

‘You should have told me, dear.’

’Well, my love! Well—poor Dartrey! I fancy I hadn’t a confirmation of the news. I remember a horrible fit of envy on hearing the hint: not much more than a hint: serious illness, was it?—or expected event. Hardly worth while to trouble my dear soul, till certain. Anything about wives, forces me to think of myself—my better self!’

‘I had to hear of it first from Mrs. Blathenoy.’

’You’ve heard of duels in dark rooms:—that was the case between Blathenoy and me last night for an hour.’

She feigned somnolent fatigue over her feverish weariness of heart. He kissed her on the forehead.

Her spell-bound intention to speak of Dudley Sowerby to him, was broken by the sounding of the hall-door, thirty minutes later. She had lain in a trance.

Life surged to her with the thought, that she could decide and take her step. Many were the years back since she had taken a step; less independently then than now; unregretted, if fatal. Her brain was heated for the larger view of things and the swifter summing of them. It could put the man at a remove from her and say, that she had lived with him and suffered intensely. It gathered him to her breast rejoicing in their union: the sharper the scourge, the keener the exultation. But she had one reproach to deafen and beat down. This did not come on her from the world: she and the world were too much foot to foot on the antagonist’s line, for her to listen humbly. It came of her quick summary survey of him, which was unnoticed by the woman’s present fiery mind as being new or strange in any way: simply it was a fact she now read; and it directed her to reproach herself for an abasement beneath his leadership, a blind subserviency and surrender of her faculties to his greater powers, such as no soul of a breathing body should yield to man: not to the highest, not to the Titan, not to the most Godlike of men. Under cloak, they demand it. They demand their bane.

And Victor! . . . She had seen into him.

The reproach on her was, that she, in her worship, had been slave, not helper. Scarcely was she irreproachable in the character of slave. If it had been utter slave! she phrased

the words, for a further reproach. She remembered having at times murmured, dissented. And it would have been a desperate proud thought to comfort a slave, that never once had she known even a secret opposition to the will of her lord.

But she had: she recalled instances. Up they rose; up rose everything her mind ranged over, subsiding immediately when the service was done. She had not conceived her beloved to be infallible, surest of guides in all earthly-matters. Her intellect had sometimes protested.

Page 3599

What, then, had moved her to swamp it?

Her heart answered. And that heart also was arraigned: and the heart's fleshly habitation acting on it besides: so flagellant of herself was she: covertly, however, and as the chaste among women can consent to let our animal face them. Not grossly, still perceptibly to her penetrative hard eye on herself, she saw the senses of the woman under a charm. She saw, and swam whirling with a pang of revolt from her personal being and this mortal kind.

Her rational intelligence righted her speedily. She could say in truth, by proof, she loved the man: nature's love, heart's love, soul's love. She had given him her life.

It was a happy cross-current recollection, that the very beginning and spring of this wild cast of her life, issued from something he said and did (merest of airy gestures) to signify the blessing of life—how good and fair it is. A drooping mood in her had been struck; he had a look like the winged lyric up in blue heavens: he raised the head of the young flower from its contemplation of grave-mould. That was when he had much to bear: Mrs. Burman present: and when the stranger in their household had begun to pity him and have a dread of her feelings. The lucent splendour of his eyes was memorable, a light above the rolling oceans of Time.

She had given him her life, little aid. She might have closely counselled, wound in and out with his ideas. Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward; and she was arrested now by an accident, like a waif of the river-floods by the dip of a branch. Time that it should be! But was not Mr. Durance, inveighing against the favoured system for the education of women, right when he declared them to be unfitted to speak an opinion on any matter external to the household or in a crisis of the household? She had not agreed with him: he presented stinging sentences, which irritated more than they enlightened. Now it seemed to her, that the model women of men make pleasant slaves, not true mates: they lack the worldly training to know themselves or take a grasp of circumstances.

There is an exotic fostering of the senses for women, not the strengthening breath of vital common air. If good fortune is with them, all may go well: the stake of their fates is upon the perpetual smooth flow of good fortune. She had never joined to the cry of the women. Few among them were having it in the breast as loudly.

Hard on herself, too, she perceived how the social rebel had reduced her mind to propitiate a simulacrum, reflected from out, of an enthroned Society within it, by an advocacy of the existing laws and rules and habits. Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker: none so conservative. Not until we are driven back upon an unviolated Nature, do we call to the intellect to think radically: and then we begin to think of our fellows.

Page 3600

Or when we have set ourselves in motion direct for the doing of the right thing: have quitted the carriage at the station, and secured the ticket, and entered the train, counting the passage of time for a simple rapid hour before we have eased heart in doing justice to ourself and to another; then likewise the mind is lighted for radiation. That doing of the right thing, after a term of paralysis, cowardice—any evil name—is one of the mighty reliefs, equal to happiness, of longer duration.

Nataly had it. But her mind was actually radiating, and the comfort to her heart evoked the image of Dartrey Fenellan. She saw a possible reason for her bluntness to the coming scene with Dudley.

At once she said, No! and closed the curtain; knowing what was behind, counting it nought. She repeated almost honestly her positive negative. How we are mixed of the many elements! she thought, as an observer; and self-justifyingly thought on, and with truth, that duty urged her upon this journey; and proudly thought, that she had not a shock of the painful great organ in her breast at the prospect at the end, or any apprehension of its failure to carry her through.

Yet the need of peace or some solace needed to prepare her for her interview turned her imagination burningly on Dartrey. She would not allow herself to meditate over hopes and schemes:—Nesta free: Dartrey free. She vowed to her soul sacredly—and she was one of those in whom the Divinity lives, that they may do so—not to speak a word for the influencing of Dudley save the one fact. Consequently, for a personal indulgence, she mused; she caressed maternally the object of her musing; of necessity, she excluded Nesta; but in tenderness she gave Dartrey a fair one to love him.

The scene was waved away. That one so loving him, partly worthy of him, ready to traverse the world now beside him—who could it be other than she who knew and prized his worth? Foolish! It is one of the hatefuller scourges upon women whenever, a little shaken themselves, they muse upon some man’s image, that they cannot put in motion the least bit of drama without letting feminine self play a part; generally to develop into a principal part. . . The apology makes it a melancholy part.

Dartrey’s temper of the caged lion dominated by his tamer, served as keynote for any amount of saddest colouring. He controlled the brute: but he held the contempt of danger, the love of strife, the passion for adventure; he had crossed the desert of human anguish. He of all men required a devoted mate, merited her. Of all men living, he was the hardest to match with a woman—with a woman deserving him.

Page 3601

The train had quitted London. Now for the country, now for free breathing! She who two days back had come from Alps, delighted in the look on flat green fields. It was under the hallucination of her saying in flight adieu to them, and to England; and, that somewhere hidden, to be found in Asia, Africa, America, was the man whose ideal of life was higher than enjoyment. His caged brute of a temper offered opportunities for delicious petting; the sweetest a woman can bestow: it lifts her out of timidity into an adoration still palpitatingly fearful. Ah, but familiarity, knowledge, confirmed assurance of his character, lift her to another stage, above the pleasures. May she not prove to him how really matched with him she is, to disdain the pleasures, cheerfully accept the burdens, meet death, if need be; readily face it as the quietly grey to-morrow: at least, show herself to her hero for a woman—the incredible being to most men—who treads the terrors as well as the pleasures of humanity beneath her feet, and may therefore have some pride in her stature. Ay, but only to feel the pride of standing not so shamefully below his level beside him.

Woods were flying past the carriage-windows. Her solitary companion was of the class of the admiring gentlemen. Presently he spoke. She answered. He spoke again. Her mouth smiled, and her accompanying look of abstract benevolence arrested the tentative allurement to conversation.

New ideas were set revolving in her. Dartrey and Victor grew to a likeness; they became hazily one man, and the mingled phantom complimented her on her preserving a good share of the beauty of her youth. The face perhaps: the figure rather too well suits the years! she replied. To reassure her, this Dartrey-Victor drew her close and kissed her; and she was confused and passed into the breast of Mrs. Burman expecting an operation at the hands of the surgeons. The train had stopped. ‘Penhurst?’ she said.

‘Penhurst is the next station,’ said the gentleman. Here was a theme for him! The stately mansion, the noble grounds, and Sidney! He discoursed of them.

The handsome lady appeared interested. She was interested also by his description of a neighbouring village, likely one hundred years hence to be a place of pilgrimage for Americans and for Australians. Age, he said, improves true beauty; and his eyelids indicated a levelling to perform the soft intentness. Mechanically, a ball rose in her throat; the remark was illuminated by a saying of Colney’s, with regard to his countrymen at the play of courtship. No laughter came. The gentleman talked on.

All fancies and internal communications left her. Slowness of motion brought her to the plain piece of work she had to do, on a colourless earth, that seemed foggy; but one could see one’s way. Resolution is a form of light, our native light in this dubious world.

Dudley Sowerby opened her carriage-door. They greeted.

Page 3602

‘You have seen Nesta?’ she said.

’Not for two days. You have not heard? The Miss Duvidneys have gone to Brighton.’

‘They are rather in advance of the Season.’

She thanked him for meeting her. He was grateful for the summons.

Informing the mother of his betrothed, that he had ridden over from Cronidge, he speculated on the place to select for her luncheon, and he spoke of his horse being led up and down outside the station. Nataly inquired for the hour of the next train to London. He called to one of the porters, obtained and imparted the time; evidently now, as shown by an unevenness of his lifted brows, expecting news of some little weight.

‘Your husband is quite well?’ he said, in affection for the name of husband.

‘Mr. Radnor is well; I have to speak to you; I have more than time.’

‘You will lunch at the inn?’

‘I shall not eat. We will walk.’

They crossed the road and passed under trees.

’My mother was to have called on the Miss Duvidneys. They left hurriedly; I think it was unanticipated by Nesta. I venture . . . you pardon the liberty . . . she allows me to entertain hopes. Mr. Radnor, I am hardly too bold in thinking . . . I trust, in appealing to you . . . at least I can promise!

’Mr. Sowerby, you have done my daughter the honour to ask her hand in marriage.’

He said: ‘I have,’ and had much to say besides, but deferred: a blow was visible. The father had been more encouraging to him than the mother.

’You have not known of any circumstance that might cause hesitation in asking?’

‘Miss Radnor?’

‘My daughter:—you have to think of your family.’

’Indeed, Mrs. Radnor, I was coming to London tomorrow, with the consent of my family.’

‘You address me as Mrs. Radnor. I have not the legal right to the name.’

‘Not legal!’ said he, with a catch at the word.

He spun round in her sight, though his demeanour was manfully rigid.

‘Have I understood, madam . . . ?’

’You would not request me to repeat it. Is that your horse the man is leading?’

‘My horse: it must be my horse.’

’Mount and ride back. Leave me: I shall not eat. Reflect, by yourself. You are in a position of one who is not allowed to decide by his feelings. Mr. Radnor you know where to find.’

‘But surely, some food? I cannot have misapprehended?’

‘I cannot eat. I think you have understood me clearly.’

‘You wish me to go?’

‘I beg.’

‘It pains me, dear madam.’

‘It relieves me, if you will. Here is your horse.’

She gave her hand. He touched it and bent. He looked at her. A surge of impossible questions rolled to his mouth and rolled back, with the thought of an incredible thing, that her manner, more than her words, held him from doubting.

Page 3603

‘I obey you,’ he said.

‘You are kind.’

He mounted horse, raised hat, paced on, and again bowing, to one of the wayside trees, cantered. The man was gone; but not from Nataly’s vision that face of wet chalk under one of the shades of fire.

CHAPTER XXVI

In which we see A *conventional gentleman endeavouring to examine* A *spectre of himself*

Dudley rode back to Cronidge with his thunderstroke. It filled him, as in those halls of political clamour, where explanatory speech is not accepted, because of a drowning tide of hot blood on both sides. He sought to win attention by submitting a resolution, to the effect, that he would the next morning enter into the presence of Mr. Victor Radnor, bearing his family’s feelings, for a discussion upon them. But the brutish tumult, in addition to surcharging, encased him: he could not rightly conceive the nature of feelings: men were driving shoals; he had lost hearing and touch of individual men; had become a house of angrily opposing parties.

He was hurt, he knew; and therefore he supposed himself injured, though there were contrary outcries, and he admitted that he stood free; he had not been inextricably deceived.

The girl was caught away to the thinnest of wisps in a dust-whirl. Reverting to the father and mother, his idea of a positive injury, that was not without its congratulations, sank him down among his disordered deeper sentiments; which were a diver’s wreck, where an armoured livid subtermarine, a monstrous puff-ball of man, wandered seriously light in heaviness; trembling his hundredweights to keep him from dancing like a bladder-block of elastic lumber; thinking occasionally, amid the mournful spectacle, of the atmospheric pipe of communication with the world above, whereby he was deafened yet sustained. One tug at it, and he was up on the surface, disengaged from the hideous harness, joyfully no more that burly phantom cleaving green slime, free! and the roaring stopped; the world looked flat, foreign, a place of crusty promise. His wreck, animated by the dim strange fish below, appeared fairer; it winked lurefully when abandoned.

The internal state of a gentleman who detested intangible metaphor as heartily as the vulgarest of our gobblegobbets hate it, metaphor only can describe; and for the reason, that he had in him just something more than is within the compass of the language of the meat-markets. He had—and had it not the less because he fain would not have had—sufficient stuff to furnish forth a soul’s epic encounter between Nature and

Circumstance: and metaphor, simile, analysis, all the fraternity of old lamps for lighting our abysmal darkness, have to be rubbed, that we may get a glimpse of the fray.

Page 3604

Free, and rejoicing; without the wish to be free; at the same time humbly and sadly acquiescing in the stronger claim of his family to pronounce the decision: such was the second stage of Dudley's perturbation after the blow. A letter of Nesta's writing was in his pocket: he knew her address. He could not reply to her until he had seen her father: and that interview remained necessarily prospective until he had come to his exact resolve, not omitting his critical approval of the sentences giving it shape, stamp, dignity—a noble's crest, as it were.

Nesta wrote briefly. The apostrophe was, 'Dear Mr. Sowerby.' She had engaged to send her address. Her father had just gone. The Miss Duvidneys had left the hotel yesterday for the furnished house facing the sea. According to arrangements, she had a livery-stable hack, and had that morning trotted out to the downs with a riding-master and company, one of whom was 'an agreeable lady.'

He noticed approvingly her avoidance of an allusion to the 'Delphica' of Mr. Durance's incomprehensible serial story, or whatever it was; which, as he had shown her, annoyed him, for its being neither fact nor fun; and she had insisted on the fun; and he had painfully tried to see it or anything of a meaning; and it seemed to him now, that he had been humiliated by the obedience to her lead: she had offended by her harping upon Delphica. However, here it was unmentioned. He held the letter out to seize it in the large, entire.

Her handwriting was good, as good as the writing of the most agreeable lady on earth. Dudley did not blame her for letting the lady be deceived in her—if she knew her position. She might be ignorant of it. And to strangers, to chance acquaintances, even to friends, the position, of the loathsome name, was not materially important. Marriage altered the view. He sided with his family.

He sided, edgeing away, against his family. But a vision of the earldom coming to him, stirred reverential objections, composed of all which his unstained family could protest in religion, to repudiate an alliance with a stained house, and the guilty of a condonation of immorality. Who would have imagined Mr. Radnor a private sinner flaunting for one of the righteous? And she, the mother, a lady—quite a lady; having really a sense of duty, sense of honour! That she must be a lady, Dudley was convinced. He beheld through a porous crape, woven of formal respectfulness, with threads of personal disgust, the scene, striking him drearly like a distant great mansion's conflagration across moorland at midnight, of a lady's breach of bonds and plunge of all for love. How had it been concealed? In Dudley's upper sphere, everything was exposed: Scandal walked naked and unashamed-figurante of the polite world. But still this lady was of the mint and coin, a true lady. Handsome now, she must have been beautiful. And a comprehensible pride (for so would Dudley have borne it) keeps the forsaken man silent up to death: . . . grandly silent; but the loss of such a woman is enough to kill a man! Not in time, though! Legitimacy evidently, by the mother's confession, cannot

protect where it is wanted. Dudley was optically affected by a round spot of the world swinging its shadow over Nesta.

Page 3605

He pitied, and strove to be sensible of her. The effort succeeded so well, that he was presently striving to be insensible. The former state, was the mounting of a wall; the latter, was a sinking through a chasm. There would be family consultations, abhorrent; his father's agonized amazement at the problem presented to a family of scrupulous principles and pecuniary requirements; his mother's blunt mention of the abominable name—mediaevally vindicated in champions of certain princely families indeed, but morally condemned; always under condemnation of the Church: a blot: and handed down: Posterity, and it might be a titled posterity, crying out. A man in the situation of Dudley could not think solely of himself. The nobles of the land are bound in honour to their posterity. There you have one of the prominent permanent distinctions between them and the commonalty.

His mother would again propose her chosen bride for him: Edith Averst, with the dowry of a present one thousand pounds per annum, and prospect of six or so, excluding Sir John's estate, Carping, in Leicestershire; a fair estate, likely to fall to Edith; consumption seized her brothers as they ripened. A fair girl too; only Dudley did not love her; he wanted to love. He was learning the trick from this other one, who had become obscured and diminished, tainted, to the thought of her; yet not extinct. Sight of her was to be dreaded.

Unguiltily tainted, in herself she was innocent. That constituted the unhappy invitation to him to swallow one half of his feelings, which had his world's blessing on it, for the beneficial enlargement and enthronement of the baser unblest half, which he hugged and distrusted. Can innocence issue of the guilty? He asked it, hopeing it might be possible: he had been educated in his family to believe, that the laws governing human institutions are divine—until History has altered them. They are altered, to present a fresh bulwark against the infidel. His conservative mind, retiring in good order, occupied the next rearward post of resistance. Secretly behind it, the man was proud of having a heart to beat for the cause of the besiegeing enemy, in the present instance. When this was blabbed to him, and he had owned it, he attributed his weakness to excess of nature, the liking for a fair face.—Oh, but more! spirit was in the sweet eyes. She led him—she did lead him in spiritual things; led him out of common circles of thought, into refreshing new spheres; he had reminiscences of his having relished the juices of the not quite obviously comic, through her indications: and really, in spite of her inferior flimsy girl's education, she could boast her acquirements; she was quick, startlingly; modest, too, in commerce with a slower mind that carried more; though she laughed and was a needle for humour: she taught him at times to put away his contempt of the romantic; she had actually shown him, that his expressed contempt of it disguised a dread: as it did, and he was conscious of the foolishness of it now while pursuing her image, while his intelligence and senses gave her the form and glory of young morning.

Page 3606

Wariness counselled him to think it might be merely the play of her youth; and also the disposition of a man in harness of business, exaggeratingly to prize an imagined finding of the complementary feminine of himself. Venerating purity as he did, the question, whether the very sweetest of pure young women, having such an origin, must not at some time or other show trace of the origin, surged up. If he could only have been sure of her moral exemption from taint, a generous ardour, in reserve behind his anxious dubieties, would have precipitated Dudley to quench disapprobation and brave the world under a buckler of those monetary advantages, which he had but stoutly to plead with the House of Cantor, for the speedy overcoming of a reluctance to receive the nameless girl and prodigious heiress. His family's instruction of him, and his inherited tastes, rendered the aspect of a Nature stripped of the clothing of the laws offensive down to devilish: we grant her certain steps, upon certain conditions accompanied by ceremonies; and when she violates them, she becomes visibly again the revolutionary wicked old beast bent on levelling our sacredest edifices. An alliance with any of her votaries, appeared to Dudley as an act of treason to his house, his class, and his tenets. And nevertheless he was haunted by a cry of criminal happiness for and at the commission of the act.

He would not decide to be 'precipitate,' and the days ran their course, until Lady Grace Halley arrived at Cronidge, a widow. Lady Cantor spoke to her of Dudley's unfathomable gloom. Lady Grace took him aside.

She said, without preface: 'You've heard, have you!'

'You were aware of it?' said he, and his tone was irritable with a rebuke.

'Coming through town, for the first time yesterday. I had it—of all men!—from a Sir Abraham Quatley, to whom I was recommended to go, about my husband's shares in a South American Railway; and we talked, and it came out. He knows; he says, it is not generally known; and he likes, respects Mr. Victor Radnor; we are to keep the secret. Hum? He had heard of your pretensions; and our relationship, *etc*.: "esteemed" it—you know the City dialect—his duty to mention, *etc*. That was after I had spied on his forehead the something I wormed out of his mouth. What are you going to do?'

'What can I do!'

'Are you fond of the girl?'

An attachment was indicated, as belonging to the case. She was not a woman to whom the breathing of pastoral passion would be suitable; yet he saw that she despised him for a lover; and still she professed to understand his dilemma. Perplexity at the injustice of fate and persons universally, put a wrinkled mask on his features and the expression of his feelings. They were torn, and the world was torn; and what he wanted, was delay,

time for him to define his feelings and behold a recomposed picture of the world. He had already taken six days. He pleaded the shock to his family.

Page 3607

‘You won’t have such a chance again,’ she said. Shrugs had set in.

They agreed as to the behaviour of the girl’s mother. It reflected on the father, he thought.

‘Difficult thing to proclaim, before an engagement!’ Her shoulders were restless.

‘When a man’s feelings get entangled!’

‘Oh! a man’s feelings! I’m your British Jury for, a woman’s.’

‘He has married her?’

She declared to not knowing particulars. She could fib smoothly.

The next day she was on the line to London, armed with the proposal of an appointment for the Hon. Dudley to meet ‘the girl’s father.’

CHAPTER XXVII

Contains what is A *small thing or* A *great*, *as the soul of the chief actor may decide*

Skepsey ushered Lady Grace into his master’s private room, and entertained her during his master’s absence. He had buried his wife, he said: she feared, seeing his posture of the soaping of hands at one shoulder, that he was about to bewail it; and he did wish to talk of it, to show his modest companionship with her in loss, and how a consolation for our sorrows may be obtained: but he won her approval, by taking the acceptable course between the dues to the subject and those to his hearer, as a model cab should drive considerate equally of horse and fare.

A day of holiday at Hampstead, after the lowering of the poor woman’s bones into earth, had been followed by a descent upon London; and at night he had found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of a public house, noted for sparring exhibitions and instructions on the first floor; and he was melancholy, unable quite to disperse ‘the ravens’ flocking to us on such days: though, if we ask why we have to go out of the world, there is a corresponding inquiry, of what good was our coming into it; and unless we are doing good work for our country, the answer is not satisfactory—except, that we are as well gone. Thinking which, he was accosted by a young woman: perfectly respectable, in every way: who inquired if he had seen a young man enter the door. She described him, and reviled the temptations of those houses; and ultimately, as she insisted upon going in to look for the young man and use her persuasions to withdraw him from ‘that snare of Satan,’ he had accompanied her, and he had gone upstairs and brought the young man down. But friends, or the acquaintances they call friends, were

with him, and they were ‘in drink,’ and abused the young woman; and she had her hand on the young man’s arm, quoting Scripture. Sad to relate of men bearing the name of Englishmen—and it was hardly much better if they pleaded intoxication!—they were not content to tear the young man from her grasp, they hustled her, pushed her out, dragged her in the street.

Page 3608

‘It became me to step to her defence: she was meek,’ said Skepsey. ’She had a great opinion of the efficacy of quotations from Scripture; she did not recriminate. I was able to release her and the young man she protected, on condition of my going upstairs to give a display of my proficiency. I had assured them, that the poor fellows who stood against me were not a proper match. And of course, they jeered, but they had the evidence, on the pavement. So I went up with them. I was heavily oppressed, I wanted relief, I put on the gloves. He was a bigger man; they laughed at the little one. I told them, it depended upon a knowledge of first principles, and the power to apply them. I will not boast, my lady: my junior by ten years, the man went down; he went down a second time; and the men seemed surprised; I told them, it was nothing but first principles put into action. I mention the incident, for the extreme relief it afforded me at the close of a dark day.’

‘So you cured your grief!’ said Lady Grace; and Skepsey made way for his master.

Victor’s festival-lights were kindled, beholding her; cressets on the window-sill, lamps inside.

‘Am I so welcome?’ There was a pull of emotion at her smile. ’What with your little factotum and you, we are flattered to perdition when we come here. He has been proposing, by suggestion, like a Court-physician, the putting on of his boxing-gloves, for the consolation of the widowed:—meant most kindly! and it’s a thousand pities women haven’t their padded gloves.’

’Oh! but our boxing-gloves can do mischief enough. You have something to say, I see.’

‘How do you see?’

‘Tusk, tush.’

The silly ring of her voice and the pathless tattle changed; she talked to suit her laden look. ’You hit it. I come from Dudley. He knows the facts. I wish to serve you, in every way.’

Victor’s head had lifted.

‘Who was it?’

‘No enemy.’

’Her mother. She did rightly!

‘Certainly she did,’ said Victor, and he thought that instantaneously of the thing done. ’Oh, then she spoke to him! She has kept it from me. For now nearly a week—six days—I’ve seen her spying for something she expected, like a face behind a door three

inches ajar. She has not been half alive; she refused explanations;—she was expecting to hear from him, of him:—the decision, whatever it's to be!'

'I can't aid you there,' said Lady Grace. 'He's one of the unreadables. He names Tuesday next week.'

'By all means.'

'She?'

'Fredi?—poor Fredi!—ah, my poor girl, yes!—No, she knows nothing. Here is the truth of it.—she, the legitimate, lives: they say she lives. Well, then, she lives against all rules physical or medical, lives by sheer force of will—it's a miracle of the power of a human creature to . . . . I have it from doctors, friends, attendants, they can't

Page 3609

guess what she holds on, to keep her breath. All the happiness in life!—if only it could benefit her. But it 's the cause of death to us. Do you see, dear friend;—you are a friend, proved friend,' he took her hand, and held and pressed it, in great need of a sanguine response to emphasis; and having this warm feminine hand, his ideas ran off with it. 'The friend I need! You have courage. My Nataly, poor dear—she can endure, in her quiet way. A woman of courage would take her place beside me and compel the world to do her homage, help;—a bright ready smile does it! She would never be beaten. Of course, we could have lived under a bushel—stifled next to death! But I am for light, air-battle, if you like. I want a comrade, not a—not that I complain. I respect, pity, love—I do love her, honour: only, we want something else—courage—to face the enemy. Quite right, that she should speak to Dudley Sowerby. He has to know, must know; all who deal closely with us must know. But see a moment: I am waiting to see the impediment dispersed, which puts her at an inequality with the world: and then I speak to all whom it concerns—not before: for her sake. How is it now? Dudley will ask . . . you understand. And when I am forced to confess, that the mother, the mother of the girl he seeks in marriage, is not yet in that state herself, probably at that very instant the obstacle has crumbled to dust! I say, probably: I have information—doctors, friends, attendants—they all declare it cannot last outside a week. But you are here—-true, I could swear! a touch of a hand tells me. A woman's hand? Well, yes: I read by the touch of a woman's hand:—betrays more than her looks or her lips!' He sank his voice. 'I don't talk of condoling: if you are in grief, you know I share it.' He kissed her hand, and laid it on her lap; eyed it, and met her eyes; took a header into her eyes, and lost himself. A nip of his conscience moved his tongue to say: 'As for guilt, if it were known . . . a couple of ascetics—absolutely!' But this was assumed to be unintelligible; and it was merely the apology to his conscience in communion with the sprite of a petticoated fair one who was being subjected to tender little liberties, necessarily addressed in enigmas. He righted immediately, under a perception of the thoroughbred's contempt for the barriers of wattled sheep; and caught the word 'guilt,' to hide the Philistine citizen's lapse, by relating historically, in abridgement, the honest beauty of the passionate loves of the two whom the world proscribed for honestly loving. There was no guilt. He harped on the word, to erase the recollection of his first use of it.

'Fiddle,' said Lady Grace. 'The thing happened. You have now to carry it through. You require a woman's aid in a social matter. Rely on me, for what I can do. You will see Dudley on Tuesday? I will write. Be plain with him; not forgetting the gilding, I need not remark. Your Nesta has no aversion?'

Page 3610

‘Admires, respects, likes; is quite—is willing.’

‘Good enough beginning.’ She rose, for the atmosphere was heated, rather heavy. ’And if one proves to be of aid, you’ll own that a woman has her place in the battle.’

The fair black-clad widow’s quick and singular interwreathing of the evanescent pretty pouts and frowns dimpled like the brush of the wind on a sunny pool in a shady place; and her forehead was close below his chin, her lips not far. Her apparel was attractively mourning.

Widows in mourning, when they do not lean over extremely to the Stygian shore, with the complexions of the drugs which expedited the defunct to the ferry, provoke the manly arm within reach of them to pluck their pathetic blooming persons clean away from it. What of the widow who visibly likes the living? Compassion; sympathy, impulse; and gratitude, impulse again, living warmth; and a spring of the blood to wrestle with the King of Terrors for the other poor harper’s half-night capped Eurydice; and a thirst, sudden as it is overpowering; and the solicitude, a reflective solicitude, to put the seal on a thing and call it a fact, to the astonishment of history; and a kick of our naughty youth in its coffin; all the insurgencies of Nature, with her colonel of the regiment absent, and her veering trick to drive two vessels at the cross of a track into collision, combine for doing that, which is very much more, and which affects us at times so much less than did the pressure of a soft wedded hand by our own elsewhere pledged one. On the contrary, we triumph, we have the rich flavour of the fruit for our pains; we commission the historian to write in hieroglyphs a round big fact.

The lady passed through the trial submitting, stiffening her shoulders, and at the close, shutting her eyes. She stood cool in her blush, and eyed him, like one gravely awakened. Having been embraced and kissed, she had to consider her taste for the man, and acknowledge a neatness of impetuosity in the deed; and he was neither apologizing culprit nor glorying-bandit when it was done, but something of the lyric God tempering his fervours to a pleased sereneness, not offering a renewal of them. He glowed transparently. He said: ’You are the woman to take a front place in the battle!’ With this woman beside him, it was a conquered world.

Comparisons, in the jotting souvenirs of a woman of her class and set, favoured him; for she disliked enterprising libertines and despised stumbling youths; and the genial simple glow of his look assured her, that the vanished fiery moment would not be built on by a dating master. She owned herself. Or did she? Some understanding of how the other woman had been won to the leap with him, was drawing in about her. She would have liked to beg for the story; and she could as little do that as bring her tongue to reproach. If we come to the den! she said to her thought of reproach. Our semi-civilization makes it a den, where a scent in his nostrils will spring the half-tamed animal away to wildness. And she had come unanticipatingly, without design, except perhaps

to get a superior being to direct and restrain a gambler’s hand perhaps for the fee of a temporary pressure.

Page 3611

‘I may be able to help a little—I hope!’ she fetched a breath to say, while her eyelids mildly sermonized; and immediately she talked of her inheritance of property in stocks and shares.

Victor commented passingly on the soundness of them, and talked of projects he entertained:—Parliament! ’But I have only to mention it at home, and my poor girl will set in for shrinking.’

He doated on the diverse aspect of the gallant woman of the world.

‘You succeed in everything you do,’ said she, and she cordially believed it; and that belief set the neighbour memory palpitating. Success folded her waist, was warm upon her lips: she worshipped the figure of Success.

‘I can’t consent to fail, it’s true, when my mind is on a thing,’ Victor rejoined.

He looked his mind on Lady Grace. The shiver of a maid went over her. These transparent visages, where the thought which is half design is perceived as a lightning, strike lightning into the physically feebler. Her hand begged, with the open palm, her head shook thrice; and though she did not step back, he bowed to the negation, and then she gave him a grateful shadow of a smile, relieved, with a startled view of how greatly relieved, by that sympathetic deference in the wake of the capturing intrepidity.

‘I am to name Tuesday for Dudley?’ she suggested.

‘At any hour he pleases to appoint.’

‘A visit signifies . . .’

‘Whatever it signifies!’

‘I’m thinking of the bit of annoyance.’

‘To me? Anything appointed, finds me ready the next minute.’

Her smile was flatteringly bright. ’By the way, keep your City people close about you: entertain as much as possible; dine them,’ she said.

‘At home?’

’Better. Sir Rodwell Blachington, Sir Abraham Quatley: and their wives. There’s no drawing back now. And I will meet them.’

She received a compliment. She was on the foot to go.

But she had forgotten the Tiddler mine.

The Tiddler mine was leisurely mounting. Victor stated the figures; he saluted her hand, and Lady Grace passed out, with her heart on the top of them, and a buzz about it of the unexpected having occurred She had her experiences to match new patterns in events; though not very many. Compared with gambling, the game of love was an idle entertainment. Compared with other players, this man was gifted.

Victor went in to Mr. Inchling's room, and kept Inchling from speaking, that he might admire him for he knew not what, or knew not well what. The good fellow was devoted to his wife. Victor in old days had called the wife Mrs. Grundy. She gossiped, she was censorious; she knew—could not but know—the facts; yet never by a shade was she disrespectful. He had a curious recollection of how his knowledge of Inchling and his wife being always in concert, entirely—whatever they might think in private—devoted to him in action, had influenced, if it had not originally sprung, his resolve to cast off the pestilential cloak of obscurity shortening his days, and emerge before a world he could illumine to give him back splendid reflections. Inchling and his wife, it was: because the two were one: and if one, and subservient to him, knowing all the story, why, it foreshadowed a conquered world.

Page 3612

They were the one pulse of the married Grundy beating in his hand. So it had been.

He rattled his views upon Indian business, to hold Inchling silent, and let his mind dwell almost lovingly on the good faithful spouse, who had no phosphorescent writing of a recent throbbing event on the four walls of his room.

Nataly was not so generously encountered in idea.

He felt and regretted this. He greeted her with a doubled affectionateness. Her pitiable deficiency of courage, excusing a man for this and that small matter in the thick of the conflict, made demands on him for gentle treatment.

‘You have not seen any one?’ she asked.

‘City people. And you, my love?’

’Mr. Barmby called. He has gone down to Tunbridge Wells for a week, to some friend there.’ She added, in pain of thought: ’I have seen Dartrey. He has brought Lord Clanconan to town, for a consultation, and expects he will have to take him to Brighton.’

‘Brighton? What a life for a man like Dartrey, at Brighton!’

Her breast heaved. ’If I cannot see my Nesta there, he will bring her up to me for a day:

’But, my dear, I will bring her up to you, if it is your wish to see her.’

‘It is becoming imperative that I should.’

’No hurry, no hurry: wait till the end of next week. And I must see Dartrey, on business, at once!’

She gave the address in a neighbouring square. He had minutes to spare before dinner, and flew. She was not inquisitive.

Colney Durance had told Dartrey that Victor was killing her. She had little animation; her smiles were ready, but faint. After her interview with Dudley, there had been a swoon at home; and her maid, sworn to secrecy, willingly spared a tender-hearted husband—so good a master.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. MARSETT

Little acts of kindness were not beyond the range of Colney Durance, and he ran down to Brighton, to give the exiled Nesta some taste of her friendly London circle. The Duvidney ladies knew that the dreaded gentleman had a regard for the girl. Their own, which was becoming warmer than they liked to think, was impressed by his manner of conversing with her. 'Child though she was,' he paid her the compliment of a sober as well as a satirical review of the day's political matter and recent publications; and the ladies were introduced, in a wonderment, to the damsel Delphica. They listened placidly to a discourse upon her performances, Japanese to their understandings.

Page 3613

At New York, behold, another adventurous representative and advocate of the European tongues has joined the party: Signor Jeridomani: a philologer, of course; a politician in addition; Macchiavelli redivivus, it seems to fair Delphica. The speech he delivers at the Syndicate Delmonico Dinner, is justly applauded by the New York Press as a masterpiece of astuteness. He appears to be the only one of the party who has an eye for the dark. She fancies she may know a more widely awake in the abstract. But now, thanks to jubilant Journals and Homeric laughter over the Continent, the secret is out, in so far as the concurrents are all unmasked and exposed for the edification of the American public. Dr. Bouthoin's eyebrows are up, Mr. Semhians disfigures his name by greatly gaping. Shall they return to their Great Britain indignant? Patriotism, with the sauce of a luxurious expedition at no cost to the private purse, restrains them. Moreover, there is no sign of any one of the others intending to quit the expedition; and Mr. Semhians has done a marvel or two in the cricket-field: Old England looks up where she can. What is painfully extraordinary to our couple, they find in the frigid attitude of the Americans toward their 'common tongue'; together with the rumour of a design to despatch an American rival emissary to Japan.

Nesta listened, inquired, commented, laughed; the ladies could not have a doubt that she was interested and understood. She would have sketches of scenes between Delphica and M. Falarique, with whom the young Germania was cleverly ingenuous indeed—a seminary Celimene; and between Delphica and M. Mytharete, with whom she was archaeological, ravishingly amoebaean of Homer. Dr. Gannius holds a trump card in his artless daughter, conjecturally, for the establishment of the language of the gutturals in the far East. He has now a suspicion, that the inventive M. Falarique, melted down to sobriety by misfortune, may some day startle their camp by the cast of more than a crow into it, and he is bent on establishing alliances; frightens the supple Signor Jeridomani to lingual fixity; eulogizes Football, with Dr. Bouthoin; and retracts, or modifies, his dictum upon the English, that, 'masculine brawn they have in their bodies, but muscle they have not in their feminine minds'; to exalt them, for a signally clean, if a dense, people: 'Amousia, not Alousia, is their enemy:'—How, when we have the noblest crop of poets? 'You have never heartily embraced those aliens among you until you learnt from us, that you might brag of them.'—Have they not endowed us with the richest of languages? 'The words of which are used by you, as old slippers, for puns.' Mr. Semhians has been superciliously and ineffectively punning in foreign presences: he and his chief are inwardly shocked by a new perception; What if, now that we have the populace for paymaster, subservience to the literary tastes of the populace should reduce the nation to its lowest mental level, and render us not only unable to compete with the foreigner, but unintelligible to him, although so proudly paid at home! Is it not thus that nations are seen of the Highest to be devouring themselves?

Page 3614

‘For,’ says Dr. Gannius, as if divining them, ’this excessive and applauded productiveness, both of your juvenile and your senile, in your modern literature, is it ever a crop? Is it even the restorative perishable stuff of the markets? Is it not rather your street-pavement’s patter of raindrops, incessantly in motion, and as fruitful?’ Mr. Semhians appeals to Delphica. ‘Genius you have,’ says she, stiffening his neck-band, ’genius in superabundance’:—he throttles to the complexion of the peony:—’perhaps criticism is wanting.’ Dr. Gannius adds: ’Perhaps it is the drill-sergeant everywhere wanting for an unrivalled splendid rabble!’

Colney left the whole body of concurrents on the raised flooring of a famous New York Hall, clearly entrapped, and incited to debate before an enormous audience, as to the merits of their respective languages. ’I hear,’ says Dr. Bouthoin to Mr. Semhians (whose gape is daily extending), ‘that the tickets cost ten dollars!’

There was not enough of Delphicafor Nests.

Colney asked: ‘Have you seen any of our band?’

‘No,’ she said, with good cheer, and became thoughtful, conscious of a funny reason for the wish to hear of the fictitious creature disliked by Dudley. A funny and a naughty reason, was it? Not so very naughty: but it was funny; for it was a spirit of opposition to Dudley, without an inferior feeling at all, such as girls should have.

Colney brought his viola for a duet; they had a pleasant musical evening, as in old days at Creckholt; and Nesta, going upstairs with the ladies to bed, made them share her father’s amused view of the lamb of the flock this bitter gentleman became when he had the melodious instrument tucked under his chin. He was a guest for the night. Dressing in the early hour, Nests saw him from her window on the parade, and soon joined him, to hear him at his bitterest, in the flush of the brine. ’These lengths of blank-faced terraces fronting sea!’ were the satirist’s present black beast. ’So these moneyed English shoulder to the front place; and that is the appearance they offer to their commercial God!’ He gazed along the miles of ‘English countenance,’ drearily laughing. Changeful ocean seemed to laugh at the spectacle. Some Orphic joke inspired his exclamation: ‘Capital!’

‘Come where the shops are,’ said Nesta.

‘And how many thousand parsons have you here?’

‘Ten, I think,’ she answered in his vein, and warmed him; leading him contemplatively to scrutinize her admirers: the Rev. Septimus; Mr. Sowerby.

‘News of our friend of the whimpering flute?’

‘Here? no. I have to understand you!’

Colney cast a weariful look backward on the ‘regiments of Anglo-Chinese’ represented to him by the moneyed terraces, and said: ’The face of a stopped watch!—the only meaning it has is past date.’

He had no liking for Dudley Sowerby. But it might have been an allusion to the general view of the houses. But again, ’the meaning of it past date,’ stuck in her memory. A certain face close on handsome, had a fatal susceptibility to caricature.

Page 3615

She spoke of her ‘exile’: wanted Skepsey to come down to her; moaned over the loss of her Louise. The puzzle of the reason for the long separation from her parents, was evident in her mind, and unmentioned.

They turned on to the pier.

Nesta reminded him of certain verses he had written to celebrate her visit to the place when she was a child:

’"And then along the pier we sped,
And there we saw a Whale
He seemed to have a Normous Head,
And not a bit of Tail!"’

’Manifestly a foreigner to our shores, where the exactly inverse condition rules,’ Colney said.

’"And then we scampered on the beach,
To chase the foaming wave;
And when we ran beyond its reach
We all became more brave."’

Colney remarked: ‘I was a poet—for once.’

A neat-legged Parisianly-booted lady, having the sea, winds very enterprising with her dark wavy, locks and jacket and skirts, gave a cry of pleasure and—a silvery ‘You dear!’ at sight of Nesta; then at sight of one of us, moderated her tone to a propriety equalling the most conventional. ‘We ride to-day?’

‘I shall be one,’ said Nesta.

‘It would not be the commonest pleasure to me, if you were absent.’

‘Till eleven, then!’

‘After my morning letter to Ned.’

She sprinkled silvery sound on that name or on the adieu, blushed, blinked, frowned, sweetened her lip-lines, bit at the underone, and passed in a discomposure.

‘The lady?’ Colney asked.

’She is—I meet her in the troop conducted by the riding-master: Mrs. Marsett.’

‘And who is Ned?’

’It is her husband, to whom she writes every morning. He is a captain in the army, or was. He is in Norway, fishing.’

’Then the probability is, that the English officer continues his military studies.’

‘Do you not think her handsome, Mr. Durance?’

’Ned may boast of his possession, when he has trimmed it and toned it a little!

‘She is different, if you are alone with her.’

‘It is not unusual,’ said Colney.

At eleven o’clock he was in London, and Nesta rode beside Mrs. Marsett amid the troop.

A South-easterly wind blew the waters to shifty goldleaf prints of brilliance under the sun.

‘I took a liberty this morning, I called you “Dear” this morning,’ the lady said. ’It’s what I feel, only I have no right to blurt out everything I feel, and I was ashamed. I am sure I must have appeared ridiculous. I got quite nervous.’

‘You would not be ridiculous to me.’

’I remember I spoke of Ned!

‘You have spoken of him before.’

’Oh! I know: to you alone. I should like to pluck out my heart and pitch it on the waves, to see whether it would sink or swim. That’s a funny idea, isn’t it! I tell you everything that comes up. What shall I do when I lose you! You always make me feel you’ve a lot of poetry ready-made in you.’

Page 3616

‘We will write. And you will have your husband then.’

’When I had finished my letter to Ned, I dropped my head on it and behaved like a fool for several minutes. I can’t bear the thought of losing you!’

‘But you don’t lose me,’ said Nesta; ’there is no ground for your supposing that you will. And your wish not to lose me, binds me to you more closely.’

‘If you knew!’ Mrs. Marsett caught at her slippery tongue, and she carolled: ’If we all knew everything, we should be wiser, and what a naked lot of people we should be!’

They were crossing the passage of a cavalcade of gentlemen, at the end of the East Cliff. One among them, large and dominant, with a playful voice of brass, cried out:

‘And how do you do, Mrs. Judith Marsett—ha? Beautiful morning?’

Mrs. Marsett’s figure tightened; she rode stonily erect, looked level ahead. Her woman’s red mouth was shut fast on a fighting underlip.

‘He did not salute you,’ Nesta remarked, to justify her for not having responded.

The lady breathed a low thunder: ‘Coward!’

‘He cannot have intended to insult you,’ said Nesta.

’That man knows I will not notice him. He is a beast. He will learn that I carry a horsewhip.’

‘Are you not taking a little incident too much to heart?’

The sigh of the heavily laden came from Mrs. Marsett.

’Am I pale? I dare say. I shall go on my knees tonight hating myself that I was born “one of the frail sex.” We are, or we should ride at the coward and strike him to the ground. Pray, pray do not look distressed! Now you know my Christian name. That dog of a man barks it out on the roads. It doesn’t matter.’

‘He has offended you before?’

’You are near me. They can’t hurt me, can’t touch me, when I think that I ’m talking with you. How I envy those who call you by your Christian name!’

‘Nesta,’ said smiling Nesta. The smile was forced, that she might show kindness, for the lady was jarring on her.

Mrs. Marsett opened her lips: 'Oh, my God, I shall be crying!—let's gallop. No, wait, I'll tell you. I wish I could! I will tell you of that man. That man is Major Worrell. One of the majors who manage to get to their grade. A retired warrior. He married a handsome woman, above him in rank, with money; a good woman. She was a good woman, or she would have had her vengeance, and there was never a word against her. She must have loved that—Ned calls him, full-blooded ox. He spent her money and he deceived her.—You innocent! Oh, you dear! I'd give the world to have your eyes. I've heard tell of "crystal clear," but eyes like yours have to tell me how deep and clear. Such a world for them to be in! I did pray, and used your name last night on my knees, that you—I said Nesta—might never have to go through other women's miseries. Ah me! I have to tell you he deceived her. You don't quite understand.'

Page 3617

‘I do understand,’ said Nesta.

’God help you!—I am excited to-day. That man is poison to me. His wife forgave him three times. On three occasions, that unhappy woman forgave him. He is great at his oaths, and a big breaker of them. She walked out one November afternoon and met him riding along with a notorious creature. You know there are bad women. They passed her, laughing. And look there, Nesta, see that groyne; that very one.’ Mrs. Marsett pointed her whip hard out. ’The poor lady went down from the height here; she walked into that rough water look!—steadying herself along it, and she plunged; she never came out alive. A week after her burial, Major Worrell—I ‘ve told you enough.’

’We ‘ll gallop now,’ said Nesta.

Mrs. Marsett’s talk, her presence hardly less, affected the girl with those intimations of tumult shown upon smooth waters when the great elements are conspiring. She felt that there was a cause why she had to pity, did pity her. It might be, that Captain Marsett wedded one who was of inferior station,’ and his wife had to bear blows from cruel people. The supposition seemed probable. The girl accepted it; for beyond it, as the gathering of the gale masked by hills, lay a brewing silence. What? She did not reflect. Her quick physical sensibility curled to some breath of heated atmosphere brought about her by this new acquaintance: not pleasant, if she had thought of pleasure: intensely suggestive of our life at the consuming tragic core, round which the furnace pants. But she was unreflecting, feeling only a beyond and hidden.

Besides, she was an exile. Spelling at dark things in the dark, getting to have the sight which peruses darkness, she touched the door of a mystery that denied her its key, but showed the lock; and her life was beginning to know of hours that fretted her to recklessness. Her friend Louise was absent: she had so few friends—owing to that unsolved reason: she wanted one, of any kind, if only gentle: and this lady seemed to need her: and she flattered; Nesta was in the mood for swallowing and digesting and making sweet blood of flattery.

At one time, she liked Mrs. Marsett best absent: in musing on her, wishing her well, having said the adieu. For it was wearisome to hear praises of ‘innocence’; and women can do so little to cure that ‘wickedness of men,’ among the lady’s conversational themes; and ‘love’ too: it may be a ‘plague,’ and it may be ‘heaven’: it is better left unspoken of. But there were times when Mrs. Marsett’s looks and tones touched compassion to press her hand: an act that had a pledgeing signification in the girl’s bosom: and when, by the simple avoidance of ejaculatory fervours, Mrs. Marsett’s quieted good looks had a shadow of a tender charm, more pathetic than her outcries were.

Page 3618

These had not always the sanction of polite usage: and her English was guilty of sudden lapses to the Thameswater English of commerce and drainage instead of the upper wells. But there are many uneducated ladies in the land. Many, too, whose tastes in romantic literature betray now and then by peeps a similarity to Nesta's maid Mary's. Mrs. Marsett liked love, blood, and adventure. She had, moreover, a favourite noble poet, and she begged Nesta's pardon for naming him, and she would not name him, and told her she must not read him until she was a married woman, because he did mischief to girls. Thereupon she fell into one of her silences, emerging with a cry of hate of herself for having ever read him. She did not blame the bard. And, ah, poor bard! he fought his battle: he shall not be named for the brand on the name. He has lit a sulphur match for the lover of nature through many a generation; and to be forgiven by sad frail souls who could accuse him of pipeing devil's agent to them at the perilous instant—poor girls too!—is chastisement enough. This it is to be the author of unholy sweets: a Posterity sitting in judgement will grant, that they were part of his honest battle with the hypocrite English Philistine, without being dupe of the plea or at all the thirsty swallower of his sugary brandy. Mrs. Marsett expressed aloud her gladness of escape in never having met a man like him; followed by her regret that 'Ned' was so utterly unlike; except 'perhaps'—and she hummed; she was off on the fraternity in wickedness.

Nesta's ears were fatigued. 'My mother writes of you,' she said, to vary the subject.

Mrs. Marsett looked. She sighed downright: 'I have had my dream of a friend!—It was that gentleman with you on the pier! Your mother objects?'

'She has inquired, nothing more.'

'I am not twenty-three: not as old as I should be, for a guide to you. I know I would never do you harm. That I know. I would walk into that water first, and take Mrs. Worrell's plunge:—the last bath; a thorough cleanser for a woman! Only, she was a good woman and didn't want it, as we—as lots of us do:—to wash off all recollection of having met a man! Your mother would not like me to call you Nesta! I have never begged you to call me Judith. Damnable name!' Mrs. Marsett revelled in the heat of the curse on it, as a relief to torture of the breast, until a sense of the girl's alarmed hearing sent the word reverberating along her nerves and shocked her with such an exposure of our Shaggy wild one on a lady's lips. She murmured: 'Forgive me,' and had the passion to repeat the epithet in shrieks, and scratch up male speech for a hatefuller; but the twitch of Nesta's brows made her say: 'Do pardon me. I did something in Scripture. Judith could again. Since that brute Worrell crossed me riding with you, I loathe my name; I want to do things. I have offended you.'

'We have been taught differently. I do not use those words. Nothing else.'

Page 3619

‘They frighten you.’

‘They make me shut; that is all.’

’Supposing you were some day to discover . . . ta-tata, all the things there are in the world.’ Mrs. Marsett let fly an artificial chirrup. ’You must have some ideas of me.’

‘I think you have had unhappy experiences.’

’Nesta . . . just now and then! the first time we rode out together, coming back from the downs, I remember, I spoke, without thinking—I was enraged—of a case in the newspapers; and you had seen it, and you were not afraid to talk of it. I remember I thought, Well, for a girl, she’s bold! I thought you knew more than a girl ought to know: until—you did—you set my heart going. You spoke of the poor women like an angel of compassion. You said, we were all mixed up with their fate—I forget the words. But no one ever heard in Church anything that touched me so. I worshipped you. You said, you thought of them often, and longed to find out what you could do to help. And I thought, if they could hear you, and only come near you, as I was—ah, my heaven! Unhappy experiences? Yes. But when men get women on the slope to their perdition, they have no mercy, none. They deceive, and they lie; they are false in acts and words; they do as much as murder. They’re never hanged for it. They make the Laws! And then they become fathers of families, and point the finger at the “wretched creatures.” They have a dozen names against women, for one at themselves.’

‘It maddens me at times to think . . . !’ said Nesta, burning with the sting of vile names.

Oh, there are bad women as well as bad men: but men have the power and the lead, and they take advantage of it; and then they turn round and execrate us for not having what they have robbed us of!’

‘I blame women—if I may dare, at my age,’ said Nesta, and her bosom heaved. ’Women should feel for their sex; they should not allow the names; they should go among their unhappier sisters. At the worst, they are sisters! I am sure, that fallen cannot mean—Christ shows it does not. He changes the tone of Scripture. The women who are made outcasts, must be hopeless and go to utter ruin. We should, if we pretend to be better, step between them and that. There cannot be any goodness unless it is a practiced goodness. Otherwise it is nothing more than paint on canvas. You speak to me of my innocence. What is it worth, if it is only a picture and does no work to help to rescue? I fear I think most of the dreadful names that redden and sicken us.—The Old Testament!—I have a French friend, a Mademoiselle Louise de Seines—-you should hear her: she is intensely French, and a Roman Catholic, everything which we are not: but so human, so wise, and so full of the pride of her sex! I love her. It is love. She will never marry until she meets a man who has the respect for women, for all women. We both think we cannot separate ourselves from our sisters. She seems to

me to wither men, when she speaks of their injustice, their snares to mislead and their cruelty when they have succeeded. She is right, it is the—brute: there is no other word.'

Page 3620

‘And French and good!’ Mrs. Marsett ejaculated. ’My Ned reads French novels, and he says, their women . . . . But your mademoiselle is a real one. If she says all that, I could kneel to her, French or not. Does she talk much about men and women?’

’Not often: we lose our tempers. She wants women to have professions; at present they have not much choice to avoid being penniless. Poverty, and the sight of luxury! It seems as if we produced the situation, to create an envious thirst, and cause the misery. Things are improving for them; but we groan at the slowness of it.’

Mrs. Marsett now declared a belief, that women were nearly quite as bad as men. ’I don’t think I could take up with a profession. Unless to be a singer. Ah! Do you sing?’

Nesta smiled: ‘Yes, I sing.’

’How I should like to hear you! My Ned’s a thorough Englishman—gentleman, you know: he cares only for sport; Shooting, Fishing, Hunting; and Football, Cricket, Rowing, and matches. He’s immensely proud of England in those things. And such muscle he has! though he begins to fancy his heart’s rather weak. It’s digestion, I tell him. But he takes me to the Opera sometimes—Italian Opera; he can’t stand German. Down at his place in Leicestershire, he tells me, when there ’s company, he has—I’m sure you sing beautifully. When I hear beautiful singing, even from a woman they tell tales of, upon my word, it’s true, I feel my sins all melting out of me and I’m new-made: I can’t bear Ned to speak. Would you one day, one afternoon, before the end of next week?—it would do me such real good, you can’t guess how much; if I could persuade you! I know I’m asking something out of rules. For just half an hour: I judge by your voice in talking. Oh! it would do me good-good-good to hear you sing. There is a tuned piano—a cottage; I don’t think it sounds badly. You would not see any great harm in calling on me? once!’

‘No,’ said Nesta. And it was her nature that projected the word. Her awakened wits were travelling to her from a distance, and she had an intimation of their tidings; and she could not have said what they were; or why, for a moment, she hesitated to promise she would come. Her vision of the reality of things was without written titles, to put the stamp of the world on it. She felt this lady to be one encompassed and in the hug of the elementary forces, which are the terrors to inexperienced pure young women. But she looked at her, and dared trust those lips, those eyes. She saw, through whatever might be the vessel, the spirit of the woman; as the upper nobility of our brood are enabled to do in a crisis mixed of moral aversion and sisterly sympathy, when nature cries to them, and the scales of convention, the mud-spots of accident, even naughtiness, even wickedness, all misfortune’s issue, if we but see the one look upward, fall away. Reason is not excluded from these blind throbs of a blood that strikes to right the doings of the Fates.

Page 3621

Nesta did not err in her divination of the good and the bad incarnate beside her, though both good and bad were behind a curtain; the latter sparing her delicate senses, appealing to chivalry, to the simply feminine claim on her. Reason, acting in her heart as a tongue of the flames of the forge where we all are wrought, told her surely that the good predominated. She had the heart which is at our primal fires when nature speaks.

She gave the promise to call on Mrs. Marsett and sing to her.

'An afternoon? Oh! what afternoon?' she was asked, and she said: 'This afternoon, if you like.'

So it was agreed: Mrs. Marsett acted violently the thrill of delight she felt in the prospect.

The ladies Dorothea and Virginia, consulted, and pronounced the name of Marsett to be a reputable County name. 'There was a Leicestershire baronet of the name of Marsett.' They arranged to send their button-blazing boy at Nesta's heels. Mrs. Marsett resided in a side-street not very distant from the featureless but washed and orderly terrace of the glassy stare at sea.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHOWS ONE OF THE SHADOWS OF THE WORLD CROSSING A VIRGIN'S MIND

Nasta and her maid were brought back safely through the dusk by their constellation of a boy, to whom the provident ladies had entrusted her. They could not but note how short her syllables were. Her face was only partly seen. They had returned refreshed from their drive on the populous and orderly parade——so fair a pattern of their England! —after discoursing of 'the dear child,' approving her manners, instancing proofs of her intelligence, nay, her possession of 'character.' They did so, notwithstanding that these admissions were worse than their growing love for the girl, to confound established ideas. And now, in thoughtfulness on her behalf, Dorothea said, 'We have considered, Nesta, that you may be lonely; and if it is your wish, we will leave our card on your new acquaintance.' Nesta took her hand and kissed it; she declined, saying, 'No,' without voice.

They had two surprises at the dinner-hour. One was the card of Dartrey Fenellan, naming an early time next day for his visit; and the other was the appearance of the Rev. Stuart Rem, a welcome guest. He had come to meet his Bishop.

He had come also with serious information for the ladies, regarding the Rev. Abram Posterley. No sooner was this out of his mouth than both ladies exclaimed:

‘Again!’ So serious was it, that there had been a consultation at the Wells; Mr. Posterley’s friend, the Rev. Septimus Barmby, and his own friend, the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had journeyed from London to sit upon the case: and, ‘One hoped,’ Mr. Stuart Rem said, ’poor Posterley would be restored to the senses he periodically abandoned.’ He laid a hand on Tasso’s curls, and withdrew it at a menace of teeth. Tasso would submit to rough caresses from Mr. Posterley; he would not allow Mr. Stuart Rem to touch him. Why was that? Perhaps for the reason of Mr. Posterley’s being so emotional as perpetually to fall a victim to some bright glance and require the rescue of his friends; the slave of woman had a magnet for animals!

Page 3622

Dorothea and Virginia were drawn to compassionate sentiments, in spite of the provokeing recurrence of Mr. Posterley's malady. He had not an income to support a wife. Always was this unfortunate gentleman entangling himself in a passion for maid or widow of the Wells and it was desperate, a fever. Mr. Stuart Rem charitably remarked on his taking it so severely because of his very scrupulous good conduct. They pardoned a little wound to their delicacy, and asked: 'On this occasion?' Mr. Stuart Rem named a linendraper's establishment near the pantiles, where a fair young woman served. 'And her reputation?' That was an article less presentable through plate-glass, it seemed: Mr. Stuart Rem drew a prolonged breath into his nose.

'It is most melancholy!' they said in unison. 'Nothing positive,' said he. 'But the suspicion of a shadow, Mr. Stuart Rem! You will not permit it?' He stated, that his friend Buttermore might have influence. Dorothea said: 'When I think of Mr. Posterley's addiction to ceremonial observances, and to matrimony, I cannot but think of a sentence that fell from Mr. Durance one day, with reference to that division of our Church: he called it:—you frown! and I would only quote Mr. Durance to you in support of your purer form, as we hold it to be—with the candles, the vestments, Confession, alas! he called it, "Rome and a wife."'

Mr. Stuart Rem nodded an enforced assent: he testily dismissed mention of Mr. Durance, and resumed on Mr. Posterley.

The good ladies now, with some of their curiosity appeased, considerately signified to him, that a young maiden was present.

The young maiden had in heart stuff to render such small gossip a hum of summer midges. She did not imagine the dialogue concerned her in any way. She noticed Mr. Stuart Rem's attentive scrutiny of her from time to time. She had no sensitiveness, hardly a mind for things about her. To-morrow she was to see Captain Dartrey. She dwelt on that prospect, for an escape from the meshes of a painful hour—the most woeful of the hours she had yet known-passed with Judith Marsett: which dragged her soul through a weltering of the deeps, tossed her over and over, still did it with her ideas. It shocked her nevertheless to perceive how much of the world's flayed life and harsh anatomy she had apprehended, and so coldly, previous to Mrs. Marsett's lift of the veil in her story of herself: a skipping revelation, terrible enough to the girl; whose comparison of the previously suspected things with the things now revealed imposed the thought of her having been both a precocious and a callous young woman: a kind of 'Delphica without the erudition,' her mind phrased it airily over her chagrin.—And the silence of Dudley proved him to have discovered his error in choosing such a person—-he was wise, and she thanked him. She had an envy of the ignorant-innocents adored by the young man she cordially thanked for quitting her. She admired the white coat of armour they wore, whether bestowed on them by their constitution or by prudence. For while combating mankind now on Judith Marsett's behalf, personally she ran like a hare from the mere breath of an association with the very minor sort of similar charges;

ardently she desired the esteem of mankind; she was at moments abject. But had she actually been aware of the facts now known?

Page 3623

Those wits of the virgin young, quickened to shrewdness by their budding senses—and however vividly—require enlightenment of the audible and visible before their sterner feelings can be heated to break them away from a blushful dread and force the mind to know. As much as the wilfully or naturally blunted, the intelligently honest have to learn by touch: only, their understandings cannot meanwhile be so wholly obtuse as our society's matron, acting to please the tastes of the civilized man—a creature that is not clean-washed of the Turk in him—barbarously exacts. The signor aforesaid is puzzled to read the woman, who is after all in his language; but when it comes to reading the maiden, she appears as a phosphorescent hieroglyph to some speculative Egyptologer; and he insists upon distinct lines and characters; no variations, if he is to have sense of surety. Many a young girl is misread by the amount she seems to know of our construction, history, and dealings, when it is not more than her sincere ripeness of nature, that has gathered the facts of life profuse about her, and prompts her through one or other of the instincts, often vanity, to show them to be not entirely strange to her; or haply her filly nature is having a fling at the social harness of hypocrisy. If you (it is usually through the length of ears of your Novelist that the privilege is yours) have overheard queer communications passing between girls, and you must act the traitor eavesdropper or Achilles masquerader to overhear so clearly, these, be assured, are not specially the signs of their corruptness. Even the exceptionally cynical are chiefly to be accused of bad manners. Your Moralist is a myopic preacher, when he stamps infamy, on them, or on our later generation, for the kick they have at grandmother decorum, because you do not or cannot conceal from them the grinning skeleton behind it.

Nesta once had dreams of her being loved: and she was to love in return for a love that excused her for loving double, treble; as not her lover could love, she thought with grateful pride in the treasure she was to pour out at his feet; as only one or two (and they were women) in the world had ever loved. Her notion of the passion was parasitic: man the tree, woman the bine: but the bine was flame to enwind and to soar, serpent to defend, immortal flowers to crown. The choice her parents had made for her in Dudley, behind the mystery she had scent of, nipped her dream, and prepared her to meet, as it were, the fireside of a November day instead of springing up and into the dawn's blue of full summer with swallows on wing. Her station in exile at the Wells of the weariful rich, under the weight of the sullen secret, unenlivened by Dudley's courtship, subdued her to the world's decrees; phrased thus: 'I am not to be a heroine.' The one golden edge to the view was, that she would greatly please her father.

Page 3624

Her dream of a love was put away like a botanist's pressed weed. But after hearing Judith Marsett's wild sobs, it had no place in her cherishing. For, above all, the unhappy woman protested love to have been the cause of her misery. She moaned of 'her Ned'; of his goodness, his deceitfulness, her trustfulness; his pride and the vileness of his friends; her longsuffering and her break down of patience. It was done for the proof of her unworthiness of Nesta's friendship: that she might be renounced, and embraced. She told the pathetic half of her story, to suit the gentle ear, whose critical keenness was lost in compassion. How deep the compassion, mixed with the girl's native respect for the evil-fortuned, may be judged by her inaccessibility to a vulgar tang that she was aware of in the deluge of the torrent, where Innocence and Ned and Love and a proud Family and that beast Worrell rolled together in leaping and shifting involutions.

A darkness of thunder was on the girl. Although she was not one to shrink beneath it like the small bird of the woods, she had to say within herself many times, 'I shall see Captain Dartrey to-morrow,' for a recovery and a nerving. And with her thought of him, her tooth was at her underlip, she struggled abashed, in hesitation over men's views of her sex, and how to bring a frank mind to meet him; to be sure of his not at heart despising; until his character swam defined and bright across her scope. 'He is good to women.' Fragments of conversation, principally her father's, had pictured Captain Dartrey to her most manfully tolerant toward a frivolous wife.

He came early in the morning, instantly after breakfast.

Not two minutes had passed before she was at home with him. His words, his looks, revived her spirit of romance, gave her the very landscapes, and new ones. Yes, he was her hero. But his manner made him also an adored big brother, stamped splendid by the perils of life. He sat square, as if alert to rise, with an elbow on a knee, and the readiest turn of head to speakers, the promptest of answers, eyes that were a brighter accent to the mouth, so vividly did look accompany tone. He rallied her, chatted and laughed; pleased the ladies by laughing at Colney Durance, and inspired her with happiness when he spoke of England:—that 'One has to be in exile awhile, to see the place she takes.'

'Oh, Captain Dartrey, I do like to hear you say so,' she cried; his voice was reassuring also in other directions: it rang of true man.

He volunteered, however, a sad admission, that England had certainly lost something of the great nation's proper conception of Force: the meaning of it, virtue of it, and need for it. 'She bleats for a lesson, and will get her lesson.'

But if we have Captain Dartrey, we shall come through! So said the sparkle of Nesta's eyes.

'She is very like her father,' he said to the ladies.

Page 3625

‘We think so,’ they remarked.

‘There’s the mother too,’ said he; and Nesta saw that the ladies shadowed.

They retired. Then she begged him to ‘tell her of her own dear mother.’ The news gave comfort, except for the suspicion, that the dear mother was being worn by her entertaining so largely. ‘Papa is to blame,’ said Nesta.

’A momentary strain. Your father has an idea of Parliament; one of the London Boroughs.’

‘And I, Captain Dartrey, when do I go back to them?’

’Your mother comes down to consult with you. And now, do we ride together?’

‘You are free?’

‘My uncle, Lord Clan, lets me out.’

‘To-day?’

‘Why, yes!’

‘This morning?’

‘In an hour’s time.’

‘I will be ready.’

Nesta sent a line of excuse to Mrs. Marsett, throwing in a fervent adjective for balm.

That fair person rode out with the troop under conduct of the hallowing squire of the stables, and passed by Nesta on horseback beside Dartrey Fenellan at the steps of a huge hotel; issuing from which, pretty Mrs. Blathenoy was about to mount. Mrs. Marsett looked ahead and coloured, but she could not restrain one look at Nesta, that embraced her cavalier. Nesta waved hand to her, and nodded. Mrs. Marsett withdrew her eyes; her doing so, silent though it was, resembled the drag back to sea of the shingle-wave below her, such a screaming of tattle she heard in the questions discernible through the attitude of the cavalier and of the lady, who paused to stare, before the leap up in the saddle. ’Who is she?—what is she?—how did you know her?—where does she come from?—wears her hat on her brows!—huge gauntlets out of style!—shady! shady! shady!’ And as always during her nervous tumults, the name of Worrell made diapason of that execrable uproar. Her hat on her brows had an air of dash, defying a world it could win, as Ned well knew. But she scanned her gauntlets disapprovingly. This town, we are glad to think, has a bright repute for glove-shops. And Mrs. Marsett could

applaud herself for sparing Ned's money; she had mended her gloves, if they were in the fashion.—But how does the money come? Hark at that lady and that gentleman questioning Miss Radnor of everything, everything in the world about her! Not a word do they get from Miss Radnor. And it makes them the more inquisitive. Idle rich people, comfortably fenced round, are so inquisitive! And Mrs. Marsett, loving Nesta for the notice of her, maddened by the sting of tongues it was causing, heard the wash of the beach, without consciousness of analogies, but with a body ready to jump out of skin, out of life, in desperation at the sound.

She was all impulse; a shifty piece of unmercenary stratagem occasionally directing it. Arrived at her lodgings, she wrote to Nesta: 'I entreat you not to notice me, if you pass me on the road again. Let me drop, never mind how low I go. I was born to be wretched. A line from you, just a line now and then, only to show me I am not forgotten. I have had a beautiful dream. I am not bad in reality; I love goodness, I know. I cling to the thought of you, as my rescue, I declare. Please, let me hear: if it's not more than "good day" and your initials on a post-card.'

Page 3626

The letter brought Nesta in person to her.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BURDEN UPON NESTA

Could there be confidences on the subject of Mrs. Marsett with Captain Dartrey?—-Nesta timidly questioned her heart: she knocked at an iron door shut upon a thing alive. The very asking froze her, almost to stopping her throbs of pity for the woman. With Captain Dartrey, if with any one; but with no one. Not with her mother even. Toward her mother, she felt guilty of knowing. Her mother had a horror of that curtain. Nesta had seen it, and had taken her impressions; she, too, shrank from it; the more when impelled to draw near it. Louise de Seilles would have been another self; Louise was away; when to return, the dear friend could not state. Speaking in her ear, would have been possible; the theme precluded writing.

It was ponderous combustible new knowledge of life for a girl to hold unaided. In the presence of the simple silvery ladies Dorothea and Virginia, she had qualms, as if she were breaking out in spots before them. The ladies fancied, that Mr. Stuart Rem had hinted to them oddly of the girl; and that he might have meant, she appeared a little too cognizant of poor Mr. Abram Posterley's malady—as girls in these terrible days, only too frequently, too brazenly, are. They discoursed to her of the degeneracy of the manners, nay, the morals of young Englishwomen, once patterns! They sketched the young English gentlewoman of their time; indeed a beauty; with round red cheeks, and rounded open eyes, and a demure shut mouth, a puppet's divine ignorance; inoffensive in the highest degree, rightly worshipped. They were earnest, and Nesta struck at herself. She wished to be as they had been, reserving her painful independence.

They were good: they were the ideal women of our country; which demands if it be but the semblance of the sureness of stationary excellence; such as we have in Sevres and Dresden, polished bright and smooth as ever by the morning's flick of a duster; perhaps in danger of accidents—accidents must be kept away; but enviable, admirable, we think, when we are not thinking of seed sown or help given to the generations to follow. Nesta both envied and admired; she revered them; yet her sharp intelligence, larger in the extended boundary of thought coming of strange crimson-lighted new knowledge, discerned in a dimness what blest conditions had fixed them on their beautiful barren eminence. Without challengeing it, she had a rebellious rush of sympathy for our evil-fortuned of the world; the creatures in the battle, the wounded, trodden, mud-stained: and it alarmed her lest she should be at heart one out of the fold.

Page 3627

She had the sympathy, nevertheless, and renewing and increasing with the pulsations of a compassion that she took for her reflective survey. The next time she saw Dartrey Fenellan, she was assured of him, as being the man who might be spoken to; and by a woman: though not by a girl; not spoken to by her. The throb of the impulse precipitating speech subsided to a dumb yearning. He noticed her look: he was unaware of the human sun in the girl's eyes taking an image of him for permanent habitation in her breast. That face of his, so clearly lined, quick, firm, with the blue smile on it like the gleam of a sword coming out of sheath, did not mean hardness, she could have vowed. O that some woman, other than the unhappy woman herself, would speak the words denied to a girl! He was the man who would hearken and help. Essential immediate help was to be given besides the noble benevolence of mind. Novel ideas of manliness and the world's need for it were printed on her understanding. For what could women do in aid of a good cause! She fawned: she deemed herself very despicably her hero's inferior. The thought of him enclosed her. In a prison, the gaoler is a demi-God-hued bright or black, as it may be; and, by the present arrangement between the sexes, she, whom the world allowed not to have an intimation from eye or ear, or from nature's blood-ripeness in commune with them, of certain matters, which it suffers to be notorious, necessarily directed her appeal almost in worship to the man, who was the one man endowed to relieve, and who locked her mouth for shame.

Thus was she, too, being put into her woman's harness of the bit and the blinkers, and taught to know herself for the weak thing, the gentle parasite, which the fiction of our civilization expects her, caressingly and contemptuously, to become in the active, while it is exacted of hero Comedy of Clowns!—that in the passive she be a rockfortress impregnable, not to speak of magically encircled. She must also have her feelings; she must not be an unnatural creature. And she must have a sufficient intelligence; for her stupidity does not flatter the possessing man. It is not an organic growth that he desires in his mate, but a happy composition. You see the world which comes of the pair.

This burning Nesta, Victor's daughter, tempered by Nataly's milder blood, was a girl in whom the hard shocks of the knowledge of life, perforce of the hardness upon pure metal, left a strengthening for generous imagination. She did not sit to brood on her injured senses or set them through speculation touching heat; they were taken up and consumed by the fire of her mind. Nor had she leisure for the abhorrences, in a heart all flowing to give aid, and uplift and restore. Self was as urgent in her as in most of the young; but the gift of humour, which had previously diverted it, was now the quick feeling for her sisterhood, through the one piteous example she knew; and broadening it, through her insurgent

Page 3628

abasement on their behalf, which was her scourged pride of sex. She but faintly thought of blaming the men whom her soul besought for justice, for common kindness, to women. There was the danger, that her aroused young ignorance would charge the whole of the misery about and abroad upon the stronger of those two: and another danger, that the vision of the facts below the surface would discolour and disorder her views of existence. But she loved, she sprang to, the lighted world; and she had figures of male friends, to which to cling; and they helped in animating glorious historical figures on the world's library-shelves or under yet palpitating earth. Promise of a steady balance of her nature, too, was shown in the absence of any irritable urgency to be doing, when her bosom bled to help. Beyond the resolve, that she would not abandon the woman who had made confession to her, she formed no conscious resolutions. Far ahead down her journey of the years to come, she did see muffled things she might hope and would strive to do. They were chrysalis shapes. Above all, she flew her blind quickened heart on the wings of an imaginative force; and those of the young who can do that, are in their blood incorruptible by dark knowledge, irradiated under darkness in the mind. Let but the throb be kept for others. That is the one secret, for redemption; if not for preservation.

Victor descended on his marine London to embrace his girl, full of regrets at Fredi's absence from the great whirl 'overhead,' as places of multitudinous assembly, where he shone, always appeared to him. But it was not to last long; she would soon be on the surface again! At the first clasp of her, he chirped some bars of her song. He challenged her to duet before the good ladies, and she kindled, she was caught up by his gaiety, wondering at herself; faintly aware of her not being spontaneous. And she made her father laugh, just in the old way; and looked at herself in his laughter, with the thought, that she could not have become so changed; by which the girl was helped to jump to her humour. Victor turned his full front to Dorothea and Virginia, one sunny beam of delight and although it was Mr. Stuart Rem who was naughty Nesta's victim, and although it seemed a trespass on her part to speak in such a manner of a clerical gentleman, they were seized; they were the opposite partners of a laughing quadrille, lasting till they were tired out.

Victor had asked his girl, if she sang on a Sunday. The ladies remembered, that she had put the question for permission to Mr. Stuart Rem, who was opposed to secular singing.

'And what did he say?' said Victor.

Nesta shook her head: 'It was not what he said, papa; it was his look. His duty compelled him, though he loves music. He had the look of a Patriarch putting his handmaiden away into the desert.'

Dorothea and Virginia, in spite of protests within, laughed to streams. They recollected the look; she had given the portrait of Mr. Stuart Rem in the act of repudiating secular song.

Page 3629

’Victor conjured up a day when this darling Fredi, a child, stood before a famous picture in the Brera, at Milan; when he and her mother noticed the child’s very studious graveness; and they had talked of it; he remarking, that she disapproved of the Patriarch; and Nataly, that she was taken with Hagar’s face.

He seemed surprised at her not having heard from Dudley.

‘How is that?’ said he.

‘Most probably because he has not written, papa.’

He paused after the cool reply. She had no mournful gaze at all; but in the depths of the clear eyes he knew so well, there was a coil of something animate, whatever it might be. And twice she drew a heavy breath.

He mentioned it in London. Nataly telegraphed at night for her girl to meet her next day at Dartrey’s hotel.

Their meeting was incomprehensibly joyless to the hearts of each, though it was desired, and had long been desired, and mother was mother, daughter daughter, without diminution of love between them. They held hands, they kissed and clasped, they showered their tender phrases with full warm truth, and looked into eyes and surely saw one another. But the heart of each was in a battle of its own, taking wounds or crying for supports. Whether to speak to her girl at once, despite the now vehement contrary counsel of Victor, was Nataly’s deliberation, under the thought of the young creature’s perplexity in not seeing her at the house of the Duvidney ladies: while Nesta conjured in a flash the past impressions of her mother’s shrinking distaste from any such hectic themes as this which burdened and absorbed her; and she was almost joining to it, through sympathy with any thought or feeling of one in whom she had such pride; she had the shudder of revulsion. Further, Nataly put on, rather cravenly an air, of distress, or she half designingly permitted her trouble to be seen, by way of affecting her girl’s recollection when the confession was to come, that Nesta might then understand her to have been restrained from speaking, not evasive of her duty. The look was interpreted by Nesta as belonging to the social annoyances dating, in her calendar, from Creckholt, apprehensively dreaded at Lakelands. She hinted asking, and her mother nodded; not untruthfully; but she put on a briskness after the nod; and a doubt was driven into Nesta’s bosom.

Her dear Skepsey was coming down to her for a holiday, she was glad to hear. Of Dudley, there was no word. Nataly shunned his name, with a superstitious dread lest any mention of him should renew pretensions that she hoped, and now supposed, were quite withdrawn. So she had told poor Mr. Barmby only yesterday, at his humble request to know. He had seen Dudley on the pantiles, walking with a young lady, he said. And ’he feared,’ he said; using, a pardonable commonplace of deceit. Her

compassion accounted for the ‘fear’ which was the wish, and caused her not to think it particularly strange, that he should imagine Dudley to have quitted the field. Now that a disengaged Dartrey Fenellan was at hand, poor Mr. Barmby could have no chance.

Page 3630

Dartrey came to her room by appointment. She wanted to see him alone, and he informed her, that Mrs. Blathenoy was in the hotel, and would certainly receive and amuse Nesta for any length of time.

'I will take her up,' said Nataly, and rose, and she sat immediately, and fluttered a hand at her breast. She laughed: 'Perhaps I'm tired!'

Dartrey took Nesta.

He returned, saying: 'There's a lift in the hotel. Do the stairs affect you at all?'

She fenced his sharp look. 'Laziness, I fancy; age is coming on. How is it Mrs. Blathenoy is here?'

'Well! how?' 'Foolish curiosity?' 'I think I have made her of service. I did not bring the lady here.' 'Of service to whom?' 'Why, to Victor!' 'Has Victor commissioned you?' 'You can bear to hear it. Her husband knows the story. He has a grudge . . . commercial reasons. I fancy it is, that Victor stood against his paper at the table of the Bank. Blathenoy vowed blow for blow. But I think the little woman holds him in. She says she does.' 'Victor prompted you?' 'It occurred as it occurred.' 'She does it for love of us?—-Oh! I can't trifle. Dartrey!' 'Tell me.' 'First, you haven't let me know what you think of my Nesta.' 'She's a dear good girl.' 'Not so interesting to you as a flighty little woman!' 'She has a speck of some sort on her mind.' Nataly spied at Dudley's behaviour, and said: 'That will wear away. Is Mr. Blathenoy much here?' 'As often as he can come, I believe.' 'That is . . . ?' 'I have seen him twice.' 'His wife remains?' 'Fixed here for the season.' 'My friend!' 'No harm, no harm!' 'But-to her!' 'You have my word of honour.' 'Yes: and she is doing you a service, at your request; you occasionally reward her with thanks; and she sees you are a man of honour. Do you not know women?'

Dartrey blew his pooh-pooh on feminine suspicions. 'There's very little left of the Don Amoroso in me. Women don't worship stone figures.'

'They do: like the sea-birds. And what do you say to me, Dartrey?—I can confess it: I am one of them: I love you. When last you left England, I kissed your hand. It was because of your manly heart in that stone figure. I kept from crying: you used to scorn us English for the "whimpering fits" you said we enjoy and must have in books, if we can't get them up for ourselves. I could have prayed to have you as brother or son. I love my Victor the better for his love of you. Oh!—poor soul—how he is perverted since that building of Lakelands! He cannot take soundings of the things he does. Formerly he confided in me, in all things: now not one;—I am the chief person to deceive. If only he had waited! We are in a network of intrigues and schemes, every artifice in London —tempting one to hate simple worthy people, who naturally have their views, and see me an impostor, and tolerate me, fascinated by him:—or bribed—it has to be said. There are ways of bribeing. I trust

Page 3631

he may not have in the end to pay too heavily for succeeding. He seems a man pushed by Destiny; not irresponsible, but less responsible than most. He is desperately tempted by his never failing. Whatever he does! . . it is true! And it sets me thinking of those who have never had an ailment, up to a certain age, when the killing blow comes. Latterly I have seen into him: I never did before. Had I been stronger, I might have saved, or averted . . . . But, you will say, the stronger woman would not have occupied my place. I must have been blind too. I did not see, that his nature shrinks from the thing it calls up. He dreads the exposure he courts—or has to combat with all his powers. It has been a revelation to me of him life as well. Nothing stops him. Now it is Parliament—a vacant London Borough. He counts on a death: Ah! terrible! I have it like a snake's bite night and day.'

Nataly concluded: 'There: it has done me some good to speak. I feel so base.' She breathed heavily.

Dartrey took her hand and bent his lips to it. 'Happy the woman who has not more to speak! How long will Nesta stay here?'

'You will watch over her, Dartrey? She stays-her father wishes—up to—ah! We can hardly be in such extreme peril. He has her doctor, her lawyer, and her butler—a favourite servant—to check, and influence, her: She—you know who it is!—does not, I am now convinced, mean persecution. She was never a mean-minded woman. Oh! I could wish she were. They say she is going. Then I am to be made an "honest woman of." Victor wants Nesta, now that she is away, to stay until . . . You understand. He feels she is safe from any possible kind of harm with those good ladies. And I feel she is the safer for having you near. Otherwise, how I should pray to have you with us! Daily I have to pass through, well, something like the ordeal of the red-hot ploughshares —and without the innocence, dear friend! But it's best that my girl should not have to be doing the same; though she would have the innocence. But she writhes under any shadow of a blot. And for her to learn the things that are in the world, through her mother's history!—and led to know it by the falling away of friends, or say, acquaintances! However ignorant at present, she learns from a mere nothing. I dread! . . . . In a moment, she is a blaze of light. There have been occurrences. Only Victor could have overcome them! I had to think it better for my girl, that she was absent. We are in such a whirl up there! So I work round again to "how long?" and the picture of myself counting the breaths of a dying woman. The other day I was told I was envied!'

'Battle, battle, battle; for all of us, in every position!' said Dartrey sharply, to clip a softness: 'except when one's attending on an invalid uncle. Then it's peace; rather like extinction. And I can't be crying for the end either. I bite my moustache and tap foot on the floor, out of his hearing; make believe I'm patient. Now I 'll fetch Nesta.'

Page 3632

Mrs. Blathenoy came down with an arm on Nesta's shoulder. She held a telegram, and said to Nataly—

'What can this mean? It's from my husband; he puts "Jacob": my husband's Christian name:—so like my husband, where there's no concealment! There—he says:

"Down to-night else pack ready start to-morrow." Can it signify, affairs are bad with my husband in the city?'

It had that signification to Nataly's understanding. At the same time, the pretty little woman's absurd lisping repetition of 'my husband' did not seem without design to inflict the wound it caused.

In reality, it was not malicious; it came of the bewitchment of a silly tongue by her knowledge of the secret to be controlled: and after contrasting her fortunes with Nataly's, on her way downstairs, she had comforted herself by saying, that at least she had a husband. She was not aware that she dealt a hurt until she had found a small consolation in the indulgence: for Captain Dartrey Fenellan admired this commanding figure of a woman, who could not legally say that which the woman he admired less, if at all, legally could say.

'I must leave you to interpret,' Nataly remarked.

Mrs. Blathenoy resented her unbefitting queenly style. For this reason, she abstained from an intended leading up to mention of the 'singular-looking lady' seen riding with Miss Radnor more than once; and as to whom, Miss Radnor (for one gives her the name) had not just now, when questioned, spoken very clearly. So the mother's alarms were not raised.

And really it was a pity, Mrs. Blathenoy said to Dartrey subsequently; finding him colder than before Mrs. Radnor's visit; it was a pity, because a young woman in Miss Radnor's position should not by any possibility be seen in association with a person of commonly doubtful appearance.

She was denied the petulant satisfaction of rousing the championship bitter to her. Dartrey would not deliver an opinion on Miss Radnor's conduct. He declined, moreover, to assist in elucidating the telegram by 'looking here,' and poring over the lines beside a bloomy cheek. He was petulantly whipped on the arm with her glove, and pouted at. And it was then—and then only or chiefly through Nataly's recent allusion—that the man of honour had his quakings in view of the quagmire, where he was planted on an exceedingly narrow causeway, not of the firmest. For she was a pretty little woman, one of the prize gifts of the present education of women to the men who are for having them quiescent domestic patterns; and her artificial ingenuousness or candid frivolities came to her by nature to kindle the nature of the gentleman on the other bank of the stream,

and witch him to the plunge, so greatly mutually regretted after taken: an old duet to the moon.

Page 3633

Dartrey escaped to the Club, where he had a friend. The friend was Colonel Sudley, one of the modern studious officers, not in good esteem with the authorities. He had not forgiven Dartrey for the intemperateness which cut off a brilliant soldier from the service. He was reduced to acknowledge, however, that there was a sparkling defence for him to reply with, in the shape of a fortune gained and where we have a Society forcing us to live up to an expensive level, very trying to a soldier's income, a fortune gained will offer excuses for misconduct short of disloyal or illegal. They talked of the state of the Army: we are moving. True, and at the last Review, the 'march past' was performed before a mounted generalissimo profoundly asleep, head on breast. Our English military 'moving' may now be likened to Somnolency on Horseback. 'Oh, come, no rancour,' said the colonel; 'you know he's a kind old boy at heart; nowhere a more affectionate man alive!'

'So the sycophants are sure of posts!'

'Come, I say! He's devoted to the Service.'

'Invalid him, and he shall have a good epitaph.'

'He's not so responsible as the taxpayer.'

'There you touch home. Mother Goose can't imagine the need for defence until a hand's at her feathers.'

'What about her shrieks now and then?'

'Indigestion of a surfeit?'

They were in a laughing wrangle when two acquaintances of the colonel's came near. One of them recognized Dartrey. He changed a prickly subject to one that is generally as acceptable to the servants of Mars. His companion said: 'Who is the girl out with Judith Marsett?' He flavoured eulogies of the girl's good looks in easy garrison English. She was praised for sitting her horse well. One had met her on the parade, in the afternoon, walking with Mrs. Marsett. Colonel Sudley had seen them on horseback. He remarked to Dartrey:

'And by the way, you're a clean stretch ahead of us. I've seen you go by these windows, with the young lady on one side, and a rather pretty woman on the other too.'

'Nothing is unseen in this town!' Dartrey rejoined.

Strolling to his quarters along the breezy parade at night, he proposed to himself, that he would breathe an immediate caution to Nesta. How had she come to know this Mrs. Marsett? But he was more seriously thinking of what Colney Durance called 'The Mustard Plaster'; the satirist's phrase for warm relations with a married fair one: and

Dartrey, clear of any design to have it at his breast, was beginning to take intimations of pricks and burns. They are an almost positive cure of inflammatory internal conditions. They were really hard on him, who had none to be cured.

The hour was nigh midnight. As he entered his hotel, the porter ran off to the desk in his box, and brought him a note, saying, that a lady had left it at half-past nine. Left it? —Then the lady could not be the alarming lady. He was relieved. The words of the letter were cabalistic; these, beneath underlined address:

Page 3634

'I beg you to call on me, if I do not see you this evening. It is urgent; you will excuse me when I explain. Not late to-morrow. I am sure you will not fail to come. I could write what would be certain to bring you. I dare not trust any names to paper.'

The signature was, Judith Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXI

Shows how the squires in A *conqueror's service have at times to do knightly conquest of themselves*

By the very earliest of the trains shot away to light and briny air from London's November gloom, which knows the morning through increase of gasjets, little Skepsey was hurried over suburban chimneys, in his friendly third-class carriage; where we have reminders of ancient pastoral times peculiar to our country, as it may chance; but where a man may speak to his neighbour right off without being deemed offensive. That is homely. A social fellow knitting closely to his fellows when he meets them, enjoys it, even at the cost of uncushioned seats he can, if imps are in him, merryandrew as much as he pleases; detested punctilio does not reign there; he can proselytize for the soul's welfare; decry or uphold the national drink; advertize a commercial Firm deriving prosperity from the favour of the multitude; exhort to patriotism. All is accepted. Politeness is the rule, according to Skepsey's experience of the Southern part of the third-class kingdom. And it is as well to mark the divisions, for the better knowledge of our countrymen. The North requires volumes to itself.

The hard-grained old pirate-stock Northward has built the land, and is to the front when we are at our epic work. Meanwhile it gets us a blowzy character, by shouldering roughly among the children of civilization. Skepsey, journeying one late afternoon up a Kentish line, had, in both senses of the word, encountered a long-limbed navvy; an intoxicated, he was compelled by his manly modesty to desire to think; whose loathly talk, forced upon the hearing of a decent old woman opposite him, passed baboonish behaviour; so much so, that Skepsey civilly intervened; subsequently inviting him to leave the carriage and receive a lesson at the station they were nearing. Upon his promising faithfully, that it should be a true and telling lesson, the navvy requested this pygmy spark to flick his cheek, merely to show he meant war in due sincerity; and he as faithfully, all honour, promising not to let it bring about a breakage of the laws of the Company, Skepsey promptly did the deed. So they went forth.

Skepsey alluded to the incident, for an example of the lamentable deficiency in science betrayed by most of our strong men when put to it; and the bitter thought, that he could count well nigh to a certainty on the total absence of science in the long-armed navvy, whose fist on his nose might have been as the magnet of a pin, was chief among his reminiscences after the bout, destroying pleasure for the lover of Old England's might.

One blow would have sent Skepsey travelling. He was not seriously struck once. They parted, shaking hands; the navvy confessing himself to have ‘drunk a drop’; and that perhaps accounted for his having been ‘topped by a dot on him.’

Page 3635

He declined to make oath never to repeat his offence; but said, sending his vanquisher to the deuce, with an amicable push at his shoulder, ‘Damned if I ever forget five foot five stretched six foot flat!’

Skepsey counted his feet some small amount higher; but our hearty rovers’ sons have their ballad moods when giving or taking a thrashing. One of the third-class passengers, a lad of twenty, became Skepsey’s pupil, and turned out clever with the gloves, and was persuaded to enter the militia, and grew soon to be a corporal. Thus there was profit of the affair, though the navvy sank out of sight. Let us hope and pray he will not insult the hearing of females again. If only females knew how necessary it is, for their sakes, to be able to give a lesson now and then! Ladies are positively opposed. And Judges too, who dress so like them. The manhood of our country is kept down, in consequence. Mr. Durance was right, when he said something about the state of war being wanted to weld our races together: and yet we are always praying for the state of peace, which causes cracks and gaps among us! Was that what he meant by illogical? It seemed to Skepsey—oddly, considering his inferior estimate of the value of the fair sex—that a young woman with whom he had recently made acquaintance; and who was in Brighton now, upon missionary work; a member of the ‘Army,’ an officer of advancing rank, Matilda Pridden, by name; was nearer to the secret of the right course of conduct for individual citizens and the entire country than any gentleman he knew.

Yes, nearer to it than his master was! Thinking of Mr. Victor Radnor, Skepsey fetched a sigh. He had knocked at his master’s door at the office one day, and imagining the call to enter, had done so, and had seen a thing he could not expunge. Lady Grace Halley was there. From matters he gathered, Skepsey guessed her to be working for his master among the great folks, as he did with Jarniman, and Mr. Fenellan with Mr. Carling. But is it usual; he asked himself—his natural veneration framing the rebuke to his master thus—to repay the services of a lady so warmly?—We have all of us an ermined owl within us to sit in judgement of our superiors as well as our equals; and the little man, notwithstanding a servant’s bounden submissiveness, was forced to hear the judicial pronouncement upon his master’s behaviour. His master had, at the same time, been saying most weighty kind words more and more of late: one thing:—that, if he gave all he had to his fellows, and did all he could, he should still be in their debt. And he was a very wealthy gentleman. What are we to think? The ways of our superiors are wonderful. We do them homage: still we feel, we painfully feel, we are beginning to worship elsewhere. It is the pain of a detachment of the very roots of our sea-weed heart from a rock. Mr. Victor Radnor was an honour to his country. Skepsey did not place the name of Matilda Pridden beside it or in

Page 3636

any way compare two such entirely different persons. At the same time and most earnestly, while dreading to hear, he desired to have Matilda Pridden's opinion of the case distressing him. He never could hear it, because he could never be allowed to expound the case to her. Skepsey sighed again: he as much as uttered: Oh, if we had a few thousands like her!—But what if we do have them? They won't marry! There they are, all that the country requires in wives and mothers; and like Miss Priscilla Graves, they won't marry!

He looked through sad thoughts across the benches of the compartments to the farther end of the carriage, where sat the Rev. Septimus Barmby, looking at him through a meditation as obscure if not so mournful. Few are the third-class passengers outward at that early hour in the winter season, and Skepsey's gymnastics to get beside the Rev. Septimus were unimpeded; though a tight-packed carriage of us poor journaliers would not have obstructed them with as much as a sneer. Mr. Barmby and Skepsey greeted. The latter said, he had a holiday, to pay a visit to Miss Nesta. The former said, he hoped he should see Miss Nesta. Skepsey then rapidly brought the conversation to a point where Matilda Pridden was comprised. He discoursed of the 'Army' and her position in the Army, giving instances of her bravery, the devotion shown by her to the cause of morality, in all its forms. Mr. Barmby had his fortunes on his hands at the moment, he could not lend an attentive ear; and he disliked this Army, the title it had taken, and the mixing of women and men in its ranks; not to speak of a presumption in its proceedings, and the public marching and singing. Moreover, he enjoyed his one or two permissible glasses: he doubted that the Chiefs of the Army had common benevolence for the inoffensive pipe. But the cause of morality was precious to him; morality and a fit of softness, and the union of the happiest contrast of voices, had set him for a short while, before the dawn of Nesta's day, hankering after Priscilla Graves. Skepsey's narrative of Matilda Pridden's work down at the East of London; was effective; it had the ring to thrill a responsive chord in Mr. Barmby, who mused on London's East, and martyrly service there. His present expectations were of a very different sort; but a beautiful bride, bringing us wealth, is no misleading beam, if we direct the riches rightly. Septimus, a solitary minister in those grisly haunts of the misery breeding vice, must needs accomplish less than a Septimus the husband of one of England's chief heiresses:—only not the most brilliant, owing to circumstances known to the Rev. Groseman Buttermore: strangely, and opportunely, revealed: for her exceeding benefit, it may be hoped. She is no longer the ignorant girl, to reject the protecting hand of one whose cloth is the best of cloaking. A glance at Dudley Sowerby's defection, assures our worldly wisdom too, that now is the time to sue.

Page 3637

Several times while Mr. Barmby made thus his pudding of the desires of the flesh and the spirit, Skepsey's tales of Matilda Pridden's heroism caught his attention. He liked her deeds; he disliked the position in which the young woman placed herself to perform them; and he said so. Women are to be women, he said.

Skepsey agreed: 'If we could get men to do the work, sir!'

Mr. Barmby was launching forth: Plenty of men!—His mouth was blocked by the reflection, that we count the men on our fingers; often are we, as it were, an episcopal thumb surveying scarce that number of followers! He diverged to censure of the marchings and the street-singing: the impediment to traffic, the annoyance to a finely musical ear. He disapproved altogether of Matilda Pridden's military display, pronouncing her to be, 'Doubtless a worthy young person.'

'Her age is twenty-seven,' said Skepsey, spying at the number of his own.

'You have known her long?' Mr. Barmby asked.

'Not long, sir. She has gone through trouble. She believes very strongly in the will:—If I will this, if I will that, and it is the right will, not wickedness, it is done—as good as done; and force is quite superfluous. In her sermons, she exhorts to prayer before action.'

'Preaches?'

'She moves a large assembly, sir.'

'It would seem, that England is becoming Americanized!' exclaimed the Conservative in Mr. Barmby. Almost he groaned; and his gaze was fish-like in vacancy, on hearing the little man speak of the present intrepid forwardness of the sex to be publicly doing. It is for men the most indigestible fact of our century: one that—by contrast throws an overearthly holiness on our decorous dutiful mothers, who contentedly worked below the surface while men unremittingly attended to their interests above.

Skepsey drew forth a paper-covered shilling-book: a translation from the French, under a yelling title of savage hate of Old England and cannibal glee at her doom. Mr. Barmby dropped his eyelashes on it, without comment; nor did he reply to Skepsey's forlorn remark: 'We let them think they could do it!'

Behold the downs. Breakfast is behind them. Miss Radnor likewise: if the poor child has a name. We propose to supply the deficiency. She does not declare war upon tobacco. She has a cultured and a beautiful voice. We abstain from enlargeing on the charms of her person. She has resources, which representatives of a rival creed would plot to secure.

’Skepsey, you have your quarters at the house of Miss Radnor’s relatives?’ said Mr. Barmby, as they emerged from tunnelled chalk.

‘Mention, that I think of calling in the course of the day.’

A biscuit had been their breakfast without a name.

Page 3638

They parted at the station, roused by the smell of salt to bestow a more legitimate title on the day's restorative beginning. Down the hill, along by the shops, and Skepsey, in sight of Miss Nesta's terrace, considered it still an early hour for a visitor; so, to have the sea about him, he paid pier-money, and hurried against the briny wings of a South-wester; green waves, curls of foam, flecks of silver, under low-flying grey-dark cloud-curtains shaken to a rift, where at one shot the sun had a line of Nereids nodding, laughing, sparkling to him. Skepsey enjoyed it, at the back of thoughts military and naval. Visible sea, this girdle of Britain, inspired him to exultations in reverence. He wished Mr. Durance could behold it now and have such a breastful. He was wishing he knew a song of Britain and sea, rather fancying Mr. Durance to be in some way a bar to patriotic poetical recollection, when he saw his Captain Dartrey mounting steps out of an iron anatomy of the pier, and looking like a razor off a strap.

'Why, sir!' cried Skepsey.

'Just a plunge and a dozen strokes,' Dartrey said; 'and you'll come to my hotel and give me ten minutes of the "recreation"; and if you don't come willingly, I shall insult your country.'

'Ah! I wish Mr. Durance were here,' Skepsey rejoined.

'It would upset his bumboat of epigrams. He rises at ten o'clock to a queasy breakfast by candlelight, and proceeds to composition. His picture of the country is a portrait of himself by the artist.'

'But, sir, Captain Dartrey, you don't think as Mr. Durance does of England!'

'There are lots to flatter her, Skepsey! A drilling can't do her harm. You're down to see Miss Nesta. Ladies don't receive quite so early. And have you breakfasted? Come on with me quick.' Dartrey led him on, saying: 'You have an eye at my stick. It was a legacy to me, by word of mouth, from a seaman of a ship I sailed in, who thought I had done him a service; and he died after all. He fell overboard drunk. He perished of the villain stuff. One of his messmates handed me the stick in Cape Town, sworn to deliver it. A good knot to grasp; and it 's flexible and strong; stick or rattan, whichever you please; it gives point or caresses the shoulder; there's no break in it, whack as you may. They call it a Demerara supple-jack. I'll leave it to you.'

Skepsey declared his intention to be the first to depart. He tried the temper of the stick, bent it a bit, and admired the prompt straightening.

'It would give a good blow, sir.'

'Does its business without braining.'

Page 3639

Perhaps for the reason, that it was not a handsome instrument for display on fashionable promenades, Dartrey chose it among his collection by preference; as ugly dogs of a known fidelity are chosen for companions. The Demerara supple-jack surpasses bull-dogs in its fashion of assisting the master; for when once at it, the clownish-looking thing reflects upon him creditably, by developing a refined courtliness of style, while in no way showing a diminution of jolly ardour for the fray. It will deal you the stroke of a bludgeon with the playfulness of a cane. It bears resemblance to those accomplished natural actors, who conversationally present a dramatic situation in two or three spontaneous flourishes, and are themselves again, men of the world, the next minute.

Skepsey handed it back. He spoke of a new French rifle. He mentioned, in the form of query for no answer, the translation of the barking little volume he had shown to Mr. Barmby: he slapped at his breast-pocket, where it was. Not a ship was on the sea-line; and he seemed to deplore that vacancy.

‘But it tells both ways,’ Dartrey said. ’We don’t want to be hectoring in the Channel. All we want, is to be sure of our power, so as not to go hunting and fawning for alliances. Up along that terrace Miss Nesta lives. Brighton would be a choice place for a landing.’

Skepsey temporized, to get his national defences, by pleading the country’s love of peace.

’Then you give-up your portion of the gains of war—an awful disgorgement,’ said Dartrey. ’If you are really for peace, you toss all your spare bones to the war-dogs. Otherwise, Quakerly preaching is taken for hypocrisy.’

’I ‘m afraid we are illogical, sir,’ said Skepsey, adopting one of the charges of Mr. Durance, to elude the abominable word.

‘In you run, my friend.’ Dartrey sped him up the steps of the hotel.

A little note lay on his breakfast-table. His invalid uncle’s valet gave the morning’s report of the night.

The note was from Mrs. Blathenoy: she begged Captain Dartrey, in double underlinings of her brief words, to mount the stairs. He debated, and he went.

She was excited, and showed a bosom compressed to explode: she had been weeping. ’My husband is off. He bids me follow him. What would you have me do?’

‘Go.’

‘You don’t care what may happen to your friends, the Radnors?’

‘Not at the cost of your separation from your husband.’

‘You have seen him!’

‘Be serious.’

’Oh, you cold creature! You know—you see: I can’t conceal. And you tell me to go. “Go!” Gracious heavens! I’ve no claim on you; I haven’t been able to do much; I would have—never mind! believe me or not. And now I’m to go: on the spot, I suppose. You’ve seen the man I ’m to go to, too. I would bear it, if it were not away from . . . out of sight of I’m a fool of a woman, I know. There’s frankness for you! and I could declare you’re saying “impudence” in your heart—or what you have for one. Have you one?’

Page 3640

’My dear soul, it ‘s a flint. So just think of your duty.’ Dartrey played the horrid part of executioner with some skill.

Her bosom sprang to descend into abysses.

’And never a greater fool than when I sent for you to see such a face as I’m showing!’ she cried, with lips that twitched and fingers that plucked at her belt. ’But you might feel my hatred of being tied to—dragged about over the Continent by that . . . perhaps you think a woman is not sensible of vulgarity in her husband! I ’m bothering you? I don’t say I have the slightest claim. You never made love to me, never! Never so much as pressed my hand or looked. Others have—as much as I let them. And before I saw you, I had not an idea of another man but that man. So you advise me to go?’

‘There’s no other course.’

’No other course. I don’t see one. What have I been dreaming of! Usually a woman feeling . . .’ she struck at her breast, ’has had a soft word in her ear. “Go!” I don’t blame you, Captain Dartrey. At least, you ’re not the man to punish a woman for stripping herself, as I ’ve done. I call myself a fool—I’m a lunatic. Trust me with your hand.’

‘There you are.’

She grasped the hand, and shut her eyes to make a long age of the holding on to him. ’Oh, you dear dear fellow!—don’t think me unwomanly; I must tell you now: I am naked and can’t disguise. I see you are ice—feel: and if you were different, I might be. You won’t be hurt by hearing you’ve made yourself dear to me—without meaning to, I know! It began that day at Lakelands; I fell in love with you the very first minute I set eyes on you! There’s a confession for a woman to make! and a married woman! I’m married, and I no more feel allegiance, as they call it, than if there never had been a ceremony and no Jacob Blathenoy was in existence. And why I should go to him! But you shan’t be troubled. I did not begin to live, as a woman, before I met you. I can speak all this to you because—we women can’t be deceived in that—you are one of the men who can be counted on for a friend.’

‘I hope so,’ Dartrey said, and his mouth hardened as nature’s electricity shot sparks into him from the touch and rocked him.

‘No, not yet: I will soon let it drop,’ said she, and she was just then thrillingly pretty; she caressed the hand, placing it at her throat and moving her chin on it, as women fondle birds. ’I am positively to go, then?’

‘Positively, you are to go; and it’s my command.’

‘Not in love with any one at all?’

‘Not with a soul.’

‘Not with a woman?’

‘With no woman.’

‘Nor maid?’

‘No! and no to everything. And an end to the catechism!’

‘It is really a flint that beats here?’ she said, and with a shyness in adventurousness, she struck the point of her forefinger on the rib. ’Fancy me in love with a flint! And running to be dutiful to a Jacob Blathenoy, at my flint’s command. I’m half in love with doing what I hate, because this cold thing here bids me do it. I believe I married for money, and now it looks as if I were to have my bargain with poverty to bless it.’

Page 3641

‘There I may help,’ said Dartrey, relieved at sight of a loophole, to spring to some initiative out of the paralysis cast on him by a pretty little woman’s rending of her veil. A man of honour alone with a woman who has tossed concealment to the winds, is a riddled target indeed: he is tempted to the peril of cajoleing, that he may escape from the torment and the ridicule; he is tempted to sigh for the gallant spirit of his naughty adolescence. ’Come to me—will you?—apply to me, if there’s ever any need. I happen to have money. And forgive me for naming it.’

She groaned: ’Don’t! I’m, sure, and I thought it from the first, you’re one of the good men, and the woman who meets you is lucky, and wretched, and so she ought to be! Only to you should I! . . . do believe that! I won’t speak of what excuses I’ve got. You’ve seen.’

’Don’t think of them: there’ll be danger in it.

‘Shall you think of me in danger?’

’Silly, silly! Don’t you see you have to do with a flint! I’ve gone through fire. And if I were in love with you, I should start you off to your husband this blessed day.’

‘And you’re not the slightest wee wee bit in love with me!’

’Perfectly true; but I like you; and if we’re to be hand in hand, in the time to come, you must walk firm at present.’

‘I’m to go to-day?’

‘You are.’

‘Without again.’

The riddled target kicked. Dartrey contrasted Jacob Blathenoy with the fair wife, and commiseratingly exonerated her; he lashed at himself for continuing to be in this absurdest of postures, and not absolutely secure for all that. His head shook. ‘Friends, you’ll find best.’

‘Well!’ she sighed, ’I feel I’m doomed to go famished through life. There’s never to be such a thing as, love, for me! I can’t tell you no woman could: though you’ll say I’ve told enough. I shall burn with shame when I think of it. I could go on my knees to have your arms round me once. I could kill myself for saying it!—I should feel that I had one moment of real life.—I know I ought to admire you. They say a woman hates if she’s refused. I can’t: I wish I were able to. I could have helped the Radnors better by staying here and threatening never to go to him unless he swore not to do them injury. He’s revengeful. Just as you like. You say “Go,” and I go. There. I may kiss your hand?’

‘Give me yours.’

Dartrey kissed the hand. She kissed the mark of his lips. He got himself away, by promising to see her to the train for Paris. Outside her door, he was met by the reflection, coming as a thing external, that he might veraciously and successfully have pleaded a passionate hunger for breakfast: nay, that he would have done so, if he had been downright in earnest. For she had the prettiness to cast a spell; a certain curve at the lips, a fluttering droop of the eyelids, a corner of the eye, that led

Page 3642

long distances away to forests and nests. This little woman had the rosy-peeping June bud's plumpness. What of the man who refused to kiss her once? Cold antecedent immersion had to be thanked; and stringent vacuity; perhaps a spotting ogre-image of her possessor. Some sense of right-doing also, we hope. Dartrey angrily attributed his good conduct to the lowest motives. He went so far as to accuse himself of having forborne to speak of breakfast, from a sort of fascinated respect for the pitch of a situation that he despised and detested. Then again, when beginning to eat, his good conduct drew on him a chorus of the jeers of all the martial comrades he had known. But he owned he would have had less excuse than they, had he taken advantage of a woman's inability, at a weak moment, to protect herself: or rather, if he had not behaved in a manner to protect her from herself. He thought of his buried wife, and the noble in the base of that poor soul; needing constantly a present helper, for the nobler to conquer. Be true man with a woman, she must be viler than the devil has yet made one, if she does not follow a strong right lead:—but be patient, of course. And the word patience here means more than most men contain. Certainly a man like Jacob Blathenoy was a mouthful for any woman: and he had bought his wife, he deserved no pity. Not? Probably not. That view, however, is unwholesome and opens on slides. Pity of his wife, too, gets to be fervidly active with her portrait, fetches her breath about us. As for condemnation of the poor little woman, her case was not unexampled, though the sudden flare of it startled rather. Mrs. Victor could read men and women closely. Yes, and Victor, when he schemed—but Dartrey declined to be throwing blame right or left. More than by his breakfast, and in a preferable direction, he was refreshed by Skepsey's narrative of the deeds of Matilda Pridden.

'The right sort of girl for you to know, Skepsey,' he said. 'The best in life is a good woman.'

Skepsey exhibited his book of the Gallic howl.

'They have their fits now and then, and they're soon over and forgotten,' Dartrey said. 'The worst of it is, that we remember.'

After the morning's visit to his uncle, he peered at half a dozen sticks in the corner of the room, grasped their handles, and selected the Demerara supple-jack, for no particular reason; the curved knot was easy to the grasp. It was in his mind, that this person signing herself Judith Marsett, might have something to say, which intimately concerned Nesta. He fell to brooding on it, until he wondered why he had not been made a trifle anxious by the reading of the note overnight. Skepsey was left at Nesta's house.

Dartrey found himself expected by the servant waiting on Mrs. Marsett.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHOWS HOW TEMPER MAY KINDLE TEMPER AND AN INDIGNANT WOMAN GET HER WEAPON

Page 3643

Judith Marsett stood in her room to receive Nesta's hero. She was flushed, and had thinned her lips for utterance of a desperate thing, after the first severe formalities.

Her aim was to preserve an impressive decorum. She was at the same time burning to speak out furious wrath, in words of savage rawness, if they should come, as a manner of slapping the world's cheek for the state to which it reduces its women; whom one of the superior creatures can insult, and laugh.

Men complaining of the 'peace which is near their extinction,' have but to shuffle with the sex; they will experience as remarkable a change as if they had passed off land on to sea.

Dartrey had some flitting notion of the untamed original elements women can bring about us, in his short observant bow to Mrs. Marsett, following so closely upon the scene with Mrs. Blathenoy.

But this handsome woman's look of the dull red line of a sombre fire, that needed only stir of a breath to shoot the blaze, did not at all alarm him. He felt refreshingly strung by it.

She was discerned at a glance to be an aristocratic member of regions where the senses perpetually simmer when they are not boiling. The talk at the Club recurred to him. How could Nesta have come to know the woman? His questioning of the chapter of marvellous accidents, touched Nesta simply, as a young girl to be protected, without abhorrently involving the woman. He had his ideas of the Spirit of Woman stating her case to the One Judge, for lack of an earthly just one: a story different from that which is proclaimed pestilential by the body of censors under conservatory glass; where flesh is delicately nurtured, highly prized; spirit not so much so; and where the pretty tricking of the flesh is taken for a spiritual ascendancy.

In spite of her turbulent breast's burden to deliver, Mrs. Marsett's feminine acuteness was alive upon Dartrey, confirming here and there Nesta's praises of him. She liked his build and easy carriage of a muscular frame: her Ned was a heavy man. More than Dartrey's figure, as she would have said, though the estimate came second, she liked his manner with her. Not a doubt was there, that he read her position. She could impose upon some: not upon masculine eyes like these. They did not scrutinize, nor ruffle a smooth surface with a snap at petty impressions; and they were not cynically intimate or dominating or tentatively amorous: clear good fellowship was in them. And it was a blessedness (whatever might be her feeling later, when she came to thank him at heart) to be in the presence of a man whose appearance breathed of offering her common ground, whereon to meet and speak together, unburdened by the hunting world, and by the stoneing world. Such common ground seems a kind of celestial to the better order of those excluded from it.

Dartrey relieved her midway in a rigid practice of the formalities: 'I think I may guess that you have something to tell me relating to Miss Radnor?'

Page 3644

‘It is.’ Mrs. Marsett gathered up for an immediate plunge, and deferred it. ’I met her—-we went out with the riding-master. She took to me. I like her—I could say’ (the woman’s voice dropped dead low, in a tremble), ’I love her. She is young: I could kneel to her. Do you know a Major Worrell?’

‘Worrell? no.’

’He is a-calls himself a friend of my—of Captain Marsett’s. He met us out one day.’

‘He permitted himself to speak to Miss Radnor?’

She rejoiced in Dartrey’s look. ’Not then. First let me tell you. I can hardly tell you. But Miss Radnor tells me you are not like other men. You have made your conclusions already. Are you asking what right I had to be knowing her? It is her goodness. Accident began it; I did not deceive her; as soon as ever I could I—I have Captain Marsett’s promise to me: at present he’s situated, he—but I opened my heart to her: as much as a woman can. It came! Did I do very wrong?’

‘I’m not here to decide: continue, pray.’

Mrs. Marsett aimed at formal speech, and was driving upon her natural in anger. ’I swear I did it for the best. She is an innocent girl . . . young lady: only she has a head; she soon reads things. I saw the kind of cloud in her. I spoke. I felt bound to: she said she would not forsake me.—I was bound to! And it was enough to break my heart, to think of her despising me. No, she forgave, pitied;—she was kind. Those are the angels who cause us to think of changeing. I don’t care for sermons, but when I meet charity: I won’t bore you!’

‘You don’t.’

’My . . . Captain Marsett can’t bear—he calls it Psalmody. He thinks things ought always to be as they are, with women and men; and women preachers he does detest. She is not one to preach. You are waiting to hear what I have to tell. That man Major Worrell has tried to rob me of everything I ever had to set a value on:—love, I ’d say;—-he laughs at a woman like me loving.’

Dartrey nodded, to signify a known sort of fellow.

‘She came here.’ Mrs. Marsett’s tears had risen. ’I ought not to have let her come. I invited her—for once: I am lonely. None of my sex—none I could respect! I meant it for only once. She promised to sing to me. And, Oh! how she sings! You have heard her. My whole heart came out. I declare I believe girls exist who can hear our way of life—and I’m not so bad except compared with that angel, who heard me, and was and is, I could take oath, no worse for it. Some girls can; she is one. I am all for bringing them up in complete innocence. If I was a great lady, my daughters should never know

anything of the world until they were married. But Miss Radnor is a young lady who cannot be hurt. She is above us. Oh! what a treasure for a man!—and my God! for any man born of woman to insult a saint, as she is!—He is a beast!'

'Major Worrell met her here?'

Page 3645

’Blame me as much as you like: I do myself. Half my rage with him is at myself for putting her in the way of such a beast to annoy. Each time she came, I said it was to be the last. I let her see what a mercy from heaven she was to me. She would come. It has not been many times. She wishes me either to . . . Captain Marsett has promised. And nothing seems hard—to me when my own God’s angel is by. She is! I’m not such a bad woman, but I never before I knew her knew the meaning of the word virtue. There is the young lady that man worried with his insulting remarks! though he must have known she was a lady:—because he found her in my rooms.’

‘You were present when, as you say, he insulted her?’

‘I was. Here it commenced; and he would see her downstairs.’

‘You heard?’

‘Of course, I never left her.’

‘Give me a notion . . .’

‘To get her to make an appointment: to let him conduct her home.’

‘She was alone?’

‘Her maid was below.’

‘And this happened . . .?’

’Yesterday, after dark. My Ned—Captain Marsett encourages him to be familiar. I should be the lowest of women if I feared the threats of such a reptile of a man. I could tell you more. I can’t always refuse his visits, though if Ned knew the cur he is! Captain Marsett is easy-going.’

‘I should like to know where he lives.’

She went straight to the mantelpiece, and faced about with a card, handing it, quite aware that it was a charge of powder.

Desperate things to be done excused the desperate said; and especially they seemed a cover to the bald and often spotty language leaping out of her, against her better taste, when her temper was up.

‘Somewhere not very distant,’ said Dartrey perusing. ’Is he in the town to-day, do you know?’

‘I am not sure; he may be. Her name . . .’

‘Have no fear. Ladies’ names are safe.’

‘I am anxious that she may not be insulted again.’

‘Did she show herself conscious of it?’

’She stopped speaking: she looked at the door. She may come again—or never! through that man!’

‘You receive him, at his pleasure?’

’Captain Marsett wishes me to. He is on his way home. He calls Major Worrell my pet spite. All I want is; not to hear of the man. I swear he came yesterday on the chance of seeing—for he forced his way up past my servant; he must have seen Miss Radnor’s maid below.’

‘You don’t mean, that he insulted her hearing?’

‘Oh! Captain Fenellan, you know the style.’

‘Well, I thank you,’ Dartrey said. ’The young lady is the daughter of my dearest friends. She’s one of the precious—you’re quite right. Keep the tears back.’

Page 3646

‘I will.’ She heaved open-mouthed to get physical control of the tide. ’When you say that of her!—how can I help it? It’s I fear, because I fear . . . and I’ve no right to expect ever . . . but if I’m never again to look on that dear face, tell her I shall—I shall pray for her in my grave. Tell her she has done all a woman can, an angel can, to save my soul. I speak truth: my very soul! I could never go to the utter bad after knowing her. I don’t—you know the world—I’m a poor helpless woman!—don’t swear to give up my Ned if he does break the word he promised once; I can’t see how I could. I haven’t her courage. I haven’t—what it is! You know her: it’s in her eyes and her voice. If I had her beside me, then I could starve or go to execution—I could, I am certain. Here I am, going to do what you men hate. Let me sit.’

‘Here’s a chair,’ said Dartrey. ’I’ve no time to spare; good day, for the present. You will permit me to call.’

‘Oh! come’; she cried, out of her sobs, for excuse. They were genuine, or she would better have been able to second her efforts to catch a distinct vision of his retreating figure.

She beheld him, when he was in the street, turn for the district where Major Worrell had his lodgeings. That set her mind moving, and her tears fell no longer.

Major Worrell was not at home. Dartrey was informed that he might be at his Club.

At the Club he heard of the major as having gone to London and being expected down in the afternoon. Colonel Sudley named the train: an early train; the major was engaged to dine at the Club. Dartrey had information supplied to him concerning Major Worrell and Captain Marsett, also Mrs. Marsett. She had a history. Worthy citizens read the description of history with interest when the halo of Royalty is round it. They may, if their reading extends, perceive, that it has been the main turbid stream in old Mammon’s train since he threw his bait for flesh. They might ask, too, whether it is likely to cease to flow while he remains potent. The lady’s history was brief, and bore recital in a Club; came off quite honourably there. Regarding Major Worrell, the tale of him showed him to have a pass among men. He managed cleverly to get his pleasures out of a small income and a ‘fund of anecdote.’ His reputation indicated an anecdotist of the table, prevailing in the primitive societies, where the art of conversing does not come by nature, and is exercised in monosyllabic undertones or grunts until the narrator’s well-masticated popular anecdote loosens a digestive laughter, and some talk ensues. He was Marsett’s friend, and he boasted of not letting Ned Marsett make a fool of himself.

Dartrey was not long in shaping the man’s character: Worrell belonged to the male birds of upper air, who mangle what female prey they are forbidden to devour. And he had Miss Radnor’s name: he had spoken her name at the Club overnight. He had roused a sensation, because of a man being present, Percy Southweare, who was

related to a man as good as engaged to marry her. The major never fell into a quarrel with sons of nobles, if he could help it, or there might have been a pretty one.

Page 3647

So Colonel Sudley said.

Dartrey spoke musing: 'I don't know how he may class me; I have an account to square with him.'

'It won't do in these days, my good friend. Come and cool yourself; and we'll lunch here. I shan't leave you.'

'By all means. We'll lunch, and walk up to the station, and you will point him out to me.'

Dartrey stated Major Worrell's offence. The colonel was not astonished; but evidently he thought less of Worrell's behaviour to Miss Radnor in Mrs. Marsett's presence than of the mention of her name at the Club: and that, he seemed to think, had a shade of excuse against the charge of monstrous. He blamed the young lady who could go twice to visit a Mrs. Marsett; partly exposed a suspicion of her. Dartrey let him talk. They strolled along the parade, and were near the pier.

Suddenly saying: 'There, beside our friend in clerical garb: here she comes; judge if that is the girl for the foulest of curs to worry, no matter where she's found.' Dartrey directed the colonel's attention to Nesta and Mr. Barmby turning off the pier and advancing.

He saluted. She bowed. There was no contraction of her eyelids; and her face was white. The mortal life appeared to be deadened in her cold wide look; as when the storm-wind banks a leaden remoteness, leaving blown space of sky.

The colonel said: 'No, that's not the girl a gentleman would offend.'

'What man!' cried Dartrey. 'If we had a Society for the trial of your gentleman!—but he has only to call himself gentleman to get grant of licence: and your Society protects him. It won't punish, and it won't let you. But you saw her: ask yourself—what man could offend that girl!'

'Still, my friend, she ought to keep clear of the Marsetts.'

'When I meet him, I shall treat him as one out of the law.'

'You lead on to an ultimate argument with the hangman.'

We 'll dare it, to waken the old country. Old England will count none but Worrells in time. As for discreet, if you like!—the young lady might have been more discreet. She's a girl with a big heart. If we were all everlastingly discreet!'

Dartrey may have meant, that the consequence of a prolonged conformity would be the generation of stenches to shock to purgeing tempests the tolerant heavens over such

smooth stagnancy. He had his ideas about movement; about the good of women, and the health of his England. The feeling of the hopelessness of pleading Nesta's conduct, for the perfect justification of it to son or daughter of our impressing conventional world —even to a friend, that friend a true man, a really chivalrous man—drove him back in a silence upon his natural brotherhood with souls that dare do. It was a wonder, to think of his finding this kinship in a woman. In a girl?—and the world holding that virgin spirit to be unclean or shadowed because its rays were shed on foul places? He clasped the girl. Her smitten clear face, the face of the second sigh after torture, bent him in devotion to her image.

Page 3648

The clasping and the worshipping were independent of personal ardours: quaintly mixed with semi-paternal recollections of the little 'blue butterfly' of the days at Craye. Farm and Creckholt; and he had heard of Dudley Sowerby's pretensions to; her hand. Nesta's youthfulness cast double age on him from the child's past. He pictured the child; pictured the girl, with her look of solitariness of sight; as in the desolate wide world, where her noble compassion for a woman had unexpectedly, painfully, almost by transubstantiation, rack-screwed her to woman's mind. And above sorrowful, holy were those eyes.

They held sway over Dartrey, and lost it some steps on; his demon temper urgeing him to strike at Major Worrell, as the cause of her dismayed expression. He was not the happier for dropping to his nature; but we proceed more easily, all of us, when the strain which lifts us a foot or two off our native level is relaxed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PAIR OF WOOERS

That ashen look of the rise out of death from one of our mortal wounds, was caused by deeper convulsions in Nesta's bosom than Dartrey could imagine.

She had gone for the walk with Mr. Barmby, reading the omen of his tones in the request. Dorothea and Virginia would have her go. The clerical gentleman, a friend of the Rev. Abram Posterley; and one who deplored poor Mr. Posterley's infatuation; and one besides who belonged to Nesta's musical choir in London: seemed a safe companion for the child. The grand organ of Mr. Barmby's voice, too, assured them of a devout seriousness in him, that arrested any scrupulous little questions. They could not conceive his uttering the nonsensical empty stuff, compliments to their beauty and what not, which girls hear sometimes from inconsiderate gentlemen, to the having of their heads turned. Moreover, Nesta had rashly promised her father's faithful servant Skepsey to walk, out with him in the afternoon; and the ladies hoped she would find the morning's walk to have been enough; good little man though Skepsey was, they were sure. But there is the incongruous for young women of station on a promenade.

Mr. Barmby headed to the pier. After pacing up and down between the briny gulls and a polka-band, he made his way forethoughtfully to the glass-sheltered seats fronting East: where, as his enthusiasm for the solemnity of the occasion excited him to say, 'We have a view of the terraces and the cliffs'; and where not more than two enwrapped invalid figures were ensconsed. Then it was, that Nesta recalled her anticipation of his possible design; forgotten by her during their talk of her dear people: Priscilla Graves and Mr. Pempton, and the Yatts, and Simeon Fenellan, Peridon and Catkin, and Skepsey likewise; and the very latest news of her mother. She wished she could have run before him, to spare him. He would not notice a sign. Girls must wait and hear.

Page 3649

It was an oratorio. She watched the long wave roll on to the sinking into its fellow; and onward again for the swell and the weariful lapse; and up at last bursting to the sheet of white. The far-heard roar and the near commingled, giving Mr. Barmby a semblance to the powers of ocean.

At the first direct note, the burden of which necessitated a pause, she petitioned him to be her friend, to think of himself as her friend.

But a vessel laden with merchandize, that has crossed wild seas for this particular port, is hardly to be debarred from discharging its goods on the quay by simple intimations of their not being wanted. We are precipitated both by the aim and the tedium of the lengthened voyage to insist that they be seen. We believe perforce in their temptingness; and should allurement fail, we fall back to the belief in our eloquence. An eloquence to expose the qualities they possess, is the testification in the promise of their excellence. She is to be induced by feeling to see it. We are asking a young lady for the precious gift of her hand. We respect her; and because of our continued respect, despite an obstruction, we have come to think we have a claim upon her gratitude; could she but be led to understand how different we are from some other man!—from one hitherto favoured among them, unworthy of this prize, however personally exalted and meritorious.

The wave of wide extension rolled and sank and rose, heaving lifeless variations of the sickly streaks on its dull green back.

Dudley Sowerby's defection was hinted at and accounted for, by the worldly test of worldly considerations.

What were they?—Nesta glanced.

An indistinct comparison was modestly presented, of one unmoved by worldly considerations.

But what were they? She was wakened by a lamp, and her darkness was all inflammable to it.

'Oh! Mr. Barmby, you have done me the honour to speak before; you know my answer,' she said.

'You were then subject to an influence. A false, I may say wicked, sentiment upholding celibacy.'

'My poor Louise? She never thought of influencing me. She has her views, I mine. Our friendship does not depend on a "treaty of reciprocity." We are one at heart, each free to judge and act, as it should be in friendship. I heard from her this morning. Her

brother will be able to resume his military duties next month. Then she will return to me.'

'We propose!' rejoined Mr. Barmby.

Beholding the involuntary mercurial rogue-dimple he had started from a twitch at the corner, of her lips, the good gentleman pursued: 'Can we dare write our designs for the month to come? Ah!—I will say—Nesta! give me the hope I beg to have. See the seriousness. You are at liberty. That other has withdrawn his pretensions. We will not blame him. He is in expectation of exalted rank. Where there is any shadow . . .

Page 3650

!’ Mr. Barmby paused on his outroll of the word; but immediately, not intending to weigh down his gentle hearer with the significance in it, resumed at a yet more sonorous depth: ’He is under the obligation to his family; an old, a venerable family. In the full blaze of public opinion! His conduct can be palliated by us, too. There is a right and wrong in minor things, independent of the higher rectitude. We pardon, we can partly support, the worldly view.’

‘There is a shadow?’ said Nesta; and her voice was lurefully encouraging.

He was on the footing where men are precipitated by what is within them to blunder. ’On you—no. On you personally, not at all. No. It could not be deemed so. Not by those knowing, esteeming—not by him who loves you, and would, with his name, would, with his whole strength, envelop, shield . . . certainly, certainly not.’

‘It is on my parents?’ she said.

’But to me nothing, nothing, quite nought! To confound the innocent with the guilty! . . . and excuses may exist. We know but how little we know!’

‘It is on both my parents?’ she said; with a simplicity that induced him to reply: ‘Before the world. But not, I repeat . . .’

The band-instruments behind the sheltering glass flourished on their termination of a waltz.

She had not heeded their playing. Now she said:

‘The music is over; we must not be late at lunch’; and she stood up and moved.

He sprang to his legs and obediently stepped out:

‘I shall have your answer to-day, this evening? Nesta!’

’Mr. Barmby, it will be the same. You will be kind to me in not asking me again.’

He spoke further. She was dumb.

Had he done ill or well for himself and for her when he named the shadow on her parents? He dwelt more on her than on himself: he would not have wounded her to win the blest affirmative. Could she have been entirely ignorant?—and after Dudley Sowerby’s defection? For such it was: the Rev. Stuart Rem had declared the union between the almost designated head of the Cantor family and a young person of no name, of worse than no birth, impossible: ‘absolutely and totally impossible,’ he, had said, in his impressive fashion, speaking from his knowledge of the family, and an acquaintance with Dudley. She must necessarily have learnt why Dudley Sowerby

withdrew. No parents of an attractive daughter should allow her to remain unaware of her actual position in the world. It is criminal, a reduplication of the criminality! Yet she had not spoken as one astonished. She was mysterious. Women are so: young women most of all. It is undecided still whether they do of themselves conceive principles, or should submit to an imposition of the same upon them in terrorem. Mysterious truly, but most attractive! As Lady Bountiful of a district, she would have in her maturity the majestic stature to suit a dispensation of earthly good things. And, strangely, here she was, at this moment, rivalling to excelling all others of her sex (he verified it in the crowd of female faces passing), when they, if they but knew the facts, would visit her very appearance beside them on a common footing as an intrusion and a scandal. To us who know, such matters are indeed wonderful!

Page 3651

Moved by reflective compassion, Mr. Barmby resumed the wooer's note, some few steps after he had responded to the salutation of Dartrey Fenellan and Colonel Sudley. She did not speak. She turned her forehead to him; and the absence of the world from her eyes chilled his tongue.

He declined the pleasure of the lunch with the Duvidney ladies. He desired to be alone, to question himself fasting, to sound the deed he had done; for he had struck on a suspicion of selfishness in it: and though Love must needs be an egoism, Love is no warrant for the doing of a hurt to the creature beloved. Thoughts upon Skepsey and the tale of his Matilda Pridden's labours in poor neighbourhoods, to which he had been inattentive during the journey down to the sea, invaded him; they were persistent. He was a worthy man, having within him the spiritual impulse curiously ready to take the place where a material disappointment left vacancy. The vulgar sort embrace the devil at that stage. Before the day had sunk, Mr. Barmby's lowest wish was, to be a light, as the instrument of his Church in her ministrations amid the haunts of sin and slime, to such plain souls as Daniel Skepsey and Matilda Pridden. And he could still be that, if Nesta, in the chapters of the future, changed her mind. She might; for her good she would; he reserved the hope. His light was one to burn beneath an extinguisher.

At the luncheon table of the Duvidney ladies, it was a pain to Dorothea and Virginia to witness how poor the appetite their Nesta brought in from the briny blowy walk. They prophesied against her chances of a good sleep at night, if she did not eat heartily. Virginia timidly remarked on her paleness. Both of them put their simple arts in motion to let her know, that she was dear to them: so dear as to make them dread the hour of parting. They named their dread of it. They had consulted in private and owned to one another, that they did really love the child, and dared not look forward to what they would do without her. The dear child's paleness and want of appetite (they remembered they were observing a weak innocent girl) suggested to them mutually the idea of a young female heart sickening, for the old unhappy maiden reason. But, if only she might return with them to the Wells, the Rev. Stuart Rem would assure her to convince her of her not being quite, quite forsaken. He, or some one having sanction from Victor, might ultimately (the ladies waiting anxiously in the next room, to fold her on the warmth of their bosoms when she had heard) impart to her the knowledge of circumstances, which would, under their further tuition concerning the particular sentiments of great families and the strict duties of the scions of the race, help to account for and excuse the Hon. Dudley Sowerby's behaviour.

They went up to the drawing-room, talking of Skepsey and his tale of Miss Pridden, for Nesta's amusement. Any talk of her Skepsey usually quickened her lips to reminiscent smiles and speech. Now she held on to gazeing; and sadly, it seemed; as if some object were not present.

Page 3652

For a vague encouragement, Dorothea said: ’One week, and we are back home at Moorsedge!’—not so far from Cronidge, was implied, for the administering of some foolish temporary comfort. And it was as when a fish on land springs its hollow sides in alien air for the sustaining element; the girl panted; she clasped Dorothea’s hand and looked at Virginia: ‘My mother—I must see her!’ she said. They were slightly stupefied by the unwonted mention of her mother. They made no reply. They never had done so when there was allusion to her mother. Their silence now struck a gong at the girl’s bosom.

Dorothea had it in mind to say, that if she thirsted for any special comfort, the friends about her would offer consolation for confidence.

Before she could speak, Perrin the footman entered, bearing the card of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Mr. Dudley Sowerby begged for an immediate interview with Miss Radnor.

The ladies were somewhat agitated, but no longer perplexed as to their duties. They had quitted Moorsedge to avoid the visit of his family. If he followed, it signified that which they could not withstand:—The ‘Tivoli falls!’ as they named the fateful tremendous human passion, from the reminiscences of an impressive day on their travels in youth; when the leaping torrent had struck upon a tale of love they were reading. They hurriedly entreated Nesta to command her nerves; peremptorily requested her to stay where she was; showed her spontaneously, by way of histrionic adjuration, the face to be worn by young ladies at greetings on these occasions; kissed her and left her; Virginia whispering: ’He is true!’

Dudley entered the drawing-room, charged with his happy burden of a love that had passed through the furnace. She stood near a window, well in the light; she hardly gave him welcome. His address to her was hurried, rather uncertain, coherent enough between the drop and the catch of articulate syllables. He found himself holding his hat. He placed it on the table, and it rolled foolishly; but soon he was by her side, having two free hands to claim her one.

’You are thinking, you have not heard from me! I have been much occupied,’ he said. ‘My brother is ill, very ill. I have your pardon?’

‘Indeed you have—if it has to be asked.’

‘I have it?’

‘Have I to grant it?’

’I own to remissness!

‘I did not blame you.’

‘Nesta . . . !’

Her coldness was unshaken.

He repeated the call of her name. ’I should have written—I ought to have written!—I could not have expressed . . . You do forgive? So many things!’

‘You come from Cronidge to-day?’

‘From my family—to you.’

She seemed resentful. His omissions as a correspondent were explicable in a sentence. It had to be deferred.

Reviewing for a moment the enormous internal conflict undergone by him during the period of the silence between them, he wondered at the vastness of the love which had conquered objections, to him so poignant.

Page 3653

There was at least no seeing of the public blot on her birth when looking on her face. Nor when thinking of the beauty of her character, in absence or in presence, was there any. He had mastered distaste to such a degree, that he forgot the assistance he had received from the heiress for enabling him to appreciate the fair young girl. Money is the imperious requirement of superior station; and more money and more: in these our modern days of the merchant's wealth, and the miner's, and the gigantic American and Australian millionaires, high rank is of necessity vowed, in peril of utter eclipse; to the possession of money. Still it is, when assured, a consideration far to the rear with a gentleman in whose bosom love and the buzzing world have fought their battle out. He could believe it thoroughly fought out, by the prolonged endurance of a contest lasting many days and nights; in the midst of which, at one time, the task of writing to tell her of his withdrawal from the engagement, was the cause of his omission to write.

As to her character, he dwelt on the charm of her recovered features, to repress an indicative dread of some intrepid force behind it, that might be unfeminine, however gentle the external lineaments. Her features, her present aristocratic deficiency of colour, greatly pleased him; her character would submit to moulding. Of all young ladies in the world, she should be the one to shrink from a mental independence and hold to the guidance of the man ennobling her. Did she? Her eyes were reading him. She had her father's limpid eyes, and when they concentrated rays, they shot.

'Have you seen my parents, Mr. Sowerby?'

He answered smilingly, for reassuringly: 'I have seen them.'

'My mother?'

'From your mother first. But am I not to be Dudley?'

'She spoke to you? She told you?'

'And yesterday your father—a second time.'

Some remainder of suspicion in the dealing with members of this family, urged Dudley to say: 'I understood from them, you were not? . . . that you were quite . . .?'

'I have heard: I have guessed: it was recently—this morning, as it happened. I wish to go to my mother to-day. I shall go to her to-morrow.'

'I might offer to conduct you-now!'

'You are kind; I have Skepsey.' She relieved the situation of its cold-toned strain in adding: 'He is a host.'

'But I may come?—now! Have I not the right? You do not deny it me?'

‘You are very generous.’

’I claim the right, then. Always. And subsequently, soon after, my mother hopes to welcome you at Cronidge. She will be glad to hear of your naming of a day. My father bids me . . . he and all our family.’

‘They are very generous.’

‘I may send them word this evening of a day you name?’

’No, Mr. Sowerby.

‘Dudley?’

‘I cannot say it. I have to see my parents.’

Page 3654

‘Between us, surely?’

’My whole heart thanks you for your goodness to me. I am unable to say more.’

He had again observed and he slightly crisped under the speculative look she directed on him: a simple unstrained look, that had an air of reading right in, and was worse to bear with than when the spark leaped upon some thought from her eyes: though he had no imagination of anything he concealed—or exposed, and he would have set it down to her temporary incredulousness of his perfect generosity or power to overcome the world’s opinion of certain circumstances. That had been a struggle! The peculiar look was not renewed. She spoke warmly of her gratitude. She stated, that she must of necessity see her parents at once. She submitted to his entreaty to conduct her to them on the morrow. It was in the manner of one who yielded step by step, from inability to contend.

Her attitude continuing unchanged, he became sensible of a monotony in the speech with which he assailed it, and he rose to leave, not dissatisfied. She, at his urgent request, named her train for London in the early morning. He said it was not too early. He would have desired to be warmed; yet he liked her the better for the moral sentiment controlling the physical. He had appointments with relatives or connections in the town, and on that pretext he departed, hoping for the speedy dawn of the morrow as soon as he had turned his back on the house.

No, not he the man to have pity of women underfoot! That was the thought, unrevolved, unphrased, all but unconscious, in Nesta: and while her heart was exalting him for his generosity. Under her present sense of the chilling shadow, she felt the comfort there was in being grateful to him for the golden beams which his generosity cast about her. But she had an intelligence sharp to pierce, virgin though she was; and with the mark in sight, however distant, she struck it, unerring as an Artemis for blood of beasts: those shrewd young wits, on the lookout to find a champion, athirst for help upon a desolate road, were hard as any judicial to pronounce the sentence upon Dudley in that respect. She raised him high; she placed herself low; she had a glimpse of the struggle he had gone through; love of her had helped him, she believed. And she was melted; and not the less did the girl’s implacable intuition read with the keenness of eye of a man of the world the blunt division in him, where warm humanity stopped short at the wall of social concrete forming a part of this rightly esteemed young citizen. She, too, was divided: she was at his feet; and she rebuked herself for daring to judge—or rather, it was, for having a reserve in her mind upon a man proving so generous with her. She was pulled this way and that by sensibilities both inspiring to blind gratitude and quickening her penetrative view. The certainty of an unerring perception remained.

Dorothea and Virginia were seated in the room below, waiting for their carriage, when the hall-door spoke of the Hon. Dudley’s departure; soon after, Nesta entered to them. She swam up to Dorothea’s lap, and dropped her head on it, kneeling.

Page 3655

The ladies feared she might be weeping. Dorothea patted her thick brown twisted locks of hair. Unhappiness following such an interview, struck them as an ill sign.

Virginia bent to the girl's ear, and murmured: 'All well?'

She replied: 'He has been very generous.'

Her speaking of the words renewed an oppression, that had darkened her on the descent of stairs. For sensibilities sharp as Nesta's, are not to be had without their penalties: and she who had gone nigh to summing in a flash the nature of Dudley, sank suddenly under that affliction often besetting the young adventurous mind, crushing to young women:—the fascination exercised upon them by a positive adverse masculine attitude and opinion. Young men know well what it is: and if young women have by chance overcome their timidity, to the taking of any step out of the trim pathway, they shrink, with a sense of forlornest isolation. It becomes a subjugation; inciting to revolt, but a heavy weight to cast off. Soon it assumed its material form for the contention between her and Dudley, in the figure of Mrs. Marsett. The Nesta who had been instructed to know herself to be under a shadow, heard, she almost justified Dudley's reproaches to her, for having made the acquaintance of the unhappy woman, for having visited her, for having been, though but for a minute, at the mercy of a coarse gentleman's pursuit. The recollection was a smart buffet.

Her lighted mind punished her thus through her conjuring of Dudley's words, should news of her relations with Mrs. Marsett reach him:—and she would have to tell him. Would he not say: 'I have borne with the things concerning your family. All the greater reason why I must insist'—he would assuredly say he insisted (her humour caught at the word, as being the very word one could foresee and clearly see him uttering in a fit of vehemence) on her immediate abandonment of 'that woman.'

And with Nesta's present enlightenment by dusky beams, upon her parentage, she listened abjectly to Dudley, or the opinion of the majority. Would he not say or think, that her clinging to Mrs. Marsett put them under a kind of common stamp, or gave the world its option to class them together?

These were among the ideas chasing in a head destined to be a battle-field for the enrichment of a harvest-field of them, while the girl's face was hidden on Dorothea's lap, and her breast heaved and heaved.

She distressed them when she rose, by saying she must instantly see her mother.

They saw the pain their hesitation inflicted, and Dorothea said: 'Yes, dear; any day you like.'

'To-morrow—I must go to her to-morrow!'

A suggestion of her mother’s coming down, was faintly spoken by one lady, echoed in a quaver by the other.

Nesta shook her head. To quiet the kind souls, she entreated them to give their promise that they would invite her again.

Page 3656

Imagining the Hon. Dudley to have cast her off, both ladies embraced her: not entirely yielding-up their hearts to her, by reason of the pernicious new ideas now in the world to sap our foundations of morality; which warned them of their duty to uphold mentally his quite justifiable behaviour, even when compassionating the sufferings of the guiltless creature loved by them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONTAINS DEEDS UNRELATED AND EXPOSITIONS OF FEELINGS

All through the afternoon and evening Skepsey showed indifference to meals by continuing absent: and he was the one with whom Nesta would have felt at home; more at home than with her parents. He and the cool world he moved in were a transparency of peace to her mind; even to his giving of some portion of it, when she had the dear little man present to her in a vivid image of a fish in a glass globe, wandering round and round, now and then shooting across, just as her Skepsey did: he carried his head semihorizontally at his arrowy pace; plain to read though he was, he appeared, under that image created of him, animated by motives inducing to speculation.

She thought of him till she could have reproached him for not returning and helping her to get away from the fever of other thoughts:—this anguish twisting about her parents, and the dreadful trammels of gratitude to a man afflictingly generous, the frown of congregated people.

The latter was the least of evils; she had her charges to bring against them for injustice: uncited, unstirred charges, they were effective as a muffled force to sustain her: and the young who are of healthy lively blood and clean conscience have either emotion or imagination to fold them defensively from an enemy world; whose power to drive them forth into the wilderness they acknowledge. But in the wilderness their souls are not beaten down by breath of mortals; they burn straight flame there up to the parent Spirit.

She could not fancy herself flying thither;—where to be shorn and naked and shivering is no hardship, for the solitude clothes, and the sole true life in us resolves to that steady flame;—she was restrained by Dudley’s generosity, which held her fast to have the forgiveness for her uncommitted sin dashed in her face. He surprised her; the unexpected quality in him seemed suddenly to have snared her fast: and she did not obtain release after seeing behind it;—seeing it, by the light of what she demanded, personal, shallow, a lover’s generosity. So her keen intellect saw it; and her young blood (for the youthful are thus divided) thrilled in thinking it must be love! The name of the sacred passion lifted it out of the petty cabin of the individual into a quiring cathedral universal, and subdued her. It subdued her with an unwelcome touch of tenderness when she thought of it as involving tenderness for her mother, some chivalrous respect

Page 3657

for her mother. Could he love the daughter without some little, which a more intimate knowledge of her dear mother would enlarge? The girl's heart flew to her mother, clung to her, vindicated her dumbly. It would not inquire, and it refused to hear, hungering the while. She sent forth her flights of stories in elucidation of the hidden; and they were like white bird after bird winging to covert beneath a thundercloud; until her breast ached for the voice of the thunder: harsh facts: sure as she was of her never losing her filial hold of the beloved. She and her mother grew together, they were one. Accepting the shadow, they were the closer one beneath it. She had neither vision nor active thought of her father, in whom her pride was.

At the hour of ten, the ladies retired for the enjoyment of their sweet reward. Manton, their maid, came down to sit with Nesta on the watch for Skepsey. Perrin, the footman, returning, as late as twenty minutes to eleven, from his tobacco promenade along the terrace, reported to Manton 'a row in town'; and he repeated to Nesta the policeman's opinion and his own of the 'Army' fellows, and the way to treat them. Both were for rigour.

'The name of "Army" attracts poor Skepsey so, I am sure he would join it, if they would admit him,' Nesta said.

'He has an immense respect for a young woman, who belongs to his "Army"; and one doesn't know what may have come,' said Manton.

Two or three minutes after eleven, a feeble ring at the bell gained admission for some person: whispering was heard in the passage.

Manton played eavesdropper, and suddenly bursting on Skepsey, arrested him when about to dash upstairs. His young mistress's voice was a sufficient command; he yielded; he pitched a smart sigh and stepped into her presence for his countenance to be seen, or the show of a countenance, that it presented.

'Skepsey wanted to rush to bed without saying good night to me?' said she; leaving unnoticed, except for woefulness of tone, his hurried shuffle of remarks on 'his appearance,' and 'little accidents'; ending with an inclination of his disgraceful person to the doorway, and a petition: 'If I might, Miss Nesta?' The implied pathetic reference to a surgically-treated nose under a cross of strips of plaster, could not obtain dismissal for him. And he had one eye of sinister hue, showing beside its lighted-grey fellow as if a sullen punished dragonwhelp had couched near some quick wood-pigeon. The two eyes blinked rapidly. He was a picture of Guilt in the nude, imploring to be sent into concealment.

The cruelty of detaining him was evident.

‘Yes, if you must,’ Nesta said. ’But, dear Skepsey, will it be the magistrate again to-morrow?’

He feared it would be; he fancied it would needs be. He concluded by stating, that he was bound to appear before the magistrate in the morning; and he begged assistance to keep it from the knowledge of the Miss Duvidneys, who had been so kind to him.

Page 3658

‘Has there been bailing of you again, Skepsey?’

‘A good gentleman, a resident,’ he replied; ’a military gentleman; indeed, a colonel of the cavalry; but, it may so be, retired; and anxious about our vast possessions; though he thinks a translation of a French attack on England unimportant. He says, the Germans despise us most.’

‘Then this gentleman thinks you have a good case?’

‘He is a friend of Captain Dartrey’s.’

Hearing that name, Nesta said: ’Now, Skepsey, you must tell me everything. You are not to mind your looks. I believe, I do always believe you mean well.’

’Miss Nesta, it depends upon the magistrate’s not being prejudiced against the street-processionists!

‘But you may expect justice from the magistrate, if your case is good?’

’I would not say no, Miss Nesta. But we find, the opinion of the public has its effect with magistrates—their sentences. They are severe on boxing. They have latterly treated the “Army” with more consideration, owing to the change in the public view. I myself have changed.’

‘Have you joined it?’

‘I cannot say I am a member of it.’

’You walked in the ranks to-day, and you were maltreated? Your friend was there?’

‘I walked with Matilda Pridden; that is, parallel, along the pavement.’

‘I hope she came out of it unhurt?’

‘It is thanks to Captain Dartrey, Miss Nesta?’

This time Nesta looked her question.

Manton interposed: ‘You are to speak, Mr. Skepsey’; and she stopped a flood of narrative, that was knocking in his mind to feel its head and to leap—an uninterrupted half-minute more would have shaped the story for the proper flow.

He began, after attending to the throb of his bruises in a manner to correct them rather than solace; and the beginning was the end: ’Captain Dartrey rescued us, before Matilda Pridden suffered harm, to mention—the chin, slight, teeth unshaken; a beautiful

set. She is angry with Captain Dartrey, for having recourse to violence in her defence: it is against her principles. “Then you die,” she says; and our principles are to gain more by death. She says, we are alive in them; but worse if we abandon them for the sake of living.—I am a little confused; she is very abstruse.—Because, that is the corruptible life, she says. I have found it quite impossible to argue with her; she has always a complete answer; wonderful. In case of Invasion, we are to lift our voices to the Lord; and the Lord’s will shall be manifested. If we are robbed, we ask, How came we by the goods? It is unreasonable; it strikes at rights of property. But I have to go on thinking. When in danger, she sings without excitement. When the blow struck her, she stopped singing only an instant. She says, no one fears, who has real faith. She will not let me call her brave. She cannot admire Captain Dartrey. Her principles are opposed. She said to him, “Sir, you did what seemed to you right.” She thinks every blow struck sends us back to the state of the beasts. Her principles . . .’

Page 3659

‘How was it Captain Dartrey happened to be present, Skepsey?’

’She is very firm. You cannot move her.—Captain Dartrey was on his way to the station, to meet a gentleman from London, Miss Nesta. He carried a stick—a remarkable stick —he had shown to me in the morning, and he has given it me now. He says, he has done his last with it. He seems to have some of Matilda Pridden’s ideas about fighting, when it’s over. He was glad to be rid of the stick, he said.’

‘But who attacked you? What were the people?’

’Captain Dartrey says, England may hold up her head while she breeds young women like Matilda Pridden: right or wrong, he says: it is the substance.’

Hereupon Manton, sick of Miss Pridden, shook the little man with a snappish word, to bring him to attention. She got him together sufficiently for him to give a lame version of the story; flat until he came to his heroine’s behaviour, when he brightened a moment, and he sank back absorbed in her principles and theories of life. It was understood by Nesta, that the processionists, going at a smart pace, found their way blocked and were assaulted in one of the sidestreets; and that Skepsey rushed to the defence of Matilda Pridden; and that, while they were engaged, Captain Dartrey was passing at the end of the street, and recognized one he knew in the thick of it and getting the worst of it, owing to numbers. ‘I will show you the stick he did it with, Miss Nests’; said Skepsey, regardless of narrative; and darted out of the room to bring in the Demerara supple-jack; holding which, he became inspired to relate something of Captain Dartrey’s deeds.

They gave no pleasure to his young lady, as he sadly perceived:—thus it is with the fair sex ever, so fond of heroes! She shut her eyes from the sight of the Demerara supple-jack descending right and left upon the skulls of a couple of bully lads. ’That will do—-you were rescued. And now go to bed, Skepsey; and be up at seven to breakfast with me,’ Nesta said, for his battle-damaged face would be more endurable to behold after an interval, she hoped; and she might in the morning dissociate its evil look from the deeds of Captain Dartrey.

The thought of her hero taking active part in a streetfray, was repulsive to her; it swamped his brilliancy. And this distressed her, by withdrawing the support which the thought of him had been to her since mid-day. She lay for sleepless hours, while nursing a deeper pain, under oppression of repugnance to battle-dealing, bloodshedding men. It was long before she grew mindful of the absurdity of the moan recurring whenever reflection wearied. Translated into speech, it would have run:

’In a street of the town! with a stick!’—The vulgar picture pursued her to humiliation; it robbed her or dimmed her possession of the one bright thing she had remaining to her. So she deemed it during the heavy sighs of night; partly conscious, that in some strange way it was as much as tossing her to the man who never could have condescended to

the pugnacious using of a stick in a street. He, on the contrary, was a cover to the shamefaced.

Page 3660

Her heart was weak that night. She hovered above it, but not so detached as to scorn it for fawning to one—any one—who would offer her and her mother a cover from scorn. And now she exalted Dudley's generosity, now clung to a low idea of a haven in her father's wealth; and she was unaware, that the second mood was deduced from the first. She did know herself cowardly: she had, too, a critic in her clear head, to spurn at the creature who could think of purchasing the world's respect. Dudley's generosity sprang up to silence the voice. She could praise him, on a review of it, for delicacy, moreover; and the delicacy laid her under a more positive obligation. Her sense of it was not without a toneless quaint faint savour of the romantic, that her humour little humorously caught at, to paint her a picture of former heroes of fiction, who win their trying lady by their perfection of good conduct on a background of high birth; and who are not seen to be wooden before the volume closes. Her fatigue of sleeplessness plunged her into the period of poke-bonnets and peaky hats to admire him; giving her the kind of sweetness we may imagine ourselves to get in the state of tired horse munching hay. If she had gone to her bed with a noble or simply estimable plain image of one of her friends in her heart, to sustain it, she would not have been thus abject. Skepsey's discoloured eye, and Captain Dartrey's behaviour behind it, threw her upon Dudley's generosity, as being the shield for an outcast. Girls, who see at a time of need their ideal extinguished in its appearing tarnished, are very much at the disposal of the pressing suitor. Nesta rose in the black winter morn, summoning the best she could think of to glorify Dudley, that she might not feel so doomed.

According to an agreement overnight, she went to the bedroom of Dorothea and Virginia, to assure them of her having slept well, and say the good-bye to them and their Tasso. The little dog was the growl of a silken ball in a basket. His mistresses excused him, because of his being unused to the appearance of any person save Manton in their bedroom. Dorothea, kissing her, said: 'Adieu, dear child; and there is home with us always, remember. And, after breakfast, however it may be, you will, for our greater feeling of security, have—she has our orders—Manton—your own maid we consider too young for a guardian—to accompany you. We will not have it on our consciences, that by any possibility harm came to you while you were under our charge. The good innocent girl we received from the hands of your father, we return to him; we are sure of that.'

Nesta said: 'Mr. Sowerby promised he would come.'

'However it may be,' Dorothea repeated her curtaining phrase.

Page 3661

Virginia put in a word of apology for Tasso's temper he enjoyed ordinarily a slumber of half an hour's longer duration. He was, Dorothea feelingly added, regularity itself. Virginia murmured: 'Except once!' and both were appalled by the recollection of that night. It had, nevertheless, caused them to reperuse the Rev. Stuart Rem's published beautiful sermon *on dirt*; the words of which were an antidote to the night of Tasso in the nostrils of Mnemosyne; so that Dorothea could reply to her sister, slightly by way of a reproval, quoting Mr. Stuart Rem at his loftiest: '"Let us not bring into the sacred precincts Dirt from the roads, but have a care to spread it where it is a fructification."' Virginia produced the sequent sentence, likewise weighty. Nesta stood between the thin division of their beds, her right hand given to one, her left to the other. They had the semblance of a haven out of storms.

She reflected, after shutting the door of their room, that the residing with them had been a means of casting her—it was an effort to remember how—upon the world where the tree of knowledge grows. She had eaten; and she might be the worse for it; but she was raised to a height that would not let her look with envy upon peace and comfort. Luxurious quiet people were as ripening glass-house fruits. Her bitter gathering of the knowledge of life had sharpened her intellect; and the intellect, even in the young, is, and not less usefully, hard metal rather than fallow soil. But for the fountain of human warmth at her breast, she might have been snared by the conceit of intellect, to despise the simple and conventional, or shed the pity which is charity's contempt. She had only to think of the kindness of the dear good ladies; her heart jumped to them at once. And when she fancied hearing those innocent souls of women embracing her and reproaching her for the knowledge of life she now bore, her words down deep in her bosom were: It has helped me to bear the shock of other knowledge! How would she have borne it before she knew of the infinitely evil? Saving for the tender compassion weeping over her mother, she had not much acute personal grief.

For this world condemning her birth, was the world tolerant of that infinitely evil! Her intellect fortified her to be combative by day, after the night of imagination; which splendid power is not so serviceable as the logical mind in painful seasons: for night revealed the world snorting Dragon's breath at a girl guilty of knowing its vilest. More than she liked to recall, it had driven her scorched, half withered, to the shelter of Dudley. The daylight, spreading thin at the windows, restored her from that weakness. 'We will quit England,' she said, thinking of her mother and herself, and then of her father's surely following them. She sighed thankfully, half way through the breakfast with Skepsey, at sight of the hour by the clock; she was hurriedly sentient of the puzzle of her feelings, when she guessed at a chance that Dudley would be delayed. She supposed herself as possibly feeling not so well able to keep every thought of her head brooding on her mother in Dudley's company.

Page 3662

Skepsey's face was just sufferable by light of day, if one pitied reflecting on his honest intentions; it ceased to discolour another. He dropped a few particulars of his hero in action; but the heroine eclipsed. He was heavier than ever with his Matilda Pridden. At the hour for departure, Perrin had a conveyance at the door. Nesta sent off Skepsey with a complimentary message to Captain Dartrey. Her maid Mary begged her to finish her breakfast; Manton suggested the waiting a further two or three minutes. 'We must not be late,' Nesta said; and when the minute-hand of the clock marked ample time for the drive to the station, she took her seat and started, keeping her face resolutely set seaward, having at her ears the ring of a cry that was to come from Manton. But Manton was dumb; she spied no one on the pavement who signalled to stop them. And no one was at the station to greet them. They stepped into a carriage where they were alone. Dudley with his dreaded generosity melted out of Nesta's thoughts, like the vanishing steam-wreath on the dip between the line and the downs.

She passed into music, as she always did under motion of carriages and trains, whether in happiness or sadness: and the day being one that had a sky, the scenic of music swung her up to soar. None of her heavy burdens enchained, though she knew the weight of them, with those of other painful souls. The pipeing at her breast gave wings to large and small of the visible; and along the downs went stateliest of flowing dances; a copse lengthened to forest; a pool of cattle-water caught grey for flights through enchantment. Cottage-children, wherever seen in groups, she wreathed above with angels to watch them. Her mind all the while was busy upon earth, embracing her mother, eyeing her father. Imagination and our earthly met midway, and still she flew, until she was brought to the ground by a shot. She struggled to rise, uplifting Judith Marsett: a woman not so very much older than her own teens, in the count of years, and ages older; and the world pulling at her heels to keep her low. That unhappiest had no one but a sisterly girl to help her: and how she clung to the slender help! Who else was there?

The good and the bad in the woman struck separate blows upon the girl's resonant nature. She perceived the good, and took it into her reflections. The bad she divined: it approached like some threat of inflammation. Natures resonant as that which animated this girl, are quick at the wells of understanding: and she had her intimations of the world's wisdom in withholding contagious presences from the very mangy of the young, who may not have an, aim, or ideal or strong human compassion, for a preservative. She was assured of her possessing it. She asked herself in her mother's voice, and answered mutely. She had the certainty: for she rebuked the slavish feverishness of the passion, as betrayed by Mrs. Marsett; and the woman's tone, as of strung wires ringing on a rage of the wind. Then followed her cry for the man who could speak to Captain Marsett of his duty in honour. An image of one, accompanying the faster beats of her heart, beguiled her to think away from the cause. He, the one man known to her, would act the brother's part on behalf of the hapless creature.

Page 3663

Nesta just imagined her having supplicated him, and at once imagination came to dust. She had to thank him she knelt to him. For the first time of her life she found herself seized with her sex's shudder in the blood.

CHAPTER XXXV

In which again we make use of the old lamps for lighting an abysmal darkness

And if Nesta had looked out of her carriage-window soon after the train began to glide, her eagle of imagination would have reeled from the heights, with very different feelings, earlier, perhaps a captive, at sight of the tardy gentleman rushing along the platform, and bending ear to the footman Perrin, and staring for one lost.

The snaky tail of the train imparted to Dudley an apprehension of the ominous in his having missed her. It wound away, and left regrets, which raised a chorus of harsh congratulations from the opposite party of his internal parliament.

Neither party could express an opinion without rousing the other to an uproar.

He had met his cousin Southweare overnight. He had heard, that there was talk of Miss Radnor. Her name was in the mouth of Major Worrell. It was coupled with the name of Mrs. Marsett. A military captain, in the succession to be Sir Edward Marsett, bestowed on her the shadow of his name.

It could be certified, that Miss Radnor visited the woman at her house. What are we to think of Miss Radnor, save that daughters of depraved parents! . . . A torture undeserved is the Centaur's shirt for driving us to lay about in all directions. He who had swallowed so much—a thunderbolt: a still undigested discharge from the perplexing heavens jumped frantic under the pressure upon him of more, and worse. A girl getting herself talked of at a Club! And she of all young ladies should have been the last to draw round her that buzz of tongues. On such a subject!—The parents pursuing their career of cynical ostentation in London, threw an evil eye of heredity on their offspring in the egg; making anything credible, pointing at tendencies.

An alliance with her was impossible. So said disgust. Anger came like a stronger beast, and extinguished the safety there was in the thing it consumed, by growing so excessive as to require tempering with drops of compassion; which prepared the way for a formal act of cold forgiveness; and the moment that was conceived, he had a passion to commit the horrible magnanimity, and did it on a grand scale, and dissolved his Heart in the grandeur, and slaved himself again.

Page 3664

Far from expungeing the doubt of her, forgiveness gave it a stamp and an edge. His renewed enslavement set him perusing his tyrant keenly, as nauseated captives do; and he saw, that forgiveness was beside the case. For this Nesta Victoria Radnor would not crave it or accept it. He had mentally played the woman to her superior vivaciousness too long for him to see her taking a culprit's attitude. What she did, she intended to do. The mother would not have encouraged her. The father idolized her; and the father was a frank hedonist, whose blood . . . speculation on horseback gallops to barren extremes. Eyes like hers—if there had not been the miserable dupes of girls! Conduct is the sole guide to female character. That likewise may be the hypocrite's mask.

Popular artists, intent to gratify the national taste for effects called realistic, have figured in scenes of battle the raying fragments of a man from impact of a cannon-ball on his person. Truly thus it may be when flesh contends. But an image of the stricken and scattered mind of the man should, though deficient in the attraction, have a greater significance, forasmuch as it does not exhibit him entirely liquefied and showered into space; it leaves him his legs for the taking of further steps. Dudley, standing on the platform of Nesta's train, one half minute too late, according to his desire before he put himself in motion, was as wildly torn as the vapour shredded streaming to fingers and threads off the upright columnar shot of the shriek from the boiler. He wished every mad antagonism to his wishes: that he might see her, be blind to her; embrace, discard; heal his wound, and tear it wider. He thanked her for the grossness of an offence precluding excuses. He was aware of a glimmer of advocacy in the very grossness. He conjured-up her features, and they said, her innocence was the sinner; they scoffed at him for the dupe he was willing to be. She had enigma's mouth, with the eyes of morning.

More than most girls, she was the girl-Sphinx to him because of her having ideas—or what he deemed ideas. She struck a toneing warmth through his intelligence, not dissimilar to the livelier circulation of the blood in the frame breathing mountain air. She really helped him, incited him to go along with this windy wild modern time more cheerfully, if not quite hopefully. For she had been the book of Romance he despised when it appeared as a printed volume: and which might have educated the young man to read some among our riddles in the book of humanity. The white he was ready to take for silver the black were all black; the spotted had received corruption's label. Her youthful French governess Mademoiselle de Seilles was also peculiarly enigmatic at the mouth conversant, one might expect, with the disintegrating literature of her country. In public, the two talked of St. Louis. One of them in secret visits a Mrs. Marsett. The Southweare women, the Hennen women, and Lady Evelina Reddish, were artless candid creatures in their early days, not transgressing in a glance. Lady Grace Halley had her fit of the devotional previous to marriage. No girl known to Dudley by report or acquaintance had committed so scandalous an indiscretion as Miss Radnor's: it pertained to the insolently vile.

Page 3665

And on that ground, it started the voluble defence. For certain suspected things will dash suspicion to the rebound, when they are very dark. As soon as the charge against her was moderated, the defence expired. He heard the world delivering its judgement upon her; and he sorrowfully acquiesced. She passed from him.

When she was cut off, she sang him in the distance a remembered saying of hers, with the full melody of her voice. One day, treating of modern pessimism, he had draped a cadaverous view of our mortal being in a quotation of the wisdom of the Philosopher Emperor: 'To set one's love upon the swallow is a futility.' And she, weighing it, nodded, and replied: 'May not the pleasure for us remain if we set our love upon the beauty of the swallow's flight?'

There was, for a girl, a bit of idea, real idea, in that meaning, of course, the picture we are to have of the bird's wings in motion, it has often been admired. Oh! not much of an idea in itself: feminine and vague. But it was pertinent, opportune; in this way she stimulated. And the girl who could think it, and call on a Mrs. Marsett, was of the class of mixtures properly to be handed over to chemical experts for analysis!

She had her aspirations on behalf of her sex: she and Mademoiselle de Seilles discussed them; women were to do this, do that:—necessarily a means of instructing a girl to learn what they did do. If the lower part of her face had been as reassuring to him as the upper, he might have put a reluctant faith in the pure-mindedness of these aspirations, without reverting to her origin, and also to recent rumours of her father and Lady Grace Halley. As it was, he inquired of the cognizant, whether an intellectual precocity, devoted by preference to questions affecting the state of women, did not rather more than suggest the existence of urgent senses likewise. She, a girl under twenty, had an interest in public matters, and she called on a Mrs. Marsett. To plead her simplicity, was to be absolutely ignorant of her.

He neighboured sagacity when he pointed that interrogation relating to Nesta's precociousness of the intelligence. For, as they say in dactylomancy, the 'psychical' of women are not disposed in their sensitive early days to dwell upon the fortunes of their sex: a thought or two turns them facing away, with the repugnant shiver. They worship at a niche in the wall. They cannot avoid imputing some share of foulness to them that are for scouring the chamber; and the civilized male, keeping his own chamber locked, quite shares their pale taper's view. The full-blooded to the finger-tips, on the other hand, are likely to be drawn to the subject, by noble inducement as often as by base: Nature at flood being the cause in either instance. This young Nature of the good and the bad, is the blood which runs to power of heart as well as to thirsts of the flesh. Then have men to sound themselves, to discover how

Page 3666

much of Nature their abstract honourable conception or representative eidolon of young women will bear without going to pieces; and it will not be much, unless they shall have taken instruction from the poet's pen: for a view possibly of Nature at work to cast the slough, when they see her writhing as in her ugliest old throes. If they have learnt of Nature's priest to respect her, they will less distrust those rare daughters of hers who are moved by her warmth to lift her out of slime. It is by her own live warmth that it has to be done: cold worship at a niche in the wall will not do it.—Well, there is an index, for the enlargement of your charity.

But facts were Dudley's teachers. Physically, morally, mentally, he read the world through facts; that is to say, through the facts he encountered: and he was in consequence foredoomed to a succession of bumps; all the heavier from his being, unlike the horned kind, not unimpressible by the hazy things outside his experience. Even at his darkest over Nesta, it was his indigestion of the misconduct of her parents, which denied to a certain still small advocate within him the right to raise a voice: that good fellow struck the attitude for pleading, and had to be silent; for he was Instinct; at best a stammering speaker in the Court of the wigged Facts. Instinct of this Nesta Radnor's character would have said a brave word, but for her deeds bearing witness to her inheritance of a lawlessly adventurous temperament.

What to do? He was no nearer to an answer when the wintry dusk had fallen on the promenading crowds. To do nothing, is the wisdom of those who have seen fools perish. Facts had not taught him, that the doing nothing, for a length of days after the first shock he sustained, was the reason of how it came that Nesta knitted closer her acquaintance with the 'agreeable lady' she mentioned in her letter to Cronidge. Those excellent counsellors of a mercantile community gave him no warnings, that the 'masterly inactive' part, so greatly esteemed by him for the conduct of public affairs, might be perilous in dealings with a vivid girl: nor a hint, that when facts continue undigested, it is because the sensations are as violent as hysterical females to block them from the understanding. His Robin Goodfellow instinct tried to be serviceable at a crux of his meditations, where Edith Averst's consumptive brothers waved faded hands at her chances of inheriting largely. Superb for the chances: but what of her offspring? And the other was a girl such as the lusty Dame Dowager of fighting ancestors would have signalled to the heir of the House's honours for the perpetuation of his race. No doubt: and the venerable Dame (beautiful in her old-lace frame, or say foliage) of the Ages backward, temp: Ed: III. inflated him with a thought of her: and his readings in modern books on heredity, pure blood, physical regeneration, pronounced approval of Nesta Radnor: and thereupon instinct opened mouth to speak; and a lockjaw seized it under that scowl of his presiding mistrust of Nature.

Page 3667

He clung to his mistrust the more because of a warning he had from the silenced natural voice: somewhat as we may behold how the Conservatism of a Class, in a world of all the evidences showing that there is no stay to things, comes of the intuitive discernment of its finality. His mistrust was his own; and Nesta was not; not yet; though a step would make her his own. Instinct prompting to the step, was a worthless adviser. It spurred him, nevertheless.

He called at the Club for his cousin Southweare, with whom he was not in sympathy; and had information that, Southweare said, 'made the girl out all right.' Girls in these days do things which the sainted stay-at-homes preceding them would not have dreamed of doing. Something had occurred, relating to Major Worrell: he withdrew Miss Radnor's name, acknowledged himself mistaken or amended his report of her, in some way, not quite intelligible. Dudley was accosted by Simeon Fenellan; subsequently by Dartrey. There was gossip over the latter gentleman's having been up before the magistrate, talk of a queer kind of stick, and Dartrey said, laughing, to Simeon: 'Rather lucky I bled the rascal';—whatever the meaning. She nursed one of her adorations for this man, who had yesterday, apparently, joined in a street-fray; so she partook of the stain of the turbid defacing all these disorderly people.

At his hotel at breakfast the next morning, a newspaper furnished an account of Captain Dartrey Fenellan's participation in the strife, after mention of him as nephew of the Earl of Clanconan, 'now a visitor to our town'; and his deeds were accordant with his birth. Such writing was enough to send Dudley an eager listener to Colney Durance. What a people!

Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's card compelled Dudley presently to receive him.

Dartrey, not debarred by considerations, that an allusion to Miss Radnor could be conveyed only in the most delicately obscure manner, spared him no more than the plain English of his relations with her. Requested to come to the Club, at a certain hour of the afternoon, that he might hear Major Worrell's personal contradiction of scandal involving the young lady's name, together with his apology, *etc*., Dudley declined: and he was obliged to do it curtly; words were wanting. They are hard to find for wounded sentiments rendered complex by an infusion of policy. His present mood, with the something new to digest, held the going to Major Worrell a wrong step; he behaved as if the speaking to Dartrey Fenellan pledged him hardly less. And besides he had a physical abhorrence, under dictate of moral reprobation, of the broad-shouldered sinewy man, whose look of wiry alertness pictured the previous day's gory gutters.

Dartrey set sharp eyes on him for an instant, bowed; and went.

CHAPTER XXXVI

NESTA AND HER FATHER

Page 3668

The day of Nesta's return was one of a number of late when Victor was robbed of his walk Westward by Lady Grace Halley, who seduced his politeness with her various forms of blandishment to take a seat in her carriage; and she was a practical speaker upon her quarter of the world when she had him there. Perhaps she was right in saying—though she had no right to say—that he and she together might have the world under their feet. It was one of those irritating suggestions which expedite us up to a bald ceiling, only to make us feel the gas-bladder's tight extension upon emptiness: It moved him to examine the poor value of his aim, by tying him to the contemptible means: One estimate involved the other, whichever came first. Somewhere he had an idea, that would lift and cleanse all degradations. But it did seem as if he were not enjoying: things pleasant enough in the passage of them were barren, if not prickly, in the retrospect.

He sprang out at the head of the park, for a tramp round it, in the gloom of the girdle of lights, to recover his deadened relish of the thin phantasmal strife to win an intangible prize. His dulled physical system asked, as with the sensations of a man at the start from sleep in the hurrying grip of steam, what on earth he wanted to get, and what was the substance of his gains: what! if other than a precipitous intimacy, a deep crumbling over deeper, with a little woman amusing him in remarks of a whimsical nudity; hardly more. Nay, not more! he said; and at the end of twenty paces, he saw much more; the campaign gathered a circling suggestive brilliancy, like the lamps about the winter park; the Society, lured with glitter, hooked by greed, composed a ravishing picture; the little woman was esteemed as a serviceable lieutenant; and her hand was a small soft one, agreeable to fondle—and avaunt! But so it is in war: we must pay for our allies. What if it had been, that he and she together, with their united powers . . . ? He dashed the silly vision aside, as vainer than one of the bubble-empires blown by boys; and it broke, showing no heart in it. His heart was Nataly's.

Let Colney hint his worst; Nataly bore the strain, always did bear any strain coming in the round of her duties: and if she would but walk, or if she danced at parties, she would scatter the fits of despondency besetting the phlegmatic, like this day's breeze the morning fog; or as he did with two minutes of the stretch of legs.

Full of the grandeur of that black pit of the benighted London, with its ocean-voice of the heart at beat along the lighted outer ring, Victor entered at his old door of the two houses he had knocked into one: a surprise for Fredi!—and heard that his girl had arrived in the morning.

'And could no more endure her absence from her Mammy O!' The songful satirical line spouted in him, to be flung at his girl, as he ran upstairs to the boudoir off the drawing-room.

Page 3669

He peeped in. It was dark. Sensible of presences, he gradually discerned a thick blot along the couch to the right of the door, and he drew near. Two were lying folded together; mother and daughter. He bent over them. His hand was taken and pressed by Fredi's; she spoke; she said tenderly: 'Father.' Neither of the two made a movement. He heard the shivering rise of a sob, that fell. The dry sob going to the waste breath was Nataly's. His girl did not speak again.

He left them. He had no thought until he stood in his dressing-room, when he said 'Good!' For those two must have been lying folded together during the greater part of the day: and it meant, that the mother's heart had opened; the girl knew. Her tone: 'Father,' sweet, was heavy, too, with the darkness it came out of.

So she knew. Good. He clasped them both in his heart; tempering his pity of those dear ones with the thought, that they were of the sex which finds enjoyment in a day of the mutual tear; and envying them; he strained at a richness appearing in the sobs of their close union.

All of his girl's loving soul flew to her mother; and naturally: She would not be harsh on her father. She would say he loved! And true: he did love, he does love; loves no woman but the dear mother.

He flicked a short wring of the hand having taken pressure from an alien woman's before Fredi pressed it, and absolved himself in the act; thinking, How little does a woman know how true we can be to her when we smell at a flower here and there!—-There they are, stationary; women the flowers, we the bee; and we are faithful in our seeming volatility; faithful to the hive!—And if women are to be stationary, the reasoning is not so bad. Funny, however, if they here and there imitatively spread a wing, and treat men in that way? It is a breach of the convention; we pay them our homage, that they may serve as flowers, not to be volatile tempters. Nataly never had been one of the sort: Lady Grace was. No necessity existed for compelling the world to bow to Lady Grace, while on behalf of his Nataly he had to . . . Victor closed the curtain over a gulf-revealed by an invocation of Nature, and showing the tremendous force he partook of so largely, in her motive elements of the devourer. Horrid to behold, when we need a gracious presentation of the circumstances. She is a splendid power for as long as we confine her between the banks: but she has a passion to discover cracks; and if we give her headway, she will find one, and drive at it, and be through, uproarious in her primitive licentiousness, unless we labour body and soul like Dutchmen at the dam. Here she was, and not desired, almost detested! Nature detested! It had come about through the battle for Nataly; chiefly through Mrs. Burman's tenacious hold of the filmy thread she took for life and was enabled to use as a means for the perversion besides bar to the happiness of creatures really living. We may well marvel at the Fates, and tell them they are not moral agents!

Page 3670

Victor's reflections came across Colney Durance, who tripped and stopped them.

Dressed with his customary celerity, he waited for Nesta, to show her the lighted grand double drawing-room: a further proof of how Fortune favoured him: she was to be told, how he one day expressed a wish for greater space, and was informed on the next, that the neighbour house was being vacated, and the day following he was in treaty for the purchase of it; returning from Tyrol, he found his place habitable.

Nesta came. Her short look at him was fond, her voice not faltering; she laid her hand under his arm and walked round the spacious room, praising the general design, admiring the porcelain, the ferns, friezes, hangings, and the grand piano, the ebony inlaid music-stands, the firegrates and plaques, the ottomans, the tone of neutral colour that, as in sound, muted splendour. He told her it was a reception night, with music: and added: 'I miss my . . . seen anybody lately?'

'Mr. Sowerby?' said she. 'He was to have escorted me back. He may have overslept himself.'

She spoke it plainly; when speaking of the dear good ladies, she set a gentle humour at play, and comforted him, as she intended, with a souvenir of her lively spirit, wanting only in the manner of gaiety.

He allowed, that she could not be quite gay.

More deeply touched the next minute, he felt in her voice, in her look, in her phrasing of speech, an older, much older daughter than the Fredi whom he had conducted to Moorsedge. 'Kiss me,' he said.

She turned to him full-front, and kissed his right cheek and left, and his forehead, saying: 'My love! my papa! my own dear dada!' all the words of her girlhood in her new sedateness; and smiling: like the moral crepuscular of a sunlighted day down a not totally inanimate Sunday Londen street.

He strained her to his breast. 'Mama soon be here?'

'Soon.'

That was well. And possibly at the present moment applying, with her cunning hand, the cosmetics and powders he could excuse for a concealment of the traces of grief.

Satisfied in being a superficial observer, he did not spy to see more than the world would when Nataly entered the dining-room at the quiet family dinner. She performed her part for his comfort, though not prattling; and he missed his Fredi's delicious warble of the prattle running rill-like over our daily humdrum. Simeon Fenellan would have helped. Then suddenly came enlivenment: a recollection of news in the morning's

paper. 'No harm before Fredi, my dear. She's a young woman now. And no harm, so to speak-at least, not against the Sanfredini. She has donned her name again, and a villa on Como, leaving her 'duque';—paragraph from a Milanese musical Journal; no particulars. Now, mark me, we shall have her at Lakelands in the Summer. If only we could have her now!'

'It would be a pleasure,' said Nataly. Her heart had a blow in the thought, that a lady of this kind would create the pleasure by not bringing criticism.

Page 3671

‘The godmother?’ he glistened upon Nesta.

She gave him low half-notes of the little blue butterfly’s imitation of the superb contralto; and her hand and head at turn to hint the theatrical operatic attitude.

‘Delicious!’ he cried, his eyelids were bedewed at the vision of the three of them planted in the past; and here again, out of the dark wood, where something had required to be said, and had been said; and all was happily over, owing to the goodness and sweetness of the two dear innocents;—whom heaven bless! Jealousy of their naturally closer heart-at-heart, had not a whisper for him; part of their goodness and sweetness was felt to be in the not excluding him.

Nesta engaged to sing one of the ’old duets with her mother. She saw her mother’s breast lift in a mechanical effort to try imaginary notes, as if doubtful of her capacity, more at home in the dumb deep sigh they fell to. Her mother’s heroism made her a sacred woman to the thoughts of the girl, overcoming wonderment at the extreme submissiveness.

She put a screw on her mind to perceive the rational object there might be for causing her mother to go through tortures in receiving and visiting; and she was arrested by the louder question, whether she could think such a man as her father irrational.

People with resounding names, waves of a steady stream, were announced by Arlington, just as in the days, that seemed remote, before she went to Moorsedge; only they were more numerous, and some of the titles had ascended a stage. There were great lords, there were many great ladies; and Lady Grace Halley shuffling amid them, like a silken shimmer in voluminous robes.

They crowded about their host where he stood. ‘He, is their Law!’ Colney said, speaking unintelligibly, in the absence of the Simeon Fenellan regretted so loudly by Mr. Beaves Urmsing. They had an air of worshipping, and he of swimming.

There were also City magnates, and Lakelands’ neighbours: the gentleman representing Pride of Port, Sir Abraham Quatley; and Colonel Corfe; Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington; Mrs. Fanning; Mr. Caddis. Few young men and maids were seen. Dr. John Cormyn came without his wife, not mentioning her. Mrs. Peter Yatt touched the notes for voices at the piano. Priscilla Graves was a vacancy, and likewise the Rev. Septimus Barmby. Peridon and Catkin, and Mr. Pempton took their usual places. There was no fluting. A famous Canadian lady was the principal singer. A Galician violinist, zig-zagging extreme extensions and contractions of his corporeal frame in execution, and described by Colney as ‘Paganini on wall,’ failed to supplant Durandarte in Nesta’s memory. She was asked by Lady Grace for the latest of Dudley. Sir Abraham Quatley named him with handsome emphasis. Great dames caressed her; openly approved; shadowed the future place among them.

Page 3672

Victor alluded at night to Mrs. John Cormyn's absence. He said: 'A homoeopathic doctor's wife!' nothing more; and by that little, he prepared Nesta for her mother's explanation. The great London people, ignorant or not, were caught by the strong tide he created, and carried on it. But there was a bruiting of the secret among their set; and the one to fall away from her, Nataly marvellingly named Mrs. John Cormyn; whose marriage was of her making. She did not disapprove Priscilla's behaviour. Priscilla had come to her and, protesting affection, had openly stated, that she required time and retirement to recover her proper feelings. Nataly smiled a melancholy criticism of an inconsequent or capricious woman, in relating to Nesta certain observations Priscilla had dropped upon poor faithful Mr. Pempton, because of his concealment from her of his knowledge of things for this faithful gentleman had been one of the few not ignorant. The rumour was traceable to the City.

'Mother, we walk on planks,' Nesta said.

Nataly answered: 'You will grow used to it.'

Her mother's habitual serenity in martyrdom was deceiving. Nesta had a transient suspicion, that she had grown, from use, to like the whirl of company, for oblivion in the excitement; and as her remembrance of her own station among the crowding people was a hot flush, the difference of their feelings chilled her.

Nataly said: 'It is to-morrow night again; we do not rest.' She smiled; and at once the girl read woman's armour on the dear face, and asked herself, Could I be so brave? The question following was a speechless wave, that surged at her father. She tried to fathom the scheme he entertained. The attempt obscured her conception of the man he was. She could not grasp him, being too young for knowing, that young heads cannot obtain a critical hold upon one whom they see grandly succeeding it is the sun's brilliance to their eyes.

Mother and daughter slept together that night, and their embrace was their world.

Nesta delighted her father the next day by walking beside him into the, City, as far as the end of the Embankment, where the carriage was in waiting with her maid to bring her back; and at his mere ejaculation of a wish, the hardy girl drove down in the afternoon for the walk home with him. Lady Grace Halley was at the office. 'I'm an incorrigible Stock Exchange gambler,' she said.

'Only,' Victor bade her beware, 'Mines are undulating in movement, and their heights are a preparation for their going down.'

She said she 'liked a swing.'

Nesta looked at them in turn.

The day after and the day after, Lady Grace was present. She made play with Dudley's name.

Page 3673

This coming into the City daily of a girl, for the sake of walking back in winter weather with her father, struck her as ambiguous: either a jealous foolish mother's device, or that of a weak man beating about for protection. But the woman of the positive world soon read to the contrary; helped a little by the man, no doubt. She read rather too much to the contrary, and took the pedestrian girl for perfect simplicity in her tastes, when Nesta had so far grown watchful as to feel relieved by the lady's departure. Her mother, without sympathy for the lady, was too great of soul for jealousy. Victor had his Nataly before him at a hint from Lady Grace: and he went somewhat further than the exact degree when affirming, that Nataly could not scheme, and was incapable of suspecting.—Nataly could perceive things with a certain accuracy: she would not stoop to a meanness. 'Plot? Nataly?' said he, and shrugged. In fact, the void of plot, drama, shuffle of excitement, reflected upon Nataly. He might have seen as tragic as ever dripped on Stage, had he looked.

But the walk Westward with his girl, together with pride in a daughter who clove her way through all weathers, won his heart to exultation. He told her: 'Fredi does her dada so much good'; not telling her in what, or opening any passage to the mystery of the man he was. She was trying to be a student of life, with her eyes down upon hard earth, despite of her winged young head; she would have compassed him better had he dilated in sublime fashion; but he baffled her perusal of a man of power by the simpleness of his enjoyment of small things coming in his way;—the lighted shops, the crowd, emergence from the crowd, or the meeting near midwinter of a soft warm wind along the Embankment, and dark Thames magnificently coroneted over his grimy flow. There is no grasping of one who quickens us.

His flattery of his girl, too, restored her broken feeling of personal value; it permeated her nourishingly from the natural breath of him that it was.

At times he touched deep in humaneness; and he set her heart leaping on the flash of a thought to lay it bare, with the secret it held, for his help. That was a dream. She could more easily have uttered the words to Captain Dartrey, after her remembered abashing holy tremour of the vision of doing it and casting herself on noblest man's compassionateness; and her imagined thousand emotions;—a rolling music within her, a wreath of cloudglory in her sky;—which had, as with virgins it may be, plighted her body to him for sheer urgency of soul; drawn her by a single unwitting-to-brain, conscious-in-blood, shy curl outward of the sheathing leaf to the flowering of woman to him; even to the shore of that strange sea, where the maid stands choosing this one man for her destiny, as in a trance. So are these young ones unfolded, shade by shade; and a shade is all the difference with them; they can teach the poet to marvel at the immensity of vitality in 'the shadow of a shade.'

Page 3674

Her father shut the glimpse of a possible speaking to him of Mrs. Marsett, with a renewal of his eulogistic allusions to Dudley Sowerby: the ‘perfect gentleman, good citizen’; prospective heir to an earldom besides. She bowed to Dudley’s merits; she read off the honorific pedimental letters of a handsome statue, for a sign to herself that she passed it.

She was unjust, as Victor could feel, though he did not know how coldly unjust. For among the exorbitant requisitions upon their fellow-creatures made by the young, is the demand, that they be definite: no mercy is in them for the transitional. And Dudley—-and it was under her influence, and painfully, not ignobly—was in process of development: interesting to philosophers, if not to maidens.

Victor accused her of paying too much heed to Colney Durance’s epigrams upon their friends. He quite joined with his English world in its opinion, that epigrams are poor squibs when they do not come out of great guns. Epigrams fired at a venerable nation, are surely the poorest of popgun paper pellets. The English kick at the insolence, when they are not in the mood for pelleting themselves, or when the armed Foreigner is overshadowing and braceing. Colney’s pretentious and laboured Satiric Prose Epic of ‘*the rival tongues*,’ particularly offended him, as being a clever aim at no hitting; and sustained him, inasmuch as it was an acid friend’s collapse. How could Colney expect his English to tolerate such a spiteful diatribe! The suicide of Dr. Bouthoin at San Francisco was the finishing stroke to the chances of success of the Serial;—although we are promised splendid evolutions on the part of Mr. Semhians; who, after brilliant achievements with bat and ball, abandons those weapons of Old England’s modern renown, for a determined wrestle with our English pronunciation of words, and rescue of the spelling of them from the printer. His headache over the present treatment of the verb ‘To bid,’ was a quaint beginning for one who had soon to plead before Japanese, and who acknowledged now ‘in contrition of spirit,’ that in formerly opposing the scheme for an Academy, he helped to the handing of our noble language to the rapid reporter of news for an apathetic public. Further, he discovered in astonishment the subordination of all literary Americans to the decrees of their literary authorities; marking a Transatlantic point of departure, and contrasting ominously with the unruly Islanders ’grunting the higgledy-piggledy of their various ways, in all the porker’s gut-gamut at the rush to the trough.’ After a week’s privation of bat and ball, he is, lighted or not, a gas-jet of satire upon his countrymen. As for the ’pathetic sublimity of the Funeral of Dr. Bouthoin,’ Victor inveighed against an impious irony in the over dose of the pathos; and the same might be suspected in Britannia’s elegy upon him, a strain of hot eulogy throughout. Mr. Semhians, all but treasonably, calls it, Papboat

Page 3675

and Brandy:—'our English literary diet of the day': stimulating and not nourishing. Britannia's mournful anticipation, that 'The shroud enwinding this my son is mine!'—-should the modern generation depart from the track of him who proved himself the giant in mainly supporting her glory—was, no doubt, a high pitch of the note of Conservatism. But considering, that Dr. Bouthoin 'committed suicide under a depression of mind produced by a surfeit of unaccustomed dishes, upon a physical system inspired by the traditions of exercise, and no longer relieved by the practice'—to translate from Dr. Gannius: we are again at war with the writer's reverential tone, and we know not what to think: except, that Mr. Durance was a Saturday meat market's butcher in the Satiric Art.

Nesta found it pleasanter to see him than to hear of his work: which, to her present feeling, was inhuman. As little as our native public, had she then any sympathy for the working in the idea: she wanted throbs, visible aims, the Christian incarnate; she would have preferred the tale of slaughter—periodically invading all English classes as a flush from the undrained lower, Vikings all—to frigid sterile Satire. And truly it is not a fruit-bearing rod. Colney had to stand on the defence of it against the damsel's charges. He thought the use of the rod, while expressing profound regret at a difference of opinion between him and those noble heathens, beneficial for boys; but in relation to their seniors, and particularly for old gentlemen, he thought that the sharpest rod to cut the skin was the sole saving of them. Insensibility to Satire, he likened to the hard-mouthed horse; which is doomed to the worser thing in consequence. And consequently upon the lack of it, and of training to appreciate it, he described his country's male venerables as being distinguishable from annuitant spinsters only in presenting themselves forked.

'He is unsuccessful and embittered, Victor said to Nesta. 'Colney will find in the end, that he has lost his game and soured himself by never making concessions. Here's this absurd Serial—it fails, of course; and then he has to say, it's because he won't tickle his English, won't enter into a "frowzy complicity" with their tastes.'

'But—I think of Skepsey honest creatures respect Mr. Durance, and he is always ready to help them,' said Nesta.

'If he can patronize.'

'Does he patronize me, dada?'

'You are one of his exceptions. Marry a title and live in state—and then hear him! I am successful, and the result of it is, that he won't acknowledge wisdom in anything I say or do; he will hardly acknowledge the success. It is "a dirty road to success," he says. So that, if successful, I must have rolled myself in mire. I compelled him to admit he was wrong about your being received at Moorsedge: a bit of a triumph!'

Nesta's walks with her father were no loss of her to Nataly; the girl came back to her bearing so fresh and so full a heart; and her father was ever prouder of her: he presented new features of her in his quotations of her sayings, thoughtful sayings. 'I declare she helps one to think,' he said. 'It 's not precocity; it 's healthy inquiry. She brings me nearer ideas of my own, not yet examined, than any one else does. I say, what a wife for a man!'

Page 3676

‘She takes my place beside you, dear, now I am not quite strong,’ said Nataly. ‘You have not seen . . .?’

’Dudley Sowerby? He’s at Cronidge, I believe. His elder brother’s in a bad way. Bad business, this looking to a death.’

Nataly eyes revealed a similar gulf.

Let it be cast on Society, then! A Society opposing Nature forces us to these murderous looks upon impediments. But what of a Society in the dance with Nature? Victor did not approve of that. He began, under the influence of Nesta’s companionship, to see the Goddess Nature there is in a chastened nature. And this view shook the curtain covering his lost Idea. He felt sure he should grasp it soon and enter into its daylight: a muffled voice within him said, that he was kept waiting to do so by the inexplicable tardiness of a certain one to rise ascending to her spiritual roost. She was now harmless to strike: Themison, Carling, Jarniman, even the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, had been won to the cause of humanity. Her ascent, considering her inability to do further harm below, was most mysteriously delayed. Owing to it, in a manner almost as mysterious, he was kept crossing a bridge having a slippery bit on it. Thanks to his gallant Fredi, he had found his feet again. But there was a bruise where, to his honour, he felt tenderest. And Fredi away, he might be down again—for no love of a slippery bit, proved slippery, one might guess, by a predecessor or two. Ta-ta-ta-to and mum! Still, in justice to the little woman, she had been serviceable.

She would be still more so, if a member of Parliament now on his back here we are with the murder-eye again!

Nesta’s never speaking of Lakelands clouded him a little, as an intimation of her bent of mind.

‘And does my girl come to her dada to-day?’ he said, on the fifth morning since her return; prepared with a villanous resignation to hear, that this day she abstained, though he had the wish for her coming.

‘Why, don’t you know,’ said she, ’we all meet to have tea in Mr. Durance’s chambers; and I walk back with you, and there we are joined by mama; and we are to have a feast of literary celebrities.’

’Colney’s selection of them! And Simeon Fenellan, I hope. Perhaps Dartrey. Perhaps . . . eh?’

She reddened. So Dudley Sowerby’s unspoken name could bring the blush to her cheeks. Dudley had his excuses in his brother’s condition. His father’s health, too, was —but this was Dudley calculating. Where there are coronets, calculations of this sort

must needs occur; just as where there are complications. Odd, one fancies it, that we walking along the pavement of civilized life, should be perpetually summoning Orcus to our aid, for the sake of getting a clear course.

‘And supposing a fog, my dearie?’ he said.

’The daughter in search of her father carries a lamp to light her to him through densest fogs as well as over deserts,’ *etc*. She declaimed a long sentence, to set the ripple running in his features; and when he left the room for a last word with Armandine, she flung arms round her mother’s neck, murmuring: ‘Mother! mother!’ a cry equal to ‘I am sure I do right,’ and understood so by Nataly approving it; she too on the line of her instinct, without an object in sight.

Page 3677

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE MOTHER-THE DAUGHTER

Taking Nesta's hand, on her entry into his chambers with her father, Colney Durance bowed over it and kissed it. The unusual performance had a meaning; she felt she was praised. It might be because she made herself her father's companion. 'I can't persuade him to put on a great-coat,' she said. 'You would defeat his aim at the particular waistcoat of his ambition,' said Colney, goaded to speak, not anxious to be heard.

He kept her beside him, leading her about for introductions to multiform celebrities of both sexes; among them the gentleman editing the Magazine which gave out serially *the rival tongues*: and there was talk of a dragon-throated public's queer appetite in Letters. The pained Editor deferentially smiled at her cheerful mention of Delphica. 'In, book form, perhaps!' he remarked, with plaintive' resignation; adding: 'You read it?' And a lady exclaimed: 'We all read it!'

But we are the elect, who see signification and catch flavour; and we are reminded of an insatiable monster how sometimes capricious is his gorge. 'He may happen to be in the humour for a shaking!' Colney's poor consolation it was to say of the prospects of his published book: for the funny monster has been known to like a shaking.

'He takes it kinder tickled,' said Fenellan, joining the group and grasping Nesta's hand with a warmth that thrilled her and set her guessing. 'A taste of his favourite Cayenne lollypop, Colney; it fetches the tear he loves to shed, or it gives him digestive heat in the bag of his literary receptacle-fearfully relaxed and enormous! And no wonder; his is to lie him down on notion of the attitude for reading, his back; and he has in a jiffy the funnel of the Libraries inserted into his mouth, and he feels the publishers pouring their gallons through it unlimitedly; never crying out, which he can't; only swelling, which he's obliged to do, with a non-nutritious inflation; and that's his intellectual enjoyment; bearing a likeness to the horrible old torture of the baillir d'eau; and he's doomed to perish in the worst book-form of dropsy. You, my dear Colney, have offended his police or excise, who stand by the funnel, in touch with his palate, to make sure that nothing above proof is poured in; and there's your misfortune. He's not half a bad fellow, you find when you haven't got to serve him.'

'Superior to his official parasites, one supposes!' Colney murmured.

The celebrities were unaffectedly interested in a literary failure having certain merits; they discussed it, to compliment the crownless author; and the fervider they, the more was he endowed to read the meanness prompting the generosity. Publication of a book, is the philosopher's lantern upon one's fellows.

Colney was caught away from his private manufactory of acids by hearing Simeon Fenellan relate to Victor some of the recent occurrences at Brighton. Simeon's tone was unsatisfying; Colney would have the word; he was like steel on the grindstone for such a theme of our national grotesque-sublime.

Page 3678

’That Demerara Supple-jack, Victor! Don’t listen to Simeon; he’s a man of lean narrative, fit to chronicle political party wrangles and such like crop of carcase prose: this is epical. In *drink* we have Old England’s organic Epic; Greeks and Trojans; Parliamentary Olympus, ennobled brewers, nasal fanatics, all the machinery to hand. Keep a straight eye on the primary motives of man, you’ll own the English produce the material for proud verse; they’re alive there! Dartrey’s Demerara makes a pretty episode of the battle. I haven’t seen it—if it’s possible to look on it: but I hear it is flexible, of a vulgar appearance in repose, Jove’s lightning at one time, the thong of AEacus at another. Observe Dartrey marching off to the Station, for the purpose of laying his miraculous weapon across the shoulders of a son of Mars, who had offended. But we have his name, my dear Victor! His name, Simeon?—Worrell; a Major Worrell: his offence being probably, that he obtained military instruction in the Service, and left it at his convenience, for our poor patch and tatter British Army to take in his place another young student, who’ll grow up to do similarly. And Dartrey, we assume, is off to stop that system. You behold Sir Dartrey twirling the weapon in preparatory fashion; because he is determined we shall have an army of trained officers instead of infant amateurs heading heroic louts. Not a thought of Beer in Dartrey!—-always unpatriotic, you ’ll say. Plato entreats his absent mistress to fix eyes on a star: eyes on Beer for the uniting of you English! I tell you no poetic fiction. Seeing him on his way, thus terribly armed, and knowing his intent, Venus, to shield a former favourite servant of Mars, conjured the most diverting of interventions, in the shape of a young woman in a poke-bonnet, and Skepsey, her squire, marching with a dozen or so, informing bedevilled mankind of the hideousness of our hymnification when it is not under secluding sanction of the Edifice, and challengeing criticism; and that was hard by, and real English, in the form of bludgeons, wielded by a battalion of the national idol Bungay Beervat’s boys; and they fell upon the hymners. Here you fill in with pastoral similes. They struck the maid adored by Skepsey. And that was the blow which slew them! Our little man drove into the press with a pair of fists able to do their work. A valiant skiff upon a sea of enemies, he was having it on the nob, and suddenly the Demerara lightened. It flailed to thresh. Enough. to say, brains would have come. The Bungays made a show of fight. No lack of blood in them, to stock a raw shilling’s worth or gush before Achilles rageing. You perceive the picture, you can almost sing the ballad. We want only a few names of the fallen. It was the carving of a maitre chef, according to Skepsey: right-left-and point, with supreme precision: they fell, accurately sliced from the joint. Having done with them, Dartrey tossed the Demerara to Skepsey, and washed his hands of battle; and he let his major go unscathed. Phlebotomy sufficient for the day!’

Page 3679

Nesta's ears hummed with the name of Major Worrell.

'Skepsey did come back to London with a rather damaged frontispiece,' Victor said. 'He can't have joined those people?'

'They may suit one of your militant peacemakers,' interposed Fenellan. 'The most placable creatures alive, and the surest for getting-up a shindy.'

'Suit him! They're the scandal of our streets.' Victor was pricked with a jealousy of them for beguiling him of his trusty servant.

'Look at your country, see where it shows its vitality,' said Colney. 'You don't see elsewhere any vein in movement-movement,' he harped on the word Victor constantly employed to express the thing he wanted to see. 'Think of that, when the procession sets your teeth on edge. They're honest foes of vice, and they move:—in England! Pulpit-preaching has no effect. For gross maladies, gross remedies. You may judge of what you are by the quality of the cure. Puritanism, I won't attempt to paint—it would barely be decent; but compare it with the spectacle of English frivolity, and you'll admit it to be the best show you make. It may still be the saving of you—on the level of the orderly ox: I 've not observed that it aims at higher. And talking of the pulpit, Barmby is off to the East, has accepted a Shoreditch curacy, Skepsey tells me.'

'So there's the reason for our not seeing him!' Victor turned to Nesta.

'Papa, you won't be angry with Skepsey if he has joined those people,' said Nesta. 'I'm sure he thinks of serving his country, Mr. Durance.'

Colney smiled on her. 'And you too?'

'If women knew how!'

'They're hitting on more ways at present than the men—in England.'

'But, Mr. Durance, it speaks well for England when they're allowed the chance here.'

'Good!' Fenellan exclaimed. 'And that upsets his placement of the modern national genders: Germany masculine, France feminine, Old England what remains.'

Victor ruffled and reddened on his shout of 'Neuter?'

Their circle widened. Nesta knew she was on promotion, by her being led about and introduced to ladies. They were encouraging with her. One of them, a Mrs. Marina Floyer, had recently raised a standard of feminine insurrection. She said: 'I hear your praises from Mr. Durance. He rarely praises. You have shown capacity to meditate on the condition of women, he says.'

Nesta drew a shorter breath, with a hope at heart. She speculated in the dark, as to whether her aim to serve and help was not so friendless. And did Mr. Durance approve? But surely she stood in a glorious England if there were men and women to welcome a girl to their councils. Oh! that is the broad free England where gentlemen and gentlewomen accept of the meanest aid to cleanse the land of its iniquities, and do not suffer shame to smite a young face for touching upon horrors with a pure design.

Page 3680

She cried in her bosom: I feel! She had no other expression for that which is as near as great natures may come to the conceiving of the celestial spirit from an emissary angel; and she trembled, the fire ran through her. It seemed to her, that she would be called to help or that certainly they were nearing to an effacement of the woefullest of evils; and if not helping, it would still be a blessedness for her to kneel thanking heaven.

Society was being attacked and defended. She could but studiously listen. Her father was listening. The assailant was a lady; and she had a hearing, although she treated Society as a discrowned monarch on trial for an offence against a more precious: *viz*., the individual cramped by brutish laws: the individual with the ideas of our time, righteously claiming expansion out of the clutches of a narrow old-world disciplinarian-that giant hypocrite! She flung the gauntlet at externally venerable Institutions; and she had a hearing, where horrification, execration, the foul Furies of Conservatism would in a shortly antecedent day have been hissing and snakily lashing, hounding her to expulsion. Mrs. Marina Floyer gravely seconded her. Colney did the same. Victor turned sharp on him. 'Yes,' Colney said; 'we unfold the standard of extremes in this country, to get a single step taken: that's how we move: we threaten death to get footway. Now, mark: Society's errors will be admitted.'

A gentleman spoke. He began by admitting Society's errors. Nevertheless, it so distinctly exists for the common good, that we may say of Society in relation to the individual, it is the body to the soul. We may wash, trim, purify, but we must not maim it. The assertion of our individuality in opposition to the Government of Society—this existing Society—is a toss of the cap for the erasure of our civilization, et caetera.

Platitudes can be of intense interest if they approach our case.—But, if you please, we ask permission to wash, trim, purify, and we do not get it.—But you have it! Because we take it at our peril; and you, who are too cowardly to grant or withhold, call-up the revolutionary from the pits by your slackness:—etc. There was a pretty hot debate. Both assailant and defendant, to Victor's thinking, spoke well, and each the right thing and he could have made use of both, but he could answer neither. He beat about for the cause of this deficiency, and discovered it in his position. Mentally, he was on the side of Society. Yet he was annoyed to find the attack was so easily answerable when the defence unfolded. But it was absurd to expect it would not be. And in fact, a position secretly rebellious is equal to water on the brain for stultifying us.

Before the controversy was over, a note in Nataly's handwriting called him home. She wrote: 'Make my excuses. C. D. will give Nesta and some lady dinner. A visitor here. Come alone, and without delay. Quite well, robust. Impatient to consult with you, nothing else.'

Page 3681

Nesta was happy to stay; and Victor set forth.

The visitor? plainly Dudley. Nataly's trusting the girl to the chance of some lady being present, was unlike her. Dudley might be tugging at the cord; and the recent conversation upon Society, rendered one of its gilt pillars particularly estimable.—A person in the debate had declared this modern protest on behalf of individualism to represent Society's Criminal Trial. And it is likely to be a long one. And good for the world, that we see such a Trial!—Well said or not, undoubtedly Society is an old criminal: not much more advanced than the state of spiritual worship where bloody sacrifice was offered to a hungry Lord. But it has a case for pleading. We may liken it, as we have it now, to the bumping lumberer's raft; suitable along torrent waters until we come to smoother. Are we not on waters of a certain smoothness at the reflecting level?—enough to justify demands for a vessel of finer design. If Society is to subsist, it must have the human with the logical argument against the cry of the free-flags, instead of presenting a block's obtuseness. That, you need not hesitate to believe, will be rolled downward and disintegrated, sooner than later. A Society based on the logical concrete of humane considerateness:—a Society prohibiting to Mrs. Burman her wielding of a life-long rod . . . .

The personal element again to confuse inquiry!—And Skepsey and Barmby both of them bent on doing work without inquiry of any sort! They were enviable: they were good fellows. Victor clung to the theme because it hinted of next door to his lost Idea. He rubbed the back of his head, fancying a throb there. Are civilized creatures incapable of abstract thought when their social position is dubious? For if so, we never can be quit of those we forsake.—Apparently Mrs. Burman's unfathomed power lay in her compelling him to summon the devilish in himself and play upon the impish in Society, that he might overcome her.

Victor's house-door stopped this current.

Nataly took his embrace.

'Nothing wrong?' he said, and saw the something. It was a favourable moment to tell her what she might not at another time regard as a small affair. 'News in the City to-day of that South London borough being vacated. Quatley urges me. A death again! I saw Pempton, too. Will you credit me when I tell you he carries his infatuation so far, that he has been investing in Japanese and Chinese Loans, because they are less meat-eaters than others, and vegetarians are more stable, and outlast us all!—Dudley the visitor?'
'Mr. Sowerby has been here,' she said, in a shaking low voice.

Victor held her hand and felt a squeeze more nervous than affectionate.

'To consult with me,' she added. 'My maid will go at ten to bring Nesta; Mr. Durance I can count on, to see her safe home. Ah!' she wailed.

Victor nodded, saying: 'I guess. And, my love, you will receive Mrs. John Cormyn tomorrow morning. I can't endure gaps. Gaps in our circle must never be. Do I guess? —I spoke to Colney about bringing her home.'

Page 3682

Nataly sighed: 'Ah! make what provision we will! Evil—Mr. Sowerby has had a great deal to bear.'

'A worldling may think so.'

Her breast heaved, and the wave burst: but her restraining of tears froze her speech.

'Victor! Our Nesta! Mr. Sowerby is unable to explain. And how the Miss Duvidneys! . . . At that Brighton!'—The voice he heard was not his darling's deep rich note, it had dropped to toneless hoarseness: 'She has been permitted to make acquaintance—she has been seen riding with—she has called upon—Oh! it is one of those abandoned women. In her house! Our girl! Our Nesta! She was insulted by a man in the woman's house. She is talked of over Brighton. The mother!—the daughter! And grant me this—that never was girl more carefully . . . never till she was taken from me. Oh! do not forget. You will defend me? You will say, that her mother did with all her soul strive . . . It is not a rumour. Mr. Sowerby has had it confirmed.' A sob caught her voice.

Victor's hands caressed to console: 'Dudley does not propose to . . ?'

'Nesta must promise . . . But how it happened? How! An acquaintance with—contact with!—Oh! cruel!' Each time she ceased speaking, the wrinkles of a shiver went over her, and the tone was of tears coming, but she locked them in.

'An accident!' said Victor; 'some misunderstanding—there can't be harm. Of course, she promises—hasn't to promise. How could a girl distinguish! He does not cast blame on her?'

'Dear, if you would go down to Dartrey to-morrow. He knows:—it is over the Clubs there; he will tell you, before a word to Nesta. Innocent, yes! Mr. Sowerby has not to be assured of that. Ignorant of the character of the dreadful woman? Ah, if I could ever in anything think her ignorant! She frightens me. Mr. Sowerby is indulgent. He does me justice. My duty to her—I must defend myself—has been my first thought. I said in my prayers—she at least! . . . We have to see the more than common reasons why she, of all girls, should—he did not hint it, he was delicate: her name must not be public.'

'Yes, yes, Dudley is without parallel as a gentleman,' said Victor. 'It does not suit me to hear the word "indulgent." My dear, if you were down there, you would discover that the talk was the talk of two or three men seeing our girl ride by—and she did ride with a troop: why, we've watched them along the parade, often. Clear as day how it happened! I'll go down early to-morrow.'

He fancied Nataly was appeased. And even out of this annoyance, there was the gain of her being won to favour Dudley's hitherto but tolerated suit.

Nataly also had the fancy, that the calm following on her anguish, was a moderation of it. She was kept strung to confide in her girl by the recent indebtedness to her for words heavenly in the strengthening comfort they gave. But no sooner was she alone than her torturing perplexities and her abasement of the hours previous to Victor's coming returned.

Page 3683

For a girl of Nesta's head could not be deceived; she had come home with a woman's intelligence of the world, hard knowledge of it—a knowledge drawn from foul wells, the unhappy mother imagined: she dreaded to probe to the depth of it. She had in her wounded breast the world's idea, that corruption must come of the contact with impurity.

Nataly renewed her cry of despair: 'The mother!—the daughter!'—her sole revelation of the heart's hollows in her stammered speaking to Victor.

She thanked heaven for the loneliness of her bed, where she could repeat: 'The mother!—the daughter!' hearing the world's words:—the daughter excused, by reason of her having such a mother; the mother unpitied for the bruiting of her brazen daughter's name: but both alike consigned to the corners of the world's dust-heaps. She cried out, that her pride was broken. Her pride, her last support of life, had gone to pieces. The tears she restrained in Victor's presence, were called on to come now, and she had none. It might be, that she had not strength for weeping. She was very weak. Rising from bed to lock her door against Nesta's entry to the room on her return at night, she could hardly stand: a chill and a clouding overcame her. The quitted bed seemed the haven of a drifted wreck to reach.

Victor tried the handle of a locked door in the dark of the early winter morning. 'The mother!—the daughter!' had swung a pendulum for some time during the night in him, too. He would rather have been subjected to the spectacle of tears than have heard that toneless voice, as it were the dry torrent-bed rolling blocks instead of melodious, if afflicting, waters.

He told Nesta not to disturb her mother, and murmured of a headache: 'Though, upon my word, the best cure for mama would be a look into Fredi's eyes!' he said, embracing his girl, quite believing in her, just a little afraid of her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

NATALY, NESTA, AND DARTREY FENELLAN

Pleasant things, that come to us too late for our savour of the sweetness in them, toll ominously of life on the last walk to its end. Yesterday, before Dudley Sowerby's visit, Nataly would have been stirred where the tears we shed for happiness or repress at a flattery dwell when seeing her friend Mrs. John Cormyn enter her boudoir and hearing her speak repentantly, most tenderly. Mrs. John said: 'You will believe I have suffered, dear; I am half my weight, I do think': and she did not set the smile of responsive humour moving; although these two ladies had a key of laughter between them. Nataly took her kiss; held her hand, and at the parting kissed her. She would rather have seen her friend than not: so far she differed from a corpse; but she was near the likeness to the dead in the insensibility to any change of light shining on one who best loved

darkness and silence. She cried to herself wilfully, that her pride was broken: as women do when they spurn at the wounding of a dignity they cannot protect and die to see bleeding; for in it they live.

Page 3684

The cry came of her pride unbroken, sore bruised, and after a certain space for recovery combative. She said:

Any expiation I could offer where I did injury, I would not refuse; I would humble myself and bless heaven for being able to pay my debt—what I can of it. All I contend against is, injustice. And she sank into sensational protests of her anxious care of her daughter, too proud to phrase them.

Her one great affliction, the scourging affliction of her utter loneliness;—an outcast from her family; daily, and she knew not how, more shut away from the man she loved; now shut away from her girl;—seemed under the hand of the angel of God. The abandonment of her by friends, was merely the light to show it.

Midday's post brought her a letter from Priscilla Graves, entreating to be allowed to call on her next day.—We are not so easily cast off! Nataly said, bitterly, in relation to the lady whose offending had not been so great. She wrote: 'Come, if sure that you sincerely wish to.'

Having fasted, she ate at lunch in her dressing-room, with some taste of the food, haunted by an accusation of gluttony because of her eating at all, and a vile confession, that she was enabled to eat, owing to the receipt of Priscilla's empty letter: for her soul's desire was to be doing a deed of expiation, and the macerated flesh seemed her assurance to herself of the courage to make amends.—I must have some strength, she said wearifully, in apology for the morsel consumed.

Nesta's being in the house with her, became an excessive irritation. Doubts of the girl's possible honesty to speak a reptile truth under question; amazement at her boldness to speak it; hatred of, the mouth that could: and loathing of the words, the theme; and abomination of herself for conjuring fictitious images to rouse real emotions; all ran counterthreads, that produced a mad pattern in the mind, affrighting to reason: and then, for its preservation, reason took a superrational leap, and ascribed the terrible injustice of this last cruel stroke to the divine scourge, recognized divine by the selection of the mortal spot for chastisement. She clasped her breast, and said: It is mortal. And that calmed her.

She said, smiling: I never felt my sin until this blow came! Therefore the blow was proved divine. Ought it not to be welcomed?—and she appearing no better than one of those, the leprous of the sex! And brought to acknowledgement of the likeness by her daughter!

Nataly drank the poison distilled from her exclamations and was ice. She had denied herself to Nesta's redoubled petition. Nesta knocking at the door a third time and calling, tore the mother two ways: to have her girl on her breast or snap their union in a word with an edge. She heard the voice of Dartrey Fenellan.

He was admitted. ‘No, dear,’ she said to Nesta; and Nesta’s, ’My own mother,’ consentingly said, in tender resignation, as she retired, sprang a stinging tear to the mother’s eyelids.

Page 3685

Dartrey looked at the door closing on the girl.

‘Is it a very low woman?’ Nataly asked him in a Church whisper, with a face abashed.

‘It is not,’ said he, quick to meet any abruptness.

‘She must be cunning.’

‘In the ordinary way. We say it of Puss before the hounds.’

‘To deceive a girl like Nesta!’

‘She has done no harm.’

‘Dartrey, you speak to a mother. You have seen the woman? She is?—ah!’

‘She is womanly, womanly.’

‘Quite one of those . . . ?’

’My dear soul! You can’t shake them off in that way. She is one of us. If we have the class, we can’t escape from it. They are not to bear all the burden because they exist. We are the bigger debtors. I tell you she is womanly.’

‘It sounds like horrid cynicism.’

‘Friends of mine would abuse it for the reverse.’

’Do not make me hate your chivalry. This woman is a rod on my back. Provided only she has not dropped venom into Nesta’s mind!’

‘Don’t fear!’

‘Can you tell me you think she has done no harm to my girl?’

‘To Nesta herself?—not any: not to a girl like your girl.’

’To my girl’s name? Speak at once. But I know she has. She induced Nesta to go to her house. My girl was insulted in this woman’s house.’

Dartrey’s forehead ridged with his old fury and a gust of present contempt. ’I can tell you this, that the fellow who would think harm of it, knowing the facts ’s not worthy of touching the tips of the fingers of your girl.’

‘She is talked of!’

’A good-looking girl out riding with a handsome woman on a parade of idlers!’

‘The woman is notorious.’ Nataly said it shivering.

He shook his head. ‘Not true.’

‘She has an air of a lady?’

‘She sits a horse well.’

‘Would she to any extent deceive me—impose on me here?’

‘No.’

‘Ah!’ Nataly moaned. . . .

‘But what?’ said Dartrey. ’There was no pretence. Her style is not worse than that of some we have seen. There was no effort to deceive. The woman’s plain for you and me to read, she has few of the arts; one or two tricks, if you like: and these were not needed for use. There are women who have them, and have not been driven or let slip into the wilderness.’

‘Yes; I know!—those ideas of yours!’ Nataly had once admired him for his knightliness toward the weakest women and the women underfoot. ’You have spoken to this woman? She boasted of acquaintance with Nesta?’

‘She thanked God for having met her.’

‘Is it one of the hysterical creatures?’

Mrs. Marsett appeared fronting Dartrey.

He laughed to himself. ’A clever question. There is a leaning to excitement of manner at times. It ’s not hysteria. Allow for her position.’

Nataly took the unintended blow, and bowed to it; and still more harshly said: ‘What rank of life does the woman come from?’

Page 3686

’The class educated for a skittish career by your popular Stage and your Book-stalls. I am not precise?’

’Leave Mr. Durance. Is she in any degree commonly well bred? . . . behaviour, talk-her English.’

’I trench on Mr. Durance in replying. Her English is passable. You may hear . . .’

’Everywhere, of course! And this woman of slipshod English and excited manners imposed upon Nesta!’

‘It would not be my opinion.’

‘Did not impose on her!’

‘Not many would impose on Nesta Radnor for long.’

‘Think what that says, Dartrey!’

‘You have had a detestable version of the story.’

‘Because an excited creature thanks God to you for having met her!’

’She may. She’s a better woman for having met her. Don’t suppose we’re for supernatural conversions. The woman makes no show of that. But she has found a good soul among her sex—her better self in youth, as one guesses; and she is grateful—feels farther from exile in consequence. She has found a lady to take her by the hand!—not a common case. She can never go to the utterly bad after knowing Nesta. I forget if she says it; I say it. You have heard the story from one of your conventional gentlemen.’

’A true gentleman. I have reason to thank him. He has not your ideas on these matters, Dartrey. He is very sensitive . . . on Nesta’s behalf.’

’With reference to marriage. I’ll own I prefer another kind of gentleman. I ’ve had my experience of that kind of gentleman. Many of the kind have added their spot to the outcasts abominated for uncleanness—in holy unction. Many?—I won’t say all; but men who consent to hear black words pitched at them, and help to set good women facing away from them, are pious dolts or rascal dogs of hypocrites. They, if you’ll let me quote Colney Durance to you to-day—and how is it he is not in favour?—they are tempting the Lord to turn the pillars of Society into pillars of salt. Down comes the house. And priests can rest in sight of it!—They ought to be dead against the sanctimony that believes it excommunicates when it curses. The relationship is not dissolved so cheaply, though our Society affects to think it is. Barmby’s off to the East End of this London, Victor informs me:—good fellow! And there he’ll be groaning over

our vicious nature. Nature is not more responsible for vice than she is for inhumanity. Both bad, but the latter's the worse of the two.'

Nataly interposed: 'I see the contrast, and see whom it's to strike.'

Dartrey sent a thought after his meaning. 'Hardly that. Let it stand. He 's only one with the world: but he shares the criminal infamy for crushing hope out of its frailest victims. They're that—no sentiment. What a world, too, look behind it!—brutal because brutish. The world may go hang: we expect more of your gentleman. To hear of Nesta down there, and doubt that she was about good work; and

Page 3687

come complaining! He had the privilege of speaking to her, remonstrating, if he wished. There are men who think—men!—the plucking of sinners out of the mire a dirty business. They depute it to certain officials. And your women—it's the taste of the world to have them educated so, that they can as little take the humane as the enlightened view. Except, by the way, sometimes, in secret;—they have a sisterly breast. In secret, they do occasionally think as they feel. In public, the brass mask of the Idol they call Propriety commands or supplies their feelings and thoughts. I won't repeat my reasons for educating them differently. At present we have but half the woman to go through life with—and thank you.'

Dartrey stopped. 'Don't be disturbed,' he added. 'There's no ground for alarm. Not of any sort.'

Nataly said: 'What name?'

'Her name is Mrs. Marsett.'

'The name is . . . ?'

'Captain Marsett: will be Sir Edward. He came back from the Continent yesterday.'

A fit of shuddering seized Nataly. It grew in violence, and speaking out of it, with a pause of sickly empty chatter of the jaws, she said: 'Always that name?'

'Before the maiden name? May have been or not.'

'Not, you say?'

'I don't accurately know.'

Dartrey sprang to his legs. 'My dear soul! dear friend—one of the best! if we go on fencing in the dark, there'll be wounds. Your way of taking this affair disappointed me. Now I understand. It's the disease of a trouble, to fly at comparisons. No real one exists. I wished to protect the woman from a happier sister's judgement, to save you from alarm concerning Nesta:—quite groundless, if you'll believe me. Come, there's plenty of benevolent writing abroad on these topics now: facts are more looked at, and a good woman may join us in taking them without the horrors and loathings of angels rather too much given to claim distinction from the luckless. A girl who's unprotected may go through adventures before she fixes, and be a creature of honest intentions. Better if protected, we all agree. Better also if the world did not favour the girl's multitude of enemies. Your system of not dealing with facts openly is everyway favourable to them. I am glad to say, Victor recognizes what corruption that spread of wealth is accountable for. And now I must go and have a talk with the—what a change from the blue butterfly! Eaglet, I ought to have said. I dine with you, for Victor may bring news.'

‘Would anything down there be news to you, Dartrey?’

‘He makes it wherever he steps.’

’He would reproach me for not detaining you. Tell Nesta I have to lie down after talking. She has a child’s confidence in you.’

Page 3688

A man of middle age! he said to himself. It is the particular ejaculation which tames the senior whose heart is for a dash of holiday. He resolved, that the mother might trust to the discretion of a man of his age; and he went down to Nesta, grave with the weight his count of years should give him. Seeing her, the light of what he now knew of her was an ennobling equal to celestial. For this fair girl was one of the active souls of the world —his dream to discover in woman's form. She, the little Nesta, the tall pure-eyed girl before him, was, young though she was, already in the fight with evil: a volunteer of the army of the simply Christian. The worse for it? Sowerby would think so. She was not of the order of young women who, in sheer ignorance or in voluntary, consent to the peace with evil, and are kept externally safe from the smirch of evil, and are the ornaments of their country, glory of a country prizing ornaments higher than qualities.

Dartrey could have been momentarily incredulous of things revealed by Mrs. Marsett—-not incredulous of the girl's heroism: that capacity he caught and gauged in her shape of head, cut of mouth, and the measurements he was accustomed to make at a glance: —but her beauty, or the form of beauty which was hers, argued against her having set foot of thought in our fens. Here and far there we meet a young saint vowed to service along by those dismal swamps: and saintly she looks; not of this earth. Nesta was of the blooming earth. Where do we meet girl or woman comparable to garden-flowers, who can dare to touch to lift the spotted of her sex? He was puzzled by Nesta's unlikeness in deeds and in aspect. He remembered her eyes, on the day when he and Colonel Sudley beheld her; presently he was at quiet grapple with her mind. His doubts cleared off. Then the question came, How could a girl of heroical character be attached to the man Sowerby? That entirely passed belief.

And was it possible his wishes beguiled his hearing? Her tones were singularly vibrating.

They talked for a while before, drawing a deep breath, she said: 'I fancy I am in disgrace with my mother.'

'You have a suspicion why?' said he.

'I have.'

She would have told him why: the words were at her lips. Previous to her emotion on the journey home, the words would have come out. They were arrested by the thunder of the knowledge, that the nobleness in him drawing her to be able to speak of scarlet matter, was personally worshipped.

He attributed the full rose upon her cheeks to the forbidding subject.

To spare pain, he said: 'No misunderstanding with the dear mother will last the day through. Can I help?'

‘Oh, Captain Dartrey!’

‘Drop the captain. Dartrey will do.’

‘How could I!’

‘You’re not wanting in courage, Nesta.’

‘Hardly for that!’

‘By-and-by, then.’

Page 3689

‘Though I could not say Mr. Fenellan.’

‘You see; Dartrey, it must be.’

‘If I could!’

’But the fellow is not a captain: and he is a friend, an old friend, very old friend: he’ll be tipped with grey in a year or two.’

‘I might be bolder then.’

’Imagine it now. There is no disloyalty in your calling your friends by their names.’

Her nature rang to the implication. ‘I am not bound.’ Dartrey hung fast, speculating on her visibly: ‘I heard you were?’

‘No. I must be free.’

‘It is not an engagement?’

’Will you laugh?—I have never quite known. My father desired it: and my desire is to please him. I think I am vain enough to think I read through blinds and shutters. The engagement—what there was—has been, to my reading, broken more than once. I have not considered it, to settle my thoughts on it, until lately: and now I may suspect it to be broken. I have given cause—if it is known. There is no blame elsewhere. I am not unhappy, Captain Dartrey.’

’Captain by courtesy. Very well. Tell me how Nesta judges the engagement to be broken?’

She was mentally phrasing before she said: ‘Absence.’

‘He was here yesterday.’

All that the visit embraced was in her expressive look, as of sight drawing inward, like our breath in a spell of wonderment. ’Then I understand; it enlightens me.

My own mother!—my poor mother! he should have come to me. I was the guilty person, not she; and she is the sufferer. That, if in life were direct retribution! but the very meaning of having a heart, is to suffer through others or for them.’

‘You have soon seen that, dear girl,’ said Dartrey.

‘So, my own mother, and loving me as she does, blames me!’ Nesta sighed; she took a sharp breath. ‘You? do you blame me too?’

He pressed her hand, enamoured of her instantaneous divination and heavenly candour.

But he was admonished, that to speak high approval would not be honourable advantage taken of the rival condemning; and he said: 'Blame? Some think it is not always the right thing to do the right thing. I've made mistakes, with no bad design. A good mother's view is not often wrong.'

'You pressed my hand,' she murmured.

That certainly had said more.

'Glad to again,' he responded. It was uttered airily and was meant to be as lightly done.

Nesta did not draw back her hand. 'I feel strong when you press it.' Her voice wavered, and as when we hear a flask sing thin at the filling, ceased upon evidence of a heart surcharged. How was he to relax the pressure!—he had to give her the strength she craved: and he vowed it should be but for half a minute, half a minute longer.

Her tears fell; she eyed him steadily; she had the look of sunlight in shower.

'Oldish men are the best friends for you, I suppose,' he said; and her gaze turned elusive phrases to vapour.

Page 3690

He was compelled to see the fiery core of the raincloud lighting it for a revealment, that allowed as little as it retained of a shadow of obscurity.

The sight was keener than touch and the run of blood with blood to quicken slumbering seeds of passion.

But here is the place of broken ground and tangle, which calls to honourable men, not bent on sport, to be wary to guard the gunlock. He stopped the word at his mouth. It was not in him to stop or moderate the force of his eyes. She met them with the slender unbendingness that was her own; a feminine of inspirited manhood. There was no soft expression, only the direct shot of light, on both sides; conveying as much as is borne from sun to earth, from earth to sun. And when such an exchange has come between the two, they are past plighting, they are the wedded one.

Nesta felt it, without asking whether she was loved. She was his. She had not a thought of the word of love or the being beloved. Showers of painful blissfulness went through her, as the tremours of a shocked frame, while she sat quietly, showing scarce a sign; and after he had let her hand go, she had the pressure on it. The quivering intense of the moment of his eyes and grasp was lord of her, lord of the day and of all days coming. That is how Love slays Death. Never did girl so give her soul.

She would have been the last to yield it unreservedly to a man untrusted for the character she worshipped. But she could have given it to Dartrey, despite his love of another, because it was her soul, without any of the cravings, except to bestow.

He perceived, that he had been carried on for the number of steps which are countless miles and do not permit the retreat across the desert behind; and he was in some amazement at himself, remindful of the different nature of our restraining power when we have a couple playing on it. Yet here was this girl, who called him up to the heights of young life again: and a brave girl; and she bled for the weak, had no shrinking from the women underfoot: for the reason, that she was a girl sovereignly pure, angelically tender. Was there a point of honour to hold him back?

Nataly entered the room. She kissed Nesta, and sat silent.

‘Mother, will you speak of me to him, if I go out?’ Nesta said.

‘We have spoken,’ her mother replied, vexed by the unmaidenly allusion to that theme.

She would have asked, How did you guess I knew of it?—but that the, Why should I speak of you to him? struck the louder note in her bosom: and then, What is there that this girl cannot guess!—filled the mother’s heart with apprehensive dread: and an inward cry, What things will she not set going, to have them discussed. And the appalling theme, sitting offensive though draped in their midst, was taken for a proof of

the girl's unblushingness. After standing as one woman against the world so long, Nataly was relieved to be on the side of a world now

Page 3691

convictedly unjust to her in the confounding of her with the shameless. Her mind had taken the brand of that thought:—And Nesta had brought her to it:—And Dudley Sowerby, a generous representative of the world, had kindly, having the deputed power to do so, sustained her, only partially blaming Nesta, not casting them off; as the world, with which Nataly felt, under a sense of the protection calling up all her gratitude to young Dudley, would have approved his doing.

She was passing through a fit of the cowardice peculiar to the tediously strained, who are being more than commonly tried—persecuted, as they say when they are not supplicating their tyrannical Authority for aid. The world will continue to be indifferent to their view of it and behaviour toward it until it ceases to encourage the growth of hypocrites.

These are moments when the faces we are observing drop their charm, showing us our perversion internal, if we could but reflect, to see it. Very many thousand times above Dudley Sowerby, Nataly ranked Dartrey Fenellan; and still she looked at him, where he sat beside Nesta, ungenially, critical of the very features, jealously in the interests of Dudley; and recollecting, too, that she had once prayed for one exactly resembling Dartrey Fenellan to be her Nesta's husband. But, as she would have said, that was before the indiscretion of her girl had shown her to require for her husband a man whose character and station guaranteed protection instead of inciting to rebellion. And Dartrey, the loved and prized, was often in the rebel ranks; he was dissatisfied with matters as they are; was restless for action, angry with a country denying it to him; he made enemies, he would surely bring down inquiries about Nesta's head, and cause the forgotten or quiescent to be stirred; he would scarcely be the needed hand for such a quiver of the lightnings as Nesta was.

Dartrey read Nataly's brows. This unwonted uncomeliness of hers was an indication to one or other of our dusky pits, not a revealing.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A CHAPTER IN THE SHADOW OF MRS. MARSETT

He read her more closely when Arlington brought in the brown paper envelope of the wires—to which the mate of Victor ought to have become accustomed. She took it; her eyelids closed, and her features were driven to whiteness. 'Only these telegrams,' she said, in apology.

'Lakelands on fire?' Dartrey murmured to Nesta; and she answered: 'I should not be sorry.'

Nataly coldly asked her why she would not be sorry.

Dartrey interposed: ‘I’m sure she thinks Lakelands worries her mother.’

‘That ranks low among the worries,’ Nataly sighed, opening the envelope.

Nesta touched her arm: ’Mother! even before Captain Dartrey, if you will let me!’—she turned to him: ‘before . . .’ at the end of her breath she said: ‘Dartrey Fenellan. You shall see my whole heart, mother.’

Page 3692

Her mother looked from her at him.

‘Victor returns by the last train. He telegraphs, that he dines with—’ She handed the paper to Dartrey.

‘Marsett,’ he read aloud; and she flushed; she was angry with him for not knowing, that the name was a term of opprobrium flung at her.

‘It’s to tell you he has done what he thought good,’ said Dartrey. ’In other words, as I interpret, he has completed his daughter’s work. So we won’t talk about it till he comes. You have no company this evening?’

’Oh! there is a pause to-night! It’s nearly as unceasing as your brother Simeon’s old French lady in the ronde with her young bridegroom, till they danced her to pieces. I do get now and then an hour’s repose,’ Nataly added, with a vision springing up of the person to whom the story had applied.

‘My dear, you are a good girl to call me Dartrey,’ the owner of the name said to Nesta.

Nataly saw them both alert, in the terrible manner peculiar to both, for the directest of the bare statements. She could have protested, that her love of truth was on an equality with theirs; and certainly, that her regard for decency was livelier. Pass the deficiency in a man. But a girl who could speak, by allusion, of Mrs. Marsett—of the existence of a Mrs. Marsett—in the presence of a man: and he excusing, encouraging: and this girl her own girl;—it seemed to her, that the world reeled; she could hardly acknowledge the girl; save under the penitential admission of her sin’s having found her out.

She sent Nesta to her room when they went upstairs to dress, unable to endure her presence after seeing her show a placid satisfaction at Dartrey’s nod to the request for him to sleep in the house that night. It was not at all a gleam of pleasure, hardly an expression; it was a manner of saying, One drop more in my cup of good fortune! an absurd and an offensive exhibition of silly optimism of the young, blind that they are!

For were it known, and surely the happening of it would be known, that Dudley Sowerby had shaken off the Nesta of no name, who was the abominable Mrs. Marsett’s friend, a whirlwind with a trumpet would sweep them into the wilderness on a blast frightfuller than any ever heard.

Nataly had a fit of weeping for want of the girl’s embrace, against whom her door was jealously locked. She hoped those two would talk much, madly if they liked, during dinner, that she might not be sensible, through any short silence, of the ardour animating them: especially glowing in Nesta, ready behind her quiet mask to come brazenly forth. But both of them were mercilessly ardent; and a sickness of the fear,

that they might fall on her to capture her and hurry her along with them perforce of the allayed, once fatal, inflammable element in herself, shook the warmth from her limbs: causing her to say to herself aloud in a ragged hoarseness, very strangely: Every thought of mine now has a physical effect on me!

Page 3693

They had not been two minutes together when she descended to them. Yet she saw the girl's heart brimming, either with some word spoken to her or for joy of an unmaidenly confession. During dinner they talked, without distressful pauses. Whatever said, whatever done, was manifestly another drop in Nesta's foolish happy cup. Could it be all because Dartrey Fenellan countenanced her acquaintance with that woman? The mother had lost hold of her. The tortured mother had lost hold of herself.

Dartrey in the course of the evening, begged to hear the contralto; and Nataly, refusing, was astounded by the admission in her blank mind of the truth of man's list of charges against her sex, starting from their capriciousness for she could have sung in a crowded room, and she had now a desire for company, for stolid company or giddy, an ocean of it. This led to her thinking, that the world of serious money-getters, and feasts, and the dance, the luxurious displays, and the reverential Sunday service, will always ultimately prove itself right in opposition to critics and rebels, and to any one vainly trying to stand alone: and the thought annihilated her; for she was past the age of the beginning again, and no footing was left for an outsider not self-justified in being where she stood. She heard Dartrey's praise of Nesta's voice for tearing her mother's bosom with notes of intolerable sweetness; and it was haphazard irony, no doubt; we do not the less bleed for the accident of a shot.

At last, after midnight Victor arrived.

Nesta most impudently expected to be allowed to remain. 'Pray, go, dear,' her mother said. Victor kissed his Fredi. 'Some time to-morrow,' said he; and she forbore to beseech him.

He stared, though mildly, at sight of her taking Dartrey's hand for the good-night and deliberately putting her lips to it.

Was she a girl whose notion of rectifying one wrong thing done, was to do another? Nataly could merely observe. A voice pertaining to no one present, said in her ear:—-Mothers have publicly slapped their daughter's faces for less than that!—It was the voice of her incapacity to cope with the girl. She watched Nesta's passage from the room, somewhat affected by the simple bearing for which she was reproaching her.

'And our poor darling has not seen a mountain this year!' Victor exclaimed, to have mentionable grounds for pitying his girl. 'I promised Fredi she should never count a year without Highlands or Alps. You remember, mama?—down in the West Highlands. Fancy the dear bit of bundle, Dartrey!—we had laid her in her bed; she was about seven or eight; and there she lay wide awake. "What 's Fredi thinking of?"—"I'm thinking of the tops of the mountains at night, dada."—She could climb them now; she has the legs.'

Nataly said: 'You have some report to make. You dined with those people?'

’The Marsetts: yes:—well-suited couple enough. It’s to happen before Winter ends—at once; before Christmas; positively before next Spring. Fredi’s doing! He has to manage, arrange.—She’s a good-looking woman, good height, well-rounded; well-behaved, too: she won’t make a bad Lady Marsett. Every time that woman spoke of our girl, the tears jumped to her eyelids.’

Page 3694

‘Come to me before you go to bed,’ Nataly said, rising, her voice foundering; ‘Good-night, Dartrey.’

She turned to the door; she could not trust herself to shake hands with composure. Not only was it a nauseous mixture she was forced to gulp from Victor, it burned like a poison.

‘Really Fredi’s doing—chiefly,’ said Victor, as soon as Dartrey and he were alone, comfortably settled in the smoking-room. ’I played the man of pomp with Marsett—good heavy kind of creature: attached to the woman. She’s the better horse, as far as brains go. Good enough Lady Marsett. I harped on Major Worrell: my daughter insulted. He knew of it—spoke of you properly. The man offered all apologies; he has told the Major he is no gentleman, not a fit associate for gentlemen:—quite so—and has cut him dead. Will marry her, as I said, make her as worthy as he can of the honour of my daughter’s acquaintance. Rather comical grimace, when he vowed he’d fasten the tie. He doesn’t like marriage. But, he can’t give her up. And she’s for patronizing the institution. But she is ready to say good-bye to him “rather than see the truest lady in the world insulted”—her words. And so he swallows his dose for health, and looks a trifle sourish. Antecedents, I suppose: has to stomach them. But if a man’s fond of a woman—if he knows he saves her from slipping lower—and it’s an awful world, for us to let a woman be under its wheels:—I say, a woman who has a man to lean on, unless she’s as downright corrupt as two or three of the men we’ve known:—upon my word, Dartrey, I come round to some of your ideas on these matters. It’s this girl of mine, this wee bit of girl in her little nightshirt with the frill, astonishes me most:—“thinking of the tops of the mountains at night!” She has positively done the whole of this work-main part. I smiled when I left the house, to have to own our little Fredi starting us all on the road. It seems, Marsett had sworn he would; amorous vow, you know; he never came nearer to doing it. I hope it’s his better mind now; I do hope the man won’t have cause to regret it. He speaks of Nesta—sort of rustic tone of awe. Mrs. Marsett has impressed him. He expects the title soon, will leave the army—the poor plucked British army, as you call it!—and lead the life of a country squire: hunting! Well, it’s not only the army, it’s over Great Britain, with this infernal wealth of ours!—and all for pleasure—eh?—or Paradise lost for a sugar plum! Eh, Dartrey? Upon my word, it appears to me, Esau’s the Englishman, Jacob the German, of these times. I wonder old Colney hasn’t said it. If we’re not plucked, as your regiments are of the officers who have learnt their work, we’re emasculated:—the nation’s half made-up of the idle and the servants of the idle.’

’Ay, and your country squires and your manufacturers contrive to give the army a body of consumptive louts fit for nothing else than to take the shilling—and not worth it,’ said Dartrey.

Page 3695

‘Sounds like old Colney,’ Victor remarked to himself. ’But, believe me, I’m ashamed of the number of servants who wait on me. It wouldn’t so much matter, as Skepsey says, if they were trained to arms and self-respect. That little fellow Skepsey’s closer to the right notion, and the right practice, too, than any of us. With his Matilda Pridden! He has jumped out of himself to the proper idea of women, too. And there’s a man who has been up three times before the magistrates, and is considered a disorderly subject—-one among the best of English citizens, I declare! I never think of Skepsey without the most extraordinary, witless kind of envy—as if he were putting in action an idea I once had and never quite got hold of again. The match for him is Fredi. She threatens to be just as devoted, just as simple, as he. I positively doubt whether any of us could stop her, if she had set herself to do a thing she thought right.’

‘I should not like to think our trying it possible,’ said Dartrey.

’All very well, but it’s a rock ahead. We shall have to alter our course, my friend. You know, I dined with that couple, after the private twenty minutes with Marsett: he formally propounded the invitation, as we were close on his hour, rather late: and I wanted to make the woman happy, besides putting a seal of cordiality on his good intentions—-politic! And subsequently I heard from her, that—you’ll think nothing of it!—Fredi promised to stand by her at the altar.’

Dartrey said, shrugging: ‘She needn’t do that.’

’So we may say. You’re dealing with Nesta Victoria. Spare me a contest with that girl, I undertake to manage any man or woman living.’

‘When the thing to be done is thought right by her.’

‘But can we always trust her judgement, my dear Dartrey?’

’In this case, she would argue, that her resolution to keep her promise would bind or help to bind Marsett to fulfil his engagement.’

’Odd, her mother has turned dead round in favour of that fellow Dudley Sowerby! I don’t complain; it suits; but one thinks—eh?—women!’

’Well, yes, one thinks or should think, that if you insist on having women rooted to the bed of the river, they’ll veer with the tides, like water-weeds, and no wonder.’

’Your heterodoxy on that subject is a mania, Dartrey. We can’t have women independent.’

‘Then don’t be exclaiming about their vagaries.’

Victor mused: 'It's wonderful: that little girl of mine!—good height now: but what a head she has! Oh, she'll listen to reason: only mark what I say:—with that quiet air of hers, the husband, if a young fellow, will imagine she's the most docile of wives in the world. And as to wife, I'm not of the contrary opinion. But qua individual female, supposing her to have laid fast hold of an idea of duty, it's he who'll have to turn the corner second, if they're to trot in the yoke

Page 3696

together. Or it may be an idea of service to a friend—or to her sex! That Mrs. Marsett says she feels for—“bleeds” for her sex. The poor woman didn’t show to advantage with me, because she was in a fever to please:—talks in jerks, hot phrases. She holds herself well. At the end of the dinner she behaved better. Odd, you can teach women with hints and a lead. But Marsett ’s Marsett to the end. Rather touching!—the poor fellow said: Deuce of a bad look-out for me if Judith doesn’t have a child! First-rate sportsman, I hear. He should have thought of his family earlier. You know, Dartrey, the case is to be argued for the family as well. You won’t listen. And for Society too! Off you go.’

A battery was opened on that wall of composite.

‘Ah, well,’ said Victor. ’But I may have to beg your help, as to the so-called promise to stand at the altar. I don’t mention it upstairs.’

He went to Nataly’s room.

She was considerately treated, and was aware of being dandled, that she might have sleep.

She consented to it, in a loathing of the topic.—Those women invade us—we cannot keep them out! was her inward cry: with a reverberation of the unfailing accompaniment: The world holds you for one of them!

Victor tasked her too much when his perpetual readiness to doat upon his girl for whatever she did, set him exalting Nesta’s conduct. She thought: Was Nesta so sympathetic with her mother of late by reason of a moral insensibility to the offence?

This was her torture through the night of a labouring heart, that travelled to one dull shock, again and again repeated:—the apprehended sound, in fact, of Dudley Sowerby’s knock at the street door. Or sometimes a footman handed her his letter, courteously phrased to withdraw from the alliance. Or else he came to a scene with Nesta, and her mother was dragged into it, and the intolerable subject steamed about her. The girl was visioned as deadly. She might be indifferent to the protection of Dudley’s name. Robust, sanguine, Victor’s child, she might—her mother listened to a devil’s whisper—but no; Nesta’s aim was at the heights; she was pure in mind as in body. No, but the world would bring the accusation; and the world would trace the cause: Heredity, it would say. Would it say falsely? Nataly harped on the interrogation until she felt her existence dissolving to a dark stain of the earth, and she found herself wondering at the breath she drew, doubting that another would follow, speculating on the cruel force which keeps us to the act of breathing.—Though I could draw wild blissful breath if I were galloping across the moors! her worn heart said to her youth: and out of ken of the world, I could regain a portion of my self-esteem. Nature thereat renewed her old sustainment with gentle murmurs, that were supported by Dr.

Themison's account of the virtuous married lady who chafed at the yoke on behalf of her sex, and deemed the independent union the ideal. Nataly's brain had a short gallop over moorland. It brought her face to face with Victor's girl, and she dropped once more to her remorse in herself and her reproaches of Nesta. The girl had inherited from her father something of the cataract's force which won its way by catching or by mastering, uprooting, ruining!

Page 3697

In the morning she was heavily asleep. Victor left word with Nesta, that the dear mother was not to be disturbed. Consequently, when Dudley called to see Mrs. Victor Radnor, he was informed that Miss Radnor would receive him.

Their interview lasted an hour.

Dudley came to Victor in the City about luncheon time.

His perplexity of countenance was eloquent. He had, before seeing the young lady, digested an immense deal more, as it seemed to him, than any English gentleman should be asked to consume. She now referred him to her father, who had spent a day in Brighton, and would, she said, explain whatever there was to be explained. But she added, that if she was expected to abandon a friend, she could not. Dudley had argued with her upon the nature of friendship, the measurement of its various dues; he had lectured on the choice of friends, the impossibility for young ladies, necessarily inexperienced, to distinguish the right class of friends, the dangers they ran in selecting friends unwarranted by the stamp of honourable families.

‘And what did Fredi say to that?’ Victor inquired.

’Miss Radnor said—I may be dense, I cannot comprehend—that the precepts were suitable for seminaries of Pharisees. When it is a question of a young lady associating with a notorious woman!’

’Not notorious. You spoil your case if you “speak extremely,” as a friend says. I saw her yesterday. She worships “Miss Radnor."’

Nesta will know when she is older; she will thank me,’ said Dudley hurriedly. ’As it is at present, I may reckon, I hope, that the association ceases. Her name: I have to consider my family.’

’Good anchorage! You must fight it out with the girl. And depend upon this—you’re not the poorer for being the husband of a girl of character; unless you try to bridle her. She belongs to her time. I don’t mind owning to you, she has given me a lead.—Fredi ’ll be merry to-night. Here’s a letter I have from the Sanfredini, dated Milan, fresh this morning; invitation to bring the god-child to her villa on Como in May; desirous to embrace her. She wrote to the office. Not a word of her duque. She has pitched him to the winds. You may like to carry it off to Fredi and please her.’

‘I have business,’ Dudley replied.

‘Away to it, then!’ said Victor. ’You stand by me?—we expect our South London borough to be open in January; early next year, at least; may be February. You have family interest there.’

‘Personally, I will do my best,’ Dudley said; and he escaped, feeling, with the universal censor’s angry spite, that the revolutions of the world had made one of the wealthiest of City men the head of a set of Bohemians. And there are eulogists of the modern time! And the man’s daughter was declared to belong to it! A visit in May to the Italian cantatrice separated from her husband, would render the maiden an accomplished flinger of caps over the windmills.

Page 3698

At home Victor discovered, that there was not much more than a truce between Nesta and Nataly. He had a medical hint from Dr. Themison, and he counselled his girl to humour her mother as far as could be: particularly in relation to Dudley, whom Nataly now, womanlike, after opposing, strongly favoured. How are we ever to get a clue to the labyrinthine convolutions and changeful motives of the sex! Dartrey's theories were absurd. Did Nataly think them dangerous for a young woman? The guess hinted at a clue of some sort to the secret of her veering.

'Mr. Sowerby left me with an adieu,' said Nesta.

'Mr. Sowerby! My dear, he is bound, bound in honour, bound at heart. You did not dismiss him?'

'I repeated the word he used. I thought of mother. The blood leaves her cheeks at a disappointment now. She has taken to like him.'

'Why, you like him!'

'I could not vow.'

'Tush.'

'Ah, don't press me, dada. But you will see, he has disengaged himself.'

He had done it, though not in formal speech. Slow digestion of his native antagonism to these Bohemians, to say nothing of his judicial condemnation of them, brought him painfully round to the writing of a letter to Nataly; cunningly addressed to the person on whom his instinct told him he had the strongest hold.

She schooled herself to discuss the detested matter forming Dudley's grievance and her own with Nesta; and it was a woeful half-hour for them. But Nataly was not the weeper.

Another interview ensued between Nesta and her suitor. Dudley bore no resemblance to Mr. Barmby, who refused to take the word no from her, and had taken it, and had gone to do holy work, for which she revered him. Dudley took the word, leaving her to imagine freedom, until once more her mother or her father, inspired by him, came interceding, her mother actually supplicating. So that the reality of Dudley's love rose to conception like a London dawn over Nesta; and how, honourably, decently, positively, to sever herself from it, grew to be an ill-visaged problem. She glanced in soul at Dartrey Fenellan for help; she had her wild thoughts. Having once called him Dartrey, the virginal barrier to thoughts was broken; and but for love of her father, for love and pity of her mother, she would have ventured the step to make the man who had her whole being in charge accept or reject her. Nothing else appeared in prospect. Her father and mother were urgently one to favour Dudley; and the sensitive gentleman presented himself to receive his wound and to depart with it. But always he returned. At last, as if

under tuition, he refrained from provoking a wound; he stood there to win her upon any terms; and he was a handsome figure, acknowledged by the damsel to be increasing in good looks as more and more his pretensions became distasteful to her. The slight cast of sourness on his lower features had almost vanished, his nature seemed to have enlarged. He complimented her for her ‘generous benevolence,’ vaguely, yet with evident sincereness; he admitted, that the modern world is ’attempting difficulties with at least commendable intentions’; and that the position of women demands improvement, consideration for them also. He said feelingly: ’They have to bear extraordinary burdens!’ There he stopped.

Page 3699

The sharp intelligence fronting him understood, that this compassionate ejaculation was the point where she, too, must cry halt. He had, however—still under tuition, perhaps—withdrawn his voice from the pursuit of her; and so she in gratitude silenced her critical mind beneath a smooth conceit of her having led him two steps to a broader tolerance. Susceptible as she was, she did not influence him without being affected herself in other things than her vanity: his prudishness affected her. Only when her heart flamed did she disdain that real haven of refuge, with its visionary mount of superiority, offered by Society to its effect, in the habit of ignoring the sins it fosters under cloak;—not less than did the naked barbaric time, and far more to the vitiation of the soul. He fancied he was moulding her; therefore winning her. It followed, that he had the lover's desire for assurance of exclusive possession; and reflecting, that he had greatly pardoned, he grew exacting. He mentioned his objections to some of Mr. Dartrey Fenellan's ideas.

Nesta replied: 'I have this morning had two letters to make me happy.'

A provoking evasion. He would rather have seen antagonism bridle and stiffen her figure. 'Is one of them from that gentleman?'

'One is from my dear friend Louise de Seilles. She comes to me early next month.'

'The other?'

'The other is also from a friend.'

'A dear friend?'

'Not so dear. Her letter gives me happiness.'

'She writes—not from France: from . . .? you tempt me to guess.'

'She writes to tell me, that Mr. Dartrey Fenellan has helped her in a way to make her eternally thankful.'

'The place she writes from is . . . ?'

The drag of his lips betrayed his enlightenment insisted on doubting. He demanded assurance.

'It matters in no degree,' she said.

Dudley 'thought himself excusable for inquiring.'

She bowed gently.

The stings and scorpions and degrading itches of this nest of wealthy Bohemians enraged him.

’Are you—I beg to ask—are you still:—I can hardly think it—Nesta!—I surely have a claim to advise:—it cannot be with your mother’s consent:—in communication, in correspondence with . . . ?’

Again she bowed her head; saying: ‘It is true.’

‘With that person?’

He could not but look the withering disgust of the modern world in a conservative gentleman who has been lured to go with it a little way, only to be bitten. ‘I decline to believe it,’ he said with forcible sound.

‘She is married,’ was the rather shameless, exasperating answer.

‘Married or not!’ he cried, and murmured: ’I have borne—. These may be Mr. Dartrey Fenellan’s ideas; they are not mine. I have—Something at least is due to me: Ask any lady:—there are clergymen, I know, clergymen who are for uplifting—quite right, but not associating:—to call one of them a friend! Ask any lady, any! Your mother . . .’

Page 3700

‘I beg you will not distress my mother,’ said Nesta.

‘I beg to know whether this correspondence is to continue?’ said Dudley.

‘All my life, if I do not feel dishonoured by it.’

‘You are.’ He added hastily: ’Counsels of prudence—there is not a lady living who would tell you otherwise. At all events, in public opinion, if it were known—and it would certainly be known,—a lady, wife or spinster, would suffer—would not escape the—at least shadow of defilement from relationship, any degree of intimacy with . . . hard words are wholesome in such a case: “touch pitch,” yes! My sense is coherent.’

‘Quite,’ said Nesta.

‘And you do not agree with me?’

‘I do not.’

‘Do you pretend to be as able to judge as I?’

‘In this instance, better.’

’Then I retire. I cannot retain my place here. You may depend upon it, the world is not wrong when it forbids young ladies to have cognizance of women leading disorderly lives.’

‘Only the women, Mr. Sowerby?’

‘Men, too, of course.’

‘You do not exclude the men from Society.’

‘Oh! one reads that kind of argument in books.’

‘Oh! the worthy books, then. I would read them, if I could find them.’

‘They are banned by self-respecting readers.’

‘It grieves me to think differently.’

Dudley looked on this fair girl, as yet innocent girl; and contrasting her with the foulness of the subject she dared discuss, it seemed to him, that a world which did not puff at her and silence, if not extinguish, was in a state of liquefaction.

Remembering his renewed repentances his absence, he said: ’I do hope you may come to see, that the views shared by your mother and me are not erroneous.’

‘But do not distress her,’ Nesta implored him. ’She is not well. When she has grown stronger, her kind heart will move her to receive the lady, so that she may not be deprived of the society of good women. I shall hope she will not disapprove of me. I cannot forsake a friend.’

‘I beg to say good-bye,’ said Dudley.

She had seen a rigidity smite him as she spoke; and so little startling was it, that she might have fancied it expected, save for her knowing herself too serious to have played at wiles to gain her ends.

He ‘wished her prudent advisers.’

She thanked him. ‘In a few days, Louise de Seilles will be here.’

A Frenchwoman and Papist! was the interjection of his twist of brows.

Surely I must now be free? she thought when he had covered his farewell under a salutation regretful in frostiness.

A week later, she had the embrace of her Louise, and Armandine was made happy with a piece of Parisian riband.

Winter was rapidly in passage: changes were visible everywhere; Earth and House of Commons and the South London borough exhibited them; Mrs. Burman was the sole exception. To the stupefaction of physicians, in a manner to make a sane man ask whether she was not being retained as an instrument for one of the darker purposes of Providence—and where are we standing if we ask such things?—she held on to her thread of life.

Page 3701

February went by. And not a word from Themison; nor from Carling, nor from the Rev. Groseman Buttermore, nor from Jarniman. That is to say, the two former accepted invitations to grand dinners; the two latter acknowledged contributions to funds in which they were interested; but they had apparently grown to consider Mrs. Burman as an establishment, one of our fixtures. On the other hand, there was nothing to be feared from her. Lakelands feared nothing: the entry into Lakelands was decreed for the middle of April. Those good creatures enclosed the poor woman and nourished her on comfortable fiction. So the death of the member for the South London borough (fifteen years younger than the veteran in maladies) was not to be called premature, and could by no possibility lead to an exposure of the private history of the candidate for his vacant seat.

CHAPTER XL

AN EXPIATION

Nataly had fallen to be one of the solitary who have no companionship save with the wound they nurse, to chafe it rather than try at healing. So rational a mind as she had was not long in outliving mistaken impressions; she could distinguish her girl's feeling, and her aim; she could speak on the subject with Dartrey; and still her wound bled on. Louise de Seilles comforted her partly, through an exaltation of Nesta. Mademoiselle, however, by means of a change of tone and look when Dudley Sowerby and Dartrey Fenellan were the themes, showed a too pronounced preference of the more unstable one:—or rather, the man adventurous out of the world's highways, whose image, as husband of such a daughter as hers, smote the wounded mother with a chillness. Mademoiselle's occasional thrill of fervency in an allusion to Dartrey, might have tempted a suspicious woman to indulge suppositions, accounting for the young Frenchwoman's novel tenderness to England, of which Nesta proudly, very happily boasted. The suspicion proposed itself, and was rejected: for not even the fever of an insane body could influence Nataly's generous character, to let her moods divert and command her thoughts of persons.

Her thoughts were at this time singularly lucid upon everything about her; with the one exception of the reason why she had come to favour Dudley, and how it was she had been smitten by that woman at Brighton to see herself in her position altogether with the world's relentless, unexamining hard eyes. Bitterness added, of Mrs. Marsett: She is made an honest woman!—And there was a strain of the lower in Nataly, to reproach the girl for causing the reflection to be cast on the unwedded. Otherwise her mind was open; she was of aid to Victor in his confusion over some lost Idea he had often touched on latterly. And she was the one who sent him ahead at a trot under a light, by saying: 'You would found a new and more stable aristocracy of the contempt of luxury' when he talked of combatting

Page 3702

the Jews with a superior weapon. That being, in fact, as Colney Durance had pointed out to him, the weapon of self-conquest used by them ‘before they fell away to flesh-pottery.’ Was it his Idea? He fancied an aching at the back of his head when he speculated. But his Idea had been surpassingly luminous, alive, a creation; and this came before him with the yellow skin of a Theory, bred, born of books. Though Nataly’s mention of the aristocracy of self-denying discipline struck a Lucifer in his darkness.

Nesta likewise helped: but more in what she did than in what she said: she spoke intelligently enough to make him feel a certain increase of alarm, amounting to a cursory secret acknowledgement of it, both at her dealings with Dudley and with himself. She so quietly displaced the lady visiting him at the City offices. His girl’s disregard of hostile weather, and her company, her talk, delighted him: still he remonstrated, at her coming daily. She came: nor was there an instigation on the part of her mother, clearly none: her mother asked him once whether he thought she met the dreadful Brighton woman. His Fredi drove constantly to walk back beside him Westward, as he loved to do whenever it was practicable; and exceeding the flattery of his possession of the gallant daughter, her conversation charmed him to forget a disappointment caused by the defeat and entire exclusion of the lady visiting him so complimentarily for his advice on stocks, shares, mines, et caetera. The lady resisted; she was vanquished, as the shades are displaced by simple apparition of daylight.

His Fredi was like the daylight to him; she was the very daylight to his mind, whatsoever their theme of converse for by stimulating that ready but vagrant mind to quit the leash of the powerful senses and be a ethereally excursive, she gave him a new enjoyment; which led to reflections—a sounding of Nature, almost a question to her, on the verge of a doubt. Are we, in fact, harmonious with the Great Mother when we yield to the pressure of our natures for indulgence? Is she, when translated into us, solely the imperious appetite? Here was Fredi, his little Fredi—stately girl that she had grown, and grave, too, for all her fun and her sail on wings—lifting him to pleasures not followed by clamorous, and perfectly satisfactory, yet discomposingly violent, appeals to Nature. They could be vindicated. Or could they, when they would not bear a statement of the case? He could not imagine himself stating it namelessly to his closest friend—not to Simeon Fenellan. As for speaking to Dartrey, the notion took him with shivers:—Young Dudley would have seemed a more possible confidant:—and he represented the Puritan world.—And young Dudley was getting over Fredi’s infatuation for the woman she had rescued: he was beginning to fancy he saw a right enthusiasm in it;—in the abstract; if only the fair maid would drop an unseemly acquaintance. He had called at the office to say so. Victor stammered the plea for him.

Page 3703

‘Never, dear father,’ came the smooth answer: a shocking answer in contrast with the tones. Her English was as lucid as her eyes when she continued up to the shock she dealt: ’Do not encourage a good man to waste his thoughts upon me. I have chosen my mate, and I may never marry him. I do not know whether he would marry me. He has my soul. I have no shame in saying I love him. It is to love goodness, greatness of heart. He is a respecter of women—of all women; not only the fortunate. He is the friend of the weaker everywhere. He has been proved in fire. He does not sentimentalize over poor women, as we know who scorns people for doing:—and that is better than hardness, meaning kindly. He is not one of the unwise advocates. He measures the forces against them. He reads their breasts. He likes me. He is with me in my plans. He has not said, has not shown, he loves me. It is too high a thought for me until I hear it.’

‘Has your soul!’ was all that Victor could reply, while the whole conception of Lakelands quaked under the crumbling structure.

Remonstrance, argument, a word for Dudley, swelled to his lips and sank in dumbness. Her seeming intuition—if it was not a perception—of the point where submission to the moods of his nature had weakened his character, and required her defence of him, struck Victor with a serious fear of his girl: and it was the more illuminatingly damnatory for being recognized as the sentiment which no father should feel. He tried to think she ought not to be so wise of the things of the world. An effort to imagine a reproof, showed him her spirit through her eyes: in her deeds too: she had already done work on the road:—Colney Durance, Dartrey Fenellan, anything but sentimentalists either of them, strongly backing her, upholding her. Victor could no longer so naturally name her Fredi.

He spoke it hastily, under plea of some humorous tenderness, when he ventured. When Dudley, calling on him in the City to discuss the candidature for the South London borough, named her Fredi, that he might regain a vantage of familiarity by imitating her father, it struck Victor as audacious. It jarred in his recollection, though the heir of the earldom spoke in the tone of a lover, was really at high pitch. He appeared to be appreciating her, to have suffered stings of pain; he offered himself; he made but one stipulation. Victor regretfully assured him, he feared he could do nothing. The thought of his entry into Lakelands, with Nesta Victoria refusing the foundation stone of the place, grew dim.

But he was now canvassing for the Borough, hearty at the new business as the braced swimmer on seas, which instantly he became, with an end in view to be gained.

Late one April night, expecting Nataly to have gone to bed, and Nesta to be waiting for him, he reached home, and found Nataly in her sitting-room alone. ‘Nesta was tired,’ she said: ’we have had a scene; she refuses Mr. Sowerby; I am sick of pressing it; he is very much in earnest, painfully; she blames him for disturbing me; she will not see the

right course:—a mother reads her daughter! If my girl has not guidance!—she means rightly, she is rash.’

Page 3704

Nataly could not utter all that her insaneness of feeling made her think with regard to Victor's daughter—daughter also of the woman whom her hard conscience accused of inflammability. 'Here is a note from Dr. Themison, dear.'

Victor seized it, perused, and drew the big breath.

'From Themison,' he said; he coughed.

'Don't think to deceive me,' said she. 'I have not read the contents, I know them.'

'The invitation at last, for to-morrow, Sunday, four P.M. Odd, that next day at eight of the evening I shall be addressing our meeting in the Theatre. Simeon speaks. Beaves Urmsing insists on coming, Tory though he is. Those Tories are jollier fellows than—-well, no wonder! There will be no surgical . . . the poor woman is very low. A couple of days at the outside. Of course, I go.'

'Hand me the note, dear.'

It had to be given up, out of the pocket.

'But,' said Victor, 'the mention of you is merely formal.'

She needed sleep: she bowed her head.

Nataly was the first at the breakfast-table in the morning, a fair Sunday morning. She was going to Mrs. John Cormyn's Church, and she asked Nesta to come with her.

She returned five minutes before the hour of lunch, having left Nesta with Mrs. John. Louise de Seilles undertook to bring Nesta home at the time she might choose. Fenellan, Mr. Pempton, Peridon and Catkin, lunched and chatted. Nataly chatted. At a quarter to three o'clock Victor's carriage was at the door. He rose: he had to keep an appointment. Nataly said to him publicly: 'I come too.' He stared and nodded. In the carriage, he said: 'I'm driving to the Gardens, for a stroll, to have a look at the beasts. Sort of relief. Poor crazy woman! However, it 's a comfort to her: so . . . !'

'I like to see them,' said Nataly. 'I shall see her. I have to do it.'

Up to the gate of the Gardens Victor was arguing to dissuade his dear soul from this very foolish, totally unnecessary, step. Alighting, he put the matter aside, for good angels to support his counsel at the final moment.

Bears, lions, tigers, eagles, monkeys: they suggested no more than he would have had from prints; they sprang no reflection, except, that the coming hour was a matter of indifference to them. They were about him, and exercised so far a distraction. He took very kindly to an old mother monkey, relinquishing her society at sight of Nataly's heave

of the bosom. Southward, across the park, the dread house rose. He began quoting Colney Durance with relish while sarcastically confuting the cynic, who found much pasture in these Gardens. Over Southward, too, he would be addressing a popular assembly to-morrow evening. Between now and then there was a ditch to jump. He put on the sympathetic face of grief. ‘After all, a caged wild beast hasn’t so bad a life,’ he said.—To be well fed while they live, and welcome death as a release

Page 3705

from the maladies they develop in idleness, is the condition of wealthy people:—-creatures of prey? horrible thought! yet allied to his Idea, it seemed. Yes, but these good caged beasts here set them an example, in not troubling relatives and friends when they come to the gasp! Mrs. Burman's invitation loomed as monstrous—a final act of her cruelty. His skin pricked with dews. He thought of Nataly beside him, jumping the ditch with him, as a relief—if she insisted on doing it. He hoped she would not, for the sake of her composure.

It was a ditch void of bottom. But it was a mere matter of an hour, less. The state of health of the invalid could bear only a few minutes. In any case, we are sure that the hour will pass. Our own arrive? Certainly.

'Capital place for children,' he exclaimed. And here startlingly before him in the clusters of boys and girls, was the difference between young ones and their elders feeling quite as young: the careless youngsters have not to go and sit in the room with a virulent old woman, and express penitence and what not, and hear words of pardon, after their holiday scamper and stare at the caged beasts.

Attention to the children precipitated him upon acquaintances, hitherto cleverly shunned. He nodded them off, after the brightest of greetings.

Such anodyne as he could squeeze from the incarcerated wild creatures, was exhausted. He fell to work at Nataly's 'aristocracy of the contempt of luxury'; signifying, that we the wealthy will not exist to pamper flesh, but we live for the promotion of brotherhood:—ay, and that our England must make some great moral stand, if she is not to fall to the rear and down. Unuttered, it caught the skirts of the Idea: it evaporated when spoken. Still, this theme was almost an exorcism of Mrs. Burman. He consulted his watch. 'Thirteen minutes to four. I must be punctual,' he said. Nataly stepped faster.

Seated in the carriage, he told her he had never felt the horror of that place before. 'Put me down at the corner of the terrace, dear: I won't drive to the door.'

'I come with you, Victor,' she replied.

After entreaties and reasons intermixed, to melt her resolve, he saw she was firm: and he asked himself, whether he might not be constitutionally better adapted to persuade than to dissuade. The question thumped. Having that house of drugs in view, he breathed more freely for the prospect of feeling his Nataly near him beneath the roof.

'You really insist, dear love?' he appealed to her: and her answer: 'It must be,' left no doubt: though he chose to say: 'Not because of standing by me?' And she said: 'For my peace, Victor.' They stepped to the pavement. The carriage was dismissed.

Seventeen houses of the terrace fronting the park led to the funereal one: and the bell was tolled in the breast of each of the couple advancing with an air of calmness to the inevitable black door.

Page 3706

Jarniman opened it. 'His mistress was prepared to see them.'—Not like one near death.—They were met in the hall by the Rev. Groseman Buttermore. 'You will find a welcome,' was his reassurance to them: gently delivered, on the stoop of a large person. His whispered tones were more agreeably deadening than his words.

Mr. Buttermore ushered them upstairs.

'Can she bear it?' Victor said, and heard: 'Her wish ten minutes.'

'Soon over,' he murmured to Nataly, with a compassionate exclamation for the invalid.

They rounded the open door. They were in the drawing-room. It was furnished as in the old time, gold and white, looking new; all the same as of old, save for a division of silken hangings; and these were pale blue: the colour preferred by Victor for a bedroom. He glanced at the ceiling, to bathe in a blank space out of memory. Here she lived,—here she slept, behind the hangings. There was refreshingly that little difference in the arrangement of the room. The corner Northward was occupied by the grand piano; and Victor had an inquiry in him:—tuned? He sighed, expecting a sight to come through the hangings. Sensible that Nataly trembled, he perceived the Rev. Groseman Buttermore half across a heap of shawl-swathe on the sofa.

Mrs. Burman was present; seated. People may die seated; she had always disliked the extended posture; except for the night's rest, she used to say; imagining herself to be not inviting the bolt of sudden death, in her attitude when seated by day:—and often at night the poor woman had to sit up for the qualms of her dyspepsia!—But I 'm bound to think humanely, be Christian, be kind, benignant, he thought, and he fetched the spirit required, to behold her face emerge from a pale blue silk veiling; as it were, the inanimate wasted led up from the mould by morning.

Mr. Buttermore signalled to them to draw near.

Wasted though it was, the face of the wide orbits for sunken eyes was distinguishable as the one once known. If the world could see it and hear, that it called itself a man's wife! She looked burnt out.

Two chairs had been sent to front the sofa. Execution there! Victor thought, and he garrotted the unruly mind of a man really feeling devoutness in the presence of the shadow thrown by the dread Shade.

'Ten minutes,' Mr. Buttermore said low, after obligingly placing them on the chairs.

He went. They were alone with Mrs. Burman.

No voice came. They were unsure of being seen by the floating grey of eyes patient to gaze from their vast distance. Big drops fell from Nataly's. Victor heard the French

timepiece on the mantel-shelf, where a familiar gilt Cupid swung for the seconds: his own purchase. The time of day on the clock was wrong; the Cupid swung.

Nataly's mouth was taking breath of anguish at moments. More than a minute of the terrible length of the period of torture must have gone: two, if not three.

Page 3707

A quaver sounded. ‘You have come.’ The voice was articulate, thinner than the telephonic, trans-Atlantic by deep-sea cable.

Victor answered: ‘We have.’

Another minute must have gone in the silence. And when we get to five minutes we are on the descent, rapidly counting our way out of the house, into the fresh air, where we were half an hour back, among those happy beasts in the pleasant Gardens!

Mrs. Burman’s eyelids shut. ‘I said you would come.’

Victor started to the fire-screen. ‘Your sight requires protection.’

She dozed. ‘And Natalia Dreighton!’ she next said.

They were certainly now on the five minutes. Now for the slide downward and outward! Nataly should never have been allowed to come.

‘The white waistcoat!’ struck his ears.

‘Old customs with me, always!’ he responded. ’The first of April, always. White is a favourite. Pale blue, too. But I fear—I hope you have not distressing nights? In my family we lay great stress on the nights we pass. My cousins, the Miss Duvidneys, go so far as to judge of the condition of health by the nightly record.’

‘Your daughter was in their house.’

She knew everything!

‘Very fond of my daughter—the ladies,’ he remarked.

‘I wish her well.’

‘You are very kind.’

Mrs. Burman communed within or slept. ‘Victor, Natalia, we will pray,’ she said.

Her trembling hands crossed their fingers. Nataly slipped to her knees.

The two women mutely praying, pulled Victor into the devotional hush. It acted on him like the silent spell of service in a Church. He forgot his estimate of the minutes, he formed a prayer, he refused to hear the Cupid swinging, he droned a sound of sentences to deaden his ears. Ideas of eternity rolled in semblance of enormous clouds. Death was a black bird among them. The piano rang to Nataly’s young voice and his. The gold and white of the chairs welcomed a youth suddenly enrolled among

the wealthy by an enamoured old lady on his arm. Cupid tick-ticked.—Poor soul! poor woman! How little we mean to do harm when we do an injury! An incomprehensible world indeed at the bottom and at the top. We get on fairly at the centre. Yet it is there that we do the mischief making such a riddle of the bottom and the top. What is to be said! Prayer quiets one. Victor peered at Nataly fervently on her knees and Mrs. Burman bowed over her knotted fingers. The earnestness of both enforced an effort at a phrased prayer in him. Plungeing through a wave of the scent of Marechale, that was a tremendous memory to haul him backward and forward, he beheld his prayer dancing across the furniture; a diminutive thin black figure, elvish, irreverent, appallingly unlike his proper emotion; and he brought his hands just to touch, and got to the edge of his chair, with split knees. At once the figure vanished. By merely looking at Nataly, he passed into her prayer. A look at Mrs. Burman made it personal, his own. He heard the cluck of a horrible sob coming from him. After a repetition of his short form of prayer deeply stressed, he thanked himself with the word ‘sincere,’ and a queer side-thought on our human susceptibility to the influence of posture. We are such creatures.

Page 3708

Nataly resumed her seat. Mrs. Burman had raised her head. She said: 'We are at peace.' She presently said, with effort: 'It cannot last with me. I die in nature's way. I would bear forgiveness with me, that I may have it above. I give it here, to you, to all. My soul is cleansed, I trust. Much was to say. My strength will not. Unto God, you both!'

The Rev. Groseman Buttermore was moving on slippered step to the back of the sofa. Nataly dropped before the unseeing, scarce breathing, lady for an instant. Victor murmured an adieu, grateful for being spared the ceremonial shake of hands. He turned away, then turned back, praying for power to speak, to say that he had found his heart, was grateful, would hold her in memory. He fell on a knee before her, and forgot he had done so when he had risen. They were conducted by the Rev. gentleman to the hall-door: he was not speechless. Jarniman uttered something.

That black door closed behind them.

CHAPTER XLI

THE NIGHT OF THE GREAT UNDELIVERED SPEECH

To a man issuing from a mortuary where a skull had voice, London may be restorative as air of Summer Alps. It is by contrast blooming life. Observe the fellowship of the houses shoulder to shoulder; and that straight ascending smoke of the preparation for dinner; and the good policeman yonder, blessedly idle on an orderly Sabbath evening; and the families of the minor people trotting homeward from the park to tea; here and again an amiable carriage of the superimposed people driving to pay visits; they are so social, friendly, inviting to him; they strip him of the shroud, sing of the sweet old world. He cannot but be moved to the extremity of the charitableness neighbouring on tears.

A stupefaction at the shock of the positive reminder, echo of the fact still shouting in his breast, that he had seen Mrs. Burman, and that the interview was over—the leaf turned and the book shut held Victor in a silence until his gratefulness to London City was borne down by the more human burst of gratitude to the dying woman, who had spared him, as much as she could, a scene of the convulsive pathetic, and had not called on him for any utterance of penitence. That worm-like thread of voice came up to him still from sexton-depths: it sounded a larger forgiveness without the word. He felt the sorrow of it all, as he told Nataly; at the same time bidding her smell 'the marvellous oxygen of the park.' He declared it to be quite equal to Lakelands.

She slightly pressed his arm for answer. Perhaps she did not feel so deeply? She was free of the horrid associations with the scent of Marechale. At any rate, she had comported herself admirably!

Page 3709

Victor fancied he must have shuddered when he passed by Jarniman at the door, who was almost now seeing his mistress's ghost—would have the privilege to-morrow. He called a cab and drove to Mrs. John Cormyn's, at Nataly's request, for Nesta and mademoiselle: enjoying the Londonized odour of the cab. Nataly did not respond to his warm and continued eulogies of Mrs. Burman; she rather disappointed him. He talked of the gold and white furniture, he just alluded to the Cupid: reserving his mental comment, that the time-piece was all astray, the Cupid regular on the swing:—strange, touching, terrible, if really the silly gilt figure symbolized! . . . And we are a silly figure to be sitting in a cab imagining such things!—When Nesta and mademoiselle were opposite, he had the pleasure to see Nataly take Nesta's hand and hold it until they reached home. Those two talking together in the brief words of their deep feeling, had tones that were singularly alike: the mezzo-soprano filial to the divine maternal contralto. Those two dear ones mounted to Nataly's room.

The two dear ones showed themselves heart in heart together once more; each looked the happier for it. Dartrey was among their dinner-guests, and Nataly took him to her little blue-room before she went to bed. He did not speak of their conversation to Victor, but counselled him to keep her from excitement. 'My dear fellow, if you had seen her with Mrs. Burman!' Victor said, and loudly praised her coolness. She was never below a situation, he affirmed.

He followed his own counsel to humour his Nataly. She began panting at a word about Mr. Barmby's ready services. When, however, she related the state of affairs between Dartrey and Nesta, by the avowal of each of them to her, he said, embracing her: 'Your wisdom shall guide us, my love,' and almost extinguished a vexation by concealing it.

She sighed: 'If one could think, that a girl with Nesta's revolutionary ideas of the duties of women, and their powers, would be safe—or at all rightly guided by a man who is both one of the noblest and the wildest in the ideas he entertains!'

Victor sighed too. He saw the earldom, which was to dazzle the gossips, crack on the sky in a futile rocket-bouquet.

She was distressed; she moaned: 'My girl! my girl: I should wish to leave her with one who is more fixed—the old-fashioned husband. New ideas must come in politics, but in Society!—and for women! And the young having heads, are the most endangered. Nesta vows her life to it! Dartrey supports her!'

'See Colney,' said Victor. 'Odd, Colney does you good; some queer way he has. Though you don't care for his *rival tongues*,—and the last number was funny, with Semhians on the Pacific, impressively addressing a farewell to his cricket-bat, before he whirls it away to Neptune—and the blue hand of his nation's protecting God observed to seize it!—Dead failure with the public, of course! However, he seems to seem wise with you. The poor old fellow gets his trouncing from the critics monthly. See Colney to-

morrow, my love. Now go to sleep. We have got over the worst. I speak at my Meeting to-morrow and am a champagne-bottle of notes and points for them.'

Page 3710

His lost Idea drew close to him in sleep: or he thought so, when awaking to the conception of a people solidified, rich and poor, by the common pride of simple manhood. But it was not coloured, not a luminous globe: and the people were in drab, not a shining army on the march to meet the Future. It looked like a paragraph in a newspaper, upon which a Leading Article sits, dutifully arousing the fat worm of sarcastic humour under the ribs of cradled citizens, with an exposure of its excellent folly. He would not have it laughed at; still he could not admit it as more than a skirt of the robe of his Idea. For let none think him a mere City merchant, millionnaire, boon-fellow, or music-loving man of the world. He had ideas to shoot across future Ages;—provide against the shrinkage of our Coal-beds; against, and for, if you like, the thickening, jumbling, threatening excess of population in these Islands, in Europe, America, all over our habitable sphere. Now that Mrs. Burman, on her way to bliss, was no longer the dungeon-cell for the man he would show himself to be, this name for successes, corporate nucleus of the enjoyments, this Victor Montgomery Radnor, intended impressing himself upon the world as a factory of ideas. Colney's insolent charge, that the English have no imagination—a doomed race, if it be true!—would be confuted. For our English require but the lighted leadership to come into cohesion, and step ranked, and chant harmoniously the song of their benevolent aim. And that astral head giving, as a commencement, example of the right use of riches, the nation is one, part of the riddle of the future solved.

Surely he had here the Idea? He had it so warmly, that his bath-water heated. Only the vision was wanted.

On London Bridge he had seen it—a great thing done to the flash of brilliant results. That was after a fall.

There had been a fall also of the scheme of Lakelands.

Come to us with no superstitious whispers of indications and significations in the fall!—But there had certainly been a moral fall, fully to the level of the physical, in the maintaining of that scheme of Lakelands, now ruined by his incomprehensible Nesta—who had saved him from falling further. His bath-water chilled. He jumped out and rubbed furiously with his towels and flesh-brushes, chasing the Idea for simple warmth, to have Something inside him, to feel just that sustainment; with the cry: But no one can say I do not love my Nataly! And he tested it to prove it by his readiness to die for her: which is heroically easier than the devotedly living, and has a weight of evidence in our internal Courts for surpassing the latter tedious performance.

Page 3711

His Nesta had knocked Lakelands to pieces. Except for the making of money, the whole year of an erected Lakelands, notwithstanding uninterrupted successes, was a blank. Or rather we have to wish it were a blank. The scheme departs: payment for the enlisted servants of it is in prospect. A black agent, not willingly enlisted, yet pointing to proofs of service, refuses payment in ordinary coin; and we tell him we owe him nothing, that he is not a man of the world, has no understanding of Nature: and still the fellow thumps and alarums at a midnight door we are astonished to find we have in our daylight house. How is it? Would other men be so sensitive to him? Victor was appeased by the assurance of his possession of an exceptionally scrupulous conscience; and he settled the debate by thinking: 'After all, for a man like me, battling incessantly, a kind of Vesuvius, I must have—can't be starved, must be fed—though, pah! But I'm not to be questioned like other men.—But how about an aristocracy of the contempt of distinctions?—But there is no escaping distinctions! my aristocracy despises indulgence.—And indulges?—Say, an exceptional nature! Supposing a certain beloved woman to pronounce on the case?—She cannot: no woman can be a just judge of it.'—He cried: My love of her is testified by my having Barmby handy to right her to-day, tomorrow, the very instant the clock strikes the hour of my release!

Mention of the clock swung that silly gilt figure. Victor entered into it, condemned to swing, and be a thrall. His intensity of sensation launched him on an eternity of the swinging in ridiculous nakedness to the measure of time gone crazy. He had to correct a reproof of Mrs. Burman, as the cause of the nonsense. He ran down to breakfast, hopeing he might hear of that clock stopped, and that sickening motion with it.

Another letter from the Sanfredini in Milan, warmly inviting to her villa over Como, acted on him at breakfast like the waving of a banner. 'We go,' Victor said to Nataly, and flattered-up a smile about her lips—too much a resurrection smile. There was talk of the Meeting at the theatre: Simeon Fenellan had spoken there in the cause of the deceased Member, was known, and was likely to have a good reception. Fun and enthusiasm might be expected.

'And my darling will hear her husband speak to-night,' he whispered as he was departing; and did a mischief, he had to fear, for a shadowy knot crossed Nataly's forehead, she seemed paler. He sent back Nesta and mademoiselle, in consequence, at the end of the Green Park.

Their dinner-hour was early; Simeon Fenellan, Colney Durance, and Mr. Peridon—-pleasing to Nataly for his faithful siege of the French fortress—were the only guests. When they rose, Nataly drew Victor aside. He came dismayed to Nesta. She ran to her mother. 'Not hear papa speak? Oh, mother, mother! Then I stay with her. But can't she come? He is going to unfold ideas to us. There!'

Page 3712

‘My naughty girl is not to poke her fun at orators,’ Nataly said. ’No, dearest; it would agitate me to go. I’m better here. I shall be at peace when the night is over.’

‘But you will be all alone here, dear mother.’

Nataly’s eyes wandered to fall on Colney. He proposed to give her his company. She declined it. Nesta ventured another entreaty, either that she might be allowed to stay or have her mother with her at the Meeting.

‘My love,’ Nataly said, ‘the thought of the Meeting—’ She clasped at her breast; and she murmured: ’I shall be comforted by your being with him. There is no danger there. But I shall be happy, I shall be at peace when this night is over.’

Colney persuaded her to have him for companion. Mr. Peridon, who was to have driven with Nesta and mademoiselle, won admiration by proposing to stay for an hour and play some of Mrs. Radnor’s favourite pieces. Nesta and Victor overbore Nataly’s objections to the lover’s generosity. So Mr. Peridon was left. Nesta came hurrying back from the step of the carriage to kiss her mother again, saying: ’Just one last kiss, my own! And she’s not to look troubled. I shall remember everything to tell my own mother. It will soon be over.’

Her mother nodded; but the embrace was passionate.

Nesta called her father into the passage, bidding him prohibit any delivery to her mother of news at the door. ’She is easily startled now by trifles—you have noticed?’

Victor summoned his recollections and assured her he had noticed, as he believed he had ’The dear heart of her is fretting for the night to be over! And think! seven days, and she is in Lakelands. A fortnight, and we have our first Concert. Durandarte! Oh, the dear heart ’ll be at peace when I tell her of a triumphant Meeting. Not a doubt of that, even though Colney turns the shadow of his back on us.’

‘One critic the less for you!’ said Nesta. Skepsey was to meet her carriage at the theatre.

Ten minutes later, Victor and Simeon Fenellan were proceeding thitherward on foot.

‘I have my speech,’ said Victor. ’You prepare the way for me, following our influential friend Dubbleson; Colewort winds up; any one else they shout for. We shall have a great evening. I suspect I shall find Themison or Jarniman when I get home. You don’t believe in intimations? I’ve had crapy processions all day before my eyes. No wonder, after yesterday!’

‘Dubbleson mustn’t drawl it out too long,’ said Fenellan.

’We ‘ll drop a hint. Where’s Dartrey?’

’He’ll come. He’s in one of his black moods: not temper. He’s got a notion he killed his wife by dragging her to Africa with him. She was not only ready to go, she was glad to go. She had a bit of the heroine in her and a certainty of tripping to the deuce if she was left to herself.’

Page 3713

‘Tell Nataly that,’ said Victor. ’And tell her about Dartrey. Harp on it. Once she was all for him and our girl. But it’s a woman—though the dearest! I defy any one to hit on the cause of their changes. We must make the best of things, if we’re for swimming. The task for me to-night will be, to keep from rolling out all I’ve got in my head. And I’m not revolutionary, I’m for stability. Only I do see, that the firm stepping-place asks for a long stride to be taken. One can’t get the English to take a stride—unless it’s for a foot behind them: bother old Colney! Too timid, or too scrupulous, down we go into the mire. There!—But I want to say it! I want to save the existing order. I want, Christianity, instead of the Mammonism we ’re threatened with. Great fortunes now are becoming the giants of old to stalk the land: or mediaeval Barons. Dispersion of wealth, is the secret. Nataly’s of that mind with me. A decent poverty! She’s rather wearying, wants a change. I’ve a steam-yacht in my eye, for next month on the Mediterranean. All our set. She likes quiet. I believe in my political recipe for it.’

He thumped on a method he had for preserving aristocracy—true aristocracy, amid a positively democratic flood of riches.

‘It appears to me, you’re on the road of Priscilla Graves and Pempton,’ observed Simeon. ’Strike off Priscilla’s viands and friend Pempton’s couple of glasses, and there’s your aristocracy established; but with rather a dispersed recognition of itself.’

‘Upon my word, you talk like old Colney, except for a twang of your own,’ said Victor. ’Colney sours at every fresh number of that Serial. The last, with Delphica detecting the plot of Falarique, is really not so bad. The four disguised members of the Comedie Francaise on board the vessel from San Francisco, to declaim and prove the superior merits of the Gallic tongue, jumped me to bravo the cleverness. And Bobinikine turning to the complexion of the remainder of cupboard dumplings discovered in an emigrant’s house-to-let! And Semhians—I forget what and Mytharete’s forefinger over the bridge of his nose, like a pensive vulture on the skull of a desert camel! But, I complain, there’s nothing to make the English love the author; and it’s wasted, he’s basted, and the book ‘ll have no sale. I hate satire.’

‘Rough soap for a thin skin, Victor. Does it hurt our people much?’

‘Not a bit; doesn’t touch them. But I want my friends to succeed!’

Their coming upon Westminster Bridge changed the theme. Victor wished the Houses of Parliament to catch the beams of sunset. He deferred to the suggestion, that the Hospital’s doing so seemed appropriate.

Page 3714

‘I’m always pleased to find a decent reason for what is,’ he said. Then he queried: ’But what is, if we look at it, and while we look, Simeon? She may be going—or she’s gone already, poor woman! I shall have that scene of yesterday everlastingly before my eyes, like a drop-curtain. Only, you know, Simeon, they don’t feel the end, as we in health imagine. Colney would say, we have the spasms and they the peace. I ’ve a mind to send up to Regent’s Park with inquiries. It would look respectful. God forgive me!—the poor woman perverts me at every turn. Though I will say, a certain horror of death I had—she whisked me out of it yesterday. I don’t feel it any longer. What are you jerking at?’

’Only to remark, that if the thing’s done for us, we haven’t it so much on our sensations.’

’More, if we’re sympathetic. But that compels us to be philosophic—or who could live! Poor woman!’

‘Waft her gently, Victor!’

’Tush! Now for the South side of the Bridges; and I tell you, Simeon, what I can’t mention to-night: I mean to enliven these poor dear people on their forsaken South of the City. I ’ve my scheme. Elected or not, I shall hardly be accused of bribery when I put down my first instalment.’

Fenellan went to work with that remark in his brain for the speech he was to deliver. He could not but reflect on the genial man’s willingness and capacity to do deeds of benevolence, constantly thwarted by the position into which he had plunged himself.

They were received at the verge of the crowd outside the theatre-doors by Skepsey, who wriggled, tore and clove a way for them, where all were obedient, but the numbers lumped and clogged. When finally they reached the stage, they spied at Nesta’s box, during the thunder of the rounds of applause, after shaking hands with Mr. Dubbleson, Sir Abraham Quatley, Dudley Sowerby, and others; and with Beaves Urmsing—a politician ’never of the opposite party to a deuce of a funny fellow!—go anywhere to hear him,’ he vowed.

‘Miss Radnor and Mademoiselle de Seilles arrived quite safely,’ said Dudley, feasting on the box which contained them and no Dartrey Fenellan in it.

Nesta was wondering at Dartrey’s absence. Not before Mr. Dubbleson, the chairman, the ‘gentleman of local influence,’ had animated the drowsed wits and respiratory organs of a packed audience by yielding place to Simeon, did Dartrey appear. Simeon’s name was shouted, in proof of the happy explosion of his first anecdote, as Dartrey took seat behind Nesta. ‘Half an hour with the dear mother,’ he said.

Nesta's eyes thanked him. She pressed the hand of a demure young woman sitting close behind. Louise de Seilles. 'You know Matilda Pridden.'

Dartrey held his hand out. 'Has she forgiven me?'

Matilda bowed gravely, enfolding her affirmative in an outline of the no need for it, with perfect good breeding. Dartrey was moved to think Skepsey's choice of a woman to worship did him honour. He glanced at Louise. Her manner toward Matilda Pridden showed her sisterly with Nesta. He said: 'I left Mr. Peridon playing.—A little anxiety to hear that the great speech of the evening is done; it's nothing else. I'll run to her as soon as it's over.'

Page 3715

‘Oh, good of you! And kind of Mr. Peridon!’ She turned to Louise, who smiled at the simple art of the exclamation, assenting.

Victor below, on the stage platform, indicated the waving of a hand to them, and his delight at Simeon’s ringing points: which were, to Dartrey’s mind, vacuously clever and crafty. Dartrey despised effects of oratory, save when soldiers had to be hurled on a mark—or citizens nerved to stand for their country.

Nesta dived into her father’s brilliancy of appreciation, a trifle pained by Dartrey’s aristocratic air when he surveyed the herd of heads agape and another cheer rang round. He smiled with her, to be with her, at a hit here and there; he would not pretend an approval of this manner of winning electors to consider the country’s interests and their own. One fellow in the crowded pit, affecting a familiarity with Simeon, that permitted the taking of liberties with the orator’s Christian name, mildly amused him. He had no objection to hear ‘Simmy’ shouted, as Louise de Seilles observed. She was of his mind, in regard to the rough machinery of Freedom.

Skepsey entered the box.

‘We shall soon be serious, Miss Nesta,’ he said, after a look at Matilda Pridden.

There was a prolonged roaring—on the cheerful side.

’And another word about security that your candidate will keep his promises,’ continued Simeon: ‘You have his word, my friends!’ And he told the story of the old Governor of Goa, who wanted money and summoned the usurers, and they wanted security; whereupon he laid his Hidalgo hand on a cataract of Kronos-beard across his breast, and pulled forth three white hairs, and presented them: ’And as honourably to the usurious Jews as to the noble gentleman himself, that security was accepted!’

Emerging from hearty clamours, the illustrative orator fell upon the question of political specifics:—Mr. Victor Radnor trusted to English good sense too profoundly to be offering them positive cures, as they would hear the enemy say he did. Yet a bit of a cure may be offered, if we ’re not for pushing it too far, in pursuit of the science of specifics, in the style of the foreign physician, probably Spanish, who had no practice, and wished for leisure to let him prosecute his anatomical and other investigations to discover his grand medical nostrum. So to get him fees meanwhile he advertised a cure for dyspepsia—the resource of starving doctors. And sure enough his patient came, showing the grand fat fellow we may be when we carry more of the deciduously mortal than of the scraggy vital upon our persons. Any one at a glance would have prescribed water-cresses to him: water-cresses exclusively to eat for a fortnight. And that the good physician did. Away went his patient, returning at the end of the fortnight, lean, and with the appetite of a Toledo blade for succulent slices. He vowed he was the man. Our estimable doctor eyed him, tapped at

Page 3716

him, pinched his tender parts; and making him swear he was really the man, and had eaten nothing whatever but unadulterated water-cresses in the interval, seized on him in an ecstasy by the collar of his coat, pushed him into the surgery, knocked him over, killed him, cut him up, and enjoyed the felicity of exposing to view the very healthiest patient ever seen under dissecting hand, by favour of the fortunate discovery of the specific for him. All to further science!—to which, in spite of the petitions of all the scientific bodies of the civilized world, he fell a martyr on the scaffold, poor gentleman! But we know politics to be no such empirical science.

Simeon ingeniously interwove his analogy. He brought it home to Beaves Urmsing, whose laugh drove any tone of apology out of it. Yet the orator was asked: 'Do you take politics for a joke, Simmy?'

He countered his questioner: 'Just to liberate you from your moribund state, my friend.' And he told the story of the wrecked sailor, found lying on the sands, flung up from the foundered ship of a Salvation captain, and how, that nothing could waken him, and there he lay fit for interment; until presently a something of a voice grew down into his ears; and it was his old chum Polly, whom he had tied to a board to give her a last chance in the surges; and Polly shaking the wet from her feathers, and shouting: 'Polly tho dram dry!'—which struck on the nob of Jack's memory, to revive all the liquorly tricks of the cabin under Salvationism, and he began heaving, and at last he shook in a lazy way, and then from sputter to sputter got his laugh loose; and he sat up, and cried; 'That did it! Now to business!' for he was hungry. 'And when I catch the ring of this world's laugh from you, my friend . . . !' Simeon's application of the story was drowned.

After the outburst, they heard his friend again interruptingly: 'You keep that tongue of yours from wagging, as it did when you got round the old widow woman for her money, Simmy!'

Victor leaned forward. Simeon towered. He bellowed

'And you keep that tongue of yours from committing incest on a lie!'

It was like a lightning-flash in the theatre. The man went under. Simeon flowed. Conscience reproached him with the little he had done for Victor, and he had now his congenial opportunity.

Up in the box, the powers of the orator were not so cordially esteemed. To Matilda Pridden, his tales were barely decently the flesh and the devil smothering a holy occasion to penetrate and exhort. Dartrey sat rigid, as with the checked impatience for a leap. Nesta looked at Louise when some one was perceived on the stage bending to her father: It was Mr. Peridon; he never once raised his face. Apparently he was not intelligible or audible but the next moment Victor sprang erect. Dartrey quitted the box.

Nesta beheld her father uttering hurried words to right and left. He passed from sight, Mr. Peridon with him; and Dartrey did not return.

Page 3717

Nesta felt her father's absence as light gone: his eyes rayed light. Besides she had the anticipation of a speech from him, that would win Matilda Pridden. She fancied Simeon Fenellan to be rather under the spell of the hilarity he roused. A gentleman behind him spoke in his ear; and Simeon, instead of ceasing, resumed his flow. Matilda Pridden's gaze on him and the people was painful to behold: Nesta saw her mind. She set herself to study a popular assembly. It could be serious to the call of better leadership, she believed. Her father had been telling her of late of a faith he had in the English, that they (or so her intelligence translated his remarks) had power to rise to spiritual ascendancy, and be once more the Islanders heading the world of a new epoch abjuring materialism—some such idea; very quickening to her, as it would be to this earnest young woman worshipped by Skepsey. Her father's absence and the continued shouts of laughter, the insatiable thirst for fun, darkened her in her desire to have the soul of the good working sister refreshed. They had talked together; not much: enough for each to see at either's breast the wells from the founts of life.

The box-door opened, Dartrey came in. He took her hand. She stood-up to his look. He said to Matilda Pridden: 'Come with us; she will need you.'

'Speak it,' said Nesta.

He said to the other: 'She has courage.'

'I could trust to her,' Matilda Pridden replied.

Nesta read his eyes. 'Mother?'

His answer was in the pressure.

'Ill?'

'No longer.'

'Oh! Dartrey.' Matilda Pridden caught her fast.

'I can walk, dear,' Nesta said.

Dartrey mentioned her father.

She understood: 'I am thinking of him.'

The words of her mother: 'At peace when the night is over,' rang. Along the gassy passages of the back of the theatre, the sound coming from an applausive audience was as much a thunder as rage would have been. It was as void of human meaning as a sea.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LAST

In the still dark hour of that April morning, the Rev. Septimus Barmby was roused by Mr. Peridon, with a scribbled message from Victor, which he deciphered by candlelight held close to the sheet of paper, between short inquiries and communications, losing more and more the sense of it as his intelligence became aware of what dread blow had befallen the stricken man. He was bidden come to fulfil his promise instantly. He remembered the bearing of the promise. Mr. Peridon's hurried explanatory narrative made the request terrific, out of tragically lamentable. A semblance of obedience had to be put on, and the act of dressing aided it. Mr. Barmby prayed at heart for guidance further.

The two gentlemen drove Westward, speaking little; they had the dry sob in the throat.

Page 3718

‘Miss Radnor?’ Mr. Barmby asked.

‘She is shattered; she holds up; she would not break down.’

‘I can conceive her to possess high courage.’

‘She has her friend Mademoiselle de Seilles.’

Mr. Barmby remained humbly silent. Affectionate deep regrets moved him to say: ’A loss irreparable. We have but one voice of sorrow. And how sudden! The dear lady had no suffering, I trust.’

’She fell into the arms of Mr. Durance. She died in his arms. She was unconscious, he says. I left her straining for breath. She said “Victor”; she tried to smile:—I understood I was not to alarm him.’

‘And he too late!’

‘He was too late, by some minutes.’

‘At least I may comfort. Miss Radnor must be a blessing to him.’

‘They cannot meet. Her presence excites him.’

That radiant home of all hospitality seemed opening on from darker chambers to the deadly dark. The immorality in the moral situation could not be forgotten by one who was professionally a moralist. But an incorruptible beauty in the woman’s character claimed to plead for her memory. Even the rigorous in defence of righteous laws are softened by a sinner’s death to hear excuses, and may own a relationship, haply perceive the faint nimbus of the saint. Death among us proves us to be still not so far from the Nature saying at every avenue to the mind: ‘Earth makes all sweet.’

Mr. Durance had prophesied a wailful end ever to the carol of Optimists! Yet it is not the black view which is the right view. There is one between: the path adopted by Septimus Barmby:—if he could but induce his brethren to enter on it! The dreadful teaching of circumstances might help to the persuading of a fair young woman, under his direction . . . having her hand disengaged. Mr. Barmby started himself in the dream of his uninterred passion for the maiden: he chased it, seized it, hurled it hence, as a present sacrilege:—constantly, and at the pitch of our highest devotion to serve, are we assailed by the tempter! Is it, that the love of woman is our weakness? For if so, then would a celibate clergy have grant of immunity. But, alas, it is not so with them! We have to deplore the hearing of reports too credible. Again we are pushed to contemplate woman as the mysterious obstruction to the perfect purity of soul. Nor is there a refuge in asceticism. No more devilish nourisher of pride do we find than in pain voluntarily embraced. And strangely, at the time when our hearts are pledged to

thoughts upon others, they are led by woman to glance revolving upon ourself, our vile self! Mr. Barmby clutched it by the neck.

Page 3719

Light now, as of a strong memory of day along the street, assisted him to forget himself at the sight of the inanimate houses of this London, all revealed in a quietness not less immobile than tombstones of an unending cemetery, with its last ghost laid. Did men but know it!—The habitual necessity to amass matter for the weekly sermon, set him noting his meditative exclamations, the noble army of platitudes under haloes, of good use to men: justifiably turned over in his mind for their good. He had to think, that this act of the justifying of the act reproached him with a lack of due emotion, in sympathy with agonized friends truly dear. Drawing near the hospitable house, his official and a cordial emotion united, as we see sorrowful crape-wreathed countenances. His heart struck heavily when the house was visible.

Could it be the very house? The look of it belied the tale inside. But that threw a ghostliness on the look.

Some one was pacing up and down. They greeted Dudley Sowerby. His ability to speak was tasked. They gathered, that mademoiselle and 'a Miss Pridden' were sitting with Nesta, and that their services in a crisis had been precious. At such times, one of them reflected, woman has indeed her place: when life's battle waxes red. Her soul must be capable of mounting to the level of the man's, then? It is a lesson!

Dudley said he was waiting for Dr. Themison to come forth. He could not tear himself from sight of the house.

The door opened to Dr. Themison departing, Colney Durance and Simeon Fenellan bare-headed. Colney showed a face with stains of the lashing of tears.

Dr. Themison gave his final counsels. 'Her father must not see her. For him, it may have to be a specialist. We will hope the best. Mr. Dartrey Fenellan stays beside him:—good. As to the ceremony he calls for, a form of it might soothe:—any soothing possible! No music. I will return in a few hours.'

He went on foot.

Mr. Barmby begged advice from Colney and Simeon concerning the message he had received—the ceremony requiring his official presidency. Neither of them replied. They breathed the morning air, they gave out long-drawn sighs of relief, looking on the trees of the park.

A man came along the pavement, working slow legs hurriedly. Simeon ran down to him.

'Humour, as much as you can,' Colney said to Mr. Barmby. 'Let him imagine.'

'Miss Radnor?'

'Not to speak of her.'

‘The daughter he so loves?’

Mr. Barmby’s tender inquisitiveness was unanswered. Were they inducing him to mollify a madman? But was it possible to associate the idea of madness with Mr. Radnor?

Simeon ran back. ‘Jarniman,’ he remarked. ‘It’s over!’

‘Now!’ Colney’s shoulders expressed the comment. ’Well, now, Mr. Barmby, you can do the part desired. Come in. It’s morning!’ He stared at the sky.

Page 3720

All except Dudley passed in.

Mr. Barmby wanted more advice, his dilemma being acute. It was moderated, though not more than moderated, when he was informed of the death of Mrs. Burman Radnor; an event that occurred, according to Jarniman's report, forty-five minutes after Skepsey had a second time called for information of it at the house in Regent's Park—five hours and a half, as Colney made his calculation, after the death of Nataly. He was urged by some spur of senseless irony to verify the calculation and correct it in the minutes.

Dudley crossed the road. No sign of the awful interior was on any of the windows of the house either to deepen awe or relieve. They were blank as eyeballs of the mindless. He shivered. Death is our common cloak; but Calamity individualizes, to set the unwounded speculating whether indeed a stricken man, who has become the cause of woeful trouble, may not be pointing a moral. Pacing on the Park side of the house, he saw Skepsey drive up and leap out with a gentleman, Mr. Radnor's lawyer. Could it be, that there was no Will written? Could a Will be executed now? The moral was more forcibly suggested. Dudley beheld this Mr. Victor Radnor successful up all the main steps, persuasive, popular, brightest of the elect of Fortune, felled to the ground within an hour, he and all his house! And if at once to pass beneath the ground, the blow would have seemed merciful for him. Or if, instead of chattering a mixture of the rational and the monstrous, he had been heard to rave like the utterly distraught. Recollection of some of the things he shouted, was an anguish: A notion came into the poor man, that he was the dead one of the two, and he cried out: 'Cremation? No, Colney's right, it robs us of our last laugh. I lie as I fall.' He 'had a confession for his Nataly, for her only, for no one else.' He had 'an Idea.' His begging of Dudley to listen without any punctilio (putting a vulgar oath before it), was the sole piece of unreasonableness in the explanation of the idea: and that was not much wilder than the stuff Dudley had read from reports of Radical speeches. He told Dudley he thought him too young to be 'best man to a widower about to be married,' and that Barmby was 'coming all haste to do the business, because of no time to spare.'

Dudley knew but the half, and he did not envy Dartrey Fenellan his task of watching over the wreck of a splendid intelligence, humouring and restraining. According to the rumours, Mr. Radnor had not shown the symptoms before the appearance of his daughter. For awhile he hung, and then fell, like an icicle. Nesta came with a cry for her father. He rose: Dartrey was by. Hugged fast in iron muscles, the unhappy creature raved of his being a caged lion. These things Dudley had heard in the house.

There are scenes of life proper to the grave-cloth.

Nataly's dead body was her advocate with her family, with friends, with the world. Victor had more need of a covering shroud to keep calamity respected. Earth makes all sweet: and we, when the privilege is granted us, do well to treat the terribly stricken as if they had entered to the bosom of earth.

Page 3721

That night's infinite sadness was concentrated upon Nesta. She had need of her strength of mind and body.

The night went past as a year. The year followed it as a refreshing night. Slowly lifting her from our abysses, it was a good angel to the girl. Permission could not be given for her to see her father. She had a home in the modest home of Louise de Seilles on the borders of Dauphins; and with French hearts at their best in winningness around her, she learned again, as an art, the natural act of breathing calmly; she had by degrees a longing for the snow-heights. When her imagination could perch on them with love and pride, she began to recover the throb for a part in human action. It set her nature flowing to the mate she had chosen, who was her counsellor, her supporter, and her sword. She had awakened to new life, not to sink back upon a breast of love, though thoughts of the lover were as blows upon strung musical chords of her bosom. Her union with Dartrey was for the having an ally and the being an ally, in resolute vision of strife ahead, through the veiled dreams that bear the blush. This was behind a maidenly demureness. Are not young women hypocrites? Who shall fathom their guile! A girl with a pretty smile, a gentle manner, a liking for wild flowers up on the rocks; and graceful with resemblances to the swelling proportions of garden-fruits approved in young women by the connoisseur eye of man; distinctly designed to embrace the state of marriage, that she might (a girl of singularly lucid and receptive eyes) the better give battle to men touching matters which they howl at an eccentric matron for naming. So it was. And the yielding of her hand to Dartrey, would have appeared at that period of her revival, as among the baser compliances of the fleshly, if she had not seen in him, whom she owned for leader, her fellow soldier, warrior friend, hero, of her own heart's mould, but a greater.

She was on Como, at the villa of the Signora Giulia Sanfredini, when Dudley's letter reached her, with the supplicating offer of the share of his earldom. An English home meanwhile was proposed to her at the house of his mother the Countess. He knew that he did not write to a brilliant heiress. The generosity she had always felt that he possessed, he thus proved in figures. They are convincing and not melting. But she was moved to tears by his goodness in visiting her father, as well as by the hopeful news he sent. He wrote delicately, withholding the title of her father's place of abode. There were expectations of her father's perfect recovery; the signs were auspicious; he appeared to be restored to the 'likeness to himself' in the instances Dudley furnished:—-his appointment with him for the flute-duet next day; and particularly his enthusiastic satisfaction with the largeness and easy excellent service of the residence 'in which he so happily found himself established.' He held it to be, 'on the whole, superior to

Page 3722

Lakelands.’ The smile and the tear rolled together in Nesta reading these words. And her father spoke repeatedly of longing to embrace his Fredi, of the joy her last letter had given him, of his intention to send an immediate answer: and he showed Dudley a pile of manuscript ready for the post. He talked of public affairs, was humorous over any extravagance or eccentricity in the views he took; notably when he alluded to his envy of little Skepsey. He said he really did envy; and his daughter believed it and saw fair prospects in it.

Her grateful reply to the young earl conveyed all that was perforce ungentle, in the signature of the name of Nesta Victoria Fenellan:—a name he was to hear cited among the cushioned conservatives, and plead for as he best could under a pressure of disapprobation, and compelled esteem, and regrets.

The day following the report of her father’s wish to see her, she and her husband started for England. On that day, Victor breathed his last. Dudley had seen the not hopeful but an ominous illumination of the stricken man; for whom came the peace his Nataly had in earth. Often did Nesta conjure up to vision the palpitating form of the beloved mother with her hand at her mortal wound in secret through long years of the wearing of the mask to keep her mate inspirited. Her gathered knowledge of things and her ruthless penetrativeness made it sometimes hard for her to be tolerant of a world, whose tolerance of the infinitely evil stamped blotches on its face and shrieked in stains across the skin beneath its gallant garb. That was only when she thought of it as the world condemning her mother. She had a husband able and ready, in return for corrections of his demon temper, to trim an ardent young woman’s fanatical overflow of the sisterly sentiments; scholarly friends, too, for such restrainings from excess as the mind obtains in a lamp of History exhibiting man’s original sprouts to growth and fitful continuation of them. Her first experience of the grief that is in pleasure, for those who have passed a season, was when the old Concert-set assembled round her. When she heard from the mouth of a living woman, that she had saved her from going under the world’s waggon-wheels, and taught her to know what is actually meant by the good living of a shapely life, Nesta had the taste of a harvest happiness richer than her recollection of the bride’s, though never was bride in fuller flower to her lord than she who brought the dower of an equal valiancy to Dartrey Fenellan. You are aware of the reasons, the many, why a courageous young woman requires of high heaven, far more than the commendably timid, a doughty husband. She had him; otherwise would that puzzled old world, which beheld her step out of the ranks to challenge it, and could not blast her personal reputation, have commissioned a paw to maul her character, perhaps instructing the gossips to murmur of her parentage. Nesta Victoria Fenellan had the husband who would have the world respectful to any brave woman. This one was his wife.

Page 3723

Daniel Skepsey rejoices in service to his new master, owing to the scientific opinion he can at any moment of the day apply for, as to the military defences of the country; instead of our attempting to arrest the enemy by vociferations of persistent prayer:—the sole point of difference between him and his Matilda; and it might have been fatal but that Nesta's intervention was persuasive. The two members of the Army first in the field to enrol and give rank according to the merits of either, to both sexes, were made one. Colney Durance (practically cynical when not fancifully, men said) stood by Skepsey at the altar. His published exercises in Satire produce a flush of the article in the Reviews of his books. Meat and wine in turn fence the Hymen beckoning Priscilla and Mr. Pempton. The forms of Religion more than the Channel's division of races keep Louise de Seilles and Mr. Peridon asunder: and in the uniting of them Colney is interested, because it would have so pleased the woman of the loyal heart no longer beating. He let Victor's end be his expiation and did not phrase blame of him. He considered the shallowness of the abstract Optimist exposed enough in Victor's history. He was reconciled to it when, looking on their child, he discerned, that for a cancelling of the errors chargeable to them, the father and mother had kept faith with Nature.

Etext editor's bookmarks

Admiration of an enemy or oppressor doing great deeds
All of us an ermined owl within us to sit in judgement
An incomprehensible world indeed at the bottom and at the top
Aristocratic assumption of licence
Arrest the enemy by vociferations of persistent prayer
Ask not why, where reason never was
Belief in the narrative by promoting nausea in the audience
But what is it we do (excepting cricket, of course)
Cannot be any goodness unless it is a practiced goodness
Claim for equality puts an end to the priceless privileges
Consent of circumstances
Consent to take life as it is
Continued trust in the man—is the alternative of despair
Country prizing ornaments higher than qualities
Cover of action as an escape from perplexity
Critical fashion of intimates who know as well as hear
Death is our common cloak; but Calamity individualizes
Despises hostile elements and goes unpunished
Dialogue between Nature and Circumstance
Dithyrambic inebriety of narration
Dudley was not gifted to read behind words and looks
Eminently servile is the tolerated lawbreaker
Exuberant anticipatory trustfulness
Fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously
Feminine; coming when she willed and flying when wanted

Fire smoothes the creases
Frankness as an armour over wariness
Greater our successes,

Page 3724

the greater the slaves we become
Half designingly permitted her trouble to be seen
Half a dozen dozen left
Happy the woman who has not more to speak
Hard to bear, at times unbearable
Haremed opinion of the unfitness of women
He sinks terribly when he sinks at all
He never acknowledged a trouble, he dispersed it
He never explained
He neared her, wooing her; and she assented
He prattled, in the happy ignorance of compulsion
Heathen vindictiveness declaring itself holy
Honest creatures who will not accept a lift from fiction
How little we mean to do harm when we do an injury
How Success derides Ambition!
If only been intellectually a little flexible in his morality
If we are robbed, we ask, How came we by the goods?
If we are really for Nature, we are not lawless
In the pay of our doctors
In bottle if not on draught (oratory)
Intrusion of hard material statements, facts
Judgeing of the destiny of man by the fate of individuals
Kelts, as they are called, can’t and won’t forgive injuries
Let but the throb be kept for others—That is the one secret
Love must needs be an egoism
Man with a material object in aim, is the man of his object
Memory inspired by the sensations
Nation’s half made-up of the idle and the servants of the idle
Naturally as deceived as he wished to be
Nature and Law never agreed
Nature could at a push be eloquent to defend the guilty
Nature’s logic, Nature’s voice, for self-defence
Next door to the Last Trump
No companionship save with the wound they nurse
Not to go hunting and fawning for alliances
Not always the right thing to do the right thing
Obeseness is the most sensitive of our ailments
Official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one
Once out of the rutted line, you are food for lion and jackal
One wants a little animation in a husband
Optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years
People of a provocative prosperity
Pessimy is invulnerable

Portrait of himself by the artist
Put into her woman’s harness of the bit and the blinkers
Repeatedly, in contempt of the disgust of iteration
Satirist is an executioner by profession
Satirist too devotedly loves his lash to be a persuasive teacher
Self-deceiver may be a persuasive deceiver of another
Semblance of a tombstone lady beside her lord
Share of foulness to them that are for scouring the chamber
She was not his match—To speak would be to succumb
She disdained to question the mouth which had bitten her
Slap and pinch and starve our appetites
Slave of existing conventions
Smallest of our gratifications

Page 3725

in life could give a happy tone
Smothered in its pudding-bed of the grotesque (obesity)
Snuffle of hypocrisy in her prayer
Startled by the criticism in laughter
State of feverish patriotism
Statistics are according to their conjurors
Subterranean recess for Nature against the Institutions of Man
Tale, which leaves the man’s mind at home
The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke
The homage we pay him flatters us
The effects of the infinitely little
The night went past as a year
The old confession, that we cannot cook (The English)
The worst of it is, that we remember
The face of a stopped watch
The impalpable which has prevailing weight
There is little to be learnt when a little is known
They helped her to feel at home with herself
They kissed coldly, pressed a hand, said good night
They do not live; they are engines
Thought of differences with him caused frightful apprehensions
To do nothing, is the wisdom of those who have seen fools perish
Universal censor’s angry spite
Unshamed exuberant male has found the sweet reverse in his mate
We have come to think we have a claim upon her gratitude
We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life
We cannot relinquish an idea that was ours
We’ve all a parlous lot too much pulpit in us
Whimpering fits you said we enjoy and must have in books
Who enjoyed simple things when commanding the luxuries

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA, Complete

By George Meredith

CONTENTS.

Book 1.
I. *Love at* A *school*
ii. *Lady Charlotte*
III. *The tutor*

iv. *Recognition*
V. *In which the shades of browny and matey advance and retire*

Book 2.
VI. *In* A *mood of languor*
VII. *Exhibits effects of* A PRATTLER'S *doses*
viii. *Mrs*. *Lawrence Finchley*
IX. A *flash of the bruised warrior*
X. A *short passage in the game played by two*
xi. *The secretary taken as an antidote*

Book 3.
XII. *More of Cuper's boys*
XIII. *War at Olmer*
xiv. *Old lovers new friends*
XV. *Showing* A *secret fished without angling*
XVI. *Along two roads to Steignton*

Page 3726

Book 4.
XVII. *Lady Charlotte's triumph*
XVIII. A *scene on the road back*
XIX. *The pursuers*
XX. *At the sign of the jolly cricketers*
XXI. *Under-currents in the minds of lady Charlotte and lord Ormont*
XXII. *Treats of the first day of the contention of brother and sister*
XXIII. *The Ormont jewels*

Book 5.
XXIV. *Lovers mated*
XXXV. *Preparations for* A *resolve*
XXVI. *Visits of farewell*
XXVII. A *marine duet*
XXVIII. *The plighting*
XXIX. *Aminta to her lord*
XXX. *Conclusion*

CHAPTER I.

LOVE AT A SCHOOL

A procession of schoolboys having to meet a procession of schoolgirls on the Sunday's dead march, called a walk, round the park, could hardly go by without dropping to a hum in its chatter, and the shot of incurious half-eyes the petticoated creatures—all so much of a swarm unless you stare at them like lanterns. The boys cast glance because it relieved their heaviness; things were lumpish and gloomy that day of the week. The girls, who sped their peep of inquisition before the moment of transit, let it be seen that they had minds occupied with thoughts of their own.

Our gallant fellows forgot the intrusion of the foreign as soon as it had passed. A sarcastic discharge was jerked by chance at the usher and the governess—at the old game, it seemed; or why did they keep steering columns to meet? There was no fun in meeting; it would never be happening every other Sunday, and oftener, by sheer toss-penny accident. They were moved like pieces for the pleasure of these two.

Sometimes the meeting occurred twice during the stupid march-out, when it became so nearly vexatious to boys almost biliously oppressed by the tedium of a day merely allowing them to shove the legs along, ironically naming it animal excise, that some among them pronounced the sham variation of monotony to be a bothering nuisance if it was going to happen every Sunday, though Sunday required diversions. They hated the absurdity in this meeting and meeting; for they were obliged to anticipate it, as a part of their ignominious weekly performance; and they could not avoid reflecting on it, as a

thing done over again: it had them in front and in rear; and it was a kind of broadside mirror, flashing at them the exact opposite of themselves in an identically similar situation, that forced a resemblance.

Page 3727

Touching the old game, Cuper's fold was a healthy school, owing to the good lead of the head boy, Matey Weyburn, a lad with a heart for games to bring renown, and no thought about girls. His emulation, the fellows fancied, was for getting the school into a journal of the Sports. He used to read one sent him by a sporting officer of his name, and talk enviously of public schools, printed whatever they did—a privilege and dignity of which, they had unrivalled enjoyment in the past, days, when wealth was more jealously exclusive; and he was always prompting for challenges and saving up to pay expenses; and the fellows were to laugh at kicks and learn the art of self-defence—train to rejoice in whipcord muscles. The son of a tradesman, if a boy fell under the imputation, was worthy of honour with him, let the fellow but show grip and toughness. He loathed a skulker, and his face was known for any boy who would own to fatigue or confess himself beaten. "Go to bed," was one of his terrible stings. Matey was good at lessons, too—liked them; liked Latin and Greek; would help a poor stumbler.

Where he did such good work was in sharpening the fellows to excel. He kept them to the grindstone, so that they had no time for rusty brooding; and it was fit done by exhortations off a pedestal, like St. Paul at the Athenians, it breathed out of him every day of the week. He carried a light for followers. Whatever he demanded of them, he himself did it easily. He would say to boys, "You're going to be men," meaning something better than women. There was a notion that Matey despised girls. Consequently, never much esteemed, they were in disfavour. The old game was mentioned only because of a tradition of an usher and governess leering sick eyes until they slunk away round a corner and married, and set up a school for themselves—an emasculate ending. Comment on it came of a design to show that the whole game had been examined dismissed as uninteresting and profitless.

One of the boys alluded in Matey's presence to their general view upon the part played by womankind on the stage, confident of a backing; and he had it, in a way: their noble chief whisked the subject, as not worth a discussion; but he turned to a younger chap, who said he detested girls, and asked him how about a sister at home; and the youngster coloured, and Matey took him and spun him round, with a friendly tap on the shoulder.

Odd remarks at intervals caused it to be suspected that he had ideas concerning girls. They were high as his head above the school; and there they were left, with Algebra and Homer, for they were not of a sort to inflame; until the boys noticed how he gave up speaking, and fell to hard looking, though she was dark enough to get herself named Browny. In the absence of a fair girl of equal height to set beside her, Browny shone.

She had a nice mouth, ready for a smile at the corners, or so it was before Matey let her see that she was his mark. Now she kept her mouth asleep and her eyes half down, up to the moment of her nearing to pass, when the girl opened on him, as if lifting her eyelids from sleep to the window, a full side—look, like a throb, and no disguise—no

slyness or boldness either, not a bit of languishing. You might think her heart came quietly out.

Page 3728

The look was like the fall of light on the hills from the first of morning. It lasted half a minute, and left a ruffle for a good half-hour. Even the younger fellows, without knowing what affected them, were moved by the new picture of a girl, as if it had been a frontispiece of a romantic story some day to be read. She looked compelled to look, but consenting and unashamed; at home in submission; just the look that wins observant boys, shrewd as dogs to read by signs, if they are interested in the persons. They read Browny's meaning: that Matey had only to come and snatch her; he was her master, and she was a brave girl, ready to go all over the world with him; had taken to him as he to her, shot for shot. Her taking to the pick of the school was a capital proof that she was of the right sort. To be sure, she could not much help herself.

Some of the boys regretted her not being fair. But, as they felt, and sought to explain, in the manner of the wag of a tail, with elbows and eyebrows to one another's understanding, fair girls could never have let fly such look; fair girls are softer, woollier, and when they mean to look serious, overdo it by craping solemn; or they pinafore a jigging eagerness, or hoist propriety on a chubby flaxen grin; or else they dart an eye, or they mince and prim and pout, and are sigh-away and dying-ducky, given to girls' tricks. Browny, after all, was the girl for Matey.

She won a victory right away and out of hand, on behalf of her cloud-and-moon sisters, as against the sunny-meadowy; for slanting intermediates are not espied of boys in anything: conquered by Browny; they went over to her colour, equal to arguing, that Venus at her mightiest must have been dark, or she would not have stood a comparison with the forest Goddess of the Crescent, swanning it through a lake—on the leap for run of the chase—watching the dart, with her humming bow at breast. The fair are simple sugary thing's, prone to fat, like broad-sops in milk; but the others are milky nuts, good to bite, Lacedaemonian virgins, hard to beat, putting us on our mettle; and they are for heroes, and they can be brave. So these boys felt, conquered by Browny. A sneaking native taste for the forsaken side, known to renegades, hauled at them if her image waned during the week; and it waned a little, but Sunday restored and stamped it.

By a sudden turn the whole upper-school had fallen to thinking of girls, and the meeting on the Sunday was a prospect. One of the day-boarders had a sister in the seminary of Miss Vincent. He was plied to obtain information concerning Browny's name and her parents. He had it pat to hand in answer. No parents came to see her; an aunt came now and then. Her aunt's name was not wanted. Browny's name was Aminta Farrell.

Farrell might pass; Aminta was debated. This female Christian name had a foreign twang; it gave dissatisfaction. Boy after boy had a try at it, with the same effect: you could not speak the name without a pursing of the month and a puckering of the nose, beastly to see, as one little fellow reminded them on a day when Matey was in more than common favour, topping a pitch of rapture, for clean bowling, first ball, middle stump on the kick, the best bat of the other eleven in a match; and, says this youngster, drawling, soon after the cheers and claps had subsided to business, "Aminta."

Page 3729

He made it funny by saying it as if to himself and the ground, in a subdued way, while he swung his leg on a half-circle, like a skater, hands in pockets. He was a sly young rascal, innocently precocious enough, and he meant no disrespect either to Browny or to Matey; but he had to run for it, his delivery of the name being so like what was in the breasts of the senior fellows, as to the inferiority of any Aminta to old Matey, that he set them laughing; and Browny was on the field, to reprove them, left of the tea-booth, with her school-mates, part of her head under a scarlet parasol.

A girl with such a name as Aminta might not be exactly up to the standard of old Matey, still, if he thought her so and she had spirit, the school was bound to subscribe; and that look of hers warranted her for taking her share in the story, like the brigand's wife loading gnus for him while he knocks over the foremost carabineer on the mountain-ledge below, who drops on his back with a hellish expression.

Browny was then clearly seen all round, instead of only front-face, as on the Sunday in the park, when fellows could not spy backward after passing. The pleasure they had in seeing her all round involved no fresh stores of observation, for none could tell how she tied her back-hair, which was the question put to them by a cynic of a boy, said to be queasy with excess of sisters. They could tell that she was tall for a girl, or tallish—not a maypole. She drank a cup of tea, and ate a slice of bread-and-butter; no cake.

She appeared undisturbed when Matey, wearing his holiday white ducks, and all aglow, entered the booth. She was not expected to faint, only she stood for the foreign Aminta more than for their familiar Browny in his presence. Not a sign of the look which had fired the school did she throw at him. Change the colour and you might compare her to a lobster fixed on end, with a chin and no eyes. Matey talked to Miss Vincent up to the instant of his running to bat. She would have liked to guess how he knew she had a brother on the medical staff of one of the regiments in India: she asked him twice, and his cheeks were redder than cricket in the sun. He said he read all the reports from India, and asked her whether she did not admire Lord Ormont, our general of cavalry, whose charge at the head of fifteen hundred horse in the last great battle shattered the enemy's right wing, and gave us the victory—rolled him up and stretched him out like a carpet for dusting. Miss Vincent exclaimed that it was really strange, now, he should speak of Lord Ormont, for she had been speaking of him herself in morning to one of her young ladies, whose mind was bent on his heroic deeds. Matey turned his face to the group of young ladies, quite pleased that one of them loved his hero; and he met a smile here and there—not from Miss Aminta Farrell. She was a complete disappointment to the boys that day. "Aminta" was mouthed at any allusions to her.

Page 3730

So, she not being a match for Matey, they let her drop. The flush that had swept across the school withered to a dry recollection, except when on one of their Sunday afternoons she fanned the desert. Lord Ormont became the subject of inquiry and conversation; and for his own sake—not altogether to gratify Matey. The Saturday autumn evening's walk home, after the race out to tea at a distant village, too late in the year for cricket, too early for regular football, suited Matey, going at long strides, for the story of his hero's adventures; and it was nicer than talk about girls, and puzzling. Here lay a clear field; for he had the right to speak of a cavalry officer: his father died of wounds in the service, and Matey naturally intended to join the Dragoons; if he could get enough money to pay for mess, he said, laughing. Lord Ormont was his pattern of a warrior. We had in him a lord who cast off luxury to live like a Spartan when under arms, with a passion to serve his country and sustain the glory of our military annals. He revived respect for the noble class in the hearts of Englishmen. He was as good an authority on horseflesh as any Englishman alive; the best for the management of cavalry: there never was a better cavalry leader. The boys had come to know that Browny admired Lord Ormont, so they saw a double reason why Matey should; and walking home at his grand swing in the October dusk, their school hero drew their national hero closer to them.

Every fellow present was dead against the usher, Mr. Shalders, when he took advantage of a pause to strike in with his "Murat!"

He harped on Murat whenever he had a chance. Now he did it for the purpose of casting eclipse upon Major-General Lord Ormont, the son and grandson of English earls; for he was an earl by his title, and Murat was the son of an innkeeper. Shalders had to admit that Murat might have served in the stables when a boy. Honour to Murat, of course, for climbing the peaks! Shalders, too, might interest him in military affairs and Murat; he did no harm, and could be amusing. It rather added to his amount of dignity. It was rather absurd, at the same time, for an English usher to be spouting and glowing about a French general, who had been a stable-boy and became a king, with his Murat this, Murat that, and hurrah Murat in red and white and green uniform, tunic and breeches, and a chimney-afire of feathers; and how the giant he was charged at the head of ten thousand horse, all going like a cataract under a rainbow over the rocks, right into the middle of the enemy and through; and he a spark ahead, and the enemy streaming on all sides flat away, as you see puffed smoke and flame of a bonfire. That was fun to set boys jigging. No wonder how in Russia the Cossacks feared him, and scampered from the shadow of his plumes—were clouds flying off his breath! That was a fine warm picture for the boys on late autumn or early winter evenings, Shalders warming his back at the

Page 3731

grate, describing bivouacs in the snow. They liked well enough to hear him when he was not opposing Matey and Lord Ormont. He perked on his toes, and fetched his hand from behind him to flourish it when his Murat came out. The speaking of his name clapped him on horseback—the only horseback he ever knew. He was as fond of giving out the name Murat as you see in old engravings of tobacco-shops men enjoying the emission of their whiff of smoke.

Matey was not inclined to class Lord Ormont alongside Murat, a first-rate horseman and an eagle-eye, as Shalders rightly said; and Matey agreed that forty thousand cavalry under your orders is a toss above fifteen hundred; but the claim for a Frenchman of a superlative merit to swallow and make nothing of the mention of our best cavalry generals irritated him to call Murat a mountebank.

Shalders retorted, that Lord Ormont was a reprobate.

Matey hoped he would some day write us an essay on the morale of illustrious generals of cavalry; and Shalders told him he did not advance his case by talking nonsense.

Each then repeated to the boys a famous exploit of his hero. Their verdict was favourable to Lord Ormont. Our English General learnt riding before he was ten years old, on the Pampas, where you ride all day, and cook your steak for your dinner between your seat and your saddle. He rode with his father and his uncle, Muncastle, the famous traveller, into Paraguay. He saw fighting before he was twelve. Before he was twenty he was learning outpost duty in the Austrian frontier cavalry. He served in the Peninsula, served in Canada, served in India, volunteered for any chance of distinction. No need to say much of his mastering the picked Indian swordsmen in single combat: he knew their trick, and was quick to save his reins when they made a dash threatening the headstroke—about the same as disabling sails in old naval engagements.

That was the part for the officer; we are speaking of the General. For that matter, he had as keen an eye for the field and the moment for his arm to strike as any Murat. One world have liked to see Murat matched against the sabre of a wily Rajpoot! As to campaigns and strategy, Lord Ormont's head was a map. What of Murat and Lord Ormont horse to horse and sword to sword? Come, imagine that, if you are for comparisons. And if Lord Ormont never headed a lot of thousands, it does not prove he was unable. Lord Ormont was as big as Murat. More, he was a Christian to his horses. How about Murat in that respect? Lord Ormont cared for his men: did Murat so particularly much? And he was as cunning fronting odds, and a thunderbolt at the charge. Why speak of him in the past? He is an English lord, a lord by birth, and he is alive; things may be expected of him to-morrow or next day.

Shalders here cut Matey short by meanly objecting to that.

“Men are mortal,” he said, with a lot of pretended stuff, deploring our human condition in the elegy strain; and he fell to reckoning the English hero’s age—as that he, Lord Ormont, had been a name in the world for the last twenty-five years or more. The noble lord could be no chicken. We are justified in calculating, by the course of nature, that his term of activity is approaching, or has approached, or, in fact, has drawn to its close.

Page 3732

“If your estimate, sir, approaches to correctness,” rejoined Matey—tellingly, his comrades thought.

“Sixty, as you may learn some day, is a serious age, Matthew Weyburn.”

Matey said he should be happy to reach it with half the honours Lord Ormont had won.

“Excepting the duels,” Shalders had the impudence to say.

“If the cause is a good one!” cried Matey.

“The cause, or Lord Ormont has been maligned, was reprehensible in the extremest degree.” Shalders cockhorsed on his heels to his toes and back with a bang.

“What was the cause, if you please, sir?” a boy, probably naughty, inquired; and as Shalders did not vouchsafe a reply, the bigger boys knew.

They revelled in the devilish halo of skirts on the whirl encircling Lord Ormont’s laurelled head.

That was a spark in their blood struck from a dislike of the tone assumed by Mr. Shalders to sustain his argument; with his “men are mortal,” and talk of a true living champion as “no chicken,” and the wordy drawl over “justification for calculating the approach of a close to a term of activity”—in the case of a proved hero!

Guardians of boys should make sure that the boys are on their side before they raise the standard of virtue. Nor ought they to summon morality for support of a polemic. Matey Weyburn’s object of worship rode superior to a morality puffing its phrasy trumpet. And, somehow, the sacrifice of an enormous number of women to Lord Ormont’s glory seemed natural; the very thing that should be, in the case of a first-rate military hero and commander—Scipio notwithstanding. It brightens his flame, and it is agreeable to them. That is how they come to distinction: they have no other chance; they are only women; they are mad to be singed, and they rush pelf-mall, all for the honour of the candle.

Shortly after this discussion Matey was heard informing some of the bigger fellows he could tell them positively that Lord Ormont’s age was under fifty-four—the prime of manhood, and a jolly long way off death! The greater credit to him, therefore, if he bad been a name in the world for anything like the period Shalders insinuated, “to get himself out of a sad quandary.” Matey sounded the queer word so as to fix it sticking to the usher, calling him Mr. Peter Bell Shalders, at which the boys roared, and there was a question or two about names, which belonged to verses, for people caring to read poems.

To the joy of the school he displayed a greater knowledge of Murat than Shalders had: named the different places in Europe where Lord Ormont and Murat were both springing to the saddle at the same time—one a Marshal, the other a lieutenant; one a king, to be off his throne any day, the other a born English nobleman, seated firm as fate. And he accused Murat of carelessness of his horses, ingratitude to his benefactor, circussy style. Shalders went so far as to defend Murat for attending to the affairs of his kingdom, instead of galloping over hedges and ditches to swell Napoleon's ranks in distress. Matey listened to him there; he became grave; he nodded like a man saying, "I suppose we must examine it in earnest." The school was damped to hear him calling it a nice question. Still, he said he thought he should have gone; and that settled it.

Page 3733

The boys inclined to speak contemptuously of Shalders. Matey world not let them; he contrasted Shalders with the other ushers, who had no enthusiasms. He said enthusiasms were salt to a man; and he liked Shalders for spelling at his battles and thinking he understood them, and admiring Murat, and leading Virgil and parts of Lucan for his recreation. He said he liked the French because they could be splendidly enthusiastic. He almost lost his English flavour when he spoke in downright approval of a small French fellow, coming from Orthez, near the Pyrenees, for senselessly dashing and kicking at a couple of English who jeered to hear Orthez named—a place trampled under Wellington's heels, on his march across conquered France. The foreign little cockerel was a clever lad, learning English fast, and anxious to show he had got hold of the English trick of not knowing when he was beaten. His French vanity insisted on his engaging the two, though one of them stood aside, and the other let him drive his nose all the compass round at a poker fist. What was worse, Matey examined these two, in the interests of fair play, as if he doubted.

Little Emile Grenat set matters right with his boast to vindicate his country against double the number, and Matey praised him, though he knew Emile had been floored without effort by the extension of a single fist. He would not hear the French abused; he said they were chivalrous, they were fine fellows, topping the world in some things; his father had fought them and learnt to respect them. Perhaps his father had learnt to respect Jews, for there was a boy named Abner, he protected, who smelt Jewish; he said they ran us Gentiles hard, and carried big guns.

Only a reputation like Matey's could have kept his leadership from a challenge. Joseph Masner, formerly a rival, went about hinting and shrugging; all to no purpose, you find boys born to be chiefs. On the day of the snow-fight Matey won the toss, and chose J. Masner first pick; and Masner, aged seventeen and some months, big as a navvy, lumbered across to him and took his directions, proud to stand in the front centre, at the head of the attack, and bear the brunt—just what he was fit for, Matey gave no offence by choosing, half-way down the list, his little French friend, whom he stationed beside himself, rather off his battle-front, as at point at cricket, not quite so far removed. Two boys at his heels piled ammunition. The sides met midway of a marshy ground, where a couple of flat and shelving banks, formed for a broad new road, good for ten abreast —counting a step of the slopes—ran transverse; and the order of the game was to clear the bank and drive the enemy on to the frozen ditch-water. Miss Vincent heard in the morning from the sister of little Collett of the great engagement coming off; she was moved by curiosity, and so the young ladies of her establishment beheld the young gentlemen of Mr. Cuper's in furious division, and Matey's sore aim and

Page 3734

hard fling, equal to a slinger's, relieving J. Masner of a foremost assailant with a spanker on the nob. They may have fancied him clever for selecting a position rather comfortable, as things went, until they had sight of him with his little French ally and two others, ammunition boys to rear, descending one bank and scaling another right into the flank of the enemy, when his old tower of a Masner was being heavily pressed by numbers. Then came a fight hand to hand, but the enemy stood in a clamp; not to split like a nut between crackers, they gave way and rolled, backing in lumps from bank to ditch.

The battle was over before the young ladies knew. They wondered to see Matey shuffling on his coat and hopping along at easy bounds to pay his respects to Miss Vincent, near whom was Browny; and this time he and Browny talked together. He then introduced little Emile to her. She spoke of Napoleon at Brienne, and complimented Matey. He said he was cavalry, not artillery, that day. They talked to hear one another's voices. By constantly appealing to Miss Vincent he made their conversation together seem as under her conduct; and she took a slide on some French phrases with little Emile. Her young ladies looked shrinking and envious to see the fellows wet to the skin, laughing, wrestling, linking arms; and some, who were clown-faced with a wipe of scarlet, getting friends to rub their cheeks with snow, all of them happy as larks in air, a big tea steaming for them at the school. Those girls had a leap and a fail of the heart, glad to hug themselves in their dry clothes, and not so warm as the dripping boys were, nor so madly fond of their dress-circle seats to look on at a play they were not allowed even to desire to share. They looked on at blows given and taken in good temper, hardship sharpening jollity. The thought of the difference between themselves and the boys must have been something like the tight band—call it corset—over the chest, trying to lift and stretch for draughts of air. But Browny's feeling naturally was, that all this advantage for the boys came of Matey Weyburn's lead.

Miss Vincent with her young ladies walked off in couples, orderly chicks, the usual Sunday march of their every day. The school was coolish to them; one of the fellows hummed bars of some hymn tune, rather faster than church. And next day there was a murmur of letters passing between Matey and Browny regularly, little Collett for postman. Anybody might have guessed it, but the report spread a feeling that girls are not the entirely artificial beings or flat targets we suppose. The school began to brood, like air deadening on oven-heat. Winter is hen-mother to the idea of love in schools, if the idea has fairly entered. Various girls of different colours were selected by boys for animated correspondence, that never existed and was vigorously prosecuted, with efforts to repress contempt of them in courtship for their affections. They found their part of it by no

Page 3735

means difficult when they imagined the lines without the words, or, better still, the letter without the lines. A holy satisfaction belonged to the sealed thing; the breaking of the seal and inspection of the contents imposed perplexity on that sentiment. They thought of certain possible sentences Matey and Browny would exchange; but the plain, conceivable, almost visible, outside of the letter had a stronger spell for them than the visionary inside. This fancied contemplation of the love-letter was reversed in them at once by the startling news of Miss Vincent's discovery and seizure of the sealed thing, and her examination of the burden it contained. Then their thirst was for drama—to see, to drink every wonderful syllable those lovers had written.

Miss Vincent's hand was upon one of Matey's letters. She had come across the sister of little Collett, Selina her name was, carrying it. She saw nothing of the others. Aminta was not the girl to let her. Nor did Mr. Cuper dare demand from Matey a sight or restitution of the young lady's half of the correspondence. He preached heavily at Matey; deplored that the boy he most trusted, *etc*.—the school could have repeated it without hearing. We know the master's lecture in tones—it sings up to sing down, and touches nobody. As soon as he dropped to natural talk, and spoke of his responsibility and Miss Vincent's, Matey gave the word of a man of honour that he would not seek to communicate farther with Miss Farrell at the school.

Now there was a regular thunder-hash among the boys on the rare occasions when they met the girls. All that Matey and Browny were forbidden to write they looked—-much like what it had been before the discovery; and they dragged the boys back from promised instant events. It was, nevertheless, a heaving picture, like the sea in the background of a marine piece at the theatre, which rouses anticipations of storm, and shows readiness. Browny's full eyebrow sat on her dark eye like a cloud of winter noons over the vanishing sun. Matey was the prisoner gazing at light of a barred window and measuring the strength of the bars. She looked unhappy, but looked unbeaten more. Her look at him fed the school on thoughts of what love really is, when it is not fished out of books and poetry. For though she was pale, starved and pale, they could see she was never the one to be sighing; and as for him, he looked ground dower all to edge. However much they puzzled over things, she made them feel they were sure, as to her, that she drove straight and meant blood, the life or death of it: all her own, if need be, and confidence in the captain she had chosen. She could have been imagined saying, There is a storm, but I am ready to embark with you this minute.

Page 3736

That sign of courage in real danger ennobled her among girls. The name Browny was put aside for a respectful Aminta. Big and bright events to come out in the world were hinted, from the love of such a couple. The boys were not ashamed to speak the very word love. How he does love that girl! Well, and how she loves him! She did, but the boys had to be seeing her look at Matey if they were to put the girl on some balanced equality with a fellow she was compelled to love. It seemed to them that he gave, and that she was a creature carried to him, like driftwood along the current of the flood, given, in spite of herself. When they saw those eyes of hers they were impressed with an idea of her as a voluntary giver too; pretty well the half to the bargain; and it confused their notion of feminine inferiority. They resolved to think her an exceptional girl, which, in truth, they could easily do, for none but an exceptional girl could win Matey to love her.

Since nothing appeared likely to happen at the school, they speculated upon what would occur out in the world, and were assisted to conjecture, by a rumour, telling of Aminta Farrell's aunt as a resident at Dover. Those were days when the benevolently international M. de Porquet had begun to act as interpreter to English schools in the portico of the French language; and under his guidance it was asked, in contempt of the answer, Combien de postes d'ici a Douvres? But, accepting the rumour as a piece of information, the answer became important. Ici was twenty miles to the north-west of London. How long would it take Matey to reach Donvres? Or at which of the combien did he intend to waylay and away with Aminta? The boys went about pounding at the interrogative French phrase in due sincerity, behind the burlesque of traveller bothering coachman. Matey's designs could be finessed only by a knowledge of his character: that he was not the fellow to give up the girl he had taken to; and impediments might multiply, but he would bear them down. Three days before the break-up of the school another rumour came tearing through it: Aminta's aunt had withdrawn her from Miss Vincent's. And now rose the question, two-dozen-mouthed, Did Matey know her address at Douvres? His face grew stringy and his voice harder, and his eyes ready to burst from a smother of fire. All the same, he did his work: he was the good old fellow at games, considerate in school affairs, kind to the youngsters; he was heard to laugh. He liked best the company of his little French friend from Orthez, over whose shoulder his hand was laid sometimes as they strolled and chatted in two languages. He really went a long way to make French fellows popular, and the boys were sorry that little Emile was off to finish his foreign education in Germany. His English was pretty good, thanks to Matey. He went away, promising to remember Old England, saying he was French first, and a Briton next. He had lots of plunk; which accounted for Matey's choice of him as a friend among the juniors.

Page 3737

CHAPTER II.

LADY CHARLOTTE

Love-passages at a school must produce a ringing crisis if they are to leave the rosy impression which spans the gap of holidays. Neither Matey nor Browny returned to their yoke, and Cuper's boys recollected the couple chiefly on Sundays. They remembered several of Matey's doings and sayings: his running and high leaping, his bowling, a maxim or two of his, and the tight strong fellow he was; also that the damsel's colour distinctly counted for dark. She became nearly black in their minds. Well, and Englishmen have been known to marry Indian princesses: some have a liking for negresses. There are Nubians rather pretty in pictures, if you can stand thick lips. Her colour does not matter, provided the girl is of the right sort. The exchange of letters between the lovers was mentioned. The discovery by Miss Vincent of their cool habit of corresponding passed for an incident; and there it remained, stiff as a poet, not being heated by a story to run. So the foregone excitement lost warmth, and went out like a winter sun at noon or a match lighted before the candle is handy.

Lord Ormont continued to be a subject of discussion from time to time, for he was a name in the newspapers; and Mr. Shalders had been worked by Matey Weyburn into a state of raw antagonism at the mention of the gallant General; he could not avoid sitting in judgement on him.

According to Mr. Shalders, the opinion of all thoughtful people in England was with John Company and the better part of the Press to condemn Lord Ormont in his quarrel with the Commissioner of one of the Indian provinces, who had the support of the Governor of his Presidency and of the Viceroy; the latter not unreservedly, yet ostensibly inclined to condemn a too prompt military hand. The Gordian knot of a difficulty cut is agreeable in the contemplation of an official chief hesitating to use the sword and benefiting by having it done for him. Lord Ormont certainly cut the knot.

Mr. Shalders was cornered by the boys, coming at him one after another without a stop, vowing it was the exercise of a military judgement upon a military question at a period of urgency, which had brought about the quarrel with the Commissioner and the reproof of the Governor. He betrayed the man completely cornered by generalizing. He said—

"We are a civilian people; we pride ourselves on having civilian methods."

"How can that be if we have won India with guns and swords?"

"But that splendid jewel for England's tiara won," said he (and he might as well have said crown), "we are bound to sheathe the sword and govern by the Book of the Law."

"But if they won't have the Book of the Law!"

“They knew the power behind it.”

“Not if we knock nothing harder than the Book of the Law upon their skulls.”

“Happily for the country, England’s councils are not directed by boys!”

Page 3738

“Ah, but we’re speaking of India, Mr. Shalders.”

“You are presuming to speak of an act of insubordination committed by a military officer under civilian command.”

“What if we find an influential prince engaged in conspiracy?”

“We look for proof.”

“Suppose we have good proof?”

“We summon him to exonerate himself.”

“No; we mount and ride straight away into his territory, spot the treason, deport him, and rule in his place!”

It was all very well for Mr. Shalders to say he talked to boys; he was cornered again, as his shrug confessed.

The boys asked among themselves whether he would have taken the same view if his Murat had done it!

These illogical boys fought for Matey Weyburn in their defence of Lord Ormont. Somewhere, they wee sure, old Matey was hammering to the same end—they could hear him. Thought of him inspired them to unwonted argumentative energy, that they might support his cause; and scatter the gloomy prediction of the school, as going to the dogs now Matey had left.

The subject provoked everywhere in Great Britain a division similar to that between master and boys at Cuper’s establishment: one party for our modern English magisterial methods with Indians, the other for the decisive Oriental at the early time, to suit their native tastes; and the Book of the Law is to be conciliatingly addressed to their sentiments by a benign civilizing Power, or the sword is out smartly at the hint of a warning to protect the sword’s conquests. Under one aspect we appear potteringly European; under another, drunk of the East.

Lord Ormont’s ride at the head of two hundred horsemen across a stretch of country including hill and forest, to fall like a bolt from the blue on the suspected Prince in the midst of his gathering warriors, was a handsome piece of daring, and the high-handed treatment of the Prince was held by his advocates to be justified by the provocation, and the result. He scattered an unprepared body of many hundreds, who might have enveloped him, and who would presumptively have stood their ground, had they not taken his handful to be the advance of regiments. These are the deeds that win empires! the argument in his favour ran. Are they of a character to maintain empires? the counter-question was urged. Men of a deliberative aspect were not wanting in

approval of the sharp and summary of the sword in air when we have to deal with Indians. They chose to regard it as a matter of the dealing with Indians, and put aside the question of the contempt of civil authority.

Counting the cries, Lord Ormont won his case. Festival aldermen, smoking clubmen, buckskin squires, obsequious yet privately excitable tradesmen, sedentary coachmen and cabmen, of Viking descent, were set to think like boys about him: and the boys, the women, and the poets formed a tipsy chorea. Journalists, on the whole, were fairly halved, as regarded numbers. In relation to weight, they were with the burgess and the presbyter; they preponderated heavily in the direction of England's burgess view of all cases disputed between civilian and soldier. But that was when the peril was over.

Page 3739

Admirers of Lord Ormont enjoyed a perusal of a letter addressed by him to the burgess's journal; and so did his detractors. The printing of it was an act of editorial ruthlessness. The noble soldier had no mould in his intellectual or educational foundry for the casting of sentences; and the editor's leading type to the letter, without further notice of the writer—who was given a prominent place or scaffolding for the execution of himself publicly, if it pleased him to do that thing—tickled the critical mind. Lord Ormont wrote intemperately.

His Titanic hurling of blocks against critics did no harm to an enemy skilled in the use of trimmer weapons, notably the fine one of letting big missiles rebound. He wrote from India, with Indian heat—"curry and capsicums," it was remarked. He dared to claim the countenance of the Commander-in-chief of the Army of India for an act disapproved by the India House. Other letters might be on their way, curryer than the preceding, his friends feared; and might also be malevolently printed, similarly commissioning the reverberation of them to belabour his name before the public. Admirers were still prepared to admire; but aldermen not at the feast, squire-archs not in the saddle or at the bottle, some few of the juvenile and female fervent, were becoming susceptible to a frosty critical tone in the public pronunciation of Lord Ormont's name since the printing of his letter and the letters it called forth. None of them doubted that his case was good. The doubt concerned the effect on it of his manner of pleading it. And if he damaged his case, he compromised his admirers. Why, the case of a man who has cleverly won a bold stroke for his country must be good, as long as he holds his tongue. A grateful country will right him in the end: he has only to wait, and not so very long. "This I did: now examine it." Nothing more needed to be said by him, if that.

True, he has a temper. It is owned that he is a hero. We take him with his qualities, impetuosity being one, and not unsuited to his arm of the service, as he has shown. If his temper is high, it is an element of a character proved heroical. So has the sun his blotches, and we believe that they go to nourish the luminary, rather than that they are a disease of the photosphere.

Lord Ormont's apologists had to contend with anecdotes and dicta now pouring in from offended Britons, for illustration of an impetuosity fit to make another Charley XII. of Sweden—a gratuitous Coriolanus haughtiness as well, new among a people accustomed socially to bow the head to their nobles, and not, of late, expecting a kick for their pains. Newspapers wrote of him that, "a martinet to subordinates, he was known for the most unruly of lieutenants." They alluded to current sayings, as that he "habitually took counsel of his horse on the field when a movement was entrusted to his discretion." Numerous were the journalistic sentences running under an air of eulogy of the lordly warrior purposely to be tripped, and producing their damnable effect, despite the obvious artifice. The writer of the letter from Bombay, signed Ormont, was a born subject for the antithetical craftsmen's tricky springes.

Page 3740

He was, additionally, of infamous repute for morale in burgess estimation, from his having a keen appreciation of female beauty and a prickly sense of masculine honour. The stir to his name roused pestilential domestic stories. In those days the aristocrat still claimed licence, and eminent soldier-nobles, comporting themselves as imitative servants of their god Mars, on the fields of love and war, stood necessarily prepared to vindicate their conduct as the field of the measured paces, without deeming themselves bounden to defend the course they took. Our burgess, who bowed head to his aristocrat, and hired the soldier to fight for him, could not see that such mis-behaviour necessarily ensued. Lord Ormont had fought duels at home and abroad. His readiness to fight again, and against odds, and with a totally unused weapon, was exhibited by his attack on the Press in the columns of the Press. It wore the comical face to the friends deploring it, which belongs to things we do that are so very like us. They agreed with his devoted sister, Lady Charlotte Eglett, as to the prudence of keeping him out of England for a time, if possible.

At the first perusal of the letter, Lady Charlotte quitted her place in Leicestershire, husband, horses, guests, the hunt, to scour across a vacant London and pick up acquaintances under stress to be spots there in the hunting season, with them to gossip for counsel on the subject of “Ormont’s hand-grenade,” and how to stop and extinguish a second. She was a person given to plain speech. “Stinkpot” she called it, when acknowledging foul elements in the composition and the harm it did to the unskilful balist. Her view of the burgess English imaged a mighty monster behind bars, to whom we offer anything but our hand. As soon as he gets held of that he has you; he won’t let it loose with flesh on the bones. We must offend him—we can’t be man or woman without offending his tastes and his worships; but while we keep from contact (i.e. intercommunication) he may growl, he is harmless. Witness the many occasions when her brother offended worse, and had been unworried, only growled at, and distantly, not in a way to rouse concern; and at the neat review, or procession into the City, or public display of any sort, Ormont had but to show himself, he was the popular favourite immediately. He had not committed the folly of writing a letter to a newspaper then.

Lady Charlotte paid an early visit to the office of the great London solicitor, Arthur Abner, who wielded the law as an instrument of protection for countless illustrious people afflicted by what they stir or attract in a wealthy metropolis. She went simply to gossip of her brother’s affairs with a refreshing man of the world, not given to circumlocutions, and not afraid of her: she had no deeper object; but fancying she heard the clerk, on his jump from the stool, inform her that Mr. Abner was out, “Out?” she cried, and rattled the room, thumping, under knitted brows. “Out of town?” For a man of business taking holidays, when a lady craves for gossip, disappointed her faith in him as cruelly as the shut-up, empty inn the broken hunter knocking at a hollow door miles off home.

Page 3741

Mr. Abner, hatted and gloved and smiling, came forth. “Going out, the man meant, Lady Charlotte. At your service for five minutes.”

She complimented his acuteness, in the remark, “You see I’ve only come to chat,” and entered his room.

He led her to her theme: “The excitement is pretty well over.”

“My brother’s my chief care—always was. I’m afraid he’ll be pitchforking at it again, and we shall have another blast. That letter ought never to have been printed. That editor deserves the horsewhip for letting it appear. If he prints a second one I shall treat him as a personal enemy.”

“Better make a friend of him.”

“How?”

“Meet him at my table.”

She jumped an illumined half-about on her chair. “So I will, then. What are the creature’s tastes?”

“Hunts, does he?” The editor rose in her mind from the state of neuter to something of a man. “I recollect an article in that paper on the Ormont duel. I hate duelling, but I side with my brother. I had to laugh, though. Luckily, there’s no woman on hand at present, as far as I know. Ormont’s not likely to be hooked by garrison women or blacks. Those coloured women—some of ours too—send the nose to the clouds; not a bad sign for health. And there are men like that old Cardinal Guicciardini tells of...hum! Ormont’s not one of them. I hope he’ll stay in India till this blows over, or I shall be hearing of provocations.”

“You have seen the Duke?”

She nodded. Her reserve was a summary of the interview. “Kind, as he always is,” she said. “Ormont has no chance of employment unless there’s a European war. They can’t overlook him in case of war. He’ll have to pray for that.”

“Let us hope we shan’t get it.”

“My wish; but I have to think of my brother. If he’s in England with no employment, he’s in a mess with women and men both. He kicks if he’s laid aside to rust. He has a big heart. That’s what I said: all he wants is to serve his country. If you won’t have war, give him Gibraltar or Malta, or command of one of our military districts. The South-eastern ’ll be vacant soon. He’d like to be Constable of the Castle, and have an eye on France.”

“I think he’s fond of the French?”

“Loves the French. Expects to have to fight them all the same. He loves his country best. Here’s the man everybody’s abusing!”

“I demur, my lady. I was dining the other day with a client of mine, and a youngster was present who spoke of Lord Ormont in a way I should like you to have heard. He seemed to know the whole of Lord Ormont’s career, from the time of the ride to Paraguay up to the capture of the plotting Rajah. He carried the table.”

“Good boy! We must turn to the boys for justice, then. Name your day for this man, this editor.”

“I will see him. You shall have the day to-night.”

Page 3742

Lady Charlotte and the editor met. She was racy, he anecdotal. Stag, fox, and hare ran before them, over fields and through drawing-rooms: the scent was rich. They found that they could talk to one another as they thought; that he was not the Isle-bound burgess, nor she the postured English great lady; and they exchanged salt, without which your current scandal is of exhausted savour. They enjoyed the peculiar novel relish of it, coming from a social pressman and a dame of high society. The different hemispheres became known as one sphere to these birds of broad wing convening in the upper blue above a quartered carcase earth.

A week later a letter, the envelope of a bulky letter in Lord Ormont's handwriting, reached Lady Charlotte. There was a line from the editor:

> "Would it please your ladyship to have this printed?"

She read the letter, and replied:

> "Come to me for six days; you shall have the best mount in the county."

An editor devoid of malice might probably have forborne to print a letter that appealed to Lady Charlotte, or touched her sensations, as if a glimpse of the moon, on the homeward ride in winter on a nodding horse, had suddenly bared to view a precipitous quarry within two steps. There is no knowing: few men can forbear to tell a spicy story of their friends; and an editor, to whom an exhibition of the immensely preposterous on the part of one writing arrogantly must be provocative, would feel the interests of his Journal, not to speak of the claims of readers, pluck at him when he meditated the consignment of such a precious composition to extinction. Lady Charlotte withheld a sight of the letter from Mr. Eglett. She laid it in her desk, understanding well that it was a laugh lost to the world. Poets could reasonably feign it to shake the desk inclosing it. She had a strong sense of humour; her mind reverted to the desk in a way to make her lips shut grimly. She sided with her brother.

Only pen in hand did he lay himself open to the enemy. In his personal intercourse he was the last of men to be taken at a disadvantage. Lady Charlotte was brought round to the distasteful idea of some help coming from a legitimate adjunct at his elbow: a restraining woman—wife, it had to be said. And to name the word wife for Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont, put up the porcupine quills she bristled with at the survey of a sex thirsting, and likely to continue thirsting, for such honour. What woman had she known fit to bear the name? She had assumed the judicial seat upon the pretensions of several, and dismissed them to their limbo, after testifying against them. Who is to know the fit one in these mines of deception? Women of the class offering wives decline to be taken on trial; they are boxes of puzzles—often dire surprises. Her brother knew them well enough to shy at the box. Her brother Rowsley had a funny pride, like a

boy at a game, at the never having been caught by one among the many he made captive. She let him have it all to himself.

Page 3743

He boasted it to a sister sharing the pride exultant in the cry of the hawk, scornful of ambitions poultry, a passed finger-post to the plucked, and really regretful that no woman had been created fit for him. When she was not aiding with her brother, women, however contemptible for their weakness, appeared to her as better than barn-door fowl, or vermin in their multitudes gnawing to get at the cheese-trap. She could be humane, even sisterly, with women whose conduct or prattle did not outrage plain sense, just as the stickler for the privileges of her class was large-heartedly charitable to the classes flowing in oily orderliness round about below it—if they did so flow. Unable to read woman's character, except upon the broadest lines as it were the spider's main threads of its web, she read men minutely, from the fact that they were neither mysteries nor terrors to her; but creatures of importunate appetites, humorous objects; very manageable, if we leave the road to their muscles, dress their wounds, smoothe their creases, plume their vanity; and she had an unerring eye for the man to be used when a blow was needed, methods for setting him in action likewise. She knew how much stronger than ordinary men the woman who can put them in motion. They can be set to serve as pieces of cannon, under compliments on their superior powers, which were not all undervalued by her on their own merits, for she worshipped strength. But the said, with a certain amount of truth, that the women unaware of the advantage Society gave them (as to mastering men) were fools.

Tender, is not a word coming near to Lady Charlotte. Thoughtful on behalf of the poor foolish victims of men she was. She had saved some, avenged others. It should be stated, that her notion of saving was the saving of them from the public: she had thrown up a screen. The saving of them from themselves was another matter—hopeless, to her thinking. How preach at a creature on the bend of passion's rapids! One might as well read a chapter from the Bible to delirious patients. When once a woman is taken with the love-passion, we must treat her as bitten; hide her antics from the public: that is the principal business. If she recovers, she resumes her place, and horrid old Nature, who drove her to the frenzy, is unlikely to bother or, at least, overthrow her again, unless she is one of the detestable wantons, past compassion or consideration. In the case reviewed, the woman has gone through fire, and is none the worse for her experiences: worth ten times what she was, to an honest man, if men could be got to see it. Some do. Of those men who do not, Lady Charlotte spoke with the old family-nurse humour, which is familiar with the tricks and frailties of the infants; and it is a knife to probe the male, while seemingly it does the part of the napkin—pities and pats. They expect a return of much for the little that is next to nothing. They are fall of expectations: and of what else? They are hard bargainers.

Page 3744

She thought this of men; and she liked men by choice. She had old nurse's preference for the lustier male child. The others are puling things, easier to rear, because they bend better; and less esteemed, though they give less trouble, rouse less care. But when it came to the duel between the man and the woman, her sense of justice was moved to join her with the party of her unfairly handled sisters—a strong party, if it were not so cowardly, she had to think.

Mr. Eglett, her husband, accepted her—accepted the position into which he naturally fell beside her, and the ideas she imposed on him; for she never went counter to his principles. These were the fixed principles of a very wealthy man, who abhorred debt, and was punctilious in veracity, scrupulous in cleanliness of mind and body, devoted to the honour of his country, the interests of his class. She respected the high landmark possessing such principles; and she was therefore enabled to lead without the wish to rule. As it had been between them at the beginning, so it was now, when they were grandparents running on three lines of progeny from two daughters and a son: they were excellent friends. Few couples can say more. The union was good English grey—that of a prolonged November, to which we are reconciled by occasions for the hunt and the gun. She was, nevertheless, an impassioned woman. The feeling for her brother helped to satisfy her heart's fires, though as little with her brother as with her husband was she demonstrative. Lord Ormont disrelished the caresses of relatives.

She, for her part, had so strong a sympathy on behalf of poor gentlemen reduced to submit to any but a young woman's hug, that when, bronzed from India, he quitted the carriage and mounted her steps at Olmer, the desire to fling herself on his neck and breast took form in the words: "Here you are home again, Rowsley; glad to have you." They shook hands firmly.

He remained three days at Olmer. His temper was mild, his frame of mind bad as could be. Angry evaporations had left a residuum of solid scorn for these "English," who rewarded soldierly services as though it were a question of damaged packages of calico. He threatened to take the first offer of a foreign State "not in insurrection." But clear sky was overhead. He was the Rowsley of the old boyish delight in field sports, reminiscences of prowlings and trappings in the woods, gropings along water-banks, enjoyment of racy gossip. He spoke wrathfully of "one of their newspapers" which steadily persisted in withholding from publication every letter he wrote to it, after printing the first. And if it printed one, why not the others?

Lady Charlotte put it on the quaintness of editors.

He had found in London, perhaps, reason for saying that he should do well to be "out of this country" as early as he could; adding, presently, that he meant to go, though "it broke his heart to keep away from a six months' rest at Steignton," his Wiltshire estate.

Page 3745

No woman was in the field. Lady Charlotte could have submitted to the intrusion of one of those at times wholesome victims, for the sake of the mollification the unhappy proud thing might bring to a hero smarting under injustice at the hands of chiefs and authorities.

He passed on to Steignton, returned to London, and left England for Spain, as he wrote word, saying he hoped to settle at Steignton neat year. He was absent the next year, and longer. Lady Charlotte had the surprising news that Steignton was let, shooting and all, for five years; and he had no appointment out of England or at home. When he came to Olmer again he was under one of his fits of reserve, best undisturbed. Her sympathy with a great soldier snubbed, an active man rusting, kept her from remonstrance.

Three years later she was made meditative by the discovery of a woman's being absolutely in the field, mistress of the field; and having been there for a considerable period, dating from about the time when he turned his back on England to visit a comrade-in-arms condemned by the doctors to pass the winter in Malaga; and it was a young woman, a girl in her teens, a handsome girl. Handsome was to be expected; Ormont bargained for beauty. But report said the girl was very handsome, and showed breeding: she seemed a foreigner, walked like a Goddess, sat her horse the perfect Amazon. Rumour called her a Spaniard.

"Not if she rides!" Lady Charlotte cut that short.

Rumour had subsequently more to say. The reporter in her ear did not confirm it, and she was resolutely deaf to a story incredible of her brother—the man, of all men living, proudest of his name, blood, station. So proud was he by nature, too, that he disdained to complain of rank injustice; he maintained a cheerful front against adversity and obloquy. And this man of complete self-command, who has every form of noble pride, gets cajoled like a twenty-year-old yahoo at college! Do you imagine it? To suppose of a man cherishing the name of Ormont, that he would bestow it legally on a woman, a stranger, and imperil his race by mixing blood with a creature of unknown lineage, was—why, of course, it was to suppose him struck mad, and there never had been madness among the Ormonts: they were too careful of the purity of the strain. Lady Charlotte talked. She was excited, and ran her sentences to blanks, a cunning way for ministering consolation to her hearing, where the sentence intended a question, and the blank ending caught up the query tone and carried it dwindling away to the most distant of throttled interrogatives. She had, in this manner, only to ask,—her hearing received the comforting answer it desired; for she could take that thin far sound as a travelling laughter of incredulity, triumphant derision.

This meant to her—though she scarcely knew it, though the most wilful of women declined to know it—a state of alarm. She had said of her brother in past days that he

would have his time of danger after striking sixty. The dangerous person was to be young.

Page 3746

But, then, Ormont had high principles with regard to the dues to his family. His principles could always be trusted. The dangerous young person would have to be a person of lineage, of a certain station at least: no need for a titled woman, only for warranted good blood. Is that to be found certificated out of the rolls of Society? It may just possibly be found, without certificate, however, in those muddled caverns where the excluded intermingle. Here and there, in a peasant family, or a small country tradesman's just raised above a peasant, honest regenerating blood will be found. Nobles wanting refreshment from the soil might do worse than try a slip of one of those juicy weeds; ill-fated, sickly Royalties would be set-up striding through another half-century with such invigoration, if it could be done for them! There are tales. The tales are honourably discredited by the crazy constitutions of the heirs to the diadem.

Yes, but we are speculating on the matter seriously, as though it were one of intimate concern to the family. What is there to make us think that Ormont would marry? Impossible to imagine him intimidated. Unlikely that he, a practised reader of women, having so little of the woman in him, would be melted by a wily girl; as women in the twilight situation have often played the trick to come into the bright beams. How? They do a desperate thing, and call it generosity, and then they appeal from it to my lord's generosity; and so the two generosities drive off in a close carriage with a friend and a professional landlady for the blessing of the parson, and are legitimately united. Women have won round fools to give way in that way. And quite right too! thought Lady Charlotte, siding with nature and justice, as she reflected that no woman created would win round her brother to give way in that way. He was too acute. The moment the woman showed sign of becoming an actress, her doom was written. "Poor idiot!" was not uncharitably inscribed by the sisterly lady on the tombstone of hopes aimed with scarce pardonable ambition at her brother.

She blew away the rumour. Ormont, she vowed, had not entitled any woman to share and bear his title. And this was her interpretation of the report: he permitted (if he did permit) the woman to take his name, that he might have a scornful fling at the world maltreating him. Besides, the name was not published, it was not to be seen in the papers; it passed merely among male friends, tradesmen, servants: no great harm in that.

Listen further. Here is an unknown girl: why should he marry her? A girl consenting to the place beside a man of his handsome ripe age, is either bought, or she is madly enamoured; she does not dictate terms. Ormont is not of the brute buyers in that market. One sees it is the girl who leads the dance. A girl is rarely so madly enamoured as when she falls in love with her grandfather; she pitches herself at his head. This had not happened for the first time in Ormont's case; and he had never proposed marriage. Why should he do it now?

Page 3747

But again, if the girl has breeding to some extent, he might think it her due that she should pass under the safeguard of his name, out of sight.

Then, so far the report is trustworthy. We blow the rumour out of belief. A young woman there is: she is not a wife. Lady Charlotte allowed her the fairly respectable post of Hecate of the Shades, as long as the girl was no pretender to the place and name in the upper sphere. Her deductions were plausible, convincing to friends shaken by her vehement manner of coming at them. She convinced herself by means of her multitude of reasons for not pursuing inquiry. Her brother said nothing. There was no need for him to speak. He seemed on one or two occasions in the act of getting himself together for the communication of a secret; and she made ready to listen hard, with ears, eyebrows, shut month, and a gleam at the back of her eyes, for a signification of something she would refer him to after he had spoken. He looked at her and held his peace, or virtually held it,—that is, he said not one word on the subject she was to have told him she had anticipated. Lady Charlotte ascribed it to his recollection of the quick blusher, the pained blusher, she was in her girlhood at mention or print of the story of men and women. Who, not having known her, could conceive it! But who could conceive that, behind the positive, plain-dealing, downright woman of the world, there was at times, when a nerve was touched or an old blocked path of imagination thrown open, a sensitive youthfulness; still quick to blush as far as the skin of a grandmother matron might show it!

CHAPTER III.

THE TUTOR

There was no counting now on Lord Ormont’s presence in the British gathering seasons, when wheatears wing across our fields or swallows return to their eaves. He forsook the hunt to roam the Continent, one of the vulgar band of tourists, honouring town only when Mayflies had flown, and London’s indiscriminate people went about without their volatile heads.

Lady Charlotte put these changed conditions upon the behaviour of the military authorities to her brother, saying that the wonder was he did not shake the dust of his country from his feet. In her wise head she rejoiced to think he was not the donkey she sketched for admiration; and she was partly consoled, or played at the taking of a comfort needed in her perpetual struggle with a phantom of a fact, by the reflection that a young woman on his arm would tense him to feel himself more at home abroad. Her mind’s habit of living warmly beside him in separation was vexed by the fixed intrusion of a female third person, who checked the run of intimate chatter, especially damped the fancied talk over early days—of which the creature was ignorant; and her propinquity to him arrested or broke the dialogue Lady Charlotte invented and pressed to renew. But a wife, while letting him be seen, would have insisted on appropriating the thought of

him—all his days, past as well as present. An impassioned sister's jealousy preferred that it should not be a wife reigning to dispute her share of her brother in imagination.

Page 3748

Then came a rumour, telling of him as engaged upon the composition of his Memoirs.

Lady Charlotte's impulsive outcry: "Writing them?" signified her grounds for alarm.

Happily, Memoirs are not among the silly deeds done in a moment; they were somewhere ahead and over the hills: a band of brigands rather than a homely shining mansion, it was true; but distant; and a principal question shrieked to know whether he was composing them for publication. She could look forward with a girl's pleasure to the perusal of them in manuscript, in a woody nook, in a fervour of partizanship, easily avoiding sight of errors, grammatical or moral. She chafed at the possible printing and publishing of them. That would be equivalent to an exhibition of him clean-stripped for a run across London—brilliant in himself, spotty in the offence. Published Memoirs indicate the end of a man's activity, and that he acknowledges the end; and at a period of Lord Ormont's life when the denial of it should thunder. They are his final chapter, making mummy of the grand figure they wrap in the printed stuff. They are virtually his apology. Can those knowing Lord Ormont hear him apologize? But it is a craven apology if we stoop to expound: we are seen as pleading our case before the public. Call it by any name you please, and under any attitude, it is that. And set aside the writing: it may be perfect; the act is the degradation. It is a rousing of swarms. His friends and the public will see the proudest nobleman of his day, pleading his case in mangled English, in the headlong of an out-poured, undrilled, rabble vocabulary, doubling the ridicule by his imperturbability over the ridicule he excites: he who is no more ridiculous, cried the partizan sister, conjuring up the scene, not an ace more ridiculous, than a judge of assize calling himself miserable sinner on Sunday before the parson, after he has very properly condemned half a score of weekday miserable sinners to penal servitude or the rope. Nobody laughs at the judge. Everybody will be laughing at the scornful man down half-way to his knee-cape with a stutter of an apology for having done his duty to his country, after stigmatizing numbers for inability or ill-will to do it. But Ormont's weapon is the sword, not a pen! Lady Charlotte hunted her simile till the dogs had it or it ran to earth.

She struck at the conclusion, that the young woman had been persuading him. An adoring young woman is the person to imagine and induce to the commission of such folly. "What do you think? You have seen her, you say?" she asked of a man she welcomed for his flavour of the worldling's fine bile.

Lord Adderwood made answer: "She may be having a hand in it. She worships, and that is your way of pulling gods to the ground."

"Does she understand good English?"

"Speaks it."

"Can she write?"

“I have never had a letter from her.”

Page 3749

“You tell me Morsfield admires the woman—would marry her to-morrow, if he could get her.”

“He would go through the ceremony Ormont has performed, I do not doubt.”

“I don’t doubt all of you are ready. She doesn’t encourage one?”

“On the contrary, all.”

“She’s clever. This has been going on for now seven years, and, as far as I know, she has my brother fast.”

“She may have done the clever trick of having him fast from the beginning.”

“She’d like people to think it.”

“She has an aunt to advertise it.”

“Ormont can’t swallow the woman, I’m told.”

“Trying, if one is bound to get her down!”

“Boasts of the connection everywhere she’s admitted, Randeller says.”

“Randeller procures the admission to various parti-coloured places.”

“She must be a blinking moll-owl! And I ask any sane Christian or Pagan—proof enough!—would my brother Rowsley let his wife visit those places, those people? Monstrous to have the suspicion that he would, you know him! Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, for example. I say nothing to hurt the poor woman; I back her against her imbecile of a husband. He brings a charge he can’t support; she punishes him by taking three years’ lease of independence and kicks up the grass all over the paddock, and then comes cuckoo, barking his name abroad to have her home again. You can win the shyest filly to corn at last. She goes, and he digests ruefully the hotch-potch of a dish the woman brings him. Only the world spies a side-head at her, husbanded or not, though the main fault was his, and she had a right to insist that he should be sure of his charge before he smacked her in the face with it before the world. In dealing with a woman, a man commonly prudent—put aside chivalry, justice, and the rest—should bind himself to disbelieve what he can’t prove. Otherwise, let him expect his whipping, with or without ornament. My opinion is, Lawrence Finchley had no solid foundation for his charge, except his being an imbecile. She wasn’t one of the adventurous women to jump the bars,—the gate had to be pushed open, and he did it. There she is; and I ask you, would my brother Rowsley let his wife be intimate with her? And there are others. And, sauf votre respect, the men—Morsfield for one, Randeller another!”

“They have a wholesome dread of the lion.”

“If they smell a chance with the lion’s bone—it’s the sweeter for being the lion’s. These metaphors carry us off our ground. I must let these Ormont Memoirs run and upset him, if they get to print. I’ve only to oppose, printed they’ll be. The same if I say a word of this woman, he marries her to-morrow morning. You speak of my driving men. Why can’t I drive Ormont? Because I’m too fond of him. There you have the secret of the subjection of women: they can hold their own, and a bit more, when they’ve no enemy beating inside.”

Page 3750

“Hearts!—ah, well, it’s possible. I don’t say no; I’ve not discovered them,” Lord Adderwood observed.

They are rarely discovered in the haunts he frequented.

Her allusion to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley rapped him smartly, and she admired his impassiveness under the stroke. Such a spectacle was one of her pleasures.

Lady Charlotte mentioned incidentally her want of a tutor for her grandson Leo during the winter holidays. He suggested an application to the clergyman of her parish. She was at feud with the Rev. Stephen Hampton-Evey, and would not take, she said, a man to be a bootblack in her backyard or a woman a scullery-wench in her kitchen upon his recommendation. She described the person of Mr. Hampton-Evey, his manner of speech, general opinions, professional doctrines; rolled him into a ball and bowled him, with a shrug for lamentation, over the decay of the good old order of manly English Protestant clergymen, who drank their port, bothered nobody about belief, abstained from preaching their sermon, if requested; were capital fellows in the hunting-field, too; for if they came, they had the spur to hunt in the devil’s despite. Now we are going to have a kind of bitter, clawed, forked female, in vestments over breeches. “How do you like that bundling of the sexes?”

Lord Adderwood liked the lines of division to be strictly and invitingly definite. He was thinking, as he reviewed the frittered appearance of the Rev. Stephen Hampton-Evey in Lady Charlotte’s hinds, of the possibility that Lord Ormont, who was reputed to fear nobody, feared her. In which case, the handsome young woman passing among his associates as the pseudo Lady Ormont might be the real one after all, and Isabella Lawrence Finchley prove right in the warning she gave to dogs of chase.

The tutor required by Lady Charlotte was found for her by Mr. Abner. Their correspondence on the subject filled the space of a week, and then the gentleman hired to drive a creaky wheel came down from London to Olmer, arriving late in the evening.

Lady Charlotte’s blunt “Oh!” when he entered her room and bowed upon the announcement of his name, was caused by an instantaneous perception and refection that it would be prudent to keep her grand-daughter Philippa, aged between seventeen and eighteen, out of his way.

“You are friend of Mr. Abner’s, are you?”

He was not disconcerted. He replied, in an assured and pleasant voice, “I have hardly the pretension to be called a friend, madam.”

“Are you a Jew?”

Her abruptness knocked something like a laugh almost out of him, but he restrained the signs of it.

“I am not.”

“You wouldn’t be ashamed to tell me you were one if you were?”

“Not at all.”

“You like the Jews?”

“Those I know I like.”

“Not many Christians have the good sense and the good heart of Arthur Abner. Now go and eat. Come back to me when you’ve done. I hope you are hungry. Ask the butler for the wine you prefer.”

Page 3751

She had not anticipated the enrolment in her household of a man so young and good-looking. These were qualifications for Cupid's business, which his unstrained self-possession accentuated to a note of danger to her chicks, because she liked the taste of him. Her grand-daughter Philippa was in the girl's waxen age; another, Beatrice, was coming to it. Both were under her care; and she was a vigilant woman, with an intuition and a knowledge of sex. She did not blame Arthur Abner for sending her a good-looking young man; she had only a general idea that tutors in a house, and even visiting tutors, should smell of dust and wear a snuffy appearance. The conditions will not always insure the tutors from foolishness, as her girl's experience reminded her, but they protect the girl.

"Your name is Weyburn; your father was an officer in the army, killed on the battle-field, Arthur Abner tells me," was her somewhat severely-toned greeting to the young tutor on his presenting himself the second time.

It had the sound of the preliminary of an indictment read in a Court of Law.

"My father died of his wounds in hospital," he said.

"Why did you not enter the service?"

"Want of an income, my lady."

"Bad look-out. Army or Navy for gentlemen, if they stick to the school of honour. The sedentary professions corrupt men: bad for the blood. Those monastery monks found that out. They had to birch the devil out of them three times a day and half the night, howling like full-moon dogs all through their lives, till the flesh was off them. That was their exercise, if they were for holiness. My brother, Lord Ormont, has never been still in his youth or his manhood. See him now. He counts his years by scores; and he has about as many wrinkles as you when you're smiling. His cheeks are as red as yours now you're blushing. You ought to have left off that trick by this time. It's well enough in a boy."

Against her will she was drawn to the young man, and her consciousness of it plucked her back to caution with occasional jerks—quaint alternations of the familiar and the harshly formal, in the stranger's experience.

"If I have your permission, Lady Charlotte," said he, "the reason why I mount red a little—if I do it—is, you mention Lord Ormont, and I have followed his career since I was the youngest of boys."

"Good to begin with the worship of a hero. He can't sham, can't deceive—not even a woman; and you're old enough to understand the temptation: they're so silly. All the

more, it’s a point of honour with a man of honour to shield her from herself. When it’s a girl—”

The young man’s eyebrows bent.

Page 3752

“Chapters of stories, if you want to hear them,” she resumed; “and I can vouch some of them true. Lord Ormont was never one of the wolves in a hood. Whatever you hear of him; you may be sure he laid no trap. He’s just the opposite to the hypocrite; so hypocrites date him. I’ve heard them called high-priests of decency. Then we choose to be indecent and honest, if there’s a God to worship. Fear, they’re in the habit of saying—we are to fear God. A man here, a Rev. Hampton-Evey, you’ll hear him harp on ‘fear God.’ Hypocrites may: honest sinners have no fear. And see the cause: they don’t deceive themselves—that is why. Do you think we call love what we fear? They love God, or they disbelieve. And if they believe in Him, they know they can’t conceal anything from Him. Honesty means piety: we can’t be one without the other. And here are people—parsons—who talk of dying as going into the presence of our Maker, as if He had been all the while outside the world He created. Those parsons, I told the Rev. Hampton-Evey here, make infidels—they make a puzzle of their God. I’m for a rational Deity. They preach up a supernatural eccentric. I don’t say all: I’ve heard good sermons, and met sound-headed clergymen—not like that gaping Hampton-Evey, when a woman tells him she thinks for herself. We have him sitting on our pariah. A free-thinker startles him as a kind of demon; but a female free-thinker is one of Satan’s concubines. He took it upon himself to reproach me—flung his glove at my feet, because I sent a cheque to a poor man punished for blasphemy. The man had the right to his opinions, and he had the courage of his opinions. I doubt whether the Rev. Hampton-Evey would go with a willing heart to prison for his. All the better for him if he comes head-up out of a trial. But now see: all these parsons and judges and mobcaps insist upon conformity. A man with common manly courage comes before them, and he’s cast in penalties. Yet we know from history, in England, France, Germany, that the time of nonconformity brought out the manhood of the nation. Now, I say, a nation, to be a nation, must have men—I mean brave men. That’s what those hosts of female men combine to try to stifle. They won’t succeed, but we shall want a war to teach the country the value of courage. You catch what I am driving at? They accuse my brother of immorality because he makes no pretence to be better than the men of his class.”

Weyburn’s eyelids fluttered. Her kite-like ascent into the general, with the sudden drop on her choice morsel, switched his humour at the moment when he was respectfully considering that her dartings and gyrations had motive as mach as the flight of the swallow for food. They had meaning; and here was one of the great ladies of the land who thought for herself, and was thoughtful for the country. If she came down like a bird winged, it was her love of her brother that did it. His look at Lady Charlotte glistened.

Page 3753

She raised her defences against the basilisk fascinating Philippa; and with a vow to keep them apart and deprive him of his chance, she relapsed upon the stiff frigidity which was not natural to her. It lasted long enough to put him on his guard under the seductions of a noble dame's condescension to a familiar tone. But, as he was too well bred to show the change in his mind for her change of manner, and as she was the sister of his boyhood's hero, and could be full of flavour, his eyes retained something of their sparkle. They were ready to lighten again, in the way peculiar to him, when she, quite forgetting her defence of Philippa, disburdened herself of her antagonisms and enthusiasms, her hates and her loves all round the neighbourhood and over the world, won to confidential communication by this young man's face. She confessed as much, had he been guided to perceive it. She said, "Arthur Abner's a reader of men: I can trust his word about them."

Presently, it is true, she added: "No man's to be relied upon where there's a woman." She refused her implicit trust to saints—"if ever a man really was a saint before he was canonized!"

Her penetrative instinct of sex kindled the scepticism. Sex she saw at play everywhere, dogging the conduct of affairs, directing them at times; she saw it as the animation of nature, senselessly stigmatized, hypocritically concealed, active in our thoughts where not in our deeds; and the declining of the decorous to see it, or admit the sight, got them abhorred bad names from her, after a touch at the deadly poison coming of that blindness, or blindfoldedness, and a grimly melancholy shrug over the cruelties resulting —cruelties chiefly affecting women.

"You're too young to have thought upon such matters," she said, for a finish to them.

That was hardly true.

"I have thought," said Weyburn, and his head fell to reckoning of the small sum of his thoughts upon them.

He was pulled up instantly for close inspection by the judge. "What is your age?"

"I am in my twenty-sixth year."

"You have been among men: have you studied women?"

"Not largely, Lady Charlotte. Opportunity has been wanting at French and German colleges."

"It's only a large and a close and a pretty long study of them that can teach you anything; and you must get rid of the poetry about them, and be sure you haven't lost it altogether. That's what is called the golden mean. I'm not for the golden mean in every instance; it's a way of exhorting to brutal selfishness. I grant it's the right way in those

questions. You'll learn in time." Her scanning gaze at the young man's face drove him along an avenue of his very possible chances of learning. "Certain to. But don't tell me that at your age you have thought about women. You may say you have felt. A young man's feelings about women are better reading for him six or a dozen chapters farther on. Then he can sift and strain. It won't be perfectly clear, but it will do."

Page 3754

Mr. Eglett hereupon threw the door open, and ushered in Master Leo.

Lady Charlotte noticed that the tutor shook the boy's hand offhandedly, with not a whit of the usual obtrusive geniality, and merely dropped him a word. Soon after, he was talking to Mr. Eglett of games at home and games abroad. Poor fun over there! We head the world in field games, at all events. He drew a picture of a foreigner of his acquaintance looking on at football. On the other hand, French boys and German, having passed a year or two at an English school, get the liking for our games, and do a lot of good when they go home. The things we learn from them are to dance, to sing, and to study:—they are more in earnest than we about study. They teach us at fencing too. The tutor praised fencing as an exercise and an accomplishment. He had large reserves of eulogy for boxing. He knew the qualities of the famous bruisers of the time, cited fisty names, whose owners were then to be seen all over an admiring land in prints; in the glorious defensive-offensive attitude, England's own—Touch me, if you dare! with bullish, or bull-dog, or oak-bole fronts for the blow, handsome to pugilistic eyes.

The young tutor had lighted on a pet theme of Mr. Eglett's—the excelling virtues of the practice of pugilism in Old England, and the school of honour that it is to our lower population. "Fifty times better for them than cock-fighting," he exclaimed, admitting that he could be an interested spectator at a ring or the pit cock-fighting or ratting.

"Ratting seems to have more excuse," the tutor said, and made no sign of a liking for either of those popular pastimes. As he disapproved without squeamishness, the impulsive but sharply critical woman close by nodded; and she gave him his dues for being no courtier.

Leo had to be off to bed. The tutor spared him any struggle over the shaking of hands, and saying, "Goodnight, Leo," continued the conversation. The boy went away, visibly relieved of the cramp that seizes on a youngster at the formalities pertaining to these chilly and fateful introductions.

"What do you think of the look of him?" Mr. Eglett asked.

The tutor had not appeared to inspect the boy. "Big head," he remarked. "Yes, Leo won't want pushing at books when he's once in harness. He will have six weeks of me. It's more than the yeomanry get for drill per annum, and they're expected to know something of a soldier's duties. There's a chance of putting him on the right road in certain matters. We'll walk, or ride, or skate, if the frost holds to-morrow: no lessons the first day."

"Do as you think fit," said lady Charlotte.

The one defect she saw in the tutor did not concern his pupil. And a girl, if hit, would be unable to see that this tutor, judged as a man, was to some extent despicable for accepting tutorships, and, one might say, dishonouring the family of a soldier of rank and distinction, by coming into houses at the back way, with footing enough to air his graces when once established there. He ought to have knocked at every door in the kingdom for help, rather than accept tutorships, and disturb households (or providently-minded mistresses of them) with all sorts of probably groundless apprehensions, founded naturally enough on the good looks he intrudes.

Page 3755

This tutor committed the offence next day of showing he had a firm and easy seat in the saddle, which increased Lady Charlotte's liking for him and irritated her watchful forecasts. She rode with the young man after lunch, "to show him the country," and gave him a taste of what he took for her variable moods. He misjudged her. Like a swimmer going through warm and cold springs of certain lake waters, he thought her a capricious ladyship, dangerous for intimacy, alluring to the deeps and gripping with cramps.

She pushed him to defend his choice of the tutor's profession.

"Think you understand boys?" she caught up his words; "you can't. You can humour them, as you humour women. They're just as hard to read. And don't tell me a young man can read women. Boys and women go on their instincts. Egyptologists can spell you hieroglyphs; they'd be stumped, as Leo would say, to read a spider out of an ink-pot over a sheet of paper."

"One gets to interpret by degrees, by observing their habits," the tutor said, and vexed her with a towering complacency under provocation that went some way further to melt the woman she was, while her knowledge of the softness warned her still more of the duty of playing dragon round such a young man in her house. The despot is alert at every issue, to every chance; and she was one, the wakefuller for being benevolent; her mind had no sleep by day.

For a month she subjected Mr. Matthew Weyburn to the microscope of her observation and the probe of her instinct. He proved that he could manage without cajoling a boy. The practical fact established, by agreement between herself and the unobservant gentleman who was her husband, Lady Charlotte allowed her meditations to drop an indifferent glance at the speculative views upon education entertained by this young tutor. To her mind they were flighty; but she liked him, and as her feelings dictated to her mind when she had not to think for others, she spoke of his views toleratingly, almost with an implied approval, after passing them through the form of burlesque to which she customarily treated things failing to waft her enthusiasm. In regard to Philippa, he behaved well: he bestowed more of his attention on Beatrice, nearer Leo's age, in talk about games and story-books and battles; nothing that he did when the girls were present betrayed the strutting plumed cock, bent to attract, or the sickly reptile, thirsty for a prize above him and meaning to have it, like Satan in Eden. Still, of course, he could not help his being a handsome fellow, having a vivid face and eyes transparent, whether blue or green, to flame of the brain exciting them; and that becomes a picture in the dream of girls—a picture creating the dream often. And Philippa had asked her grandmother, very ingenuously indeed, with a most natural candour, why "they saw so little of Leo's hero." Simple female child!

However, there was no harm done, and Lady Charlotte liked him. She liked few. Forthwith, in the manner of her particular head, a restless head, she fell to work at combinations.

Page 3756

Thus:—he is a nice young fellow, well bred, no cringing courtier, accomplished, good at classics, fairish at mathematics, a scholar in French, German, Italian, with a shrewd knowledge of the different races, and with sound English sentiment too, and the capacity for writing good English, although in those views of his the ideas are unusual, therefore un-English, profoundly so. But his intentions are patriotic; they would not displease Lord Ormont. He has a worship of Lord Ormont. All we can say on behalf of an untried inferior is in that,—only the valiant admire devotedly. Well, he can write grammatical, readable English. What if Lord Ormont were to take him as a secretary while the Memoirs are in hand? He might help to chasten the sentences laughed at by those newspapers. Or he might, being a terrible critic of writing, and funny about styles, put it in an absurd light, that would cause the Memoirs to be tossed into the fire. He was made for the post of secretary! The young man's good looks would be out of harm's way then. If any sprig of womankind come across him there, it will, at any rate, not be a girl. Women must take care of themselves. Only the fools among them run to mischief in the case of a handsome young fellow.

Supposing a certain woman to be one of the fools? Lady Charlotte merely suggested it in the dashing current of her meditations—did not strike it out interrogatively. The woman would be a fine specimen among her class; that was all. For the favourite of Lord Ormont to stoop from her place beside him—ay, but women do; heroes have had the woeful experience of that fact. First we see them aiming themselves at their hero; next they are shooting an eye at the handsome man. The thirst of nature comes after that of their fancy, in conventional women. Sick of the hero tried, tired of their place in the market, no longer ashamed to acknowledge it, they begin to consult their own taste for beauty—they have it quite as much as the men have it; and when their worshipped figure of manliness, in a romantic sombrero, is a threadbare giant, showing bruises, they sink on their inherent desire for a dance with the handsome man. And the really handsome man is the most extraordinary of the rarities. No wonder that when he appears he slays them, walks over them like a pestilence!

This young Weyburn would touch the fancy of a woman of a romantic turn. Supposing her enthusiastic in her worship of the hero, after a number of years—for anything may be imagined where a woman is concerned—why, another enthusiasm for the same object, and on the part of a stranger, a stranger with effective eyes, rapidly leads to sympathy. Suppose the reverse—the enthusiasm gone to dust, or become a wheezy old bellows, as it does where there's disparity of age, or it frequently does—then the sympathy with a good-looking stranger comes more rapidly still.

Page 3757

These were Lady Charlotte's glances right and left—idle flights of the eye of a mounted Amazon across hedges at the canter along the main road of her scheme; which was to do a service to the young man she liked and to the brother she loved, for the marked advantage of both equally; perhaps for the chance of a little gossip to follow about that tenacious woman by whom her brother was held hard and fast, kept away from friends and relatives, isolated, insomuch as to have given up living on his estate—the old home!—because he would not disgrace it or incur odium by taking her there.

In consequence of Lord Ormont's resistance to pressure from her on two or three occasions, she chose to nurse and be governed by the maxim for herself: Never propose a plan to him, if you want it adopted. That was her way of harmlessly solacing love's vindictiveness for an injury.

She sent Arthur Abner a letter, thanking him for his recommendation of young Mr. Weyburn, stating her benevolent wishes as regarded the young man and "those hateful Memoirs," requesting that her name should not be mentioned in the affair, because she was anxious on all grounds to have the proposal accepted by her brother. She could have vowed to herself that she wrote sincerely.

"He must want a secretary. He would be shy at an offer of one from me. Do you hint it, if you get a chance. You gave us Mr. Weyburn, and Mr. Eglett and I like him. Ormont would too, I am certain. You have obliged him before; this will be better than anything you have done for us. It will stop the Memoirs, or else give them a polish. Your young friend has made me laugh over stuff taken for literature until we put on our spectacles. Leo jogs along in harness now, and may do some work at school yet."

Having posted her letter, she left the issue to chance, as we may when conscience is easy. An answer came the day before Weyburn's departure. Arthur Abner had met Lord Ormont in the street, had spoken of the rumour of Memoirs promised to the world, hinted at the possible need for a secretary; "Lord Ormont would appoint a day to see Mr. Weyburn."

Lady Charlotte considered that to be as good as the engagement.

"So we keep you in the family," she said. "And now look here: you ought to know my brother's ways, if you're going to serve him. You'll have to guess at half of everything he tells you; he'll expect you to know the whole. There's no man so secret. Why? He fears nothing; I can't tell why. And what his mouth shuts on, he exposes as if in his hand. Of course he's proud, and good reason. You'll see when you mustn't offend. A lady's in the house—I hear of it. She takes his name, they say. She may be a respectable woman—I've heard no scandal. We have to hear of a Lady Ormont out of Society! We have to suppose it means there's not to be a real one. He can't marry if he has allowed her to go about bearing his name. She has a fool

Page 3758

of an aunt, I'm told; as often in the house as not. Good proof of his fondness for the woman, if he swallows half a year of the aunt! Well, you won't, unless you've mere man's eyes, be able to help seeing him trying to hide what he suffers from that aunt. He bears it, like the man he is; but woe to another betraying it! She has a tongue that goes like the reel of a rod, with a pike bolting out of the shallows to the snag he knows—to wind round it and defy you to pull. Often my brother Rowsley and I have fished the day long, and in hard weather, and brought home a basket; and he boasted of it more than of anything he has ever done since. That woman holds him away from me now. I say no harm of her. She may be right enough from her point of view; or it mayn't be owing to her. I wouldn't blame a woman. Well, but my point with you is, you swallow the woman's aunt—the lady's aunt—without betraying you suffer at all. Lord Ormont has eyes of an eagle for a speck above the surface. All the more because the aunt is a gabbling idiot does he—I say it seeing it—fire up to defend her from the sneer of the lip or half a sign of it! No, you would be an your guard; I can trust you. Of course you'd behave like the gentleman you are where any kind of woman's concerned; but you mustn't let a shadow be seen, think what you may. The woman—lady—calling herself Lady Ormont,—poor woman, I should do the same in her place,—she has a hard game to play; I have to be for my family: she has manners, I'm told; holds herself properly. She fancies she brings him up to the altar, in the end, by decent behaviour. That's a delusion. It's creditable to her, only she can't understand the claims of the family upon a man like my brother. When you have spare time—'kick-ups,' he need to call it, writing to me from school—come here; you're welcome, after three days' notice. I shall be glad to see you again. You've gone some way to make a man of Leo."

He liked her well: he promised to come. She was a sinewy bite of the gentle sex, but she had much flavour, and she gave nourishment.

"Let me have three days' notice," she repeated.

"Not less, Lady Charlotte," said he.

Weyburn received intimation from Arthur Abner of the likely day Lord Ormont would appoint, and he left Olmer for London to hold himself in readiness. Lady Charlotte and Leo drove him to meet the coach. Philippa, so strangely baffled in her natural curiosity, begged for a seat; she begged to be allowed to ride. Petitions were rejected. She stood at the window seeing "Grandmama's tutor," as she named him, carried off by grandmama. Her nature was avenged on her tyrant grandmama: it brought up almost to her tongue thoughts which would have remained subterranean, under control of her habit of mind, or the nursery's modesty, if she had been less tyrannically treated. They were subterranean thoughts, Nature's original, such as the sense of injustice will rouse in young women; and they are better unstirred, for they ripen girls over-rapidly when they are made to revolve near the surface. It flashed on the girl why she had been treated tyrannically.

Page 3759

“Grandmama has good taste in tutors,” was all that she said while the thoughts rolled over.

CHAPTER IV.

RECOGNITION

Our applicant for the post of secretary entered the street of Lord Ormont’s London house, to present himself to his boyhood’s hero by appointment.

He was to see, perhaps to serve, the great soldier. Things had come to this; and he thought it singular. But for the previous introduction to Lady Charlotte, he would have thought it passing wonderful. He ascribed it to the whirligig.

The young man was not yet of an age to gather knowledge of himself and of life from his present experience of the fact, that passionate devotion to an object strikes a vein through circumstances, as a travelling run of flame darts the seeming haphazard zigzags to catch at the dry of dead wood amid the damp; and when passion has become quiescent in the admirer, there is often the unsubsided first impulsion carrying it on. He will almost sorely embrace his idol with one or other of the senses.

Weyburn still read the world as it came to him, by bite, marvelling at this and that, after the fashion of most of us. He had not deserted his adolescent’s hero, or fallen upon analysis of a past season. But he was now a young man, stoutly and cognizantly on the climb, with a good aim overhead, axed green youth’s enthusiasms a step below his heels: one of the lovers of life, beautiful to behold, when we spy into them; generally their aspect is an enlivenment, whatever may be the carving of their features. For the sake of holy unity, this lover of life, whose gaze was to the front in hungry animation, held fast to his young dreams, perceiving a soul of meaning in them, though the fire might have gone out; and he confessed to a past pursuit of delusions. Young men of this kind will have, for the like reason, a similar rational sentiment on behalf of our world’s historic forward march, while admitting that history has to be taken from far backward if we would gain assurance of man’s advance. It nerves an admonished ambition.

He was ushered into a London house’s library, looking over a niggard enclosure of gravel and dull grass, against a wall where ivy dribbled. An armchair was beside the fireplace. To right and left of it a floreate company of books in high cases paraded shoulder to shoulder, without a gap; grenadiers on the line. Weyburn read the titles on their scarlet-and-blue facings. They were approved English classics; honoured veterans, who have emerged from the conflict with contemporary opinion, stamped excellent, or have been pushed by the roar of contemporaneous applauses to wear the leather-and-gilt uniform of our Immortals, until a more qualmish posterity disgorges

them. The books had costly bindings. Lord Ormont's treatment of Literature appeared to resemble Lady Charlotte's, in being reverential and uninquiring. The books she bought to read

Page 3760

were Memoirs of her time by dead men and women once known to her. These did fatigue duty in cloth or undress. It was high drill with all of Lord Ormont's books, and there was not a modern or a minor name among the regiments. They smelt strongly of the bookseller's lump lots by order; but if a show soldiery, they were not a sham, like a certain row of venerably-titled backs, that Lady Charlotte, without scruple, left standing to blow an ecclesiastical trumpet of empty contents; any one might have his battle of brains with them, for the twining of an absent key.

The door opened. Weyburn bowed to his old star in human shape: a grey head on square shoulders, filling the doorway. He had seen at Olmer Lady Charlotte's treasured miniature portrait of her brother; a perfect likeness, she said—complaining the neat instant of injustice done to the fire of his look.

Fire was low down behind the eyes at present. They were quick to scan and take summary of their object, as the young man felt while observing for himself. Height and build of body were such as might be expected in the brother of Lady Charlotte and from the tales of his prowess. Weyburn had a glance back at Cuper's boys listening to the tales.

The soldier-lord's manner was courteously military—that of an established superior indifferent to the deferential attitude he must needs enact. His curt nick of the head, for a response to the visitor's formal salutation, signified the requisite acknowledgment, like a city creditor's busy stroke of the type-stamp receipt upon payment.

The ceremony over, he pitched a bugle voice to fit the contracted area: "I hear from Mr. Abner that you have made acquaintance with Olmer. Good hunting country there."

"Lady Charlotte kindly gave me a mount, my lord."

"I knew your father by name—Colonel Sidney Weyburn. You lost him at Toulouse. We were in the Peninsula; I was at Talavera with him. Bad day for our cavalry."

"Our officers were young at their work then."

"They taught the Emperor's troops to respect a charge of English horse. It was teaching their fox to set traps for them."

Lord Ormont indicated a chair. He stood.

"The French had good cavalry leaders," Weyburn said, for cover to a continued study of the face,

"Montbrun, yes: Murat, Lassalle, Bessieres. Under the Emperor they had."

"You think them not at home in the saddle, my lord?"

“Frenchmen have nerves; horses are nerves. They pile excitement too high. When cool, they’re among the best. None of them had head for command of all the arms.”

“One might say the same of Seidlitz and Ziethen?”

Page 3761

“Of Ziethen. Seidlitz had a wider grasp, I suppose.” He pursed his month, pondering. “No; and in the Austrian service, too; generals of cavalry are left to whistle for an independent command. There’s a jealousy of our branch!” The injured warrior frowned and hummed. He spoke his thought mildly: “Jealousy of the name of soldier in this country! Out of the service, is the place to recommend. I’d have advised a son of mine to train for a jockey rather than enter it. We deal with that to-morrow, in my papers. You come to me? Mr. Abner has arranged the terms? So I see you at ten in the morning. I am glad to meet a young man—Englishman—who takes an interest in the service.”

Weyburn fancied the hearing of a step; he heard the whispering dress. It passed him; a lady went to the armchair. She took her seat, as she had moved, with sedateness, the exchange of a toneless word with my lord. She was a brune. He saw that when he rose to do homage.

Lord Ormont resumed: “Some are born to it, must be soldiers; and in peace they are snubbed by the heads; in war they are abused by the country. They don’t understand in England how to treat an army; how to make one either!

“The gentleman—Mr. Weyburn: Mr. Arthur Abner’s recommendation,” he added hurriedly, with a light wave of his hand and a murmur, that might be the lady’s title; continuing: “A young man of military tastes should take service abroad. They’re in earnest about it over there. Here they play at it; and an army’s shipped to land without commissariat, ambulances, medical stores, and march against the odds, as usual—if it can march!

“Albuera, my lord?”

“Our men can spurt, for a flick o’ the whip. They’re expected to be constantly ready for doing prodigies—to repair the country’s omissions. All the country cares for is to hope Dick Turpin may get to York. Our men are good beasts; they give the best in ’em, and drop. More’s the scandal to a country that has grand material and overtasks it. A blazing disaster ends the chapter!”

This was talk of an injured veteran. It did not deepen the hue of his ruddied skin. He spoke in the tone of matter of fact. Weyburn had been prepared for something of the sort by his friend, Arthur Abner. He noted the speaker’s heightened likeness under excitement to Lady Charlotte. Excitement came at an early call of their voices to both; and both had handsome, open features, bluntly cut, nothing of aquiline or the supercilious; eyes bluish-grey, in arched recesses, horny between the thick lids, lively to shoot their meaning when the trap-mouth was active; effectively expressing promptitute for combat, pleasure in attack, wrestle, tag, whatever pertained to strife; an absolute sense of their right.

As there was a third person present at this dissuasion of military topics, the silence of the lady drew Weyburn to consult her opinion in her look.

Page 3762

It was on him. Strange are the woman's eyes which can unoffendingly assume the privilege to dwell on such a living object as a man without become gateways for his return look, and can seem in pursuit of thoughts while they enfold. They were large dark eyes, eyes of southern night. They sped no shot; they rolled forth an envelopment. A child among toys, caught to think of other toys, may gaze in that way. But these were a woman's eyes.

He gave Lord Ormont his whole face, as an auditor should. He was interested besides, as he told a ruffled conscience. He fell upon the study of his old hero determinedly.

The pain of a memory waking under pillows, unable to do more than strain for breath, distracted his attention. There was a memory: that was all he knew. Or else he would have lashed himself for hanging on the beautiful eyes of a woman. To be seeing and hearing his old hero was wonder enough.

Recollections of Lady Charlotte's plain hints regarding the lady present resolved to the gross retort, that her eyes were beautiful. And he knew them—there lay the strangeness. They were known beautiful eyes, in a foreign land of night and mist.

Lord Ormont was discoursing with racy eloquence of our hold on India: his views in which respect were those of Cuper's boys. Weyburn ventured a dot-running description of the famous ride, and out flew an English soldier's grievance. But was not the unjustly-treated great soldier well rewarded, whatever the snubs and the bitterness, with these large dark eyes in his house, for his own? Eyes like these are the beginning of a young man's world; they nerve, inspire, arm him, colour his life; he would labour, fight, die for them. It seemed to Weyburn a blessedness even to behold them. So it had been with him at the early stage; and his heart went swifter, memory fetched a breath. Memory quivered eyelids, when the thought returned—of his having known eyes as lustrous. First lights of his world, they had more volume, warmth, mystery—were sweeter. Still, these in the room were sisters to them. They quickened throbs; they seemed a throb of the heart made visible.

That was their endowment of light and lustre simply, and the mystical curve of the lids. For so they could look only because the heart was disengaged from them. They were but heavenly orbs.

The lady's elbow was on an arm of her chair, her forefinger at her left temple. Her mind was away, one might guess; she could hardly be interested in talk of soldiering and of foreign army systems, jealous English authorities and officials, games, field-sports. She had personal matters to think of.

Adieu until to-morrow to the homes she inhabited! The street was a banishment and a relief when Weyburn's first interview with Lord Ormont was over.

He rejoiced to tell his previous anticipations that he had not been disappointed; and he bade hero-worshippers expect no gilded figure. We gather heroes as we go, if we are among the growing: our constancy is shown in the not discarding of our old ones. He held to his earlier hero, though he had seen him, and though he could fancy he saw round him.

Page 3763

Another, too, had been a hero-lover. How did that lady of night's eyes come to fall into her subjection?

He put no question as to the name she bore; it hung in a black suspense—vividly at its blackest illuminated her possessor. A man is a hero to some effect who wins a woman like this; and, if his glory bespells her, so that she flings all to the winds for him, burns the world; if, for solely the desperate rapture of belonging to him, she consents of her free will to be one of the nameless and discoloured, he shines in a way to make the marrow of men thrill with a burning envy. For that must be the idolatrous devotion desired by them all.

Weyburn struck down upon his man's nature—the bad in us, when beauty of woman is viewed; or say, the old original revolutionary, best kept untouched; for a touch or a meditative pause above him, fetches him up to roam the civilized world devouringly and lawlessly. It is the special peril of the young lover of life, that an inflammability to beauty in women is in a breath intense with him. He is, in truth, a thinly-sealed volcano of our imperishable ancient father; and has it in him to be the multitudinously-amorous of the mythologic Jove. Give him head, he can be civilization's devil. Is she fair and under a shade?—then is she doubly fair. The shadow about her secretes mystery, just as the forest breeds romance: and mystery is a measureless realm. If we conceive it, we have a mysterious claim on her who is the heart of it.

He marched on that road to the music of sonorous brass for some drunken minutes.

The question came, What of the man who takes advantage of her self-sacrifice?

It soon righted him, and he did Lord Ormont justice, and argued the case against Lady Charlotte's naked hints.

This dark-eyed heroine's bearing was assured, beyond an air of dependency. Her deliberate short nod to him at his leave-taking, and the toneless few words she threw to my lord, signified sufficiently that she did not stand defying the world or dreading it.

She had by miracle the eyes which had once charmed him—could again—would always charm. She reminded him of Aminta Farrell's very eyes under the couchant-dove brows—something of her mouth, the dimple running from a corner. She had, as Aminta had, the self-collected and self-cancelled look, a realm in a look, that was neither depth nor fervour, nor a bestowal, nor an allurement; nor was it an exposure, though there seemed no reserve. One would be near the meaning in declaring it to bewilder men with the riddle of openhandedness. We read it—all may read it—as we read inexplicable plain life; in which let us have a confiding mind, despite the blows at our heart, and some understanding will enter us.

He shut the door upon picture and speculations, returning to them by another door. The lady had not Aminta's freshness: she might be taken for an elder sister of Aminta. But Weyburn wanted to have her position defined before he set her beside Aminta. He writhed under Lady Charlotte's tolerating scorn of "the young woman." It roused an uneasy sentiment of semi-hostility in the direction of my lord; and he had no personal complaint to make.

Page 3764

Lord Ormont was cordial on the day of the secretary's installation; as if—if one might dare to guess it—some one had helped him to a friendly judgement.

The lady of Aminta's eyes was absent at the luncheon table. She came into the room a step, to speak to Lord Ormont, dressed for a drive to pay a visit.

The secretary was unnoticed.

Lord Ormont put inquiries to him at table, for the why of his having avoided the profession of arms; and apparently considered that the secretary had made a mistake, and that he would have committed a greater error in becoming a soldier—"in this country." A man with a grievance is illogical under his burden. He mentioned the name "Lady Ormont" distinctly during some remarks on travel. Lady Ormont preferred the Continent.

Two days later she came to the armchair, as before, met Weyburn's eyes when he raised them; gave him no home in hers—not a temporary shelter from the pelting of interrogations. She hardly spoke. Why did she come?

But how was it that he was drawn to think of her? Absent or present, she was round him, like the hills of a valley. She was round his thoughts—caged them; however high, however far they flew, they were conscious of her.

She took her place at the midday meal. She had Aminta's voice in some tones; a mellower than Aminta's—the voice of one of Aminta's family. She had the trick of Aminta's upper lip in speaking. Her look on him was foreign; a civil smile as they conversed. She was very much at home with my lord, whom she rallied for his addiction to his Club at a particular hour of the afternoon. She conversed readily. She reminded him, incidentally that her aunt would arrive early next day. He informed her, some time after, of an engagement "to tiffin with a brother officer," and she nodded.

They drove away together while the secretary was at his labour of sorting the heap of autobiographical scraps in a worn dispatch-box, pen and pencil jottings tossed to swell the mess when they had relieved an angry reminiscence. He noticed, heedlessly at the moment, feminine handwriting on some few clear sheets among them.

Next day he was alone in the library. He sat before the box, opened it and searched, merely to quiet his annoyance for having left those sheets of the fair amanuensis unexamined. They were not discoverable. They had gone.

He stood up at the stir of the door. It was she, and she acknowledged his bow; she took her steps to her chair.

He was informed that Lord Ormont had an engagement, and he remarked, "I can do the work very well." She sat quite silent.

He read first lines of the scraps, laid them in various places, as in a preparation for conjurer’s tricks at cards; refraining from a glance, lest he should disconcert the eyes he felt to be on him fitfully.

At last she spoke, and he knew Aminta in his hearing and sight.

Page 3765

“Is Emile Grenat still anglomane?”

An instant before her voice was heard he had been persuading himself that the points of unlikeness between his young Aminta and this tall and stately lady of the proud reserve in her bearing flouted the resemblance.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE SHADES OF BROWNY AND MATEY ADVANCE AND RETIRE

“Emile is as anglomane as ever, and not a bit less a Frenchman,” Weyburn said, in a tone of one who muffles a shock at the heart.

“It would be the poorer compliment to us,” she rejoined.

They looked at one another; she dropped her eyelids, he looked away.

She had the grand manner by nature. She was the woman of the girl once known.

“A soldier, is he?”

“Emile’s profession and mine are much alike, or will be.”

“A secretary?”

Her deadness of accent was not designed to carry her opinion of the post of secretary.

It brought the reply: “We hope to be schoolmasters.”

She drew in a breath; there was a thin short voice, hardly voice, as when one of the unschooled minor feelings has been bruised. After a while she said—

“Does he think it a career?”

“Not brilliant.”

“He was formed for a soldier.”

“He had to go as the road led.”

“A young man renouncing ambition!”

“Considering what we can do best.”

“It signifies the taste for what he does.”

“Certainly that.”

Weyburn had senses to read the word “schoolmaster” in repetition behind her shut mouth. He was sharply sensible of a fall.

The task with his papers occupied him. If he had a wish, it was to sink so low in her esteem as to be spurned. A kick would have been a refreshment. Yet he was unashamed of the cause invoking it. We are instruments to the touch of certain women, and made to play strange tunes.

“Mr. Cuper flourishes?”

“The school exists. I have not been down there. I met Mr. Shalders yesterday. He has left the school.”

“You come up from Olmer?”

“I was at Olmer last week, Lady Ormont.”

An involuntary beam from her eyes thanked him for her title at that juncture of the dialogue. She grew more spirited.

“Mr. Shalders has joined the Dragoons, has he?”

“The worthy man has a happy imagination. He goes through a campaign daily.”

“It seems to one to dignify his calling.”

“I like his enthusiasm.”

The lady withdrew into her thoughts; Weyburn fell upon his work.

Mention of the military cloak of enthusiasm covering Shalders, brought the scarce credible old time to smite at his breast, in the presence of these eyes. A ringing of her title of Lady Ormont rendered the present time the incredible.

“I can hardly understand a young Frenchman’s not entering the army,” she said.

Page 3766

“The Napoleonic legend is weaker now,” said he.

“The son of an officer!”

“Grandson.”

“It was his choice to be,—he gave it up without reluctance?”

“Emile obeyed the command of his parents,” Weyburn answered; and he was obedient to the veiled direction of her remark, in speaking of himself: “I had a reason, too.”

“One wonders!”

“It would have impoverished my mother’s income to put aside a small allowance for me for years. She would not have hesitated. I then set my mind on the profession of schoolmaster.”

“Emile Grenat was a brave boy. Has he no regrets?”

“Neither of us has a regret.”

“He began ambitiously.”

“It’s the way at the beginning.”

“It is not usually abjured.”

“I’m afraid we neither of us ‘dignify our calling’ by discontent with it!”

A dusky flash, worth seeing, came on her cheeks. “I respect enthusiasms,” she said; and it was as good to him to hear as the begging pardon, though clearly she could not understand enthusiasm for the schoolmaster’s career.

Light of evidence was before him, that she had a friendly curiosity to know what things had led to their new meeting under these conditions. He sketched them cursorily; there was little to tell—little, that is; appealing to a romantic mind for interest. Aware of it, by sympathy, he degraded the narrative to a flatness about as cheering as a suburban London Sunday’s promenade. Sympathy caused the perverseness. He felt her disillusionment; felt with it and spread a feast of it. She had to hear of studies at Caen and at a Paris Lycee; French fairly mastered; German, the same; Italian, the same; after studies at Heidelberg, Asti, and Florence; between four and five months at Athens (he was needlessly precise), in tutorship with a young nobleman: no events, nor a spot of colour. Thus did he wilfully, with pain to himself, put an extinguisher on the youth painted brilliant and eminent in a maiden’s imagination.

“So there can no longer be thought of the army,” she remarked; and the remark had a sort of sigh, though her breathing was equable.

“Unless a big war knocks over all rules and the country comes praying us to serve,” he said.

“You would not refuse then?”

“Not in case of need. One may imagine a crisis when they would give commissions to men of my age or older for the cavalry—heavy losses of officers.”

She spoke, as if urged by a sting to revert to the distasteful: “That profession—must you not take...enter into orders if you aim at any distinction?”

“And a member of the Anglican Church would not be allowed to exchange his frock for a cavalry sabre,” said he. “That is true. I do not propose to settle as a schoolmaster in England.”

“Where?”

“On the Continent.”

“Would not America be better?”

“It would not so well suit the purpose in view for us.”

Page 3767

“There are others besides?”

“Besides Emile, there is a German and an Italian and a Swiss.”

“It is a Company?”

“A Company of schoolmasters! Companies of all kinds are forming. Colleges are Companies. And they have their collegians. Our aim is at pupils; we have no ambition for any title higher than School and Schoolmaster; it is not a Company.”

So, like Nature parading her skeleton to youthful adorers of her face, he insisted on reducing to hideous material wreck the fair illusion, which had once arrayed him in alluring promise.

She explained; “I said, America. You would be among Protestants in America.”

“Catholics and Protestants are both welcome to us, according to our scheme. And Germans, French, English, Americans, Italians, if they will come; Spaniards and Portuguese, and Scandinavians, Russians as well. And Jews; Mahommedans too, if only they will come! The more mixed, the more it hits our object.”

“You have not stated where on the Continent it is to be.”

“The spot fixed on is in Switzerland.”

“You will have scenery.”

“I hold to that, as an influence.”

A cool vision of the Bernese Alps encircled the young schoolmaster; and she said, “It would influence girls; I dare say.”

“A harder matter with boys, of course—at first. We think we may make it serve.”

“And where is the spot? Is that fixed on?”

“Fifteen miles from Berne, on elevated land, neighbouring a water, not quite to be called a lake, unless in an auctioneer’s advertisement.”

“I am glad of the lake. I could not look on a country home where there was no swimming. You will be head of the school.”

“There must be a head.”

“Is the school likely to be established soon?”

He fell into her dead tone: “Money is required for establishments. I have a Reversion coming some day; I don’t dabble in post obits.”

He waited for farther questions. They were at an end.

“You have your work to do, Mr. Weyburn.”

Saying that, she bowed an implied apology for having kept him from it, and rose. She bowed again as she passed through the doorway, in acknowledgment of his politeness.

Here; then, was the end of the story of Browny and Matey. Such was his thought under the truncheon-stroke of their colloquy. Lines of Browny’s letters were fiery waving ribands about him, while the coldly gracious bow of the Lady wrote Finis.

The gulf between the two writings remained unsounded. It gave a heave to the old passion; but stirred no new one; he had himself in hand now, and he shut himself up when the questions bred of amazement buzzed and threatened to storm. After all, what is not curious in this world? The curious thing would be if curious things should fail to happen. Men have been saying it since they began to count and turn corners. And let us hold off from speculating when there is or but seems a shadow of unholiness over that mole-like business. There shall be no questions; and as to feelings, the same. They, if petted for a moment beneath the shadow, corrupt our blood. Weyburn was a man to have them by the throat at the birth.

Page 3768

Still they thronged; heavy work of strangling had to be done. Her tone of disappointment with the schoolmaster bit him, and it flattered him. The feelings leapt alive, equally venomous from the wound and the caress. They pushed to see, had to be repelled from seeing, the girl Browny in the splendid woman; they had lightning memories: not the pain of his grip could check their voice on the theme touching her happiness or the reverse. And this was an infernal cunning. He paused perforce to inquire, giving them space for the breeding of their multitudes. Was she happy? Did she not seem too meditative, enclosed, toneless, at her age? Vainly the persecuted fellow said to himself: "But what is it to me now?"—The Browny days were over. The passion for the younger Aminta was over—buried; and a dream of power belonging to those days was not yet more than visionary. It had moved her once, when it was a young soldier's. She treated the schoolmaster's dream as vapour, and the old days as dead and ghostless. She did rightly. How could they or she or he be other than they were!

With that sage exclamation, he headed into the Browny days and breasted them; and he had about him the living foamy sparkle of the very time, until the Countess of Ormont breathed the word "Schoolmaster"; when, at once, it was dusty land where buoyant waters had been, and the armies of the facts, in uniform drab, with some feathers and laces, and a significant surpliced figure, decorously covering the wildest of Cupids, marched the standard of the winking gold-piece, which is their nourishing sun and eclipser of all suns that foster dreams.

As you perceive, he was drawing swiftly to the vortex of the fools, and round and round he went, lucky to float.

His view of the business of the schoolmaster plucked him from the whirl. She despised it; he upheld it. He stuck to his view, finding their antagonism on the subject wholesome for him. All that she succeeded in doing was to rob it of the aurora colour clothing everything on which Matey Weyburn set his aim. Her contempt of it, whether as a profession in itself or as one suitable to the former young enthusiast for arms, dwarfed it to appear like the starved plants under Greenland skies. But those are of a sturdy genus; they mean to live; they live, perforce, of the right to live; they will prove their right in a coming season, when some one steps near and wonders at them, and from more closely observing; gets to understand, learning that the significance and the charm of earth will be as well shown by them as by her tropical fair flaunters or the tenderly-nurtured exotics.

Page 3769

An unopened coffer of things to be said in defence of—no, on behalf of—no, in honour of the Profession of Schoolmaster, perhaps to the convincing of Aminta, Lady Ormont, was glanced at; a sentence or two leapt out and stepped forward, and had to retire. He preferred to the fathering of tricky, windy phrases, the being undervalued—even by her. He was taught to see again how Rhetoric haunts, and Rhetoric bedevils, the vindication of the clouded, especially in the case of a disesteemed Profession requiring one to raise it and impose it upon the antagonistic senses for the bewildering of the mind. One has to sound it loudly; there is no treating it, as in the advocacy of the cases of flesh and blood, with the masterly pathos of designed simplicity. And Weyburn was Cuper's Matey Weyburn still in his loathing of artifice to raise emotion, loathing of the affected, the stilted, the trumpet of speech—always excepting school-exercises in the tongues, the unmasking of a Catiline, the address of a General, Athenian or other, to troops.

He kept his coffer shut; and, for a consequence, he saw the contents as an avenue of blossom leading to vistas of infinite harvest.

She was Lady Ormont: Aminta shared the title of his old hero! He refused to speculate upon how it had come to pass, and let the curtain hang, though dramas and romances, with the miracles involved in them, were agitated by a transient glimpse at the curtain.

Well! and he hoped to be a member of the Profession she despised: hoped it with all his heart. And one good effect of his giving his heart to the hope was, that he could hold from speculating and from feeling, even from pausing to wonder at the most wonderful turn of events. Blessed antagonism drove him to be braced by thoughts upon the hardest of the schoolmaster's tasks—bright winter thoughts, prescribing to him satisfaction with a faith in the sowing, which may be his only reaping. Away fly the boys in sheaves. After his toil with them, to instruct, restrain, animate, point their minds, they leave him, they plunge into the world and are gone. Will he see them again? It is a flickering perhaps. To sustain his belief that he has done serviceable work, he must be sore of his having charged them with good matter. How can the man do it, if, during his term of apprenticeship, he has allowed himself to dally here and there, down to moony dreamings over inscrutable beautiful eyes of a married lady; for the sole reason that he meets her unexpectedly, after an exchange of letters with her in long-past days at school, when she was an inexperienced girl, who knew not what she vowed, and he a flighty-headed youngster, crying out to be the arrow of any bow that was handy? Yea, she was once that girl, named Browny by the boys.

Page 3770

Temptation threw warm light on the memory, and very artfully, by conjuring up the faces, cries, characters, all the fun of the boys. There was no possibility of forgetting her image in those days; he had, therefore, to live with it and to live near the grown woman—Time's present answer to the old riddle. It seemed to him, that instead of sorting Lord Ormont's papers, he ought to be at sharp exercise. According to his prescript, sharp exercise of lungs and limbs is a man's moral aid against temptation. He knew it as the one trusty antidote for him, who was otherwise the vessel of a temperament pushing to mutiny. Certainly it is the best philosophy youth can pretend to practise; and Lord Ormont kept him from it! Worse than that, the slips and sheets of paper in the dispatch-box were not an exercise of the mind even; there was nothing to grapple with—no diversion; criticism passed by them indulgently, if not benevolently.

Quite apart from the subject inscribed on them, Weyburn had now and again a blow at the breast, of untraceable origin. For he was well enough aware that the old days when Browny imagined him a hero, in drinking his praises of a brighter, were drowned. They were dead; but here was she the bride of the proved hero. His praises might have helped in causing her willingness—devotional readiness, he could fancy—to yield her hand. Perhaps at the moment when the hero was penning some of the Indian slips here, the boy at school was preparing Aminta; but he could not be responsible for a sacrifice of the kind suggested by Lady Charlotte. And no, there had been no such sacrifice, although Lord Ormont's inexplicable treatment of his young countess, under cover of his notorious reputation with women, conduced to the suspicion.

While the vagrant in Weyburn was thus engaged, his criticism of the soldier-lord's field-English on paper let the stuff go tolerantly unexamined, but with a degree of literary contempt at heart for the writer who had that woman-scented reputation and expressed himself so poorly. The sentiment was outside of reason. We do, nevertheless, expect our Don Juans to deliver their minds a trifle elegantly; if not in classic English, on paper; and when we find one of them inflicting cruelty, as it appears, and the victim is a young woman, a beautiful young woman, she pleads to us poetically against the bearish sentences of his composition. We acknowledge, however, that a mere sentiment, entertained possibly by us alone, should not be permitted to condemn him unheard.

Lady Ormont was not seen again. After luncheon at a solitary table, the secretary worked till winter's lamps were lit; and then shone freedom, with assurance to him that he would escape from the miry mental ditch he had been floundering in since Aminta revealed herself. Sunday was the glorious day to follow, with a cleansing bath of a walk along the southern hills; homely English scenery to show to a German friend, one of his "Company." Half a dozen good lads were pledged to the walk; bearing which in view, it could be felt that this nonsensical puzzlement over his relations to the moods and tenses of a married woman would be bounced out of recollection before nightfall. The landscape given off any of the airy hills of Surrey would suffice to do it.

Page 3771

A lady stood among her boxes below, as he descended the stairs to cross the hall. He knew her for the person Lady Charlotte called “the woman’s aunt,” whom Lord Ormont could not endure—a forgiven old enemy, Mrs. Nargett Pagnell.

He saluted. She stared, and corrected her incivility with “Ah, yes,” and a formal smile.

If not accidentally delayed on her journey, she had been needlessly the cause why Lord Ormont hugged his Club during the morning and afternoon. Weyburn was pushed to think of the matter by remembrance of his foregone resentment at her having withdrawn Aminta from Miss Vincent’s three days earlier than the holiday time. The resentment was over; but a germ of it must have sprang from the dust to prompt the kindling leap his memory took, out of all due connection; like a lightning among the crags. It struck Aminta smartly. He called to mind the conversation at table yesterday. Had she played on Lord Ormont’s dislike of the aunt to drive him forth for some purpose of her own? If so, the little trick had been done with deplorable spontaneity or adeptness of usage. What was the purpose?—to converse with an old acquaintance, undisturbed by Lord Ormont and her aunt? Neatly done, supposing the surmise correct.

But what was there in the purpose? He sifted rapidly for the gist of the conversation; reviewed the manner of it, the words, the sound they had, the feelings they touched; then owned that the question could not be answered. Owning, further, that the recurrence of these idiotic speculations, feelings, questions, wrote him down as both dull fellow and impertinent, he was unabled to restore Aminta to the queenly place she took above the schoolmaster, who was very soon laughing at his fever or flash of the afternoon. The day had brought a great surprise, nothing more. Twenty minutes of fencing in the a salle d’armes of an Italian captain braced him to health, and shifted scenes of other loves, lighter loves, following the Browny days—not to be called loves; in fact; hardly beyond inclinations. Nevertheless, inclinations are an infidelity. To meet a married woman, and be mooning over her because she gave him her eyes and her handwriting when a girl, was enough to rouse an honest fellow’s laugh at himself, in the contemplation of his intermediate amorous vagabondage. Had he ever known the veritable passion after Browny sank from his ken? Let it be confessed, never. His first love was his only true love, despite one shuddering episode, oddly humiliating to recollect, though he had not behaved badly. So, then, by right of his passion, thus did eternal justice rule it: that Browny belonged, to Matey Weyburn, Aminta to Lord Ormont. Aminta was a lady blooming in the flesh, Browny was the past’s pale phantom; for which reason he could call her his own, without harm done to any one, and with his usual appetite for dinner, breakfast, lunch, whatever the meal supplied by the hour.

Page 3772

It would somewhat alarmingly have got to Mr. Weyburn's conscience through a disturbance of his balance, telling him that he was on a perilous road, if his relish for food had been blunted. He had his axiom on the subject, and he was wrong in the general instance, for the appetites of rogues and ogres are not known to fail. As regarded himself, he was eminently right; and he could apply it to boys also, to all young people—the unlaunched, he called them. He counted himself among the launched, no doubt, and had breasted seas; but the boy was alive, a trencherman lad, in the coming schoolmaster, and told him profitable facts concerning his condition; besides throwing a luminous ray on the arcane of our elusive youthful. If they have no stout zest for eating, put Query against them.

His customary enjoyment of dinner convinced Mr. Weyburn that he had not brooded morbidly over his phantom Browny, and could meet Aminta, Countess of Ormont, on the next occasion with the sentiments proper to a common official. Did she not set him a commendable example? He admired her for not concealing her disdain of the aspirant schoolmaster, quite comprehending, by sympathy, why the woman should reproach the girl who had worshipped heroes, if this was a full-grown specimen; and the reply of the shamed girl, that in her ignorance she could not know better. He spared the girl, but he laughed at the woman he commended, laughed at himself.

Aminta's humour was being stirred about the same time. She and her aunt were at the dinner-table in the absence of my lord. The dinner had passed with the stiff dialogue peculiar to couples under supervision of their inferiors; and, as soon as the room was clear, she had asked her aunt, touching the secretary: "Have you seen him?"

Mrs. Nargett Pagnell's answer could have been amusing only to one whose intimate knowledge of her found it characteristically salt; for she was a lady of speech addressed ever directly or roundabout to the chief point of business between herself and her hearer, and the more she was brief, oblique, far-shooting, the more comically intelligible she was to her niece. She bent her head to signify that she had seen the secretary, and struck the table with both hands, exclaiming:

"Well, to be sure, Lord Ormont!"

Their discussion, before they descended the stairs to dinner, concerned his lordship's extraordinary indifference to the thronging of handsome young men around his young countess.

Here, the implication ran, is one established in the house.

Aminta's thoughts could be phrased: "Yes, that is true, for one part of it."

As for the other part, the ascent of a Phoebus Apollo, with his golden bow and quiver off the fairest of Eastern horizon skies, followed suddenly by the sight of him toppling over

in Mr. Cuper's long-skirted brown coat, with spectacles and cane, is an image that hardly exceeds the degradation she conceived. It was past ludicrous; yet admitted of no woefulness, nothing soothingly pathetic. It smothered and barked at the dreams of her blooming spring of life, to which her mind had latterly been turning back, for an escape from sour, one may say cynical, reflections, the present issue of a beautiful young woman's first savour of battle with the world.

Page 3773

CHAPTER VI.

IN A MOOD OF LANGUOR

Up in Aminta's amber dressing-room; Mrs. Nargett Pagnell alluded sadly to the long month of separation, and begged her niece to let her have in plain words an exact statement of the present situation; adding, "Items will do." Thereupon she slipped into prattle and held the field.

She was the known, worthy, good, intolerable woman whom the burgess turns out for his world in regiments, that do and look and all but step alike; and they mean well, and have conventional worships and material aspirations, and very peculiar occult refinements, with a blind head and a haphazard gleam of acuteness, impressive to acquaintances, convincing themselves that they impersonate sagacity. She had said this, done that; and it was, by proof, Providence consenting, the right thing. A niece, written down in her girlhood, because of her eyes and her striking air and excellent deportment, as mate for a nobleman, marries, him before she is out of her teens. "I said, She shall be a countess." A countess she is. Providence does not comply with our predictions in order to stultify us. Admitting the position of affairs for the moment as extraordinary, we are bound by what has happened to expect they will be conformable in the end. Temporarily warped, we should say of them.

She could point to the reason: it was Lord Ormont's blunt misunderstanding of her character. The burgess's daughter was refining to an appreciation of the exquisite so rapidly that she could criticize patricians. My lord had never forgiven her for correcting him in his pronunciation of her name by marriage. Singular indeed; but men, even great men, men of title, are so, some of them, whom you could least suspect of their being so. He would speak the "g" in Nargett, and he, declined—after a remonstrance he declined—to pass Pagnell under the cedilla. Lord Ormont spoke the name like a man hating it, or an English rustic: "Nargett Pagnell," instead, of the soft and elegant "Naryett Pagnell," the only true way of speaking it; and she had always taken that pronunciation of her name for a test of people's breeding. The expression of his lordship's countenance under correction was memorable. Naturally, in those honeymoony days, the young Countess of Ormont sided with her husband the earl; she declared that her aunt had never dreamed of the cedilla before the expedition to Spain. When, for example, Alfred Nargett Pagnell had a laughing remark, which Aminta in her childhood must have heard: "We rhyme with spaniel!"

That was the secret of Lord Ormont's prepossession against Aminta's aunt; and who can tell? perhaps of much of his behaviour to the beautiful young wife he at least admired, sincerely admired, though he caused her to hang her head—cast a cloud on the head so dear to him!

Page 3774

Otherwise there was no interpreting his lordship. To think of herself as personally disliked by a nobleman stupefied Mrs. Pagnell, from her just expectation of reciprocal dealings in high society; for she confessed herself a fly to a title. Where is the shame, if titles are created to attract? Elsewhere than in that upper circle, we may anticipate hard bargains; the widow of a solicitor had not to learn it. But when a distinguished member and ornament of the chosen seats above blew cold upon their gesticulatory devotee, and was besides ungrateful; she was more than commonly assured of his being, as she called him, “a sphinx.” His behaviour to his legally wedded wife confirmed the charge.

She checked her flow to resume the question. “So, then, where are we now? He allows you liberally for pin-money in addition to your own small independent income. Satisfaction with that would warrant him to suppose his whole duty done by you.”

“We are where we were, aunty; the month has made no change,” said Aminta in languor.

“And you as patient as ever?”

“I am supposed to have everything a woman can require.”

“Can he possibly think it? And I have to warn you, child, that lawyers are not so absolving as the world is with some of the ladies Lord Ormont allows you to call your friends. I have been hearing—it is not mere airy tales one hears from lawyers about cases in Courts of Law. Tighten your lips as you like; I say nothing to condemn or reflect on Mrs. Lawrence Finchley. I have had my eyes a little opened, that is all. Oh, I know my niece Aminta, when it’s a friend to stand by; but our position—thanks to your inscrutable lord and master—demands of us the utmost scrupulousness, or it soon becomes a whirl and scandal flying about, and those lawyers picking up and putting together. I have had a difficulty to persuade them!... and my own niece! whom I saw married at the British Embassy in Madrid, as I take good care to tell everybody; for it was my doing; I am the responsible person! and by an English Protestant clergyman, to all appearance able to walk erect in and out of any of these excellent new Life Assurance offices they are starting for the benefit of widows and orphans, and deceased within six days of the ceremony—if ceremony one may call the hasty affair in those foreign places. My dear, the instant I heard it I had a presentiment, ’All has gone well up to now.’ I remember murmuring the words. Then your letter, received in that smelly Barcelona: Lord Ormont was carrying you off to Granada—a dream of my infancy! It may not have been his manoeuvre, but it was the beginning of his manoeuvres.”

Aminta shuddered. “And tra-la-la, and castanets, and my Cid! my Cid! and the Alhambra, the Sierra Nevada, and ay di me, Alhama; and Boabdil el Chico and el Zagal and Fray Antonio Agapida!” She flung out the rattle, yawning, with her arms up and her head back, in the posture of a woman wounded. One of her aunt’s chance shots had

traversed her breast, flashing at her the time, the scene, the husband, intensest sunniness on sword-edges of shade,—and now the wedded riddle; illusion dropping mask, romance in its anatomy, cold English mist. Ah, what a background is the present when we have the past to the fore! That filmy past is diaphanous on heaving ribs.

Page 3775

She smiled at the wide-eyed little gossip. “Don’t speak of manaoeuvres, dear aunt. And we’ll leave Granada to the poets. I’m tired. Talk of our own people, on your side and my father’s, and as much as you please of the Pagnell-Pagnells, they refresh me. Do they go on marrying?”

“Why, my child, how could they go on without it?”

Aminta pressed her hands at her eyelids. “Oh, me!” she sighed, feeling the tear come with a sting from checked laughter. “But there are marriages, aunty, that don’t go on, though Protestant clergymen officiated. Leave them unnoticed, I have really nothing to tell.”

“You have not heard anything of Lady Eglett?”

“Lady Charlotte Eglett? No syllable. Or wait—my lord’s secretary was with her at Olmer; approved by her, I have to suppose.”

“There, my dear, I say again I do dread that woman, if she can make a man like Lord Ormont afraid of her. And no doubt she is of our old aristocracy. And they tell me she is coarse in her conversation—like a man. Lawyers tell me she is never happy but in litigation. Years back, I am given to understand, she did not set so particularly good an example. Lawyers hear next to everything. I am told she lifted her horsewhip on a gentleman once, and then put her horse at him and rode him down. You will say, the sister of your husband. No; not to make my niece a countess, would I, if I had known the kind of family! Then one asks, Is she half as much afraid of him? In that case, no wonder they have given up meeting. Was formerly one of the Keepsake Beauties. Well, Lady Eglett, and Aminta, Countess of Ormont, will be in that Peerage, as they call it, let her only have her dues. My dear, I would—if I ever did—swear the woman is jealous.”

“Of me, aunty!”

“I say more; I say again, it would be a good thing for somebody if somebody had his twitch of jealousy. Wives may be too meek. Cases and cases my poor Alfred read to me, where an ill-behaving man was brought to his senses by a clever little shuffle of the cards, and by the most innocent of wives. A kind of poison to him, of course; but there are poisons that cure. It might come into the courts; and the nearer the proofs the happier he in withdrawing from his charge and effecting a reconciliation. Short of guilt, of course. Men are so strange. Imagine now, if a handsome young woman were known to be admired rather more than enough by a good-looking gentleman near about her own age. Oh, I’ve no patience with, the man for causing us to think and scheme! Only there are men who won’t be set right unless we do. My husband used to say, change is such a capital thing in life’s jogtrot; that men find it refreshing if we now and then, reverse the order of our pillion-riding for them. A spiritless woman in a wife is what they

bear least of all. Anything rather. Is Mr. Morsfield haunting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley's house as usual?"

Aminta's cheeks unrolled their deep damask rose at the abrupt intrusion of the name. "I meet him there."

Page 3776

“Lord Adderwood, Sir John Randeller; and the rest?”

“Two or three times a week.”

“And the lady, wife of the captain, really a Lady Fair—Mrs.... month of May: so I have to get at it.”

“She may be seen there.”

“Really a contrast, when you two are together! As to reputation, there is an exchange of colours. Those lawyers hold the keys of the great world, and a naughty world it is, I fear—with exceptions, who are the salt, but don’t taste so much. I can’t help enjoying the people at Mrs. Lawrence Finchley’s. I like to feel I can amuse them, as they do me. One puzzles for what they say—in somebody’s absence, I mean. They must take Lord Ormont for a perfect sphinx; unless they are so silly as to think they may despise him, or suppose him indifferent. Oh, that upper class! It’s a garden, and we can’t help pushing to enter it; and fair flowers, indeed, but serpents too, like the tropics. It tries us more than anything else in the world—well, just as good eating tries the constitution. He ought to know it and feel it, and give his wife all the protection of his name, instead of—-not that he denies: I have brought him to that point; he cannot deny it with me. But not to present her—to shun the Court; not to introduce her to his family, to appear ashamed of her! My darling Aminta, a month of absence for reflection on your legally-wedded husband’s conduct increases my astonishment. For usually men old enough to be the grandfathers of their wives—”

“Oh, pray, aunty, pray, pray!” Aminta cried, and her body writhed. “No more to-night. You mean well, I am sure. Let us wait. I shall sleep, perhaps, if I go to bed early. I dare say I am spiritless—not worth more than I get. I gave him the lead altogether; he keeps it. In everything else he is kind; I have all the luxuries—enough to loathe them. Kiss me and say good night.”

Aminta made it imperative by rising. Her aunt stood up, kissed, and exclaimed, “I tell you you are a queenly creature, not to be treated as any puny trollop of a handmaid. And although he is a great nobleman, he is not to presume to behave any longer, my dear, as if your family had no claim on his consideration. My husband, Alfred Pagnell, would have laid that before him pretty quick. You are the child of the Farrells and the Solers, both old families; on your father’s side you are linked with the oldest nobility in Europe. It flushes one to think of it! Your grandmother, marrying Captain Algernon Farrell, was the legitimate daughter of a Grandee of Spain; as I have told Lord Ormont often, and I defy him to equal that for a romantic marriage in the annals of his house, or boast of bluer blood. Again, the Solers—”

“We take the Solers for granted, aunty, good night.”

Page 3777

“Commoners, if you like; but established since the Conquest. That is, we trace the pedigree. And to be treated, even by a great nobleman, as if we were stuff picked up out of the ditch! I declare, there are times when I sit and think and boil. Is it chivalrous, is it generous—is it, I say, decent—is it what Alfred would have called a fair fulfilment of a pact, for your wedded husband—? You may close my mouth! But he pretends to be chivalrous and generous, and he has won a queen any wealthy gentleman in England—I know of one, if not two—would be proud to have beside him in equal state; and what is he to her? He is an extinguisher. Or is it the very meanest miserliness, that he may keep you all to himself? There we are again! I say he is an unreadable sphinx.”

Aminta had rung the bell for her maid. Mrs. Pagnell could be counted on for drawing in her tongue when the domestics were near.

A languor past delivery in sighs was on the young woman’s breast. She could have heard without a regret that the heart was to cease beating. Had it been downright misery she would have looked about her with less of her exanimate glassiness. The unhappy have a form of life: until they are worn out, they feel keenly. She felt nothing. The blow to her pride of station and womanhood struck on numbed sensations. She could complain that the blow was not heavier.

A letter lying in her jewel-box called her to read it, for the chance of some slight stir. The contents were known. The signature of Adolphus Morsfield had a new meaning for her eyes, and dashed her at her husband in a spasm of revolt and wrath against the man exposing her to these letters, which a motion of her hand could turn to blood, and abstention from any sign maintained in a Satanic whisper, saying, “Here lies one way of solving the riddle.” It was her husband who drove her to look that way.

The look was transient, and the wrath: she could not burn. A small portion of contempt lodged in her mind to shadow husbands precipitating women on their armoury for a taste of vengeance. Women can always be revenged—so speedily, so completely: they have but to dip. Husbands driving wives to taste their power execrate the creature for her fall deep downward. They are forgetful of causes.

Does it matter? Aminta’s languor asked. The letter had not won a reply. Thought of the briefest of replies was a mountain of effort, and she moaned at her nervelessness in body and mind. To reply, to reproach the man, to be flame—an image of herself under the form she desired—gave her a momentary false energy, wherein the daring of the man, whose life was at a loss for the writing of this letter, hung lighted. She had therewith a sharp vision of his features, repellent in correctness, Greek in lines, with close eyes, hollow temples, pressed lips—a face indicating the man who can fling himself on a die. She had heard tales of women and the man. Some had loved him, report said. Here were words to say that he loved her. They might, poor man, be true. Otherwise she had never been loved.

Page 3778

Memory had of late been paying visits to a droopy plant in the golden summer drought on a gorgeous mid-sea island, and had taken her on board to refresh her with voyages, always bearing down full sail on a couple of blissful schools, abodes of bloom and briny vigour, sweet merriment, innocent longings, dreams the shyest, dreams the mightiest. At night before sleep, at morn before rising, often during day, and when vexed or when dispirited, she had issued her command for the voyage. Sheer refreshment followed, as is ever the case if our vessel carries no freight of hopes. There could be no hopes. It was forgotten that they had ever been seriously alive. But it carried an admiration. Now, an admiration may endure, and this one had been justified all round. The figure heroical, the splendid, active youth, hallowed Aminta's past. The past of a bitterly humiliated Aminta was a garden in the coming kiss of sunset, with that godlike figure of young manhood to hallow it. There he stayed, perpetually assuring her of his triumphs to come.

She could have no further voyages. Ridicule convulsed her home of refuge. For the young soldier-hero, to be unhorsed by misfortune, was one thing; but the meanness of the ambition he had taken in exchange for the thirst of glory, accused his nature. He so certainly involved her in the burlesque of the transformation that she had to quench memory.

She was, therefore, having smothered a good part of herself, accountably languid—a condition alternating with fire in Aminta; and as Mr. Morsfield's letter supplied the absent element, her needy instinct pushed her to read his letter through. She had not yet done that with attention.

Whether a woman loves a man or not, he is her lover if he dare tell her he loves her, and is heard with attention. Aware that the sentences were poison, she summoned her constitutional antagonism to the mad step proposed, so far nullifying the virus as to make her shrink from the madness. Even then her soul cried out to her husband, Who drives me to read? or rather, to brood upon what she read. The brooding ensued, was the thirst of her malady. The best antidote she could hit on was the writer's face. Yet it expressed him, his fire and his courage—gifts she respected in him, found wanting in herself. Read by Lord Ormont, this letter would mean a deadly thing.

Aminta did her lord the justice to feel sure of him, that with her name bearing the superscription, it might be left on her table, and world not have him to peruse it. If he manoeuvred, it was never basely. Despite resentment, her deepest heart denied his being indifferent either to her honour or his own in relation to it. He would vindicate both at a stroke, for a sign. Nevertheless, he had been behaving cruelly. She charged on him the guilt of the small preludes, archeries, anglings, veilings, evasions, all done with the eyelids and the mute of the lips, or a skirmisher word or a fan's flourish, and which, intended to pique the husband rather than incite the lover, had led Mrs. Lawrence Finchley to murmur at her ear, in close assembly, without a distinct designation of Mr.

Morsfield, “Dangerous man to play little games with!” It had brought upon her this letter of declaration, proposal, entreaty.

Page 3779

This letter was the man's life in her hands, and safe, of course. But surely it was a proof that the man loved her?

Aminta was in her five-and-twentieth year; when the woman who is uncertain of the having been loved, and she reputed beautiful, desirable, is impelled by a sombre necessity to muse on a declaration, and nibble at an idea of a test. If "a dangerous man to play little games with," he could scarcely be dangerous to a woman having no love for him at all. It meant merely that he would soon fall to writing letters like this, and he could not expect an answer to it. But her heart really thanked him, and wished the poor gentleman to take its dumb response as his reward, for being the one sole one who had loved her.

Aminta dwelt on "the one sole one." Lord Ormont's treatment had detached her from any belief in love on his part; and the schoolboy, now ambitions to become a schoolmaster, was behind the screen unlikely to be lifted again by a woman valuing her pride of youth, though he had—behold our deceptions!—the sympathetic face entirely absent from that of Mr. Adolphus Morsfield, whom the world would count quite as handsome—nay, it boasted him. He enjoyed the reputation of a killer of ladies. Women have odd tastes, Aminta thought, and examined the gentleman's handwriting. It pleased her better. She studied it till the conventional phrases took a fiery hue, and came at her with an invasive rush.

The letter was cast back into the box, locked up; there an end to it, or no interdiction of sleep.

Sleep was a triumph. Aminta's healthy frame rode her over petty agitations of a blood uninflamed, as lightly as she swam the troubled sea-waters her body gloried to cleave. She woke in the morning peaceful and mildly reflective, like one who walks across green meadows. Only by degrees, by glimpses, was she drawn to remember the trotting, cantering, galloping, leaping of an active heart during night. We cannot, men or woman, control the heart in sleep at night. There had been wild leapings. Night will lead an unsatisfied heart of a woman, by way of sleep, to scale black mountains, jump jagged chasms. Sleep is a horse that laughs at precipices and abysses. We bid women, moreover, be all heart. They are to cultivate their hearts, pay much heed to their hearts. The vast realm of feeling is open to these appointed keepers of the sanctuary household, who may be withering virgins, may be childless matrons, may be unhusbanded wives. Wandering in the vast realm which they are exhorted to call their own, for the additional attractiveness it gives them, an unsatisfied heart of woman will somewhat audaciously cross the borderland a single step into the public road of the vast realm of thinking. Once there, and but a single step on the road, she is a rebel against man's law for her sex. Nor is it urgent on her that she should think defiantly in order to feel herself the rebel. She may think submissively; with a heart (the enlarged, the scientifically plumped, the pasture of epicurean man), with her coveted heart in revolt, and from the mere act of thinking at all.

Page 3780

Aminta reviewed perforce, dead against her will, certain of the near-to-happiness ratings over-night. She thinned her lips, and her cheeks glowed. An arm, on the plea of rescuing, had been round her. The choice now offered her was, to yield to softness or to think. She took the latter step, the single step of an unaccustomed foot, which women educated simply to feet, will, upon extreme impulsion, take; and it held a candle in a windy darkness. She saw no Justice there. The sensational immensity touched sublime, short of that spirit of Justice required for the true sublime. And void of Justice; what a sunless place is any realm! Infants, the male and the female alike, first begin to know they feel when it is refused them. When they know they feel, they have begun to reflect. The void of Justice is a godless region. Women, to whom the solitary thought has come as a blown candle, illumining the fringes of their storm, ask themselves whether they are God's creatures or man's. The question deals a sword-stroke of division between them and their human masters. Young women, animated by the passions their feeling bosoms of necessity breed, and under terror discover, do not distinguish an abstract justice from a concrete. They are of the tribe too long hereditarily enslaved to conceive an abstract. So it is with them, that their God is the God of the slave, as it is with all but the bravest of boys. He is a Thing to cry to, a Punisher, not much of a Supporter—the Biblical Hebrew's right reading of Nature, favouring man, yet prompt to confound him, and with woman for the instrument of vengeance. By such a maze the blindfolded, are brought round to see Justice on earth. If women can only believe in some soul of justice, they will feel they belong to God—of the two; and the peril for them then is, that they will set the one incomprehensible Power in opposition to the other, urging them unsatisfied natures to make secret appeal away from man and his laws altogether, at the cost of losing clear sight of the God who shines in thought. It is a manner whereby the desperately harried among these creatures of the petted heart arrive upon occasion at an agreeable, almost reposeful, contemplation of the reverse of God.

There is little pleasure to be on the lecture-rostrum for a narrator sensible to the pulses of his audience. Justice compels at times. In truth, there are times when the foggy obscurities of the preacher are by comparison broad daylight beside the whirling loose tissues of a woman unexplained. Aminta was one born to prize rectitude, to walk on the traced line uprightly; and while the dark rose overflowed the soft brown of her cheeks, under musings upon her unlicenced heart's doings overnight, she not only pleaded for woeful creatures of her sex burdened as she and erring, she weighed them in the scales with men, and put her heart where Justice pointed, sending men to kick aloft.

Page 3781

Her husband, the man-riddle: she was unable to rede or read him. Her will could not turn him; nor her tongue combat; nor was it granted her to pique the mailed veteran. Every poor innocent little bit of an art had been exhausted. Her title was Lady Ormont her condition actually slave. A luxuriously established slave, consorting with a singularly enfranchised set,—as, for instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood; Sir John Randeller and Lady Staines; Mrs. May, Amy May, notorious wife of a fighting captain, the loneliest of blondes; and other ladies, other gentlemen, Mr. Morsfield in the list, paired or not yet paired: gossip raged. Aminta was of a disposition too generously cordial to let her be the rigorous critic of people with whom she was in touch. But her mind knew relief when she recollected that her humble little school-mate, Selina Collect, who had suffered on her behalf in old days, was coming up to her from the Suffolk coast on a visit for a week. However much a slave and an unloved woman, she could be a constant and protecting friend. Besides, Lord Ormont was gracious to little Selina. She thought of his remarks about the modest-minded girl after first seeing her. From that she struck upon a notion of reserves of humaneness being in him, if she might find the path to them: and thence, fortified by the repose her picture of little Selina's merit had bestowed, she sprang to the idea of valiancy, that she would woo him to listen to her, without inflicting a scene. He had been a listening lover, seeming lover, once, later than the Granada sunsets. The letter in her jewel-box urged Aminta to clear her conscience by some means, for leaving it unburnt.

CHAPTER VII.

EXHIBITS EFFECTS OF A PRATTLER'S DOSES

The rules in Lord Ormont's household assisted to shelter him for some hours of the day from the lady who was like a blast of sirocco under his roof. He had his breakfast alone, as Lady Charlotte had it at Olmer; a dislike of a common table in the morning was a family trait with both. At ten o'clock the secretary arrived, and they were shut up together. At the luncheon table Aminta usually presided. If my lord dined at home, he had by that time established an equanimity rendering, his constant civility to Mrs. Pagnell less arduous. The presence of a woman of tongue, perpetually on the spring to gratify him and win him, was among the burdens he bore for his Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell soon perceived that the secretary was in favour. My lord and this Mr. Weyburn had their pet themes of conversation, upon which the wary aunt of her niece did not gaze like the wintry sun with the distant smile her niece displayed over discussions concerning military biographies, Hannibal's use of his elephants and his Numidian horse, the Little St. Bernard, modern artillery, ancient slingers, English and Genoese bowmen, Napoleon's tactics, his

Page 3782

command to the troopers to “give point,” and English officers’ neglect of sword exercise, and the “devil of a day” Old England is to have on a day to come. My lord connected our day of trial with India. Mrs. Pagnell assumed an air of studious interest; she struck in to give her niece a lead, that Lord Ormont might know his countess capable of joining the driest of subjects occupying exalted minds. Aminta did not follow her; and she was extricated gallantly by the gentlemen in turn.

The secretary behaved with a pretty civility. Aminta shook herself to think tolerantly of him when he, after listening to the suggestion, put interrogatively, that we should profit by Hannibal’s example and train elephants to serve as a special army corps for the perfect security of our priceless Indian Empire, instanced the danger likely to result from their panic fear of cannon, and forbore to consult Lord Ormont’s eye.

Mrs. Pagnell knew that she had put her foot into it; but women advised of being fools in what they say, are generally sustained by their sense of the excellent motive which impelled them. Even to the Countess of Ormont, she could have replied, “We might have given them a higher idea of us”—if, that meant, the Countess of Ormont had entered the field beside her, to the exclusion of a shrinking Aminta. She hinted as much subsequently, and Aminta’s consciousness of the troth was touched. The young schoolmaster’s company sat on her spirits, deadened her vocabulary. Her aunt spoke of passing the library door and hearing the two gentlemen loudly laughing. It seemed subserviency on the fallen young hero’s part. His tastes were low. He frequented the haunts of boxing men; her lord informed her of his having made, or of his making, matches to run or swim or walk certain distances against competitors or within a given time. He had also half a dozen boys or more in tow, whom he raced out of town on Sundays; a nucleus of the school he intended to form.

But will not Achilles become by comparison a common rushlight where was a blazing torch, if we see him clap a clown’s cap on the head whose golden helm was fired by Pallas?

Nay, and let him look the hero still: all the more does he point finger on his meanness of nature.

Turning to another, it is another kind of shame that a woman feels, if she consents to an exchange of letters—shameful indeed, but not such a feeling of deadly sickness as comes with the humiliating view of an object of admiration degraded. Bad she may be; and she may be deceived, vilely treated, in either case. And what is a woman’s pride but the staff and banner of her soul, beyond all gifts? He who wounds it cannot be forgiven—never!—he has killed the best of her. Aminta found herself sliding along into the sentiment, that the splendid idol of a girl’s worship is, if she discover him in the lapse of years as an infinitesimally small one, responsible for the woman’s possible reckless fit of giddiness. And she could see her nonsense; she could not correct it. Lines of the letters under signature of Adolphus were phosphorescent about her: they would recur;

and she charged their doing so on the discovered meanness of the girl's idol. Her wicked memory was caused by his having plunged her low.

Page 3783

Mrs. Pagnell performed the offices of attention to Mr. Weyburn in lieu of the countess, who seemed to find it a task to sit at the luncheon table with him, when Lady Ormont was absent. “Just peeped in,” she said as she entered the library, “to see if all was comfortable;” and gossip ensued, not devoid of object. She extracted an astonishingly smooth description of Lady Charlotte. Weyburn was brightness in speaking of the much-misunderstood lady. “She’s one of the living women of the world.”

“You are sure you don’t mean one of the worldly women?” Mrs. Pagnell rejoiced.

“She has to be known to be liked,” he owned.

“And you were, one hears, among the favoured?”

“I can scarcely pretend to that, ma’am.”

“You were recommended.”

“Lady Charlotte is devoted to her brother.”

Mrs. Pagnell’s bosom heaved. “How strange Lord Ormont is! One would suppose, with his indignation at the country for its treatment of him, admirers would be welcome. Oh dear, no! that is not the way. On board the packet, on our voyage to Spain, my niece in her cabin, imploring mercy of Neptune, as they say, I heard of Lord Ormont among the passengers. I could hardly credit my ears. For I had been hearing of him from my niece ever since her return from a select establishment for the education of young ladies, not much more than a morning’s drive out of London, though Dover was my residence. She had got a hero! It was Lord Ormont! Lord Ormont! all day: and when the behaviour of the country to him became notorious, Aminta—my niece the countess—she could hardly contain herself. A secret:—I promised her—it’s not known to Lord Ormont himself:—a printed letter in a metropolitan paper, copied into the provincial papers, upholding him for one of the greatest of our patriot soldiers and the saviour of India, was the work of her hands. You would, I am sure, think it really well written. Meeting him on deck—the outline of the coast of Portugal for an introductory subject, our Peninsular battles and so forth—I spoke of her enthusiasm. The effect was, to cut off all communication between us. I had only to appear, Lord Ormont vanished. I said to myself, this is a character. However, the very mention of him to my niece, as one of the passengers on board—medicine, miraculous! She was up in half an hour, out pacing the deck before evening, hardly leaning on my arm, and the colour positively beginning to show on her cheeks again. He fled, of coarse. I had prepared her for his eccentricities. Next morning she was out by herself. In the afternoon Lord Ormont strode up to us his—military step—and most courteously requested the honour of an introduction. I had broken the ice at last; from that moment he was cordiality itself, until—I will not say, until he had called her his own—a few little misunderstandings!—not

with his countess. You see, a resident aunt is translated mother-in-law by husbands; though I spare them pretty

Page 3784

frequently; I go to friends, they travel. Here in London she must have a duenna. The marriage at Madrid, at the Embassy:—well, perhaps it was a step for us, for commoners, though we rank with the independent. Has her own little pin-money—an inheritance. Perhaps Lady Eglett gives the world her version. She may say, there was aiming at station. I reply, never was there a more whole-hearted love-match! Absolutely the girl's heart has been his from the period of her school-days. Oh! a little affair—she was persecuted by a boy at a neighbouring school. Her mistress wrote me word—a very determined Romeo young gentleman indeed—quite alarmed about him. In the bud! I carried her off on the spot, and snapped it effectually. Warned he meant to be desperate, I kept her away from my house at Dover four months, place to place; and I did well. I heard on my return, that a youth, answering to the schoolmistress's description of him, had been calling several times, the first two months and longer. You have me alluding to these little nonsensical nothings, because she seemed born to create violent attachments, even at that early day; and Lady Eglett—Lady Charlotte Eglett may hear; for there is no end to them, and impute them to her, when really!—can she be made responsible for eyes innocent of the mischief they appear destined to do? But I am disturbing you in your work."

"You are very good, ma'am," said the ghost of the determined young gentleman.

"A slight cold, have you?" Mrs. Pagnell asked solicitously.

"Dear me, no!" he gave answer with a cleared throat.

In charging him with more than he wanted to carry, she supplied him with particulars he had wanted to know; and now he asked himself what could be the gain of any amount of satisfied curiosity regarding a married Aminta. She slew my lord on board a packet-boat; she bears the arrows that slay. My lord married her where the first English chaplain was to be found; that is not wonderful either. British Embassy, Madrid! Weyburn believed the ceremony to have been performed there: at the same time, he could hear Lady Charlotte's voice repeating with her varied intonation Mrs. Pagnell's impressive utterances; and he could imagine how the somewhat silly duenna aunt, so penetrable in her transparent artifices, struck emphasis on the incredulity of people inclined to judge of the reported ceremony by Lord Ormont's behaviour to his captive.

How explain that strange matter? But can there be a gain in trying to sound it? Weyburn shuffled it away. Before the fit of passion seized him, he could turn his eager mind from anything which had not a perceptible point of gain, either for bodily strength or mental acquisition, or for money, too, now that the school was growing palpable as an infant in arms and agape for the breast. Thought of gain, and the bent to pursue it, is the shield of Athene over young men in the press of the seductions.

Page 3785

He had to confess his having lost some bits of himself by reason of his meditations latterly; and that loss, if we let it continue a space, will show in cramp at the wrist, logs on the legs, a wheezy wind, for any fellow vowed to physical trials of strength and skill. It will show likewise in the brain beating broken wings—inability to shoot a thought up out of the body for half a minute. And, good Lord! how quickly the tight-strong fellow crumbles, when once the fragmentary disintegration has begun! Weyburn cried out on a heart that bounded off at prodigal gallops, and had to be nipped with reminders of the place of good leader he was for taking among the young. Hang superexcellence! but we know those moanings over the troubles of a married woman; we know their sources, know their goal, or else we are the fiction-puppet or the Bedlamite; and she is a married woman, married at the British Embassy, Madrid, if you please! after a few weeks' acquaintance with her husband, who doubtless wrote his name intelligibly in the registrar's book, but does not prove himself much the hero when he drives a pen, even for so little as the signing of his name! He signed his name, apparently not more than partly pledging himself to the bond. Lord Ormont's autobiographical scraps combined with Lady Charlotte's hints and Mrs. Pagnell's communications, to provoke the secretary's literary contempt of his behaviour to his wife. However, the former might be mended, and he resumed the task.

It had the restorative effect of touching him to see his old hero in action; whereby he was brought about to a proper modesty, so that he really craved no more than for the mistress of this house to breathe the liberal air of a public acknowledgment of her rightful position. Things constituted by their buoyancy to float are remarkable for lively bobbings when they are cast upon the waters; and such was the case with Weyburn, until the agitation produced by Mrs. Pagnell left him free to sail away in the society of the steadiest.

He decided that by not observing, not thinking, not feeling, about the circumstances of the household into which Fate had thrown him, he would best be able—probably it was the one way—to keep himself together; and his resolution being honest all round, he succeeded in it as long as he abstained from a very wakeful vigilance over simple eyesight. For if one is nervously on guard to not-see, the matter starts up winged, and enters us, and kindles the mind, and tingles through the blood; it has us as a foe. The art of blind vision requires not only practice, but an intimate knowledge of the arts of the traitor we carry within. Safest for him, after all, was to lay fast hold of the particularly unimportant person he was, both there and anywhere else. The Countess of Ormont's manner toward him was to be read as a standing index of the course he should follow; and he thanked her. He could not quite so sincerely thank her aunt. His ingratitude for the sickly dose she had administered to him sprang a doubt whether Lady Ormont now thanked her aunt on account of services performed at the British Embassy, Madrid.

Page 3786

Certain looks of those eyes recently, when in colloquy with my lord, removed the towering nobleman to a shadowed landscape.

Was it solely an effect of eyes commanding light, and having every shaft of the quiver of the rays at her disposal? Or was it a shot from a powerful individuality issuing out of bondage to some physical oppressor no longer master of the soul, in peril of the slipping away of the body? Her look on him was not hate: it was larger, more terribly divine. Those eyes had elsewhere once looked love: they had planted their object in a throbbing Eden. The man on whom they had looked shivered over the thought of it after years of blank division.

Rather than have those eyes to look on him their displacing unintentness, the man on whom they had once looked love would have chosen looks of wrath, the darts that kill —blest darts of the celestial Huntress, giving sweet sudden cessation of pain, in the one everlasting last flash of life with thought that the shot was hers. Oh for the 'ayava behea' of the Merciful in splendour!

These were the outcries of the man deciding simultaneously not to observe, not to think, not to feel, and husbanding calculations upon storage of gain for the future. Softness held the song below. It came of the fact that his enforced resolution, for the sake of sanity, drove his whole reflective mind backward upon his younger days, when an Evening and a Morning star in him greeted the bright Goddess Browny or sang adieu, and adored beyond all golden beams the underworld whither she had sunk, where she was hidden.

Meanwhile, the worthy dame who had dosed him was out in her carriage, busy paying visits to distinguished ladies of the great world, with the best of excuses for an early call, which was gossip to impart, such as the Countess of Ormont had not yet thought of mentioning; and two or three of them were rather amusedly interested to hear that Lord Ormont had engaged a handsome young secretary, "under the patronage of Lady Charlotte Eglett, devoted to sports of all kinds, immensely favoured by both." Gossip must often have been likened to the winged insect bearing pollen to the flowers; it fertilizes many a vacuous reverie. Those flowers of the upper garden are not, indeed, stationary and in need of the missionary buzzer, but if they have been in one place unmoved for one hour, they are open to take animation from their visitors. Aminta was pleasantly surprised next day by the receipt of a note from Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, begging to be invited to lunch if she came, as she had a purpose in the wish to meet my lord.

[*Note*: The remainder of 'Lord Ormont and His Aminta' is taken from an older edition which uses single rather than double quotation marks. D.W.]

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. LAWRENCE FINCHLEY

Page 3787

My lord had one of his wilful likings for Isabella Lawrence Finchley, and he consented to the torture of an hour of Mrs. Nargett Pagnell in the middle of the day, just to taste the favourite he welcomed at home as he championed her abroad. The reasons were numerous and intimate why she pleased him. He liked the woman, enjoyed the cause for battle that she gave. Weyburn, on coming to the luncheon table, beheld a lady with the head of a comely boy, the manner, softened in delicate feminine, of a capital comrade. Her air of candour was her nature in her face; and it carried a guileless roguery, a placid daring, a supersensual naughtiness, a simplicity of repose amid the smoky reputation she created, that led one to think the vapour calumnious or the creature privileged. That young boy's look opened him at once; he had not to warm to her,—he flew. Ordinarily the sweetest ladies will make us pass through cold mist and cross a stile or two, or a broken bridge, before the formalities are cleared away to grant us rights of citizenship. She was like those frank lands where we have not to hand out a passport at the frontier and wait for dubious inspection of it.

She prevailed with cognizant men and with the frivolous. Women were capable of appreciating her, too: as Aminta did, despite some hinted qualifications addressed shyly to her husband. But these were the very matters exciting his particular esteem. He was of Lady Charlotte's mind, in her hot zeal against injustice done to the creatures she despised; and yet more than she applauded a woman who took up her idiot husband's challenge to defend her good name, and cleared it, right or wrong, and beat him down on his knees, and then started for her spell of the merry canter over turf: an example to the English of the punishment they get for their stupid Puritanic tyranny—sure to be followed by a national helter-skelter down-hill headlong. And Mrs. Lawrence was not one of the corrupt, he argued; she concealed what it was decent to conceal, without pouting hypocritical pretences; she had merely dispensed with idle legal formalities, in the prettiest curvetting airy wanton way, to divorce the man who tried to divorce her, and 'whined to be forgiven when he found he couldn't. Adderwood was ready to marry her to-morrow, if the donkey husband would but go and bray his last. Half a dozen others were heads off on the same course to that goal.'

That was her champion's perusal of a lady candidly asserting her right to have breeched comrades, and paying for it in the advocacy which compromises. She was taken to be and she was used as a weapon wherewith to strike at our Pharisees. Women pushing out into the world for independence, bleed heavy payments all round.

Page 3788

The earl's double-edged defence of her was partly a vindication of another husband, who allowed his wife to call her friend; he was nevertheless assured of her not being corrupt, both by his personal knowledge of the lady, and his perception of her image in the bosom of his wife. She did no harm there, he knew well. Although he was not a man to put his trust in faces, as his young secretary inclined to do, Mrs. Lawrence's look of honest boy did count among the pleadings. And somewhat so might a government cruiser observe the intrusion of a white-sailed yacht in protected sea-waters, where licenced trawlers are at the haul.

Talk over the table coursed as fluently as might be, with Mrs. Pagnell for a boulder in the stream. Uninformed by malice, she led up to Lord Adderwood's name, and perhaps more designedly spoke of Mr. Morsfield, on whom her profound reading into the female heart of the class above her caused her to harp, as 'a real Antinous,' that the ladies might discuss him and Lord Ormont wax meditative.

Mrs. Lawrence pitied the patient gentleman, while asking him in her mind who was the author of the domestic burden he had to bear.

'It reminds me I have a mission,' she said. 'There's a fencing match down at a hall in the West, near the barracks; private and select: Soldier and Civilian; I forget who challenged—Civilian, one judges; Soldiers are the peaceful party. They want you to act "umpire," as they call it, on the military side, my dear lord; and you will?—I have given my word you will bring Lady Ormont. You will?—and not let me be confounded! Yes, and we shall make a party. I see consent. Aminta will enjoy the switch of steel. I love to see fencing. It rouses all that is diabolical in me.'

She sent a skimming look at the opposite.

'And I,' said he, much freshened.

'You fence?'

'Handle the foils.'

'If you must speak modestly! Are you in practice?'

'I spend in hour in Captain Chiallo's fencing rooms generally every evening before dinner. I heard there the first outlines of the match proposed. You are right; it was the civilian.'

'Mr. Morsfield, as I suspected.'

She smiled to herself, like one saying, Not badly managed, Mr. Morsfield!

'Italian school?' Lord Ormont inquired, with a screw of the eyelids.

‘French, my lord.’

‘The only school for teaching.’

’The simplest—has the most rational method. Italians are apt to be tricky. But they were masters once, and now and then they send out a fencer the French can’t touch.’

‘How would you account for it?’

’If I had to account for it, I should say, hotter blood, cool nerve, quick brain.’

‘Hum. Where are we, then?’

‘We don’t shine with the small sword.’

‘We had men neatly pinked for their slashings in the Peninsula.’

‘We’ve had clever Irishmen.’

Page 3789

’Hot enough blood! This man Morsfield—have you crossed the foils with him?’

’Goes at it like a Spaniard; though Spaniards in Paris have been found wary enough.’

My lord hummed. ’Fellow looks as if he would easily lose his head over steel.’

‘He can be dangerous.’

The word struck on something, and rang.

Mrs. Lawrence had a further murmur within her lips. Her travelling eye met Aminta’s and passed it.

‘But not dangerous, surely, if the breast is padded?’ said Mrs. Pagnell.

‘Oh no, oh no; not in that case!’ Mrs. Lawrence ran out her voluble assent, and her eyelids blinked; her fair boy’s face was mischief at school under shadow of the master.

She said to Weyburn: ’Are you one in the list—to give our military a lesson? They want it.’

His answer was unheard by Aminta. She gathered from Mrs. Lawrence’s pleased sparkle that he had been invited to stand in the list; and the strange, the absurd spectacle of a young schoolmaster taking the heroic attitude for attack and defence wrestled behind her eyes with a suddenly vivid first-of-May cricketing field, a scene of snowballs flying, the vision of a strenuous lighted figure scaling to noble young manhood. Isabella Lawrence’s look at him spirited the bright past out of the wretched long-brown-coat shroud of the present, prompting her to grieve that some woman’s hand had not smoothed a small tuft of hair, disorderly on his head a little above the left parting, because Isabella Lawrence Finchley could have no recollection of how it used to toss feathery—wild at his games.

My lord hummed again. ’I suspect we ’re going to get a drubbing. This fellow here has had his French maitre d’armes. Show me your hand, sir.’

Weyburn smiled, and extended his right hand, saying: ’The wrist wants exercise.’

‘Ha! square thumb, flesh full at the nails’ ends; you were a bowler at cricket.’

‘Now examine the palms, my lord; I judge by the lines on the palms,’ Mrs. Pagnell remarked.

He nodded to her and rose.

Coffee had not been served, she reminded him; it was coming in, so down he sat a yard from the table; outwardly equable, inwardly cursing coffee; though he refused to finish a meal without his cup.

‘I think the palms do betray something,’ said Mrs. Lawrence; and Aminta said: ‘Everything betrays.’

‘No, my dear,’ Mrs. Pagnell corrected her; ’the extremities betray, and we cannot read the centre. Is it not so, my lord?’

‘It may be as you say, ma’am.’

She was disappointed in her scheme to induce a general examination of palms, and especially his sphinx lordship’s.

Weyburn controlled the tongue she so frequently tickled to an elvish gavotte, but the humour on his face touched Mrs. Lawrence’s to a subdued good-fellow roguishness, and he felt himself invited to chat with her on the walk for a reposeful ten minutes in Aminta’s drawing-room.

Page 3790

Mrs. Pagnell, ‘quite enjoying the company,’ as she told her niece, was dismayed to hear her niece tell her of a milliner’s appointment, positive for three o’clock; and she had written it in her head ’p.m., four o’clock,’ and she had mislaid or destroyed the milliner’s note; and she still had designs upon his lordship’s palms, things to read and hint around her off the lines. She departed.

Lord Ormont became genial; and there was no one present who did not marvel that he should continue to decree a state of circumstances more or less necessitating the infliction he groaned under. He was too lofty to be questioned, even by his favourites. Mrs. Lawrence conjured the ghost of Lady Charlotte for an answer: this being Lord Adderwood’s idea. Weyburn let his thoughts go on fermenting. Pride froze a beginning stir in the bosom of Aminta.

Her lord could captivate a reluctant woman’s bosom when he was genial. He melted her and made her call up her bitterest pride to perform its recent office. That might have failed; but it had support in a second letter received from the man accounted both by Mrs. Lawrence and by Mr. Weyburn ‘dangerous’; and the thought of who it was that had precipitated her to ‘play little games’ for the sole sake of rousing him through jealousy to a sense of righteous duty, armed her desperately against him. She could exult in having read the second letter right through on receipt of it, and in remembering certain phrases; and notably in a reflection shot across her bewildered brain by one of the dangerous man’s queer mad sentences: ‘Be as iron as you like, I will strike you to heat’; and her thought: Is there assurance of safety in a perpetual defence?—all while she smiled on her genial lord, and signified agreement, with a smiting of wonderment at her heart, when he alluded to a panic shout of the country for defence, and said: ’Much crying of that kind weakens the power to defend when the real attack comes.’ Was it true?

‘But say what you propose?’ she asked.

Lord Ormont proposed vigilance and drill; a small degree of self-sacrifice on the part of the population, and a look-out head in the War Department. He proposed to have a nation of stout-braced men laughing at the foreign bully or bandit, instead of being a pack of whimpering women; whom he likened to the randomly protestant geese of our country roadside, heads out a yard in a gabble of defence while they go backing.

So thereupon Aminta’s notion of a resemblance in the mutual thought subsided; she relapsed on the cushioning sentiment that she was a woman. And—only a woman! he might exclaim, if it pleased him; though he would never be able to say she was one of the whimpering. She, too, had the choice to indulge in scorn of the superior man stone blind to proceedings intimately affecting him—if he cared! One might doubt it.

Mrs. Lawrence listened to him with a mind more disengaged, and a flitting disapproval of Aminta’s unsympathetic ear, or reluctance to stimulate the devout attention a bruised

warrior should have in his tent. She did not press on him the post of umpire. He consented—at her request, he said—to visit the show; but refused any official position that would, it was clearly enough implied, bring his name in any capacity whatever before the country which had unpardonably maltreated him.

Page 3791

Feminine wits will be set working, when a point has been gained; and as Mrs. Lawrence could now say she had persuaded Lord Ormont to gratify her specially, she warmed to fancy she read him, and that she might have managed the wounded and angry giant. Her minor intelligence, caracoling unhampered by harassing emotions, rebuked Aminta's for not perceiving that to win him round to whatever a woman may desire, she must be with him, outstrip him even, along the line he chooses for himself; abuse the country, rail at the Government, ridicule the title of English Army, proscribe the name of India in his hearing. Little stings of jealousy are small insect bites, and do not pique a wounded giant hardly sensible of irritation under his huge, and as we assume for our purpose, justifiable wrath. We have to speculate which way does the giant incline to go? and turn him according to the indication.

Mrs. Lawrence was driven by her critic mood to think Aminta relied—erroneously, after woman's old fashion—on the might of superb dark eyes after having been captured. It seemed to her worse than a beautiful woman's vanity, a childishness. But her boy's head held boy's brains; and Lord Ormont's praise of the splendid creature's nerve when she had to smell powder in Spain, and at bull-fights, and once at a wrecking of their carriage down a gully on the road over the Alpujarras, sent her away subdued, envious, happy to have kissed the cheek of the woman who could inspire it.

CHAPTER IX.

A FLASH OF THE BRUISED WARRIOR

The winning of Lord Ormont's consent to look on at the little bout of arms was counted an achievement; for even in his own rarefied upper circle, where the fervid sentiments are not allowed to be seen plunging, he had his troop of enthusiasts; and they were anxious that he should make an appearance in public, to take what consolation a misunderstood and injured man could get from evidence of the grateful esteem entertained for him by a party of his countrymen, who might reasonably expect at the same time to set eyes, at rather close quarters, on the wonderful dark beauty, supposed a Spaniard, occasionally beheld riding beside him. If it is possible to connect a woman with the devoutest of their anticipations, the sons of leisure up there will do it. But, in truth, an English world was having cause to ransack the dust-heaps for neglected men of mettle. Our intermittent ague, known as dread of invasion, was over the land. Twice down the columns of panic newspaper correspondence Lord Ormont saw his name cited, with the effect on him that such signs of national repentance approaching lodged a crabbed sourness in his consulting-room, whether of head or breast.

Page 3792

He was assailed by a gusty appeal from Lady Charlotte, bidding him seize the moment to proclaim his views while the secretary had a private missive from her, wherein, between insistency and supplication, she directed him to bring the subject before my lord every day, and be sure to write out a fair copy of the epistle previous to the transmission of it. ‘Capua’ was mentioned; she brought in ‘a siren,’ too. Her brother was to be the soldier again—fling off silken bonds. The world might prate of his morality; now was the hour for showing his patriotism, casting aside his just anger, and backing his chief’s opinion. ’A good chance to get their names together.’ To her brother she declared that the columns of the leading journal were open to him—’in large type’; he was to take her word for it; he had only to ‘dictate away,’ quite at his ease, just as he talked at Olmer, and leave the bother of the scribe’s business to his aide. ‘Lose no time,’ she concluded; ’the country wants your ideas; let us have your plan.’

The earl raised his shoulders, and kept his aide exclusively at the Memoirs. Weyburn, however, read out to him, with accentuation, foolish stuff in the recurrent correspondence of the daily sheets, and a complacent burgess article, meant to be a summary of the controversy and a recommendation to the country to bask in the sun of its wealth again.

‘Ay, be the porker sow it’s getting liker and liker to every year!’ Lord Ormont exclaimed, and sprang on his feet. ’Take a pen. Shut up that box. We’ll give ’em digestive biscuits for their weak stomachs. Invasion can’t be done, they say! I tell the doddered asses Napoleon would have been over if Villeneuve had obeyed him to the letter. Villeneuve had a fit of paralysis, owing to the prestige of Nelson—that ’s as it happened. And they swear at prestige, won’t believe in it, because it’s not fat bacon. I tell them, after Napoleon’s first battles, prestige did half his work for him. It saved him at Essling from a plunge into the Danube; it saved him at Moskowa; it would have marched him half over England at his first jump on our shingle beach. But that squelch of fat citizens should be told—to the devil with them! will they ever learn? short of a second William!—there were eight-and-forty hours when the liberty of this country hung wavering in the balance with those Boulogne boats. Now look at Ulm and Austerlitz. Essling, Wagram; put the victors in those little affairs to front our awkward squads. The French could boast a regimental system, and chiefs who held them as the whist-player his hand of cards. Had we a better general than the Archduke Charles? or cavalry and artillery equal to the Hungarian? or drilled infantry numbering within eighty thousand of the Boulogne-Wimereux camps? We had nothing but the raw material of courage—pluck, and no science. Ask any boxing man what he thinks of the chances. The French might have sacrificed a fleet to land fifty

Page 3793

thousand. Our fleet was our one chance. Any foreign General at the head of fifty thousand trained, picked troops would risk it, and cut an ‘entrechat’ for joy of the chance. We should have fought and bled and been marched over—a field of Anglo-Saxon stubble! and Nelson riding the Channel, undisputed lord of the waters. Heigh! by the Lord, this country would have been like a man free to rub his skin with his hand and a mortal disease in his blood. Are you ready? How anticipate a hostile march on the capital, is our business.’

Striding up and down the library, Lord Ormont dropped his wrath to dictate the practical measures for defence—detesting the cat’s-cry ‘defence,’ he said; but the foe would bring his old growlers, and we should have to season our handful of regulars and mob of levies, turn the mass into troops. With plenty of food, and blows daily, Englishmen soon get stomachs for the right way to play the game; bowl as well as bat; and the sooner they give up the idea of shamming sturdy on a stiff hind leg, the better for their chances. Only, it’s a beastly thing to see that for their favourite attitude;—like some dog of a fellow weak in the fists, weaker in the midriff, at a fair, who cries, Come on, and prays his gods you won’t. All for peace, the rascal boasts himself, and he beats his wife and kicks his curs at home. Is there any one to help him now, he vomits gold and honours on the man he yesterday treated as a felon. Ha!

Bull the bumpkin disposed of, my lord drew leisurely back from the foeman’s landing-place, at the head of a body of serious Englishmen; teaching them to be manageable as chess-pieces, ready as bow-strings to let fly. Weyburn rejoiced to find himself transcribing crisp sentences, hard on the matter, without garnish of scorn. Kent, Sussex, Surrey, all the southern heights about London, round away to the south-western of the Hampshire heathland, were accurately mapped in the old warrior’s brain. He knew his points of vantage by name; there were no references to gazetteer or atlas. A chain of forts and earthworks enables us to choose our ground, not for clinging to them, but for choice of time and place to give battle. If we have not been playing double-dyed traitor to ourselves, we have a preponderating field artillery; our yeomanry and volunteer horsemen are becoming a serviceable cavalry arm; our infantry prove that their heterogeneous composition can be welded to a handy mass, and can stand fire and return it, and not be beaten by an acknowledged defeat.

‘That’s English! yes, that’s English! when they’re at it,’ my lord sang out.

‘To know how to take a licking, that wins in the end,’ cried Weyburn; his former enthusiasm for the hero mounting, enlightened by a reminiscence of the precept he had hammered on the boys at Cuper’s.

Page 3794

‘They fall well. Yes, the English fall like men,’ said my lord, pardoning and embracing the cuffed nation. ’Bodies knocked over, hearts upright. That’s example; we breed Ironsides out of a sight like that. If it weren’t for a cursed feeble Government scraping ‘conges’ to the taxpayer—well, so many of our good fellows would not have to fall. That I say; for this thing is going to happen some day, mind you, sir! And I don’t want to have puncheons and hogsheads of our English blood poured out merely to water the soil of a conquered country because English Governments are a craven lot, not daring risk of office by offending the taxpayer. But, on!’

Weyburn sent Lady Charlotte glowing words of the composition in progress.

They worked through a day, and a second day—talked of nothing else in the intervals. Explanatory answers were vouchsafed to Aminta’s modest inquiries at Finch, as she pictured scenes of smoke, dust and blood from the overpowering plain masculine lines they drew, terrible in bluntness. The third morning Lord Ormont had map and book to verify distances and attempt a scale of heights, take names of estates, farms, parishes, commons, patches of woodland. Weyburn wrote his fair copy on folio paper, seven-and-thirty pages. He read it aloud to the author on the afternoon of the fourth day, with the satisfaction in his voice that he felt. My lord listened and nodded. The plan for the defence of England’s heart was a good plan.

He signed to have the manuscript handed to him. A fortified London secure of the Thames for abundant supplies, well able to breathe within earthworks extending along the southern hills, was clearly shown to stand the loss of two big battles on the Sussex weald or more East to North-east, if fortune willed it.

He rose from his chair, paced some steps, with bent head, came back thoughtfully, lifted the manuscript sheets for another examination. Then he stooped to the fire, spreading the edges unevenly, so that they caught flame. Weyburn spied at him. It was to all appearance the doing of a man who had intended it and brought it to the predetermined conclusion.

‘About time for you to be off for your turn at Chiallo’s,’ our country’s defender remarked, after tossing the last half-burnt lump under the grate and shovelling at it.

‘I will go, my lord,’ said Weyburn—and he was glad to go.

He went, calculated his term of service under Lord Ormont. He was young, not a philosopher. Waste of anything was abhorrent to a nature pointed at store of daily gain, if it were only the gain in a new or a freshened idea; and time lost, work lost, good counsel to the nation lost, represented horrid vacuity to him, and called up the counter demonstration of a dance down the halls of madness, for proof that we should, at least, have jolly motion of limbs there before Perdition struck the great gong. Ay, and we should be twirling with a fair form on the arm:

Page 3795

woman and man; as it ought to be; twirling downward, true, but together. Such a companionship has a wisdom to raise it above the title of madness. Name it, heartily, pleasure; and in contempt of the moralist burgess, praise the dance of a woman and the man together high over a curmudgeonly humping solitariness, that won't forgive an injury, nurses rancour, smacks itself in the face, because it can't—to use the old schoolboy words—take a licking!

These were the huddled, drunken sensations and thoughts entertained by Weyburn, without his reflecting on the detachment from his old hero, of which they were the sign. He criticized impulsively, and fancied he did no more, and was not doing much though, in fact, criticism is the end of worship; the Brutus blow at that Imperial but mortal bosom.

The person criticized was manifest. Who was the woman he twirled with? She was unfeatured, undistinguished, one of the sex, or all the sex: the sex to be shunned as our deadly sapper of gain, unless we find the chosen one to super-terrestrialize it and us, and trebly outdo our gift of our whole self for her.

She was indistinguishable, absolutely unknown; yet she murmured, or seemed to murmur—for there was no sound—a complaint of Lord Ormont. And she, or some soundless mouth of woman, said he was a splendid military hero, a chivalrous man, a man of inflexible honour; but had no understanding of how to treat a woman, or belief in her having equal life with him on earth.

She was put aside rather petulantly, and she took her seat out of the whirl with submission. Thinking she certainly was not Browny, whom he would have known among a million, he tried to quit the hall, and he twirled afresh, necessarily not alone; it is the unpardonable offence both to the Graces and the Great Mother for man to valse alone. She twirled on his arm, uninvited; accepted, as in the course of nature; hugged, under dictate of the nature of the man steeled against her by the counting of gain, and going now at desperation's pace, by very means of those defensive locked steam-valves meant to preserve him from this madness,—for the words of the red-lipped mate, where there were no words, went through him like a music when the bow is over the viol, sweeping imagination, and they said her life was wasting.

Was not she a priceless manuscript cast to the flames? Her lord had been at some trouble to win her. Or his great fame and his shadowed fortunes had won her. He took her for his own, and he would not call her his own. He comported himself with absolute, with kindly deference to the lady whose more than vital spark he let the gossips puff at and blur. He praised her courage, visibly admired her person, admitted her in private to be his equal, degraded her in public. Could anything account for the behaviour of so manly and noble a gentleman?—Rhetoric made the attempt, and Weyburn gave up the windy business.

Discovering that his fair partner of the wasting life was—he struggled to quench the revelation—Aminta, he stopped the dance. If there was no gain in whirling fancifully with one of the sex, a spin of a minute with her was downright bankruptcy.

Page 3796

He was young, full of blood; his heart led him away from the door Lord Ormont had exposed; at which a little patient unemotional watchfulness might have intimated to him something besides the simple source of the old hero's complex chapter of conduct. As it was, Weyburn did see the rancour of a raw wound in operation. But he moralized and disapproved; telling himself, truly enough, that so it would not have been with him; instead of sounding at my lord's character, and his condition of the unjustly neglected great soldier, for the purpose of asking how that raw wound would affect an injured veteran, who compressed, almost repressed, the roar of Achilles, though his military bright name was to him his Briseis.

CHAPTER X

A SHORT PASSAGE IN THE GAME PLAYED BY TWO

Politest of men in the domestic circle and everywhere among women, Lord Ormont was annoyed to find himself often gruffish behind the tie of his cravat. Indeed, the temper of our eminently serene will feel the strain of a doldrum-dulness that is goaded to activity by a nettle. The forbearance he carried farther than most could do was tempted to kick, under pressure of Mrs. Nargett Pagnell. Without much blaming Aminta, on whose behalf he submitted to it, and whose resolution to fix in England had brought it to this crisis, he magnanimously proposed to the Fair Enemy he forced her to be, and liked to picture her as being, a month in Paris.

Aminta declined it for herself; after six or more years of travelling, she wished to settle, and know her country, she said: a repetition remark, wide of the point, and indicatory to the game of Pull she was again playing beneath her smooth visage, unaware that she had the wariest of partners at the game.

'But go you—do, I beg,' she entreated. 'It will give you new impressions; and I cannot bear to tie you down here.'

'How you can consent to be tied down here, is the wonder to me!' said he. 'When we travelled through the year, just visited England and were off again, we were driving on our own road. Vienna in April and May—what do you say? You like the reviews there, and the dances, concerts, Zigeuner bands, military Bohemian bands. Or Egypt to-morrow, if you like—though you can't be permitted to swim in the Nile, as you wanted. Come, Xarifa, speak it. I go to exile without you. Say you come.'

She smiled firmly. The name of her honeymoon days was not a cajolery to her.

His name had been that of the Christian Romancero Knight Durandarte, and she gave it to him, to be on the proper level with him, while she still declined.

’Well, but just a month in Paris! There’s nothing doing here. And we both like the French theatre.’

‘London will soon be filling.’

‘Well, but—’ He stopped; for the filling of London did really concern her, in the game of Pull she was covertly playing with him. ’You seem to have caught the fever of this London; . . . no bands . . . . no reviews . . . . Low comedy acting.’ He muttered his objections to London.

Page 3797

‘The society of people speaking one’s own tongue, add that,’ she ventured to say.

’You know you are ten times more Spanish than English. Moorish, if you like.’

’The slave of the gallant Christian Knight, converted, baptized, and blissful. Oh, I know. But now we are settled in England, I have a wish to study English society.’

’Disappointing, I assure you;—dinners heavy, dancing boorish, intrigue a blind-man’s-buff. We’ve been over it all before!’

‘We have.’

‘Admired, I dare say. You won’t be understood.’

‘I like my countrymen.’

‘The women have good looks—of the ungarnished kind. The men are louts.’

‘They are brave.’

‘You’re to see their fencing. You’ll own a little goes a long way.’

‘I think it will amuse me.’

‘So I thought when I gave the nod to Isabella your friend.’

‘You like her?’

‘You, too.’

‘One fancies she would make an encouraging second in a duel.’

‘I will remember . . . when I call you out.’

’Oh, my dear lord, you have dozens to choose from leave me my one if we are to enter the lists.’

’We are, it seems; unless you consent to take the run to Paris. You are to say Tom or Rowsley.’

’The former, I can never feel at home in saying; Rowsley is Lady Charlotte’s name for you.’

The name of Lady Charlotte was an invitation to the conflict between them. He passed it, and said ’Durandarte runs a mile on the mouth, and the Coriolanus of their newspapers helps a stage-player to make lantern jaws. Neither of them comes well

from the lips of my girl. After seven years she should have hit on a nickname, of none of the Christian suit. I am not “at home” either with “my lord.” However, you send me off to Paris alone; and you’ll be alone and dull here in this London. Incomprehensible to me why!’

‘We are both wondering?’ said Aminta.

’You ‘re handsomer than when I met you first—by heaven you are!’

She flushed her dark brown-red late-sunset. ’Brunes are exceptional in England.’

‘Thousands admiring you, of course! I know, my love, I have a jewel.’

She asked him: ‘What are jewels for?’ and he replied, ’To excite cupidity.’

’When they ‘re shut in a box?’

’Ware burglars! But this one is not shut up. She shuts herself up. And up go her shoulders! Decide to be out of it, and come to Paris for some life for a month. No? It’s positive? When do you expect your little school friend?’

‘After Easter. Aunt will be away.’

’Your little friend likes the country. I’ll go to my house agents. If there ’s a country house open on the upper Thames, you can have swimming, boating, botanizing . . .’

He saw her throat swallow. But as he was offering agreeable things he chose to not understand how he was to be compassionate.

Page 3798

‘Steignton?’ she said, and did her cause no good by saying it feebly.

His look of a bygone awake-in-sleep old look, drearily known to her, was like a strip of sunlight on a fortress wall. It signified, Is the poor soul pushing me back to that again?

She compelled herself to say: ‘Your tenant there?’

‘Matter of business . . . me and my tenant,’ he remarked. ’The man pays punctually.’

‘The lease has expired.’

‘Not quite. You are misinformed.’

‘At Easter.’

‘Ah! Question of renewing.’

‘You were fond of the place.’

‘I was fond of the place? Thank Blazes, I’m not what I was!’ He paced about. ’There’s not a corner of the place that doesn’t screw an eye at me, because I had a dream there. La gloire!’

The rest he muttered. ‘These English!’ was heard. Aminta said: ’Am I never to see Steignton?’

Lord Ormont invoked the Powers. He could not really give answer to this female talk of the eternities.

‘Beaten I can never be,’ he said, with instinctive indulgence to the greater creature. ’But down there at Steignton, I should be haunted by a young donkey swearing himself the fellow I grew up out of. No doubt of that. I don’t like him the better for it. Steignton grimaces at a cavalry officer fool enough at his own risks and penalties to help save India for the English. Maunderers! You can’t tell—they don’t know themselves—what they mean. Except that they ’re ready to take anything you hand ’em, and then pipe to your swinging. I served them well—and at my age, in full activity, they condemn me to sit and gape!’

He stopped his pacing and gazed on the glass of the window.

‘Would you wish me not to be present at this fencing?’ said Aminta.

‘Dear me! by all means, go, my love,’ he replied.

Any step his Fair Enemy won in the secret game Pull between them, she was undisputedly to keep.

She suggested: ‘It might lead to unpleasantness.’

‘Of what sort?’

‘You ask?’

He emphasized: ’Have you forgotten? Something happened after that last ball at Challis’s Rooms. Their women as well as their men must be careful not to cross me.’

Aminta had confused notions of her being planted in hostile territory, and torn and knitted, trumpeted to the world as mended, but not honourably mended in a way to stop corridor scandal. The ball at Challis’s Rooms had been one of her steps won: it had necessitated a requirement for the lion in her lord to exhibit himself, and she had gained nothing with Society by the step, owing to her poor performance of the lion’s mate. She had, in other words, shunned the countenance of some scattered people pityingly ready to support her against the deadly passive party known to be Lady Charlotte’s.

She let her lord go; thinking that once more had she striven and gained nothing: which was true of all their direct engagements. And she had failed because of her being only a woman! Mr. Morsfield was foolishly wrong in declaring that she, as a woman, had reserves of strength. He was perhaps of Lady Charlotte’s mind with regard to the existence of a Countess of Ormont, or he would know her to be incredibly cowardly. Cowardly under the boast of pride, too; well, then, say, if you like, a woman!

Page 3799

Yet this mere shallow woman would not hesitate to meet the terrible Lady Charlotte at any instant, on any terms: and what are we to think of a soldier, hero, lion, dreading to tell her to her face that the persecuted woman is his wife!

‘Am I a woman they can be ashamed of?’ she asked, and did not seek the answer at her mirror. She was in her bedroom, and she put out a hand to her jewel-box, fingered it, found it locked, and abandoned her idle project. A gentleman was ‘dangerous.’ She had not found him so. He had the reputation, perhaps, because he was earnest. Not so very many men are earnest. She called to recollection how ludicrously practical he was in the thick of his passion. His third letter (addressed to the Countess of Ormont—-whom he manifestly did not or would not take to be the veritable Countess—and there was much to plead for his error), or was it his fourth?—the letters were a tropical hail-storm: third or fourth, he broke off a streaked thunderpeal, to capitulate his worldly possessions, give the names and degrees of kinship of his relatives, the exact amount of the rent-roll of his Yorkshire estates, of his funded property.

Silly man! but not contemptible. He proposed everything in honour, from his view of it.

Whether in his third, fourth, or fifth letter. . . . How many had come? She drew the key from her purse, and opened a drawer. The key of the jewel-box was applied to the lock.

Mr. Morsfield had sent her six flaming letters. He not only took no precautions, he boasted that he hailed the consequences of discovery. Six!

She lifted a pen: it had to be done.

He was briefly informed that he disturbed her peace. She begged he would abstain from any further writing to her.

The severity was in the brevity. The contrast of her style and his appeared harsh. But it belonged to the position.

Having with one dash of the pen scribbled her three lines, she slipped the letter into her pocket. That was done, and it had to be done; it ought to have been done before. How simple it was when one contemplated it as actually done! Aminta made the motion of a hand along the paper, just a flourish. Soon after, her head dropped back on the chair, and her eyes shut, she took in breath through parted lips. The brief lines of writing had cut away a lump of her vitality.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRETARY TAKEN AS AN ANTIDOTE

Dusty wayfarers along a white high-road who know of a bubbling little spring across a stile, on the woodland borders of deep grass, are hailed to sit aside it awhile: and Aminta's feverishness was cooled by now and then a quiet conversation with the secretary ambitious to become a school-master. Lady Charlotte liked him, so did her lord; Mrs. Lawrence had chatted with him freshly, as it was refreshing to recollect; nobody thought him a stunted growth.

Page 3800

In Aminta's realized recollections, amid the existing troubles of her mind, the charge against him grew paler, and she could no longer quite think that the young hero transformed into a Mr. Cuper had deceived her, though he had done it—much as if she had assisted at the planting and watched aforetime the promise of a noble tree, to find it, after an interval of years, pollarded—a short trunk shooting out a shock of small, slim, stiff branches; dwarfed and disgraced; serviceable perhaps; not ludicrous or ugly, certainly, taking it for a pollard. And he was a cool well-spring to talk with. He, supposed once to be a passionate nature, scorned passion as a madness; he smiled in his merciful executioner's way at the high society, of which her aim was to pass for one among the butterflies or dragonflies; he had lost his patriotism; he labelled our English classes the skimmers, the gorgers, the grubbers, and stigmatized them with a friendly air; and uttered words of tolerance only for farmers and surgeons and schoolmasters. But that was quite incidental in the humorous run of his talk, diverting to hear while it lasted. He had, of course, a right to his ideas.

No longer concerned in contesting them, she drank at the water of this plain earth-well, and hoped she preferred it to fiery draughts, though it was flattish, or, say, flavourless. In the other there was excess of flavour—or, no, spice it had to be called. The young schoolmaster's world seemed a sunless place, the world of traders bargaining for gain, without a glimmer of the rich generosity to venture life, give it, dare all for native land—-or for the one beloved. Love pressed its claim on heroical generosity, and instantly it suffused her, as an earth under flush of sky. The one beloved! She had not known love; she was in her five-and-twentieth year, and love was not only unknown to her, it was shut away from her by the lock of a key that opened on no estimable worldly advantage in exchange, but opened on a dreary, clouded round, such as she had used to fancy it must be to the beautiful creamy circus-horse of the tossing mane and flowing tail and superb step. She was admired; she was just as much doomed to a round of paces, denied the glorious fling afield, her nature's food. Hitherto she would have been shamefaced as a boy in forming the word 'love': now, believing it denied to her for good and all—for ever and ever—her bosom held and uttered the word. She saw the word, the nothing but the word that it was, and she envisaged it, for the purpose of saying adieu to it—good-bye even to the poor empty word.

This condition was attributable to a gentleman's wild rageing with the word, into which he had not infused the mystic spirit. He poured hot wine and spiced. If not the spirit of love, it was really the passion of the man. Her tremors now and again in the reading of his later letters humiliated her, in the knowledge that they came of no response to him, but from the temporary base acquiescence; which is, with women, a terrible perception of the gulf of their unsatisfied nature.

Page 3801

The secretary, cheerful at his work, was found for just the opening of a door. Sometimes she hesitated—to disturb him, she said to herself,—and went up-stairs or out visiting. He protested that he could work on and talk too. She was able to amuse her lord with some of his ideas. He had a stock of them, all his own.

Ideas, new-born and naked original ideas, are acceptable at no time to the humanity they visit to help uplift, it from the state of beast. In the England of that, period original or unknown ideas were a smoking brimstone to the nose, dread Arabian afrites, invisible in the air, jumping out of vases, armed for the slaughter of the venerable and the cherished, the ivy-clad and celestially haloed. They carried the dishevelled Maenad's torch. A step with them, and we were on the Phlegethon waters of the French Revolution. For a publication of simple ideas men were seized, tried at law, mulcted, imprisoned, and not pardoned after the term of punishment; their names were branded: the horned elect butted at them; he who alluded to them offered them up, wittingly or not, to be damned in the nose of the public for an execrable brimstone stench.

Lord Ormont broke through his shouts or grunts at Aminta's report of the secretary's ideas on various topics, particularly the proposal that the lords of the land should head the land in a revolutionary effort to make law of his crazy, top-heavy notions, with a self-satisfied ejaculation: 'He has not favoured me with any of these puffballs of his.'

The deduction was, that the author sagaciously considered them adapted for the ear of a woman; they were womanish—i.e. flighty, gossamer. To the host of males, all ideas are female until they are made facts.

This idea, proposing it to our aristocracy to take up his other ideas, or reject them on pain of the forfeiture of their caste and headship with the generations to follow, and a total displacing of them in history by certain notorious, frowzy, scrubby pamphleteers and publishers, Lord Ormont thought amazingly comical. English nobles heading the weavers, cobblers, and barbers of England! He laughed, but he said, 'Charlotte would listen to that.'

The dread, high-sitting Lady Charlotte was, in his lofty thinking, a woman, and would therefore listen to nonsense, if it happened to strike a particular set of bells hanging in her cranium. She patronized blasphemous and traitorous law-breakers, just to keep up the pluck of the people, not with a notion of maintaining our English aristocracy eminent in history.

Lady Charlotte, however, would be the foremost to swoop down on the secretary's ideas about the education of women.

On that subject, Aminta said she did not know what to think.

Now, if a man states the matter he thinks, and a woman does but listen, whether inclining to agree or not, a perceptible stamp is left on soft wax. Lord Ormont told her so, with cavalier kindness.

Page 3802

She confessed ‘she did not know what to think,’ when the secretary proposed the education and collocation of boys and girls in one group, never separated, declaring it the only way for them to learn to know and to respect one another. They were to learn together, play together, have matches together, as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them.

’But, my dear girl, don’t you see, the devilry was intended by Nature. Life would be the coldest of dishes without it.’ And as for mixing the breeched and petticoated in those young days—’I can’t enter into it,’ my lord considerately said. ‘All I can tell you is, I know boys.’

Aminta persisted in looking thoughtful. ’Things are bad, as they are now,’ she said.

’Always were—always will be. They were intended to be, if we are to call them bad. Botched mendings will only make them worse.’

‘Which side suffers?’

’Both; and both like it. One side must be beaten at any game. It’s off and on, pretty equal—except in the sets where one side wears thick boots. Is this fellow for starting a mixed sexes school? Funny mothers!’

‘I suppose—’ Aminta said, and checked the supposition. ’The mothers would not leave their girls unless they were confident . . . ?’

’There’s to be a female head of the female department? He reckons on finding a woman as big a fool as himself? A fair bit of reckoning enough. He’s clever at the pen. He doesn’t bother me with his ideas; now and then I ‘ve caught a sound of his bee buzzing.’

The secretary was left undisturbed at his labours for several days.

He would have been gladdened by a brighter look of her eyes at her next coming. They were introspective and beamless. She had an odd leaning to the talk upon Cuper’s boys. He was puzzled by what he might have classed, in any other woman, as a want of delicacy, when she recurred to incidents which were red patches of the school time, and had clearly lost their glow for her.

A letter once written by him, in his early days at Cuper’s, addressed to J. Masner, containing a provocation to fight with any weapons, and signed, ‘Your Antagonist,’ had been read out to the whole school, under strong denunciation of the immorality, the unchristian-like conduct of the writer, by Mr. Cuper; creating a sensation that had travelled to Miss Vincent’s establishment, where some of the naughtiest of the girls had taken part with the audacious challenger, dreadful though the contemplation of a possible duel so close to them was. And then the girls heard that the anonymous ‘Your

Antagonist,' on being cited to proclaim himself in public assembly of school-mates and masters, had jumped on his legs and into the name of—one who was previously thought by Miss Vincent's good girls incapable of the 'appalling wickedness,' as Mr. Cuper called it, of signing 'Your Antagonist' to a Christian school-fellow, having the design to provoke a breach of the law of the land and shed Christian blood. Mr. Cuper delivered an impressive sermon from his desk to the standing up boarders and day-scholars alike, vilifying the infidel Greek word 'antagonist.'

Page 3803

‘Do you remember the offender’s name?’ the Countess of Ormont said; and Weyburn said—

’Oh yes, I ‘ve not forgotten the incident.’

Her eyes, wherein the dead time hung just above the underlids, lingered, as with the wish for him to name the name.

She said: ’I am curious to hear how you would treat a case of that sort. Would you preach to the boys?

’Ten words at most. The right assumption is that both fellows were to blame. I fancy the proper way would be to appeal to the naughty girls for their opinion as to how the dispute should be decided.’

‘You impose too much on them. And you are not speaking seriously.’

’Pardon me, I am. I should throw myself into the mind of a naughty girl—supposing none of these at hand—and I should let it be known that my eyes were shut to proceedings, always provided the weapons were not such as would cause a shock of alarm in female bosoms.’

‘You would at your school allow it to be fought out?’

’Judging by the characters of the boys. If they had heads to understand, I would try them at their heads. Otherwise they are the better, they come round quicker to good blood, at their age—I speak of English boys—for a little hostile exercise of their fists. Well, for one thing, it teaches them the value of sparring.’

’I must imagine I am not one of the naughty sisterhood,—for I cannot think I should ever give consent to fighting of any description, unless for the very best of reasons,’ said the countess.

His eyes were at the trick of the quarter-minute’s poising. Her lids fluttered. ‘Oh, I don’t mean to say I was one of the good,’ she added.

At the same time her enlivened memory made her conscious of a warning, that she might, as any woman might, so talk on of past days as to take, rather more than was required of the antidote she had come for.

The antidote was excellent; cooling, fortifying; ‘quite a chalybeate,’ her aunt would say, and she was thankful. Her heart rose on a quiet wave of the thanks, and pitched down to a depth of uncounted fathoms. Aminta was unable to tell herself why.

Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had been announced. On her way to the drawing room Aminta's brain fell upon a series of dots, that wound along a track to the point where she accused herself of a repented coquettry—cause of the burning letters she was doomed to receive and could not stop without rousing her lion. She dotted backwards; there was no sign that she had been guilty of any weakness other than the almost—at least, in design—innocent first move, which had failed to touch Lord Ormont in the smallest degree. Never failure more absolute!

She was about to inquire of her bosom's oracle whether she greatly cared now. For an answer, her brain went dotting along from Mr. Cuper's school, and a boy named Abner there, and a boy named Matey Weyburn, who protected the little Jew-boy, up to Mr. Abner in London, who recommended him in due season to various acquaintances; among them to Lady Charlotte Eglett. Hence the introduction to Lord Ormont. How little extraordinary circumstances are, if only we trace them to the source!

Page 3804

But if only it had appeared marvellous, the throbbing woman might have seized on it, as a thing fateful, an intervention distinctly designed to waken the best in her, which was, after all, the strongest. Yea, she could hope and pray and believe it was the strongest.

She was listening to Isabella Lawrence Finchley, wishing she might have followed to some end the above line of her meditations.

Mrs. Lawrence was changed, much warmer, pressing to be more than merely friendly. Aminta twice gave her cheek for kisses. The secretary had spoken of Mrs. Lawrence as having the look of a handsome boy; and Aminta's view of her now underwent a change likewise. Compunction, together with a sisterly taste for the boyish fair one flying her sail independently, and gallantly braving the winds, induced her to kiss in return.

'You do like me a morsel?' said Mrs. Lawrence. 'I fell in love with you the last time I was here. I came to see Mr. Secretary—it's avowed; and I have been thinking of you ever since, of no one else. Oh yes, for a man; but you caught me. I've been hearing of him from Captain May. They fence at those rooms. And it 's funny, Mr. Morsfield practises there, you know; and there was a time when the lovely innocent Amy, Queen of Blondes, held the seat of the Queen of Brunes. Ah, my dear, the infidelity of men doesn't count. They are affected by the changeing moons. As long as the captain is civil to him, we may be sure beautiful Amy has not complained. Her husband is the pistol she carries in her pocket, and she has fired him twice, with effect. Through love of you I have learnt the different opinion the world of the good has of her and of me; I thought we ran under a common brand. There are gradations. I went to throw myself at the feet of my great-aunt; good old great-aunt Lady de Culme, who is a power in the land. I let her suppose I came for myself, and she reproached me with Lord Adder. I confessed to him and ten others. She is a dear, she's ticklish, and at eighty-four she laughed! She looked into my eyes and saw a field with never a man in it—just the shadow of a man. She admitted the ten cancelled the one, and exactly named to me, by comparison with the erring Amy, the sinner I am and must be, if I 'm to live. So, dear, the end of it is,' and Mrs. Lawrence put her fingers to a silken amber bow at Aminta's throat, and squared it and flattened it with dainty precision, speaking on under dropped eyelids, intent upon her work, 'Lady de Culme will be happy to welcome you whenever it shall suit the Countess of Ormont to accompany her disreputable friend. But what can I do, dear?' She raised her lids and looked beseechingly. 'I was born with this taste for the ways and games and style of men. I hope I don't get on badly with women; but if I 'm not allowed to indulge my natural taste, I kick the stable-boards and bite the manger.'

Aminta threw her arms round her, and they laughed their mutual peal.

Page 3805

Caressing her still, Aminta said: ‘I don’t know whether I embrace a boy.’

‘That idea comes from a man!’ said Mrs. Lawrence. It was admitted. The secretary was discussed.

Mrs. Lawrence remarked: ’Yes, I like talking with him; he’s bright. You drove him out of me the day I saw him. Doesn’t he give you the idea of a man who insists on capturing you and lets it be seen he doesn’t care two snaps of a finger?’

Aminta petitioned on his behalf indifferently: ’He ‘s well bred.’

She was inattentive to Mrs. Lawrence’s answer. The allusion of the Queen of Blondes had stung her in the unacknowledged regions where women discard themselves and are most sensitive.

‘Decide on coming soon to Lady de Culme,’ said Mrs. Lawrence. ’Now that her arms are open to you, she would like to have you in them. She is old—. You won’t be rigorous? no standing on small punctilios?

She would call, but she does not—h’m, it is M. le Comte that she does not choose to—-h’m. But her arms are open to the countess. It ought to be a grand step. You may be assured that Lady Charlotte Eglett would not be taken into them. My great-aunt has a great-aunt’s memory. The Ormonts are the only explanation—if it ’s an apology—she can offer for the behaviour of the husband of the Countess of Ormont. You know I like him. I can’t help liking a man who likes me. Is that the way with a boy, Mr. Secretary? I must have another talk with the gentleman, my dear. You are Aminta to me.’

‘Always Aminta to you,’ was the reply, tenderly given.

’But as for comprehending him, I’m as far off that as Lady de Culme, who hasn’t the liking for him I have.’

‘The earl?’ said Aminta, showing by her look that she was in the same position.

Mrs. Lawrence shrugged: ’I believe men and women marry in order that they should never be able to understand one another. The riddle’s best read at a moderate distance. It ’s what they call the golden mean; too close, too far, we’re strangers. I begin to understand that husband of mine, now we’re on bowing terms. Now, I must meet the earl to-morrow. You will arrange? His hand wants forcing. Upon my word, I don’t believe it ’s more.’

Mrs. Lawrence contrasted him in her mind with the husband she knew, and was invigorated by the thought that a placable impenetrable giant may often be more pliable in a woman’s hands than an irascible dwarf—until, perchance, the latter has been

soundly cuffed, and then he is docile to trot like a squire, as near your heels as he can get. She rejoiced to be working for the woman she had fallen in love with.

Aminta promised herself to show the friend a livelier affection at their next meeting.

A seventh letter, signed ‘Adolphus,’ came by post, was read and locked up in her jewel-box. They were all nigh destruction for a wavering minute or so. They were placed where they lay because the first of them had been laid there, the box being a strong one, under a patent key, and discovery would mean the terrible. They had not been destroyed because they had, or seemed to her to have, the language of passion. She could read them unmoved, and appease a wicked craving she owned to having, and reproached herself with having, for that language.

Page 3806

Was she not colour in the sight of men? Here was one, a mouthpiece of numbers, who vowed that homage was her due, and devotion, the pouring forth of the soul to her. What was the reproach if she read the stuff unmoved?

But peruse and reperuse it, and ask impressions to tell our deepest instinct of truthfulness whether language of this character can have been written to two women by one hand! Men are cunning. Can they catch a tone? Not that tone!

She, too, Mrs. Amy May, was colour in the sight of men. Yet it seemed that he could not have written so to the Queen of Blondes. And she, by repute, was as dangerous to slight as he to attract. Her indifference exonerated him. Besides, a Queen of Blondes would not draw the hearts out of men in England, as in Italy and in Spain. Aminta had got thus far when she found ‘Queen of Brunes’ expunged by a mist: she imagined hearing the secretary’s laugh. She thought he was right to laugh at her. She retorted simply: ‘These are feelings that are poetry.’

A man may know nothing about them, and be an excellent schoolmaster.

Suggestions touching the prudence of taking Mrs. Lawrence into her confidence, as regarded these troublesome letters of the man with the dart in his breast, were shuffled aside for various reasons: her modesty shrank; and a sense of honour toward the man forbade it. She would have found it easier to do if she had conspired against her heart in doing it. And yet, cold-bloodedly to expose him and pluck the clothing from a passion—dear to think of only when it is profoundly secret—struck her as an extreme baseness, of which not even the woman who perused and reperused his letters could be guilty.

Her head rang with some of the lines, and she accused her head of the crime of childishness, seeing that her heart was not an accomplice. At the same time, her heart cried out violently against the business of a visit to Lady de Culme, and all the steps it involved. Justly she accused her heart of treason. Heart and head were severed. This, as she partly apprehended, is the state of the woman who is already on the slope of her nature’s mine-shaft, dreading the rush downwards, powerless to break away from the light.

Letters perused and reperused, coming from a man never fervently noticed in person, conjure features one would wish to put beside the actual, to make sure that the fiery lines he writes are not practising a beguilement. Aminta had lost grasp of the semblance of the impassioned man. She just remembered enough of his eyes to think there might be healing in a sight of him.

Latterly she had refused to be exhibited to a tattling world as the great nobleman’s conquest:—The ‘Beautiful Lady Doubtful’ of a report that had scorched her cars. Theatres, rides, pleasure-drives, even such houses as she saw standing open to her had been shunned. Now she asked the earl to ride in the park.

He complied, and sent to the stables immediately, just noted another of her veerings. The whimsy creatures we are matched to contrast with, shift as the very winds or feather-grasses in the wind. Possibly a fine day did it. Possibly, too, her not being requested to do it.

Page 3807

He was proud of her bearing on horseback. She rode well and looked well. A finer weapon wherewith to strike at a churlish world was never given into the hands of man. These English may see in her, if they like, that they and their laws and customs are defied. It does her no hurt, and it hits them a ringing buffet.

Among the cavaliers they passed was Mr. Morsfield. He rode by slowly. The earl stiffened his back in returning the salute. Both that and the gentleman were observed by Aminta.

'He sees to having good blood under him,' said the earl. 'I admired his mount,' she replied.

Interpreted by the fire of his writing, his features expressed character: insomuch that a woman could say of another woman, that she admired him and might reasonably do so. His gaze at her in the presence of her lord was audacious.

He had the defect of his virtue of courage. Yet a man indisputably possessing courage cannot but have an interesting face—though one may continue saying, Pity that the eyes are not a little wider apart! He dresses tastefully; the best English style. A portrait by a master hand might hand him down to generations as an ancestor to be proud of. But with passion and with courage, and a bent for snatching at the lion's own, does he not look foredoomed to an early close? Her imagination called up a portrait of Elizabeth's Earl of Essex to set beside him; and without thinking that the two were fraternally alike, she sent him riding away with the face of the Earl of Essex and the shadow of the unhappy nobleman's grievous fortunes over his head.

But it is inexcuseable to let the mind be occupied recurrently by a man who has not moved the feelings, wicked though it be to have the feelings moved by him. Aminta rebuked her silly wits, and proceeded to speculate from an altitude, seeing the man's projects in a singularly definite minuteness, as if the crisis he invoked, the perils he braved, the mute participation he implored of her for the short space until their fate should be decided, were a story sharply cut on metal. Several times she surprised herself in an interesting pursuit of the story; abominably cold, abominably interested. She fell upon a review of small duties of the day, to get relief; and among them a device for spiriting away her aunt from the table where Mrs. Lawrence wished to meet Lord Ormont. It sprang up to her call like an imp of the burning pit. She saw it ingenious and of natural aspect. I must be a born intriguer! she said in her breast. That was hateful; but it seemed worse when she thought of a woman commanding the faculty and consenting to be duped and foiled. That might be termed despicable; but what if she had not any longer the wish to gain her way with her lord?

Those letters are acting like a kind of poison in me! her heart cried: and it was only her head that dwelt on the antidote.

CHAPTER XII

Page 3808

MORE OF CUPER'S BOYS

Entering the dining-room at the appointed minute in a punctual household, Mrs. Lawrence informed the company that she had seen a Horse Guards orderly at the trot up the street. Weyburn said he was directing a boy to ring the bell of the house for him. Lord Ormont went to the window.

'Amends and honours?' Mrs. Lawrence hummed and added an operatic flourish of an arm. Something like it might really be imagined. A large square missive was handed to the footman. Thereupon the orderly trotted off.

My lord took seat at table, telling the footman to lay 'that parcel' beside the clock on the mantelpiece. Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence gave out a little cry of bird or mouse, pitiable to hear: they could not wait, they must know, they pished at sight of plates. His look deferred to their good pleasure, like the dead hand of a clock under key; and Weyburn placed the missive before him, seeing by the superscription that it was not official.

It was addressed, in the Roman hand of a boy's copybook writing, to

General the Earl of Ormont, I.C.B., *etc*.,
Horse Guards,
London.'

The earl's eyebrows creased up over the address; they came down low on the contents.

He resumed his daily countenance. 'Nothing of importance,' he said to the ladies.

Mrs. Lawrence knocked the table with her knuckles. Aminta put out a hand, in sign of her wish.

'Pray let me see it.'

'After lunch will do.'

'No, no, no! We are women—we are women,' cried Mrs. Lawrence.

'How can it concern women?'

'As well ask how a battle-field concerns them!'

'Yes, the shots hit us behind you,' said Aminta; and she, too, struck the table.

He did not prolong their torture. Weyburn received the folio sheet and passed it on. Aminta read. Mrs. Lawrence jumped from her chair and ran to the countess's shoulder; her red lips formed the petitioning word to the earl for the liberty she was bent to take.

‘Peep? if you like,’ my lord said, jesting at the blank she would find, and soft to the pretty play of her mouth.

When the ladies had run to the end of it, he asked them: ’Well; now then?’

‘But it’s capital—the dear laddies!’ Mrs. Lawrence exclaimed.

Aminta’s eyes met Weyburn’s.

She handed him the sheet of paper; upon the transmission of which empty thing from the Horse Guards my lord commented: ‘An orderly!’

Weyburn scanned it rapidly, for the table had been served.

The contents were these:

’*High Brent near* ARTSWELL.
’April 7th.

’To *general the earl of Ormont*
’Cavalry.

Page 3809

’May it please your Lordship, we, the boys of Mr. Cuper’s school, are desirous to bring to the notice of the bravest officer England possesses now living, a Deed of Heroism by a little boy and girl, children of our school laundress, aged respectively eight and six, who, seeing a little fellow in the water out of depth, and sinking twice, before the third time jumped in to save him, though unable to swim themselves; the girl aged six first, we are sorry to say; but the brother, Robert Coop, followed her example, and together they made a line, and she caught hold of the drowning boy, and he held her petycoats, and so they pulled. We have seen the place: it is not a nice one. They got him ashore at last. The park-keeper here going along found them dripping, rubbing his hands, and blowing into his nostrils. Name, T. Shellen, son of a small cobbler here, and recovered.

’May it please your Lordship, we make bold to apply, because you have been for a number of years, as far as the oldest can recollect, the Hero of our school, and we are so bold as to ask the favour of General Lord Ormont’s name to head a subscription we are making to circulate for the support of their sick mother, who has fallen ill. We think her a good woman. Gentlemen and ladies of the neighbourhood are willing to subscribe. If we have a great name to head the list, we think we shall make a good subscription. Names:—

’Martha Mary Coop, mother.
’Robert Coop.
’Jane Coop, the girl, aged six.

’If we are not taking too great a liberty, a subscription paper will follow. We are sure General the Earl of Ormont’s name will help to make them comfortable.

’We are obediently and respectfully,

’*David Gowen*,
’*Walter bench*,
’*James* PANNERS *parsons*,
‘And seven others.’

Weyburn spared Aminta an answering look, that would have been a begging of Browny to remember Matey.

’It ‘s genuine,’ he said to Mrs. Lawrence, as he attacked his plate with the gusto for the repast previously and benignly observed by her. ’It ought to be the work of some of the younger fellows.’

‘They spell correctly, on the whole.’

‘Excepting,’ said my lord, ‘an article they don’t know much about yet.’

Weyburn had noticed the word, and he smiled. ’Said to be the happy state! The three signing their names are probably what we called bellman and beemen, collector, and heads of the swarm-enthusiasts. If it is not the work of some of the younger hands, the school has levelled on minors. In any case it shows the school is healthy.’

‘I subscribe,’ said Mrs. Lawrence.

‘The little girl aged six shall have something done for her,’ said Aminta, and turned her eyes on the earl.

He was familiar with her thrilled voice at a story of bravery. He said—

Page 3810

‘The boys don’t say the girl’s brother turned tail.’

’Only that the girl’s brother aged eight followed the lead of the little girl aged six,’ Mrs. Lawrence remarked. ’Well, I like the schoolboys, too—“we are sorry to say!” But they ’re good lads. Boys who can appreciate brave deeds are capable of doing them.’

‘Speak to me about it on Monday,’ the earl said to Weyburn.

He bowed, and replied—

’I shall have the day to-morrow. I ‘ll walk it and call on Messrs.’ (he glanced at the paper) ’Gowen, Bench, and Parsons. I have a German friend in London anxious to wear his legs down stumpier.’

‘The name of the school?’

‘It is called Cuper’s.’

Aminta, on hearing the name of Cuper a second time, congratulated herself on the happy invention of her pretext to keep Mrs. Pagnell from the table at midday. Her aunt had a memory for names: what might she not have exclaimed! There would have been little in it, but it was as well that the ‘boy of the name of Weyburn’ at Cuper’s should be unmentioned. By an exaggeration peculiar to a disgust in fancy, she could hear her aunt vociferating ‘Weyburn!’ and then staring at Mr. Weyburn opposite—perhaps not satisfied with staring.

He withdrew after his usual hearty meal, during which his talk of boys and their monkey tricks, and what we can train them to, had been pleasant generally, especially to Mrs. Lawrence. Aminta was carried back to the minute early years at High Brent. A line or two of a smile touched her cheek.

’Yes, my dear countess, that is the face I want for Lady de Culme to-day,’ said Mrs. Lawrence.’ She likes a smiling face. Aunty—aunty has always been good; she has never been prim. I was too much for her, until I reflected that she was very old, and deserved to know the truth before she left us; and so I went to her; and then she said she wished to see the Countess of Ormont, because of her being my dearest friend. I fancy she entertains an ‘arriere’ idea of proposing her flawless niece Gracey, Marchioness of Fencaster, to present you. She ’s quite equal to the fatigue herself. You ’ll rejoice in her anecdotes. People were virtuous in past days: they counted their sinners. In those days, too, as I have to understand, the men chivalrously bore the blame, though the women were rightly punished. Now, alas! the initiative is with the women, and men are not asked for chivalry. Hence it languishes. Lady de Culme won’t hear of the Queen of Blondes; has forbidden her these many years!’

Lord Ormont, to whom the lady's prattle was addressed, kept his visage moveless, except in slight jerks of the brows.

'What queen?'

'You insist upon renewing my old, old pangs of jealousy, my dear lord! The Queen of Cyprus, they called her, in the last generation; she fights our great duellist handsomely.'

'My dear Mrs. Lawrence!'

'He triumphs finally, we know, but she beats him every round.'

Page 3811

’It ‘s only tattle that says the duel has begun.’

’May is the month of everlasting beauty! There ’s a widower marquis now who claims the right to cast the glove to any who dispute it.’

‘Mrs. May is too good-looking to escape from scandal.’

‘Amy May has the good looks of the Immortals.’

‘She can’t be thirty.’

‘In the calendar of women she counts thirty-four.’

‘Malignity! Her husband’s a lucky man.’

‘The shots have proved it.’

Lord Ormont nodded his head over the hopeless task of defending a woman from a woman, and their sharp interchange ceased. But the sight of his complacency in defeat told Aminta that he did not respect his fair client: it drew a sketch of the position he allotted his wife before the world side by side with this Mrs. Amy May, though a Lady de Culme was persuaded to draw distinctions.

He had, however, quite complacently taken the dose intended for him by Mrs. Lawrence, who believed that the system of gently forcing him was the good one.

The ladies drove away in the afternoon. The earl turned his back on manuscript. He sent for a couple of walking sticks, and commanded Weyburn to go through his parades. He was no tyro, merely out of practice, and unacquainted with the later, simpler form of the great master of the French school, by which, at serious issues, the guarding of the line can be more quickly done: as, for instance, the ‘parade de septime’ supplanting the slower ‘parade de prime;’ the ‘parade de quarte’ having advantage over the ‘parade de quince;’ the ‘parade de tierce’ being readier and stronger than the ‘parade de sixte;’ the same said for the ‘parade de seconde’ instead of the weak ‘parade d’octave.’

These were then new points of instruction. Weyburn demonstrated them as neatly as he could do with his weapon.

‘Yes, the French think,’ Lord Ormont said, grasping the stick to get conviction of thumb-strength and finger-strength from the parades advocated; ’their steel would thread the ribs of our louts before: they could raise a cry of parry; so here they ’re pleased to sneer at fencing, as if it served no purpose but the duel. Fencing, for one thing, means, that with a good stick in his hand, a clever fencer can double up a giant or two, grant him choice of ground. Some of our men box; but the sword’s the weapon for an officer,

and precious few of ’em are fit for more than to kick the scabbard. Slashing comes easier to them: a plaguey cut, if it does cut—say, one in six. Navy too. Their cutlass-drill is like a woman’s fling of the arm to fetch a slap from behind her shoulder. Pinking beats chopping. These English ’ll have their lesson. It ’s like what you call good writing: the simple way does the business, and that’s the most difficult to learn, because you must give your head to it, as those French fellows do. ‘Trop de finesse’ is rather their fault. Anything’s better than loutishness. Well! the lesson ‘ll come.’

Page 3812

He continued. He spoke as he thought: he was not speaking what he was thinking. His mind was directed on the visit of Aminta to Lady de Culme, and the tolerably wonderful twist whereby Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had vowed herself to his girl's interests. And he blamed neither of them; only he could not understand how it had been effected, for Aminta and Mrs. Lawrence had not been on such particularly intimate terms last week or yesterday. His ejaculation, 'Women!' was, as he knew, merely ignorance roaring behind a mask of sarcasm. But it allied him with all previous generations on the male side, and that was its virtue. His view of the shifty turns of women got no further, for the reason that he took small account of the operations of the feelings, to the sole exercise of which he by system condemned the sex.

He was also insensibly half a grain more soured by the homage of those poor schoolboys, who called to him to take it for his reward in a country whose authorities had snubbed, whose Parliament had ignored, whose Press had abused him. The ridiculous balance made him wilfully oblivious that he had seen his name of late eulogized in articles and in books for the right martial qualities. Can a country treating a good soldier—not serving it for pay—in so scurvy a fashion, be struck too hard with our disdain? One cannot tell it in too plain a language how one despises its laws, its moralities, its sham of society. The Club, some choice anecdotists, two or three listeners to his dolences clothed as diatribes; a rubber, and the sight of his girl at home, composed, with a week's shooting now and then, his round of life now that she refused to travel. What a life for a soldier in his vigour. Weyburn was honoured by the earl's company on the walk to Chiallo's. In the street of elegant shops they met Lord Adderwood, and he, as usual, appeared in the act of strangling one of his flock of yawns, with gentlemanly consideration for the public. Exercise was ever his temporary specific for these incurables. Flinging off his coat, he cast away the cynic style engendering or engendered by them. He and Weyburn were for a bout. Sir John Randeller and Mr. Morsfield were at it, like Bull in training and desperado foiled. A French 'maitre d'armes,' famed in 'escrime,' standing near Captain Chiallo, looked amused in the eyes, behind a mask of professional correctness. He had come on an excursion for the display of his art. Sir John's very sturdy defence was pierced. Weyburn saluted the Frenchman as an acquaintance, and they shook hands, chatted, criticized, nodded. Presently he and his adversary engaged, vizored and in their buckram, and he soon proved to be too strong for Adderwood, as the latter expected and had notified to Lord Ormont before they crossed the steel. My lord had a pleasant pricking excitement in the sound. There was a pretty display between Weyburn and the 'escrimeur,' who neatly and kindly trifled, took a point and returned one, and at the finish complimented him. The earl could see that he had to be sufficiently alert.

Page 3813

Age mouthed an ugly word to the veteran insensible of it in his body, when a desire to be one with these pairs of nimble wrists and legs was like an old gamecock shown the pit and put back into the basket. He left the place, carrying away an image of the coxcombical attitudinizing of the man Morsfield at the salut, upon which he brought down his powers of burlesque.

My lord sketched the scene he had just quitted to a lady who had stopped her carriage. She was the still beautiful Mrs. Amy May, wife of the famous fighting captain. Her hair was radiant in a shady street; her eyelids tenderly toned round the almond enclosure of blue pebbles, bright as if shining from the seawash. The lips of the fair woman could be seen to say that they were sweet when, laughing or discoursing, they gave sight of teeth proudly her own, rivalling the regularity of the grin of dentistry. A Venus of nature was melting into a Venus of art, and there was a decorous concealment of the contest and the anguish in the process, for which Lord Ormont liked her well enough to wink benevolently at her efforts to cheat the world at various issues, and maintain her duel with Time. The world deserved that she should beat it, even if she had been all deception.

She let the subject of Mr. Morsfield pass without remark from her, until the exhaustion of open-air topics hinted an end of their conversation, and she said—

'We shall learn next week what to think if the civilians. I have heard Mr. Morsfield tell that he is 'de premiere force.' Be on your guard. You are to know that I never forget a service, and you did me one once.' 'You have reason . . . ?' said the earl.

'If anybody is the dragon to the treasure he covets he is a spadassin who won't hesitate at provocations. Adieu.'

Lord Ormont's eye had been on Mr. Morsfield. He had seen what Mrs. Pagnell counselled her niece to let, him see. He thanked Mr. Morsfield for a tonic that made him young with anticipations of bracing; and he set his head to work upon an advance half-way to meet the gentleman, and safely exclude his wife's name.

Monday brought an account of Cuper's boys. Aminta received it while the earl was at his papers for the morning's news of the weightier deeds of men.

They were the right boys, Weyburn said; his interview with Gowen, Bench, Parsons, and the others assured him that the school was breathing big lungs. Mr. Cuper, too, had spoken well of them.

'You walked the twenty miles?' Aminta interrupted him.

'With my German friend: out and home: plenty of time in the day. He has taken to English boys, but asks why enthusiasm and worship of great deeds don't grow upward

from them to their elders. And I, in turn, ask why Germans insist on that point more even than the French do.'

'Germans are sentimental. But the English boys he saw belonged to a school with traditions of enthusiasm sown by some one. The school remembered?'

Page 3814

’Curiously, Mr. Cuper tells me, the hero of the school has dropped and sprung up, stout as ever, twice—it tells me what I wish to believe—since Lord Ormont led their young heads to glory. He can’t say how it comes. The tradition’s there, and it ’s kindled by some flying spark.’

‘They remember who taught the school to think of Lord Ormont?’

’I ’m a minor personage. I certainly did some good, and that ’s a push forward.’

‘They speak of you?’

It was Aminta more than the Countess of Ormont speaking to him.

‘You take an interest in the boys,’ he said, glowing. ’Yes, well, they have their talks. I happened to be a cricketer, counting wickets and scores. I don’t fancy it’s remembered that it was I preached my lord. A day of nine wickets and one catch doesn’t die out of a school. The boy Gowen was the prime spirit in getting up the subscription for the laundress. But Bench and Parsons are good boys, too.’

He described them, dwelt on them. The enthusiast, when not lyrical, is perilously near to boring. Aminta was glad of Mrs. Lawrence’s absence. She had that feeling because Matthew Weyburn would shun talk of himself to her, not from a personal sense of tedium in hearing of the boys; and she was quaintly reminded by suggestions, coming she knew not whence, of a dim likeness between her and these boys of the school when their hero dropped to nothing and sprang up again brilliantly—a kind of distant cousinship, in her susceptibility to be kindled by so small a flying spark as this one on its travels out of High Brent. Moreover, the dear boys tied her to her girlhood, and netted her fleeting youth for the moth-box. She pressed to hear more and more of them, and of the school-laundress Weyburn had called to see, and particularly of the child, little Jane, aged six. Weyburn went to look at the sheet of water to which little Jane had given celebrity over the county. The girl stood up to her shoulders when she slid off the bank and made the line for her brother to hold, he in the water as well. Altogether, Cuper’s boys were justified in promoting a subscription, the mother being helpless.

‘Modest little woman,’ he said of Jane. ’We’ll hope people won’t spoil her. Don’t forget, Lady Ormont, that the brother did his part; he had more knowledge of the danger than she.’

’You will undertake to convey our subscriptions? Lord Ormont spoke of the little ones and the schoolboys yesterday.’

’I’ll be down again among them next Sunday, Lady Ormont. On the Monday I go to Olmer.’

‘The girls of High Brent subscribe?’

There was a ripple under Weyburn's gravity.

'Messrs. Gowen, Bench, and Parsons thought proper to stop Miss Vincent at the head of her detachment in the park.'

'On the Sunday?'

'And one of them handed her a paper containing a report of their interview with Mrs. Coop and a neat eulogy of little Jane. But don't suspect them, I beg. I believe them to be good, honest fellows. Bench, they say, is religious; Gowen has written verses; Parsons generally harum-scarum. They're boyish in one way or another, and that'll do. The cricket of the school has been low: seems to be reviving.'

Page 3815

‘Mr. Weyburn,’ said the countess, after a short delay—and Aminta broke through—’it pleases me to hear of them, and think they have not forgotten you, or, at least, they follow the lead you gave. I should like to know whether an idea I have is true: Is much, I mean constant, looking down on young people likely to pull one’s mind down to their level?’

’Likely enough to betray our level, if there ‘s danger,’ he murmured. ’Society offers an example that your conjecture is not unfounded, Lady Ormont. But if we have great literature and an interest in the world’s affairs, can there be any fear of it? The schoolmaster ploughs to make a richer world, I hope. He must live with them, join with them in their games, accustom them to have their heads knocked with what he wants to get into them, leading them all the while, as the bigger schoolfellow does, if he is a good fellow. He has to be careful not to smell of his office. Doing positive good is the business of his every day—on a small scale, but it ’s positive, if he likes his boys. ‘Avaunt favouritism!’ he must like all boys. And it ’s human nature not so far removed from the dog; only it’s a supple human nature: there ’s the beauty of it. We train it. Nothing is more certain than that it will grow upward. I have the belief that I shall succeed, because I like boys, and they like me. It always was the case.’

‘I know,’ said Aminta.

Their eyes met. She looked moved at heart behind that deep forest of her chestnut eyes.

‘And I think I can inspire confidence in fathers and mothers,’ he resumed.’ I have my boys already waiting for me to found the school. I was pleased the other day: an English friend brought an Italian gentleman to see me and discuss my system, up at Norwood, at my mother’s—a Signor Calliani. He has a nephew; the parents dote on him. The uncle confesses that the boy wants—he has got hold of our word—“pluck.” We had a talk. He has promised to send me the lad when I am established in Switzerland.’

‘When?’ said Aminta.

’A relative from whom a Reversion comes is near the end. It won’t be later than September that I shall go. My Swiss friend has the school, and would take me at once before he retires.’

‘You make friends wherever you go,’ said Aminta.

’Why shouldn’t everybody? I’m convinced it’s because I show people I mean well, and I never nurse an injury, great or small. And besides, they see I look forward. I do hope good for the world. If at my school we have all nationalities—French boys and German, Italian, Russian, Spaniard—without distinction of race and religion and station, and with

English intermixing—English games, English sense of honour and conception of gentleman—we shall help to nationalize Europe. Emile Grenat, Adolf Fleischer, and an Italian, Vincentino Chiuse, are prepared to start with me: and they are men of attainments; they will throw up their positions; they will do me the honour to trust to my leadership. It's not scaling Alps or commanding armies, true.'

Page 3816

‘It may be better,’ said Aminta, and thought as she spoke.

’Slow work, if we have a taste for the work, doesn’t dispirit. Otherwise, one may say that an African or South American traveller has a more exciting time. I shall manage to keep my head on its travels.’

‘You have ideas about the education of girls?’

‘They can’t be carried out unaided.’

‘Aid will come.’

Weyburn’s confidence, high though it was, had not mounted to that pitch.

‘One may find a mate,’ he said. The woman to share and practically to aid in developing such ideas is not easily found: that he left as implied.

Aminta was in need of poetry; but the young schoolmaster’s plain, well-directed prose of the view of a business in life was welcome to her.

Lord Ormont entered the room. She reminded him of the boys of High Brent and the heroine Jane. He was ready to subscribe his five-and-twenty guineas, he said. The amount of the sum gratified Weyburn, she could see. She was proud of her lord, and of the boys and the little girl; and she would have been happy to make the ardent young schoolmaster aware of her growing interest in the young.

The night before the earl’s departure on the solitary expedition to which she condemned him, he surprised her with a visit of farewell, so that he need not disturb her in the early morning, he said. She was reading beside her open jewel-box, and she closed it with the delicate touch of a hand turned backward while listening to him, with no sign of nervousness.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR AT OLMER

Lively doings were on the leap to animate Weyburn at Olmer during Easter week. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, rector of Barborough, on hearing that Lady Charlotte Eglett was engaged in knocking at the doors of litigation with certain acts that constituted distinct breaches of the law and the peace, and were a violation of the rights of her neighbour, Mr. Gilbert Addicote, might hope that the troublesome parishioner whom he did not often number among his congregation would grant him a term of repose. Therein he was deceived. Alterations and enlargements of the church, much required, had necessitated the bricking up of a door regarded by the lady as the private entrance

to the Olmer pew. She sent him notice of her intention to batter at the new brickwork; so there was the prospect of a pew-fight before him. But now she came to sit under him every Sunday; and he could have wished her absent; for she diverted his thoughts from piety to the selections of texts applicable in the case of a woman who sat with arms knotted, and the frown of an intemperate schoolgirl forbidden speech; while her pew's firelight startlingly at intervals danced her sinister person into view, as from below. The lady's inaccessible and unconquerable obtuseness to exhortation informed the picture with an evil spirit that cried for wrestlings.

Page 3817

Regularly every week-day she headed the war now rageing between Olmer and Addicotes, on the borders of the estates. It was open war, and herself to head the cavalry. Weyburn, driving up a lane in the gig she had sent to meet the coach, beheld a thicket of countrymen and boys along a ridge; and it swayed and broke, and through it burst the figure of a mounted warrior woman at the gallop, followed by what bore an appearance of horse and gun, minus carriage, drivers at the flanks cracking whips on foot. Off went the train, across a small gorse common, through a gate.

‘That’s another down,’ said his whip. ’Sound good wood it is, not made to fall. Her ladyship’s at it hard to-day. She ’ll teach Mr. Addicote a thing or two about things females can do. That is, when they stand for their rights.’

He explained to Weyburn that Mr. Addicote, a yeoman farmer and a good hunting man, but a rare obstinate one, now learning his lesson from her ladyship, was in dispute with her over rights of property on a stretch of fir-trees lining the ridge where the estates of Olmer and Addicotes met. Her ladyship had sworn that if he did not yield to her claim she would cut down every tree of the ridge and sell the lot for timber under his nose. She acted according to her oath, in the teeth of his men two feet across the border. All the world knew the roots of those trees were for the most part in Olmer soil, though Addicote shared the shade. All the people about mourned for the felling of those trees. All blamed Mr. Gilbert Addicote for provoking her ladyship, good hunting man though he was. But as to the merits of the question, under the magnifier of the gentlemen of the law, there were as many different opinions as wigs in the land.

‘And your opinion?’ said Weyburn.

To which the young groom answered: ’Oh, I don’t form an opinion, sir. I ’m of my mistress’s opinion; and if she says, Do it, think as we like, done it has to be.’

Lady Charlotte came at a trot through the gate, to supervise the limbering-up of another felled tree. She headed it as before. The log dragged bounding and twirling, rattling its chains; the crowd along the ridge, forbidden to cheer, watching it with intense repression of the roar. We have not often in England sight of a great lady challengeing an unpopular man to battle and smacking him in the face like this to provoke him. Weyburn was driven on a half-circle of the lane to the gate, where he jumped out to greet Lady Charlotte trotting back for another smack in the face of her enemy,—a third rounding of her Troy with the vanquished dead at her heels, as Weyburn let a flimsy suggestion beguile his fancy, until the Homeric was overwhelming even to a playful mind, and he put her in a mediaeval frame. She really had the heroical aspect in a grandiose-grotesque, fitted to some lines of Ariosto. Her head wore a close hood, disclosing a fringe of grey locks, owlish to see about features hooked for action.

Page 3818

‘Ah, you! there you are: good—I’ll join you in three minutes,’ she sang out to him, and cantered to the ridge.

Hardly beyond the stated number she was beside him again, ranging her steed for the victim log to dance a gyration on its branches across the lane and enter a field among the fallen compeers. One of her men had run behind her. She slid from her saddle and tossed him the reins, catching up her skirts.

‘That means war, as much as they’ll have it in England,’ she said, seeing his glance at the logs. ’My husband’s wise enough to leave it to me, so I save him trouble with neighbours. An ass of a Mr. Gilbert Addicote dares us to make good our claim on our property, our timber, because half a score of fir-tree roots go stretching on to his ground.’

She swished her whip. Mr. Gilbert Addicote received the stroke and retired, a buried subject. They walked on at an even pace. ’You ’ll see Leo to-morrow. He worships you. You may as well give him a couple of hours’ coaching a day for the week. He’ll be hanging about you, and you won’t escape him. Well, and my brother Rowsley: how is Lord Ormont? He never comes to me now, since—Well, it ’s nothing to me; but I like to see my brother. She can’t make any change here. Olmer and Lady Charlotte ’s bosom were both implied. ’What do you think?—you ’ve noticed: is he in good health? It ’s the last thing he ‘ll be got to speak of.’

Weyburn gave the proper assurances.

‘Not he!’ said she. ’He’s never ill. Men beat women in the long race, if they haven’t overdone it when young. My doctor wants me to renounce the saddle. He says it ’s time. Not if I ‘ve got work for horseback!’ she nicked her head emphatically: ’I hate old age. They sha’nt dismount me till a blow comes. Hate it! But I should despise myself if I showed signs, like a worm under heel. Let Nature do her worst; she can’t conquer us as long as we keep up heart. You won’t have to think of that for a good time yet. Now tell me why Lord Ormont didn’t publish the “Plan for the Defence” you said he was writing; and he was, I know. He wrote it and he finished it; you made the fair copy. Well, and he read it,—there! see!’ She took the invisible sheets in her hands and tore them. ’That’s my brother. He’s so proud. It would have looked like asking the country, that injured him, to forgive him. I wish it had been printed. But whatever he does I admire. That—she might have advised, if she ’d been a woman of public spirit or cared for his reputation. He never comes near me. Did she read your copy?’

The question was meant for an answer.

Weyburn replied: ‘Lady Ormont had no sight of it.’

’Ah! she’s Lady Ormont to the servants, I know. She has an aunt living in the house. If my brother’s a sinner, and there’s punishment for him, he has it from that aunt. Pag . . . something. He bears with her. He ’s a Spartan. She ’s his pack on his back, for what she covers and the game he plays. It looks just tolerably decent with her in the house. She goes gabbling a story about our Embassy at Madrid. To preserve propriety, as they call it. Her niece doesn’t stoop to any of those tricks, I ’m told. I like her for that.’

Page 3819

Weyburn was roused: 'I think you would like Lady Ormont, if you knew her, my lady.'

'The chances of my liking the young woman are not in the dice-box. You call her Lady Ormont: you are not one of the servants. Don't call her Lady Ormont to me.'

'It is her title, Lady Charlotte.' She let fly a broadside at him.

'You are one of the woman's dupes. I thought you had brains. How can you be the donkey not to see that my brother Rowsley, Lord Ormont, would never let a woman, lawfully bearing his name, go running the quadrille over London in couples with a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, Lord Adderwood, and that man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped—tell me why? Pooh, you must be the poorest fool born to suppose it possible my brother would allow a man like that man Morsfield to take his wife's name in his mouth a second time. Have you talked much with this young person?'

'With Lady Ormont? I have had the honour occasionally.'

'Stick to the title and write yourself plush-breech. Can't you be more than a footman? Try to be a man of the world; you're old enough for that by now. I know she 's good-looking; the whole tale hangs on that. You needn't be singing me mooncalf hymn tunes of "Lady Ormont, Lady Ormont," solemn as a parson's clerk; the young woman brought good looks to market; and she got the exchange she had a right to expect. But it 's not my brother Rowsley's title she has got—except for footmen and tradesmen. When there's a true Countess of Ormont!..... Unless my brother has cut himself from his family. Not he. He's not mad.'

They passed through Olmer park-gates. Lady Charlotte preceded him, and she turned, waiting for him to rejoin her. He had taken his flagellation in the right style, neither abashed nor at sham crow: he was easy, ready to converse on any topic; he kept the line between supple courtier and sturdy independent; and he was a pleasant figure of a young fellow. Thinking which, a reminder that she liked him drew her by the road of personal feeling, as usual with her, to reflect upon another, and a younger, woman's observing and necessarily liking him too.

'You say you fancy I should like the person you call Lady Ormont?'

'I believe you would, my lady.'

'Are her manners agreeable?'

'Perfect; no pretension.'

'Ah! she sings, plays—all that?

‘She plays the harp and sings.’

‘You have heard her?’

‘Twice.’

‘She didn’t set you mewing?’

‘I don’t remember the impulse; at all events, it was restrained.’

’She would me; but I’m an old woman. I detest their squalling and strumming. I can stand it with Italians on the boards: they don’t, stop conversation. She was present at that fencing match where you plucked a laurel? I had an account of it. I can’t see the use of fencing in this country. Younger women can, I dare say. Now, look. If we’re to speak of her, I can’t call her Lady Ormont, and I don’t want to hear you. Give me her Christian name.’

Page 3820

‘It is’—Weyburn found himself on a slope without a stay—’Aminta.’

Lady Charlotte’s eye was on him. He felt intolerably hot; his vexation at the betrayal of the senseless feeling made it worse, a conscious crimson.

‘Aminta,’ said she, rather in the style of Cuper’s boys, when the name was a strange one to them. ’I remember my Italian master reading out a poem when I was a girl. I read poetry then. You wouldn’t have imagined that. I did, and liked it. I hate old age. It changes you so. None of my children know me as I was when I had life in me and was myself, and my brother Rowsley called me Cooey. They think me a hard old woman. I was Cooey through the woods and over the meadows and down stream to Rowsley. Old age is a prison wall between us and young people. They see a miniature head and bust, and think it a flattery—won’t believe it. After I married I came to understand that the world we are in is a world to fight in, or under we go. But I pity the young who have to cast themselves off and take up arms. Young women above all.’

Why had she no pity for Aminta? Weyburn asked it of his feelings, and he had the customary insurgent reply from them.

‘You haven’t seen Steignton yet,’ she continued. ’No place on earth is equal to Steignton for me. It ’s got the charm. Here at Olmer I’m a mother and a grandmother —the “devil of an old-woman” my neighbours take me to be. She hasn’t been to Steignton, either. No, and won’t go there, though she’s working her way round, she supposes. He’ll do everything for his “Aminta,” but he won’t take her to Steignton. I’m told now she’s won Lady de Culme. That Mrs. Lawrence Finchley has dropped the curtsey to her great-aunt and sworn to be a good girl, for a change, if Lady de Culme will do the chaperon, and force Lord Ormont’s hand. My brother shrugs. There’ll be a nice explosion one day soon. Presented? The Court won’t have her. That I know for positive. If she’s pushed forward, she ’ll be bitterly snubbed. It ’s on the heads of those women—silly women! I can’t see the game Mrs. Lawrence Finchley’s playing. She’d play for fun. If they’d come to me, I ’d tell them I ’ve proof she ’s not the Countess of Ormont: positive proof. You look? I have it. I hold something; and not before,—(he may take his Aminta to Steignton, he may let her be presented, she may wear his name publicly, I say he’s laughing at them, snapping his fingers at them louder and louder the more they seem to be pushing him into a corner, until—I know my brother Rowsley!—-and, poor dear fellow! a man like that, the best cavalry general England ever had:—-they’ll remember it when there comes a cry for a general from India: that’s the way with the English; only their necessities teach them to be just!)—he to be reduced to be out-manoeuvring a swarm of women,—I tell them, not before my brother Rowsley comes to me for what he handed to my care and I keep safe for him, will I believe he has made or means to make his Aminta Countess of Ormont.’

Page 3821

They were at the steps of the house. Turning to Weyburn there, the inexhaustible Lady Charlotte remarked that their conversation had given her pleasure. Leo was hanging on to one of his hands the next minute. A small girl took the other. Philippa and Beatrice were banished damsels.

Lady Charlotte's breath had withered the aspect of Aminta's fortunes. Weyburn could forgive her, for he was beginning to understand her. He could not pardon 'her brother Rowsley,' who loomed in his mind incomprehensible, and therefore black. Once he had thought the great General a great man. He now regarded him as a mere soldier, a soured veteran; socially as a masker and a trifler, virtually a callous angler playing his cleverly-hooked fish for pastime.

What could be the meaning of Lady Charlotte's 'that, man Morsfield, who boasts of your Lady Ormont, and does it unwhipped'?

Weyburn stopped his questioning, with the reflection that he had no right to recollect her words thus accurately. The words, however, stamped Morsfield's doings and sayings and postures in the presence of Aminta with significance. When the ladies were looking on at the fencers, Morsfield's perfect coxcombry had been noticeable. He knew the art of airing a fine figure. Mrs. Lawrence Finchley had spoken of it, and Aminta had acquiesced; in the gravely simple manner of women who may be thinking of it much more intently than the vivacious prattler. Aminta confessed to an admiration of masculine physical beauty; the picador, matador, of the Spanish ring called up an undisguised glow that English ladies show coldly when they condescend to let it be seen; as it were, a line or two of colour on the wintriest of skies. She might, after all, at heart be one of the leisured, jewelled, pretty-winged; the spending, never harvesting, world she claimed and sought to enter. And what a primitive world it was!—world of the glittering beast and the not too swiftly flying prey, the savage passions clothed in silk. Surely desire to belong to it writes us poor creatures. Mentally, she could hardly be maturer than the hero-worshipping girl in the procession of Miss Vincent's young seminarists. Probably so, but she carried magic. She was of the order of women who walk as the goddesses of old, bearing the gift divine. And, by the way, she had the step of the goddess. Weyburn repeated to himself the favourite familiar line expressive of the glorious walk, and accused Lord Ormont of being in cacophonous accordance with the perpetual wrong of circumstance, he her possessor, the sole person of her sphere insensible to the magic she bore! So ran his thought.

The young man chose to conceive that he thought abstractedly. He was, in truth, often casting about for the chances of his meeting on some fortunate day the predestined schoolmaster's wife: a lady altogether praiseworthy for carrying principles of sound government instead of magic. Consequently, susceptible to woman's graces though he knew himself to be, Lady Ormont's share of them hung in the abstract for him. His hopes were bent on an early escape to Switzerland and his life's work.

Page 3822

Lady Charlotte mounted to ride to the battle daily. She talked of her brother Rowsley, and of ‘Aminta,’ and provoked an advocacy of the Countess of Ormont, and trampled the pleas and defences to dust, much in the same tone as on the first day; sometimes showing a peep of sweet humaneness, like the ripe berry of a bramble, and at others rattling thunder at the wretch of a woman audacious enough to pretend to a part in her brother’s title.

Not that she had veneration for titles. She considered them a tinsel, and the devotee on his knee-caps to them a lump for a kick. Adding: ’Of course I stand for my class; and if we can’t have a manlier people—and it ’s not likely in a country treating my brother so badly—well, then, let things go on as they are.’ But it was the pretension to a part in the name of Ormont which so violently offended the democratic aristocrat, and caused her to resent it as an assault on the family honour, by ’a woman springing up out of nothing’—a woman of no distinctive birth.

She was rational in her fashion; or Weyburn could at least see where and how the reason in her took a twist. The Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey would not see it; he was, in charity to her ladyship, of a totally contrary opinion, he informed Weyburn. The laborious pastor and much-enduring Churchman met my lady’s apologist as he was having a swing of the legs down the lanes before breakfast, and he fell upon a series of complaints, which were introduced by a declaration that ‘he much feared’ her ladyship would have a heavy legal bill to pay for taking the law into her hands up at Addicotes.

Her ladyship might, if she pleased, he said, encourage her domestics and her husband’s tenants and farm-labourers to abandon the church for the chapel, and go, as she had done and threatened to do habitually, to the chapel herself; but to denounce the ritual of the Orthodox Church under the denomination of ‘barbarous,’ to say of the invoking supplications of the service, that they were—she had been heard to state it more or less publicly and repeatedly—suitable to abject ministers and throngs at the court of an Indian rajah, that he did not hesitate to term highly unbecoming in a lady of her station, subversive and unchristian. The personal burdens inflicted on him by her ladyship he prayed for patience to endure. He surprised Weyburn in speaking of Lady Charlotte as ‘educated and accomplished.’ She was rather more so than Weyburn knew, and more so than was common among the great ladies of her time.

Weyburn strongly advised the reverend gentleman on having it out with Lady Charlotte in a personal interview. He sketched the great lady’s combative character on a foundation of benevolence, and stressed her tolerance for open dealing, and the advantage gained by personal dealings with her—after a mauling or two. His language and his illustrations touched an old-school chord in the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey, who hummed over the project, profoundly disrelishing the introductory portion.

Page 3823

’Do me the honour to call and see me to-morrow, after breakfast, before her ladyship starts for the fray on Addicote heights,’ Weyburn said; ’and I will ask your permission to stand by you. Her bark is terrific, we know; and she can bite, but there’s no venom.’

Finally, on a heave of his chest, Mr. Hampton-Evey consented to call, in the interests of peace.

Weyburn had said it must be ’man to man with her, facing her and taking steps’; and, although the prospect was unpleasant to repulsiveness, it was a cheerful alternative beside Mr. Hampton-Evey’s experiences and anticipations of the malignant black power her ladyship could be when she was not faced.

‘Let the man come,’ said Lady Charlotte. Her shoulders intimated readiness for him.

She told Weyburn he might be present—insisted to have him present. During the day Weyburn managed to slide in observations on the favourable reports of Mr. Hampton-Evey’s work among the poor—emollient doses that irritated her to fret and paw, as at a checking of her onset.

In the afternoon the last disputed tree on the Addicotes’ ridge was felled and laid on Olmer ground. Riding with Weyburn and the joyful Leo, she encountered Mr. Eglett and called out the news. He remarked, in the tone of philosophy proper to a placable country gentleman obedient to government on foreign affairs: ’Now for the next act. But no more horseback now, mind!’

She muttered of not recollecting a promise. He repeated the interdict. Weyburn could fancy seeing her lips form words of how she hated old age.

He had been four days at Olmer, always facing her, ‘man to man,’ in the matter of Lady Ormont, not making way at all, but holding firm, and winning respectful treatment. They sat alone in her private room, where, without prelude, she discharged a fiery squib at impudent hussies caught up to the saddle-bow of a hero for just a canter, and pretending to a permanent seat beside him.

’You have only to see Lady Ormont; you will admit the justice of her claim, my lady,’ said he; and as evidently he wanted a fight, she let him have it.

’You try to provoke me; you take liberties. You may call the woman Aminta, I’ve told you; you insult me when you call the woman by my family name.’

‘Pardon me, my lady: I have no right to call Lady Ormont Aminta.’

‘You’ve never done so, eh? Say!’

She had him at the edge of the precipice. He escaped by saying, 'Her Christian name was asked the other day, and I mentioned it. She is addressed by me as Lady Ormont.'

'And by her groom and her footman. They all do; it 's the indemnity to that class of young woman. Her linendraper is Lady-Ormonting as you do. I took you for a gentleman. Let me hear you give her that title again, you shall hear her true one, that the world fits her with, from me.'

The time was near the half-hour bell before dinner, the situation between them that of the fall of the breath to fetch words electrical. She left it to him to begin the fight, and was not sorry that she had pricked him for it.

Page 3824

A footman entered the room, bearer of a missive for Mr. Weyburn. Lord Ormont's groom had brought it from London.

'Send in the man,' said Lady Charlotte.

Weyburn read

'The Countess of Ormont begs Mr. Weyburn to return instantly. There has been an accident in his home. It may not be very serious. An arm—a shock to the system from a fall. Messenger informs her, fear of internal hemorrhage. Best doctors in attendance.'

He handed Lady Charlotte the letter. She humped at the first line, flashed across the remainder, and in a lowered voice asked—

'Sister in the house?'

'My mother,' Weyburn said.

The groom appeared. He knew nothing. The Countess had given him orders to spare no expense on the road to Olmer, without a minute's delay. He had ridden and driven.

He looked worn. Lady Charlotte rang the bell for her butler. To him she said—

'See that this man has a good feed of meat, any pastry you have, and a bottle of port wine. He has earned a pipe of tobacco; make up a bed for him. Despatch at once any one of the stable-boys to Loughton—the Dolphin. Mr. Leeman there will have a chariot, fly, gig, anything, ready-horsed in three hours from now. See Empson yourself; he will put my stepper Mab to the light trap; no delay. Have his feed at Loughton. Tell Mrs. Maples to send up now, here, a tray, whatever she has, within five minutes—not later. A bottle of the Peace of Amiens Chambertin—Mr. Eglett's. You understand. Mrs. Maples will pack a basket for the journey; she will judge. Add a bottle of the Waterloo Bordeaux. Wait: a dozen of Mr. Eglett's cigars. Brisk with all the orders. Go.'

She turned to Weyburn. 'You pack your portmanteau faster than a servant will do it.'

He ran up-stairs.

She was beside the tray to welcome and inspirit his eating, and she performed the busy butler's duty in pouring out wine for him. It was a toned old Burgundy, happy in the year of its birth, the grandest of instruments to roll the gambol-march of the Dionysiaca through the blood of this frame and sound it to the spirit. She spoke no word of his cause for departure. He drank, and he felt what earth can do to cheer one of her stricken children and strengthen the beat of a heart with a dread like a shot in it.

She, while he flew supporting the body of his most beloved to the sun of Life in brighter hope, reckoned the stages of his journey.

'Leeman at Loughton will post you through the night to Mersley. Wherever you bait, it is made known that you come from Olmer, and are one of us. That passes you on up to London. Where can Lord Ormont be now?'

'In Paris.'

'Still in Paris? He leaves her. She did well to send as she did. You will not pay for the posting along the road.'

'I will pay for myself—I have a 'purse,' Weyburn said; and continued, 'Oh, my lady; there is Mr. Hampton-Evey to-morrow morning: I promised to stand by him.'

Page 3825

‘I’ll explain,’ said Lady Charlotte. ’He shall not miss you. If he strips the parson and comes as a man and a servant of the poor, he has nothing to fear. You’ve done? The night before my brother Rowsley’s first duel I sat with him at supper and poured his wine out, and knew what was going to happen, didn’t say a word. No use in talking about feelings. Besides, death is only the other side of the ditch, and one or other of us must go foremost. Now then, good-bye. Empson’s waiting by this time. Mr. Eglett and Leo shall hear the excuses from me. Think of anything you may want, while I count ten.’

She held his hand. He wanted her to be friendly to Lady Ormont, but could not vex her at the last moment, touched as he was by her practical kindness.

She pressed his hand and let it go.

CHAPTER XIV

OLD LOVERS NEW FRIENDS

The cottage inhabited by Weyburn’s mother was on the southern hills over London. He reached it late in the afternoon. His mother’s old servant, Martha, spied the roadway at the gate of the small square of garden. Her steady look without welcome told him the scene he would meet beyond the door, and was the dead in her eyes. He dropped from no height; he stood on a level with the blow. His apprehensions on the road had lowered him to meet it.

‘Too late, Martha?’

‘She’s in heaven, my dear.’

‘She is lying alone?’

’The London doctor left half an hour back. She’s gone. Slipped, and fell, coming from her room, all the way down. She prayed for grace to see her son. She ’ll watch over him, be sure. You ’ll not find it lone and cold. A lady sits with it—Lady Ormont, they call her—a very kind lady. My mistress liked her voice. Ever since news of the accident, up to ten at night; and never eats or drinks more than a poor tiny bit of bread-and-butter, with a teacup.’

’Weyburn went up-stairs.

Aminta sat close to the bedside in a darkened room. They greeted silently. He saw the white shell of the life that had flown; he took his mother’s hand and kissed it, and knelt, clasping it.

Fear of disturbing his prayer kept Aminta seated. Death was a stranger to him. The still warm, half-cold, nerveless hand smote the fact of things as they were through the prayer for things as we would have them. The vitality of his prayer was the sole light he had. It drew sustainment from the dead hand in his grasp, and cowered down to the earth claiming all we touch. He tried to summon vision of a soaring spirituality; he could not; his understanding and senses were too stricken. He prayed on. His prayer was as a little fountain, not rising high out of earth, and in the clutch of death; but its being it had from death, his love gave it food.

Page 3826

Prayer is power within us to communicate with the desired beyond our thirsts. The goodness of the dear good mother gone was in him for assurance of a breast of goodness to receive her, whatever the nature of the eternal secret may be. The good life gone lives on in the mind; the bad has but a life in the body, and that not lasting,—it extends, dispreads, it worms away, it perishes. Need we more to bid the mind perceive through obstructive flesh the God who reigns, a devil vanquished? Be certain that it is the pure mind we set to perceive. The God discerned in thought is another than he of the senses. And let the prayer be as a little fountain. Rising on a spout, from dread of the hollow below, the prayer may be prolonged in words begetting words, and have a pulse of fervour: the spirit of it has fallen after the first jet. That is the delirious energy of our craving, which has no life in our souls. We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is befit to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations.

Weyburn still knelt. He was warned to quit the formal posture of an exhausted act by the thought, that he had come to reflect upon how he might be useful to his boys in a like calamity.

Having risen, he became aware, that for some time of his kneeling Aminta's hand had been on his head, and they had raised their souls in unison. It was a soul's link. They gazed together on the calm, rapt features. They passed from the room.

'I cannot thank you,' he said.

'Oh no; I have the reason for gratitude,' said she. 'I have learnt to know and love her, and hope I may imitate when my time is near.'

"She . . . . at the last?'

'Peacefully; no pain. The breath had not left her very long before you came.'

'I said I cannot; but I must—

'Do not.'

'Not in speech, then.'

They went into the tasteful little sitting-room below, where the stillness closed upon them as a consciousness of loss.

'You have comforted her each day,' he said.

'It has been my one happiness.'

'I could not wish for better than for her to have known you.'

’Say that for me. I have gained. She left her last words for you with me. They were love, love . . . pride in her son: thanks to God for having been thought worthy to give him birth.’

‘She was one of the noble women of earth.’

’She was your mother. Let me not speak any more. I think I will now go. I am rarely given to these—’

The big drops were falling.

‘You have not ordered your carriage?’

‘It brings me here. I find my way home.’

‘Alone?’

‘I like the independence.’

‘At night, too!’

’Nothing harmed me. Now it is daylight. A letter arrived for you from High Brent this morning. I forgot to bring it. Yesterday two of your pupils called here. Martha saw them.’

Page 3827

Her naming of the old servant familiarly melted him. 'You will not bear to hear praise or thanks.'

'If I deserved them. I should like you to call on Dr. Buxton; he will tell you more than we can. He drove with me the first day, after I had sent you the local doctor's report. I had it from the messenger, his assistant.'

Weyburn knew Dr. Buxton's address. He begged her to stay and take some nourishment; ventured a remark on her wasted look.

'It is poor fare in cottages.'

'I have been feeding on better than bread and meat,' she said.' I should have eaten if I had felt appetite. My looks will recover, such as they are. I hope I have grown out of them; they are a large part of the bondage of women. You would like to see me safe into some conveyance. Go up-stairs for a few minutes; I will wait here.'

He obeyed her. Passing from the living to the dead, from the dead to the living, they were united in his heart.

Her brevity of tone, and her speech, so practical upon a point of need, under a crisis of distress, reminded him of Lady Charlotte at the time of the groom's arrival with her letter.

Aminta was in no hurry to drive. She liked walking and looking down on London, she said.

'My friend and schoolmate, Selina Collett, comes to me at Whitsuntide. We have taken a house on the Upper Thames, above Marlow. You will come and see us, if you can be persuaded to leave your boys. We have a boathouse, and a bathing-plank for divers. The stream is quiet there between rich meadows. It seems to flow as if it thought. I am not poetical; I tell you only my impression. You shall be a great deal by yourself, as men prefer to be.'

'As men are forced to be—I beg!' said he. 'Division is against my theories.'

'We might help, if we understood one another, I have often fancied. I know something of your theories. I should much like to hear you some day on the scheme of the school in Switzerland, and also on the schoolmaster's profession. She whom we have lost was full of it, and spoke of it to me as much as her weakness would permit. The subject seemed to give her strength.'

'She has always encouraged me,' said Weyburn.' I have lost her, but I shall feel that she is not absent. She had ideas of her own about men and women.'

‘Some she mentioned.’

‘And about marriage?’

‘That too.’

Aminta shook herself out of a sudden stupor.

’Her mind was very clear up to the last hour upon all the subjects interesting her son. She at one time regretted his not being a soldier, for the sake of his father’s memory. Then she learned to think he could do more for the world as the schoolmaster. She said you can persuade.’

’We had our talks. She would have the reason, if she was to be won. I like no other kind of persuasion.’

’I long to talk over the future school with you. That is, to hear your plans.’

Page 3828

They were at the foot of the hill, in view of an inn announcing livery stables. She wished to walk the whole distance. He shook his head.

The fly was ready for her soon, and he begged to see her safe home. She refused, after taking her seat, but said: 'At any other time. We are old friends. You will really go through the ceremony of consulting me about the school?'

He replied: 'I am honoured.'

'Ah, not to me,' said Aminta. 'We will be the friends we—You will not be formal with me?—not from this day?'

She put out her hand. He took it gently. The dead who had drawn them together withheld a pressure. Holding the hand, he said: 'I shall crave leave of absence for some days.'

'I shall see you on the day,' said she. 'If it is your desire: I will send word.'

'We both mourn at heart. We should be in company. Adieu.'

Their hands fell apart. They looked. The old school time was in each mind. They saw it as a shore-bank in grey outline across morning mist. Years were between; and there was a division of circumstance, more repelling than an abyss or the rush of deep wild waters.

Neither of them had regrets. Under their cloud, and with the grief they shared, they were as happy as two could be in recovering one another as friends.

On the day of the funeral Aminta drove to the spot where they had parted—she walked to the churchyard.

She followed the coffin to its gravel-heap, wishing neither to see nor be seen, only that she might be so far attached to the remains of the dead; and the sense of blessedness she had in her bowed simplicity of feeling was as if the sainted dead had cleansed and anointed her.

When the sods had been cast on, the last word spoken, she walked her way back, happy in being alone, unnoticed. She was grateful to the chief mourner for letting her go as she had come. That helped her to her sense of purification, the haven out of the passions, hardly less quiet than the repose into which the dear dead woman, his mother, had entered.

London lay beneath her. The might of the great hive hummed at the verge of her haven of peace without disturbing. There she had been what none had known of her: an ambitious girl, modest merely for lack of intrepidity; paralyzed by her masterful lord;

aiming her highest at a gilt weathercock; and a disappointed creature, her breast a home of serpents; never herself. She thought and hoped she was herself now. Alarm lest this might be another of her moods, victim of moods as she had latterly been, was a shadow armed with a dart playing round her to find the weak spot. It sprang from her acknowledged weakness of nature; and she cast about for how to keep it outside her and lean on a true though a small internal support. She struck at her desires, to sound them.

Page 3829

They were yesterday for love; partly for distinction, for a woman having beauty to shine in the sphere of beauty; but chiefly to love and be loved, therefore to live. She had yesterday read letters of a man who broke a music from the word—about as much music as there is in a tuning—fork, yet it rang and lingered; and he was not the magical musician. Now those letters were as dust of the road. The sphere of beauty was a glass lamp-globe for delirious moths. She had changed. Belief in the real change gave her full view of the compliant coward she had been.

Her heart assured her she had natural courage. She felt that it could be stubborn to resist a softness. Now she cared no more for the hackneyed musical word; friendship was her desire. If it is not life's poetry, it is a credible prose; a land of low undulations instead of Alps; beyond the terrors and the deceptions. And she could trust her friend: he who was a singular constancy. His mother had told her of his preserving letters of a girl he loved when at school; and of his journeys to an empty house at Dover. That was past; but, as the boy, so the man would be in sincerity of feeling trustworthy to the uttermost.

She mused on the friend. He was brave. She had seen how he took his blow, and sorrow as a sister, conquering emotion. It was not to be expected of him by one who knew him when at school. Had he faults? He must have faults. She, curiously, could see none. After consenting to his career as a schoolmaster, and seeing nothing ludicrous in it, she endowed him with the young school-hero's reputation, beheld him with the eyes of the girl who had loved him—and burnt his old letters!—bitterly regretted that she burnt his letters!—and who had applauded his contempt of ushers and master opposing his individual will and the thing he thought it right to do.

Musing thus, she turned a corner, on a sudden, in her mind, and ran against a mirror, wherein a small figure running up to meet her, grew large and nodded, with the laugh and eyes of Browny. So little had she changed! The stedfast experienced woman rebuked that volatile, and some might say, faithless girl. But the girl had her answer: she declared they were one and the same, affirmed that the years between were a bad night's dream, that her heart had been faithful, that he who conjures visions of romance in a young girl's bosom must always have her heart, as a crisis will reveal it to her. She had the volubility of the mettled Browny of old, and was lectured. When she insisted on shouting 'Matey! Matey!' she was angrily spurned and silenced.

Aminta ceased to recline in her carriage. An idea that an indolent posture fostered vapourish meditations, counselled her sitting rigidly upright and interestedly observing the cottages and merry gutter-children along the squat straight streets of a London suburb. Her dominant ultimate thought was, 'I, too, can work!' Like her courage, the plea of a capacity to work appealed for confirmation to the belief which exists without demonstrated example; and as she refrained from probing to the inner sources of that mental outcry, it was allowed to stand and remain among the convictions we store—-wherewith to shape our destinies.

Page 3830

Childishly indeed, quite witlessly, she fell into a trick of repeating the name of Matthew Weyburn in her breast and on her lips, after the manner of Isabella Lawrence Finchley, when she had inquired for his Christian name, and went on murmuring it, as if sucking a new bonbon, with the remark: 'It sounds nice, it suits the mouth.' Little Selina Collett had told, Aminta remembered, how those funny boys at Cuper's could not at first get the name 'Aminta' to suit the mouth, but went about making hideous faces in uttering it. She smiled at the recollection, and thought, up to a movement of her lips, one is not tempted to do that in saying Matthew Weyburn!

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING A SECRET FISHED WITHOUT ANGLING

That great couchant dragon of the devouring jaws and the withering breath, known as our London world, was in expectation of an excitement above yawns on the subject of a beautiful Lady Doubtful proposing herself, through a group of infatuated influential friends, to a decorous Court, as one among the ladies acceptable. The popular version of it sharpened the sauce by mingling romance and cynicism very happily; for the numerous cooks, when out of the kitchen, will furnish a piquant dish. Thus, a jewel-eyed girl of half English origin (a wounded British officer is amiably nursed in a castle near the famous Peninsula battlefield, *etc*.), running wild down the streets of Seville, is picked up by Lord Ormont, made to discard her tambourine, brought over to our shores, and allowed the decoration of his name, without the legitimate adornment of his title. Discontented with her position after a time, she now pushes boldly to claim the place which will be most effective in serving her as a bath. She has, by general consent, beauty; she must, seeing that she counts influential friends, have witchery. Those who have seen her riding and driving beside her lord, speak of Andalusian grace, Oriental lustre, fit qualification for the fair slave of a notoriously susceptible old warrior.

She won a party in the widening gossip world; and enough of a party in the regent world to make a stream. Pretending to be the actual Countess of Ormont, though not publicly acknowledged as his countess by the earl, she had on her side the strenuous few who knew and liked her, some who were pleased compassionately to patronize, all idle admirers of a shadowed beautiful woman at bay, the devotees of any beauty in distress, and such as had seen, such as imagined they had seen, such as could paint a mental picture of a lady of imposing stature, persuasive appearance, pathetic history, and pronounce her to be unjustly treated, with a general belief that she was visible and breathing. She had the ready enthusiasts, the responsive sentimentalists, and an honest active minor number, of whom not every one could be declared perfectly unspotted in public estimation, however innocent under verdict of the courts of law.

Page 3831

Against her was the livid cloud-bank over a flowery field, that has not yet spoken audible thunder: the terrible aggregate social woman, of man's creation, hated by him, dreaded, scorned, satirized, and nevertheless, upheld, esteemed, applauded: a mark of civilization, on to which our human society must hold as long as we have nothing humaner. She exhibits virtue, with face of waxen angel, with paw of desert beast, and blood of victims on it. Her fold is a genial climate and the material pleasures for the world's sheepy: worshipping herself, she claims the sanctification of a performed religion. She is gentle when unassailed, going her way serenely, with her malady in the blood. When the skin bears witness to it, she swallows an apothecary, and there is a short convulsion. She is refreshed by cutting off diseased inferior members: the superior betraying foul symptoms, she covers up and retains; rationally, too, for they minister to her present existence, and she lives all in the present. Her subjects are the mixed Subservient; among her rebellious are earth's advanced, who have cold a morning on their foreheads, and these would not dethrone her, they would but shame and purify by other methods than the druggist. She loves nothing. Undoubtedly, she dislikes the vicious. On that merit she subsists.

The vexatious thing in speaking of her is, that she compels to the use of the rhetorician's brass instrument. As she is one of the Powers giving life and death, one may be excused. This tremendous queen of the congregation has brought discredit on her sex for the scourge laid on quivering female flesh, and for the flippant indifference shown to misery and to fine distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad; and particularly for the undiscriminating hardness upon the starved of women. We forget her having been conceived in the fear of men, shaped to gratify them. She is their fiction of the state they would fain beguile themselves to suppose her sex has reached, for their benefit; where she may be queen of it in a corner, certain of a loyal support, if she will only give men her half-the-world's assistance to uplift the fabric comfortable to them; together with assurance of paternity, case of mind in absence, exclusive possession, enormous and minutest, *etc*.; not by any means omitting a regimental orderliness, from which men are privately exempt, because they are men, or because they are grown boys—the brisker at lessons after a vacation or a truancy, says the fiction.

In those days the world had oscillated, under higher leading than its royal laxity, to rigidity. Tiny peccadilloes were no longer matter of jest, and the sinner exposed stood 'sola' to receive the brand. A beautiful Lady Doubtful needed her husband's countenance if she was to take one of the permanent steps in public places. The party of Lady Charlotte Eglett called on the livid cloud-bank aforesaid to discharge celestial bolts and sulphur

Page 3832

oil on the head of an impudent, underbred, ambitious young slut, whose arts had bewitched a distinguished nobleman not young in years at least, and ensnared the remainder wits of some principal ancient ladies of the land. Professional Puritans, born conservatives, malicious tattlers, made up a goodly tail to Lady Charlotte's party. The epithet 'unbred' was accredited upon the quoted sayings and doings of the pretentious young person's aunt, repeated abroad by noblemen and gentlemen present when she committed herself; and the same were absurd. They carried a laugh, and so they lived and circulated. Lord Ormont submitted to the infliction of that horrid female in his household! It was no wonder he stopped short of allying himself with the family.

Nor was it a wonder that the naturally enamoured old warrior or invalided Mars (for she had the gift of beauty) should deem it prudent to be out of England when she and her crazy friends determined on the audacious move. Or put it the other way—for it is just as confounding right side or left—she and her friends take advantage of his absence to make the clever push for an establishment, and socially force him to legalize their union on his return. The deeds of the preceding reign had bequeathed a sort of legendary credence to the wildest tales gossip could invent under a demurrer.

But there was the fact, the earl was away. Lady Charlotte's party buzzed everywhere. Her ladyship had come to town to head it. Her ladyship laid trains of powder from dinner-parties, balls, routs, park-processions, into the Lord Chamberlain's ear, and fired and exploded them, deafening the grand official. Do you consider that virulent Pagan Goddesses and the flying torch-furies are extinct? Error of Christians! We have relinquished the old names and have no new ones for them; but they are here, inextinguishable, threading the day and night air with their dire squib-trail, if we would but see. Hissing they go, and we do not hear. We feel the effects.

Upon the counsel of Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta sent a letter to Lord Ormont at his hotel in Paris, informing him of the position of affairs. He had delayed his return, and there had been none of his brief communications.

She wrote, as she knew, as she felt, coldly. She was guided by others, and her name was up before the world, owing to some half-remembered impulsion of past wishes, but her heart was numbed; she was not a woman to have a wish without a beat of the heart in it. For her name she had a feeling, to be likened rather to the losing gambler's contemplation of a big stake he has flung, and sees it gone while fortune is undecided; and he catches at a philosophy nothing other than his hug of a modest little background pleasure, that he has always preferred to this accursed bad habit of gambling with the luck against him. Reckless in the cast, she was reckless of success.

Her letter was unanswered.

Page 3833

Then, and day by day more strongly, she felt for her name. She put a false heart into it. She called herself to her hearing the Countess of Ormont, and deigned to consult the most foolish friend she could have chosen—her aunt; and even listened to her advice, that she should run about knocking at all the doors open to her, and state her case against the earl. It seemed the course to take, the moment for taking it. Was she not asked if she could now at last show she had pride? Her pride ran stinging through her veins, like a band of freed prisoners who head the rout to fire a city. She charged her lord with having designedly—oh! cunningly indeed left her to be the prey of her enemies at the hour when he knew it behoved him to be her great defender. There had been no disguise of the things in progress: they had been spoken of allusively, quite comprehensibly, after the fashion common with two entertaining a secret semi-hostility on a particular subject; one of them being the creature that blushes and is educated to be delicate, reserved, and timorous. He was not ignorant, and he had left her, and he would not reply to her letter!

So fell was her mood, that an endeavour to conjure up the scene of her sitting beside the death-bed of Matthew Weyburn's mother, failed to sober and smooth it, holy though that time was. The false heart she had put into the pride of her name was powerfuller than the heart in her bosom. But to what end had the true heart counselled her of late? It had been a home of humours and languors, an impotent insurgent, the sapper of her character; and as we see in certain disorderly States a curative incendiarism usurp the functions of the sluggish citizen, and the work of re-establishment done by destruction, in peril of a total extinction, Aminta's feverish anger on behalf of her name went a stretch to vivify and give her dulled character a novel edge. She said good-bye to cowardice. 'I have no husband to defend me—I must do it for myself.' The peril of a too complete exercise of independence was just intimated to her perceptions. On whom the blame? And let the motively guilty go mourn over consequences! That Institution of Marriage was eyed. Is it not a halting step to happiness? It is the step of a cripple,—-and one leg or the other poses for the feebler sex,—small is the matter which! And is happiness our cry? Our cry is rather for circumstance and occasion to use our functions, and the conditions are denied to women by Marriage—denied to the luckless of women, who are many, very many: denied to Aminta, calling herself Countess of Ormont, for one, denied to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley for another, and in a base bad manner. She had defended her good name triumphantly, only to enslave herself for life or snatch at the liberty which besmirches.

Page 3834

Reviewing Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta's real heart pressed forward at the beat, in tender pity of the woman for whom a yielding to love was to sin; and unwomanly is the woman who does not love: men will say it. Aminta found herself phrasing. 'Why was she unable to love her husband?—he is not old.' She hurried in flight from the remark to confidences imparted by other ladies, showing strange veins in an earthy world; after which, her mind was bent to rebuke Mrs. Pagnell for the silly soul's perpetual allusions to Lord Ormont's age. She did not think of his age. But she was vividly thinking that she was young. Young, married, loveless, cramped in her energies, publicly dishonoured—a Lady Doubtful, courting one friend whom she liked among women, one friend whom she respected among men; that was the sketch of her.

That was in truth the outline, as much as Aminta dared sketch of herself without dragging her down lower than her trained instinct would bear to look. Our civilization shuns nature; and most shuns it in the most artificially civilized, to suit the market. They, however, are always close to their mother nature, beneath their second nature's mask of custom; and Aminta's unconscious concluding touch to the sketch: 'My husband might have helped me to a footing in Society,' would complete it as a coloured picture, if writ in tones.

She said it, and for the footing in Society she had lost her taste.

Mrs. Lawrence brought the final word from high quarters: that the application must be deferred until Lord Ormont returned to town. It was known before, that such would be the decision. She had it from the eminent official himself, and she kicked about the room, setting her pretty mouth and nose to pout and sniff, exactly like a boy whose chum has been mishandled by a bully.

'Your dear good man is too much for us. I thought we should drive him. 'C'est un ruse homme de guerre.' I like him, but I could slap him. He stops the way. Upon my word, he seems tolerably careless of his treasure. Does he suppose Mrs. Paggy is a protection? Do you know she's devoted to that man Morsfield? He listens to her stories. To judge by what he shouts aloud, he intends carrying you off the first opportunity, divorcing, and installing you in Cobeck Hall. All he fears is, that your lord won't divorce. You should have seen him the other day; he marched up and down the room, smacking his head and crying out: "Legal measures or any weapons her husband pleases!" For he has come to believe that the lady would have been off with him long before, if her lord had no claim to the marital title. "It 's that husband I can't get over! that husband!" He reminded me, to the life, of Lawrence Finchley with a headache the morning after a supper, striding, with his hand on the shining middle of his head: "It's that Welsh rabbit! that Welsh rabbit!" He has a poor digestion, and he will eat cheese. The Welsh rabbit chased him into his bed. But listen to me, dear, about your Morsfield. I told you he was dangerous.'

Page 3835

‘He is not my Morsfield,’ said Aminta.

‘Beware of his having a tool in Paggy. He boasts of letters.’

‘Mine? Two: and written to request him to cease writing to me.’

’He stops at nothing. And, oh, my Simplicity! don’t you see you gave him a step in begging him to retire? Morsfield has lived a good deal among our neighbours, who expound the physiology of women. He anatomizes us; pulls us to pieces, puts us together, and then animates us with a breath of his “passion”—sincere upon every occasion, I don’t doubt. He spared me, although he saw I was engaged. Perhaps it was because I ’m of no definite colour. Or he thought I was not a receptacle for “passion.” And quite true,—Adder, the dear good fellow, has none. Or where should we be? On a Swiss Alp, in a chalet, he shooting chamois, and I milking cows, with ‘ah-ahio, ah-ahio,’ all day long, and a quarrel at night over curds and whey. Well, and that ’s a better old pensioner’s limp to his end for “passion” than the foreign hotel bell rung mightily, and one of the two discovered with a dagger in the breast, and the other a don’t-look lying on the pavement under the window. Yes, and that’s better than “passion” splitting and dispersing upon new adventures, from habit, with two sparks remaining of the fire.’

Aminta took Mrs. Lawrence’s hands. ‘Is it a lecture?’

She was kissed. ’Frothy gabble. I’m really near to “passion” when I embrace you. You’re the only one I could run away with; live with all alone, I believe. I wonder men can see you while that silly lord of yours is absent, and not begin Morsfielding. They’re virtuous if they resist. Paggy tells the world . . . well?’ Aminta had reddened.

‘What does my aunt tell the world?’

Mrs. Lawrence laid her smoothing hand absently on a frill of lace fichu above a sternly disciplined bosom at half-heave. ’I think I can judge now that you’re not much hurt by this wretched business of the presentation. The little service I could do was a moral lesson to me on the subject of deuce-may-care antecedents. My brother Tom, too, was always playing truant, as a boy. It ‘s in the blood.’

She seemed to be teasing, and Aminta cried: ’My aunt! Let me hear. She tells the world—?’

’Paggy? ah, yes. Only that she says the countess has an exalted opinion of Mr. Secretary’s handwriting—as witnessed by his fair copy of the Memoirs, of course.’

‘Poor woman! How can she talk such foolishness! I guessed it.’

’You wear a dark red rose when you’re guessing, ’ma mie,’—French for, my Aminta.’

’But consider, Isabella, Mr. Weyburn has just had the heaviest of losses. My aunt should spare mention of him.’

‘Matthew Weyburn! we both like the name.’ Mrs. Lawrence touched at her friend and gazed. ’I’ve seen it on certain evenings—crimson over an olive sky. What it forebodes, I can’t imagine; but it’s the end of a lovely day. They say it threatens rain, if it begins one. It ’s an ominous herald.’

Page 3836

‘You make me,’ said Aminta. ’I must redden if you keep looking at me so closely.’

’Now frown one little bit, please. I love to see you. I love to see a secret disclose itself ingenuously.’

‘But what secret, my dear?’ cried Aminta’s defence of her innocence; and she gave a short frown.

’Have no fear. Mr. Secretary is not the man to be Morsfielding. And he can enjoy his repast; a very good sign. But is he remaining long?’

‘He is going soon, I hear.’

’He’s a good boy. I could have taken to him myself, and not dreaded a worrying. There ’s this difference between you and me, though, my Aminta; one of us has the fireplace prepared for what’s-his-name—“passion.” Kiss me. How could you fancy you were going to have a woman for your friend and keep hidden from her any one of the secrets that blush! and with Paggy to aid! I am sure it means very little. Admiration for good handwriting is—’ a smile broke the sentence.

‘You’re astray, Isabella.’

‘Not I, dear, I’m too fond of you.’

‘You read what is not.’

‘What is not yet written, you mean.’

‘What never could be written.’

’I read what is in the blood, and comes out to me when I look. That lord of yours should take to study you as I have done ever since I fell in love with you. He ‘s not counselling himself well in keeping away.’

‘Now you speak wisely,’ said Aminta.

’Not a particle more wisely. And the reason is close at hand—see. You are young, you attract—how could it be otherwise?—and you have “passion” sleeping, and likely to wake with a spring whether roused or not. In my observation good-man t’other fellow—-the poet’s friend—is never long absent when the time is ripe—at least, not in places where we gather together. Well, one is a buckler against the other: I don’t say with lovely Amy May,—with an honourable woman. But Aminta can smell powder and grow more mettlesome. Who can look at you and be blind to passion sleeping! The sight of you makes me dream of it—me, a woman, cool as a wine-cellar or a well. So there’s to help you to know yourself and be on your guard. I know I’m not deceived, because I’ve

fallen in love with you, and no love can be without jealousy, so I have the needle in my breast, that points at any one who holds a bit of you. Kind of sympathetic needle to the magnet behind anything. You'll know it, if you don't now. I should have felt the thing without the aid of Paggy. So, then, imagine all my nonsense unsaid, and squeeze a drop or two of 'sirop de bon conseil' out of it, as if it were your own wise meditations.' The rest of Mrs. Lawrence's discourse was a swallow's wing skimming the city stream. She departed, and Aminta was left to beat at her heart and ask whether it had a secret.

But if there was one, the secret was out, and must have another name. It had been a secret for her until she heard her friend speak those pin-points that pricked her heart, and sent the blood coursing over her face, like a betrayal, so like as to resemble a burning confession.

Page 3837

But if this confessed the truth, she was the insanest of women. No woman could be surer that she had her wits. She had come to see things, previously mysteries, with surprising clearness. As, for example, that passion was part of her nature; therefore her very life, lying tranced. She certainly could not love without passion such an abandonment was the sole justification of love in a woman standing where she stood. And now for the first time she saw her exact position before the world; and she saw some way into her lord: saw that he nursed a wound, extracted balm from anything enabling him to show the world how he despised it, and undesigningly immolated her for the petty gratification.

It could not, in consequence, be the truth. To bear what she had borne she must be a passionless woman; and she was glad of her present safety in thinking it. Once it was absolutely true. She swam away to the golden-circled Island of Once; landed, and dwelt there solitarily and blissfully, looking forward to Sunday's walk round the park, looking back on it. Proudly she could tell herself that her dreams of the Prince of the island had not been illusions as far as he was concerned; for he had a great soul. He did not aim at a tawdry glory. He was a loss to our army—no loss to his country or the world. A woman might clasp her feeling of pride in having foreseen distinction for him; and a little, too, in distinguishing now the true individual distinction from the feathered uniform vulgar. Where the girl's dreams had proved illusions, she beheld in a title and luxuries, in a loveless marriage.

That was perilous ground. Still it taught her to see that the substantial is the dust; and passion not being active, she could reflect. After a series of penetrative flashes, flattering to her intelligence the more startling they were, reflection was exhausted. She sank on her nature's desire to join or witness agonistic incidents, shocks, wrestlings, the adventures which are brilliant air to sanguine energies. Imagination shot tap, and whirled the circle of a succession of them; and she had a companion and leader, unfeatured, reverently obeyed, accepted as not to be known, not to be guessed at, in the deepest hooded inmost of her being speechlessly divined.

The sudden result of Aminta's turmoil was a determination that she must look on Steignton. And what was to be gained by that? She had no idea. And how had she stopped her imaginative flight with the thought of looking on Steignton? All she could tell was, that it would close a volume. She could not say why the volume must be closed.

Her orders for the journey down to Steignton were prompt. Mrs. Pagnell had an engagement at the house of Lady Staines for the next day to meet titles and celebrities, and it precluded her comprehension of the project. She begged to have the journey postponed. She had pledged her word, she said.

'To Mr. Morsfield?' said Aminta.

Page 3838

Her aunt was astounded.

‘I did tell him we should be there, my dear.’ ’He appears to have a pleasure in meeting you.’ ‘He is one of the real gentlemen of the land.’

‘You correspond with him?’

‘I may not be the only one.’

‘Foolish aunty! How can you speak to me in that senseless way?’ cried Aminta. ’You know the schemer he is, and that I have no protection from his advances unless I run the risk of bloodshed.’

’My dear Aminta, whenever I go into society, and he is present, I know I shall not be laughed at, or fall into that pit of one of their dead silences, worse for me to bear than titters and faces. It is their way of letting one feel they are of birth above us. Mr. Morsfield—purer blood than many of their highest titles—is always polite, always deferential; he helps me to feel I am not quite out of my element in the sphere I prefer. We shall be travelling alone?’

‘Have you any fear?’

‘Not if nothing happens. Might we not ask that Mr. Weyburn?’

‘He has much work to do. He will not long be here. He is absent to-day.’

Mrs. Pagnell remarked: ‘I must say he earns his money easily.’

Aminta had softened herself with the allusion to the shortness of his time with them. Her aunt’s coarse hint, and the thought of his loss, and the banishment it would be to her all the way to Steignton, checked a sharp retort she could have uttered, but made it necessary to hide her eyes from sight. She went to her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed. Even so little as an unspoken defence of him shook her to floods of tears.

CHAPTER XVI

ALONG TWO ROADS TO STEIGNTON

Unaccountable resolutions, if impromptu and springing from the female breast, are popularly taken for caprices; and even when they divert the current of a history, and all the more when they are very small matters producing a memorable crisis. In this way does a lazy world consign discussion to silence with the cynical closure. Man’s hoary shrug at a whimsy sex is the reading of his enigma still.

But ask if she has the ordinary pumping heart in that riddle of a breast: and then, as the organ cannot avoid pursuit, we may get hold of it, and succeed in spelling out that she is consequent, in her fashion. She is a creature of the apparent moods and shifts and tempers only because she is kept in narrow confines, resembling, if you like, a wild cat caged. Aminta's journey down to Steignton turned the course of other fortunes besides her own; and she disdained the minor adventure it was, while dreaming it important; and she determined eagerly on going, without wanting to go; and it was neither from a sense of duty nor in a spirit of contrariety that she went. Nevertheless, with her heart in hand, her movements are traceably as rational as a soldier's before the enemy or a trader's matching his customer.

Page 3839

The wish to look on Steignton had been spoken or sighed for during long years between Aminta and her aunt, until finally shame and anger clinched the subject. To look on Steignton for once was now Aminta's phrasing of her sudden resolve; it appeared as a holiday relief from recent worries, and it was an expedition with an aim, though she had but the coldest curiosity to see the place, and felt alien to it. Yet the thought, never to have seen Steignton! roused phantoms of dead wishes to drive the strange engine she was, faster than the living would have done. Her reason for haste was rationally founded on the suddenness of her resolve, which, seeing that she could not say she desired to go, seemed to come of an external admonition; and it counselled quick movements, lest her inspired obedience to the prompting should as abruptly breathe itself out. 'And in that case I shall never have seen Steignton at all,' she said, with perfect calmness, and did not attempt to sound her meaning.

She did know that she was a magazine of a great storage of powder. It banked inoffensively dry. She had forgiven her lord, owning the real nobleman he was in courtesy to women, whom his inherited ideas of them so quaintly minimized and reduced to pretty insect or tricky reptile. They, too, had the choice of being ultimately the one or the other in fact; the latter most likely.

If, however, she had forgiven her lord, the shattering of their union was the cost of forgiveness. In letting him stand high, as the lofty man she had originally worshipped, she separated herself from him, to feel that the humble she was of a different element, as a running water at a mountain's base. They are one in the landscape; they are far from one in reality. Aminta's pride of being chafed at the yoke of marriage.

Her aunt was directed to prepare for a start at an early hour the next morning. Mrs. Pagnell wrote at her desk, and fussed, and ordered the posting chariot, and bewailed herself submissively; for it was the Countess of Ormont speaking when Aminta delivered commands, and the only grievance she dared to mutter was 'the unexpectedness.' Her letters having been despatched, she was amazed in the late evening to hear Aminta give the footman orders for the chariot to be ready at the door an hour earlier than the hour previously appointed. She remonstrated. Aminta simply observed that it would cause less inconvenience to all parties. A suspicion of her aunt's proceedings was confirmed by the good woman's flustered state. She refrained from smiling.

She would have mustered courage to invite Matthew Weyburn as her escort, if he had been at hand. He was attending to his affairs with lawyers—mainly with his friend Mr. Abner. She studied map and gazetteer till late into the night. Giving her orders to the postillion on the pavement in the morning, she named a South-westerly direction out of London, and after entering the chariot, she received a case from one of the footmen.

Page 3840

‘What is that, my dear?’ said Mrs. Pagnell.

Aminta unlocked and laid it open. A pair of pistols met Mrs. Pagnell’s gaze.

‘We shan’t be in need of those things?’ the lady said anxiously.

‘One never knows, on the road, aunt.’

‘Loaded? You wouldn’t hesitate to fire; I’m sure.’

‘At Mr. Morsfield himself, if he attempted to stop me.’

Mrs. Pagnell withdrew into her astonishment, and presently asked, in a tone of some indignation: ‘Why did you mention Mr. Morsfield, Aminta?’

‘Did you not write to him yesterday afternoon, aunt?’

‘You read the addresses on my letters!’

’Did you not supply him with our proposed route and the time for starting?’

‘Pistols!’ exclaimed Mrs. Pagnell. ’One would fancy you think we are in the middle of the last century. Mr. Morsfield is a gentleman, not a highwayman.’

‘He gives the impression of his being a madman.’

‘The real madman is your wedded husband, Aminta, if wedding it was!’

It was too surely so, in Aminta’s mind. She tried, by looking out of the window, to forget her companion. The dullness of the roads and streets opening away to flat fields combined with the postillion’s unvarying jog to sicken her thoughts over the exile from London she was undergoing, and the chance that Matthew Weyburn might call at a vacant house next day, to announce his term of service to the earl, whom he had said he much wanted to see. He said it in his sharp manner when there was decision behind it. Several times after contemplating the end of her journey, and not perceiving any spot of pleasure ahead, an emotion urged her to turn back; for the young are acutely reasoning when their breasts advise them to quit a road where no pleasure beckons.

Unlike Matthew Weyburn, the tiptoe sparkle of a happy mind did not leap from her at wayside scenes, a sweep of grass, distant hills, clouds in flight. She required, since she suffered, the positive of events or blessings to kindle her glow.

Matthew Weyburn might call at the house. Would he be disappointed? He had preserved her letters of the old school-days. She had burnt his. But she had not burnt the letters of Mr. Morsfield; and she cared nothing for that man. Assuredly she merited

the stigma branding women as crack-brained. Yet she was not one of the fools; she could govern a household, and she liked work, she had the capacity for devotedness. So, therefore, she was a woman perverted by her position, and she shook her bonds in revolt from marriage. Imagining a fall down some suddenly spied chasm of her nature, she had a sisterly feeling for the women named sinful. At the same time, reflecting that they are sinful only with the sinful, she knelt thankfully at the feet of the man who had saved her from such danger. Tears threatened. They were a poor atonement for the burning of his younger letters. But not he—she

Page 3841

was the sufferer, and she whipped up a sensation of wincing at the flames they fell to, and at their void of existence, committing sentimental idiocies worthy of a lovesick girl, consciously to escape the ominous thought, which her woman's perception had sown in her, that he too chafed at a marriage no marriage: was true in fidelity, not true through infidelity, as she had come to be. The thought implied misery for both. She entered a black desolation, with the prayer that he might not be involved, for his own sake: partly also on behalf of the sustaining picture the young schoolmaster at his task, merry among his dear boys, to trim and point them body and mind for their business in the world, painted for her a weariful prospect of the life she must henceforth drag along.

Is a woman of the plain wits common to numbers ever deceived in her perception of a man's feelings for her? Let her first question herself whether she respects him. If she does not, her judgement will go easily astray, intuition and observation are equally at fault, she has no key; he has charmed her blood, that is all. But if she respects him, she cannot be deceived; respect is her embrace of a man's character. Aminta's vision was clear. She had therefore to juggle with the fact revealed, that she might keep her heart from rushing out; and the process was a disintegration of her feminine principle of docility under the world's decrees. At each pause of her mental activity she was hurled against the state of marriage. Compassion for her blameless fellow in misery brought a deluge to sweep away institutions and landmarks.

But supposing the blest worst to happen, what exchange had she to bestow? Her beauty? She was reputed beautiful. It had made a madman of one man; and in her poverty of endowments to be generous with, she hovered over Mr. Morsfield like a cruel vampire, for the certification that she had a much-prized gift to bestow upon his rival.

But supposing it: she would then be no longer in the shiny garden of the flowers of wealth; and how little does beauty weigh as all aid to an active worker in the serious fighting world! She would be a kind of potted rose-tree under his arm, of which he must eventually tire.

A very cold moment came, when it seemed that even the above supposition, in the case of a woman who has been married, is shameful to her, a sin against her lover, and should be obliterated under floods of scarlet. For, if she has pride, she withers to think of pushing the most noble of men upon his generosity. And, further, if he is not delicately scrupulous, is there not something wanting in him? The very cold wave passed, leaving the sentence: better dream of being plain friends.

Page 3842

Mrs. Pagnell had been quietly chewing her cud of the sullens, as was the way with her after a snub. She now resumed her gossip of the naughty world she knelt to and expected to see some day stricken by a bolt from overhead; containing, as it did, such wicked members as that really indefensible brazen Mrs. Amy May, who was only the daughter of a half-pay naval captain, and that Marquis of Collestou, who would, they say, decorate her with his title to-morrow, if her husband were but somewhere else. She spread all sorts of report, about Mr. Morsfield, and he was honour itself in his reserve about her. 'Depend upon it, Aminta—he was not more than a boy then, and they say she aimed at her enfranchisement by plotting the collision, for his Yorkshire revenues are immense, and he is, you know, skilful in the use of arms, and Captain May has no resources whatever: penury! no one cares to speculate how they contrive!—but while that dreadful duelling—and my lord as bad as any in his day-exists, depend upon it, an unscrupulous good-looking woman has as many lives for her look of an eye or lift of a finger as a throned Ottoman Turk on his divan.'

Aminta wished to dream. She gave her aunt a second dose, and the lady relapsed again.

Power to dream had gone. She set herself to look at roadside things, cottage gardens, old housewives in doorways, gaffer goodman meeting his crony on the path, groups of boys and girls. She would take the girls, Matthew Weyburn the boys. She had lessons to give to girls, she had sympathy, pity, anticipation. That would be a life of happy service. It might be a fruitful trial of the system he proposed, to keep the boys and girls in company as much as possible, both at lessons and at games. His was the larger view. Her lord's view appeared similar to that of her aunt's 'throned Ottoman Turk on his divan.' Matthew Weyburn believed in the bettering of the world; Lord Ormont had no belief like it.

Presently Mrs. Pagnell returned to the charge, and once more she was nipped, and irritated to declare she had never known her niece's temper so provoking. Aminta was launching a dream of a lass she had seen in a field, near a white hawthorn, standing upright, her left arm aloft round the pole of a rake, the rim of her bonnet tipped on her forehead; an attitude of a rustic.

Britannia with helmet heeling at dignity. The girl's eyes hung to the passing chariot, without movement of her head. It was Aminta who looked back, and she saw the girl looking away. Among the superior dames and damsels she had seen, there was not one to match that figure for stately air, gallant ease, and splendour of pose. Matthew Weyburn would have admired the girl. Aminta did better than envy, she cast off the last vestiges of her bitter ambition to be a fine lady, and winged into the bosom of the girl, and not shyly said 'yes' to Matthew Weyburn, and to herself, deep in herself: 'A maid has no need to be shy.' Hardly

Page 3843

blushing, she walks on into the new life beside him, and hears him say: 'I in my way, you in yours; we are equals, the stronger for being equals,' and she quite agrees, and she gives him the fuller heart for his not requiring her to be absorbed—she is the braver mate for him. Does not that read his meaning? Happiest of the girls of earth, she has divined it at once, from never having had the bitter ambition to be a slave, that she might wear rich tissues; and let herself be fettered, that she might loll in idleness; lose a soul to win a title; escape commonplace to discover it ghastlier under cloth of gold, and the animal crowned, adored, fattened, utterly served, in the class called by consent of human society the Upper.

Reason whispered a reminder of facts to her.

'But I am not the Countess of Ormont!' she said. She felt herself the girl, her sensations were so intensely simple.

Proceeding to an argument, that the earl did not regard her as the Countess of Ormont, or the ceremony at the British Embassy as one serious and binding, she pushed her reason too far: sweet delusion waned. She waited for some fresh scene to revive it.

Aminta sat unwittingly weaving her destiny.

While she was thus engaged, a carriage was rolling on the more westerly road down to Steignton. Seated in it were Lady Charlotte Eglett and Matthew Weyburn. They had met at Arthur Abner's office the previous day. She went there straight from Lord Ormont's house-agent and upholsterer, to have a queer bit of thunderous news confirmed, that her brother was down at Steignton, refurnishing the house, and not for letting. She was excited: she treated Arthur Abner's closed-volume reticence as a corroboration of the house-agent's report, and hearing Weyburn speak of his anxiety to see the earl immediately, in order to get release from his duties, proposed a seat in her carriage; for down Steignton way she meant to go, if only as excuse for a view of the old place. She kept asking what Lord Ormont wanted down at Steignton refurnishing the house, and not to let it! Her evasions of answers that, plain speculation would supply were quaint. 'He hasn't my feeling for Steignton. He could let it—I couldn't. Sacrilege to me to have a tenant in my old home where I was born. He's furnishing to raise his rent. His country won't give him anything to do, so he turns miser. That's my brother Rowsley's way of taking on old age.'

Her brother Rowsley might also be showing another sign of his calamitous condition. She said to Weyburn, in the carriage, that her brother Rowsley might like having his hair clipped by the Philistine woman; which is one of the ways of strong men to confess themselves ageing. 'Not,' said she, with her usual keen justness 'not that I've, a word against Delilah. I look upon her as a patriot; she dallied and she used the scissors on behalf of her people. She wasn't bound to Samson in honour,—liked a strong man,

probably enough. She proved she liked her country better. The Jews wrote the story of it, so there she stands for posterity to pelt her, poor wretch.'

Page 3844

‘A tolerably good analogy for the story of men and women generally,’ said Weyburn.

’Ah, well, you’ve a right to talk; you don’t run miauling about women. It ’s easy to be squashy on that subject. As for the Jews, I don’t go by their history, but now they ’re down I don’t side with the Philistines, or Christians. They ’re good citizens, and they ’ve got Samson in the brain, too. That comes of persecution, a hard education. They beat the world by counting in the head. That ’s because they ’ve learnt the value of fractions. Napoleon knew it in war, when he looked to the boots and great-coats of his men; those were his fractions. Lord Ormont thinks he had too hard-and-fast a system for the battle-field.’

‘A greater strategist than tactician, my lady? It may be,’ said Weyburn, smiling at her skips.

’Massing his cannon to make a big hole for his cavalry, my brother says; and weeding his infantry for the Imperial Guard he postponed the moment to use.’

‘At Moskowa?’

’Waterloo. I believe Lord Ormont would—there! his country ’s lost him, and chose it. They ’ll have their day for repentance yet. What a rapture to have a thousand horsemen following you! I suppose there never was a man worthy of the name who roared to be a woman. I know I could have shrieked half my life through to have been born male. It ’s no matter now. When we come to this hateful old age, we meet: no, we ’re no sex then—we ’re dry sticks. I ’ll tell you: my Olmer doctor—that ’s an impudent fellow who rode by staring into my carriage. The window’s down. He could see without pushing his hat in.’

Weyburn looked out after a man cantering on.

‘A Mr. Morsfield,’ he said. ’I thought it was he when I saw him go by. I’ve met him at the fencing-rooms. He ’s one of the violent fencers, good for making his point, if one funks an attack.’

’That man Morsfield, is it? I wonder what he’s doing on the road here. He goes over London boasting—hum, nothing to me. But he ’ll find Lord Ormont’s arm can protect a poor woman, whatever she is. He’d have had it before, only Lord Ormont shuns a scandal. I was telling you, my Olmer doctor forbade horse-riding, and my husband raised a noise like one of my turkeycocks on the wing; so I ’ve given up the saddle, to quiet him. I guessed. I went yesterday morning to my London physician. He sounded me, pushed out his mouth and pulled down his nose, recommended avoidance of excitement. “Is it heart?” I said. He said it was heart. That was the best thing an old woman could hear. He said, when he saw I wasn’t afraid, it was likely to be quick; no doctors, no nurses and daily bulletins for inquirers, but just the whites of the eyes, the

laying-out, the undertaker, and the family-vault. That's one reason why I want to see Steignton before the blow that may fall any day, whether my brother Rowsley's there or no. But that Olmer doctor of mine, Causitt, Peter Causitt, shall pay me for being a liar or else an ignoramus when I told him he was to tell me bluntly the nature of my disease.'

Page 3845

A horseman, in whom they recognized Mr. Morsfield, passed, clattering on the road behind them.

‘Some woman here about,’ Lady Charlotte muttered. Weyburn saw him joined by a cavalier, and the two consulted and pointed whips right and left.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY CHARLOTTE’S TRIUMPH

One of the days of sovereign splendour in England was riding down the heavens, and drawing the royal mantle of the gold-fringed shadows over plain and wavy turf, blue water and woods of the country round Steignton. A white mansion shone to a length of oblong lake that held the sun-ball suffused in mild yellow.

‘There’s the place,’ Lady Charlotte said to Weyburn, as they had view of it at a turn of the park. She said to herself—where I was born and bred! and her sight gloated momentarily on the house and side avenues, a great plane standing to the right of the house, the sparkle of a little river running near; all the scenes she knew, all young and lively. She sprang on her seat for a horse beneath her, and said, ’But this is healthy excitement,’ as in reply to her London physician’s remonstrances. ’And there’s my brother Rowsley, talking to one of the keepers,’ she cried. ’You see Lord Ormont? I can see a mile. Sight doesn’t fail with me. He ’s insisting. ’Ware poachers when Rowsley’s on his ground! You smell the air here? Nobody dies round about Steignton. Their legs wear out and they lie down to rest them. It ’s the finest air in the world. Now look, the third window left of the porch, first floor. That was my room before I married. Strangers have been here and called the place home. It can never be home to any but me and Rowsley. He sees the carriage. He little thinks! He’s dressed in his white corduroy and knee-breeches. Age! he won’t know age till he’s ninety. Here he comes marching. He can’t bear surprises. I’ll wave my hand and call.’

She called his name.

In a few strides he was at the carriage window. ‘You, Charlotte?’

’Home again, Rowsley! Bring down your eyebrows, and let me hear you’re glad I ‘ve come.’

‘What made you expect you would find me here?’

’Anything-cats on the tiles at night. You can’t keep a secret from me. Here’s Mr. Weyburn, good enough to be my escort. I ‘ll get out.’

She alighted, scorning help; Weyburn at her heels. The earl nodded to him politely and not cordially. He was hardly cordial to Lady Charlotte.

That had no effect on her. ‘A glorious day for Steignton,’ she said. ’Ah, there’s the Buridon group of beeches; grander trees than grow at Buridon. Old timber now. I knew them slim as demoiselles. Where ’s the ash? We had a splendid ash on the west side.’

‘Dead and cut down long since,’ replied the earl.

‘So we go!’

She bent her steps to the spot: a grass-covered heave of the soil.

Page 3846

‘Dear old tree!’ she said, in a music of elegy: and to Weyburn: ’Looks like a stump of an arm lopped off a shoulder in bandages. Nature does it so. All the tenants doing well, Rowsley?’

‘About the same amount of trouble with them.’

‘Ours at Olmer get worse.’

‘It’s a process for the extirpation of the landlords.’

‘Then down goes the country.’

’They ‘ve got their case, their papers tell us.’

’I know they have; but we’ve got the soil, and we’ll make a, fight of it.’

‘They can fight too, they say.’

‘I should be sorry to think they couldn’t if they’re Englishmen.’

She spoke so like his old Charlotte of the younger days that her brother partly laughed.

’Parliamentary fighting ’s not much to your taste or mine. They ’ve lost their stomach for any other. The battle they enjoy is the battle that goes for the majority. Gauge their valour by that.’

‘To be sure,’ said his responsive sister. She changed her note. ’But what I say is, let the nobles keep together and stick to their class. There’s nothing to fear then. They must marry among themselves, think of the blood: it’s their first duty. Or better a peasant girl! Middle courses dilute it to the stuff in a publican’s tankard. It ’s an adulterous beast who thinks of mixing old wine with anything.’

‘Hulloa!’ said the earl; and she drew up.

’You’ll have me here till over to-morrow, Rowsley, so that I may have one clear day at Steignton?’

He bowed. ‘You will choose your room. Mr. Weyburn is welcome.’

Weyburn stated the purport of his visit, and was allowed to name an early day for the end of his term of service.

Entering the house, Lady Charlotte glanced at the armour and stag branches decorating corners of the hall, and straightway laid her head forward, pushing after it in the

direction of the drawing room. She went in, stood for a minute, and came out. Her mouth was hard shut.

At dinner she had tales of uxorious men, of men who married mistresses, of the fearful incubus the vulgar family of a woman of the inferior classes ever must be; and her animadversions were strong in the matter of gew-gaw modern furniture. The earl submitted to hear.

She was, however, keenly attentive whenever he proffered any item of information touching Steignton. After dinner Weyburn strolled to the points of view she cited as excellent for different aspects of her old home.

He found her waiting to hear his laudation when he came back; and in the early morning she was on the terrace, impatient to lead him down to the lake. There, at the boat-house, she commanded him to loosen a skiff and give her a paddle. Between exclamations, designed to waken louder from him, and not so successful as her cormorant hunger for praise of Steignton required, she plied him to confirm with his opinion an opinion that her reasoning mind had almost formed in the close neighbourhood of the beloved and honoured person providing it; for abstract ideas were unknown to her. She put it, however, as in the abstract:—

Page 3847

’How is it we meet people brave as lions before an enemy, and rank cowards where there’s a botheration among their friends at home? And tell me, too, if you’ve thought the thing over, what’s the meaning of this? I ’ve met men in high places, and they’ve risen to distinction by their own efforts, and they head the nation. Right enough, you’d say. Well, I talk with them, and I find they’ve left their brains on the ladder that led them up; they’ve only the ideas of their grandfather on general subjects. I come across a common peasant or craftsman, and he down there has a mind more open—he’s wiser in his intelligence than his rulers and lawgivers up above him. He understands what I say, and I learn from him. I don’t learn much from our senators, or great lawyers, great doctors, professors, members of governing bodies—that lot. Policy seems to petrify their minds when they ’ve got on an eminence. Now explain it, if you can.’

‘Responsibility has a certain effect on them, no doubt,’ said Weyburn. ’Eminent station among men doesn’t give a larger outlook. Most of them confine their observation to their supports. It happens to be one of the questions I have thought over. Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight’s run in the lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across the people we call common, men and women, old wayside men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads the delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air, there ’s no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand, I have not felt the same with “our senators, rulers, and lawgivers.” They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind.’

‘Ha! good, so far. How do you account for it?’ said Lady Charlotte.

’I read it in this way: that the world being such as it is at present, demanding and rewarding with honours and pay special services, the men called great, who have risen to distinction, are not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes. These men of aptitudes have a poor conception of the facts of life to meet the necessities of modern expansion. They are serviceable in departments. They go as they are driven, or they resist. In either case, they explain how it is that we have a world moving so sluggishly. They are not the men of brains, the men of insight and outlook. Often enough they are foes of the men of brains.’

‘Aptitudes; yes, that flashes a light into me,’ said Lady Charlotte. ’I see it better. It helps to some comprehension of their muddle. A man may be a first-rate soldier, doctor, banker—as we call the usurer now-a-days—or brewer, orator, anything that leads up to a figure-head, and prove a foolish fellow if you sound him. I ’ve thought something like it, but wanted the word. They say themselves, “Get to know, and you see with what little wisdom the world is governed!” You explain how it is. I shall carry “aptitudes” away.’

Page 3848

She looked straight at Weyburn. 'If I were a younger woman I could kiss you for it.'

He bowed to her very gratefully.

'Remember, my lady, there's a good deal of the Reformer in that definition.'

'I stick to my class. But they shall hear a true word when there's one abroad, I can tell them. That reminds me—you ought to have asked; let me tell you I'm friendly with the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey. We had a wrestle for half an hour, and I threw him and helped him up, and he apologized for tumbling, and I subscribed to one of his charities, and gave up about the pew, but had an excuse for not sitting under the sermon. A poor good creature. He 's got the aptitudes for his office. He won't do much to save his Church. I knew another who had his aptitude for the classics, and he has mounted. He was my tutor when I was a girl. He was fond of declaiming passages from Lucian and Longus and Ovid. One day he was at it with a piece out of Daphnis and Chloe, and I said, "Now translate." He fetched a gurgle to say he couldn't, and I slapped his check. Will you believe it? the man was indignant. I told him, if he would like to know why I behaved in "that unmaidenly way," he had better apply at home. I had no further intimations of his classical aptitudes; but he took me for a cleverer pupil than I was. I hadn't a notion of the stuff he recited. I read by his face. That was my aptitude—always has been. But think of the donkeys parents are when they let a man have a chance of pouring his barley-sugar and sulphur into the ears of a girl. Lots of girls have no latent heckles and prickles to match his villany.—There's my brother come back to breakfast from a round. You and I 'll have a drive before lunch, and a ride or a stroll in the afternoon. There's a lot to see. I mean you to get the whole place into your head. I 've ordered the phaeton, and you shall take the whip, with me beside you. That's how my husband and I spent three-quarters of our honeymoon.'

Each of the three breakfasted alone.

They met on the terrace. It was easily perceived that Lord Ormont stood expecting an assault at any instant; prepared also to encounter and do battle with his redoubtable sister. Only he wished to defer the engagement. And he was magnanimous: he was in the right, she in the wrong; he had no desire to grapple with her, fling and humiliate. The Sphinx of Mrs. Pagnell had been communing with himself unwontedly during the recent weeks.

What was the riddle of him? That, he did not read. But, expecting an assault, and relieved by his sister Charlotte's departure with Weyburn, he went to the drawing-room, where he had seen her sniff her strong suspicions of a lady coming to throne it. Charlotte could believe that he flouted the world with a beautiful young woman on his arm; she would not believe him capable of doing that in his family home and native county; so, then, her shrewd wits had nothing or little to learn. But her vehement fighting against facts; her obstinate aristocratic prejudices, which he shared; her stinger

of a tongue: these in ebullition formed a discomforting prospect. The battle might as well be conducted through the post. Come it must!

Page 3849

Even her writing of the pointed truths she would deliver was an unpleasant anticipation. His ears heated. Undoubtedly he could crush her. Yet, supposing her to speak to his ears, she would say: 'You married a young woman, and have been foiling and fooling her ever since, giving her half a title to the name of wife, and allowing her in consequence to be wholly disfigured before the world—your family naturally her chief enemies, who would otherwise (Charlotte would proclaim it) have been her friends. What! your intention was (one could hear Charlotte's voice) to smack the world in the face, and you smacked your young wife's instead!'

His intention had been nothing of the sort. He had married, in a foreign city, a young woman who adored him, whose features, manners, and carriage of her person satisfied his exacting taste in the sex; and he had intended to cast gossipy England over the rail and be a traveller for the remainder of his days. And at the first she had acquiesced, tacitly accepted it as part of the contract. He bore with the burden of an intolerable aunt of hers for her sake. The two fell to work to conspire. Aminta 'tired of travelling,' Aminta must have a London house. She continually expressed a hope that 'she might set her eyes on Steignton some early day.' In fact, she as good as confessed her scheme to plot for the acknowledged position of Countess of Ormont in the English social world. That was a distinct breach of the contract.

As to the babble of the London world about a 'very young wife,' he scorned it completely, but it belonged to the calculation. 'A very handsome young wife,' would lay commands on a sexagenarian vigilance while adding to his physical glory. The latter he could forego among a people he despised. It would, however, be an annoyance to stand constantly hand upon sword-hilt. There was, besides, the conflict with his redoubtable sister. He had no dread of it, in contemplation of the necessity; he could crush his Charlotte. The objection was, that his Aminta should be pressing him to do it. Examine the situation at present. Aminta has all she needs—every luxury. Her title as Countess of Ormont is not denied. Her husband justly refuses to put foot into English society. She, choosing to go where she may be received, dissociates herself from him, and he does not complain. She does complain. There is a difference between the two.

He had always shunned the closer yoke with a woman because of these vexatious dissensions. For not only are women incapable of practising, they cannot comprehend magnanimity.

Lord Ormont's argumentative reverie to the above effect had been pursued over and over. He knew that the country which broke his military career and ridiculed his newspaper controversy was unforgiven by him. He did not reflect on the consequences of such an unpardoning spirit in its operation on his mind.

Page 3850

If he could but have passed the injury, he would ultimately—for his claims of service were admitted—have had employment of some kind. Inoccupation was poison to him; travel juggled with his malady of restlessness; really, a compression of the warrior's natural forces. His Aminta, pushed to it by the woman Pagnell, declined to help him in softening the virulence of the disease. She would not travel; she would fix in this London of theirs, and scheme to be hailed the accepted Countess of Ormont. She manoeuvred; she threw him on the veteran soldier's instinct, and it resulted spontaneously that he manoeuvred.

Hence their game of Pull, which occupied him a little, tickled him and amused. The watching of her pretty infantile tactics amused him too much to permit of a sidethought on the cruelty of the part he played. She had every luxury, more than her station by right of birth would have supplied.

But he was astonished to find that his Aminta proved herself clever, though she had now and then said something pointed. She was in awe of him: notwithstanding which, clearly she meant to win and pull him over. He did not dislike her for it; she might use her weapons to play her game; and that she should bewitch men—a, man like Morsfield—was not wonderful. On the other hand, her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley scored tellingly: that was unaccountably queer. What did Mrs. Lawrence expect to gain? the sage lord asked. He had not known women devoid of a positive practical object of their own when they bestirred themselves to do a friendly deed.

Thanks to her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence, his Aminta was gaining ground—daily she made an advance; insomuch that he had heard of himself as harshly blamed in London for not having countenanced her recent and rather imprudent move. In other words, whenever she gave a violent tug at their game of Pull, he was expected to second it. But the world of these English is too monstrously stupid in what it expects, for any of its extravagances to be followed by interjections.

All the while he was trimming and rolling a field of armistice at Steignton, where they could discuss the terms he had a right to dictate, having yielded so far. Would she be satisfied with the rule of his ancestral hall, and the dispensing of hospitalities to the county? No, one may guess: no woman is ever satisfied. But she would have to relinquish her game, counting her good round half of the honours. Somewhat more, on the whole. Without beating, she certainly had accomplished the miracle of bending him. To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend. It is the form of submission of the bulrush to the wind, of courtesy in the cavalier to a lady.

'Oh, here you are, Rowsley,' Lady Charlotte exclaimed at the drawing room door. 'Well, and I don't like those Louis Quinze cabinets; and that modern French mantelpiece clock is hideous. You seem to furnish in downright contempt of the women you invite to sit in the room. Lord help the wretched woman playing hostess in such a pinchbeck bric-a-brac shop, if there were one! She 's spared, at all events.'

Page 3851

He stepped at slow march to one of the five windows. Lady Charlotte went to another near by. She called to Weyburn—

'We had a regatta on that water when Lord Ormont came of age. I took an oar in one of the boats, and we won a prize; and when I was landing I didn't stride enough to the spring-plank, and plumped in.'

Some labourers of the estate passed in front.

Lord Ormont gave out a broken laugh. 'See those fellows walk! That 's the raw material of the famous English infantry. They bend their knees five-and-forty degrees for every stride; and when you drill them out of that, they 're stiff as ramrods. I gymnasticized them in my regiment. I'd have challenged any French regiment to out-walk or out-jump us, or any crack Tyrolese Jagers to out-climb, though we were cavalry.'

'Yes, my lord, and exercised crack corps are wanted with us,' Weyburn replied. 'The English authorities are adverse to it, but it 's against nature—on the supposition that all Englishmen might enrol untrained in Caesar's pet legion. Virgil shows knowledge of men when he says of the row-boat straining in emulation, 'Possunt quia posse videntur.''

He talked on rapidly; he wondered that he did not hear Lady Charlotte exclaim at what she must be seeing. From the nearest avenue a lady had issued. She stood gazing at the house, erect—a gallant figure of a woman—one hand holding her parasol, the other at her hip. He knew her. She was a few paces ahead of Mrs. Pagnell, beside whom a gentleman walked.

The cry came: 'It's that man Morsfield! Who brings that man Morsfield here? He hunted me on the road; he seemed to be on the wrong scent. Who are those women? Rowsley, are your grounds open every day of the week? She threatens to come in!'

Lady Charlotte had noted that the foremost and younger of 'those women' understood how to walk and how to dress to her shape and colour. She inclined to think she was having to do with an intrepid foreign-bred minx.

Aminta had been addressed by one of her companions, and had hastened forward. It looked like the beginning of a run to enter the house.

Mrs. Pagnell ran after her. She ran cow-like.

The earl's gorge rose at the spectacle Charlotte was observing.

With Morsfield he could have settled accounts at any moment, despatching Aminta to her chamber for an hour. He had, though he was offended, an honourable guess that she had not of her free will travelled with the man and brought him into the grounds. It

was the presence of the intolerable Pagnell under Charlotte's eyes which irritated him beyond the common anger he felt at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton. His mouth locked. Lady Charlotte needed no speech from him for sign of the boiling; she was too wary to speak while that went on.

He said to Weyburn, loud enough for his Charlotte to heir. 'Do me the favour to go to the Countess of Ormont. Conduct her back to London. You will say it is my command. Inform Mr. Morsfield, with my compliments, I regret I have no weapons here. I understand him to complain of having to wait. I shall be in town three days from this date.'

Page 3852

‘My lord,’ said Mr. Weyburn; and actually he did mean to supplicate. He could imagine seeing Lord Ormont’s eyebrows rising to alpine heights.

Lady Charlotte seized his arm.

’Go at once. Do as you are told. I’ll have your portmanteau packed and sent after you —the phaeton’s out in the yard—to Rowsley, or Ashead, or Dornton, wherever they put up. Now go, or we shall have hot work. Keep your head on, and go.’

He went, without bowing.

Lady Charlotte rang for the footman.

The earl and she watched the scene on the sward below the terrace.

Aminta listened to Weyburn. Evidently there was no expostulation.

But it was otherwise with Mrs. Pagnell. She flung wild arms of a semaphore signalling national events. She sprang before Aminta to stop her retreat, and stamped and gibbed, for sign that she would not be driven. She fell away to Mr. Morsfield, for simple hearing of her plaint. He appeared emphatic. There was a passage between him and Weyburn.

‘I suspect you’ve more than your match in young Weyburn, Mr. Morsfield,’ Lady Charlotte said, measuring them as they stood together. They turned at last.

‘You shall drive back to town with me, Rowsley,’ said the fighting dame.

She breathed no hint of her triumph.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SCENE ON THE ROAD BACK

After refusing to quit the grounds of Steignton, in spite of the proprietor, Mrs. Pagnell burst into an agitation to have them be at speed, that they might ’shake the dust of the place from the soles of their feet’; and she hurried past Aminta and Lord Ormont’s insolent emissary, carrying Mr. Morsfield beside her, perforce of a series of imperiously-toned vacuous questions, to which he listened in rigid politeness, with the ejaculation steaming off from time to time, ’A scandal!’

He shot glances behind him.

Mrs. Pagnell was going too fast. She, however, world not hear of a halt, and she was his main apology for being present; he was excruciatingly attached to the horrid woman.

Weyburn spoke the commonplaces about regrets to Aminta.

‘Believe me, it’s long since I have been so happy,’ she said.

She had come out of her stupefaction, and she wore no theatrical looks of cheerfulness.

’I regret that you should be dragged away. But, if you say you do not mind, it will be pleasant to me. I can excuse Lord Ormont’s anger. I was ignorant of his presence here. I thought him in Paris. I supposed the place empty. I wished to see it once. I travelled as the niece of Mrs. Pagnell. She is a little infatuated. . . . Mr. Morsfield heard of our expedition through her. I changed the route. I was not in want of a defender. I could have defended myself in case of need. We slept at Ashead, two hours from Steignton. He and a friend accompanied us, not with my consent. Lord Ormont could not have been aware of that. These accidental circumstances happen. There may be pardonable intentions on all sides.’

Page 3853

She smiled. Her looks were open, and her voice light and spirited; though the natural dark rose-glow was absent from her olive cheeks.

Weyburn puzzled over the mystery of so volatile a treatment of a serious matter, on the part of a woman whose feelings he had reason to know were quick and deep. She might be acting, as women so cleverly do.

It could hardly be acting when she pointed to peeps of scenery, with a just eye for landscape.

‘You leave us for Switzerland very soon?’ she said.

’The Reversion I have been expecting has fallen in, besides my inheritance. My mother was not to see the school. But I shall not forget her counsels. I can now make my purchase of the house and buildings, and buy out my partner at the end of a year. My boys are jumping to start. I had last week a letter from Emile.’

‘Dear little Emile!’

‘You like him?’

‘I could use a warmer word. He knew me when I was a girl.’

She wound the strings of his heart suddenly tense, and they sang to their quivering.

‘You will let me hear of you, Mr. Weyburn?’

’I will write. Oh! certainly I will write, if I am told you are interested in our doings, Lady Ormont.’

‘I will let you know that I am.’

‘I shall be happy in writing full reports.’

’Every detail, I beg. All concerning the school. Help me to feel I am a boarder. I catch up an old sympathy I had for girls and boys. For boys! any boys! the dear monkey boys! cherub monkeys! They are so funny. I am sure I never have laughed as I did at Selina Collett’s report, through her brother, of the way the boys tried to take to my name; and their sneezing at it, like a cat at a deceitful dish. “Aminta”—was that their way?’

‘Something—the young rascals!’

‘But please repeat it as you heard them.’

‘” Aminta.”’

He subdued the mouthing.

’It didn’t, offend me at all. It is one of my amusements to think of it. But after a time they liked the name; and then how did they say it?’

He had the beloved Aminta on his lips.

He checked it, or the power to speak it failed. She drew in a sharp breath.

’I hope your boys will have plenty of fun in them. They will have you for a providence and a friend. I should wish to propose to visit your school some day. You will keep me informed whether the school has vacancies. You will, please, keep me regularly informed?’

She broke into sobs.

Weyburn talked on of the school, for a cover to the resuming of her fallen mask, as he fancied it.

She soon recovered, all save a steady voice for converse, and begged him to proceed, and spoke in the flow of the subject; but the quaver of her tones was a cause of further melting. The tears poured, she could not explain why, beyond assuring him that they were no sign of unhappiness. Winds on the great waters against a strong tidal current beat up the wave and shear and wing the spray, as in Aminta’s bosom. Only she could know that it was not her heart weeping, though she had grounds for a woman’s weeping. But she alone could be aware of her heart’s running counter to the tears.

Page 3854

Her agitation was untimely. Both Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Morsfield observed emotion at work. And who could wonder? A wife denied the admittance to her husband's house by her husband! The most beautiful woman of her time relentlessly humiliated, ordered to journey back the way she had come.

They had reached the gate of the park, and had turned.

'A scandal!'

Mr. Morsfield renewed his interjection vehemently, for an apology to his politeness in breaking from Mrs. Pagnell.

Joining the lady, whose tears were of the nerves, he made offer of his devotion in any shape; and she was again in the plight to which a desperado can push a woman of the gentle kind. She had the fear of provoking a collision if she reminded him, that despite her entreaties, he had compelled her, seconded by her aunt as he had been, to submit to his absurd protection on the walk across the park.

He seemed quite regardless of the mischief he had created; and, reflecting upon how it served his purpose, he might well be. Intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern, that he was, his aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means. Her pitiable position appealed to the best of him; his inordinate desire of her aroused the worst. It was, besides, an element of his coxcombry, that he should, in apeing the utterly inconsiderate, rush swiftly to impersonate it when his passions were cast on a die.

Weyburn he ignored as a stranger, an intruder, an inferior.

Aminta's chariot was at the gate.

She had to resign herself to the chances of a clash of men, and, as there were two to one, she requested help of Weyburn's hand, that he might be near her.

A mounted gentleman, smelling parasite in his bearing, held the bridle of Morsfield's horse.

The ladies having entered the chariot, Morsfield sprang to the saddle, and said: 'You, sir, had better stretch your legs to the inn.'

'There is room for you, Mr. Weyburn,' said Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell puffed.

'I can't think we've room, my dear. I want that bit of seat in front for my feet.'

Morsfield kicked at his horse's flanks, and between Weyburn and the chariot step, cried: 'Back, sir!'

His reins were seized; the horse reared, the unexpected occurred.

Weyburn shouted 'Off!' to the postillion, and jumped in.

Morsfield was left to the shaking of a dusty coat, while the chariot rolled its gentle course down the leafy lane into the high-road.

His friend had seized the horse's bridle-reins; and he remarked: 'I say, Dolf, we don't prosper to-day.'

'He pays for it!' said Morsfield, foot in stirrup. 'You'll take him and trounce him at the inn. I don't fight with servants. Better game. One thing, Cumnock: the fellow's clever at the foils.'

'Foils to the devil! If I tackle the fellow, it won't be with the buttons. But how has he pushed in?'

Page 3855

Morsfield reported ‘the scandal!’ in sharp headings.

’Turned her away. Won’t have her enter his house—grandest woman in all England! Sent his dog to guard. Think of it for an insult! It’s insult upon insult. I ’ve done my utmost to fire his marrow. I did myself a good turn by following her up and entering that park with her. I shall succeed; there ’s a look of it. All I have—my life—is that woman’s. I never knew what this devil’s torture was before I saw her.’

His friend was concerned for his veracity. ‘Amy!’

’A common spotted snake. She caught me young, and she didn’t carry me off, as I mean to carry off this glory of her sex—she is: you’ve seen her!—and free her, and devote every minute of the rest of my days to her. I say I must win the woman if I stop at nothing, or I perish; and if it ’s a failure, exit ’s my road. I ’ve watched every atom she touched in a room, and would have heaped gold to have the chairs, tables, cups, carpets, mine. I have two short letters written with her hand. I ’d give two of my estates for two more. If I were a beggar, and kept them, I should be rich. Relieve me of that dog, and I toss you a thousand-pound note, and thank you from my soul, Cumnock. You know what hangs on it. Spur, you dolt, or she’ll be out of sight.’

They cantered upon application of the spur. Captain Cumnock was an impecunious fearless rascal, therefore a parasite and a bully duellist; a thick-built north-countryman; a burly ape of the ultra-elegant; hunter, gamester, hard-drinker, man of pleasure. His known readiness to fight was his trump-card at a period when the declining custom of the duel taxed men’s courage to brave the law and the Puritan in the interests of a privileged and menaced aristocracy. An incident like the present was the passion in the dice-box to Cumnock. Morsfield was of the order of men who can be generous up to the pitch of their desires. Consequently, the world accounted him open-handed and devoted when enamoured. Few men liked him; he was a hero with some women. The women he trampled on; the men he despised. To the lady of his choice he sincerely offered his fortune and his life for the enjoyment of her favour. His ostentation and his offensive daring combined the characteristics of the peacock and the hawk. Always near upon madness, there were occasions when he could eclipse the insane. He had a ringing renown in his class.

Chariot and horsemen arrived at the Roebuck Arms, at the centre of the small town of Ashead, on the line from Steignton through Rowsley. The pair of cavaliers dismounted and hustled Weyburn in assisting the ladies to descend.

The ladies entered the inn; they declined refection of any sort. They had biscuits and sweetmeats, and looked forward to tea at a farther stage. Captain Cumnock stooped to their verdict on themselves, with marvel at the quantity of flesh they managed to put on their bones from such dieting.

Page 3856

‘By your courtesy, sir, a word with you in the inn yard, if you please,’ he said to Weyburn in the inn-porch.

Weyburn answered, ‘Half a minute,’ and was informed that it was exactly the amount of time the captain could afford to wait.

Weyburn had seen the Steignton phaeton and coachman in the earl’s light-blue livery. It was at his orders, he heard. He told the coachman to expect hire shortly, and he followed the captain, with a heavy trifle of suspicion that some brew was at work. He said to Aminta in the passage—

’You have your settlement with the innkeeper. Don’t, I beg, step into the chariot till you see me.’

‘Anything?’ said she.

‘Only prudence.’

‘Our posting horses will be harnessed soon, I hope. I burn to get away.’

Mrs. Pagnell paid the bill at the bar of the inn. Morsfield poured out for the injured countess or no-countess a dram of the brandy of passion, under the breath.

’Deny that you singled me once for your esteem. Hardest-hearted of the women of earth and dearest! deny that you gave me reason to hope—and now! I have ridden in your track all this way for the sight of you, as you know, and you kill me with frost. Yes, I rejoice that we were seen together. Look on me. I swear I perish for one look of kindness. You have been shamefully used, madam.’

‘It seems to me I am being so,’ said Aminta, cutting herself loose from the man of the close eyes that wavered as they shot the dart.

Her action was too decided for him to follow her up under the observation of the inn windows and a staring street.

Mrs. Pagnell came out. She went boldly to Morsfield and they conferred. He was led by her to the chariot, where she pointed to a small padded slab of a seat back to the horses. Turning to the bar, he said:—My friend will look to my horse. Both want watering and a bucketful. There!’—he threw silver—’I have to protect the ladies.’

Aminta was at the chariot door talking to her aunt inside.

’But I say I have been insulted—is the word—more than enough by Lord Ormont to-day!’ Mrs. Pagnell exclaimed; ’and I won’t, I positively refuse to ride up to London with

any servant of his. It's quite sufficient that it's his servant. I'm not titled, but I 'in not quite dirt. Mr. Morsfield kindly offers his protection, and I accept. He is company.'

Nodding and smirking at Morsfield's approach, she entreated Aminta to step up and in, for the horses were coming out of the yard.

Aminta looked round. Weyburn was perceived; and Morsfield's features cramped at thought of a hitch in the plot.

'Possession,' Mrs. Pagnell murmured significantly. She patted the seat. Morsfield sprang to Weyburn's place.

That was witnessed by Aminta and Weyburn. She stepped to consult him. He said to the earl's coachman—a young fellow with a bright eye for orders—

Page 3857

'Drive as fast as you can pelt for Dornton. I'm doing my lord's commands.'

'Trust yourself to me, madam.' His hand stretched for Aminta to mount. She took it without a word and climbed to the seat. A clatter of hoofs rang out with the crack of the whip. They were away behind a pair of steppers that could go the pace.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PURSUERS

For promptitude, the lady, the gentleman, and the coachman were in such unison as to make it a reasonable deduction that the flight had been concerted.

Never did any departure from the Roebuck leave so wide-mouthed a body of spectators. Mrs. Pagnell's shrieks of 'Stop, oh! stop!' to the backs of the coachman and Aminta were continued until they were far down the street. She called to the innkeeper, called to the landlady and to invisible constables for help. But her pangs were childish compared with Morsfield's, who, with the rage of a conceited schemer tricked and the fury of a lover beholding the rape of his beautiful, bellowed impotently at Weyburn and the coachman out of hearing, 'Stop! you!' He was in the state of men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations, and he shot loud oaths after them, shook his fist, cursed his friend Cumnock, whose name he vociferated as a summons to him,—-generally the baffled plotter misconducted himself to an extreme degree, that might have apprised Mrs. Pagnell of a more than legitimate disappointment on his part.

Pursuit was one of the immediate ideas which rush forward to look back woefully on impediments and fret to fever over the tardiness of operations. A glance at the thing of wrinkles receiving orders to buckle at his horses and pursue convinced them of the hopelessness; and Morsfield was pricked to intensest hatred of the woman by hearing the dire exclamation, 'One night, and her character's gone!'

'Be quiet, ma'am, if you please, or nothing can be done,' he cried.

'I tell you, Mr. Morsfield—don't you see?—he has thrown them together. It is Lord Ormont's wicked conspiracy to rid himself of her. A secretary! He'll beat any one alive in plots. She can't show her face in London after this, if you don't overtake her. And she might have seen Lord Ormont's plot to ruin her. He tired of her, and was ashamed of her inferior birth to his own, after the first year, except on the Continent, where she had her rights. Me he never forgave for helping make him the happy man he might have been in spite of his age. For she is lovely! But it's worse for a lovely woman with a damaged reputation. And that 's his cunning. How she could be so silly as to play into it! She can't have demeaned herself to look on that secretary! I said from the first he seemed as if thrown into her way for a purpose. But she has pride: my niece Aminta

has pride. She might well have listened to flatterers—she had every temptation—if it hadn’t

Page 3858

been for her pride. It may save her yet. However good-looking, she will remember her dignity—unless he's a villain. Runnings away! drivings together! inns oh! the story over London! I do believe she has a true friend in you, Mr. Morsfield; and I say, as I have said before, the sight of a devoted admirer would have brought any husband of more than sixty to his senses, if he hadn't hoped a catastrophe and determined on it. Catch them we can't, unless she repents and relents; and prayers for that are our only resource. Now, start, man, do!'

The postillion had his foot in position to spring. Morsfield bawled Cumnock's name, and bestrode his horse. Captain Cumnock emerged from the inn-yard with a dubitative step, pressing a handkerchief to his nose, blinking, and scrutinizing the persistent fresh stains on it.

Stable-boys were at the rear. These, ducking and springing, surcharged and copious exponents of the play they had seen, related, for the benefit of the town, how that the two gentlemen had exchanged words in the yard, which were about beastly pistols, which the slim gentleman would have none of; and then the big one trips up, like dancing, to the other one and flicks him a soft clap on the check—quite friendly, you may say; and before he can square to it, the slim one he steps his hind leg half a foot back, and he drives a straight left like lightning off the shoulder slick on to t' other one's nob, and over he rolls, like a cart with the shafts up down a bank; and he' a been washing his 'chops' and threatening bullets ever since.

The exact account of the captain's framework in the process of the fall was graphically portrayed in our blunt and racy vernacular, which a society nourished upon Norman-English and English-Latin banishes from print, largely to its impoverishment, some think.

By the time the primary narrative of the encounter in the inn yard had given ground for fancy and ornament to present it in yet more luscious dress, Lord Ormont's phaeton was a good mile on the road. Morsfield and Captain Cumnock—the latter inquisitive of the handkerchief pressed occasionally at his nose—trotted on tired steeds along dusty wheel-tracks. Mrs. Pagnell was the solitary of the chariot, having a horrid couple of loaded pistols to intimidate her for her protection, and the provoking back view of a regularly jogging mannikin under a big white hat with blue riband, who played the part of Time in dragging her along, with worse than no countenance for her anxieties.

News of the fugitives was obtained at the rampant Red Lion in Dudsworth, nine miles on along the London road, to the extent that the Earl of Ormont's phaeton, containing a lady and a gentleman, had stopped there a minute to send back word to Steignton of their comfortable progress, and expectations of crossing the borders into Hampshire before sunset. Morsfield and Cumnock shrugged at the bumpkin artifice. They left their line of route to be communicated to the chariot, and chose, with practised acumen, that very course, which was the main road, and rewarded them at the end of half an hour with sight of the Steignton phaeton.

Page 3859

But it was returning. A nearer view showed it empty of the couple.

Morsfield bade the coachman pull up, and he was readily obeyed. Answers came briskly.

Although provincial acting is not of the high class which conceals the art, this man's look beside him and behind him at vacant seats had incontestable evidence in support of his declaration, that the lady and gentleman had gone on by themselves: the phaeton was a box of flown birds.

'Where did you say they got out, you dog?' said Cumnock.

The coachman stood up to spy a point below. 'Down there at the bottom of the road, to the right, where there's a stile across the meadows, making a short cut by way of a bridge over the river to Busley and North Tothill, on the high-road to Hocklebourne. The lady and gentleman thought they 'd walk for a bit of exercise the remains of the journey.'

'Can't prove the rascal's a liar,' Cumnock said to Morsfield, who rallied him savagely on his lucky escape from another knock-down blow, and tossed silver on the seat, and said —

'We 'll see if there is a stile.'

'You'll see the stile, sir,' rejoined the man, and winked at their backs.

Both cavaliers, being famished besides baffled, were in sour tempers, expecting to see just the dead wooden stile, and see it as a grin at them. Cumnock called on Jove to witness that they had been donkeys enough to forget to ask the driver how far round on the road it was to the other end of the cross-cut.

Morsfield, entirely objecting to asinine harness with him, mocked at his invocation and intonation of the name of Jove.

Cumnock was thereupon stung to a keen recollection of the allusion to his knock-down blow, and he retorted that there were some men whose wit was the parrot's.

Morsfield complimented him over the exhibition of a vastly superior and more serviceable wit, in losing sight of his antagonist after one trial of him.

Cumnock protested that the loss of time was caused by his friend's dalliance with the Venus in the chariot.

Morsfield's gall seethed at a flying picture of Mrs. Pagnell, coupled with the retarding reddened handkerchief business, and he recommended Cumnock to pay court to the

old woman, as the only chance he would have of acquaintanceship with the mother of Love.

Upon that Cumnock confessed in humility to his not being wealthy. Morsfield looked a willingness to do the deed he might have to pay for in tenderer places than the pocket, and named the head as a seat of poverty with him.

Cumnock then yawned a town fop's advice to a hustling street passenger to apologize for his rudeness before it was too late. Whereat Morsfield, certain that his parasitic thrasyleon apeing coxcomb would avoid extremities, mimicked him execrably.

Page 3860

Now this was a second breach of the implied convention existing among the exquisitely fine-bred silken-slender on the summits of our mundane sphere, which demands of them all, that they respect one another's affectations. It is commonly done, and so the costly people of a single pattern contrive to push forth, flatteringly to themselves, luxuriant shoots of individuality in their orchidean glass-house. A violation of the rule is a really deadly personal attack. Captain Cumnock was particularly sensitive regarding it, inasmuch as he knew himself not the natural performer he strove to be, and a mimicry affected him as a haunting check.

He burst out: 'Damned if I don't understand why you're hated by men and women both!'

Morsfield took a shock. 'Infernal hornet!' he muttered; for his conquests had their secret history.

'May and his wife have a balance to pay will trip you yet, you 'll find.'

'Reserve your wrath, sir, for the man who stretched you on your back.'

The batteries of the two continued exchangeing redhot shots, with the effect, that they had to call to mind they were looking at the stile. A path across a buttercup meadow was beyond it. They were damped to some coolness by the sight.

'Upon my word, the trick seems neat!' said Cumnock staring at the pastoral curtain.

'Whose trick?' he was asked sternly.

'Here or there 's not much matter; they 're off, unless they 're under a hedge laughing.'

An ache of jealousy and spite was driven through the lover, who groaned, and presently said—

'I ride on. That old woman can follow. I don't want to hear her gibberish. We've lost the game—there 's no reckoning the luck. If there's a chance, it's this way. It smells a trick. He and she—by all the devils! It has been done in my family—might have been done again. Tell the men on the plain they can drive home. There's a hundred-pound weight on your tongue for silence.'

Cumnock cried: 'But we needn't be parting, Dolf! Stick together. Bad luck's not repeated every day. Keep heart for the good.'

'My heart's shattered, Cumnock. I say it's impossible she can love a husband twice her age, who treats her—you 've seen. Contempt of that lady!

By heaven! once in my power, I swear she would have been sacred to me. But she would have been compelled to face the public and take my hand. I swear she would

have been congratulated on the end of her sufferings. Worship!—that's what I feel. No woman ever alive had eyes in her head like that lady's. I repeat her name ten times every night before I go to sleep. If I had her hand, no, not one kiss would I press on it without her sanction. I could be in love with her cruelty, if only I had her near me. I 've lost her—by the Lord, I 've lost her!'

'Pro tem.,' said the captain. 'A plate of red beef and a glass of port wine alters the view. Too much in the breast, too little in the belly, capsizes lovers. Old story. Horses that ought to be having a mash between their ribs make riders despond. Say, shall we back to the town behind us, or on? Back's the safest, if the chase is up.'

Page 3861

Morsfield declared himself incapable of turning and meeting that chariot. He sighed heavily. Cumnock offered to cheer him with a song of Captain Chanter's famous collection, if he liked; but Morsfield gesticulated abhorrence, and set out at a trot. Song in defeat was a hiss of derision to him.

He had failed. Having failed, he for the first time perceived the wildness of a plot that had previously appeared to him as one of the Yorkshire Morsfields' moves to win an object. Traditionally they stopped at nothing. There would have been a sunburst of notoriety in the capture and carrying off of the beautiful Countess of Ormont.

She had eluded him during the downward journey to Steignton. He came on her track at the village at the junction of the roads above Ashead, and thence, confiding in the half-connivance or utter stupidity of the fair one's duenna, despatched a mounted man-servant to his coachman and footmen, stationed ten miles behind, with orders that they should drive forthwith to the great plain, and be ready at a point there for two succeeding days. That was the plot, promptly devised upon receipt of Mrs. Pagnell's communication; for the wealthy man of pleasure was a strategist fit to be a soldier, in dexterity not far from rivalling the man by whom he had been outdone.

An ascetic on the road to success, he dedicated himself to a term of hard drinking under a reverse; and the question addressed to the chief towns in the sketch counties his head contained was, which one near would be likely to supply the port wine for floating him through garlanding dreams of possession most tastily to blest oblivion.

He was a lover, nevertheless, honest in his fashion, and meant not worse than to pull his lady through a mire, and wash her with Morsfield soap, and crown her, and worship. She was in his blood, about him, above him; he had plunged into her image, as into deeps that broke away in phosphorescent waves on all sides, reflecting every remembered, every imagined, aspect of the adored beautiful woman piercing him to extinction with that last look of her at the moment of flight.

Had he been just a trifle more sincere in the respect he professed for his lady's duenna, he would have turned on the road to Dornton and a better fortune. Mrs. Pagnell had now become the ridiculous Paggy of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and her circle for the hypocritical gentleman; and he remarked to Captain Cumnock, when their mutual trot was established: 'Paggy enough for me for a month—good Lord! I can't stand another dose of her by herself.'

'It's a bird that won't roast or boil or stew,' said the captain.

They were observed trotting along below by Lord Ormont's groom of the stables on promotion, as he surveyed the country from the chalk-hill rise and brought the phaeton to a stand, Jonathan Boon, a sharp lad, whose comprehension was a little muddled by 'the rights of it' in this adventure. He knew, however, that he did well to follow the

directions of one who was in his lordship's pay, and stretched out the fee with the air of a shake of the hand, and had a look of the winning side, moreover. A born countryman could see that.

Page 3862

Boon watched the pair of horsemen trotting to confusion, and clicked in his cheek. The provincial of the period when coaches were beginning to be threatened by talk of new-fangled rails was proud to boast of his outwitting Londoners on material points; and Boon had numerous tales of how it had been done, to have the laugh of fellows thinking themselves such razors. They compensated him for the slavish abasement of his whole neighbourhood under the hectoring of the grand new manufacture of wit in London:—-the inimitable Metropolitan *pun*, which came down to the country by four-in-hand, and stopped all other conversation wherever it was reported, and would have the roar—-there was no resisting it. Indeed, to be able to see the thing smartly was an entry into community with the elect of the district; and when the roaring ceased and the thing was examined, astonishment at the cleverness of it, and the wonderful shallowness of the seeming deep hole, and the unexhausted bang it had to go off like a patent cracker, fetched it out for telling over again; and up went the roar, and up it went at home and in stable-yards, and at the net puffing of churchwardens on a summer's bench, or in a cricket-booth after a feast, or round the old inn's taproom fine. The pun, the wonderful bo-peep of double meanings darting out to surprise and smack one another from behind words of the same sound, sometimes the same spelling, overwhelmed the provincial mind with awe of London's occult and prolific genius.

Yet down yonder you may behold a pair of London gentlemen trotting along on as fine a fool's errand as ever was undertaken by nincompoops bearing a scaled letter, marked urgent, to a castle, and the request in it that the steward would immediately upon perusal down with their you-know-what and hoist them and birch them a jolly two dozen without parley.

Boon smacked his leg, and then drove ahead merrily.

For this had happened to his knowledge: the gentleman accompanying the lady had refused to make anything of a halt at the Red Lion, and had said he was sure there would be a small public-house at the outskirts of the town, for there always was one; and he proved right, and the lady and he had descended at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers, and Boon had driven on for half an hour by order.

This, too, had happened, external to Boon's knowledge: the lady and the gentleman had witnessed, through the small diamond window-panes of the Jolly Cricketers' parlour, the passing-by of the two horsemen in pursuit of them; and the gentleman had stopped the chariot coming on some fifteen minutes later, but he did not do it at the instigation of the lady.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE SIGN OF THE JOLLY CRICKETERS

The passing by of the pair of horsemen, who so little suspected the treasure existing behind the small inn's narrow window did homage in Aminta's mind to her protector's adroitness. Their eyes met without a smile, though they perceived the grisly comic of the incident. Their thoughts were on the chariot to follow.

Page 3863

Aminta had barely uttered a syllable since the start of the flight from Ashead. She had rocked in a swing between sensation and imagination, exultant, rich with the broad valley of the plain and the high green waves of the downs at their giant's bound in the flow of curves and sunny creases to the final fling-off of the dip on sky. Here was a twisted hawthorn carved clean to the way of the wind; a sheltered clump of chestnuts holding their blossoms up, as with a thousand cresset-clasping hands; here were grasses that nodded swept from green to grey; flowers yellow, white, and blue, significant of a marvellous unknown through the gates of colour; and gorse-covers giving out the bird, squares of young wheat, a single fallow threaded by a hare, and cottage gardens, shadowy garths, wayside flint-heap, woods of the mounds and the dells, fluttering leaves, clouds: all were swallowed, all were the one unworried significance. Scenery flew, shifted, returned; again the line of the downs raced and the hollows reposed simultaneously. They were the same in change to an eye grown older; they promised, as at the first, happiness for recklessness. The whole woman was urged to delirious recklessness in happiness, and she drank the flying scenery as an indication, a likeness, an encouragement.

When her wild music of the blood had fallen to stillness with the stopped wheels, she was in the musky, small, low room of the diamond window-panes, at her companion's disposal for what he might deem the best: he was her fate. But the more she leaned on a man of self-control, the more she admired; and an admiration that may not speak itself to the object present drops inward, stirs the founts; and if these are repressed, the tenderness which is not allowed to weep will drown self-pity, hardening the woman to summon scruples in relation to her unworthiness. He might choose to forget, but the more she admired, the less could her feminine conscience permit of an utter or of any forgetfulness that she was not the girl Browny, whom he once loved—perhaps loved now, under some illusion of his old passion for her—does love now, ill-omened as he is in that! She read him by her startled reading of her own heart, and she constrained her will to keep from doing, saying, looking aught that would burden without gracing his fortunes. For, as she felt, a look, a word, a touch would do the mischief; she had no resistance behind her cold face, only the physical scruple, which would become the moral unworthiness if in any way she induced him to break his guard and blow hers to shreds. An honourable conscience before the world has not the same certificate in love's pure realm. They are different kingdoms. A girl may be of both; a married woman, peering outside the narrow circle of her wedding-ring, should let her eyelids fall and the unseen fires consume her.

Their common thought was now, Will the chariot follow?

What will he do if it comes? was an unformed question with Aminta.

Page 3864

He had formed and not answered it, holding himself, sincerely at the moment, bound to her wishes. Near the end of Ashead main street she had turned to him in her seat beside the driver, and conveyed silently, with the dental play of her tongue and pouted lips, ‘No title.’

Upon that sign, waxen to those lips, he had said to the driver, ’You took your orders from Lady Charlotte?

And the reply, ’Her ladyship directed me sir, exonerated Lord Ormont so far.

Weyburn remembered then a passage of one of her steady looks, wherein an oracle was mute. He tried several of the diviner’s shots to interpret it: she was beyond his reach. She was in her blissful delirium of the flight, and reproached him with giving her the little bit less to resent—she who had no sense of resentment, except the claim on it to excuse.

Their landlady entered the room to lay the cloth for tea and eggs. She made offer of bacon as well, homecured. She was a Hampshire woman, and understood the rearing of pigs. Her husband had been a cricketer, and played for his county. He didn’t often beat Hampshire! They had a good garden of vegetables, and grass-land enough for two cows. They made their own bread, their own butter, but did not brew.

Weyburn pronounced for a plate of her home-cured. She had children, the woman told him—two boys and a girl. Her husband wished for a girl. Her eldest boy wished to be a sailor, and would walk miles to a pond to sail bits of wood on it, though there had never been a sea-faring man in her husband’s family or her own. She agreed with the lady and gentleman that it might be unwise to go contrary to the boy’s bent. Going to school or coming home, a trickle of water would stop him.

Aminta said to her companion in French, ‘Have you money?’

She chased his blood. ‘Some: sufficient. I think.’ It stamped their partnership.

’I have but a small amount. Aunt was our paymaster. We will buy the little boy a boat to sail. You are pale.’

’I ‘ve no notion of it.’

‘Something happened it Ashead.’

‘It would not have damaged my complexion.’

He counted his money. Aminta covertly handed him her purse. Their fingers touched. The very minor circumstance of their landlady being in the room dammed a flood.

Her money and his amounted to seventeen pounds. The sum-total was a symbol of days that were a fiery wheel.

Honour and blest adventure might travel together two days or three, he thought. If the chariot did not pass:—Lord Ormont had willed it. A man could not be said to swerve in his duty when acting to fulfil the master's orders, and Mrs. Pagnell was proved a hoodwinked duenna, and Morsfield was in the air. The breathing Aminta had now a common purse with her first lover. For three days or more they were, it would seem, to journey together, alone together: the prosecution of his

Page 3865

duty imposed it on him. Sooth to say, Weyburn knew that a spice of passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist's mess; but he fancied an absolute reliance on Aminta's dignity, and his respect for her was another barrier. He begged the landlady's acceptance of two shillings for her boy's purchase of a boat, advising her to have him taught early to swim. Both he and Aminta had a feeling that they could be helpful in some little things on the road if the chariot did not pass.

Justification began to speak loudly against the stopping of the chariot if it did pass. The fact that sweet wishes come second, and not so loudly, assured him they were quite secondary; for the lover sunk to sophist may be self-beguiled by the arts which render him the potent beguiler.

'We are safe here,' he said, and thrilled her with the 'we' behind the curtaining leaded window-panes.

'What is it you propose?' Her voice was lower than she intended. To that she ascribed his vivid flush. It kindled the deeper of her dark hue.

He mentioned her want of luggage, and the purchase of a kit.

She said, 'Have we the means?'

'We can adjust the means to the ends.'

'We must be sparing of expenses.'

'Will you walk part of the way?'

'I should like it.'

'We shall be longer on the journey.'

'We shall not find it tiresome, I hope.'

'We can say so, if we do.'

'We are not strangers.'

The recurrence of the 'we' had an effect of wedding: it was fatalistic, it would come; but, in truth, there was pleasure in it, and the pleasure was close to consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent.

And, no, they were not strangers; hardly a word could they utter without cutting memory to the quick; their present breath was out of the far past.

Love told them both that they were trembling into one another's arms, not voluntarily, against the will with each of them; they knew it would be for life; and Aminta's shamed reserves were matched to make an obstacle by his consideration for her good name and her station, for his own claim to honest citizenship also.

Weyburn acted on his instinct at sight of the postillion and the chariot; he flung the window wide and shouted. Then he said, 'It is decided,' and he felt the rightness of the decision, like a man who has given a condemned limb to the surgeon.

Aminta was passive as a water-weed in the sway of the tide. Hearing it to be decided, she was relieved. What her secret heart desired, she kept secret, almost a secret from herself. He was not to leave her; so she had her permitted wish, she had her companion plus her exclamatory aunt, who was a protection, and she had learnt her need of the smallest protection.

'I can scarcely believe I see you, my dear, dear child!' Mrs. Pagnell cried, upon entering the small inn parlour; and so genuine was her satisfaction that for a time she paid no heed to the stuffiness of the room, the meanness of the place, the unfitness of such a hostelry to entertain ladies—the Countess of Ormont!

Page 3866

‘Eat here?’ Mrs. Pagnell asked, observing the preparations for the meal. Her pride quailed, her stomach abjured appetite. But she forbore from asking how it was that the Countess of Ormont had come to the place.

At a symptom of her intention to indulge in disgust; Aminta brought up Mr. Morsfield by name; whereupon Mrs. Pagnell showed she had reflected on her conduct in relation to the gentleman, and with the fear of the earl if she were questioned.

Home-made bread and butter, fresh eggs and sparkling fat of bacon invited her to satisfy her hunger. Aminta let her sniff at the teapot unpunished; the tea had a rustic aroma of ground-ivy, reminding Weyburn of his mother’s curiosity to know the object of an old man’s plucking of hedgeside leaves in the environs of Bruges one day, and the simple reply to her French, ‘Tea for the English.’ A hint of an anecdote interested and enriched the stores of Mrs. Pagnell, so she capped it and partook of the infusion ruefully.

‘But the bread is really good,’ she said, ’and we are unlikely to be seen leaving the place by any person of importance.’

‘Unless Mr. Morsfield should be advised to return this way,’ said Aminta.

Her aunt proposed for a second cup. She was a manageable woman; the same scourge had its instant wholesome effect on her when she snubbed the secretary.

So she complimented his trencherman’s knife, of which the remarkably fine edge was proof enough that he had come heart-whole out of the trial of an hour or so’s intimate companionship with a beautiful woman, who had never been loved, never could be loved by man, as poor Mr. Morsfield loved her! He had sworn to having fasted three whole days and nights after his first sight of Aminta. Once, he said, her eyes pierced him so that he dreamed of a dagger in his bosom, and woke himself plucking at it. That was love, as a born gentleman connected with a baronetcy and richer than many lords took the dreadful passion. A secretary would have no conception of such devoted extravagance. At the most he might have attempted to insinuate a few absurd, sheepish soft nothings, and the Countess of Ormont would know right well how to shrivel him with one of her looks. No lady of the land could convey so much either way, to attract or to repel, as Aminta, Countess of Ormont! And the man, the only man, insensible to her charm or her scorn, was her own wedded lord and husband. Old, to be sure, and haughty, his pride might not allow him to overlook poor Mr. Morsfield’s unintentional offence. But the presence of the countess’s aunt was a reply to any charge he might seek to establish. Unhappily, the case is one between men on their touchiest point, when women are pushed aside, and justice and religion as well. We might be living in a heathen land, for aught that morality has to say.

Page 3867

Mrs. Pagnell fussed about being seen on her emergence from the Jolly Cricketers. Aminta sent Weyburn to spy for the possible reappearance of Mr. Morsfield. He reported a horseman; a butcher-boy clattered by. Aminta took the landlady's hand, under her aunt's astonished gaze, and said: 'I shall not forget your house and your attention to us.' She spoke with a shake of her voice. The landlady curtseyed and smiled, curtseyed and almost whimpered. The house was a poor one, she begged to say; they didn't often have such guests, but whoever came to it they did their best to give good food and drink.

Hearing from Weyburn that the chariot was bound to go through Winchester, she spoke of a brother, a baker there, the last surviving member of her family and, after some talk, Weyburn offered to deliver a message of health and greeting at the baker's shop. There was a waving of hands, much nodding and curtseying, as the postillion resumed his demi-volts—all to the stupefaction of Mrs. Pagnell; but she dared not speak, she had Morsfield on the mouth. Nor could she deny the excellent quality of the bread and butter, and milk, too, at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers. She admitted, moreover, that the food and service of the little inn belonged in their unpretentious honesty to the, kind we call old English: the dear old simple country English of the brotherly interchange in sight of heaven—good stuff for good money, a matter with a blessing on it.

'But,' said she, 'my dear Aminta, I do not and I cannot understand looks of grateful affection at a small innkeeper's wife paid, and I don't doubt handsomely paid, for her entertainment of you.'

'I feel it,' said Aminta; tears rushed to her eyelids, overflowing, and her features were steady.

'Ah, poor dear! that I do understand,' her aunt observed. 'Any little kindness moves you to-day; and well it may.'

'Yes, aunty,' said Aminta, and in relation to the cause of her tears she was the less candid of the two.

So far did she carry her thanks for a kindness as to glance back through her dropping tears at the sign-board of the Jolly Cricketers; where two brave batsmen cross for the second of a certain three runs, if only the fellow wheeling legs, face up after the ball in the clouds, does but miss his catch: a grand suspensory moment of the game, admirably chosen by the artist to arrest the wayfarer and promote speculation. For will he let her slip through his fingers when she comes down? or will he have her fast and tight? And in the former case, the bats are tearing their legs off for just number nought. And in the latter, there 's a wicket down, and what you may call a widower walking it bat on shoulder, parted from his mate for that mortal innings, and likely to get more chaff than consolation when he joins the booth.

CHAPTER XXI

UNDER-CURRENTS IN THE MINDS OF LADY CHARLOTTE AND LORD ORMONT

Page 3868

Another journey of travellers to London, in the rear of the chariot, was not diversified by a single incident or refreshed by scraps of dialogue. Lady Charlotte had her brother Rowsley with her, and he might be taciturn,—she drove her flocks of thoughts, she was busily and contentedly occupied. Although separation from him stirred her mind more excitedly over their days and deeds of boy and girl, her having him near, and having now won him to herself, struck her as that old time's harvest, about as much as can be hoped for us from life, when we have tasted it.

The scene of the invasion of Steignton by the woman and her aunt, and that man Morsfield, was a steel engraving among her many rapid and featureless cogitations. She magnified the rakishness of the woman's hand on hip in view of the house, and she magnified the woman's insolence in bringing that man Morsfield—to share probably the hospitality of Steignton during the master's absence! Her trick of caricature, whenever she dealt with adversaries, was active upon the three persons under observation of the windows. It was potent to convince her that her brother Rowsley had cast the woman to her native obscurity. However, Lady Charlotte could be just: the woman's figure, and as far as could be seen of her face, accounted for Rowsley's entanglement.

Why chastize that man Morsfield at all? Calling him out would give a further dip to the name of Ormont. A pretty idea, to be punishing a roan for what you thank him for! He did a service; and if he's as mad about her as he boasts, he can take her and marry her now Rowsley 's free of her.

Morsfield says he wants to marry her—wants nothing better. Then let him. Rowsley has shown him there 's no legal impediment. Pity that young Weyburn had to be sent to do watch-dog duty. But Rowsley would not have turned her back to travel alone: that is, without a man to guard. He 's too chivalrous.

The sending of Weyburn, she now fancied, was her own doing, and Lady Charlotte attributed it to her interpretation of her brother's heart of chivalry; though it would have been the wiser course, tending straight and swift to the natural end, if the two women and their Morsfield had received the dismissal to travel as they came.

One sees it after the event. Yes, only Rowsley would not have dismissed her without surety that she would be protected. So it was the right thing prompted on the impulse of the moment. And young Weyburn would meet some difficulty in protecting his 'Lady Ormont,' if she had no inclination for it.

Analyzing her impulse of the moment, Lady Charlotte credited herself, not unjustly, with a certain considerateness for the woman, notwithstanding the woman's violent intrusion between brother and sister. Knowing the world, and knowing the upper or Beanstalk world intimately, she winked at nature's passions. But when the legitimate affection of a brother and sister finds them interposing, they are, as little parsonically as possible, reproved. If persistently intrusive, they are handed to the constable.

Page 3869

How, supposing the case of a wife? Well, then comes the contest; and it is with an inferior, because not a born, legitimacy of union; which may be, which here and there is, affection; is generally the habit of partnership. It is inferior, from not being the union of the blood; it is a matter merely of the laws and the tastes. No love, she reasoned, is equal to the love of brother and sister: not even the love of parents for offspring, or of children for mother and father. Brother and sister have the holy young days in common; they have lastingly the recollection of their youth, the golden time when they were themselves, or the best of themselves. A wife is a stranger from the beginning; she is necessarily three parts a stranger up to the finish of the history. She thinks she can absorb the husband. Not if her husband has a sister living! She may cry and tear for what she calls her own: she will act prudently in bowing her head to the stronger tie. Is there a wife in Europe who broods on her husband's merits and his injuries as the sister of Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont does? or one to defend his good name, one to work for his fortunes, as devotedly?

Over and over Lady Charlotte drove her flocks, of much the same pattern, like billows before a piping gale. They might be similar—a puffed iteration, and might be meaningless and wearisome; the gale was a power in earnest.

Her brother sat locked-up. She did as a wife would not have done, and held her peace. He spoke; she replied in a few words—blunt, to the point, as no wife would have done.

Her dear, warm-hearted Rowsley was shaken by the blow he had been obliged to deal to the woman—poor woman!—if she felt it. He was always the principal sufferer where the feelings were concerned. He was never for hurting any but the enemy.

His 'Ha, here we dine!' an exclamation of a man of imprisoned yawns at the apparition of the turnkey, was delightful to her, for a proof of health and sanity and enjoyment of the journey.

'Yes, and I've one bottle left, in the hamper, of the hock you like,' she said. 'That Mr. Weyburn likes it too. He drank a couple coming down.'

She did not press for talk; his ready appetite was the flower of conversation to her. And he slept well, he said. Her personal experience on that head was reserved.

London enfolded them in the late evening of a day brewing storm. My lord heard at the door of his house that Lady Ormont had not arrived. Yet she had started a day in advance of him. He looked down, up and round at Charlotte. He looked into an empty hall. Pagnell was not there. A sight of Pagnell would, strange to say, have been agreeable.

Storm was in the air, and Aminta was on the road. Lightning has, before now, frightened carriage-horses. She would not misconduct herself; she would sit firm. No woman in England had stouter nerve—few men.

But the carriage might be smashed. He was ignorant of the road she had chosen for her return. Out of Wiltshire there would be no cliffs, quarries, river-banks, presenting dangers. Those dangers, however, spring up when horses have the frenzy.

Page 3870

Charlotte was nodded at, for a signal to depart; and she drove off, speculating on the bullet of a grey eye, which was her brother's adieu to her.

The earl had apparently a curiosity to inspect vacant rooms. His Aminta's drawing-room, her boudoir, her bed-chamber, were submissive in showing bed, knickknacks, furniture. They told the tale of a corpse.

He washed and dressed, and went out to his club to dine, hating the faces of the servants of the house, just able to bear with the attentions of his valet.

Thunder was rattling at ten at night. The house was again the tomb.

She had high courage, that girl. She might be in a bed, with her window-blind up, calmly waiting for the flashes: lightning excited her. He had seen her lying at her length quietly, her black hair scattered on the pillow, like shadow of twigs and sprays on moonlit grass, illuminated intermittently; smiling to him, but her heart out and abroad, wild as any witch's. If on the road, she would not quail. But it was necessary to be certain of her having a trusty postillion.

He walked through the drench and scream of a burst cloud to the posting-office. There, after some trouble, he obtained information directing him to the neighbouring mews. He had thence to find his way to the neighbouring pot-house.

The report of the postillion was, on the whole, favourable. The man understood horses —was middle-aged—no sot; he was also a man with an eye for weather, proverbially in the stables a cautious hand—slow 'Old Slow-and-sure,' he was called; by name, Joshua Abnett.

'Oh, Joshua Abnett?' said the earl, and imprinted it on his memory, for the service it was to do during the night.

Slow-and-sure Joshua Abnett would conduct her safely, barring accidents. For accidents we must all be prepared. She was a heroine in an accident. The earl recalled one and more: her calm face, brightened eyes, easy laughter. Hysterics were not in her family.

She did wrong to let that fellow Morsfield accompany her. Possibly he had come across her on the road, and she could not shake him off. Judging by all he knew of her, the earl believed she would not have brought the fellow into the grounds of Steignton of her free will. She had always a particular regard for decency.

According to the rumour, Morsfield and the woman Pagnell were very thick together. He barked over London of his being a bitten dog. He was near to the mad dog's fate, as soon as a convenient apology for stopping his career could be invented.

The thinking of the lesson to Morsfield on the one hand, and of the slow-and-sure postillion Joshua Abriett on the other, lulled Lord Ormont to a short repose in his desolate house. Of Weyburn he had a glancing thought, that the young man would be a good dog to guard the countess from a mad dog, as he had reckoned in commissioning him.

Next day was the day of sunlight Aminta loved.

Page 3871

It happens with the men who can strike, supposing them of the order of civilized creatures, that when they have struck heavily, however deserved the blow, a liking for the victim will assail them, if they discover no support in hatred; and no sooner is the spot of softness touched than they are invaded by hosts of the stricken person's qualities, which plead to be taken as virtues, and are persuasive. The executioner did rightly. But it is the turn for the victim to declare the blow excessive.

Now, a just man, who has overdone the stroke, will indemnify and console in every way, short of humiliating himself.

He had an unusually clear vision of the scene at Steignton. Surprise and wrath obscured it at the moment, for reflection to bring it out in sharp outline; and he was able now to read and translate into inoffensive English the inherited Spanish of it, which violated nothing of Aminta's native 'donayre,' though it might look on English soil outlandish or stagey.

Aminta stood in sunlight on the greensward. She stood hand on hip, gazing at the house she had so long desired to see, without a notion that she committed an offence. Implicitly upon all occasions she took her husband's word for anything he stated, and she did not consequently imagine him to be at Steignton. So, then, she had no thought of running down from London to hunt and confound him, as at first it appeared. The presence of that white-faced Morsfield vindicated her sufficiently so far. And let that fellow hang till the time for cutting him down! Not she, but Pagnell, seems to have been the responsible party. And, by the way, one might prick the affair with Morsfield by telling him publicly that his visit to inspect Steignton was waste of pains, for he would not be accepted as a tenant in the kennels, et caetera.

Well, poor girl, she satisfied her curiosity, not aware that a few weeks farther on would have done it to the full.

As to Morsfield, never once, either in Vienna or in Paris, had she, warmly admired though she was, all eyes telescoping and sun-glassing on her, given her husband an hour or half an hour or two minutes of anxiety. Letters came. The place getting hot, she proposed to leave it.

She had been rather hardly tried. There are flowers we cannot keep growing in pots. Her fault was, that instead of flinging down her glove and fighting it out openly, she listened to Pagnell, and began the game of Pull. If he had a zest for the game, it was to stump the woman Pagnell. So the veteran fancied in his amended mind.

This intrusive sunlight chased him from the breakfast-table and out of the house. She would be enjoying it somewhere; but the house empty of a person it was used to contain had an atmosphere of the vaults, and inside it the sunlight she loved had an effect of taunting him singularly.

Page 3872

He called on his upholsterer and heard news to please her. The house hired for a month above Great Marlow was ready; her ladyship could enter it to-morrow. It pleased my lord to think that she might do so, and not bother him any more about the presentation at Court during the current year. In spite of certain overtures from the military authorities, and roused eulogistic citations of his name in the newspapers and magazines, he was not on friendly terms with his country yet, having contracted the fatal habit of irony, which, whether hitting or musing its object, stirs old venom in our wound, twitches the feelings. Unfortunately for him, they had not adequate expression unless he raged within; so he had to shake up wrath over his grievances, that he might be satisfactorily delivered; and he was judged irreconcilable when he had subsided into the quietest contempt, from the prospective seat of a country estate, in the society of a young wife who adored him.

An exile from the sepulchre of that house void of the consecration of ashes, he walked the streets and became reconciled to street sunlight. There were no carriage accidents to disturb him with apprehensions. Besides, the slowness of the postillion Joshua Abnett, which probably helped to the delay, was warrant of his sureness. And in an accident the stringy fellow, young Weyburn, could be trusted for giving his attention to the ladies—especially to the younger of the two, taking him for the man his elders were at his age. As for Pagnell, a Providence watches over the Pagnells! Mortals have no business to interfere.

An accident on water would be a frolic to his girl. Swimming was a gift she had from nature. Pagnell vowed she swam out a mile at Dover when she was twelve. He had seen her in blue water: he had seen her readiness to jump to the rescue once when a market-woman, stepping out of a boat to his yacht on the Tabus, plumped in. She had the two kinds of courage—the impulsive and the reasoned. What is life to man or woman if we are not to live it honourably? Men worthy of the name say this. The woman who says and acts on it is—well, she is fit company for them. But only the woman of natural courage can say it and act on it.

Would she come by Winchester, or choose the lower road by Salisbury and Southampton, to smell the sea? perhaps-like her!—dismissing the chariot and hiring a yacht for a voyage round the coast and up the Thames. She had an extraordinary love of the sea, yet she preferred soldiers to sailors. A woman? Never one of them more a woman! But it came of her quickness to take the colour and share the tastes of the man to whom she gave herself.

My lord was beginning to distinguish qualities in a character.

He was informed at the mews that Joshua Abnett was on the road still. Joshua seemed to be a roadster of uncommon unprogressiveness, proper to a framed picture.

While debating whether to lunch at his loathed club or at a home loathed more, but open to bright enlivenment any instant, Lord Ormont beheld a hat lifted and Captain May saluting him. They were near a famous gambling-house in St. James's Street.

Page 3873

‘Good! I am glad to see you,’ he said. ’Tell me you know Mr. Morsfield pretty well. I’m speaking of my affair. He has been trespassing down on my grounds at Steignton, and I think of taking the prosecution of him into my own hands. Is he in town?’

’I ‘ve just left his lame devil Cumnock, my lord,’ said May, after a slight grimace. ‘They generally run in tandem.’

‘Will you let me know?’

‘At once, when I hear.’

‘You will call on me? Before noon?’

‘Any service required?’

‘My respects to your wife.’

‘Your lordship is very good.’

Captain May bloomed at a civility paid to his wife. He was a smallish, springy, firm-faced man, devotee of the lady bearing his name and wielding him. In the days when duelling flourished on our land, frail women could be powerful.

The earl turned from him to greet Lord Adderwood and a superior officer of his Profession, on whom he dropped a frigid nod. He held that all but the rank and file, and a few subalterns, of the service had abandoned him to do homage to the authorities. The Club he frequented was not his military Club. Indeed, lunching at any Club in solitariness that day, with Aminta away from home, was bitter penance. He was rejoiced by Lord Adderwood’s invitation, and hung to him after the lunch; for a horrible prospect of a bachelor dinner intimated astonishingly that he must have become unawares a domesticated man.

The solitary later meal of a bachelor was consumed, if the word will suit a rabbit’s form of feeding. He fatigued his body by walking the streets and the bridge of the Houses of Parliament, and he had some sleep under a roof where a life like death, or death apeing life, would have seemed to him the Joshua Abnett, if he had been one to take up images.

Next day he was under the obligation to wait at home till noon. Shortly before noon a noise of wheels drew him to the window. A young lady, in whom he recognized Aminta’s little school friend, of some name, stepped out of a fly. He met her in the hall.

She had expected to be welcomed by Aminta, and she was very timid on finding herself alone with the earl. He, however, treated her as the harbinger bird, wryneck of the nightingale, sure that Aminta would keep her appointment unless an accident delayed.

He had forgotten her name, but not her favourite pursuit of botany; and upon that he discoursed, and he was interested, not quite independently of the sentiment of her being there as a guarantee of Aminta's return. Still he knew his English earth, and the counties and soil for particular wild-flowers, grasses, mosses; and he could instruct her and inspire a receptive pupil on the theme of birds, beasts, fishes, insects, in England and other lands.

He remained discoursing without much weariness till four of the afternoon. Then he had his reward. The chariot was at the door, and the mounted figure of Joshua Abnett, on which he cast not a look or a thought. Aminta was alone. She embraced Selina Collett warmly, and said, in friendly tones, 'Ah! my lord, you are in advance of me.'

Page 3874

She had dropped Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Weyburn at two suburban houses; working upon her aunt's dread of the earl's interrogations as regarded Mr. Morsfield. She had, she said, chosen to take the journey easily on her return, and enjoyed it greatly.

My lord studied her manner more than her speech. He would have interpreted a man's accurately enough. He read hers to signify that she had really enjoyed her journey, 'made the best of it,' and did not intend to be humble about her visit to Steignton without his permission; but that, if hurt at the time, she had recovered her spirits, and was ready for a shot or two—to be nothing like a pitched battle. And she might fire away to her heart's content: wordy retorts would not come from him; he had material surprises in reserve for her. His question concerning Morsfield knew its answer, and would only be put under pressure.

Comparison of the friends Aminta and Selina was forced by their standing together, and the representation in little Selina of the inferiority of the world of women to his Aminta; he thought of several, and splendid women, foreign and English. The comparison rose sharply now, with Aminta's novel, airy, homely, unchallengeing assumption of an equal footing beside her lord, in looks and in tones that had cast off constraint of the adoring handmaid, to show the full-blown woman, rightful queen of her half of the dominion. Between the Aminta of then and now, the difference was marked as between Northern and Southern women: the frozen-mouthed Northerner and the pearl and rose-nipped Southerner; those who smirk in dropping congealed monosyllables, and those who radiantly laugh out the voluble chatter.

Conceiving this to the full in a mind destitute of imagery, but indicative of the thing as clearly as the planed, unpolished woodwork of a cabinet in a carpenter's shop, Lord Ormont liked her the better for the change, though she was not the woman whose absence from his house had caused him to go mooning half a night through the streets, and though it forewarned him of a tougher bit of battle, if battle there was to be.

He was a close reader of surfaces. But in truth, the change so notable came of the circumstance, that some little way down below the surface he perused, where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect, for the two to beget a resolution, the battle of the man and the woman had been fought, and the man beaten.

CHAPTER XXII

TREATS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONTENTION OF BROTHER AND SISTER

Page 3875

In the contest rageing at mid-sea still between the man and the woman, it is the one who is hard to the attractions of the other that will make choice of the spot and have the advantages. A short time earlier Lord Ormont could have marked it out at his leisure. He would have been unable to comprehend why it was denied him to do so now; for he was master of himself, untroubled by conscience, unaware, since he was assured of his Aminta's perfect safety and his restored sense of possession, that any taint of softness in him had reversed the condition of their alliance. He felt benevolently the much he had to bestow, and was about to bestow. Meanwhile, without complicity on his part, without his knowledge, yet absolutely involving his fate, the battle had gone against him in Aminta's breast.

Like many of his class and kind, he was thoroughly acquainted with the physical woman, and he took that first and very engrossing volume of the great Book of Mulier for all the history. A powerful wing of imagination, strong as the flappers of the great Roc of Arabian story, is needed to lift the known physical woman even a very little way up into azure heavens. It is far easier to take a snap-shot at the psychic, and tumble her down from her fictitious heights to earth. The mixing of the two make nonsense of her. She was created to attract the man, for an excellent purpose in the main. We behold her at work incessantly. One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light. By the various arts at her disposal she will have us, unless early in life we tear away the creature's coloured gauzes and penetrate to her absurdly simple mechanism. That done, we may, if we please, dominate her. High priests of every religion have successively denounced her as the chief enemy. To subdue and bid her minister to our satisfaction is therefore a right employment of man's unperverted superior strength. Of course, we keep to ourselves the woman we prefer; but we have to beware of an uxorious preference, or we are likely to resemble the Irishman with his wolf, and dance imprisoned in the hug of our captive.

For it is the creature's characteristic to be lastingly awake, in her moments of utmost slavishness most keenly awake to the chances of the snaring of the stronger. Be on guard, then. Lord Ormont had been on guard then and always: his instinct of commandership kept him on guard. He was on guard now when his Aminta played, not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent. She did it well, he admitted.

Had it been the indignant she played, he might have stooped to cajole the handsome queen of gypsies she was, without acknowledgement of her right to complain. Feeling that he was about to be generous, he shrugged. He meant to speak in deeds.

Lady Charlotte's house was at the distance of a stroller's half-hour across Hyde Park westward from his own. Thither he walked, a few minutes after noon, prepared for cattishness. He could fancy that he had hitherto postponed the visit rather on her account, considering that he would have to crush her if she humped and spat, and he hoped to be allowed to do it gently. There would certainly be a scene.

Page 3876

Lady Charlotte was at home.

’Always at home to you, Rowsley, at any hour. Mr. Eglett has driven down to the City. There ’s a doctor in a square there’s got a reputation for treating weak children, and he has taken down your grand-nephew Bobby to be inspected. Poor boy comes of a poor stock on the father’s side. Mr. Eglett would have that marriage. Now he sees wealth isn’t everything. Those Benlews are rushlights. However, Elizabeth stood with her father to have Robert Benlew, and this poor child ’s the result. I wonder whether they have consciences!’

My lord prolonged the sibilation of his ‘Yes,’ in the way of absent-minded men. He liked little Bobby, but had to class the boy second for the present.

‘You have our family jewels in your keeping, Charlotte?’

‘No, I haven’t,—and you know I haven’t, Rowsley.’ She sprang to arms, the perfect porcupine, at his opening words, as he had anticipated.

‘Where are the jewels?’

’They’re in the cellars of my bankers, and safe there, you may rely on it.’

‘I want them.’

‘I want to have them safe; and there they stop.’

‘You must get them and hand them over.’

‘To whom?’

‘To me.’

‘What for?’

‘They will be worn by the Countess of Ormont’

’Who ‘s she?’

‘The lady who bears the title.’

’The only Countess of Ormont I know of is your mother and mine, Rowsley; and she’s dead.’

‘The Countess of Ormont I speak of is alive.’

Lady Charlotte squared to him. ‘Who gives her the title?’

‘She bears it by right.’

’Do you mean to say, Rowsley, you have gone and married the woman since we came up from Steignton?’

‘She is my wife.’

‘Anyhow, she won’t have our family jewels.’

‘If you had swallowed them, you’d have to disgorge.’

‘I don’t give up our family jewels to such people.’

‘Do you decline to call on her?’

‘I do: I respect our name and blood.’

’You will send the order to your bankers for them to deliver the jewels over to me at my house this day.’

’Look here, Rowsley; you’re gone cracked or senile. You ’re in the hands of one of those clever wenches who catch men of your age. She may catch you; she shan’t lay hold of our family jewels: they stand for the honour of our name and blood.’

‘They are to be at my house-door at four o’clock this afternoon.’

‘They’ll not stir.’

‘Then I go down to order your bankers and give them the order.’

‘My bankers won’t attend to it without the order from me.’

‘You will submit to the summons of my lawyers.’

‘You’re bent on a public scandal, are you?’

‘I am bent on having the jewels.’

’They are not yours; you ’ve no claim to them; they are heirlooms in our family. Things most sacred to us are attached to them. They belong to our history. There ’s the tiara worn by the first Countess of Ormont. There ’s the big emerald of the necklace-pendant —you know the story of it. Two rubies not counted second to any in England. All those diamonds! I wore the cross and the two pins the day I was presented after my marriage.’

Page 3877

‘The present Lady Ormont will wear them the day she is presented.’

‘She won’t wear them at Court.’

‘She will.’

’Don’t expect the Lady Ormont of tradesmen and footmen to pass the Lord Chamberlain.’

’That matter will be arranged for next season. Now I ‘ve done.’

‘So have I; and you have my answer, Rowsley.’ They quitted their chairs.

‘You decline to call on my wife?’ said the earl.

Lady Charlotte replied: ’Understand me, now. If the woman has won you round to legitimize the connection, first, I’ve a proper claim to see her marriage lines. I must have a certificate of her birth. I must have a testified account of her life before you met her and got the worst of it. Then, as the case may be, I ’ll call on her.

‘You will behave yourself when you call.’

‘But she won’t have our family jewels.’

‘That affair has been settled by me.’

’I should be expecting to hear of them as decorating the person of one of that man Morsfield’s mistresses.’

The earl’s brow thickened. ’Charlotte, I smacked your cheek when you were a girl.’

’I know you did. You might again, and I wouldn’t cry out. She travels with that Morsfield; you ’ve seen it. He goes boasting of her. Gypsy or not, she ‘s got queer ways.’

’I advise you, you had better learn at once to speak of her respectfully.’

’I shall have enough to go through, if what you say’s true, with questions of the woman’s antecedents and her people, and the date of the day of this marriage. When was the day you did it? I shall have to give an answer. You know cousins of ours, and the way they ’ll be pressing, and comparing ages and bawling rumours. None of them imagined my brother such a fool as to be wheedled into marrying her. You say it’s done, Rowsley. Was it done yesterday or the day before?’

Lord Ormont found unexpectedly that she struck on a weak point. Married from the first? Why not tell me of it? He could hear her voice as if she had spoken the words. And how communicate the pell-mell of reasons?

‘You’re running vixen. The demand I make is for the jewels,’ he said.

‘You won’t have them, Rowsley—not for her.’

‘You think of compelling me to use force?’

‘Try it.’

‘You swear the jewels are with your bankers?’

‘I left them in charge of my bankers, and they’ve not been moved by me.’

‘Well, it must be force.’

‘Nothing short of it when the honour of our family’s concerned.’

It was rather worse than the anticipated struggle with this Charlotte, though he had kept his temper. The error was in supposing that an hour’s sharp conflict would settle it, as he saw. The jewels required a siege.

‘When does Eglett return?’ he asked.

’Back to lunch. You stay and lunch here, Rowsley we don’t often have you.’

Page 3878

The earl contemplated her, measuring her powers of resistance for a prolonged engagement. Odd that the pride which had withdrawn him from the service of an offending country should pitch him into a series of tussles with women, for its own confusion! He saw that, too, in his dim reflectiveness, and held the country answerable for it.

Mr. Eglett was taken into confidence by him privately after lunch. Mr. Eglett's position between the brother and sister was perplexing; habitually he thought his wife had strong good sense, in spite of the costliness of certain actions at law not invariably confirming his opinion; he thought also that the earl's demand must needs be considered obediently. At the same time, his wife's objections to the new Countess of Ormont, unmasked upon the world, seemed very legitimate; though it might be asked why the earl should not marry, marrying the lady who pleased him. But if, in the words of his wife, the lady had no claim to be called a lady, the marriage was deplorable. On the other hand, Lord Ormont spoke of her in terms of esteem, and he was no fondling dotard.

How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace? The man perpetually plunged into strife by his combative spouse, cried the familiar question again; and at every suggestion of his on behalf of concord he heard from Lady Charlotte that he had no principles, or else from Lord Ormont that his head must be off his shoulders.

The man for peace had the smallest supply of language, and so, unless he took a side and fought, his active part was football between them.

It went on through the afternoon up to five o'clock. No impression was betrayed by Lady Charlotte.

She congratulated her brother on the recruit he had enlisted. He smiled his grimmest of the lips drawn in. A combat, perceptibly of some extension, would soon give him command of the man of peace; and energy to continue attacks will break down the energies of any dogged defensive stand.

He deferred the discussion with his unreasonable sister until the next day at half-past twelve o'clock. Lady Charlotte nodded to the appointment. She would have congratulated herself without irony on the result of the first day's altercation but for her brother Rowsley's unusual and ominous display of patience. Twice during the wrangle she had to conceal a difficult breathing. She felt a numbness in one arm now it was over, and mentally complimented her London physician on the unerringness of his diagnosis. Her heart, however, complained of the cruelty of having in the end, perhaps, if the wrangle should be protracted, to yield, for sheer weakness, without ceasing to beat.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ORMONT JEWELS

Page 3879

At half-past twelve of the noon next day Lord Ormont was at Lady Charlotte's house door. She welcomed him affectionately, as if nothing were in dispute; he nodded an acceptance of her greetings, with a blunt intimation of the business to be settled; she put on her hump of the feline defensive; then his batteries opened fire and hers barked back on him. Each won admiration of the other's tenacity, all the more determined to sap or split it. They had known one another's character, but they had never seen it in such strong light. Never had their mutual and similar, though opposed, resources been drawn out so copiously and unreservedly. This was the shining scrawl of all that each could do to gain a fight. They admired one another's contemptibly justifiable evasions, changes of front, statements bordering the lie, even to meanness in the withdrawal of admissions and the denial of the same ever having been made. That was Charlotte! That was Rowsley! Anything to beat down the adversary.

As to will, the woman's will, of these two, equalled the man's. They were matched in obstinacy and unscrupulousness.

Her ingenuitics of the defence eluded his attacks, and compelled him to fall on heavy iteration of his demand for the jewels, an immediate restitution of the jewels. 'Why immediate?' cried she.

He repeated it without replying to her.

'But, you tell me, Rowsley, why immediate? If you're in want of money for her, you come to me, tell me, you shall have thousands. I'll drive down to the City to-morrow and sell out stock. Mr. Eglett won't mind when he hears the purpose. I shall call five thousand cheap, and don't ask to see the money again.'

'Ah! double the sum to have your own way!' said he.

She protested that she valued her money. She furnished instances of her carefulness of her money all along up to the present period of brutal old age. Yet she would willingly part with five thousand or more to save the family honour. Mr. Eglett would not only approve, he would probably advance a good part of the money himself.

'Money! Who wants money?' thundered the earl, and jumped out of her trap of the further diversion from the plain request. 'To-morrow, when I am here, I shall expect to have the jewels delivered to me.'

'That you may hand them over to her. Where are they likely to be this time next year? And what do you know about jewels? You may look at them when you ask to see them, and not know imitation paste—like the stuff Lady Beltus showed her old husband. Our mother wore them, and she prized them. I'm not sure I wouldn't rather hear they were exhibited in a Bond Street jeweller's shop or a Piccadilly pawnbroker's than have them on that woman.'

‘You speak of my wife.’

’For a season, perhaps; and off they’re likely to go, to pay bills, if her Adderwoods and her Morsfields are out of funds, as they call it.’

Page 3880

‘You are aware you are speaking of my wife, Charlotte?’

‘You daren’t say my sister-in-law.’

He did not choose to say it; and once more she dared him. She could imagine she scored a point.

They were summoned to lunch by Mr. Eglett; and there was an hour’s armistice; following which the earl demanded the restitution of the jewels, and heard the singular question, childishly accentuated, ’What for?’

Patience was his weapon and support, so he named his object with an air of inveteracy in tranquillity they were for his wife to wear.

Lady Charlotte dared him to say they were for her sister-in-law.

He despised the transparent artifice of the challenge.

‘But you have to own the difference,’ she said. ’You haven’t lost respect for your family, thank God! No. It ’s one thing to say she ’s a wife: you hang fire when it ’s to say she ‘s my sister-in-law.’

‘You’ll have to admit the fact, Charlotte.’

‘How long is it since I should have had to admit the fact?’

‘From the date of my marriage.’

‘Tell me the date.’

’No, you don’t wear a wig, Charlotte; but you are fit to practise in the Law-courts!’ he said, exasperatedly jocular.

She had started a fresh diversion, and she pressed him for the date. ’I ‘m supposed to have had a sister-in-law-how many weeks?—months?’

‘Years.’

’Married years! And if you’ve been married years, where were you married? Not in a church. That woman’s no church-bride.’

‘There are some clever women made idiots of by their trullish tempers.’

‘Abuse away. I’ve asked you where you were married, Rowsley.’

‘Go to Madrid. Go to the Embassy. Apply to the chaplain.’

’Married in Madrid! Who’s ever married in Madrid! You flung her a yellow handkerchief, and she tied it round her neck—that ’s your ceremony! Now you tell me you’ve been married years; and she’s a young woman; you fetch her over from Madrid, set her in a place where those Morsfields and other fungi-fellows grow, and she has to think herself lucky to be received by a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she the talk of the town, refused at Court, for all an honourable-enough old woman countenanced her in pity; and I ’m asked to believe she was my brother’s wife, sister-in-law of mine, all the while! I won’t.’

Lady Charlotte dilated on it for a length of time, merely to show she declined to believe it; pouring Morsfield over him and the talk of the town, the gypsy caught in Spain—now to be foisted on her as her sister-in-law! She could fancy she produced an effect.

She did indeed unveil to him a portion of the sufferings his Aminta had undergone; as visibly, too, the good argumentative reasons for his previous avoidance of the deadly, dismal wrangle here forced on him. A truly dismal, profitless wrangle! But the finish of it would be the beginning of some solace to his Aminta.

Page 3881

The finish of it must be to-morrow. He refrained from saying so, and simply appointed to-morrow for the resumption of the wrestle, departing in his invincible coat of patience: which one has to wear when dealing with a woman like Charlotte, he informed Mr. Eglett, on his way out at a later hour than on the foregone day. Mr. Eglett was of his opinion, that an introduction of lawyers into a family dispute was 'rats in the pantry'; and he would have joined him in his gloomy laugh, if the thought of Charlotte in a contention had not been so serious a matter. She might be beaten; she could not be brought to yield.

She retired to her bedroom, and laid herself flat on her bed, immoveable, till her maid undressed her for the night. A cup of broth and strip of toast formed her sole nourishment. As for her doctor's possible reproaches, the symptoms might crowd and do their worst; she fought for the honour of her family.

At midday of the third day Lady Charlotte was reduced to the condition of those fortresses which wave defiantly the flag, but deliver no further shot, awaiting the assault. Her body, affected by hideous old age, succumbed. Her will was unshaken. She would not write to her bankers. Mr. Eglett might go to them, if he thought fit. Rowsley was to understand that he might call himself married; she would have no flower-basket bunch of a sister-in-law thrust upon her.

Lord Ormont and Mr. Eglett walked down to her bankers in the afternoon. As a consequence of express injunctions given by my lady five years previously, the assistant-manager sought an interview with her.

The jewels were lodged at her house the day ensuing. They were examined, verified by the list in Lady Charlotte's family record-book, and then taken away—forcibly, of course—by her brother.

He laughed in his dry manner; but the reminiscent glimpses, helping him to see the humour of it, stirred sensations of the tug it had been with that combative Charlotte, and excused him for having shrunk from the encounter until he conceived it to be necessary.

Settlement of the affair with Morsfield now claimed his attention. The ironical tolerance he practised in relation to Morsfield when Aminta had no definite station before the world changed to an angry irritability at the man's behaviour now that she had stepped forth under his acknowledgement of her as the Countess of Ormont. He had come round to a rather healthier mind regarding his country, and his introduction of the Countess of Ormont to the world was his peace-offering.

As he returned home earlier on the third day, he found his diligent secretary at work. The calling on Captain May and the writing to the sort of man were acts obnoxious to his dignity; so he despatched Weyburn to the captain's house, one in a small street of three narrow tenements abutting on aristocracy and terminating in mews. Weyburn's

mission was to give the earl's address at Great Marlow for the succeeding days, and to see Captain May, if the captain was at home. During his absence the precious family jewel-box was locked in safety. Aminta and her friend, little Miss Collett, were out driving, by the secretary's report. The earl considered it a wholesome feature of Aminta's character that she should have held to her modest schoolmate the fact spoke well for both of them.

Page 3882

A look at the papers to serve for Memoirs was discomposing, and led him to think the secretary could be parted with as soon as he pleased to go: say, a week hence.

The Memoirs were no longer designed for issue. He had the impulse to treat them on the spot as the Plan for the Defence of the Country had been treated; and for absolutely obverse reasons. The secretary and the Memoirs were associated: one had sprung out of the other. Moreover, the secretary had witnessed a scene at Steignton. The young man had done his duty, and would be thanked for that, and dismissed, with a touch of his employer's hand. The young man would have made a good soldier—a better soldier, good as he might be as a scribe. He ought to have been in his father's footsteps, and he would then have disciplined or quashed his fantastical ideas. Perhaps he was right on the point of toning the Memoirs here and there. Since the scene at Steignton Lord Ormont's views had changed markedly in relation to everybody about him, and most things.

Weyburn came back at the end of an hour to say that he had left the address with Mrs. May, whom he had seen.

'A handsome person,' the earl observed.

'She must have been very handsome,' said Weyburn.

'Ah! we fall into their fictions, or life would be a bald business, upon my word!'

Lord Ormont had not uttered it before the sentiment of his greater luck with one of that queer world of the female lottery went through him on a swell of satisfaction, just a wave.

An old-world eye upon women, it seemed to Weyburn. But the man who could crown a long term of cruel injustice with the harshness to his wife at Steignton would naturally behold women with that eye.

However, he was allowed only to generalize; he could not trust himself to dwell on Lady Ormont and the Aminta inside the shell. Aminta and Lady Ormont might think as one or diversely of the executioner's blow she had undergone. She was a married woman, and she probably regarded the wedding by law as the end a woman has to aim at, and is annihilated by hitting; one flash of success, and then extinction, like a boy's cracker on the pavement. Not an elevated image, but closely resembling that which her alliance with Lord Ormont had been!

At the same time, no true lover of a woman advises her—imploring is horrible treason—to slip the symbolic circle of the law from her finger, and have in an instant the world for her enemy. She must consent to be annihilated, and must have no feelings; particularly no mind. The mind is the danger for her. If she has a mind alive, she will

certainly push for the position to exercise it, and run the risk of a classing with Nature’s created mates for reptile men.

Page 3883

Besides, Lady Ormont appeared, in the company of her friend Selina Collett, not worse than rather too thoughtful; not distinctly unhappy. And she was conversable, smiling. She might have had an explanation with my lord, accepting excuses—or, who knows? taking the blame, and offering them. Weakness is pliable. So pliable is it, that it has been known for a crack of the masterly whip to fling off the victim and put on the culprit! Ay, but let it be as it may with Lady Ormont, Aminta is of a different composition. Aminta's eyes of the return journey to London were haunting lights, and lured him to speculate; and for her sake he rejected the thought that for him they meant anything warmer than the passing thankfulness, though they were a novel assurance to him of her possession beneath her smothering cloud of the power to resolve, and show forth a brilliant individuality.

The departure of the ladies and my lord in the travelling carriage for the house on the Upper Thames was passably sweetened to Weyburn by the command to him to follow in a day or two, and continue his work there until he left England. Aminta would not hear of an abandonment of the Memoirs. She spoke on the subject to my lord as to a husband pardoned.

She was not less affable and pleasant with him out of Weyburn's hearing. My lord earned her gratitude for his behaviour to Selina Collett, to whom he talked interestedly of her favourite pursuit, as he had done on the day when, as he was not the man to forget, her arrival relieved him of anxiety. Aminta, noticed the box on the seat beside him.

They drove up to their country house in time to dress leisurely for dinner. Nevertheless, the dinner-hour had struck several minutes before she descended; and the earl, as if not expecting her, was out on the garden path beside the river bank with Selina. She beckoned from the step of the open French window.

He came to her at little Selina's shuffling pace, conversing upon water-plants.

'No jewelry to-day?' he said.

And Aminta replied: 'Carstairs has shown me the box and given the key. I have not opened it.'

'Time in the evening, or to-morrow. You guess the contents?'

'I presume I do.'

She looked feverish and shadowed.

He murmured kindly: 'Anything?'

'Not now: we will dine.'

She had missed, had lost, she feared, her own jewelbox; a casket of no great treasure to others, but of a largely estimable importance to her.

After the heavy ceremonial entrance and exit of dishes, she begged the earl to accompany her for an examination of the contents of the box.

As soon as her chamber-door was shut, she said, in accents of alarm: 'Mine has disappeared. Carstairs, I know, is to be trusted. She remembers carrying the box out of my room; she believes she can remember putting it into the fly. She had to confess that it had vanished, without her knowing how, when my boxes were unpacked.'

Page 3884

‘Is she very much upset?’ said the earl.

’Carstairs? Why, yes, poor creature! you can imagine. I have no doubt she feels for me; and her own reputation is concerned. What do you think is best to be done?’

‘To be done! Overhaul the baggage again in all the rooms.’

‘We’ve not failed to do that.’

’Control yourself, my dear. If, by bad luck, they’re lost, we can replace them. The contents of this box, now, we could not replace. Open it, and judge.’

’I have no curiosity—forgive me, I beg. And the servant’s fly has been visited, ransacked inside and out, footmen questioned; we have not left anything we can conceive of undone. My lord, will you suggest?’

’The intrinsic value of the gems would not be worth—not worth Aminta’s one beat of the heart. Upon my word—not one!’

An amatory knightly compliment breasting her perturbation roused an unwonted spite; and a swift reflection on it startled her with a suspicion. She cast it behind her. He could be angler and fish, he would not be cat and mouse.

She said, however, more temperately: ’It is not the value of the gems. We are losing precious minutes!’

’Association of them with the giver? Is it that? If that has a value for you, he is flattered.’

This betrayed him to the woman waxing as intensely susceptible in all her being as powder to sparks.

‘There is to be no misunderstanding, my lord,’ she said. ’I like—I value my jewels; but—I am alarmed lest the box should fall into hands—into strange hands.’

‘The box!’ he exclaimed with an outline of a comic grimace; and, if proved a voluptuary in torturing, he could instance half a dozen points for extenuation: her charm of person, withheld from him, and to be embraced; her innocent naughtiness; compensation coming to her in excess for a transient infliction of pain. ‘Your anxiety is about the box?’

‘Yes, the box,’ Aminta said firmly. ‘It contains—’

‘No false jewels? A thief might complain.’

‘It contains letters, my lord.’ ‘Blackmail?’

‘You would be at liberty to read them. I would rather they were burnt.’

‘Ah!’ The earl heaved his chest prodigiously. ’Blackmail letters are better in a husband’s hands, if they can be laid there.’

‘If there is a necessity for him to read them—yes.’

’There may be a necessity, there can’t be a gratification,—though there are dogs of thick blood that like to scratch their sores,’ he murmured to himself. ‘You used to show me these declaration epistles.’

‘Not the names.’

‘Not the names—no!’

’When we had left the country, I showed you why it had been my wish to go.’

’Xarifa was and is female honour. Take the key, open that box; I will make inquiries. But, my dear, you guess everything. Your little box was removed for the bigger impression to be produced by this one.’

Page 3885

A flash came out of her dark eyes.

'No, you guess wrong this time, you clever shrew! I wormed nothing from you,' said he. 'I knew you kept particular letters in that receptacle of things of price: Aminta can't conceal. The man has worried you. Why not have come to me?'

'Oblige me, my lord, by restoring me my box.'

'This is your box.'

Her bosom lifted with the words Oh, no! unspoken. He took the key and opened the box. A dazzling tray of stones was revealed; underneath it the constellations in cases, very heavens for the worldly Eve; and he doubted that Eve could have gone completely out of her. But she had, as observation instructed him, set her woman's mind on something else, and must have it before letting her eyes fall on objects impossible for any of her sex to see without coveting them.

He bowed. 'I will fetch it,' he said magnanimously. Her own box was brought from his room. She then consented to look womanly at the Ormont jewels, over which the battle; whereof she knew nothing, and nothing could be told her, had been fought in her interests, for her sovereign pleasure.

She looked and admired. They were beautiful jewels the great emerald was wonderful, and there were two rubies to praise. She excused herself for declining to put the circlet for the pendant round her neck, or a glittering ring on her finger. Her remarks were encomiums, not quite so cold as those of a provincial spinster of an ascetic turn at an exhibition of the world's flycatcher gewgaws. He had divided Aminta from the Countess of Ormont, and it was the wary Aminta who set a guard on looks and tones before the spectacle of his noble bounty, lest any, the smallest, payment of the dues of the countess should be demanded. Rightly interpreting him to be by nature incapable of asking pardon, or acknowledging a wrong done by him, however much he might crave exemption from blame and seek for peace, she kept to her mask of injury, though she hated unforgivingness; and she felt it little, she did it easily, because her heart was dead to the man. My lord's hand touched her on her shoulder, propitiatingly in some degree, in his dumb way.

Offended women can be emotional to a towering pride, that bends while it assumes unbendingness: it must come to their sensations, as it were a sign of humanity in the majestic, speechless king of beasts; and they are pathetically melted, abjectly hypocritical; a nice confusion of sentiments, traceable to a tender bosom's appreciation of strength and the perceptive compassion for its mortality.

In a case of the alienated wife, whose blood is running another way, no foul snake's bite is more poisonous than that indicatory touch, however simple and slight. My lord's

hand, lightly laid on Aminta’s shoulder, became sensible of soft warm flesh stiffening to the skeleton.

CHAPTER XXIV

Page 3886

LOVERS MATED

He was benevolently martial, to the extent of paternal, in thinking his girl, of whom he deigned to think now as his countess, pardonably foolish. Woman for woman, she was of a pattern superior to the world's ordinary, and might run the world's elect a race. But she was pitifully woman-like in her increase of dissatisfaction with the more she got. Women are happier enslaved. Men, too, if their despot is an Ormont. Colonel of his regiment, he proved that: his men would follow him anywhere, do anything. Grand old days, before he was condemned by one knows not what extraordinary round of circumstances to cogitate on women as fluids, and how to cut channels for them, that they may course along in the direction good for them, imagining it their pretty wanton will to go that way! Napoleon's treatment of women is excellent example. Peterborough's can be defended.

His Aminta could not reason. She nursed a rancour on account of the blow she drew on herself at Steignton, and she declined consolation in her being pardoned. The reconcilement evidently was proposed as a finale of one of the detestable feminine storms enveloping men weak enough to let themselves be dragged through a scene for the sake of domestic tranquillity.

A remarkable exhibition of Aminta the woman was, her entire change of front since he had taken her spousal chill. Formerly she was passive, merely stately, the chiselled grande dame, deferential in her bearing and speech, even when argumentative and having an opinion to plant. She had always the independent eye and step; she now had the tongue of the graceful and native great lady, fitted to rule her circle and hold her place beside the proudest of the Ormonts. She bore well the small shuffle with her jewel-box—held herself gallantly. There had been no female feignings either, affected misapprehensions, gapy ignorances, and snaky subterfuges, and the like, familiar to men who have the gentle twister in grip. Straight on the line of the thing to be seen she flew, and struck on it; and that is a woman's martial action. He would right heartily have called her comrade, if he had been active himself. A warrior pulled off his horse, to sit in a chair and contemplate the minute evolutions of the sex is pettish with his part in such battle-fields at the stage beyond amusement.

Seen swimming, she charmed him. Abstract views of a woman summon opposite advocates: one can never say positively, That is she! But the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us. We have none of your pleadings and counter-pleadings and judicial summaries to obstruct a ravenous loyalty. My lord beheld Aminta take her three quick steps on the plank, and spring and dive and ascend, shaking the ends of her bound black locks; and away she went with shut mouth and broad stroke of her arms into the sunny early morning river; brave to see, although he had to flick a bee of a question, why he enjoyed the privilege of seeing, and was not beside her. The only answer confessed to a distaste for all exercise once pleasurable.

Page 3887

She and her little friend boated or strolled through the meadows during the day; he fished. When he and Aminta rode out for the hour before dinner, she seemed pleased. She was amicable, conversable, all that was agreeable as a woman, and she was the chillest of wives. My lord's observations and reflections came to one conclusion: she pricked and challenged him to lead up to her desired stormy scene. He met her and meant to vanquish her with the dominating patience Charlotte had found too much for her: women cannot stand against it.

To be patient in contention with women, however, one must have a continuous and an exclusive occupation; and the tax it lays on us conduces usually to impatience with men. My lord did not directly connect Aminta's chillness and Morsfield's impudence; yet the sensation roused by his Aminta participated in the desire to punish Morsfield speedily. Without wishing for a duel, he was moved by the social sanction it had to consider whether green youths and women might not think a grey head had delayed it too long. The practice of the duel begot the peculiar animal logic of the nobler savage, which tends to magnify an offence in the ratio of our vanity, and hunger for a blood that is not demanded by the appetite. Moreover, a waning practice, in disfavour with the new generation, will be commended to the conservative barbarian, as partaking of the wisdom of his fathers. Further, too, we may have grown slothful, fallen to moodiness, done excess of service to Omphale, our tyrant lady of the glow and the chill; and then undoubtedly the duel braces.

He left Aminta for London, submissive to the terms of intimacy dictated by her demeanour, his unacknowledged seniority rendering their harshness less hard to endure. She had not gratified him with a display of her person in the glitter of the Ormont jewels; and since he was, under common conditions, a speechless man, his ineptitude for amorous remonstrances precipitated him upon deeds, that he might offer additional proofs of his esteem and the assurance of her established position as his countess. He proposed to engage Lady Charlotte in a conflict severer than the foregoing, until he brought her to pay the ceremonial visit to her sister-in-law. The count of time for this final trial of his masterfulness he calculated at a week. It would be an occupation, miserable occupation though it was. He hailed the prospect of chastising Morsfield, for a proof that his tussels with women, prolonged study of their tricks, manoeuvrings and outwittings of them, had not emasculated him.

Aminta willingly promised to write from day to day. Her senses had his absence insured to them by her anticipation of the task. She did not conceive it would be so ponderous a task. What to write to him when nothing occurred! Nothing did occur, unless the arrival of Mr. Weyburn was to be named an event. She alluded to it: 'Mr. Weyburn has come, expecting to find you here. The dispatch-box is here. Is he to await you?'

Page 3888

That innocent little question was a day gained.

One day of boating on the upper reaches of the pastoral river, and walks in woods and golden meadows, was felicity fallen on earth, the ripe fruit of dreams. A dread surrounded it, as a belt, not shadowing the horizon; and she clasped it to her heart the more passionately, like a mother her rosy infant, which a dark world threatens and the universal fate.

Love, as it will be at her June of life, was teaching her to know the good and bad of herself. Women, educated to embrace principles through their timidity and their pudency, discover, amazed, that these are not lasting qualities under love's influence. The blushes and the fears take flight. The principles depend much on the beloved. Is he a man whose contact with the world has given him understanding of life's laws, and can hold him firm to the right course in the strain and whirling of a torrent, they cling to him, deeply they worship. And if they tempt him, it is not advisedly done. Nature and love are busy in conjunction. The timidities and pudencies have flown; they may hover, they are not present. You deplore it, you must not blame; you have educated them so. Muscular principles are sown only out in the world; and, on the whole, with all their errors, the worldly men are the truest as well as the bravest of men. Her faith in his guidance was equal to her dependence. The retrospect of a recent journey told her how he had been tried.

She could gaze tenderly, betray her heart, and be certain of safety. Can wine match that for joy? She had no schemes, no hopes, but simply the desire to bestow, the capacity to believe. Any wish to be enfolded by him was shapeless and unlighted, unborn; though now and again for some chance word or undefined thought she surprised the strange tenant of her breast at an incomprehensibly faster beat, and knew it for her own and not her own, the familiar the stranger—an utter stranger, as one who had snared her in a wreath and was pulling her off her feet.

She was not so guileless at the thought of little Selina Collett here, and of Selina as the letter-bearer of old; and the marvel that Matey and Browny and Selina were together after all! Was it not a kind of summons to her to call him Matey just once, only once, in play? She burned and ached to do it. She might have taxed her ingenuity successfully to induce little Selina to the boldness of calling him Matey—and she then repeating it, as the woman who revived with a meditative effort recollections of the girl. Ah, frightful hypocrite! Thoughts of the pleasure of his name aloud on her lips in his hearing dissolved through her veins, and were met by Matthew Weyburn's open face, before which hypocrisy stood rent and stripped. She preferred the calmer, the truer pleasure of seeing him modestly take lessons in the nomenclature of weeds, herbs, grasses, by hedge and ditch. Selina could instruct him as well in entomology, but he knew better the Swiss, Tyrolese, and Italian valley-homes of beetle and butterfly species. Their simple talk was a cool zephyr fanning Aminta.

Page 3889

The suggestion to unite the two came to her, of course, but their physical disparity denied her that chance to settle her own difficulty, and a whisper of one physically the match for him punished her. In stature, in healthfulness, they were equals, perhaps: not morally or intellectually. And she could claim headship of him on one little point confided to her by his mother, who was bearing him, and startled by the boom of guns under her pillow, when her husband fronted the enemy: Matthew Weyburn, the fencer, boxer, cricketer, hunter, all things manly, rather shrank from firearms—at least, one saw him put on a screw to manipulate them. In danger—among brigands or mutineers, for example—she could stand by him and prove herself his mate. Intellectually, morally, she had to bow humbly. Nor had she, nor could she do more than lean on and catch example from his prompt spiritual valiancy. It shone out from him, and a crisis fulfilled the promise. Who could be his mate for cheerful courage, for skill, the ready mind, easy adroitness, and for self-command? To imitate was a woman's utmost.

Matthew Weyburn appeared the very Matey of the first of May cricketing day among Cuper's boys the next morning, when seen pacing down the garden-walk. He wore his white trousers of that happiest of old days—the 'white ducks' Aminta and Selina remembered. Selina beamed. 'Yes, he did; he always wore them; but now it's a frock-coat instead of a jacket.'

'But now he will be a master instead of a schoolboy,' said Aminta. 'Let us hope he will prosper.'

'He gives me the idea of a man who must succeed,' Selina said; and she was patted, rallied, asked how she had the idea, and kissed; Aminta saying she fancied it might be thought, for he looked so confident.

'Only not what the boys used to call "cocky,"' said Selina. 'He won't be contemptuous of those he outstrips.'

'His choice of the schoolmaster's profession points to a modesty in him, does it not, little woman?'

'He made me tell him, while you were writing your letters yesterday, all about my brother and his prospects.'

'Yes, that is like him. And I must hear of your brother, "little Collett." Don't forget, Sely, little Collett was our postman.'

The Countess of Ormont's humorous reference to the circumstance passed with Selina for a sign of a poetic love of the past, and a present social elevation that allowed her to review it impassively. She admired the great lady and good friend who could really be interested in the fortunes of a mere schoolmaster and a merchant's clerk. To her astonishment, by some agency beyond her fathoming, she found herself, and hardly for

her own pleasure, pushing the young schoolmaster animatedly to have an account of his aims in the establishment of the foreign school.

Page 3890

Weyburn smiled. He set a short look at Aminta; and she, conscious of her detected diplomacy, had an inward shiver, mixed of the fascination and repugnance felt by a woman who knows that under one man's eyes her character is naked and anatomized. Her character?—her soul. He held it in hand and probed it mercifully. She had felt the sweet sting again and again, and had shrunk from him, and had crawled to him. The love of him made it all fascination. How did he learn to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman? Did experience teach him, or sentimental sympathy? He was too young, he was too manly. It must be because of his being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women.

Thames played round them on his pastoral pipes. Bee-note and woodside blackbird and meadow cow, and the fish of the silver rolling rings, composed the leap of the music.

She gave her mind to his voice, following whither it went; half was in air, higher than the swallow's, exalting him.

How is it he is the brother of women? They are sisters for him because he is neither sentimentalist nor devourer. He will not flatter to feed on them. The one he chooses, she will know love. There are women who go through life not knowing love. They are inanimate automatic machines, who lay them down at last, inquiring wherefore they were caused to move. She is not of that sad flock. She will be mated; she will have the right to call him Matey. A certain Browny called him Matey. She lived and died. A certain woman apes Browny's features and inherits her passion, but has forfeited her rights. Were she, under happiest conditions, to put her hand in his, shame would burn her. For he is just—he is Justice; and a woman bringing him less than his due, she must be a creature of the slime!

This was the shadowy sentiment that made the wall of division between them. There was no other. Lord Ormont had struck to fragments that barrier of the conventional oath and ceremonial union. He was unjust—he was Injustice. The weak may be wedded, they cannot be married; to Injustice. And if we have the world for the buttress of injustice, then is Nature the flaring rebel; there is no fixed order possible. Laws are necessary instruments of the majority; but when they grind the sane human being to dust for their maintenance, their enthronement is the rule of the savage's old deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot be a based society upon such conditions. An immolation of the naturally constituted individual arrests the general expansion to which we step, decivilizes more, and is more impious to the God in man, than temporary revelries of a licence that Nature soon checks.

Arrows of thoughts resembling these shot over the half of Aminta's mind not listening. Her lover's head was active on the same theme while he spoke. They converged to it from looks crossing or catching profiles, or from tones, from a motion of hand, from a chance word. Insomuch that the third person present was kept unobservant only by her

studious and humble speculations on the young schoolmaster's grand project to bring the nationalities together, and teach Old England to the Continent—the Continent to Old England: our healthy games, our scorn of the lie, manliness; their intellectual valour, diligence, considerate manners.

Page 3891

‘Just to name a few of the things for interchange,’ said Weyburn. ’As to method, we shall be their disciples. But I look forward to our fellows getting the lead. No hurry. Why will they? you ask in petto. Well, they ’re emulous, and they take a thrashing kindly. That ’s the way to learn a lesson. I ’ve seen our fellows beaten and beaten—-never the courage beaten out of them. In the end, they won and kept the field. They have a lot to learn—principally not to be afraid of ideas. They lose heaps of time before they can feel at home with ideas. They call themselves practical for having an addiction to the palpable. It is a pretty wreath they clap on their deficiencies. Practical dogs are for bones, horses for corn. I want the practical Englishman to settle his muzzle in a nosebag of ideas. When he has once got hold of them, he makes good stuff of them. On the Continent ideas have wings and pay visits. Here, they’re stay-at-home. Then I want our fellows to have the habit of speaking from the chest. They shall return to England with the whoop of the mountains in them and ready to jump out. They shall have an Achillean roar; and they shall sing by second nature. Don’t fear: they’ll give double for anything they take. I’ve known Italians, to whom an Englishman’s honesty of mind and dealing was one of the dreams of a better humanity they had put in a box. Frenchmen, too, who, when they came to know us, were astonished at their epithet of perfide, and loved us.’

‘Emile,’ said Aminta. ’You remember Emile, Selina: the dear little French boy at Mr. Cuper’s?’

‘Oh, I do,’ Selina responded.

‘He will work with Mr. Weyburn in Switzerland.’

‘Oh, that will be nice!’ the girl exclaimed.

Aminta squeezed Selina’s hand. A shower of tears clouded her eyes. She chose to fancy it was because of her envy of the modest, busy, peaceful girl, who envied none. Conquers also sincerity in the sincerest. She was vexed with her full breast, and had as little command of her thoughts as of her feelings.

‘Mr. Weyburn has ideas for the education of girls too,’ she said.

‘There’s the task,’ said he. ’It’s to separate them as little as possible. All the—passez-moi le mot—devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They ’re foreigners when they meet; and their alliances are not always binding. The chief object in life, if happiness be the aim, and the growing better than we are, is to teach men and women how to be one; for, if they ’re not, then each is a morsel for the other to prey on. Lady Charlotte Eglett’s view is, that the greater number of them on both sides hate one another.’

‘Hate!’ exclaimed Selina; and Aminta said: ’Is Lady Charlotte Eglett an authority?’

’She has observed, and she thinks. She has in the abstract the justest of minds: and that is the curious point about her. But one may say they are trained at present to be hostile. Some of them fall in love and strike a truce, and still they are foreigners. They have not the same standard of honour. They might have it from an education in common.’

Page 3892

‘But there must be also a lady to govern the girls?’ Selina interposed.

‘Ah, yes; she is not yet found!’

’Would it increase their mutual respect?—or show of respect, if you like?’ said Aminta, with his last remark at work as the shattering bell of a city’s insurrection in her breast.

’In time, under management; catching and grouping them young. A boy who sees a girl do what he can’t, and would like to do, won’t take refuge in his muscular superiority—-which, by the way, would be lessened.’

‘You suppose their capacities are equal?’

’Things are not equal. I suppose their excellencies to make a pretty nearly equal sum in the end. But we ’re not weighing them each. The question concerns the advantage of both.’

‘That seems just!’

Aminta threw no voice into the word ‘just.’ It was the word of the heavens assuaging earth’s thirst, and she was earth to him. Her soul yearned to the man whose mind conceived it.

She said to Selina: ’We must plan an expedition next year or the year after, and see how the school progresses.’

All three smiled; and Selina touched and held Aminta’s hand shyly. Visions of the unseen Switzerland awed her.

Weyburn named the Spring holiday time, the season of the flowering Alpine robes. He promised welcome, pressed for a promise of the visit. Warmly it was given. ‘We will; we will indeed!’

‘I shall look forward,’ he said.

There was nothing else for him or for her, except to doat on the passing minute that slipped when seized. The looking forward turned them to the looking back at the point they had flown from, and yielded a momentary pleasure, enough to stamp some section of a picture on their memories, which was not the burning now Love lives for, in the clasp, if but of hands. Desire of it destroyed it. They swung to the future, swung to the present it made the past, sensible to the quick of the now they could not hold. They were lovers. Divided lovers in presence, they thought and they felt in pieces. Feelings and thoughts were forbidden to speech. She dared look the very little of her heart’s fulness, without the disloyalty it would have been in him to let a small peep of his heart be seen. While her hand was not clasped she could look tenderly, and her fettered

state, her sense of unworthiness muffled in the deeps, would keep her from the loosening to passion.

He who read through her lustrous, transiently dwelling eyes had not that security. His part, besides the watch over the spring of his hot blood, was to combat a host, insidious among which was unreason calling her Browny, urging him to take his own, to snatch her from a possessor who forfeited by undervaluing her. This was the truth in a better-ordered world: she belonged to the man who could help her to grow and to do her work. But in the world we have around us, it was the distorted truth: and keeping passion down, he was able to wish her such happiness as pertained to safety from shipwreck, and for himself, that he might continue to walk in the ranks of the sober citizens.

Page 3893

Oh, true and right, but she was gloriously beautiful! Day by day she surpassed the wondrous Browny of old days. All women were eclipsed by her. She was that fire in the night which lights the night and draws the night to look at it. And more: this queen of women was beginning to have a mind at work. One saw already the sprouting of a mind repressed. She had a distinct ability; the good ambition to use her qualities. She needed life and air—that is, comprehension of her, encouragement, the companion mate. With what strength would she now endow him! The pride in the sharp imagination of possessing her whispered a boast of the strength her mate would have from her. His need and her need rushed together somewhere down the skies. They could not, he argued, be separated eternally.

He had to leave her. Selina, shocked at a boldness she could not understand in herself, begged him to stay and tell her of Switzerland and Alpine flowers and herbs, and the valleys for the gold beetle and the Apollo butterfly. Aminta hinted that Lord Ormont might expect to find him there, if he came the next morning; but she would not try to persuade, and left the decision with him, loving him for the pain he inflicted by going.

Why, indeed, should he stay? Both could ask; they were one in asking. Anguish balanced pleasure in them both. The day of the pleasure was heaven to remember, heaven to hope for; not so heavenly to pray for. The praying for it, each knew, implored their joint will to decree the perilous blessing. A shadowy sentiment of duty and rectitude, born of what they had suffered, hung between them and the prayer for a renewal, that would renew the tempting they were conscious of when the sweet, the strained, throbbing day was over. They could hope for chance to renew it, and then they would be irresponsible. Then they would think and wish discreetly, so as to have it a happiness untainted. In refusing now to take another day or pray for it, they deserved that chance should grant it.

Aminta had said through Selina the utmost her self-defences could allow. But the idea of a final parting cut too cruelly into her life, and she murmured: ‘I shall see you before you go for good?’

‘I will come, here or in London.’

‘I can trust?’

‘Quite certain.’

A meeting of a few hasty minutes involved none of the dangers of a sunny, long summer day; and if it did, the heart had its claims, the heart had its powers of resistance. Otherwise we should be base verily.

He turned on a bow to leave her before there was a motion for the offer of her hand.

After many musings and frettings, she reached the wisdom of that. Wisdom was her only nourishment now. A cold, lean dietary it is; but he dispensed it, and it fed her, or kept her alive. It became a proud feeling that she had been his fellow in the achievement of a piece of wisdom; though the other feeling, that his hand's kind formal touching, without pressure of hers, would have warmed her to go through the next interview with her lord, mocked at pure satisfaction. Did he distrust himself? Or was it to spare her? But if so, her heart was quite bare to him! But she knew it was.

Page 3894

Aminta drove her questioning heart as a vessel across blank circles of sea, where there was nothing save the solitary heart for answer. It answered intelligibly and comfortingly at last, telling her of proof given that she could repose under his guidance with absolute faith. Was ever loved woman more blest than she in such belief? She had it firmly; and a blessedness, too, in this surety wavering beneath shadows of the uncertainty. Her eyes knew it, her ears were empty of the words. Her heart knew it, and it was unconfirmed by reason. As for his venturing to love her, he feared none. And no sooner did that reflection surge than she stood up beside him in revolt against her lion and lord. Her instinct judged it impossible she could ever have yielded her heart to a man lacking courage. Hence—what? when cowardice appeared as the sole impediment to happiness now!

He had gone, and the day lived again for both of them—a day of sheer gold in the translation from troubled earth to the mind. One another's beauty through the visage into the character was newly perceived and worshipped; and the beauties of pastoral Thames, the temple of peace, hardly noticed in the passing of the day—taken as air to the breather; until some chip of the scene, round which an emotion had curled, was vivid foreground and gateway to shrouded romance: it might be the stream's white face browning into willow-droopers, or a wagtail on a water-lily leaf, or the fore-horse of an up-river barge at strain of legs, a red-finned perch hung a foot above the pebbles in sun-veined depths, a kingfisher on the scud under alders, the forest of the bankside weeds.

CHAPTER XXV

PREPARATIONS FOR A RESOLVE

That day receded like a spent billow, and lapsed among the others advancing, but it left a print deeper than events would have stamped. Aminta's pen declined to run to her lord; and the dipping it in ink was no acceleration of the process. A sentence, bearing likeness to an artless infant's trot of the half-dozen steps to mother's lap, stumbled upon the full stop midway. Desperate determination pushed it along, and there was in consequence a dead stop at the head of the next sentence. A woman whose nature is insurgent against the majesty of the man to whom she must, among the singular injunctions binding her, regularly write, sees no way between hypocrisy and rebellion. For rebellion, she, with the pen in her hand, is avowedly not yet ripe, hypocrisy is abominable.

If she abstained from writing, he might travel down to learn the cause; a similar danger, or worse, haunted the writing frigidly. She had to be the hypocrite or else—leap.

But an honest woman who is a feeling woman, when she consents to play hypocrite, cannot do it by halves. From writing a short cold letter, Aminta wrote a short warm one, or very friendly. Length she could avoid, because she was unable to fill a page. It

seemed that she could not compose a friendly few lines without letting her sex be felt in them. What she had put away from her, so as not to feel it herself, the simulation of ever so small a bit of feeling brought prominently back; and where she had made a cast for flowing independent simplicity, she was feminine, ultra-feminine to her reading of it.

Page 3895

Better take the leap than be guilty of double-dealing even on paper! The nature of the leap she did not examine.

Her keen apprehension of the price payable for his benevolent intentions caught scent of them in the air. Those Ormont jewels shone as emblems of a detested subjection, the penalty for being the beautiful woman rageing men proclaimed. Was there no scheme of some other sort, and far less agreeable, to make amends for Steignton? She was shrewd at divination; she guessed her lord's design. Rather than meet Lady Charlotte, she proposed to herself the 'leap' immediately; knowing it must be a leap in the dark, hoping it might be into a swimmer's water. She had her own pin-money income, and she loathed the chain of her title. So the leap would at least be honourable, as it assuredly would be unregretted, whatever ensued.

While Aminta's heart held on to this debate, and in her bed, in her boat, across the golden valley meadows beside her peaceful little friend, she gathered a gradual resolution without sight of agencies or consequences, Lord Ormont was kept from her by the struggle to master his Charlotte a second time—compared with which the first was insignificant. And this time it was curious: he could not subdue her physique, as he did before; she was ready for him each day, and she was animated, much more voluble, she was ready to jest. The reason being, that she fought now on plausibly good grounds: on behalf of her independent action.

Previously, her intelligence of the ultimate defeat hanging over the more stubborn defence of a weak position had harassed her to death's door. She had no right to retain the family jewels; she had the most perfect of established rights to refuse doing an ignominious thing. She refused to visit the so-called Countess of Ormont, or leave her card, or take one step to warrant the woman in speaking of her as her sister-in-law. And no,—it did not signify that her brother Rowsley was prohibited by her from marrying whom he pleased. It meant, that to judge of his acts as those of a reasoning man, he would have introduced his wife to his relatives—the relatives he had not quarrelled with —immediately upon his marriage unless he was ashamed of the woman; and a wife he was ashamed of was no sister-in-law for her nor aunt for her daughters. Nor should she come playing the Black Venus among her daughters' husbands, Lady Charlotte had it in her bosom to say additionally.

Lord Ormont was disconcerted by her manifest pleasure in receiving him every day. Evidently she consented to the recurrence of a vexatious dissension for the enjoyment of having him with her hourly. Her dialectic, too, was cunning. Impetuous with meaning, she forced her way to get her meaning out, in a manner effective to strike her blow. Anything for a diversion or a triumph of the moment! He made no way. She was the better fencer at the tongue.

Page 3896

Yet there was not any abatement of her deference to her brother; and this little misunderstanding put aside, he was the Rowsley esteemed by her as the chief of men. She foiled him, it might seem, to exalt him the more. After he had left the house, visibly annoyed and somewhat stupefied, she talked of him to her husband, of the soul of chivalry Rowsley was, the loss to his country. Mr. Eglett was a witness to one of the altercations, when she, having as usual the dialectical advantage, praised her brother, to his face, for his magnanimous nature; regretting only that it could be said he was weak on the woman side of him—which was, she affirmed, a side proper to every man worth the name; but in his case his country might complain. Of what?—Well, of a woman.—What had she done, for the country to complain of her?—Why, then, arts or graces, she had bewitched and weaned him from his public duty, his military service, his patriotic ambition.

Lord Ormont's interrogations, heightening the effect of Charlotte's charge, appeared to Mr. Eglett as a giving of himself over into her hands; but the earl, after a minute of silence, proved he was a tricky combatant. It was he who had drawn on Charlotte, that he might have his opportunity to eulogize—'this lady, whom you continue to call the woman, after I have told you she is my wife.' According to him, her appeals, her entreaties, that he should not abandon his profession or let his ambition rust, had been at one period constant.

He spoke fervently, for him eloquently; and he gained his point; he silenced Lady Charlotte's tongue, and impressed Mr. Eglett.

When the latter and his wife were alone, he let her see that the Countess of Ormont was becoming a personage in his consideration.

Lady Charlotte cried out: 'Hear these men where it's a good-looking woman between the winds! Do you take anything Rowsley says for earnest? You ought to know he stops at no trifle to get his advantage over you in a dispute. That 's the soldier in him. It 's victory at any cost!—and I like him for it. Do you tell me you think it possible my brother Rowsley would keep smothered years under a bushel the woman he can sit here magnifying because he wants to lime you and me: you to take his part, and me to go and call the noble creature decked out in his fine fiction my sister-in-law. Nothing 'll tempt me to believe my brother could behave in such a way to the woman he respected!'

So Mr. Eglett opined. But he had been impressed.

He relieved his mind on the subject in a communication to Lord Adderwood; who habitually shook out the contents of his to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she, deeming it good for Aminta to have information of the war waging for her behoof, obtained her country address, with the resolve to drive down, a bearer of good news to the dear

woman she liked to think of, look at, and occasionally caress; besides rather tenderly pitying her, now that a change of fortune rendered her former trials conspicuous.

Page 3897

An incident, considered grave even in the days of the duel and the kicks against a swelling public reprehension of the practice, occurred to postpone her drive for four-and-twenty hours. London was shaken by rumours of a tragic mishap to a socially well-known gentleman at the Chiallo fencing rooms. The rumours passing from mouth to mouth acquired, in the nature of them, sinister colours as they circulated. Lord Ormont sent Aminta word of what he called ‘a bad sort of accident at Chiallo’s,’ without mentioning names or alluding to suspicions.

He treated it lightly. He could not have written of it with such unconcern if it involved the secretary! Yet Aminta did seriously ask herself whether he could; and she flew rapidly over the field of his character, seizing points adverse, points favourably advocative, balancing dubiously—most unjustly: she felt she was unjust. But in her condition, the heart of a woman is instantly planted in jungle when the spirits of the two men closest to her are made to stand opposed by a sudden excitement of her fears for the beloved one. She cannot see widely, and is one of the wild while the fit lasts; and, after it, that savage narrow vision she had of the unbeloved retains its vivid print in permanence. Was she unjust? Aminta cited corroboration of her being accurate: such was Lord Ormont! and although his qualities of gallantry, courtesy, integrity, honourable gentleman, presented a fair low-level account on the other side, she had so stamped his massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion on her conception of him that the repulsive figure formed by it continued towering when her mood was kinder.

Love played on love in the woman’s breast. Her love had taken a fever from her lord’s communication of the accident at Chiallo’s, and she pushed her alarm to imagine the deadliest, and plead for the right of confession to herself of her unrepented regrets. She and Matey Weyburn had parted without any pressure of hands, without a touch. They were, then, unplighted if now the grave divided them! No touch: mere glances! And she sighed not, as she pleaded, for the touch, but for the plighting it would have been. If now she had lost him, he could never tell herself that since the dear old buried and night-walking schooldays she had said once Matey to him, named him once to his face Matey Weyburn. A sigh like the roll of a great wave breaking against a wall of rock came from her for the possibly lost chance of naming him to his face Matey,—oh, and seeing his look as she said it!

The boldness might be fancied: it could not be done. Agreeing with the remote inner voice of her reason so far, she toned her exclamatory foolishness to question, in Reason’s plain, deep, basso-profundo accompaniment tone, how much the most blessed of mortal women could do to be of acceptable service to a young schoolmaster?

Page 3898

There was no reply to the question. But it became a nestling centre for the skiey flock of dreams, and for really temperate soundings of her capacities, tending to the depreciatory. She could do little. She entertained the wish to work, not only ‘for the sake of Somebody,’ as her favourite poet sang, but for the sake of working and serving —proving that she was helpfuller than a Countess of Ormont, ranged with all the other countesses in china and Dresden on a drawing-room mantelpiece for show. She could organize, manage a household, manage people too, she thought: manage a husband? The word offends. Perhaps invigorate him, here and there perhaps inspire him, if he would let her breathe. Husbands exist who refuse the right of breathing to their puppet wives. Above all, as it struck her, she could assist, and be more than an echo of one nobler, in breathing manliness, high spirit, into boys. With that idea she grazed the shallows of reality, and her dreams whirred from the nest and left it hungrily empty.

Selina Collett was writing under the verandah letters to her people in Suffolk, performing the task with marvellous ease. Aminta noted it as a mark of superior ability, and she had the envy of the complex nature observing the simple. It accused her of some guiltiness, uncommitted and indefensible. She had pushed her anxiety about ’the accident at Chiallo’s’ to an extreme that made her the creature of her sensibilities. In the midst of this quiet country life and landscape; these motionless garden flowers headed by the smooth white river, and her gentle little friend so homely here, the contemplation of herself was like a shriek in music. Worse than discordant, she pronounced herself inferior, unfit mentally as well as bodily for the dreams of companionship with any noble soul who might have the dream of turning her into something better. There are couples in the world, not coupled by priestly circumstance, who are close to the true; union, by reason of generosity on the one part, grateful devotion, as for the gift of life, on the other. For instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood, which was an instance without resemblance; but Aminta’s heart beat thick for what it wanted, and they were the instance of two that did not have to snap false bonds of a marriage-tie in order to walk together composedly outside it—in honour? Oh yes, yes! She insisted on believing it was in honour.

She saw the couple issue from the boathouse. She had stepped into the garden full of a presentiment; so she fancied, the moment they were seen. She had, in fact, heard a noise in the boathouse while thinking of them, and the effect on her was to spring an idea of mysterious interventions at the sight.

Mrs. Lawrence rushed to her, and was embraced. ’You ’re not astonished to see me? Adder drove me down, and stopped his coach at the inn, and rowed me the half-mile up. We will lunch, if you propose; but presently. My dear, I have to tell you things. You have heard?’

Page 3899

‘The accident?’

Aminta tried to read in Mrs. Lawrence’s eyes whether it closely concerned her.

Those pretty eyes, their cut of lids hinting at delicate affinities with the rice-paper lady of the court of China, were trying to peer seriously.

‘Poor man! One must be sorry for him: he—’

‘Who?’

’You ‘ve not heard, then?’ Mrs. Lawrence dropped her voice: ‘Morsfield.’

Aminta shivered. ’All I have heard-half a line from my lord this morning: no name. It was at the fencing-rooms, he said.’

‘Yes, he wouldn’t write more;’ said Mrs. Lawrence, nodding. ’You know, he would have had to do it himself if it had not been done for him. Adder saw him some days back in a brown consultation near his club with Captain May. Oh, but of course it was accident! Did he call it so in his letter to you?’

‘One word of Mr. Morsfield: he is wounded?’

’Past cure: he has the thing he cried for, spoilt boy as he was from his birth. I tell you truth, m’ Aminta, I grieve to lose him. What with his airs of the foreign-tinted, punctilious courtly gentleman covering a survival of the ancient British forest boar or bear, he was a picture in our modern set, and piquant. And he was devoted to our sex, we must admit, after the style of the bears. They are for honey, and they have a hug. If he hadn’t been so much of a madman, I should have liked him for his courage. He had plenty of that, nothing to steer it. A second cousin comes in for his estates.’

‘He is dead?’ Aminta cried.

’Yes, dear, he is gone. What the women think of it I can’t say. The general feeling among the men is that some one of them would have had to send him sooner or later. The curious point, Adder says, is his letting it be done by steel. He was a dead shot, dangerous with the small sword, as your Mr. Weyburn said, only soon off his head. But I used to be anxious about the earl’s meeting him with pistols. He did his best to provoke it. Here, Adder,’—she spoke over her shoulder,—’tell Lady Ormont all you know of the Morsfield-May affair.’

Lord Adderwood bowed compliance. His coolness was the masculine of Mrs. Lawrence’s hardly feminine in treating of a terrible matter, so that the dull red facts had to be disengaged from his manner of speech before they sank into Aminta’s acceptance; of them as credible.

’They fought with foils, buttons off, preliminary ceremonies perfect; salute in due order; guard, and at it.

Odd thing was, nobody at Chiallo’s had a notion of the business till Morsfield was pinked. He wouldn’t be denied; went to work like a fellow meaning to be skewered, if he couldn’t do the trick: and he tried it. May had been practising some weeks. He’s well on the Continent by this time. It’ll blow over. Button off sheer accident. I wasn’t lucky enough to see the encounter: came in just when Chiallo was lashing his poll over Morsfield flat on the ground.

Page 3900

He had it up to the hilt. We put a buttoned foil by the side of Morsfield, and all swore to secrecy. As it is, it 'll go badly against poor Chiallo. Taste for fencing won't be much improved by the affair. They quarrelled in the dressing room, and fetched the foils and knocked off the buttons there. A big rascal toady squire of Morsfield's did it for him. Morsfield was just up from Yorkshire. He said he was expecting a summons elsewhere, bound to await it, declined provocation for the present. May filliped him on the cheek.'

'Adder conveyed the information of her husband's flight to the consolable Amy,' said Mrs. Lawrence.

'He had to catch the coach for Dover,' Adderwood explained. 'His wife was at a dinner-party. I saw her at midnight.'

'Fair Amy was not so very greatly surprised?'

'Quite the soldier's wife!'

'She said she was used to these little catastrophes. But, Adder, what did she say of her husband?'

'Said she was never anxious about him, for nothing would kill him.'

Mrs. Lawrence shook a doleful head at Aminta.

'You see, my dear Aminta, here's another, and probably her last, chance of sharing the marquisate gone. Who can fail to pity her, except old Time! And I 'm sure she likes her husband well enough. She ought: no woman ever had such a servant. But the captain has not been known to fight without her sanction, and the inference is—'Alas! woe! Fair Amy is doomed to be the fighting captain's bride to the end of the chapter. Adder says she looked handsome. A dinner-party suits her cosmetic complexion better than a ball. The account of the inquest is in the day's papers, and we were tolerably rejoiced we could drive out of London without having to reply to coroner's questions.'

'He died-soon?' Aminta's voice was shaken.

Mrs. Lawrence touched at her breast, it might be for heart or lungs. Judging by Aminta's voice and face, one could suppose she was harking back, in woman's way, to her original sentiment for the man, now that he lay prostrate.

Aminta read the unreproachful irony in the smile addressed to her. She was too convulsed by her many emotions and shouting thoughts to think of defending herself.

Selina, in the drawing-room, diligently fingered and classed brown-black pressed weeds of her neophyte's botany-folios. The sight of her and her occupation struck Aminta as

that of a person in another world beyond this world of blood, strangely substantial to view; and one heard her speak.

Guilty?—no. But she had wished to pique her lord. After the term of a length of months, could it be that the unhappy man and she were punished for the half-minute's acting of some interest in him? And Lord Ormont had been seen consulting Captain May; or was it giving him directions?

Page 3901

Her head burned. All the barren interrogations were up, running and knocking for hollow responses; and, saving a paleness of face, she cloaked any small show of the riot. She was an amiable hostess. She had ceased to comprehend Mrs. Lawrence, even to the degree of thinking her unfeminine. She should have known that the 'angelical chimpanzee,' as a friend, once told of his being a favourite with the lady, had called her, could not simulate a feeling, and had not the slightest power of pretence to compassion for an ill-fated person who failed to quicken her enthusiasm. In that, too, she was a downright boy. Morsfield was a kind of Bedlamite to her; amusing in his antics, and requiring to be manoeuvred and eluded while he lived: once dead, just a tombstone, of interest only to his family.

She beckoned Aminta to follow her; and, with a smirk of indulgent fun, commended Lord Adderwood to a study of Selina Collett's botany-folios, which the urbanest of indifferent gentlemen had slid his eyes over his nose to inspect before the lunch.

'You ought to know what is going on in town, my dear Aminta. You have won the earl to a sense of his duty, and he 's at work on the harder task of winning Lady Charlotte Eglett to a sense of hers. It 's tremendous. Has been forward some days, and no sign of yielding on either side. Mr. Eglett, good man, is between them, catching it right and left; and he deserves his luck for marrying her. Vows she makes him the best of wives. If he 's content, I 've nothing to complain of. You must be ready to receive her; my lord is sure to carry the day. You gulp. You won't be seeing much of her. I 'm glad to say he is condescending to terms of peace with the Horse Guards. We hear so. You may be throning it officially somewhere next year. And all 's well that ends well! Say that to me!'

'It is, when the end comes,' Aminta replied.

Mrs. Lawrence's cool lips were pressed to her cheek. The couple and their waterman rowed away to the party they had left with the four-in-hand at their inn.

A wind was rising. The trees gave their swish of leaves, the river darkened the patch of wrinkles, the bordering flags amid the reed-blades dipped and streamed.

Surcharged with unassimilated news of events, that made a thunder in her head, Aminta walked down the garden path, meeting Selina and bearing her on. She had a witch's will to rouse gales. Hers was not the woman's nature to be driven cowering by stories of men's bloody deeds. She took the field, revolted, dissevering herself from the class which tolerated them—actuated by a reflective moralty, she believed; and loathed herself for having aspired, schemed, to be a member of the class. But it was not the class, it was against her lord as representative of the class, that she was now the rebel, neither naming him nor imaging him. Her enveloping mind was black on him. Such as one of those hard slaughtering men could call her his own? She breathed short and breathed deep. Her bitter reason had but the common pity for a madman despatched to his rest. Yet she knew hatred of her lord in his being suspected as instigator or

accomplice of the hand that dealt the blow. He became to her thought a python whose coils were about her person, insufferable to the gaze backward.

Page 3902

Moments like these are the mothers in travail of a resolve joylessly conceived, undesired to clasp, Necessity's offspring. Thunderclouds have as little love of the lightnings they fling.

Aminta was aware only of her torment. The trees were bending, the water hissing, the grasses all this way and that, like hands of a delirious people in surges of wreck. She scorned the meaningless shake of the garments of earth, and exclaimed: 'If we were by the sea to-night!'

'I shall be to-morrow night,' said Selina. 'I shall think of you. Oh! would you come with me?'

'Would you have me?'

'My mother will indeed be honoured by your consenting to come.'

'Write to her before the post is out.'

'We shall travel down together?'

Aminta nodded and smiled, and Selina kissed her hand in joy, saying, that down home she would not be so shy of calling her Aminta. She was bidden to haste.

CHAPTER XXVI

VISITS OF FAREWELL

The noise in London over Adolphus Morsfield's tragical end disturbed Lord Ormont much less than the cessation of letters from his Aminta; and that likewise, considering his present business on her behalf, he patiently shrugged at and pardoned, foreseeing her penitent air. He could do it lightly after going some way to pardon his offending country. For Aminta had not offended, his robust observation of her was moved to the kindly humorous by a reflective view here and there of the downright woman her clever little shuffles exposed her to be, not worse. It was her sex that made her one of the gliders in grasses, some of whom are venomous; but she belonged to the order only as an innocuous blindworm. He could pronounce her small by-play with Morsfield innocent, her efforts to climb the stairs into Society quite innocent; judging her, of course, by her title of woman. A woman's innocence has a rainbow skin. Set this one beside other women, she comes out well, fairly well, well enough.

Now that the engagement with Charlotte assumed proportions of a series of battle, properly to be entitled a campaign, he had, in his loneliness, fallen into the habit of reflecting at the close of his day's work; and the rubbing of that unused opaque mirror hanging inside a man of action had helped him piecemeal to perceive bits of his

conduct, entirely approved by him, which were intimately connected, nevertheless, with a train of circumstances that he disliked and could not charge justly upon any other shoulders than his own. What was to be thought of it? He would not be undergoing this botheration of the prolonged attempt to bring a stubborn woman to a sense of her duty, if he had declared his marriage in the ordinary style, and given his young countess her legitimate place before the world. What impeded it? The shameful ingratitude of his countrymen to the soldier who did it eminent service at a crisis of the destinies of

Page 3903

our Indian Empire! He could not condone the injury done to him by entering among them again. Too like the kicked cur, that! He retired—call it ‘sulked in his tent,’ if you like. His wife had to share his fortunes. He being slighted, she necessarily was shadowed. For a while she bore it contentedly enough; then began her mousy scratches to get into the room off the wainscot, without blame from him; she behaved according to her female nature.

Yes, but the battles with Charlotte forced on his recognition once more, and violently, the singular consequences of his retirement and Coriolanus quarrel with his countrymen. He had doomed himself ever since to a contest with women. First it was his Queen of Amazons, who, if vanquished, was not so easily vanquished, and, in fact, doubtfully,—for now, to propitiate her, he had challenged, and must overcome or be disgraced, the toughest Amazonian warrior man could stand against at cast of dart or lock of arms. No day scored an advantage; and she did not apparently suffer fatigue. He did: that is to say, he was worried and hurried to have the wrangle settled and Charlotte at Aminta’s feet. He gained not an inch of ground. His principle in a contention of the sort was to leave the woman to the practice of her obvious artifices, and himself simply hammer, incessantly hammer. But Charlotte hammered as well. The modest position of the defensive negative was not to her taste. The moment he presented himself she flew out upon some yesterday’s part of the argument and carried the war across the borders, in attacks on his character and qualities—his weakness regarding women, his incapacity to forgive, and the rest. She hammered on that head. As for any prospect of a termination of the strife, he could see none in her joyful welcome to him and regretful parting and pleased appointment of the next meeting day after day.

The absurdest of her devices for winding him off his aim was to harp on some new word she had got hold of as, for example, to point out to him his aptitudes, compliment him on his aptitudes, recommend him to study and learn the limitations of his aptitudes! She revelled in something the word unfolded to her.

However, here was the point: she had to be beaten. So, if she, too, persisted in hammering, he must employ her female weapon of artifice with her. One would gladly avoid the stooping to it in a civil dispute, in which one is not so gloriously absolved for lying and entrapping as in splendid war.

Weyburn’s name was announced to him at an early hour on Thursday morning. My lord nodded to the footman; he nodded to himself over a suggestion started in a tactical intelligence by the name.

’Ah! you ‘re off?’ he accosted the young man.

‘I have come to take my leave, my lord.’

‘Nothing new in the morning papers?’

‘A report that Captain May intends to return and surrender.’

‘Not before a month has passed, if he follows my counsel.’

Page 3904

‘To defend his character.’

‘He has none.’

‘His reputation.’

‘He has too much.’

‘These charges against him must be intolerable.’

‘Was he not a bit of a pupil of yours?’

‘We practised two or three times-nothing more.’

’Morsfield was a wasp at a feast. Somebody had to crush him. I ’ve seen the kind of man twice in my life and exactly the kind of man. If their law puts down duelling, he rules the kingdom!’

’My lord, I should venture to say the kind of man can be a common annoyance because the breach of the law is countenanced.’

’Bad laws are best broken. A society that can’t get a scouring now and then will be a dirty set.’

With a bend of the head, in apology for speaking of himself, Weyburn said: ’I have acted on my view. I declined a challenge from a sort of henchman of his.’

’Oh! a poacher’s lurcher? You did right. Fight such fellows with constables. You have seen Lady Charlotte?’

‘I am on my way to her ladyship.’

’Do me this favour. Fourteen doors up the street of her residence, my physician lives. I have to consult him at once. Dr. Rewkes.’

Weyburn bowed. Lady Charlotte could not receive him later than half-past ten of the morning, he said. ‘This morning she can,’ said my lord. ’You will tell Dr. Rewkes that it is immediate. I rather regret your going. I shall be in a controversy with the Horse Guards about our cavalry saddles. It would be regiments of raw backs the first fortnight of a campaign.’

The earl discoursed on saddles; and passed to high eulogy of our Hanoverian auxiliary troopers in the Peninsula; ‘good husbands,’ he named them quaintly, speaking of their management of their beasts. Thence he diverged to Frederic’s cavalry, rarely matched

for shrewdness and endurance; to the deeds of the Liechtenstein Hussars; to the great things Blucher did with his horsemen.

The subject was interesting; but Weyburn saw the clock at past the half after ten. He gave a slight sign of restiveness, and was allowed to go when the earl had finished his pro and con upon Arab horses and Mameluke saddles. Lord Ormont nicked his head, just as at their first interview: he was known to have an objection to the English shaking of hands. 'Good-morning,' he said; adding a remark or two, of which *et cetera* may stand for an explicit rendering. It concerned the young man's prosperity: my lord's conservative plain sense was in doubt of the prospering of a giddy pate, however good a worker. His last look at the young man, who had not served him badly, held an anticipation of possibly some day seeing a tatterdemalion of shipwreck, a rueful exhibition of ideas put to the business of life.

Weyburn left the message with Dr. Rewkes in person. It had not seemed to him that Lord Ormont was one requiring the immediate attendance of a physician. By way of accounting to Lady Charlotte for the lateness of his call, he mentioned the summons he had delivered.

Page 3905

‘Oh, that’s why he hasn’t come yet,’ said she. ’We’ll sit and talk till he does come. I don’t wonder if his bile has been stirred. He can’t oil me to credit what he pumps into others. His Lady Ormont! I believe in it less than ever I did. Morsfield or no Morsfield —and now the poor wretch has got himself pinned to the plank, like my grandson Bobby’s dragonflies, I don’t want to say anything further of him—she doesn’t have much of a welcome at Steignton! If I were a woman to wager as men do, I ’d stake a thousand pounds to five on her never stepping across the threshold of Steignton. All very well in London, and that place he hires up at Marlow. He respects our home. That ’s how I know my brother Rowsley still keeps a sane man. A fortune on it!—and so says Mr. Eglett. Any reasonable person must think it. He made a fool of some Hampton-Evey at Madrid, if he went through any ceremony—and that I doubt. But she and old (what do they call her?) may have insisted upon the title, as much as they could. He sixty; she under twenty, I’m told. Pagnell ’s the name. That aunt of a good-looking young woman sees a noble man of sixty admiring her five feet seven or so—she’s tall —of marketable merchandise, and she doesn’t need telling that at sixty he’ll give the world to possess the girl. But not his family honour! He stops at that. Why? Lord Ormont ’s made of pride! He’ll be kind to her, he’ll be generous, he won’t forsake her; she’ll have her portion in his will, and by the course of things in nature, she’ll outlive him and marry, and be happy, I hope. Only she won’t enter Steignton. You remember what I say. You ’ll live when I ’m gone. It ’s the thirst of her life to be mistress of Steignton. Not she!—though Lord Ormont would have us all open our doors to her; mine too, now he ’s about it. He sets his mind on his plan, and he forgets rights and dues—everything; he must have it as his will dictates. That ’s how he made such a capital soldier. You know the cavalry leader he was. If they’d given him a field in Europe! His enemies admit that. Twelve! and my clock’s five minutes or more slow. What can Rowsley be doing?’

She rattled backward on the scene at Steignton, and her brother’s handsome preservation of his dignity ‘stood it like the king he is!’ and to the Morsfield-May encounter, which had prevented another; and Mrs. May was rolled along in the tide, with a hint of her good reason for liking Lord Ormont; also the change of opinion shown by the Press as to Lord Ormont’s grand exploit. Referring to it, she flushed and jigged on her chair for a saddle beneath her. And that glorious Indian adventure warmed her to the man who had celebrated it among his comrades when a boy at school.

Page 3906

’You ’re to teach Latin and Greek, you said. For you ’re right: we English can’t understand the words we ’re speaking, if we don’t know a good deal of Latin and some Greek. “Conversing in tokens, not standard coin,” you said, I remember; and there’ll be a “general rabble tongue,” unless we English are drilled in the languages we filched from. Lots of lords and ladies want the drilling, then! I’ll send some over to you for Swiss air and roots of the English tongue. Oh, and you told me you supported Lord Ormont on his pet argument for corps d’elite; and you quoted Virgil to back it. Let me have that line again—in case of his condescending to write to the papers on the subject.’

Weyburn repeated the half-line.

’Good: I won’t forget now. And you said the French act on that because they follow human nature, and the English don’t. We “bully it,” you said. That was on our drive down to Steignton. I hope you ’ll succeed. You ’ll be visiting England. Call on me in London or at Olmer—only mind and give me warning. I shall be glad to see you. I ’ve got some ideas from you. If I meet a man who helps me to read the world and men as they are, I ’m grateful to him; and most people are not, you ’ll find. They want you to show them what they ’d like the world to be. We don’t agree about a lady. You ’re in the lists, lance in rest, all for chivalry. You ’re a man, and a young man. Have you taken your leave of her yet? She’ll expect it, as a proper compliment.’

‘I propose running down to take my leave of Lady Ormont to-morrow,’ replied Weyburn.

‘She is handsome?’

She is very handsome.’

‘Beautiful, do you mean?’

‘Oh, my lady, it would only be a man’s notion!’

’Now, that ’s as good an answer as could be made! You ’re sure to succeed. I ’m not the woman’s enemy. But let her keep her place. Why, Rowsley can’t be coming to-day! Did Lord Ormont look ill?’

‘It did not strike me so.’

’He ’s between two fires. A man gets fretted. But I shan’t move a step. I dare say she won’t. Especially with that Morsfield out of the way. You do mean you think her a beauty. Well, then, there’ll soon be a successor to Morsfield. Beauties will have their weapons, and they can hit on plenty; and it ‘s nothing to me, as long as I save my brother from their arts.’

Weyburn felt he had done his penance in return for kindness. He bowed and rose, Lady Charlotte stretched out her hand.

‘We shall be sending you a pupil some day,’ she said, and smiled.

’Forward your address as soon as you ‘re settled.’ Her face gave a glimpse of its youth in a cordial farewell smile.

Lord Ormont had no capacity to do the like, although they were strictly brother and sister in appearance. The smallest difference in character rendered her complex and kept him simple. She had a thirsting mind.

Weyburn fancied that a close intimacy of a few months would have enabled him to lift her out of her smirching and depraving mean jealousies. He speculated, as he trod the street, on little plots and surprises, which would bring Lady Charlotte and Lady Ormont into presence, and end by making friends of them. Supposing that could be done, Lady Ormont might be righted by the intervention of Lady Charlotte after all.

Page 3907

Weyburn sent his dream flying with as dreamy an after-thought: 'Funny it will be then for Lady Charlotte to revert to the stuff she has been droning in my ear half an hour ago! —Look well behind, and we see spots where we buzzed, lowed, bit and tore; and not until we have cast that look and seen the brute are we human creatures.'

A crumb of reflection such as this could brace him, adding its modest maravedi to his prized storehouse of gain, fortifying with assurances of his having a concrete basis for his business in life. His great youthful ambition had descended to it, but had sunk to climb on a firmer footing.

Arthur Abner had his next adieu. They talked of Lady Ormont, as to whose position of rightful Countess of Ormont Mr. Abner had no doubt. He said of Lady Charlotte: 'She has a clear head; but she loves her "brother Rowsley" excessively; and any excess pushes to craziness.'

He spoke to Weyburn of his prospects in the usually, perhaps necessarily, cheerless tone of men who recognize by contrast the one mouse's nibbling at a mountain of evil. 'To harmonize the nationalities, my dear boy! teach Christians to look fraternally on Jews! David was a harper, but the setting of him down to roll off a fugue on one of your cathedral organs would not impose a heavier task than you are undertaking. You have my best wishes, whatever aid I can supply. But we 're nearer to King John's time than to your ideal, as far as the Jews go.'

'Not in England.'

'Less in England,' Abner shrugged.

'You have beaten the Christians on the field they challenged you to enter for a try. They feel the pinch in their interests and their vanity. That will pass. I 'm for the two sides, under the name of Justice; and I give the palm to whichever of the two first gets hold of the idea of Justice. My old schoolmate's well?'

'Always asking after Matey Weyburn!'

'He shall have my address in Switzerland. You and I will be corresponding.'

Now rose to view the visit to the lady who was Lady Ormont on the tongue, Aminta at heart; never to be named Aminta even to himself. His heart broke loose at a thought of it.

He might say Browny. For that was not serious with the intense present signification the name Aminta had. Browny was queen of the old school-time-enclosed it in her name; and that sphere enclosed her, not excluding him. And the dear name of Browny played gently, humorously, fervently, too, with life: not, pathetically, as that of Aminta did when came a whisper of her situation, her isolation, her friendlessness; hardly dissimilar to

what could be imagined of a gazelle in the streets of London city. The Morsfields were not all slain. The Weyburns would be absent.

At the gate of his cottage garden Weyburn beheld a short unfamiliar figure of a man with dimly remembered features. Little Collett he still was in height. The schoolmates had not met since the old days of Cuper's.

Page 3908

Little Collett delivered a message of invitation from Selina, begging Mr. Weyburn to accompany her brother on the coach to Harwich next day, and spend two or three days by the sea. But Weyburn's mind had been set in the opposite direction—up Thames instead of down.

He was about to refuse, but he checked his voice and hummed. Words of Selina's letter jumped in italics. He perceived Lady Ormont's hand. For one thing, would she be at Great Marlow alone? And he knew that hand—how deftly it moved and moved others. Selina Collett would not have invited him with underlinings merely to see a shoreside house and garden. Her silence regarding a particular name showed her to be under injunction, one might guess. At worst, it would be the loss of a couple of days; worth the venture. They agreed to journey by coach next day.

Facing eastward in the morning, on a seat behind the coachman, Weyburn had a seafaring man beside him, bound for the good port of Harwich, where his family lived, and thence by his own boat to Flushing. Weyburn set him talking of himself, as the best way of making him happy; for it is the theme which pricks to speech, and so liberates an uncomfortably locked-up stranger; who, if sympathetic to human proximity, is thankful. They exchanged names, delighted to find they were both Matthews; whereupon Matthew of the sea demanded the paw of Matthew of the land, and there was a squeeze. The same with little Collett, after hearing of him as the old schoolmate of the established new friend. Then there was talk. Little Collett named Felixstowe as the village of his mother's house and garden sloping to the sands. 'That 's it-you have it,' said the salted Matthew: 'peace is in that spot, and there I 've sworn to pitch my tent when I 'm incapacitated for further exercise—profitable, so to speak. My eldest girl has a bar of amber she picked up one wash of the tide at Felixstowe, and there it had been lying sparkling, unseen, hours, the shore is that solitary. What I like!—a quiet shore and a peopled sea. Ever been to Brighton? There it 's t' other way.'

Not long after he had mentioned the time of early evening for their entry into his port of Harwich, the coach turned quietly over on a bank of the roadside, depositing outside passengers quite safely, in so matter-of-course a way, that only the screams of an uninjured lady inside repressed their roars of laughter. One of the wheels had come loose, half a mile off the nearest town. Their entry into Harwich was thereby delayed until half-past nine at night. Full of consideration for the new mates now fast wedded to his heart by an accident. Matthew Shale proposed to Matthew Weyburn, instead of the bother of crossing the ferry with a portmanteau and a bag at that late hour, to sup at his house, try the neighbouring inn for a short sleep, and ship on board his yawl, the honest Susan, to be rowed ashore off the Swin to Felixstowe sands no later than six o'clock of a summer's morning, in time for a bath and a swim before breakfast. It sounded well—it sounded sweetly. Weyburn suggested the counter proposal of supper for the three at the inn. But the other Matthew said: 'I married a cook. She expects a big appetite, and she always keeps warm when I 'm held away, no matter how late. Sure to be enough.'

Page 3909

Beds were secured at the inn; after which came the introduction to Mrs. Shale, the exhibition of Susan Shale's bar of amber, the dish of fresh-fried whiting, the steak pudding, a grog, tobacco, rest at the inn, and a rousing bang at the sleepers' doors when the unwonted supper in them withheld an answer to the intimating knock. Young Matthew Shale, who had slept on board the Susan, conducted them to her boat. His glance was much drawn to the very white duck trousers Weyburn had put on, for a souvenir of the approbation they had won at Marlow. They were on, and so it was of no use for young Matthew to say they were likely to bear away a token from the Susan. She was one among the damsels of colour, and free of her tokens, especially to the spotless.

How it occurred, nobody saw; though everybody saw how naturally it must occur for the white ducks to 'have it in the eye' by the time they had been on board a quarter of an hour. Weyburn got some fun out of them, for a counterbalance to a twitch of sentimental regret scarcely decipherable, as that the last view of him should bear a likeness of Browny's recollection of her first.

A glorious morning of flushed open sky and sun on sea chased all small thoughts out of it. The breeze was from the west, and the Susan, lightly laden, took the heave of smooth rollers with a flowing current-curtsey in the motion of her speed. Fore-sail and aft were at their gentle strain; her shadow rippled fragmentarily along to the silver rivulet and boat of her wake. Straight she flew to the ball of fire now at spring above the waters, and raining red gold on the line of her bows. By comparison she was an ugly yawl, and as the creature of wind and wave beautiful.

They passed an English defensive fort, and spared its walls, in obedience to Matthew Shale's good counsel that they should forbear from sneezing. Little Collett pointed to the roof of his mother's house twenty paces rearward of a belt of tamarisks, green amid the hollowed yellows of shorebanks yet in shade, crumbling to the sands. Weyburn was attracted by a diminutive white tent, of sentry-box shape, evidently a bather's, quite as evidently a fair bather's. He would have to walk on some way for his dip. He remarked to little Collett that ladies going into the water half-dressed never have more than half a bath. His arms and legs flung out contempt of that style of bathing, exactly in old Matey's well-remembered way. Half a mile off shore, the Susan was put about to flap her sails, and her boat rocked with the passengers. Turning from a final cheer to friendly Matthew, Weyburn at the rudder espied one of those unenfranchised ladies in marine uniform issuing through the tent-slit. She stepped firmly, as into her element. A plain look at her, and a curious look, and an intent look fixed her fast, and ran the shock on his heart before he knew of a guess. She waded, she dipped; a head across the breast of the waters was observed:

Page 3910

this one of them could swim. She was making for sea, a stone's throw off the direction of the boat. Before his wits had grasped the certainty possessing them, fiery envy and desire to be alongside her set his fingers fretting at buttons. A grand smooth swell of the waters lifted her, and her head rose to see her world. She sank down the valley, where another wave was mounding for its onward roll: a gentle scene of Weyburn's favourite Sophoclean chorus. Now she was given to him—it was she. How could it ever have been any other! He handed his watch to little Collett, and gave him the ropes, pitched coat and waistcoat on his knees, stood free of boots and socks, and singing out, truly enough, the words of a popular cry, 'White ducks want washing,' went over and in.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MARINE DUET

She soon had to know she was chased. She had seen the dive from the boat, and received all illumination. With a chuckle of delighted surprise, like a blackbird startled, she pushed seaward for joy of the effort, thinking she could exult in imagination of an escape up to the moment of capture, yielding then only to his greater will; and she meant to try it.

The swim was a holiday; all was new—nothing came to her as the same old thing since she took her plunge; she had a sea-mind—had left her earth-mind ashore. The swim, and Matey Weyburn pursuing her passed up, out of happiness, through the spheres of delirium, into the region where our life is as we would have it be a home holding the quiet of the heavens, if but midway thither, and a home of delicious animation of the whole frame, equal to wings.

He drew on her, but he was distant, and she waved an arm. The shout of her glee sprang from her: 'Matey!' He waved; she heard his voice. Was it her name? He was not so drunken of the sea as she: he had not leapt out of bondage into buoyant waters, into a youth without a blot, without an aim, satisfied in tasting; the dream of the long felicity.

A thought brushed by her: How if he were absent? It relaxed her stroke of arms and legs. He had doubled the salt sea's rapture, and he had shackled its gift of freedom. She turned to float, gathering her knees for the funny sullen kick, until she heard him near. At once her stroke was renewed vigorously; she had the foot of her pursuer, and she called, 'Adieu, Matey Weyburn!'

Her bravado deserved a swifter humiliation than he was able to bring down on her: she swam bravely, and she was divine to see ahead as well as overtake.

Darting to the close parallel, he said: ‘What sea nymph sang me my name?’

She smote a pang of her ecstasy into him: ‘Ask mine!’

‘Browny!’

They swam; neither of them panted; their heads were water-flowers that spoke at ease.

’We ‘ve run from school; we won’t go back.’

’We ‘ve a kingdom.’

Page 3911

‘Here’s a big wave going to be a wall.’

‘Off he rolls.’

‘He’s like the High Brent broad meadow under Elling Wood.’

‘Don’t let Miss Vincent hear you.’

’They ’re not waves; they ‘re sighs of the deep.’

’A poet I swim with! He fell into the deep in his first of May morning ducks. We used to expect him.’

‘I never expected to owe them so much.’

Pride of the swimmer and the energy of her joy embraced Aminta, that she might nerve all her powers to gain the half-minute for speaking at her ease.

’Who ’d have thought of a morning like this? You were looked for last night.’

’A lucky accident to our coach. I made friends with the skipper of the yawl.’

‘I saw the boat. Who could have dreamed—? Anything may happen now.’

For nothing further would astonish her, as he rightly understood her; but he said: ’You ‘re prepared for the rites? Old Triton is ready.’

‘Float, and tell me.’

They spun about to lie on their backs. Her right hand, at piano-work of the octave-shake, was touched and taken, and she did not pull it away. Her eyelids fell.

‘Old Triton waits.’

‘Why?’

’We ‘re going to him.’

‘Yes?’

‘Customs of the sea.’

‘Tell me.’

’He joins hands. We say, “Browny-Matey,” and it ‘s done.’

She splashed, crying ‘Swim,’ and after two strokes, ’You want to beat me, Matey Weyburn.’

‘How?’

‘Not fair!’

‘Say what.’

’Take my breath. But, yes! we’ll be happy in our own way. We ’re sea-birds. We ’ve said adieu to land. Not to one another. We shall be friends?’

‘Always.’

‘This is going to last?’

‘Ever so long.’

They had a spell of steady swimming, companionship to inspirit it. Browny was allowed place a little foremost, and she guessed not wherefore, in her flattered emulation.

’I ‘m bound for France.’

‘Slew a point to the right: South-east by South. We shall hit Dunkerque.’

‘I don’t mean to be picked up by boats.’

‘We’ll decline.’

‘You see I can swim.’

‘I was sure of it.’

They stopped their talk—for the pleasure of the body to be savoured in the mind, they thought; and so took Nature’s counsel to rest their voices awhile.

Considering that she had not been used of late to long immersions, and had not broken her fast, and had talked much, for a sea-nymph, Weyburn spied behind him on a shore seeming flat down, far removed.

‘France next time,’ he said: ‘we’ll face to the rear.’

‘Now?’ said she, big with blissful conceit of her powers and incredulous of such a command from him.

‘You may be feeling tired presently.’

The musical sincerity of her ‘Oh no, not I!’ sped through his limbs; he had a willingness to go onward still some way.

Page 3912

But his words fastened the heavy land on her spirit, knocked at the habit of obedience. Her stroke of the arms paused. She inclined to his example, and he set it shoreward.

They swam silently, high, low, creatures of the smooth green roller. He heard the water-song of her swimming. She, though breathing equably at the nostrils, lay deep. The water shocked at her chin, and curled round the under lip. He had a faint anxiety; and, not so sensible of a weight in the sight of land as she was, he chattered, by snatches, rallied her, encouraged her to continue sportive for this once, letting her feel it was but a once and had its respected limit with him. So it was not out of the world.

Ah, friend Matey! And that was right and good on land; but rightness and goodness flung earth's shadow across her brilliancy here, and any stress on 'this once' withdrew her liberty to revel in it, putting an end to perfect holiday; and silence, too, might hint at fatigue. She began to think her muteness lost her the bloom of the enchantment, robbing her of her heavenly frolic lead, since friend Matey resolved to be as eminently good in salt water as on land. Was he unaware that they were boy and girl again?—she washed pure of the intervening years, new born, by blessing of the sea; worthy of him here!—that is, a swimmer worthy of him, his comrade in salt water.

'You're satisfied I swim well?' she said.

'It would go hard with me if we raced a long race.'

'I really was out for France.'

'I was ordered to keep you for England.' She gave him Browny's eyes.

'We've turned our backs on Triton.'

'The ceremony was performed.'

'When?'

'The minute I spoke of it and you splashed.'

'Matey! Matey Weyburn!'

'Browny Farrell!'

'Oh, Matey! she's gone!'

'She's here.'

'Try to beguile me, then, that our holiday's not over. You won't forget this hour?'

‘No time of mine on earth will live so brightly for me.’

’I have never had one like it. I could go under and be happy; go to old Triton, and wait for you; teach him to speak your proper Christian name. He hasn’t heard it yet,—heard “Matey,”—never yet has been taught “Matthew."’

‘Aminta!’

‘Oh, my friend! my dear!’ she cried, in the voice of the wounded, like a welling of her blood: ’my strength will leave me. I may play—not you: you play with a weak vessel. Swim, and be quiet. How far do you count it?’

‘Under a quarter of a mile.’

‘Don’t imagine me tired.’

‘If you are, hold on to me.’

‘Matey, I’m for a dive.’

He went after the ball of silver and bubbles, and they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface.

Page 3913

She shook off her briny blindness, and settled to the full sweep of the arms, quite silent now. Some emotion, or exhaustion from the strain of the swimmer's breath in speech, stopped her playfulness. The pleasure she still knew was a recollection of the outward swim, when she had been privileged to cast away sex with the push from earth, as few men will believe that women, beautiful women, ever wish to do; and often and ardently during the run ahead they yearn for Nature to grant them their one short holiday truce.

But Aminta forgave him for bringing earth so close to her when there was yet a space of salt water between her and shore; and she smiled at times, that he might not think she was looking grave.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PLIGHTING

They touched sand at the first draw of the ebb, and this being earth, Matey addressed himself to the guardian and absolving genii of matter-of-fact, by saying; 'Did you inquire about the tides?'

Her head shook, stunned with what had passed. She waded to shore, after motioning for him to swim on. Men, in comparison beside their fair fellows, are so little sensationally complex, that his one feeling now, as to what had passed, was relief at the idea of his presence having been a warrantable protectorship.

Aminta's return from the sea-nymph to the state of woman crossed annihiliation on the way back to sentience, and picked up meaningless pebbles and shells of life, between the sea's verge and her tent's shelter; hardly her own life to her understanding yet, except for the hammer Memory became, to strike her insensible, at here and there a recollected word or nakedness of her soul.

He swam along by the shore to where the boat was paddled, spying at her bare feet on the sand, her woman's form. He waved, and the figure in the striped tunic and trousers waved her response, apparently the same person he had quitted.

Dry and clad, and decently formal under the transformation, they met at Mrs. Collett's breakfast-table, and in each hung the doubt whether land was the dream or sea. Both owned to a swim; both omitted mention of the tale of white ducks. Little Collett had brought Matey's and his portmanteau into the house, by favour of the cook, through the scullery. He, who could have been a pictorial and suggestive narrator, carried a spinning head off his shoulders from this wonderful Countess of Ormont to Matey Weyburn's dark-eyed Browny at High Brent, and the Sunday walk in Sir Peter Wensell's park. Away and back his head went. Browny was not to be thought of as Browny; she was this grand Countess of Ormont; she had married Matey Weyburn's hero: she

would never admit she had been Browny. Only she was handsome then, and she is handsome now; and she looks on Matey Weyburn now just as she did then. How strange is the world! Or how if we are the particular person destined to encounter the strange things of

Page 3914

the world? And fancy J. Masner, and Pinnett major, and young Oakes (liked nothing better than a pretty girl, he strutted boasting at thirteen), and the Frenchy, and the lot, all popping down at the table, and asked the name of the lady sitting like Queen Esther—-how they would roar out! Boys, of course—but men, too!—very few men have a notion of the extraordinary complications and coincidences and cracker-surprises life contains. Here 's an instance; Matey Weyburn positively will wear white ducks to play before Aminta Farrell on the first of May cricketing-day. He happens to have his white ducks on when he sees the Countess of Ormont swimming in the sea; and so he can go in just as if they were all-right bathing-drawers. In he goes, has a good long swim with her, and when he comes out, says, of his dripping ducks, 'tabula votiva . . . avida vestimenta,' to remind an old schoolmate of his hopping to the booth at the end of a showery May day, and dedicating them to the laundry in these words. It seems marvellous. It was a quaint revival, an hour after breakfast, for little Collett to be acting as intermediary with Selina to request Lady Ormont's grant of a five-minutes' interview before the church-bell summoned her. She was writing letters, and sent the message: 'Tell Mr. Weyburn I obey.' Selina delivered it, uttering 'obey' in a demurely comical way, as a word of which the humour might be comprehensible to him.

Aminta stood at the drawing-room window. She was asking herself whether her recent conduct shrieked coquette to him, or any of the abominable titles showered on the women who take free breath of air one day after long imprisonment.

She said: 'Does it mean you are leaving us?' the moment he was near.

'Not till evening or to-morrow, as it may happen,' he answered: 'I have one or two things to say, if you will spare the time.'

'All my time,' said she, smiling to make less of the heart's reply; and he stepped into the room.

They had not long back been Matey and Browny, and though that was in another element, it would not sanction the Lady Ormont and Mr. Weyburn now. As little could it be Aminta and Matthew. Brother and sister they were in the spirit's world, but in this world the titles had a sound of imposture. And with a great longing to call her by some allying name, he rejected 'friend' for its insufficiency and commonness, notwithstanding the entirely friendly nature of the burden to be spoken. Friend, was a title that ran on quicksands: an excuse that tried for an excuse. He distinguished in himself simultaneously, that the hesitation and beating about for a name had its origin in an imperfect frankness when he sent his message: the fretful desire to be with her, close to her, hearing her, seeing her, besides the true wish to serve her. He sent it after swinging round abruptly from an outlook over the bordering garden tamarisks on a sea now featureless, desolately empty.

Page 3915

However, perceptibly silence was doing the work of a scourge, and he said: 'I have been thinking I may have—and I don't mind fighting hard to try it before I leave England on Tuesday or Wednesday—some influence with Lady Charlotte Eglett. She is really one of the true women living, and the heartiest of backers, if she can be taught to see her course. I fancy I can do that. She 's narrow, but she is not one of the class who look on the working world below them as, we'll say, the scavenger dogs on the plains of Ilium were seen by the Achaeans. And my failure would be no loss to you! Your name shall not be alluded to as empowering me to plead for her help. But I want your consent, or I may be haunted and weakened by the idea of playing the busy-body. One has to feel strong in a delicate position. Well, you know what my position with her has been—one among the humble; and she has taken contradictions, accepted views from me, shown me she has warmth of heart to an extreme degree.'

Aminta slightly raised her hand. 'I will save you trouble. I have written to Lord Ormont. I have left him.'

Their eyes engaged on the thunder of this. 'The letter has gone?'

'It was posted before my swim: posted yesterday.'

'You have fully and clearly thought it out to a determination?'

'Bit by bit—I might say, blow by blow.'

'It is no small matter to break a marriage-tie.'

'I have conversed with your mother.'

'Yes, she! and the woman happiest in marriage!'

'I know. It was hatred of injustice, noble sympathy. And she took me for one of the blest among wives.'

'She loved God. She saw the difference between men's decrees for their convenience, and God's laws. She felt for women. You have had a hard trial Aminta.'

'Oh, my name! You mean it?'

'You heard it from me this morning.'

'Yes, there! I try to forget. I lost my senses. You may judge me harshly, on reflection.'

'Judge myself worse, then. You had a thousand excuses. I had only my love of you. There's no judgement against either of us, for us to see, if I read rightly. We elect to be

tried in the courts of the sea-god. Now we ’ll sit and talk it over. The next ten minutes will decide our destinies.’

His eyes glittered, otherwise he showed the coolness of the man discussing business; and his blunt soberness refreshed and upheld her, as a wild burst of passion would not have done.

Side by side, partly facing, they began their interchange.

‘You have weighed what you abandon?’

‘It weighs little.’

‘That may be error. You have to think into the future.’

‘My sufferings and experiences are not bad guides.’

‘They count. How can you be sure you have all the estimates?’

‘Was I ever a wife?’

‘You were and are the Countess of Ormont.’

Page 3916

‘Not to the world. An unacknowledged wife is a slave, surely.’

‘You step down, if you take the step.’

’From what? Once I did desire that station—had an idea it was glorious. I despise it: or rather the woman who had the desire.’

‘But the step down is into the working world.’

’I have means to live humbly. I want no more, except to be taught to work.’

’So says the minute. Years are before you. You have weighed well, that you attract?’

She reddened and murmured: ‘How small!’ Her pout of spite at her attractions was little simulated.

’Beauty and charm are not small matters. You have the gift, called fatal. Then—looking right forward—you have faith in the power of resistance of the woman living alone?’

He had struck at her breast. From her breast she replied.

’Hear this of me. I was persecuted with letters. I read them and did not destroy them. Perhaps you saved me. Looking back, I see weakness, nothing worse; but it is a confession.’

’Yes, you have courage. And that comes of a great heart. And therein lies the danger.’

‘Advise me of what is possible to a lonely woman.’

‘You have resolved on the loneliness?’

‘It means breathing to me.’

‘You are able to see that Lord Ormont is a gentleman?’

‘A chivalrous gentleman, up to the bounds of his intelligence.’

The bounds of his intelligence closed their four walls in a rapid narrowing slide on Aminta’s mind, and she exclaimed:

’If only to pluck flowers in fields and know their names, I must be free! I say what one can laugh at, and you are good and don’t. Is the interrogatory exhausted?’

‘Aminta, my beloved, if you are free, I claim you.’

‘Have you thought—?’

The sense of a dissolving to a fountain quivered through her veins.

‘Turn the tables and examine me.’

’But have you thought—oh! I am not the girl you loved. I would go through death to feel I was, and give you one worthy of you.’

’That means what I won’t ask you to speak at present but I must have proof.’

He held out a hand, and hers was laid in his.

There was more for her to say, she knew. It came and fled, lightened and darkened. She had yielded her hand to him here on land, not with the licence and protection of the great holiday salt water; and she was trembling from the run of his blood through hers at the pressure of hands, when she said in undertones: ‘Could we—we might be friends.’

‘Meet and part as friends, you and I,’ he replied.

His voice carried the answer for her, his intimate look had in it the unfolding of the full flower of the woman to him, as she could not conceal from such eyes; and feeling that, she was all avowal.

‘It is for life, Matthew.’

‘My own words to myself when I first thought of the chance.’

Page 3917

‘But the school?’

’I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. And there are hints of humaner opinions; it’s not all a huge rolling block of a Juggernaut. Our case could be pleaded before it. I don’t think the just would condemn us heavily. I shall have to ask you to strengthen me, complete me. If you love me, it is your leap out of prison, and without you, I am from this time no better than one-third of a man. I trust you to weigh the position you lose, and the place we choose to take in the world. It ’s this—I think this describes it. You know the man who builds his house below the sea’s level has a sleepless enemy always threatening. His house must be firm and he must look to the dykes. We commit this indiscretion. With a world against us, our love and labour are constantly on trial; we must have great hearts, and if the world is hostile we are not to blame it. In the nature of things it could not be otherwise. My own soul, we have to see that we do—though not publicly, not insolently, offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law. You are the woman I can help and join with; think whether you can tell yourself that I am the man. So, then, our union gives us powers to make amends to the world, if the world should grant us a term of peace for the effort. That is our risk; consider it, Aminta, between now and tomorrow; deliberate. We don’t go together into a garden of roses.’

‘I know. I should feel shame. I wish it to look dark,’ said Aminta, her hand in his, and yet with a fair-sailing mind on the stream of the blood.

Rationally and irrationally, the mixed passion and reason in two clear heads and urgent hearts discussed the stand they made before a world defied, neither of them quite perceiving what it was which coloured reason to beauty, or what so convinced their intellects when passion spoke the louder.

‘I am to have a mate.’

‘She will pray she may be one.’

‘She is my first love.’

Aminta’s lips formed ‘mine,’ without utterance.

Meanwhile his hand or a wizardry subdued her will, allured her body. She felt herself being drawn to the sign and seal of their plighting for life. She said, ‘Matthew,’ softly in protest; and he said, ’Never once yet!’ She was owing to his tenderness. Her deepened voice murmured: ’Is this to deliberate?’ Colour flooded the beautiful dark face, as of the funeral hues of a sun suffusing all the heavens; firing earth.

CHAPTER XXIX

AMINTA TO HER LORD

Page 3918

On Friday, on Saturday, on Sunday, Lady Charlotte waited for her brother Rowsley, until it was a diminished satisfaction that she had held her ground and baffled his mighty will to subdue her. She did not sleep for thinking of him on the Sunday night. Toward morning a fit of hazy horrors, which others would have deemed imaginings, drove her from her bed to sit and brood over Rowsley in a chair. What if it was a case of heart with him too? Heart disease had been in the family. A man like Rowsley, still feeling the world before him, as a man of his energies and aptitudes, her humour added in the tide of his anxieties, had a right to feel, would not fall upon resignation like a woman.

She was at the physician's door at eight o'clock. Dr. Rewkes reported reassuringly; it was a simple disturbance in Lord Ormont's condition of health, and he conveyed just enough of disturbance to send the impetuous lady knocking and ringing at her brother's door upon the hour of nine.

The announcement of Lady Charlotte's early visit informed my lord that Dr. Rewkes had done the spiriting required of him. He descended to the library and passed under scrutiny.

'You don't look ill, Rowsley,' she said, reluctantly in the sound.

'I am the better for seeing you here, Charlotte. Shall I order breakfast for you? I am alone.'

'I know you are. I've eaten. Rewkes tells me you've not lost appetite.'

'Have I the appearance of a man who has lost anything?' Prouder man, and heartier and ruddier, could not be seen, she thought.

'You're winning the country to right you; that I know.'

'I don't ask it.'

'The country wants your services.'

'I have heard some talk of it. That lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. If they promoted and offered me the command in India to-morrow—'My lord struck the arm of his chair. 'I live at Steignton henceforth; my wife is at a seaside place eastward. She left the jewel-case when on her journey through London for safety; she is a particularly careful person, forethoughtful. I take her down to Steignton two days after her return. We entertain there in the autumn. You come?'

'I don't. I prefer decent society.'

'You are in her house now, ma'am.'

’If I have to meet the person, you mean, I shall be civil. The society you’ve given her, I won’t meet.’

’You will have to greet the Countess of Ormont if you care to meet your brother.’

’Part, then, on the best terms we can. I say this, the woman who keeps you from serving your country, she ‘s your country’s enemy.’

’Hear my answer. The lady who is my wife has had to suffer for what you call my country’s treatment of me. It ’s a choice between my country and her. I give her the rest of my time.’

‘That’s dotage.’

‘Fire away your epithets.’

‘Sheer dotage. I don’t deny she’s a handsome young woman.’

Page 3919

’You’ll have to admit that Lady Ormont takes her place in our family with the best we can name.’

‘You insult my ears, Rowsley.’

‘The world will say it when it has the honour of her acquaintance.’

‘An honour suspiciously deferred.’

‘That’s between the world and me.’

’Set your head to work, you’ll screw the world to any pitch you like—that I don’t need telling.’

Lord Ormont’s head approved the remark.

‘Now,’ said Lady Charlotte, ’you won’t get the Danmores, the Dukerlys, the Carminters, the Oxbridges any more than you get me.’

’You are wrong, ma’am. I had yesterday a reply from Lady Danmore to a communication of mine.’

’It ’s thickening. But while I stand, I stand for the family; and I ’m not in it, and while I stand out of it, there ’s a doubt either of your honesty or your sanity.’

‘There’s a perfect comprehension of my sister!’

’I put my character in the scales against your conduct, and your Countess of Ormont’s reputation into the bargain.’

’You have called at her house; it ’s a step. You ’ll be running at her heels next. She ‘s not obdurate.’

’When you see me running at her heels, it’ll be with my head off. Stir your hardest, and let it thicken. That man Morsfield’s name mixed up with a sham Countess of Ormont, in the stories flying abroad, can’t hurt anybody. A true Countess of Ormont—we ‘re cut to the quick.’

’We ‘re cut! Your quick, Charlotte, is known to court the knife.’

Letters of the morning’s post were brought in.

The earl turned over a couple and took up a third, saying: ’I ’ll attend to you in two minutes’; and thinking once more: Queer world it is, where, when you sheath the sword, you have to be at play with bodkins!

Lady Charlotte gazed on the carpet, effervescent with retorts to his last observation, rightly conjecturing that the letter he selected to read was from ‘his Aminta.’

The letter apparently was interesting, or it was of inordinate length. He seemed still to be reading. He reverted to the first page.

At the sound of the paper, she discarded her cogitations and glanced up. His countenance had become stony. He read on some way, with a sudden drop on the signature, a recommencement, a sound in the throat, as when men grasp a comprehensible sentence of a muddled rigmarole and begin to have hopes of the remainder. But the eye on the page is not the eye which reads.

‘No bad news, Rowsley?’

The earl’s breath fell heavily.

Lady Charlotte left her chair, and walked about the room.

’Rowsley, I ‘d like to hear if I can be of use.’

‘Ma’am?’ he said; and pondered on the word ‘use,’ staring at her.

’I don’t intend to pry. I can’t see my brother look like that, and not ask.’

The letter was tossed on the table to her. She read these lines, dated from Felixstowe:

Page 3920

’*My dear lord*,

’The courage I have long been wanting in has come at last, to break a tie that I have seen too clearly was a burden on you from the beginning. I will believe that I am chiefly responsible for inducing you to contract it. The alliance with an inexperienced girl of inferior birth, and a perhaps immoderate ambition, has taxed your generosity; and though the store may be inexhaustible, it is not truly the married state when a wife subjects the husband to such a trial. The release is yours, the sadness is for me. I have latterly seen or suspected a design on your part to meet my former wishes for a public recognition of the wife of Lord Ormont. Let me now say that these foolish wishes no longer exist. I rejoice to think that my staying or going will be alike unknown to the world. I have the means of a livelihood, in a modest way, and shall trouble no one.

’I have said, the sadness is for me. That is truth. But I have to add, that I, too, am sensible of the release. My confession of a change of feeling to you as a wife, writes the close of all relations between us. I am among the dead for you; and it is a relief to me to reflect on the little pain I give . . .’

‘Has she something on her conscience about that man Morsfield?’ Lady Charlotte cried.

Lord Ormont’s prolonged Ah! of execration rolled her to a bundle.

Nevertheless her human nature and her knowledge of woman’s, would out with the words: ‘There’s a man!’

She allowed her brother to be correct in repudiating the name of the dead Morsfield—-chivalrous as he was on this Aminta’s behalf to the last!—and struck along several heads, Adderwood’s, Weyburn’s, Randeller’s, for the response to her suspicion. A man there certainly was. He would be probably a young man. He would not necessarily be a handsome man. . . . or a titled or a wealthy man. She might have set eyes on a gypsy somewhere round Great Marlow—blood to blood; such things have been. Imagining a wildish man for her, rather than a handsome one and one devoted staidly to the founding of a school, she overlooked Weyburn, or reserved him with others for subsequent speculation.

The remainder of Aminta’s letter referred to her delivery of the Ormont jewel-case at Lord Ormont’s London house, under charge of her maid Carstairs. The affairs of the household were stated very succinctly, the drawer for labelled keys, whatever pertained to her management, in London or at Great Marlow.

’She ‘s cool,’ Lady Charlotte said, after reading out the orderly array of items, in a tone of rasping irony, to convince her brother he was well rid of a heartless wench.

Aminta's written statement of those items were stabs at the home she had given him, a flashed picture of his loss. Nothing written by her touched him to pierce him so shrewdly; nothing could have brought him so closely the breathing image in the flesh of the woman now a phantom for him.

Page 3921

‘Will she be expecting you to answer, Rowsley?’

‘Will that forked tongue cease hissing!’ he shouted, in the agony of a strong man convulsed both to render and conceal the terrible, shameful, unexampled gush of tears.

Lady Charlotte beheld her bleeding giant. She would rather have seen the brother of her love grimace in woman’s manner than let loose those rolling big drops down the face of a rock. The big sob shook him, and she was shaken to the dust by the sight. Now she was advised by her deep affection for her brother to sit patient and dumb, behind shaded eyes: praising in her heart the incomparable force of the man’s love of the woman contrasted with the puling inclinations of the woman for the man.

Neither opened mouth when they separated. She pressed and kissed a large nerveless hand. Lord Ormont stood up to bow her forth. His ruddied skin had gone to pallor resembling the berg of ice on the edge of Arctic seas, when sunlight has fallen away from it.

CHAPTER XXX

CONCLUSION

The peaceful little home on the solitary sandy shore was assailed, unwarned, beneath a quiet sky, some hours later, by a whirlwind, a dust-storm, and rattling volleys. Miss Vincent’s discovery, in the past school-days, of Selina Collett’s ’wicked complicity in a clandestine correspondence’ had memorably chastened the girl, who vowed at the time when her schoolmistress, using the rod of Johnsonian English for the purpose, exposed the depravity of her sinfulness, that she would never again be guilty of a like offence. Her dear and lovely Countess of Ormont, for whom she then uncomplainingly suffered, who deigned now to call her friend, had spoken the kind good-bye, and left the house after Mr. Weyburn’s departure that same day; she, of course, to post by Harwich to London; he to sail by packet from the port of Harwich for Flushing. The card of an unknown lady, a great lady, the Lady Charlotte Eglett, was handed to her mother at eight o’clock in the evening.

Lady Charlotte was introduced to the innocent country couple; the mother knitting, the daughter studying a book of the botany of the Swiss Alps, dreaming a distant day’s journey over historic lands of various hues to the unimaginable spectacle of earth’s grandeur. Her visit lasted fifteen minutes. From the moment of her entry, the room was in such turmoil as may be seen where a water-mill wheel’s paddles are suddenly set rounding to pour streams of foam on the smooth pool below. A relentless catechism bewildered their hearing. Mrs. Collett attempted an opposition of dignity to those vehement attacks for answers. It was flooded and rolled over. She was put upon her honour to reply positively to positive questions: whether the Countess of Ormont was in

this house at present; whether the Countess of Ormont left the house alone or in company; whether a gentleman had come to the house during the stay of the Countess of Ormont; whether Lady Ormont had left the neighbourhood; the exact time of the day when she quitted the house, and the stated point of her destination.

Page 3922

Ultimately, protesting that they were incapable of telling what they did not know—which Lady Charlotte heard with an incredulous shrug—they related piecemeal what they did know, and Weyburn's name gave her scent. She paid small heed to the tale of Mr. Weyburn's having come there in the character of young Mr. Collett's old schoolmate. Mr. Weyburn had started for the port of Harwich. This day, and not long subsequently, Lady Ormont had started for the port of Harwich, on her way to London, if we like to think it. Further corroboration was quite superfluous.

'Is there a night packet-boat from this port of yours?' Lady Charlotte asked.

The household servants had to be consulted; and she, hurriedly craving the excuse of their tedious mistress, elicited, as far as she could understand them, that there might be and very nearly was, a night packet-boat starting for Flushing. The cook, a native of Harwich, sent up word of a night packet-boat starting at about eleven o'clock last year.

Lady Charlotte saw the chance as a wind-blown beacon-fire under press of shades. Changeing her hawkish manner toward the simple pair, she gave them view of a smile magical by contrast, really beautiful—the smile she had in reserve for serviceable persons whom she trusted—while thanking them and saying, that her anxiety concerned Lady Ormont's welfare.

Her brother had prophesied she would soon be 'running at his wife's heels,' and so she was, but not 'with her head off,' as she had rejoined. She might prove, by intercepting his Aminta, that her head was on. The windy beacon-fire of a chance blazed at the rapid rolling of her carriage-wheels, and sank to stifling smoke at any petty obstruction. Let her but come to an interview with his Aminta, she would stop all that nonsense of the woman's letter; carry her off—and her Weyburn plucking at her other hand to keep her. Why, naturally, treated as she was by Rowsley, she dropped soft eyes on a good-looking secretary. Any woman would—confound the young fellow! But all 's right yet if we get to Harwich in time; unless . . . as a certain coldfish finale tone of the letter playing on the old string, the irrevocable, peculiar to women who are novices in situations of the kind, appeared to indicate; they see in their conscience-blasted minds a barrier to a return home, high as the Archangelical gate behind Mother Eve, and they are down on their knees blubbering gratitude and repentance if the gate swings open to them. It is just the instant, granting the catastrophe, to have a woman back to her duty. She has only to learn she has a magnanimous husband. If she learns into the bargain how he suffers, how he loves her,—well, she despises a man like that Lawrence Finchley all the more for the 'magnanimity' she has the profit of, and perceives to be feebleness. But there 's woman in her good and her bad; she'll trick a man of age, and if he forgives her, owning his own faults in the case, she won't scorn him for it; the likelihood is, she 'll feel bound in honour to serve him faithfully for the rest of their wedded days.

Page 3923

A sketch to her of Rowsley's deep love. . . . Lady Charlotte wandered into an amazement at it. A sentence of her brother's recent speaking danced in her recollection. He said of his country: That Lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. True, Old England is always louting to the rear, and has to be pricked in the rear and pulled by the neck before she 's equal to the circumstances around her. But what if his words were flung at him in turn! Short of 'Lout,' it rang correctly. 'Too late,' we hope to clip from the end of the sentence likewise. We have then, if you stress it—'comes to a knowledge of his wants;—a fair example of the creatures men are; the greatest of men; who have to learn from the loss of the woman—or a fear of the loss—how much they really do love her.

Well, and she may learn the same or something sufficiently like it, if she 's caught in time, called to her face, Countess of Ormont, sister-in-law, and smoothed, petted, made believe she 's now understood and won't be questioned on a single particular—in fact, she marches back in a sort of triumph; and all the past in a cupboard, locked up, without further inquiry.

Her brother Rowsley's revealed human appearance of the stricken man—stricken right into his big heart—precipitated Lady Charlotte's reflections and urged her to an unavailing fever of haste during the circuitous drive in moonlight to the port. She alighted at the principal inn, and was there informed that the packetboat, with a favouring breeze and tide, had started ten minutes earlier. She summoned the landlord, and described a lady, as probably one of the passengers: 'Dark, holds herself up high. Some such lady had dined at the inn on tea, and gone aboard the boat soon after.

Lady Charlotte burned with the question: Alone? She repressed her feminine hunger and asked to see the book of visitors. But the lady had not slept at the inn, so had not been requested to write her name.

The track of the vessel could be seen from the pier, on the line of a bar of moonlight; and thinking, that the abominable woman, if aboard she was, had coolly provided herself with a continental passport—or had it done for two by her accomplice, that Weyburn, before she left London—Lady Charlotte sent a loathing gaze at the black figure of the boat on the water, untroubled by any reminder of her share in the conspiracy of events, which was to be her brother's chastisement to his end.

Years are the teachers of the great rocky natures, whom they round and sap and pierce in caverns, having them on all sides, and striking deep inward at moments. There is no resisting the years, if we have a heart, and a common understanding. They constitute, in the sum of them, the self-examination, whence issues, acknowledged or not, a belated self-knowledge, to direct our final actions. She had the heart. Sight of the high-minded, proud, speechless man suffering for the absence of a runaway woman, not ceasing to

Page 3924

suffer, never blaming the woman, and consequently, it could be fancied, blaming himself, broke down Lady Charlotte's defences and moved her to review her part in her brother Rowsley's unhappiness. For supposing him to blame himself, her power to cast a shadow of blame on him went from her, and therewith her vindication of her conduct. He lived at Olmer. She read him by degrees, as those who have become absolutely tongueless have to be read; and so she gathered that this mortally (or lastingly) wounded brother of hers was pleased by an allusion to his Aminta. He ran his finger on the lines of a map of Spain, from Barcelona over to Granada; and impressed his nail at a point appearing to be mountainous or woody. Lady Charlotte suggested that he and his Aminta had passed by there. He told a story of a carriage accident: added, 'She was very brave.' One day, when he had taken a keepsake book of England's Beauties off the drawing-room table, his eyes dwelt on a face awhile, and he handed it, with a nod, followed by a slight depreciatory shrug. 'Like her, not so handsome,' Lady Charlotte said.

He nodded again. She came to a knowledge of Aminta's favourite colours through the dwelling of his look on orange and black, deepest rose, light yellow, light blue. Her grand-daughters won the satisfied look if they wore a combination touching his memory. The rocky are not imaginative, and have to be struck from without for a kindling of them. Submissive though she was to court and soothe her brother Rowsley, a spur of jealousy burned in the composition of her sentiments, to set her going. He liked visiting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley at her effaced good man's country seat, Brockholm in Berkshire, and would stay there a month at a time. Lady Charlotte learnt why. The enthusiast for Aminta, without upholding her to her late lord, whom she liked well, talked of her openly with him, confessed to a fondness for her. How much Mrs. Lawrence ventured to say, Lady Charlotte could not know. But rivalry pushed her to the extreme of making Aminta partially a topic; and so ready was he to follow her lead in the veriest trifles recalling the handsome runaway; that she had to excite his racy diatribes against the burgess English and the pulp they have made of a glorious nation, in order not to think him inclining upon dotage.

Philippa's occasional scoff in fun concerning 'grandmama's tutor,' hurt Lady Charlotte for more reasons than one, notwithstanding the justification of her fore-thoughtfulness. The girl, however, was privileged; she was Bobby Benlew's dearest friend, and my lord loved the boy; with whom nothing could be done at school, nor could a tutor at Olmer control him. In fine, Bobby saddened the family and gained the earl's anxious affection by giving daily proofs of his being an Ormont in a weak frame; patently an Ormont, recurrently an invalid. His moral qualities hurled him on his physical deficiencies. The local doctor and Dr. Rewkes banished him twice to the seashore, where he began to bloom the first week and sickened the next, for want of playfellows, jolly fights and friendships. Ultimately they prescribed mountain air, Swiss air, easy travelling to Switzerland, and several weeks of excursions at the foot of the Alps. Bobby might possibly get an aged tutor, or find an English clergyman taking pupils, on the way.

Page 3925

Thus it happened, that seven years after his bereavement, Lord Ormont and Philippa and Bobby were on the famous Bernese Terrace, grandest of terrestrial theatres where soul of man has fronting him earth's utmost majesty. Sublime: but five minutes of it fetched sounds as of a plug in an empty phial from Bobby's bosom, and his heels became electrical.

He was observed at play with a gentleman of Italian complexion. Past guessing how it had come about, for the gentleman was an utter stranger. He had at any rate the tongue of an Englishman. He had the style, too, the slang and cries and tricks of an English schoolboy, though visibly a foreigner. And he had the art of throwing his heart into that bit of improvised game, or he would never have got hold of Bobby, shrewd to read a masker.

Lugged-up by the boy to my lord and the young lady, he doffed and bowed. 'Forgive me, pray,' he said; 'I can't see an English boy without having a spin with him; and I make so bold as to speak to English people wherever I meet them, if they give me the chance. Bad manners? Better than that. You are of the military profession, sir, I see. I am a soldier, fresh from Monte Video. Italian, it is evident, under an Italian chief there. A clerk on a stool, and hey presto plunged into the war a month after, shouldering a gun and marching. Fifteen battles in eighteen months; and Death a lady at a balcony we kiss hands to on the march below. Not a bit more terrible! Ah, but your pardon, sir,' he hastened to say, observing rigidity on the features of the English gentleman; 'would I boast? Not I. Accept it as my preface for why I am moved to speak the English wherever I meet them:—Uruguay, Buenos Ayres, La Plata, or Europe. I cannot resist it. At least, he bent gracefully, 'I do not. We come to the grounds of my misbehaviour. I have shown at every call I fear nothing, kiss hand of welcome or adieu to Death. And I, a boy of the age of this youngster—he 's not like me, I can declare!—I was a sneak and a coward. It follows, I was a liar and a traitor. Who cured me of that vileness, that scandal? I will tell you—an Englishman and an Englishwoman: my schoolmaster and his wife. My schoolmaster—my friend! He is the comrade of his boys: English, French, Germans, Italians, a Spaniard in my time—a South American I have sent him—two from Boston, Massachusetts—and clever!—all emulous to excel, none boasting. But, to myself; I was that mean fellow. I did—I could let you know: before this young lady—-she would wither me with her scorn, Enough, I sneaked, I lied. I let the blame fall on a schoolfellow and a housemaid. Oh! a small thing, but I coveted it—a scarf. It reminded me of Rome. Enough, there at the bottom of that pit, behold me. It was not discovered, but my schoolfellow was unpunished, the housemaid remained in service; I thought, I thought, and I thought until I could not look in my dear friend Matthew's face. He said to me one day:

Page 3926

“Have you nothing to tell me, Giulio?” as if to ask the road to right or left. Out it all came. And no sermon, no! He set me the hardest task I could have. That was a penance!—to go to his wife, and tell it all to her. Then I did think it an easier thing to go and face death—and death had been my nightmare. I went, she listened, she took my hand she said: “You will never do this again, I know, Giulio.” She told me no English girl would ever look on a man who was a coward and lied. From that day I have made Truth my bride. And what the consequence? I know not fear! I could laugh, knowing I was to lie down in my six-foot measure to-morrow. If I have done my duty and look in the face of my dear Matthew and his wife! Ah, those two! They are loved. They will be loved all over Europe. He works for Europe and America—all civilized people—to be one country. He is the comrade of his boys. Out of school hours, it is Christian names all round—Matthew, Emile, Adolf, Emilio, Giulio, Robert, Marcel, Franz, et caetera. Games or lessons, a boy can’t help learning with him. He makes happy fellows and brave soldiers of them without drill. Sir, do I presume when I say I have your excuse for addressing you because you are his countryman? I drive to the old school in half an hour, and next week he and his dear wife and a good half of the boys will be on the tramp over the Simplon, by Lago Maggiore, to my uncle’s house in Milan for a halt. I go to Matthew before I see my own people.’

He swept another bow of apology, chiefly to Philippa, as representative of the sex claiming homage.

Lord Ormont had not greatly relished certain of the flowery phrases employed by this young foreigner. ‘Truth his bride,’ was damnable: and if a story had to be told, he liked it plain, without jerks and evolutions. Many offences to our taste have to be overlooked in foreigners—Italians! considered, before they were proved in fire, a people classed by nature as operatic declaimers. Bobby had shown himself on the road out to Bern a difficult boy, and stupefyingly ignorant. My lord had two or three ideas working to cloudy combination in his head when he put a question, referring to the management of the dormitories at the school. Whereupon the young Italian introduced himself as Giulio Calliani, and proposed a drive to inspect the old school, with its cricket and football fields, lake for rowing and swimming, gymnastic fixtures, carpenter’s shed, bowling alley, and four European languages in the air by turns daily; and the boys, too, all the boys rosy and jolly, according to the last report received of them from his friend Matthew. Enthusiasm struck and tightened the loose chord of scepticism in Lord Ormont; somewhat as if a dancing beggar had entered a kennel-dog’s yard, designing to fascinate the faithful beast. It is a chord of one note, that is tightened to sound by the violent summons to accept, which is a provocation to deny. At the same time,

Page 3927

the enthusiast's dance is rather funny; he is not an ordinary beggar; to see him trip himself in his dance would be rather funnier. This is to say, inspect the trumpeted school and retire politely. My lord knew the Bern of frequent visits: the woman was needed beside him to inspire a feeling for scenic mountains. Philippa's admiration of them was like a new-pressed grape-juice after a draught of the ripe vintage. Moreover, Bobby was difficult: the rejected of his English schools was a stiff Ormont at lessons, a wheezy Benlew in the playground: exactly the reverse of what should have been. A school of four languages in bracing air, if a school with healthy dormitories, and a school of the trained instincts we call gentlemanly, might suit Master Bobby for a trial. An eye on the boys of the school would see in a minute what stuff they were made of. Supposing this young Italianissimo with the English tongue to be tolerably near the mark, with a deduction of two-thirds of the enthusiasm, Bobby might stop at the school as long as his health held out, or the master would keep him. Supposing half a dozen things and more, the meeting with this Mr. Calliand was a lucky accident. But lucky accidents are anticipated only by fools.

Lord Ormont consented to visit the school. He handed his card and invited his guest; he had a carriage in waiting for the day, he said; and obedient to Lady Charlotte's injunctions, he withheld Philippa from the party. She and her maid were to pass the five hours of his absence in efforts to keep their monkey Bobby out of the well of the solicitious bears.

My lord left his carriage at the inn of the village lying below the school-house on a green height. The young enthusiast was dancing him into the condition of livid taciturnity, which could, if it would, flash out pungent epigrams of the actual world at Operatic recitative.

'There's the old school-clock! Just in time for the half-hour before dinner,' said Calliani, chattering two hundred to the minute, of the habits and usages of the school, and how all had meals together, the master, his wife, the teachers, the boys. 'And she—as for her!' Calliani kissed finger up to the furthest skies: into which a self-respecting sober Northener of the Isles could imagine himself to kick enthusiastic gesticulators, if it were polite to do so.

The school-house faced the master's dwelling house, and these, with a block of building, formed a three-sided enclosure, like barracks! Forth from the school-house door burst a dozen shouting lads, as wasps from the hole of their nest from a charge of powder. Out they poured whizzing; and the frog he leaped, and pussy ran and doubled before the hounds, and hockey-sticks waved, and away went a ball. Cracks at the ball anyhow, was the game for the twenty-five minutes breather before dinner.

'French day!' said Calliani, hearing their cries. Then he bellowed 'Matthew!—Giulio!'

Page 3928

A lusty inversion of the order of the names and an Oberland jodel returned his hail. The school retreating caught up the Alpine cry in the distance. Here were lungs! Here were sprites!

Lord Ormont bethought him of the name of the master. 'Mr. Matthew, I think you said, sir,' he was observing to Calliani, as the master came nearer; and Calliani replied: 'His Christian name. But if the boys are naughty boys, it is not the privilege. Mr. Weyburn.'

There was not any necessity to pronounce that name Calliani spoke it on the rush to his friend.

Lord Ormont and Weyburn advanced the steps to the meeting. Neither of them flinched in eye or limb.

At a corridor window of the dwelling-house a lady stood. Her colour was the last of a summer day over western seas; her thought: 'It has come!' Her mind was in her sight; her other powers were frozen.

The two men conversed. There was no gesture.

This is one of the lightning moments of life for the woman, at the meeting of the two men between whom her person has been in dispute, may still be; her soul being with one. And that one, dearer than the blood of her body, imperilled by her.

She could ask why she exists, if a question were in her grasp. She would ask for the meaning of the gift of beauty to the woman, making her desireable to those two men, making her a cause of strife, a thing of doom. An incessant clamour dinned about her: 'It has come!'

The two men walked conversing into the school-house. She was unconscious of the seeing of a third, though she saw and at the back of her mind believed she knew a friend in him. The two disappeared. She was insensible stone, except for the bell-clang: 'It has come'; until they were in view again, still conversing: and the first of her thought to stir from petrifaction was: 'Life holds no secret.'

She tried, in shame of the inanimate creature she had become, to force herself to think: and had, for a chastising result, a series of geometrical figures shooting across her brain, mystically expressive of the situation, not communicably. The most vivid and persistent was a triangle. Interpret who may. The one beheld the two pass from view again, still conversing.

They are on the gravel; they bow; they separate. He of the grey head poised high has gone.

Her arm was pressed by a hand. Weyburn longed to enfold her, and she desired it, and her soul praised him for refraining. Both had that delicacy.

‘You have seen, my darling,’ Weyburn said. ’It has come, and we take our chance. He spoke not one word, beyond the affairs of the school. He has a grandnephew in want of a school: visited the dormitories, refectory, and sheds: tasted the well-water, addressed me as Mr. Matthew. He had it from Giulio. Came to look at the school of Giulio’s “friend Matthew,":—you hear him. Giulio little imagines!—Well, dear love, we stand with a squad in front, and wait the word. It mayn’t be spoken. We have counted long before that something like it was bound to happen. And you are brave. Ruin’s an empty word for us two.’

Page 3929

‘Yes, dear, it is: we will pay what is asked of us,’ Aminta said. ’It will be heavy, if the school . . . and I love our boys. I am fit to be the school-housekeeper; for nothing else.’

‘I will go to the boys’ parents. At the worst, we can march into new territory. Emile will stick to us. Adolf, too. The fresh flock will come.’

Aminta cried in the voice of tears: ‘I love the old so!’

‘The likelihood is, we shall hear nothing further.’

‘You had to bear the shock, Matthew.’

‘Whatever I bore, and you saw, you shared.’

‘Yes,’ she said.

’Mais, n’oublions pas que c’est aujourd’hui jour francais; si, madame, vous avez assez d’appetit pour diner avec nous?

‘Je suis, comme toujours, aux ordres de Monsieur.’ She was among the bravest of women. She had a full ounce of lead in her breast when she sat with the boys at their midday meal, showing them her familiar pleasant face.

Shortly after the hour of the evening meal, a messenger from Bern delivered a letter addressed to the Headmaster. Weyburn and Aminta were strolling to the playground, thinking in common, as they usually did. They read the letter together. These were the lines:

’Lord Ormont desires to repeat his sense of obligation to Mr. Matthew for the inspection of the school under his charge, and will be thankful to Mr. Calliani, if that gentleman will do him the favour to call at his hotel at Bern to-morrow, at as early an hour as is convenient to him, for the purpose of making arrangements, agreeable to the Head-master’s rules, for receiving his grandnephew Robert Benlew as a pupil at the school.’

The two raised eyes on one another, pained in their deep joy by the religion of the restraint upon their hearts, to keep down the passion to embrace.

‘I thank heaven we know him to be one of the true noble men,’ said Aminta, now breathing, and thanking Lord Ormont for the free breath she drew.

Weyburn spoke of an idea he had gathered from the earl’s manner. But he had not imagined the proud lord’s great-heartedness would go so far as to trust him with the guardianship of the boy. That moved, and that humbled him, though it was far from humiliating.

Six months later, the brief communication arrived from Lady Charlotte

’She is a widow.

’Unlikely you will hear from me again. Death is always next door, you said once. I look on the back of life.

’Tell Bobby, capital for him to write he has no longing for home holidays. If any one can make a man of him, you will. That I know.

‘*CharlotteEglett*.’

Etext editor’s bookmarks

Page 3930

A bird that won’t roast or boil or stew
A woman, and would therefore listen to nonsense
A free-thinker startles him as a kind of demon
A female free-thinker is one of Satan’s concubines
Acting is not of the high class which conceals the art
Affected misapprehensions
Ah! we fall into their fictions
All that Matey and Browny were forbidden to write they looked
And not be beaten by an acknowledged defeat
Any excess pushes to craziness
As well ask (women) how a battle-field concerns them!
Bad luck’s not repeated every day Keep heart for the good
Bad laws are best broken
Began the game of Pull
Being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women
Botched mendings will only make them worse
Bounds of his intelligence closed their four walls
Boys who can appreciate brave deeds are capable of doing them
Boys, of course—but men, too!
But had sunk to climb on a firmer footing
By nature incapable of asking pardon
Cajoled like a twenty-year-old yahoo at college
Careful not to smell of his office
Challenged him to lead up to her desired stormy scene
Chose to conceive that he thought abstractedly
Consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent
Consign discussion to silence with the cynical closure
Convictions we store—wherewith to shape our destinies
Convincing themselves that they impersonate sagacity
Could not understand enthusiasm for the schoolmaster’s career
Could we—we might be friends
Curious thing would be if curious things should fail to happen
Death is only the other side of the ditch
Death is always next door
Desire of it destroyed it
Detestable feminine storms enveloping men weak enough
Didn’t say a word No use in talking about feelings
Distaste for all exercise once pleasurable
Divided lovers in presence
Enthusiasm struck and tightened the loose chord of scepticism
Enthusiast, when not lyrical, is perilously near to boring
Exult in imagination of an escape up to the moment of capture
Few men can forbear to tell a spicy story of their friends

Greatest of men; who have to learn from the loss of the woman
Having contracted the fatal habit of irony
He had to shake up wrath over his grievances
He had gone, and the day lived again for both of them
He gave a slight sign of restiveness, and was allowed to go
He loathed a skulker
He took small account of the operations of the feelings
He began ambitiously—It's the way at the beginning
Her vehement fighting against facts
Her duel with Time
His aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means
His restored sense of possession
Hopeless task of defending a woman from a woman
How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace?
I have all the luxuries—enough to loathe them
I hate old age It changes you so
I could be in love with her cruelty, if only

Page 3931

I had her near me
I look on the back of life
I want no more, except to be taught to work
I married a cook She expects a big appetite
I'm for a rational Deity
If the world is hostile we are not to blame it
Ignorance roaring behind a mask of sarcasm
Increase of dissatisfaction with the more she got
Lawyers hold the keys of the great world
Learn—principally not to be afraid of ideas
Loathing of artifice to raise emotion
Look well behind
Lucky accidents are anticipated only by fools
Magnify an offence in the ratio of our vanity
Man who helps me to read the world and men as they are
Meant to vanquish her with the dominating patience
Men bore the blame, though the women were rightly punished
Men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations
Naked original ideas, are acceptable at no time
Napoleon's treatment of women is excellent example
Necessity's offspring
Never nurse an injury, great or small
Nevertheless, inclinations are an infidelity
No love can be without jealousy
Not daring risk of office by offending the taxpayer
Not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent
Not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes
Old age is a prison wall between us and young people
One has to feel strong in a delicate position
One night, and her character's gone
One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light
Orderliness, from which men are privately exempt
Our love and labour are constantly on trial
Passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist's mess
People were virtuous in past days: they counted their sinners
Perhaps inspire him, if he would let her breathe
Person in another world beyond this world of blood
Policy seems to petrify their minds
Practical for having an addiction to the palpable
Professional Puritans
Published Memoirs indicate the end of a man's activity
Rage of a conceited schemer tricked

Regularity of the grin of dentistry
Respect one another’s affectations
Screams of an uninjured lady
Selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion
She had to be the hypocrite or else—leap
She had a thirsting mind
Silence was doing the work of a scourge
Smile she had in reserve for serviceable persons
Snatch her from a possessor who forfeited by undervaluing her
So says the minute Years are before you
That pit of one of their dead silences
The despot is alert at every issue, to every chance
The spending, never harvesting, world
The shots hit us behind you
The terrible aggregate social woman
The next ten minutes will decide our destinies
The woman side of him
The good life gone lives on in the mind
The beat of a heart with a dread like a shot in it
There is no history of events below the surface
There are women who go through life not knowing love
They want you to show them what they ’d like the world to be

Page 3932

Things are not equal
Things were lumpish and gloomy that day of the week
This female talk of the eternities
Titles showered on the women who take free breath of air
To males, all ideas are female until they are made facts
To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend
To know how to take a licking, that wins in the end
Uncommon unprogressiveness
Venus of nature was melting into a Venus of art
Violent summons to accept, which is a provocation to deny
We cannot, men or woman, control the heart in sleep at night
We shall want a war to teach the country the value of courage
We don’t go together into a garden of roses
When duelling flourished on our land, frail women powerful
Where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect
Who cries, Come on, and prays his gods you won’t
Why he enjoyed the privilege of seeing, and was not beside her
With what little wisdom the world is governed
Women are happier enslaved
World against us It will not keep us from trying to serve
Years are the teachers of the great rocky natures
You’ll have to guess at half of everything he tells you
You’re going to be men, meaning something better than women

THE AMAZING MARRIAGE

By George Meredith

1895

CONTENTS:

Book 1.
I. *Enter dame gossip as chorus*
ii. *Mistress gossip tells of the elopement of the countess of Cressett with the old buccaneer*, *and of Charles dump the postillion conducting them*, *and of* A *great county family*
III. *Continuation of the introductory meanderings of dame gossip*, *together with her sudden extinction*

iv. *Morning and farewell to an old home*
V. A *mountain walk in mist and sunshine*
vi. *The natural philosopher*
VII. *The lady's letter*
viii. *Of the encounter of two strange young men and their consorting*:
In which the male reader is requested to bear in mind what wild creature he was in his youth, *while the female should marvel credulously*
IX. *Concerning the black goddess fortune and the worship of her*, *together with an introduction of some of her votaries*

Page 3933

Book 2.
X. *Small causes*
xi. *The prisoner of his word*
XII. *Henrietta's letter treating of the great event*
XIII. *An irruption of mistress gossip in breach of the convention*
xiv. A *pendant of the foregoing*
XV. *Opening stage of the honeymoon*
XVI. *In which the bride from foreign parts is given* A *taste of old England*
xvii. *Records* A *shadow contest close on the foregoing*
XVIII. *Down Whitechapel way*
XIX. *The girl Madge*

Book 3.
XX. *Studies in fog*, *gout*, *an old seaman*, A *lovely serpent*, *and the moral effects that may come of* A *borrowed shirt*
XXI. *In which we have further glimpses of the wondrous mechanism of our younger man*
XXII. A *right-minded great lady*
XXIII. *In dame gossip's vein*
XXIV. A *kidnapping and no great harm*
XXV. *The philosopher man of action*
XXVI. *After some fencing the dame passes our guard*
XXVII. *We descend into* A STEAMER'S *engine-room*
XXVIII. *By concessions to mistress gossip* A *further intrusion is averted*

Book 4.
XXIX. *Carinthia in Wales*
XXX. *Rebecca Wythan*
XXXI. *We have again to deal with the examples of our younger man*
XXXII. *In which we see carinthia put in practice one of her old father's lessons*
XXXIII. A *frightful debate*
XXXIV. A *survey of the ride of the Welsh cavaliers escorting the countess of Fleetwood to Kentish Esslemont*
XXXV. *In which certain changes may be discerned*
XXXVI. *Below the surface and above*
XXXVII. *Between carinthia and her lord*
XXXVIII. A *dip into the spring's waters*

Page 3934

Book 5.
XXXIX. *The red warning from* A *son of vapour*
XL. A *record of minor incidents*
XLI. *In which the fates are seen and* A *choice of the refuges from them*
XLII. *The retarded courtship*
XLIII. *On the road to the act of penance*
XLIV. *Between the earl*; *the countess and her brother*, *and of* A *silver cross*
XLV. *Contains* A *record of what was feared*, *what was hoped*, *and what happened*
XLVI. A *chapter of undercurrents and some surface flashes*
XLVII. *The last*: *With* A *concluding word by the dame*

CHAPTER I

ENTER DAME GOSSIP AS CHORUS

Everybody has heard of the beautiful Countess of Cressett, who was one of the lights of this country at the time when crowned heads were running over Europe, crying out for charity's sake to be amused after their tiresome work of slaughter: and you know what a dread they have of moping. She was famous for her fun and high spirits besides her good looks, which you may judge of for yourself on a walk down most of our great noblemen's collections of pictures in England, where you will behold her as the goddess Diana fitting an arrow to a bow; and elsewhere an Amazon holding a spear; or a lady with dogs, in the costume of the day; and in one place she is a nymph, if not Diana herself, gazing at her naked feet before her attendants loosen her tunic for her to take the bath, and her hounds are pricking their ears, and you see antlers of a stag behind a block of stone. She was a wonderful swimmer, among other things, and one early morning, when she was a girl, she did really swim, they say, across the Shannon and back to win a bet for her brother Lord Levellier, the colonel of cavalry, who left an arm in Egypt, and changed his way of life to become a wizard, as the common people about his neighbourhood supposed, because he foretold the weather and had cures for aches and pains without a doctor's diploma. But we know now that he was only a mathematician and astronomer, all for inventing military engines. The brother and sister were great friends in their youth, when he had his right arm to defend her reputation with; and she would have done anything on earth to please him.

Page 3935

There is a picture of her in an immense flat white silk hat trimmed with pale blue, like a pavilion, the broadest brim ever seen, and she simply sits on a chair; and Venus the Queen of Beauty would have been extinguished under that hat, I am sure; and only to look at Countess Fanny's eye beneath the brim she has tipped ever so slightly in her artfulness makes the absurd thing graceful and suitable. Oh! she was a cunning one. But you must be on your guard against the scandalmongers and collectors of anecdotes, and worst of any, the critic, of our Galleries of Art; for she being in almost all of them (the principal painters of the day were on their knees for the favour of a sitting), they have to speak of her pretty frequently, and they season their dish, the coxcombs do, by hinting a knowledge of her history.

'Here we come to another portrait of the beautiful but, we fear, naughty Countess of Cressett.'

You are to imagine that they know everything, and they are so indulgent when they drop their blot on a lady's character.

They can boast of nothing more than having read Nymriey's Letters and Correspondence, published, fortunately for him, when he was no longer to be called to account below for his malicious insinuations, pretending to decency in initials and dashes: That man was a hater of women and the clergy. He was one of the horrid creatures who write with a wink at you, which sets the wicked part of us on fire: I have known it myself, and I own it to my shame; and if I happened to be ignorant of the history of Countess Fanny, I could not refute his wantonness. He has just the same benevolent leer for a bishop. Give me, if we are to make a choice, the beggar's breech for decency, I say: I like it vastly in preference to a Nymney, who leads you up to the curtain and agitates it, and bids you to retire on tiptoe. You cannot help being angry with the man for both reasons. But he is the writer society delights in, to show what it is composed of. A man brazen enough to declare that he could hold us in suspense about the adventures of a broomstick, with the aid of a yashmak and an ankle, may know the world; you had better not know him—that is my remark; and do not trust him.

He tells the story of the Old Buccaneer in fear of the public, for it was general property, but of course he finishes with a Nymney touch: 'So the Old Buccaneer is the doubloon she takes in exchange for a handful of silver pieces.' There is no such handful to exchange—not of the kind he sickeningly nudges at you. I will prove to you it was not Countess Fanny's naughtiness, though she was indeed very blamable. Women should walk in armour as if they were born to it; for these cold sneerers will never waste their darts on cuirasses. An independent brave young creature, exposing herself thoughtlessly in her reckless innocence, is the victim for them. They will bring all society down on her with one of their explosive sly words appearing so careless, the cowards. I say without hesitation, her conduct with regard to Kirby, the Old Buccaneer, as he was called, however indefensible in itself, warrants her at heart an innocent young woman, much to be pitied. Only to think of her, I could sometimes drop into a chair for a

good cry. And of him too! and their daughter Carinthia Jane was the pair of them, as to that, and so was Chillon John, the son.

Page 3936

Those critics quoting Nymney should look at the portrait of her in the Long Saloon of Cresset Castle, where she stands in blue and white, completely dressed, near a table supporting a couple of holster pistols, and then let them ask themselves whether they would speak of her so if her little hand could move.

Well, and so the tale of her swim across the Shannon river and back drove the young Earl of Cresset straight over to Ireland to propose for her, he saying; that she was the girl to suit his book; not allowing her time to think of how much he might be the man to suit hers. The marriage was what is called a good one: both full of frolic, and he wealthy and rather handsome, and she quite lovely and spirited.

No wonder the whole town was very soon agog about the couple, until at the end of a year people began to talk of them separately, she going her way, and he his. She could not always be on the top of a coach, which was his throne of happiness.

Plenty of stories are current still of his fame as a four-in-hand coachman. They say he once drove an Emperor and a King, a Prince Chancellor and a pair of Field Marshals, and some ladies of the day, from the metropolis to Richmond Hill in fifty or sixty odd minutes, having the ground cleared all the way by bell and summons, and only a donkey-cart and man, and a deaf old woman, to pay for; and went, as you can imagine, at such a tearing gallop, that those Grand Highnesses had to hold on for their lives and lost their hats along the road; and a publican at Kew exhibits one above his bar to the present hour. And Countess Fanny was up among them, they say. She was equal to it. And some say, that was the occasion of her meeting the Old Buccaneer.

She met him at Richmond in Surrey we know for certain. It was on Richmond Hill, where the old King met his Lass. They say Countess Fanny was parading the hill to behold the splendid view, always admired so much by foreigners, with their Achs and Hechs! and surrounded by her crowned courtiers in frogged uniforms and moustachioed like sea-horses, a little before dinner time, when Kirby passed her, and the Emperor made a remark on him, for Kirby was a magnificent figure of a man, and used to be compared to a three-decker entering harbour after a victory. He stood six feet four, and was broad-shouldered and deep-chested to match, and walked like a king who has humbled his enemy. You have seen big dogs. And so Countess Fanny looked round. Kirby was doing the same. But he had turned right about, and appeared transfixed and like a royal beast angry, with his wound. If ever there was love at first sight, and a dreadful love, like a runaway mail-coach in a storm of wind and lightning at black midnight by the banks of a flooded river, which was formerly our comparison for terrible situations, it was when those two met.

Page 3937

And, what! you exclaim, Buccaneer Kirby full sixty-five, and Countess Fanny no more than three and twenty, a young beauty of the world of fashion, courted by the highest, and she in love with him! Go and gaze at one of our big ships coming out of an engagement home with all her flags flying and her crew manning the yards. That will give you an idea of a young woman's feelings for an old warrior never beaten down an inch by anything he had to endure; matching him, I dare say, in her woman's heart, with the Mighty Highnesses who had only smelt the outside edge of battle. She did rarely admire a valiant man. Old as Methuselah, he would have made her kneel to him. She was all heart for a real hero.

The story goes, that Countess Fanny sent her husband to Captain Kirby, at the emperor's request, to inquire his name; and on hearing it, she struck her hands on her bosom, telling his Majesty he saw there the bravest man in the king's dominions; which the emperor scarce crediting, and observing that the man must be, then, a superhuman being to be so distinguished in a nation of the brave, Countess Fanny related the well-known tale of Captain Kirby and the shipful of mutineers; and how when not a man of them stood by him, and he in the service of the first insurgent State of Spanish America, to save his ship from being taken over to the enemy,—he blew her up, fifteen miles from land: and so he got to shore swimming and floating alternately, and was called Old Sky-high by English sailors, any number of whom could always be had to sail under Buccaneer Kirby. He fought on shore as well; and once he came down from the tops of the Andes with a black beard turned white, and went into action with the title of Kirby's Ghost.

But his heart was on salt water; he was never so much at home as in a ship foundering or splitting into the clouds. We are told that he never forgave the Admiralty for striking him off the list of English naval captains: which is no doubt why in his old age he nursed a grudge against his country.

Ours, I am sure, was the loss; and many have thought so since. He was a mechanician, a master of stratagems; and would say, that brains will beat Grim Death if we have enough of them. He was a standing example of the lessons of his own *maxims for men*, a very curious book, that fetches a rare price now wherever a copy is put up for auction. I shudder at them as if they were muzzles of firearms pointed at me; but they were not addressed to my sex; and still they give me an interest in the writer who would declare, that 'he had never failed in an undertaking without stripping bare to expose to himself where he had been wanting in Intention and Determination.'

There you may see a truly terrible man.

So the emperor being immensely taken with Kirby's method of preserving discipline on board ship, because (as we say to the madman, 'Your strait-waistcoat is my easy-chair') monarchs have a great love of discipline, he begged Countess Fanny's permission that

he might invite Captain Kirby to his table; and Countess Fanny (she had the name from the ballad

Page 3938

> ’I am the star of Prince and Czar,
> My light is shed on many,
> But I wait here till my bold Buccaneer
> Makes prize of Countess Fanny’:—

for the popular imagination was extraordinarily roused by the elopement, and there were songs and ballads out of number), Countess Fanny despatched her husband to Captain Kirby again, meaning no harm, though the poor man is laughed at in the songs for going twice upon his mission.

None of the mighty people repented of having the Old Buccaneer—for that night, at all events. He sat in the midst of them, you may believe, like the lord of that table, with his great white beard and hair—not a lock of it shed—and his bronze lion-face, and a resolute but a merry eye that he had. He was no deep drinker of wine, but when he did drink, and the wine champagne, he drank to show his disdain of its powers; and the emperor wishing for a narrative of some of his exploits, particularly the blowing up of his ship, Kirby paid his Majesty the compliment of giving it him as baldly as an official report to the Admiralty. So disengaged and calm was he, with his bottles of champagne in him, where another would have been sparkling and laying on the colours, that he was then and there offered Admiral’s rank in the Imperial navy; and the Old Buccaneer, like a courtier of our best days, bows to Countess Fanny, and asks her, if he is a free man to go: and, No, says she, we cannot spare you! And there was a pretty wrangle between Countess Fanny and the emperor, each pulling at the Old Buccaneer to have possession of him.

He was rarely out of her sight after their first meeting, and the ridiculous excuse she gave to her husband’s family was, she feared he would be kidnapped and made a Cossack of! And young Lord Cressett, her husband, began to grumble concerning her intimacy with a man old enough to be her grandfather. As if the age were the injury! He seemed to think it so, and vowed he would shoot the old depredator dead, if he found him on the grounds of Cressett: ‘like vermin,’ he said, and it was considered that he had the right, and no jury would have convicted him. You know what those days were.

He had his opportunity one moonlight night, not far from the castle, and peppered Kirby with shot from a fowling-piece at, some say, five paces’ distance, if not point-blank.

But Kirby had a maxim, Steady shakes them, and he acted on it to receive his enemy’s fire; and the young lord’s hand shook, and the Old Buccaneer stood out of the smoke not much injured, except in the coat-collar, with a pistol cocked in his hand, and he said:

Page 3939

’Many would take that for a declaration of war, but I know it ’s only your lordship’s diplomacy’; and then he let loose to his mad fun, astounding Lord Cressett and his gamekeeper, and vowed, as the young lord tried to relate subsequently, as well as he could recollect the words—here I have it in print:—’that he was a man pickled in saltpetre when an infant, like Achilles, and proof against powder and shot not marked with cross and key, and fetched up from the square magazine in the central depot of the infernal factory, third turning to the right off the grand arcade in Kingdom-come, where the night-porter has to wear wet petticoats, like a Highland chief, to make short work of the sparks flying about, otherwise this world and many another would not have to wait long for combustion.’

Kirby had the wildest way of talking when he was not issuing orders under fire, best understood by sailors. I give it you as it stands here printed. I do not profess to understand.

So Lord Cressett said: ’Diplomacy and infernal factories be hanged! Have your shot at me; it’s only fair.’ And Kirby discharged his pistol at the top twigs of an old oak tree, and called the young lord a Briton, and proposed to take him in hand and make a man of him, as nigh worthy of his wife as any one not an Alexander of Macedon could be.

So they became friendly, and the young lord confessed it was his family that had urged him to the attack; and Kirby abode at the castle, and all three were happy, in perfect honour, I am convinced: but such was not the opinion of the Cressetts and Levelliers. Down they trooped to Cressett Castle with a rush and a roar, crying on the disgrace of an old desperado like Kirby living there; Dukes, Marchionesses, Cabinet Ministers, leaders of fashion, and fire-eating colonels of the King’s body-guard, one of whom Captain John Peter Kirby laid on his heels at ten paces on an April morning, when the duel was fought, as early as the blessed heavens had given them light to see to do it. Such days those were!

There was talk of shutting up the infatuated lady. If not incarcerated, she was rigidly watched. The earl her husband fell altogether to drinking and coaching, and other things. The ballad makes her say:

> ’My family my gaolers be,
> My husband is a zany;
> Naught see I clear save my bold Buccaneer
> To rescue Countess Fanny!’

and it goes on:

> ’O little lass, at play on the grass,

Come earn a silver penny,
And you'll be dear to my bold Buccaneer
For news of his Countess Fanny.'

In spite of her bravery, that poor woman suffered!

We used to learn by heart the ballads and songs upon famous events in those old days when poetry was worshipped.

Page 3940

But Captain Kirby gave provocation enough to both families when he went among the taverns and clubs, and vowed before Providence over his big fist that they should rue their interference, and he would carry off the lady on a day he named; he named the hour as well, they say, and that was midnight of the month of June. The Levelliers and Cressetts foamed at the mouth in speaking of him, so enraged they were on account of his age and his passion for a young woman. As to blood, the Kirbys of Lincolnshire were quite equal to the Cressetts of Warwick. The Old Buccaneer seems to have had money too. But you can see what her people had to complain of: his insolent contempt of them was unexampled. And their tyranny had roused my lady's high spirit not a bit less; and she said right out: 'When he comes, I am ready and will go with him.'

There was boldness for you on both sides! All the town was laughing and betting on the event of the night in June: and the odds were in favour of Kirby; for though, Lord Cressett was quite the popular young English nobleman, being a capital whip and free of his coin, in those days men who had smelt powder were often prized above titles, and the feeling, out of society, was very strong for Kirby, even previous to the fight on the heath. And the age of the indomitable adventurer must have contributed to his popularity. He was the hero of every song.

> "'What's age to me!" cries Kirby;
> "Why, young and fresh let her be,
> But it 's mighty better reasoned
> For a man to be well seasoned,
> And a man she has in me," cries Kirby.'

As to his exact age:

> "'Write me down sixty-three," cries Kirby.'

I have always maintained that it was an understatement. We must remember, it was not Kirby speaking, but the song-writer. Kirby would not, in my opinion, have numbered years he was proud of below their due quantity. He was more, if he died at ninety-one; and Chillon Switzer John Kirby, born eleven months after the elopement, was, we know, twenty-three years old when the old man gave up the ghost and bequeathed him little besides a law-suit with the Austrian Government, and the care of Carinthia Jane, the second child of this extraordinary union; both children born in wedlock, as you will hear. Sixty-three, or sixty-seven, near upon seventy, when most men are reaping and stacking their sins with groans and weak knees, Kirby was a match for his juniors, which they discovered.

Captain John Peter Avason Kirby, son of a Lincolnshire squire of an ancient stock, was proud of his blood, and claimed descent from a chief of the Danish rovers.

’"What’s rank to me!” cries Kirby;
“A titled lass let her be,
But unless my plans miscarry,
I’ll show her when we marry;
As brave a pedigree,” cries Kirby.’

That was the song-writer’s answer to the charge that the countess had stooped to a degrading alliance.

Page 3941

John Peter was fourth of a family of seven children, all males, and hard at the bottle early in life: ‘for want of proper occupation,’ he says in his Memoirs, and applauds his brother Stanson, the clergyman, for being ahead of him in renouncing strong dunks, because he found that he ’cursed better upon water.’ Water, however, helped Stanson Kirby to outlive his brothers and inherit the Lincolnshire property, and at the period of the great scandal in London he was palsied, and waited on by his grandson and heir Ralph Thorkill Kirby, the hero of an adventure celebrated in our Law courts and on the English stage; for he took possession of his coachman’s wife, and was accused of compassing the death of the husband. He was not hanged for it, so we are bound to think him not guilty.

The stage-piece is called ‘Saturday Night’, and it had an astonishing run, but is only remembered now for the song of ‘Saturday,’ sung by the poor coachman and labourers at the village ale-house before he starts to capture his wife from the clutches of her seducer and meets his fate. Never was there a more popular song: you heard it everywhere. I recollect one verse:

> ’O Saturday money is slippery metal,
> And Saturday ale it is tipsy stuff
> At home the old woman is boiling her kettle,
> She thinks we don’t know when we’ve tippled enough.
> We drink, and of never a man are we jealous,
> And never a man against us will he speak
> For who can be hard on a set of poor fellows
> Who only see Saturday once a week!

You chorus the last two lines.

That was the very song the unfortunate coachman of Kirby Hall joined in singing before he went out to face his end for the woman he loved. He believed in her virtue to the very last.

‘The ravished wife of my bosom,’ he calls her all through the latter half of the play. It is a real tragedy. The songs of that day have lost their effect now, I suppose. They will ever remain pathetic to me; and to hear the poor coachman William Martin invoking the name of his dear stolen wife Elizabeth, jug in hand, so tearfully, while he joins the song of Saturday, was a most moving thing. You saw nothing but handkerchiefs out all over the theatre. What it is that has gone from our drama, I cannot tell: I am never affected now as I was then; and people in a low station of life could affect me then, without being flung at me, for I dislike an entire dish of them, I own. We were simpler in our habits and ways of thinking. Elizabeth Martin, according to report, was a woman to make better men than Ralph Thorkill act evilly—as to good looks, I mean. She was not entirely guiltless, I am afraid; though in the last scene, Mrs. Kempson, who played the part (as, alas, she could do to the very life!), so threw herself into the pathos of it that

there were few to hold out against her, and we felt that Elizabeth had been misled. So much for morality in those days!

Page 3942

And now for the elopement.

CHAPTER II

Mistress gossip tells of the elopement of the countess of Cressett with the old buccaneer, *and of Charles dump the postillion conducting them*, *and of* A *great county family*

The twenty-first of June was the day appointed by Captain Kirby to carry off Countess Fanny, and the time midnight: and ten minutes to the stroke of twelve, Countess Fanny, as if she scorned to conceal that she was in a conspiracy with her grey-haired lover, notwithstanding that she was watched and guarded, left the Marchioness of Arpington's ball-room and was escorted downstairs by her brother Lord Levellier, sworn to baffle Kirby. Present with him in the street and witness to the shutting of the carriage-door on Countess Fanny, were brother officers of his, General Abrane, Colonel Jack Potts, and Sir Upton Tomber.

The door fast shut, Countess Fanny kissed her hand to them and drew up the window, seeming merry, and as they had expected indignation and perhaps resistance, for she could be a spitfire in a temper and had no fear whatever of firearms, they were glad to have her safe on such good terms; and so General Abrane jumped up on the box beside the coachman, Jack Potts jumped up between the footmen, and Sir Upton Tomber and the one-armed lord, as soon as the carriage was disengaged from the ruck two deep, walked on each side of it in the road all the way to Lord Cressett's town house. No one thought of asking where that silly young man was—probably under some table.

Their numbers were swelled by quite a host going along, for heavy bets were on the affair, dozens having backed Kirby; and it must have appeared serious to them, with the lady in custody, and constables on the look-out, and Kirby and his men nowhere in sight. They expected an onslaught at some point of the procession, and it may be believed they wished it, if only that they might see something for their money. A beautiful bright moonlight night it happened to be. Arm in arm among them were Lord Pitscrew and Russett, Earl of Fleetwood, a great friend of Kirby's; for it was a device of the Old Buccaneer's that helped the earl to win the great Welsh heiress who made him, even before he took to hoarding and buying,—one of the wealthiest noblemen in England; but she was crazed by her marriage or the wild scenes leading to it; she never presented herself in society. She would sit on the top of Estlemont towers—as they formerly spelt it—all day and half the night in midwinter, often, looking for the mountains down in her native West country, covered with an old white flannel cloak, and on her head a tall hat of her Welsh women-folk; and she died of it, leaving a son in her likeness, of whom you will hear. Lord Fleetwood had lost none of his faith in Kirby, and went on booking bets giving him huge odds, thousands!

Page 3943

He accepted fifty to one when the carriage came to a stop at the steps of Lord Cressett's mansion; but he was anxious, and well he might be, seeing Countess Fanny alight and pass up between two lines of gentlemen all bowing low before her: not a sign of the Old Buccaneer anywhere to right or left! Heads were on the look out, and vows offered up for his appearance.

She was at the door and about to enter the house. Then it was; that with a shout of the name of some dreadful heathen god, Colonel Jack Potts roared out, 'She's half a foot short o' the mark!'

He was on the pavement, and it seems he measured her as she slipped by him, and one thing and another caused him to smell a cheat; and General Abrane, standing beside her near the door, cried: 'Where art flying now, Jack?' But Jack Potts grew more positive and bellowed, 'Peel her wig! we're done!'

And she did not speak a word, but stood huddled-up and hooded; and Lord Levellier caught her up by the arm as she was trying a dash into the hall, and Sir Upton Tomber plucked at her veil and raised it, and whistled:

'Phew!'—which struck the rabble below with awe of the cunning of the Old Buccaneer; and there was no need for them to hear General Abrane say: 'Right! Jack, we've a dead one in hand,' or Jack Potts reply:

'It's ten thousand pounds clean winged away from my pocket, like a string of wild geese!'

The excitement of the varletry in the square, they say, was fearful to hear. So the principal noblemen and gentlemen concerned thought it prudent to hurry the young woman into the house and bar the door; and there she was very soon stripped of veil and blonde false wig with long curls, the whole framing of her artificial resemblance to Countess Fanny, and she proved to be a good-looking foreign maid, a dark one, powdered, trembling very much, but not so frightened upon hearing that her penalty for the share she had taken in the horrid imposture practised upon them was to receive and return a salute from each of the gentlemen in rotation; which the hussy did with proper submission; and Jack Potts remarked, that 'it was an honest buss, but dear at ten thousand!'

When you have been the victim of a deceit, the explanation of the simplicity of the trick turns all the wonder upon yourself, you know, and the backers of the Old Buccaneer and the wagerers against him crowed and groaned in chorus at the maid's narrative of how the moment Countess Fanny had thrown up the window of her carriage, she sprang out to a carriage on the off side, containing Kirby, and how she, this little French jade, sprang in to take her place. One snap of the fingers and the transformation was accomplished. So for another kiss all round they let her go free, and she sat at the

supper-table prepared for Countess Fanny and the party by order of Lord Levellier, and amused the gentlemen with stories of the ladies she had served, English and foreign. And that is

Page 3944

how men are taught to think they know our sex and may despise it! I could preach them a lesson. Those men might as well not believe in the steadfastness of the very stars because one or two are reported lost out of the firmament, and now and then we behold a whole shower of fragments descending. The truth is, they have taken a stain from the life they lead, and are troubled puddles, incapable of clear reflection. To listen to the tattle of a chatting little slut, and condemn the whole sex upon her testimony, is a nice idea of justice. Many of the gentlemen present became notorious as woman-scorners, whether owing to Countess Fanny or other things. Lord Levellier was, and Lord Fleetwood, the wicked man! And certainly the hearing of naughty stories of us by the light of a grievous and vexatious instance of our misconduct must produce an impression. Countess Fanny's desperate passion for a man of the age of Kirby struck them as out of nature. They talked of it as if they could have pardoned her a younger lover.

All that Lord Cressett said, on the announcement of the flight of his wife, was: 'Ah! Fan! she never would run in my ribbons.'

He positively declined to persue. Lord Levellier would not attempt to follow her up without him, as it would have cost money, and he wanted all that he could spare for his telescopes and experiments. Who, then, was the gentleman who stopped the chariot, with his three mounted attendants, on the road to the sea, on the heath by the great Punch-Bowl?

That has been the question for now longer than half a century, in fact approaching seventy mortal years. No one has ever been able to say for certain.

It occurred at six o'clock on the summer morning. Countess Fanny must have known him,—and not once did she open her mouth to breathe his name. Yet she had no objection to talk of the adventure and how Simon Fettle, Captain Kirby's old ship's steward in South America, seeing horsemen stationed on the ascent of the high road bordering the Bowl, which is miles round and deep, made the postillion cease jogging, and sang out to his master for orders, and Kirby sang back to him to look to his priming, and then the postillion was bidden proceed, and he did not like it, but he had to deal with pistols behind, where men feel weak, and he went bobbing on the saddle in dejection, as if upon his very heart he jogged; and soon the fray commenced. There was very little parleying between determined men.

Simon Fettle was a plain kindly creature without a thought of malice, who kept his master's accounts. He fired the first shot at the foremost man, as he related in after days, 'to reduce the odds.' Kirby said to Countess Fanny, just to comfort her, never so much as imagining she would be afraid, 'The worst will be a bloody shirt for Simon to mangle,' for they had been arranging to live cheaply in a cottage on the Continent, and Simon Fettle to do the washing. She could not help laughing outright. But when the

Old Buccaneer was down striding in the battle, she took a pistol and descended likewise; and she used it, too, and loaded again.

Page 3945

She had not to use it a second time. Kirby pulled the gentleman off his horse, wounded in the thigh, and while dragging him to Countess Fanny to crave her pardon, a shot intended for Kirby hit the poor gentleman in the breast, and Kirby stretched him at his length, and Simon and he disarmed the servant who had fired. One was insensible, one flying, and those two on the ground. All in broad daylight; but so lonely is that spot, nothing might have been heard of it, if at the end of the week the postillion who had been bribed and threatened with terrible threats to keep his tongue from wagging, had not begun to talk. So the scene of the encounter was examined, and on one spot, carefully earthed over, blood-marks were discovered in the green sand. People in the huts on the hill-top, a quarter of a mile distant, spoke of having heard sounds of firing while they were at breakfast, and a little boy named Tommy Wedger said he saw a dead body go by in an open coach that morning; all bloody and mournful. He had to appear before the magistrates, crying terribly, but did not know the nature of an oath, and was dismissed. Time came when the boy learned to swear, and he did, and that he had seen a beautiful lady firing and killing men like pigeons and partridges; but that was after Charles Dump, the postillion, had been telling the story.

Those who credited Charles Dump's veracity speculated on dozens of great noblemen —and gentlemen known to be dying in love with Countess Fanny. And this brings us to another family.

I do not say I know anything; I do but lay before you the evidence we have to fix suspicion upon a notorious character, perfectly capable of trying to thwart a man like Kirby, and with good reason to try, if she had bewitched him to a consuming passion, as we are told.

About eleven miles distant, as the crow flies and a bold huntsman will ride in that heath country, from the Punch-Bowl, right across the mounds and the broad water, lies the estate of the Fakenhams, who intermarried with the Coplestones of the iron mines, and were the wealthiest of the old county families until Curtis Fakenham entered upon his inheritance. Money with him was like the farm-wife's dish of grain she tosses in showers to her fowls. He was more than what you call a lady-killer, he was a woman-eater. His pride was in it as well as his taste, and when men are like that, indeed they are devourers!

Curtis was the elder brother of Commodore Baldwin Fakenham, whose offspring, like his own, were so strangely mixed up with Captain Kirby's children by Countess Fanny, as you will hear. And these two brothers were sons of Geoffrey Fakenham, celebrated for his devotion to the French Countess Jules d'Andreuze, or some such name, a courtly gentleman, who turned Papist on his death-bed in France, in Brittany somewhere, not to be separated from her in the next world, as he solemnly left word; wickedly, many think.

Page 3946

To show the oddness of things and how opposite to one another brothers may be, his elder, the uncle of Curtis, and Baldwin, was the renowned old Admiral Fakenham, better known along our sea-coasts and ports among sailors as ‘Old Showery,’ because of a remark he once made to his flag-captain, when cannon-balls were coming thick on them in a hard-fought action. ‘Hot work, sir,’ his captain said. ‘Showery,’ replied the admiral, as his cocked-hat was knocked off by the wind of a cannon-ball. He lost both legs before the war was over, and said merrily, ‘Stumps for life’’ while they were carrying him below to the cockpit. In my girlhood the boys were always bringing home anecdotes of old Admiral Showery: not all of them true ones, perhaps, but they fitted him. He was a rough seaman, fond, as they say, of his glass and his girl, and utterly despising his brother Geoffrey for the airs he gave himself, and crawling on his knees to a female Parleyvoo; and when Geoffrey died, the admiral drank to his rest in the grave: ‘There’s to my brother Jeff,’ he said, and flinging away the dregs of his glass: ’There ‘s to the Frog!’ and flinging away the glass to shivers: ‘There’s to the Turncoat!’

He salted his language in a manner I cannot repeat; no epithet ever stood by itself. When I was young the boys relished these dreadful words because they seemed to smell of tar and battle-smoke, when every English boy was for being a sailor and daring the Black Gentleman below. In all truth, the bad words came from him; though an excellent scholar has assured me they should be taken for aspirates, and mean no harm; and so it may be, but heartily do I rejoice that aspirates, have been dropped by people of birth; for you might once hear titled ladies guilty of them in polite society, I do assure you.

We have greatly improved in that respect. They say the admiral’s reputation as a British sailor of the old school made him, rather his name, a great favourite at Court; but to Court he could not be got to go, and if the tale be true, their Majesties paid him a visit on board his ship, in harbour one day, and sailors tell you that Old Showery gave his liege lord and lady a common dish of boiled beef with carrots and turnips, and a plain dumpling, for their dinner, with ale and port wine, the merit of which he swore to; and he became so elate, that after the cloth was removed, he danced them a hornpipe on his pair of wooden legs, whistling his tune, and holding his full tumbler of hot grog in his hand all the while, without so much as the spilling of a drop!—so earnest was he in everything he did. They say his limit was two bottles of port wine at a sitting, with his glass of hot grog to follow, and not a soul could induce him to go beyond that. In addition to being a great seaman, he was a very religious man and a stout churchman.

Page 3947

Well, now, the Curtis Fakenham of Captain Kirby's day had a good deal of his uncle as well as his father in him, the spirit of one and the outside, of the other; and, favoured or not, he had been distinguished among Countess Fanny's adorers: she certainly chose to be silent about the name of the assailant. And it has been attested on oath that two days and a night subsequent to the date furnished by Charles Dump, Curtis Fakenham was brought to his house, Hollis Grange, lame of a leg, with a shot in his breast, that he carried to the family vault; and his head gamekeeper, John Wiltshire, a resolute fellow, was missing from that hour. Some said they had a quarrel, and Curtis was wounded and John Wiltshire killed. Curtis was known to have been extremely attached to the man. Yet when Wiltshire was inquired for, he let fall a word of 'having more of Wiltshire than was agreeable to Hampshire'—his county. People asked what that meant. Yet, according to the tale, it was the surviving servant, by whom he, or whoever it may have been, was accidentally shot.

We are in a perfect tangle. On the other hand, it was never denied that Curtis and John Wiltshire were in London together at the time of Countess Fanny's flight: and Curtis Fakenham was one of the procession of armed gentleman conducting her in her carriage, as they supposed; and he was known to have started off, on the discovery of the cheat, with horrible imprecations against Frenchwomen. It became known, too; that horses of his were standing saddled in his innyard at midnight. And more, Charles Dump the postillion was taken secretly to set eyes on him as they wheeled him in his garden-walk, and he vowed it was the identical gentleman. But this coming by and by to the ear of Curtis, he had Charles Dump fetched over to confront him; and then the man made oath that he had never seen Mr. Curtis Fakenham anywhere but there, in his own house at Hollis! One does not really know what, to think of it.

This postillion made a small fortune. He was everywhere in request. People were never tired of asking him how he behaved while the fight was going on, and he always answered that he sat as close to his horse as he could, and did not dream of dismounting; for, he said, 'he was a figure on a horse, and naught when off it.' His repetition of the story, with some adornments, and that same remark, made him the popular man of the county; people said he might enter Parliament, and I think at one time it was possible. But a great success is full of temptations. After being hired at inns to fill them with his account of the battle, and tipped by travellers from London to show the spot, he set up for himself as innkeeper, and would have flourished, only he had contracted habits on his rounds, and he fell to contradicting himself, so that he came to be called Lying Charley; and the people of the country said it was 'he who drained the Punch-Bowl, for though he helped to put the capital into it, he took all the interest out of it.'

Page 3948

Yet we have the doctor of the village of Ipley, Dr. Cawthorne, a noted botanist, assuring us of the absolute credibility of Charles Dump, whom he attended in the poor creature's last illness, when Charles Dump confessed he had lived in mortal terror of Squire Curtis, and had got the trick of lying, through fear of telling the truth. Hence his ruin.

So he died delirious and contrite. Cawthorne, the great Turf man, inherited a portrait of him from his father the doctor. It was often the occasion of the story being told over again, and used to hang in the patients' reception room, next to an oil-painting of the Punch-Bowl, an admired landscape picture by a local artist, highly-toned and true to every particular of the scene, with the bright yellow road winding uphill, and the banks of brilliant purple heath, and a white thorn in bloom quite beautiful, and the green fir trees, and the big Bowl black as a cauldron,—indeed a perfect feast of harmonious contrasts in colours.

And now you know how it is that the names of Captain Kirby and Curtis Fakenham are alive to the present moment in the district.

We lived a happy domestic life in those old coaching days, when county affairs and county people were the topics of firesides, and the country enclosed us to make us feel snug in our own importance. My opinion is, that men and women grow to their dimensions only where such is the case. We had our alarms from the outside now and again, but we soon relapsed to dwell upon our private business and our pleasant little hopes and excitements; the courtships and the crosses and the scandals, the tea-parties and the dances, and how the morning looked after the stormy night had passed, and the coach coming down the hill with a box of news and perhaps a curious passenger to drop at the inn. I do believe we had a liking for the very highwaymen, if they had any reputation for civility. What I call human events, things concerning you and me, instead of the deafening catastrophes now afflicting and taking all conversation out of us, had their natural interest then. We studied the face of each morning as it came, and speculated upon the secret of the thing it might have in store for us or our heroes and heroines; we thought of them more than of ourselves. Long after the adventures of the Punch-Bowl, our county was anxious about Countess Fanny and the Old Buccaneer, wondering where they were and whether they were prospering, whether they were just as much in love as ever, and which of them would bury the other, and what the foreign people abroad thought of that strange pair.

CHAPTER III

Continuation of the introductory meanderings of dame gossip, *together with her sudden extinction*

I have still time before me, according to the terms of my agreement with the person to whom I have, I fear foolishly, entrusted the letters and documents of a story surpassing

ancient as well as modern in the wonderment it causes, that would make the Law courts bless their hearts, judges no less than the barristers, to have it running through them day by day, with every particular to wrangle over, and many to serve as a text for the pulpit. So to proceed.

Page 3949

It should be mentioned that the postillion Charles Dump is not represented, and I have no conception of the reason why not, sitting on horseback, in the portrait in the possession of the Cawthorne family. I have not seen it, I am bound to admit. We had offended Dr. Cawthorne, by once in an urgent case calling in another doctor, who, he would have it, was a quack, that ought to have killed us, and we ceased to visit; but a gentleman who was an established patient of Dr. Cawthorne's and had frequent opportunities of judging the portrait, in the course of a chronic malady, describes Charles Dump on his legs as a small man looking diminished from a very much longer one by shrinkage in thickish wrinkles from the shoulders to the shanks. His hat is enormous and very gay. He is rather of sad countenance. An elevation of his collar behind the ears, and pointed at the neck, gives you notions of his having dropped from some hook. He stands with his forefinger extended, like a disused semaphore-post, that seems tumbling and desponding on the hill by the highroad, in his attitude while telling the tale; if standing it may be called, where the whole figure appears imploring for a seat. That was his natural position, as one would suppose any artist must have thought, and a horse beneath him. But it has been suggested that the artist in question was no painter of animals. Then why did he not get a painter of animals to put in the horse? It is vain to ask, though it is notorious that artists combine without bickering to do these things; and one puts his name on the animal, the other on the human being or landscape.

My informant adds, that the prominent feature, telling a melancholy tale of its own, is of sanguine colour, and while plainly in the act of speaking, Charles Dump might be fancied about to drop off to sleep. He was impressed by the dreaminess of the face; and I must say I regard him as an interesting character. During my girlhood Napoleon Bonaparte alone would have been his rival for filling an inn along our roads. I have known our boys go to bed obediently and get up at night to run three miles to *the wheatsheaf*, only to stand on the bench or traveller's-rest outside the window and look in at Charles Dump reciting, with just room enough in the crowd to point his finger, as his way was.

He left a child, Mary Dump, who grew up to become lady's maid to Livia Fakenham, daughter of Curtis, the beauty of Hampshire, equalled by no one save her cousin Henrietta Fakenham, the daughter of Commodore Baldwin; and they were two different kinds of beauties, not to be compared, and different were their fortunes; for this lady was likened to the sun going down on a cloudy noon, and that lady to the moon riding through a stormy night. Livia was the young widow of Lord Duffield when she accepted the Earl of Fleetwood, and was his third countess, and again a widow at eight-and-twenty, and stepmother to young Croesus, the Earl of Fleetwood of my story. Mary Dump testifies to her kindness of heart to her dependents. If we are to speak of goodness, I am afraid there are other witnesses.

Page 3950

I resent being warned that my time is short and that I have wasted much of it over ‘the attractive Charles.’ What I have done I have done with a purpose, and it must be a storyteller devoid of the rudiments of his art who can complain of my dwelling on Charles Dump, for the world to have a pause and pin its faith to him, which it would not do to a grander person—that is, as a peg. Wonderful events, however true they are, must be attached to something common and familiar, to make them credible. Charles Dump, I say, is like a front-page picture to a history of those old quiet yet exciting days in England, and when once you have seized him the whole period is alive to you, as it was to me in the delicious dulness I loved, that made us thirsty to hear of adventures and able to enjoy to the utmost every thing occurring. The man is no more attractive to me than a lump of clay. How could he be? But supposing I took up the lump and told you that there where I found it, that lump of clay had been rolled over and flung off by the left wheel of the prophet’s Chariot of Fire before it mounted aloft and disappeared in the heavens above!—you would examine it and cherish it and have the scene present with you, you may be sure; and magnificent descriptions would not be one-half so persuasive. And that is what we call, in my profession, Art, if you please.

So to continue: the Earl of Cressett fell from his coach-box in a fit, and died of it, a fortnight after the flight of his wife; and the people said she might as well have waited. Kirby and Countess Fanny were at Lucerne or Lausanne, or some such place, in Switzerland when the news reached them, and Kirby, without losing an hour, laid hold of an English clergyman of the Established Church and put him through the ceremony of celebrating his lawful union with the beautiful young creature he adored. And this he did, he said, for the world to guard his Fan in a wider circle than his two arms could compass, if not quite so well.

So the Old Buccaneer was ever after that her lawful husband, and as his wedded wife, not wedded to a fool, she was an example to her sex, like many another woman who has begun badly with a light-headed mate. It is hard enough for a man to be married to a fool, but a man is only half-cancelled by that burden, it has been said; whereas a woman finds herself on board a rudderless vessel, and often the desperate thing she does is to avoid perishing! Ten months, or eleven, some say, following the proclamation of the marriage-tie, a son was born to Countess Fanny, close by the castle of Chillon-on-the-lake, and he had the name of Chillon Switzer John Kirby given to him to celebrate the fact.

Two years later the girl was born, and for the reason of her first seeing the light in that Austrian province, she was christened Carinthia Jane. She was her old father’s pet; but Countess Fanny gloried in the boy. She had fancied she would be a childless woman before he gave sign of coming; and they say she wrote a little volume of Meditations in Prospect of Approaching Motherhood, for the guidance of others in a similar situation.

Page 3951

I have never been able to procure the book or pamphlet, but I know she was the best of mothers, and of wives too. And she, with her old husband, growing like a rose out of a weather-beaten rock, proved she was that, among those handsome foreign officers poorly remarkable for their morals. Not once had the Old Buccaneer to teach them a lesson. Think of it and you will know that her feet did not stray—nor did her pretty eyes. Her heart was too full for the cravings of vanity. Innocent ladies who get their husbands into scrapes are innocent, perhaps; but knock you next door in their bosoms, where the soul resides, and ask for information of how innocence and uncleanness may go together. Kirby purchased a mine in Carinthia, on the borders of Styria, and worked it himself. His native land displeased him, so that he would not have been unwilling to see Chillon enter the Austrian service, which the young man was inclined for, subsequent to his return to his parents from one of the English public schools, notwithstanding his passionate love for Old England. But Lord Levellier explained the mystery in a letter to his half-forgiven sister, praising the boy for his defence of his mother's name at the school, where a big brutal fellow sneered at her, and Chillon challenged him to sword or pistol; and then he walked down to the boy's home in Staffordshire to force him to fight; and the father of the boy made him offer an apology. That was not much balm to Master Chillon's wound. He returned to his mother quite heavy, unlike a young man; and the unhappy lady, though she knew, him to be bitterly sensitive on the point of honour, and especially as to everything relating to her, saw herself compelled to tell him the history of her life, to save him, as she thought, from these chivalrous vindications of her good name. She may have even painted herself worse than she was, both to excuse her brother's miserliness to her son and the world's evil speaking of her. Wisely or not, she chose this course devotedly to protect him from the perils she foresaw in connection with the name of the once famous Countess Fanny in the British Isles. And thus are we stricken by the days of our youth. It is impossible to moralize conveniently when one is being hurried by a person at one's elbow.

So the young man heard his mother out and kissed her, and then he went secretly to Vienna and enlisted and served for a year as a private in the regiment of Hussars, called, my papers tell me, Liechtenstein, and what with his good conduct and the help of Kirby's friends, he would have obtained a commission from the emperor, when, at the right moment to keep a sprig of Kirby's growth for his country, Lord Levellier sent word that he was down for a cornetcy in a British regiment of dragoons. Chillon came home from a garrison town, and there was a consultation about his future career. Shall it be England? Shall it be Austria? Countess Fanny's voice was for England, and she carried the vote, knowing though she did that it signified separation, and it might be alienation—where her son would chance to hear things he could not refute. She believed that her son by such a man as Kirby would be of use to his country, and her voice, against herself, was for England.

Page 3952

It broke her heart. If she failed to receive the regular letter, she pined and was disconsolate. He has heard more of me! was in her mind. Her husband sat looking at her with his old large grey glassy eyes. You would have fancied him awaiting her death as the signal for his own release. But she, poor mother, behind her weeping lids beheld her son's filial love of her wounded and bleeding. When there was anything to be done for her, old Kirby was astir. When it was nothing, either in physic or assistance, he was like a great corner of rock. You may indeed imagine grief in the very rock that sees its flower fading to the withered shred. On the last night of her life this old man of past ninety carried her in his arms up a flight of stairs to her bed.

A week after her burial, Kirby was found a corpse in the mountain forest. His having called the death of his darling his lightning-stroke must have been the origin of the report that he died of lightning. He touched not a morsel of food from the hour of the dropping of the sod on her coffin of ebony wood. An old crust of their mahogany bread, supposed at first to be a specimen of quartz, was found in one of his coat pockets. He kissed his girl Carinthia before going out on his last journey from home, and spoke some wandering words. The mine had not been worked for a year. She thought she would find him at the mouth of the shaft, where he would sometimes be sitting and staring, already dead at heart with the death he saw coming to the beloved woman. They had to let her down with ropes, that she might satisfy herself he was not below. She and her great dog and a faithful man-servant discovered the body in the forest. Chillon arrived from England to see the common grave of both his parents.

And now good-bye to sorrow for a while. Keep your tears for the living. And first I am going to describe to you the young Earl of Fleetwood, son of the strange Welsh lady, the richest nobleman of his time, and how he persued and shunned the lady who had fascinated him, Henrietta, the daughter of Commodore Baldwin Fakenham; and how he met Carinthia Jane; and concerning that lovely Henrietta and Chillon Kirby-Levellier; and of the young poet of ordinary parentage, and the giant Captain Abrane, and Livia the widowed Countess of Fleetwood, Henrietta's cousin, daughter of Curtis Fakenham; and numbers of others; Lord Levellier, Lord Brailstone, Lord Simon Pitscrew, Chumley Potts, young Ambrose Mallard; and the English pugilist, such a man of honour though he drank; and the adventures of Madge, Carinthia Jane's maid. Just a few touches. And then the marriage dividing Great Britain into halves, taking sides. After that, I trust you may go on, as I would carry you were we all twenty years younger, had I but sooner been in possession of these treasured papers. I promise you excitement enough, if justice is done to them. But I must and will describe the wedding. This young Earl of Fleetwood, you should know, was a very powder-magazine of ambition, and never would he break his word: which is right, if we are properly careful; and so he—

Page 3953

She ceases. According to the terms of the treaty, the venerable lady's time has passed. An extinguisher descends on her, giving her the likeness of one under condemnation of 'the Most Holy Inqusition, in the ranks of an 'auto da fe'; and singularly resembling that victim at the first sharp bite of the flames she will, be when she hears the version of her story.

CHAPTER IV

MORNING AND FAREWELL TO AN OLD HOME

Brother and sister were about to leave the mountainland for England. They had not gone to bed overnight, and from the windows of their deserted home, a little before dawn, they saw the dwindled moon, a late riser, break through droves of hunted cloud, directly topping their ancient guardian height, the triple peak and giant of the range, friendlier in his name than in aspect for the two young people clinging to the scene they were to quit. His name recalled old-days: the apparition of his head among the heavens drummed on their sense of banishment.

To the girl, this was a division of her life, and the dawn held the sword. She felt herself midswing across a gulf that was the grave of one half, without a light of promise for the other. Her passionate excess of attachment to her buried home robbed the future of any colours it might have worn to bid a young heart quicken. And England, though she was of British blood, was a foreign place to her, not alluring: her brother had twice come out of England reserved in speech; her mother's talk of England had been unhappy; her father had suffered ill-treatment there from a brutal institution termed the Admiralty, and had never regretted the not seeing England again. The thought that she was bound thitherward enfolded her like a frosty mist. But these bare walls, these loud floors, chill rooms, dull windows, and the vault-sounding of the ghostly house, everywhere the absence of the faces in the house told her she had no choice, she must go. The appearance of her old friend the towering mountain-height, up a blue night-sky, compelled her swift mind to see herself far away, yearning to him out of exile, an exile that had no local features; she would not imagine them to give a centre of warmth, her wilful grief preferred the blank. It resembled death in seeming some hollowness behind a shroud, which we shudder at.

The room was lighted by a stable-lantern on a kitchen-table. Their seat near the window was a rickety garden-bench rejected in the headlong sale of the furniture; and when she rose, unable to continue motionless while the hosts of illuminated cloud flew fast, she had to warn her brother to preserve his balance. He tacitly did so, aware of the necessity.

Page 3954

She walked up and down the long seven-windowed saloon, haunted by her footfall, trying to think, chafing at his quietness and acknowledging that he did well to be quiet. They had finished their packing of boxes and of wearing-apparel for the journey. There was nothing to think of, nothing further to talk of, nothing for her to do save to sit and look, and deaden her throbs by counting them. She soon returned to her seat beside her brother, with the marvel in her breast that the house she desired so much to love should be cold and repel her now it was a vacant shell. Her memories could not hang within it anywhere. She shut her eyes to be with the images of the dead, conceiving the method as her brother's happy secret, and imitated his posture, elbows propped on knees to support the chin. His quietness breathed of a deeper love than her own.

Meanwhile the high wind had sunk; the moon, after pushing her withered half to the zenith, was climbing the dusky edge, revealed fitfully; threads and wisps of thin vapour travelled along a falling gale, and branched from the dome of the sky in migratory broken lines, like wild birds shifting the order of flight, north and east, where the dawn sat in a web, but as yet had done no more than shoot up a glow along the central heavens, in amid the waves of deepened aloud: a mirror for night to see her dark self in her own hue. A shiver between the silent couple pricked their wits, and she said:

'Chillon, shall we run out and call the morning?'

It was an old game of theirs, encouraged by their hearty father, to be out in the early hour on a rise of ground near the house and 'call the morning.' Her brother was glad of the challenge, and upon one of the yawns following a sleepless night, replied with a return to boyishness: 'Yes, if you like. It's the last time we shall do her the service here. Let's go.'

They sprang up together and the bench fell behind them. Swinging the lantern he carried inconsiderately, the ring of it was left on his finger, and the end of candle rolled out of the crazy frame to the floor and was extinguished. Chillon had no match-box. He said to her:

'What do you think of the window?—we've done it before, Carin. Better than groping down stairs and passages blocked with lumber.'

'I'm ready,' she said, and caught at her skirts by instinct to prove her readiness on the spot.

A drop of a dozen feet or so from the French window to a flower—bed was not very difficult. Her father had taught her how to jump, besides the how of many other practical things. She leaped as lightly as her brother, never touching earth with her hands; and rising from the proper contraction of the legs in taking the descent, she quoted her father: 'Mean it when you're doing it.'

‘For no enemy’s shot is equal to a weak heart in the act,’

Chillon pursued the quotation, laying his hand on her shoulder for a sign of approval. She looked up at him.

Page 3955

They passed down the garden and a sloping meadow to a brook swollen by heavy rains; over the brook on a narrow plank, and up a steep and stony pathway, almost a watercourse, between rocks, to another meadow, level with the house, that led ascending through a firwood; and there the change to thicker darkness told them light was abroad, though whether of the clouded moon or of the first grey of the quiet revolution was uncertain. Metallic light of a subterranean realm, it might have been thought.

‘You remember everything of father,’ Carinthia said. ‘We both do,’ said Chillon.

She pressed her brother’s arm. ‘We will. We will never forget anything.’

Beyond the firwood light was visibly the dawn’s. Half-way down the ravines it resembled the light cast off a torrent water. It lay on the grass like a sheet of unreflecting steel, and was a face without a smile above. Their childhood ran along the tracks to the forest by the light, which was neither dim nor cold, but grave; presenting tree and shrub and dwarf growth and grass austerely, not deepening or confusing them. They wound their way by borders of crag, seeing in a dell below the mouth of the idle mine begirt with weedy and shrub-hung rock, a dripping semi-circle. Farther up they came on the flat juniper and crossed a wet ground-thicket of whortleberry: their feet were in the moist moss among sprigs of heath; and a great fir-tree stretched his length, a peeled multitude of his dead fellows leaned and stood upright in the midst of scattered fire-stained members, and through their skeleton limbs the sheer precipice of slate-rock of the bulk across the chasm, nursery of hawk and eagle; wore a thin blue tinge, the sign of warmer light abroad.

‘This way, my brother!’ cried Carinthia, shuddering at a path he was about to follow.

Dawn in the mountain-land is a meeting of many friends. The pinnacle, the forest-head, the latschen-tufted mound, rock-bastion and defiant cliff and giant of the triple peak, were in view, clearly lined for a common recognition, but all were figures of solid gloom, unfeatured and bloomless. Another minute and they had flung off their mail, and changed to various, indented, intricate, succinct in ridge, scar and channel; and they had all a look of watchfulness that made them one company. The smell of rock-waters and roots of herb and moss grew keen; air became a wine that raised the breast high to breathe it; an uplifting coolness pervaded the heights. What wonder that the mountain-bred girl should let fly her voice. The natural carol woke an echo. She did not repeat it.

‘And we will not forget our home, Chillon,’ she said, touching him gently to comfort some saddened feeling.

The plumes of cloud now slowly entered into the lofty arch of dawn and melted from brown to purpleblack. The upper sky swam with violet; and in a moment each stray cloud-feather was edged with rose, and then suffused. It seemed that the heights

fronted East to eye the interflooding of colours, and it was imaginable that all turned to the giant whose forehead first kindled to the sun: a greeting of god and king.

Page 3956

On the morning of a farewell we fluctuate sharply between the very distant and the close and homely: and even in memory the fluctuation occurs, the grander scene casting us back on the modestly nestling, and that, when it has refreshed us, conjuring imagination to embrace the splendour and wonder. But the wrench of an immediate division from what we love makes the things within us reach the dearest, we put out our hands for them, as violently-parted lovers do, though the soul in days to come would know a craving, and imagination flap a leaden wing, if we had not looked beyond them.

‘Shall we go down?’ said Carinthia, for she knew a little cascade near the house, showering on rock and fern, and longed to have it round her.

They descended, Chillon saying that they would soon have the mists rising, and must not delay to start on their journey.

The armies of the young sunrise in mountain-lands neighbouring the plains, vast shadows, were marching over woods and meads, black against the edge of golden; and great heights were cut with them, and bounding waters took the leap in a silvery radiance to gloom; the bright and dark-banded valleys were like night and morning taking hands down the sweep of their rivers. Immense was the range of vision scudding the peaks and over the illimitable Eastward plains flat to the very East and sources of the sun.

Carinthia said: ‘When I marry I shall come here to live and die.’

Her brother glanced at her. He was fond of her, and personally he liked her face; but such a confident anticipation of marriage on the part of a portionless girl set him thinking of the character of her charms and the attraction they would present to the world of men. They were expressive enough; at times he had thought them marvellous in their clear cut of the animating mind.—No one could fancy her handsome; and just now her hair was in some disorder, a night without sleep had an effect on her complexion.

‘It’s not usually the wife who decides where to live,’ said he.

Her ideas were anywhere but with the dream of a husband. ’Could we stay on another day?—’

’My dear girl! Another night on that crazy stool! ’Besides, Mariandl is bound to go to-day to her new place, and who’s to cook for us? Do you propose fasting as well as watching?’

‘Could I cook?’ she asked him humbly.

’No, you couldn’t; not for a starving regiment! Your accomplishments are of a different sort. No, it’s better to get over the pain at once, if we can’t escape it.

‘That I think too,’ said she, ’and we should have to buy provisions. Then, brother, instantly after breakfast. Only, let us walk it. I know the whole way, and it is not more than a two days’ walk for you and me. Consent. Driving would be like going gladly. I could never bear to remember that I was driven away.

And walking will save money; we are not rich, you tell me, brother.’

Page 3957

‘A few florins more or less!’ he rejoined, rather frowning. ’You have good Styrian boots, I see. But I want to be over at the Baths there soon; not later than to-morrow.’

’But, brother, if they know we are coming they will wait for us. And we can be there to-morrow night or the next morning!’

He considered it. He wanted exercise and loved this mountain-land; his inclinations melted into hers; though he had reasons for hesitating. ’Well, we’ll send on my portmanteau and your boxes in the cart; we’ll walk it. You’re a capital walker, you’re a gallant comrade; I wouldn’t wish for a better.’ He wondered, as he spoke, whether any true-hearted gentleman besides himself would ever think the same of this lonely girl.

Her eyes looked a delighted ‘No-really?’ for the sweetest on earth to her was to be prized by her brother.

She hastened forward. ‘We will go down and have our last meal at home,’ she said in the dialect of the country. ’We have five eggs. No meat for you, dear, but enough bread and butter, some honey left, and plenty of coffee. I should like to have left old Mariandl more, but we are unable to do very much for poor people now. Milk, I cannot say. She is just the kind soul to be up and out to fetch us milk for an early first breakfast; but she may have overslept herself.’

Chillon smiled. ‘You were right, Janet’, about not going to bed last night; we might have missed the morning.’

‘I hate sleep: I hate anything that robs me of my will,’ she replied.

‘You’d be glad of your doses of sleep if you had to work and study.’

’To fall down by the wayside tired out—yes, brother, a dead sleep is good. Then you are in the hands of God. Father used to say, four hours for a man, six for a woman.’

‘And four and twenty for a lord,’ added Chillon. ‘I remember.’

‘A lord of that Admiralty,’ she appealed to his closer recollection. ’But I mean, brother, dreaming is what I detest so.’

‘Don’t be detesting, my dear; reserve your strength,’ said he. ’I suppose dreams are of some use, now and then.’

‘I shall never think them useful.’

‘When we can’t get what we want, my good Carin.’

‘Then we should not waste ourselves in dreams.’

’They promise falsely sometimes. That’s no reason why we should reject the consolation when we can’t get what we want, my little sister.’

‘I would not be denied.’

‘There’s the impossible.’

‘Not for you, brother.’

Perhaps a half-minute after she had spoken, he said, ’pursuing a dialogue within himself aloud rather than revealing a secret: ’You don’t know her position.’

Carinthia’s heart stopped beating. Who was this person suddenly conjured up?

She fancied she might not have heard correctly; she feared to ask and yet she perceived a novel softness in him that would have answered. Pain of an unknown kind made her love of her brother conscious that if she asked she would suffer greater pain.

Page 3958

The house was in sight, a long white building with blinds down at some of the windows, and some wide open, some showing unclean glass: the three aspects and signs of a house's emptiness when they are seen together.

Carinthia remarked on their having met nobody. It had a serious meaning for them. Formerly they were proud of outstripping the busy population of the mine, coming down on them with wild wavings and shouts of sunrise. They felt the death again, a whole field laid low by one stroke, and wintriness in the season of glad life. A wind had blown and all had vanished.

The second green of the year shot lively sparkles off the meadows, from a fringe of coloured glovelets to a warm silver lake of dews. The firwood was already breathing rich and sweet in the sun. The half-moon fell rayless and paler than the fan of fleeces pushed up Westward, high overhead, themselves dispersing on the blue in downy feathers, like the mottled grey of an eagle's breast: the smaller of them bluish like traces of the beaked wood-pigeon.

She looked above, then below on the slim and straightgrown flocks of naked purple crocuses in bud and blow abounding over the meadow that rolled to the level of the house, and two of these she gathered.

CHAPTER V

A MOUNTAIN WALK IN MIST AND SUNSHINE

Chillon was right in his forecast of the mists. An over-moistened earth steaming to the sun obscured it before the two had finished breakfast, which was a finish to everything eatable in the ravaged dwelling, with the exception of a sly store for the midday meal, that old Mariandl had stuffed into Chillon's leather sack—the fruit of secret begging on their behalf about the neighbourhood. He found the sack heavy and bulky as he slung it over his shoulders; but she bade him make nothing of such a trifle till he had it inside him. 'And you that love tea so, my pretty one, so that you always laughed and sang after drinking a cup with your mother,' she said to Carinthia, 'you will find one pinch of it in your bag at the end of the left-foot slipper, to remember your home by when you are out in the world.'

She crossed the strap of the bag on her mistress's bosom, and was embraced by Carinthia and Chillon in turns, Carinthia telling her to dry her eyes, for that she would certainly come back and perhaps occupy the house one day or other. The old soul moaned of eyes that would not be awake to behold her; she begged a visit at her grave, though it was to be in a Catholic burial-place and the priests had used her dear master and mistress ill, not allowing them to lie in consecrated ground; affection made her a

champion of religious tolerance and a little afraid of retribution. Carinthia soothed her, kissed her, gave the promise, and the parting was over.

Page 3959

She and Chillon had on the previous day accomplished a pilgrimage to the resting-place of their father and mother among humble Protestants, iron-smelters, in a valley out of the way of their present line of march to the glacier of the great snow-mountain marking the junction of three Alpine provinces of Austria. Josef, the cart-driver with the boxes, who was to pass the valley, vowed of his own accord to hang a fresh day's wreath on the rails. He would not hear of money for the purchase, and they humoured him. The family had been beloved. There was an offer of a home for Carinthia in the castle of Count Lebern, a friend of her parents, much taken with her, and she would have accepted it had not Chillon overruled her choice, determined that, as she was English, she must come to England and live under the guardianship of her uncle, Lord Levellier, of whose character he did not speak.

The girl's cheeks were drawn thin and her lips shut as they departed; she was tearless. A phantom ring of mist accompanied her from her first footing outside the house. She did not look back. The house came swimming and plunging after her, like a spectral ship on big seas, and her father and mother lived and died in her breast; and now they were strong, consulting, chatting, laughing, caressing; now still and white, caught by a vapour that dived away with them either to right or left, but always with the same suddenness, leaving her to question herself whether she existed, for more of life seemed to be with their mystery than with her speculations. The phantom ring of mist enclosing for miles the invariable low-sweeping dark spruce-fir kept her thoughts on them as close as the shroud. She walked fast, but scarcely felt that she was moving. Near midday the haunted circle widened; rocks were loosely folded in it, and heads of trees, whose round intervolving roots grasped the yellow roadside soil; the mists shook like a curtain, and partly opened and displayed a tapestry-landscape, roughly worked, of woollen crag and castle and suggested glen, threaded waters, very prominent foreground, Autumn flowers on banks; a predominant atmospheric greyness. The sun threw a shaft, liquid instead of burning, as we see his beams beneath a wave; and then the mists narrowed again, boiled up the valleys and streams above the mountain, curled and flew, and were Python coils pierced by brighter arrows of the sun. A spot of blue signalled his victory above.

To look at it was to fancy they had been walking under water and had now risen to the surface. Carinthia's mind stepped out of the chamber of death. The different air and scene breathed into her a timid warmth toward the future, and between her naming of the lesser mountains on their side of the pass, she asked questions relating to England, and especially the ladies she was to see at the Baths beyond the glacier-pass. She had heard of a party of his friends awaiting him there, without much encouragement from him to ask particulars of them, and she had hitherto abstained, as she was rather shy of meeting her countrywomen. The ladies, Chillon said, were cousins; one was a young widow, the Countess of Fleetwood, and the other was Miss Fakenham, a younger lady.

Page 3960

Carinthia murmured in German: ‘Poor soul!’ Which one was she pitying? The widow, she said, in the tone implying, naturally.

Her brother assured her the widow was used to it, for this was her second widowhood.

‘She marries again!’ exclaimed the girl.

‘You don’t like that idea?’ said he.

Carinthia betrayed a delicate shudder.

Her brother laughed to himself at her expressive present tense. ’And marries again!’ he said. ‘There will certainly be a third.’

‘Husband?’ said she, as at the incredible.

‘Husband, let’s hope,’ he answered.

She dropped from her contemplation of the lady, and her look at her brother signified: It will not be you!

Chillon was engaged in spying for a place where he could spread out the contents of his bag. Sharp hunger beset them both at the mention of eating. A bank of sloping green shaded by a chestnut proposed the seat, and here he relieved the bag of a bottle of wine, slices of, meat, bread, hard eggs, and lettuce, a chipped cup to fling away after drinking the wine, and a supply of small butler-cakes known to be favourites with Carinthia. She reversed the order of the feast by commencing upon one of the cakes, to do honour to Mariandl’s thoughtfulness. As at their breakfast, they shared the last morsel.

’But we would have made it enough for our dear old dog Pluto as well, if he had lived,’ said Carinthia, sighing with her thankfulness and compassionate regrets, a mixture often inspiring a tender babbling melancholy. ‘Dogs’ eyes have such a sick look of love. He might have lived longer, though he was very old, only he could not survive the loss of father. I know the finding of the body broke his heart. He sprang forward, he stopped and threw up his head. It was human language to hear him, Chillon. He lay in the yard, trying to lift his eyes when I came to him, they were so heavy; and he had not strength to move his poor old tail more than once. He died with his head on my lap. He seemed to beg me, and I took him, and he breathed twice, and that was his end. Pluto! old dog! Well, for you or for me, brother, we could not have a better wish. As for me, death! . . . When we know we are to die! Only let my darling live! that is my prayer, and that we two may not be separated till I am taken to their grave. Father bought ground for four—his wife and himself and his two children. It does not oblige us to be buried there, but could we have any other desire?’

She stretched her hand to her brother. He kissed it spiritedly.

’Look ahead, my dear girl. Help me to finish this wine. There ’s nothing like good hard walking to give common wine of the country a flavour—and out of broken crockery.’

‘I think it so good,’ Carinthia replied, after drinking from the cup. ’In England they, do not grow wine. Are the people there kind?’

‘They’re civilized people, of course.’

Page 3961

‘Kind—warm to you, Chillon?’

’Some of them, when you know them. “Warm,” is hardly the word. Winter’s warm on skates. You must do a great deal for yourself. They don’t boil over. By the way, don’t expect much of your uncle.’

‘Will he not love me?’

’He gives you a lodging in his house, and food enough, we’ll hope. You won’t see company or much of him.’

’I cannot exist without being loved. I do not care for company. He must love me a little.’

’He is one of the warm-hearted race—he’s mother’s brother; but where his heart is, I ’ve not discovered.

Bear with him just for the present, my dear, till I am able to support you.’

‘I will,’ she said.

The dreary vision of a home with an unloving uncle was not brightened by the alternative of her brother’s having to support her. She spoke of money. ‘Have we none, Chillon?’

‘We have no debts,’ he answered. ’We have a claim on the Government here for indemnification for property taken to build a fortress upon one of the passes into Italy. Father bought the land, thinking there would be a yield of ore thereabout; and they have seized it, rightly enough, but they dispute our claim for the valuation we put on it. A small sum they would consent to pay. It would be a very small sum, and I ’m father’s son, I will have justice.’

‘Yes!’ Carthinia joined with him to show the same stout nature.

‘We have nothing else except a bit to toss up for luck.’

‘And how can I help being a burden on my brother?’ she inquired, in distress.

‘Marry, and be a blessing to a husband,’ he said lightly.

They performed a sacrifice of the empty bottle and cracked cup on the site of their meal, as if it had been a ceremony demanded from travellers, and leaving them in fragments, proceeded on their journey refreshed.

Walking was now high enjoyment, notwithstanding the force of the sun, for they were a hardy couple, requiring no more than sufficient nourishment to combat the elements

with an exulting blood. Besides they loved mountain air and scenery, and each step to the ridge of the pass they climbed was an advance in splendour. Peaks of ashen hue and pale dry red and pale sulphur pushed up, straight, forked, twisted, naked, striking their minds with an indeterminate ghostliness of Indian, so strange they were in shape and colouring. These sharp points were the first to greet them between the blue and green. A depression of the pass to the left gave sight of the points of black fir forest below, round the girths of the barren shafts. Mountain blocks appeared pushing up in front, and a mountain wall and woods on it, and mountains in the distance, and cliffs riven with falls of water that were silver skeins, down lower to meadows, villages and spires, and lower finally to the whole valley of the foaming river, field and river seeming in imagination rolled out from the hand of the heading mountain.

Page 3962

‘But see this in winter, as I did with father, Chillon!’ said Carinthia.

She said it upon love’s instinct to halo the scene with something beyond present vision, and to sanctify it for her brother, so that this walk of theirs together should never be forgotten.

A smooth fold of cloud, moveless along one of the upper pastures, and still dense enough to be luminous in sunlight, was the last of the mist.

They watched it lying in the form of a fish, leviathan diminished, as they descended their path; and the head was lost, the tail spread peacockwise, and evaporated slowly in that likeness; and soft to a breath of air as gossamer down, the body became a ball, a cock, a little lizard, nothingness.

The bluest bright day of the year was shining. Chillon led the descent. With his trim and handsome figure before her, Carinthia remembered the current saying, that he should have been the girl and she the boy. That was because he resembled their mother in face. But the build of his limbs and shoulders was not feminine.

To her admiring eyes, he had a look superior to simple strength and grace; the look of a great sky-bird about to mount, a fountain-like energy of stature, delightful to her contemplation. And he had the mouth women put faith in for decision and fixedness. She did, most fully; and reflecting how entirely she did so, the thought assailed her: some one must be loving him!

She allowed it to surprise her, not choosing to revert to an uneasy sensation of the morning.

That some one, her process of reasoning informed her, was necessarily an English young lady. She reserved her questions till they should cease this hopping and heeling down the zigzag of the slippery path-track. When children they had been collectors of beetles and butterflies, and the flying by of a ‘royal-mantle,’ the purple butterfly grandly fringed, could still remind Carinthia of the event it was of old to spy and chase one. Chillon himself was not above the sentiment of their “very early days”; he stopped to ask if she had been that lustrous blue-wing, a rarer species, prized by youngsters, shoot through the chestnut trees: and they both paused for a moment, gazing into the fairyland of infancy, she seeing with her brother’s eyes, this prince of the realm having escaped her. He owned he might have been mistaken, as the brilliant fellow flew swift and high between leaves, like an ordinary fritillary. Not the less did they get their glimpse of the wonders in the sunny eternity of a child’s afternoon.

‘An Auerhahn, Chillon!’ she said, picturing the maturer day when she had scaled perilous heights with him at night to stalk the blackcock in the prime of the morning.

She wished they could have had another such adventure to stamp the old home on his heart freshly, to the exclusion of beautiful English faces.

On the level of the valley, where they met the torrent-river, walking side by side with him, she ventured an inquiry: 'English girls are fair girls, are they not?'

Page 3963

‘There are some dark also,’ he replied.

‘But the best-looking are fair?’

‘Perhaps they are, with us.’

‘Mother was fair.’

‘She was.’

’I have only seen a few of them, once at Vies and at Venice, and those Baths we are going to; and at Meran, I think.’

‘You considered them charming?’

‘Not all.’

It was touching that she should be such a stranger to her countrywomen! He drew a portrait-case from his breast-pocket, pressing the spring, and handed it to her, saying: ‘There is one.’ He spoke indifferently, but as soon as she had seen the face inside it, with a look at him and a deep breath; she understood that he was an altered brother, and that they were three instead of two.

She handed it back to him, saying hushedly and only ‘Yes.’

He did not ask an opinion upon the beauty she had seen. His pace increased, and she hastened her steps beside him. She had not much to learn when some minutes later she said; ‘Shall I see her, Chillon?’

‘She is one of the ladies we are to meet.’

‘What a pity!’ Carinthia stepped faster, enlightened as to his wish to get to the Baths without delay; and her heart softened in reflecting how readily he had yielded to her silly preference for going on foot.

Her cry of regret was equivocal; it produced no impression on him. They reached a village where her leader deemed it adviseable to drive for the remainder of the distance up the valley to the barrier snow-mountain. She assented instantly, she had no longer any active wishes of her own, save to make amends to her brother, who was and would ever be her brother: she could not be robbed of their relationship.

Something undefined in her feeling of possession she had been robbed of, she knew it by her spiritlessness; and she would fain have attributed it to the idle motion of the car, now and them stupidly jolting her on, after the valiant exercise of her limbs. They were in a land of waterfalls and busy mills, a narrowing vale where the runs of grass grew

short and wild, and the glacier-river roared for the leap, more foam than water, and the savagery, naturally exciting to her, breathed of its lair among the rocks and ice-fields.

Her brother said: ‘There he is.’ She saw the whitecrowned king of the region, of whose near presence to her old home she had been accustomed to think proudly, end she looked at him without springing to him, and continued imaging her English home and her loveless uncle, merely admiring the scene, as if the fire of her soul had been extinguished.—’Marry, and be a blessing to a husband.’ Chillon’s words whispered of the means of escape from the den of her uncle.

Page 3964

But who would marry me! she thought. An unreproved sensation of melting pervaded her; she knew her capacity for gratitude, and conjuring it up in her 'heart, there came with it the noble knightly gentleman who would really stoop to take a plain girl by the hand, release her, and say: 'Be mine!' His vizor was down, of course. She had no power of imagining the lineaments of that prodigy. Or was he a dream? He came and went. Her mother, not unkindly, sadly, had counted her poor girl's chances of winning attention and a husband. Her father had doated on her face; but, as she argued, her father had been attracted by her mother, a beautiful woman, and this was a circumstance that reflected the greater hopelessness on her prospects. She bore a likeness to her father, little to her mother, though he fancied the reverse and gave her the mother's lips and hair. Thinking of herself, however, was destructive to the form of her mirror of knightliness: he wavered, he fled for good, as the rosy vapour born of our sensibility must do when we relapse to coldness, and the more completely when we try to command it. No, she thought, a plain girl should think of work, to earn her independence.

'Women are not permitted to follow armies, Chillon?' she said.

He laughed out. 'What 's in your head?'

The laugh abashed her; she murmured of women being good nurses for wounded soldiers, if they were good walkers to march with the army; and, as evidently it sounded witless to him, she added, to seem reasonable: 'You have not told me the Christian names of those ladies.'

He made queer eyes over the puzzle to connect the foregoing and the succeeding in her remarks, but answered straightforwardly: 'Livia is one, and Henrietta!

Her ear seized on the stress of his voice. 'Henrietta!' She chose that name for the name of the person disturbing her; it fused best, she thought, with the new element she had been compelled to take into her system, to absorb it if she could.

'You're not scheming to have them serve as army hospital nurses, my dear?'

'No, Chillon.'

'You can't explain it, I suppose?'

'A sister could go too, when you go to war, Chillon.'

A sister could go, if it were permitted by the authorities, and be near her brother to nurse him in case of wounds; others would be unable to claim the privilege. That was her meaning, involved with the hazy project of earning an independence; but she could not explain it, and Chillon set her down for one of the inexplicable sex, which the simple adventurous girl had not previously seemed to be.

She was inwardly warned of having talked foolishly, and she held her tongue. Her humble and modest jealousy, scarce deserving the title, passed with a sigh or two. It was her first taste of life in the world.

Page 3965

A fit of heavy-mindedness ensued, that heightened the contrast her recent mood had bequeathed, between herself, ignorant as she was, and those ladies. Their names, Livia and Henrietta, soared above her and sang the music of the splendid spheres. Henrietta was closer to earth, for her features had been revealed; she was therefore the dearer, and the richer for him who loved her, being one of us, though an over-earthly one; and Carinthia gave her to Chillon, reserving for herself a handmaiden's place within the circle of their happiness.

This done, she sat straight in the car. It was toiling up the steep ascent of a glen to the mountain village, the last of her native province. Her proposal to walk was accepted, and the speeding of her blood, now that she had mastered a new element in it, soon restored her to her sisterly affinity with natural glories. The sunset was on yonder side of the snows. Here there was a feast of variously-tinted sunset shadows on snow, meadows, rock, river, serrated cliff. The peaked cap of the rushing rock-dotted sweeps of upward snow caught a scarlet illumination: one flank of the white in heaven was violetted wonderfully.

At nightfall, under a clear black sky, alive with wakeful fires round head and breast of the great Alp, Chillon and Carinthia strolled out of the village, and he told her some of his hopes. They referred to inventions of destructive weapons, which were primarily to place his country out of all danger from a world in arms; and also, it might be mentioned, to bring him fortune. 'For I must have money!' he said, sighing it out like a deliberate oath. He and his uncle were associated in the inventions. They had an improved rocket that would force military chiefs to change their tactics: they had a new powder, a rifle, a model musket—the latter based on his own plans; and a scheme for fortress artillery likely to turn the preponderance in favour of the defensive once again. 'And that will be really doing good,' said Chillon, 'for where it's with the offensive, there's everlasting bullying and plundering.'

Carinthia warmly agreed with him, but begged him be sure his uncle divided the profits equally. She discerned what his need of money signified.

Tenderness urged her to say: 'Henrietta! Chillon.'

'Well?' he answered quickly.

'Will she wait?'

'Can she, you should ask.'

'Is she brave?'

'Who can tell, till she has been tried?'

'Is she quite free?'

‘She has not yet been captured.’

‘Brother, is there no one else . . . ?’

‘There’s a nobleman anxious to bestow his titles on her.’

‘He is rich?’

‘The first or second wealthiest in Great Britain, they say.’

‘Is he young?’

‘About the same age as mine.’

‘Is he a handsome young man?’

‘Handsomer than your brother, my girl.’

Page 3966

‘No, no, no!’ said she. ’And what if he is, and your Henrietta does not choose him? Now let me think what I long to think. I have her close to me.’

She rocked a roseate image on her heart and went to bed with it by starlight.

By starlight they sprang to their feet and departed the next morning, in the steps of a guide carrying, Chillon said, ’a better lantern than we left behind us at the smithy.’

‘Father!’ exclaimed Carinthia on her swift inward breath, for this one of the names he had used to give to her old home revived him to her thoughts and senses fervently.

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURAL PHILOSOPHER

Three parts down a swift decline of shattered slate, where travelling stones loosened from rows of scree hurl away at a bound after one roll over, there sat a youth dusty and torn, nursing a bruised leg, not in the easiest of postures, on a sharp tooth of rock, that might at any moment have broken from the slanting slab at the end of which it formed a stump, and added him a second time to the general crumble of the mountain. He had done a portion of the descent in excellent imitation of the detached fragments, and had parted company with his alpenstock and plaid; preserving his hat and his knapsack. He was alone, disabled, and cheerful; in doubt of the arrival of succour before he could trust his left leg to do him further service unaided; but it was morning still, the sun was hot, the air was cool; just the tempering opposition to render existence pleasant as a piece of vegetation, especially when there has been a question of your ceasing to exist; and the view was of a sustaining sublimity of desolateness: crag and snow overhead; a gloomy vale below; no life either of bird or herd; a voiceless region where there had once been roars at the bowling of a hill from a mountain to the deep, and the third flank of the mountain spoke of it in the silence.

He would have enjoyed the scene unremittingly, like the philosopher he pretended to be, in a disdain of civilization and the ambitions of men, had not a contest with earth been forced on him from time to time to keep the heel of his right foot, dug in shallow shale, fixed and supporting. As long as it held he was happy and maintained the attitude of a guitar-player, thrumming the calf of the useless leg to accompany tuneful thoughts, but the inevitable lapse and slide of the foot recurred, and the philosopher was exhibited as an infant learning to crawl. The seat, moreover, not having been fashioned for him or for any soft purpose, resisted his pressure and became a thing of violence, that required to be humiliatingly coaxed. His last resource to propitiate it was counselled by nature turned mathematician: tenacious extension solved the problem; he lay back at his length, and with his hat over his eyes consented to see nothing for the

sake of comfort. Thus he was perfectly rational, though when others beheld him he appeared the insanest of mortals.

Page 3967

A girl's voice gave out the mountain carol ringingly above. His heart and all his fancies were in motion at the sound. He leaned on an elbow to listen; the slide threatened him, and he resumed his full stretch, determined to take her for a dream. He was of the class of youths who, in apprehension that their bright season may not be permanent, choose to fortify it by a systematic contempt of material realities unless they come in the fairest of shapes, and as he was quite sincere in this feeling and election of the right way to live, disappointment and sullenness overcame him on hearing men's shouts and steps; despite his helpless condition he refused to stir, for they had jarred on his dream. Perhaps his temper, unknown to himself, had been a little injured by his mishap, and he would not have been sorry to charge them with want of common humanity in passing him; or he did not think his plight so bad, else he would have bawled after them had they gone by: far the youths of his description are fools only upon system,—however earnestly they indulge the present self-punishing sentiment. The party did not pass; they stopped short, they consulted, and a feminine tongue more urgent than the others, and very musical, sweet to hear anywhere, put him in tune. She said, 'Brother! brother!' in German. Our philosopher flung off his hat.

'You see!' said the lady's brother.

'Ask him, Anton,'she said to their guide.

'And quick!' her brother added.

The guide scrambled along to him, and at a closer glance shouted: 'The Englishman!' wheeling his finger to indicate what had happened to the Tomnoddy islander.

His master called to know if there were broken bones, as if he could stop for nothing else.

The cripple was raised. The gentleman and lady made their way to him, and he tried his hardest to keep from tottering on the slope in her presence. No injury had been done to the leg; there was only a stiffness, and an idiotic doubling of the knee, as though at each step his leg pronounced a dogged negative to the act of walking. He said something equivalent to 'this donkey leg,' to divert her charitable eyes from a countenance dancing with ugly twitches. She was the Samaritan. A sufferer discerns his friend, though it be not the one who physically assists him: he is inclined by nature to put material aid at a lower mark than gentleness, and her brief words of encouragement, the tone of their delivery yet more, were medical to his blood, better help than her brother's iron arm, he really believed. Her brother and the guide held him on each side, and she led to pick out the safer footing for him; she looked round and pointed to some projection that would form a step; she drew attention to views here and there, to win excuses for his resting; she did not omit to soften her brother's visible impatience as well, and this was the art which affected her keenly sensible debtor most.

Page 3968

‘I suppose I ought to have taken a guide,’ he said.

‘There’s not a doubt of that,’ said Chillon Kirby.

Carinthia halted, leaning on her staff: ’But I had the same wish. They told us at the inn of an Englishman who left last night to sleep on the mountain, and would go alone; and did I not say, brother, that must be true love of the mountains?’

‘These freaks get us a bad name on the Continent,’ her brother replied. He had no sympathy with nonsense, and naturally not with a youth who smelt of being a dreamy romancer and had caused the name of Englishman to be shouted in his ear in derision. And the fellow might delay his arrival at the Baths and sight of the lady of his love for hours!

They managed to get him hobbling and slipping to the first green tuft of the base, where long black tongues of slate-rubble pouring into the grass, like shore-waves that have spent their burden, seem about to draw back to bring the mountain down. Thence to the level pasture was but a few skips performed sliding.

‘Well, now,’ said Chillon, ‘you can stand?’

‘Pretty well, I think.’ He tried his foot on the ground, and then stretched his length, saying that it only wanted rest. Anton pressed a hand at his ankle and made him wince, but the bones were sound, leg and hip not worse than badly bruised. He was advised by Anton to plant his foot in the first running water he came to, and he was considerate enough to say to Chillon:

’Now you can leave me; and let me thank you. Half an hour will set me right. My name is Woodseer, if ever we meet again.’

Chillon nodded a hurried good-bye, without a thought of giving his name in return. But Carinthia had thrown herself on the grass. Her brother asked her in dismay if she was tired. She murmured to him: ’I should like to hear more English.’

‘My dear girl, you’ll have enough of it in two or three weeks.’

‘Should we leave a good deed half done, Chillon?’

‘He shall have our guide.’

‘He may not be rich.’

‘I’ll pay Anton to stick to him.’

‘Brother, he has an objection to guides.’

Chillon cast hungry eyes on his watch: ‘Five minutes, then.’ He addressed Mr. Woodseer, who was reposing, indifferent to time, hard-by: ’Your objection to guides might have taught you a sharp lesson. It ’s like declining to have a master in studying a science—trusting to instinct for your knowledge of a bargain. One might as well refuse an oar to row in a boat.’

’I ‘d rather risk it,’ the young man replied. ’These guides kick the soul out of scenery. I came for that and not for them.’

‘You might easily have been a disagreeable part of the scene.’

‘Why not here as well as elsewhere?’

‘You don’t care for your life?’

‘I try not to care for it a fraction more than Destiny does.’

‘Fatalism. I suppose you care for something?’

Page 3969

’Besides I’ve a slack purse, and shun guides and inns when I can. I care for open air, colour, flowers, weeds, birds, insects, mountains. There’s a world behind the mask. I call this life; and the town’s a boiling pot, intolerably stuffy. My one ambition is to be out of it. I thank heaven I have not another on earth. Yes, I care for my note-book, because it’s of no use to a human being except me. I slept beside a spring last night, and I never shall like a bedroom so well. I think I have discovered the great secret: I may be wrong, of course.’ And if so, he had his philosophy, the admission was meant to say.

Carinthia expected the revelation of a notable secret, but none came; or if it did it eluded her grasp:—he was praising contemplation, he was praising tobacco. He talked of the charm of poverty upon a settled income of a very small sum of money, the fruit of a compact he would execute with the town to agree to his perpetual exclusion from it, and to retain his identity, and not be the composite which every townsman was. He talked of Buddha. He said: ’Here the brook’s the brook, the mountain’s the mountain: they are as they always were.’

‘You’d have men be the same,’ Chillon remarked as to a nursling prattler, and he rejoined: ’They’ve lost more than they’ve gained; though, he admitted, ‘there has been some gain, in a certain way.’

Fortunately for them, young men have not the habit of reflecting upon the indigestion of ideas they receive from members of their community, sometimes upon exchange. They compare a view of life with their own view, to condemn it summarily; and he was a curious object to Chillon as the perfect opposite of himself.

‘I would advise you,’ Chillon said, ’to get a pair of Styrian boots, if you intend to stay in the Alps. Those boots of yours are London make.’

’They ‘re my father’s make,’ said Mr. Woodseer.

Chillon drew out his watch. ‘Come, Carinthia, we must be off.’ He proposed his guide, and, as Anton was rejected, he pointed the route over the head of the valley, stated the distance to an inn that way, saluted and strode.

Mr. Woodseer, partly rising, presumed, in raising his hat and thanking Carinthia, to touch her fingers. She smiled on him, frankly extending her open hand, and pointing the route again, counselling him to rest at the inn, even saying: ‘You have not yet your strength to come on with us?’

He thought he would stay some time longer: he had a disposition to smoke.

She tripped away to her brother and was watched through the whiffs of a pipe far up the valley, guiltless of any consciousness of producing an impression. But her mind was with the stranger sufficiently to cause her to say to Chillon, at the close of a dispute

between him and Anton on the interesting subject of the growth of the horns of chamois: 'Have we been quite kind to that gentleman?'

Chillon looked over his shoulder. 'He's there still; he's fond of solitude. And, Carin, my dear, don't give your hand when you are meeting or parting with people it's not done.'

Page 3970

His uninstructed sister said: ‘Did you not like him?’

She was answered with an ‘Oh,’ the tone of which balanced lightly on the neutral line. ’Some of the ideas he has are Lord Fleetwood’s, I hear, and one can understand them in a man of enormous wealth, who doesn’t know what to do with himself and is dead-sick of flattery; though it seems odd for an English nobleman to be raving about Nature. Perhaps it’s because none else of them does.’

‘Lord Fleetwood loves our mountains, Chillon?’

’But a fellow who probably has to make his way in the world!—and he despises ambition!’ . . . Chillon dropped him. He was antipathetic to eccentrics, and his soldierly and social training opposed the profession of heterodox ideas: to have listened seriously to them coming from the mouth of an unambitious bootmaker’s son involved him in the absurdity. He considered that there was no harm in the lad, rather a commendable sort of courage and some notion of manners; allowing for his ignorance of the convenable in putting out his hand to take a young lady’s, with the plea of thanking her. He hoped she would be more on her guard.

Carinthia was sure she had the name of the nobleman wishing to bestow his title upon the beautiful Henrietta. Lord Fleetwood! That slender thread given her of the character of her brother’s rival who loved the mountains was woven in her mind with her passing experience of the youth they had left behind them, until the two became one, a highly transfigured one, and the mountain scenery made him very threatening to her brother. A silky haired youth, brown-eyed, unconquerable in adversity, immensely rich, fond of solitude, curled, decorated, bejewelled by all the elves and gnomes of inmost solitude, must have marvellous attractions, she feared. She thought of him so much, that her humble spirit conceived the stricken soul of the woman as of necessity the pursuer; as shamelessly, though timidly, as she herself pursued in imagination the enchanted secret of the mountain-land. She hoped her brother would not supplicate, for it struck her that the lover who besieged the lady would forfeit her roaming and hunting fancy.

‘I wonder what that gentleman is doing now,’ she said to Chillon.

He grimaced slightly, for her sake; he would have liked to inform her, for the sake of educating her in the customs of the world she was going to enter, that the word ‘gentleman’ conveys in English a special signification.

Her expression of wonder whether they were to meet him again gave Chillon the opportunity of saying:

’It ‘s the unlikeliest thing possible—at all events in England.’

‘But I think we shall,’ said she.

‘My dear, you meet people of your own class; you don’t meet others.’

‘But we may meet anybody, Chillon!’

’In the street. I suppose you would not stop to speak to him in the street.’

‘It would be strange to see him in the street!’ Carinthia said.

Page 3971

‘Strange or not!’

. . . . Chillon thought he had said sufficient. She was under his protectorship, otherwise he would not have alluded to the observance of class distinctions. He felt them personally in this case because of their seeming to stretch grotesquely by the pretentious heterodoxy of the young fellow, whom, nevertheless, thinking him over now that he was mentioned, he approved for his manliness in bluntly telling his origin and status.

A chalet supplied them with fresh milk, and the inn of a village on a perch with the midday meal. Their appetites were princely and swept over the little inn like a conflagration. Only after clearing it did they remember the rearward pedestrian, whose probable wants Chillon was urged by Carthinia to speak of to their host. They pushed on, clambering up, scurrying down, tramping gaily, till by degrees the chambers of Carinthia’s imagination closed their doors and would no longer intercommunicate. Her head refused to interest her, and left all activity to her legs and her eyes, and the latter became unobservant, except of foot-tracks, animal-like. She felt that she was a fine machine, and nothing else: and she was rapidly approaching those ladies!

‘You will tell them how I walked with you,’ she said.

‘Your friends over yonder?’ said he.

‘So that they may not think me so ignorant, brother.’ She stumbled on the helpless word in a hasty effort to cloak her vanity.

He laughed. Her desire to meet the critical English ladies with a towering reputation in one department of human enterprise was comprehensible, considering the natural apprehensiveness of the half-wild girl before such a meeting. As it often happens with the silly phrases of simple people, the wrong word, foolish although it was, went to the heart of the hearer and threw a more charitable light than ridicule on her. So that they may know I can do something they cannot do, was the interpretation. It showed her deep knowledge of her poorness in laying bare the fact.

Anxious to cheer her, he said: ’Come, come, you can dance. You dance well, mother has told me, and she was a judge. You ride, you swim, you have a voice for country songs, at all events. And you’re a bit of a botanist too. You’re good at English and German; you had a French governess for a couple of years. By the way, you understand the use of a walking-stick in self-defence: you could handle a sword on occasion.’

‘Father trained me,’ said Carthinia. ‘I can fire a pistol, aiming.’

’With a good aim, too. Father told me you could. How fond he was of his girl! Well, bear in mind that father was proud of you, and hold up your head wherever you are.’

‘I will,’ she said.

He assured her he had a mind to have a bugle blown at the entrance of the Baths for a challenge to the bathers to match her in warlike accomplishments.

She bit her lips: she could not bear much rallying on the subject just then:

Page 3972

‘Which is the hard one to please?’ she asked.

‘The one you will find the kinder of the two.’

‘Henrietta?’

He nodded.

‘Has she a father?’

‘A gallant old admiral: Admiral Baldwin Fakenham.’

‘I am glad of that!’ Carinthia sighed out heartily. ’And he is with her? And likes you, Chillon?’

‘On the whole, I think he does.’

‘A brave officer!’ Such a father would be sure to like him.

So the domestic prospect was hopeful.

At sunset they stood on the hills overlooking the basin of the Baths, all enfolded in swathes of pink and crimson up to the shining grey of a high heaven that had the fresh brightness of the morning.

‘We are not tired in the slightest,’ said Carinthia, trifling with the vision of a cushioned rest below. ’I could go on through the night quite comfortably.’

‘Wait till you wake up in your little bed to-morrow,’ Chillon replied stoutly, to drive a chill from his lover’s heart, that had seized it at the bare suggestion of their going on.

CHAPTER VII

THE LADY’S LETTER

Is not the lover a prophet? He that fervently desires may well be one; his hurried nature is alive with warmth to break the possible blow: and if his fears were not needed they were shadows; and if fulfilled, was he not convinced of his misfortune by a dark anticipation that rarely erred? Descending the hills, he remembered several omens: the sun had sunk when he looked down on the villas and clustered houses, not an edge of the orb had been seen; the admiral’s quarters in the broad-faced hotel had worn an appearance resembling the empty house of yesterday; the encounter with the fellow on the rocks had a bad whisper of impish tripping. And what moved Carinthia to speak of going on?

A letter was handed to Chillon in the hall of the admiral's hotel, where his baggage had already been delivered. The manager was deploring the circumstance that his rooms were full to the roof, when Chillon said:

'Well, we must wash and eat'; and Carinthia, from watching her brother's forehead during his perusal of the letter, declared her readiness for anything. He gave her the letter to read by herself while preparing to sit at table, unwilling to ask her for a further tax on her energies—but it was she who had spoken of going on! He thought of it as of a debt she had contracted and might be supposed to think payable to their misfortune.

She read off the first two sentences.

'We can have a carriage here, Chillon; order a carriage; I shall get as much sleep in a carriage as in a bed: I shall enjoy driving at night,' she said immediately, and strongly urged it and forced him to yield, the manager observing that a carriage could be had.

In the privacy of her room, admiring the clear flowing hand, she read the words, delicious in their strangeness to her, notwithstanding the heavy news, as though they were sung out of a night-sky:

Page 3973

’Most picturesque of Castles!

May none these marks efface,
For they appeal from Tyranny . . .’

’We start at noon to-day. Sailing orders have been issued, and I could only have resisted them in my own person by casting myself overboard. I go like the boat behind the vessel. You were expected yesterday, at latest this morning. I have seen boxes in the hall, with a name on them not foreign to me. Why does the master tarry? Sir, of your valliance you should have held to your good vow,—quoth the damozel, for now you see me sore perplexed and that you did not your devoir is my affliction. Where lingers chivalry, she should have proceeded, if not with my knight? I feast on your regrets. I would not have you less than miserable: and I fear the reason is, that I am not so very, very sure you will be so at all or very hugely, as I would command it of you for just time enough to see that change over your eyebrows I know so well.

’If you had seen a certain Henrietta yesterday you would have the picture of how you ought to look. The admiral was heard welcoming a new arrival—you can hear him. She ran down the stairs quicker than any cascade of this district, she would have made a bet with Livia that it could be no one else—her hand was out, before she was aware of the difference it was locked in Lord F.’s!

’Let the guilty absent suffer for causing such a betrayal of disappointment. I must be avenged! But if indeed you are unhappy and would like to chide the innocent, I am full of compassion for the poor gentleman inheriting my legitimate feelings of wrath, and beg merely that he will not pour them out on me with pen and paper, but from his lips and eyes.

’Time pressing, I chatter no more. The destination is Livia’s beloved Baden. We rest a night in the city of Mozart, a night at Munich, a night at Stuttgart. Baden will detain my cousin full a week. She has Captain Abrane and Sir Meeson Corby in attendance—her long shadow and her short: both devoted to Lord F., to win her smile, and how he drives them! The captain has been paraded on the promenade, to the stupefaction of the foreigner. Princes, counts, generals, diplomats passed under him in awe. I am told that he is called St. Christopher.

’Why do we go thus hastily?—my friend, this letter has to be concealed. I know some one who sees in the dark.

’Think no harm of Livia. She is bent upon my worldly advantage, and that is plain even to the person rejecting it. How much more so must it be to papa, though he likes you, and when you are near him would perhaps, in a fit of unworldliness, be almost as reckless as the creature he calls madcap and would rather call countess. No! sooner with a Will-o’-the-wisp, my friend. Who could ever know where the man was when he

himself never knows where he is. He is the wind that bloweth as it listeth—because it is without an aim or always with a new one. And am I the one

Page 3974

to direct him? I need direction. My lord and sovereign must fix my mind. I am volatile, earthly, not to be trusted if I do not worship. He himself said to me that—he reads our characters. “Nothing but a proved hero will satisfy Henrietta,” his words! And the hero must be shining like a beacon-fire kept in a blaze. Quite true; I own it. Is Chillon Kirby satisfied? He ought to be.

’But oh!—to be yoked is an insufferable thought, unless we name all the conditions. But to be yoked to a creature of impulses! Really I could only describe his erratic nature by commending you to the study of a dragon-fly. It would map you an idea of what he has been in the twenty-four hours since we had him here. They tell me a vain sort of person is the cause. Can she be the cause of his resolving to have a residence here, to buy up half the valley—erecting a royal palace—and marking out the site—raving about it in the wildest language, poetical if it had been a little reasonable—and then, after a night, suddenly, unaccountably, hating the place, and being under the necessity of flying from it in hot haste, tearing us all away, as if we were attached to a kite that will neither mount nor fall, but rushes about headlong. Has he heard, or suspected? or seen certain boxes bearing a name? Livia has no suspicion, though she thinks me wonderfully contented in so dull a place, where it has rained nine days in a fortnight. I ask myself whether my manner of greeting him betrayed my expectation of another. He has brains. It is the greatest of errors to suppose him at all like the common run of rich young noblemen. He seems to thirst for brilliant wits and original sayings. His ambition is to lead all England in everything! I readily acknowledge that he has generous ideas too; but try to hold him, deny him his liberty, and it would be seen how desperate and relentless he would be to get loose. Of this I am convinced: he would be either the most abject of lovers, or a woman (if it turned out not to be love) would find him the most unscrupulous of yoke-fellows. Yoke-fellow! She would not have her reason in consenting. A lamb and a furious bull! Papa and I have had a serious talk. He shuts his ears to my comparisons, but admits, that as I am the principal person concerned, *etc*. Rich and a nobleman is too tempting for an anxious father; and Livia’s influence is paramount. She has not said a syllable in depreciation of you. That is to her credit. She also admits that I must yield freely if at all, and she grants me the use of similes; but her tactics are to contest them one by one, and the admirable pretender is not as shifty as the mariner’s breeze, he is not like the wandering spark in burnt paper, of which you cannot say whether it is chasing or chased: it is I who am the shifty Pole to the steadiest of magnets. She is a princess in other things besides her superiority to Physics. There will be wild scenes at Baden.

Page 3975

’My Diary of to-day is all bestowed on you. What have I to write in it except the pair of commas under the last line of yesterday—“He has not come!” Oh! to be caring for a he.

’O that I were with your sister now, on one side of her idol, to correct her extravagant idolatry! I long for her. I had a number of nice little phrases to pet her with.

’You have said (I have it written) that men who are liked by men are the best friends for women. In which case, the earl should be worthy of our friendship; he is liked. Captain Abrane and Sir Meeson, in spite of the hard service he imposes on them with such comical haughtiness, incline to speak well of him, and Methuen Rivers—here for two days on his way to his embassy at Vienna—assured us he is the rarest of gentlemen on the point of honour of his word. They have stories of him, to confirm Livia’s eulogies, showing him punctilious to chivalry: No man alive is like him in that, they say. He grieves me. All that you have to fear is my pity for one so sensitive. So speed, sir! It is not good for us to be much alone, and I am alone when you are absent.

’I hear military music!

’How grand that music makes the dullest world appear in a minute. There is a magic in it to bring you to me from the most dreadful of distances.—Chillon! it would kill me!—-Writing here and you perhaps behind the hill, I can hardly bear it;—I am torn away, my hand will not any more. This music burst out to mock me! Adieu.

’I am yours.

’Your *Henrietta*.

‘A kiss to the sister. It is owing to her.’

Carinthia kissed the letter on that last line. It seemed to her to end in a celestial shower.

She was oppressed by wonder of the writer who could run like the rill of the mountains in written speech; and her recollection of the contents perpetually hurried to the close, which was more in her way of writing, for there the brief sentences had a throb beneath them.

She did not speak of the letter to her brother when she returned it. A night in the carriage, against his shoulder, was her happy prospect, in the thought that she would be with her dearest all night, touching him asleep, and in the sweet sense of being near to the beloved of the fairest angel of her sex. They pursued their journey soon after Anton was dismissed with warm shakes of the hand and appointments for a possible year in the future.

The blast of the postillion’s horn on the dark highway moved Chillon to say: ‘This is what they call posting, my dear.’

She replied: 'Tell me, brother: I do not understand, "Let none these marks efface," at the commencement, after most "picturesque of Castles":—that is you.'

'They are quoted from the verses of a lord who was a poet, addressed to the castle on Lake Leman. She will read them to you.'

'Will she?'

The mention of the lord set Carinthia thinking of the lord whom that beautiful *she* pitied because she was forced to wound him and he was very sensitive. Wrapped in Henrietta, she slept through the joltings of the carriage, the grinding of the wheels, the blowing of the horn, the flashes of the late moonlight and the kindling of dawn.

Page 3976

CHAPTER VIII

Of the encounter of two strange young men and their consorting: *In which the male reader is requested to bear in mind what wild creature he was in his youth*, *while the female should marvel credulously*.

The young man who fancied he had robed himself in the plain homespun of a natural philosopher at the age of twenty-three journeyed limping leisurely in the mountain maid Carinthia's footsteps, thankful to the Fates for having seen her; and reproving the remainder of superstition within him, which would lay him open to smarts of evil fortune if he, encouraged a senseless gratitude for good; seeing that we are simply to take what happens to us. The little inn of the village on the perch furnished him a night's lodging and a laugh of satisfaction to hear of a young lady and gentleman, and their guide, who had devoured everything eatable half a day in advance of him, all save the bread and butter, and a few scraps of meat, apologetically spread for his repast by the maid of the inn: not enough for, a bantam cock, she said, promising eggs for breakfast. He vowed with an honest heart, that it was more than enough, and he was nourished by sympathy with the appetites of his precursors and the maid's description of their deeds. That name, Carinthia, went a good way to fill him.

Farther on he had plenty, but less contentment. He was compelled to acknowledge that he had expected to meet Carinthia again at the Baths. Her absence dealt a violent shock to the aerial structure he dwelt in; for though his ardour for the life of the solitudes was unfeigned, as was his calm overlooking of social distinctions, the self-indulgent dreamer became troubled with an alarming sentience, that for him to share the passions of the world of men was to risk the falling lower than most. Women are a cause of dreams, but they are dreaded enemies of his kind of dream, deadly enemies of the immaterial dreamers; and should one of them be taken on board a vessel of the vapourish texture young Woodseer sailed in above the clouds lightly while he was in it alone, questions of past, future, and present, the three weights upon humanity, bear it down, and she must go, or the vessel sinks. And cast out of it, what was he? The asking exposed him to the steadiest wind the civilized world is known to blow. From merely thinking upon one of the daughters of earth, he was made to feel his position in that world, though he refused to understand it, and assisted by two days of hard walking he reduced Carinthia to an abstract enthusiasm, no very serious burden. His note-book sustained it easily. He wrote her name in simple fondness of the name; a verse, and hints for more, and some sentences, which he thought profound. They were composed as he sat by the roadway, on the top of hills, and in a boat crossing a dark green lake deep under wooded mountain walls: things of priceless value.

Page 3977

It happened, that midway on the lake he perceived his boatman about to prime a pistol to murder the mild-eyed stillness, and he called to the man in his best German to desist. During the altercation, there passed a countryman of his in another of the punts, who said gravely: 'I thank you for that.' It was early morning, and they had the lake to themselves, each deeming the other an intruder; for the courtship of solitude wanes when we are haunted by a second person in pursuit of it; he is discolouring matter in our pure crystal cup. Such is the worship of the picturesque; and it would appear to say, that the spirit of man finds itself yet in the society of barbarians. The case admits of good pleading either way, even upon the issue whether the exclusive or the vulgar be the more barbarous. But in those days the solicitation of the picturesque had been revived by a poet of some impassioned rhetoric, and two devotees could hardly meet, as the two met here, and not be mutually obscurants.

They stepped ashore in turn on the same small shoot of land where a farm-house near a chapel in the shadow of cliffs did occasional service for an inn. Each had intended to pass a day and a night in this lonely dwelling-place by the lake, but a rival was less to be tolerated there than in love, and each awaited the other's departure, with an air that said: 'You are in my sunlight'; and going deeper, more sternly: 'Sir, you are an offence to Nature's pudency!'

Woodseer was the more placable of the two; he had taken possession of the bench outside, and he had his note-book and much profundity to haul up with it while fish were frying. His countryman had rushed inside to avoid him, and remained there pacing the chamber like a lion newly caged. Their boatmen were brotherly in the anticipation of provision and payment.

After eating his fish, Woodseer decided abruptly, that as he could not have the spot to himself, memorable as it would have been to intermarry with Nature in so sacred a welldepth of the mountains, he had better be walking and climbing. Another boat paddling up the lake had been spied: solitude was not merely shared with a rival, but violated by numbers. In the first case, we detest the man; in the second, we fly from an outraged scene. He wrote a line or so in his book, hurriedly paid his bill, and started, full of the matter he had briefly committed to his pages.

At noon, sitting beside the beck that runs from the lake, he was overtaken by the gentleman he had left behind, and accosted in the informal English style, with all the politeness possible to a nervously blunt manner: 'This book is yours,—I have no doubt it is yours; I am glad to be able to restore it; I should be glad to be the owner-writer of the contents, I mean. I have to beg your excuse; I found it lying open; I looked at the page, I looked through the whole; I am quite at your mercy.'

Woodseer jumped at the sight of his note-book, felt for the emptiness of his pocket, and replied: 'Thank you, thank you. It's of use to me, though to no one else.'

Page 3978

‘You pardon me?’

‘Certainly. I should have done it myself.’

‘I cannot offer you my apologies as a stranger.’ Lord Fleetwood was the name given.

Woodseer’s plebeian was exchanged for it, and he stood up.

The young lord had fair, straight, thin features, with large restless eyes that lighted quickly, and a mouth that was winning in his present colloquial mood.

’You could have done the same? I should find it hard to forgive the man who pried into my secret thoughts,’ he remarked.

‘There they are. If one puts them to paper! . . .’ Woodseer shrugged.

’Yes, yes. They never last long enough with me. So far I’m safe. One page led to another. You can meditate. I noticed some remarks on Religions. You think deeply.’

Woodseer was of that opinion, but modesty urged him to reply with a small flourish. ’Just a few heads of ideas. When the wind puffs down a sooty chimney the air is filled with little blacks that settle pretty much like the notes in this book of mine. There they wait for another puff, or my fingers to stamp them.’

‘I could tell you were the owner of that book,’ said Lord Fleetwood. He swept his forehead feverishly. ’What a power it is to relieve one’s brain by writing! May I ask you, which one of the Universities . . . ?’

The burden of this question had a ring of irony to one whom it taught to feel rather defiantly, that he carried the blazon of a reeking tramp. ’My University,’ Woodseer replied, ’was a merchant’s office in Bremen for some months. I learnt more Greek and Latin in Bremen than business. I was invalided home, and then tried a merchant’s office in London. I put on my hat one day, and walked into the country. My College fellows were hawkers, tinkers, tramps and ploughmen, choughs and crows. A volume of our Poets and a History of Philosophy composed my library. I had scarce any money, so I learnt how to idle inexpensively—a good first lesson. We’re at the bottom of the world when we take to the road; we see men as they were in the beginning—not so eager for harness till they get acquainted with hunger, as I did, and studied in myself the old animal having his head pushed into the collar to earn a feed of corn.’

Woodseer laughed, adding, that he had been of a serious mind in those days of the alternation of smooth indifference and sharp necessity, and he had plucked a flower from them.

His nature prompted him to speak of himself with simple candour, as he had done spontaneously to Chillon Kirby, yet he was now anxious to let his companion know at once the common stuff he was made of, together with the great stuff he contained. He grew conscious of an over-anxiety, and was uneasy, recollecting how he had just spoken about his naturalness, dimly if at all apprehending the cause of this disturbance within. What is a lord to a philosopher! But the world is around us as a cloak, if not a coat; in his ignorance he supposed it specially due to a lord seeking acquaintance with him, that he should expose his condition: doing the which appeared to subject him to parade his intellectual treasures and capacity for shaping sentences; and the effect upon Lord Fleetwood was an incentive to the display. Nevertheless he had a fretful desire to escape from the discomposing society of a lord; he fixed his knapsack and began to saunter.

Page 3979

The young lord was at his elbow. 'I can't part with you. Will you allow me?'

Woodseer was puzzled and had to say: 'If you wish it.'

'I do wish it: an hour's walk with you. One does not meet a man like you every day. I have to join a circle of mine in Baden, but there's no hurry; I could be disengaged for a week. And I have things to ask you, owing to my indiscretion—but you have excused it.'

Woodseer turned for a farewell gaze at the great Watzmann, and saluted him.

'Splendid,' said Lord Fleetwood; 'but don't clap names on the mountains.—I saw written in your book: "A text for Dada." You write: "A despotism would procure a perfect solitude, but kill the ghost." That was my thought at the place where we were at the lake. I had it. Tell me—though I could not have written it, and "ghost" is just the word, the exact word—tell me, are you of Welsh blood? "Dad" is good Welsh—pronounce it hard.'

Woodseer answered: 'My mother was a Glamorganshire woman. My father, I know, walked up from Wales, mending boots on his road for a livelihood. He is not a bad scholar, he knows Greek enough to like it. He is a Dissenting preacher. When I strike a truism, I 've a habit of scoring it to give him a peg or tuning-fork for one of his discourses. He's a man of talent; he taught himself, and he taught me more than I learnt at school. He is a thinker in his way. He loves Nature too. I rather envy him in some respects. He and I are hunters of Wisdom on different tracks; and he, as he says, "waits for me." He's patient!'

Ah, and I wanted to ask you,' Lord Fleetwood observed, bursting with it, 'I was puzzled by a name you write here and there near the end, and permit me to ask, it: Carinthia! It cannot be the country? You write after, the name: "A beautiful Gorgon—a haggard Venus." It seized me. I have had the face before my eyes ever since. You must mean a woman. I can't be deceived in allusions to a woman: they have heart in them. You met her somewhere about Carinthia, and gave her the name? You write—may I refer to the book?'

He received the book and flew through the leaves:

'Here—"A panting look": you write again: "A look of beaten flame: a look of one who has run and at last beholds!" But that is a living face: I see her! Here again: "From minute to minute she is the rock that loses the sun at night and reddens in the morning." You could not create an idea of a woman to move you like that. No one could, I am certain of it, certain; if so, you 're a wizard—I swear you are. But that's a face high over beauty. Just to know there is a woman like her, is an antidote. You compare her to a rock. Who would imagine a comparison of a woman to a rock! But

rock is the very picture of beautiful Gorgon, haggard Venus. Tell me you met her, you saw her. I want only to hear she lives, she is in the world. Beautiful women compared

Page 3980

to roses may whirl away with their handsome dragoons! A pang from them is a thing to be ashamed of. And there are men who trot about whining with it! But a Carinthia makes pain honourable. You have done what I thought impossible—fused a woman's face and grand scenery, to make them inseparable. She might be wicked for me. I should see a bright rim round hatred of her!—the rock you describe. I could endure horrors and not annihilate her! I should think her sacred.'

Woodseer turned about to have a look at the man who was even quicker than he at realizing a person from a hint of description, and almost insanely extravagant in the pitch of the things he uttered to a stranger. For himself, he was open with everybody, his philosophy not allowing that strangers existed on earth. But the presence of a lord brought the conventional world to his feelings, though at the same time the title seemed to sanction the exceptional abruptness and wildness of this lord. As for suspecting him to be mad, it would have been a common idea: no stretching of speech or overstepping of social rules could waken a suspicion so spiritless in Woodseer.

He said: 'I can tell you I met her and she lives. I could as soon swim in that torrent or leap the mountain as repeat what she spoke, or sketch a feature of her. She goes into the blood, she is a new idea of women. She has the face that would tempt a gypsy to evil tellings. I could think of it as a history written in a line: Carinthia, Saint and Martyr! As for comparisons, they are flowers thrown into the fire.'

'I have had that—I have thought that,' said Lord Fleetwood. 'Go on; talk of her, pray; without comparisons. I detest them. How did you meet her? What made you part? Where is she now? I have no wish to find her, but I want thoroughly to believe in her.'

Another than Woodseer would have perceived the young lord's malady. Here was one bitten by the serpent of love, and athirst for an image of the sex to serve for the cooling herb, as youth will be. Woodseer put it down to a curious imaginative fellowship with himself. He forgot the lord, and supposed he had found his own likeness, less gifted in speech. After talking of Carinthia more and more in the abstract, he fell upon his discovery of the Great Secret of life, against which his hearer struggled for a time, though that was cooling to him too; but ultimately there was no resistance, and so deep did they sink into the idea of pure contemplation, that the idea of woman seemed to have become a part of it. No stronger proof of their aethereal conversational earnestness could be offered. A locality was given to the Great Secret, and of course it was the place where the most powerful recent impression had been stamped on the mind of the discoverer: the shadowy valley rolling from the slate-rock. Woodseer was too artistic a dreamer to present the passing vision of Carinthia with any associates there. She passed: the solitude accepted her and lost her; and it was the richer for the one swift gleam: she brought no trouble, she left no regrets; she was the ghost of the rocky obscurity. But now remembering her mountain carol, he chanced to speak of her as a girl.

Page 3981

‘She is a girl?’ cried Lord Fleetwood, frowning over an utter revolution of sentiment at the thought of the beautiful Gorgon being a girl; for, rapid as he was to imagine, he had raised a solid fabric upon his conception of Carinthia the woman, necessarily the woman—logically. Who but the woman could look the Gorgon! He tried to explain it to be impossible for a girl to wear the look: and his notion evidently was, that it had come upon a beautiful face in some staring horror of a world that had bitten the tender woman. She touched him sympathetically through the pathos.

Woodseer flung out vociferously for the contrary. Who but a girl could look the beautiful Gorgon! What other could seem an emanation of the mountain solitude? A woman would instantly breathe the world on it to destroy it. Hers would be the dramatic and not the poetic face. It would shriek of man, wake the echoes with the tale of man, slaughter all. quietude. But a girl’s face has no story of poisonous intrusion. She indeed may be cast in the terrors of Nature, and yet be sweet with Nature, beautiful because she is purely of Nature. Woodseer did his best to present his view irresistibly. Perhaps he was not clear; it was a piece of skiamachy, difficult to render clear to the defeated.

Lord Fleetwood had nothing to say but ‘Gorgon! a girl a Gorgon!’ and it struck Woodseer as intensely unreasonable, considering that he had seen the girl whom, in his effort to portray her, he had likened to a beautiful Gorgon. He recounted the scene of the meeting with her, pictured it in effective colours, but his companion gave no response, nor a nod. They ceased to converse, and when the young lord’s hired carriage drew up on the road, Woodseer required persuasion to accompany him. They were both in their different stations young tyrants of the world, ready to fight the world and one another for not having their immediate view of it such as they wanted it. They agreed, however, not to sleep in the city. Beds were to be had near the top of a mountain on the other side of the Salza, their driver informed them, and vowing themselves to that particular height, in a mutual disgust of the city, they waxed friendlier, with a reserve.

Woodseer soon had experience that he was receiving exceptional treatment from Lord Fleetwood, whose manservant was on the steps of the hotel in Salzburg on the lookout for his master.

‘Sir Meeson has been getting impatient, my lord,’ said the man.

Sir Meeson Corby appeared; Lord Fleetwood cut him short: ’You ’re in a hurry; go at once, don’t wait for me; I join you in Baden.—Do me the favour to eat with me,’ he turned to Woodseer. ’And here, Corby! tell the countess I have a friend to bear me company, and there is to be an extra bedroom secured at her hotel. That swinery of a place she insists on visiting is usually crammed. With you there,’ he turned to Woodseer, ’I might find it agreeable.—You can take my man, Corby; I shall not want the fellow.’

Page 3982

‘Positively, my dear Fleetwood, you know,’ Sir Meeson expostulated, ’I am under orders; I don’t see how—I really can’t go on without you.’

‘Please yourself. This gentleman is my friend, Mr. Woodseer.’

Sir Meeson Corby was a plump little beau of forty, at war with his fat and accounting his tight blue tail coat and brass buttons a victory. His tightness made his fatness elastic; he looked wound up for a dance, and could hardly hold on a leg; but the presentation of a creature in a battered hat and soiled garments, carrying a tattered knapsack half slung, lank and with disorderly locks, as the Earl of Fleetwood’s friend—the friend of the wealthiest nobleman of Great Britain!—fixed him in a perked attitude of inquiry that exhausted interrogatives. Woodseer passed him, slouching a bow. The circular stare of Sir Meeson seemed unable to contract. He directed it on Lord Fleetwood, and was then reminded that he dealt with prickles.

‘Where have you been?’ he said, blinking to refresh his eyeballs. ’I missed you, I ran round and round the town after you.’

‘I have been to the lake.’

‘Queer fish there!’ Sir Meeson dropped a glance on the capture.

Lord Fleetwood took Woodseer’s arm. ‘Do you eat with us?’ he asked the baronet, who had stayed his eating for an hour and was famished; so they strode to the dining-room.

‘Do you wash, sir, before eating?’ Sir Meeson said to Woodseer, caressing his hands when they had seated themselves at table. ’Appliances are to be found in this hotel.’

‘Soap?’ said Lord Fleetwood.

‘Soap—at least, in my chamber.’

‘Fetch it, please.’

Sir Meeson, of course, could not hear that. He requested the waiter to show the gentleman to a room.

Lord Fleetwood ordered the waiter to bring a handbasin and towel. ’We’re off directly and must eat at once,’ he said.

‘Soap—soap! my dear Fleetwood,’ Sir Meeson knuckled on the table, to impress it that his appetite and his gorge demanded a thorough cleansing of those fingers, if they were to sit at one board.

‘Let the waiter fetch it.’

‘The soap is in my portmanteau.’

‘You spoke of it as a necessity for this gentleman and me. Bring it.’

Woodseer had risen. Lord Fleetwood motioned him down. He kept an eye dead—as marble on Corby, who muttered: ’You can’t mean that you ask me . . . ?’ But the alternative was forced on Sir Meeson by too strong a power of the implacable eye; there was thunder in it, a continuity of gaze forcefuller than repetitions of the word. He knew Lord Fleetwood. Men privileged to attend on him were dogs to the flinty young despot: they were sure to be called upon to expiate the faintest offence to him. He had hastily to consider, that he was banished beyond appeal, with the whole torture of banishment to an adorer of the Countess Livia, or else the mad behest must be obeyed. He protested, shrugged, sat fast, and sprang up, remarking, that he went with all the willingness imaginable. It could not have been the first occasion.

Page 3983

He was affecting the excessively obsequious when he came back bearing his metal soap-case. The performance was checked by another look solid as shot, and as quick. Woodseer, who would have done for Sir Meeson Corby or Lazarus what had been done for him, thought little of the service, but so intense a peremptoriness in the look of an eye made him uncomfortable in his own sense of independence. The humblest citizen of a free nation has that warning at some notable exhibition of tyranny in a neighbouring State: it acts like a concussion of the air.

Lord Fleetwood led an easy dialogue with him and Sir Meeson, on their different themes immediately, which was not less impressive to an observer. He listened to Sir Meeson's entreaties that he should start at once for Baden, and appeared to pity the poor gentleman, condemned by his office to hang about him in terror of his liege lady's displeasure. Presently, near the close of the meal, drawing a ring from his finger, he handed it to the baronet, and said, 'Give her that. She knows I shall follow that.' He added to himself:—I shall have ill-luck till I have it back! and he asked Woodseer whether he put faith in the virtue of talismans.

'I have never possessed one,' said Woodseer, with his natural frankness. 'It would have gone long before this for a night's lodging.'

Sir Meeson heard him, and instantly urged Lord Fleetwood not to think of dismissing his man Francis. 'I beg it, Fleetwood! I beg you to take the man. Her ladyship will receive me badly, ring or no ring, if she hears of your being left alone. I really can't present myself. I shall not go, not go. I say no.'

'Stay, then,' said Fleetwood.

He turned to Woodseer with an air of deference, and requested the privilege of glancing at his notebook again, and scanned it closely at one of the pages. 'I believe it true,' he cried; 'I had a half recollection of it—I have had some such thought, but never could put it in words. You have thought deeply.'

'That is only a surface thought, or common reflection,' said Woodseer.

Sir Meeson stared at them in turn. Judging by their talk and the effect produced on the earl, he took Woodseer for a sort of conjuror.

It was his duty to utter a warning.

He drew Fleetwood aside. A word was whispered, and they broke asunder with a snap. Francis was called. His master gave him his keys, and despatched him into the town to purchase a knapsack or bag for the outfit of a jolly beggar. The prospect delighted Lord Fleetwood. He sang notes from the deep chest, flaunting like an opera brigand, and contemplating his wretched satellite's indecision with brimming amusement.

‘Remember, we fight for our money. I carry mine,’ he said to Woodseer.

‘Wouldn’t it be expedient, Fleetwood . . .’ Sir Meeson suggested a treasurer in the person of himself.

‘Not a florin, Corby! I should find it all gambled away at Baden.’

Page 3984

’But I am not Abrane, I’m not Abrane! I never play, I have no mania, none. It would be prudent, Fleetwood.’

’The slightest bulging of a pocket would show on you, Corby; and they would be at you, they would fall on you and pluck you to have another fling. I ’d rather my money should go to a knight of the road than feed that dragon’s jaw. A highwayman seems an honest fellow compared with your honourable corporation of fly-catchers. I could surrender to him with some satisfaction after a trial of the better man. I ’ve tried these tables, and couldn’t stir a pulse. Have you?’

It had to be explained to Woodseer what was meant by trying the tables. ‘Not I,’ said he, in strong contempt of the queer allurement.

Lord Fleetwood studied him half a minute, as if measuring and discarding a suspicion of the young philosopher’s possible weakness under temptation.

Sir Meeson Corby accompanied the oddly assorted couple through the town and a short way along the road to the mountain, for the sake of quieting his conscience upon the subject of his leaving them together. He could not have sat down a second time at a table with those hands. He said it:—he could not have done the thing. So the best he could do was to let them go. Like many of his class, he had a mind open to the effect of striking contrasts, and the spectacle of the wealthiest nobleman in Great Britain tramping the road, pack on back, with a young nobody for his comrade, a total stranger, who might be a cut-throat, and was avowedly next to a mendicant, charged him with quantities of interjectory matter, that he caught himself firing to the foreign people on the highway. Hundreds of thousands a year, and tramping it like a pedlar, with a beggar for his friend! He would have given something to have an English ear near him as he watched them rounding under the mountain they were about to climb.

CHAPTER IX

Concerning the black goddess fortune and the worship of her, *together with an introduction of some of her votaries*

In those early days of Fortune’s pregnant alternations of colour between the Red and the Black, exhibited publicly, as it were a petroleum spring of the ebony-fiery lake below, Black-Forest Baden was the sprightliest’ of the ante-chambers of Hades. Thither in the ripeness of the year trooped the devotees of the sable goddess to perform sacrifice; and annually among them the beautiful Livia, the Countess of Fleetwood; for nowhere else had she sensation of the perfect repose which is rocked to a slumber by gales.

Page 3985

She was not of the creatures who are excited by an atmosphere of excitement; she took it as the nymph of the stream her native wave, and swam on the flood with expansive languor, happy to have the master passions about her; one or two of which her dainty hand caressed, fearless of a sting; the lady petted them as her swans. It surprised her to a gentle contempt of men and women, that they should be ruffled either by love or play. A withholding from the scene will naturally arouse disturbing wishes; but to be present lulls; for then we live, we are in our element. And who could expect, what sane person can desire, perpetual good luck? Fortune, the goddess, and young Love, too, are divine in their mutability: and Fortune would resemble a humdrum housewife, Love a droning husband, if constancy were practised by them. Observe the staggering and plunging of the blindfold wretch seeking to be persuaded of their faithfulness.

She could make for herself a quiet centre in the heart of the whirlwind, but the whirlwind was required. The clustered lights at the corner of the vale under forest hills, the burst of music, the blazing windows of the saloons of the Furies, and the gamblers advancing and retreating, with their totally opposite views of consequences, and fashions of wearing or tearing the mask; and closer, the figures shifting up and down the promenade, known and unknown faces, and the histories half known, half woven, weaving fast, which flew their, threads to provoke speculation; pleasantly embraced and diverted the cool-blooded lady surrounded by her courtiers, who could upon occasion supply the luminous clue or anecdote. She had an intuitive liveliness to detect interchanges of eyes, the shuttle of intrigue; the mild hypocrisy, the clever audacity, the suspicion confirmed, the complication threatening to become resonant and terrible; and the old crossing the young and the young outwitting the old, wiles of fair traitors and dark, knaves of all suits of the pack. A more intimate acquaintance with their lineaments inspired a regard for them, such as poets may feign the throned high moon to entertain for objects causing her rays to flash.

The simple fools, performing in character, were a neutral people, grotesques and arabesques wreathed about the margins of the scene. Venus or Fortune smote them to a relievo distinguishing one from another. Here, however, as elsewhere, the core of interest was with the serious population, the lovers and the players in earnest, who stood round the furnace and pitched themselves into it, not always under a miscalculation of their chances of emerging transfigured instead of serving for fuel. These, the tragical children of folly, were astute: they played with lightning, and they knew the conditions of the game; victories were to be had.

Page 3986

The ulterior conditions of the game, the price paid for a victory, they thought little of: for they were feverish worshippers of the phantasmal deity called the Present; a god reigning over the Past, appreciable only in the Future; whose whiff of actual being is composed of the embryo idea of the union of these two periods. Still he is occasionally a benevolent god to the appetites; which have but to be continuous to establish him in permanence; and as nothing in us more readily supposes perpetuity than the appetite rushing to destroy itself, the rational nature of the most universal worship on earth is perceived at once.

Now, the price paid for a victory is this: that having been favoured in a single instance by the spouse of the aforesaid eminent divinity—the Black Goddess of the golden fringes—men believe in her for ever after, behold her everywhere, they belong to her. Their faith as to sowing and reaping has gone; and so has their capacity to see the actual as it is: she has the power to attach them to her skirts the more by rewarding their impassioned devotion with cuffs and scorns. They have ceased to have a first notion upon anything without a second haunting it, which directs them to propitiate Fortune.

But I am reminded by the convulsions of Dame Gossip, that the wisdom of our ancestors makes it a mere hammering of commonplace to insist on such reflections. Many of them, indeed, took the union of the Black Goddess and the Rosy Present for the composition of the very Arch-Fiend. Some had a shot at the strange conjecture, figuring her as tired of men in the end and challengeing him below—equally tired of his easy conquests of men since the glorious old times of the duelling saints. By virtue of his one incorrigible weakness, which we know him to have as long as we have it ourselves: *viz*., the belief in her existence, she is to get the better of him.

Upon this point the experience of Captain Abrane has a value. Livia was a follower of the Red and Black and the rounding ball in the person of the giant captain, through whom she received her succession of sweetly teasing thrills and shocks, as one of the adventurous company they formed together. The place was known to him as the fair Philistine to another muscular hero; he had been shorn there before, and sent forth tottering, treating the friends he met as pillars to fall with him; and when the operation was done thoroughly, he pronounced himself refreshed by it, like a more sensible Samson, the cooler for his clipping. Then it was that he relapsed undistractedly upon processes of his mind and he often said he thought Fortune would beat the devil.

Her power is shown in the moving of her solicitors to think, instantly after they have made their cast, that the reverse of it was what they intended. It comes as though she had withdrawn the bandage from her forehead and dropped a leaden glance on them, like a great dame angry to have her signal misinterpreted. Well, then, distinguished by the goddess in such a manner, we have it proved to us how she wished to favour: for the reverse wins, and we who are pinched blame not her cruelty but our blind folly. This is true worship. Henceforth the pain of her nip is mingled with the dream of her kiss;

between the positive and the imagined of her we remain confused until the purse is an empty body on a gallows, honour too, perhaps.

Page 3987

Captain Abrane was one of the Countess Livia's numerous courtiers on the border of the promenade under the lighted saloons. A colossus inactive, he had little to say among the chattering circle; for when seated, cards were wanted to animate him: and he looked entirely out of place and unfitted, like a great vessel's figure-head in a shipwright's yard.

She murmured: 'Not this evening?'

Abrane quoted promptly a line of nursery song 'How shall he cut it without e'er a knife?'

'Have we run it down so low?' said she, with no reproach in her tone.

The captain shrugged over his clean abyss, where nothing was.

Yesterday their bank presented matronly proportions. But an importuned goddess reduces the most voluminous to bare stitches within a few winks of an eye.

Livia turned to a French gentleman of her court, M. de St. Ombre, and pursued a conversation. He was a stately cavalier of the Gallicized Frankish outlines, ready, but grave in his bearing, grave in his delivery, trimly moustached, with a Guise beard.

His profound internal question relating to this un-English beauty of the British Isles:—had she no passion in her nature? was not convinced by her apparent insensibility to Fortune's whips.

Sir Meeson Corby inserted a word of Bull French out of place from time to time.

As it might be necessary to lean on the little man for weapons of war, supposing Lord Fleetwood delayed his arrival yet another day, Livia was indulgent. She assisted him to think that he spoke the foreign tongue.

Mention of Lord Fleetwood set Sir Meeson harping again on his alarms, in consideration of the vagabond object of the young lord had roamed away with.

'You forget that Russett has gypsy in him: Welsh! it's about the same,' said Livia. 'He can take excellent care of himself and his purse.'

'Countess, he is a good six days overdue.'

'He will be in time for the ball at the Schloss.'

Sir Meeson Corby produced an aspect of the word 'if,' so perkily, that the dejected Captain Abrane laughed outright and gave him double reason to fret for Lord Fleetwood's arrival, by saying: 'If he hangs off much longer, I shall have to come on you for another fifty.'

Our two pedestrians out of Salzburg were standing up in the night of cloud and pines above the glittering pool, having made their way along the path from the hill anciently dedicated to the god Mercury; and at the moment when Sir Meeson put forth his frilled wrists to say: 'If you had seen his hands—the creature Fleetwood trotted off alone with!—you'd be a bit anxious too'; the young lord called his comrade to gaze underneath them: 'There they are, hard at it, at their play!—it's the word used for the filthiest gutter scramble.'

Page 3988

They had come to know something of one another's humours; which are taken by young men for their characters; and should the humours please, they are friends, until further humours develop, trying these nascent conservatives hard to suit them to their moods as well as the accustomed. Lord Fleetwood had discovered in his companion, besides the spirit of independence and the powers of thought impressed on him by Woodseer's precocious flashes, a broad playfulness, that trenched on buffoonery; it astonished, amused, and relieved him, loosening the spell of reverence cast over him by one who could so wonderfully illumine his brain. Prone to admire and bend the knee where he admired, he chafed at subjection, unless he had the particular spell constantly renewed. A tone in him once or twice of late, different from the comrade's, had warned Woodseer to be guarded.

Susceptible, however, of the extreme contrast between the gamblers below and Nature's lover beside him, Fleetwood returned to his enthusiasm without thinking it a bondage.

'I shall never forget the walk we 've had. I have to thank you for the noblest of pleasures. You 've taught me—well, a thousand things; the things money can't buy. What mornings they were! And the dead-tired nights! Under the rock and up to see the snowy peak pink in a gap of thick mist. You were right: it made a crimsoning colour shine like a new idea. Up in those mountains one walks with the divinities, you said. It's perfectly true. I shall remember I did. I have a treasure for life! Now I understand where you get your ideas. The life we lead down there is hoggish. You have chosen the right. You're right, over and over again, when you say, the dirty sweaters are nearer the angels for cleanliness than my Lord and Lady Sybarite out of a bath, in chemical scents. A man who thinks, loathes their High Society. I went through Juvenal at college. But you—to be sure, you add example—make me feel the contempt of it more. I am everlastingly indebted to you. Yes, I won't forget: you preach against the despising of anything.

This was pleasant in Woodseer's ears, inasmuch as it established the young nobleman as the pupil of his philosophy for the conduct of life; and to fortify him, he replied:

'Set your mind on the beauty, and there'll be no room for comparisons. Most of them are unjust, precious few instructive. In this case, they spoil both pictures: and that scene down there rather hooks me; though I prefer the Dachstein in the wane of the afterglow. You called it Carinthia.'

'I did: the beautiful Gorgon, haggard Venus—if she is to be a girl!' Fleetwood rejoined. 'She looked burnt out—a spectre.'

'One of the admirably damned,' said Woodseer, and he murmured with enjoyment: 'Between the lights—that 's the beauty and the tragedy of Purgatory!'

Page 3989

His comrade fell in with the pictured idea: ’You hit it:—not what you called the “sublimely milky,” and not squalid as you’ll see the faces of the gambling women at the tables below. Oblige me—may I beg?—don’t clap names on the mountains we’ve seen. It stamps guide-book on them, English tourist, horrors. We’ll moralize over the crowds at the tables down there. On the whole, it’s a fairish game: you know the odds against you, as you don’t on the Turf or the Bourse. Have your fling; but don’t get bitten. There’s a virus. I’m not open to it. Others are.’

Hereupon Woodseer, wishing to have his individuality recognised in the universality it consented to, remarked on an exchequer that could not afford to lose, and a disposition free of the craving to win.

These were, no doubt, good reasons for abstaining, and they were grand morality. They were, at the same time, customary phrases of the unfleshed in folly. They struck Fleetwood with a curious reminder of the puking inexperienced, whom he had seen subsequently plunge suicidally. He had a sharp vision of the attractive forces of the game; and his elemental nature exulted in siding with the stronger against a pretender to the superhuman. For Woodseer had spoken a trifle loftily, as quite above temptation. To see a forewarned philosopher lured to try the swim on those tides, pulled along the current, and caught by the undertug of the lasher, would be fun.

’We’ll drop down on them, find our hotel, and have a look at what they’re doing,’ he said, and stepped.

Woodseer would gladly have remained. The starlit black ridges about him and the dragon’s mouth yawing underneath were an opposition of spiritual and mundane; innocent, noxious; exciting to the youthful philosopher. He had to follow, and so rapidly in the darkness that he stumbled and fell on an arm; a small matter.

Bed-chambers awaited them at the hotel, none of the party: and Fleetwood’s man-servant was absent.

‘Gambling, the rascal!’ he said. Woodseer heard the first note of the place in that.

His leader was washed, neatly dressed, and knocking at his door very soon, impatient to be off, and he flung a promise of ‘supper presently’ to one whose modest purse had fallen into a debate with this lordly hostelry, counting that a supper and a night there would do for it. They hurried on to the line of promenaders, a river of cross-currents by the side of seated groups; and the willowy swish of silken dresses, feminine perfumery, cigar-smoke, chatter, laughter, told of pleasure reigning.

Fleetwood scanned the groups. He had seen enough in a moment and his face blackened. A darting waiter was called to him.

He said to Woodseer, savagely, as it sounded: 'You shall have something to joint your bones!' What cause of wrath he had was past a guess: a wolf at his vitals bit him, hardening his handsome features.

Page 3990

The waiter darted back, bearing a tray and tall glasses filled each with piled parti-coloured liqueurs, on the top of which an egg-yolk swam. Fleetwood gave example. Swallowing your egg, the fiery-velvet triune behind slips after it, in an easy milky way, like a princess's train on a state-march, and you are completely, transformed, very agreeably; you have become a merry demon. 'Well, yes, it's next to magic,' he replied to Woodseer's astonished snigger after the draught, and explained, that it was a famous Viennese four-of-the-morning panacea, the revellers' electrical restorer. 'Now you can hold on for an hour or two, and then we'll sup. At Rome?'

'Ay! Druids to-morrow!' cried the philosopher bewitched.

He found himself bowing to a most heavenly lady, composed of day and night in her colouring, but more of night, where the western edge has become a pale steel blade. Men were around her, forming a semi-circle. The world of men and women was mere timber and leafage to this flower of her sex, glory of her kind. How he behaved in her presence, he knew not; he was beyond self-criticism or conscious reflection; simply the engine of the commixed three liqueurs, with parlous fine thoughts, and a sense of steaming into the infinite.

To leave her was to have her as a moon in the heavens and to think of her creatively. A swarm of images rushed about her and away, took lustre and shade. She was a miracle of greyness, her eyes translucently grey, a dark-haired queen of the twilights; and his heart sprang into his brain to picture the novel beauty; language became a flushed Bacchanal in a ring of dancing similes. Lying beside a bank of silvery cinquefoil against a clear evening sky, where the planet Venus is a point of new and warmer light, one has the vision of her. Or something of Persephone rising to greet her mother, when our beam of day first melts through her as she kneels to gather an early bud of the year, would be near it. Or there is a lake in mid-forest, that curls part in shadow under the foot of morning: there we have her.

He strained to the earthly and the skyey likenesses of his marvel of human beauty because they bestowed her on him in passing. All the while, he was gazing on a green gaming-table.

The gold glittered, and it heaped or it vanished. Contemptuous of money, beyond the limited sum for his needs, he gazed; imagination was blunted in him to the hot drama of the business. Moreover his mind was engaged in insisting that the Evening Star is not to be called Venus, because of certain stories; and he was vowed to defend his lady from any allusion to them. This occupied him. By degrees, the visible asserted its authority; his look on the coin fell to speculating. Oddly, too, he was often right;—the money, staked on the other side, would have won. He considered it rather a plain calculation than a guess.

Page 3991

Philosophy withdrew him from his temporary interest in the tricks of a circling white marble ball. The chuck farthing of street urchins has quite as much dignity. He compared the creatures dabbling, over the board to summer flies on butcher's meat, periodically scared by a cloth. More in the abstract, they were snatching at a snapdragon bowl. It struck him, that the gamblers had thronged on an invitation to drink the round of seed-time and harvest in a gulp. Again they were desperate gleaners, hopping, skipping, bleeding, amid a whizz of scythe-blades, for small wisps of booty. Nor was it long before the presidency of an ancient hoary Goat-Satan might be perceived, with skew-eyes and pucker-mouth, nursing a hoof on a knee.

Our mediaeval Enemy sat symbolical in his deformities, as in old Italian and Dutch thick-line engravings of him. He rolled a ball for souls, excited like kittens, to catch it, and tumbling into the dozens of vacant pits. So it seemed to Woodseer, whose perceptions were discoloured by hereditary antagonism. Had he preserved his philosopher's eye, he would have known that the Hoofed One is too wily to show himself, owing to his ugliness. The Black Goddess and no other presides at her own game. She (it is good for us to know it) is the Power who challenges the individual, it is he who spreads the net for the mass. She liquefies the brain of man; he petrifies or ossifies the heart. From her comes craziness, from him perversity: a more provocative and, on the whole, more contagious disease. The gambler does not seek to lead his fellows into perdition; the snared of the Demon have pleasure in the act. Hence our naturally interested forecasts of the contests between them: for if he is beaten, as all must be at the close of an extended game with her, we have only to harden the brain against her allurements and we enter a clearer field.

Woodseer said to Fleetwood: 'That ball has a look of a nymph running round and round till she changes to one of the Fates.'

'We'll have a run with her,' said Fleetwood, keener for business than for metaphors—at the moment.

He received gold for a bank-note. Captain Abrane hurriedly begged a loan. Both of them threw. Neither of them threw on the six numbers Woodseer would have selected, and they lost. He stated that the number of 17 had won before. Abrane tried the transversal enclosing this favoured number. 'Of course!' he cried, with foul resignation and a hostile glare: the ball had seated itself and was grinning at him from the lowest of the stalls.

Fleetwood quitted the table-numbers to throw on Pair; he won, won again, pushed his luck and lost, dragging Abrane with him. The giant varied his tone of acquiescence in Fortune's whims: 'Of course! I 've only to fling! Luck hangs right enough till I put down my stake.'

‘If the luck has gone three times, the chances . . . .’ Woodseer was rather inquiring than pronouncing. . . . Lord Fleetwood cut him short. ‘The chances are equally the contrary!’ and discomposed his argumentative mind.

Page 3992

As argument in such a place was impossible, he had a wild idea of example—'just to see'—; and though he smiled, his brain was liquefying. Upon a calculation of the chances, merely for the humour of it, he laid a silver piece on the first six, which had been neglected. They were now blest. He laid his winnings on the numbed 17. Who would have expected it? why, the player, surely! Woodseer comported himself like a veteran: he had proved that you can calculate the chances. Instead of turning in triumph to Lord Fleetwood, he laid gold pieces to hug the number 17, and ten in the centre. And it is the truth, he hoped then to lose and have done with it—after proving his case. The ball whirled, kicked, tried for seat in two, in three points, and entered 17. The usual temporary wonderment flew round the table; and this number was courted in dread, avoided with apprehension.

Abrane let fly a mighty breath: 'Virgin, by Jove!'

Success was a small matter to Gower Woodseer. He displayed his contempt of fortune by letting his heap of bank-notes lie on Impair, and he won. Abrane bade him say 'Maximum' in a furious whisper. He did so, as one at home with the word; and winning repeatedly, observed to Fleetwood: 'Now I can understand what historians mean, in telling us of heroes rushing into the fray and vainly seeking death. I always thought death was to be had, if you were in earnest.'

Fleetwood scrutinized the cast of his features and the touch of his fingers on the crispy paper.

'Come to another of these "green fields,"' he returned briefly. 'The game here is child's play.'

Urging Virgin Luck not to quit his initiatory table, the captain reluctantly went at their heels. Shortly before the tables were clad in mantles for the night, he reported to Livia one of the great cases of Virgin Luck; described it, from the silver piece to the big heap of notes, and drew on his envy of the fellow to sketch the indomitable coolness shown in following or in quitting a run. 'That fellow it is, Fleetwood's tag-rag; holds his head like a street-fiddler; Woodler or some name. But there's nothing to be done if we don't cultivate him. He must have pocketed a good three thousand and more. They had a quarrel about calculations of chances, and Fleet ran the V up his forehead at a piece of impudence. Fellow says some high-flying stuff; Fleet brightens like a Sunday chimney-sweep. If I believed in Black Arts, upon my word!'

'Russett is not usually managed with ease,' the lady said.

Her placid observation was directed on the pair then descending the steps.

'Be careful how you address, this gentleman,' she counselled Abrane. 'The name is not Woodier, I know. It must be the right name or none.'

Livia's fairest smile received them. She heard the captain accosting the child of luck as Mr. Woodier, and she made a rustle in rising to take Fleetwood's arm.

Page 3993

‘We haven’t dined, we have to sup,’ said he.

’You are released at the end of the lamps. You redeem your ring, Russett, and I will restore it. I have to tell you, Henrietta is here to-morrow.’

‘She might be in a better place.’

’The place where she is to be seen is not generally undervalued by men. It is not her fault that she is absent. The admiral was persuaded to go and attend those cavalry manoeuvres with the Grand Duke, to whom he had been civil when in command of the Mediterranean squadron. You know, the admiral believes he has military—I mean soldierly-genius; and the delusion may have given him wholesome exercise and helped him to forget his gout. So far, Henrietta will have been satisfied. She cannot have found much amusement among dusty troopers or at that court at Carlsruhe. Our French milliner there has helped in retarding her quite against her will. She has had to choose a balldress for the raw mountain-girl they have with them, and get her fitted, and it’s a task! Why take her to the ball? But the admiral’s infatuated with this girl, and won’t hear of her exclusion—because, he says, she understands a field of battle; and the Ducal party have taken to her. Ah, Russett, you should not have flown! No harm, only Henrietta does require a trifle of management. She writes, that she is sure of you for the night at the Schloss.’

‘Why, ma’am?’

’You have given your word. “He never breaks his lightest word,” she says.’

‘It sounds like the beginning of respect.’

‘The rarest thing men teach women to feel for them!’

’A respectable love match—eh? Good Lord! You’ll be civil to my friend. You have struck him to the dust. You have your one poetical admirer in him.’

‘I am honoured, Russett.’

’Cleared out, I suppose? Abrane is a funnel for pouring into that Bank. Have your fun as you like it! I shall get supplies to-morrow. By the way, you have that boy Cressett here. What are you doing with him?’

Livia spoke of watching over him and guarding him:

’He was at the table beside me, bursting to have a fling; and my friend Mr. Woodseer said, it was “Adonis come to spy the boar":—the picture!’

Prompt as bugle to the breath, Livia proposed to bet him fifty pounds that she would keep young Cressett from gambling a single louis. The pretty saying did not touch her.

Fleetwood moved and bowed. Sir Meeson Corby simulated a petrifaction of his frame at seeing the Countess of Fleetwood actually partly bent with her gracious acknowledgement of the tramp's gawky homage.

CHAPTER X

SMALL CAUSES

Page 3994

A clock sounded one of the later morning hours of the night as Gower Woodseer stood at his hotel door, having left Fleetwood with a band of revellers. The night was now clear. Stars were low over the ridge of pines, dropped to a league of our strange world to record the doings. Beneath this roof lay the starry She. He was elected to lie beneath it also: and he beheld his heavenly lady floating on the lull of soft white cloud among her sister spheres. After the way of imaginative young men, he had her features more accurately now she was hidden, and he idealized her more. He could escape for a time from his coil of similes and paint for himself the irids of her large, long, grey eyes darkly rimmed; purest water-grey, lucid within the ring, beneath an arch of lashes. He had them fast; but then he fell to contemplating their exceeding rareness; And the mystery of the divinely grey swung a kindled fancy to the flight with some queen-witch of woods, of whom a youth may dream under the spell of twilights, East or West, among forest branches.

She had these marvellous eyes and the glamour for men. She had not yet met a man with the poetical twist in the brain to prize her elementally. All admitted the glamour; none of her courtiers were able to name it, even the poetical head giving it a name did not think of the witch in her looks as a witch in her deeds, a modern daughter of the mediaeval. To her giant squire the eyes of the lady were queer: they were unlit glass lamps to her French suppliant; and to the others, they were attractively uncommon; the charm for them being in her fine outlines, her stature, carriage of her person, and unalterable composure; particularly her latent daring. She had the effect on the general mind of a lofty crag-castle with a history. There was a whiff of gunpowder exciting the atmosphere in the anecdotal part of the history known.

Woodseer sat for a certain time over his note-book. He closed it with a thrilling conceit of the right thing written down; such as entomologists feel when they have pinned the rare insect. But what is butterfly or beetle compared with the chiselled sentences carved out of air to constitute us part owner of the breathing image and spirit of an adored fair woman? We repeat them, and the act of repeating them makes her come close on ours, by virtue of the eagle thought in the stamped gold of the lines.

Then, though she is not ever to be absolutely ours (and it is an impoverishing desire that she should be), we have beaten out the golden sentence—the essential she and we in one. But is it so precious after all? A suspicious ring of an adjective drops us on a sickening descent.

The author dashed at his book, examined, approved, keenly enjoyed, and he murderously scratched the adjective. She stood better without it, as a bright planet star issuing from clouds, which are perhaps an adornment to our hackneyed moon. This done, he restored the book to his coat’s breast-pocket, smiling or sneering at the rolls of bank-notes there, disdaining to count them. They stuffed an inner waistcoat pocket and his trousers also. They at any rate warranted that we can form a calculation of the chances, let Lord Fleetwood rave as he may please.

Page 3995

Woodseer had caught a glimpse of the elbow-point of his coat when flinging it back to the chair. There was distinctly abrasion. Philosophers laugh at such things. But they must be the very ancient pallium philosophers, ensconced in tubs, if they pretend to merriment over the spectacle of nether garments gapped at the spot where man is most vulnerable. He got loose from them and held them up to the candle, and the rays were admitted, neither winking nor peeping. Serviceable old clothes, no doubt. Time had not dealt them the final kick before they scored a good record.

They dragged him, nevertheless, to a sort of confession of some weakness, that he could not analyze for the swirl of emotional thoughts in the way; and they had him to the ground. An eagle of the poetic becomes a mere squat toad through one of these pretty material strokes. Where then is Philosophy? But who can be philosopher and the fervent admirer of a glorious lady? Ask again, who in that frowzy garb can presume to think of her or stand within fifty miles of her orbit?

A dreary two hours brought round daylight. Woodseer quitted his restless bed and entered the abjured habiliments, chivalrous enough to keep from denouncing them until he could cast the bad skin they now were to his uneasy sensations. He remembered having stumbled and fallen on the slope of the hill into this vale, and probably then the mischief had occurred though a brush would have, been sufficient, the slightest collision. Only, it was odd that the accident should have come to pass just previous to his introduction. How long antecedent was it? He belaboured his memory to reckon how long it was from the moment of the fall to the first sight of that lady.

His window looked down on the hotel stable-yard. A coach-house door was open. Odd or not—and it certainly looked like fate—that he should be bowing to his lady so shortly after the mishap expelling him, he had to leave the place. A groom in the yard was hailed, and cheerily informed him he could be driven to Carlsruhe as soon as the coachman had finished his breakfast. At Carlsruhe a decent refitting might be obtained, and he could return from exile that very day, thanks to the praiseworthy early hours of brave old Germany.

He had swallowed a cup of coffee with a roll of stale bread, in the best of moods, and entered his carriage; he was calling the order to start when a shout surprised his ear: ‘The fiddler bolts!’

Captain Abrane’s was the voice. About twenty paces behind, Abrane, Fleetwood, and one whom they called Chummy Potts, were wildly waving arms. Woodseer could hear the captain’s lowered roar: ’Race you, Chummy, couple of louis, catch him first!’ The two came pelting up to the carriage abreast.

They were belated revellers, and had been carelessly strolling under the pinky cloudlets bedward, after a prolonged carousal with the sons and daughters of hilarious nations,

until the apparition of Virgin Luck on the wing shocked all prospect of a dead fight with the tables that day.

Page 3996

’Here, come, no, by Jove, you, Mr. Woodsir! won’t do, not a bit! can’t let you go,’ cried Abrane, as he puffed. ’What! cut and run and leave us, post winnings—bankers—knock your luck on the head! What a fellow! Can’t let you. Countess never forgive us. You promised—swore it—play for her. Struck all aheap to hear of your play! You’ve got the trick. Her purse for you in my pocket. Never a fellow played like you. Cool as a cook over a-gridiron! Comme un phare! St. Ombre says—that Frenchman. You astonished the Frenchman! And now cut and run? Can’t allow it. Honour of the country at stake.’

‘Hands off!’ Woodseer bellowed, feeling himself a leaky vessel in dock, his infirmities in danger of exposure. ’If you pull!—what the deuce do you want? Stop!’

‘Out you come,’ said the giant, and laughed at the fun to his friends, who were entirely harmonious when not violently dissenting, as is the way with Night’s rollickers before their beds have reconciled them to the day-beams.

Woodseer would have had to come and was coming; he happened to say: ‘Don’t knock my pipe out of my mouth,’ and touched a chord in the giant.

‘All—right; smoke your pipe,’ was answered to his remonstrance.

During the amnesty, Fleetwood inquired: ‘Where are you going?’

‘Far a drive,—to be sure. Don’t you see!’

‘You’ll return?’

‘I intend to return.’

‘He’s beastly excited,’ quoth Abrane.

Fleetwood silenced him, though indeed Woodseer appeared suspiciously restive.

’Step down and have a talk with me before you start. You’re not to go yet.’

‘I must. I’m in a hurry.’

’What ‘s the hurry?’

‘I want to smoke and think.’

’Takes a carriage on the top of the morning to smoke and think! Hark at that!’ Abrane sang out. ’Oh, come along quietly, you fellow, there’s a good fellow! It concerns us all, every man Jack; we’re all bound up in your fortunes. Fellow with luck like yours can’t pretend to behave independently. Out of reason!’

‘Do you give me your word you return?’ said Fleetwood.

Woodseer replied: ’Very well, I do; there, I give my word. Hang it! now I know what they mean by “anything for a quiet life.” Just a shake brings us down on that cane-bottomed chair!’

‘You return to-day?’

‘To-day, yes, yes.’

Fleetwood signified the captive’s release; and Abrane immediately suggested:

‘Pop old Chummy in beside the fellow to mount guard.’

Potts was hustled and precipitated into the carriage by the pair, with whom he partook this last glimmer of their night’s humorous extravagances, for he was an easy creature. The carriage drove off.

‘Keep him company!’ they shouted.

‘Escort him back!’ said he, nodding.

He remarked to Woodseer: ‘With your permission,’ concerning the seat he took, and that ‘a draught of morning air would do him good.’ Then he laughed politely, exchanged wavy distant farewells with his comrades, touched a breast-pocket for his case of cigars, pulled forth one, obtained ‘the loan of a light,’ blew clouds and fell into the anticipated composure, quite understanding the case and his office.

Page 3997

Both agreed as to the fine morning it was. Woodseer briefly assented to his keeper's reiterated encomium on the morning, justified on oath. A fine morning, indeed. 'Damned if I think I ever saw so fine a morning!' Potts cried. He had no other subject of conversation with this hybrid: and being equally disposed for hot discourse or for sleep, the deprivation of the one and the other forced him to seek amusement in his famous reading of character; which was profound among the biped equine, jockeys, turfmen, sharpers, pugilists, demireps. He fronted Woodseer with square shoulders and wide knees, an elbow on one, a fist on the other, engaged in what he termed the 'prodding of his eel,' or 'nicking of his man,' a method of getting straight at the riddle of the fellow by the test of how long he could endure a flat mute stare and return look for look unblinking. The act of smoking fortifies and partly covers the insolence. But if by chance an equable, not too narrowly focussed, counterstare is met, our impertinent inquisitor may resemble the fisherman pulled into deep waters by his fish. Woodseer perused his man, he was not attempting to fathom him: he had besides other stuff in his head. Potts had naught, and the poor particle he was wriggled under detection.

'Tobacco before breakfast!' he said disgustedly tossing his cigar to the road. 'Your pipe holds on. Bad thing, I can tell you, that smoking on an empty stomach. No trainer'd allow it, not for a whole fee or double. Kills your wind. Let me ask you, my good sir, are you going to turn? We've sat a fairish stretch. I begin to want my bath and a shave, linen and coffee. Thirsty' as a dog.'

He heard with stupefaction, that he could alight on the spot, if he pleased, otherwise he would be driven into Carlsruhe. And now they had a lingual encounter, hot against cool; but the eyes of Chummy Potts having been beaten, his arguments and reproaches were not backed by the powerful looks which are an essential part of such eloquence as he commanded. They fled from his enemy's currishly, even while he was launching epithets. His pathetic position subjected him to beg that Woodseer would direct the driver to turn, for he had no knowledge of 'their German lingo.' And said he: 'You've nothing to laugh at, that I can see. I'm at your mercy, you brute; caught in a trap. I never walk;—and the sun fit to fry a mackerel along that road! I apologize for abusing you; I can't do more. You're an infernally clever player—there! And, upon my soul, I could drink ditchwater! But if you're going in for transactions at Carlsruhe, mark my words, your luck's gone. Laugh as much as you like.'

Woodseer happened to be smiling over the excellent reason for not turning back which inflicted the wofulness. He was not without sympathy for a thirsty wretch, and guessing, at the sight of an avenue of limes to the left of the road, that a wayside inn was below, he said: 'You can have coffee or beer in two minutes,' and told the driver where to pull up.

Page 3998

The sight of a grey-jacketed, green-collared sportsman, dog at heel, crossing the flat land to the hills of the forest, pricked him enviously, and caused him to ask what change had come upon him, that he should be hurrying to a town for a change of clothes. Just as Potts was about to jump out, a carriage, with a second behind it, left the inn door. He rubbed a hand on his unshaven chin, tried a glance at his shirt-front, and remarking: 'It won't be any one who knows me,' stood to let the carriages pass. In the first were a young lady and a gentleman: the lady brilliantly fair, an effect of auburn hair and complexion, despite the signs of a storm that had swept them and had not cleared from her eyelids. Apparently her maid, a damsel sitting straight up, occupied the carriage following; and this fresh-faced young person twice quickly and bluntly bent her head as she was driven by. Potts was unacquainted with the maid. But he knew the lady well, or well enough for her inattention to be the bigger puzzle. She gazed at the Black Forest hills in the steadiest manner, with eyes betraying more than they saw; which solved part of the puzzle, of course. Her reasons for declining to see him were exposed by the presence of the gentleman beside her. At the same time, in so highly bred a girl, a defenceless exposure was unaccountable. Half a nod and the shade of a smile would have been the proper course; and her going along on the road to the valley seemed to say it might easily have been taken; except that there had evidently been a bit of a scene.

Potts ranked Henrietta's beauty far above her cousin Livia's. He was therefore personally offended by her disregard of him, and her bit of a scene with the fellow carrying her off did him injury on behalf of his friend Fleetwood. He dismissed Woodseer curtly. Thirsting more to gossip than to drink, he took a moody draught of beer at the inn, and by the aid of a conveyance, hastily built of rotten planks to serve his needs, and drawn by a horse of the old wars,' as he reported on his arrival at Baden,—-reached that home of the maltreated innocents twenty minutes before the countess and her party were to start for lunch up the Lichtenthal. Naturally, he was abused for letting his bird fly: but as he was shaven, refreshed, and in clean linen, he could pull his shirt-cuffs and take seat at his breakfast-table with equanimity while Abrane denounced him.

'I'll bet you the fellow's luck has gone,' said Potts. 'He 's no new hand and you don't think him so either, Fleet. I've looked into the fellow's eye and seen a leery old badger at the bottom of it. Talks vile stuff. However, 'perhaps I didn't drive out on that sweltering Carlsruhe road for nothing.'

He screwed a look at the earl, who sent Abrane to carry a message and heard the story Potts had to tell.

Page 3999

’Henrietta Fakenham! no mistake about her; driving out from a pothouse; man beside her, military man; might be a German. And, if you please, quite unacquainted with your humble servant, though we were as close as you to me. Something went wrong in that pothouse. Red eyes. There had been a scene, one could swear. Behind the lady another carriage, and her maid. Never saw the girl before, and sets to bowing and smirking at me, as if I was the-fellow of all others! Comical. I made sure they were bound for this place. They were on the Strasburg road. No sign of them?’

‘You speak to me?’ said Fleetwood.

Potts muttered. He had put his foot into it.

‘You have a bad habit of speaking to yourself,’ Fleetwood remarked, and left him. He suffered from the rustics he had to deal with among his class, and it was not needed that he should thunder at them to make his wrath felt.

Livia swam in, asking: ’What has come to Russett? He passed me in one of his black fits.’

The tale of the Carlsruhe road was repeated by Potts. She reproved him. ’How could you choose Russett for such a report as that! The admiral was on the road behind. Henrietta—you’re sure it was she? German girls have much the same colouring. The gentleman with her must have been one of the Court equerries. They were driving to some chateau or battlefield the admiral wanted to inspect. Good-looking man? Military man?’

‘Oh! the man! pretty fair, I dare say,’ Potts rejoined. ’If it wasn’t Henrietta Fakenham, I see with the back of my head. German girl! The maid was a German girl.’

‘That may well be,’ said Livia.

She conceived the news to be of sufficient importance for her to countermand the drive up the Lichtenthal, and take the Carlsruhe road instead; for Henrietta was weak, and Chillon Kirby an arch-plotter, and pleader too, one of the desperate lovers. He was outstaying his leave of absence already, she believed; he had to be in England. If he feared to lose Henrietta, he would not hesitate to carry her off. Livia knew him, and knew the power of his pleading with a firmer woman than Henrietta.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRISONER OF HIS WORD

Nothing to rouse alarm was discovered at Carlsruhe. Livia’s fair cousin was there with the red-haired gaunt girl of the mountains; and it was frankly stated by Henrietta, that

she had accompanied the girl a certain distance along the Strasburg road, for her to see the last of her brother Chillon on his way to England. Livia was not the woman to push inquiries. On that subject, she merely said, as soon as they were alone together:

‘You seem to have had the lion’s share of the parting.’

‘Yes, we passed Mr. Chumley Potts,’ was Henrietta’s immediate answer; and her reference to him disarmed Livia.

They smiled at his name transiently, but in agreement: the tattler-spout of their set was, a fatal person to encounter, and each deemed the sudden apparition of him in the very early morning along the Carlsruhe road rather magical.

Page 4000

’You place particular confidence in Russett’s fidelity to his word, Riette—as you have been hearing yourself called. You should be serious by this time. Russett won’t bear much more. I counted on the night of the Ball for the grand effect. You will extinguish every woman there—and if he is absent?’

‘I shall excuse him.’

’You are not in a position to be so charitable. You ought to know your position, and yourself too, a little better than you do. How could you endure poverty? Chillon Kirby stands in his uniform, and all’s told. He can manoeuvre, we know. He got the admiral away to take him to those reviews cleverly. But is he thinking of your interests when he does it? He requires twenty years of active service to give you a roof to your head. I hate such allusions. But look for a moment at your character: you must have ordinary luxuries and pleasures, and if you were to find yourself grinding against common necessities—imagine it! Russett is quite manageable. He is, trust me! He is a gentleman; he has more ability than most young men: he can do anything he sets his mind to do. He has his great estates and fortune all in his own hands. We call him eccentric. He is only young, with a lot of power. Add, he’s in love, and some one distracts him. Not love, do you say?—you look it. He worships. He has no chance given him to show himself at his best. Perhaps he is off again now. Will you bet me he is not?’

‘I should incline to make the bet, if I betted,’ said Henrietta. ’His pride is in his word, and supposing he’s in love, it’s with his pride, which never quits him.’

’There’s firmness in a man who has pride of that kind. You must let me take you back to Baden. I hold to having you with me to-day. You must make an appearance there. The admiral will bring us his Miss Kirby to-morrow, if he is bound to remain here to-night. There’s no harm in his bachelor dinners. I suspect his twinges of gout come of the prospect of affairs when he lands in England. Remember our bill with Madame Clemence. There won’t be the ghost of a bank-note for me if Russett quits the field; we shall all be stranded.’

Henrietta inquired: ‘Does it depend on my going with you to-day?’

’Consider, that he is now fancying a thousand things. We won’t talk of the road to Paris.’

A shot of colour swept over Henrietta.

‘I will speak to papa:—if he can let me go. He has taken to Miss Kirby.’

‘Does she taste well?’

Henrietta debated. 'It's impossible to dislike her. Oh! she is wild! She knows absolutely nothing of the world. She can do everything we can't—or don't dare to try.—Men would like her. Papa's beginning to doat. He says she would have made a first-rate soldier. She fears blood as little as her morning cup of milk. One of the orderlies fell rather badly from a frightened horse close by our carriage. She was out in a

Page 4001

moment and had his head on her lap, calling to papa to keep the carriage fast and block the way of the squadron, for the man's leg was hurt. I really thought we were lost. At these manoeuvres anything may happen, at any instant. Papa will follow the horse-artillery. You know his vanity to be a military quite as much as a naval commander like the Greeks and Romans, he says. We took the bruised man into our carriage and drove him to camp, Carinthia nursing him on the way.'

'Carinthia! She's well fitted with her name. What with her name and her hair and her build and her singular style of attire, one wonders at her coming into civilized parts. She 's utterly unlike Chillon.'

Henrietta reddened at the mention of one of her own thoughts in the contrasting of the pair.

They had their points of likeness, she said.

It did not concern Livia to hear what these were. Back to Baden, with means to procure the pleasant shocks of the galvanic battery there, was her thought; for she had a fear of the earl's having again departed in a huff at Henrietta's behaviour.

The admiral consented that his daughter should go, as soon as he heard that Miss Kirby was to stay. He had when a young man met her famous father; he vowed she was the Old Buccaneer young again in petticoats and had made prize of an English man-of-war by storm; all the profit, however, being his. This he proved with a courteous clasp of the girl and a show of the salute on her cheek, which he presumed to take at the night's farewell. 'She's my tonic,' he proclaimed heartily. She seemed to Livia somewhat unstrung and toneless. The separation from her brother in the morning might account for it. And a man of the admiral's age could be excused if he exalted the girl. Senility, like infancy, is fond of plain outlines for the laying on of its paints. The girl had rugged brows, a short nose, red hair; no young man would look at her twice. She was utterly unlike Chillon! Kissing her hand to Henrietta from the steps of the hotel, the girl's face improved.

Livia's little squire, Sir Meeson Corby, ejaculated as they were driving down the main street, 'Fleetwood's tramp! There he goes. Now see, Miss Fakenham, the kind of object Lord Fleetwood picks up and calls friend!—calls that object friend! . . But, what? He has been to a tailor and a barber!'

'Stop the coachman. Run, tell Mr. Woodseer I wish him to join us,' Livia said, and Sir Meeson had to thank his tramp for a second indignity. He protested, he simulated remonstrance,—he had to go, really feeling a sickness.

The singular-looking person, whose necessities or sense of the decencies had, unknown to himself and to the others, put them all in motion that day, swung round

listening to the challenge to arms, as the puffy little man's delivery of the countess's message sounded. He was respectably clad, he thought, in the relief of his escape from the suit of clothes discarded, and he silently followed Sir Meeson's trot to the carriage. 'Should have mistaken you for a German to-day, sir,' the latter said, and trotted on.

Page 4002

‘A stout one,’ Woodseer replied, with his happy indifference to his exterior.

His dark lady’s eyes were kindly overlooking, like the heavens. Her fair cousin, to whom he bowed, awakened him to a perception of the spectacle causing the slight, quick arrest of her look, in an astonishment not unlike the hiccup in speech, while her act of courtesy proceeded. At once he was conscious of the price he paid for respectability, and saw the Teuton skin on the slim Cambrian, baggy at shoulders, baggy at seat, pinched at the knees, short at the heels, showing outrageously every spot where he ought to have been bigger or smaller. How accept or how reject the invitation to drive in such company to Baden!

‘You’re decided enough, sir, in your play, they tell me,’ the vindictive little baronet commented on his hesitation, and Woodseer sprang to the proffered vacant place. But he had to speak of his fly waiting for him at the steps of a certain hotel.

‘Best hotel in the town!’ Sir Beeson exclaimed pointedly to Henrietta, reading her constraint with this comical object before her. It was the admiral’s hotel they stopped at.

’Be so good as to step down and tell the admiral he is to bring Madame Clemence in his carriage to-morrow; and on your way, you will dismiss Mr. Woodseer’s fly,’ Livia mildly addressed her squire. He stared: again he had to go, muttering: ‘That nondescript’s footman!’ and his mischance in being checked and crossed and humiliated perpetually by a dirty-fisted vagabond impostor astounded him. He sent the flyman to the carriage for orders.

Admiral Fakenham and Carinthia descended. Sir Meeson heard her cry out: ‘Is it you!’ and up stood the pretentious lout in the German sack, affecting the graces of a born gentleman fresh from Paris,—bowing, smirking, excusing himself for something; and he jumped down to the young lady, he talked intimately with her, with a joker’s air; he roused the admiral to an exchange of jokes, and the countess and Miss Fakenham more than smiled; evidently at his remarks, unobservant of the preposterous figure he cut. Sir Meeson Corby had intimations of the disintegration of his country if a patent tramp burlesquing in those clothes could be permitted to amuse English ladies of high station, quite at home with them. Among the signs of England’s downfall, this was decidedly one. What to think of the admiral’s favourite when, having his arm paternally on her shoulder, she gave the tramp her hand at parting, and then blushed! All that the ladies had to say about it was, that a spread of colour rather went to change the character of her face.

Page 4003

Carinthia had given Woodseer her hand and reddened under the recollection of Chillon's words to her as they mounted the rise of the narrow vale, after leaving the lame gentleman to his tobacco on the grass below the rocks. Her brother might have counselled her wisely and was to be obeyed. Only, the great pleasure in seeing the gentleman again inspired gratitude: he brought the scene to her; and it was alive, it chatted and it beckoned; it neighboured her home; she had passed it on her walk away from her home; the gentleman was her link to the mountain paths; he was just outside an association with her father and mother. At least, her thinking of them led to him, he to them. Now that she had lost Chillon, no one was near to do so much. Besides, Chillon loved Henrietta; he was her own. His heart was hers and his mind his country's. This gentleman loved the mountains; the sight of him breathed mountain air. To see him next day was her anticipation: for it would be at the skirts of hilly forest land, where pinetrees are a noble family, different from the dusty firs of the weariful plains, which had tired her eyes of late.

Baden was her first peep at the edges of the world since she had grown to be a young woman. She had but a faint idea of the significance of gambling. The brilliant lights, the band music, the sitting groups and company of promenaders were novelties; the Ball of the ensuing night at the Schloss would be a wonder, she acknowledged in response to Henrietta, who was trying to understand her; and she admired her ball-dress, she said, looking unintelligently when she heard that she would be guilty of slaying numbers of gentlemen before the night was over. Madame Clemence thought her chances in that respect as good as any other young lady's, if only she could be got to feel interested. But at a word of the pine forest, and saying she intended to climb the hills early with the light in the morning, a pointed eagerness flushed Carinthia, the cold engraving became a picture of colour.

She was out with the earliest light. Yesterday's parting between Chillon and Henrietta had taught her to know some little about love; and if her voice had been heeded by Chillon's beloved, it would not have been a parting. Her only success was to bring a flood of tears from Henrietta. The tears at least assured her that her brother's beautiful girl had no love for the other one,—the young nobleman of the great wealth, who was to be at the Ball, and had 'gone flying,' Admiral Fakenham shrugged to say; for Lord Fleetwood was nowhere seen.

Page 4004

The much talk of him on the promenade overnight fetched his name to her thoughts; he scarcely touched a mind that her father filled when she was once again breathing early morning air among the stems of climbing pines, broken alleys of the low-sweeping spruce branches and the bare straight shafts carrying their heads high in the march upward. Her old father was arch-priest of such forest land, always recoverable to her there. The suggestion of mountains was enough to make her mind play, and her old father and she were aware of one another without conversing in speech. He pointed at things to observe; he shared her satisfied hunger for the solitudes of the dumb and growing and wild sweet-smelling. He would not let a sorrowful thought backward or an apprehensive idea forward disturb the scene. A half-uprooted pine-tree stem propped mid-fall by standing comrades, and the downy drop to ground and muted scurry up the bark of long-brush squirrels, cocktail on the wary watch, were noticed by him as well as by her; even the rotting timber drift, bark and cones on the yellow pine needles, and the tortuous dwarf chestnut pushing level out, with a strain of the head up, from a crevice of mossed rock, among ivy and ferns; he saw what his girl saw. Power of heart was her conjuring magician.

She climbed to the rock-slabs above. This was too easily done. The poor bit of effort excited her frame to desire a spice of danger, her walk was towering in the physical contempt of a mountain girl for petty lowland obstructions. And it was just then, by the chance of things—by the direction of events, as Dame Gossip believes it to be—while colour, expression, and her proud stature marked her from her sex, that a gentleman, who was no other than Lord Fleetwood, passed Carinthia, coming out of the deeper pine forest.

Some distance on, round a bend of the path, she was tempted to adventure by a projected forked head of a sturdy blunted and twisted little rock-fostered forest tree pushing horizontally for growth about thirty feet above the lower ground. She looked on it, and took a step down to the stem soon after.

Fleetwood had turned and followed, merely for the final curious peep at an unexpected vision; he had noticed the singular shoot of thick timber from the rock, and the form of the goose-neck it rose to, the sprout of branches off the bill in the shape of a crest. And now a shameful spasm of terror seized him at sight of a girl doing what he would have dreaded to attempt. She footed coolly, well-balanced, upright. She seated herself.

And there let her be. She was a German girl, apparently. She had an air of breeding, something more than breeding. German families of the nobles give out, here and there, as the Great War showed examples of, intrepid young women, who have the sharp lines of character to render them independent of the graces. But, if a young woman out alone in the woods was hardly to be counted among the well-born, she held rank above them. Her face and bearing might really be taken to symbolize the forest life. She was as individual a representative as the Tragic and Comic masks, and should be got to

stand between them for sign of the naturally straight-growing untrained, a noble daughter of the woods.

Page 4005

Not comparable to Henrietta in feminine beauty, she was on an upper plateau, where questions as to beauty are answered by other than the shallow aspect of a girl. But would Henrietta eclipse her if they were side by side? Fleetwood recalled the strange girl's face. There was in it a savage poignancy in serenity unexampled among women—or modern women. One might imagine an apotheosis of a militant young princess of Goths or Vandals, the glow of blessedness awakening her martial ardours through the languor of the grave:—Woodseer would comprehend and hit on the exact image to portray her in a moment, Fleetwood thought, and longed for that fellow.

He walked hurriedly back to the stunted rock tree. The damsel had vanished. He glanced below. She had not fallen. He longed to tell Woodseer he had seen a sort of Carinthia sister, cousin, one of the family. A single glimpse of her had raised him out of his grovelling perturbations, cooled and strengthened him, more than diverting the course of the poison Henrietta infused, and to which it disgraced him to be so subject. He took love unmanfully; the passion struck at his weakness; in wrath at the humiliation, if only to revenge himself for that, he could be fiendish; he knew it, and loathed the desired fair creature who caused and exposed to him these cracks in his nature, whence there came a brimstone stench of the infernal pits. And he was made for better. Of this he was right well assured. Superior to station and to wealth, to all mundane advantages, he was the puppet of a florid puppet girl; and he had slept at the small inn of a village hard by, because it was intolerable to him to see the face that had been tearful over her lover's departure, and hear her praises of the man she trusted to keep his word, however grievously she wounded him.

He was the prisoner of his word;—rather like the donkeys known as married men: rather more honourable than most of them. He had to be present at the ball at the Schloss and behold his loathed Henrietta, suffer torture of chains to the rack, by reason of his having promised the bitter coquette he would be there. So hellish did the misery seem to him, that he was relieved by the prospect of lying a whole day long in loneliness with the sunshine of the woods, occasionally conjuring up the antidote face of the wood-sprite before he was to undergo it. But, as he was not by nature a dreamer, only dreamed of the luxury of being one, he soon looked back with loathing on a notion of relief to come from the state of ruminating animal, and jumped up and shook off another of men's delusions—that they can, if they have the heart to suffer pain, deaden it with any semi-poetical devices, similar to those which Rufus Abrane's 'fiddler fellow' practised and was able to carry out because he had no blood. The spite of a present entire opposition to Woodseer's professed views made him exult in the thought, that the mouther of sentences was likely to be at work stultifying them and himself in the halls there below during the day. An imp of mischief offered consolatory sport in those halls of the Black Goddess; already he regarded his recent subservience to the conceited and tripped peripatetic philosopher as among the ignominies he had cast away on his road to a general contempt; which is the position of a supreme elevation for particularly sensitive young men.

Page 4006

Pleasure in the scenery had gone, and the wood-sprite was a flitted vapour; he longed to be below there, observing Abrane and Potts and the philosopher confounded, and the legible placidity of Countess Livia. Nevertheless, he hung aloft, feeding where he could, impatient of the solitudes, till night, when, according to his guess, the ladies were at their robing.

Half the fun was over: but the tale of it, narrated in turn by Abrane and his Chummy Potts on the promenade, was a very good half. The fiddler had played for the countess and handed her back her empty purse, with a bow and a pretty speech. Nothing had been seen of him since. He had lost all his own money besides. 'As of course he would,' said Potts. 'A fellow calculating the chances catches at a knife in the air.'

'Every franc-piece he had!' cried Abrane. 'And how could the jackass expect to keep his luck! Flings off his old suit and comes back here with a rig of German bags—you never saw such a figure!—Shoreditch Jew's holiday!—why, of course, the luck wouldn't stand that.'

They confessed ruefully to having backed him a certain distance, notwithstanding. 'He took it so coolly, just as if paying for goods across a counter.'

'And he had something to bear, Braney, when you fell on him,' said Potts, and murmured aside: 'He can be smartish. Hears me call Braney Rufus, and says he, like a fellow-chin on his fiddle—"Captain Mountain, Rufus Mus'. Not bad, for a counter."'

Fleetwood glanced round: he could have wrung Woodseer's hand. He saw young Cressett instead, and hailed him: 'Here you are, my gallant! You shall flash your maiden sword tonight. When I was under your age by a long count, I dealt sanctimoniousness a flick o' the cheek, and you shall, and let 'em know you're a man. Come and have your first boar-hunt along with me. Petticoats be hanged.'

The boy showed some recollection of the lectures of his queen, but he had not the vocables for resistance to an imperative senior at work upon sneaking inclinations. 'Promised Lady F.'—do you hear him?' Fleetwood called to the couple behind; and as gamblers must needs be parasites, manly were the things they spoke to invigorate the youthful plunger and second the whim of their paymaster.

At half-past eleven, the prisoner of his word entered under the Schloss partico, having vowed to himself on the way, that he would satisfy the formulas to gain release by a deferential bow to the great personages, and straightway slip out into the heavenly starlight, thence down among the jolly Parisian and Viennese Bacchanals.

CHAPTER XII

HENRIETTA'S LETTER TREATING OF THE GREAT EVENT

By the first light of an autumn morning, Henrietta sat at her travelling-desk, to shoot a spark into the breast of her lover with the story of the great event of the night. For there had been one, one of our biggest, beyond all tongues and trumpets and possible anticipations. Wonder at it hammered on incredulity as she wrote it for fact, and in writing had vision of her lover's eyes over the page.

Page 4007

’Monsieur Du Lac!

’Grey Dawn. ’You are greeted. This, if you have been tardy on the journey home, will follow close on the heels of the prowest, I believe truest, of knights, and bear perhaps to his quick mind some help to the solution he dropped a hint of seeking.

’The Ball in every way a success. Grand Duke and Duchess perfect in courtesy, not a sign of the German morgue. Livia splendid. Compared to Day and Night. But the Night eclipses the Day. A summer sea of dancing. Who, think you, eclipsed those two?

’I tell you the very truth when I say your Carinthia did. If you had seen her,—the “poor dear girl” you sigh to speak of,—with the doleful outlook on her fortunes: “portionless, unattractive!” Chillon, she was magical!

You cannot ever have seen her irradiated with happiness. Her pleasure in the happiness of all around her was part of the charm. One should be a poet to describe her. It would task an artist to paint the rose-crystal she became when threading her way through the groups to be presented. This is not meant to say that she looked beautiful. It was the something above beauty—more unique and impressive—like the Alpine snow-cloak towering up from the flowery slopes you know so well and I a little.

’You choose to think, is it Riette who noticed my simple sister so closely before . . . ? for I suppose you to be reading this letter a second time and reflecting as you read. In the first place, acquaintance with her has revealed that she is not the simple person—only in her manner. Under the beams of subsequent events, it is true I see her more picturesquely. But I noticed also just a suspicion of the “grenadier” stride when she was on the march to make her curtsey. But Livia had no cause for chills and quivers. She was not the very strange bird requiring explanatory excuses; she dances excellently, and after the first dance, I noticed she minced her steps in the walk with her partner. She catches the tone readily. If not the image of her mother, she has inherited her mother’s bent for the graces; she needs but a small amount of practice.

’Take my assurance of that; and you know who has critical eyes. Your anxiety may rest; she is equal to any station.

’As expected by me, my Lord Tyrant appeared, though late, near midnight. I saw him bowing to the Ducal party. Papa had led your “simple sister” there. Next I saw the Tyrant and Carinthia conversing. Soon they were dancing together, talking interestedly, like cheerful comrades. Whatever his faults, he has the merit of being a man of his word. He said he would come, he did not wish to come, and he came.

’His word binds him—I hope not fatally; irrevocably, it certainly does. There is charm of character in that. His autocrat airs can be forgiven to a man who so profoundly respects his word.

’It occurred during their third dance. Your Riette was not in the quadrille. O but she was a snubbed young woman last night! I refrain—the examples are too minute for quotation.

Page 4008

’A little later and he had vanished. Carinthia Kirby may already be written Countess of Fleetwood! His hand was offered and hers demanded in plain terms. Her brother would not be so astounded if he had seen the brilliant creature she was—is, I could say; for when she left me here, to go to her bed, she still wore the “afterglow.” She tripped over to me in the ball-room to tell me. I might doubt, she had no doubt whatever. I fancied he had subjected her to some degree of trifling. He was in a mood. His moods are known to me. But no, he was precise; her report of him strikes the ear as credible, in spite of the marvel it insists on our swallowing.

“’Lord Fleetwood had asked me to marry him.” Neither assurance nor bashfulness; newspaper print; aid an undoubting air of contentment.

’Imagine me hearing it.

’"To be his wife?”

’"He said wife.”

’"And you replied?”

’"I—said I would.”

’"Tell me all?”

’"He said we were plighted.”

’Now, “wife” is one of the words he abhors; and he loathes the hearing of a girl as “engaged.” However, “plighted” carried a likeness.

’I pressed her: “My dear Carinthia, you thought him in earnest?”

’"He was.”

’"How do you judge?”

’"By his look when he spoke.”

’"Not by his words?”

“’I repeat them to you.”

’She has repeated them to me here in my bedroom. There is no variation. She remembers every syllable. He went so far as to urge her to say whether she would as willingly utter consent if they were in a church and a clergyman at the altar-rails.

’That was like him.

’She made answer: “Wherever it may be, I am bound, if I say yes.”

’She then adds: “He told me he joined hands with me.”

’"Did he repeat the word ’wife’?”

’"He said it twice.”

’I transcribe verbatim scrupulously. There cannot be an error, Chillon. It seems to show, that he has embraced the serious meaning of the word—or seriously embraced the meaning, reads’ better. I have seen his lips form “wife.”

’But why wonder so staringly? They both love the mountains. Both are wildish. She was looking superb. And he had seen her do a daring thing on the rocks on the heights in the early morning, when she was out by herself, unaware of a spectator, he not knowing who she was;—the Fates had arranged it so. That was why he took to her so rapidly. So he told her. She likes being admired. The preparation for the meeting does really seem “under direction.” She likes him too, I do think. Between her repetitions of his compliments, she praised his tone of voice, his features. She is ready to have the fullest faith in the sincerity of his offer; speaks without any impatience for the fulfilment. If it should happen, what a change in the fortunes of a girl—of more than one, possibly.

Page 4009

’Now I must rest “eyelids fall.” It will be with a heart galloping. No rest for me till this letter flies. Good morning is my good night to you, in a world that has turned over.’

Henrietta resumes:

’Livia will not hear of it, calls up all her pretty languor to put it aside. It is the same to-day as last night. “Why mention Russett’s nonsense to me?” Carinthia is as quietly circumstantial as at first. She and the Tyrant talked of her native home. Very desirous to see it! means to build a mansion there! “He said it must be the most romantic place on earth.”

’I suppose I slept. I woke with my last line to you on my lips, and the great news thundering. He named Esslemont and his favourite—always uninhabited—Cader Argau. She speaks them correctly. She has an unfailing memory. The point is, that it is a memory.

’Do not forget also—Livia is affected by her distaste—that he is a gentleman. He plays with his nobility. With his reputation of gentleman, he has never been known to play. You will understand the slightly hypocritical air—it is not of sufficient importance for it to be alluded to in papa’s presence—I put on with her.

’Yes, I danced nearly all the dances. One, a princeling in scarlet uniform, appearing fresh from under earth; Prussian: a weighty young Graf in green, between sage and bottle, who seemed to have run off a tree in the forest, and was trimmed with silver like dew-drops: one in your Austrian white, dragon de Boheme, if I caught his French rightly. Others as well, a list. They have the accomplishment. They are drilled in it young, as girls are, and so few Englishmen—even English officers. How it may be for campaigning, you can pronounce; but for dancing, the pantalon collant is the perfect uniform. Your critical Henrietta had not to complain of her partners, in the absence of the one.

’I shall be haunted by visions of Chillon’s amazement until I hear or we meet. I serve for Carinthia’s mouthpiece, she cannot write it, she says. It would be related in two copybook lines, if at all.

’The amazement over London! The jewel hand of the kingdom gone in a flash, to “a raw mountain girl,” as will be said. I can hear Lady Endor, Lady Eldritch, Lady Cowry. The reasonable woman should be Lady Arpington. I have heard her speak of your mother, seen by her when she was in frocks.

’Enter the “plighted.” Poor Livia! to be made a dowager of by any but a damsel of the family. She may well ridicule “that nonsense of Russett’s last night”! Carinthia kisses, embraces, her brother. I am to say: “What Henrietta tells you is true, Chillon.” She is

contented though she has not seen him again and has not the look of expecting to see him. She still wears the kind of afterglow.

'Chillon's Viennese waltz was played by the band: played a second time, special request, conveyed to the leader by Prince Ferdinand. True, most true, she longs to be home across the water. But be it admitted, that to any one loving colour, music, chivalry, the Island of Drab is an exile. Imagine, then, the strange magnetism drawing her there! Could warmer proof be given?

Page 4010

’Adieu. Livia’s “arch-plotter” will weigh the letter he reads to the smallest fraction of a fraction before he moves a step.

’I could leave it and come to it again and add and add. I foresee in Livia’s mind a dread of the aforesaid “arch,” and an interdict. So the letter must be closed, sealed and into the box, with the hand I still call mine, though I should doubt my right if it were contested fervently. I am singing the waltz.

’Adieu,
’Ever and beyond it,
’Your obedient Queen,
’*Henrietta*.

’P.S.-My Lord Tyrant has departed—as on other occasions. The prisoner of his word is sure to take his airing before he presents himself to redeem it. His valet is left to pay bills, fortunately for Livia. She entrusted her purse yesterday to a man picked up on the road by my lord, that he might play for her. Captain Abrane assured her he had a star, and Mr. Potts thought him a rush compere, an adept of those dreadful gambling tables. Why will she continue to play! The purse was returned to her, without so much as a piece of silver in it; the man has flown. Sir M. Corby says, he is a man whose hands betray him—or did to Sir M.; expects to see him one day on the wrong side of the criminal bar. He struck me as not being worse than absurd. He was, in any case, an unfit companion, and our C. would help to rescue the Eccentric from such complicating associates. I see worlds of good she may do. Happily, he is no slave of the vice of gambling; so she would not suffer that anxiety. I wish it could be subjoined, that he has no malicious pleasure in misleading others. Livia is inconsolable over her pet, young Lord Cressett, whom he yesterday induced to “try his luck”—with the result. We leave, if bills are paid, in two days. Captain Abrane and Mr. Potts left this afternoon; just enough to carry them home. Papa and your blissful sister out driving. Riette within her four walls and signing herself,

‘*The prisoner of chillon*.’

CHAPTER XIII

AN IRRUPTION. OF MISTRESS GOSSIP IN BREACH OF THE CONVENTION

‘It is a dark land,’ Carinthia said, on seeing our Island’s lowered clouds in swift motion, without a break of their folds, above the sheer white cliffs.

—She said it, we know. That poor child Carinthia Jane, when first she beheld Old England’s shores, tossing in the packet-boat on a wild Channel sea, did say it and think it, for it is in the family that she did; and no wonder that she should, the day being

showery from the bed of the sun, after a frosty three days, at the close of autumn. We used to have an eye of our own for English weather before printed Meteorological Observations and Forecasts undertook to supplant the shepherd and the poacher, and the pilot with his worn brown leather telescope tucked beneath his arm. All three would have told you, that the end of a three days' frost in the late season of the year and the early, is likely to draw the warm winds from the Atlantic over Cornish Land's End and Lizard.

Page 4011

Quite by chance of things, Carinthia Jane looked on the land of her father and mother for the first time under those conditions. There can be no harm in quoting her remark. Only—I have to say it—experience causes apprehension, that we are again to be delayed by descriptions, and an exposition of feelings; taken for granted,—of course, in a serious narrative; which it really seems these moderns think designed for a frequent arrest of the actors in the story and a searching of the internal state of this one or that one of them: who is laid out stark naked and probed and expounded, like as in the celebrated picture by a great painter—and we, thirsting for events as we are, are to stop to enjoy a lecture on Anatomy. And all the while the windows of the lecture-room are rattling, if not the whole fabric shaking, with exterior occurrences or impatience for them to come to pass. Every explanation is sure to be offered by the course events may take; so do, in mercy, I say, let us bide for them.

She thought our Island all the darker because Henrietta had induced her to talk on the boat of her mountain home and her last morning there for the walk away with Chillon John. Soon it was to appear supernaturally bright, a very magician's cave for brilliancy.

Now, this had happened—and comment on it to yourselves, remembering always, that Chillon John was a lover, and a lover has his excuses, though they will not obviate the penalties he may incur; and dreadful they were. After reading Henrietta's letter to him, he rode out of his Canterbury quarters across the country to the borders of Sussex, where his uncle Lord Levellier lived, on the ridge of ironstone, near the wild land of a forest, Croridge the name of the place. Now, Chillon John knew his uncle was miserly, and dreaded the prospect of having to support a niece in the wretched establishment at Lekkatts, or, as it was popularly called, Leancats; you can understand why. But he managed to assure himself he must in duty consult with the senior and chief member of .his family on a subject of such importance as the proposal of marriage to his lordship's niece.

The consultation was short: 'You will leave it to me,' his uncle said: and we hear of business affairs between them, involving payment of moneys due to the young man; and how, whenever he touched on them, his uncle immediately fell back on the honour of the family and Carinthia Jane's reputation, her good name to be vindicated, and especially that there must be no delays, together with as close a reckoning as he could make of the value of Lord Fleetwood's estates in Kent and in Staffordshire and South Wales, and his house property in London.

'He will have means to support her,' said the old lord, shrugging as if at his own incapacity for that burden.

The two then went to the workshops beside a large pond, where there was an island bordered with birch trees and workmen's cottages near the main building; and that was an arsenal containing every kind of sword and lance and musket, rifle and fowling-piece

and pistol, and more gunpowder than was, I believe, allowed by law. For they were engaged in inventing a new powder for howitzer shells, of tremendous explosive power.

Page 4012

Nothing further did either of them say, concerning the marriage. Nor did Carinthia Jane hear any mention of Lord Fleetwood from her brother on the landingplace at Dover. She was taken to Admiral Baldwin Fakenham's house in Hampshire; and there she remained, the delight of his life, during two months, patiently expecting and rebuking the unmaidenliness of her expectations, as honest young women in her position used to do. So did they sometimes wait for years; they have waited until they withered into their graves, like the vapours of a brief winter's day: a moving picture of a sex restrained by modesty in those purer times from the taking of one step forward unless inquired for.

Two months she waited in our 'dark land.' January arrived, and her brother. Henrietta communicated the news:

'My Janey, you are asked by Lord Fleetwood whether it is your wish that he should marry you.'

Now, usually a well-born young woman's answer, if a willing one, is an example of weak translation. Here it was the heart's native tongue, without any roundabout, simple but direct.

'Oh, I will, I am ready, tell him.'

Remember, she was not speaking publicly.

Henrietta knew the man enough to be glad he did not hear. She herself would have felt a little shock on his behalf: only, that answer suited the scheme of the pair of lovers.

How far those two were innocent in not delivering the whole of Lord Fleetwood's message to Carinthia Jane through Lord Levellier, we are unable to learn. We may suspect the miserly nobleman of curtailing it for his purposes; and such is my idea. But the answer would have been the same, I am sure.

In consequence and straight away, Chillon John betakes him to Admiral Baldwin and informs him of Lord Fleetwood's proposal on the night at Baden, and renewal of it through the mouth of Lord Levellier, not communicating, however (he may really not have known), the story of how it had been wrung from the earl by a surprise movement on the part of the one-armed old lord, who burst out on him in the street from the ambush of a Club-window, where he had been stationed every day for a fortnight, indefatigably to watch for the passing of the earl, as there seemed no other way to find him. They say, indeed, there was a scene, judging by the result, and it would have been an excellent scene for the stage; though the two noblemen were to all appearance politely exchanging their remarks. But the audience hearing what passes, appreciates the courteous restraint of an attitude so contrasting with their tempers. Behind the ostentation of civility, their words were daggers.

Page 4013

For it chanced, that the young earl, after a period of refuge at his Welsh castle, supposing, as he well might, that his latest mad freak of the proposal of his hand and title to the strange girl in a quadrille at a foreign castle had been forgotten by her, and the risks of annoyance on the subject had quite blown over, returned to town, happy in having done the penance for his impulsiveness, and got clean again—that is to say, struck off his fetters and escaped from importunities—the very morning of the day when Lord Levellier sprang upon him! It shows the old campaigner's shrewdness in guessing where his prey would come, and not putting him on his guard by a call at his house. Out of the window he looked for all the hours of light during an entire fortnight. 'In the service of my sister's child,' he said. 'To save him from the cost of maintaining her,' say his enemies. At any rate he did it.

He was likely to have done the worse which I suspect.

Now, the imparting of the wonderful news to Admiral Baldwin Fakenham was, we read, the whiff of a tropical squall to lay him on his beam ends. He could not but doubt; and his talk was like the sails of a big ship rattling to the first puff of wind. He had to believe; and then, we read, he was for hours like a vessel rolling in the trough of the sea. Of course he was a disappointed father. Naturally his glance at the loss to Henrietta of the greatest prize of the matrimonial market of all Europe and America was vexing and saddening. Then he woke up to think of the fortunes of his 'other girl,' as he named her, and cried: 'Crinny catches him!'

He cried it in glee and rubbed his hands.

So thereupon, standing before him, Chillon John, from whom he had the news, bent to him slightly, as his elegant manner was, and lengthened the admiral's chaps with another proposal; easy, deliberate, precise, quite the respectful bandit, if you please, determined on having his daughter by all means, only much preferring the legal, formal, and friendly. Upon that, in the moment of indecision, Henrietta enters, followed by Admiral Baldwin's heroine, his Crinny, whom he embraced and kissed, congratulated and kissed again. One sees the contrivance to soften him.

So it was done, down in that Hampshire household on the heights near the downs, whence you might behold, off a terra firma resembling a roll of billows, England's big battle-ships in line fronting the island; when they were a spectacle of beauty as well as power: which now they are no more, but will have to be, if they are both to float and to fight. For I have, had quoted to me by a great admirer of the Old Buccaneer, one of the dark sayings in his *maxims for men*, where Captain John Peter Kirby commends his fellow-men to dissatisfaction with themselves if they have not put an end to their enemy handsomely.. And he advises the copying of Nature in this; whose elements have always, he says, a pretty, besides a

Page 4014

thorough, style of doing it, when they get the better of us; and the one by reason of the other. He instances the horse, the yacht, and chiefly the sword, for proof, that the handsomest is the most effective. And he prints large: '*Ugly is only half way to* A *thing*.' To an invention, I suppose he intends to say. But looking on our huge foundering sea-monsters and the disappearance of the unwieldy in Nature, and the countenances of criminals, who are, he bids us observe, always in the long run beaten, I seem to see a meaning our country might meditate on.

So, as I said, it was done; for Admiral Baldwin could refuse his Crinny nothing; as little as he would deny anything to himself, the heartiest of kindly hosts, fathers, friends. Carinthia Jane's grand good fortune covered that pit, the question of money, somehow, and was, we may conceive, a champagne wine in their reasoning faculties. The admiral was in debt, Henrietta had no heritage, Chillon John was the heir of a miserly uncle owing him sums and evading every application for them, yet they behaved as people who had the cup of golden wishes. Perhaps it was because Henrietta and her lover were so handsome a match as to make it seem to them and others they must marry; and as to character, her father could trust her to the man of her choice more readily than to the wealthy young nobleman; of whose discreetness he had not the highest opinion. He reconciled this view with his warm feeling for the Countess of Fleetwood to be, by saying: 'Crinny will tame him!' His faith was in her dauntless bold spirit, not thinking of the animal she was to tame.

Countess Livia, after receiving Henrietta's letter of information, descended on them and thought them each and all a crazed set. Love, as a motive of action for a woman, she considered the female's lunacy and suicide. Men are born subject to it, happily, and thus the balance between the lordly half of creation and the frail is rectified. We women dress, and smile, sigh, if you like, to excite the malady. But if we are the fools to share it, we lose our chance; instead of the queens, we are the slaves, and instead of a life of pleasure, we pass from fever to fever at a tyrant's caprice: he does rightly in despising us. Ay, and many a worthy woman thinks the same. Educated in dependency as they are, they come to the idea of love to snatch at it for their weapon of the man's weakness. For which my lord calls them heartless, and poets are angry with them, rightly or wrongly.

It must, I fear, be admitted for a truth, that sorrow is the portion of young women who give the full measure of love to the engagement, marrying for love. At least, Countess Livia could declare subsequently she had foretold it and warned her cousin. Not another reflection do you hear from me, if I must pay forfeit of my privilege to hurry you on past descriptions of places and anatomy of character and impertinent talk about philosophy in a story. When we are startled and offended by the insinuated tracing of principal incidents to a thread-bare spot in the nether garments of a man of no significance, I lose patience.

Page 4015

Henrietta's case was a secondary affair. What with her passion—it was nothing less—-and her lover's cunning arts, and her father's consent given, and in truth the look of the two together, the dissuasion of them from union was as likely to keep them apart as an exhortation addressed to magnet and needle. Countess Livia attacked Carinthia Jane and the admiral backing her. But the admiral, having given his consent to his daughter's marriage, in consequence of the earl's pledged word to 'his other girl,' had become a zealot for this marriage and there was only not a grand altercation on the subject because Livia shunned annoyances. Alone with Carinthia Jane, as she reported to Henrietta, she spoke to a block, that shook a head and wore a thin smile and nursed its own idea of the better knowledge of Edward Russett, Earl of Fleetwood, gained in the run of a silly quadrille at a ball:

What is a young man's word to his partner in a quadrille?

Livia put the question, she put it twice rather sternly, and the girl came out with: 'Oh, he meant it!'

The nature, the pride, the shifty and furious moods of Lord Fleetwood were painted frightful to her.

She had conceived her own image of him.

Whether to set her down as an enamoured idiot or a creature not a whit less artful than her brother, was Countess Livia's debate. Her inclination was to misdoubt the daughter of the Old Buccaneer: she might be simple, at her age, and she certainly was ignorant; but she clung to her prize. Still the promise was extracted from her, that she would not worry the earl to fulfil the word she supposed him to mean in its full meaning.

The promise was unreluctantly yielded. No, she would not write. Admiral Fakenham, too, engaged to leave the matter to a man of honour.

Meanwhile, Chillon John had taken a journey to Lekkatts; following which, his uncle went to London. Lord Fleetwood heard that Miss Kirby kept him bound. He was again the fated prisoner of his word.

And following that, not so very long, there was the announcement of the marriage of Chillon John Kirby Levellier, Lieutenant in the King's Own Hussars, and Henrietta, daughter of Admiral Baldwin Fakenham. A county newspaper paragraph was quoted for its eulogy of the Beauty of Hampshire—not too strong, those acquainted with her thought. Interest at Court obtained an advancement for the bridegroom: he was gazetted Captain during his honeymoon, and his prospects under his uncle's name were considerd fair, though certain people said at the time, it was likely to be all he would get while old Lord Levellier of Leancats remained in the flesh.

Page 4016

Now, as it is good for those to tell who intend preserving their taste for romance and hate anatomical lectures, we never can come to the exact motives of any extraordinary piece of conduct on the part of man or woman. Girls are to read; and the study of a boy starts from the monkey. But no literary surgeon or chemist shall explain positively the cause of the behaviour of men and women in their relations together; and speaking to rescue my story, I say we must with due submission accept the facts. We are not a bit the worse for wondering at them. So it happened that Lord Fleetwood's reply to Lord Levellier's hammer—hammer by post and messenger at his door, one may call it, on the subject of the celebration of the marriage of the young Croesus and Carinthia Jane, in which there was demand for the fixing of a date forthwith, was despatched on the day when London had tidings of Henrietta Pakenham's wedding.

The letter, lost for many years, turned up in the hands of a Kentish auctioneer, selling it on behalf of a farm-serving man, who had it from Lord Levellier's cook and housemaid, among the things she brought him as her wifely portion after her master's death, and this she had not found saleable in her husband's village at her price, but she had got the habit of sticking to the scraps, being proud of hearing it said that she had skinned Leancats to some profit: and her expectation proved correct after her own demise, for her husband putting it up at the auction; our relative on the mother's side, Dr. Glossop, interested in the documents and particulars of the story as he was, had it knocked down to him, in contest with an agent of a London gentleman, going as high as two pounds ten shillings, for the sum of two pounds and fifteen shillings. Count the amount that makes for each word of a letter a marvel of brevity, considering the purport! But Dr. Glossop was right in saying he had it cheap. The value of that letter may now be multiplied by ten: nor for that sum would he part with it.

Thus it ran, I need not refer to it in Bundle No. 3:

'*My lord*: I drive to your church-door on the fourteenth of the month
at ten A.M., to keep my appointment with Miss C. J. Kirby, if I do
not blunder the initials.
'Your lordship's obedient servant,
'*Fleetwood*.'

That letter will ever be a treasured family possession with us.

That letter was dated from Lord Fleetwood's Kentish mansion, Esslemont, the tenth of the month. He must have quitted London for Esslemont, for change of scene, for air, the moment after the news of Henrietta's marriage. Carinthia Jane received the summons without transmission of the letter from her uncle on the morning of the twelfth. It was a peremptory summons.

Page 4017

Unfortunately, Admiral Fakenham, a real knight and chevalier of those past times, would not let her mount the downs to have her farewell view of the big ships unaccompanied by him; and partly and largely in pure chivalry, no doubt; but her young idea of England's grandeur, as shown in her great vessels of war, thrilled him, too, and restored his youthful enthusiasm for his noble profession or made it effervesce. However it was, he rode beside her and rejoiced to hear the young girl's talk of her father as a captain of one of England's thunderers, and of the cruelty of that Admiralty to him: at which Admiral Baldwin laughed, but had not the heart to disagree with her, for he could belabour the Admiralty in season, cause or no cause. Altogether he much enjoyed the ride, notwithstanding intimations of the approach of 'his visitor,' as he called his attacks of gout.

Riding home, however, the couple passed through a heavy rainfall, and the next day, when he was to drive with the bride to Lekkatts, gout, the fiercest he had ever known, chained him fast to his bed. Such are the petty accidents affecting circumstances. They are the instruments of Destiny.

There he lay, protesting that the ceremony could not possibly be for the fourteenth, because Countess Livia had, he now remembered, written of her engagement to meet Russett on the night of that day at a ball at Mrs. Cowper Quillett's place, Canleys, lying south of the Surrey hills: a house famed for its gatherings of beautiful women; whither Lord Fleetwood would be sure to engage to go, the admiral now said; and it racked him like gout in his mind, and perhaps troubled his conscience about handing the girl to such a young man. But he was lying on his back, the posture for memory to play the fiend with us, as we read in the *book* of *maxims* of the Old Buccaneer. Admiral Baldwin wished heartily to be present at his Crinny's wedding 'to see her launched,' if wedding it was to be, and he vowed the date of the fourteenth, in Lord Levellier's announcement of it, must be an error and might be a month in advance, and ought to be. But it was sheer talking and raving for a solace to his disappointment or his anxiety. He had to let Carinthia Jane depart under the charge of his housekeeper, Mrs. Carthew, a staid excellent lady, poorly gifted with observation.

Her report of the performance of the ceremony at Croridge village church, a half mile from Lekkatts, was highly reassuring to the anxious old admiral still lying on his back with memory and gout at their fiend's play, and livid forecasts hovering. He had recollected that there had been no allusion in Lord Levellier's message to settlements or any lawyer's preliminaries, and he raged at himself for having to own it would have been the first of questions on behalf of his daughter.

'All passed off correctly,' Mrs. Carthew said. 'The responses of the bride and bridegroom were particularly articulate.'

Page 4018

She was reserved upon the question of the hospitality of Lekkatts. The place had entertained her during her necessitated residence there, and honour forbade her to smile concordantly at the rosy admiral's mention of Leancats. She took occasion, however, to praise the Earl of Fleetwood's eminently provident considerateness for his bride, inasmuch as he had packed a hamper in his vehicle, which was a four-in-hand, driven by himself.

Admiral Baldwin inquired: 'Bride inside?'

He was informed: 'The Countess of Fleetwood sat on the box on the left of my lord.'

She had made no moan about the absence of bridesmaids.

'She appeared too profoundly happy to meditate an instant upon deficiencies.'

'How did the bridegroom behave?'

'Lord Fleetwood was very methodical. He is not, or was not, voluntarily a talker.'

'Blue coat, brass buttons, hot-house flower? old style or new?'

'His lordship wore a rather low beaver and a buttoned white overcoat, not out of harmony with the bride's plain travelling-dress.'

'Ah! he's a good whip, men say. Keeps first-rate stables, hacks, and bloods. Esslemont hard by will be the place for their honeymoon, I guess. And he's a lucky dog, if he knows his luck.'

So said Admiral Baldwin. He was proceeding to say more, for he had a prodigious opinion of the young countess and the benefit of her marriage to the British race. As it concerned a healthy constitution and motherhood, Mrs. Carthew coughed and retired. Nor do I reprove either of them. The speculation and the decorum are equally commendable. Masculine ideas are one thing; but let feminine ever be feminine, or our civilization perishes.

At Croridge village church, then, one of the smallest churches in the kingdom, the ceremony was performed and duly witnessed, names written in the vestry book, the clergyman's fee, the clerk, and the pew-woman, paid by the bridegroom. And thus we see how a pair of lovers, blind with the one object of lovers in view; and a miserly uncle, all on edge to save himself the expense of supporting his niece; and an idolatrous old admiral, on his back with gout; conduced in turn and together to the marriage gradually exciting the world's wonder, till it eclipsed the story of the Old Buccaneer and Countess Fanny, which it caused to be discussed afresh.

Mrs. Carthew remembered Carinthia Jane's last maiden remark and her first bridal utterance. On the way, walking to the church of Croridge from Lekkatts, the girl said: 'Going on my feet, I feel I continue the mountain walk with my brother when we left our home.' And after leaving the church, about to mount the coach, she turned to Mrs. Carthew, saying, as she embraced her:

'A happy bride's kiss should bring some good fortune.' And looking down from her place on the top of the coach:

Page 4019

‘Adieu, dear Mrs. Carthew. A day of glory it is to-day.’ She must actually have had it in her sight as a day of glory: and it was a day of the clouds off our rainy quarter, similar in every way to the day of her stepping on English soil and saying: ‘It is a dark land.’ For the heart is truly declared to be our colourist. A day having the gale in its breast, sweeping the whole country and bending the trees for the twigs to hiss like spray of the billows around our island, was a day of golden splendour to the young bride of the Earl of Fleetwood, though he scarcely addressed one syllable to her, and they sat side by side all but dumb, he like a coachman driving an unknown lady fare, on a morning after a night when his wife’s tongue may have soured him for the sex.

CHAPTER XIV

A PENDANT OF THE FOREGOING

Mention has been omitted or forgotten by the worthy Dame, in her vagrant fowl’s treatment of a story she cannot incubate, will not relinquish, and may ultimately addle, that the bridegroom, after walking with a disengaged arm from the little village church at Croridge to his coach and four at the cross of the roads to Lekkatts and the lowland, abruptly, and as one pursuing a deferential line of conduct he had prescribed to himself, asked his bride, what seat she would prefer.

He shouted: ‘Ives!’

A person inside the coach appeared to be effectually roused.

The glass of the window dropped. The head of a man emerged. It was the head of one of the bargefaced men of the British Isles, broad, and battered flattish, with sentinel eyes.

In an instant the heavy-headed but not ill-looking fellow was nimble and jumped from the coach.

‘Napping, my lord,’ he said.

Heavy though the look of him might be, his feet were light; they flipped a bar of a hornpipe at a touch of the ground. Perhaps they were allowed to go with their instinct for the dance, that his master should have a sample of his wakefulness. He quenched a smirk and stood to take orders; clad in a flat blue cap, a brown overcoat, and knee-breeches, as the temporary bustle of his legs had revealed.

Fleet-wood heard the young lady say: ’I would choose, if you please, to sit beside you.’

He gave a nod of enforced assent, glancing at the vacated box.

The man inquired: ‘A knee and a back for the lady to mount up, my lord?’

‘In!’ was the smart command to him; and he popped in with the agility of his popping out.

Then Carinthia made reverence to the grey lean figure of her uncle and kissed Mrs. Carthew. She needed no help to mount the coach. Fleetwood’s arm was rigidly extended, and he did not visibly wince when this foreign girl sprang to the first hand-grip on the coach and said: ’No, my husband, I can do it’; unaided,’ was implied.

Her stride from the axle of the wheel to the step higher would have been a graceful spectacle on Alpine crags.

Page 4020

Fleetwood swallowed that, too, though it conjured up a mocking recollection of the Baden woods, and an astonished wild donkey preparing himself for his harness. A sour relish of the irony in his present position sharpened him to devilish enjoyment of it, as the finest form of loathing: on the principle that if we find ourselves consigned to the nether halls, we do well to dance drunkenly. He had cried for Romance—here it was!

He raised his hat to Mrs. Carthew and to Lord Levellier. Previous to the ceremony, the two noblemen had interchanged the short speech of mannered duellists punctiliously courteous in the opening act. Their civility was maintained at the termination of the deadly work. The old lord's bosom thanked the young one for not requiring entertainment and a repast; the young lord's thanked the old one for a strict military demeanour at an execution and the abstaining from any nonsensical talk over the affair.

A couple of liveried grooms at the horses' heads ran and sprang to the hinder seats as soon as their master had taken the reins. He sounded the whip caressingly: off those pretty trotters went.

Mrs. Carthew watched them, waving to the bride. She was on the present occasion less than usually an acute or a reflective observer, owing to her admiration of lordly state and masculine commandership; and her thought was: 'She has indeed made a brilliant marriage!'

The lady thought it, notwithstanding an eccentricity in the wedding ceremony, such as could not but be noticeable. But very wealthy noblemen were commonly, perhaps necessarily, eccentric, for thus they proved themselves egregious, which the world expected them to be.

Lord Levellier sounded loud eulogies of the illustrious driver's team. His meditation, as he subsequently stated to Chillon, was upon his vanquished antagonist's dexterity, in so conducting matters, that he had to be taken at once, with naught of the customary preface and apology for taking to himself the young lady, of which a handsome settlement, is the memorial.

We have to suppose, that the curious occupant of the coach inside aroused no curiosity in the pair of absorbed observers.

Speculations regarding the chances of a fall of rain followed the coach until it sank and the backs of the two liveried grooms closed the chapter of the wedding, introductory to the honeymoon at Esslemont, seven miles distant by road, to the right of Lekkatts. It was out of sight that the coach turned to the left, Northwestward.

CHAPTER XV

OPENING STAGE OF THE HONEYMOON

A famous maxim in the book of the Old Buccaneer, treating of *precaution*, as ‘The brave man’s clean conscience,’ with sound counsel to the adventurous, has it:—

’Then you sail away into the tornado, happy as a sealed bottle of ripe wine.’

It should mean, that brave men entering the jaws of hurricanes are found to have cheerful hearts in them when they know they have done their best. But, touching the picture of happiness, conceive the bounteous Bacchic spirit in the devoutness of a Sophocles, and you find comparison neighbour closely between the sealed wine-flask and the bride, who is being driven by her husband to the nest of the unknown on her marriage morn.

Page 4021

Seated beside him, with bosom at heave and shut mouth, in a strange land, travelling cloud-like, rushing like the shower-cloud to the vale, this Carinthia, suddenly wedded, passionately grateful for humbleness exalted, virginly sensible of treasures of love to give, resembled the inanimate and most inspiring, was mindless and inexpressive, past memory, beyond the hopes, a thing of the thrilled blood and skylark air, since she laid her hand in this young man's. His not speaking to her was accepted. Her blood rather than recollection revived their exchanges during the dance at Baden, for assurance that their likings were one, their aims rapturously one; that he was she, she he, the two hearts making one soul.

Could she give as much as he? It was hardly asked. If we feel we can give our breath of life, the strength of the feeling fully answers. It bubbles perpetually from the depth like a well-spring in tumult. Two hearts that make one soul do not separately count their gifts.

For the rest, her hunger to admire disposed her to an absorbing sentience of his acts; the trifles, gestures, manner of this and that; which were seized as they flew, and swiftly assimilated to stamp his personality. Driving was the piece of skill she could not do. Her husband's mastery of the reins endowed him with the beauty of those harmonious trotters he guided and kept to their pace; and the humming rush of the pace, the smooth torrent of the brown heath-knolls and reddish pits and hedge-lines and grass-flats and copses pouring the counter-way of her advance, belonged to his wizardry. The bearing of her onward was her abandonment to him. Delicious as mountain air, the wind sang; it had a song of many voices. Quite as much as on the mountains, there was the keen, the blissful, nerve-knotting catch of the presence of danger in the steep descents, taken as if swallowed, without swerve or check. She was in her husband's hands. At times, at the pitch of a rapid shelving, that was like a fall, her heart went down; and at the next throb exalted before it rose, not reasoning why;—her confidence was in him; she was his comrade whatever chanced. Up over the mountain-peaks she had known edged moments, little heeded in their passage, when life is poised as a crystal pitcher on the head, in peril of a step. Then she had been dependent on herself. Now she had the joy of trusting to her husband.

His hard leftward eye had view of her askant, if he cared to see how she bore the trial; and so relentlessly did he take the slopes, that the man inside pushed out an inquiring pate, the two grooms tightened arms across their chests. Her face was calmly set, wakeful, but unwrinkled: the creature did not count among timid girls—or among civilized. She had got what she wanted from her madman—mad in his impulses, mad in his reading of honour. She was the sister of Henrietta's husband. Henrietta bore the name she had quitted. Could madness go beyond the marrying of the creature? He chafed at her containment, at her courage, her silence, her withholding the brazen or the fawnish look-up, either of which he would have hated.

Page 4022

He, however, was dragged to look down. Neither Gorgon nor Venus, nor a mingling of them, she had the chasm of the face, recalling the face of his bondage, seen first that night at Baden. It recalled and it was not the face; it was the skull of the face, or the flesh of the spirit. Occasionally she looked, for a twinkle or two, the creature or vision she had been, as if to mock by reminding him. She was the abhorred delusion, who captured him by his nerves, ensnared his word—the doing of a foul witch. How had it leapt from his mouth? She must have worked for it. The word spoken—she must have known it—he was bound, or the detested Henrietta would have said: Not even true to his word!

To see her now, this girl, insisting to share his name, for a slip of his tongue, despite the warning sent her through her uncle, had that face much as a leaden winter landscape pretends to be the country radiant in colour. She belonged to the order of the variable animals—a woman indeed!—womanish enough in that. There are men who love women—the idea of woman. Woman is their shepherdess of sheep. He loved freedom, loathed the subjection of a partnership; could undergo it only in adoration of an ineffable splendour. He had stepped to the altar fancying she might keep to her part of the contract by appearing the miracle that subdued him. Seen by light of day, this bitter object beside him was a witch without her spells; that is, the skeleton of the seductive, ghastliest among horrors and ironies. Let her have the credit of doing her work thoroughly before the exposure. She had done it. She might have helped—such was the stipulation of his mad freak in consenting to the bondage—yes, she might have helped to soften the sting of his wound. She was beside him bearing his name, for the perpetual pouring of an acid on the wound that vile Henrietta—poisoned honey of a girl! —had dealt.

He glanced down at his possession:—heaven and the yawning pit were the contrast! Poisoned honey is after all honey while you eat it. Here there was nothing but a rocky bowl of emptiness. And who was she? She was the sister of Henrietta’s husband. He was expected to embrace the sister of Henrietta’s husband. Those two were on their bridal tour.

This creature was also the daughter of an ancient impostor and desperado called the Old Buccaneer; a distinguished member of the family of the Lincolnshire Kirbys, boasting a present representative grimly acquitted, men said, on a trial for murder. An eminent alliance! Society considered the Earl of Fleetwood wildish, though he could manage his affairs. He and his lawyers had them under strict control. How of himself? The prize of the English marriage market had taken to his bosom for his winsome bride the daughter of the Old Buccaneer. He was to mix his blood with the blood of the Lincolnshire Kirbys, lying pallid under the hesitating acquittal of a divided jury.

How had he come to this pass, which swung him round to think almost regretfully of the scorned multitude of fair besiegers in the market, some of whom had their unpoetic charms?

Page 4023

He was renowned and unrivalled as the man of stainless honour: the one living man of his word. He had never broken it—never would. There was his distinction among the herd. In that, a man is princely above princes. The nobility of Edward Russett, Earl of Fleetwood, surpassed the nobility of common nobles. But, by all that is holy, he pays for his distinction.

The creature beside him is a franked issue of her old pirate of a father in one respect—-nothing frightens her. There she sits; not a screw of her brows or her lips; and the coach rocked, they were sharp on a spill midway of the last descent. It rocks again. She thinks it scarce worth while to look up to reassure him. She is looking over the country.

‘Have you been used to driving?’ he said.

She replied: ‘No, it is new to me on a coach.’

Carinthia felt at once how wild the wish or half expectation that he would resume the glowing communion of the night which had plighted them.

She did not this time say ‘my husband,’ still it flicked a whip at his ears.

She had made it more offensive, by so richly toning the official title just won from him as to ring it on the nerves; one had to block it or be invaded. An anticipation that it would certainly recur haunted every opening of her mouth.

Now that it did not, he felt the gap, relieved, and yet pricked to imagine a mimicry of her tones, for the odd foreignness of the word and the sound. She had a voice of her own besides her courage. At the altar, her responses had their music. No wonder: the day was hers. ‘My husband’ was a manner of saying ‘my fish.’

He, spoke very civilly. ’Oblige me by telling me what name you are accustomed to answer to.’

She seemed unaware of an Arctic husband, and replied: ’My father called me Carin—-short for Carinthia. My mother called me Janey; my second name is Jane. My brother Chillon says both. Henrietta calls me Janey.’

The creature appeared dead flesh to goads. But the name of her sister-in-law on her lips returned the stroke neatly. She spared him one whip, to cut him with another.

‘You have not informed me which of these names you prefer.’

‘Oh, my husband, it is as you shall please.’

Fleetwood smartened the trot of his team, and there was a to-do with the rakish leaders.

Fairies of a malignant humour in former days used to punish the unhappiest of the naughty men who were not favourites, by suddenly planting a hump on their backs. Off the bedevilled wretches pranced, and they kicked, they snorted, whinnied, rolled, galloped, outflying the wind, but not the dismal rider. Marriage is our incubus now. No explanation is offered of why we are afflicted; we have simply offended, or some one absent has offended, and we are handy. The spiteful hag of power ties a wife to us; perhaps for the reason, that we behaved in the spirit of a better time by being chivalrously honourable. Wives are just as inexplicable curses, just as ineradicable and astonishing as humps imposed on shapely backs.

Page 4024

Fleetwood lashed his horses until Carinthia's low cry of entreaty rose to surprise. That stung him.

'Leave the coachman to his devices: we have an appointment and must keep it,' he said.

'They go so willingly.'

'Good beasts, in their way.'

'I do not like the whip.'

'I have the same objection.'

They were on the level of the vale, going along a road between farms and mansions, meadows and gardenplots and park-palings. A strong warm wind drove the pack of clouds over the tree-tops and charged at the branches. English scenery, animating air; a rouse to the blood and the mind. Carinthia did not ask for hues. She had come to love of the dark land with the warm lifting wind, the big trees and the hedges, and the stately houses, and people requiring to be studied, who mean well and are warm somewhere below, as chimneypots are, though they are so stiff.

English people dislike endearments, she had found. It might be that her husband disliked any show of fondness. He would have to be studied very much. He was not like others, as Henrietta had warned her. From thinking of him fervidly, she was already past the marvel of the thought that she called him husband. At the same time, a curious intimation, gathered she knew not whence, of the word 'husband' on a young wife's lips as being a foreign sound in England, advised her to withhold it. His behaviour was instructing her.

'Are you weather-wise?—able to tell when the clouds will hold off or pelt,' he said, to be very civil to a neighbour.

She collected her understanding, apparently; treating a conversational run of the tongue as a question to be pondered; and the horses paid for it. Ordinarily he was gentle with his beasts. He lashed at her in his heart for perverting the humanest of men.

'Father was,' she replied.

'Oh! I have heard of him.'

Her face lightened. 'Father had a great name in England.'

'The Old Buccaneer, I think.'

’I do not know. He was a seaman of the navy, like Admiral Fakenham is. Weather at sea, weather on the mountains, he could foretell it always. He wrote a book; I have a copy you will read. It is a book of Maxims. He often speaks of the weather. English weather and women, he says. But not my mother. My mother he stood aside by herself —pas capricieuse du tout! Because she would be out in the weather and brave the weather. She rode, she swam, best of any woman. If she could have known you, what pleasure for me! Mother learnt to read mountain weather from father. I did it too. But sometimes on the high fields’ upper snows it is very surprising. Father has been caught. Here the cloud is down near the earth and the strong wind keeps the rain from falling. How long the wind will blow I cannot guess. But you love the mountains. We spoke . . . And mountains’ adventures we both love. I will talk French if you like, for, I think, German you do not speak. I may speak English better than French; but I am afraid of my English with you.’

Page 4025

‘Dear me!’ quoth Fleetwood, and he murmured politely and cursorily, attentive to his coachman business. She had a voice that clove the noise of the wheels, and she had a desire to talk—that was evident. Talk of her father set her prattling. It became clear also to his not dishonest, his impressionable mind, that her baby English might be natural. Or she was mildly playing on it, to give herself an air.

He had no remembrance of such baby English at Baden. There, however, she was in a state of enthusiasm—the sort of illuminated transparency they show at the end of fireworks. Mention of her old scapegrace of a father lit her up again. The girl there and the girl here were no doubt the same. It could not be said that she had duped him; he had done it for himself—acted on by a particular agency. This creature had not the capacity to dupe. He had armed a bluntwitted young woman with his idiocy, and she had dealt the stroke; different in scarce a degree by nature from other young women of prey.

But her look at times, and now and then her voice, gave sign that she counted on befooling him as well, to reconcile him to his bondage. The calculation was excessive. No woman had done it yet. Idiocy plunged him the step which reawakened understanding; and to keep his whole mind alert on guard against any sort of satisfaction with his bargain, he frankly referred to the cause. Not female arts, but nature’s impulses, it was his passion for the wondrous in the look of a woman’s face, the new morning of the idea of women in the look, and the peep into imaginary novel character, did the trick of enslaving him. Call it idiocy. Such it was. Once acknowledged, it is not likely to recur. An implacable reason sits in its place, with a keen blade for efforts to carry the imposture further afield or make it agreeable. Yet, after giving his word to Lord Levellier, he had prodded himself to think the burden of this wild young woman might be absurdly tolerable and a laugh at the world.

A solicitude for the animal was marked by his inquiry ’You are not hungry yet?’

‘Oh no, not yet,’ said she, oddly enlivened.

They had a hamper and were independent of stoppages for provision, he informed her. What more delightful? cried her look, seeing the first mid-day’s rest and meal with Chillon on the walk over the mountain from their empty home.

She could get up enthusiasm for a stocked hamper! And when told of some business that drew him to a meadow they were nearing, she said she would be glad to help, if she could. ‘I learn quickly, I know.’

His head acquiesced. The daughter of the Old Buccaneer might learn the business quickly, perhaps; a singularly cutting smile was on his tight lips, in memory of a desire he had as a boy to join hands with an Amazonian damsel and be out over the world for

adventures, comrade and bride as one. Here the creature sat. Life is the burlesque of young dreams; or they precipitate us on the roar and grin of a recognized beast world.

Page 4026

The devil possessing him gnawed so furiously that a partial mitigation of the pain was afforded by sight of waving hats on a hill-rise of the road. He flourished his whip. The hats continued at wind-mill work. It signified brisk news to him, and prospect of glee to propitiate any number of devils.

‘You will want a maid to attend on you,’ he said.

She replied: ’I am not used to attendance on me. Henrietta’s maid would help. I did not want her. I had no maid at home. I can do for myself. Father and mother liked me to be very independent.’

He supposed he would have to hear her spelling her words out next.

The hill-top was gained; twenty paces of pretty trotting brought up the coach beside an inn porch, in the style of the finish dear to whips, and even imperative upon them, if they love their art. Two gentlemen stood in the road, and a young woman at the inn door; a dark-haired girl of an anxious countenance. Her puckers vanished at some signal from inside the coach.

‘All right, Madge; nothing to fear,’ Fleetwood called to her, and she curtseyed.

He alighted, saying to her, before he spoke to his friends: ’I’ve brought him safe; had him under my eye the last four and twenty hours. He’ll do the trick to-day. You don’t bet?’

‘Oh! my lord, no.’

‘Help the lady down. Out with you, Ines!’

The light-legged barge-faced man touched ground capering. He was greeted ‘Kit’ by the pair of gentlemen, who shook hands with him, after he had faintly simulated the challenge to a jig with Madge. She flounced from him, holding her arms up to the lady. Landlord, landlady, and hostler besought the lady to stay for the fixing of a ladder. Carinthia stepped, leaped, and entered the inn, Fleetwood remarking:

‘We are very independent, Chummy Potts.’

‘Cordy bally, by Jove!’ Potts cried. But the moment after this disengaged ejaculation, he was taken with a bewilderment. ‘At the Opera?’ he questioned of his perplexity.

‘No, sir, not at the Opera,’ Fleetwood rejoined. ’The lady’s last public appearance was at the altar.’

’Sort of a suspicion of having seen her somewhere. Left her husband behind, has she?’

‘You see: she has gone in.’

The scoring of a proposition of Euclid on the forehead of Potts amused him and the other gentleman, who was hailed ‘Mallard!’ and cared nothing for problems involving the female of man when such work was to the fore as the pugilistic encounter of the Earl of Fleetwood’s chosen Kit Ines, with Lord Brailstone’s unbeaten and well-backed Ben Todds.

Page 4027

Ines had done pretty things from the age of seventeen to his twenty-third year. Remarkably clever things they were, to be called great in the annals of the Ring. The point, however, was, that the pockets of his backers had seriously felt his latest fight. He received a dog's licking at the hands of Lummy Phelps, his inferior in skill, fighting two to one of the odds; and all because of his fatal addiction to the breaking of his trainer's imposed fast in liquids on, the night before the battle. Right through his training, up to that hour, the rascal was devout; the majority's money rattled all on the snug safe side. And how did he get at the bottle? His trainers never could say. But what made him turn himself into a headlong ass, when he had only to wait a night to sit among friends and worshippers drinking off his tumbler upon tumbler with the honours? It was past his wits to explain. Endurance of his privation had snapped in him; or else, which is more likely, this Genius of the Ring was tempted by his genius on the summit of his perfected powers to believe the battle his own, and celebrate it, as became a victor despising the drubbed antagonist.

In any case, he drank, and a minor man gave him the dog's licking.. 'Went into it puffy, came out of it bunged,' the chronicle resounding over England ran. Old England read of an 'eyeless carcase' heroically stepping up to time for three rounds of mashing punishment. If he had won the day after all, the country would have been electrified. It sympathized on the side of his backers too much to do more than nod a short approval of his fortitude. To sink with flag flying is next to sinking the enemy. There was talk of a girl present at the fight, and of how she received the eyeless, almost faceless, carcase of her sweetheart Kit, and carried him away in a little donkey-cart, comfortably cushioned to meet disaster. This petty incident drew the attention of the Earl of Fleetwood, then beginning to be known as the diamond of uncounted facets, patron of the pick of all departments of manly activity in England.

The devotion of the girl Madge to her sweetheart was really a fine story. Fleetwood touched on it to Mr. Mallard, speaking of it like the gentleman he could be, while Chumley Potts wagged impatient acquiescence in a romantic episode of the Ring, that kept the talk from the hotter theme.

'Money's Bank of England to-day, you think?' he interposed, and had his answer after Mallard had said:

'The girl 's rather good-looking, too.'

'You may double your bets, Chummy. I had the fellow to his tea at my dinner-table yesterday evening; locked him in his bedroom, and had him up and out for a morning spin at six. His trainer, Flipper's on the field, drove from Esslemont at nine, confident as trumps.'

'Deuce of a good-looking girl,' Potts could now afford to say; and he sang out: 'Feel fit, lucky dog?'

‘Concert pitch!’ was the declaration of Kit Ives.

Page 4028

‘How about Lord Brailstone’s man?’

‘Female partner in a quadrille, sir.’

‘Ah!’ Potts doated on his limbs with a butcher’s eye for prize joints.

‘Cock-sure has crowed low by sunset,’ Mallard observed.

Fleetwood offered him to take his bets.

‘You’re heavy on it with Brailstone?’ said Mallard.

‘Three thousand.’

‘I’d back you for your luck blindfold.’

A ruffle of sourness shot over the features of the earl, and was noticed by both eager betters, who exchanged a glance.

Potts inspected his watch, and said half aloud: ’Liver, ten to one! That never meant bad luck—except bad to act on. We slept here last night, you know. It ’s a mile and a quarter from the Royal Sovereign to the field of glory. Pretty well time to start. Brailstone has a drive of a couple of miles. Coaches from London down by this time. Abrane’s dead on Ben Todds, any odds. Poor old Braney! “Steady man, Todds.” Backs him because he’s a “respectable citizen,”—don’t drink. A prize-fighter total abstainer has no spurts. Old Braney’s branded for the losing side. You might bet against Braney blindfold, Mallard. How long shall you take to polish him off, Kit Ines?’

The opponent of Ben Todds calculated.

’Well, sir, steady Benny ought to be satisfied with his dose in, say, about forty minutes. Maybe he won’t own to it before an hour and ten. He’s got a proud English stomach.’

‘Shall we be late?’ Potts asked.

‘Jump in,’ Fleetwood said to his man. ’We may be five minutes after time, Chummy. I had a longer drive, and had to get married on the way, and—ah, here they are!’

‘Lady coming?’

’I fancy she sticks to the coach; I don’t know her tastes. Madge must see her through it, that’s positive.’

Potts deferred his astonishment at the things he was hearing and seeing, which were only Fleetwood’s riddles. The fight and the bets rang every other matter out of his

head. He beheld the lady, who had come down from the coach like a columbine, mount it like Bean-stalk Jack. Madge was not half so clever, and required a hand at her elbow.

After, giving hurried directions to Rundles, the landlord of the Royal Sovereign, Fleetwood took the reins, and all three gentlemen touched hats to the curtseying figure of Mrs. Rundles.

‘You have heard, I dare say—it’s an English scene,’ he spoke, partly turning his face, to Carinthia; ’particularly select to-day. Their Majesties might look on, as the Caesars did in Rome. Pity we can’t persuade them. They ought to set the fashion. Here we have the English people at their grandest, in prime condition, if they were not drunk overnight; and dogged, perfectly awake, magnanimous, all for fair play; fine fellows, upon my word. A little blood, of course.’

Page 4029

But the daughter of the Old Buccaneer would have inherited a tenderness for the sight of blood. She should make a natural Lady Patroness of England's National Sports. We might turn her to that purpose; wander over England with a tail of shouting riff-raft; have exhibitions, join in them, display our accomplishments; issue challenges to fence, shoot, walk, run, box, in time: the creature has muscle. It's one way of crowning a freak; we follow the direction, since the deed done can't be undone; and a precious poetical life, too! You may get as royally intoxicated on swipes as on choice wine; win a name for yourself as the husband of such a wife; a name in sporting journals and shilling biographies: quite a revival of the Peerage they have begun to rail at!

'I would not wish to leave you,' said Carinthia.

'You have chosen,' said Fleetwood.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE BRIDE FROM FOREIGN PARTS IS GIVEN A TASTE OF OLD ENGLAND

Cheers at an open gate of a field saluted the familiar scarlet of the Earl of Fleetwood's coach in Kentish land. They were chorister cheers, the spontaneous ringing out of English country hearts in homage to the nobleman who brightened the heaviness of life on English land with a spectacle of the noble art distinguishing their fathers. He drove along over muffling turf; ploughboys and blue butcher-boys, and smocked old men, with an approach to a hundred-weight on their heels, at the trot to right and left; all hoping for an occasional sight of the jewel called Kitty, that he carried inside. Kitty was there.

Kitty's eyes are shut. Think of that: cradled innocence and angels' dreams and the whole of the hymn just before ding-dong-bang on noses and jaws! That means confidence? Looks like it. But Kitty's not asleep you try him. He's only quiet because he has got to undergo great exertion. Last fight he was knocked out of time, because he went into it honest drunk, they tell. And the earl took him up, to give him a chance of recovering his good name, and that's Christian. But the earl, he knows a man as well as a horse. He's one to follow. Go to a fayte down at Esslemont, you won't forget your day. See there, he's brought a lady on the top o' the coach. That seems for to signify he don't expect it's going to be much of a bloody business. But there's no accounting. Anyhow, Broadfield 'll have a name in the papers for Sunday reading. In comes t' other lord's coach. They've timed it together closes they have.

They were pronounced to be both the right sort of noblemen for the country. Lord Brailstone's blue coach rattled through an eastern gate to the corner of the thirty-acre meadow, where Lord Fleetwood had drawn up, a toss from the ring. The meeting of the blue and scarlet coaches drew forth Old England's thunders; and when the costly

treasures contained in them popped out heads, the moment was delirious. Kit Ines came after his head on a bound. Ben Todds was ostentatiously deliberate: his party said he was no dancing-master. He stepped out, grave as a barge emerging from a lock, though alive to the hurrahs of supporters and punctilious in returning the formal portion of his rival's too roguish nod. Their look was sharp into the eyes, just an instant.

Page 4030

Brailstone and Fleetwood jumped to the grass and met, talking and laughing, precise upon points of business, otherwise cordial: plenipotentiaries of great powers, whom they have set in motion and bind to the ceremonial opening steps, according to the rules of civilized warfare. They had a short colloquy with newspaper reporters;—an absolutely fair, square, upright fight of Britons was to be chronicled. Captain Abrane, a tower in the crowd, registered bets whenever he could. Curricles, gigs, carts, pony-traps, boys on ponies, a swarm on legs, flowed to the central point and huddled there.

Was either champion born in Kent? An audacious boy proclaimed Kit Ines a man of Kent. Why, of course he was! and that was why the Earl of Fleetwood backed our cocky Kitty, and means to land him on the top of his profession. Ben Todds was shuffled aside; as one of their Londoners, destitute of county savour.

All very well, but have a spy at Benny Todds. Who looks the square man? And hear what that big gentleman of the other lord's party says. A gentleman of his height and weight has a right to his opinion. He 's dead against Kit Ines: it's fists, not feet, he says, 'll do it to-day; stamina, he says. Benny has got the stamina.

Todds' possession of the stamina, and the grand voice of Captain Abrane, and the Father Christmas, roast-beef-of-Old England face of the umpire declared to be on the side of Lord Brailstone's colour blue, darkened the star of Kit Ines till a characteristic piece of behaviour was espied. He dashed his cap into the ring and followed it, with the lightest of vaults across the ropes. There he was, the first in the ring: and that stands for promise of first blow, first blood, first flat knock-down, and last to cry for quarter. His pair of seconds were soon after him. Fleetwood mounted his box.

'Is it to fight?' said Carinthia.

'To see which is the master.'

'They fight to see?'

'Generally until one or the other can't see. You are not obliged to see it; you can be driven away if you wish.'

'I will be here, if you are here.'

'You choose it.'

Fleetwood leaned over to Chumley Potts on the turf. 'Abrane's ruining himself.'

Potts frankly hoped that his friend might be doing so. 'Todds is jolly well backed. He's in prime condition. He's the favourite of the knowing ones.'

'You wouldn't have the odds, if he weren't.'

’No; but the odds are like ten per cent.: they conjure the gale, and be hanged,’ said Potts; he swore at his betting mania, which destroyed the pleasure of the show he loved.

All in the ring were shaking hands. Shots of a desire to question and comment sped through Carinthia’s veins and hurt her. She had gathered that she spoke foolishly to her husband’s ear, so she kept her mouth shut, though the unanswered of her inquisitive ignorance in the strange land pricked painfully at her bosom. She heard the girl behind her say: ‘Our colours!’ when the colour scarlet unwound with Lord Brailstone’s blue was tied to the stake: and her husband nodded; he smiled; he liked to hear the girl.

Page 4031

Potts climbed up, crying: 'Toilets complete! Now for paws out, and then at it, my hearties!'

Choice of corners under the leaden low cloud counted for little. A signal was given; a man outside the ring eyed a watch, raised a hand; the two umpires were on foot in their places; the pair of opposing seconds hurried out cheery or bolt-business words to their men; and the champions advanced to the scratch. Todds first, by the courtesy of Ines, whose decorous control of his legs at a weighty moment was rightly read by his party.

Their hands grasped firmly: thereupon becoming fists of a hostile couple in position. And simply to learn which of us two is the better man! Or in other words, with four simple fists to compass a patent fact and stand it on the historic pedestal, with a little red writing underneath: you never can patent a fact without it. But mark the differences of this kind of contention from all other—especially the Parliamentary: this is positive, it has a beginning and an end; and it is good-humoured from beginning to end; trial of skill, trial of stamina; Nature and Art; Old English; which made us what we are; and no rancours, no vows of vengeance; the beaten man of the two bowing to the bit of history he has helped to make.

Kittites had need to be confident in the skill of their lither lad. His facer looked granite. Fronting that mass, Kit you might—not to lash about for comparisons—call a bundle of bamboo. Ay, but well knitted, springy, alive every inch of him; crafty, too, as you will soon bear witness. He knows he has got his task, and he's the man to do it.

There was wary sparring, and mirrors watched them.

'Bigger fellow: but have no fear,' the earl said over his shoulder to Madge.

She said in return: 'Oh, I don't know, I'm praying.'

Kit was now on his toes, all himself, like one who has found the key. He feinted. Quick as lightning, he landed a bolt on Ben's jib, just at the toll-bar of the bridge, between the eyes, and was off, out of reach, elastic; Ben's counter fell short by a couple of inches. Cheers for first blow.

The earl clucked to Madge. Her gaze at the ring was a sullen intensity.

Will you believe it?—Ben received a second spanking cracker on the spectacles-seat: neat indeed; and, poor payment for the compliment, he managed to dig a drive at the ribs. As much of that game as may suit you, sturdy Ben! But hear the shout, and behold!

First blood to Kit Ines! That tell-tale nose of old Ben's has mounted the Earl of Fleetwood's colours, and all his party are looking Brailstone-blue.

‘So far!’ said Fleetwood. His grooms took an indication: the hamper was unfastened; sandwiches were handed. Carinthia held one; she tried to nibble, in obedience to her husband’s example. Madge refused a bite of food.

Hearing Carinthia say to her: ’I hope he will not be beaten, I hope, I hope,’ she made answer: ‘You are very good, Miss’; and the young lady flushed.

Page 4032

Gentlemen below were talking up to the earl. A Kentish squire of an estate neighbouring Esslemont introduced a Welsh squire he had driven to see the fun, by the name of Mr. Owain Wythan, a neighbour of the earl's down in Wales. Refreshments were offered. Carinthia submissively sipped the sparkling wine, which stings the lips when they are indisposed to it. The voice of the girl Madge rang on the tightened chords of her breast. Madge had said she was praying: and to pray was all that could be done by two women. Her husband could laugh loudly with Mr. Potts and the other gentlemen and the strangers. He was quite sure the man he supported would win; he might have means of knowing. Carinthia clung to his bare words, for the sake of the girl.

A roaring peal went up from the circle of combat. Kit had it this time. Attacking Ben's peepers, he was bent on defending his own, and he caught a bodyblow that sent him hopping back to his pair of seconds, five clear hops to the rear, like a smashed surge-wave off the rock. He was respectful for the remainder of the round. But hammering at the system he had formed, in the very next round he dropped from a tremendous repetition of the blow, and lay flat as a turbot. The bets against him had simultaneously a see-saw rise.

'Bellows, he appears to have none,' was the comment of Chumley Potts.

'Now for training, Chummy!' said Lord Fleetwood.

'Chummy!' signifying a crow over Potts, rang out of the hollows of Captain Abrane on Lord Brailstone's coach.

Carinthia put a hand behind her to Madge. It was grasped, in gratitude for sympathy or in feminine politeness. The girl murmured: 'I've seen worse.' She was not speaking to ears.

Lord Fleetwood sat watch in hand. 'Up,' he said; and, as if hearing him, Kit rose from the ministering second's knee. He walked stiffly, squared after the fashion of a man taught caution. Ben made play. They rounded the ring, giving and taking. Ben rushed, and had an emollient; spouted again and was corked; again, and received a neat red-waxen stopper. He would not be denied at Kit's door, found him at home and hugged him. Kit got himself to grass, after a spell of heavy fibbing, Ben's game.

It did him no great harm; it might be taken for an enlivener; he was dead on his favourite spot the ensuing round, played postman on it. So cleverly, easily, dancingly did he perform the double knock and the retreat, that Chumley Potts was moved to forget his wagers and exclaim: 'Racket-ball, by Jove!'

'If he doesn't let the fellow fib the wind out of him,' Mallard addressed his own crab eyeballs.

Lord Fleetwood heard and said coolly: 'Tightstrung. I kept him fasting since he earned his breakfast. You don't wind an empty rascal fit for action. A sword through the lungs won't kill when there's no air in them.'

That was printed in the 'Few Words before the Encounter', in the Book Of *maxims for men*. Carinthia, hearing everything her husband uttered, burned to remind him of the similarity between his opinions and her father's.

Page 4033

She was learning, that for some reason, allusions to her father were not acceptable. She squeezed the hand of Madge, and felt a pressure, like a scream, telling her the girl's heart was with the fight beneath them. She thought it natural for her. She wished she could continue looking as intently. She looked because her husband looked. The dark hills and clouds curtaining the run of the stretch of fields relieved her sight.

The clouds went their way; the hills were solid, but like a blue smoke; the scene here made them very distant and strange. Those two men were still hitting, not hating one another; only to gratify a number of unintelligible people and win a success. But the earth and sky seemed to say, What is the glory? They were insensible to it, as they are not—they are never insensible to noble grounds of strife. They bless the spot, they light lamps on it; they put it into books of history, make it holy, if the cause was a noble one or a good one.

Or supposing both those men loved the girl, who loved one of them! Then would Carinthia be less reluctantly interested in their blows.

Her infant logic stumbled on for a reason while she repressed the torture the scene was becoming, as though a reason could be found by her submissive observation of it. And she was right in believing that a reason for the scene must or should exist. Only, like other bewildered instinctive believers, she could not summon the great universe or a life's experience to unfold it. Her one consolation was in squeezing the hand of the girl from time to time.

Not stealthily done, it was not objected to by the husband whose eye was on all. But the persistence in doing it sank her from the benignity of her station to the girl's level: it was conduct much too raw, and grated on the deed of the man who had given her his name.

Madge pleased him better. She had the right to be excited, and she was very little demonstrative. She had—well, in justice, the couple of them had, only she had it more—the tone of the women who can be screwed to witness a spill of blood, peculiarly catching to hear;—a tone of every string in them snapped except the silver string. Catching to hear? It is worth a stretching of them on the rack to hear that low buzz-hum of their inner breast . . . By heaven! we have them at their best when they sing that note.

His watch was near an hour of the contest, and Brailstone's man had scored first knock-down blow, a particularly clean floorer. Thinking of that, he was cheered by hearing Chummy Potts, whose opinions he despised, cry out to Abrane:—

'Yeast to him!' For the face of Todds was visibly swelling to the ripest of plums from Kit's deliveries.

Down he went. He had the sturdy legs which are no legs to a clean blow. Odds were offered against him.

Page 4034

‘Oh! pretty play with your right, Kit!’ exclaimed Mallard, as Kit fetched his man an ugly stroke on the round of the waist behind, and the crowd sent up the name of the great organs affected: a sickener of a stroke, if dealt soundly. It meant more than 4 showed. Kit was now for taking liberties. Light as ever on his pins, he now and then varied his attentions to the yeasty part, delivering a wakener in unexpected quarters: masterly as the skilled cook’s carving of a joint with hungry guests for admirers.

‘Eh, Madge?’ the earl said.

She kept her sight fixed, replying: ‘Yes, I think . . .’ Carinthia joined with her: ’I must believe it that he will: but will the other man, poor man, submit? I entreat him to put away his pride. It is his—oh, poor man!’

Ben was having it hot and fast on a torso physiognomy.

The voices of these alien women thrilled the fray and were a Bardic harp to Lord Fleetwood.

He dropped a pleasant word on the heads in the curricle.

Mr. Owain Wythan looked up. ’Worthy of Theocritus. It’s the Boxing Twin and the Bembrycian giant. The style of each. To the letter!’

‘Kit is assiduously fastening Ben’s blinkers,’ Potts remarked.

He explained to the incomprehensible lady he fancied he had somewhere seen, that the battle might be known as near the finish by the behaviour on board Lord Brailstone’s coach.

‘It’s like Foreign Affairs and the Stock Exchange,’ he said to the more intelligent males. ’If I want to know exactly how the country stands, I turn to the Money Article in the papers. That’s a barometrical certainty. No use inquiring abroad. Look at old Rufus Abrane. I see the state of the fight on the old fellow’s mug. He hasn’t a bet left in him!’

‘Captain Mountain—Rufus Mus!’ cried Lord Fleetwood, and laughed at the penetrative portrait Woodseer’s epigram sketched; he had a desire for the presence of the singular vagabond.

The Rufus Mus in the Captain Mountain exposed his view of the encounter, by growing stiller, apparently growing smaller, without a squeak, like the entrapped; and profoundly contemplative, after the style of the absolutely detached, who foresee the fatal crash, and are calculating, far ahead of events, the means for meeting their personal losses.

The close of the battle was on the visage of Rufus Abrane fifteen minutes before that Elgin marble under red paint in the ring sat on the knee of a succouring seconder,

mopped, rubbed, dram-primed, puppy-peeping, inconsolably comforted, preparatory to the resumption of the great-coat he had so hopefully cast from his shoulders. Not downcast by any means. Like an old Roman, the man of the sheer hulk with purple eyemounds found his legs to do the manful thing, show that there was no bad blood, stand equal to all forms. Ben Todds, if ever man in Old England, looked the picture you might label ‘Bellyful,’ it was remarked. Kit Ines had an appearance of springy readiness to lead off again. So they faced on the opening step of their march into English History.

Page 4035

Vanquisher and vanquished shook hands, engaged in a parting rally of good-humoured banter; the beaten man said his handsome word; the best man capped it with a compliment to him. They drink of different cups to-day. Both will drink of one cup in the day to come. But the day went too clearly to crown the light and the tight and the right man of the two, for moralizing to wag its tail at the end. Oldsters and youngsters agreed to that. Science had done it: happy the backers of Science! Not one of them alluded to the philosophical 'hundred years hence.' For when England, thanks to a spirited pair of our young noblemen, has exhibited one of her characteristic performances consummately, Philosophy is bidden fly; she is a foreign bird.

CHAPTER XVII

RECORDS A SHADOW CONTEST CLOSE ON THE FOREGOING

Kit Ines cocked an eye at Madge, in the midst of the congratulations and the paeans pumping his arms. As he had been little mauled, he could present a face to her, expecting a wreath of smiles for the victor.

What are we to think of the contrarious young woman who, when he lay beaten, drove him off the field and was all tenderness and devotion? She bobbed her head, hardly more than a trifle pleased, one might say. Just like females. They're riddles, not worth spelling. Then, drunk I'll get to-night, my pretty dear! the man muttered, soured by her inopportune staidness, as an opponent's bruisings could never have rendered him.

She smiled a lively beam in answer to the earl; 'Oh yes I 'm glad. It's your doing, my lord.' Him it was that she thanked, and for the moment prized most. The female riddle is hard to read, because it is compounded of sensations, and they rouse and appeal to the similar cockatrices in us, which either hiss back or coil upon themselves. She admired Kit Ines for his valour: she hated that ruinous and besotting drink. It flung skeletons of a married couple on the wall of the future. Nevertheless her love had been all maternal to him when he lay chastised and disgraced on account of his vice. Pity had done it. Pity not being stirred, her admiration of the hero declared victorious, whose fortunes in uncertainty had stopped the beating of her heart, was eclipsed by gratitude toward his preserver, and a sentiment eclipsed becomes temporarily coldish, against our wish and our efforts, in a way to astonish; making her think that she cannot hold two sentiments at a time; when it is but the fact that she is unable to keep the two equally warm.

Carinthia said to her: 'He is brave.'

'Oh yes, he's brave,' Madge assented.

Lord Brailstone, flourishing his whip, cried out: 'At Canleys to-night?'

The earl nodded: ‘I shall be there.’

‘You, too, Chummy?’ came from Abrane.

‘To see you dance,’ Potts rejoined, and mumbled

’But will he dance! Old Braney’s down on his luck; he’s a specimen of a fellow emptier and not lighter. And won’t be till supper-time. But, I say, Fleet, how the deuce?—funny sort of proceeding!—You haven’t introduced me.’

Page 4036

‘The lady bears my name, Mr. Chumley Potts.’

With a bow to the lady’s profile and a mention of a glimpse at Baden, Potts ejaculated: ‘It happened this morning?’

‘You allude to the marriage. It happened this morning.’

‘How do I get to Canleys?’

’I drive you. Another team from the Esslemont stables is waiting at the Royal.’

‘You stay at Canleys?’

‘No.’

’No? Oh! Funny, upon my word. Though I don’t know why not—except that people . . .’

‘Count your winnings, Chummy.’

Fleetwood remarked to his bride: ’Our friend has the habit of soliloquizing in company. I forgot to tell you of an appointment of mine at a place called Canleys, about twenty miles or more from here. I gave my word, so I keep it. The landlady at the inn, Mrs. Rundles, motherly kind of woman; she will be attentive. They don’t cook badly, for an English inn, I have heard. Madge here will act as your lady’s-maid for the time. You will find her serviceable; she’s a bruiser’s lass and something above it. Ines informed me, Madge, you were going to friends of yours at the Wells. You will stay at the Royal and wait on this lady, who bears my name. You understand?—A girl I can trust for courage, if the article is in request,’ he resumed to his bride; and talked generally of the inn and the management of it, and its favoured position outside the village and contiguous to the river, upon which it subsisted.

Carinthia had heard. She was more than ever the stunned young woman she had been since her mounting of the coach, between the village church and Lekkatts.

She said not a word. Why should she? her object was won. Give her that, and a woman’s tongue will consent to rest. The dreaded weapon rest, also when she is kept spinning by the whip. She gives out a pleasant hum, too. Her complexion must be pronounced dull in repose. A bride on her travels with an aspect of wet chalk, rather helps to scare mankind from marriage: which may be good or bad; but she reflects a sicklier hue on the captured Chessman calling her his own. Let her shine in privacy.

Fleetwood drew up at the Royal Sovereign, whereof the reigning monarch, in blue uniform on the signboard, curtseyed to his equally windy subjects; and a small congregation of the aged, and some cripples and infants, greeted the patron of Old

England’s manfullest display, cheering at news of the fight, brought them by many little runners.

‘Your box has been conveyed to your room,’ he said to his bride.

She bowed. This time she descended the coach by the aid of the ladder.

Ines, victorious in battle, had scant notice from his love. ’Yes, I ’m glad,’ and she passed him to follow her newly constituted mistress. His pride was dashed, all the foam of the first draw on the top of him blown off, as he figuratively explained the cause of his gloom to the earl. ’I drink and I gets a licking—that girl nurses and cossets me. I don’t drink and I whops my man—she shows me her back. Ain’t it encouragement, my lord?’

Page 4037

‘You ought to know them by this time, you dolt,’ returned his patron, and complimented him on his bearing in the fight. ’You shall have your two hundred, and something will be added. Hold handy here till I mount. I start in ten minutes.’

Whether to speak a polite adieu to the bride, whose absurd position she had brought on her own head, was debated for half a minute. He considered that the wet chalk-quarry of a beauty had at all events the merit of not being a creature to make scenes. He went up to the sitting-room. If she was not there, he would leave his excuses.

She was there, and seated; neither crying, nor smiling, nor pointedly serious in any way, not conventionally at her ease either. And so clearly was he impressed by her transparency in simplicity of expression, that he took without a spurn at it the picture of a woman half drained of her blood, veiling the wound. And a young woman, a stranger to suffering: perhaps—as the creatures do looking for the usual flummery tenderness, what they call happiness; wondering at the absence of it and the shifty ghost of a husband she has got by floundering into the bog known as Marriage. She would have it, and here she was!

He entered the situation and was possessed by the shivering delicacy of it. Surface emotions were not seen on her. She might be a creature with a soul. Here and there the thing has been found in women. It is priceless when found, and she could not be acting. One might swear the creature had no power to act.

She spoke without offence, the simplest of words, affected no solicitudes, put on no gilt smiles, wore no reproaches: spoke to him as if so it happened—he had necessarily a journey to perform. One could see all the while big drops falling from the wound within. One could hear it in her voice. Imagine a crack of the string at the bow’s deep stress. Or imagine the bow paralyzed at the moment of the deepest sounding. And yet the voice did not waver. She had now the richness of tone carrying on a music through silence.

Well, then, at least, he had not been the utterly duped fool he thought himself since the consent was pledged to wed her.

More, she had beauty—of its kind. Or splendour or grandeur, was the term for it. But it bore no name. None of her qualities—if they were qualities—had a name. She stood with a dignity that the word did not express. She endured meekly, when there was no meekness. Pain breathed out of her, and not a sign of pain was visible. She had, under his present observation of her, beauty, with the lines of her face breaking in revolt from beauty—or requiring a superterrestrial illumination to show the harmony. He, as he now saw, had erred grossly in supposing her insensitive, and therefore slow of a woman’s understanding. She drew the breath of pain through the lips: red lips and well cut. Her brown eyes were tearless, not alluring or beseeching or repelling; they did but

Page 4038

look, much like the skies opening high aloof on a wreck of storm. Her reddish hair-chestnut, if you will—let fall a skein over one of the rugged brows, and softened the ruggedness by making it wilder, as if a great bird were winging across a shoulder of the mountain ridges. Conceived of the mountains, built in their image, the face partook alternately of mountain terror or splendour; wholly, he remembered, of the splendour when her blood ran warm. No longer the chalk-quarry face,—its paleness now was that of night Alps beneath a moon chasing the shadows.

She might be casting her spells again.

'You remember I told you,' he said, 'I have given my word—I don't break it—to be at a Ball. Your uncle was urgent to have the ceremony over. These clashes occur. The people here—I have spoken of that: people of good repute for attention to guests. I am uncertain of the time . . . we have all to learn to wait. So then, good-bye till we meet.'

He was experiencing a novel nip of torment, of just the degree which takes a partial appeasement from the inflicting of it, and calls up a loathed compassion. She might have been in his arms for a step, though she would not have been the better loved.

He was allowed his escape, bearing with him enough of husband to execrate another enslaving pledge of his word, that begat a frenzy to wreak some caresses on the creature's intolerably haunting image. Of course, he could not return to her. How would she receive him? There was no salt in the thought of it; she was too submissive.

However, there would be fun with Chummy Potts on the drive to Canleys; fun with Rufus Abrane at Mrs. Cowper Quillett's; and with the Countess Livia, smothered, struggling, fighting for life with the title of Dowager. A desire for unbridled fun had hold of any amount of it, to excess in any direction. And though this cloud as a dry tongue after much wine craves water, glimpses of his tramp's walk with a fellow tramp on a different road, enjoying strangely healthy vagabond sensations and vast ideas; brought the vagrant philosopher refreshfully to his mind: chiefly for the reason that while in Woodseer's company he had hardly suffered a stroke of pain from the thought of Henrietta. She was now a married woman, he was a married man by the register. Stronger proof of the maddest of worlds could not be furnished.

Sane in so mad a world, a man is your flabby citizen among outlaws, good for plucking. Fun, at any cost, is the one object worth a shot in such a world. And the fun is not to stop. If it does, we are likely to be got hold of, and lugged away to the altar—the terminus. That foul disaster has happened, through our having temporarily yielded to a fit of the dumps and treated a mad world's lunatic issue with some seriousness. But fun shall be had with the aid of His Highness below. The madder the world, the madder the fun. And the mixing in it of another element, which it has to beguile us—romance—is not at all bad cookery. Poetic romance is delusion—a tale of a Corsair; a poet's brain, a

bottle of gin, and a theatrical wardrobe. Comic romance is about us everywhere, alive for the tapping.

Page 4039

A daughter of the Old Buccaneer should participate in it by right of birth: she would expect it in order to feel herself perfectly at home. Then, be sure, she finds an English tongue and prattles away as merrily as she does when her old scapegrace of a father is the theme. Son-in-law to him! But the path of wisdom runs in the line of facts, and to have wild fun and romance on this pantomime path, instead of kicking to break away from it, we follow things conceived by the genius of the situation, for the delectation of the fair Countess of Fleetwood and the earl, her delighted husband, quite in the spirit of the Old Buccaneer, father of the bride.

Carinthia sat beside the fire, seeing nothing in the room or on the road. Up in her bedchamber, the girl Madge was at her window. She saw Lord Fleetwood standing alone, laughing, it seemed, at some thought; he threw up his head. Was it a newly married man leaving his bride and laughing? The bride was a dear lady, fit for better than to be driven to look on at a prize-fight—a terrible scene to a lady. She was left solitary: and this her wedding day? The earl had said it, he had said she bore his name, spoke of coming from the altar, and the lady had blushed to hear herself called Miss. The pressure of her hand was warm with Madge: her situation roused the fervid latent sisterhood in the breast of women.

Before he mounted the coach, Lord Fleetwood talked to Kit Ives. He pointed at an upper window, seemed to be issuing directions. Kit nodded; he understood it, whatever it was. You might have said, a pair of burglars. The girl ran downstairs to bid her lover good-bye and show him she really rejoiced in his victory. Kit came to her saying: 'Given my word of honour I won't make a beast of myself to-night. Got to watch over you and your lady.'

Lord Fleetwood started his fresh team, casting no glance at the windows of the room where his bride was. He and the gentlemen on the coach were laughing.

His leaving of his young bride to herself this day was classed among the murky flashes which distinguished the deeds of noblemen. But his laughter on leaving her stamped it a cruelty; of the kind that plain mortals, who can be monsters, commit. Madge conceived a pretext for going into the presence of her mistress, whose attitude was the same as when she first sat in the chair. The lady smiled and said: 'He is not hurt much?' She thought for them about her.

The girl's, heart of sympathy thumped, and her hero became a very minute object. He had spoken previously of the making or not making a beast of himself; without inflicting a picture of the beast. His words took shape now, and in consequence a little self-pity began to move. It stirred to swell the great wave of pity for the lady, that was in her bosom. 'Oh, he!' she said, and extinguished the thought of him; and at once her under-lip was shivering, her eyes filled and poured.

Page 4040

Carinthia rose anxiously. The girl dropped at her feet. 'You have been so good to me to-day, my lady! so good to me to-day! I can't help it—I don't often just for this moment; I've been excited. Oh, he's well, he will do; he's nothing. You say "poor child!" But I'm not; it's only. excitement. I do long to serve you the best I can.'

She stood up in obedience and had the arms of her young mistress pressing her. Tears also were streaming from Carinthia's eyes. Heartily she thanked the girl for the excuse to cry.

They were two women. On the road to Canleys, the coach conveying men spouted with the lusty anecdote, relieved of the interdict of a tyrannical sex.

CHAPTER XVIII

DOWN WHITECHAPEL WAY

Contention begets contention in a land of the pirate races. Gigs were at high rival speed along the road from the battle-field to London. They were the electrical wires of the time for an expectant population bursting to have report of so thundering an event as the encounter of two champion light weights, nursed and backed by a pair of gallant young noblemen, pick of the whole row of coronets above. London panted gaping and the gigs flew with the meat to fill it.

Chumley Potts offered Ambrose Mallard fair odds that the neat little trap of the chief sporting journal, which had a reputation to maintain, would be over one or other of the bridges crossing the Thames first. Mallard had been struck by the neat little trap of an impudent new and lower-priced journal, which had a reputation to gain. He took the proffered odds, on the cry as of a cracker splitting. Enormous difficulties in regard to the testimony and the verifications were discussed; they were overcome. Potts was ready for any amount of trouble; Mallard the same. There was clearly a race. There would consequently be a record. Visits to the offices of those papers, perhaps half a day at the south end of London or on Westminster bridge, examining witnesses, corner shopmen, watermen, and the like, would or should satisfactorily establish the disputed point.

Fleetwood had his fun; insomuch that he laughed himself into a sentiment of humaneness toward the couple of donkeys and forgot his contempt of them. Their gamblings and their bets increased his number of dependents; and imbeciles were preferable to dolts or the dry gilt figures of the circle he had to move in. Matter for some astonishment had been furnished to the latter this day; and would cause an icy Signor stare and rather an angry Signora flutter. A characteristic of that upper circle, as he knew it, is, that the good are dull, the vicious very bad. They had nothing to please him but manners. Elsewhere this land is a land of no manners. Take it and make the most

of it, then, for its quality of brute honesty: which is found to flourish best in the British prize-ring.

Page 4041

His irony landed him there. It struck the country a ringing blow. But it struck an almost effacing one at the life of the young nobleman of boundless wealth, whose highest renown was the being a patron of prizefighters. Husband of the daughter of the Old Buccaneer as well! perchance as a result. That philosopher tramp named her 'beautiful Gorgon.' She has no beauty; and as for Gorgon, the creature has a look of timid softness in waiting behind her rocky eyes. A barbaric damsel beginning to nibble at civilization, is nearer the mark; and ought she to be discouraged?

Fleetwood's wrath with his position warned him against the dupery of any such alcove thoughts. For his wrath revenged him, and he feared the being stripped of it, lest a certain fund of his own softness, that he knew of; though few did, should pull him to the creature's feet. She belonged to him indeed; so he might put her to the trial of whether she had a heart and personal charm, without the ceremony of wooing—which, in his case, tempted to the feeling desperately earnest and becoming enslaved. He speculated upon her eyelids and lips, and her voice, when melting, as women do in their different ways; here and there with an execrable—perhaps pardonable—art; one or two divinely. The vision drew him to a headlong plunge and swim of the amorous mind, occupying a minute, filling an era. He corrected the feebleness, and at the same time threw a practical coachman's glance on peculiarities of the road, requiring some knowledge of it if traversed backward at a whipping pace on a moonless night. The drive from Canleys to the Royal Sovereign could be done by good pacers in an hour and a half, little more—with Ives and the stables ready, and some astonishment in a certain unseen chamber. Fleetwood chuckled at a vision of romantic devilry—perfectly legitimate too. Something, more to inflict than enjoy, was due to him.

He did, not phrase it, that a talk with the fellow Woodseer of his mountains and his forests, and nature, philosophy, poetry, would have been particularly healthy for him, almost as good as the good counsel be needed and solicited none to give him. It swept among his ruminations while he pricked Potts and Mallard to supply his craving for satanical fare.

Gower Woodseer; the mention of whom is a dejection to the venerable source of our story, was then in the act of emerging from the Eastward into the Southward of the line of Canterbury's pilgrims when they set forth to worship, on his homeward course, after a walk of two days out of Dover. He descended London's borough, having exactly twopence halfpenny for refreshment; following a term of prudent starvation, at the end of the walk. It is not a district seductive to the wayfarer's appetite; as, for example, one may find the Jew's fry of fish in oil, inspiriting the Shoreditch region, to be. Nourishment is afforded, according to the laws of England's genius in the arts of refection, at

Page 4042

uninviting shops, to the necessitated stomach. A penn'orth of crumb of bread, assisted on its laborious passage by a penn'orth of the rinsings of beer, left the natural philosopher a ha'penny for dessert at the stall of an applewoman, where he withstood an inclination toward the juicy fruit and chose nuts. They extend a meal, as a grimace broadens the countenance, illusorily; but they help to cheat an emptiness in time, where it is nearly as offensive to our sensations as within us; and that prolonged occupation of the jaws goes a length to persuade us we are filling. All the better when the substance is indigestible. Tramps of the philosophical order, who are the practically sagacious, prefer tough grain for the teeth. Woodseer's munching of his nuts awakened to fond imagination the picture of his father's dinner, seen one day and little envied: a small slice of cold boiled mutton-flesh in a crescent of white fat, with a lump of dry bread beside the plate.

Thus he returned to the only home he had, not disheartened, and bearing scenes that outvied London's print-shops for polychrome splendour, an exultation to recall. His condition, moreover, threw his father's life and work into colour: the lean Whitechapel house of the minister among the poor; the joy in the saving of souls, if he could persuade himself that such good labour advanced: and at the fall of light, the pastime task of bootmaking—a desireable occupation for a thinker. Thought flies best when the hands are easily busy. Cobblers have excursive minds. Their occasional rap at the pegs diversifies the stitchings and is often happily timed to settle an internal argument. Seek in a village for information concerning the village or the state of mankind, you will be less disappointed at the cobbler's than elsewhere, it has been said.

As Gower had anticipated, with lively feelings of pleasure, Mr. Woodseer was at the wonted corner of his back room, on the stool between two tallow candleflames, leather scented strongly, when the wanderer stood before him, in the image of a ball that has done with circling about a stable point.

'Back?' the minister sang out at once, and his wrinkles gleamed:

Their hands grasped.

'Hungry, sir, rather.'

'To be sure, you are. One can read it on your boots. Mrs. Jones will spread you a table. How many miles to-day? Show the soles. They tell a tale of wear.'

They had worn to resemble the thin-edged layers of still upper cloud round the peep of coming sky.

'About forty odd to-day, sir. They've done their hundreds of miles and have now come to dock. I 'll ask Mrs. Jones to bring me a plate here.'

Gower went to the housekeeper in the kitchen. His father's front door was unfastened by day; she had not set eyes on him yet, and Mr. Woodseer murmured:

'Now she's got the boy. There 's clasping and kissing. He's all wild Wales to her.'

Page 4043

The plate of meat was brought by Mary Jones with Gower beside her, and a sniffle of her happiness audible. She would not, although invited to stay and burning to hear Gower, wait in the room where father and son had to talk together after a separation, long to love's counting. She was a Welshwoman of the pure blood, therefore delicately mannered by nature.

'Yes, dear lad, tobacco helps you on to the marrow of your story, and I too will blow the cloud,' said Mr. Woodseer, when the plate was pushed aside and the pipe appeared.

So Gower's recital of his wanderings began, more puffs than speech at the commencement. He was alternately picturesque and sententious until he reached Baden; there he became involved, from thinking of a revelation of beauty in woman.

Mr. Woodseer rapped the leather on his block.

'A place where they have started public gambling, I am told.'

'We must look into all the corners of the world to know it, sir, and the world has to be riddled or it riddles us.'

'Ah. Did you ever tell a lie, Gower Woodseer?'

'I played.'

'You played. The Lord be thanked you have kept your straight tongue! The Lord can always enter a heart of truth. Sin cannot dwell with it. But you played for gain, and that was a licenced thieving; and that was a backsliding; and there will have to be a climbing up. And what that means, your hold on truth will learn. Touch sin and you accommodate yourself to its vileness. Ay, you love nature. Nature is not anchorage for vessels like men. If you loved the Book you would float in harbour. You played. I do trust you lost.'

'You have your wish, sir.'

'To have won their money, Gower! Rather starve.'

'I did.'

'Your reason for playing, poor lad?'

'The reason eludes reason.'

'Not in you.'

’Sight of the tables; an itch to try them—one’s self as well; a notion that the losers were playing wrong. In fine, a bit of a whirl of a medley of atoms; I can’t explain it further.’

’Ah. The tippler’s fumes in his head! Spotty business, Gower Woodseer. “Lead us not into temptation” is worldly wisdom in addition to heavenly.’

After listening to an extended homily, with a general assent and tobacco’s phlegm, Gower replied to his father’s ‘You starved manfully?’ nodding: ’From Baden to Nancy. An Alsatian cottager at times helped me along, milk and bread.’

‘Wholesome for body and for soul.’

’Entering Nancy I subscribed to the dictum of our first fathers, which dogs would deliver, if they could speak: that there is no driver like stomach: and I went head on to the College, saw the Principal: plea of urgency. No engagement possible, to teach either French or English. But he was inquisitive touching the urgency. That was my chance. The French are humane when they are not suspicious of you. They are generous, if you put a light

Page 4044

to their minds. As I was dealing with a scholarly one, I made use of such ornamental literary skill as I possessed, to prove urgency. He supplied me with bread, fruit, and wine. In the end he procured me pupils. I lodged over a baker's shop. I had food walks, and learnt something of forestry there—a taking study. When I had saved enough to tramp it home, I said my adieux to that good friend and tramped away, entering London with about the same amount in small coin as when I entered Nancy. A manner of exactly hitting the mark, that some would not find so satisfactory as it is to me.'

The minister sighed. 'There comes in the "philosophy," I suppose. When will you understand, that this "philosophy" is only the passive of a religious faith? It seems to suit you gentlemen of the road while you are young. Work among the Whitechapel poor. It would be a way for discovering the shallows of your "philosophy" earlier.'

Gower asked him: 'Going badly here, sir?'

'Murders, robberies, misusage of women, and misconduct of women!—Drink, in short: about the same amount. Drink is their death's river, rolling them on helpless as corpses, on to—may they find mercy! I and a few stand—it's in the tide we stand here, to stop them, pluck them out, make life a bit sweet to them before the poor bodies go beneath. But come! all's not dark, we have our gleams. I speak distressed by one of our girls: a good girl, I believe; and the wilfullest that ever had command of her legs. A well-favoured girl! You'll laugh, she has given her heart to a prize-fighter. Well, you can say, she might have chosen worse. He drinks, she hates it; she loves the man and hates his vice. He swears amendment, is hiccupping at night; fights a match on the morrow, and gets beaten out of formation. No matter: whenever, wherever, that man goes to his fight, that girl follows to nurse him after it. He's her hero. Women will have one, and it's their lottery. You read of such things; here we have it alive and walking. I am led to think they 're an honest couple. They come of established families. Her mother was out of Caermarthen; died under my ministration, saintly, forgiving the drunkard. You may remember the greengrocer, Tobias Winch? He passed away in shrieks for one drop. I had to pitch my voice to the top notes to get hearing for the hymn. He was a reverent man, with the craving by fits. That should have been a lesson to Madge.'

'A little girl at the greengrocer's hard by? She sold me apples; rather pretty,' said Gower.

'A fine grown girl now—Madge Winch; a comely wench she is. It breaks her sister Sarah's heart. They both manage the little shop; they make it prosper in a small way; enough, and what need they more? Then Christopher Ines has on one of his matches. Madge drives her cart out, if it 's near town. She's off down into Kent to-day by coach, Sarah tells me. A great nobleman patronizes Christopher; a Lord Fleetwood,

Page 4045

a lord of wealth. And he must be thoughtful for these people: he sent Sarah word that Christopher should not touch drink. You may remember a butcher Ines in the street next to us. Christopher was a wild lad, always at “best man” with every boy he met: went to sea—ran away. He returned a pugilist. The girl will be nursing him now. I have spoken to her of him; and I trust to her; but I mourn her attachment to the man who drinks.’

‘The lord’s name?’ said Gower.

’Lord Fleetwood, Sarah named him. And so it pleases him to spend his money!’

’He has other tastes. I know something of him, sir. He promises to be a patron of Literature as well. His mother was a South Wales woman.’

‘Could he be persuaded to publish a grand edition of the Triads?’ Mr. Woodseer said at once.

‘No man more likely.’

‘If you see him, suggest it.’

’Very little chance of my meeting him again. But those Triads! They’re in our blood. They spring to tie knots in the head. They push me to condense my thoughts to a tight ball. They were good for primitive times: but they—or the trick of the mind engendered by them—trip my steps along the lines of composition. I produce pellets instead of flowing sheets. It’ll come right. At present I ’m so bent to pick and perfect, polish my phrase, that I lose my survey. As a consequence, my vocabulary falters.’

‘Ah,’ Mr. Woodseer breathed and smote. ’This Literature is to be your profession for the means of living?’

’Nothing else. And I’m so low down in the market way of it, that I could not count on twenty pounds per annum. Fifty would give me standing, an independent fifty.’

‘To whom are you crying, Gower?’

‘Not to gamble, you may be sure.’

‘You have a home.’

’Good work of the head wants an easy conscience. I’ve too much of you in me for a comfortable pensioner.’

’Or is it not, that you have been living the gentleman out there, with just a holiday title to it?’

Gower was hit by his father's thrust. 'I shall feel myself a pieman's chuckpenny as long as I'm unproductive, now I 've come back and have to own to a home,' he said.

Tea brought in by Mrs. Mary Jones rather brightened him until he considered that the enlivenment was due to a purchase by money, of which he was incapable, and he rejected it, like an honourable man. Simultaneously, the state of depression threw critic shades on a prized sentence or two among his recent confections. It was rejected for the best of reasons and the most discomforting: because it racked our English; signifying, that he had not yet learnt the right use of his weapons.

Page 4046

He was in this wrestle, under a placid demeanour, for several days, hearing the shouts of Whitechapel Kit's victory, and hearing of Sarah Winch's anxiety on account of her sister Madge; unaffected by sounds of joy or grief, in his effort to produce a supple English, with Baden's Madonna for sole illumination of his darkness. To her, to the illimitable gold-mist of perspective and the innumerable images the thought of her painted for him, he owed the lift which withdrew him from contemplation of himself in a very disturbing stagnant pool of the wastes; wherein often will strenuous youth, grown faint, behold a face beneath a scroll inscribed Impostor. All whose aim was high have spied into that pool, and have seen the face. His glorious lady would not let it haunt him.

The spell she cast had likewise power to raise him clean out of a neighbourhood hinting Erebus to the young man with thirst for air, solitudes, and colour. Scarce imaginable as she was, she reigned here, in the idea of her, more fixedly than where she had been visible; as it were, by right of her being celestially removed from the dismal place. He was at the same time not insensible to his father's contented ministrations among these homes of squalor; they pricked the curiosity, which was in the youthful philosopher a form of admiration. For his father, like all Welshmen, loved the mountains. Yet here he lived, exhorting, ministering, aiding, supported up to high good cheer by some, it seemed, superhuman backbone of uprightness;—his religious faith? Well, if so, the thing might be studied. But things of the frozen senses, lean and hueless things, were as repellent to Gower's imagination as his father's dishes to an epicure. What he envied was, the worthy old man's heart of feeling for others: his feeling at present for the girl Sarah Winch and her sister Madge, who had not been heard of since she started for the fight. Mr. Woodseer had written to her relatives at the Wells, receiving no consolatory answer.

He was relieved at last; and still a little perplexed. Madge had returned, he informed Gower. She was well, she was well in health; he had her assurances that she was not excited about herself.

'She has brought a lady with her, a great lady to lodge with her. She has brought the Countess of Fleetwood to lodge with her.'

Gower heard those words from his father; and his father repeated them. To the prostrate worshipper of the Countess of Fleetwood, they were a blow on the head; madness had set in here, was his first recovering thought, or else a miracle had come to pass. Or was it a sham Countess of Fleetwood imposing upon the girl? His father was to go and see the great lady, at the greengrocer's shop; at her request, according to Madge. Conjectures shot their perishing tracks across a darkness that deepened and made shipwreck of philosophy. Was it the very Countess of Fleetwood penitent for her dalliance with the gambling passion, in feminine need of pastor's aid, having had report from Madge of this good shepherd? His father expressed a certain surprise; his countenance was mild. He considered it a merely strange occurrence.

Page 4047

Perhaps, in a crisis, a minister of religion is better armed than a philosopher. Gower would not own that, but he acknowledged the evidences, and owned to envy; especially when he accompanied his father to the greengrocer's shop, and Mr. Woodseer undisturbedly said:

'Here is the place.' The small stuffed shop appeared to grow portentously cavernous and waveringly illumined.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GIRL MADGE

Customers were at the counter of the shop, and these rational figures, together with the piles of cabbages, the sacks of potatoes, the pale small oranges here and there, the dominant smell of red herrings, denied the lurking of an angelical presence behind them.

Sarah Winch and a boy served at the counter. Sarah led the Mr. Woodseers into a corner knocked off the shop and called a room. Below the top bars of a wizened grate was a chilly fire. London's light came piecemeal through a smut-streaked window. If the wonderful was to occur, this was the place to heighten it.

'My son may be an intruder,' Mr. Woodseer said. 'He is acquainted with a Lord Fleetwood . . .'

'Madge will know, sir,' replied Sarah, and she sent up a shrill cry for Madge from the foot of the stairs.

The girl ran down swiftly. She entered listening to Sarah, looking at Gower; to whom, after a bob and pained smile where reverence was owing, she said, 'Can you tell me, sir, please, where we can find Lord Fleetwood now?'

Gower was unable to tell. Madge turned to Mr. Woodseer, saying soon after: 'Oh, she won't mind; she'll be glad, if he knows Lord Fleetwood. I'll fetch her.'

The moments were of the palpitating order for Gower, although his common sense lectured the wildest of hearts for expecting such a possibility as the presence of his lofty lady here.

And, of course, common sense proved to be right: the lady was quite another. But she struck on a sleeping day of his travels. Her face was not one to be forgotten, and to judge by her tremble of a smile, she remembered him instantly.

They were soon conversing, each helping to paint the scene of the place where they had met.

‘Lord Fleetwood has married me,’ she said.

Gower bent his head; all stood silent.

‘May I?’ said Madge to her. ’It is Lord Fleetwood’s wedded wife, sir. He drove her from her uncle’s, on her wedding day, the day of a prize-fight, where I was; he told me to wait on his lady at an inn there, as I ’ve done and will. He drove away that evening, and he hasn’t’—the girl’s black eyebrows worked: ’I’ve not seen him since. He’s a great nobleman, yes. He left his lady at the inn, expenses paid. He left her with no money. She stayed on till her heart was breaking. She has come to London to find him. She had to walk part of the way. She has only a change of linen we brought in a parcel. She’s a stranger to England: she knows nobody in London. She had no place to come to but this poor hole of ours she ’s so good as let welcome her. We can’t do better, and it ’s no use to be ashamed. She ‘s not a lady to scorn poor people.’

Page 4048

The girl's voice hummed through Gower.

He said: 'Lord Fleetwood may not be in London,' and chafed at himself for such a quaver.

'It's his house we want, sir, he has not been at his house in Kent. We want his London house.'

'My dear lady,' said Mr. Woodseer; 'it might be as well to communicate the state of things to your family without delay. My son will call at any address you name; or if it is a country address, I can write the items, with my assurances of your safety under my charge, in my house, which I beg you to make your home. My housekeeper is known to Sarah and Madge for an excellent Christian woman.'

Carinthia replied: 'You are kind to me, sir. I am grateful. I have an uncle; I would not disturb my uncle; he is inventing guns and he wishes peace. It is my husband I have come to find. He did not leave me in anger.'

She coloured. With a dimple of tenderness at one cheek, looking from Sarah to Madge, she said: 'I would not leave my friends; they are sisters to me.' Sarah, at these words, caught up her apron. Madge did no more than breathe deep and fast.

An unoccupied cold parlour in Mr. Woodseer's house that would be heated for a guest, urged him to repeat his invitation, but he took the check from Gower, who suggested the doubt of Mary Jones being so good an attendant upon Lady Fleetwood as Madge. 'And Madge has to help in the shop at times.'

Madge nodded, looked into the eyes of her mistress, which sanctioned her saying: 'She will like it best here, she is my lady and I understand her best. My lady gives no trouble: she is hardy, she's not like other ladies. I and Sarah sleep together in the room next. I can hear anything she wants. She takes us as if she was used to it.'

Sarah had to go to serve a customer. Madge made pretence of pricking her ears and followed into the shop.

'Your first visit to London is in ugly weather, Lady Fleetwood,' said Gower.

'It is my first,' she answered.

How the marriage came about, how the separation, could not be asked and was not related.

'Our district is not all London, my dear lady,' said Mr. Woodseer. 'Good hearts are here, as elsewhere, and as many, if one looks behind the dirt. I have found it since I laboured

amongst them, now twenty years. Unwashed human nature, though it is natural to us to wash, is the most human, we find.'

Gower questioned the naturalness of human nature's desire to wash; and they wrangled good-humouredly, Carinthia's eyes dwelling on them each in turn; until Mr. Woodseer, pursuing the theme started by him to interest her, spoke of consolations derived from his labours here, in exchange for the loss of his mountains. Her face lightened.

'You love the mountains?'

'I am a son of the mountains.'

'Ah, I love them! Father called me a daughter of the mountains. I was born in the mountains. I was leaving my mountains on the day, I think it yesterday, when I met this gentleman who is your son.'

Page 4049

‘A glorious day it was!’ Gower exclaimed.

‘It was a day of great glory for me,’ said Carinthia. ’Your foot did not pain you for long?’

‘The length of two pipes. You were with your brother.’

’With my brother. My brother has married a most beautiful lady. He is now travelling his happy time—my Chillon!’

There came a radiance on her under-eyelids. There was no weeping.

Struck by the contrast between the two simultaneous honeymoons, and a vision of the high-spirited mountain girl, seen in this place a young bride seeking her husband, Gower Woodseer could have performed that unphilosophical part. He had to shake himself. She seemed really a soaring bird brought down by the fowler.

Lord Fleetwood’s manner of abandoning her was the mystery.

Gower stood waiting for her initiative, when the minister interposed: ’There are books, books of our titled people-the Peers, books of the Peerage. They would supply the address. My son will discover where to examine them. He will find the address. Most of the great noblemen have a London house.’

‘My husband has a house in London,’ Carinthia said.

‘I know him, to some degree,’ said Gower.

She remarked: ‘I have heard that you do.’

Her lips were shut, as to any hint at his treatment of her.

Gower went into the shop to speak with Madge. The girl was talking in the business tone to customers; she finished her commission hurriedly and joined him on the pavement by the doorstep. Her voice was like the change for the swing of a door from street to temple.

’You’ve seen how brave she is, sir. She has things to bear. Never cries, never frets. Her marriage day—leastways . . . I can’t, no girl can tell. A great nobleman, yes. She waited, believing in him; she does. She hasn’t spoken to me of what she’s had to bear. I don’t know; I guess; I’m sure I’m right—and him a man! Girls learn to know men, call them gentlemen or sweeps. She thinks she has only to meet him to persuade him she ’s fit to be loved by him. She thinks of love. Would he—our tongues are tied except among ourselves to a sister. Leaves her by herself, with only me, after—it knocks me dumb! Many a man commits a murder wouldn’t do that. She could force him to—no, it isn’t a house she wants, she wants him. He’s her husband, Mr. Woodseer. You will do

what you can to help; I judge by your father. I and Sarah 'll slave for her to be as comfortable—as we—can make her; we can't give her what she 's used to. I shall count the hours.'

'You sold me apples when your head was just above the counter,' said Gower.

'Did I?—you won't lose time, sir?' she rejoined. 'Her box is down at the beastly inn in Kent. Kind people, I dare say; their bill was paid any extent, they said. And he might do as he liked in it—enter it like a thief, if it pleased him, and off like one, and they no wiser. She walked to his big house Esslemont for news of him. And I'm not a snivelling wench either; but she speaks of him a way to make a girl drink her tears, if they ain't to be let fall.'

Page 4050

‘But you had a victory down there,’ Gower hinted congratulations.

‘Ah,’ said she.

‘Christopher Ines is all right now?’

‘I’ve as good as lost my good name for Kit Ines, Mr. Woodseer.’

‘Not with my dad, Madge.’

’The minister reads us at the heart. Shall we hear the street of his house in London before night?’

‘I may be late.’

’I’ll be up, any hour, for a rap at the shutters. I want to take her to the house early next morning. She won’t mind the distance. She lies in bed, her eyes shut or open, never sleeping, hears any mouse. It shouldn’t go on, if we can do a thing to help.’

‘I’m off,’ said Gower, unwontedly vexed at his empty pocket, that could not offer the means for conveyance to a couple of young women.

The dark-browed girl sent her straight eyes at him. They pushed him to hasten. On second thoughts, he stopped and hailed her; he was moved to confirm an impression of this girl’s features.

His mind was directed to the business burning behind them, honestly enough, as soon as he had them in sight again.

‘I ought to have the address of some of her people, in case,’ he said.

’She won’t go to her uncle, I ‘m sure of that,’ said Madge. ’He ’s a lord and can’t be worried. It ‘s her husband to find first.’

’If he’s to be found!—he’s a lord, too. Has she no other relatives or friends?’

’She loves her brother. He’s an officer. He’s away on honeymoon. There ’s an admiral down Hampshire way, a place I’ve been near and seen. I’d not have you go to any of them, sir, without trying all we can do to find Lord Fleetwood. It’s Admiral Fakenham she speaks of; she’s fond of him. She’s not minded to bother any of her friends about herself.’

‘I shall see you to-night,’ said Gower, and set his face Westward, remembering that his father had named Caermarthen as her mother’s birthplace.

Just in that tone of hers do Welshwomen talk of their country; of its history, when at home, of its mountains, when exiled: and in a language like hers, bare of superlatives to signify an ardour conveyed by the fire of the breath. Her quick devotion to a lady exciting enthusiasm through admiring pity for the grace of a much-tried quiet sweetness, was explained; apart from other reasons, feminine or hidden, which might exist. Only a Welsh girl would be so quick and all in it, with a voice intimating a heated cauldron under her mouth. None but a Welsh-blooded girl, risking her good name to follow and nurse the man she considered a hero, would carry her head to look virgin eyes as she did. One could swear to them, Gower thought. Contact with her spirited him out of his mooniness.

Page 4051

He had the Cymric and Celtic respect of character; which puts aside the person's environments to face the soul. He was also an impressionable fellow among his fellows, a philosopher only at his leisure, in his courted solitudes. Getting away some strides from this girl of the drilling voice,—the shudder-voice, he phrased it,—the lady for whom she pleaded came clearer into his view and gradually absorbed him; though it was an emulation with the girl Madge, of which he was a trifle conscious, that drove him to do his work of service in the directest manner. He then fancied the girl had caught something of the tone of her lady: the savage intensity or sincerity; and he brooded on Carinthia's position, the mixture of the astounding and the woful in her misadventure. One could almost laugh at our human fate, to think of a drop off the radiant mountain heights upon a Whitechapel greengrocer's shop, gathering the title of countess midway.

But nothing of the ludicrous touched her; no, and if we bring reason to scan our laugh at pure humanity, it is we who are in the place of the ridiculous, for doing what reason disavows. Had he not named her, Carinthia, Saint and Martyr, from a first perusal of her face? And Lord Fleetwood had read and repeated it. Lord Fleetwood had become the instrument to martyrize her? That might be; there was a hoard of bad stuff in his composition besides the precious: and this was a nobleman owning enormous wealth, who could vitiate himself by disposing of a multitude of men and women to serve his will, a shifty will. Wealth creates the magician, and may breed the fiend within him. In the hands of a young man, wealth is an invitation to devilry. Gower's idea of the story of Carinthia inclined to charge Lord Fleetwood with every possible false dealing. He then quashed the charge, and decided to wait for information.

At the second of the aristocratic Clubs of London's West, into which he stepped like an easy member, the hall-porter did not examine his clothing from German hat to boots, and gave him Lord Fleetwood's town address. He could tell Madge at night by the door of the shuttered shop, that Lord Fleetwood had gone down to Wales.

'It means her having to wait,' she said. 'The minister has been to the coach-office, to order up her box from that inn. He did it in his name; they can't refuse; no money's owing. She must have a change. Sally has fifteen pounds locked up in case of need.'

Sally's capacity and economy fetched the penniless philosopher a slap.

'You've taken to this lady,' he said.

'She held my hand, while Kit Ines was at his work; and I was new to her, and a prize-fighter's lass, they call me:—upon the top of that nobleman's coach, where he made me sit, behind her, to see the fight; and she his wedded lady that morning. A queer groom. He may keep Kit Ines from drink, he's one of you men, and rides over anything in his way. I can't speak about

Page 4052

it; I could swear it before a judge, from what I know. Those Rundles at that inn don't hear anything it suits him to do. All the people down in those parts are slaves to him. And I thought he was a real St. George before,—yes, ready I was to kiss the ground his feet crossed. If you could, it's Chinningfold near where Admiral Fakenham lives, down Hampshire way. Her friends ought to hear what's happened to her. They'll find her in a queer place. She might go to the minister's. I believe she's happier with us girls.'

Gower pledged his word to start for Chinningfold early as the light next day. He liked the girl the better, in an amicable fashion, now that his nerves had got free of the transient spell of her kettle tone—the hardly varied one note of a heart boiling with sisterly devotion to a misused stranger of her sex;—and, after the way of his race, imagination sprang up in him, at the heels of the quieted senses, releasing him from the personal and physical to grasp the general situation and place the protagonist foremost.

He thought of Carinthia, with full vision of her. Some wrong had been done, or some violation of the right, to guess from the girl Madge's molten words in avoidance of the very words. It implied—though it might be but one of Love's shrewder discords—such suspected traitorous dealing of a man with their sister woman as makes the world of women all woman toward her. They can be that, and their being so illuminates their hidden sentiments in relation to the mastering male, whom they uphold.

But our uninformed philosopher was merely picking up scraps of sheddings outside the dark wood of the mystery they were to him, and playing imagination upon them. This primary element of his nature soon enthroned his chosen lady above their tangled obscurities. Beneath her tranquil beams, with the rapture of the knowledge that her name on earth was Livia, he threaded East London's thoroughfares,—on a morning when day and night were made one by fog, to journey down to Chinningfold, by coach, in the service of the younger Countess of Fleetwood, whose right to the title he did not doubt, though it directed surprise movements at his understanding from time to time.

CHAPTER XX

Studies in fog, *gout*, *an old seaman*, A *lovely serpent*, *and the moral effects that may come of* A *borrowed shirt*

Money of his father's enabled Gower to take the coach; and studies in fog, from the specked brown to the woolly white, and the dripping torn, were proposed to the traveller, whose preference of Nature's face did not arrest his observation of her domino and petticoats; across which blank sheets he curiously read backward, that he journeyed by the aid of his father's hard-earned, ungrudged piece of gold.

Page 4053

Without it, he would have been useless in this case of need. The philosopher could starve with equanimity, and be the stronger. But one had, it seemed here clearly, to put on harness and trudge along a line, if the unhappy were to have one's help. Gradual experiences of his business among his fellows were teaching an exercised mind to learn in regions where minds unexercised were doctorial giants beside it.

The study of gout was offered at Chinningfold. Admiral Fakenham's butler refused at first to take a name to his master. Gower persisted, stating the business of his mission; and in spite of the very suspicious glib good English spoken by a man wearing such a hat and suit, the butler was induced to consult Mrs. Carthew.

She sprang up alarmed. After having seen the young lady happily married and off with her lordly young husband, the arrival of a messenger from the bride gave a stir the wrong way to her flowing recollections; the scenes and incidents she had smothered under her love of the comfortable stood forth appallingly. The messenger, the butler said, was no gentleman. She inspected Gower and heard him speak. An anomaly had come to the house; for he had the language of a gentleman, the appearance of a nondescript; he looked indifferent, he spoke sympathetically; and he was frank as soon as the butler was out of hearing. In return for the compliment, she invited him to her sitting-room. The story of the young countess, whom she had seen driven away by her husband from the church in a coach and four, as being now destitute, praying to see her friends, in the Whitechapel of London—the noted haunt of thieves and outcasts, bankrupts and the abandoned; set her asking for the first time, who was the man with dreadful countenance inside the coach? A previously disregarded horror of a man. She went trembling to the admiral, though his health was delicate, his temper excitable. It was, she considered, an occasion for braving the doctor's interdict.

Gower was presently summoned to the chamber where Admiral Fakenham reclined on cushions in an edifice of an arm-chair. He told a plain tale. Its effect was to straighten the admiral's back, and enlarge in grey glass a pair of sea-blue eyes. And, 'What's that? Whitechapel?' the admiral exclaimed,—at high pitch, far above his understanding. The particulars were repeated, whereupon the sick-room shook with, 'Greengrocer?' He stunned himself with another of the monstrous points in his pet girl's honeymoon: 'A prizefight?'

To refresh a saving incredulity, he took a closer view of the messenger. Gower's habiliments were those of the 'queer fish,' the admiral saw. But the meeting at Carlsruhe was recalled to him, and there was a worthy effort to remember it. 'Prize-fight!—Greengrocer! Whitechapel!' he rang the changes rather more moderately; till, swelling and purpling, he cried: 'Where's the husband?'

That was the emissary's question likewise.

Page 4054

‘If I could have found him, sir, I should not have troubled you.’

’Disappeared? Plays the man of his word, then plays the madman! Prize-fight the first day of her honeymoon? Good Lord! Leaves her at the inn?’

‘She was left.’

‘When was she left?’

‘As soon as the fight was over—as far as I understand.’

The admiral showered briny masculine comments on that bridegroom.

’Her brother’s travelling somewhere in the Pyrenees—married my daughter. She has an uncle, a hermit.’ He became pale. ’I must do it. The rascal insults us all. Flings her off the day he married her! It ’s a slap in the face to all of us. You are acquainted with the lady, sir. Would you call her a red-haired girl?’

‘Red-gold of the ballads; chestnut-brown, with threads of fire.’

’She has the eyes for a man to swear by. I feel the loss of her, I can tell you. She was wine and no penalty to me. Is she much broken under it?—if I ‘m to credit . . . I suppose I must. It floors me.’

Admiral Baldwin’s frosty stare returned on him. Gower caught an image of it, as comparable, without much straining, to an Arctic region smitten by the beams.

‘Nothing breaks her courage,’ he said.

’To be sure, my poor dear! Who could have guessed when she left my house she was on her way to a prizefight and a greengrocer’s in Whitechapel. But the dog’s not mad, though his bite ’s bad; he ’s an eccentric mongrel. He wants the whip; ought to have had it regularly from his first breeching. He shall whistle for her when he repents; and he will, mark me. This gout here will be having a snap at the vitals if I don’t start to-night. Oblige me, half a minute.’

The admiral stretched his hand for an arm to give support, stood, and dropped into the chair, signifying a fit of giddiness in the word ‘Head.’

Before the stupor had passed, Mrs. Carthew entered, anxious lest the admittance of a messenger of evil to her invalid should have been an error of judgement. The butler had argued it with her. She belonged to the list of persons appointed to cut life’s thread when it strains, their general kindness being so liable to misdirection.

Gower left the room and went into the garden. He had never seen a death; and the admiral's peculiar pallor intimated events proper to days of cold mist and a dripping stillness. How we go, was the question among his problems:—if we are to go! his youthful frame insistingly added.

The fog down a wet laurel-walk contracted his mind with the chilling of his blood, and he felt that he would have to see the thing if he was to believe in it. Of course he believed, but life throbbed rebelliously, and a picture of a desk near a lively fire-grate, books and pen and paper, and a piece of writing to be approved of by the Hesper of ladies, held ground with a pathetic heroism against the inevitable.

Page 4055

He got his wits to the front by walking faster; and then thought of the young countess and the friend she might be about to lose. She could number her friends on her fingers. Admiral Fakenham's exclamations of the name of the place where she now was, conveyed an inky idea of the fall she had undergone. Counting her absent brother, with himself, his father, and the two Whitechapel girls, it certainly was an unexampled fall, to say of her, that they and those two girls had become by the twist of circumstances the most serviceable of her friends.

Her husband was the unriddled riddle we have in the wealthy young lord,—burning to possess, and making, tatters of all he grasped, the moment it was his own. Glints of the devilish had shot from him at the gamingtables,—fine haunts for the study of our lower man. He could be magnificent in generosity; he had little humaneness. He coveted beauty in women hungrily, and seemed to be born hostile to them; or so Gower judged by the light of the later evidence on unconsidered antecedent observations of him. Why marry her to cast her off instantly? The crude philosopher asked it as helplessly as the admiral. And, further, what did the girl Madge mean by the drop of her voice to a hum of enforced endurance under injury, like the furnace behind an iron door? Older men might have understood, as he was aware; he might have guessed, only he had the habit of scattering meditation upon the game of hawk and fowl.

Dame Gossip boils. Her one idea of animation is to have her dramatis persona in violent motion, always the biggest foremost; and, indeed, that is the way to make them credible, for the wind they raise and the succession of collisions. The fault of the method is, that they do not instruct; so the breath is out of them before they are put aside; for the uninstructive are the humanly deficient: they remain with us like the tolerated old aristocracy, which may not govern, and is but socially seductive. The deuteragonist or secondary person can at times tell us more of them than circumstances at furious heat will help them to reveal; and the Dame will have him only as an index-post. Hence her endless ejaculations over the mystery of Life, the inscrutability of character,—in a plain world, in the midst of such readable people! To preserve Romance (we exchange a sky for a ceiling if we let it go), we must be inside the heads of our people as well as the hearts, more than shaking the kaleidoscope of hurried spectacles, in days of a growing activity of the head.

Gower Woodseer could not know that he was drawn on to fortune and the sight of his Hesper by Admiral Fakenham's order that the visitor was to stay at his house until he should be able to quit his bed, and journey with him to London, doctor or no doctor. The doctor would not hear of it. The admiral threatened it every night for the morning, every morning for the night; and Gower had to submit to postponements

Page 4056

balefully affecting his linen. Remonstrance was not to be thought of; for at a mere show of reluctance the courtly admiral flushed, frowned, and beat the bed where he lay, a gouty volcano. Gower's one shirt was passing through the various complexions, and had approached the Nubian on its way to negro. His natural candour checked the downward course. He mentioned to Mrs. Carthew, with incidental gravity, on a morning at breakfast, that this article of his attire 'was beginning to resemble London snow.' She was amused; she promised him a change more resembling country snow. 'It will save me from buttoning so high up,' he said, as he thanked her. She then remembered the daily increase of stiffness in his figure: and a reflection upon his patient waiting, and simpleness, and lexicographer speech to expose his minor needs, touched her unused sense of humour on the side where it is tender in women, from being motherly.

In consequence, she spoke of him with a pleading warmth to the Countess Livia, who had come down to see the admiral 'concerning an absurd but annoying rumour running over London.' Gower was out for a walk. He knew of the affair, Mrs. Carthew said, for an introduction to her excuses of his clothing.

'But I know the man,' said Livia. 'Lord Fleetwood picked him up somewhere, and brought him to us. Clever: Why, is he here?'

'He is here, sent to the admiral, as I understand, my lady.'

'Sent by whom?'

Having but a weak vocabulary to defend a delicate position, Mrs. Carthew stuttered into evasions, after the way of ill-armed persons; and naming herself a stranger to the circumstances, she feebly suggested that the admiral ought not to be disturbed before the doctor's next visit; Mr. Woodseer had been allowed to sit by his bed yesterday only for ten minutes, to divert him with his talk. She protected in this wretched manner the poor gentleman she sacrificed and emitted such a smell of secresy, that Livia wrote three words on her card, for it to be taken to Admiral Baldwin at once. Mrs. Carthew supplicated faintly; she was unheeded.

The Countess of Fleetwood mounted the stairs—to descend them with the knowledge of her being the Dowager Countess of Fleetwood! Henrietta had spoken of the Countess of Fleetwood's hatred of the title of Dowager. But when Lady Fleetwood had the fact from the admiral, would she forbear to excite him? If she repudiated it, she would provoke him to fire 'one of his broadsides,'—as they said in the family, to assert its and that might exhaust him; and there was peril in that. And who was guilty? Mrs. Carthew confessed her guilt, asking how it could have been avoided. She made appeal to Gower on his return, transfixing him.

Not only is he no philosopher who has an idol, he has to learn that he cannot think rationally; his due sense of weight and measure is lost, the choice of his thoughts as

well. He was in the house with his devoutly, simply worshipped, pearl of women, and his whole mind fell to work without ado upon the extravagant height of the admiral's shirt-collar cutting his ears. The very beating of his heart was perplexed to know whether it was for rapture or annoyance. As a result he was but histrionically master of himself when the Countess Livia or the nimbus of the lady appeared in the room.

Page 4057

She received his bow; she directed Mrs. Carthew to have the doctor summoned immediately. The remorseful woman flew.

'Admiral Fakenham is very ill, Mr. Woodseer, he has had distracting news. Oh, no, the messenger is not blamed. You are Lord Fleetwood's friend and will not allow him to be prejudged. He will be in town shortly. I know him well, you know him; and could you hear him accused of cruelty—and to a woman? He is the soul of chivalry. So, in his way, is the admiral. If he were only more patient! Let us wait for Lord Fleetwood's version. I am certain it will satisfy me. The admiral wishes you to step up to him. Be very quiet; you will be; consent to everything. I was unaware of his condition: the things I heard were incredible. I hope the doctor will not delay. Now go. Beg to retire soon.'

Livia spoke under her breath; she had fears.

Admiral Baldwin lay in his bed, submitting to a nurse-woman-sign of extreme exhaustion. He plucked strength from the sight of Gower and bundled the woman out of the room, muttering: 'Kill myself? Not half so quick as they'd do it. I can't rest for that Whitechapel of yours. Please fetch pen and paper: it's a letter.'

The letter began, 'Dear Lady Arpington.'

The dictation of it came in starts. Atone moment it seemed as if life's ending shook the curtains on our stage and were about to lift. An old friend in the reader of the letter would need no excuse for its jerky brevity. It said that his pet girl, Miss Kirby, was married to the Earl of Fleetwood in the first week of last month, and was now to be found at a shop No. 45 Longways, Whitechapel; that the writer was ill, unable to stir; that he would be in London within eight-and-forty hours at furthest. He begged Lady Arpington to send down to the place and have the young countess fetched to her, and keep her until he came.

Admiral Baldwin sat up to sign the letter.

'Yes, and write "miracles happen when the devil's abroad"—done it!' he said, sinking back. 'Now seal, you'll find wax—the ring at my watch-chain.'

He sighed, as it were the sound of his very last; he lay like a sleeper twitched by a dream. There had been a scene with Livia. The dictating of the letter took his remainder of strength out of him.

Gower called in the nurse, and went downstairs. He wanted the address of Lady Arpington's town house.

'You have a letter for her?' said Livia, and held her hand for it in a way not to be withstood.

‘There’s no superscription,’ he remarked.

‘I will see to that, Mr. Woodseer.’

‘I fancy I am bound, Lady Fleetwood.’

‘By no means.’ She touched his arm. ‘You are Lord Fleetwood’s friend.’

A slight convulsion of the frame struck the admiral’s shirt-collar at his ears; it virtually prostrated him under foot of a lady so benign in overlooking the spectacle he presented. Still, he considered; he had wits alive enough, just to perceive a duty.

Page 4058

‘The letter was entrusted to me, Lady Fleetwood.’

‘You are afraid to entrust it to the post?’

‘I was thinking of delivering it myself in town.’

‘You will entrust it to me.’

‘Anything on earth of my own.’

‘The treasure would be valued. This you confide to my care.’

‘It is important.’

‘No.’

‘Indeed it is.’

’Say that it is, then. It is quite safe with me. It may be important that it should not be delivered. Are you not Lord Fleetwood’s friend? Lady Arpington is not so very, very prominent in the list with you and me. Besides, I don’t think she has come to town yet. She generally sees out the end of the hunting season. Leave the letter to me: it shall go. You, with your keen observation missing nothing, have seen that my uncle has not his whole judgement at present. There are two sides to a case. Lord Fleetwood’s friend will know that it would be unfair to offer him up to his enemies while he is absent. Things going favourably here, I drive back to town to-morrow, and I hope you will accept a seat in my carriage.’

He delivered his courtliest; he was riding on cloud.

They talked of Baden. His honourable surrender of her defeated purse was a subject for gentle humour with her, venturesome compliment with him. He spoke well; and though his hands were clean of Sir Meeson Corby’s reproach of them, the caricature of presentable men blushed absurdly and seemed uneasy in his monstrous collar. The touching of him again would not be required to set him pacing to her steps. His hang of the head testified to the unerring stamp of a likeness Captain Abrane could affix with a stroke: he looked the fiddler over his bow, playing wonderfully to conceal the crack of a string. The merit of being one of her army of admirers was accorded to him. The letter to Lady Arpington was retained.

Gower deferred the further mention of the letter until a visit to the admiral’s chamber should furnish an excuse; and he had to wait for it. Admiral Baldwin’s condition was becoming ominous. He sent messages downstairs by the doctor, forbidding his guest’s departure until they two could make the journey together next day. The tortured and blissful young man, stripped of his borrowed philosopher’s cloak, hung conscience-

ridden in this delicious bower, which was perceptibly an antechamber of the vaults, offering him the study he thirsted for, shrank from, and mixed with his cup of amorous worship.

CHAPTER XXI

In which we have further glimpses of the wondrous mechanism of our younger man

Page 4059

The report of Admiral Baldwin Fakenham as having died in the arms of a stranger visiting the house, hit nearer the mark than usual. He yielded his last breath as Gower Woodseer was lowering him to his pillow, shortly after a husky whisper of the letter to Lady Arpington; and that was one of Gower's crucial trials. It condemned him, for the pacifying of a dying man, to the murmur and shuffle, which was a lie; and the lie burnt him, contributed to the brand on his race. He and his father upheld a solitary bare staff, where the Cambrian flag had flown, before their people had been trampled in mire, to do as the worms. His loathing of any shadow of the lie was a protest on behalf of Welsh blood against an English charge, besides the passion for spiritual cleanliness: without which was no comprehension, therefore no enjoyment, of Nature possible to him. For Nature is the Truth.

He begged the countess to let him have the letter; he held to the petition, with supplications; he spoke of his pledged word, his honour; and her countenance did not deny to such an object as she beheld the right to a sense of honour. 'We all have the sentiment, I hope, Mr. Woodseer,' she said, stupefying the worshipper, who did not see it manifested. There was a look of gentle intimacy, expressive of common grounds between them, accompanying the dead words. Mistress of the letter, and the letter safe under lock, the admiral dead, she had not to bestow a touch of her hand on his coatsleeve in declining to return it. A face languidly and benevolently querulous was bent on him, when he, so clever a man, resumed his very silly petition.

She was moon out of cloud at a change of the theme. Gower journeyed to London without the letter, intoxicated, and conscious of poison; enamoured of it, and straining for health. He had to reflect at the journey's end, that he had picked up nothing on the road, neither a thing observed nor a thing imagined; he was a troubled pool instead of a flowing river.

The best help to health for him was a day in his father's house. We are perpetually at our comparisons of ourselves with others; and they are mostly profitless; but the man carrying his religious light, to light the darkest ways of his fellows, and keeping good cheer, as though the heart of him ran a mountain water through the grimy region, plucked at Gower with an envy to resemble him in practice. His philosophy, too, reproached him for being outshone. Apart from his philosophy, he stood confessed a bankrupt; and it had dwindled to near extinction. Adoration of a woman takes the breath out of philosophy. And if one had only to say sheer donkey, he consenting to be driven by her! One has to say worse in this case; for the words are, liar and traitor.

Page 4060

Carinthia's attitude toward his father conduced to his emulous respect for the old man, below whom, and indeed below the roadway of ordinary principles hedged with dull texts, he had strangely fallen. The sight of her lashed him. She made it her business or it was her pleasure to go the rounds beside Mr. Woodseer visiting his poor people. She spoke of the scenes she witnessed, and threw no stress on the wretchedness, having only the wish to assist in ministering. Probably the great wretchedness bubbling over the place blunted her feeling of loss at the word of Admiral Baldwin's end; her bosom sprang up: 'He was next to father,' was all she said; and she soon reverted to this and that house of the lodgings of poverty. She had descended on the world. There was of course a world outside Whitechapel, but Whitechapel was hot about her; the nests of misery, the sharp note of want in the air, tricks of an urchin who had amused her.

As to the place itself, she had no judgement to pronounce, except that: 'They have no mornings here'; and the childish remark set her quivering on her heights, like one seen through a tear, in Gower's memory. Scarce anything of her hungry impatience to meet her husband was visible: she had come to London to meet him; she hoped to meet him soon: before her brother's return, she could have added. She mentioned the goodness of Sarah Winch in not allowing that she was a burden to support. Money and its uses had impressed her; the quantity possessed by some, the utter need of it for the first of human purposes by others. Her speech was not of so halting or foreign an English. She grew rapidly wherever she was planted.

Speculation on the conduct of her husband, empty as it might be, was necessitated in Gower. He pursued it, and listened to his father similarly at work: 'A young lady fit for any station, the kindest of souls, a born charitable human creature, void of pride, near in all she—does and thinks to the Shaping Hand, why should her husband forsake her on the day of their nuptials.

She is most gracious; the simplicity of an infant. Can you imagine the doing of an injury by a man to a woman like her?'

Then it was that Gower screwed himself to say:

'Yes, I can imagine it, I'm doing it myself. I shall be doing it till I've written a letter and paid a visit.'

He took a meditative stride or two in the room, thinking without revulsion of the Countess Livia under a similitude of the bell of the plant henbane, and that his father had immunity from temptation because of the insensibility to beauty. Out of which he passed to the writing of the letter to Lord Fleetwood, informing his lordship that he intended immediately to deliver a message to the Marchioness of Arpington from Admiral Baldwin Fakenham, in relation to the Countess of Fleetwood. A duty was easily done by Gower when he had surmounted the task of conceiving his resolution to do it; and this task, involving an offence to the Lady Livia and intrusion of his name on a

nobleman’s recollection, ranked next in severity to the chopping off of his fingers by a man suspecting them of the bite of rabies.

Page 4061

An interview with Lady Arpington was granted him the following day.

She was a florid, aquiline, loud-voiced lady, evidently having no seat for her wonderments, after his account of the origin of his acquaintance with the admiral had quieted her suspicions. The world had only to stand beside her, and it would hear what she had heard. She rushed to the conclusion that Lord Fleetwood had married a person of no family.

'Really, really, that young man's freaks appear designed for the express purpose of heightening our amazement!' she exclaimed. 'He won't easily get beyond a wife in the east of London, at a shop; but there's no knowing. Any wish of Admiral Baldwin Fakenham's I hold sacred. At least I can see for myself. You can't tell me more of the facts? If Lord Fleetwood's in town, I will call him here at once. I will drive down to this address you give me. She is a civil person?'

'Her breeding is perfect,' said Gower.

'Perfect breeding, you say?' Lady Arpington was reduced to a murmur. She considered the speaker: his outlandish garb, his unprotesting self-possession. He spoke good English by habit, her ear told her. She was of an eminence to judge of a man impartially, even to the sufferance of an opinion from him, on a subject that lesser ladies would have denied to his clothing. Outwardly simple, naturally frank, though a tangle of the complexities inwardly, he was a touchstone for true aristocracy, as the humblest who bear the main elements of it must be. Certain humorous turns in his conversation won him an amicable smile when he bowed to leave: they were the needed finish of a favourable impression.

One day later the earl arrived in town, read Gower Woodseer's brief words, and received the consequently expected summons, couched in a great lady's plain imperative. She was connected with his family on the paternal side.

He went obediently; not unwillingly, let the deputed historian of the Marriage, turning over documents, here say. He went to Lady Arpington disposed for marital humaneness and jog-trot harmony, by condescension; equivalent to a submitting to the drone of an incessant psalm at the drum of the ear. He was, in fact, rather more than inclined that way. When very young, at the age of thirteen, a mood of religious fervour had spiritualized the dulness of Protestant pew and pulpit for him. Another fit of it, in the Roman Catholic direction, had proposed, during his latest dilemma, to relieve him of the burden of his pledged word. He had plunged for a short space into the rapturous contemplation of a monastic life—'the clean soul for the macerated flesh,' as that fellow Woodseer said once: and such as his friend, the Roman Catholic Lord Feltre, moodily talked of getting in his intervals. He had gone down to a young and novel trial establishment of English penitents in the forest of a Midland county, and had watched and envied, and seen the escape from a lifelong bondage to the 'beautiful Gorgon,'

under cover of a white flannel frock. The world pulled hard, and he gave his body into chains of a woman, to redeem his word.

Page 4062

But there was a plea on behalf of this woman. The life she offered might have psalmic iteration; the dead monotony of it in prospect did, nevertheless, exorcise a devil. Carinthia promised, it might seem to chase and keep the black beast out of him permanently, as she could, he now conceived: for since the day of the marriage with her, the devil inhabiting him had at least been easier, ‘up in a corner.’

He held an individual memory of his bride, rose-veiled, secret to them both, that made them one, by subduing him. For it was a charm; an actual feminine, an unanticipated personal, charm; past reach of tongue to name, wordless in thought. There, among the folds of the incense vapours of our heart’s holy of holies, it hung; and it was rare, it was distinctive of her, and alluring, if one consented to melt to it, and accepted for compensation the exorcising of a devil.

Oh, but no mere devil by title!—a very devil. It was alert and frisky, flushing, filling the thin cold idea of Henrietta at a thought; and in the thought it made Carinthia’s intimate charm appear as no better than a thing to enrich a beggar, while he knew that kings could never command the charm. Not love, only the bathing in Henrietta’s incomparable beauty and the desire to be, desire to have been, the casket of it, broke the world to tempest and lightnings at a view of Henrietta the married woman—married to the brother of the woman calling him husband:—’It is my husband.’ The young tyrant of wealth could have avowed that he did not love Henrietta; but not the less was he in the swing of a whirlwind at the hint of her loving the man she had married. Did she? It might be tried.

She? That Henrietta is one of the creatures who love pleasure, love flattery, love their beauty: they cannot love a man. Or the love is a ship that will not sail a sea.

Now, if the fact were declared and attested, if her shallowness were seen proved, one might get free of the devil she plants in the breast. Absolutely to despise her would be release, and it would allow of his tasting Carinthia’s charm, reluctantly acknowledged; not ’money of the country’ beside that golden Henrietta’s.

Yet who can say?—women are such deceptions. Often their fairest, apparently sweetest, when brought to the keenest of the tests, are graceless; or worse, artificially consonant; in either instance barren of the poetic. Thousands of the confidently expectant among men have been unbewitched; a lamentable process; and the grimly reticent and the loudly discursive are equally eloquent of the pretty general disillusion. How they loathe and tear the mask of the sham attraction that snatched them to the hag yoke, and fell away to show its grisly horrors within the round of the month, if not the second enumeration of twelve by the clock! Fleetwood had heard certain candid seniors talk, delivering their minds in superior appreciation of unpretentious boor wenches, nature’s products,

Page 4063

not esteemed by him. Well, of a truth, she—'Red Hair and Rugged Brows,' as the fellow Woodseer had called her, in alternation with 'Mountain Face to Sun'—she at the unveiling was gentle, surpassingly; graceful in the furnace of the trial. She wore through the critic ordeal his burning sensitiveness to grace and delicacy cast about a woman, and was rather better than not withered by it.

On the borders between maidenly and wifely, she, a thing of flesh like other daughters of earth, had impressed her sceptical lord, inclining to contempt of her and detestation of his bargain, as a flitting hue, ethereal, a transfiguration of earthliness in the core of the earthly furnace. And how?—but that it must have been the naked shining forth of her character, startled to show itself:—'It is my husband':—it must have been love.

The love that they versify, and strum on guitars, and go crazy over, and end by roaring at as the delusion; this common bloom of the ripeness of a season; this would never have utterly captured a sceptic, to vanquish him in his mastery, snare him in her surrender. It must have been the veritable passion: a flame kept alive by vestal ministrants in the yewwood of the forest of Old Romance; planted only in the breasts of very favourite maidens. Love had eyes, love had a voice that night,-love was the explicable magic lifting terrestrial to seraphic. Though, true, she had not Henrietta's golden smoothness of beauty. Henrietta, illumined with such a love, would outdo all legends, all dreams of the tale of love. Would she? For credulous men she would be golden coin of the currency. She would not have a particular wild flavour: charm as of the running doe that has taken a dart and rolls an eye to burst the hunter's heart with pity.

Fleetwood went his way to Lady Arpington almost complacently, having fought and laid his wilder self. He might be likened to the doctor's patient entering the chemist's shop, with a prescription for a drug of healing virtue, upon which the palate is as little consulted as a robustious lollypop boy in the household of ceremonial parents, who have rung for the troop of their orderly domestics to sit in a row and hearken the intonation of good words.

CHAPTER XXII

A RIGHT-MINDED GREAT LADY

The bow, the welcome, and the introductory remarks passed rapidly as the pull at two sides of a curtain opening on a scene that stiffens courtliness to hard attention.

After the names of Admiral Baldwin and 'the Mr. Woodseer,' the name of Whitechapel was mentioned by Lady Arpington. It might have been the name of any other place.

‘Ah, so far, then, I have to instruct you,’ she said, observing the young earl. ’I drove down there yesterday. I saw the lady calling herself Countess of Fleetwood. By right? She was a Miss Kirby.’

‘She has the right,’ Fleetwood said, standing well up out of a discharge of musketry.

Page 4064

’Marriage not contested. You knew of her being in that place?—I can’t describe it.’

‘Your ladyship will pardon me?’

London’s frontier of barbarism was named for him again, and in a tone to penetrate.

He refrained from putting the question of how she had come there.

As iron as he looked, he said: ‘She stays there by choice.’

The great lady tapped her foot on the floor.

‘You are not acquainted with the district.’

‘One of my men comes out of it.’

’The coming out of it! . . . However, I understand her story, that she travelled from a village inn, where she had been left-without resources. She waited weeks; I forget how many. She has a description of maid in attendance on her. She came to London to find her husband. You were at the mines, we heard. Her one desire is to meet her husband. But, goodness! Fleetwood, why do you frown? You acknowledge the marriage, she has the name of the church; she was married out of that old Lord Levellier’s house. You drove her—I won’t repeat the flighty business. You left her, and she did her best to follow you. Will the young men of our time not learn that life is no longer a game when they have a woman for partner in the match!

You don’t complain of her flavour of a foreign manner? She can’t be so very . . . Admiral Baldwin’s daughter has married her brother; and he is a military officer. She has germs of breeding, wants only a little rub of the world to smooth her. Speak to the point:—do you meet her here? Do you refuse?’

‘At present? I do.’

‘Something has to be done.’

‘She was bound to stay where I left her.’

‘You are bound to provide for her becomingly.’

‘Provision shall be made, of course.’

‘The story will . . . unless—and quickly, too.’

I know, I know!’

Fleetwood had the clang of all the bells of London chiming Whitechapel at him in his head, and he betrayed the irritated tyrant ready to decree fire and sword, for the defence or solace of his tender sensibilities.

The black flash flew.

'It 's a thing to mend as well as one can,' Lady Arpington said. 'I am not inquisitive: you had your reasons or chose to act without any. Get her away from that place. She won't come to me unless it 's to meet her husband. Ah, well, temper does not solve your problem; husband you are, if you married her. We'll leave the husband undiscussed: with this reserve, that it seems to me men are now beginning to play the misunderstood.'

'I hope they know themselves better,' said Fleetwood; and he begged for the name and number of the house in the Whitechapel street, where she who was discernibly his enemy, and the deadliest of enemies, had now her dwelling.

Her immediate rush to that place, the fixing of herself there for an assault on him, was a move worthy the daughter of the rascal Old Buccaneer; it compelled to urgent measures. He, as he felt horribly in pencilling her address, acted under compulsion; and a woman prodded the goad. Her mask of ingenuousness was flung away for a look of craft, which could be power; and with her changed aspect his tolerance changed to hatred.

Page 4065

‘A shop,’ Lady Arpington explained for his better direction: ’potatoes, vegetable stuff. Honest people, I am to believe. She is indifferent to her food, she says. She works, helping one of their ministers—one of their denominations: heaven knows what they call themselves! Anything to escape from the Church! She’s likely to become a Methodist. With Lord Feltre proselytizing for his Papist creed, Lord Pitscrew a declared Mohammedan, we shall have a pretty English aristocracy in time. Well, she may claim to belong to it now. She would not be persuaded against visitations to pestiferous hovels. What else is there to do in such a place? She goes about catching diseases to avoid bilious melancholy in the dark back room of a small greengrocer’s shop in Whitechapel. There—you have the word for the Countess of Fleetwood’s present address.’

It drenched him with ridicule.

‘I am indebted to your ladyship for the information,’ he said, and maintained his rigidity.

The great lady stiffened.

’I am obliged to ask you whether you intend to act on it at once. The admiral has gone; I am in some sort deputed as a guardian to her, and I warn you—very well, very well. In your own interests, it will be. If she is left there another two or three days, the name of the place will stick to her.’

‘She has baptized herself with it already, I imagine,’ said Fleetwood. ‘She will have Esslemont to live in.’

‘There will be more than one to speak as to that. You should know her.’

‘I do not know her.’

‘You married her.’

‘The circumstances are admitted.’

’If I may hazard a guess, she is unlikely to come to terms without a previous interview. She is bent on meeting you.’

’I am to be subjected to further annoyance, or she will take the name of the place she at present inhabits, and bombard me with it. Those are the terms.’

‘She has a brother living, I remind you.’

‘State the deduction, if you please, my lady.’

’She is not of ‘a totally inferior family.’

’She had a father famous over England as the Old Buccaneer, and is a diligent reader of his book of *maxims for men*.’

’Dear me! Then Kirby—Captain Kirby! I remember. That’s her origin, is it?’ the great lady cried, illumined. ’My mother used to talk of the Cressett scandal. Old Lady Arpington, too. At any rate, it ended in their union—the formalities were properly respected, as soon as they could be.’

‘I am unaware.’

’I detest such a tone of speaking. Speaking as you do now—married to the daughter? You are not yourself, Lord Fleetwood.’

’Quite, ma’am, let me assure you. Otherwise the Kirby-Cressetts would be dictating to me from the muzzle of one of the old rapscallion’s Maxims. They will learn that I am myself.’

’You don’t improve as you proceed. I tell you this, you’ll not have me for a friend. You have your troops of satellites; but take it as equal to a prophecy, you won’t have London with you; and you’ll hear of Lord Fleetwood and his Whitechapel Countess till your ears ache.’

Page 4066

The preluding box on them reddened him.

‘She will have the offer of Esslemont.’

‘Undertake to persuade her in person.’

‘I have spoken on that head.’

’Well, I may be mistaken,—I fancied it before I knew of the pair she springs from: you won’t get her consent to anything without your consenting to meet her. Surely it’s the manlier way. It might be settled for to-morrow, here, in this room. She prays to meet you.’

With an indicated gesture of ‘Save me from it,’ Fleetwood bowed.

He left no friend thinking over the riddle of his conduct. She was a loud-voiced lady, given to strike out phrases. The ‘Whitechapel Countess’ of the wealthiest nobleman of his day was heard by her on London’s wagging tongue. She considered also that he ought at least have propitiated her; he was in the position requiring of him to do something of the kind, and he had shown instead the dogged pride which calls for a whip. Fool as he must have been to go and commit himself to marriage with a girl of whom he knew nothing or little, the assumption of pride belonged to the order of impudent disguises intolerable to behold and not, in a modern manner, castigate.

Notwithstanding a dislike of the Dowager Countess of Fleetwood, Lady Arpington paid Livia an afternoon visit; and added thereby to the stock of her knowledge and the grounds of her disapprobation.

Down in Whitechapel, it was known to the Winch girls and the Woodseers that Captain Kirby and his wife had spent the bitterest of hours in vainly striving to break their immoveable sister’s will to remain there.

At the tea-time of simple people, who make it a meal, Gower’s appetite for the home-made bread of Mary Jones was checked by the bearer of a short note from Lord Fleetwood. The half-dozen lines were cordial, breathing of their walk in the Austrian highlands, and naming a renowned city hotel for dinner that day, the hour seven, the reply yes or no by messenger.

‘But we are man to man, so there’s no “No” between us two,’ the note said, reviving a scene of rosy crag and pine forest, where there had been philosophical fun over the appropriate sexes of those our most important fighting-ultimately, we will hope, to be united-syllables, and the when for men, the when for women, to select the one of them as their weapon.

Under the circumstances, Gower thought such a piece of writing to him magnanimous.

‘It may be the solution,’ his father remarked.

Both had the desire; and Gower’s reply was the yes, our brave male word, supposed to be not so compromising to men in the employment of it as a form of acquiescence rather than insistent pressure.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN DAME GOSSIP’S VEIN

Right soon the London pot began to bubble. There was a marriage.

’There are marriages by the thousand every day of the year that is not consecrated to prayer for the forgiveness of our sins,’ the Old Buccaneer, writing it with simple intent, says, by way of preface to a series of Maxims for men who contemplate acceptance of the yoke.

Page 4067

This was a marriage high as the firmament over common occurrences, black as Erebus to confound; it involved the wreck of expectations, disastrous eclipse of a sovereign luminary in the splendour of his rise, Phaethon's descent to the Shades through a smoking and a crackling world. Asserted here, verified there, the rumour gathered volume, and from a serpent of vapour resolved to sturdy concrete before it was tangible. Contradiction retired into corners, only to be swept out of them. For this marriage, abominable to hear of, was of so wonderful a sort, that the story filled the mind, and the discrediting of the story threatened the great world's cranium with a vacuity yet more monstrously abominable.

For he, the planet Croesus of his time, recently, scarce later than last night, a glorious object of the mid-heavens above the market, has been enveloped, caught, gobbled up by one of the nameless little witches riding after dusk the way of the wind on broomsticks-by one of them! She caught him like a fly in the hand off a pane of glass, gobbled him with the customary facility of a pecking pullet.

But was the planet Croesus of his time a young man to be so caught, so gobbled?

There is the mystery of it. On his coming of age, that young man gave sign of his having a city head. He put his guardians deliberately aside, had his lawyers and bailiffs and stewards thoroughly under control: managed a particularly difficult step-mother; escaped the snares of her lovely cousin; and drove his team of sycophants exactly the road he chose to go and no other. He had a will.

The world accounted him wildish?

Always from his own offset, to his own ends. Never for another's dictation or beguilement. Never for a woman. He was born with a suspicion of the sex. Poetry decorated women, he said, to lime and drag men in the foulest ruts of prose.

We are to believe he has been effectively captured?

It is positively a marriage; he admits it.

Where celebrated?

There we are at hoodman-blind for the moment. Three counties claim the church; two ends of London.

She is not a person of society, lineage?

Nor of beauty. She is a witch; ordinarily petticoated and not squeaking like a shrew-mouse in her flights, but not a whit less a moon-shade witch. The kind is famous. Fairy tales and terrible romances tell of her; she is just as much at home in life, and springs

usually from the mire to enthral our knightliest. Is it a popular hero? She has him, sooner or later. A planet Croesus? He falls to her.

That is, if his people fail to attach him in legal bonds to a damsel of a corresponding birth on the day when he is breeched.

Page 4068

Small is her need to be young—especially if it is the man who is very young. She is the created among women armed with the deadly instinct for the motive force in men, and shameless to attract it. Self-respecting women treat men as their tamed housemates. She blows the horn of the wild old forest, irresistible to the animal. O the droop of the eyelids, the curve of a lip, the rustle of silks, the much heart, the neat ankle; and the sparkling agreement, the reserve—the motherly feminine petition that she may retain her own small petted babe of an opinion, legitimate or not, by permission of superior authority!—proof at once of her intelligence and her appreciativeness. Her infinitesimal spells are seen; yet, despite experience, the magnetism in their repulsive display is barely apprehended by sedate observers until the astounding capture is proclaimed. It is visible enough then:—and O men! O morals! If she can but trick the smallest bit in stooping, she has the pick of men.

Our present sample shows her to be young: she is young and a foreigner. Mr. Chumley Potts vouches for it. Speaks foreign English. He thinks her more ninny than knave: she is the tool of a wily plotter, picked up off the highway road by Lord Fleetwood as soon as he had her in his eye. Sir Meeson Corby wrings his frilled hands to depict the horror of the hands of that tramp the young lord had her from. They afflict him malariously still. The man, he says, the man as well was an infatuation, because he talks like a Dictionary Cheap Jack, and may have had an education and dropped into vagrancy, owing to indiscretions. Lord Fleetwood ran about in Germany repeating his remarks. But the man is really an accomplished violinist, we hear. She dances the tambourine business. A sister of the man, perhaps, if we must be charitable. They are, some say, a couple of Hungarian gypsies Lord F. found at a show and brought over to England, and soon had it on his conscience that he ought to marry her, like the Quixote of honour that he is; which is equal to saying crazy, as there is no doubt his mother was.

The marriage is no longer disputable; poor Lady Fleetwood, whatever her faults as a step-mother, does no longer deny the celebration of a marriage; though she might reasonably discredit any such story if he, on the evening of the date of the wedding day, was at a Ball, seen by her at the supper-table; though it is admitted he left the Ball-room at night. But the next day he certainly was in his place among the Peers and voted against the Government, and then went down to his estates in Wales, being an excellent holder of the reins, whether on the coach box or over the cash box.

Page 4069

More and more wonderful, we hear that he drove his bride straight from the church to the field of a prizefight, arranged for her special delectation. She doats on seeing blood-shed and drinking champagne. Young Mr. Mallard is our authority; and he says, she enjoyed it, and cheered the victor for being her husband's man. And after the shocking exhibition, good-bye; the Countess of Fleetwood was left sole occupant of a wayside inn, and may have learnt in her solitude that she would have been wise to feign disgust; for men to the smallest degree cultivated are unable to pardon a want of delicacy in a woman who has chosen them, as they are taught to think by their having chosen her.

So talked, so twittered, piped and croaked the London world over the early rumours of the marriage, this Amazing Marriage; which it got to be called, from the number of items flocking to swell the wonder.

Ravens ravening by night, poised peregrines by day, provision-merchants for the dispensing of dainty scraps to tickle the ears, to arm the tongues, to explode reputations, those great ladies, the Ladies Endor, Eldritch, and Cowry, fateful three of their period, avenged and scourged both innocence and naughtiness; innocence, on the whole, the least, when their withering suspicion of it had hunted the unhappy thing to the bank of Ophelia's ditch. Mallard and Chumley Potts, Captain Abrane, Sir Meeson Corby, Lord Brailstone, were plucked at and rattled, put to the blush, by a pursuit of inquiries conducted with beaks. High-nosed dames will surpass eminent judges in their temerity on the border-line where Ahem sounds the warning note to curtained decency. The courtly M. de St. Ombre had to stand confused. He, however, gave another version of Captain Abrane's 'fiddler,' and precipitated the great ladies into the reflection, that French gentlemen, since the execrable French Revolution, have lost their proper sense of the distinctions of Class. Homme d'esprit, applied to a roving adventurer, a scarce other than vagabond, was either an undiscriminating epithet or else a further example of the French deficiency in humour.

Dexterous contriver, he undoubtedly is. Lady Cowry has it from Sir Meeson Corby, who had it from the poor dowager, that Lord Fleetwood has installed the man in his house and sits at the opposite end of his table; fished him up from Whitechapel, where the countess is left serving oranges at a small fruit-shop. With her own eyes, Lady Arpington saw her there; and she can't be got to leave the place unless her husband drives his coach down to fetch her. That he declines to do; so she remains the Whitechapel Countess, all on her hind heels against the offer of a shilling of her husband's money, if she 's not to bring him to his knees; and goes about at night with a low Methodist singing hymns along those dreadful streets, while Lord Fleetwood gives gorgeous entertainments. One signal from the man he has hired, and he stops drinking —he will stop speaking as soon as the man's mouth is open. He is under a complete fascination, attributable, some say, to passes of the hands, which the man won't wash lest he should weaken their influence.

Page 4070

For it cannot be simply his violin playing. They say he was a pupil of a master of the dark art in Germany, and can practise on us to make us think his commonest utterances extraordinarily acute and precious. Lord Fleetwood runs round quoting him to everybody, quite ridiculously. But the man's influence is sufficient to induce his patron to drive down and fetch the Whitechapel Countess home in state, as she insists—if the man wishes it. Depend upon it he is the key of the mystery.

Totally the contrary, Lady Arpington declares! the man is a learned man, formerly a Professor of English Literature in a German University, and no connection of the Whitechapel Countess whatever, a chance acquaintance at the most. He operates on Lord Fleetwood with doses of German philosophy; otherwise, a harmless creature; and has consented to wash and dress. It is my lord who has had the chief influence. And the Countess Livia now backs him in maintaining that there is nowhere a more honest young man to be found. She may have her reasons.

As for the Whitechapel Countess . . . the whole story of the Old Buccaneer and Countess Fanny was retold, and it formed a terrific halo, presage of rains and hurricane tempest, over the girl the young earl had incomprehensibly espoused to discard. Those two had a son and a daughter born aboard:—in wedlock, we trust. The girl may be as wild a one as the mother. She has a will as determined as her husband's. She is offered Esslemont, the earl's Kentish mansion, for a residence, and she will none of it until she has him down in the east of London on his knees to entreat her. The injury was deep on one side or the other. It may be almost surely prophesied that the two will never come together. Will either of them deal the stroke for freedom? And which is the likelier?

Meanwhile Lord Fleetwood and his Whitechapel Countess composed the laugh of London. Straightway Invention, the violent propagator, sprang from his shades at a call of the great world's appetite for more, and, rushing upon stationary Fact, supplied the required. Marvel upon marvel was recounted. The mixed origin of the singular issue could not be examined, where all was increasingly funny.

Always the shout for more produced it. She and her band of Whitechapel boys were about in ambush to waylay the earl wherever he went. She stood knocking at his door through a whole night. He dared not lug her before a magistrate for fear of exposure. Once, riding in the park with a troop of friends he had a young woman pointed out to him, and her finger was levelled, and she cried: 'There is the English nobleman who marries a girl and leaves her to go selling cabbages!'

He left town for the Island, and beheld his yacht sailing the Solent:—my lady the countess was on board! A pair of Tyrolese minstrels in the square kindled his enthusiasm at one of his dinners; he sent them a sovereign; their humble, hearty thanks were returned to him in the name of Die Grafin von Fleetwood.

Page 4071

The Ladies Endor, Eldritch, and Cowry sifted their best. They let pass incredible stories: among others, that she had sent cards to the nobility and gentry of the West End of London, offering to deliver sacks of potatoes by newly-established donkey-cart at the doors of their residences, at so much per sack, bills quarterly; with the postscript, Vive L'aristocratie! Their informant had seen a card, and the stamp of the Fleetwood dragoncrest was on it.

He has enemies, was variously said of the persecuted nobleman. But it was nothing worse than the parasite that he had. This was the parasite's gentle treason. He found it an easy road to humour; it pricked the slug fancy in him to stir and curl; gave him occasion to bundle and bustle his patron kindly. Abrane, Potts, Mallard, and Sir Meeson Corby were personages during the town's excitement, besought for having something to say. Petrels of the sea of tattle, they were buoyed by the hubbub they created, and felt the tipsy happiness of being certain to rouse the laugh wherever they alighted. Sir Meeson Corby, important to himself in an eminent degree, enjoyed the novel sense of his importance with his fellows. They crowded round the bore who had scattered them.

He traced the miserable catastrophe in the earl's fortunes to the cunning of the rascal now sponging on Fleetwood and trying to dress like a gentleman: a convicted tramp, elevated by the caprice of the young nobleman he was plotting to ruin. Sir Meeson quoted Captain Abrane's latest effort to hit the dirty object's name, by calling him 'Fleetwood's Mr. Woodlouse.' And was the rascal a sorcerer? Sir Meeson spoke of him in the hearing of the Countess Livia, and she, previously echoing his disgust, corrected him sharply, and said: 'I begin to be of Russett's opinion, that his fault is his honesty.' The rascal had won or partly won the empress of her sex! This Lady Livia, haughtiest and most fastidious of our younger great dames, had become the indulgent critic of the tramp's borrowed plumes! Nay, she would not listen to a depreciatory word on him from her cousin Henrietta Kirby-Levellier.

Perhaps, after all, of all places for an encounter between the Earl of Fleetwood and the countess, those vulgar Gardens across the water, long since abandoned by the Fashion, were the most suitable. Thither one fair June night, for the sake of showing the dowager countess and her beautiful cousin, the French nobleman, Sir Meeson Corby, and others, what were the pleasures of the London lower orders, my lord had the whim to conduct them,—merely a parade of observation once round;—the ladies veiled, the gentlemen with sticks, and two servants following, one of whom, dressed in quiet black, like the peacefullest of parsons, was my lord's pugilist, Christopher Ives.

Now, here we come to history: though you will remember what History is.

Page 4072

The party walked round the Gardens unmolested nor have we grounds for supposing they assumed airs of state in the style of a previous generation. Only, as it happened, a gentleman of the party was a wag; no less than the famous, well-seasoned John Rose Mackrell, bent on amusing Mrs. Kirby-Levellier, to hear her lovely laughter; and his wit and his anecdotes, both inexhaustible, proved, as he said, 'that a dried fish is no stale fish, and a smoky flavour to an old chimney story will often render it more piquant to the taste than one jumping fresh off the incident.' His exact meaning in 'smoky flavour' we are not to know; but whether that M. de St. Ombre should witness the effect of English humour upon them, or that the ladies could permit themselves to laugh, their voices accompanied the gentlemen in silvery volleys. There had been 'Mackrell' at Fleetwood's dinner-table; which was then a way of saying that dry throats made no count of the quantity of champagne imbibed, owing to the fits Rose Mackrell caused. However, there was loud laughter as they strolled, and it was noticed; and Fleetwood crying out, 'Mackrell! Mackrell!' in delighted repudiation of the wag's last sally, the cry of 'Hooray, Mackrell!' was caught up by the crowd. They were not the primary offenders, for loud laughter in an isolated party is bad breeding; but they had not the plea of a copious dinner.

So this affair began; inoffensively at the start, for my lord was good-humoured about it.

Kit Ines, of the mercurial legs, must now give impromptu display of his dancing. He seized a partner, in the manner of a Roman the Sabine, sure of pleasing his patron; and the maid, passing from surprise to merriment, entered the quadrille perforce, all giggles, not without emulation, for she likewise had the passion for the dance. Whereby it befell that the pair footed in a way to gather observant spectators; and if it had not been that the man from whom the maid was willy-nilly snatched, conceived resentment, things might have passed comfortably; for Kit's quips and cuts and high capers, and the Sunday gravity of the barge face while the legs were at their impish trickery, double motion to the music, won the crowd to cheer. They conjectured him to be a British sailor. But the destituted man said, sailor or no sailor,—bos'en be hanged! he should pay for his whistle.

Honourably at the close of the quadrille, Kit brought her back; none the worse for it, he boldly affirmed, and he thanked the man for the short loan of her.—The man had an itch to strike. Choosing rather to be struck first, he vented nasty remarks. My lord spoke to Kit and moved on. At the moment of the step, Rose Mackrell uttered something, a waggery of some sort, heard to be forgotten, but of such instantaneous effect, that the prompt and immoderate laugh succeeding it might reasonably be taken for a fling of scorn at himself, by an injured man. They were a party; he therefore proceeded to make one, appealing to English sentiment and right feeling. The blameless and repentant maid plucked at his coat to keep him from dogging the heels of the gentlemen. Fun was promised; consequently the crowd waxed.

Page 4073

‘My lord,’ had been let fall by Kit Ines. Conjoined to ‘Mackrell,’ it rang finely, and a trumpeting of ‘Lord Mackrell’ resounded. Lord Mackrell was asked for ‘more capers and not so much sauce.’ Various fish took part in his title of nobility. The wag Mackrell continuing to be discreetly silent, and Kit Ines acting as a pacific rearguard, the crowd fell in love with their display of English humour, disposed to the surly satisfaction of a big street dog that has been appeased by a smaller one’s total cessation of growls.

All might have gone well but for the sudden appearance of two figures of young women on the scene. They fronted the advance of the procession. They wanted to have a word with Lord Mackrell. Not a bit of it—he won’t listen, turns away; and one of the pair slips round him. It’s regular imploring: ‘my lord! my lord!’

O you naughty Surrey melodram villain of a Lord Mackrell! Listen to the young woman, you Mackrell, or you’ll get Billingsgate! Here’s Mr. Jig-and-Reel behind here, says she’s done him! By Gosh! What’s up now?

One of the young ladies of the party ahead had rushed up to the young woman dodging to stand in Lord Mackrell’s way. The crowd pressed to see. Kit Ines and his mate shouldered them off. They performed an envelopment of the gentlemen and ladies, including the two young women. Kit left his mate and ran to the young woman hitherto the quieter of the two. He rattled at her. But she had a tongue of her own and rattled it at him. What did she say?

Merely to hear, for no other reason,’ a peace-loving crowd of clerks and tradesmen, workmen and their girls, young aspirants to the professions, night-larks of different classes, both sexes, there in that place for simple entertainment, animated simply by the spirit of English humour, contracted, so closing upon the Mackrell party as to seem threatening to the most orderly and apprehensive member of it, who was the baronet, Sir Meeson Corby.

He was a man for the constables in town emergencies, and he shouted. ‘Cock Robin crowing’ provoked a jolly round of barking chaff. The noise in a dense ring drew Fleetwood’s temper. He gave the word to Kit Ines, and immediately two men dropped; a dozen staggered unhit. The fists worked right and left; such a clearing of ground was never seen for sickle or scythe. And it was taken respectfully; for Science proclaimed her venerable self in the style and the perfect sufficiency of the strokes. A bruiser delivered them. No shame to back away before a bruiser. There was rather an admiring envy of the party claiming the nimble champion on their side, until the very moderate lot of the Mackrells went stepping forward along the strewn path with sticks pointed.

If they had walked it like gentlemen, they would have been allowed to get through. An aggressive minority, and with Cock Robin squealing for constables in the midst, is that insolent upstart thing which howls to have a lesson. The sticks were fallen on; bump

came the mass. Kit Ines had to fight his way back to his mate, and the couple scoured a clearish ring, but the gentlemen were at short thrusts, affable in tone, to cheer the spirits of the ladies:—'All right, my friend, you're a trifle mistaken, it 's my stick, not yours.' Therewith the wrestle for the stick.

Page 4074

The one stick not pointed was wrenched from the grasp of Sir Meeson Corby; and by a woman, the young woman who had accosted my lord; not a common young woman either, as she appeared when beseeching him. Her stature rose to battle heights: she made play with Sir Meeson Corby's ebony stick, using it in one hand as a dwarf quarterstaff to flail the sconces, then to dash the point at faces; and she being a woman, a girl, perhaps a lady, her cool warrior method of cleaving way, without so much as tightening her lips, was found notable; and to this degree (vouched for by Rose Mackrell, who heard it), that a fellow, rubbing his head, cried: 'Damn it all, she's clever, though!' She took her station beside Lord Fleetwood.

He had been as cool as she, or almost. Now he was maddened; she defended him, she warded and thrust for him, only for him, to save him a touch; unasked, undesired, detested for the box on his ears of to-morrow's public mockery, as she would be, overwhelming him with ridicule. Have you seen the kick and tug at the straps of the mettled pony in stables that betrays the mishandling of him by his groom? Something so did Fleetwood plunge and dart to be free of her, and his desperate soul cried out on her sticking to him like a plaster!

Welcome were the constables. His guineas winked at their chief, as fair women convey their meanings, with no motion of eyelids; and the officers of the law knew the voice habituated to command, and answered two words of his: 'Right, my lord,' smelling my lord in the unerring manner of those days. My lord's party were escorted to the gates, not a little jeered; though they by no means had the worst of the tussle. But the puffing indignation of Sir Meesan Corby over his battered hat and torn frill and buttons plucked from his coat, and his threat of the magistrates, excited the crowd to derisive yells.

My lord spoke something to his man, handing his purse.

The ladies were spared the hearing of bad language. They, according to the joint testimony of M. de St. Ombre and Mr. Rose Mackrell, comported themselves throughout as became the daughters of a warrior race. Both gentlemen were emphatic to praise the unknown Britomart who had done such gallant service with Sir Meeson's ebony wand. He was beginning to fuss vociferously about the loss of the stick—a family stick, goldheaded, the family crest on it, priceless to the family—when Mrs. Kirby-Levellier handed it to him inside the coach.

'But where is she?' M. de St. Ombre said, and took the hint of Livia's touch on his arm in the dark.

At the silence following the question, Mr. Rose Mackrell murmured, 'Ah!'

He and the French gentleman understood that there might have been a manifestation of the notorious Whitechapel Countess.

Page 4075

They were two; and a slower-witted third was travelling to his ideas on the subject. Three men, witnesses of a remarkable incident in connection with a boiling topic of current scandal,—glaringly illustrative of it, moreover,—were unlikely to keep close tongues, even if they had been sworn to secresy. Fleetwood knew it, and he scorned to solicit them; an exaction of their idle vows would be merely the humiliation of himself. So he tossed his dignity to recklessness, as the ultraconvivial give the last wink of reason to the wine-cup. Persecuted as he was, nothing remained for him but the nether-sublime of a statuesque desperation.

That was his feeling; and his way of cloaking it under light sallies at Sir Meeson and easy chat with Henrietta made it visible to her, from its being the contrary of what the world might expect a proud young nobleman to exhibit. She pitied him: she had done him some wrong. She read into him, too, as none else could. Seeing the solitary tortures behind the pleasant social mask, she was drawn to partake of them; and the mask seemed pathetic. She longed to speak a word in sympathy or relieve her bosom of tears. Carinthia had sunk herself, was unpardonable, hardly mentionable. Any of the tales told of her might be credited after this! The incorrigible cause of humiliation for everybody connected with her pictured, at a word of her name, the crowd pressing and the London world acting audience. Livia spoke the name when they had reached their house and were alone. Henrietta responded with the imperceptible shrug which is more eloquent than a cry to tell of the most monstrous of loads. My lord, it was thought by the ladies, had directed his man to convey her safely to her chosen home, whence she might be expected very soon to be issuing and striking the gong of London again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A KIDNAPPING AND NO GREAT HARM

Ladies who have the pride of delicate breeding are not more than rather violently hurled back on the fortress it is, when one or other of the gross mishaps of circumstance may subject them to a shock: and this happening in the presence of gentlemen, they are sustained by the within and the without to keep a smooth countenance, however severe their affliction. Men of heroic nerve decline similarly to let explosions shake them, though earth be shaken. Dragged into the monstrous grotesque of the scene at the Gardens, Livia and Henrietta went through the ordeal, masking any signs that they were stripped for a flagellation. Only, the fair cousins were unable to perceive a comic element in the scene: and if the world was for laughing, as their instant apprehension foresaw it, the world was an ignoble beast. They did not discuss Carinthia’s latest craziness at night, hardly alluded to it while they were in the interjectory state.

Page 4076

Henrietta was Livia's guest, her husband having hurried away to Vienna: 'To get money! money!' her angry bluntness explained his absence, and dealt its blow at the sudden astounding poverty into which they had fallen. She was compelled to practise an excessive, an incredible economy:—'think of the smallest trifles!' so that her Chillon travelled unaccompanied, they were separated. Her iterations upon money were the vile constraint of an awakened interest and wonderment at its powers. She, the romantic Riette, banner of chivalry, reader of poetry, struck a line between poor and rich in her talk of people, and classed herself with the fallen and pinched; she harped on her slender means, on the enforced calculations preceding purchases, on the living in lodgings; and that miserly Lord Levellier's indebtedness to Chillon—large sums! and Chillon's praiseworthy resolve to pay the creditors of her father's estate; and of how he travelled like a common man, in consequence of the money he had given Janey—-weakly, for her obstinacy was past endurance; but her brother would not leave her penniless, and penniless she had been for weeks, because of her stubborn resistance to the earl—quite unreasonably, whether right or wrong—in the foul retreat she had chosen; apparently with a notion that the horror of it was her vantage ground against him: and though a single sign of submission would place the richest purse in England at her disposal. 'She refuses Esslemont! She insists on his meeting her! No child could be so witless. Let him be the one chiefly or entirely to blame, she might show a little tact—for her brother's sake! She loves her brother? No: deaf to him, to me, to every consideration except her blind will.'

Here was the skeleton of the love match, earlier than Livia had expected.

It refreshed a phlegmatic lady's disposition for prophecy. Lovers abruptly tossed between wind and wave may still be lovers, she knew: but they are, or the weaker of the two is, hard upon any third person who tugs at them for subsistence or existence. The condition, if they are much beaten about, prepares true lovers, through their mutual tenderness, to be bitterly misanthropical.

Livia supposed the novel economic pinches to be the cause of Henrietta's unwonted harsh judgement of her sister-in-law's misconduct, or the crude expression of it. She could not guess that Carinthia's unhappiness in marriage was a spectre over the married happiness of the pair fretted by the conscience which told them they had come together by doing much to bring it to pass. Henrietta could see herself less the culprit when she blamed Carinthia in another's hearing.

After some repose, the cousins treated their horrible misadventure as a piece of history. Livia was cool; she had not a husband involved in it, as Henrietta had; and London's hoarse laugh surely coming on them, spared her the dread Henrietta suffered, that Chillon would hear; the most sensitive of men on any matter touching his family.

Page 4077

‘And now a sister added to the list! Will there be names, Livia?’

‘The newspapers!’ Livia’s shoulders rose.

‘We ought to have sworn the gentlemen to silence.’

’M. de St. Ombre is a tomb until he writes his Memoirs. I hold Sir Meeson under lock. But a spiced incident, a notorious couple,—an anecdotal witness to the scene,—could you expect Mr. Rose Mackrell to contain it? The sacredest of oaths, my dear!’

That relentless force impelling an anecdotist to slaughter families for the amusement of dinner-tables, was brought home to Henrietta by her prospect of being a victim; and Livia reminding her of the excessive laughter at Rose Mackrell’s anecdotes overnight, she bemoaned her having consented to go to those Gardens in mourning.

’How could Janey possibly have heard of the project to go?

’You went to please Russett, he to please you, and that wild-cat to please herself,’ said Livia. ’She haunts his door, I suppose, and follows him, like a running footman. Every step she takes widens the breach. He keeps his temper, yes, keeps his temper as he keeps his word, and one morning it breaks loose, and all that’s done has to be undone. It will bemust. That extravaganza, as she is called, is fatal, dogs him with burlesque—of all men!’

‘Why not consent to meet her once, Chillon asks.’

‘You are asking Russett to yield an inch on demand, and to a woman.’

’My husband would yield to a woman what he would refuse to all the men in Europe and America,’ said Henrietta; and she enjoyed her thrill of allegiance to her chivalrous lord and courtier.

’No very extraordinary specimen of a newly married man, who has won the Beauty of England and America for his wife-at some cost to some people,’ Livia rejoined.

There came a moisture on the eyelashes of the emotional young woman, from a touch of compassion for the wealthy man who had wished to call her wife, and was condemned by her rejection of him to call another woman wife, to be wifeless in wedding her, despite his wealth.

She thinks he loves her; it is pitiable, but she thinks it—after the treatment she has had. She begs to see him once.’

‘And subdue him with a fit of weeping,’ Livia was moved to say by sight of the tear she hated. ’It would harden Russett—on other eyes, too! Salt-water drops are like the

forced agony scenes in a play: they bring down the curtain, they don't win the critics. I heard her "my husband" and saw his face.'

'You didn't hear a whimper with it,' Henrietta said. 'She's a mountain girl, not your city madam on the boards. Chillon and I had her by each hand, implored her to leave that impossible Whitechapel, and she trembled, not a drop was shed by her. I can almost fancy privation and squalor have no terrors for Janey. She sings to the people down there, nurses them. She might be occupying Esslemont—our dream of an English home! She is the destruction of the idea of romantic in connection with the name of marriage. I talk like a simpleton. Janey upsets us all. My lord was only—a little queer before he knew her: His Mr. Woodseer may be encouraging her. You tell me the creature has a salary from him equal to your jointure.'

Page 4078

‘Be civil to the man while it lasts,’ Livia said, attentive to a degradation of tone—in her cousin, formerly of supreme self-containment.

The beautiful young woman was reminded of her holiday in town. She brightened, and the little that it was, and the meanness of the satisfaction, darkened her. Envy of the lucky adventurer Mr. Woodseer, on her husband’s behalf, grew horridly conscious for being reproved. So she plucked resolution to enjoy her holiday and forget the contrasts of life-palaces running profusion, lodgings hammered by duns; the pinch of poverty distracting every simple look inside or out. There was no end to it; for her husband’s chivalrous honour forced him to undertake the payment of her father’s heavy debts. He was right and admirable, it could not be contested; but the prospect for them was a grinding gloom, an unrelieved drag, as of a coach at night on an interminable uphill flinty road.

These were her sensations, and she found it diverting to be admired; admired by many while she knew herself to be absorbed in the possession of her by one. It bestowed the before and after of her marriage. She felt she was really, had rapidly become, the young woman of the world, armed with a husband, to take the flatteries of men for the needed diversion they brought. None moved her; none could come near to touching the happy insensibility of a wife who adored her husband, wrote to him daily, thought of him by the minute. Her former worshippers were numerous at Livia’s receptions; Lord Fleetwood, Lord Brailstone, and the rest. Odd to reflect on—they were the insubstantial but coveted wealth of the woman fallen upon poverty, ignoble poverty! She could not discard her wealth. She wrote amusingly of them, and fully, vivacious descriptions, to Chillon; hardly so much writing to him as entering her heart’s barred citadel, where he resided at his ease, heard everything that befell about her. If she dwelt on Lord Fleetwood’s kindness in providing entertainments, her object was to mollify Chillon’s anger in some degree. She was doing her utmost to gratify him, ’for the purpose of paving a way to plead Janey’s case.’ She was almost persuading herself she was enjoying the remarks of his friend, confidant, secretary, or what not, Livia’s worshipper, Mr. Woodseer, ’who does as he wills with my lord; directs his charities, his pleasures, his opinions, all because he is believed to have wonderful ideas and be wonderfully honest.’ Henrietta wrote: ‘Situation unchanged. Janey still At that place’; and before the letter was posted, she and Livia had heard from Gower Woodseer of the reported disappearance of the Countess of Fleetwood and her maid. Gower’s father had walked up from Whitechapel, bearing news of it to the earl, she said.

‘And the earl is much disturbed?’ was Livia’s inquiry.

‘He has driven down with my father,’ Gower said carelessly, ambiguously in the sound.

Troubled enough to desire the show of a corresponding trouble, Henrietta read at their faces.

Page 4079

‘May it not be—down there—a real danger?’

The drama, he could inform her, was only too naked down there for disappearances to be common.

‘Will it be published that she is missing?’

’She has her maid with her, a stout-hearted girl. Both have courage. I don’t think we need take measures just yet.’

‘Not before it is public property?’

Henrietta could have bitten her tongue for laying her open to the censure implied in his muteness. Janey perverted her.

Women were an illegible manuscript, and ladies a closed book of the binding, to this raw philosopher, or he would not so coldly have judged the young wife, anxious on her husband’s account, that they might escape another scorching. He carried away his impression.

Livia listened to a remark on his want of manners.

‘Russett puts it to the credit of his honesty,’ she said. ’Honesty is everything with us at present. The man has made his honesty an excellent speculation. He puts a piece on zero and the bank hands him a sackful. We may think we have won him to serve us, up comes his honesty. That’s how we have Lady Arpington mixed in it—too long a tale. But be guided by me; condescend a little.’

’My dear! my whole mind is upon that unhappy girl. It would break Chillon’s heart.’

Livia pished. ’There are letters we read before we crack the seal. She is out of that ditch, and it suits Russett that she should be. He’s not often so patient. A woman foot to foot against his will—I see him throwing high stakes. Tyrants are brutal; and really she provokes him enough. You needn’t be alarmed about the treatment she ’ll meet. He won’t let her beat him, be sure.’

Neither Livia nor Gower wondered at the clearing of the mystery, before it went to swell the scandal. A young nobleman of ready power, quick temper, few scruples, and a taxed forbearance, was not likely to stand thwarted and goaded-and by a woman. Lord Fleetwood acted his part, inscrutable as the blank of a locked door. He could not conceal that he was behind the door.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PHILOSOPHER MAN OF ACTION

Gower's bedroom window looked over the shrubs of the square, and as his form of revolt from a city life was to be up and out with the sparrows in the early flutter of morning, for a stretch of the legs where grass was green and trees were not enclosed, he rarely saw a figure below when he stood dressing. Now there appeared a petticoated one stationary against the rails, with her face lifted. She fronted the house, and while he speculated abstractedly, recognition rushed on him. He was down and across the roadway at leaps.

'It's Madge here!'

The girl panted for her voice.

'Mr. Woodseer, I'm glad; I thought I should have to wait hours. She's safe.'

'Where?'

Page 4080

‘Will you come, sir?’

‘Step ahead.’

Madge set forth to north of the square.

He judged of the well-favoured girl that she could steer her way through cities: mouth and brows were a warning to challenger pirate craft of a vessel carrying guns; and the red lips kept their firm line when they yielded to the pressure for speech.

’It’s a distance. She’s quite safe, no harm; she’s a prisoner; she’s well fed; she’s not ill treated.’

’You ‘re out?’

’That’s as it happens. I’m lucky in seeing you early. He don’t mean to hurt her; he won’t be beaten. All she asks is ten minutes with him. If he would!—he won’t. She didn’t mean to do him offence t’ other night in that place—you’ve heard. Kit Ines told me he was on duty there—going. She couldn’t help speaking when she had eyes on her husband. She kisses the ground of his footsoles, you may say, let him be ever so unkind. She and I were crossing to the corner of Roper Street a rainy night, on way to Mile End, away down to one of your father’s families, Mother Davis and her sick daughter and the little ones, and close under the public-house Goat and Beard we were seized on and hustled into a covered carriage that was there, and they drove sharp. She ’s not one to scream. We weren’t frightened. We both made the same guess. They drove us to the house she ‘s locked in, and me, too, up till three o’clock this morning.’

‘You’ve seen nobody, Madge?’

’He ’s fixed she ’s to leave London, Mr. Woodseer. I’ve seen Kit Ines. And she ’s to have one of the big houses to her use. I guessed Kit Ines was his broom. He defends it because he has his money to make—and be a dirty broom for a fortune! But any woman’s sure of decent handling with Kit Ines—not to speak of lady. He and a mate guard the house. An old woman cooks.’

‘He guards the house, and he gave you a pass?’

’Not he. His pride’s his obedience to his “paytron”—he calls his master, and won’t hear that name abused. We are on the first floor; all the lower doors are locked day and night. New Street, not much neighbours; she wouldn’t cry out of the window. She ’s to be let free if she’ll leave London.’

‘You jumped it!’

’If I’d broke a leg, Mr. Kit Ines would have had to go to his drams. It wasn’t very high; and a flower-bed underneath. My mistress wanted to be the one. She has to be careful. She taught me how to jump down not to hurt. She makes you feel you can do anything. I had a bother to get her to let me and be quiet herself. She’s not one to put it upon others, you’ll learn. When I was down I felt like a stick in the ground and sat till I had my feet, she at the window waiting; and I started for you. She kissed her hand. I was to come to you, and then your father, you nowhere seen. I wasn’t spoken to. I know empty London.’

‘Kit Ines was left sleeping in the house?’

Page 4081

‘Snoring, I dare say: He don’t drink on duty.’

‘He must be kept on duty.’

‘Drink or that kind of duty, it’s a poor choice.’

‘You’ll take him in charge, Madge.’

‘I’ve got a mistress to look after.’

‘You’ve warmed to her.’

’That’s not new; Mr. Woodseer. I do trust you, and you his friend. But you are the minister’s son, and any man not a great nobleman must have some heart for her. You’ll learn. He kills her so because she’s fond of him—loves him, however he strikes. No, not like a dog, as men say of us. She’d die for him this night, need were. Live with her, you won’t find many men match her for brave; and she’s good. My Sally calls her a Bible saint. I could tell you stories of her goodness, short the time though she’s been down our way. And better there for her than at that inn he left her at to pine and watch the Royal Sovereign come swing come smirk in sailor blue and star to meet the rain—-would make anybody disrespect Royalty or else go mad! He’s a great nobleman, he can’t buy what she’s ready to give; and if he thinks he breaks her will now, it’s because she thinks she’s obeying a higher than him, or no lord alive and Kit Ines to back him ’d hold her. Women want a priest to speak to men certain times. I wish I dared; we have to bite our tongues. He’s master now, but, as I believe God’s above, if he plays her false, he’s the one to be brought to shame. I talk.’

‘Talk on, Madge,’ said Gower, to whom the girl’s short-syllabled run of the lips was a mountain rill compared with London park waters.

’You won’t let him hurry her off where she’ll eat her heart for never seeing him again? She prays to be near him, if she’s not to see him.’

‘She speaks in that way?’

’I get it by bits. I’m with her so, it’s as good as if I was inside her. She can’t obey when it goes the wrong way of her heart to him.’

’Love and wisdom won’t pull together, and they part company for good at the church door,’ said Gower. ‘This matrimony’s a bad business.’

Madge hummed a moan of assent. ’And my poor Sally ’ll have to marry. I can’t leave my mistress while she wants me, and Sally can’t be alone. It seems we take a step and harm’s done, though it’s the right step we take.’

‘It seems to me you’ve engaged yourself to follow Sally’s lead, Madge.’

‘Girls’ minds turn corners, Mr. Woodseer.’

He passed the remark. What it was that girls’ minds occasionally or habitually did, or whether they had minds to turn, or whether they took their whims for minds, were untroubled questions with a young man studying abstract and adoring surface nature too exclusively to be aware of the manifestation of her spirit in the flesh, as it is not revealed so much by men. However, she had a voice and a face that led him to be thoughtful over her devotedness to her mistress, after nearly losing her character for the prize-fighter, and he had to thank her for invigorating him. His disposition was to muse and fall slack, helpless to a friend. Here walked a creature exactly the contrary. He listened to the steps of the dissimilar pair on the detonating pavement, and eyed a church clock shining to the sun.

Page 4082

She was sure of the direction: ‘Out Camden way, where the murder was.’

They walked at a brisk pace, conversing or not.

‘Tired? You must be,’ he said.

‘Not when I’m hot to do a thing.’

‘There’s the word of the thoroughbred!’

‘You don’t tire, sir,’ said she. ’Sally and I see you stalking out for the open country in the still of the morning. She thinks you look pale for want of food, and ought to have some one put a biscuit into your pocket overnight.’

‘Who’d have guessed I was under motherly observation!’

‘You shouldn’t go so long empty, if you listen to trainers.’

‘Capital doctors, no doubt. But I get a fine appetite.’

‘You may grind the edge too sharp.’

He was about to be astonished, and reflected that she had grounds for her sagacity. His next thought plunged him into contempt for Kit Ines, on account of the fellow’s lapses to sottishness. But there would be no contempt of Kit Ines in a tussle with him. Nor could one funk the tussle and play cur, if Kit’s engaged young woman were looking on. We get to our courage or the show of it by queer screws.

Contemplative over these matters, the philosopher transformed to man of action heard Madge say she read directions in London by churches, and presently exclaiming disdainfully, and yet relieved, ‘Spooner Villas,’ she turned down a row of small detached houses facing a brickfield, that had just contributed to the erection of them, and threatened the big city with further defacements.

Madge pointed to the marks of her jump, deep in flower-bed earth under an open window.

Gower measured the height with sensational shanks.

She smote at the door. Carinthia nodded from her window. Close upon that, Kit Ines came bounding to the parlour window; he spied and stared. Gower was known to him as the earl’s paymaster; so he went to the passage and flung the door open, blocking the way.

‘Any commands, your honour?’

‘You bring the countess to my lord immediately,’ said Gower.

Kit swallowed his mouthful of surprise in a second look at Madge and the ploughed garden-bed beneath the chamber window.

‘Are the orders written, sir?’

’To me?—for me to deliver to you?—for you to do my lord’s bidding? Where’s your head?’

Kit’s finger-nails travelled up to it. Madge pushed past him. She and her mistress, and Kit’s mate, and the old woman receiving the word for a cup of tea, were soon in the passage. Kit’s mate had a ready obedience for his pay, nothing else,—no counsel at all, not a suggestion to a head knocked to a pudding by Madge’s jump and my lord’s paymaster here upon the scene.

‘My lady was to go down Wales way, sir.’

‘That may be ordered after.’

’I ‘m to take my lady to my lord?’ and, ’Does it mean my lady wants a fly?’ Kit asked, and harked back on whether Madge had seen my lord.

Page 4083

‘At five in the morning?—don’t sham donkey with me,’ said Gower.

The business looked inclined to be leaky, but which the way for proving himself other than a donkey puzzled Kit: so much so, that a shove made him partly grateful. Madge’s clever countermove had stunned his judgement. He was besides acting subordinate to his patron’s paymaster; and by the luck of it, no voice of woman interposed. The countess and her maid stood by like a disinterested couple. Why be suspicious, if he was to keep the countess, in sight? She was a nice lady, and he preferred her good opinion. She was brave, and he did her homage. It might be, my lord had got himself round to the idea of thanking her for saving his nob that night, and his way was to send and have her up, to tell her he forgave her, after the style of lords. Gower pricked into him by saying aside: ‘Mad, I suppose, in case of a noise?’ And he could not answer quite manfully, lost his eyes and coloured. Neighbours might have required an explanation of shrieks, he confessed. Men have sometimes to do nasty work for their patrons.

They were afoot, walking at Carinthia’s pace before half-past seven. She would not hear of any conveyance. She was cheerful, and, as it was pitiful to see, enjoyed her walk. Hearing of her brother’s departure for the Austrian capital, she sparkled. Her snatches of speech were short flights out of the meditation possessing her. Gower noticed her easier English, that came home to the perpetual student he was. She made use of some of his father’s words, and had assimilated them mentally besides appropriating them: the verbalizing of ‘purpose,’ then peculiar to his father, for example. She said, in reply to a hint from him: ’If my lord will allow me an interview, I purpose to be obedient.’ No one could imagine of her that she spoke broken-spiritedly. Her obedience was to a higher than a mortal lord: and Gower was touched to the quick through the use of the word.

Contrasting her with Countess Livia and her cousin, the earl might think her inferior on the one small, square compartment called by them the world; but she carried the promise of growth, a character in expansion, and she had at least natural grace, a deerlike step. Although her picturesqueness did not swarm on him with images illuminating night, subduing day, like the Countess Livia’s, it was marked, it could tower and intermittently eclipse; and it was of the uplifting and healing kind by comparison, not a delicious balefulness.

The bigger houses, larger shops, austere streets of private residences, were observed by the recent inhabitant of Whitechapel.

‘My lord lives in a square,’ she said.

‘We shall soon be there now,’ he encouraged her, doubtful though the issue appeared.

’It is a summer morning for the Ortler, the Gross-Glockner, the Venediger,—all our Alps, Mr. Woodseer.’

‘If we could fly!’

Page 4084

‘We love them.’

‘Why, then we beat a wing—yes.’

’For I have them when I want them to sight. It is the feet are so desirous. I feel them so this morning, after prisonership. I could not have been driven to my lord.’

‘I know the feeling,’ said Gower; ’any movement of us not our own impulse, hurries the body and deadens the mind. And by the way, my dear lady, I spoke of the earl’s commands to this man behind us walking with your Madge. My father would accuse me of Jesuitry. Ines mentioned commands, and I took advantage of it.’

‘I feared,’ said Carinthia. ‘I go for my chance.’

Gower had a thought of the smaller creature, greater by position, to whom she was going for her chance. He alluded to his experience of the earl’s kindness in relation to himself, from a belief in his ‘honesty’; dotted outlines of her husband’s complex character, or unmixed and violently opposing elements.

She remarked: ‘I will try and learn.’

The name of the street of beautiful shops woke a happy smile on her mouth. ’Father talked of it; my mother, too. He has it written down in his Book of Maxims. When I was a girl, I dreamed of one day walking up Bond Street.’

They stepped from the pavement and crossed the roadway for a side-street leading to the square. With the swift variation of her aspect at times, her tone changed.

’We are near. My lord will not be troubled by me. He has only to meet me. There has been misunderstanding. I have vexed him; I could not help it. I will go where he pleases after I have heard him give orders. He thinks me a frightful woman. I am peaceful.’

Gower muttered her word ‘misunderstanding.’ They were at the earl’s house door. One tap at it, and the two applicants for admission would probably be shot as far away from Lord Fleetwood as when they were on the Styrian heights last autumn. He delivered the tap, amused by the idea. It was like a summons to a genie of doubtful service.

My lord was out riding in the park.

Only the footman appeared at that early hour, and his countenance was blank whitewash as he stood rigid against the wall for the lady to pass. Madge followed into the morning room; Ines remained in the hall, where he could have the opening speech with his patron, and where he soon had communication with the butler.

This official entered presently to Gower, presenting a loaded forehead. A note addressed to Mrs. Kirby-Levellier at the Countess Livia's house hard by was handed to him for instant despatch. He signified a deferential wish to speak.

'You can speak in the presence of the Countess of Fleetwood, Mr. Waytes,' Gower said.

Waytes checked a bend of his shoulders. He had not a word, and he turned to send the note. He was compelled to think that he saw a well-grown young woman in the Whitechapel Countess.

Page 4085

Gower's note reached Henrietta on her descent to the breakfast-table. She was, alone, and thrown into a torture of perplexity: for she wanted advice as to the advice to be given to Janey, and Livia was an utterly unprofitable person to consult in the case. She thought of Lady Arpington, not many doors distant. Drinking one hasty cup of tea, she sent for her bonnet, and hastened away to the great lady, whom she found rising from breakfast with the marquis.

Lady Arpington read Gower's note. She unburdened herself: 'Oh! So it 's no longer a bachelor's household!'

Henrietta heaved the biggest of sighs. 'I fear the poor dear may have made matters worse.'

To which Lady Arpington said: 'Worse or better, my child!' and shrugged; for the present situation strained to snapping.

She proposed to go forthwith, and give what support she could to the Countess of Fleetwood.

They descended the steps of the house to the garden and the Green Park's gravel walk up to Piccadilly. There they had view of Lord Fleetwood on horseback leisurely turning out of the main way's tide. They saw him alight at the mews. As they entered the square, he was met some doors from the south corner by his good or evil genius, whose influence with him came next after the marriage in the amazement it caused, and was perhaps to be explained by it; for the wealthiest of young noblemen bestowing his name on an unknown girl, would be the one to make an absurd adventurer his intimate. Lord Fleetwood bent a listening head while Mr. Gower Woodseer, apparently a good genius for the moment, spoke at his ear.

How do we understand laughter at such a communication as he must be hearing from the man? Signs of a sharp laugh indicated either his cruel levity or that his presumptuous favourite trifled—and the man's talk could be droll, Lady Arpington knew: it had, she recollected angrily, diverted her, and softened her to tolerate the intruder into regions from which her class and her periods excluded the lowly born, except at the dinner-tables of stale politics and tattered scandal. Nevertheless, Lord Fleetwood mounted the steps to his house door, still listening. His 'Asmodeus,' on the tongue of the world, might be doing the part of Mentor really. The house door stood open.

Fleetwood said something to Gower; he swung round, beheld the ladies and advanced to them, saluting. 'My dear Lady Arpington! quite so, you arrive opportunely. When the enemy occupies the citadel, it's proper to surrender. Say, I beg, she can have the house, if she prefers it. I will fall back on Esslemont. Arrangements for her convenience will be made. I thank you, by anticipation.'

His bow included Henrietta loosely. Lady Arpington had exclaimed: ’Enemy, Fleetwood?’ and Gower, in his ignorance of the smoothness of aristocratic manners, expected a remonstrance; but Fleetwood was allowed to go on, with his air of steely geniality and a decision, that his friend imagined he could have broken down like an old partition board under the kick of a sarcasm sharpening an appeal.

Page 4086

‘Lord Fleetwood was on the point of going in,’ he assured the great lady.

‘Lord Fleetwood may regret his change of mind,’ said she. ’The Countess of Fleetwood will have my advice to keep her footing in this house.’

She and Henrietta sat alone with Carinthia for an hour. Coming forth, Lady Arpington ejaculated to herself: ’Villany somewhere!—You will do well, Henrietta, to take up your quarters with her a day or two. She can hold her position a month. Longer is past possibility.’

A shudder of the repulsion from men crept over the younger lady. But she was a warrior’s daughter, and observed: ’My husband, her brother, will be back before the month ends.’

‘No need for hostilities to lighten our darkness,’ Lady Arpington rejoined. ‘You know her? trust her?’

’One cannot doubt her face. She is my husband’s sister. Yes, I do trust her. I nail my flag to her cause.’

The flag was crimson, as it appeared on her cheeks; and that intimated a further tale, though not of so dramatic an import as the cognizant short survey of Carinthia had been.

These young women, with the new complications obtruded by them, irritated a benevolent great governing lady, who had married off her daughters and embraced her grandchildren, comfortably finishing that chapter; and beheld now the apparition of the sex’s ancient tripping foe, when circumstances in themselves were quite enough to contend against on their behalf. It seemed to say, that nature’s most burdened weaker must always be beaten. Despite Henrietta’s advocacy and Carinthia’s clear face, it raised a spectral form of a suspicion, the more effective by reason of the much required justification it fetched from the shades to plead apologies for Lord Fleetwood’s erratic, if not mad, and in any case ugly, conduct. What otherwise could be his excuse? Such was his need of one, that the wife he crushed had to be proposed for sacrifice, in the mind of a lady tending strongly to side with her and condemn her husband.

Lady Arpington had counselled Carinthia to stay where she was, the Fates having brought her there. Henrietta was too generous to hesitate in her choice between her husband’s sister and the earl. She removed from Livia’s house to Lord Fleetwood’s. My lord was at Esslemont two days; then established his quarters at Scrope’s hotel, five minutes’ walk from the wedded lady to whom the right to bear his title was granted, an interview with him refused. Such a squaring for the battle of spouses had never—or not in mighty London—been seen since that old fight began.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER SOME FENCING THE DAME PASSES OUR GUARD

Dame Gossip at this present pass bursts to give us a review of the social world siding for the earl or for his countess; and her parrot cry of ‘John Rose Mackrell!’ with her head’s loose shake over the smack of her lap, to convey the contemporaneous tipsy relish of the rich good things he said on the subject of the contest, indicates the kind of intervention it would be.

Page 4087

To save the story from having its vein tied, we may accept the reminder, that he was the countess's voluble advocate at a period when her friends were shy to speak of her. After relating the Vauxhall Gardens episode in burlesque Homeric during the freshness of the scandal, Rose Mackrell's enthusiasm for the heroine of his humour set in. He tracked her to her parentage, which was new breath blown into the sunken tradition of some Old Buccaneer and his Countess Fanny: and, a turn of great good luck helping him to a copy of the book of the *maxims for men*, he would quote certain of the racier ones, passages of Captain John Peter Kirby's personal adveres in various lands and waters illustrating the text, to prove that the old warrior acted by the rule of his recommendations. They had the repulsive attraction proper to rusty lumber swords and truncehons that have tasted brains. They wove no mild sort of halo for the head of a shillelagh-flourishing Whitechapel Countess descended from the writer and doer.

People were willing to believe in her jump of thirty feet or more off a suburban house-top to escape durance, and her midnight storming of her lord's town house, and ousting of him to go find his quarters at Scrope's hotel. He, too, had his band of pugilists, as it was known; and he might have heightened a rageing scandal. The nobleman forbore. A woman's blow gracefully taken adds a score of inches to our stature, floor us as it may: we win the world's after-thoughts. Rose Mackrell sketched the earl;—always alert, smart, quick to meet a combination and protect a dignity never obtruded, and in spite of himself the laugh of the town. His humour flickered wildly round the ridiculous position of a prominent young nobleman, whose bearing and character were foreign to a position of ridicule.

Nevertheless, the earl's figure continuing to be classic sculpture, it allied him with the aristocracy of martyrs, that burn and do not wince. He propitiated none, and as he could not but suffer shrewdly, he gained esteem enough to shine through the woman's pitiless drenching of him. During his term at Scrope's hotel, the carousals there were quite old-century and matter of discourse. He had proved his return to sound sense in the dismissal of 'the fiddler,' notoriously the woman's lieutenant, or more; and nightly the revelry closed at the great gaming tables of St. James's Street, while Whitechapel held the coroneted square, well on her way to the Law courts, as Abrane and Potts reported; and positively so, 'clear case.' That was the coming development and finale of the Marriage. London waited for it.

Page 4088

A rich man's easy smile over losses at play, merely taught his emulous troop to feel themselves poor devils in the pocket. But Fleetwood's contempt of Sleep was a marvel, superhuman, and accused them of an inferior vigour, hard for young men to admit by the example. He never went to bed. Issuing from Fortune's hall-doors in the bright, lively, summer morning, he mounted horse and was away to the hills. Or he took the arm of a Roman Catholic nobleman, Lord Feltre, and walked with him from the green tables and the establishment's renowned dry still Sillery to a Papist chapel. As it was not known that he had given his word to abjure his religion, the pious gamblers did no worse than spread an alarm and quiet it, by the citation of his character for having a try at everything.

Henrietta despatched at this period the following letter to Chillon:

'I am with Livia to-morrow. Janey starts for Wales to-morrow morning, a voluntary exile. She pleaded to go back to that place where you had to leave her, promising she would not come Westward; but was persuaded. Lady Arpington approves. The situation was getting too terribly strained. We met and passed my lord in the park.

'He was walking his horse-elegant cavalier that he is: would not look on his wife. A woman pulled by her collar should be passive; if she pulls her way, she is treated as a dog. I see nothing else in the intention of poor Janey's last offence to him. There is an opposite counsel, and he can be eloquent, and he will be heard on her side. How could she manage the most wayward when she has not an idea of ordinary men! But, my husband, they have our tie between them; it may move him. It subdues her—and nothing else would have done that. If she had been in England a year before the marriage, she would, I think, have understood better how to guide her steps and her tongue for his good pleasure. She learns daily, very quickly: observes, assimilates; she reads and has her comments—would have shot far ahead of your Riette, with my advantages.

'Your uncle—but he will bear any charge on his conscience as long as he can get the burden off his shoulders. Do not fret, my own! Reperuse the above—you will see we have grounds for hope.

'He should have looked down on her! No tears from her eyes, but her eyes were tears. She does not rank among beautiful women. She has her moments for outshining them—the loveliest of spectres! She caught at my heart. I cannot forget her face looking up for him to look down. A great painter would have reproduced it, a great poet have rendered the impression. Nothing short of the greatest. That is odd to say of one so simple as she. But when accidents call up her reserves, you see mountain heights where mists were—she is actually glorified. Her friend—I do believe a friend—the Mr. Woodseer you are to remember meeting somewhere—a sprained ankle—has a dozen similes ready for what she is when pain or happiness vivify her. Or, it may be, tender

charity. She says, that if she feels for suffering people, it is because she is the child of Chillon's mother. In like manner Chillon is the son of Janey's father.

Page 4089

’Mr. Woodseer came every other evening. Our only enlivenment. Livia followed her policy, in refusing to call. We lived luxuriously; no money, not enough for a box at the opera, though we yearned—you can imagine. Chapters of philosophy read out and expounded instead. Janey likes them. He sets lessons to her queer maid—reading, writing, pronunciation of English. An inferior language to Welsh, for poetical purposes, we are informed. So Janey—determining to apply herself to Welsh, and a chameleon Riette dreading that she will be taking a contrary view of the honest souls—as she feels them to be—when again under Livia’s shadow.

’The message from Janey to Scrope’s hotel was despatched half-an-hour after we had driven in from the park; fruit of a brown meditation. I wrote it—third person—a single sentence. Arrangements are made for her to travel comfortably. It is funny—the shops for her purchases of clothes, necessaries, *etc*., are specified; she may order to any extent. Not a shilling of money for her poor purse. What can be the secret of that? He does nothing without an object. To me, uniformly civil, no irony, few compliments. Livia writes, that I am commended for keeping Janey company. What can be the secret of a man scrupulously just with one hand, and at the same time cruel with the other? Mr. Woodseer says, his wealth:—“More money than is required for their needs, men go into harness to Plutus,”—if that is clever.

’I have written my husband—as Janey ceases to call her own; and it was pretty and touching to hear her “my husband.”—Oh! a dull letter. But he is my husband though he keeps absent—to be longed for—he is my husband still, my husband always. Chillon is Henrietta’s husband, the world cries out, and when she is flattered she does the like, for then it is not too presumptuous that she should name Henrietta Chillon’s wife. In my ears, husband has the sweeter sound. It brings an angel from overhead. Will it bring him one-half hour sooner? My love! My dear! If it did, I should be lisping “husband, husband, husband” from cock-crow to owl’s cry. Livia thinks the word foolish, if not detestable. She and I have our different opinions. She is for luxury. I choose poverty and my husband. Poverty has its beauty, if my husband is the sun of it. Elle radote. She would not have written so dull a letter to her husband if she had been at the opera last night, or listened to a distant street-band. No more—the next line would be bleeding. He should have her blood too, if that were her husband’s—it would never be; but if it were for his good in the smallest way. Chillon’s wish is to give his blood for them he loves. Never did woman try more to write worthily to her absent lord and fall so miserably into the state of dripping babe from bath on nurse’s knee. Cover me, my lord; and love, my cause for—no, my excuse, my refuge from myself. We are one? Oh! we are one!—and we have been separated eight and twenty days.

Page 4090

‘*HenriettaKirby-Levellier*.’

That was a letter for the husband and lover to receive in a foreign land and be warmed.

The tidings of Carinthia washed him clean of the grimy district where his waxen sister had developed her stubborn insensibility;—resembling craziness, every perversion of the refinement demanded by young Englishmen of their ladies; and it pacified him with the belief that she was now at rest, the disturbed history of their father and mother at rest as well; his conscience in relation to the marriage likewise at rest. Chillon had a wife. Her writing of the welcome to poverty stirred his knowledge of his wife’s nature. Carinthia might bear it and harden to flint; Henrietta was a butterfly for the golden rays. His thoughts, all his energies, were bent on the making of money to supply her need for the pleasure she flew in—a butterfly’s grub without it. Accurately so did the husband and lover read his wife—adoring her the more.

Her letter’s embracing close was costly to them. It hurried him to the compromise of a debateable business, and he fell into the Austrian Government’s terms for the payment of the inheritance from his father; calculating that—his sister’s share deducted-money would be in hand to pay pressing debts and enable Henrietta to live unworried by cares until he should have squeezed debts, long due and increasing, out of the miserly old lord, his uncle. A prospect of supplies for twelve months, counting the hack and carriage Henrietta had always been used to, seemed about as far as it was required to look by the husband hastening homeward to his wife’s call. Her letter was a call in the night. Besides, there were his yet untried Inventions. The new gunpowder testing at Croridge promised to provide Henrietta with many of the luxuries she could have had, and had abandoned for his sake. The new blasting powder and a destructive shell might build her the palace she deserved. His uncle was, no doubt, his partner. If, however, the profits were divided, sufficient wealth was assured. But his uncle remained a dubious image. The husband and lover could enfold no positive prospect to suit his wife’s tastes beyond the twelve months.

We have Dame Gossip upon us.

—One minute let mention be of the excitement over Protestant England when that rumour disseminated, telling of her wealthiest nobleman’s visit to a monastery, up in the peaks and snows; and of his dwelling among the monks, and assisting in all their services day and night, hymning and chanting, uttering not one word for one whole week: his Papistical friend, Lord Feltre, with him, of course, after Jesuit arts had allured him to that place of torrents and lightnings and canticles and demon echoes, all as though expressly contrived for the horrifying of sinners into penitence and confession and the monkish cowl up to life’s end, not to speak of the abjuration of worldly possessions and donation of them into the

Page 4091

keeping of the shaven brothers; when either they would have settled a band of them here in our very midst, or they would have impoverished—is not too strong a word—the country by taking the money's worth of the mines, estates, mansions, freehold streets and squares of our metropolis out of it without scruple; rejoicing so to bleed the Protestant faith. Underrate it now—then it was a truly justifiable anxiety: insomuch that you heard people of station, eminent titled persons, asking, like the commonest low Radicals, whether it was prudent legislation to permit of the inheritance of such vast wealth by a young man, little more than a boy, and noted for freaks. And some declared it could not be allowed for foreign monks to have a claim to inherit English property. There was a general consent, that if the Earl of Fleetwood went to the extreme of making over his property to those monks, he should be pronounced insane and incapable. Ultimately the world was a little pacified by hearing that a portion of it was entailed, Esslemont and the Welsh mines.

So it might be; but what if he had no child! The marriage amazing everybody scarcely promised fruit, it was thought. Countess Livia, much besought for her opinion, scouted the possibility. And Carinthia Jane was proclaimed by John Rose Mackrell (to his dying day the poor gentleman tried vainly to get the second syllable of his name accentuated) a young woman who would outlive twice over the husband she had. He said of his name, it was destined to pass him down a dead fish in the nose of posterity, and would affect his best jokes; which something has done, or the present generation has lost the sense of genuine humour.

Thanks to him, the talk of the Whitechapel Countess again sprang up, merrily as ever; and after her having become, as he said, 'a desiccated celebrity,' she outdid cabinet ministers and naughty wives for a living morsel in the world's mouth. She was denounced by the patriotic party as the cause of the earl's dalliance with Rome.

The earl, you are to know, was then coasting along the Mediterranean, on board his beautiful schooner yacht, with his Lord Feltre, bound to make an inspection of Syrian monasteries, and forget, if he could, the face of all faces, another's possession by the law.

Those two lords, shut up together in a yacht, were advised by their situation to be bosom friends, and they quarrelled violently, and were reconciled, and they quarrelled again; they were explosive chemicals; until the touch of dry land relieved them of what they really fancied the spell of the Fiend. For their argumentative topic during confinement was Woman, when it was not Theology; and even off a yacht, those are subjects to kindle the utmost hatred of dissension, if men are not perfectly concordant. They agreed upon land to banish any talk of Women or Theology, where it would have been comparatively innocent; so they both desiring to be doing the thing they had sworn they would not do, the thoughts of both were fastened on one or the other interdicted subject. They hardly spoke; they perceived in their longing minds, that the imagined spell of, the Fiend was indeed the bile of the sea, secreted thickly for want of exercise,

and they both regretted the days and nights of their angry controversies; unfit pilgrims of the Holy Land, they owned.

Page 4092

To such effect, Lord Fleetwood wrote to Gower Woodseer, as though there had been no breach between them, from Jerusalem, expressing the wish to hear his cool wood-notes of the philosophy of Life, fresh drawn from Nature's breast; and urgent for an answer, to be addressed to his hotel at Southampton, that he might be greeted on his return home first by his 'friend Gower.'

He wrote in the month of January. His arrival at Southampton was on the thirteenth day of March; and there he opened a letter some weeks old, the bearer of news which ought by rights to make husbands proudly happy.

CHAPTER XXVII

WE DESCEND INTO A STEAMER'S ENGINE-ROOM

Fleetwood had dropped his friend Lord Feltre at Ancona; his good fortune was to be alone when the clang of bells rang through his head in the reading of Gower's lines. Other letters were opened: from the Countess Livia, from Lady Arpington, from Captain Kirby-Levellier. There was one from his lawyers, informing him of their receipt of a communication dated South Wales, December 11th, and signed Owain Wythan; to the effect, that the birth of a son to the Earl of Fleetwood was registered on the day of the date, with a copy of the document forwarded.

Livia scornfully stated the tattling world's 'latest.' The captain was as brief, in ordinary words, whose quick run to the stop could be taken for a challenge of the eye. It stamped the adversary's frown on Fleetwood reading. Lady Arpington was more politic; she wrote of 'a healthy boy,' and 'the healthy mother giving him breast,' this being 'the way for the rearing of strong men.' She condescended to the particulars, that she might touch him.

The earl had not been so reared: his mother was not the healthy mother. One of his multitudinous, shifty, but ineradicable ambitions was to exhibit an excellingly vigorous, tireless constitution. He remembered the needed refreshment of the sea-breezes aboard his yacht during the week following the sleep-discarded nights at Scrope's and the green tables. For a week he hung to the smell of brine, in rapturous amity with Feltre, until they yellowed, differed, wrangled, hated.

A powerful leaven was put into him by the tidings out of Wales. Gower, good fellow, had gone down to see the young mother three weeks after the birth of her child. She was already renewing her bloom. She had produced the boy in the world's early manner, lightly, without any of the tragic modern hovering over death to give the life. Gower compared it to a 'flush of the vernal orchard after a day's drink of sunlight.' That was well: that was how it should be. One loathes the idea of tortured women.

The good fellow was perhaps absurdly poetical. Still we must have poetry to hallow this and other forms of energy: or say, if you like, the right view of them impels to poetry. Otherwise we are in the breeding yards, among the litters and the farrows. It is a question of looking down or looking up. If we are poor creatures—as we are if we do but feast and gamble and beget—we shall run for a time with the dogs and come to the finish of swine. Better say, life is holy! Why, then have we to thank her who teaches it.

Page 4093

He gazed at the string of visions of the woman naming him husband, making him a father: the imagined Carinthia—beautiful Gorgon, haggard Venus; the Carinthia of the precipice tree-shoot; Carinthia of the ducal dancing-hall; and she at the altar rails; she on the coach box; she alternately softest of brides, doughtiest of Amazons. A mate for the caress, an electrical heroine, fronted him.

Yes, and she was Lord Fleetwood's wife, cracking sconces,—a demoiselle Moll Flanders,—the world's Whitechapel Countess out for an airing, infernally earnest about it, madly ludicrous; the schemer to catch his word, the petticoated Shylock to bind him to the letter of it; now persecuting, haunting him, now immoveable for obstinacy; malignant to stay down in those vile slums and direct tons of sooty waters on his head from its mains in the sight of London, causing the least histrionic of men to behave as an actor. He beheld her a skull with a lamp behind the eyeholes.

But this woman was the woman who made him a father; she was the mother of the heir of the House; and the boy she clasped and suckled as her boy was his boy. They met inseparably in that new life.

Truly, there could not be a woman of flesh so near to a likeness with the beatific image of Feltre's worshipped Madonna!

The thought sparkled and darkened in Fleetwood's mind, as a star passing into cloud. For an uproarious world claimed the woman, jeered at all allied with her; at her husband most, of course:—the punctilious noodle! the golden jackass, tethered and goaded! He had choice among the pick of women: the daughter of the Old Buccaneer was preferred by the wiseacre Coelebs. She tricked him cunningly and struck a tremendous return blow in producing her male infant.

By the way, was she actually born in wedlock? Lord Levellier's assurances regarding her origin were, by the calculation, a miser's shuffles to clinch his bargain. Assuming the representative of holy motherhood to be a woman of illegitimate birth, the history of the House to which the spotted woman gave an heir would suffer a jolt when touching on her. And altogether the history fumed rank vapours. Imagine her boy in his father's name a young collegian! No commonly sensitive lad could bear the gibes of the fellows raking at antecedents: Fleetwood would be the name to start roars. Smarting for his name, the earl chafed at the boy's mother. Her production of a man-child was the further and grosser offence.

The world sat on him. His confession to some degree of weakness, even to folly, stung his pride of individuality so that he had to soothe the pain by tearing himself from a thought of his folly's partner, shutting himself up and away from her. Then there was a cessation of annoyance, flatteringly agreeable: which can come to us only of our having done the right thing, young men will think. He felt at once warmly with the world, enjoyed the world's kind shelter, and in return for its eulogy of his unprecedented

attachment to the pledge of his word, admitted an understanding of its laughter at the burlesque edition of a noble lady in the person of the Whitechapel Countess. The world sat on him heavily.

Page 4094

He recurred to Gower Woodseer's letter.

The pictures and images in it were not the principal matter,—the impression had been deep. A plain transcription of the young mother's acts and words did more to portray her: the reader could supply reflections.

Would her boy's father be very pleased to see him? she had asked.

And she spoke of a fear that the father would try to take her boy from her.

'Never that—you have my word!' Fleetwood said; and he nodded consentingly over her next remark—

'Not while I live, till he must go to school!'

The stubborn wife would be the last of women to sit and weep as a rifled mother.

A child of the Countess Carinthia (he phrased it) would not be deficient in will, nor would the youngster lack bravery.

For his part, comparison rushing at him and searching him, he owned that he leaned on pride. To think that he did, became a theme for pride. The mother had the primitive virtues, the father the developed: he was the richer mine. And besides, he was he, the unriddled, complex, individual he; she was the plain barbarian survival, good for giving her offspring bone, muscle, stout heart.

Shape the hypothesis of a fairer woman the mother of the heir to the earldom.

Henrietta was analyzed in a glimpse. Courage, animal healthfulness, she, too, might—-her husband not obstructing—transmit; and good looks, eyes of the sapphire AEgean. And therewith such pliability as the Mother of Love requires of her servants.

Could that woman resist seductions?

Fleetwood's wrath with her for refusing him and inducing him in spite to pledge his word elsewhere, haphazard, pricked a curiosity to know whether the woman could be—and easily! easily! he wagered—led to make her conduct warrant for his contempt of her. Led,—that is, misled, you might say, if you were pleading for a doll. But it was necessary to bait the pleasures for the woman, in order to have full view of the precious fine fate one has escaped. Also to get well rid of a sort of hectic in the blood, which the woman's beauty has cast on that reflecting tide: a fever-sign, where the fever has become quite emotionless and is merely desirous for the stain of it to be washed out. As this is not the desire to possess or even to taste, contempt will do it. When we know that the weaver of the fascinations is purchasable, we toss her to the market where men buy; and we walk released from vile subjection to one of the female heap: subjection no

longer, doubtless, and yet a stain of the past flush, often colouring our reveries, creating active phantasms of a passion absolutely extinct, if it ever was the veritable passion.

Page 4095

The plot—formless plot—to get release by the sacrifice or at least a crucial temptation of the woman, that should wash his blood clean of her image, had a shade of the devilish, he acknowledged; and the apology offered no improvement of its aspect. She might come out of the trial triumphant. And benefit for himself, even a small privilege, even the pressure of her hand, he not only shrank from the thought of winning,-he loathed the thought. He was too delicate over the idea of the married woman whom he fancied he loved in her maidenhood. Others might press her hand, lead her the dance: he simply wanted his release. She had set him on fire; he conceived a method for trampling the remaining sparks and erasing stain and scars; that was all. Henrietta rejected her wealthy suitor: she might some day hence be seen crawling abjectly to wealth, glad of a drink from the cup it holds, intoxicated with the draught. An injured pride could animate his wealth to crave solace of such a spectacle.

Devilish, if you like. He had expiated the wickedness in Cistercian seclusion. His wife now drove him to sin again.

She had given him a son. That fluted of home and honourable life. She had her charm, known to him alone.

But how, supposing she did not rub him to bristle with fresh irritations, how go to his wife while Henrietta held her throne? Consideration was due to her until she stumbled. Enough if she wavered. Almost enough is she stood firm as a statue in the winds, and proved that the first page of her was a false introduction. The surprising apparition of a beautiful woman with character; a lightly-thrilled, pleasure-loving woman devoted to her husband or protected by her rightful self-esteem, would loosen him creditably. It had to be witnessed, for faith in it. He reverenced our legendary good women, and he bowed to noble deeds; and he ascribed the former to poetical creativeness, the latter operated as a scourging to his flesh to yield its demoniacal inmates. Nothing of the kind was doing at present.

Or stay: a studious re-perusal of Gower Woodseer's letter enriched a little incident. Fleetwood gave his wife her name of Carinthia when he had read deliberately and caught the scene.

Mrs. Wythan down in Wales related it to Gower. Carinthia and Madge, trudging over the treeless hills, came on a birchen clump round a deep hollow or gullypit; precipitous, the earl knew, he had peeped over the edge in his infant days. There at the bottom, in a foot or so of water, they espied a lamb; and they rescued the poor beastie by going down to it, one or both. It must have been the mountain-footed one. A man would hesitate, spying below. Fleetwood wondered how she had managed to climb up, and carrying the lamb! Down pitches Madge Winch to help—they did it between them. We who stand aloof admire stupidly. To defend himself from admiring, he condemned the two women for the risk they ran to save a probably broken-legged little beast: and he escaped the melting mood by forcing a sneer at the sort of stuff out of which popular

ballads are woven. Carinthia was accused of letting her adventurous impulses and sentimental female compassion swamp thought of a mother's duties. If both those women had broken their legs the child might have cried itself into fits for the mother, there she would have remained.

Page 4096

Gower wrote in a language transparent of the act, addressed to a reader whose memory was to be impregnated. His reader would have flown away from the simple occurrence on arabesques and modulated tones; and then envisaging them critically, would have tossed his poor little story to the winds, as a small thing magnified: with an object, being the next thought about it. He knew his Fleetwood so far.

His letter concluded: 'I am in a small Surrey village over a baker's shop, rent eight shillings per week, a dame's infant school opposite my window, miles of firwood, heath, and bracken openings, for the winged or the nested fancies. Love Nature, she makes you a lord of her boundless, off any ten square feet of common earth. I go through my illusions and come always back on that good truth. It says, beware of the world's passion for flavours and spices. Much tasted, they turn and bite the biter. My exemplars are the lately breeched youngsters with two pence in their pockets for the gingerbread-nut booth on a fair day. I learn more from one of them than you can from the whole cavalcade of your attendant Ixionides.'

Mounting the box of his coach for the drive to London, Fleetwood had the new name for the parasitic and sham vital troop at his ears.

'My Ixionides!' he repeated, and did not scorn them so much as he rejoiced to be enlightened by the title. He craved the presence of the magician who dropped illumination with a single word; wholesomer to think of than the whole body of those Ixionides—not bad fellows, here and there, he reflected, tolerantly, half laughing at some of their clownish fun. Gower Woodseer and he had not quarrelled? No, they had merely parted at one of the crossways. The plebeian could teach that son of the, genuflexions, Lord Feltre, a lesson in manners. Woodseer was the better comrade and director of routes. Into the forest, up on the heights; and free, not locked; and not parroting day and night, but quick for all that the world has learnt and can tell, though two-thirds of it be composed of Ixionides: that way lies wisdom, and his index was cut that way.

Arrived in town, he ran over the headings of his letters, in no degree anxious for a communication from Wales. There was none. Why none?

She might as well have scrawled her announcement of an event pleasing to her, and, by the calculation, important to him, if not particularly interesting. The mother's wifeish lines would, perhaps, have been tested in a furnace. He smarted at the blank of any, of even two or three formal words. She sulked? 'I am not a fallen lamb!' he said. Evidently one had to be a shivering beast in trouble, to excite her to move a hand.

Through so slight a fissure as this piece of discontent cracked in him, the crowd of his grievances with the woman rushed pell-mell, deluging young shoots of sweeter feelings. She sulked! If that woman could not get the command, he was to know her incapable of submission. After besmutting the name she had filched from him, she let

him understand that there was no intention to repent. Possibly she meant war. In which case a man must fly, or stand assailed by the most intolerable of vulgar farces;—to be compared to a pelting of one on the stage.

Page 4097

The time came for him to knock at doors and face his public.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BY CONCESSIONS TO MISTRESS GOSSIP A FURTHER INTRUSION IS AVERTED

Livia welcomed him, with commiserating inquiry behind her languid eyelids. ‘You have all the latest?’ it said.

He struck on the burning matter.

‘You wish to know the part you have to play, ma’am.’ ‘Tell me, Russett.’

‘You will contradict nothing.’

Her eyebrows asked, ‘It means?’

‘You have authority from me to admit the facts.’

‘They are facts?’ she remarked.

’Women love teasing round certain facts, apparently; like the Law courts over their pet cases.’

‘But, Russett, will you listen?’

‘Has the luck been civil of late?’

‘I think of something else at present. No, it has not.’

‘Abrane?’

‘Pray, attend to me. No, not Abrane.’

‘I believe you’ve all been cleared out in my absence. St. Ombre?’

Her complexion varied. ’Mr. Ambrose Mallard has once or twice . . . But let me beg you —the town is rageing with it. My dear Russett, a bold front now; there ‘s the chance of your release in view.’

‘A rascal in view! Name the sum.’

‘I must reckon. My head is—can you intend to submit?’

’So it’s Brosey Mallard now. You choose your deputy queerly. He’s as bad as Abrane, with steam to it. Chummy Potts would have done better.’

’He wins one night; loses every pound-note he has the next; and comes vaunting—the “dry still Sillery” of the establishment,—a perpetual chorus to his losses!’

’His consolation to you for yours. That is the gentleman. Chummy doesn’t change. Say, why not St. Ombre? He’s cool.’

‘There are reasons.’

‘Let them rest. And I have my reasons. Do the same for them.’

‘Yours concern the honour of the family.’

‘Deeply: respect them.’

’Your relatives have to be thought of, though they are few and not too pleasant.’

’If I had thought much of them, what would our relations be? They object to dicing, and I to leading strings.’

She turned to a brighter subject, of no visible connection with the preceding.

‘Henrietta comes in May.’

‘The month of her colours.’

‘Her money troubles are terrible.’

’Both of you appear unlucky in your partners,—if winning was the object. She shall have all the distractions we can offer.’

‘Your visit to the Chartreuse alarmed her.’

‘She has rejoiced her husband.’

‘A girl. She feared the Jesuit in your friend.’

‘Feltre and she are about equally affected by music. They shall meet.’

’Russett, this once: I do entreat you to take counsel with your good sense, and remember that you stand where you are by going against my advice. It is a perfect storm over London. The world has not to be informed of your generosity; but a chivalry that invites the most horrible of sneers at a man! And what can I say? I have said it was impossible.’

Page 4098

‘Add the postscript: you find it was perfectly possible.’

‘I have to learn more than I care to hear.’

‘Your knowledge is not in request: you will speak in my name.’

‘Will you consult your lawyers, Russett, before you commit yourself?’

‘I am on my way to Lady Arpington.’

‘You cannot be thinking how serious it is.’

‘I rather value the opinion of a hard-headed woman of the world.’

‘Why not listen to me?’

‘You have your points, ma’am.’

‘She’s a torch.’

‘She serves my purpose.’

Livia shrugged sadly. ’I suppose it serves your purpose to be unintelligible to me.’

He rendered himself intelligible immediately by saying, ’Before I go—a thousand?’

‘Oh, my dear Russett!’ she sighed.

‘State the amount.’

She seemed to be casting unwieldly figures and he helped her with, ’Mr. Isaacs?’

‘Not less than three, I fear.’

‘Has he been pressing?’

‘You are always good to us, Russett.’

’You are always considerate for the honour of the family, ma’am. Order for the money with you here to-morrow. And I thank you for your advice. Do me the favour to follow mine.

‘Commands should be the word.’

‘Phrase it as you please.’

‘You know I hate responsibility.’

’The chorus in classical dramas had generally that sentiment, but the singing was the sweeter for it.’

‘Whom do you not win when you condescend to the mood, you dear boy?’

He restrained a bitter reply, touching the kind of persons he had won: a girl from the mountains, a philosophical tramp of the roads, troops of the bought.

Livia spelt at the problem he was. She put away the task of reading it.
He departed to see Lady Arpington, and thereby rivet his chains.

As Livia had said, she was a torch. Lady Endor, Lady Eldritch, Lady Cowry, kindled at her. Again there were flights of the burning brands over London. The very odd marriage; the no-marriage; the two-ends-of-the-town marriage; and the maiden marriage a fruitful marriage; the monstrous marriage of the countess productive in banishment, and the unreadable earl accepting paternity; this Amazing Marriage was again the riddle in the cracker for tattlers and gapers. It rattled upon the world’s native wantonness, the world’s acquired decorum: society’s irrepressible original and its powerfully resisting second nature. All the rogues of the fine sphere ran about with it, male and female; and there was the narrative that suggestively skipped, and that which trod the minuet measure, dropping a curtsey to ravenous curiosity; the apology surrendering its defensible cause in supplications to benevolence; and the benevolence damnatory in a too eloquent urgency; followed by the devout objection to a breath of the subject, so blackening it as to call forth the profanely circumstantial exposition. Smirks, blushes, dead silences, and in the lower regions roars, hung round it.

Page 4099

But the lady, though absent, did not figure poorly at all. Granting Whitechapel and the shillelagh affair, certain whispers of her good looks, contested only to be the more violently asserted; and therewith Rose Mackrell's tale of her being a 'young woman of birth,' having a 'romantic story to tell of herself and her parentage,' made her latest performance the champagne event of it hitherto. Men sparkled when they had it on their lips.

How, then, London asked, would the Earl of Fleetwood move his pieces in reply to his countess's particularly clever indication of the check threatening mate?

His move had no relation to the game, it was thought at first. The world could not suppose that he moved a simple pawn on his marriage board. He purchased a shop in Piccadilly for the sale of fruit and flowers.

Lady Arpington was entreated to deal at the shop, Countess Livia had her orders; his friends, his parasites and satellites, were to deal there. Intensely earnest as usual, he besought great ladies to let him have the overflow of their hothouses; and they classing it as another of the mystifications of a purse crazy for repleteness, inquired: 'But is it you we are to deal with?' And he quite seriously said: 'With me, yes, at present.' Something was behind the curtain, of course. His gravity had the effect of the ultra-comical in concealing it.

The shop was opened. We have the assurance of Rose Mackrell, that he entered and examined the piles and pans of fruit, and the bouquets cunningly arranged by a hand smelling French. The shop was roomy, splendid windows lighted the yellow, the golden, the green and parti-coloured stores. Four doors off, a chemist's motley in bellied glasses crashed on the sight. Passengers along the pavement had presented to them such a contrast as might be shown if we could imagine the Lethean ferry-boatload brought sharp against Pomona's lapful. In addition to the plucked flowers and fruits of the shop, Rose Mackrell more attentively examined the samples doing service at the counters. They were three, under supervision of a watchful-eyed fourth. Dame Gossip is for quoting his wit. But the conclusion he reached, after quitting the shop and pacing his dozen steps, is important; for it sent a wind over the town to set the springs of tattle going as wildly as when the herald's trumpet blew the announcement for the world to hear out of Wales.

He had observed, that the young woman supervising was deficient in the ease of an established superior; her brows were troubled; she was, therefore, a lieutenant elevated from a lower grade; and, to his thinking, conducted the business during the temporary retirement of the mistress of the shop.

And the mistress of the shop?

The question hardly needs be put.

Rose Mackrell or his humour answered it in unfaltering terms.

London heard, with the variety of feelings which are indistinguishable under a flooding amazement, that the beautiful new fruit and flower shop had been purchased and stocked by the fabulously wealthy young Earl of Fleetwood, to give his Whitechapel Countess a taste for business, an occupation, and an honourable means of livelihood.

Page 4100

There was, Dame Gossip thumps to say, a general belief in this report. Crowds were on the pavement, peering through the shop-windows. Carriages driving by stopped to look. My lord himself had been visible, displaying his array of provisions to friends. Nor was credulity damped appreciably when over the shop, in gold letters, appeared the name of Sarah Winch. It might be the countess's maiden name, if she really was a married countess.

But, in truth, the better informed of the town, having begun to think its Croesus capable of any eccentricity, chose to believe. They were at the pitch of excitement which demands and will swallow a succession of wilder extravagances. To accelerate the delirium of the fun, nothing was too much, because any absurdity was anticipated. And the earl's readiness to be complimented on the shop's particular merits, his gratified air at an allusion to it, whirled the fun faster. He seemed entirely unconscious that each step he now took wakened peals.

For such is the fate of a man who has come to be dogged by the humourist for the provision he furnishes; and, as it happens, he is the more laughable if not in himself a laughable object. The earl's handsome figure, fine style, and contrasting sobriety heightened the burlesque of his call to admiration of a shop where Whitechapel would sit in state-according to the fiction so closely under the lee of fact that they were not strictly divisible. Moreover, Sarah Winch, whom Chumley Potts drew into conversation, said, he vowed, she came up West from Whitechapel. She said it a little nervously, but without blushing. Always on the side of the joke, he could ask: 'Who can doubt?' Indeed, scepticism poisoned the sport.

The Old Buccaneer has written: Friends may laugh; I am not roused. My enemy's laugh is a bugle blown in the night.

Our enemy's laugh at us rouses to wariness, he would say. He can barely mean, that a condition of drowsihead is other than providently warned by laughter of friends. An old warrior's tough fibre would, perhaps, be insensible to that small crackle. In civil life, however, the friend's laugh at us is the loudest of the danger signals to stop our course: and the very wealthy nobleman, who is known for not a fool, is kept from hearing it. Unless he does hear it, he can have no suspicion of its being about him: he cannot imagine such 'lese-majeste' in the subservient courtiers too prudent to betray a sign. So Fleetwood was unwarned; and his child-like unconsciousness of the boiling sentiments around, seasoned, pricked, and maddened his parasites under compression to invent, for a faint relief. He had his title for them, they their tales of him.

Page 4101

Dame Gossip would recount the tales. She is of the order of persons inclining to suspect the tittle of truth in prodigies of scandal. She is rustling and bustling to us of 'Carinthia Jane's run up to London to see Sarah Winch's grand new shop,' an eclipse of all existing grand London western shops; and of Rose Mackrell's account of her dance of proud delight in the shop, ending with a 'lovely cheese' just as my lord enters; and then a scene, wild beyond any conceivable 'for pathos and humour'—her pet pair of the dissimilar twins, both banging at us for tear-drops by different roads, through a common aperture:—and the earl has the Whitechapel baby boy plumped into his arms; and the countess fetches him a splendid bob-dip and rises out of a second cheese to twirl and fandango it; and, all serious on a sudden, request, whimperingly beseech, his thanks to her for the crowing successor she has presented him with: my lord ultimately, but carefully, depositing the infant on a basket of the last oranges of the season, fresh from the Azores, by delivery off my lord's own schooner-yacht in Southampton water; and escaping, leaving his gold-headed stick behind him—a trophy for the countess? a weapon, it may be.

Quick she tucks up her skirts, she is after him. Dame Gossip speaks amusingly enough of the chase, and many eye-witnesses to the earl's flight at top speed down the right side of the way along by the Green Park; and of a Prince of the Blood, a portly Royal Duke on foot, bumped by one or the other of them, she cannot precisely say which, but 'thinks it to have been Carinthia Jane,' because the exalted personage, his shock of surprise abating, turned and watched the chase, in much merriment. And it was called, we are informed, 'The Piccadilly Hare and Hound' from that day.

Some tradition of an extenuated nobleman pursued by a light-footed lady amid great excitement, there is; the Dame attaches importance also to verses of one of the ballads beginning to gain currency at the time (issuing ostensibly from London's poetic centre, the Seven Dials, which had, we are to conjecture, got the story by discolouring filtration through footmen retailing in public-houses the stock of anecdotes they gathered when stationed behind Rose Mackrell's chair, or Captain Abrane's, or Chumley 'Potts's), and would have the whole of it quoted:—

"'Tho' fair I be a powdered peruke,
And once was a gaping silly,
Your Whitechapel Countess will prove, Lord Duke,
She's a regular tiger-lily.
She'll fight you with cold steel
    or she'll run you off your legs
Down the length of Piccadilly!"

That will satisfy; and perhaps indicate the hand.

'Popular sympathy, of course, was all on the side of the Fair, as ever in those days when women had not forfeited it by stepping from their sanctuary seclusion.'

Page 4102

The Dame shall expose her confusions. She really would seem to fancy that the ballad verifies the main lines of the story, which is an impossible one. Carinthia had not the means to travel: she was moneyless. Every bill of her establishment was paid without stint by Mr. Howell Edwards, the earl's manager of mines; but she had not even the means for a journey to the Gowerland rocks she longed to see. She had none since she forced her brother to take the half of her share of their inheritance, L1400, and sent him the remainder.

Accepted by Chillon John as a loan, says Dame Gossip, and no sooner received than consumed by the pressing necessities of a husband with the Rose Beauty of England to support in the comforts and luxuries he deemed befitting.

Still the Dame leans to her opinion that 'Carinthia Jane' may have been seen about London: for 'where we have much smoke there must be fire.' And the countess never denying an imputation not brought against her in her hearing, the ballad was unchallenged and London's wags had it their own way. Among the reasons why they so persistently hunted the earl, his air of a smart correctness shadowed by this new absurdity invited them, as when a spot of mud on the trimmest of countenances arrests observation: Humour plucked at him the more for the good faith of his handsome look under the prolific little disfigurement. Besides, a wealthy despot, with no conception of any hum around him, will have the wags in his track as surely as the flexibles in front: they avenge his exactions.

Fleetwood was honestly unaware of ridicule in the condition of inventive mania at his heels. Scheming, and hesitating to do, one-half of his mind was absorbed with the problem of how now to treat the mother of his boy. Her behaviour in becoming a mother was acknowledged to be good: the production of a boy was good—considerate, he almost thought. He grew so far reconciled to her as to have intimations of a softness coming on; a wish to hear her speak of the trifling kindness done to the sister of Madge in reward of kindness done to her; wishes for looks he remembered, secret to him, more his own than any possessions. Dozens of men had wealth, some had beautiful wives; none could claim as his own that face of the look of sharp steel melting into the bridal flower, when she sprang from her bed to defend herself and recognized the intruder at her window; stood smitten:—'It is my, husband.' Moonlight gave the variation of her features.

And that did not appease the resentment tearing him from her, so justifiable then, as he forced himself to think, now hideous. Glimpses of the pictures his deeds painted of him since his first meeting with this woman had to be shunned. He threw them off; they were set down to the mystery men are. The degrading, utterly different, back view of them teaches that Life is an irony. If the teaching is not accepted, and we are to take the blame, can we bear to live? Therefore, either way the irony of Life is proved. Young men straining at thought, in the grip of their sensations, reach this logical conclusion.

They will not begin by examining the ground they stand on, and questioning whether they have consciences at peace with the steps to rearward.

Page 4103

Having established Life as the coldly malignant element, which induces to what it chastises, a loathing of womanhood, the deputed Mother of Life, ensues, by natural sequence. And if there be one among women who disturbs the serenity we choose to think our due, she wears for us the sinister aspect of a confidential messenger between Nemesis and the Parcae. Fleetwood was thus compelled to regard Carinthia as both originally and successively the cause of his internal as well as his exterior discomfort; otherwise those glimpses would have burnt into perpetual stigmas. He had also to get his mind away from her. They pleaded against him volubly with the rising of her image into it.

His manager at the mines had sent word of ominous discontent down there. His presence might be required. Obviously, then, the threatened place was unfitting for the Countess of Fleetwood. He despatched a kind of order through Mr. Howell Edwards, that she should remove to Esslemont to escape annoyances. Esslemont was the preferable residence. She could there entertain her friends, could spend a pleasanter time there.

He waited for the reply; Edwards deferred it.

Were they to be in a struggle with her obstinate will once more?

Henrietta was preparing to leave London for her dismal, narrow, and, after an absence, desired love-nest. The earl called to say farewell, cool as a loyal wife could wish him to be, admiring perforce. Marriage and maternity withdrew nothing—added to the fair young woman's bloom.

She had gone to her room to pack and dress. Livia received him. In the midst of the casual commonplaces her memory was enlightened.

'Oh,' said she, and idly drew a letter out of a blottingpad, 'we have heard from Wales.' She handed it to him.

Before he knew the thing he did, he was reading:

'There is no rest foamy brother, and I cannot help; I am kept so poor I have not the smallest of sums. I do not wish to leave Wales—the people begin to love me; and can one be mistaken? I know if I am loved or hated. But if my lord will give me an allowance of money of some hundreds, I will do his bidding; I will leave England or I will go to Esslemont; I could say—to Mr. Woodseer, in that part of London. He would not permit. He thinks me blacked by it, like a sweepboy coming from a chimney; and that I have done injury to his title. No, Riette, to be a true sister, I must bargain with my lord before I submit. He has not cared to come and see his little son. His boy has not offended him. There may be some of me in this dear. I know whose features will soon show to defend the mother's good name. He is early my champion. He is not

christened yet, and I hear it accuse me, and I am not to blame,—I still wait my lord's answer.'

'Don't be bothered to read the whole,' Livia had said, with her hand out, when his eyes were halfway down the page.

Fleetwood turned it, to read the signature: 'Janey.'

Page 4104

She seemed servile enough to some of her friends. ‘Carinthia’ would have had—a pleasanter sound. He folded the letter.

’Why give me this? Take it,’—said he.

She laid it on the open pad.

Henrietta entered and had it restored to her, Livia remarking: ’I found it in the blotter after all.’

She left them together, having to dress for the drive to the coach office with Henrietta.

‘Poor amusement for you this time.’ Fleetwood bowed, gently smiling.

‘Oh!’ cried Henrietta, ’balls, routs, dinners, music—as much music as I could desire, even I! What more could be asked? I am eternally grateful.’

‘The world says, you are more beautiful than ever.’

‘Happiness does it, then,—happiness owing to you, Lord Fleetwood.’

‘Columelli pleases you?’

‘His voice is heavenly! He carries me away from earth.’

‘He is a gentleman, too-rare with those fellows.’

‘A pretty manner. He will speak his compliments in his English.’

’You are seasoned to endure them in all languages. Pity another of your wounded: Brailstone has been hard hit at the tables.

‘I cannot pity gamblers.—May I venture?—half a word?’

’Tomes! But just a little compassion for the devoted. He wouldn’t play so madly—if, well, say a tenth dilution of the rapt hearing Columelli gets.’

‘Signor Columelli sings divinely.’

‘You don’t dislike Brailstone?’

‘He is one of the agreeable.’

‘He must put his feelings into Italian song!’

‘To put them aside will do.’

‘We are not to have our feelings?’

’Yes, on the proviso that ours are respected. But, one instant, Lord Fleetwood, pray. She is—I have to speak of her as my sister. I am sure she regrets . . . She writes very nicely.’

‘You have a letter from her?’

Henrietta sighed that it would not bear exposure to him: ‘Yes.’

‘Nicely worded?’

‘Well, yes, it is.’

He paused, not expecting that the letter would be shown, but silence fired shots, and he had stopped the petition. ’We are to have you for a week’s yachting. You prescribe your company. Only be merciful. Exclusion will mean death to some. Columelli will be touring in Switzerland. You shall have him in the house when my new bit of ground Northwest of London is open: very handy, ten miles out. We’ll have the Opera troupe there, and you shall command the Opera.’

Her beauty sweetened to thank him.

If, as Livia said, his passion for her was unchanged, the generosity manifested in the considerate screen it wore over any physical betrayal of it, deserved the lustre of her eyes. It dwelt a moment, vivid with the heart close behind and remorseful for misreading of old his fine character. Here was a young man who could be the very kindest of friends to the woman rejecting him to wed another. Her smile wavered. How shall a loving wife express warmth of sentiment elsewhere, without the one beam too much, that plunges her on a tideway? His claim of nothing called for everything short of the proscribed. She gave him her beauty in fullest flower.

Page 4105

It had the appearance of a temptation; and he was not tempted, though he admired; his thought being, Husband of the thing!

But he admired. That condition awakened his unsatisfied past days to desire positive proof of her worthlessness. The past days writhed in him. The present were loveless, entirely cold. He had not even the wish to press her hand. The market held beautiful women of a like description. He wished simply to see her proved the thing he read her to be: and not proved as such by himself. He was unable to summon or imagine emotion enough for him to simulate the forms by which fair women are wooed to their perdition. For all he cared, any man on earth might try, succeed or fail, as long as he had visual assurance that she coveted, a slave to the pleasures commanded by the wealth once disdained by her. Till that time, he could not feel himself perfectly free.

Dame Gossip prefers to ejaculate. Young men are mysteries! and bowl us onward. No one ever did comprehend the Earl of Fleetwood, she says: he was bad, he was good; he was whimsical and stedfast; a splendid figure, a mark for ridicule; romantic and a close arithmetician; often a devil, sometimes the humanest of creatures.

In fine, he was a millionaire nobleman, owning to a considerable infusion of Welsh blood in the composition of him. Now, to the Cymry and to the pure Kelt, the past is at their elbows continually. The past of their lives has lost neither face nor voice behind the shroud; nor are the passions of the flesh, nor is the animate soul, wanting to it. Other races forfeit infancy, forfeit youth and manhood with their progression to the wisdom age may bestow. These have each stage always alive, quick at a word, a scent, a sound, to conjure up scenes, in spirit and in flame. Historically, they still march with Cadwallader, with Llewellyn, with Glendower; sing with Aneurin, Taliesin, old Llywarch: individually, they are in the heart of the injury done them thirty years back or thrilling to the glorious deed which strikes an empty buckler for most of the sons of Time. An old sea rises in them, rolling no phantom billows to break to spray against existing rocks of the shore. That is why, and even if they have a dose of the Teuton in them, they have often to feel themselves exiles when still in amicable community among the preponderating Saxon English.

Add to the single differentiation enormous wealth—we convulse the excellent Dame by terming it a chained hurricane, to launch in foul blasts or beneficent showers, according to the moods during youth—and the composite Lord Fleetwood comes nearer into our focus. Dame Gossip, with her jigging to be at the butterwoman’s trot, when she is not violently interrupting, would suffer just punishment were we to digress upon the morality of a young man’s legal possession of enormous wealth as well.

Page 4106

Wholly Cambrian Fleetwood was not. But he had to the full the Cambrian's reverential esteem for high qualities. His good-bye with Henrietta, and estimate of her, left a dusky mental, void requiring an orb of some sort for contemplation; and an idea of the totally contrary Carinthia, the woman he had avowedly wedded, usurped her place. Qualities were admitted. She was thrust away because she had offended: still more because he had offended. She bore the blame for forcing him to an examination of his conduct at this point and that, where an ancestral savage in his lineaments cocked a strange eye. Yet at the moment of the act of the deed he had known himself the veritable Fleetwood. He had now to vindicate himself by extinguishing her under the load of her unwomanliness: she was like sun-dried linen matched beside oriental silk: she was rough, crisp, unyielding. That was now the capital charge. Henrietta could never be guilty of the unfeminine. Which did he prefer?

It is of all questions the one causing young men to screw wry faces when they are asked; they do so love the feminine, the ultra-feminine, whom they hate for her inclination to the frail. His depths were sounded, and he answered independently of his will, that he must be up to the heroical pitch to decide. Carinthia stood near him then. The confession was a step, and fraught with consequences. Her unacknowledged influence expedited him to Sarah Winch's shop, for sight of one of earth's honest souls; from whom he had the latest of the two others down in Wales, and of an infant there.

He dined the host of his Ixionides, leaving them early for a drive at night Eastward, and a chat with old Mr. Woodseer over his punching and sewing of his bootleather. Another honest soul. Mr. Woodseer thankfully consented to mount his coach-box next day, and astonish Gower with a drop on his head from the skies about the time of the mid-day meal.

There we have our peep into Dame Gossip's young man mysterious.

CHAPTER XXIX

CARINTHIA IN WALES

An August of gales and rains drove Atlantic air over the Welsh highlands. Carinthia's old father had impressed on her the rapture of 'smelling salt' when by chance he stood and threw up his nostrils to sniff largely over a bed of bracken, that reminded him of his element, and her fancy would be at strain to catch his once proud riding of the seas. She felt herself an elder daughter of the beloved old father, as she breathed it in full volume from the billowy West one morning early after sunrise and walked sisterly with the far-seen inexperienced little maid, whom she saw trotting beside him through the mountain forest, listening, storing his words, picturing the magnetic, veined great gloom of an untasted world.

Page 4107

This elder daughter had undergone a shipwreck; but clear proof that she had not been worsted was in the unclouded liveliness of the younger one gazing forward. Imaginative creatures who are courageous will never be lopped of the hopeful portion of their days by personal misfortune. Carinthia could animate both; it would have been a hurt done to a living human soul had she suffered the younger self to run overcast. Only, the gazing forward had become interdicted to her experienced self. Nor could she vision a future having any horizon for her child. She saw it in bleak squares, and snuggled him between dangers weathered and dangers apprehended.

The conviction that her husband hated her had sunk into her nature. Hating the mother, he would not love her boy. He was her boy, and strangely bestowed, not beautifully to be remembered rapturously or gratefully, and with deep love of the father. She felt the wound recollection dealt her. But the boy was her one treasure, and no treasure to her husband. They were burdens, and the heir of his House, child of a hated mother, was under perpetual menace from an unscrupulous tyrannical man. The dread and antagonism were first aroused by the birth of her child. She had not known while bearing him her present acute sensation of the hunted flying and at bay. Previously, she could say: I did wrong here; I did wrong there. Distrust had brought the state of war, which allows not of the wasting of our powers in confessions.

Her husband fed her and he clothed her; the limitation of his bounty was sharply outlined. Sure of her rectitude, a stranger to the world, she was not very sensible of dishonour done to her name. It happened at times that her father inquired of her how things were going with his little Carin; and then revolt sprang up and answered on his behalf rather fiercely. She was, however, prepared for any treaty including forgiveness, if she could be at peace in regard to her boy, and have an income of some help to her brother. Chillon was harassed on all sides; she stood incapable of aiding; so foolishly feeble in the shadow of her immense longing to strive for him, that she could think her husband had purposely lamed her with an infant. Her love of her brother, now the one man she loved, laid her insufficiency on the rack and tortured imbecile cries from it.

On the contrary, her strange husband had blest her with an infant. Everything was pardonable to him if he left her boy untouched in the mother’s charge. Much alone as she was, she raised the dead to pet and cherish her boy. Chillon had seen him and praised him. Mrs. Owain Wythan, her neighbour over a hill, praised him above all babes on earth, poor childless woman!

Page 4108

She was about to cross the hill and breakfast with Mrs. Wythan. The time for the weaning of the babe approached, and had as prospect beyond it her dull fear that her husband would say the mother's work was done, and seize the pretext to separate them: and she could not claim a longer term to be giving milk, because her father had said: 'Not a quarter of a month more than nine for the milk of the mother'—or else the child would draw an unsustaining nourishment from the strongest breast. She could have argued her exceptional robustness against another than he. But the dead father wanting to build a great race of men and women ruled.

Carinthia knelt at the cradle of a princeling gone from the rich repast to his alternative kingdom.

'You will bring him over when he wakes,' she said to Madge. 'Mrs. Wythan would like to see him every day. Martha can walk now.'

'She can walk and hold a child in her two arms, my lady,' said Madge. 'She expects miners popping up out of the bare ground when she sees no goblins.'

'They!—they know him, they would not hurt him, they know my son,' her mistress answered.

The population of the mines in revolt had no alarms for her. The works were empty down below. Men sat by the wayside brooding or strolled in groups, now and then loudly exercising their tongues; or they stood in circle to sing hymns: melancholy chants of a melancholy time for all.

How would her father have acted by these men? He would have been among them. Dissensions in his mine were vapours of a day. Lords behaved differently. Carinthia fancied the people must regard their master as a foreign wizard, whose power they felt, without the chance of making their cry to him heard. She, too, dealt with a lord. It was now his wish for her to leave the place where she had found some shreds of a home in the thought of being useful. She was gathering the people's language; many of their songs she could sing, and please them by singing to them. They were not suspicious of her; at least, their women had open doors for her; the men, if shy, were civil. She had only to go below, she was greeted in the quick tones of their speech all along the street of the slate-roofs.

But none loved the castle, and she as little, saving the one room in it where her boy lay. The grey of Welsh history knew a real castle beside the roaring brook frequently a torrent. This was an eighteenth century castellated habitation on the verge of a small wood midway up the height, and it required a survey of numberless happy recollections to illumine its walls or drape its chambers. The permanently lighted hearth of a dear home, as in that forsaken unfavoured old white house of the wooded Austrian crags, it

had not. Rather it seemed a place waiting for an ill deed to be done in it and stop all lighting of hearths thereafter.

Out on the turf of the shaven hills, her springy step dispersed any misty fancies. Her short-winged hive set to work in her head as usual, building scaffoldings of great things to be done by Chillon, present evils escaped. The rolling big bade hills with the riding clouds excited her as she mounted, and she was a figure of gladness on the ridge bending over to hospitable Plas Llwyn, where the Wythans lived, entertaining rich and poor alike.

Page 4109

They had led the neighbourhood to call on the discarded Countess of Fleetwood.

A warm strain of arms about her neck was Carinthia's welcome from Mrs. Wythan lying along the couch in her boudoir; an established invalid, who yearned sanely to life, and caught a spark of it from the guest eyed tenderly by her as they conversed.

'Our boy?—our Chillon Kirby till he has his baptism names; he is well? I am to see him?'

'He follows me. He sleeps almost through the night now.'

'Ah, my dear,' Mrs. Wythan sighed, imagining: 'It would disappoint me if he did not wake me.'

'I wake at his old time and watch him.'

Carinthia put on the baby's face in the soft mould of slumber.

'I see him!' Mrs. Wythan cried. 'He is part mine. He has taught Owain to love babies.'

A tray of breakfast was placed before the countess. 'Mr. Wythan is down among his men?' she said.

'Every morning, as long as this agitation lasts. I need not say good appetite to you after your walk. You have no fear of the men, I know. Owain's men are undisturbed; he has them in hand. Absentee masters can't expect continued harmony. Dear, he tells me Mr. Edwards awaits the earl.'

Drinking her tea, Carinthia's eyelids shut; she set down her cup, 'If he must come,' she said. 'He wishes me to leave. I am to go again where I have no friends, and no language to learn, and can be of no use. It is not for me that I dread his coming. He speaks to command. The men ask to be heard. He will have submission first. They do not trust him. His coming is a danger. For me, I should wish him to come. May I say . . . ?'

'Your Rebecca bids you say, my darling.'

'It is, I am with the men because I am so like them. I beg to be heard. He commands obedience. He is a great nobleman, but I am the daughter of a greater man, and I have to say, that if those poor miners do harm, I will not stand by and see an anger against injustice punished. I wish his coming, for him to agree upon the Christian names of the boy. I feel his coming will do me, injury in making me offend him worse. I would avoid that. Oh, dear soul! I may say it to you:—he cannot hurt me any more. I am spared loving him when I forgive him; and I do. The loving is the pain. That is gone by.'

Mrs. Wythan fondled and kissed Carinthia's hand.

'Let me say in my turn; I may help you, dear. You know I have my husband's love, as he mine. Am I, have I ever been a wife to him? Here I lie, a dead weight, to be carried up and down, all of a wife that Owain has had for years. I lie and pray to be taken, that my good man, my proved good man, may be free to choose a healthy young woman and be rewarded before his end by learning what a true marriage is. The big simpleton will otherwise be going to his grave, thinking he was married! I see him stepping about softly in my room, so contented

Page 4110

if he does not disturb me, and he crushes me with a desire to laugh at him while I worship. I tricked him into marrying the prostrate invalid I am, and he can't discover the trick, he will think it's a wife he has, instead of a doctor's doll. Oh! you have a strange husband, it has been a strange marriage for you, but you have your invincible health, you have not to lie and feel the horror of being a deception to a guileless man, whose love blindfolds him. The bitter ache to me is, that I can give nothing. You abound in power to give.'

Carinthia lifted her open hands for sign of their emptiness.

'My brother would not want, if I could give. He may have to sell out of. the army, he thinks, fears; and I must look on. Our mother used to say she had done something for her country in giving a son like Chillon to the British army. Poor mother! Our bright opening days all seem to end in rain. We should turn to Mr. Wythan for a guide.'

'He calls you Morgan le Fay christianized.'

'What I am!' Carinthia raised and let fall her head. 'An example makes dwarfs of us. When Mr. Wythan does penance for temper by descending into his mine and working among his men for a day with the pick, seated, as he showed me down below, that is an example. If I did like that, I should have no firedamp in the breast, and not such a task to forgive, that when I succeed I kill my feelings.'

The entry of Madge and Martha, the nurse-girl, with the overflowing armful of baby, changed their converse into melodious exclamations.

'Kit Ines has arrived, my lady,' Madge said. 'I saw him on the road and stopped a minute.'

Mrs. Wythan studied Carinthia. Her sharp invalid's ears had caught the name. She beckoned. 'The man who—the fighting man?'

'It will be my child this time,' said Carinthia; 'I have no fear for myself.' She was trembling, though her features were hard for the war her lord had declared, as it seemed. 'Did he tell you his business here?' she asked of Madge.

'He says, to protect you, my lady, since you won't leave.'

'He stays at the castle?'

'He is to stay there, he says, as long as the Welsh are out.'

'The "Welsh" are misunderstood by Lord Fleetwood,'

Mrs. Wythan said to Carinthia. 'He should live among them. They will not hurt their lady. Protecting may be his intention; but we will have our baby safe here. Not?' she appealed. 'And baby's mother. How otherwise?'

'You read my wishes,' Carinthia rejoined. 'The man I do not think a bad man. He has a master. While I am bound to my child I must be restful, and with the man at the castle Martha's goblins would jump about me day and night. My boy makes a coward of his mother.'

'We merely take a precaution, and I have the pleasure of it,' said her hostess. 'Give orders to your maid not less than a fortnight. It will rejoice my husband so much.'

Page 4111

As with the warmly hospitable, few were the words. Madge was promised by her mistress plenty of opportunities daily for seeing Kit Ines, and her mouth screwed to one of women's dimples at a corner. She went off in a cart to fetch boxes, thinking: We are a hunted lot! So she was not mildly disposed for the company of Mr. Kit on her return to the castle.

England's champion light-weight thought it hard that his, coming down to protect the castle against the gibbering heathen Welsh should cause a clearing out, and solitariness for his portion.

'What's the good of innocence if you 're always going to suspect a man!' he put it, like a true son of the pirates turned traders. 'I've got a paytron, and a man in my profession must have a paytron, or where is he? Where's his money for a trial of skill? Say he saves and borrows and finds the lump to clap it down, and he's knocked out o' time. There he is, bankrup', and a devil of a licking into the bargain. That 's the cream of our profession, if a man has got no paytron.

No prize-ring can live without one. The odds are too hard on us. My lady ought to take into account I behaved respectful when I was obliged to do my lord's orders and remove her from our haunts, which wasn't to his taste. Here I'm like a cannon for defending the house, needs be, and all inside flies off scarified.'

'It strikes me, Kit Ines, a man with a paytron is no better than a tool of a man,' said Madge.

'And don't you go to be sneering at honest tools,' Ines retorted. 'When will women learn a bit of the world before they're made hags of by old Father Wear-and-Tear! A young woman in her prime, you Madge! be such a fool as not see I serve tool to stock our shop.'

'Your paytron bid you steal off with my lady's child, Kit Ines, you'd do it to stock your shop.'

Ines puffed. 'If you ain't a girl to wallop the wind! Fancy me at that game! Is that why my lady—but I can't be suspected that far? You make me break out at my pores. My paytron's a gentleman: he wouldn't ask and I couldn't act such a part. Dear Lord! it'd have to be stealing off, for my lady can use a stick; and put it to the choice between my lady and her child and any paytron living, paytron be damned, I'd say, rather'n go against my notions of honour. Have you forgot all our old talk about the prize-ring, the nursery of honour in Old England?'

'That was before you sold yourself to a paytron, Kit Ines.'

’Ah! Women wants mast-heading off and on, for ’em to have a bit of a look-out over life as it is. They go stewing over books of adventure and drop into frights about awful man. Take me, now; you had a no small admiration for my manly valour once, and you trusted yourself to me, and did you ever repent it?—owning you’re not the young woman to tempt to t’ other way.’

‘You wouldn’t have found me talking to you here if I had.’

‘And here I’m left to defend an empty castle, am I?’

Page 4112

‘Don’t drink or you’ll have your paytron on you. He’s good use there.’

‘I ask it, can I see my lady?’

’Drunk nor sober you won’t. Serve a paytron, be a leper, you’ll find, with all honest folk.’

Ines shook out an execrating leg at the foul word. ’Leper, you say? You say that? You say leper to me?’

’Strut your tallest, Kit Ines. It’s the money rattles in your pocket says it.’

’It’s my reputation for decent treatment of a woman lets you say it, Madge Winch.’

’Stick to that as long as your paytron consents. It’s the one thing you’ve got left.’

‘Benefit, you hussy, and mind you don’t pull too stiff.’

‘Be the woman and have the last word!’

His tongue was checked. He swallowed the exceeding sourness of a retort undelivered, together with the feeling that she beat him in the wrangle by dint of her being an unreasonable wench.

Madge huffed away to fill her boxes.

He stood by the cart, hands deep down his pockets, when she descended. She could have laughed at the spectacle of a champion prize-fighter out of employ, hulking idle, because he was dog to a paytron; but her contempt of him declined passing in small change.

‘So you’re off. What am I to tell my lord when he comes?’ Kit growled. ‘His yacht’s fetching for a Welsh seaport.’

She counted it a piece of information gained, and jumped to her seat, bidding the driver start. To have pretty well lost her character for a hero changed into a patron’s dog, was a thought that outweighed the show of incivility. Some little distance away, she reproached herself for not having been so civil as to inquire what day my lord was expected, by his appointment. The girl reflected on the strangeness of a body of discontented miners bringing my lord and my lady close, perhaps to meet.

CHAPTER XXX

REBECCA WYTHAN

The earl was looked for at the, chief office of the mines, and each day an expectation of him closed in disappointment, leaving it to be surmised that there were more serious reasons for his continued absence during a crisis than any discussed; whether indeed, as when a timepiece neglects to strike the hour which is, by the reckoning of natural impatience, past, the capital charge of ‘crazy works’ must not be brought against a nobleman hitherto precise upon business, of a just disposition, fairly humane. For though he was an absentee sucking the earth through a tube, in Ottoman ease, he had never omitted the duty of personally attending on the spot to grave cases under dispute. The son of the hardheaded father came out at a crisis; and not too highhandedly: he could hear an opposite argument to the end. Therefore, since he refused to comply without hearing, he was wanted on the spot imperatively, now.

Page 4113

Irony perusing History offers the beaten and indolent a sugary acid in the indication of the spites and the pranks, the whims and the tastes, at the springs of main events. It is, taken by itself, destructive nourishment. But those who labour in the field to shovel the clods of earth to History, would be wiser of their fellows for a minor dose of it. Mr. Howell Edwards consulting with Mr. Owain Wythan on the necessity, that the earl should instantly keep his promise to appear among the men and stop the fermentation, as in our younger days a lordly owner still might do by small concessions and the physical influence—the nerve-charm—could suppose him to be holding aloof for his pleasure or his pride; perhaps because of illness or inability to conceive the actual situation at a distance. He mentioned the presence of the countess, and Mr. Wythan mentioned it, neither of them thinking a rational man would so play the lunatic as to let men starve, and wreck precious mines, for the sake of avoiding her.

Sullen days went by. On these days of the slate-cloud or the leaden-winged, Carinthia walked over the hills to her staring or down-eyed silent people, admitted without a welcome at some doors, rejected at some. Her baskets from the castle were for the most part received as graciously. She continued to direct them for delivery where they were needed, and understood why a charity that supplied the place of justice was not thanked. She and her people here were one regarding the master, as she had said. They could not hurt her sensitiveness, she felt too warmly with them. And here it was not the squalid, flat, bricked east-corner of London at the close of her daily pilgrimage. Up from the solitary street of the slate-roofs, she mounted a big hill and had the life of high breathing. A perpetual escape out of the smoky, grimy city mazes was trumpeted to her in the winds up there: a recollected contrast lightened the skyless broad spaces overhead almost to sunniness. Having air of the hills and activity for her limbs, she made sunshine for herself. Regrets were at no time her nestlings.

Look backward only to correct an error of conduct for the next attempt, says one of her father’s Maxims; as sharply bracing for women as for men. She did not look back to moan. Now that her hunger for the safety of her infant was momentarily quieted, she could see Kit Ines hanging about the lower ground, near the alehouse, and smile at Madge’s comparison of him to a drummed-out soldier, who would like to be taken for a holiday pensioner.

He saluted; under the suspicion of his patron’s lady his legs were hampered, he dared not approach her; though his innocence of a deed not proposed to him yet—and all to stock that girl Madge’s shop, if done! knocked at his ribs with fury to vindicate himself before the lady and her maid. A gentleman met them and conducted them across the hills.

And two Taffy gentlemen would hardly be sufficient for the purpose, supposing an ill-used Englishman inclined to block their way!—What, and play footpad, Kit Ines? No, it’s just a game in the head. But a true man hates to feel himself suspected. His refuge is the beer of the country.

Page 4114

Next day there were the two gentlemen to conduct the lady and her maid; and Taffy the first walks beside the countess; and that girl Madge trudges along with no other than my lord's Mr. Woodseer, chattering like a watering-can on a garden-bed: deuce a glance at Kit Ines. How can she keep it up and the gentleman no more than nodding? How does he enjoy playing second fiddle with the maid while Mr. tall brown-face Taffy violins it to her ladyship a stone's throw in front? Ines had less curiosity to know the object of Mr. Woodseer's appearance on the scene. Idle, unhandsomely treated, and a cave of the yawns, he merely commented on his observations.

'Yes, there he is, don't look at him,' Madge said to Gower; 'and whatever he's here for, he has a bad time of it, and rather more than it's pleasant for him to think over, if a slave to a "paytron" thinks at all. I won't judge him; my mistress is bitten with the fear for the child, worse than ever. And the earl, my lord, not coming, and he wanting her to move again, seems to her he durstn't do it here and intends to snap at the child on the road. She-'s forced to believe anything of such a husband and father. And why does he behave so? I can't spell it. He's kind to my Sally—you've seen the Piccadilly shop?—-because she was . . . she did her best in love and duty for my lady. And behaves like a husband hating his wife's life on earth! Then he went down with good Mr. Woodseer, and called on Sally, pretending to inquire, after she was kidnapped by that Kit Ines acting to please his paytron, he must be shown up to the room where she slept, and stands at the door and peeps in, Sally's letter says, and asks if he may enter the room. He went to the window looking on the chimneys she used to see, and touched an ornament over the fireplace, called grandfather's pigtail case—he was a sailor; only a ridiculous piece of china, that made my lady laugh about the story of its holding a pigtail. But he turns it over because she did—Sally told him. He couldn't be pretending when he bought the beautiful shop and stocked it for Sally. He gets her lots of customers; and no rent to pay till next Michaelmas a year. She's a made woman through him. He said to her, he had heard from Mr. Woodseer the Countess of Fleetwood called her sister; he shook her hand.'

'The Countess of Fleetwood called both of you her sisters, I think,' said Gower.

'I'm her servant. I'd rather serve her than have a fortune.'

'You were born with a fortune one would like to have a nibble at, Madge.'

'I can't lay hand on it, then.'

'It's the capacity for giving, my dear.'

'Please, Mr. Gower, don't say that; you'll make me cry. He keeps his wife so poor she hasn't a shilling of her own; she wearies about her brother; she can't help. He can spend hundreds on my Sally for having been good to her, in our small way—it's a fairy

tale; and he won’t hear of money for his wife, except that she’s never to want for anything it can buy.’

Page 4115

‘You give what it can’t buy.’

’Me. I’m “a pugilist’s wench”—I’ve heard myself called. She was the first who gave me a lift; never mind me. Have you come to take her away? She’d trust herself and the child to you.’

’Take her?—reason with her as to the best we can do. He holds off from a meeting just now. I fancy he’s wearing round to it. His keeping his wife without money passes comprehension. After serving him for a few months, I had a store invested to support me for years—as much as I need before I join the ranks of the pen. I was at my reading and writing and drowsing, and down he rushes: I ’m in harness again. I can’t say it’s dead waste of time; besides I pick up an independence for the days ahead. But I don’t respect myself for doing the work. Here’s the difference between us two servants, Madge: I think of myself, and you don’t.’

’The difference is more like between the master and mistress we serve, Mr. Gower.’

‘Well, I’d rather be the woman in this case.’

’You know the reputation I’ve got. And can only just read, and can’t spell. My mistress teaches me bits of German and French on her walks.’

Gower took a new observation of this girl, whom he had not regarded as like himself, a pushing blade among the grasses. He proposed to continue her lessons, if she cared to learn; saying it could be done in letters.

‘I won’t be ashamed of writing, if you mean it,’ said she. ’My mistress will have a usefuller servant. She had a strange honeymoon of a marriage, if ever was—and told me t’ other day she was glad because it brought us together—she a born lady!’

’A fling-above born ladies. She’s quick as light to hit on a jewel where there is one, whether it shines or not. She stands among the Verities of the world.’

‘Yes,’ Madge said, panting for more. ’Do speak of her. When you praise her, I feel she’s not wasted. Mistress; and friend and wife—if he’d let her be; and mother; never mother like her. The boy ’ll be a sturdy. She’ll see he has every chance. He’s a lucky little one to have that mother.’

‘You think her handsome, Madge?’

Gower asked it, wishing to hear a devotee’s confusion of qualities and looks.

The question was a drop on lower spheres, and it required definitions, to touch the exact nature of the form of beauty, and excuse a cooler tone on the commoner plane. These demanded language. She rounded the difficulty, saying: ’You see engravings of

archery; that ’s her figure—her real figure. I think her face . . . I can’t describe . . . it flashes.’

Page 4116

‘That’s it,’ said Gower, delighted with his perception of a bare mind at work and hitting the mark perforce of warmth. ’When it flashes, it’s unequalled. There’s the supremacy of irregular lines. People talk of perfect beauty: suitable for paintings and statues. Living faces, if they’re to show the soul, which is the star on the peak of beauty, must lend themselves to commotion. Nature does it in a breezy tree or over ruffled waters. Repose has never such splendid reach as animation—I mean, in the living face. Artists prefer repose. Only Nature can express the uttermost beauty with her gathering and tuning of discords. Well, your mistress has that beauty. I remember my impression when I saw her first on her mountains abroad. Other beautiful faces of women go pale, grow stale. The diversified in the harmony of the flash are Nature’s own, her radiant, made of her many notes, beyond our dreams to reproduce. We can’t hope to have a true portrait of your mistress. Does Madge understand?’

The literary dose was a strong one for her; but she saw the index, and got a lift from the sound. Her bosom heaved. ’Oh, I do try, Mr. Gower. I think I do a little. I do more while you’re talking. You are good to talk so to me. You should have seen her the night she went to meet my lord at those beastly Gardens Kit Ines told me he was going to. She was defending him. I’ve no words. You teach me what’s meant by poetry. I couldn’t understand that once.’

Their eyes were on the countess and her escort in advance. Gower’s praises of her mistress’s peculiar beauty set the girl compassionately musing. His eloquence upon the beauty was her clue.

Carinthia and Mr. Wythan started at a sharp trot in the direction of the pair of ponies driven by a groom along the curved decline of the narrow roadway. His whip was up for signal.

It concerned the house and the master of it. His groom drove rapidly down, while he hurried on the homeward way, as a man will do, with the dread upon him that his wife’s last breath may have been yielded before he can enfold her.

Carinthia walked to be overtaken, not daring to fever her blood at a swifter pace; ‘lamed with an infant,’ the thought recurred.

‘She is very ill, she has fainted, she lies insensible,’ Madge heard from her of Mrs. Wythan. ’We were speaking of her when the groom appeared. It has happened twice. They fear the third. He fears it, though he laughs at a superstition. Now step, I know you like walking, Mr. Woodseer. Once I left you behind.’

‘I have the whole scene of the angel and the cripple,’ Gower replied.

‘O that day!’

They ’were soon speculating on the unimpressionable house in its clump of wood midway below, which had no response for anxieties.

A maid-servant at the garden gate, by Mr. Wythan’s orders, informed Carinthia that her mistress had opened her eyes: There was a hope of weathering the ominous third time. But the hope was a bird of short flight from bush to bush until the doctor should speak to confirm it. Even the child was under the shadow of the house. Carinthia had him in her arms, trusting to life as she hugged him, and seeing innumerable darts out of all regions assailing her treasure.

Page 4117

‘She wishes to have you,’ Mr. Wythan came and said to her. ’Almost her first word. The heart is quickening. She will live for me if she can.’

He whispered it. His features shot the sparkle.

Rebecca Wythan had strength to press Carinthia’s hand faintly. She made herself heard: ‘No pain.’ Her husband sat upright, quite still, attentive for any sign. His look of quiet pleasure ready to show, sprightliness dwelt on her. She returned the look, unable to give it greeting. Past the sense of humour, she wanted to say: ’See the poor simple fellow who will think it a wife that he has!’ She did but look.

Carinthia spoke his name, ‘Mr. Wythan,’ by chance, and Rebecca breathed heavily until she formed the words: ‘Owain to me.’

‘To me,’ Owain added.

The three formed a chain of clasped hands.

It was in the mind of the sick lady to disburden herself of more than her weakness could utter, so far was she above earthly links. The desire in her was to be quit of the flesh, bearing a picture of her husband as having the dues of his merits.

Her recovered strength next day brought her nearer to our laws. ’You will call him Owain, Carinthia?’ she said. ’He is not one to presume on familiarity. I must be going soon. I cannot leave him the wife I would choose. I can leave him the sister. He is a sure friend. He is the knightly man women dream of. I harp on it because I long for testimony that I leave him to have some reward. And this may be, between two so pure at heart as you two.’

‘Dear soul friend, yes, and Owain, yes, I can say it,’ Carinthia rejoined. ’Brother? I have only my Chillon. My life is now for him. I am punished for separating myself from the son of my father. I have no heart for a second brother. What I can give to my friend I will. I shall love you in him, if I am to lose you.’

’Not Owain—it was I was the wretch refused to call on the lonely lady at the castle until I heard she had done a romantic little bit of thing—hushed a lambkin’s bleating. My loss! my loss! And I could afford it so poorly. Since then Carinthia has filled my days. I shudder to leave you and think of your going back to the English. Their sneer withers. They sent you down among us as a young woman to be shunned.’

‘I did wildly, I was ungoverned, I had one idea,’ said Carinthia. ’One idea is a bullet, good for the day of battle to beat the foe, father tells us. It was a madness in me. Now it has gone, I see all round. I see straight, too. With one idea, we see nothing—nothing but itself. Whizz! we go. I did. I shall no longer offend in that way. Mr. Gower Woodseer is here from my lord.’

‘With him the child will be safe.’

’I am not alarmed. It is to request—they would have me gone, to prepare the way for my lord.’

’You have done, it; he has the castle to himself. I cannot-spare you. A tyrant ordering you to go should be defied. My Lord Fleetwood puts lightning into my slow veins.’

Page 4118

‘We have talked: we shall be reproved by the husband and the doctor,’ said Carinthia.

Sullen days continued and rolled over to night at the mines. Gower’s mission was rendered absurd by the countess’s withdrawal from the castle. He spoke of it to Mr. Wythan once, and the latter took a big breath and blew such a lord to the winds. ’Persuade our guest to leave us, that the air may not be tainted for her husband when he comes? He needn’t call; he’s not obliged to see her. She’s offered Esslemont to live in? I believe her instinct’s right—he has designs on the child. A little more and we shall have a mad dog in the fellow. He doubles my work by keeping his men out. If she were away we should hear of black doings. Twenty dozen of his pugilists wouldn’t stop the burning.’

They agreed that persuasions need not be addressed to the countess. She was and would remain Mr. Wythan’s guest. As for the earl, Gower inclined to plead hesitatingly, still to plead, on behalf of a nobleman owning his influence and very susceptible to his wisdom, whose echo of a pointed saying nearly equalled the satisfaction bestowed by print. The titled man affected the philosopher in that manner; or rather, the crude philosopher’s relish of brilliant appreciation stripped him of his robe. For he was with Owain Wythan at heart to scorn titles which did not distinguish practical offices. A nation bowing to them has gone to pith, for him; he had to shake himself, that he might not similarly stick; he had to do it often. Objects elevated even by a decayed world have their magnetism for us unless we nerve the mind to wakeful repulsion. He protested he had reason to think the earl was humanizing, though he might be killing a woman in the process. ‘Could she wish for better?’ he asked, with at least the gravity of the undermining humourist; and he started Owain to course an idea when he remarked of Lord Fleetwood: ’Imagine a devil on his back on a river, flying a cherub.’

Owain sparkled from the vision of the thing to wrath with it.

’Ay, but while he’s floating, his people are edging on starvation. And I’ve a personal grievance. I keep, you know, open hall, bread and cheese and beer, for poor mates. His men are favouring us with a call. We have to cart treble from the town. If I straighten the sticks he dies to bend, it’ll be a grievance against me—and a fig for it! But I like to be at peace with my neighbours, and waft them “penillion” instead of dealing the “cleddyfal” of Llewellyn.’

At last the tension ceased; they had intelligence of the earl’s arrival.

His countess was little moved by it; and the reason for that lay in her imagination being absorbed. Henrietta had posted her a journal telling of a deed of Chillon’s: no great feat, but precious for its ’likeness to him,’ as they phrased it; that is, for the light it cast on their conception of the man. Heading a squadron in a riotous Midland town, he stopped a charge, after fire of a shot from the mob, and galloped up the street to catch a

staggering urchin to his saddle-bow, and place the mite in safety. Then it was a simple trot of the hussars ahead; way was made for him.

Page 4119

Now, to see what banquet there is for the big of heart in the world's hot stress, take the view of Carinthia, to whom her brother's thoughtful little act of gentleness at the moment of the red-of-the-powder smoke was divinest bread and wine, when calamity hung around, with the future an unfooted wilderness, her powers untried, her husband her enemy.

CHAPTER XXXI

WE HAVE AGAIN TO DEAL WITH THE EXAMPLES OF OUR YOUNGER MAN

The most urgent of Dames is working herself up to a grey squall in her detestation of imagerial epigrams. Otherwise Gower Woodseer's dash at the quintessential young man of wealth would prompt to the carrying of it further, and telling how the tethered flutterer above a 'devil on his back on a river' was beginning to pull if not drag his withholder and teaser.

Fleetwood had almost a desire to see the small dot of humanity which drew the breath from him;—and was indistinguishably the bubbly grin and gurgle of the nurses, he could swear. He kicked at the bondage to our common fleshly nature imposed on him by the mother of the little animal. But there had been a mother to his father: odd movements of a warmish curiosity brushed him when the cynic was not mounting guard. They were, it seemed, external—no part of him: like blasts of a wayside furnace across wintry air. They were, as it chanced, Nature's woman in him plucking at her separated partner, Custom's man; something of an oriental voluptuary on his isolated regal seat; and he would suck the pleasures without a descent into the stale old ruts where Life's convict couple walk linked to one another, to their issue more.

There was also a cold curiosity to see the male infant such a mother would have. The grandson of Old Lawless might turn out a rascal,—he would be no mean one, no coward.

That mother, too, who must have been a touch astonished to find herself a mother:—-Fleetwood laughed a curt bark, and heard rebukes, and pleaded the marriage-trap to the man of his word; devil and cherub were at the tug, or say, dog and gentleman, a survival of the schoolboy—that mother, a girl of the mountains, perhaps wanted no more than smoothing by the world. 'It is my husband' sounded foolish, sounded freshish,—a new note. Would she repeat it? The bit of simplicity would bear repeating once. Gower Woodseer says the creature grows and studies to perfect herself. She's a good way off that, and may spoil herself in the process; but she has a certain power. Her donkey obstinacy in refusing compliance, and her pursuit of 'my husband,' and ability to drench him with ridicule, do not exhibit the ordinary young female. She stamps her impression on the people she meets. Her husband is shaken to confess it likewise, despite a disagreement between them.

Page 4120

He has owned he is her husband: he has not disavowed the consequence. That fellow, Gower Woodseer, might accuse the husband of virtually lying, if he by his conduct implied her distastefulness or worse. By heaven! as felon a deed as could be done. Argue the case anyhow, it should be undone. Let her but cease to madden. For whatever the rawness of the woman, she has qualities; and experience of the facile loves of London very sharply defines her qualities. Think of her as raw, she has the gift of rareness: forget the donkey obstinacy, her character grasps. In the grasp of her character, one inclines, and her husband inclines, to become her advocate. She has only to discontinue maddening.

The wealthy young noble prized any form of rareness wherever it was visible, having no thought of the purchase of it, except with worship. He could listen pleased to the talk of a Methodist minister sewing bootleather. He picked up a roadside tramp and made a friend of him, and valued the fellow's honesty, submitted to his lectures, pardoned his insolence. The sight of Carinthia's narrow bedroom and strip of bed over Sarah Winch's Whitechapel shop had gone a step to drown the bobbing Whitechapel Countess. At least, he had not been hunted by that gaunt chalk-quarry ghost since his peep into the room. Own it! she likewise has things to forgive. Women nurse their larvae of ideas about fair dealing. But observe the distinction: aid if women understood justice they would be the first to proclaim, that when two are tied together, the one who does the other serious injury is more naturally excused than the one who-tenfold abhorrent if a woman!—calls up the grotesque to extinguish both.

With this apology for himself, Lord Fleetwood grew tolerant of the person honourably avowed as his wife. So; therefore, the barrier between him and his thoughts of her was broken. The thoughts carrying red doses were selected. Finally, the taste to meet her sprouted. If agreeable, she could be wooed; if barely agreeable, tormented; if disagreeable, left as before.

Although it was the hazard of a die, he decided to follow his taste. Her stay at the castle had kept him long from the duties of his business; and he could imagine it a grievance if he pleased, but he put it aside. Alighting at his chief manager's office, he passed through the heated atmosphere of black-browed, wiry little rebels, who withheld the salute as they lounged: a posture often preceding the spring in compulsorily idle workers. He was aware of instinct abroad, an antagonism to the proprietor's rights. They roused him to stand by them, and were his own form of instinct, handsomely clothed. It behoved that he should examine them and the claims against them, to be sure of his ground. He and Mr. Howell Edwards debated the dispute for an hour; agreeing, partially differing. There was a weakness on the principle in Edwards. These fellows fixed to the spot are for compromise too much. An owner of mines has no steady reckoning of income if the rate of wage is perpetually to shift according to current, mostly ignorant, versions of the prosperity of the times. Are we so prosperous? It is far from certain. And if the rate ascends, the question of easing it down to suit the

discontinuance of prosperity agitating our exchequer—whose demand is for fixity—-perplexes us further.

Page 4121

However, that was preliminary. He and Howell Edwards would dine and wrangle it out. The earl knew himself a hot disputant after dinner. Incidentally he heard of Lady Fleetwood as a guest of Mrs. Wythan; and the circumstance was injurious to him because he stood against Mr. Wythan's pampering system with his men.

Ines up at the castle smelt of beer, and his eyelids were sottish. Nothing to do tries the virtue of the best. He sought his excuse in a heavy lamentation over my lady's unjust suspicion of him,—a known man of honour, though he did serve his paytron.

The cause of Lady Fleetwood's absence was exposed to her outraged lord, who had sent the man purely to protect her at this castle, where she insisted on staying. The suspicion cast on the dreary lusher was the wife's wild shot at her husband. One could understand a silly woman's passing terror. Her acting under the dictate of it struck the husband's ribbed breast as a positive clap of hostilities between them across a chasm.

His previous placable mood was immediately conceived by him to have been one of his fits of generosity; a step to a frightful dutiful embrace of an almost repulsive object. He flung the thought of her back on her Whitechapel. She returned from that place with smiles, dressed in a laundry white with a sprinkle of smuts, appearing to him as an adversary armed and able to strike. There was a blow, for he chewed resentments; and these were goaded by a remembered shyness of meeting her eyes when he rounded up the slope of the hill, in view of his castle, where he supposed she would be awaiting 'my husband.' The silence of her absence was lively mockery of that anticipation.

Gower came on him sauntering about the grounds.

'You're not very successful down here,' Fleetwood said, without greeting.

'The countess likes the air of this country,' said Gower, evasively, impertinently, and pointlessly; offensively to the despot employing him to be either subservient or smart.

'I wish her to leave it.'

'She wishes to see you first.'

'She takes queer measures. I start to-morrow for my yacht at Cardiff.' There the matter ended; for Fleetwood fell to talking of the mines. At dinner and after dinner it was the topic, and after Howell Edwards had departed.

When the man who has a heart will talk of nothing but what concerns his interests, and the heart is hurt, it may be perceived by a cognizant friend, that this is his proud mute way of petitioning to have the tenderer subject broached. Gower was sure of the heart, armoured or bandaged though it was,—a haunt of evil spirits as well,—and he began: 'Now to speak of me half a minute. You cajoled me out of my Surrey room, where I was writing, in the vein . . .'

‘I’ve had the scene before me!’ the earl interposed. ’Juniper dells and that tree of the flashing leaf, and that dear old boy, your father, young as you and me, and saying love of Nature gives us eternal youth. On with you.’

Page 4122

’I doubted whether I should be of use to you. I told you the amount of alloy in my motives. A year with you, I have subsistence for ten years assured to me.’

‘Don’t be a prosy dog, Gower Woodseer.’

‘Will you come over to the Wythans before you go?’

‘I will not.’

‘You would lengthen your stride across a wounded beast?’

‘I see no wound to the beast.’

‘You can permit yourself to kick under cover of a metaphor.’

‘Tell me what you drive at, Gower.’

’The request is, for you to spare pain by taking one step—an extra strain on the muscles of the leg. It ‘s only the leg wants moving.’

‘The lady has legs to run away, let them bring her back.’

’Why have me with you, then? I’m useless. But you read us all, see everything, and wait only for the mood to do the right. You read me, and I’m not open to everybody. You read the crux of a man like me in my novel position. You read my admiration of a beautiful woman and effort to keep honest. You read my downright preference of what most people would call poverty, and my enjoyment of good cookery and good company. You enlist among the crew below as one of our tempters. You find I come round to the thing I like best. Therefore, you have your liking for me; and that’s why you turn to me again, after your natural infidelities. So much for me. You read this priceless lady quite as clearly. You choose to cloud her with your moods. She was at a disadvantage, ’arriving in a strange country, next to friendless; and each new incident bred of a luckless beginning—I could say more.’

Fleetwood nodded. ’You are read without the words: You read in history, too, I suppose, that there are two sides to most cases. The loudest is not often the strongest. However, now the lady shows herself crazed. That’s reading her charitably. Else she has to be taken for a spiteful shrew, who pretends to suspect anything that’s villanous, because she can hit on no other way of striking.’

‘Crazed, is a wide shot and hits half the world,’ muttered Gower. ’Lady Fleetwood had a troubled period after her marriage. She suffered a sort of kidnapping when she was bearing her child. There’s a book by an Edinburgh doctor might be serviceable to you. It enlightens me. She will have a distrust of you, as regards the child, until she understands you by living with you under one roof.’

‘Such animals these women are!’ Good Lord!’ Fleetwood ejaculated. ’I marry one, and I ‘m to take to reading medical books!’ He yawned.

‘You speak that of women and pretend to love Nature,’ said Gower. ’You hate Nature unless you have it served on a dish by your own cook. That’s the way to the madhouse or the monastery. There we expiate the sin of sins. A man finds the woman of all women fitted to stick him in the soil, and trim and point him to grow, and she’s an animal for her pains! The secret of your malady

Page 4123

is, you've not yet, though you're on a healthy leap for the practices of Nature, hopped to the primary conception of what Nature means. Women are in and of Nature. I've studied them here—had nothing to do but study them. That most noble of ladies' whole mind was knotted to preserve her child during her time of endurance up to her moment of trial. Think it over. It's your one chance of keeping sane.

And expect to hear flat stuff from me while you go on playing tyrant.'

'You certainly take liberties,' Fleetwood's mildest voice remarked.

'I told you I should try you, when you plucked me out of my Surrey nest.'

Fleetwood, passed from a meditative look to a malicious half-laugh. 'You seem to have studied the "most noble of ladies" latterly rather like a barrister with a brief for the defendant—plaintiff, if you like!'

'As to that, I'll help you to an insight of a particular weakness of mine,' said Gower. 'I require to have persons of even the highest value presented to me on a stage, or else I don't grasp them at all—they 're simply pictures. I saw the lady; admired, esteemed, sufficiently, I supposed, until her image appeared to me in the feelings of another. Then I saw fathoms. No doubt, it was from feeling warmer. I went through the blood of the other for my impression.'

'Name the other,' said the earl, and his features were sharp.

You can have the name,' Gower answered. 'It was the girl, Madge Winch.'

Fleetwood's hard stare melted to surprise and contemptuous amusement. 'You see the lady to be the "most noble of ladies" through the warming you get by passing into the feelings of Madge Winch?'

Sarcasm was in the tone, and beneath it a thrill of compassionateness traversed him and shot a remorseful sting with the vision of those two young women on the coach at the scene of the fight. He had sentience of their voices, nigh to hearing them. The forlorn bride's hand given to the anxious girl behind her gushed an image of the sisterhood binding women under the pangs they suffer from men. He craved a scourging that he might not be cursing himself; and he provoked it, for Gower was very sensitive to a cold breath on the weakness he had laid bare; and when Fleetwood said: 'You recommend a bath in the feelings of Madge Winch?' the retort came:—'It might stop you on the road to a cowl.'

Fleetwood put on the mask of cogitation to cover a shudder, 'How?'

'A question of the man or the monk with you, as I fancy I've told you more than once!'

‘You may fancy committing any impertinence and be not much out.’

‘The saving of you is that you digest it when you’ve stewed it down.’

‘You try me!’

‘I don’t impose the connection.’

‘No, I take the blame for that.’

They sat in dumbness, fidgeted, sprang to their feet, and lighted bedroom candles.

Page 4124

Mounting the stairs, Gower was moved to let fall a benevolent look on the worried son of fortune. 'I warned you I should try you. It ought to be done politely. If I have to speak a truth I 'm boorish. The divinely damnable naked truth won't wear ornaments. It's about the same as pitching a handful of earth.'

'You dirt your hands, hit or miss. Out of this corridor! Into my room, and spout your worst,' cried the earl.

Gower entered his dressing-room and was bidden to smoke there.

'You're a milder boor when you smoke. That day down in Surrey with the grand old bootmaker was one of our days, Gower Woodseer! There's no smell of the boor in him. Perhaps his religion helps him, more than Nature-worship: not the best for manners. You won't smoke your pipe?—a cigar? Lay on, then, as hard as you like.'

'You're asking for the debauchee's last luxury—not a correction,' said Gower, grimly thinking of how his whip might prove effective and punish the man who kept him fruitlessly out of his bed.

'I want stuff for a place in the memory,' said Fleetwood; and the late hour, with the profitless talk, made it a stinging taunt.

'You want me to flick your indecision.'

'That's half a hit.'

'I 'm to talk italics, for you to store a smart word or so.'

'True, I swear! And, please, begin.'

'You hang for the Fates to settle which is to be smothered in you, the man or the lord—-and it ends in the monk, if you hang much longer.'

'A bit of a scorpion in his intention,' Fleetwood muttered on a stride. 'I'll tell you this, Gower Woodseer; when you lay on in earnest, your diction is not so choice. Do any of your remarks apply to Lady Fleetwood?'

'All should. I don't presume to allude to Lady Fleetwood.'

'She has not charged you to complain?'

'Lady Fleetwood is not the person to complain or condescend to speak of injuries.'

'She insults me with her insane suspicion.'

A swollen vein on the young nobleman's forehead went to confirm the idea at the Wythans' that he was capable of mischief. They were right; he was as capable of villany as of nobility. But he happened to be thanking Gower Woodseer's whip for the comfortable numbness he felt at Carinthia's behaviour, while detesting her for causing him to desire it and endure it, and exonerate his prosy castigator.

He was ignorant of the revenge he had on Gower, whose diction had not been particularly estimable. In the feebleness of a man vainly courting sleep, the disarmed philosopher tossed from one side to the other through the remaining hours of darkness, polishing sentences that were natural spouts of choicest diction; and still the earl's virulent small sneer rankled. He understood why, after a time. The fervour of advocacy, which inspires high diction, had been wanting. He had sought more to lash the earl with his personal

Page 4125

disgust and partly to parade his contempt of a lucrative dependency—than he had felt for the countess. No wonder his diction was poor. It was a sample of limp thinness; a sort of tongue of a Master Slender:—flavourless, unsatisfactory, considering its object: measured to be condemned by its poor achievement. He had nevertheless a heart to feel for the dear lady, and heat the pleading for her, especially when it ran to its object, as along a shaft of the sun-rays, from the passionate devotedness of that girl Madge.

He brooded over it till it was like a fire beneath him to drive him from his bed and across the turfy roller of the hill to the Wythans', in the front of an autumnal sunrise—grand where the country is shorn of surface decoration, as here and there we find some unadorned human creature, whose bosom bears the ball of warmth.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH WE SEE CARINTHIA PUT IN PRACTICE ONE OF HER OLD FATHER'S LESSONS

Seated at his breakfast-table, the earl saw Gower stride in, and could have wagered he knew the destination of the fellow's morning walk. It concerned him little; he would be leaving the castle in less than an hour. She might choose to come or choose to keep away. The whims of animals do not affect men unless they are professionally tamers. Petty domestic dissensions are besides poor webs to the man pulling singlehanded at ropes with his revolted miners. On the topic of wages, too, he was Gower's master, and could hold forth: by which he taught himself to feel that practical affairs are the proper business of men, women and infants being remotely secondary; the picturesque and poetry, consequently, sheer nonsense.

'I suppose your waiting here is useless, to quote you,' he said. 'The countess can decide now to remain, if she pleases. Drive with me to Cardiff—I miss you if you 're absent a week. Or is it legs? Drop me a line of your stages on the road, and don't loiter much.'

Gower spoke of starting his legs next day, if he had to do the journey alone: and he clouded the yacht for Fleetwood with talk of the Wye and the Usk, Hereford and the Malvern Hills elliptical over the plains.

'Yes,' the earl acquiesced jealously; 'we ought to have seen—tramped every foot of our own country. That yacht of mine, there she is, and I said I would board her and have a fly with half a dozen fellows round the Scottish isles. We're never free to do as we like.'

'Legs are the only things that have a taste of freedom,' said Gower.

They strolled down to Howell Edwards' office at nine, Kit Ines beside the luggage cart to the rear.

Around the office and along to the street of the cottages crowds were chattering, gesticulating; Ines fancied the foreign jabberers inclined to threaten. Howell Edwards at the door of his office watched them calculatingly. The lord of their destinies passed in with him, leaving Gower to study the features of the men, and Ines to reckon the chance of a fray.

Page 4126

Fleetwood came out presently, saying to Edwards:

’That concession goes far enough. Because I have a neighbour who yields at every step? No, stick to the principle. I’ve said my final word. And here’s the carriage. If the mines are closed, more’s the pity: but I’m not responsible. You can let them know if you like, before I drive off; it doesn’t matter to me.’

The carriage was ready. Gower cast a glance up the hill. Three female figures and a pannier-donkey were visible on the descent. He nodded to Edwards, who took the words out of his mouth. ‘Her ladyship, my lord.’

She was distinctly seen, and looked formidable in definition against the cloud. Madge and the nurse-maid Martha were the two other young women. On they came, and the, angry man seated in the carriage could not give the order to start. Nor could he quite shape an idea of annoyance, though he hung to it and faced at Gower a battery of the promise to pay him for this. Tattling observers were estimated at their small importance there, as everywhere, by one so high above them. But the appearance of the woman of the burlesque name and burlesque actions, and odd ascension out of the ludicrous into a form to cast a spell, so that she commanded serious recollections of her, disturbed him. He stepped from his carriage. Again he had his incomprehensible fit of shyness; and a vision of the complacent, jowled, redundant, blue-coated monarch aswing in imbecile merriment on the signboard of the Royal Sovereign inn; constitutionally his total opposite, yet instigating the sensation.

In that respect his countess and he had shifted characters. Carinthia came on at her bold mountain stride to within hail of him. Met by Gower, she talked, smiled, patted her donkey, clutched his ear, lifted a silken covering to show the child asleep; entirely at her ease and unhurried. These women get aid from their pride of maternity. And when they can boast a parson behind them, they are indecorous up to insolent in their ostentation of it.

She resumed her advance, with a slight abatement of her challengeing match, sedately; very collectedly erect; changed in the fulness of her figure and her poised calm bearing.

He heard her voice addressing Gower: ’Yes, they do; we noticed the slate-roofs, looking down on them. They do look like a council of rooks in the hollow; a parliament, you said. They look exceedingly like, when a peep of sunshine falls. Oh, no; not clergymen!’

She laughed at the suggestion.

She might be one of the actresses by nature.

Is the man unsympathetic with women a hater of Nature deductively? Most women are actresses. As to worshipping Nature, we go back to the state of heathen beast, Mr. Philosopher Gower could be answered . . . .

Fleetwood drew in his argument. She stood before him. There was on his part an insular representation of old French court salute to the lady, and she replied to it in the exactest measure, as if an instructed proficient.

Page 4127

She stood unshadowed. ‘We have come to bid you adieu, my lord,’ she said, and no trouble of the bosom shook her mellow tones. Her face was not the chalk-quarry or the rosed rock; it was oddly individual, and, in a way, alluring, with some gentle contraction of her eyelids. But evidently she stood in full repose, mistress of herself.

Upon him, it appeared, the whole sensibility of the situation was to be thrown. He hardened.

‘We have had to settle business here,’ he said, speaking resonantly, to cover his gazing discomposedly, all but furtively.

The child was shown, still asleep. A cunning infant not a cry in him to excuse a father for preferring concord or silence or the bachelor’s exemption.

‘He is a strong boy,’ the mother said. ’Our doctor promises he will ride over all the illnesses.’

Fleetwood’s answer set off with an alarum of the throat, and dwindled to ’We ‘ll hope so. Seems to sleep well.’

She had her rocky brows. They were not barren crags, and her shape was Nature’s ripeness, it was acknowledged: She stood like a lance in air-rather like an Amazon schooled by Athene, one might imagine. Hues of some going or coming flush hinted the magical trick of her visage. She spoke in modest manner, or it might be indifferently, without a flaunting of either.

’I wish to consult you, my lord. He is not baptized. His Christian names?’

‘I have no choice.’

‘I should wish him to bear one of my brother’s names.’

‘I have no knowledge of your brother’s names.’

‘Chillon is one.’

‘Ah! Is it, should you think, suitable to our climate?’

‘Another name of my brother’s is John.’

‘Bull.’ The loutish derision passed her and rebounded on him. ’That would be quite at home.’

‘You will allow one of your own names, my lord?’

’Oh, certainly, if you desire it, choose. There are four names you will find in a book of the Peerage or Directory or so. Up at the castle—or you might have written:—better than these questions on the public road. I don’t demur. Let it be as you like.’

‘I write empty letters to tell what I much want,’ Carinthia said.

‘You have only to write your plain request.’

‘If, now I see you, I may speak another request, my lord.’

‘Pray,’ he said, with courteous patience, and stepped forward down to the street of the miners’ cottages. She could there speak out-bawl the request, if it suited her to do so.

On the point of speaking, she gazed round.

‘Perfectly safe! no harm possible,’ said he, fretful under the burden of this her maniacal maternal anxiety.

’The men are all right, they would not hurt a child. What can rationally be suspected!’

‘I know the men; they love their children,’ she replied. ’I think my child would be precious to them. Mr. Woodseer and Mr. Edwards and Madge are there.’

Page 4128

’Is the one more request—I mean, a mother’s anxiety does not run to the extent of suspecting everybody?’

‘Some of the children are very pretty,’ said Carinthia, and eyed the bands of them at their games in the roadway and at the cottage doors. ‘Children of the poor have happy mothers.’

Her eyes were homely, morning over her face. They were open now to what that fellow Woodseer (who could speak to the point when he was not aiming at it) called the parlour, or social sitting-room; where we may have converse with the tame woman’s mind, seeing the door to the clawing recesses temporarily shut.

‘Forgive me if I say you talk like the bigger child,’ Fleetwood said lightly, not ungenially; for the features he looked on were museful, a picture in their one expression.

Her answer chilled him. ’It is true, my lord. I will not detain you. I would beg to be supplied with money.’

He was like the leaves of a frosted plant, in his crisp curling inward:—he had been so genial.

’You have come to say good-bye, that an opportunity to—as you put it—beg for money. I am not sure of your having learnt yet the right disposal of money.’

‘I beg, my lord, to have two thousand pounds a year allowed me.’

’Ten—and it’s a task to spend the sum on a single household—shall be alloted to your expenditure at Esslemont;—stables, bills, et caetera. You can entertain. My steward Leddings will undertake the management. You will not be troubled with payings.’

Her head acknowledged the graciousness.—’I would have two thousand pounds and live where I please.’

’Pardon me: the two, for a lady living where she pleases, exceeds the required amount.’

‘I will accept a smaller sum, my lord.’

‘Money!-it seems a singular demand when all supplies are furnished.’

‘I would have control of some money.’

‘You are thinking of charities.’

‘Not charities.’

’Edwards here has a provision for the hospital needs of the people. Mr. Woodseer applies to me in cases he can certify. Leddings will do the same at Esslemont.’

’I am glad, I am thankful. The money I would have is for my own use. It is for me.’

‘Ah. Scarcely that, I fancy.’

The remark should have struck home. He had a thirst for the sign of her confessing to it. He looked. Something like a petrifaction of her wildest face was shown.

Carinthia’s eyes were hard out on a scattered knot of children down the street.

She gathered up her skirts. Without a word to him, she ran, and running shouted to the little ones around and ahead: ’In! in! indoors, children! “Blant, i’r ty!” Mothers, mothers, ho! get them in. See the dog! “Ci! Ci!” In with them! “Blant, i’r ty! Vr ty!"’

A big black mongrel appeared worrying at one of two petticoated urchins on the ground.

She scurried her swiftest, with such warning Welsh as she had on the top of her mountain cry; and doors flew wide, there was a bang of doors when she darted by: first gust of terrible heavens that she seemed to the cottagers.

Page 4129

Other shouts behind her rent the air, gathering to a roar, from the breasts of men and women. ‘Mad dog about’ had been for days the rumour, crossing the hills over the line of village, hamlet, farm, from Cardiff port.

Dead hush succeeded the burst. Men and women stood off. The brute was at the lady.

Her arms were straight above her head; her figure overhanging, on a bend of the knees. Right and left, the fury of the slavering fangs shook her loose droop of gown; and a dull, prolonged growl, like the clamour of a far body of insurrectionary marching men, told of the rage.

Fleetwood hovered helpless as a leaf on a bough.

‘Back—’, I pray,’ she said to him, and motioned it, her arms at high stretch.

He held no weapon. The sweat of his forehead half blinded him. And she waved him behind her, beckoned to the crowd to keep wide way, used her lifted hands as flappers; she had all her wits. There was not a wrinkle of a grimace. Nothing but her locked lips betrayed her vision of imminent doom. The shaking of her gown and the snarl in the undergrowl sounded insatiate.

The brute dropped hold. With a weariful jog of the head, it pursued its course at an awful even swinging pace: Death’s own, Death’s doer, his reaper,—he, the very Death of the Terrors.

Carinthia’s cry rang for clear way to be kept on either side, and that accursed went the path through a sharp-edged mob, as it poured pell-mell and shrank back, closing for the chase to rear of it.

‘Father taught me,’ she said to the earl, not more discomposed than if she had taken a jump.

‘It’s over!’ he groaned, savagely white, and bellowed for guns, any weapons. ‘Your father? pray?’ She was entreated to speak.

‘Yes, it must be shot; it will be merciful to kill it,’ she said. ’They have carried the child indoors. The others are safe. Mr. Woodseer, run to my nurse-girl, Martha. He goes,’ she murmured, and resumed to the earl: ’Father told me women have a better chance than men with a biting dog. He put me before him and drilled me. He thought of everything. Usually the poor beast snaps—one angry bite, not more. My dress teased it.’

Fleetwood grinned civilly in his excitement; intending to yield patient hearing, to be interested by any mortal thing she might choose to say.

She was advised by recollection to let her father rest.

‘No, dear girl, not hurt, no scratch,—only my gown torn,’ she said to Madge; and Madge heaved and whimpered, and stooped to pin the frayed strips. ’Quite safe; you see it is easy for women to escape, Mr. Edwards.’

Carinthia’s voice hummed over the girl’s head

’Father made me practise it, in case. He forethought. Madge, you heard of this dog. I told you how to act. I was not feverish. Our babe will not feel it.’

She bade Madge open her hands. ’A scratch would kill. Never mind the tearings; I will hold my dress. Oh! there is that one child bitten. Mr. Edwards, mount a man for the doctor. I will go in to the child. He was bitten. Lose not one minute, Mr. Edwards. I see you go.’

Page 4130

He bowed and hastened.

The child's mother was red eyes at her door for ease of her heart to the lady. Carinthia stepped into the room, where the little creature was fetching sobs after the spout of screams.

'God in heaven! she can't be going to suck the bite?' Fleetwood cried to Madge, whose answer was disquieting 'If it's to save life, my mistress won't stop at anything.'

His heart sprang with a lighted comprehension of Gower Woodseer's meaning. This girl's fervour opened portals to new views of her mistress, or opened eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A FRIGHTFUL DEBATE

Pushing through a swarm into the cot, Fleetwood saw Carinthia on a knee beside a girl's lap, where the stripped child lay. Its mother held a basin for the dabbing at raw red spots.

A sting of pain touched the memory of its fright, and brought further screams, then the sobs. Carinthia hummed a Styrian cradle-song as the wailing lulled.

She glanced up; she said to the earl: 'The bite was deep; it was in the blood. We may have time. Get me an interpreter. I must ask the mother. I know not many words.'

'What now?' said he, at the looming of new vexations.

'We have no choice. Has a man gone? Dr. Griffiths would hurry fast. An hour may be too late. The poison travels: Father advised it:—Fifty years for one brave minute! This child should be helped to live.'

'We 'll do our best. Why an interpreter?'

'A poker in the fire. The interpreter—whether the mother will bear to have it done.'

'Burn, do you mean?'

'It should be burnt.'

'Not by you?'

'Quick! Quick!'

'But will you—could you? No, I say!'

‘If there is no one else.’

‘You forget your own child.’

‘He is near the end of his mother.’

‘The doctor will soon arrive.’

’The poison travels. It cannot be overtaken unless we start nearly equal, father said.’

‘Work like that wants an experienced hand.’

‘A steady one. I would not quake—not tremble.’

‘I cannot permit it.’

’Mr. Wythan would know!—he would know!

‘Do you hear, Lady Fleetwood—the dog may not be mad!’

‘Signs! He ran heavy, he foamed.’

’Foam ‘s no sign.’

‘Go; order to me a speaker of English and Welsh.’

The earl spun round, sensible of the novelty of his being commanded, and submitting; but no sooner had he turned than he fell into her view of the urgency, and he went, much like the boy we see at school, with a strong hand on his collar running him in.

Madge entered, and said: ’Mr. Woodseer has seen baby and Martha and the donkey all safe.’

‘He is kind,’ said Carinthia. ’Do we right to bathe the wound? It seems right to wash it. Little things that seem right may be exactly wrong after all, when we are ignorant. I know burning the wound is right.’

Page 4131

Madge asked: ‘But, my lady, who is to do it?’

‘You would do it, dear, if I shrank,’ her mistress replied.

’Oh, my lady, I don’t know, I can’t say. Burning a child! And there’s our baby.’

‘He has had me nearly his time.’

‘Oh, my dear lady! Would the mother consent?’

’My Madge! I have so few of their words yet. You would hold the child to save it from a dreadful end.’

’God help me, my lady—I would, as long as I live I will . . . . Oh! poor infant, we do need our courage now.’

Seeing that her mistress had not a tear or a tremor, the girl blinked and schooled her quailing heart, still under the wicked hope that the mother would not consent; in a wonderment at this lady, who was womanly, and who could hold the red iron at living flesh, to save the poor infant from a dreadful end. Her flow of love to this dear lady felt the slicing of a cut; was half revulsion, half worship; uttermost worship in estrangement, with the further throbbing of her pulses.

The cottage door was pushed open for Lord Fleetwood and Howell Edwards, whom his master had prepared to stand against immediate operations. A mounted messenger had been despatched. But it was true, the doctor might not be at home. Assuming it to be a bite of rabies, minutes lost meant the terrible: Edwards bowed his head to that. On the other hand, he foresaw the closest of personal reasons for hesitating to be in agreement with the lady wholly. The countess was not so much a persuasive lady as she was, in her breath and gaze, a sweeping and a wafting power. After a short argument, he had the sense of hanging like a bank detached to fatality of motion by the crack of a landslip, and that he would speedily be on his manhood to volunteer for the terrible work.

He addressed the mother. Her eyes whitened from their red at his first word of laying hot iron on the child: she ran out with the wild woman’s howl to her neighbours.

‘Poor mother!’ Carinthia sighed. ’It may last a year in the child’s body, and one day he shudders at water. Father saw a bitten man die. I could fear death with the thought of that poison in me. I pray Dr. Griffiths may come.’

Fleetwood shuffled a step. ‘He will come, he will come.’

The mother and some women now packed the room.

A gabble arose between them and Edwards. They fired sharp snatches of speech, and they darted looks at the lady and her lord.

‘They do not know!’ said Carinthia.

Gower brought her news that the dog had been killed; Martha and her precious burden were outside, a mob of men, too. He was not alarmed; but she went to the door and took her babe in her arms, and when the women observed the lady holding her own little one, their looks were softened. At a hint of explanation from Edwards, the guttural gabble rattled up to the shrill vowels.

Page 4132

Fleetwood's endurance broke short. The packed small room, the caged-monkey lingo, the wailful child, and the past and apprehended debate upon the burning of flesh, composed an intolerable torture. He said to Edwards: 'Go to the men; settle it with them. We have to follow that man Wythan; no peace otherwise. Tell the men the body of the dog must be secured for analysis. Mad or not, it's the same. These Welsh mothers and grandmothers won't allow cautery at any price. Hark at them!'

He turned to Carinthia: 'Your ladyship will let Mr. Edwards or Mr. Woodseer conduct you to the house where you are residing. You don't know these excitable people. I wish you to leave.'

She replied softly: 'I stay for the doctor's coming.'

'Impossible for me to wait, and I can't permit you to be here.'

'It is life and death, and I must not be commanded.'

'You may be proposing gratuitous agony.'

'I would do it to my own child.'

The earl attacked Gower: 'Add your voice to persuade Lady Fleetwood.'

Gower said: 'What if I think with Lady Fleetwood?'

'You would see her do it?'

'Do it myself, if there was no one else'

'This dog-all of you have gone mad,' the earl cried.

'Griffiths may keep his head; it's the only chance. Take my word, these Welshwomen just listen to them won't have it. You 'll find yourself in a nest of Furies. It may be right to do, it's folly to propose it, madness to attempt it. And I shall be bitten if I stop here a minute longer; I'm gone; I can neither command nor influence. I should have thought Gower Woodseer would have kept his wits.'

Fleetwood's look fell on Madge amid the group. Gower's perception of her mistress through the girl's devotion to her moved him. He took Madge by the hand, and the sensation came that it was the next thing to pressing his wife's. 'You're a loyal girl. You have a mistress it 's an honour to serve. You bind me. By the way, Ines shall run down for a minute before I go.'

'Let him stay where he is,'' Madge said, having bobbed her curtsey.

‘Oh, if he’s not to get a welcome!’ said the earl; and he could now fix a steadier look on his countess, who would have animated him with either a hostile face or a tender. She had no expression of a feeling. He bent to her formally.

Carinthia’s words were: ‘Adieu, my lord.’

‘I have only to say, that Esslemont is ready to receive you,’ he remarked, bowed more curtly, and walked out. . .

Gower followed him. They might as well have been silent, for any effect from what was uttered between them. They spoke opinions held by each of them—adverse mainly; speaking for no other purpose than to hold their positions.

‘Oh, she has courage, no doubt; no one doubted it,’ Fleetwood said, out of all relation to the foregoing.

Courage to grapple with his pride and open his heart was wanting in him.

Page 4133

Had that been done, even to the hint of it, instead of the lordly indifference shown, Gower might have ventured on a suggestion, that the priceless woman he could call wife was fast slipping away from him and withering in her allegiance. He did allude to his personal sentiment. 'One takes aim at Philosophy; Lady Fleetwood pulls us up to pay tribute to our debts.' But this was vague, and his hearer needed a present thunder and lightning to shake and pierce him.

'I pledged myself to that yacht,' said Fleetwood, by way of reply, 'or you and I would tramp it, as we did once-jolly old days! I shall have you in mind. Now turn back. Do the best you can.'

They parted midway up the street, Gower bearing away a sharp contrast of the earl and his countess; for, until their senses are dulled, impressionable young men, however precociously philosophical, are mastered by appearances; and they have to reflect under new lights before vision of the linked eye and mind is given them.

Fleetwood jumped into his carriage and ordered the coachman to drive smartly. He could not have admitted the feeling small; he felt the having been diminished, and his requiring a rapid transportation from these parts for him to regain his proper stature. Had he misconducted himself at the moment of danger? It is a ghastly thought, that the craven impulse may overcome us. But no, he could reassure his repute for manliness. He had done as much as a man could do in such a situation.

At the same time, he had done less than the woman.

Needed she to have gone so far? Why precipitate herself into the jaws of the beast?

Now she, proposes to burn the child's wound. And she will do it if they let her. One, sees her at the work,—pale, flinty; no faces; trebly the terrific woman in her mild way of doing the work. All because her old father recommended it. Because she thinks it a duty, we will say; that is juster. This young woman is a very sword in the hand of her idea of duty. She can be feminine, too,—there is one who knows. She can be particularly distant, too. If in timidity, she has a modest view of herself—or an enormous conception of the magi that married her. Will she take the world's polish a little?

Fleetwood asked with the simplicity of the superior being who will consequently perhaps bestow the debt he owes. . .

But his was not the surface nature which can put a question of the sort and pass it. As soon as it had been formed, a vision of the elemental creature calling him husband smote to shivers the shell we walk on, and caught him down among the lower forces, up amid the higher; an infernal and a celestial contest for the extinction of the one or the other of them, if it was not for their union. She wrestled with him where the darknesses roll their snake-eyed torrents over between jagged horns of the netherworld. She stood

him in the white ray of the primal vital heat, to bear unwithering beside her the test of light. They flew, they chased, battled, embraced, disjoined, adventured apart, brought back the count of their deeds, compared them,—and name the one crushed! It was the one weighted to shame, thrust into the cellar-corner of his own disgust, by his having asked whether that starry warrior spirit in the woman's frame would 'take polish a little.'

Page 4134

Why should it be a contention between them? For this reason: he was reduced to admire her act; and if he admired, he could not admire without respecting; if he respected, perforce he reverenced; if he reverenced, he worshipped. Therefore she had him at her feet. At the feet of any woman, except for the trifling object! But at the feet of 'It is my husband!' That would be a reversal of things.

Are not things reversed when the name Carinthia sounds in the thought of him who laughed at the name not less angelically martial than Feltre's adored silver trumpets of his Papal procession; sweeter of the new morning for the husband of the woman; if he will but consent to the worshipper's posture? Yes, and when Gower Woodseer's 'Malady of the Wealthy,' as he terms the pivotting of the whole marching and wheeling world upon the favoured of Fortune's habits and tastes, promises to quit its fell clutch on him?

Another voice in the young nobleman cried: Pooh, dolt and dupe! and surrounded her for half a league with reek of burnt flesh and shrieks of a tortured child; giving her the aspect of a sister of the Parcw. But it was not the ascendant' voice. It growled underneath, much like the deadly beast at Carinthia's gown while she stood:—an image of her to dominate the princeliest of men.

The princeliest must have won his title to the place before he can yield other than complimentary station to a woman without violation of his dignity; and vast wealth is not the title; worldly honours are not; deeds only are the title. Fleetwood consented to tell himself that he had not yet performed the deeds.

Therefore, for him to be dominated was to be obscured, eclipsed. A man may outrun us; it is the fortune of war. Eclipsed behind the skirts of a woman waving her upraised hands, with, 'Back, pray!'—no, that ignominy is too horribly abominable! Be sure, the situation will certainly recur in some form; will constantly recur. She will usurp the lead; she will play the man.

Let matters go on as they are. We know our personal worth.

Arrived at this point in the perpetual round of the conflict Carinthia had implanted, Fleetwood entered anew the ranks of the ordinary men of wealth and a coronet, and he hugged himself. He enjoyed repose; knowing it might be but a truce. Matters might go on as they were. Still, he wished her away from those Wythans, residing at Esslemont. There she might come eventually to a better knowledge of his personal worth:—'the gold mine we carry in our bosoms till it is threshed out of us in sweat,' that fellow Gower Woodseex says; adding, that we are the richer for not exploring it. Philosophical cynicism is inconclusive. Fleetwood knew his large capacities; he had proved them and could again. In case a certain half foreseen calamity should happen:—imagine it a fact, imagine him seized, besides admiring her character, with a taste for her person! Why,

then, he would have to impress his own mysteriously deep character on her portion of understanding. The battle for domination would then begin.

Page 4135

Anticipation of the possibility of it hewed division between the young man's pride of being and his warmer feelings. Had he been free of the dread of subjection, he would have sunk to kiss the feet of the statuesque young woman, arms in air, firm-fronted over the hideous death that tore at her skirts.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A *survey of the ride of the Welsh cavaliers escorting the countess of Fleetwood to Kentish Esslemont*

A formal notification from the earl, addressed to the Countess of Fleetwood in the third person, that Esslemont stood ready to receive her, autocratically concealed her lord's impatience to have her there; and by the careful precision with which the stages of her journey were marked, as places where the servants despatched to convey their lady would find preparations for her comfort, again alarmed the disordered mother's mind on behalf of the child she deemed an object of the father's hatred, second to his hatred of the mother. But the mother could defend herself, the child was prey the child of a detested wife was heir to his title and estates. His look at the child, his hasty one look down at her innocent, was conjured before her as resembling a kick at a stone in his path. His indifference to the child's Christian names pointed darkly over its future.

The distempered wilfulness of a bruised young woman directed her thoughts. She spoke them in the tone of reason to her invalid friend Rebecca Wythan, who saw with her, felt with her, yearned to retain her till breath was gone. Owain Wythan had his doubts of the tyrant guilty of maltreating this woman of women. 'But when you do leave Wales,' he said, 'you shall be guarded up to your haven.'

Carinthia was not awake to his meaning then. She sent a short letter of reply, imitating the style of her lord; very baldly stating, that she was unable to leave Wales because of her friend's illness and her part as nurse. Regrets were unmentioned.

Meanwhile Rebecca Wythan was passing to death. Not cheerlessly, more and more faintly, her thread of life ran to pause, resembling a rill of the drought; and the thinner-it grew, the shrewder were her murmurs for Carinthia's ears in commending 'the most real of husbands of an unreal wife' to her friendly care of him when he would no longer see the shadow he had wedded. She had the privilege of a soul beyond our minor rules and restrainings to speak her wishes to the true wife of a mock husband-no husband; less a husband than this shadow of a woman a wife, she said; and spoke them without adjuring the bowed head beside her to record a promise or seem to show the far willingness, but merely that the wishes should be heard on earth in her last breath, for a good man's remaining one chance of happiness. On the theme touching her husband Owain, it was verily

Page 4136

to hear a soul speak, and have knowledge of the broader range, the rich interflowings of the tuned discords, a spirit past the flesh can find. Her mind was at the same time alive to our worldly conventions when other people came under its light; she sketched them and their views in her brief words between the gasps, with perspicuous, humorous bluntness, as vividly as her twitched eyebrows indicated the laugh. Gower Woodseer she read startlingly, if correctly.

Carinthia could not leave her. Attendance upon this dying woman was a drinking at the springs of life.

Rebecca Wythan under earth, the earl was briefly informed of Lady Fleetwood's consent to quit Wales, obedient to a summons two months old,—and that she would be properly escorted; for the which her lord had made provision. Consequently the tyrant swallowed his wrath, little conceiving the monstrous blow she was about to strike.

In peril of fresh floods from our Dame, who should be satisfied with the inspiring of these pages, it is owned that her story of 'the four and twenty squires of Glamorgan and Caermarthen in their brass-buttoned green coats and buckskins, mounted and armed, an escort of the Countess of Fleetwood across the swollen Severn, along midwinter roads, up to the Kentish gates of Esslemont,' has a foundation, though the story is not the more credible for her flourish of documentary old ballad-sheets, printed when London's wags had ears on cock to any whisper of the doings. of their favourite Whitechapel Countess; and indeed hardly depended on whispers.

Enthusiasm sufficient to troop forth four and twenty and more hundreds of Cambrian gentlemen, and still more of the common folk, as far as they could journey afoot, was over the two halves of the Principality, to give the countess a reputable and gallant body-guard. London had intimations of kindling circumstances concerning her, and magnified them in the interests of the national humour: which is the English way of exalting to criticize, criticizing to depreciate, and depreciating to restore, ultimately to cherish, in reward for the amusement furnished by an eccentric person, not devoid of merit.

These little tales of her, pricking cool blood to some activity, were furze-fires among the Welsh. But where the latter heard Bardic strings inviting a chorus, the former as unanimously obeyed the stroke of their humorous conductor's baton for an outburst from the ribs or below. And it was really funny to hear of Whitechapel's titled heroine roaming Taffyland at her old pranks.

Catching a maddened bull by the horns in the marketplace, and hanging to the infuriate beast, a wild whirl of clouts, till he is reduced to be a subject for steaks, that is no common feat.

Page 4137

Her performances down mines were things of the underworld. England clapped hands, merely objecting to her not having changed her garb for the picador's or matador's, before she seized the bull. Wales adopted and was proud of her in any costume. Welshmen North and South, united for the nonce, now propose her gallantry as a theme to the rival Bards at the next Eisteddfod. She is to sit throned in full assembly, oak leaves and mistletoe interwoven on her head, a white robe and green sash to clothe her, and the vanquished beast's horns on a gilded pole behind the dais; hearing the eulogies respectively interpreted to her by Colonel Fluellen Wythan at one ear, and Captain Agincourt Gower at the other. A splendid scene; she might well insist to be present.

There, however, we are at the pitch of burlesque beyond her illustrious lord's capacity to stand. Peremptory orders from England arrive, commanding her return. She temporizes, postpones, and supplicates to have the period extended up to the close of the Eisteddfod. My lord's orders are imperatively repeated, and very blunt. He will not have her 'continue playing the fool down there.' She holds her ground from August into February, and then sets forth, to undergo the further process of her taming at Esslemont in England; with Llewellyn and Vaughan and Cadwallader, and Watkyn and Shenkyn and the remains of the race of Owen Tudor, attending her; vowed to extract a receipt from the earl her lord's responsible servitors for the safe delivery of their heroine's person at the gates of Esslemont; ich dien their trumpeted motto.

Counting the number at four and twenty, it wears the look of an invasion. But the said number is a ballad number, and has been since the antique time. There was, at a lesser number, enough of a challenge about it for squires of England, never in those days backward to pick up a glove or give the ringing rejoinder for a thumb-bite, to ride out and tilt compliments with the Whitechapel Countess's green cavaliers, rally their sprites and entertain them exactly according to their degrees of dignity, as exhibited by their 'haviour under something of a trial; and satisfy also such temporary appetites as might be excited in them by (among other matters left to the luck of events) a metropolitan play upon the Saxon tongue, hard of understanding to the leeky cocks until their ready store of native pepper seasons it; which may require a corresponding English condiment to rectify the flavour of the stew.

Now the number of Saxe-Normans riding out to meet and greet the Welshmen is declared to have not exceeded nine. So much pretends to be historic, in opposition to the poetic version. They would, we may be sure, have made it a point of honour to meet and greet their invading guests in precisely similar numbers a larger would have overshot the mark of courtesy; and doubtless a smaller have fallen deplorably short of it. Therefore, an acquaintance with her chivalrous, if less impulsive, countrymen compels to the dismissing of the Dame's ballad authorities. She has every right to quote them for her own good pleasure, and may create in others an enjoyment of what has been called 'the Mackrell fry.'

Page 4138

Her notion of a ballad is, that it grows like mushrooms from a scuffle of feet on grass overnight, and is a sort of forest mother of the pied infant reared and trimmed by historians to show the world its fatherly antecedent steps. The hand of Rose Mackrell is at least suggested in more than one of the ballads. Here the Welsh irruption is a Chevy Chase; next we have the countess for a disputed Helen.

The lady's lord is not a shining figure. How can an undecided one be a dispenser of light? Poetry could never allow him to say with her:

> 'Where'er I go I make a name,
> And leave a song to follow.'

Yet he was the master of her fortunes at the time; all the material power was his. Even doggerel verse (it is worth while to brood on the fact) denies a surviving pre-eminence to the potent moody, reverses the position between the driven and the driver. Poetry, however erratic, is less a servant of the bully Present, or pomlious Past, than History. The Muse of History has neither the same divination of the intrinsic nor the devotion to it, though truly, she has possession of all the positive matter and holds us faster by the crediting senses.

Nine English cavaliers, then, left London early on a January or February morning in a Southerly direction, bearing East; and they were the Earl of Fleetwood's intimates, of the half-dependent order; so we may suppose them to have gone at his bidding. That they met the procession of the Welsh, and claimed to take charge of the countess's carriage, near the Kentish border-line, is an assertion supported by testimony fairly acceptable.

Intelligence of the advancing party had reached the earl by courier, from the date of the first gathering on the bridge of Pont-y-pridd; and from Gloucester, along to the Thames at Reading; thence away to the Mole, from Mickleham, where the Surrey chalk runs its final turfy spine North-eastward to the slope upon Kentish soil.

Greatly to the astonishment of the Welsh cavaliers, a mounted footman, clad in the green and scarlet facings of Lord Fleetwood's livery, rode up to them a mile outside the principal towns and named the inn where the earl had ordered preparations for the reception of them. England's hospitality was offered on a princely scale. Cleverer fencing could not be.

The meeting, in no sense an encounter, occurred close by a thirty-acre meadow, famous over the county; and was remarkable for the punctilious exchange of ceremonial speech, danger being present; as we see powder-magazines protected by their walls and fosses and covered alleys. Notwithstanding which, there was a scintillation of sparks.

Lord Brailstone, spokesman of the welcoming party, expressed comic regrets that they had not an interpreter with them.

Mr. Owain Wythan, in the name of the Cambrian chivalry, assured him of their comprehension and appreciation of English slang.

Page 4139

Both gentlemen kept their heads uncovered in a suspense; they might for a word or two more of that savour have turned into the conveniently spacious meadow. They were induced, on the contrary, to enter the channel of English humour, by hearing Chumley Potts exclaim: 'His nob!' and all of them laughed at the condensed description of a good hit back, at the English party's cost.

Laughter, let it be but genuine, is of a common nationality, indeed a common fireside; and profound disagreement is not easy after it. The Dame professes to believe that 'Carinthia Jane' had to intervene as peacemaker, before the united races took the table in Esslemont's dining-hall for a memorable night of it, and a contest nearer the mark of veracity than that shown in another of the ballads she would have us follow. Whatever happened, they sat down at table together, and the point of honour for them each and every was, not to be first to rise from it. Once more the pure Briton and the mixed if not fused English engaged, Bacchus for instrument this time, Bacchus for arbiter of the fray.

You may imagine! says the Dame. She cites the old butler at Esslemont, 'as having been much questioned on the subject by her family relative, Dr. Glossop, and others interested to know the smallest items of the facts,'—and he is her authority for the declaration that the Welsh gentlemen and the English gentlemen, 'whatever their united number,' consumed the number of nine dozen and a half of old Esslemont wine before they rose, or as possibly sank, at the festive board at the hour of five of the morning.

Years later, this butler, Joshua Queeney, 'a much enfeebled old man,' retold and enlarged the tale of the enormous consumption of his best wine; with a sacred oath to confirm it, and a tear expressive of elegiacal feelings.

'They bled me twelve dozen, not a bottle less,' she quotes him, after a minute description of his countenance and scrupulously brushed black suit, pensioner though he had become. He had grown, during the interval, to be more communicative as to particulars. The wines were four. Sherry led off the parade pace, Hock the trot into the merry canter, Champagne the racing gallop, Burgundy the grand trial of constitutional endurance for the enforced finish. All these wines, except the sparkling, had their date of birth in the precedent century. 'They went like water.'

Questioned anxiously by Dr. Glossop, Queeney maintained an impartial attitude, and said there was no victor, no vanquished. They did not sit in blocks. The tactics for preserving peace intermingled them. Each English gentleman had a Welsh gentleman beside him; they both sat firm; both fell together. The bottles or decanters were not stationary for the guest to fill his glass, they circulated, returning to an empty glass. All drank equally. Often the voices were high, the talk was loud. The gentlemen were too serious to sing.

Page 4140

At one moment of the evening Queeney confidently anticipated a ‘fracassy,’ he said. One of the foreign party—and they all spoke English, after five dozen bottles had gone the round, as correct as the English themselves—remarked on the seventy-years Old Brown Sherry, that ‘it had a Madeira flavour.’ He spoke it approvingly. Thereupon Lord Simon Pitscrew calls to Queeney, asking him ’why Madeira had been supplied instead of Esslemont’s renowned old Sherry?’ A second Welsh gentleman gave his assurances that his friend had not said it was Madeira. But Lord Brailstone accused them of the worse unkindness to a venerable Old Brown Sherry, in attributing a Madeira flavour to it. Then another Welsh gentleman briskly and emphatically stated his opinion, that the attribution of Madeira flavour to it was a compliment. At this, which smelt strongly, he said, of insult, Captain Abrane called on the name of their absent host to warrant the demand of an apology to the Old Brown Sherry, for the imputation denying it an individual distinction. Chumley Potts offered generally to bet that he would distinguish blindfold at a single sip any Madeira from any first-class Sherry, Old Brown or Pale. ‘Single sip or smell!’ Ambrose Mallard cried, either for himself or his comrade, Queeney could not say which.

Of all Lord Fleetwood’s following, Mr. Potts and Mr. Mallard were, the Dame informs us, Queeney’s favourites, because they were so genial; and he remembered most of what they said and did, being moved to it by ’poor young Mr. Mallard’s melancholy end and Mr. Potts’s grief!’

The Welsh gentlemen, after paying their devoirs to the countess next morning, rode on in fresh health and spirits at mid-day to Barlings, the seat of Mr. Mason Fennell, a friend of Mr. Owain Wythan’s. They shouted, in an unseemly way, Queeney thought, at their breakfast-table, to hear that three of the English party, namely, Captain Abrane, Mr. Mallard, and Mr. Potts, had rung for tea and toast in bed. Lord Simon Pitscrew, Lord Brailstone, and the rest of the English were sore about it; for it certainly wore a look of constitutional inferiority on the English side, which could boast of indubitably stouter muscles. The frenzied spirits of the Welsh gentlemen, when riding off, let it be known what their opinion was. Under the protection of the countess’s presence, they were so cheery as to seem triumphantly ironical; they sent messages of condolence to the three in bed.

With an undisguised reluctance, the countess, holding Mr. Owain Wythan’s hand longer than was publicly decent, calling him by his Christian name, consented to their departure. As they left, they defiled before her; the vow was uttered by each, that at the instant of her summons he would mount and devote himself to her service, individually or collectively. She waved her hand to them. They ranged in line and saluted. She kissed her hand. Sweeping the cavaliers’ obeisance, gallantest of bows, they rode away.

Page 4141

A striking scene, Dame Gossip says; but raises a wind over the clipped adventure, and is for recounting what London believed about it. Enough has been conceded for the stoppage of her intrusion; she is left in the likeness of a full-charged pistol capless to the clapping trigger.

That which London believed, or affected to believe about it, would fill chapters. There was during many months an impression of Lord Fleetwood's countess as of a tenacious, dread, prevailing young woman, both intrepid and astute, who had, by an exercise of various arts, legitimate in open war of husband and wife, gathered the pick of the Principality to storm and carry another of her husband's houses. The certification that her cavaliers were Welsh gentlemen of wealth and position required a broader sneer at the Welsh than was warranted by later and more intimate acquaintance, if it could be made to redound to her discredit. So, therefore, added to the national liking for a plucky woman, she gained the respect for power. Whitechapel was round her like London's one street's length extension of smoky haze, reminder of the morning's fog under novel sunbeams.

Simultaneously, strange to say, her connubial antagonist, far from being overshadowed, grew to be proportionately respected, and on the strength of his deserts, apart from his title and his wealth. He defended himself, as he was bound to do, by welcoming the picked Welsh squires with hospitable embrace, providing ceremonies, receptions, and most comfortable arrangements for them, along the route. But in thus gravely entering into the knightly burlesque of the procession, and assisting to swell the same, he not only drew the venom from it, he stood forth as England's deputed representative, equal to her invasive challengeing guests at all points, comic, tragic, or cordial. He saw that it had to be treated as a national affair; and he parried the imputation which would have injured his country's name for courtly breeding, had they been ill-received, while he rescued his own good name from derision by joining the extravagance.

He was well inspired. It was popularly felt to be the supreme of clever-nay, noble-fencing. Really noble, though the cleverness was conspicuous. A defensive stroke, protecting him against his fair one's violent charge of horse, warded off an implied attack upon Old England, in Old England's best-humoured easy manner.

Supposing the earl to have acted otherwise, his countess would virtually have ridden over him, and wild Wales have cast a shadow on the chivalry of magisterial England. He and his country stood to meet the issue together the moment the Countess of Fleetwood and her escort crossed the Welsh border; when it became a question between the hot-hearted, at their impetuous gallop, and the sedatively minded, in an unfortified camp of arm-chairs. The earl's adroitness, averting a collision fatal or discomforting to both, disengaged him from an incumbent odium, of which, it need hardly be stated, neither the lady nor her attendant cavaliers had any notion at the hour of the assembly for the start for England on the bridge of Pont-y-pridd. The hungry

mother had the safety of her babe in thought. The hotheaded Welshmen were sworn to guard their heroine.

Page 4142

That is the case presented by the Dame's papers, when the incredible is excised. She claims the being a good friend to fiction in feeding popular voracity with all her stores. But the Old Buccaneer, no professed friend to it, is a sounder guide in the maxim, where he says: Deliver yourself by permit of your cheque on the 'Bank of Reason, and your account is increased instead of lessened.

Our account with credulity, he would signify.

The Dame does not like the shaking for a sifting. Romance, however, is not a mountain made of gold, but a vein running some way through; and it must be engineered, else either we are filled with wind from swallowing indigestible substance, or we consent to a debasing of the currency, which means her to-morrow's bankruptcy; and the spectacle of Romance in the bankruptcy court degrades us (who believe we are allied to her) as cruelly as it appals. It gives the cynic licence to bark day and night for an entire generation.

Surely the Countess of Fleetwood's drive from the Welsh borders to Esslemont, accompanied by the chosen of the land, followed by the vivats of the whole Principality, and England gaping to hear the stages of her progress, may be held sufficiently romantic without stuffing of surprises and conflicts, adventures at inns, alarms at midnight, windings of a horn over hilly verges of black heaths, and the rape of the child, the pursuit, the recovery of the child, after a new set of heroine performances on the part of a strung-wire mother, whose outcry in a waste country district, as she clasps her boy to her bosom again: 'There's a farm I see for milk for him!' the Dame repeats, having begun with an admission that the tale has been contradicted, and is not produced on authority. The end in design is to win the ear by making a fuss, and roll event upon event for the braining of common intelligence, until her narrative resembles dusty troopings along a road to the races.

Carinthia and her babe reached Esslemont, no matter what impediments. There, like a stopped runner whose pantings lengthen to the longer breath, her alarms over the infant subsided, ceasing for as long as she clasped it or was in the room with it. Walking behind the precious donkey-basket round the park, she went armed, and she soon won a fearful name at Kentish cottage-hearths, though she 'was not black to see, nor old. No, she was very young. But she did all the things that soldiers do,—was a bit of a foreigner;—she brought a reputation up from the Welsh land, and it had a raven's croak and a glow-worm's drapery and a goblin's origin.

Something was hinted of her having agitated London once. Somebody dropped word of her and that old Lord Levellier up at Croridge. She stalked park and country at night. Stories, one or two near the truth, were told of a restless and a very decided lady down these parts as well; and the earl her husband daren't come nigh in his dread of her, so that he runs as if to save his life out of every place she enters. And he's not one to run for a trifle. His pride is pretty well a match for princes and princesses.

Page 4143

All the same, he shakes in his shoes before her, durst hardly spy at Esslemont again while she's in occupation. His managing gentleman comes down from him, and goes up from her; that's how they communicate. One week she's quite solitary; another week the house is brimful as can be. She 's the great lady entertaining then. Yet they say it 's a fact, she has not a shilling of her own to fling at a beggar. She 'll stock a cottage wanting it with provision for a fortnight or more, and she'll order the doctor in, and she'll call and see the right things done for illness. 'But no money; no one's to expect money of her. The shots you hear in Esslemont grounds out of season are she and her maid, always alongside her, at it before a target on a bank, trying that old Lord Levellier's gunpowder out of his mill; and he's got no money either; not for his workmen, they say, until they congregate, and a threatening to blow him up brings forth half their pay, on account. But he 's a known miser. She's not that. She's a pleasant-faced lady for the poor. She has the voice poor people like. It's only her enemy, maybe her husband, she can be terrible to. She'd drive a hole through a robber stopping her on the road, as soon as look at him.

This was Esslemont's atmosphere working its way to the earl, not so very long after the establishment of his countess there. She could lay hold of the English, too, it seemed. Did she call any gentleman of the district by his Christian name? Lord Simon Pitscrew reported her doing so in the case of one of the Welshmen. Those Welshmen! Apparently they are making a push for importance in the kingdom!

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH CERTAIN CHANGES MAY BE DISCERNED

Behind his white plaster of composure, Lord Fleetwood had alternately raged and wondered during the passage of the Welsh cavalcade up Eastward: a gigantic burlesque, that would have swept any husband of their heroine off the scene had he failed to encounter it deferentially, preserving his countenance and ostensibly his temper. An idiot of a woman, incurable in her lunacy, suspects the father of the infant as guilty of designs done to death in romances; and so she manages to set going solemnly a bigger blazing Tom Fool's show than any known or written romance gives word of! And that fellow, Gower Woodseer, pleads, in apology, for her husband's confusion, physiologically, that it comes of her having been carried off and kept a prisoner when she was bearing the child and knitting her whole mind to ensure the child. But what sheer animals these women are, if they take impressions in such a manner! And Mr. Philosopher argues that the abusing of women proves the hating of Nature; names it 'the commonest insanity, and the deadliest,' and men are 'planted in the bog of their unclean animal condition until they do proper homage to the animal Nature makes the woman be.' Oh,

Page 4144

pish, sir!—as Meeson Corby had the habit of exclaiming when Abrane's 'fiddler' argues him into a corner. The fellow can fiddle fine things and occasionally clear sense:—'Men hating Nature are insane. Women and Nature are close. If it is rather general to hate Nature and maltreat women, we begin to see why the world is a mad world.' That is the tune of the fiddler's fiddling. As for him, something protects him. He was the slave of Countess Livia; like Abrane, Mallard, Corby, St. Ombre, young Cressett, and the dozens. He is now her master. Can a man like that be foolish, in saying of the Countess Carinthia, she is 'not only quick to understand, she is in the quick of understanding'? Gower Woodseer said it of her in Wales, and again on the day of his walk up to London from Esslemont, after pedestrian exercise, which may heat the frame, but cools the mind. She stamped that idea on a thoughtful fellow.

He's a Welshman. They are all excitable,—have heads on hound's legs for a flying figure in front. Still, they must have an object, definitely seen by them—definite to them if dim to their neighbours; and it will run in the poetic direction: and the woman to win them, win all classes of them, within so short a term, is a toss above extraordinary. She is named Carinthia—suitable name for the Welsh pantomimic procession. Or cry out the word in an amphitheatre of Alpine crags,—it sounds at home.

She is a daughter of the mountains,—should never have left them. She is also a daughter of the Old Buccaneer—no poor specimen of the fighting Englishman of his day. According to Rose Mackrell, he, this Old Buccaneer, it was, who, by strange adventures, brought the great Welsh mines into the family! He would not be ashamed in spying through his nautical glass, up or down, at his daughter's doings. She has not yet developed a taste for the mother's tricks:—the mother, said to have been a kindler. That Countess of Cressett was a romantic little fly-away bird. Both parents were brave: the daughter would inherit gallantry. She inherits a kind of thwarted beauty. Or it needs the situation seen in Wales: her arms up and her unaffrighted eyes over the unappeasable growl. She had then the beauty coming from the fathom depths, with the torch of Life in the jaws of Death to light her: beauty of the nether kingdom mounting to an upper place in the higher. Her beauty recognized, the name of the man who married her is not Longears—not to himself, is the main point; nor will it be to the world when he shows that it is not so to himself.

Suppose he went to her, would she be trying at domination? The woman's pitch above woman's beauty was perceived to be no intermittent beam, but so living as to take the stamp of permanence. More than to say it was hers, it was she. What a deadly peril brought into view was her character-soul, some call it: generally a thing rather distasteful in women, or chilling to the masculine temperament.

Page 4145

Here it attracts. Here, strange to say, it is the decided attraction, in a woman of a splendid figure and a known softness. By rights, she should have more understanding than to suspect the husband as guilty of designs done to death in romances. However, she is not a craven who compliments him by rearing him, and he might prove that there is no need for fear. But she would be expecting explanations before the reconcilement. The bosom of these women will keep on at its quick heaving until they have heard certain formal words, oaths to boot. How speak them?

His old road of the ladder appeared to Fleetwood an excellent one for obviating explanations and effecting the reconcilement without any temporary seeming forfeit of the native male superiority. For there she is at Esslemont now; any night the window could be scaled. 'It is my husband.' The soul was in her voice when she said it.

He remembered that it had not ennobled her to him then; had not endeared; was taken for a foreign example of the childish artless, imperfectly suited to our English clime.' The tone of adorable utterances, however much desired, is never for repetition; nor is the cast of divine sweet looks; nor are the particular deeds-once pardonable, fitly pleaded. A second scaling of her window—no, night's black hills girdle the scene with hoarse echoes; the moon rushes out of her clouds grimacing. Even Fleetwood's devil, much addicted to cape and sword and ladder, the vulpine and the gryphine, rejected it.

For she had, by singular transformation since, and in spite of a deluging grotesque that was antecedently incredible, she had become a personage, counting her adherents; she could put half the world in motion on her side. Yell those Welshmen to scorn, they were on a plane finding native ground with as large a body of these English. His baser mind bowed to the fact. Her aspect was entirely different; her attitude toward him as well: insomuch that he had to chain her to her original features by the conjuring of recollected phrases memorable for the vivid portraiture of her foregone simplicity and her devotion to 'my husband.'

Yes, there she was at Essleinont, securely there, near him, to be seen any day; worth claiming, too; a combatant figure, provocative of the fight and the capture rather than repellent. The respect enforced by her attitude awakened in him his inherited keen old relish for our intersexual strife and the indubitable victory of the stronger, with the prospect of slavish charms, fawning submission, marrowy spoil. Or perhaps, preferably, a sullen submission, reluctant charms; far more marrowy. Or who can say?—the creature is a rocket of the shot into the fiery garland of stars; she may personate any new marvel, be an unimagined terror, an overwhelming bewitchment: for she carries the unexpected in her bosom. And does it look like such indubitable victory, when the man, the woman's husband, divided from her,

Page 4146

toothsome to the sex, acknowledges within himself and lets the world know his utter dislike of other women's charms, to the degree that herbal anchorites positively could not be colder, could not be chaster: and he no forest bird, but having the garden of the variety of fairest flowers at nod and blush about him! That was the truth. Even Henrietta's beauty had the effect of a princess's birthday doll admired on show by a contemptuous boy.

Wherefore, then, did the devil in him seek to pervert this loveliest of young women and feed on her humiliation for one flashing minute? The taste had gone, the desire of the vengeance was extinct, personal gratification could not exist. He spied into himself, and set it down to one among the many mysteries.

Men uninstructed in analysis of motives arrive at this dangerous conclusion, which spares their pride and caresses their indolence, while it flatters the sense of internal vastness, and invites to headlong intoxication. It allows them to think they are of such a compound, and must necessarily act in that manner. They are not taught at the schools or by the books of the honoured places in the libraries, to examine and see the simplicity of these mysteries, which it would be here and there a saving grace for them to see; as the minstrel, dutifully inclining to the prosy in their behalf and morality's, should exhibit; he should arrest all the characters of his drama to spring it to vision and strike perchance the chord primarily if not continually moving them, that readers might learn the why and how of a germ of evil, its flourishing under rebuke, the persistency of it after the fell creative energy has expired and pleasure sunk to be a phlegmatic dislike, almost a loathing.

This would here be done, but for signs of a barometric dead fall in Dame Gossip's chaps, already heavily pendent. She would be off with us on one of her whirling cyclones or elemental mad waltzes, if a step were taken to the lecturing-desk. We are so far in her hands that we have to keep her quiet. She will not hear of the reasons and the change of reasons for one thing and the other. Things were so: narrate them, and let readers do their reflections for themselves, she says, denouncing our conscientious method as the direct road downward to the dreadful modern appeal to the senses and assault on them for testimony to the veracity of everything described; to the extent that, at the mention of a vile smell, it shall be blown into the reader's nostrils, and corking-pins attack the comfortable seat of him simultaneously with a development of surprises. 'Thither your conscientiousness leads.'

It is not perfectly visible. And she would gain information of the singular nature of the young of the male sex in listening to the wrangle between Lord Fleetwood and Gower Woodseer on the subject of pocket-money for the needs of the Countess Carinthia. For it was a long and an angry one, and it brought out both of them, exposing, of course, the more complex creature the most. They were near a rupture, so scathing was Gower's tone of irate professor to shirky scholar—or it might be put, German professor to English scuffleshoe.

Page 4147

She is for the scene of ‘Chillon John’s’ attempt to restore the respiration of his bank-book by wager; to wit, that he would walk a mile, run a mile, ride a mile, and jump ten hurdles, then score five rifle-shots at a three hundred yards’ distant target within a count of minutes; twenty-five, she says; and vows it to have been one of the most exciting of scenes ever witnessed on green turf in the land of wagers; and that he was accomplishing it quite certainly when, at the first of the hurdles, a treacherous unfolding and waving of a white flag caused his horse to swerve and the loss of one minute, seven and twenty seconds, before he cleared the hurdles; after which, he had to fire his shots hurriedly, and the last counted blank, for being outside the circle of the stated time.

So he was beaten. But a terrific uproar over the field proclaimed the popular dissatisfaction. Presently there was a cleavage of the mob, and behold a chase at the heels of the fellow to rival the very captain himself for fleetness. He escaped, leaving his pole with the sheet nailed to it, by way of flag, in proof of foul play; or a proof, as the other side declared, of an innocently premature signalizing of the captain’s victory.

However that might be, he ran. Seeing him spin his legs at a hound’s pace, half a mile away, four countrymen attempted to stop him. All four were laid on their backs in turn with stupefying celerity; and on rising to their feet, and for the remainder of their natural lives, they swore that no man but a Champion could have floored them so. This again may have been due to the sturdy island pride of four good men knocked over by one. We are unable to decide. Wickedness there was, the Dame says; and she counsels the world to ‘put and put together,’ for, at any rate, ’a partial elucidation of a most mysterious incident.’ As to the wager-money, the umpires dissented; a famous quarrel, that does not concern us here, sprang out of the dispute; which was eventually, after great disturbance ’of the country, referred to three leading sportsmen in the metropolitan sphere, who pronounced the wager ‘off,’ being two to one. Hence arose the dissatisfied third party, and the letters of this minority to the newspapers, exciting, if not actually dividing, all England for several months.

Now the month of December was the month of the Dame’s mysterious incident. From the date of January, as Madge Winch knew, Christopher Ines had ceased to be in the service of the Earl of Fleetwood. At Esslemont Park gates, one winter afternoon of a North-east wind blowing ’rum-shrub into men for a stand against rheumatics,’ as he remarked, Ines met the girl by appointment, and informing her that he had money, and that Lord Fleetwood was ‘a black nobleman,’ he proposed immediate marriage. The hymeneal invitation, wafted to her on the breath of rum-shrub, obtained no response from Madge until she had received evasive answers as to why the earl dismissed him, and whence the stock of money came.

Page 4148

Lord Fleetwood, he repeated, was a black nobleman. She brought him to say of his knowledge, that Lord Fleetwood hated, and had reason to hate, Captain Levellier. 'Shouldn't I hate the man took my sweetheart from me and popped me into the noose with his sister instead?' Madge was now advised to be overcome by the smell of rum-shrub:—a mere fancy drink tossed off by heroes in their idle moments, before they settle down to the serious business of real drinking, Kit protested. He simulated envious admiration of known heroes, who meant business, and scorned any of the weak stuff under brandy, and went at it till the bottles were the first to give in. For why? They had to stomach an injury from the world or their young woman, and half-way on they shoved that young person and all enemies aside, trampled 'em. That was what Old O'Devy signified; and many's the man driven to his consolation by a cat of a girl, who's like the elements in their puffs and spits at a gallant ship, that rides the tighter and the tighter for all they can do to capsize. 'Tighter than ever I was tight I'll be to-night, if you can't behave.'

They fell upon the smack of words. Kit hitched and huffed away, threatening bottles. Whatever he had done, it was to establish the petticoated hornet in the dignity of matron of a champion light-weight's wholesome retreat of a public-house. A spell of his larkish hilarity was for the punishment of the girl devoted to his heroical performances, as he still considered her to be, though women are notoriously volatile, and her language was mounting a stage above the kitchen.

Madge had little sorrow for him. She was the girl of the fiery heart, not the large heart; she could never be devoted to more than one at a time, and her mistress had all her heart. In relation to Kit, the thought of her having sacrificed her good name to him, flung her on her pride of chastity, without the reckoning of it as a merit. It was the inward assurance of her independence: the young spinster's planting of the, standard of her proud secret knowledge of what she is, let it be a thing of worth or what you will, or the world think as it may. That was her thought.

Her feeling, the much livelier animation, was bitter grief, because her mistress, unlike herself, had been betrayed by her ignorance of the man into calling him husband. Just some knowledge of the man! The warning to the rescue might be there. For nothing did the dear lady weep except for her brother's evil fortune. The day when she had intelligence from Mrs. Levellier of her brother's defeat, she wept over the letter on her knees long hours. 'Me, my child, my brother!' she cried more than once. She had her suspicion of the earl then, and instantly, as her loving servant had. The suspicion was now no dark light, but a clear day-beam to Madge. She adopted Kit's word of Lord Fleetwood. 'A black nobleman he is! he is!' Her mistress had written like a creature begging him for money. He did not deign a reply. To her! When he had seen good proof she was the bravest woman on earth; and she rushed at death to save a child, a common child; as people say. And who knows but she saved that husband of hers, too, from bites might have sent him out of the world barking, and all his wealth not able to stop him!

Page 4149

They were in the month of March. Her dear mistress had been begging my lord through Mr. Woodseer constantly of late for an allowance of money; on her knees to him, as it seemed; and Mr. Woodseer was expected at Esslemont. Her mistress was looking for him eagerly. Something her heart was in depended on it, and only her brother could be the object, for now she loved only him of these men; though a gentleman coming over from Barlings pretty often would pour mines of money into her lap for half a word.

Carinthia had walked up to Croridge in the morning to meet her brother at Lekkatts. Madge was left guardian of the child. She liked a stroll any day round Esslemont Park, where her mistress was beginning to strike roots; as she soon did wherever she was planted, despite a tone of pity for artificial waters and gardeners' arts. Madge respected them. She knew nothing of the grandeur of wildness. Her native English veneration for the smoothing hand of wealth led her to think Esslemont the home of all homes for a lady with her husband beside her. And without him, too, if he were wafted over seas and away: if there would but come a wind to do that!

The wild North-easter tore the budded beeches. Master John Edward Russett lay in the cradling-basket drawn by his docile donkey, Martha and Madge to right and left of him; a speechless rustic, graduating in footman's livery, to rear.

At slow march round by the wrinkled water, Madge saw the park gates flung wide. A coach drove up the road along on the farther rim of the circle, direct for the house. It stopped, the team turned leisurely and came at a smart pace toward the carriage-basket. Lord Fleetwood was recognized.

He alighted, bidding one of his grooms drive to stables. Madge performed her reverence, aware that she did it in clumsy style; his presence had startled her instincts and set them travelling.

'Coldish for the youngster,' he said. 'All well, Madge?'

'Baby sleeps in the air, my lord,' she replied. 'My lady has gone to Croridge.'

'Sharp air for a child, isn't it?'

'My lady teaches him to breathe with his mouth shut, like her father taught her when she was little. Our baby never catches colds.'

Madge displayed the child's face.

The father dropped a glance on it from the height of skies.

'Croridge, you said?'

'Her uncle, Lord Levellier's.'

‘You say, never catches cold?’

‘Not our baby, my lord.’

Probably good management on the part of the mother. But the wife’s absence disappointed the husband strung to meet her, and an obtrusion of her practical motherhood blurred the prospect demanded by his present step.

‘When do you expect her to return, Madge?’

‘Before nightfall, my lord.’

‘She walks?’

‘Oh yes, my lady is fond of walking.’

‘I suppose she could defend herself?’

Page 4150

‘My lady walks with a good stick.’

Fleetwood weighed the chances; beheld her figure attacked, Amazonian.

‘And tell me, my dear—Kit?’

I don’t see more of Kit Ines.’

‘What has the fellow done?’

‘I’d like him to let me know why he was dismissed.’

‘Ah. He kept silent on that point.’

‘He let out enough.’

’You’ve punished him, if he’s to lose a bonny sweetheart, poor devil! Your sister Sally sends you messages?’

‘We’re both of us grateful, my lord.’

He lifted the thin veil from John Edward Russett’s face with a loveless hand.

’You remember the child bitten by a dog down in Wales. I have word from my manager there. Poor little wretch has died—died raving.’

Madge’s bosom went shivering up and sank. ’My lady was right. She’s not often wrong.’

‘She’s looking well?’ said the earl, impatient with her moral merits:—and this communication from Wales had been the decisive motive agent in hurrying him at last to Esslemont. The next moment he heard coolly of the lady’s looking well. He wanted fervid eulogy of his wife’s looks, if he was to hear any.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BELOW THE SURFACE AND ABOVE

The girl was counselled by the tremor of her instincts to forbear to speak of the minor circumstance, that her mistress had, besides a good stick, a good companion on the road to Croridge: and she rejoiced to think her mistress had him, because it seemed an intimation of justice returning upon earth. She was combative, a born rebel against tyranny. She weighed the powers, she felt to the worth of the persons coming into her range of touch: she set her mistress and my lord fronting for a wrestle, and my lord’s

wealth went to thin vapour, and her mistress's character threw him. More dimly, my lord and the Welsh gentleman were put to the trial: a tough one for these two men. She did not proclaim the winner, but a momentary flutter of pity in the direction of Lord Fleetwood did as much. She pitied him; for his presence at Esslemont betrayed an inclination; he was ignorant of his lady's character, of how firm she could be to defy him and all the world, in her gratitude to the gentleman she thought of as her true friend, smiled at for his open nature,—called by his Christian name.

The idea of a piece of information stinging Lord Fleetwood, the desire to sting, so as to be an instrument of retribution (one of female human nature's ecstasies); and her, abstaining, that she, might not pain the lord who had been generous to her sister Sally, made the force in Madge's breast which urges to the gambling for the undeveloped, entitled prophecy. She kept it low and felt it thrill.

Page 4151

Lord Fleetwood, chatted; Madge had him wincing. He might pull the cover off the child's face carelessly—he looked at the child. His look at the child was a thought of the mother. If he thought of the mother, he would be wanting to see her. If he heard her call a gentleman by his Christian name, and heard the gentleman say 'Carinthia' my lord would begin to shiver at changes. Women have to do unusual things when they would bring that outer set to human behaviour. Perhaps my lord would mount the coach-box and whip his horses away, adieu forever. His lady would not weep. He might, perhaps, command her to keep her mouth shut from gentlemen's Christian names, all except his own. His lady would not obey. He had to learn something of changes that had come to others as well as to himself. Ah, and then would he dare hint, as base men will? He may blow foul smoke on her, she will shine out of it. He has to learn what she is, that is his lesson; and let him pray all night and work hard all day for it not to be too late. Let him try to be a little like Mr. Woodseer, who worships the countess, and is hearty with the gentleman she treats as her best of friends. There is the real nobleman.

Fleetwood chatted on airily. His instincts were duller than those of the black-browed girl, at whom he gazed for idle satisfaction of eye from time to time while she replied demurely and maintained her drama of, the featureless but well-distinguished actors within her bosom,—a round, plump bust, good wharfage and harbourage, he was thinking. Excellent harbourage, supposing the arms out in pure good-will. A girl to hold her voyager fast and safe! Men of her class had really a capital choice in a girl like this. Men of another class as well, possibly, for temporary anchorage out midchannel. No? —possibly not. Here and there a girl is a Tartar. Ines talked of her as if she were a kind of religious edifice and a doubt were sacrilege. She could impress the rascal: girls have their arts for reaching the holy end, and still they may have a welcome for a foreign ship.

The earl said humorously: 'You will grant me permission to lunch at your mistress's table in her absence?' And she said: 'My lord!' And he resumed, to waken her interest with a personal question: 'You like our quiet country round Esslemont?' She said: 'I do,' and gave him plain look for look. Her eye was undefended: he went into it, finding neither shallow nor depth, simply the look, always the look; whereby he knew that no story of man was there, and not the shyest of remote responsive invitations from Nature's wakened and detected rogue. The bed of an unmarried young woman's eye yields her secret of past and present to the intrepid diver, if he can get his plunge; he holds her for the tenth of a minute, that is the revealment. Jewel or oyster-shell, it is ours. She cannot withhold it, he knew right well. This girl, then, was, he could believe, one of the rarely exampled innocent in knowledge. He was practised to judge.

Page 4152

Invitation or challenge or response from the handsomest he would have scorned just then. His native devilry suffered a stir at sight of an innocent in knowledge and spotless after experiences. By a sudden singular twist, rather unfairly, naturally, as it happened, he attributed it to an influence issuing from her mistress, to whom the girl was devoted, whom consequently she copied; might physically, and also morally, at a distance, resemble.

'Well, you've been a faithful servant to your lady, my dear; I hope you'll be comfortable here,' he said. 'She likes the mountains.'

'My lady would be quite contented if she could pass two months of the year in the mountains,' Madge answered.

'Look at me. They say people living together get a likeness to one another. What's your opinion? Upon my word, your eyebrows remind me, though they're not the colour—they have a bend!'

'You've seen my lady in danger, my lord.'

'Yes; well, there 's no one to resemble her there, she has her mark—kind of superhuman business. We're none of us "fifty feet high, with phosphorus heads," as your friend Mr. Gower Woodseer says of the prodigiosities. Lady Fleetwood is back—-when?'

'Before dark, she should be.'

He ran up the steps to the house.

At Lekkatts beneath Croridge a lean midday meal was being finished hard on the commencement by a silent company of three. When eating is choking to the younger members of the repast, bread and cold mutton-bone serve the turn as conclusively as the Frenchman's buffet-dishes. Carinthia's face of unshed tears dashed what small appetite Chillon had. Lord Levellier plied his fork in his right hand ruminating, his back an arch across his plate.

Riddles to the thwarted young, these old people will not consent to be read by sensations. Carinthia watched his jaws at their work of eating under his victim's eye-knowing Chillon to be no longer an officer in the English service; knowing that her beloved had sold out for the mere money to pay debts and support his Henrietta; knowing, as he must know, that Chillon's act struck a knife to pierce his mother's breast through her coffin-boards! This old man could eat, and he could withhold the means due to his dead sister's son. Could he look on Chillon and not feel that the mother's heart was beating in her son's fortunes? Half the money due to Chillon would have saved him from ruin.

Lord Levellier laid his fork on the plate. He munched his grievance with his bit of meat. The nephew and niece here present feeding on him were not so considerate as the Welsh gentleman, a total stranger, who had walked up to Lekkatts with the Countess of Fleetwood, and expressed the preference to feed at an inn. Relatives are cormorants.

His fork on his plate released the couple. Barely half a dozen words, before the sitting to that niggard restoration, had informed Carinthia of the step taken by her brother. She beckoned him to follow her.

Page 4153

’The worst is done now, Chillon. I am silent. Uncle is a rock. You say we must not offend. I have given him my whole mind. Say where Riette is to live.’

’Her headquarters will be here, at a furnished house. She’s, with her cousin, the Dowager.’

‘Yes. She should be with me.’

‘She wants music. She wants—poor girl! let her have what comes to her.’

Their thoughts beneath their speech were like fish darting under shadow of the traffic bridge.

‘She loves music,’ said Carinthia; ’it is almost life to her, like fresh air to me. Next month I am in London; Lady Arpington is kind. She will give me as much of their polish as I can take. I dare say I should feel the need of it if I were an enlightened person.’

‘For instance, did I hear “Owain,” when your Welsh friend was leaving?’ Chillon asked.

‘It was his dying wife’s wish, brother.’

‘Keep to the rules, dear.’

‘They have been broken, Chillon.’

‘Mend them.’

‘That would be a step backward.’

‘"The right one for defence!” father says.’

‘Father says, “The habit of the defensive paralyzes will."’

’"Womanizes,” he says, Carin. You quote him falsely, to shield the sex. Quite right. But my sister must not be tricky. Keep to the rules. You’re an exceptional woman, and it would be a good argument, if you were not in an exceptional position.’

‘Owain is the exceptional man, brother.’

‘My dear, after all, you have a husband.’

’I have a brother, I have a friend, I have no—I am a man’s wife and the mother of his child; I am free, or husband would mean dungeon. Does my brother want an oath from me? That I can give him.’

‘Conduct, yes; I couldn’t doubt you,’ said Chillon. ’But “the world’s a flood at a dyke for women, and they must keep watch,” you’ve read.’

‘But Owain is not our enemy,’ said Carinthia, in her deeper tones, expressive of conviction, and not thereby assuring to hear. ’He is a man with men, a child with women. His Rebecca could describe him; I laugh now at some of her sayings of him; I see her mouth, so tenderly comical over her big “simpleton,” she called him, and loved him so.’

The gentleman appeared on the waste land above the house. His very loose black suit and a peculiar roll of his gait likened him to a mourning boatswain who was jolly. In Lord Levellier’s workshop his remarks were to the point. Chillon’s powders for guns and blasting interested him, and he proposed to ride over from Barlings to witness a test of them.

‘You are staying at Barlings?’ Chillon said.

‘Yes; now Carinthia is at Esslemont,’ he replied, astoundingly the simpleton.

His conversation was practical and shrewd on the walk with Chillon and Carinthia down to Esslemont evidently he was a man well armed to encounter the world; social usages might be taught him. Chillon gained a round view of the worthy simple fellow, unlikely to turn out impracticable, for he talked such good sense upon matters of business.

Page 4154

Carinthia saw her brother tickled and interested. A feather moved her. Full of tears though she was, her, heart lay open to the heavens and their kind, small, wholesome gifts. Her happiness in the walk with her brother and her friend—the pair of them united by her companionship, both of them showing they counted her their comrade—was the nearest to the radiant day before she landed on an island, and imagined happiness grew here, and found it to be gilt thorns, loud mockery. A shaving North-easter tore the scream from hedges and the roar from copses under a faceless breadth of sky, and she said, as they turned into Esslemont Park lane: 'We have had one of our old walks to-day, Chillon!'

'You used to walk together long walks over in your own country,' said Mr. Wythan.

'Yes, Owain, we did, and my brother never knew me tired.'

'Never knew you confess to it,' said Chillon, as he swallowed the name on her lips.

'Walking was flying over there, brother.'

'Say once or twice in Wales, too,' Mr. Wythan begged of her.

'Wales reminded. Yes, ..Owain, I shall not forget Wales, Welsh people. Mr. Woodseer says they have the three-stringed harp in their breasts, and one string is always humming, whether you pull it or no.'

'That 's love of country! that 's their love of wild Wales, Carinthia.'

There was a quiet interrogation in Chillon's turn of the head at this fervent simpleton.

'I love them for that hum,' said she. 'It joins one in me.'

'Call to them any day, they are up, ready to march!'

'Oh, dear souls!' Carinthia said.

Her breath drew in.

The three were dumb. They saw Lord Fleetwood standing in the park gateway.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BETWEEN CARINTHIA AND HER LORD

The earl's easy grace of manner was a ceremonial mantle on him as he grasped the situation in a look. He bent with deferential familiarity to his countess, exactly toning the degree of difference which befitted a salute to the two gentlemen, amiable or hostile.

'There and back?' he said, and conveyed a compliment to Carinthia's pedestrian vigour in the wary smile which can be recalled for a snub.

She replied: 'We have walked the distance, my lord.'

Her smile was the braced one of an untired stepper.

'A cold wind for you.'

'We walked fast.'

She compelled him to take her in the plural, though he addressed her separately, but her tones had their music.

'Your brother, Captain Kirby-Levellier, I believe?'

'My brother is not of the army now, my lord.'

She waved her hand for Madge to conduct donkey and baby to the house. He noticed. He was unruffled.

The form of amenity expected from her, in relation to her brother, was not exhibited. She might perhaps be feeling herself awkward at introductions, and had to be excused.

Page 4155

‘I beg,’ he said, and motioned to Chillon the way of welcome into the park, saw the fixed figure, and passed over the unspoken refusal, with a remark to Mr. Wythan: ‘At Barlings, I presume?’

‘My tent is pitched there,’ was the answer.

‘Good-bye, my brother,’ said Carinthia.

Chillon folded his arms round her. ’God bless you, dear love. Let me see you soon.’ He murmured:

‘You can protect yourself.’

‘Fear nothing for me, dearest.’

She kissed her brother’s cheek. The strain of her spread fingers on his shoulder signified no dread at her being left behind.

Strangers observing their embrace would have vowed that the pair were brother and sister, and of a notable stock.

’I will walk with you to Croridge again when you send word you are willing to go; and so, good-bye, Owain,’ she said.

She gave her hand; frankly she pressed the Welshman’s, he not a whit behind her in frankness.

Fleetwood had a skimming sense of a drop upon a funny, whirly world. He kept from giddiness, though the whirl had lasted since he beheld the form of a wild forest girl, dancing, as it struck him now, over an abyss, on the plumed shoot of a stumpy tree.

Ay, and she danced at the ducal schloss;—she mounted his coach like a witch of the Alps up crags;—she was beside him pelting to the vale under a leaden Southwester;—she sat solitary by the fireside in the room of the inn.

Veil it. He consented to the veil he could not lift. He had not even power to try, and his heart thumped.

London’s Whitechapel Countess glided before him like a candle in the fog.

He had accused her as the creature destroying Romance. Was it gold in place of gilding, absolute upper human life that the ridiculous object at his heels over London proposed instead of delirious brilliancies, drunken gallops, poison-syrups,—puffs of a young man’s vapours?

There was Madge and the donkey basket-trap ahead on the road to the house, bearing proof of the veiled had-been: signification of a might-have-been. Why not a possible might-be? Still the might-be might be. Looking on this shaven earth and sky of March with the wrathful wind at work, we know that it is not the end: a day follows for the world. But looking on those blown black funeral sprays, and the wrinkled chill waters, and the stare of the Esslemont house-windows, it has an appearance of the last lines of our written volume: dead Finis. Not death; fouler, the man alive seeing himself stretched helpless for the altering of his deeds; a coffin carrying him; the fatal whiteheaded sacerdotal official intoning his aims on the march to front, the drear craped files of the liveried, salaried mourners over his failure, trooping at his heels.

Frontward was the small lake's grey water, rearward an avenue of limes.

But the man alive, if but an inch alive, can so take his life in his clutch, that he does alter, cleanse, recast his deeds:—it is known; priests proclaim it, philosophers admit it.

Page 4156

Can he lay his clutch on another's life, and wring out the tears shed, the stains of the bruises, recollection of the wrongs?

Contemplate the wounded creature as a woman. Then, what sort of woman is she? She was once under a fascination—ludicrously, painfully, intensely like a sort of tipsy poor puss, the trapped hare tossed to her serpent; and thoroughly reassured for a few caresses, quite at home, caged and at home; and all abloom with pretty ways, modest pranks, innocent fondlings. Gobbled, my dear!

It is the doom of the innocents, a natural fate. Smother the creature with kindness again, show we are a point in the scale above that old coiler snake—which broke no bones, bit not so very deep;—she will be, she ought to be, the woman she was. That is, if she was then sincere, a dose of kindness should operate happily to restore the honeymoony fancies, hopes, trusts, dreams, all back, as before the honeymoon showed the silver crook and shadowy hag's back of a decaying crescent. And true enough, the poor girl's young crescent of a honeymoon went down sickly-yellow rather early. It can be renewed. She really was at that time rather romantic. She became absurd. Romance is in her, nevertheless. She is a woman of mettle: she is probably expecting to be wooed. One makes a hash of yesterday's left dish, but she may know no better. 'Add a pickle,' as Chummy Potts used to say. The dish is rendered savoury by a slight expenditure of attentions, just a dab of intimated soft stuff.

'Pleasant to see you established here, if you find the place agreeable,' he said.

She was kissing her hand to her brother, all her eyes for him—or for the couple; and they were hidden by the park lodge before she replied: 'It is an admired, beautiful place.'

'I came,' said he, 'to have your assurance that it suits you.'

'I thank you, my lord.'

'"My lord" would like a short rest, Carinthia.'

She seemed placidly acquiescing. 'You have seen the boy?'

'Twice to-day. We were having a conversation just now.'

'We think him very intelligent.'

'Lady Arpington tells me you do the honours here excellently.'

'She is good to me.'

’Praises the mother’s management of the young one. John Edward: Edward for call-name. Madge boasts his power for sleeping.’

‘He gives little trouble.’

’And babes repay us! We learn from small things. Out of the mouth of babes wisdom? Well, their habits show the wisdom of the mother. A good mother! There’s no higher title. A lady of my acquaintance bids fair to win it, they say.’

Carinthia looked in simplicity, saw herself, and said ’If a mother may rear her boy till he must go to school, she is rewarded for all she does.’

‘Ah,’ said he, nodding over her mania of the perpetual suspicion. ‘Leddings, Queeney, the servants here, run smoothly?’

Page 4157

‘They do: they are happy in serving.’

’You see, we English are not such bad fellows when we’re known. The climate to-day, for example, is rather trying.’

‘I miss colours most in England,’ said Carinthia. ’I like the winds. Now and then we have a day to remember.’

’We ’re to be “the artist of the day,” Gower Woodseer says, and we get an attachment to the dreariest; we are to study “small variations of the commonplace”—dear me! But he may be right. The “sky of lead and scraped lead” over those lines, he points out; and it’s not a bad trick for reconciling us to gloomy English weather. You take lessons from him?’

‘I can always learn from him,’ said Carinthia.

Fleetwood depicted his plodding Gower at the tussle with account-books. She was earnest in sympathy; not awake to the comical; dull as the clouds, dull as the discourse. Yet he throbbed for being near her took impression of her figure, the play of her features, the carriage of her body.

He was shut from her eyes. The clear brown eyes gave exchange of looks; less of admission than her honest maid’s.

Madge and the miracle infant awaited them on the terrace. For so foreign did the mother make herself to him, that the appearance of the child, their own child, here between them, was next to miraculous; and the mother, who might well have been the most astonished, had transparently not an idea beyond the verified palpable lump of young life she lifted in her arms out of the arms of Madge, maternally at home with its presence on earth.

Demonstrably a fine specimen, a promising youngster. The father was allowed to inspect him. This was his heir: a little fellow of smiles, features, puckered brows of inquiry; seeming a thing made already, and active on his own account.

‘Do people see likenesses?’ he asked.

‘Some do,’ said the mother.

‘You?’

She was constrained to give answer. ’There is a likeness to my father, I have thought.’

There’s a dotage of idolatrous daughters, he could have retorted; and his gaze was a polite offer to humdrum reconcilement, if it pleased her.

She sent the child up the steps.

‘Do you come in, my lord?’

‘The house is yours, my lady.’

‘I cannot feel it mine.’

‘You are the mistress to invite or exclude.’

’I am ready to go in a few hours for a small income of money, for my child and me.’

‘—Our child.’

‘Yes.’

‘It is our child.’

‘It is.’

‘Any sum you choose to name. But where would you live?’

‘Near my brother I would live.’

’Three thousand a year for pin-money, or more, are at your disposal. Stay here, I beg. You have only to notify your wants. And we’ll talk familiarly now, as we’re together. Can I be of aid to your brother? Tell me, pray. I am disposed in every way to subscribe to your wishes. Pray, speak, speak out.’

Page 4158

So the earl said. He had to force his familiar tone against the rebuke of her grandeur of stature; and he was for inducing her to deliver her mind, that the mountain girl's feebleness in speech might reinstate him. She rejoined unhesitatingly: 'My brother would not accept aid from you, my lord. I will take no money more than for my needs.'

'You spoke of certain sums down in Wales.'

'I did then.' Her voice was dead.

'Ah! You must be feeling the cold North-wind here.'

'I do not. You may feel the cold, my lord. Will you enter the house?'

'Do you invite me?'

'The house is your own.'

'Will the mistress of the house honour me so far?'

'I am not the mistress of the house, my lord.'

'You refuse, Carinthia?'

'I would keep from using those words. I have no right to refuse the entry of the house to you.'

'If I come in?'

'I guard my rooms.'

She had been awake, then, to the thrusting and parrying behind masked language.

'Good. You are quite decided, I may suppose.'

'I will leave them when I have a little money, or when I know of how I may earn some.'

'The Countess of Fleetwood earning a little money?'

'I can put aside your title, my lord.'

'No, you can't put it aside while the man with the title lives, not even if you're running off in earnest, under a dozen Welsh names. Why should you desire to do it? The title entitles you to the command of half my possessions. As to the house; don't be alarmed; you will not have to guard your rooms. The extraordinary wild animal you—the impression may have been produced; I see, I see. If I were in the house, I should not

be rageing at your doors; and it is not my intention to enter the house. That is, not by right of ownership. You have my word.'

He bowed to her, and walked to the stables.

She had the art of extracting his word from him. The word given, she went off with it, disengaged mistress of Esslemont. And she might have the place for residence, but a decent courtesy required that she should remain at the portico until he was out of sight. She was the first out of sight, rather insolently.

She returned him without comment the spell he had cast on her, and he was left to estimate the value of a dirited piece of metal not in the currency, stamped false coin. An odd sense of impoverishment chilled him. Chilly weather was afflicting the whole country, he was reminded, and he paced about hurriedly until his horses were in the shafts. After all, his driving away would be much more expected of him than a stay at the house where the Whitechapel Countess resided, chill, dry, talking the language of early Exercises in English, suitable to her Welshmen. Did she 'Owain' them every one?

As he whipped along the drive and left that glassy stare of Esslemont behind him, there came a slap of a reflection:—here, on the box of this coach, the bride just bursting her sheath sat, and was like warm wax to take impressions. She was like hard stone to retain them, pretty evidently. Like women the world over, she thinks only of her side of the case. Men disdain to plead theirs. Now money is offered her, she declines it. Formerly, she made it the principal subject of her conversation.

Page 4159

Turn the mind to something brighter. Fleetwood strung himself to do so, and became agitated by the question whether the bride sat to left or to right of him when the South-wester blew-a wind altogether preferable to the chill North-east. Women, when they are no longer warm, are colder than the deadliest catarrh wind scything across these islands. Of course she sat to left of him. In the line of the main road, he remembered a look he dropped on her, a look over his left shoulder.

She never had a wooing: she wanted it, had a kind of right to it, or the show of it. How to begin? But was she worth an effort? Turn to something brighter. Religion is the one refuge from women, Feltre says: his Roman Catholic recipe. The old shoemaker, Mr. Woodseer, hauls women into his religion, and purifies them by the process,—fancies he does. He gets them to wear an air. Old Gower, too, has his Religion of Nature, with free admission for women, whom he worships in similes, running away from them, leering sheepishly. No, Feltre's' rigid monastic system is the sole haven. And what a world, where we have no safety except in renouncing it! The two sexes created to devour one another must abjure their sex before they gain 'The Peace,' as Feltre says, impressively, if absurdly. He will end a monk if he has the courage of his logic. A queer spectacle—an English nobleman a shaven monk!

Fleetwood shuddered. We are twisted face about to discover our being saved by women from that horror—the joining the ranks of the nasal friars. By what women? Bacchante, clearly, if the wife we have is a North-easter to wither us, blood, bone, and soul.

He was hungry; he waxed furious with the woman who had flung him out upon the roads. He was thirsty as well. The brightest something to refresh his thoughts grew and glowed in the form of a shiny table, bearing tasty dishes, old wines; at an inn or anywhere. But, out of London, an English inn to furnish the dishes and the wines for a civilized and self-respecting man is hard to seek, as difficult to find as a perfect skeleton of an extinct species. The earl's breast howled derision of his pursuit when he drew up at the; sign of the Royal Sovereign, in the dusky hour, and handed himself desperately to Mrs. Rundles' mercy.

He could not wait for a dinner, so his eating was cold meat. Warned by a sip, that his drinking, if he drank, was to be an excursion in chemical acids, the virtues of an abstainer served for his consolation. Tolerant of tobacco, although he did not smoke, he fronted the fire, envying Gower Woodseer the contemplative pipe, which for half a dozen puffs wafted him to bracing deserts, or primaeval forests, or old highways with the swallow thoughts above him, down the Past, into the Future. A pipe is pleasant dreams at command. A pipe is the concrete form of philosophy. Why, then, a pipe is the alternative of a friar's frock for an escape from women. But if one does not smoke! . . . Here and there a man is visibly in the eyes of all men cursed: let him be blest by Fortune; let him be handsome, healthy, wealthy, courted, he is cursed.

Page 4160

Fleetwood lay that night beneath the roof of the Royal Sovereign. Sleep is life's legitimate mate. It will treat us at times as the faithless wife, who becomes a harrying beast, behaves to her lord. He had no sleep. Having put out his candle, an idea took hold of him, and he jumped up to light it again and verify the idea that this room . . . He left the bed and strode round it, going in the guise of an urgent somnambulist, or ghost bearing burden of an imperfectly remembered mission. This was the room.

Reason and cold together overcame his illogical scruples to lie down on that bed soliciting the sleep desired. He lay and groaned, lay and rolled. All night the Naval Monarch with the loose cheeks and jelly smile of the swinging sign-board creaked. Flaws of the North-easter swung and banged him. He creaked high, in complaint,—low, in some partial contentment. There was piping of his boatswain, shrill piping—shrieks of the whistle. How many nights had that most ill-fated of brides lain listening to the idiotic uproar! It excused a touch of craziness. But how many? Not one, not two, ten, twenty:—count, count to the exact number of nights the unhappy girl must have heard those mad colloquies of the hurricane boatswain and the chirpy king. By heaven! Whitechapel, after one night of it, beckons as a haven of grace.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A DIP INTO THE SPRING'S WATERS

The night Lord Fleetwood had passed cured him of the wound Carinthia dealt, with her blunt, defensive phrase and her Welshman. Seated on his coach-box, he turned for a look the back way leading to Esslemont, and saw rosed crag and mountain forest rather than the soft undulations of parkland pushing green meadows or brown copse up the slopes under his eye. She had never been courted: she deserved a siege. She was a daughter of the racy highlands. And she, who could say to her husband, 'I guard my rooms,' without sign of the stage-face of scorn or defiance or flinging of the glove, she would have to be captured by siege, it was clear. She wore an aspect of the confident fortress, which neither challenges nor cries to treat, but commands respect. How did she accomplish this miracle of commanding respect after such a string of somersaults before the London world?

He had to drive North-westward: his word was pledged to one of his donkey Ixionides —Abrane, he recollected—to be a witness at some contemptible exhibition of the fellow's muscular skill: a match to punt against a Thames waterman: this time. Odd how it should come about that the giving of his word forced him now to drive away from the woman once causing him to curse his luck as the prisoner of his word! However, there was to be an end of it soon—a change; change as remarkable as Harry Monmouth's at the touching of his crown. Though in these days, in our jog-trot Old England, half a step on the road to greatness is the utmost

Page 4161

we can hop; and all England jeers at the man attempting it. He caps himself with this or that one of their titles. For it is not the popular thing among Englishmen. Their hero, when they have done their fighting, is the wealthy patron of Sport. What sort of creatures are his comrades? But he cannot have comrades unless he is on the level of them. Yet let him be never so high above them, they charge him and point him as a piece of cannon; assenting to the flatteries they puff into him, he is their engine. 'The idol of the hour is the mob's wooden puppet, and the doing of the popular thing seed of no harvest,' Gower Woodseer says, moderately well, snuffing incense of his happy delivery. Not to be the idol, to have an aim of our own, there lies the truer pride, if we intend respect of ourselves.

The Mr. Pulpit young men have in them, until their habits have fretted him out, was directing Lord Fleetwood's meditations upon the errors of the general man, as a cover for lateral references to his hitherto erratic career: not much worse than a swerving from the right line, which now seemed the desirable road for him, and had previously seemed so stale, so repulsive. He was, of course, only half-conscious of his pulpitizing; he fancied the serious vein of his thoughts attributable to a tumbled night. Nevertheless, he had the question whether that woman—poor girl!—was influencing his thoughts. For in a moment, the very word 'respect' pitched him upon her character; to see it a character that emerged beneath obstacles, and overcame ridicule, won suffrages, won a reluctant husband's admiration, pricked him from distaste to what might really be taste for her companionship, or something more alarming to contemplate in the possibilities,—thirst for it. He was driving away, and he longed to turn back. He did respect her character: a character angular as her features were, and similarly harmonious, splendid in action.

Respect seems a coolish form of tribute from a man who admires. He had to say that he did not vastly respect beautiful women. Have they all the poetry? Know them well, and where is it?

The pupil of Gower Woodseer asked himself to specify the poetry of woman. She is weak and inferior, but she has it; civilized men acknowledge it; and it is independent, or may be beside her gift of beauty. She has more of it than we have. Then name it.

Well, the flowers of the field are frail things. Pluck one, and you have in your hand the frailest of things. But reach through the charm of colour and the tale of its beneficence in frailty to the poetry of the flower, and secret of the myriad stars will fail to tell you more than does that poetry of your little flower. Lord Feltre, at the heels of St. Francis, agrees in that.

Page 4162

Well, then, much so with the flowers of the two hands and feet. We do homage to those ungathered, and reserve our supremacy; the gathered, no longer courted, are the test of men. When the embraced woman breathes respect into us, she wings a beast. We have from her the poetry of the tasted life; excelling any garden-gate or threshold lyrics called forth by purest early bloom. Respect for her person, for her bearing, for her character that is in the sum a beauty plastic to the civilized young man's needs and cravings, as queenly physical loveliness has never so fully been to him along the walks of life, and as ideal worships cannot be for our nerving contentment. She brings us to the union of body and soul; as good as to say, earth and heaven. Secret of all human aspirations, the ripeness of the creeds, is there; and the passion for the woman desired has no poetry equalling that of the embraced respected woman.

Something of this went reeling through Fleetwood; positively to this end; accompanied the while with flashes of Carinthia, her figure across the varied scenes. Ridicule vanished. Could it ever have existed? If London had witnessed the scene down in Wales, London never again would laugh at the Whitechapel Countess.

He laughed amicably at himself for the citizen sobriety of these views, on the part of a nobleman whose airy pleasure it had been to flout your sober citizens, with their toad-at-the-hop notions, their walled conceptions, their drab propriety; and felt a petted familiar within him dub all pulpitizing, poetizing drivellers with one of those detested titles, invented by the English as a corrective of their maladies or the excesses of their higher moods. But, reflection telling him that he had done injury to Carinthia—had inflicted the sorest of the wounds a young woman a new bride can endure, he nodded acquiescence to the charge of misbehaviour, and muzzled the cynic.

As a consequence, the truisms flooded him and he lost his guard against our native prosiness. Must we be prosy if we are profoundly, uncynically sincere? Do but listen to the stuff we are maundering! Extracts of poetry, if one could hit upon the right, would serve for a relief and a lift when we are in this ditch of the serious vein. Gower Woodseer would have any number handy to spout. Or Felter:—your convinced and fervent Catholic has quotations of images and Latin hymns to his Madonna or one of his Catherines, by the dozen, to suit an enthusiastic fit of the worship of some fair woman, and elude the prosy in commending her. Feltre is enviable there. As he says, it is natural to worship, and only the Catholics can prostrate themselves with dignity. That is matter for thought. Stir us to the depths, it will be found that we are poor soupy stuff. For estimable language, and the preservation of self-respect in prostration, we want ritual, ceremonial elevation of the visible object for the soul's adoring through the eye. So may we escape our foul or empty selves.

Page 4163

Lord Feltre seemed to Fleetwood at the moment a more serviceable friend than Gower Woodseer preaching 'Nature'—an abstraction, not inspiring to the devout poetic or giving us the tongue above our native prosy. He was raised and refreshed by recollected lines of a Gregorian chant he and Feltre had heard together under the roof of that Alpine monastery.

The Dame collapses. There is little doubt of her having the world to back her in protest against all fine filmy work of the exploration of a young man's intricacies or cavities. Let her not forget the fact she has frequently impressed upon us, that he was 'the very wealthiest nobleman of his time,' instructive to touch inside as well as out. He had his share of brains, too. And also she should be mindful of an alteration of English taste likely of occurrence in the remote posterity she vows she is for addressing after she has exhausted our present hungry generation. The posterity signified will, it is calculable, it is next to certain, have studied a developed human nature so far as to know the composition of it a not unequal mixture of the philosophic and the romantic, and that credible realism is to be produced solely by an involvement of those two elements. Or else, she may be sure, her story once out of the mouth, goes off dead as the spirits of a vapour that has performed the stroke of energy. She holds a surprising event in the history of 'the wealthiest nobleman of his time,' and she would launch it upon readers unprepared, with the reference to our mysterious and unfathomable nature for an explanation of the stunning crack on the skull.

This may do now. It will not do ten centuries hence. For the English, too, are a changeable people in the sight of ulterior Time.

One of the good pieces of work Lord Fleetwood could suppose he had performed was recalled to him near the turning to his mews by the handsome Piccadilly fruit-shop. He jumped to the pavement, merely to gratify. Sarah Winch with a word of Madge; and being emotional just then, he spoke of Lady Fleetwood's attachment to Madge; and he looked at Sarah straight, he dropped his voice: 'She said, you remember, you were sisters to her.'

Sarah remembered that he had spoken of it before. Two brilliant drops from the deepest of woman's ready well stood in her eyes.

He carried the light of them away. They were such pure jewels of tribute to the Carinthia now seen by him as worshipping souls of devotees offer to their Madonna for her most glorious adornment.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE RED WARNING FROM A SON OF VAPOUR

Page 4164

Desiring loneliness or else Lord Feltre's company, Fleetwood had to grant a deferred audience at home to various tradesmen, absurdly fussy about having the house of his leased estate of Calesford furnished complete and habitable on the very day stipulated by his peremptory orders that the place should be both habitable and hospitable. They were right, they were excused; grand entertainments of London had been projected, and he fell into the weariful business with them, thinking of Henrietta's insatiable appetite for the pleasures. He had taken the lease of this burdensome Calesford, at an eight-miles' drive from the Northwest of town, to gratify the devouring woman's taste which was, to have all the luxuries of the town in a framework of country scenery.

Gower Woodseer and he were dining together in the evening. The circumstance was just endurable, but Gower would play the secretary, and doggedly subjected him to hear a statement of the woeful plight of Countess Livia's affairs. Gower, commissioned to examine them, remarked: 'If we have all the figures!'

'If we could stop the bleeding!' Fleetwood replied. 'Come to the Opera to-night; I promised. I promised Abrane for to-morrow. There's no end to it. This gambling mania's a flux. Not one of them except your old enemy, Corby, keeps clear of it; and they're at him for subsidies, as they are at me, and would be at you or any passenger on the suspected of a purse. Corby shines among them.'

That was heavy judgement enough, Gower thought. No allusion to Esslemont ensued. The earl ate sparely, and silently for the most part.

He was warmed a little at the Opera by hearing Henrietta's honest raptures over her Columelli in the Pirata. But Lord Brailstone sat behind her, and their exchange of ecstasies upon the tattered pathos of

> E il mio tradito amor,

was not moderately offensive.

His countenance in Henrietta's presence had to be studied and interpreted by Livia. Why did it darken? The demurest of fuliginous intriguers argued that Brail stone was but doing the spiriting required of him, and would have to pay the penalty unrewarded, let him Italianize as much as he pleased. Not many months longer, and there would be the bit of an outburst, the whiff of scandal, perhaps a shot, and the rupture of an improvident alliance, followed by Henrietta's free hand to the moody young earl, who would then have possession of the only woman he could ever love: and at no cost. Jealousy of a man like Brailstone, however infatuated the man, was too foolish. He must perceive how matters were tending? The die-away acid eyeballs-at-the-ceiling of a pair of fanatics per la musica might irritate a husband, but the lover should read and know. Giddy as the beautiful creature deprived of her natural aliment seems in her excuseable hunger for it, she has learnt her lesson, she is not a reeling libertine.

Page 4165

Brailstone peered through his eyelashes at the same shadow of a frown where no frown sat on his friend's brows. Displeasure was manifest, and why? Fleetwood had given him the dispossessing shrug of the man out of the run, and the hint of the tip for winning, with the aid of operatic arias; and though he was in Fleetwood's books ever since the prize-fight, neither Fleetwood nor the husband nor any skittishness of a timorous wife could stop the pursuer bent to capture the fairest and most inflaming woman of her day.

'I prefer your stage Columelli,' Fleetwood said.

'I come from exile!' said Henrietta; and her plea in excuse of ecstatics wrote her down as confessedly treasonable to the place quitted.

Ambrose Mallard entered the box, beholding only his goddess Livia. Their eyebrows and inaudible lips conversed eloquently. He retired like a trumped card on the appearance of M. de St. Ombre. The courtly Frenchman won the ladies to join him in whipping the cream of the world for five minutes, and passed out before his flavour was exhausted. Brailstone took his lesson and departed, to spy at them from other boxes and heave an inflated shirt-front. Young Cressett, the bottle of effervescence, dashed in, and for him Livia's face was motherly. He rattled a tale of the highway robbery of Sir Meeson Corby on one of his Yorkshire moors. The picture of the little baronet arose upon the narration, and it amused. Chumley Potts came to 'confirm every item,' as he said. 'Plucked Corby clean. Pistol at his head. Quite old style. Time, ten P.M. Suspects Great Britain, King, Lords and Commons, and buttons twenty times tighter. Brosey Mallard down on him for a few fighting men. Perfect answer to Brosey.'

'Mr. Mallard did not mention the robbery,' Henrietta remarked.

'Feared to shock: Corby such a favoured swain,' Potts accounted for the omission.

'Brosey spilling last night?' Fleetwood asked.

'At the palazzo, we were,' said Potts. 'Luck pretty fair first off. Brosey did his trick, and away and away and away went he! More old Brosey wins, the wiser he gets. I stayed.' He swung to Gower: 'Don't drink dry Sillery after two A.M. You read me?'

'Egyptian, but decipherable,' said Gower.

The rising of the curtain drew his habitual groan from Potts, and he fled to collogue with the goodly number of honest fellows in the house of music who detested 'squallery.' Most of these afflicted pilgrims to the London conservatory were engaged upon the business of the Goddess richly inspiring the Heliconian choir, but rendering the fountain-waters heady. Here they had to be, if they would enjoy the spectacle of London's biggest and choicest bouquet: and in them, too, there was an unattached air during

Potts' cooling discourse of turf and tables, except when he tossed them a morsel of tragedy, or the latest joke, not yet past the full gallop on its course. Their sparkle was transient; woman had them fast. Compelled to think of them as not serious members of our group, he assisted at the crush-room exit, and the happy riddance of the beautiful cousins dedicated to the merry London midnights' further pastures.

Page 4166

Fleetwood's word was extracted, that he would visit the 'palazzo' within a couple of hours.

Potts exclaimed: 'Good. You promise. Hang me, if I don't think it 's the only certain thing a man can depend upon in this world.'

He left the earl and Gower Woodseer to their lunatic talk. He still had his ideas about the association of the pair. 'Hard-headed player of his own game, that Woodseer, spite of his Mumbo-Jumbo-oracle kind of talk.'

Mallard's turn of luck downward to the deadly drop had come under Potts' first inspection of the table. Admiring his friend's audacity, deploring his rashness, reproving his persistency, Potts allowed his verdict to go by results; for it was clear that Mallard and Fortune were in opposition. Something like real awe of the tremendous encounter kept him from a plunge or a bet. Mallard had got the vertigo, he reported the gambler's launch on dementedness to the earl. Gower's less experienced optics perceived it. The plainly doomed duellist with the insensible Black Goddess offered her all the advantages of the Immortals challenged by flesh. His effort to smile was a line cut awry in wood; his big eyes were those of a cat for sociability; he looked cursed, and still he wore the smile. In this condition, the gambler runs to emptiness of everything he has, his money, his heart, his brains, like a coal-truck on the incline of the rails to a collier.

Mallard applied to the earl for a loan of fifty guineas. He had them and lost them, and he came, not begging, blustering for a second supply; quite in the wrong tone, Potts knew. Fleetwood said: 'Back it with pistols, Brosey'; and, as Potts related subsequently, 'Old Brosey had the look of a staked horse.'

Fortune and he having now closed the struggle, perforce of his total disarmament, he regained the wits we forfeit when we engage her. He said to his friend Chummy: 'Abrane tomorrow? Ah, yes, punts a Thames waterman. Start of—how many yards? Sunbury-Walton: good reach. Course of two miles: Braney in good training. Straight business? I mayn't be there. But you, Chummy, you mind, old Chums, all cases of the kind, safest back the professional. Unless—you understand!'

Fleetwood could not persuade Gower to join the party. The philosopher's pretext of much occupation masked a bashfully sentimental dislike of the flooding of quiet country places by the city's hordes. 'You're right, right,' said Fleetwood, in sympathy, resigned to the prospect of despising his associates without a handy helper. He named Esslemont once, shot up a look at the sky, and glanced it Eastward.

Three coaches were bound for Sunbury from a common starting-point at nine of the morning. Lord Fleetwood, Lord Brailstone, and Lord Simon Pitscrew were the whips. Two hours in advance of them, the earl's famous purveyors of picnic feasts bowled along to pitch the riverside tent and spread the tables. Our upper and lower London

world reported the earl as out on another of his expeditions: and, say what we will, we must think kindly of a wealthy nobleman ever to the front to enliven the town's dusty eyes and increase Old England's reputation for pre-eminence in the Sports.

Page 4167

He is the husband of the Whitechapel Countess—got himself into that mess; but whatever he does, he puts the stamp of style on it. He and the thing he sets his hand to, they're neat, they're finished, they're fitted to trot together, and they've a shining polish, natural, like a lily of the fields; or say Nature and Art, like the coat of a thoroughbred led into the paddock by his groom, if you're of that mind.

Present at the start in Piccadilly, Gower took note of Lord Fleetwood's military promptitude to do the work he had no taste for, and envied the self-compression which could assume so pleasant an air. He heard here and there crisp comments on his lordship's coach and horses and personal smartness; the word 'style,' which reflects handsomely on the connoisseur conferring it, and the question whether one of the ladies up there was the countess. His task of unearthing and disentangling the monetary affairs of 'one of the ladies' compelled the wish to belong to the party soon to be towering out of the grasp of bricks, and delightfully gay, spirited, quick for fun. A fellow, he thought, may brood upon Nature, but the real children of Nature—or she loves them best—are those who have the careless chatter, the ready laugh, bright welcome for a holiday. In catching the hour, we are surely the bloom of the hour? Why, yes, and no need to lose the rosy wisdom of the children when we wrap ourselves in the patched old cloak of the man's.

On he went to his conclusions; but the Dame will have none of them, though here was a creature bent on masonry-work in his act of thinking, to build a traveller's-rest for thinkers behind him; while the volatile were simply breaking their bubbles.

He was discontented all day, both with himself and the sentences he coined. A small street-boy at his run along the pavement nowhither, distanced him altogether in the race for the great Secret; precipitating the thought, that the conscious are too heavily handicapped. The unburdened unconscious win the goal. Ay, but they leave no legacy. So we must fret and stew, and look into ourselves, and seize the brute and scourge him, just to make one serviceable step forward: that is, utter a single sentence worth the pondering for guidance.

Gower imagined the fun upon middle Thames: the vulcan face of Captain Abrane; the cries of his backers, the smiles of the ladies, Lord Fleetwood's happy style in the teeth of tattlean Aurora's chariot for overriding it. One might hope, might almost see, that he was coming to his better senses on a certain subject. As for style overriding the worst of indignities, has not Scotia given her poet to the slack dependant of the gallows-tree, who so rantingly played his jig and wheeled it round in the shadow of that institution? Style was his, he hit on the right style to top the situation, and perpetually will he slip his head out of the noose to dance the poet's verse.

In fact, style is the mantle of greatness; and say that the greatness is beyond our reach, we may at least pray to have the mantle.

Page 4168

Strangest of fancies, most unphilosophically, Gower conceived a woman's love as that which would bestow the gift upon a man so bare of it as he. Where was the woman? He embraced the idea of the sex, and found it resolving to a form of one. He stood humbly before the one, and she waned into swarms of her sisters. So did she charge him with the loving of her sex, not her. And could it be denied, if he wanted a woman's love just to give him a style? No, not that, but to make him feel proud of himself. That was the heart's way of telling him a secret in owning to a weakness. Within it the one he had thought of forthwith obtained her lodgement. He discovered this truth, in this roundabout way, and knew it a truth by the warm fireside glow the contemplation of her cast over him.

Dining alone, as he usually had to do, he was astonished to see the earl enter his room.

'Ah, you always make the right choice!' Fleetwood said, and requested him to come to the library when he had done eating.

Gower imagined an accident. A metallic ring was in the earl's voice.

One further mouthful finished dinner, for Gower was anxious concerning the ladies. He joined the earl and asked.

'Safe. Oh yes. We managed to keep it from them,' said Fleetwood. 'Nothing particular, perhaps you'll think. Poor devil of a fellow! Father and mother alive, too! He did it out of hearing, that 'a one merit. Mallard: Ambrose Mallard. He has blown his brains out.'

Seated plunged in the armchair, with stretched legs and eyes at the black fire-grate, Fleetwood told of the gathering under the tent, and Mallard seen, seen drinking champagne; Mallard no longer seen, not missed.

'He killed himself three fields off. He must have been careful to deaden the sound. Small pocket-pistol hardly big enough to—but anything serves. Couple of brats came running up to Chummy Potts:—"Gentleman's body bloody in a ditch." Chummy came to me, and we went. Clean dead;—in the mouth, pointed up; hole through the top of the skull. We're crockery! crockery! I had to keep Chummy standing. I couldn't bring him back to our party. We got help at a farm; the body lies there. And that's not the worst. We found a letter to me in his pocket pencilled his last five minutes. I don't see what he could have done except to go. I can't tell you more. I had to keep my face, rowing and driving back. "But where is Mr. Potts? Where can Mr. Mallard be?" Queer sensation, to hear the ladies ask! Give me your hand.'

The earl squeezed Gower's hand an instant; and it was an act unknown for him to touch or bear a touch; it said a great deal.

Page 4169

Late at night he mounted to Gower's room. The funeral of the day's impressions had not been skaken off. He kicked at it and sunk under it as his talk rambled. 'Add five thousand,' he commented, on the spread of Livia's papers over the table. 'I've been having an hour with her. Two thousand more, she says. Better multiply by two and a half for a woman's confession. We have to trust to her for some of the debts of honour. See her in the morning. No one masters her but you. Mind, the first to be clear of must be St. Ombre. I like the fellow; but these Frenchmen—they don't spare women. Ambrose,'—the earl's eyelids quivered. 'Jealousy fired that shot. Quite groundless. She 's cool as a marble Venus, as you said. Go straight from her house to Esslemont. I don't plead a case. Make the best account you can of it. Say—you may say my eyes are opened. I respect her. If you think that says little, say more. It can't mean more. Whatever the Countess of Fleetwood may think due to her, let her name it. Say my view of life, way of life, everything in me, has changed. I shall follow you. I don't expect to march over the ground. She has a heap to forgive. Her father owns or boasts, in that book of his Rose Mackrell lent me, he never forgave an injury.'

Gower helped the quotation, rubbing his hands over it, for cover of his glee at the words he had been hearing. 'Never forgave an injury without a return blow for it. The blow forgives. Good for the enemy to get it. He called his hearty old Pagan custom "an action of the lungs" with him. And it's not in nature for injuries to digest in us. They poison the blood, if we try. But then, there's a manner of hitting back. It is not to go an inch beyond the exact measure, Captain Kirby warns us.'

Fleetwood sighed down to a low groan.

'Lord Feltre would have an answer for you. She's a wife; and a wife hitting back is not a pleasant—well, petticoats make the difference. If she's for amends, she shall exact them; and she may be hard to satisfy, she shall have her full revenge. Call it by any other term you like. I did her a wrong. I don't defend myself; it 's not yet in the Law Courts. I beg to wipe it out, rectify it—choose your phrase—to the very fullest. I look for the alliance with her to . . .'

He sprang up and traversed the room: 'We're all guilty of mistakes at starting: I speak of men. Women are protected; and if they're not, there's the convent for them, Feltre says. But a man has to live it on before the world; and this life, with these flies of fellows . . . I fell into it in some way. Absolutely like the first bird I shot as a youngster, and stood over the battered head and bloody feathers, wondering! There was Ambrose Mallard—the same splintered bones—blood—come to his end; and for a woman; that woman the lady bearing the title of half-mother to me. God help me! What are my sins? She feels nothing, or about as much as the mortuary paragraph of the newspapers, for the dead man; and I have Ambrose Mallard's look at her and St. Ombre talking together, before he left the tent to cross the fields. Borrow, beg, or steal for money to play for her! and not a glimpse of the winning post.

Page 4170

St. Ombre 's a cool player; that 's at the bottom of the story. He's cool because play doesn't bite him, as it did Ambrose. I should say the other passion has never bitten him. And he's alive and presentable; Ambrose under a sheet, with Chummy Potts to watch. Chummy cried like a brat in the street for his lost mammy. I left him crying and sobbing. They have their feelings, these "children of vapour," as you call them. But how did I fall into the line with a set I despised? She had my opinion of her gamblers, and retorted that young Cressett's turn for the fling is my doing. I can't swear it's not. There's one of my sins. What's to wipe them out! She has a tender feeling for the boy; confessed she wanted governing. Why; she's young, in a way. She has that particular vice of play. She might be managed. Here's a lesson for her! Don't you think she might? The right man,—the man she can respect, fancy incorruptible! He must let her see he has an eye for tricks. She's not responsible for—his mad passion was the cause, cause of everything he did. The kind of woman to send the shaft. You called her "Diana seated." You said, "She doesn't hunt, she sits and lets fly her arrow." Well, she showed feeling for young Cressett, and her hit at me was an answer. It struck me on the mouth. But she's an eternal anxiety. A man she respects! A man to govern her!'

Fleetwood hurried his paces. 'I couldn't have allowed poor Ambrose. Besides, he had not a chance—never had in anything. It wants a head, wants the man who can say no to her. "The Reveller's Aurora," you called her. She has her beauty, yes. She respects you. I should be relieved—a load off me! Tell her, all debts paid; fifty thousand invested, in her name and her husband's. Tell her, speak it, there's my consent—if only the man to govern her! She has it from me, but repeat it, as from me. That sum and her portion would make a fair income for the two. Relieved? By heaven, what a relief! Go early. Coach to Esslemont at eleven. Do my work there. I haven't to repeat my directions. I shall present myself two days after. I wish Lady Fleetwood to do the part of hostess at Calesford. Tell her I depute you to kiss my son for me. Now I leave you. Good-night. I shan't sleep. I remember your saying, "bad visions come under the eyelids." I shall keep mine open and read—read her father's book of the Maxims; I generally find two or three at a dip to stimulate. No wonder she venerates him. That sort of progenitor is your "permanent aristocracy." Hard enemy. She must have some of her mother in her, too. Abuse me to her, admit the justice of reproaches, but say, reason, good feeling—I needn't grind at it. Say I respect her. Advise her to swallow the injury—not intended for insult. I don't believe anything higher than respect can be offered to a woman. No defence of me to her, but I'll tell you, that when I undertook to keep my word with her, I plainly said—never mind; good-night. If we meet in the morning, let this business rest until it 's done. I must drive to help poor Chums and see about the Inquest.'

Page 4171

Fleetwood nodded from the doorway. Gower was left with humming ears.

CHAPTER XL

RECORD OF MINOR INCIDENTS

They went to their beds doomed to lie and roam as the solitaries of a sleepless night. They met next day like a couple emerging from sirocco deserts, indisposed for conversation or even short companionship, much of the night's dry turmoil in their heads. Each would have preferred the sight of an enemy; and it was hardly concealed by them, for they inclined to regard one another as the author of their infernal passage through the drear night's wilderness.

Fleetwood was the civiller; his immediate prospective duties being clear, however abhorrent. But he had inflicted a monstrous disturbance on the man he meant in his rash, decisive way to elevate, if not benefit. Gower's imagination, foreign to his desires and his projects, was playing juggler's tricks with him, dramatizing upon hypotheses, which mounted in stages and could pretend to be soberly conceivable, assuming that the earl's wild hints overnight were a credible basis. He transported himself to his first view of the Countess Livia, the fountain of similes born of his prostrate adoration, close upon the invasion and capture of him by the combined liqueurs in the giddy Batlen lights; and joining the Arabian magic in his breast at the time with the more magical reality now proposed as a sequel to it, he entered the land where dreams confess they are outstripped by revelations.

Yet it startled him to hear the earl say: 'You'll get audience at ten; I've arranged; make the most of the situation to her. I refuse to help. I foresee it 's the only way of solving this precious puzzle. You do me and every one of us a service past paying. Not a man of her set worth. . . . She—but you'll stop it; no one else can. Of course, you've had your breakfast. Off, and walk yourself into a talkative mood, as you tell me you do.'

'One of the things I do when I've nobody to hear,' said Gower, speculating whether the black sprite in this young nobleman was for sending him as a rod to scourge the lady: an ingenious device, that smelt of mediaeval Courts and tickled his humour.

'Will she listen?' he said gravely.

'She will listen; she has not to learn you admire. You admit she has helped to trim and polish, and the rest. She declares you're incorruptible. There's the ground open. I fling no single sovereign more into that quicksand, and I want not one word further on the subject. I follow you to Esslemont. Pray, go.'

Fleetwood pushed into the hall. A footman was ordered to pack and deposit Mr. Woodseer's portmanteau at the coach-office.

‘The principal point is to make sure we have all the obligations,’ Gower said.

‘You know the principal point,’ said the earl. ‘Relieve me.’

He faced to the opening street door. Lord Feltre stood in the framing of it—a welcome sight. The ‘monastic man of fashion,’ of Gower’s phrase for him, entered, crooning condolences, with a stretched waxen hand for his friend, a partial nod for Nature’s worshipper—inefficient at any serious issue of our human affairs, as the earl would now discover.

Page 4172

Gower left the two young noblemen to their greetings. Happily for him, philosophy, in the present instance, after a round of profundities, turned her lantern upon the comic aspect of his errand. Considering the Countess Livia, and himself, and the tyrant, who benevolently and providentially, or sardonically, hurled them to their interview, the situation was comic, certainly, in the sense of its being an illumination of this life's odd developments. For thus had things come about, that if it were possible even to think of the lady's condescending, he, thanks to the fair one he would see before evening, was armed and proof against his old infatuation or any renewal of it. And he had been taught to read through the beautiful twilighted woman, as if she were burnt paper held at the fire consuming her. His hopes hung elsewhere. Nevertheless, an intellectual demon-imp very lively in his head urged him to speculate on such a contest between them, and weigh the engaging forces. Difficulties were perceived, the scornful laughter on her side was plainly heard; but his feeling of savage mastery, far from beaten down, swelled so as to become irritable for the trial; and when he was near her house he held a review of every personal disadvantage he could summon, incited by an array of limping deficiencies that flattered their arrogant leader with ideas of the power he had in spite of them.

In fact, his emancipation from sentiment inspired the genial mood to tease. Women, having to encounter a male adept at the weapon for the purpose, must be either voluble or supportingly proud to keep the skin from shrinking: which is a commencement of the retrogression; and that has frequently been the beginning of a rout. Now the Countess Livia was a lady of queenly pose and the servitorial conventional speech likely at a push to prove beggarly. When once on a common platform with a man of agile tongue instigated by his intellectual demon to pursue inquiries into her moral resources, after a ruthless exposure of the wrecked material, she would have to be, after the various fashions, defiant, if she was to hold her own against pressure; and seeing, as she must, the road of prudence point to conciliation, it was calculable that she would take it. Hence a string of possible events, astounding to mankind, but equally calculable, should one care to give imagination headway. Gower looked signally Captain Abrane's 'fiddler' while he waited at Livia's house door. A studious intimacy with such a lady was rather like the exposure of the silver moon to the astronomer's telescope.

The Dame will have nought of an interview and colloquy not found mentioned in her collection of ballads, concerning a person quite secondary in Dr. Glossop's voluminous papers. She as vehemently prohibits a narration of Gower Woodseer's proposal some hours later, for the hand of the Countess of Fleetwood's transfixed maid Madge, because of the insignificance of the couple; and though it was a quaint idyll of

Page 4173

an affection slowly formed, rationally based while seeming preposterous, tending to bluntly funny utterances on both sides. The girl was a creature of the enthusiasms, and had lifted that passion of her constitution into higher than the worship of sheer physical bravery. She had pitied Mr. Gower Woodseer for his apparently extreme, albeit reverential, devotion to her mistress. The plainly worded terms of his asking a young woman of her position and her reputation to marry him came on her like an intrusion of dazzling day upon the closed eyelids of the night, requiring time, and her mistress's consent, and his father's expressed approval, before she could yield him an answer that might appear a forgetfulness of her station, her ignorance, her damaged character. Gower protested himself, with truth, a spotted pard, an ignoramus, and an outcast of all established classes, as the worshipper of Nature cannot well avoid being.

'But what is it you like me for, Mr. Gower?' Madge longed to know, that she might see a way in the strange land where he had planted her after a whirl; and he replied: 'I 've thought of you till I can say I love you because you have naturally everything I shoot at.'

The vastness of the compliment drove her to think herself empty of anything.

He named courage, and its offspring, honesty, and devotedness, constancy. Her bosom rose at the word.

'Yes, constancy,' he repeated; and 'growing girls have to "turn corners," as you told me once.'

'I did?' said she, reddening under a memory, and abashed by his recollection of a moment she knew to have been weak with her, or noisy of herself.

Madge went straightway to her mistress and related her great event, in the tone of a confession of crime. Her mistress's approbation was timidly suggested rather than besought.

It came on a flood. Carinthia's eyes filled; she exclaimed: 'Oh, that good man!—he chooses my Madge for wife. She said it, Rebecca said it. Mrs. Wythan saw and said Mr. Woodseer loved my Madge. I hear her saying it. Then yes, and yes, from me for both your sakes, dear girl. He will have the faithfullest, he will have the kindest—Oh! and I shall know there can be a happy marriage in England.'

She summoned Gower; she clasped his hand, to thank him for appreciating her servant and sister, and for the happiness she had in hearing it; and she gazed at him and the laden brows of her Madge alternately, encouraging him to repeat his recital of his pecuniary means, for the poetry of the fact it verified, feasting on the sketch of a four-roomed cottage and an agricultural labourer's widow for cook and housemaid; Madge to listen to his compositions of the day in the evening; Madge to praise him, Madge to correct his vanity.

Love was out of the count, but Carinthia’s leaping sympathy decorated the baldness of the sketch and spied his features through the daubed mask he chose to wear as a member of the order of husbands, without taking it for his fun. Dry material statements presented the reality she doated to think of. Moreover, the marriage of these two renewed her belief in true marriages, and their intention to unite was evidence of love.

Page 4174

‘My journey to England was worth all troubles for the meeting Madge,’ she said. ’I can look with pleasure to that day of my meeting her first—the day, it was then!’

She stopped. Madge felt the quivering upward of a whimper to a sob in her breast. She slipped away.

‘It’s a day that has come round to be repaired, Lady Fleetwood,’ said Gower. ’If you will. Will you not? He has had a blow—the death of a friend, violent death. It has broken him. He wants a month or so in your mountains. I have thought him hard to deal with; he is humane. His enormous wealth has been his tempter. Madge and I will owe him our means of livelihood, enough for cottagers, until I carve my way. His feelings are much more independent of his rank than those of most noblemen. He will repeat your kind words to Madge and me; I am sure of it. He has had heavy burdens; he is young, hardly formed yet. He needs a helper; I mean, one allied to him. You forgive me? I left him with a Catholic lord for comforter, who regards my prescript of the study of Nature, when we’re in grief, as about the same as an offer of a dish of cold boiled greens. Silver and ivory images are more consoling. Neither he nor I can offer the right thing for Lord Fleetwood. It will be found here. And then your mountains. More than I, nearly as much as you, he has a poet’s ardour for mountain land. He and Mr. Wythan would soon learn to understand one another on that head, if not as to management of mines.’

The pleading was crafty, and it was penetrative in the avoidance of stress. Carinthia shook herself to feel moved. The endeavour chilled her to a notion that she was but half alive. She let the question approach her, whether Chillon could pardon Lord Fleetwood. She, with no idea of benignness, might speak pardon’s word to him, on a late autumn evening years hence, perhaps, or to his friends to-morrow, if he would considerately keep distant. She was upheld by the thought of her brother’s more honourable likeness to their father, in the certainty of his refusal to speak pardon’s empty word or touch an offending hand, without their father’s warrant for the injury wiped out; and as she had no wish for that to be done, she could anticipate his withholding of the word.

For her brother at wrestle with his fallen fortunes was now the beating heart of Carinthia’s mind. Her husband was a shadow there. He did obscure it, and he might annoy, he was unable to set it in motion. He sat there somewhat like Youth’s apprehension of Death:—the dark spot seen mistily at times through people’s tears, or visioned as in an ambush beyond the hills; occasionally challenged to stimulate recklessness; oftener overlooked, acknowledged for the undesired remote of life’s conditions, life’s evil, fatal, ill-assorted yoke-fellow; and if it was in his power to burst out of his corner and be terrible to her, she could bring up a force unnamed and unmeasured, that being the blood of her father in her veins. Having done her utmost to guard her babe, she said her prayers; she stood for peace or the struggle.

Page 4175

‘Does Lord Fleetwood speak of coming here?’ she said.

‘To-morrow.’

‘I go to Croridge to-morrow.’

‘Your ladyship returns?’

’Yes, I return Mr. Gower, you have fifty minutes before you dress for dinner.’

He thought only of the exceeding charity of the intimation; and he may be excused for his not seeing the feminine full answer it was, in an implied, unmeditated contrast. He went gladly to find his new comrade, his flower among grass-blades, the wonderful creature astonishing him and surcharging his world by setting her face at him, opening her breast to him, breathing a young man’s word of words from a woman’s mouth. His flower among grass-blades for a head looking studiously down, she was his fountain of wisdom as well, in the assurance she gave him of the wisdom of his choice.

But Madge had put up the ‘prize-fighter’s lass,’ by way of dolly defence, to cover her amazed confusion when the proposal of this well-liked gentleman to a girl such as she sounded churchy. He knocked it over easily; it left, however, a bee at his ear and an itch to transfer the buzzer’s attentions and tease his darling; for she had betrayed herself as right good game. Nor is there happier promise of life-long domestic enlivenment for a prescient man of Letters than he has in the contemplation of a pretty face showing the sensitiveness to the sting, which is not allowed to poison her temper, and is short of fetching tears. The dear innocent girl gave this pleasing promise; moreover, she could be twisted-to laugh at herself, just a little. Now, the young woman who can do that has already jumped the hedge into the highroad of philosophy, and may become a philosopher’s mate in its by-ways, where the minute discoveries are the notable treasures.

They had their ramble, agreeable to both, despite the admonitory dose administered to one of them. They might have been espied at a point or two from across the parkpalings; their laughter would have caught an outside pedestrian’s hearing. Whatever the case, Owain Wythan, riding down off Croridge, big with news of her brother for the countess, dined at her table, and walking up the lane to the Esslemont Arms on a moonless night, to mount his horse, pitched against an active and, as it was deemed by Gower’s observation of his eyes, a scientific fist. The design to black them finely was attributable to the dyeing accuracy of the stroke. A single blow had done it. Mr. Wythan’s watch and purse were untouched; and a second look at the swollen blind peepers led Gower to surmise that they were, in the calculation of the striker, his own.

He walked next day to the Royal Sovereign inn. There he came upon the earl driving his phaeton. Fleetwood jumped down, and Gower told of the mysterious incident, as

the chief thing he had to tell, not rendering it so mysterious in his narrative style. He had the art of indicating darkly.

‘Ines, you mean?’ Fleetwood cried, and he appeared as nauseated and perplexed as he felt. Why should Ines assault Mr. Wythan? It happened that the pugilist’s patron had, within the last fifteen minutes, driven past a certain thirty-acre meadow, sight of which on his way to Carinthia had stirred him. He had even then an idea of his old deeds dogging him to bind him, every one of them, the smallest.

Page 4176

‘But you’ve nothing to go by,’ he said. ’Why guess at this rascal more than another?’

Gower quoted Mrs. Rundles and the ostler for witnesses to Kit’s visit yesterday to the Royal Sovereign, though Kit shunned the bar of the Esslemont Arms.

’I guess pretty clearly, because I suspect he was hanging about and saw me and Madge together.’

’Consolations for failures in town?—by the way, you are complimented, and I don’t think you deserved it. However, there was just the chance to stop a run to perdition. But, Madge? Madge? I’d swear to the girl!’

‘Not so hard as I,’ said Gower, and spoke of the oath to come between the girl and him.

Fleetwood’s dive into the girl’s eyes drew her before him. He checked a spirt of exclamations.

‘You fancy the brute had a crack for revenge and mistook his man?’

‘That’s what I want her ladyship to know,’ said Gower.

‘How could you let her hear of it?’

‘Nothing can be concealed from her.’

The earl was impressionable to the remark, in his disgust at the incident. It added a touch of a new kind of power to her image.

‘She’s aware of my coming?’

‘To-day or to-morrow.’

They scaled the phaeton and drove.

‘You undervalue Lord Feltre. You avoid your adversaries,’ Fleetwood now rebuked his hearer. ’It ’s an easy way to have the pull of them in your own mind. You might learn from him. He’s willing for controversy. Nature-worship—or “aboriginal genuflexion,” he calls it; Anglicanism, Methodism; he stands to engage them. It can’t be doubted, that in days of trouble he has a faith “stout as a rock, with an oracle in it,” as he says; and he’s right, “men who go into battle require a rock to back them or a staff to lean on.” You have your “secret,” you think; as far as I can see, it’s to keep you from going into any form of battle.’

The new influence at work on the young nobleman was evident, if only in the language used.

Gower answered mildly: 'That can hardly be said of a man who's going to marry.'

'Perhaps not. Lady Fleetwood is aware?'

'Lady Fleetwood does me the honour to approve my choice.'

'You mean, you're dead on to it with this girl?'

'For a year or more.'

'Fond of her?'

'All my heart.'

'In love!'

'Yes, in love. The proof of it is, I 've asked her now I can support her as a cottager leaning on the Three Per Cents.'

'Well, it helps you to a human kind of talk. It carries out your theories. I never disbelieved in your honesty. The wisdom's another matter. Did you ever tell any one, that there's not an act of a man's life lies dead behind him, but it is blessing or cursing him every step he takes?'

'By that,' rejoined Gower, 'I can say Lord Feltre proves there's wisdom in the truisms of devoutness.'

Page 4177

He thought the Catholic lord had gone a step or two to catch an eel.

Fleetwood was looking on the backward of his days, beholding a melancholy sunset, with a grimace in it.

’Lord Feltre might show you the “leanness of Philosophy";—you would learn from hearing him:—“an old gnawed bone for the dog that chooses to be no better than a dog."’

‘The vertiginous roast haunch is recommended,’ Gower said.

’See a higher than your own head, good sir. But, hang the man! he manages to hit on the thing he wants.’ Fleetwood set his face at Gower with cutting heartiness. ’In love, you say, and Madge: and mean it to be the holy business! Well, poor old Chummy always gave you credit for knowing how to play your game. She has given proof she ’s a good girl. I don’t see why it shouldn’t end well. That attack on the Welshman’s the bad lookout. Explained, if you like, but women’s impressions won’t get explained away. We must down on our knees or they. Her ladyship attentive at all to affairs of the house?’

‘Every day with Queeney; at intervals with Leddings.’

’Excellent! You speak like a fellow recording the devout observances of a great dame with her minor and superior, ecclesiastical comforters. Regular at church?’

‘Her ladyship goes.’

’A woman without religion, Gower Woodseer, is a weed on the water, or she’s hard as nails. We shall see. Generally, Madge and the youngster parade the park at this hour. I drive round to the stables. Go in and offer your version of that rascally dog’s trick. It seems the nearest we can come at. He’s a sot, and drunken dogs ’ll do anything. I’ve had him on my hands, and I’ve got the stain of him.’

They trotted through Esslemont Park gates. ’I’ve got that place, Calesford, on my hands, too,’ the earl said, suddenly moved to a liking for his Kentish home.

He and Gower were struck by a common thought of the extraordinary burdens his indulgence in impulses drew upon him. Present circumstances pictured to Gower the opposing weighed and matured good reason for his choosing Madge, and he complimented himself in his pity for the earl. But Fleetwood, as he reviewed a body of acquaintances perfectly free from the wretched run in harness, though they had their fits and their whims, was pushed to the conclusion that fatalism marked his particular course through life. He could not hint at such an idea to the unsympathetic fellow, or rather, the burly antagonist to anything of the sort, beside him. Lord Feltre would have understood and appreciated it instantly. Where is aid to be had if we have the Fates

against us? Feltre knew the Power, he said; was an example of ‘the efficacy of supplications’; he had been ‘fatally driven to find the Power,’ and had found it—on the road to Rome, of course: not a delectable road for an English nobleman, except that the noise of another convert in pilgrimage on it would deal our English world a lively smack, the very stroke that heavy body wants. But the figure of a ‘monastic man of fashion’ was antipathetic to the earl, and he flouted an English Protestant mass merely because of his being highly individual, and therefore revolutionary for the minority.

Page 4178

He cast his bitter cud aside. ’My man should have arrived. Lady Fleetwood at home?’

Gower spoke of her having gone to Croridge in the morning.

‘Has she taken the child?’

‘She has, yes. For the air of the heights.’

’For greater security. Lady Arpington praises the thoughtful mother. I rather expected to see the child.’

‘They can’t be much later,’ Gower supposed.

‘You don’t feel your long separation from “the object"?’

Letting him have his cushion for pins, Gower said ’It needs all my philosophy:

He was pricked and probed for the next five minutes; not bad rallying, the earl could be smart when he smarted. Then they descended the terrace to meet Lady Fleetwood driving her pony-trap. She gave a brief single nod to the salute of her lord, quite in the town-lady’s manner, surprisingly.

CHAPTER XLI

IN WHICH THE FATES ARE SEEN AND A CHOICE OF THE REFUGES FROM THEM

The home of husband and wife was under one roof at last. Fleetwood went, like one deported, to his wing of the house, physically sensible, in the back turned to his wife’s along the corridor, that our ordinary comparison for the division of a wedded twain is correct. She was Arctic, and Antarctic he had to be, perforce of the distance she put between them. A removal of either of them from life—or from ’the act of breathing,’ as Gower Woodseer’s contempt of the talk about death would call it—was an imaginable way of making it a wider division. Ambrose Mallard was far enough from his fatal lady now—farther than the Poles asunder. Ambrose, if the clergy will allow him, has found his peace. . But the road and the means he chose were a madman’s.

The blotting of our character, to close our troubles, is the final proof of our being ‘sons of vapour,’ according to Gower Woodseer’s heartless term for poor Ambrose and the lot. They have their souls; and above philosophy, ‘natural’ or unnatural, they may find a shelter. They can show in their desperation that they are made of blood, as philosophers rather fail of doing. An insignificant brainless creature like Feltre had wits, by the aid of his religion, to help or be charitable to his fellows, particularly the sinners, in the crisis of life, surpassing any philosopher’s.

Information of her ladyship's having inspected the apartments, to see to the minutest of his customary luxuries, cut at him all round. His valet had it from the footmen and maids; and their speaking of it meant a liking for their mistress; and that liking, added to her official solicitude on his behalf, touched a soft place in him and blew an icy wind; he was frozen where he was warmed. Here was evidence of her intending the division to be a fixed gap. She had entered this room and looked about her. He was here to feel her presence in her absence.

Page 4179

Some one or something had schooled her, too. Her large-eyed directness of gaze was the same as at that inn and in Wales, but her easy sedateness was novel, her English, almost the tone of the English world: he gathered it, at least, from the few remarks below stairs.

His desire to be with her was the desire to escape the phantasm of the woman haunting to subjugate him when they were separate. He could kill illusion by magnifying and clawing at her visible angles and audible false notes; and he did it until his recollections joined to the sight of her, when a clash of the thought of what she had been and the thought of what she was had the effect of conjuring a bitter sweet image that was a more seductive illusion. Strange to think, this woman once loved the man who was not half the value of the man she no longer loved. He took a shot at cynicism, but hit no mark. This woman protected her whole sex.

They sat at the dinner-table alone, thanks to a handsome wench's attractions for a philosopher. Married, and parents of a lusty son, this was their first sitting at table together. The mouth that said 'I guard my rooms' was not obtruded; she talked passingly of her brother, much of Lady Arpington and of old Mr. Woodseer; and, though she reserved a smile, there was no look of a lock on her face. She seemed pleased to be treated very courteously; she returned the stately politeness in exactest measure; very simply, as well. Her face had now an air of homeliness, well suited to an English household interior. She could chat. Any pauses occurring, he was the one guilty of them; she did not allow them to be barrier chasms, or 'strids' for the leap with effort; she crossed them like the mountain maid over a gorge's plank—kept her tones perfectly. Her Madge and Mr. Gower Woodseer made a conversible topic. She was inquisitive for accounts of Spanish history and the land of Spain.

They passed into the drawing-room. She had heard of the fate of the poor child in Wales, she said, without a comment.

'I see now, I ought to have backed your proposal,' he confessed, and was near on shivering. She kept silent, proudly or regretfully.

Open on her workbasket was a Spanish guide-book and a map attached to it. She listened to descriptions of Cadiz, Malaga, Seville, Granada. Her curiosity was chiefly for detailed accounts of Catalonia and the Pyrenees.

'Hardly the place for you; there's a perpetual heaving of Carlism in those mountains; your own are quieter for travellers,' he remarked; and for a moment her lips moved to some likeness of a smile; a dimple in a flowing thought.

He remarked the come and go of it.

He regretted his inability to add to her knowledge of the Spanish Pyrenees.

Books helped her at present, she said.

Feeling acutely that hostility would have brought them closer than her uninviting civility, he spoke of the assault on Mr. Wythan, and Gower Woodseer’s conjecture, and of his having long since discharged the rascal Ines.

Page 4180

To which her unreproachful answer, ‘You made use of those men, my lord,’ sent a cry ringing through him, recalling Feltre’s words, as to the grip men progressively are held in by their deeds done.

‘Oh, quite true, we change our views and ways of life,’ he said, thinking she might set her considerations on other points of his character. But this reflection was a piece of humility not yet in his particular estimate of his character, and he spurned it: an act of pride that drove his mind, for occupation, to contemplate hers; which speedily became an embrace of her character, until he was asking whether the woman he called wife and dared not clasp was one of those rarest, who can be idealized by virtue of their being known. For the young man embracing a character loses grasp of his own, is plucked out of himself and passes into it, to see the creature he is with the other’s eyes, and feel for the other as a very self. Such is the privilege and the chastisement of the young.

Gower Woodseer’s engagement with the girl Madge was a happier subject for expatiation and agreement. Her deeper tones threw a light on Gower, and where she saw goodness, he could at least behold the natural philosopher practically philosophizing.

‘The girl shall have a dowry from me,’ he said; and the sum named was large. Her head bent acknowledgingly; money had small weight with her now. His perception of it stripped him and lamed him.

He wished her ladyship good-night. She stood up and performed a semi-ceremonious obeisance, neatly adapted to their mutual position. She had a well-bred mother.

Probably she would sleep. No such expectation could soothe the friend, and some might be thinking misleader, of Ambrose Mallard, before he had ocular proof that the body lay underground. His promise was given to follow it to the grave, a grave in consecrated earth. Ambrose died of the accidental shot of a pocket-pistol he customarily carried loaded. Two intimate associates of the dead man swore to that habit of his. They lied to get him undisputed Christian burial. Aha! The earl laughed outright at Chummy Potts’s nursery qualms. The old fellow had to do it, and he lied like a man for the sake of Ambrose Mallard’s family. So much is owing to our friend.

Can ecclesiastical casuists decide upon cases of conscience affecting men of the world?

A council sat upon the case the whole night long. A committee of the worldly held argumentation in a lower chamber.

These are nights that weaken us to below the level of women. A shuttle worked in Fleetwood’s head. He defended the men of the world. Lord Feltre oiled them, damned them, kindled them to a terrific expiatory blaze, and extinguishingly salved and wafted

aloft the released essence of them. Maniacal for argument, Fleetwood rejected the forgiveness of sins, if sins they be. Prove them sins, and the suffering is of necessity everlasting, his insomnia logic insisted. Whichever side he took, his wife was against him; not in speech, but in her look. She was a dumb figure among the wranglers, clouded up to the neck. Her look said she knew more of him than they knew.

Page 4181

He departed next day for London, after kissing his child; and he would have done wisely to abstain from his exhibition of the paternal. Knowing it a step to conciliation, he checked his impulsive warmth, under the apprehension that the mother would take it for a piece of acting to propitiate—and his lips pecked the baby's cheek. Its mother held arms for it immediately.

Not without reason did his heart denounce her as a mere mother, with little of a mind to see.

The recent series of feverishly sleepless nights disposed him to snappish irritability or the thirst for tenderness. Gower had singular experiences of him on the drive North-westward. He scarcely spoke; he said once: 'If you mean to marry, you'll be wanting to marry soon, of course,' and his curt nod before the reply was formulated appeared to signify, the sooner the better, and deliverance for both of us. Honest though he might, be sometimes deep and sometimes picturesque, the philosopher's day had come to an end. How can Philosophy minister to raw wounds, when we are in a rageing gale of the vexations, battered to right and left! Religion has a nourishing breast: Philosophy is breastless. Religion condones offences: Philosophy has no forgiveness, is an untenanted confessional: 'wide air to a cry in anguish,' Feltre says.

All the way to London Fleetwood endured his companion, letting him talk when he would.

He spent the greater part of the night discussing human affairs and spiritual with Lord Feltre, whose dialectical exhortations and insinuations were of the feeblest, but to an isolated young man, yearning for the tenderness of a woman thinking but of her grievances, the ointment brought comfort.

It soothed him during his march to and away from Ambrose Mallard's grave; where it seemed to him curious and even pitiable that Chumley Potts should be so inconsolably shaken. Well, and if the priests have the secret of strengthening the backbone for a bend of the knee in calamity, why not go to the priests, Chummy? Potts's hearing was not addressed; nor was the chief person in the meditation affected by a question that merely jumped out of his perturbed interior.

Business at Calesford kept Fleetwood hanging about London several days further; and his hatred of a place he wasted time and money to decorate grew immeasurable. It distorted the features of the beautiful woman for whose pleasure the grand entertainments to be held there had, somewhere or other—when felon spectres were abroad over earth—been conceived.

He could then return to Esslemont. Gower was told kindly, with intentional coldness, that he could take a seat in the phaeton if he liked; and he liked, and took it. Anything to get to that girl of his!

Page 4182

Whatever the earl's inferiors did, their inferior station was not suffered to discolour it for his judgement. But an increasing antagonism to Woodseer's philosophy—which the fellow carried through with perpetual scorings of satisfaction—caused him to set a hard eye on the damsel under the grisly spotting shadow of the sottish bruiser, of whom, after once touching the beast, he could not rub his hands clean; and he chose to consider the winning of the prize-fighter's lass the final triumph or flag on the apex of the now despised philosophy. Vain to ask how he had come to be mixed up with the lot, or why the stolidly conceited, pretentious fellow had seat here, as by right, beside him! We sow and we reap; 'plant for sugar and taste the cane,' some one says—this Woodseer, probably; he can, when it suits him, tickle the ears of the worldlings. And there is worthier stuff to remember; stuff to nourish: Feltre's 'wisdom of our fathers,' rightly named Religion.

More in the country, when he traversed sweep and rise of open land, Carinthia's image began to shine, and she threw some of her light on Madge, who made Woodseer appear tolerable, sagacious, absurdly enviable, as when we have the fit to wish we were some four-foot. The fellow's philosophy wore a look of practical craft.

He was going to the girl he liked, and she was, one could swear, an honest girl; and she was a comely girl, a girl to stick to a man. Her throwing over a sot was creditable. Her mistress loved her. That said much for any mortal creature. Man or woman loved by Carinthia could not be cowardly, could not be vile, must have high qualities. Next to Religion, she stood for a test of us. Had she any strong sense of Religion, in addition to the formal trooping to one of their pallid Protestant churches? Lord Feltre might prove useful to her. For merely the comprehension of the signification of Religion steadies us. It had done that for him, the earl owned.

He broke a prolonged silence by remarking to Gower 'You haven't much to say to-day'; and the answer was 'Very little. When I'm walking, I'm picking up; and when I'm driving, I'm putting together.'

Gower was rallied on the pursuit of the personal object in both cases. He pointed at sheep, shepherd, farmer, over the hedge, all similarly occupied; and admitted shamelessly, that he had not a thought for company, scarce a word to fling. 'Ideas in gestation are the dullest matter you can have.'

'There I quite agree with you,' said Fleetwood. Abrane, Chummy Potts, Brailstone, little Corby, were brighter comrades. And these were his Ixionides! Hitherto his carving of a way in the world had been sufficiently ill-considered. Was it preferable to be a loutish philosopher? Since the death of Ambrose Mallard, he felt Woodseer's title for that crew grind harshly; and he tried to provoke a repetition of it, that he might burst out in wrathful defence of his friends—to be named friends when they were vilified: defence of poor Ambrose at least, the sinner who, or one as bad, might have reached to pardon through the priesthood.

Page 4183

Gower offered him no chance..

Entering Esslemont air, Fleetwood tossed his black mood to the winds. She breathed it. She was a mountain girl, and found it hard to forgive our lowlands. She would learn tolerance, taking her flights at seasons. The yacht, if she is anything of a sailor, may give her a taste of England's pleasures. She will have a special allowance for distribution among old Mr. Woodseer's people. As to the rest of the Countess of Fleetwood's wishes, her family ranks with her husband's in claims of any kind on him. There would be—she would require and had a right to demand—say, a warm half-hour of explanations: he knew the tone for them, and so little did he revolve it apprehensively, that his mind sprang beyond, to the hearing from her mouth of her not intending further to 'guard her rooms.' How quietly the words were spoken! There was a charm in the retrospect of her mouth and manner. One of the rare women who never pout or attitudinize, she could fling her glove gracefully—one might add, capturingly under every aspect, she was a handsome belligerent. The words he had to combat pleased his memory. Some good friend, Lady Arpington probably, had instructed her in the art of dressing to match her colour.

Concerning himself, he made no stipulation, but he reflected on Lord Feltre's likely estimate of her as a bit of a heathen. And it might be to her advantage, were she and Feltre to have some conversations. Whatever the faith, a faith should exist, for without the sentiment of religion, a woman, he says, is where she was when she left the gates of Eden. A man is not much farther. Feltre might have saved Ambrose Mallard. He is, however, right in saying, that the woman with the sentiment of religion in her bosom is a box of holy incense distinguishing her from all other women. Empty of it, she is devil's bait. At best, she is a creature who cannot overlook an injury, or must be exacting God knows what humiliations before she signs the treaty.

Informed at the house that her ladyship had been staying up on Croridge for the last two days, Fleetwood sent his hardest shot of the eyes at Gower. Let her be absent: it was equal to the first move of war, and absolved him from contemplated proposals to make amends. But the enforced solitary companionship with this ruminator of a fellow set him asking whether the godless dog he had picked up by the wayside was not incarnate another of the sins he had to expiate. Day after day, almost hourly, some new stroke fell on him. Why? Was he selected for persecution because he was wealthy? The Fates were driving him in one direction, no doubt of that.

Page 4184

This further black mood evaporated, and like a cessation of English storm-weather bequeathed him gloom. Ashamed of the mood, he was nevertheless directed by its final shadows to see the ruminating tramp in Gower, and in Madge the prize-fighter's jilt: and round about Esslemont a world eyeing an Earl of Fleetwood, who painted himself the man he was, or was held to be, by getting together such a collection, from the daughter of the Old Buccaneer to the ghastly corpse of Ambrose Mallard. Why, clearly, wealth was the sole origin and agent of the mischief. With somewhat less of it, he might have walked in his place among the nation's elect, the 'herd of the gilt horns,' untroubled by ambitions and ideas.

Arriving thus far, he chanced to behold Gower and Madge walking over the grounds near the western plantation, and he regretted the disappearance of them, with the fellow talking hard into the girl's ear. Those two could think he had been of some use. The man pretending to philosophical depth was at any rate honest; one could swear to the honesty of the girl, though she had been a reckless hussy. Their humble little hopes and means to come to union approached, after a fashion, hymning at his ears. Those two were pleasanter to look on than amorous lords and great ladies, who are interesting only when they are wicked.

Four days of desolate wanderings over the estate were occupied chiefly in his decreeing the fall of timber that obstructed views, and was the more imperatively doomed for his bailiff's intercession. 'Sound wood' the trees might be: they had to assist in defraying the expense of separate establishments. A messenger to Queeney from Croridge then announced the Countess's return 'for a couple of hours.' Queeney said it was the day when her ladyship examined the weekly bills of the household. That was in the early morning. The post brought my lord a letter from Countess Livia, a most infrequent writer. She had his word to pay her debts; what next was she for asking? He shrugged, opened the letter, and stared at the half dozen lines. The signification of them rapped on his consciousness of another heavy blow before he was perfectly intelligent.

All possible anticipation seemed here outdone: insomuch that he held palpable evidence of the Fates at work to harass and drive him. She was married to the young Earl of Cressett!'

Fleetwood printed the lines on his eyeballs. They were the politely flowing feminine of a statement of the fact, which might have been in one line. They flourished wantonly: they were deadly blunt. And of all men, this youngster, who struck at him through her lips with the reproach, that he had sped the good-looking little beast upon his road to ruin:—perhaps to Ambrose Mallard's end!

CHAPTER XLII

THE RETARDED COURTSHIP

Carinthia reached Esslemont near noon. She came on foot, and had come unaccompanied, stick in hand, her dress looped for the roads. Madge bustled her shorter steps up the park beside her; Fleetwood met her on the terrace.

Page 4185

‘No one can be spared at Croridge,’ she said. ‘I go back before dark.’ Apology was not thought of; she seemed wound to the pitch.

He bowed; he led into the morning-room. ‘The boy is at Croridge?’

‘With me. He has his nurse. Madge was at home here more than there.’

‘Why do you go back?’

‘I am of use to my brother.’

‘Forgive me—in what way?’

’He has enemies about him. They are the workmen of Lord Levellier. They attacked Lekkatts the other night, and my uncle fired at them out of a window and wounded a man. They have sworn they will be revenged. Mr. Wythan is with my brother to protect him.’

’Two men, very well; they don’t want, if there’s danger, a woman’s aid in protecting him?’

She smiled, and her smile was like the hint of the steel blade an inch out of sheath.

‘My brother does not count me a weak woman.’

‘Oh no! No one would think that,’ Fleetwood said hurriedly and heartily. ‘Least of all men, I, Carinthia. But you might be rash.’

‘My brother knows me cautious.’

‘Chillon?’

‘It is my brother’s name.’

’You used to call him by his name.

‘I love his name.’

’Ah, well! I may be pardoned for wishing to hear what part you play there.’

‘I go the rounds with my brother.’

‘Armed?’

‘We carry arms.’

’Queer sight to see in England. But there are rascals in this country, too.’

She was guilty of saying, though not pointedly: 'We do not hire defenders.'

'In civilized lands . . .' he began and stopped 'You have Mr. Wythan?'

'Yes, we are three.'

'You call him, I think, Owain?'

'I do.'

'In your brother's hearing?'

'Yes, my lord; it would be in your hearing if you were near.'

'No harm, no doubt.'

'There is none.'

'But you will not call your brother Chillon to me.'

'You dislike the name.'

'I learn to like everything you do and say; and every person you like.'

'It is by Mr. Wythan's dead wife's request that I call him by his name. He is our friend. He is a man to trust.'

'The situation . . .' Fleetwood hung swaying between the worldly view of it and the white light of this woman's nature flashed on his emotion into his mind. 'You shall be trusted for judging. If he is your friend, he is my friend. I have missed the sight of our boy. You heard I was at Esslemont?'

'I heard from Madge!'

'It is positive you must return to Croridge?'

'I must be with my brother, yes.'

'Your ladyship will permit me to conduct you.'

Her head assented. There was nothing to complain of, but he had not gained a step.

Page 4186

The rule is, that when we have yielded initiative to a woman, we are unable to recover it without uncivil bluster. So, therefore, women dealing with gentlemen are allowed unreasonable advantages. He had never granted it in colloquy or act to any woman but this one. Consequently, he was to see, that if the gentleman in him was not put aside, the lady would continue moving on lines of the independence he had likewise yielded, or rather flung, to her. Unless, as a result, he besieged and wooed his wife, his wife would hold on a course inclining constantly farther from the union he desired. Yet how could he begin to woo her if he saw no spark of womanly tenderness? He asked himself, because the beginning of the wooing might be checked by the call on him for words of repentance only just possible to conceive. Imagine them uttered, and she has the initiative for life.

She would not have it, certainly, with a downright brute. But he was not that. In an extremity of bitterness, he fished up a drowned old thought, of all his torments being due to the impulsive half-brute he was. And between the good and the bad in him, the sole point of strength was a pride likely, as the smooth simplicity of her indifference showed him, soon to be going down prostrate beneath her feet. Wholly a brute—well? He had to say, that playing the perfect brute with any other woman he would have his mastery. The summoning of an idea of personal power to match this woman in a contest was an effort exhausting the idea.

They passed out of Esslemont gates together at that hour of the late afternoon when South-westerly breezes, after a summer gale, drive their huge white flocks over blue fields fresh as morning, on the march to pile the crown of the sphere, and end a troubled day with grandeur. Up the lane by the park they had open land to the heights of Croridge.

‘Splendid clouds,’ Fleetwood remarked.

She looked up, thinking of the happy long day’s walk with her brother to the Styrian Baths. Pleasure in the sight made her face shine superbly. ’A flying Switzerland, Mr. Woodseer says,’ she replied. ’England is beautiful on days like these.—For walking, I think the English climate very good.’

He dropped a murmur: ‘It should suit so good a walker,’ and burned to compliment—her spirited easy stepping, and scorned himself for the sycophancy it would be before they were on the common ground of a restored understanding. But an approval of any of her acts threatened him with enthusiasm for the whole of them, her person included; and a dam in his breast had to keep back the flood.

’You quote Woodseer to me, Carinthia. I wish you knew Lord Feltre. He can tell you of every cathedral, convent, and monastery in Europe and Syria. Nature is well enough; she is, as he says, a savage. Men’s works, acting under divine direction to escape from that tangle, are better worthy of study, perhaps. If one has done wrong, for example.’

Page 4187

‘I could listen to him,’ she said.

’You would not need—except, yes, one thing. Your father’s book speaks of not forgiving an injury.’

’My father does. He thinks it weakness to forgive an injury. Women do, and are disgraced, they are thought slavish. My brother is much stronger than I am. He is my father alive in that.’

‘It is anti-Christian, some would think.’

’Let offending people go. He would not punish them. They may go where they will be forgiven. For them our religion is a happy retreat; we are glad they have it. My father and my brother say that injury forbids us to be friends again. My father was injured by the English Admiralty: he never forgave it; but he would have fought one of their ships and offered his blood any day, if his country called to battle.’

‘You have the same feeling, you mean.’

’I am a woman. I follow my brother, whatever he decides. It is not to say he is the enemy of persons offending him; only that they have put the division.’

‘They repent?’

‘If they do, they do well for themselves.’

‘You would see them in sackcloth and ashes?’

‘I would pray to be spared seeing them.’

‘You can entirely forget—well, other moments, other feelings?’

‘They may heighten the injury.’

‘Carinthia, I should wish to speak plainly, if I could, and tell you....’

‘You speak quite plainly, my lord.’

‘You and I cannot be strangers or enemies.’

‘We cannot be, I would not be. To be friends, we should be separate.’

’You say you are a woman; you have a heart, then?’—for, if not, what have you? was added in the tone.

‘My heart is my brother’s,’ she said.

‘All your heart?’

‘My heart is my brother’s until one of us drops.’

‘There is not another on earth beside your brother Chillon?’

‘There is my child.’

The dwarf square tower of Croridge village church fronted them against the sky, seen of both.

‘You remember it,’ he said; and she answered: ‘I was married there.’

‘You have not forgotten that injury, Carinthia?’

‘I am a mother.’

’By all the saints! you hit hard. Justly. Not you. Our deeds are the hard hitters. We learn when they begin to flagellate, stroke upon stroke! Suppose we hold a costly thing in the hand and dash it to the ground—no recovery of it, none! That must be what your father meant. I can’t regret you are a mother. We have a son, a bond. How can I describe the man I was!’ he muttered,—’possessed! sort of werewolf! You are my wife?’

‘I was married to you, my lord.’

‘It’s a tie of a kind.’

‘It binds me.’

‘Obey, you said.’

‘Obey it. I do.’

‘You consider it holy?’

’My father and my mother spoke to me of the marriage-tie. I read the service before I stood at the altar. It is holy. It is dreadful. I will be true to it.’

Page 4188

‘To your husband?’

‘To his name, to his honour.’

‘To the vow to live with him?’

‘My husband broke that for me.’

’Carinthia, if he bids you, begs you to renew it? God knows what you may save me from!’

’Pray to God. Do not beg of me, my lord. I have my brother and my little son. No more of husband for me! God has given me a friend, too,—a man of humble heart, my brother’s friend, my dear Rebecca’s husband. He can take them from me: no one but God. See the splendid sky we have.’

With those words she barred the gates on him; at the same time she bestowed the frank look of an amiable face brilliant in the lively red of her exercise, in its bent-bow curve along the forehead, out of the line of beauty, touching, as her voice was, to make an undertone of anguish swell an ecstasy. So he felt it, for his mood was now the lover’s. A torture smote him, to find himself transported by that voice at his ear to the scene of the young bride in thirty-acre meadow.

‘I propose to call on Captain Kirby-Levellier tomorrow, Carinthia,’ he said. ‘The name of his house?’

‘My brother is not now any more in the English army,’ she replied. ’He has hired a furnished house named Stoneridge.’

‘He will receive me, I presume?’

‘My brother is a courteous gentleman, my lord.’

‘Here is the church, and here we have to part for today. Do we?’

‘Good-bye to you, my lord,’ she said.

He took her hand and dropped the dead thing.

‘Your idea is, to return to Esslemont some day or other?’

‘For the present,’ was her strange answer.

She bowed, she stepped on. On she sped, leaving him at the stammered beginning of his appeal to her.

Their parting by the graveyard of the church that had united them was what the world would class as curious. To him it was a further and a well-marked stroke of the fatality pursuing him. He sauntered by the graveyard wall until her figure slipped out of sight. It went like a puffed candle, and still it haunted the corner where last seen. Her vanishing seemed to say, that less of her belonged to him than the phantom his eyes retained behind them somewhere.

There was in his pocket a memento of Ambrose Mallard, that the family had given him at his request. He felt the lump. It had an answer for all perplexities. It had been charged and emptied since it was in his possession; and it could be charged again. The thing was a volume as big as the world to study. For the touch of a finger, one could have its entirely satisfying contents, and fly and be a raven of that night wherein poor Ambrose wanders lost, but cured of human wounds.

Page 4189

He leaned on the churchyard wall, having the graves to the front of eyes bent inward. They were Protestant graves, not so impressive to him as the wreathed and gilt of those under dedication to Feltre's Madonna. But whatever they were, they had ceased to nurse an injury or feel the pain for having inflicted it. Their wrinkles had gone from them, whether of anger or suffering. Ambrose Mallard lay as peaceful in consecrated ground: and Chumley Potts would be unlikely to think that the helping to lay Ambrose in his quiet last home would cost him a roasting until priestly intercession availed. So Chummy continues a Protestant; dull consciences can! But this is incomprehensible, that she, nursing her injury, should be perfectly civil. She is a woman without emotion. She is a woman full of emotion, one man knows. She ties him to her, to make him feel the lash of his remorse. He feels it because of her casting him from her—and so civilly. If this were a Catholic church, one might go in and give the stained soul free way to get a cleansing. As it is, here are the graves; the dead everywhere have their sanctity, even the heathen.

Fleetwood read the name of the family of Meek on several boards at the head of the graves. Jonathan Meek died at the age of ninety-five. A female Meek had eighty-nine years in this life. Ezra Meek gave up the ghost prematurely, with a couplet, at eighty-one. A healthy spot, Croridge, or there were virtues in the Meek family, he reflected, and had a shudder that he did not trace to its cause, beyond an acknowledgement of a desire for the warm smell of incense.

CHAPTER XLIII

ON THE ROAD TO THE ACT OF PENANCE

His customary wrestle with the night drove Lord Fleetwood in the stillness of the hour after matins from his hated empty Esslemont up again to the village of the long-lived people, enjoying the moist earthiness of the air off the ironstone. He rode fasting, a good preparatory state for the simple pleasures, which are virtually the Great Nourisher's teats to her young. The earl was relieved of his dejection by a sudden filling of his nostrils. Fat Esslemont underneath had no such air. Except on the mornings of his walk over the Salzkammergut and Black Forest regions, he had never consciously drawn that deep breath of the satisfied rapture, charging the whole breast with thankfulness. Huntsmen would know it, if the chase were not urgent to pull them at the tail of the running beast. Once or twice on board his yacht he might have known something like it, but the salt sea-breeze could not be disconnected from his companion Lord Feltre, and a thought of Feltre swung vapour of incense all about him. Breathing this air of the young sun's kiss of earth, his invigoration repelled the seductions of the burnt Oriental gums.

Page 4190

Besides, as he had told his friend, it was the sincerity of the Catholic religion, not the seductiveness, that won him to a form of homage—the bend of the head of a foreign observer at a midnight mass. Asceticism, though it may not justify error, is a truth in itself, it is the essence extracted of the scourge, flesh vanquished; and it stands apart from controversy. Those monks of the forested mountain heights, rambling for their herbs, know the blessedness to be found in mere breathing: a neighbour readiness to yield the breath inspires it the more. For when we do not dread our end, the sense of a free existence comes back to us: we have the prized gift to infancy under the piloting of manhood. But before we taste that happiness we must perform our penance; 'No living happiness can be for the unclean,' as the holy father preached to his flock of the monastery dispersing at matins.

Ay, but penance? penance? Is there not such a thing as the doing of penance out of the Church, in the manly fashion? So to regain the right to be numbered among the captains of the world's fighting men, incontestably the best of comrades, whether or no they led away on a cataract leap at the gates of life. Boldly to say we did a wrong will clear our sky for a few shattering peals.

The penitential act means, youth put behind us, and a steady course ahead. But, for the keeping of a steady course, men made of blood in the walks of the world must be steadied. Say it plainly-mated. There is the humiliating point of our human condition. We must have beside us and close beside us the woman we have learned to respect; supposing ourselves lucky enough to have found her; 'that required other scale of the human balance,' as Woodseer calls her now he has got her, wiser than Lord Feltre in reference to men and women. We get no balance without her. That is apparently the positive law; and by reason of men's wretched enslavement, it is the dance to dissolution when we have not honourable union with women. Feltre's view of women sees the devilish or the angelical; and to most men women are knaves or ninnies. Hence do we behold rascals or imbeciles in the offspring of most men.

He embraced the respected woman's character, with the usual effect:—to see with her sight; and she beheld a speckled creature of the intermittent whims and moods and spites; the universal Patron, whose ambition to be leader of his world made him handle foul brutes—corrupt and cause their damnation, they retort, with curses, in their pangs. She was expected to pardon the husband, who had not abstained from his revenge on her for keeping him to the pledge of his word. And what a revenge!—he had flung the world at her. She is consequently to be the young bride she was on the memorable morning of the drive off these heights of Croridge down to thirty-acre meadow! It must be a saint to forgive such offences; and she is not one, she is deliciously not one, neither a Genevieve nor a Griselda.

Page 4191

He handed her the rod to chastise him. Her exchange of Christian names with the Welshman would not do it; she was too transparently sisterly, provincially simple; she was, in fact, respected. Any whipping from her was child's play to him, on whom, if he was to be made to suffer, the vision of the intense felicity of austerest asceticism brought the sensation as bracingly as the Boreal morning animates men of high blood in ice regions. She could but gently sting, even if vindictive.

Along the heights, outside the village, some way below a turn of the road to Lekkatts, a gentleman waved hand. The earl saluted with his whip, and waited for him.

'Nothing wrong, Mr. Wythan?'

'Nothing to fear, my lord.'

'I get a trifle uneasy.'

'The countess will not leave her brother.'

A glow of his countess's friendliness for this open-faced, prompt-speaking, good fellow of the faintly inky eyelids, and possibly sheepish inclinations, melted Fleetwood. Our downright repentance of misconduct toward a woman binds us at least to the tolerant recognition of what poor scraps of consolement she may have picked up between then and now—when we can stretch fist in flame to defy it on the oath of her being a woman of honour.

The earl alighted and said: 'Her brother, I suspect, is the key of the position.'

'He's worth it—she loves her brother,' said Mr. Wythan, betraying a feature of his quick race, with whom the reflection upon a statement is its lightning in advance.

Gratified by the instant apprehension of his meaning, Fleetwood interpreted the Welshman's. 'I have to see the brother worthy of her love. Can you tell me the hour likely to be convenient?'. . . . .

Mr. Wythan thought an appointment unnecessary which conveyed the sufficient assurance of audience granted.

'You know her brother well, Mr. Wythan?'

'Know him as if I had known him for years. They both come to the mind as faith comes —no saying how; one swears by them.'

Fleetwood eyed the Welsh gentleman, with an idea that he might readily do the same by him.

Mr. Wythan's quarters were at the small village inn, whither he was on his way to breakfast. The earl slipped an arm through the bridle reins and walked beside him, listening to an account of the situation at Lekkatts. It was that extraordinary complication of moves and checks which presents in the main a knot, for the powers above to cut. A miserly old lord withholds arrears of wages; his workmen strike at a critical moment; his nephew, moved by common humanity, draws upon crippled resources to supply their extremer needs, though they are ruining his interests. They made one night a demonstration of the terrorizing sort round Lekkatts, to give him a chorus; and the old lord fired at them out of window and wounded a man. For that they vowed vengeance. All the new gunpowder milled in Surrey was, for some purpose

Page 4192

of his own, stored by Lord Levellier on the alder island of the pond near his workshops, a quarter of a mile below the house. They refused, whatever their object, to let a pound of it be moved, at a time when at last the Government had undertaken to submit it to experiments. And there they stood on ground too strong for ‘the Captain,’ as they called him, to force, because of the quantity stored at Lekkatts being largely beyond the amount under cover of Lord Levellier’s licence. The old lord was very ill, and he declined to see a doctor, but obstinately kept from dying. His nephew had to guard him and at the same time support an enemy having just cause of complaint. This, however, his narrow means would not much longer permit him to do. The alternative was then offered him of either siding arbitrarily against the men and his conscience or of taking a course ‘imprudent on the part of a presumptive heir,’ Mr. Wythan said hurriedly at the little inn’s doorsteps.

‘You make one of his lordship’s guard?’ said Fleetwood.

‘The countess, her brother, and I, yes’

‘Danger at all?’

‘Not so much to fear while the countess is with us.’

‘Fear is not a word for Carinthia.’

Her name on the earl’s lips drew a keen shot of the eye from Mr. Wythan, and he read the signification of the spoken name. ’You know what every Cambrian living thinks of her, my lord.’

‘She shall not have one friend the less for me.’

Fleetwood’s hand was out for a good-bye, and the hand was grasped by one who looked happy in doing it. He understood and trusted the man after that, warmed in thinking how politic his impulses could be.

His intention of riding up to Croridge at noon to request his interview with Mr. Kirby-Levellier was then stated.

‘The key of the position, as you said,’ Mr. Wythan remarked, not proffering an opinion of it more than was expressed by a hearty, rosy countenance, that had to win its way with the earl before excuse was found for the venturesome repetition of his phrase.

Cantering back to that home of the loves of Gower Woodseer and Madge Winch, the thought of his first act of penance done, without his feeling the poorer for it, reconciled Fleetwood to the aspect of the hollow place.

He could not stay beneath the roof. His task of breakfasting done, he was off before the morning's delivery of letters, riding round the country under Croridge, soon up there again. And Henrietta might be at home, he was reminded by hearing band-music as he followed the directions to the house named Stoneridge. The band consisted of eight wind instruments; they played astonishingly well for itinerant musicians. By curious chance, they were playing a selection from the Pirata; presently he heard the notes to 'il mio tradito amor.' They had hit upon Henrietta's favourite piece!

Page 4193

At the close of it he dismounted, flung the reins to his groom, and, addressing a compliment to the leader, was deferentially saluted with a ‘my lord.’ Henrietta stood at the window, a servant held the door open for him to enter; he went in, and the beautiful young woman welcomed him: ’Oh, my dear lord, you have given me such true delight! How very generous of you!’ He protested ignorance. She had seen him speak to the conductor and receive the patron’s homage; and who but he knew her adored of operas, or would have had the benevolent impulse to think of solacing her exile from music in the manner so sure of her taste! She was at her loveliest: her features were one sweet bloom, as of the sunny flower garden; and, touched to the heart by the music and the kindness, she looked the look that kisses; innocently, he felt, feeling himself on the same good ground while he could own he admired the honey creature, much as an amateur may admire one of the pictures belonging to the nation.

‘And you have come . . . ?’ she said. ’We are to believe in happy endings?’

He shrugged, as the modest man should, who says:

‘If it depends on me’; but the words were firmly spoken and could be credited.

’Janey is with her brother down at Lekkatts. Things are at a deadlock. A spice of danger, enough to relieve the dulness; and where there is danger Janey’s at home.’ Henrietta mimicked her Janey. ’Parades with her brother at night; old military cap on her head; firearms primed; sings her Austrian mountain songs or the Light Cavalry call, till it rings all day in my ears—she has a thrilling contralto. You are not to think her wild, my lord. She’s for adventure or domesticity, “whichever the Fates decree.” She really is coming to the perfect tone.’

‘Speak of her,’ said the earl. ‘She can’t yet overlook . . . ?’

‘It’s in the family. She will overlook anything her brother excuses.’

‘I’m here to see him.’

‘I heard it from Mr. Wythan.’

‘"Owain," I believe?’

Henrietta sketched apologies, with a sidled head, soft pout, wavy hand. ’He belongs to the order of primitive people. His wife—the same pattern, one supposes—pledged them to their Christian names. The man is a simpleton, but a gentleman; and Janey holds his dying wife’s wish sacred. We are all indebted to him.’

‘Whatever she thinks right!’ said Fleetwood.

The fair young woman’s warm nature flew out to him on a sparkle of grateful tenderness in return for his magnanimity, oblivious of the inflamer it was: and her heart thanked him more warmly, without the perilous show of emotion, when she found herself secure.

Page 4194

She was beautiful, she was tempting, and probably the weakest of players in the ancient game of two; and clearly she was not disposed to the outlaw game; was only a creature of ardour. That he could see, seeing the misinterpretation a fellow like Brailstone would put upon a temporary flush of the feminine, and the advantage he would take of it, perhaps not unsuccessfully—the dog! He committed the absurdity of casting a mental imprecation at the cunning tricksters of emotional women, and yelled at himself in the worn old surplice of the converted rake. But letting his mind run this way, the tradito amor of the band outside the lady's window was instantly traced to Lord Brailstone; so convincingly, that he now became a very counsel for an injured husband in denunciation of the seductive compliment.

Henrietta prepared to conduct him to Lekkatts; her bonnet was brought. She drew forth a letter from a silken work-bag, and raised it,—Livia's handwriting. 'I 've written my opinion,' he said.

'Not too severe, pray.'

'Posted.'

'Livia wanted a protector.'

'And chose—what on earth are you saying!'

Livia and her boyish lord were abandoned on the spot, though Henrietta could have affirmed stoutly that there was much to be pleaded, if a female advocate dared it, and a man would but hear.

His fingers were at the leaves of a Spanish dictionary.

'Oh yes, and here we have a book of Travels in Spain,' she said. 'Everything Spanish for Janey now. You are aware?—no?'

He was unaware and desired to be told.

'Janey's latest idea; only she would have conceived the notion. You solve our puzzle, my lord.'

She renewed the thanks she persisted in offering for the military music now just ceasing: vexatiously, considering that it was bad policy for him to be unmasking Brailstone to her. At the same time, the blindness which rendered her unconscious of Brailstone's hand in sending members of a military band to play selections from the favourite opera they had jointly drunk of to ecstasy, was creditable; touching, when one thought of the pursuer's many devices, not omitting some treason on the part of her present friend.

‘Tell me—I solve?’ he said . . . .

Henrietta spied the donkey-basket bearing the two little ones.

‘Yes, I hope so—on our way down,’ she made answer. ’I want you to see the pair of love-birds in a nest.’

The boy and girl were seen lying side by side, both fast asleep; fair-haired girl, dark-haired boy, faced to one another.

‘Temper?’ said Fleetwood, when he had taken observation of them.

‘Very imperious—Mr. Boy!’ she replied, straightening her back under a pretty frown, to convey the humour of the infant tyrant.

Page 4195

The father's mind ran swiftly on a comparison of the destinies of the two children, from his estimate of their parents; many of Gower Woodseer's dicta converging to reawaken thoughts upon Nature's laws, which a knowledge of his own nature blackened. He had to persuade himself that this child of his was issue of a loving union; he had to do it violently, conjuring a vivid picture of the mother in bud, and his recognition of her young charm; the pain of keeping to his resolve to quit her, lest she should subjugate him and despoil him of his wrath; the fatalism in his coming and going; the romantic freak it had been,—a situation then so clearly wrought, now blurred past comprehension. But there must have been love, or some love on his part. Otherwise he was bound to pray for the mother to predominate in the child, all but excluding its father.

Carinthia's image, as a result, ascended sovereignty, and he hung to it.

For if we are human creatures with consciences, nothing is more certain than that we make our taskmasters of those to whom we have done a wrong, the philosopher says. Between Lord Feltre and Gower Woodseer, influenced pretty equally by each of them, this young nobleman was wakening to the claims of others—Youth's infant conscience. Fleetwood now conceived the verbal supplication for his wife's forgiveness involved in the act of penance; and verbal meant abject; with him, going so far, it would mean naked, precise, no slurring. That he knew, and a tremor went over him. Women, then, are really the half of the world in power as much as in their number, if men pretend to a step above the savage. Or, well, his wife was a power.

He had forgotten the puzzle spoken of by Henrietta, when she used the word again and expressed her happiness in the prospect before them—caused by his presence, of course.

'You are aware, my dear lord, Janey worships her brother. He was defeated, by some dastardly contrivance, in a wager to do wonderful feats—for money! money! money! a large stake. How we come off our high horses! I hadn't an idea of money before I was married. I think of little else. My husband has notions of honour; he engaged himself to pay a legacy of debts; his uncle would not pay debts long due to him. He was reduced to the shift of wagering on his great strength and skill. He could have done it. His enemy managed—enemy there was! He had to sell out of the army in consequence. I shall never have Janey's face of suffering away from my sight. He is a soldier above all things. It seems hard on me, but I cannot blame him for snatching at an opportunity to win military distinction. He is in treaty for the post of aide to the Colonel—the General of the English contingent bound for Spain, for the cause of the Queen. My husband will undertake to be at the orders of his chief as soon as he can leave this place. Janey goes with him, according to present arrangements.'

Page 4196

Passing through a turnstile, that led from the road across a meadow-slope to the, broken land below, Henrietta had view of the earl's hard white face, and she hastened to say: 'You have altered that, my lord. She is devoted to her brother; and her brother running dangers . . . and danger in itself is an attraction to her. But her husband will have the first claim. She has her good sense. She will never insist on going, if you oppose. She will be ready to fill her station. It will be-her pride and her pleasure.'

Henrietta continued in the vein of these assurances; and Carinthia's character was shooting lightnings through him, withering that of the woman who referred to his wife's good sense and her station; and certainly would not have betrayed herself by such drawlings if she had been very positive that Carinthia's disposition toward wealth and luxury resembled hers. She knew the reverse; or so his contemptuously generous effort to frame an apology for the stuff he was hearing considered it. His wife was lost to him. That fact smote on his breast the moment he heard of her desire to go with her brother.

Wildest of enterprises! But a criminal saw himself guilty of a large part in the disaster the two heroical souls were striving desperately to repair. If her Chillon went, Carinthia would go—sure as flame is drawn to air. The exceeding splendour in the character of a young woman, injured as she had been, soft to love, as he knew her, and giving her husband no other rival than a beloved brother, no ground of complaint save her devotion to her brother, pervaded him, without illuminating or lifting; rather with an indication of a foul contrast, that prostrated him.

Half of our funny heathen lives we are bent double to gather things we have tossed away! was one of the numbers of apposite sayings that hummed about him, for a chorus of the world's old wisdom in derision, when he descended the heathy path and had sight of Carinthia beside her Chillon. Would it be the same thing if he had it in hand again? Did he wish it to be the same? Was not he another man? By the leap of his heart to the woman standing down there, he was a better man.

But recent spiritual exercises brought him to see superstitiously how by that sign she was lost to him; for everlastingly in this life the better pays for the worse; thus is the better a proved thing.

Both Chillon and Carinthia, it is probable, might have been stirred to deeper than compassion, had the proud young nobleman taken them into his breast to the scouring of it; exposing the grounds of his former brutality, his gradual enlightenment, his ultimate acknowledgement of the pricelessness of the woman he had won to lose her. An imploring of forgiveness would not have been necessary with those two, however great their—or the woman's—astonishment at the revelation of an abysmal male humanity. A complete exposure of past meanness is the deed of

Page 4197

present courage certain of its reward without as well as within; for then we show our fellows that the slough is cast. But life is a continuous fight; and members of the social world display its degree of civilization by fighting in armour; most of them are born in it; and their armour is more sensitive than their skins. It was Fleetwood's instinct of his inability to fling it off utterly which warned him of his loss of the wife, whose enthusiasm to wait on her brother in danger might have subsided into the channel of duty, even tenderness, had he been able resolutely to strip himself bare. This was the further impossible to him, because of a belief he now imposed upon himself, to cover the cowardly shrinking from so extreme a penitential act, that such confessions are due from men to the priest only, and that he could confess wholly and absolutely to the priest—to heaven, therefore, under seal, and in safety, but with perfect repentance.

So, compelled to keep his inner self unknown, he fronted Chillon; courteously, in the somewhat lofty seeming of a guarded manner, he requested audience for a few minutes; observing the princely figure of the once hated man, and understanding Henrietta's sheer womanly choice of him; Carinthia's idolatry, too, as soon as he had spoken. The man was in his voice.

Chillon said: 'It concerns my sister, I have to think. In that case, her wish is to be present. Your lordship will shorten the number of minutes for the interview by permitting it.'

Fleetwood encountered Carinthia's eyes. They did not entreat or defy. They seconded her brother, and were a civil shining naught on her husband. He bowed his head, constrained, feeling heavily the two to one.

She replied to the look: 'My brother and I have a single mind. We save time by speaking three together, my lord.'

He was led into the long room of the workshop, where various patterns of muskets, rifles, pistols, and swords were stars, crosses, wedges, over the walls, and a varnished wooden model of a piece of cannon occupied the middle place, on a block.

Contempt of military weapons and ridicule of the art of war were common on those days among a people beginning to sit with habitual snugness at the festive board provided for them by the valour of their fathers. Fleetwood had not been on the side of the banqueting citizens, though his country's journals and her feasted popular wits made a powerful current to whelm opposition. But the appearance of the woman, his wife, here, her head surrounded by destructive engines in the form of trophy, and the knowledge that this woman bearing his name designed to be out at the heels of a foreign army or tag-rag of uniformed rascals, inspired him to reprobate men's bad old game as heartily as good sense does in the abstract, and as derisively as it is the way with comfortable islanders before the midnight trumpet-notes of panic have tumbled them to their legs. He took his chair; sickened.

Page 4198

He was the next moment taking Carinthia's impression of Chillon, compelled to it by an admiration that men and women have alike for shapes of strength in the mould of grace, over whose firm build a flicker of agility seems to run. For the young soldier's figure was visibly in its repose prompt to action as the mind's movement. This was her brother; her enthusiasm for her brother was explained to him. No sooner did he have the conception of it than it plucked at him painfully; and, feeling himself physically eclipsed by the object of Carinthia's enthusiasm, his pride of the rival counselled him to preserve the mask on what was going on within, lest it should be seen that he was also morally beaten at the outset. A trained observation told him, moreover, that her Chillon's correctly handsome features, despite their conventional urbanity, could knit to smite, and held less of the reserves of mercy behind them than Carinthia's glorious barbaric ruggedness. Her eyes, each time she looked at her brother, had, without doating, the light as of the rise of happy tears to the underlids as they had on a certain day at the altar, when 'my lord' was 'my husband,'—more shyly then. He would have said, as beautifully, but for envy of the frank, pellucid worship in that look on her proved hero. It was the jewel of all the earth to win back to himself; and it subjected him, through his desire for it, to a measurement with her idol, in character, quality, strength, hardness. He heard the couple pronouncing sentence of his loss by anticipation.

Why had she primed her brother to propose the council of three? Addressing them separately, he could have been his better or truer self. The sensation of the check imposed on him was instructive as to her craft and the direction of her wishes. She preferred the braving of hazards and horrors beside her brother, in scorn of the advantages he could offer; and he yearned to her for despising by comparison the bribe he proposed in the hope that he might win her to him. She was with religion to let him know the meanness of wealth.

Thus, at the edge of the debate, or contest, the young lord's essential nobility disarmed him; and the revealing of it, which would have appealed to Carinthia and Chillon both, was forbidden by its constituent pride, which helped him to live and stood obstructing explanatory speech.

CHAPTER XLIV

BETWEEN THE EARL, THE COUNTESS AND HER BROTHER, AND OF A SILVER CROSS

Carinthia was pleased by hearing Lord Fleetwood say to her: 'Your Madge and my Gower are waiting to have the day named for them.'

She said: 'I respect him so much for his choice of Madge. They shall not wait, if I am to decide.'

‘Old Mr. Woodseer has undertaken to join them.’

‘It is in Whitechapel they will be married.’

The blow that struck was not intended, and Fleetwood passed it, under her brother’s judicial eye. Any small chance word may carry a sting for the neophyte in penitence.

Page 4199

’My lawyers will send down the settlement on her, to be read to them to-day or to-morrow. With the interest on that and the sum he tells me he has in the Funds, they keep the wolf from the door—a cottage door. They have their cottage. There’s an old song of love in a cottage. His liking for it makes him seem wiser than his clever sayings. He’ll work in that cottage.’

’They have a good friend to them in you, my lord. It will not be poverty for their simple wants. I hear of the little cottage in Surrey where they are to lodge at first, before they take one of their own.’

‘We will visit them.’

‘When I am in England I shall visit them often.’

He submitted.

‘The man up here wounded is recovering?’

’Yes, my lord. I am learning to nurse the wounded, with the surgeon to direct me.’

‘Matters are sobering down?—The workmen?’

‘They listen to reason so willingly when we speak personally, we find.’

The earl addressed Chillon. ’Your project of a Spanish expedition reminds me of favourable reports of your chief.’

‘Thoroughly able and up to the work,’ Chillon answered.

‘Queer people to meddle with.’

’We ‘re on the right side on the dispute.’

‘It counts, Napoleon says. A Spanish civil war promises bloody doings.’

‘Any war does that.’

‘In the Peninsula it’s war to the knife, a merciless business.’

‘Good schooling for the profession.’

Fleetwood glanced: she was collected and attentive. ’I hear from Mrs. Levellier that Carinthia would like to be your companion.’

‘My sister has the making of a serviceable hospital nurse.’

‘You hear the chatter of London!’

‘I have heard it.’

‘You encourage her, Mr. Levellier?’

‘She will be useful—better there than here, my lord.’

‘I claim a part in the consultation.’

’There ‘s no consultation; she determines to go.’

‘We can advise her of all the risks.’

‘She has weighed them, every one.’

’In the event of accidents, the responsibility for having persuaded her would rest on you.’

‘My brother has not persuaded me,’ Carinthia’s belltones intervened. ’I proposed it. The persuasion was mine. It is my happiness to be near him, helping, if I can.’

’Lady Fleetwood, I am entitled to think that your brother yielded to a request urged in ignorance of the nature of the risks a woman runs.’

’My brother does not yield to a request without examining it all round, my lord, and I do not. I know the risks. An evil that we should not endure,—life may go. There can be no fear for me.’

Page 4200

She spoke plain truth. The soul of this woman came out in its radiance to subdue him, as her visage sometimes did; and her voice enlarged her words. She was a warrior woman, Life her sword, Death her target, never to be put to shame, unconquerable. No such symbolical image smote him, but he had an impression, the prose of it. As in the scene of the miners' cottares, her lord could have knelt to her: and for an unprotesting longer space now. He choked a sigh, shrugged, and said, in the world's patient manner with mad people: 'You have set your mind on it; you see it rose-coloured. You would not fear, no, but your friends would have good reason to fear. It's a menagerie in revolt over there. It is not really the place for you. Abandon the thought, I beg.'

'I shall, if my brother does not go,' said Carinthia.

Laughter of spite at a remark either silly or slyly defiant was checked in Fleetwood by the horror of the feeling that she had gone, was ankle-deep in bloody mire, captive, prey of a rabble soldiery, meditating the shot or stab of the blessed end out of woman's half of our human muddle.

He said to Chillon: 'Pardon me, war is a detestable game. Women in the thick of it add a touch to the brutal hideousness of the whole thing.'

Chillon said: 'We are all of that opinion. Men have to play the game; women serving in hospital make it humaner.'

'Their hospitals are not safe.'

'Well! Safety!'

For safety is nowhere to be had. But the earl pleaded: 'At least in our country.'

'In our country women are safe?'

'They are, we may say, protected.'

'Laws and constables are poor protection for them.'

'The women we name ladies are pretty safe, as a rule.'

'My sister, then, was the exception.'

After a burning half minute the earl said: 'I have to hear it from you, Mr. Levellier. You see me here.'

That was handsomely spoken. But Lord Fleetwood had been judged and put aside. His opening of an old case to hint at repentance for brutality annoyed the man who had let him go scathless for a sister's sake.

‘The grounds of your coming, my lord, are not seen; my time is short.’

’I must, I repeat, be consulted with regard to Lady Fleetwood’s movements.’

‘My sister does not acknowledge your claim.’

‘The Countess of Fleetwood’s acts involve her husband.’

‘One has to listen at times to what old sailors call Caribbee!’ Chillon exclaimed impatiently, half aloud. ’My sister received your title; she has to support it. She did not receive the treatment of a wife:—or lady, or woman, or domestic animal. The bond is broken, as far as it bears on her subjection. She holds to the rite, thinks it sacred. You can be at rest as to her behaviour. In other respects, your lordship does not exist for her.’

‘The father of her child must exist for her.’

Page 4201

‘You raise that curtain, my lord!’

In the presence of three it would not bear a shaking.

Carinthia said, in pity of his torture:—

’I have my freedom, and am thankful for it, to follow my brother, to share his dangers with him. That is more to me than luxury and the married state. I take only my freedom.’

‘Our boy? You take the boy?’

’My child is with my sister Henrietta!

‘Where?’

‘We none know yet.’

‘You still mistrust me?’

Her eyes were on a man that she had put from her peaceably; and she replied, with sweetness in his ears, with shocks to a sinking heart, ’My lord, you may learn to be a gentle father to the child. I pray you may. My brother and I will go. If it is death for us, I pray my child may have his father, and God directing his father.’

Her speech had the clang of the final.

‘Yes, I hope—if it be the worst happening, I pray, too,’ said he, and drooped and brightened desperately: ’But you, too, Carinthia, you could aid by staying, by being with the boy and me. Carinthia!’ he clasped her name, the vapour left to him of her: ’I have learnt learnt what I am, what you are; I have to climb a height to win back the wife I threw away. She was unknown to me; I to myself nearly as much. I sent a warning of the kind of husband for you—a poor kind; I just knew myself well enough for that. You claimed my word—the blessing of my life, if I had known it! We were married; I played —I see the beast I played. Money is power, they say. I see the means it is to damn the soul, unless we—unless a man does what I do now.’

Fleetwood stopped. He had never spoken such words—arterial words, as they were, though the commonest, and with moist brows, dry lips, he could have resumed, have said more, have taken this woman, this dream of the former bride, the present stranger, into his chamber of the brave aims and sentenced deeds. Her brother in the room was the barrier; and she sat mute, large-eyed, expressionless. He had plunged low in the man’s hearing; the air of his lungs was thick, hard to breathe, for shame of a degradation so extreme.

Chillon imagined him to be sighing. He had to listen further. ‘Soul’ had been an uttered word. When the dishonouring and mishandling brute of a young nobleman stuttered a compliment to Carinthia on her ’faith in God’s assistance and the efficacy of prayer,’ he jumped to his legs, not to be shouting ‘Hound!’ at him. He said, under control: ’God’s name shall be left to the Church. My sister need not be further troubled. She has shown she is not persuaded by me. Matters arranged here quickly,—we start. If I am asked whether I think she does wisely to run the risks in an insurrectionary country rather than remain at home exposed to the honours and amusements your lordship offers, I think so; she is acting in her best interests. She has the choice of being abroad with me or staying here unguarded

Page 4202

by me. She has had her experience. She chooses rightly. Paint the risks she runs, you lay the colours on those she escapes.' She thanks the treatment she has undergone for her freedom to choose. I am responsible for nothing but the not having stood against her most wretched marriage. It might have been foreseen. Out there in the war she is protected. Here she is with—I spare your lordship the name.'

Fleetwood would have heard harsher had he not been Carinthia's husband. He withheld his reply. The language moved him to proud hostility: but the speaker was Carinthia's brother.

He said to her: 'You won't forget Gower and Madge?'

She gave him a smile in saying: 'It shall be settled for a day after next week.'

The forms of courtesy were exchanged.

At the closing of the door on him, Chillon said: 'He did send a message: I gathered it —without the words—from our Uncle Griphard. I thought him in honour bound to you—-and it suited me that I should.'

'I was a blindfold girl, dearest; no warning would have given me sight,' said Carinthia. 'That was my treachery to the love of my brother. . I dream of father and mother reproaching me.'

The misery of her time in England had darkened her mind's picture of the early hour with Chillon on the heights above the forsaken old home; and the enthusiasm of her renewed devotion to her brother giving it again, as no light of a lost Eden, as the brilliant step she was taking with him from their morning Eastern Alps to smoky-crimson Pyrenees and Spanish Sierras; she could imagine the cavernous interval her punishment for having abandoned a sister's duties in the quest of personal happiness.

But simultaneously, the growing force of her mind's intelligence, wherein was no enthusiasm to misdirect by overcolouring, enabled her to gather more than a suspicion of comparative feebleness in the man stripped of his terrors. She penetrated the discrowned tyrant's nature some distance, deep enough to be quit of her foregoing alarms. These, combined with his assured high style, had woven him the magical coat, threadbare to quiet scrutiny. She matched him beside her brother. The dwarfed object was then observed; and it was not for a woman to measure herself beside him. She came, however, of a powerful blood, and he was pressing her back on her resources: without the measurement or a thought of it, she did that which is the most ordinary and the least noticed of our daily acts in civilized intercourse, she subjected him to the trial of the elements composing him, by collision with what she felt of her own; and it was because she felt them strongly, aware of her feeling them, but unaware of any conflict, that the wrestle occurred. She flung him, pitied him, and passed on along her path

elsewhere. This can be done when love is gone. It is done more or less at any meeting of men and men; and men and women who love not are perpetually doing it, unconsciously or sensibly. Even in their love, a time for the trial arrives among certain of them; and the leadership is assumed, and submission ensues, tacitly; nothing of the contention being spoken, perhaps, nothing definitely known.

Page 4203

In Carinthia's case, her revived enthusiasm for her brother drove to the penetration of the husband pleading to thwart its course. His offer was wealth: that is, luxury, amusement, ease. The sub-audible 'himself' into the bargain was disregarded, not counting with one who was an upward rush of fire at the thought that she was called to share her brother's dangers.

Chillon cordially believed the earl to be the pestilent half madman, junction with whom is a constant trepidation for the wife, when it is not a screaming plight. He said so, and Carinthia let him retain his opinion. She would have said it herself to support her scheme, though 'mad' applied to a man moving in the world with other men was not understood by her.

With Henrietta for the earl's advocate, she was patient as the deaf rock-wall enthusiam can be against entreaties to change its direction or bid it disperse: The 'private band of picked musicians' at the disposal of the Countess of Fleetwood, and Opera singers (Henrietta mentioned resonant names) hired for wonderful nights at Esslemont and Calesford or on board the earl's beautiful schooner yacht, were no temptation. Nor did Henrietta's allusions to his broken appearance move his wife, except in her saying regretfully: 'He changes.'

On the hall table at Esslemont, a letter from his bankers informed the earl of a considerable sum of money paid in to his account in the name of Lord Brailstone. Chumley Potts, hanging at him like a dog without a master since the death of his friend Ambrose, had journeyed down: 'Anxious about you,' he said. Anxious about or attracted by the possessor of Ambrose Mallard's 'clean sweeper,' the silver-mounted small pistol; sight of which he begged to have; and to lengthened his jaw on hearing it was loaded. A loaded pistol, this dark little one to the right of the earl's blotting-pad and pens, had the look of a fearful link with his fallen chaps and fishy hue. Potts maundered moralities upon 'life,' holding the thing in his hand, weighing it, eyeing the muzzle. He 'couldn't help thinking of what is going to happen to us after it all': and 'Brosey knows now!' was followed by a twitch of one cheek and the ejaculation 'Forever!' Fleetwood alive and Ambrose dead were plucking the startled worldling to a peep over the verge into our abyss; and the young lord's evident doing of the same commanded Chumley Potts' imitation of him under the cloud Ambrose had become for both of them.

He was recommended to see Lord Feltre, if he had a desire to be instructed on the subject of the mitigation of our pains in the regions below. Potts affirmed that he meant to die a Protestant Christian. Thereupon, carrying a leaden burden of unlaughed laughable stuff in his breast, and Chummy's concluding remark to speed him: 'Damn it, no, we'll stick to our religion!' Fleetwood strode off to his library, and with the names of the Ixionides of his acquaintance ringing round his head, proceeded

Page 4204

to strike one of them off the number privileged at the moment to intrude on him. Others would follow; this one must be the first to go. He wrote the famous letter to Lord Brailstone, which debarred the wily pursuer from any pretext to be running down into Mrs. Levellier's neighbourhood, and also precluded the chance of his meeting the fair lady at Calesford. With the brevity equivalent to the flick of a glove on the cheek, Lord Brailstone was given to understand by Lord Fleetwood that relations were at an end between them. No explanation was added; a single sentence executed the work, and in the third person. He did not once reflect on the outcry in the ear of London coming from the receiver of such a letter upon payment of a debt.

The letter posted and flying, Lord Fleetwood was kinder to Chumley Potts; he had a friendly word for Gower Woodseer; though both were heathens, after their diverse fashions, neither of them likely ever to set out upon the grand old road of Rome: Lord Feltre's 'Appian Way of the Saints and Comforters.'

Chummy was pardoned when they separated at night for his reiterated allusions to the temptation of poor Ambrose Mallard's conclusive little weapon lying on the library table within reach of a man's arm-chair: in its case, and the case locked, yes, but easily opened, 'provoking every damnable sort of mortal curiosity!' The soundest men among us have their fits of the blues, Fleetwood was told. 'Not wholesome!' Chummy shook his head resolutely, and made himself comprehensibly mysterious. He meant well. He begged his old friend to promise he would unload and keep it unloaded. 'For I know the infernal worry you have—deuced deal worse than a night's bad luck!' said he; and Fleetwood smiled sourly at the world's total ignorance of causes. His wretchedness was due now to the fact that the aforetime huntress refused to be captured. He took a silver cross from a table-drawer and laid it on the pistol-case. 'There, Chummy,' he said; that was all; not sermonizing or proselytizing. He was partly comprehended by Chumley Potts, fully a week later. The unsuspecting fellow, soon to be despatched in the suite of Brailstone, bore away an unwontedly affectionate dismissal to his bed, and spoke some rather squeamish words himself, as he recollected with disgust when he ran about over London repeating his executioner's.

The Cross on the pistol-case may have conduced to Lord Fleetwood's thought, that his days among unrepentant ephemeral Protestant sinners must have their immediate termination. These old friends were the plague-infected clothes he flung off his body. But the Cross where it lay, forbidding a movement of the hand to that box, was authoritative to decree his passage through a present torture, by the agency of the hand he held back from the solution of his perplexity, at the cost which his belief in the Eternal would pay. Henrietta had mentioned her husband's defeat, by some dastardly contrivance.

Page 4205

He had to communicate, for the disburdening of his soul, not only that he was guilty, but the meanest of criminals, in being no more than half guilty. His training told him of the contempt women entertain toward the midway or cripple sinner, when they have no special desire to think him innocent. How write, or even how phrase his having merely breathed in his ruffian's hearing the wish that he might hear of her husband's defeat! And with what object? Here, too, a woman might, years hence, if not forgive, bend her head resignedly over the man's vile nature, supposing strong passion his motive. But the name for the actual motive? It would not bear writing, or any phrasing round it. An unsceptred despot bidden take a fair woman's eyes into his breast, saw and shrank. And now the eyes were Carinthia's: he saw a savage bridegroom, and a black ladder-climber, and the sweetest of pardoning brides, and the devil in him still insatiate for revenge upon her who held him to his word.

He wrote, read, tore the page, trimmed the lamp, and wrote again. He remembered Gower Woodseer's having warned him he would finish his career a monk. Not, like Feltre, an oily convert, but under the hood, yes, and extracting a chartreuse from his ramble through woods richer far than the philosopher's milk of Mother Nature's bosom. There flamed the burning signal of release from his torments; there his absolving refuge, instead of his writing fruitless, intricate, impossible stuff to a woman. The letter was renounced and shredded: the dedicated ascetic contemplated a hooded shape, washed of every earthly fleck. It proved how men may by power of grip squeeze raptures out of pain.

CHAPTER XLV

CONTAINS A RECORD OF WHAT WAS FEARED, WHAT WAS HOPED, AND WHAT HAPPENED

The Dame is at her thumps for attention to be called to 'the strangeness of it,' that a poor, small, sparse village, hardly above a hamlet, on the most unproductive of Kentish heights, part of old forest land, should at this period become 'the cynosure of a city beautifully named by the poet Great Augusta, and truly indeed the world's metropolis.'

Put aside her artful pother to rouse excitement at stages of a narrative, London's general eye upon little Croridge was but another instance of the extraordinary and not so wonderful. Lady Arpington, equal to a Parliament in herself, spoke of the place and the countess courted by her repentant lord. Brailstone and Chumley Potts were town criers of the executioner letter each had received from the earl; Potts with his chatter of a suicide's pistol kept loaded in a case under a two-inch-long silver Cross, and with sundry dramatic taps on the forehead, Jottings over the breast, and awful grimace of devoutness. There was no mistaking him. The young nobleman of the millions was watched; the town spyglass had him in its orbit. Tales of the ancestral Fleetwoods

Page 4206

ran beside rumours of a Papist priest at the bedside of the Foredoomed to Error's dying mother. His wealth was counted, multiplied by the ready naughts of those who know little and dread much. Sir Meeson Corby referred to an argument Lord Fleetwood had held on an occasion hotly against the logical consistency of the Protestant faith; and to his alarm lest some day 'all that immense amount of money should slip away from us to favour the machinations of Roman Catholicism!' The Countess of Cressett, Livia, anticipated her no surprise at anything Lord Fleetwood might do: she knew him.

So thereupon, with the whirr of a covey on wing before the fowler, our crested three of immemorial antiquity and a presumptive immortality, the Ladies Endor, Eldritch, and Cowry, shot up again, hooting across the dormant chief city Old England's fell word of the scarlet shimmer above the nether pit-flames, Rome. An ancient horror in the blood of the population, conceiving the word to signify, beak, fang, and claw, the fiendish ancient enemy of the roasting day of yore, heard and echoed. Sleepless at the work of the sapper, in preparation for the tiger's leap, Rome is keen to spy the foothold of English stability, and her clasp of a pillar of the structure sends tremors to our foundations.

The coupling of Rome and England's wealthiest nobleman struck a match to terrorize the Fire Insurance of Smithfield. That meteoric, intractable, perhaps wicked, but popular, reputedly clever; manifestly evil-starred, enormously wealthy, young Earl of Fleetwood, wedded to an adventuress, and a target for the scandals emanating from the woman, was daily, without omission of a day, seen walking Piccadilly pavement in company once more with the pervert, the Jesuit agent, that crafty Catesby of a Lord Feltre, arm in arm the pair of them, and uninterruptedly conversing, utterly unlike Englishmen. Mr. Rose Mackrell passed them, and his breezy salutation of the earl was unobserved in my lord's vacant glass optics, as he sketched the scene. London had report of the sinister tempter and the imperilled young probationer undisguisedly entering the Roman Catholic chapel of a fashionable district-chapel erected on pervert's legacies, down a small street at the corner of a grandee square, by tolerance or connivance of our constabulary,—entering it linked; and linked they issued, their heads bent; for the operation of the tonsure, you would say. Two English noblemen! But is there no legislation to stop the disease? Our female government asks it vixenly of our impotent male; which pretends, beneath an air of sympathy, that we should abstain from any compulsory action upon the law to interfere, though the situation is confessedly grave; and the aspect men assume is correspondingly, to the last degree provokingly, grave-half alive that they are, or void of patriotism, or Babylonian at heart!

Page 4207

Lord Fleetwood's yet undocked old associates vowed he 'smelt strong' of the fumes of the whirled silver censer-balls. His disfavour had caused a stoppage of supplies, causing vociferous abomination of their successful rivals, the Romish priests. Captain Abrane sniffed, loud as a horse, condemnatory as a cat, in speaking of him. He said: 'By George, it comes to this; we shall have to turn Catholics for a loan!' Watchdogs of the three repeated the gigantic gambler's melancholy roar. And, see what gap, cried the ratiocination of alarm, see the landslip it is in our body, national and religious, when exalted personages go that way to Rome!

As you and the world have reflected in your sager moods, an ordinary pebble may roll where it likes, for individualism of the multitudinously obscure little affects us. Not so the costly jewel, which is a congregation of ourselves, in our envies and longings and genuflexions thick about its lustres. The lapses of precious things must needs carry us, both by weight and example, and it will ceaselessly be, that we are possessed by the treasure we possess, we hang on it. A still, small voice of England's mind under panic sent up these truisms containing admonitions to the governing Ladies. They, the most conservative of earthly bodies, clamoured in return, like cloud-scud witches that have caught fire at their skirts from the torches of marsh-fire radicals. They cited for his arrest the titled millionaire who made a slide for the idiots of the kingdom; they stigmatized our liberty as a sophistry, unless we have in it the sustaining element of justice; and where is the justice that punishes his country for any fatal course a mad young Croesus may take! They shackled the hands of testators, who endangered the salvation of coroneted boys by having sanction to bequeath vast wealth in bulk. They said, in truth, that it was the liberty to be un-Christian. Finally, they screeched a petitioning of Parliament to devote a night to a sitting, and empower the Lord Chancellor to lay an embargo on the personal as well as the real estate of wealthy perverts; in common prudence depriving Rome of the coveted means to turn our religious weapons against us.

The three guardian ladies and their strings of followers headed over the fevered and benighted town, as the records of the period attest, windpiping these and similar Solan notes from the undigested cropful of alarms Lord Fleetwood's expected conduct crammed into them. They and all the world traced his present madness to the act foregoing: that marriage! They reviewed it to deplore it, every known incident and the numbers imagined; yet merely to deplore: frightful comparisons of then with now rendered the historical shock to the marriage market matter for a sick smile. Evil genius of some sort beside him the wealthy young nobleman is sure to have. He has got rid of one to take up with a viler. First, a sluttish trollop of German origin is foisted on him for life; next, he is misled to abjure the faith of his fathers for Rome. But patently, desperation in the husband of such a wife weakened his resistance to the Roman Catholic pervert's insinuations. There we punctuate the full stop to our inquiries; we have the secret.

Page 4208

And upon that, suddenly comes a cyclonic gust; and gossip twirls, whines, and falls to the twanging of an entirely new set of notes, that furnish a tolerably agreeable tune, on the whole. O hear! The Marchioness of Arpington proclaims not merely acquaintanceship with Lord Fleetwood's countess, she professes esteem for the young person. She has been heard to say, that if the Principality of Wales were not a royal title, a dignity of the kind would be conferred by the people of those mountains on the Countess of Fleetwood: such unbounded enthusiasm there was for her character when she sojourned down there. As it is, they do speak of her in their Welsh by some title. Their bards are offered prizes to celebrate her deeds. You remember the regiment of mounted Welsh gentlemen escorting her to her Kentish seat, with their band of the three-stringed harps! She is well-born, educated, handsome, a perfectly honest woman, and a sound Protestant. Quite the reverse of Lord Fleetwood's seeking to escape her, it is she who flies; she cannot forgive him his cruelties and infidelities: and that is the reason why he threatens to commit the act of despair. Only she can save him! She has flown for refuge to her uncle, Lord Levellier's house at a place named Croridge—not in the gazetteer—hard of access and a home of poachers, where shooting goes on hourly; but most picturesque and romantic, as she herself is! Lady Arpington found her there, nursing one of the wounded, and her uncle on his death-bed; obdurate all round against her husband, but pensive when supplicated to consider her country endangered by Rome. She is a fervent patriot. The tales of her Whitechapel origin, and heading mobs wielding bludgeons, are absolutely false, traceable to scandalizing anecdotists like Mr. Rose Mackrell. She is the beautiful example of an injured wife doing honour to her sex in the punishment of a faithless husband, yet so little cherishing her natural right to deal him retribution, that we dare hope she will listen to her patriotic duty in consenting to the reconcilement, which is Lord Fleetwood's alternative: his wife or Rome! They say she has an incommunicable charm, accounting for the price he puts on her now she holds aloof and he misses it. Let her but rescue him from England's most vigilant of her deadly enemies, she will be entitled to the nation's lasting gratitude. She has her opportunity for winning the Anglican English, as formerly she won the Dissenter Welsh. She may yet be the means of leading back the latter to our fold.

A notation of the cries in air at a time of surgent public excitement can hardly yield us music; and the wording of them, by the aid of compounds and transplants, metaphors and similes only just within range of the arrows of Phoebus' bow (i.e. the farthest flight known), would, while it might imitate the latent poetry, expose venturesome writers to the wrath of a people commendably believing their language a perfected instrument

Page 4209

when they prefer the request for a plateful, and commissioning their literary police to brain audacious experimenters who enlarge or wing it beyond the downright aim at that mark. The gossip of the time must therefore appear commonplace, in resemblance to the panting venue a terre of the toad, instead of the fiery steed's; although we have documentary evidence that our country's heart was moved;—in no common degree, Dr. Glossop's lucid English has it, at the head of a broadsheet ballad discovered by him, wherein the connubially inclined young earl and the nation in turn beseech the countess to resume her place at Esslemont, and so save both from a terrific dragon's jaw, scarlet as the infernal flames; described as fascinating—

> 'The classes with the crests,
> And the lining to their vests,
> Till down they jump, and empty leave
> A headless trunk that rests.'

These ballads, burlesque to present reading, mainly intended for burlesque by the wits who dogged without much enlivening an anxious period of our history, when corner-stones were falling the way the young lord of the millions threatened to go, did, there is little doubt, according to another part of their design (Rose Mackrell boasts it indirectly in his Memoirs), interpret public opinion, that is, the English humour of it—the half laugh in their passing and not simulated shudder.

Carinthia had a study of the humours of English character in the person of the wounded man she nursed on little Croridge, imagining it the most unobserved of English homes, and herself as unimportant an object. Daniel Charner took his wound, as he took his medicine and his posset from her hand, kindly, and seemed to have a charitable understanding of Lord Levellier now that the old nobleman had driven a pellet of lead into him and laid him flat. It pleased him to assure her that his mates were men of their word, and had promised to pay the old lord with a 'rouse' for it, nothing worse. Her father used to speak of the 'clean hearts of the English' as to the husbanding of revenge; that is, the 'no spot of bad blood' to vitiate them. Captain John Peter seconded all good-humoured fighters 'for the long account': they will surely win; and it was one of his maxims: 'My foe can spoil my face; he beats me if he spoils my temper.'

Recalling the scene of her bridal day—the two strong Englishmen at the shake of hands, that had spoiled one another's faces, she was enlightened with a comprehension of her father's love for the people; seeing the spiritual of the gross ugly picture, as not every man can do, and but a warrior Joan among women. Chillon shall teach the Spanish people English heartiness, she thought. Lord Fleetwood's remarks on the expedition would have sufficed to stamp it righteous with her; that was her logic of the low valuation of him. She fancied herself absolutely released at his departure. Neither her sister Riette nor her friend Owain, administering sentiment and common sense to her by turns, could conceive how the passion for the recovery of her brother's military name fed the hope that she might aid in it, how the hope fed the passion. She

had besides her hunger to be at the work she could do; her Chillon’s glory for morning sky above it.

Page 4210

Such was the mind Lady Arpington brought the world's wisdom to bear upon; deeming it in the end female only in its wildness and obstinacy. Carinthia's answers were few, barely varied. Her repetition of 'my brother' irritated the great lady, whose argument was directed to make her see that these duties toward her brother were primarily owing to her husband, the man she would reclaim and could guide. And the Countess of Fleetwood's position, her duty to society, her dispensing of splendid hospitality, the strengthening of her husband to do his duty to the nation, the saving of him from a fatal step-from Rome; these were considerations for a reasonable woman to weigh before she threw up all to be off on the maddest of adventures. 'Inconceivable, my dear child!' Lady Arpington proceeded until she heard herself as droning.

Carinthia's unmoved aspect of courteous attention appeared to invoke the prolongation of the sermon it criticized. It had an air of reversing their positions while she listened to the charge of folly, and incidentally replied.

Her reason for not fearing Roman Catholic encroachments was, she said, her having known good Catholics in the country she came from. For herself, she should die professing the faith of her father and mother. Behind her correct demeanour a rustic intelligence was exhibited. She appreciated her duty to her marriage oath: 'My husband's honour is quite safe with me.' Neither England nor religion, nor woman's proper devotion to a husband's temporal and spiritual welfare, had claims rivalling her devotion to her brother. She could not explain a devotion that instigated her to an insensate course. It seemed a kind of enthusiasm; and it was coldly spoken; in the tone referring to 'her husband's honour.' Her brother's enterprise had her approval because 'her mother's prayer was for him to serve in the English army.' By running over to take a side in a Spanish squabble? she was asked and answered: 'He will learn war; my Chillon will show his value; he will come back a tried soldier.'

She counted on his coming back? She did.

'I cannot take a step forward without counting on success. We know the chances we are to meet. My father has written of death. We do not fear it, so it is nothing to us. We shall go together; we shall not have to weep for one another.'

The strange young woman's avoidance of any popular sniffle of the pathetic had a recognized merit.

'Tell me,' Lady Arpington said abruptly; 'this maid of yours, who is to marry the secretary, or whatever he was—you are satisfied with her?'

'She is my dear servant Madge.' A cloud opened as Carinthia spoke the name. 'She will be a true wife to him. They will always be my friends!'

Nothing against the earl in that direction, apparently; unless his countess was blest with the density of frigidity.

Society's emissary sketched its perils for unprotected beautiful woman; an outline of the London quadrille Henrietta danced in; and she glanced at Carinthia and asked: 'Have you thought of it?'

Page 4211

Carinthia's eyes were on the great lady's. Their meaning was, 'You hit my chief thought.' They were read as her farthest thought. For the hint of Henrietta's weakness deadened her feelings with a reminder of warm and continued solicitations rebutted; the beautiful creature's tortures at the idea of her exile from England. An outwearied hopelessness expressed a passive sentiment very like indifference in the clear wide gaze. She replied: 'I have. My proposal to her was Cadiz, with both our young ones. She will not.'

And there is an end to that part of the question! Lady Arpington interpreted it, by the gaze more than the words, under subjection of the young woman's character. Nevertheless, she bore away Carinthia's consent to a final meeting with the earl at her house in London, as soon as things were settled at Croridge. Chillon, whom she saw, was just as hard, unforgiving, careless of his country's dearest interests; brother and sister were one heart of their one blood. She mentioned the general impression in town, that the countess and only she could save the earl from Rome. A flash of polite laughter was Chillon's response. But after her inspection of the elegant athlete, she did fancy it possible for a young wife, even for Henrietta, to bear his name proudly in his absence—if that was worth a moment's consideration beside the serious issues involved in her appeal to the countess; especially when the suggestion regarding young wives left unprotected, delicately conveyed to the husband, had failed of its purpose. The handsome husband's brows fluttered an interrogation, as if her clear-obscure should be further lighted; and it could not be done. He weighed the wife by the measure of the sister, perhaps; or his military head had no room for either. His callousness to the danger of his country's disintegration, from the incessant, becoming overt, attacks of a foreign priesthood might—an indignant great lady's precipitation to prophecy said would—bring chastisement on him. She said it, and she liked Henrietta, vowing to defeat her forecast as well as she could in a land seeming forsaken by stable principles; its nobles breaking up its national church, going over to Rome, embracing the faith of the impostor Mahomet.

Gossip fed to the starvation bone of Lady Arpington's report, until one late afternoon, memorable for the breeding heat in the van of elemental artillery, newsboys waved damp sheets of fresh print through the streets, and society's guardians were brought to confess, in shame and gladness, that they had been growing sceptical of the active assistance of Providence. At first the 'Terrible explosion of gunpowder at Croridge' alarmed them lest the timely Power should have done too much. A day later the general agitation was pacified; Lady Arpington circulated the word 'safe,' and the world knew the disaster had not engulphed Lady Fleetwood's valuable life. She had the news by word of mouth from the

Page 4212

lovely Mrs. Kirby-Levellier, sister-in-law to the countess. We are convinced we have proof of Providence intervening when some terrific event of the number at its disposal accomplishes the thing and no more than the thing desired. Pitiful though it may seem for a miserly old lord to be blown up in his bed, it is necessarily a subject of congratulation if the life, or poor remnant of a life, sacrificed was an impediment to our righteous wishes. But this is a theme for the Dame, who would full surely have committed another breach of the treaty, had there not been allusion to her sisterhood's view of the government of human affairs.

On the day preceding the catastrophe, Chillon's men returned to work. He and Carinthia and Mr. Wythan lunched with Henrietta at Stoneridge. Walking down to Lekkatts, they were astounded to see the figure of the spectral old lord on the plank to the powder store, clad in his long black cloak, erect. He was crossing, he told them, to count his barrels; a dream had disturbed him. Chillon fell to rapid talk upon various points of business, and dispersed Lord Levellier's memory relating to his errand. Leaning on Carinthia's arm, he went back to the house, where he was put to bed in peace of mind. His resuscitated physical vigour blocked all speculation for the young people assembled at Stoneridge that night. They hardly spoke; they strangled thoughts forming as larvae of wishes. Henrietta would be away to Lady Arpington's next day, Mr. Wythan to Wales. The two voyagers were sadder by sympathy than the two whom they were leaving to the clock's round of desert sameness. About ten at night Chillon and Mr. Wythan escorted Carinthia, for the night's watch beside her uncle, down to Lekkatts. It was midway that the knocks on air, as of a muffled mallet at a door and at farther doors of caverns, smote their ears and shook the ground.

After an instant of the silence following a shock, Carinthia touched her brother's arm; and Chillon said:

'Not my powder!'

They ran till they had Lekkatts in sight. A half moon showed the house; it stood. Fifty paces below, a column of opal smoke had begun to wreathe and stretch a languid flag. The 'rouse' promised to Lord Levellier by Daniel Charner's humorous mates had hit beyond its aim. Intended to give him a start—or 'One-er in return,' it surpassed his angry shot at the body of them in effect.

Carinthia entered his room and saw that he was lying stretched restfully. She whispered of this to Chillon, and began upon her watch, reading her Spanish phrasebook; and she could have wept, if she had been a woman for tears. Her duty to stay in England with Chillon's fair wife crossed the beckoning pages like a black smoke. Her passion to go and share her brother's dangers left the question of its righteousness at each fall of the big breath.

Her uncle’s grey head on his pillow was like a flintstone in chalk under her look by light of dawn; the chin had dropped.

Page 4213

CHAPTER XLVI

A CHAPTER OF UNDERCURRENTS AND SOME SURFACE FLASHES

Thus a round and a good old English practical repartee, worthy a place in England's book of her historical popular jests; conceived ingeniously, no bit murderously, even humanely, if Englishmen are to be allowed indulgence of a jolly hit back for an injury—-more a feint than a real stroke—gave the miserly veteran his final quake and cut Chillon's knot.

Lord Levellier dead of the joke detracted from the funny idea there had been in the anticipation of his hearing the libertine explosion of his grand new powder, and coming out cloaked to see what walls remained upright. Its cleverness, however, was magnified by the shades into which it had despatched him. The man who started the 'rouse for old Griphard' was named: nor did he shuffle his honours off. Chillon accused him, and he regretfully grinned; he would have owned to it eloquently, excited by the extreme ingenuity, but humour at the criminal bar is an abject thing, that has to borrow from metaphysics for the expository words. He lacked them entirely, and as he could not, fronting his master, supply the defect with oaths, he drew up and let out on the dead old lord, who wanted a few pounds of blasting powder, like anything else in everybody's way. Chillon expected the lowest of his countrymen to show some degree of chivalry upon occasions like the present. He was too young to perceive how it is, that a block of our speech in the needed direction drives it storming in another, not the one closely expressing us. Carinthia liked the man; she was grieved to hear of his having got the sack summarily, when he might have had a further month of service or a month's pay. Had not the workmen's forbearance been much tried? And they had not stolen, they had bought the powder, only intending to startle.

She touched her brother's native sense of fairness and vexed him with his cowardly devil of impatience, which kicked at a simply stupid common man, and behaved to a lordly offender, smelling rascal, civilly. Just as her father would have—treated the matter, she said: 'Are we sorry for what has happened, Chillon?' The man had gone, the injustice was done; the master was left to reflect on the part played by his inheritance of the half share of ninety thousand pounds in his proper respect for Lord Levellier's memory. Harsh to an inferior is a horrible charge. But the position of debtor to a titled cur brings a worse for endurance. Knowing a part of Lord Fleetwood's message to Lord Levellier suppressed, the bride's brother, her chief guardian, had treated the omission as of no importance, and had all the while understood that he ought to give her his full guess at the reading of it: or so his racked mind understood it now. His old father had said: A dumb tongue can be a heavy liar; and, Lies are usurers' coin we pay for ten thousand per cent. His harshness in the past hour to a workman who had suffered with him and had not intended serious mischief was Chillon's

unsounded motive for the resolution to be out of debt to the man he loathed. There is a Muse that smiles aloft surveying our acts from the well-springs.

Page 4214

Carinthia heard her brother's fuller version of the earl's communication to her uncle before the wild day of her marriage. 'Not particularly fitted for the married state,' Chillon phrased it, saying: 'He seems to have known himself, he was honest so far.' She was advised to think it over, that the man was her husband.

She had her brother's heart in her breast, she could not misread him. She thought it over, and felt a slight drag of compassion for the reluctant bridegroom. That was a stretch long leagues distant from love with her; the sort of feeling one has for strange animals hurt and she had in her childish blindness done him a hurt, and he had bitten her. He was a weak young nobleman; he had wealth for a likeness of strength; he had no glory about his head. Why had he not chosen a woman to sit beside him who would have fancied his coronet a glory and his luxury a kindness? But the poor young nobleman did not choose! The sadly comic of his keeping to the pledge of his word—-his real wife—the tyrant of the tyrant—clothed him; the vision of him at the altar, and on the coach, and at the Royal Sovereign Inn, and into the dimness where a placidly smiling recollection met a curtain and lost the smile.

Suppose that her duty condemned her to stay in England on guard over Chillon's treasure! The perpetual struggle with a weak young nobleman of aimless tempers and rightabout changes, pretending to the part of husband, would, she foresaw, raise another figure of duty, enchaining a weak young woman. The world supported his pretension; and her passion to serve as Chillon's comrade sank at a damping because it was flame. Chillon had done that; Lady Arpington, to some extent; Henrietta more. A little incident, pointing in no direction, had left a shadow of a cloud, consequent upon Lady Arpington's mention of Henrietta's unprotectedness. Stepping up the hill to meet her sister, on the morning of Henrietta's departure for London under the convoy of Mr. Wythan, Carinthia's long sight spied Kit Ines, or a man like him, in the meadow between Lekkatts and Croridge. He stood before Henrietta, and vanished light-legged at a gesture. Henrietta was descending to take her leave of her busied husband; her cheeks were flushed; she would not speak of the fellow, except to reply, 'oh, a beggar,' and kept asking whether she ought not to stay at Stoneridge. And if she did she would lose the last of the Opera in London! How could she help to investigate the cause of an explosion so considerate to them? She sang snatches of melodies, clung to her husband, protested her inability to leave him, and went, appearing torn away. As well bid healthy children lie abed on a bright summer morning, as think of holding this fair young woman bound to the circle of safety when she has her view of pleasure sparkling like the shore-sea mermaid's mirror.

Page 4215

Suspicions were not of the brood Carinthia's bosom harboured. Suspicion of Chillon's wife Carinthia could not feel. An uncaptained vessel in the winds on high seas was imagined without a picturing of it. The apparition of Ives, if it was he, would not fit with any conjecture. She sent a warning to Madge, and at the same time named the girl's wedding day for her; pained in doing it. She had given the dear girl her word that she would be present at this of all marriages. But a day or two days or more would have to be spent away from Chillon; and her hunger for every hour beside her brother confessed to the war going on within her, as to which was her holier duty, the one on the line of her inclinations, or that one pointing to luxury-choice between a battle-horse and a cushioned-chair; between companionship with her glorious brother facing death, and submission to a weak young nobleman claiming his husband's rights over her. She had submitted, had forgotten his icy strangeness, had thought him love; and hers was a breast for love, it was owned by the sobbing rise of her breast at the thought. And she might submit again—in honour? scorning the husband? Chillon scorned him. Yet Chillon left the decision to her, specified his excuses. And Henrietta and Owain, Lady Arpington, Gower Woodseer, all the world—Carinthia shuddered at the world's blank eye on what it directs for the acquiescence of the woman. That shred of herself she would become, she felt herself becoming it when the view of her career beside her brother waned. The dead Rebecca living in her heart was the only soul among her friends whose voice was her own against the world's.

But there came a turn where she and Rebecca separated. Rebecca's insurgent wishes taking shape of prophecy, robbed her of her friend Owain, to present her an impossible object, that her mind could not compass or figure. She bade Rebecca rest and let her keep the fancy of Owain as her good ghost of a sun in the mist of a frosty morning; sweeter to her than an image of love, though it were the very love, the love of maidens' dreams, bursting the bud of romance, issuing its flower. Delusive love drove away with a credulous maiden, under an English heaven, on a coach and four, from a windy hill-top, to a crash below, and a stunned recovery in the street of small shops, mud, rain, gloom, language like musket-fire and the wailing wounded.

No regrets, her father had said; they unman the heart we want for to-morrow. She kept her look forward at the dead wall Chillon had thrown up. He did not reject her company; his prospect of it had clouded; and there were allusions to Henrietta's loneliness. 'His Carin could do her service by staying, if she decided that way.' Her enthusiasm dropped to the level of life's common ground. With her sustainment gone, she beheld herself a titled doll, and had sternly to shut her eyes on the behind scenes, bar any shadowy approaches of womanly softness; thinking her father's daughter dishonoured in the submissive wife of the weak young nobleman Chillon despised as below the title of man.

Page 4216

Madge and Gower came to Stoneridge on their road to London three days before their union. Madge had no fear of Ines, but said: 'I never let Mr. Gower out of my sight.' Perforce of studying him with the thirsty wonder consequent upon his proposal to her, she had got fast hold of the skirts of his character; she 'knew he was happy because he was always making her laugh at herself.' Her manner of saying, 'She hoped to give him a comfortable home, so that he might never be sorry for what he had done,' was toned as in a church, beautiful to her mistress. Speaking of my lord's great kindness, her eyes yearned for a second and fell humbly. She said of Kit Ives, 'He's found a new "paytron," Sarah says Mr. Woodseer tells her, my lady. It's another nobleman, Lord Brailstone, has come into money lately and hired him for his pugilist when it's not horseracing.' Gower spoke of thanks to Lord Fleetwood for the independence allowing him to take a wife and settle to work in his little Surrey home. He, too, showed he could have said more and was advised not to push at a shut gate. My lord would attend their wedding as well as my lady, Carinthia heard from Madge; counting it a pity that wealthy noblemen had no professions to hinder the doing of unprofitable things.

Her sensibility was warmer on the wedding-day of these two dear ones. He graced the scene, she admitted, when reassured by his perfect reserve toward her personally. He was the born nobleman in his friendliness with the bridal pair and respectfulness to Mr. Woodseer. High social breeding is an exquisite performance on the instrument we are, and his behaviour to her left her mind at liberty for appreciation of it. Condescension was not seen, his voice had no false note. During the ceremony his eyelids blinked rapidly. At the close, he congratulated the united couple, praising them each for the wisdom of their choice. He said to his countess:

'This is one of the hopeful marriages; chiefly of your making.'

She replied: 'My prayers will be for them always.'

'They are fortunate who have your prayers,' he said, and turned to Sarah Winch. She was to let him know when she also had found her 'great philosopher.' Sarah was like a fish on a bank, taking gasps at the marvel of it all; she blushed the pale pink of her complexion, and murmured of 'happiness.' Gower had gone headlong into happiness, where philosophers are smirkers and mouthers of ordinary stuff. His brightest remark was to put the question to his father: 'The three good things of the Isle of Britain?' and treble the name of Madge Woodseer for a richer triad than the Glamorgan man could summon. Pardonably foolish; but mindful of a past condition of indiscipline, Nature's philosopher said to the old minister: 'Your example saved me for this day at a turn of my road, sir.' Nature's poor wild scholar paid that tribute to the regimental sectarian. Enough for proud philosophy to have done the thing

Page 4217

demonstrably right, Gower's look at his Madge and the world said. That 'European rose of the coal-black order,' as one of his numerous pictures of her painted the girl, was a torch in a cavern for dusky redness at her cheeks. Her responses beneath the book Mr. Woodseer held open had flashed a distant scene through Lord Fleetwood. Quaint to notice was her reverence for the husband she set on a towering monument, and her friendly, wifely; whispered jogs at the unpractical creature's forgetfulness of his wraps, his books; his writing-desk—on this tremendous occasion, his pipe. Again the earl could have sworn, that despite her antecedents, she brought her husband honest dower, as surely as she gave the lucky Pagan a whole heart; and had a remarkably fine bust to house the organ, too; and a clarionet of a voice, curiously like her, mistress's. And not a bad fellow, but a heathen dog, a worshipper of Nature, walked off with the girl, whose voice had the ring of Carinthia's. The Powers do not explain their dispensations.

These two now one by united good-will for the junction Lord Fleetwood himself drove through Loudon to the hills, where another carriage awaited them by his orders, in the town of London's race-course. As soon as they were seated he nodded to them curtly from his box, and drove back, leaving them puzzled. But his countess had not so very coldly seen him start his horses to convey the modest bridal pair. His impulses to kindness could be politic. Before quitting Whitechapel, she went with Sarah to look at the old shop of the fruits and vegetables. They found it shut, untenanted; Mr. Woodseer told them that the earl was owner of it by recent purchase, and would not lease it. He had to say why; for the countess was dull to the notion of a sentimental desecration in the occupying of her bedchamber by poor tradespeople. She was little flattered. The great nobleman of her imagination when she lay there dwindled to a whimsy infant, despot of his nursery, capricious with his toys; likely to damage himself, if left to himself.

How it might occur, she heard hourly from her hostess, Lady Arpington; from Henrietta as well, in different terms. He seemed to her no longer the stationed nobleman, but one of other idle men, and the saddest of young men. His weakness cast a net on her. Worse than that drag of compassion, she foresaw the chance of his having experience of her own weakness, if she was to be one among idle women: she might drop to the love of him again. Chillon's damping of her enthusiasm sank her to a mere breathing body, miserably an animal body, no comrade for a valiant brother; this young man's feeble consort, perhaps: and a creature thirsting for pleasure, disposed to sigh in the prospect of caresses. Enthusiasm gone, her spirited imagination of active work on the field of danger beside her brother flapped a broken wing.

Page 4218

She fell too low in her esteem to charge it upon Henrietta that she stood hesitating, leaning on the hated side of the debate; though she could almost have blamed Chillon for refusing her his positive counsel, and not ordering his wife to follow him. Once Lady Arpington, reasoning with her on behalf of the husband who sought reconciliation, sneered at her brother's project, condemned it the more for his resolve to carry it out now that he had means. The front of a shower sprang to Carinthia's eyelids. Now that her brother had means, he from whom she might be divided was alert to keep his engagement and study war on the field, as his father had done in foreign service, offering England a trained soldier, should his country subsequently need him. The contrast of her heroic brother and a luxurious idle lord scattering blood of bird or stag, and despising the soldier's profession, had a singular bitter effect, consequent on her scorn of words to defend the man her heart idolized. This last of young women for weeping wept in the lady's presence.

The feminine trick was pardoned to her because her unaccustomed betrayal of that form of enervation was desired. It was read as woman's act of self-pity over her perplexity: which is a melting act with the woman when there is no man to be dissolved by it. So far Lady Arpington judged rightly; Carinthia's tears, shed at the thought of her brother under the world's false judgement of him, left her spiritless to resist her husband's advocates. Unusual as they were, almost unknown, they were thunder-drops and shook her.

All for the vivid surface, the Dame frets at stresses laid on undercurrents. There is no bridling her unless the tale be here told of how Lord Brailstone in his frenzy of the disconcerted rival boasted over town the counterstroke he had dealt Lord Fleetwood, by sending Mrs. Levellier a statement of the latter nobleman's base plot to thwart her husband's wager, with his foul agent, the repentant and well-paid ruffian in person, to verify every written word. The town's conception of the necessity for the reunion of the earl and countess was too intense to let exciting scandal prosper. Moreover, the town's bright anticipation of its concluding festivity on the domain of Calesford argued such tattle down to a baffled adorer's malice. The Countess of Cressett, having her cousin, the beautiful Mrs. Kirby-Levellier, in her house, has denied Lord Brailstone admission at her door, we can affirm. He has written to her vehemently, has called a second time, has vowed publicly that Mrs. Levellier shall have her warning against Lord Fleetwood. The madness of jealousy was exhibited. Lady Arpington pronounced him in his conduct unworthy the name of gentleman. And how foolish the scandal he circulates! Lord Fleetwood's one aim is to persuade his offended wife to take her place beside him. He expresses regret everywhere, that the death of her uncle Lord Levellier withholds

Page 4219

her presence from Calesford during her term of mourning; and that he has given his word for the fete on a particular day, before London runs quite dry. His pledge of his word is notoriously inviolate. The Countess of Cressett—an extraordinary instance of a thrice married woman corrected in her addiction to play by her alliance with a rakish juvenile—declares she performs the part of hostess at the request of the Countess of Fleetwood. Perfectly convincing. The more so (if you have the gossips' keen scent of a deduction) since Lord Fleetwood and young Lord Cressett and the Jesuit Lord Feltre have been seen confabulating with very sacerdotal countenances indeed. Three English noblemen! not counting eighty years for the whole three! And dear Lady Cressett fears she may be called on to rescue her boy-husband from a worse enemy than the green tables, if Lady Fleetwood should unhappily prove unyielding, as it shames the gentle sex to imagine she will be. In fact, we know through Mrs. Levellier, the meeting of reconciliation between the earl and the countess comes off at Lady Arpington's, by her express arrangement, to-morrow: 'none too soon,' the expectant world of London declared it.

The meeting came to pass three days before the great day at Calesford. Carinthia and her lord were alone together. This had been his burning wish at Croridge, where he could have poured his heart to her and might have moved the wife's. But she had formed her estimate of him there: she had, in the comparison or clash of forces with him, grown to contemplate the young man of wealth and rank, who had once been impatient of an allusion to her father, and sought now to part her from her brother—stop her breathing of fresh air. Sensationally, too, her ardour for the exercise of her inherited gifts attributed it to him that her father's daughter had lived the mean existence in England, pursuing a husband, hounded by a mother's terrors. The influences environing her and pressing her to submission sharpened her perusal of the small object largely endowed by circumstances to demand it. She stood calmly discoursing, with a tempered smile: no longer a novice in the social manner. An equal whom he had injured waited for his remarks, gave ready replies; and he, bowing to the visible equality, chafed at a sense of inferiority following his acknowledgement of it. He was alone with her, and next to dumb; she froze a full heart. As for his heart, it could not speak at all, it was a swinging lump. The rational view of the situation was exposed to her; and she listened to that favourably, or at least attentively; but with an edge to her civil smile when he hinted of entertainments, voyages, travels, an excursion to her native mountain land. Her brother would then be facing death. The rational view, she admitted, was one to be considered. Yes, they were married; they had a son; they were bound to sink misunderstandings, in the interests of their little son. He ventured to say that the child was a

Page 4220

link uniting them; and she looked at him. He blinked rapidly, as she had seen him do of late, but kept his eyes on her through the nervous flutter of the lids; his pride making a determined stand for physical mastery, though her look was but a look. Had there been reproach in it, he would have found the voice to speak out. Her look was a cold sky above a hungering man. She froze his heart from the marble of her own.

And because she was for adventuring with her brother at bloody work of civil war in the pay of a foreign government!—he found a short refuge in that mute sneer, and was hurled from it by an apparition of the Welsh scene of the bitten infant, and Carinthia volunteering to do the bloody work which would have saved it; which he had contested, ridiculed. Right then, her insanity now conjured the wretched figure of him opposing the martyr her splendid humaneness had offered her to be, and dominated his reason, subjected him to admire—on to worship of the woman, whatever she might do. Just such a feeling for a woman he had dreamed of in his younger time, doubting that he would ever meet the fleshly woman to impose it. His heart broke the frost she breathed. Yet, if he gave way to the run of speech, he knew himself unmanned, and the fatal habit of superiority stopped his tongue after he had uttered the name he loved to speak, as nearest to the embrace of her.

'Carinthia—so I think, as I said, we both see the common sense of the position. I regret over and over again—we'll discuss all that when we meet after this Calesford affair. I shall have things to say. You will overlook, I am sure—well, men are men!—or try to. Perhaps I'm not worse than—we'll say, some. You will, I know,—I have learnt it,—be of great service, help to me; double my value, I believe; more than double it. You will receive me—here? Or at Croridge or Esslemont; and alone together, as now, I beg.'

That was what he said. Having said it, his escape from high tragics in the comfortable worldly tone rejoiced him; to some extent also the courteous audience she gave him. And her hand was not refused. Judging by her aspect, the plain common-sense ground of their situation was accepted for the best opening step to their union; though she must have had her feelings beneath it, and God knew that he had! Her hand was friendly. He could have thanked her for yielding her hand without a stage scene; she had fine breeding by nature. The gracefullest of trained ladies could not have passed through such an interview so perfectly in the right key; and this was the woman he had seen at the wrestle with hideous death to save a muddy street-child! She touched the gentleman in him. Hard as it was while he held the hand of the wife, his little son's mother, who might be called his bride, and drew him by the contact of their blood to a memory, seeming impossible, some other world's attested reality,—she the angel, he the demon of it,—unimaginable,

Page 4221

yet present, palpable, a fact beyond his mind, he let her hand fall scarce pressed. Did she expect more than the common sense of it to be said? The ‘more’ was due to her, and should partly be said at their next meeting for the no further separating; or else he would vow in his heart to spread it out over a whole life’s course of wakeful devotion, with here and there a hint of his younger black nature. Better that except for a desire seizing him to make sacrifice of the demon he had been, offer him up hideously naked to her mercy. But it was a thing to be done by hints, by fits, by small doses. She could only gradually be brought to the comprehension of how the man or demon found indemnification under his yoke of marriage in snatching her, to torment, perhaps betray; and solace for the hurt to his pride in spreading a snare for the beautiful Henrietta. A confession! It could be to none but the priest.

Knowledge of Carinthia would have urged him to the confession straightway. In spite of horror, the task of helping to wash a black soul white would have been her compensation for loss of companionship with her soldier brother. She would have held hot iron to the rabid wound and come to a love of the rescued sufferer.

It seemed to please her when he spoke of Mr. Rose Mackrell’s applications to get back his volume of her father’s Book of Maxims.

‘There is mine,’ she said.

For the sake of winning her quick gleam at any word of the bridal couple, he conjured a picture of her Madge and his Gower, saying: ’That marriage—as you will learn—proves him honest from head to foot; as she is in her way, too.’

‘Oh, she is,’ was the answer.

‘We shall be driving down to them very soon, Carinthia.’

‘It will delight them to see either of us, my lord.’

‘My lady, adieu until I am over with this Calesford,’ he gestured, as in fetters.

She spared him the my lording as she said adieu, sensitive as she was, and to his perception now.

Lady Arpington had a satisfactory two minutes with him before he left the house. London town, on the great day at Calesford, interchanged communications, to the comforting effect, that the Countess of Fleetwood would reign over the next entertainment.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE LAST: WITH A CONCLUDING WORD BY THE DAME

It is of seemingly good augury for the cause of a suppliant man, however little for the man himself, when she who has much to pardon can depict him in a manner that almost smiles, not unlike a dandling nurse the miniature man-child sobbing off to sleep after a frenzy; an example of a genus framed for excuses, and he more than others. Chillon was amused up to inquisitive surprise by Carinthia's novel idea of her formerly dreaded riddle of a husband. As she sketched the very rational alliance proposed to her, and his kick at the fetters of Calesford, a shadowy dash for an image of the solicitous tyrant was added perforce to complete the scene; following which, her head moved sharply, the subject was flung over her shoulder.

Page 4222

She was developing; she might hold her ground with the husband, if the alliance should be resumed; and she would be a companion for Henrietta in England: she was now independent, as to money, and she could break an intolerable yoke without suffering privation. He kept his wrath under, determined not to use his influence either way, sure though he was of her old father's voting for her to quit the man and enter the field where qualities would be serviceable. The man probably feared a scandal more than the loss of his wife in her going. He had never been thrashed—the sole apology Chillon discovered for him, in a flushed review of the unavenged list of injuries Carinthia had sustained. His wise old father insisted on the value of an early thrashing to trim and shape the growth of most young men. There was no proof of Lord Fleetwood's having schemed to thwart his wager, so he put that accusation by: thinking for an instant, that if the man desired to have his wife with him, and she left the country with her brother, his own act would recoil; or if she stayed to hear of a villany, Carinthia's show of scorn could lash. Henrietta praised my lord's kindness. He had been one of the adorers—as what man would not be!—and upon her at least (he could hardly love her husband) he had not wreaked his disappointment. A young man of huge wealth, having nothing to do but fatten his whims, is the monster a rich country breeds under the blessing of peace. His wife, if a match for him, has her work traced out:—mean work for the child of their father, Chillon thought. She might be doing braver, more suitable to the blood in her veins. But women have to be considered as women, not as possible heroines; and supposing she held her own with this husband of hers, which meant, judging by the view of their unfolded characters at present, a certain command of the freakish beast; she, whatever her task, would not be the one set trotting. He came to his opinion through the estimate he had recently formed of Lord Fleetwood, and a study of his changed sister.

Her brows gloomed at a recurrence to that subject. Their business of the expedition absorbed her, each detail, all the remarks he quoted of his chief, hopeful or weariful; for difficulties with the Spanish Government, and with the English too, started up at every turn; and the rank and file of the contingent were mostly a rough lot, where they were rather better than soaked weeds. A small body of trained soldiers had sprung to the call to arms; here and there an officer could wheel a regiment.

Carinthia breasted discouragement. 'English learn from blows, Chillon.'

'He might have added, they lose half their number by having to learn from blows, Carin.'

'He said, "Let me lead Britons!"'

'When the canteen's fifty leagues to the rear, yes!'

'Yes, it is a wine country,' she sighed. 'But would the Spaniards have sent for us if their experience told them they could not trust us?'

Page 4223

Chillon brightened rigorously: ’Yes, yes; there’s just a something about our men at their best, hard to find elsewhere. We’re right in thinking that. And our chief ‘s the right man.’

‘He is Owain’s friend and countryman,’ said Carinthia, and pleased, her brother for talking like a girl, in the midst of methodical calculations of the cost of this and that, to purchase the supplies he would need. She had an organizing head. On her way down from London she had drawn on instructions from a London physician of old Peninsula experience to pencil a list of the medical and surgical stores required by a campaigning army; she had gained information of the London shops where they were to be procured; she had learned to read medical prescriptions for the composition of drugs. She was at her Spanish still, not behind him in the ordinary dialogue, and able to correct him on points of Spanish history relating to fortresses, especially the Basque. A French bookseller had supplied her with the Vicomte d’Eschargue’s recently published volume of a Travels in Catalonia. Chillon saw paragraphs marked, pages dog-eared, for reference. At the same time, the question of Henrietta touched her anxiously. Lady Arpington’s hints had sunk into them both.

’I have thought of St. Jean de Luz, Chillon, if Riette would consent to settle there. French people are friendly. You expect most of your work in and round the Spanish Pyrenees.’

‘Riette alone there?’ said he, and drew her by her love of him into his altered mind; for he did not object to his wife’s loneliness at Cadiz when their plan was new.

London had taught her that a young woman in the giddy heyday of her beauty has to be guarded; her belonging to us is the proud burden involving sacrifices. But at St. Jean de Luz, if Riette would consent to reside there, Lord Fleetwood’s absence and the neighbourhood of the war were reckoned on to preserve his yokefellow from any fit of the abominated softness which she had felt in one premonitory tremor during their late interview, and deemed it vile compared with the life of action and service beside, almost beside, her brother, sharing his dangers at least. She would have had Chillon speak peremptorily to his wife regarding the residence on the Spanish borders, adding, in a despair: ‘And me with her to protect her!’

‘Unfair to Riette, if she can’t decide voluntarily,’ he said.

All he refrained from was, the persuading her to stay in England and live reconciled with the gaoler of the dungeon, as her feelings pictured it.

Page 4224

Chillon and Carinthia journeyed to London for purchases and a visit to lawyer, banker, and tradesmen, on their way to meet his chief and Owain Wythan at Southampton. They lunched with Livia. The morrow was the great Calesford day; Henrietta carolled of it. Lady Arpington had been afflictingly demure on the theme of her presence at Calesford within her term of mourning. 'But I don't mourn, and I'm not related to the defunct, and I can't be denied the pleasure invented for my personal gratification,' Henrietta's happy flippancy pouted at the prudish objections. Moreover, the adored Columelli was to be her slave of song. The termination of the London season had been postponed a whole week for Calesford: the utmost possible strain; and her presence was understood to represent the Countess of Fleetwood, temporarily in decorous retirement. Chillon was assured by her that the earl had expressed himself satisfied with his wife's reasonableness. 'The rest will follow.' Pleading on the earl's behalf was a vain effort, but she had her grounds for painting Lord Fleetwood's present mood to his countess in warm colours. 'Nothing short of devotion, Chillon!' London's extreme anxiety to see them united, and the cause of it, the immense good Janey could do to her country, should certainly be considered by her, Henrietta said. She spoke feverishly. A mention of St. Jean de Luz for a residence inflicted, it appeared, a more violent toothache than she had suffered from the proposal of quarters in Cadiz. And now her husband had money? . . . she suggested his reinstatement in the English army. Chillon hushed that: his chief had his word. Besides, he wanted schooling in war. Why had he married! His love for her was the answer; and her beauty argued for the love. But possessing her, he was bound to win her a name. So his reasoning ran to an accord with his military instincts and ambition. Nevertheless, the mournful strange fact she recalled, that they had never waltzed together since they were made one, troubled his countenance in the mirror of hers. Instead of the waltz, grief, low worries, dulness, an eclipse of her, had been the beautiful creature's portion.

It established mighty claims to a young husband's indulgence. She hummed a few bars of his favourite old Viennese waltz, with 'Chillon!' invitingly and reproachfully. His loathing of Lord Fleetwood had to withstand an envious jump at the legs in his vison of her partner on the morrow. He said: 'You'll think of some one absent.'

'You really do wish me to go, my darling? It is Chillon's wish?' She begged for the words; she had them, and then her feverishness abated to a simple sparkling composure.

Page 4225

Carinthia had observed her. She was heart-sick under pressure of thoughts the heavier for being formless. They signified in the sum her doom to see her brother leave England for the war, and herself crumble to pieces from the imagined figure of herself beside him on or near the field. They could not be phrased, for they accused the beloved brother of a weakness in the excessive sense of obligation to the beautiful woman who had wedded him. Driving down to Southampton by the night-coach, her tenderness toward Henrietta held other thoughts unshaped, except one, that moved in its twilight, murmuring of how the love of pleasure keeps us blind children. And how the innocents are pushed by it to snap at wicked bait, which the wealthy angle with, pointed a charitable index on some of our social story. The Countess Livia, not an innocent like Henrietta had escaped the poisoned tongues by contracting a third marriage—'in time!' Lady Arpington said; and the knotty question was presented to a young mind: Why are the innocents tempted to their ruin, and the darker natures allowed an escape? Any street-boy could have told her of the virtue in quick wits. But her unexercised reflectiveness was on the highroad of accepted doctrines, with their chorus of the moans of gossips for supernatural intervention to give us justice. She had not learnt that those innocents, pushed by an excessive love of pleasure, are for the term lower in the scale than their wary darker cousins, and must come to the diviner light of intelligence through suffering.

However, the result of her meditations was to show her she was directed to be Henrietta's guardian. After that, she had no thoughts; travelling beside Chillon, she was sheer sore feeling, as of a body aching for its heart plucked out. The bitterness of the separation to come between them prophesied a tragedy. She touched his hand. It was warm now.

During six days of travels from port to port along the Southern and Western coasts, she joined in the inspection of the English contingent about to be shipped. They and their chief and her brother were plain to sight, like sample print of a book's first page, blank sheets for the rest of the volume. If she might have been one among them, she would have dared the reckless forecast. Her sensations were those of a bird that has flown into a room, and beats wings against the ceiling and the window-panes. A close, hard sky, a transparent prison wall, narrowed her powers, mocked her soul. She spoke little; what she said impressed Chillon's chief, Owain Wythan was glad to tell her. The good friend had gone counter to the tide of her breast by showing satisfaction with the prospect that she would take her rightful place in the world. Her concentrated mind regarded the good friend as a phantom of a man, the world's echo. His dead Rebecca would have understood her passion to be her brother's comrade, her abasement in the staying at home to guard his butterfly. Owain had never favoured her project; he could not now perceive the special dangers Chillon would be exposed to in her separation from him. She had no means of explaining what she felt intensely, that dangers, death, were nothing to either of them, if they shared the fate together.

Page 4226

Her rejected petition to her husband for an allowance of money, on the day in Wales, became the vivid memory which brings out motives in its glow. Her husband hated her brother; and why? But the answer was lighted fierily down another avenue. A true husband, a lord of wealth, would have rejoiced to help the brother of his wife. He was the cause of Chillon's ruin and this adventure to restore his fortunes. Could she endure a close alliance with the man while her brother's life was imperilled? Carinthia rebuked her drowsy head for not having seen his reason for refusing at the time. 'How long I am before I see anything that does not stare in my face!' She was a married woman, whose order of mind rendered her singularly subject to the holiness of the tie; and she was a weak woman, she feared. Already, at intervals, now that action on a foreign field of the thunders and lightnings was denied, imagination revealed her dissolving to the union with her husband, and cried her comment on herself as the world's basest of women for submitting to it while Chillon's life ran risks; until finally she said: 'Not before I have my brother home safe!' an exclamation equal to a vow.

That being settled, some appearance of equanimity returned; she talked of the scarlet business as one she participated in as a distant spectator. Chillon's chief was hurrying the embarkation of his troops; within ten days the whole expedition would be afloat. She was to post to London for further purchases, he following to take leave of his wife and babe. Curiously, but hardly remarked on during the bustle of work, Livia had been the one to send her short account of the great day at Calesford; Henrietta, the born correspondent, pencilling a couple of lines; she was well, dreadfully fatigued, rather a fright from a trip of her foot and fall over a low wire fence. Her message of love thrice underlined the repeated word.

Henrietta was the last person Carinthia would have expected to meet midway on the London road. Her name was called from a carriage as she drove up to the door of the Winchester hostlery, and in the lady, over whose right eye and cheek a covering fold of silk concealed a bandage, the voice was her sister Riette's. With her were two babes and their nursemaids.

'Chillon is down there—you have left him there?' Henrietta greeted her, saw the reply, and stepped out of her carriage. 'You shall kiss the children afterwards; come into one of the rooms, Janey.'

Alone together, before an embrace, she said, in the voice of tears hardening to the world's business, 'Chillon must not enter London. You see the figure I am. My character's in as bad case up there—thanks to those men! My husband has lost his "golden Riette." When you see beneath the bandage! He will have the right to put me away. His "beauty of beauties"! I'm fit only to dress as a page-boy and run at his heels. My hero! my poor dear! He thinking I cared for nothing but amusement, flattery. Was ever a punishment so cruel to the noblest of generous husbands! Because I know he will overlook it, make light of it, never reproach his Riette. And the rose he married

comes to him a shrivelled leaf of a potpourri heap. You haven't seen me yet. I was their "beautiful woman." I feel for my husband most.'

Page 4227

She took breath. Carinthia pressed her lips on the cheek sensible to a hiss, and Henrietta pursued, in words liker to sobs: 'Anywhere, Cadiz, St. Jean de Luz, hospital work either, anywhere my husband likes, anything! I want to work, or I'll sit and rock the children. I'm awake at last. Janey, we're lambs to vultures with those men. I don't pretend I was the perfect fool. I thought myself so safe. I let one of them squeeze my hand one day, he swears. You know what a passion is; you have it for mountains and battles, I for music. I do remember, one morning before sunrise, driving back to town out of Windsor,—a dance, the officers of the Guards,—and my lord's trumpeter at the back of the coach blowing notes to melt a stone, I found a man's hand had mine. I remember Lord Fleetwood looking over his shoulder and smiling hard and lashing his horses. But listen—yes, at Calesford it happened. He—oh, hear the name, then; Chillon must never hear it;—Lord Brailstone was denied the right to step on Lord Fleetwood's grounds. The Opera company had finished selections from my Pirata. I went out for cool air; little Sir Meeson beside me. I had a folded gauze veil over my head, tied at the chin in a bow. Some one ran up to me—Lord Brailstone. He poured forth their poetry. They suppose it the wine for their "beautiful woman." I dare say I laughed or told him to go, and he began a tirade against Lord Fleetwood. There's no mighty difference between one beast of prey and another. Let me get away from them all! Though now! they would not lift an eyelid. This is my husband's treasure returning to him. We have to be burnt to come to our senses. Janey—oh! you do well!—it was fiendish; old ballads, melodrama plays, I see they were built on men's deeds. Janey, I could not believe it, I have to believe, it is forced down my throat;—that man, your husband, because he could not forgive my choosing Chillon, schemed for Chillon's ruin. I could not believe it until I saw in the glass this disfigured wretch he has made of me. Livia serves him, she hates him for the tyrant he is; she has opened my eyes. And not for himself, no, for his revenge on me, for my name to be as my face is. He tossed me to his dogs; fair game for them! You do well, Janey; he is capable of any villany. And has been calling at Livia's door twice a day, inquiring anxiously; begs the first appointment possible. He has no shame; he is accustomed to buy men and women; he thinks his money will buy my pardon, give my face a new skin, perhaps. A woman swears to you, Janey, by all she holds holy on earth, it is not the loss of her beauty—-there will be a wrinkled patch on the cheek for life, the surgeon says; I am to bear a brown spot, like a bruised peach they sell at the fruit-shops cheap. Chillon's Riette! I think of that, the miserable wife I am for him without the beauty he loved so! I think of myself as guilty, a really guilty woman, when I compare my loss with my husband's.'

Page 4228

‘Your accident, dearest Riette—how it happened?’ Carinthia said, enfolding her.

’Because, Janey, what have I ever been to Chillon but the good-looking thing he was proud of? It’s gone. Oh, the accident. Brailstone had pushed little Corby away; he held my hand, kept imploring, he wanted the usual two minutes, and all to warn me against —I’ve told you; and he saw Lord Fleetwood coming. I got my hand free, and stepped back, my head spinning; and I fell. That I recollect, and a sight of flames, like the end of the world. I fell on one of the oil-lamps bordering the grass; my veil lighted; I had fainted; those two men saw nothing but one another; and little Sir Meeson was no help; young Lord Cressett dashed out the flames. They brought me to my senses for a second swoon. Livia says I woke moaning to be taken away from that hated Calesford. It was, oh! never to see that husband of yours again. Forgive him, if you can. Not I. I carry the mark of him to my grave. I have called myself “Skin-deep” ever since, day and night—the name I deserve.’

‘We will return to Chillon together, my own,’ said Carinthia. ’It may not be so bad.’ And in the hope that her lovely sister exaggerated a defacement leaving not much worse than a small scar, her heart threw off its load of the recent perplexities, daylight broke through her dark wood. Henrietta brought her liberty. How far guilty her husband might be, she was absolved from considering; sufficiently guilty to release her. Upon that conclusion, pity for the awakened Riette shed purer tear-drops through the gratitude she could not restrain, could hardly conceal, on her sister’s behalf and her own. Henrietta’s prompt despatch to Croridge to fetch the babes, her journey down out of a sick-room to stop Chillon’s visit to London, proved her an awakened woman, well paid for the stain on her face, though the stain were lasting. Never had she loved Henrietta, never shown her so much love, as on the road to the deepening colours of the West. Her sisterly warmth surprised the woeful spotted beauty with a reflection that this martial Janey was after all a woman of feeling, one whom her husband, if he came to know it and the depth of it, the rich sound of it, would mourn in sackcloth to have lost.

And he did, the Dame interposes for the final word, he mourned his loss of Carinthia Jane in sackcloth and ashes, notwithstanding that he had the world’s affectionate condolences about him to comfort him, by reason of his ungovernable countess’s misbehaviour once more, according to the report, in running away with a young officer to take part in a foreign insurrection; and when he was most the idol of his countrymen and countrywomen, which it was once his immoderate aim to be, he mourned her day and night, knowing her spotless, however wild a follower of her father’s *maxims for men*. He believed—some have said his belief was not in error—that the woman to aid and make him man and be the star in

Page 4229

human form to him, was miraculously revealed on the day of his walk through the foreign pine forest, and his proposal to her at the ducal ball was an inspiration of his Good Genius, continuing to his marriage morn, and then running downwards, like an overstrained reel, under the leadership of his Bad. From turning to turning of that descent, he saw himself advised to retrieve the fatal steps, at each point attempting it just too late; until too late by an hour, he reached the seaport where his wife had embarked; and her brother, Chillon John, cruelly, it was the common opinion, refused him audience. No syllable of the place whither she fled abroad was vouchsafed to him; and his confessions of sins and repentance of them were breathed to empty air. The wealthiest nobleman of all England stood on the pier, watching the regiments of that doomed expedition mount ship, ready with the bribe of the greater part of his possessions for a single word to tell him of his wife's destination. Lord Feltre, his companion, has done us the service to make his emotions known. He describes them, true, as the Papist who sees every incident contribute to precipitate sinners into the bosom of his Church. But this, we have warrant for saying, did not occur before the earl had visited and strolled in the woods with his former secretary, Mr. Gower Woodseer, of whom so much has been told, and he little better than an infidel, declaring his aim to be at contentedness in life. Lord Fleetwood might envy for a while, he could not be satisfied with Nature.

Within six months of Carinthia Jane's disappearance, people had begun to talk of strange doings at Calesford; and some would have it, that it was the rehearsal of a play, in which friars were prominent characters, for there the frocked gentry were seen flitting across the ground. Then the world learnt too surely that the dreaded evil had happened, its wealthiest nobleman had gone over to the Church of Rome! carrying all his personal and unentailed estate to squander it on images and a dogma. Calesford was attacked by the mob;—one of the notorious riots in our history was a result of the Amazing Marriage, and roused the talk of it again over Great Britain. When Carinthia Jane, after two years of adventures and perils rarely encountered by women, returned to these shores, she was, they say, most anxious for news of her husband; and then, indeed, it has been conjectured, they might have been united to walk henceforward as one for life, but for the sad fact that the Earl of Fleetwood had two months and some days previously abjured his rank, his remaining property, and his title, to become, there is one report, the Brother Russett of the mountain monastery he visited in simple curiosity once with his betraying friend, Lord Feltre. Or some say, and so it may truly be, it was an amateur monastery established by him down among his Welsh mountains, in which he served as a simple brother, without any authority over the priests or what not he paid to act as his superiors. Monk of some sort he would be. He was never the man to stop at anything half way.

Page 4230

Mr. Rose Mackrell, in his Memoirs, was the first who revealed to the world, that the Mademoiselle de Levellier of the French Count fighting with the Carlists—falsely claimed by him as a Frenchwoman—was, in very truth, Carinthia Jane, the Countess of Fleetwood, to whom Carlists and Legitimises alike were indebted for tender care of them on the field and in hospital; and who rode from one camp through the other up to the tent of the Pretender to the throne of Spain, bearing her petition for her brother's release; which was granted, in acknowledgement of her 'renowned humanity to both conflicting armies,' as the words translated by Dr. Glossop run. Certain it is she brought her wounded brother safe home to England, and prisoners in that war usually had short shrift. For three years longer she was the Countess of Fleetwood, 'widow of a living suicide,' Mr. Rose Mackrell describes the state of the Marriage at that period. No whisper of divorce did she tolerate.

Six months after it was proved that Brother Russett had perished of his austerities, or his heart, we learn she said to the beseeching applicant for her hand, Mr. Owain Wythan, with the gift of it, in compassion: 'Rebecca could foretell events.' Carinthia Jane had ever been ashamed of second marriages, and the union with her friend Rebecca's faithful simpleton gave it, one supposes, a natural air, for he as little as she had previously known the wedded state. She married him, Henrietta has written, because of his wooing her with dog's eyes instead of words. The once famous beauty carried a wrinkled spot on her cheek to her grave; a saving disfigurement, and the mark of changes in the story told you enough to make us think it a providential intervention for such ends as were in view.

So much I can say: the facts related, with some regretted omissions, by which my story has so skeleton a look, are those that led to the lamentable conclusion. But the melancholy, the pathos of it, the heart of all England stirred by it, have been—and the panting excitement it was to every listener—sacrificed in the vain effort to render events as consequent to your understanding as a piece of logic, through an exposure of character! Character must ever be a mystery, only to be explained in some degree by conduct; and that is very dependent upon accident: and unless we have a perpetual whipping of the tender part of the reader's mind, interest in invisible persons must needs flag. For it is an infant we address, and the storyteller whose art excites an infant to serious attention succeeds best; with English people assuredly, I rejoice to think, though I have to pray their patience here while that philosophy and exposure of character block the course along a road inviting to traffic of the most animated kind.

Etext editor's bookmarks

Page 4231

A dumb tongue can be a heavy liar
Accounting his tight blue tail coat and brass buttons a victory
Advised not to push at a shut gate
Always the shout for more produced it ("News")
Amused after their tiresome work of slaughter
And her voice, against herself, was for England
Anecdotist to slaughter families for the amusement
As faith comes—no saying how; one swears by them
As for comparisons, they are flowers thrown into the fire
As if the age were the injury!
Be the woman and have the last word!
Bent double to gather things we have tossed away
Brains will beat Grim Death if we have enough of them
But a great success is full of temptations
Call of the great world's appetite for more (Invented news)
Charity that supplied the place of justice was not thanked
Cock-sure has crowed low by sunset
Contempt of military weapons and ridicule of the art of war
Could affect me then, without being flung at me
Country enclosed us to make us feel snug in our own importance
Courage to grapple with his pride and open his heart was wanting
Deeds only are the title
Detested titles, invented by the English
Did not know the nature of an oath, and was dismissed
Dogs' eyes have such a sick look of love
Drank to show his disdain of its powers
Drink is their death's river, rolling them on helpless
Earl of Cressett fell from his coach-box in a fit
Enemy's laugh is a bugle blown in the night
Everlastingly in this life the better pays for the worse
Fatal habit of superiority stopped his tongue
Father used to say, four hours for a man, six for a woman
Father and she were aware of one another without conversing
Festive board provided for them by the valour of their fathers
Flung him, pitied him, and passed on
Foe can spoil my face; he beats me if he spoils my temper
Fond, as they say, of his glass and his girl
Found that he 'cursed better upon water'
Fun, at any cost, is the one object worth a shot
Good-bye to sorrow for a while—Keep your tears for the living
Had got the trick of lying, through fear of telling the truth
Hard enough for a man to be married to a fool
He did not vastly respect beautiful women

He was a figure on a horse, and naught when off it
He had wealth for a likeness of strength
He wants the whip; ought to have had it regularly
He was the prisoner of his word
Heartily she thanked the girl for the excuse to cry
Hearts that make one soul do not separately count their gifts
Her intimacy with a man old enough to be her grandfather
Himself in the worn old surplice of the converted rake
I hate sleep: I hate anything that robs me of my will

Page 4232

Ideas in gestation are the dullest matter you can have
Injury forbids us to be friends again
Innocence and uncleanness may go together
It was an honest buss, but dear at ten thousand
Lies are usurers' coin we pay for ten thousand per cent
Life is the burlesque of young dreams
Limit was two bottles of port wine at a sitting
Little boy named Tommy Wedger said he saw a dead body go by
Look backward only to correct an error of conduct in future
Love of pleasure keeps us blind children
Magnificent in generosity; he had little humaneness
Make a girl drink her tears, if they ain't to be let fall
Meditations upon the errors of the general man, as a cover
Mighty Highnesses who had only smelt the outside edge of battle
Never forgave an injury without a return blow for it
No enemy's shot is equal to a weak heart in the act
Not afford to lose, and a disposition free of the craving to win
Not to be the idol, to have an aim of our own
Objects elevated even by a decayed world have their magnetism
On a morning when day and night were made one by fog
One idea is a bullet
Past, future, and present, the three weights upon humanity
Pebble may roll where it likes—not so the costly jewel
Poetic romance is delusion
Push me to condense my thoughts to a tight ball
Put material aid at a lower mark than gentleness
Puzzle to connect the foregoing and the succeeding
Quick to understand, she is in the quick of understanding
Reflection upon a statement is its lightning in advance
Religion condones offences: Philosophy has no forgiveness
Religion is the one refuge from women
Scorn titles which did not distinguish practical offices
Sensitiveness to the sting, which is not allowed to poison
Seventy, when most men are reaping and stacking their sins
She seemed really a soaring bird brought down by the fowler
She was thrust away because because he had offended
She stood with a dignity that the word did not express
She endured meekly, when there was no meekness
Should we leave a good deed half done
Showery, replied the admiral, as his cocked-hat was knocked off
So much for morality in those days!

So indulgent when they drop their blot on a lady’s character
Steady shakes them
Strengthening the backbone for a bend of the knee in calamity
Style is the mantle of greatness
Sweetest on earth to her was to be prized by her brother
That sort of progenitor is your “permanent aristocracy”
The habit of the defensive paralyzes will
The embraced respected woman
The idol of the hour is the mob’s wooden puppet
The divinely damnable naked truth won’t wear ornaments

Page 4233

Their sneer withers
There is no driver like stomach
There’s not an act of a man’s life lies dead behind him
They could have pardoned her a younger lover
Those who have the careless chatter, the ready laugh
Those who know little and dread much
Thus are we stricken by the days of our youth
Tighter than ever I was tight I’ll be to-night
To most men women are knaves or ninnies
Touch sin and you accommodate yourself to its vileness
Truth is, they have taken a stain from the life they lead
Very little parleying between determined men
Wakening to the claims of others—Youth’s infant conscience
Warm, is hardly the word—Winter’s warm on skates
We make our taskmasters of those to whom we have done a wrong
We shall go together; we shall not have to weep for one another
With one idea, we see nothing—nothing but itself
Woman finds herself on board a rudderless vessel
Women treat men as their tamed housemates
Wooing her with dog’s eyes instead of words
Writer society delights in, to show what it is composed of
You played for gain, and that was a licenced thieving
You saw nothing but handkerchiefs out all over the theatre
You are to imagine that they know everything
You want me to flick your indecision

CELT AND SAXON

By George Meredith

1910.

CONTENTS

Book 1.
I. *Wherein an excursion is made in* A *Celtic mind*
ii. *Mr*. *Adister*
III. *Caroline*
iv. *The princess*
V. *At the pianos chiefly without music*

vi. A *consultation*: *With opinions upon Welsh women and the Cambrian race*
VII. *The miniature*
viii. *Captain con and Mrs*. *Adister* O'DONNELL
IX. *The captain's cabin*
X. *The brothers*
xi. *Introducing* A *new character*

Book 2.
XII. *Miss mattock*
XIII. *The dinner-party*
xiv. *Of Rockney*
XV. *The mattock family*
XVI. *Of the great Mr*. *Bull and the Celtic and Saxon view of him*: *And something of Richard Rockney*
xvii. *Crossing the Rubicon*
XVIII. *Captain Con's letter*
X1X. *Mars convalescent*

Page 4234

CHAPTER I

WHEREIN AN EXCURSION IS MADE IN A CELTIC MIND

A young Irish gentleman of the numerous clan O'Donnells, and a Patrick, hardly a distinction of him until we know him, had bound himself, by purchase of a railway-ticket, to travel direct to the borders of North Wales, on a visit to a notable landowner of those marches, the Squire Adister, whose family-seat was where the hills begin to lift and spy into the heart of black mountains. Examining his ticket with an apparent curiosity, the son of a greener island debated whether it would not be better for him to follow his inclinations, now that he had gone so far as to pay for the journey, and stay. But his inclinations were also subject to question, upon his considering that he had expended pounds English for the privilege of making the journey in this very train. He asked himself earnestly what was the nature of the power which forced him to do it—a bad genius or a good: and it seemed to him a sort of answer, inasmuch as it silenced the contending parties, that he had been the victim of an impetus. True; still his present position involved a certain outlay of money simply, not at all his bondage to the instrument it had procured for him, and that was true; nevertheless, to buy a ticket to shy it away is an incident so uncommon, that if we can but pause to dwell on the singularity of the act, we are unlikely to abjure our fellowship with them who would not be guilty of it; and therefore, by the aid of his reflections and a remainder of the impetus, Mr. Patrick O'Donnell stepped into a carriage of the train like any ordinary English traveller, between whom and his destination there is an agreement to meet if they can.

It is an experience of hesitating minds, be they Saxon or others, that when we have submitted our persons to the charge of public companies, immediately, as if the renouncing of our independence into their hands had given us a taste of a will of our own, we are eager for the performance of their contract to do what we are only half inclined to; the train cannot go fast enough to please us, though we could excuse it for breaking down; stoppages at stations are impertinences, and the delivery of us at last on the platform is an astonishment, for it is not we who have done it—we have not even desired it. To be imperfectly in accord with the velocity precipitating us upon a certain point, is to be going without our heads, which have so much the habit of supposing it must be whither we intend, when we go in a determined manner, that a, doubt of it distracts the understanding—decapitates us; suddenly to alight, moreover, and find ourselves dropped at the heels of flying Time, like an unconsidered bundle, is anything but a reconstruction of the edifice. The natural revelry of the blood in speed suffers a violent shock, not to speak of our notion of being left behind, quite isolated and unsound. Or, if you insist, the condition shall be said to belong exclusively to Celtic nature, seeing that it had been drawn directly from a scion of one of those tribes.

Page 4235

Young Patrick jumped from the train as headless as good St. Denis. He was a juvenile thinker, and to discover himself here, where he both wished and wished not to be, now deeming the negative sternly in the ascendant, flicked his imagination with awe of the influence of the railway service upon the destinies of man. Settling a mental debate about a backward flight, he drove across the land so foreign to his eyes and affections, and breasted a strong tide of wishes that it were in a contrary direction. He would rather have looked upon the desert under a sand-storm, or upon a London suburb yet he looked thirstingly. Each variation of landscape of the curved highway offered him in a moment decisive features: he fitted them to a story he knew: the whole circle was animated by a couple of pale mounted figures beneath no happy light. For this was the air once breathed by Adiante Adister, his elder brother Philip's love and lost love: here she had been to Philip flame along the hill-ridges, his rose-world in the dust-world, the saintly in his earthly. And how had she rewarded him for that reverential love of her? She had forborne to kill him. The bitter sylph of the mountain lures men to climb till she winds them in vapour and leaves them groping, innocent of the red crags below. The delicate thing had not picked his bones: Patrick admitted it; he had seen his brother hale and stout not long back. But oh! she was merciless, she was a witch. If ever queen-witch was, she was the crowned one!

For a personal proof, now: he had her all round him in a strange district though he had never cast eye on her. Yonder bare hill she came racing up with a plume in the wind: she was over the long brown moor, look where he would: and vividly was she beside the hurrying beck where it made edges and chattered white. He had not seen, he could not imagine her face: angelic dashed with demon beauty, was his idea of the woman, and there is little of a portrait in that; but he was of a world where the elemental is more individual than the concrete, and unconceived of sight she was a recognised presence for the green-island brain of a youth whose manner of hating was to conjure her spirit from the air and let fly his own in pursuit of her.

It has to be stated that the object of the youngster's expedition to Earlsfont was perfectly simple in his mind, however much it went against his nature to perform it. He came for the purpose of obtaining Miss Adister's Continental address; to gather what he could of her from her relatives, and then forthwith to proceed in search of her, that he might plead with her on behalf of his brother Philip, after a four years' division of the lovers. Could anything be simpler? He had familiarised himself with the thought of his advocacy during those four years. His reluctance to come would have been accountable to the Adisters by a sentiment of shame at his family's dealings with theirs: in fact, a military captain of the

Page 4236

O’Donnells had in old days played the adventurer and charmed a maid of a certain age into yielding her hand to him; and the lady was the squire of Earlsfont’s only sister: she possessed funded property. Shortly after the union, as one that has achieved the goal of enterprise, the gallant officer retired from the service nor did north-western England put much to his credit the declaration of his wife’s pronouncing him to be the best of husbands. She naturally said it of him in eulogy; his own relatives accepted it in some contempt, mixed with a relish of his hospitality: his wife’s were constant in citing his gain by the marriage. Could he possibly have been less than that? they exclaimed. An excellent husband, who might easily have been less than that, he was the most devoted of cousins, and the liberal expenditure of his native eloquence for the furtherance of Philip’s love-suit was the principal cause of the misfortune, if misfortune it could subsequently be called to lose an Adiante.

The Adister family were not gifted to read into the heart of a young man of a fanciful turn. Patrick had not a thought of shame devolving on him from a kinsman that had shot at a mark and hit it. Who sees the shame of taking an apple from a garden of the Hesperides? And as England cultivates those golden, if sometimes wrinkled, fruits, it would have seemed to him, in thinking about it, an entirely lucky thing for the finder; while a question of blood would have fired his veins to rival heat of self-assertion, very loftily towering: there were Kings in Ireland: cry for one of them in Uladh and you will hear his name, and he has descendants yet! But the youth was not disposed unnecessarily to blazon his princeliness. He kept it in modest reserve, as common gentlemen keep their physical strength. His reluctance to look on Earlsfont sprang from the same source as unacknowledged craving to see the place, which had precipitated him thus far upon his road: he had a horror of scenes where a faithless girl had betrayed her lover. Love was his visionary temple, and his idea of love was the solitary light in it, painfully susceptible to coldair currents from the stories of love abroad over the world. Faithlessness he conceived to be obnoxious to nature; it stained the earth and was excommunicated; there could be no pardon of the crime, barely any for repentance. He conceived it in the feminine; for men are not those holy creatures whose conduct strikes on the soul with direct edge: a faithless man is but a general villain or funny monster, a subject rejected of poets, taking no hue in the flat chronicle of history: but a faithless woman, how shall we speak of her! Women, sacredly endowed with beauty and the wonderful vibrating note about the very mention of them, are criminal to hideousness when they betray. Cry, False! on them, and there is an instant echo of bleeding males in many circles, like the poor quavering flute-howl of transformed beasts, which at some remembering touch bewail their higher state. Those women are sovereignly attractive, too, loathsomely. Therein you may detect the fiend.

Page 4237

Our moralist had for some time been glancing at a broad, handsome old country mansion on the top of a wooded hill backed by a swarm of mountain heads all purple-dark under clouds flying thick to shallow, as from a brush of sepia. The dim silver of half-lighted lakewater shot along below the terrace. He knew the kind of sky, having oftener seen that than any other, and he knew the house before it was named to him and he had flung a discolouring thought across it. He contemplated it placably and studiously, perhaps because the shower-folding armies of the fields above likened its shadowed stillness to that of his Irish home. There had this woman lived! At the name of Earlsfont she became this witch, snake, deception. Earlsfont was the title and summary of her black story: the reverberation of the word shook up all the chapters to pour out their poison.

CHAPTER II

MR. ADISTER

Mr. Patrick O'Donnell drove up to the gates of Earlsfont notwithstanding these emotions, upon which light matter it is the habit of men of his blood too much to brood; though it is for our better future to have a capacity for them, and the insensible race is the oxenish.

But if he did so when alone, the second man residing in the Celt put that fellow by and at once assumed the social character on his being requested to follow his card into Mr. Adister's library. He took his impression of the hall that had heard her voice, the stairs she had descended, the door she had passed through, and the globes she had perchance laid hand on, and the old mappemonde, and the severely-shining orderly regiment of books breathing of her whether she had opened them or not, as he bowed to his host, and in reply to, 'So, sir! I am glad to see you,' said swimmingly that Earlsfont was the first house he had visited in this country: and the scenery reminded him of his part of Ireland: and on landing at Holyhead he had gone off straight to the metropolis by appointment to meet his brother Philip, just returned from Canada a full captain, who heartily despatched his compliments and respects, and hoped to hear of perfect health in this quarter of the world. And Captain Con the same, and he was very flourishing.

Patrick's opening speech concluded on the sound of a short laugh coming from Mr. Adister.

It struck the young Irishman's ear as injurious and scornful in relation to Captain Con; but the remark ensuing calmed him:

'He has no children.'

‘No, sir; Captain Con wasn’t born to increase the number of our clan,’ Patrick rejoined; and thought: By heaven! I get a likeness of her out of you, with a dash of the mother mayhap somewhere. This was his Puck-manner of pulling a girdle round about from what was foremost in his head to the secret of his host’s quiet observation; for, guessing that such features as he beheld would be slumped on a handsome family, he was led by the splendid severity

Page 4238

of their lines to perceive an illimitable pride in the man likely to punish him in his offspring, who would inherit that as well; so, as is the way with the livelier races, whether they seize first or second the matter or the spirit of what they hear, the vivid indulgence of his own ideas helped him to catch the right meaning by the tail, and he was enlightened upon a domestic unhappiness, although Mr. Adister had not spoken miserably. The ‘dash of the mother’ was thrown in to make Adiante, softer, and leave a loophole for her relenting.

The master of Earlsfont stood for a promise of beauty in his issue, requiring to be softened at the mouth and along the brows, even in men. He was tall, and had clear Greek outlines: the lips were locked metal, thin as edges of steel, and his eyes, when he directed them on the person he addressed or the person speaking, were as little varied by motion of the lids as eyeballs of a stone bust. If they expressed more, because they were not sculptured eyes, it was the expression of his high and frigid nature rather than any of the diversities pertaining to sentiment and shades of meaning.

‘You have had the bequest of an estate,’ Mr. Adister said, to compliment him by touching on his affairs.

‘A small one; not a quarter of a county,’ said Patrick.

‘Productive, sir?’

’’Tis a tramp of discovery, sir, to where bog ends and cultivation begins.’

’Bequeathed to you exclusively over the head of your elder brother, I understand.’

Patrick nodded assent. ’But my purse is Philip’s, and my house, and my horses.’

‘Not bequeathed by a member of your family?’

‘By a distant cousin, chancing to have been one of my godmothers.’

‘Women do these things,’ Mr. Adister said, not in perfect approbation of their doings.

‘And I think too, it might have gone to the elder,’ Patrick replied to his tone.

‘It is not your intention to be an idle gentleman?’

‘No, nor a vagrant Irishman, sir.’

‘You propose to sit down over there?’

‘When I’ve more brains to be of service to them and the land, I do.’

Mr. Adister pulled the arm of his chair. 'The professions are crammed. An Irish gentleman owning land might do worse. I am in favour of some degree of military training for all gentlemen. You hunt?'

Patrick's look was, 'Give me a chance'; and Mr. Adister continued: 'Good runs are to be had here; you shall try them. You are something of a shot, I suppose. We hear of gentlemen now who neither hunt nor shoot. You fence?'

'That's to say, I've had lessons in the art.'

'I am not aware that there is now an art of fencing taught in Ireland.'

'Nor am I,' said Patrick; 'though there's no knowing what goes on in the cabins.'

Mr. Adister appeared to acquiesce. Observations of sly import went by him like the whispering wind.

Page 4239

‘Your priests should know,’ he said.

To this Patrick thought it well not to reply. After a pause between them, he referred to the fencing.

‘I was taught by a Parisian master of the art, sir.’

‘You have been to Paris?’

‘I was educated in Paris.’

‘How? Ah!’ Mr. Adister corrected himself in the higher notes of recollection. ‘I think I have heard something of a Jesuit seminary.’

’The Fathers did me the service to knock all I know into me, and call it education, by courtesy,’ said Patrick, basking in the unobscured frown of his host.

‘Then you are accustomed to speak French?’ The interrogation was put to extract some balm from the circumstance.

Patrick tried his art of fence with the absurdity by saying: ’All but like a native.’

‘These Jesuits taught you the use of the foils?’

‘They allowed me the privilege of learning, sir.’

After meditation, Mr. Adister said: ‘You don’t dance?’ He said it speculating on the’ kind of gentleman produced in Paris by the disciples of Loyola.

‘Pardon me, sir, you hit on another of my accomplishments.’

‘These Jesuits encourage dancing?’

‘The square dance—short of the embracing: the valse is under interdict.’

Mr. Adister peered into his brows profoundly for a glimpse of the devilry in that exclusion of the valse.

What object had those people in encouraging the young fellow to be a perfect fencer and dancer, so that he should be of the school of the polite world, and yet subservient to them?

‘Thanks to the Jesuits, then, you are almost a Parisian,’ he remarked; provoking the retort:

’Thanks to them, I’ve stored a little, and Paris is to me as pure a place as four whitewashed walls:’ Patrick added: ’without a shadow of a monk on them.’ Perhaps it was thrown in for the comfort of mundane ears afflicted sorely, and no point of principle pertained to the slur on a monk.

Mr. Adister could have exclaimed, That shadow of the monk! had he been in an exclamatory mood. He said: ‘They have not made a monk of you, then.’

Patrick was minded to explain how that the Jesuits are a religious order exercising worldly weapons. The lack of precise words admonished him of the virtue of silence, and he retreated—with a quiet negative: ’They have not.’

‘Then, you are no Jesuit?’ he was asked.

Thinking it scarcely required a response, he shrugged.

‘You would not change your religion, sir?’ said Mr. Adister in seeming anger.

Patrick thought he would have to rise: he half fancied himself summoned to change his religion or depart from the house.

‘Not I,’ said he.

‘Not for the title of Prince?’ he was further pressed, and he replied:

‘I don’t happen to have an ambition for the title of Prince.’

‘Or any title!’ interjected Mr. Adister, ’or whatever the devil can offer!—or,’ he spoke more pointedly, ’for what fools call a brilliant marriage?’

Page 4240

‘My religion?’ Patrick now treated the question seriously and raised his head: ‘I’d not suffer myself to be asked twice.’

The sceptical northern-blue eyes of his host dwelt on him with their full repellent stare.

The young Catholic gentleman expected he might hear a frenetic zealot roar out: Be off!

He was not immediately reassured by the words ’Dead or alive, then, you have a father!’

The spectacle of a state of excitement without a show of feeling was novel to Patrick. He began to see that he was not implicated in a wrath that referred to some great offender, and Mr. Adister soon confirmed his view by saying: ‘You are no disgrace to your begetting, sir!’

With that he quitted his chair, and hospitably proposed to conduct his guest over the house and grounds.

CHAPTER III

CAROLINE

Men of the Adister family having taken to themselves brides of a very dusty pedigree from the Principality, there were curious rough heirlooms to be seen about the house, shields on the armoury walls and hunting-horns, and drinking-horns, and spears, and chain-belts bearing clasps of heads of beasts; old gold ornaments, torques, blue-stone necklaces, under glass-cases, were in the library; huge rings that must have given the wearers fearful fists; a shirt of coarse linen with a pale brown spot on the breast, like a fallen beech-leaf; and many sealed parchment-skins, very precious, for an inspection of which, as Patrick was bidden to understand, History humbly knocked at the Earlsfont hall-doors; and the proud muse made her transcripts of them kneeling. He would have been affected by these wonders had any relic of Adiante appeased his thirst. Or had there been one mention of her, it would have disengaged him from the incessant speculations regarding the daughter of the house, of whom not a word was uttered. No portrait of her was shown. Why was she absent from her home so long? where was she? How could her name be started? And was it she who was the sinner in her father’s mind? But the idolatrous love between Adiante and her father was once a legend: they could not have been cut asunder. She had offered up her love of Philip as a sacrifice to it: Patrick recollected that, and now with a softer gloom on his brooding he released her from the burden of his grand charge of unfaithfulness to the truest of lovers, by acknowledging that he was in the presence of the sole rival of his brother. Glorious girl that she was, her betrayal of Philip had nothing of a woman’s base caprice to make it infamous: she had sacrificed him to her reading of duty; and that was duty to

her father; and the point of duty was in this instance rather a sacred one. He heard voices murmur that she might be praised. He remonstrated with them, assuring them, as one who knew, that a woman's first duty is her duty to her lover; her parents are her second thought.

Page 4241

Her lover, in the consideration of a real soul among the shifty creatures, is her husband; and have we not the word of heaven directing her to submit herself to him who is her husband before all others? That peerless Adiante had previously erred in the upper sphere where she received her condemnation, but such a sphere is ladder and ladder and silver ladder high above your hair-splitting pates, you children of earth, and it is not for you to act on the verdict in decrying her: rather 'tis for you to raise hymns of worship to a saint.

Thus did the ingenious Patrick change his ground and gain his argument with the celerity of one who wins a game by playing it without an adversary. Mr. Adister had sprung a new sense in him on the subject of the renunciation of the religion. No thought of a possible apostasy had ever occurred to the youth, and as he was aware that the difference of their faith had been the main cause of the division of Adiante and Philip, he could at least consent to think well of her down here, that is, on our flat surface of earth. Up there, among the immortals, he was compelled to shake his head at her still, and more than sadly in certain moods of exaltation, reprovingly; though she interested him beyond all her sisterhood above, it had to be confessed.

They traversed a banqueting-hall hung with portraits, to two or three of which the master of Earlsfont carelessly pointed, for his guest to be interested in them or not as he might please. A reception-hall flung folding-doors on a grand drawing-room, where the fires in the grates went through the ceremony of warming nobody, and made a show of keeping the house alive. A modern steel cuirass, helmet and plume at a corner of the armoury reminded Mr. Adister to say that he had worn the uniform in his day. He cast an odd look at the old shell containing him when he was a brilliant youth. Patrick was marched on to Colonel Arthur's rooms, and to Captain David's, the sailor. Their father talked of his two sons. They appeared to satisfy him. If that was the case, they could hardly have thrown off their religion. Already Patrick had a dread of naming the daughter. An idea struck him that she might be the person who had been guilty of it over there on the Continent. What if she had done it, upon a review of her treatment of her lover, and gone into a convent to wait for Philip to come and claim her?—saying, 'Philip, I've put the knife to my father's love of me; love me double'; and so she just half swoons, enough to show how the dear angel looks in her sleep: a trick of kindness these heavenly women have, that we heathen may get a peep of their secret rose-enfolded selves; and dream 's no word, nor drunken, for the blessed mischief it works with us.

Supposing it so, it accounted for everything: for her absence, and her father's abstention from a mention of her, and the pretty good sort of welcome Patrick had received; for as yet it was unknown that she did it all for an O'Donnell.

Page 4242

These being his reflections, he at once accepted a view of her that so agreeably quieted his perplexity, and he leapt out of his tangle into the happy open spaces where the romantic things of life are as natural as the sun that rises and sets. There you imagine what you will; you live what you imagine. An Adiante meets her lover another Adiante, the phantom likeness of her, similar to the finger-tips, hovers to a meeting with some one whose heart shakes your manful frame at but a thought of it. But this other Adiante is altogether a secondary conception, barely descried, and chased by you that she may interpret the mystical nature of the happiness of those two, close-linked to eternity, in advance. You would learn it, if she would expound it; you are ready to learn it, for the sake of knowledge; and if you link yourself to her and do as those two are doing, it is chiefly in a spirit of imitation, in sympathy with the darting couple ahead . . . .

Meanwhile he conversed, and seemed, to a gentleman unaware of the vaporous activities of his brain, a young fellow of a certain practical sense.

‘We have not much to teach you in: horseflesh,’ Mr. Adister said, quitting the stables to proceed to the gardens.

‘We must look alive to keep up our breed, sir,’ said Patrick. ’We’re breeding too fine: and soon we shan’t be able to horse our troopers. I call that the land for horses where the cavalry’s well-mounted on a native breed.’

‘You have your brother’s notions of cavalry, have you!’

’I leave it to Philip to boast what cavalry can do on the field. He knows: but he knows that troopers must be mounted: and we’re fineing more and more from bone: with the sales to foreigners! and the only chance of their not beating us is that they’ll be so good as follow our bad example. Prussia’s well horsed, and for the work it’s intended to do, the Austrian light cavalry’s a model. So I’m told. I’ll see for myself. Then we sit our horses too heavy. The Saxon trooper runs headlong to flesh. ’Tis the beer that fattens and swells him. Properly to speak, we’ve no light cavalry. The French are studying it, and when they take to studying, they come to the fore. I’ll pay a visit to their breeding establishments. We’ve no studying here, and not a scrap of system that I see. All the country seems armed for bullying the facts, till the periodical panic arrives, and then it ’s for lying flat and roaring—and we’ll drop the curtain, if you please.’

‘You say we,’ returned Mr. Adister. ’I hear you launched at us English by the captain, your cousin, who has apparently yet to learn that we are one people.’

’We ’re held together and a trifle intermixed; I fancy it’s we with him and with me when we’re talking of army or navy,’ said Patrick. ’But Captain Con’s a bit of a politician: a poor business, when there’s nothing to be done.’

‘A very poor business!’ Mr. Adister rejoined,

Page 4243

’If you’d have the goodness to kindle his enthusiasm, he’d be for the first person plural, with his cap in the air,’ said Patrick.

’I detest enthusiasm.

’You’re not obliged to adore it to give it a wakener.

‘Pray, what does that mean?’

Patrick cast about to reply to the formal challenge for an explanation.

He began on it as it surged up to him: ’Well, sir, the country that’s got hold of us, if we ’re not to get loose. We don’t count many millions in Europe, and there’s no shame in submitting to force majeure, if a stand was once made; and we’re mixed up, ’tis true, well or ill; and we’re stronger, both of us, united than tearing to strips: and so, there, for the past! so long as we can set our eyes upon something to admire, instead of a bundle squatting fat on a pile of possessions and vowing she won’t budge; and taking kicks from a big foot across the Atlantic, and shaking bayonets out of her mob-cap for a little one’s cock of the eye at her: and she’s all for the fleshpots, and calls the rest of mankind fools because they’re not the same: and so long as she can trim her ribands and have her hot toast and tea, with a suspicion of a dram in it, she doesn’t mind how heavy she sits: nor that ’s not the point, nor ’s the land question, nor the potato crop, if only she wore the right sort of face to look at, with a bit of brightness about it, to show an idea inside striking alight from the day that’s not yet nodding at us, as the tops of big mountains do: or if she were only braced and gallant, and cried, Ready, though I haven’t much outlook! We’d be satisfied with her for a handsome figure. I don’t know whether we wouldn’t be satisfied with her for politeness in her manners. We’d like her better for a spice of devotion to alight higher up in politics and religion. But the key of the difficulty’s a sparkle of enthusiasm. It’s part business, and the greater part sentiment. We want a rousing in the heart of us; or else we’d be pleased with her for sitting so as not to overlap us entirely: we’d feel more at home, and behold her more respectfully. We’d see the policy of an honourable union, and be joined to you by more than a telegraphic cable. That’s Captain Con, I think, and many like him.’

Patrick finished his airy sketch of the Irish case in a key signifying that he might be one among the many, but unobtrusive.

‘Stick to horses!’ observed Mr. Adister.

It was pronounced as the termination to sheer maundering.

Patrick talked on the uppermost topic for the remainder of their stroll.

He noticed that his host occasionally allowed himself to say, ’You Irish’: and he reflected that the saying, ‘You English,’ had been hinted as an offence.

Page 4244

He forgot to think that he had possibly provoked this alienation in a scornfully proud spirit. The language of metaphor was to Mr. Adister fool's froth. He conceded the use of it to the Irish and the Welsh as a right that stamped them for what they were by adopting it; and they might look on a country as a 'she,' if it amused them: so long as they were not recalcitrant, they were to be tolerated, they were a part of us; doubtless the nether part, yet not the less a part for which we are bound to exercise a specially considerate care, or else we suffer, for we are sensitive there: this is justice but the indications by fiddle-faddle verbiage of anything objectionable to the whole in the part aroused an irritability that speedily endued him with the sense of sanity opposing lunacy; when, not having a wide command of the undecorated plain speech which enjoyed his approval, he withdrew into the entrenchments of contempt.

Patrick heard enough to let him understand why the lord of Earlsfont and Captain Con were not on the best of terms. Once or twice he had a twinge or suspicion of a sting from the tone of his host, though he was not political and was of a mood to pity the poor gentleman's melancholy state of solitariness, with all his children absent, his wife dead, only a niece, a young lady of twenty, to lend an air of grace and warmth to his home.

She was a Caroline, and as he had never taken a liking to a Caroline, he classed her in the tribe of Carolines. To a Kathleen, an Eveleen, a Nora, or a Bessy, or an Alicia, he would have bowed more cordially on his introduction to her, for these were names with portraits and vistas beyond, that shook leaves of recollection of the happiest of life—the sweet things dreamed undesiringly in opening youth. A Caroline awakened no soft association of fancies, no mysterious heaven and earth. The others had variously tinted skies above them; their features wooed the dream, led it on as the wooded glen leads the eye till we are deep in richness. Nor would he have throbbed had one of any of his favourite names appeared in the place of Caroline Adister. They had not moved his heart, they had only stirred the sources of wonder. An Eveleen had carried him farthest to imagine the splendours of an Adiante, and the announcement of the coming of an Eveleen would perchance have sped a little wild fire, to which what the world calls curiosity is frozenly akin, through his veins.

Mr. Adister had spoken of his niece Caroline. A lacquey, receiving orders from his master, mentioned Miss Adister. There was but one Miss Adister for Patrick. Against reason, he was raised to anticipate the possible beholding of her, and Caroline's entrance into the drawing-room brought him to the ground. Disappointment is a poor term for the descent from an immoderate height, but the acknowledgment that we have shot up irrationally reconciles even unphilosophical youth to the necessity of the fall,

Page 4245

though we must continue sensible of a shock. She was the Miss Adister; and how, and why? No one else accompanied them on their march to the dinner-table. Patrick pursued his double task of hunting his thousand speculations and conversing fluently, so that it is not astonishing if, when he retired to his room, the impression made on him by this young Caroline was inefficient to distinguish her from the horde of her baptismal sisters. And she had a pleasant face: he was able to see that, and some individuality in the look of it, the next morning; and then he remembered the niceness of her manners. He supposed her to have been educated where the interfusion of a natural liveliness with a veiling retenue gives the title of lady. She had enjoyed the advantage of having an estimable French lady for her governess, she informed him, as they sauntered together on the terrace.

‘A Protestant, of course,’ Patrick spoke as he thought.

’Madame Dugue is a Catholic of Catholics, and the most honourable of women.’

‘That I’ll believe; and wasn’t for proselytisms,’ said he.

‘Oh, no: she was faithful to her trust.’

‘Save for the grand example!’

‘That,’ said Caroline, ’one could strive to imitate without embracing her faith.’

‘There’s my mind clear as print!’ Patrick exclaimed. ’The Faith of my fathers! and any pattern you like for my conduct, if it’s a good one.’

Caroline hesitated before she said: ’You have noticed my Uncle Adister’s prepossession; I mean, his extreme sensitiveness on that subject.’

‘He blazed on me, and he seemed to end by a sort of approval.’

She sighed. ‘He has had cause for great unhappiness.’

‘Is it the colonel, or the captain? Forgive me!’

Her head shook.

‘Is it she? Is it his daughter? I must ask!’

‘You have not heard?’

Oh! then, I guessed it,’ cried Patrick, with a flash of pride in his arrowy sagacity. ’Not a word have I heard, but I thought it out for myself; because I love my brother, I fancy. And now, if you’ll be so good, Miss Caroline, let me beg, it’s just the address, or the city,

or the country—where she is, can you tell me?—just whereabouts! You're surprised: but I want her address, to be off, to see her; I'm anxious to speak to her. It's anywhere she may be in a ring, only show me the ring, I'll find her, for I've a load; and there's nothing like that for sending you straight, though it's in the dark; it acts like an instinct. But you know the clear address, and won't let me be running blindfold. She's on the Continent and has been a long time, and it was the capital of Austria, which is a Catholic country, and they've Irish blood in the service there, or they had. I could drop on my knees to you!'

The declaration was fortunately hushed by a supplicating ardour, or Mr. Adister would have looked more surprised than his niece. He stepped out of the library window as they were passing, and, evidently with a mind occupied by his own affairs, held up an opened letter for Caroline's perusal. She took a view of the handwriting.

Page 4246

‘Any others?’ she said.

‘You will consider that one enough for the day,’ was his answer.

Patrick descended the terrace and strolled by the waterside, grieved at their having bad news, and vexed with himself for being a stranger, unable to console them.

Half an hour later they were all three riding to the market-town, where Mr. Adister paid a fruitless call on his lawyer.

‘And never is at home! never was known to be at home when wanted!’ he said, springing back to the saddle.

Caroline murmured some soothing words. They had a perverse effect.

’His partner! yes, his partner is at home, but I do not communicate upon personal business with his partner; and by and by there will be, I suppose, a third partner. I might as well deposit my family history in the hands of a club. His partner is always visible. It is my belief that Camminy has taken a partner that he may act the independent gentleman at his leisure. I, meantime, must continue to be the mark for these letters. I shall expect soon to hear myself abused as the positive cause of the loss of a Crown!’

‘Mr. Camminy will probably appear at the dinner hour,’ said Caroline.

‘Claret attracts him: I wish I could say as much of duty,’ rejoined her uncle.

Patrick managed to restrain a bubbling remark on the respective charms of claret and duty, tempting though the occasion was for him to throw in a conversational word or two.

He was rewarded for listening devoutly.

Mr. Adister burst out again: ’And why not come over here to settle this transaction herself?—provided that I am spared the presence of her Schinderhannes! She could very well come. I have now received three letters bearing on this matter within as many months. Down to the sale of her hereditary jewels! I profess no astonishment. The jewels may well go too, if Crydney and Welvas are to go. Disrooted body and soul!—for a moonshine title!—a gaming-table foreign knave!—Known for a knave!—A young gentlewoman?—a wild Welsh . . . !’

Caroline put her horse to a canter, and the exclamations ended, leaving Patrick to shuffle them together and read the riddle they presented, and toss them to the wind, that they might be blown back on him by the powers of air in an intelligible form.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCESS

Dinner, and a little piano-music and a song closed an evening that was not dull to Patrick in spite of prolonged silences. The quiet course of things within the house appeared to him to have a listening ear for big events outside. He dreaded a single step in the wrong direction, and therefore forbore to hang on any of his conjectures; for he might perchance be unjust to the blessedest heroine on the surface of the earth—a truly awful thought! Yet her name would no longer bear the speaking of it to himself. It conjured up a smoky moon under confounding eclipse.

Page 4247

Who was Schinderhannes?

Mr. Adister had said, her Schinderhannes.

Patrick merely wished to be informed who the man was, and whether he had a title, and was much of a knave: and particularly Patrick would have liked to be informed of the fellow's religion. But asking was not easy.

It was not possible. And there was a barrel of powder to lay a fiery head on, for a pillow!

To confess that he had not the courage to inquire was as good as an acknowledgment that he knew too much for an innocent questioner. And what did he know? His brother Philip's fair angel forbade him to open the door upon what he knew. He took a peep through fancy's keyhole, and delighted himself to think that he had seen nothing.

After a turbulent night with Schinderhannes, who let him go no earlier than the opening of a December day, Patrick hied away to one of the dusky nooks by the lake for a bracing plunge. He attributed to his desire for it the strange deadness of the atmosphere, and his incapacity to get an idea out of anything he looked on: he had not a sensation of cold till the stinging element gripped him. It is the finest school for the cure of dreamers; two minutes of stout watery battle, with the enemy close all round, laughing, but not the less inveterate, convinced him that, in winter at least, we have only to jump out of our clothes to feel the reality of things in a trice. The dip was sharpening; he could say that his prescription was good for him; his craving to get an idea ceased with it absolutely, and he stood in far better trim to meet his redoubtable adversary of overnight; but the rascal was a bandit and had robbed him of his purse; that was a positive fact; his vision had gone; he felt himself poor and empty and rejoicing in the keenness of his hunger for breakfast, singularly lean. A youth despoiled of his Vision and made sensible by the activity of his physical state that he is a common machine, is eager for meat, for excess of whatsoever you may offer him; he is on the highroad of recklessness, and had it been the bottle instead of Caroline's coffee-cup, Patrick would soon have received a priming for a delivery of views upon the sex, and upon love, and the fools known as lovers, acrid enough to win the applause of cynics.

Boasting was the best relief that a young man not without modesty could find. Mr. Adister complimented him on the robustness of his habits, and Patrick 'would like to hear of the temptation that could keep him from his morning swim.'

Caroline's needle-thrust was provoked:

'Would not Arctic weather deter you, Mr. O'Donnell?' He hummed, and her eyes filled with the sparkle.

‘Short of Arctic,’ he had to say. ’But a gallop, after an Arctic bath, would soon spin the blood-upon an Esquimaux dog, of course,’ he pursued, to anticipate his critic’s remark on the absence of horses, with a bow.

She smiled, accepting the mental alertness he fastened on her.

Page 4248

We must perforce be critics of these tear-away wits; which are, moreover, so threadbare to conceal the character! Caroline led him to vaunt his riding and his shooting, and a certain time passed before she perceived that though he responded naturally to her first sly attacks, his gross exaggerations upon them had not been the triumph of absurdity she supposed herself to have evoked.

Her wish was to divert her uncle. Patrick discerned the intention and aided her.

‘As for entertainment,’ he said, in answer to Mr. Adister’s courteous regrets that he would have to be a prisoner in the house until his legal adviser thought proper to appear, ’I’ll be perfectly happy if Miss Caroline will give me as much of her company as she can spare. It ’s amusing to be shot at too, by a lady who ’s a good marksman! And birds and hares are always willing to wait for us; they keep better alive. I forgot to say that I can sing.’

‘Then I was in the presence of a connoisseur last night,’ said Caroline. Mr. Adister consulted his watch and the mantelpiece clock for a minute of difference between them, remarking that he was a prisoner indeed, and for the whole day, unless Camminy should decide to come. ’There is the library,’ he said, ’if you care for books; the best books on agriculture will be found there. You can make your choice in the stables, if you would like to explore the country. I am detained here by a man who seems to think my business of less importance than his pleasures. And it is not my business; it is very much the reverse but I am compelled to undertake it as my own, when I abhor the business. It is hard for me to speak of it, much more to act a part in it.’

‘Perhaps,’ Caroline interposed hurriedly, ’Mr. O’Donnell would not be unwilling to begin the day with some duets?’

Patrick eagerly put on his shame-face to accept her invitation, protesting that his boldness was entirely due to his delight in music.

‘But I’ve heard,’ said he, ’that the best fortification for the exercise of the a voice is hearty eating, so I ’ll pay court again to that game-pie. I’m one with the pigs for truffles.’

His host thanked him for spreading the contagion of good appetite, and followed his example. Robust habits and heartiness were signs with him of a conscience at peace, and he thought the Jesuits particularly forbearing in the amount of harm they had done to this young man. So they were still at table when Mr. Camminy was announced and ushered in.

The man of law murmured an excuse or two; he knew his client’s eye, and how to thaw it.

‘No, Miss Adister, I have not breakfasted,’ he said, taking the chair placed for him. ’I was all day yesterday at Windlemont, engaged in assisting to settle the succession. Where estates are not entailed!’

’The expectations of the family are undisciplined and certain not to be satisfied,’ Mr. Adister carried on the broken sentence. ’That house will fall! However, you have lost no time this morning.—Mr. Patrick O’Donnell.’

Page 4249

Mr. Camminy bowed busily somewhere in the direction between Patrick and the sideboard.

‘Our lawyers have us inside out, like our physicians,’ Mr. Adister resumed, talking to blunt his impatience for a private discussion with his own.

‘Surgery’s a little in their practice too, we think in Ireland,’ said Patrick.

Mr. Camminy assented: ‘No doubt.’ He was hungry, and enjoyed the look of the table, but the look of his client chilled the prospect, considered in its genial appearance as a feast of stages; having luminous extension; so, to ease his client’s mind, he ventured to say: ’I thought it might be urgent.’

‘It is urgent,’ was the answer.

‘Ah: foreign? domestic?’

A frown replied.

Caroline, in haste to have her duties over, that she might escape the dreaded outburst, pressed another cup of tea on Mr. Camminy and groaned to see him fill his plate. She tried to start a topic with Patrick.

‘The princess is well, I hope?’ Mr. Camminy asked in the voice of discretion. ‘It concerns her Highness?’

‘It concerns my daughter and her inheritance from her mad grandmother!’ Mr. Adister rejoined loudly; and he continued like a retreating thunder: ’A princess with a title as empty as a skull! At best a princess of swamps, and swine that fight for acorns, and men that fight for swine!’

Patrick caught a glance from Caroline, and the pair rose together.

‘They did that in our mountains a couple of thousand years ago,’ said Mr. Camminy, ’and the cause was not so bad, to judge by this ham. Men must fight: the law is only a quieter field for them.’

‘And a fatter for the ravens,’ Patrick joined in softly, as if carrying on a song.

’Have at us, Mr. O’Donnell! I’m ashamed of my appetite, Miss Adister, but the morning’s drive must be my excuse, and I’m bounden to you for not forcing me to detain you. Yes, I can finish breakfast at my leisure, and talk of business, which is never particularly interesting to ladies—though,’ Mr. Camminy turned to her uncle, ’I know Miss Adister has a head for it.’

Patrick hummed a bar or two of an air, to hint of his being fanatico per la musica, as a pretext for their departure.

‘If you’ll deign to give me a lesson,’ said he, as Caroline came away from pressing her lips to her uncle’s forehead.

‘I may discover that I am about to receive one,’ said she.

They quitted the room together.

Mr. Camminy had seen another Miss Adister duetting with a young Irishman and an O’Donnell, with lamentable results to that union of voices, and he permitted himself to be a little astonished at his respected client’s defective memory or indifference to the admonition of identical circumstances.

CHAPTER V

AT THE PIANO, CHIEFLY WITHOUT MUSIC

Barely had the door shut behind them when Patrick let his heart out: ’The princess?’ He had a famished look, and Caroline glided along swiftly with her head bent, like one musing; his tone alarmed her; she lent him her ear, that she might get some understanding of his excitement, suddenly as it seemed to have come on him; but he was all in his hungry interrogation, and as she reached her piano and raised the lid, she saw it on tiptoe straining for her answer.

Page 4250

‘I thought you were aware of my cousin’s marriage.’

‘Was I?’ said Patrick, asking it of himself, for his conscience would not acknowledge an absolute ignorance. ’No: I fought it, I wouldn’t have a blot on her be suspected. She’s married! She’s married to one of their princes!—married for a title!—and changed her religion! And Miss Adister, you’re speaking of Adiante?’

‘My cousin Adiante.’

’Well did I hate the name! I heard it first over in France. Our people wrote to me of her; and it’s a name to set you thinking: Is she tender, or nothing like a woman,—a stone? And I put it to my best friend there, Father Clement, who’s a scholar, up in everything, and he said it was a name with a pretty sound and an ill meaning—far from tender; and a bad history too, for she was one of the forty-nine Danaides who killed their husbands for the sake of their father and was not likely to be the fiftieth, considering the name she bore. It was for her father’s sake she as good as killed her lover, and the two Adiantes are like enough: they’re as like as a pair of hands with daggers. So that was my brother Philip’s luck! She’s married! It’s done; it’s over, like death: no hope. And this time it’s against her father; it’s against her faith. There’s the end of Philip! I could have prophesied it; I did; and when they broke, from her casting him off—true to her name! thought I. She cast him off, and she couldn’t wait for him, and there’s his heart broken. And I ready to glorify her for a saint! And now she must have loved the man, or his title, to change her religion. She gives him her soul! No praise to her for that: but mercy! what a love it must be. Or else it’s a spell. But wasn’t she rather one for flinging spells than melting? Except that we’re all of us hit at last, and generally by our own weapon. But she loved Philip: she loved him down to shipwreck and drowning: she gave battle for him, and against her father; all the place here and the country’s alive with their meetings and partings:—she can’t have married! She wouldn’t change her religion for her lover: how can she have done it for this prince? Why, it’s to swear false oaths!—-unless it’s possible for a woman to slip out of herself and be another person after a death like that of a love like hers.’

Patrick stopped: the idea demanded a scrutiny.

‘She’s another person for me,’ he said. ’Here’s the worst I ever imagined of her!—-thousands of miles and pits of sulphur beyond the worst and the very worst! I thought her fickle, I thought her heartless, rather a black fairy, perched above us, not quite among the stars of heaven. I had my ideas. But never that she was a creature to jump herself down into a gulf and be lost for ever. She’s gone, extinguished—there she is, under the penitent’s hoodcap with eyeholes, before the faggots! and that’s what she has married!—a burning torment, and none of the joys of martyrdom. Oh! I’m not awake. But I never dreamed of such a thing as this—not the hard, bare, lump-of-earth-fact:—-and that’s the only thing to tell me I’m not dreaming now.’

Page 4251

He subsided again; then deeply beseeching asked:

’Have you by chance a portrait of the gentleman, Miss Adister? Is there one anywhere?’

Caroline stood at her piano, turning over the leaves of a music-book, with a pressure on her eyelids. She was near upon being thrilled in spite of an astonishment almost petrifying: and she could nearly have smiled, so strange was his fraternal adoption, amounting to a vivification—of his brother’s passion. He seemed quite naturally to impersonate Philip. She wondered, too, in the coolness of her alien blood, whether he was a character, or merely an Irish character. As to the unwontedness of the scene, Ireland was chargeable with that; and Ireland also, a little at his expense as a citizen of the polite world, relieved him of the extreme ridicule attached to his phrases and images.

She replied: ‘We have no portrait.’

‘May I beg to know, have you seen him?’ said Patrick. Caroline shook her head.

‘Is there no telling what he is like, Miss Adister?’

‘He is not young.’

‘An old man!’

She had not said that, and she wished to defend her cousin from the charge of contracting such an alliance, but Patrick’s face had brightened out of a gloom of stupefaction; he assured her he was now ready to try his voice with hers, only she was to excuse a touch of hoarseness; he felt it slightly in his throat: and could he, she asked him, wonder at it after his morning’s bath?

He vindicated the saneness of the bath as well as he was able, showing himself at least a good reader of music. On the whole, he sang pleasantly, particularly French songs. She complimented him, with an emphasis on the French. He said, yes, he fancied he did best in French, and he had an idea of settling in France, if he found that he could not live quietly in his own country.

’And becoming a Frenchman?’said Caroline.

‘Why not?’ said he. ’I ’m more at home with French people; they’re mostly of my creed; they’re amiable, though they weren’t quite kind to poor Lally Tollendal. I like them. Yes, I love France, and when I’m called upon to fix myself, as I suppose I shall be some day, I shan’t have the bother over there that I should find here.’

She spoke reproachfully: ‘Have you no pride in the title of Englishman?’

’I ‘m an Irishman.’

‘We are one nation.’

‘And it’s one family where the dog is pulled by the collar.’

There was a retort on him: she saw, as it were, the box, but the lid would not open to assist her to it, and she let it go by, thinking in her patriotic derision, that to choose to be likened to the unwilling dog of the family was evidence of a want of saving pride.

Besides, she could not trust to the glibness of her tongue in a contest with a young gentleman to whom talking was as easy as breathing, even if sometimes his volubility exposed him to attack. A superior position was offered her by her being silent and critical. She stationed herself on it: still she was grieved to think of him as a renegade from his country, and she forced herself to say: ‘Captain O’Donnell talks in that manner.’

Page 4252

'Captain Con is constitutionally discontented because he's a bard by nature, and without the right theme for his harp,' said Patrick. 'He has a notion of Erin as the unwilling bride of Mr. Bull, because her lord is not off in heroics enough to please her, and neglects her, and won't let her be mistress of her own household, and she can't forget that he once had the bad trick of beating her: she sees the marks. And you mayn't believe it, but the Captain's temper is to praise and exalt. It is. Irony in him is only eulogy standing on its head: a sort of an upside down; a perversion: that's our view of him at home. All he desires is to have us on the march, and he'd be perfectly happy marching, never mind the banner, though a bit of green in it would put him in tune, of course. The banner of the Cid was green, Miss Adister: or else it's his pennon that was. And there's a quantity of our blood in Spain too. We've watered many lands.'

The poor young English lady's brain started wildly on the effort to be with him, and to understand whether she listened to humour or emotion: she reposed herself as well as she could in the contemplation of an electrically-flashing maze, where every line ran losing itself in another.

He added: 'Old Philip!' in a visible throb of pity for his brother; after the scrupulous dubitation between the banner and the pennon of the Cid!

It would have comforted her to laugh. She was closer upon tears, and without any reason for them in her heart.

Such a position brings the hesitancy which says that the sitting is at an end.

She feared, as she laid aside her music-books, that there would be more to come about Adiante, but he spared her. He bowed to her departing, and strolled off by himself.

CHAPTER VI

A CONSULTATION: WITH OPINIONS UPON WELSHWOMEN AND THE CAMBRIAN RACE

Later in the day she heard that he was out scouring the country on one of her uncle's horses. She had too many distressing matters to think of for so singular a young man to have any other place than that which is given to the fantastical in a troubled and serious mind. He danced there like the whimsy sunbeam of a shaken water below. What would be his opinion of Adiante if he knew of her determination to sell the two fair estates she inherited from a grandmother whom she had venerated; that she might furnish arms to her husband to carry out an audacious enterprise likely to involve both of them in blood and ruin? Would he not bound up aloft and quiver still more wildly? She respected, quaint though it was, his imaginative heat of feeling for Adiante sufficiently to associate him with her so far; and she lent him in fancy her own bewilderment and grief at her

cousin’s conduct, for the soothing that his exaggeration of them afforded her. She could almost hear his outcry.

Page 4253

The business of the hour demanded more of her than a seeking for refreshment. She had been invited to join the consultation of her uncle with his lawyer. Mr. Adister tossed her another letter from Vienna, of that morning's delivery. She read it with composure. It became her task to pay no heed to his loss of patience, and induce him to acquiesce in his legal adviser's view which was, to temporise further, present an array of obstacles, and by all possible suggestions induce the princess to come over to England, where her father's influence with her would have a chance of being established again; and it might then be hoped that she, who had never when under sharp temptation acted disobediently to his wishes at home, and who certainly would not have dreamed of contracting the abhorred alliance had she been breathing the air of common sense peculiar to her native land, would see the prudence, if not the solemn obligation, of retaining to herself these family possessions. Caroline was urgent with her uncle to act on such good counsel. She marvelled at his opposition, though she detected the principal basis of it.

Mr. Adister had no ground of opposition but his own intemperateness. The Welsh grandmother's legacy of her estates to his girl, overlooking her brothers, Colonel Arthur and Captain David, had excessively vexed him, despite the strong feeling he entertained for Adiante; and not simply because of the blow he received in it unexpectedly from that old lady, as the last and heaviest of the long and open feud between them, but also, chiefly, that it outraged and did permanent injury to his ideas of the proper balance of the sexes. Between himself and Mrs. Winnion Rhys the condition of the balance had been a point of vehement disputation, she insisting to have it finer up to equality, and he that the naturally lighter scale should continue to kick the beam. Behold now the consequence of the wilful Welshwoman's insanest of legacies! The estates were left to Adiante Adister for her sole use and benefit, making almost a man of her, and an unshackled man, owing no dues to posterity. Those estates in the hands of a woman are in the hands of her husband; and the husband a gambler and a knave, they are in the hands of the Jews—or gone to smoke. Let them go. A devilish malignity bequeathed them: let them go back to their infernal origin. And when they were gone, his girl would soon discover that there was no better place to come to than her home; she would come without an asking, and alone, and without much prospect of the intrusion of her infamous Hook-nose in pursuit of her at Earlsfont. The money wasted, the wife would be at peace. Here she would have leisure to repent of all the steps she had taken since that fatal one of the acceptance of the invitation to the Embassy at Vienna. Mr. Adister had warned her both against her going and against the influence of her friend Lady Wenchester, our Ambassadress there, another Welsh woman, with the

Page 4254

weathervane head of her race. But the girl would accept, and it was not for him to hold out. It appeared to be written that the Welsh, particularly Welsh women, were destined to worry him up to the end of his days. Their women were a composition of wind and fire. They had no reason, nothing solid in their whole nature. Englishmen allied to them had to learn that they were dealing with broomstick witches and irresponsible sprites. Irishwomen were models of propriety beside them: indeed Irishwomen might often be patterns to their English sisterhood. Mr. Adister described the Cambrian ladies as a kind of daughters of the Fata Morgana, only half human, and deceptive down to treachery, unless you had them fast by their spinning fancy. They called it being romantic. It was the ante-chamber of madness. Mad, was the word for them. You pleased them you knew not how, and just as little did you know how you displeased them. And you were long hence to be taught that in a certain past year, and a certain month, and on a certain day of the month, not forgetting the hour of the day to the minute of the hour, and attendant circumstances to swear loud witness to it, you had mortally offended them. And you receive your blow: you are sure to get it: the one passion of those women is for vengeance. They taste a wound from the lightest touch, and they nurse the venom for you. Possibly you may in their presence have had occasion to praise the military virtues of the builder of Carnarvon Castle. You are by and by pierced for it as hard as they can thrust. Or you have incidentally compared Welsh mutton with Southdown:—you have not highly esteemed their drunken Bards:—-you have asked what the Welsh have done in the world; you are supposed to have slighted some person of their family—a tenth cousin!—anything turns their blood. Or you have once looked straight at them without speaking, and you discover years after that they have chosen to foist on you their idea of your idea at the moment; and they have the astounding presumption to account this misreading of your look to the extent of a full justification, nothing short of righteous, for their treachery and your punishment! O those Welshwomen!

The much-suffering lord of Earlsfont stretched forth his open hand, palm upward, for a testifying instrument to the plain truth of his catalogue of charges. He closed it tight and smote the table. 'Like mother—and grandmother too—like daughter!' he said, and generalised again to preserve his dignity: 'They're aflame in an instant. You may see them quiet for years, but it smoulders. You dropped the spark, and they time the explosion.'

Caroline said to Mr. Camminy: 'You are sure you can give us the day?'

'All of it,' he replied, apologising for some show of restlessness. 'The fact is, Miss Adister, I married a lady from over the borders, and though I have never had to complain of her yet, she may have a finale in store. It's true that I love wild Wales.'

Page 4255

‘And so do I’ Caroline raised her eyes to imagined mountains.

‘You will pardon me, Camminy,’ said Mr. Adister.

The lawyer cracked his back to bow to the great gentleman so magnanimously humiliating himself. ‘Sir! Sir!’ he said. ’Yes, Welsh blood is queer blood, I own. They find it difficult to forgive; and trifles offend; and they are unhappily just as secretive as they are sensitive. The pangs we cause them, without our knowing it, must be horrible. They are born, it would seem, with more than the common allowance of kibes for treading on: a severe misfortune for them. Now for their merits: they have poetry in them; they are valiant; they are hospitable to teach the Arab a lesson: I do believe their life is their friend’s at need—seriously, they would lay it down for him: or the wherewithal, their money, their property, excepting the three-stringed harp of three generations back, worth now in current value sixpence halfpenny as a curiosity, or three farthings for firewood; that they’ll keep against their own desire to heap on you everything they have—if they love you, and you at the same time have struck their imaginations. Offend them, however, and it’s war, declared or covert. And I must admit that their best friend can too easily offend them. I have lost excellent clients, I have never understood why; yet I respect the remains of their literature, I study their language, I attend their gatherings and subscribe the expenses; I consume Welsh mutton with relish; I enjoy the Triads, and can come down on them with a quotation from Catwg the Wise: but it so chanced that I trod on a kibe, and I had to pay the penalty. There’s an Arabian tale, Miss Adister, of a peaceful traveller who ate a date in the desert and flung away the stone, which hit an invisible son of a genie in the eye, and the poor traveller suffered for it. Well, you commit these mortal injuries to the invisible among the Welsh. Some of them are hurt if you call them Welsh. They scout it as the original Saxon title for them. No, they are Cymry, Cambrians! They have forgiven the Romans. Saxon and Norman are still their enemies. If you stir their hearts you find it so. And, by the way, if King Edward had not trampled them into the mire so thoroughly, we should hear of it at times even now. Instead of penillions and englyns, there would be days for fiery triplets. Say the worst of them, they are soundheaded. They have a ready comprehension for great thoughts. The Princess Nikolas, I remember, had a special fondness for the words of Catwg the Wise.’

‘Adiante,’ had murmured Caroline, to correct his indiscretion.

She was too late.

Page 4256

‘Nikolas!’ Mr. Adister thundered. ’Hold back that name in this house, title and all, if you speak of my daughter. I refuse admission to it here. She has given up my name, and she must be known by the one her feather-brained grandmother proposed for her, to satisfy her pleasure in a fine sound. English Christian names are my preference. I conceded Arthur to her without difficulty. She had a voice in David, I recollect; with very little profit to either of the boys. I had no voice in Adiante; but I stood at my girl’s baptism, and Adiante let her be. At least I saved the girl from the addition of Arianrod. It was to have been Adiante Arianrod. Can you credit it? Prince-pah! Nikolas? Have you a notion of the sort of prince that makes an English lady of the best blood of England his princess?’

The lawyer had a precise notion of the sort of prince appearing to Mr. Adister in the person of his foreign son-in-law. Prince Nikolas had been described to him before, with graphic touches upon the quality of the reputation he bore at the courts and in the gambling-saloons of Europe. Dreading lest his client’s angry heat should precipitate him on the prince again, to the confusion of a lady’s ears, Mr. Camminy gave an emphatic and short affirmative.

‘You know what he is like?’ said Mr. Adister, with a face of disgust reflected from the bare thought of the hideous likeness.

Mr. Camminy assured him that the description of the prince’s lineaments would not be new. It was, as he was aware, derived from a miniature of her husband, transmitted by the princess, on its flight out of her father’s loathing hand to the hearthstone and under his heel.

Assisted by Caroline, he managed to check the famous delineation of the adventurer prince in which a not very worthy gentleman’s chronic fever of abomination made him really eloquent, quick to unburden himself in the teeth of decorum.

‘And my son-in-law! My son-in-law!’ ejaculated Mr. Adister, tossing his head higher, and so he stimulated his amazement and abhorrence of the portrait he rather wondered at them for not desiring to have sketched for their execration of it, alluringly foul as it was: while they in concert drew him back to the discussion of his daughter’s business, reiterating prudent counsel, with a knowledge that they had only to wait for the ebbing of his temper.

’Let her be informed, sir, that by coming to England she can settle the business according to her wishes in one quarter of the time it would take a Commission sent out to her—if we should be authorised to send out one,’ said Mr. Camminy. ’By committing the business to you, I fancy I perceive your daughter’s disposition to consider your feelings: possibly to a reluctance to do the deed unsanctioned by her father. It would appear so to a cool observer, notwithstanding her inattention to your remonstrances.’

The reply was: 'Dine here and sleep here. I shall be having more of these letters,' Mr. Adister added, profoundly sighing.

Page 4257

Caroline slipped away to mark a conclusion to the debate; and Mr. Camminy saw his client redden fast and frown.

‘Besides,’ he spoke in a husky voice, descending upon a subject hateful, ’she tells me to-day she is not in a state to travel! Do you hear? Make what you can of it.’

The proud and injured gentleman had the aspect of one who receives a blow that it is impossible for him to resent. He could not speak the shame he felt: it was literally in his flesh. But the cause had been sufficiently hinted to set the lawyer staring as men do when they encounter situations of grisly humour, where certain of the passions of man’s developed nature are seen armed and furious against our mild prevailing ancient mother nature; and the contrast is between our utter wrath and her simple exposition of the circumstances and consequences forming her laws. There are situations which pass beyond the lightly stirred perceptive wits to the quiet court of the intellect, to be received there as an addition to our acquaintance with mankind. We know not of what substance to name them. Humour in its intense strain has a seat somewhere about the mouth of tragedy, giving it the enigmatical faint wry pull at a corner visible at times upon the dreadful mask.

That Mr. Adister should be astonished at such a communication from the princess, after a year of her marriage: and that he should take it for a further outrage of his paternal sentiments, should actually redden and be hoarse in alluding to it: the revelation of such points in our human character set the humane old lawyer staring at the reserve space within himself apart from his legal being, whereon he by fits compared his own constitution with that of the individuals revealed to him by their acts and confidential utterances. For him, he decided that he would have rejoiced at the news.

Granting the prince a monster, however, as Mr. Adister unforcedly considered him, it was not so cheering a piece of intelligence that involved him yet closer with that man’s rank blood: it curdled his own. The marriage had shocked and stricken him, cleaving, in his love for his daughter, a goodly tree and withering many flowers. Still the marriage was but Adiante’s gulf: he might be called father-in-law of her spangled ruffian; son-in-law, the desperado-rascal would never be called by him. But the result of the marriage dragged him bodily into the gulf: he became one of four, numbering the beast twice among them. The subtlety of his hatred so reckoned it; for he could not deny his daughter in the father’s child; he could not exclude its unhallowed father in the mother’s: and of this man’s child he must know and own himself the grandfather. If ever he saw the child, if drawn to it to fondle it, some part of the little animal not his daughter’s would partake of his embrace. And if neither of his boys married, and his girl gave birth to a son! darkness rolled upon that avenue of vision. A trespasser and usurper-one of the demon’s brood chased his very name out of Earlsfont!

Page 4258

‘Camminy, you must try to amuse yourself,’ he said briskly. ’Anything you may be wanting at home shall be sent for. I must have you here to make sure that I am acting under good advice. You can take one of the keepers for an hour or two of shooting. I may join you in the afternoon. You will find occupation for your gun in the north covers.’

He wandered about the house, looking into several rooms, and only partially at rest when he discovered Caroline in one, engaged upon some of her aquarelle sketches. He asked where the young Irishman was.

‘Are you in search of him?’ said she. ’You like him, uncle? He is out riding, they tell me.’

‘The youngster is used to south-western showers in that climate of his,’ Mr. Adister replied. ’I dare say we could find the Jesuit in him somewhere. There’s the seed. His cousin Con O’Donnell has filled him with stuff about Ireland and England: the man has no better to do than to train a parrot. What do you think of him, my love?’

The judgement was not easily formed for expression. ’He is not quite like what I remember of his brother Philip. He talks much more, does he not? He seems more Irish than his brother. He is very strange. His feelings are strong; he has not an idea of concealing them. For a young man educated by the Jesuits, he is remarkably open.’

‘The Jesuits might be of service to me just now!’ Mr. Adister addressed his troubled soul, and spoke upon another conception of them: ’How has he shown his feelings?’

Caroline answered quickly: ’His love of his brother. Anything that concerns his brother moves him; it is like a touch on a musical instrument. Perhaps I should say a native one.’

‘Concerns his brother?’ Mr. Adister inquired, and his look requesting enlightenment told her she might speak.

‘Adiante,’ she said softly. She coloured.

Her uncle mused awhile in a half-somnolent gloom. ’He talks of this at this present day?’

’It is not dead to him. He really appears to have hoped . . . he is extraordinary. He had not heard before of her marriage. I was a witness of the most singular scene this morning, at the piano. He gathered it from what he had heard. He was overwhelmed by it. I could not exaggerate. It was impossible to help being a little touched, though it was curious, very strange.’

Her uncle's attentiveness incited her to describe the scene, and as it visibly relieved his melancholy, she did it with a few vivid indications of the quaint young Irishman's manner of speech. She concluded: 'At last he begged to see a portrait of her husband.'

'Not of her?' said Mr. Adister abruptly.

'No; only of her husband.'

'Show him her portrait.'

A shade of surprise was on Caroline's forehead. 'Shall I?' She had a dim momentary thought that the sight of the beautiful face would not be good for Patrick.

Page 4259

’Yes; let him see the woman who could throw herself away on that branded villain called a prince, abjuring her Church for a little fouler than hangman to me and every gentleman alive. I desire that he should see it. Submission to the demands of her husband’s policy required it of her, she says! Show it him when he returns; you have her miniature in your keeping. And to-morrow take him to look at the full-length of her before she left England and ceased to be a lady of our country. I will order it to be placed in the armoury. Let him see the miniature of her this day.’

Mr. Adister resolved at the same time that Patrick should have his portrait of the prince for a set-off to the face of his daughter. He craved the relief it would be to him to lay his colours on the prince for the sparkling amazement of one whom, according to Caroline’s description, he could expect to feel with him acutely, which neither his niece nor his lawyer had done: they never did when he painted the prince. He was unstrung, heavily plunged in the matter of his chagrin and grief: his unhealed wound had been scraped and strewn with salt by his daughter’s letter; he had a thirst for the kind of sympathy he supposed he would find in the young Irishman’s horror at the husband of the incomparable beauty now past redemption degraded by her hideous choice; lost to England and to her father and to common respect. For none, having once had the picture of the man, could dissociate them; they were like heaven and its reverse, everlastingly coupled in the mind by their opposition of characters and aspects. Her father could not, and he judged of others by himself. He had been all but utterly solitary since her marriage, brooded on it until it saturated him; too proud to speak of the thing in sadness, or claim condolence for this wound inflicted on him by the daughter he had idolised other than through the indirect method of causing people to wonder at her chosen yoke-fellow. Their stupefaction refreshed him. Yet he was a gentleman capable of apprehending simultaneously that he sinned against his pride in the means he adopted to comfort his nature. But the wound was a perpetual sickness needing soul-medicine. Proud as he was, and unbending, he was not stronger than his malady, and he could disguise, he could not contain, the cry of immoderate grief. Adiante had been to him something beyond a creature beloved; she had with her glorious beauty and great-heartedness been the sole object which had ever inspirited his imagination. He could have thought no man, not the most illustrious, worthy of her. And there she was, voluntarily in the hands of a monster! ‘Husband!’ Mr. Adister broke away from Caroline, muttering: ‘Her husband’s policy!’

Page 4260

She was used to his interjections; she sat thinking more of the strange request to her to show Mr. O'Donnell the miniature of Adiante. She had often thought that her uncle regretted his rejection of Philip. It appeared so to her now, though not by any consecutive process of reasoning. She went to fetch the miniature, and gazing on it, she tried to guess at Mr. O'Donnell's thoughts when doing the same; for who so inflammable as he? And who, woman or man, could behold this lighted face, with the dark raised eyes and abounding auburn tresses, where the contrast of colours was in itself thrilling, and not admire, or more, half worship, or wholly worship? She pitied the youth: she fancied that he would not continue so ingenuously true to his brother's love of Adiante after seeing it; unless one might hope that the light above beauty distinguishing its noble classic lines, and the energy of radiance, like a morning of chivalrous promise, in the eyes, would subdue him to distant admiration. These were her flitting thoughts under the spell of her queenly cousin's visage. She shut up the miniature-case, and waited to hand it to young Mr. O'Donnell.

CHAPTER VII

THE MINIATURE

Patrick returned to Earlsfont very late; he had but ten minutes to dress for dinner; a short allowance after a heated ride across miry tracks, though he would have expended some of them, in spite of his punctilious respect for the bell of the house entertaining him, if Miss Adister had been anywhere on the stairs or corridors as he rushed away to his room. He had things to tell; he had not been out over the country for nothing.

Fortunately for his good social principles, the butler at Earlsfont was a wary supervisor of his man; great guest or little guest; Patrick's linen was prepared for him properly studded; he had only to spring out of one suit into another; and still more fortunately the urgency for a rapid execution of the manoeuvre prevented his noticing a large square envelope posted against the looking-glass of his toilette-table. He caught sight of it first when pulling down his shirt-cuffs with an air of recovered ease, not to say genial triumph, to think that the feat of grooming himself, washing, dressing and stripping, the accustomed persuasive final sweep of the brush to his hair-crop, was done before the bell had rung. His name was on the envelope; and under his name, in smaller letters,

Adiante.

'Shall I?' said he, doing the thing he asked himself about doing tearing open the paper cover of the portrait of her who had flitted in his head for years unseen. And there she was, remote but present.

His underlip dropped; he had the look of those who bate breath and swarm their wits to catch a sound. At last he remembered that the summoning bell had been in his ears a

long time back, without his having been sensible of any meaning in it. He started to and fro. The treasure he held declined to enter the breast-pocket of his coat, and the other pockets he perhaps, if sentimentally, justly discarded as being beneath the honour of serving for a temporary casket. He locked it up, with a vow to come early to rest. Even then he had thoughts whether it might be safe.

Page 4261

Who spoke, and what they uttered at the repast, and his own remarks, he was unaware of. He turned right and left a brilliant countenance that had the glitter of frost-light; it sparkled and was unreceptive. No wonder Miss Adister deemed him wilder and stranger than ever. She necessarily supposed the excess of his peculiarities to be an effect of the portrait, and would have had him, according to her ideas of a young man of some depth of feeling, dreamier. On the contrary, he talked sheer commonplace. He had ridden to the spur of the mountains, and had put up the mare, and groomed and fed her, not permitting another hand to touch her: all very well, and his praises of the mare likewise, but he had not a syllable for the sublime of the mountains. He might have careered over midland flats for any susceptibility that he betrayed to the grandeur of the scenery she loved. Ultimately she fancied the miniature had been overlooked in his hurry to dress, and that he was now merely excited by his lively gallop to a certain degree of hard brightness noticeable in hunting men at their dinner.

The elixir in Patrick carried him higher than mountain crests. Adiante illumined an expanded world for him, miraculous, yet the real one, only wanting such light to show its riches. She lifted it out of darkness with swift throbs of her heavenliness as she swam to his eyelids, vanished and dazzled anew, and made these gleams of her and the dark intervals his dream of the winged earth on her flight from splendour to splendour, secresy to secresy;—follow you that can, the youth whose heart is an opened mine, whose head is an irradiated sky, under the spell of imagined magical beauty. She was bugle, banner, sunrise, of his inmost ambition and rapture.

And without a warning, she fled; her features were lost; his power of imagining them wrestled with vapour; the effort contracted his outlook. But if she left him blind of her, she left him with no lessened bigness of heart. He frankly believed in her revelation of a greater world and a livelier earth, a flying earth and a world wealthier than grouped history in heroic marvels: he fell back on the exultation of his having seen her, and on the hope for the speedy coming of midnight, when the fountain of her in the miniature would be seen and drunk of at his full leisure, and his glorious elation of thrice man almost up to mounting spirit would be restored to make him worthy of the vision.

Meanwhile Caroline had withdrawn and the lord of Earlsfont was fretting at his theme. He had decided not to be a party in the sale of either of his daughter’s estates: let her choose other agents: if the iniquity was committed, his hands would be clean of it. Mr. Adister spoke by way of prelude to the sketch of ‘this prince’ whose title was a lurid delusion. Patrick heard of a sexagenarian rake and Danube adventurer, in person a description of falcon-Caliban, containing his shagginess in a frogged

Page 4262

hussar-jacket and crimson pantaloons, with hook-nose, fox-eyes, grizzled billow of frowsy moustache, and chin of a beast of prey. This fellow, habitually one of the dogs lining the green tables of the foreign Baths, snapping for gold all day and half the night, to spend their winnings in debauchery and howl threats of suicide, never fulfilled early enough, when they lost, claimed his princedom on the strength of his father's murder of a reigning prince and sitting in his place for six months, till a merited shot from another pretender sent him to his account. 'What do you say to such a nest of assassins, and one of them, an outcast and blackleg, asking an English gentleman to acknowledge him as a member of his family! I have,' said Mr. Adister, 'direct information that this gibbet-bird is conspiring to dethrone—they call it—the present reigning prince, and the proceeds of my daughter's estates are, by her desire—if she has not written under compulsion of the scoundrel—intended to speed their blood-mongering. There goes a Welshwoman's legacy to the sea, with a herd of swine with devils in them!'

Mr. Camminy kept his head bent, his hand on his glass of port. Patrick stared, and the working of his troubled brows gave the unhappy gentleman such lean comfort as he was capable of taking. Patrick in sooth was engaged in the hard attempt at the same time to do two of the most difficult things which can be proposed to the ingenuity of sensational youth: he was trying to excuse a respected senior for conduct that he could not approve, while he did inward battle to reconcile his feelings with the frightful addition to his hoard of knowledge: in other words, he sought strenuously to mix the sketch of the prince with the dregs of the elixir coming from the portrait of Adiante; and now she sank into obscurity behind the blackest of brushes, representing her incredible husband; and now by force of some natural light she broke through the ugly mist and gave her adored the sweet lines and colours of the features he had lost. There was an ebb and flow of the struggle, until, able to say to himself that he saw her clearly as though the portrait was in the palm of his hand, the battle of the imagination ceased and she was fairer for him than if her foot had continued pure of its erratic step: fairer, owing to the eyes he saw with; he had shaken himself free of the exacting senses which consent to the worship of women upon the condition of their possessing all the precious and the miraculous qualities; among others, the gift of an exquisite fragility that cannot break; in short, upon terms flattering to the individual devotee. Without knowing it he had done it and got some of the upholding strength of those noblest of honest men who not merely give souls to women—an extraordinary endowment of them—but also discourse to them with their souls.

Page 4263

Patrick accepted Adiante's husband: the man was her husband. Hideous (for there was no combating her father's painting of him), he was almost interesting through his alliance:—an example of how much earth the worshipper can swallow when he is quite sincere. Instead of his going under eclipse, the beauty of his lady eclipsed her monster. He believed in her right to choose according to her pleasure since her lover was denied her. Sitting alone by his fire, he gazed at her for hours and bled for Philip. There was a riddle to be answered in her cutting herself away from Philip; he could not answer it; her face was the vindication and the grief. The usual traverses besetting true lovers were suggested to him, enemies and slanders and intercepted letters. He rejected them in the presence of the beautiful inscrutable. Small marvel that Philip had loved her. 'Poor fellow' Patrick cried aloud, and drooped on a fit of tears.

The sleep he had was urgently dream-ridden to goals that eluded him and broadened to fresh races and chases waving something to be won which never was won, albeit untiringly pursued amid a series of adventures, tragic episodes; wild enthusiasm. The whole of it was featureless, a shifting agitation; yet he must have been endowed to extricate a particular meaning applied to himself out of the mass of tumbled events, and closely in relation to realities, for he quitted his bed passionately regretting that he had not gone through a course of drill and study of the military art. He remembered Mr. Adister's having said that military training was good for all gentlemen.

'I could join the French Foreign Legion,' he thought.

Adiante was as beautiful by day as by night. He looked. The riddle of her was more burdensome in the daylight.

He sighed, and on another surging of his admiration launched the resolve that he would serve her blindly, without one question. How, when, where, and the means and the aim, he did not think of. There was she, and here was he, and heaven and a great heart would show the way.

Adiante at eighteen, the full length of her, fresh in her love of Philip, was not the same person to him, she had not the same secret; she was beautiful differently. By right he should have loved the portrait best: but he had not seen it first; he had already lived through a life of emotions with the miniature, and could besides clasp the frame; and moreover he fondled an absurd notion that the miniature would be entrusted to him for a time, and was almost a possession. The pain of the thought of relinquishing it was the origin of this foolishness. And again, if it be fair to prove him so deeply, true to his brother though he was (admiration of a woman does thus influence the tides of our blood to render the noblest of us guilty of some unconscious wavering of our loyalty), Patrick dedicated the full-length of Adiante to Philip, and reserved the other, her face and neck, for himself.

Page 4264

Obediently to Mr. Adister's order, the portrait had been taken from one of his private rooms and placed in the armoury, the veil covering the canvas of late removed. Guns and spears and swords overhead and about, the youthful figure of Adiante was ominously encompassed. Caroline stood with Patrick before the portrait of her cousin; she expected him to show a sign of appreciation. He asked her to tell him the Church whose forms of faith the princess had embraced. She answered that it was the Greek Church. 'The Greek,' said he, gazing harder at the portrait. Presently she said: 'It was a perfect likeness.' She named the famous artist who had painted it. Patrick's 'Ah' was unsatisfactory.

'We,' said she, 'think it a living image of her as she was then.'

He would not be instigated to speak.

'You do not admire it, Mr. O'Donnell?' she cried.

'Oh, but I do. That's how she looked when she was drawing on her gloves with good will to go out to meet him. You can't see her there and not be sure she had a heart. She part smiles; she keeps her mouth shut, but there's the dimple, and it means a thought, like a bubble bursting up from the heart in her breast. She's tall. She carries herself like a great French lady, and nothing beats that. It's the same colour, dark eyebrows and fair hair. And not thinking of her pride. She thinks of her walk, and the end of it, where he's waiting. The eyes are not the same.'

'The same?' said Caroline.

'As this.' He tapped on the left side. She did not understand it at all.

'The bit of work done in Vienna,' said he.

She blushed. 'Do you admire that so much?'

'I do.'

'We consider it not to be compared to this.'

'Perhaps not. I like it better.'

'But why do you like that better?' said Caroline, deeming it his wilfulness.

Patrick put out a finger. 'The eyes there don't seem to say, "I'm yours to make a hero of you." But look,' he drew forth from under his waistcoat the miniature, 'what don't they say here! It's a bright day for the Austrian capital that has her by the river Danube. Yours has a landscape; I've made acquaintance with the country, I caught the print of it on my ride yesterday; and those are your mountains. But mine has her all to herself

while she's thinking undisturbed in her boudoir. I have her and her thoughts; that's next to her soul. I've an idea it ought to be given to Philip.' He craned his head round to woo some shadow of assent to the daring suggestion. 'Just to break the shock 'twill be to my brother, Miss Adister. If I could hand him this, and say, "Keep it, for you'll get nothing more of her; and that's worth a kingdom."'

Caroline faltered: 'Your brother does not know?'

'Pity him. His blow 's to come. He can't or he 'd have spoken of it to me. I was with him a couple of hours and he never mentioned a word of it, nor did Captain Con. We talked of Ireland, and the service, and some French cousins we have.'

Page 4265

‘Ladies?’ Caroline inquired by instinct.

‘And charming,’ said Patrick, ’real dear girls. Philip might have one, if he would, and half my property, to make it right with her parents. There’d be little use in proposing it. He was dead struck when the shaft struck him. That’s love! So I determined the night after I’d shaken his hand I’d be off to Earlsfont and try my hardest for him. It’s hopeless now. Only he might have the miniature for his bride. I can tell him a trifle to help him over his agony. She would have had him, she would, Miss Adister, if she hadn’t feared he’d be talked of as Captain Con has been—about the neighbourhood, I mean, because he,’ Patrick added hurriedly, ’he married an heiress and sank his ambition for distinction like a man who has finished his dinner. I’m certain she would. I have it on authority.’

‘What authority?’ said Caroline coldly.

‘Her own old nurse.’

‘Jenny Williams?’

’The one! I had it from her. And how she loves her darling Miss Adiante! She won’t hear of “princess.” She hates that marriage. She was all for my brother Philip. She calls him “Our handsome lieutenant.” She’ll keep the poor fellow a subaltern all his life.’

‘You went to Jenny’s inn?’

’The Earlsfont Arms, I went to. And Mrs. Jenny at the door, watching the rain. Destiny directed me. She caught the likeness to Philip on a lift of her eye, and very soon we sat conversing like old friends. We were soon playing at old cronies over past times. I saw the way to bring her out, so I set to work, and she was up in defence of her darling, ready to tell me anything to get me to think well of her. And that was the main reason, she said, why Miss Adiante broke with him and went abroad her dear child wouldn’t have Mr. Philip abused for fortune-hunting. As for the religion, they could each have practised their own: her father would have consented to the fact, when it came on him in that undeniable shape of two made one. She says, Miss Adiante has a mighty soul; she has brave ideas. Miss Deenly, she calls her. Ay, and so has Philip: though the worst is, they’re likely to drive him out of the army into politics and Parliament; and an Irishman there is a barrow trolling a load of grievances. Ah, but she would have kept him straight. Not a soldier alive knows the use of cavalry better than my brother. He wanted just that English wife to steady him and pour drops of universal fire into him; to keep him face to face with the world, I mean; letting him be true to his country in a fair degree, but not an old rainpipe and spout. She would have held him to his profession. And, Oh dear! She’s a friend worth having, lost to Ireland. I see what she could have done there. Something bigger than an island, too, has to be served in our days: that is, if we don’t forget our duty at home. Poor Paddy, and his pig, and his bit of earth! If you knew what we feel for him! I’m a landlord, but I’m

Page 4266

one with my people about evictions. We Irish take strong root. And honest rent paid over to absentees, through an agent, if you think of it, seems like flinging the money that's the sweat of the brow into a stone conduit to roll away to a giant maw hungry as the sea. It's the bleeding to death of our land! Transactions from hand to hand of warm human flesh-nothing else will do: I mean, for men of our blood. Ah! she would have kept my brother temperate in his notions and his plans. And why absentees, Miss Adister? Because we've no centre of home life: the core has been taken out of us; our country has no hearth-fire. I'm for union; only there should be justice, and a little knowledge to make allowance for the natural cravings of a different kind of people. Well, then, and I suppose that inter-marriages are good for both. But here comes a man, the boldest and handsomest of his race, and he offers himself to the handsomest and sweetest of yours, and she leans to him, and the family won't have him. For he's an Irishman and a Catholic. Who is it then opposed the proper union of the two islands? Not Philip. He did his best; and if he does worse now he's not entirely to blame. The misfortune is, that when he learns the total loss of her on that rock-promontory, he'll be dashing himself upon rocks sure to shiver him. There's my fear. If I might take him this . . . ?' Patrick pleaded with the miniature raised like the figure of his interrogation.

Caroline's inward smile threw a soft light of humour over her features at the simple cunning of his wind-up to the lecture on his country's case, which led her to perceive a similar cunning simplicity in his identification of it with Philip's. It startled her to surprise, for the reason that she'd been reviewing his freakish hops from Philip to Ireland and to Adiante, and wondering in a different kind of surprise, how and by what profitless ingenuity he contrived to weave them together. Nor was she unmoved, notwithstanding her fancied perception of his Jesuitry: his look and his voice were persuasive; his love of his brother was deep; his change of sentiment toward Adiante after the tale told him by her old nurse Jenny, stood for proof of a generous manliness.

Before she had replied, her uncle entered the armoury, and Patrick was pleading still, and she felt herself to be a piece of damask, a very fiery dye.

To disentangle herself, she said on an impulse, desperately

'Mr. O'Donnell begs to have the miniature for his brother.'

Patrick swung instantly to Mr. Adister. 'I presumed to ask for it, sir, to carry it to Philip. He is ignorant about the princess as yet; he would like to have a bit of the wreck. I shan't be a pleasant messenger to him. I should be glad to take him something. It could be returned after a time. She was a great deal to Philip—three parts of his life. He has nothing of her to call his own.'

'That!' said Mr. Adister. He turned to the virgin Adiante, sat down and shut his eyes, fetching a breath. He looked vacantly at Patrick.

Page 4267

’When you find a man purely destructive, you think him a devil, don’t you?’ he said.

‘A good first cousin to one,’ Patrick replied, watchful for a hint to seize the connection.

’If you think of hunting to-day, we have not many minutes to spare before we mount. The meet is at eleven, five miles distant. Go and choose your horse. Caroline will drive there.’

Patrick consulted her on a glance for counsel. ’I shall be glad to join you, sir, for to-morrow I must be off to my brother.’

‘Take it,’ Mr. Adister waved his hand hastily. He gazed at his idol of untouched eighteen. ‘Keep it safe,’ he said, discarding the sight of the princess. ’Old houses are doomed to burnings, and a devil in the family may bring us to ashes. And some day . . . !’ he could not continue his thought upon what he might be destined to wish for, and ran it on to, ’Some day I shall be happy to welcome your brother, when it pleases him to visit me.’

Patrick bowed, oppressed by the mighty gift. ’I haven’t the word to thank you with, sir.’

Mr. Adister did not wait for it.

‘I owe this to you, Miss Adister,’ said Patrick.

Her voice shook: ‘My uncle loves those who loved her.’

He could see she was trembling. When he was alone his ardour of gratefulness enabled him to see into her uncle’s breast: the inflexible frigidity; lasting regrets and remorse; the compassion for Philip in kinship of grief and loss; the angry dignity; the stately generosity.

He saw too, for he was clear-eyed when his feelings were not over-active, the narrow pedestal whereon the stiff figure of a man of iron pride must accommodate itself to stand in despite of tempests without and within; and how the statue rocks there, how much more pitiably than the common sons of earth who have the broad common field to fall down on and our good mother’s milk to set them on their legs again.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN CON AND MRS. ADISTER O’DONNELL

Riding homeward from the hunt at the leisurely trot of men who have steamed their mounts pretty well, Mr. Adister questioned Patrick familiarly about his family, and his estate, and his brother’s prospects in the army, and whither he intended first to direct his

travels: questions which Patrick understood to be kindly put for the sake of promoting conversation with a companion of unripe age by a gentleman who had wholesomely excited his blood to run. They were answered, except the last one. Patrick had no immediate destination in view.

‘Leave Europe behind you,’ said Mr. Adister warming, to advise him, and checking the trot of his horse. ‘Try South America.’ The lordly gentleman plotted out a scheme of colonisation and conquest in that region with the coolness of a practised freebooter. ‘No young man is worth a job,’ he said, ’who does not mean to be a leader, and as leader to have dominion.

Page 4268

Here we are fettered by ancestry and antecedents. Had I to recommence without those encumbrances, I would try my fortune yonder. I stood condemned to waste my youth in idle parades, and hunting the bear and buffalo. The estate you have inherited is not binding on you. You can realise it, and begin by taking over two or three hundred picked Irish and English—have both races capable of handling spade and musket; purchasing some thousands of acres to establish a legal footing there.

’You increase your colony from the mother country in the ratio of your prosperity, until your power is respected, and there is a necessity for the extension of your territory. When you are feared you will be on your mettle. They will favour you with provocation. I should not doubt the result, supposing myself to have under my sole command a trained body of men of English blood—and Irish.’

‘Owners of the soil,’ rejoined Patrick, much marvelling.

‘Undoubtedly, owners of the soil, but owing you service.’

‘They fight sir’

’It is hardly to be specified in the calculation, knowing them. Soldiery who have served their term, particularly old artillerymen, would be my choice: young fellows and boys among them. Women would have to be taken. Half-breeds are the ruin of colonists. Our men are born for conquest. We were conquerors here, and it is want of action and going physically forward that makes us a rusty people. There are—Mr. Adister’s intonation told of his proposing a wretched alternative,—’the Pacific Islands, but they will soon be snapped up by the European and North American Governments, and a single one of them does not offer space. It would require money and a navy.’ He mused. ’South America is the quarter I should decide for, as a young man. You are a judge of horses; you ride well; you would have splendid pastures over there; you might raise a famous breed. The air is fine; it would suit our English stock. We are on ground, Mr. O’Donnell, which my forefathers contested sharply and did not yield.’

‘The owners of the soil had to do that,’ said Patrick. ’I can show the same in my country, with a difference.’

‘Considerably to your benefit.’

‘Everything has been crushed there barring the contrary opinion.’

‘I could expect such a remark from a rebel.’

‘I’m only interpreting the people, sir.’

‘Jump out of that tinder-box as soon as you can.’

’When I was in South America, it astonished me that no Englishman had cast an eye on so inviting a land. Australia is not comparable with it. And where colonisations have begun without system, and without hard fighting to teach the settlers to value good leadership and respect their chiefs, they tumble into Republics.’

Page 4269

Patrick would have liked to fling a word in about the Englishman's cast of his eye upon inviting lands, but the trot was resumed, the lord of Earlsfont having delivered his mind, and a minute made it happily too late for the sarcastic bolt. Glad that his tongue had been kept from wagging, he trotted along beside his host in the dusky evening over the once contested land where the gentleman's forefathers had done their deeds and firmly fixed their descendants. A remainder of dull red fire prolonged the half-day above the mountain strongholds of the former owners of the soil, upon which prince and bard and priest, and grappling natives never wanting for fierceness, roared to-arms in the beacon-flames from ridge to peak: and down they poured, and back they were pushed by the inveterate coloniser—stationing at threatened points his old 'artillerymen' of those days and so it ends, that bard and priest and prince; holy poetry, and divine prescription, and a righteous holding; are as naught against him. They go, like yonder embers of the winter sunset before advancing night: and to morrow the beacon-heaps are ashes, the conqueror's foot stamps on them, the wind scatters them; strangest of all, you hear victorious lawlessness appealing solemnly to God the law.

Patrick was too young to philosophise upon his ideas; or else the series of pictures projected by the troops of sensations running through him were not of a solidity to support any structure of philosophy. He reverted, though rather in name than in spirit, to the abstractions, justice, consistency, right. They were too hard to think of, so he abandoned the puzzle of fitting them to men's acts and their consciences, and he put them aside as mere titles employed for the uses of a police and a tribunal to lend an appearance of legitimacy to the decrees of them that have got the upper hand. An insurrectionary rising of his breast on behalf of his country was the consequence. He kept it down by turning the whole hubbub within him to the practical contemplation of a visionary South America as the region for him and a fighting tenantry. With a woman, to crown her queen there, the prospect was fair. But where dwelt the woman possessing majesty suitable to such a dream in her heart or her head? The best he had known in Ireland and in France, preferred the charms of society to bold adventure.

All the same, thought he, it's queer counsel, that we should set to work by buying a bit of land to win a clean footing to rob our neighbours: and his brains took another shot at Mr. Adister, this time without penetrating. He could very well have seen the matter he disliked in a man that he disliked; but the father of Adiante had touched him with the gift of the miniature.

Page 4270

Patrick was not asked to postpone his departure from Earlsfont, nor was he invited to come again. Mr. Adister drove him to the station in the early morning, and gave him a single nod from the phaeton-box for a good-bye. Had not Caroline assured him at the leave-taking between them that he had done her uncle great good by his visit, the blank of the usual ceremonial phrases would have caused him to fancy himself an intruder courteously dismissed, never more to enter the grand old Hall. He was further comforted by hearing the stationmaster's exclamation of astonishment and pleasure at the sight of the squire 'in his place' handling the reins, which had not been witnessed for many a day and so it appeared that the recent guest had been exceptionally complimented. 'But why not a warm word, instead of turning me off to decipher a bit of Egyptian on baked brick,' he thought, incurably Celtic as he was.

From the moment when he beheld Mr. Adister's phaeton mounting a hill that took the first leap for the Cambrian highlands, up to his arrival in London, scarcely one of his 'ideas' darted out before Patrick, as they were in the habit of doing, like the enchanted bares of fairyland, tempting him to pursue, and changing into the form of woman ever, at some turn of the chase. For as he had travelled down to Earlsfont in the state of ignorance and hopefulness, bearing the liquid brains of that young condition, so did his acquisition of a particular fact destructive of hope solidify them about it as he travelled back: in other words, they were digesting what they had taken in. Imagination would not have stirred for a thousand fleeting hares: and principally, it may be, because he was conscious that no form of woman would anywhere come of them. Woman was married; she had the ring on her finger! He could at his option look on her in the miniature, he could think of her as being in the city where she had been painted; but he could not conjure her out of space; she was nowhere in the ambient air. Secretly she was a feeling that lay half slumbering very deep down within him, and he kept the secret, choosing to be poor rather than call her forth. He was in truth digesting with difficulty, as must be the case when it is allotted to the brains to absorb what the soul abhors.

'Poor old Philip!' was his perpetual refrain. 'Philip, the girl you loved is married; and here's her portrait taken in her last blush; and the man who has her hasn't a share in that!' Thus, throwing in the ghost of a sigh for sympathy, it seemed to Patrick that the intelligence would have to be communicated. Bang is better, thought he, for bad news than snapping fire and feinting, when you're bound half to kill a fellow, and a manly fellow.

Page 4271

Determined that bang it should be, he hurried from the terminus to Philip's hotel, where he had left him, and was thence despatched to the house of Captain Con O'Donnell, where he created a joyful confusion, slightly dashed with rigour on the part of the regnant lady; which is not to be wondered at, considering that both the gentlemen attending her, Philip and her husband, quitted her table with shouts at the announcement of his name, and her husband hauled him in unwashed before her, crying that the lost was found, the errant returned, the Prodigal Pat recovered by his kinsman! and she had to submit to the introduction of the disturber: and a bedchamber had to be thought of for the unexpected guest, and the dinner to be delayed in middle course, and her husband corrected between the discussions concerning the bedchamber, and either the guest permitted to appear at her table in sooty day-garb, or else a great gap commanded in the service of her dishes, vexatious extreme for a lady composed of orderliness. She acknowledged Patrick's profound salute and his excuses with just so many degrees in the inclining of her head as the polite deem a duty to themselves when the ruffling world has disarranged them.

'Con!' she called to her chattering husband, 'we are in England, if you please.'

'To be sure, madam,' said the captain, 'and so 's Patrick, thanks to the stars. We fancied him gone, kidnapped, burned, made a meal of and swallowed up, under the earth or the water; for he forgot to give us his address in town; he stood before us for an hour or so, and then the fellow vanished. We've waited for him gaping. With your permission I'll venture an opinion that he'll go and dabble his hands and sit with us as he is, for the once, as it happens.'

'Let it be so,' she rejoined, not pacified beneath her dignity. She named the bedchamber to a footman.

'And I'll accompany the boy to hurry him on,' said the captain, hurrying Patrick on as he spoke, till he had him out of the dining-room, when he whispered: 'Out with your key, and if we can scramble you into your evening-suit quick we shall heal the breach in the dinner. You dip your hands and face, I'll have out the dress. You've the right style for her, my boy: and mind, she is an excellent good woman, worthy of all respect: but formality's the flattery she likes: a good bow and short speech. Here we are, and the room's lighted. Off to the basin, give me the key; and here's hot water in tripping Mary's hands. The portmanteau opens easy. Quick! the door's shut on rosy Mary. The race is for domestic peace, my boy. I sacrifice everything I can for it, in decency. 'Tis the secret of my happiness.'

Patrick's transformation was rapid enough to satisfy the impatient captain, who said: 'You'll tell her you couldn't sit down in her presence undressed. I married her at forty, you know, when a woman has reached her perfect development, and leans a trifle more to ceremonies than to substance. And where have you been the while?'

Page 4272

‘I’ll tell you by and by,’ said Patrick.

’Tell me now, and don’t be smirking at the glass; your necktie’s as neat as a lady’s company-smile, equal at both ends, and warranted not to relax before the evening ’s over. And mind you don’t set me off talking over-much downstairs. I talk in her presence like the usher of the Court to the judge. ‘Tis the secret of my happiness.’

‘Where are those rascally dress-boots of mine?’ cried Patrick.

Captain Con pitched the contents of the portmanteau right and left. ’Never mind the boots, my boy. Your legs will be under the table during dinner, and we’ll institute a rummage up here between that and the procession to the drawing-room, where you’ll be examined head to foot, devil a doubt of it. But say, where have you been? She’ll be asking, and we’re in a mess already, and may as well have a place to name to her, somewhere, to excuse the gash you’ve made in her dinner. Here they are, both of ‘m, rolled in a dirty shirt!’

Patrick seized the boots and tugged them on, saying ‘Earlsfont, then.’

’You’ve been visiting Earlsfont? Whack! but that’s the saving of us! Talk to her of her brother he sends her his love. Talk to her of the ancestral hall—it stands as it was on the day of its foundation. Just wait about five minutes to let her punish us, before you out with it. ’Twill come best from you. What did you go down there for? But don’t stand answering questions; come along. Don’t heed her countenance at the going in: we’ve got the talisman. As to the dressing, it’s a perfect trick of harlequinade, and she’ll own it after a dose of Earlsfont. And, by the way, she’s not Mrs. Con, remember; she’s Mrs. Adister O’Donnell: and that’s best rolled out to Mistress. She’s a worthy woman, but she was married at forty, and I had to take her shaped as she was, for moulding her at all was out of the question, and the soft parts of me had to be the sufferers, to effect a conjunction, for where one won’t and can’t, poor t’ other must, or the union’s a mockery. She was cast in bronze at her birth, if she wasn’t cut in bog-root. Anyhow, you’ll study her. Consider her for my sake. Madam, it should be—madam, call her, addressing her, madam. She hasn’t a taste for jokes, and she chastises absurdities, and England’s the foremost country of the globe, indirect communication with heaven, and only to be connected with such a country by the tail of it is a special distinction and a comfort for us; we’re that part of the kite!—but, Patrick, she’s a charitable soul; she’s a virtuous woman and an affectionate wife, and doesn’t frown to see me turn off to my place of worship while she drum-majors it away to her own; she entertains Father Boyle heartily, like the good woman she is to good men; and unfortunate females too have a friend in her, a real friend—that they have; and that ’s a wonder in a woman chaste as ice. I do respect her; and I’d like to see the man to favour me with an opportunity of proving it on him! So you’ll not forget, my boy; and prepare for a cold bath the first five minutes. Out with Earlsfont early after that. All these things are trifles to an unmarried man. I have to

attend to ’m, I have to be politic and give her elbow-room for her natural angles. ’Tis the secret of my happiness.’

Page 4273

Priming his kinsman thus up to the door of the diningroom, Captain Con thrust him in.

Mistress Adister O'Donnell's head rounded as by slow attraction to the clock. Her disciplined husband signified an equal mixture of contrition and astonishment at the passing of time. He fell to work upon his plate in obedience to the immediate policy dictated to him.

The unbending English lady contrasted with her husband so signally that the oddly united couple appeared yoked in a common harness for a perpetual display of the opposition of the races. She resembled her brother, the lord of Earlsfont, in her remarkable height and her calm air of authority and self-sustainment. From beneath a head-dress built of white curls and costly lace, half enclosing her high narrow forehead, a pale, thin, straight bridge of nose descended prominently over her sunken cheeks to thin locked lips. Her aspect suggested the repose of a winter landscape, enjoyable in pictures, or on skates, otherwise nipping. . . . Mental directness, of no greater breadth than her principal feature, was the character it expressed; and candour of spirit shone through the transparency she was, if that mild taper could be said to shine in proof of a vitality rarely notified to the outer world by the opening of her mouth; chiefly then, though not malevolently to command: as the portal of some snow-bound monastery opens to the outcast, bidding it be known that the light across the wolds was not deceptive and a glimmer of light subsists among the silent within. The life sufficed to her. She was like a marble effigy seated upright, requiring but to be laid at her length for transport to the cover of the tomb.

Now Captain Con was by nature ruddy as an Indian summer flushed in all its leaves. The corners of his face had everywhere a frank ambush, or child's hiding-place, for languages and laughter. He could worm with a smile quite his own the humour out of men possessing any; and even under rigorous law, and it could not be disputed that there was rigour in the beneficent laws imposed upon him by his wife, his genius for humour and passion for sly independence came up and curled away like the smoke of the illicit still, wherein the fanciful discern fine sprites indulging in luxurious grimaces at a government long-nosed to no purpose. Perhaps, as Patrick said of him to Caroline Adister, he was a bard without a theme. He certainly was a man of speech, and the having fearfully to contain himself for the greater number of the hours of the day, for the preservation of the domestic felicity he had learnt to value, fathered the sentiment of revolt in his bosom.

By this time, long after five minutes had elapsed, the frost presiding at the table was fast withering Captain Con; and he was irritable to hear why Patrick had gone off to Earlsfont, and what he had done there, and the adventures he had tasted on the road; anything for warmth. His efforts to fish the word out of Patrick produced deeper crevasses in the conversation, and he cried to himself: Hats and crape-bands! mightily struck by an idea that he and his cousins were a party of hired mourners over the meat they consumed. Patrick was endeavouring to spare his brother a mention of Earlsfont

before they had private talk together. He answered neither to a dip of the hook nor to a pull.

Page 4274

’The desert where you ’ve come from ‘s good,’ said the captain, sharply nodding.

Mrs. Adister O’Donnell ejaculated: ‘Wine!’ for a heavy comment upon one of his topics, and crushed it.

Philip saw that Patrick had no desire to spread, and did not trouble him.

‘Good horses in the stable too,’ said the captain.

Patrick addressed Mrs. Adister: ’I have hardly excused myself to you, madam.’

Her head was aloft in dumb apostrophe of wearifulness over another of her husband’s topics.

‘Do not excuse yourself at all,’ she said.

The captain shivered. He overhauled his plotting soul publicly: ’Why don’t you out with it yourself!’ and it was wonderful why he had not done so, save that he was prone to petty conspiracy, and had thought reasonably that the revelation would be damp, gunpowder, coming from him. And for when he added: ’The boy’s fresh from Earlsfont; he went down to look at the brav old house of the Adisters, and was nobly welcomed and entertained, and made a vast impression,’ his wife sedately remarked to Patrick, ‘You have seen my brother Edward.’

‘And brings a message of his love to you, my dear,’ the Captain bit his nail harder.

‘You have a message for me?’ she asked; and Patrick replied: ’The captain is giving a free translation. I was down there, and I took the liberty of calling on Mr. Adister, and I had a very kind reception. We hunted, we had a good day with the hounds. I think I remember hearing that you go there at Christmas, madam.’

’Our last Christmas at Earlsfont was a sad meeting for the family. My brother Edward is well?’

’I had the happiness to be told that I had been of a little service in cheering him.’

‘I can believe it,’ said Mrs. Adister, letting her eyes dwell on the young man; and he was moved by the silvery tremulousness of her voice.

She resumed: ‘You have the art of dressing in a surprisingly short time.’

‘There!’ exclaimed Captain Con: for no man can hear the words which prove him a prophet without showing excitement. ’Didn’t I say so? Patrick’s a hero for love or war, my dear. He stood neat and trim from the silk socks to the sprig of necktie in six minutes by my watch. And that’s witness to me that you may count on him for what the

great Napoleon called two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage; not too common even in his immortal army:—when it's pitch black and frosty cold, and you're buried within in a dream of home, and the trumpet springs you to your legs in a trice, boots and trowsers, coat and sword-belt and shako, and one twirl to the whiskers, and away before a second snap of the fingers to where the great big bursting end of all things for you lies crouching like a Java-Tiger—a ferocious beast painted undertaker's colour—for a leap at you in particular out of the dark;—never waiting an instant to ask what's the matter and pretend you don't know. That's rare, Philip; that's bravery; Napoleon knew the thing; and Patrick has it; my hand's on the boy's back for that.'

Page 4275

The captain was permitted to discourse as he pleased: his wife was wholly given to the recent visitor to Earlsfont, whom she informed that Caroline was the youngest daughter of General Adister, her second brother, and an excellent maiden, her dear Edward's mainstay in his grief. At last she rose, and was escorted to the door by all present. But Captain Con rather shame-facedly explained to Patrick that it was a sham departure; they had to follow without a single spin to the claretjug: he closed the door merely to state his position; how at half-past ten he would be a free man, according to the convention, to which his wife honourably adhered, so he had to do likewise, as regarded his share of it. Thereupon he apologised to the brothers, bitterly regretting that, with good wine in the cellar, his could be no house for claret; and promising them they should sit in their shirts and stretch their legs, and toast the old country and open their hearts, no later than the minute pointing to the time for his deliverance.

Mrs. Adister accepted her husband's proffered arm unhesitatingly at the appointed stroke of the clock. She said: 'Yes,' in agreement with him, as if she had never heard him previously enunciate the formula, upon his pious vociferation that there should be no trifling with her hours of rest.

'You can find your way to my cabin,' he said to Philip over his shoulder, full of solicitude for the steps of the admirable lady now positively departing.

As soon as the brothers were alone, Philip laid his hand on Patrick, asking him, 'What does it mean?'

Patrick fired his cannon-shot: 'She's married!' Consulting his feelings immediately after, he hated himself for his bluntness.

Philip tossed his head. 'But why did you go down there?'

'I went,' said Patrick, 'well, I went . . . . I thought you looked wretched, and I went with an idea of learning where she was, and seeing if I couldn't do something. It's too late now; all's over.'

'My dear boy, I've worse than that to think of.'

'You don't mind it?'

'That's old news, Patrick.'

'You don't care for her any more, Philip?'

'You wouldn't have me caring for a married woman?'

'She has a perfect beast for a husband.'

‘I’m sorry she didn’t make a better choice.’

‘He’s a prince.’

‘So I hear.’

‘Ah! And what worse, Philip, can you be having to think of?’

‘Affairs,’ Philip replied, and made his way to the cabin of Captain Con, followed in wonderment by Patrick, who would hardly have been his dupe to suppose him indifferent and his love of Adiante dead, had not the thought flashed on him a prospect of retaining the miniature for his own, or for long in his custody.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAPTAIN’S CABIN

Patrick left his brother at the second flight of stairs to run and fling on a shooting-jacket, into which he stuffed his treasure, after one peep that eclipsed his little dream of being allowed to keep it; and so he saw through Philip.

Page 4276

The captain's cabin was the crown of his house-top, a builder's addition to the roof, where the detestable deeds he revelled in, calling them liberty, could be practised, according to the convention, and no one save rosy Mary, in her sense of smell, when she came upon her morning business to clean and sweep, be any the wiser of them, because, as it is known to the whole world, smoke ascends, and he was up among the chimneys. Here, he would say to his friends and fellow-sinners, you can unfold, unbosom, explode, do all you like, except caper, and there 's a small square of lead between the tiles outside for that, if the spirit of the jig comes upon you with violence, as I have had it on me, and eased myself mightily there, to my own music; and the capital of the British Empire below me. Here we take our indemnity for subjection to the tyrannical female ear, and talk like copious rivers meandering at their own sweet will. Here we roll like dogs in carrion, and no one to sniff at our coats. Here we sing treason, here we flout reason, night is out season at half-past ten.

This introductory ode to Freedom was his throwing off of steam, the foretaste of what he contained. He rejoined his cousins, chirping variations on it, and attired in a green silken suit of airy Ottoman volume, full of incitement to the legs and arms to swing and set him up for a Sultan. 'Now Phil, now Pat,' he cried, after tenderly pulling the door to and making sure it was shut, 'any tale you've a mind for—infamous and audacious! You're licensed by the gods up here, and may laugh at them too, and their mothers and grandmothers, if the fit seizes ye, and the heartier it is the greater the exemption. We're pots that knock the lid and must pour out or boil over and destroy the furniture. My praties are ready for peelin', if ever they were in this world! Chuck wigs from sconces, and off with your buckram. Decency's a dirty petticoat in the Garden of Innocence. Naked we stand, boys! we're not afraid of nature. You're in the annexe of Erin, Pat, and devil a constable at the keyhole; no rats; I'll say that for the Government, though it's a despotism with an iron bridle on the tongue outside to a foot of the door. Arctic to freeze the boldest bud of liberty! I'd like a French chanson from ye, Pat, to put us in tune, with a right revolutionary hurling chorus, that pitches Kings' heads into the basket like autumn apples. Or one of your hymns in Gaelic sung ferociously to sound as horrid to the Saxon, the wretch. His reign 's not for ever; he can't enter here. You're in the stronghold defying him. And now cigars, boys, pipes; there are the boxes, there are the bowls. I can't smoke till I have done steaming. I'll sit awhile silently for the operation. Christendom hasn't such a man as your cousin Con for feeling himself a pig-possessed all the blessed day, acting the part of somebody else, till it takes me a quarter of an hour of my enfranchisement and restoration of my natural man to know myself again. For the moment, I'm froth, scum, horrid boiling hissing dew of the agony of transformation; I am; I'm that pig disgorging the spirit of wickedness from his poor stomach.'

Page 4277

The captain drooped to represent the state of the self-relieving victim of the evil one; but fearful lest either of his cousins should usurp the chair and thwart his chance of delivering himself, he rattled away sympathetically with his posture in melancholy: 'Ay, we're poor creatures; pigs and prophets, princes and people, victors and vanquished, we 're waves of the sea, rolling over and over, and calling it life! There's no life save the eternal. Father Boyle's got the truth. Flesh is less than grass, my sons; 'tis the shadow that crosses the grass. I love the grass. I could sit and watch grassblades for hours. I love an old turf mound, where the grey grass nods and seems to know the wind and have a whisper with it, of ancient times maybe and most like; about the big chief lying underneath in the last must of his bones that a breath of air would scatter. They just keep their skeleton shape as they are; for the turf mound protects them from troubles: 'tis the nurse to that delicate old infant!—Waves of the sea, did I say? We're wash in a hog-trough for Father Saturn to devour; big chief and suckling babe, we all go into it, calling it life! And what hope have we of reading the mystery? All we can see is the straining of the old fellow's hams to push his old snout deeper into the gobble, and the ridiculous curl of a tail totally devoid of expression! You'll observe that gluttons have no feature; they're jaws and hindquarters; which is the beginning and end of 'm; and so you may say to Time for his dealing with us: so let it be a lesson to you not to bother your wits, but leave the puzzle to the priest. He understands it, and why? because he was told. There 's harmony in his elocution, and there's none in the modern drivel about where we're going and what we came out of. No wonder they call it an age of despair, when you see the big wigs filing up and down the thoroughfares with a great advertisement board on their shoulders, proclaiming no information to the multitude, but a blank note of interrogation addressed to Providence, as if an answer from above would be vouchsafed to their impudence! They haven't the first principles of good manners. And some of 'm in a rage bawl the answer for themselves. Hear that! No, Phil; No, Pat, no: devotion's good policy.—You're not drinking! Are you both of ye asleep? why do ye leave me to drone away like this, when it 's conversation I want, as in the days of our first parents, before the fig-leaf?—and you might have that for scroll and figure on the social banner of the hypocritical Saxon, who's a gormandising animal behind his decency, and nearer to the Arch-devourer Time than anything I can imagine: except that with a little exertion you can elude him. The whisky you've got between you 's virgin of the excise. I'll pay double for freepeaty any day. Or are you for claret, my lads? No? I'm fortified up here to stand a siege in my old round tower, like the son of Eremon that I am. Lavra Con! Con speaks at last!

Page 4278

I don’t ask you, Pat, whether you remember Maen, who was born dumb, and had for his tutors Ferkelne the bard and Crafting the harper, at pleasant Dinree: he was grandson of Leary Lore who was basely murdered by his brother Cova, and Cova spared the dumb boy, thinking a man without a tongue harmless, as fools do: being one of their savings-bank tricks, to be repaid them, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns at compound interest, have no fear. So one day Maen had an insult put on him; and ’twas this for certain: a ruffian fellow of the Court swore he couldn’t mention the name of his father; and in a thundering fury Maen burst his tongue-tie, and the Court shouted Lavra Maen: and he had to go into exile, where he married in the middle of delicious love-adventures the beautiful Moira through the cunning of Craftine the harper. There’s been no harper in my instance but plenty of ruffians to swear I’m too comfortable to think of my country.’ The captain holloaed. ’Do they hear that? Lord! but wouldn’t our old Celtic fill the world with poetry if only we were a free people to give our minds to ’t, instead of to the itch on our backs from the Saxon horsehair shirt we’re forced to wear. For, Pat, as you know, we’re a loving people, we’re a loyal people, we burn to be enthusiastic, but when our skins are eternally irritated, how can we sing? In a freer Erin I’d be the bard of the land, never doubt it. What am I here but a discontented idle lout crooning over the empty glories of our isle of Saints! You feel them, Pat. Phil’s all for his British army, his capabilities of British light cavalry. Write me the history of the Enniskillens. I’ll read it. Aha, my boy, when they ’re off at the charge! And you’ll oblige me with the tale of Fontenoy. Why, Phil has an opportunity stretching forth a hand to him now more than halfway that comes to a young Irishman but once in a century: backed by the entire body of the priesthood of Ireland too! and if only he was a quarter as full of the old country as you and I, his hair would stand up in fire for the splendid gallop at our head that’s proposed to him. His country’s gathered up like a crested billow to roll him into Parliament; and I say, let him be there, he ’s the very man to hurl his gauntlet, and tell ’m, Parliament, so long as you are parliamentary, which means the speaking of our minds, but if you won’t have it, then-and it ’s on your heads before Europe and the two Americas. We’re dying like a nun that ’d be out of her cloister, we’re panting like the wife who hears of her husband coming home to her from the field of honour, for that young man. And there he is; or there he seems to be; but he’s dead: and the fisherman off the west coast after dreaming of a magical haul, gets more fish than disappointment in comparison with us when we cast the net for Philip. Bring tears of vexation at the emptiness we pull back for our pains. Oh, Phil! and to think of your youth! We had you

Page 4279

then. At least we had your heart. And we should have had the length and strength of you, only for a woman fatal to us as the daughter of Rhys ap Tudor, the beautiful Nesta:—and beautiful she was to match the mother of the curses trooping over to Ireland under Strongbow, that I'll grant you. But she reined you in when you were a real warhorse ramping and snorting flame from your nostrils, challenging any other to a race for Ireland; ay, a Cuchullin you were, Philip, Culann's chain-bound: but she unmanned you. She soaked the woman into you and squeezed the hero out of you. All for Adiante! or a country left to slavery! that's the tale. And what are you now? A paltry captain of hussars on the General's staff! One O'Donnell in a thousand! And what is she?—you needn't frown, Phil; I'm her relative by marriage, and she 's a lady. More than that, she shot a dart or two into my breast in those days, she did, I'll own it: I had the catch of the breath that warns us of convulsions. She was the morning star for beauty, between night and day, and the best colour of both. Welshmen and Irishmen and Englishmen tumbled into the pit, which seeing her was, and there we jostled for a glimpse quite companionably; we were too hungry for quarrelling; and to say, I was one of 'm, is a title to subsequent friendship. True; only mark me, Philip, and you, Patrick: they say she has married a prince, and I say no; she's took to herself a husband in her cradle; she's married ambition. I tell you, and this prince of hers is only a step she has taken, and if he chases her first mate from her bosom, he'll prove himself cleverer than she, and I dare him to the trial. For she's that fiery dragon, a beautiful woman with brains—which Helen of Troy hadn't, combustible as we know her to have been: but brains are bombshells in comparison with your old-fashioned pine-brands for kindling men and cities. Ambition's the husband of Adiante Adister, and all who come nigh her are steps to her aim. She never consulted her father about Prince Nikolas; she had begun her march and she didn't mean to be arrested. She simply announced her approaching union; and as she couldn't have a scion of one of the Royal House of Europe, she put her foot on Prince Nikolas. And he 's not to fancy he 's in for a peaceful existence; he's a stone in a sling, and probably mistaken the rocking that's to launch him through the air for a condition of remarkable ease, perfectly remarkable in its lullaby motion; ha! well, and I've not heard of ambition that didn't kill its votary: somehow it will; 'tis sure to. There she lies!'

The prophetic captain pointed at the spot. He then said: 'And now I'm for my pipe, and the blackest clay of the party, with your permission. I'll just go to the window to see if the stars are out overhead. They're my blessed guardian angels.'

There was a pause. Philip broke from a brown study to glance at his brother. Patrick made a queer face.

Page 4280

‘Fun and good-fellowship to-night, Con,’ said Philip, as the captain sadly reported no star visible.

‘Have I ever flown a signal to the contrary?’ retorted the captain.

’No politics, and I ‘ll thank you,’ said Philip: ’none of your early recollections. Be jovial.’

’You should have seen me here the other night about a month ago; I smuggled up an old countrywoman of ours, with the connivance of rosy Mary,’ said Captain Con, suffused in the merriest of grins. ’She sells apples at a stall at a corner of a street hard by, and I saw her sitting pulling at her old pipe in the cold October fog morning and evening for comfort, and was overwhelmed with compassion and fraternal sentiment; and so I invited her to be at the door of the house at half-past ten, just to have a roll with her in Irish mud, and mend her torn soul with a stitch or two of rejoicing. She told me stories; and one was pretty good, of a relative of hers, or somebody’s—I should say, a century old, but she told it with a becoming air of appropriation that made it family history, for she’s come down in the world, and this fellow had a stain of red upon him, and wanted cleaning; and, “What!” says the good father, “Mika! you did it in cold blood?” And says Mika, “Not I, your Riverence. I got myself into a passion ’fore I let loose.” I believe she smoked this identical pipe. She acknowledged the merits of my whisky, as poets do hearing fine verses, never clapping hands, but with the expressiveness of grave absorption. That’s the way to make good things a part of you. She was a treat. I got her out and off at midnight, rosy Mary sneaking her down, and the old girl quiet as a mouse for the fun’s sake. The whole intrigue was exquisitely managed.’

‘You run great risks,’ Philip observed.

‘I do,’ said the captain.

He called on the brothers to admire the ‘martial and fumial’ decorations of his round tower, buzzing over the display of implements, while Patrick examined guns and Philip unsheathed swords. An ancient clay pipe from the bed of the Thames and one from the bed of the Boyne were laid side by side, and strange to relate, the Irish pipe and English immediately, by the mere fact of their being proximate, entered into rivalry; they all but leapt upon one another. The captain judicially decided the case against the English pipe, as a newer pipe of grosser manufacture, not so curious by any means.

‘This,’ Philip held up the reputed Irish pipe, and scanned as he twirled it on his thumb, ’This was dropped in Boyne Water by one of William’s troopers. It is an Orange pipe. I take it to be of English make.’

’If I thought that, I’d stamp my heel on the humbug the neighbour minute,’ said Captain Con. ‘Where’s the sign of English marks?’

‘The pipes resemble one another,’ said Philip, ’like tails of Shannon-bred retrievers.’

’Maybe they ‘re both Irish, then?’ the captain caught at analogy to rescue his favourite from reproach.

Page 4281

‘Both of them are Saxon.’

‘Not a bit of it!’

‘Look at the clay.’

’I look, and I tell you, Philip, it’s of a piece with your lukewarmness for the country, or you wouldn’t talk like that.’

’There is no record of pipe manufactories in Ireland at the period you name.’

’There is: and the jealousy of rulers caused them to be destroyed by decrees, if you want historical evidence.’

‘Your opposition to the Saxon would rob him of his pipe, Con!’

’Let him go to the deuce with as many pipes as he can carry; but he shan’t have this one.’

‘Not a toss-up of difference is to be seen in the pair.’

’Use your eyes. The Irish bowl is broken, and the English has an inch longer stem!’

‘O the Irish bowl is broken!’ Philip sang.

‘You’ve the heart of a renegade-foreigner not to see it!’ cried the captain.

Patrick intervened saying: ‘I suspect they’re Dutch.’

’Well, and that ‘s possible.’ Captain Con scrutinised them to calm his temper: ‘there’s a Dutchiness in the shape.’

He offered Philip the compromise of ‘Dutch’ rather plaintively, but it was not accepted, and the pipes would have mingled their fragments on the hearthstone if Patrick had not stayed his arm, saying: ‘Don’t hurt them.’

‘And I won’t,’ the captain shook his hand gratefully.

’But will Philip O’Donnell tell me that Ireland should lie down with England on the terms of a traveller obliged to take a bedfellow? Come! He hasn’t an answer. Put it to him, and you pose him. But he ’ll not stir, though he admits the antagonism. And Ireland is asked to lie down with England on a couch blessed by the priest! Not she. Wipe out our grievances, and then we’ll begin to talk of policy. Good Lord!—love? The love of Ireland for the conquering country will be the celebrated ceremony in the concluding chapter previous to the inauguration of the millennium. Thousands of us are in a

starving state at home this winter, Patrick. And it's not the fault of England?—-landlordism 's not? Who caused the ruin of all Ireland's industries? You might as well say that it 's the fault of the poor beggar to go limping and hungry because his cruel master struck him a blow to cripple him. We don't want half and half doctoring, and it's too late in the day for half and half oratory. We want freedom, and we'll have it, and we won't leave it to the Saxon to think about giving it. And if your brother Philip won't accept this blazing fine offer, then I will, and you'll behold me in a new attitude. The fellow yawns! You don't know me yet, Philip. They tell us over here we ought to be satisfied. Fall upon our list of wrongs, and they set to work yawning. You can only move them by popping at them over hedges and roaring on platforms. They're incapable of understanding a complaint a yard beyond their noses. The Englishman has an island mind, and when he's out of it he's at sea.'

Page 4282

‘Mad, you mean,’ said Philip.

’I repeat my words, Captain Philip O’Donnell, late of the staff of the General commanding in Canada.’

’The Irishman too has an island mind, and when he’s out of it he’s at sea, and unable to manage his craft,’ said Philip.

‘You’ll find more craft in him when he’s buffeted than you reckoned on,’ his cousin flung back. ’And if that isn’t the speech of a traitor sold to the enemy, and now throwing off the mask, traitors never did mischief in Ireland! Why, what can you discover to admire in these people? Isn’t their army such a combination of colours in the uniforms, with their yellow facings on red jackets, I never saw out of a doll-shop, and never saw there. And their Horse Guards, weedy to a man! fit for a doll-shop they are, by my faith! And their Foot Guards: Have ye met the fellows marching? with their feet turned out, flat as my laundress’s irons, and the muscles of their calves depending on the joints to get ’m along, for elasticity never gave those bones of theirs a springing touch; and their bearskins heeling behind on their polls; like pot-house churls daring the dursn’t to come on. Of course they can fight. Who said no? But they ’re not the only ones: and they ’ll miss their ranks before they can march like our Irish lads. The look of their men in line is for all the world to us what lack-lustre is to the eye. The drill they ’ve had hasn’t driven Hodge out of them, it has only stiffened the dolt; and dolt won’t do any longer; the military machine requires intelligence in all ranks now. Ay, the time for the Celt is dawning: I see it, and I don’t often spy a spark where there isn’t soon a blaze. Solidity and stupidity have had their innings: a precious long innings it has been; and now they’re shoved aside like clods of earth from the risin flower. Off with our shackles! We’ve only to determine it to be free, and we’ll bloom again; and I’ll be the first to speak the word and mount the colours. Follow me! Will ye join in the toast to the emblem of Erin—the shamrock, Phil and Pat?’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Philip. ’What ‘s that row going on?’ Patrick also called attention to the singular noise in the room. ’I fancy the time for the Celt is not dawning, but setting,’ said Philip, with a sharp smile; and Patrick wore an artful look.

A corner of the room was guilty of the incessant alarum. Captain Con gazed in that direction incredulously and with remonstrance. ’The tinkler it is!’ he sighed. ‘But it can’t be midnight yet?’ Watches were examined. Time stood at half-past the midnight. He groaned: ’I must go. I haven’t heard the tinkler for months. It signifies she’s cold in her bed. The thing called circulation’s unknown to her save by the aid of outward application, and I ’m the warming pan, as legitimately I should be, I’m her husband and her Harvey in one. Goodbye to my hop and skip. I ought by rights to have been down beside her at midnight. She’s

Page 4283

the worthiest woman alive, and I don't shirk my duty. Be quiet!' he bellowed at the alarum; 'I 'm coming. Don't be in such a fright, my dear,' he admonished it as his wife, politely. 'Your hand'll take an hour to warm if you keep it out on the spring that sets the creature going.' He turned and informed his company: 'Her hand'll take an hour to warm. Dear! how she runs ahead: d' ye hear? That's the female tongue, and once off it won't stop. And this contrivance for fetching me from my tower to her bed was my own suggestion, in a fit of generosity! Ireland all over! I must hurry and wash my hair, for she can't bear a perfume to kill a stink; she carries her charitable heart that far. Good-night, I'll be thinking of ye while I'm warming her. Sit still, I can't wait; 'tis the secret of my happiness.' He fled. Patrick struck his knee on hearing the expected ballad-burden recur.

CHAPTER X

THE BROTHERS

'Con has learnt one secret,' said Philip, quitting his chair.

Patrick went up to him, and, 'Give us a hug,' he said, and the hug was given.

They were of an equal height, tall young men, alert, nervously braced from head to foot, with the differences between soldier and civilian marked by the succintly military bearing of the elder brother, whose movements were precise and prompt, and whose frame was leopardlike in indolence. Beside him Patrick seemed cubbish, though beside another he would not have appeared so. His features were not so brilliantly regular, but were a fanciful sketch of the same design, showing a wider pattern of the long square head and the forehead, a wavering at the dip of the nose, livelier nostrils: the nostrils dilated and contracted, and were exceeding alive. His eyelids had to do with the look of his eyes, and were often seen cutting the ball. Philip's eyes were large on the pent of his brows, open, liquid, and quick with the fire in him. Eyes of that quality are the visible mind, animated both to speak it and to render it what comes within their scope. They were full, unshaded direct, the man himself, in action. Patrick's mouth had to be studied for an additional index to the character. To symbolise them, they were as a sword-blade lying beside book.

Men would have thought Patrick the slippery one of the two: women would have inclined to confide in him the more thoroughly; they bring feeling to the test, and do not so much read a print as read the imprinting on themselves; and the report that a certain one of us is true as steel, must be unanimous at a propitious hour to assure them completely that the steel is not two-edged in the fully formed nature of a man whom they have not tried. They are more at home with the unformed, which lends itself to feeling and imagination. Besides Patrick came nearer to them; he showed sensibility. They

have it, and they deem it auspicious of goodness, or of the gentleness acceptable as an equivalent. Not the less was Philip the one to inspire the deeper and the wilder passion.

Page 4284

‘So you’ve been down there?’ said Philip. ’Tell us of your welcome. Never mind why you went: I think I see. You’re the Patrick of fourteen, who tramped across Connaught for young Dermot to have a sight of you before he died, poor lad. How did Mr. Adister receive you?’

Patrick described the first interview.

Philip mused over it. ’Yes, those are some of his ideas: gentlemen are to excel in the knightly exercises. He used to fence excellently, and he was a good horseman. The Jesuit seminary would have been hard for him to swallow once. The house is a fine old house: lonely, I suppose.’

Patrick spoke of Caroline Adister and pursued his narrative. Philip was lost in thought. At the conclusion, relating to South America, he raised his head and said: ’Not so foolish as it struck you, Patrick. You and I might do that,—without the design upon the original owner of the soil! Irishmen are better out of Europe, unless they enter one of the Continental services.’

‘What is it Con O’Donnell proposes to you?’ Patrick asked him earnestly.

’To be a speaking trumpet in Parliament. And to put it first among the objections, I haven’t an independence; not above two hundred a year.’

‘I’ll make it a thousand,’ said Patrick, ‘that is, if my people can pay.’

’Secondly, I don’t want to give up my profession. Thirdly, fourthly, fifthly, once there, I should be boiling with the rest. I never could go half way. This idea of a commencement gives me a view of the finish. Would you care to try it?’

’If I’m no wiser after two or three years of the world I mean to make a better acquaintance with,’ Patrick replied. ’Over there at home one catches the fever, you know. They have my feelings, and part of my judgement, and whether that’s the weaker part I can’t at present decide. My taste is for quiet farming and breeding.’

‘Friendship, as far as possible; union, if the terms are fair,’ said Philip. ’It’s only the name of union now; supposing it a concession that is asked of them; say, sacrifice; it might be made for the sake of what our people would do to strengthen the nation. But they won’t try to understand our people. Their laws, and their rules, their systems are forced on a race of an opposite temper, who would get on well enough, and thrive, if they were properly consulted. Ireland ’s the sore place of England, and I’m sorry for it. We ought to be a solid square, with Europe in this pickle. So I say, sitting here. What should I be saying in Parliament?’

‘Is Con at all likely, do you think, Philip?’

’He might: and become the burlesque Irishman of the House. There must be one, and the lot would be safe to fall on him.’

‘Isn’t he serious about it?’

’Quite, I fancy; and that will be the fun. A serious fellow talking nonsense with lively illustrations, is just the man for House of Commons clown. Your humorous rogue is not half so taking. Con would be the porpoise in a fish tank there, inscrutably busy on his errand and watched for his tumblings. Better I than he; and I should make a worse of it —at least for myself.’

Page 4285

‘Wouldn’t the secret of his happiness interfere?’

’If he has the secret inside his common sense. The bulk of it I suspect to be, that he enjoys his luxuries and is ashamed of his laziness; and so the secret pulls both ways. One day a fit of pride may have him, or one of his warm impulses, and if he’s taken in the tide of it, I shall grieve for the secret.’

‘You like his wife, Philip?’

’I respect her. They came together,—I suppose, because they were near together, like the two islands, in spite of the rolling waves between. I would not willingly see the union disturbed. He warms her, and she houses him. And he has to control the hot blood that does the warming, and she to moderate the severity of her principles, which are an essential part of the housing. Oh! shiver politics, Patrice. I wish I had been bred in France: a couple of years with your Pere Clement, and I could have met Irishmen and felt to them as an Irishman, whether they were disaffected or not. I wish I did. When I landed the other day, I thought myself passably cured, and could have said that rhetoric is the fire-water of our country, and claptrap the springboard to send us diving into it. I like my comrades-in-arms, I like the character of British officers, and the men too—I get on well with them. I declare to you, Patrice, I burn to live in brotherhood with them, not a rift of division at heart! I never show them that there is one. But our early training has us; it comes on us again; three or four days with Con have stirred me; I don’t let him see it, but they always do: these tales of starvations and shootings, all the old work just as when I left, act on me like a smell of powder. I was dipped in “Ireland for the Irish”; and a contented Irishman scarcely seems my countryman.’

’I suppose it ‘s like what I hear of as digesting with difficulty,’ Patrick referred to the state described by his brother.

‘And not the most agreeable of food,’ Philip added.

’It would be the secret of our happiness to discover how to make the best of it, if we had to pay penance for the discovery by living in an Esquimaux shanty,’ said Patrick.

‘With a frozen fish of admirable principles for wife,’ said Philip.

‘Ah, you give me shudders!’

’And it’s her guest who talks of her in that style! and I hope to be thought a gentleman!’ Philip pulled himself up. ’We may be all in the wrong. The way to begin to think so, is to do them an injury and forget it. The sensation’s not unpleasant when it’s other than a question of good taste. But politics to bed, Patrice. My chief is right—soldiers have nothing to do with them. What are you fiddling at in your coat there?’

‘Something for you, my dear Philip.’ Patrick brought out the miniature. He held it for his brother to look. ’It was the only thing I could get. Mr. Adister sends it. The young lady, Miss Caroline, seconded me. They think more of the big portrait: I don’t. And it ’s to be kept carefully, in case of the other one getting damaged. That’s only fair.’

Page 4286

Philip drank in the face upon a swift shot of his eyes.

‘Mr. Adister sends it?’ His tone implied wonder at such a change in Adiante’s father.

‘And an invitation to you to visit him when you please.’

‘That he might do,’ said Philip: it was a lesser thing than to send her likeness to him.

Patrick could not help dropping his voice: ‘Isn’t it very like?’ For answer the miniature had to be inspected closely.

Philip was a Spartan for keeping his feelings under.

‘Yes,’ he said, after an interval quick with fiery touches on the history of that face and his life. ’Older, of course. They are the features, of course. The likeness is not bad. I suppose it resembles her as she is now, or was when it was painted. You ’re an odd fellow to have asked for it.’

‘I thought you would wish to have it, Philip.’

’You’re a good boy, Patrice. Light those candles we’ll go to bed. I want a cool head for such brains as I have, and bumping the pillow all night is not exactly wholesome. We’ll cross the Channel in a few days, and see the nest, and the mother, and the girls.’

’Not St. George’s Channel. Mother would rather you would go to France and visit the De Reuils. She and the girls hope you will keep out of Ireland for a time: it’s hot. Judge if they’re anxious, when it’s to stop them from seeing you, Philip!’

‘Good-night, dear boy.’ Philip checked the departing Patrick. ’You can leave that.’ He made a sign for the miniature to be left on the table.

Patrick laid it there. His brother had not touched it, and he could have defended himself for having forgotten to leave it, on the plea that it might prevent his brother from having his proper share of sleep; and also, that Philip had no great pleasure in the possession of it. The two pleas, however, did not make one harmonious apology, and he went straight to the door in an odd silence, with the step of a decorous office-clerk, keeping his shoulders turned on Philip to conceal his look of destitution.

CHAPTER XI

INTRODUCING A NEW CHARACTER

Letters and telegrams and morning journals lay on the breakfast-table, awaiting the members of the household with combustible matter. Bad news from Ireland came upon

ominous news from India. Philip had ten words of mandate from his commanding officer, and they signified action, uncertain where. He was the soldier at once, buckled tight and buttoned up over his private sentiments. Vienna shot a line to Mrs. Adister O'Donnell. She communicated it:'The Princess Nikolas has a son!' Captain Con tossed his newspaper to the floor, crying:

'To-day the city'll be a chimney on fire, with the blacks in everybody's faces; but I must go down. It's hen and chicks with the director of a City Company. I must go.'

Did you say, madam?' Patrick inquired. 'A son,' said Mrs. Adister.

Page 4287

‘And the military holloaing for reinforcements,’ exclaimed Con. ’Pheu! Phil!’

‘That’s what it comes to,’ was Philip’s answer. ’Precautionary measures, eh?’

‘You can make them provocative.’ ‘Will you beg for India?’ ’I shall hear in an hour.’ ‘Have we got men?’

‘Always the question with us.’

‘What a country!’ sighed the captain. ’I’d compose ye a song of old Drowsylid, except that it does no good to be singing it at the only time when you can show her the consequences of her sluggery. A country of compromise goes to pieces at the first cannon-shot of the advance, and while she’s fighting on it’s her poor business to be putting herself together again: So she makes a mess of the beginning, to a certainty. If it weren’t that she had the army of Neptune about her—’

’The worst is she may some day start awake to discover that her protecting deity ’s been napping too.—A boy or girl did you say, my dear?’

His wife replied: ‘A son.’

‘Ah! more births.’ The captain appeared to be computing. ’But this one’s out of England: and it’s a prince I suppose they’ll call him: and princes don’t count in the population for more than finishing touches, like the crossing of t’s and dotting of i’s, though true they’re the costliest, like some flowers and feathers, and they add to the lump on Barney’s back. But who has any compassion for a burdened donkey? unless when you see him standing immortal meek! Well, and a child of some sort must have been expected? Because it’s no miracle after marriage: worse luck for the crowded earth!’

‘Things may not be expected which are profoundly distasteful,’ Mrs. Adister remarked.

‘True,’ said her sympathetic husband. ’’Tis like reading the list of the dead after a battle where you’ve not had the best of it—each name ’s a startling new blow. I’d offer to run to Earlsfont, but here’s my company you would have me join for the directoring of it, you know, my dear, to ballast me, as you pretty clearly hinted; and all ’s in the city to-day like a loaf with bad yeast, thick as lead, and sour to boot. And a howl and growl coming off the wilds of Old Ireland! We’re smitten to-day in our hearts and our pockets, and it ’s a question where we ought to feel it most, for the sake of our families.’

‘Do you not observe that your cousins are not eating?’ said his wife, adding, to Patrick: ’I entertain the opinion that a sound breakfast-appetite testifies to the proper vigour of men.’

‘Better than a doctor’s pass: and to their habits likewise,’ Captain Con winked at his guests, begging them to steal ten minutes out of the fray for the inward fortification of them.

Eggs in the shell, and masses of eggs, bacon delicately thin and curling like Apollo’s locks at his temples, and cutlets, caviar, anchovies in the state of oil, were pressed with the captain’s fervid illustrations upon the brothers, both meditatively nibbling toast and indifferent to the similes he drew and applied to life from the little fish which had their sharpness corrected but not cancelled by the improved liquid they swam in. ‘Like an Irishman in clover,’ he said to his wife to pay her a compliment and coax an acknowledgement: ’just the flavour of the salt of him.’

Page 4288

Her mind was on her brother Edward, and she could not look sweet-oily, as her husband wooed her to do, with impulse to act the thing he was imagining.

'And there is to-morrow's dinner-party to the Mattocks: I cannot travel to Earlsfont,' she said.

'Patrick is a disengaged young verderer, and knows the route, and has a welcome face there, and he might go, if you're for having it performed by word of mouth. But, trust me, my dear, bad news is best communicated by telegraph, which gives us no stupid articles and particles to quarrel with. "Boy born Vienna doctor smiling nurse laughing." That tells it all, straight to the understanding, without any sickly circumlocutory stuff; and there's nothing more offensive to us when we're hurt at intelligence. For the same reason, Colonel Arthur couldn't go, since you'll want him to meet the Mattocks?'

Captain Con's underlip shone with a roguish thinness.

'Arthur must be here,' said Mrs. Adister. 'I cannot bring myself to write it. I disapprove of telegrams.'

She was asking to be assisted, so her husband said:

'Take Patrick for a secretary. Dictate. He has a bold free hand and'll supply all the fiorituri and arabesques necessary to the occasion running.'

She gazed at Patrick as if to intimate that he might be enlisted, and said: 'It will be to Caroline. She will break it to her uncle.'

'Right, madam, on the part of a lady I 've never known to be wrong! And so, my dear, I must take leave of you, to hurry down to the tormented intestines of that poor racked city, where the winds of panic are violently engaged in occupying the vacuum created by knocking over what the disaster left standing; and it 'll much resemble a colliery accident there, I suspect, and a rescue of dead bodies. Adieu, my dear.' He pressed his lips on her thin fingers.

Patrick placed himself at Mrs. Adister's disposal as her secretary. She nodded a gracious acceptance of him.

'I recommended the telegraph because it's my wife's own style, and comes better from wires,' said the captain, as they were putting on their overcoats in the hall. 'You must know the family. "Deeds not words" would serve for their motto. She hates writing, and doesn't much love talking. Pat 'll lengthen her sentences for her. She's fond of Adiante, and she sympathises with her brother Edward made a grandfather through the instrumentality of that foreign hooknose; and Patrick must turn the two dagger sentiments to a sort of love-knot and there's the task he'll have to work out in his letter to Miss Caroline. It's fun about Colonel Arthur not going. He's to meet the burning Miss

Mattock, who has gold on her crown and a lot on her treasury, Phil, my boy! but I'm bound in honour not to propose it. And a nice girl, a prize; afresh healthy girl; and brains: the very girl! But she's jotted down for the Adisters, if Colonel Arthur can

Page 4289

look lower than his nose and wag his tongue a bit. She's one to be a mother of stout ones that won't run up big doctors' bills or ask assistance in growing. Her name's plain Jane, and she 's a girl to breed conquerors; and the same you may say of her brother John, who 's a mighty fit man, good at most things, though he counts his fortune in millions, which I've heard is lighter for a beggar to perform than in pounds, but he can count seven, and beat any of us easy by showing them millions! We might do something for them at home with a million or two, Phil. It all came from the wedding of a railway contractor, who sprang from the wedding of a spade and a clod—and probably called himself Mattock at his birth, no shame to him.'

'You're for the city,' said Philip, after they had walked down the street.

'Not I,' said Con. 'Let them play Vesuvius down there. I've got another in me: and I can't stop their eruption, and they wouldn't relish mine. I know a little of Dick Martin, who called on the people to resist, and housed the man Liffey after his firing the shot, and I'm off to Peter M'Christy, his brother-in-law. I'll see Distell too. I must know if it signifies the trigger, or I'm agitated about nothing. Dr. Forbery'll be able to tell how far they mean going for a patriotic song.

"For we march in ranks to the laurelled banks,
On the bright horizon shining,
Though the fields between run red on the green,
And many a wife goes pining."

Will you come, Phil?'

'I 'm under orders.'

'You won't engage yourself by coming.'

'I'm in for the pull if I join hands.'

'And why not?—inside the law, of course.'

'While your Barney skirmishes outside!'

'And when the poor fellow's cranium's cracking to fling his cap in the air, and physician and politician are agreed it's good for him to do it, or he'll go mad and be a dangerous lunatic! Phil, it must be a blow now and then for these people over here, else there's no teaching their imaginations you're in earnest; for they've got heads that open only to hard raps, these English; and where injustice rules, and you'd spread a light of justice, a certain lot of us must give up the ghost—naturally on both sides. Law's law, and life's life, so long as you admit that the law is bad; and in that case, it's big misery and chronic disease to let it be and at worst a jump and tumble into the next world, of a score or two of us if we have a wrestle with him. But shake the old villain; hang on him

and shake him. Bother his wig, if he calls himself Law. That ’s how we dust the corruption out of him for a bite or two in return. Such is humanity, Phil: and you must allow for the roundabout way of moving to get into the straight road at last. And I see what you’re for saying: a roundabout eye won’t find it! You’re wrong where there are dozens of corners. Logic like yours, my boy, would have you go on picking at the Gordian Knot till it became a jackasses’ race between you and the rope which was to fall to pieces last.—There ’s my old girl at the stall, poor soul! See her!’

Page 4290

Philip had signalled a cabman to stop. He stood facing his cousin with a close-lipped smile that summarised his opinion and made it readable.

‘I have no time for an introduction to her this morning,’ he said.

’You won’t drop in on Distell to hear the latest brewing? And, by the by, Phil, tell us, could you give us a hint for packing five or six hundred rifles and a couple of pieces of cannon?’

Philip stared; he bent a lowering frown on his cousin, with a twitch at his mouth.

‘Oh! easy!’ Con answered the look; ’it’s for another place and harder to get at.’

He was eyed suspiciously and he vowed the military weapons were for another destination entirely, the opposite Pole.

‘No, you wouldn’t be in for a crazy villainy like that!’ said Philip.

‘No, nor wink to it,’ said Con. ’But it’s a question about packing cannon and small arms; and you might be useful in dropping a hint or two. The matter’s innocent. It’s not even a substitution of one form of Government for another: only a change of despots, I suspect. And here’s Mr. John Mattock himself, who’ll corroborate me, as far as we can let you into the secret before we’ve consulted together. And he’s an Englishman and a member of Parliament, and a Liberal though a landlord, a thorough stout Briton and bulldog for the national integrity, not likely to play at arms and ammunition where his country’s prosperity ‘s concerned. How d’ ye do, Mr. Mattock—and opportunely, since it’s my cousin, Captain Philip O’Donnell, aide-de-camp to Sir Charles, fresh from Canada, of whom you’ve heard, I’d like to make you acquainted with, previous to your meeting at my wife’s table tomorrow evening.’

Philip bowed to a man whose notion of the ceremony was to nod.

Con took him two steps aside and did all the talking. Mr. Mattock listened attentively the first half-minute, after which it could be perceived that the orator was besieging a post, or in other words a Saxon’s mind made up on a point of common sense. His appearance was redolently marine; his pilot coat, flying necktie and wideish trowsers, a general airiness of style on a solid frame, spoke of the element his blue eyes had dipped their fancy in, from hereditary inclination. The colour of a sandpit was given him by hair and whiskers of yellow-red on a ruddy face. No one could express a negative more emphatically without wording it, though he neither frowned nor gesticulated to that effect.

‘Ah!’ said Con, abruptly coming to an end after an eloquent appeal. ’And I think I’m of your opinion: and the sea no longer dashes at the rock, but makes itself a mirror to the same. She’ll keep her money and nurse her babe, and not be trying risky adventures to

turn him into a reigning prince. Only this: you'll have to persuade her the thing is impossible. She'll not take it from any of us. She looks on you as Wisdom in the uniform of a great commander, and if you say a thing can be done it 's done.'

Page 4291

‘The reverse too, I hope,’ said Mr. Mattock, nodding and passing on his way.

‘That I am not so sure of,’ Con remarked to himself. ’There’s a change in a man through a change in his position! Six months or so back, Phil, that man came from Vienna, the devoted slave of the Princess Nikolas. He’d been there on his father’s business about one of the Danube railways, and he was ready to fill the place of the prince at the head of his phantom body of horse and foot and elsewhere. We talked of his selling her estates for the purchase of arms and the enemy—as many as she had money for. We discussed it as a matter of business. She had bewitched him: and would again, I don’t doubt, if she were here to repeat the dose. But in the interim his father dies, he inherits; and he enters Parliament, and now, mind you, the man who solemnly calculated her chances and speculates on the transmission of rifled arms of the best manufacture and latest invention by his yacht and with his loads of rails, under the noses of the authorities, like a master rebel, and a chivalrous gentleman to boot, pooh poohs the whole affair. You saw him. Grave as an owl, the dead contrary of his former self!’

‘I thought I heard you approve him,’ said Philip.

’And I do. But the poor girl has ordered her estates to be sold to cast the die, and I ’m taking the view of her disappointment, for she believes he can do anything; and if I know the witch, her sole comfort lying in the straw is the prospect of a bloody venture for a throne. The truth is, to my thinking, it’s the only thing she has to help her to stomach her husband.’

‘But it’s rank idiocy to suppose she can smuggle cannon!’ cried Philip.

’But that man Mattock’s not an idiot and he thought she could. And it ’s proof he was under a spell. She can work one.’

‘The country hasn’t a port.’

’Round the Euxine and up the Danube, with the British flag at the stern. I could rather enjoy the adventure. And her prince is called for. He’s promised a good reception when he drops down the river, they say. A bit of a scrimmage on the landing-pier may be, and the first field or two, and then he sits himself, and he waits his turn. The people change their sovereigns as rapidly as a London purse. Two pieces of artillery and two or three hundred men and a trumpet alter the face of the land there. Sometimes a trumpet blown by impudence does it alone. They’re enthusiastic for any new prince. He’s their Weekly Journal or Monthly Magazine. Let them make acquaintance with Adiante Adister, I’d not swear she wouldn’t lay fast hold of them.’

Philip signalled to his driver, and Captain Con sang out his dinner-hour for a reminder to punctuality, thoughtful of the feelings of his wife.

CHAPTER XII

MISS MATTOCK

Page 4292

Mrs. Adister O'Donnell, in common with her family, had an extreme dislike of the task of composing epistles, due to the circumstance that she was unable, unaided, to conceive an idea disconnected with the main theme of her communication, and regarded, as an art of conjuring, the use of words independent of ideas. Her native superiority caused her to despise the art, but the necessity for employing it at intervals subjected her to fits of admiration of the conjurer, it being then evident that a serviceable piece of work, beyond her capacity to do, was lightly performed by another. The lady's practical intelligence admitted the service, and at the same time her addiction to the practical provoked disdain of so flimsy a genius, which was identified by her with the genius of the Irish race. If Irishmen had not been notoriously fighters, famous for their chivalry, she would have looked on them as a kind of footmen hired to talk and write, whose volubility might be encouraged and their affectionateness deserved by liberal wages. The promptitude of Irish blood to deliver the war-cry either upon a glove flung down or taken up, raised them to a first place in her esteem: and she was a peaceful woman abhorring sanguinary contention; but it was in her own blood to love such a disposition against her principles.

She led Patrick to her private room, where they both took seats and he selected a pen. Mr. Patrick supposed that his business would be to listen and put her words to paper; a mechanical occupation permitting the indulgence of personal phantasies; and he was flying high on them until the extraordinary delicacy of the mind seeking to deliver itself forced him to prick up all his apprehensiveness. She wished to convey that she was pleased with the news from Vienna, and desired her gratification to be imparted to her niece Caroline, yet not so as to be opposed to the peculiar feelings of her brother Edward, which had her fullest sympathy; and yet Caroline must by no means be requested to alter a sentence referring to Adiante, for that would commit her and the writer jointly to an insincerity.

'It must be the whole truth, madam,' said Patrick, and he wrote: 'My dear Caroline,' to get the start. At once a magnificently clear course for the complicated letter was distinguished by him. 'Can I write on and read it to you afterward? I have the view,' he said.

Mrs. Adister waved to him to write on.

Patrick followed his 'My dear Caroline' with greetings very warm, founded on a report of her flourishing good looks. The decision of Government to send reinforcements to Ireland was mentioned as a prelude to the information from Vienna of the birth of a son to the Princess Nikolas: and then; having conjoined the two entirely heterogeneous pieces of intelligence, the composer adroitly interfused them by a careless transposition of the prelude and the burden that enabled him to play ad libitum on regrets and rejoicings; by which device the lord of Earlsfont

Page 4293

might be offered condolences while the lady could express her strong contentment, inasmuch as he deplored the state of affairs in the sister island, and she was glad of a crisis concluding a term of suspense thus the foreign-born baby was denounced and welcomed, the circumstances lamented and the mother congratulated, in a breath, all under cover of the happiest misunderstanding, as effective as the cabalism of Prospero's wand among the Neapolitan mariners, by the skilful Irish development on a grand scale of the rhetorical figure anastrophe, or a turning about and about.

He read it out to her, enjoying his composition and pleased with his reconcilement of differences. 'So you say what you feel yourself, madam, and allow for the feelings on the other side,' he remarked. 'Shall I fold it?

There was a smoothness in the letter particularly agreeable to her troubled wits, but with an awful taste. She hesitated to assent: it seemed like a drug that she was offered.

Patrick sketched a series of hooked noses on the blotter. He heard a lady's name announced at the door, and glancing up from his work he beheld a fiery vision.

Mrs. Adister addressed her affectionately: 'My dear Jane!' Patrick was introduced to Miss Mattock.

His first impression was that the young lady could wrestle with him and render it doubtful of his keeping his legs. He was next engaged in imagining that she would certainly burn and be a light in the dark. Afterwards he discovered her feelings to be delicate, her looks pleasant. Thereupon came one of the most singular sensations he had ever known: he felt that he was unable to see the way to please her. She confirmed it by her remarks and manner of speaking. Apparently she was conducting a business.

'You're right, my dear Mrs. Adister, I'm on my way to the Laundry, and I called to get Captain Con to drive there with me and worry the manageress about the linen they turn out: for gentlemen are complaining of their shirt-fronts, and if we get a bad name with them it will ruin us. Women will listen to a man. I hear he has gone down to the city. I must go and do it alone. Our accounts are flourishing, I'm glad to say, though we cannot yet afford to pay for a secretary, and we want one. John and I verified them last night. We're aiming at steam, you know. In three or four years we may found a steam laundry on our accumulated capital. If only we can establish it on a scale to let us give employment to at least as many women as we have working now! That is what I want to hear of. But if we wait for a great rival steam laundry to start ahead of us, we shall be beaten and have to depend on the charitable sentiments of rich people to support the Institution. And that won't do. So it's a serious question with us to think of taking the initiative: for steam must come. It 's a scandal every day that it doesn't while we have coal. I'm for grand measures. At the same time we must not be imprudent: turning off hands, even temporarily, that have to feed infants, would be quite against my policy.'

Page 4294

Her age struck Patrick as being about twenty-three.

‘Could my nephew Arthur be of any use to you?’ said Mrs. Adister.

‘Colonel Adister?’ Miss Mattock shook her head. ‘No.’

‘Arthur can be very energetic when he takes up a thing.’ ’Can he? But, Mrs. Adister, you are looking a little troubled. Sometimes you confide in me. You are so good to us with your subscriptions that I always feel in your debt.’

Patrick glanced at his hostess for a signal to rise and depart.

She gave none, but at once unfolded her perplexity, and requested Miss Mattock to peruse the composition of Mr. Patrick O’Donnell and deliver an opinion upon it.

The young lady took the letter without noticing its author. She read it through, handed it back, and sat with her opinion evidently formed within.

‘What do you think of it?’ she was asked.

‘Rank jesuitry,’ she replied.

‘I feared so!’ sighed Mrs. Adister. ’Yet it says everything I wish to have said. It spares my brother and it does not belie me. The effect of a letter is often most important. I cannot but consider this letter very ingenious. But the moment I hear it is jesuitical I forswear it. But then my dilemma remains. I cannot consent to give pain to my brother Edward: nor will I speak an untruth, though it be to save him from a wound. I am indeed troubled. Mr. Patrick, I cannot consent to despatch a jesuitical letter. You are sure of your impression, my dear Jane?’

‘Perfectly,’ said Miss Mattock.

Patrick leaned to her. ’But if the idea in the mind of the person supposed to be writing the letter is accurately expressed? Does it matter, if we call it jesuitical, if the emotion at work behind it happens to be a trifle so, according to your definition?’

She rejoined: ‘I should say, distinctly it matters.’

‘Then you’d not express the emotions at all?’

He flashed a comical look of astonishment as he spoke. She was not to be diverted; she settled into antagonism.

‘I should write what I felt.’

‘But it might be like discharging a bullet.’

‘How?’

‘If your writing in that way wounded the receiver.’

‘Of course I should endeavour not to wound!’

’And there the bit of jesuitry begins. And it’s innocent while it ’s no worse than an effort to do a disagreeable thing as delicately as you can.’

She shrugged as delicately as she could:

‘We cannot possibly please everybody in life.’

‘No: only we may spare them a shock: mayn’t we?’

‘Sophistries of any description, I detest.’

‘But sometimes you smile to please, don’t you?’

‘Do you detect falseness in that?’ she answered, after the demurest of pauses.

‘No: but isn’t there a soupcon of sophistry in it?’

‘I should say that it comes under the title of common civility.’

Page 4295

‘And on occasion a little extra civility is permitted!’

‘Perhaps: when we are not seeking a personal advantage.’

‘On behalf of the Steam Laundry?’

Miss Mattock grew restless: she was too serious in defending her position to submit to laugh, and his goodhumoured face forbade her taking offence.

‘Well, perhaps, for that is in the interest of others.’

’In the interests of poor and helpless females. And I agree with you with all my heart. But you would not be so considerate for the sore feelings of a father hearing what he hates to hear as to write a roundabout word to soften bad news to him?’

She sought refuge in the reply that nothing excused jesuitry.

‘Except the necessities of civilisation,’ said Patrick.

‘Politeness is one thing,’ she remarked pointedly.

’And domestic politeness is quite as needful as popular, you’ll admit. And what more have we done in the letter than to be guilty of that? And people declare it’s rarer: as if we were to be shut up in families to tread on one another’s corns! Dear me! and after a time we should be having rank jesuitry advertised as the specific balsam for an unhappy domesticated population treading with hard heels from desperate habit and not the slightest intention to wound.’

‘My dear Jane,’ Mrs. Adister interposed while the young lady sat between mildly staring and blinking, ’you have, though still of a tender age, so excellent a head that I could trust to your counsel blindfolded. It is really deep concern for my brother. I am also strongly in sympathy with my niece, the princess, that beautiful Adiante: and my conscience declines to let me say that I am not.’

’We might perhaps presume to beg for Miss Mattock’s assistance in the composition of a second letter more to her taste,’ Patrick said slyly.

The effect was prompt: she sprang from her seat.

’Dear Mrs. Adister! I leave it to you. I am certain you and Mr. O’Donnell know best. It’s too difficult and delicate for me. I am horribly blunt. Forgive me if I seemed to pretend to casuistry. I am sure I had no such meaning. I said what I thought. I always do. I never meant that it was not a very clever letter; and if it does exactly what you require it should be satisfactory. To-morrow evening John and I dine with you, and I look forward to plenty of controversy and amusement. At present I have only a head for work.’

‘I wish I had that,’ said Patrick devoutly.

She dropped her eyes on him, but without letting him perceive that he was a step nearer to the point of pleasing her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DINNER-PARTY

Miss Mattock ventured on a prediction in her mind:

Page 4296

She was sure the letter would go. And there was not much to signify if it did. But the curious fatality that a person of such a native uprightness as Mrs. Adister should have been drawn in among Irishmen, set her thoughts upon the composer of the letter, and upon the contrast of his ingenuous look with the powerful cast of his head. She fancied a certain danger about him; of what kind she could not quite distinguish, for it had no reference to woman's heart, and he was too young to be much of a politician, and he was not in the priesthood. His transparency was of a totally different order from Captain Con's, which proclaimed itself genuine by the inability to conceal a shoal of subterfuges. The younger cousin's features carried a something invisible behind them, and she was just perceptive enough to spy it, and it excited her suspicions. Irishmen both she and her brother had to learn to like, owing to their bad repute for stability: they are, moreover, Papists: they are not given to ideas: that one of the working for the future has not struck them. In fine, they are not solid, not law-supporting, not disposed to be (humbly be it said) beneficent, like the good English. These were her views, and as she held it a weakness to have to confess that Irishmen are socially more fascinating than the good English, she was on her guard against them.

Of course the letter had gone. She heard of it before the commencement of the dinner, after Mrs. Adister had introduced Captain Philip O'Donnell to her, and while she was exchanging a word or two with Colonel Adister, who stood ready to conduct her to the table. If he addressed any remarks to the lady under his charge, Miss Mattock did not hear him; and she listened—who shall say why? His unlike likeness to his brother had struck her. Patrick opposite was flowing in speech. But Captain Philip O'Donnell's taciturnity seemed no uncivil gloom: it wore nothing of that look of being beneath the table, which some of our good English are guilty of at their social festivities, or of towering aloof a Matterhorn above it, in the style of Colonel Adister. Her discourse with the latter amused her passing reflections. They started a subject, and he punctuated her observations, or she his, and so they speedily ran to earth.

'I think,' says she, 'you were in Egypt this time last winter.'

He supplies her with a comma: 'Rather later.'

Then he carries on the line. 'Dull enough, if you don't have the right sort of travelling crew in your boat.'

'Naturally,' she puts her semicolon, ominous of the full stop.

'I fancy you have never been in Egypt?'

'No'

There it is; for the tone betrays no curiosity about Egypt and her Nile, and he is led to suppose that she has a distaste for foreign places.

Condescending to attempt to please, which he has reason to wish to succeed in doing, the task of pursuing conversational intercourse devolves upon him—

Page 4297

‘I missed Parlatti last spring. What opinion have you formed of her?’

‘I know her only by name at present.’

‘Ah, I fancy you are indifferent to Opera.’

‘Not at all; I enjoy it. I was as busy then as I am now.’

‘Meetings? Dorcas, so forth.’

‘Not Dorcas, I assure you. You might join if you would.’

‘Your most obliged.’

A period perfectly rounded. At the same time Miss Mattock exchanged a smile with her hostess, of whose benignant designs in handing her to the entertaining officer she was not conscious. She felt bound to look happy to gratify an excellent lady presiding over the duller half of a table of eighteen. She turned slightly to Captain O’Donnell. He had committed himself to speech at last, without tilting his shoulders to exclude the company by devoting himself to his partner, and as he faced the table Miss Mattock’s inclination to listen attracted him. He cast his eyes on her: a quiet look, neither languid nor frigid seeming to her both open and uninviting. She had the oddest little shiver, due to she knew not what. A scrutiny she could have borne, and she might have read a signification; but the look of those mild clear eyes which appeared to say nothing save that there was fire behind them, hit on some perplexity, or created it; for she was aware of his unhappy passion for the beautiful Miss Adister; the whole story had been poured into her ears; she had been moved by it. Possibly she had expected the eyes of such a lover to betray melancholy, and his power of containing the expression where the sentiment is imagined to be most transparent may have surprised her, thrilling her as melancholy orbs would not have done.

Captain Con could have thumped his platter with vexation. His wife’s diplomacy in giving the heiress to Colonel Adister for the evening had received his cordial support while he manoeuvred cleverly to place Philip on the other side of her; and now not a step did the senseless fellow take, though she offered him his chance, dead sick of her man on the right; not a word did he have in ordinary civility; he was a burning disgrace to the chivalry of Erin. She would certainly be snapped up by a man merely yawning to take the bite. And there’s another opportunity gone for the old country!—one’s family to boot!

Those two were in the middle of the table, and it is beyond mortal, beyond Irish, capacity, from one end of a table of eighteen to whip up the whole body of them into a lively unanimous froth, like a dish of cream fetched out of thickness to the airiest lightness. Politics, in the form of a firebrand or apple of Discord, might knead them

together and cut them in batches, only he had pledged his word to his wife to shun politics as the plague, considering Mr. Mattock's presence. And yet it was tempting: the recent Irish news had stung him; he could say sharp things from the heart, give neat thrusts; and they were fairly divided

Page 4298

and well matched. There was himself, a giant; and there was an unrecognised bard of his country, no other than himself too; and there was a profound politician, profoundly hidden at present, like powder in a mine—the same person. And opposite to him was Mr. John Mattock, a worthy antagonist, delightful to rouse, for he carried big guns and took the noise of them for the shattering of the enemy, and this champion could be pricked on to a point of assertion sure to fire the phlegm in Philip; and then young Patrick might be trusted to warm to the work. Three heroes out skirmishing on our side. Then it begins to grow hot, and seeing them at it in earnest, Forbery glows and couches his gun, the heaviest weight of the Irish light brigade. Gallant deeds! and now Mr. Marbury Dyke opens on Forbery's flank to support Mattock hardpressed, and this artillery of English Rockney resounds, with a similar object: the ladies to look on and award the crown of victory, Saxon though they be, excepting Rockney's wife, a sure deserter to the camp of the brave, should fortune frown on them, for a punishment to Rockney for his carrying off to himself a flower of the Green Island and holding inveterate against her native land in his black ingratitude. Oh! but eloquence upon a good cause will win you the hearts of all women, Saxon or other, never doubt of it. And Jane Mattock there, imbibing forced doses of Arthur Adister, will find her patriotism dissolving in the natural human current; and she and Philip have a pretty wrangle, and like one another none the worse for not agreeing: patriotically speaking, she's really unrooted by that half-thawed colonel, a creature snow-bound up to his chin; and already she's leaping to be transplanted. Jane is one of the first to give her vote for the Irish party, in spite of her love for her brother John: in common justice, she says, and because she hopes for complete union between the two islands. And thereupon we debate upon union. On the whole, yes: union, on the understanding that we have justice, before you think of setting to work to sow the land with affection:—and that 's a crop in a clear soil will spring up harvest-thick in a single summer night across St. George's Channel, ladies! . . .

Indeed a goodly vision of strife and peace: but, politics forbidden, it was entirely a dream, seeing that politics alone, and a vast amount of blowing even on the topic of politics, will stir these English to enter the arena and try a fall. You cannot, until you say ten times more than you began by meaning, and have heated yourself to fancy you mean more still, get them into any state of fluency at all. Forbery's anecdote now and then serves its turn, but these English won't take it up as a start for fresh pastures; they lend their ears and laugh a finale to it; you see them dwelling on the relish, chewing the cud, by way of mental note for their friends to-morrow, as if they were kettles come here merely for boiling purposes, to make tea elsewhere, and putting a damper on the fire that does the business for them. They laugh, but they laugh extinguishingly, and not a bit to spread a general conflagration and illumination.

Page 4299

The case appeared hopeless to Captain Con, bearing an eye on Philip. He surveyed his inanimate eights right and left, and folded his combative ardour around him, as the soldier's martial cloak when he takes his rest on the field. Mrs. Marbury Dyke, the lady under his wing, honoured wife of the chairman of his imagined that a sigh escaped him, and said in sympathy: 'Is the bad news from India confirmed?'

He feared it was not bright, and called to Philip for the latest.

'Nothing that you have not had already in the newspapers,' Philip replied, distinctly from afar, but very bluntly, as through a trumpet.

Miss Mattock was attentive. She had a look as good as handsome when she kindled.

The captain persevered to draw his cousin out.

'Your chief has his orders?'

'There's a rumour to that effect.'

'The fellow's training for diplomacy,' Con groaned.

Philip spoke to Miss Mattock: he was questioned and he answered, and answered dead as a newspaper telegraphic paragraph, presenting simply the corpse of the fact, and there an end. He was a rival of Arthur Adister for military brevity.

'Your nephew is quite the diplomatist,' said Mrs. Dyke, admiring Philip's head.

'Cousin, ma'am. Nephews I might drive to any market to make the most of them. Cousins pretend they're better than pigs, and diverge bounding from the road at the hint of the stick. You can't get them to grunt more than is exactly agreeable to them.'

'My belief is that if our cause is just our flag will triumph,' Miss Grace Barrow, Jane Mattock's fellow-worker and particular friend, observed to Dr. Forbery.

'You may be enjoying an original blessing that we in Ireland missed in the cradle,' said he.

She emphasised: 'I speak of the just cause; it must succeed.'

'The stainless flag'll be in the ascendant in the long run,' he assented.

'Is it the flag of Great Britain you're speaking of, Forbery?' the captain inquired.

'There's a harp or two in it,' he responded pacifically.

Mrs. Dyke was not pleased with the tone. ‘And never will be out of it!’ she thumped her interjection.

’Or where ‘s your music?’ said the captain, twinkling for an adversary among the males, too distant or too dull to distinguish a note of challenge. ’You’d be having to mount your drum and fife in their places, ma’am.’

She saw no fear of the necessity.

‘But the fife’s a pretty instrument,’ he suggested, and with a candour that seduced the unwary lady to think dubiously whether she quite liked the fife. Miss Barrow pronounced it cheerful.

‘Oh, and martial!’ he exclaimed, happy to have caught Rockney’s deliberate gaze. ’The effect of it, I’m told in the provinces is astonishing for promoting enlistment. Hear it any morning in your London parks, at the head of a marching regiment of your giant foot-Guards. Three bangs of the drum, like the famous mountain, and the fife announces himself to be born, and they follow him, left leg and right leg and bearskin. And what if he’s a small one and a trifle squeaky; so ’s a prince when the attendant dignitaries receive him submissively and hear him informing the nation of his advent. It ’s the idea that ‘s grand.’

Page 4300

‘The idea is everything in military affairs,’ a solemn dupe, a Mr. Rumford, partly bald, of benevolent aspect, and looking more copious than his flow, observed to the lady beside him. ‘The flag is only an idea.’

She protested against the barbarism of war, and he agreed with her, but thought it must be: it had always been: he deplored the fatality. Nevertheless, he esteemed our soldiers, our sailors too. A city man himself and a man of peace, he cordially esteemed and hailed the victories of a military body whose idea was Duty instead of Ambition.

‘One thing,’ said Mrs. Dyke, evading the ambiguous fife, ’patriotic as I am, I hope, one thing I confess; I never have yet brought myself to venerate thoroughly our Royal Standard. I dare say it is because I do not understand it.’

A strong fraternal impulse moved Mr. Rumford to lean forward and show her the face of one who had long been harassed by the same incapacity to digest that one thing. He guessed it at once, without a doubt of the accuracy of the shot. Ever since he was a child the difficulty had haunted him; and as no one hitherto had even comprehended his dilemma, he beamed like a man preparing to embrace a recovered sister.

‘The Unicorn!’ he exclaimed.

‘It is the Unicorn!’ she sighed. ‘The Lion is noble.’

’The Unicorn, if I may speak by my own feelings, certainly does not inspire attachment, that is to say, the sense of devotion, which we should always be led to see in national symbols,’ Mr. Rumford resumed, and he looked humorously rueful while speaking with some earnestness; to show that he knew the subject to be of the minor sort, though it was not enough to trip and jar a loyal enthusiasm in the strictly meditative.

‘The Saxon should carry his White Horse, I suppose,’ Dr. Forbery said.

‘But how do we account for the horn on his forehead?’ Mr. Rumford sadly queried.

‘Two would have been better for the harmony of the Unicorn’s appearance,’ Captain Con remarked, desirous to play a floundering fish, and tender to the known simple goodness of the ingenuous man. ’What do you say, Forbery? The poor brute had a fall on his pate and his horn grew of it, and it ’s to prove that he has got something in his head, and is dangerous both fore and aft, which is not the case with other horses, who’re usually wicked at the heels alone. That’s it, be sure, or near it. And his horn’s there to file the subject nation’s grievances for the Lion to peruse at his leisure. And his colour’s prophetic of the Horse to come, that rides over all.’

’Lion and Unicorn signify the conquest of the two hemispheres, Matter and Mind,’ said Dr. Forbery. ’The Lion there’s no mistake about. The Unicorn sets you thinking. So it’s a splendid Standard, and means the more for not being perfectly intelligible at a glance.’

’But if the Lion, as they’ve whispered of late, Forbery, happens to be stuffed with straw or with what’s worse, with sawdust, a fellow bearing a pointed horn at close quarters might do him mortal harm; and it must be a situation trying to the patience of them both. The Lion seems to say “No prancing!” as if he knew his peril; and the Unicorn to threaten a playful dig at his flank, as if he understood where he’s ticklish.’

Page 4301

Mr. Rumford drank some champagne and murmured with a shrug to the acquiescent lady beside him: 'Irishmen!' implying that the race could not be brought to treat serious themes as befitted the seriousness of the sentiments they stir in their bosoms. He was personally a little hurt, having unfolded a shy secret of his feelings, which were keenly patriotic in a phlegmatic frame, and he retired within himself, assuring the lady that he accepted our standard in its integrity; his objection was not really an objection; it was, he explained to her, a ridiculous desire to have a perfect comprehension of the idea in the symbol. But where there was no seriousness everything was made absurd. He could, he said, laugh as well as others on the proper occasion. As for the Lion being stuffed, he warned England's enemies for their own sakes not to be deluded by any such patent calumny. The strong can afford to be magnanimous and forbearing. Only let not that be mistaken for weakness. A wag of his tail would suffice.

The lady agreed. But women are volatile. She was the next moment laughing at something she had heard with the largest part of her ear, and she thought the worthy gentleman too simple, though she knew him for one who had amassed wealth. Captain Con and Dr. Forbery had driven the Unicorn to shelter, and were now baiting the Lion. The tremendous import of that wag of his tail among the nations was burlesqued by them, and it came into collision with Mr. Rumford's legendary forefinger threat. She excused herself for laughing:

'They are so preposterous!'

'Yes, yes, I can laugh,' said he, soberly performing the act: and Mr. Rumford covered the wound his delicate sensations had experienced under an apology for Captain Con, that would redound to the credit of his artfulness were it not notorious our sensations are the creatures and born doctors of art in discovering unguents for healing their bruises. 'O'Donnell has a shrewd head for business. He is sound at heart. There is not a drop of gout in his wine.'

The lady laughed again, as we do when we are fairly swung by the tide, and underneath her convulsion she quietly mused on the preference she would give to the simple English citizen for soundness.

'What can they be discussing down there?' Miss Mattock said to Philip, enviously as poor Londoners in November when they receive letters from the sapphire Riviera.

'I will venture to guess at nonsense,' he answered.

'Nothing political, then.'

'That scarcely follows; but a host at his own table may be trusted to shelve politics.'

'I should not object.'

‘To controversy?’

‘Temperately conducted.’

‘One would go a long way to see the exhibition.’

‘But why cannot men be temperate in their political arguments?’

‘The questions raised are too close about the roots of us.’

‘That sounds very pessimist.’

Page 4302

‘More duels come from politics than from any other source.’

‘I fear it is true. Then women might set you an example.’

‘By avoiding it?’

‘I think you have been out of England for some time.’

‘I have been in America.’

‘We are not exactly on the pattern of the Americans.’ Philip hinted a bow. He praised the Republican people.

‘Yes, but in our own way we are working out our own problems over here,’ said she. ’We have infinitely more to contend with: old institutions, monstrous prejudices, and a slower-minded people, I dare say: much slower, I admit. We are not shining to advantage at present. Still, that is not the fault of English women.’

‘Are they so spirited?’

Spirited was hardly the word Miss Mattock would have chosen to designate the spirit in them. She hummed a second or two, deliberating; it flashed through her during the pause that he had been guilty of irony, and she reddened: and remembering a foregoing strange sensation she reddened more. She had been in her girlhood a martyr to this malady of youth; it had tied her to the stake and enveloped her in flames for no accountable reason, causing her to suffer cruelly and feel humiliated. She knew the pangs of it in public, and in private as well. And she had not conquered it yet. She was angered to find herself such a merely physical victim of the rushing blood: which condition of her senses did not immediately restore her natural colour.

‘They mean nobly,’ she said, to fill an extending gap in the conversation under a blush; and conscious of an ultra-swollen phrase, she snatched at it nervously to correct it: ’They are becoming alive to the necessity for action.’ But she was talking to a soldier! ’I mean, their heads are opening.’ It sounded ludicrous. ’They are educating themselves differently.’ Were they? ’They wish to take their part in the work of the world.’ That was nearer the proper tone, though it had a ring of claptrap rhetoric hateful to her: she had read it and shrunk from it in reports of otherwise laudable meetings.

’Well, spirited, yes. I think they are. I believe they are. One has need to hope so.’

Philip offered a polite affirmative, evidently formal.

Not a sign had he shown of noticing her state of scarlet. His grave liquid eyes were unalterable. She might have been grateful, but the reflection that she had made a step to unlock the antechamber of her dearest deepest matters to an ordinary military officer,

whose notions of women were probably those of his professional brethren, impelled her to transfer his polished decorousness to the burden of his masculine antagonism-plainly visible. She brought the dialogue to a close. Colonel Adister sidled an eye at a three-quarter view of her face. 'I fancy you're feeling the heat of the room,' he said.

Jane acknowledged a sensibility to some degree of warmth.

Page 4303

The colonel was her devoted squire on the instant for any practical service. His appeal to his aunt concerning one of the windows was answered by her appeal to Jane's countenance for a disposition to rise and leave the gentlemen. Captain Con, holding the door for the passage of his wife and her train of ladies, received the injunction:

'Ten,' from her, and remarked: 'Minutes,' as he shut it. The shortness of the period of grace proposed dejection to him on the one hand, and on the other a stimulated activity to squeeze it for its juices without any delay. Winding past Dr. Forbery to the vacated seat of the hostess he frowned forbiddingly.

'It's I, is it!' cried the doctor. Was it ever he that endangered the peace and placability of social gatherings! He sat down prepared rather for a bout with Captain Con than with their common opponents, notwithstanding that he had accurately read the mock thunder of his brows.

CHAPTER XIV

OF ROCKNEY

Battles have been won and the streams of History diverted to new channels in the space of ten minutes. Ladies have been won, a fresh posterity founded, and grand financial schemes devised, revolts arranged, a yoke shaken off, in less of mortal time. Excepting an inspired Epic song and an original Theory of the Heavens, almost anything noteworthy may be accomplished while old Father Scythe is taking a trot round a courtyard; and those reservations should allow the splendid conception to pass for the performance, when we bring to mind that the conception is the essential part of it, as a bard poorly known to fame was constantly urging. Captain Con had blown his Epic bubbles, not to speak of his projected tuneful narrative of the adventures of the great Cuchullin, and his Preaching of St. Patrick, and other national triumphs. He could own, however, that the world had a right to the inspection of the Epic books before it awarded him his crown. The celestial Theory likewise would have to be worked out to the last figure by the illustrious astronomers to whom he modestly ranked himself second as a benefactor of his kind, revering him. So that, whatever we may think in our own hearts, Epic and Theory have to remain the exception. Battles indeed have been fought, but when you survey the field in preparation for them you are summoned to observe the preluding courtesies of civilised warfare in a manner becoming a chivalrous gentleman. It never was the merely flinging of your leg across a frontier, not even with the abrupt Napoleon. You have besides to drill your men; and you have often to rouse your foe with a ringing slap, if he's a sleepy one or shamming sleepiness. As here, for example: and that of itself devours more minutes than ten. Rockney and Mattock could be roused; but these English, slow to kindle, can't subside in a twinkling; they are for preaching on when they have once begun; betray

Page 4304

the past engagement, and the ladies are chilled, and your wife puts you the pungent question: ‘Did you avoid politics, Con?’ in the awful solitude of domestic life after a party. Now, if only there had been freedom of discourse during the dinner hour, the ten disembarrassed minutes allotted to close it would have afforded time sufficient for hearty finishing blows and a soothing word or so to dear old innocent Mr. Rumford, and perhaps a kindly clap of the shoulder to John Mattock, no bad fellow at bottom. Rockney too was no bad fellow in his way. He wanted no more than a beating and a thrashing. He was a journalist, a hard-headed rascal, none of your good old-fashioned order of regimental scribes who take their cue from their colonel, and march this way and that, right about face, with as little impediment of principles to hamper their twists and turns as the straw he tosses aloft at midnight to spy the drift of the wind to-morrow. Quite the contrary; Rockney was his own colonel; he pretended to think independently, and tried to be the statesman of a leading article, and showed his intention to stem the current of liberty, and was entirely deficient in sympathy with the oppressed, a fanatical advocate of force; he was an inveterate Saxon, good-hearted and in great need of a drubbing. Certain lines Rockney had written of late about Irish affairs recurred to Captain Con, and the political fires leaped in him; he sparkled and said: ’Let me beg you to pass the claret over to Mr. Rockney, Mr. Rumford; I warrant it for the circulating medium of amity, if he’ll try it.’

‘’Tis the Comet Margaux,’ said Dr. Forbery, topping anything Rockney might have had to say, and anything would have served. The latter clasped the decanter, poured and drank in silence.

‘’Tis the doctor’s antidote, and best for being antedated,’ Captain Con rapped his friend’s knuckles.

‘As long as you’re contented with not dating in double numbers,’ retorted the doctor, absolutely scattering the precious minutes to the winds, for he hated a provocation.

‘There’s a golden mean, is there!’

’There is; there’s a way between magnums of good wine and gout, and it’s generally discovered too late.’

’At the physician’s door, then! where the golden mean is generally discovered to be his fee. I’ve heard of poor souls packed off by him without an obolus to cross the ferry. Stripped they were in all conscience.’

’You remind me of a fellow in Dublin who called on me for medical advice, and found he’d forgotten his purse. He offered to execute a deed to bequeath me his body, naked and not ashamed.’

’You’d a right to cut him up at once, Forbery. Any Jury ’d have pronounced him guilty of giving up the ghost before he called.’

‘I let him go, body and all. I never saw him again.’

’The fellow was not a lunatic. As for your golden mean, there’s a saying: Prevention is better than cure: and another that caps it: Drink deep or taste not.’

Page 4305

‘That’s the Pierian Spring.’

‘And what is the wine on my table, sir?’

‘Exhaustless if your verses come of it.’

‘And pure, you may say of the verses and the fount.’

’And neither heady nor over-composed; with a blush like Diana confessing her love for the young shepherd: it’s one of your own comparisons.’

‘Oh!’ Con could have roared his own comparisons out of hearing. He was angry with Forbery for his obstructive dulness and would not taste the sneaking compliment. What could Forbery mean by paying compliments and spoiling a game! The ten minutes were dancing away like harmless wood-nymphs when the Satyr slumbers. His eyes ranged over his guests despondently, and fixed in desperation on Mr. Rumford, whom his magnanimous nature would have spared but for the sharp necessity to sacrifice him.

The wine in Rumford at any rate let loose his original nature, if it failed to unlock the animal in these other unexcitable Saxons.

’By the way, now I think of it, Mr. Rumford, the interpretation of your Royal Standard, which perplexes you so much, strikes me as easy if you ‘ll examine the powerfully different colours of the two beasts in it.’

Mr. Rumford protested that he had abandoned his inquiry: it was a piece of foolishness: he had no feeling in it whatever, none.

The man was a perfect snail’s horn for coyness.

The circumstances did not permit of his being suffered to slip away: and his complexion showed that he might already be classed among the roast.

’Your Lion:—Mr. Rumford, you should know, is discomposed, as a thoughtful patriot, by the inexplicable presence of the Unicorn in the Royal Standard, and would be glad to account for his one horn and the sickly appearance of the beast. I’m prepared to say he’s there to represent the fair one half of the population.

Your Lion, my dear sir, may have nothing in his head, but his tawniness tells us he imbibes good sound stuff, worthy of the reputation of a noble brewery. Whereas your, Unicorn, true to the character of the numberless hosts he stands for, is manifestly a consumer of doctor’s drugs. And there you have the symbolism of your country. Right or left of the shield, I forget which, and it is of no importance to the point—you have Grandgosier or Great Turk in all his majesty, mane and tail; and on the other hand, you behold, as the showman says, Dyspepsia. And the pair are intended to indicate that

you may see yourselves complete by looking at them separately; and so your Royal Standard is your national mirror; and when you gaze on it fondly you're playing the part of a certain Mr. Narcissus, who got liker to the Lion than to the Unicorn in the act. Now will that satisfy you?'

'Quite as you please, quite as you please,' Mr. Rumford replied. 'One loves the banner of one's country—that is all.' He rubbed his hands. 'I for one am proud of it.'

Page 4306

’Far be it from me to blame you, my dear sir. Or there’s the alternative of taking him to stand for your sole great festival holiday, and worshipping him as the personification of your Derbyshire race.’

A glittering look was in Captain Con’s eye to catch Rockney if he would but rise to it.

That doughty Saxon had been half listening, half chatting to Mr. Mattock, and wore on his drawn eyelids and slightly drawn upper lip a look of lambent pugnacity awake to the challenge, indifferent to the antagonist, and disdainful of the occasion.

‘We have too little of your enthusiasm for the flag,’ Philip said to Mr. Rumford to soothe him, in a form of apology for his relative.

‘Surely no! not in England?’ said Mr. Rumford, tempted to open his heart, for he could be a bellicose gentleman by deputy of the flag. He recollected that the speaker was a cousin of Captain Con’s, and withdrew into his wound for safety. ’Here and there, perhaps; not when we are roused; we want rousing, we greatly prefer to live at peace with the world, if the world will let us.’

‘Not at any price?’ Philip fancied his tone too quakerly.

‘Indeed I am not one of that party!’ said Mr. Rumford, beginning to glow; but he feared a snare, and his wound drew him in again.

‘When are you ever at peace!’ quoth his host, shocked by the inconsiderate punctuality of Mrs. Adister O’Donnell’s household, for here was the coffee coming round, and Mattock and Rockney escaping without a scratch. ’There’s hardly a day in the year when your scarlet mercenaries are not popping at niggers.’

Rockney had the flick on the cheek to his manhood now, it might be hoped.

‘Our what?’ asked Mr. Rumford, honestly unable to digest the opprobrious term.

’Paid soldiery, hirelings, executioners, whom you call volunteers, by a charming euphemism, and send abroad to do the work of war while you propound the doctrines of peace at home.’

Rockney’s forehead was exquisitely eruptive, red and swelling. Mattock lurched on his chair. The wine was in them, and the captain commended the spiriting of it, as Prospero his Ariel.

Who should intervene at this instant but the wretched Philip, pricked on the point of honour as a soldier! Are we inevitably to be thwarted by our own people?

‘I suppose we all work for pay,’ said he. ’It seems to me a cry of the streets to call us by hard names. The question is what we fight for.’

He spoke with a witless moderation that was most irritating, considering the latest news from the old country.

‘You fight to subjugate, to enslave,’ said Con, ’that’s what you’re doing, and at the same time your journals are venting their fine irony at the Austrians and the Russians and the Prussians for tearing Poland to strips with their bloody beaks.’

‘We obey our orders, and leave you to settle the political business,’ Philip replied.

Page 4307

Forbery declined the fray. Patrick was eagerly watchful and dumb. Rockney finished his coffee with a rap of the cup in the saucer, an appeal for the close of the sitting; and as Dr. Forbery responded to it by pushing back his chair, he did likewise, and the other made a movement.

The disappointed hero of a fight unfought had to give the signal for rising. Double the number of the ten minutes had elapsed. He sprang up, hearing Rockney say: ‘Captain Con O’Donnell is a politician or nothing,’ and as he was the most placable of men concerning his personality, he took it lightly, with half a groan that it had not come earlier, and said, ‘He thinks and he feels, poor fellow!’

All hope of a general action was over.

‘That shall pass for the epitaph of the living,’ said Rockney.

It was too late to catch at a trifle to strain it to a tussle. Con was obliged to subjoin: ‘Inscribe it on the dungeon-door of tyranny.’ But the note was peaceful.

He expressed a wish that the fog had cleared for him to see the stars of heaven before he went to bed, informing Mr. Mattock that a long look in among them was often his prayer at night, and winter a holy season to him, for the reason of its showing them bigger and brighter.

’I can tell my wife with a conscience we’ve had a quiet evening, and you’re a witness to it,’ he said to Patrick. That consolation remained.

‘You know the secret of your happiness,’ Patrick answered.

’Know you one of the secrets of a young man’s fortune in life, and give us a thrilling song at the piano, my son,’ said Con: ’though we don’t happen to have much choice of virgins for ye to-night. Irish or French. Irish are popular. They don’t mind having us musically. And if we’d go on joking to the end we should content them, if only by justifying their opinion that we’re born buffoons.’

His happy conscience enabled him to court his wife with assiduity and winsomeness, and the ladies were once more elated by seeing how chivalrously lover-like an Irish gentleman can be after years of wedlock.

Patrick was asked to sing. Miss Mattock accompanied him at the piano. Then he took her place on the music-stool, and she sang, and with an electrifying splendour of tone and style.

‘But it’s the very heart of an Italian you sing with!’ he cried.

‘It will surprise you perhaps to hear that I prefer German music,’ said she.

‘But where—who had the honour of boasting you his pupil?’

She mentioned a famous master. Patrick had heard of him in Paris. He begged for another song and she complied, accepting the one he selected as the favourite of his brother Philip’s, though she said: ‘That one?’ with a superior air. It was a mellifluous love-song from a popular Opera somewhat out of date. ‘Well, it’s in Italian!’ she summed up her impressions of the sickly words while scanning them for delivery.

Page 4308

She had no great admiration of the sentimental Sicilian composer, she confessed, yet she sang as if possessed by him. Had she, Patrick thought, been bent upon charming Philip, she could not have thrown more fire into the notes. And when she had done, after thrilling the room, there was a gesture in her dismissal of the leaves displaying critical loftiness. Patrick noticed it and said, with the thrill of her voice lingering in him: 'What is it you do like? I should so like to know.'

She was answering when Captain Con came up to the piano and remarked in an undertone to Patrick: 'How is it you hit on the song Adiante Adister used to sing?'

Miss Mattock glanced at Philip. He had applauded her mechanically, and it was not that circumstance which caused the second rush of scarlet over her face. This time she could track it definitely to its origin. A lover's favourite song is one that has been sung by his love. She detected herself now in the full apprehension of the fact before she had sung a bar: it had been a very dim fancy: and she denounced herself guilty of the knowledge that she was giving pain by singing the stuff fervidly, in the same breath that accused her of never feeling things at the right moment vividly. The reminiscences of those pale intuitions made them always affectingly vivid.

But what vanity in our emotional state in a great jarring world where we are excused for continuing to seek our individual happiness only if we ally it and subordinate it to the well being of our fellows! The interjection was her customary specific for the cure of these little tricks of her blood. Leaving her friend Miss Barrow at the piano, she took a chair in a corner and said; 'Now, Mr. O'Donnell, you will hear the music that moves me.'

'But it's not to be singing,' said Patrick. 'And how can you sing so gloriously what you don't care for? It puzzles me completely.'

She assured him she was no enigma: she hushed to him to hear.

He dropped his underlip, keeping on the conversation with his eyes until he was caught by the masterly playing of a sonata by the chief of the poets of sound.

He was caught by it, but he took the close of the introductory section, an allegro con brio, for the end, and she had to hush at him again, and could not resist smiling at her lullaby to the prattler. Patrick smiled in response. Exchanges of smiles upon an early acquaintance between two young people are peeps through the doorway of intimacy. She lost sight of the Jesuit. Under the influence of good music, too, a not unfavourable inclination towards the person sitting beside us and sharing that sweetness, will soften general prejudices—if he was Irish, he was boyishly Irish, not like his inscrutable brother; a better, or hopefuller edition of Captain Con; one with whom something could be done to steady him, direct him, improve him. He might be taught to appreciate Beethoven and work for his fellows. 'Now does not that touch you more deeply than the Italian?' said she, delicately mouthing: 'I, mio tradito amor!'

Page 4309

‘Touch, I don’t know,’ he was honest enough to reply. ’It’s you that haven’t given it a fair chance I’d like to hear it again. There’s a forest on fire in it.’

‘There is,’ she exclaimed. ’I have often felt it, but never seen it. You exactly describe it. How true!’

‘But any music I could listen to all day and all the night,’ said he.

‘And be as proud of yourself the next morning?’

Patrick was rather at sea. What could she mean?

Mrs. Adister O’Donnell stepped over to them, with the object of installing Colonel Adister in Patrick’s place.

The object was possibly perceived. Mrs. Adister was allowed no time to set the manoeuvre in motion.

’Mr. O’Donnell is a great enthusiast for music, and could listen to it all day and all night, he tells me,’ said Miss Mattock. ’Would he not sicken of it in a week, Mrs. Adister?’

‘But why should I?’ cried Patrick. ‘It’s a gift of heaven.’

‘And, like other gifts of heaven, to the idle it would turn to evil.’

‘I can’t believe it.’

‘Work, and you will believe it.’

’But, Miss Mattock, I want to work; I’m empty-handed. It ’s true I want to travel and see a bit of the world to help me in my work by and by. I’m ready to try anything I can do, though.’

‘Has it ever struck you that you might try to help the poor?’

‘Arthur is really anxious, and only doubts his ability,’ said Mrs. Adister.

‘The doubt throws a shadow on the wish,’ said Miss Mattock. ’And can one picture Colonel Adister the secretary of a Laundry Institution, receiving directions from Grace and me! We should have to release him long before the six months’ term, when we have resolved to incur the expense of a salaried secretary.’

Mrs. Adister turned her head to the colonel, who was then looking down the features of Mrs. Rockney.

Patrick said: ‘I’m ready, for a year, Miss Mattock.’

She answered him, half jocosely: ’A whole year of free service? Reflect on what you are undertaking.’

‘It’s writing and accounts, no worse?’

’Writing and accounts all day, and music in the evening only now and then.’

‘I can do it: I will, if you’ll have me.’

‘Do you hear Mr. O’Donnell, Mrs. Adister?’

Captain Con fluttered up to his wife, and heard the story from Miss Mattock.

He fancied he saw a thread of good luck for Philip in it. ’Our house could be Patrick’s home capitally,’ he suggested to his wife. She was not a whit less hospitable, only hinting that she thought the refusal of the post was due to Arthur.

’And if he accepts, imagine him on a stool, my dear madam; he couldn’t sit it!’

Miss Mattock laughed. ’No, that is not to be thought of seriously. And with Mr. O’Donnell it would be probationary for the first fortnight or month. Does he know anything about steam?’

Page 4310

‘The rudimentary idea,’ said Patrick.

‘That’s good for a beginning,’ said the captain; and he added: ’Miss Mattock, I’m proud if one of my family can be reckoned worthy of assisting in your noble work.’

She replied: ’I warn everybody that they shall be taken at their word if they volunteer their services.’

She was bidden to know by the captain that the word of an Irish gentleman was his bond. ’And not later than to-morrow evening I’ll land him at your office. Besides, he’ll find countrywomen of his among you, and there’s that to enliven him. You say they work well, diligently, intelligently.’

She deliberated. ’Yes, on the whole; when they take to their work. Intelligently certainly compared with our English. We do not get the best of them in London. For that matter, we do not get the best of the English—not the women of the north. We have to put up with the rejected of other and better-paying departments of work. It breaks my heart sometimes to see how near they are to doing well, but for such a little want of ballast.’

‘If they’re Irish,’ said Patrick, excited by the breaking of her heart, ‘a whisper of cajolery in season is often the secret.’

Captain Con backed him for diplomacy. ’You’ll learn he has a head, Miss Mattock.’

‘I am myself naturally blunt, and prefer the straightforward method,’ said she.

Patrick nodded. ’But where there’s an obstruction in the road, it’s permissible to turn a corner.’

’Take ’em in flank when you can’t break their centre,’ said Con.

’Well, you shall really try whether you can endure the work for a short time if you are in earnest,’ Miss Mattock addressed the volunteer.

‘But I am,’ he said.

‘We are too poor at present to refuse the smallest help.’

‘And mine is about the smallest.’

‘I did not mean that, Mr. O’Donnell.’

‘But you’ll have me?’

‘Gladly.’

Captain Con applauded the final words between them. They had the genial ring, though she accepted the wrong young man for but a shadow of the right sort of engagement.

This being settled, by the sudden combination of enthusiastic Irish impulse and benevolent English scheming, she very considerately resigned herself to Mrs. Adister's lead and submitted herself to a further jolting in the unprogressive conversational coach with Colonel Adister, whose fault as a driver was not in avoiding beaten ways, but whipping wooden horses.

Evidently those two were little adapted to make the journey of life together, though they were remarkably fine likenesses of a pair in the dead midway of the journey, Captain Con reflected, and he could have jumped at the thought of Patrick's cleverness: it was the one bright thing of the evening. There was a clear gain in it somewhere. And if there was none, Jane Mattock was a good soul worth saving. Why not all the benefaction on our side, and a figo for rewards! Devotees or adventurers, he was ready in imagination to see his cousins play the part of either, as the cross-roads offered, the heavens appeared to decree. We turn to the right or the left, and this way we're voluntary drudges, and that way we're lucky dogs; it's all according to the turn, the fate of it. But never forget that old Ireland is weeping!

Page 4311

O never forget that old Ireland is weeping
The bitter salt tears of the mother bereft!

He hummed the spontaneous lines. He was accused of singing to himself, and a song was vigorously demanded of him by the ladies.

He shook his head. ‘I can’t,’ he sighed. ’I was plucking the drowned body of a song out of the waters to give it decent burial. And if I sing I shall be charged with casting a firebrand at Mr. Rockney.’

Rockney assured him that he could listen to anything in verse.

‘Observe the sneer:—for our verses are smoke,’ said Con.

Miss Mattock pressed him to sing.

But he had saddened his mind about old Ireland: the Irish news weighed heavily on him, unrelieved by a tussle with Rockney. If he sang, it would be an Irish song, and he would break down in it, he said; and he hinted at an objection of his wife’s to spirited Irish songs of the sort which carry the sons of Erin bounding over the fences of tyranny and the brook of tears. And perhaps Mr. Rockney might hear a tale in verse as hard to bear as he sometimes found Irish prose!—Miss Mattock perceived that his depression was genuine, not less than his desire to please her. ’Then it shall be on another occasion,’ she said.

‘Oh! on another occasion I’m the lark to the sky, my dear lady.’

Her carriage was announced. She gave Patrick a look, with a smile, for it was to be a curious experiment. He put on the proper gravity of a young man commissioned, without a dimple of a smile. Philip bowed to her stiffly, as we bow to a commanding officer who has insulted us and will hear of it. But for that, Con would have manoeuvred against his wife to send him downstairs at the lady’s heels. The fellow was a perfect riddle, hard to read as the zebra lines on the skin of a wild jackass—if Providence intended any meaning when she traced them! and it’s a moot point: as it is whether some of our poets have meaning and are not composers of zebra. ‘No one knows but them above!’ he said aloud, apparently to his wife.

‘What can you be signifying?’ she asked him. She had deputed Colonel Arthur to conduct Miss Mattock and Miss Barrow to their carriage, and she supposed the sentence might have a mysterious reference to the plan she had formed; therefore it might be a punishable offence. Her small round eyes were wide-open, her head was up and high.

She was easily appeased, too easily.

‘The question of rain, madam,’ he replied to her repetition of his words. ’I dare say that was what I had in my mind, hearing Mr. Mattock and Mr. Rockney agree to walk in company to their clubs.’

Page 4312

He proposed to them that they should delay the march on a visit to his cabin near the clouds. They were forced to decline his invitation to the gentle lion's mouth; as did Mr. Rumford, very briskly and thankfully. Mr. Rockney was taken away by Mr. and Mrs. Marbury Dyke. So the party separated, and the Englishmen were together, and the Irishmen together; and hardly a syllable relating to the Englishmen did the Irishmen say, beyond an allusion to an accident to John Mattock's yacht off the Irish west-coast last autumn; but the Irishmen were subjected to some remarks by the Englishmen, wherein their qualities as individuals and specimens of a race were critically and neatly packed. Common sense is necessarily critical in its collision with vapours, and the conscious possessors of an exclusive common sense are called on to deliver a summary verdict, nor is it an unjust one either, if the verdict be taken simply for an estimate of what is presented upon the plain surface of to-day. Irishmen are queer fellows, never satisfied, thirsting for a shindy. Some of them get along pretty well in America. The air of their Ireland intoxicates them. They require the strong hand: fair legislation, but no show of weakness. Once let them imagine you are afraid of them, and they see perfect independence in their grasp. And what would be the spectacle if they were to cut themselves loose from England? The big ship might be inconvenienced by the loss of the tender; the tender would fall adrift on the Atlantic, with pilot and captain at sword and pistol, the crew playing Donnybrook freely. Their cooler heads are shrewd enough to see the folly, but it catches the Irish fancy to rush to the extreme, and we have allowed it to be supposed that it frightens us. There is the capital blunder, fons et origo.

Their leaders now pretend to work upon the Great Scale; they demand everything on the spot upon their own interpretation of equity. Concessions, hazy speeches, and the puling nonsense of our present Government, have encouraged them so far and got us into the mess. Treat them as policemen treat highwaymen: give them the law: and the law must be tightened, like the hold on a rogue by his collar, if they kick at it. Rockney was for sharp measures in repression, fair legislation in due course.

'Fair legislation upon your own interpretation of fair,' said Mattock, whose party opposed Rockney's. 'As to repression, you would have missed that instructive scene this evening at Con O'Donnell's table, if you had done him the kindness to pick up his glove. It 's wisest to let them exhaust their energies upon one another. Hold off, and they're soon at work.'

'What kind of director of a City Company does he make?' said Rockney.

Mattock bethought him that, on the whole, strange to say, Con O'Donnell comported himself decorously as a director, generally speaking on the reasonable side, not without shrewdness: he seemed to be sobered by the money question.

Page 4313

‘That wife of his is the salvation of him,’ Rockney said, to account for the Captain’s shrewdness. ’She manages him cleverly. He knows the length of his line. She’s a woman of principle, and barring the marriage, good sense too. His wife keeps him quiet, or we should be hearing of him. Forbery ’s a more dangerous man. There’s no intentional mischief in Con O’Donnell; it’s only effervescence. I saw his game, and declined to uncork him. He talks of a niece of his wife’s: have you ever seen her?—-married to some Servian or Roumanian prince.’

Mattock answered: ‘Yes.’

‘Is she such a beauty?’

Again Mattock answered: ‘Yes,’ after affecting thoughtfulness.

‘They seem to marry oddly in that family.’

Mattock let fly a short laugh at the remark, which had the ring of some current phrase. ‘They do,’ he said.

Next morning Jane Mattock spoke to her brother of her recruit. He entirely trusted to her discretion; the idea of a young Irish secretary was rather comical, nevertheless. He had his joke about it, requesting to have a sight of the secretary’s books at the expiry of the week, which was the length of time he granted this ardent volunteer for evaporating and vanishing.

‘If it releases poor Grace for a week, it will be useful to us,’ Jane said. ’Women are educated so shamefully that we have not yet found one we can rely on as a competent person. And Mr. O’Donnell—did you notice him? I told you I met him a day or two back—seems willing to be of use. It cannot hurt him to try. Grace has too much on her hands.’

‘She has a dozen persons.’

‘They are zealous when they are led.’

‘Beware of letting them suspect that they are led.’

‘They are anxious to help the poor if they can discover how.’

‘Good men, I don’t doubt,’ said John Mattock. ’Any proposals from curates recently?’

’Not of late. Captain O’Donnell, the brother of our secretary, is handsomer, but we do not think him so trustworthy. Did you observe him at all?—he sat by me. He has a conspirator’s head.’

‘What is that?’ her brother asked her.

‘Only a notion of mine.’

She was directed to furnish a compendious report of the sayings, doings, and behaviour of the Irish secretary in the evening.

‘If I find him there,’ she said.

Her brother was of opinion that Mr. Patrick O’Donnell would be as good as his word, and might be expected to appear there while the novelty lasted.

CHAPTER XV

THE MATTOCK FAMILY

Page 4314

That evening's report of the demeanour of the young Irish secretary in harness was not so exhilarating as John Mattock had expected, and he inclined to think his sister guilty of casting her protecting veil over the youth. It appeared that Mr. O'Donnell had been studious of his duties, had spoken upon no other topic, had asked pertinent questions, shown no flippancy, indulged in no extravagances. He seemed, Jane said, eager to master details. A certain eagerness of her own in speaking of it sharpened her clear features as if they were cutting through derision. She stated it to propitiate her brother, as it might have done but for the veracious picture of Patrick in the word 'eager,' which pricked the scepticism of a practical man. He locked his mouth, looking at her with a twinkle she refused to notice. 'Determined to master details' he could have accepted. One may be determined to find a needle in a dust-heap; one does not with any stiffness of purpose go at a dust-heap eagerly. Hungry men have eaten husks; they have not betrayed eagerness for such dry stuff. Patrick's voracity after details exhibited a doubtfully genuine appetite, and John deferred his amusement until the termination of the week or month when his dear good Jane would visit the office to behold a vacated seat, or be assailed by the customary proposal. Irishmen were not likely to be far behind curates in besieging an heiress. For that matter, Jane was her own mistress and could very well take care of herself; he had confidence in her wisdom.

He was besides of an unsuspicious and an unexacting temperament. The things he would strongly object to he did not specify to himself because he was untroubled by any forethought of them. Business, political, commercial and marine, left few vacancies in his mind other than for the pleasures he could command and enjoy. He surveyed his England with a ruddy countenance, and saw the country in the reflection. His England saw much of itself in him. Behind each there was more, behind the country a great deal more, than could be displayed by a glass. The salient features wore a resemblance. Prosperity and heartiness; a ready hand on, and over, a full purse; a recognised ability of the second-rate order; a stout hold of patent principles; inherited and embraced, to make the day secure and supply a somniferous pillow for the night; occasional fits of anxiety about affairs, followed by an illuminating conviction that the world is a changing one and our construction not of granite, nevertheless that a justifiable faith in the ship, joined to a constant study of the chart, will pull us through, as it has done before, despite all assaults and underminings of the common enemy and the particular; these, with the humorous indifference of familiarity and constitutional annoyances, excepting when they grew acute and called for drugs, and with friendliness to the race of man of both colours, in the belief that our Creator originally composed in black and white, together with a liking for matters on their present footing in slow motion, partly under his conductorship, were the prominent characteristics of the grandson of the founder of the house, who had built it from a spade.

Page 4315

The story of the building was notorious; popular books for the inciting of young Englishmen to dig to fortune had a place for it among the chapters, where we read of the kind of man, and the means by which the country has executed its later giant strides of advancement. The first John Mattock was a representative of his time; he moved when the country was moving, and in the right direction, finding himself at the auspicious moment upon a line of rail. Elsewhere he would have moved, we may suppose, for the spade-like virtues bear their fruits; persistent and thrifty, solid and square, will fetch some sort of yield out of any soil; but he would not have gone far. The Lord, to whom an old man of a mind totally Hebrew ascribed the plenitude of material success, the Lord and he would have reared a garden in the desert; in proximity to an oasis, still on the sands, against obstacles. An accumulation of upwards of four hundred thousand pounds required, as the moral of the popular books does not sufficiently indicate, a moving country, an ardent sphere, to produce the sum: and since, where so much was done, we are bound to conceive others at work as well as he, it seems to follow that the exemplar outstripping them vastly must have profited by situation at the start, which is a lucky accident; and an accident is an indigestible lump in a moral tale, real though the story be. It was not mentioned in the popular books; nor did those worthy guides to the pursuit of wealth contain any reminder of old John Mattock's dependence upon the conjoint labour of his fellows to push him to his elevation. As little did they think of foretelling a day, generations hence, when the empty heirs of his fellows might prefer a modest claim (confused in statement) to compensation against the estate he bequeathed: for such prophecy as that would have hinted at a tenderness for the mass to the detriment of the individual, and such tenderness as that is an element of our religion, not the drift of our teaching.

He grumbled at the heavy taxation of his estate during life: yearly this oppressed old man paid thousands of pounds to the Government. It was poor encouragement to shoulder and elbow your way from a hovel to a mansion!

He paid the money, dying sour; a splendid example of energy on the road, a forbidding one at the terminus. And here the moral of the popular books turned aside from him to snatch at humanity for an instance of our frailness and dealt in portentous shadows:—-we are, it should be known, not the great creatures we assume ourselves to be. Six months before his death he appeared in the garb of a navvy, humbly soliciting employment at his own house-door. There he appealed to the white calves of his footmen for a day's work, upon the plea that he had never been a democrat.

Page 4316

The scene had been described with humanely-moralising pathos in the various books of stories of Men who have come to Fortune, and it had for a length of seasons an annual position in the foremost rank (on the line, facing the door) in our exhibition of the chosen artists, where, as our popular words should do, it struck the spectator's eye and his brain simultaneously with pugilistic force: a reference to the picture in the catalogue furnishing a recapitulation of the incident. 'I've worked a good bit in my time, gentlemen, and I baint done yet':—*See professor* SUMMIT'S '*men who have come to fortune*.' There is, we perceive at a glance, a contrast in the bowed master of the Mansion applying to his menials for a day's work at the rate of pay to able-bodied men:—which he is not, but the deception is not disingenuous. The contrast flashed with the rapid exchange of two prizefighters in a ring, very popularly. The fustian suit and string below the knee, on the one side, and the purple plush breeches and twinkling airy calves (fascinating his attention as he makes his humble request to his own, these domestic knights) to right and left of the doorway and in front, hit straight out of the canvas. And as quickly as you perceive the contrast you swallow the moral. The dreaded thing is down in a trice, to do what salutary work it may within you. That it passed into the blood of England's middle-class population, and set many heads philosophically shaking, and filled the sails of many a sermon, is known to those who lived in days when Art and the classes patronising our Native Art existed happily upon the terms of venerable School-Dame and studious pupils, before the sickly era displacing Exhibitions full of meaning for tricks of colour, monstrous atmospherical vagaries that teach nothing, strange experiments on the complexion of the human face divine—the feminine hyper-aethereally. Like the first John Mattock, it was formerly of, and yet by dint of sturdy energy, above the people. They learnt from it; they flocked to it thirsting and retired from it thoughtful, with some belief of having drunk of nature in art, as you will see the countless troops of urchins about the one cow of London, in the Great City's Green Park.

A bequest to the nation of the best of these pictures of Old John, by a very old Yorkshire collector, makes it milk for all time, a perpetual contrast, and a rebuke. Compared with the portrait of Jane Mattock in her fiery aureole of hair on the walls of the breakfast-room, it marks that fatal period of degeneracy for us, which our critics of Literature as well as Art are one voice in denouncing, when the complex overwhelms the simple, and excess of signification is attempted, instead of letting plain nature speak her uncorrupted tongue to the contemplative mind. Degeneracy is the critical history of the Arts. Jane's hair was of a reddish gold-inwoven cast that would, in

Page 4317

her grandfather's epoch, have shone unambiguously as carrots. The girl of his day thus adorned by Nature, would have been shown wearing her ridiculous crown with some decent sulkiness; and we should not have had her so unsparingly crowned; the truth would have been told in a dexterous concealment—a rope of it wound up for a bed of the tortoise-shell comb behind, and a pair of tight cornucopias at the temples. What does our modern artist do but flare it to right and left, lift it wavily over her forehead, revel in the oriental superabundance, and really seem to swear we shall admire it, against our traditions of the vegetable, as a poetical splendour. The head of the heiress is in a Jovian shower. Marigolds are in her hand. The whole square of canvas is like a meadow on the borders of June. It causes blinking.

Her brother also is presented: a fine portrait of him, with clipped red locks, in blue array, smiling, wearing the rose of briny breezes, a telescope under his left arm, his right forefinger on a map, a view of Spitzbergen through a cabin-window: for John had notions about the north-west passage, he had spent a winter in the ice, and if an amateur, was not the less a true sailor.

With his brass-buttoned blue coat, and his high coloured cheeks, and his convict hair—-a layer of brickdust—and his air of princely wealth, and the icebergs and hummocks about him, he looks for adventure without a thought of his heroism—the country all over.

There he stands, a lover of the sea, and a scientific seaman and engineer to boot, practical in every line of his face, defying mankind to suspect that he cherishes a grain of romance. On the wall, just above his shoulder, is a sketch of a Viking putting the lighted brand to his ship in mid sea, and you are to understand that his time is come and so should a Viking die: further, if you will, the subject is a modern Viking, ready for the responsibilities of the title. Sketches of our ancient wooden walls and our iron and plated defences line the panellings. These degenerate artists do work hard for their money.

The portrait of John's father, dated a generation back, is just the man and little else, phantomly the man. His brown coat struggles out of the obscurity of the background, but it is chiefly background clothing him. His features are distinguishable and delicate: you would suppose him appearing to you under the beams of a common candle, or cottage coalfire—ferruginously opaque. The object of the artist (apart from the triumph of tone on the canvas) is to introduce him as an elegant and faded gentleman, rather retiring into darkness than emerging. He is the ghost of the painter's impasto. Yet this is Ezra Mattock, who multipled the inheritance of the hundreds of thousands into millions, and died, after covering Europe, Asia, and the Americas with iron rails, one of the few Christians that can hold up their heads beside the banking Jew as magnates in the lists of

Page 4318

gold. The portrait is clearly no frontispiece of his qualities. He married an accomplished and charitable lady, and she did not spoil the stock in refining it. His life passed quietly; his death shook the country: for though it had been known that he had been one of our potentates, how mightily he was one had not entered into the calculations of the public until the will of the late Ezra Mattock, cited in our prints, received comments from various newspaper articles. A chuckle of collateral satisfaction ran through the empire. All England and her dependencies felt the state of cousinship with the fruits of energy; and it was an agreeable sentiment, coming opportunely, as it did, at the tail of articles that had been discussing a curious manifestation of late—to-wit, the awakening energy of the foreigner—a prodigious apparition on our horizon. Others were energetic too! We were not, the sermon ran, to imagine we were without rivals in the field. We were possessed of certain positive advantages; we had coal, iron, and an industrious population, but we were, it was to be feared, by no means a thrifty race, and there was reason for doubt whether in the matter of industry we were quite up to the mark of our forefathers. No deterioration of the stock was apprehended, still the nation must be accused of a lack of vigilance. We must look round us, and accept the facts as they stood. So accustomed had we become to the predominance of our position that it was difficult at first to realise a position of rivalry that threatened our manufacturing interests in their hitherto undisputed lead in the world's markets. The tale of our exports for the last five years conveys at once its moral and its warning. Statistics were then cited.

As when the gloomy pedagogue has concluded his exhortation, statistics birched the land. They were started at our dinner-tables, and scourged the social converse. Not less than in the articles, they were perhaps livelier than in the preface; they were distressing nevertheless; they led invariably to the question of our decadence. Carthage was named; a great mercantile community absolutely obliterated! Senatorial men were led to propose in their thoughtfullest tones that we should turn our attention to Art. Why should we not learn to excel in Art? We excelled in Poetry. Our Poets were cited: not that there was a notion that poems would pay as an export but to show that if we excel in one of the Arts we may in others of them. The poetry was not cited, nor was it necessary, the object being to inflate the balloon of paradox with a light-flying gas, and prove a poem-producing people to be of their nature born artists; if they did but know it. The explosion of a particular trade points to your taking up another. Energy is adapted to flourish equally in every branch of labour.

Page 4319

It is the genius of the will, commanding all the crossroads. A country breeding hugely must prove its energy likewise in the departments of the mind, or it will ultimately be unable to feed its young—nay, to feast its aldermen! Let us be up and alive.—Such was the exhortation of a profound depression. Outside these dismal assemblies, in the streets, an ancient song of raven recurrence croaked of 'Old England a-going down the hill'; for there is a link of electricity between the street-boy and the leading article in days when the Poles exchange salutations.

Mr. Ezra's legacy of his millions to son and daughter broke like a golden evening on the borders of the raincloud. Things could not be so bad when a plain untitled English gentleman bequeathed in the simplest manner possible such giant heaps, a very Pelion upon Ossa, of wealth to his children. The minds of the readers of journals were now directed to think of the hoarded treasures of this favoured country. They might approximately be counted, but even if counted they would be past conception, like the sidereal system. The contemplation of a million stupefies: consider the figures of millions and millions! Articles were written on Lombard Street, the world's gold-mine, our granary of energy, surpassing all actual and fabulous gold-mines ever spoken of: Aladdin's magician would find his purse contracting and squeaking in the comparison. Then, too, the store of jewels held by certain private families called for remark and an allusion to Sindbad the sailor, whose eyes were to dilate wider than they did in the valley of diamonds. Why, we could, if we pleased, lie by and pass two or three decades as jolly cricketers and scullers, and resume the race for wealth with the rest of mankind, hardly sensible of the holiday in our pockets though we were the last people to do it, we were the sole people that had the option. Our Fortunatus' cap was put to better purposes, but to have the cap, and not to be emasculated by the possession, might excuse a little reasonable pride in ourselves.

Thus did Optimism and Pessimism have their turn, like the two great parties in the State, and the subsiding see-saw restored a proper balance, much to the nation's comfort. Unhappily, it was remembered, there are spectators of its method of getting to an equipoise out of the agitation of extremes. The peep at our treasures to regain composure had, we fear, given the foreigner glimpses, and whetted the appetite of our masses. No sooner are we at peace than these are heard uttering low howls, and those are seen enviously glaring. The spectre, Panic, that ever dogs the optimistic feast, warns us of a sack under our beds, and robbers about to try a barely-bolted door. . . Then do we, who have so sweetly sung our senses to sleep, start up, in their grip, rush to the doctor and the blacksmith, rig alarums, proclaim ourselves intestinally torn, defenceless, a prey to foes within and without. It is discovered to be no worse than an alderman's dream, but the pessimist frenzy of the night has tossed a quieting sop to the Radical, and summoned the volunteers to a review. Laudatory articles upon the soldierly 'march past' of our volunteers permit of a spell of soft repose, deeper than prudent, at the end of it, India and Ireland consenting.

Page 4320

So much for a passing outline of John Bull—the shadow on the wall of John Mattock. The unostentatious millionaire's legacy to his two children affected Mr. Bull thrillingly, pretty nearly as it has here been dotted in lining. That is historical. Could he believe in the existence of a son of his, a master of millions, who had never sighed (and he had only to sigh) to die a peer, or a baronet, or simple Knight? The downright hard-nailed coffin fact was there; the wealthiest man in the country had flown away to Shadowland a common Mr.! You see the straight deduction from the circumstances:—we are, say what you will, a Republican people! Newspaper articles on the watch sympathetically for Mr. Bull's latest view of himself, preached on the theme of our peculiar Republicanism. Soon after he was observed fondling the Crown Insignia. His bards flung out their breezy columns, reverentially monarchial. The Republican was informed that they were despised as a blatant minority. A maudlin fit of worship of our nobility had hold of him next, and English aristocracy received the paean. Lectures were addressed to democrats; our House of Lords was pledged solemnly in reams of print. We were told that 'blood' may always be betted on to win the race; blood that is blue will beat the red hollow. Who could pretend to despise the honour of admission to the ranks of the proudest peerage the world has known! Is not a great territorial aristocracy the strongest guarantee of national stability? The loudness of the interrogation, like the thunder of Jove, precluded thought of an answer.

Mr. Bull, though he is not of lucid memory, kept an eye on the owner of those millions. His bards were awake to his anxiety, and celebrated John Mattock's doings with a trump and flourish somewhat displeasing to a quietly-disposed commoner. John's entry into Parliament as a Liberal was taken for a sign of steersman who knew where the tide ran. But your Liberals are sometimes Radicals in their youth, and his choice of parties might not be so much sagacity as an instance of unripe lightheadedness. A young conservative millionaire is less disturbing. The very wealthy young peer is never wanton in his politics, which seems to admonish us that the heir of vast wealth should have it imposed on him to accept a peerage, and be locked up as it were. A coronet steadies the brain. You may let out your heels at the social laws, you are almost expected to do it, but you are to shake that young pate of yours restively under such a splendid encumbrance. Private reports of John, however, gave him credit for sound opinions: he was moderate, merely progressive. When it was added that the man had the habit of taking counsel with his sister, he was at once considered as fast and safe, not because of any public knowledge of the character of Jane Mattock. We pay this homage to the settled common sense of women. Distinctly does she discountenance leaps in the dark, wild driving, and the freaks of Radicalism.

Page 4321

John, as it happened, had not so grave a respect for the sex as for the individual Jane. He thought women capable of acts of foolishness; his bright-faced sister he could thoroughly trust for prudent conduct. He gave her a good portion of his heart in confidence, and all of it in affection. There were matters which he excluded from confidence, even from intimate communication with himself. These he could not reveal; nor could she perfectly open her heart to him, for the same reason. They both had an established ideal of their personal qualities, not far above the positive, since they were neither of them pretentious, yet it was a trifle higher and fairer than the working pattern; and albeit they were sincere enough, quite sincere in their mutual intercourse, they had, by what each knew at times of the thumping organ within them, cause for doubting that they were as transparent as the other supposed; and they were separately aware of an inward smile at one another's partial deception; which did not thwart their honest power of working up to the respected ideal. The stroke of the deeper self-knowledge rarely shook them; they were able to live with full sensations in the animated picture they were to the eyes best loved by them. This in fact was their life. Anything beside it was a dream, and we do not speak of our dreams—not of every dream. Especially do we reserve our speech concerning the dream in which we had a revelation of the proud frame deprived of a guiding will, flung rudderless on the waves. Ah that abject! The dismantled ship has the grandeur of the tempest about it, but the soul swayed by passion is ignominiously bare-poled, detected, hooted by its old assumption. If instinct plays fantastical tricks when we are sleeping, let it be ever behind a curtain. We can be held guilty only if we court exposure. The ideal of English gentleman and gentlewoman is closely Roman in the self-repression it exacts, and that it should be but occasionally difficult to them shows an affinity with the type. Do you perchance, O continental observers of the race, call it hypocritical? It is their nature disciplined to the regimental step of civilisation. Socially these island men and women of a certain middle rank are veterans of an army, and some of the latest enrolled are the stoutest defenders of the flag.

Brother and sister preserved their little secrets of character apart. They could not be expected to unfold what they declined personally to examine. But they were not so successful with the lady governing the household, their widowed maternal aunt, Mrs. Lackstraw, a woman of decisive penetration, and an insubordinate recruit of the army aforesaid. To her they were without a mask; John was passion's slave, Jane the most romantic of Eve's daughters. She pointed to incidents of their youth; her vision was acutely retrospective. The wealth of her nephew and niece caused such a view of them to be, as she remarked, anxious past endurance. She had grounds

Page 4322

for fearing that John, who might step to an alliance with any one of the proudest houses in the Kingdom, would marry a beggar-maid. As for Jane, she was the natural prey of a threadbare poet. Mrs. Lackstraw heard of Mr. Patrick O'Donnell, and demanded the right to inspect him. She doubted such perfect disinterestedness in any young man as that he should slave at account-keeping to that Laundry without a prospect of rich remuneration, and the tale of his going down to the city for a couple of hours each day to learn the art of keeping books was of very dubious import in a cousin of Captain Con O'Donnell. 'Let me see your prodigy,' she said, with the emphasis on each word. Patrick was presented at her table. She had steeled herself against an Irish tongue. He spoke little, appeared simple, professed no enthusiasm for the Laundry. And he paid no compliments to Jane: of the two he was more interested by the elder lady, whose farm and dairy in Surrey he heard her tell of with a shining glance, observing that he liked thick cream: there was a touch of home in it. The innocent sensuality in the candid avowal of his tastes inspired confidence. Mrs. Lackstraw fished for some account of his home. He was open to flow on the subject; he dashed a few sketches of mother and sisters, dowerless girls, fresh as trout in the stream, and of his own poor estate, and the peasantry, with whom he was on friendly terms. He was an absentee for his education. Sweet water, pure milk, potatoes and bread, were the things he coveted in plenty for his people and himself, he said, calling forth an echo from Mrs. Lackstraw, and an invitation to come down to her farm in the Spring. 'That is, Mr. O'Donnell, if you are still in London.'

'Oh, I'm bound apprentice for a year,' said he.

He was asked whether he did not find it tiresome work.

'A trifle so,' he confessed.

Then why did he pursue it, the question was put.

He was not alive for his own pleasure, and would like to feel he was doing a bit of good, was the answer.

Could one, Mrs. Lackstraw asked herself, have faith in this young Irishman? He possessed an estate. His brogue rather added to his air of truthfulness. His easy manners and the occasional streak of correct French in his dialogue cast a shadow on it. Yet he might be an ingenuous creature precisely because of the suspicion roused by his quaint unworldliness that he might be a terrible actor. Why not?—his heart was evidently much more interested in her pursuits than in her niece's. The juvenility of him was catching, if it was indeed the man, and not one of the actor's properties. Mrs. Lackstraw thought it prudent to hint at the latter idea to Jane while she decided in her generosity to embrace the former. Oh! if all Irishmen shared his taste for sweet water, pure milk and wholesome bread, what a true Union we should have! She had always insisted on those three things as most to be desired on earth

Page 4323

for the masses, and she reminded Jane of it as a curious fact. Jane acquiesced, having always considered it a curious fact that her aunt should combine the relish of a country life with the intensest social ambition—a passion so sensitive as to make the name her husband had inflicted on her a pain and a burden. The name of Mattock gave her horrors. She spoke of it openly to prove that Jane must marry a title and John become a peer. Never was there such a name to smell of the soil. She declared her incapacity to die happy until the two had buried Mattock. Her own one fatal step condemned her, owing to the opinion she held upon the sacredness of marriage, as Lackstraw on her tombstone, and to Lackstraw above the earthly martyr would go bearing the designation which marked her to be claimed by him. But for John and Jane the index of Providence pointed a brighter passage through life. They had only to conquer the weakness native to them—the dreadful tendency downward. They had, in the spiritual sense, frail hearts. The girl had been secretive about the early activity of hers, though her aunt knew of two or three adventures wanting in nothing save boldness to have put an end to her independence and her prospects:—hence this Laundry business! a clear sign of some internal disappointment. The boy, however, had betrayed himself in his mother's days, when it required all her influence and his father's authority, with proof positive of the woman's unworthiness, to rescue him from immediate disaster.

Mrs. Lackstraw's confidences on the theme of the family she watched over were extended to Patrick during their strolls among the ducks and fowls and pheasants at her farm. She dealt them out in exclamations, as much as telling him that now they knew him they trusted him, notwithstanding the unaccountable part he played as honorary secretary to that Laundry. The confidences, he was aware, were common property of the visitors one after another, but he had the knowledge of his being trusted as not every Irishman would have been. A service of six months to the secretaryship established his reputation as the strange bird of a queer species: not much less quiet, honest, methodical, than an Englishman, and still impulsive, Irish still; a very strange bird.

The disposition of the English to love the children of Erin, when not fretted by them, was shown in the treatment Patrick received from the Mattock family. It is a love resembling the affection of the stage-box for a set of favourite performers, and Patrick, a Celt who had schooled his wits to observe and meditate, understood his position with them as one of the gallant and amusing race, as well as the reason why he had won their private esteem. They are not willingly suspicious: it agitates their minds to be so; and they are most easily lulled by the flattery of seeing their special virtues grafted on an alien stock: for in this admiration of virtues that are so necessary

Page 4324

to the stalwart growth of man, they become just sensible of a minor deficiency; the tree, if we jump out of it to examine its appearance, should not be all trunk. Six months of ungrudging unremunerated service, showing devotion to the good cause and perfect candour from first to last, was English, and a poetic touch beyond: so that John Mattock, if he had finished the sentence instead of lopping it with an interjection, would have said: 'These Irish fellows, when they're genuine and first rate!—are pretty well the pick of the land.' Perhaps his pause on the interjection expressed a doubt of our getting them genuine. Mr. O'Donnell was a sort of exceptional Irishman, not devoid of practical ability in a small way—he did his duties of secretary fairly well; apparently sincere—he had refrained from courting Jane; an odd creature enough, what with his mixture of impulsiveness and discretion; likeable, pleasant to entertain and talk to; not one of your lunatics concerning his country—he could listen to an Englishman's opinion on that head, listen composedly to Rockney, merely seeming to take notes; and Rockney was, as Captain Con termed him, Press Dragoon about Ireland, a trying doctor for a child of the patient.

On the whole, John Mattock could shake his hand heartily when he was leaving our shores. Patrick was released by Miss Grace Barrow's discovery at last of a lady capable of filling his place: a circumstance that he did not pretend to regret. He relinquished his post and stood aside with the air of a disciplined soldier. This was at the expiration of seven months and two weeks of service. Only after he had gone, upon her receiving his first letter from the Continent, did Jane distinguish in herself the warmth of friendliness she felt for him, and know that of all around her she, reproaching every one who had hinted a doubt, had been the most suspicious of his pure simplicity. It was the vice of her condition to be suspicious of the honesty of men. She thought of her looks as less attractive than they were; of her wealth she had reason to think that the scent transformed our sad sex into dogs under various disguises. Remembering her chill once on hearing Patrick in a green lane where they botanised among spring flowers call himself her Irish cousin, as if he had advanced a step and betrayed the hoof, she called him her Irish cousin now in good earnest. Her nation was retrospectively enthusiastic. The cordiality of her letter of reply to the wandering Patrick astonished him on the part of so cool a young lady; and Captain Con, when he heard Miss Mattock speak of Patrick to his wife, came to the conclusion that the leery lad had gone a far way toward doing the trick for himself, though Jane said his correspondence was full of the deeds of his brother in India. She quite sparkled in speaking of this boy.

Page 4325

She and the captain had an interchange of sparklings over absent Patrick, at a discovery made by Miss Colesworth, the lady replacing him, in a nook of the amateur secretary's official desk, under heaps of pamphlets and slips, French and English and Irish journals, not at all bearing upon the business of the Laundry. It was a blotting-pad stuffed with Patrick's jottings. Jane brought it to Con as to the proper keeper of the reliquary. He persuaded her to join him in examining it, and together they bent their heads, turning leaf by leaf, facing, laughing, pursuing the search for more, sometimes freely shouting.

Her inspection of the contents had previously been shy; she had just enough to tell her they were funny. Dozens of scraps, insides of torn envelopes, invitation-cards, ends of bills received from home, whatever was handy to him at the moment, had done service for the overflow of Mr. Secretary's private notes and reflections; the blotting-paper as well; though that was devoted chiefly to sketches of the human countenance, the same being almost entirely of the fair. Jane fancied she spied herself among the number. Con saw the likeness, but not considering it a complimentary one, he whisked over the leaf. Grace Barrow was unmistakeable. Her dimpled cushion features, and very intent eyes gazing out of the knolls and dingles, were given without caricature. Miss Colesworth appeared on the last page, a half-length holding a big key, demure between curls. The key was explained by a cage on a stool, and a bird flying out. She had unlocked the cage for Patrick.

'He never seemed anxious to be released while he was at work,' said Jane, after she and the captain had spelt the symbolling in turns.

'And never thirsted to fly till he flew, I warrant him,' said Con.

A repeated sketch of some beauty confused them both; neither of them could guess the proud owner of those lineaments. Con proclaimed it to be merely one of the lad's recollections, perhaps a French face. He thought he might have seen a face rather resembling it, but could not call to mind whose face it was.

'I dare say it's just a youngster's dream on a stool at a desk, as poets write sonnets in their youth to nobody, till they're pierced by somebody, and then there's a difference in their handwriting,' he said, vexed with Patrick for squandering his opportunity to leave a compliment to the heiress behind him.

Jane flipped the leaves back to the lady with stormy hair.

'But you'll have the whole book, and hand it to him when he returns; it 'll come best from you,' said Con. 'The man on horseback, out of uniform, 's brother Philip, of course. And man and horse are done to the life. Pray, take it, Miss Mattock. I should lose it to a certainty; I should; I can't be trusted. You'll take it!'

He pressed her so warmly to retain the bundle in her custody that she carried it away.

Page 4326

Strange to say the things she had laughed at had been the things which struck her feelings and sympathies. Patrick's notes here and there recalled conversations he had more listened to than taken part in between herself and Grace Barrow. Who could help laughing at his ideas about women! But if they were crude, they were shrewd—or so she thought them; and the jejuneness was, to her mind, chiefly in the dressing of them. Grace agreed with her, for Grace had as good a right to inspect the papers as she, and a glance had shown that there was nothing of peculiar personal import in his notes: he did not brood on himself.

Here was one which tickled the ladies and formed a text for discussion.

'Women must take the fate of market-fruit till they earn their own pennies, and then they 'll regulate the market. It is a tussle for money with them as with us, meaning power. They'd do it as little by oratory as they have done by millinery, for their oratory, just like their millinery, appeals to a sentiment, and to a weaker; and nothing solid comes of a sentiment. Power is built on work.'

To this was appended: 'The better for mankind in the developing process, ay, and a bad day for us, boys, when study masks the charming eyes in gig-lamps, and there is no pretty flying before us. Good-night to Cupid, I fear. May be I am not seeing far enough, and am asking for the devil to have the loveliest women as of old. Retro S. M.'

The youthful eye on their sex, the Irish voice, and the perceptible moral earnestness in the background, made up a quaint mixture.

CHAPTER XVI

Of the great Mr. Bull and the Celtic and Saxon view of him: And something of Richard Rockney

Meanwhile India, our lubber giant, had ceased to kick a leg, and Ireland, our fever-invalid, wore the aspect of an opiate slumber. The volcano we couch on was quiet, the gritty morsel unabsorbed within us at an armistice with the gastric juices. Once more the personification of the country's prosperity had returned to the humming state of roundness. Trade whipped him merrily, and he spun.

A fuller sketch of the figure of this remarkable emanation of us and object of our worship, Bull, is required that we may breathe the atmosphere of a story dealing with such very different views of the idol, and learn to tolerate plain-speaking about him.

Fancy yourself delayed by stress of weather at an inn or an excursion, and snapped up by some gossip drone of the district, who hearing whither you are bound, recounts the history and nature of the place, to your ultimate advantage, though you groan for the

outer downpour to abate.—Of Bull, then: our image, before the world: our lord and tyrant, ourself in short—the lower part of us.

Page 4327

Coldly worshipped on the whole, he can create an enthusiasm when his roast-beef influence mounts up to peaceful skies and the domestic English world spins with him. What he does not like will then be the forbidding law of a most governable people, what he does like the consenting. If it is declared that argument will be inefficacious to move him, he is adored in the form of post. A hint of his willingness in any direction, causes a perilous rush of his devotees. Nor is there reason to suppose we have drawn the fanatical subserviency from the example of our subject India. We may deem it native; perhaps of its origin Aryan, but we have made it our own. Some have been so venturesome as to trace the lordliness of Bull to the protecting smiles of the good Neptune, whose arms are about him to encourage the development of a wanton eccentricity. Certain weeds of the human bosom are prompt to flourish where safeness would seem to be guaranteed. Men, for instance, of stoutly independent incomes are prone to the same sort of wilfulness as Bull's, the salve abject submission to it which we behold in his tidal bodies of supporters. Neptune has done something. One thinks he has done much, at a rumour of his inefficiency to do the utmost. Spy you insecurity?—a possibility of invasion? Then indeed the colossal creature, inaccessible to every argument, is open to any suggestion: the oak-like is a reed, the bull a deer. But as there is no attack on his shores, there is no proof that they are invulnerable. Neptune is appealed to and replies by mouth of the latest passenger across the Channel on a windy night:—Take heart, son John! They will have poor stomachs for blows who intrude upon you. The testification to the Sea-God's watchfulness restores his darling who is immediately as horny to argument as before. Neptune shall have his share of the honours.

Ideal of his country Bull has none—he hates the word; it smells of heresy, opposition to his image. It is an exercise of imagination to accept an ideal, and his digestive organs reject it, after the manner of the most beautiful likeness of him conjurable to the mind—-that flowering stomach, the sea-anemone, which opens to anything and speedily casts out what it cannot consume. He is a positive shape, a practical corporation, and the best he can see is the mirror held up to him by his bards of the Press and his jester Frank Guffaw. There, begirt by laughing ocean-waves, manifestly blest, he glorifies his handsome roundness, like that other Foam-Born, whom the decorative Graces robed in vestments not so wonderful as printed sheets. Rounder at each inspection, he preaches to mankind from the text of a finger curved upon the pattern spectacles. Your Frenchmen are revolutionising, wagering on tentative politics; your Germans ploughing in philosophy, thumbing classics, composing music of a novel order: both are marching, evolutionising, learning how to kill. Ridiculous Germans! capricious Frenchmen! We want nothing new in musical composition and abstract speculation of an indecent mythology, or political contrivances and schemes of Government, and we do not want war. Peace is the Goddess we court for the hand of her daughter Plenty, and we have won that jolly girl, and you are welcome to the marriage-feast; but avaunt new-fangled theories and howlings: old tunes, tried systems, for us, my worthy friends.

Page 4328

Roundness admiring the growth of its globe may address majestic invitation to the leaner kine. It can exhibit to the world that Peace is a most desirable mother-in-law; and it is tempted to dream of capping the pinnacle of wisdom when it squats on a fundamental truth. Bull's perusal of the Horatian carpe diem is acute as that of the cattle in fat meads; he walks like lusty Autumn carrying his garner to drum on, for a sign of his diligent wisdom in seizing the day. He can read the page fronting him; and let it be of dining, drinking, toasting, he will vociferously confute the wiseacre bookworms who would have us believe there is no such thing as a present hour for man.

In sad fact, the member for England is often intoxicate. Often do we have him whirling his rotundity like a Mussulman dervish inflated by the spirit to agitate the shanks, until pangs of a commercial crisis awaken him to perceive an infructuous past and an unsown future, without one bit of tracery on its black breast other than that which his apprehensions project. As for a present hour, it swims, it vanishes, thinner than the phantom banquets of recollection. What has he done for the growth of his globe of brains?—the lesser, but in our rightful posture the upper, and justly the directing globe, through whose directions we do, by feeding on the past to sow the future, create a sensible present composed of both—the present of the good using of our powers. What can he show in the Arts? What in Arms? His bards—O faithless! but they are men—his bards accuse him of sheer cattle-contentedness in the mead, of sterility of brain, drowsihood, mid-noddyism, downright carcase-dulness. They question him to deafen him of our defences, our intellectual eminence, our material achievements, our poetry, our science; they sneer at his trust in Neptune, doubt the scaly invulnerability of the God. They point over to the foreigner, the clean-stepping, braced, self-confident foreigner, good at arms, good at the arts, and eclipsing us in industriousness manual and mental, and some dare to say, in splendour of verse=-our supreme accomplishment.

Then with one big fellow, the collapse of pursiness, he abandons his pedestal of universal critic; prostrate he falls to the foreigner; he is down, he is roaring; he is washing his hands of English performances, lends ear to foreign airs, patronises foreign actors, browses on reports from camps of foreign armies. He drops his head like a smitten ox to all great foreign names, moaning 'Shakespeare!' internally for a sustaining apostrophe. He well-nigh loves his poets, can almost understand what poetry means. If it does not pay, it brings him fame, respectfulness in times of reverse. Brains, he is reduced to apprehend, brains are the generators of the conquering energies. He is now for brains at all costs, he has gained a conception of them. He is ready to knock knighthood on the heads of men of brains—even literary brains. They shall be knights, an ornamental body. To make them peers, and a legislative, has not struck him, for he has not yet imagined them a stable body. They require petting, to persuade them to flourish and bring him esteem.

Page 4329

This is Mr. Bull, our image before the world, whose pranks are passed as though the vivid display of them had no bad effect on the nation. Doubtless the perpetual mirror, the slavish mirror, is to blame, but his nakedness does not shrink from the mirror, he likes it and he is proud of it. Beneath these exhibitions the sober strong spirit of the country, unfortunately not a prescient one, nor an attractively loveable, albeit of a righteous benevolence, labours on, doing the hourly duties for the sake of conscience, little for prospective security, little to win affection. Behold it as the donkey of a tipsy costermonger, obedient to go without the gift of expression. Its behaviour is honourable under a discerning heaven, and there is ever something pathetic in a toilful speechlessness; but it is of dogged attitude in the face of men. Salt is in it to keep our fleshly grass from putrefaction; poets might proclaim its virtues. They will not; they are averse. The only voice it has is the Puritan bray, upon which one must philosophise asinically to unveil the charm. So the world is pleased to let it be obscured by the paunch of Bull. We have, however, isolated groups, individuals in all classes, by no means delighting in his representation of them. When such is felt to be the case among a sufficient number, his bards blow him away as a vapour; we hear that he is a piece of our English humour—we enjoy grotesques and never should agree to paint ourselves handsome: our subtle conceit insists on the reverse. Nevertheless, no sooner are the hours auspicious to fatness than Bull is back on us; he is our family goat, ancestral ghost, the genius of our comfortable sluggishness. And he is at times a mad Bull: a foaming, lashing, trampling, horn-driving, excessive, very parlous Bull. It is in his history that frenzies catch him, when to be yoked to him is to suffer frightful shakings, not to mention a shattering of our timbers. It is but in days of the rousing of the under-spirit of the country, days of storm imprudent to pray the advent of, that we are well rid of him for a while. In the interim he does mischief, serious mischief; he does worse than when, a juvenile, he paid the Dannegelt for peace. Englishmen of feeling do not relish him. For men with Irish and Cambrian blood in their veins the rubicund grotesque, with his unimpressionable front and his noisy benevolence of the pocket, his fits of horned ferocity and lapses of hardheartedness, is a shame and a loathing. You attach small importance to images and symbols; yet if they seem representative, and they sicken numbers of us, they are important. The hat we wear, though it is not a part of the head, stamps the character of our appearance and has a positive influence on our bearing. Symbolical decorations will stimulate the vacant-minded to act up to them, they encircle and solidify the mass; they are a sword of division between Celts and Saxons if they are abhorrent to one section. And the Celtic brotherhood are

Page 4330

not invariably fools in their sensitiveness. They serve you on the field of Mars, and on other fields to which the world has given glory. These execrate him as the full-grown Golden Calf of heathenish worship. And they are so restive because they are so patriotic. Think a little upon the ideas of unpatriotic Celts regarding him. You have heard them. You tell us they are you: accurately, they affirm, succinctly they see you in his crescent outlines, tame bulk, spasms of alarm and foot on the weaker; his imperviousness to whatsoever does not confront the sensual eye of him with a cake or a fist, his religious veneration of his habitual indulgences, his peculiar forms of nightmare. They swear to his perfect personification of your moods, your Saxon moods, which their inconsiderate spleen would have us take for unmixedly Saxon. They are unjust, but many of them speak with a sense of the foot on their necks, and they are of a blood demanding a worshipworthy idea. And they dislike Bull's bellow of disrespect for their religion, much bruited in the meadows during his periods of Arcadia. They dislike it, cannot forget the sound: it hangs on the afflicted drum of the ear when they are in another land, perhaps when the old devotion to their priest has expired. For this, as well as for material reasons, they hug the hatred they packed up among their bundles of necessaries and relics, in the flight from home, and they instruct their children to keep it burning. They transmit the sentiment of the loathing of Bull, as assuredly they would be incapable of doing, even with the will, were a splendid fire-eyed motherly Britannia the figure sitting in the minds of men for our image—a palpitating figure, alive to change, penetrable to thought, and not a stolid concrete of our traditional old yeoman characteristic. Verily he lives for the present, all for the present, will be taught in sorrow that there is no life for him but of past and future: his delusion of the existence of a present hour for man will not outlast the season of his eating and drinking abundantly in security. He will perceive that it was no more than the spark shot out from the clash of those two meeting forces; and penitently will he gaze back on that misleading spark-the spectral planet it bids wink to his unreceptive stars—-acknowledging him the bare machine for those two to drive, no instrument of enjoyment. He lives by reading rearward and seeing vanward. He has no actual life save in power of imagination. He has to learn this fact, the great lesson of all men. Furthermore there may be a future closed to him if he has thrown too extreme a task of repairing on that bare machine of his. The sight of a broken-down plough is mournful, but the one thing to do with it is to remove it from the field.

Page 4331

Among the patriotic of stout English substance, who blew in the trumpet of the country, and were not bards of Bull to celebrate his firmness and vindicate his shiftings, Richard Rockney takes front rank. A journalist altogether given up to his craft, considering the audience he had gained, he was a man of forethought besides being a trenchant writer, and he was profoundly, not less than eminently, the lover of Great Britain. He had a manner of utterance quite in the tone of the familiar of the antechamber for proof of his knowing himself to be this person. He did not so much write articles upon the health of his mistress as deliver Orphic sentences. He was in one her physician, her spiritual director, her man-at-arms. Public allusions to her were greeted with his emphatic assent in a measured pitch of the voice, or an instantaneous flourish of the rapier; and the flourish was no vain show. He meant hard steel to defend the pill he had prescribed for her constitutional state, and the monition for her soul's welfare. Nor did he pretend to special privileges in assuming his militant stand, but simply that he had studied her case, was intimate with her resources, and loved her hotly, not to say inspiredly. Love her as well, you had his cordial hand; as wisely, then all his weapons to back you. There were occasions when distinguished officials and Parliamentary speakers received the impetus of Rockney's approval and not hesitatingly he stepped behind them to bestow it. The act, in whatever fashion it may have been esteemed by the objects propelled, was a sign of his willingness to let the shadow of any man adopting his course obscure him, and of the simplicity of his attachment. If a bitter experience showed that frequently, indeed generally, they travelled scarce a tottering stagger farther than they were precipitated, the wretched consolation afforded by a side glance at a more enlightened passion, solitary in its depth, was Rockney's. Others perchance might equal his love, none the wisdom of it; actually none the vigilant circumspection, the shaping forethought. That clear knowledge of the right thing for the country was grasped but by fits by others. Enough to profit them this way and yonder as one best can! You know the newspaper Press is a mighty engine. Still he had no delight in shuffling a puppetry; he would have preferred automatic figures. His calls for them resounded through the wilderness of the wooden.

Any solid conviction of a capable head of a certainty impressed upon the world, and thus his changes of view were not attributed to a fluctuating devotion; they passed out of the range of criticism upon inconsistency, notwithstanding that the commencement of his journalistic career smelt of sources entirely opposed to the conclusions upon which it broadened. One secret of the belief in his love of his country was the readiness of Rockney's pen to support our nobler patriotic impulses, his relish of the bluff besides. His eye was on our commerce,

Page 4332

on our courts of Law, on our streets and alleys, our army and navy, our colonies, the vaster than the island England, and still he would be busy picking up needles and threads in the island. Deeds of valour were noted by him, lapses of cowardice: how one man stood against a host for law or humanity, how crowds looked on at the beating of a woman, how a good fight was maintained in some sly ring between two of equal brawn: and manufacturers were warned of the consequences of their iniquities, Government was lashed for sleeping upon shaky ordinances, colonists were gibbeted for the maltreating of natives: the ring and fervour of the notes on daily events told of Rockney's hand upon the national heart—with a faint, an enforced, reluctant indication of our not being the men we were.

But after all, the main secret was his art of writing round English, instead of laborious Latinised periods: and the secret of the art was his meaning what he said. It was the personal throb. The fire of a mind was translucent in Press columns where our public had been accustomed to the rhetoric of primed scribes. He did away with the Biscay billow of the leading article—Bull's favourite prose—bardic construction of sentences that roll to the antithetical climax, whose foamy top is offered and gulped as equivalent to an idea. Writing of such a kind as Rockney's was new to a land where the political opinions of Joint Stock Companies had rattled Jovian thunders obedient to the nod of Bull. Though not alone in working the change, he was the foremost. And he was not devoid of style. Fervidness is the core of style. He was a tough opponent for his betters in education, struck forcibly, dexterously, was always alert for debate. An encounter between Swift and Johnson, were it imaginable, would present us probably the most prodigious Gigantomachy in literary polemics. It is not imaginable among comparative pygmies. But Rockney's combat with his fellow-politicians of the Press partook of the Swiftian against the Johnsonian in form. He was a steam ram that drove straight at the bulky broadside of the enemy.

Premiers of parties might be Captains of the State for Rockney: Rockney was the premier's pilot, or woe to him. Woe to the country as well, if Rockney's directions for steering were unheeded. He was a man of forethought, the lover of Great Britain: he shouted his directions in the voice of the lover of his mistress, urged to rebuke, sometimes to command, the captain by the prophetic intimations of a holier alliance, a more illumined prescience. Reefs here, shallows there, yonder a foul course: this is the way for you! The refusal of the captain to go this way caused Rockney sincerely to discredit the sobriety of his intellect. It was a drunken captain. Or how if a traitorous? We point out the danger to him, and if he will run the country on to it, we proclaim him guilty either of inebriety or of treason—the alternatives are named: one or the other has him. Simple unfitness can scarcely be conceived of a captain having our common senses and a warranted pilot at his elbow.

Page 4333

Had not Rockney been given to a high expression of opinion, plain in fervour, he would often have been exposed bare to hostile shafts. Style cast her aegis over him. He wore an armour in which he could walk, run and leap-a natural style. The ardour of his temperament suffused the directness of his intelligence to produce it, and the two qualities made his weakness and strength. Feeling the nerve of strength, the weakness was masked to him, while his opponents were equally insensible to the weakness under the force of his blows. Thus there was nothing to teach him, or reveal him, except Time, whose trick is to turn corners of unanticipated sharpness, and leave the directly seeing and ardent to dash at walls.

How rigidly should the man of forethought govern himself, question himself! how constantly wrestle with himself! And if he be a writer ebullient by the hour, how snappishly suspect himself, that he may feel in conscience worthy of a hearing and have perpetually a conscience in his charge! For on what is his forethought founded? Does he try the ring of it with our changed conditions? Bus a man of forethought who has to be one of our geysers ebullient by the hour must live days of fever. His apprehensions distemper his blood; the scrawl of them on the dark of the undeveloped dazzles his brain. He sees in time little else; his very sincereness twists him awry. Such a man has the stuff of the born journalist, and journalism is the food of the age. Ask him, however, midway in his running, what he thinks of quick breathing: he will answer that to be a shepherd on the downs is to be more a man. As to the gobbling age, it really thinks better of him than he of it.

After a term of prolonged preachification he is compelled to lash that he may less despise the age. He has to do it for his own sake. O gobbling age! swallowing all, digesting nought, us too you have swallowed, O insensate mechanism! and we will let you know you have a stomach. Furiously we disagree with you. We are in you to lead you or work you pangs!

Rockney could not be a mild sermoniser commenting on events. Rather no journalism at all for him! He thought the office of the ordinary daily preacher cowlike. His gadfly stung him to warn, dictate, prognosticate; he was the oracle and martyr of superior vision: and as in affairs of business and the weighing of men he was of singularly cool sagacity, hard on the downright, open to the humours of the distinct discrimination of things in their roughness, the knowledge of the firmly-based materialism of his nature caused him thoroughly to trust to his voice when he delivered it in ardour—circumstance coming to be of daily recurrence. Great love creates forethoughtfulness, without which incessant journalism is a gabble. He was sure of his love, but who gave ear to his prescience? Few: the echo of the country now and then, the Government not often. And, dear me! those jog-trot sermonisers,

Page 4334

mere commentators upon events, manage somehow to keep up the sale of their journals: advertisements do not flow and ebb with them as under the influence of a capricious moon. Ah, what a public! Serve it honourably, you are in peril of collapsing: show it nothing but the likeness of its dull animal face, you are steadily inflated. These reflections within us! Might not one almost say that the retreat for the prophet is the wilderness, far from the hustled editor's desk; and annual should be the uplifting of his voice instead of diurnal, if only to spare his blood the distemper? A fund of gout was in Rockney's, and he had begun to churn it. Between gouty blood and luminous brain the strife had set in which does not conduce to unwavering sobriety of mind, though ideas remain closely consecutive and the utterance resonant.

Never had he been an adulator of Bull. His defects as well as his advantages as a politician preserved to him this virtue. Insisting on a future, he could not do homage to the belying simulacrum of the present. In the season of prosperity Rockney lashed the old fellow with the crisis he was breeding for us; and when prostration ensued no English tongue was loftier in preaching dignity and the means of recovery. Our monumental image of the Misuse of Peace he pointed out unceasingly as at a despot constructed by freemen out of the meanest in their natures to mock the gift of liberty. His articles of foregone years were an extraordinary record of events or conditions foreseen: seductive in the review of them by a writer who has to be still foreseeing: nevertheless, that none of them were bardic of Bull, and that our sound man would have acted wisely in heeding some of the prescriptions, constituted their essential merit, consolatory to think of, though painful. The country has gone the wrong road, but it may yet cross over to the right one, when it perceives that we were prophetic.

Compared with the bolts discharged at Bull by Rockney's artillery, Captain Con O'Donnell's were popgun-pellets. Only Rockney fired to chasten, Con O'Donnell for a diversion, to appease an animus. The revolutionist in English journalism was too devoutly patriotic to belabour even a pantomime mask that was taken as representative of us for the disdainful fun of it. Behind the plethoric lamp, now blown with the fleshpots, now gasping puffs of panic, he saw the well-minded valorous people, issue of glorious grandsires; a nation under a monstrous defacement, stupefied by the contemplation of the mask: his vision was of the great of old, the possibly great in the graver strife ahead, respecters of life, despisers of death, the real English whereas an alienated Celtic satirist, through his vivid fancy and his disesteem, saw the country incarnate in Bull, at most a roguish screw-kneed clown to be whipped out of him. Celt and Saxon are much inmixed with us, but the prevalence of Saxon blood is evinced by the public disregard of

Page 4335

any Celtic conception of the honourable and the loveable; so that the Celt anxious to admire is rebutted, and the hatred of a Celt, quick as he is to catch at images, has a figure of hugeous animalism supplied to his malign contempt. Rockney's historic England, and the living heroic England to slip from that dull hide in a time of trial, whether of war or social suffering, he cannot see, nor a people hardening to Spartan lineaments in the fire, iron men to meet disaster, worshippers of a discerned God of Laws, and just men too, thinking to do justice; he has Bull on the eye, the alternately braggart and poltroon, sweating in labour that he may gorge the fruits, graceless to a scoffer. And this is the creature to whose tail he is tied! Hereditary hatred is approved by critical disgust. Some spirited brilliancy, some persistent generosity (other than the guzzle's flash of it), might soften him; something sweeter than the slow animal well-meaningness his placable brethren point his attention to. It is not seen, and though he can understand the perils of a severance, he prefers to rub the rawness of his wound and be ready to pitch his cap in the air for it, out of sheer bloodloathing of a connection that offers him nothing to admire, nothing to hug to his heart. Both below and above the blind mass of discontent in his island, the repressed sentiment of admiration-or passion of fealty and thirst to give himself to a visible brighter—is an element of the division: meditative young Patrick O'Donnell early in his reflections had noted that:—and it is partly a result of our daily habit of tossing the straw to the monetary world and doting on ourselves in the mirror, until our habitual doings are viewed in a bemused complacency by us, and the scum-surface of the country is flashed about as its vital being. A man of forethought using the Press to spur Parliament to fitly represent the people, and writing on his daily topics with strenuous original vigour, even though, like Rockney, he sets the teeth of the Celt gnashing at him, goes a step nearer to the bourne of pacification than Press and Parliament reflecting the popular opinion that law must be passed to temper Ireland's eruptiveness; for that man can be admired, and the Celt, in combating him, will like an able and gallant enemy better than a grudgingly just, lumbersome, dull, politic friend. The material points in a division are always the stronger, but the sentimental are here very strong. Pass the laws; they may put an extinguisher on the Irish Vesuvian; yet to be loved you must be a little perceptibly admirable. You may be so self-satisfied as to dispense with an ideal: your yoke-fellow is not; it is his particular form of strength to require one for his proper blooming, and he does bloom beautifully in the rays he courts.

Page 4336

Ah then, seek to be loved, and banish Bull. Believe in a future and banish that gross obscuration of you. Decline to let that old-yeoman-turned alderman stand any longer for the national man. Speaking to the brain of the country, one is sure of the power of a resolute sign from it to dismiss the brainless. Banish him your revels and your debatings, prohibit him your Christmas, lend no ear either to his panics or his testiness, especially none to his rages; do not report him at all, and he will soon subside into his domestic, varied by pothouse, privacy. The brain should lead, if there be a brain. Once free of him, you will know that for half a century you have appeared bottom upward to mankind. And you have wondered at the absence of love for you under so astounding a presentation. Even in a Bull, beneficent as he can dream of being, when his notions are in a similar state of inversion, should be sheepish in hope for love.

He too, whom you call the Welshman, and deride for his delight in songful gatherings, harps to wild Wales, his Cambrian highlands, and not to England. You have not yet, though he is orderly and serviceable, allured his imagination to the idea of England. Despite the passion for his mountains and the boon of your raising of the interdict (within a hundred years) upon his pastors to harangue him in his native tongue, he gladly ships himself across the waters traversed by his Prince Madoc of tradition, and becomes contentedly a transatlantic citizen, a member of strange sects—he so inveterate in faithfulness to the hoar and the legendary!—Anything rather than Anglican. The Cymry bear you no hatred; their affection likewise is undefined. But there is reason to think that America has caught the imagination of the Cambrian Celt: names of Welshmen are numerous in the small army of the States of the Union; and where men take soldier-service they are usually fixed, they and their children. Here is one, not very deeply injured within a century, of ardent temperament, given to be songful and loving; he leaves you and forgets you. Be certain that the material grounds of division are not all. To pronounce it his childishness provokes the retort upon your presented shape. He cannot admire it. Gaelic Scots wind the same note of repulsion.

And your poets are in a like predicament. Your poets are the most persuasive of springs to a lively general patriotism. They are in the Celtic dilemma of standing at variance with Bull; they return him his hearty antipathy, are unable to be epical or lyrical of him, are condemned to expend their genius upon the abstract, the quaint, the picturesque. Nature they read spiritually or sensually, always shrinkingly apart from him. They swell to a resemblance of their patron if they stoop to woo his purse. He has, on hearing how that poets bring praise to nations, as in fact he can now understand his Shakespeare to have done, been seen to thump the midriff and rally

Page 4337

them for their shyness of it, telling them he doubts them true poets while they abstain from singing him to the world-him, and the things refreshing the centre of him. Ineffectual is that encouragement. Were he in the fire, melting to the iron man, the backbone of him, it would be different. At his pleasures he is anti-hymnic, repellent to song. He has perceived the virtues of Peace, without the brother eye for the need of virtuousness to make good use of them and inspire the poet. His own enrolled unrhythmical bardic troops (humorous mercenaries when Celts) do his trumpeting best, and offend not the Pierides.

This interlude, or rather inter-drone, repulsive to write, can hardly be excluded from a theme dramatising Celtic views, and treating of a blood, to which the idea of country must shine resplendently if we would have it running at full tide through the arteries. Preserve your worship, if the object fills your optics. Better worship that than nothing, as it is better for flames to be blown out than not to ascend, otherwise it will wreak circular mischief instead of illumining. You are requested simply to recollect that there is another beside you who sees the object obliquely, and then you will not be surprised by his irreverence. What if, in the end, you were conducted to a like point of view? Self-worship, it has been said, is preferable to no trimming of the faculty, but worship does not necessarily cease with the extinction of this of the voraciously carnal. An ideal of country, of Great Britain, is conceivable that will be to the taste of Celt and Saxon in common, to wave as a standard over their fraternal marching. Let Bull boo his drumliest at such talk: it is, I protest, the thing we want and can have. He is the obstruction, not the country; and against him, not against the country, the shots are aimed which seem so malignant. Him the gay manipulators propitiate who look at him through Literature and the Press, and across the pulpit-cushions, like airy Macheath at Society, as carrion to batten on. May plumpness be their portion, and they never hanged for it! But the flattering, tickling, pleasantly pinching of Bull is one of those offices which the simple starveling piper regards with afresh access of appetite for the well-picked bone of his virtue. That ghastly apparition of the fleshly present is revealed to him as a dead whale, having the harpoon of the inevitable slayer of the merely fleshly in his oils. To humour him, and be his piper for his gifts, is to descend to a carnival deep underneath. While he reigns, thinks this poor starveling, Rome burns, or the explosive powders are being secretly laid. He and his thousand Macheaths are dancing the country the giddy pace, and there will, the wretch dreads, be many a crater of scoria in the island, before he stretches his inanimate length, his parasites upon him. The theme is chosen and must be treated as a piper involved in his virtue conceives it: that is, realistically; not with Bull’s

Page 4338

notion of the realism of the butcher's shop and the pendent legs of mutton and blocks of beef painted raw and glaring in their streaks, but with the realism of the active brain and heart conjoined. The reasons for the division of Celt and Saxon, what they think and say of one another, often without knowing that they are divided, and the wherefore of our abusing of ourselves, brave England, our England of the ancient fortitude and the future incarnation, can afford to hear. Why not in a tale? It is he, your all for animal pleasure in the holiday he devours and cannot enjoy, whose example teaches you to shun the plaguey tale that carries fright: and so you find him sour at business and sick of his relaxings, hating both because he harnesses himself in turn bestially to each, growling at the smallest admixture of them, when, if he would but chirp a little over his work, and allow his pleasures to inspire a dose of thoughtfulness, he would be happier, and—who knows?-become a brighter fellow, one to be rescued from the pole-axe.

Now the rain is over, your carriage is at the door, the country smiles and the wet highway waves a beckoning hand. We have worn through a cloud with cloudy discourses, but we are in a land of shifting weathers, 'coelum crebris imbribus ac nebulis foedum,' not every chapter can be sunshine.

CHAPTER XVII

CROSSING THE RUBICON

Rough weather on the Irish sea discharged a pallid file of passengers from the boat at Holyhead just as the morning sun struck wave and mountain with one of the sudden sparkling changes which our South-welters have in their folds to tell us after a tumultuous night that we have only been worried by Puck. The scene of frayed waters all rosy-golden, and golden-banded heathery height, with the tinted sand, breaking to flights of blue, was resplendent for those of our recent sea-farers who could lift an eye to enjoy it. Freshness, illumination, then salt air, vivid distances, were a bath for every sense of life. You could believe the breast of the mountain to be heaving, the billows to be kissing fingers to him, the rollers shattered up the cliff to have run to extinction to scale him. He seemed in his clear-edged mass King of this brave new boundless world built in a minute out of the wreck of the old.

An hour back the vessel was labouring through rueful chasms under darkness, and then did the tricksy Southwest administer grisly slaps to right and left, whizzing spray across the starboard beam, and drenching the locks of a young lady who sat cloaked and hooded in frieze to teach her wilfulness a lesson, because she would keep her place on deck from beginning to end of the voyage. Her faith in the capacity of Irish frieze to turn a deluge of the deeps driven by an Atlantic gale was shaken by the time she sighted harbour, especially when she shed showers by flapping a batlike wing of the cloak, and had a slight shudder to find herself trickling within.

Page 4339

‘Dear! and I’m wet to the skin,’ she confided the fact to herself vocally.

‘You would not be advised,’ a gentleman beside her said after a delicate pause to let her impulsive naturalism of utterance fly by unwounded.

’And aren’t you the same and worse? And not liking it either, I fear, Sir!’ she replied, for despite a manful smile his complexion was tell-tale. ’But there ’s no harm in salt. But you should have gone down to the cabin with Father Boyle and you would have been sure of not catching cold. But, Oh! the beautiful . . . look at it! And it’s my first view of England. Well, then, I’ll say it’s a beautiful country.’

Her companion looked up at the lighted sky, and down at the pools in tarpaulin at his feet. He repressed a disposition to shudder, and with the anticipated ecstasy of soon jumping out of wet clothes into dry, he said: ‘I should like to be on the top of that hill now.’

The young lady’s eyes flew to the top.

’They say he looks on Ireland; I love him; and his name is Caer Gybi; and it was one of our Saints gave him the name, I ’ve read in books. I’ll be there before noon.’

‘You want to have a last gaze over to Erin?’

‘No, it’s to walk and feel the breeze. But I do, though.’

‘Won’t you require a little rest?’

‘Sure and I’ve had it sitting here all night!’ said she.

He laughed: the reason for the variation of exercise was conclusive.

Father Boyle came climbing up the ladder, uncertain of his legs; he rolled and snatched and tottered on his way to them, and accepted the gentleman’s help of an arm, saying: ’Thank ye, thank ye, and good morning, Mr. Colesworth. And my poor child! what sort of a night has it been above, Kathleen?’

He said it rather twinkling, and she retorted:

‘What sort of a night has it been below, Father Boyle?’ Her twinkle was livelier than his, compassionate in archness.

’Purgatory past is good for contemplation, my dear. ’Tis past, and there’s the comfort! You did well to be out of that herring-barrel, Mr. Colesworth. I hadn’t the courage, or I would have burst from it to take a ducking with felicity. I haven’t thrown up my soul; that’s the most I can say. I thought myself nigh on it once or twice. And an amazing

kind steward it was, or I'd have counted the man for some one else. Surely 'tis a glorious morning?'

Mr. Colesworth responded heartily in praise of the morning. He was beginning to fancy that he felt the warmth of spring sunshine on his back. He flung up his head and sniffed the air, and was very like a horse fretful for the canter; so like as to give Miss Kathleen an idea of the comparison. She could have rallied him; her laughing eyes showed the readiness, but she forbore, she drank the scene. Her face, with the threaded locks about forehead and cheeks, and the dark, the blue, the rosy red of her lips, her eyes, her hair, was just such a south-western sky as April drove above her, the same in colour and quickness; and much of her spirit was the same, enough to stand for a resemblance. But who describes the spirit? No one at the gates of the field of youth. When Time goes reaping he will gather us a sheaf, out of which the picture springs.

Page 4340

‘There’s our last lurch, glory to the breakwater!’ exclaimed Father Boyle, as the boat pitched finally outside the harbour fence, where a soft calm swell received them with the greeting of civilised sea-nymphs. ’The captain’ll have a quieter passage across. You may spy him on the pier. We’ll be meeting him on the landing.’

‘If he’s not in bed, from watching the stars all night,’ said Miss Kathleen.

‘He must have had a fifty-lynx power of sight for that, my dear.’

‘They did appear, though, and wonderfully bright,’ she said. ’I saw them come out and go in. It’s not all cloud when the high wind blows.’

‘You talk like a song, Kathleen.’

‘Couldn’t I rattle a throat if I were at home, Father!’

‘Ah! we’re in the enemy’s country now.’

Miss Kathleen said she would go below to get the handbags from the stewardess.

Mr. Colesworth’s brows had a little darkened over the Rev. Gentleman’s last remark. He took two or three impatient steps up and down with his head bent. ‘Pardon me; I hoped we had come to a better understanding,’ he said. ’Is it quite fair to the country and to Miss O’Donnell to impress on her before she knows us that England is the enemy?’

’Habit, Mr. Colesworth, habit! we’ve got accustomed to the perspective and speak accordingly. There’s a breach visible.’

’I thought you agreed with me that good efforts are being made on our side to mend the breach.’

’Sir, you have a noble minority at work, no doubt; and I take you for one of the noblest, as not objecting to stand next to alone.’

’I really thought, judging from our conversation at Mrs. O’Donnell’s that evening, that you were going to hold out a hand and lead your flock to the right sort of fellowship with us.’

’To submission to the laws, Mr. Colesworth; ’tis my duty to do it as pastor and citizen.’

‘No, to more than that, sir. You spoke with friendly warmth.’

’The atmosphere was genial, if you remember the whisky and the fumes of our tobacco at one o’clock!’

’I shall recollect the evening with the utmost pleasure. You were kind enough to instruct me in a good many things I shall be sure to profit by. I wish I could have spent more time in Ireland. As it is, I like Irishmen so well that if the whole land were in revolt I should never call it the enemy’s country.’

‘Excellently spoken, Mr. Colesworth,’ said the priest. ’We ’ll hope your writings may do service to mend the breach. For there is one, as you know, and more ’s the pity; there’s one, and it’s wide and deep. As my friend Captain Con O’Donnell says, it’s plain to the naked eye as a pair of particularly fat laundry drawers hung out to dry and ballooned in extension—if mayhap you’ve ever seen the sight of them in that state:—just held together by a narrow neck of thread or button, and stretching away like a corpulent frog in the act of swimming on the wind. His comparison touches the sentiment of disunion, sir.’

Page 4341

Mr. Colesworth had not ever seen such a pair of laundry drawers inflated to symbolise the breach between Ireland and England; nor probably, if he had, would the sentiment of national disunion have struck his mind: it was difficult to him in the description. He considered his Rev. friend to be something of a slippery fish, while Father Boyle's opinion of him likewise referred him to an elemental substance, of slow movement- earth, in short: for he continued to look argumentative after all had been said.

Or perhaps he threw a coveting eye on sweet Miss Kathleen and had his own idea of mending a stitch of the breach in a quite domestic way. If so, the Holy Father would have a word to say, let alone Kathleen. The maids of his Church do not espouse her foes. For the men it is another matter: that is as the case may be. Temporarily we are in cordial intercourse, Mr. Colesworth.

Miss Kathleen returned to deck carrying her bags. The gentleman had to descend, and subsequently an amiable dissension arose on the part of the young lady and Mr. Colesworth. She, however, yielded one of her bags, and he, though doubly laden, was happy. All very transparent to pastoral observation, but why should they not be left to their chirruping youthfulness? The captain was not in view, and Father Boyle wanted to go to bed for refreshment, and Kathleen was an airy gossamer, with a boy running after it, not by any means likely to catch it, or to keep it if he did. Proceed and trip along, you young ones!

At the hotel they heard that Captain Con O'Donnell was a snug sleeper upstairs. This, the captain himself very soon informed them, had not been the kernel of the truth. He had fancied they would not cross the Channel on so rattlesome a night, or Kathleen would have had an Irish kiss to greet her landing in England. But the cousinly salute was little delayed, news of the family in Ireland and England was exchanged, and then Mr. Colesworth and the captain bowed to an introduction; and the captain, at mention of his name, immediately cried out that Mr. Colesworth might perchance be a relative of the highly intelligent admirable lady who had undertaken the secretaryship, and by her vast ability got the entire management, of Miss Mattock's benevolent institution, and was conducting it with such success that it was fast becoming a grief to the generous heart of the foundress of the same to find it not only self-paying, but on the road to a fortune, inasmuch as it was already an article in the decrees of fashion among the nobility and gentry of both sexes in the metropolis to have their linen and laces washed at the Mattock laundry.

Mr. Colesworth said he was the brother of the lady in question, he had also the pleasure of an acquaintance with Miss Mattock. He was vehemently congratulated on the relationship, which bore witness, the captain armed, to a certain hereditary share of brains greatly to be envied: brother of Miss Colesworth, a title of distinction in itself! He was congratulated not less cordially for his being so fortunate as to know Miss Mattock, one of a million.

Page 4342

Captain Con retained the hand of Father Boyle and squeezed it during his eulogies, at the same time dispensing nods and winks and sunny sparkles upon Kathleen. Mr. Colesworth went upstairs to his room not unflattered. The flattery enveloped him in the pleasant sense of a somehow now established companionship for the day with a pleasant person from whom he did not wish to separate.

‘You made the gentleman’s acquaintance, my dear . . . ?’ said Con.

Kathleen answered: ’He made friends with our Patrick on the Continent, I think it was in Germany, and came to us to study the old country, bearing a letter from Patrick. He means to be one of their writers on the newspapers. He studies everything; he has written books. He called on us coming and called on us going and we came over together,’ said Miss Kathleen. ‘But tell me: our Philip?’

‘Books!’ Con exclaimed. ’It’s hard to discover a man in these days who hasn’t written books. Oh! Philip! Ease your heart about Philip. They’re nursing him, round. He was invalided at the right moment for him, no fear. I gave him his chance of the last vacant seat up to the last hour, and now the die is cast and this time I ’m off to it. Poor Philip—-yes, yes! we ’re sorry to see him flat all his length, we love him; he’s a gallant soldier; alive to his duty; and that bludgeon sun of India knocked him down, and that fall from his horse finished the business, and there he lies. But he’ll get up, and he might have accepted the seat and spared me my probation: he’s not married, I am, I have a wife, and Master Philip divides me against my domestic self, he does. But let that be: I serve duty too. Not a word to our friend up yonder. It’s a secret with a time-fuse warranted to explode safe enough when the minutes are up, and make a powerful row when it does. It is all right over there, Father Boyle, I suppose?’

‘A walk over! a pure ceremonial,’ said the priest, and he yawned frightfully.

‘You’re for a nap to recompose you, my dear friend,’ remarked the captain.

‘But you haven’t confided anything of it to Mrs. Adister?’

’Not a syllable; no. That’s to come. There’s my contest! I had urgent business in Ireland, and she ’s a good woman, always willing to let me go. I count on her kindness, there ’s no mightier compliment to one’s wife. She’ll know it when it’s history. She’s fond of history. Ay, she hates fiction, and so I’m proud to tell her I offer her none. She likes a trifling surprise too, and there she has it. Oh! we can whip up the business to a nice little bowl of froth-flummery. But it’s when the Parliamentary voting is on comes the connubial pull. She’s a good woman, a dear good soul, but she’s a savage patriot; and Philip might have saved his kinsman if he had liked. He had only to say the word: I could have done all the business for him, and no contest to follow by my fireside. He’s on his couch—Mars convalescent:

Page 4343

a more dreadful attraction to the ladies than in his crimson plumes! If the fellow doesn't let slip his opportunity! with his points of honour and being an Irish Bayard. Why Bayard in the nineteenth century's a Bedlamite, Irish or no. So I tell him. There he is; you'll see him, Kathleen: and one of them as big an heiress as any in England. Philip's no fool, you'll find.'

'Then he's coming all right, is he?' said Kathleen.

'He 's a soldier, and a good one, but he 's nothing more, and as for patriotic inflammation, doesn't know the sensation.'

'Oh! but he's coming round, and you'll go and stroke down mother with that,' Kathleen cried. 'Her heart's been heavy, with Patrick wandering and Philip on his back. I'll soon be dressed for breakfast.'

Away she went.

'She's got an appetite, and looks like a strapped bit of steel after the night's tumbling,' said the captain, seeing her trip aloft. 'I'm young as that too, or not far off it. Stay, I'll order breakfast for four in a quiet corner where we can converse—which, by the way, won't be possible in the presence of that gaping oyster of a fellow, who looks as if he were waiting the return of the tide.'

Father Boyle interposed his hand.

'Not for . . .' he tried to add 'four.' The attempt at a formation of the word produced a cavernous yawn a volume of the distressful deep to the beholder.

'Of course,' Captain Con assented. He proposed bed and a sedative therein, declaring that his experience overnight could pronounce it good, and that it should be hot. So he led his tired old friend to the bedroom, asked dozens of questions, flurried a withdrawal of them, suggested the answers, talked of his Rubicon, praised his wife, delivered a moan on her behalf, and after assisting to half disrobe the scarce animate figure, which lent itself like an artist's lay-model to the operation, departed on his mission of the sedative.

At the breakfast for three he was able to tell Kathleen that the worthy Father was warm, and on his way to complete restoration.

'Full fathom five the Father lies, in the ocean of sleep, by this time,' said Con. 'And 'tis a curious fact that every man in that condition seems enviable to men on their legs. And similarly with death; we'd rather not, because of a qualm, but the picture of the finish of the leap across is a taking one. These chops are done as if Nature had mellowed their juiciness.'

‘They are so nice,’ Kathleen said.

‘You deserve them, if ever girl in this world!’

‘I sat on deck all night, and Mr. Colesworth would keep me company.’

’He could hardly do less, having the chance. But that notwithstanding, I’m under an obligation to your cavalier. And how did you find Ireland, sir? You’ve made acquaintance with my cousin, young Mr. Patrick O’Donnell, I rejoice to hear.’

’Yes, through his hearing or seeing my name and suspecting I had a sister,’ said Mr. Colesworth, who was no longer in the resemblance of a gaping oyster on the borders of the ebb. ‘The country is not disturbed.’

Page 4344

’So the doctor thinks his patient is doing favourably! And you cottoned to Patrick? And I don’t wonder. Where was it?’

’We met in Trieste. He was about to start by one of the Austrian boats for the East.’

‘Not disturbed! no! with a rotten potato inside it paralysing digestion!’ exclaimed Con. ‘Now Patrick had been having a peep at Vienna, hadn’t he?’

’He had; he was fresh from Vienna when I met him. As to Ireland, the harvest was only middling good last year.’

’And that’s the bit of luck we depend on. A cloud too much, and it’s drowned! Had he seen, do you know, anybody in Vienna?—you were not long together at Trieste?’

Mr. Colesworth had sufficient quickness to perceive that the two questions could be answered as one, and saying: ‘He was disappointed,’ revealed that he and Patrick had been long enough together to come to terms of intimacy.

‘To be sure, he gave you a letter of introduction to his family!’ said Con. ’And permit me to add, that Patrick’s choice of a friend is mine on trust. The lady he was for seeing, Mr. Colesworth, was just then embarking on an adventure of a romantic character, particularly well suited to her nature, and the end of it was a trifle sanguinary, and she suffered a disappointment also, though not perhaps on that account.’

‘I heard of it in England last year,’ said Mr. Colesworth. ’Did she come through it safely?’

’Without any personal disfigurement: and is in England now, under her father’s roof, meditating fresh adventures.’

Kathleen cried: ’Ye ’re talking of the lady who was Miss Adister—I can guess—Ah!’ She humped her shoulders and sent a shudder up her neck.

‘But she’s a grand creature, Mr. Colesworth, and you ought to know her,’ said Con. ’That is, if you’d like to have an idea of a young Catherine or a Semiramisminus an army and a country. There’s nothing she’s not capable of aiming at. And there’s pretty well nothing and nobody she wouldn’t make use of. She has great notions of the power of the British Press and the British purse—each in turn as a key to the other. Now for an egg, Kathleen.’

‘I think I’ll eat an egg,’ Kathleen replied.

’Bless the honey heart of the girl! Life’s in you, my dear, and calls for fuel. I’m glad to see that Mr. Colesworth too can take a sight at the Sea-God after a night of him. It augurs magnificently for a future career. And let me tell you that the Pen demands it of

us. The first of the requisites is a stout stomach—before a furnished head! I'd not pass a man to be anything of a writer who couldn't step ashore from a tempest and consume his Titan breakfast.'

'We are qualifying for the literary craft, Miss O'Donnell,' said Mr. Colesworth.

'It's for a walk in the wind up Caer Gybi, and along the coast I mean to go,' said Kathleen.

'This morning?' the captain asked her.

Page 4345

She saw his dilemma in his doubtful look.

’When I’ve done. While you’re discussing matters with Father Boyle. I—know you’re burning to. Sure it’s yourself knows as well as anybody, Captain Con, that I can walk a day long and take care of my steps. I’ve walked the better half of Donegal alone, and this morning I’ll have a protector.’

Captain Con eyed the protector, approved of him, disapproved of himself, thought of Kathleen as a daughter of Erin—a privileged and inviolate order of woman in the minds of his countrymen—and wriggling internally over a remainder scruple said: ’Mr. Colesworth mayhap has to write a bit in the morning.’

‘I’m unattached at present,’ the latter said. ’I am neither a correspondent nor a reporter, and if I were, the event would be wanting.’

’That remark, sir, shows you to be eminently a stranger to the official duties,’ observed the captain. ’Journalism is a maw, and the journalist has to cram it, and like anything else which perpetually distends for matter, it must be filled, for you can’t leave it gaping, so when nature and circumstance won’t combine to produce the stuff, we have recourse to the creative arts. ‘Tis the necessity of the profession.’

‘The profession will not impose that necessity upon me,’ remarked the young practitioner.

’Outside the wheels of the machine, sir, we indulge our hallucination of immunity. I’ve been one in the whirr of them, relating what I hadn’t quite heard, and capitulating what I didn’t think at all, in spite of the cry of my conscience—a poor infant below the waters, casting up ejaculatory bubbles of protestation. And if it is my reproach that I left it to the perils of drowning, it’s my pride that I continued to transmit air enough to carry on the struggle. Not every journalist can say as much. The Press is the voice of the mass, and our private opinion is detected as a discord by the mighty beast, and won’t be endured by him.’

‘It’s better not to think of him quite as a beast,’ said Mr. Colesworth.

’Infinitely better: and I like your “guile,” sir: But wait and tell me what you think of him after tossing him his meat for a certain number of years. There’s Rockney. Do you know Rockney? He’s the biggest single gun they’ve got, and he’s mad for this country, but ask him about the public, you’ll hear the menagerie-keeper’s opinion of the brute that mauled his loins.’

‘Rockney,’ said Mr. Colesworth, ’has the tone of a man disappointed of the dictatorship.’

‘Then you do know Rockney!’ shouted Captain Con. ’That’s the man in a neat bit of drawing. He’s a grand piece of ordnance. But wait for him too, and tell me by and by. If

it isn’t a woman, you’ll find, that primes him, ay, and points him, and what’s more, discharges him, I’m not Irish born. Poor fellow! I pity him. He had a sweet Irish lady for his wife, and lost her last year, and has been raging astray politically ever since. I

Page 4346

suppose it’s hardly the poor creature’s fault. None the less, you know, we have to fight him. And now he ’s nibbling at a bait—it ’s fun: the lady I mentioned, with a turn for adventure and enterprise: it’s rare fun: he ’s nibbling, he’ll be hooked. You must make her acquaintance, Mr. Colesworth, and hold your own against her, if you can. She’s a niece of my wife’s and I’ll introduce you. I shall find her in London, or at our lodgings at a Surrey farm we’ve taken to nurse my cousin Captain Philip O’Donnell invalided from Indian awful climate!—on my return, when I hope to renew the acquaintance. She has beauty, she has brains. Resist her, and you ’ll make a decent stand against Lucifer. And supposing she rolls you up and pitches you over, her noticing you is a pretty compliment to your pen. That ‘ll be consoling.’

Mr. Colesworth fancied, he said, that he was proof against feminine blandishments in the direction of his writings.

He spoke as one indicating a thread to suggest a cable. The captain applauded the fancy as a pleasing delusion of the young sprigs of Journalism.

Upon this, Mr. Colesworth, with all respect for French intelligence, denied the conclusiveness of French generalisations, which ascribed to women universal occult dominion, and traced all great affairs to small intrigues.

The captain’s eyes twinkled on him, thinking how readily he would back smart Miss Kathleen to do the trick, if need were.

He said to her before she started: ’Don’t forget he may be a clever fellow with that pen of his, and useful to our party.’

‘I’ll not forget,’ said she.

For the good of his party, then, Captain Con permitted her to take the walk up Caer Gybi alone with Mr. Colesworth: a memorable walk in the recollections of the scribe, because of the wonderful likeness of the young lady to the breezy weather and the sparkles over the deep, the cloud that frowned, the cloud that glowed, the green of the earth greening out from under wings of shadow, the mountain ranges holding hands about an immensity of space. It was one of our giant days to his emotions, and particularly memorable to him through the circumstance that it insisted on a record in verse, and he was unused to the fetters of metre: and although the verse was never seen by man, his attempt at it confused his ideas of his expressive powers. Oddly too, while scourging the lines with criticism, he had a fondness for them: they stamped a radiant day in his mind, beyond the resources of rhetoric to have done it equally.

This was the day of Captain Con’s crossing the Rubicon between the secret of his happiness and a Parliamentary career.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTAIN CON'S LETTER

Women may be able to tell you why the nursing of a military invalid awakens tenderer anxieties in their bosoms than those called forth by the drab civilian. If we are under sentence of death we are all of us pathetic of course; but stretched upon the debateable couch of sickness we are not so touching as the coloured coat: it has the distinction belonging to colour. It smites a deeper nerve, or more than one; and this, too, where there is no imaginary subjection to the charms of military glory, in minds to which the game of war is lurid as the plumes of the arch-slayer.

Page 4347

Jane Mattock assisting Mrs. Adister O'Donnell to restore Captain Philip was very singularly affected, like a person shut off on a sudden from her former theories and feelings. Theoretically she despised the soldier's work as much as she shrank abhorrently from bloodshed. She regarded him and his trappings as an ensign of our old barbarism, and could peruse platitudes upon that theme with enthusiasm. The soldier personally, she was accustomed to consider an inferior intelligence: a sort of schoolboy when young, and schoolmaster when mature a visibly limited creature, not a member of our broader world. Without dismissing any of these views she found them put aside for the reception of others of an opposite character; and in her soul she would have ascribed it to her cares of nursing that she had become thoughtful, doubtful, hopeful, even prayerful, surcharged with zeal, to help to save a good sword for the country. If in a world still barbarous we must have soldiers, here was one whom it would be grievous to lose. He had fallen for the country; and there was a moving story of how he had fallen. She inclined to think more highly of him for having courted exposure on a miserable frontier war where but a poor sheaf of glory could be gathered. And he seemed to estimate his professional duties apart from an aim at the laurels. A conception of the possibility of a man's being both a soldier and morally a hero edged its way into her understanding. It stood edgeways within, desirous of avoiding a challenge to show every feature.

The cares of nursing were Jane's almost undividedly, except for the aid she had from her friend Grace Barrow and from Miss Colesworth. Mrs. Adister O'Donnell was a nurse in name only. 'She'll be seen by Philip like as if she were a nightmare apparition of his undertaker's wraith,' Captain Con said to Jane, when recommending his cousin to her charitable nature, after he had taken lodgings at a farmhouse near Mrs. Lackstraw's model farm Woodside on the hills. 'Barring the dress,' as he added, some such impression of her frigid mournfulness might have struck a recumbent invalid. Jane acknowledged it, and at first induced her aunt to join her in the daily walk of half a mile to sit with him. Mrs. Lackstraw was a very busy lady at her farm; she was often summoned to London by her intuition of John's wish to have her presiding at table for the entertainment of his numerous guests; she confessed that she supervised the art of nursing better than she practised it, and supervision can be done at a distance if the subordinate is properly attentive to the rules we lay down, as Jane appeared to be. So Jane was left to him. She loved the country; Springtide in the country set her singing; her walk to her patient at Lappett's farm and homeward was an aethereal rapture for a heart rocking easy in fulness. There was nothing to trouble it, no hint of wild winds and heavy seas, not even the familiar insinuation from the vigilant

Page 4348

monitress, her aunt, to bid her be on her guard, beware of what it is that great heiresses are courted for, steel her heart against serpent speeches, see well to have the woman's precious word No at the sentinel's post, and alert there. Mrs. Lackstraw, the most vigilant and plain-spoken of her sex, had forborne to utter the usual warnings which were to preserve Miss Mattock for her future Earl or Duke and the reason why she forbore was a double one; a soldier and Papist could never be thought perilous to a young woman scorning the sons of Mars and slaves of sacerdotalism. The picture of Jane bestowing her hand on a Roman Catholic in military uniform, refused to be raised before the mind. Charitableness, humaneness, the fact that she was an admirable nurse and liked to exercise her natural gift, perfectly accounted for Jane's trips to Lappett's farm, and the jellies and fresh dairy dainties and neat little dishes she was constantly despatching to the place. A suggestion of possible danger might prove more dangerous than silence, by rendering it attractive. Besides, Jane talked of poor Captain Philip as Patrick O'Donnell's brother, whom she was bound to serve in return for Patrick's many services to her; and of how unlike Patrick he was. Mrs. Lackstraw had been apprehensive about her fancy for Patrick. Therefore if Captain Philip was unlike him, and strictly a Catholic, according to report, the suspicion of danger dispersed, and she was allowed to enjoy the pleasures of the metropolis as frequently as she chose. The nursing of a man of Letters, or of the neighbour to him, a beggar in rags, would not have been so tolerated. Thus we perceive that wits actively awake inside the ring-fence of prepossessions they have erected may lull themselves with their wakefulness. Who would have thought!—is the cry when the strongest bulwark of the fence is broken through.

Jane least of any would have thought what was coming to pass. The pale square-browed young officer, so little Irish and winning in his brevity of speech, did and said nothing to alarm her or strike the smallest light. Grace Barrow noticed certain little changes of mood in Jane she could scarcely have had a distinct suspicion at the time. After a recent observation of him, on an evening stroll from Lappett's to Woodside, she pronounced him interesting, but hard. 'He has an interesting head . . . I should not like to offend him.' They agreed as to his unlikeness to fluid Patrick; both eulogistic of the absent brother; and Jane, who could be playful in privacy with friends, clapped a brogue on her tongue to discourse of Patrick and apostrophise him: 'Oh! Pat, Pat, my dear cousin Pat! why are you so long away from your desponding Jane? I 'll take to poetry and write songs, if you don't come home soon. You've put seas between us, and are behaving to me as an enemy. I know you 'll bring home a foreign Princess to break the heart of your faithful. But I'll always praise you for a dear boy, Pat, and wish you happy, and beg the good gentleman your brother to give me a diploma as nurse to your first-born. There now!'

Page 4349

She finished smiling brightly, and Grace was a trifle astonished, for her friend's humour was not as a rule dramatic.

'You really have caught a twang of it from your friend Captain Con; only you don't rattle the eighteenth letter of the alphabet in the middle of words.'

'I've tried, and can't persuade my tongue to do it "first off," as boys say, and my invalid has no brogue whatever to keep me in practice,' Jane replied. 'One wonders what he thinks of as he lies there by the window. He doesn't confide it to his hospital nurse.'

'Yes, he would treat her courteously, just in that military style,' said Grace, realising the hospital attendance.

'It 's the style I like best:—no perpetual personal thankings and allusions to the trouble he gives!' Jane exclaimed. 'He shows perfect good sense, and I like that in all things, as you know. A red-haired young woman chooses to wait on him and bring him flowers —he's brother to Patrick in his love of wild flowers, at all events!—and he takes it naturally and simply. These officers bear illness well. I suppose it 's the drill.'

'Still I think it a horrid profession, dear.'

Grace felt obliged to insist on that: and her 'I think,' though it was not stressed, tickled Jane's dormant ear to some drowsy wakefulness.

'I think too much honour is paid to it, certainly. But soldiers, of all men, one would expect to be overwhelmed by a feeling of weakness. He has never complained; not once. I doubt if he would have complained if Mrs. Adister had been waiting on him all the while, or not a soul. I can imagine him lying on the battle-field night after night quietly, resolving not to groan.'

'Too great a power of self-repression sometimes argues the want of any emotional nature,' said Grace.

Jane shook her head. She knew a story of him contradicting that.

The story had not recurred to her since she had undertaken her service. It coloured the remainder of an evening walk home through the beechwoods and over the common with Grace, and her walk across the same tracks early in the morning, after Grace had gone to London. Miss Colesworth was coming to her next week, with her brother if he had arrived in England. Jane remembered having once been curious about this adventurous man of Letters who lived by the work of his pen. She remembered comparing him to one who was compelled to swim perpetually without a ship to give him rest or land in view. He had made a little money by a book, and was expending it on travels—rather imprudently, she fancied Emma Colesworth to be thinking. He talked well, but for the present she was happier in her prospect of nearly a week of loneliness.

The day was one of sunshine, windless, odorous: one of the rare placid days of April when the pettish month assumes a matronly air of summer and wears it till the end of the day. The beech twigs were strongly embrowned,

Page 4350

the larches shot up green spires by the borders of woods and on mounds within, deep ditchbanks unrolled profuse tangles of new blades, and sharp eyes might light on a late white violet overlooked by the children; primroses ran along the banks. Jane had a maxim that flowers should be spared to live their life, especially flowers of the wilds; she had reared herself on our poets; hence Mrs. Lackstraw's dread of the arrival of one of the minstrel order: and the girl, who could deliberately cut a bouquet from the garden, if requested, would refuse to pluck a wildflower. But now they cried out to her to be plucked in hosts, they claimed the sacrifice, and it seemed to her no violation of her sentiment to gather handfuls making a bunch that would have done honour to the procession of the children's May-day—a day she excused for the slaughter because her idol and prophet among the poets, wild nature's interpreter, was that day on the side of the children. How like a bath of freshness would the thick faintly-fragrant mass shine to her patient! Only to look at it was medicine! She believed, in her lively healthfulness, that the look would give him a spring to health, and she hurried forward to have them in water-the next sacred obligation to the leaving of them untouched.

She had reared herself on our poets. If much brooding on them will sometimes create a sentimentalism of the sentiment they inspire, that also, after our manner of developing, leads to finer civilisation; and as her very delicate feelings were not always tyrants over her clear and accurate judgement, they rather tended to stamp her character than lead her into foolishness. Blunt of speech, quick in sensibility, imaginative, yet idealistic, she had the complex character of diverse brain and nerve, and was often a problem to the chief person interested in it. She thought so decisively, felt so shrinkingly; spoke so flatly, brooded so softly! Such natures, in the painful effort to reconcile apparent antagonism and read themselves, forget that they are not full grown. Longer than others are they young: but meanwhile they are of an age when we are driven abroad to seek and shape our destinies.

Passing through the garden-gate of Lappett's farm she made her way to the south-western face of the house to beg a bowl of water of the farmer's wife, and had the sweet surprise of seeing her patient lying under swallows' eaves on a chair her brother had been commissioned to send from London for coming uses. He was near the farm-wife's kitchen, but to windward of the cooking-reek, pleasantly warmed, sufficiently shaded, and alone, with open letter on the rug covering his legs. He whistled to Jane's dog Wayland, a retriever, having Newfoundland relationships, of smithy redness and ruggedness; it was the whistle that startled her to turn and see him as she was in the act of handing Mrs. Lappett her primroses.

'Out? I feared it would be a week. Is it quite prudent?' Jane said, toning down her delight.

Page 4351

He answered with the half-smile that refers these questions to the settled fact. Air had always brought him round; now he could feel he was embarked for recovery: and he told her how the farmer and one of his men had lent a shoulder to present him to his old and surest physician—rather like a crippled ghost. M. Adister was upstairs in bed with one of her headaches. Captain Con, then, was attending her, Jane supposed: She spoke of him as the most devoted of husbands.

A slight hardening of Philip's brows, well-known to her by this time, caused her to interrogate his eyes. They were fixed on her in his manner of gazing with strong directness. She read the contrary opinion, and some hieroglyphic matter besides.

'We all respect him for his single-hearted care of her,' she said. 'I have a great liking for him. His tirades about the Saxon tyrant are not worth mentioning, they mean nothing. He would be one of the first to rush to the standard if there were danger; I know he would. He is truly chivalrous, I am sure.'

Philip's broad look at her had not swerved. The bowl of primroses placed beside him on a chair by the farmer's dame diverted it for a moment.

'You gathered them?' he said.

Jane drank his look at the flowers.

'Yes, on my way,' she replied. 'We can none of us live for ever; and fresh water every day will keep them alive a good long time. They had it from the clouds yesterday. Do they not seem a bath of country happiness!' Evidently they did their service in pleasing him.

Seeing his fingers grope on the rug, she handed him his open letters.

He selected the second, passing under his inspection, and asked her to read it.

She took the letter, wondering a little that it should be in Captain Con's handwriting.

'I am to read it through?' she said, after a run over some lines.

He nodded. She thought it a sign of his friendliness in sharing family secrets with her, and read:

'*My dear Philip*,—Not a word of these contents, which will be delivered seasonably to the lady chiefly concerned, by the proper person. She hears this morning I 'm off on a hasty visit to Ireland, as I have been preparing her of late to expect I must, and yours the blame, if any, though I will be the last to fling it at you. I meet Father B. and pretty Kitty before I cross. Judging by the wind this morning, the passage will furnish good schooling for a spell of the hustings. But if I am in the nature of things unable to

command the waves, trust me for holding a mob in leash; and they are tolerably alike. My spirits are up. Now the die is cast. My election to the vacancy must be reckoned beforehand. I promise you a sounding report from the Kincora Herald. They will not say of me after that (and read only the speeches reported in the local paper) “what is the man but an Irish adventurer!” He is a lover of his country, Philip O’Donnell, and one of millions, we will hope. And that stigmatic title of long standing, more than anything earthly, drove him to the step-to the ruin of his domestic felicity perhaps. But we are past sighing.

Page 4352

’Think you, when he crossed the tide, Caius Julius Caesar sighed?

’No, nor thought of his life, nor his wife, but of the thing to be done. Laugh, my boy! I know what I am about when I set my mind on a powerful example. As the chameleon gets his colour, we get our character from the objects we contemplate . . .’

Jane glanced over the edge of the letter sheet rosily at Philip.

His dryness in hitting the laughable point diverted her, and her mind became suffused with a series of pictures of the chameleon captain planted in view of the Roman to become a copy of him, so that she did not peruse the terminating lines with her wakefullest attention:

’The liege lady of my heart will be the earliest to hail her hero triumphant, or cherish him beaten—which is not in the prospect. Let Ireland be true to Ireland. We will talk of the consolidation of the Union by and by. You are for that, you say, when certain things are done; and you are where I leave you, on the highway, though seeming to go at a funeral pace to certain ceremonies leading to the union of the two countries in the solidest fashion, to their mutual benefit, after a shining example. Con sleeps with a corner of the eye open, and you are not the only soldier who is a strategist, and a tactician too, aware of when it is best to be out of the way. Now adieu and pax vobiscum. Reap the rich harvest of your fall to earth. I leave you in the charge of the kindest of nurses, next to the wife of my bosom the best of women. Appreciate her, sir, or perish in my esteem. She is one whom not to love is to be guilty of an offence deserving capital punishment, and a bastinado to season the culprit for his execution. Have I not often informed her myself that a flower from her hand means more than treasures from the hands of others. Expect me absent for a week. The harangues will not be closely reported. I stand by the truth, which is my love of the land of my birth. A wife must come second to that if she would be first in her husband’s consideration. Hurrah me on, Philip, now it is action, and let me fancy I hear you shouting it.’

The drop of the letter to the signature fluttered affectionately on a number of cordial adjectives, like the airy bird to his home in the corn.

CHAPTER XIX

MARS CONVALESCENT

Jane’s face was clear as the sky when she handed the letter back to Philip. In doing so, it struck her that the prolonged directness of his look was peculiar: she attributed it to some effect of the fresh Spring atmosphere on a weakened frame. She was guessing at his reasons for showing her the letter, and they appeared possibly serious.

’An election to Parliament! Perhaps Mrs. Adister should have a hint of it, to soften the shock I fear it may be: but we must wait till her headache has passed,’ she said.

‘You read to the end?’ said Philip.

Page 4353

’Yes, Captain Con always amuses me, and I am bound to confess I have no positive disrelish of his compliments. But this may prove a desperate step. The secret of his happiness is in extreme jeopardy. Nothing would stop him, I suppose?’

Philip signified that it was too late. He was moreover of opinion, and stated it in his briefest, that it would be advisable to leave the unfolding of the present secret to the captain.

Jane wondered why the letter had been shown. Her patient might be annoyed and needing sympathy?

‘After all,’ she said, ’Captain Con may turn out to be a very good sort of member of Parliament in his way.’

Philip’s eyebrows lifted, and he let fall a breath, eloquent of his thoughts.

’My brother says he is a serviceable director of the Company they are associated in.’

‘He finds himself among reasonable men, and he is a chameleon.’

‘Parliament may steady him.’

‘It is too much of a platform for Con’s head.’

‘Yes, there is more of poet than politician,’ said she. ’That is a danger. But he calls himself our friend; I think he really has a liking for John and me.’

‘For you he has a real love,’ said Philip.

’Well, then, he may listen to us at times; he may be trusted not to wound us. I am unmitigatedly for the one country—no divisions. We want all our strength in these days of monstrous armies directed by banditti Councils. England is the nation of the Christian example to nations. Oh! surely it is her aim. At least she strives to be that. I think it, and I see the many faults we have.’

Her patient’s eyelids were down.

She proposed to send her name up to Mrs. Adister.

On her return from the poor lady racked with headache and lying little conscious of her husband’s powder-barrel under the bed, Jane found her patient being worried by his official nurse, a farm-labourer’s wife, a bundle of a woman, whose lumbering assiduities he fenced with reiterated humourous negatives to every one of her propositions, until she prefaced the last two or three of the list with a ‘Deary me!’ addressed consolatorily to herself. She went through the same forms each day, at the usual hours of the day,

and Jane, though she would have felt the apathetic doltishness of the woman less, felt how hard it must be for him to bear.

‘Your sister will be with you soon,’ she said. ’I am glad, and yet I hope you will not allow her to put me aside altogether?’

‘You shall do as you wish,’ said Philip.

‘Is she like Patrick? Her name is Kathleen, I know.’

‘She is a raw Irish girl, of good Irish training, but Irish.’

‘I hope she will be pleased with England. Like Patrick in face, I mean.’

‘We think her a good-looking girl.’

‘Does she play? sing?’

‘Some of our ballads.’

‘She will delight my brother. John loves Irish ballads.’

Page 4354

A silence of long duration fell between them. She fancied he would like to sleep, and gently rose to slip away, that she might consult with Mrs. Lappett about putting up some tentcover. He asked her if she was going. 'Not home,' she said. His hand moved, but stopped. It seemed to have meant to detain her. She looked at a white fleece that came across the sun, desiring to conjure it to stay and shadow him. It sailed by. She raised her parasol.

His eyelids were shut, and she thought him asleep. Meditating on her unanswered question of Miss Kathleen's likeness to Patrick, Jane imagined a possibly greater likeness to her patient, and that he did not speak of his family's exclamations on the subject because of Kathleen's being so good-looking a girl. For if good-looking, a sister must resemble these handsome features here, quiescent to inspection in their marble outlines as a corse. So might he lie on the battle-field, with no one to watch over him!

While she watched, sitting close beside him to shield his head from the sunbeams, her heart began to throb before she well knew the secret of it. She had sight of a tear that grew big under the lashes of each of his eyelids, and rolled heavily. Her own eyes overflowed.

The fit of weeping was momentary, April's, a novelty with her. She accused her silly visions of having softened her. A hasty smoothing to right and left removed the traces; they were unseen; and when she ventured to look at him again there was no sign of fresh drops falling. His eyelids kept shut.

The arrival of her diurnal basket of provisions offered a refreshing intervention of the commonplace. Bright air had sharpened his appetite: he said he had been sure it would, and anticipated cheating the doctor of a part of the sentence which condemned him to lie on his back up to the middle of June, a log. Jane was hungry too, and they feasted together gaily, talking of Kathleen on her journey, her strange impressions and her way of proclaiming them, and of Patrick and where he might be now; ultimately of Captain Con and Mrs. Adister.

'He has broken faith with her,' Philip said sternly. 'She will have the right to tell him so. He never can be anything but a comic politician. Still he was bound to consult his wife previous to stepping before the public. He knows that he married a fortune.'

'A good fortune,' said Jane.

Philip acquiesced. 'She is an excellent woman, a model of uprightness; she has done him all the good in the world, and here is he deceiving her, lying—there is no other word: and one lie leads to another. When he married a fortune he was a successful adventurer. The compact was understood. His duty as a man of honour is to be true to his bond and serve the lady. Falseness to his position won't wash him clean of the title.'

Jane pleaded for Captain Con. ‘He is chivalrously attentive to her.’

‘You have read his letter,’ Philip replied.

Page 4355

He crushed her charitable apologies with references to the letter.

‘We are not certain that Mrs. Adister will object,’ said she.

‘Do you see her reading a speech of her husband’s?’ he remarked. Presently with something like a moan:

‘And I am her guest!’

’Oh! pray, do not think Mrs. Adister will ever allow you to feel the lightest shadow . . .’ said Jane.

‘No; that makes it worse.’

Had this been the burden of his thoughts when those two solitary tears forced their passage?

Hardly: not even in his physical weakness would he consent to weep for such a cause.

’I forgot to mention that Mrs. Adister has a letter from her husband telling her he has been called over to Ireland on urgent business,’ she said.

Philip answered: ‘He is punctilious.’

‘I wish indeed he had been more candid,’ Jane assented to the sarcasm.

’In Ireland he is agreeably surprised by the flattering proposal of a vacant seat, and not having an instant to debate on it, assumes the consent of the heavenliest wife in Christendom.’

Philip delivered the speech with a partial imitation of Captain Con addressing his wife on his return as the elected among the pure Irish party. The effort wearied him.

She supposed he was regretting his cousin’s public prominence in the ranks of the malcontents. ‘He will listen to you,’ she said, while she smiled at his unwonted display of mimicry.

’A bad mentor for him. Antics are harmless, though they get us laughed at,’ said Philip.

‘You may restrain him from excesses.’

’Were I in that position, you would consider me guilty of greater than any poor Con is likely to commit.’

‘Surely you are not for disunion?’

‘The reverse. I am for union on juster terms, that will hold it fast.’

‘But what are the terms?’

He must have desired to paint himself as black to her as possible. He stated the terms, which were hardly less than the affrighting ones blown across the Irish sea by that fierce party. He held them to be just, simply sensible terms. True, he spoke of the granting them as a sure method to rally all Ireland to an ardent love of the British flag. But he praised names of Irish leaders whom she had heard Mr. Rockney denounce for disloyal insolence: he could find excuses for them and their dupes—poor creatures, verily! And his utterances had a shocking emphasis. Then she was not wrong in her idea of the conspirator’s head, her first impression of him!

She could not quit the theme: doing that would have been to be indifferent: something urged her to it.

‘Are they really your opinions?’

He seemed relieved by declaring that they were.

‘Patrick is quite free of them,’ said she.

’We will hope that the Irish fever will spare Patrick. He was at a Jesuit college in France when he was wax. Now he’s taking the world.’

Page 4356

‘With so little of the Jesuit in him!’

‘Little of the worst: a good deal of the best.’

‘What is the best?’

’Their training to study. They train you to concentrate the brain upon the object of study. And they train you to accept service: they fit you for absolute service: they shape you for your duties in the world; and so long as they don’t smelt a man’s private conscience, they are model masters. Happily Patrick has held his own. Not the Jesuits would have a chance of keeping a grasp on Patrick! He’ll always be a natural boy and a thoughtful man.’

Jane’s features implied a gentle shudder.

‘I shake a scarlet cloak to you?’ said Philip.

She was directed by his words to think of the scarlet coat. ’I reflect a little on the substance of things as well,’ she said. ’Would not Patrick’s counsels have an influence?’

‘Hitherto our Patrick has never presumed to counsel his elder brother.’

‘But an officer wearing . . .’

’The uniform! That would have to be stripped off. There’d be an end to any professional career.’

‘You would not regret it?’

’No sorrow is like a soldier’s bidding farewell to flag and comrades. Happily politics and I have no business together. If the country favours me with active service I’m satisfied for myself. You asked me for my opinions: I was bound to give them. Generally I let them rest.’

Could she have had the temerity? Jane marvelled at herself.

She doubted that the weighty pair of tears had dropped for the country. Captain Con would have shed them over Erin, and many of them. Captain Philip’s tone was too plain and positive: he would be a most practical unhistrionic rebel.

‘You would countenance a revolt?’ she said, striking at that extreme to elicit the favourable answer her tones angled for. And it was instantly:

‘Not in arms.’ He tried an explanation by likening the dissension to a wrangle in a civilised family over an unjust division of property.

And here, as he was marking the case with some nicety and difficulty, an itinerant barrel-organ crashed its tragic tale of music put to torture at the gate. It yelled of London to Jane, throttled the spirits of the woods, threw a smoke over the country sky, befouled the pure air she loved.

The instrument was one of the number which are packed to suit all English tastes and may be taken for a rough sample of the jumble of them, where a danceless quadrille-tune succeeds a suicidal Operatic melody and is followed by the weariful hymn, whose last drawl pert polka kicks aside. Thus does the poor Savoyard compel a rich people to pay for their wealth. Not without pathos in the abstract perhaps do the wretched machines pursue their revolutions of their factory life, as incapable of conceiving as of bestowing pleasure: a bald cry for pennies through the barest pretence

Page 4357

to be agreeable but Jane found it hard to be tolerant of them out of London, and this one affecting her invalid and Mrs. Adister must be dismissed. Wayland was growling; he had to be held by the collar. He spied an objectionable animal. A jerky monkey was attached to the organ; and his coat was red, his kepi was blue; his tailor had rigged him as a military gentleman. Jane called to the farm-wife. Philip assured her he was not annoyed. Jane observed him listening, and by degrees she distinguished a maundering of the Italian song she had one day sung to Patrick in his brother's presence.

'I remember your singing that the week before I went to India,' said Philip, and her scarlet blush flooded her face.

'Can you endure the noise?' she asked him.

'Con would say it shrieks "murder." But I used to like it once.'

Mrs. Lappett came answering to the call. Her children were seen up the garden setting to one another with squared aprons, responsive to a livelier measure.

'Bless me, miss, we think it so cheerful!' cried Mrs. Lappett, and glanced at her young ones harmonious and out of mischief.

'Very well,' said Jane, always considerate for children. She had forgotten the racked Mrs. Adister.

Now the hymn of Puritanical gloom-the peacemaker with Providence performing devotional exercises in black bile. The leaps of the children were dashed. A sallow two or three minutes composed their motions, and then they jumped again to the step for lively legs. The similarity to the regimental band heading soldiers on the march from Church might have struck Philip.

'I wonder when I shall see Patrick!' he said, quickened in spite of himself by the sham sounds of music to desire changes and surprises.

Jane was wondering whether he could be a man still to brood tearfully over his old love.

She echoed him. 'And I! Soon, I hope.'

The appearance of Mrs. Adister with features which were the acutest critical summary of the discord caused toll to be paid instantly, and they beheld a flashing of white teeth and heard Italian accents. The monkey saluted militarily, but with painful suggestions of his foregone drilling in the ceremony.

'We are safe nowhere from these intrusions,' Mrs. Adister said; 'not on these hills!—and it must be a trial for the wretched men to climb them, that thing on their backs.'

’They are as accustomed to it as mountain smugglers bearing packs of contraband,’ said Philip.

’Con would have argued him out of hearing before he ground a second note,’ she resumed. ’I have no idea when Con returns from his unexpected visit to Ireland.’

‘Within a fortnight, madam.’

’Let me believe it! You have heard from him? But you are in the air! exposed! My head makes me stupid. It is now five o’clock. The air begins to chill. Con will never forgive me if you catch a cold, and I would not incur his blame.’

Page 4358

The eyes of Jane and Philip shot an exchange.

‘Anything you command, madam,’ said Philip.

He looked up and breathed his heaven of fresh air. Jane pitied, she could not interpose to thwart his act of resignation. The farmer, home for tea, and a footman, took him between them, crutched, while Mrs. Adister said to Jane: ’The doctor’s orders are positive:—if he is to be a man once more, he must rest his back and not use his legs for months. He was near to being a permanent cripple from that fall. My brother Edward had one like it in his youth. Soldiers are desperate creatures.’

‘I think Mr. Adister had his fall when hunting, was it not?’ said Jane.

‘Hunting, my dear.’

That was rather different from a fall on duty before the enemy, incurred by severe exhaustion after sunstroke! . . .

Jane took her leave of Philip beside his couch of imprisonment in his room, promising to return in the early morning. He embraced her old dog Wayland tenderly. Hard men have sometimes a warm affection for dogs.

Walking homeward she likewise gave Wayland a hug. She called him ’dear old fellow,’ and questioned him of his fondness for her, warning him not to be faithless ever to the mistress who loved him. Was not her old Wayland as good a protector as the footman Mrs. Adister pressed her to have at her heels? That he was!

Captain Con’s behaviour grieved her. And it certainly revived an ancient accusation against his countrymen. If he cared for her so much, why had he not placed confidence in her and commissioned her to speak of his election to his wife? Irishmen will never be quite sincere!—But why had his cousin exposed him to one whom he greatly esteemed? However angry he might be with Con O’Donnell in his disapproval of the captain’s conduct, it was not very considerate to show the poor man to her in his natural colours. Those words: ‘The consolidation of the Union:’ sprang up. She had a dim remembrance of words ensuing: ’ceremonies going at a funeral pace . . . on the highway to the solidest kind of union:’—Yes, he wrote: ‘I leave you to . . .’ And Captain Philip showed her the letter:

She perceived motives beginning to stir. He must have had his intention: and now as to his character!—Jane was of the order of young women possessing active minds instead of figured paste-board fronts, who see what there is to be seen about them and know what may be known instead of decorously waiting for the astonishment of revelations. As soon as she had asked herself the nature of the design of so honourable a man as Captain Philip in showing her his cousin’s letter, her blood spun

round and round, waving the reply as a torch; and the question of his character confirmed it.

Page 4359

But could he be imagined seeking to put her on her guard? There may be modesty in men well aware of their personal attractions: they can credit individual women with powers of resistance. He was not vain to the degree which stupefies the sense of there being weight or wisdom in others. And he was honour's own. By these lights of his character she read the act. His intention was . . . and even while she saw it accurately, the moment of keen perception was overclouded by her innate distrust of her claim to feminine charms. For why should he wish her to understand that he was no fortune-hunter and treated heiresses with greater reserve than ordinary women! How could it matter to him?

She saw the tears roll. Tears of men sink plummet-deep; they find their level. The tears of such a man have more of blood than of water in them.—What was she doing when they fell? She was shading his head from the sun. What, then, if those tears came of the repressed desire to thank her with some little warmth? He was honour's own, and warmhearted Patrick talked of him as a friend whose heart was, his friend's. Thrilling to kindness, and, poor soul! helpless to escape it, he felt perhaps that he had never thanked her, and could not. He lay there, weak and tongue-tied: hence those two bright volumes of his condition of weakness.

So the pursuit of the mystery ended, as it had commenced, in confusion, but of a milder sort and partially transparent at one or two of the gates she had touched. A mind capable of seeing was twisted by a nature that would not allow of open eyes; yet the laden emotions of her nature brought her round by another channel to the stage neighbouring sight, where facts, dimly recognised for such—as they may be in truth, are accepted under their disguises, because disguise of them is needed by the bashful spirit which accuses itself of audaciousness in presuming to speculate. Had she asked herself the reason of her extended speculation, her foot would not have stopped more abruptly on the edge of a torrent than she on that strange road of vapours and flying lights. She did not; she sang, she sent her voice through the woods and took the splendid ring of it for an assurance of her peculiarly unshackled state. She loved this liberty. Of the men who had 'done her the honour,' not one had moved her to regret the refusal. She lived in the hope of simply doing good, and could only give her hand to a man able to direct and help her; one who would bear to be matched with her brother. Who was he? Not discoverable; not likely to be.

Therefore she had her freedom, an absolutely unflushed freedom, happier than poor Grace Barrow's. Rumour spoke of Emma Colesworth having a wing clipped. How is it that sensible women can be so susceptible? For, thought Jane, the moment a woman is what is called in love, she can give her heart no longer to the innocent things about her; she is cut away from Nature: that pure well-water is tasteless to her. To me it is wine!

Page 4360

The drinking of the pure well-water as wine is among the fatal signs of fire in the cup, showing Nature at work rather to enchain the victim than bid her daughter go. Jane of course meant the poet's 'Nature.' She did not reflect that the strong glow of poetic imagination is wanted to hallow a passionate devotion to the inanimate for this evokes the spiritual; and passionateness of any kind in narrower brains should be a proclamation to us of sanguine freshets not coming from a spiritual source. But the heart betraying deluded her. She fancied she had not ever been so wedded to Nature as on that walk through the bursting beechwoods, that sweet lonely walk, perfect in loneliness, where even a thought of a presence was thrust away as a desecration and images of souls in thought were shadowy.

Her lust of freedom gave her the towering holiday. She took the delirium in her own pure fashion, in a love of the bankside flowers and the downy edges of the young beech-buds fresh on the sprays. And it was no unreal love, though too intent and forcible to win the spirit from the object. She paid for this indulgence of her mood by losing the spirit entirely. At night she was a spent rocket. What had gone she could not tell: her very soul she almost feared. Her glorious walk through the wood seemed burnt out. She struck a light to try her poet on the shelf of the elect of earth by her bed, and she read, and read flatness. Not his the fault! She revered him too deeply to lay it on him. Whose was it? She had a vision of the gulfs of bondage.

Could it be possible that human persons were subject to the spells of persons with tastes, aims, practices, pursuits alien to theirs? It was a riddle taxing her to solve it for the resistance to a monstrous iniquity of injustice, degrading her conception of our humanity. She attacked it in the abstract, as a volunteer champion of our offended race. And Oh! it could not be. The battle was won without a blow.

Thereupon came glimpses of the gulfs of bondage, delicious, rose-enfolded, foreign; they were chapters of soft romance, appearing interminable, an endless mystery, an insatiable thirst for the mystery. She heard crashes of the opera-melody, and despising it even more than the wretched engine of the harshness, she was led by it, tyrannically led a captive, like the organ-monkey, until perforce she usurped the note, sounded the cloying tune through her frame, passed into the vulgar sugariness, lost herself.

And saying to herself: This is what moves them! she was moved. One thrill of appreciation drew her on the tide, and once drawn from shore she became submerged. Why am I not beautiful, was her thought. Those voluptuous modulations of melting airs are the natural clothing of beautiful women. Beautiful women may believe themselves beloved. They are privileged to believe, they are born with the faith.

Etext editor's bookmarks

Page 4361

A country of compromise goes to pieces at the first cannon-shot
A lady’s company-smile
A superior position was offered her by her being silent
A whisper of cajolery in season is often the secret
A contented Irishman scarcely seems my countryman
Ah! we’re in the enemy’s country now
And it’s one family where the dog is pulled by the collar
Arch-devourer Time
As secretive as they are sensitive
As if she had never heard him previously enunciate the formula
Be politic and give her elbow-room for her natural angles
Beautiful women may believe themselves beloved
Becoming air of appropriation that made it family history
Constitutionally discontented
Could peruse platitudes upon that theme with enthusiasm
Decency’s a dirty petticoat in the Garden of Innocence
England’s the foremost country of the globe
Enjoys his luxuries and is ashamed of his laziness
Fires in the grates went through the ceremony of warming nobody
Foamy top is offered and gulped as equivalent to an idea
Foist on you their idea of your idea at the moment
Grimaces at a government long-nosed to no purpose
Hard men have sometimes a warm affection for dogs
He judged of others by himself
He was not alive for his own pleasure
Hear victorious lawlessness appealing solemnly to God the law
Her aspect suggested the repose of a winter landscape
Here, where he both wished and wished not to be
Hug the hatred they packed up among their bundles
I never saw out of a doll-shop, and never saw there
I ’m the warming pan, as legitimately I should be
I detest enthusiasm
I baint done yet
Indirect communication with heaven
Ireland ’s the sore place of England
Irishman there is a barrow trolling a load of grievances
Irishmen will never be quite sincere
Irony in him is only eulogy standing on its head
Lack of precise words admonished him of the virtue of silence
Loudness of the interrogation precluded thought of an answer
Love the children of Erin, when not fretted by them
Loves his poets, can almost understand what poetry means
Married at forty, and I had to take her shaped as she was

May lull themselves with their wakefulness
Men must fight: the law is only a quieter field for them
Mika! you did it in cold blood?
Never forget that old Ireland is weeping
No man can hear the words which prove him a prophet (quietly)
Not every chapter can be sunshine
Not likely to be far behind curates in besieging an heiress
Not the great creatures we assume ourselves to be
Not so much read a print as read the imprinting on themselves
Not to bother your wits, but leave the puzzle to the priest

Page 4362

Nursing of a military invalid awakens tenderer anxieties
Old houses are doomed to burnings
Our lawyers have us inside out, like our physicians
Paying compliments and spoiling a game!
Philip was a Spartan for keeping his feelings under
Secret of the art was his meaning what he said
Suggestion of possible danger might more dangerous than silence
Taste a wound from the lightest touch, and they nurse the venom
Tears of men sink plummet-deep
Tears of such a man have more of blood than of water in them
That fiery dragon, a beautiful woman with brains
The race is for domestic peace, my boy
They laugh, but they laugh extinguishingly
Time, whose trick is to turn corners of unanticipated sharpness
Twisted by a nature that would not allow of open eyes
We’re all of us hit at last, and generally by our own weapon
We’re smitten to-day in our hearts and our pockets
Welsh blood is queer blood
Where one won’t and can’t, poor t’ other must
Winds of panic are violently engaged in occupying the vacuum
With a frozen fish of admirable principles for wife
With death; we’d rather not, because of a qualm
Withdrew into the entrenchments of contempt
Woman’s precious word No at the sentinel’s post, and alert
Would like to feel he was doing a bit of good
You’ll tell her you couldn’t sit down in her presence undressed

THE ENTIRE SHORT WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

CONTENTS: Farina Case of General Ople The Tale of Chloe The House on the Beach The Gentleman of Fifty The Sentimentalists Miscellaneous Prose

FARINA

By George Meredith

THE WHITE ROSE CLUB

In those lusty ages when the Kaisers lifted high the golden goblet of Aachen, and drank, elbow upward, the green-eyed wine of old romance, there lived, a bow-shot from the bones of the Eleven Thousand Virgins and the Three Holy Kings, a prosperous Rhinelander, by name Gottlieb Groschen, or, as it was sometimes ennobled, Gottlieb von Groschen; than whom no wealthier merchant bartered for the glory of his ancient mother-city, nor more honoured burgess swallowed impartially red juice and white under the shadow of his own fig-tree.

Vine-hills, among the hottest sun-bibbers of the Rheingau, glistened in the roll of Gottlieb's possessions; corn-acres below Cologne; basalt-quarries about Linz; mineral-springs in Nassau, a legacy of the Romans to the genius and enterprise of the first of German traders. He could have bought up every hawking crag, owner and all, from Hatto's Tower to Rheineck. Lore-ley, combing her yellow locks against the night-cloud, beheld old Gottlieb's rafts endlessly stealing on the moonlight through the iron pass she peoples above St. Goar. A wailful host were the wives of his raftsmen widowed there by her watery music!

Page 4363

This worthy citizen of Cologne held vasty manuscript letters of the Kaiser addressed to him:

‘Dear Well-born son and Subject of mine, Gottlieb!’ and he was easy with the proudest princes of the Holy German Realm. For Gottlieb was a money-lender and an honest man in one body. He laid out for the plenteous harvests of usury, not pressing the seasons with too much rigour. ’I sow my seed in winter,’ said he, ’and hope to reap good profit in autumn; but if the crop be scanty, better let it lie and fatten the soil.’

‘Old earth’s the wisest creditor,’ he would add; ’she never squeezes the sun, but just takes what he can give her year by year, and so makes sure of good annual interest.’

Therefore when people asked Gottlieb how he had risen to such a pinnacle of fortune, the old merchant screwed his eye into its wisest corner, and answered slyly, ’Because I ’ve always been a student of the heavenly bodies’; a communication which failed not to make the orbs and systems objects of ardent popular worship in Cologne, where the science was long since considered alchymic, and still may be.

Seldom could the Kaiser go to war on Welschland without first taking earnest counsel of his Well-born son and Subject Gottlieb, and lightening his chests. Indeed the imperial pastime must have ceased, and the Kaiser had languished but for him. Cologne counted its illustrious citizen something more than man. The burghers doffed when he passed; and scampish leather-draggled urchins gazed after him with praeternatural respect on their hanging chins, as if a gold-mine of great girth had walked through the awe-struck game.

But, for the young men of Cologne he had a higher claim to reverence as father of the fair Margarita, the White Rose of Germany; a noble maiden, peerless, and a jewel for princes.

The devotion of these youths should give them a name in chivalry. In her honour, daily and nightly, they earned among themselves black bruises and paraded discoloured countenances, with the humble hope to find it pleasing in her sight. The tender fanatics went in bands up and down Rhineland, challenging wayfarers and the peasantry with staff and beaker to acknowledge the supremacy of their mistress. Whoso of them journeyed into foreign parts, wrote home boasting how many times his head had been broken on behalf of the fair Margarita; and if this happened very often, a spirit of envy was created, which compelled him, when he returned, to verify his prowess on no less than a score of his rivals. Not to possess a beauty-scar, as the wounds received in these endless combats were called, became the sign of inferiority, so that much voluntary maiming was conjectured to be going on; and to obviate this piece of treachery, minutes of fights were taken and attested, setting forth that a certain glorious cut or crack was honourably won in fair field; on what occasion; and from whom; every member of the White Rose Club keeping his particular

Page 4364

scroll, and, on days of festival and holiday, wearing it haughtily in his helm. Strangers entering Cologne were astonished at the hideous appearance of the striplings, and thought they never had observed so ugly a race; but they were forced to admit the fine influence of beauty on commerce, seeing that the consumption of beer increased almost hourly. All Bavaria could not equal Cologne for quantity made away with.

The chief members of the White Rose Club were Berthold Schmidt, the rich goldsmith's son; Dietrich Schill, son of the imperial saddler; Heinrich Abt, Franz Endermann, and Ernst Geller, sons of chief burghers, each of whom carried a yard-long scroll in his cap, and was too disfigured in person for men to require an inspection of the document. They were dangerous youths to meet, for the oaths, ceremonies, and recantations they demanded from every wayfarer, under the rank of baron, were what few might satisfactorily perform, if lovers of woman other than the fair Margarita, or loyal husbands; and what none save trained heads and stomachs could withstand, however naturally manful. The captain of the Club was he who could drink most beer without intermediate sighing, and whose face reckoned the proudest number of slices and mixture of colours. The captaincy was most in dispute between Dietrich Schill and Berthold Schmidt, who, in the heat and constancy of contention, were gradually losing likeness to man. 'Good coin,' they gloried to reflect, 'needs no stamp.'

One youth in Cologne held out against the standing tyranny, and chose to do beauty homage in his own fashion, and at his leisure. It was Farina, and oaths were registered against him over empty beer-barrels. An axiom of the White Rose Club laid it down that everybody must be enamoured of Margarita, and the conscience of the Club made them trebly suspicious of those who were not members. They had the consolation of knowing that Farina was poor, but then he was affirmed a student of Black Arts, and from such a one the worst might reasonably be feared. He might bewitch Margarita!

Dietrich Schill was deputed by the Club to sound the White Rose herself on the subject of Farina, and one afternoon in the vintage season, when she sat under the hot vine-poles among maiden friends, eating ripe grapes, up sauntered Dietrich, smirking, cap in hand, with his scroll trailed behind him.

'Wilt thou?' said Margarita, offering him a bunch.

'Unhappy villain that I am!' replied Dietrich, gesticulating fox-like refusal; 'if I but accept a favour, I break faith with the Club.'

'Break it to pleasure me,' said Margarita, smiling wickedly.

Dietrich gasped. He stood on tiptoe to see if any of the Club were by, and half-stretched out his hand. A mocking laugh caused him to draw it back as if stung. The grapes fell. Farina was at Margarita's feet offering them in return.

‘Wilt thou?’ said Margarita, with softer stress, and slight excess of bloom in her cheeks.

Page 4365

Farina put the purple cluster to his breast, and clutched them hard on his heart, still kneeling.

Margarita's brow and bosom seemed to be reflections of the streaming crimson there. She shook her face to the sky, and affected laughter at the symbol. Her companions clapped hands. Farina's eyes yearned to her once, and then he rose and joined in the pleasantry.

Fury helped Dietrich to forget his awkwardness. He touched Farina on the shoulder with two fingers, and muttered huskily: 'The Club never allow that.'

Farina bowed, as to thank him deeply for the rules of the Club. 'I am not a member, you know,' said he, and strolled to a seat close by Margarita.

Dietrich glared after him. As head of a Club he understood the use of symbols. He had lost a splendid opportunity, and Farina had seized it. Farina had robbed him.

'May I speak with Mistress Margarita?' inquired the White Rose chief, in a ragged voice.

'Surely, Dietrich! do speak,' said Margarita.

'Alone?' he continued.

'Is that allowed by the Club?' said one of the young girls, with a saucy glance.

Dietrich deigned no reply, but awaited Margarita's decision. She hesitated a second; then stood up her full height before him; faced him steadily, and beckoned him some steps up the vine-path. Dietrich bowed, and passing Farina, informed him that the Club would wring satisfaction out of him for the insult.

Farina laughed, but answered, 'Look, you of the Club! beer-swilling has improved your manners as much as fighting has beautified your faces. Go on; drink and fight! but remember that the Kaiser's coming, and fellows with him who will not be bullied.'

'What mean you?' cried Dietrich, lurching round on his enemy.

'Not so loud, friend,' returned Farina. 'Or do you wish to frighten the maidens? I mean this, that the Club had better give as little offence as possible, and keep their eyes as wide as they can, if they want to be of service to Mistress Margarita.'

Dietrich turned off with a grunt.

'Now!' said Margarita.

She was tapping her foot. Dietrich grew unfaithful to the Club, and looked at her longer than his mission warranted. She was bright as the sunset gardens of the Golden Apples. The braids of her yellow hair were bound in wreaths, and on one side of her head a saffron crocus was stuck with the bell downward. Sweetness, song, and wit hung like dews of morning on her grape-stained lips. She wore a scarlet corset with bands of black velvet across her shoulders. The girlish gown was thin blue stuff, and fell short over her firm-set feet, neatly cased in white leather with buckles. There was witness in her limbs and the way she carried her neck of an amiable, but capable, dragon, ready, when aroused, to bristle up and guard the Golden Apples against all save the rightful claimant. Yet her nether lip and little white chin-ball had a

Page 4366

dreamy droop; her frank blue eyes went straight into the speaker: the dragon slept. It was a dangerous charm. ‘For,’ says the minnesinger, ’what ornament more enchants us on a young beauty than the soft slumber of a strength never yet called forth, and that herself knows not of! It sings double things to the heart of knighthood; lures, and warns us; woos, and threatens. ‘Tis as nature, shining peace, yet the mother of storm.’

‘There is no man,’ rapturously exclaims Heinrich von der Jungferweide, ’can resist the desire to win a sweet treasure before which lies a dragon sleeping. The very danger prattles promise.’

But the dragon must really sleep, as with Margarita.

’A sham dragon, shamming sleep, has destroyed more virgins than all the heathen emperors,’ says old Hans Aepfelmann of Duesseldorf.

Margarita’s foot was tapping quicker.

‘Speak, Dietrich!’ she said.

Dietrich declared to the Club that at this point he muttered, ’We love you.’ Margarita was glad to believe he had not spoken of himself. He then informed her of the fears entertained by the Club, sworn to watch over and protect her, regarding Farina’s arts.

‘And what fear you?’ said Margarita.

‘We fear, sweet mistress, he may be in league with Sathanas,’ replied Dietrich.

‘Truly, then,’ said Margarita, ’of all the youths in Cologne he is the least like his confederate.’

Dietrich gulped and winked, like a patient recovering wry-faced from an abhorred potion.

‘We have warned you, Fraulein Groschen!’ he exclaimed. ’It now becomes our duty to see that you are not snared.’

Margarita reddened, and returned: ’You are kind. But I am a Christian maiden and not a Pagan soldan, and I do not require a body of tawny guards at my heels.’

Thereat she flung back to her companions, and began staining her pretty mouth with grapes anew.

THE TAPESTRY WORD

Fair maids will have their hero in history. Siegfried was Margarita's chosen. She sang of Siegfried all over the house. 'O the old days of Germany, when such a hero walked!' she sang.

'And who wins Margarita,' mused Farina, 'happier than Siegfried, has in his arms Brunhild and Chrimhild together!'

Crowning the young girl's breast was a cameo, and the skill of some cunning artist out of Welschland had wrought on it the story of the Drachenfels. Her bosom heaved the battle up and down.

This cameo was a north star to German manhood, but caused many chaste expressions of abhorrence from Aunt Lisbeth, Gottlieb's unmarried sister, who seemed instinctively to take part with the Dragon. She was a frail-fashioned little lady, with a face betokening the perpetual smack of lemon, and who reigned in her brother's household when the good wife was gone. Margarita's robustness was beginning to alarm and shock Aunt Lisbeth's sealed stock of virtue.

Page 4367

‘She must be watched, such a madl as that,’ said Aunt Lisbeth. ’Ursula! what limbs she has!’

Margarita was watched; but the spy being neither foe nor friend, nothing was discovered against her. This did not satisfy Aunt Lisbeth, whose own suspicion was her best witness. She allowed that Margarita dissembled well.

‘But,’ said she to her niece, ’though it is good in a girl not to flaunt these naughtinesses in effrontery, I care for you too much not to say—Be what you seem, my little one!’

‘And that am I!’ exclaimed Margarita, starting up and towering.

‘Right good, my niece,’ Lisbeth squealed; ’but now Frau Groschen lies in God’s acre, you owe your duty to me, mind! Did you confess last week?’

‘From beginning to end,’ replied Margarita.

Aunt Lisbeth fixed pious reproach on Margarita’s cameo.

‘And still you wear that thing?’

‘Why not?’ said Margarita.

’Girl! who would bid you set it in such a place save Satan? Oh, thou poor lost child! that the eyes of the idle youths may be drawn there! and thou become his snare to others, Margarita! What was that Welsh wandering juggler but the foul fiend himself, mayhap, thou maiden of sin! They say he has been seen in Cologne lately. He was swarthy as Satan and limped of one leg. Good Master in heaven, protect us! it was Satan himself I could swear!’

Aunt Lisbeth crossed brow and breast.

Margarita had commenced fingering the cameo, as if to tear it away; but Aunt Lisbeth’s finish made her laugh outright.

‘Where I see no harm, aunty, I shall think the good God is,’ she answered; ‘and where I see there’s harm, I shall think Satan lurks.’

A simper of sour despair passed over Aunt Lisbeth. She sighed, and was silent, being one of those very weak reeds who are easily vanquished and never overcome.

‘Let us go on with the Tapestry, child,’ said she.

Now, Margarita was ambitious of completing a certain Tapestry for presentation to Kaiser Heinrich on his entry into Cologne after his last campaign on the turbaned

Danube. The subject was again her beloved Siegfried slaying the Dragon on Drachenfels. Whenever Aunt Lisbeth indulged in any bitter virginity, and was overmatched by Margarita's frank maidenhood, she hung out this tapestry as a flag of truce. They were working it in bits, not having contrivances to do it in a piece. Margarita took Siegfried and Aunt Lisbeth the Dragon. They shared the crag between them. A roguish gleam of the Rhine toward Nonnenwerth could be already made out, Roland's Corner hanging like a sentinel across the chanting island, as one top-heavy with long watch.

Aunt Lisbeth was a great proficient in the art, and had taught Margarita. The little lady learnt it, with many other gruesome matters, in the Palatine of Bohemia's family. She usually talked of the spectres of Hollenbogenblitz Castle in the passing of the threads. Those were dismal spectres in Bohemia, smelling of murder and the charnel-breath of midnight. They uttered noises that wintered the blood, and revealed sights that stiffened hair three feet long; ay, and kept it stiff!

Page 4368

Margarita placed herself on a settle by the low-arched window, and Aunt Lisbeth sat facing her. An evening sun blazoned the buttresses of the Cathedral, and shadowed the workframes of the peaceful couple to a temperate light. Margarita unrolled a sampler sheathed with twists of divers coloured threads, and was soon busy silver-threading Siegfried's helm and horns.

'I told you of the steward, poor Kraut, did I not, child?' inquired Aunt Lisbeth, quietly clearing her throat.

'Many times!' said Margarita, and went on humming over her knee

'Her love was a Baron,
A Baron so bold;
She loved him for love,
He loved her for gold.'

'He must see for himself, and be satisfied,' continued Aunt Lisbeth; 'and Holy Thomas to warn him for an example! Poor Kraut!'

'Poor Kraut!' echoed Margarita.

'The King loved wine, and the Knight loved wine,
And they loved the summer weather:
They might have loved each other well,
But for one they loved together.'

'You may say, poor Kraut, child!' said Aunt Lisbeth. 'Well! his face was before that as red as this dragon's jaw, and ever after he went about as white as a pullet's egg. That was something wonderful!' 'That was it!' chimed Margarita.

'O the King he loved his lawful wife,
The Knight a lawless lady:
And ten on one-made ringing strife,
Beneath the forest shady.'

'Fifty to one, child!' said Aunt Lisbeth: 'You forget the story. They made Kraut sit with them at the jabbering feast, the only mortal there. The walls were full of eye-sockets without eyes, but phosphorus instead, burning blue and damp.'

'Not to-night, aunty dear! It frightens me so,' pleaded Margarita, for she saw the dolor coming.

'Night! when it's broad mid-day, thou timid one! Good heaven take pity on such as thou! The dish was seven feet in length by four broad. Kraut measured it with his eye,

and never forgot it. Not he! When the dish-cover was lifted, there he saw himself lying, boiled!

"'I did not feel uncomfortable then," Kraut told us. "It seemed natural."

'His face, as it lay there, he says, was quite calm, only a little wrinkled, and piggish-looking-like. There was the mole on his chin, and the pucker under his left eyelid. Well! the Baron carved. All the guests were greedy for a piece of him. Some cried out for breast; some for toes. It was shuddering cold to sit and hear that! The Baroness said, "Cheek!"'

'Ah!' shrieked Margarita, 'that can I not bear! I will not hear it, aunt; I will not!'

'Cheek!' Aunt Lisbeth reiterated, nodding to the floor.

Margarita put her fingers to her ears.

'Still, Kraut says, even then he felt nothing odd. Of course he was horrified to be sitting with spectres as you and I should be; but the first tremble of it was over. He had plunged into the bath of horrors, and there he was. I 've heard that you must pronounce the names of the Virgin and Trinity, sprinkling water round you all the while for three minutes; and if you do this without interruption, everything shall disappear. So they say. "Oh! dear heaven of mercy!" says Kraut, "what I felt when the Baron laid his long hunting-knife across my left cheek!"'

Page 4369

Here Aunt Lisbeth lifted her eyes to dote upon Margarita's fright. She was very displeased to find her niece, with elbows on the window-sill and hands round her head, quietly gazing into the street.

She said severely, 'Where did you learn that song you were last singing, Margarita? Speak, thou girl!'

Margarita laughed.

'The thrush, and the lark, and the blackbird,
They taught me how to sing:
And O that the hawk would lend his eye,
And the eagle lend his wing.'

'I will not hear these shameless songs,' exclaimed Aunt Lisbeth.

'For I would view the lands they view,
And be where they have been:
It is not enough to be singing
For ever in dells unseen!'

A voice was heard applauding her. 'Good! right good! Carol again, Gretelchen! my birdie!'

Margarita turned, and beheld her father in the doorway. She tripped toward him, and heartily gave him their kiss of meeting. Gottlieb glanced at the helm of Siegfried.

'Guessed the work was going well; you sing so lightsomely to-day, Grete! Very pretty! And that's Drachenfels? Bones of the Virgins! what a bold fellow was Siegfried, and a lucky, to have the neatest lass in Deutschland in love with him. Well, we must marry her to Siegfried after all, I believe! Aha? or somebody as good as Siegfried. So chirrup on, my darling!'

'Aunt Lisbeth does not approve of my songs,' replied Margarita, untwisting some silver threads.

'Do thy father's command, girl!' said Aunt Lisbeth.

'And doing his command,
Should I do a thing of ill,
I'd rather die to his lovely face,
Than wanton at his will.'

'There—there,' said Aunt Lisbeth, straining out her fingers; 'you see, Gottlieb, what over-indulgence brings her to. Not another girl in blessed Rhineland, and Bohemia to boot,

dared say such words!—than—I can't repeat them!—don't ask me!—She's becoming a Frankish girl!'

'What ballad's that?' said Gottlieb, smiling.

'The Ballad of Holy Ottilia; and her lover was sold to darkness. And she loved him—-loved him——'

'As you love Siegfried, you little one?'

'More, my father; for she saw Winkried, and I never saw Siegfried. Ah! if I had seen Siegfried! Never mind. She loved him; but she loved Virtue more. And Virtue is the child of God, and the good God forgave her for loving Winkried, the Devil's son, because she loved Virtue more, and He rescued her as she was being dragged down—down—down, and was half fainting with the smell of brimstone—rescued her and had her carried into His Glory, head and feet, on the wings of angels, before all men, as a hope to little maidens.

'And when I thought that I was lost
I found that I was saved,
And I was borne through blessed clouds,
Where the banners of bliss were waved.'

'And so you think you, too, may fall in, love with Devils' sons, girl?' was Aunt Lisbeth's comment.

Page 4370

‘Do look at Lisbeth’s Dragon, little Heart! it’s so like!’ said Margarita to her father.

Old Gottlieb twitted his hose, and chuckled.

‘She’s my girl! that may be seen,’ said he, patting her, and wheezed up from his chair to waddle across to the Dragon. But Aunt Lisbeth tartly turned the Dragon to the wall.

‘It is not yet finished, Gottlieb, and must not be looked at,’ she interposed. ’I will call for wood, and see to a fire: these evenings of Spring wax cold’: and away whimpered Aunt Lisbeth.

Margarita sang:

’I with my playmates,
In riot and disorder,
Were gathering herb and blossom
Along the forest border.’

‘Thy mother’s song, child of my heart!’ said Gottlieb; ’but vex not good
Lisbeth: she loves thee!’

’And do you think she loves me?
And will you say ’tis true?
O, and will she have me,
When I come up to woo?’

‘Thou leaping doe! thou chattering pie!’ said Gottlieb.

’She shall have ribbons and trinkets,
And shine like a morn of May,
When we are off to the little hill-church,
Our flowery bridal way.’

‘That she shall; and something more!’ cried Gottlieb. ’But, hark thee, Gretelchen; the Kaiser will be here in three days. Thou dear one! had I not stored and hoarded all for thee, I should now have my feet on a hearthstone where even he might warm his boot. So get thy best dresses and jewels in order, and look thyself; proud as any in the land. A simple burgher’s daughter now, Grete; but so shalt thou not end, my butterfly, or there’s neither worth nor wit in Gottlieb Groschen!’

‘Three days!’ Margarita exclaimed; ’and the helm not finished, and the tapestry-pieces not sewed and joined, and the water not shaded off.—Oh! I must work night and day.’

’Child! I’ll have no working at night! Your rosy cheeks will soon be sucked out by oil-light, and you look no better than poor tallow Court beauties—to say nothing of the

danger. This old house saw Charles the Great embracing the chief magistrate of his liege city yonder. Some swear he slept in it. He did not sneeze at smaller chambers than our Kaisers abide. No gold ceilings with cornice carvings, but plain wooden beams.'

'Know that the men of great renown,
Were men of simple needs:
Bare to the Lord they laid them down,
And slept on mighty deeds.'

'God wot, there's no emptying thy store of ballads, Grete: so much shall be said of thee. Yes; times are changeing: We're growing degenerate. Look at the men of Linz now to what they were! Would they have let the lads of Andernach float down cabbage-stalks to them without a shy back? And why? All because they funk that brigand-beast Werner, who gets redemption from Laach, hard by his hold, whenever he commits a crime worth paying for. As for me, my timber and stuffs must come down stream, and are too good for the nixen under Rhine, or think you I would acknowledge him with a toll, the hell-dog? Thunder and lightning! if old scores could be rubbed out on his hide!'

Page 4371

Gottlieb whirled a thong-lashing arm in air, and groaned of law and justice. What were they coming to!

Margarita softened the theme with a verse:

‘And tho’ to sting his enemy,
Is sweetness to the angry bee,
The angry bee must busy be,
Ere sweet of sweetness hiveth he.

The arch thrill of his daughter’s voice tickled Gottlieb. ’That’s it, birdie! You and the proverb are right. I don’t know which is best,

’Better hive
And keep alive
Than vengeance wake
With that you take.’

A clatter in the cathedral square brought Gottlieb on his legs to the window. It was a company of horsemen sparkling in harness. One trumpeter rode at the side of the troop, and in front a standard-bearer, matted down the chest with ochre beard, displayed aloft to the good citizens of Cologne, three brown hawks, with birds in their beaks, on an azure stardotted field.

‘Holy Cross!’ exclaimed Gottlieb, low in his throat; ’the arms of Werner! Where got he money to mount his men? Why, this is daring all Cologne in our very teeth! ’Fend that he visit me now! Ruin smokes in that ruffian’s track. I ‘ve felt hot and cold by turns all day.’

The horsemen came jingling carelessly along the street in scattered twos and threes, laughing together, and singling out the maidens at the gable-shadowed windows with hawking eyes. The good citizens of Cologne did not look on them favourably. Some showed their backs and gruffly banged their doors: others scowled and pocketed their fists: not a few slunk into the side alleys like well-licked curs, and scurried off with forebent knees. They were in truth ferocious-looking fellows these trusty servants of the robber Baron Werner, of Werner’s Eck, behind Andernach. Leather, steel, and dust, clad them from head to foot; big and black as bears; wolf-eyed, fox-nosed. They glistened bravely in the falling beams of the sun, and Margarita thrust her fair braided yellow head a little forward over her father’s shoulder to catch the whole length of the grim cavalcade. One of the troop was not long in discerning the young beauty. He pointed her boldly out to a comrade, who approved his appetite, and referred her to a third. The rest followed lead, and Margarita was as one spell-struck when she became aware that all those hungry eyes were preying on hers. Old Gottlieb was too full of his own fears to think for her, and when he drew in his head rather suddenly, it was with a

dismal foreboding that Werner’s destination in Cologne was direct to the house of Gottlieb Groschen, for purposes only too well to be divined.

‘Devil’s breeches!’ muttered Gottlieb; ’look again, Grete, and see if that hell-troop stop the way outside.’

Margarita’s cheeks were overflowing with the offended rose.

‘I will not look at them again, father.’

Gottlieb stared, and then patted her.

Page 4372

‘I would I were a man, father!’

Gottlieb smiled, and stroked his beard.

‘Oh! how I burn!’

And the girl shivered visibly.

’Grete! mind to be as much of a woman as you can, and soon such raff as this you may sweep away, like cobwebs, and no harm done.’

He was startled by a violent thumping at the streetdoor, and as brazen a blast as if the dead were being summoned. Aunt Lisbeth entered, and flitted duskily round the room, crying:

’We are lost: they are upon us! better death with a bodkin! Never shall it be said of me; never! the monsters!’

Then admonishing them to lock, bar, bolt, and block up every room in the house, Aunt Lisbeth perched herself on the edge of a chair, and reversed the habits of the screech-owl, by being silent when stationary.

‘There’s nothing to fear for you, Lisbeth,’ said Gottlieb, with discourteous emphasis.

’Gottlieb! do you remember what happened at the siege of Mainz? and poor Marthe Herbstblum, who had hoped to die as she was; and Dame Altknopfchen, and Frau Kaltblut, and the old baker, Hans Topf’s sister, all of them as holy as abbesses, and that did not save them! and nothing will from such godless devourers.’

Gottlieb was gone, having often before heard mention of the calamity experienced by these fated women.

‘Comfort thee, good heart, on my breast,’ said Margarita, taking Lisbeth to that sweet nest of peace and fortitude.

’Margarita! ’tis your doing! have I not said—lure them not, for they swarm too early upon us! And here they are! and, perhaps, in five minutes all will be over!

Herr Je!—What, you are laughing! Heavens of goodness, the girl is delighted!’

Here a mocking ha-ha! accompanied by a thundering snack at the door, shook the whole house, and again the trumpet burst the ears with fury.

This summons, which seemed to Aunt Lisbeth final, wrought a strange composure in her countenance. She was very pale, but spread her dress decently, as if fear had departed, and clasped her hands on her knees.

‘The will of the Lord above must be done,’ said she; ’it is impious to complain when we are given into the hand of the Philistines. Others have been martyred, and were yet acceptable.’

To this heroic speech she added, with cold energy: ‘Let them come!’

‘Aunt,’ cried Margarita, ’I hear my father’s voice with those men. Aunty! I will not let him be alone. I must go down to him. You will be safe here. I shall come to you if there’s cause for alarm.’

And in spite of Aunt Lisbeth’s astonished shriek of remonstrance, she hurried off to rejoin Gottlieb.

THE WAGER

Ere Margarita had reached the landing of the stairs, she repented her haste and shrank back. Wrapt in a thunder of oaths, she distinguished: ’’Tis the little maiden we want; let’s salute her and begone! or cap your skull with something thicker than you’ve on it now, if you want a whole one, happy father!’

Page 4373

‘Gottlieb von Groschen I am,’ answered her father, ‘and the Kaiser——’

’’S as fond of a pretty girl as we are! Down with her, and no more drivelling! It’s only for a moment, old Measure and Scales!’

’I tell you, rascals, I know your master, and if you’re not punished for this, may I die a beggar!’ exclaimed Gottlieb, jumping with rage.

’May you die as rich as an abbot! And so you will, if you don’t bring her down, for I’ve sworn to see her; there ‘s the end of it, man!’

‘I’ll see, too, if the laws allow this villany!’ cried Gottlieb. ’Insulting a peaceful citizen! in his own house! a friend of your emperor! Gottlieb von Groschen!’

’Groschen? We’re cousins, then! You wouldn’t shut out your nearest kin? Devil’s lightning! Don’t you know me? Pfennig? Von Pfennig! This here’s Heller: that’s Zwanziger: all of us Vons, every soul! You’re not decided? This’ll sharpen you, my jolly King Paunch!’

And Margarita heard the ruffian step as if to get swing for a blow. She hurried into the passage, and slipping in front of her father, said to his assailant:

‘You have asked for me! I am here!’

Her face was colourless, and her voice seemed to issue from between a tightened cord. She stood with her left foot a little in advance, and her whole body heaving and quivering: her arms folded and pressed hard below her bosom: her eyes dilated to a strong blue: her mouth ashy white. A strange lustre, as of suppressed internal fire, flickered over her.

’My name ’s Schwartz Thier, and so ‘s my nature!’ said the fellow with a grin; ’but may I never smack lips with a pretty girl again, if I harm such a young beauty as this! Friendly dealing’s my plan o’ life.’

‘Clear out of my house, then, fellow, and here’s money for you,’ said Gottlieb, displaying a wrathfully-trembling handful of coin.

’Pish! money! forty times that wouldn’t cover my bet! And if it did? Shouldn’t I be disgraced? jeered at for a sheep-heart? No, I’m no ninny, and not to be diddled. I’ll talk to the young lady! Silence, out there! all’s going proper’: this to his comrades through the door. ’So, my beautiful maiden! thus it stands: We saw you at the window, looking like a fresh rose with a gold crown on. Here are we poor fellows come to welcome the Kaiser. I began to glorify you. “Schwartz Thier!” says Henker Rothhals to me, “I’ll wager you odds you don’t have a kiss of that fine girl within twenty minutes, counting from the hand-smack!” Done! was my word, and we clapped our fists together. Now,

you see, that's straightforward! All I want is, not to lose my money and be made a fool of—leaving alone that sugary mouth which makes mine water'; and he drew the back of his hand along his stubbled jaws: 'So, come! don't hesitate! no harm to you, my beauty, but a compliment, and Schwartz Thier's your friend and anything else you like for ever after. Come, time's up, pretty well.'

Page 4374

Margarita leaned to her father a moment as if mortal sickness had seized her. Then cramping her hands and feet, she said in his ear, 'Leave me to my own care; go, get the men to protect thee'; and ordered Schwartz Thier to open the door wide.

Seeing Gottlieb would not leave her, she joined her hands, and begged him. 'The good God will protect me! I will overmatch these men. Look, my father! they dare not strike me in the street: you they would fell without pity. Go! what they dare in a house, they dare not in the street.'

Schwartz Thier had opened the door. At sight of Margarita, the troop gave a shout.

'Now! on the doorstep, full in view, my beauteous one! that they may see what a lucky devil I am—and have no doubts about the handing over.'

Margarita looked behind. Gottlieb was still there, every member of him quaking like a bog under a heavy heel. She ran to him. 'My father! I have a device wilt thou spoil it, and give me to this beast? You can do nothing, nothing! protect yourself and save me!'

'Cologne! broad day!' muttered Gottlieb, as if the enormity had prostrated his belief in facts; and moved slowly back.

Margarita strode to the door-step. Schwartz Thier was awaiting her, his arm circled out, and his leering face ducked to a level with his victim's. This rough show of gallantry proved costly to him. As he was gently closing his iron hold about her, enjoying before hand with grim mouthridges the flatteries of triumph, Margarita shot past him through the door, and was already twenty paces beyond the troop before either of them thought of pursuing her. At the first sound of a hoof, Henker Rothhals seized the rider's bridle-rein, and roared: 'Fair play for a fair bet! leave all to the Thier!' The Thier, when he had recovered from his amazement, sought for old Gottlieb to give him a back-hit, as Margarita foresaw that he would. Not finding him at hand, out lumbered the fellow as swiftly as his harness would allow, and caught a glimpse of Margarita rapidly fleeting up the cathedral square.

'Only five minutes, Schwartz Thier!' some of the troop sung out.

'The devil can do his business in one,' was the retort, and Schwartz Thier swung himself on his broad-backed charger, and gored the fine beast till she rattled out a blast of sparkles from the flint.

In a minute he drew up in front of Margarita.

'So! you prefer settling this business in the square.

Good! my choice sweetheart!' and he sprang to her side.

The act of flight had touched the young girl's heart with the spirit of flight. She crouched like a winded hare under the nose of the hound, and covered her face with her two hands. Margarita was no wisp in weight, but Schwartz Thier had her aloft in his arm as easily as if he had tossed up a kerchief.

'Look all, and witness!' he shouted, lifting the other arm.

Page 4375

Henker Rothhals and the rest of the troop looked, as they came trotting to the scene, with the coolness of umpires: but they witnessed something other than what Schwartz Thier proposed. This was the sight of a formidable staff, whirling an unfriendly halo over the head of the Thier, and descending on it with such honest intent to confound and overthrow him, that the Thier succumbed to its force without argument, and the square echoed blow and fall simultaneously. At the same time the wielder of this sound piece of logic seized Margarita, and raised a shout in the square for all true men to stand by him in rescuing a maiden from the clutch of brigands and ravishers. A crowd was collecting, but seemed to consider the circle now formed by the horsemen as in a manner charmed, for only one, a fair slender youth, came forward and ranged himself beside the stranger.

‘Take thou the maiden: I’ll keep to the staff,’ said this latter, stumbling over his speech as if he was in a foreign land among old roots and wolfpits which had already shaken out a few of his teeth, and made him cautious about the remainder.

‘Can it be Margarita!’ exclaimed the youth, bending to her, and calling to her: ‘Margarita! Fraulein Groschen!’

She opened her eyes, shuddered, and said: ‘I was not afraid! Am I safe?’

‘Safe while I have life, and this good friend.’

‘Where is my father?’

‘I have not seen him.’

‘And you—who are you? Do I owe this to you?’

‘Oh! no! no! Me you owe nothing.’

Margarita gazed hurriedly round, and at her feet there lay the Thier with his steel-cap shining in dints, and three rivulets of blood coursing down his mottled forehead. She looked again at the youth, and a blush of recognition gave life to her cheeks.

’I did not know you. Pardon me. Farina! what thanks can reward such courage! Tell me! shall we go?’

’The youth eyed her an instant, but recovering himself, took a rapid survey, and called to the stranger to follow and help give the young maiden safe conduct home.

’Just then Henker Rothhals bellowed, ‘Time’s up!’ He was answered by a chorus of agreement from the troop. They had hitherto patiently acted their parts as spectators, immovable on their horses. The assault on the Thier was all in the play, and a visible interference of fortune in favour of Henker Rothhals. Now general commotion shuttled

them, and the stranger's keen hazel eyes read their intentions rightly when he lifted his redoubtable staff in preparation for another mighty swoop, this time defensive. Rothhals, and half a dozen others, with a war-cry of curses, spurred their steeds at once to ride him down. They had not reckoned the length and good-will of their antagonist's weapon. Scarce were they in motion, when round it whizzed, grazing the nostrils of their horses with a precision that argued practice in the feat, and unhorsing two, Rothhals among the number. He dropped heavily on his head, and showed signs of being as incapable of combat as the Thier. A cheer burst from the crowd, but fell short.

Page 4376

The foremost of their number was struck flat to the earth by a fellow of the troop.

Calling on St. George, his patron saint, the stranger began systematically to make a clear ring in his path forward. Several of the horsemen essayed a cut at his arm with their long double-handed swords, but the horses could not be brought a second time to the edge of the magic circle; and the blood of these warriors being thoroughly up, they now came at him on foot. In their rage they would have made short work with the three, in spite of the magistracy of Cologne, had they not been arrested by cries of ‘Werner! Werner!’

At the South-west end of the square, looking Rhinewards, rode the marauder Baron, in full armour, helm and hauberk, with a single retainer in his rear. He had apparently caught sight of the brawl, and, either because he distinguished his own men, or was seeking his natural element, hastened up for his share in it, which was usually that of the king of beasts. His first call was for Schwartz Thier. The men made way, and he beheld his man in no condition to make military responses. He shouted for Henker Rothhals, and again the men opened their ranks mutely, exhibiting the two stretched out in diverse directions, with their feet slanting to a common point. The Baron glared; then caught off his mailed glove, and thrust it between his teeth. A rasping gurgle of oaths was all they heard, and presently surged up,

‘Who was it?’

Margarita’s eyes were shut. She opened them fascinated with horror. There was an unearthly awful and comic mixture of sounds in Werner’s querulous fury, that was like the noise of a complaining bear, rolling up from hollow-chested menace to yawning lament. Never in her life had Margarita such a shock of fear. The half gasp of a laugh broke on her trembling lips. She stared at Werner, and was falling; but Farina’s arm clung instantly round her waist. The stranger caught up her laugh, loud and hearty.

‘As for who did it, Sir Baron,’ he cried, is a cheery tone, ’I am the man! As you may like to know why—and that’s due to you and me both of us—all I can say is, the Black Muzzle yonder lying got his settler for merry-making with this peaceful maiden here, without her consent—an offence in my green island they reckon a crack o’ the sconce light basting for, I warrant all company present,’ and he nodded sharply about. ’As for the other there, who looks as if a rope had been round his neck once and shirked its duty, he counts his wages for helping the devil in his business, as will any other lad here who likes to come on and try.’

Werner himself, probably, would have given him the work he wanted; but his eye had sidled a moment over Margarita, and the hardly-suppressed applause of the crowd at the stranger’s speech failed to bring his ire into action this solitary time.

‘Who is the maiden?’ he asked aloud.

‘Fraulein von Groschen,’ replied Farina.

Page 4377

’Von Groschen! Von Groschen! the daughter of Gottlieb Groschen?—Rascals!’ roared the Baron, turning on his men, and out poured a mud-spring of filthy oaths and threats, which caused Henker Rothhals, who had opened his eyes, to close them again, as if he had already gone to the place of heat.

‘Only lend me thy staff, friend,’ cried Werner.

’Not I! thwack ’em with your own wood,’ replied the stranger, and fell back a leg.

Werner knotted his stringy brows, and seemed torn to pieces with the different pulling tides of his wrath. He grasped the mane of his horse and flung abroad handfuls, till the splendid animal reared in agony.

’You shall none of you live over this night, villains! I ’ll hang you, every hag’s son! My last orders were,—Keep quiet in the city, ye devil’s brood. Take that! and that!’ laying at them with his bare sword. ’Off with you, and carry these two pigs out of sight quickly, or I’ll have their heads, and make sure o’ them.’

The latter injunction sprang from policy, for at the head of the chief street there was a glitter of the city guard, marching with shouldered spears.

‘Maiden,’ said Werner, with a bull’s bow, ’let me conduct thee to thy father.’

Margarita did not reply; but gave her hand to Farina, and took a step closer to the stranger.

Werner’s brows grew black.

‘Enough to have saved you, fair maid,’ he muttered hoarsely. ’Gratitude never was a woman’s gift. Say to your father that I shall make excuses to him for the conduct of my men.’

Whereupon, casting a look of leisurely scorn toward the guard coming up in the last beams of day, the Baron shrugged his huge shoulders to an altitude expressing the various contemptuous shades of feudal coxcombry, stuck one leather-ruffled arm in his side, and jolted off at an easy pace.

‘Amen!’ ejaculated the stranger, leaning on his staff. ’There are Barons in my old land; but never a brute beast in harness.’

Margarita stood before him, and took his two hands.

’You will come with me to my father! He will thank you. I cannot. You will come?’

Tears and a sob of relief started from her.

The city guard, on seeing Werner's redoubtable back turned, had adopted double time, and now came panting up, while the stranger bent smiling under a fresh overflow of innocent caresses. Margarita was caught to her father's breast.

'You shall have vengeance for this, sweet chuck,' cried old Gottlieb in the intervals of his hugs.

'Fear not, my father; they are punished': and Margarita related the story of the stranger's prowess, elevating him into a second Siegfried. The guard huzzaed him, but did not pursue the Baron.

Old Gottlieb, without hesitation, saluted the astonished champion with a kiss on either cheek.

'My best friend! You have saved my daughter from indignity! Come with us home, if you can believe that a home where the wolves come daring us, dragging our dear ones from our very doorsteps. Come, that we may thank you under a roof at least. My little daughter! Is she not a brave lass?'

Page 4378

‘She’s nothing less than the white rose of Germany,’ said the stranger, with a good bend of the shoulders to Margarita.

‘So she’s called,’ exclaimed Gottlieb; ’she ‘s worthy to be a man!’

‘Men would be the losers, then, more than they could afford,’ replied the stranger, with a ringing laugh.

‘Come, good friend,’ said Gottlieb; ’you must need refreshment. Prove you are a true hero by your appetite. As Charles the Great said to Archbishop Turpin, “I conquered the world because Nature gave me a gizzard; for everywhere the badge of subjection is a poor stomach.” Come, all! A day well ended, notwithstanding!’

THE SILVER ARROW

At the threshold of Gottlieb’s house a number of the chief burgesses of Cologne had corporated spontaneously to condole with him. As he came near, they raised a hubbub of gratulation. Strong were the expressions of abhorrence and disgust of Werner’s troop in which these excellent citizens clothed their outraged feelings; for the insult to Gottlieb was the insult of all. The Rhinestream taxes were provoking enough to endure; but that the licence of these free-booting bands should extend to the homes of free and peaceful men, loyal subjects of the Emperor, was a sign that the evil had reached from pricks to pokes, as the saying went, and must now be met as became burgesses of ancient Cologne, and by joint action destroyed.

‘In! in, all of you!’ said Gottlieb, broadening his smile to suit the many. ’We ’ll talk about that in-doors. Meantime, I’ve got a hero to introduce to you: flesh and blood! no old woman’s coin and young girl’s dream-o’day: the honest thing, and a rarity, my masters. All that over some good Rhine-juice from above Bacharach. In, and welcome, friends!’

Gottlieb drew the stranger along with him under the carved old oak-wood portals, and the rest paired, and reverentially entered in his wake. Margarita, to make up for this want of courtesy, formed herself the last of the procession. She may have had another motive, for she took occasion there to whisper something to Farina, bringing sun and cloud over his countenance in rapid flushes. He seemed to remonstrate in dumb show; but she, with an attitude of silence, signified her wish to seal the conversation, and he drooped again. On the door step she paused a moment, and hung her head pensively, as if moved by a reminiscence. The youth had hurried away some strides. Margarita looked after him. His arms were straightened to his flanks, his hands clenched, and straining out from the wrist. He had the aspect of one tugging against the restraint of a chain that suddenly let out link by link to his whole force.

‘Farina!’ she called; and wound him back with a run. ’Farina! You do not think me ungrateful? I could not tell my father in the crowd what you did for me. He shall know. He will thank you. He does not understand you now, Farina. He will. Look not so sorrowful. So much I would say to you.’

Page 4379

So much was rushing on her mind, that her maidenly heart became unruly, and warned her to beware.

The youth stood as if listening to a nightingale of the old woods, after the first sweet stress of her voice was in his ear. When she ceased, he gazed into her eyes. They were no longer deep and calm like forest lakes; the tender-glowing blue quivered, as with a spark of the young girl's soul, in the beams of the moon then rising.

'Oh, Margarita!' said the youth, in tones that sank to sighs: 'what am I to win your thanks, though it were my life for such a boon!'

He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it. Twice his lips dwelt upon those pure fingers.

'Margarita: you forgive me: I have been so long without hope. I have kissed your hand, dearest of God's angels!'

She gently restrained the full white hand in his pressure.

'Margarita! I have thought never before death to have had this sacred bliss. I am guerdoned in advance for every grief coming before death.'

She dropped on him one look of a confiding softness that was to the youth like the opened gate of the innocent garden of her heart.

'You pardon me, Margarita? I may call you my beloved? strive, wait, pray, hope, for you, my star of life?'

Her face was so sweet a charity!

'Dear love! one word!—or say nothing, but remain, and move not. So beautiful you are! Oh, might I kneel to you here; dote on you; worship this white hand for ever.'

The colour had passed out of her cheeks like a blissful western red leaving rich paleness in the sky; and with her clear brows levelled at him, her bosom lifting more and more rapidly, she struggled against the charm that was on her, and at last released her hand.

'I must go. I cannot stay. Pardon you? Who might not be proud of your love!—-Farewell!'

She turned to move away, but lingered a step from him, hastily touching her bosom and either hand, as if to feel for a brooch or a ring. Then she blushed, drew the silver arrow from the gathered gold-shot braids above her neck, held it out to him, and was gone.

Farina clutched the treasure, and reeled into the street. Half a dozen neighbours were grouped by the door.

'What 's the matter in Master Groschen's house now?' one asked, as he plunged into the midst of them.

'Matter?' quoth the joy-drunken youth, catching at the word, and mused off into raptures; 'There never was such happiness! 'Tis paradise within, exile without. But what exile! A star ever in the heavens to lighten the road and cheer the path of the banished one'; and he loosened his vest and hugged the cold shaft on his breast.

'What are you talking and capering at, fellow?' exclaimed another: 'Can't you answer about those shrieks, like a Christian, you that have just come out of the house? Why, there's shrieking now! It 's a woman. Thousand thunders! it sounds like the Frau Lisbeth's voice. What can be happening to her?'

Page 4380

‘Perhaps she’s on fire,’ was coolly suggested between two or three.

‘Pity to see the old house burnt,’ remarked one.

‘House! The woman, man! the woman!’

‘Ah!’ replied the other, an ancient inhabitant of Cologne, shaking his head, ‘the house is oldest!’

Farina, now recovering his senses, heard shrieks that he recognized as possible in the case of Aunt Lisbeth dreading the wickedness of an opposing sex, and alarmed by the inrush of old Gottlieb’s numerous guests. To confirm him, she soon appeared, and hung herself halfway out of one of the upper windows, calling desperately to St. Ursula for aid. He thanked the old lady in his heart for giving him a pretext to enter Paradise again; but before even love could speed him, Frau Lisbeth was seized and dragged remorselessly out of sight, and he and the rosy room darkened together.

Farina twice strode off to the Rhine-stream; as many times he returned. It was hard to be away from her. It was harder to be near and not close. His heart flamed into jealousy of the stranger. Everything threatened to overturn his slight but lofty structure of bliss so suddenly shot into the heavens. He had but to remember that his hand was on the silver arrow, and a radiance broke upon his countenance, and a calm fell upon his breast. ‘It was a plight of her troth to me,’ mused the youth. ’She loves me! She would not trust her frank heart to speak. Oh, generous young girl! what am I to dare hope for such a prize? for I never can be worthy. And she is one who, giving her heart, gives it all. Do I not know her? How lovely she looked thanking the stranger! The blue of her eyes, the warm-lighted blue, seemed to grow full on the closing lids, like heaven’s gratitude. Her beauty is wonderful. What wonder, then, if he loves her? I should think him a squire in his degree. There are squires of high birth and low.’

So mused Farina with his arms folded and his legs crossed in the shadow of Margarita’s chamber. Gradually he fell into a kind of hazy doze. The houses became branded with silver arrows. All up the Cathedral stone was a glitter, and dance, and quiver of them. In the sky mazed confusion of arrowy flights and falls. Farina beheld himself in the service of the Emperor watching these signs, and expecting on the morrow to win glory and a name for Margarita. Glory and the name now won, old Gottlieb was just on the point of paternally blessing them, when a rude pat aroused him from the delicious moon-dream.

‘Hero by day! house-guard by night! That tells a tale,’ said a cheerful voice.

The moon was shining down the Cathedral square and street, and Farina saw the stranger standing solid and ruddy before him. He was at first prompted to resent such

familiar handling, but the stranger’s face was of that bland honest nature which, like the sun, wins everywhere back a reflection of its own kindliness.

‘You are right,’ replied Farina; ‘so it is!’

Page 4381

’Pretty wines inside there, and a rare young maiden. She has a throat like a nightingale, and more ballads at command than a piper’s wallet. Now, if I hadn’t a wife at home.’

‘You’re married?’ cried Farina, seizing the stranger’s hand.

’Surely; and my lass can say something for herself on the score of brave looks, as well as the best of your German maids here, trust me.’

Farina repressed an inclination to perform a few of those antics which violent joy excites, and after rushing away and back, determined to give his secret to the stranger.

‘Look,’ said he in a whisper, that opens the private doors of a confidence.

But the stranger repeated the same word still more earnestly, and brought Farina’s eyes on a couple of dark figures moving under the Cathedral.

‘Some lamb’s at stake when the wolves are prowling,’ he added: ’’Tis now two hours to the midnight. I doubt if our day’s work be over till we hear the chime, friend.’

’What interest do you take in the people of this house that you watch over them thus?’ asked Farina.

The stranger muffled a laugh in his beard.

’An odd question, good sooth. Why, in the first place, we like well whatso we have done good work for. That goes for something. In the second, I’ve broken bread in this house. Put down that in the reckoning. In the third; well! in the third, add up all together, and the sum total’s at your service, young sir.’

Farina marked him closely. There was not a spot on his face for guile to lurk in, or suspicion to fasten on. He caught the stranger’s hand.

’You called me friend just now. Make me your friend. Look, I was going to say: I love this maiden! I would die for her. I have loved her long. This night she has given me a witness that my love is not vain. I am poor. She is rich. I am poor, I said, and feel richer than the Kaiser with this she has given me! Look, it is what our German girls slide in their back-hair, this silver arrow!’

‘A very pretty piece of heathenish wear!’ exclaimed the stranger.

’Then, I was going to say—tell me, friend, of a way to win honour and wealth quickly; I care not at how rare a risk. Only to wealth, or high baronry, will her father give her!’

The stranger buzzed on his moustache in a pause of cool pity, such as elders assume when young men talk of conquering the world for their mistresses: and in truth it is a calm of mind well won!

’Things look so brisk at home here in the matter of the maiden, that I should say, wait a while and watch your chance. But you’re a boy of pluck: I serve in the Kaiser’s army, under my lord: the Kaiser will be here in three days. If you ’re of that mind then, I doubt little you may get posted well: but, look again! there’s a ripe brew yonder. Marry, you may win your spurs this night even; who knows?—’S life! there’s a tall fellow joining those two lurkers.’

Page 4382

‘Can you see into the murk shadow, Sir Squire?’

’Ay! thanks to your Styrian dungeons, where I passed a year’s apprenticeship:

“I learnt to watch the rats and mice
At play, with never a candle-end.
They play’d so well; they sang so nice;
They dubb’d me comrade; called me friend!”

So says the ballad of our red-beard king’s captivity. All evil has a good:

“When our toes and chins are up,
Poison plants make sweetest cup”

as the old wives mumble to us when we’re sick. Heigho! would I were in the little island well home again, though that were just their song of welcome to me, as I am a Christian.’

‘Tell me your name, friend,’ said Farina.

’Guy’s my name, young man: Goshawk’s my title. Guy the Goshawk! so they called me in my merry land. The cap sticks when it no longer fits. Then I drove the arrow, and was down on my enemy ere he could ruffle a feather. Now, what would be my nickname?

“A change so sad, and a change so bad,
Might set both Christian and heathen a sighing:
Change is a curse, for it’s all for the worse:
Age creeps up, and youth is flying!”

and so on, with the old song. But here am I, and yonder’s a game that wants harrying; so we’ll just begin to nose about them a bit.’

He crossed to the other side of the street, and Farina followed out of the moonlight. The two figures and the taller one were evidently observing them; for they also changed their position and passed behind an angle of the Cathedral.

’Tell me how the streets cross all round the Cathedral you know the city,’ said the stranger, holding out his hand.

Farina traced with his finger a rough map of the streets on the stranger’s hand.

’Good! that’s how my lord always marks the battlefield, and makes me show him the enemy’s posts. Forward, this way!’

He turned from the Cathedral, and both slid along close under the eaves and front hangings of the houses. Neither spoke. Farina felt that he was in the hands of a skilful captain, and only regretted the want of a weapon to make harvest of the intended surprise; for he judged clearly that those were fellows of Werner's band on the look-out. They wound down numberless intersections of narrow streets with irregular-built houses standing or leaning wry-faced in row, here a quaint-beamed cottage, there almost a mansion with gilt arms, brackets, and devices. Oil-lamps unlit hung at intervals by the corners, near a pale Christ on crucifix. Across the passages they hung alight. The passages and alleys were too dusky and close for the moon in her brightest ardour to penetrate; down the streets a slender lane of white beams could steal: 'In all conscience,' as the good citizens of Cologne declared, 'enough for those heathen hounds and sons of the sinful who are abroad when God's own blessed lamp is out.' So, when there was a moon, the expense of oil was saved to the Cologne treasury, thereby satisfying the virtuous.

Page 4383

After incessant doubling here and there, listening to footfalls, and themselves eluding a chase which their suspicious movements aroused, they came upon the Rhine. A full flood of moonlight burnished the knightly river in glittering scales, and plates, and rings, as headlong it rolled seaward on from under crag and banner of old chivalry and rapine. Both greeted the scene with a burst of pleasure. The grey mist of flats on the south side glimmered delightful to their sight, coming from that drowsy crowd and press of habitations; but the solemn glory of the river, delaying not, heedless, impassioned-pouring on in some sublime conference between it and heaven to the great marriage of waters, deeply shook Farina's enamoured heart. The youth could not restrain his tears, as if a magic wand had touched him. He trembled with love; and that delicate bliss which maiden hope first showers upon us like a silver rain when she has taken the shape of some young beauty and plighted us her fair fleeting hand, tenderly embraced him.

As they were emerging into the spaces of the moon, a cheer from the stranger arrested Farina.

'Seest thou? on the wharf there! that is the very one, the tallest of the three. Lakin! but we shall have him.'

Wrapt in a long cloak, with low pointed cap and feather, stood the person indicated. He appeared to be meditating on the flow of the water, unaware of hostile presences, or quite regardless of them. There was a majesty in his height and air, which made the advance of the two upon him more wary and respectful than their first impulse had counselled. They could not read his features, which were mantled behind voluminous folds: all save a pair of very strange eyes, that, even as they gazed directly downward, seemed charged with restless fiery liquid.

The two were close behind him: Guy the Goshawk prepared for one of those fatal pounces on the foe that had won him his title. He consulted Farina mutely, who Nodded readiness; but the instant after, a cry of anguish escaped from the youth:

'Lost! gone! lost! Where is it? where! the arrow! The Silver Arrow! My Margarita!'

Ere the echoes of his voice had ceased lamenting into the distance, they found themselves alone on the wharf.

THE LILIES OF THE VALLEY

'He opened like a bat!' said the stranger.

'His shadow was red!' said Farina.

'He was off like an arrow!' said the stranger.

‘Oh! pledge of my young love, how could I lose thee!’ exclaimed the youth, and his eyes were misted with tears.

Guy the Goshawk shook his brown locks gravely.

’Bring me a man, and I ’ll stand up against him, whoever he be, like a man; but this fellow has an ill scent and foreign ways about him, that he has! His eye boils all down my backbone and tingles at my finger-tips. Jesu, save us!’

Page 4384

‘Save us!’ repeated Farina, with the echo of a deadened soul.

They made the sign of the Cross, and purified the place with holy ejaculations.

’I ’ve seen him at last; grant it be for the last time! That’s my prayer, in the name of the Virgin and Trinity,’ said Guy. ’And now let’s retrace our steps: perchance we shall hunt up that bauble of yours, but I’m not fit for mortal work this night longer.’

Burdened by their black encounter, the two passed again behind the Cathedral. Farina’s hungry glances devoured each footmark of their track. Where the moon held no lantern for him, he went on his knees, and groped for his lost treasure with a miser’s eager patience of agony, drawing his hand slowly over the stony kerb and between the interstices of the thick-sown flints, like an acute-feeling worm. Despair grew heavy in his breast. At every turning he invoked some good new saint to aid him, and ran over all the propitiations his fancy could suggest and his religious lore inspire. By-and-by they reached the head of the street where Margarita dwelt. The moon was dipping down, and paler, as if touched with a warning of dawn. Chill sighs from the open land passed through the spaces of the city. On certain coloured gables and wood-crossed fronts, the white light lingered; but mostly the houses were veiled in dusk, and Gottlieb’s house was confused in the twilight with those of his neighbours, notwithstanding its greater stateliness and the old grandeur of its timbered bulk. They determined to take up their position there again, and paced on, Farina with his head below his shoulders, and Guy nostril in air, as if uneasy in his sense of smell.

On the window-ledge of a fair-fitted domicile stood a flower-pot, a rude earthen construction in the form of a river-barge, wherein grew some valley lilies that drooped their white bells over the sides.

The Goshawk eyed them wistfully.

‘I must smell those blessed flowers if I wish to be saved!’ and he stamped resolve with his staff.

Moved by this exclamation, Farina gazed up at them.

‘How like a company of maidens they look floating in the vessel of life!’ he said.

Guy curiously inspected Farina and the flower-pot, shrugged, and with his comrade’s aid, mounted to a level with it, seized the prize and redescended.

‘There,’ he cried, between long luxurious sniffs, ’that chases him out of the nostril sooner than aught else, the breath of a fresh lass-like flower! I was tormented till now by the reek of the damned rising from under me. This is heaven’s own incense, I think!’

And Guy inhaled the flowers and spake prettily to them.

‘They have a melancholy sweetness, friend,’ said Farina. ’I think of whispering Fays, and Elf, and Erl, when their odour steals through me. Do not you?’

‘Nay, nor hope to till my wits are clean gone,’ was the Goshawk’s reply. ’To my mind, ’tis an honest flower, and could I do good service by the young maiden who there set it, I should be rendering back good service done; for if that flower has not battled the devil in my nose this night, and beaten him, my head’s a medlar!’

Page 4385

’I scarce know whether as a devout Christian I should listen to that, friend,’ Farina mildly remonstrated. ’Lilies are indeed emblems of the saints; but then they are not poor flowers of earth, being transfigured, lustrous unfadingly. Oh, Cross and Passion! with what silver serenity thy glory enwraps me, gazing on these fair bells! I look on the white sea of the saints. I am enamoured of fleshly anguish and martyrdom. All beauty is that worn by wan-smiling faces wherein Hope sits as a crown on Sorrow, and the pale ebb of mortal life is the twilight of joy everlasting. Colourless peace! Oh, my beloved! So walkest thou for my soul on the white sea ever at night, clad in the straight fall of thy spotless virgin linen; bearing in thy hand the lily, and leaning thy cheek to it, where the human rose is softened to a milky bloom of red, the espousals of heaven with earth; over thee, moving with thee, a wreath of sapphire stars, and the solitude of purity around!’

‘Ah!’ sighed the Goshawk, dandling his flower-pot; ’the moon gives strokes as well’s the sun. I’ faith, moon-struck and maid-struck in one! He’ll be asking for his head soon. This dash of the monk and the minstrel is a sure sign. That ’s their way of loving in this land: they all go mad, straight off. I never heard such talk.’

Guy accompanied these remarks with a pitiful glance at his companion.

’Come, Sir Lover! lend me a help to give back what we’ve borrowed to its rightful owner. ’S blood! but I feel an appetite. This night-air takes me in the wind like a battering ram. I thought I had laid in a stout four-and-twenty hours’ stock of Westphalian Wurst at Master Groschen’s supper-table. Good stuff, washed down with superior Rhine wine; say your Liebfrauenmilch for my taste; though, when I first tried it, I grimaced like a Merry-Andrew, and remembered roast beef and Glo’ster ale in my prayers.’

The Goshawk was in the act of replacing the pot of lilies, when a blow from a short truncheon, skilfully flung, struck him on the neck and brought him to the ground. With him fell the lilies. He glared to the right and left, and grasped the broken flower-pot for a return missile; but no enemy was in view to test his accuracy of aim.

The deep-arched doorways showed their empty recesses the windows slept.

‘Has that youth played me false?’ thought the discomfited squire, as he leaned quietly on his arm. Farina was nowhere near.

Guy was quickly reassured.

’By my fay, now! that’s a fine thing! and a fine fellow! and a fleet foot! That lad ’ll rise! He’ll be a squire some day. Look at him. Bowels of a’Becket! ’tis a sight! I’d rather see that, now, than old Groschen ’s supper-table groaning with Wurst again, and running a

river of Rudesheimer! Tussle on! I'll lend a hand if there's occasion; but you shall have the honour, boy, an you can win it.'

This crying on of the hound was called forth by a chase up the street, in which the Goshawk beheld Farina pursue and capture a stalwart runaway, who refused with all his might to be brought back, striving every two and three of his tiptoe steps to turn against the impulse Farina had got on his neck and nether garments.

Page 4386

’Who ’d have thought the lad was so wiry and mettlesome, with his soft face, blue eyes, and lank locks? but a green mead has more in it than many a black mountain. Hail, and well done! if I could dub you knight, I would: trust me!’ and he shook Farina by the hand.

Farina modestly stood aside, and allowed the Goshawk to confront his prisoner.

’So, Sir Shy-i’the-dark! gallant Stick-i’the-back! Squire Truncheon, and Knight of the noble order of Quicksilver Legs! just take your stand at the distance you were off me when you discharged this instrument at my head. By ’r lady! I smart a scratch to pay you in coin, and it’s lucky for you the coin is small, or you might reckon on it the same, trust me. Now, back!’

The Goshawk lunged out with the truncheon, but the prisoner displayed no hesitation in complying, and fell back about a space of fifteen yards.

‘I suppose he guesses I’ve never done the stupid trick before,’ mused Guy, ‘or he would not be so sharp.’ Observing that Farina had also fallen back in a line as guard, Guy motioned him to edge off to the right more, bawling, ‘Never mind why!’

‘Now,’ thought Guy, ’if I were sure of notching him, I’d do the speech part first; but as I’m not—throwing truncheons being no honourable profession anywhere—I’ll reserve that. The rascal don’t quail. We’ll see how long he stands firm.’

The Goshawk cleared his wrist, fixed his eye, and swung the truncheon meditatively to and fro by one end. He then launched off the shoulder a mighty down-fling, calmly, watching it strike the prisoner to earth, like an ox under the hammer.

‘A hit!’ said he, and smoothed his wrist.

Farina knelt by the body, and lifted the head on his breast. ’Berthold! Berthold!’ he cried; ‘no further harm shall hap to you, man! Speak!’

‘You ken the scapegrace?’ said Guy, sauntering up.

’’Tis Berthold Schmidt, son of old Schmidt, the great goldsmith of Cologne.’

‘St. Dunstan was not at his elbow this time!’

‘A rival of mine,’ whispered Farina.

‘Oho!’ and the Goshawk wound a low hiss at his tongue’s tip. ’Well! as I should have spoken if his ears had been open: Justice struck the blow; and a gentle one. This comes of taking a flying shot, and not standing up fair. And that seems all that can be said. Where lives he?’

Farina pointed to the house of the Lilies.

'Beshrew me! the dog has some right on his side. Whew! yonder he lives? He took us for some night-prowlers. Why not come up fairly, and ask my business?

Smelling a flower is not worth a broken neck, nor defending your premises quite deserving a hole in the pate. Now, my lad, you see what comes of dealing with cut and run blows; and let this be a warning to you.'

Page 4387

They took the body by head and feet, and laid him at the door of his father's house. Here the colour came to his cheek, and they wiped off the streaks of blood that stained him. Guy proved he could be tender with a fallen foe, and Farina with an ill-fated rival. It was who could suggest the soundest remedies, or easiest postures. One lent a kerchief and nursed him; another ran to the city fountain and fetched him water. Meantime the moon had dropped, and morning, grey and beamless, looked on the house-peaks and along the streets with steadier eye. They now both discerned a body of men, far down, fronting Gottlieb's house, and drawn up in some degree of order. All their charity forsook them at once.

'Possess thyself of the truncheon,' said Guy: 'You see it can damage. More work before breakfast, and a fine account I must give of myself to my hostess of the Three Holy Kings!'

Farina recovered the destructive little instrument.

'I am ready,' said he. 'But hark! there's little work for us there, I fancy. Those be lads of Cologne, no grunters of the wild. 'Tis the White Rose Club. Always too late for service.'

Voices singing a hunting glee, popular in that age, swelled up the clear morning air; and gradually the words became distinct.

The Kaiser went a-hunting,
A-hunting, tra-ra:
With his bugle-horn at springing morn,
The Kaiser trampled bud and thorn:
Tra-ra!

And the dew shakes green as the horsemen rear,
And a thousand feathers they flutter with fear;
And a pang drives quick to the heart of the deer;
For the Kaiser's out a-hunting,
Tra-ra!
Ta, ta, ta, ta,
Tra-ra, tra-ra,
Ta-ta, tra-ra, tra-ra!

the owner of the truncheon awoke to these reviving tones, and uttered a faint responsive 'Tra-ra!'

'Hark again!' said Farina, in reply to the commendation of the Goshawk, whose face was dimpled over with the harmony.

The wild boar lay a-grunting,
A-grunting, tra-ra!
And, boom! comes the Kaiser to hunt up me?
Or, queak! the small birdie that hops on the tree?
Tra-ra!
O birdie, and boar, and deer, lie tame!
For a maiden in bloom, or a full-blown dame,
Are the daintiest prey, and the windingest game,
When Kaisers go a-hunting,
Tra-ra!
Ha, ha, ha, ha,
Tra-ra, tra-ra,
Ha-ha, tra-ra, tra-ra!

The voices held long on the last note, and let it die in a forest cadence.

''Fore Gad! well done. Hurrah! Tra-ra, ha-ha, tra-ra! That's a trick we're not half alive to at home,' said Guy. 'I feel friendly with these German lads.'

The Goshawk's disposition toward German lads was that moment harshly tested by a smart rap on the shoulder from an end of German oak, and a proclamation that he was prisoner of the hand that gave the greeting, in the name of the White Rose Club. Following that, his staff was wrested from him by a dozen stout young fellows, who gave him no time to get his famous distance for defence against numbers; and he and Farina were marched forthwith to the chorusing body in front of Gottlieb Groschen's house.

Page 4388

THE MISSIVES

Of all the inmates, Gottlieb had slept most with the day on his eyelids, for Werner hung like a nightmare over him. Margarita lay and dreamed in rose-colour, and if she thrilled on her pillowed silken couch like a tense-strung harp, and fretted drowsily in little leaps and starts, it was that a bird lay in her bosom, panting and singing through the night, and that he was not to be stilled, but would musically utter the sweetest secret thoughts of a love-bewitched maiden. Farina's devotion she knew his tenderness she divined: his courage she had that day witnessed. The young girl no sooner felt that she could love worthily, than she loved with her whole strength. Muffed and remote came the hunting-song under her pillow, and awoke dreamy delicate curves in her fair face, as it thinned but did not banish her dream. Aunt Lisbeth also heard the song, and burst out of her bed to see that the door and window were secured against the wanton Kaiser. Despite her trials, she had taken her spell of sleep; but being possessed of some mystic maiden belief that in cases of apprehended peril from man, bed was a rock of refuge and fortified defence, she crept back there, and allowed the sun to rise without her. Gottlieb's voice could not awaken her to the household duties she loved to perform with such a doleful visage. She heard him open his window, and parley in angry tones with the musicians below.

'Decoys!' muttered Aunt Lisbeth; 'be thou alive to them, Gottlieb!'

He went downstairs and opened the street door, whereupon the scolding and railing commenced anew.

'Thou hast given them vantage, Gottlieb, brother mine,' she complained; 'and the good heavens only can say what may result from such indiscreetness.'

A silence, combustible with shuffling of feet in the passage and on the stairs, dinned horrors into Aunt Lisbeth's head.

'It was just that sound in the left wing of Hollenbogenblitz,' she said: 'only then it was night and not morning. Ursula preserve me!'

'Why, Lisbeth! Lisbeth!' cried Gottlieb from below. 'Come down! 'tis full five o' the morning. Here's company; and what are we to do without the woman?'

'Ah, Gottlieb! that is like men! They do not consider how different it is for us!' which mysterious sentence being uttered to herself alone, enjoyed a meaning it would elsewhere have been denied.

Aunt Lisbeth dressed, and met Margarita descending. They exchanged the good-morning of young maiden and old.

‘Go thou first,’ said Aunt Lisbeth.

Margarita gaily tripped ahead.

‘Girl!’ cried Aunt Lisbeth, ‘what’s that thing in thy back hair?’

‘I have borrowed Lieschen’s arrow, aunt. Mine has had an accident.’

’Lieschen’s arrow! An accident! Now I will see to that after breakfast, Margarita.’

‘Tra-ra, ta-ta, tra-ra, tra-ra,’ sang Margarita.

Page 4389

’The wild boar lay a-grunting,
A-grunting, tra-ra.’

’A maiden’s true and proper ornament! Look at mine, child! I have worn it fifty years. May I deserve to wear it till I am called! O Margarita! trifle not with that symbol.’

’"O birdie, and boar, and deer, lie tame!”

I am so happy, aunty.’

‘Nice times to be happy in, Margarita.’

> “Be happy in Spring, sweet maidens all,
> For Autumn’s chill will early fall.”

So sings the Minnesinger, aunty; and

> ’"A maiden in the wintry leaf
> Will spread her own disease of grief.”

I love the Minnesingers! Dear, sweet-mannered men they are! Such lovers! And men of deeds as well as song: sword on one side and harp on the other. They fight till set of sun, and then slacken their armour to waft a ballad to their beloved by moonlight, covered with stains of battle as they are, and weary!’

’What a girl! Minnesingers! Yes; I know stories of those Minnesingers. They came to the castle—Margarita, a bead of thy cross is broken. I will attend to it. Wear the pearl one till I mend this. May’st thou never fall in the way of Minnesingers. They are not like Werner’s troop. They do not batter at doors: they slide into the house like snakes.’

‘Lisbeth! Lisbeth!’ they heard Gottlieb calling impatiently.

‘We come, Gottlieb!’ and in a low murmur Margarita heard her say: ’May this day pass without trouble and shame to the pious and the chaste.’

Margarita knew the voice of the stranger before she had opened the door, and on presenting herself, the hero gave her a guardian-like salute.

‘One may see,’ he said, ’that it requires better men than those of Werner to drive away the rose from that cheek.’

Gottlieb pressed the rosy cheek to his shoulder and patted her.

’What do you think, Grete? You have now forty of the best lads in Cologne enrolled to protect you, and keep guard over the house night and day. There! What more could a

Pfalzgrafin ask, now? And voluntary service; all to be paid with a smile, which I daresay my lady won't refuse them. Lisbeth, you know our friend. Fear him not, good Lisbeth, and give us breakfast. Well, sweet chuck, you're to have royal honours paid you. I warrant they've begun good work already in locking up that idle moony vagabond, Farina—'

'Him? What for, my father? How dared they! What has he done?'

'O, start not, my fairy maid! A small matter of breakage, pet! He tried to enter Cunigonde Schmidt's chamber, and knocked down her pot of lilies: for which Berthold Schmidt knocked him down, and our friend here, out of good fellowship, knocked down Berthold. However, the chief offender is marched off to prison by your trusty guard, and there let him cool himself. Berthold shall tell you the tale himself: he'll be here to breakfast, and receive your orders, mistress commander-in-chief.'

Page 4390

The Goshawk had his eye on Margarita. Her teeth were tight down on her nether lip, and her whole figure had a strange look of awkwardness, she was so divided with anger.

'As witness of the affair, I think I shall make a clearer statement, fair maiden,' he interposed. 'In the first place, I am the offender. We passed under the window of the Fraulein Schmidt, and 'twas I mounted to greet the lilies. One shoot of them is in my helm, and here let me present them to a worthier holder.'

He offered the flowers with a smile, and Margarita took them, radiant with gratitude.

'Our friend Berthold,' he continued, 'thought proper to aim a blow at me behind my back, and then ran for his comrades. He was caught, and by my gallant young hero, Farina; concerning whose character I regret that your respected father and I differ: for, on the faith of a soldier and true man, he's the finest among the fine fellows I've yet met in Germany, trust me. So, to cut the story short, execution was done upon Berthold by my hand, for an act of treachery. He appears to be a sort of captain of one of the troops, and not affectionately disposed to Farina; for the version of the affair you have heard from your father is a little invention of Master Berthold's own. To do him justice, he seemed equally willing to get me under the cold stone; but a word from your good father changed the current; and as I thought I could serve our friend better free than behind bars, I accepted liberty. Pshaw! I should have accepted it any way, to tell the truth, for your German dungeons are mortal shivering ratty places. So rank me no hero, fair Mistress Margarita, though the temptation to seem one in such sweet eyes was beginning to lead me astray. And now, as to our business in the streets at this hour, believe the best of us.'

'I will! I do!' said Margarita.

'Lisbeth! Lisbeth!' called Gottlieb. 'Breakfast, little sister! our champion is starving. He asks for wurst, milk-loaves, wine, and all thy rarest conserves. Haste, then, for the honour of Cologne is at stake.'

Aunt Lisbeth jingled her keys in and out, and soon that harmony drew a number of domestics with platters of swine flesh, rolls of white wheaten bread, the perpetual worst, milk, wine, barley-bread, and household stores of dainties in profusion, all sparkling on silver, relieved by spotless white cloth. Gottlieb beheld such a sunny twinkle across the Goshawk's face at this hospitable array, that he gave the word of onset without waiting for Berthold, and his guest immediately fell to, and did not relax in his exertions for a full half-hour by the Cathedral clock, eschewing the beer with a wry look made up of scorn and ruefulness, and drinking a well-brimmed health in Rhine wine all round. Margarita was pensive: Aunt Lisbeth on her guard. Gottlieb remembered Charles the Great's counsel to Archbishop Turpin, and did his best to remain on earth one of its lords dominant.

Page 4391

‘Poor Berthold!’ said he. ’’Tis a good lad, and deserves his seat at my table oftener. I suppose the flower-pot business has detained him. We’ll drink to him: eh, Grete?’

‘Drink to him, dear father!—but here he is to thank you in person.’

Margarita felt a twinge of pity as Berthold entered. The livid stains of his bruise deepened about his eyes, and gave them a wicked light whenever they were fixed intently; but they looked earnest; and spoke of a combat in which he could say that he proved no coward and was used with some cruelty. She turned on the Goshawk a mute reproach; yet smiled and loved him well when she beheld him stretch a hand of welcome and proffer a brotherly glass to Berthold. The rich goldsmith’s son was occupied in studying the horoscope of his fortunes in Margarita’s eyes; but when Margarita directed his attention to Guy, he turned to him with a glance of astonishment that yielded to cordial greeting.

‘Well done, Berthold, my brave boy! All are friends who sit at table,’ said Gottlieb. ’In any case, at my table:

> “’Tis a worthy foe
> Forgives the blow
> Was dealt him full and fairly,”

says the song; and the proverb takes it up with, “A generous enemy is a friend on the wrong side”; and no one’s to blame for that, save old Dame Fortune. So now a bumper to this jovial make-up between you. Lisbeth! you must drink it.’

The little woman bowed melancholy obedience.

‘Why did you fling and run?’ whispered Guy to Berthold.

‘Because you were two against one.’

’Two against one, man! Why, have you no such thing as fair play in this land of yours? Did you think I should have taken advantage of that?’

‘How could I tell who you were, or what you would do?’ muttered Berthold, somewhat sullenly.

’Truly no, friend! So you ran to make yourself twenty to two? But don’t be down on the subject. I was going to say, that though I treated you in a manner upright, ’twas perhaps a trifle severe, considering your youth: but an example’s everything; and I must let you know in confidence, that no rascal truncheon had I flung in my life before; so, you see, I gave you all the chances.’

Berthold moved his lips in reply; but thinking of the figure of defeat he was exhibiting before Margarita, caused him to estimate unfavourably what chances had stood in his favour.

The health was drunk. Aunt Lisbeth touched the smoky yellow glass with a mincing lip, and beckoned Margarita to withdraw.

‘The tapestry, child!’ she said. ’Dangerous things are uttered after the third glass, I know, Margarita.’

‘Do you call my champion handsome, aunt?’

’I was going to speak to you about him, Margarita. If I remember, he has rough, good looks, as far as they go. Yes: but thou, maiden, art thou thinking of him? I have thrice watched him wink; and that, as we know, is a habit of them that have sold themselves. And what is frail womankind to expect from such a brawny animal?’

Page 4392

’And oh! to lace his armour up,
And speed him to the field;
To pledge him in a kissing-cup,
The knight that will not yield!

I am sure he is tender, aunt. Notice how gentle he looks now and then.’

’Thou girl! Yes, I believe she is madly in love with him. Tender, and gentle! So is the bear when you’re outside his den; but enter it, maiden, and try! Thou good Ursula, preserve me from such a fate.’

’Fear not, dear aunt! Have not a fear of it! Besides, it is not always the men that are bad. You must not forget Dalilah, and Lot’s wife, and Pfalzgrafin Jutta, and the Baroness who asked for a piece of poor Kraut. But, let us work, let us work!’

Margarita sat down before Siegfried, and contemplated the hero. For the first time, she marked a resemblance in his features to Farina: the same long yellow hair scattered over his shoulders as that flowing from under Siegfried’s helm; the blue eyes, square brows, and regular outlines. ‘This is a marvel,’ thought Margarita. ’And Farina! it was to watch over me that he roamed the street last night, my best one! Is he not beautiful?’ and she looked closer at Siegfried.

Aunt Lisbeth had begun upon the dragon with her usual method, and was soon wandering through skeleton halls of the old palatial castle in Bohemia. The woolly tongue of the monster suggested fresh horrors to her, and if Margarita had listened, she might have had fair excuses to forget her lover’s condition; but her voice only did service like a piece of clock-work, and her mind was in the prison with Farina. She was long debating how to win his release; and meditated so deeply, and exclaimed in so many bursts of impatience, that Aunt Lisbeth found her heart melting to the maiden. ‘Now,’ said she, ’that is a well-known story about the Electress Dowager of Bavaria, when she came on a visit to the castle; and, my dear child, be it a warning. Terrible, too!’ and the little woman shivered pleasantly. ’She had—I may tell you this, Margarita—yes, she had been false to her wedded husband.—You understand, maiden; or, no! you do not understand: I understand it only partly, mind. False, I say——’

‘False—not true: go on, dear aunty,’ said Margarita, catching the word.

‘I believe she knows as much as I do!’ ejaculated Aunt Lisbeth; ’such are girls nowadays. When I was young-oh! for a maiden to know anything then—oh! it was general reprobation. No one thought of confessing it. We blushed and held down our eyes at the very idea. Well, the Electress! she was—you must guess. So she called for her caudle at eleven o’clock at night. What do you think that was? Well, there was spirit in it: not to say nutmeg, and lemon, and peach kernels. She wanted me to sit with her, but I begged my mistress to keep me from the naughty woman: and no friend of

Hilda of Bayern was Bertha of Bohmen, you may be sure. Oh! the things she talked while she was drinking her caudle.

Page 4393

Isentrude sat with her,’and said it was fearful!—beyond blasphemy! and that she looked like a Bible witch, sitting up drinking and swearing and glaring in her nightclothes and nightcap. She was on a journey into Hungary, and claimed the hospitality of the castle on her way there. Both were widows. Well, it was a quarter to twelve. The Electress dropped back on her pillow, as she always did when she had finished the candle. Isentrude covered her over, heaped up logs on the fire, wrapped her dressing-gown about her, and prepared to sleep. It was Winter, and the wind howled at the doors, and rattled the windows, and shook the arras—Lord help us! Outside was all snow, and nothing but forest; as you saw when you came to me there, Gretelchen. Twelve struck. Isentrude was dozing; but she says that after the last stroke she woke with cold. A foggy chill hung in the room. She looked at the Electress, who had not moved. The fire burned feebly, and seemed weighed upon: Herr Je!—she thought she heard a noise. No. Quite quiet! As heaven preserve her, says slip, the smell in that room grew like an open grave, clammily putrid. Holy Virgin! This time she was certain she heard a noise; but it seemed on both sides of her. There was the great door leading to the first landing and state-room; and opposite exactly there was the panel of the secret passage. The noises seemed to advance as if step by step, and grew louder in each ear as she stood horrified on the marble of the hearth. She looked at the Electress again, and her eyes were wide open; but for all Isentrude’s calling, she would not wake. Only think! Now the noise increased, and was a regular tramp-grate, tramp-screw sound-coming nearer and nearer: Saints of mercy! The apartment was choking with vapours. Isentrude made a dart, and robed herself behind a curtain of the bed just as the two doors opened. She could see through a slit in the woven work, and winked her eyes which she had shut close on hearing the scream of the door-hinges—winked her eyes to catch a sight for moment—we are such sinful, curious creatures!—What she saw then, she says she shall never forget; nor I! As she was a living woman, there she saw the two dead princes, the Prince Palatine of Bohemia and the Elector of Bavaria, standing front to front at the foot of the bed, all in white armour, with drawn swords, and attendants holding pine-torches. Neither of them spoke. Their vizors were down; but she knew them by their arms and bearing: both tall, stately presences, good knights in their day, and had fought against the Infidel! So one of them pointed to the bed, and then a torch was lowered, and the fight commenced. Isentrude saw the sparks fly, and the steel struck till it was shattered; but they fought on, not caring for wounds, and snorting with fury as they grew hotter. They fought a whole hour. The poor girl was so eaten up with looking on, that she let go the curtain and stood quite exposed among them. So, to steady herself, she rested her hand on the bed-side; and—think what she felt—a hand as cold as ice locked hers, and get from it she could not! That instant one of the princes fell. It was Bohmen. Bayern sheathed his sword, and waved his hand, and the attendants took up the slaughtered ghost, feet and shoulders, and bore him to the door of the secret passage, while Bayern strode after—’

Page 4394

‘Shameful!’ exclaimed Margarita. ’I will speak to Berthold as he descends. I hear him coming. He shall do what I wish.’

’Call it dreadful, Grete! Dreadful it was. If Berthold would like to sit and hear—Ah! she is gone. A good girl! and of a levity only on the surface.’

Aunt Lisbeth heard Margarita’s voice rapidly addressing Berthold. His reply was low and brief. ‘Refuses to listen to anything of the sort,’ Aunt Lisbeth interpreted it. Then he seemed to be pleading, and Margarita uttering short answers. ’I trust ‘tis nothing a maiden should not hear,’ the little lady exclaimed with a sigh.

The door opened, and Lieschen stood at the entrance.

‘For Fraulein Margarita,’ she said, holding a letter halfway out.

‘Give it,’ Aunt Lisbeth commanded.

The woman hesitated—”Tis for the Fraulein.’

‘Give it, I tell thee!’ and Aunt Lisbeth eagerly seized the missive, and subjected it to the ordeal of touch. It was heavy, and contained something hard. Long pensive pressures revealed its shape on the paper. It was an arrow. ‘Go!’ said she to the woman, and, once alone, began, bee-like, to buzz all over it, and finally entered. It contained Margarita’s Silver Arrow. ‘The art of that girl!’ And the writing said:

’*Sweetest maiden*!

’By this arrow of our betrothal, I conjure thee to meet me in all haste without the western gate, where, burning to reveal to thee most urgent tidings that may not be confided to paper, now waits, petitioning the saints, thy

‘*Farina*.’

Aunt Lisbeth placed letter and arrow in a drawer; locked it; and ’always thought so.’ She ascended the stairs to consult with Gottlieb. Roars of laughter greeted her just as she lifted the latch, and she retreated abashed.

There was no time to lose. Farina must be caught in the act of waiting for Margarita, and by Gottlieb, or herself. Gottlieb was revelling. ’May this be a warning to thee, Gottlieb,’ murmured Lisbeth, as she hooded her little body in Margarita’s fur-cloak, and determined that she would be the one to confound Farina.

Five minutes later Margarita returned. Aunt Lisbeth was gone. The dragon still lacked a tip to his forked tongue, and a stream of fiery threads dangled from the jaws of the monster. Another letter was brought into the room by Lieschen.

‘For Aunt Lisbeth,’ said Margarita, reading the address. ’Who can it be from?’

‘She does not stand pressing about your letters,’ said the woman; and informed Margarita of the foregoing missive.

‘You say she drew an arrow from it?’ said Margarita, with burning face. ‘Who brought this? tell me!’ and just waiting to hear it was Farina’s mother, she tore the letter open, and read:

’*Dearest Lisbeth*!

Page 4395

'Thy old friend writes to thee; she that has scarce left eyes to see the words she writes. Thou knowest we are a fallen house, through the displeasure of the Emperor on my dead husband. My son, Farina, is my only stay, and well returns to me the blessings I bestow upon him. Some call him idle: some think him too wise. I swear to thee, Lisbeth, he is only good. His hours are devoted to the extraction of essences—to no black magic. Now he is in trouble-in prison. The shadow that destroyed his dead father threatens him. Now, by our old friendship, beloved Lisbeth! intercede with Gottlieb, that he may plead for my son before the Emperor when he comes—'

Margarita read no more. She went to the window, and saw her guard marshalled outside. She threw a kerchief over her head, and left the house by the garden gate.

THE MONK

By this time the sun stood high over Cologne. The market-places were crowded with buyers and sellers, mixed with a loitering swarm of soldiery, for whose thirsty natures winestalls had been tumbled up. Barons and knights of the empire, bravely mounted and thickly followed, poured hourly into Cologne from South Germany and North. Here, staring Suabians, and round-featured warriors of the East Kingdom, swaggered up and down, patting what horses came across them, for lack of occupation for their hands. Yonder, huge Pomeranians, with bosks of beard stiffened out square from the chin, hurtled mountainous among the peaceable inhabitants. Troopers dismounted went straddling, in tight hose and loose, prepared to drink good-will to whomsoever would furnish the best quality liquor for that solemn pledge, and equally ready to pick a quarrel with them that would not. It was a scene of flaring feathers, wide-flapped bonnets, flaunting hose, blue and battered steel plates, slashed woollen haunch-bags, leather-leggings, ensigns, and imperious boots and shoulders. Margarita was too hurried in her mind to be conscious of an imprudence; but her limbs trembled, and she instinctively quickened her steps. When she stood under the sign of the Three Holy Kings, where dwelt Farina's mother, she put up a fervent prayer of thanks, and breathed freely.

'I had expected a message from Lisbeth,' said Frau Farina; 'but thou, good heart! thou wilt help us?'

'All that may be done by me I will do,' replied Margarita; 'but his mother yearns to see him, and I have come to bear her company.'

The old lady clasped her hands and wept.

'Has he found so good a friend, my poor boy! And trust me, dear maiden, he is not unworthy, for better son never lived, and good son, good all! Surely we will go to him, but not as thou art. I will dress thee. Such throngs are in the streets: I heard them clattering in early this morning. Rest, dear heart, till I return.'

Page 4396

Margarita had time to inspect the single sitting-room in which her lover lived. It was planted with bottles, and vases, and pipes, and cylinders, piling on floor, chair, and table. She could not suppress a slight surprise of fear, for this display showed a dealing with hidden things, and a summoning of scattered spirits. It was this that made his brow so pale, and the round of his eye darker than youth should let it be! She dismissed the feeling, and assumed her own bright face as Dame Farina reappeared, bearing on her arm a convent garb, and other apparel. Margarita suffered herself to be invested in the white and black robes of the denial of life.

‘There!’ said the Frau Farina, ’and to seal assurance, I have engaged a guard to accompany us. He was sorely bruised in a street combat yesterday, and was billeted below, where I nursed and tended him, and he is grateful, as man should be-though I did little, doing my utmost—and with him near us we have nought to fear.’

‘Good,’ said Margarita, and they kissed and departed. The guard was awaiting them outside.

’Come, my little lady, and with thee the holy sister! ’Tis no step from here, and I gage to bring ye safe, as sure as my name’s Schwartz Thier!—Hey? The good sister’s dropping. Look, now! I’ll carry her.’

Margarita recovered her self-command before he could make good this offer.

‘Only let us hasten there,’ she gasped.

The Thier strode on, and gave them safe-conduct to the prison where Farina was confined, being near one of the outer forts of the city.

‘Thank and dismiss him,’ whispered Margarita.

’Nay! he will wait-wilt thou not, friend! We shall not be long, though it is my son I visit here,’ said Frau Farina.

’Till to-morrow morning, my little lady! The lion thanked him that plucked the thorn from his foot, and the Thier may be black, but he’s not ungrateful, nor a worse beast than the lion.’

They entered the walls and left him.

For the first five minutes Schwartz Thier found employment for his faculties by staring at the shaky, small-paned windows of the neighbourhood. He persevered in this, after all novelty had been exhausted, from an intuitive dread of weariness. There was nothing to see. An old woman once bobbed out of an attic, and doused the flints with water. Harassed by increasing dread of the foul nightmare of nothing-to-do, the Thier endeavoured to establish amorous intelligence with her. She responded with an

indignant projection of the underjaw, evanishing rapidly. There was no resource left him but to curse her with extreme heartiness. The Thier stamped his right leg, and then his left, and remembered the old woman as a grievance five minutes longer. When she was clean forgotten, he yawned. Another spouse of the moment was wanted, to be wooed, objurgated, and regretted. The prison-gate was in a secluded street. Few passengers went

Page 4397

by, and those who did edged away from the ponderous, wanton-eyed figure of lazy mischief lounging there, as neatly as they well could. The Thier hailed two or three. One took to his legs, another bowed, smirked, gave him a kindly good-day, and affected to hear no more, having urgent business in prospect. The Thier was a faithful dog, but the temptation to betray his trust and pursue them was mighty. He began to experience an equal disposition to cry and roar. He hummed a ballad—

'I swore of her I'd have my will,
And with him I'd have my way:
I learn'd my cross-bow over the hill:
Now what does my lady say?

Give me the good old cross-bow, after all, and none of these lumbering puff-and-bangs that knock you down oftener than your man!

'A cross stands in the forest still,
And a cross in the churchyard grey:
My curse on him who had his will,
And on him who had his way!

Good beginning, bad ending! 'Tisn't so always. "Many a cross has the cross-bow built," they say. I wish I had mine, now, to peg off that old woman, or somebody. I'd swear she's peeping at me over the gable, or behind some cranny. They're curious, the old women, curse 'em! And the young, for that matter. Devil a young one here.

'When I'm in for the sack of a town,
What, think ye, I poke after, up and down?
Silver and gold I pocket in plenty,
But the sweet tit-bit is my lass under twenty.

I should like to be in for the sack of this Cologne. I'd nose out that pretty girl I was cheated of yesterday. Take the gold and silver, and give me the maiden! Her neck's silver, and her hair gold. Ah! and her cheeks roses, and her mouth-say no more! I'm half thinking Werner, the hungry animal, has cast wolf's eyes on her. They say he spoke of her last night. Don't let him thwart me. Thunderblast him! I owe him a grudge. He's beginning to forget my plan o' life.'

A flight of pigeons across the blue top of the street abstracted the Thier from these reflections. He gaped after them in despair, and fell to stretching and shaking himself, rattling his lungs with loud reports. As he threw his eyes round again, they encountered those of a monk opposite fastened on him in penetrating silence. The Thier hated monks as a wild beast shuns fire; but now even a monk was welcome.

'Halloo!' he sung out.

The monk crossed over to him.

‘Friend!’ said he, ’weariness is teaching thee wantonness. Wilt thou take service for a night’s work, where the danger is little, the reward lasting?’

‘As for that,’ replied the Thier, ’danger comes to me like greenwood to the deer, and good pay never yet was given in promises. But I’m bound for the next hour to womankind within there. They’re my masters; as they’ve been of tough fellows before me.’

‘I will seek them, and win their consent,’ said the monk, and so left him.

Page 4398

‘Quick dealing!’ thought the Thier, and grew brisker. ’The Baron won’t want me to-night: and what if he does? Let him hang himself—though, if he should, ‘twill be a pity I’m not by to help him.’

He paced under the wall to its farthest course. Turning back, he perceived the monk at the gateway.

‘A sharp hand!’ thought the Thier.

‘Intrude no question on me,’ the monk began; ’but hold thy peace and follow: the women release thee, and gladly.’

‘That’s not my plan o’ life, now! Money down, and then command me’: and Schwartz Thier stood with one foot forward, and hand stretched out.

A curl of scorn darkened the cold features of the monk.

He slid one hand into a side of his frock above the girdle, and tossed a bag of coin.

’Take it, if ‘tis in thee to forfeit the greater blessing,’ he cried contemptuously.

The Thier peeped into the bag, and appeared satisfied.

‘I follow,’ said he; ’lead on, good father, and I’ll be in the track of holiness for the first time since my mother was quit of me.’

The monk hurried up the street and into the marketplace, oblivious of the postures and reverences of the people, who stopped to stare at him and his gaunt attendant. As they crossed the square, Schwartz Thier spied Henker Rothhals starting from a wine-stall on horseback, and could not forbear hailing him. Before the monk had time to utter a reproach, they were deep together in a double-shot of query and reply.

‘Whirr!’ cried the Thier, breaking on some communication. ’Got her, have they? and swung her across stream? I’m one with ye for my share, or call me sheep!’

He waved his hand to the monk, and taking hold of the horse’s rein, ran off beside his mounted confederate, heavily shod as he was.

The monk frowned after him, and swelled with a hard sigh.

‘Gone!’ he exclaimed, ’and the accursed gold with him! Well did a voice warn me that such service was never to be bought!’

He did not pause to bewail or repent, but returned toward the prison with rapid footsteps, muttering: ’I with the prison-pass for two; why was I beguiled by that bandit?

Saw I not the very youth given into my hands there, he that was with the damsel and the aged woman?’

THE RIDE AND THE RACE

Late in the noon a horseman, in the livery of the Kaiser’s body-guard, rode dry and dusty into Cologne, with tidings that the Kaiser was at Hammerstein Castle, and commanding all convocated knights, barons, counts, and princes, to assemble and prepare for his coming, on a certain bare space of ground within two leagues of Cologne, thence to swell the train of his triumphal entry into the ancient city of his empire.

Guy the Goshawk, broad-set on a Flemish mare, and a pack-horse beside him, shortly afterward left the hotel of the Three Holy Kings, and trotted up to Gottlieb’s door.

Page 4399

‘Tent-pitching is now my trade,’ said he, as Gottlieb came down to him. ’My lord is with the Kaiser. I must say farewell for the nonce. Is the young lady visible?’

‘Nor young, nor old, good friend,’ replied Gottlieb, with a countenance somewhat ruffled. ’I dined alone for lack of your company. Secret missives came, I hear, to each of them, and both are gadding. Now what think you of this, after the scene of yesterday?—Lisbeth too!’

’Preaches from the old text, Master Groschen; “Never reckon on womankind for a wise act.” But farewell! and tell Mistress Margarita that I take it ill of her not giving me her maiden hand to salute before parting. My gravest respects to Frau Lisbeth. I shall soon be sitting with you over that prime vintage of yours, or fortune’s dead against me.’

So, with a wring of the hand, Guy put the spur to his round-flanked beast, and was quickly out of Cologne on the rough roadway.

He was neither the first nor the last of the men-at-arms hastening to obey the Kaiser’s mandate. A string of horse and foot in serpentine knots stretched along the flat land, flashing colours livelier than the spring-meadows bordering their line of passage. Guy, with a nod for all, and a greeting for the best-disposed, pushed on toward the van, till the gathering block compelled him to adopt the snail’s pace of the advance party, and gave him work enough to keep his two horses from being jammed with the mass. Now and then he cast a weather-eye on the heavens, and was soon confirmed in an opinion he had repeatedly ejaculated, that ’the first night’s camping would be a drencher.’ In the West a black bank of cloud was blotting out the sun before his time. Northeast shone bare fields of blue lightly touched with loosefloating strips and flakes of crimson vapour. The furrows were growing purple-dark, and gradually a low moaning obscurity enwrapped the whole line, and mufed the noise of hoof, oath, and waggon-wheel in one sullen murmur.

Guy felt very much like a chopped worm, as he wriggled his way onward in the dusk, impelled from the rear, and reduced to grope after the main body. Frequent and deep counsel he took with a trusty flask suspended at his belt. It was no pleasant reflection that the rain would be down before he could build up anything like shelter for horse and man. Still sadder the necessity of selecting his post on strange ground, and in darkness. He kept an anxious look-out for the moon, and was presently rejoiced to behold a broad fire that twinkled branchy beams through an east-hill orchard.

‘My lord calls her Goddess,’ said Guy, wistfully. ’The title’s outlandish, and more the style of these foreigners but she may have it to-night, an she ’ll just keep the storm from shrouding her bright eye a matter of two hours.’

She rose with a boding lustre. Drifts of thin pale upper-cloud leaned down ladders, pure as virgin silver, for her to climb to her highest seat on the unrebellious half-circle of heaven.

Page 4400

‘My mind’s made up!’ quoth Guy to the listening part of himself. ’Out of this I’ll get.’

By the clearer ray he had discerned a narrow track running a white parallel with the general route. At the expense of dislocating a mile of the cavalcade, he struck into it. A dyke had to be taken, some heavy fallows crossed, and the way was straight before him. He began to sneer at the slow jog-trot and absence of enterprise which made the fellows he had left shine so poorly in comparison with the Goshawk, but a sight of two cavaliers in advance checked his vanity, and now to overtake them he tasked his fat Flemish mare with unwonted pricks of the heel, that made her fling out and show more mettle than speed.

The objects of this fiery chase did not at first awake to a sense of being pursued. Both rode with mantled visages, and appeared profoundly inattentive to the world outside their meditations. But the Goshawk was not to be denied, and by dint of alternately roaring at them and upbraiding his two stumping beasts, he at last roused the younger of the cavaliers, who called to his companion loudly: without effect it seemed, for he had to repeat the warning. Guy was close up with them, when the youth exclaimed:

’Father! holy father! ‘Tis Sathanas in person!’

The other rose and pointed trembling to a dark point in the distance as he vociferated:

‘Not here! not here; but yonder!’

Guy recognized the voice of the first speaker, and cried:

‘Stay! halt a second! Have you forgotten the Goshawk?’

‘Never!’ came the reply, ‘and forget not Farina!’

Spur and fleeter steeds carried them out of hearing ere Guy could throw in another syllable. Farina gazed back on him remorsefully, but the Monk now rated his assistant with indignation.

’Thou weak one! nothing less than fool! to betray thy name on such an adventure as this to soul save the saints!’

Farina tossed back his locks, and held his forehead to the moon. All the Monk’s ghostly wrath was foiled by the one little last sweet word of his beloved, which made music in his ears whenever annoyance sounded.

‘And herein,’ say the old writers, ’are lovers, who love truly, truly recompensed for their toils and pains; in that love, for which they suffer, is ever present to ward away suffering not sprung of love: but the disloyal, who serve not love faithfully, are a race given over

to whatso this base world can wreak upon them, without consolation or comfort of their mistress, Love; whom sacrificing not all to, they know not to delight in.’

Page 4401

The soul of a lover lives through every member of him in the joy of a moonlight ride. Sorrow and grief are slow distempers that crouch from the breeze, and nourish their natures far from swift-moving things. A true lover is not one of those melancholy flies that shoot and maze over muddy stagnant pools. He must be up in the great air. He must strike all the strings of life. Swiftness is his rapture. In his wide arms he embraces the whole form of beauty. Eagle-like are his instincts; dove-like his desires. Then the fair moon is the very presence of his betrothed in heaven. So for hours rode Farina in a silver-fleeting glory; while the Monk as a shadow, galloped stern and silent beside him. So, crowning them in the sky, one half was all love and light; one, blackness and fell purpose.

THE COMBAT ON DRACHENFELS

Not to earth was vouchsafed the honour of commencing the great battle of that night. By an expiring blue-shot beam of moonlight, Farina beheld a vast realm of gloom filling the hollow of the West, and the moon was soon extinguished behind sluggish scraps of iron scud detached from the swinging bulk of ruin, as heavily it ground on the atmosphere in the first thunder-launch of motion.

The heart of the youth was strong, but he could not view without quicker fawning throbs this manifestation of immeasurable power, which seemed as if with a stroke it was capable of destroying creation and the works of man. The bare aspect of the tempest lent terrors to the adventure he was engaged in, and of which he knew not the aim, nor might forecast the issue. Now there was nothing to illumine their path but such forked flashes as lightning threw them at intervals, touching here a hill with clustered cottages, striking into day there a May-blossom, a patch of weed, a single tree by the wayside. Suddenly a more vivid and continuous quiver of violet fire met its reflection on the landscape, and Farina saw the Rhine-stream beneath him.

‘On such a night,’ thought he, ‘Siegfried fought and slew the dragon!’

A blast of light, as from the jaws of the defeated dragon in his throes, made known to him the country he traversed. Crimsoned above the water glimmered the monster-haunted rock itself, and mid-channel beyond, flat and black to the stream, stretched the Nuns’ Isle in cloistral peace.

‘Halt!’ cried the Monk, and signalled with a peculiar whistle, to which he seemed breathlessly awaiting an answer. They were immediately surrounded by longrobed veiled figures.

‘Not too late?’ the Monk hoarsely asked of them.

‘Yet an hour!’ was the reply, in soft clear tones of a woman’s voice.

‘Great strength and valour more than human be mine,’ exclaimed the Monk, dismounting.

He passed apart from them; and they drew in a circle, while he prayed, kneeling.

Presently he returned, and led Farina to a bank, drawing from some hiding-place a book and a bell, which he gave into the hands of the youth.

Page 4402

‘For thy soul, no word!’ said the Monk, speaking down his throat as he took in breath. ’Nay! not in answer to me! Be faithful, and more than earthly fortune is thine; for I say unto thee, I shall not fail, having grace to sustain this combat.’

Thereupon he commenced the ascent of Drachenfels.

Farina followed. He had no hint of the Monk’s mission, nor of the part himself was to play in it. Such a load of silence gathered on his questioning spirit, that the outcry of the rageing elements alone prevented him from arresting the Monk and demanding the end of his service there. That outcry was enough to freeze speech on the very lips of a mortal. For scarce had they got footing on the winding path of the crags, when the whole vengeance of the storm was hurled against the mountain. Huge boulders were loosened and came bowling from above: trees torn by their roots from the fissures whizzed on the eddies of the wind: torrents of rain foamed down the iron flanks of rock, and flew off in hoar feathers against the short pauses of darkness: the mountain heaved, and quaked, and yawned a succession of hideous chasms.

‘There’s a devil in this,’ thought Farina. He looked back and marked the river imaging lurid abysses of cloud above the mountain-summit—yea! and on the summit a flaming shape was mirrored.

Two nervous hands stayed the cry on his mouth.

‘Have I not warned thee?’ said the husky voice of the Monk. ’I may well watch, and think for thee as for a dog. Be thou as faithful!’

He handed a flask to the youth, and bade him drink. Farina drank and felt richly invigorated. The Monk then took bell and book.

‘But half an hour,’ he muttered, ’for this combat that is to ring through centuries.’

Crossing himself, he strode wildly upward. Farina saw him beckon back once, and the next instant he was lost round an incline of the highest peak.

The wind that had just screamed a thousand death-screams, was now awfully dumb, albeit Farina could feel it lifting hood and hair. In the unnatural stillness his ear received tones of a hymn chanted below; now sinking, now swelling; as though the voices faltered between prayer and inspiration. Farina caught on a projection of crag, and fixed his eyes on what was passing on the height.

There was the Monk in his brown hood and wrapper, confronting—if he might trust his balls of sight—the red-hot figure of the Prince of Darkness.

As yet no mortal tussle had taken place between them. They were arguing: angrily, it was true: yet with the first mutual deference of practised logicians. Latin and German

was alternately employed by both. It thrilled Farina's fervid love of fatherland to hear the German Satan spoke: but his Latin was good, and his command over that tongue remarkable; for, getting the worst of the argument, as usual, he revenged himself by parodying one of the Church canticles with a point that discomposed his adversary, and caused him to retreat a step, claiming support against such shrewd assault.

Page 4403

’The use of an unexpected weapon in warfare is in itself half a victory. Induce your antagonist to employ it as a match for you, and reckon on completely routing him . . .’ says the old military chronicle.

‘Come!’ said the Demon with easy raillery. ’You know your game—I mine! I really want the good people to be happy; dancing, kissing, propagating, what you will. We quite agree. You can have no objection to me, but a foolish old prejudice—not personal, but class; an antipathy of the cowl, for which I pardon you! What I should find in you to complain of—I have only to mention it, I am sure—is, that perhaps you do speak a little too much through your nose.’

The Monk did not fall into the jocular trap by retorting in the same strain.

‘Laugh with the Devil, and you won’t laugh longest,’ says the proverb.

Keeping to his own arms, the holy man frowned.

‘Avaunt, Fiend!’ he cried. ’To thy kingdom below! Thou halt raged over earth a month, causing blights, hurricanes, and epidemics of the deadly sins. Parley no more! Begone!’

The Demon smiled: the corners of his mouth ran up to his ears, and his eyes slid down almost into one.

‘Still through the nose!’ said he reproachfully.

‘I give thee Five Minutes!’ cried the Monk.

‘I had hoped for a longer colloquy,’ sighed the Demon, jogging his left leg and trifling with his tail.

‘One Minute!’ exclaimed the Monk.

‘Truly so!’ said the Demon. ’I know old Time and his habits better than you really can. We meet every Saturday night, and communicate our best jokes. I keep a book of them Down There!’

And as if he had reason to remember the pavement of his Halls, he stood tiptoe and whipped up his legs.

‘Two Minutes!’

The Demon waved perfect acquiescence, and continued:

’We understand each other, he and I. All Old Ones do. As long as he lasts, I shall. The thing that surprises me is, that you and I cannot agree, similar as we are in temperament, and playing for the long odds, both of us. My failure is, perhaps, too great a passion for sport, aha! Well, ’tis a pity you won’t try and live on the benevolent principle. I am indeed kind to them who commiserate my condition. I give them all they want, aha! Hem! Try and not believe in me now, aha! Ho! . . . Can’t you? What are eyes? Persuade yourself you’re dreaming. You can do anything with a mind like yours, Father Gregory! And consider the luxury of getting me out of the way so easily, as many do. It is my finest suggestion, aha! Generally I myself nudge their ribs with the capital idea—You’re above bribes? I was going to observe—’

‘Three!’

Page 4404

’Observe, that if you care for worldly honours, I can smother you with that kind of thing. Several of your first-rate people made a bargain with me when they were in the fog, and owe me a trifle. Patronage they call it. I hook the high and the low. Too-little and too-much serve me better than Beelzebub. A weak stomach is certainly more carnally virtuous than a full one. Consequently my kingdom is becoming too respectable. They’ve all got titles, and object to being asked to poke the fire without—Honourable-and-with-Exceeding-Brightness-Beaming Baroness This! Admirably-Benignant-Down-looking Highness That! Interrupts business, especially when you have to ask them to fry themselves, according to the rules . . . Would you like Mainz and the Rheingau? . . . You don’t care for Beauty—Puella, Puellae? I have plenty of them, too, below. The Historical Beauties warmed up at a moment’s notice. Modern ones made famous between morning and night—Fame is the sauce of Beauty. Or, no—eh?’

‘Four!’

’Not quite so fast, if you please. You want me gone. Now, where’s your charity? Do you ask me to be always raking up those poor devils underneath? While I’m here, they’ve a respite. They cannot think you kind, Father Gregory! As for the harm, you see, I’m not the more agreeable by being face to face with you—though some fair dames do take to my person monstrously. The secret is, the quantity of small talk I can command: that makes them forget my smell, which is, I confess, abominable, displeasing to myself, and my worst curse. Your sort, Father Gregory, are somewhat unpleasant in that particular—if I may judge by their Legate here. Well, try small talk. They would fall desperately in love with polecats and skunks if endowed with small talk. Why, they have become enamoured of monks before now! If skunks, why not monks? And again—’

‘Five!’

Having solemnly bellowed this tremendous number, the holy man lifted his arms to begin the combat.

Farina felt his nerves prick with admiration of the ghostly warrior daring the Second Power of Creation on that lonely mountain-top. He expected, and shuddered at thought of the most awful fight ever yet chronicled of those that have taken place between heroes and the hounds of evil: but his astonishment was great to hear the Demon, while Bell was in air and Book aloft, retreat, shouting, ‘Hold!’

‘I surrender,’ said he sullenly. ‘What terms?’

‘Instantaneous riddance of thee from face of earth.’

‘Good!—Now,’ said the Demon, ’did you suppose I was to be trapped into a fight? No doubt you wish to become a saint, and have everybody talking of my last defeat . . . .

Pictures, poems, processions, with the Devil downmost! No. You're more than a match for me.'

'Silence, Darkness!' thundered the Monk, 'and think not to vanquish thy victor by flatteries. Begone!'

And again he towered in his wrath.

Page 4405

The Demon drew his tail between his legs, and threw the forked, fleshy, quivering end over his shoulder. He then nodded cheerfully, pointed his feet, and finicked a few steps away, saying: 'I hope we shall meet again.'

Upon that he shot out his wings, that were like the fins of the wyver-fish, sharpened in venomous points.

'Commands for your people below?' he inquired, leering with chin awry. 'Desperate ruffians some of those cowls. You are right not to acknowledge them.'

Farina beheld the holy man in no mood to let the Enemy tamper with him longer.

The Demon was influenced by a like reflection; for, saying, 'Cologne is the city your Holiness inhabits, I think?' he shot up rocket-like over Rhineland, striking the entire length of the stream, and its rough-bearded castle-crests, slate-ledges, bramble-clefts, vine-slopes, and haunted valleys, with one brimstone flash. Frankfort and the far Main saw him and reddened. Ancient Trier and Mosel; Heidelberg and Neckar; Limberg and Lahn, ran guilty of him. And the swift artery of these shining veins, Rhine, from his snow cradle to his salt decease, glimmered Stygian horrors as the Infernal Comet, sprung over Bonn, sparkled a fiery minute along the face of the stream, and vanished, leaving a seam of ragged flame trailed on the midnight heavens.

Farina breathed hard through his teeth.

'The last of him was awful,' said he, coming forward to where the Monk knelt and grasped his breviary, 'but he was vanquished easily.'

'Easily?' exclaimed the holy man, gasping satisfaction: 'thou weakling! is it for thee to measure difficulties, or estimate powers? Easily? thou worldling! and so are great deeds judged when the danger's past! And what am I but the humble instrument that brought about this wondrous conquest! the poor tool of this astounding triumph! Shall the sword say, This is the battle I won! Yonder the enemy I overthrow! Bow to me, ye lords of earth, and worshippers of mighty acts? Not so! Nay, but the sword is honoured in the hero's grasp, and if it break not, it is accounted trusty. This, then, this little I may claim, that I was trusty! Trusty in a heroic encounter! Trusty in a battle with earth's terror! Oh! but this must not be said. This is to think too much! This is to be more than aught yet achieved by man!'

The holy warrior crossed his arms, and gently bowed his head.

'Take me to the Sisters,' he said. 'The spirit has gone out of me! I am faint, and as a child!'

Farina asked, and had, his blessing.

‘And with it my thanks!’ said the Monk. ’Thou hast witnessed how he can be overcome! Thou hast looked upon a scene that will be the glory of Christendom! Thou hast beheld the discomfiture of Darkness before the voice of Light! Yet think not much of me: account me little in this matter! I am but an instrument! but an instrument!—and again, but an instrument!’

Page 4406

Farina drew the arms of the holy combatant across his shoulders and descended Drachenfels.

The tempest was as a forgotten anguish. Bright with maiden splendour shone the moon; and the old rocks, cherished in her beams, put up their horns to blue heaven once more. All the leafage of the land shook as to shake off a wicked dream, and shuddered from time to time, whispering of old fears quieted, and present peace. The heart of the river fondled with the image of the moon in its depths.

‘This is much to have won for earth,’ murmured the Monk. ’And what is life, or who would not risk all, to snatch such loveliness from the talons of the Fiend, the Arch-foe? Yet, not I! not I! say not, ’twas I did this!’

Soft praises of melody ascended to them on the moist fragrance of air. It was the hymn of the Sisters.

‘How sweet!’ murmured the Monk. ‘Put it from me! away with it!’

Rising on Farina’s back, and stirruping his feet on the thighs of the youth, he cried aloud: ’I charge ye, whoso ye be, sing not this deed before the emperor! By the breath of your nostrils; pause! ere ye whisper aught of the combat of Saint Gregory with Satan, and his victory, and the marvel of it, while he liveth; for he would die the humble monk he is.’

He resumed his seat, and Farina brought him into the circle of the Sisters. Those pure women took him, and smoothed him, lamenting, and filling the night with triumphing tones.

Farina stood apart.

‘The breeze tells of dawn,’ said the Monk; ’we must be in Cologne before broad day.’

They mounted horse, and the Sisters grouped and reverenced under the blessings of the Monk.

‘No word of it!’ said the Monk warningly. ‘We are silent, Father!’ they answered. ‘Cologne-ward!’ was then his cry, and away he and Farina, flew.

THE GOSHAWK LEADS

Morning was among the grey eastern clouds as they rode upon the camp hastily formed to meet the Kaiser. All there was in a wallow of confusion. Fierce struggles for precedence still went on in the neighbourhood of the imperial tent ground, where, under the standard of Germany, lounged some veterans of the Kaiser’s guard, calmly

watching the scramble. Up to the edge of the cultivated land nothing was to be seen but brawling clumps of warriors asserting the superior claims of their respective lords. Variously and hotly disputed were these claims, as many red coxcombs testified. Across that point where the green field flourished, not a foot was set, for the Kaiser's care of the farmer, and affection for good harvests, made itself respected even in the heat of those jealous rivalries. It was said of him, that he would have camped in a bog, or taken quarters in a cathedral, rather than trample down a green blade of wheat, or turn over one vine-pole in the empire. Hence the presence of Kaiser Heinrich was never hailed as Egypt's plague by the peasantry, but welcome as the May month wherever he went.

Page 4407

Father Gregory and Farina found themselves in the centre of a group ere they drew rein, and a cry rose, 'The good father shall decide, and all's fair,' followed by, 'Agreed! Hail and tempest! he's dropped down o' purpose.'

'Father,' said one, 'here it is! I say I saw the Devil himself fly off Drachenfels, and flop into Cologne. Fritz here, and Frankenbauch, saw him too. They'll swear to him: so 'll I. Hell's thunder! will we. Yonder fellows will have it 'twas a flash o' lightning, as if I didn't see him, horns, tail, and claws, and a mighty sight 'twas, as I'm a sinner.'

A clash of voices, for the Devil and against him, burst on this accurate description of the Evil spirit. The Monk sank his neck into his chest.

'Gladly would I hold silence on this, my sons,' said he, in a supplicating voice.

'Speak, Father,' cried the first spokesman, gathering courage from the looks of the Monk.

Father Gregory appeared to commune with himself deeply. At last, lifting his head, and murmuring, 'It must be,' he said aloud:

''Twas verily Satan, O my sons! Him this night in mortal combat I encountered and overcame on the summit of Drachenfels, before the eyes of this youth; and from Satan I this night deliver ye! an instrument herein as in all other.'

Shouts, and a far-spreading buzz resounded in the camp. Hundreds had now seen Satan flying off the Drachenstein. Father Gregory could no longer hope to escape from the importunate crowds that beset him for particulars. The much-contested point now was, as to the exact position of Satan's tail during his airy circuit, before descending into Cologne. It lashed like a lion's. 'Twas cocked, for certain! He sneaked it between his legs like a lurcher! He made it stumpy as a brown bear's! He carried it upright as a pike!

'O my sons! have I sown dissension? Have I not given ye peace?' exclaimed the Monk.

But they continued to discuss it with increasing frenzy.

Farina cast a glance over the tumult, and beheld his friend Guy beckoning earnestly. He had no difficulty in getting away to him, as the fetters of all eyes were on the Monk alone.

The Goshawk was stamping with excitement.

'Not a moment to be lost, my lad,' said Guy, catching his arm. 'Here, I've had half-a-dozen fights already for this bit of ground. Do you know that fellow squatting there?'

Farina beheld the Thier at the entrance of a tumbledown tent. He was ruefully rubbing a broken head.

‘Now,’ continued Guy, ’to mount him is the thing; and then after the wolves of Werner as fast as horse-flesh can carry us. No questions! Bound, are you? And what am I? But this is life and death, lad! Hark!’

The Goshawk whispered something that sucked the blood out of Farina’s cheek.

’Look you—what’s your lockjaw name? Keep good faith with me, and you shall have your revenge, and the shiners I promise, besides my lord’s interest for a better master: but, sharp! we won’t mount till we’re out of sight o’ the hell-scum you horde with.’

Page 4408

The Thier stood up and staggered after them through the camp. There was no difficulty in mounting him horses were loose, and scampering about the country, not yet delivered from their terrors of the last night's tempest.

'Here be we, three good men!' exclaimed Guy, when they were started, and Farina had hurriedly given him the heads of his adventure with the Monk. 'Three good men! One has helped to kick the devil: one has served an apprenticeship to his limb: and one is ready to meet him foot to foot any day, which last should be myself. Not a man more do we want, though it were to fish up that treasure you talk of being under the Rhine there, and guarded by I don't know how many tricksy little villains. Horses can be ferried across at Linz, you say?'

'Ay, thereabout,' grunted the Thier.

'We 're on the right road, then!' said Guy. 'Thanks to you both, I've had no sleep for two nights—not a wink, and must snatch it going—not the first time.'

The Goshawk bent his body, and spoke no more. Farina could not get a word further from him. By the mastery he still had over his rein, the Goshawk alone proved that he was of the world of the living. Schwartz Thier, rendered either sullen or stunned by the latest cracked crown he had received, held his jaws close as if they had been nailed.

At Linz the horses were well breathed. The Goshawk, who had been snoring an instant before, examined them keenly, and shook his calculating head.

'Punch that beast of yours in the ribs,' said he to Farina. 'Ah! not a yard of wind in him. And there's the coming back, when we shall have more to carry. Well: this is my lord's money; but i' faith, it's going in a good cause, and Master Groschen will make it all right, no doubt; not a doubt of it.'

The Goshawk had seen some excellent beasts in the stables of the Kaiser's Krone; but the landlord would make no exchange without an advance of silver. This done, the arrangement was prompt.

'Schwartz Thier!—I've got your name now,' said Guy, as they were ferrying across, 'you're stiff certain they left Cologne with the maiden yesternoon, now?'

'Ah, did they! and she's at the Eck safe enow by this time.'

'And away from the Eck this night she shall come, trust me!'

'Or there will I die with her!' cried Farina.

'Fifteen men at most, he has, you said,' continued Guy.

’Two not sound, five true as steel, and the rest shillyshally. ’Slife, one lock loose serves us; but two saves us: five we’re a match for, throwing in bluff Baron; the remainder go with victory.’

‘Can we trust this fellow?’ whispered Farina.

‘Trust him!’ roared Guy. ’Why, I’ve thumped him, lad; pegged and pardoned him. Trust him? trust me! If Werner catches a sight of that snout of his within half-a-mile of his hold, he’ll roast him alive.’

He lowered his voice: ’Trust him? We can do nothing without him. I knocked the devil out of him early this morning. No chance for his Highness anywhere now. This Eck of Werner’s would stand a siege from the Kaiser in person, I hear. We must into it like weasels; and out as we can.’

Page 4409

Dismissing the ferry-barge with stern injunctions to be in waiting from noon to noon, the three leapt on their fresh nags.

‘Stop at the first village,’ said Guy; ’we must lay in provision. As Master Groschen says, “Nothing’s to be done, Turpin, without provender."’

‘Goshawk!’ cried Farina; ’you have time; tell me how this business was done.’

The only reply was a soft but decided snore, that spoke, like a voluptuous trumpet, of dreamland and its visions.

At Sinzig, the Thier laid his hand on Guy’s bridle, with the words, ’Feed here,’ a brief, but effective, form of signal, which aroused the Goshawk completely. The sign of the Trauben received them. Here, wurst reeking with garlic, eggs, black bread, and sour wine, was all they could procure. Farina refused to eat, and maintained his resolution, in spite of Guy’s sarcastic chiding.

‘Rub down the beasts, then, and water them,’ said the latter. ’Made a vow, I suppose,’ muttered Guy.

’That’s the way of those fellows. No upright manly take-the-thing-as-it-comes; but fly-sky-high whenever there’s a dash on their heaven. What has his belly done to offend him? It will be crying out just when we want all quiet. I wouldn’t pay Werner such a compliment as go without a breakfast for him. Not I! Would you, Schwartz Thier?’

‘Henker! not I!’ growled the Thier. ‘He’ll lose one sooner.’

’First snatch his prey, or he’ll be making, God save us! a meal for a Kaiser, the brute.’

Guy called in the landlady, clapped down the score, and abused the wine.

‘Sir,’ said the landlady, ‘ours is but a poor inn, and we do our best.’

‘So you do,’ replied the Goshawk, softened; ’and I say that a civil tongue and rosy smiles sweeten even sour wine.’

The landlady, a summer widow, blushed, and as he was stepping from the room, called him aside.

‘I thought you were one of that dreadful Werner’s band, and I hate him.’

Guy undeceived her.

‘He took my sister,’ she went on, ’and his cruelty killed her. He persecuted me even in the lifetime of my good man. Last night he came here in the middle of the storm with a young creature bright as an angel, and sorrowful—’

‘He’s gone, you’re sure?’ broke in Guy.

’Gone! Oh, yes! Soon as the storm abated he dragged her on. Oh! the way that young thing looked at me, and I able to do nothing for her.’

‘Now, the Lord bless you for a rosy Christian!’ cried Guy, and, in his admiration, he flung his arm round her and sealed a ringing kiss on each cheek.

’No good man defrauded by that! and let me see the fellow that thinks evil of it. If I ever told a woman a secret, I ’d tell you one now, trust me. But I never do, so farewell! Not another?’

Hasty times keep the feelings in a ferment, and the landlady was extremely angry with Guy and heartily forgave him, all within a minute.

Page 4410

‘No more,’ said she, laughing: ‘but wait; I have something for you.’

The Goshawk lingered on a fretting heel. She was quickly under his elbow again with two flasks leaning from her bosom to her arms.

’There! I seldom meet a man like you; and, when I do, I like to be remembered. This is a true good wine, real Liebfrauenmilch, which I only give to choice customers.’

‘Welcome it is!’ sang Guy to her arch looks; ‘but I must pay for it.’

‘Not a pfennig!’ said the landlady.

‘Not one?’

‘Not one!’ she repeated, with a stamp of the foot.

‘In other coin, then,’ quoth Guy; and folding her waist, which did not this time back away, the favoured Goshawk registered rosy payment on a very fresh red mouth, receiving in return such lively discount, that he felt himself bound in conscience to make up the full sum a second time.

‘What a man!’ sighed the landlady, as she watched the Goshawk lead off along the banks; ’courtly as a knight, open as a squire, and gentle as a page!’

WERNER’S ECK

A league behind Andernach, and more in the wintry circle of the sun than Laach, its convenient monastic neighbour, stood the castle of Werner, the Robber Baron. Far into the South, hazy with afternoon light, a yellow succession of sandhills stretched away, spouting fire against the blue sky of an elder world, but now dead and barren of herbage. Around is a dusty plain, where the green blades of spring no sooner peep than they become grimed with sand and take an aged look, in accordance with the ungenerous harvests they promise. The aridity of the prospect is relieved on one side by the lofty woods of Laach, through which the sun setting burns golden-red, and on the other by the silver sparkle of a narrow winding stream, bordered with poplars, and seen but a glistening mile of its length by all the thirsty hills. The Eck, or Corner, itself, is thick-set with wood, but of a stunted growth, and lying like a dark patch on the landscape. It served, however, entirely to conceal the castle, and mask every movement of the wary and terrible master. A trained eye advancing on the copse would hardly mark the glimmer of the turrets over the topmost leaves, but to every loophole of the walls lies bare the circuit of the land. Werner could rule with a glance the Rhine’s course down from the broad rock over Coblentz to the white tower of Andernach. He claimed that march as his right; but the Mosel was no hard ride’s distance, and he

gratified his thirst for rapine chiefly on that river, delighting in it, consequently, as much as his robber nature boiled over the bound of his feudal privileges.

Often had the Baron held his own against sieges and restrictions, bans and impositions of all kinds. He boasted that there was never a knight within twenty miles of him that he had not beaten, nor monk of the same limit not in his pay. This braggadocio received some warrant from his yearly increase of licence; and his craft and his castle combined, made him a notable pest of the region, a scandal to the abbey whose countenance he had, and a frightful infliction on the poorer farmers and peasantry.

Page 4411

The sun was beginning to slope over Laach, and threw the shadows of the abbey towers half-way across the blue lake-waters, as two men in the garb of husbandmen emerged from the wood. Their feet plunged heavily and their heads hung down, as they strode beside a wain mounted with straw, whistling an air of stupid unconcern; but a close listener might have heard that the lumbering vehicle carried a human voice giving them directions as to the road they were to take, and what sort of behaviour to observe under certain events. The land was solitary. A boor passing asked whether toll or tribute they were conveying to Werner. Tribute, they were advised to reply, which caused him to shrug and curse as he jogged on. Hearing him, the voice in the wain chuckled grimly. Their next speech was with a trooper, who overtook them, and wanted to know what they had in the wain for Werner. Tribute, they replied, and won the title of 'brave pigs' for their trouble.

'But what's the dish made of?' said the trooper, stirring the straw with his sword-point.

'Tribute,' came the answer.

'Ha! You've not been to Werner's school,' and the trooper swung a sword-stroke at the taller of the two, sending a tremendous shudder throughout his frame; but he held his head to the ground, and only seemed to betray animal consciousness in leaning his ear closer to the wain.

'Blood and storm! Will ye speak?' cried the trooper.

'Never talk much; but an ye say nothing to the Baron,'—thrusting his hand into the straw —'here's what's better than speaking.'

'Well said!—Eh? Liebfrauenmilch? Ho, ho! a rare bleed!'

Striking the neck of the flask on a wheel, the trooper applied it to his mouth, and ceased not deeply ingurgitating till his face was broad to the sky and the bottle reversed. He then dashed it down, sighed, and shook himself.

'Rare news! the Kaiser's come: he'll be in Cologne by night; but first he must see the Baron, and I'm post with the order. That's to show you how high he stands in the Kaiser's grace. Don't be thinking of upsetting Werner yet, any of you; mind, now!'

'That's Blass-Gesell,' said the voice in the wain, as the trooper trotted on: adding, ''gainst us.'

'Makes six,' responded the driver.

Within sight of the Eck, they descried another trooper coming toward them. This time the driver was first to speak.

’Tribute! Provender! Bread and wine for the high Baron Werner from his vassals over Tonnistein.’

‘And I’m out of it! fasting like a winter wolf,’ howled the fellow.

He was in the act of addressing himself to an inspection of the wain’s contents, when a second flask lifted in air, gave a sop to his curiosity. This flask suffered the fate of the former.

‘A Swabian blockhead, aren’t you?’

‘Ay, that country,’ said the driver. ’May be, Henker Rothhals happens to be with the Baron?’

Page 4412

’To hell with him! I wish he had my job, and I his, of watching the yellow-bird in her new cage, till she’s taken out to-night, and then a jolly bumper to the Baron all round.’

The driver wished him a fortunate journey, strongly recommending him to skirt the abbey westward, and go by the Ahr valley, as there was something stirring that way, and mumbling, ‘Makes five again,’ as he put the wheels in motion.

‘Goshawk!’ said his visible companion; ‘what do you say now?’

‘I say, bless that widow!’

‘Oh! bring me face to face with this accursed Werner quickly, my God!’ gasped the youth.

’Tusk! ’tis not Werner we want—there’s the Thier speaking. No, no, Schwartz Thier! I trust you, no doubt; but the badger smells at a hole, before he goes inside it. We’re strangers, and are allowed to miss our way.’

Leaving the wain in Farina’s charge, he pushed through a dense growth of shrub and underwood, and came crouching on a precipitous edge of shrouded crag, which commanded a view of the stronghold, extending round it, as if scooped clean by some natural action, about a stone’sthrow distant, and nearly level with the look-out tower. Sheer from a deep circular basin clothed with wood, and bottomed with grass and bubbling water, rose a naked moss-stained rock, on whose peak the castle firmly perched, like a spying hawk. The only means of access was by a narrow natural bridge of rock flung from this insulated pinnacle across to the mainland. One man, well disposed, might have held it against forty.

‘Our way’s the best,’ thought Guy, as he meditated every mode of gaining admission. ’A hundred men an hour might be lost cutting steps up that steep slate; and once at the top we should only have to be shoved down again.’

While thus engaged, he heard a summons sounded from the castle, and scrambled back to Farina.

‘The Thier leads now,’ said he, ’and who leads is captain. It seems easier to get out of that than in. There’s a square tower, and a round. I guess the maiden to be in the round. Now, lad, no crying out—You don’t come in with us; but back you go for the horses, and have them ready and fresh in yon watered meadow under the castle. The path down winds easy.’

‘Man!’ cried Farina, ‘what do you take me for?—go you for the horses.’

‘Not for a fool,’ Guy rejoined, tightening his lip; ’but now is your time to prove yourself one.’

‘With you, or without you, I enter that castle!’

’Oh! if you want to be served up hot for the Baron’s supper-mess, by all means.’

‘Thunder!’ growled Schwartz Thier, ‘aren’t ye moving?’

The Goshawk beckoned Farina aside.

‘Act as I tell you, or I’m for Cologne.’

‘Traitor!’ muttered the youth.

’Swearing this, that if we fail, the Baron shall need a leech sooner than a bride.’

‘That stroke must be mine!’

Page 4413

The Goshawk griped the muscle of Farina's arm till the youth was compelled to slacken it with pain.

'Could you drive a knife through a six-inch wood-wall? I doubt this wild boar wants a harder hit than many a best man could give. 'Sblood! obey, sirrah. How shall we keep yon fellow true, if he sees we're at points?'

'I yield,' exclaimed Farina with a fall of the chest; 'but hear I nothing of you by midnight —Oh! then think not I shall leave another minute to chance. Farewell! haste! Heaven prosper you! You will see her, and die under her eyes. That may be denied to me. What have I done to be refused that last boon?'

'Gone without breakfast and dinner,' said Guy in abhorrent tones.

A whistle from the wain, following a noise of the castlegates being flung open, called the Goshawk away, and he slouched his shoulders and strode to do his part, without another word. Farina gazed after him, and dropped into the covert.

THE WATER-LADY

'Bird of lovers! Voice of the passion of love! Sweet, deep, disaster-toning nightingale!' sings the old minnesinger; 'who that has not loved, hearing thee is touched with the wand of love's mysteries, and yearneth to he knoweth not whom, humbled by overfulness of heart; but who, listening, already loveth, heareth the language he would speak, yet faileth in; feeleth the great tongueless sea of his infinite desires stirred beyond his narrow bosom; is as one stript of wings whom the angels beckon to their silver homes: and he leaneth forward to ascend to them, and is mocked by his effort: then is he of the fallen, and of the fallen would he remain, but that tears lighten him, and through the tears stream jewelled shafts dropt down to him from the sky, precious ladders inlaid with amethyst, sapphire, blended jasper, beryl, rose-ruby, ether of heaven flushed with softened bloom of the insufferable Presences: and lo, the ladders dance, and quiver, and waylay his eyelids, and a second time he is mocked, aspiring: and after the third swoon standeth Hope before him with folded arms, and eyes dry of the delusions of tears, saying, Thou hast seen! thou hast felt! thy strength hath reached in thee so far! now shall I never die in thee!'

'For surely,' says the minstrel, 'Hope is not born of earth, or it were perishable. Rather know her the offspring of that embrace strong love straineth the heavens with. This owe we to thy music, bridal nightingale! And the difference of this celestial spirit from the smirking phantasy of whom all stand soon or late forsaken, is the difference between painted day with its poor ambitious snares, and night lifting its myriad tapers round the throne of the eternal, the prophet stars of everlasting time! And the one dieth, and the other liveth; and the one is unregretted, and the other walketh in thought-spun raiment

of divine melancholy; her ears crowded with the pale surges that wrap this shifting shore; in her eyes a shape of beauty floating dimly, that she will not attain this side the water, but broodeth on evermore.

Page 4414

’Therefore, hold on thy cherished four long notes, which are as the very edge where exultation and anguish melt, meet, and are sharpened to one ecstasy, death-dividing bird! Fill the woods with passionate chuckle and sob, sweet chaplain of the marriage service of a soul with heaven! Pour out thy holy wine of song upon the soft-footed darkness, till, like a priest of the inmost temple, ‘tis drunken with fair intelligences!’

Thus the old minstrels and minnesingers.

Strong and full sang the nightingales that night Farina held watch by the guilty castle that entombed his living beloved. The castle looked itself a denser shade among the moonthrown shadows of rock and tree. The meadow spread like a green courtyard at the castle’s foot. It was of lush deep emerald grass, softly mixed with grey in the moon’s light, and showing like jasper. Where the shadows fell thickest, there was yet a mist of colour. All about ran a brook, and babbled to itself. The spring crocus lifted its head in moist midgrasses of the meadow, rejoiced with freshness. The rugged heights seemed to clasp this one innocent spot as their only garden-treasure; and a bank of hazels hid it from the castle with a lover’s arm.

‘The moon will tell me,’ mused Farina; ’the moon will signal me the hour! When the moon hangs over the round tower, I shall know ’tis time to strike.’

The song of the nightingales was a full unceasing throb.

It went like the outcry of one heart from branch to branch. The four long notes, and the short fifth which leads off to that hurried gush of music, gurgling rich with passion, came thick and constant from under the tremulous leaves.

At first Farina had been deaf to them. His heart was in the dungeon with Margarita, or with the Goshawk in his dangers, forming a thousand desperate plans, among the red-hot ploughshares of desperate action. Finally, without a sense of being wooed, it was won. The tenderness of his love then mastered him.

‘God will not suffer that fair head to come to harm!’ he thought, and with the thought a load fell off his breast.

He paced the meadows, and patted the three pasturing steeds. Involuntarily his sight grew on the moon. She went so slowly. She seemed not to move at all. A little wing of vapour flew toward her; it whitened, passed, and the moon was slower than before. Oh! were the heavens delaying their march to look on this iniquity? Again and again he cried, ‘Patience, it is not time!’ He flung himself on the grass. The next moment he climbed the heights, and was peering at the mass of gloom that fronted the sky. It reared such a mailed head of menace, that his heart was seized with a quivering, as though it had been struck. Behind lay scattered some small faint-winkling stars on sapphire fields, and a stain of yellow light was in a breach of one wall.

He descended. What was the Goshawk doing? Was he betrayed? It was surely now time? No; the moon had not yet smitten the face of the castle. He made his way through the hazel-bank among flitting nightmoths, and glanced up to measure the moon’s distance. As he did so, a first touch of silver fell on the hoary flint.

Page 4415

‘Oh, young bird of heaven in that Devil’s clutch!’

Sounds like the baying of boar-hounds alarmed him. They whined into silence.

He fell back. The meadow breathed peace, and more and more the nightingales volumed their notes. As in a charmed circle of palpitating song, he succumbed to languor. The brook rolled beside him fresh as an infant, toying with the moonlight. He leaned over it, and thrice waywardly dipped his hand in the clear translucence.

Was it his own face imaged there?

Farina bent close above an eddy of the water. It whirled with a strange tumult, breaking into lines and lights a face not his own, nor the moon’s; nor was it a reflection. The agitation increased. Now a wreath of bubbles crowned the pool, and a pure water-lily, but larger, ascended wavering.

He started aside; and under him a bright head, garlanded with gemmed roses, appeared. No fairer figure of woman had Farina seen. Her visage had the lustrous white of moonlight, and all her shape undulated in a dress of flashing silver-white, wonderful to see. The Lady of the Water smiled on him, and ran over with ripples and dimples of limpid beauty. Then, as he retreated on the meadow grass, she swam toward him, and taking his hand, pressed it to her. After her touch the youth no longer feared. She curved her finger, and beckoned him on. All that she did was done flowingly. The youth was a shadow in her silver track as she passed like a harmless wave over the closed crocuses; but the crocuses shivered and swelled their throats of streaked purple and argent as at delicious rare sips of a wine. Breath of violet, and ladysmock, and valley-lily, mingled and fluttered about her. Farina was as a man working the day’s intent in a dream. He could see the heart in her translucent, hanging like a cold dingy ruby. By the purity of his nature he felt that such a presence must have come but to help. It might be Margarita’s guardian fairy!

They passed the hazel-bank, and rounded the castlecrag, washed by the brook and, beneath the advancing moon, standing in a ring of brawling silver. The youth with his fervid eyes marked the old weather-stains and scars of long defiance coming into colour. That mystery of wickedness which the towers had worn in the dusk, was dissolved, and he endured no more the almost abashed sensation of competing littleness that made him think there was nought to do, save die, combating single-handed such massive power. The moon shone calmly superior, like the prowess of maiden knights; and now the harsh frown of the walls struck resolution to his spirit, and nerved him with hate and the contempt true courage feels when matched against fraud and villany.

On a fallen block of slate, cushioned with rich brown moss and rusted weather-stains, the Water-Lady sat, and pointed to Farina the path of the moon toward the round tower.

She did not speak, and if his lips parted, put her cold finger across them. Then she began to hum a soft sweet monotony of song, vague and careless, very witching to hear. Farina caught no words, nor whether the song was of days in dust or in flower, but his mind bloomed with legends and sad splendours of story, while she sang on the slate-block under sprinkled shadows by the water.

Page 4416

He had listened long in trance, when the Water-Lady hushed, and stretched forth a slender forefinger to the moon. It stood like a dot over the round tower. Farina rose in haste. She did not leave him to ask her aid, but took his hand and led him up the steep ascent. Halfway to the castle, she rested. There, concealed by bramble-tufts, she disclosed the low portal of a secret passage, and pushed it open without effort. She paused at the entrance, and he could see her trembling, seeming to wax taller, till she was like a fountain glittering in the cold light. Then she dropped, as drops a dying bet, and cowered into the passage.

Darkness, thick with earth-dews, oppressed his senses. He felt the clammy walls scraping close on him. Not the dimmest lamp, or guiding sound, was near; but the lady went on as one who knew her way. Passing a low-vaulted dungeon-room, they wound up stairs hewn in the rock, and came to a door, obedient to her touch, which displayed a chamber faintly misted by a solitary bar of moonlight. Farina perceived they were above the foundation of the castle. The walls gleamed pale with knightly harness, habergeons gaping for heads, breastplates of blue steel, halbert, and hand-axe, greaves, glaives, boar-spears, and polished spur-fixed heel-pieces. He seized a falchion hanging apart, but the lady stayed his arm, and led to another flight of stone ending in a kind of corridor. Noises of laughter and high feasting beset him at this point. The Lady of the Water sidled her head, as to note a familiar voice; and then drew him to a looped aperture.

Farina beheld a scene that first dazzled, but, as it grew into shape, sank him with dismay. Below, and level with the chamber he had left, a rude banqueting-hall glowed, under the light of a dozen flambeaux, with smoking boar's flesh, deer's flesh, stone-flagons, and horn-beakers. At the head of this board sat Werner, scarlet with furious feasting, and on his right hand, Margarita, bloodless as a beautiful martyr bound to the fire. Retainers of Werner occupied the length of the hall, chorusing the Baron's speeches, and drinking their own healths when there was no call for another. Farina saw his beloved alone. She was dressed as when he parted with her last. The dear cameo lay on her bosom, but not heaving proudly as of old. Her shoulders were drooped forward, and contracted her bosom in its heaving. She would have had a humbled look, but for the marble sternness of her eyes. They were fixed as eyes that see the way of death through all earthly objects.

'Now, dogs!' cried the Baron, 'the health of the night! and swell your lungs, for I'll have no cat's cry when Werner's bride is the toast. Monk or no monk's leave, she's mine. Ay, my pretty one! it shall be made right in the morning, if I lead all the Laach rats here by the nose. Thunder! no disrespect to Werner's bride from Pope or abbot. Now, sing out! —or wait! these fellows shall drink it first.'

Page 4417

He stretched and threw a beaker of wine right and left behind him, and Farina's despair stiffened his limbs as he recognized the Goshawk and Schwartz Thier strapped to the floor. Their beards were already moist with previous libations similarly bestowed, and they received this in sullen stillness; but Farina thought he observed a rapid glance of encouragement dart from beneath the Goshawk's bent brows, as Margarita momentarily turned her head half-way on him.

'Lick your chaps, ye beasts, and don't say Werner stints vermin good cheer his nuptial-night. Now,' continued the Baron, growing huskier as he talked louder: 'Short and ringing, my devil's pups:—Werner and his Bride! and may she soon give you a young baron to keep you in better order than I can, as, if she does her duty, she will.'

The Baron stood up, and lifted his huge arm to lead the toast.

'Werner and his Bride!'

Not a voice followed him. There was a sudden intimation of the call being echoed; but it snapped, and ended in shuffling tones, as if the hall-door had closed on the response.

'What 's this?' roared the Baron, in that caged wild beast voice Margarita remembered she had heard in the Cathedral Square.

No one replied.

'Speak! or I'll rot you a fathom in the rock, curs!'

'Herr Baron!' said Henker Rothhals impressively; 'the matter is, that there's something unholy among us.'

The Baron's goblet flew at his head before the words were uttered.

'I'll make an unholy thing of him that says it,' and Werner lowered at them one by one.

'Then I say it, Herr Baron!' pursued Henker Rothhals, wiping his frontispiece: 'The Devil has turned against you at last. Look up there—Ah, it's gone now; but where's the man sitting this side saw it not?'

The Baron made one spring, and stood on the board.

'Now! will any rascal here please to say so?'

Something in the cruel hang of his threatening hatchet jaw silenced many in the act of confirming the assertion.

'Stand out, Henker Rotthals!'

Rotthals slid a hunting-knife up his wrist, and stepped back from the board.

‘Beast!’ roared the Baron, ’I said I wouldn’t shed blood to-night. I spared a traitor, and an enemy——’

‘Look again!’ said Rothhals; ‘will any fellow say he saw nothing there.’

While all heads, including Werner’s, were directed to the aperture which surveyed them, Rothhals tossed his knife to the Goshawk unperceived.

This time answers came to his challenge, but not in confirmation. The Baron spoke with a gasping gentleness.

’So you trifle with me? I’m dangerous for that game. Mind you of Blass-Gesell? I made a better beast of him by sending him three-quarters of the road to hell for trial.’ Bellowing, ‘Take that!’ he discharged a broad blade, hitherto concealed in his right hand, straight at Rothhals. It fixed in his cheek and jaw, wringing an awful breath of pain from him as he fell against the wall.

Page 4418

‘There’s a lesson for you not to cross me, children!’ said Werner, striding his stumpy legs up and down the crashing board, and puffing his monstrous girth of chest and midriff. ’Let him stop there awhile, to show what comes of thwarting Werner!—Fire-devils! before the baroness, too!—Something unholy is there? Something unholy in his jaw, I think!—Leave it sticking! He’s against meat last, is he? I’ll teach you who he’s for!—Who speaks?’

All hung silent. These men were animals dominated by a mightier brute.

He clasped his throat, and shook the board with a jump, as he squeaked, rather than called, a second time ‘Who spoke?’

He had not again to ask. In this pause, as the Baron glared for his victim, a song, so softly sung that it sounded remote, but of which every syllable was clearly rounded, swelled into his ears, and froze him in his angry posture.

’The blood of the barons shall turn to ice,
And their castle fall to wreck,
When a true lover dips in the water thrice,
That runs round Werner’s Eck.

’Round Werner’s Eck the water runs;
The hazels shiver and shake:
The walls that have blotted such happy suns,
Are seized with the ruin-quake.

’And quake with the ruin, and quake with rue,
Thou last of Werner’s race!
The hearts of the barons were cold that knew
The Water-Dame’s embrace.

’For a sin was done, and a shame was wrought,
That water went to hide:
And those who thought to make it nought,
They did but spread it wide.

’Hold ready, hold ready to pay the price,
And keep thy bridal cheer:
A hand has dipped in the water thrice,
And the Water-Dame is here.’

THE RESCUE

The Goshawk was on his feet. ‘Now, lass,’ said he to Margarita, ’now is the time!’ He took her hand, and led her to the door. Schwartz Thier closed up behind her. Not a man in the hall interposed. Werner’s head moved round after them, like a dog on the watch; but he was dumb. The door opened, and Farina entered. He bore a sheaf of weapons under his arm. The familiar sight relieved Werner’s senses from the charm. He shouted to bar the prisoners’ passage. His men were ranged like statues in the hall. There was a start among them, as if that terrible noise communicated an instinct of obedience, but no more. They glanced at each other, and remained quiet.

The Goshawk had his eye on Werner. ‘Stand back, lass!’ he said to Margarita. She took a sword from Farina, and answered, with white lips and flashing eyes, ‘I can fight, Goshawk!’

’And shall, if need be; but leave it to me now, returned Guy.

His eye never left the Baron. Suddenly a shriek of steel rang. All fell aside, and the combatants stood opposed on clear ground. Farina, took Margarita’s left hand, and placed her against the wall between the Thier and himself. Werner’s men were well content to let their master fight it out. The words spoken by Henker Rothhals, that the Devil had forsaken him, seemed in their minds confirmed by the weird song which every one present could swear he heard with his ears. ’Let him take his chance, and try his own luck,’ they said, and shrugged. The battle was between Guy, as Margarita’s champion, and Werner.

Page 4419

In Schwartz Thier's judgement, the two were well matched, and he estimated their diverse qualities from sharp experience. 'For short work the Baron, and my new mate for tough standing to 't!' Farina's summary in favour of the Goshawk was, 'A stouter heart, harder sinews, and a good cause. The combat was generally regarded with a professional eye, and few prayers. Margarita solely there asked aid from above, and knelt to the Virgin; but her, too, the clash of arms and dire earnest of mortal fight aroused to eager eyes. She had not dallied with heroes in her dreams. She was as ready to second Siegfried on the crimson field as tend him in the silken chamber.

It was well that a woman's heart was there to mark the grace and glory of manhood in upright foot-to-foot encounter. For the others, it was a mere calculation of lucky hits. Even Farina, in his anxiety for her, saw but the brightening and darkening of the prospect of escape in every attitude and hard-ringing blow. Margarita was possessed with a painful exaltation. In her eyes the bestial Baron now took a nobler form and countenance; but the Goshawk assumed the sovereign aspect of old heroes, who, whether persecuted or favoured of heaven, still maintained their stand, remembering of what stuff they were, and who made them.

'Never,' say the old writers, with a fervour honourable to their knowledge of the elements that compose our being, 'never may this bright privilege of fair fight depart from us, nor advantage of it fail to be taken! Man against man, or beast, singly keeping his ground, is as fine rapture to the breast as Beauty in her softest hour affordeth. For if woman taketh loveliness to her when she languisheth, so surely doth man in these fierce moods, when steel and iron sparkle opposed, and their breath is fire, and their lips white with the lock of resolution; all their faculties knotted to a point, and their energies alive as the daylight to prove themselves superior, according to the laws and under the blessing of chivalry.'

'For all,' they go on to improve the comparison, 'may admire and delight in fair blossoming dales under the blue dome of peace; but 'tis the rare lofty heart alone comprehendeth, and is heightened by, terrific splendours of tempest, when cloud meets cloud in skies black as the sepulchre, and Glory sits like a flame on the helm of Ruin'

For a while the combatants aired their dexterity, contenting themselves with cunning cuts and flicks of the sword-edge, in which Werner first drew blood by a keen sweep along the forehead of the Goshawk. Guy had allowed him to keep his position on the board, and still fought at his face and neck. He now jerked back his body from the hip, and swung a round stroke at Werner's knee, sending him in retreat with a snort of pain. Before the Baron could make good his ground, Guy was level with him on the board.

Werner turned an upbraiding howl at his men. They were not disposed to second him yet. They one and all approved his personal battle with Fate, and never more admired him and felt his power; but the affair was exciting, and they were not the pillars to prop a falling house.

Page 4420

Werner clenched his two hands to his ponderous glaive, and fell upon Guy with heavier fury. He was becoming not unworth the little womanly appreciation Margarita was brought to bestow on him. The voice of the Water-Lady whispered at her heart that the Baron warred on his destiny, and that ennobles all living souls.

Bare-headed the combatants engaged, and the headpiece was the chief point of attack. No swerving from blows was possible for either: ward, or take; a false step would have ensured defeat. This also induced caution. Many a double stamp of the foot was heard, as each had to retire in turn.

‘Not at his head so much, he’ll bear battering there all night long,’ said Henker Rothhals in a breathing interval. Knocks had been pretty equally exchanged, but the Baron’s head certainly looked the least vulnerable, whereas Guy exhibited several dints that streamed freely. Yet he looked, eye and bearing, as fresh as when they began, and the calm, regular heave of his chest contrasted with Werner’s quick gasps. His smile, too, renewed each time the Baron paused for breath, gave Margarita heart. It was not a taunting smile, but one of entire confidence, and told all the more on his adversary. As Werner led off again, and the choice was always left him, every expression of the Goshawk’s face passed to full light in his broad eyes.

The Baron’s play was a reckless fury. There was nothing to study in it. Guy became the chief object of speculation. He was evidently trying to wind his man.

He struck wildly, some thought. Others judged that he was a random hitter, and had no mortal point in aim. Schwartz Thier’s opinion was frequently vented. ‘Too round a stroke—down on him! Chop-not slice!’

Guy persevered in his own fashion. According to Schwartz Thier, he brought down by his wilfulness the blow that took him on the left shoulder, and nigh broke him. It was a weighty blow, followed by a thump of sound. The sword-edge swerved on his shoulder-blade, or he must have been disabled. But Werner’s crow was short, and he had no time to push success. One of the Goshawk’s swooping under-hits half severed his right wrist, and the blood spirted across the board. He gasped and seemed to succumb, but held to it still, though with slackened force. Guy now attacked. Holding to his round strokes, he accustomed Werner to guard the body, and stood to it so briskly right and left, that Werner grew bewildered, lost his caution, and gave ground. Suddenly the Goshawk’s glaive flashed in air, and chopped sheer down on Werner’s head. So shrewd a blow it was against a half-formed defence, that the Baron dropped without a word right on the edge of the board, and there hung, feebly grasping with his fingers.

‘Who bars the way now?’ sang out Guy.

No one accepted the challenge. Success clothed him with terrors, and gave him giant size.

‘Then fare you well, my merry men all,’ said Guy. ’Bear me no ill-will for this. A little doctoring will right the bold Baron.’

Page 4421

He strode jauntily to the verge of the board, and held his finger for Margarita to follow. She stepped forward. The men put their beards together, muttering. She could not advance. Farina doubled his elbow, and presented sword-point. Three of the ruffians now disputed the way with bare steel. Margarita looked at the Goshawk. He was smiling calmly curious as he leaned over his sword, and gave her an encouraging nod. She made another step in defiance. One fellow stretched his hand to arrest her. All her maidenly pride stood up at once. 'What a glorious girl!' murmured the Goshawk, as he saw her face suddenly flash, and she retreated a pace and swung a sharp cut across the knuckles of her assailant, daring him, or one of them, with hard, bright eyes, beautifully vindictive, to lay hand on a pure maiden.

'You have it, Barenleib!' cried the others, and then to Margarita: 'Look, young mistress! we are poor fellows, and ask a trifle of ransom, and then part friends.'

'Not an ace!' the Goshawk pronounced from his post.

'Two to one, remember.'

'The odds are ours,' replied the Goshawk confidently.

They ranged themselves in front of the hall-door. Instead of accepting this challenge, Guy stepped to Werner, and laid his moaning foe length-wise in an easier posture. He then lifted Margarita on the board, and summoned them with cry of 'Free passage!' They answered by a sullen shrug and taunt.

'Schwartz Thier! Rothhals! Farina! buckle up, and make ready then,' sang Guy.

He measured the length, of his sword, and raised it. The Goshawk had not underrated his enemies. He was tempted to despise them when he marked their gradually lengthening chaps and eyeballs.

Not one of them moved. All gazed at him as if their marrows were freezing with horror.

'What's this?' cried Guy.

They knew as little as he, but a force was behind them irresistible against their efforts. The groaning oak slipped open, pushing them forward, and an apparition glided past, soft as the pallid silver of the moon. She slid to the Baron, and put her arms about him, and sang to him. Had the Water-Lady laid an iron hand on all those ruffians, she could not have held them faster bound than did the fear of her presence. The Goshawk drew his fair charge through them, followed by Farina, the Thier, and Rothhals. A last glimpse of the hall showed them still as old cathedral sculpture staring at white light on a fluted pillar of the wall.

THE PASSAGE OF THE RHINE

Low among the swarthy sandhills behind the Abbey of Laach dropped the round red moon. Soft lengths of misty yellow stole through the glens of Rhineland. The nightingales still sang. Closer and closer the moon came into the hushed valleys.

Page 4422

There is a dell behind Hammerstein Castle, a ring of basking sward, girdled by a silver slate-brook, and guarded by four high-peaked hills that slope down four long wooded corners to the grassy base. Here, it is said, the elves and earthmen play, dancing in circles with laughing feet that fatten the mushroom. They would have been fulfilling the tradition now, but that the place was occupied by a sturdy group of mortals, armed with staves. The intruders were sleepy, and lay about on the inclines. Now and then two got up, and there rang hard echoes of oak. Again all were calm as cud-chewing cattle, and the white water ran pleased with quiet.

It may be that the elves brewed mischief among them; for the oaken blows were becoming more frequent. One complained of a kick: another demanded satisfaction for a pinch. 'Go to,' drawled the accused drowsily in both cases, 'too much beer last night!' Within three minutes, the company counted a pair of broken heads. The East was winning on the West in heaven, and the dusk was thinning. They began to mark, each, whom he had cudgelled. A noise of something swiftly in motion made them alert. A roebuck rushed down one of the hills, and scampered across the sward. The fine beast went stretching so rapidly away as to be hardly distinct.

'Sathanas once more!' they murmured, and drew together.

The name passed through them like a watchword.

'Not he this time,' cried the two new-comers, emerging from the foliage. 'He's safe under Cologne—the worse for all good men who live there! But come! follow to the Rhine! there 's work for us on the yonder side, and sharp work.'

'Why,' answered several, 'we 've our challenge with the lads of Leutesdorf and Wied to-day.'

'D' ye see this?' said the foremost of the others, pointing to a carved ivory white rose in his cap.

'Brothers!' he swelled his voice, 'follow with a will, for the White Rose is in danger!'

Immediately they ranked, and followed zealously through the buds of young bushes, and over heaps of damp dead leaves, a half-hour's scramble, when they defiled under Hammerstein, and stood before the Rhine. Their leader led up the river, and after a hasty walk, stopped, loosened his hood, and stripped.

'Now,' said he, strapping the bundle to his back, 'let me know the hound that refuses to follow his leader when the White Rose is in danger.'

'Long live Dietrich!' they shouted. He dropped from the bank, and waded in. He was soon supported by the remainder of the striplings, and all struck out boldly into mid-stream.

Never heard history of a nobler Passage of the Rhine than this made between Andernach and Hammerstein by members of the White Rose Club, bundle on back, to relieve the White Rose of Germany from thrall and shame!

Page 4423

They were taken far down by the rapid current, and arrived panting to land. The dressing done, they marched up the pass of Tonnistein, and took a deep draught at the spring of pleasant waters there open to wayfarers. Arrived at the skirts of Laach, they beheld two farmer peasants lashed back to back against a hazel. They released them, but could gain no word of information, as the fellows, after a yawn and a wink, started off, all heels, to make sure of liberty. On the shores of the lake the brotherhood descried a body of youths, whom they hailed, and were welcomed to companionship.

‘Where’s Berthold?’ asked Dietrich.

He was not present.

‘The more glory for us, then,’ Dietrich said.

It was here seriously put to the captain, whether they should not halt at the abbey, and reflect, seeing that great work was in prospect.

‘Truly,’ quoth Dietrich, ’dying on an empty stomach is heathenish, and cold blood makes a green wound gape. Kaiser Conrad should be hospitable, and the monks honour numbers. Here be we, thirty and nine; let us go!’

The West was dark blue with fallen light. The lakewaters were growing grey with twilight. The abbey stood muffled in shadows. Already the youths had commenced battering at the convent doors, when they were summoned by the voice of the Goshawk on horseback. To their confusion they beheld the White Rose herself on his right hand. Chapfallen Dietrich bowed to his sweet mistress.

‘We were coming to the rescue,’ he stammered.

A laugh broke from the Goshawk. ’You thought the lady was locked up in the ghostly larder; eh!’

Dietrich seized his sword, and tightened his belt.

‘The Club allows no jesting with the White Rose, Sir Stranger.’

Margarita made peace. ’I thank you all, good friends. But quarrel not, I pray you, with them that save me at the risk of their lives.’

‘Our service is equal,’ said the Goshawk, flourishing, ’Only we happen to be beforehand with the Club, for which Farina and myself heartily beg pardon of the entire brotherhood.’

‘Farina!’ exclaimed Dietrich. ’Then we make a prisoner instead of uncaging a captive.’

’What ‘s this?’ said Guy.

‘So much,’ responded Dietrich. ’Yonder’s a runaway from two masters: the law of Cologne, and the conqueror of Satan; and all good citizens are empowered to bring him back, dead or alive.’

‘Dietrich! Dietrich! dare you talk thus of the man who saved me?’ cried Margarita.

Dietrich sullenly persisted.

‘Then, look!’ said the White Rose, reddening under the pale dawn; ’he shall not, he shall not go with you.’

One of the Club was here on the point of speaking to the White Rose,—a breach of the captain’s privilege. Dietrich felled him unresisting to earth, and resumed:

’It must be done, Beauty of Cologne! the monk, Father Gregory, is now enduring shame and scorn for lack of this truant witness.’

Page 4424

‘Enough! I go!’ said Farina.

‘You leave me?’ Margarita looked tender reproach. Weariness and fierce excitement had given a liquid flame to her eyes and an endearing darkness round their circles that matched strangely with her plump youth. Her features had a soft white flush. She was less radiant, but never looked so bewitching. An aspect of sweet human languor caught at the heart of love, and raised tumults.

‘It is a duty,’ said Farina.

‘Then go,’ she beckoned, and held her hand for him to kiss. He raised it to his lips. This was seen of all the Club.

As they were departing with Farina, and Guy prepared to demand admittance into the convent, Dietrich chanced to ask how fared Dame Lisbeth. Schwartz Thier was by, and answered, with a laugh, that he had quite forgotten the little lady.

’We took her in mistake for you, mistress! She was a one to scream! The moment she was kissed—mum as a cloister. We kissed her, all of us, for the fun of it. No harm—no harm! We should have dropped her when we found we had the old bird ’stead of the young one, but reckoned ransom, ye see. She’s at the Eck, rattling, I’s wager, like last year’s nut in the shell!’

‘Lisbeth! Lisbeth! poor Lisbeth; we will return to her. Instantly,’ cried Margarita.

‘Not you,’ said Guy.

‘Yes! I!’

‘No!’ said Guy.

‘Gallant Goshawk! best of birds, let me go!’

’Without me or Farina, never! I see I shall have no chance with my lord now. Come, then, come, fair Irresistible! come, lads. Farina can journey back alone. You shall have the renown of rescuing Dame Lisbeth.’

‘Farina! forget not to comfort my father,’ said Margarita.

Between Margarita’s society and Farina’s, there was little dispute in the captain’s mind which choice to make. Farina was allowed to travel single to Cologne; and Dietrich, petted by Margarita, and gently jeered by Guy, headed the Club from Laach waters to the castle of the Robber Baron.

THE BACK-BLOWS OF SATHANAS

Monk Gregory was pacing the high road between the Imperial camp and suffering Cologne. The sun had risen through interminable distances of cloud that held him remote in a succession of receding mounds and thinner veils, realm beyond realm, till he showed fireless, like a phantom king in a phantom land. The lark was in the breast of morning. The field-mouse ran along the furrows. Dews hung red and grey on the weedy banks and wayside trees. At times the nostril of the good father was lifted, and he beat his breast, relapsing into sorrowful contemplation. Passed-any citizen of Cologne, the ghostly head sunk into its cowl. 'There's a black raven!' said many. Monk Gregory heard them, and murmured, 'Thou hast me, Evil one! thou hast me!'

It was noon when Farina came clattering down from the camp.

Page 4425

‘Father,’ said he, ‘I have sought thee.’

‘My son!’ exclaimed Monk Gregory with silencing hand, ’thou didst not well to leave me contending against the tongues of doubt. Answer me not. The maiden! and what weighed she in such a scale?—No more! I am punished. Well speaks the ancient proverb:

> “Beware the back-blows of Sathanas!”

I, that thought to have vanquished him! Vanity has wrecked me, in this world and the next. I am the victim of self-incense. I hear the demons shouting their chorus—“Here comes Monk Gregory, who called himself Conqueror of Darkness!” In the camp I am discredited and a scoff; in the city I am spat upon, abhorred. Satan, my son, fights not with his fore-claws. ’Tis with his tail he fights, O Farina!—Listen, my son! he entered to his kingdom below through Cologne, even under the stones of the Cathedral Square, and the stench of him abominably remaineth, challenging the nostrils of holy and unholy alike. The Kaiser cannot approach for him; the citizens are outraged. Oh! had I held my peace in humbleness, I had truly conquered him. But he gave me easy victory, to inflate me. I shall not last. Now this only is left, my son; that thou bear living testimony to the truth of my statement, as I bear it to the folly!’

Farina promised, in the face of all, he would proclaim and witness to his victory on Drachenfels.

‘That I may not be ranked an impostor!’ continued the Monk. ’And how great must be the virtue of them that encounter that dark spirit! Valour availeth nought. But if virtue be not in’ ye, soon will ye be puffed to bursting with that devil’s poison, self-incense. Surely, my son, thou art faithful; and for this service I can reward thee. Follow me yet again.’

On the road they met Gottlieb Groschen, hastening to the camp. Dismay rumpled the old merchant’s honest jowl. Farina drew rein before him.

‘Your daughter is safe, worthy Master Groschen,’ said he.

‘Safe?’ cried Gottlieb; ‘where is she, my Grete?’

Farina briefly explained. Gottlieb spread out his arms, and was going to thank the youth. He saw Father Gregory, and his whole frame narrowed with disgust.

‘Are you in company with that pestilent animal, that curse of Cologne!’

‘The good Monk—,’ said Farina.

’You are leagued with him, then, sirrah! Expect no thanks from me. Cologne, I say, is cursed! Meddling wretches! could ye not leave Satan alone? He hurt us not. We were free of him. Cologne, I say, is cursed! The enemy of mankind is brought by you to be the deadly foe of Cologne.’

So saying, Gottlieb departed.

‘Seest thou, my son,’ quoth the Monk, ‘they reason not!’

Farina was dejected. Willingly would he, for his part, have left the soul of Evil a loose rover for the sake of some brighter horizon to his hope.

Page 4426

No twinge of remorse accompanied Gottlieb. The Kaiser had allotted him an encampment and a guard of honour for his household while the foulness raged, and there Gottlieb welcomed back Margarita and Aunt Lisbeth on the noon after his meeting with Farina. The White Rose had rested at Laach, and was blooming again. She and the Goshawk came trotting in advance of the Club through the woods of Laach, startling the deer with laughter, and sending the hare with her ears laid back all across country. In vain Dietrich menaced Guy with the terrors of the Club: Aunt Lisbeth begged of Margarita not to leave her with the footmen in vain. The joyous couple galloped over the country, and sprang the ditches, and leapt the dykes, up and down the banks, glad as morning hawks, entering Andernach at a round pace; where they rested at a hostel as capable of producing good Rhine and Mosel wine then as now. Here they had mid-day's meal laid out in the garden for the angry Club, and somewhat appeased them on their arrival with bumpers of the best Scharzhofberger. After a refreshing halt, three boats were hired. On their passage to the river, they encountered a procession of monks headed by the Archbishop of Andernach, bearing a small figure of Christ carved in blackthorn and varnished: said to work miracles, and a present to the good town from two Hungarian pilgrims.

'Are ye for Cologne?' the monks inquired of them.

'Direct down stream!' they answered.

'Send, then, hither to us Gregory, the conqueror of Darkness, that he may know there is gratitude on earth and gratulation for great deeds,' said the monks.

So with genuflexions the travellers proceeded, and entered the boats by the Archbishop's White Tower. Hammerstein Castle and Rheineck they floated under; Salzig and the Ahr confluence; Rolandseck and Nonnenwerth; Drachenfels and Bonn; hills green with young vines; dells waving fresh foliage. Margarita sang as they floated. Ancient ballads she sang that made the Goshawk sigh for home, and affected the Club with delirious love for the grand old water that was speeding them onward. Aunt Lisbeth was not to be moved. She alone held down her head. She looked not Gottlieb in the face as he embraced her. Nor to any questioning would she vouchsafe reply. From that time forth, she was charity to woman; and the exuberant cheerfulness and familiarity of the men toward her soon grew kindly and respectful. The dragon in Aunt Lisbeth was destroyed. She objected no more to Margarita's cameo.

The Goshawk quickly made peace with his lord, and enjoyed the commendation of the Kaiser. Dietrich Schill thought of challenging him; but the Club had graver business: and this was to pass sentence on Berthold Schmidt for the crime of betraying the White Rose into the hands of Werner. They had found Berthold at the Eck, and there consented to let him remain until ransom was paid for his traitorous body. Berthold in his mad passion was tricked by Werner, and on his release, by payment of the ransom, submitted to the judgement of the Club, which condemned him to fight them all in turn,

and then endure banishment from Rhineland; the Goshawk, for his sister’s sake, interceding before a harsher tribunal.

Page 4427

THE ENTRY INTO COLOGNE

Seven days Kaiser Heinrich remained camped outside Cologne. Six times in six successive days the Kaiser attempted to enter the city, and was foiled.

‘Beard of Barbarossa!’ said the Kaiser, ’this is the first stronghold that ever resisted me.’

The warrior bishops, electors, pfalzgrafs, and knights of the Empire, all swore it was no shame not to be a match for the Demon.

‘If,’ said the reflective Kaiser, ’we are to suffer below what poor Cologne is doomed to undergo now, let us, by all that is savoury, reform and do penance.’

The wind just then setting on them dead from Cologne made the courtiers serious. Many thought of their souls for the first time.

This is recorded to the honour of Monk Gregory.

On the seventh morning, the Kaiser announced his determination to make a last trial.

It was dawn, and a youth stood before the Kaiser’s tent, praying an audience.

Conducted into the presence of the Kaiser, the youth, they say, succeeded in arousing him from his depression, for, brave as he was, Kaiser Heinrich dreaded the issue. Forthwith order was given for the cavalcade to set out according to the rescript, Kaiser Heinrich retaining the youth at his right hand. But the youth had found occasion to visit Gottlieb and Margarita, each of whom he furnished with a flash, [flask?] curiously shaped, and charged with a distillation.

As the head of the procession reached the gates of Cologne, symptoms of wavering were manifest.

Kaiser Heinrich commanded an advance, at all cost.

Pfalzgraf Nase, as the old chronicles call him in their humour, but assuredly a great noble, led the van, and pushed across the draw-bridge.

Hesitation and signs of horror were manifest in the assemblage round the Kaiser’s person. The Kaiser and the youth at his right hand were cheery. Not a whit drooped they! Several of the heroic knights begged the Kaiser’s permission to fall back.

‘Follow Pfalzgraf Nase!’ the Kaiser is reported to have said.

Great was the wonderment of the people of Cologne to behold Kaiser Heinrich riding in perfect stateliness up the main street toward the Cathedral, while right and left of him bishops and electors were dropping incapable.

The Kaiser advanced till by his side the youth rode sole.

‘Thy name?’ said the Kaiser.

He answered: ‘A poor youth, unconquerable Kaiser! Farina I am called.’

‘Thy recompense?’ said the Kaiser.

He answered: ’The hand of a maiden of Cologne, most gracious Kaiser and master!’

‘She is thine!’ said the Kaiser.

Kaiser Heinrich looked behind him, and among a host grasping the pommels of their saddles, and reeling vanquished, were but two erect, a maiden and an old man.

‘That is she, unconquerable Kaiser!’ Farina continued, bowing low.

Page 4428

‘It shall be arranged on the spot,’ said the Kaiser.

A word from Kaiser Heinrich sealed Gottlieb’s compliance.

Said he: ’Gracious Kaiser and master! though such a youth could of himself never have aspired to the possession of a Groschen, yet when the Kaiser pleads for him, objection is as the rock of Moses, and streams consent. Truly he has done Cologne good service, and if Margarita, my daughter, can be persuaded—’

The Kaiser addressed her with his blazing brows.

Margarita blushed a ready autumn of rosy-ripe acquiescence.

‘A marriage registered yonder!’ said the Kaiser, pointing upward.

’I am thine, murmured Margarita, as Farina drew near her.

‘Seal it! seal it!’ quoth the Kaiser, in hearty good humour; ’take no consent from man or maid without a seal.’

Farina tossed the contents of a flask in air, and saluted his beloved on the lips.

This scene took place near the charred round of earth where the Foulest descended to his kingdom below.

Men now pervaded Cologne with flasks, purifying the atmosphere. It became possible to breathe freely.

‘We Germans,’ said Kaiser Heinrich, when he was again surrounded by his courtiers, ’may go wrong if we always follow Pfalzgraf Nase; but this time we have been well led.’ Whereat there was obsequious laughter.

The Pfalzgraf pleaded a susceptible nostril.

‘Thou art, I fear, but a timid mortal,’ said the Kaiser.

‘Never have I been found so on the German Field, Imperial Majesty!’ returned the Pfalzgraf. ’I take glory to myself that this Nether reek overcomes me.’

‘Even that we must combat, you see!’ exclaimed Kaiser Heinrich; ’but come all to a marriage this night, and take brides as soon as you will, all of you. Increase, and give us loyal subjects in plenty. I count prosperity by the number of marriages in my empire!’

The White Rose Club were invited by Gottlieb to the wedding, and took it in vast wrath until they saw the, Kaiser, and such excellent stout German fare present, when

immediately a battle raged as to who should do the event most honour, and was in dispute till dawn: Dietrich Schill being the man, he having consumed wurst the length of his arm, and wine sufficient to have floated a St. Goar salmon; which was long proudly chronicled in his family, and is now unearthed from among the ancient honourable records of Cologne.

The Goshawk was Farina's bridesman, and a very spiriting bridesman was he! Aunt Lisbeth sat in a corner, faintly smiling.

'Child!' said the little lady to Margarita when they kissed at parting, 'your courage amazes me. Do you think? Do you know? Poor, sweet bird, delivered over hand and foot!'

'I love him! I love him, aunty! that's all I know,' said Margarita: 'love, love, love him!'

'Heaven help you!' ejaculated Aunt Lisbeth.

Page 4429

‘Pray with me,’ said Margarita.

The two knelt at the foot of the bride-bed, and prayed very different prayers, but to the same end. That done, Aunt Lisbeth helped undress the White Rose, and trembled, and told a sad nuptial anecdote of the Castle, and put her little shrivelled hand on Margarita’s heart, and shrieked.

‘Child! it gallops!’ she cried.

‘’Tis happiness,’ said Margarita, standing in her hair.

‘May it last only!’ exclaimed Aunt Lisbeth.

‘It will, aunty! I am humble: I am true’; and the fair girl gathered the frill of her nightgown.

‘Look not in the glass,’ said Lisbeth; ’not to-night! Look, if you can, to-morrow.’

She smoothed the White Rose in her bed, tucked her up, and kissed her, leaving her as a bud that waits for sunshine.

CONCLUSION

The shadow of Monk Gregory was seen no more in Cologne. He entered the Calendar, and ranks next St. Anthony. For three successive centuries the towns of Rhineland boasted his visits in the flesh, and the conqueror of Darkness caused dire Rhenish feuds.

The Tailed Infernal repeated his famous Back-blow on Farina. The youth awoke one morning and beheld warehouses the exact pattern of his own, displaying flasks shaped even as his own, and a Farina to right and left of him. In a week, they were doubled. A month quadrupled them. They increased.

‘Fame and Fortune,’ mused Farina, ’come from man and the world: Love is from heaven. We may be worthy, and lose the first. We lose not love unless unworthy. Would ye know the true Farina? Look for him who walks under the seal of bliss; whose darling is for ever his young sweet bride, leading him from snares, priming his soul with celestial freshness. There is no hypocrisy can ape that aspect. Least of all, the creatures of the Damned! By this I may be known.’

Seven years after, when the Goshawk came into Cologne to see old friends, and drink some of Gottlieb’s oldest Rudesheimer, he was waylaid by false Farinas; and only discovered the true one at last, by chance, in the music-gardens near the Rhine, where

Farina sat, having on one hand Margarita, and at his feet three boys and one girl, over whom both bent lovingly, like the parent vine fondling its grape bunches in summer light.

Etext editor's bookmarks:

A generous enemy is a friend on the wrong side
All are friends who sit at table
Be what you seem, my little one
Bed was a rock of refuge and fortified defence
Civil tongue and rosy smiles sweeten even sour wine
Dangerous things are uttered after the third glass
Everywhere the badge of subjection is a poor stomach
Face betokening the perpetual smack of lemon
Gratitude never was a woman's gift
It was harder to be near and not close

Page 4430

Loving in this land: they all go mad, straight off
Never reckon on womankind for a wise act
Self-incense
Sign that the evil had reached from pricks to pokes
So are great deeds judged when the danger's past (as easy)
Soft slumber of a strength never yet called forth
Suspicion was her best witness
Sweet treasure before which lies a dragon sleeping
We like well whatso we have done good work for
Weak reeds who are easily vanquished and never overcome
Weak stomach is certainly more carnally virtuous than a full one
Wins everywhere back a reflection of its own kindliness

THE CASE OF GENERAL OPLE AND LADY CAMPER

By George Meredith

CHAPTER I

An excursion beyond the immediate suburbs of London, projected long before his pony-carriage was hired to conduct him, in fact ever since his retirement from active service, led General Ople across a famous common, with which he fell in love at once, to a lofty highway along the borders of a park, for which he promptly exchanged his heart, and so gradually within a stone's-throw or so of the river-side, where he determined not solely to bestow his affections but to settle for life. It may be seen that he was of an adventurous temperament, though he had thought fit to loosen his sword-belt. The pony-carriage, however, had been hired for the very special purpose of helping him to pass in review the lines of what he called country houses, cottages, or even sites for building, not too remote from sweet London: and as when Coelebs goes forth intending to pursue and obtain, there is no doubt of his bringing home a wife, the circumstance that there stood a house to let, in an airy situation, at a certain distance in hail of the metropolis he worshipped, was enough to kindle the General's enthusiasm. He would have taken the first he saw, had it not been for his daughter, who accompanied him, and at the age of eighteen was about to undertake the management of his house. Fortune, under Elizabeth Ople's guiding restraint, directed him to an epitome of the comforts. The place he fell upon is only to be described in the tongue of auctioneers, and for the first week after taking it he modestly followed them by terming it bijou. In time, when his own imagination, instigated by a state of something more than mere contentment, had been at work on it, he chose the happy phrase, 'a gentlemanly residence.' For it was, he declared, a small estate. There was a lodge to it, resembling two sentry-boxes

forced into union, where in one half an old couple sat bent, in the other half lay compressed; there was a backdrive to discoverable stables; there was a bit of grass that would have appeared a meadow if magnified; and there was a wall round the kitchen-garden and a strip of wood round the flower-garden. The prying of the outside world was impossible. Comfort, fortification; and gentlemanliness made the place, as the General said, an ideal English home.

Page 4431

The compass of the estate was half an acre, and perhaps a perch or two, just the size for the hugging love General Ople was happiest in giving. He wisely decided to retain the old couple at the lodge, whose members were used to restriction, and also not to purchase a cow, that would have wanted pasture. With the old man, while the old woman attended to the bell at the handsome front entrance with its gilt-spiked gates, he undertook to do the gardening; a business he delighted in, so long as he could perform it in a gentlemanly manner, that is to say, so long as he was not overlooked. He was perfectly concealed from the road. Only one house, and curiously indeed, only one window of the house, and further to show the protection extended to Douro Lodge, that window an attic, overlooked him. And the house was empty.

The house (for who can hope, and who should desire a commodious house, with conservatories, aviaries, pond and boat-shed, and other joys of wealth, to remain unoccupied) was taken two seasons later by a lady, of whom Fame, rolling like a dust-cloud from the place she had left, reported that she was eccentric. The word is uninstructive: it does not frighten. In a lady of a certain age, it is rather a characteristic of aristocracy in retirement. And at least it implies wealth.

General Ople was very anxious to see her. He had the sentiment of humble respectfulness toward aristocracy, and there was that in riches which aroused his admiration. London, for instance, he was not afraid to say he thought the wonder of the world. He remarked, in addition, that the sacking of London would suffice to make every common soldier of the foreign army of occupation an independent gentleman for the term of his natural days. But this is a nightmare! said he, startling himself with an abhorrent dream of envy of those enriched invading officers: for Booty is the one lovely thing which the military mind can contemplate in the abstract. His habit was to go off in an explosion of heavy sighs when he had delivered himself so far, like a man at war with himself.

The lady arrived in time: she received the cards of the neighbourhood, and signalized her eccentricity by paying no attention to them, excepting the card of a Mrs. Baerens, who had audience of her at once. By express arrangement, the card of General Wilson Ople, as her nearest neighbour, followed the card of the rector, the social head of the district; and the rector was granted an interview, but Lady Camper was not at home to General Ople. She is of superior station to me, and may not wish to associate with me, the General modestly said. Nevertheless he was wounded: for in spite of himself, and without the slightest wish to obtrude his own person, as he explained the meaning that he had in him, his rank in the British army forced him to be the representative of it, in the absence of any one of a superior rank. So that he was professionally hurt, and his heart

Page 4432

being in his profession, it may be honestly stated that he was wounded in his feelings, though he said no, and insisted on the distinction. Once a day his walk for constitutional exercise compelled him to pass before Lady Camper's windows, which were not bashfully withdrawn, as he said humorously of Douro Lodge, in the seclusion of half-pay, but bowed out imperiously, militarily, like a generalissimo on horseback, and had full command of the road and levels up to the swelling park-foliage. He went by at a smart stride, with a delicate depression of his upright bearing, as though hastening to greet a friend in view, whose hand was getting ready for the shake. This much would have been observed by a housemaid; and considering his fine figure and the peculiar shining silveriness of his hair, the acceleration of his gait was noticeable. When he drove by, the pony's right ear was flicked, to the extreme indignation of a mettlesome little animal. It ensued in consequence that the General was borne flying under the eyes of Lady Camper, and such pace displeasing him, he reduced it invariably at a step or two beyond the corner of her grounds.

But neither he nor his daughter Elizabeth attached importance to so trivial a circumstance. The General punctiliously avoided glancing at the windows during the passage past them, whether in his wild career or on foot. Elizabeth took a side-shot, as one looks at a wayside tree. Their speech concerning Lady Camper was an exchange of commonplaces over her loneliness: and this condition of hers was the more perplexing to General Ople on his hearing from his daughter that the lady was very fine-looking, and not so very old, as he had fancied eccentric ladies must be. The rector's account of her, too, excited the mind. She had informed him bluntly, that she now and then went to church to save appearances, but was not a church-goer, finding it impossible to support the length of the service; might, however, be reckoned in subscriptions for all the charities, and left her pew open to poor people, and none but the poor. She had travelled over Europe, and knew the East. Sketches in watercolours of the scenes she had visited adorned her walls, and a pair of pistols, that she had found useful, she affirmed, lay on the writing-desk in her drawing-room. General Ople gathered from the rector that she had a great contempt for men: yet it was curiously varied with lamentations over the weakness of women. 'Really she cannot possibly be an example of that,' said the General, thinking of the pistols.

Now, we learn from those who have studied women on the chess-board, and know what ebony or ivory will do along particular lines, or hopping, that men much talked about will take possession of their thoughts; and certainly the fact may be accepted for one of their moves. But the whole fabric of our knowledge of them, which we are taught to build on this originally acute perception, is shattered when we hear, that it

Page 4433

is exactly the same, in the same degree, in proportion to the amount of work they have to do, exactly the same with men and their thoughts in the case of women much talked about. So it was with General Ople, and nothing is left for me to say except, that there is broader ground than the chessboard. I am earnest in protesting the similarity of the singular couples on common earth, because otherwise the General is in peril of the accusation that he is a feminine character; and not simply was he a gallant officer, and a veteran in gunpowder strife, he was also (and it is an extraordinary thing that a genuine humility did not prevent it, and did survive it) a lord and conqueror of the sex. He had done his pretty bit of mischief, all in the way of honour, of course, but hearts had knocked. And now, with his bright white hair, his close-brushed white whiskers on a face burnt brown, his clear-cut features, and a winning droop of his eyelids, there was powder in him still, if not shot.

There was a lamentable susceptibility to ladies' charms. On the other hand, for the protection of the sex, a remainder of shyness kept him from active enterprise and in the state of suffering, so long as indications of encouragement were wanting. He had killed the soft ones, who came to him, attracted by the softness in him, to be killed: but clever women alarmed and paralyzed him. Their aptness to question and require immediate sparkling answers; their demand for fresh wit, of a kind that is not furnished by publications which strike it into heads with a hammer, and supply it wholesale; their various reading; their power of ridicule too; made them awful in his contemplation.

Supposing (for the inflammable officer was now thinking, and deeply thinking, of a clever woman), supposing that Lady Camper's pistols were needed in her defence one night: at the first report proclaiming her extremity, valour might gain an introduction to her upon easy terms, and would not be expected to be witty. She would, perhaps, after the excitement, admit his masculine superiority, in the beautiful old fashion, by fainting in his arms. Such was the reverie he passingly indulged, and only so could he venture to hope for an acquaintance with the formidable lady who was his next neighbour. But the proud society of the burglarious denied him opportunity.

Meanwhile, he learnt that Lady Camper had a nephew, and the young gentleman was in a cavalry regiment. General Ople met him outside his gates, received and returned a polite salute, liked his appearance and manners and talked of him to Elizabeth, asking her if by chance she had seen him. She replied that she believed she had, and praised his horsemanship. The General discovered that he was an excellent sculler. His daughter was rowing him up the river when the young gentleman shot by, with a splendid stroke, in an outrigger, backed, and floating alongside presumed to enter into conversation, during which he managed to express regrets

Page 4434

at his aunt's turn for solitariness. As they belonged to sister branches of the same Service, the General and Mr. Reginald Roller had a theme in common, and a passion. Elizabeth told her father that nothing afforded her so much pleasure as to hear him talk with Mr. Roller on military matters. General Ople assured her that it pleased him likewise. He began to spy about for Mr. Roller, and it sometimes occurred that they conversed across the wall; it could hardly be avoided. A hint or two, an undefinable flying allusion, gave the General to understand that Lady Camper had not been happy in her marriage. He was pained to think of her misfortune; but as she was not over forty, the disaster was, perhaps, not irremediable; that is to say, if she could be taught to extend her forgiveness to men, and abandon her solitude. 'If,' he said to his daughter, 'Lady Camper should by any chance be induced to contract a second alliance, she would, one might expect, be humanized, and we should have highly agreeable neighbours.' Elizabeth artlessly hoped for such an event to take place.

She rarely differed with her father, up to whom, taking example from the world around him, she looked as the pattern of a man of wise conduct.

And he was one; and though modest, he was in good humour with himself, approved himself, and could say, that without boasting of success, he was a satisfied man, until he met his touchstone in Lady Camper.

CHAPTER II

This is the pathetic matter of my story, and it requires pointing out, because he never could explain what it was that seemed to him so cruel in it, for he was no brilliant son of fortune, he was no great pretender, none of those who are logically displaced from the heights they have been raised to, manifestly created to show the moral in Providence. He was modest, retiring, humbly contented; a gentlemanly residence appeased his ambition. Popular, he could own that he was, but not meteorically; rather by reason of his willingness to receive light than his desire to shed it. Why, then, was the terrible test brought to bear upon him, of all men? He was one of us; no worse, and not strikingly or perilously better; and he could not but feel, in the bitterness of his reflections upon an inexplicable destiny, that the punishment befalling him, unmerited as it was, looked like absence of Design in the scheme of things, Above. It looked as if the blow had been dealt him by reckless chance. And to believe that, was for the mind of General Ople the having to return to his alphabet and recommence the ascent of the laborious mountain of understanding.

To proceed, the General's introduction to Lady Camper was owing to a message she sent him by her gardener, with a request that he would cut down a branch of a wychelm, obscuring her view across his grounds toward the river. The General consulted with his daughter, and came to the conclusion, that as he could hardly despatch a written reply to a verbal message, yet greatly wished to subscribe to the wishes of Lady Camper, the

best thing for him to do was to apply for an interview. He sent word that he would wait on Lady Camper immediately, and betook himself forthwith to his toilette. She was the niece of an earl.

Page 4435

Elizabeth commended his appearance, ‘passed him,’ as he would have said; and well she might, for his hat, surtout, trousers and boots, were worthy of an introduction to Royalty. A touch of scarlet silk round the neck gave him bloom, and better than that, the blooming consciousness of it.

‘You are not to be nervous, papa,’ Elizabeth said.

‘Not at all,’ replied the General. ‘I say, not at all, my dear,’ he repeated, and so betrayed that he had fallen into the nervous mood. ’I was saying, I have known worse mornings than this.’ He turned to her and smiled brightly, nodded, and set his face to meet the future.

He was absent an hour and a half.

He came back with his radiance a little subdued, by no means eclipsed; as, when experience has afforded us matter for thought, we cease to shine dazzlingly, yet are not clouded; the rays have merely grown serener. The sum of his impressions was conveyed in the reflective utterance—’It only shows, my dear, how different the reality is from our anticipation of it!’

Lady Camper had been charming; full of condescension, neighbourly, friendly, willing to be satisfied with the sacrifice of the smallest branch of the wych-elm, and only requiring that much for complimentary reasons.

Elizabeth wished to hear what they were, and she thought the request rather singular; but the General begged her to bear in mind, that they were dealing with a very extraordinary woman; ’highly accomplished, really exceedingly handsome,’ he said to himself, aloud.

The reasons were, her liking for air and view, and desire to see into her neighbour’s grounds without having to mount to the attic.

Elizabeth gave a slight exclamation, and blushed.

‘So, my dear, we are objects of interest to her ladyship,’ said the General.

He assured her that Lady Camper’s manners were delightful. Strange to tell, she knew a great deal of his antecedent history, things he had not supposed were known; ‘little matters,’ he remarked, by which his daughter faintly conceived a reference to the conquests of his dashing days. Lady Camper had deigned to impart some of her own, incidentally; that she was of Welsh blood, and born among the mountains. ‘She has a romantic look,’ was the General’s comment; and that her husband had been an insatiable traveller before he became an invalid, and had never cared for Art. ‘Quite an extraordinary circumstance, with such a wife!’ the General said.

He fell upon the wych-elm with his own hands, under cover of the leafage, and the next day he paid his respects to Lady Camper, to inquire if her ladyship saw any further obstruction to the view.

‘None,’ she replied. ‘And now we shall see what the two birds will do.’

Apparently, then, she entertained an animosity to a pair of birds in the tree.

‘Yes, yes; I say they chirp early in the morning,’ said General Ople.

Page 4436

‘At all hours.’

‘The song of birds . . . ?’ he pleaded softly for nature.

‘If the nest is provided for them; but I don’t like vagabond chirping.’

The General perfectly acquiesced. This, in an engagement with a clever woman, is what you should do, or else you are likely to find yourself planted unawares in a high wind, your hat blown off, and your coat-tails anywhere; in other words, you will stand ridiculous in your bewilderment; and General Ople ever footed with the utmost caution to avoid that quagmire of the ridiculous. The extremer quags he had hitherto escaped; the smaller, into which he fell in his agile evasions of the big, he had hitherto been blest in finding none to notice.

He requested her ladyship’s permission to present his daughter. Lady Camper sent in her card.

Elizabeth Ople beheld a tall, handsomely-mannered lady, with good features and penetrating dark eyes, an easy carriage of her person and an agreeable voice, but (the vision of her age flashed out under the compelling eyes of youth) fifty if a day. The rich colouring confessed to it. But she was very pleasing, and Elizabeth’s perception dwelt on it only because her father’s manly chivalry had defended the lady against one year more than forty.

The richness of the colouring, Elizabeth feared, was artificial, and it caused her ingenuous young blood a shudder. For we are so devoted to nature when the dame is flattering us with her gifts, that we loathe the substitute omitting to think how much less it is an imposition than a form of practical adoration of the genuine.

Our young detective, however, concealed her emotion of childish horror.

Lady Camper remarked of her, ’She seems honest, and that is the most we can hope of girls.’

‘She is a jewel for an honest man,’ the General sighed, ‘some day!’

‘Let us hope it will be a distant day.’

‘Yet,’ said the General, ‘girls expect to marry.’

Lady Camper fixed her black eyes on him, but did not speak.

He told Elizabeth that her ladyship’s eyes were exceedingly searching: ‘Only,’ said he, ’as I have nothing to hide, I am able to submit to inspection’; and he laughed slightly up to an arresting cough, and made the mantelpiece ornaments pass muster.

General Ople was the hero to champion a lady whose airs of haughtiness caused her to be somewhat backbitten. He assured everybody, that Lady Camper was much misunderstood; she was a most remarkable woman; she was a most affable and highly intelligent lady. Building up her attributes on a splendid climax, he declared she was pious, charitable, witty, and really an extraordinary artist. He laid particular stress on her artistic qualities, describing her power with the brush, her water-colour sketches, and also some immensely clever caricatures. As he talked of no one else, his friends heard enough of Lady Camper, who was anything but a favourite.

Page 4437

The Pollingtons, the Wilders, the Wardens, the Baerens, the Goslings, and others of his acquaintance, talked of Lady Camper and General Ople rather maliciously. They were all City people, and they admired the General, but mourned that he should so abjectly have fallen at the feet of a lady as red with rouge as a railway bill. His not seeing it showed the state he was in. The sister of Mrs. Pollington, an amiable widow, relict of a large City warehouse, named Barcop, was chilled by a falling off in his attentions. His apology for not appearing at garden parties was, that he was engaged to wait on Lady Camper.

And at one time, her not condescending to exchange visits with the obsequious General was a topic fertile in irony. But she did condescend. Lady Camper came to his gate unexpectedly, rang the bell, and was let in like an ordinary visitor. It happened that the General was gardening—not the pretty occupation of pruning—he was digging—and of necessity his coat was off, and he was hot, dusty, unpresentable. From adoring earth as the mother of roses, you may pass into a lady's presence without purification; you cannot (or so the General thought) when you are caught in the act of adoring the mother of cabbages. And though he himself loved the cabbage equally with the rose, in his heart respected the vegetable yet more than he esteemed the flower, for he gloried in his kitchen garden, this was not a secret for the world to know, and he almost heeled over on his beam ends when word was brought of the extreme honour Lady Camper had done him. He worked his arms hurriedly into his fatigue jacket, trusting to get away to the house and spend a couple of minutes on his adornment; and with any other visitor it might have been accomplished, but Lady Camper disliked sitting alone in a room. She was on the square of lawn as the General stole along the walk. Had she kept her back to him, he might have rounded her like the shadow of a dial, undetected. She was frightfully acute of hearing. She turned while he was in the agony of hesitation, in a queer attitude, one leg on the march, projected by a frenzied tip-toe of the hinder leg, the very fatallest moment she could possibly have selected for unveiling him.

Of course there was no choice but to surrender on the spot.

He began to squander his dizzy wits in profuse apologies. Lady Camper simply spoke of the nice little nest of a garden, smelt the flowers, accepted a Niel rose and a Rohan, a Cline, a Falcot, and La France.

'A beautiful rose indeed,' she said of the latter, 'only it smells of macassar oil.'

'Really, it never struck me, I say it never struck me before,' rejoined the General, smelling it as at a pinch of snuff. 'I was saying, I always . . . .' And he tacitly, with the absurdest of smiles, begged permission to leave unterminated a sentence not in itself particularly difficult

'I have a nose,' observed Lady Camper.

Page 4438

Like the nobly-bred person she was, according to General Ople's version of the interview on his estate, when he stood before her in his gardening costume, she put him at his ease, or she exerted herself to do so; and if he underwent considerable anguish, it was the fault of his excessive scrupulousness regarding dress, propriety, appearance.

He conducted her at her request to the kitchen garden and the handful of paddock, the stables and coach-house, then back to the lawn.

'It is the home for a young couple,' she said.

'I am no longer young,' the General bowed, with the sigh peculiar to this confession. 'I say, I am no longer young, but I call the place a gentlemanly residence. I was saying, I . . .'

'Yes, yes!' Lady Camper tossed her head, half closing her eyes, with a contraction of the brows, as if in pain.

He perceived a similar expression whenever he spoke of his residence.

Perhaps it recalled happier days to enter such a nest. Perhaps it had been such a home for a young couple that she had entered on her marriage with Sir Scrope Camper, before he inherited his title and estates.

The General was at a loss to conceive what it was.

It recurred at another mention of his idea of the nature of the residence. It was almost a paroxysm. He determined not to vex her reminiscences again; and as this resolution directed his mind to his residence, thinking it pre-eminently gentlemanly, his tongue committed the error of repeating it, with 'gentleman-like' for a variation.

Elizabeth was out—he knew not where. The housemaid informed him, that Miss Elizabeth was out rowing on the water.

'Is she alone?' Lady Camper inquired of him.

'I fancy so,' the General replied.

'The poor child has no mother.'

'It has been a sad loss to us both, Lady Camper.'

'No doubt. She is too pretty to go out alone.'

'I can trust her.'

‘Girls!’

‘She has the spirit of a man.’

‘That is well. She has a spirit; it will be tried.’

The General modestly furnished an instance or two of her spiritedness.

Lady Camper seemed to like this theme; she looked graciously interested.

‘Still, you should not suffer her to go out alone,’ she said.

‘I place implicit confidence in her,’ said the General; and Lady Camper gave it up.

She proposed to walk down the lanes to the river-side, to meet Elizabeth returning.

The General manifested alacrity checked by reluctance. Lady Camper had told him she objected to sit in a strange room by herself; after that, he could hardly leave her to dash upstairs to change his clothes; yet how, attired as he was, in a fatigue jacket, that warned him not to imagine his back view, and held him constantly a little to the rear of Lady Camper, lest she should be troubled by it;—and he knew the habit of the second rank to criticise the front—how consent to face the outer world in such style side by side with the lady he admired?

Page 4439

‘Come,’ said she; and he shot forward a step, looking as if he had missed fire.

‘Are you not coming, General?’

He advanced mechanically.

Not a soul met them down the lanes, except a little one, to whom Lady Camper gave a small silver-piece, because she was a picture.

The act of charity sank into the General’s heart, as any pretty performance will do upon a warm waxen bed.

Lady Camper surprised him by answering his thoughts. ’No; it’s for my own pleasure.’

Presently she said, ‘Here they are.’

General Ople beheld his daughter by the river-side at the end of the lane, under escort of Mr. Reginald Rolles.

It was another picture, and a pleasing one. The young lady and the young gentleman wore boating hats, and were both dressed in white, and standing by or just turning from the outrigger and light skiff they were about to leave in charge of a waterman. Elizabeth stretched a finger at arm’s-length, issuing directions, which Mr. Rolles took up and worded further to the man, for the sake of emphasis; and he, rather than Elizabeth, was guilty of the half-start at sight of the persons who were approaching.

‘My nephew, you should know, is intended for a working soldier,’ said Lady Camper; ‘I like that sort of soldier best.’

General Ople drooped his shoulders at the personal compliment.

She resumed. ’His pay is a matter of importance to him. You are aware of the smallness of a subaltern’s pay.

‘I,’ said the General, ’I say I feel my poor half-pay, having always been a working soldier myself, very important, I was saying, very important to me!’

‘Why did you retire?’

Her interest in him seemed promising. He replied conscientiously, ’Beyond the duties of General of Brigade, I could not, I say I could not, dare to aspire; I can accept and execute orders; I shrink from responsibility!’

‘It is a pity,’ said she, ’that you were not, like my nephew Reginald, entirely dependent on your profession.’

She laid such stress on her remark, that the General, who had just expressed a very modest estimate of his abilities, was unable to reject the flattery of her assuming him to be a man of some fortune. He coughed, and said, ‘Very little.’ The thought came to him that he might have to make a statement to her in time, and he emphasized, ’Very little indeed. Sufficient,’ he assured her, ‘for a gentlemanly appearance.’

‘I have given you your warning,’ was her inscrutable rejoinder, uttered within earshot of the young people, to whom, especially to Elizabeth, she was gracious. The damsel’s boating uniform was praised, and her sunny flush of exercise and exposure.

Lady Camper regretted that she could not abandon her parasol: ’I freckle so easily.’

The General, puzzling over her strange words about a warning, gazed at the red rose of art on her cheek with an air of profound abstraction.

Page 4440

‘I freckle so easily,’ she repeated, dropping her parasol to defend her face from the calculating scrutiny.

‘I burn brown,’ said Elizabeth.

Lady Camper laid the bud of a Falcot rose against the young girl’s cheek, but fetched streams of colour, that overwhelmed the momentary comparison of the sunswarthed skin with the rich dusky yellow of the rose in its deepening inward to soft brown.

Reginald stretched his hand for the privileged flower, and she let him take it; then she looked at the General; but the General was looking, with his usual air of satisfaction, nowhere.

CHAPTER III

‘Lady Camper is no common enigma,’ General Ople observed to his daughter.

Elizabeth inclined to be pleased with her, for at her suggestion the General had bought a couple of horses, that she might ride in the park, accompanied by her father or the little groom. Still, the great lady was hard to read. She tested the resources of his income by all sorts of instigation to expenditure, which his gallantry could not withstand; she encouraged him to talk of his deeds in arms; she was friendly, almost affectionate, and most bountiful in the presents of fruit, peaches, nectarines, grapes, and hot-house wonders, that she showered on his table; but she was an enigma in her evident dissatisfaction with him for something he seemed to have left unsaid. And what could that be?

At their last interview she had asked him, ’Are you sure, General, you have nothing more to tell me?’

And as he remarked, when relating it to Elizabeth, ’One might really be tempted to misapprehend her ladyship’s . . . I say one might commit oneself beyond recovery. Now, my dear, what do you think she intended?’

Elizabeth was ‘burning brown,’ or darkly blushing, as her manner was.

She answered, ’I am certain you know of nothing that would interest her; nothing, unless . . .’

‘Well?’ the General urged her.

‘How can I speak it, papa?’

‘You really can’t mean . . .’

‘Papa, what could I mean?’

‘If I were fool enough!’ he murmured. ’No, no, I am an old man. I was saying, I am past the age of folly.’

One day Elizabeth came home from her ride in a thoughtful mood. She had not, further than has been mentioned, incited her father to think of the age of folly; but voluntarily or not, Lady Camper had, by an excess of graciousness amounting to downright invitation; as thus, ’Will you persist in withholding your confidence from me, General?’ She added, ’I am not so difficult a person.’ These prompting speeches occurred on the morning of the day when Elizabeth sat at his table, after a long ride into the country, profoundly meditative.

A note was handed to General Ople, with the request that he would step in to speak with Lady Camper in the course of the evening, or next morning. Elizabeth waited till his hat was on, then said, ’Papa, on my ride to-day, I met Mr. Rolles.’

Page 4441

‘I am glad you had an agreeable escort, my dear.’

‘I could not refuse his company.’

‘Certainly not. And where did you ride?’

’To a beautiful valley; and there we met. . . . ’

‘Her ladyship?’

‘Yes.’

‘She always admires you on horseback.’

‘So you know it, papa, if she should speak of it.’

‘And I am bound to tell you, my child,’ said the General, ’that this morning Lady Camper’s manner to me was . . . if I were a fool . . . I say, this morning I beat a retreat, but apparently she . . . I see no way out of it, supposing she . . .’

‘I am sure she esteems you, dear papa,’ said Elizabeth. ’You take to her, my dear?’ the General inquired anxiously; ’a little?—a little afraid of her?’

‘A little,’ Elizabeth replied, ‘only a little.’

‘Don’t be agitated about me.’

‘No, papa; you are sure to do right.’

‘But you are trembling.’

‘Oh! no. I wish you success.’

General Ople was overjoyed to be reinforced by his daughter’s good wishes. He kissed her to thank her. He turned back to her to kiss her again. She had greatly lightened the difficulty at least of a delicate position.

It was just like the imperious nature of Lady Camper to summon him in the evening to terminate the conversation of the morning, from the visible pitfall of which he had beaten a rather precipitate retreat. But if his daughter cordially wished him success, and Lady Camper offered him the crown of it, why then he had only to pluck up spirit, like a good commander who has to pass a fordable river in the enemy’s presence; a dash, a splash, a rattling volley or two, and you are over, established on the opposite bank. But you must be positive of victory, otherwise, with the river behind you, your new position is likely to be ticklish. So the General entered Lady Camper’s drawing-room warily,

watching the fair enemy. He knew he was captivating, his old conquests whispered in his ears, and her reception of him all but pointed to a footstool at her feet. He might have fallen there at once, had he not remembered a hint that Mr. Reginald Rolles had dropped concerning Lady Camper's amazing variability.

Lady Camper began.

'General, you ran away from me this morning. Let me speak. And, by the way, I must reproach you; you should not have left it to me. Things have now gone so far that I cannot pretend to be blind. I know your feelings as a father. Your daughter's happiness . . .'

'My lady,' the General interposed, 'I have her distinct assurance that it is, I say it is wrapt up in mine.'

'Let me speak. Young people will say anything. Well, they have a certain excuse for selfishness; we have not. I am in some degree bound to my nephew; he is my sister's son.'

'Assuredly, my lady. I would not stand in his light, be quite assured. If I am, I was saying if I am not mistaken, I . . . and he is, or has the making of an excellent soldier in him, and is likely to be a distinguished cavalry officer.'

Page 4442

‘He has to carve his own way in the world, General.’

’All good soldiers have, my lady. And if my position is not, after a considerable term of service, I say if . . .’

‘To continue,’ said Lady Camper: ’I never have liked early marriages. I was married in my teens before I knew men. Now I do know them, and now . . . .’

The General plunged forward: ’The honour you do us now:—a mature experience is worth:—my dear Lady Camper, I have admired you:—and your objection to early marriages cannot apply to . . . indeed, madam, vigour, they say . . . though youth, of course . . . yet young people, as you observe . . . and I have, though perhaps my reputation is against it, I was saying I have a natural timidity with your sex, and I am grey-headed, white-headed, but happily without a single malady.’

Lady Camper’s brows showed a trifling bewilderment. ’I am speaking of these young people, General Ople.’

’I consent to everything beforehand, my dear lady. He should be, I say Mr. Rolles should be provided for.’

‘So should she, General, so should Elizabeth.’

’She shall be, she will, dear madam. What I have, with your permission, if—good heaven! Lady Camper, I scarcely know where I am. She would . . . . I shall not like to lose her: you would not wish it. In time she will . . . . she has every quality of a good wife.’

‘There, stay there, and be intelligible,’ said Lady Camper. ’She has every quality. Money should be one of them. Has she money?’

‘Oh! my lady,’ the General exclaimed, ’we shall not come upon your purse when her time comes.’

‘Has she ten thousand pounds?’

’Elizabeth? She will have, at her father’s death . . . but as for my income, it is moderate, and only sufficient to maintain a gentlemanly appearance in proper self-respect. I make no show. I say I make no show. A wealthy marriage is the last thing on earth I should have aimed at. I prefer quiet and retirement. Personally, I mean. That is my personal taste. But if the lady . . . . I say if it should happen that the lady . . . . and indeed I am not one to press a suit: but if she who distinguishes and honours me should chance to be wealthy, all I can do is to leave her wealth at her disposal, and that I do: I do that unreservedly. I feel I am very confused, alarmingly confused. Your ladyship merits a superior . . . I trust I have not . . . I am entirely at your ladyship’s mercy.’

’Are you prepared, if your daughter is asked in marriage, to settle ten thousand pounds on her, General Ople?’

The General collected himself. In his heart he thoroughly appreciated the moral beauty of Lady Camper’s extreme solicitude on behalf of his daughter’s provision; but he would have desired a postponement of that and other material questions belonging to a distant future until his own fate was decided.

So he said: ’Your ladyship’s generosity is very marked. I say it is very marked.’

Page 4443

‘How, my good General Ople! how is it marked in any degree?’ cried Lady Camper. ’I am not generous. I don’t pretend to be; and certainly I don’t want the young people to think me so. I want to be just. I have assumed that you intend to be the same. Then will you do me the favour to reply to me?’

The General smiled winningly and intently, to show her that he prized her, and would not let her escape his eulogies.

’Marked, in this way, dear madam, that you think of my daughter’s future more than I. I say, more than her father himself does. I know I ought to speak more warmly, I feel warmly. I was never an eloquent man, and if you take me as a soldier, I am, as, I have ever been in the service, I was saying I am Wilson Ople, of the grade of General, to be relied on for executing orders; and, madam, you are Lady Camper, and you command me. I cannot be more precise. In fact, it is the feeling of the necessity for keeping close to the business that destroys what I would say. I am in fact lamentably incompetent to conduct my own case.’

Lady Camper left her chair.

‘Dear me, this is very strange, unless I am singularly in error,’ she said.

The General now faintly guessed that he might be in error, for his part.

But he had burned his ships, blown up his bridges; retreat could not be thought of.

He stood, his head bent and appealing to her sideface, like one pleadingly in pursuit, and very deferentially, with a courteous vehemence, he entreated first her ladyship’s pardon for his presumption, and then the gift of her ladyship’s hand.

As for his language, it was the tongue of General Ople. But his bearing was fine. If his clipped white silken hair spoke of age, his figure breathed manliness. He was a picture, and she loved pictures.

For his own sake, she begged him to cease. She dreaded to hear of something ‘gentlemanly.’

‘This is a new idea to me, my dear General,’ she said. ’You must give me time. People at our age have to think of fitness. Of course, in a sense, we are both free to do as we like. Perhaps I may be of some aid to you. My preference is for absolute independence. And I wished to talk of a different affair. Come to me tomorrow. Do not be hurt if I decide that we had better remain as we are.’

The General bowed. His efforts, and the wavering of the fair enemy’s flag, had inspired him with a positive re-awakening of masculine passion to gain this fortress. He said well: ’I have, then, the happiness, madam, of being allowed to hope until to-morrrow?’

She replied, ’I would not deprive you of a moment of happiness. Bring good sense with you when you do come.’

The General asked eagerly, ’I have your ladyship’s permission to come early?’

‘Consult your happiness,’ she answered; and if to his mind she seemed returning to the state of enigma, it was on the whole deliciously. She restored him his youth. He told Elizabeth that night; he really must begin to think of marrying her to some worthy young fellow. ‘Though,’ said he, with an air of frank intoxication, ’my opinion is, the young ones are not so lively as the old in these days, or I should have been besieged before now.’

Page 4444

The exact substance of the interview he forbore to relate to his inquisitive daughter, with a very honourable discretion.

CHAPTER IV

Elizabeth came riding home to breakfast from a gallop round the park, and passing Lady Camper's gates, received the salutation of her parasol. Lady Camper talked with her through the bars. There was not a sign to tell of a change or twist in her neighbourly affability. She remarked simply enough, that it was her nephew's habit to take early gallops, and possibly Elizabeth might have seen him, for his quarters were proximate; but she did not demand an answer. She had passed a rather restless night, she said. 'How is the General?'

'Papa must have slept soundly, for he usually calls to me through his door when he hears I am up,' said Elizabeth.

Lady Camper nodded kindly and walked on.

Early in the morning General Ople was ready for battle. His forces were, the anticipation of victory, a carefully arranged toilet, and an unaccustomed spirit of enterprise in the realms of speech; for he was no longer in such awe of Lady Camper.

'You have slept well?' she inquired.

'Excellently, my lady:

'Yes, your daughter tells me she heard you, as she went by your door in the morning for a ride to meet my nephew. You are, I shall assume, prepared for business.'

'Elizabeth? . . . to meet . . .?' General Ople's impression of anything extraneous to his emotion was feeble and passed instantly. 'Prepared! Oh, certainly'; and he struck in a compliment on her ladyship's fresh morning bloom.

'It can hardly be visible,' she responded; 'I have not painted yet.'

'Does your ladyship proceed to your painting in the very early morning?'

'Rouge. I rouge.'

'Dear me! I should not have supposed it.'

'You have speculated on it very openly, General. I remember your trying to see a freckle through the rouge; but the truth is, I am of a supernatural paleness if I do not rouge, so I do. You understand, therefore, I have a false complexion. Now to business.'

’If your ladyship insists on calling it business. I have little to offer—myself!’

‘You have a gentlemanly residence.’

‘It is, my lady, it is. It is a bijou.’

‘Ah!’ Lady Camper sighed dejectedly.

‘It is a perfect bijou!’

’Oblige me, General, by not pronouncing the French word as if you were swearing by something in English, like a trooper.’

General Ople started, admitted that the word was French, and apologized for his pronunciation. Her variability was now visible over a corner of the battlefield like a thunder-cloud.

‘The business we have to discuss concerns the young people, General.’

‘Yes,’ brightened by this, he assented: ’Yes, dear Lady Camper; it is a part of the business; it is a secondary part; it has to be discussed; I say I subscribe beforehand. I may say, that honouring, esteeming you as I do, and hoping ardently for your consent . . . .

Page 4445

‘They must have a home and an income, General.’

’I presume, dearest lady, that Elizabeth will be welcome in your home. I certainly shall never chase Reginald out of mine.’

Lady Camper threw back her head. ’Then you are not yet awake, or you practice the art of sleeping with open eyes! Now listen to me. I rouge, I have told you. I like colour, and I do not like to see wrinkles or have them seen. Therefore I rouge. I do not expect to deceive the world so flagrantly as to my age, and you I would not deceive for a moment. I am seventy.’

The effect of this noble frankness on the General, was to raise him from his chair in a sitting posture as if he had been blown up.

Her countenance was inexorably imperturbable under his alternate blinking and gazing that drew her close and shot her distant, like a mysterious toy.

‘But,’ said she, ’I am an artist; I dislike the look of extreme age, so I conceal it as well as I can. You are very kind to fall in with the deception: an innocent and, I think, a proper one, before the world, though not to the gentleman who does me the honour to propose to me for my hand. You desire to settle our business first. You esteem me; I suppose you mean as much as young people mean when they say they love. Do you? Let us come to an understanding.’

‘I can,’ the melancholy General gasped, ’I say I can—I cannot—I cannot credit your ladyship’s . . .’

‘You are at liberty to call me Angela.’

‘Ange . . .’ he tried it, and in shame relapsed. ‘Madam, yes. Thanks.’

‘Ah,’ cried Lady Camper, ’do not use these vulgar contractions of decent speech in my presence. I abhor the word “thanks.” It is fit for fribbles.’

‘Dear me, I have used it all my life,’ groaned the General.

’Then, for the remainder, be it understood that you renounce it. To continue, my age is . . .’

‘Oh, impossible, impossible,’ the General almost wailed; there was really a crack in his voice.

’Advancing to seventy. But, like you, I am happy to say I have not a malady. I bring no invalid frame to a union that necessitates the leaving of the front door open day and

night to the doctor. My belief is, I could follow my husband still on a campaign, if he were a warrior instead of a pensioner.'

General Ople winced.

He was about to say humbly, 'As General of Brigade . . .'

'Yes, yes, you want a commanding officer, and that I have seen, and that has caused me to meditate on your proposal,' she interrupted him; while he, studying her countenance hard, with the painful aspect of a youth who lashes a donkey memory in an examination by word of mouth, attempted to marshal her signs of younger years against her awful confession of the extremely ancient, the witheringly ancient. But for the manifest rouge, manifest in spite of her declaration that she had not yet that morning proceeded to her paintbrush, he would have thrown down his glove to challenge her on the subject of her age. She had actually charms. Her mouth had a charm; her eyes were lively; her figure, mature if you like, was at least full and good; she stood upright, she had a queenly seat. His mental ejaculation was, 'What a wonderful constitution!'

Page 4446

By a lapse of politeness, he repeated it to himself half aloud; he was shockingly nervous.

‘Yes, I have finer health than many a younger woman,’ she said. ’An ordinary calculation would give me twenty good years to come. I am a widow, as you know. And, by the way, you have a leaning for widows. Have you not? I thought I had heard of a widow Barcop in this parish. Do not protest. I assure you I am a stranger to jealousy. My income . . .’

The General raised his hands.

‘Well, then,’ said the cool and self-contained lady, ’before I go farther, I may ask you, knowing what you have forced me to confess, are you still of the same mind as to marriage? And one moment, General. I promise you most sincerely that your withdrawing a step shall not, as far as it touches me, affect my neighbourly and friendly sentiments; not in any degree. Shall we be as we were?’

Lady Camper extended her delicate hand to him.

He took it respectfully, inspected the aristocratic and unshrunken fingers, and kissing them, said, ’I never withdraw from a position, unless I am beaten back. Lady Camper, I . . .’

‘My name is Angela.’

The General tried again: he could not utter the name.

To call a lady of seventy Angela is difficult in itself. It is, it seems, thrice difficult in the way of courtship.

‘Angela!’ said she.

’Yes. I say, there is not a more beautiful female name, dear Lady Camper.’

’Spare me that word “female” as long as you live. Address me by that name, if you please.’

The General smiled. The smile was meant for propitiation and sweetness. It became a brazen smile.

‘Unless you wish to step back,’ said she.

’Indeed, no. I am happy, Lady Camper. My life is yours. I say, my life is devoted to you, dear madam.’

‘Angela!’

General Ople was blushingly delivered of the name.

‘That will do,’ said she. ’And as I think it possible one may be admired too much as an artist, I must request you to keep my number of years a secret.’

‘To the death, madam,’ said the General.

’And now we will take a turn in the garden, Wilson Ople. And beware of one thing, for a commencement, for you are full of weeds, and I mean to pluck out a few: never call any place a gentlemanly residence in my hearing, nor let it come to my ears that you have been using the phrase elsewhere. Don’t express astonishment. At present it is enough that I dislike it. But this only,’ Lady Camper added, ’this only if it is not your intention to withdraw from your position.’

’Madam, my lady, I was saying—hem!—Angela, I could not wish to withdraw.’

Lady Camper leaned with some pressure on his arm, observing, ’You have a curious attachment to antiquities.’

’My dear lady, it is your mind; I say, it is your mind: I was saying, I am in love with your mind,’ the General endeavoured to assure her, and himself too.

Page 4447

‘Or is it my powers as an artist?’

‘Your mind, your extraordinary powers of mind.’

‘Well,’ said Lady Camper, ’a veteran General of Brigade is as good a crutch as a childless old grannam can have.’

And as a crutch, General Ople, parading her grounds with the aged woman, found himself used and treated.

The accuracy of his perceptions might be questioned. He was like a man stunned by some great tropical fruit, which responds to the longing of his eyes by falling on his head; but it appeared to him, that she increased in bitterness at every step they took, as if determined to make him realize her wrinkles.

He was even so inconsequent, or so little recognized his position, as to object in his heart to hear himself called Wilson.

It is true that she uttered Wilsonople as if the names formed one word. And on a second occasion (when he inclined to feel hurt) she remarked, ’I fear me, Wilsonople, if we are to speak plainly, thou art but a fool.’ He, perhaps, naturally objected to that. He was, however, giddy, and barely knew.

Yet once more the magical woman changed. All semblance of harshness, and harridan-like spike-tonguedness vanished when she said adieu.

The astronomer, looking at the crusty jag and scoria of the magnified moon through his telescope, and again with naked eyes at the soft-beaming moon, when the crater-ridges are faint as eyebrow-pencillings, has a similar sharp alternation of prospect to that which mystified General Ople.

But between watching an orb that is only variable at our caprice, and contemplating a woman who shifts and quivers ever with her own, how vast the difference!

And consider that this woman is about to be one’s wife! He could have believed (if he had not known full surely that such things are not) he was in the hands of a witch.

Lady Camper’s ‘adieu’ was perfectly beautiful—a kind, cordial, intimate, above all, to satisfy his present craving, it was a lady-like adieu—the adieu of a delicate and elegant woman, who had hardly left her anchorage by forty to sail into the fifties.

Alas! he had her word for it, that she was not less than seventy. And, worse, she had betrayed most melancholy signs of sourness and agedness as soon as he had sworn himself to her fast and fixed.

‘The road is open to you to retreat,’ were her last words.

‘My road,’ he answered gallantly, ‘is forward.’

He was drawing backward as he said it, and something provoked her to smile.

CHAPTER V

It is a noble thing to say that your road is forward, and it befits a man of battles. General Ople was too loyal a gentleman to think of any other road. Still, albeit not gifted with imagination, he could not avoid the feeling that he had set his face to Winter. He found himself suddenly walking straight into the heart of Winter, and a nipping Winter. For her ladyship had proved acutely nipping. His little customary phrases, to which Lady Camper objected, he could see no harm in whatever. Conversing with her in the privacy of domestic life would never be the flowing business that it is for other men. It would demand perpetual vigilance, hop, skip, jump, flounderings, and apologies.

Page 4448

This was not a pleasing prospect.

On the other hand, she was the niece of an earl. She was wealthy. She might be an excellent friend to Elizabeth; and she could be, when she liked, both commandingly and bewitchingly ladylike.

Good! But he was a General Officer of not more than fifty-five, in his full vigour, and she a woman of seventy!

The prospect was bleak. It resembled an outlook on the steppes. In point of the discipline he was to expect, he might be compared to a raw recruit, and in his own home!

However, she was a woman of mind. One would be proud of her.

But did he know the worst of her? A dreadful presentiment, that he did not know the worst of her, rolled an ocean of gloom upon General Ople, striking out one solitary thought in the obscurity, namely, that he was about to receive punishment for retiring from active service to a life of ease at a comparatively early age, when still in marching trim. And the shadow of the thought was, that he deserved the punishment!

He was in his garden with the dawn. Hard exercise is the best of opiates for dismal reflections. The General discomposed his daughter by offering to accompany her on her morning ride before breakfast. She considered that it would fatigue him. ‘I am not a man of eighty!’ he cried. He could have wished he had been.

He led the way to the park, where they soon had sight of young Rolles, who checked his horse and spied them like a vedette, but, perceiving that he had been seen, came cantering, and hailing the General with hearty wonderment.

‘And what’s this the world says, General?’ said he. ’But we all applaud your taste. My aunt Angela was the handsomest woman of her time.’

The General murmured in confusion, ‘Dear me!’ and looked at the young man, thinking that he could not have known the time.

‘Is all arranged, my dear General?’

’Nothing is arranged, and I beg—I say I beg . . . I came out for fresh air and pace.’..

The General rode frantically.

In spite of the fresh air, he was unable to eat at breakfast. He was bound, of course, to present himself to Lady Camper, in common civility, immediately after it.

And first, what were the phrases he had to avoid uttering in her presence? He could remember only the ‘gentlemanly residence.’ And it was a gentlemanly residence, he thought as he took leave of it. It was one, neatly named to fit the place. Lady Camper is indeed a most eccentric person! he decided from his experience of her.

He was rather astonished that young Rolles should have spoken so coolly of his aunt’s leaning to matrimony; but perhaps her exact age was unknown to the younger members of her family.

This idea refreshed him by suggesting the extremely honourable nature of Lady Camper’s uncomfortable confession.

He himself had an uncomfortable confession to make. He would have to speak of his income. He was living up to the edges of it.

Page 4449

She is an upright woman, and I must be the same! he said, fortunately not in her hearing.

The subject was disagreeable to a man sensitive on the topic of money, and feeling that his prudence had recently been misled to keep up appearances.

Lady Camper was in her garden, reclining under her parasol. A chair was beside her, to which, acknowledging the salutation of her suitor, she waved him.

‘You have met my nephew Reginald this morning, General?’

’Curiously, in the park, this morning, before breakfast, I did, yes. Hem! I, I say I did meet him. Has your ladyship seen him?’

‘No. The park is very pretty in the early morning.’

‘Sweetly pretty.’

Lady Camper raised her head, and with the mildness of assured dictatorship, pronounced: ‘Never say that before me.’

‘I submit, my lady,’ said the poor scourged man.

’Why, naturally you do. Vulgar phrases have to be endured, except when our intimates are guilty, and then we are not merely offended, we are compromised by them. You are still of the mind in which you left me yesterday? You are one day older. But I warn you, so am I.’

’Yes, my lady, we cannot, I say we cannot check time. Decidedly of the same mind. Quite so.’

’Oblige me by never saying “Quite so.” My lawyer says it. It reeks of the City of London. And do not look so miserable.’

‘I, madam? my dear lady!’ the General flashed out in a radiance that dulled instantly.

‘Well,’ said she cheerfully, ‘and you’re for the old woman?’

‘For Lady Camper.’

’You are seductive in your flatteries, General. Well, then, we have to speak of business.’

‘My affairs——’ General Ople was beginning, with perturbed forehead; but Lady Camper held up her finger.

’We will touch on your affairs incidentally. Now listen to me, and do not exclaim until I have finished. You know that these two young ones have been whispering over the wall for some months. They have been meeting on the river and in the park habitually, apparently with your consent.’

‘My lady!’

‘I did not say with your connivance.’

‘You mean my daughter Elizabeth?’

’And my nephew Reginald. We have named them, if that advances us. Now, the end of such meetings is marriage, and the sooner the better, if they are to continue. I would rather they should not; I do not hold it good for young soldiers to marry. But if they do, it is very certain that their pay will not support a family; and in a marriage of two healthy young people, we have to assume the existence of the family. You have allowed matters to go so far that the boy is hot in love; I suppose the girl is, too. She is a nice girl. I do not object to her personally. But I insist that a settlement be made on her before I give my nephew one penny. Hear me out, for I am not fond of business,

Page 4450

and shall be glad to have done with these explanations. Reginald has nothing of his own. He is my sister's son, and I loved her, and rather like the boy. He has at present four hundred a year from me. I will double it, on the condition that you at once make over ten thousand—not less; and let it be yes or no!—to be settled on your daughter and go to her children, independent of the husband—cela va sans dire. Now you may speak, General.'

The General spoke, with breath fetched from the deeps:

'Ten thousand pounds! Hem! Ten! Hem, frankly—ten, my lady! One's income—I am quite taken by surprise. I say Elizabeth's conduct—though, poor child! it is natural to her to seek a mate, I mean, to accept a mate and an establishment, and Reginald is a very hopeful fellow—I was saying, they jump on me out of an ambush, and I wish them every happiness. And she is an ardent soldier, and a soldier she must marry. But ten thousand!'

'It is to secure the happiness of your daughter, General.'

'Pounds! my lady. It would rather cripple me.'

'You would have my house, General; you would have the moiety, as the lawyers say, of my purse; you would have horses, carriages, servants; I do not divine what more you would wish to have.'

'But, madam—a pensioner on the Government! I can look back on past services, I say old services, and I accept my position. But, madam, a pensioner on my wife, bringing next to nothing to the common estate! I fear my self-respect would, I say would . . .'

'Well, and what would it do, General Ople?'

'I was saying, my self-respect as my wife's pensioner, my lady. I could not come to her empty-handed.'

'Do you expect that I should be the person to settle money on your daughter, to save her from mischances? A rakish husband, for example; for Reginald is young, and no one can guess what will be made of him.'

'Undoubtedly your ladyship is correct. We might try absence for the poor girl. I have no female relation, but I could send her to the sea-side to a lady-friend.'

'General Ople, I forbid you, as you value my esteem, ever—and I repeat, I forbid you ever—to afflict my ears with that phrase, "lady-friend!"'

The General blinked in a state of insurgent humility.

These incessant whippings could not but sting the humblest of men; and ‘lady-friend,’ he was sure, was a very common term, used, he was sure, in the very best society. He had never heard Her Majesty speak at levees of a lady-friend, but he was quite sure that she had one; and if so, what could be the objection to her subjects mentioning it as a term to suit their own circumstances?

He was harassed and perplexed by old Lady Camper’s treatment of him, and he resolved not to call her Angela even upon supplication—not that day, at least.

She said, ’You will not need to bring property of any kind to the common estate; I neither look for it nor desire it. The generous thing for you to do would be to give your daughter all you have, and come to me.’

Page 4451

’But, Lady Camper, if I denude myself or curtail my income—a man at his wife’s discretion, I was saying a man at his wife’s mercy . . . !’

General Ople was really forced, by his manly dignity, to make this protest on its behalf. He did not see how he could have escaped doing so; he was more an agent than a principal. ‘My wife’s mercy,’ he said again, but simply as a herald proclaiming superior orders.

Lady Camper’s brows were wrathful. A deep blood-crimson overcame the rouge, and gave her a terrible stormy look.

‘The congress now ceases to sit, and the treaty is not concluded,’ was all she said.

She rose, bowed to him, ‘Good morning, General,’ and turned her back.

He sighed. He was a free man. But this could not be denied—whatever the lady’s age, she was a grand woman in her carriage, and when looking angry, she had a queenlike aspect that raised her out of the reckoning of time.

So now he knew there was a worse behind what he had previously known. He was precipitate in calling it the worst. ‘Now,’ said he to himself, ’I know the worst!’

No man should ever say it. Least of all, one who has entered into relations with an eccentric lady.

CHAPTER VI

Politeness required that General Ople should not appear to rejoice in his dismissal as a suitor, and should at least make some show of holding himself at the beck of a reconsidering mind. He was guilty of running up to London early next day, and remaining absent until nightfall; and he did the same on the two following days. When he presented himself at Lady Camper’s lodge-gates, the astonishing intelligence, that her ladyship had departed for the Continent and Egypt gave him qualms of remorse, which assumed a more definite shape in something like awe of her triumphant constitution. He forbore to mention her age, for he was the most honourable of men, but a habit of tea-table talkativeness impelled him to say and repeat an idea that had visited him, to the effect, that Lady Camper was one of those wonderful women who are comparable to brilliant generals, and defend themselves from the siege of Time by various aggressive movements. Fearful of not being understood, owing to the rarity of the occasions when the squat plain squad of honest Saxon regulars at his command were called upon to explain an idea, he re-cast the sentence. But, as it happened that the regulars of his vocabulary were not numerous, and not accustomed to work upon thoughts and images, his repetitions rather succeeded in exposing the piece of knowledge he had recently acquired than in making his meaning plainer. So we need

not marvel that his acquaintances should suppose him to be secretly aware of an extreme degree in which Lady Camper was a veteran.

Page 4452

General Ople entered into the gaieties of the neighbourhood once more, and passed through the Winter cheerfully. In justice to him, however, it should be said that to the intent dwelling of his mind upon Lady Camper, and not to the festive life he led, was due his entire ignorance of his daughter's unhappiness. She lived with him, and yet it was in other houses he learnt that she was unhappy. After his last interview with Lady Camper, he had informed Elizabeth of the ruinous and preposterous amount of money demanded of him for a settlement upon her and Elizabeth, like the girl of good sense that she was, had replied immediately, 'It could not be thought of, papa.'

He had spoken to Reginald likewise. The young man fell into a dramatic tearing-of-hair and long-stride fury, not ill becoming an enamoured dragoon. But he maintained that his aunt, though an eccentric, was a cordially kind woman. He seemed to feel, if he did not partly hint, that the General might have accepted Lady Camper's terms. The young officer could no longer be welcome at Douro Lodge, so the General paid him a morning call at his quarters, and was distressed to find him breakfasting very late, tapping eggs that he forgot to open—one of the surest signs of a young man downright and deep in love, as the General knew from experience—and surrounded by uncut sporting journals of past weeks, which dated from the day when his blow had struck him, as accurately as the watch of the drowned man marks his minute. Lady Camper had gone to Italy, and was in communication with her nephew: Reginald was not further explicit. His legs were very prominent in his despair, and his fingers frequently performed the part of blunt combs; consequently the General was impressed by his passion for Elizabeth. The girl who, if she was often meditative, always met his eyes with a smile, and quietly said 'Yes, papa,' and 'No, papa,' gave him little concern as to the state of her feelings. Yet everybody said now that she was unhappy. Mrs. Barcop, the widow, raised her voice above the rest. So attentive was she to Elizabeth that the General had it kindly suggested to him, that some one was courting him through his daughter. He gazed at the widow. Now she was not much past thirty; and it was really singular—he could have laughed—thinking of Mrs. Barcop set him persistently thinking of Lady Camper. That is to say, his mad fancy reverted from the lady of perhaps thirty-five to the lady of seventy.

Such, thought he, is genius in a woman! Of his neighbours generally, Mrs. Baerens, the wife of a German merchant, an exquisite player on the pianoforte, was the most inclined to lead him to speak of Lady Camper. She was a kind prattling woman, and was known to have been a governess before her charms withdrew the gastronomic Gottfried Baerens from his devotion to the well-served City club, where, as he exclaimed (ever turning fondly to his wife as he vocalized the compliment), he had found every necessity, every luxury, in life, 'as you cannot have dem out of London—all save de female!' Mrs. Baerens, a lady of Teutonic extraction, was distinguishable as of that sex; at least, she was not masculine. She spoke with great respect of Lady Camper and her family, and seemed to agree in the General's eulogies of Lady Camper's constitution. Still he thought she eyed him strangely.

Page 4453

One April morning the General received a letter with the Italian postmark. Opening it with his usual calm and happy curiosity, he perceived that it was composed of pen-and-ink drawings. And suddenly his heart sank like a scuttled ship. He saw himself the victim of a caricature.

The first sketch had merely seemed picturesque, and he supposed it a clever play of fancy by some travelling friend, or perhaps an actual scene slightly exaggerated. Even on reading, 'A distant view of the city of Wilsonople,' he was only slightly enlightened. His heart beat still with befitting regularity. But the second and the third sketches betrayed the terrible hand. The distant view of the city of Wilsonople was fair with glittering domes, which, in the succeeding near view, proved to have been soap-bubbles, for a place of extreme flatness, begirt with crazy old-fashioned fortifications, was shown; and in the third view, representing the interior, stood for sole place of habitation, a sentry-box.

Most minutely drawn, and, alas! with fearful accuracy, a military gentleman in undress occupied the box. Not a doubt could exist as to the person it was meant to be.

The General tried hard to remain incredulous. He remembered too well who had called him Wilsonople.

But here was the extraordinary thing that sent him over the neighbourhood canvassing for exclamations: on the fourth page was the outline of a lovely feminine hand, holding a pen, as in the act of shading, and under it these words: 'What I say is, I say I think it exceedingly unladylike.'

Now consider the General's feelings when, turning to this fourth page, having these very words in his mouth, as the accurate expression of his thoughts, he discovered them written!

An enemy who anticipates the actions of our mind, has a quality of the malignant divine that may well inspire terror. The senses of General Ople were struck by the aspect of a lurid Goddess, who penetrated him, read him through, and had both power and will to expose and make him ridiculous for ever.

The loveliness of the hand, too, in a perplexing manner contested his denunciation of her conduct. It was ladylike eminently, and it involved him in a confused mixture of the moral and material, as great as young people are known to feel when they make the attempt to separate them, in one of their frenzies.

With a petty bitter laugh he folded the letter, put it in his breast-pocket, and sallied forth for a walk, chiefly to talk to himself about it. But as it absorbed him entirely, he showed it to the rector, whom he met, and what the rector said is of no consequence, for General Ople listened to no remarks, calling in succession on the Pollingtons, the

Goslings, the Baerens, and others, early though it was, and the lords of those houses absent amassing hoards; and to the ladies everywhere he displayed the sketches he had received, observing, that Wilsonople meant himself; and there he was, he said, pointing at the capped fellow in the sentry-box, done unmistakably. The likeness indeed was remarkable. 'She is a woman of genius,' he ejaculated, with utter melancholy. Mrs. Baerens, by the aid of a magnifying glass, assisted him to read a line under the sentry-box, that he had taken for a mere trembling dash; it ran, A gentlemanly residence.

Page 4454

‘What eyes she has!’ the General exclaimed; ’I say it is miraculous what eyes she has at her time of . . . I was saying, I should never have known it was writing.’

He sighed heavily. His shuddering sensitiveness to caricature was increased by a certain evident dread of the hand which struck; the knowing that he was absolutely bare to this woman, defenceless, open to exposure in his little whims, foibles, tricks, incompetencies, in what lay in his heart, and the words that would come to his tongue. He felt like a man haunted.

So deeply did he feel the blow, that people asked how it was that he could be so foolish as to dance about assisting Lady Camper in her efforts to make him ridiculous; he acted the parts of publisher and agent for the fearful caricaturist. In truth, there was a strangely double reason for his conduct; he danced about for sympathy, he had the intensest craving for sympathy, but more than this, or quite as much, he desired to have the powers of his enemy widely appreciated; in the first place, that he might be excused to himself for wincing under them, and secondly, because an awful admiration of her, that should be deepened by a corresponding sentiment around him, helped him to enjoy luxurious recollections of an hour when he was near making her his own—his own, in the holy abstract contemplation of marriage, without realizing their probable relative conditions after the ceremony.

‘I say, that is the very image of her ladyship’s hand,’ he was especially fond of remarking, ‘I say it is a beautiful hand.’

He carried the letter in his pocket-book; and beginning to fancy that she had done her worst, for he could not imagine an inventive malignity capable of pursuing the theme, he spoke of her treatment of him with compassionate regret, not badly assumed from being partly sincere.

Two letters dated in France, the one Dijon, the other Fontainebleau, arrived together; and as the General knew Lady Camper to be returning to England, he expected that she was anxious to excuse herself to him. His fingers were not so confident, for he tore one of the letters to open it.

The City of Wilsonople was recognizable immediately. So likewise was the sole inhabitant.

General Ople’s petty bitter laugh recurred, like a weak-chested patient’s cough in the shifting of our winds eastward.

A faceless woman’s shadow kneels on the ground near the sentry-box, weeping. A faceless shadow of a young man on horseback is beheld galloping toward a gulf. The sole inhabitant contemplates his largely substantial full fleshed face and figure in a glass.

Next, we see the standard of Great Britain furled; next, unfurled and borne by a troop of shadows to the sentrybox. The officer within says, ’I say I should be very happy to carry it, but I cannot quit this gentlemanly residence.’

Next, the standard is shown assailed by popguns. Several of the shadows are prostrate. ’I was saying, I assure you that nothing but this gentlemanly residence prevents me from heading you,’ says the gallant officer.

Page 4455

General Ople trembled with protestant indignation when he saw himself reclining in a magnified sentry-box, while detachments of shadows hurry to him to show him the standard of his country trailing in the dust; and he is maliciously made to say, 'I dislike responsibility. I say I am a fervent patriot, and very fond of my comforts, but I shun responsibility.'

The second letter contained scenes between Wilsonople and the Moon.

He addresses her as his neighbour, and tells her of his triumphs over the sex.

He requests her to inform him whether she is a 'female,' that she may be triumphed over.

He hastens past her window on foot, with his head bent, just as the General had been in the habit of walking.

He drives a mouse-pony furiously by.

He cuts down a tree, that she may peep through.

Then, from the Moon's point of view, Wilsonople, a Silenus, is discerned in an arm-chair winking at a couple too plainly pouting their lips for a doubt of their intentions to be entertained.

A fourth letter arrived, bearing date of Paris. This one illustrated Wilsonople's courtship of the Moon, and ended with his 'saying,' in his peculiar manner, 'In spite of her paint I could not have conceived her age to be so enormous.'

How break off his engagement with the Lady Moon? Consent to none of her terms!

Little used as he was to read behind a veil, acuteness of suffering sharpened the General's intelligence to a degree that sustained him in animated dialogue with each succeeding sketch, or poisoned arrow whirring at him from the moment his eyes rested on it; and here are a few samples:

'Wilsonople informs the Moon that she is "sweetly pretty."

'He thanks her with "thanks" for a handsome piece of lunar green cheese.

'He points to her, apparently telling some one, "my lady-friend."

'He sneezes "Bijou! bijou! bijou!"'

They were trifles, but they attacked his habits of speech; and he began to grow more and more alarmingly absurd in each fresh caricature of his person.

He looked at himself as the malicious woman's hand had shaped him. It was unjust; it was no resemblance—and yet it was! There was a corner of likeness left that leavened the lump; henceforth he must walk abroad with this distressing image of himself before his eyes, instead of the satisfactory reflex of the man who had, and was happy in thinking that he had, done mischief in his time. Such an end for a conquering man was too pathetic.

The General surprised himself talking to himself in something louder than a hum at neighbours' dinner-tables. He looked about and noticed that people were silently watching him.

CHAPTER VII

Lady Camper's return was the subject of speculation in the neighbourhood, for most people thought she would cease to persecute the General with her preposterous and unwarrantable pen-and-ink sketches when living so closely proximate; and how he would behave was the question. Those who made a hero of him were sure he would treat her with disdain. Others were uncertain. He had been so severely hit that it seemed possible he would not show much spirit.

Page 4456

He, for his part, had come to entertain such dread of the post, that Lady Camper's return relieved him of his morning apprehensions; and he would have forgiven her, though he feared to see her, if only she had promised to leave him in peace for the future. He feared to see her, because of the too probable furnishing of fresh matter for her ladyship's hand. Of course he could not avoid being seen by her, and that was a particular misery. A gentlemanly humility, or demureness of aspect, when seen, would, he hoped, disarm his enemy. It should, he thought. He had borne unheard-of things. No one of his friends and acquaintances knew, they could not know, what he had endured. It has caused him fits of stammering. It had destroyed the composure of his gait. Elizabeth had informed him that he talked to himself incessantly, and aloud. She, poor child, looked pale too. She was evidently anxious about him.

Young Rolles, whom he had met now and then, persisted in praising his aunt's good heart. So, perhaps, having satiated her revenge, she might now be inclined for peace, on the terms of distant civility.

'Yes! poor Elizabeth!' sighed the General, in pity of the poor girl's disappointment; 'poor Elizabeth! she little guesses what her father has gone through. Poor child! I say, she hasn't an idea of my sufferings.'

General Ople delivered his card at Lady Camper's lodgegates and escaped to his residence in a state of prickly heat that required the brushing of his hair with hard brushes for several minutes to comfort and re-establish him.

He had fallen to working in his garden, when Lady Camper's card was brought to him an hour after the delivery of his own; a pleasing promptitude, showing signs of repentance, and suggesting to the General instantly some sharp sarcasms upon women, which he had come upon in quotations in the papers and the pulpit, his two main sources of information.

Instead of handing back the card to the maid, he stuck it in his hat and went on digging.

The first of a series of letters containing shameless realistic caricatures was handed to him the afternoon following. They came fast and thick. Not a day's interval of grace was allowed. Niobe under the shafts of Diana was hardly less violently and mortally assailed. The deadliness of the attack lay in the ridicule of the daily habits of one of the most sensitive of men, as to his personal appearance, and the opinion of the world. He might have concealed the sketches, but he could not have concealed the bruises, and people were perpetually asking the unhappy General what he was saying, for he spoke to himself as if he were repeating something to them for the tenth time.

'I say,' said he, 'I say that for a lady, really an educated lady, to sit, as she must—I was saying, she must have sat in an attic to have the right view of me. And there you see—-

this is what she has done. This is the last, this is the afternoon's delivery. Her ladyship has me correctly as to costume, but I could not exhibit such a sketch to ladies.'

Page 4457

A back view of the General was displayed in his act of digging.

‘I say I could not allow ladies to see it,’ he informed the gentlemen, who were suffered to inspect it freely.

’But you see, I have no means of escape; I am at her mercy from morning to night,’ the General said, with a quivering tongue, ’unless I stay at home inside the house; and that is death to me, or unless I abandon the place, and my lease; and I shall—I say, I shall find nowhere in England for anything like the money or conveniences such a gent—a residence you would call fit for a gentleman. I call it a bi . . . it is, in short, a gem. But I shall have to go.’

Young Rolles offered to expostulate with his aunt Angela.

The General said, ’Tha . . . I thank you very much. I would not have her ladyship suppose I am so susceptible. I hardly know,’ he confessed pitiably, ’what it is right to say, and what not—what not. I-I-I never know when I am not looking a fool. I hurry from tree to tree to shun the light. I am seriously affected in my appetite. I say, I shall have to go.’

Reginald gave him to understand that if he flew, the shafts would follow him, for Lady Camper would never forgive his running away, and was quite equal to publishing a book of the adventures of Wilsonople.

Sunday afternoon, walking in the park with his daughter on his arm, General Ople met Mr. Rolles. He saw that the young man and Elizabeth were mortally pale, and as the very idea of wretchedness directed his attention to himself, he addressed them conjointly on the subject of his persecution, giving neither of them a chance of speaking until they were constrained to part.

A sketch was the consequence, in which a withered Cupid and a fading Psyche were seen divided by Wilsonople, who keeps them forcibly asunder with policeman’s fists, while courteously and elegantly entreating them to hear him. ‘Meet,’ he tells them, ’as often as you like, in my company, so long as you listen to me’; and the pathos of his aspect makes hungry demand for a sympathetic audience.

Now, this, and not the series representing the martyrdom of the old couple at Douro Lodge Gates, whose rigid frames bore witness to the close packing of a gentlemanly residence, this was the sketch General Ople, in his madness from the pursuing bite of the gadfly, handed about at Mrs. Pollington’s lawn-party. Some have said, that he should not have betrayed his daughter; but it is reasonable to suppose he had no idea of his daughter’s being the Psyche. Or if he had, it was indistinct, owing to the violence of his personal emotion. Assuming this to have been the very sketch; he handed it to two or three ladies in turn, and was heard to deliver himself at intervals in the following

snatches: ’As you like, my lady, as you like; strike, I say strike; I bear it; I say I bear it. . . . If her ladyship is unforgiving, I say I am enduring. . . . I may go, I was saying I may go mad, but while I have my reason I walk upright, I walk upright.’

Page 4458

Mr. Pollington and certain City gentlemen hearing the poor General's renewed soliloquies, were seized with disgust of Lady Camper's conduct, and stoutly advised an application to the Law Courts.

He gave ear to them abstractedly, but after pulling out the whole chapter of the caricatures (which it seemed that he kept in a case of morocco leather in his breast-pocket), showing them, with comments on them, and observing, 'There will be more, there must be more, I say I am sure there are things I do that her ladyship will discover and expose,' he declined to seek redress or simple protection; and the miserable spectacle was exhibited soon after of this courtly man listening to Mrs. Barcop on the weather, and replying in acquiescence: 'It is hot.—If your ladyship will only abstain from colours. Very hot as you say, madam,—I do not complain of pen and ink, but I would rather escape colours. And I dare say you find it hot too?'

Mrs. Barcop shut her eyes and sighed over the wreck of a handsome military officer.

She asked him: 'What is your objection to colours?'

His hand was at his breast-pocket immediately, as he said: 'Have you not seen?'—-though but a few minutes back he had shown her the contents of the packet, including a hurried glance of the famous digging scene.

By this time the entire district was in fervid sympathy with General Ople. The ladies did not, as their lords did, proclaim astonishment that a man should suffer a woman to goad him to a state of semi-lunacy; but one or two confessed to their husbands, that it required a great admiration of General Ople not to despise him, both for his susceptibility and his patience. As for the men, they knew him to have faced the balls in bellowing battle-strife; they knew him to have endured privation, not only cold but downright want of food and drink—an almost unimaginable horror to these brave daily feasters; so they could not quite look on him in contempt; but his want of sense was offensive, and still more so his submission to a scourging by a woman. Not one of them would have deigned to feel it. Would they have allowed her to see that she could sting them? They would have laughed at her. Or they would have dragged her before a magistrate.

It was a Sunday in early Summer when General Ople walked to morning service, unaccompanied by Elizabeth, who was unwell. The church was of the considerate old-fashioned order, with deaf square pews, permitting the mind to abstract itself from the sermon, or wrestle at leisure with the difficulties presented by the preacher, as General Ople often did, feeling not a little in love with his sincere attentiveness for grappling with the knotty point and partially allowing the struggle to be seen.

The Church was, besides, a sanctuary for him. Hither his enemy did not come. He had this one place of refuge, and he almost looked a happy man again.

He had passed into his hat and out of it, which he habitually did standing, when who should walk up to within a couple of yards of him but Lady Camper. Her pew was full of poor people, who made signs of retiring. She signified to them that they were to sit, then quietly took her seat among them, fronting the General across the aisle.

Page 4459

During the sermon a low voice, sharp in contradistinction to the monotone of the preacher's, was heard to repeat these words: 'I say I am not sure I shall survive it.' Considerable muttering in the same quarter was heard besides.

After the customary ceremonious game, when all were free to move, of nobody liking to move first, Lady Camper and a charity boy were the persons who took the lead. But Lady Camper could not quit her pew, owing to the sticking of the door. She smiled as with her pretty hand she twice or thrice essayed to shake it open. General Ople strode to her aid. He pulled the door, gave the shadow of a respectful bow, and no doubt he would have withdrawn, had not Lady Camper, while acknowledging the civility, placed her prayer-book in his hands to carry at her heels. There was no choice for him. He made a sort of slipping dance back for his hat, and followed her ladyship. All present being eager to witness the spectacle, the passage of Lady Camper dragging the victim General behind her was observed without a stir of the well-dressed members of the congregation, until a desire overcame them to see how Lady Camper would behave to her fish when she had him outside the sacred edifice.

None could have imagined such a scene. Lady Camper was in her carriage; General Ople was holding her prayer-book, hat in hand, at the carriage step, and he looked as if he were toasting before the bars of a furnace; for while he stood there, Lady Camper was rapidly pencilling outlines in a small pocket sketchbook. There are dogs whose shyness is put to it to endure human observation and a direct address to them, even on the part of their masters; and these dear simple dogs wag tail and turn their heads aside waveringly, as though to entreat you not to eye them and talk to them so. General Ople, in the presence of the sketchbook, was much like the nervous animal. He would fain have run away. He glanced at it, and round about, and again at it, and at the heavens. Her ladyship's cruelty, and his inexplicable submission to it, were witnessed of the multitude.

The General's friends walked very slowly. Lady Camper's carriage whirled by, and the General came up with them, accosting them and himself alternately. They asked him where Elizabeth was, and he replied, 'Poor child, yes! I am told she is pale, but I cannot, believe I am so perfectly, I say so perfectly ridiculous, when I join the responses.' He drew forth half a dozen sheets, and showed them sketches that Lady Camper had taken in church, caricaturing him in the sitting down and the standing up. She had torn them out of the book, and presented them to him when driving off. 'I was saying, worship in the ordinary sense will be interdicted to me if her ladyship . . .,' said the General, woefully shuffling the sketch-paper sheets in which he figured.

He made the following odd confession to Mr. and Mrs. Gosling on the road:—that he had gone to his chest, and taken out his sword-belt to measure his girth, and found himself thinner than when he left the service, which had not been the case before his attendance at the last levee of the foregoing season. So the deduction was obvious,

that Lady Camper had reduced him. She had reduced him as effectually as a harassing siege.

Page 4460

‘But why do you pay attention to her? Why . . . !’ exclaimed Mr. Gosling, a gentleman of the City, whose roundness would have turned a rifle-shot.

‘To allow her to wound you so seriously!’ exclaimed Mrs. Gosling.

‘Madam, if she were my wife,’ the General explained, ’I should feel it. I say it is the fact of it; I feel it, if I appear so extremely ridiculous to a human eye, to any one eye.’

‘To Lady Camper’s eye.’

He admitted it might be that. He had not thought of ascribing the acuteness of his pain to the miserable image he presented in this particular lady’s eye. No; it really was true, curiously true: another lady’s eye might have transformed him to a pumpkin shape, exaggerated all his foibles fifty-fold, and he, though not liking it, of course not, would yet have preserved a certain manly equanimity. How was it Lady Camper had such power over him?—a lady concealing seventy years with a rouge-box or paint-pot! It was witchcraft in its worst character. He had for six months at her bidding been actually living the life of a beast, degraded in his own esteem; scorched by every laugh he heard; running, pursued, overtaken, and as it were scored or branded, and then let go for the process to be repeated.

CHAPTER VIII

Our young barbarians have it all their own way with us when they fall into love-liking; they lead us whither they please, and interest us in their wishings, their weepings, and that fine performance, their kissings. But when we see our veterans tottering to their fall, we scarcely consent to their having a wish; as for a kiss, we halloo at them if we discover them on a byway to the sacred grove where such things are supposed to be done by the venerable. And this piece of rank injustice, not to say impoliteness, is entirely because of an unsound opinion that Nature is not in it, as though it were our esteem for Nature which caused us to disrespect them. They, in truth, show her to us discreet, civilized, in a decent moral aspect: vistas of real life, views of the mind’s eye, are opened by their touching little emotions; whereas those bully youngsters who come bellowing at us and catch us by the senses plainly prove either that we are no better than they, or that we give our attention to Nature only when she makes us afraid of her. If we cared for her, we should be up and after her reverentially in her sedater steps, deeply studying her in her slower paces. She teaches them nothing when they are whirling. Our closest instructors, the true philosophers—the story-tellers, in short-will learn in time that Nature is not of necessity always roaring, and as soon as they do, the world may be said to be enlightened. Meantime, in the contemplation of a pair of white whiskers fluttering round a pair of manifestly painted cheeks, be assured that Nature is in it: not that hectoring wanton—but let the young have their fun. Let the superior

interest of the passions of the aged be conceded, and not a word shall be said against the young.

Page 4461

If, then, Nature is in it, how has she been made active? The reason of her launch upon this last adventure is, that she has perceived the person who can supply the virtue known to her by experience to be wanting. Thus, in the broader instance, many who have journeyed far down the road, turn back to the worship of youth, which they have lost. Some are for the graceful worldliness of wit, of which they have just share enough to admire it. Some are captivated by hands that can wield the rod, which in earlier days they escaped to their cost. In the case of General Ople, it was partly her whippings of him, partly her penetration; her ability, that sat so finely on a wealthy woman, her indifference to conventional manners, that so well beseemed a nobly-born one, and more than all, her correction of his little weaknesses and incompetencies, in spite of his dislike of it, won him. He began to feel a sort of nibbling pleasure in her grotesque sketches of his person; a tendency to recur to the old ones while dreading the arrival of new. You hear old gentlemen speak fondly of the swish; and they are not attached to pain, but the instrument revives their feeling of youth; and General Ople half enjoyed, while shrinking, Lady Camper's foregone outlines of him. For in the distance, the whip's-end may look like a clinging caress instead of a stinging flick. But this craven melting in his heart was rebuked by a very worthy pride, that flew for support to the injury she had done to his devotions, and the offence to the sacred edifice. After thinking over it, he decided that he must quit his residence; and as it appeared to him in the light of duty, he, with an unspoken anguish, commissioned the house-agent of his town to sell his lease or let the house furnished, without further parley.

From the house-agent's shop he turned into the chemist's, for a tonic—a foolish proceeding, for he had received bracing enough in the blow he had just dealt himself, but he had been cogitating on tonics recently, imagining certain valiant effects of them, with visions of a former careless happiness that they were likely to restore. So he requested to have the tonic strong, and he took one glass of it over the counter.

Fifteen minutes after the draught, he came in sight of his house, and beholding it, he could have called it a gentlemanly residence aloud under Lady Camper's windows, his insurgency was of such violence. He talked of it incessantly, but forbore to tell Elizabeth, as she was looking pale, the reason why its modest merits touched him so. He longed for the hour of his next dose, and for a caricature to follow, that he might drink and defy it. A caricature was really due to him, he thought; otherwise why had he abandoned his bijou dwelling? Lady Camper, however, sent none. He had to wait a fortnight before one came, and that was rather a likeness, and a handsome likeness, except as regarded a certain disorderliness in his dress, which he knew to be very unlike him. Still it despatched him to the looking-glass, to bring that verifier of facts in evidence against the sketch. While sitting there he heard the housemaid's knock at the door, and the strange intelligence that his daughter was with Lady Camper, and had left word that she hoped he would not forget his engagement to go to Mrs. Baerens' lawn-party.

Page 4462

The General jumped away from the glass, shouting at the absent Elizabeth in a fit of wrath so foreign to him, that he returned hurriedly to have another look at himself, and exclaimed at the pitch of his voice, 'I say I attribute it to an indigestion of that tonic. Do you hear?' The housemaid faintly answered outside the door that she did, alarming him, for there seemed to be confusion somewhere. His hope was that no one would mention Lady Camper's name, for the mere thought of her caused a rush to his head. 'I believe I am in for a touch of apoplexy,' he said to the rector, who greeted him, in advance of the ladies, on Mr. Baerens' lawn. He said it smilingly, but wanting some show of sympathy, instead of the whisper and meaningless hand at his clerical band, with which the rector responded, he cried, 'Apoplexy,' and his friend seemed then to understand, and disappeared among the ladies.

Several of them surrounded the General, and one inquired whether the series was being continued. He drew forth his pocket-book, handed her the latest, and remarked on the gross injustice of it; for, as he requested them to take note, her ladyship now sketched him as a person inattentive to his dress, and he begged them to observe that she had drawn him with his necktie hanging loose. 'And that, I say that has never been known of me since I first entered society.'

The ladies exchanged looks of profound concern; for the fact was, the General had come without any necktie and any collar, and he appeared to be unaware of the circumstance. The rector had told them, that in answer to a hint he had dropped on the subject of neckties, General Ople expressed a slight apprehension of apoplexy; but his careless or merely partial observance of the laws of buttonment could have nothing to do with such fears. They signified rather a disorder of the intelligence. Elizabeth was condemned for leaving him to go about alone. The situation was really most painful, for a word to so sensitive a man would drive him away in shame and for good; and still, to let him parade the ground in the state, compared with his natural self, of scarecrow, and with the dreadful habit of talking to himself quite rageing, was a horrible alternative. Mrs. Baerens at last directed her husband upon the General, trembling as though she watched for the operations of a fish torpedo; and other ladies shared her excessive anxiousness, for Mr. Baerens had the manner and the look of artillery, and on this occasion carried a surcharge of powder.

The General bent his ear to Mr. Baerens, whose German-English and repeated remark, 'I am to do it wid delicassy,' did not assist his comprehension; and when he might have been enlightened, he was petrified by seeing Lady Camper walk on the lawn with Elizabeth. The great lady stood a moment beside Mrs. Baerens; she came straight over to him, contemplating him in silence.

Then she said, 'Your arm, General Ople,' and she made one circuit of the lawn with him, barely speaking.

Page 4463

At her request, he conducted her to her carriage. He took a seat beside her, obediently. He felt that he was being sketched, and comported himself like a child's flat man, that jumps at the pulling of a string.

'Where have you left your girl, General?'

Before he could rally his wits to answer the question, he was asked:

'And what have you done with your necktie and collar?'

He touched his throat.

'I am rather nervous to-day, I forgot Elizabeth,' he said, sending his fingers in a dotting run of wonderment round his neck.

Lady Camper smiled with a triumphing humour on her close-drawn lips.

The verified absence of necktie and collar seemed to be choking him.

'Never mind, you have been abroad without them,' said Lady Camper, 'and that is a victory for me. And you thought of Elizabeth first when I drew your attention to it, and that is a victory for you. It is a very great victory. Pray, do not be dismayed, General. You have a handsome campaigning air. And no apologies, if you please; I like you well enough as you are. There is my hand.'

General Ople understood her last remark. He pressed the lady's hand in silence, very nervously.

'But do not shrug your head into your shoulders as if there were any possibility of concealing the thunderingly evident,' said Lady Camper, electrifying him, what with her cordial squeeze, her kind eyes, and her singular language. 'You have omitted the collar. Well? The collar is the fatal finishing touch in men's dress; it would make Apollo look bourgeois.'

Her hand was in his: and watching the play of her features, a spark entered General Ople's brain, causing him, in forgetfulness of collar and caricatures, to ejaculate, 'Seventy? Did your ladyship say seventy? Utterly impossible! You trifle with me.'

'We will talk when we are free of this accompaniment of carriage-wheels, General,' said Lady Camper.

'I will beg permission to go and fetch Elizabeth, madam.'

’Rightly thought of. Fetch her in my carriage. And, by the way, Mrs. Baerens was my old music-mistress, and is, I think, one year older than I. She can tell you on which side of seventy I am.’

‘I shall not require to ask, my lady,’ he said, sighing.

’Then we will send the carriage for Elizabeth, and have it out together at once. I am impatient; yes, General, impatient: for what?—forgiveness.’

‘Of me, my lady?’ The General breathed profoundly.

’Of whom else? Do you know what it is?-I don’t think you do. You English have the smallest experience of humanity. I mean this: to strike so hard that, in the end, you soften your heart to the victim. Well, that is my weakness. And we of our blood put no restraint on the blows we strike when we think them wanted, so we are always overdoing it.’

General Ople assisted Lady Camper to alight from the carriage, which was forthwith despatched for Elizabeth.

Page 4464

He prepared to listen to her with a disconnected smile of acute attentiveness.

She had changed. She spoke of money. Ten thousand pounds must be settled on his daughter. ‘And now,’ said she, ’you will remember that you are wanting a collar.’

He acquiesced. He craved permission to retire for ten minutes.

‘Simplest of men! what will cover you?’ she exclaimed, and peremptorily bidding him sit down in the drawing-room, she took one of the famous pair of pistols in her hand, and said, ’If I put myself in a similar position, and make myself decodletee too, will that satisfy you? You see these murderous weapons. Well, I am a coward. I dread fire-arms. They are laid there to impose on the world, and I believe they do. They have imposed on you. Now, you would never think of pretending to a moral quality you do not possess. But, silly, simple man that you are! You can give yourself the airs of wealth, buy horses to conceal your nakedness, and when you are taken upon the standard of your apparent income, you would rather seem to be beating a miserly retreat than behave frankly and honestly. I have a little overstated it, but I am near the mark.’

‘Your ladyship wanting courage!’ cried the General.

‘Refresh yourself by meditating on it,’ said she. ’And to prove it to you, I was glad to take this house when I knew I was to have a gallant gentleman for a neighbour. No visitors will be admitted, General Ople, so you are bare-throated only to me: sit quietly. One day you speculated on the paint in my cheeks for the space of a minute and a half:—I had said that I freckled easily. Your look signified that you really could not detect a single freckle for the paint. I forgave you, or I did not. But when I found you, on closer acquaintance, as indifferent to your daughter’s happiness as you had been to her reputation . . .’

‘My daughter! her reputation! her happiness!’

General Ople raised his eyes under a wave, half uttering the outcries.

’So indifferent to her reputation, that you allowed a young man to talk with her over the wall, and meet her by appointment: so reckless of the girl’s happiness, that when I tried to bring you to a treaty, on her behalf, you could not be dragged from thinking of yourself and your own affair. When I found that, perhaps I was predisposed to give you some of what my sisters used to call my spice. You would not honestly state the proportions of your income, and you affected to be faithful to the woman of seventy. Most preposterous! Could any caricature of mine exceed in grotesqueness your sketch of yourself? You are a brave and a generous man all the same: and I suspect it is more hoodwinking than egotism—or extreme egotism—that blinds you. A certain amount you

must have to be a man. You did not like my paint, still less did you like my sincerity; you were annoyed by my corrections of your habits of speech; you were horrified

Page 4465

by the age of seventy, and you were credulous—General Ople, listen to me, and remember that you have no collar on—you were credulous of my statement of my great age, or you chose to be so, or chose to seem so, because I had brushed your cat's coat against the fur. And then, full of yourself, not thinking of Elizabeth, but to withdraw in the chivalrous attitude of the man true to his word to the old woman, only stickling to bring a certain independence to the common stock, because—I quote you! and you have no collar on, mind—"you could not be at your wife's mercy," you broke from your proposal on the money question. Where was your consideration for Elizabeth then?

'Well, General, you were fond of thinking of yourself, and I thought I would assist you. I gave you plenty of subject matter. I will not say I meant to work a homoeopathic cure. But if I drive you to forget your collar, is it or is it not a triumph?

'No,' added Lady Camper, 'it is no triumph for me, but it is one for you, if you like to make the most of it. Your fault has been to quit active service, General, and love your ease too well. It is the fault of your countrymen. You must get a militia regiment, or inspectorship of militia. You are ten times the man in exercise. Why, do you mean to tell me that you would have cared for those drawings of mine when marching?'

'I think so, I say I think so,' remarked the General seriously.

'I doubt it,' said she. 'But to the point; here comes Elizabeth. If you have not much money to spare for her, according to your prudent calculation, reflect how this money has enfeebled you and reduced you to the level of the people round about us here—-who are, what? Inhabitants of gentlemanly residences, yes! But what kind of creature? They have no mental standard, no moral aim, no native chivalry. You were rapidly becoming one of them, only, fortunately for you, you were sensitive to ridicule.'

'Elizabeth shall have half my money settled on her,' said the General; 'though I fear it is not much. And if I can find occupation, my lady...'

'Something worthier than that,' said Lady Camper, pencilling outlines rapidly on the margin of a book, and he saw himself lashing a pony; 'or that,' and he was plucking at a cabbage; 'or that,' and he was bowing to three petticoated posts.

'The likeness is exact,' General Ople groaned.

'So you may suppose I have studied you,' said she. 'But there is no real likeness. Slight exaggerations do more harm to truth than reckless violations of it.

You would not have cared one bit for a caricature, if you had not nursed the absurd idea of being one of our conquerors. It is the very tragedy of modesty for a man like you to have such notions, my poor dear good friend. The modest are the most easily intoxicated when they sip at vanity. And reflect whether you have not been intoxicated,

for these young people have been wretched, and you have not observed it, though one of them was living with you, and is the child you love. There, I have done. Pray show a good face to Elizabeth.'

Page 4466

The General obeyed as well as he could. He felt very like a sheep that has come from a shearing, and when released he wished to run away. But hardly had he escaped before he had a desire for the renewal of the operation. 'She sees me through, she sees me through,' he was heard saying to himself, and in the end he taught himself, to say it with a secret exultation, for as it was on her part an extraordinary piece of insight to see him through, it struck him that in acknowledging the truth of it, he made a discovery of new powers in human nature.

General Ople studied Lady Camper diligently for fresh proofs of her penetration of the mysteries in his bosom; by which means, as it happened that she was diligently observing the two betrothed young ones, he began to watch them likewise, and took a pleasure in the sight. Their meetings, their partings, their rides out and home furnished him themes of converse. He soon had enough to talk of, and previously, as he remembered, he had never sustained a conversation of any length with composure and the beneficent sense of fulness. Five thousand pounds, to which sum Lady Camper reduced her stipulation for Elizabeth's dowry, he signed over to his dear girl gladly, and came out with the confession to her ladyship that a well-invested twelve thousand comprised his fortune. She shrugged she had left off pulling him this way and that, so his chains were enjoyable, and he said to himself: 'If ever she should in the dead of night want a man to defend her!' He mentioned it to Reginald, who had been the repository of Elizabeth's lamentations about her father being left alone, forsaken, and the young man conceived a scheme for causing his aunt's great bell to be rung at midnight, which would certainly have led to a dramatic issue and the happy re-establishment of our masculine ascendancy at the close of this history. But he forgot it in his bridegroom's delight, until he was making his miserable official speech at the wedding-breakfast, and set Elizabeth winking over a tear. As she stood in the hall ready to depart, a great van was observed in the road at the gates of Douro Lodge; and this, the men in custody declared to contain the goods and knick-knacks of the people who had taken the house furnished for a year, and were coming in that very afternoon.

'I remember, I say now I remember, I had a notice,' the General said cheerily to his troubled daughter.

'But where are you to go, papa?' the poor girl cried, close on sobbing.

'I shall get employment of some sort,' said he. 'I was saying I want it, I need it, I require it.'

'You are saying three times what once would have sufficed for,' said Lady Camper, and she asked him a few questions, frowned with a smile, and offered him a lodgement in his neighbour's house.

'Really, dearest Aunt Angela?' said Elizabeth.

’What else can I do, child? I have, it seems, driven him out of a gentlemanly residence, and I must give him a ladylike one. True, I would rather have had him at call, but as I have always wished for a policeman in the house, I may as well be satisfied with a soldier.’

Page 4467

‘But if you lose your character, my lady?’ said Reginald.

‘Then I must look to the General to restore it.’

General Ople immediately bowed his head over Lady Camper’s fingers.

‘An odd thing to happen to a woman of forty-one!’ she said to her great people, and they submitted with the best grace in the world, while the General’s ears tingled till he felt younger than Reginald. This, his reflections ran, or it would be more correct to say waltzed, this is the result of painting!—that you can believe a woman to be any age when her cheeks are tinted!

As for Lady Camper, she had been floated accidentally over the ridicule of the bruit of a marriage at a time of life as terrible to her as her fiction of seventy had been to General Ople; she resigned herself to let things go with the tide. She had not been blissful in her first marriage, she had abandoned the chase of an ideal man, and she had found one who was tunable so as not to offend her ears, likely ever to be a fund of amusement for her humour, good, impressible, and above all, very picturesque. There is the secret of her, and of how it came to pass that a simple man and a complex woman fell to union after the strangest division.

Etext editor’s bookmarks:

Can believe a woman to be any age when her cheeks are tinted
Modest are the most easily intoxicated when they sip at vanity
Nature is not of necessity always roaring
Only to be described in the tongue of auctioneers
Respected the vegetable yet more than he esteemed the flower
She seems honest, and that is the most we can hope of girls
Spare me that word “female” as long as you live
The mildness of assured dictatorship
When we see our veterans tottering to their fall

THE TALE OF CHLOE AN EPISODE IN THE HISTORY OF BEAU BEAMISH

By George Meredith

’Fair Chloe, we toasted of old,
As the Queen of our festival meeting;
Now Chloe is lifeless and cold;
You must go to the grave for her greeting.
Her beauty and talents were framed
To enkindle the proudest to win her;

Then let not the mem’ry be blamed
Of the purest that e’er was a sinner!’

Captain Chanter’s Collection.

CHAPTER I

A proper tenderness for the Peerage will continue to pass current the illustrious gentleman who was inflamed by Cupid’s darts to espouse the milkmaid, or dairymaid, under his ballad title of Duke of Dewlap: nor was it the smallest of the services rendered him by Beau Beamish, that he clapped the name upon her rustic Grace, the young duchess, the very first day of her arrival at the Wells. This happy inspiration of a wit never failing at a pinch has rescued one of our princeliest houses from the assaults of the vulgar, who are ever too rejoiced to bespatter and disfigure a brilliant coat-of-arms; insomuch that the ballad, to which we are indebted for the narrative of the meeting and marriage of the ducal pair, speaks of Dewlap in good faith—

Page 4468

O the ninth Duke of Dewlap I am, Susie dear!

without a hint of a domino title. So likewise the pictorial historian is merry over ‘Dewlap alliances’ in his description of the society of that period. He has read the ballad, but disregarded the memoirs of the beau. Writers of pretension would seem to have an animus against individuals of the character of Mr. Beamish. They will treat of the habits and manners of highwaymen, and quote obscure broadsheets and songs of the people to colour their story, yet decline to bestow more than a passing remark upon our domestic kings: because they are not hereditary, we may suppose. The ballad of ‘The Duke and the Dairymaid,’ ascribed with questionable authority to the pen of Mr. Beamish himself in a freak of his gaiety, was once popular enough to provoke the moralist to animadversions upon an order of composition that ’tempted every bouncing country lass to sidle an eye in a blowsy cheek’ in expectation of a coronet for her pains —and a wet ditch as the result! We may doubt it to have been such an occasion of mischief. But that mischief may have been done by it to a nobility-loving people, even to the love of our nobility among the people, must be granted; and for the particular reason, that the hero of the ballad behaved so handsomely. We perceive a susceptibility to adulteration in their worship at the sight of one of their number, a young maid, suddenly snatched up to the gaping heights of Luxury and Fashion through sheer good looks. Remembering that they are accustomed to a totally reverse effect from that possession, it is very perceptible how a breach in their reverence may come of the change.

Otherwise the ballad is innocent; certainly it is innocent in design. A fresher national song of a beautiful incident of our country life has never been written. The sentiments are natural, the imagery is apt and redolent of the soil, the music of the verse appeals to the dullest ear. It has no smell of the lamp, nothing foreign and far-fetched about it, but is just what it pretends to be, the carol of the native bird. A sample will show, for the ballad is much too long to be given entire:

Sweet Susie she tripped on a shiny May morn,
As blithe as the lark from the green-springing corn,
When, hard by a stile, ’twas her luck to behold
A wonderful gentleman covered with gold!

There was gold on his breeches and gold on his coat,
His shirt-frill was grand as a fifty-pound note;
The diamonds glittered all up him so bright,
She thought him the Milky Way clothing a Sprite!

‘Fear not, pretty maiden,’ he said with a smile;
’And, pray, let me help you in crossing the stile.
She bobbed him a curtsey so lovely and smart,
It shot like an arrow and fixed in his heart.

As light as a robin she hopped to the stone,
But fast was her hand in the gentleman’s own;
And guess how she stared, nor her senses could trust,
When this creamy gentleman knelt in the dust!

Page 4469

With a rhapsody upon her beauty, he informs her of his rank, for a flourish to the proposal of honourable and immediate marriage. He cannot wait. This is the fatal condition of his love: apparently a characteristic of amorous dukes. We read them in the signs extended to us. The minds of these august and solitary men have not yet been sounded; they are too distant. Standing upon their lofty pinnacles, they are as legible to the rabble below as a line of cuneiform writing in a page of old copybook roundhand. By their deeds we know them, as heathendom knows of its gods; and it is repeatedly on record that the moment they have taken fire they must wed, though the lady's finger be circled with nothing closer fitting than a ring of the bed-curtain. Vainly, as becomes a candid country lass, blue-eyed Susan tells him that she is but a poor dairymaid. He has been a student of women at Courts, in which furnace the sex becomes a transparency, so he recounts to her the catalogue of material advantages he has to offer. Finally, after his assurances that she is to be married by the parson, really by the parson, and a real parson—

> Sweet Susie is off for her parents' consent,
> And long must the old folk debate what it meant.
> She left them the eve of that happy May morn,
> To shine like the blossom that hangs from the thorn!

Apart from its historical value, the ballad is an example to poets of our day, who fly to mythological Greece, or a fanciful and morbid mediaevalism, or—save the mark!—-abstract ideas, for themes of song, of what may be done to make our English life poetically interesting, if they would but pluck the treasures presented them by the wayside; and Nature being now as then the passport to popularity, they have themselves to thank for their little hold on the heart of the people. A living native duke is worth fifty Phoebus Apollos to Englishmen, and a buxom young lass of the fields mounting from a pair of pails to the estate of duchess, a more romantic object than troops of your visionary Yseults and Guineveres.

CHAPTER II

A certain time after the marriage, his Grace alighted at the Wells, and did himself the honour to call on Mr. Beamish. Addressing that gentleman, to whom he was no stranger, he communicated the purport of his visit.

'Sir, and my very good friend,' he said, 'first let me beg you to abate the severity of your countenance, for if I am here in breach of your prohibition, I shall presently depart in compliance with it. I could indeed deplore the loss of the passion for play of which you effectually cured me. I was then armed against a crueller, that allows of no interval for a man to make his vow to recover!'

'The disease which is all crisis, I apprehend,' Mr. Beamish remarked.

’Which, sir, when it takes hold of dry wood, burns to the last splinter. It is now’—the duke fetched a tender groan—’three years ago that I had a caprice to marry a grandchild!’

Page 4470

‘Of Adam’s,’ Mr. Beamish said cheerfully. ’There was no legitimate bar to the union.’

’Unhappily none. Yet you are not to suppose I regret it. A most admirable creature, Mr. Beamish, a real divinity! And the better known, the more adored. There is the misfortune. At my season of life, when the greater and the minor organs are in a conspiracy to tell me I am mortal, the passion of love must be welcomed as a calamity, though one would not be free of it for the renewal of youth. You are to understand, that with a little awakening taste for dissipation, she is the most innocent of angels. Hitherto we have lived . . . To her it has been a new world. But she is beginning to find it a narrow one. No, no, she is not tired of my society. Very far from that. But in her present station an inclination for such gatherings as you have here, for example, is like a desire to take the air: and the healthy habits of my duchess have not accustomed her to be immured. And in fine, devote ourselves as we will, a term approaches when the enthusiasm for serving as your wife’s playfellow all day, running round tables and flying along corridors before a knotted handkerchief, is mightily relaxed. Yet the dread of a separation from her has kept me at these pastimes for a considerable period beyond my relish of them. Not that I acknowledge fatigue. I have, it seems, a taste for reflection; I am now much disposed to read and meditate, which cannot be done without repose. I settle myself, and I receive a worsted ball in my face, and I am expected to return it. I comply; and then you would say a nursery in arms. It would else be the deplorable spectacle of a beautiful young woman yawning.’

‘Earthquake and saltpetre threaten us less terribly,’ said Mr. Beamish.

’In fine, she has extracted a promise that ’this summer she shall visit the Wells for a month, and I fear I cannot break my pledge of my word; I fear I cannot.’

‘Very certainly I would not,’ said Mr. Beamish.

The duke heaved a sigh. ’There are reasons, family reasons, why my company and protection must be denied to her here. I have no wish . . . indeed my name, for the present, until such time as she shall have found her feet . . . and there is ever a penalty to pay for that. Ah, Mr. Beamish, pictures are ours, when we have bought them and hung them up; but who insures us possession of a beautiful work of Nature? I have latterly betaken me to reflect much and seriously. I am tempted to side with the Divines in the sermons I have read; the flesh is the habitation of a rebellious devil.’

‘To whom we object in proportion as we ourselves become quit of him,’ Mr. Beamish acquiesced.

’But this mania of young people for pleasure, eternal pleasure, is one of the wonders. It does not pall on them; they are insatiate.’

’There is the cataract, and there is the cliff. Potentate to potentate, duke—so long as you are on my territory, be it understood. Upon my way to a place of worship once, I passed a Puritan, who was complaining of a butterfly that fluttered prettily abroad in desecration of the Day of Rest. “Friend,” said I to him, “conclusively you prove to me that you are not a butterfly.” Surly did no more than favour me with the anathema of his countenance.’

Page 4471

’Cousin Beamish, my complaint of these young people is, that they miss their pleasure in pursuing it. I have lectured my duchess—’

‘Ha!’

‘Foolish, I own,’ said the duke. ’But suppose, now, you had caught your butterfly, and you could neither let it go nor consent to follow its vagaries. That poses you.’

‘Young people,’ said Mr. Beamish, ’come under my observation in this poor realm of mine—young and old. I find them prodigiously alike in their love of pleasure, differing mainly in their capacity to satisfy it. That is no uncommon observation. The young, have an edge which they are desirous of blunting; the old contrariwise. The cry of the young for pleasure is actually—I have studied their language—a cry for burdens. Curious! And the old ones cry for having too many on their shoulders: which is not astonishing. Between them they make an agreeable concert both to charm the ears and guide the steps of the philosopher, whose wisdom it is to avoid their tracks.’

’Good. But I have asked you for practical advice, and you give me an essay.’

’For the reason, duke, that you propose a case that suggests hanging. You mention two things impossible to be done. The alternative is, a garter and the bedpost. When we have come upon crossways, and we can decide neither to take the right hand nor the left, neither forward nor back, the index of the board which would direct us points to itself, and emphatically says, Gallows.’

’Beamish, I am distracted. If I refuse her the visit, I foresee dissensions, tears, games at ball, romps, not one day of rest remaining to me. I could be of a mind with your Puritan, positively. If I allow it, so innocent a creature in the atmosphere of a place like this must suffer some corruption. You should know that the station I took her from was . . . it was modest. She was absolutely a buttercup of the fields. She has had various masters. She dances . . . she dances prettily, I could say bewitchingly. And so she is now for airing her accomplishments: such are women!’

‘Have you heard of Chloe?’ said Mr. Beamish. ’There you have an example of a young lady uncorrupted by this place—of which I would only remark that it is best unvisited, but better tasted than longed for.’

’Chloe? A lady who squandered her fortune to redeem some ill-requiting rascal: I remember to have heard of her. She is here still? And ruined, of course?’

‘In purse.’

‘That cannot be without the loss of reputation.’

’Chloe’s champion will grant that she is exposed to the evils of improvidence. The more brightly shine her native purity, her goodness of heart, her trustfulness. She is a lady whose exaltation glows in her abasement.’

‘She has, I see, preserved her comeliness,’ observed the duke, with a smile.

Page 4472

’Despite the flying of the roses, which had not her heart’s patience. ’Tis now the lily that reigns. So, then, Chloe shall be attached to the duchess during her stay, and unless the devil himself should interfere, I guarantee her Grace against any worse harm than experience; and that,’ Mr. Beamish added, as the duke raised his arms at the fearful word, ’that shall be mild. Play she will; she is sure to play. Put it down at a thousand. We map her out a course of permissible follies, and she plays to lose the thousand by degrees, with as telling an effect upon a connubial conscience as we can produce.’

‘A thousand,’ said the duke, ’will be cheap indeed. I think now I have had a description of this fair Chloe, and from an enthusiast; a brune? elegantly mannered and of a good landed family; though she has thought proper to conceal her name. And that will be our difficulty, cousin Beamish.’

‘She was, under my dominion, Miss Martinsward,’ Mr. Beamish pursued. ’She came here very young, and at once her suitors were legion. In the way of women, she chose the worst among them; and for the fellow Caseldy she sacrificed the fortune she had inherited of a maternal uncle. To release him from prison, she paid all his debts; a mountain of bills, with the lawyers piled above—Pelion upon Ossa, to quote our poets. In fact, obeying the dictates of a soul steeped in generosity, she committed the indiscretion to strip herself, scandalizing propriety. This was immediately on her coming of age; and it was the death-blow to her relations with her family. Since then, honoured even by rakes, she has lived impoverished at the Wells. I dubbed her Chloe, and man or woman disrespectful to Chloe packs. From being the victim of her generous disposition, I could not save her; I can protect her from the shafts of malice.’

‘She has no passion for play?’ inquired the duke.

’She nourishes a passion for the man for whom she bled, to the exclusion of the other passions. She lives, and I believe I may say that it is the motive of her rising and dressing daily, in expectation of his advent.’

‘He may be dead.’

’The dog is alive. And he has not ceased to be Handsome Caseldy, they say. Between ourselves, duke, there is matter to break her heart. He has been the Count Caseldy of Continental gaming tables, and he is recently Sir Martin Caseldy, settled on the estate she made him free to take up intact on his father’s decease.’

‘Pah! a villain!’

’With a blacker brand upon him every morning that he looks forth across his property, and leaves her to languish! She still—I say it to the redemption of our sex—has offers. Her incomparable attractions of mind and person exercise the natural empire of beauty.

But she will none of them. I call her the Fair Suicide. She has died for love; and she is a ghost, a good ghost, and a pleasing ghost, but an apparition, a taper.

Page 4473

The duke fidgeted, and expressed a hope to hear that she was not of melancholy conversation; and again, that the subject of her discourse was not confined to love and lovers, happy or unhappy. He wished his duchess, he said, to be entertained upon gayer topics: love being a theme he desired to reserve to himself. 'This month!' he said, prognostically shaking and moaning. 'I would this month were over, and that we were well purged of it.'

Mr. Beamish reassured him. The wit and sprightliness of Chloe were so famous as to be considered medical, he affirmed; she was besieged for her company; she composed and sang impromptu verses, she played harp and harpsichord divinely, and touched the guitar, and danced, danced like the silvery moon on the waters of the mill pool. He concluded by saying that she was both humane and wise, humble-minded and amusing, virtuous yet not a Tartar; the best of companions for her Grace the young duchess. Moreover, he boldly engaged to carry the duchess through the term of her visit under a name that should be as good as a masquerade for concealing his Grace's, while giving her all the honours due to her rank.

'You strictly interpret my wishes,' said the duke; 'all honours, the foremost place, and my wrath upon man or woman gainsaying them!'

'Mine! if you please, duke,' said Mr. Beamish.

'A thousand pardons! I leave it to you, cousin. I could not be in safer hands. I am heartily bounders to you. Chloe, then. By the way, she has a decent respect for age?'

'She is reverentially inclined.'

'Not that. She is, I would ask, no wanton prattler of the charms and advantages of youth?'

'She has a young adorer that I have dubbed Alonzo, whom she scarce notices.'

'Nothing could be better. Alonzo: h'm! A faithful swain?'

'Life is his tree, upon which unceasingly he carves his mistress's initials.'

'She should not be too cruel. I recollect myself formerly: I was . . . Young men will, when long slighted, transfer their affections, and be warmer to the second flame than to the first. I put you on your guard. He follows her much? These lovers' paintings and puffings in the neighbourhood of the most innocent of women are contagious.'

'Her Grace will be running home all the sooner.'

'Or off!—may she forgive me! I am like a King John's Jew, forced to lend his treasure without security. What a world is ours! Nothing, Beamish, nothing desirable will you

have which is not coveted! Catch a prize, and you will find you are at war with your species. You have to be on the defensive from that moment. There is no such thing as peaceable procession on earth. Let it be a beautiful young woman!—Ah!'

Mr. Beamish replied bracingly, 'The champion wrestler challenges all comers while he wears the belt.'

The duke dejectedly assented. 'True; or he is challenged, say. Is there any tale we could tell her of this Alonzo? You could deport him for the month, my dear Beamish.'

Page 4474

'I commit no injustice unless with sufficient reason. It is an estimable youth, as shown by his devotion to a peerless woman. To endow her with his name and fortune is his only thought.'

'I perceive; an excellent young fellow! I have an incipient liking for this young Alonzo. You must not permit my duchess to laugh at him. Encourage her rather to advance his suit. The silliness of a young man will be no bad spectacle. Chloe, then. You have set my mind at rest, Beamish, and it is but another obligation added to the heap; so, if I do not speak of payment, the reason is that I know you would not have me bankrupt.'

The remainder of the colloquy of the duke and Mr. Beamish referred to the date of her Grace's coming to the Wells, the lodgement she was to receive, and other minor arrangements bearing upon her state and comfort; the duke perpetually observing, 'But I leave it all to you, Beamish,' when he had laid down precise instructions in these respects, even to the specification of the shopkeepers, the confectioner and the apothecary, who were to balance or cancel one another in the opposite nature of their supplies, and the haberdasher and the jeweller, with whom she was to make her purchases. For the duke had a recollection of giddy shops, and of giddy shopmen too; and it was by serving as one for a day that a certain great nobleman came to victory with a jealously guarded dame beautiful as Venus. 'I would have challenged the goddess!' he cried, and subsided from his enthusiasm plaintively, like a weak wind instrument. 'So there you see the prudence of a choice of shops. But I leave it to you, Beamish.' Similarly the great military commander, having done whatsoever a careful prevision may suggest to insure him victory, casts himself upon Providence, with the hope of propitiating the unanticipated and darkly possible.

CHAPTER III

The splendid equipage of a coach and six, with footmen in scarlet and green, carried Beau Beamish five miles along the road on a sunny day to meet the young duchess at the boundary of his territory, and conduct her in state to the Wells. Chloe sat beside him, receiving counsel with regard to her prospective duties. He was this day the consummate beau, suave, but monarchical, and his manner of speech partook of his external grandeur. 'Spy me the horizon, and apprise me if somewhere you distinguish a chariot,' he said, as they drew up on the rise of a hill of long descent, where the dusty roadway sank between its brown hedges, and crawled mounting from dry rush-spotted hollows to corn fields on a companion height directly facing them, at a remove of about three-quarters of a mile. Chloe looked forth, while the beau passingly raised his hat for coolness, and murmured, with a glance down the sultry track: 'It sweats the eye to see!'

Presently Chloe said, 'Now a dust blows. Something approaches. Now I discern horses, now a vehicle; and it is a chariot!'

Page 4475

Orders were issued to the outriders for horns to be sounded.

Both Chloe and Beau Beamish wrinkled their foreheads at the disorderly notes of triple horns, whose pealing made an acid in the air instead of sweetness.

‘You would say, kennel dogs that bay the moon!’ said the wincing beau. ’Yet, as you know, these fellows have been exercised. I have had them out in a meadow for hours, baked and drenched, to get them rid of their native cacophony. But they love it, as they love bacon and beans. The musical taste of our people is in the stage of the primitive appetite for noise, and for that they are gluttons.’

‘It will be pleasant to hear in the distance,’ Chloe replied.

’Ay, the extremer the distance, the pleasanter to hear. Are they advancing?’

‘They stop. There is a cavalier at the window. Now he doffs his hat.’

‘Sweepingly?’

Chloe described a semicircle in the grand manner.

The beau’s eyebrows rose. ‘Powers divine!’ he muttered. ’She is let loose from hand to hand, and midway comes a cavalier. We did not count on the hawks. So I have to deal with a cavalier! It signifies, my dear Chloe, that I must incontinently affect the passion if I am to be his match: nothing less.’

‘He has flown,’ said Chloe.

‘Whom she encounters after meeting me, I care not,’ quoth the beau, snapping a finger. ’But there has been an interval for damage with a lady innocent as Eve. Is she advancing?’

’The chariot is trotting down the hill. He has ridden back. She has no attendant horseman.’

’They were dismissed at my injunction ten miles off particularly to the benefit of the cavaliering horde, it would appear. In the case of a woman, Chloe, one blink of the eyelids is an omission of watchfulness.’

‘That is an axiom fit for the harem of the Grand Signior.’

’The Grand Signior might give us profitable lessons for dealing with the sex.’

‘Distrust us, and it is a declaration of war!’

‘Trust you, and the stopper is out of the smelling-bottle.’

‘Mr. Beamish, we are women, but we have souls.’

’The pip in the apple whose ruddy cheek allures little Tommy to rob the orchard is as good a preservative.’

‘You admit that men are our enemies?’

‘I maintain that they carry the banner of virtue.’

‘Oh, Mr. Beamish, I shall expire.’

’I forbid it in my lifetime, Chloe, for I wish to die believing in one woman.’

‘No flattery for me at the expense of my sisters!’

’Then fly to a hermitage; for all flattery is at somebody’s expense, child. ’Tis an essence-extract of humanity! To live on it, in the fashion of some people, is bad—it is downright cannibal. But we may sprinkle our handkerchiefs with it, and we should, if we would caress our noses with an air. Society, my Chloe, is a recommencement upon an upper level of the savage system; we must have our sacrifices. As, for instance, what say you of myself beside our booted bumpkin squires?’

Page 4476

‘Hundreds of them, Mr. Beamish!’

’That is a holocaust of squires reduced to make an incense for me, though you have not performed Druid rites and packed them in gigantic osier ribs. Be philosophical, but accept your personal dues. Grant us ours too. I have a serious intention to preserve this young duchess, and I expect my task to be severe. I carry the banner aforesaid; verily and penitentially I do. It is an error of the vulgar to suppose that all is dragon in the dragon’s jaws.’

‘Men are his fangs and claws.’

’Ay, but the passion for his fiery breath is in woman. She will take her leap and have her jump, will and will! And at the point where she will and she won’t, the dragon gulps and down she goes! However, the business is to keep our buttercup duchess from that same point. Is she near?’

‘I can see her,’ said Chloe.

Beau Beamish requested a sketch of her, and Chloe began: ’She is ravishing.’

Upon which he commented, ’Every woman is ravishing at forty paces, and still more so in imagination.’

’Beautiful auburn hair, and a dazzling red and white complexion, set in a blue coif.’

‘Her eyes?’

‘Melting blue.’

‘’Tis an English witch!’ exclaimed the beau, and he compassionately invoked her absent lord.

Chloe’s optics were no longer tasked to discern the fair lady’s lineaments, for the chariot windows came flush with those of the beau on the broad plateau of the hill. His coach door was opened. He sat upright, levelling his privileged stare at Duchess Susan until she blushed.

‘Ay, madam,’ quoth he, ‘I am not the first.’

‘La, sir!’ said she; ‘who are you?’

The beau deliberately raised his hat and bowed. ’He, madam, of whose approach the gentleman who took his leave of you on yonder elevation informed you.’

She looked artlessly over her shoulder, and at the beau alighting from his carriage. ‘A gentleman?’

‘On horseback.’

The duchess popped her head through the window on an impulse to measure the distance between the two hills.

‘Never!’ she cried.

‘Why, madam, did he deliver no message to announce me?’ said the beau, ruffling.

‘Goodness gracious! You must be Mr. Beamish,’ she replied.

He laid his hat on his bosom, and invited her to quit her carriage for a seat beside him. She stipulated, ‘If you are really Mr. Beamish?’ He frowned, and raised his head to convince her; but she would not be impressed, and he applied to Chloe to establish his identity. Hearing Chloe’s name, the duchess called out, ’Oh! there, now, that’s enough, for Chloe’s my maid here, and I know she’s a lady born, and we’re going to be friends. Hand me to Chloe. And you are Chloe?’ she said, after a frank stride from step to step of the carriages. ’And don’t mind being my maid? You do look a nice, kind creature. And I see you’re a lady born; I know in a minute.

Page 4477

You're dark, I'm fair; we shall suit. And tell me—hush!—what dreadful long eyes he has! I shall ask you presently what you think of me. I was never at the Wells before. Dear me! the coach has turned. How far off shall we hear the bells to say I'm coming? I know I'm to have bells. Mr. Beamish, Mr. Beamish! I must have a chatter with a woman, and I'm in awe of you, sir, that I am, but men and men I see to talk to for a lift of my finger, by the dozen, in my duke's palace—though they're old ones, that's true—but a woman who's a lady, and kind enough to be my maid, I haven't met yet since I had the right to wear a coronet. There, I'll hold Chloe's hand, and that'll do. You would tell me at once, Chloe, if I was not dressed to your taste; now, wouldn't you? As for talkative, that's a sign with me of my liking people. I really don't know what to say to my duke sometimes. I sit and think it so funny to be having a duke instead of a husband. You're off!'

The duchess laughed at Chloe's laughter. Chloe excused herself, but was informed by her mistress that it was what she liked.

'For the first two years,' she resumed, 'I could hardly speak a syllable. I stammered, I reddened, I longed to be up in my room brushing and curling my hair, and was ready to curtsey to everybody. Now I'm quite at home, for I've plenty of courage—except about death, and I'm worse about death than I was when I was a simple body with a gawk's "lawks!" in her round eyes and mouth for an egg. I wonder why that is? But isn't death horrible? And skeletons!' The duchess shuddered.

'It depends upon the skeleton,' said Beau Beamish, who had joined the conversation. 'Yours, madam, I would rather not meet, because she would precipitate me into transports of regret for the loss of the flesh. I have, however, met mine own and had reason for satisfaction with the interview.'

'Your own skeleton, sir!' said the duchess wonderingly and appalled.

'Unmistakably mine. I will call you to witness by an account of him.'

Duchess Susan gaped, and, 'Oh, don't!' she cried out; but added, 'It 's broad day, and I've got some one to sleep anigh me after dark'; with which she smiled on Chloe, who promised her there was no matter for alarm.

'I encountered my gentleman as I was proceeding to my room at night,' said the beau, 'along a narrow corridor, where it was imperative that one of us should yield the 'pas;' and, I must confess it, we are all so amazingly alike in our bones, that I stood prepared to demand place of him. For indubitably the fellow was an obstruction, and at the first glance repulsive. I took him for anybody's skeleton, Death's ensign, with his cachinnatory skull, and the numbered ribs, and the extraordinary splay feet—in fact, the whole ungainly and shaky hobbledehoy which man is built on, and by whose image in

his weaker moments he is haunted. I had, to be frank, been dancing on a supper with certain of our choicest Wits and

Page 4478

Beauties. It is a recipe for conjuring apparitions. Now, then, thinks I, my fine fellow, I will bounce you; and without a salutation I pressed forward. Madam, I give you my word, he behaved to the full pitch as I myself should have done under similar circumstances. Retiring upon an inclination of his structure, he draws up and fetches me a bow of the exact middle nick between dignity and service. I advance, he withdraws, and again the bow, devoid of obsequiousness, majestically condescending. These, thinks I, be royal manners. I could have taken him for the Sable King in person, stripped of his mantle. On my soul, he put me to the blush.'

'And is that all?' asked the duchess, relieving herself with a sigh.

'Why, madam,' quoth the beau, 'do you not see that he could have been none other than mine own, who could comport himself with that grand air and gracefulness when wounded by his closest relative? Upon his opening my door for me, and accepting the 'pas,' which I now right heartily accorded him, I recognized at once both him and the reproof he had designedly dealt me—or the wine supper I had danced on, perhaps I should say' and I protest that by such a display of supreme good breeding he managed to convey the highest compliment ever received by man, namely the assurance, that after the withering away of this mortal garb, I shall still be noted for urbanity and elegancy. Nay, and more, immortally, without the slip I was guilty of when I carried the bag of wine.'

Duchess Susan fanned herself to assist her digestion of the anecdote.

'Well, it's not so frightful a story, and I know you are the great Mr. Beamish;' she said.

He questioned her whether the gentleman had signalled him to her on the hill.

'What can he mean about a gentleman?' she turned to Chloe. 'My duke told me you would meet me, sir. And you are to protect me. And if anything happens, it is to be your fault.'

'Entirely,' said the beau. 'I shall therefore maintain a vigilant guard.'

'Except leaving me free. Oof! I've been boxed up so long. I declare, Chloe, I feel like a best dress out for a holiday, and a bit afraid of spoiling. I'm a real child, more than I was when my duke married me. I seemed to go in and grow up again, after I was raised to fortune. And nobody to tell of it! Fancy that! For you can't talk to old gentlemen about what's going on in your heart.'

'How of young gentlemen?' she was asked by the beau.

And she replied, 'They find it out.'

'Not if you do not assist them,' said he.

Duchess Susan let her eyelids and her underlie half drop, as she looked at him with the simple shyness of one of nature's thoughts in her head at peep on the pastures of the world. The melting blue eyes and the cherry lip made an exceedingly quickening picture. 'Now, I wonder if that is true?' she transferred her slyness to speech.

Page 4479

‘Beware the middle-aged!’ he exclaimed.

She appealed to Chloe. ‘And I’m sure they’re the nicest.’

Chloe agreed that they were.

The duchess measured Chloe and the beau together, with a mind swift in apprehending all that it hungered for.

She would have pursued the pleasing theme had she not been directed to gaze below upon the towers and roofs of the Wells, shining sleepily in a siesta of afternoon Summer sunlight.

With a spread of her silken robe, she touched the edifice of her hair, murmuring to Chloe, ’I can’t abide that powder. You shall see me walk in a hoop. I can. I’ve done it to slow music till my duke clapped hands. I’m nothing sitting to what I am on my feet. That’s because I haven’t got fine language yet. I shall. It seems to come last. So, there ’s the place. And whereabouts do all the great people meet and prommy—?’

‘They promenade where you see the trees, madam,’ said Chloe.

’And where is it where the ladies sit and eat jam tarts with whipped cream on ’em, while the gentlemen stand and pay compliments?’

Chloe said it was at a shop near the pump room.

Duchess Susan looked out over the house-tops, beyond the dusty hedges.

‘Oh, and that powder!’ she cried. ’I hate to be out of the fashion and a spectacle. But I do love my own hair, and I have such a lot, and I like the colour, and so does my duke. Only, don’t let me be fingered at. If once I begin to blush before people, my courage is gone; my singing inside me is choked; and I’ve a real lark going on in me all day long, rain or sunshine—hush, all about love and amusement.’

Chloe smiled, and Duchess Susan said, ’Just like a bird, for I don’t know what it is.’

She looked for Chloe to say that she did.

At the moment a pair of mounted squires rode up, and the coach stopped, while Beau Beamish gave orders for the church bells to be set ringing, and the band to meet and precede his equipage at the head of the bath avenue: ‘in honour of the arrival of her Grace the Duchess of Dewlap.’

He delivered these words loudly to his men, and turned an effulgent gaze upon the duchess, so that for a minute she was fascinated and did not consult her hearing; but

presently she fell into an uneasiness; the signs increased, she bit her lip, and after breathing short once or twice, 'Was it meaning me, Mr. Beamish?' she said.

'You, madam, are the person whom we 'delight to honour,' he replied.

'Duchess of what?' she screwed uneasy features to hear.

'Duchess of Dewlap,' said he.

'It's not my title, sir.'

'It is your title on my territory, madam.'

Page 4480

She made her pretty nose and upper lip ugly with a sneer of 'Dew—! And enter that town before all those people as Duchess of . . . Oh, no, I won't; I just won't! Call back those men now, please; now, if you please. Pray, Mr. Beamish! You'll offend me, sir. I'm not going to be a mock. You'll offend my duke, sir. He'd die rather than have my feelings hurt. Here's all my pleasure spoilt. I won't and I sha'n't enter the town as duchess of that stupid name, so call 'em back, call 'em back this instant. I know who I am and what I am, and I know what's due to me, I do.'

Beau Beamish rejoined, 'I too. Chloe will tell you I am lord here.'

'Then I'll go home, I will. I won't be laughed at for a great lady ninny. I'm a real lady of high rank, and such I'll appear. What 's a Duchess of Dewlap? One might as well be Duchess of Cowstail, Duchess of Mopsend. And those people! But I won't be that. I won't be played with. I see them staring! No, I can make up my mind, and I beg you to call back your men, or I'll go back home.' She muttered, 'Be made fun of—made a fool of!'

'Your Grace's chariot is behind,' said the beau.

His despotic coolness provoked her to an outcry and weeping: she repeated, 'Dewlap! Dewlap!' in sobs; she shook her shoulders and hid her face.

'You are proud of your title, are you, madam?' said he.

'I am.' She came out of her hands to answer him proudly. 'That I am!' she meant for a stronger affirmation.

'Then mark me,' he said impressively; 'I am your duke's friend, and you are under my charge here. I am your guardian and you are my ward, and you can enter the town only on the condition of obedience to me. Now, mark me, madam; no one can rob you of your real name and title saving yourself. But you are entering a place where you will encounter a thousand temptations to tarnish, and haply forfeit it. Be warned do nothing that will.'

'Then I'm to have my own title?' said she, clearing up.

'For the month of your visit you are Duchess of Dewlap.'

'I say I sha'n't!'

'You shall.'

'Never, sir!'

'I command it.'

She flung herself forward, with a wail, upon Chloe's bosom. 'Can't you do something for me?' she whimpered.

'It is impossible to move Mr. Beamish,' Chloe said.

Out of a pause, composed of sobs and sighs, the duchess let loose in a broken voice: 'Then I 'm sure I think—I think I'd rather have met—have met his skeleton!'

Her sincerity was equal to wit.

Beau Beamish shouted. He cordially applauded her, and in the genuine kindness of an admiration that surprised him, he permitted himself the liberty of taking and saluting her fingers. She fancied there was another chance for her, but he frowned at the mention of it.

Page 4481

Upon these proceedings the exhilarating sound of the band was heard; simultaneously a festival peal of bells burst forth; and an admonishment of the necessity for concealing her chagrin and exhibiting both station and a countenance to the people, combined with the excitement of the new scenes and the marching music to banish the acuter sense of disappointment from Duchess Susan's mind; so she very soon held herself erect, and wore a face open to every wonder, impressionable as the blue lake-surface, crisped here and there by fitful breezes against a level sun.

CHAPTER IV

It was an axiom with Mr. Beamish, our first, if not our only philosophical beau and a gentleman of some thoughtfulness, that the social English require tyrannical government as much as the political are able to dispense with it: and this he explained by an exposition of the character of a race possessed of the eminent virtue of individual self-assertion, which causes them to insist on good elbowroom wherever they gather together. Society, however, not being tolerable where the smoothness of intercourse is disturbed by a perpetual punching of sides, the merits of the free citizen in them become their demerits when a fraternal circle is established, and they who have shown an example of civilization too notable in one sphere to call for eulogy, are often to be seen elbowing on the ragged edge of barbarism in the other. They must therefore be reduced to accept laws not of their own making, and of an extreme rigidity.

Here too is a further peril; for the gallant spirits distinguishing them in the state of independence may (he foresaw the melancholy experience of a later age) abandon them utterly in subjection, and the glorious boisterousness befitting the village green forsake them even in their haunts of liberal association, should they once be thoroughly tamed by authority. Our 'merrie England' will then be long-faced England, an England of fallen chaps, like a boar's head, bearing for speech a lemon in the mouth: good to feast on, mayhap; not with!

Mr. Beamish would actually seem to have foreseen the danger of a transition that he could watch over only in his time; and, as he said, 'I go, as I came, on a flash'; he had neither ancestry nor descendants: he was a genius, he knew himself a solitary, therefore, in spite of his efforts to create his like. Within his district he did effect something, enough to give him fame as one of the princely fathers of our domestic civilization, though we now appear to have lost by it more than formerly we gained. The chasing of the natural is ever fraught with dubious hazards. If it gallops back, according to the proverb, it will do so at the charge: commonly it gallops off, quite off; and then for any kind of animation our precarious dependence is upon brains: we have to live on our wits, which are ordinarily less productive than land, and cannot be remitted in entail.

Page 4482

Rightly or wrongly (there are differences of opinion about it) Mr. Beamish repressed the chthonic natural with a rod of iron beneath his rule. The hoyden and the bumpkin had no peace until they had given public imitations of the lady and the gentleman; nor were the lady and the gentleman privileged to be what he called ‘free flags.’ He could be charitable to the passion, but he bellowed the very word itself (hauled up smoking from the brimstone lake) against them that pretended to be shamelessly guilty of the peccadilloes of gallantry. His famous accost of a lady threatening to sink, and already performing like a vessel in that situation: ’So, madam, I hear you are preparing to enrol yourself in the very ancient order?’ . . . (he named it) was a piece of insolence that involved him in some discord with the lady’s husband and ’the rascal steward,’ as he chose to term the third party in these affairs: yet it is reputed to have saved the lady.

Furthermore, he attacked the vulgarity of persons of quality, and he has told a fashionable dame who was indulging herself in a marked sneer of disdain, not improving to her features, ’that he would be pleased to have her assurance it was her face she presented to mankind’: a thing—thanks perhaps to him chiefly—no longer possible of utterance. One of the sex asking him why he addressed his persecutions particularly to women: ‘Because I fight your battles,’ says he, ’and I find you in the ranks of the enemy.’ He treated them as traitors.

He was nevertheless well supported by a sex that compensates for dislike of its friend before a certain age by a cordial recognition of him when it has touched the period. A phalanx of great dames gave him the terrors of Olympus for all except the natively audacious, the truculent and the insufferably obtuse; and from the midst of them he launched decree and bolt to good effect: not, of course, without receiving return missiles, and not without subsequent question whether the work of that man was beneficial to the country, who indeed tamed the bumpkin squire and his brood, but at the cost of their animal spirits and their gift of speech; *viz*. by making petrifactions of them. In the surgical operation of tracheotomy, a successful treatment of the patient hangs, we believe, on the promptness and skill of the introduction of the artificial windpipe; and it may be that our unhappy countrymen when cut off from the source of their breath were not neatly handled; or else that there is a physical opposition in them to anything artificial, and it must be nature or nothing. The dispute shall be left where it stands.

Page 4483

Now, to venture upon parading a beautiful young Duchess of Dewlap, with an odour of the shepherdess about her notwithstanding her acquired art of stepping conformably in a hoop, and to demand full homage of respect for a lady bearing such a title, who had the intoxicating attractions of the ruddy orchard apple on the tree next the roadside wall, when the owner is absent, was bold in Mr. Beamish, passing temerity; nor would even he have attempted it had he not been assured of the support of his phalanx of great ladies. They indeed, after being taken into the secret, had stipulated that first they must have an inspection of the transformed dairymaid; and the review was not unfavourable. Duchess Susan came out of it more scatheless than her duke. She was tongue-tied, and her tutored walking and really admirable stature helped her to appease, the critics of her sex; by whom her too readily blushful innocence was praised, with a reserve, expressed in the remark, that she was a monstrous fine toy for a duke's second childhood, and should never have been let fly from his nursery. Her milliner was approved. The duke was a notorious connoisseur of female charms, and would see, of course, to the decorous adornment of her person by the best of modistes. Her smiling was pretty, her eyes were soft; she might turn out good, if well guarded for a time; but these merits of the woman are not those of the great lady, and her title was too strong a beam on her character to give it a fair chance with her critics. They one and all recommended powder for her hair and cheeks. That odour of the shepherdess could be exorcised by no other means, they declared. Her blushing was indecent.

Truly the critics of the foeman sex behaved in a way to cause the blushes to swarm rosy as the troops of young Loves round Cytherea in her sea-birth, when, some soaring, and sinking some, they flutter like her loosened zone, and breast the air thick as flower petals on the summer's breath, weaving her net for the world. Duchess Susan might protest her inability to keep her blushes down; that the wrong was done by the insolent eyes, and not by her artless cheeks. Ay, but nature, if we are to tame these men, must be swathed and concealed, partly stifled, absolutely stifled upon occasion. The natural woman does not move a foot without striking earth to conjure up the horrid apparition of the natural man, who is not as she, but a cannibal savage. To be the light which leads, it is her business to don the misty vesture of an idea, that she may dwell as an idea in men's minds, very dim, very powerful, but abstruse, unseizable. Much wisdom was imparted to her on the subject, and she understood a little, and echoed hollow to the remainder, willing to show entire docility as far as her intelligence consented to be awake. She was in that stage of the dainty, faintly tinged innocence of the amorousness of themselves when beautiful young women who have not been caught for schooling in infancy deem it a defilement to be made to appear other than the blessed nature has made them, which has made them beautiful, and surely therefore deserves to be worshipped. The lectures of the great ladies and Chloe's counsels failed to persuade her to use the powder puff-ball. Perhaps too, as timidity quitted her, she enjoyed her distinctiveness in their midst.

Page 4484

But the distinctiveness of a Duchess of Dewlap with the hair and cheeks of our native fields, was fraught with troubles outrunning Mr. Beamish's calculations. He had perceived that she would be attractive; he had not reckoned on the homogeneousness of her particular English charms. A beauty in red, white, and blue is our goddess Venus with the apple of Paris in her hand; and after two visits to the Pump Room, and one promenade in the walks about the Assembly House, she had as completely divided the ordinary guests of the Wells into male and female in opinion as her mother Nature had done in it sex. And the men would not be silenced; they had gazed on their divinest, and it was for the women to succumb to that unwholesome state, so full of thunder. Knights and squires, military and rural, threw up their allegiance right and left to devote themselves to this robust new vision, and in their peculiar manner, with a general View-halloo, and Yoicks, Tally-ho, and away we go, pelt ahead! Unexampled as it is in England for Beauty to kindle the ardours of the scent of the fox, Duchess Susan did more—she turned all her followers into hounds; they were madmen: within a very few days of her entrance bets raged about her, and there were brawls, jolly flings at her character in the form of lusty encomium, givings of the lie, and upon one occasion a knock-down blow in public, as though the place had never known the polishing touch of Mr. Beamish.

He was thrown into great perplexity by that blow. Discountenancing the duel as much as he could, an affair of the sword was nevertheless more tolerable than the brutal fist: and of all men to be guilty of it, who would have anticipated the young Alonzo, Chloe's quiet, modest lover! He it was. The case came before Mr. Beamish for his decision; he had to pronounce an impartial judgement, and for some time, during the examination of evidence, he suffered, as he assures us in his Memoirs, a royal agony. To have to strike with the glaive of Justice them whom they most esteem, is the greatest affliction known to kings. He would have done it: he deserved to reign. Happily the evidence against the gentleman who was tumbled, Mr. Ralph Shepster, excused Mr. Augustus Camwell, otherwise Alonzo, for dealing with him promptly to shut his mouth.

This Shepster, a raw young squire, 'reeking,' Beau Beamish writes of him, 'one half of the soil, and t' other half of the town,' had involved Chloe in his familiar remarks upon the Duchess of Dewlap; and the personal respect entertained by Mr. Beamish for Chloe so strongly approved Alonzo's championship of her, that in giving judgement he laid stress on young Alonzo's passion for Chloe, to prove at once the disinterestedness of the assailant, and the judicial nature of the sentence: which was, that Mr. Ralph Shepster should undergo banishment, and had the right to demand reparation. The latter part of this decree assisted in effecting the execution of the former. Shepster declined cold steel, calling it murder, and was effusive of nature's logic on the subject.

Page 4485

’Because a man comes and knocks me down, I’m to go up to him and ask him to run me through!’

His shake of the head signified that he was not such a noodle. Voluble and prolific of illustration, as is no one so much as a son of nature inspired to speak her words of wisdom, he defied the mandate, and refused himself satisfaction, until in the strangest manner possible flights of white feathers beset him, and he became a mark for persecution too trying for the friendship of his friends. He fled, repeating his tale, that he had seen ‘Beamish’s Duchess,’ and Chloe attending her, at an assignation in the South Grove, where a gentleman, unknown to the Wells, presented himself to the adventurous ladies, and they walked together—a tale ending with nods.

Shepster’s banishment was one of those victories of justice upon which mankind might be congratulated if they left no commotion behind. But, as when a boy has been horsed before his comrades, dread may visit them, yet is there likewise devilry in the school; and everywhere over earth a summary punishment that does not sweep the place clear is likely to infect whom it leaves remaining. The great law-givers, Lycurgus, Draco, Solon, Beamish, sorrowfully acknowledge that they have had recourse to infernal agents, after they have thus purified their circle of an offender. Doctors confess to the same of their physic. The expelling agency has next to be expelled, and it is a subtle poison, affecting our spirits. Duchess Susan had now the incense of a victim to heighten her charms; like the treasure-laden Spanish galleon for whom, on her voyage home from South American waters, our enterprising light-craft privateers lay in wait, she had the double attraction of being desirable and an enemy. To watch above her conscientiously was a harassing business.

Mr. Beamish sent for Chloe, and she came to him at once. Her look was curious; he studied it while they conversed. So looks one who is watching the sure flight of an arrow, or the happy combinations of an intrigue. Saying, ‘I am no inquisitor, child,’ he ventured upon two or three modest inquisitions with regard to her mistress. The title he had disguised Duchess Susan in, he confessed to rueing as the principal cause of the agitation of his principality. ‘She is courted,’ he said, ’less like a citadel waving a flag than a hostelry where the demand is for sitting room and a tankard! These be our manners. Yet, I must own, a Duchess of Dewlap is a provocation, and my exclusive desire to protect the name of my lord stands corrected by the perils environing his lady. She is other than I supposed her; she is, we will hope, an excellent good creature, but too attractive for most and drawbridge and the customary defences to be neglected.

Chloe met his interrogatory with a ready report of the young duchess’s innocence and good nature that pacified Mr. Beamish.

‘And you?’ said he.

She smiled for answer.

Page 4486

That smile was not the common smile; it was one of an eager exultingness, producing as he gazed the twitch of an inquisitive reflection of it on his lips. Such a smile bids us guess and quickens us to guess, warns us we burn and speeds our burning, and so, like an angel wafting us to some heaven-feasting promontory, lifts us out of ourselves to see in the universe of colour what the mouth has but pallid speech to tell. That is the very heart's language; the years are in a look, as mount and vale of the dark land spring up in lightning.

He checked himself: he scarce dared to say it.

She nodded.

'You have seen the man, Chloe?'

Her smiling broke up in the hard lines of an ecstasy neighbouring pain. 'He has come; he is here; he is faithful; he has not forgotten me. I was right. I knew! I knew!'

'Caseldy has come?'

'He has come. Do not ask. To have him! to see him! Mr. Beamish, he is here.'

'At last!'

'Cruel!'

'Well, Caseldy has come, then! But now, friend Chloe, you should be made aware that the man—'

She stopped her ears. As she did so, Mr. Beamish observed a thick silken skein dangling from one hand. Part of it was plaited, and at the upper end there was a knot. It resembled the commencement of her manufactory of a whip: she swayed it to and fro, allowing him to catch and lift the threads on his fingers for the purpose of examining her work. There was no special compliment to pay, so he dropped it without remark.

Their faces had expressed her wish to hear nothing from him of Caseldy and his submission to say nothing. Her happiness was too big; she appeared to beg to lie down with it on her bosom, in the manner of an outworn, young mother who has now first received her infant in her arms from the nurse.

CHAPTER V

Humouring Chloe with his usual considerateness, Mr. Beamish forbore to cast a shadow on her new-born joy, and even within himself to doubt the security of its foundation. Caseldy's return to the Wells was at least some assurance of his constancy, seeing that

here they appointed to meet when he and Chloe last parted. All might be well, though it was unexplained why he had not presented himself earlier. To the lightest inquiry Chloe's reply was a shiver of happiness.

Moreover, Mr. Beamish calculated that Caseldy would be a serviceable ally in commanding a proper respect for her Grace the Duchess of Dewlap. So he betook himself cheerfully to Caseldy's lodgings to deliver a message of welcome, meeting, on his way thither, Mr. Augustus Camwell, with whom he had a short conversation, greatly to his admiration of the enamoured young gentleman's goodness and self-compression in speaking of Caseldy and Chloe's better fortune. Mr. Camwell seemed hurried.

Page 4487

Caseldy was not at home, and Mr. Beamish proceeded to the lodgings of the duchess. Chloe had found her absent. The two consulted. Mr. Beamish put on a serious air, until Chloe mentioned the pastrycook's shop, for Duchess Susan had a sweet tooth; she loved a visit to the pastrycook's, whose jam tarts were dearer to her than his more famous hot mutton pies. The pastry cook informed Mr. Beamish that her Grace had been in his shop, earlier than usual, as it happened, and accompanied by a foreign-looking gentleman wearing moustachois. Her Grace, the pastrycook said, had partaken of several tarts, in common with the gentleman, who complimented him upon his excelling the Continental confectioner. Mr. Beamish glanced at Chloe. He pursued his researches down at the Pump Room, while she looked round the ladies' coffee house. Encountering again, they walked back to the duchess's lodgings, where a band stood playing in the road, by order of her Grace; but the duchess was away, and had not been seen since her morning's departure.

'What sort of character would you give mistress Susan of Dewlap, from your personal acquaintance with it?' said Mr. Beamish to Chloe, as they stepped from the door.

Chloe mused and said, 'I would add "good" to the unkindest comparison you could find for her.'

'But accepting the comparison!' Mr. Beamish nodded, and revolved upon the circumstance of their being very much in nature's hands with Duchess Susan, of whom it might be said that her character was good, yet all the more alive to the temptations besetting the Spring season. He allied Chloe's adjective to a number of epithets equally applicable to nature and to women, according to current ideas, concluding: 'Count, they call your Caseldy at his lodgings. "The Count he is out for an airing." He is counted out. Ah! you will make him drop that "Count" when he takes you from here.'

'Do not speak of the time beyond the month,' said Chloe, so urgently on a rapid breath as to cause Mr. Beamish to cast an inquiring look at her.

She answered it, 'Is not one month of brightness as much as we can ask for?'

The beau clapped his elbows complacently to his sides in philosophical concord with her sentiment.

In the afternoon, on the parade, they were joined by Mr. Camwell, among groups of fashionable ladies and their escorts, pacing serenely, by medical prescription, for an appetite. As he did not comment on the absence of the duchess, Mr. Beamish alluded to it; whereupon he was informed that she was about the meadows, and had been there for some hours.

'Not unguarded,' he replied to Mr. Beamish.

‘Aha!’ quoth the latter; ‘we have an Argus!’ and as the duchess was not on the heights, and the sun’s rays were mild in cloud, he agreed to his young friend’s proposal that they should advance to meet her. Chloe walked with them, but her face was disdainful; at the stiles she gave her hand to Mr. Beamish; she did not address a word to Mr. Camwell, and he knew the reason. Nevertheless he maintained his air of soldierly resignation to the performance of duty, and held his head like a gentleman unable to conceive the ignominy of having played spy. Chloe shrank from him.

Page 4488

Duchess Susan was distinguished coming across a broad uncut meadow, tirra-lirraing beneath a lark, Caseldy in attendance on her. She stopped short and spoke to him; then came forward, crying ingenuously. 'Oh, Mr. Beamish, isn't this just what you wanted me to do?'

'No, madam,' said he, 'you had my injunctions to the contrary.'

'La!' she exclaimed, 'I thought I was to run about in the fields now and then to preserve my simplicity. I know I was told so, and who told me!'

Mr. Beamish bowed effusively to the introduction of Caseldy, whose fingers he touched in sign of the renewal of acquaintance, and with a laugh addressed the duchess:

'Madam, you remind me of a tale of my infancy. I had a juvenile comrade of the tenderest age, by name Tommy Plumston, and he enjoyed the privilege of intimacy with a component urchin yclept Jimmy Clungeon, with which adventurous roamer, in defiance of his mother's interdict against his leaving the house for a minute during her absence from home, he departed on a tour of the district, resulting, perhaps as a consequence of its completeness, in this, that at a distance computed at four miles from the maternal mansion, he perceived his beloved mama with sufficient clearness to feel sure that she likewise had seen him. Tommy consulted with Jimmy, and then he sprang forward on a run to his frowning mama, and delivered himself in these artless words, which I repeat as they were uttered, to give you the flavour of the innocent babe: he said, "I frink I frought I hear you call me, ma! and Jimmy Clungeon, he frought he frink so too!" So, you see, the pair of them were under the impression that they were doing right. There is a delicate distinction in the tenses of each frinking where the other frought, enough in itself to stamp sincerity upon the statement.'

Caseldy said, 'The veracity of a boy possessing a friend named Clungeon is beyond contest.'

Duchess Susan opened her eyes. 'Four miles from home! And what did his mother do to him?'

'Tommy's mama,' said Mr. Beamish, and with the resplendent licence of the period which continued still upon tolerable terms with nature under the compromise of decorous 'Oh-fie!' flatly declared the thing she did.

'I fancy, sir, that I caught sight of your figure on the hill yonder about an hour or so earlier,' said Caseldy to Mr. Camwell.

'If it was at the time when you were issuing from that wood, sir, your surmise is correct,' said the young gentleman.

'You are long-sighted, sir!'

‘I am, sir.’

‘And so am I.’

‘And I,’ said Chloe.

‘Our Chloe will distinguish you accurately at a mile, and has done it,’ observed Mr. Beamish.

’One guesses tiptoe on a suspicion, and if one is wrong it passes, and if one is right it is a miracle,’ she said, and raised her voice on a song to quit the subject.

’Ay, ay, Chloe; so then you had a suspicion, you rogue, the day we had the pleasure of meeting the duchess, had you?’ Mr. Beamish persisted.

Page 4489

Duchess Susan interposed. ‘Such a pretty song! and you to stop her, sir!’

Caseldy took up the air.

‘Oh, you two together!’ she cried. ’I do love hearing music in the fields; it is heavenly. Bands in the town and voices in the green fields, I say! Couldn’t you join Chloe, Mr .... Count, sir, before we come among the people, here where it ’s all so nice and still. Music! and my heart does begin so to pit-a-pat. Do you sing, Mr. Alonzo?’

‘Poorly,’ the young gentleman replied.

’But the Count can sing, and Chloe’s a real angel when she sings; and won’t you, dear?’ she implored Chloe, to whom Caseldy addressed a prelude with a bow and a flourish of the hand.

Chloe’s voice flew forth. Caseldy’s rich masculine matched it. The song was gay; he snapped his finger at intervals in foreign style, singing big-chested, with full notes and a fine abandonment, and the quickest susceptibility to his fair companion’s cunning modulations, and an eye for Duchess Susan’s rapture.

Mr. Beamish and Mr. Camwell applauded them.

‘I never can tell what to say when I’m brimming’; the duchess let fall a sigh. ’And he can play the flute, Mr. Beamish. He promised me he would go into the orchestra and play a bit at one of your nice evening delicious concerts, and that will be nice—Oh!’

‘He promised you, madam, did he so?’ said the beau. ’Was it on your way to the Wells that he promised you?’

‘On my way to the Wells!’ she exclaimed softly. ’Why, how could anybody promise me a thing before ever he saw me? I call that a strange thing to ask a person. No, to-day, while we were promenading; and I should hear him sing, he said. He does admire his Chloe so. Why, no wonder, is it, now? She can do everything; knit, sew, sing, dance—-and talk! She’s never uneasy for a word. She makes whole scenes of things go round you, like a picture peep-show, I tell her. And always cheerful. She hasn’t a minute of grumps; and I’m sometimes a dish of stale milk fit only for pigs.

With your late hours here, I’m sure I want tickling in the morning, and Chloe carols me one of her songs, and I say, “There’s my bird!"’

Mr. Beamish added, ‘And you will remember she has a heart.’

‘I should think so!’ said the duchess.

‘A heart, madam!’

‘Why, what else?’

Nothing other, the beau, by his aspect, was constrained to admit.

He appeared puzzled by this daughter of nature in a coronet; and more on her remarking, ‘You know about her heart, Mr. Beamish.’

He acquiesced, for of course he knew of her life-long devotion to Caseldy; but there was archness in her tone. However, he did not expect a woman of her education to have the tone perfectly concordant with the circumstances. Speaking tentatively of Caseldy’s handsome face and figure, he was pleased to hear the duchess say, ‘So I tell Chloe.’

Page 4490

‘Well,’ said he, ‘we must consider them united; they are one.’

Duchess Susan replied, ’That’s what I tell him; she will do anything you wish.’

He repeated these words with an interjection, and decided in his mind that they were merely silly. She was a real shepherdess by birth and nature, requiring a strong guard over her attractions on account of her simplicity; such was his reading of the problem; he had conceived it at the first sight of her, and always recurred to it under the influence of her artless eyes, though his theories upon men and women were astute, and that cavalier perceived by long-sighted Chloe at Duchess Susan’s coach window perturbed him at whiles. Habitually to be anticipating the simpleton in a particular person is the sure way of being sometimes the dupe, as he would not have been the last to warn a neophyte; but abstract wisdom is in need of an unappeased suspicion of much keenness of edge, if we would have it alive to cope with artless eyes and our prepossessed fancy of their artlessness.

‘You talk of Chloe to him?’ he said.

She answered. ’Yes, that I do. And he does love her! I like to hear him. He is one of the gentlemen who don’t make me feel timid with them.’

She received a short lecture on the virtues of timidity in preserving the sex from danger; after which, considering that the lady who does not feel timid with a particular cavalier has had no sentiment awakened, he relinquished his place to Mr. Camwell, and proceeded to administer the probe to Caseldy.

That gentleman was communicatively candid. Chloe had left him, and he related how, summoned home to England and compelled to settle a dispute threatening a lawsuit, he had regretfully to abstain from visiting the Wells for a season, not because of any fear of the attractions of play—he had subdued the frailty of the desire to play—but because he deemed it due to his Chloe to bring her an untroubled face, and he wished first to be the better of the serious annoyances besetting him. For some similar reason he had not written; he wished to feast on her surprise. ‘And I had my reward,’ he said, as if he had been the person principally to suffer through that abstinence. ’I found—I may say it to you, Mr. Beamish love in her eyes. Divine by nature, she is one of the immortals, both in appearance and in steadfastness.’

They referred to Duchess Susan. Caseldy reluctantly owned that it would be an unkindness to remove Chloe from attendance on her during the short remaining term of her stay at the Wells; and so he had not proposed it, he said, for the duchess was a child, an innocent, not stupid by any means; but, of course, her transplanting from an inferior to an exalted position put her under disadvantages.

Mr. Beamish spoke of the difficulties of his post as guardian, and also of the strange cavalier seen at her carriage window by Chloe.

Caseldy smiled and said, ’If there was one—and Chloe is rather long—sighted—we can hardly expect her to confess it.’

Page 4491

‘Why not, sir, if she be this piece of innocence?’ Mr. Beamish was led to inquire.

‘She fears you, sir,’ Caseldy answered. ’You have inspired her with an extraordinary fear of you.’

‘I have?’ said the beau: it had been his endeavour to inspire it, and he swelled somewhat, rather with relief at the thought of his possessing a power to control his delicate charge, than with our vanity; yet would it be audacious to say that there was not a dose of the latter. He was a very human man; and he had, as we have seen, his ideas of the effect of the impression of fear upon the hearts of women. Something, in any case, caused him to forget the cavalier.

They were drawn to the three preceding them, by a lively dissension between Chloe and Mr. Camwell.

Duchess Susan explained it in her blunt style: ’She wants him to go away home, and he says he will, if she’ll give him that double skein of silk she swings about, and she says she won’t, let him ask as long as he pleases; so he says he sha’n’t go, and I’m sure I don’t see why he should; and she says he may stay, but he sha’n’t have her necklace, she calls it. So Mr. Camwell snatches, and Chloe fires up. Gracious, can’t she frown!—at him. She never frowns at anybody but him.’

Caseldy attempted persuasion on Mr. Camwell’s behalf. With his mouth at Chloe’s ear, he said, ’Give it; let the poor fellow have his memento; despatch him with it.’

‘I can hear! and that is really kind,’ exclaimed Duchess Susan.

‘Rather a missy-missy schoolgirl sort of necklace,’ Mr. Beamish observed; ’but he might have it, without the dismissal, for I cannot consent to lose Alonzo. No, madam,’ he nodded at the duchess.

Caseldy continued his whisper: ’You can’t think of wearing a thing like that about your neck?’

‘Indeed,’ said Chloe, ‘I think of it.’

‘Why, what fashion have you over here?’

‘It is not yet a fashion,’ she said.

’A silken circlet will not well become any precious pendant that I know of.’

‘A bag of dust is not a very precious pendant,’ she said.

‘Oh, a memento mori!’ cried he.

And she answered, ‘Yes.’

He rallied her for her superstition, pursuing, ’Surely, my love, ’tis a cheap riddance of a pestilent, intrusive jaloux. Whip it into his hands for a mittimus.’

‘Does his presence distress you?’ she asked.

’I will own that to be always having the fellow dogging us, with his dejected leer, is not agreeable. He watches us now, because my lips are close by your cheek. He should be absent; he is one too many. Speed him on his voyage with the souvenir he asks for.’

‘I keep it for a journey of my own, which I may have to take,’ said Chloe.

‘With me?’

‘You will follow; you cannot help following me, Caseldy.’

He speculated on her front. She was tenderly smiling. ’You are happy, Chloe?’

Page 4492

‘I have never known such happiness,’ she said. The brilliancy of her eyes confirmed it.

He glanced over at Duchess Susan, who was like a sunflower in the sun. His glance lingered a moment. Her abundant and glowing young charms were the richest fascination an eye like his could dwell on. ‘That is right,’ said he. ’We will be perfectly happy till the month ends. And after it? But get us rid of Monsieur le Jeune; toss him that trifle; I spare him that. ’Twill be bliss to him, at the cost of a bit of silk thread to us. Besides, if we keep him to cure him of his passion here, might it not be—these boys veer suddenly, like the winds of Albion, from one fair object to t’ other—at the cost of the precious and simple lady you are guarding? I merely hint. These two affect one another, as though it could be. She speaks of him. It shall be as you please, but a trifle like that, my Chloe, to be rid of a green eye!’

‘You much wish him gone?’ she said.

He shrugged. ‘The fellow is in our way.’

‘You think him a little perilous for my innocent lady?’

‘Candidly, I do.’

She stretched the half-plaited silken rope in her two hands to try the strength of it, made a second knot, and consigned it to her pocket.

At once she wore her liveliest playfellow air, in which character no one was so enchanting as Chloe could be, for she became the comrade of men without forfeit of her station among sage sweet ladies, and was like a well-mannered sparkling boy, to whom his admiring seniors have given the lead in sallies, whims, and fights; but pleasanter than a boy, the soft hues of her sex toned her frolic spirit; she seemed her sex’s deputy, to tell the coarser where they could meet, as on a bridge above the torrent separating them, gaily for interchange of the best of either, unfired and untempted by fire, yet with all the elements which make fire burn to animate their hearts.

‘Lucky the man who wins for himself that life-long cordial!’ Mr. Beamish said to Duchess Susan.

She had small comprehension of metaphorical phrases, but she was quick at reading faces; and comparing the enthusiasm on the face of the beau with Caseldy’s look of troubled wonderment and regret, she pitied the lover conscious of not having the larger share of his mistress’s affections. When presently he looked at her, the tender-hearted woman could have cried for very compassion, so sensible did he show himself of Chloe’s preference of the other.

CHAPTER VI

That evening Duchess Susan played at the Pharaoh table and lost eight hundred pounds, through desperation at the loss of twenty. After encouraging her to proceed to this extremity, Caseldy checked her. He was conducting her out of the Play room when a couple of young squires of the Shepster order, and primed with wine, intercepted her to present their condolences, which they performed with exaggerated gestures, intended for broad mimicry of the courtliness imported from the Continent, and a very dulcet harping on the popular variations of her Christian name, not forgetting her singular title, ‘my lovely, lovely Dewlap!’

Page 4493

She was excited and stunned by her immediate experience in the transfer of money, and she said, 'I 'm sure I don't know what you want.'

'Yes!' cried they, striking their bosoms as guitars, and attempting the posture of the thrummer on the instrument; 'she knows. She does know. Handsome Susie knows what we want.' And one ejaculated, mellifluously, 'Oh!' and the other 'Ah!' in flagrant derision of the foreign ways they produced in boorish burlesque—a self-consolatory and a common trick of the boor.

Caseldy was behind. He pushed forward and bowed to them. 'Sirs, will you mention to me what you want?'

He said it with a look that meant steel. It cooled them sufficiently to let him place the duchess under the protectorship of Mr. Beamish, then entering from another room with Chloe; whereupon the pair of rustic bucks retired to reinvigorate their valiant blood.

Mr. Beamish had seen that there was cause for gratitude to Caseldy, to whom he said, 'She has lost?' and he seemed satisfied on hearing the amount of the loss, and commissioned Caseldy to escort the ladies to their lodgings at once, observing, 'Adieu, Count!'

'You will find my foreign title of use to you here, after a bout or two,' was the reply.

'No bouts, if possibly to be avoided; though I perceive how the flavour of your countship may spread a wholesome alarm among our rurals, who will readily have at you with fists, but relish not the tricky cold weapon.'

Mr. Beamish haughtily bowed the duchess away.

Caseldy seized the opportunity while handing her into her sedan to say,
'We will try the fortune-teller for a lucky day to have our revenge.'

She answered: 'Oh, don't talk to me about playing again ever; I'm nigh on a clean pocket, and never knew such a sinful place as this. I feel I've tumbled into a ditch. And there's Mr. Beamish, all top when he bows to me. You're keeping Chloe waiting, sir.'

'Where was she while we were at the table?'

'Sure she was with Mr. Beamish.'

'Ah!' he groaned.

'The poor soul is in despair over her losses to-night,' he turned from the boxed-up duchess to remark to Chloe. 'Give her a comfortable cry and a few moral maxims.'

‘I will,’ she said. ‘You love me, Caseldy?’

‘Love you? I? Your own? What assurance would you have?’

‘None, dear friend.’

Here was a woman easily deceived.

In the hearts of certain men, owing to an intellectual contempt of easy dupes, compunction in deceiving is diminished by the lightness of their task; and that soft confidence which will often, if but passingly, bid betrayers reconsider the charms of the fair soul they are abandoning, commends these armoured knights to pursue with redoubled earnest the fruitful ways of treachery. Their feelings are warm for their prey, moreover; and choosing to judge their victim

Page 4494

by the present warmth of their feelings, they can at will be hurt, even to being scandalized, by a coldness that does not waken one suspicion of them. Jealousy would have a chance of arresting, for it is not impossible to tease them back to avowed allegiance; but sheer indifference also has a stronger hold on them than a, dull, blind trustfulness. They hate the burden it imposes; the blind aspect is only touching enough to remind them of the burden, and they hate if for that, and for the enormous presumption of the belief that they are everlastingly bound to such an imbecile. She walks about with her eyes shut, expecting not to stumble, and when she does, am I to blame? The injured man asks it in the course of his reasoning.

He recurs to his victim's merits, but only compassionately, and the compassion is chilled by the thought that she may in the end start across his path to thwart him. Thereat he is drawn to think of the prize she may rob him of; and when one woman is an obstacle, the other shines desirable as life beyond death; he must have her; he sees her in the hue of his desire for her, and the obstacle in that of his repulsion. Cruelty is no more than the man's effort to win the wished object.

She should not leave it to his imagination to conceive that in the end the blind may awaken to thwart him. Better for her to cast him hence, or let him know that she will do battle to keep him. But the pride of a love that has hardened in the faithfulness of love cannot always be wise on trial.

Caseldy walked considerably in the rear of the couple of chairs. He saw on his way what was coming. His two young squires were posted at Duchess Susan's door when she arrived, and he received a blow from one of them in clearing a way for her. She plucked at his hand. 'Have they hurt you?' she asked.

'Think of me to-night thanking them and heaven for this, my darling,' he replied, with a pressure that lit the flying moment to kindle the after hours.

Chloe had taken help of one of her bearers to jump out. She stretched a finger at the unruly intruders, crying sternly, 'There is blood on you—come not nigh me!' The loftiest harangue would not have been so cunning to touch their wits. They stared at one another in the clear moonlight. Which of them had blood on him? As they had not been for blood, but for rough fun, and something to boast of next day, they gesticulated according to the first instructions of the dancing master, by way of gallantry, and were out of Caseldy's path when he placed himself at his liege lady's service. 'Take no notice of them, dear,' she said.

'No, no,' said he; and 'What is it?' and his hoarse accent and shaking clasp of her arm sickened her to the sensation of approaching death.

Upstairs Duchess Susan made a show of embracing her. Both were trembling. The duchess ascribed her condition to those dreadful men. 'What makes them be at me so?' she said.

Page 4495

And Chloe said, ‘Because you are beautiful.’

‘Am I?’

‘You are.’

‘I am?’

’Very beautiful; young and beautiful; beautiful in the bud. You will learn to excuse them, madam.’

‘But, Chloe—’ The duchess shut her mouth. Out of a languid reverie, she sighed: ’I suppose I must be! My duke—oh, don’t talk of him. Dear man! he’s in bed and fast asleep long before this. I wonder how he came to let me come here.

I did bother him, I know. Am I very, very beautiful, Chloe, so that men can’t help themselves?’

‘Very, madam.’

’There, good-night. I want to be in bed, and I can’t kiss you because you keep calling me madam, and freeze me to icicles; but I do love you, Chloe.’

‘I am sure you do.’

’I’m quite certain I do. I know I never mean harm. But how are we women expected to behave, then? Oh, I’m unhappy, I am.’

‘You must abstain from playing.’

’It’s that! I’ve lost my money—I forgot. And I shall have to confess it to my duke, though he warned me. Old men hold their fingers up—so! One finger: and you never forget the sight of it, never. It’s a round finger, like the handle of a jug, and won’t point at you when they’re lecturing, and the skin’s like an old coat on gaffer’s shoulders—or, Chloe! just like, when you look at the nail, a rumpled counterpane up to the face of a corpse. I declare, it’s just like! I feel as if I didn’t a bit mind talking of corpses tonight. And my money’s gone, and I don’t much mind. I’m a wild girl again, handsomer than when that ——he is a dear, kind, good old nobleman, with his funny old finger: “Susan! Susan!” I’m no worse than others. Everybody plays here; everybody superior. Why, you have played, Chloe.’

‘Never!’

’I’ve heard you say you played once, and a bigger stake it was, you said, than anybody ever did play.’

‘Not money.’

‘What then?’

‘My life.’

’Goodness—yes! I understand. I understand everything to-night-men too. So you did! —They’re not so shamefully wicked, Chloe. Because I can’t see the wrong of human nature—if we’re discreet, I mean. Now and then a country dance and a game, and home to bed and dreams. There’s no harm in that, I vow. And that’s why you stayed at this place. You like it, Chloe?’

‘I am used to it.’

‘But when you’re married to Count Caseldy you’ll go?’

‘Yes, then.’

She uttered it so joylessly that Duchess Susan added, with intense affectionateness, ‘You’re not obliged to marry him, dear Chloe.’

‘Nor he me, madam.’

The duchess caught at her impulsively to kiss her, and said she would undress herself, as she wished to be alone.

From that night she was a creature inflamed.

CHAPTER VII

Page 4496

The total disappearance of the pair of heroes who had been the latest in the conspiracy to vex his delicate charge, gave Mr. Beamish a high opinion of Caseldy as an assistant in such an office as he held. They had gone, and nothing more was heard of them. Caseldy confined his observations on the subject to the remark that he had employed the best means to be rid of that kind of worthies; and whether their souls had fled, or only their bodies, was unknown. But the duchess had quiet promenades with Caseldy to guard her, while Mr. Beamish counted the remaining days of her visit with the impatience of a man having cause to cast eye on a clock. For Duchess Susan was not very manageable now; she had fits of insurgency, and plainly said that her time was short, and she meant to do as she liked, go where she liked, play when she liked, and be an independent woman—if she was so soon to be taken away and boxed in a castle that was only a bigger sedan.

Caseldy protested he was as helpless as the beau. He described the annoyance of his incessant running about at her heels in all directions amusingly, and suggested that she must be beating the district to recover her ‘strange cavalier,’ of whom, or of one that had ridden beside her carriage half a day on her journey to the Wells, he said she had dropped a sort of hint. He complained of the impossibility of his getting an hour in privacy with his Chloe.

‘And I, accustomed to consult with her, see too little of her,’ said Mr. Beamish. ’I shall presently be seeing nothing, and already I am sensible of my loss.’

He represented his case to Duchess Susan:—that she was for ever driving out long distances and taking Chloe from him, when his occupation precluded his accompanying them; and as Chloe soon was to be lost to him for good, he deeply felt her absence.

The duchess flung him enigmatical rejoinders: ’You can change all that, Mr. Beamish, if you like, and you know you can. Oh, yes, you can. But you like being a butterfly, and when you’ve made ladies pale you’re happy: and there they’re to stick and wither for you. Never!—I’ve that pride. I may be worried, but I’ll never sink to green and melancholy for a man.’

She bridled at herself in a mirror, wherein not a sign of paleness was reflected.

Mr. Beamish meditated, and he thought it prudent to speak to Caseldy manfully of her childish suspicions, lest she should perchance in like manner perturb the lover’s mind.

‘Oh, make your mind easy, my dear sir, as far as I am concerned,’ said Caseldy. ’But, to tell you the truth, I think I can interpret her creamy ladyship’s innuendos a little differently and quite as clearly. For my part, I prefer the pale to the blowsy, and I stake my right hand on Chloe’s fidelity. Whatever harm I may have the senseless cruelty—-misfortune, I may rather call it—to do that heavenly-minded woman in our days to come,

none shall say of me that I was ever for an instant guilty of the baseness of doubting her purity and constancy. And, sir, I will add that I could perfectly rely also on your honour.'

Page 4497

Mr. Beamish bowed. 'You do but do me justice. But, say, what interpretation?'

'She began by fearing you,' said Caseldy, creating a stare that was followed by a frown. 'She fancies you neglect her. Perhaps she has a woman's suspicion that you do it to try her.'

Mr. Beamish frenetically cited his many occupations. 'How can I be ever dancing attendance on her?' Then he said, 'Pooh,' and tenderly fingered the ruffles of his wrist. 'Tush, tush,' said he, 'no, no: though if it came to a struggle between us, I might in the interests of my old friend, her lord, whom I have reasons for esteeming, interpose an influence that would make the exercise of my authority agreeable. Hitherto I have seen no actual need of it, and I watch keenly. Her eye has been on Colonel Poltermore once or twice his on her. The woman is a rose in June, sir, and I forgive the whole world for looking—and for longing too. But I have observed nothing serious.'

'He is of our party to the beacon-head to-morrow,' said Caseldy. 'She insisted that she would have him; and at least it will grant me furlough for an hour.'

'Do me the service to report to me,' said Mr. Beamish.

In this fashion he engaged Caseldy to supply him with inventions, and prepared himself to swallow them. It was Poltermore and Poltermore, the Colonel here, the Colonel there until the chase grew so hot that Mr. Beamish could no longer listen to young Mr. Camwell's fatiguing drone upon his one theme of the double-dealing of Chloe's betrothed. He became of her way of thinking, and treated the young gentleman almost as coldly as she. In time he was ready to guess of his own acuteness that the 'strange cavalier' could have been no other than Colonel Poltermore. When Caseldy hinted it, Mr. Beamish said, 'I have marked him.' He added, in highly self-satisfied style, 'With all your foreign training, my friend, you will learn that we English are not so far behind you in the art of unravelling an intrigue in the dark.' To which Caseldy replied, that the Continental world had little to teach Mr. Beamish.

Poor Colonel Poltermore, as he came to be called, was clearly a victim of the sudden affability of Duchess Susan. The transformation of a stiff military officer into a nimble Puck, a runner of errands and a sprightly attendant, could not pass without notice. The first effect of her discriminating condescension on this unfortunate gentleman was to make him the champion of her claims to breeding. She had it by nature, she was Nature's great lady, he would protest to the noble dames of the circle he moved in; and they admitted that she was different in every way from a bourgeoise elevated by marriage to lofty rank: she was not vulgar. But they remained doubtful of the perfect simplicity of a young woman who worked such changes in men as to render one of the famous conquerors of the day her agitated humble servant. By rapid degrees the Colonel had fallen

Page 4498

to that. When not by her side, he was ever marching with sharp strides, hurrying through rooms and down alleys and groves until he had discovered and attached himself to her skirts. And, curiously, the object of his jealousy was the devoted Alonzo! Mr. Beamish laughed when he heard of it. The lady's excitement and giddy mien, however, accused Poltermore of a stage of success requiring to be combated immediately. There was mention of Duchess Susan's mighty wish to pay a visit to the popular fortune-teller of the hut on the heath, and Mr. Beamish put his veto on the expedition. She had obeyed him by abstaining from play of late, so he fully expected, that his interdict would be obeyed; and besides the fortune-teller was a rogue of a sham astrologer known to have foretold to certain tender ladies things they were only too desirous to imagine predestined by an extraordinary indication of the course of planets through the zodiac, thus causing them to sin by the example of celestial conjunctions—-a piece of wanton impiety. The beau took high ground in his objections to the adventure. Nevertheless, Duchess Susan did go. She drove to the heath at an early hour of the morning, attended by Chloe, Colonel Poltermore, and Caseldy. They subsequently breakfasted at an inn where gipsy repasts were occasionally served to the fashion, and they were back at the wells as soon as the world was abroad. Their surprise then was prodigious when Mr. Beamish, accosting them full in assembly, inquired whether they were satisfied with the report of their fortunes, and yet more when he positively proved himself acquainted with the fortunes which had been recounted to each of them in privacy.

'You, Colonel Poltermore, are to be in luck's way up to the tenth milestone,—where your chariot will overset and you will be lamed for life.'

'Not quite so bad,' said the Colonel cheerfully, he having been informed of much better.

'And you, Count Caseldy, are to have it all your own way with good luck, after committing a deed of slaughter, with the solitary penalty of undergoing a visit every night from the corpse.'

'Ghost,' Caseldy smilingly corrected him.

'And Chloe would not have her fortune told, because she knew it!' Mr. Beamish cast a paternal glance at her. 'And you, madam,' he bent his brows on the duchess, 'received the communication that "All for Love" will sink you as it raised you, put you down as it took you up, furnish the feast to the raven gentleman which belongs of right to the golden eagle?'

'Nothing of the sort! And I don't believe in any of their stories,' cried the duchess, with a burning face.

'You deny it, madam?'

’I do. There was never a word of a raven or an eagle, that I’ll swear, now.’

‘You deny that there was ever a word of “All for Love”? Speak, madam.’

‘Their conjuror’s rigmarole!’ she murmured, huffing. ’As if I listened to their nonsense!’

Page 4499

‘Does the Duchess of Dewlap dare to give me the lie?’ said Mr. Beamish.

‘That’s not my title, and you know it,’ she retorted.

‘What’s this?’ the angry beau sang out. ‘What stuff is this you wear?’ He towered and laid hand on a border of lace of her morning dress, tore it furiously and swung a length of it round him: and while the duchess panted and trembled at an outrage that won for her the sympathy of every lady present as well as the championship of the gentlemen, he tossed the lace to the floor and trampled on it, making his big voice intelligible over the uproar: ’Hear what she does! ’Tis a felony! She wears the stuff with Betty Worcester’s yellow starch on it for mock antique! And let who else wears it strip it off before the town shall say we are disgraced—when I tell you that Betty Worcester was hanged at Tyburn yesterday morning for murder!’

There were shrieks.

Hardly had he finished speaking before the assembly began to melt; he stood in the centre like a pole unwinding streamers, amid a confusion of hurrying dresses, the sound and whirl and drift whereof was as that of the autumnal strewn leaves on a wind rising in November. The troops of ladies were off to bereave themselves of their fashionable imitation old lace adornment, which denounced them in some sort abettors and associates of the sanguinary loathed wretch, Mrs. Elizabeth Worcester, their benefactress of the previous day, now hanged and dangling on the gallows-tree.

Those ladies who wore not imitation lace or any lace in the morning, were scarcely displeased with the beau for his exposure of them that did. The gentlemen were confounded by his exhibition of audacious power. The two gentlemen nighest upon violently resenting his brutality to Duchess Susan, led her from the room in company with Chloe.

‘The woman shall fear me to good purpose,’ Mr. Beamish said to himself.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Camwell was in the ante-room as Chloe passed out behind the two incensed supporters of Duchess Susan.

‘I shall be by the fir-trees on the Mount at eight this evening,’ she said.

‘I will be there,’ he replied.

’Drive Mr. Beamish into the country, that these gentlemen may have time to cool.’

He promised her it should be done.

Close on the hour of her appointment, he stood under the fir-trees, admiring the sunset along the western line of hills, and when Chloe joined him he spoke of the beauty of the scene.

‘Though nothing seems more eloquently to say farewell,’ he added, with a sinking voice.

‘We could say it now, and be friends,’ she answered.

‘Later than now, you think it unlikely that you could forgive me, Chloe.’

‘In truth, sir, you are making it hard for me.’

‘I have stayed here to keep watch; for no pleasure of my own,’ said he.

Page 4500

‘Mr. Beamish is an excellent protector of the duchess.’

’Excellent; and he is cleverly taught to suppose she fears him greatly; and when she offends him, he makes a display of his Jupiter’s awfulness, with the effect on woman of natural spirit which you have seen, and others had foreseen, that she is exasperated and grows reckless. Tie another knot in your string, Chloe.’

She looked away, saying, ’Were you not the cause? You were in collusion with that charlatan of the heath, who told them their fortunes this morning. I see far, both in the dark and in the light.’

‘But not through a curtain. I was present.’

’Hateful, hateful business of the spy! You have worked a great mischief Mr. Camwell. And how can you reconcile it to, your conscience that you should play so base a part?’

‘I have but performed my duty, dear madam.’

’You pretend that it is your devotion to me! I might be flattered if I saw not so abject a figure in my service. Now have I but four days of my month of happiness remaining, and my request to you is, leave me to enjoy them. I beseech you to go. Very humbly, most earnestly, I beg your departure. Grant it to me, and do not stay to poison my last days here. Leave us to-morrow. I will admit your good intentions. I give you my hand in gratitude. Adieu, Mr. Camwell.’

He took her hand. ’Adieu. I foresee an early separation, and this dear hand is mine while I have it in mine. Adieu. It is a word to be repeated at a parting like ours. We do not blow out our light with one breath: we let it fade gradually, like yonder sunset.’

‘Speak so,’ said she.

’Ah, Chloe, to give one’s life! And it is your happiness I have sought more than your favor.’

‘I believe it; but I have not liked the means. You leave us to-morrow?’

‘It seems to me that to-morrow is the term.’

Her face clouded. ‘That tells me a very uncertain promise.’

’You looked forth to a month of happiness—meaning a month of delusion. The delusion expires to-night. You will awaken to see your end of it in the morning. You have never looked beyond the month since the day of his arrival.’

‘Let him not be named, I supplicate you.’

’Then you consent that another shall be sacrificed for you to enjoy your state of deception an hour longer?’

’I am not deceived, sir. I wish for peace, and crave it, and that is all I would have.’

’And you make her your peace-offering, whom you have engaged to serve! Too surely your eyes have been open as well as mine. Knot by knot—I have watched you—where is it?—you have marked the points in that silken string where the confirmation of a just suspicion was too strong for you.’

‘I did it, and still I continued merry?’ She subsided from her scornfulness on an involuntary ‘Ah!’ that was a shudder.

’You acted Light Heart, madam, and too well to hoodwink me. Meanwhile you allowed that mischief to proceed, rather than have your crazy lullaby disturbed.’

Page 4501

‘Indeed, Mr. Camwell, you presume.’

’The time, and my knowledge of what it is fraught with, demand it and excuse it. You and I, my dear and one only love on earth, stand outside of ordinary rules. We are between life and death.’

‘We are so always.’

’Listen further to the preacher: We have them close on us, with the question, Which it shall be to-morrow. You are for sleeping on, but I say no; nor shall that iniquity of double treachery be committed because of your desire to be rocked in a cradle. Hear me out. The drug you have swallowed to cheat yourself will not bear the shock awaiting you tomorrow with the first light. Hear these birds! When next they sing, you will be broad awake, and of me, and the worship and service I would have dedicated to you, I do not . . . it is a spectral sunset of a day that was never to be!—awake, and looking on what? Back from a monstrous villainy to the forlorn wretch who winked at it with knots in a string. Count them then, and where will be your answer to heaven? I begged it of you, to save you from those blows of remorse; yes, terrible!’

‘Oh, no!’

‘Terrible, I say!’

‘You are mistaken, Mr. Camwell. It is my soother. I tell my beads on it.’

’See how a persistent residence in this place has made a Pagan of the purest soul among us! Had you . . . but that day was not to lighten me! More adorable in your errors that you are than others by their virtues, you have sinned through excess of the qualities men prize. Oh, you have a boundless generosity, unhappily enwound with a pride as great. There is your fault, that is the cause of your misery. Too generous! too proud! You have trusted, and you will not cease to trust; you have vowed yourself to love, never to remonstrate, never to seem to doubt; it is too much your religion, rare verily. But bethink you of that inexperienced and most silly good creature who is on the rapids to her destruction. Is she not—you will cry it aloud to-morrow—your victim? You hear it within you now.’

‘Friend, my dear, true friend,’ Chloe said in her deeper voice of melody, ’set your mind at ease about to-morrow and her. Her safety is assured. I stake my life on it. She shall not be a victim. At the worst she will but have learnt a lesson. So, then, adieu! The West hangs like a garland of unwatered flowers, neglected by the mistress they adorned. Remember the scene, and that here we parted, and that Chloe wished you the happiness it was out of her power to bestow, because she was of another world, with her history written out to the last red streak before ever you knew her. Adieu; this time adieu for good!

Mr. Camwell stood in her path. ‘Blind eyes, if you like,’ he said, ’but you shall not hear blind language. I forfeit the poor consideration for me that I have treasured; hate me; better hated by you than shun my duty! Your duchess is away at the first dawn this next morning; it has come to that. I speak with full knowledge. Question her.’

Page 4502

Chloe threw a faltering scorn of him into her voice, as much as her heart's sharp throbs would allow. 'I question you, sir, how you came to this full knowledge you boast of?'

'I have it; let that suffice. Nay, I will be particular; his coach is ordered for the time I name to you; her maid is already at a station on the road of the flight.'

'You have their servants in your pay?'

'For the mine—the countermine. We must grub dirt to match deceivers. You, madam, have chosen to be delicate to excess, and have thrown it upon me to be gross, and if you please, abominable, in my means of defending you. It is not too late for you to save the lady, nor too late to bring him to the sense of honour.'

'I cannot think Colonel Poltermore so dishonourable.'

'Poor Colonel Poltermore! The office he is made to fill is an old one. Are you not ashamed, Chloe?'

'I have listened too long,' she replied.

'Then, if it is your pleasure, depart.'

He made way for her. She passed him. Taking two hurried steps in the gloom of the twilight, she stopped, held at her heart, and painfully turning to him, threw her arms out, and let herself be seized and kissed.

On his asking pardon of her, which his long habit of respect forced him to do in the thick of rapture and repetitions, she said, 'You rob no one.'

'Oh,' he cried, 'there is a reward, then, for faithful love. But am I the man I was a minute back? I have you; I embrace you; and I doubt that I am I. Or is it Chloe's ghost?'

'She has died and visits you.'

'And will again?'

Chloe could not speak for languor.

The intensity of the happiness she gave by resting mutely where she was, charmed her senses. But so long had the frost been on them that their awakening to warmth was haunted by speculations on the sweet taste of this reward of faithfulness to him, and the strange taste of her own unfaithfulness to her. And reflecting on the cold act of speculation while strong arm and glowing mouth were pressing her, she thought her senses might really be dead, and she a ghost visiting the good youth for his comfort. So feel ghosts, she thought, and what we call happiness in love is a match between

ecstasy and compliance. Another thought flew through her like a mortal shot: 'Not so with those two! with them it will be ecstasy meeting ecstasy; they will take and give happiness in equal portions.' A pang of jealousy traversed her frame. She made the shrewdness of it help to nerve her fervour in a last strain of him to her bosom, and gently releasing herself, she said, 'No one is robbed. And now, dear friend, promise me that you will not disturb Mr. Beamish.'

'Chloe,' said he, 'have you bribed me?'

'I do not wish him to be troubled.'

'The duchess, I have told you—'

Page 4503

'I know. But you have Chloe's word that she will watch over the duchess and die to save her. It is an oath. You have heard of some arrangements. I say they shall lead to nothing: it shall not take place. Indeed, my friend, I am awake; I see as much as you see. And those . . . after being where I have been, can you suppose I have a regret? But she is my dear and peculiar charge, and if she runs a risk, trust to me that there shall be no catastrophe; I swear it; so, now, adieu. We sup in company to-night. They will be expecting some of Chloe's verses, and she must sing to herself for a few minutes to stir the bed her songs take wing from; therefore, we will part, and for her sake avoid her; do not be present at our table, or in the room, or anywhere there. Yes, you rob no one,' she said, in a voice that curled through him deliciously by wavering; but I think I may blush at recollections, and I would rather have you absent. Adieu! I will not ask for obedience from you beyond to-night. Your word?'

He gave it in a stupor of felicity, and she fled.

CHAPTER IX

Chloe drew the silken string from her bosom, as she descended the dim pathway through the furies, and set her fingers travelling along it for the number of the knots. 'I have no right to be living,' she said. Seven was the number; seven years she had awaited her lover's return; she counted her age and completed it in sevens. Fatalism had sustained her during her lover's absence; it had fast hold of her now. Thereby had she been enabled to say, 'He will come'; and saying, 'He has come,' her touch rested on the first knot in the string. She had no power to displace her fingers, and the cause of the tying of the knot stood across her brain marked in dull red characters, legible neither to her eye nor to her understanding, but a reviving of the hour that brought it on her spirit with human distinctness, except of the light of day: she had a sense of having forfeited light, and seeing perhaps more clearly. Everything assured her that she saw more clearly than others; she saw too when it was good to cease to live.

Hers was the unhappy lot of one gifted with poet-imagination to throb with the woman supplanting her and share the fascination of the man who deceived. At their first meeting, in her presence, she had seen that they were not strangers; she pitied them for speaking falsely, and when she vowed to thwart this course of evil it to save a younger creature of her sex, not in rivalry. She treated them both with a proud generosity surpassing gentleness. All that there was of selfishness in her bosom resolved to the enjoyment of her one month of strongly willed delusion.

Page 4504

The kiss she had sunk to robbed no one, not even her body's purity, for when this knot was tied she consigned herself to her end, and had become a bag of dust. The other knots in the string pointed to verifications; this first one was a suspicion, and it was the more precious, she felt it to be more a certainty; it had come from the dark world beyond us, where all is known. Her belief that it had come thence was nourished by testimony, the space of blackness wherein she had lived since, exhausting her last vitality in a simulation of infantile happiness, which was nothing other than the carrying on of her emotion of the moment of sharp sour sweet—such as it may be, the doomed below attain for their knowledge of joy—when, at the first meeting with her lover, the perception of his treachery to the soul confiding in him, told her she had lived, and opened out the cherishable kingdom of insensibility to her for her heritage.

She made her tragic humility speak thankfully to the wound that slew her. 'Had it not been so, I should not have seen him,' she said:—Her lover would not have come to her but for his pursuit of another woman.

She pardoned him for being attracted by that beautiful transplant of the fields: pardoned her likewise. 'He when I saw him first was as beautiful to me. For him I might have done as much.'

Far away in a lighted hall of the West, her family raised hands of reproach. They were minute objects, keenly discerned as diminished figures cut in steel. Feeling could not be very warm for them, they were so small, and a sea that had drowned her ran between; and looking that way she had scarce any warmth of feeling save for a white rhaiadr leaping out of broken cloud through branched rocks, where she had climbed and dreamed when a child. The dream was then of the coloured days to come; now she was more infant in her mind, and she watched the scattered water broaden, and tasted the spray, sat there drinking the scene, untroubled by hopes as a lamb, different only from an infant in knowing that she had thrown off life to travel back to her home and be refreshed. She heard her people talk; they were unending babblers in the waterfall. Truth was with them, and wisdom. How, then, could she pretend to any right to live? Already she had no name; she was less living than a tombstone. For who was Chloe? Her family might pass the grave of Chloe without weeping, without moralizing. They had foreseen her ruin, they had foretold it, they noised it in the waters, and on they sped to the plains, telling the world of their prophecy, and making what was untold as yet a lighter thing to do.

The lamps in an irregularly dotted line underneath the hill beckoned her to her task of appearing as the gayest of them that draw their breath for the day and have pulses for the morrow.

CHAPTER X

Page 4505

At midnight the great supper party to celebrate the reconciliation of Mr. Beamish and Duchess Susan broke up, and beneath a soft fair sky the ladies, with their silvery chatter of gratitude for amusement, caught Chloe in their arms to kiss her, rendering it natural for their cavaliers to exclaim that Chloe was blest above mortals. The duchess preferred to walk. Her spirits were excited, and her language smelt of her origin, but the superb fleshly beauty of the woman was aglow, and crying, 'I declare I should burst in one of those boxes—just as if you'd stalled me!' she fanned a wind on her face, and sumptuously spread her spherical skirts, attended by the vanquished and captive Colonel Poltermore, a gentleman manifestly bent on insinuating sly slips of speech to serve for here a pinch of powder, there a match. 'Am I?' she was heard to say. She blew prodigious deep-chested sighs of a coquette that has taken to roaring.

Presently her voice tossed out: 'As if I would!' These vivid illuminations of the Colonel's proceedings were a pasture to the rearward groups, composed of two very grand ladies, Caseldy, Mr. Beamish, a lord, and Chloe.

'You man! Oh!' sprang from the duchess. 'What do I hear? I won't listen; I can't, I mustn't, I oughtn't.'

So she said, but her head careened, she gave him her coy reluctant ear, with total abandonment to the seductions of his whispers, and the lord let fly a peal of laughter. It had been a supper of copious wine, and the songs which rise from wine. Nature was excused by our midnight naturalists.

The two great dames, admonished by the violence of the nobleman's laughter, laid claim on Mr. Beamish to accompany them at their parting with Chloe and Duchess Susan.

In the momentary shuffling of couples incident to adieux among a company, the duchess murmured to Caseldy:

'Have I done it well.'

He praised her for perfection in her acting. 'I am at your door at three, remember.'

'My heart's in my mouth,' said she.

Colonel Poltermore still had the privilege of conducting her the few farther steps to her lodgings.

Caseldy walked beside Chloe, and silently, until he said, 'If I have not yet mentioned the subject—'

'If it is an allusion to money let me not hear it to-night,' she replied.

’I can only say that my lawyers have instructions. But my lawyers cannot pay you in gratitude. Do not think me in your hardest review of my misconduct ungrateful. I have ever esteemed you above all women; I do, and I shall; you are too much above me. I am afraid I am a composition of bad stuff; I did not win a very particularly good name on the Continent; I begin to know myself, and in comparison with you, dear Catherine——’

‘You speak to Chloe,’ she said. ’Catherine is a buried person. She died without pain. She is by this time dust.’

The man heaved his breast. ‘Women have not an idea of our temptations.’

Page 4506

’You are excused by me for all your errors, Caseldy. Always remember that.’

He sighed profoundly. ‘Ay, you have a Christian’s heart.’

She answered, ‘I have come to the conclusion that it is a Pagan’s.’

‘As for me,’ he rejoined, ’I am a fatalist. Through life I have seen my destiny. What is to be, will be; we can do nothing.’

’I have heard of one who expired of a surfeit that he anticipated, nay proclaimed, when indulging in the last desired morsel,’ said Chloe.

‘He was driven to it.’

‘From within.’

Caseldy acquiesced; his wits were clouded, and an illustration even coarser and more grotesque would have won a serious nod and a sigh from him. ‘Yes, we are moved by other hands!’

‘It is pleasant to think so: and think it of me tomorrow. Will you!’ said Chloe.

He promised it heartily, to induce her to think the same of him.

Their separation was in no way remarkable. The pretty formalities were executed at the door, and the pair of gentlemen departed.

‘It’s quite dark still,’ Duchess Susan said, looking up at the sky, and she ran upstairs, and sank, complaining of the weakness of her legs, in a chair of the ante-chamber of her bedroom, where Chloe slept. Then she asked the time of the night. She could not suppress her hushed ‘Oh!’ of heavy throbbing from minute to minute. Suddenly she started off at a quick stride to her own room, saying that it must be sleepiness which affected her so.

Her bedroom had a door to the sitting-room, and thence, as also from Chloe’s room, the landing on the stairs was reached, for the room ran parallel with both bed-chambers. She walked in it and threw the window open, but closed it immediately; opened and shut the door, and returned and called for Chloe. She wanted to be read to. Chloe named certain composing books. The duchess chose a book of sermons. ’But we’re all such dreadful sinners, it’s better not to bother ourselves late at night.’ She dismissed that suggestion. Chloe proposed books of poetry. ’Only I don’t understand them except about larks, and buttercups, and hayfields, and that’s no comfort to a woman burning,’ was the answer.

‘Are you feverish, madam?’ said Chloe. And the duchess was sharp on her: ‘Yes, madam, I am.’

She reproved herself in a change of tone: ’No, Chloe, not feverish, only this air of yours here is such an exciting air, as the doctor says; and they made me drink wine, and I played before supper—Oh! my money; I used to say I could get more, but now!’ she sighed—’but there’s better in the world than money. You know that, don’t you, you dear? Tell me. And I want you to be happy; that you’ll find. I do wish we could all be!’ She wept, and spoke of requiring a little music to compose her.

Page 4507

Chloe stretched a hand for her guitar. Duchess Susan listened to some notes, and cried that it went to her heart and hurt her. 'Everything we like a lot has a fence and a board against trespassers, because of such a lot of people in the world,' she moaned. 'Don't play, put down that thing, please, dear. You're the cleverest creature anybody has ever met; they all say so. I wish I——Lovely women catch men, and clever women keep them: I've heard that said in this wretched place, and it 's a nice prospect for me, next door to a fool! I know I am.'

'The duke adores you, madam.'

'Poor duke! Do let him be—sleeping so woebegone with his mouth so, and that chin of a baby, like as if he dreamed of a penny whistle. He shouldn't have let me come here. Talk of Mr. Beamish. How he will miss you, Chloe!'

'He will,' Chloe said sadly.

'If you go, dear.'

'I am going.'

'Why should you leave him, Chloe?'

'I must.'

'And there, the thought of it makes you miserable!'

'It does.'

'You needn't, I'm sure.'

Chloe looked at her.

The duchess turned her head. 'Why can't you be gay, as you were at the supper-table, Chloe? You're out to him like a flower when the sun jumps over the hill; you're up like a lark in the dews; as I used to be when I thought of nothing. Oh, the early morning; and I'm sleepy. What a beast I feel, with my grandeur, and the time in an hour or two for the birds to sing, and me ready to drop. I must go and undress.'

She rushed on Chloe, kissed her hastily, declaring that she was quite dead of fatigue, and dismissed her. 'I don't want help, I can undress myself. As if Susan Barley couldn't do that for herself! and you may shut your door, I sha'n't have any frights to-night, I'm so tired out.'

'Another kiss,' Chloe said tenderly.

’Yes, take it’—the duchess leaned her cheek—’but I’m so tired I don’t know what I’m doing.’

‘It will not be on your conscience,’ Chloe answered, kissing her warmly.

Will those words she withdrew, and the duchess closed the door. She ran a bolt in it immediately.

‘I’m too tired to know anything I’m doing,’ she said to herself, and stood with shut eyes to hug certain thoughts which set her bosom heaving.

There was the bed, there was the clock. She had the option of lying down and floating quietly into the day, all peril past. It seemed sweet for a minute. But it soon seemed an old, a worn, an end-of-autumn life, chill, without aim, like a something that was hungry and toothless. The bed proposing innocent sleep repelled her and drove her to the clock. The clock was awful: the hand at the hour, the finger following the minute, commanded her to stir actively, and drove her to gentle meditations on the bed. She lay down dressed, after setting her light beside the clock, that she might see it at will, and

Page 4508

considering it necessary for the bed to appear to have been lain on. Considering also that she ought to be heard moving about in the process of undressing, she rose from the bed to make sure of her reading of the guilty clock. An hour and twenty minutes! she had no more time than that: and it was not enough for her various preparations, though it was true that her maid had packed and taken a box of the things chiefly needful; but the duchess had to change her shoes and her dress, and run at bo-peep with the changes of her mind, a sedative preface to any fatal step among women of her complexion, for so they invite indecision to exhaust their scruples, and they let the blood have its way. Having so short a space of time, she thought the matter decided, and with some relief she flung despairing on the bed, and lay down for good with her duke. In a little while her head was at work reviewing him sternly, estimating him not less accurately than the male moralist charitable to her sex would do. She quitted the bed, with a spring to escape her imagined lord; and as if she had felt him to be there, she lay down no more. A quiet life like that was flatter to her idea than a handsomely bound big book without any print on the pages, and without a picture. Her contemplation of it, contrasted with the life waved to her view by the timepiece, set her whole system rageing; she burned to fly. Providently, nevertheless, she thumped a pillow, and threw the bedclothes into proper disorder, to inform the world that her limbs had warmed them, and that all had been impulse with her. She then proceeded to disrobe, murmuring to herself that she could stop now, and could stop now, at each stage of the advance to a fresh dressing of her person, and moralizing on her singular fate, in the mouth of an observer. 'She was shot up suddenly over everybody's head, and suddenly down she went.' Susan whispered to herself: 'But it was for love!' Possessed by the rosiness of love, she finished her business, with an attention to everything needed that was equal to perfect serenity of mind. After which there was nothing to do, save to sit humped in a chair, cover her face and count the clock-tickings, that said, Yes—no; do—-don't; fly—stay; fly—fly! It seemed to her she heard a moving. Well she might with that dreadful heart of hers!

Chloe was asleep, at peace by this time, she thought; and how she envied Chloe! She might be as happy, if she pleased. Why not? But what kind of happiness was it? She likened it to that of the corpse underground, and shrank distastefully.

Susan stood at her glass to have a look at the creature about whom there was all this disturbance, and she threw up her arms high for a languid, not unlovely yawn, that closed in blissful shuddering with the sensation of her lover's arms having wormed round her waist and taken her while she was defenceless. For surely they would. She took a jewelled ring, his gift, from her purse, and kissed it, and drew it on and off her finger, leaving it on. Now she might wear it without fear of inquiries and virtuous eyebrows. O heavenly now—if only it were an hour hence; and going behind galloping horses!

Page 4509

The clock was at the terrible moment. She hesitated internally and hastened; once her feet stuck fast, and firmly she said, ‘No’; but the clock was her lord. The clock was her lover and her lord; and obeying it, she managed to get into the sitting-room, on the pretext that she merely wished to see through the front window whether daylight was coming.

How well she knew that half-light of the ebb of the wave of darkness.

Strange enough it was to see it showing houses regaining their solidity of the foregone day, instead of still fields, black hedges, familiar shapes of trees. The houses had no wakefulness, they were but seen to stand, and the light was a revelation of emptiness. Susan’s heart was cunning to reproach her duke for the difference of the scene she beheld from that of the innocent open-breasted land. Yes, it was dawn in a wicked place that she never should have been allowed to visit. But where was he whom she looked for? There! The cloaked figure of a man was at the corner of the street. It was he. Her heart froze; but her limbs were strung to throw off the house, and reach air, breathe, and (as her thoughts ran) swoon, well-protected. To her senses the house was a house on fire, and crying to her to escape.

Yet she stepped deliberately, to be sure-footed in a dusky room; she touched along the wall and came to the door, where a foot-stool nearly tripped her. Here her touch was at fault, for though she knew she must be close by the door, she was met by an obstruction unlike wood, and the door seemed neither shut nor open. She could not find the handle; something hung over it. Thinking coolly, she fancied the thing must be a gown or dressing-gown; it hung heavily. Her fingers were sensible of the touch of silk; she distinguished a depending bulk, and she felt at it very carefully and mechanically, saying within herself, in her anxiety to pass it without noise, ‘If I should awake poor Chloe, of all people!’ Her alarm was that the door might creak. Before any other alarm had struck her brain, the hand she felt with was in a palsy, her mouth gaped, her throat thickened, the dust-ball rose in her throat, and the effort to swallow it down and get breath kept her from acute speculation while she felt again, pinched, plucked at the thing, ready to laugh, ready to shriek. Above her head, all on one side, the thing had a round white top. Could it be a hand that her touch had slid across? An arm too! this was an arm! She clutched it, imagining that it clung to her. She pulled it to release herself from it, desperately she pulled, and a lump descended, and a flash of all the torn nerves of her body told her that a dead human body was upon her.

Page 4510

At a quarter to four o'clock of a midsummer morning, as Mr. Beamish relates of his last share in the Tale of Chloe, a woman's voice, in piercing notes of anguish, rang out three shrieks consecutively, which were heard by him at the instant of his quitting his front doorstep, in obedience to the summons of young Mr. Camwell, delivered ten minutes previously, with great urgency, by that gentleman's lacquey. On his reaching the street of the house inhabited by Duchess Susan, he perceived many night-capped heads at windows, and one window of the house in question lifted but vacant. His first impression accused the pair of gentlemen, whom he saw bearing drawn swords in no friendly attitude of an ugly brawl that had probably affrighted her Grace, or her personal attendant, a woman capable of screaming, for he was well assured that it could not have been Chloe, the least likely of her sex to abandon herself to the use of their weapons either in terror or in jeopardy. The antagonists were Mr. Camwell and Count Caseldy. On his approaching them, Mr. Camwell sheathed his sword, saying that his work was done. Caseldy was convulsed with wrath, to such a degree as to make the part of an intermediary perilous. There had been passes between them, and Caseldy cried aloud that he would have his enemy's blood. The night-watch was nowhere. Soon, however, certain shopmen and their apprentices assisted Mr. Beamish to preserve the peace, despite the fury of Caseldy and the provocations—'not easy to withstand,' says the chronicler—offered by him to young Camwell. The latter said to Mr. Beamish: 'I knew I should be no match, so I sent for you,' causing his friend astonishment, inasmuch as he was assured of the youth's natural valour.

Mr. Beamish was about to deliver an allocution of reproof to them in equal shares, being entirely unsuspicious of any other reason for the alarum than this palpable outbreak of a rivalry that he would have inclined to attribute to the charms of Chloe, when the house-door swung wide for them to enter, and the landlady of the house, holding clasped hands at full stretch, implored them to run up to the poor lady: 'Oh, she's dead; she's dead, dead!'

Caseldy rushed past her.

'How, dead! good woman?' Mr. Beamish questioned her most incredulously, half-smiling.

She answered among her moans: 'Dead by the neck; off the door—Oh!'

Young Camwell pressed his forehead, with a call on his Maker's name. As they reached the landing upstairs, Caseldy came out of the sitting-room.

'Which?' said Camwell to the speaking of his face.

'She!' said the other.

'The duchess?' Mr. Beamish exclaimed.

But Camwell walked into the room. He had nothing to ask after that reply.

The figure stretched along the floor was covered with a sheet. The young man fell at his length beside it, and his face was downward.

Page 4511

Mr. Beamish relates: 'To this day, when I write at an interval of fifteen years, I have the tragic ague of that hour in my blood, and I behold the shrouded form of the most admirable of women, whose heart was broken by a faithless man ere she devoted her wreck of life to arrest one weaker than herself on the descent to perdition. Therein it was beneficently granted her to be of the service she prayed to be through her death. She died to save. In a last letter, found upon her pincushion, addressed to me under seal of secrecy toward the parties principally concerned, she anticipates the whole confession of the unhappy duchess. Nay, she prophesies: "The duchess will tell you truly she has had enough of love!" Those actual words were reiterated to me by the poor lady daily until her lord arrived to head the funeral procession, and assist in nursing back the shattered health of his wife to a state that should fit her for travelling. To me, at least, she was constant in repeating, "No more of love!" By her behaviour to her duke, I can judge her to have been sincere. She spoke of feeling Chloe's eyes go through her with every word of hers that she recollected. Nor was the end of Chloe less effective upon the traitor. He was in the procession to her grave. He spoke to none. There is a line of the verse bearing the superscription, "My Reasons for Dying," that shows her to have been apprehensive to secure the safety of Mr. Camwell:

> I die because my heart is dead
> To warn a soul from sin I die:
> I die that blood may not be shed, *etc*.

She feared he would be somewhere on the road to mar the fugitives, and she knew him, as indeed he knew himself, no match for one trained in the foreign tricks of steel, ready though he was to dispute the traitor's way. She remembers Mr. Camwell's petition for the knotted silken string in her request that it shall be cut from her throat and given to him.'

Mr. Beamish indulges in verses above the grave of Chloe. They are of a character to cool emotion. But when we find a man, who is commonly of the quickest susceptibility to ridicule as well as to what is befitting, careless of exposure, we may reflect on the truthfulness of feeling by which he is drawn to pass his own guard and come forth in his nakedness; something of the poet's tongue may breathe to us through his mortal stammering, even if we have to acknowledge that a quotation would scatter pathos.

Etext editor's bookmarks:

All flattery is at somebody's expense
Be philosophical, but accept your personal dues
But I leave it to you
Distrust us, and it is a declaration of war
Happiness in love is a match between ecstasy and compliance
If I do not speak of payment
Intellectual contempt of easy dupes

Invite indecision to exhaust their scruples
Is not one month of

Page 4512

brightness as much as we can ask for?
No flattery for me at the expense of my sisters
Nothing desirable will you have which is not coveted
Primitive appetite for noise
She might turn out good, if well guarded for a time
The alternative is, a garter and the bedpost
They miss their pleasure in pursuing it
This mania of young people for pleasure, eternal pleasure
Wits, which are ordinarily less productive than land

THE HOUSE ON THE BEACH

By George Meredith
A *realistic tale*

CHAPTER I

The experience of great officials who have laid down their dignities before death, or have had the philosophic mind to review themselves while still wielding the deputy sceptre, teaches them that in the exercise of authority over men an eccentric behaviour in trifles has most exposed them to hostile criticism and gone farthest to jeopardize their popularity. It is their Achilles' heel; the place where their mother Nature holds them as she dips them in our waters. The eccentricity of common persons is the entertainment of the multitude, and the maternal hand is perceived for a cherishing and endearing sign upon them; but rarely can this be found suitable for the august in station; only, indeed, when their sceptre is no more fearful than a grandmother's birch; and these must learn from it sooner or later that they are uncomfortably mortal.

When herrings are at auction on a beach, for example, the man of chief distinction in the town should not step in among a poor fraternity to take advantage of an occasion of cheapness, though it be done, as he may protest, to relieve the fishermen of a burden; nor should such a dignitary as the bailiff of a Cinque Port carry home the spoil of victorious bargaining on his arm in a basket. It is not that his conduct is in itself objectionable, so much as that it causes him to be popularly weighed; and during life, until the best of all advocates can plead before our fellow Englishmen that we are out of their way, it is prudent to avoid the process.

Mr. Tinman, however, this high-stepping person in question, happened to have come of a marketing mother. She had started him from a small shop to a big one. He, by the practice of her virtues, had been enabled to start himself as a gentleman. He was a man of this ambition, and prouder behind it. But having started himself precipitately, he took rank among independent incomes, as they are called, only to take fright at the

perils of starvation besetting one who has been tempted to abandon the source of fifty per cent. So, if noble imagery were allowable in our time in prose, might alarms and partial regrets be assumed to animate the splendid pumpkin cut loose from the suckers. Deprived of that prodigious nourishment of the shop in the fashionable seaport

Page 4513

of Helmstone, he retired upon his native town, the Cinque Port of Crikswich, where he rented the cheapest residence he could discover for his habitation, the House on the Beach, and lived imposingly, though not in total disaccord with his old mother's principles. His income, as he observed to his widowed sister and solitary companion almost daily in their privacy, was respectable. The descent from an altitude of fifty to five per cent. cannot but be felt. Nevertheless it was a comforting midnight bolster reflection for a man, turning over to the other side between a dream and a wink, that he was making no bad debts, and one must pay to be addressed as esquire. Once an esquire, you are off the ground in England and on the ladder. An esquire can offer his hand in marriage to a lady in her own right; plain esquires have married duchesses; they marry baronets' daughters every day of the week.

Thoughts of this kind were as the rise and fall of waves in the bosom of the new esquire. How often in his Helmstone shop had he not heard titled ladies disdaining to talk a whit more prettily than ordinary women; and he had been a match for the subtlety of their pride—he understood it. He knew well that at the hint of a proposal from him they would have spoken out in a manner very different to that of ordinary women. The lightning, only to be warded by an esquire, was in them. He quitted business at the age of forty, that he might pretend to espousals with a born lady; or at least it was one of the ideas in his mind.

And here, I think, is the moment for the epitaph of anticipation over him, and the exclamation, alas! I would not be premature, but it is necessary to create some interest in him, and no one but a foreigner could feel it at present for the Englishman who is bursting merely to do like the rest of his countrymen, and rise above them to shake them class by class as the dust from his heels. Alas! then an—undertaker's pathos is better than none at all—he was not a single-minded aspirant to our social honours. The old marketing mother; to whom he owed his fortunes, was in his blood to confound his ambition; and so contradictory was the man's nature, that in revenge for disappointments, there were times when he turned against the saving spirit of parsimony. Readers deep in Greek dramatic writings will see the fatal Sisters behind the chair of a man who gives frequent and bigger dinners, that he may become important in his neighbourhood, while decreasing the price he pays for his wine, that he may miserably indemnify himself for the outlay. A sip of his wine fetched the breath, as when men are in the presence of the tremendous elements of nature. It sounded the constitution more darkly-awful, and with a profounder testimony to stubborn health, than the physician's instruments. Most of the guests at Mr. Tinman's table were so constructed that they admired him for its powerful quality the more at his announcement of the price of it; the combined

Page 4514

strength and cheapness probably flattering them, as by another mystic instance of the national energy. It must have been so, since his townsmen rejoiced to hail him as head of their town. Here and there a solitary esquire, fished out of the bathing season to dine at the house on the beach, was guilty of raising one of those clamours concerning subsequent headaches, which spread an evil reputation as a pall. A resident esquire or two, in whom a reminiscence of Tinman's table may be likened to the hook which some old trout has borne away from the angler as the most vivid of warnings to him to beware for the future, caught up the black report and propagated it.

The Lieutenant of the Coastguard, hearing the latest conscious victim, or hearing of him, would nod his head and say he had never dined at Tinman's table without a headache ensuing and a visit to the chemist's shop; which, he was assured, was good for trade, and he acquiesced, as it was right to do in a man devoted to his country. He dined with Tinman again. We try our best to be social. For eight months in our year he had little choice but to dine with Tinman or be a hermit attached to a telescope.

"Where are you going, Lieutenant?" His frank reply to the question was, "I am going to be killed;" and it grew notorious that this meant Tinman's table. We get on together as well as we can. Perhaps if we were an acutely calculating people we should find it preferable both for trade and our physical prosperity to turn and kill Tinman, in contempt of consequences. But we are not, and so he does the business gradually for us. A generous people we must be, for Tinman was not detested. The recollection of "next morning" caused him to be dimly feared.

Tinman, meanwhile, was awake only to the Circumstance that he made no progress as an esquire, except on the envelopes of letters, and in his own esteem. That broad region he began to occupy to the exclusion of other inhabitants; and the result of such a state of princely isolation was a plunge of his whole being into deep thoughts. From the hour of his investiture as the town's chief man, thoughts which were long shots took possession of him. He had his wits about him; he was alive to ridicule; he knew he was not popular below, or on easy terms with people above him, and he meditated a surpassing stroke as one of the Band of Esq., that had nothing original about it to perplex and annoy the native mind, yet was dazzling. Few members of the privileged Band dare even imagine the thing.

It will hardly be believed, but it is historical fact, that in the act of carrying fresh herrings home on his arm, he entertained the idea of a visit to the First Person and Head of the realm, and was indulging in pleasing visions of the charms of a personal acquaintance. Nay, he had already consulted with brother jurats. For you must know that one of the princesses had recently suffered betrothal in the newspapers, and supposing

Page 4515

her to deign to ratify the engagement, what so reasonable on the part of a Cinque Port chieftain as to congratulate his liege mistress, her illustrious mother? These are thoughts and these are deeds >which give emotional warmth and colour to the ejecter members of a population wretchedly befogged. They are our sunlight, and our brighter theme of conversation. They are necessary to the climate and the Saxon mind; and it would be foolish to put them away, as it is foolish not to do our utmost to be intimate with terrestrial splendours while we have them—as it may be said of wardens, mayors, and bailiffs-at command. Tinman was quite of this opinion. They are there to relieve our dulness. We have them in the place of heavenly; and he would have argued that we have a right to bother them too. He had a notion, up in the clouds, of a Sailors' Convalescent Hospital at Crikswich to seduce a prince with, hand him the trowel, make him "lay the stone," and then poor prince! refresh him at table. But that was a matter for by and by.

His purchase of herrings completed, Mr. Tinman walked across the mound of shingle to the house on the beach. He was rather a fresh-faced man, of the Saxon colouring, and at a distance looking good-humoured. That he should have been able to make such an appearance while doing daily battle with his wine, was a proof of great physical vigour. His pace was leisurely, as it must needs be over pebbles, where half a step is subtracted from each whole one in passing; and, besides, he was aware of a general breath at his departure that betokened a censorious assembly. Why should he not market for himself? He threw dignity into his retreating figure in response to the internal interrogation. The moment >was one when conscious rectitude =pliers man should have a tail for its just display. Philosophers have drawn attention to the power of the human face to express pure virtue, but no sooner has it passed on than the spirit erect within would seem helpless. The breadth of our shoulders is apparently presented for our critics to write on. Poor duty is done by the simple sense of moral worth, to supplant that absence of feature in the plain flat back. We are below the animals in this. How charged with language behind him is a dog! Everybody has noticed it. Let a dog turn away from a hostile circle, and his crisp and wary tail not merely defends him, it menaces; it is a weapon. Man has no choice but to surge and boil, or stiffen preposterously. Knowing the popular sentiment about his marketing—for men can see behind their backs, though they may have nothing to speak with—Tinman resembled those persons of principle who decline to pay for a "Bless your honour!" from a voluble beggar-woman, and obtain the reverse of it after they have gone by. He was sufficiently sensitive to feel that his back was chalked as on a slate. The only remark following him was, "There he goes!"

Page 4516

He went to the seaward gate of the house on the beach, made practicable in a low flint wall, where he was met by his sister Martha, to whom he handed the basket. Apparently he named the cost of his purchase per dozen. She touched the fish and pressed the bellies of the topmost, it might be to question them tenderly concerning their roes. Then the couple passed out of sight. Herrings were soon after this despatching their odours through the chimneys of all Crikswich, and there was that much of concord and festive union among the inhabitants.

The house on the beach had been posted where it stood, one supposes, for the sake of the sea-view, from which it turned right about to face the town across a patch of grass and salt scurf, looking like a square and scornful corporal engaged in the perpetual review of an awkward squad of recruits. Sea delighted it not, nor land either. Marine Parade fronting it to the left, shaded sickly eyes, under a worn green verandah, from a sun that rarely appeared, as the traducers of spinsters pretend those virgins are ever keenly on their guard against him that cometh not. Belle Vue Terrace stared out of lank glass panes without reserve, unashamed of its yellow complexion. A gaping public-house, calling itself newly Hotel, fell backward a step. Villas with the titles of royalty and bloody battles claimed five feet of garden, and swelled in bowwindows beside other villas which drew up firmly, commending to the attention a decent straightness and unintrusive decorum in preference. On an elevated meadow to the right was the Crouch. The Hall of Elba nestled among weather-beaten dwarf woods further toward the cliff. Shavenness, featurelessness, emptiness, clamminess scurfiness, formed the outward expression of a town to which people were reasonably glad to come from London in summer-time, for there was nothing in Crikswich to distract the naked pursuit of health. The sea tossed its renovating brine to the determinedly sniffing animal, who went to his meals with an appetite that rendered him cordially eulogistic of the place, in spite of certain frank whiffs of sewerage coming off an open deposit on the common to mingle with the brine. Tradition told of a French lady and gentleman entering the town to take lodgings for a month, and that on the morrow they took a boat from the shore, saying in their faint English to a sailor veteran of the coastguard, whom they had consulted about the weather, “It is better zis zan zat,” as they shrugged between rough sea and corpselike land. And they were not seen again. Their meaning none knew. Having paid their bill at the lodging-house, their conduct was ascribed to systematic madness. English people came to Crikswich for the pure salt sea air, and they did not expect it to be cooked and dressed and decorated for them. If these things are done to nature, it is nature no longer that you have, but something Frenchified. Those French are for trimming Neptune’s beard! Only wait, and you are

Page 4517

sure to find variety in nature, more than you may like. You will find it in Neptune. What say you to a breach of the sea-wall, and an inundation of the aromatic grass-flat extending from the house on the beach to the tottering terraces, villas, cottages: and public-house transformed by its ensign to Hotel, along the frontage of the town? Such an event had occurred of old, and had given the house on the beach the serious shaking great Neptune in his wrath alone can give. But many years had intervened. Groynes had been run down to intercept him and divert him. He generally did his winter mischief on a mill and salt marshes lower westward. Mr. Tinman had always been extremely zealous in promoting the expenditure of what moneys the town had to spare upon the protection of the shore, as it were for the propitiation or defiance of the sea-god. There was a kindly joke against him an that subject among brother jurats. He retorted with the joke, that the first thing for Englishmen to look to were England's defences.

But it will not do to be dwelling too fondly on our eras of peace, for which we make such splendid sacrifices. Peace, saving for the advent of a German band, which troubled the repose of the town at intervals, had imparted to the inhabitants of Crikswich, within and without, the likeness to its most perfect image, together, it must be confessed, with a degree of nervousness that invested common events with some of the terrors of the Last Trump, when one night, just upon the passing of the vernal equinox, something happened.

CHAPTER II

A carriage Stopped short in the ray of candlelight that was fitfully and feebly capering on the windy blackness outside the open workshop of Crickledon, the carpenter, fronting the sea-beach. Mr. Tinnnan's house was inquired for. Crickledon left off planing; at half-sprawl over the board, he bawled out, "Turn to the right; right ahead; can't mistake it." He nodded to one of the cronies intent on watching his labours: "Not unless they mean to be bait for whiting-pout. Who's that for Tinman, I wonder?" The speculations of Crickledon's friends were lost in the scream of the plane.

One cast an eye through the door and observed that the carriage was there still. "Gentleman's got out and walked," said Crickledon. He was informed that somebody was visible inside. "Gentleman's wife, mayhap," he said. His friends indulged in their privilege of thinking what they liked, and there was the usual silence of tongues in the shop. He furnished them sound and motion for their amusement, and now and then a scrap of conversation; and the sedater spirits dwelling in his immediate neighbourhood were accustomed to step in and see him work up to supper-time, instead of resorting to the more turbid and costly excitement of the public-house.

Crickledon looked up from the measurement of a thumb-line. In the doorway stood a bearded gentleman, who announced himself with the startling exclamation, "Here's a

pretty pickle!” and bustled to make way for a man well known to them as Ned Crummins, the upholsterer’s man, on whose back hung an article of furniture, the condition of which, with a condensed brevity of humour worthy of literary admiration, he displayed by mutely turning himself about as he entered.

Page 4518

“Smashed!” was the general outcry.

“I ran slap into him,” said the gentleman. “Who the deuce!—no bones broken, that’s one thing. The fellow—there, look at him: he’s like a glass tortoise.”

“It’s a chiwal glass,” Crickledon remarked, and laid finger on the star in the centre.

“Gentleman ran slap into me,” said Crummins, depositing the frame on the floor of the shop.

“Never had such a shock in my life,” continued the gentleman. “Upon my soul, I took him for a door: I did indeed. A kind of light flashed from one of your houses here, and in the pitch dark I thought I was at the door of old Mart Tinman’s house, and dash me if I did n’t go in—crash! But what the deuce do you do, carrying that great big looking-glass at night, man? And, look here tell me; how was it you happened to be going glass foremost when you’d got the glass on your back?”

“Well, ’t ain’t my fault, I knows that,” rejoined Crummins. “I came along as careful as a man could. I was just going to bawl out to Master Tinman, ‘I knows the way, never fear me’; for I thinks I hears him call from his house, ‘Do ye see the way?’ and into me this gentleman runs all his might, and smash goes the glass. I was just ten steps from Master Tinman’s gate, and that careful, I reckoned every foot I put down, that I was; I knows I did, though.”

“Why, it was me calling, ‘I’m sure I can’t see the way.’

“You heard me, you donkey!” retorted the bearded gentleman. “What was the good of your turning that glass against me in the very nick when I dashed on you?”

“Well, ’t ain’t my fault, I swear,” said Crummins. “The wind catches voices so on a pitch dark night, you never can tell whether they be on one shoulder or the other. And if I’m to go and lose my place through no fault of mine——”

“Have n’t I told you, sir, I’m going to pay the damage? Here,” said the gentleman, fumbling at his waistcoat, “here, take this card. Read it.”

For the first time during the scene in the carpenter’s shop, a certain pomposity swelled the gentleman’s tone. His delivery of the card appeared to act on him like the flourish of a trumpet before great men.

“Van Diemen Smith,” he proclaimed himself for the assistance of Ned Crummins in his task; the latter’s look of sad concern on receiving the card seeming to declare an unscholarly conscience.

An anxious feminine voice was heard close beside Mr. Van Diemen Smith.

“Oh, papa, has there been an accident? Are you hurt?”

“Not a bit, Netty; not a bit. Walked into a big looking-glass in the dark, that’s all. A matter of eight or ten pound, and that won’t stump us. But these are what I call queer doings in Old England, when you can’t take a step in the dark, on the seashore without plunging bang into a glass. And it looks like bad luck to my visit to old Mart Tinman.”

“Can you,” he addressed the company, “tell me of a clean, wholesome lodging-house? I was thinking of flinging myself, body and baggage, on your mayor, or whatever he is—-my old schoolmate; but I don’t so much like this beginning. A couple of bed-rooms and sitting-room; clean sheets, well aired; good food, well cooked; payment per week in advance.”

Page 4519

The pebble dropped into deep water speaks of its depth by the tardy arrival of bubbles on the surface, and, in like manner, the very simple question put by Mr. Van Diemen Smith pursued its course of penetration in the assembled mind in the carpenter's shop for a considerable period, with no sign to show that it had reached the bottom.

"Surely, papa, we can go to an inn? There must be some hotel," said his daughter.

"There's good accommodation at the Cliff Hotel hard by," said Crickledon.

"But," said one of his friends, "if you don't want to go so far, sir, there's Master Crickledon's own house next door, and his wife lets lodgings, and there's not a better cook along this coast."

"Then why did n't the man mention it? Is he afraid of having me?" asked Mr. Smith, a little thunderingly. "I may n't be known much yet in England; but I'll tell you, you inquire the route to Mr. Van Diemen Smith over there in Australia."

"Yes, papa," interrupted his daughter, "only you must consider that it may not be convenient to take us in at this hour—so late."

"It's not that, miss, begging your pardon," said Crickledon. "I make a point of never recommending my own house. That's where it is. Otherwise you're welcome to try us."

"I was thinking of falling bounce on my old schoolmate, and putting Old English hospitality to the proof," Mr. Smith meditated. "But it's late. Yes, and that confounded glass! No, we'll bide with you, Mr. Carpenter. I'll send my card across to Mart Tinman to-morrow, and set him agog at his breakfast."

Mr. Van Diemen Smith waved his hand for Crickledon to lead the way.

Hereupon Ned Crummins looked up from the card he had been turning over and over, more and more like one arriving at a condemnatory judgment of a fish.

"I can't go and give my master a card instead of his glass," he remarked.

"Yes, that reminds me; and I should like to know what you meant by bringing that glass away from Mr. Tinman's house at night," said Mr. Smith. "If I'm to pay for it, I've a right to know. What's the meaning of moving it at night? Eh, let's hear. Night's not the time for moving big glasses like that. I'm not so sure I haven't got a case."

"If you'll step round to my master along o' me, sir," said Crummins, "perhaps he'll explain."

Crummins was requested to state who his master was, and he replied, "Phippun and Company;" but Mr. Smith positively refused to go with him.

“But here,” said he, “is a crown for you, for you’re a civil fellow. You’ll know where to find me in the morning; and mind, I shall expect Phippun and Company to give me a very good account of their reason for moving a big looking-glass on a night like this. There, be off.”

The crown-piece in his hand effected a genial change in Crummins’ disposition to communicate. Crickledon spoke to him about the glass; two or three of the others present jogged him. “What did Mr. Tinman want by having the glass moved so late in the day, Ned? Your master wasn’t nervous about his property, was he?”

Page 4520

“Not he,” said Crummins, and began to suck down his upper lip and agitate his eyelids and stand uneasily, glimmering signs of the setting in of the tide of narration.

He caught the eye of Mr. Smith, then looked abashed at Miss.

Crickledon saw his dilemma. “Say what’s uppermost, Ned; never mind how you says it. English is English. Mr. Tinman sent for you to take the glass away, now, did n’t he?”

“He did,” said Crummins.

“And you went to him.”

“Ay, that I did.”

“And he fastened the chiwal glass upon your back”

“He did that.”

“That’s all plain sailing. Had he bought the glass?”

“No, he had n’t bought it. He’d hired it.”

As when upon an enforced visit to the dentist, people have had one tooth out, the remaining offenders are more willingly submitted to the operation, insomuch that a poetical licence might hazard the statement that they shed them like leaves of the tree, so Crummins, who had shrunk from speech, now volunteered whole sentences in succession, and how important they were deemed by his fellow-townsman, Mr. Smith, and especially Miss Annette Smith, could perceive in their ejaculations, before they themselves were drawn into the strong current of interest.

And this was the matter: Tinman had hired the glass for three days. Latish, on the very first day of the hiring, close upon dark, he had despatched imperative orders to Phippun and Company to take the glass out of his house on the spot. And why? Because, as he maintained, there was a fault in the glass causing an incongruous and absurd reflection; and he was at that moment awaiting the arrival of another chiwal-glass.

“Cut along, Ned,” said Crickledon.

“What the deuce does he want with a chiwal-glass at all?” cried Mr. Smith, endangering the flow of the story by suggesting to the narrator that he must “hark back,” which to him was equivalent to the jumping of a chasm hindward. Happily his brain had seized a picture:

“Mr. Tinman, he’s a-standin’ in his best Court suit.”

Mr. Tinmau's old schoolmate gave a jump; and no wonder.

"Standing?" he cried; and as the act of standing was really not extraordinary, he fixed upon the suit: "Court?"

"So Mrs. Cavely told me, it was what he was standin' in, and as I found 'm I left 'm," said Crummins.

"He's standing in it now?" said Mr. Van Diemen Smith, with a great gape.

Crummins doggedly repeated the statement. Many would have ornamented it in the repetition, but he was for bare flat truth.

"He must be precious proud of having a Court suit," said Mr. Smith, and gazed at his daughter so glassily that she smiled, though she was impatient to proceed to Mrs. Crickledon's lodgings.

"Oh! there's where it is?" interjected the carpenter, with a funny frown at a low word from Ned Crummins. "Practicing, is he? Mr. Tinman's practicing before the glass preparatory to his going to the palace in London."

Page 4521

“He gave me a shillin’,” said Crummins.

Crickledon comprehended him immediately. “We sha’n’t speak about it, Ned.”

What did you see? was thus cautiously suggested.

The shilling was on Crummins’ tongue to check his betrayal of the secret scene. But remembering that he had only witnessed it by accident, and that Mr. Tinman had not completely taken him into his confidence, he thrust his hand down his pocket to finger the crown-piece lying in fellowship with the coin it multiplied five times, and was inspired to think himself at liberty to say: “All I saw was when the door opened. Not the house-door. It was the parlour-door. I saw him walk up to the glass, and walk back from the glass. And when he’d got up to the glass he bowed, he did, and he went back’ards just so.”

Doubtless the presence of a lady was the active agent that prevented Crummins from doubling his body entirely, and giving more than a rapid indication of the posture of Mr. Tinman in his retreat before the glass. But it was a glimpse of broad burlesque, and though it was received with becoming sobriety by the men in the carpenter’s shop, Annette plucked at her father’s arm.

She could not get him to depart. That picture of his old schoolmate Martin Tinman practicing before a chiwal glass to present himself at the palace in his Court suit, seemed to stupefy his Australian intelligence.

“What right has he got to go to Court?” Mr. Van Diemen Smith inquired, like the foreigner he had become through exile.

“Mr. Tinman’s bailiff of the town,” said Crickledon.

“And what was his objection to that glass I smashed?”

“He’s rather an irritable gentleman,” Crickledon murmured, and turned to Crummins.

Crummins growled: “He said it was misty, and gave him a twist.”

“What a big fool he must be! eh?” Mr. Smith glanced at Crickledon and the other faces for the verdict of Tinman’s townsmen upon his character.

They had grounds for thinking differently of Tinman.

“He’s no fool,” said Crickledon.

Another shook his head. “Sharp at a bargain.”

“That he be,” said the chorus.

Mr. Smith was informed that Mr. Tinman would probably end by buying up half the town.

“Then,” said Mr. Smith, “he can afford to pay half the money for that glass, and pay he shall.”

A serious view of the recent catastrophe was presented by his declaration.

In the midst of a colloquy regarding the cost of the glass, during which it began to be seen by Mr. Tinman’s townsmen that there was laughing-stuff for a year or so in the scene witnessed by Crummins, if they postponed a bit their right to the laugh and took it in doses, Annette induced her father to signal to Crickledon his readiness to go and see the lodgings. No sooner had he done it than he said, “What on earth made us wait all this time here? I’m hungry, my dear; I want supper.”

Page 4522

“That is because you have had a disappointment. I know you, papa,” said Annette.

“Yes, it’s rather a damper about old Mart Tinman,” her father assented. “Or else I have n’t recovered the shock of smashing that glass, and visit it on him. But, upon my honour, he’s my only friend in England, I have n’t a single relative that I know of, and to come and find your only friend making a donkey of himself, is enough to make a man think of eating and drinking.”

Annette murmured reproachfully: “We can hardly say he is our only friend in England, papa, can we?”

“Do you mean that young fellow? You’ll take my appetite away if you talk of him. He’s a stranger. I don’t believe he’s worth a penny. He owns he’s what he calls a journalist.”

These latter remarks were hurriedly exchanged at the threshold of Crickledon’s house.

“It don’t look promising,” said Mr. Smith.

“I didn’t recommend it,” said Crickledon.

“Why the deuce do you let your lodgings, then?”

“People who have come once come again.”

“Oh! I am in England,” Annette sighed joyfully, feeling at home in some trait she had detected in Crickledon.

CHAPTER III

The story of the shattered chiwal-glass and the visit of Tinman’s old schoolmate fresh from Australia, was at many a breakfast-table before. Tinman heard a word of it, and when he did he had no time to spare for such incidents, for he was reading to his widowed sister Martha, in an impressive tone, at a tolerably high pitch of the voice, and with a suppressed excitement that shook away all things external from his mind as violently as it agitated his body. Not the waves without but the engine within it is which gives the shock and tremor to the crazy steamer, forcing it to cut through the waves and scatter them to spray; and so did Martin Tinman make light of the external attack of the card of *van Diemen smith*, and its pencilled line: “An old chum of yours, eh, matey?” Even the communication of Phippun & Co. concerning the chiwal-glass, failed to divert him from his particular task. It was indeed a public duty; and the chiwal-glass, though pertaining to it, was a private business. He that has broken the glass, let that man pay for it, he pronounced—no doubt in simpler fashion, being at his ease in his home, but with the serenity of one uplifted. As to the name *van Diemen smith*, he knew it not, and

so he said to himself while accurately recollecting the identity of the old chum who alone of men would have thought of writing eh, matey?

Mr. Van Diemen Smith did not present the card in person. “At Crickledon’s,” he wrote, apparently expecting the bailiff of the town to rush over to him before knowing who he was.

Tinman was far too busy. Anybody can read plain penmanship or print, but ask anybody not a Cabinet Minister or a Lord-in-Waiting to read out loud and clear in a Palace, before a Throne. Oh! the nature of reading is distorted in a trice, and as Tinman said to his worthy sister: “I can do it, but I must lose no time in preparing myself.” Again, at a reperusal, he informed her: “I must habituate myself.” For this purpose he had put on the suit overnight.

Page 4523

The articulation of faultless English was his object. His sister Martha sat vice-regally to receive his loyal congratulations on the illustrious marriage, and she was pensive, less nervous than her brother from not having to speak continuously, yet somewhat perturbed. She also had her task, and it was to avoid thinking herself the Person addressed by her suppliant brother, while at the same time she took possession of the scholarly training and perfect knowledge of diction and rules of pronunciation which would infallibly be brought to bear on him in the terrible hour of the delivery of the Address. It was no small task moreover to be compelled to listen right through to the end of the Address, before the very gentlest word of criticism was allowed. She did not exactly complain of the renewal of the rehearsal: a fatigue can be endured when it is a joy. What vexed her was her failing memory for the points of objection, as in her imagined High Seat she conceived them; for, in painful truth, the instant her brother had finished she entirely lost her acuteness of ear, and with that her recollection: so there was nothing to do but to say: "Excellent! Quite unobjectionable, dear Martin, quite:" so she said, and emphatically; but the addition of the word "only" was printed on her contracted brow, and every faculty of Tinman's mind and nature being at strain just then, he asked her testily: "What now? what's the fault now?" She assured him with languor that there was not a fault. "It's not your way of talking," said he, and what he said was true. His discernment was extraordinary; generally he noticed nothing.

Not only were his perceptions quickened by the preparations for the day of great splendour: day of a great furnace to be passed through likewise!—he, was learning English at an astonishing rate into the bargain. A pronouncing Dictionary lay open on his table. To this he flew at a hint of a contrary method, and disputes, verifications and triumphs on one side and the other ensued between brother and sister. In his heart the agitated man believed his sister to be a misleading guide. He dared not say it, he thought it, and previous to his African travel through the Dictionary he had thought his sister infallible on these points. He dared not say it, because he knew no one else before whom he could practice, and as it was confidence that he chiefly wanted—above all things, confidence and confidence comes of practice, he preferred the going on with his practice to an absolute certainty as to correctness.

At midday came another card from Mr. Van Diemen Smith bearing the superscription: alias Phil R.

"Can it be possible," Tinman asked his sister, "that Philip Ribstone has had the audacity to return to this country? I think," he added, "I am right in treating whoever sends me this card as a counterfeit."

Martha's advice was, that he should take no notice of the card.

"I am seriously engaged," said Tinman. With a "Now then, dear," he resumed his labours.

Page 4524

Messages had passed between Tinman and Phippun; and in the afternoon Phippun appeared to broach the question of payment for the chiwal-glass. He had seen Mr. Van Diemen Smith, had found him very strange, rather impracticable. He was obliged to tell Tinman that he must hold him responsible for the glass; nor could he send a second until payment was made for the first. It really seemed as if Tinman would be compelled, by the force of circumstances, to go and shake his old friend by the hand. Otherwise one could clearly see the man might be off: he might be off at any minute, leaving a legal contention behind him. On the other hand, supposing he had come to Crikswich for assistance in money? Friendship is a good thing, and so is hospitality, which is an essentially English thing, and consequently one that it behoves an Englishman to think it his duty to perform, but we do not extend it to paupers. But should a pauper get so close to us as to lay hold of us, vowing he was once our friend, how shake him loose? Tinman foresaw that it might be a matter of five pounds thrown to the dogs, perhaps ten, counting the glass. He put on his hat, full of melancholy presentiments; and it was exactly half-past five o'clock of the spring afternoon when he knocked at Crickledon's door.

Had he looked into Crickledon's shop as he went by, he would have perceived Van Diemen Smith astride a piece of timber, smoking a pipe. Van Diemen saw Tinman. His eyes cocked and watered. It is a disgraceful fact to record of him without periphrasis. In truth, the bearded fellow was almost a woman at heart, and had come from the Antipodes throbbing to slap Martin Tinman on the back, squeeze his hand, run over England with him, treat him, and talk of old times in the presence of a trotting regiment of champagne. That affair of the chiwal-glass had temporarily damped his enthusiasm. The absence of a reply to his double transmission of cards had wounded him; and something in the look of Tinman disgusted his rough taste. But the well-known features recalled the days of youth. Tinman was his one living link to the country he admired as the conqueror of the world, and imaginatively delighted in as the seat of pleasures, and he could not discard the feeling of some love for Tinman without losing his grasp of the reason why, he had longed so fervently and travelled so breathlessly to return hither. In the days of their youth, Van Diemen had been Tinman's cordial spirit, at whom he sipped for cheerful visions of life, and a good honest glow of emotion now and then. Whether it was odd or not that the sipper should be oblivious, and the cordial spirit heartily reminiscent of those times, we will not stay to inquire.

Their meeting took place in Crickledon's shop. Tinman was led in by Mrs. Crickledon. His voice made a sound of metal in his throat, and his air was that of a man buttoned up to the palate, as he read from the card, glancing over his eyelids, "Mr. Van Diemen Smith, I believe."

Page 4525

“Phil Ribstone, if you like,” said the other, without rising.

“Oh, ah, indeed!” Tinman temperately coughed.

“Yes, dear me. So it is. It strikes you as odd?”

“The change of name,” said Tinman.

“Not nature, though!”

“Ah! Have you been long in England?”

“Time to run to Helmstone, and on here. You’ve been lucky in business, I hear.”

“Thank you; as things go. Do you think of remaining in England?”

“I’ve got to settle about a glass I broke last night.”

“Ah! I have heard of it. Yes, I fear there will have to be a settlement.”

“I shall pay half of the damage. You’ll have to stump up your part.”

Van Diemen smiled roguishly.

“We must discuss that,” said Tinman, smiling too, as a patient in bed may smile at a doctor’s joke; for he was, as Crickledon had said of him, no fool on practical points, and Van Diemen’s mention of the half-payment reassured him as to his old friend’s position in the world, and softly thawed him. “Will you dine with me to-day?”

“I don’t mind if I do. I’ve a girl. You remember little Netty? She’s walking out on the beach with a young fellow named Fellingham, whose acquaintance we made on the voyage, and has n’t left us long to ourselves. Will you have her as well? And I suppose you must ask him. He’s a newspaper man; been round the world; seen a lot.”

Tinman hesitated. An electrical idea of putting sherry at fifteen shillings per dozen on his table instead of the ceremonial wine at twenty-five shillings, assisted him to say hospitably, “Oh! ah! yes; any friend of yours.”

“And now perhaps you’ll shake my fist,” said Van Diemen.

“With pleasure,” said Tinman. “It was your change of name, you know, Philip.”

“Look here, Martin. Van Diemen Smith was a convict, and my benefactor. Why the deuce he was so fond of that name, I can’t tell you; but his dying wish was for me to take it and carry it on. He left me his fortune, for Van Diemen Smith to enjoy life, as he never did, poor fellow, when he was alive. The money was got honestly, by hard labour

at a store. He did evil once, and repented after. But, by Heaven!"—Van Diemen jumped up and thundered out of a broad chest—"the man was one of the finest hearts that ever beat. He was! and I'm proud of him. When he died, I turned my thoughts home to Old England and you, Martin."

"Oh!" said Tinman; and reminded by Van Diemen's way of speaking, that cordiality was expected of him, he shook his limbs to some briskness, and continued, "Well, yes, we must all die in our native land if we can. I hope you're comfortable in your lodgings?"

"I'll give you one of Mrs. Crickledon's dinners to try. You're as good as mayor of this town, I hear?"

"I am the bailiff of the town," said Mr. Tinman.

"You're going to Court, I'm told."

Page 4526

“The appointment,” replied Mr. Tinman, “will soon be made. I have not yet an appointed day.”

On the great highroad of life there is Expectation, and there is Attainment, and also there is Envy. Mr. Tinman’s posture stood for Attainment shadowing Expectation, and sunning itself in the glass of Envy, as he spoke of the appointed day. It was involuntary, and naturally evanescent, a momentary view of the spirit.

He unbent, and begged to be excused for the present, that he might go and apprise his sister of guests coming.

“All right. I daresay we shall see, enough of one another,” said Van Diemen. And almost before the creak of Tinman’s heels was deadened on the road outside the shop, he put the funny question to Crickledon, “Do you box?”

“I make ’em,” Crickledon replied.

“Because I should like to have a go in at something, my friend.”

Van Diemen stretched and yawned.

Crickledon recommended the taking of a walk.

“I think I will,” said the other, and turned back abruptly. “How long do you work in the day?”

“Generally, all the hours of light,” Crickledon replied; “and always up to supper-time.”

“You’re healthy and happy?”

“Nothing to complain of.”

“Good appetite?”

“Pretty regular.”

“You never take a holiday?”

“Except Sundays.”

“You’d like to be working then?”

“I won’t say that.”

“But you’re glad to be up Monday morning?”

“It feels cheerfuller in the shop.”

“And carpentering’s your joy?”

“I think I may say so.”

Van Diemen slapped his thigh. “There’s life in Old England yet!”

Crickledon eyed him as he walked away to the beach to look for his daughter, and conceived that there was a touch of the soldier in him.

CHAPTER IV

Annette Smith’s delight in her native England made her see beauty and kindness everywhere around her; it put a halo about the house on the beach, and thrilled her at Tinman’s table when she heard the thunder of the waves hard by. She fancied it had been a most agreeable dinner to her father and Mr. Herbert Fellingham—especially to the latter, who had laughed very much; and she was astonished to hear them at breakfast both complaining of their evening. In answer to which, she exclaimed, “Oh, I think the situation of the house is so romantic!”

“The situation of the host is exceedingly so,” said Mr. Fellingham; “but I think his wine the most unromantic liquid I have ever tasted.”

“It must be that!” cried Van Diemen, puzzled by novel pains in the head. “Old Martin woke up a little like his old self after dinner.”

“He drank sparingly,” said Mr. Fellingham.

“I am sure you were satirical last night,” Annette said reproachfully.

“On the contrary, I told him I thought he was in a romantic situation.”

Page 4527

“But I have had a French mademoiselle for my governess and an Oxford gentleman for my tutor; and I know you accepted French and English from Mr. Tinman and his sister that I should not have approved.”

“Netty,” said Van Diemen, “has had the best instruction money could procure; and if she says you were satirical, you may depend on it you were.”

“Oh, in that case, of course!” Mr. Fellingham rejoined. “Who could help it?”

He thought himself warranted in giving the rein to his wicked satirical spirit, and talked lightly of the accidental character of the letter H in Tinman’s pronunciation; of how, like somebody else’s hat in a high wind, it descended on somebody else’s head, and of how his words walked about asking one another who they were and what they were doing, danced together madly, snapping their fingers at signification; and so forth. He was flippant.

Annette glanced at her father, and dropped her eyelids.

Mr. Fellingham perceived that he was enjoined to be on his guard.

He went one step farther in his fun; upon which Van Diemen said, with a frown, “If you please!”

Nothing could withstand that.

“Hang old Mart Tinman’s wine!” Van Diemen burst out in the dead pause. “My head’s a bullet. I’m in a shocking bad temper. I can hardly see. I’m bilious.”

Mr. Fellingham counselled his lying down for an hour, and he went grumbling, complaining of Mart Tinman’s incredulity about the towering beauty of a place in Australia called Gippsland.

Annette confided to Mr. Fellingham, as soon as they were alone, the chivalrous nature of her father in his friendships, and his indisposition to hear a satirical remark upon his old schoolmate, the moment he understood it to be satire.

Fellingham pleaded: “The man’s a perfect burlesque. He’s as distinctly made to be laughed at as a mask in a pantomime.”

“Papa will not think so,” said Annette; “and papa has been told that he is not to be laughed at as a man of business.”

“Do you prize him for that?”

“I am no judge. I am too happy to be in England to be a judge of anything.”

“You did not touch his wine!”

“You men attach so much importance to wine!”

“They do say that powders is a good thing after Mr. Tinman’s wine,” observed Mrs. Crickledon, who had come into the sitting-room to take away the breakfast things.

Mr. Fellingham gave a peal of laughter; but Mrs Crickledon bade him be hushed, for Mr. Van Diemen Smith had gone to lay down his poor aching head on his pillow. Annette ran upstairs to speak to her father about a doctor.

During her absence, Mr. Fellingham received the popular portrait of Mr. Tinman from the lips of Mrs. Crickledon. He subsequently strolled to the carpenter’s shop, and endeavoured to get a confirmation of it.

“My wife talks too much,” said Crickledon.

Page 4528

When questioned by a gentleman, however, he was naturally bound to answer to the extent of his knowledge.

“What a funny old country it is!” Mr. Fellingham said to Annette, on their walk to the beach.

She implored him not to laugh at anything English.

“I don’t, I assure you,” said he. “I love the country, too. But when one comes back from abroad, and plunges into their daily life, it’s difficult to retain the real figure of the old country seen from outside, and one has to remember half a dozen great names to right oneself. And Englishmen are so funny! Your father comes here to see his old friend, and begins boasting of the Gippsland he has left behind. Tinman immediately brags of Helvellyn, and they fling mountains at one another till, on their first evening together, there’s earthquake and rupture—they were nearly at fisticuffs at one time.”

“Oh! surely no,” said Annette. “I did not hear them. They were good friends when you came to the drawingroom. Perhaps the wine did affect poor papa, if it was bad wine. I wish men would never drink any. How much happier they would be.”

“But then there would cease to be social meetings in England. What should we do?”

“I know that is a sneer; and you were nearly as enthusiastic as I was on board the vessel,” Annette said, sadly.

“Quite true. I was. But see what quaint creatures we have about us! Tinman practicing in his Court suit before the chiwal-glass! And that good fellow, the carpenter, Crickledon, who has lived with the sea fronting him all his life, and has never been in a boat, and he confesses he has only once gone inland, and has never seen an acorn!”

“I wish I could see one—of a real English oak,” said Annette.

“And after being in England a few months you will be sighing for the Continent.”

“Never!”

“You think you will be quite contented here?”

“I am sure I shall be. May papa and I never be exiles again! I did not feel it when I was three years old, going out to Australia; but it would be like death to me now. Oh!” Annette shivered, as with the exile’s chill.

“On my honour,” said Mr. Fellingham, as softly as he could with the wind in his teeth, “I love the old country ten times more from your love of it.”

“That is not how I want England to be loved,” returned Annette.

“The love is in your hands.”

She seemed indifferent on hearing it.

He should have seen that the way to woo her was to humour her prepossession by another passion. He could feel that it ennobled her in the abstract, but a latent spite at Tinman on account of his wine, to which he continued angrily to attribute as unwonted dizziness of the head and slight irascibility, made him urgent in his desire that she should separate herself from Tinman and his sister by the sharp division of derision.

Page 4529

Annette declined to laugh at the most risible caricatures of Tinman. In her antagonism she forced her simplicity so far as to say that she did not think him absurd. And supposing Mr. Tinman to have proposed to the titled widow, Lady Ray, as she had heard, and to other ladies young and middle-aged in the neighbourhood, why should he not, if he wished to marry? If he was economical, surely he had a right to manage his own affairs. Her dread was lest Mr. Tinman and her father should quarrel over the payment for the broken chiwal-glass: that she honestly admitted, and Fellingham was so indiscreet as to roar aloud, not so very cordially.

Annette thought him unkindly satirical; and his thoughts of her reduced her to the condition of a commonplace girl with expressive eyes.

She had to return to her father. Mr. Fellingham took a walk on the springy turf along the cliffs; and “certainly she is a commonplace girl,” he began by reflecting; with a side eye at the fact that his meditations were excited by Tinman’s poisoning of his bile. “A girl who can’t see the absurdity of Tinman must be destitute of common intelligence.” After a while he sniffed the fine sharp air of mingled earth and sea delightedly, and he strode back to the town late in the afternoon, laughing at himself in scorn of his wretched susceptibility to bilious impressions, and really all but hating Tinman as the cause of his weakness—in the manner of the criminal hating the detective, perhaps. He cast it altogether on Tinman that Annette’s complexion of character had become discoloured to his mind; for, in spite of the physical freshness with which he returned to her society, he was incapable of throwing off the idea of her being commonplace; and it was with regret that he acknowledged he had gained from his walk only a higher opinion of himself.

Her father was the victim of a sick headache, [Migraine—D.W.]and lay, a groaning man, on his bed, ministered to by Mrs. Crickledon chiefly. Annette had to conduct the business with Mr. Phippun and Mr. Tinman as to payment for the chiwal-glass. She was commissioned to offer half the price for the glass on her father’s part; more he would not pay. Tinman and Phippun sat with her in Crickledon’s cottage, and Mrs. Crickledon brought down two messages from her invalid, each positive, to the effect that he would fight with all the arms of English law rather than yield his point.

Tinman declared it to be quite out of the question that he should pay a penny. Phippun vowed that from one or the other of them he would have the money.

Annette naturally was in deep distress, and Fellingham postponed the discussion to the morrow.

Even after such a taste of Tinman as that, Annette could not be induced to join in deriding him privately. She looked pained by Mr. Fellingham’s cruel jests. It was monstrous, Fellingham considered, that he should draw on himself a second reprimand from Van Diemen Smith, while they were consulting in entire agreement upon the case of the chiwal-glass.

Page 4530

“I must tell you this, mister sir,” said Van Diemen, “I like you, but I’ll be straightforward and truthful, or I’m not worthy the name of Englishman; and I do like you, or I should n’t have given you leave to come down here after us two. You must respect my friend if you care for my respect. That’s it. There it is. Now you know my conditions.”

“I ’m afraid I can’t sign the treaty,” said Fellingham.

“Here’s more,” said Van Diemen. “I’m a chilly man myself if I hear a laugh and think I know the aim of it. I’ll meet what you like except scorn. I can’t stand contempt. So I feel for another. And now you know.”

“It puts a stopper on the play of fancy, and checks the throwing off of steam,” Fellingham remonstrated. “I promise to do my best, but of all the men I’ve ever met in my life—-Tinman!—the ridiculous! Pray pardon me; but the donkey and his looking-glass! The glass was misty! He—as particular about his reflection in the glass as a poet with his verses! Advance, retire, bow; and such murder of the Queen’s English in the very presence! If I thought he was going to take his wine with him, I’d have him arrested for high treason.”

“You’ve chosen, and you know what you best like,” said Van Diemen, pointing his accents—by which is produced the awkward pause, the pitfall of conversation, and sometimes of amity.

Thus it happened that Mr. Herbert Fellingham journeyed back to London a day earlier than he had intended, and without saying what he meant to say.

CHAPTER V

A month later, after a night of sharp frost on the verge of the warmer days of spring, Mr. Fellingham entered Crikswich under a sky of perfect blue that was in brilliant harmony with the green downs, the white cliffs and sparkling sea, and no doubt it was the beauty before his eyes which persuaded him of his delusion in having taken Annette for a commonplace girl. He had come in a merely curious mood to discover whether she was one or not. Who but a commonplace girl would care to reside in Crikswich, he had asked himself; and now he was full sure that no commonplace girl would ever have had the idea. Exquisitely simple, she certainly was; but that may well be a distinction in a young lady whose eyes are expressive.

The sound of sawing attracted him to Crickledon’s shop, and the industrious carpenter soon put him on the tide of affairs.

Crickledon pointed to the house on the beach as the place where Mr. Van Diemen Smith and his daughter were staying.

“Dear me! and how does he look?” said Fellingham.

“Our town seems to agree with him, sir.”

“Well, I must not say any more, I suppose.” Fellingham checked his tongue. “How have they settled that dispute about the chiwal-glass?”

“Mr. Tinman had to give way.”

“Really.”

“But,” Crickledon stopped work, “Mr. Tinman sold him a meadow.”

Page 4531

“I see.”

“Mr. Smith has been buying a goodish bit of ground here. They tell me he’s about purchasing Elba. He has bought the Crouch. He and Mr. Tinman are always out together. They’re over at Helmstone now. They’ve been to London.”

“Are they likely to be back to-day?”

“Certain, I should think. Mr. Tinman has to be in London to-morrow.”

Crickledon looked. He was not the man to look artful, but there was a lighted corner in his look that revived Fellingham’s recollections, and the latter burst out:

“The Address? I ’d half forgotten it. That’s not over yet? Has he been practicing much?”

“No more glasses ha’ been broken.”

“And how is your wife, Crickledon?”

“She’s at home, sir, ready for a talk, if you’ve a mind to try her.”

Mrs. Crickledon proved to be very ready. “That Tinman,” was her theme. He had taken away her lodgers, and she knew his objects. Mr. Smith repented of leaving her, she knew, though he dared not say it in plain words. She knew Miss Smith was tired to death of constant companionship with Mrs. Cavely, Tinman’s sister. She generally came once in the day just to escape from Mrs. Cavely, who would not, bless you! step into a cottager’s house where she was not allowed to patronize. Fortunately Miss Smith had induced her father to get his own wine from the merchants.

“A happy resolution,” said Fellingham; “and a saving one.”

He heard further that Mr. Smith would take possession of the Crouch next month, and that Mrs. Cavely hung over Miss Smith like a kite.

“And that old Tinman, old enough to be her father!” said Mrs. Crickledon.

She dealt in the flashes which connect ideas. Fellingham, though a man, and an Englishman, was nervously wakeful enough to see the connection.

“They’ll have to consult the young lady first, ma’am.”

“If it’s her father’s nod she’ll bow to it; now mark me,” Mrs. Crickledon said, with emphasis. “She’s a young lady who thinks for herself, but she takes her start from her father where it’s feeling. And he’s gone stone-blind over that Tinman.”

While they were speaking, Annette appeared.

“I saw you,” she said to Fellingham; gladly and openly, in the most commonplace manner.

“Are you going to give me a walk along the beach?” said he.

She proposed the country behind the town, and that was quite as much to his taste. But it was not a happy walk. He had decided that he admired her, and the notion of having Tinman for a rival annoyed him. He overflowed with ridicule of Tinman, and this was distressing to Annette, because not only did she see that he would not control himself before her father, but he kindled her own satirical spirit in opposition to her father’s friendly sentiments toward his old schoolmate.

“Mr. Tinman has been extremely hospitable to us,” she said, a little coldly.

Page 4532

“May I ask you, has he consented to receive instruction in deportment and pronunciation?”

Annette did not answer.

“If practice makes perfect, he must be near the mark by this time.”

She continued silent.

“I dare say, in domestic life, he’s as amiable as he is hospitable, and it must be a daily gratification to see him in his Court suit.”

“I have not seen him in his Court suit.”

“That is his coyness.”

“People talk of those things.”

“The common people scandalize the great, about whom they know nothing, you mean! I am sure that is true, and living in Courts one must be keenly aware of it. But what a splendid sky and-sea!”

“Is it not?”

Annette echoed his false rapture with a candour that melted him.

He was preparing to make up for lost time, when the wild waving of a parasol down a road to the right, coming from the town, caused Annette to stop and say, “I think that must be Mrs. Cavely. We ought to meet her.”

Fellingham asked why.

“She is so fond of walks,” Anisette replied, with a tooth on her lip

Fellingham thought she seemed fond of runs.

Mrs. Cavely joined them, breathless. “My dear! the pace you go at!” she shouted. “I saw you starting. I followed, I ran, I tore along. I feared I never should catch you. And to lose such a morning of English scenery!

“Is it not heavenly?”

“One can’t say more,” Fellingham observed, bowing.

“I am sure I am very glad to see you again, sir. You enjoy Crikswich?”

“Once visited, always desired, like Venice, ma’am. May I venture to inquire whether Mr. Tinman has presented his Address?”

“The day after to-morrow. The appointment is made with him,” said Mrs. Cavely, more officially in manner, “for the day after to-morrow. He is excited, as you may well believe. But Mr. Smith is an immense relief to him—the very distraction he wanted. We have become one family, you know.”

“Indeed, ma’am, I did not know it,” said Fellingham.

The communication imparted such satiric venom to his further remarks, that Annette resolved to break her walk and dismiss him for the day.

He called at the house on the beach after the dinner-hour, to see Mr. Van Diemen Smith, when there was literally a duel between him and Tinman; for Van Diemen’s contribution to the table was champagne, and that had been drunk, but Tinman’s sherry remained. Tinman would insist on Fellingham’s taking a glass. Fellingham parried him with a sedate gravity of irony that was painfully perceptible to Anisette. Van Diemen at last backed Tinman’s hospitable intent, and, to Fellingham’s astonishment, he found that he had been supposed by these two men to be bashfully retreating from a seductive offer all the time that his tricks of fence and transpiercings of one of them had been marvels of skill.

Page 4533

Tinman pushed the glass into his hand.

“You have spilt some,” said Fellingham.

“It won’t hurt the carpet,” said Tinman.

“Won’t it?” Fellingham gazed at the carpet, as if expecting a flame to arise.

He then related the tale of the magnanimous Alexander drinking off the potion, in scorn of the slanderer, to show faith in his friend.

“Alexander—Who was that?” said Tinman, foiled in his historical recollections by the absence of the surname.

“General Alexander,” said Fellingham. “Alexander Philipson, or he declared it was Joveson; and very fond of wine. But his sherry did for him at last.”

“Ah! he drank too much, then,” said Tinman.

“Of his own!”

Anisette admonished the vindictive young gentleman by saying, “How long do you stay in Crikswich, Mr. Fellingham?”

He had grossly misconducted himself. But an adversary at once offensive and helpless provokes brutality. Anisette prudently avoided letting her father understand that satire was in the air; and neither he nor Tinman was conscious of it exactly: yet both shrank within themselves under the sensation of a devilish blast blowing. Fellingham accompanied them and certain jurats to London next day.

Yes, if you like: when a mayor visits Majesty, it is an important circumstance, and you are at liberty to argue at length that it means more than a desire on his part to show his writing power and his reading power: it is full of comfort the people, as an exhibition of their majesty likewise; and it is an encouragement to men to strive to become mayors, bailiffs, or prime men of any sort; but a stress in the reporting of it—the making it appear too important a circumstance—will surely breathe the intimation to a politically-minded people that satire is in the air, and however dearly they cherish the privilege of knocking at the first door of the kingdom, and walking ceremoniously in to read their writings, they will, if they are not in one of their moods for prostration, laugh. They will laugh at the report.

All the greater reason is it that we should not indulge them at such periods; and I say woe’s me for any brother of the pen, and one in some esteem, who dressed the report of that presentation of the Address of congratulation by Mr. Bailiff Tinman, of Crikswich! Herbert Fellingham wreaked his personal spite on Tinman. He should have bethought

him that it involved another than Tinman that is to say, an office—which the fitful beast rejoices to paw and play with contemptuously now and then, one may think, as a solace to his pride, and an indemnification for those caprices of abject worship so strongly recalling the days we see through Mr. Darwin’s glasses.

Page 4534

He should not have written the report. It sent a titter over England. He was so unwise as to despatch a copy of the newspaper containing it to Van Diemen Smith. Van Diemen perused it with satisfaction. So did Tinman. Both of these praised the able young writer. But they handed the paper to the Coastguard Lieutenant, who asked Tinman how he liked it; and visitors were beginning to drop in to Crikswich, who made a point of asking for a sight of the chief man; and then came a comic publication, all in the Republican tone of the time, with Man's Dignity for the standpoint, and the wheezy laughter residing in old puns to back it, in eulogy of the satiric report of the famous Address of congratulation of the Bailiff of Crikswich.

"Annette," Van Diemen said to his daughter, "you'll not encourage that newspaper fellow to come down here any more. He had his warning."

CHAPTER VI

One of the most difficult lessons for spirited young men to learn is, that good jokes are not always good policy. They have to be paid for, like good dinners, though dinner and joke shall seem to have been at somebody else's expense. Young Fellingham was treated rudely by Van Diemen Smith, and with some cold reserve by Annette: in consequence of which he thought her more than ever commonplace. He wrote her a letter of playful remonstrance, followed by one that appealed to her sentiments.

But she replied to neither of them. So his visits to Crikswich came to an end.

Shall a girl who has no appreciation of fun affect us? Her expressive eyes, and her quaint simplicity, and her enthusiasm for England, haunted Mr. Fellingham; being conjured up by contrast with what he met about him. But shall a girl who would impose upon us the task of holding in our laughter at Tinman be much regretted? There could be no companionship between us, Fellingham thought.

On an excursion to the English Lakes he saw the name of Van Diemen Smith in a visitors' book, and changed his ideas on the subject of companionship. Among mountains, or on the sea, or reading history, Annette was one in a thousand. He happened to be at a public ball at Helmstone in the Winter season, and who but Annette herself came whirling before him on the arm of an officer! Fellingham did not miss his chance of talking to her. She greeted him gaily, and speaking with the excitement of the dance upon her, appeared a stranger to the serious emotions he was willing to cherish. She had been to the Lakes and to Scotland. Next summer she was going to Wales. All her experiences were delicious. She was insatiable, but satisfied.

"I wish I had been with you," said Fellingham.

"I wish you had," said she.

Mrs. Cavely was her chaperon at the ball, and he was not permitted to enjoy a lengthened conversation sitting with Annette. What was he to think of a girl who could be submissive to Mrs. Cavely, and danced with any number of officers, and had no idea save of running incessantly over England in the pursuit of pleasure? Her tone of saying, “I wish you had,” was that of the most ordinary of wishes, distinctly, if not designedly different from his own melodious depth.

Page 4535

She granted him one waltz, and he talked of her father and his whimsical vagrancies and feeling he had a positive liking for Van Diemen, and he sagaciously said so.

Annette's eyes brightened. "Then why do you never go to see him? He has bought Elba. We move into the Hall after Christmas. We are at the Crouch at present. Papa will be sure to make you welcome. Do you not know that he never forgets a friend or breaks a friendship?"

"I do, and I love him for it," said Fellingham.

If he was not greatly mistaken a gentle pressure on the fingers of his left hand rewarded him.

This determined him. It should here be observed that he was by birth the superior of Annette's parentage, and such is the sentiment of a better blood that the flattery of her warm touch was needed for him to overlook the distinction.

Two of his visits to Crikswich resulted simply in interviews and conversations with Mrs. Crickledon. Van Diemen and his daughter were in London with Tinman and Mrs. Cavely, purchasing furniture for Elba Hall. Mrs. Crickledon had no scruple in saying, that Mrs. Cavely meant her brother to inhabit the Hall, though Mr. Smith had outbid him in the purchase. According to her, Tinman and Mr. Smith had their differences; for Mr. Smith was a very outspoken gentleman, and had been known to call Tinman names that no man of spirit would bear if he was not scheming.

Fellingham returned to London, where he roamed the streets famous for furniture warehouses, in the vain hope of encountering the new owner of Elba.

Failing in this endeavour, he wrote a love-letter to Annette.

It was her first. She had liked him. Her manner of thinking she might love him was through the reflection that no one stood in the way. The letter opened a world to her, broader than Great Britain.

Fellingham begged her, if she thought favourably of him, to prepare her father for the purport of his visit. If otherwise, she was to interdict the visit with as little delay as possible and cut him adrift.

A decided line of conduct was imperative. Yet you have seen that she was not in love. She was only not unwilling to be in love. And Fellingham was just a trifle warmed. Now mark what events will do to light the fires.

Van Diemen and Tinman, old chums re-united, and both successful in life, had nevertheless, as Mrs. Crickledon said, their differences. They commenced with an opposition to Tinman's views regarding the expenditure of town moneys. Tinman was

ever for devoting them to the patriotic defence of “our shores;” whereas Van Diemen, pointing in detestation of the town sewerage reeking across the common under the beach, loudly called on him to preserve our lives, by way of commencement. Then Van Diemen precipitately purchased Elba at a high valuation, and Tinman had expected by waiting to buy it at his own valuation, and sell it out of friendly consideration to his friend

Page 4536

afterwards, for a friendly consideration. Van Diemen had joined the hunt. Tinman could not mount a horse. They had not quarrelled, but they had snapped about these and other affairs. Van Diemen fancied Tinman was jealous of his wealth. Tinman shrewdly suspected Van Diemen to be contemptuous of his dignity. He suffered a loss in a loan of money; and instead of pitying him, Van Diemen had laughed him to scorn for expecting security for investments at ten per cent. The bitterness of the pinch to Tinman made him frightfully sensitive to strictures on his discretion. In his anguish he told his sister he was ruined, and she advised him to marry before the crash. She was aware that he exaggerated, but she repeated her advice. She went so far as to name the person. This is known, because she was overheard by her housemaid, a gossip of Mrs. Crickledon's, the subsequently famous "Little Jane."

Now, Annette had shyly intimated to her father the nature of Herbert Fellingham's letter, at the same time professing a perfect readiness to submit to his directions; and her father's perplexity was very great, for Annette had rather fervently dramatized the young man's words at the ball at Helmstone, which had pleasantly tickled him, and, besides, he liked the young man. On the other hand, he did not at all like the prospect of losing his daughter; and he would have desired her to be a lady of title. He hinted at her right to claim a high position. Annette shrank from the prospect, saying, "Never let me marry one who might be ashamed of my father!"

"I shouldn't stomach that," said Van Diemen, more disposed in favour of the present suitor.

Annette was now in a tremor. She had a lover; he was coming. And if he did not come, did it matter? Not so very much, except to her pride. And if he did, what was she to say to him? She felt like an actress who may in a few minutes be called on the stage, without knowing her part. This was painfully unlike love, and the poor girl feared it would be her conscientious duty to dismiss him—most gently, of course; and perhaps, should he be impetuous and picturesque, relent enough to let him hope, and so bring about a happy postponement of the question. Her father had been to a neighbouring town on business with Mr. Tinman. He knocked at her door at midnight; and she, in dread of she knew not what—chiefly that the Hour of the Scene had somehow struck—-stepped out to him trembling. He was alone. She thought herself the most childish of mortals in supposing that she could have been summoned at midnight to declare her sentiments, and hardly noticed his gloomy depression. He asked her to give him five minutes; then asked her for a kiss, and told her to go to bed and sleep. But Annette had seen that a great present affliction was on him, and she would not be sent to sleep. She promised to listen patiently, to bear anything, to be brave. "Is it bad news from home?" she said, speaking of the old home where she had not left her heart, and where his money was invested.

Page 4537

“It’s this, my dear Netty,” said Van Diemen, suffering her to lead him into her sitting-room; “we shall have to leave the shores of England.”

“Then we are ruined.”

“We’re not; the rascal can’t do that. We might be off to the Continent, or we might go to America; we’ve money. But we can’t stay here. I’ll not live at any man’s mercy.”

“The Continent! America!” exclaimed the enthusiast for England. “Oh, papa, you love living in England so!”

“Not so much as all that, my dear. You do, that I know. But I don’t see how it’s to be managed. Mart Tinman and I have been at tooth and claw to-day and half the night; and he has thrown off the mask, or he’s dashed something from my sight, I don’t know which. I knocked him down.”

“Papa!”

“I picked him up.”

“Oh,” cried Annette, “has Mr. Tinman been hurt?”

“He called me a Deserter!”

Anisette shuddered.

She did not know what this thing was, but the name of it opened a cabinet of horrors, and she touched her father timidly, to assure him of her constant love, and a little to reassure herself of his substantial identity.

“And I am one,” Van Diemen made the confession at the pitch of his voice. “I am a Deserter; I’m liable to be branded on the back. And it’s in Mart Tinman’s power to have me marched away to-morrow morning in the sight of Crikswich, and all I can say for myself, as a man and a Briton, is, I did not desert before the enemy. That I swear I never would have done. Death, if death’s in front; but your poor mother was a handsome woman, my child, and there—I could not go on living in barracks and leaving her unprotected. I can’t tell a young woman the tale. A hundred pounds came on me for a legacy, as plump in my hands out of open heaven, and your poor mother and I saw our chance; we consulted, and we determined to risk it, and I got on board with her and you, and over the seas we went, first to shipwreck, ultimately to fortune.”

Van Diemen laughed miserably. “They noticed in the hunting-field here I had a soldier-like seat. A soldier-like seat it’ll be, with a brand on it. I sha’n’t be asked to take a soldier-like seat at any of their tables again. I may at Mart Tinman’s, out of pity, after I’ve undergone my punishment. There’s a year still to run out of the twenty of my term

of service due. He knows it; he's been reckoning; he has me. But the worst cat-o'-nine-tails for me is the disgrace. To have myself pointed at, 'There goes the Deserter' He was a private in the Carbineers, and he deserted.' No one'll say, 'Ay, but he clung to the idea of his old schoolmate when abroad, and came back loving him, and trusted him, and was deceived."

Van Diemen produced a spasmodic cough with a blow on his chest. Anisette was weeping.

"There, now go to bed," said he. "I wish you might have known no more than you did of our flight when I got you on board the ship with your poor mother; but you're a young woman now, and you must help me to think of another cut and run, and what baggage we can scrape together in a jiffy, for I won't live here at Mart Tinman's mercy."

Page 4538

Drying her eyes to weep again, Annette said, when she could speak: “Will nothing quiet him? I was going to bother you with all sorts of silly questions, poor dear papa; but I see I can understand if I try. Will nothing—Is he so very angry? Can we not do something to pacify him? He is fond of money. He—oh, the thought of leaving England! Papa, it will kill you; you set your whole heart on England. We could—I could—could I not, do you not think?—step between you as a peacemaker. Mr. Tinman is always very courteous to me.”

At these words of Annette’s, Van Diemen burst into a short snap of savage laughter. “But that’s far away in the background, Mr. Mart Tinman!” he said. “You stick to your game, I know that; but you’ll find me flown, though I leave a name to stink like your common behind me. And,” he added, as a chill reminder, “that name the name of my benefactor. Poor old Van Diemen! He thought it a safe bequest to make.”

“It was; it is! We will stay; we will not be exiled,” said Annette. “I will do anything. What was the quarrel about, papa?”

“The fact is, my dear, I just wanted to show him—and take down his pride—I’m by my Australian education a shrewder hand than his old country. I bought the house on the beach while he was chaffering, and then I sold it him at a rise when the town was looking up—only to make him see. Then he burst up about something I said of Australia. I will have the common clean. Let him live at the Crouch as my tenant if he finds the house on the beach in danger.”

“Papa, I am sure,” Annette repeated—“sure I have influence with Mr. Tinman.”

“There are those lips of yours shutting tight,” said her father. “Just listen, and they make a big O. The donkey! He owns you’ve got influence, and he offers he’ll be silent if you’ll pledge your word to marry him. I’m not sure he didn’t say, within the year. I told him to look sharp not to be knocked down again. Mart Tinman for my son-in-law! That’s an upside down of my expectations, as good as being at the antipodes without a second voyage back! I let him know you were engaged.”

Annette gazed at her father open-mouthed, as he had predicted; now with a little chilly dimple at one corner of the mouth, now at another—as a breeze curves the leaden winter lake here and there. She could not get his meaning into her sight, and she sought, by looking hard, to understand it better; much as when some solitary maiden lady, passing into her bedchamber in the hours of darkness, beholds—tradition telling us she has absolutely beheld foot of burglar under bed; and lo! she stares, and, cunningly to moderate her horror, doubts, yet cannot but believe that there is a leg, and a trunk, and a head, and two terrible arms, bearing pistols, to follow. Sick, she palpitates; she compresses her trepidation; she coughs, perchance she sings a bar or two of an aria. Glancing down again, thrice horrible to her is it to discover that there is

no foot! For had it remained, it might have been imagined a harmless, empty boot. But the withdrawal has a deadly significance of animal life. . . .

Page 4539

In like manner our stricken Annette perceived the object; so did she gradually apprehend the fact of her being asked for Tinman's bride, and she could not think it credible. She half scented, she devised her plan of escape from another single mention of it. But on her father's remarking, with a shuffle, frightened by her countenance, "Don't listen to what I said, Netty. I won't paint him blacker than he is"—then Annette was sure she had been proposed for by Mr. Tinman, and she fancied her father might have revolved it in his mind that there was this means of keeping Tinman silent, silent for ever, in his own interests.

"It was not true, when you told Mr. Tinman I was engaged, papa," she said.

"No, I know that. Mart Tinman only half-kind of hinted. Come, I say! Where's the unmarried man wouldn't like to have a girl like you, Netty! They say he's been rejected all round a circuit of fifteen miles; and he's not bad-looking, neither—he looks fresh and fair. But I thought it as well to let him know he might get me at a disadvantage, but he couldn't you. Now, don't think about it, my love."

"Not if it is not necessary, papa," said Annette; and employed her familiar sweetness in persuading him to go to bed, as though he were the afflicted one requiring to be petted.

CHAPTER VII

Round under the cliffs by the sea, facing South, are warm seats in winter. The sun that shines there on a day of frost wraps you as in a mantle. Here it was that Mr. Herbert Fellingham found Annette, a chalk-block for her chair, and a mound of chalk-rubble defending her from the keen-tipped breath of the east, now and then shadowing the smooth blue water, faintly, like reflections of a flight of gulls.

Infants are said to have their ideas, and why not young ladies? Those who write of their perplexities in descriptions comical in their length are unkind to them, by making them appear the simplest of the creatures of fiction; and most of us, I am sure, would incline to believe in them if they were only some bit more lightly touched. Those troubled sentiments of our young lady of the comfortable classes are quite worthy of mention. Her poor little eye poring as little fishlike as possible upon the intricate, which she takes for the infinite, has its place in our history, nor should we any of us miss the pathos of it were it not that so large a space is claimed for the exposure. As it is, one has almost to fight a battle to persuade the world that she has downright thoughts and feelings, and really a superhuman delicacy is required in presenting her that she may be credible. Even then—so much being accomplished the thousands accustomed to chapters of her when she is in the situation of Annette will be disappointed by short sentences, just as of old the Continental eater of oysters would have been offended at the offer of an exchange of two live for two dozen dead ones.

Page 4540

Annette was in the grand crucial position of English imaginative prose. I recognize it, and that to this the streamlets flow, thence pours the flood. But what was the plain truth? She had brought herself to think she ought to sacrifice herself to Tinman, and her evasions with Herbert, manifested in tricks of coldness alternating with tones of regret, ended, as they had commenced, in a mysterious half-sullenness. She had hardly a word to say. Let me step in again to observe that she had at the moment no pointed intention of marrying Tinman. To her mind the circumstances compelled her to embark on the idea of doing so, and she saw the extremity in an extreme distance, as those who are taking voyages may see death by drowning. Still she had embarked.

“At all events, I have your word for it that you don’t dislike me?” said Herbert.

“Oh! no,” she sighed. She liked him as emigrants the land they are leaving.

“And you have not promised your hand?”

“No,” she said, but sighed in thinking that if she could be induced to promise it, there would not be a word of leaving England.

“Then, as you are not engaged, and don’t hate me, I have a chance?” he said, in the semi-wailful interrogative of an organ making a mere windy conclusion.

Ocean sent up a tiny wave at their feet.

“A day like this in winter is rarer than a summer day,” Herbert resumed encouragingly.

Annette was replying, “People abuse our climate—”

But the thought of having to go out away from this climate in the darkness of exile, with her father to suffer under it worse than herself, overwhelmed her, and fetched the reality of her sorrow in the form of Tinman swimming before her soul with the velocity of a telegraph-pole to the window of the flying train. It was past as soon as seen, but it gave her a desperate sensation of speed.

She began to feel that this was life in earnest.

And Herbert should have been more resolute, fierier. She needed a strong will.

But he was not on the rapids of the masterful passion. For though going at a certain pace, it was by his own impulsion; and I am afraid I must, with many apologies, compare him to the skater—to the skater on easy, slippery ice, be it understood; but he could perform gyrations as he went, and he rather sailed along than dashed; he was careful of his figuring. Some lovers, right honest lovers, never get beyond this quaint skating-stage; and some ladies, a right goodly number in a foggy climate, deceived by their occasional runs ahead, take them for vessels on the very torrent of love. Let them

take them, and let the race continue. Only we perceive that they are skating; they are careering over a smooth icy floor, and they can stop at a signal, with just half-a-yard of grating on the heel at the outside. Ice, and not fire nor falling water, has been their medium of progression.

Whether a man should unveil his own sex is quite another question. If we are detected, not solely are we done for, but our love-tales too. However, there is not much ground for anxiety on that head. Each member of the other party is blind on her own account.

Page 4541

To Annette the figuring of Herbert was graceful, but it did not catch her up and carry her; it hardly touched her: He spoke well enough to make her sorry for him, and not warmly enough to make her forget her sorrow for herself.

Herbert could obtain no explanation of the singularity of her conduct from Annette, and he went straight to her father, who was nearly as inexplicable for a time. At last he said:

“If you are ready to quit the country with us, you may have my consent.”

“Why quit the country?” Herbert asked, in natural amazement.

Van Diemen declined to tell him.

But seeing the young man look stupefied and wretched he took a turn about the room, and said: “I have n’t robbed,” and after more turns, “I have n’t murdered.” He growled in his menagerie trot within the four walls. “But I’m, in a man’s power. Will that satisfy you? You’ll tell me, because I’m rich, to snap my fingers. I can’t. I’ve got feelings. I’m in his power to hurt me and disgrace me. It’s the disgrace—to my disgrace I say it—I dread most. You’d be up to my reason if you had ever served in a regiment. I mean, discipline—if ever you’d known discipline—in the police if you like—anything—anywhere where there’s what we used to call spiny de cor. I mean, at school. And I’m,” said Van Diemen, “a rank idiot double D. dolt, and flat as a pancake, and transparent as a pane of glass. You see through me. Anybody could. I can’t talk of my botheration without betraying myself. What good am I among you sharp fellows in England?”

Language of this kind, by virtue of its unintelligibility, set Mr. Herbert Fellingham’s acute speculations at work. He was obliged to lean on Van Diemen’s assertion, that he had not robbed and had not murdered, to be comforted by the belief that he was not once a notorious bushranger, or a defaulting manager of mines, or any other thing that is naughtily Australian and kangarooly.

He sat at the dinner-table at Elba, eating like the rest of mankind, and looking like a starved beggarman all the while.

Annette, in pity of his bewilderment, would have had her father take him into their confidence. She suggested it covertly, and next she spoke of it to him as a prudent measure, seeing that Mr. Fellingham might find out his exact degree of liability. Van Diemen shouted; he betrayed himself in his weakness as she could not have imagined him. He was ready to go, he said—go on the spot, give up Elba, fly from Old England: what he could not do was to let his countrymen know what he was, and live among them afterwards. He declared that the fact had eternally been present to his mind, devouring him; and Annette remembered his kindness to the artillerymen posted along the shore westward of Crikswich, though she could recall no sign of remorse. Van

Diemen said: “We have to do with Martin Tinman; that’s one who has a hold on me, and one’s enough. Leak out my secret to a second fellow, you double my risks.” He would not be taught to see how the second might counteract the first. The singularity of the action of his character on her position was, that though she knew not a soul to whom she could unburden her wretchedness, and stood far more isolated than in her Australian home, fever and chill struck her blood in contemplation of the necessity of quitting England.

Page 4542

Deep, then, was her gratitude to dear good Mrs. Cavely for stepping in to mediate between her father and Mr. Tinman. And well might she be amazed to hear the origin of their recent dispute.

“It was,” Mrs. Cavely said, “that Gippsland.”

Annette cried: “What?”

“That Gippsland of yours, my dear. Your father will praise Gippsland whenever my Martin asks him to admire the beauties of our neighbourhood. Many a time has Martin come home to me complaining of it. We have no doubt on earth that Gippsland is a very fine place; but my brother has his idea’s of dignity, you must know, and I only wish he had been more used to contradiction, you may believe me. He is a lamb by nature. And, as he says, ‘Why underrate one’s own country?’ He cannot bear to hear boasting. Well! I put it to you, dear Annette, is he so unimportant a person? He asks to be respected, and especially by his dearest friend. From that to blows! It’s the way with men. They begin about trifles, they drink, they quarrel, and one does what he is sorry for, and one says more than he means. All my Martin desires is to shake your dear father’s hand, forgive and forget. To win your esteem, darling Annette, he would humble himself in the dust. Will you not help me to bring these two dear old friends together once more? It is unreasonable of your dear papa to go on boasting of Gippsland if he is so fond of England, now is it not? My brother is the offended party in the eye of the law. That is quite certain. Do you suppose he dreams of taking advantage of it? He is waiting at home to be told he may call on your father. Rank, dignity, wounded feelings, is nothing to him in comparison with friendship.”

Annette thought of the blow which had felled him, and spoke the truth of her heart in saying, “He is very generous.”

“You understand him.” Mrs. Cavely pressed her hand. “We will both go to your dear father. He may,” she added, not without a gleam of feminine archness, “praise Gippsland above the Himalayas to me. What my Martin so much objected to was, the speaking of Gippsland at all when there was mention of our Lake scenery. As for me, I know how men love to boast of things nobody else has seen.”

The two ladies went in company to Van Diemen, who allowed himself to be melted. He was reserved nevertheless. His reception of Mr. Tinman displeased his daughter. Annette attached the blackest importance to a blow of the fist. In her mind it blazed fiendlike, and the man who forgave it rose a step or two on the sublime. Especially did he do so considering that he had it in his power to dismiss her father and herself from bright beaming England before she had looked on all the cathedrals and churches, the sea-shores and spots named in printed poetry, to say nothing of the nobility.

“Papa, you were not so kind to Mr. Tinman as I could have hoped,” said Annette.

“Mart Tinman has me at his mercy, and he’ll make me know it,” her father returned gloomily. “He may let me off with the Commander-in-chief. He’ll blast my reputation some day, though. I shall be hanging my head in society, through him.”

Page 4543

Van Diemen imitated the disconsolate appearance of a gallows body, in one of those rapid flashes of spontaneous veri-similitude which spring of an inborn horror painting itself on the outside.

“A Deserter!” he moaned.

He succeeded in impressing the terrible nature of the stigma upon Annette’s imagination.

The guest at Elba was busy in adding up the sum of his own impressions, and dividing it by this and that new circumstance; for he was totally in the dark. He was attracted by the mysterious interview of Mrs. Cavely and Annette. Tinman’s calling and departing set him upon new calculations. Annette grew cold and visibly distressed by her consciousness of it.

She endeavoured to account for this variation of mood. “We have been invited to dine at the house on the beach to-morrow. I would not have accepted, but papa . . . we seemed to think it a duty. Of course the invitation extends to you. We fancy you do not greatly enjoy dining there. The table will be laid for you here, if you prefer.”

Herbert preferred to try the skill of Mrs. Crickledon.

Now, for positive penetration the head prepossessed by a suspicion is unmatched; for where there is no daylight; this one at least goes about with a lantern. Herbert begged Mrs. Crickledon to cook a dinner for him, and then to give the right colour to his absence from the table of Mr. Tinman, he started for a winter day’s walk over the downs as sharpening a business as any young fellow, blunt or keen, may undertake; excellent for men of the pen, whether they be creative, and produce, or slaughtering, and review; good, then, for the silly sheep of letters and the butchers. He sat down to Mrs. Crickledon’s table at half-past six. She was, as she had previously informed him, a forty-pound-a-year cook at the period of her courting by Crickledon. That zealous and devoted husband had made his first excursion inland to drop over the downs to the great house, and fetch her away as his bride, on the death of her master, Sir Alfred Pooney, who never would have parted with her in life; and every day of that man’s life he dirtied thirteen plates at dinner, nor more, nor less, but exactly that number, as if he believed there was luck in it. And as Crickledon said, it was odd. But it was always a pleasure to cook for him. Mrs. Crickledon could not abide cooking for a mean eater. And when Crickledon said he had never seen an acorn, he might have seen one had he looked about him in the great park, under the oaks, on the day when he came to be married.

“Then it’s a standing compliment to you, Mrs. Crickledon, that he did not,” said Herbert.

He remarked with the sententiousness of enforced philosophy, that no wine was better than bad wine.

Mrs. Crickledon spoke of a bottle left by her summer lodgers, who had indeed left two, calling the wine invalid's wine; and she and her husband had opened one on the anniversary of their marriage day in October. It had the taste of doctor's shop, they both agreed; and as no friend of theirs could be tempted beyond a sip, they were advised, because it was called a tonic, to mix it with the pig-wash, so that it should not be entirely lost, but benefit the constitution of the pig. Herbert sipped at the remaining bottle, and finding himself in the superior society of an old Manzanilla, refilled his glass.

Page 4544

“Nothing I knows of proves the difference between gentlefolks and poor persons as tastes in wine,” said Mrs. Crickledon, admiring him as she brought in a dish of cutlets, —with Sir Alfred Pooney’s favourite sauce Soubise, wherein rightly onion should be delicate as the idea of love in maidens’ thoughts, albeit constituting the element of flavour. Something of such a dictum Sir Alfred Pooney had imparted to his cook, and she repeated it with the fresh elegance of, such sweet sayings when transfused through the native mind:

“He said, I like as it was what you would call a young gal’s blush at a kiss round a corner.”

The epicurean baronet had the habit of talking in that way.

Herbert drank to his memory. He was well-filled; he had no work to do, and he was exuberant in spirits, as Mrs. Crickledon knew her countrymen should and would be under those conditions. And suddenly he drew his hand across a forehead so wrinkled and dark, that Mrs. Crickledon exclaimed, “Heart or stomach?”

“Oh, no,” said he. “I’m sound enough in both, I hope.”

“That old Tinman’s up to one of his games,” she observed.

“Do you think so?”

“He’s circumventing Miss Annette Smith.”

“Pooh! Crickledon. A man of his age can’t be seriously thinking of proposing for a young lady.”

He’s a well-kept man. He’s never racketed. He had n’t the rackets in him. And she may n’t care for him. But we hear things drop.”

“What things have you heard drop, Crickledon? In a profound silence you may hear pins; in a hubbub you may hear cannon-balls. But I never believe in eavesdropping gossip.”

“He was heard to say to Mr. Smith,” Crickledon pursued, and she lowered her voice, “he was heard to say, it was when they were quarreling over that chiwal, and they went at one another pretty hard before Mr. Smith beat him and he sold Mr. Smith that meadow; he was heard to say, there was worse than transportation for Mr. Smith if he but lifted his finger. They Tinmans have awful tempers. His old mother died malignant, though she was a saving woman, and never owed a penny to a Christian a hour longer than it took to pay the money. And old Tinman’s just such another.”

“Transportation!” Herbert ejaculated, “that’s sheer nonsense, Crickledon. I’m sure your husband would tell you so.”

“It was my husband brought me the words,” Mrs. Crickledon rejoined with some triumph. “He did tell me, I own, to keep it shut: but my speaking to you, a friend of Mr. Smith’s, won’t do no harm. He heard them under the battery, over that chiwal glass: ‘And you shall pay,’ says Mr. Smith, and ‘I sha’n’t,’ says old Tinman. Mr. Smith said he would have it if he had to squeeze a deathbed confession from a sinner. Then old Tinman fires out, ‘You!’ he says, ‘you’ and he stammered. ‘Mr. Smith,’ my husband said and you never saw a man so shocked as my husband at being obliged to hear them at one another Mr. Smith used the word damn. ‘You may laugh, sir.’”

Page 4545

“You say it so capitally, Crickledon.”

“And then old Tinman said, ’And a D. to you; and if I lift my finger, it’s Big D. on your back.”

“And what did Mr. Smith say, then?”

“He said, like a man shot, my husband says he said, ‘My God!’”

Herbert Fellingham jumped away from the table.

“You tell me, Crickledon, your husband actually heard that—just those words?—the tones?”

“My husband says he heard him say, ‘My God!’ just like a poor man shot or stabbed. You may speak to Crickledon, if you speaks to him alone, sir. I say you ought to know. For I’ve noticed Mr. Smith since that day has never looked to me the same easy-minded happy gentleman he was when we first knew him. He would have had me go to cook for him at Elba, but Crickledon thought I’d better be independent, and Mr. Smith said to me, ’Perhaps you’re right, Crickledon, for who knows how long I may be among you?’”

Herbert took the solace of tobacco in Crickledon’s shop. Thence, with the story confirmed to him, he sauntered toward the house on the beach.

CHAPTER VIII

The moon was over sea. Coasting vessels that had run into the bay for shelter from the North wind lay with their shadows thrown shoreward on the cold smooth water, almost to the verge of the beach, where there was neither breath nor sound of wind, only the lisp at the pebbles.

Mrs. Crickledon’s dinner and the state of his heart made young Fellingham indifferent to a wintry atmosphere. It sufficed him that the night was fair. He stretched himself on the shingle, thinking of the Manzanilla, and Annette, and the fine flavour given to tobacco by a dry still air in moonlight—thinking of his work, too, in the background, as far as mental lassitude would allow of it. The idea of taking Annette to see his first play at the theatre when it should be performed—was very soothing. The beach rather looked like a stage, and the sea like a ghostly audience, with, if you will, the broadside bulks of black sailing craft at anchor for representatives of the newspaper piers. Annette was a nice girl; if a little commonplace and low-born, yet sweet. What a subject he could make of her father! “The Deserter” offered a new complication. Fellingham rapidly sketched it in fancy—Van Diemen, as a Member of the Parliament of Great Britain, led away from the House of Commons to be branded on the bank! What a magnificent fall! We have so few intensely dramatic positions in English real life that the meditative author grew

enamoured of this one, and laughed out a royal “Ha!” like a monarch reviewing his well-appointed soldiery.

“There you are,” said Van Diemen’s voice; “I smelt your pipe. You’re a rum fellow, to belying out on the beach on a cold night. Lord! I don’t like you the worse for it. Twas for the romance of the moon in my young days.”

“Where is Annette?” said Fellingham, jumping to his feet.

Page 4546

“My daughter? She ’s taking leave of her intended.”

“What’s that?” Fellingham gasped. “Good heavens, Mr. Smith, what do you mean?”

“Pick up your pipe, my lad. Girls choose as they please, I suppose”

“Her intended, did you say, sir? What can that mean?”

“My dear good young fellow, don’t make a fuss. We’re all going to stay here, and very glad to see you from time to time. The fact is, I oughtn’t to have quarrelled with Mart Tinman as I’ve done; I’m too peppery by nature. The fact is, I struck him, and he forgave it. I could n’t have done that myself. And I believe I’m in for a headache to-morrow; upon my soul, I do. Mart Tinman would champagne us; but, poor old boy, I struck him, and I couldn’t make amends—didn’t see my way; and we joined hands over the glass—to the deuce with the glass!—and the end of it is, Netty—she did n’t propose it, but as I’m in his—I say, as I had struck him, she—it was rather solemn, if you had seen us—she burst into tears, and there was Mrs. Cavely, and old Mart, and me as big a fool—if I’m not a villain!”

Fellingham perceived a more than common effect of Tin man’s wine. He touched Van Diemen on the shoulder. “May I beg to hear exactly what has happened?”

“Upon my soul, we’re all going to live comfortably in Old England, and no more quarreling and decamping,” was the stupid rejoinder. “Except that I did n’t exactly—I think you said I exactly’?—I did n’t bargain for old Mart as my—but he’s a sound man; Mart’s my junior; he’s rich. He’s eco . . . he’s eco . . . you know—my Lord! where’s my brains?—but he’s upright—’nomical!”

“An economical man,” said Fellingham, with sedate impatience.

“My dear sir, I’m heartily obliged to you for your assistance,” returned Van Diemen. “Here she is.”

Annette had come out of the gate in the flint wall. She started slightly on seeing Herbert, whom she had taken for a coastguard, she said. He bowed. He kept his head bent, peering at her intrusively.

“It’s the air on champagne,” Van Diemen said, calling on his lungs to clear themselves and right him. “I was n’t a bit queer in the house.”

“The air on Tinman’s champagne!” said Fellingham.

“It must be like the contact of two hostile chemical elements.”

Annette walked faster.

They descended from the shingle to the scant-bladed grass-sweep running round the salted town-refuse on toward Elba. Van Diemen sniffed, ejaculating, “I’ll be best man with Mart Tinman about this business! You’ll stop with us, Mr.——what’s your Christian name? Stop with us as long as you like. Old friends for me! The joke of it is that Nelson was my man, and yet I went and enlisted in the cavalry. If you talk of chemical substances, old Mart Tinman was a sneak who never cared a dump for his country; and I’m not to speak a single sybbarel about that..... over there . . . Australia . . . Gippsland! So down he went, clean over. Very sorry for what we have done. Contrite. Penitent.”

Page 4547

“Now we feel the wind a little,” said Annette.

Fellingham murmured, “Allow me; your shawl is flying loose.”

He laid his hands on her arms, and, pressing her in a tremble, said, “One sign! It’s not true? A word! Do you hate me?”

“Thank you very much, but I am not cold,” she replied and linked herself to her father.

Van Diemen immediately shouted, “For we are jolly boys! for we are jolly boys! It’s the air on the champagne. And hang me,” said he, as they entered the grounds of Elba, “if I don’t walk over my property.”

Annette interposed; she stood like a reed in his way.

“No! my Lord! I’ll see what I sold you for!” he cried. “I’m an owner of the soil of Old England, and care no more for the title of squire than Napoleon Bonaparty. But I’ll tell you what, Mr. Hubbard: your mother was never so astonished at her dog as old Van Diemen would be to hear himself called squire in Old England. And a convict he was, for he did wrong once, but he worked his redemption. And the smell of my own property makes me feel my legs again. And I’ll tell you what, Mr. Hubbard, as Netty calls you when she speaks of you in private: Mart Tinman’s ideas of wine are pretty much like his ideas of healthy smells, and when I’m bailiff of Crikswich, mind, he’ll find two to one against him in our town council. I love my country, but hang me if I don’t purify it—”

Saying this, with the excitement of a high resolve a upon him, Van Diemen bored through a shrubbery-brake, and Fellingham said to Annette:

“Have I lost you?”

“I belong to my father,” said she, contracting and disengaging her feminine garments to step after him in the cold silver-spotted dusk of the winter woods.

Van Diemen came out on a fish-pond.

“Here you are, young ones!” he said to the pair. “This way, Fellowman. I’m clearer now, and it’s my belief I’ve been talking nonsense. I’m puffed up with money, and have n’t the heart I once had. I say, Fellowman, Fellowbird, Hubbard—what’s your right name? —fancy an old carp fished out of that pond and flung into the sea. That’s exile! And if the girl don’t mind, what does it matter?”

“Mr. Herbert Fellingham, I think, would like to go to bed, papa,” said Annette.

“Miss Smith must be getting cold,” Fellingham hinted.

“Bounce away indoors,” replied Van Diemen, and he led them like a bull.

Annette was disinclined to leave them together in the smoking-room, and under the pretext of wishing to see her father to bed she remained with them, though there was a novel directness and heat of tone in Herbert that alarmed her, and with reason. He divined in hideous outlines what had happened. He was no longer figuring on easy ice, but desperate at the prospect of a loss to himself, and a fate for Annette, that tossed him from repulsion to incredulity, and so back.

Van Diemen begged him to light his pipe.

Page 4548

“I’m off to London to-morrow,” said Fellingham. “I don’t want to go, for very particular reasons; I may be of more use there. I have a cousin who’s a General officer in the army, and if I have your permission—you see, anything’s better, as it seems to me, than that you should depend for peace and comfort on one man’s tongue not wagging, especially when he is not the best of tempers if I have your permission—without mentioning names, of course—I’ll consult him.”

There was a dead silence.

“You know you may trust me, sir. I love your daughter with all my heart. Your honour and your interests are mine.”

Van Diemen struggled for composure.

“Netty, what have you been at?” he said.

“It is untrue, papa!” she answered the unworded accusation.

“Annette has told me nothing, sir. I have heard it. You must brace your mind to the fact that it is known. What is known to Mr. Tinman is pretty sure to be known generally at the next disagreement.”

“That scoundrel Mart!” Van Diemen muttered.

“I am positive Mr. Tinman did not speak of you, papa,” said Annette, and turned her eyes from the half-paralyzed figure of her father on Herbert to put him to proof.

“No, but he made himself heard when it was being discussed. At any rate, it’s known; and the thing to do is to meet it.”

“I’m off. I’ll not stop a day. I’d rather live on the Continent,” said Van Diemen, shaking himself, as to prepare for the step into that desert.

“Mr. Tinman has been most generous!” Annette protested tearfully.

“I won’t say no: I think you are deceived and lend him your own generosity,” said Herbert. “Can you suppose it generous, that even in the extremest case, he should speak of the matter to your father, and talk of denouncing him? He did it.”

“He was provoked.”

“A gentleman is distinguished by his not allowing himself to be provoked.”

“I am engaged to him, and I cannot hear it said that he is not a gentleman.”

The first part of her sentence Annette uttered bravely; at the conclusion she broke down. She wished Herbert to be aware of the truth, that he might stay his attacks on Mr. Tinman; and she believed he had only been guessing the circumstances in which her father was placed; but the comparison between her two suitors forced itself on her now, when the younger one spoke in a manner so self-contained, brief, and full of feeling.

She had to leave the room weeping.

“Has your daughter engaged herself, sir?” said Herbert.

“Talk to me to-morrow; don’t give us up if she has we were trapped, it’s my opinion,” said Van Diemen. “There’s the devil in that wine of—Mart Tinman’s. I feel it still, and in the morning it’ll be worse. What can she see in him? I must quit the country; carry her off. How he did it, I don’t know. It was that woman, the widow,

Page 4549

the fellow's sister. She talked till she piped her eye—talked about our lasting union. On my soul, I believe I egged Netty on! I was in a mollified way with that wine; all of a sudden the woman joins their hands! And I—a man of spirit will despise me!—what I thought of was, 'now my secret's safe!' You've sobered me, young sir. I see myself, if that's being sober. I don't ask your opinion of me; I am a deserter, false to my colours, a breaker of his oath. Only mark this: I was married, and a common trooper, married to a handsome young woman, true as steel; but she was handsome, and we were starvation poor, and she had to endure persecution from an officer day by day. Bear that situation in your mind. . . . Providence dropped me a hundred pounds out of the sky. Properly speaking, it popped up out of the earth, for I reaped it, you may say, from a relative's grave. Rich and poor 's all right, if I'm rich and you're poor; and you may be happy though you're poor; but where there are many poor young women, lots of rich men are a terrible temptation to them. That's my dear good wife speaking, and had she been spared to me I never should have come back to Old England, and heart's delight and heartache I should not have known. She was my backbone, she was my breast-comforter too. Why did she stick to me? Because I had faith in her when appearances were against her. But she never forgave this country the hurt to her woman's pride. You'll have noticed a squarish jaw in Netty. That's her mother. And I shall have to encounter it, supposing I find Mart Tinman has been playing me false. I'm blown on somehow. I'll think of what course I'll take 'twixt now and morning. Good night, young gentleman."

"Good night; sir," said Herbert, adding, "I will get information from the Horse Guards; as for the people knowing it about here, you're not living much in society—"

"It's not other people's feelings, it's my own," Van Diemen silenced him. "I feel it, if it's in the wind; ever since Mart Tinman spoke the thing out, I've felt on my skin cold and hot."

He flourished his lighted candle and went to bed, manifestly solaced by the idea that he was the victim of his own feelings.

Herbert could not sleep. Annette's monstrous choice of Tinman in preference to himself constantly assailed and shook his understanding. There was the "squarish jaw" mentioned by her father to think of. It filled him with a vague apprehension, but he was unable to imagine that a young girl, and an English girl, and an enthusiastic young English girl, could be devoid of sentiment; and presuming her to have it, as one must, there was no fear, that she would persist in her loathsome choice when she knew her father was against it.

CHAPTER IX

Annette did not shun him next morning. She did not shun the subject, either. But she had been exact in arranging that she should not be more than a few minutes downstairs

before her father. Herbert found, that compared with her, girls of sentiment are commonplace indeed. She had conceived an insane idea of nobility in Tinman that blinded her to his face, figure, and character—his manners, likewise. He had forgiven a blow!

Page 4550

Silly as the delusion might be, it clothed her in whimsical attractiveness.

It was a beauty in her to dwell so firmly upon moral quality. Overthrown and stunned as he was, and reduced to helplessness by her brief and positive replies, Herbert was obliged to admire the singular young lady, who spoke, without much shyness, of her incongruous, destined mate though his admiration had an edge cutting like irony. While in the turn for candour, she ought to have told him, that previous to her decision she had weighed the case of the diverse claims of himself and Tinman, and resolved them according to her predilection for the peaceful residence of her father and herself in England. This she had done a little regretfully, because of the natural sympathy of the young girl for the younger man. But the younger man had seemed to her seriously-straightforward mind too light and airy in his wooing, like one of her waltzing officers—-very well so long as she stepped the measure with him, and not forcible enough to take her off her feet. He had changed, and now that he had become persuasive, she feared he would disturb the serenity with which she desired and strove to contemplate her decision. Tinman's magnanimity was present in her imagination to sustain her, though she was aware that Mrs. Cavely had surprised her will, and caused it to surrender unconsulted by her wiser intelligence.

"I cannot listen to you," she said to Herbert, after listening longer than was prudent. "If what you say of papa is true, I do not think he will remain in Crikswich, or even in England. But I am sure the old friend we used, to speak of so much in Australia has not wilfully betrayed him."

Herbert would have had to say, "Look on us two!" to proceed in his baffled wooing; and the very ludicrousness of the contrast led him to see the folly and shame of proposing it.

Van Diemen came down to breakfast looking haggard and restless. "I have 'nt had my morning's walk—I can't go out to be hooted," he said, calling to his daughter for tea, and strong tea; and explaining to Herbert that he knew it to be bad for the nerves, but it was an antidote to bad champagne.

Mr. Herbert Fellingham had previously received an invitation on behalf of a sister of his to Crikswich. A dull sense of genuine sagacity inspired him to remind Annette of it. She wrote prettily to Miss Mary Fellingham, and Herbert had some faint joy in carrying away the letter of her handwriting.

"Fetch her soon, for we sha'n't be here long," Van Diemen said to him at parting. He expressed a certain dread of his next meeting with Mart Tinman.

Herbert speedily brought Mary Fellingham to Elba, and left her there. The situation was apparently unaltered. Van Diemen looked worn, like a man who has been feeding mainly on his reflections, which was manifest in his few melancholy bits of speech. He said to Herbert: "How you feel a thing when you are found out!" and, "It doesn't do for a

man with a heart to do wrong!" He designated the two principal roads by which poor sinners come to a conscience. His own would have slumbered but for discovery; and, as he remarked, if it had not been for his heart leading him to Tinman, he would not have fallen into that man's power.

Page 4551

The arrival of a young lady of fashionable appearance at Elba was matter of cogitation to Mrs. Cavely. She was disposed to suspect that it meant something, and Van Diemen's behaviour to her brother would of itself have fortified any suspicion. He did not call at the house on the beach, he did not invite Martin to dinner, he was rarely seen, and when he appeared at the Town Council he once or twice violently opposed his friend Martin, who came home ruffled, deeply offended in his interests and his dignity.

"Have you noticed any difference in Annette's treatment of you, dear?" Mrs. Cavely inquired.

"No," said Tinman; "none. She shakes hands. She asks after my health. She offers me my cup of tea."

"I have seen all that. But does she avoid privacy with you?"

"Dear me, no! Why should she? I hope, Martha, I am a man who may be confided in by any young lady in England."

"I am sure you may, dear Martin."

"She has an objection to name the . . . the day," said Martin. "I have informed her that I have an objection to long engagements. I don't like her new companion: She says she has been presented at Court. I greatly doubt it."

"It's to give herself a style, you may depend. I don't believe her!" exclaimed Mrs. Cavely, with sharp personal asperity.

Brother and sister examined together the Court Guide they had purchased on the occasion at once of their largest outlay and most thrilling gratification; in it they certainly found the name of General Fellingham. "But he can't be related to a newspaper-writer," said Mrs. Cavely.

To which her brother rejoined, "Unless the young man turned scamp. I hate unproductive professions."

"I hate him, Martin." Mrs. Cavely laughed in scorn, "I should say, I pity him. It's as clear to me as the sun at noonday, he wanted Annette. That's why I was in a hurry. How I dreaded he would come that evening to our dinner! When I saw him absent, I could have cried out it was Providence! And so be careful—we have had everything done for us from on High as yet—but be careful of your temper, dear Martin. I will hasten on the union; for it's a shame of a girl to drag a man behind her till he 's old at the altar. Temper, dear, if you will only think of it, is the weak point."

"Now he has begun boasting to me of his Australian wines!" Tinman ejaculated.

“Bear it. Bear it as you do Gippsland. My dear, you have the retort in your heart:—Yes! but have you a Court in Australia?”

“Ha! and his Australian wines cost twice the amount I pay for mine!”

“Quite true. We are not obliged to buy them, I should hope. I would, though—a dozen—if I thought it necessary, to keep him quiet.”

Tinman continued muttering angrily over the Australian wines, with a word of irritation at Gippsland, while promising to be watchful of his temper.

“What good is Australia to us,” he asked, “if it does n’t bring us money?”

Page 4552

“It’s going to, my dear,” said Mrs. Cavely. “Think of that when he begins boasting his Australia. And though it’s convict’s money, as he confesses—”

“With his convict’s money!” Tinman interjected tremblingly. “How long am I expected to wait?”

“Rely on me to hurry on the day,” said Mrs. Cavely. “There is no other annoyance?”

“Wherever I am going to buy, that man outbids me and then says it’s the old country’s want of pluck and dash, and doing things large-handed! A man who’d go on his knees to stop in England!” Tinman vociferated in a breath; and fairly reddened by the effort: “He may have to do it yet. I can’t stand insult.”

“You are less able to stand insult after Honours,” his sister said, in obedience to what she had observed of him since his famous visit to London. “It must be so, in nature. But temper is everything just now. Remember, it was by command of temper, and letting her father put himself in the wrong, you got hold of Annette. And I would abstain even from wine. For sometimes after it, you have owned it disagreed. And I have noticed these eruptions between you and Mr. Smith—as he calls himself—generally after wine.”

“Always the poor! the poor! money for the poor!” Tinman harped on further grievances against Van Diemen. “I say doctors have said the drain on the common is healthy; it’s a healthy smell, nourishing. We’ve always had it and been a healthy town. But the sea encroaches, and I say my house and my property is in danger. He buys my house over my head, and offers me the Crouch to live in at an advanced rent. And then he sells me my house at an advanced price, and I buy, and then he votes against a penny for the protection of the shore! And we’re in Winter again! As if he was not in my power!”

“My dear Martin, to Elba we go, and soon, if you will govern your temper,” said Mrs. Cavely. “You’re an angel to let me speak of it so, and it’s only that man that irritates you. I call him sinfully ostentatious.”

“I could blow him from a gun if I spoke out, and he knows it! He’s wanting in common gratitude, let alone respect,” Tinman snorted.

“But he has a daughter, my dear.”

Tinman slowly and crackingly subsided.

His main grievance against Van Diemen was the non-recognition of his importance by that uncultured Australian, who did not seem to be conscious of the dignities and distinctions we come to in our country. The moneyed daughter, the prospective marriage, for an economical man rejected by every lady surrounding him, advised him to lock up his temper in submission to Martha.

“Bring Annette to dine with us,” he said, on Martha’s proposing a visit to the dear young creature.

Martha drank a glass of her brother’s wine at lunch, and departed on the mission.

Annette declined to be brought. Her excuse was her guest, Miss Fellingham.

“Bring her too, by all means—if you’ll condescend, I am sure,” Mrs. Cavely said to Mary.

Page 4553

“I am much obliged to you; I do not dine out at present,” said the London lady.

“Dear me! are you ill?”

“No.”

“Nothing in the family, I hope?”

“My family?”

“I am sure, I beg pardon,” said Mrs. Cavely, bridling with a spite pardonable by the severest moralist.

“Can I speak to you alone?” she addressed Annette.

Miss Fellingham rose.

Mrs. Cavely confronted her. “I can’t allow it; I can’t think of it. I’m only taking a little liberty with one I may call my future sister-in-law.”

“Shall I come out with you?” said Annette, in sheer lassitude assisting Mary Fellingham in her scheme to show the distastefulness of this lady and her brother.

“Not if you don’t wish to.”

“I have no objection.”

“Another time will do.”

“Will you write?”

“By post indeed!”

Mrs. Cavely delivered a laugh supposed to, be peculiar to the English stage.

“It would be a penny thrown away,” said Annette. “I thought you could send a messenger.”

Intercommunication with Miss Fellingham had done mischief to her high moral conception of the pair inhabiting the house on the beach. Mrs. Cavely saw it, and could not conceal that she smarted.

Her counsel to her brother, after recounting the offensive scene to him in animated dialogue, was, to give Van Diemen a fright.

“I wish I had not drunk that glass of sherry before starting,” she exclaimed, both savagely and sagely. “It’s best after business. And these gentlemen’s habits of yours of taking to dining late upset me. I’m afraid I showed temper; but you, Martin, would not have borne one-tenth of what I did.”

“How dare you say so!” her brother rebuked her indignantly; and the house on the beach enclosed with difficulty a storm between brother and sister, happily not heard outside, because of loud winds raging.

Nevertheless Tinman pondered on Martha’s idea of the wisdom of giving Van Diemen a fright.

CHAPTER X

The English have been called a bad-tempered people, but this is to judge of them by their manifestations; whereas an examination into causes might prove them to be no worse tempered than that man is a bad sleeper who lies in a biting bed. If a sagacious instinct directs them to discountenance realistic tales, the realistic tale should justify its appearance by the discovery of an apology for the tormented souls. Once they sang madrigals, once they danced on the green, they revelled in their lusty humours, without having recourse to the pun for fun, an exhibition of hundreds of bare legs for jollity, a sentimental wailing all in the throat for music. Evidence is procurable that they have been an artificially-reared people, feeding on the genius of inventors, transposers, adulterators, instead of the products of nature, for

Page 4554

the last half century; and it is unfair to affirm of them that they are positively this or that. They are experiments. They are the sons and victims of a desperate Energy, alluring by cheapness, satiating with quantity, that it may mount in the social scale, at the expense of their tissues. The land is in a state of fermentation to mount, and the shop, which has shot half their stars to their social zenith, is what verily they would scald themselves to wash themselves free of. Nor is it in any degree a reprehensible sign that they should fly as from hue and cry the title of tradesman. It is on the contrary the spot of sanity, which bids us right cordially hope. Energy, transferred to the moral sense, may clear them yet.

Meanwhile this beer, this wine, both are of a character to have killed more than the tempers of a less gifted people. Martin Tinman invited Van Diemen Smith to try the flavour of a wine that, as he said, he thought of “laying down.”

It has been hinted before of a strange effect upon the minds of men who knew what they were going to, when they received an invitation to dine with Tinman. For the sake of a little social meeting at any cost, they accepted it; accepted it with a sigh, midway as by engineering measurement between prospective and retrospective; as nearly mechanical as things human may be, like the Mussulman’s accustomed cry of Kismet. Has it not been related of the little Jew babe sucking at its mother’s breast in Jerusalem, that this innocent, long after the Captivity, would start convulsively, relinquishing its feast, and indulging in the purest. Hebrew lamentation of the most tenacious of races, at the passing sound of a Babylonian or a Ninevite voice? In some such manner did men, unable to refuse, deep in what remained to them of nature, listen to Tinman; and so did Van Diemen, sighing heavily under the operation of simple animal instinct.

“You seem miserable,” said Tinman, not oblivious of his design to give his friend a fright.

“Do I? No, I’m all right,” Van Diemen replied. “I’m thinking of alterations at the Hall before Summer, to accommodate guests—if I stay here.”

“I suppose you would not like to be separated from Annette.”

“Separated? No, I should think I shouldn’t. Who’d do it?”

“Because I should not like to leave my good sister Martha all to herself in a house so near the sea—”

“Why not go to the Crouch, man?”

“Thank you.”

“No thanks needed if you don’t take advantage of the offer.”

They were at the entrance to Elba, whither Mr. Tinman was betaking himself to see his intended. He asked if Annette was at home, and to his great stupefaction heard that she had gone to London for a week.

Dissembling the spite aroused within him, he postponed his very strongly fortified design, and said, “You must be lonely.”

Van Diemen informed him that it would be for a night only, as young Fellingham was coming down to keep him company.

Page 4555

“At six o’clock this evening, then,” said Tinman. “We’re not fashionable in Winter.”

“Hang me, if I know when ever we were!” Van Diemen rejoined.

“Come, though, you’d like to be. You’ve got your ambition, Philip, like other men.”

“Respectable and respected—that ’s my ambition, Mr. Mart.”

Tinman simpered: “With your wealth!”

“Ay, I ’m rich—for a contented mind.”

“I ’m pretty sure you ’ll approve my new vintage,” said Tinman. “It’s direct from Oporto, my wine-merchant tells me, on his word.”

“What’s the price?”

“No, no, no. Try it first. It’s rather a stiff price.”

Van Diemen was partially reassured by the announcement. “What do you call a stiff price?”

“Well!—over thirty.”

“Double that, and you may have a chance.”

“Now,” cried Tinman, exasperated, “how can a man from Australia know anything about prices for port? You can’t divest your ideas of diggers’ prices. You’re like an intoxicating drink yourself on the tradesmen of our town. You think it fine—ha! ha! I daresay, Philip, I should be doing the same if I were up to your mark at my banker’s. We can’t all of us be lords, nor baronets.”

Catching up his temper thus cleverly, he curbed that habitual runaway, and retired from his old friend’s presence to explode in the society of the solitary Martha.

Annette’s behaviour was as bitterly criticized by the sister as by the brother.

“She has gone to those Fellingham people; and she may be thinking of jilting us,” Mrs. Cavely said.

“In that case, I have no mercy,” cried her brother. “I have borne”—he bowed with a professional spiritual humility—“as I should, but it may get past endurance. I say I have borne enough; and if the worst comes to the worst, and I hand him over to the authorities—I say I mean him no harm, but he has struck me. He beat me as a boy and

he has struck me as a man, and I say I have no thought of revenge, but I cannot have him here; and I say if I drive him out of the country back to his Gippsland!”

Martin Tinman quivered for speech, probably for that which feedeth speech, as is the way with angry men.

“And what?—what then?” said Martha, with the tender mellifluousness of sisterly reproach. “What good can you expect of letting temper get the better of you, dear?”

Tinman did not enjoy her recent turn for usurping the lead in their consultations, and he said, tartly, “This good, Martha. We shall get the Hall at my price, and be Head People here. Which,” he raised his note, “which he, a Deserter, has no right to pretend to give himself out to be. What your feelings may be as an old inhabitant, I don’t know, but I have always looked up to the people at Elba Hall, and I say I don’t like to have a Deserter squandering convict’s money there—with his forty-pound-a-year cook, and his champagne at seventy a dozen. It’s the luxury of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Page 4556

“That does not prevent its being very nice to dine there,” said Mrs. Cavely; “and it shall be our table for good if I have any management.”

“You mean me, ma’am,” bellowed Tinman.

“Not at all,” she breathed, in dulcet contrast. “You are good-looking, Martin, but you have not half such pretty eyes as the person I mean. I never ventured to dream of managing you, Martin. I am thinking of the people at Elba.”

“But why this extraordinary treatment of me, Martha?”

“She’s a child, having her head turned by those Fellinghams. But she’s honourable; she has sworn to me she would be honourable.”

“You do think I may as well give him a fright?” Tinman inquired hungrily.

“A sort of hint; but very gentle, Martin. Do be gentle—casual like—as if you did n’t want to say it. Get him on his Gippsland. Then if he brings you to words, you can always laugh back, and say you will go to Kew and see the Fernery, and fancy all that, so high, on Helvellyn or the Downs. Why”—Mrs. Cavely, at the end of her astute advices and cautionings, as usual, gave loose to her natural character—“Why that man came back to England at all, with his boastings of Gippsland, I can’t for the life of me find out. It ’s a perfect mystery.”

“It is,” Tinman sounded his voice at a great depth, reflectively. Glad of taking the part she was perpetually assuming of late, he put out his hand and said: “But it may have been ordained for our good, Martha.”

“True, dear,” said she, with an earnest sentiment of thankfulness to the Power which had led him round to her way of thinking and feeling.

CHAPTER XI

Annette had gone to the big metropolis, which burns in colonial imaginations as the sun of cities, and was about to see something of London, under the excellent auspices of her new friend, Mary Fellingham, and a dense fog. She was alarmed by the darkness, a little in fear, too, of Herbert; and these feelings caused her to chide herself for leaving her father.

Hearing her speak of her father sadly, Herbert kindly proposed to go down to Crikswich on the very day of her coming. She thanked him, and gave him a taste of bitterness by smiling favourably on his offer; but as he wished her to discern and take to heart the difference between one man and another, in the light of a suitor, he let her perceive that it cost him heavy pangs to depart immediately, and left her to brood on his example.

Mary Fellingham liked Annette. She thought her a sensible girl of uncultivated sensibilities, the reverse of thousands; not commonplace, therefore; and that the sensibilities were expanding was to be seen in her gradual unreadiness to talk of her engagement to Mr. Tinman, though her intimacy with Mary warmed daily. She considered she was bound to marry the man at some distant date, and did not feel unhappiness yet. She had only felt uneasy when she had to greet and converse with her intended; especially when the London young lady had been present. Herbert's departure relieved her of the pressing sense of contrast. She praised him to Mary for his extreme kindness to her father, and down in her unsounded heart desired that her father might appreciate it even more than she did.

Page 4557

Herbert drove into Crikswich at night, and stopped at Crickledon's, where he heard that Van Diemen was dining with Tinman.

Crickledon the carpenter permitted certain dry curves to play round his lips like miniature shavings at the name of Tinman; but Herbert asked, "What is it now?" in vain, and he went to Crickledon the cook.

This union of the two Crickledons, male and female; was an ideal one, such as poor women dream of; and men would do the same, if they knew how poor they are. Each had a profession, each was independent of the other, each supported the fabric. Consequently there was mutual respect, as between two pillars of a house. Each saw the other's faults with a sly wink to the world, and an occasional interchange of sarcasm that was tonic, very strengthening to the wits without endangering the habit of affection. Crickledon the cook stood for her own opinions, and directed the public conduct of Crickledon the carpenter; and if he went astray from the line she marked out, she put it down to human nature, to which she was tolerant. He, when she had not followed his advice, ascribed it to the nature of women. She never said she was the equal of her husband; but the carpenter proudly acknowledged that she was as good as a man, and he bore with foibles derogatory to such high stature, by teaching himself to observe a neatness of domestic and general management that told him he certainly was not as good as a woman. Herbert delighted in them. The cook regaled the carpenter with skilful, tasty, and economic dishes; and the carpenter, obedient to her supplications, had promised, in the event of his outliving her, that no hands but his should have the making of her coffin. "It is so nice," she said, "to think one's own husband will put together the box you are to lie in, of his own make!" Had they been even a doubtfully united pair, the cook's anticipation of a comfortable coffin, the work of the best carpenter in England, would have kept them together; and that which fine cookery does for the cementing of couples needs not to be recounted to those who have read a chapter or two of the natural history of the male sex.

"Crickledon, my dear soul, your husband is labouring with a bit of fun," Herbert said to her.

"He would n't laugh loud at Punch, for fear of an action," she replied. "He never laughs out till he gets to bed, and has locked the door; and when he does he says 'Hush!' to me. Tinman is n't bailiff again just yet, and where he has his bailiff's best Court suit from, you may ask. He exercises in it off and on all the week, at night, and sometimes in the middle of the day."

Herbert rallied her for her gossip's credulity.

"It's truth," she declared. "I have it from the maid of the house, little Jane, whom he pays four pound a year for all the work of the house: a clever little thing with her hands and her head she is; and can read and write beautiful; and she's a mind to leave 'em if

they don’t advance her. She knocked and went in while he was full blaze, and bowing his poll to his glass. And now he turns the key, and a child might know he was at it.”

Page 4558

“He can’t be such a donkey!”

“And he’s been seen at the window on the seaside. ’Who’s your Admiral staying at the house on the beach?’ men have inquired as they come ashore. My husband has heard it. Tinman’s got it on his brain. He might be cured by marriage to a sound-headed woman, but he ’ll soon be wanting to walk about in silk legs if he stops a bachelor. They tell me his old mother here had a dress value twenty pound; and pomp’s inherited. Save as he may, there’s his leak.”

Herbert’s contempt for Tinman was intense; it was that of the young and ignorant who live in their imaginations like spendthrifts, unaware of the importance of them as the food of life, and of how necessary it is to seize upon the solider one among them for perpetual sustenance when the unsubstantial are vanishing. The great event of his bailiff’s term of office had become the sun of Tinman’s system. He basked in its rays. He meant to be again the proud official, royally distinguished; meantime, though he knew not that his days were dull, he groaned under the dulness; and, as cart or cab horses, uncomplaining as a rule, show their view of the nature of harness when they have release to frisk in a field, it is possible that existence was made tolerable to the jogging man by some minutes of excitement in his bailiff’s Court suit. Really to pasture on our recollections we ought to dramatize them. There is, however, only the testimony of a maid and a mariner to show that Tinman did it, and those are witnesses coming of particularly long-bow classes, given to magnify small items of fact.

On reaching the hall Herbert found the fire alight in the smoking-room, and soon after settling himself there he heard Van Diemen’s voice at the hall-door saying good night to Tinman.

“Thank the Lord! there you are,” said Van Diemen, entering the room. “I couldn’t have hoped so much. That rascal!” he turned round to the door. “He has been threatening me, and then smoothing me. Hang his oil! It’s combustible. And hang the port he’s for laying down, as he calls it. ‘Leave it to posterity,’ says I. ‘Why?’ says he. ’Because the young ones ‘ll be better able to take care of themselves,’ says I, and he insists on an explanation. I gave it to him. Out he bursts like a wasp’s nest. He may have said what he did say in temper. He seemed sorry afterwards—poor old Mart! The scoundrel talked of Horse Guards and telegraph wires.”

“Scoundrel, but more ninny,” said Herbert, full of his contempt. “Dare him to do his worst. The General tells me they ’d be glad to overlook it at the Guards, even if they had all the facts. Branding ’s out of the question.”

“I swear it was done in my time,” cried Van Diemen, all on fire.

“It’s out of the question. You might be advised to leave England for a few months. As for the society here—”

“If I leave, I leave for good. My heart’s broken. I’m disappointed. I’m deceived in my friend. He and I in the old days! What’s come to him? What on earth is it changes men who stop in England so? It can’t be the climate. And did you mention my name to General Fellingham?”

Page 4559

“Certainly not,” said Herbert. “But listen to me, sir, a moment. Why not get together half-a-dozen friends of the neighbourhood, and make a clean breast of it. Englishmen like that kind of manliness, and they are sure to ring sound to it.”

“I couldn’t!” Van Diemen sighed. “It’s not a natural feeling I have about it—I ’ve brooded on the word. If I have a nightmare, I see Deserter written in sulphur on the black wall.”

“You can’t remain at his mercy, and be bullied as you are. He makes you ill, sir. He won’t do anything, but he’ll go on worrying you. I’d stop him at once. I’d take the train to-morrow and get an introduction to the Commander-in-Chief. He’s the very man to be kind to you in a situation like this. The General would get you the introduction.”

“That’s more to my taste; but no, I couldn’t,” Van Diemen moaned in his weakness. “Money has unmanned me. I was n’t this kind of man formerly; nor more was Mart Tinman, the traitor! All the world seems changeing for the worse, and England is n’t what she used to be.”

“You let that man spoil it for you, sir.” Herbert related Mrs. Crickledon’s tale of Mr. Tinman, adding, “He’s an utter donkey. I should defy him. What I should do would be to let him know to-morrow morning that you don’t intend to see him again. Blow for, blow, is the thing he requires. He’ll be cringing to you in a week.”

“And you’d like to marry Annette,” said Van Diemen, relishing, nevertheless, the advice, whose origin and object he perceived so plainly.

“Of course I should,” said Herbert, franker still in his colour than his speech.

“I don’t see him my girl’s husband.” Van Diemen eyed the red hollow in the falling coals. “When I came first, and found him a healthy man, good-looking enough for a trifle over forty, I ’d have given her gladly, she nodding Yes. Now all my fear is she’s in earnest. Upon my soul, I had the notion old Mart was a sort of a boy still; playing man, you know. But how can you understand? I fancied his airs and stiffness were put on; thought I saw him burning true behind it. Who can tell? He seems to be jealous of my buying property in his native town. Something frets him. I ought never to have struck him! There’s my error, and I repent it. Strike a friend! I wonder he didn’t go off to the Horse Guards at once. I might have done it in his place, if I found I couldn’t lick him. I should have tried kicking first.”

“Yes, shinning before peaching,” said Herbert, astonished almost as much as he was disgusted by the inveterate sentimental attachment of Van Diemen to his old friend.

Martin Tinman anticipated good things of the fright he had given the man after dinner. He had, undoubtedly, yielded to temper, forgetting pure policy, which it is so exceeding difficult to practice. But he had soothed the startled beast; they had shaken hands at

parting, and Tinman hoped that the week of Annette's absence would enable him to mould her father. Young Fellingham's appointment to come to Elba had slipped Mr. Tinman's memory. It was annoying to see this intruder. "At all events, he's not with Annette," said Mrs. Cavely. "How long has her father to run on?"

Page 4560

“Five months,” Tinman replied. “He would have completed his term of service in five months.”

“And to think of his being a rich man because he deserted,” Mrs. Cavely interjected. “Oh! I do call it immoral. He ought to be apprehended and punished, to be an example for the good of society. If you lose time, my dear Martin, your chance is gone. He’s wriggling now. And if I could believe he talked us over to that young impudent, who has n’t a penny that he does n’t get from his pen, I’d say, denounce him to-morrow. I long for Elba. I hate this house. It will be swallowed up some day; I know it; I have dreamt it. Elba at any cost. Depend upon it, Martin, you have been foiled in your suits on account of the mean house you inhabit. Enter Elba as that girl’s husband, or go there to own it, and girls will crawl to you.”

“You are a ridiculous woman, Martha,” said Tinman, not dissenting.

The mixture of an idea of public duty with a feeling of personal rancour is a strong incentive to the pursuit of a stern line of conduct; and the glimmer of self-interest superadded does not check the steps of the moralist. Nevertheless, Tinman held himself in. He loved peace. He preached it, he disseminated it. At a meeting in the town he strove to win Van Diemen’s voice in favour of a vote for further moneys to protect “our shores.” Van Diemen laughed at him, telling him he wanted a battery. “No,” said Tinman, “I’ve had enough to do with soldiers.”

“How’s that?”

“They might be more cautious. I say, they might learn to know their friends from their enemies.”

“That’s it, that’s it,” said Van Diemen. “If you say much more, my hearty, you’ll find me bidding against you next week for Marine Parade and Belle Vue Terrace. I’ve a cute eye for property, and this town’s looking up.”

“You look about you before you speculate in land and house property here,” retorted Tinman.

Van Diemen bore so much from him that he asked himself whether he could be an Englishman. The title of Deserter was his raw wound. He attempted to form the habit of stigmatizing himself with it in the privacy of his chamber, and he succeeded in establishing the habit of talking to himself, so that he was heard by the household, and Annette, on her return, was obliged to warn him of his indiscretion. This development of a new weakness exasperated him. Rather to prove his courage by defiance than to baffle Tinman’s ambition to become the principal owner of houses in Crikswich, by outbidding him at the auction for the sale of Marine Parade and Belle Vue Terrace, Van Diemen ran the houses up at the auction, and ultimately had Belle Vue knocked down to

him. So fierce was the quarrel that Annette, in conjunction with Mrs. Cavely; was called on to interpose with her sweetest grace. “My native place,” Tinman said to her; “it is my native place. I have a pride in it; I desire to own property in it, and your father opposes me. He opposes me. Then says I may have it back at auction price, after he has gone far to double the price! I have borne—I repeat I have borne too much.”

Page 4561

“Are n’t your properties to be equal to one?” said Mrs. Cavely, smiling mother—like from Tinman to Annette.

He sought to produce a fondling eye in a wry face, and said, “Yes, I will remember that.”

“Annette will bless you with her dear hand in a month or two at the outside,” Mrs. Cavely murmured, cherishingly.

“She will?” Tinman cracked his body to bend to her.

“Oh, I cannot say; do not distress me. Be friendly with papa,” the girl resumed, moving to escape.

“That is the essential,” said Mrs. Cavely; and continued, when Annette had gone, “The essential is to get over the next few months, miss, and then to snap your fingers at us. Martin, I would force that man to sell you Belle Vue under the price he paid for it, just to try your power.”

Tinman was not quite so forcible. He obtained Belle Vue at auction price, and his passion for revenge was tipped with fire by having it accorded as a friend’s favour.

The poisoned state of his mind was increased by a December high wind that rattled his casements, and warned him of his accession of property exposed to the elements. Both he and his sister attributed their nervousness to the sinister behaviour of Van Diemen. For the house on the beach had only, in most distant times, been threatened by the sea, and no house on earth was better protected from man,—Neptune, in the shape of a coastguard, being paid by Government to patrol about it during the hours of darkness. They had never had any fears before Van Diemen arrived, and caused them to give thrice their ordinary number of dinners to guests per annum. In fact, before Van Diemen came, the house on the beach looked on Crikswich without a rival to challenge its anticipated lordship over the place, and for some inexplicable reason it seemed to its inhabitants to have been a safer as well as a happier residence.

They were consoled by Tinman’s performance of a clever stroke in privately purchasing the cottages west of the town, and including Crickledon’s shop, abutting on Marine Parade. Then from the house on the beach they looked at an entire frontage of their property.

They entered the month of February. No further time was to be lost, “or we shall wake up to find that man has fooled us,” Mrs. Cavely said. Tinman appeared at Elba to demand a private interview with Annette. His hat was blown into the hall as the door opened to him, and he himself was glad to be sheltered by the door, so violent was the gale. Annette and her father were sitting together. They kept the betrothed gentleman

waiting a very long time. At last Van Diemen went to him, and said, “Netty ’ll see you, if you must. I suppose you have no business with me?”

“Not to-day,” Tinman replied.

Page 4562

Van Diemen strode round the drawing-room with his hands in his pockets. “There’s a disparity of ages,” he said, abruptly, as if desirous to pour out his lesson while he remembered it. “A man upwards of forty marries a girl under twenty, he’s over sixty before she’s forty; he’s decaying when she’s only mellow. I ought never to have struck you, I know. And you’re such an infernal bad temper at times, and age does n’t improve that, they say; and she’s been educated tip-top. She’s sharp on grammar, and a man may n’t like that much when he’s a husband. See her, if you must. But she does n’t take to the idea; there’s the truth. Disparity of ages and unsuitableness of dispositions —what was it Fellingham said?—like two barrel-organs grinding different tunes all day in a house.”

“I don’t want to hear Mr. Fellingham’s comparisons,” Tinman snapped.

“Oh! he’s nothing to the girl,” said Van Diemen. “She doesn’t stomach leaving me.”

“My dear Philip! why should she leave you? When we have interests in common as one household—”

“She says you’re such a damned bad temper.”

Tinman was pursuing amicably, “When we are united—” But the frightful charge brought against his temper drew him up. “Fiery I may be. Annette has seen I am forgiving. I am a Christian. You have provoked me; you have struck me.”

“I ’ll give you a couple of thousand pounds in hard money to be off the bargain, and not bother the girl,” said Van Diemen.

“Now,” rejoined Tinman, “I am offended. I like money, like most men who have made it. You do, Philip. But I don’t come courting like a pauper. Not for ten thousand; not for twenty. Money cannot be a compensation to me for the loss of Annette. I say I love Annette.”

“Because,” Van Diemen continued his speech, “you trapped us into that engagement, Mart. You dosed me with the stuff you buy for wine, while your sister sat sugaring and mollifying my girl; and she did the trick in a minute, taking Netty by surprise when I was all heart and no head; and since that you may have seen the girl turn her head from marriage like my woods from the wind.”

“Mr. Van Diemen Smith!” Tinman panted; he mastered himself. “You shall not provoke me. My introductions of you in this neighbourhood, my patronage, prove my friendship.”

“You’ll be a good old fellow, Mart, when you get over your hopes of being knighted.”

“Mr. Fellingham may set you against my wine, Philip. Let me tell you—I know you—you would not object to have your daughter called Lady.”

“With a spindle-shanked husband capering in a Court suit before he goes to bed every night, that he may n’t forget what a fine fellow he was one day bygone! You’re growing lean on it, Mart, like a recollection fifty years old.”

“You have never forgiven me that day, Philip!”

“Jealous, am I? Take the money, give up the girl, and see what friends we’ll be. I’ll back your buyings, I’ll advertise your sellings. I’ll pay a painter to paint you in your Court suit, and hang up a copy of you in my diningroom.”

Page 4563

“Annette is here,” said Tinman, who had been showing Etna’s tokens of insurgency.

He admired Annette. Not till latterly had Herbert Fellingham been so true an admirer of Annette as Tinman was. She looked sincere and she dressed inexpensively. For these reasons she was the best example of womankind that he knew, and her enthusiasm for England had the sympathetic effect on him of obscuring the rest of the world, and thrilling him with the reassuring belief that he was blest in his blood and his birthplace—-points which her father, with his boastings of Gippsland, and other people talking of scenes on the Continent, sometimes disturbed in his mind.

“Annette,” said he, “I come requesting to converse with you in private.”

“If you wish it—I would rather not,” she answered.

Tinman raised his head, as often at Helmstone when some offending shopwoman was to hear her doom.

He bent to her. “I see. Before your father, then!”

“It isn’t an agreeable bit of business, to me,” Van Diemen grumbled, frowning and shrugging.

“I have come, Annette, to ask you, to beg you, entreat—before a third person—-laughing, Philip?”

“The wrong side of my mouth, my friend. And I’ll tell you what: we’re in for heavy seas, and I ’m not sorry you’ve taken the house on the beach off my hands.”

“Pray, Mr. Tinman, speak at once, if you please, and I will do my best. Papa vexes you.”

“No, no,” replied Tinman.

He renewed his commencement. Van Diemen interrupted him again.

“Hang your power over me, as you call it. Eh, old Mart? I’m a Deserter. I’ll pay a thousand pounds to the British army, whether they punish me or not. March me off tomorrow!”

“Papa, you are unjust, unkind.” Annette turned to him in tears.

“No, no,” said Tinman, “I do not feel it. Your father has misunderstood me, Annette.”

“I am sure he has,” she said fervently. “And, Mr. Tinman, I will faithfully promise that so long as you are good to my dear father, I will not be untrue to my engagement, only do

not wish me to name any day. We shall be such very good dear friends if you consent to this. Will you?"

Pausing for a space, the enamoured man unrolled his voice in lamentation: "Oh! Annette, how long will you keep me?"

"There; you'll set her crying!" said Van Diemen. "Now you can run upstairs, Netty. By jingo! Mart Tinman, you've got a bass voice for love affairs."

"Annette," Tinman called to her, and made her turn round as she was retiring. "I must know the day before the end of winter. Please. In kind consideration. My arrangements demand it."

"Do let the girl go," said Van Diemen. "Dine with me tonight and I'll give you a wine to brisk your spirits, old boy"

"Thank you. When I have ordered dinner at home, I——and my wine agrees with *me*," Tinman replied.

Page 4564

“I doubt it.”

“You shall not provoke me, Philip.”

They parted stiffly.

Mrs. Cavely had unpleasant domestic news to communicate to her brother, in return for his tale of affliction and wrath. It concerned the ungrateful conduct of their little housemaid Jane, who, as Mrs. Cavely said, “egged on by that woman Crickledon,” had been hinting at an advance of wages.

“She didn’t dare speak, but I saw what was in her when she broke a plate, and wouldn’t say she was sorry. I know she goes to Crickledon and talks us over. She’s a willing worker, but she has no heart.”

Tinman had been accustomed in his shop at Helmstone—where heaven had blessed him with the patronage of the rich, as visibly as rays of supernal light are seen selecting from above the heads of prophets in the illustrations to cheap holy books—to deal with willing workers that have no hearts. Before the application for an advance of wages—-and he knew the signs of it coming—his method was to calculate how much he might be asked for, and divide the estimated sum by the figure 4; which, as it seemed to come from a generous impulse, and had been unsolicited, was often humbly accepted, and the willing worker pursued her lean and hungry course in his service. The treatment did not always agree with his males. Women it suited; because they do not like to lift up their voices unless they are in a passion; and if you take from them the grounds of temper, you take their words away—you make chickens of them. And as Tinman said, “Gratitude I never expect!” Why not? For the reason that he knew human nature. He could record shocking instances of the ingratitude of human nature, as revealed to him in the term of his tenure of the shop at Helmstone. Blest from above, human nature’s wickedness had from below too frequently besulphured and suffumigated him for his memory to be dim; and though he was ever ready to own himself an example that heaven prevaileth, he could cite instances of scandal-mongering shop-women dismissed and working him mischief in the town, which pointed to him in person for a proof that the Powers of Good and Evil were still engaged in unhappy contention. Witness Strikes! witness Revolutions!

“Tell her, when she lays the cloth, that I advance her, on account of general good conduct, five shillings per annum. Add,” said Tinman, “that I wish no thanks. It is for her merits—to reward her; you understand me, Martha?”

“Quite; if you think it prudent, Martin.”

“I do. She is not to breathe a syllable to cook.”

“She will.”

“Then keep your eye on cook.”

Mrs. Cavely promised she would do so. She felt sure she was paying five shillings for ingratitude; and, therefore, it was with humility that she owned her error when, while her brother sipped his sugared acrid liquor after dinner (in devotion to the doctor’s decree, that he should take a couple of glasses, rigorously as body-lashing friar), she imparted to him the singular effect of the advance of wages upon little Jane—“Oh, ma’am! and me never asked you for it!” She informed her brother how little Jane had confided to her that they were called “close,” and how little Jane had vowed she would—the willing little thing!—go about letting everybody know their kindness.

Page 4565

“Yes! Ah!” Tinman inhaled the praise. “No, no; I don’t want to be puffed,” he said. “Remember cook. I have,” he continued, meditatively, “rarely found my plan fail. But mind, I give the Crickledons notice to quit to-morrow. They are a pest. Besides, I shall probably think of erecting villas.”

“How dreadful the wind is!” Mrs. Cavely exclaimed. “I would give that girl Annette one chance more. Try her by letter.”

Tinman despatched a business letter to Annette, which brought back a vague, unbusiness-like reply. Two days afterward Mrs. Cavely reported to her brother the presence of Mr. Fellingham and Miss Mary Fellingham in Crikswich. At her dictation he wrote a second letter. This time the reply came from Van Diemen:

“My *dear Martin*,—Please do not go on bothering my girl. She does
not like the idea of leaving me, and my experience tells me I could
not live in the house with you. So there it is. Take it friendly.
I have always wanted to be, and am,
“Your friend,
“*Phil*.”

Tinman proceeded straight to Elba; that is, as nearly straight as the wind would allow his legs to walk. Van Diemen was announced to be out; Miss Annette begged to be excused, under the pretext that she was unwell; and Tinman heard of a dinner-party at Elba that night.

He met Mr. Fellingham on the carriage drive. The young Londoner presumed to touch upon Tinman’s private affairs by pleading on behalf of the Crikledons, who were, he said, much dejected by the notice they had received to quit house and shop.

“Another time,” bawled Tinman. “I can’t hear you in this wind.”

“Come in,” said Fellingham.

“The master of the house is absent,” was the smart retort roared at him; and Tinman staggered away, enjoying it as he did his wine.

His house rocked. He was backed by his sister in the assurance that he had been duped.

The process he supposed to be thinking, which was the castigation of his brains with every sting wherewith a native touchiness could ply immediate recollection, led him to conclude that he must bring Van Diemen to his senses, and Annette running to him for mercy.

He sat down that night amid the howling of the storm, wind whistling, water crashing, casements rattling, beach desperately dragging, as by the wide-stretched star-fish fingers of the half-engulphed.

He hardly knew what he wrote. The man was in a state of personal terror, burning with indignation at Van Diemen as the main cause of his jeopardy. For, in order to prosecute his pursuit of Annette, he had abstained from going to Helmstone to pay moneys into his bank there, and what was precious to life as well as life itself, was imperilled by those two—Annette and her father—who, had they been true, had they been honest, to say nothing of honourable, would by this time have opened Elba to him as a fast and safe abode.

Page 4566

His letter was addressed, on a large envelope,

"To the Adjutant-General,

"*Horse guards*."

But if ever consigned to the Post, that post-office must be in London; and Tinman left the letter on his desk till the morning should bring counsel to him as to the London friend to whom he might despatch it under cover for posting, if he pushed it so far.

Sleep was impossible. Black night favoured the tearing fiends of shipwreck, and looking through a back window over sea, Tinman saw with dismay huge towering ghostwhite wreaths, that travelled up swiftly on his level, and lit the dark as they flung themselves in ruin, with a gasp, across the mound of shingle at his feet.

He undressed: His sister called to him to know if they were in danger. Clothed in his dressing-gown, he slipped along to her door, to vociferate to her hoarsely that she must not frighten the servants; and one fine quality in the training of the couple, which had helped them to prosper, a form of self-command, kept her quiet in her shivering fears.

For a distraction Tinman pulled open the drawers of his wardrobe. His glittering suit lay in one. And he thought, "What wonderful changes there are in the world!" meaning, between a man exposed to the wrath of the elements, and the same individual reading from vellum, in that suit, in a palace, to the Head of all of us!

The presumption is; that he must have often done it before. The fact is established, that he did it that night. The conclusion drawn from it is, that it must have given him a sense of stability and safety.

At any rate that he put on the suit is quite certain.

Probably it was a work of ingratiation and degrees; a feeling of the silk, a trying on to one leg, then a matching of the fellow with it. O you Revolutionists! who would have no state, no ceremonial, and but one order of galligaskins! This man must have been wooed away in spirit to forgetfulness of the tempest scourging his mighty neighbour to a bigger and a farther leap; he must have obtained from the contemplation of himself in his suit that which would be the saving of all men, in especial of his countrymen—-imagination, namely.

Certain it is, as I have said, that he attired himself in the suit. He covered it with his dressing-gown, and he lay down on his bed so garbed, to await the morrow's light, being probably surprised by sleep acting upon fatigue and nerves appeased and soothed.

CHAPTER XII

Page 4567

Elba lay more sheltered from South-east winds under the slopes of down than any other house in Crikswich. The South-caster struck off the cliff to a martello tower and the house on the beach, leaving Elba to repose, so that the worst wind for that coast was one of the most comfortable for the owner of the hall, and he looked from his upper window on a sea of crumbling grey chalk, lashed unremittingly by the featureless piping gale, without fear that his elevated grounds and walls would be open at high tide to the ravage of water. Van Diemen had no idea of calamity being at work on land when he sat down to breakfast. He told Herbert that he had prayed for poor fellows at sea last night. Mary Fellingham and Annette were anxious to finish breakfast and mount the down to gaze on the sea, and receiving a caution from Van Diemen not to go too near the cliff, they were inclined to think he was needlessly timorous on their account.

Before they were half way through the meal, word was brought in of great breaches in the shingle, and water covering the common. Van Diemen sent for his head gardener, whose report of the state of things outside took the comprehensive form of prophecy; he predicted the fall of the town.

“Nonsense; what do you mean, John Scott?” said Van Diemen, eyeing his orderly breakfast table and the man in turns. “It does n’t seem like that, yet, does it?”

“The house on the beach won’t stand an hour longer, sir.”

“Who says so?”

“It’s cut off from land now, and waves mast-high all about it.”

“Mart Tinman?” cried Van Diemen.

All started; all jumped up; and there was a scampering for hats and cloaks. Maids and men of the house ran in and out confirming the news of inundation. Some in terror for the fate of relatives, others pleasantly excited, glad of catastrophe if it but killed monotony, for at any rate it was a change of demons.

The view from the outer bank of Elba was of water covering the space of the common up to the stones of Marine Parade and Belle Vue. But at a distance it had not the appearance of angry water; the ladies thought it picturesque, and the house on the beach was seen standing firm. A second look showed the house completely isolated; and as the party led by Van Diemen circled hurriedly toward the town, they discerned heavy cataracts of foam pouring down the wrecked mound of shingle on either side of the house.

“Why, the outer wall’s washed away,” said Van Diemen. “Are they in real danger?” asked Annette, her teeth chattering, and the cold and other matters at her heart

precluding for the moment such warmth of sympathy as she hoped soon to feel for them. She was glad to hear her father say:

“Oh! they’re high and dry by this time. We shall find them in the town And we’ll take them in and comfort them. Ten to one they have n’t breakfasted. They sha’n’t go to an inn while I’m handy.”

Page 4568

He dashed ahead, followed closely by Herbert. The ladies beheld them talking to townsfolk as they passed along the upper streets, and did not augur well of their increase of speed. At the head of the town water was visible, part of the way up the main street, and crossing it, the ladies went swiftly under the old church, on the tower of which were spectators, through the churchyard to a high meadow that dropped to a stone wall fixed between the meadow and a grass bank above the level of the road, where now salt water beat and cast some spray. Not less than a hundred people were in this field, among them Crickledon and his wife. All were in silent watch of the house on the beach, which was to east of the field, at a distance of perhaps three stonethrows. The scene was wild. Continuously the torrents poured through the shingleclefts, and momently a thunder sounded, and high leapt a billow that topped the house and folded it weltering.

“They tell me Mart Tinman’s in the house,” Van Diemen roared to Herbert. He listened to further information, and bellowed: “There’s no boat!”

Herbert answered: “It must be a mistake, I think; here’s Crickledon says he had a warning before dawn and managed to move most of his things, and the people over there must have been awakened by the row in time to get off”

“I can’t hear a word you say;” Van Diemen tried to pitch his voice higher than the wind. “Did you say a boat? But where?”

Crickledon the carpenter made signal to Herbert. They stepped rapidly up the field.

“Women feels their weakness in times like these, my dear,” Mrs. Crickledon said to Annette. “What with our clothes and our cowardice it do seem we’re not the equals of men when winds is high.”

Annette expressed the hope to her that she had not lost much property. Mrs. Crickledon said she was glad to let her know she was insured in an Accident Company. “But,” said she, “I do grieve for that poor man Tinman, if alive he be, and comes ashore to find his property wrecked by water. Bless ye! he wouldn’t insure against anything less common than fire; and my house and Crickledon’s shop are floating timbers by this time; and Marine Parade and Belle Vue are safe to go. And it’ll be a pretty welcome for him, poor man, from his investments.”

A cry at a tremendous blow of a wave on the doomed house rose from the field. Back and front door were broken down, and the force of water drove a round volume through the channel, shaking the walls.

“I can’t stand this,” Van Diemen cried.

Annette was too late to hold him back. He ran up the field. She was preparing to run after when Mrs. Crickledon touched her arm and implored her: “Interfere not with men, but let them follow their judgements when it’s seasons of mighty peril, my dear. If any one’s guilty it’s me, for minding my husband of a boat that was launched for a life-boat here, and wouldn’t answer, and is at the shed by the Crouch—left lying there, I’ve often said, as if it was a-sulking. My goodness!”

Page 4569

A linen sheet bad been flung out from one of the windows of the house on the beach, and flew loose and flapping in sign of distress.

“It looks as if they had gone mad in that house, to have waited so long for to declare theirselves, poor souls,” Mrs. Crickledon said, sighing.

She was assured right and left that signals had been seen before, and some one stated that the cook of Mr. Tinman, and also Mrs. Cavely, were on shore.

“It’s his furniture, poor man, he sticks to: and nothing gets round the heart so!” resumed Mrs. Crickledon. “There goes his bed-linen!”

The sheet was whirled and snapped away by the wind; distended doubled, like a flock of winter geese changeing alphabetical letters on the clouds, darted this way and that, and finally outspread on the waters breaking against Marine Parade.

“They cannot have thought there was positive danger in remaining,” said Annette.

“Mr. Tinman was waiting for the cheapest Insurance office,” a man remarked to Mrs. Crickledon.

“The least to pay is to the undertaker,” she replied, standing on tiptoe. “And it’s to be hoped he ’ll pay more to-day. If only those walls don’t fall and stop the chance of the boat to save him for more outlay, poor man! What boats was on the beach last night, high up and over the ridge as they was, are planks by this time and only good for carpenters.”

“Half our town’s done for,” one old man said; and another followed him in a pious tone: “From water we came and to water we go.”

They talked of ancient inroads of the sea, none so serious as this threatened to be for them. The gallant solidity, of the house on the beach had withstood heavy gales: it was a brave house. Heaven be thanked, no fishing boats were out. Chiefly well-to-do people would be the sufferers—an exceptional case. For it is the mysterious and unexplained dispensation that: “Mostly heaven chastises we.”

A knot of excited gazers drew the rest of the field to them. Mrs. Crickledon, on the edge of the crowd, reported what was doing to Annette and Miss Fellingham. A boat had been launched from the town. “Praise the Lord, there’s none but coastguard in it!” she exclaimed, and excused herself for having her heart on her husband.

Annette was as deeply thankful that her father was not in the boat.

They looked round and saw Herbert beside them. Van Diemen was in the rear, panting, and straining his neck to catch sight of the boat now pulling fast across a tumbled sea to

where Tinman himself was perceived, beckoning them wildly, half out of one of the windows.

“A pound apiece to those fellows, and two if they land Mart Tinman dry; I’ve promised it, and they’ll earn it. Look at that! Quick, you rascals!”

To the east a portion of the house had fallen, melted away. Where it stood, just below the line of shingle, it was now like a structure wasting on a tormented submerged reef. The whole line was given over to the waves.

Page 4570

“Where is his sister?” Annette shrieked to her father.

“Safe ashore; and one of the women with her. But Mart Tinman would stop, the fool! to-poor old boy! save his papers and things; and has n’t a head to do it, Martha Cavely tells me. They’re at him now! They’ve got him in! There’s another? Oh! it’s a girl, who would n’t go and leave him. They’ll pull to the field here. Brave lads!—By jingo, why ain’t Englishmen always in danger!—eh? if you want to see them shine!”

“It’s little Jane,” said Mrs. Crickledon, who had been joined by her husband, and now that she knew him to be no longer in peril, kept her hand on him to restrain him, just for comfort’s sake.

The boat held under the lee of the house-wreck a minute; then, as if shooting a small rapid, came down on a wave crowned with foam, to hurrahs from the townsmen.

“They’re all right,” said Van Diemen, puffing as at a mist before his eyes. “They’ll pull westward, with the wind, and land him among us. I remember when old Mart and I were bathing once, he was younger than me, and could n’t swim much, and I saw him going down. It’d have been hard to see him washed off before one’s eyes thirty years afterwards. Here they come. He’s all right. He’s in his dressing-gown!”

The crowd made way for Mr. Van Diemen Smith to welcome his friend. Two of the coastguard jumped out, and handed him to the dry bank, while Herbert, Van Diemen, and Crickledon took him by hand and arm, and hoisted him on to the flint wall, preparatory to his descent into the field. In this exposed situation the wind, whose pranks are endless when it is once up, seized and blew Martin Tinman’s dressing-gown wide as two violently flapping wings on each side of him, and finally over his head.

Van Diemen turned a pair of stupefied flat eyes on Herbert, who cast a sly look at the ladies. Tinman had sprung down. But not before the. world, in one tempestuous glimpse, had caught sight of the Court suit.

Perfect gravity greeted him from the crowd.

“Safe, old Mart! and glad to be able to say it,” said Van Diemen.

“We are so happy,” said Annette.

“House, furniture, property, everything I possess!” ejaculated Tinman, shivering.

“Fiddle, man; you want some hot breakfast in you. Your sister has gone on—to Elba. Come you too, old Man; and where’s that plucky little girl who stood by—”

“Was there a girl?” said Tinman.

“Yes, and there was a boy wanted to help.” Van Diemen pointed at Herbert.

Tinman looked, and piteously asked, “Have you examined Marine Parade and Belle Vue? It depends on the tide!”

“Here is little Jane, sir,” said Mrs. Crickledon.

“Fall in,” Van Diemen said to little Jane.

The girl was bobbing curtseys to Annette, on her introduction by Mrs. Crickledon.

“Martin, you stay at my house; you stay at Elba till you get things comfortable about you, and then you shall have the Crouch for a year, rent free. Eh, Netty?”

Page 4571

Annette chimed in: “Anything we can do, anything. Nothing can be too much.”

Van Diemen was praising little Jane for her devotion to her master.

“Master have been so kind to me,” said little Jane.

“Now, march; it is cold,” Van Diemen gave the word, and Herbert stood by Mary rather dejectedly, foreseeing that his prospects at Elba were darkened.

“Now then, Mart, left leg forward,” Van Diemen linked his arm in his friend’s.

“I must have a look,” Tinman broke from him, and cast a forlorn look of farewell on the last of the house on the beach.

“You’ve got me left to you, old Mart; don’t forget that,” said Van Diemen.

Tinman’s chest fell. “Yes, yes,” he responded. He was touched.

“And I told those fellows if they landed you dry they should have—I’d give them double pay; and I do believe they’ve earned their money.”

“I don’t think I’m very wet, I’m cold,” said Tinman.

“You can’t help being cold, so come along.”

“But, Philip!” Tinman lifted his voice; “I’ve lost everything. I tried to save a little. I worked hard, I exposed my life, and all in vain.”

The voice of little Jane was heard.

“What’s the matter with the child?” said Van Diemen.

Annette went up to her quietly.

But little Jane was addressing her master.

“Oh! if you please, I did manage to save something the last thing when the boat was at the window, and if you please, sir, all the bundles is lost, but I saved you a papercutter, and a letter Horse Guards, and here they are, sir.”

The grateful little creature drew the square letter and paper-cutter from her bosom, and held them out to Mr. Tinman.

It was a letter of the imposing size, with *the horse guards* very distinctly inscribed on it in Tinman’s best round hand, to strike his vindictive spirit as positively intended for transmission, and give him sight of his power to wound if it pleased him; as it might.

“What!” cried he, not clearly comprehending how much her devotion had accomplished for him.

“A letter to the Horse Guards!” cried Van Diemen.

“Here, give it me,” said little Jane’s master, and grasped it nervously.

“What’s in that letter?” Van Diemen asked. “Let me look at that letter. Don’t tell me it’s private correspondence.”

“My dear Philip, dear friend, kind thanks; it’s not a letter,” said Tinman.

“Not a letter! why, I read the address, ‘Horse Guards.’ I read it as it passed into your hands. Now, my man, one look at that letter, or take the consequences.”

“Kind thanks for your assistance, dear Philip, indeed! Oh! this? Oh! it’s nothing.” He tore it in halves.

His face was of the winter sea-colour, with the chalk wash on it.

“Tear again, and I shall know what to think of the contents,” Van Diemen frowned. “Let me see what you’ve said. You’ve sworn you would do it, and there it is at last, by miracle; but let me see it and I’ll overlook it, and you shall be my house-mate still. If not! ——”

Page 4572

Tinman tore away.

“You mistake, you mistake, you’re entirely wrong,” he said, as he pursued with desperation his task of rendering every word unreadable.

Van Diemen stood fronting him; the accumulation of stores of petty injuries and meannesses which he had endured from this man, swelled under the whip of the conclusive exhibition of treachery. He looked so black that Annette called, “Papa!”

“Philip,” said Tinman. “Philip! my best friend!”

“Pooh, you’re a poor creature. Come along and breakfast at Elba, and you can sleep at the Crouch, and goodnight to you. Crickledon,” he called to the houseless couple, “you stop at Elba till I build you a shop.”

With these words, Van Diemen led the way, walking alone. Herbert was compelled to walk with Tinman.

Mary and Annette came behind, and Mary pinched Annette’s arm so sharply that she must have cried out aloud had it been possible for her to feel pain at that moment, instead of a personal exultation, flying wildly over the clash of astonishment and horror, like a sea-bird over the foam.

In the first silent place they came to, Mary murmured the words: “Little Jane.”

Annette looked round at Mrs. Crickledon, who wound up the procession, taking little Jane by the hand. Little Jane was walking demurely, with a placid face. Annette glanced at Tinman. Her excited feelings nearly rose to a scream of laughter. For hours after, Mary had only to say to her: “Little Jane,” to produce the same convulsion. It rolled her heart and senses in a headlong surge, shook her to burning tears, and seemed to her ideas the most wonderful running together of opposite things ever known on this earth. The young lady was ashamed of her laughter; but she was deeply indebted to it, for never was mind made so clear by that beneficent exercise.

Etext editor’s bookmarks:

Adversary at once offensive and helpless provokes brutality
Causes him to be popularly weighed
Distinguished by his not allowing himself to be provoked
Eccentric behaviour in trifles
Excited, glad of catastrophe if it but killed monotony
Generally he noticed nothing
Good jokes are not always good policy
I make a point of never recommending my own house
Indulged in their privilege of thinking what they liked

Infants are said to have their ideas, and why not young ladies?
Lend him your own generosity
Men love to boast of things nobody else has seen
Naughtily Australian and kangarooly
Not in love—She was only not unwilling to be in love
Rich and poor ’s all right, if I’m rich and you’re poor
She began to feel that this was life in earnest
She dealt in the flashes which connect ideas
She sought, by looking hard, to understand it better
Sunning itself in the

Page 4573

glass of Envy
That which fine cookery does for the cementing of couples
The intricate, which she takes for the infinite
Tossed him from repulsion to incredulity, and so back
Two principal roads by which poor sinners come to a conscience

THE GENTLEMAN OF FIFTY AND THE DAMSEL OF NINETEEN

(An early uncompleted and hitherto unpublished fragment.)

By *George Meredith*

CHAPTER I

HE

Passing over Ickleworth Bridge and rounding up the heavily-shadowed river of our narrow valley, I perceived a commotion as of bathers in a certain bright space immediately underneath the vicar's terrace-garden steps. My astonishment was considerable when it became evident to me that the vicar himself was disporting in the water, which, reaching no higher than his waist, disclosed him in the ordinary habiliments of his cloth. I knew my friend to be one of the most absent-minded of men, and my first effort to explain the phenomenon of his appearance there, suggested that he might have walked in, the victim of a fit of abstraction, and that he had not yet fully comprehended his plight; but this idea was dispersed when I beheld the very portly lady, his partner in joy and adversity, standing immersed, and perfectly attired, some short distance nearer to the bank. As I advanced along the bank opposed to them, I was further amazed to hear them discoursing quite equably together, so that it was impossible to say on the face of it whether a catastrophe had occurred, or the great heat of a cloudless summer day had tempted an eccentric couple to seek for coolness in the directest fashion, without absolute disregard to propriety. I made a point of listening for the accentuation of the 'my dear' which was being interchanged, but the key-note to the harmony existing between husband and wife was neither excessively unctuous, nor shrewd, and the connubial shuttlecock was so well kept up on both sides that I chose to await the issue rather than speculate on the origin of this strange exhibition. I therefore, as I could not be accused of an outrage to modesty, permitted myself to maintain what might be invidiously termed a satyr-like watch from behind a forward flinging willow, whose business in life was to look at its image in a brown depth, branches, trunk, and roots. The sole indication of discomfort displayed by the pair was that the lady's hand worked somewhat fretfully to keep her dress from ballooning and puffing out of all proportion round about her person, while the vicar, who stood without his hat, employed

a spongy handkerchief from time to time in tempering the ardours of a vertical sun. If you will consent to imagine a bald blackbird, his neck being shrunk in apprehensively, as you may see him in the first rolling of the thunder, you will gather an image of my friend's appearance.

Page 4574

He performed his capital ablutions with many loud ‘poofs,’ and a casting up of dazzled eyes, an action that gave point to his recital of the invocation of Chryses to Smintheus which brought upon the Greeks disaster and much woe. Between the lines he replied to his wife, whose remarks increased in quantity, and also, as I thought, in emphasis, under the river of verse which he poured forth unbaffled, broadening his chest to the sonorous Greek music in a singular rapture of obliviousness.

A wise man will not squander his laughter if he can help it, but will keep the agitation of it down as long as he may. The simmering of humour sends a lively spirit into the mind, whereas the boiling over is but a prodigal expenditure and the disturbance of a clear current: for the comic element is visible to you in all things, if you do but keep your mind charged with the perception of it, as I have heard a great expounder deliver himself on another subject; and he spoke very truly. So, I continued to look on with the gravity of Nature herself, and I could not but fancy, and with less than our usual wilfulness when we fancy things about Nature’s moods, that the Mother of men beheld this scene with half a smile, differently from the simple observation of those cows whisking the flies from their flanks at the edge of the shorn meadow and its aspens, seen beneath the curved roof of a broad oak-branch. Save for this happy upward curve of the branch, we are encompassed by breathless foliage; even the gloom was hot; the little insects that are food for fish tried a flight and fell on the water’s surface, as if panting. Here and there, a sullen fish consented to take them, and a circle spread, telling of past excitement.

I had listened to the vicar’s Homeric lowing for the space of a minute or so—what some one has called, the great beast-like, bellow-like, roar and roll of the Iliad hexameter: it stopped like a cut cord. One of the numerous daughters of his house appeared in the arch of white cluster-roses on the lower garden-terrace, and with an exclamation, stood petrified at the extraordinary spectacle, and then she laughed outright. I had hitherto resisted, but the young lady’s frank and boisterous laughter carried me along, and I too let loose a peal, and discovered myself. The vicar, seeing me, acknowledged a consciousness of his absurd position with a laugh as loud. As for the scapegrace girl, she went off into a run of high-pitched shriekings like twenty woodpeckers, crying: I Mama, mama, you look as if you were in Jordan!’

The vicar cleared his throat admonishingly, for it was apparent that Miss Alice was giving offence to her mother, and I presume he thought it was enough for one of the family to have done so.

‘Wilt thou come out of Jordan?’ I cried.

‘I am sufficiently baptized with the water,’ said the helpless man. . .

‘Indeed, Mr. Amble,’ observed his spouse, ’you can lecture a woman for not making the best of circumstances; I hope you’ll bear in mind that it’s you who are irreverent. I can endure this no longer. You deserve Mr. Pollingray’s ridicule.’

Page 4575

Upon this, I interposed: 'Pray, ma'am, don't imagine that you have anything but sympathy from me.'—but as I was protesting, having my mouth open, the terrible Miss Alice dragged the laughter remorselessly out of me.

They have been trying Frank's new boat, Mr. Pollingray, and they've upset it. Oh! oh' and again there was the woodpeckers' chorus.

'Alice, I desire you instantly to go and fetch John the gardener,' said the angry mother.

'Mama, I can't move; wait a minute, only a minute. John's gone about the geraniums. Oh! don't look so resigned, papa; you'll kill me! Mama, come and take my hand. Oh! oh!'

The young lady put her hands in against her waist and rolled her body like a possessed one.

'Why don't you come in through the boat-house?' she asked when she had mastered her fit.

'Ah!' said the vicar. I beheld him struck by this new thought.

'How utterly absurd you are, Mr. Amble!' exclaimed his wife, 'when you know that the boat-house is locked, and that the boat was lying under the camshot when you persuaded me to step into it.'

Hearing this explanation of the accident, Alice gave way to an ungovernable emotion.

'You see, my dear,' the vicar addressed his wife, she can do nothing; it's useless. If ever patience is counselled to us, it is when accidents befall us, for then, as we are not responsible, we know we are in other hands, and it is our duty to be comparatively passive. Perhaps I may say that in every difficulty, patience is a life-belt. I beg of you to be patient still.'

'Mr. Amble, I shall think you foolish,' said the spouse, with a nod of more than emphasis.

My dear, you have only to decide,' was the meek reply.

By this time, Miss Alice had so far conquered the fiend of laughter that she could venture to summon her mother close up to the bank and extend a rescuing hand. Mrs. Amble waded to within reach, her husband following. Arrangements were made for Alice to pull, and the vicar to push; both in accordance with Mrs. Amble's stipulations, for even in her extremity of helplessness she affected rule and sovereignty. Unhappily, at the decisive moment, I chanced (and I admit it was more than an inadvertence on my part, it was a most ill-considered thing to do) I chanced, I say, to call out—and that I refrained from quoting Voltaire is something in my favour:

‘How on earth did you manage to tumble in?’

There can be no contest of opinion that I might have kept my curiosity waiting, and possibly it may be said with some justification that I was the direct cause of my friend’s unparalleled behaviour; but could a mortal man guess that in the very act of assisting his wife’s return to dry land, and while she was—if I may put it so—modestly in his hands, he would turn about with a quotation that compared him to old Palinurus, all the while allowing his worthy and admirable burden to sink lower

Page 4576

and dispread in excess upon the surface of the water, until the vantage of her daughter's help was lost to her; I beheld the consequences of my indiscretion, dismayed. I would have checked the preposterous Virgilian, but in contempt of my uplifted hand and averted head, and regardless of the fact that his wife was then literally dependent upon him, the vicar declaimed (and the drenching effect produced by Latin upon a lady at such a season, may be thought on):

> Vix primos inopina quies laxaverat artus,
> Et super incumbens, cum puppis parte revulsa
> Cumque gubernaclo liquidas projecit in undas.'

It is not easy when you are unacquainted with the language, to retort upon Latin, even when the attempt to do so is made in English. Very few even of the uneducated ears can tolerate such anti-climax vituperative as English after sounding Latin. Mrs. Amble kept down those sentiments which her vernacular might have expressed. I heard but one groan that came from her as she lay huddled indistinguishably in the, arms of her husband.

'Not—praecipitem! I am happy to say,' my senseless friend remarked further, and laughed cheerfully as he fortified his statement with a run of negatives. 'No, no'; in a way peculiar to him. 'No, no. If I plant my grey hairs anywhere, it will be on dry land: no. But, now, my dear; he returned to his duty; why, you're down again. Come: one, two, and up.'

He was raising a dead weight. The passion for sarcastic speech was manifestly at war with common prudence in the bosom of Mrs. Amble; prudence, however, overcame it. She cast on him a look of a kind that makes matrimony terrific in the dreams of bachelors, and then wedding her energy to the assistance given she made one of those senseless springs of the upper half of the body, which strike the philosophic eye with the futility of an effort that does not arise from a solid basis. Owing to the want of concert between them, the vicar's impulsive strength was expended when his wife's came into play. Alice clutched her mother bravely. The vicar had force enough to stay his wife's descent; but Alice (she boasts of her muscle) had not the force in the other direction—-and no wonder. There are few young ladies who could pull fourteen stone sheer up a camshot.

Mrs. Amble remained in suspense between the two.

Oh, Mr. Pollingray, if you were only on this side to help us,' Miss Alice exclaimed very piteously, though I could see that she was half mad with the internal struggle of laughter at the parents and concern for them.

'Now, pull, Alice,' shouted the vicar.

‘No, not yet,’ screamed Mrs. Amble; I’m sinking.’

‘Pull, Alice.’

‘Now, Mama.’

‘Oh!’

‘Push, Papa.’

‘I’m down.’

‘Up, Ma’am; Jane; woman, up.’

‘Gently, Papa: Abraham, I will not.’

‘My dear, but you must.’

Page 4577

‘And that man opposite.’

‘What, Pollingray? He’s fifty.’

I found myself walking indignantly down the path. Even now I protest my friend was guilty of bad manners, though I make every allowance for him; I excuse, I pass the order; but why—what justifies one man’s bawling out another man’s age? What purpose does it serve? I suppose the vicar wished to reassure his wife, on the principle (I have heard him enunciate it) that the sexes are merged at fifty—by which he means, I must presume, that something which may be good or bad, and is generally silly—of course, I admire and respect modesty and pudeur as much as any man—something has gone: a recognition of the bounds of division. There is, if that is a lamentable matter, a loss of certain of our young tricks at fifty. We have ceased to blush readily: and let me ask you to define a blush. Is it an involuntary truth or an ingenuous lie? I know that this will sound like the language of a man not a little jealous of his youthful compeers. I can but leave it to rightly judging persons to consider whether a healthy man in his prime, who has enough, and is not cursed by ambition, need be jealous of any living soul.

A shriek from Miss Alice checked my retreating steps. The vicar was staggering to support the breathing half of his partner while she regained her footing in the bed of the river. Their effort to scale the camshot had failed. Happily at this moment I caught sight of Master Frank’s boat, which had floated, bottom upwards, against a projecting mud-bank of forget-me-nots. I contrived to reach it and right it, and having secured one of the sculls, I pulled up to the rescue; though not before I had plucked a flower, actuated by a motive that I cannot account for. The vicar held the boat firmly against the camshot, while I, at the imminent risk of joining them (I shall not forget the combined expression of Miss Alice’s retreating eyes and the malicious corners of her mouth) hoisted the lady in, and the river with her. From the seat of the boat she stood sufficiently high to project the step towards land without peril. When she had set her foot there, we all assumed an attitude of respectful attention, and the vicar, who could soar over calamity like a fairweather swallow, acknowledged the return of his wife to the element with a series of apologetic yesses and short coughings.

‘That would furnish a good concert for the poets,’ he remarked. ’A parting, a separation of lovers; “even as a body from the watertorn,” or “from the water plucked”; eh? do you think—“so I weep round her, tearful in her track,” an excellent—’

But the outraged woman, dripping in grievous discomfort above him, made a peremptory gesture.

’Mr. Amble, will you come on shore instantly, I have borne with your stupidity long enough. I insist upon your remembering, sir, that you have a family dependent upon you. Other men may commit these follies.’

Page 4578

This was a blow at myself, a bachelor whom the lady had never persuaded to dream of relinquishing his freedom.

‘My dear, I am coming,’ said the vicar.

‘Then, come at once, or I shall think you idiotic,’ the wife retorted.

‘I have been endeavouring,’ the vicar now addressed me, ’to prove by a practical demonstration that women are capable of as much philosophy as men, under any sudden and afflicting revolution of circumstances.’

’And if you get a sunstroke, you will be rightly punished, and I shall not be sorry, Mr. Amble.’

’I am coming, my dear Jane. Pray run into the house and change your things.’

‘Not till I see you out of the water, sir.’

‘You are losing your temper, my love.’

‘You would make a saint lose his temper, Mr. Amble.’

‘There were female saints, my dear,’ the vicar mildly responded; and addressed me further: ’Up to this point, I assure you, Pollingray, no conduct could have been more exemplary than Mrs. Amble’s. I had got her into the boat—a good boat, a capital boat—but getting in myself, we overturned. The first impulse of an ordinary woman would have been to reproach and scold; but Mrs. Amble succumbed only to the first impulse. Discovering that all effort unaided to climb the bank was fruitless, she agreed to wait patiently and make the best of circumstances; and she did; and she learnt to enjoy it. There is marrow in every bone. My dear. Jane, I have never admired you so much. I tried her, Pollingray, in metaphysics. I talked to her of the opera we last heard, I think fifty years ago. And as it is less endurable for a woman to be patient in tribulation—the honour is greater, when she overcomes the fleshy trial. Insomuch,’ the vicar put on a bland air of abnegation of honour, ’that I am disposed to consider any male philosopher our superior; when you’ve found one, ha, ha—when you’ve found one. O sol pulcher! I am ready to sing that the day has been glorious, so far. Pulcher ille dies.’

Mrs. Amble appealed to me. ’Would anybody not swear that he is mad to see him standing waist-deep in the water and the sun on his bald head, I am reduced to entreat you not to—though you have no family of your own—not to encourage him. It is amusing to you. Pray, reflect that such folly is too often fatal. Compel him to come on shore.’

The logic of the appeal was no doubt distinctly visible in the lady’s mind, though it was not accurately worded. I saw that I stood marked to be the scape goat of the day, and

humbly continued to deserve well, notwithstanding. By dint of simple signs and nods of affirmative, and a constant propulsion of my friend's arm, I drew him into the boat, and thence projected him up to the level with his wife, who had perhaps deigned to understand that it was best to avoid the arresting of his divergent mind by any remark during the passage, and remained silent. No sooner was he established on his feet, than she plucked him away.

Page 4579

‘Your papa’s hat,’ she called, flashing to her daughter, and streamed up the lawn into the rose-trellised pathways leading on aloft to the vicarage house. Behind roses the weeping couple disappeared. The last I saw of my friend was a smiting of his hand upon his head in a vain effort to catch at one of the fleeting ideas sowed in him by the quick passage of objects before his vision, and shaken out of him by abnormal hurry. The Rev. Abraham Amble had been lord of his wife in the water, but his innings was over. He had evidently enjoyed it vastly, and I now understood why he had chosen to prolong it as much as possible. Your eccentric characters are not uncommonly amateurs of petty artifice. There are hours of vengeance even for henpecked men.

I found myself sighing over the enslaved condition of every Benedict of my acquaintance, when the thought came like a surprise that I was alone with Alice. The fair and pleasant damsel made a clever descent into the boat, and having seated herself, she began to twirl the scull in the rowlock, and said: ’Do you feel disposed to join me in looking after the other scull and papa’s hat, Mr. Pollingray?’ I suggested ’Will you not get your feet wet? I couldn’t manage to empty all the water in the boat.’

‘Oh’ cried she, with a toss of her head; I wet feet never hurt young people.’

There was matter for an admonitory lecture in this. Let me confess I was about to give it, when she added: But Mr. Pollingray, I am really afraid that your feet are wet! You had to step into the water when you righted the boat:

My reply was to jump down by her side with as much agility as I could combine with a proper discretion. The amateur craft rocked threateningly, and I found myself grasped by and grasping the pretty damsel, until by great good luck we were steadied and preserved from the same misfortune which had befallen her parents. She laughed and blushed, and we tottered asunder.

‘Would you have talked metaphysics to me in the water, Mr. Pollingray?’

Alice was here guilty of one of those naughty sort of innocent speeches smacking of Eve most strongly; though, of course, of Eve in her best days.

I took the rudder lines to steer against the sculling of her single scull, and was Adam enough to respond to temptation: ’I should perhaps have been grateful to your charitable construction of it as being metaphysics.’

She laughed colloquially, to fill a pause. It had not been coquetry: merely the woman unconsciously at play. A man is bound to remember the seniority of his years when this occurs, for a veteran of ninety and a worn out young debauchee will equally be subject to it if they do not shun the society of the sex. My long robust health and perfect self-reliance apparently tend to give me unguarded moments, or lay me open to fitful impressions. Indeed there are times when I fear I have the heart of a boy, and certainly

Page 4580

nothing more calamitous can be conceived, supposing that it should ever for one instant get complete mastery of my head. This is the peril of a man who has lived soberly. Do we never know when we are safe? I am, in reflecting thereupon, positively prepared to say that if there is no fool like what they call an old fool (and a man in his prime, who can be laughed at, is the world's old fool) there is wisdom in the wild oats theory, and I shall come round to my nephew's way of thinking: that is, as far as Master Charles by his acting represents his thinking. I shall at all events be more lenient in my judgement of him, and less stern in my allocutions, for I shall have no text to preach from.

We picked up the hat and the scull in one of the little muddy bays of our brown river, forming an amphitheatre for water-rats and draped with great dockleaves, nettle-flowers, ragged robins, and other weeds for which the learned young lady gave the botanical names. It was pleasant to hear her speak with the full authority of absolute knowledge of her subject. She has intelligence. She is decidedly too good for Charles, unless he changes his method of living.

'Shall we row on?' she asked, settling her arms to work the pair of sculls.

'You have me in your power,' said I, and she struck out. Her shape is exceedingly graceful; I was charmed by the occasional tightening in of her lips as she exerted her muscle, while at intervals telling me of her race with one of her boastful younger brothers, whom she had beaten. I believe it is only when they are using physical exertion that the eyes of young girls have entire simplicity—the simplicity of nature as opposed to that other artificial simplicity which they learn from their governesses, their mothers, and the admiration of witlings. Attractive purity, or the nice glaze of no comprehension of anything which is considered to be improper in a wicked world, and is no doubt very useful, is not to my taste. French girls, as a rule, cannot compete with our English in the purer graces. They are only incomparable when as women they have resort to art.

Alice could look at me as she rowed, without thinking it necessary to force a smile, or to speak, or to snigger and be foolish. I felt towards the girl like a comrade.

We went no further than Hatchard's mile, where the water plumps the poor sleepy river from a sidestream, and, as it turned the boat's head quite round, I let the boat go. These studies of young women are very well as a pastime; but they soon cease to be a recreation. She forms an agreeable picture when she is rowing, and possesses a musical laugh. Now and then she gives way to the bad trick of laughing without caring or daring to explain the cause for it. She is moderately well-bred. I hope that she has principle. Certain things a man of my time of life learns by associating with very young people which are serviceable to him. What a different matter this earth must be to that girl from what it is to me! I knew it before. And—mark the difference—I feel it now.

Page 4581

CHAPTER II

SHE

Papa never will cease to meet with accidents and adventures. If he only walks out to sit for half an hour with one of his old dames, as he calls them, something is sure to happen to him, and it is almost as sure that Mr. Pollingray will be passing at the time and mixed up in it.

Since Mr. Pollingray's return from his last residence on the Continent, I have learnt to know him and like him. Charles is unjust to his uncle. He is not at all the grave kind of man I expected from Charles's description. He is extremely entertaining, and then he understands the world, and I like to hear him talk, he is so unpretentious and uses just the right words. No one would imagine his age, from his appearance, and he has more fun than any young man I have listened to.

But, I am convinced I have discovered his weakness. It is my fatal. peculiarity that I cannot be with people ten minutes without seeing some point about them where they are tenderest. Mr. Pollingray wants to be thought quite youthful. He can bear any amount of fatigue; he is always fresh and a delightful companion; but you cannot get him to show even a shadow of exhaustion or to admit that he ever knew what it was to lie down beaten. This is really to pretend that he is superhuman. I like him so much that I could wish him superior to such—it is nothing other than—vanity. Which is worse? A young man giving himself the air of a sage, or—but no one can call Mr. Pollingray an old man. He is a confirmed bachelor. That puts the case. Charles, when he says of him that he is a 'gentleman in a good state of preservation,' means to be ironical. I doubt whether Charles at fifty would object to have the same said of Mr. Charles Everett. Mr. Pollingray has always looked to his health. He has not been disappointed. I am sure he was always very good. But, whatever he was, he is now very pleasant, and he does not talk to women as if he thought them singular, and feel timid, I mean, confused, as some men show that they feel—the good ones. Perhaps he felt so once, and that is why he is still free. Charles's dread that his uncle will marry is most unworthy. He never will, but why should he not? Mama declares that he is waiting for a woman of intellect, I can hear her: 'Depend upon it, a woman of intellect will marry Dayton Manor.' Should that mighty event not come to pass, poor Charles will have to sink the name of Everett in that of Pollingray. Mr. Pollingray's name is the worst thing about him. When I think of his name I see him ten times older than he is. My feelings are in harmony with his pedigree concerning the age of the name. One would have to be a woman of profound intellect to see the advantage of sharing it.

'Mrs. Pollingray!' She must be a lady with a wig.

It was when we were rowing up by Hatchard's mill that I first perceived his weakness, he was looking at me so kindly, and speaking of his friendship for papa, and how glad he was to be fixed at last, near to us at Dayton. I wished to use some term of endearment in reply, and said, I remember, 'Yes, and we are also glad, Godpapa.' I was astonished that he should look so disconcerted, and went on: 'Have you forgotten that you are my godpapa?'

Page 4582

He answered: ‘Am I? Oh! yes—the name of Alice.’

Still he looked uncertain, uncomfortable, and I said, ’Do you want to cancel the past, and cast me off?’

‘No, certainly not’; he, I suppose, thought he was assuring me.

I saw his lips move at the words I cancel the past,’ though he did not speak them out. He positively blushed. I know the sort of young man he must have been. Exactly the sort of young man mama would like for a son-in-law, and her daughters would accept in pure obedience when reduced to be capable of the virtue by rigorous diet, or consumption.

He let the boat go round instantly. This was enough for me. It struck me then that when papa had said to mama (as he did in that absurd situation) ‘He is fifty,’ Mr. Pollingray must have heard it across the river, for he walked away hurriedly. He came back, it is true, with the boat, but I have my own ideas. He is always ready to do a service, but on this occasion I think it was an afterthought. I shall not venture to call him ‘Godpapa’ again.

Indeed, if I have a desire, it is that I may be blind to people’s weakness. My insight is inveterate. Papa says he has heard Mr. Pollingray boast of his age. If so, there has come a change over him. I cannot be deceived. I see it constantly. After my unfortunate speech, Mr. Pollingray shunned our house for two whole weeks, and scarcely bowed to us when coming out of church. Miss Pollingray idolises him—spoils him. She says that he is worth twenty of Charles. Nous savons ce que nous savons, nous autres. Charles is wild, but Charles would be above these littlenesses. How could Miss Pollingray comprehend the romance of Charles’s nature?

My sister Evelina is now Mr. Pollingray’s favourite. She could not say Godpapa to him, if she would. Persons who are very much petted at home, are always establishing favourites abroad. For my part, let them praise me or not, I know that I can do any thing I set my mind upon. At present I choose to be frivolous. I know I am frivolous. What then? If there is fun in the world am I not to laugh at it? I shall astonish them by and by. But, I will laugh while I can. I am sure, there is so much misery in the world, it is a mercy to be able to laugh. Mr. Pollingray may think what he likes of me. When Charles tells me that I must do my utmost to propitiate his uncle, he cannot mean that I am to refrain from laughing, because that is being a hypocrite, which I may become when I have gone through all the potential moods and not before.

It is preposterous to suppose that I am to be tied down to the views of life of elderly people.

Page 4583

I dare say I did laugh a little too much the other night, but could I help it? We had a dinner party. Present were Mr. Pollingray, Mrs. Kershaw, the Wilbury people (three), Charles, my brother Duncan, Evelina, mama, papa, myself, and Mr. and Mrs. (put them last for emphasis) Romer Pattlecombe, Mrs. Pattlecombe (the same number of syllables as Pollingray, and a 'P' to begin with) is thirty-one years her husband's junior, and she is twenty-six; full of fun, and always making fun of him, the mildest, kindest, goody old thing, who has never distressed himself for anything and never will. Mrs. Romer not only makes fun, but is fun. When you have done laughing with her, you can laugh at her. She is the salt of society in these parts. Some one, as we were sitting on the lawn after dinner, alluded to the mishap to papa and mama, and mama, who has never forgiven Mr. Pollingray for having seen her in her ridiculous plight, said that men were in her opinion greater gossips than women. 'That is indisputable, ma'am,' said Mr. Pollingray, he loves to bewilder her; 'only, we never mention it.'

'There is an excuse for us,' said Mrs. Romer; 'our trials are so great, we require a diversion, and so we talk of others.'

'Now really,' said Charles, 'I don't think your trials are equal to ours.'

For which remark papa bantered him, and his uncle was sharp on him; and Charles, I know, spoke half seriously, though he was seeking to draw Mrs. Romer out: he has troubles.

From this, we fell upon a comparison of sufferings, and Mrs. Romer took up the word. She is a fair, smallish, nervous woman, with delicate hands and outlines, exceedingly sympathetic; so much so that while you are telling her anything, she makes half a face in anticipation, and is ready to shriek with laughter or shake her head with uttermost grief; and sometimes, if you let her go too far in one direction, she does both. All her narrations are with ups and downs of her hands, her eyes, her chin, and her voice. Taking poor, good old Mr. Romer by the roll of his coat, she made as if posing him, and said: 'There! Now, it's all very well for you to say that there is anything equal to a woman's sufferings in this world. I do declare you know nothing of what we unhappy women have to endure. It's dreadful! No male creature can possibly know what tortures I have to undergo.'

Mama neatly contrived, after interrupting her, to divert the subject. I think that all the ladies imagined they were in jeopardy, but I knew Mrs. Romer was perfectly to be trusted. She has wit which pleases, jusqu'aux ongles, and her sense of humour never overrides her discretion with more than a glance—never with preparation.

Page 4584

‘Now,’ she pursued, ’let me tell you what excruciating trials I have to go through. This man,’ she rocked the patient old gentleman to and fro, ’this man will be the death of me. He is utterly devoid of a sense of propriety. Again and again I say to him—cannot the tailor cut down these trowsers of yours? Yes, Mr. Amble, you preach patience to women, but this is too much for any woman’s endurance. Now, do attempt to picture to yourself what an agony it must be to me:—he will shave, and he will wear those enormously high trowsers that, when they are braced, reach up behind to the nape of his neck! Only yesterday morning, as I was lying in bed, I could see him in his dressing-room. I tell you: he will shave, and he will choose the time for shaving early after he has braced these immensely high trowsers that make such a placard of him. Oh, my goodness! My dear Romer, I have said to him fifty times if I have said it once, my goodness me! why can you not get decent trowsers such as other men wear? He has but one answer—he has been accustomed to wear those trowsers, and he would not feel at home in another pair. And what does he say if I continue to complain? and I cannot but continue to complain, for it is not only moral, it is physical torment to see the sight he makes of himself; he says: “My dear, you should not have married an old man.” What! I say to him, must an old man wear antiquated trowsers? No! nothing will turn him; those are his habits. But, you have not heard the worst. The sight of those hideous trowsers totally destroying all shape in the man, is horrible enough; but it is absolutely more than a woman can bear to see him—for he will shave—first cover his face with white soap with that ridiculous centre-piece to his trowsers reaching quite up to his poll, and then, you can fancy a woman’s rage and anguish! the figure lifts its nose by the extremist tip. Oh! it’s degradation! What respect can a woman have for her husband after that sight? Imagine it! And I have implored him to spare me. It’s useless. You sneer at our hbops and say that you are inconvenienced by them but you gentlemen are not degraded,—Oh! unutterably!—as I am every morning of my life by that cruel spectacle of a husband.’

I have but faintly sketched Mrs. Romer’s style. Evelina, who is prudish and thinks her vulgar, refused to laugh, but it came upon me, as the picture of ‘your own old husband,’ with so irresistibly comic an effect that I was overcome by convulsions of laughter. I do not defend myself. It was as much a fit as any other attack. I did all I could to arrest it. At last, I ran indoors and upstairs to my bedroom and tried hard to become dispossessed. I am sure I was an example of the sufferings of my sex. It could hardly have been worse for Mrs. Romer than it was for me. I was drowned in internal laughter long after I had got a grave face. Early in the evening Mr. Pollingray left us.

CHAPTER III

Page 4585

HE

I am carried by the fascination of a musical laugh. Apparently I am doomed to hear it at my own expense. We are secure from nothing in this life.

I have determined to stand for the county. An unoccupied man is a prey to every hook of folly. Be dilettante all your days, and you might as fairly hope to reap a moral harvest as if you had chased butterflies. The activities created by a profession or determined pursuit are necessary to the growth of the mind.

Heavens! I find myself writing like an illegitimate son of La Rochefoucauld, or of Vauvenargues. But, it is true that I am fifty years old, and I am not mature. I am undeveloped somewhere.

The question for me to consider is, whether this development is to be accomplished by my being guilty of an act of egregious folly.

Dans la cinquantaine! The reflection should produce a gravity in men. Such a number of years will not ring like bridal bells in a man's ears. I have my books about me, my horses, my dogs, a contented household. I move in the centre of a perfect machine, and I am dissatisfied. I rise early. I do not digest badly. What is wrong?

The calamity of my case is that I am in danger of betraying what is wrong with me to others, without knowing it myself. Some woman will be suspecting and tattling, because she has nothing else to do. Girls have wonderfully shrewd eyes for a weakness in the sex which they are instructed to look upon as superior. But I am on my guard.

The fact is manifest: I feel I have been living more or less uselessly. It is a fat time. There are a certain set of men in every prosperous country who, having wherewithal, and not being compelled to toil, become subjected to the moral ideal. Most of them in the end sit down with our sixth Henry or second Richard and philosophise on shepherds. To be no better than a simple hind! Am I better? Prime bacon and an occasional draft of shrewd beer content him, and they do not me. Yet I am sound, and can sit through the night and be ready, and on the morrow I shall stand for the county.

I made the announcement that I had thoughts of entering Parliament, before I had half formed the determination, at my sister's lawn party yesterday.

'Gilbert!' she cried, and raised her hands. A woman is hurt if you do not confide to her your plans as soon as you can conceive them. She must be present to assist at the birth, or your plans are unblessed plans.

I had been speaking aside in a casual manner to my friend Amble, whose idea is that the Church is not represented with sufficient strength in the Commons, and who at once, as I perceived, grasped the notion of getting me to promote sundry measures

connected with schools and clerical stipends, for his eyes dilated; he said: 'Well, if you do, I can put you up to several things,' and imparting the usual chorus of yesses to his own mind, he continued absently: 'Pollingray might be made strong on church rates. There is much to do. He has lived abroad and requires schooling in these things. We want a man. Yes, yes, yes. It's a good idea; a notion.'

Page 4586

My sister, however, was of another opinion. She did me the honour to take me aside.

‘Gilbert, were you serious just now?’

‘Quite serious. Is it not my characteristic?’

’Not on these occasions. I saw the idea come suddenly upon you. You were looking at Charles.’

‘Continue: and at what was he looking?’

‘He was looking at Alice Amble.’

‘And the young lady?’

‘She looked at you.’

I was here attacked by a singularly pertinacious fly, and came out of the contest with a laugh.

’Did she have that condescension towards me? And from the glance, my resolution to enter Parliament was born? It is the French vaudevilliste’s doctrine of great events from little causes. The slipper of a soubrette trips the heart of a king and changes the destiny of a nation-the history of mankind. It may be true. If I were but shot into the House from a little girl’s eye!’

With this I took her arm gaily, walked with her, and had nearly overreached myself with excess of cunning. I suppose we are reduced to see more plainly that which we systematically endeavour to veil from others. It is best to flutter a handkerchief, instead of nailing up a curtain. The principal advantage is that you may thereby go on deceiving yourself, for this reason: few sentiments are wholly matter of fact; but when they are half so, you make them concrete by deliberately seeking either to crush or conceal them, and you are doubly betrayed—betrayed to the besieging eye and to yourself. When a sentiment has grown to be a passion (mercifully may I be spared!) different tactics are required. By that time, you will have already betrayed yourself too deeply to dare to be flippant: the investigating eye is aware that it has been purposely diverted: knowing some things, it makes sure of the rest from which you turn it away. If you want to hide a very grave case, you must speak gravely about it.—At which season, be but sure of your voice, and simulate a certain depth of sentimental philosophy, and you may once more, and for a long period, bewilder the investigator of the secrets of your bosom. To sum up: in the preliminary stages of a weakness, be careful that you do not show your own alarm, or all will be suspected. Should the weakness turn to fever, let a little of it be seen, like a careless man, and nothing will really be thought.

I can say this, I can do this; and is it still possible that a pin's point has got through the joints of the armour of a man like me?

Elizabeth quitted my side with the conviction that I am as considerate an uncle as I am an affectionate brother.

I said to her, apropos, 'I have been observing those two. It seems to me they are deciding things for themselves.'

'I have been going to speak to you about them Gilbert,' said she.

And I: 'The girl must be studied. The family is good. While Charles is in Wales, you must have her at Dayton. She laughs rather vacantly, don't you think? but the sound of it has the proper wholesome ring. I will give her what attention I can while she is here, but in the meantime I must have a bride of my own and commence courting.'

Page 4587

‘Parliament, you mean,’ said Elizabeth with a frank and tender smile. The hostess was summoned to welcome a new guest, and she left me, pleased with her successful effort to reach my meaning, and absorbed by it.

I would not have challenged Machiavelli; but I should not have encountered the Florentine ruefully. I feel the same keen delight in intellectual dexterity. On some points my sister is not a bad match for me. She can beat me seven games out of twelve at chess; but the five I win sequently, for then I am awake. There is natural art and artificial art, and the last beats the first. Fortunately for us, women are strangers to the last. They have had to throw off a mask before they have, got the schooling; so, when they are thus armed we know what we meet, and what are the weapons to be used.

Alice, if she is a fine fencer at all, will expect to meet the ordinary English squire in me. I have seen her at the baptismal font! It is inconceivable. She will fancy that at least she is ten times more subtle than I. When I get the mastery—it is unlikely to make me the master. What may happen is, that the nature of the girl will declare itself, under the hard light of intimacy, vulgar. Charles I cause to be absent for six weeks; so there will be time enough for the probation. I do not see him till he returns. If by chance I had come earlier to see him and he to allude to her, he would have had my conscience on his side, and that is what a scrupulous man takes care to prevent.

I wonder whether my friends imagine me to be the same man whom they knew as Gilbert Pollingray a month back? I see the change, I feel the change; but I have no retrospection, no remorse, no looking forward, no feeling: none for others, very little, for myself. I am told that I am losing fluency as a dinner-table talker. There is now more savour to me in a silvery laugh than in a spiced wit. And this is the man who knows women, and is far too modest to give a decided opinion upon any of their merits. Search myself through as I may, I cannot tell when the change began, or what the change consists of, or what is the matter with me, or what charm there is in the person who does the mischief. She is the counterpart of dozens of girls; lively, brown-eyed, brown-haired, underbred—it is not too harsh to say so—underbred slightly; half-educated, whether quickwitted I dare not opine. She is undoubtedly the last whom I or another person would have fixed upon as one to work me this unmitigated evil. I do not know her, and I believe I do not care to know her, and I am thirsting for the hour to come when I shall study her. Is not this to have the poison of a bite in one’s blood? The wrath of Venus is not a fable. I was a hard reader and I despised the sex in my youth, before the family estates fell to me; since when I have playfully admired the sex; I have dallied with a passion, and not read at all, save for diversion: her anger is not a fable.

Page 4588

You may interpret many a mythic tale by the facts which lie in your own blood. My emotions have lain altogether dormant in sentimental attachment. I have, I suppose, boasted of, Python slain, and Cupid has touched me up with an arrow. I trust to my own skill rather than to his mercy for avoiding a second from his quiver. I will understand this girl if I have to submit to a close intimacy with her for six months. There is no doubt of the elegance of her movements. Charles might as well take his tour, and let us see him again next year. Yes, her movements are (or will be) gracious. In a year's time she will have acquired the fuller tones and poetry of womanliness. Perhaps then, too, her smile will linger instead of flashing. I have known infinitely lovelier women than she. One I have known! but let her be. Louise and I have long since said adieu.

CHAPTER IV

SHE

Behold me installed in Dayton Manor House, and brought here for the express purpose (so Charles has written me word) of my being studied, that it may be seen whether I am worthy to be, on some august future occasion—possibly—a member (Oh, so much to mumble!) of this great family. Had I known it when I was leaving home, I should have countermanded the cording of my boxes. If you please, I do the packing, and not the cording. I must practise being polite, or I shall be horrifying these good people.

I am mortally offended. I am very very angry. I shall show temper. Indeed, I have shown it. Mr. Pollingray must and does think me a goose. Dear sir, and I think you are justified. If any one pretends to guess how, I have names to suit that person. I am a ninny, an ape, and mind I call myself these bad things because I deserve worse. I am flighty, I believe I am heartless. Charles is away, and I suffer no pangs. The truth is, I fancied myself so exceedingly penetrating, and it was my vanity looking in a glass. I saw something that answered to my nods and howd'ye-do's and—but I am ashamed, and so penitent I might begin making a collection of beetles. I cannot lift up my head.

Mr. Pollingray is such a different man from the one I had imagined! What that one was, I have now quite forgotten. I remember too clearly what the wretched guesser was. I have been three weeks at Dayton, and if my sisters know me when I return to the vicarage, they are not foolish virgins. For my part, I know that I shall always hate Mrs. Romer Pattlecombe, and that I am unjust to the good woman, but I do hate her, and I think the stories shocking, and wonder intensely what it was that I could have found in them to laugh at. I shall never laugh again for many years. Perhaps, when I am an old woman, I may. I wish the time had come. All young people seem to me so helplessly silly. I am one of them for the present, and have no hope that I can appear to be anything else. The young are a crowd—a shoal of small fry. Their elders are the select of the world.

Page 4589

On the morning of the day when I was to leave home for Dayton, a distance of eight miles, I looked out of my window while dressing—as early as halfpast seven—and I saw Mr. Pollingray's groom on horseback, leading up and down the walk a darling little, round, plump, black cob that made my heart leap with an immense bound of longing to be on it and away across the downs. And then the maid came to my door with a letter:

'Mr. Pollingray, in return for her considerate good behaviour and saving of trouble to him officially, begs his goddaughter to accept the accompanying little animal: height 14 h., age 31 years; hunts, is sure-footed, and likely to be the best jumper in the county.'

I flew downstairs. I rushed out of the house and up to my treasure, and kissed his nose and stroked his mane. I could not get my fingers away from him. Horses are so like the very best and beautifullest of women when you caress them. They show their pleasure so at being petted. They curve their necks, and paw, and look proud. They take your flattery like sunshine and are lovely in it. I kissed my beauty, peering at his black-mottled skin, which is like Allingborough Heath in the twilight. The smell of his new saddle and bridle-leather was sweeter than a garden to me. The man handed me a large riding-whip mounted with silver. I longed to jump up and ride till midnight.

Then mama and papa came out and read the note and looked, at my darling little cob, and my sisters saw him and kissed me, for they are not envious girls. The most distressing thing was that we had not a riding-habit in the family. I was ready to wear any sort. I would have ridden as a guy rather than not ride at all. But mama gave me a promise that in two days a riding-habit should be sent on to Dayton, and I had to let my pet be led back from where he came. I had no life till I was following him. I could have believed him to be a fairy prince who had charmed me. I called him Prince Leboo, because he was black and good. I forgive anybody who talks about first love after what my experience has been with Prince Leboo.

What papa thought of the present I do not know, but I know very well what mama thought: and for my part I thought everything, not distinctly including that, for I could not suppose such selfishness in one so generous as Mr. Pollingray. But I came to Dayton in a state of arrogant pride, that gave assurance if not ease to my manners. I thanked Mr. Pollingray warmly, but in a way to let him see it was the matter of a horse between us. 'You give, I register thanks, and there's an end.'

'He thinks me a fool! a fool!

'My habit,' I said, 'comes after me. I hope we shall have some rides together.'

'Many,' replied Mr. Pollingray, and his bow inflated me with ideas of my condescension.

And because Miss Pollingray (Queen Elizabeth he calls her) looked half sad, I read it —! I do not write what I read it to be.

Page 4590

Behold the uttermost fool of all female creation led over the house by Mr. Pollingray. He showed me the family pictures.

‘I am no judge of pictures, Mr. Pollingray.’

‘You will learn to see the merits of these.’

‘I’m afraid not, though I were to study them for years.’

‘You may have that opportunity.’

‘Oh! that is more than I can expect.’

‘You will develop intelligence on such subjects by and by.’

A dull sort of distant blow struck me in this remark; but I paid no heed to it.

He led me over the gardens and the grounds. The Great John Methlyn Pollingray planted those trees, and designed the house, and the flower-garden still speaks of his task; but he is not my master, and consequently I could not share his three great-grandsons’ veneration for him. There are high fir-woods and beech woods, and a long ascending narrow meadow between them, through which a brook falls in continual cascades. It is the sort of scene I love, for it has a woodland grandeur and seclusion that leads, me to think, and makes a better girl of me. But what I said was: ’Yes, it is the place of all others to come and settle in for the evening of one’s days.’

‘You could not take to it now?’ said Mr. Pollingray.

‘Now?’ my expression of face must have been a picture.

’You feel called upon to decline such a residence in the morning of your days?’

He persisted in looking at me as he spoke, and I felt like something withering scarlet.

I am convinced he saw through me, while his face was polished brass. My self-possession returned, for my pride was not to be dispersed immediately.

‘Please, take me to the stables,’ I entreated; and there I was at home. There I saw my Prince Leboo, and gave him a thousand caresses.’

‘He knows me already,’ I said.

Then he is some degrees in advance of me,’ said Mr. Pollingray.

Is not cold dissection of one’s character a cruel proceeding? And I think, too, that a form of hospitality like this by which I am invited to be analysed at leisure, is both mean

and base. I have been kindly treated and I am grateful, but I do still say (even though I may have improved under it) it is unfair.

To proceed: the dinner hour arrived. The atmosphere of his own house seems to favour Mr. Pollingray as certain soils and sites favour others. He walked into the dining-room between us with his hands behind him, talking to us both so easily and smoothly cheerfully—naturally and pleasantly—inimitable by any young man! You hardly feel the change of room. We were but three at table, but there was no lack of entertainment. Mr. Pollingray is an admirable host; he talks just enough himself and helps you to talk. What does comfort me is that it gives him real pleasure to see a hearty appetite. Young men, I know it for a certainty, never quite like us to be so human. Ah! which is right? I would not miss the faith in our nobler essence which Charles has. But, if it nobler? One who has lived longer in the world ought to know better, and Mr. Pollingray approves of naturalness in everything. I have now seen through Charles's eyes for several months; so implicitly that I am timid when I dream of trusting to another's judgement. It is, however, a fact that I am not quite natural with Charles.

Page 4591

Every day Mr. Pollingray puts on evening dress out of deference to his sister. If young men had these good habits they would gain our respect, and lose their own self-esteem less early.

After dinner I sang. Then Mr. Pollingray read an amusing essay to us, and retired to his library. Miss Pollingray sat and talked to me of her brother, and of her nephew—for whom it is that Mr. Pollingray is beginning to receive company, and is going into society. Charles's subsequently received letter explained the 'receive company.' I could not comprehend it at the time.

'The house has been shut up for years, or rarely inhabited by us for more than a month in the year. Mr. Pollingray prefers France. All his associations, I may say his sympathies, are in France. Latterly he seems to have changed a little; but from Normandy to Touraine and Dauphiny—we had a triangular home over there. Indeed, we have it still. I am never certain of my brother.'

While Miss Pollingray was speaking, my eyes were fixed on a Vidal crayon drawing, faintly coloured with chalks, of a foreign lady—I could have sworn to her being French—young, quite girlish, I doubt if her age was more than mine.

She is pretty, is she not?' said Miss Pollingray.

She is almost beautiful,' I exclaimed, and Miss Pollingray, seeing my curiosity, was kind enough not to keep me in suspense.

'That is the Marquise de Mazardouin—nee Louise de Riverolles. You will see other portraits of her in the house. This is the most youthful of them, if I except one representing a baby, and bearing her initials.'

I remembered having noticed a similarity of feature in some of the portraits in the different rooms. My longing to look at them again was like a sudden jet of flame within me. There was no chance of seeing them till morning; so, promising myself to dream of the face before me, I dozed through a conversation with my hostess, until I had got the French lady's eyes and hair and general outline stamped accurately, as I hoped, on my mind. I was no sooner on my way to bed than all had faded. The torment of trying to conjure up that face was inconceivable. I lay, and tossed, and turned to right and to left, and scattered my sleep; but by and by my thoughts reverted to Mr. Pollingray, and then like sympathetic ink held to the heat, I beheld her again; but vividly, as she must have been when she was sitting to the artist. The hair was naturally crisped, waving thrice over the forehead and brushed clean from the temples, showing the small ears, and tied in a knot loosely behind. Her eyebrows were thick and dark, but soft; flowing eyebrows; far lovelier, to my thinking, than any pencilled arch. Dark eyes, and full, not prominent. I find little expression of inward sentiment in very prominent eyes. On the contrary they

seem to have a fish-like dependency of gaze on what is without, and show fishy depths, if any. For instance, my eyes are rather prominent, and I

Page 4592

am just the little fool—but the French lady is my theme. Madame la Marquise, your eyes are sweeter to me than celestial. I never saw such candour and unaffected innocence in eyes before. Accept the compliment of the pauvre Anglaise. Did you do mischief with them? Did Vidal's delicate sketch do justice to you? Your lips and chin and your throat all repose in such girlish grace, that if ever it is my good fortune to see you, you will not be aged to me!

I slept and dreamed of her.

In the morning, I felt certain that she had often said: 'Mon cher Gilbert,' to Mr. Pollingray. Had he ever said: 'Ma chere Louise?' He might have said: 'Ma bien aimee!' for it was a face to be loved.

My change of feeling towards him dates from that morning. He had previously seemed to me a man so much older. I perceived in him now a youthfulness beyond mere vigour of frame. I could not detach him from my dreams of the night. He insists upon addressing me by the terms of our 'official' relationship, as if he made it a principle of our intercourse.

'Well, and is your godpapa to congratulate you on your having had a quiet rest?' was his greeting.

I answered stupidly: 'Oh, yes, thank you,' and would have given worlds for the courage to reply in French, but I distrusted my accent. At breakfast, the opportunity or rather the excuse for an attempt, was offered. His French valet, Francois, waits on him at breakfast. Mr. Pollingray and his sister asked for things in the French tongue, and, as if fearing some breach of civility, Mr. Pollingray asked me if I knew French.

Yes, I know it; that is, I understand it,' I stuttered. Allons, nous parlerons francais,' said he. But I shook my head, and remained like a silly mute.

I was induced towards the close of the meal to come out with a few French words. I was utterly shamefaced. Mr. Pollingray has got the French manner of protesting that one is all but perfect in one's speaking. I know how absurd it must have sounded. But I felt his kindness, and in my heart I thanked him humbly. I believe now that a residence in France does not deteriorate an Englishman. Mr. Pollingray, when in his own house, has the best qualities of the two countries. He is gay, and, yes, while he makes a study of me, I am making a study of him. Which of us two will know the other first? He was papa's college friend—papa's junior, of course, and infinitely more papa's junior now. I observe that weakness in him, I mean, his clinging to youthfulness, less and less; but I do see it, I cannot be quite in error. The truth is, I begin to feel that I cannot venture to mistrust my infallible judgement, or I shall have no confidence in myself at all.

After breakfast, I was handed over to Miss Pollingray, with the intimation that I should not see him till dinner.

'Gilbert is anxious to cultivate the society of his English neighbours, now that he has, as he supposes, really settled among them,' she remarked to me. 'At his time of life, the desire to be useful is almost a malady. But, he cherishes the poor, and that is more than an occupation, it is a virtue.'

Page 4593

Her speech has become occasionally French in the construction of the sentences.

‘Mais oui,’ I said shyly, and being alone with her, I was not rebuffed by her smile, especially as she encouraged me on.

I am, she told me, to see a monde of French people here in September. So, the story of me is to be completer, or continued in September. I could not get Miss Pollingray to tell me distinctly whether Madame la Marquise will be one of the guests. But I know that she is not a widow. In that case, she has a husband. In that case, what is the story of her relations towards Mr. Pollingray? There must be some story. He would not surely have so many portraits of her about the house (and they travel with him wherever he goes) if she were but a lovely face to him. I cannot understand it. They were frequent, constant visitors to one another’s estates in France; always together. Perhaps a man of Mr. Pollingray’s age, or perhaps M. le Marquis—and here I lose myself. French habits are so different from ours. One thing I am certain of: no charge can be brought against my Englishman. I read perfect rectitude in his face. I would cast anchor by him. He must have had a dreadful unhappiness.

Mama kept her promise by sending my riding habit and hat punctually, but I had run far ahead of all the wishes I had formed when I left home, and I half feared my ride out with Mr. Pollingray. That was before I had received Charles’s letter, letting me know the object of my invitation here. I require at times a morbid pride to keep me up to the work. I suppose I rode befittingly, for Mr. Pollingray praised my seat on horseback. I know I can ride, or feel the ’blast of a horse like my own’—as he calls it. Yet he never could have had a duller companion. My conversation was all yes and no, as if it went on a pair of crutches like a miserable cripple. I was humiliated and vexed. All the while I was trying to lead up to the French lady, and I could not commence with a single question. He appears to, have really cancelled the past in every respect save his calling me his goddaughter. His talk was of the English poor, and vegetation, and papa’s goodness to his old dames in Ickleworth parish, and defects in my education acknowledged by me, but not likely to restore me in my depressed state. The ride was beautiful. We went the length of a twelve-mile ridge between Ickleworth and Hillford, over high commons, with immense views on both sides, and through beech-woods, oakwoods, and furzy dells and downs spotted with juniper and yewtrees—old picnic haunts of mine, but Mr. Pollingray’s fresh delight in the landscape made them seem new and strange. Home through the valley.

Page 4594

The next day Miss Pollingray joined us, wearing a feutre gris and green plume, which looked exceedingly odd until you became accustomed to it. Her hair has decided gray streaks, and that, and the Queen Elizabeth nose, and the feutre gris!—but she is so kind, I could not even smile in my heart. It is singular that Mr. Pollingray, who's but three years her junior, should look at least twenty years younger—at the very least. His moustache and beard are of the colour of a corn sheaf, and his blue eyes shining over them remind me of summer. That describes him. He is summer, and has not fallen into his autumn yet. Miss Pollingray helped me to talk a little. She tried to check her brother's enthusiasm for our scenery, and extolled the French paysage. He laughed at her, for when they were in France it was she who used to say, 'There is nothing here like England!' Miss Fool rode between them attentive to the jingling of the bells in her cap: 'Yes' and 'No' at anybody's command, in and out of season.

Thank you, Charles, for your letter! I was beginning to think my invitation to Dayton inexplicable, when that letter arrived. I cannot but deem it an unworthy baseness to entrap a girl to study her without a warning to her. I went up to my room after I had read it, and wrote in reply till the breakfast-bell rang. I resumed my occupation an hour later, and wrote till one o'clock. In all, fifteen pages of writing, which I carefully folded and addressed to Charles; sealed the envelope, stamped it, and destroyed it. I went to bed. 'No, I won't ride out to-day, I have a headache!' I repeated this about half-a-dozen times to nobody's knocking on the door, and when at last somebody knocked I tried to repeat it once, but having the message that Mr. Pollingray particularly wished to have my company in a ride, I rose submissively and cried. This humiliation made my temper ferocious. Mr. Pollingray observed my face, and put it down in his notebook. 'A savage disposition,' or, no, 'An untamed little rebel'; for he has hopes of me. He had the cruelty to say so.

'What I am, I shall remain,' said I.

He informed me that it was perfectly natural for me to think it; and on my replying that persons ought to know themselves best: 'At my age, perhaps,' he said, and added, 'I cannot speak very confidently of my knowledge of myself.'

'Then you make us out to be nothing better than puppets, Mr. Pollingray.'

'If we have missed an early apprenticeship to the habit of self-command, ma filleule.'

'Merci, mon parrain.'

He laughed. My French, I suppose.

I determined that, if he wanted to study me, I would help him.

'I can command myself when I choose, but it is only when I choose.'

This seemed to me quite a reasonable speech, until I found him looking for something to follow, in explanation, and on coming to sift my meaning, I saw that it was temper, and getting more angry, continued:

Page 4595

’The sort of young people who have such wonderful command of themselves are not the pleasantest.’

‘No,’ he said; ‘they disappoint us. We expect folly from the young.’

I shut my lips. Prince Leboo knew that he must go, and a good gallop reconciled me to circumstances. Then I was put to jumping little furzes and ditches, which one cannot pretend to do without a fair appearance of gaiety; for, while you are running the risk of a tumble, you are compelled to look cheerful and gay, at least, I am. To fall frowning will never do. I had no fall. My gallant Leboo made my heart leap with love of him, though mill-stones were tied to it. I may be vexed when I begin, but I soon ride out a bad temper. And he is mine! I am certainly inconstant to Charles, for I think of Leboo fifty times more. Besides, there is no engagement as yet between Charles and me. I have first to be approved worthy by Mr. and Miss Pollingray: two pairs of eyes and ears, over which I see a solemnly downy owl sitting, conning their reports of me. It is a very unkind ordeal to subject any inexperienced young woman to. It was harshly conceived and it is being remorselessly executed. I would complain more loudly—in shrieks—if I could say I was unhappy; but every night I look out of my window before going to bed and see the long falls of the infant river through the meadow, and the dark woods seeming to enclose the house from harm: I dream of the old inhabitant, his ancestors, and the numbers and numbers of springs when the wildflowers have flourished in those woods and the nightingales have sung there. And I feel there will never be a home to me like Dayton.

CHAPTER V

HE

For twenty years of my life I have embraced the phantom of the fairest woman that ever drew breath. I have submitted to her whims, I have worshipped her feet, I have, I believe, strengthened her principle. I have done all in my devotion but adopt her religious faith. And I have, as I trusted some time since, awakened to perceive that those twenty years were a period of mere sentimental pastime, perfectly useless, fruitless, unless, as is possible, it has saved me from other follies. But it was a folly in itself. Can one’s nature be too stedfast? The question whether a spice of frivolousness may not be a safeguard has often risen before me. The truth, I must learn to think, is, that my mental power is not the match for my ideal or sentimental apprehension and native tenacity of attachment. I have fallen into one of the pits of a well-meaning but idle man. The world discredits the existence of pure platonism in love. I myself can barely look back on those twenty years of amatory servility with a full comprehension of the part I have been playing in them. And yet I would not willingly forfeit the exalted admiration of Louise for my constancy: as little willingly as I would have imperilled her purity. I cling

Page 4596

to the past as to something in which I have deserved well, though I am scarcely satisfied with it. According to our English notions I know my name. English notions, however, are not to be accepted in all matters, any more than the flat declaration of a fact will develop it in alt its bearings. When our English society shall have advanced to a high civilization, it will be less expansive in denouncing the higher stupidities. Among us, much of the social judgement of Bodge upon the relations of men to women is the stereotyped opinion of the land. There is the dictum here for a man who adores a woman who is possessed by a husband. If he has long adored her, and known himself to be preferred by her in innocency of heart; if he has solved the problem of being her bosom's lord, without basely seeking to degrade her to being his mistress; the epithets to characterise him in our vernacular will probably be all the less flattering. Politically we are the most self-conscious people upon earth, and socially the frankest animals. The terrorism of our social laws is eminently serviceable, for without it such frank animals as we are might run into bad excesses. I judge rather by the abstract evidence than by the examples our fair matrons give to astounded foreigners when abroad.

Louise writes that her husband is paralysed. The Marquis de Mazardouin is at last tasting of his mortality. I bear in mind the day when he married her. She says that he has taken to priestly counsel, and, like a woman, she praises him for that. It is the one thing which I have not done to please her. She anticipates his decease. Should she be free—what then? My heart does not beat the faster for the thought. There are twenty years upon it, and they make a great load. But I have a desire that she should come over to us. The old folly might rescue me from the new one. Not that I am any further persecuted by the dread that I am in imminent danger here. I have established a proper mastery over my young lady. 'Nous avons change de role'. Alice is subdued; she laughs feebly, is becoming conscious—a fact to be regretted, if I desired to check the creature's growth. There is vast capacity in the girl. She has plainly not centred her affections upon Charles, so that a man's conscience might be at ease if—if he chose to disregard what is due to decency. But, why, when I contest it, do I bow to the world's opinion concerning disparity of years between husband and wife? I know innumerable cases of an old husband making a young wife happy. My friend, Dr. Galliot, married his ward, and he had the best wife of any man of my acquaintance. She has been publishing his learned manuscripts ever since his death. That is an extreme case, for he was forty-five years her senior, and stood bald at the altar. Old General Althorpe married Julia Dahoop, and, but for his preposterous jealousy of her, might be cited in proof that the ordinary reckonings are not to be a yoke on the neck of one who earnestly seeks

Page 4597

to spouse a fitting mate, though late in life. But, what are fifty years? They mark the prime of a healthy man's existence. He has by that time seen the world, can decide, and settle, and is virtually more eligible—to use the cant phrase of gossips—than a young man, even for a young girl. And may not some fair and fresh reward be justly claimed as the crown of a virtuous career?

I say all this, yet my real feeling is as if I were bald as Dr. Galliot and jealous as General Althorpe. For, with my thorough knowledge of myself, I, were I like either one of them, should not have offered myself to the mercy of a young woman, or of the world. Nor, as I am and know myself to be, would I offer myself to the mercy of Alice Amble. When my filleule first drove into Dayton she had some singularly audacious ideas of her own. Those vivid young feminine perceptions and untamed imaginations are desperate things to encounter. There is nothing beyond their reach. Our safety from them lies in the fact that they are always seeing too much, and imagining too wildly; so that, with a little help from us, they may be taught to distrust themselves; and when they have once distrusted themselves, we need not afterwards fear them: their supernatural vitality has vanished. I fancy my pretty Alice to be in this state now. She leaves us to-morrow. In the autumn we shall have her with us again, and Louise will scan her compassionately. I desire that they should meet. It will be hardly fair to the English girl, but, if I stand in the gap between them, I shall summon up no small quantity of dormant compatriotic feeling. The contemplation of the contrast, too, may save me from both: like the logic ass with the two trusses of hay on either side of him.

CHAPTER VI

SHE

I am at home. There was never anybody who felt so strange in her home. It is not a month since I left my sisters, and I hardly remember that I know them. They all, and even papa, appear to be thinking about such petty things. They complain that I tell them nothing. What have I to tell? My Prince! my own Leboo, if I might lie in the stall with you, then I should feel thoroughly happy! That is, if I could fall asleep. Evelina declares we are not eight miles from Dayton. It seems to me I am eight millions of miles distant, and shall be all my life travelling along a weary road to get there again just for one long sunny day. And it might rain when I got there after all! My trouble nobody knows. Nobody knows a thing!

The night before my departure, Miss Pollingray did me the honour to accompany me up to my bedroom. She spoke to me searchingly about Charles; but she did not demand compromising answers. She is not in favour of early marriages, so she merely wishes to know the footing upon which we stand: that of friends. I assured her we were simply friends. 'It is the firmest basis of an attachment,' she said; and I did not look hurried.

Page 4598

But I gained my end. I led her to talk of the beautiful Marquise. This is the tale. Mr. Pollingray, when a very young man, and comparatively poor, went over to France with good introductions, and there saw and fell in love with Louise de Riverolles. She reciprocated his passion. If he would have consented to abjure his religion and worship with her, Madame de Riverolles, her mother, would have listened to her entreaties. But Gilbert was firm. Mr. Pollingray, I mean, refused to abandon his faith. Her mother, consequently, did not interfere, and Monsieur de Riverolles, her father, gave her to the Marquis de Marzardouin, a roue young nobleman, immensely rich, and shockingly dissipated. And she married him. No, I cannot understand French girls. Do as I will, it is quite incomprehensible to me how Louise, loving another, could suffer herself to be decked out in bridal finery and go to the altar and take the marriage oaths. Not if perdition had threatened would I have submitted. I have a feeling that Mr. Pollingray should have shown at least one year's resentment at such conduct; and yet I admire him for his immediate generous forgiveness of her. It was fatherly. She was married at sixteen. His forgiveness was the fruit of his few years' seniority, said Miss Pollingray, whose opinion of the Marquise I cannot arrive at. At any rate, they have been true and warm friends ever since, constantly together interchangeing visits. That is why Mr. Pollingray has been more French than English for those long years.

Miss Pollingray concluded by asking me what I thought of the story. I said: 'It is very strange French habits are so different from ours. I dare say . . . I hope . . . , perhaps . . . indeed, Mr. Pollingray seems happy now.' Her idea of my wits must be that they are of the schoolgirl order—a perfect receptacle for indefinite impressions.

'Ah!' said she. 'Gilbert has burnt his heart to ashes by this time.'

I slept with that sentence in my brain. In the morning, I rose and dressed, dreaming. As I was turning the handle of my door to go down to breakfast, suddenly I swung round in a fit of tears. It was so piteous to think that he should have waited by her twenty years in a slow anguish, his heart burning out, without a reproach or a complaint. I saw him, I still see him, like a martyr.

'Some people,' Miss Pollingray said, I permitted themselves to think evil of my brother's assiduous devotion to a married woman. There is not a spot on his character, or on that of the person whom Gilbert loved.'

I would believe it in the teeth of calumny. I would cling to my, belief in him if I were drowning.

I consider that those twenty years are just nothing, if he chooses to have them so. He has lived embalmed in a saintly affection. No wonder he considers himself still youthful. He is entitled to feel that his future is before him.

Page 4599

No amount of sponging would get the stains away from my horrid red eyelids. I slunk into my seat at the breakfast-table, not knowing that one of the maids had dropped a letter from Charles into my hand, and that I had opened it and was holding it open. The letter, as I found afterwards, told me that Charles has received an order from his uncle to go over to Mr. Pollingray's estate in Dauphiny on business. I am not sorry that they should have supposed I was silly enough to cry at the thought of Charles's crossing the Channel. They did imagine it, I know; for by and by Miss Pollingray whispered: 'Les absents n'auront pas tort, cette fois, n'est-ce-pas? 'And Mr. Pollingray was cruelly gentle: an air of 'I would not intrude on such emotions'; and I heightened their delusions as much as I could: there was no other way of accounting for my pantomime face. Why should he fancy I suffered so terribly? He talked with an excited cheerfulness meant to relieve me, of course, but there was no justification for his deeming me a love-sick kind of woe-begone ballad girl. It caused him likewise to adopt a manner—what to call it, I cannot think: tender respect, frigid regard, anything that accompanies and belongs to the pressure of your hand with the finger-tips. He said goodbye so tenderly that I would have kissed his sleeve. The effort to restrain myself made me like an icicle. Oh! adieu, mon parrain!

Etext editor's bookmarks:

A wise man will not squander his laughter if he can help it
A woman is hurt if you do not confide to her your plans
Gentleman in a good state of preservation
Imparting the usual chorus of yesses to his own mind
In every difficulty, patience is a life-belt
Knew my friend to be one of the most absent-minded of men
Rapture of obliviousness
Telling her anything, she makes half a face in anticipation
When you have done laughing with her, you can laugh at her

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

AN UNFINISHED COMEDY

By George Meredith

Dramatis personae
Homeware.
Professor spiral.

Arden,..... In love with Astraea.
Swithin,..... Sympathetics. *Osier*,
Dame Dresden,..... Sister to Homeware.

Astraea,..... Niece to Dame Dresden and Homeware.
Lyra,..... A Wife.
Lady Oldlace.
Virginia.
Winifred.

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

An unfinished comedy

The scene is a Surrey garden in early summer. The paths are shaded by tall box-wood hedges. The—time is some sixty years ago.

Scene I

Professor spiral, *dame Dresden*, *lady Oldlace*,
Virginia, *Winifred*, *Swithin*, and *osier*

Page 4600

(As they slowly promenade the garden, the professor is delivering one of his exquisite orations on Woman.)

Spiral: One husband! The woman consenting to marriage takes but one. For her there is no widowhood. That punctuation of the sentence called death is not the end of the chapter for her. It is the brilliant proof of her having a soul. So she exalts her sex. Above the wrangle and clamour of the passions she is a fixed star. After once recording her obedience to the laws of our common nature—that is to say, by descending once to wedlock—she passes on in sovereign disengagement—a dedicated widow.

(By this time they have disappeared from view. *Homeware* appears; he craftily avoids joining their party, like one who is unworthy of such noble oratory. He desires privacy and a book, but is disturbed by the arrival of *Arden*, who is painfully anxious to be polite to 'her uncle Homeware.')

Scene ii

Homeware, *Arden*

Arden: A glorious morning, sir.

Homeware: The sun is out, sir.

Arden: I am happy in meeting you, Mr. Homeware.

Homeware: I can direct you to the ladies, Mr. Arden. You will find them up yonder avenue.

Arden: They are listening, I believe, to an oration from the mouth of Professor Spiral.

Homeware: On an Alpine flower which has descended to flourish on English soil. Professor Spiral calls it Nature's 'dedicated widow.'

Arden: 'Dedicated widow'?

Homeware: The reference you will observe is to my niece Astraea.

Arden: She is dedicated to whom?

Homeware: To her dead husband! You see the reverse of Astraea, says the professor, in those world-infamous widows who marry again.

Arden: Bah!

Homeware: Astraea, it is decided, must remain solitary, virgin cold, like the little Alpine flower. Professor Spiral has his theme.

Arden: He will make much of it. May I venture to say that I prefer my present company?

Homeware: It is a singular choice. I can supply you with no weapons for the sort of stride in which young men are usually engaged. You belong to the camp you are avoiding.

Arden: Achilles was not the worse warrior, sir, for his probation in petticoats.

Homeware: His deeds proclaim it. But Alexander was the better chieftain until he drank with Lais.

Arden: No, I do not plead guilty to Bacchus.

Homeware: You are confessing to the madder form of drunkenness.

Arden: How, sir, I beg?

Homeware: How, when a young man sees the index to himself in everything spoken!

Arden: That might have the look. I did rightly in coming to you, sir.

Page 4601

Homeware: ‘Her uncle Homeware’?

Arden: You read through us all, sir.

Homeware: It may interest you to learn that you are the third of the gentlemen commissioned to consult the lady’s uncle Homeware.

Arden: The third.

Homeware: Yes, she is pursued. It could hardly be otherwise. Her attractions are acknowledged, and the house is not a convent. Yet, Mr. Arden, I must remind you that all of you are upon an enterprise held to be profane by the laws of this region. Can you again forget that Astraea is a widow?

Arden: She was a wife two months; she has been a widow two years.

Homeware: The widow of the great and venerable Professor Towers is not to measure her widowhood by years. His, from the altar to the tomb. As it might be read, a one day’s walk!

Arden: Is she, in the pride of her youth, to be sacrificed to a whimsical feminine delicacy?

Homeware: You have argued it with her?

Arden: I have presumed.

Homeware: And still she refused her hand!

Arden: She commended me to you, sir. She has a sound judgement of persons.

Homeware: I should put it that she passes the Commissioners of Lunacy, on the ground of her being a humorous damsel. Your predecessors had also argued it with her; and they, too, discovered their enemy in a whimsical feminine delicacy. Where is the difference between you? Evidently she cannot perceive it, and I have to seek: You will have had many conversations with Astraea?

Arden: I can say, that I am thrice the man I was before I had them.

Homeware: You have gained in manhood from conversations with a widow in her twenty-second year; and you want more of her.

Arden: As much as I want more wisdom.

Homeware: You would call her your Muse?

Arden: So prosaic a creature as I would not dare to call her that.

Homeware: You have the timely mantle of modesty, Mr. Arden. She has prepared you for some of the tests with her uncle Homeware.

Arden: She warned me to be myself, without a spice of affectation.

Homeware: No harder task could be set a young man in modern days. Oh, the humorous damsel. You sketch me the dimple at her mouth.

Arden: Frankly, sir, I wish you to know me better; and I think I can bear inspection. Astraea sent me to hear the reasons why she refuses me a hearing.

Homeware: Her reason, I repeat, is this; to her idea, a second wedlock is unholy. Further, it passes me to explain. The young lady lands us where we were at the beginning; such must have been her humorous intention.

Arden: What can I do?

Homeware: Love and war have been compared. Both require strategy and tactics, according to my recollection of the campaign.

Page 4602

Arden: I will take to heart what you say, sir.

Homeware: Take it to head. There must be occasional descent of lovers' heads from the clouds. And Professor Spiral,—But here we have a belated breeze of skirts.

(The reference is to the arrival of *Lyra*, breathless.)

Scene III

Homeware, *Arden*, *Lyra*

Lyra: My own dear uncle Homeware!

Homeware: But where is Pluriel?

Lyra: Where is a woman's husband when she is away from him?

Homeware: In Purgatory, by the proper reckoning. But hurry up the avenue, or you will be late for Professor Spiral's address.

Lyra: I know it all without hearing. Their Spiral! Ah, Mr. Arden! You have not chosen badly. The greater my experience, the more do I value my uncle Homeware's company.

(She is affectionate to excess but has a roguish eye withal, as of one who knows that uncle Homeware suspects all young men and most young women.)

Homeware: Agree with the lady promptly, my friend.

Arden: I would gladly boast of so lengthened an experience, Lady Pluriel.

Lyra: I must have a talk with Astraea, my dear uncle. Her letters breed suspicions. She writes feverishly. The last one hints at service on the West Coast of Africa.

Homeware: For the draining of a pestiferous land, or an enlightenment of the benighted black, we could not despatch a missionary more effective than the handsomest widow in Great Britain.

Lyra: Have you not seen signs of disturbance?

Homeware: A great oration may be a sedative.

Lyra: I have my suspicions.

Homeware: Mr. Arden, I could counsel you to throw yourself at Lady Pluriel's feet, and institute her as your confessional priest.

Arden: Madam, I am at your feet. I am devoted to the lady.

Lyra: Devoted. There cannot be an objection. It signifies that a man asks for nothing in return!

Homeware: Have a thought upon your words with this lady, Mr. Arden!

Arden: Devoted, I said. I am. I would give my life for her.

Lyra: Expecting it to be taken to-morrow or next day? Accept my encomiums. A male devotee is within an inch of a miracle. Women had been looking for this model for ages, uncle.

Homeware: You are the model, Mr Arden!

Lyra: Can you have intended to say that it is in view of marriage you are devoted to the widow of Professor Towers?

Arden: My one view.

Lyra: It is a star you are beseeching to descend.

Arden: It is.

Lyra: You disappoint me hugely. You are of the ordinary tribe after all; and your devotion craves an enormous exchange, infinitely surpassing the amount you bestow.

Page 4603

Arden: It does. She is rich in gifts; I am poor. But I give all I have.

Lyra: These lovers, uncle Homeware!

Homeware: A honey-bag is hung up and we have them about us. They would persuade us that the chief business of the world is a march to the altar.

Arden: With the right partner, if the business of the world is to be better done.

Lyra: Which right partner has been chosen on her part, by a veiled woman, who marches back from the altar to discover that she has chained herself to the skeleton of an idea, or is in charge of that devouring tyrant, an uxorious husband. Is Mr. Arden in favour with the Dame, uncle?

Homeware: My sister is an unsuspicious potentate, as you know. Pretenders to the hand of an inviolate widow bite like waves at a rock.

Lyra: Professor Spiral advances rapidly.

Homeware: Not, it would appear, when he has his audience of ladies and their satellites.

Lyra: I am sure I hear a spring-tide of enthusiasm coming.

Arden: I will see.

(He goes up the path.)

Lyra: Now! my own dear uncle, save me from Pluriel. I have given him the slip in sheer desperation; but the man is at his shrewdest when he is left to guess at my heels. Tell him I am anywhere but here. Tell him I ran away to get a sense of freshness in seeing him again. Let me have one day of liberty, or, upon my word, I shall do deeds; I shall console young Arden: I shall fly to Paris and set my cap at presidents and foreign princes. Anything rather than be eaten up every minute, as I am. May no woman of my acquaintance marry a man of twenty years her senior! She marries a gigantic limpet. At that period of his life a man becomes too voraciously constant.

Homeware: Cupid clipped of wing is a destructive parasite.

Lyra: I am in dead earnest, uncle, and I will have a respite, or else let decorum beware!

(Arden returns.)

Arden: The ladies are on their way.

Lyra: I must get Astraea to myself.

Homeware: My library is a virgin fortress, Mr. Arden. Its gates are open to you on other topics than the coupling of inebriates.

(He enters the house—*Lyra* disappears in the garden—Spiral's audience reappear without him.)

Scene iv

Dame Dresden, *lady Oldlace*, *Virginia*, *Winifred*, *Arden*, *Swithin*, *osier*

Lady Oldlace: Such perfect rhythm!

Winifred: Such oratory!

Lady Oldlace: A master hand. I was in a trance from the first sentence to the impressive close.

Osier: Such oratory is a whole orchestral symphony.

Virginia: Such command of intonation and subject!

Page 4604

Swithin: That resonant voice!

Lady Oldlace: Swithin, his flow of eloquence! He launched forth!

Swithin: Like an eagle from a cliff.

Osier: The measure of the words was like a beat of wings.

Swithin: He makes poets of us.

Dame Dresden: Spiral achieved his pinnacle to-day!

Virginia: How treacherous is our memory when we have most the longing to recall great sayings!

Osier: True, I conceive that my notes will be precious.

Winifred: You could take notes!

Lady Oldlace: It seems a device for missing the quintessential.

Swithin: Scraps of the body to the loss of the soul of it. We can allow that our friend performed good menial service.

Winifred: I could not have done the thing.

Swithin: In truth; it does remind one of the mess of pottage.

Lady Oldlace: One hardly felt one breathed.

Virginia: I confess it moved me to tears.

Swithin: There is a pathos for us in the display of perfection. Such subtle contrast with our individual poverty affects us.

Winifred: Surely there were passages of a distinct and most exquisite pathos.

Lady Oldlace: As in all great oratory! The key of it is the pathos.

Virginia: In great oratory, great poetry, great fiction; you try it by the pathos. All our critics agree in stipulating for the pathos. My tears were no feminine weakness, I could not be a discordant instrument.

Swithin: I must make confession. He played on me too.

Osier: We shall be sensible for long of that vibration from the touch of a master hand.

Arden: An accomplished player can make a toy-shop fiddle sound you a Stradivarius.

Dame Dresden: Have you a right to a remark, Mr. Arden? What could have detained you?

Arden: Ah, Dame. It may have been a warning that I am a discordant instrument. I do not readily vibrate.

Dame Dresden: A discordant instrument is out of place in any civil society. You have lost what cannot be recovered.

Arden: There are the notes.

Osier: Yes, the notes.

Swithin: You can be satisfied with the dog's feast at the table, Mr. Arden!

Osier: Ha!

Virginia: Never have I seen Astraea look sublimer in her beauty than with her eyes uplifted to the impassioned speaker, reflecting every variation of his tones.

Arden: Astraea!

Lady Oldlace: She was entranced when he spoke of woman descending from her ideal to the gross reality of man.

Osier: Yes, yes. I have the words [reads]: 'Woman is to the front of man, holding the vestal flower of a purer civilization. I see,' he says, 'the little taper in her hands transparent round the light, against rough winds.'

Page 4605

Dame Dresden: And of Astraea herself, what were the words? 'Nature's dedicated widow.'

Swithin: Vestal widow, was it not?

Virginia: Maiden widow, I think.

Dame Dresden: We decide for 'dedicated.'

Winifred: Spiral paid his most happy tribute to the memory of her late husband, the renowned Professor Towers.

Virginia: But his look was at dear Astraea.

Arden: At Astraea? Why?

Virginia: For her sanction doubtless.

Arden: Ha!

Winifred: He said his pride would ever be in his being received as the successor of Professor Towers.

Arden: Successor!

Swithin: Guardian was it not?

Osier: Tutor. I think he said.

(The three gentlemen consult Osier's notes uneasily.)

Dame Dresden: Our professor must by this time have received in full Astraea's congratulations, and Lyra is hearing from her what it is to be too late. You will join us at the luncheon table, if you do not feel yourself a discordant instrument there, Mr. Arden?

Arden (going to her): The allusion to knife and fork tunes my strings instantly, Dame.

Dame Dresden: You must help me to-day, for the professor will be tired, though we dare not hint at it in his presence. No reference, ladies, to the great speech we have been privileged to hear; we have expressed our appreciation and he could hardly bear it.

Arden: Nothing is more distasteful to the orator!

Virginia: As with every true genius, he is driven to feel humbly human by the exultation of him.

Swithin: He breathes in a rarified air.

Osier: I was thrilled, I caught at passing beauties. I see that here and there I have jotted down incoherencies, lines have seduced me, so that I missed the sequence—the precious part. Ladies, permit me to rank him with Plato as to the equality of women and men.

Winifred: It is nobly said.

Osier: And with the Stoics, in regard to celibacy.

(By this time all the ladies have gone into the house.)

Arden: Successor! Was the word successor?

(*Arden*, *Swithin*, and *osier* are excitedly searching the notes when *spiral* passes and strolls into the house. His air of self-satisfaction increases their uneasiness they follow him. *Astraea* and *Lyra* come down the path.)

Scene V

Astraea, *Lyra*

Lyra: Oh! Pluriel, ask me of him! I wish I were less sure he would not be at the next corner I turn.

Astraea: You speak of your husband strangely, Lyra.

Page 4606

Lyra: My head is out of a sack. I managed my escape from him this morning by renouncing bath and breakfast; and what a relief, to be in the railway carriage alone! that is, when the engine snorted. And if I set eyes on him within a week, he will hear some truths. His idea of marriage is, the taking of the woman into custody. My hat is on, and on goes Pluriel's. My foot on the stairs; I hear his boot behind me. In my boudoir I am alone one minute, and then the door opens to the inevitable. I pay a visit, he is passing the house as I leave it. He will not even affect surprise. I belong to him, I am cat's mouse. And he will look doating on me in public. And when I speak to anybody, he is that fearful picture of all smirks. Fling off a kid glove after a round of calls; feel your hand—there you have me now that I am out of him for my half a day, if for as long.

Astraea: This is one of the world's happy marriages!

Lyra: This is one of the world's choice dishes! And I have it planted under my nostrils eternally. Spare me the mention of Pluriel until he appears; that's too certain this very day. Oh! good husband! good kind of man! whatever you please; only some peace, I do pray, for the husband-haunted wife. I like him, I like him, of course, but I want to breathe. Why, an English boy perpetually bowled by a Christmas pudding would come to loathe the mess.

Astraea: His is surely the excess of a merit.

Lyra: Excess is a poison. Excess of a merit is a capital offence in morality. It disgusts, us with virtue. And you are the cunningest of fencers, tongue, or foils. You lead me to talk of myself, and I hate the subject. By the way, you have practised with Mr. Arden.

Astraea: A tiresome instructor, who lets you pass his guard to compliment you on a hit.

Lyra: He rather wins me.

Astraea: He does at first.

Lyra: Begins Plurielizing, without the law to back him, does he?

Astraea: The fencing lessons are at an end.

Lyra: The duetts with Mr. Swithin's violoncello continue?

Astraea: He broke through the melody.

Lyra: There were readings in poetry with Mr. Osier, I recollect.

Astraea: His own compositions became obtrusive.

Lyra: No fencing, no music, no poetry! no West Coast of Africa either, I suppose.

Astraea: Very well! I am on my defence. You at least shall not misunderstand me, Lyra. One intense regret I have; that I did not live in the time of the Amazons. They were free from this question of marriage; this babble of love. Why am I so persecuted? He will not take a refusal. There are sacred reasons. I am supported by every woman having the sense of her dignity. I am perverted, burlesqued by the fury of wrath I feel at their incessant pursuit. And I despise Mr. Osier and Mr. Swithin because they have an air of pious agreement with the Dame, and are conspirators behind their mask.

Page 4607

Lyra: False, false men!

Astraea: They come to me. I am complimented on being the vulnerable spot.

Lyra: The object desired is usually addressed by suitors, my poor Astraea!

Astraea: With the assumption, that as I am feminine I must necessarily be in the folds of the horrible constrictor they call Love, and that I leap to the thoughts of their debasing marriage.

Lyra: One of them goes to Mr. Homeware.

Astraea: All are sent to him in turn. He can dispose of them.

Lyra: Now that is really masterly fun, my dear; most creditable to you! Love, marriage, a troop of suitors, and uncle Homeware. No, it would not have occurred to me, and—I am considered to have some humour. Of course, he disposes of them. He seemed to have a fairly favourable opinion of Mr. Arden.

Astraea: I do not share it. He is the least respectful of the sentiments entertained by me. Pray, spare me the mention of him, as you say of your husband. He has that pitiful conceit in men, which sets them thinking that a woman must needs be susceptible to the declaration of the mere existence of their passion. He is past argument. Impossible for him to conceive a woman's having a mind above the conditions of her sex. A woman, according to him, can have no ideal of life, except as a ball to toss in the air and catch in a cup. Put him aside. . . . We creatures are doomed to marriage, and if we shun it, we are a kind of cripple. He is grossly earthy in his view of us. We are unable to move a step in thought or act unless we submit to have a husband. That is his reasoning. Nature! Nature! I have to hear of Nature! We must be above Nature, I tell him, or, we shall be very much below. He is ranked among our clever young men; and he can be amusing. So far he passes muster; and he has a pleasant voice. I dare say he is an uncle Homeware's good sort of boy. Girls like him. Why does he not fix his attention upon one of them; Why upon me? We waste our time in talking of him . . . . The secret of it is, that he has no reverence. The marriage he vaunts is a mere convenient arrangement for two to live together under command of nature. Reverence for the state of marriage is unknown to him. How explain my feeling? I am driven into silence. Cease to speak of him . . . . He is the dupe of his eloquence—his passion, he calls it. I have only to trust myself to him, and—I shall be one of the world's married women! Words are useless. How am I to make him see that it is I who respect the state of marriage by refusing; not he by perpetually soliciting. Once married, married for ever. Widow is but a term. When women hold their own against him, as I have done, they will be more esteemed. I have resisted and conquered. I am sorry I do not share in the opinion of your favourite.

Lyra: Mine?

Astraea: You spoke warmly of him.

Page 4608

Lyra: Warmly, was it?

Astraea: You are not blamed, my dear: he has a winning manner.

Lyra: I take him to be a manly young fellow, smart enough; handsome too.

Astraea: Oh, he has good looks.

Lyra: And a head, by repute.

Astraea: For the world's work, yes.

Lyra: Not romantic.

Astraea: Romantic ideas are for dreamy simperers.

Lyra: Amazons repudiate them.

Astraea: Laugh at me. Half my time I am laughing at myself. I should regain my pride if I could be resolved on a step. I am strong to resist; I have not strength to move.

Lyra: I see the sphinx of Egypt!

Astraea: And all the while I am a manufactory of gunpowder in this quiet old-world Sabbath circle of dear good souls, with their stereotyped interjections, and orchestra of enthusiasms; their tapering delicacies: the rejoicing they have in their common agreement on all created things. To them it is restful. It spurs me to fly from rooms and chairs and beds and houses. I sleep hardly a couple of hours. Then into the early morning air, out with the birds; I know no other pleasure.

Lyra: Hospital work for a variation: civil or military. The former involves the house-surgeon: the latter the grateful lieutenant.

Astraea: Not if a woman can resist . . . I go to it proof-armoured.

Lyra: What does the Dame say?

Astraea: Sighs over me! Just a little maddening to hear.

Lyra: When we feel we have the strength of giants, and are bidden to sit and smile! You should rap out some of our old sweet-innocent garden oaths with her—'Carnation! Dame!' That used to make her dance on her seat.—'But, dearest Dame, it is as natural an impulse for women to have that relief as for men; and natural will out, begonia! it will!' We ran through the book of Botany for devilish objurgations. I do believe our

misconduct caused us to be handed to the good man at the altar as the right corrective. And you were the worst offender.

Astraea: Was I? I could be now, though I am so changed a creature.

Lyra: You enjoy the studies with your Spiral, come!

Astraea: Professor Spiral is the one honest gentleman here. He does homage to my principles. I have never been troubled by him: no silly hints or side-looks—you know, the dog at the forbidden bone.

Lyra: A grand orator.

Astraea: He is. You fix on the smallest of his gifts. He is intellectually and morally superior.

Lyra: Praise of that kind makes me rather incline to prefer his inferiors. He fed gobble-gobble on your puffs of incense. I coughed and scraped the gravel; quite in vain; he tapped for more and more.

Astraea: Professor Spiral is a thinker; he is a sage. He gives women their due.

Page 4609

Lyra: And he is a bachelor too—or consequently.

Astraea: If you like you may be as playful with me as the Lyra of our maiden days used to be. My dear, my dear, how glad I am to have you here! You remind me that I once had a heart. It will beat again with you beside me, and I shall look to you for protection. A novel request from me. From annoyance, I mean. It has entirely altered my character. Sometimes I am afraid to think of what I was, lest I should suddenly romp, and perform pirouettes and cry 'Carnation!' There is the bell. We must not be late when the professor condescends to sit for meals.

Lyra: That rings healthily in the professor.

Astraea: Arm in arm, my Lyra.

Lyra: No Pluriel yet!

(They enter the house, and the time changes to evening of the same day. The scene is still the garden.)

Scene vi

Astraea, *Arden*

Astraea: Pardon me if I do not hear you well.

Arden: I will not even think you barbarous.

Astraea: I am. I am the object of the chase.

Arden: The huntsman draws the wood, then, and not you.

Astraea:

> At any instant I am forced to run,
> Or turn in my defence: how can I be
> Other than barbarous? You are the cause.

Arden: No: heaven that made you beautiful's the cause.

Astraea:

> Say, earth, that gave you instincts. Bring me down
> To instincts! When by chance I speak awhile
> With our professor, you appear in haste,
> Full cry to sight again the missing hare.
> Away ideas! All that's divinest flies!
> I have to bear in mind how young you are.

Arden:
You have only to look up to me four years,
Instead of forty!

Astraea: Sir?

Arden
There's my misfortune!
And worse that, young, I love as a young man.
Could I but quench the fire, I might conceal
The youthfulness offending you so much.

Astraea: I wish you would. I wish it earnestly.

Arden: Impossible. I burn.

Astraea: You should not burn.

Arden
'Tis more than I. 'Tis fire. It masters will.
You would not say I should not' if you knew fire.
It seizes. It devours.

Astraea: Dry wood.

Arden:
Cold wit!
How cold you can be! But be cold, for sweet
You must be. And your eyes are mine: with them
I see myself: unworthy to usurp
The place I hold a moment. While I look
I have my happiness.

Astraea: You should look higher.

Page 4610

Arden:
Through you to the highest. Only through you!
  Through you
The mark I may attain is visible,
And I have strength to dream of winning it.
You are the bow that speeds the arrow: you
The glass that brings the distance nigh. My world
Is luminous through you, pure heavenly,
But hangs upon the rose's outer leaf,
Not next her heart. Astraea! my own beloved!

Astraea: We may be excellent friends. And I have faults.

Arden: Name them: I am hungering for more to love.

Astraea:
I waver very constantly: I have
No fixity of feeling or of sight.
I have no courage: I can often dream
Of daring: when I wake I am in dread.
I am inconstant as a butterfly,
And shallow as a brook with little fish!
Strange little fish, that tempt the small boy's net,
But at a touch straight dive! I am any one's,
And no one's! I am vain.
Praise of my beauty lodges in my ears.
The lark reels up with it; the nightingale
Sobs bleeding; the flowers nod; I could believe
A poet, though he praised me to my face.

Arden:
Never had poet so divine a fount
To drink of!

Astraea:
Have I given you more to love

Arden:
More! You have given me your inner mind,
Where conscience in the robes of Justice shoots
Light so serenely keen that in such light
Fair infants, I newly criminal of earth,'
As your friend Osier says, might show some blot.
Seraphs might! More to love? Oh! these dear faults

Lead you to me like troops of laughing girls
With garlands. All the fear is, that you trifle,
Feigning them.

Astraea:
For what purpose?

Arden:
Can I guess?
Astraea:

I think 'tis you who have the trifler's note.
My hearing is acute, and when you speak,
Two voices ring, though you speak fervidly.
Your Osier quotation jars. Beware!
Why were you absent from our meeting-place
This morning?

Arden:
I was on the way, and met
Your uncle Homeware

Astraea: Ah!

Arden: He loves you.

Astraea:
He loves me: he has never understood.
He loves me as a creature of the flock;
A little whiter than some others.
Yes; He loves me, as men love; not to uplift;
Not to have faith in; not to spiritualize.
For him I am a woman and a widow
One of the flock, unmarked save by a brand.
He said it!—You confess it! You have learnt
To share his error, erring fatally.

Page 4611

Arden: By whose advice went I to him?

Astraea:
By whose?
Pursuit that seemed incessant: persecution.
Besides, I have changed since then: I change; I change;
It is too true I change. I could esteem
You better did you change. And had you heard
The noble words this morning from the mouth
Of our professor, changed were you, or raised
Above love-thoughts, love-talk, and flame and flutter,
High as eternal snows. What said he else,
My uncle Homeware?

Arden:
That you were not free:
And that he counselled us to use our wits.

Astraea:
But I am free I free to be ever free!
My freedom keeps me free! He counselled us?
I am not one in a conspiracy.
I scheme no discord with my present life.
Who does, I cannot look on as my friend.
Not free? You know me little. Were I chained,
For liberty I would sell liberty
To him who helped me to an hour's release.
But having perfect freedom . . .

Arden: No.

Astraea:
Good sir,
You check me?

Arden: Perfect freedom?

Astraea: Perfect!

Arden: No!

Astraea: Am I awake? What blinds me?

Arden:
Filaments

The slenderest ever woven about a brain
From the brain's mists, by the little sprite called
Fancy.
A breath would scatter them; but that one breath
Must come of animation. When the heart
Is as, a frozen sea the brain spins webs.

Astraea:
'Tis very singular!
I understand.
You translate cleverly. I hear in verse
My uncle Homeware's prose. He has these notions.
Old men presume to read us.

Arden:
Young men may.
You gaze on an ideal reflecting you
Need I say beautiful? Yet it reflects
Less beauty than the lady whom I love
Breathes, radiates. Look on yourself in me.
What harm in gazing? You are this flower
You are that spirit. But the spirit fed
With substance of the flower takes all its bloom!
And where in spirits is the bloom of the flower?

Astraea:
'Tis very singular. You have a tone
Quite changed.

Arden:
You wished a change. To show you, how
I read you . . .

Astraea:
Oh! no, no. It means dissection.
I never heard of reading character
That did not mean dissection. Spare me that.
I am wilful, violent, capricious, weak,
Wound in a web of my own spinning-wheel,
A star-gazer, a riband in the wind . . .

Page 4612

Arden:
A banner in the wind! and me you lead,
And shall! At least, I follow till I win.

Astraea:
Forbear, I do beseech you.

Arden:
I have had
Your hand in mine.

Astraea:
Once.

Arden:
Once!
Once! 'twas; once, was the heart alive,
Leaping to break the ice. Oh! once, was aye
That laughed at frosty May like spring's return.
Say you are terrorized: you dare not melt.
You like me; you might love me; but to dare,
Tasks more than courage. Veneration, friends,
Self-worship, which is often self-distrust,
Bar the good way to you, and make a dream
A fortress and a prison.

Astraea:
Changed! you have changed
Indeed. When you so boldly seized my hand
It seemed a boyish freak, done boyishly.
I wondered at Professor Spiral's choice
Of you for an example, and our hope.
Now you grow dangerous. You must have thought,
And some things true you speak-save 'terrorized.'
It may be flattering to sweet self-love
To deem me terrorized.—'Tis my own soul,
My heart, my mind, all that I hold most sacred,
Not fear of others, bids me walk aloof.
Who terrorizes me? Who could? Friends? Never!
The world? as little. Terrorized!

Arden:
Forgive me.

Astraea:
I might reply, Respect me. If I loved,
If I could be so faithless as to love,
Think you I would not rather noise abroad
My shame for penitence than let friends dwell
Deluded by an image of one vowed
To superhuman, who the common mock
Of things too human has at heart become.

Arden:
You would declare your love?

Astraea:
I said, my shame.
The woman that's the widow is ensnared,
Caught in the toils! away with widows!—Oh!
I hear men shouting it.

Arden:
But shame there's none
For me in loving: therefore I may take
Your friends to witness? tell them that my pride
Is in the love of you?

Astraea:
'Twill soon bring
The silence that should be between us two,
And sooner give me peace.

Arden:
And you consent?

Astraea:
For the sake of peace and silence I consent,
You should be warned that you will cruelly
Disturb them. But 'tis best. You should be warned
Your pleading will be hopeless. But 'tis best.

Page 4613

You have my full consent. Weigh well your acts,
You cannot rest where you have cast this bolt
Lay that to heart, and you are cherished, prized,
Among them: they are estimable ladies,
Warmest of friends; though you may think they soar
Too loftily for your measure of strict sense
(And as my uncle Homeware's pupil, sir,
In worldliness, you do), just minds they have:
Once know them, and your banishment will fret.
I would not run such risks. You will offend,
Go near to outrage them; and perturbate
As they have not deserved of you. But I,
Considering I am nothing in the scales
You balance, quite and of necessity
Consent. When you have weighed it, let me hear.
My uncle Homeware steps this way in haste.
We have been talking long, and in full view!

Scene VII

Astraea, *Arden*, *Homeware*

Homeware:
Astraea, child! You, Arden, stand aside.
Ay, if she were a maid you might speak first,
But being a widow she must find her tongue.
Astraea, they await you. State the fact
As soon as you are questioned, fearlessly.
Open the battle with artillery.

Astraea:
What is the matter, uncle Homeware?

Homeware (playing fox):
What?
Why, we have watched your nice preliminaries
From the windows half the evening. Now run in.
Their patience has run out, and, as I said,
Unlimber and deliver fire at once.
Your aunts Virginia and Winifred,
With Lady Oldlace, are the senators,
The Dame for Dogs. They wear terrific brows,

But be not you affrighted, my sweet chick,
And tell them uncle Homeware backs your choice,
By lawyer and by priests! by altar, fount,
And testament!

Astraea:
My choice! what have I chosen?

Homeware:
She asks? You hear her, Arden?—what and whom!

Arden:
Surely, sir! . . . heavens! have you . . .

Homeware:
Surely the old fox,
In all I have read, is wiser than the young:
And if there is a game for fox to play,
Old fox plays cunningest.

Astraea:
Why fox? Oh! uncle,
You make my heart beat with your mystery;
I never did love riddles. Why sit they
Awaiting me, and looking terrible?

Homeware:
It is reported of an ancient folk
Which worshipped idols, that upon a day
Their idol pitched before them on the floor

Astraea:
Was ever so ridiculous a tale!

Page 4614

Homeware
To call the attendant fires to account
Their elders forthwith sat . . .

Astraea:
Is there no prayer
Will move you, uncle Homeware?

Homeware:
God-daughter,
This gentleman for you I have proposed
As husband.

Astraea:
Arden! we are lost.

Arden:
Astraea!
Support him! Though I knew not his design,
It plants me in mid-heaven. Would it were
Not you, but I to bear the shock. My love!
We lost, you cry; you join me with you lost!
The truth leaps from your heart: and let it shine
To light us on our brilliant battle day
And victory

Astraea:
Who betrayed me!

Homeware:
Who betrayed?
Your voice, your eyes, your veil, your knife and fork;
Your tenfold worship of your widowhood;
As he who sees he must yield up the flag,
Hugs it oath-swearingly! straw-drowningly.
To be reasonable: you sent this gentleman
Referring him to me . . . .

Astraea:
And that is false.
All's false. You have conspired. I am disgraced.
But you will learn you have judged erroneously.
I am not the frail creature you conceive.
Between your vision of life's aim, and theirs

Who presently will question me, I cling
To theirs as light: and yours I deem a den
Where souls can have no growth.

Homeware:
But when we touched
The point of hand-pressings, ’twas rightly time
To think of wedding ties?

Astraea:
Arden, adieu!

(She rushes into house.)

Scene viii

Arden, *Homeware*

Arden:
Adieu! she said. With her that word is final.

Homeware:
Strange! how young people blowing words like clouds
On winds, now fair, now foul, and as they please
Should still attach the Fates to them.

Arden:
She’s wounded
Wounded to the quick!

Homeware:
The quicker our success: for short
Of that, these dames, who feel for everything,
Feel nothing.

Arden:
Your intention has been kind,
Dear sir, but you have ruined me.

Homeware:
Good-night. (Going.)

Arden:
Yet she said, we are lost, in her surprise.

Homeware:
Good morning. (Returning.)

Page 4615

Arden:
I suppose that I am bound
(If I could see for what I should be glad!)
To thank you, sir.

Homeware:
Look hard but give no thanks.
I found my girl descending on the road
Of breakneck coquetry, and barred her way.
Either she leaps the bar, or she must back.
That means she marries you, or says good-bye.
(Going again.)

Arden:
Now she's among them. (Looking at window.)

Homeware:
Now she sees her mind.

Arden:
It is my destiny she now decides!

Homeware:
There's now suspense on earth and round the spheres.

Arden:
She's mine now: mine! or I am doomed to go.

Homeware:
The marriage ring, or the portmanteau now!

Arden:
Laugh as you like, air! I am not ashamed
To love and own it.

Homeware:
So the symptoms show.
Rightly, young man, and proving a good breed.
To further it's a duty to mankind
And I have lent my push, But recollect:
Old Ilion was not conquered in a day.
(He enters house.)

Arden:
Ten years! If I may win her at the end!

Curtain

Etext editor's bookmarks:

A great oration may be a sedative
A male devotee is within an inch of a miracle
Above Nature, I tell him, or, we shall be very much below
As in all great oratory! The key of it is the pathos
Back from the altar to discover that she has chained herself
Cupid clipped of wing is a destructive parasite
Excess of a merit is a capital offence in morality
His idea of marriage is, the taking of the woman into custody
I am a discordant instrument I do not readily vibrate
I like him, I like him, of course, but I want to breathe
I who respect the state of marriage by refusing
Love and war have been compared—Both require strategy
Peace, I do pray, for the husband-haunted wife
Period of his life a man becomes too voraciously constant
Pitiful conceit in men
Rejoicing they have in their common agreement
Self-worship, which is often self-distrust
Suspects all young men and most young women
Their idol pitched before them on the floor
Were I chained, For liberty I would sell liberty
Woman descending from her ideal to the gross reality of man
Your devotion craves an enormous exchange

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE

CONTENTS: INTRODUCTION TO W. M. THACKERAY'S "THE FOUR GEORGES" A PAUSE IN THE STRIFE. CONCESSION TO THE CELT. LESLIE STEPHEN. CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE SEAT OF WAR IN ITALY LETTERS WRITTEN TO THE 'MORNING POST' FROM THE SEAT OF WAR IN ITALY.

Page 4616

INTRODUCTION TO W. M. THACKERAY'S "THE FOUR GEORGES"

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta, July 18, 1811, the only child of Richmond and Anne Thackeray. He received the main part of his education at the Charterhouse, as we know to our profit. Thence he passed to Cambridge, remaining there from February 1829 to sometime in 1830. To judge by quotations and allusions, his favourite of the classics was Horace, the chosen of the eighteenth century, and generally the voice of its philosophy in a prosperous country. His voyage from India gave him sight of Napoleon on the rocky island. In his young manhood he made his bow reverentially to Goethe of Weimar; which did not check his hand from setting its mark on the sickliness of Werther.

He was built of an extremely impressionable nature and a commanding good sense. He was in addition a calm observer, having 'the harvest of a quiet eye.' Of this combination with the flood of subjects brought up to judgement in his mind, came the prevalent humour, the enforced disposition to satire, the singular critical drollery, notable in his works. His parodies, even those pushed to burlesque, are an expression of criticism and are more effective than the serious method, while they rarely overstep the line of justness. The Novels by Eminent Hands do not pervert the originals they exaggerate. 'Sieyes an abbe, now a ferocious lifeguardsman,' stretches the face of the rollicking Irish novelist without disfeaturing him; and the mysterious visitor to the palatial mansion in Holywell Street indicates possibilities in the Oriental imagination of the eminent statesman who stooped to conquer fact through fiction. Thackeray's attitude in his great novels is that of the composedly urbane lecturer, on a level with a select audience, assured of interesting, above requirements to excite. The slow movement of the narrative has a grace of style to charm like the dance of the Minuet de la Cour: it is the limpidity of Addison flavoured with salt of a racy vernacular; and such is the veri-similitude and the dialogue that they might seem to be heard from the mouths of living speakers. When in this way the characters of Vanity Fair had come to growth, their author was rightly appreciated as one of the creators in our literature, he took at once the place he will retain. With this great book and with Esmond and The Newcomes, he gave a name eminent, singular, and beloved to English fiction.

Charges of cynicism are common against all satirists, Thackeray had to bear with them. The social world he looked at did not show him heroes, only here and there a plain good soul to whom he was affectionate in the unhysterical way of an English father patting a son on the head. He described his world as an accurate observer saw it, he could not be dishonest. Not a page of his books reveals malevolence or a sneer at humanity. He was driven to the satirical task

Page 4617

by the scenes about him. There must be the moralist in the satirist if satire is to strike. The stroke is weakened and art violated when he comes to the front. But he will always be pressing forward, and Thackeray restrained him as much as could be done, in the manner of a good-humoured constable. Thackeray may have appeared cynical to the devout by keeping him from a station in the pulpit among congregations of the many convicted sinners. That the moralist would have occupied it and thundered had he presented us with the Fourth of the Georges we see when we read of his rejecting the solicitations of so seductive a personage for the satiric rod.

Himself one of the manliest, the kindliest of human creatures, it was the love of his art that exposed him to misinterpretation. He did stout service in his day. If the bad manners he scourged are now lessened to some degree we pay a debt in remembering that we owe much to him, and if what appears incurable remains with us, a continued reading of his works will at least help to combat it.

A PAUSE IN THE STRIFE—1886

Our ‘Eriniad,’ or ballad epic of the enfranchisement of the sister island is closing its first fytte for the singer, and with such result as those Englishmen who have some knowledge of their fellows foresaw. There are sufficient reasons why the Tories should always be able to keep together, but let them have the credit of cohesiveness and subordination to control. Though working for their own ends, they won the esteem of their allies, which will count for them in the struggles to follow. Their leaders appear to have seen what has not been distinctly perceptible to the opposite party—that the break up of the Liberals means the defection of the old Whigs in permanence, heralding the establishment of a powerful force against Radicalism, with a capital cry to the country. They have tactical astuteness. If they seem rather too proud of their victory, it is merely because, as becomes them, they do not look ahead. To rejoice in the gaining of a day, without having clear views of the morrow, is puerile enough. Any Tory victory, it may be said, is little more than a pause in the strife, unless when the Radical game is played ’to dish the Whigs,’ and the Tories are now fast bound down by their incorporation of the latter to abstain from the violent springs and right-about-facings of the Derby-Disraeli period. They are so heavily weighted by the new combination that their Jack-in-the-box, Lord Randolph, will have to stand like an ordinary sentinel on duty, and take the measurement of his natural size. They must, on the supposition of their entry into office, even to satisfy their own constituents, produce a scheme. Their majority in the House will command it.

Page 4618

To this extent, then, Mr. Gladstone has not been defeated. The question set on fire by him will never be extinguished until the combustible matter has gone to ashes. But personally he meets a sharp rebuff. The Tories may well raise hurrahs over that. Radicals have to admit it, and point to the grounds of it. Between a man's enemies and his friends there comes out a rough painting of his character, not without a resemblance to the final summary, albeit wanting in the justly delicate historical touch to particular features. On the one side he is abused as 'the one-man power'; lauded on the other for his marvellous intuition of the popular will. One can believe that he scarcely wishes to march dictatorially, and full surely his Egyptian policy was from step to step a misreading of the will of the English people. He went forth on this campaign, with the finger of Egypt not ineffectively levelled against him a second time. Nevertheless he does read his English; he has, too, the fatal tendency to the bringing forth of Bills in the manner of Jove big with Minerva. He perceived the necessity, and the issue of the necessity; clearly defined what must come, and, with a higher motive than the vanity with which his enemies charge him, though not with such high counsel as Wisdom at his ear, fell to work on it alone, produced the whole Bill alone, and then handed it to his Cabinet to digest, too much in love with the thing he had laid and incubated to permit of any serious dismemberment of its frame. Hence the disruption. He worked for the future, produced a Bill for the future, and is wrecked in the present. Probably he can work in no other way than from the impulse of his enthusiasm, solitarily. It is a way of making men overweeningly in love with their creations. The consequence is likely to be that Ireland will get her full measure of justice to appease her cravings earlier than she would have had as much from the United Liberal Cabinet, but at a cost both to her and to England. Meanwhile we are to have a House of Commons incapable of conducting public business; the tradesmen to whom the Times addressed pathetic condolences on the loss of their season will lose more than one; and we shall be made sensible that we have an enemy in our midst, until a people, slow to think, have taken counsel of their native generosity to put trust in the most generous race on earth.

CONCESSION TO THE CELT—1886

Things are quiet outside an ant-hill until the stick has been thrust into it. Mr. Gladstone's Bill for helping to the wiser government of Ireland has brought forth our busy citizens on the top-rubble in traversing counterswarms, and whatever may be said against a Bill that deals roughly with many sensitive interests, one asks whether anything less violently impressive would have roused industrious England to take this question at last into the mind, as a matter for settlement. The Liberal leader has driven

Page 4619

it home; and wantonly, in the way of a pedestrian demagogue, some think; certainly to the discomposure of the comfortable and the myopely busy, who prefer to live on with a disease in the frame rather than at all be stirred. They can, we see, pronounce a positive electoral negative; yet even they, after the eighty and odd years of our domestic perplexity, in the presence of the eighty and odd members pledged for Home Rule, have been moved to excited inquiries regarding measures—short of the obnoxious Bill. How much we suffer from sniffing the vain incense of that word practical, is contempt of prevision! Many of the measures now being proposed responsively to the fretful cry for them, as a better alternative to correction by force of arms, are sound and just. Ten years back, or at a more recent period before Mr. Parnell's triumph in the number of his followers, they would have formed a basis for the appeasement of the troubled land. The institution of county boards, the abolition of the detested Castle, something like the establishment of a Royal residence in Dublin, would have begun the work well. Materially and sentimentally, they were the right steps to take. They are now proposed too late. They are regarded as petty concessions, insufficient and vexatious. The lower and the higher elements in the population are fused by the enthusiasm of men who find themselves marching in full body on a road, under a flag, at the heels of a trusted leader; and they will no longer be fed with sops. Petty concessions are signs of weakness to the unsatisfied; they prick an appetite, they do not close breaches. If our object is, as we hear it said, to appease the Irish, we shall have to give them the Parliament their leader demands. It might once have been much less; it may be worried into a raving, perhaps a desperate wrestling, for still more. Nations pay Sibylline prices for want of forethought. Mr. Parnell's terms are embodied in Mr. Gladstone's Bill, to which he and his band have subscribed. The one point for him is the statutory Parliament, so that Ireland may civilly govern herself; and standing before the world as representative of his country, he addresses an applausive audience when he cites the total failure of England to do that business of government, as at least a logical reason for the claim. England has confessedly failed; the world says it, the country admits it. We have failed, and not because the so-called Saxon is incapable of understanding the Celt, but owing to our system, suitable enough to us, of rule by Party, which puts perpetually a shifting hand upon the reins, and invites the clamour it has to allay. The Irish—the English too in some degree—have been taught that roaring; in its various forms, is the trick to open the ears of Ministers. We have encouraged by irritating them to practise it, until it has become a habit, an hereditary profession with them. Ministers in turn have defensively adopted the arts of beguilement,

Page 4620

varied by an exercise of the police. We grew accustomed to periods of Irish fever. The exhaustion ensuing we named tranquillity, and hoped that it would bear fruit. But we did not plant. The Party in office directed its attention to what was uppermost and urgent—-to that which kicked them. Although we were living, by common consent; with a disease in the frame, eruptive at intervals, a national disfigurement always a danger, the Ministerial idea of arresting it for the purpose of healing was confined, before the passing of Mr. Gladstone's well-meant Land Bill, to the occasional despatch of commissions; and, in fine, we behold through History the Irish malady treated as a form of British constitutional gout. Parliament touched on the Irish only when the Irish were active as a virus. Our later alternations of cajolery and repression bear painful resemblance to the nervous fit of rickety riders compounding with their destinations that they may keep their seats. The cajolery was foolish, if an end was in view; the repression inefficient. To repress efficiently we have to stifle a conscience accusing us of old injustice, and forget that we are sworn to freedom. The cries that we have been hearing for Cromwell or for Bismarck prove the existence of an impatient faction in our midst fitter to wear the collars of those masters whom they invoke than to drop a vote into the ballot-box. As for the prominent politicians who have displaced their rivals partly on the strength of an implied approbation of those cries, we shall see how they illumine the councils of a governing people. They are wiser than the barking dogs. Cromwell and Bismarck are great names; but the harrying of Ireland did not settle it, and to Germanize a Posen and call it peace will find echo only in the German tongue. Posen is the error of a master-mind too much given to hammer at obstacles. He has, however, the hammer. Can it be imagined in English hands? The braver exemplar for grappling with monstrous political tasks is Cavour, and he would not have hinted at the iron method or the bayonet for a pacification. Cavour challenged debate; he had faith in the active intellect, and that is the thing to be prayed for by statesmen who would register permanent successes. The Irish, it is true, do not conduct an argument coolly. Mr. Parnell and his eighty-five have not met the Conservative leader and his following in the Commons with the gravity of platonic disputants. But they have a logical position, equivalent to the best of arguments. They are representatives, they would say, of a country admittedly ill-governed by us; and they have accepted the Bill of the defeated Minister as final. Its provisions are their terms of peace. They offer in return for that boon to take the burden we have groaned under off our hands. If we answer that we think them insincere, we accuse these thrice accredited representatives of the Irish people of being hypocrites and crafty conspirators; and numbers in England, affected

Page 4621

by the weapons they have used to get to their present strength, do think it; forgetful that our obtuseness to their constant appeals forced them into the extremer shifts of agitation. Yet it will hardly be denied that these men love Ireland; and they have not shown themselves by their acts to be insane. To suppose them conspiring for separation indicates a suspicion that they have neither hearts nor heads. For Ireland, separation is immediate ruin. It would prove a very short sail for these conspirators before the ship went down. The vital necessity of the Union for both, countries, obviously for the weaker of the two, is known to them; and unless we resume our exasperation of the wild fellow the Celt can be made by such a process, we have not rational grounds for treating him, or treating with him, as a Bedlamite. He has besides his passions shrewd sense; and his passions may be rightly directed by benevolent attraction. This is language derided by the victorious enemy; it speaks nevertheless what the world, and even troubled America, thinks of the Irish Celt. More of it now on our side of the Channel would be serviceable. The notion that he hates the English comes of his fevered chafing against the harness of England, and when subject to his fevers, he is unrestrained in his cries and deeds. That pertains to the nature of him. Of course, if we have no belief in the virtues of friendliness and confidence—none in regard to the Irishman—we show him his footing, and we challenge the issue. For the sole alternative is distinct antagonism, a form of war. Mr. Gladstone's Bill has brought us to that definite line. Ireland having given her adhesion to it, swearing that she does so in good faith, and will not accept a smaller quantity, peace is only to be had by our placing trust in the Irish; we trust them or we crush them. Intermediate ways are but the prosecution of our ugly flounderings in Bogland; and dubious as we see the choice on either side, a decisive step to right or left will not show us to the world so bemired, to ourselves so miserably inefficient, as we appear in this session of a new Parliament. With his eighty-five, apart from external operations lawful or not, Mr. Parnell can act as a sort of lumbricus in the House. Let journalists watch and chronicle events: if Mr. Gladstone has humour, they will yet note a peculiar smile on his closed mouth from time to time when the alien body within the House, from which, for the sake of its dignity and ability to conduct its affairs, he would have relieved it till the day of a warmer intelligence between Irish and English, paralyzes our machinery business. An ably-handled coherent body in the midst of the liquid groups will make it felt that Ireland is a nation, naturally dependent though she must be. We have to do with forces in politics, and the great majority of the Irish Nationalists in Ireland has made them a force.

Page 4622

No doubt Mr. Matthew Arnold is correct in his apprehensions of the dangers we may fear from a Dublin House of Commons. The declarations and novel or ultra theories might almost be written down beforehand. I should, for my part, anticipate a greater danger in the familiar attitude of the English metropolitan Press and public toward an experiment they dislike and incline to dread:—the cynical comments, the quotations between inverted commas, the commiserating shrug, cold irony, raw banter, growl of menace, sharp snap, rounds of laughter. Frenchmen of the Young Republic, not presently appreciated as offensive, have had some of these careless trifles translated for them, and have been stung. We favoured Germany with them now and then, before Germany became the first power in Europe. Before America had displayed herself as greatest among the giants that do not go to pieces, she had, as Americans forgivingly remember, without mentioning, a series of flicks of the whip. It is well to learn manners without having them imposed on us. There are various ways for tripping the experiment. Nevertheless, when the experiment is tried, considering that our welfare is involved in its not failing, as we have failed, we should prepare to start it cordially, cordially assist it. Thoughtful political minds regard the measure as a backward step; yet conceiving but a prospect that a measure accepted by Home Rulers will possibly enable the Irish and English to step together, it seems better worth the venture than to pursue a course of prospectless discord! Whatever we do or abstain from doing has now its evident dangers, and this being imminent may appear the larger of them; but if a weighing of the conditions dictates it, and conscience approves, the wiser proceeding is to make trial of the untried. Our outlook was preternaturally black, with enormous increase of dangers when the originator of our species venturesomely arose from the posture of the ‘quatre pattes’. We consider that we have not lost by his temerity. In states of dubitation under impelling elements, the instinct pointing to courageous action is, besides the manlier, conjecturably the right one.

LESLIE STEPHEN—1904

When that noble body of scholarly and cheerful pedestrians, the Sunday Tramps, were on the march, with Leslie Stephen to lead them, there was conversation which would have made the presence of a shorthand writer a benefaction to the country. A pause to it came at the examination of the leader’s watch and Ordnance map under the western sun, and void was given for the strike across country to catch the tail of a train offering dinner in London, at the cost of a run through hedges, over ditches and fellows, past proclamation against trespassers, under suspicion of being taken for more serious depredators in flight. The chief of the Tramps had a wonderful calculating eye in the observation of distances and the nature

Page 4623

of the land, as he proved by his discovery of untried passes in the higher Alps, and he had no mercy for pursy followers. I have often said of this life-long student and philosophical head that he had in him the making of a great military captain. He would not have been opposed to the profession of arms if he had been captured early for the service, notwithstanding his abomination of bloodshed. He had a high, calm courage, was unperturbed in a dubious position, and would confidently take the way out of it which he conceived to be the better. We have not to deplore that he was diverted from the ways of a soldier, though England, as the country has been learning of late, cannot boast of many in uniform who have capacity for leadership. His work in literature will be reviewed by his lieutenant of Tramps, one of the ablest of writers!—[Frederic W. Maitland.]—The memory of it remains with us, as being the profoundest and the most sober criticism we have had in our time. The only sting in it was an inoffensive humorous irony that now and then stole out for a roll over, like a furry cub, or the occasional ripple on a lake in grey weather. We have nothing left that is like it.

One might easily fall into the pit of panegyric by an enumeration of his qualities, personal and literary. It would not be out of harmony with the temper and characteristics of a mind so equable. He, the equable, whether in condemnation or eulogy. Our loss of such a man is great, for work was in his brain, and the hand was active till close upon the time when his breathing ceased. The loss to his friends can be replaced only by an imagination that conjures him up beside them. That will be no task to those who have known him well enough to see his view of things as they are, and revive his expression of it. With them he will live despite the word farewell.

Correspondencefrom the seat of war in Italy

Letters written to the morning post from the seat of war in Italy from our own correspondent

Ferrara, June 22, 1866.

Before this letter reaches London the guns will have awakened both the echo of the old river Po and the classical Mincio. The whole of the troops, about 110,000 men, with which Cialdini intends to force the passage of the first-named river are already massed along the right bank of the Po, anxiously waiting that the last hour of to-morrow should strike, and that the order for action should be given. The telegraph will have already informed your readers that, according to the intimation sent by General Lamarmora on Tuesday evening to the Austrian headquarters, the three days fixed by the general's message before beginning hostilities will expire at twelve p.m. of the 23rd of June.

Page 4624

Cialdini's headquarters have been established in this city since Wednesday morning, and the famous general, in whom the fourth corps he commands, and the whole of the nation, has so much confidence, has concentrated the whole of his forces within a comparatively narrow compass, and is ready for action. I believe therefore that by to-morrow the right bank of the Po will be connected with the mainland of the Polesine by several pontoon bridges, which will enable Cialdini's corps d'armee to cross the river, and, as everybody here hopes, to cross it in spite of any defence the Austrians may make.

On my way to this ancient city last evening I met General Cadogan and two superior Prussian officers, who by this time must have joined Victor Emmanuel's headquarters at Cremona; if not, they have been by this time transferred elsewhere, more on the front, towards the line of the Mincio, on which, according to appearance, the first, second, and third Italian corps d'armee seem destined to operate. The English general and the two Prussian officers above mentioned are to follow the king's staff, the first as English commissioner, the superior in rank of the two others in the same capacity.

I have been told here that, before leaving Bologna, Cialdini held a general council of the commanders of the seven divisions of which his powerful corps d'armee is formed, and that he told them that, in spite of the forces the enemy has massed on the left bank of the Po, between the point which faces Stellata and Rovigo, the river must be crossed by his troops, whatever might be the sacrifice this important operation requires. Cialdini is a man who knows how to keep his word, and, for this reason, I have no doubt he will do what he has already made up his mind to accomplish. I am therefore confident that before two or three days have elapsed, these 110,000 Italian troops, or a great part of them, will have trod, for the Italians, the sacred land of Venetia.

Once the river Po crossed by Cialdini's corps d'armee, he will boldly enter the Polesine and make himself master of the road which leads by Rovigo towards Este and Padua. A glance at the map will show your readers how, at about twenty or thirty miles from the first-mentioned town, a chain of hills, called the Colli Euganei, stretches itself from the last spur of the Julian Alps, in the vicinity of Vicenza, gently sloping down towards the sea. As this line affords good positions for contesting the advance of an army crossing the Po at Lago Scuro, or at any other point not far from it, it is to be supposed that the Austrians will make a stand there, and I should not be surprised at all that Cialdini's first battle, if accepted by the enemy, should take place within that comparatively narrow ground which is within Montagnana, Este, Terradura, Abano, and Padua. It is impossible to suppose that Cialdini's corps d'armee, being so large, is destined to cross the Po only at one point of the river below

Page 4625

its course: it is extremely likely that part of it should cross it at some point above, between Revere and Stellata, where the river is in two or three instances only 450 metres wide. Were the Italian general to be successful—protected as he will be by the tremendous fire of the powerful artillery he disposes of—in these twofold operations, the Austrians defending the line of the Colli Euganei could be easily outflanked by the Italian troops, who would have crossed the river below Lago Scuro. Of course these are mere suppositions, for nobody, as you may imagine, except the king, Cialdini himself, Lamarmora, Pettiti, and Menabrea, is acquainted with the plan of the forthcoming campaign. There was a rumour at Cialdini's headquarters to-day that the Austrians had gathered in great numbers in the Polesine, and especially at Rovigo, a small town which they have strongly fortified of late, with an apparent design to oppose the crossing of the Po, were Cialdini to attempt it at or near Lago Scuro. There are about Rovigo large tracts of marshes and fields cut by ditches and brooks, which, though owing to the dryness of the season [they] cannot be, as it was generally believed two weeks ago, easily inundated, yet might well aid the operations the Austrians may undertake in order to check the advance of the Italian fourth corps d'armee. The resistance to the undertaking of Cialdini may be, on the part of the Austrians, very stout, but I am almost certain that it will be overcome by the ardour of Italian troops, and by the skill of their illustrious leader.

As I told you above, the declaration of war was handed over to an Austrian major for transmission to Count Stancowick, the Austrian governor of Mantua, on the evening of the 19th, by Colonel Bariola, sous-chef of the general staff, who was accompanied by the Duke Luigi of Sant' Arpino, the husband of the amiable widow of Lord Burghersh. The duke is the eldest son of Prince San Teodoro, one of the wealthiest noblemen of Naples. In spite of his high position and of his family ties, the Duke of Sant' Arpino, who is well known in London fashionable society, entered as a volunteer in the Italian army, and was appointed orderly officer to General Lamarmora. The choice of such a gentleman for the mission I am speaking of was apparently made with intention, in order to show the Austrians, that the Neapolitan nobility is as much interested in the national movement as the middle and lower classes of the Kingdom, once so fearfully misruled by the Bourbons. The Duke of Sant' Arpino is not the only Neapolitan nobleman who has enlisted in the Italian army since the war with Austria broke out. In order to show you the importance which must be given to this pronunciamiento of the Neapolitan noblemen, allow me to give you here a short list of the names of those of them who have enlisted as private soldiers in the cavalry regiments of the regular army: The Duke of Policastro; the Count of Savignano Guevara, the eldest son of the Duke of

Page 4626

Bovino; the Duke d'Ozia d'Angri, who had emigrated in 1860, and returned to Naples six months ago; Marquis Rivadebro Serra; Marquis Pisicelli, whose family had left Naples in 1860 out of devotion to Francis *ii*.; two Carraciolos, of the historical family from which sprung the unfortunate Neapolitan admiral of this name, whose head Lord Nelson would have done better not to have sacrificed to the cruelty of Queen Caroline; Prince Carini, the representative of an illustrious family of Sicily, a nephew of the Marquis del Vasto; and Pescara, a descendant of that great general of Charles V., to whom the proud Francis I. of France was obliged to surrender and give up his sword at the battle of Pavia. Besides these Neapolitan noblemen who have enlisted of late as privates, the Italian army now encamped on the banks of the Po and of the Mincio may boast of two Colonnas, a prince of Somma, two Barons Renzi, an Acquaviva, of the Duke of Atri, two Capece, two Princes Buttera, *etc*. To return to the mission of Colonel Bariola and the Duke of Sant' Arpino, I will add some details which were told me this morning by a gentleman who left Cremona yesterday evening, and who had them from a reliable source. The messenger of General Lamarmora had been directed to proceed from Cremona to the small village of Le Grazie, which, on the line of the Mincio, marks the Austrian and Italian frontier.

On the right bank of the Lake of Mantua, in the year 1340, stood a small chapel containing a miraculous painting of the Madonna, called by the people of the locality 'Santa Maria delle Grazie.' The boatmen and fishermen of the Mincio, who had been, as they said, often saved from certain death by the Madonna—as famous in those days as the modern Lady of Rimini, celebrated for the startling feat of winking her eyes—-determined to erect for her a more worthy abode.

Hence arose the Santuario delle Grazie. Here, as at Loretto and other holy localities of Italy, a fair is held, in which, amongst a great number of worldly things, rosaries, holy images, and other miraculous objects are sold, and astounding boons are said to be secured at the most trifling expense. The Santuario della Madonna delle Grazie enjoying a far-spread reputation, the dumb, deaf, blind, and halt-in short, people afflicted with all sorts of infirmities—flock thither during the fair, and are not wanting even on the other days of the year. The church of Le Grazie is one of the most curious of Italy. Not that there is anything remarkable in its architecture, for it is an Italian Gothic structure of the simplest style. But the ornamental part of the interior is most peculiar. The walls of the building are covered with a double row of wax statues, of life size, representing a host of warriors, cardinals, bishops, kings, and popes, who—as the story runs—pretended to have received some wonderful grace during their earthly existence. Amongst the grand array of illustrious personages, there are

Page 4627

not a few humbler individuals whose history is faithfully told (if you choose to credit it) by the painted inscriptions below. There is even a convict, who, at the moment of being hanged, implored succour of the all-powerful Madonna, whereupon the beam of the gibbet instantly broke, and the worthy individual was restored to society—a very doubtful benefit after all. On Colonel Bariola and the Duke of Sant' Arpino arriving at this place, which is only five miles distant from Mantua, their carriage was naturally stopped by the commissaire of the Austrian police, whose duty was to watch the frontier. Having told him that they had a despatch to deliver either to the military governor of Mantua or to some officer sent by him to receive it, the commissaire at once despatched a mounted gendarme to Mantua. Two hours had scarcely elapsed when a carriage drove into the village of Le Grazie, from which an Austrian major of infantry alighted and hastened to a wooden hut where the two Italian officers were waiting. Colonel Bariola, who was trained in the Austrian military school of Viller Nashstad, and regularly left the Austrian service in 1848, acquainted the newly-arrived major with his mission, which was that of delivering the sealed despatch to the general in command of Mantua and receiving for it a regular receipt. The despatch was addressed to the Archduke Albert, commander-in-chief of the Austrian army of the South, care of the governor of Mantua. After the major had delivered the receipt, the three messengers entered into a courteous conversation, during which Colonel Bariola seized an opportunity of presenting the duke, purposely laying stress on the fact of his belonging to one of the most illustrious families of Naples. It happened that the Austrian major had also been trained in the same school where Colonel Bariola was brought up—a circumstance of which he was reminded by the Austrian officer himself. Three hours had scarcely elapsed from the arrival of the two Italian messengers of war at Le Grazie, on the Austrian frontier, when they were already on their way back to the headquarters of Cremona, where during the night the rumour was current that a telegram had been received by Lamarmora from Verona, in which Archduke Albert accepted the challenge. Victor Emmanuel, whom I saw at Bologna yesterday, arrived at Cremona in the morning at two o'clock, but by this time his Majesty's headquarters must have removed more towards the front, in the direction of the Oglio. I should not be at all surprised were the Italian headquarters to be established by to-morrow either at Piubega or Gazzoldo, if not actually at Goito, a village, as you know, which marks the Italian-Austrian frontier on the Mincio. The whole of the first, second, and third Italian corps d'armee are by this time concentrated within that comparatively narrow space which lies between the position of Castiglione, Delle Stiviere, Lorrato, and Desenzano, on the Lake of Garda, and Solferino on one side; Piubega, Gazzoldo,

Page 4628

Sacca, Goito, and Castellucchio on the other. Are these three corps d'armee to attack when they hear the roar of Cialdini's artillery on the right bank of the Po? Are they destined to force the passage of the Mincio either at Goito or at Borghetto? or are they destined to invest Verona, storm Peschiera, and lay siege to Mantua? This is more than I can tell you, for, I repeat it, the intentions of the Italian leaders are enveloped in a veil which nobody—the Austrians included—has as yet been able to penetrate. One thing, however, is certain, and it is this, that as the clock of Victor Emmanuel marks the last minute of the seventy-second hour fixed by the declaration delivered at Le Grazie on Wednesday by Colonel Bariola to the Austrian major, the fair land where Virgil was born and Tasso was imprisoned will be enveloped by a thick cloud of the smoke of hundreds and hundreds of cannon. Let us hope that God will be in favour of right and justice, which, in this imminent and fierce struggle, is undoubtedly on the Italian side.

Cremona, June 30, 1866.

The telegraph will have already informed you of the concentration of the Italian army, whose headquarters have since Tuesday been removed from Redondesco to Piadena, the king having chosen the adjacent villa of Cigognolo for his residence. The concentrating movements of the royal army began on the morning of the 27th, *i.e*., three days after the bloody fait d'armes of the 24th, which, narrated and commented on in different manners according to the interests and passions of the narrators, still remains for many people a mystery. At the end of this letter you will see that I quote a short phrase with which an Austrian major, now prisoner of war, portrayed the results of the fierce struggle fought beyond the Mincio. This officer is one of the few survivors of a regiment of Austrian volunteers, uhlans, two squadrons of which he himself commanded. The declaration made by this officer was thoroughly explicit, and conveys the exact idea of the valour displayed by the Italians in that terrible fight. Those who incline to overrate the advantages obtained by the Austrians on Sunday last must not forget that if Lamarmora had thought proper to persist in holding the positions of Valeggio, Volta, and Goito, the Austrians could not have prevented him. It seems the Austrian general-in-chief shared this opinion, for, after his army had carried with terrible sacrifices the positions of Monte Vento and Custozza, it did not appear, nor indeed did the Austrians then give any signs, that they intended to adopt a more active system of warfare. It is the business of a commander to see that after a victory the fruit of it should not be lost, and for this reason the enemy is pursued and molested, and time is not left him for reorganization. Nothing of this happened after the 24th—nothing has been done by the Austrians to secure such results. The frontier which separates the two dominions is now

Page 4629

the same as it was on the eve of the declaration of war. At Goito, at Monzambano, and in the other villages of the extreme frontier, the Italian authorities are still discharging their duties. Nothing is changed in those places, were we to except that now and then an Austrian cavalry party suddenly makes its appearance, with the only object of watching the movements of the Italian army. One of these parties, formed by four squadrons of the Wurtemberg hussar regiment, having advanced at six o'clock this morning on the right bank of the Mincio, met the fourth squadron of the Italian lancers of Foggia and were beaten back, and compelled to retire in disorder towards Goito and Rivolta. In this unequal encounter the Italian lancers distinguished themselves very much, made some Austrian hussars prisoners, and killed a few more, amongst whom was an officer. The same state of thing, prevails at Rivottella, a small village on the shores of the Lake of Garda, about four miles distant from the most advanced fortifications of Peschiera. There, as elsewhere, some Austrian parties advanced with the object of watching the movements of the Garibaldians, who occupy the hilly ground, which from Castiglione, Eseuta, and Cartel Venzago stretches to Lonato, Salo, and Desenzano, and to the mountain passes of Caffaro. In the last-named place the Garibaldians came to blows with the Austrians on the morning of the 28th, and the former got the best of the fray. Had the fait d'armes of the 24th, or the battle of Custozza, as Archduke Albrecht calls it, been a great victory for the Austrians, why should the imperial army remain in such inaction? The only conclusion we must come to is simply this, that the Austrian losses have been such as to induce the commander-in-chief of the army to act prudently on the defensive. We are now informed that the charges of cavalry which the Austrian lancers and the Hungarian hussars had to sustain near Villafranca on the 24th with the Italian horsemen of the Aorta and Alessandria regiments have been so fatal to the former that a whole division of the Kaiser cavalry must be reorganised before it can be brought into the field main.

The regiment of Haller hussars and two of volunteer uhlans were almost destroyed in that terrible charge. To give you an idea of this cavalry encounter, it is sufficient to say that Colonel Vandoni, at the head of the Aorta regiment he commands, charged fourteen times during the short period of four hours. The volunteer uhlans of the Kaiser regiment had already given up the idea of breaking through the square formed by the battalion, in the centre of which stood Prince Humbert of Savoy, when they were suddenly charged and literally cut to pieces by the Alessandria light cavalry, in spite of the long lances they carried. This weapon and the loose uniform they wear makes them resemble the Cossacks of the Don. There is one circumstance, which, if I am not mistaken, has not as yet been published by the newspapers, and it

Page 4630

is this. There was a fight on the 25th on a place at the north of Roverbella, between the Italian regiment of Novara cavalry and a regiment of Hungarian hussars, whose name is not known. This regiment was so thoroughly routed by the Italians that it was pursued as far as Villafranca, and had two squadrons put hors de combat, whilst the Novara regiment only lost twenty-four mounted men. I think it right to mention this, for it proves that, the day after the bloody affair of the 24th, the Italian army had still a regiment of cavalry operating at Villafranca, a village which lay at a distance of fifteen kilometres from the Italian frontier. A report, which is much accredited here, explains how the Italian army did not derive the advantages it might have derived from the action of the 24th. It appears that the orders issued from the Italian headquarters during the previous night, and especially the verbal instructions given by Lamarmora and Pettiti to the staff officers of the different army corps, were either forgotten or misunderstood by those officers. Those sent to Durando, the commander of the first corps, seem to have been as follows: That he should have marched in the direction of Castelnuovo, without, however, taking part in the action. Durando, it is generally stated, had strictly adhered to the orders sent from the headquarters, but it seems that General Cerale understood them too literally. Having been ordered to march on Castelnuovo, and finding the village strongly held by the Austrians, who received his division with a tremendous fire, he at once engaged in the action instead of falling back on the reserve of the first corps and waiting new instructions. If such was really the case, it is evident that Cerale thought that the order to march which he had received implied that he was to attack and get possession of Castelnuovo, had this village, as it really was, already been occupied by the enemy. In mentioning this fact I feel bound to observe that I write it under the most complete reserve, for I should be sorry indeed to charge General Cerale with having misunderstood such an important order.

I see that one of your leading contemporaries believes that it would be impossible for the king or Lamarmora to say what result they expected from their ill-conceived and worse-executed attempt. The result they expected is, I think, clear enough; they wanted to break through the quadrilateral and make their junction with Cialdini, who was ready to cross the Po during the night of the 24th. That the attempt was ill-conceived and worse-executed, neither your contemporary nor the public at large has, for the present, the right to conclude, for no one knows as yet but imperfectly the details of the terrible fight. What is certain, however, is that General Durando, perceiving that the Cerale division was lost, did all that he could to help it. Failing in this he turned to his two aides-de-camp and coolly said to them:

Page 4631

'Now, gentlemen, it is time for you to retire, for I have a duty to perform which is a strictly personal one—the duty of dying.' On saying these words he galloped to the front and placed himself at about twenty paces from a battalion of Austrian sharp-shooters which were ascending the hill. In less than five minutes his horse was killed under him, and he was wounded in the right hand. I scarcely need add that his aides-de-camp did not flinch from sharing Durando's fate. They bravely followed their general, and one, the Marquis Corbetta, was wounded in the leg; the other, Count Esengrini, had his horse shot under him. I called on Durando, who is now at Milan, the day before yesterday. Though a stranger to him, he received me at once, and, speaking of the action of the 24th, he only said: 'I have the satisfaction of having done my duty. I wait tranquilly the judgement of history.'

Assuming, for argument's sake, that General Cerale misunderstood the orders he had received, and that, by precipitating his movement, he dragged into the same mistake the whole of Durando's corps—assuming, I say, this to be the right version, you can easily explain the fact that neither of the two contending parties are as yet in a position clearly to describe the action of the 24th. Why did neither the one nor the other display and bring into action the whole forces they could have had at their disposal? Why so many partial engagements at a great distance one from the other? In a word, why that want of unity, which, in my opinion, constituted the paramount characteristic of that bloody struggle? I may be greatly mistaken, but I am of opinion that neither the Italian general-in-chief nor the Austrian Archduke entertained on the night of the 23rd the idea of delivering a battle on the 24th. There, and only there, lies the whole mystery of the affair. The total want of unity of action on the part of the Italians assured to the Austrians, not the victory, but the chance of rendering impossible Lamarmora's attempt to break through the quadrilateral. This no one can deny; but, on the other hand, if the Italian army failed in attaining its object, the failure-owing to the bravery displayed both by the soldiers and by the generals-was far from being a disastrous or irreparable one. The Italians fought from three o'clock in the morning until nine in the evening like lions, showing to their enemies and to Europe that they know how to defend their country, and that they are worthy of the noble enterprise they have undertaken.

But let me now register one of the striking episodes of that memorable day. It was five o'clock p.m. when General Bixio, whose division held an elevated position not far from Villafranca, was attacked by three strong Austrian brigades, which had debouched at the same time from three different roads, supported with numerous artillery. An officer of the Austrian staff, waving a white handkerchief, was seen galloping

Page 4632

towards the front of Bixio's position, and, once in the presence of this general, bade him surrender. Those who are not personally acquainted with Bixio cannot form an idea of the impression this bold demand must have made on him. I have been told that, on hearing the word 'surrender,' his face turned suddenly pale, then flushed like purple, and darting at the Austrian messenger, said, 'Major, if you dare to pronounce once more the word surrender in my presence, I tell you—and Bixio always keeps his word—that I will have you shot at once.' The Austrian officer had scarcely reached the general who had sent him, than Bixio, rapidly moving his division, fell with such impetuosity on the Austrian column, which were ascending the hill, that they were thrown pellmell in the valley, causing the greatest confusion amongst their reserve. Bixio himself led his men, and with his aides-de-camp, Cavaliere Filippo Fermi, Count Martini, and Colonel Malenchini, all Tuscans, actually charged the enemy. I have been told that, on hearing this episode, Garibaldi said, 'I am not at all surprised, for Bixio is the best general I have made.' Once the enemy was repulsed, Bixio was ordered to manoeuvre so as to cover the backward movement of the army, which was orderly and slowly retiring on the Mincio. Assisted by the co-operation of the heavy cavalry, commanded by General Count de Sonnaz, Bixio covered the retreat, and during the night occupied Goito, a position which he held till the evening of the 27th.

In consequence of the concentrating movement of the Italian army which I have mentioned at the beginning of this letter, the fourth army corps (Cialdini's) still holds the line of the Po. If I am rightly informed, the decree for the formation of the fourth army corps was signed by the king yesterday. This corps is that of Garibaldi, and is about 40,000 strong. An officer who has just returned from Milan told me this morning that he had had an opportunity of speaking with the Austrian prisoners sent from Milan to the fortress of Finestrelle in Piedmont. Amongst them was an officer of a uhlan regiment, who had all the appearance of belonging to some aristocratic family of Austrian Poland. Having been asked if he thought Austria had really gained the battle on the 24th, he answered: 'I do not know if the illusions of the Austrian army go so far as to induce it to believe it has obtained a victory—I do not believe it. He who loves Austria cannot, however, wish she should obtain such victories, for they are the victories of Pyrrhus!

There is at Verona some element in the Austrian councils of war which we don't understand, but which gives to their operations in this present phase of the campaign just as uncertain and as vacillating a character as it possessed during the campaign of 1859. On Friday they are still beyond the Mincio, and on Saturday their small fleet on the Lake of Garda steams up to Desenzano, and opens fire against this defenceless

Page 4633

city and her railway station, whilst two battalions of Tyrolese sharp-shooters occupy the building. On Sunday they retire, but early yesterday they cross the Mincio, at Goito and Monzambano, and begin to throw two bridges over the same river, between the last-named place and the mills of Volta. At the same time they erect batteries at Goito, Torrione, and Valeggio, pushing their reconnoitring parties of hussars as far as Medole, Castiglione delle Stiviere, and Montechiara, this last-named place being only at a distance of twenty miles from Brescia. Before this news reached me here this morning I was rather inclined to believe that they were playing at hide-and-seek, in the hope that the leaders of the Italian army should be tempted by the game and repeat, for the second time, the too hasty attack on the quadrilateral. This news, which I have from a reliable source, has, however, changed my former opinion, and I begin to believe that the Austrian Archduke has really made up his mind to come out from the strongholds of the quadrilateral, and intends actually to begin war on the very battlefields where his imperial cousin was beaten on the 24th June 1859. It may be that the partial disasters sustained by Benedek in Germany have determined the Austrian Government to order a more active system of war against Italy, or, as is generally believed here, that the organisation of the commissariat was not perfect enough with the army Archduke Albert commands to afford a more active and offensive action. Be that as it may, the fact is that the news received here from several parts of Upper Lombardy seems to indicate, on the part of the Austrians, the intention of attacking their adversaries.

Yesterday whilst the peaceable village of Gazzoldo—five Italian miles from Goito—was still buried in the silence of night it was occupied by 400 hussars, to the great consternation of the people who were roused from their sleep by the galloping of their unexpected visitors. The sindaco, or mayor of the village, who is the chemist of the place, was, I hear, forcibly taken from his house and compelled to escort the Austrians on the road leading to Piubega and Redondesco. This worthy magistrate, who was not apparently endowed with sufficient courage to make at least half a hero, was so much frightened that he was taken ill, and still is in a very precarious condition. These inroads are not always accomplished with impunity, for last night, not far from Guidizzuolo, two squadrons of Italian light cavalry—Cavalleggieri di Lucca, if I am rightly informed—at a sudden turn of the road leading from the last-named village to Cerlongo, found themselves almost face to face with four squadrons of uhlans. The Italians, without numbering their foes, set spurs to their horses and fell like thunder on the Austrians, who, after a fight which lasted more than half an hour, were put to flight, leaving on the ground fifteen men hors de combat, besides twelve prisoners.

Page 4634

Whilst skirmishing of this kind is going on in the flat ground of Lombardy which lies between the Mincio and the Chiese, a more decisive action has been adopted by the Austrian corps which is quartered in the Italian Tyrol and Valtellina. A few days ago it was generally believed that the mission of this corps was only to oppose Garibaldi should he try to force those Alpine passes. But now we suddenly hear that the Austrians are already masters of Caffaro, Bagolino, Riccomassino, and Turano, which points they are fortifying. This fact explains the last movements made by Garibaldi towards that direction. But whilst the Austrians are massing their troops on the Tyrolese Alps the revolution is spreading fast in the more southern mountains of the Friuli and Cadorre, thus threatening the flank and rear of their army in Venetia. This revolutionary movement may not have as yet assumed great proportions, but as it is the effect of a plan proposed beforehand it might become really imposing, more so as the ranks of those Italian patriots are daily swollen by numerous deserters and refractory men of the Venetian regiments of the Austrian army.

Although the main body of the Austrians seems to be still concentrated between Peschiera and Verona, I should not wonder if they crossed the Mincio either to-day or to-morrow, with the object of occupying the heights of Volta, Cavriana, and Solferino, which, both by their position and by the nature of the ground, are in themselves so many fortresses. Supposing that the Italian army should decide for action—and there is every reason to believe that such will be the case—it is not unlikely that, as we had already a second battle at Custozza, we may have a second one at Solferino.

That at the Italian headquarters something has been decided upon which may hasten the forward movement of the army, I infer from the fact that the foreign military commissioners at the Italian headquarters, who, after the 24th June had gone to pass the leisure of their camp life at Cremona, have suddenly made their appearance at Torre Malamberti, a villa belonging to the Marquis Araldi, where Lamarmora's staff is quartered. A still more important event is the presence of Baron Ricasoli, whom I met yesterday evening on coming here. The President of the Council was coming from Florence, and, after stopping a few hours at the villa of Cicognolo, where Victor Emmanuel and the royal household are staying, he drove to Torre Malamberti to confer with General Lamarmora and Count Pettiti. The presence of the baron at headquarters is too important an incident to be overlooked by people whose business is that of watching the course of events in this country. And it should be borne in mind that on his way to headquarters Baron Ricasoli stopped a few hours at Bologna, where he had a long interview with Cialdini. Nor is this all; for the most important fact I have to report to-day is, that whilst I am writing (five o'clock a.m.) three corps of the Italian

Page 4635

army are crossing the Oglio at different points—all three acting together and ready for any occurrence. This reconnaissance en force may, as you see, be turned into a regular battle should the Austrians have crossed the Mincio with the main body of their army during the course of last night. You see that the air around me smells enough of powder to justify the expectation of events which are likely to exercise a great influence over the cause of right and justice—the cause of Italy.

Marcaria, July 3, Evening.

Murray's guide will save me the trouble of telling you what this little and dirty hole of Marcaria is like. The river Oglio runs due south, not far from the village, and cuts the road which from Bozzolo leads to Mantua. It is about seven miles from Castellucchio, a town which, since the peace of Villafranca, marked the Italian frontier in Lower Lombardy. Towards this last-named place marched this morning the eleventh division of the Italians under the command of General Angioletti, only a month ago Minister of the Marine in Lamarmora's Cabinet. Angioletti's division of the second corps was, in the case of an attack, to be supported by the fourth and eighth, which had crossed the Oglio at Gazzuolo four hours before the eleventh had started from the place from which I am now writing. Two other divisions also moved in an oblique line from the upper course of the above-mentioned river, crossed it on a pontoon bridge, and were directed to maintain their communications with Angioletti's on the left, whilst the eighth and fourth would have formed its right. These five divisions were the avant garde of the main body of the Italian army. I am not in a position to tell you the exact line the army thus advancing from the Oglio has followed, but I have been told that, in order to avoid the possibility of repeating the errors which occurred in the action of the 24th, the three corps d'armee have been directed to march in such a manner as to enable them to present a compact mass should they meet the enemy. Contrary to all expectations, Angioletti's division was allowed to enter and occupy Castellucchio without firing a shot. As its vanguard reached the hamlet of Ospedaletto it was informed that the Austrians had left Castellucchio during the night, leaving a few hussars, who, in their turn, retired on Mantua as soon as they saw the cavalry Angioletti had sent to reconnoitre both the country and the borough of Castellucchio.

News has just arrived here that General Angioletti has been able to push his outposts as far as Rivolta on his left, and still farther forward on his front towards Curtalone. Although the distance from Rivolta to Goito is only five miles, Angioletti, I have been told, could not ascertain whether the Austrians had crossed the Mincio in force.

What part both Cialdini and Garibaldi will play in the great struggle nobody can tell. It is certain, however, that these two popular leaders will not be idle, and that a battle, if fought, will assume the proportions of an almost unheard of slaughter.

Page 4636

General headquarters of the Italian army, *Torre* MALIMBERTI, July 7, 1866.

Whilst the Austrian emperor throws himself at the feet of the ruler of France—I was almost going to write the arbiter of Europe—Italy and its brave army seem to reject disdainfully the idea of getting Venetia as a gift of a neutral power. There cannot be any doubt as to the feeling in existence since the announcement of the Austrian proposal by the Moniteur being one of astonishment, and even indignation so far as Italy herself is concerned. One hears nothing but expressions of this kind in whatever Italian town he may be, and the Italian army is naturally anxious that she should not be said to relinquish her task when Austrians speak of having beaten her, without proving that she can beat them too. There are high considerations of honour which no soldier or general would ever think of putting aside for humanitarian or political reasons, and with these considerations the Italian army is fully in accord since the 24th June. The way, too, in which the Kaiser chose to give up the long-contested point, by ignoring Italy and recognising France as a party to the Venetian question, created great indignation amongst the Italians, whose papers declare, one and all, that a fresh insult has been offered to the country. This is the state of public opinion here, and unless the greatest advantages are obtained by a premature armistice and a hurried treaty of peace, it is likely to continue the same, not to the entire security of public order in Italy. As a matter of course, all eyes are turned towards Villa Pallavicini, two miles from here, where the king is to decide upon either accepting or rejecting the French emperor's advice, both of which decisions are fraught with considerable difficulties and no little danger. The king will have sought the advice of his ministers, besides which that of Prussia will have been asked and probably given. The matter may be decided one way or the other in a very short time, or may linger on for days to give time for public anxiety and fears to be allayed and to calm down. In the meantime, it looks as if the king and his generals had made up their mind not to accept the gift. An attack on the Borgoforte tete-de-pont on the right side of the Po, began on 5th at half-past three in the morning, under the immediate direction of General Cialdini. The attacking corps was the Duke of Mignano's. All the day yesterday the gun was heard at Torre Malamberti, as it was also this morning between ten and eleven o'clock. Borgoforte is a fortress on the left side of the Po, throwing a bridge across this river, the right end of which is headed by a strong tete-de-pont, the object of the present attack. This work may be said to belong to the quadrilateral, as it is only an advanced part of the fortress of Mantua, which, resting upon its rear, is connected to Borgoforte by a military road supported on the Mantua side by the Pietolo fortress. The distance between Mantua and Borgoforte is only eleven kilometres. The fete-de-poet is thrown upon the Po; its structure is of recent date, and it consists of a central part and of two wings, called Rocchetta and Bocca di Ganda respectively. The lock here existing is enclosed in the Rocchetta work.

Page 4637

Since I wrote you my last letter Garibaldi has been obliged to desist from the idea of getting possession of Bagolino, Sant' Antonio, and Monte Suello, after a fight which lasted four hours, seeing that he had to deal with an entire Austrian brigade, supported by uhlans, sharp-shooters (almost a battalion) and twelve pieces of artillery. These positions were subsequently abandoned by the enemy, and occupied by Garibaldi's volunteers. In this affair the general received a slight wound in his left leg, the nature of which, however, is so very trifling, that a few days will be enough to enable him to resume active duties. It seems that the arms of the Austrians proved to be much superior to those of the Garibaldians, whose guns did very bad service. The loss of the latter amounted to about 100 killed and 200 wounded, figures in which the officers appear in great proportion, owing to their having been always at the head of their men, fighting, charging, and encouraging their comrades throughout. Captain Adjutant-Major Battino, formerly of the regular army, died, struck by three bullets, while rushing on the Austrians with the first regiment. On abandoning the Caffaro line, which they had reoccupied after the Lodrone encounter—in consequence of which the Garibaldians had to fall back because of the concentration following the battle of Custozza—the Austrians have retired to the Lardara fortress, between the Stabolfes and Tenara mountains, covering the route to Tione and Trento, in the Italian Tyrol. The third regiment of volunteers suffered most, as two of their companies had to bear the brunt of the terrible Austrian fire kept up from formidable positions. Another fight was taking place almost at the same time in the Val Camonico, *i.e*., north of the Caffaro, and of Rocca d'Anfo, Garibaldi's point d'appui. This encounter was sustained in the same proportions, the Italians losing one of their bravest and best officers in the person of Major Castellini, a Milanese, commander of the second battalion of Lombardian bersaglieri. Although these and Major Caldesi's battalion had to fall back from Vezza, a strong position was taken near Edalo, while in the rear a regiment kept Breno safe.

Although still at headquarters only two days ago, Baron Ricasoli has been suddenly summoned by telegram from Florence, and, as I hear, has just arrived. This is undoubtedly brought about by the new complications, especially as, at a council of ministers presided over by the baron, a vote, the nature of which is as yet unknown, was taken on the present state of affairs. As you know very well in England, Italy has great confidence in Ricasoli, whose conduct, always far from obsequious to the French emperor, has pleased the nation. He is thought to be at this moment the right man in the right place, and with the great acquaintance he possesses of Italy and the Italians, and with the co-operation of such an honest man as General Lamarmora, Italy may be pronounced safe, both against friends and enemies.

Page 4638

From what I saw this morning, coming back from the front, I presume that something, and that something new perhaps, will be attempted to-morrow. So far, the proposed armistice has had no effect upon the dispositions at general headquarters, and did not stay the cannon's voice. In the middle of rumours, of hopes and fears, Italy's wish to push on with the war has as yet been adhered to by her trusted leaders.

HEADQUARTERS OF THE FIRST ARMY CORPS,

Piadena, July 8, 1866.

As I begin writing you, no doubt can be entertained that some movement is not only in contemplation at headquarters, but is actually provided to take place to-day, and that it will probably prove to be against the Austrian positions at Borgoforte, on the left bank of the Po. Up to this time the tete-de-pout on the right side of the river had only been attacked by General the Duke of Mignano's guns. It would now, on the contrary, be a matter of cutting the communications between Borgoforte and Mantua, by occupying the lower part of the country around the latter fortress, advancing upon the Valli Veronesi, and getting round the quadrilateral into Venetia. While, then, waiting for further news to tell us whether this plan has been carried into execution, and whether it will be pursued, mindless of the existence of Mantua and Borgoforte on its flanks, one great fact is already ascertained, that the armistice proposed by the Emperor Napoleon has not been accepted, and that the war is to be continued. The Austrians may shut themselves up in their strongholds, or may even be so obliging as to leave the king the uncontested possession of them by retreating in the same line as their opponents advance; the pursuit, if not the struggle, the war, if not the battle, will be carried on by the Italians. At Torre Malamberti, where the general headquarters are, no end of general officers were to be seen yesterday hurrying in all directions. I met the king, Generals Brignone, Gavone, Valfre, and Menabrea within a few minutes of one another, and Prince Amadeus, who has entirely recovered from his wound, had been telegraphed for, and will arrive in Cremona to-day. No precise information is to be obtained respecting the intentions of the Austrians, but it is to be hoped for the Italian army, and for the credit of its generals, that more will be known about them now than was known on the eve of the famous 24th of June, and on its very morning. The heroism of the Italians on that memorable day surpasses any possible idea that can be formed, as it did also surpass all expectations of the country. Let me relate you a few out of many heroic facts which only come to light when an occasion is had of speaking with those who have been eyewitnesses of them, as they are no object of magnified regimental—orders or, as yet, of well-deserved honours. Italian soldiers seem to think that the army only did its duty, and that, wherever Italians may fight, they will

Page 4639

always show equal valour and firmness. Captain Biraghi, of Milan, belonging to the general staff, having in the midst of the battle received an order from General Lamarmora for General Durando, was proceeding with all possible speed towards the first army corps, which was slowly retreating before the superior forces of the enemy and before the greatly superior number of his guns, when, while under a perfect shower of grape and canister, he was all of a sudden confronted by, an Austrian officer of cavalry who had been lying in wait for the Italian orderly. The Austrian fires his revolver at Biraghi; and wounds him in the arm. Nothing daunted, Biraghi assails him and makes him turn tail; then, following in pursuit, unsaddles him, but has his own horse shot down under him. Biraghi disentangles himself, kills his antagonist, and jumps upon the latter's horse. This, however, is thrown down also in a moment by a cannon ball, so that the gallant captain has to go back on foot, bleeding, and almost unable to walk. Talking of heroism, of inimitable endurance, and strength of soul, what do you think of a man who has his arm entirely carried away by a grenade, and yet keeps on his horse, firm as a rock, and still directs his battery until hemorrhage—and hemorrhage alone—-strikes him down at last, dead! Such was the case with a Neapolitan—Major Abate, of the artillery—and his name is worth the glory of a whole army, of a whole war; and may only find a fit companion in that of an officer of the eighteenth battalion of bersaglieri, who, dashing at an Austrian flag-bearer, wrenches the standard out of his hands with his left one, has it clean cut away by an Austrian officer standing near, and immediately grapples it with his right, until his own soldiers carry him away with his trophy! Does not this sound like Greek history repeated—does it not look as if the brave men of old had been born again, and the old facts renewed to tell of Italian heroism? Another bersagliere—a Tuscan, by name Orlandi Matteo, belonging to that heroic fifth battalion which fought against entire brigades, regiments, and battalions, losing 11 out of its 16 officers, and about 300 out of its 600 men—Orlandi, was wounded already, when, perceiving an Austrian flag, he makes a great effort, dashes at the officer, kills him, takes the flag, and, almost dying, gives it over to his lieutenant. He is now in a ward of the San Domenico Hospital in Brescia, and all who have learnt of his bravery will earnestly hope that he may survive to be pointed out as one of the many who covered themselves with fame on that day. If it is sad to read of death encountered in the field by so many a patriotic and brave soldiers, it is sadder still to learn that not a few of them were barbarously killed by the enemy, and killed, too, when they were harmless, for they lay wounded on the ground. The Sicilian colonel, Stalella, a son-in-law of Senator Castagnetto, and a courageous man amongst the most

Page 4640

courageous of men; was struck in the leg by a bullet, and thrown down from his horse while exciting his men to repulse the Austrians, which in great masses were pressing on his thinned column. Although retreating, the regiment sent some of his men to take him away, but as soon as he had been put on a stretcher [he] had to be put down, as ten or twelve uhlans were galloping down, obliging the men to hide themselves in a bush. When the uhlans got near the colonel, and when they had seen him lying down in agony, they all planted their lances in his body.

Is not this wanton cruelty—cruelty even unheard of cruelty that no savage possesses? Still these are facts, and no one will ever dare to deny them from Verona and Vienna, for they are known as much as it was known and seen that the uhlans and many of the Austrian soldiers were drunk when they began fighting, and that alighting from the trains they were provided with their rations and with rum, and that they fought without their haversacks. This is the truth, and nothing beyond it has to the honour of the Italians been asserted, whether to the disgrace or credit of their enemies; so that while denying that they ill-treat Austrian prisoners, they are ready to state that theirs are well treated in Verona, without thinking of slandering and calumniating as the Vienna papers have done.

This morning Prince Amadeus arrived in Cremona, where a most spontaneous and hearty reception was given him by the population and the National Guard. He proceeded at once by the shortest way to the headquarters, so that his wish to be again at the front when something should be done has been accomplished. This brave young man, and his worthy brother, Prince Humbert, have won the applause of all Italy, which is justly proud of counting her king and her princes amongst the foremost in the field.

I have just learned from a most reliable source that the Austrians have mined the bridge of Borghetto on the Mincio, so that, should it be blown up, the only two, those of Goito and Borghetto, would be destroyed, and the Italians obliged to make provisional ones instead. I also hear that the Venetian towns are without any garrison, and that most probably all the forces are massed on two lines, one from Peschiera to Custozza and the other behind the Adige.

You will probably know by this time that the garrison of Vienna had on the 3rd been directed to Prague. The news we receive from Prussia is on the whole encouraging, inasmuch as the greatly feared armistice has been repulsed by King William. Some people here think that France will not be too hard upon Italy for keeping her word with her ally, and that the brunt of French anger or disapproval will have to be borne by Prussia. This is the least she can expect, as you know!

It is probable that by to-morrow I shall be able to write you more about the Italo-Austrian war of 1866.

Gonzaga, July 9, 1866.

Page 4641

I write you from a villa, only a mile distant from Gonzaga, belonging to the family of the Counts Arrivabene of Mantua. The owners have never reentered it since 1848, and it is only the fortune of war which has brought them to see their beautiful seat of the Aldegatta, never, it is to be hoped for them, to be abandoned again. It is, as you see, 'Mutatum ab illo.' Onward have gone, then, the exiled patriots! onward will go the nation that owns them! The wish of every one who is compelled to remain behind is that the army, that the volunteers, that the fleet, should all cooperate, and that they should, one and all, land on Venetian ground, to seek for a great battle, to give the army back the fame it deserves, and to the country the honour it possesses. The king is called upon to maintain the word nobly given to avenge Novara, and with it the new Austrian insulting proposal. All, it is said, is ready. The army has been said to be numerous; if to be numerous and brave, means to deserve victory, let the Italian generals prove what Italian soldiers are worthy of. If they will fight, the country will support them with the boldest of resolutions—the country will accept a discussion whenever the Government, having dispersed all fears, will proclaim that the war is to be continued till victory is inscribed on Italy's shield.

As I am not far from Borgoforte, I am able to learn more than the mere cannon's voice can tell me, and so will give you some details of the action against the tete-de-pont, which began, as I told you in one of my former letters, on the 4th. In Gorgoforte there were about 1500 Austrians, and, on the night from the 5th to the 6th, they kept up from their four fortified works a sufficiently well-sustained fire, the object of which was to prevent the enemy from posting his guns. This fire, however, did not cause any damage, and the Italians were able to plant their batteries. Early on the 6th, the firing began all along the line, the Italian 16-pounders having been the first to open fire. The Italian right was commanded by Colonel Mattei, the left by Colonel Bangoni, who did excellent work, while the other wing was not so successful. The heaviest guns had not yet arrived owing to one of those incidents always sure to happen when least expected, so that the 40-pounders could not be brought to bear against the forts until later in the day. The damage done to the works was not great for the moment, but still the advantage had been gained of feeling the strength of the enemy's positions and finding the right way to attack them. The artillerymen worked with great vigour, and were only obliged to desist by an unexpected order which arrived about two p.m. from General Cialdini. The attack was, however, resumed on the following day, and the condition of the Monteggiana and Rochetta forts may be pronounced precarious. As a sign of the times, and more especially of the just impatience which prevails in Italy about the

Page 4642

general direction of the army movements, it may not be without importance to notice that the Italian press has begun to cry out against the darkness in which everything is enveloped, while the time already passed since the 24th June tells plainly of inaction. It is remarked that the bitter gift made by Austria of the Venetian provinces, and the suspicious offer of mediation by France, ought to have found Italy in greatly different condition, both as regards her political and military position. Italy is, on the contrary, in exactly the same state as when the Archduke Albert telegraphed to Vienna that a great success had been obtained over the Italian army. These are facts, and, however strong and worthy of respect may be the reasons, there is no doubt that an extraordinary delay in the resumption of hostilities has occurred, and that at the present moment operations projected are perfectly mysterious. Something is let out from time to time which only serves to make the subsequent absence of news more and more puzzling. For the present the first official relation of the unhappy fight of the 24th June is published, and is accordingly anxiously scanned and closely studied. It is a matter of general remark that no great military knowledge is required to perceive that too great a reliance was placed upon supposed facts, and that the indulgence of speculations and ideas caused the waste of so much precious blood. The prudence characterising the subsequent moves of the Austrians may have been caused by the effects of their opponents' arrangements, but the Italian commanders ought to have avoided the responsibility of giving the enemy the option to move.

It is clear that to mend things the utterance of generous and patriotic cries is not sufficient, and that it must be shown that the vigour of the body is not at all surpassed by the vigour of the mind. It is also clear that many lives might have been spared if there had been greater proofs of intelligence on the part of those who directed the movement.

The situation is still very serious. Such an armistice as General von Gablenz could humiliate himself enough to ask from the Prussians has been refused, but another which the Emperor of the French has advised them to accept might ultimately become a fact. For Italy, the purely Venetian question could then also be settled, while the Italian, the national question, the question of right and honour which the army prizes so much, would still remain to be solved.

Gonzaga, July 12, 1866.

Travelling is generally said to be troublesome, but travelling with and through brigades, divisions, and army corps, I can certify to be more so than is usually agreeable. It is not that Italian officers or Italian soldiers are in any way disposed to throw obstacles in your way; but they, unhappily for you, have with them the inevitable cars with the inevitable carmen, both of which are enough to make your blood freeze, though the barometer stands very high.

Page 4643

What with their indolence, what with their number and the dust they made, I really thought they would drive me mad before I should reach Casalmaggiore on my way from Torre Malamberti. I started from the former place at three a.m., with beautiful weather, which, true to tradition, accompanied me all through my journey. Passing through San Giovanni in Croce, to which the headquarters of General Pianell had been transferred, I turned to the right in the direction of the Po, and began to have an idea of the wearisome sort of journey which I would have to make up to Casalmaggiore. On both sides of the way some regiments belonging to the rear division were still camped, and as I passed it was most interesting to see how busy they were cooking their ‘rancio,’ polishing their arms, and making the best of their time. The officers stood leisurely about gazing and staring at me, supposing, as I thought, that I was travelling with some part in the destiny of their country. Here and there some soldiers who had just left the hospitals of Brescia and Milan made their way to their corps and shook hands with their comrades, from whom only illness or the fortune of war had made them part. They seemed glad to see their old tent, their old drum, their old colour-sergeant, and also the flag they had carried to the battle and had not at any price allowed to be taken. I may state here, en passant, that as many as six flags were taken from the enemy in the first part of the day of Custozza, and were subsequently abandoned in the retreat, while of the Italians only one was lost to a regiment for a few minutes, when it was quickly retaken. This fact ought to be sufficient by itself to establish the bravery with which the soldiers fought on the 24th, and the bravery with which they will fight if, as they ardently wish; a new occasion is given to them.

As long as I had only met troops, either marching or camping on the road, all went well, but I soon found myself mixed with an interminable line of cars and the like, forming the military and the civil train of the moving army. Then it was that it needed as much patience to keep from jumping out of one’s carriage and from chastising the carrettieri, as they would persist in not making room for one, and being as dumb to one’s entreaties as a stone. When you had finished with one you had to deal with another, and you find them all as obstinate and as egotistical as they are from one end of the world to the other, whether it be on the Casalmaggiore road or in High Holborn. From time to time things seemed to proceed all right, and you thought yourself free from further trouble, but you soon found out your mistake, as an enormous ammunition car went smack into your path, as one wheel got entangled with another, and as imperturbable Signor Carrettiere evidently took delight at a fresh opportunity for stoppage, inaction, indolence, and sleep. I soon came to the conclusion that Italy would not be free when the

Page 4644

Austrians had been driven away, for that another and a more formidable foe—an enemy to society and comfort, to men and horses, to mankind in general would have still to be beaten, expelled, annihilated, in the shape of the carrettiere. If you employ him, he robs you fifty times over; if you want him to drive quickly, he is sure to keep the animal from going at all; if, worse than all, you never think of him, or have just been plundered by him, he will not move an inch to oblige you. Surely the cholera is not the only pestilence a country may be visited with; and, should Cialdini ever go to Vienna, he might revenge Novara and the Spielberg by taking with him the carrettieri of the whole army.

At last Casalmaggiore hove in sight, and, when good fortune and the carmen permitted, I reached it. It was time! No iron-plated Jacob could ever have resisted another two miles' journey in such company. At Casalmaggiore I branched off. There were, happily, two roads, and not the slightest reason or smallest argument were needed to make me choose that which my cauchemar had not chosen. They were passing the river at Casalmaggiore. I went, of course, for the same purpose, somewhere else. Any place was good enough—so I thought, at least, then. New adventures, new miseries awaited me—some carrettiere, or other, guessing that I was no friend of his, nor of the whole set of them, had thrown the jattatura on me.

I alighted at the Colombina, after four hours' ride, to give the horses time to rest a little. The Albergo della Colombina was a great disappointment, for there was nothing there that could be eaten. I decided upon waiting most patiently, but most unlike a few cavalry officers, who, all covered with dust, and evidently as hungry and as thirsty as they could be, began to swear to their hearts' content. In an hour some eggs and some salame, a kind of sausage, were brought up, and quickly disposed of. A young lieutenant of the thirtieth infantry regiment of the Pisa brigade took his place opposite, and we were soon engaged in conversation. He had been in the midst and worst part of the battle of Custozza, and had escaped being taken prisoner by what seemed a miracle. He told me how, when his regiment advanced on the Monte Croce position, which he practically described to me as having the form of an English pudding, they were fired upon by batteries both on their flanks and front. The lieutenant added, however, rather contemptuously, that they did not even bow before them, as the custom appears to be—that is, to lie down, as the Austrians were firing very badly. The cross-fire got, however, so tremendous that an order had to be given to keep down by the road to avoid being annihilated. The assault was given, the whole range of positions was taken, and kept too for hours, until the infallible rule of three to one, backed by batteries, grape, and canister, compelled them to retreat, which they did slowly and in order.

Page 4645

It was then that their brigade commander, Major General Rey de Villarey, who, though a native of Mentone, had preferred remaining with his king from going over to the French after the cession, turning to his son, who was also his aide-de-camp, said in his dialect, ‘Now, my son, we must die both of us,’ and with a touch of the spurs was soon in front of the line and on the hill, where three bullets struck him almost at once dead. The horse of his son falling while following, his life was spared. My lieutenant at this moment was so overcome with hunger and fatigue that he fell down, and was thought to be dead. He was not so, however, and had enough life to hear, after the fight was over, the Austrian Jagers pass by, and again retire to their original positions, where their infantry was lying down, not dreaming for one moment of pursuing the Italians. Four of his soldiers—all Neapolitans he heard coming in search of him, while the bullets still hissed all round; and, as soon as he made a sign to them, they approached, and took him on their shoulders back to where was what remained of the regiment. It is highly creditable to Italian unity to hear an old Piedmontese officer praise the levies of the new provinces, and the lieutenant took delight in relating that another Neapolitan was in the fight standing by him, and firing as fast as he could, when a shell having burst near him, he disdainfully gave it a look, and did not even seek to save himself from the jattatura.

The gallant lieutenant had unfortunately to leave at last, and I was deprived of many an interesting tale and of a brave man’s company. I started, therefore, for Viadana, where I purposed passing the Po, the left bank of which the road was now following parallel with the stream. At Viadana, however, I found no bridge, as the military had demolished what existed only the day before, and so had to look out for in formation. As I was going about under the porticoes which one meets in almost all the villages in this neighbourhood, I was struck by the sight of an ancient and beautiful piece of art—for so it was—a Venetian mirror of Murano. It hung on the wall inside the village draper’s shop, and was readily shown me by the owner, who did not conceal the pride he had in possessing it. It was one of those mirrors one rarely meets with now, which were once so abundant in the old princes’ castles and palaces. It looked so deep and true, and the gilt frame was so light, and of such a purity and elegance, that it needed all my resolution to keep from buying it, though a bargain would not have been effected very easily. The mirror, however, had to be abandoned, as Dosalo, the nearest point for crossing the Po, was still seven miles distant. By this time the sun was out in all its force, and the heat was by no means agreeable. Then there was dust, too, as if the carrettieri had been passing in hundreds, so that the heat was almost unbearable. At last the Dosalo ferry was reached, the road leading

Page 4646

to it was entered, and the carriage was, I thought, to be at once embarked, when a drove of oxen were discovered to have the precedence; and so I had to wait. This under such a sun, on a shadeless beach, and with the prospect of having to stay there for two hours at least, was by no means pleasant. It took three-quarters of an hour to put the oxen in the boat, it took half an hour to get them on the other shore, and another hour to have the ferry boat back. The panorama from the beach was splendid, the Po appeared in all the mighty power of his waters, and as you looked with the glass at oxen and trees on the other shore, they appeared to be clothed in all the colours of the rainbow, and as if belonging to another world. Several peasants were waiting for the boat near me, talking about the war and the Austrians, and swearing they would, if possible, annihilate some of the latter. I gave them the glass to look with, and I imagined that they had never seen one before, for they thought it highly wonderful to make out what the time was at the Luzzara Tower, three miles in a straight line on the other side. The revolver, too, was a subject of great admiration, and they kept turning, feeling, and staring at it, as if they could not make out which way the cartridges were put in. One of these peasants, however, was doing the grand with the others, and once on the subject of history related to all who would hear how he had been to St. Helena, which was right in the middle of Moscow, where it was so very cold that his nose had got to be as large as his head. The poor man was evidently mixing one night's tale with that of the next one, a tale probably heard from the old Sindaco, who is at the same time the schoolmaster, the notary, and the highest municipal authority in the place.

I started in the ferry boat with them at last. While crossing they got to speak of the priests, and were all agreed, to put it in the mildest way, in thinking extremely little of them, and only differed as to what punishment they should like them to suffer.

On the side where we landed lay heaps of ammunition casks for the corps besieging Borgoforte. Others were conveyed upon cars by my friends the carrettieri, of whom it was decreed I should not be quit for some time to come. Entering Guastalla I found only a few artillery officers, evidently in charge of what we had seen carried along the route. Guastalla is a neat little town very proud of its statue of Duke Ferrante Gonzaga, and the Croce Rossa is a neat little inn, which may be proud of a smart young waiter, who actually discovered that, as I wanted to proceed to Luzzara, a few miles on, I had better stop till next morning, I did not take his advice, and was soon under the gate of Luzzara, a very neat little place, once one of the many possessions where the Gonzagas had a court, a palace, and a castle. The arms over the archway may still be seen, and would not be worth any notice but for a remarkable work of terracotta

Page 4647

representing a crown of pines and pine leaves in a wonderful state of preservation. The whole is so artistically arranged and so natural, that one might believe it to be one of Luca della Robbia's works. Luzzara has also a great tower, which I had seen in the distance from Dosalo, and the only albergo in the place gives you an excellent Italian dinner. The wine might please one of the greatest admirers of sherry, and if you are not given feather beds, the beds are at least clean like the rooms themselves. Here, as it was getting too dark, I decided upon stopping, a decision which gave me occasion to see one of the finest sunsets I ever saw. As I looked from the albergo I could see a gradation of colours, from the purple red to the deepest of sea blue, rising like an immense tent from the dark green of the trees and the fields, here and there dotted with little white houses, with their red roofs, while in front the Luzzara Tower rose majestically in the twilight. As the hour got later the colours deepened, and the lower end of the immense curtain gradually disappeared, while the stars and the planets began shining high above. A peasant was singing in a field near by, and the bells of a church were chiming in the distance. Both seemed to harmonise wonderfully. It was a scene of great loveliness.

At four a.m. I was up, and soon after on the road to Reggiolo, and then to Gonzaga. Here the vegetation gets to be more luxuriant, and every inch of ground contributes to the immense vastness of the whole. Nature is here in full perfection, and as even the telegraphic wire hangs leisurely down from tree to tree, instead of being stuck upon poles, you feel that the romantic aspect of the place is too beautiful to be encroached upon. All is peace, beauty, and happiness, all reveals to you that you are in Italy.

In Gonzaga, which only a few days ago belonged to the Austrians, the Italian tricolour is out of every window. As the former masters retired the new advanced; and when a detachment of Monferrato lancers entered the old castle town the joy of the inhabitants seemed to be almost bordering on delirium. The lancers soon left, however. The flag only remains.

July 11.

Cialdini began passing the Po on the 8th, and crossed at three points, *i.e*., Carbonara, Carbonarola, and Follonica. Beginning at three o'clock in the morning, he had finished crossing upon the two first pontoon bridges towards midnight on the 9th. The bridge thrown up at Follonica was still intact up to seven in the morning on the 10th, but the troops and the military and the civil train that remained followed the Po without crossing to Stellata, in the supposed direction of Ponte Lagoscura.

Page 4648

Yesterday guns were heard here at seven o'clock in the morning, and up to eleven o'clock, in the direction of Legnano, towards, I think, the Adige. The firing was lively, and of such a nature as to make one surmise that battle had been given. Perhaps the Austrians have awaited Cialdini under Legnano, or they have disputed the crossing of the Adige. Rovigo was abandoned by the Austrians in the night of the 9th and 10th. They have blown up the Rovigo and Boara fortresses, have destroyed the tete-de-pont on the Adige, and burnt all bridges. They may now seek to keep by the left side of this river up to Legnano, so as to get under the protection of the quadrilateral, in which case, if Cialdini can cross the river in time, the shock would be almost inevitable, and would be a reason for yesterday's firing. They may also go by rail to Padua, when they would have Cialdini between them and the quadrilateral. In any case, if this general is quick, or if they are not too quick for him, according to possible instructions, a collision is difficult to be avoided.

Baron Ricasoli has left Florence for the camp, and all sorts of rumours are afloat as to the present state of negotiations as they appear unmistakably to exist. The opinions are, I think, divided in the high councils of the Crown, and the country is still anxious to know the result of this state of affairs. A splendid victory by Cialdini might at this moment solve many a difficulty. As it is, the war is prosecuted everywhere except by sea, for Garibaldi's forces are slowly advancing in the Italian Tyrol, while the Austrians wait for them behind the walls of Landaro and Ampola. The Garibaldians' advanced posts were, by the latest news, near Darso.

The news from Prussia is still contradictory; while the Italian press is unanimous in asking with the country that Cialdini should advance, meet the enemy, fight him, and rout him if possible. Italy's wishes are entirely with him.

Noale, *near Treviso*, July 17, 1866.

From Lusia I followed General Medici's division to Motta, where I left it, not without regret, however, as better companions could not easily be found, so kind were the officers and jovial the men. They are now encamped around Padua, and will to-morrow march on Treviso, where the Italian Light Horse have already arrived, if I judge so from their having left Noale on the 15th. From the right I hear that the advanced posts have proceeded as far as Mira on the Brenta, twenty kilometres from Venice itself, and that the first army corps is to concentrate opposite Chioggia. This corps has marched from Ferrara straight on to Rovigo, which the forward movement of the fourth, or Cialdini's corps d'armee, had left empty of soldiers. General Pianell has still charge of it, and Major-General Cadalini, formerly at the head of the Siena brigade, replaces him in the command of his former division. General Pianell has under him the gallant Prince Amadeus, who has

Page 4649

entirely recovered from his chest wound, and of whom the brigade of Lombardian grenadiers is as proud as ever. They could not wish for a more skilled commander, a better superior officer, and a more valiant soldier. Thus the troops who fought on the 24th June are kept in the second line, while the still fresh divisions under Cialdini march first, as fast as they can. This, however, is of no avail. The Italian outposts on the Piave have not yet crossed it, for the reason that they must keep distances with their regiments, but will do so as soon as these get nearer to the river. If it was not that this is always done in regular warfare, they could beat the country beyond the Piave for a good many miles without even seeing the shadow of an Austrian. To the simple private, who does not know of diplomatic imbroglios and of political considerations, this sudden retreat means an almost as sudden retracing of steps, because he remembers that this manoeuvre preceded both the attacks on Solferino and on Custozza by the Austrians. To the officer, however, it means nothing else than a fixed desire not to face the Italian army any more, and so it is to him a source of disappointment and despondency. He cannot bear to think that another battle is improbable, and may be excused if he is not in the best of humour when on this subject. This is the case not only with the officers but with the volunteers, who have left their homes and the comfort of their domestic life, not to be paraded at reviews, but to be sent against the enemy. There are hundreds of these in the regular army-in the cavalry especially, and the Aosta Lancers and the regiment of Guides are half composed of them. If you listen to them, there ought not to be the slightest doubt or hesitation as to crossing the Isongo and marching upon Vienna. May Heaven see their wishes accomplished, for, unless crushed by sheer force, Italy is quite decided to carry war into the enemy's country.

The decisions of the French government are looked for here with great anxiety, and not a few men are found who predict them to be unfavourable to Italy. Still, it is hard for every one to believe that the French emperor will carry things to extremities, and increase the many difficulties Europe has already to contend with.

To-day there was a rumour at the mess table that the Austrians had abandoned Legnano, one of the four fortresses of the quadrilateral. I do not put much faith in it at present, but it is not improbable, as we may expect many strange things from the Vienna government. It would have been much better for them, since Archduke Albert spoke in eulogistic terms of the king, of his sons, and of his soldiers, while relating the action of the 24th, to have treated with Italy direct, thus securing peace, and perhaps friendship, from her. But the men who have ruled so despotically for years over Italian subjects cannot reconcile themselves to the idea that Italy has at last risen to be a nation,

Page 4650

and they even take slyly an opportunity to throw new insult into her face. You can easily see that the old spirit is still struggling for empire; that the old contempt is still trying to make light of Italians; and that the old Metternich ideas are still fondly clung to. Does not this deserve another lesson? Does not this need another Sadowa to quiet down for ever? Yes; and it devolves upon Italy to do it. If so, let only Cialdini's army alone, and the day may be nigh at hand when the king may tell the country that the task has been accomplished.

A talk on the present state of political affairs, and on the peculiar position of Italy, is the only subject worth notice in a letter from the camp. Everything else is at a standstill, and the movements of the fine army Cialdini now disposes of, about 150,000 men, are no longer full of interest. They may, perhaps, have some as regards an attack on Venice, because Austrian soldiers are still garrisoning it, and will be obliged to fight if they are assailed. It is hoped, if such is the case, that the beautiful queen of the Adriatic will be spared a scene of devastation, and that no new Haynau will be found to renew the deeds of Brescia and Vicenza.

The king has not yet arrived, and it seems probable he will not come for some time, until indeed the day comes for Italian troops to make their triumphal entry into the city of the Doges.

The heat continues intense, and this explains the slowness in advancing. As yet no sickness has appeared, and it must be hoped that the troops will be healthy, as sickness tries the morale much more than half-a-dozen Custozzas.

P.S.—I had finished writing when an officer came rushing into the inn where I am staying and told me that he had just heard that an Italian patrol had met an Austrian one on the road out of the village, and routed it. This may or may not be true, but it was must curious to see how delighted every one was at the idea that they had found 'them' at last. They did not care much about the result of the engagement, which, as I said, was reported to have been favourable. All that they cared about was that they were close to the enemy. One cannot despair of an army which is animated with such spirits. You would think, from the joy which brightens the face of the soldiers you meet now about, that a victory had been announced for the Italian arms.

Dolo, *near Venice*, July 20, 1866.

I returned from Noale to Padua last evening, and late in the night I received the intimation at my quarters that cannon was heard in the direction of Venice. It was then black as in Dante's hell, and raining and blowing with violence—one of those Italian storms which seem to awake all the earthly and heavenly elements of creation. There was no choice for it but to take to the saddle, and try to make for the front. No one who has not tried it can fancy what work it is to find one's way along a road

Page 4651

on which a whole corps d'amee is marching with an enormous materiel of war in a pitch dark night. This, however, is what your special correspondent was obliged to do. Fortunately enough, I had scarcely proceeded as far as Ponte di Brenta when I fell in with an officer of Cialdini's staff, who was bound to the same destination, namely, Dolo. As we proceeded along the road under a continuous shower of rain, our eyes now and then dazzled by the bright serpent-like flashes of the lightning, we fell in with some battalion or squadron, which advanced carefully, as it was impossible for them as well as for us to discriminate between the road and the ditches which flank it, for all the landmarks, so familiar to our guides in the daytime, were in one dead level of blackness. So it was that my companion and myself, after stumbling into ditches and out of them, after knocking our horses' heads against an ammunition car, or a party of soldiers sheltered under some big tree, found ourselves, after three hours' ride, in this village of Dolo. By this time the storm had greatly abated in its violence, and the thunder was but faintly heard now and then at such a distance as to enable us distinctly to hear the roar of the guns. Our horses could scarcely get through the sticky black mud, into which the white suffocating dust of the previous days had been turned by one night's rain. We, however, made our way to the parsonage of the village, for we had already made up our minds to ascend the steeple of the church to get a view of the surrounding country and a better hearing of the guns if possible. After a few words exchanged with the sexton—a staunch Italian, as he told us he was—we went up the ladder of the church spire. Once on the wooden platform, we could hear more distinctly the boom of the guns, which sounded like the broadsides of a big vessel. Were they the guns of Persano's long inactive fleet attacking some of Brondolo's or Chioggia's advanced forts? Were the guns those of some Austrian man-of-war which had engaged an Italian ironclad; or were they the 'Affondatore,' which left the Thames only a month ago, pitching into Trieste? To tell the truth, although we patiently waited two long hours on Dolo church spire, when both I and my companion descended we were not in a position to solve either of these problems. We, however, thought then, and still think, they were the guns of the Italian fleet which had attacked an Austrian fort.

Civita Vecchia, July 22, 1866.

Since the departure from this port of the old hospital ship 'Gregeois' about a year ago, no French ship of war had been stationed at Civita Vecchia; but on Wednesday morning the steam-sloop 'Catinat,' 180 men, cast anchor in the harbour, and the commandant immediately on disembarking took the train for Rome and placed himself in communication with the French ambassador. I am not aware whether the Pontifical government had applied for this vessel, or whether the sending it was a spontaneous attention on the part of the French emperor, but, at any rate, its arrival has proved a source of pleasure to His Holiness, as there is no knowing what may happen In troublous times like the present, and it is always good to have a retreat insured.

Page 4652

Yesterday it was notified in this port, as well as at Naples, that arrivals from Marseilles would be, until further notice, subjected to a quarantine of fifteen days in consequence of cholera having made its appearance at the latter place. A sailing vessel which arrived from Marseilles in the course of the day had to disembark the merchandise it brought for Civita Vecchia into barges off the lazaretto, where the yellow flag was hoisted over them. This vessel left Marseilles five days before the announcement of the quarantine, while the 'Prince Napoleon' of Valery's Company, passenger and merchandise steamer, which left Marseilles only one day before its announcement, was admitted this morning to free pratique. Few travellers will come here by sea now.

Marseilles, July 24.

Accustomed as we have been of late in Italy to almost hourly bulletins of the progress of hostilities, it is a trying condition to be suddenly debarred of all intelligence by finding oneself on board a steamer for thirty-six hours without touching at any port, as was my case in coming here from Civita Vecchia on board the 'Prince Napoleon.' But, although telegrams were wanting, discussions on the course of events were rife on board among the passengers who had embarked at Naples and Civita Vecchia, comprising a strong batch of French and Belgian priests returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, well supplied with rosaries and chaplets blessed by the Pope and facsimiles of the chains of St. Peter. Not much sympathy for the Italian cause was shown by these gentlemen or the few French and German travellers who, with three or four Neapolitans, formed the quarterdeck society; and our Corsican captain took no pains to hide his contempt at the dilatory proceedings of the Italian fleet at Ancona. We know that the Prussian minister, M. d'Usedom, has been recently making strenuous remonstrances at Ferrara against the slowness with which the Italian naval and military forces were proceeding, while their allies, the Prussians, were already near the gates of Vienna; and the conversation of a Prussian gentleman on board our steamer, who was connected with that embassy, plainly indicated the disappointment felt at Berlin at the rather inefficacious nature of the diversion made in Venetia, and on the coast of Istria by the army and navy of Victor Emmanuel. He even attributed to his minister an expression not very flattering either to the future prospects of Italy as resulting from her alliance with Prussia, or to the fidelity of the latter in carrying out the terms of it. I do not know whether this gentleman intended his anecdote to be taken cum grano salis, but I certainly understood him to say that he had deplored to the minister the want of vigour and the absence of success accompanying the operations of the Italian allies of Prussia, when His Excellency replied: 'C'est bien vrai. Ils nous ont tromps; mais que voulez-vous y faire maintenant? Nous aurons le temps de les faire egorger apres.'

Page 4653

It is difficult to suppose that there should exist a preconceived intention on the part of Prussia to repay the sacrifices hitherto made, although without a very brilliant accompaniment of success, by the Italian government in support of the alliance, by making her own separate terms with Austria and leaving Italy subsequently exposed to the vengeance of the latter, but such would certainly be the inference to be drawn from the conversation just quoted.

It was only on arriving in the port of Marseilles, however, that the full enmity of most of my travelling companions towards Italy and the Italians was manifested. A sailor, the first man who came on board before we disembarked, was immediately pounced upon for news, and he gave it as indeed nothing less than the destruction, more or less complete, of the Italian fleet by that of the Austrians. At this astounding intelligence the Prussian burst into a yell of indignation. 'Fools! blockheads! miserables! Beaten at sea by an inferior force! Is that the way they mean to reconquer Venice by dint of arms? If ever they do regain Venetia it will be through the blood of our Brandenburghers and Pomeranians, and not their own.' During this tirade a little old Belgian in black, with the chain of St. Peter at his buttonhole by way of watchguard, capered off to communicate the grateful news to a group of his ecclesiastical fellow-travellers, shrieking out in ecstasy:

'Rosses, Messieurs! Ces blagueurs d'Italiens ont ete rosses par mer, comme ils avaient ete rosses par terre.' Whereupon the reverend gentlemen congratulated each other with nods, and winks, and smiles, and sundry fervent squeezes of the hand. The same demonstrations would doubtless have been made by the Neapolitan passengers had they belonged to the Bourbonic faction, but they happened to be honest traders with cases of coral and lava for the Paris market, and therefore they merely stood silent and aghast at the fatal news, with their eyes and mouths as wide open as possible. I had no sooner got to my hotel than I inquired for the latest Paris journal, when the France was handed me, and I obtained confirmation in a certain degree of the disaster to the Italian fleet narrated by the sailor, although not quite in the same formidable proportions.

Before quitting the subject of my fellow-passengers on board the 'Prince Napoleon' I must mention an anecdote related to me, respecting the state of brigandage, by a Russian or German gentleman, who told me he was established at Naples. He was complaining of the dangers he had occasionally encountered in crossing in a diligence from Naples to Foggia on business; and then, speaking of the audacity of brigands in general, he told me that last year he saw with his own eyes; in broad daylight, two brigands walking about the streets of Naples with messages from captured individuals to their relations, mentioning the sums which had been demanded for their ransoms. They

Page 4654

were unarmed, and in the common peasants' dresses, and whenever they arrived at one of the houses to which they were addressed for this purpose, they stopped and opened a handkerchief which one of them carried in his hand, and took out an ear, examining whether the ticket on it corresponded with the address of the house or the name of the resident. There were six ears, all ticketed with the names of the original owners in the handkerchief, which were gradually dispensed to their families in Naples to stimulate: prompt payment of the required ransoms. On my inquiring how it was that the police took no notice of such barefaced operations, my informant told me that, previous to the arrival of these brigand emissaries in town, the chief always wrote to the police authorities warning them against interfering with them, as the messengers were always followed by spies in plain clothes belonging to the band who would immediately report any molestation they might encounter in the discharge of their delicate mission, and the infallible result of such molestation would be first the putting to death of all the hostages held for ransom; and next, the summary execution of several members of gendarmery and police force captured in various skirmishes by the brigands, and held as prisoners of war.

Such audacity would seem incredible if we had not heard and read of so many similar instances of late.

Etext editor's bookmarks:

A very doubtful benefit
Americans forgivingly remember, without mentioning
As becomes them, they do not look ahead
Charges of cynicism are common against all satirists
Fourth of the Georges
Here and there a plain good soul to whom he was affectionate
Holy images, and other miraculous objects are sold
It is well to learn manners without having them imposed on us
Men overweeningly in love with their creations
Must be the moralist in the satirist if satire is to strike
Not a page of his books reveals malevolence or a sneer
Petty concessions are signs of weakness to the unsatisfied
Statesman who stooped to conquer fact through fiction
The social world he looked at did not show him heroes
The exhaustion ensuing we named tranquillity
Utterance of generous and patriotic cries is not sufficient
We trust them or we crush them
We grew accustomed to periods of Irish fever

ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT {1}

[This etext was prepared from the 1897 Archibald Constable and Company edition by David Price, email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk]

Good Comedies are such rare productions, that notwithstanding the wealth of our literature in the Comic element, it would not occupy us long to run over the English list. If they are brought to the test I shall propose, very reputable Comedies will be found unworthy of their station, like the ladies of Arthur’s Court when they were reduced to the ordeal of the mantle.

Page 4655

There are plain reasons why the Comic poet is not a frequent apparition; and why the great Comic poet remains without a fellow. A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein ideas are current and the perceptions quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience. The semi-barbarism of merely giddy communities, and feverish emotional periods, repel him; and also a state of marked social inequality of the sexes; nor can he whose business is to address the mind be understood where there is not a moderate degree of intellectual activity.

Moreover, to touch and kindle the mind through laughter, demands more than sprightliness, a most subtle delicacy. That must be a natal gift in the Comic poet. The substance he deals with will show him a startling exhibition of the dyer's hand, if he is without it. People are ready to surrender themselves to witty thumps on the back, breast, and sides; all except the head: and it is there that he aims. He must be subtle to penetrate. A corresponding acuteness must exist to welcome him. The necessity for the two conditions will explain how it is that we count him during centuries in the singular number.

'C'est une etrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnetes gens,' Moliere says; and the difficulty of the undertaking cannot be over-estimated.

Then again, he is beset with foes to right and left, of a character unknown to the tragic and the lyric poet, or even to philosophers.

We have in this world men whom Rabelais would call agelasts; that is to say, non-laughers; men who are in that respect as dead bodies, which if you prick them do not bleed. The old grey boulder-stone that has finished its peregrination from the rock to the valley, is as easily to be set rolling up again as these men laughing. No collision of circumstances in our mortal career strikes a light for them. It is but one step from being agelastic to misogelastic, and the [Greek text which cannot be reproduced], the laughter-hating, soon learns to dignify his dislike as an objection in morality.

We have another class of men, who are pleased to consider themselves antagonists of the foregoing, and whom we may term hypergelasts; the excessive laughers, ever-laughing, who are as clappers of a bell, that may be rung by a breeze, a grimace; who are so loosely put together that a wink will shake them.

'. . . C'est n'estimer rien qu'estioner tout le monde,'

and to laugh at everything is to have no appreciation of the Comic of Comedy.

Neither of these distinct divisions of non-laughers and over-laughers would be entertained by reading The Rape of the Lock, or seeing a performance of Le Tartuffe. In relation to the stage, they have taken in our land the form and title of Puritan and Bacchanalian. For though the stage is no longer a public offender, and Shakespeare

has been revived on it, to give it nobility, we have not yet entirely raised it above the contention of these two parties. Our speaking on the theme of Comedy will appear almost a libertine proceeding to one, while the other will think that the speaking of it seriously brings us into violent contrast with the subject.

Page 4656

Comedy, we have to admit, was never one of the most honoured of the Muses. She was in her origin, short of slaughter, the loudest expression of the little civilization of men. The light of Athene over the head of Achilles illuminates the birth of Greek Tragedy. But Comedy rolled in shouting under the divine protection of the Son of the Wine-jar, as Dionysus is made to proclaim himself by Aristophanes. Our second Charles was the patron, of like benignity, of our Comedy of Manners, which began similarly as a combative performance, under a licence to deride and outrage the Puritan, and was here and there Bacchanalian beyond the Aristophanic example: worse, inasmuch as a cynical licentiousness is more abominable than frank filth. An eminent Frenchman judges from the quality of some of the stuff dredged up for the laughter of men and women who sat through an Athenian Comic play, that they could have had small delicacy in other affairs when they had so little in their choice of entertainment. Perhaps he does not make sufficient allowance for the regulated licence of plain speaking proper to the festival of the god, and claimed by the Comic poet as his inalienable right, or for the fact that it was a festival in a season of licence, in a city accustomed to give ear to the boldest utterance of both sides of a case. However that may be, there can be no question that the men and women who sat through the acting of Wycherley's Country Wife were past blushing. Our tenacity of national impressions has caused the word theatre since then to prod the Puritan nervous system like a satanic instrument; just as one has known Anti-Papists, for whom Smithfield was redolent of a sinister smoke, as though they had a later recollection of the place than the lowing herds. Hereditary Puritanism, regarding the stage, is met, to this day, in many families quite undistinguished by arrogant piety. It has subsided altogether as a power in the profession of morality; but it is an error to suppose it extinct, and unjust also to forget that it had once good reason to hate, shun, and rebuke our public shows.

We shall find ourselves about where the Comic spirit would place us, if we stand at middle distance between the inveterate opponents and the drum-and-fife supporters of Comedy: 'Comme un point fixe fait remarquer l'emportement des autres,' as Pascal says. And were there more in this position, Comic genius would flourish.

Our English idea of a Comedy of Manners might be imaged in the person of a blowsy country girl—say Hoyden, the daughter of Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, who, when at home, 'never disobeyed her father except in the eating of green gooseberries'—transforming to a varnished City madam; with a loud laugh and a mincing step; the crazy ancestress of an accountably fallen descendant. She bustles prodigiously and is punctually smart in her speech, always in a fluster to escape from Dulness, as they say the dogs on the Nile-banks drink at the river running to avoid the crocodile. If the monster catches her, as at times he does, she whips him to a froth, so that those who know Dulness only as a thing of ponderousness, shall fail to recognise him in that light and airy shape.

Page 4657

When she has frolicked through her five Acts to surprise you with the information that Mr. Aimwell is converted by a sudden death in the world outside the scenes into Lord Aimwell, and can marry the lady in the light of day, it is to the credit of her vivacious nature that she does not anticipate your calling her Farce. Five is dignity with a trailing robe; whereas one, two, or three Acts would be short skirts, and degrading. Advice has been given to householders, that they should follow up the shot at a burglar in the dark by hurling the pistol after it, so that if the bullet misses, the weapon may strike and assure the rascal he has it. The point of her wit is in this fashion supplemented by the rattle of her tongue, and effectively, according to the testimony of her admirers. Her wit is at once, like steam in an engine, the motive force and the warning whistle of her headlong course; and it vanishes like the track of steam when she has reached her terminus, never troubling the brains afterwards; a merit that it shares with good wine, to the joy of the Bacchanalians. As to this wit, it is warlike. In the neatest hands it is like the sword of the cavalier in the Mall, quick to flash out upon slight provocation, and for a similar office—to wound. Commonly its attitude is entirely pugilistic; two blunt fists rallying and countering. When harmless, as when the word ‘fool’ occurs, or allusions to the state of husband, it has the sound of the smack of harlequin’s wand upon clown, and is to the same extent exhilarating. Believe that idle empty laughter is the most desirable of recreations, and significant Comedy will seem pale and shallow in comparison. Our popular idea would be hit by the sculptured group of Laughter holding both his sides, while Comedy pummels, by way of tickling him. As to a meaning, she holds that it does not conduce to making merry: you might as well carry cannon on a racing-yacht. Morality is a duenna to be circumvented. This was the view of English Comedy of a sagacious essayist, who said that the end of a Comedy would often be the commencement of a Tragedy, were the curtain to rise again on the performers. In those old days female modesty was protected by a fan, behind which, and it was of a convenient semicircular breadth, the ladies present in the theatre retired at a signal of decorum, to peep, covertly askant, or with the option of so peeping, through a prettily fringed eyelet-hole in the eclipsing arch.

’Ego limis specto sic per flabellum clanculum.’-*Terence*.

That fan is the flag and symbol of the society giving us our so-called Comedy of Manners, or Comedy of the manners of South-sea Islanders under city veneer; and as to Comic idea, vacuous as the mask without the face behind it.

Page 4658

Elia, whose humour delighted in floating a galleon paradox and wafting it as far as it would go, bewails the extinction of our artificial Comedy, like a poet sighing over the vanished splendour of Cleopatra's Nile-barge; and the sedateness of his plea for a cause condemned even in his time to the penitentiary, is a novel effect of the ludicrous. When the realism of those 'fictitious half-believed personages,' as he calls them, had ceased to strike, they were objectionable company, uncaressable as puppets. Their artifices are staringly naked, and have now the effect of a painted face viewed, after warm hours of dancing, in the morning light. How could the Lurewells and the Plyants ever have been praised for ingenuity in wickedness? Critics, apparently sober, and of high reputation, held up their shallow knaveries for the world to admire. These Lurewells, Plyants, Pinchwifes, Fondlewifes, Miss Prue, Peggy, Hoyden, all of them save charming Milamant, are dead as last year's clothes in a fashionable fine lady's wardrobe, and it must be an exceptionably abandoned Abigail of our period that would look on them with the wish to appear in their likeness. Whether the puppet show of Punch and Judy inspires our street-urchins to have instant recourse to their fists in a dispute, after the fashion of every one of the actors in that public entertainment who gets possession of the cudgel, is open to question: it has been hinted; and angry moralists have traced the national taste for tales of crime to the smell of blood in our nursery-songs. It will at any rate hardly be questioned that it is unwholesome for men and women to see themselves as they are, if they are no better than they should be: and they will not, when they have improved in manners, care much to see themselves as they once were. That comes of realism in the Comic art; and it is not public caprice, but the consequence of a bettering state. {2} The same of an immoral may be said of realistic exhibitions of a vulgar society.

The French make a critical distinction in ce qui remue from ce qui emeut—that which agitates from that which touches with emotion. In the realistic comedy it is an incessant remuage—no calm, merely bustling figures, and no thought. Excepting Congreve's Way of the World, which failed on the stage, there was nothing to keep our comedy alive on its merits; neither, with all its realism, true portraiture, nor much quotable fun, nor idea; neither salt nor soul.

The French have a school of stately comedy to which they can fly for renovation whenever they have fallen away from it; and their having such a school is mainly the reason why, as John Stuart Mill pointed out, they know men and women more accurately than we do. Moliere followed the Horatian precept, to observe the manners of his age and give his characters the colour befitting them at the time. He did not paint in raw realism. He seized his characters firmly for the central purpose of the play, stamped

Page 4659

them in the idea, and by slightly raising and softening the object of study (as in the case of the ex-Huguenot, Duke de Montausier, {3} for the study of the Misanthrope, and, according to St. Simon, the Abbe Roquette for Tartuffe), generalized upon it so as to make it permanently human. Concede that it is natural for human creatures to live in society, and Alceste is an imperishable mark of one, though he is drawn in light outline, without any forcible human colouring. Our English school has not clearly imagined society; and of the mind hovering above congregated men and women, it has imagined nothing. The critics who praise it for its downrightness, and for bringing the situations home to us, as they admiringly say, cannot but disapprove of Moliere's comedy, which appeals to the individual mind to perceive and participate in the social. We have splendid tragedies, we have the most beautiful of poetic plays, and we have literary comedies passingly pleasant to read, and occasionally to see acted. By literary comedies, I mean comedies of classic inspiration, drawn chiefly from Menander and the Greek New Comedy through Terence; or else comedies of the poet's personal conception, that have had no model in life, and are humorous exaggerations, happy or otherwise. These are the comedies of Ben Jonson, Massinger, and Fletcher. Massinger's Justice Greedy we can all of us refer to a type, 'with fat capon lined' that has been and will be; and he would be comic, as Panurge is comic, but only a Rabelais could set him moving with real animation. Probably Justice Greedy would be comic to the audience of a country booth and to some of our friends. If we have lost our youthful relish for the presentation of characters put together to fit a type, we find it hard to put together the mechanism of a civil smile at his enumeration of his dishes. Something of the same is to be said of Bobadil, swearing 'by the foot of Pharaoh'; with a reservation, for he is made to move faster, and to act. The comic of Jonson is a scholar's excogitation of the comic; that of Massinger a moralist's.

Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we will call blood-life than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare; and they are of this world, but they are of the world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination. They are, as it were—I put it to suit my present comparison—creatures of the woods and wilds, not in walled towns, not grouped and toned to pursue a comic exhibition of the narrower world of society. Jaques, Falstaff and his regiment, the varied troop of Clowns, Malvolio, Sir Hugh Evans and Fluellen—marvellous Welshmen!—Benedict and Beatrice, Dogberry, and the rest, are subjects of a special study in the poetically comic.

His Comedy of incredible imbroglio belongs to the literary section. One may conceive that there was a natural resemblance between him and Menander, both in the scheme and style of his lighter plays. Had Shakespeare lived in a later and less emotional, less heroical period of our history, he might have turned to the painting of manners as well as humanity. Euripides would probably, in the time of Menander, when Athens was enslaved but prosperous, have lent his hand to the composition of romantic comedy. He certainly inspired that fine genius.

Page 4660

Politically it is accounted a misfortune for France that her nobles thronged to the Court of Louis Quatorze. It was a boon to the comic poet. He had that lively quicksilver world of the animalcule passions, the huge pretensions, the placid absurdities, under his eyes in full activity; vociferous quacks and snapping dupes, hypocrites, posturers, extravagants, pedants, rose-pink ladies and mad grammarians, sonneteering marquises, high-flying mistresses, plain-minded maids, inter-threading as in a loom, noisy as at a fair. A simply bourgeois circle will not furnish it, for the middle class must have the brilliant, flippant, independent upper for a spur and a pattern; otherwise it is likely to be inwardly dull as well as outwardly correct. Yet, though the King was benevolent toward Moliere, it is not to the French Court that we are indebted for his unrivalled studies of mankind in society. For the amusement of the Court the ballets and farces were written, which are dearer to the rabble upper, as to the rabble lower, class than intellectual comedy. The French bourgeoisie of Paris were sufficiently quick-witted and enlightened by education to welcome great works like Le Tartuffe, Les Femmes Savantes, and Le Misanthrope, works that were perilous ventures on the popular intelligence, big vessels to launch on streams running to shallows. The Tartuffe hove into view as an enemy's vessel; it offended, not Dieu mais les devots, as the Prince de Conde explained the cabal raised against it to the King.

The Femmes Savantes is a capital instance of the uses of comedy in teaching the world to understand what ails it. The farce of the Precieuses ridiculed and put a stop to the monstrous romantic jargon made popular by certain famous novels. The comedy of the Femmes Savantes exposed the later and less apparent but more finely comic absurdity of an excessive purism in grammar and diction, and the tendency to be idiotic in precision. The French had felt the burden of this new nonsense; but they had to see the comedy several times before they were consoled in their suffering by seeing the cause of it exposed.

The Misanthrope was yet more frigidly received. Moliere thought it dead. 'I cannot improve on it, and assuredly never shall,' he said. It is one of the French titles to honour that this quintessential comedy of the opposition of Alceste and Celimene was ultimately understood and applauded. In all countries the middle class presents the public which, fighting the world, and with a good footing in the fight, knows the world best. It may be the most selfish, but that is a question leading us into sophistries. Cultivated men and women, who do not skim the cream of life, and are attached to the duties, yet escape the harsher blows, make acute and balanced observers. Moliere is their poet.

Page 4661

Of this class in England, a large body, neither Puritan nor Bacchanalian, have a sentimental objection to face the study of the actual world. They take up disdain of it, when its truths appear humiliating: when the facts are not immediately forced on them, they take up the pride of incredulity. They live in a hazy atmosphere that they suppose an ideal one. Humorous writing they will endure, perhaps approve, if it mingles with pathos to shake and elevate the feelings. They approve of Satire, because, like the beak of the vulture, it smells of carrion, which they are not. But of Comedy they have a shivering dread, for Comedy enfolds them with the wretched host of the world, huddles them with us all in an ignoble assimilation, and cannot be used by any exalted variety as a scourge and a broom. Nay, to be an exalted variety is to come under the calm curious eye of the Comic spirit, and be probed for what you are. Men are seen among them, and very many cultivated women. You may distinguish them by a favourite phrase: 'Surely we are not so bad!' and the remark: 'If that is human nature, save us from it!' as if it could be done: but in the peculiar Paradise of the wilful people who will not see, the exclamation assumes the saving grace.

Yet should you ask them whether they dislike sound sense, they vow they do not. And question cultivated women whether it pleases them to be shown moving on an intellectual level with men, they will answer that it does; numbers of them claim the situation. Now, Comedy is the fountain of sound sense; not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle: and Comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense. The higher the Comedy, the more prominent the part they enjoy in it. Dorine in the Tartuffe is common-sense incarnate, though palpably a waiting-maid. Celimene is undisputed mistress of the same attribute in the Misanthrope; wiser as a woman than Alceste as man. In Congreve's Way of the World, Millamant overshadows Mirabel, the sprightliest male figure of English comedy.

But those two ravishing women, so copious and so choice of speech, who fence with men and pass their guard, are heartless! Is it not preferable to be the pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices, very feminine, very sympathetic, of romantic and sentimental fiction? Our women are taught to think so. The Agnes of the Ecole des Femmes should be a lesson for men. The heroines of Comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless from being clear-sighted: they seem so to the sentimentally-reared only for the reason that they use their wits, and are not wandering vessels crying for a captain or a pilot. Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men, and that of men with them: and as the two, however divergent, both look on one object, namely, Life, the gradual similarity of their

Page 4662

impressions must bring them to some resemblance. The Comic poet dares to show us men and women coming to this mutual likeness; he is for saying that when they draw together in social life their minds grow liker; just as the philosopher discerns the similarity of boy and girl, until the girl is marched away to the nursery. Philosopher and Comic poet are of a cousinship in the eye they cast on life: and they are equally unpopular with our wilful English of the hazy region and the ideal that is not to be disturbed.

Thus, for want of instruction in the Comic idea, we lose a large audience among our cultivated middle class that we should expect to support Comedy. The sentimentalist is as averse as the Puritan and as the Bacchanalian.

Our traditions are unfortunate. The public taste is with the idle laughers, and still inclines to follow them. It may be shown by an analysis of Wycherley's Plain Dealer, a coarse prose adaption of the Misanthrope, stuffed with lumps of realism in a vulgarized theme to hit the mark of English appetite, that we have in it the keynote of the Comedy of our stage. It is Moliere travestied, with the hoof to his foot and hair on the pointed tip of his ear. And how difficult it is for writers to disentangle themselves from bad traditions is noticeable when we find Goldsmith, who had grave command of the Comic in narrative, producing an elegant farce for a Comedy; and Fielding, who was a master of the Comic both in narrative and in dialogue, not even approaching to the presentable in farce.

These bad traditions of Comedy affect us not only on the stage, but in our literature, and may be tracked into our social life. They are the ground of the heavy moralizings by which we are outwearied, about Life as a Comedy, and Comedy as a jade, {4} when popular writers, conscious of fatigue in creativeness, desire to be cogent in a modish cynicism: perversions of the idea of life, and of the proper esteem for the society we have wrested from brutishness, and would carry higher. Stock images of this description are accepted by the timid and the sensitive, as well as by the saturnine, quite seriously; for not many look abroad with their own eyes, fewer still have the habit of thinking for themselves. Life, we know too well, is not a Comedy, but something strangely mixed; nor is Comedy a vile mask. The corrupted importation from France was noxious; a noble entertainment spoilt to suit the wretched taste of a villanous age; and the later imitations of it, partly drained of its poison and made decorous, became tiresome, notwithstanding their fun, in the perpetual recurring of the same situations, owing to the absence of original study and vigour of conception. Scene v. Act 2 of the Misanthrope, owing, no doubt, to the fact of our not producing matter for original study, is repeated in succession by Wycherley, Congreve, and Sheridan, and as it is at second hand, we have it done cynically—or such is the tone; in the manner of 'below stairs.'

Page 4663

Comedy thus treated may be accepted as a version of the ordinary worldly understanding of our social life; at least, in accord with the current dicta concerning it. The epigrams can be made; but it is uninstructive, rather tending to do disservice. Comedy justly treated, as you find it in Moliere, whom we so clownishly mishandled, the Comedy of Moliere throws no infamous reflection upon life. It is deeply conceived, in the first place, and therefore it cannot be impure. Meditate on that statement. Never did man wield so shrieking a scourge upon vice, but his consummate self-mastery is not shaken while administering it. Tartuffe and Harpagon, in fact, are made each to whip himself and his class, the false pietists, and the insanely covetous. Moliere has only set them in motion. He strips Folly to the skin, displays the imposture of the creature, and is content to offer her better clothing, with the lesson Chrysale reads to Philaminte and Belise. He conceives purely, and he writes purely, in the simplest language, the simplest of French verse. The source of his wit is clear reason: it is a fountain of that soil; and it springs to vindicate reason, common-sense, rightness and justice; for no vain purpose ever. The wit is of such pervading spirit that it inspires a pun with meaning and interest. {5} His moral does not hang like a tail, or preach from one character incessantly cocking an eye at the audience, as in recent realistic French Plays: but is in the heart of his work, throbbing with every pulsation of an organic structure. If Life is likened to the comedy of Moliere, there is no scandal in the comparison.

Congreve's Way of the World is an exception to our other comedies, his own among them, by virtue of the remarkable brilliancy of the writing, and the figure of Millamant. The comedy has no idea in it, beyond the stale one, that so the world goes; and it concludes with the jaded discovery of a document at a convenient season for the descent of the curtain. A plot was an afterthought with Congreve. By the help of a wooden villain (Maskwell) marked Gallows to the flattest eye, he gets a sort of plot in The Double Dealer. {6} His Way of the World might be called The Conquest of a Town Coquette, and Millamant is a perfect portrait of a coquette, both in her resistance to Mirabel and the manner of her surrender, and also in her tongue. The wit here is not so salient as in certain passages of Love for Love, where Valentine feigns madness or retorts on his father, or Mrs. Frail rejoices in the harmlessness of wounds to a woman's virtue, if she 'keeps them from air.' In The Way of the World, it appears less prepared in the smartness, and is more diffused in the more characteristic style of the speakers. Here, however, as elsewhere, his famous wit is like a bully-fencer, not ashamed to lay traps for its exhibition, transparently petulant for the train between certain ordinary words and the powder-magazine of the improprieties to be

Page 4664

fired. Contrast the wit of Congreve with Moliere's. That of the first is a Toledo blade, sharp, and wonderfully supple for steel; cast for duelling, restless in the scabbard, being so pretty when out of it. To shine, it must have an adversary. Moliere's wit is like a running brook, with innumerable fresh lights on it at every turn of the wood through which its business is to find a way. It does not run in search of obstructions, to be noisy over them; but when dead leaves and viler substances are heaped along the course, its natural song is heightened. Without effort, and with no dazzling flashes of achievement, it is full of healing, the wit of good breeding, the wit of wisdom.

'Genuine humour and true wit,' says Landor, {7} 'require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one. Rabelais and La Fontaine are recorded by their countrymen to have been reveurs. Few men have been graver than Pascal. Few men have been wittier.'

To apply the citation of so great a brain as Pascal's to our countryman would be unfair. Congreve had a certain soundness of mind; of capacity, in the sense intended by Landor, he had little. Judging him by his wit, he performed some happy thrusts, and taking it for genuine, it is a surface wit, neither rising from a depth nor flowing from a spring.

'On voit qu'il se travaille e dire de bons mots.'

He drives the poor hack word, 'fool,' as cruelly to the market for wit as any of his competitors. Here is an example, that has been held up for eulogy:

Witwoud: He has brought me a letter from the fool my brother, *etc*. *etc*.

Mirabel: A fool, and your brother, Witwoud?

Witwoud: Ay, ay, my half-brother. My half-brother he is; no nearer, upon my honour.

Mirabel: Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

By evident preparation. This is a sort of wit one remembers to have heard at school, of a brilliant outsider; perhaps to have been guilty of oneself, a trifle later. It was, no doubt, a blaze of intellectual fireworks to the bumpkin squire, who came to London to go to the theatre and learn manners.

Where Congreve excels all his English rivals is in his literary force, and a succinctness of style peculiar to him. He had correct judgement, a correct ear, readiness of illustration within a narrow range, in snapshots of the obvious at the obvious, and copious language. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue. He is at once precise and voluble. If you have ever thought upon style you will acknowledge it to be a signal accomplishment. In this he is a classic, and is worthy of treading a measure with Moliere. The Way of the World may be read out currently at a first glance,

so sure are the accents of the emphatic meaning to strike the eye, perforce of the crispness and cunning polish of the sentences. You have not to look over them before you confide yourself to him; he will carry you safe. Sheridan imitated, but was far from surpassing him. The flow of boudoir Billingsgate in Lady Wishfort is unmatched for the vigour and pointedness of the tongue. It spins along with a final ring, like the voice of Nature in a fury, and is, indeed, racy eloquence of the elevated fishwife.

Page 4665

Millamant is an admirable, almost a lovable heroine. It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her. You feel sensible of her presence in every line of her speaking. The stipulations with her lover in view of marriage, her fine lady's delicacy, and fine lady's easy evasions of indelicacy, coquettish airs, and playing with irresolution, which in a common maid would be bashfulness, until she submits to 'dwindle into a wife,' as she says, form a picture that lives in the frame, and is in harmony with Mirabel's description of her:

'Here she comes, i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.'

And, after an interview:

'Think of you! To think of a whirlwind, though 'twere in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation, a very tranquillity of mind and mansion.'

There is a picturesqueness, as of Millamant and no other, in her voice, when she is encouraged to take Mirabel by Mrs. Fainall, who is 'sure she has a mind to him':

Millamant: Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too, *etc*. *etc*.

One hears the tones, and sees the sketch and colour of the whole scene in reading it.

Celimene is behind Millamant in vividness. An air of bewitching whimsicality hovers over the graces of this Comic heroine, like the lively conversational play of a beautiful mouth.

But in wit she is no rival of Celimene. What she utters adds to her personal witchery, and is not further memorable. She is a flashing portrait, and a type of the superior ladies who do not think, not of those who do. In representing a class, therefore, it is a lower class, in the proportion that one of Gainsborough's full-length aristocratic women is below the permanent impressiveness of a fair Venetian head.

Millamant side by side with Celimene is an example of how far the realistic painting of a character can be carried to win our favour; and of where it falls short. Celimene is a woman's mind in movement, armed with an ungovernable wit; with perspicacious clear eyes for the world, and a very distinct knowledge that she belongs to the world, and is most at home in it. She is attracted to Alceste by her esteem for his honesty; she cannot avoid seeing where the good sense of the man is diseased.

Rousseau, in his letter to D'Alembert on the subject of the Misanthrope, discusses the character of Alceste, as though Moliere had put him forth for an absolute example of misanthropy; whereas Alceste is only a misanthrope of the circle he finds himself placed in: he has a touching faith in the virtue residing in the country, and a critical love of

sweet simpleness. Nor is he the principal person of the comedy to which he gives a name. He is only passively comic. Celimene is the active spirit. While he is denouncing and railing, the trial is imposed

Page 4666

upon her to make the best of him, and control herself, as much as a witty woman, eagerly courted, can do. By appreciating him she practically confesses her faultiness, and she is better disposed to meet him half .way than he is to bend an inch: only she is une ame de vingt ans, the world is pleasant, and if the gilded flies of the Court are silly, uncompromising fanatics have their ridiculous features as well. Can she abandon the life they make agreeable to her, for a man who will not be guided by the common sense of his class; and who insists on plunging into one extreme—equal to suicide in her eyes—to avoid another? That is the comic question of the Misanthrope. Why will he not continue to mix with the world smoothly, appeased by the flattery of her secret and really sincere preference of him, and taking his revenge in satire of it, as she does from her own not very lofty standard, and will by and by do from his more exalted one?

Celimene is worldliness: Alceste is unworldliness. It does not quite imply unselfishness; and that is perceived by her shrewd head. Still he is a very uncommon figure in her circle, and she esteems him, l'homme aux rubans verts, 'who sometimes diverts but more often horribly vexes her,' as she can say of him when her satirical tongue is on the run. Unhappily the soul of truth in him, which wins her esteem, refuses to be tamed, or silent, or unsuspicious, and is the perpetual obstacle to their good accord. He is that melancholy person, the critic of everybody save himself; intensely sensitive to the faults of others, wounded by them; in love with his own indubitable honesty, and with his ideal of the simpler form of life befitting it: qualities which constitute the satirist. He is a Jean Jacques of the Court. His proposal to Celimene when he pardons her, that she should follow him in flying humankind, and his frenzy of detestation of her at her refusal, are thoroughly in the mood of Jean Jacques. He is an impracticable creature of a priceless virtue; but Celimene may feel that to fly with him to the desert: that is from the Court to the country

'Ou d'etre homme d'honneur on ait la liberte,'

she is likely to find herself the companion of a starving satirist, like that poor princess who ran away with the waiting-man, and when both were hungry in the forest, was ordered to give him flesh. She is a fieffee coquette, rejoicing in her wit and her attractions, and distinguished by her inclination for Alceste in the midst of her many other lovers; only she finds it hard to cut them off—what woman with a train does not?—and when the exposure of her naughty wit has laid her under their rebuke, she will do the utmost she can: she will give her hand to honesty, but she cannot quite abandon worldliness. She would be unwise if she did.

The fable is thin. Our pungent contrivers of plots would see no indication of life in the outlines. The life of the comedy is in the idea. As with the singing of the sky-lark out of sight, you must love the bird to be attentive to the song, so in this highest flight of the Comic Muse, you must love pure Comedy warmly to understand the Misanthrope: you must be receptive of the idea of Comedy. And to love Comedy you must know the real

world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for good.

Page 4667

Menander wrote a comedy called Misogynes, said to have been the most celebrated of his works. This misogynist is a married man, according to the fragment surviving, and is a hater of women through hatred of his wife. He generalizes upon them from the example of this lamentable adjunct of his fortunes, and seems to have got the worst of it in the contest with her, which is like the issue in reality, in the polite world. He seems also to have deserved it, which may be as true to the copy. But we are unable to say whether the wife was a good voice of her sex: or how far Menander in this instance raised the idea of woman from the mire it was plunged into by the comic poets, or rather satiric dramatists, of the middle period of Greek Comedy preceding him and the New Comedy, who devoted their wit chiefly to the abuse, and for a diversity, to the eulogy of extra-mural ladies of conspicuous fame. Menander idealized them without purposely elevating. He satirized a certain Thais, and his Thais of the Eunuchus of Terence is neither professionally attractive nor repulsive; his picture of the two Andrians, Chrysis and her sister, is nowhere to be matched for tenderness. But the condition of honest women in his day did not permit of the freedom of action and fencing dialectic of a Celimene, and consequently it is below our mark of pure Comedy.

Sainte-Beuve conjures up the ghost of Menander, saying: For the love of me love Terence. It is through love of Terence that moderns are able to love Menander; and what is preserved of Terence has not apparently given us the best of the friend of Epicurus. [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] the lover taken in horror, and [Greek text] the damsel shorn of her locks, have a promising sound for scenes of jealousy and a too masterful display of lordly authority, leading to regrets, of the kind known to intemperate men who imagined they were fighting with the weaker, as the fragments indicate.

Of the six comedies of Terence, four are derived from Menander; two, the Hecyra and the Phormio, from Apollodorus. These two are inferior in comic action and the peculiar sweetness of Menander to the Andria, the Adelphi, the Heautontimorumenus, and the Eunuchus: but Phormio is a more dashing and amusing convivial parasite than the Gnatho of the last-named comedy. There were numerous rivals of whom we know next to nothing—except by the quotations of Athenaeus and Plutarch, and the Greek grammarians who cited them to support a dictum—in this as in the preceding periods of comedy in Athens, for Menander’s plays are counted by many scores, and they were crowned by the prize only eight times. The favourite poet with critics, in Greece as in Rome, was Menander; and if some of his rivals here and there surpassed him in comic force, and out-stripped him in competition by an appositeness to the occasion that had previously in the same way deprived the genius of Aristophanes of its due reward in Clouds and Birds,

Page 4668

his position as chief of the comic poets of his age was unchallenged. Plutarch very unnecessarily drags Aristophanes into a comparison with him, to the confusion of the older poet. Their aims, the matter they dealt in, and the times, were quite dissimilar. But it is no wonder that Plutarch, writing when Athenian beauty of style was the delight of his patrons, should rank Menander at the highest. In what degree of faithfulness Terence copied Menander, whether, as he states of the passage in the Adelphi taken from Diphilus, verbum de verbo in the lovelier scenes—the description of the last words of the dying Andrian, and of her funeral, for instance—remains conjectural. For us Terence shares with his master the praise of an amenity that is like Elysian speech, equable and ever gracious; like the face of the Andrian's young sister:

'Adeo modesto, adeo venusto, ut nihil supra.'

The celebrated 'flens quam familiariter,' of which the closest rendering grounds hopelessly on harsh prose, to express the sorrowful confidingness of a young girl who has lost her sister and dearest friend, and has but her lover left to her; 'she turned and flung herself on his bosom, weeping as though at home there': this our instinct tells us must be Greek, though hardly finer in Greek. Certain lines of Terence, compared with the original fragments, show that he embellished them; but his taste was too exquisite for him to do other than devote his genius to the honest translation of such pieces as the above. Menander, then; with him, through the affinity of sympathy, Terence; and Shakespeare and Moliere have this beautiful translucency of language: and the study of the comic poets might be recommended, if for that only.

A singular ill fate befell the writings of Menander. What we have of him in Terence was chosen probably to please the cultivated Romans; {8} and is a romantic play with a comic intrigue, obtained in two instances, the Andria and the Eunuchus, by rolling a couple of his originals into one. The titles of certain of the lost plays indicate the comic illumining character; a Self-pitier, a Self-chastiser, an Ill-tempered man, a Superstitious, an Incredulous, *etc*., point to suggestive domestic themes.

Terence forwarded manuscript translations from Greece, that suffered shipwreck; he, who could have restored the treasure, died on the way home. The zealots of Byzantium completed the work of destruction. So we have the four comedies of Terence, numbering six of Menander, with a few sketches of plots—one of them, the Thesaurus, introduces a miser, whom we should have liked to contrast with Harpagon—and a multitude of small fragments of a sententious cast, fitted for quotation. Enough remains to make his greatness felt.

Page 4669

Without undervaluing other writers of Comedy, I think it may be said that Menander and Moliere stand alone specially as comic poets of the feelings and the idea. In each of them there is a conception of the Comic that refines even to pain, as in the Menedemus of the Heautontimorumenus, and in the Misanthrope. Menander and Moliere have given the principal types to Comedy hitherto. The Micio and Demea of the Adelphi, with their opposing views of the proper management of youth, are still alive; the Sganarelles and Arnolphes of the Ecole des Maris and the Ecole des Femmes, are not all buried. Tartuffe is the father of the hypocrites; Orgon of the dupes; Thraso, of the braggadocios; Alceste of the 'Manlys'; Davus and Syrus of the intriguing valets, the Scapins and Figaros. Ladies that soar in the realms of Rose-Pink, whose language wears the nodding plumes of intellectual conceit, are traceable to Philaminte and Belise of the Femmes Savantes: and the mordant witty women have the tongue of Celimene. The reason is, that these two poets idealized upon life: the foundation of their types is real and in the quick, but they painted with spiritual strength, which is the solid in Art.

The idealistic conceptions of Comedy gives breadth and opportunities of daring to Comic genius, and helps to solve the difficulties it creates. How, for example, shall an audience be assured that an evident and monstrous dupe is actually deceived without being an absolute fool? In Le Tartuffe the note of high Comedy strikes when Orgon on his return home hears of his idol's excellent appetite. 'Le pauvre homme!' he exclaims. He is told that the wife of his bosom has been unwell. 'Et Tartuffe?' he asks, impatient to hear him spoken of, his mind suffused with the thought of Tartuffe, crazy with tenderness, and again he croons, 'Le pauvre homme!' It is the mother's cry of pitying delight at a nurse's recital of the feats in young animal gluttony of her cherished infant. After this masterstroke of the Comic, you not only put faith in Orgon's roseate prepossession, you share it with him by comic sympathy, and can listen with no more than a tremble of the laughing muscles to the instance he gives of the sublime humanity of Tartuffe:

'Un rien presque suffit pour le scandaliser, Jusque-le, qu'il se vint l'autre jour accuser D'avoir pris une puce en faisant sa priere, Et de l'avoir tuee avec trop de colere.'

And to have killed it too wrathfully! Translating Moliere is like humming an air one has heard performed by an accomplished violinist of the pure tones without flourish.

Orgon, awakening to find another dupe in Madame Pernelle, incredulous of the revelations which have at last opened his own besotted eyes, is a scene of the double Comic, vivified by the spell previously cast on the mind. There we feel the power of the poet's creation; and in the sharp light of that sudden turn the humanity is livelier than any realistic work can make it.

Page 4670

Italian Comedy gives many hints for a Tartuffe; but they may be found in Boccaccio, as well as in Machiavelli's Mandragola. The Frate Timoteo of this piece is only a very oily friar, compliantly assisting an intrigue with ecclesiastical sophisms (to use the mildest word) for payment. Frate Timoteo has a fine Italian priestly pose.

Donna: Credete voi, che'l Turco passi questo anno in Italia?

F. *Tim*.: Se voi non fate orazione, si.

Priestly arrogance and unctuousness, and trickeries and casuistries, cannot be painted without our discovering a likeness in the long Italian gallery. Goldoni sketched the Venetian manners of the decadence of the Republic with a French pencil, and was an Italian Scribe in style.

The Spanish stage is richer in such Comedies as that which furnished the idea of the Menteur to Corneille. But you must force yourself to believe that this liar is not forcing his vein when he piles lie upon lie. There is no preceding touch to win the mind to credulity. Spanish Comedy is generally in sharp outline, as of skeletons; in quick movement, as of marionnettes. The Comedy might be performed by a troop of the corps de ballet; and in the recollection of the reading it resolves to an animated shuffle of feet. It is, in fact, something other than the true idea of Comedy. Where the sexes are separated, men and women grow, as the Portuguese call it, affaimados of one another, famine-stricken; and all the tragic elements are on the stage. Don Juan is a comic character that sends souls flying: nor does the humour of the breaking of a dozen women's hearts conciliate the Comic Muse with the drawing of blood.

German attempts at Comedy remind one vividly of Heine's image of his country in the dancing of Atta Troll. Lessing tried his hand at it, with a sobering effect upon readers. The intention to produce the reverse effect is just visible, and therein, like the portly graces of the poor old Pyrenean Bear poising and twirling on his right hind-leg and his left, consists the fun. Jean Paul Richter gives the best edition of the German Comic in the contrast of Siebenkas with his Lenette. A light of the Comic is in Goethe; enough to complete the splendid figure of the man, but no more.

The German literary laugh, like the timed awakenings of their Barbarossa in the hollows of the Untersberg, is infrequent, and rather monstrous—never a laugh of men and women in concert. It comes of unrefined abstract fancy, grotesque or grim, or gross, like the peculiar humours of their little earthmen. Spiritual laughter they have not yet attained to: sentimentalism waylays them in the flight. Here and there a Volkslied or Marchen shows a national aptitude for stout animal laughter; and we see that the literature is built on it, which is hopeful so far; but to enjoy it, to enter into the philosophy of the Broad Grin, that seems to hesitate between the skull and the embryo, and reaches its perfection

Page 4671

in breadth from the pulling of two square fingers at the corners of the mouth, one must have aid of ‘the good Rhine wine,’ and be of German blood unmixed besides. This treble-Dutch lumbersomeness of the Comic spirit is of itself exclusive of the idea of Comedy, and the poor voice allowed to women in German domestic life will account for the absence of comic dialogues reflecting upon life in that land. I shall speak of it again in the second section of this lecture.

Eastward you have total silence of Comedy among a people intensely susceptible to laughter, as the Arabian Nights will testify. Where the veil is over women’s-faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous and the Comic spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst. Arabs in this respect are worse than Italians—much worse than Germans; just in the degree that their system of treating women is worse.

M. Saint-Marc Girardin, the excellent French essayist and master of critical style, tells of a conversation he had once with an Arab gentleman on the topic of the different management of these difficult creatures in Orient and in Occident: and the Arab spoke in praise of many good results of the greater freedom enjoyed by Western ladies, and the charm of conversing with them. He was questioned why his countrymen took no measures to grant them something of that kind of liberty. He jumped out of his individuality in a twinkling, and entered into the sentiments of his race, replying, from the pinnacle of a splendid conceit, with affected humility of manner: ’*You* can look on them without perturbation—but *we*!’ . . . And after this profoundly comic interjection, he added, in deep tones, ‘The very face of a woman!’ Our representative of temperate notions demurely consented that the Arab’s pride of inflammability should insist on the prudery of the veil as the civilizing medium of his race.

There has been fun in Bagdad. But there never will be civilization where Comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes. I am not quoting the Arab to exhort and disturb the somnolent East; rather for cultivated women to recognize that the Comic Muse is one of their best friends. They are blind to their interests in swelling the ranks of the sentimentalists. Let them look with their clearest vision abroad and at home. They will see that where they have no social freedom, Comedy is absent: where they are household drudges, the form of Comedy is primitive: where they are tolerably independent, but uncultivated, exciting melodrama takes its place and a sentimental version of them. Yet the Comic will out, as they would know if they listened to some of the private conversations of men whose minds are undirected by the Comic Muse: as the sentimental man, to his astonishment, would know likewise, if he in similar fashion could receive a lesson. But where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty—in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilization—there, and only waiting to be transplanted from life to the stage, or the novel, or the poem, pure Comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions.

Page 4672

Now, to look about us in the present time, I think it will be acknowledged that in neglecting the cultivation of the Comic idea, we are losing the aid of a powerful auxiliar. You see Folly perpetually sliding into new shapes in a society possessed of wealth and leisure, with many whims, many strange ailments and strange doctors. Plenty of common-sense is in the world to thrust her back when she pretends to empire. But the first-born of common-sense, the vigilant Comic, which is the genius of thoughtful laughter, which would readily extinguish her at the outset, is not serving as a public advocate.

You will have noticed the disposition of common-sense, under pressure of some pertinacious piece of light-headedness, to grow impatient and angry. That is a sign of the absence, or at least of the dormancy, of the Comic idea. For Folly is the natural prey of the Comic, known to it in all her transformations, in every disguise; and it is with the springing delight of hawk over heron, hound after fox, that it gives her chase, never fretting, never tiring, sure of having her, allowing her no rest.

Contempt is a sentiment that cannot be entertained by comic intelligence. What is it but an excuse to be idly minded, or personally lofty, or comfortably narrow, not perfectly humane? If we do not feign when we say that we despise Folly, we shut the brain. There is a disdainful attitude in the presence of Folly, partaking of the foolishness to Comic perception: and anger is not much less foolish than disdain. The struggle we have to conduct is essence against essence. Let no one doubt of the sequel when this emanation of what is firmest in us is launched to strike down the daughter of Unreason and Sentimentalism: such being Folly's parentage, when it is respectable.

Our modern system of combating her is too long defensive, and carried on too ploddingly with concrete engines of war in the attack. She has time to get behind entrenchments. She is ready to stand a siege, before the heavily armed man of science and the writer of the leading article or elaborate essay have primed their big guns. It should be remembered that she has charms for the multitude; and an English multitude seeing her make a gallant fight of it will be half in love with her, certainly willing to lend her a cheer. Benevolent subscriptions assist her to hire her own man of science, her own organ in the Press. If ultimately she is cast out and overthrown, she can stretch a finger at gaps in our ranks. She can say that she commanded an army and seduced men, whom we thought sober men and safe, to act as her lieutenants. We learn rather gloomily, after she has flashed her lantern, that we have in our midst able men and men with minds for whom there is no pole-star in intellectual navigation. Comedy, or the Comic element, is the specific for the poison of delusion while Folly is passing from the state of vapour to substantial form.

O for a breath of Aristophanes, Rabelais, Voltaire, Cervantes, Fielding, Moliere! These are spirits that, if you know them well, will come when you do call. You will find the very invocation of them act on you like a renovating air—the South-west coming off the sea, or a cry in the Alps.

Page 4673

No one would presume to say that we are deficient in jokers. They abound, and the organisation directing their machinery to shoot them in the wake of the leading article and the popular sentiment is good.

But the Comic differs from them in addressing the wits for laughter; and the sluggish wits want some training to respond to it, whether in public life or private, and particularly when the feelings are excited.

The sense of the Comic is much blunted by habits of punning and of using humouristic phrase: the trick of employing Johnsonian polysyllables to treat of the infinitely little. And it really may be humorous, of a kind, yet it will miss the point by going too much round about it.

A certain French Duke Pasquier died, some years back, at a very advanced age. He had been the venerable Duke Pasquier in his later years up to the period of his death. There was a report of Duke Pasquier that he was a man of profound egoism. Hence an argument arose, and was warmly sustained, upon the excessive selfishness of those who, in a world of troubles, and calls to action, and innumerable duties, husband their strength for the sake of living on. Can it be possible, the argument ran, for a truly generous heart to continue beating up to the age of a hundred? Duke Pasquier was not without his defenders, who likened him to the oak of the forest—a venerable comparison.

The argument was conducted on both sides with spirit and earnestness, lightened here and there by frisky touches of the polysyllabic playful, reminding one of the serious pursuit of their fun by truant boys, that are assured they are out of the eye of their master, and now and then indulge in an imitation of him. And well might it be supposed that the Comic idea was asleep, not overlooking them! It resolved at last to this, that either Duke Pasquier was a scandal on our humanity in clinging to life so long, or that he honoured it by so sturdy a resistance to the enemy. As one who has entangled himself in a labyrinth is glad to get out again at the entrance, the argument ran about to conclude with its commencement.

Now, imagine a master of the Comic treating this theme, and particularly the argument on it. Imagine an Aristophanic comedy of *the centenarian*, with choric praises of heroical early death, and the same of a stubborn vitality, and the poet laughing at the chorus; and the grand question for contention in dialogue, as to the exact age when a man should die, to the identical minute, that he may preserve the respect of his fellows, followed by a systematic attempt to make an accurate measurement in parallel lines, with a tough rope-yarn by one party, and a string of yawns by the other, of the veteran's power of enduring life, and our capacity for enduring *him*, with tremendous pulling on both sides.

Would not the Comic view of the discussion illumine it and the disputants like very lightning? There are questions, as well as persons, that only the Comic can fitly touch.

Page 4674

Aristophanes would probably have crowned the ancient tree, with the consolatory observation to the haggard line of long-expectant heirs of the Centenarian, that they live to see the blessedness of coming of a strong stock. The shafts of his ridicule would mainly have been aimed at the disputants. For the sole ground of the argument was the old man's character, and sophists are not needed to demonstrate that we can very soon have too much of a bad thing. A Centenarian does not necessarily provoke the Comic idea, nor does the corpse of a duke. It is not provoked in the order of nature, until we draw its penetrating attentiveness to some circumstance with which we have been mixing our private interests, or our speculative obfuscation. Dulness, insensible to the Comic, has the privilege of arousing it; and the laying of a dull finger on matters of human life is the surest method of establishing electrical communications with a battery of laughter—where the Comic idea is prevalent.

But if the Comic idea prevailed with us, and we had an Aristophanes to barb and wing it, we should be breathing air of Athens. Prosers now pouring forth on us like public fountains would be cut short in the street and left blinking, dumb as pillar-posts, with letters thrust into their mouths. We should throw off incubus, our dreadful familiar—by some called boredom—whom it is our present humiliation to be just alive enough to loathe, never quick enough to foil. There would be a bright and positive, clear Hellenic perception of facts. The vapours of Unreason and Sentimentalism would be blown away before they were productive. Where would Pessimist and Optimist be? They would in any case have a diminished audience. Yet possibly the change of despots, from good-natured old obtuseness to keen-edged intelligence, which is by nature merciless, would be more than we could bear. The rupture of the link between dull people, consisting in the fraternal agreement that something is too clever for them, and a shot beyond them, is not to be thought of lightly; for, slender though the link may seem, it is equivalent to a cement forming a concrete of dense cohesion, very desirable in the estimation of the statesman.

A political Aristophanes, taking advantage of his lyrical Bacchic licence, was found too much for political Athens. I would not ask to have him revived, but that the sharp light of such a spirit as his might be with us to strike now and then on public affairs, public themes, to make them spin along more briskly.

He hated with the politician's fervour the sophist who corrupted simplicity of thought, the poet who destroyed purity of style, the demagogue, 'the saw-toothed monster,' who, as he conceived, chicaned the mob, and he held his own against them by strength of laughter, until fines, the curtailing of his Comic licence in the chorus, and ultimately the ruin of Athens, which could no longer support the expense of the chorus, threw him altogether on dialogue, and

Page 4675

brought him under the law. After the catastrophe, the poet, who had ever been gazing back at the men of Marathon and Salamis, must have felt that he had foreseen it; and that he was wise when he pleaded for peace, and derided military coxcombry, and the captious old creature Demus, we can admit. He had the Comic poet's gift of common-sense—which does not always include political intelligence; yet his political tendency raised him above the Old Comedy turn for uproarious farce. He abused Socrates, but Xenophon, the disciple of Socrates, by his trained rhetoric saved the Ten Thousand. Aristophanes might say that if his warnings had been followed there would have been no such thing as a mercenary Greek expedition under Cyrus. Athens, however, was on a landslip, falling; none could arrest it. To gaze back, to uphold the old times, was a most natural conservatism, and fruitless. The aloe had bloomed. Whether right or wrong in his politics and his criticisms, and bearing in mind the instruments he played on and the audience he had to win, there is an idea in his comedies: it is the Idea of Good Citizenship.

He is not likely to be revived. He stands, like Shakespeare, an unapproachable. Swift says of him, with a loving chuckle:

'But as for Comic Aristophanes, The dog too witty and too profane is.'

Aristophanes was 'profane,' under satiric direction, unlike his rivals Cratinus, Phrynichus, Ameipsias, Eupolis, and others, if we are to believe him, who in their extraordinary Donnybrook Fair of the day of Comedy, thumped one another and everybody else with absolute heartiness, as he did, but aimed at small game, and dragged forth particular women, which he did not. He is an aggregate of many men, all of a certain greatness. We may build up a conception of his powers if we mount Rabelais upon Hudibras, lift him with the songfulness of Shelley, give him a vein of Heinrich Heine, and cover him with the mantle of the Anti-Jacobin, adding (that there may be some Irish in him) a dash of Grattan, before he is in motion.

But such efforts at conceiving one great one by incorporation of minors are vain, and cry for excuse. Supposing Wilkes for leading man in a country constantly plunging into war under some plumed Lamachus, with enemies periodically firing the land up to the gates of London, and a Samuel Foote, of prodigious genius, attacking him with ridicule, I think it gives a notion of the conflict engaged in by Aristophanes. This laughing bald-pate, as he calls himself, was a Titanic pamphleteer, using laughter for his political weapon; a laughter without scruple, the laughter of Hercules. He was primed with wit, as with the garlic he speaks of giving to the game-cocks, to make them fight the better. And he was a lyric poet of aerial delicacy, with the homely song of a jolly national poet, and a poet of such feeling that the comic mask is at times no broader than a cloth on a face to show the serious features of our common likeness. He is not to be revived; but if his method were studied, some of the fire in him would come to us, and we might be revived.

Page 4676

Taking them generally, the English public are most in sympathy with this primitive Aristophanic comedy, wherein the comic is capped by the grotesque, irony tips the wit, and satire is a naked sword. They have the basis of the Comic in them: an esteem for common-sense. They cordially dislike the reverse of it. They have a rich laugh, though it is not the gros rire of the Gaul tossing gros sel, nor the polished Frenchman's mentally digestive laugh. And if they have now, like a monarch with a troop of dwarfs, too many jesters kicking the dictionary about, to let them reflect that they are dull, occasionally, like the pensive monarch surprising himself with an idea of an idea of his own, they look so. And they are given to looking in the glass. They must see that something ails them. How much even the better order of them will endure, without a thought of the defensive, when the person afflicting them is protected from satire, we read in Memoirs of a Preceding Age, where the vulgarly tyrannous hostess of a great house of reception shuffled the guests and played them like a pack of cards, with her exact estimate of the strength of each one printed on them: and still this house continued to be the most popular in England; nor did the lady ever appear in print or on the boards as the comic type that she was.

It has been suggested that they have not yet spiritually comprehended the signification of living in society; for who are cheerfuller, brisker of wit, in the fields, and as explorers, colonisers, backwoodsmen? They are happy in rough exercise, and also in complete repose. The intermediate condition, when they are called upon to talk to one another, upon other than affairs of business or their hobbies, reveals them wearing a curious look of vacancy, as it were the socket of an eye wanting. The Comic is perpetually springing up in social life, and, it oppresses them from not being perceived.

Thus, at a dinner-party, one of the guests, who happens to have enrolled himself in a Burial Company, politely entreats the others to inscribe their names as shareholders, expatiating on the advantages accruing to them in the event of their very possible speedy death, the salubrity of the site, the aptitude of the soil for a quick consumption of their remains, *etc*.; and they drink sadness from the incongruous man, and conceive indigestion, not seeing him in a sharply defined light, that would bid them taste the comic of him. Or it is mentioned that a newly elected member of our Parliament celebrates his arrival at eminence by the publication of a book on cab-fares, dedicated to a beloved female relative deceased, and the comment on it is the word 'Indeed.' But, merely for a contrast, turn to a not uncommon scene of yesterday in the hunting-field, where a brilliant young rider, having broken his collar-bone, trots away very soon after, against medical interdict, half put together in splinters, to the most distant meet

Page 4677

of his neighbourhood, sure of escaping his doctor, who is the first person he encounters. 'I came here purposely to avoid you,' says the patient. 'I came here purposely to take care of you,' says the doctor. Off they go, and come to a swollen brook. The patient clears it handsomely: the doctor tumbles in. All the field are alive with the heartiest relish of every incident and every cross-light on it; and dull would the man have been thought who had not his word to say about it when riding home.

In our prose literature we have had delightful Comic writers. Besides Fielding and Goldsmith, there is Miss Austen, whose Emma and Mr. Elton might walk straight into a comedy, were the plot arranged for them. Galt's neglected novels have some characters and strokes of shrewd comedy. In our poetic literature the comic is delicate and graceful above the touch of Italian and French. Generally, however, the English elect excel in satire, and they are noble humourists. The national disposition is for hard-hitting, with a moral purpose to sanction it; or for a rosy, sometimes a larmoyant, geniality, not unmanly in its verging upon tenderness, and with a singular attraction for thick-headedness, to decorate it with asses' ears and the most beautiful sylvan haloes. But the Comic is a different spirit.

You may estimate your capacity for Comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less: and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes.

Each one of an affectionate couple may be willing, as we say, to die for the other, yet unwilling to utter the agreeable word at the right moment; but if the wits were sufficiently quick for them to perceive that they are in a comic situation, as affectionate couples must be when they quarrel, they would not wait for the moon or the almanac, or a Dorine, to bring back the flood-tide of tender feelings, that they should join hands and lips.

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.

If instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony.

If you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you and yours to your neighbour, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humour that is moving you.

The Comic, which is the perceptive, is the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim to these powers of laughter, but it is not to be confounded with them: it enfolds a thinner

form of them, differing from satire, in not sharply driving into the quivering sensibilities, and from humour, in not comforting them and tucking them up, or indicating a broader than the range of this bustling world to them.

Page 4678

Fielding's Jonathan Wild presents a case of this peculiar distinction, when that man of eminent greatness remarks upon the unfairness of a trial in which the condemnation has been brought about by twelve men of the opposite party; for it is not satiric, it is not humorous; yet it is immensely comic to hear a guilty villain protesting that his own 'party' should have a voice in the Law. It opens an avenue into villains' ratiocination. {9} And the Comic is not cancelled though we should suppose Jonathan to be giving play to his humour. I may have dreamed this or had it suggested to me, for on referring to Jonathan Wild, I do not find it.

Apply the case to the man of deep wit, who is ever certain of his condemnation by the opposite party, and then it ceases to be comic, and will be satiric.

The look of Fielding upon Richardson is essentially comic. His method of correcting the sentimental writer is a mixture of the comic and the humorous. Parson Adams is a creation of humour. But both the conception and the presentation of Alceste and of Tartuffe, of Celimene and Philaminte, are purely comic, addressed to the intellect: there is no humour in them, and they refresh the intellect they quicken to detect their comedy, by force of the contrast they offer between themselves and the wiser world about them; that is to say, society, or that assemblage of minds whereof the Comic spirit has its origin.

Byron had splendid powers of humour, and the most poetic satire that we have example of, fusing at times to hard irony. He had no strong comic sense, or he would not have taken an anti-social position, which is directly opposed to the Comic; and in his philosophy, judged by philosophers, he is a comic figure, by reason of this deficiency. 'So bald er philosophirt ist er ein Kind,' Goethe says of him. Carlyle sees him in this comic light, treats him in the humorous manner.

The Satirist is a moral agent, often a social scavenger, working on a storage of bile.

The Ironeist is one thing or another, according to his caprice. Irony is the humour of satire; it may be savage as in Swift, with a moral object, or sedate, as in Gibbon, with a malicious. The foppish irony fretting to be seen, and the irony which leers, that you shall not mistake its intention, are failures in satiric effort pretending to the treasures of ambiguity.

The Humourist of mean order is a refreshing laugher, giving tone to the feelings and sometimes allowing the feelings to be too much for him. But the humourist of high has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the Comic poet.

Heart and mind laugh out at Don Quixote, and still you brood on him. The juxtaposition of the knight and squire is a Comic conception, the opposition of their natures most humorous. They are as different as the two hemispheres in the time of Columbus, yet they touch and are bound in one by laughter. The knight's great aims and constant

mishaps, his chivalrous valiancy exercised on absurd objects, his good sense along the highroad of the craziest of expeditions; the compassion he plucks out of derision, and the admirable figure he preserves while stalking through the frantically grotesque and burlesque assailing him, are in the loftiest moods of humour, fusing the Tragic sentiment with the Comic narrative.

Page 4679

The stroke of the great humourist is world-wide, with lights of Tragedy in his laughter.

Taking a living great, though not creative, humourist to guide our description: the skull of Yorick is in his hands in our seasons of festival; he sees visions of primitive man capering preposterously under the gorgeous robes of ceremonial. Our souls must be on fire when we wear solemnity, if we would not press upon his shrewdest nerve. Finite and infinite flash from one to the other with him, lending him a two-edged thought that peeps out of his peacefullest lines by fits, like the lantern of the fire-watcher at windows, going the rounds at night. The comportment and performances of men in society are to him, by the vivid comparison with their mortality, more grotesque than respectable. But ask yourself, Is he always to be relied on for justness? He will fly straight as the emissary eagle back to Jove at the true Hero. He will also make as determined a swift descent upon the man of his wilful choice, whom we cannot distinguish as a true one. This vast power of his, built up of the feelings and the intellect in union, is often wanting in proportion and in discretion. Humourists touching upon History or Society are given to be capricious. They are, as in the case of Sterne, given to be sentimental; for with them the feelings are primary, as with singers. Comedy, on the other hand, is an interpretation of the general mind, and is for that reason of necessity kept in restraint. The French lay marked stress on mesure et gout, and they own how much they owe to Moliere for leading them in simple justness and taste. We can teach them many things; they can teach us in this.

The Comic poet is in the narrow field, or enclosed square, of the society he depicts; and he addresses the still narrower enclosure of men’s intellects, with reference to the operation of the social world upon their characters. He is not concerned with beginnings or endings or surroundings, but with what you are now weaving. To understand his work and value it, you must have a sober liking of your kind and a sober estimate of our civilized qualities. The aim and business of the Comic poet are misunderstood, his meaning is not seized nor his point of view taken, when he is accused of dishonouring our nature and being hostile to sentiment, tending to spitefulness and making an unfair use of laughter. Those who detect irony in Comedy do so because they choose to see it in life. Poverty, says the satirist, has nothing harder in itself than that it makes men ridiculous. But poverty is never ridiculous to Comic perception until it attempts to make its rags conceal its bareness in a forlorn attempt at decency, or foolishly to rival ostentation. Caleb Balderstone, in his endeavour to keep up the honour of a noble household in a state of beggary, is an exquisitely comic character. In the case of ‘poor relatives,’ on the other hand, it is the rich, whom they perplex, that

Page 4680

are really comic; and to laugh at the former, not seeing the comedy of the latter, is to betray dulness of vision. Humourist and Satirist frequently hunt together as Ironeists in pursuit of the grotesque, to the exclusion of the Comic. That was an affecting moment in the history of the Prince Regent, when the First Gentleman of Europe burst into tears at a sarcastic remark of Beau Brummell's on the cut of his coat. Humour, Satire, Irony, pounce on it altogether as their common prey. The Comic spirit eyes but does not touch it. Put into action, it would be farcical. It is too gross for Comedy.

Incidents of a kind casting ridicule on our unfortunate nature instead of our conventional life, provoke derisive laughter, which thwarts the Comic idea. But derision is foiled by the play of the intellect. Most of doubtful causes in contest are open to Comic interpretation, and any intellectual pleading of a doubtful cause contains germs of an Idea of Comedy.

The laughter of satire is a blow in the back or the face. The laughter of Comedy is impersonal and of unrivalled politeness, nearer a smile; often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humour of the mind.

One excellent test of the civilization of a country, as I have said, I take to be the flourishing of the Comic idea and Comedy; and the test of true Comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

If you believe that our civilization is founded in common-sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, when contemplating men, discern a Spirit overhead; not more heavenly than the light flashed upward from glassy surfaces, but luminous and watchful; never shooting beyond them, nor lagging in the rear; so closely attached to them that it may be taken for a slavish reflex, until its features are studied. It has the sage's brows, and the sunny malice of a faun lurks at the corners of the half-closed lips drawn in an idle wariness of half tension. That slim feasting smile, shaped like the long-bow, was once a big round satyr's laugh, that flung up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The laugh will come again, but it will be of the order of the smile, finely tempered, showing sunlight of the mind, mental richness rather than noisy enormity. Its common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men's future upon earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually, or in the bulk—the Spirit

overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.

Page 4681

Not to distinguish it is to be bull-blind to the spiritual, and to deny the existence of a mind of man where minds of men are in working conjunction.

You must, as I have said, believe that our state of society is founded in common-sense, otherwise you will not be struck by the contrasts the Comic Spirit perceives, or have it to look to for your consolation. You will, in fact, be standing in that peculiar oblique beam of light, yourself illuminated to the general eye as the very object of chase and doomed quarry of the thing obscure to you. But to feel its presence and to see it is your assurance that many sane and solid minds are with you in what you are experiencing: and this of itself spares you the pain of satirical heat, and the bitter craving to strike heavy blows. You share the sublime of wrath, that would not have hurt the foolish, but merely demonstrate their foolishness. Moliere was contented to revenge himself on the critics of the Ecole des Femmes, by writing the Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, one of the wisest as well as the playfullest of studies in criticism. A perception of the comic spirit gives high fellowship. You become a citizen of the selecter world, the highest we know of in connection with our old world, which is not supermundane. Look there for your unchallengeable upper class! You feel that you are one of this our civilized community, that you cannot escape from it, and would not if you could. Good hope sustains you; weariness does not overwhelm you; in isolation you see no charms for vanity; personal pride is greatly moderated. Nor shall your title of citizenship exclude you from worlds of imagination or of devotion. The Comic spirit is not hostile to the sweetest songfully poetic. Chaucer bubbles with it: Shakespeare overflows: there is a mild moon's ray of it (pale with super-refinement through distance from our flesh and blood planet) in Comus. Pope has it, and it is the daylight side of the night half obscuring Cowper. It is only hostile to the priestly element, when that, by baleful swelling, transcends and overlaps the bounds of its office: and then, in extreme cases, it is too true to itself to speak, and veils the lamp: as, for example, the spectacle of Bossuet over the dead body of Moliere: at which the dark angels may, but men do not laugh.

We have had comic pulpits, for a sign that the laughter-moving and the worshipful may be in alliance: I know not how far comic, or how much assisted in seeming so by the unexpectedness and the relief of its appearance: at least they are popular, they are said to win the ear. Laughter is open to perversion, like other good things; the scornful and the brutal sorts are not unknown to us; but the laughter directed by the Comic spirit is a harmless wine, conducing to sobriety in the degree that it enlivens. It enters you like fresh air into a study; as when one of the sudden contrasts of the comic idea floods the brain like reassuring

Page 4682

daylight. You are cognizant of the true kind by feeling that you take it in, savour it, and have what flowers live on, natural air for food. That which you give out—the joyful roar—is not the better part; let that go to good fellowship and the benefit of the lungs. Aristophanes promises his auditors that if they will retain the ideas of the comic poet carefully, as they keep dried fruits in boxes, their garments shall smell odoriferous of wisdom throughout the year. The boast will not be thought an empty one by those who have choice friends that have stocked themselves according to his directions. Such treasuries of sparkling laughter are wells in our desert. Sensitiveness to the comic laugh is a step in civilization. To shrink from being an object of it is a step in cultivation. We know the degree of refinement in men by the matter they will laugh at, and the ring of the laugh; but we know likewise that the larger natures are distinguished by the great breadth of their power of laughter, and no one really loving Moliere is refined by that love to despise or be dense to Aristophanes, though it may be that the lover of Aristophanes will not have risen to the height of Moliere. Embrace them both, and you have the whole scale of laughter in your breast. Nothing in the world surpasses in stormy fun the scene in The Frogs, when Bacchus and Xanthias receive their thrashings from the hands of businesslike OEacus, to discover which is the divinity of the two, by his imperviousness to the mortal condition of pain, and each, under the obligation of not crying out, makes believe that his horrible bellow—the god's iou—iou being the lustier—means only the stopping of a sneeze, or horseman sighted, or the prelude to an invocation to some deity: and the slave contrives that the god shall get the bigger lot of blows. Passages of Rabelais, one or two in Don Quixote, and the Supper in the Manner of the Ancients, in Peregrine Pickle, are of a similar cataract of laughter. But it is not illuminating; it is not the laughter of the mind. Moliere's laughter, in his purest comedies, is ethereal, as light to our nature, as colour to our thoughts. The Misanthrope and the Tartuffe have no audible laughter; but the characters are steeped in the comic spirit. They quicken the mind through laughter, from coming out of the mind; and the mind accepts them because they are clear interpretations of certain chapters of the Book lying open before us all. Between these two stand Shakespeare and Cervantes, with the richer laugh of heart and mind in one; with much of the Aristophanic robustness, something of Moliere's delicacy.

Page 4683

The laughter heard in circles not pervaded by the Comic idea, will sound harsh and soulless, like versified prose, if you step into them with a sense of the distinction. You will fancy you have changed your habitation to a planet remoter from the sun. You may be among powerful brains too. You will not find poets—or but a stray one, over-worshipped. You will find learned men undoubtedly, professors, reputed philosophers, and illustrious dilettanti. They have in them, perhaps, every element composing light, except the Comic. They read verse, they discourse of art; but their eminent faculties are not under that vigilant sense of a collective supervision, spiritual and present, which we have taken note of. They build a temple of arrogance; they speak much in the voice of oracles; their hilarity, if it does not dip in grossness, is usually a form of pugnacity.

Insufficiency of sight in the eye looking outward has deprived them of the eye that should look inward. They have never weighed themselves in the delicate balance of the Comic idea so as to obtain a suspicion of the rights and dues of the world; and they have, in consequence, an irritable personality. A very learned English professor crushed an argument in a political discussion, by asking his adversary angrily: 'Are you aware, sir, that I am a philologer?'

The practice of polite society will help in training them, and the professor on a sofa with beautiful ladies on each side of him, may become their pupil and a scholar in manners without knowing it: he is at least a fair and pleasing spectacle to the Comic Muse. But the society named polite is volatile in its adorations, and to-morrow will be petting a bronzed soldier, or a black African, or a prince, or a spiritualist: ideas cannot take root in its ever-shifting soil. It is besides addicted in self-defence to gabble exclusively of the affairs of its rapidly revolving world, as children on a whirligoround bestow their attention on the wooden horse or cradle ahead of them, to escape from giddiness and preserve a notion of identity. The professor is better out of a circle that often confounds by lionizing, sometimes annoys by abandoning, and always confuses. The school that teaches gently what peril there is lest a cultivated head should still be coxcomb's, and the collisions which may befall high-soaring minds, empty or full, is more to be recommended than the sphere of incessant motion supplying it with material.

Lands where the Comic spirit is obscure overhead are rank with raw crops of matter. The traveller accustomed to smooth highways and people not covered with burrs and prickles is amazed, amid so much that is fair and cherishable, to come upon such curious barbarism. An Englishman paid a visit of admiration to a professor in the Land of Culture, and was introduced by him to another distinguished professor, to whom he took so cordially as to walk out with him alone one afternoon. The first professor, an erudite

Page 4684

entirely worthy of the sentiment of scholarly esteem prompting the visit, behaved (if we exclude the dagger) with the vindictive jealousy of an injured Spanish beauty. After a short prelude of gloom and obscure explosions, he discharged upon his faithless admirer the bolts of passionate logic familiar to the ears of flighty caballeros:—'Either I am a fit object of your admiration, or I am not. Of these things one—either you are competent to judge, in which case I stand condemned by you; or you are incompetent, and therefore impertinent, and you may betake yourself to your country again, hypocrite!' The admirer was for persuading the wounded scholar that it is given to us to be able to admire two professors at a time. He was driven forth.

Perhaps this might have occurred in any country, and a comedy of The Pedant, discovering the greedy humanity within the dusty scholar, would not bring it home to one in particular. I am mindful that it was in Germany, when I observe that the Germans have gone through no comic training to warn them of the sly, wise emanation eyeing them from aloft, nor much of satirical. Heinrich Heine has not been enough to cause them to smart and meditate. Nationally, as well as individually, when they are excited they are in danger of the grotesque, as when, for instance, they decline to listen to evidence, and raise a national outcry because one of German blood has been convicted of crime in a foreign country. They are acute critics, yet they still wield clubs in controversy. Compare them in this respect with the people schooled in La Bruyere, La Fontaine, Moliere; with the people who have the figures of a Trissotin and a Vadius before them for a comic warning of the personal vanities of the caressed professor. It is more than difference of race. It is the difference of traditions, temper, and style, which comes of schooling.

The French controversialist is a polished swordsman, to be dreaded in his graces and courtesies. The German is Orson, or the mob, or a marching army, in defence of a good case or a bad—a big or a little. His irony is a missile of terrific tonnage: sarcasm he emits like a blast from a dragon's mouth. He must and will be Titan. He stamps his foe underfoot, and is astonished that the creature is not dead, but stinging; for, in truth, the Titan is contending, by comparison, with a god.

When the Germans lie on their arms, looking across the Alsatian frontier at the crowds of Frenchmen rushing to applaud L'ami Fritz at the Theatre Francais, looking and considering the meaning of that applause, which is grimly comic in its political response to the domestic moral of the play—when the Germans watch and are silent, their force of character tells. They are kings in music, we may say princes in poetry, good speculators in philosophy, and our leaders in scholarship. That so gifted a race, possessed moreover of the stern good sense which collects the waters of laughter to make the wells, should show

Page 4685

at a disadvantage, I hold for a proof, instructive to us, that the discipline of the comic spirit is needful to their growth. We see what they can reach to in that great figure of modern manhood, Goethe. They are a growing people; they are conversable as well; and when their men, as in France, and at intervals at Berlin tea-tables, consent to talk on equal terms with their women, and to listen to them, their growth will be accelerated and be shapelier. Comedy, or in any form the Comic spirit, will then come to them to cut some figures out of the block, show them the mirror, enliven and irradiate the social intelligence.

Modern French comedy is commendable for the directness of the study of actual life, as far as that, which is but the early step in such a scholarship, can be of service in composing and colouring the picture. A consequence of this crude, though well-meant, realism is the collision of the writers in their scenes and incidents, and in their characters. The Muse of most of them is an Aventuriere. She is clever, and a certain diversion exists in the united scheme for confounding her. The object of this person is to reinstate herself in the decorous world; and either, having accomplished this purpose through deceit, she has a nostalgie de la boue, that eventually casts her back into it, or she is exposed in her course of deception when she is about to gain her end. A very good, innocent young man is her victim, or a very astute, goodish young man obstructs her path. This latter is enabled to be the champion of the decorous world by knowing the indecorous well. He has assisted in the progress of Aventurieres downward; he will not help them to ascend. The world is with him; and certainly it is not much of an ascension they aspire to; but what sort of a figure is he? The triumph of a candid realism is to show him no hero. You are to admire him (for it must be supposed that realism pretends to waken some admiration) as a credibly living young man; no better, only a little firmer and shrewder, than the rest. If, however, you think at all, after the curtain has fallen, you are likely to think that the Aventurieres have a case to plead against him. True, and the author has not said anything to the contrary; he has but painted from the life; he leaves his audience to the reflections of unphilosophic minds upon life, from the specimen he has presented in the bright and narrow circle of a spy-glass.

I do not know that the fly in amber is of any particular use, but the Comic idea enclosed in a comedy makes it more generally perceptible and portable, and that is an advantage. There is a benefit to men in taking the lessons of Comedy in congregations, for it enlivens the wits; and to writers it is beneficial, for they must have a clear scheme, and even if they have no idea to present, they must prove that they have made the public sit to them before the sitting to see the picture. And writing for the stage would be a corrective of a too-incrusted scholarly

Page 4686

style, into which some great ones fall at times. It keeps minor writers to a definite plan, and to English. Many of them now swelling a plethoric market, in the composition of novels, in pun-manufactories and in journalism; attached to the machinery forcing perishable matter on a public that swallows voraciously and groans; might, with encouragement, be attending to the study of art in literature. Our critics appear to be fascinated by the quaintness of our public, as the world is when our beast-garden has a new importation of magnitude, and the creatures appetite is reverently consulted. They stipulate for a writer's popularity before they will do much more than take the position of umpires to record his failure or success. Now the pig supplies the most popular of dishes, but it is not accounted the most honoured of animals, unless it be by the cottager. Our public might surely be led to try other, perhaps finer, meat. It has good taste in song. It might be taught as justly, on the whole, and the sooner when the cottager's view of the feast shall cease to be the humble one of our literary critics, to extend this capacity for delicate choosing in the direction of the matter arousing laughter.

Footnotes:

{1} A lecture delivered at the London Institution, February 1st, 1877.

{2} Realism in the writing is carried to such a pitch in *the old bachelor*, that husband and wife use imbecile connubial epithets to one another.

{3} Tallemant des Reaux, in his rough portrait of the Duke, shows the foundation of the character of Alceste.

{4} See Tom Jones, book viii. chapter I, for Fielding's opinion of our Comedy. But he puts it simply; not as an exercise in the quasi-philosophical bathetic.

{5} Femmes Savantes:

Belise: Veux-tu toute la vie offenser la grammaire?

Martine: Qui parle d'offenser grand'mere ni grand-pere?'

The pun is delivered in all sincerity, from the mouth of a rustic.

{6} Maskwell seems to have been carved on the model of Iago, as by the hand of an enterprising urchin. He apostrophizes his 'invention' repeatedly. 'Thanks, my invention.' He hits on an invention, to say: 'Was it my brain or Providence? no matter which.' It is no matter which, but it was not his brain.

{7} Imaginary Conversations: Alfieri and the Jew Salomon.

{8} Terence did not please the rough old conservative Romans; they liked Plautus better, and the recurring mention of the vetus poeta in his prologues, who plagued him with the crusty critical view of his productions, has in the end a comic effect on the reader.

{9} The exclamation of Lady Booby, when Joseph defends himself: ’*Your virtue*! I shall never survive it!’ *etc*., is another instance.—Joseph Andrews. Also that of Miss Mathews in her narrative to Booth: ’But such are the friendships of women.’—Amelia.

Page 4687

Etext editor's bookmarks for the PG *short works of Meredith*:

A wise man will not squander his laughter if he can help it
A woman is hurt if you do not confide to her your plans
A generous enemy is a friend on the wrong side
A very doubtful benefit
A great oration may be a sedative
A male devotee is within an inch of a miracle
Above Nature, I tell him, or, we shall be very much below
Adversary at once offensive and helpless provokes brutality
All are friends who sit at table
All flattery is at somebody's expense
Americans forgivingly remember, without mentioning
As becomes them, they do not look ahead
As in all great oratory! The key of it is the pathos
Back from the altar to discover that she has chained herself
Be what you seem, my little one
Be philosophical, but accept your personal dues
Bed was a rock of refuge and fortified defence
But I leave it to you
Can believe a woman to be any age when her cheeks are tinted
Causes him to be popularly weighed
Charges of cynicism are common against all satirists
Civil tongue and rosy smiles sweeten even sour wine
Cupid clipped of wing is a destructive parasite
Dangerous things are uttered after the third glass
Distinguished by his not allowing himself to be provoked
Distrust us, and it is a declaration of war
Eccentric behaviour in trifles
Everywhere the badge of subjection is a poor stomach
Excess of a merit is a capital offence in morality
Excited, glad of catastrophe if it but killed monotony
Face betokening the perpetual smack of lemon
Fourth of the Georges
Generally he noticed nothing
Gentleman in a good state of preservation
Good jokes are not always good policy
Gratitude never was a woman's gift
Happiness in love is a match between ecstasy and compliance
Here and there a plain good soul to whom he was affectionate
His idea of marriage is, the taking of the woman into custody
Holy images, and other miraculous objects are sold
I who respect the state of marriage by refusing

I make a point of never recommending my own house
I like him, I like him, of course, but I want to breathe
I am a discordant instrument I do not readily vibrate
If I do not speak of payment
Imparting the usual chorus of yesses to his own mind
In every difficulty, patience is a life-belt
Indulged in their privilege of thinking what they liked
Infants are said to have their ideas, and why not young ladies?
Intellectual contempt of easy dupes
Invite indecision to exhaust their scruples
Is not one month of

Page 4688

brightness as much as we can ask for?
It was harder to be near and not close
It is well to learn manners without having them imposed on us
Knew my friend to be one of the most absent-minded of men
Lend him your own generosity
Love and war have been compared—Both require strategy
Loving in this land: they all go mad, straight off
Men love to boast of things nobody else has seen
Men overweeningly in love with their creations
Modest are the most easily intoxicated when they sip at vanity
Must be the moralist in the satirist if satire is to strike
Nature is not of necessity always roaring
Naughtily Australian and kangarooly
Never reckon on womankind for a wise act
No flattery for me at the expense of my sisters
Not a page of his books reveals malevolence or a sneer
Not in love—She was only not unwilling to be in love
Nothing desirable will you have which is not coveted
Only to be described in the tongue of auctioneers
Peace, I do pray, for the husband-haunted wife
Period of his life a man becomes too voraciously constant
Petty concessions are signs of weakness to the unsatisfied
Pitiful conceit in men
Primitive appetite for noise
Rapture of obliviousness
Rejoicing they have in their common agreement
Respected the vegetable yet more than he esteemed the flower
Rich and poor ’s all right, if I’m rich and you’re poor
Self-incense
Self-worship, which is often self-distrust
She seems honest, and that is the most we can hope of girls
She sought, by looking hard, to understand it better
She might turn out good, if well guarded for a time
She began to feel that this was life in earnest
She dealt in the flashes which connect ideas
Sign that the evil had reached from pricks to pokes
So are great deeds judged when the danger’s past (as easy)
Soft slumber of a strength never yet called forth
Spare me that word “female” as long as you live
Statesman who stooped to conquer fact through fiction
Sunning itself in the glass of Envy
Suspects all young men and most young women
Suspicion was her best witness

Sweet treasure before which lies a dragon sleeping
Telling her anything, she makes half a face in anticipation
That which fine cookery does for the cementing of couples
The intricate, which she takes for the infinite
The social world he looked at did not show him heroes
The alternative is, a garter and the bedpost
The exhaustion ensuing we named tranquillity
The mildness of assured dictatorship
Their idol pitched before them on the floor
They miss their pleasure in pursuing it
This mania of young

Page 4689

people for pleasure, eternal pleasure
Tossed him from repulsion to incredulity, and so back
Two principal roads by which poor sinners come to a conscience
Utterance of generous and patriotic cries is not sufficient
We grew accustomed to periods of Irish fever
We like well whatso we have done good work for
We trust them or we crush them
Weak reeds who are easily vanquished and never overcome
Weak stomach is certainly more carnally virtuous than a full one
Were I chained, For liberty I would sell liberty
When we see our veterans tottering to their fall
When you have done laughing with her, you can laugh at her
Wins everywhere back a reflection of its own kindliness
Wits, which are ordinarily less productive than land
Woman descending from her ideal to the gross reality of man
Your devotion craves an enormous exchange

THE POETRY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

Contents: A Reading of Life, and Other Poems Poems, Volume 1. Poems, Volume 2. Poems, Volume 3.

A Reading Of life

[This Project Gutenberg Etext was orignally prepared from a 1901 edition by David Price]

Contents:

A Reading of Life — The Vital Choice
A Reading of Life — With The Huntress
A Reading of Life — With The Persuader
A Reading of Life — The Test Of Manhood
The Cageing Of Ares
The Night-Walk
The Hueless Love
Song In The Songless
Union In Disseverance
The Burden Of Strength
The Main Regret
Alternation

Hawarden
At The Close
Forest History
A Garden Idyl
Foresight And Patience
The Invective Of Achilles
The Invective of Achilles — V. 225.
Marshalling Of The Achaians
Agamemnon In The Fight
Paris And Diomedes
Hypnos On Ida
Clash In Arms Of The Achaians And Trojans
The Horses Of Achilles
The Mares Of The Camargue

Poem: A Reading of Life — The vital choice

I.

Or shall we run with Artemis
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if divided;
Each claims worship undivided,
In her wake would have us wallow.

II.

Youth must offer on bent knees
Homage unto one or other;
Earth, the mother,
This decrees;
And unto the pallid Scyther
Either points us shun we either
Shun or too devoutly follow.

Poem: A Reading of Life — With The Huntress

Page 4690

Through the water-eye of night,
Midway between eve and dawn,
See the chase, the rout, the flight
In deep forest; oread, faun,
Goat-foot, antlers laid on neck;
Ravenous all the line for speed.
See yon wavy sparkle beck
Sign of the Virgin Lady's lead.
Down her course a serpent star
Coils and shatters at her heels;
Peals the horn exulting, peals
Plaintive, is it near or far.
Huntress, arrowy to pursue,
In and out of woody glen,
Under cliffs that tear the blue,
Over torrent, over fen,
She and forest, where she skims
Feathery, darken and relume:
Those are her white-lightning limbs
Cleaving loads of leafy gloom.
Mountains hear her and call back,
Shrewd with night: a frosty wail
Distant: her the emerald vale
Folds, and wonders in her track.
Now her retinue is lean,
Many rearward; streams the chase
Eager forth of covert; seen
One hot tide the rapturous race.
Quiver-charged and crescent-crowned,
Up on a flash the lighted mound
Leaps she, bow to shoulder, shaft
Strung to barb with archer's craft,
Legs like plaited lyre-chords, feet
Songs to see, past pitch of sweet.
Fearful swiftness they outrun,
Shaggy wildness, grey or dun,
Challenge, charge of tusks elude:
Theirs the dance to tame the rude;
Beast, and beast in manhood tame,
Follow we their silver flame.
Pride of flesh from bondage free,
Reaping vigour of its waste,
Marks her servitors, and she

Sanctifies the unembraced.
Nought of perilous she reeks;
Valour clothes her open breast;
Sweet beyond the thrill of sex;
Hallowed by the sex confessed.
Huntress arrowy to pursue,
Colder she than sunless dew,
She, that breath of upper air;
Ay, but never lyrist sang,
Draught of Bacchus never sprang
Blood the bliss of Gods to share,
High o’er sweep of eagle wings,
Like the run with her, when rings
Clear her rally, and her dart,
In the forest’s cavern heart,
Tells of her victorious aim.
Then is pause and chatter, cheer,
Laughter at some satyr lame,
Looks upon the fallen deer,
Measuring his noble crest;
Here a favourite in her train,
Foremost mid her nymphs, caressed;
All applauded. Shall she reign
Worshipped? O to be with her there!
She, that breath of nimble air,
Lifts the breast to giant power.
Maid and man, and man and maid,
Who each other would devour
Elsewhere, by the chase betrayed,
There are comrades, led by her,
Maid-preserver, man-maker.

Page 4691

Poem: A Reading of Life — With The Persuader

Who murmurs, hither, hither: who
Where nought is audible so fills the ear?
Where nought is visible can make appear
A veil with eyes that waver through,
Like twilight's pledge of blessed night to come,
Or day most golden? All unseen and dumb,
She breathes, she moves, inviting flees,
Is lost, and leaves the thrilled desire
To clasp and strike a slackened lyre,
Till over smiles of hyacinth seas,
Flame in a crystal vessel sails
Beneath a dome of jewelled spray,
For land that drops the rosy day
On nights of throbbing nightingales.

Landward did the wonder flit,
Or heart's desire of her, all earth in it.
We saw the heavens fling down their rose;
On rapturous waves we saw her glide;
The pearly sea-shell half enclose;
The shoal of sea-nymphs flush the tide;
And we, afire to kiss her feet, no more
Behold than tracks along a startled shore,
With brightened edges of dark leaves that feign
An ambush hoped, as heartless night remain.

More closely, warmly: hither, hither! she,
The very she called forth by ripened blood
For its next breath of being, murmurs; she,
Allurement; she, fulfilment; she,
The stream within us urged to flood;
Man's cry, earth's answer, heaven's consent; O she,
Maid, woman and divinity;
Our over-earthly, inner-earthly mate
Unmated; she, our hunger and our fruit
Untasted; she our written fate
Unread; Life's flowering, Life's root:
Unread, divined; unseen, beheld;
The evanescent, ever-present she,
Great Nature's stern necessity
In radiance clothed, to softness quelled;

With a sword’s edge of sweetness keen to take
Our breath for bliss, our hearts for fulness break.

The murmur hushes down, the veil is rent.
Man’s cry, earth’s answer, heaven’s consent,
Her form is given to pardoned sight,
And lets our mortal eyes receive
The sovereign loveliness of celestial white;
Adored by them who solitarily pace,
In dusk of the underworld’s perpetual eve,
The paths among the meadow asphodel,
Remembering. Never there her face
Is planetary; reddens to shore sea-shell
Around such whiteness the enamoured air
Of noon that clothes her, never there.
Daughter of light, the joyful light,
She stands unveiled to nuptial sight,
Sweet in her disregard of aid
Divine to conquer or persuade.
A fountain jets from moss; a flower
Bends gently where her sunset tresses shower.
By guerdon of her brilliance may be seen
With eyelids unabashed the passion’s Queen.

Page 4692

Shorn of attendant Graces she can use
Her natural snares to make her will supreme.
A simple nymph it is, inclined to muse
Before the leader foot shall dip in stream:
One arm at curve along a rounded thigh;
Her firm new breasts each pointing its own way
A knee half bent to shade its fellow shy,
Where innocence, not nature, signals nay.
The bud of fresh virginity awaits
The wooer, and all roseate will she burst:
She touches on the hour of happy mates;
Still is she unaware she wakens thirst.

And while commanding blissful sight believe
It holds her as a body strained to breast,
Down on the underworld's perpetual eve
She plunges the possessor dispossessed;
And bids believe that image, heaving warm,
Is lost to float like torch-smoke after flame;
The phantom any breeze blows out of form;
A thirst's delusion, a defeated aim.

The rapture shed the torture weaves;
The direst blow on human heart she deals:
The pain to know the seen deceives;
Nought true but what insufferably feels.
And stabs of her delicious note,
That is as heavenly light to hearing, heard
Through shelter leaves, the laughter from her throat,
We answer as the midnight's morning's bird.

She laughs, she wakens gleeful cries;
In her delicious laughter part revealed;
Yet mother is she more of moans and sighs,
For longings unappeased and wounds unhealed.
Yet would she bless, it is her task to bless:
Yon folded couples, passing under shade,
Are her rich harvest; bidden caress, caress,
Consume the fruit in bloom; not disobeyed.
We dolorous complainers had a dream,
Wrought on the vacant air from inner fire,
We saw stand bare of her celestial beam
The glorious Goddess, and we dared desire.

Thereat are shown reproachful eyes, and lips
Of upward curl to meanings half obscure;
And glancing where a wood-nymph lightly skips
She nods: at once that creature wears her lure.
Blush of our being between birth and death:
Sob of our ripened blood for its next breath:
Her wily semblance nought of her denies;
Seems it the Goddess runs, the Goddess hies,
The generous Goddess yields. And she can arm
Her dwarfed and twisted with her secret charm;
Benevolent as Earth to feed her own.
Fully shall they be fed, if they beseech.
But scorn she has for them that walk alone;
Blanched men, starved women, whom no arts can pleach.
The men as chief of criminals she disdains,
And holds the reason in perceptive thought.
More pitiable, like rivers lacking rains,
Kissing cold stones,

Page 4693

the women shrink for drought.
Those faceless discords, out of nature strayed,
Rank of the putrefaction ere decayed,
In impious singles bear the thorny wreaths:
Their lives are where harmonious Pleasure breathes
For couples crowned with flowers that burn in dew.
Comes there a tremor of night's forest horn
Across her garden from the insaner crew,
She darkens to malignity of scorn.
A shiver courses through her garden-grounds:
Grunt of the tusky boar, the baying hounds,
The hunter's shouts, are heard afar, and bring
Dead on her heart her crimsoned flower of Spring.
These, the irreverent of Life's design,
Division between natural and divine
Would cast; these vaunting barrenness for best,
In veins of gathered strength Life's tide arrest;
And these because the roses flood their cheeks,
Vow them in nature wise as when Love speaks.
With them is war; and well the Goddess knows
What undermines the race who mount the rose;
How the ripe moment, lodged in slumberous hours,
Enkindled by persuasion overpowers:
Why weak as are her frailer trailing weeds,
The strong when Beauty gleams o'er Nature's needs,
And timely guile unguarded finds them lie.
They who her sway withstand a sea defy,
At every point of juncture must be proof;
Nor look for mercy from the incessant surge
Her forces mixed of craft and passion urge
For the one whelming wave to spring aloof.
She, tenderness, is pitiless to them
Resisting in her godhead nature's truth.
No flower their face shall be, but writhen stem;
Their youth a frost, their age the dirge for youth.
These miserably disinclined,
The lamentably unembraced,
Insult the Pleasures Earth designed
To people and beflower the waste.
Wherefore the Pleasures pass them by:
For death they live, in life they die.

Her head the Goddess from them turns,
As from grey mounds of ashes in bronze urns.
She views her quivering couples unconsoled,
And of her beauty mirror they become,
Like orchard blossoms, apple, pear and plum,
Free of the cloud, beneath the flood of gold.
Crowned with wreaths that burn in dew,
Her couples whirl, sun-satiated,
Athirst for shade, they sigh, they wed,
They play the music made of two:
Oldest of earth, earth's youngest till earth's end:
Cunninger than the numbered strings,
For melodies, for harmonies,
For mastered discords, and the things
Not vocable, whose mysteries
Are inmost Love's, Life's reach of Life extend.

Page 4694

Is it an anguish overflowing shame
And the tongue's pudency confides to her,
With eyes of embers, breath of incense myrrh,
The woman's marrow in some dear youth's name,
Then is the Goddess tenderness
Maternal, and she has a sister's tones
Benign to soothe intemperate distress,
Divide despair from hope, and sighs from moans.
Her gentleness imparts exhaling ease
To those of her milk-bearer votaries
As warm of bosom-earth as she; of the source
Direct; erratic but in heart's excess;
Being mortal and ill-matched for Love's great force;
Like green leaves caught with flames by his impress.
And pray they under skies less overcast,
That swiftly may her star of eve descend,
Her lustrous morning star fly not too fast,
To lengthen blissful night will she befriend.

Unfailing her reply to woman's voice
In supplication instant. Is it man's,
She hears, approves his words, her garden scans,
And him: the flowers are various, he has choice.
Perchance his wound is deep; she listens long;
Enjoys what music fills the plaintive song;
And marks how he, who would be hawk at poise
Above the bird, his plaintive song enjoys.

She reads him when his humbled manhood weeps
To her invoked: distraction is implored.
A smile, and he is up on godlike leaps
Above, with his bright Goddess owned the adored.
His tales of her declare she condescends;
Can share his fires, not always goads and rends:
Moreover, quits a throne, and must enclose
A queenlier gem than woman's wayside rose.
She bends, he quickens; she breathes low, he springs
Enraptured; low she laughs, his woes disperse;
Aloud she laughs and sweeps his varied strings.
'Tis taught him how for touch of mournful verse
Rarely the music made of two ascends,
And Beauty's Queen some other way is won.
Or it may solve the riddle, that she lends
Herself to all, and yields herself to none,

Save heavenliest: though claims by men are raised
In hot assurance under shade of doubt:
And numerous are the images bepraised
As Beauty's Queen, should passion head the rout.

Be sure the ruddy hue is Love's: to woo
Love's Fountain we must mount the ruddy hue.
That is her garden's precept, seen where shines
Her blood-flower, and its unsought neighbour pines.
Daughter of light, the joyful light,
She bids her couples face full East,
Reflecting radiance, even when from her feast
Their outstretched arms brown deserts disunite,
The lion-haunted thickets hold apart.
In love the ruddy hue declares great heart;
High confidence in her

Page 4695

whose aid is lent
To lovers lifting the tuned instrument,
Not one of rippled strings and funeral tone.
And doth the man pursue a tightened zone,
Then be it as the Laurel God he runs,
Confirmed to win, with countenance the Sun's.

Should pity bless the tremulous voice of woe
He lifts for pity, limp his offspring show.
For him requiring woman's arts to please
Infantile tastes with babe reluctances,
No race of giants! In the woman's veins
Persuasion ripely runs, through hers the pains.
Her choice of him, should kind occasion nod,
Aspiring blends the Titan with the God;
Yet unto dwarf and mortal, she, submiss
In her high Lady's mandate, yields the kiss;
And is it needed that Love's daintier brute
Be snared as hunter, she will tempt pursuit.
She is great Nature's ever intimate
In breast, and doth as ready handmaid wait,
Until perverted by her senseless male,
She plays the winding snake, the shrinking snail,
The flying deer, all tricks of evil fame,
Elusive to allure, since he grew tame.

Hence has the Goddess, Nature's earliest Power,
And greatest and most present, with her dower
Of the transcendent beauty, gained repute
For meditated guile. She laughs to hear
A charge her garden's labyrinths scarce confute,
Her garden's histories tell of to all near.
Let it be said, But less upon her guile
Doth she rely for her immortal smile.
Still let the rumour spread, and terror screens
To push her conquests by the simplest means.
While man abjures not lustihead, nor swerves
From earth's good labours, Beauty's Queen he serves.

Her spacious garden and her garden's grant
She offers in reward for handsome cheer:
Choice of the nymphs whose looks will slant
The secret down a dewy leer
Of corner eyelids into haze:

Many a fair Aphrosyne
Like flower-bell to honey-bee:
And here they flicker round the maze
Bewildering him in heart and head:
And here they wear the close demure,
With subtle peeps to reassure:
Others parade where love has bled,
And of its crimson weave their mesh:
Others to snap of fingers leap,
As bearing breast with love asleep.
These are her laughters in the flesh.
Or would she fit a warrior mood,
She lights her seeming unsubdued,
And indicates the fortress-key.
Or is it heart for heart that craves,
She flecks along a run of waves
The one to promise deeper sea.

Page 4696

Bands of her limpid primitives,
Or patterned in the curious braid,
Are the blest man's; and whatsoever he gives,
For what he gives is he repaid.
Good is it if by him 'tis held
He wins the fairest ever welled
From Nature's founts: she whispers it: Even I
Not fairer! and forbids him to deny,
Else little is he lover. Those he clasps,
Intent as tempest, worshipful as prayer, —
And be they doves or be they asps, —
Must seem to him the sovereignty fair;
Else counts he soon among life's wholly tamed.
Him whom from utter savage she reclaimed,
Half savage must he stay, would he be crowned
The lover. Else, past ripeness, deathward bound,
He reasons; and the totterer Earth detests,
Love shuns, grim logic screws in grasp, is he.
Doth man divide divine Necessity
From Joy, between the Queen of Beauty's breasts
A sword is driven; for those most glorious twain
Present her; armed to bless and to constrain.
Of this he perishes; not she, the throned
On rocks that spout their springs to the sacred mounts.
A loftier Reason out of deeper founts
Earth's chosen Goddess bears: by none disowned
While red blood runs to swell the pulse, she boasts,
And Beauty, like her star, descends the sky;
Earth's answer, heaven's consent unto man's cry,
Uplifted by the innumerable hosts.

Quickened of Nature's eye and ear,
When the wild sap at high tide smites
Within us; or benignly clear
To vision; or as the iris lights
On fluctuant waters; she is ours
Till set of man: the dreamed, the seen;
Flushing the world with odorous flowers:
A soft compulsion on terrene
By heavenly: and the world is hers
While hunger after Beauty spurs.

So is it sung in any space
She fills, with laugh at shallow laws

Forbidding love’s devised embrace,
The music Beauty from it draws.

Poem: A Reading of Life — The Test Of Manhood

Like a flood river whirled at rocky banks,
An army issues out of wilderness,
With battle plucking round its ragged flanks;
Obstruction in the van; insane excess
Oft at the heart; yet hard the onward stress
Unto more spacious, where move ordered ranks,
And rise hushed temples built of shapely stone,
The work of hands not pledged to grind or slay.
They gave our earth a dress of flesh on bone;
A tongue to speak with answering heaven gave they.
Then was the gracious birth of man’s new day;
Divided from the haunted night it shone.

That quiet dawn was Reverence; whereof sprang
Ethereal Beauty in full morningtide.
Another sun had risen to clasp his bride:
It was another earth unto him sang.

Page 4697

Came Reverence from the Huntress on her heights?
From the Persuader came it, in those vales
Whereunto she melodiously invites,
Her troops of eager servitors regales?
Not far those two great Powers of Nature speed
Disciple steps on earth when sole they lead;
Nor either points for us the way of flame.
From him predestined mightier it came;
His task to hold them both in breast, and yield
Their dues to each, and of their war be field.

The foes that in repulsion never ceased,
Must he, who once has been the goodly beast
Of one or other, at whose beck he ran,
Constrain to make him serviceable man;
Offending neither, nor the natural claim
Each pressed, denying, for his true man's name.

Ah, what a sweat of anguish in that strife
To hold them fast conjoined within him still;
Submissive to his will
Along the road of life!
And marvel not he wavered if at whiles
The forward step met frowns, the backward smiles.
For Pleasure witched him her sweet cup to drain;
Repentance offered ecstasy in pain.
Delicious licence called it Nature's cry;
Ascetic rigours crushed the fleshly sigh;
A tread on shingle timed his lame advance
Flung as the die of Bacchanalian Chance,
He of the troubled marching army leaned
On godhead visible, on godhead screened;
The radiant roseate, the curtained white;
Yet sharp his battle strained through day, through night.

He drank of fictions, till celestial aid
Might seem accorded when he fawned and prayed;
Sagely the generous Giver circumspect,
To choose for grants the egregious, his elect;
And ever that imagined succour slew
The soul of brotherhood whence Reverence drew.

In fellowship religion has its founts:
The solitary his own God reveres:

Ascend no sacred Mounts
Our hungers or our fears.
As only for the numbers Nature's care
Is shown, and she the personal nothing heeds,
So to Divinity the spring of prayer
From brotherhood the one way upward leads.
Like the sustaining air
Are both for flowers and weeds.
But he who claims in spirit to be flower,
Will find them both an air that doth devour.

Whereby he smelt his treason, who implored
External gifts bestowed but on the sword;
Beheld himself, with less and less disguise,
Through those blood-cataracts which dimmed his eyes,
His army's foe, condemned to strive and fail;
See a black adversary's ghost prevail;
Never, though triumphs hailed him, hope to win
While still the conflict tore his breast within.

Page 4698

Out of that agony, misread for those
Imprisoned Powers warring unappeased,
The ghost of his black adversary rose,
To smother light, shut heaven, show earth diseased.
And long with him was wrestling ere emerged
A mind to read in him the reflex shade
Of its fierce torment; this way, that way urged;
By craven compromises hourly swayed.

Crouched as a nestling, still its wings untried,
The man’s mind opened under weight of cloud.
To penetrate the dark was it endowed;
Stood day before a vision shooting wide.
Whereat the spectral enemy lost form;
The traversed wilderness exposed its track.
He felt the far advance in looking back;
Thence trust in his foot forward through the storm.

Under the low-browed tempest’s eye of ire,
That ere it lightened smote a coward heart,
Earth nerved her chastened son to hail athwart
All ventures perilous his shrouded Sire;
A stranger still, religiously divined;
Not yet with understanding read aright.
But when the mind, the cherishable mind,
The multitude’s grave shepherd, took full flight,
Himself as mirror raised among his kind,
He saw, and first of brotherhood had sight:
Knew that his force to fly, his will to see,
His heart enlarged beyond its ribbed domain,
Had come of many a grip in mastery,
Which held conjoined the hostile rival twain,
And of his bosom made him lord, to keep
The starry roof of his unruffled frame
Awake to earth, to heaven, and plumb the deep
Below, above, aye with a wistful aim.

The mastering mind in him, by tempests blown,
By traitor inmates baited, upward burned;
Perforce of growth, the Master mind discerned,
The Great Unseen, nowise the Dark Unknown.
To whom unwittingly did he aspire
In wilderness, where bitter was his need:
To whom in blindness, as an earthy seed

For light and air, he struck through crimson mire.
But not ere he upheld a forehead lamp,
And viewed an army, once the seeming doomed,
All choral in its fruitful garden camp,
The spiritual the palpable illumed.

This gift of penetration and embrace,
His prize from tidal battles lost or won,
Reveals the scheme to animate his race:
How that it is a warfare but begun;
Unending; with no Power to interpose;
No prayer, save for strength to keep his ground,
Heard of the Highest; never battle’s close,
The victory complete and victor crowned:
Nor solace in defeat, save from that sense
Of strength well spent, which is the strength renewed.
In manhood must he find his competence;
In his clear mind the

Page 4699

spiritual food:
God being there while he his fight maintains;
Throughout his mind the Master Mind being there,
While he rejects the suicide despair;
Accepts the spur of explicable pains;
Obedient to Nature, not her slave:
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows;
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave,
And bids the Passions on the Pleasures browse:-
Whence Evil in a world unread before;
That mystery to simple springs resolved.
His God the Known, diviner to adore,
Shows Nature’s savage riddles kindly solved.
Inconscient, insensitive, she reigns
In iron laws, though rapturous fair her face.
Back to the primal brute shall he retrace
His path, doth he permit to force her chains
A soft Persuader coursing through his veins,
An icy Huntress stringing to the chase:
What one the flash disdains;
What one so gives it grace.

But is he rightly manful in her eyes,
A splendid bloodless knight to gain the skies,
A blood-hot son of Earth by all her signs,
Desireing and desireable he shines;
As peaches, that have caught the sun’s uprise
And kissed warm gold till noonday, even as vines.
Earth fills him with her juices, without fear
That she will cast him drunken down the steeps.
All woman is she to this man most dear;
He sows for bread, and she in spirit reaps:
She conscient, she sensitive, in him;
With him enwound, his brave ambition hers:
By him humaner made; by his keen spurs
Pricked to race past the pride in giant limb,
Her crazy adoration of big thews,
Proud in her primal sons, when crags they hurled,
Were thunder spitting lightnings on the world
In daily deeds, and she their evening Muse.

This man, this hero, works not to destroy;
This godlike — as the rock in ocean stands; —
He of the myriad eyes, the myriad hands

Creative; in his edifice has joy.
How strength may serve for purity is shown
When he himself can scourge to make it clean.
Withal his pitch of pride would not disown
A sober world that walks the balanced mean
Between its tempters, rarely overthrown:
And such at times his army's march has been.

Near is he to great Nature in the thought
Each changing Season intimately saith,
That nought save apparition knows the death;
To the God-lighted mind of man 'tis nought.
She counts not loss a word of any weight;
It may befal his passions and his greeds
To lose their treasures, like the vein that bleeds,
But life gone breathless will she reinstate.

Page 4700

Close on the heart of Earth his bosom beats,
When he the mandate lodged in it obeys,
Alive to breast a future wrapped in haze,
Strike camp, and onward, like the wind’s cloud-fleets.
Unresting she, unresting he, from change
To change, as rain of cloud, as fruit of rain;
She feels her blood-tree throbbing in her grain,
Yet skyward branched, with loftier mark and range.

No miracle the sprout of wheat from clod,
She knows, nor growth of man in grisly brute;
But he, the flower at head and soil at root,
Is miracle, guides he the brute to God.
And that way seems he bound; that way the road,
With his dark-lantern mind, unled, alone,
Wearifully through forest-tracts unsown,
He travels, urged by some internal goad.

Dares he behold the thing he is, what thing
He would become is in his mind its child;
Astir, demanding birth to light and wing;
For battle prompt, by pleasure unbeguiled.
So moves he forth in faith, if he has made
His mind God’s temple, dedicate to truth.
Earth’s nourishing delights, no more gainsaid,
He tastes, as doth the bridegroom rich in youth.
Then knows he Love, that beckons and controls;
The star of sky upon his footway cast;
Then match in him who holds his tempters fast,
The body’s love and mind’s, whereof the soul’s.
Then Earth her man for woman finds at last,
To speed the pair unto her goal of goals.

Or is’t the widowed’s dream of her new mate?
Seen has she virulent days of heat in flood;
The sly Persuader snaky in his blood;
With her the barren Huntress alternate;
His rough refractory off on kicking heels
To rear; the man dragged rearward, shamed, amazed;
And as a torrent stream where cattle grazed,
His tumbled world. What, then, the faith she feels?
May not his aspect, like her own so fair
Reflexively, the central force belie,

And he, the once wild ocean storming sky,
Be rebel at the core? What hope is there?

’Tis that in each recovery he preserves,
Between his upper and his nether wit,
Sense of his march ahead, more brightly lit;
He less the shaken thing of lusts and nerves;
With such a grasp upon his brute as tells
Of wisdom from that vile relapsing spun.
A Sun goes down in wasted fire, a Sun
Resplendent springs, to faith refreshed compels.

Poem: The Cageing Of Ares

[Iliad, v. V. 385 — Dedicated to the Council at The Hague.]

How big of breast our Mother Gaea laughed
At sight of her boy Giants on the leap
Each over other as they neighboured home,
Fronting the day’s descent across green slopes,

Page 4701

And up fired mountain crags their shadows danced.
Close with them in their fun, she scarce could guess,
Though these two billowy urchins reeked of craft,
It signalled some adventurous master-trick
To set Olympians buzzing in debate,
Lest it might be their godhead undermined,
The Tyranny menaced. Ephialtes high
On shoulders of his brother Otos waved
For the bull-bellowings given to grand good news,
Compact, complexioned in his gleeful roar
While Otos aped the prisoner's wrists and knees,
With doleful sniffs between recurrent howls;
Till Gaea's lap receiving them, they stretched,
And both upon her bosom shaken to speech,
Burst the hot story out of throats of both,
Like rocky head-founts, baffling in their glut
The hurried spout. And as when drifting storm
Disburdened loses clasp of here and yon
A peak, a forest mound, a valley's gleam
Of grass and the river's crooks and snaky coils,
Signification marvellous she caught,
Through gurglings of triumphant jollity,
Which now engulphed and now gave eye; at last
Subsided, and the serious naked deed,
With mountain-cloud of laughter banked around,
Stood in her sight confirmed: she could believe
That these, her sprouts of promise, her most prized,
These two made up of lion, bear and fox,
Her sportive, suckling mammoths, her young joy,
Still by the reckoning infants among men,
Had done the deed to strike the Titan host
In envy dumb, in envious heart elate:
These two combining strength and craft had snared,
Enmeshed, bound fast with thongs, discreetly caged
The blood-shedder, the terrible Lord of War;
Destroyer, ravager, superb in plumes;
The barren furrower of anointed fields;
The scarlet heel in towns, foul smoke to sky,
Her hated enemy, too long her scourge:
Great Ares. And they gagged his trumpet mouth
When they had seized on his implacable spear,

Hugged him to reedy helplessness despite
His godlike fury startled from amaze.
For he had eyed them nearing him in play,
The giant cubs, who gambolled and who snarled,
Unheeding his fell presence, by the mount
Ossa, beside a brushwood cavern; there
On Earth's original fisticuffs they called
For ease of sharp dispute: whereat the God,
Approving, deemed that sometime trained to arms,
Good servitors of Ares they would be,
And ply the pointed spear to dominate
Their rebel restless fellows, villain brood
Vowed to defy Immortals. So it chanced
Amusedly he watched them, and as one
The lusty twain were on him and they had him.
Breath to us, Powers of air, for laughter loud!

Page 4702

Cock of Olympus he, superb in plumes!
Bound like a wheaten sheaf by those two babes!
Because they knew our Mother Gaea loathed him,
Knew him the famine, pestilence and waste;
A desolating fire to blind the sight
With splendour built of fruitful things in ashes;
The gory chariot-wheel on cries for justice;
Her deepest planted and her liveliest voice,
Heard from the babe as from the broken crone.
Behold him in his vessel of bronze encased,
And tumbled down the cave. But rather look —
Ah, that the woman tattler had not sought,
Of all the Gods to let her secret fly,
Hermes, after the thirteen songful months!
Prompting the Dexterous to work his arts,
And shatter earth's delirious holiday,
Then first, as where the fountain runs a stream,
Resolving to composure on its throbs.
But see her in the Seasons through that year;
That one glad year and the fair opening month.
Had never our Great Mother such sweet face!
War with her, gentle war with her, each day
Her sons and daughters urged; at eve were flung,
On the morrow stood to challenge; in their strength
Renewed, indomitable; whereof they won,
From hourly wrestlings up to shut of lids,
Her ready secret: the abounding life
Returned for valiant labour: she and they
Defeated and victorious turn by turn;
By loss enriched, by overthrow restored.
Exchange of powers of this conflict came;
Defacement none, nor ever squandered force.
Is battle nature's mandate, here it reigned,
As music unto the hand that smote the strings;
And she the rosier from their showery brows,
They fruitful from her ploughed and harrowed breast.
Back to the primal rational of those
Who suck the teats of milky earth, and clasp
Stability in hatred of the insane,
Man stepped; with wits less fearful to pronounce
The mortal mind's concept of earth's divorced

Above; those beautiful, those masterful,
Those lawless. High they sit, and if descend,
Descend to reap, not sowing. Is it just?
Earth in her happy children asked that word,
Whereto within their breast was her reply.
Those beautiful, those masterful, those lawless,
Enjoy the life prolonged, outleap the years;
Yet they (’twas the Great Mother’s voice inspired
The audacious thought), they, glorious over dust,
Outleap not her; disrooted from her soar,
To meet the certain fate of earth’s divorced,
And clap lame wings across a wintry haze,
Up to the farthest bourne: immortal still,
Thenceforth innocuous; lovelier than when ruled
The Tyranny. This her voice within them told,
When softly the Great

Page 4703

Mother chid her sons
Not of the giant brood, who did create
Those lawless Gods, first offspring of our brain
Set moving by an abject blood, that waked
To wanton under elements more benign,
And planted aliens on Olympian heights; —
Imagination’s cradle poesy
Become a monstrous pressure upon men; —
Foes of good Gaea; until dispossessed
By light from her, born of the love of her,
Their lordship the illumined brain rejects
For earth’s beneficent, the sons of Law,
Her other name. So spake she in their heart,
Among the wheat-blades proud of stalk; beneath
Young vine-leaves pushing timid fingers forth,
Confidently to cling. And when brown corn
Swayed armied ranks with softened cricket song,
With gold necks bent for any zephyr’s kiss;
When vine-roots daily down a rubble soil
Drank fire of heaven athirst to swell the grape;
When swelled the grape, and in it held a ray,
Rich issue of the embrace of heaven and earth;
The very eye of passion drowsed by excess,
And yet a burning lion for the spring;
Then in that time of general cherishment,
Sweet breathing balm and flutes by cool wood-side,
He the harsh rouser of ire being absent, caged,
Then did good Gaea’s children gratefully
Lift hymns to Gods they judged, but praised for peace,
Delightful Peace, that answers Reason’s call
Harmoniously and images her Law;
Reflects, and though short-lived as then, revives,
In memories made present on the brain
By natural yearnings, all the happy scenes;
The picture of an earth allied to heaven;
Between them the known smile behind black masks;
Rightly their various moods interpreted;
And frolic because toilful children borne
With larger comprehension of Earth’s aim
At loftier, clearer, sweeter, by their aid.

Poem: The Night-Walk

Awakes for me and leaps from shroud
All radiantly the moon’s own night
Of folded showers in streamer cloud;
Our shadows down the highway white
Or deep in woodland woven-boughed,
With yon and yon a stem alight.

I see marauder runagates
Across us shoot their dusky wink;
I hear the parliament of chats
In haws beside the river’s brink;
And drops the vole off alder-banks,
To push his arrow through the stream.
These busy people had our thanks
For tickling sight and sound, but theme
They were not more than breath we drew
Delighted with our world’s embrace:
The moss-root smell where beeches grew,
And watered grass in breezy space;
The silken heights, of ghostly bloom
Among their folds, by distance draped.

Page 4704

’Twas Youth, rapacious to consume,
That cried to have its chaos shaped:
Absorbing, little noting, still
Enriched, and thinking it bestowed;
With wistful looks on each far hill
For something hidden, something owed.
Unto his mantled sister, Day
Had given the secret things we sought
And she was grave and saintly gay;
At times she fluttered, spoke her thought;
She flew on it, then folded wings,
In meditation passing lone,
To breathe around the secret things,
Which have no word, and yet are known;
Of thirst for them are known, as air
Is health in blood: we gained enough
By this to feel it honest fare;
Impalpable, not barren, stuff.

A pride of legs in motion kept
Our spirits to their task meanwhile,
And what was deepest dreaming slept:
The posts that named the swallowed mile;
Beside the straight canal the hut
Abandoned; near the river’s source
Its infant chirp; the shortest cut;
The roadway missed; were our discourse;
At times dear poets, whom some view
Transcendent or subdued evoked
To speak the memorable, the true,
The luminous as a moon uncloaked;
For proof that there, among earth’s dumb,
A soul had passed and said our best.
Or it might be we chimed on some
Historic favourite’s astral crest,
With part to reverence in its gleam,
And part to rivalry the shout:
So royal, unuttered, is youth’s dream
Of power within to strike without.
But most the silences were sweet,
Like mothers’ breasts, to bid it feel

It lived in such divine conceit
As envies aught we stamp for real.

To either then an untold tale
Was Life, and author, hero, we.
The chapters holding peaks to scale,
Or depths to fathom, made our glee;
For we were armed of inner fires,
Unbled in us the ripe desires;
And passion rolled a quiet sea,
Whereon was Love the phantom sail.

Poem: The Hueless Love

Unto that love must we through fire attain,
Which those two held as breath of common air;
The hands of whom were given in bond elsewhere;
Whom Honour was untroubled to restrain.

Midway the road of our life’s term they met,
And one another knew without surprise;
Nor cared that beauty stood in mutual eyes;
Nor at their tardy meeting nursed regret.

To them it was revealed how they had found
The kindred nature and the needed mind;
The mate by long conspiracy designed;
The flower to plant in sanctuary ground.

Avowed in vigilant solicitude
For either, what most lived within each breast
They let be seen: yet every human test
Demanding righteousness approved them good.

Page 4705

She leaned on a strong arm, and little feared
Abandonment to help if heaved or sank
Her heart at intervals while Love looked blank,
Life rosier were she but less revered.

An arm that never shook did not obscure
Her woman's intuition of the bliss —
Their tempter's moment o'er the black abyss,
Across the narrow plank — he could abjure.

Then came a day that clipped for him the thread,
And their first touch of lips, as he lay cold,
Was all of earthly in their love untold,
Beyond all earthly known to them who wed.

So has there come the gust at South-west flung
By sudden volt on eves of freezing mist,
When sister snowflake sister snowdrop kissed,
And one passed out, and one the bell-head hung.

Poem: Song In The Songless

They have no song, the sedges dry,
And still they sing.
It is within my breast they sing,
As I pass by.
Within my breast they touch a string,
They wake a sigh.
There is but sound of sedges dry;
In me they sing.

Poem: Union In Disseverance

Sunset worn to its last vermilion he;
She that star overhead in slow descent:
That white star with the front of angel she;
He undone in his rays of glory spent

Halo, fair as the bow-shot at his rise,
He casts round her, and knows his hour of rest
Incomplete, were the light for which he dies,
Less like joy of the dove that wings to nest.

Lustrous momently, near on earth she sinks;
Life’s full throb over breathless and abased:
Yet stand they, though impalpable the links,
One, more one than the bridally embraced.

Poem: The Burden Of Strength

If that thou hast the gift of strength, then know
Thy part is to uplift the trodden low;
Else in a giant’s grasp until the end
A hopeless wrestler shall thy soul contend.

Poem: The Main Regret

[Written for the Charing Cross Album]

I.

Seen, too clear and historic within us, our sins of omission
Frown when the Autumn days strike us all ruthlessly bare.
They of our mortal diseases find never healing physician;
Errors they of the soul, past the one hope to repair.

II.

Sunshine might we have been unto seed under soil, or have scattered
Seed to ascendant suns brighter than any that shone.
Even the limp-legged beggar a sick desperado has flattered
Back to a half-sloughed life cheered by the mere human tone.

Poem: Alternation

Between the fountain and the rill
I passed, and saw the mighty will
To leap at sky; the careless run,
As earth would lead her little son.

Page 4706

Beneath them throbs an urgent well,
That here is play, and there is war.
I know not which had most to tell
Of whence we spring and what we are.

Poem: Hawarden

When comes the lighted day for men to read
Life’s meaning, with the work before their hands
Till this good gift of breath from debt is freed,
Earth will not hear her children’s wailful bands
Deplore the chieftain fall’n in sob and dirge;
Nor they look where is darkness, but on high.
The sun that dropped down our horizon’s verge,
Illumes his labours through the travelled sky,
Now seen in sum, most glorious; and ’tis known
By what our warrior wrought we hold him fast.
A splendid image built of man has flown;
His deeds inspired of God outstep a Past.
Ours the great privilege to have had one
Among us who celestial tasks has done.

Poem: At The Close

To Thee, dear God of Mercy, both appeal,
Who straightway sound the call to arms. Thou know’st;
And that black spot in each embattled host,
Spring of the blood-stream, later wilt reveal.
Now is it red artillery and white steel;
Till on a day will ring the victor’s boast,
That ’tis Thy chosen towers uppermost,
Where Thy rejected grovels under heel.
So in all times of man’s descent insane
To brute, did strength and craft combining strike,
Even as a God of Armies, his fell blow.
But at the close he entered Thy domain,
Dear God of Mercy, and if lion-like
He tore the fall’n, the Eternal was his Foe.

Poem: Forest History

I.

Beneath the vans of doom did men pass in.
Heroic who came out; for round them hung
A wavering phantom's red volcano tongue,
With league-long lizard tail and fishy fin:

II.

Old Earth's original Dragon; there retired
To his last fastness; overthrown by few.
Him a laborious thrust of roadway slew.
Then man to play devorant straight was fired.

III.

More intimate became the forest fear
While pillared darkness hatched malicious life
At either elbow, wolf or gnome or knife
And wary slid the glance from ear to ear.

IV.

In chillness, like a clouded lantern-ray,
The forest's heart of fog on mossed morass,
On purple pool and silky cotton-grass,
Revealed where lured the swallower byway.

V.

Dead outlook, flattened back with hard rebound
Off walls of distance, left each mounted height.
It seemed a giant hag-fiend, churning spite
Of humble human being, held the ground.

VI.

Page 4707

Through friendless wastes, through treacherous woodland, slow
The feet sustained by track of feet pursued
Pained steps, and found the common brotherhood
By sign of Heaven indifferent, Nature foe.

VII.

Anon a mason’s work amazed the sight,
And long-frocked men, called Brothers, there abode.
They pointed up, bowed head, and dug and sowed;
Whereof was shelter, loaf, and warm firelight.

VIII.

What words they taught were nails to scratch the head.
Benignant works explained the chanting brood.
Their monastery lit black solitude,
As one might think a star that heavenward led.

IX.

Uprose a fairer nest for weary feet,
Like some gold flower nightly inward curled,
Where gentle maidens fled a roaring world,
Or played with it, and had their white retreat.

X.

Into big books of metal clasps they pored.
They governed, even as men; they welcomed lays.
The treasures women are whose aim is praise,
Was shown in them: the Garden half restored.

XI.

A deluge billow scoured the land off seas,
With widened jaws, and slaughter was its foam.
For food, for clothing, ambush, refuge, home,
The lesser savage offered bogs and trees.

XII.

Whence reverence round grey-haired story grew:
And inmost spots of ancient horror shone

As temples under beams of trials bygone;
For in them sang brave times with God in view.

XIII.

Till now trim homesteads bordered spaces green,
Like night’s first little stars through clearing showers.
Was rumoured how a castle’s falcon towers
The wilderness commanded with fierce mien.

XIV.

Therein a serious Baron stuck his lance;
For minstrel songs a beauteous Dame would pout.
Gay knights and sombre, felon or devout,
Pricked onward, bound for their unsung romance.

XV.

It might be that two errant lords across
The block of each came edged, and at sharp cry
They charged forthwith, the better man to try.
One rode his way, one couched on quiet moss.

XVI.

Perchance a lady sweet, whose lord lay slain,
The robbers into gruesome durance drew.
Swift should her hero come, like lightning’s blue!
She prayed for him, as crackling drought for rain.

XVII.

As we, that ere the worst her hero haps,
Of Angels guided, nigh that loathly den:
A toady cave beside an ague fen,
Where long forlorn the lone dog whines and yaps.

XVIII.

By daylight now the forest fear could read
Itself, and at new wonders chuckling went.
Straight for the roebuck’s neck the bowman spent
A dart that laughed at distance and at speed.

Page 4708

XIX.

Right loud the bugle’s hallali elate
Rang forth of merry dingles round the tors;
And deftest hand was he from foreign wars,
But soon he hailed the home-bred yeoman mate.

XX.

Before the blackbird pecked the turf they woke;
At dawn the deer’s wet nostrils blew their last.
To forest, haunt of runs and prime repast,
With paying blows, the yokel strained his yoke.

XXI.

The city urchin mooned on forest air,
On grassy sweeps and flying arrows, thick
As swallows o’er smooth streams, and sighed him sick
For thinking that his dearer home was there.

XXII.

Familiar, still unseized, the forest sprang
An old-world echo, like no mortal thing.
The hunter’s horn might wind a jocund ring,
But held in ear it had a chilly clang.

XXIII.

Some shadow lurked aloof of ancient time;
Some warning haunted any sound prolonged,
As though the leagues of woodland held them wronged
To hear an axe and see a township climb.

XXIV.

The forest’s erewhile emperor at eve
Had voice when lowered heavens drummed for gales.
At midnight a small people danced the dales,
So thin that they might dwindle through a sieve

XXV.

Ringed mushrooms told of them, and in their throats,
Old wives that gathered herbs and knew too much.
The pensioned forester beside his crutch,
Struck showers from embers at those bodeful notes.

XXVI.

Came then the one, all ear, all eye, all heart;
Devourer, and insensibly devoured;
In whom the city over forest flowered,
The forest wreathed the city's drama-mart.

XXVII.

There found he in new form that Dragon old,
From tangled solitudes expelled; and taught
How blindly each its antidote besought;
For either's breath the needs of either told.

XXVIII.

Now deep in woods, with song no sermon's drone,
He showed what charm the human concourse works:
Amid the press of men, what virtue lurks
Where bubble sacred wells of wildness lone.

XXIX.

Our conquest these: if haply we retain
The reverence that ne'er will overrun
Due boundaries of realms from Nature won,
Nor let the poet's awe in rapture wane.

Poem: A Garden Idyl

With sagest craft Arachne worked
Her web, and at a corner lurked,
Awaiting what should plump her soon,
To case it in the death-cocoon.
Sagaciously her home she chose
For visits that would never close;
Inside my chalet-porch her feast
Plucked all the winds but chill North-east.

Page 4709

The finished structure, bar on bar,
Had snatched from light to form a star,
And struck on sight, when quick with dews,
Like music of the very Muse.
Great artists pass our single sense;
We hear in seeing, strung to tense;
Then haply marvel, groan mayhap,
To think such beauty means a trap.
But Nature's genius, even man's
At best, is practical in plans;
Subservient to the needy thought,
However rare the weapon wrought.
As long as Nature holds it good
To urge her creatures' quest for food
Will beauty stamp the just intent
Of weapons upon service bent.
For beauty is a flower of roots
Embedded lower than our boots;
Out of the primal strata springs,
And shows for crown of useful things

Arachne's dream of prey to size
Aspired; so she could nigh despise
The puny specks the breezes round
Supplied, and let them shake unwound;
Assured of her fat fly to come;
Perhaps a blue, the spider's plum;
Who takes the fatal odds in fight,
And gives repast an appetite,
By plunging, whizzing, till his wings
Are webbed, and in the lists he swings,
A shrouded lump, for her to see
Her banquet in her victory.

This matron of the unnumbered threads,
One day of dandelions' heads
Distributing their gray perruques
Up every gust, I watched with looks
Discreet beside the chalet-door;
And gracefully a light wind bore,
Direct upon my webster's wall,
A monster in the form of ball;
The mildest captive ever snared,
That neither struggled nor despaired,

On half the net invading hung,
And plain as in her mother tongue,
While low the weaver cursed her lures,
Remarked, “You have me; I am yours.”

Thrice magnified, in phantom shape,
Her dream of size she saw, agape.
Midway the vast round-raying beard
A desiccated midge appeared;
Whose body pricked the name of meal,
Whose hair had growth in earth’s unreal;
Provocative of dread and wrath,
Contempt and horror, in one froth,
Inextricable, insensible,
His poison presence there would dwell,
Declaring him her dream fulfilled,
A catch to compliment the skilled;
And she reduced to beaky skin,
Disgraceful among kith and kin

Against her corner, humped and aged,
Arachne wrinkled, past enraged,
Beyond disgust or hope in guile.
Ridiculously volatile
He seemed to her last spark of mind;
And that in pallid ash declined
Beneath the blow by knowledge dealt,
Wherein throughout her frame she felt
That he, the light wind’s

Page 4710

libertine,
Without a scoff, without a grin,
And mannered like the courtly few,
Who merely danced when light winds blew,
Impervious to beak and claws,
Tradition’s ruinous Whitebeard was;
Of whom, as actors in old scenes,
Had grannam weavers warned their weans,
With word, that less than feather-weight,
He smote the web like bolt of Fate.

This muted drama, hour by hour,
I watched amid a world in flower,
Ere yet Autumnal threads had laid
Their gray-blue o’er the grass’s blade,
And still along the garden-run
The blindworm stretched him, drunk of sun.
Arachne crouched unmoved; perchance
Her visitor performed a dance;
She puckered thinner; he the same
As when on that light wind he came.

Next day was told what deeds of night
Were done; the web had vanished quite;
With it the strange opposing pair;
And listless waved on vacant air,
For her adieu to heart’s content,
A solitary filament.

Poem: Foresight And Patience

Sprung of the father blood, the mother brain,
Are they who point our pathway and sustain.
They rarely meet; one soars, one walks retired.
When they do meet, it is our earth inspired.

To see Life’s formless offspring and subdue
Desire of times unripe, we have these two,
Whose union is right reason: join they hands,
The world shall know itself and where it stands;
What cowering angel and what upright beast
Make man, behold, nor count the low the least,
Nor less the stars have round it than its flowers.
When these two meet, a point of time is ours.

As in a land of waterfalls, that flow
Smooth for the leap on their great voice below,
Some eddies near the brink borne swift along,
Will capture hearing with the liquid song,
So, while the headlong world's imperious force
Resounded under, heard I these discourse.

First words, where down my woodland walk she led,
To her blind sister Patience, Foresight said:

— Your faith in me appals, to shake my own,
When still I find you in this mire alone.

— The few steps taken at a funeral pace
By men had slain me but for those you trace.

— Look I once back, a broken pinion I:
Black as the rebel angels rained from sky!

— Needs must you drink of me while here you live,
And make me rich in feeling I can give.

Page 4711

— A brave To-be is dawn upon my brow: Yet must I read my sister for the How. My daisy better knows her God of beams Than doth an eagle that to mount him seems. She hath the secret never fieriest reach Of wing shall master till men hear her teach.

— Liker the clod flaked by the driving plough, My semblance when I have you not as now. The quiet creatures who escape mishap Bear likeness to pure growths of the green sap: A picture of the settled peace desired By cowards shunning strife or strivers tired. I listen at their breasts: is there no jar Of wrestlings and of stranglings, dead they are, And such a picture as the piercing mind Ranks beneath vegetation. Not resigned Are my true pupils while the world is brute. What edict of the stronger keeps me mute, Stronger impels the motion of my heart. I am not Resignation's counterpart. If that I teach, 'tis little the dry word, Content, but how to savour hope deferred. We come of earth, and rich of earth may be; Soon carrion if very earth are we! The coursing veins, the constant breath, the use Of sleep, declare that strife allows short truce; Unless we clasp decay, accept defeat, And pass despised; "a-cold for lack of heat," Like other corpses, but without death's plea.

— My sister calls for battle; is it she?

— Rather a world of pressing men in arms, Than stagnant, where the sensual piper charms Each drowsy malady and coiling vice With dreams of ease whereof the soul pays price! No home is here for peace while evil breeds, While error governs, none; and must the seeds You sow, you that for long have reaped disdain, Lie barren at the doorway of the brain, Let stout contention drive deep furrows, blood Moisten, and make new channels of its flood!

— My sober little maid, when we meet first, Drinks of me ever with an eager thirst. So can I not of her till circumstance Drugs cravings. Here we see how men advance A doubtful foot, but circle if much stirred, Like dead weeds on whipped waters. Shout the word Prompting their hungers, and they grandly march, As to band-music under Victory's arch. Thus was it, and thus is it; save that then The beauty of frank animals had men.

— Observe them, and down rearward for a term, Gaze to the primal twistings of the worm. Thence look this way, across the fields that show Men's early form of speech for Yes and No. My sister a bruised infant's utterance had; And issuing stronger, to mankind 'twas mad. I knew my home where I had choice to feel The toad beneath a harrow or a heel.

— Speak of this Age.

— When you it shall discern
Bright as you are, to me the Age will turn.

— For neither of us has it any care;
Its learning is through Science to despair.

— Despair lies down and grovels, grapples not
With evil, casts the burden of its lot.
This Age climbs earth.

Page 4712

— To challenge heaven.

— Not less The lower deeps. It laughs at Happiness! That know I, though the echoes of it wail, For one step upward on the crags you scale. Brave is the Age wherein the word will rust, Which means our soul asleep or body's lust, Until from warmth of many breasts, that beat A temperate common music, sunlike heat The happiness not predatory sheds!

— But your fierce Yes and No of butting heads, Now rages to outdo a horny Past. Shades of a wild Destroyer on the vast Are thrown by every novel light upraised. The world's whole round smokes ominously, amazed And trembling as its pregnant AEtna swells. Combustibles on hot combustibles Run piling, for one spark to roll in fire The mountain-torrent of infernal ire And leave the track of devils where men built. Perceptive of a doom, the sinner's guilt Confesses in a cry for help shrill loud, If drops the chillness of a passing cloud, To conscience, reason, human love; in vain: None save they but the souls which them contain. No extramural God, the God within Alone gives aid to city charged with sin. A world that for the spur of fool and knave, Sweats in its laboratory, what shall save? But men who ply their wits in such a school, Must pray the mercy of the knave and fool.

— Much have I studied hard Necessity! To know her Wisdom's mother, and that we May deem the harshness of her later cries In labour a sure goad to prick the wise, If men among the warnings which convulse, Can gravely dread without the craven's pulse. Long ere the rising of this Age of ours, The knave and fool were stamped as monstrous Powers. Of human lusts and lassitudes they spring, And are as lasting as the parent thing. Yet numbering locust hosts, bent they to drill, They might o'ermatch and have mankind at will.

Behold such army gathering: ours the spur,
No scattered foe to face, but Lucifer.
Not fool or knave is now the enemy
O'ershadowing men, 'tis Folly, Knavery!
A sea; nor stays that sea the bastioned beach.
Now must the brother soul alive in each,
His traitorous individual devildom
Hold subject lest the grand destruction come.
Dimly men see it menacing apace
To overthrow, perchance uproot the race.
Within, without, they are a field of tares:
Fruitfuller for them when the contest squares,
And wherefore warrior service they must yield,
Shines visible as life on either field.
That is my comfort, following shock on shock,
Which sets faith quaking on their firmest rock.

Since with his weapons, all the arms of Night,
Frail men have challenged Lucifer to fight,
Have matched in hostile ranks, enrolled, erect,
The human and Satanic intellect,
Determined for their uses to control
What forces on the earth and under roll,
Their granite rock runs igneous; now they stand
Pledged to the heavens for safety of their land.
They cannot learn save grossly, gross that are:
Through fear they learn whose aid is good in war.

Page 4713

— My sister, as I read them in my glass, Their field of tares they take for pasture grass. How waken them that have not any bent Save browsing — the concrete indifferent! Friend Lucifer supplies them solid stuff: They fear not for the race when full the trough. They have much fear of giving up the ghost; And these are of mankind the unnumbered host.

— If I could see with you, and did not faint In beating wing, the future I would paint. Those massed indifferents will learn to quake: Now meanwhile is another mass awake, Once denser than the grunters of the sty. If I could see with you! Could I but fly!

— The length of days that you with them have housed,
An outcast else, approves their cause espoused.

— O true, they have a cause, and woe for us, While still they have a cause too piteous! Yet, happy for us when, their cause defined, They walk no longer with a stumbler blind, And quicken in the virtue of their cause, To think me a poor mouther of old saws! I wait the issue of a battling Age; The toilers with your “troughsters” now engage; Instructing them through their acutest sense, How close the dangers of indifference! Already have my people shown their worth, More love they light, which folds the love of Earth. That love to love of labour leads: thence love Of humankind — earth’s incense flung above.

— Admit some other features: Faithless, mean; Encased in matter; vowed to Gods obscene; Contemptuous of the impalpable, it swells On Doubt; for pastime swallows miracles; And if I bid it face what I observe, Declares me hoodwinked by my optic nerve!

— Oft has your prophet, for reward of toil, Seen nests of seeming cockatrices coil: Disowned them as the unholiest of Time, Which were his offspring, born of flame on slime. Nor him, their sire, have known the filial fry: As little as Time’s earliest knew the sky. Perchance among them shoots a lustrous flame At intervals, in proof of whom they came. To strengthen our foundations is the task Of this tough Age; not in your beams to bask, Though, lighted by your beams, down mining caves The rock it blasts, the hoarded foulness braves. My sister sees no round beyond her mood; To hawk this Age has dressed her head in hood. Out of the course of ancient ruts and grooves, It moves: O much for me to say it moves! About his AEthiop Highlands Nile is Nile, Though not the stream of the paternal smile: And where his tide of nourishment he drives, An Abyssinian wantonness revives. Calm as his lotus-leaf to-day he swims; He is the yellow crops, the rounded limbs, The Past yet flowing, the fair time that fills; Breath of all mouths and grist of many mills.

To-morrow, warning none with tempest-showers,
He is the vast Insensate who devours
His golden promise over leagues of seed,
Then sits in a smooth lake upon the deed.

Page 4714

The races which on barbarous force begin,
Inherit onward of their origin,
And cancelled blessings will the current length
Reveal till they know need of shaping strength.
'Tis not in men to recognize the need
Before they clash in hosts, in hosts they bleed.
Then may sharp suffering their nature grind;
Of rabble passions grow the chieftain Mind.
Yet mark where still broad Nile boasts thousands fed,
For tens up the safe mountains at his head.
Few would be fed, not far his course prolong,
Save for the troublous blood which makes him strong.

— That rings of truth! More do your people thrive; Your Many are more merrily alive Than erewhile when I gloried in the page Of radiant singer and anointed sage. Greece was my lamp: burnt out for lack of oil; Rome, Python Rome, prey of its robber spoil! All structures built upon a narrow space Must fall, from having not your hosts for base. O thrice must one be you, to see them shift Along their desert flats, here dash, there drift; With faith, that of privations and spilt blood, Comes Reason armed to clear or bank the flood! And thrice must one be you, to wait release From duress in the swamp of their increase. At which oppressive scene, beyond arrest, A darkness not with stars of heaven dressed, Philosophers behold; desponding view. Your Many nourished, starved my brilliant few; Then flinging heels, as charioteers the reins, Dive down the fumy AEtna of their brains. Belated vessels on a rising sea, They seem: they pass!

— But not Philosophy!

— Ay, be we faithful to ourselves: despise Nought but the coward in us! That way lies The wisdom making passage through our slough. Am I not heard, my head to Earth shall bow; Like her, shall wait to see, and seeing wait. Philosophy is Life's one match for Fate. That photosphere of our high fountain One, Our spirit's Lord and Reason's fostering sun, Philosophy, shall light us in the shade, Warm in the frost, make Good our aim and aid. Companioned by the sweetest, ay renewed, Unconquerable, whose aim for aid is Good! Advantage to the Many: that we name God's voice; have there the surety in our aim. This thought unto my sister do I owe, And irony and satire off me throw. They crack a childish whip, drive puny herds, Where numbers crave their sustenance in words. Now let the perils thicken: clearer seen, Your Chieftain Mind mounts over them serene. Who never yet of scattered lamps was born To speed a world, a marching world to warn, But sunward from the vivid Many springs, Counts conquest but a step, and through disaster sings.

Fragments of the Iliad in English Hexameter Verse

Poem: The Invective Of Achilles

[Iliad, B. I. V. 149]

Page 4715

> “Heigh me! brazen of front, thou glutton for plunder, how can one,
> Servant here to thy mandates, heed thee among our Achaians,
> Either the mission hie on or stoutly do fight with the foemen?
> I, not hither I fared on account of the spear-armed Trojans,
> Pledged to the combat; they unto me have in nowise a harm done;
> Never have they, of a truth, come lifting my horses or oxen;
> Never in deep-soiled Phthia, the nurser of heroes, my harvests
> Ravaged, they; for between us is numbered full many a darksome
> Mountain, ay, therewith too the stretch of the windy sea-waters.
> O hugely shameless! thee did we follow to hearten thee, justice
> Pluck from the Dardans for him, Menelaos, thee too, thou dog-eyed!
> Whereof little thy thought is, nought whatever thou reckest.
> Worse, it is thou whose threat ’tis to ravish my prize from me,
> portion
> Won with much labour, the which my gift from the sons of Achaia.
> Never, in sooth, have I known my prize equal thine when Achaians
> Gave some flourishing populous Trojan town up to pillage.
> Nay, sure, mine were the hands did most in the storm of the combat,
> Yet when came peradventure share of the booty amongst us,
> Bigger to thee went the prize, while I some small blessed thing
> bore
> Off to the ships, my share of reward for my toil in the bloodshed!
> So now go I to Phthia, for better by much it beseems me
> Homeward go with my beaked ships now, and I hold not in prospect,
> I being outraged, thou mayst gather here plunder and wealth-store.”
>
> Poem: The Invective of Achilles — V. 225.

“Bibber besotted, with scowl of a cur, having heart of a deer, thou! Never to join to thy warriors armed for the press of the conflict, Never for ambush forth with the princeliest sons of Achaia Dared thy soul, for to thee that thing would have looked as a death-stroke. Sooth, more easy it seems, down the lengthened array of Achaians, Snatch at the prize of the one whose voice has been lifted against thee. Ravening king of the folk, for that thou hast thy rule over abjects; Else, son of Atreus, now were this outrage on me thy last one. Nay, but I tell thee, and I do swear a big oath on it likewise: Yea, by the sceptre here, and it surely bears branches and leaf- buds Never again, since first it was lopped from its trunk on the mountains, No more sprouting; for round it all clean has the sharp metal clipped off Leaves and the bark; ay, verify now do the sons of Achaia, Guardian hands of the counsels of Zeus, pronouncing the judgement, Hold it aloft; so now unto thee shall the oath have its portent; Loud will the cry for Achilles burst from the sons of Achaia Throughout the army, and thou chafe powerless, though in an anguish, How to give succour when vast crops down under man-slaying Hector Tumble expiring; and thou deep in thee shalt tear at thy heart- strings, Rage-wrung, thou, that in nought thou didst honour the flower of Achaians.”

Poem: Marshalling Of The Achaians

Page 4716

[Iliad, B. II V. 455]

Like as a terrible fire feeds fast on a forest enormous, Up on a mountain height, and the blaze of it radiates round far, So on the bright blest arms of the host in their march did the splendour Gleam wide round through the circle of air right up to the sky- vault. They, now, as when swarm thick in the air multitudinous winged flocks, Be it of geese or of cranes or the long-necked troops of the wild- swans, Off that Asian mead, by the flow of the waters of Kaistros; Hither and yon fly they, and rejoicing in pride of their pinions, Clamour, shaped to their ranks, and the mead all about them resoundeth; So those numerous tribes from their ships and their shelterings poured forth On that plain of Scamander, and horrible rumbled beneath them Earth to the quick-paced feet of the men and the tramp of the horse-hooves. Stopped they then on the fair-flower'd field of Scamander, their thousands Many as leaves and the blossoms born of the flowerful season. Even as countless hot-pressed flies in their multitudes traverse, Clouds of them, under some herdsman's wonning, where then are the milk-pails Also, full of their milk, in the bountiful season of spring-time; Even so thickly the long-haired sons of Achaia the plain held, Prompt for the dash at the Trojan host, with the passion to crush them. Those, likewise, as the goatherds, eyeing their vast flocks of goats, know Easily one from the other when all get mixed o'er the pasture, So did the chieftains rank them here there in their places for onslaught, Hard on the push of the fray; and among them King Agamemnon, He, for his eyes and his head, as when Zeus glows glad in his thunder, He with the girdle of Ares, he with the breast of Poseidon.

Poem: Agamemnon In The Fight

[Iliad, B. XI. V. 148]

These, then, he left, and away where ranks were now clashing the thickest, Onward rushed, and with him rushed all of the bright-greaved Achaians. Foot then footmen slew, that were flying from direful compulsion, Horse at the horsemen (up from off under them mounted the dust- cloud, Up off the plain, raised up cloud-thick by the thundering horse- hooves) Hewed with the sword's sharp edge; and so meanwhile Lord Agamemnon Followed, chasing and slaughtering aye, on-urgeing the Argives.

Now, as when fire voracious catches the unclipped wood-land, This way bears it and that the great whirl of the wind, and the scrubwood Stretches uptorn, flung forward alength by the fire's fury rageing, So beneath Atreides Agamemnon heads of the scattered Trojans fell; and in numbers amany the horses, neck-stiffened, Rattled their vacant cars down the roadway gaps of the war-field, Missing the blameless charioteers, but, for these, they were outstretched Flat upon earth, far dearer to vultures than to their home-mates.

Poem: Paris And Diomedes

[Iliad; B. XI V. 378]

Page 4717

So he, with a clear shout of laughter, Forth of his ambush leapt, and he vaunted him, uttering thiswise: “Hit thou art! not in vain flew the shaft; how by rights it had pierced thee Into the undermost gut, therewith to have rived thee of life- breath! Following that had the Trojans plucked a new breath from their direst, They all frighted of thee, as the goats bleat in flight from a lion.” Then unto him untroubled made answer stout Diomedes: “Bow-puller, jiber, thy bow for thy glorying, spyer at virgins! If that thou dared’st face me here out in the open with weapons, Nothing then would avail thee thy bow and thy thick shot of arrows. Now thou plumest thee vainly because of a graze of my footsole; Reck I as were that stroke from a woman or some pettish infant. Aye flies blunted the dart of the man that’s emasculate, noughtworth! Otherwise hits, forth flying from me, and but strikes it the slightest, My keen shaft, and it numbers a man of the dead fallen straightway. Torn, troth, then are the cheeks of the wife of that man fallen slaughtered, Orphans his babes, full surely he reddens the earth with his blood- drops, Rotting, round him the birds, more numerous they than the women.”

Poem: Hypnos On Ida

[Iliad, B. XIV. V. 283]

They then to fountain-abundant Ida, mother of wild beasts, Came, and they first left ocean to fare over mainland at Lektos, Where underneath of their feet waved loftiest growths of the woodland. There hung Hypnos fast, ere the vision of Zeus was observant, Mounted upon a tall pine-tree, tallest of pines that on Ida Lustily spring off soil for the shoot up aloft into aether. There did he sit well-cloaked by the wide-branched pine for concealment, That loud bird, in his form like, that perched high up in the mountains, Chalkis is named by the Gods, but of mortals known as Kymindis.

Poem: Clash In Arms Of The Achaians And Trojans

[Iliad, B. XIV. V. 394]

Not the sea-wave so bellows abroad when it bursts upon shingle, Whipped from the sea’s deeps up by the terrible blast of the Northwind; Nay, nor is ever the roar of the fierce fire’s rush so arousing, Down along mountain-glades, when it surges to kindle a woodland; Nay, nor so tonant thunders the stress of the gale in the oak- trees’ Foliage-tresses high, when it rages to raveing its utmost; As rose then stupendous the Trojan’s cry and Achaians’, Dread upshouting as one when together they clashed in the conflict.

Poem: The Horses Of Achilles

[Iliad, B. XVII. V. 426]

Page 4718

So now the horses of Aiakides, off wide of the war-ground, Wept, since first they were ware of their charioteer overthrown there, Cast down low in the whirl of the dust under man-slaying Hector. Sooth, meanwhile, then did Automedon, brave son of Diores, Oft, on the one hand, urge them with flicks of the swift whip, and oft, too, Coax entreatingly, hurriedly; whiles did he angrily threaten. Vainly, for these would not to the ships, to the Hellespont spacious, Backward turn, nor be whipped to the battle among the Achaians. Nay, as a pillar remains immovable, fixed on the tombstone, Haply, of some dead man or it may be a woman there-under; Even like hard stood they there attached to the glorious war-car, Earthward bowed with their heads; and of them so lamenting incessant Ran the hot teardrops downward on to the earth from their eyelids, Mourning their charioteer; all their lustrous manes dusty-clotted, Right side and left of the yoke-ring tossed, to the breadth of the yoke-bow. Now when the issue of Kronos beheld that sorrow, his head shook Pitying them for their grief, these words then he spake in his bosom; “Why, ye hapless, gave we to Peleus you, to a mortal Master; ye that are ageless both, ye both of you deathless! Was it that ye among men most wretched should come to have heart- grief? ’Tis most true, than the race of these men is there wretcheder nowhere Aught over earth’s range found that is gifted with breath and has movement.”

Poem: The Mares Of The Camargue

[From the *Mireio* of Mistral]

A hundred mares, all white! their manes
Like mace-reed of the marshy plains
Thick-tufted, wavy, free o’ the shears:
And when the fiery squadron rears
Bursting at speed, each mane appears
Even as the white scarf of a fay
Floating upon their necks along the heavens away.

O race of humankind, take shame!
For never yet a hand could tame,
Nor bitter spur that rips the flanks subdue
The mares of the Camargue. I have known,
By treason snared, some captives shown;
Expatriate from their native Rhone,
Led off, their saline pastures far from view:

And on a day, with prompt rebound,
They have flung their riders to the ground,
And at a single gallop, scouring free,
Wide-nostril’d to the wind, twice ten
Of long marsh-leagues devour’d, and then,

Back to the Vacares again,
After ten years of slavery just to breathe salt sea

For of this savage race unbent,
The ocean is the element.
Of old escaped from Neptune’s car, full sure,
Still with the white foam fleck’d are they,
And when the sea puffs black from grey,
And ships part cables, loudly neigh
The stallions of Camargue, all joyful in the roar;

Page 4719

And keen as a whip they lash and crack
Their tails that drag the dust, and back
Scratch up the earth, and feel, entering their flesh, where he,
The God, drives deep his trident teeth,
Who in one horror, above, beneath,
Bids storm and watery deluge seethe,
And shatters to their depths the abysses of the sea.

Cant. iv.

Poems by George Meredith—Volume 1

[This etext was prepared from the 1912 Times Book Club “Surrey Edition” by David Price]

Chillianwallah

Chillanwallah, Chillanwallah!
Where our brothers fought and bled,
O thy name is natural music
And a dirge above the dead!
Though we have not been defeated,
Though we can’t be overcome,
Still, whene’er thou art repeated,
I would fain that grief were dumb.

Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
’Tis a name so sad and strange,
Like a breeze through midnight harpstrings
Ringing many a mournful change;
But the wildness and the sorrow
Have a meaning of their own —
Oh, whereof no glad to-morrow
Can relieve the dismal tone!

Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
’Tis a village dark and low,
By the bloody Jhelum river
Bridged by the foreboding foe;
And across the wintry water
He is ready to retreat,
When the carnage and the slaughter
Shall have paid for his defeat.

Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
’Tis a wild and dreary plain,
Strewn with plots of thickest jungle,
Matted with the gory stain.
There the murder-mouthed artillery,
In the deadly ambuscade,
Wrought the thunder of its treachery
On the skeleton brigade.

Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
When the night set in with rain,
Came the savage plundering devils
To their work among the slain;
And the wounded and the dying
In cold blood did share the doom
Of their comrades round them lying,
Stiff in the dead skyless gloom.

Chillianwallah, Chillianwallah!
Thou wilt be a doleful chord,
And a mystic note of mourning
That will need no chiming word;
And that heart will leap with anguish
Who may understand thee best;
But the hopes of all will languish
Till thy memory is at rest.

The doe: A fragment (From ‘*wandering Willie*’)

And—’Yonder look! yoho! yoho!
Nancy is off!’ the farmer cried,
Advancing by the river side,
Red-kerchieft and brown-coated;—’So,
My girl, who else could leap like that?
So neatly! like a lady! ’Zounds!
Look at her how she leads the hounds!’

Page 4720

And waving his dusty beaver hat,
He cheered across the chase-filled water,
And clapt his arm about his daughter,
And gave to Joan a courteous hug,
And kiss that, like a stubborn plug
From generous vats in vastness rounded,
The inner wealth and spirit sounded:
Eagerly pointing South, where, lo,
The daintiest, fleetest-footed doe
Led o'er the fields and thro' the furze
Beyond: her lively delicate ears
Prickt up erect, and in her track
A dappled lengthy-striding pack.

Scarce had they cast eyes upon her,
When every heart was wagered on her,
And half in dread, and half delight,
They watched her lovely bounding flight;
As now across the flashing green,
And now beneath the stately trees,
And now far distant in the dene,
She headed on with graceful ease:
Hanging aloft with doubled knees,
At times athwart some hedge or gate;
And slackening pace by slow degrees,
As for the foremost foe to wait.
Renewing her outstripping rate
Whene'er the hot pursuers neared,
By garden wall and paled estate,
Where clambering gazers whooped and cheered.
Here winding under elm and oak,
And slanting up the sunny hill:
Splashing the water here like smoke
Among the mill-holms round the mill.

And—'Let her go; she shows her game,
My Nancy girl, my pet and treasure!'
The farmer sighed: his eyes with pleasure
Brimming: ''Tis my daughter's name,
My second daughter lying yonder.'
And Willie's eye in search did wander,
And caught at once, with moist regard,

The white gleams of a grey churchyard.
’Three weeks before my girl had gone,
And while upon her pillows propped,
She lay at eve; the weakling fawn —
For still it seems a fawn just dropt
A se’nnight—to my Nancy’s bed
I brought to make my girl a gift:
The mothers of them both were dead:
And both to bless it was my drift,
By giving each a friend; not thinking
How rapidly my girl was sinking.
And I remember how, to pat
Its neck, she stretched her hand so weak,
And its cold nose against her cheek
Pressed fondly: and I fetched the mat
To make it up a couch just by her,
Where in the lone dark hours to lie:
For neither dear old nurse nor I
Would any single wish deny her.
And there unto the last it lay;
And in the pastures cared to play
Little or nothing: there its meals
And milk I brought: and even now
The creature such affection feels
For that old room that, when and how,
’Tis strange to mark, it slinks and steals
To get there, and all

Page 4721

day conceals.
And once when nurse who, since that time,
Keeps house for me, was very sick,
Waking upon the midnight chime,
And listening to the stair-clock's click,
I heard a rustling, half uncertain,
Close against the dark bed-curtain:
And while I thrust my leg to kick,
And feel the phantom with my feet,
A loving tongue began to lick
My left hand lying on the sheet;
And warm sweet breath upon me blew,
And that 'twas Nancy then I knew.
So, for her love, I had good cause
To have the creature "Nancy" christened.'

He paused, and in the moment's pause,
His eyes and Willie's strangely glistened.
Nearer came Joan, and Bessy hung
With face averted, near enough
To hear, and sob unheard; the young
And careless ones had scampered off
Meantime, and sought the loftiest place
To beacon the approaching chase.

'Daily upon the meads to browse,
Goes Nancy with those dairy cows
You see behind the clematis:
And such a favourite she is,
That when fatigued, and helter skelter,
Among them from her foes to shelter,
She dashes when the chase is over,
They'll close her in and give her cover,
And bend their horns against the hounds,
And low, and keep them out of bounds!
From the house dogs she dreads no harm,
And is good friends with all the farm,
Man, and bird, and beast, howbeit
Their natures seem so opposite.
And she is known for many a mile,
And noted for her splendid style,
For her clear leap and quick slight hoof;
Welcome she is in many a roof.
And if I say, I love her, man!

I say but little: her fine eyes full
Of memories of my girl, at Yule
And May-time, make her dearer than
Dumb brute to men has been, I think.
So dear I do not find her dumb.
I know her ways, her slightest wink,
So well; and to my hand she'll come,
Sidelong, for food or a caress,
Just like a loving human thing.
Nor can I help, I do confess,
Some touch of human sorrowing
To think there may be such a doubt
That from the next world she'll be shut out,
And parted from me! And well I mind
How, when my girl's last moments came,
Her soft eyes very soft and kind,
She joined her hands and prayed the same,
That she "might meet her father, mother,
Sister Bess, and each dear brother,
And with them, if it might be, one
Who was her last companion."
Meaning the fawn—the doe you mark —
For my bay mare was then a foal,
And time has passed since then:- but hark!'

Page 4722

For like the shrieking of a soul
Shut in a tomb, a darkened cry
Of inward-wailing agony
Surprised them, and all eyes on each
Fixed in the mute-appealing speech
Of self-reproachful apprehension:
Knowing not what to think or do:
But Joan, recovering first, broke through
The instantaneous suspension,
And knelt upon the ground, and guessed
The bitterness at a glance, and pressed
Into the comfort of her breast
The deep-throed quaking shape that drooped
In misery's wilful aggravation,
Before the farmer as he stooped,
Touched with accusing consternation:
Soothing her as she sobbed aloud:-
'Not me! not me! Oh, no, no, no!
Not me! God will not take me in!
Nothing can wipe away my sin!
I shall not see her: you will go;
You and all that she loves so:
Not me! not me! Oh, no, no, no!'
Colourless, her long black hair,
Like seaweed in a tempest tossed
Tangling astray, to Joan's care
She yielded like a creature lost:
Yielded, drooping toward the ground,
As doth a shape one half-hour drowned,
And heaved from sea with mast and spar,
All dark of its immortal star.
And on that tender heart, inured
To flatter basest grief, and fight
Despair upon the brink of night,
She suffered herself to sink, assured
Of refuge; and her ear inclined
To comfort; and her thoughts resigned
To counsel; her wild hair let brush
From off her weeping brows; and shook
With many little sobs that took
Deeper-drawn breaths, till into sighs,
Long sighs, they sank; and to the 'hush!'
Of Joan's gentle chide, she sought

Childlike to check them as she ought,
Looking up at her infantwise.
And Willie, gazing on them both,
Shivered with bliss through blood and brain,
To see the darling of his troth
Like a maternal angel strain
The sinful and the sinless child
At once on either breast, and there
In peace and promise reconciled
Unite them: nor could Nature's care
With subtler sweet beneficence
Have fed the springs of penitence,
Still keeping true, though harshly tried,
The vital prop of human pride.

Beauty Rohtraut (From Moricke)

What is the name of King Ringang's daughter?
Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut!
And what does she do the livelong day,
Since she dare not knit and spin alway?
O hunting and fishing is ever her play!
And, heigh! that her huntsman I might be!
I'd hunt and fish right merrily!
Be silent, heart!

Page 4723

And it chanced that, after this some time, —
Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut, —
The boy in the Castle has gained access,
And a horse he has got and a huntsman's dress,
To hunt and to fish with the merry Princess;
And, O! that a king's son I might be!
Beauty Rohtraut I love so tenderly.
Hush! hush! my heart.

Under a grey old oak they sat,
Beauty, Beauty Rohtraut!
She laughs: 'Why look you so slyly at me?
If you have heart enough, come, kiss me.'
Cried the breathless boy, 'kiss thee?'
But he thinks, kind fortune has favoured my youth;
And thrice he has kissed Beauty Rohtraut's mouth.
Down! down! mad heart.

Then slowly and silently they rode home, —
Rohtraut, Beauty Rohtraut!
The boy was lost in his delight:
'And, wert thou Empress this very night,
I would not heed or feel the blight;
Ye thousand leaves of the wild wood wist
How Beauty Rohtraut's mouth I kiss'd.
Hush! hush! wild heart.'

The olive branch

A dove flew with an Olive Branch;
It crossed the sea and reached the shore,
And on a ship about to launch
Dropped down the happy sign it bore.

'An omen' rang the glad acclaim!
The Captain stooped and picked it up,
'Be then the Olive Branch her name,'
Cried she who flung the christening cup.

The vessel took the laughing tides;
It was a joyous revelry
To see her dashing from her sides
The rough, salt kisses of the sea.

And forth into the bursting foam
She spread her sail and sped away,
The rolling surge her restless home,
Her incense wreaths the showering spray.

Far out, and where the riot waves
Run mingling in tumultuous throngs,
She danced above a thousand graves,
And heard a thousand briny songs.

Her mission with her manly crew,
Her flag unfurl'd, her title told,
She took the Old World to the New,
And brought the New World to the Old.

Secure of friendliest welcomings,
She swam the havens sheening fair;
Secure upon her glad white wings,
She fluttered on the ocean air.

To her no more the bastioned fort
Shot out its swarthy tongue of fire;
From bay to bay, from port to port,
Her coming was the world's desire.

And tho' the tempest lashed her oft,
And tho' the rocks had hungry teeth,
And lightnings split the masts aloft,
And thunders shook the planks beneath,

And tho' the storm, self-willed and blind,
Made tatters of her dauntless sail,
And all the wildness of the wind
Was loosed on her, she did not fail;

Page 4724

But gallantly she ploughed the main,
And gloriously her welcome pealed,
And grandly shone to sky and plain
The goodly bales her decks revealed;

Brought from the fruitful eastern glebes
Where blow the gusts of balm and spice,
Or where the black blockaded ribs
Are jammed ’mongst ghostly fleets of ice,

Or where upon the curling hills
Glow clusters of the bright-eyed grape,
Or where the hand of labour drills
The stubbornness of earth to shape;

Rich harvestings and wealthy germs,
And handicrafts and shapely wares,
And spinnings of the hermit worms,
And fruits that bloom by lions’ lairs.

Come, read the meaning of the deep!
The use of winds and waters learn!
’Tis not to make the mother weep
For sons that never will return;

’Tis not to make the nations show
Contempt for all whom seas divide;
’Tis not to pamper war and woe,
Nor feed traditionary pride;

’Tis not to make the floating bulk
Mask death upon its slippery deck,
Itself in turn a shattered hulk,
A ghastly raft, a bleeding wreck.

It is to knit with loving lip
The interests of land to land;
To join in far-seen fellowship
The tropic and the polar strand.

It is to make that foaming Strength
Whose rebel forces wrestle still
Thro’ all his boundaried breadth and length
Become a vassal to our will.

It is to make the various skies,
And all the various fruits they vaunt,
And all the dowers of earth we prize,
Subservient to our household want.

And more, for knowledge crowns the gain
Of intercourse with other souls,
And Wisdom travels not in vain
The plunging spaces of the poles.

The wild Atlantic's weltering gloom,
Earth-clasping seas of North and South,
The Baltic with its amber spume,
The Caspian with its frozen mouth;

The broad Pacific, basking bright,
And girdling lands of lustrous growth,
Vast continents and isles of light,
Dumb tracts of undiscovered sloth;

She visits these, traversing each;
They ripen to the common sun;
Thro' diverse forms and different speech,
The world's humanity is one.

O may her voice have power to say
How soon the wrecking discords cease,
When every wandering wave is gay
With golden argosies of peace!

Now when the ark of human fate,
Long baffled by the wayward wind,
Is drifting with its peopled freight,
Safe haven on the heights to find;

Safe haven from the drowning slime
Of evil deeds and Deluge wrath; —
To plant again the foot of Time
Upon a purer, firmer path;

Page 4725

’Tis now the hour to probe the ground,
To watch the Heavens, to speak the word,
The fathoms of the deep to sound,
And send abroad the missioned bird,

On strengthened wing for evermore,
Let Science, swiftly as she can,
Fly seaward on from shore to shore,
And bind the links of man to man;

And like that fair propitious Dove
Bless future fleets about to launch;
Make every freight a freight of love,
And every ship an Olive Branch.

Song

Love within the lover’s breast
Burns like Hesper in the west,
O’er the ashes of the sun,
Till the day and night are done;
Then when dawn drives up her car —
Lo! it is the morning star.

Love! thy love pours down on mine
As the sunlight on the vine,
As the snow-rill on the vale,
As the salt breeze in the sail;
As the song unto the bird,
On my lips thy name is heard.

As a dewdrop on the rose
In thy heart my passion glows,
As a skylark to the sky
Up into thy breast I fly;
As a sea-shell of the sea
Ever shall I sing of thee.

The wild rose and the snowdrop

The Snowdrop is the prophet of the flowers;
It lives and dies upon its bed of snows;
And like a thought of spring it comes and goes,
Hanging its head beside our leafless bowers.

The sun’s betrothing kiss it never knows,
Nor all the glowing joy of golden showers;
But ever in a placid, pure repose,
More like a spirit with its look serene,
Droops its pale cheek veined thro’ with infant green.

Queen of her sisters is the sweet Wild Rose,
Sprung from the earnest sun and ripe young June;
The year’s own darling and the Summer’s Queen!
Lustrous as the new-throned crescent moon.
Much of that early prophet look she shows,
Mixed with her fair espoused blush which glows,
As if the ethereal fairy blood were seen;
Like a soft evening over sunset snows,
Half twilight violet shade, half crimson sheen.

Twin-born are both in beauteousness, most fair
In all that glads the eye and charms the air;
In all that wakes emotions in the mind
And sows sweet sympathies for human kind.
Twin-born, albeit their seasons are apart,
They bloom together in the thoughtful heart;
Fair symbols of the marvels of our state,
Mute speakers of the oracles of fate!

For each, fulfilling nature’s law, fulfils
Itself and its own aspirations pure;
Living and dying; letting faith ensure
New life when deathless Spring shall touch the hills.
Each perfect in its place; and each content

Page 4726

With that perfection which its being meant:
Divided not by months that intervene,
But linked by all the flowers that bud between.
Forever smiling thro’ its season brief,
The one in glory and the one in grief:
Forever painting to our museful sight,
How lowlihead and loveliness unite.

Born from the first blind yearning of the earth
To be a mother and give happy birth,
Ere yet the northern sun such rapture brings,
Lo, from her virgin breast the Snowdrop springs;
And ere the snows have melted from the grass,
And not a strip of greensward doth appear,
Save the faint prophecy its cheeks declare,
Alone, unkissed, unloved, behold it pass!
While in the ripe enthronement of the year,
Whispering the breeze, and wedding the rich air
With her so sweet, delicious bridal breath, —
Odorous and exquisite beyond compare,
And starr’d with dews upon her forehead clear,
Fresh-hearted as a Maiden Queen should be
Who takes the land’s devotion as her fee, —
The Wild Rose blooms, all summer for her dower,
Nature’s most beautiful and perfect flower.

The death of winter

When April with her wild blue eye
Comes dancing over the grass,
And all the crimson buds so shy
Peep out to see her pass;
As lightly she loosens her showery locks
And flutters her rainy wings;
Laughingly stoops
To the glass of the stream,
And loosens and loops
Her hair by the gleam,
While all the young villagers blithe as the flocks
Go frolicking round in rings; —
Then Winter, he who tamed the fly,

Turns on his back and prepares to die,
For he cannot live longer under the sky.

Down the valleys glittering green,
Down from the hills in snowy rills,
He melts between the border sheen
And leaps the flowery verges!
He cannot choose but brighten their hues,
And tho' he would creep, he fain must leap,
For the quick Spring spirit urges.
Down the vale and down the dale
He leaps and lights, till his moments fail,
Buried in blossoms red and pale,
While the sweet birds sing his dirges!

O Winter! I'd live that life of thine,
With a frosty brow and an icicle tongue,
And never a song my whole life long, —
Were such delicious burial mine!
To die and be buried, and so remain
A wandering brook in April's train,
Fixing my dying eyes for aye
On the dawning brows of maiden May.

Song

The moon is alone in

Page 4727

the sky
As thou in my soul;
The sea takes her image to lie
Where the white ripples roll
All night in a dream,
With the light of her beam,
Hushedly, mournfully, mistily up to the shore.
The pebbles speak low
In the ebb and the flow,
As I when thy voice came at intervals, tuned to adore:
Nought other stirred
Save my heart all unheard
Beating to bliss that is past evermore.

John Lackland

A wicked man is bad enough on earth;
But O the baleful lustre of a chief
Once pledged in tyranny! O star of dearth
Darkly illumining a nation's grief!
How many men have worn thee on their brows!
Alas for them and us! God's precious gift
Of gracious dispensation got by theft —
The damning form of false unholy vows!
The thief of God and man must have his fee:
And thou, John Lackland, despicable prince —
Basest of England's banes before or since!
Thrice traitor, coward, thief! O thou shalt be
The historic warning, trampled and abhorr'd
Who dared to steal and stain the symbols of the Lord!

The sleeping city

A Princess in the eastern tale
Paced thro' a marble city pale,
And saw in ghastly shapes of stone
The sculptured life she breathed alone;

Saw, where'er her eye might range,
Herself the only child of change;
And heard her echoed footfall chime
Between Oblivion and Time;

And in the squares where fountains played,
And up the spiral balustrade,
Along the drowsy corridors,
Even to the inmost sleeping floors,

Surveyed in wonder chilled with dread
The seemingness of Death, not dead;
Life's semblance but without its storm,
And silence frosting every form;

Crowned figures, cold and grouping slaves,
Like suddenly arrested waves
About to sink, about to rise, —
Strange meaning in their stricken eyes;

And cloths and couches live with flame
Of leopards fierce and lions tame,
And hunters in the jungle reed,
Thrown out by sombre glowing brede;

Dumb chambers hushed with fold on fold,
And cumbrous gorgeousness of gold;
White casements o'er embroidered seats,
Looking on solitudes of streets, —

On palaces and column'd towers,
Unconscious of the stony hours;
Harsh gateways startled at a sound,
With burning lamps all burnish'd round; —

Surveyed in awe this wealth and state,
Touched by the finger of a Fate,
And drew with slow-awakening fear
The sternness of the atmosphere; —

And gradually, with stealthier foot,
Became herself a thing as mute,
And listened,—while with swift alarm
Her alien heart shrank from the charm;

Page 4728

Yet as her thoughts dilating rose,
Took glory in the great repose,
And over every postured form
Spread lava-like and brooded warm, —

And fixed on every frozen face
Beheld the record of its race,
And in each chiselled feature knew
The stormy life that once blushed thro’; —

The ever-present of the past
There written; all that lightened last,
Love, anguish, hope, disease, despair,
Beauty and rage, all written there; —

Enchanted Passions! whose pale doom
Is never flushed by blight or bloom,
But sentinelled by silent orbs,
Whose light the pallid scene absorbs. —

Like such a one I pace along
This City with its sleeping throng;
Like her with dread and awe, that turns
To rapture, and sublimely yearns; —

For now the quiet stars look down
On lights as quiet as their own;
The streets that groaned with traffic show
As if with silence paved below;

The latest revellers are at peace,
The signs of in-door tumult cease,
From gay saloon and low resort,
Comes not one murmur or report:

The clattering chariot rolls not by,
The windows show no waking eye,
The houses smoke not, and the air
Is clear, and all the midnight fair.

The centre of the striving world,
Round which the human fate is curled,
To which the future crieth wild, —
Is pillowed like a cradled child.

The palace roof that guards a crown,
The mansion swathed in dreamy down,
Hovel, court, and alley-shed,
Sleep in the calmness of the dead.

Now while the many-motived heart
Lies hushed—fireside and busy mart,
And mortal pulses beat the tune
That charms the calm cold ear o' the moon

Whose yellowing crescent down the West
Leans listening, now when every breast
Its basest or its purest heaves,
The soul that joys, the soul that grieves; —

While Fame is crowning happy brows
That day will blindly scorn, while vows
Of anguished love, long hidden, speak
From faltering tongue and flushing cheek

The language only known to dreams,
Rich eloquence of rosy themes!
While on the Beauty's folded mouth
Disdain just wrinkles baby youth;

While Poverty dispenses alms
To outcasts, bread, and healing balms;
While old Mammon knows himself
The greatest beggar for his pelf;

While noble things in darkness grope,
The Statesman's aim, the Poet's hope;
The Patriot's impulse gathers fire,
And germs of future fruits aspire; —

Now while dumb nature owns its links,
And from one common fountain drinks,
Methinks in all around I see
This Picture in Eternity; —

Page 4729

A marbled City planted there
With all its pageants and despair;
A peopled hush, a Death not dead,
But stricken with Medusa’s head; —

And in the Gorgon’s glance for aye
The lifeless immortality
Reveals in sculptured calmness all
Its latest life beyond recall.

The poetry of Chaucer

Grey with all honours of age! but fresh-featured and ruddy As dawn when the drowsy farm-yard has thrice heard Chaunticlere. Tender to tearfulness—childlike, and manly, and motherly; Here beats true English blood richest joyance on sweet English ground.

The poetry of Spenser

Lakes where the sunsheen is mystic with splendour and softness; Vales where sweet life is all Summer with golden romance: Forests that glimmer with twilight round revel-bright palaces; Here in our May-blood we wander, careering ’mongst ladies and knights.

The poetry of Shakespeare

Picture some Isle smiling green ’mid the white-foaming ocean; — Full of old woods, leafy wisdoms, and frolicsome fays; Passions and pageants; sweet love singing bird-like above it; Life in all shapes, aims, and fates, is there warm’d by one great human heart.

The poetry of Milton

Like to some deep-chested organ whose grand inspiration, Serenely majestic in utterance, lofty and calm, Interprets to mortals with melody great as its burthen The mystical harmonies chiming for ever throughout the bright spheres.

The poetry of Southey

Keen as an eagle whose flight towards the dim empyrean
Fearless of toil or fatigue ever royally wends!
Vast in the cloud-coloured robes of the balm-breathing Orient
Lo! the grand Epic advances, unfolding the humanest truth.

The poetry of Coleridge

A brook glancing under green leaves, self-delighting, exulting,
And full of a gurgling melody ever renewed —

Renewed thro’ all changes of Heaven, unceasing in sunlight,
Unceasing in moonlight, but hushed in the beams of the holier orb.

The poetry of Shelley

See’st thou a Skylark whose glistening winglets ascending
Quiver like pulses beneath the melodious dawn?
Deep in the heart-yearning distance of heaven it flutters —
Wisdom and beauty and love are the treasures it brings down at eve.

The poetry of Wordsworth

A breath of the mountains, fresh born in the regions majestic,
That look with their eye-daring summits deep into the sky.
The voice of great Nature; sublime with her lofty conceptions,
Yet earnest and simple as any sweet child of the green lowly vale.

The poetry of Keats

The song of a nightingale sent thro’ a slumbrous valley,
Low-lidded with twilight, and tranced with the dolorous sound,
Tranced with a tender enchantment; the yearning of passion
That wins immortality even while panting delirious with death.

Page 4730

Violets

Violets, shy violets!
How many hearts with you compare!
Who hide themselves in thickest green,
And thence, unseen,
Ravish the enraptured air
With sweetness, dewy fresh and rare!

Violets, shy violets!
Human hearts to me shall be
Viewless violets in the grass,
And as I pass,
Odours and sweet imagery
Will wait on mine and gladden me!

Angelic love

Angelic love that stoops with heavenly lips
To meet its earthly mate;
Heroic love that to its sphere's eclipse
Can dare to join its fate
With one beloved devoted human heart,
And share with it the passion and the smart,
The undying bliss
Of its most fleeting kiss;
The fading grace
Of its most sweet embrace:-
Angelic love, heroic love!
Whose birth can only be above,
Whose wandering must be on earth,
Whose haven where it first had birth!
Love that can part with all but its own worth,
And joy in every sacrifice
That beautifies its Paradise!
And gently, like a golden-fruited vine,
With earnest tenderness itself consign,
And creeping up deliriously entwine
Its dear delicious arms
Round the beloved being!
With fair unfolded charms,
All-trusting, and all-seeing, —
Grape-laden with full bunches of young wine!
While to the panting heart's dry yearning drouth

Buds the rich dewy mouth —
Tenderly uplifted,
Like two rose-leaves drifted
Down in a long warm sigh of the sweet South!
Such love, such love is thine,
Such heart is mine,
O thou of mortal visions most divine!

Twilight music

Know you the low pervading breeze
That softly sings
In the trembling leaves of twilight trees,
As if the wind were dreaming on its wings?
And have you marked their still degrees
Of ebbing melody, like the strings
Of a silver harp swept by a spirit's hand
In some strange glimmering land,
'Mid gushing springs,
And glistenings
Of waters and of planets, wild and grand!
And have you marked in that still time
The chariots of those shining cars
Brighten upon the hushing dark,
And bent to hark
That Voice, amid the poplar and the lime,
Pause in the dilating lustre
Of the spheral cluster;
Pause but to renew its sweetness, deep
As dreams of heaven to souls that sleep!
And felt, despite earth's jarring wars,
When day is done
And dead the sun,
Still a voice divine can sing,
Still is there sympathy can bring
A whisper from the stars!

Page 4731

Ah, with this sentience quickly will you know
How like a tree I tremble to the tones
Of your sweet voice!
How keenly I rejoice
When in me with sweet motions slow
The spiritual music ebbs and moans —
Lives in the lustre of those heavenly eyes,
Dies in the light of its own paradise, —
Dies, and relives eternal from its death,
Immortal melodies in each deep breath;
Sweeps thro' my being, bearing up to thee
Myself, the weight of its eternity;
Till, nerved to life from its ordeal fire,
It marries music with the human lyre,
Blending divine delight with loveliest desire.

Requiem

Where faces are hueless, where eyelids are dewless,
Where passion is silent and hearts never crave;
Where thought hath no theme, and where sleep hath no dream,
In patience and peace thou art gone—to thy grave!
Gone where no warning can wake thee to morning,
Dead tho' a thousand hands stretch'd out to save.

Thou cam'st to us sighing, and singing and dying,
How could it be otherwise, fair as thou wert?
Placidly fading, and sinking and shading
At last to that shadow, the latest desert;
Wasting and waning, but still, still remaining.
Alas for the hand that could deal the death-hurt!

The Summer that brightens, the Winter that whitens,
The world and its voices, the sea and the sky,
The bloom of creation, the tie of relation,
All—all is a blank to thine ear and thine eye;
The ear may not listen, the eye may not glisten,
Nevermore waked by a smile or a sigh.

The tree that is rootless must ever be fruitless;
And thou art alone in thy death and thy birth;
No last loving token of wedded love broken,

No sign of thy singleness, sweetness and worth;
Lost as the flower that is drowned in the shower,
Fall’n like a snowflake to melt in the earth.

The flower of the ruins

Take thy lute and sing
By the ruined castle walls,
Where the torrent-foam falls,
And long weeds wave:
Take thy lute and sing,
O’er the grey ancestral grave!
Daughter of a King,
Tune thy string.

Sing of happy hours,
In the roar of rushing time;
Till all the echoes chime
To the days gone by;
Sing of passing hours
To the ever-present sky; —
Weep—and let the showers
Wake thy flowers.

Sing of glories gone:-
No more the blazoned fold
From the banner is unrolled;
The gold sun is set.
Sing his glory gone,
For thy voice may charm him yet;
Daughter of the dawn,
He is gone!

Page 4732

Pour forth all thy grief!
Passionately sweep the chords,
Wed them quivering to thy words;
Wild words of wail!
Shed thy withered grief —
But hold not Autumn to thy bale;
The eddy of the leaf
Must be brief!

Sing up to the night:
Hard it is for streaming tears
To read the calmness of the spheres;
Coldly they shine;
Sing up to their light;
They have views thou may’st divine —
Gain prophetic sight
From their light!

On the windy hills
Lo, the little harebell leans
On the spire-grass that it queens,
With bonnet blue;
Trusting love instils
Love and subject reverence true;
Learn what love instils
On the hills!

By the bare wayside
Placid snowdrops hang their cheeks,
Softly touch’d with pale green streaks,
Soon, soon, to die;
On the clothed hedgeside
Bands of rosy beauties vie,
In their prophesied
Summer pride.

From the snowdrop learn;
Not in her pale life lives she,
But in her blushing prophecy.
Thus be thy hopes,
Living but to yearn
Upwards to the hidden scopes; —
Even within the urn
Let them burn!

Heroes of thy race —
Warriors with golden crowns,
Ghostly shapes with marbled frowns
Stare thee to stone;
Matrons of thy race
Pass before thee making moan;
Full of solemn grace
Is their pace.

Piteous their despair!
Piteous their looks forlorn!
Terrible their ghostly scorn!
Still hold thou fast; —
Heed not their despair! —
Thou art thy future, not thy past;
Let them glance and glare
Thro' the air.

Thou the ruin's bud,
Be not that moist rich-smelling weed
With its arras-sembled brede,
And ruin-haunting stalk;
Thou the ruin's bud,
Be still the rose that lights the walk,
Mix thy fragrant blood
With the flood!

The rape of aurora

Never, O never,
Since dewy sweet Flora
Was ravished by Zephyr,
Was such a thing heard
In the valleys so hollow!
Till rosy Aurora,
Uprising as ever,
Bright Phosphor to follow,
Pale Phoebe to sever,
Was caught like a bird
To the breast of Apollo!

Wildly she flutters,
And flushes all over
With passionate mutters
Of shame to the hush
Of his amorous whispers:
But O such a lover

Must win when he utters,
Thro’ rosy red lispers,
The pains that discover
The wishes that gush
From the torches of Hesperus.

Page 4733

One finger just touching
The Orient chamber,
Unflooded the gushing
Of light that illumed
All her lustrous unveiling.
On clouds of glow amber,
Her limbs richly blushing,
She lay sweetly wailing,
In odours that gloomed
On the God as he bloomed
O’er her loveliness paling.

Great Pan in his covert
Beheld the rare glistening,
The cry of the love-hurt,
The sigh and the kiss
Of the latest close mingling;
But love, thought he, listening,
Will not do a dove hurt,
I know,—and a tingling,
Latent with bliss,
Prickt thro’ him, I wis,
For the Nymph he was singling.

South-west wind in the woodland

The silence of preluded song —
AEolian silence charms the woods;
Each tree a harp, whose foliaged strings
Are waiting for the master’s touch
To sweep them into storms of joy,
Stands mute and whispers not; the birds
Brood dumb in their foreboding nests,
Save here and there a chirp or tweet,
That utters fear or anxious love,
Or when the ouzel sends a swift
Half warble, shrinking back again
His golden bill, or when aloud
The storm-cock warns the dusking hills
And villages and valleys round:
For lo, beneath those ragged clouds
That skirt the opening west, a stream
Of yellow light and windy flame
Spreads lengthening southward, and the sky

Begins to gloom, and o’er the ground
A moan of coming blasts creeps low
And rustles in the crisping grass;
Till suddenly with mighty arms
Outspread, that reach the horizon round,
The great South-West drives o’er the earth,
And loosens all his roaring robes
Behind him, over heath and moor.
He comes upon the neck of night,
Like one that leaps a fiery steed
Whose keen black haunches quivering shine
With eagerness and haste, that needs
No spur to make the dark leagues fly!
Whose eyes are meteors of speed;
Whose mane is as a flashing foam;
Whose hoofs are travelling thunder-shocks; —
He comes, and while his growing gusts,
Wild couriers of his reckless course,
Are whistling from the daggered gorse,
And hurrying over fern and broom,
Midway, far off, he feigns to halt
And gather in his streaming train.

Now, whirring like an eagle’s wing
Preparing for a wide blue flight;
Now, flapping like a sail that tacks
And chides the wet bewildered mast;
Now, screaming like an anguish’d thing
Chased close by some down-breathing beak;
Now, wailing like a breaking heart,
That will not wholly break, but hopes

Page 4734

With hope that knows itself in vain;
Now, threatening like a storm-charged cloud;
Now, cooing like a woodland dove;
Now, up again in roar and wrath
High soaring and wide sweeping; now,
With sudden fury dashing down
Full-force on the awaiting woods.

Long waited there, for aspens frail
That tinkle with a silver bell,
To warn the Zephyr of their love,
When danger is at hand, and wake
The neighbouring boughs, surrendering all
Their prophet harmony of leaves,
Had caught his earliest windward thought,
And told it trembling; naked birk
Down showering her dishevelled hair,
And like a beauty yielding up
Her fate to all the elements,
Had swayed in answer; hazels close,
Thick brambles and dark brushwood tufts,
And briared brakes that line the dells
With shaggy beetling brows, had sung
Shrill music, while the tattered flaws
Tore over them, and now the whole
Tumultuous concords, seized at once
With savage inspiration,—pine,
And larch, and beech, and fir, and thorn,
And ash, and oak, and oakling, rave
And shriek, and shout, and whirl, and toss,
And stretch their arms, and split, and crack,
And bend their stems, and bow their heads,
And grind, and groan, and lion-like
Roar to the echo-peopled hills
And ravenous wilds, and crake-like cry
With harsh delight, and cave-like call
With hollow mouth, and harp-like thrill
With mighty melodies, sublime,
From clumps of column’d pines that wave
A lofty anthem to the sky,
Fit music for a prophet’s soul —

And like an ocean gathering power,
And murmuring deep, while down below
Reigns calm profound;—not trembling now
The aspens, but like freshening waves
That fall upon a shingly beach; —
And round the oak a solemn roll
Of organ harmony ascends,
And in the upper foliage sounds

A symphony of distant seas.
The voice of nature is abroad
This night; she fills the air with balm;
Her mystery is o’er the land;
And who that hears her now and yields
His being to her yearning tones,
And seats his soul upon her wings,
And broadens o’er the wind-swept world
With her, will gather in the flight
More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence,
Than hours of musing, or the lore
That lives with men could ever give!
Nor will it pass away when morn
Shall look upon the lulling leaves,
And woodland sunshine, Eden-sweet,
Dreams o’er the paths of peaceful shade; —
For every elemental power
Is kindred to our hearts, and once
Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,
Once taken to the unfettered sense,
Once claspt into the naked life,
The union is eternal.

Page 4735

Will O’ the wisp

Follow me, follow me,
Over brake and under tree,
Thro’ the bosky tanglery,
Brushwood and bramble!
Follow me, follow me,
Laugh and leap and scramble!
Follow, follow,
Hill and hollow,
Fosse and burrow,
Fen and furrow,
Down into the bulrush beds,
’Midst the reeds and osier heads,
In the rushy soaking damps,
Where the vapours pitch their camps,
Follow me, follow me,
For a midnight ramble!
O! what a mighty fog,
What a merry night O ho!
Follow, follow, nigher, nigher —
Over bank, and pond, and briar,
Down into the croaking ditches,
Rotten log,
Spotted frog,
Beetle bright
With crawling light,
What a joy O ho!
Deep into the purple bog —
What a joy O ho!
Where like hosts of puckered witches
All the shivering agues sit
Warming hands and chafing feet,
By the blue marsh-hovering oils:
O the fools for all their moans!
Not a forest mad with fire
Could still their teeth, or warm their bones,
Or loose them from their chilly coils.
What a clatter,
How they chatter!
Shrink and huddle,
All a muddle!
What a joy O ho!

Down we go, down we go,
What a joy O ho!
Soon shall I be down below,
Plunging with a grey fat friar,
Hither, thither, to and fro,
Breathing mists and whisking lamps,
Plashing in the shiny swamps;
While my cousin Lantern Jack,
With cook ears and cunning eyes,
Turns him round upon his back,
Daubs him oozy green and black,
Sits upon his rolling size,
Where he lies, where he lies,
Groaning full of sack —
Staring with his great round eyes!
What a joy O ho!
Sits upon him in the swamps
Breathing mists and whisking lamps!
What a joy O ho!
Such a lad is Lantern Jack,
When he rides the black nightmare
Through the fens, and puts a glare
In the friar's track.
Such a frolic lad, good lack!
To turn a friar on his back,
Trip him, clip him, whip him, nip him.
Lay him sprawling, smack!
Such a lad is Lantern Jack!
Such a tricksy lad, good lack!
What a joy O ho!
Follow me, follow me,
Where he sits, and you shall see!

Song

Fair and false! No dawn will greet
Thy waking beauty as of old;
The little flower beneath thy feet
Is alien to thy smile so cold;
The merry bird flown up to meet
Young morning from his nest i' the wheat
Scatters his joy to wood and wold,
But scorns the arrogance of gold.

Page 4736

False and fair! I scarce know why,
But standing in the lonely air,
And underneath the blessed sky,
I plead for thee in my despair; —
For thee cut off, both heart and eye
From living truth; thy spring quite dry;
For thee, that heaven my thought may share,
Forget—how false! and think—how fair!

Song

Two wedded lovers watched the rising moon,
That with her strange mysterious beauty glowing,
Over misty hills and waters flowing,
Crowned the long twilight loveliness of June:
And thus in me, and thus in me, they spake,
The solemn secret of fist love did wake.

Above the hills the blushing orb arose;
Her shape encircled by a radiant bower,
In which the nightingale with charmed power
Poured forth enchantment o’er the dark repose:
And thus in me, and thus in me, they said,
Earth’s mists did with the sweet new spirit wed.

Far up the sky with ever purer beam,
Upon the throne of night the moon was seated,
And down the valley glens the shades retreated,
And silver light was on the open stream.
And thus in me, and thus in me, they sighed,
Aspiring Love has hallowed Passion’s tide.

Song

I cannot lose thee for a day,
But like a bird with restless wing
My heart will find thee far away,
And on thy bosom fall and sing,
My nest is here, my rest is here; —
And in the lull of wind and rain,
Fresh voices make a sweet refrain,
‘His rest is there, his nest is there.’

With thee the wind and sky are fair,
But parted, both are strange and dark;
And treacherous the quiet air
That holds me singing like a lark,
O shield my love, strong arm above!
Till in the hush of wind and rain,
Fresh voices make a rich refrain,
‘The arm above will shield thy love.’

Daphne

Musing on the fate of Daphne,
Many feelings urged my breast,
For the God so keen desiring,
And the Nymph so deep distrest.

Never flashed thro’ sylvan valley
Visions so divinely fair!
He with early ardour glowing,
She with rosy anguish rare.

Only still more sweet and lovely
For those terrors on her brows,
Those swift glances wild and brilliant,
Those delicious panting vows.

Timidly the timid shoulders
Shrinking from the fervid hand!
Dark the tide of hair back-flowing
From the blue-veined temples bland!

Lovely, too, divine Apollo
In the speed of his pursuit;
With his eye an azure lustre,
And his voice a summer lute!

Looking like some burnished eagle
Hovering o’er a fluttered bird;
Not unseen of silver Naiad,
And of wistful Dryad heard!

Page 4737

Many a morn the naked beauty
Saw her bright reflection drown
In the flowing smooth-faced river,
While the god came sheening down.

Down from Pindus bright Peneus
Tells its muse-melodious source;
Sacred is its fountained birthplace,
And the Orient floods its course.

Many a morn the sunny darling
Saw the rising chariot-rays,
From the winding river-reaches,
Mellowing in amber haze.

Thro' the flaming mountain gorges
Lo, the River leaps the plain;
Like a wild god-stridden courser,
Tossing high its foamy mane.

Then he swims thro' laurelled sunlight,
Full of all sensations sweet,
Misty with his morning incense,
To the mirrored maiden's feet!

Wet and bright the dinting pebbles
Shine where oft she paused and stood;
All her dreamy warmth revolving,
While the chilly waters wooed.

Like to rosy-born Aurora,
Glowing freshly into view,
When her doubtful foot she ventures
On the first cold morning blue.

White as that Thessalian lily,
Fairest Tempe's fairest flower,
Lo, the tall Peneian virgin
Stands beneath her bathing bower.

There the laurell'd wreaths o'erarching
Crown'd the dainty shuddering maid;
There the dark prophetic laurel
Kiss'd her with its sister shade.

There the young green glistening leaflets
Hush'd with love their breezy peal;
There the little opening flowerets
Blush'd beneath her vermeil heel!

There among the conscious arbours
Sounds of soft tumultuous wail,
Mysteries of love, melodious,
Came upon the lyric gale!

Breathings of a deep enchantment,
Effluence of immortal grace,
Flitted round her faltering footstep,
Spread a balm about her face!

Witless of the enamour'd presence,
Like a dreamy lotus bud
From its drowsy stem down-drooping,
Gazed she in the glowing flood.

Softly sweet with fluttering presage,
Felt she that ethereal sense,
Drinking charms of love delirious,
Reaping bliss of love intense!

All the air was thrill'd with sunrise,
Birds made music of her name,
And the god-impregnate water
Claspt her image ere she came.

Richer for that glance unconscious!
Dearer for that soft dismay!
And the sudden self-possession!
And the smile as bright as day!

Plunging 'mid her scattered tresses,
With her blue invoking eyes;
See her like a star descending!
Like a rosebud see her rise!

Like a rosebud in the morning
Dashing off its jewell'd dews,
Ere unfolding all its fragrance
It is gathered by the muse!

Page 4738

Beauteous in the foamy laughter
Bubbling round her shrinking waist,
Lo! from locks and lips and eyelids
Rain the glittering pearl-drops chaste!

And about the maiden rapture
Still the ruddy ripples play'd,
Ebbing round in startled circlets
When her arms began to wade;

Flowing in like tides attracted
To the glowing crescent shine!
Clasping her ambrosial whiteness
Like an Autumn-tinted vine!

Sinking low with love's emotion!
Levying with look and tone
All love's rosy arts to mimic
Cytherea's magic zone!

Trembling up with adoration
To the crimson daisy tip
Budding from the snowy bosom —
Fainter than the rose-red lip!

Rising in a storm of wavelets,
That for shelter, feigning fright,
Prest to those twin-heaving havens,
Harbour'd there beneath her light;

Gleaming in a whirl of eddies
Round her lucid throat and neck;
Eddying in a gleam of dimples
Up against her bloomy cheek;

Bribing all the breezy water
With rich warmth, the nymph to keep
In a self-imprison'd plaisance,
Tempting her from deep to deep.

Till at last delirious passion
Thrill'd the god to wild excess,
And the fervour of a moment
Made divinity confess;

And he stood in all his glory!
But so radiant, being near,
That her eyes were frozen on him
In a fascinated fear!

All with orient splendour shining,
All with roseate birth aglow,
Gleam'd the golden god before her,
With his golden crescent bow.

Soon the dazzled light subsided,
And he seem'd a beauteous youth,
Form'd to gain the maiden's murmurs,
And to pledge the vows of truth.

Ah! that thus he had continued!
O, that such for her had been!
Graceful with all godlike beauty,
But so humanly serene!

Cheeks, and mouth, and mellow ringlets,
Bounteous as the mid-day beam;
Pleading looks and wistful tremour,
Tender as a maiden's dream!

Palms that like a bird's throbb'd bosom
Palpitate with eagerness,
Lips, the bridals of the roses,
Dewy sweet from the caress!

Lips and limbs, and eyes and ringlets,
Swaying, praying to one prayer,
Like a lyre, swept by a spirit,
In the still, enraptur'd air.

Like a lyre in some far valley,
Uttering ravishments divine!
All its strings to viewless fingers
Yearning, modulations fine!

Yearning with melodious fervour!
Like a beauteous maiden flower,
When the young beloved three paces
Hovers from the bridal bower.

Page 4739

Throbbing thro’ the dawning stillness!
As a heart within a breast,
When the young beloved is stepping
Radiant to the nuptial nest.

O for Daphne! gentle Daphne
Ever warmer by degrees
Whispers full of hopes and visions
Throng her ears like honey bees!

Never yet was lonely blossom
Woo’d with such delicious voice!
Never since hath mortal maiden
Dwelt on such celestial choice!

Love-suffused she quivers, falters —
Falters, sighs, but never speaks,
All her rosy blood up-gushing
Overflows her ripe young cheeks.

Blushing, sweet with virgin blushes,
All her loveliness a-flame,
Stands she in the orient waters,
Stricken o’er with speechless shame!

Ah! but lovelier, ever lovelier,
As more deep the colour glows,
And the honey-laden lily
Changes to the fragrant rose.

While the god with meek embraces,
Whispering all his sacred charms,
Softly folds her, gently holds her,
In his white encircling arms!

But, O Dian! veil not wholly
Thy pale crescent from the morn!
Vanish not, O virgin goddess,
With that look of pallid scorn!

Still thy pure protecting influence
Shed from those fair watchful eyes! —
Lo! her angry orb has vanished,
And the bright sun thrones the skies!

Voicelessly the forest Virgin
Vanished! but one look she gave —
Keen as Niobean arrow
Thro’ the maiden’s heart it drave.

Thus toward that throning bosom
Where all earth is warmed,—each spot
Nourished with autumnal blessings —
Icy chill was Daphne caught.

Icy chill! but swift revulsion
All her gentler self renewed,
Even as icy Winter quickens
With bud-opening warmth imbued.

Even as a torpid brooklet,
That to the night-gleaming moon
Flashed in turn the frozen glances,
Melts upon the breast of noon.

But no more—O never, never,
Turns she to that bosom bright,
Swiftly all her senses counsel,
All her nerves are strung to flight.

O’er the brows of radiant Pindus
Rolls a shadow dark and cold,
And a sound of lamentation
Issues from its mournful fold.

Voice of the far-sighted Muses!
Cry of keen foreboding song!
Every cleft of startled Tempe
Tingles with it sharp and long.

Over bourn and bosk and dingle,
Over rivers, over rills,
Runs the sad subservient Echo
Toward the dim blue distant hills!

And another and another!
’Tis a cry more wild than all;
And the hills with muffled voices
Answer ‘Daphne!’ to the call.

Page 4740

And another and another!
’Tis a cry so wildly sweet,
That her charmed heart turns rebel
To the instinct of her feet;

And she pauses for an instant;
But his arms have scarcely slid
Round her waist in cestian girdles,
And his low voluptuous lid

Lifted pleading, and the honey
Of his mouth for hers athirst,
Ruby glistening, raised for moisture —
Like a bud that waits to burst

In the sweet espousing showers —
And his tongue has scarce begun
With its inarticulate burthen,
And the clouds scarce show the sun

As it pierces thro’ a crevice
Of the mass that closed it o’er,
When again the horror flashes —
And she turns to flight once more!

And again o’er radiant Pindus
Rolls the shadow dark and cold,
And the sound of lamentation
Issues from its sable fold!

And again the light winds chide her
As she darts from his embrace —
And again the far-voiced echoes
Speak their tidings of the chase.

Loudly now as swiftly, swiftly,
O’er the glimmering sands she speeds;
Wildly now as in the furzes
From the piercing spikes she bleeds.

Deeply and with direful anguish,
As above each crimson drop
Passion checks the god Apollo,
And love bids him weep and stop. —

He above each drop of crimson
Shadowing—like the laurel leaf
That above himself will shadow —
Sheds a fadeless look of grief.

Then with love's remorseful discord,
With its own desire at war,
Sighing turns, while dimly fleeting
Daphne flies the chase afar.

But all nature is against her!
Pan, with all his sylvan troop,
Thro' the vista'd woodland valleys
Blocks her course with cry and whoop!

In the twilights of the thickets
Trees bend down their gnarled boughs,
Wild green leaves and low curved branches
Hold her hair and beat her brows.

Many a brake of brushwood covert,
Where cold darkness slumbers mute,
Slips a shrub to thwart her passage,
Slides a hand to clutch her foot.

Glens and glades of lushest verdure
Toil her in their tawny mesh,
Wilder-woofed ways and alleys
Lock her struggling limbs in leash.

Feathery grasses, flowery mosses,
Knot themselves to make her trip;
Sprays and stubborn sprigs outstretching
Put a bridle on her lip;

Many a winding lane betrays her,
Many a sudden bosky shoot,
And her knee makes many a stumble
O'er some hidden damp old root,

Whose quaint face peers green and dusky
'Mongst the matted growth of plants,
While she rises wild and weltering,
Speeding on with many pants.

Page 4741

Tangles of the wild red strawberry
Spread their freckled trammels frail;
In the pathway creeping brambles
Catch her in their thorny trail.

All the widely sweeping greensward
Shifts and swims from knoll to knoll;
Grey rough-fingered oak and elm wood
Push her by from bole to bole.

Groves of lemon, groves of citron,
Tall high-foliaged plane and palm,
Bloomy myrtle, light-blue olive,
Wave her back with gusts of balm.

Languid jasmine, scrambling briony,
Walls of close-festooning braid,
Fling themselves about her, mingling
With her wafted looks, waylaid.

Twisting bindweed, honey'd woodbine,
Cling to her, while, red and blue,
On her rounded form ripe berries
Dash and die in gory dew.

Running ivies dark and lingering
Round her light limbs drag and twine;
Round her waist with languorous tendrils
Reels and wreathes the juicy vine;

Reining in the flying creature
With its arms about her mouth;
Bursting all its mellowing bunches
To seduce her husky drouth;

Crowning her with amorous clusters;
Pouring down her sloping back
Fresh-born wines in glittering rillets,
Following her in crimson track.

Buried, drenched in dewy foliage,
Thus she glimmers from the dawn,
Watched by every forest creature,
Fleet-foot Oread, frolic Faun.

Silver-sandalled Arethusa
Not more swiftly fled the sands,
Fled the plains and fled the sunlights,
Fled the murmuring ocean strands.

O, that now the earth would open!
O, that now the shades would hide!
O, that now the gods would shelter!
Caverns lead and seas divide!

Not more faint soft-lowing Io
Panted in those starry eyes,
When the sleepless midnight meadows
Piteously implored the skies!

Still her breathless flight she urges
By the sanctuary stream,
And the god with golden swiftness
Follows like an eastern beam.

Her the close bewildering greenery
Darkens with its duskiest green, —
Him each little leaflet welcomes,
Flushing with an orient sheen.

Thus he nears, and now all Tempe
Rings with his melodious cry,
Avenues and blue expanses
Beam in his large lustrous eye!

All the branches start to music!
As if from a secret spring
Thousands of sweet bills are bubbling
In the nest and on the wing.

Gleams and shines the glassy river
And rich valleys every one;
But of all the throbbing beauty
Brightest! singled by the sun!

Page 4742

Ivy round her glimmering ancle,
Vine about her glowing brow,
Never sure was bride so beauteous,
Daphne, chosen nymph, as thou!

Thus he nears! and now she feels him
Breathing hot on every limb;
And he hears her own quick pantings —
Ah! that they might be for him.

O, that like the flower he tramples,
Bending from his golden tread,
Full of fair celestial ardours,
She would bow her bridal head.

O, that like the flower she presses,
Nodding from her lily touch,
Light as in the harmless breezes,
She would know the god for such!

See! the golden arms are round her —
To the air she grasps and clings!
See! his glowing arms have wound her —
To the sky she shrieks and springs!

See! the flushing chace of Tempe
Trembles with Olympian air —
See! green sprigs and buds are shooting
From those white raised arms of prayer!

In the earth her feet are rooting! —
Breasts and limbs and lifted eyes,
Hair and lips and stretching fingers,
Fade away—and fadeless rise.

And the god whose fervent rapture
Clasps her finds his close embrace
Full of palpitating branches,
And new leaves that bud apace,

Bound his wonder-stricken forehead; —
While in ebbing measures slow
Sounds of softly dying pulses
Pause and quiver, pause and go;

Go, and come again, and flutter
On the verge of life,—then flee!
All the white ambrosial beauty
Is a lustrous Laurel Tree!

Still with the great panting love-chase
All its running sap is warmed; —
But from head to foot the virgin
Is transfigured and transformed.

Changed!—yet the green Dryad nature
Is instinct with human ties,
And above its anguish'd lover
Breathes pathetic sympathies;

Sympathies of love and sorrow;
Joy in her divine escape;
Breathing through her bursting foliage
Comfort to his bending shape.

Vainly now the floating Naiads
Seek to pierce the laurel maze,
Nought but laurel meets their glances,
Laurel glistens as they gaze.

Nought but bright prophetic laurel!
Laurel over eyes and brows,
Over limbs and over bosom,
Laurel leaves and laurel boughs!

And in vain the listening Dryad
Shells her hand against her ear! —
All is silence—save the echo
Travelling in the distance drear.

London by lamplight

There stands a singer in the street,
He has an audience motley and meet;
Above him lowers the London night,
And around the lamps are flaring bright.

Page 4743

His minstrelsy may be unchaste —
’Tis much unto that motley taste,
And loud the laughter he provokes
From those sad slaves of obscene jokes.

But woe is many a passer by
Who as he goes turns half an eye,
To see the human form divine
Thus Circe-wise changed into swine!

Make up the sum of either sex
That all our human hopes perplex,
With those unhappy shapes that know
The silent streets and pale cock-crow.

And can I trace in such dull eyes
Of fireside peace or country skies?
And could those haggard cheeks presume
To memories of a May-tide bloom?

Those violated forms have been
The pride of many a flowering green;
And still the virgin bosom heaves
With daisy meads and dewy leaves.

But stygian darkness reigns within
The river of death from the founts of sin;
And one prophetic water rolls
Its gas-lit surface for their souls.

I will not hide the tragic sight —
Those drown’d black locks, those dead lips white,
Will rise from out the slimy flood,
And cry before God’s throne for blood!

Those stiffened limbs, that swollen face, —
Pollution’s last and best embrace,
Will call, as such a picture can,
For retribution upon man.

Hark! how their feeble laughter rings,
While still the ballad-monger sings,
And flatters their unhappy breasts
With poisonous words and pungent jests.

O how would every daisy blush
To see them ’mid that earthy crush!
O dumb would be the evening thrush,
And hoary look the hawthorn bush!

The meadows of their infancy
Would shrink from them, and every tree,
And every little laughing spot,
Would hush itself and know them not.

Precursor to what black despairs
Was that child’s face which once was theirs!
And O to what a world of guile
Was herald that young angel smile!

That face which to a father’s eye
Was balm for all anxiety;
That smile which to a mother’s heart
Went swifter than the swallow’s dart!

O happy homes! that still they know
At intervals, with what a woe
Would ye look on them, dim and strange,
Suffering worse than winter change!

And yet could I transplant them there,
To breathe again the innocent air
Of youth, and once more reconcile
Their outcast looks with nature’s smile;

Could I but give them one clear day
Of this delicious loving May,
Release their souls from anguish dark,
And stand them underneath the lark; —

I think that Nature would have power
To graft again her blighted flower
Upon the broken stem, renew
Some portion of its early hue; —

Page 4744

The heavy flood of tears unlock,
More precious than the Scriptured rock;
At least instil a happier mood,
And bring them back to womanhood.

Alas! how many lost ones claim
This refuge from despair and shame!
How many, longing for the light,
Sink deeper in the abyss this night!

O, crying sin! O, blushing thought!
Not only unto those that wrought
The misery and deadly blight;
But those that outcast them this night!

O, agony of grief! for who
Less dainty than his race, will do
Such battle for their human right,
As shall awake this startled night?

Proclaim this evil human page
Will ever blot the Golden Age
That poets dream and saints invite,
If it be unredeemed this night?

This night of deep solemnity,
And verdurous serenity,
While over every fleecy field
The dews descend and odours yield.

This night of gleaming floods and falls,
Of forest glooms and sylvan calls,
Of starlight on the pebbly rills,
And twilight on the circling hills.

This night! when from the paths of men
Grey error steams as from a fen;
As o’er this flaring City wreathes
The black cloud-vapour that it breathes!

This night from which a morn will spring
Blooming on its orient wing;
A morn to roll with many more
Its ghostly foam on the twilight shore.

Morn! when the fate of all mankind
Hangs poised in doubt, and man is blind.
His duties of the day will seem
The fact of life, and mine the dream:

The destinies that bards have sung,
Regeneration to the young,
Reverberation of the truth,
And virtuous culture unto youth!

Youth! in whose season let abound
All flowers and fruits that strew the ground,
Voluptuous joy where love consents,
And health and pleasure pitch their tents:

All rapture and all pure delight;
A garden all unknown to blight;
But never the unnatural sight
That throngs the shameless song this night!

Song

Under boughs of breathing May,
In the mild spring-time I lay,
Lonely, for I had no love;
And the sweet birds all sang for pity,
Cuckoo, lark, and dove.

Tell me, cuckoo, then I cried,
Dare I woo and wed a bride?
I, like thee, have no home-nest;
And the twin notes thus tuned their ditty, —
‘Love can answer best.’

Nor, warm dove with tender coo,
Have I thy soft voice to woo,
Even were a damsel by;
And the deep woodland crooned its ditty, —
‘Love her first and try.’

Page 4745

Nor have I, wild lark, thy wing,
That from bluest heaven can bring
Bliss, whatever fate befall;
And the sky-lyrist trilled this ditty, —
‘Love will give thee all.’

So it chanced while June was young,
Wooing well with fervent song,
I had won a damsel coy;
And the sweet birds that sang for pity,
Jubileed for joy.

PASTORALS

I

How sweet on sunny afternoons,
For those who journey light and well,
To loiter up a hilly rise
Which hides the prospect far beyond,
And fancy all the landscape lying
Beautiful and still;

Beneath a sky of summer blue,
Whose rounded cloudlets, folded soft,
Gaze on the scene which we await
And picture from their peacefulness;
So calmly to the earth inclining
Float those loving shapes!

Like airy brides, each singling out
A spot to love and bless with love,
Their creamy bosoms glowing warm,
Till distance weds them to the hills,
And with its latest gleam the river
Sinks in their embrace.

And silverly the river runs,
And many a graceful wind he makes,
By fields where feed the happy flocks,
And hedge-rows hushing pleasant lanes,
The charms of English home reflected
In his shining eye:

Ancestral oak, broad-foliaged elm,
Rich meadows sunned and starred with flowers,
The cottage breathing tender smoke
Against the brooding golden air,
With glimpses of a stately mansion
On a woodland sward;

And circling round, as with a ring,
The distance spreading amber haze,
Enclosing hills and pastures sweet;
A depth of soft and mellow light
Which fills the heart with sudden yearning
Aimless and serene!

No disenchantment follows here,
For nature's inspiration moves
The dream which she herself fulfils;
And he whose heart, like valley warmth,
Steams up with joy at scenes like this
Shall never be forlorn.

And O for any human soul
The rapture of a wide survey —
A valley sweeping to the West,
With all its wealth of loveliness,
Is more than recompense for days
That taught us to endure.

II

Yon upland slope which hides the sun
Ascending from his eastern deeps,
And now against the hues of dawn
One level line of tillage rears;
The furrowed brow of toil and time;
To many it is but a sweep of land!

To others 'tis an Autumn trust,
But unto me a mystery; —
An influence strange and swift as dreams;
A whispering of old romance;
A temple naked to the clouds;
Or one of nature's bosoms fresh revealed,

Page 4746

Heaving with adoration! there
The work of husbandry is done,
And daily bread is daily earned;
Nor seems there ought to indicate
The springs which move in me such thoughts,
But from my soul a spirit calls them up.

All day into the open sky,
All night to the eternal stars,
For ever both at morn and eve
Men mellow distances draw near,
And shadows lengthen in the dusk,
Athwart the heavens it rolls its glimmering line!

When twilight from the dream-hued West
Sighs hush! and all the land is still;
When, from the lush empurpling East,
The twilight of the crowing cock
Peers on the drowsy village roofs,
Athwart the heavens that glimmering line is seen.

And now beneath the rising sun,
Whose shining chariot overpeers
The irradiate ridge, while fetlock deep
In the rich soil his coursers plunge —
How grand in robes of light it looks!
How glorious with rare suggestive grace!

The ploughman mounting up the height
Becomes a glowing shape, as though
'Twere young Triptolemus, plough in hand,
While Ceres in her amber scarf
With gentle love directs him how
To wed the willing earth and hope for fruits!

The furrows running up are fraught
With meanings; there the goddess walks,
While Proserpine is young, and there —
'Mid the late autumn sheaves, her voice
Sobbing and choked with dumb despair —
The nights will hear her wailing for her child!

Whatever dim tradition tells,
Whatever history may reveal,

Or fancy, from her starry brows,
Of light or dreamful lustre shed,
Could not at this sweet time increase
The quiet consecration of the spot.

Blest with the sweat of labour, blest
With the young sun’s first vigorous beams,
Village hope and harvest prayer, —
The heart that throbs beneath it holds
A bliss so perfect in itself
Men’s thoughts must borrow rather than bestow.

III

Now standing on this hedgeside path,
Up which the evening winds are blowing
Wildly from the lingering lines
Of sunset o’er the hills;
Unaided by one motive thought,
My spirit with a strange impulsion
Rises, like a fledgling,
Whose wings are not mature, but still
Supported by its strong desire
Beats up its native air and leaves
The tender mother’s nest.

Great music under heaven is made,
And in the track of rushing darkness
Comes the solemn shape of night,
And broods above the earth.
A thing of Nature am I now,
Abroad, without a sense or feeling

Page 4747

Born not of her bosom;
Content with all her truths and fates;
Ev’n as yon strip of grass that bows
Above the new-born violet bloom,
And sings with wood and field.

IV

Lo, as a tree, whose wintry twigs
Drink in the sun with fibrous joy,
And down into its dampest roots
Thrills quickened with the draught of life,
I wake unto the dawn, and leave my griefs to drowse.

I rise and drink the fresh sweet air:
Each draught a future bud of Spring;
Each glance of blue a birth of green;
I will not mimic yonder oak
That dallies with dead leaves ev’n while the primrose peeps.

But full of these warm-whispering beams,
Like Memnon in his mother’s eye, —
Aurora! when the statue stone
Moaned soft to her pathetic touch, —
My soul shall own its parent in the founts of day!

And ever in the recurring light,
True to the primal joy of dawn,
Forget its barren griefs; and aye
Like aspens in the faintest breeze
Turn all its silver sides and tremble into song.

V

Now from the meadow floods the wild duck clamours,
Now the wood pigeon wings a rapid flight,
Now the homeward rookery follows up its vanguard,
And the valley mists are curling up the hills.

Three short songs gives the clear-voiced throstle,
Sweetening the twilight ere he fills the nest;

While the little bird upon the leafless branches
Tweets to its mate a tiny loving note.

Deeper the stillness hangs on every motion;
Calmer the silence follows every call;
Now all is quiet save the roosting pheasant,
The bell-wether’s tinkle and the watch-dog’s bark.

Softly shine the lights from the silent kindling homestead,
Stars of the hearth to the shepherd in the fold;
Springs of desire to the traveller on the roadway;
Ever breathing incense to the ever-blessing sky!

VI

How barren would this valley be,
Without the golden orb that gazes
On it, broadening to hues
Of rose, and spreading wings of amber;
Blessing it before it falls asleep.

How barren would this valley be,
Without the human lives now beating
In it, or the throbbing hearts
Far distant, who their flower of childhood
Cherish here, and water it with tears!

How barren should I be, were I
Without above that loving splendour,
Shedding light and warmth! without
Some kindred natures of my kind
To joy in me, or yearn towards me now!

VII

Page 4748

Summer glows warm on the meadows, and speedwell, and gold-cups, and daisies Darken ’mid deepening masses of sorrel, and shadowy grasses Show the ripe hue to the farmer, and summon the scythe and the hay- makers Down from the village; and now, even now, the air smells of the mowing, And the sharp song of the scythe whistles daily; from dawn, till the gloaming Wears its cool star, sweet and welcome to all flaming faces afield now; Heavily weighs the hot season, and drowses the darkening foliage, Drooping with languor; the white cloud floats, but sails not, for windless Heaven’s blue tents it; no lark singing up in its fleecy white valleys; Up in its fairy white valleys, once feathered with minstrels, melodious With the invisible joy that wakes dawn o’er the green fields of England. Summer glows warm on the meadows; then come, let us roam thro’ them gaily, Heedless of heat, and the hot-kissing sun, and the fear of dark freckles. Never one kiss will he give on a neck, or a lily-white forehead, Chin, hand, or bosom uncovered, all panting, to take the chance coolness, But full sure the fiery pressure leaves seal of espousal. Heed him not; come, tho’ he kiss till the soft little upper-lip loses Half its pure whiteness; just speck’d where the curve of the rosy mouth reddens.

Come, let him kiss, let him kiss, and his kisses shall make thee the sweeter. Thou art no nun, veiled and vowed; doomed to nourish a withering pallor! City exotics beside thee would show like bleached linen at mid-day, Hung upon hedges of eglantine! Thou in the freedom of nature, Full of her beauty and wisdom, gentleness, joyance, and kindness! Come, and like bees will we gather the rich golden honey of noontide; Deep in the sweet summer meadows, border’d by hillside and river, Lined with long trenches half-hidden, where smell of white meadow- sweet, sweetest, Blissfully hovers—O sweetest! but pluck it not! even in the tenderest Grasp it will lose breath and wither; like many, not made for a posy.

See, the sun slopes down the meadows, where all the flowers are falling! Falling unhymned; for the nightingale scarce ever charms the long twilight: Mute with the cares of the nest; only known by a ‘chuck, chuck,’ and dovelike Call of content, but the finch and the linnet and blackcap pipe loudly. Round on the western hill-side warbles the rich-billed ouzel; And the shrill throstle is filling the tangled thickening copses; Singing o’er hyacinths hid, and most honey’d of flowers, white field-rose. Joy thus to revel all day in the grass of our own beloved country; Revel all day, till the lark mounts at eve with his sweet ’tirra- lirra’: Trilling delightfully. See, on the river the slow-rippled surface Shining; the slow ripple broadens in circles; the bright surface smoothens; Now it is flat as the leaves of the yet unseen water-lily. There dart the lives of a day, ever-varying tactics fantastic. There, by the wet-mirrored osiers,

Page 4749

the emerald wing of the kingfisher Flashes, the fish in his beak! there the dab-chick dived, and the motion Lazily undulates all thro' the tall standing army of rushes.

Joy thus to revel all day, till the twilight turns us homeward! Till all the lingering deep-blooming splendour of sunset is over, And the one star shines mildly in mellowing hues, like a spirit Sent to assure us that light never dieth, tho' day is now buried. Saying: to-morrow, to-morrow, few hours intervening, that interval Tuned by the woodlark in heaven, to-morrow my semblance, far eastward, Heralds the day 'tis my mission eternal to seal and to prophecy. Come then, and homeward; passing down the close path of the meadows. Home like the bees stored with sweetness; each with a lark in the bosom, Trilling for ever, and oh! will yon lark ever cease to sing up there?

To A skylark

O skylark! I see thee and call thee joy!
Thy wings bear thee up to the breast of the dawn;
I see thee no more, but thy song is still
The tongue of the heavens to me!

Thus are the days when I was a boy;
Sweet while I lived in them, dear now they're gone:
I feel them no longer, but still, O still
They tell of the heavens to me.

Song—spring

When buds of palm do burst and spread
Their downy feathers in the lane,
And orchard blossoms, white and red,
Breathe Spring delight for Autumn gain;
And the skylark shakes his wings in the rain;

O then is the season to look for a bride!
Choose her warily, woo her unseen;
For the choicest maids are those that hide
Like dewy violets under the green.

Song—autumn

When nuts behind the hazel-leaf
Are brown as the squirrel that hunts them free,
And the fields are rich with the sun-burnt sheaf,

’Mid the blue cornflower and the yellowing tree;
And the farmer glows and beams in his glee;

O then is the season to wed thee a bride!
Ere the garners are filled and the ale-cups foam;
For a smiling hostess is the pride
And flower of every Harvest Home.

Sorrows and joys

Bury thy sorrows, and they shall rise
As souls to the immortal skies,
And there look down like mothers’ eyes.

But let thy joys be fresh as flowers,
That suck the honey of the showers,
And bloom alike on huts and towers.

So shall thy days be sweet and bright;
Solemn and sweet thy starry night,
Conscious of love each change of light.

The stars will watch the flowers asleep,
The flowers will feel the soft stars weep,
And both will mix sensations deep.

With these below, with those above,
Sits evermore the brooding dove,
Uniting both in bonds of love.

Page 4750

For both by nature are akin;
Sorrow, the ashen fruit of sin,
And joy, the juice of life within.

Children of earth are these; and those
The spirits of divine repose —
Death radiant o’er all human woes.

O, think what then had been thy doom,
If homeless and without a tomb
They had been left to haunt the gloom!

O, think again what now they are —
Motherly love, tho’ dim and far,
Imaged in every lustrous star.

For they, in their salvation, know
No vestige of their former woe,
While thro’ them all the heavens do flow.

Thus art thou wedded to the skies,
And watched by ever-loving eyes,
And warned by yearning sympathies.

Song

The flower unfolds its dawning cup,
And the young sun drinks the star-dews up,
At eve it droops with the bliss of day,
And dreams in the midnight far away.

So am I in thy sole, sweet glance
Pressed with a weight of utterance;
Lovingly all my leaves unfold,
And gleam to the beams of thirsty gold.

At eve I droop, for then the swell
Of feeling falters forth farewell; —
At midnight I am dreaming deep,
Of what has been, in blissful sleep.

When—ah! when will love’s own fight
Wed me alike thro’ day and night,
When will the stars with their linking charms
Wake us in each other’s arms?

Song

Thou to me art such a spring
As the Arab seeks at eve,
Thirsty from the shining sands;
There to bathe his face and hands,
While the sun is taking leave,
And dewy sleep is a delicious thing.

Thou to me art such a dream
As he dreams upon the grass,
While the bubbling coolness near
Makes sweet music in his ear;
And the stars that slowly pass
In solitary grandeur o'er him gleam.

Thou to me art such a dawn
As the dawn whose ruddy kiss
Wakes him to his darling steed;
And again the desert speed,
And again the desert bliss,
Lightens thro' his veins, and he is gone!

Antigone

The buried voice bespake Antigone.

'O sister! couldst thou know, as thou wilt know,
The bliss above, the reverence below,
Enkindled by thy sacrifice for me;
Thou wouldst at once with holy ecstasy
Give thy warm limbs into the yearning earth.
Sleep, Sister! for Elysium's dawning birth, —
And faith will fill thee with what is to be!
Sleep, for the Gods are watching over thee!
Thy dream will steer thee to perform their will,
As silently their influence they instil.
O Sister! in the sweetness

Page 4751

of thy prime,
Thy hand has plucked the bitter flower of death;
But this will dower thee with Elysian breath,
That fade into a never-fading clime.
Dear to the Gods are those that do like thee
A solemn duty! for the tyranny
Of kings is feeble to the soul that dares
Defy them to fulfil its sacred cares:
And weak against a mighty will are men.
O, Torch between two brothers! in whose gleam
Our slaughtered House doth shine as one again,
Tho' severed by the sword; now may thy dream
Kindle desire in thee for us, and thou,
Forgetting not thy lover and his vow,
Leaving no human memory forgot,
Shalt cross, not unattended, the dark stream
Which runs by thee in sleep and ripples not.
The large stars glitter thro' the anxious night,
And the deep sky broods low to look at thee:
The air is hush'd and dark o'er land and sea,
And all is waiting for the morrow light:
So do thy kindred spirits wait for thee.
O Sister! soft as on the downward rill,
Will those first daybeams from the distant hill
Fall on the smoothness of thy placid brow,
Like this calm sweetness breathing thro' me now:
And when the fated sounds shall wake thine eyes,
Wilt thou, confiding in the supreme will,
In all thy maiden steadfastness arise,
Firm to obey and earnest to fulfil;
Remembering the night thou didst not sleep,
And this same brooding sky beheld thee creep,
Defiant of unnatural decree,
To where I lay upon the outcast land;
Before the iron gates upon the plain;
A wretched, graveless ghost, whose wailing chill
Came to thy darkened door imploring thee;
Yearning for burial like my brother slain; —
And all was dared for love and piety!
This thought will nerve again thy virgin hand
To serve its purpose and its destiny.'

She woke, they led her forth, and all was still.

Swathed round in mist and crown’d with cloud,
O Mountain! hid from peak to base —
Caught up into the heavens and clasped
In white ethereal arms that make
Thy mystery of size sublime!
What eye or thought can measure now
Thy grand dilating loftiness!
What giant crest dispute with thee
Supremacy of air and sky!
What fabled height with thee compare!
Not those vine-terraced hills that seethe
The lava in their fiery cusps;
Nor that high-climbing robe of snow,
Whose summits touch the morning star,
And breathe the thinnest air of life;
Nor crocus-couching Ida, warm
With Juno’s latest nuptial lure;
Nor Tenedos whose dreamy eye
Still looks upon beleaguered Troy;
Nor yet Olympus crown’d

Page 4752

with gods
Can boast a majesty like thine,
O Mountain! hid from peak to base,
And image of the awful power
With which the secret of all things,
That stoops from heaven to garment earth,
Can speak to any human soul,
When once the earthly limits lose
Their pointed heights and sharpened lines,
And measureless immensity
Is palpable to sense and sight.

Song

No, no, the falling blossom is no sign
Of loveliness destroy'd and sorrow mute;
The blossom sheds its loveliness divine; —
Its mission is to prophecy the fruit.

Nor is the day of love for ever dead,
When young enchantment and romance are gone;
The veil is drawn, but all the future dread
Is lightened by the finger of the dawn.

Love moves with life along a darker way,
They cast a shadow and they call it death:
But rich is the fulfilment of their day;
The purer passion and the firmer faith.

The two blackbirds

A blackbird in a wicker cage,
That hung and swung 'mid fruits and flowers,
Had learnt the song-charm, to assuage
The drearness of its wingless hours.

And ever when the song was heard,
From trees that shade the grassy plot
Warbled another glossy bird,
Whose mate not long ago was shot.

Strange anguish in that creature's breast,
Unwept like human grief, unsaid,

Has quickened in its lonely nest
A living impulse from the dead.

Not to console its own wild smart, —
But with a kindling instinct strong,
The novel feeling of its heart
Beats for the captive bird of song.

And when those mellow notes are still,
It hops from off its choral perch,
O’er path and sward, with busy bill,
All grateful gifts to peck and search.

Store of ouzel dainties choice
To those white swinging bars it brings;
And with a low consoling voice
It talks between its fluttering wings.

Deeply in their bitter grief
Those sufferers reciprocate,
The one sings for its woodland life,
The other for its murdered mate.

But deeper doth the secret prove,
Uniting those sad creatures so;
Humanity’s great link of love,
The common sympathy of woe.

Well divined from day to day
Is the swift speech between them twain;
For when the bird is scared away,
The captive bursts to song again.

Yet daily with its flattering voice,
Talking amid its fluttering wings,
Store of ouzel dainties choice
With busy bill the poor bird brings.

And shall I say, till weak with age
Down from its drowsy branch it drops,
It will not leave that captive cage,
Nor cease those busy searching hops?

Page 4753

Ah, no! the moral will not strain;
Another sense will make it range,
Another mate will soothe its pain,
Another season work a change.

But thro’ the live-long summer, tried,
A pure devotion we may see;
The ebb and flow of Nature’s tide;
A self-forgetful sympathy.

July

I

Blue July, bright July,
Month of storms and gorgeous blue;
Violet lightnings o’er thy sky,
Heavy falls of drenching dew;
Summer crown! o’er glen and glade
Shrinking hyacinths in their shade;
I welcome thee with all thy pride,
I love thee like an Eastern bride.
Though all the singing days are done
As in those climes that clasp the sun;
Though the cuckoo in his throat
Leaves to the dove his last twin note;
Come to me with thy lustrous eye,
Golden-dawning oriently,
Come with all thy shining blooms,
Thy rich red rose and rolling glooms.
Though the cuckoo doth but sing ‘cuk, cuk,’
And the dove alone doth coo;
Though the cushat spins her coo-r-roo, r-r-roo —
To the cuckoo’s halting ‘cuk.’

II

Sweet July, warm July!
Month when mosses near the stream,
Soft green mosses thick and shy,
Are a rapture and a dream.
Summer Queen! whose foot the fern
Fades beneath while chestnuts burn;
I welcome thee with thy fierce love,

Gloom below and gleam above.
Though all the forest trees hang dumb,
With dense leafiness o'ercome;
Though the nightingale and thrush,
Pipe not from the bough or bush;
Come to me with thy lustrous eye,
Azure-melting westerly,
The raptures of thy face unfold,
And welcome in thy robes of gold!
Tho' the nightingale broods—'sweet-chuck-sweet' —
And the ouzel flutes so chill,
Tho' the throstle gives but one shrilly trill
To the nightingale's 'sweet-sweet.'

Song

I would I were the drop of rain
That falls into the dancing rill,
For I should seek the river then,
And roll below the wooded hill,
Until I reached the sea.

And O, to be the river swift
That wrestles with the wilful tide,
And fling the briny weeds aside
That o'er the foamy billows drift,
Until I came to thee!

I would that after weary strife,
And storm beneath the piping wind,
The current of my true fresh life
Might come unmingled, unimbrined,
To where thou floatest free.

Might find thee in some amber clime,
Where sunlight dazzles on the sail,
And dreaming of our plighted vale
Might seal the dream, and bless the time,
With maiden kisses three.

Page 4754

Song

Come to me in any shape!
As a victor crown’d with vine,
In thy curls the clustering grape, —
Or a vanquished slave:
’Tis thy coming that I crave,
And thy folding serpent twine,
Close and dumb;
Ne’er from that would I escape;
Come to me in any shape!
Only come!

Only come, and in my breast
Hide thy shame or show thy pride;
In my bosom be caressed,
Never more to part;
Come into my yearning heart;
I, the serpent, golden-eyed,
Twine round thee;
Twine thee with no venomed test;
Absence makes the venomed nest;
Come to me!

Come to me, my lover, come!
Violets on the tender stem
Die and wither in their bloom,
Under dewy grass;
Come, my lover, or, alas!
I shall die, shall die like them,
Frail and lone;
Come to me, my lover, come!
Let thy bosom be my tomb:
Come, my own!

The shipwreck of Idomeneus

Swept from his fleet upon that fatal night
When great Poseidon’s sudden-veering wrath
Scattered the happy homeward-floating Greeks
Like foam-flakes off the waves, the King of Crete
Held lofty commune with the dark Sea-god.
His brows were crowned with victory, his cheeks
Were flushed with triumph, but the mighty joy

Of Troy's destruction and his own great deeds
Passed, for the thoughts of home were dearer now,
And sweet the memory of wife and child,
And weary now the ten long, foreign years,
And terrible the doubt of short delay —
More terrible, O Gods! he cried, but stopped;
Then raised his voice upon the storm and prayed.
O thou, if injured, injured not by me,
Poseidon! whom sea-deities obey
And mortals worship, hear me! for indeed
It was our oath to aid the cause of Greece,
Not unespoused by Gods, and most of all
By thee, if gentle currents, havens calm,
Fair winds and prosperous voyage, and the Shape
Impersonate in many a perilous hour,
Both in the stately councils of the Kings,
And when the husky battle murmured thick,
May testify of services performed!
But now the seas are haggard with thy wrath,
Thy breath is tempest! never at the shores
Of hostile Ilium did thy stormful brows
Betray such fierce magnificence! not even
On that wild day when, mad with torch and glare,
The frantic crowds with eyes like starving wolves
Burst from their ports impregnable, a stream
Of headlong fury toward the hissing deep;
Where then full-armed I stood in guard, compact
Beside thee, and alone, with brand and spear,
We held at bay the swarming

Page 4755

brood, and poured
Blood of choice warriors on the foot-ploughed sands!
Thou, meantime, dark with conflict, as a cloud
That thickens in the bosom of the West
Over quenched sunset, circled round with flame,
Huge as a billow running from the winds
Long distances, till with black shipwreck swoln,
It flings its angry mane about the sky.
And like that billow heaving ere it burst;
And like that cloud urged by impulsive storm
With charge of thunder, lightning, and the drench
Of torrents, thou in all thy majesty
Of mightiness didst fall upon the war!
Remember that great moment! Nor forget
The aid I gave thee; how my ready spear
Flew swiftly seconding thy mortal stroke,
Where’er the press was hottest; never slacked
My arm its duty, nor mine eye its aim,
Though terribly they compassed us, and stood
Thick as an Autumn forest, whose brown hair,
Lustrous with sunlight, by the still increase
Of heat to glowing heat conceives like zeal
Of radiance, till at the pitch of noon
’Tis seized with conflagration and distends
Horridly over leagues of doom’d domain;
Mingling the screams of birds, the cries of brutes,
The wail of creatures in the covert pent,
Howls, yells, and shrieks of agony, the hiss
Of seething sap, and crash of falling boughs
Together in its dull voracious roar.
So closely and so fearfully they throng’d,
Savage with phantasies of victory,
A sea of dusky shapes; for day had passed
And night fell on their darkened faces, red
With fight and torchflare; shrill the resonant air
With eager shouts, and hoarse with angry groans;
While over all the dense and sullen boom,
The din and murmur of the myriads,
Rolled with its awful intervals, as though
The battle breathed, or as against the shore
Waves gather back to heave themselves anew.
That night sleep dropped not from the dreary skies,
Nor could the prowess of our chiefs oppose

That sea of raging men. But what were they?
Or what is man opposed to thee? Its hopes
Are wrecks, himself the drowning, drifting weed
That wanders on thy waters; such as I
Who see the scattered remnants of my fleet,
Remembering the day when first we sailed,
Each glad ship shining like the morning star
With promise for the world. Oh! such as I
Thus darkly drifting on the drowning waves.
O God of waters! 'tis a dreadful thing
To suffer for an evil unrevealed;
Dreadful it is to hear the perishing cry
Of those we love; the silence that succeeds
How dreadful! Still my trust is fixed on thee
For those that still remain and for myself.

Page 4756

And if I hear thy swift foam-snorting steeds
Drawing thy dusky chariot, as in
The pauses of the wind I seem to hear,
Deaf thou art not to my entreating prayer!
Haste then to give us help, for closely now
Crete whispers in my ears, and all my blood
Runs keen and warm for home, and I have yearning,
Such yearning as I never felt before,
To see again my wife, my little son,
My Queen, my pretty nursling of five years,
The darling of my hopes, our dearest pledge
Of marriage, and our brightest prize of love,
Whose parting cry rings clearest in my heart.
O lay this horror, much-offended God!
And making all as fair and firm as when
We trusted to thy mighty depths of old, —
I vow to sacrifice the first whom Zeus
Shall prompt to hail us from the white seashore
And welcome our return to royal Crete,
An offering, Poseidon, unto thee!

Amid the din of elemental strife,
No voice may pierce but Deity supreme:
And Deity supreme alone can hear,
Above the hurricane's discordant shrieks,
The cry of agonized humanity.

Not unappeased was He who smites the waves,
When to his stormy ears the warrior's vow
Entered, and from his foamy pinnacle
Tumultuous he beheld the prostrate form,
And knew the mighty heart. Awhile he gazed,
As doubtful of his purpose, and the storm,
Conscious of that divine debate, withheld
Its fierce emotion, in the luminous gloom
Of those so dark irradiating eyes!
Beneath whose wavering lustre shone revealed
The tumult of the purpling deeps, and all
The throbbing of the tempest, as it paused,
Slowly subsiding, seeming to await
The sudden signal, as a faithful hound
Pants with the forepaws stretched before its nose,

Athwart the greensward, after an eager chase;
Its hot tongue thrust to cool, its foamy jaws
Open to let the swift breath come and go,
Its quick interrogating eyes fixed keen
Upon the huntsman’s countenance, and ever
Lashing its sharp impatient tail with haste:
Prompt at the slightest sign to scour away,
And hang itself afresh by the bleeding fangs,
Upon the neck of some death-singled stag,
Whose royal antlers, eyes, and stumbling knees
Will supplicate the Gods in mute despair.
This time not mute, nor yet in vain this time!
For still the burden of the earnest voice
And all the vivid glories it revoked
Sank in the God, with that absorbed suspense
Felt only by the Olympians, whose minds
Unbounded like our mortal brain, perceive
All things complete, the end, the aim of all;
To whom the crown and consequence of deeds
Are ever present with the deed itself.

Page 4757

And now the pouring surges, vast and smooth,
Grew weary of restraint, and heaved themselves
Headlong beneath him, breaking at his feet
With wild importunate cries and angry wail;
Like crowds that shout for bread and hunger more.
And now the surface of their rolling backs
Was ridged with foam-topt furrows, rising high
And dashing wildly, like to fiery steeds,
Fresh from the Thracian or Thessalian plains,
High-blooded mares just tempering to the bit,
Whose manes at full-speed stream upon the winds,
And in whose delicate nostrils when the gust
Breathes of their native plains, they ramp and rear,
Frothing the curb, and bounding from the earth,
As though the Sun-god's chariot alone
Were fit to follow in their flashing track.
Anon with gathering stature to the height
Of those colossal giants, doomed long since
To torturous grief and penance, that assailed
The sky-throned courts of Zeus, and climbing, dared
For once in a world the Olympic wrath, and braved
The electric spirit which from his clenching hand
Pierces the dark-veined earth, and with a touch
Is death to mortals, fearfully they grew!
And with like purpose of audacity
Threatened Titanic fury to the God.
Such was the agitation of the sea
Beneath Poseidon's thought-revolving brows,
Storming for signal. But no signal came.
And as when men, who congregate to hear
Some proclamation from the regal fount,
With eager questioning and anxious phrase
Betray the expectation of their hearts,
Till after many hours of fretful sloth,
Weary with much delay, they hold discourse
In sullen groups and cloudy masses, stirred
With rage irresolute and whispering plot,
Known more by indication than by word,
And understood alone by those whose minds
Participate;—even so the restless waves
Began to lose all sense of servitude,
And worked with rebel passions, bursting, now
To right, and now to left, but evermore

Subdued with influence, and controlled with dread
Of that inviolate Authority.
Then, swiftly as he mused, the impetuous God
Seized on the pausing reins, his coursers plunged,
His brows resumed the grandeur of their ire;
Throughout his vast divinity the deeps
Concurrent thrilled with action, and away,
As sweeps a thunder-cloud across the sky
In harvest-time, preluded by dull blasts;
Or some black-visaged whirlwind, whose wide folds
Rush, wrestling on with all 'twixt heaven and earth,
Darkling he hurried, and his distant voice,
Not softened by delay, was heard in tones
Distinctly terrible, still following up

Page 4758

Its rapid utterance of tremendous wrath
With hoarse reverberations; like the roar
Of lions when they hunger, and awake
The sullen echoes from their forest sleep,
To speed the ravenous noise from hill to hill
And startle victims; but more awful, He,
Scudding across the hills that rise and sink,
With foam, and splash, and cataracts of spray,
Clothed in majestic splendour; girt about
With Sea-gods and swift creatures of the sea;
Their briny eyes blind with the showering drops;
Their stormy locks, salt tongues, and scaly backs,
Quivering in harmony with the tempest, fierce
And eager with tempestuous delight; —
He like a moving rock above them all
Solemnly towering while fitful gleams
Brake from his dense black forehead, which display'd
The enduring chiefs as their distracted fleets
Tossed, toiling with the waters, climbing high,
And plunging downward with determined beaks,
In lurid anguish; but the Cretan king
And all his crew were 'ware of under-tides,
That for the groaning vessel made a path,
On which the impending and precipitous waves
Fell not, nor suck'd to their abysmal gorge.

O, happy they to feel the mighty God,
Without his whelming presence near: to feel
Safety and sweet relief from such despair,
And gushing of their weary hopes once more
Within their fond warm hearts, tired limbs, and eyes
Heavy with much fatigue and want of sleep!
Prayers did not lack; like mountain springs they came,
After the earth has drunk the drenching rains,
And throws her fresh-born jets into the sun
With joyous sparkles;—for there needed not
Evidence more serene of instant grace,
Immortal mercy! and the sense which follows
Divine interposition, when the shock
Of danger hath been thwarted by the Gods,
Visibly, and through supplication deep, —

Rose in them, chiefly in the royal mind
Of him whose interceding vow had saved.
Tears from that great heroic soul sprang up;
Not painful as in grief, nor smarting keen
With shame of weeping; but calm, fresh, and sweet;
Such as in lofty spirits rise, and wed
The nature of the woman to the man;
A sight most lovely to the Gods! They fell
Like showers of starlight from his steadfast eyes,
As ever towards the prow he gazed, nor moved
One muscle, with firm lips and level lids,
Motionless; while the winds sang in his ears,
And took the length of his brown hair in streams
Behind him. Thus the hours passed, and the oars
Plied without pause, and nothing but the sound
Of the dull rowlocks and still watery sough,
Far off, the carnage

Page 4759

of the storm, was heard.
For nothing spake the mariners in their toil,
And all the captains of the war were dumb:
Too much oppressed with wonder, too much thrilled
By their great chieftain's silence, to disturb
Such meditation with poor human speech.
Meantime the moon through slips of driving cloud
Came forth, and glanced athwart the seas a path
Of dusky splendour, like the Hadean brows,
When with Elysian passion they behold
Persephone's complacent hueless cheeks.
Soon gathering strength and lustre, as a ship
That swims into some blue and open bay
With bright full-bosomed sails, the radiant car
Of Artemis advanced, and on the waves
Sparkled like arrows from her silver bow
The keenness of her pure and tender gaze.

Then, slowly, one by one the chiefs sought rest;
The watches being set, and men to relieve
The rowers at midseason. Fair it was
To see them as they lay! Some up the prow,
Some round the helm, in open-handed sleep;
With casques unloosed, and bucklers put aside;
The ten years' tale of war upon their cheeks,
Where clung the salt wet locks, and on their breasts
Beards, the thick growth of many a proud campaign;
And on their brows the bright invisible crown
Victory sheds from her own radiant form,
As o'er her favourites' heads she sings and soars.
But dreams came not so calmly; as around
Turbulent shores wild waves and swamping surf
Prevail, while seaward, on the tranquil deeps,
Reign placid surfaces and solemn peace,
So, from the troubled strands of memory, they
Launched and were tossed, long ere they found the tides
That lead to the gentle bosoms of pure rest.
And like to one who from a ghostly watch
In a lone house where murder hath been done,
And secret violations, pale with stealth
Emerges, staggering on the first chill gust
Wherewith the morning greets him, feeling not
Its balmy freshness on his bloodless cheek, —

But swift to hide his midnight face afar,
’Mongst the old woods and timid-glancing flowers
Hastens, till on the fresh reviving breasts
Of tender Dryads folded he forgets
The pallid witness of those nameless things,
In renovated senses lapt, and joins
The full, keen joyance of the day, so they
From sights and sounds of battle smeared with blood,
And shrieking souls on Acheron’s bleak tides,
And wail of execrating kindred, slid
Into oblivious slumber and a sense
Of satiate deliciousness complete.

Page 4760

Leave them, O Muse, in that so happy sleep!
Leave them to reap the harvest of their toil,
While fast in moonlight the glad vessel glides,
As if instinctive to its forest home.
O Muse, that in all sorrows and all joys,
Rapturous bliss and suffering divine,
Dwellest with equal fervour, in the calm
Of thy serene philosophy, albeit
Thy gentle nature is of joy alone,
And loves the pipings of the happy fields,
Better than all the great parade and pomp
Which forms the train of heroes and of kings,
And sows, too frequently, the tragic seeds
That choke with sobs thy singing,—turn away
Thy lustrous eyes back to the oath-bound man!
For as a shepherd stands above his flock,
The lofty figure of the king is seen,
Standing above his warriors as they sleep:
And still as from a rock grey waters gush,
While still the rock is passionless and dark,
Nor moves one feature of its giant face,
The tears fall from his eyes, and he stirs not.

And O, bright Muse! forget not thou to fold
In thy prophetic sympathy the thought
Of him whose destiny has heard its doom:
The Sacrifice thro' whom the ship is saved.
Haply that Sacrifice is sleeping now,
And dreams of glad tomorrows. Haply now,
His hopes are keenest, and his fervent blood
Richest with youth, and love, and fond regard!
Round him the circle of affections blooms,
And in some happy nest of home he lives,
One name oft uttering in delighted ears,
Mother! at which the heart of men are kin
With reverence and yearning. Haply, too,
That other name, twin holy, twin revered,
He whispers often to the passing winds
That blow toward the Asiatic coasts;
For Crete has sent her bravest to the war,
And multitudes pressed forward to that rank,
Men with sad weeping wives and little ones.
That other name—O Father! who art thou,

Thus doomed to lose the star of thy last days?
It may be the sole flower of thy life,
And that of all who now look up to thee!
O Father, Father! unto thee even now
Fate cries; the future with imploring voice
Cries ‘Save me,’ ‘Save me,’ though thou hearest not.
And O thou Sacrifice, foredoomed by Zeus;
Even now the dark inexorable deed
Is dealing its relentless stroke, and vain
Are prayers, and tears, and struggles, and despair!
The mother’s tears, the nation’s stormful grief,
The people’s indignation and revenge!
Vain the last childlike pleading voice for life,
The quick resolve, the young heroic brow,
So like, so like, and vainly beautiful!
Oh! whosoe’er ye are the Muse says not,
And sees not, but the Gods look down on both.

Page 4761

The longest day

On yonder hills soft twilight dwells
And Hesper burns where sunset dies,
Moist and chill the woodland smells
From the fern-covered hollows uprise;
Darkness drops not from the skies,
But shadows of darkness are flung o’er the vale
From the boughs of the chestnut, the oak, and the elm,
While night in yon lines of eastern pines
Preserves alone her inviolate realm
Against the twilight pale.

Say, then say, what is this day,
That it lingers thus with half-closed eyes,
When the sunset is quenched and the orient ray
Of the roseate moon doth rise,
Like a midnight sun o’er the skies!
’Tis the longest, the longest of all the glad year,
The longest in life and the fairest in hue,
When day and night, in bridal light,
Mingle their beings beneath the sweet blue,
And bless the balmy air!

Upward to this starry height
The culminating seasons rolled;
On one slope green with spring delight,
The other with harvest gold,
And treasures of Autumn untold:
And on this highest throne of the midsummer now
The waning but deathless day doth dream,
With a rapturous grace, as tho’ from the face
Of the unveiled infinity, lo, a far beam
Had fall’n on her dim-flushed brow!

Prolong, prolong that tide of song,
O leafy nightingale and thrush!
Still, earnest-throated blackcap, throng
The woods with that emulous gush
Of notes in tumultuous rush.
Ye summer souls, raise up one voice!
A charm is afloat all over the land;
The ripe year doth fall to the Spirit of all,

Who blesses it with outstretched hand;
Ye summer souls, rejoice!

To robin redbreast

Merrily ’mid the faded leaves,
O Robin of the bright red breast!
Cheerily over the Autumn eaves,
Thy note is heard, bonny bird;
Sent to cheer us, and kindly endear us
To what would be a sorrowful time
Without thee in the weltering clime:
Merry art thou in the boughs of the lime,
While thy fadeless waistcoat glows on thy breast,
In Autumn’s reddest livery drest.

A merry song, a cheery song!
In the boughs above, on the sward below,
Chirping and singing the live day long,
While the maple in grief sheds its fiery leaf,
And all the trees waning, with bitter complaining,
Chestnut, and elm, and sycamore,
Catch the wild gust in their arms, and roar
Like the sea on a stormy shore,
Till wailfully they let it go,
And weep themselves naked and weary with woe.

Page 4762

Merrily, cheerily, joyously still
Pours out the crimson-crested tide.
The set of the season burns bright on the hill,
Where the foliage dead falls yellow and red,
Picturing vainly, but foretelling plainly
The wealth of cottage warmth that comes
When the frost gleams and the blood numbs,
And then, bonny Robin, I'll spread thee out crumbs
In my garden porch for thy redbreast pride,
The song and the ensign of dear fireside.

Song

The daisy now is out upon the green;
And in the grassy lanes
The child of April rains,
The sweet fresh-hearted violet, is smelt and loved unseen.

Along the brooks and meads, the daffodil
Its yellow richness spreads,
And by the fountain-heads
Of rivers, cowslips cluster round, and over every hill.

The crocus and the primrose may have gone,
The snowdrop may be low,
But soon the purple glow
Of hyacinths will fill the copse, and lilies watch the dawn.

And in the sweetness of the budding year,
The cuckoo's woodland call,
The skylark over all,
And then at eve, the nightingale, is doubly sweet and dear.

My soul is singing with the happy birds,
And all my human powers
Are blooming with the flowers,
My foot is on the fields and downs, among the flocks and herds.

Deep in the forest where the foliage droops,
I wander, fill'd with joy.
Again as when a boy,
The sunny vistas tempt me on with dim delicious hopes.

The sunny vistas, dim with hurrying shade,
And old romantic haze:-
Again as in past days,
The spirit of immortal Spring doth every sense pervade.

Oh! do not say that this will ever cease; —
This joy of woods and fields,
This youth that nature yields,
Will never speak to me in vain, tho’ soundly rapt in peace.

Sunrise

The clouds are withdrawn
And their thin-rippled mist,
That stream’d o’er the lawn
To the drowsy-eyed west.
Cold and grey
They slept in the way,
And shrank from the ray
Of the chariot East:
But now they are gone,
And the bounding light
Leaps thro’ the bars
Of doubtful dawn;
Blinding the stars,
And blessing the sight;
Shedding delight
On all below;
Glimmering fields,
And wakening wealds,
And rising lark,
And meadows dark,
And idle rills,
And labouring mills,
And far-distant hills
Of the fawn and the doe.
The sun is cheered
And his path is cleared,
As he steps to the air
From his emerald cave,
His heel in the wave,

Page 4763

Most bright and bare;
In the tide of the sky
His radiant hair
From his temples fair
Blown back on high;
As forward he bends,
And upward ascends,
Timely and true,
To the breast of the blue;
His warm red lips
Kissing the dew,
Which sweetened drips
On his flower cupholders;
Every hue
From his gleaming shoulders
Shining anew
With colour sky-born,
As it washes and dips
In the pride of the morn.
Robes of azure,
Fringed with amber,
Fold upon fold
Of purple and gold,
Vine-leaf bloom,
And the grape’s ripe gloom,
When season deep
In noontide leisure,
With clustering heap
The tendrils clamber
Full in the face
Of his hot embrace,
Fill’d with the gleams
Of his firmest beams.
Autumn flushes,
Roseate blushes,
Vermeil tinges,
Violet fringes,
Every hue
Of his flower cupholders,
O’er the clear ether
Mingled together,

Shining anew
From his gleaming shoulders!
Circling about
In a coronal rout,
And floating behind,
The way of the wind,
As forward he bends,
And upward ascends,
Timely and true,
To the breast of the blue.
His bright neck curved,
His clear limbs nerved,
Diamond keen
On his front serene,
While each white arm strains
To the racing reins,
As plunging, eyes flashing,
Dripping, and dashing,
His steeds triple grown
Rear up to his throne,
Ruffling the rest
Of the sea's blue breast,
From his flooding, flaming crimson crest!

Pictures of the Rhine

I

The spirit of Romance dies not to those
Who hold a kindred spirit in their souls:
Even as the odorous life within the rose
Lives in the scattered leaflets and controls
Mysterious adoration, so there glows
Above dead things a thing that cannot die;
Faint as the glimmer of a tearful eye,
Ere the orb fills and all the sorrow flows.
Beauty renews itself in many ways;
The flower is fading while the new bud blows;
And this dear land as true a symbol shows,
While o'er it like a mellow sunset strays
The legendary splendour of old days,
In visible, inviolate repose.

II

About a mile behind the viny banks,
How sweet it was, upon a sloping green,

Sunspread, and shaded with a branching screen,
To lie in peace half-murmuring words of thanks!
To see the mountains on each other climb,
With spaces for rich meadows flowery bright;

Page 4764

The winding river freshening the sight
At intervals, the trees in leafy prime;
The distant village-roofs of blue and white,
With intersections of quaint-fashioned beams
All slanting crosswise, and the feudal gleams
Of ruined turrets, barren in the light; —
To watch the changing clouds, like clime in clime;
Oh sweet to lie and bless the luxury of time.

III

Fresh blows the early breeze, our sail is full;
A merry morning and a mighty tide.
Cheerily O! and past St. Goar we glide,
Half hid in misty dawn and mountain cool.
The river is our own! and now the sun
In saffron clothes the warming atmosphere;
The sky lifts up her white veil like a nun,
And looks upon the landscape blue and clear; —
The lark is up; the hills, the vines in sight;
The river broadens with his waking bliss
And throws up islands to behold the light;
Voices begin to rise, all hues to kiss; —
Was ever such a happy morn as this!
Birds sing, we shout, flowers breathe, trees shine with one delight!

IV

Between the two white breasts of her we love,
A dewy blushing rose will sometimes spring;
Thus Nonnenwerth like an enchanted thing
Rises mid-stream the crystal depths above.
On either side the waters heave and swell,
But all is calm within the little Isle;
Content it is to give its holy smile,
And bless with peace the lives that in it dwell.
Most dear on the dark grass beneath its bower
Of kindred trees embracing branch and bough,
To dream of fairy foot and sudden flower;
Or haply with a twilight on the brow,
To muse upon the legendary hour,
And Roland’s lonely love and Hildegard’s sad vow.

V

Hark! how the bitter winter breezes blow
Round the sharp rocks and o’er the half-lifted wave,
While all the rocky woodland branches rave
Shrill with the piercing cold, and every cave,
Along the icy water-margin low,
Rings bubbling with the whirling overflow;
And sharp the echoes answer distant cries
Of dawning daylight and the dim sunrise,
And the gloom-coloured clouds that stain the skies
With pictures of a warmth, and frozen glow
Spread over endless fields of sheeted snow;
And white untrodden mountains shining cold,
And muffled footpaths winding thro’ the wold,
O’er which those wintry gusts cease not to howl and blow.

VI

Rare is the loveliness of slow decay!
With youth and beauty all must be desired,
But ’tis the charm of things long past away,
They leave, alone, the light they have inspired:
The calmness of a picture;

Page 4765

Memory now
Is the sole life among the ruins grey,
And like a phantom in fantastic play
She wanders with rank weeds stuck on her brow,
Over grass-hidden caves and turret-tops,
Herself almost as tottering as they;
While, to the steps of Time, her latest props
Fall stone by stone, and in the Sun’s hot ray
All that remains stands up in rugged pride,
And bridal vines drink in his juices on each side.

To A nightingale

O nightingale! how hast thou learnt
The note of the nested dove?
While under thy bower the fern hangs burnt
And no cloud hovers above!
Rich July has many a sky
With splendour dim, that thou mightst hymn,
And make rejoice with thy wondrous voice,
And the thrill of thy wild pervading tone!
But instead of to woo, thou hast learnt to coo:
Thy song is mute at the mellowing fruit,
And the dirge of the flowers is sung by the hours
In silence and twilight alone.

O nightingale! ’tis this, ’tis this
That makes thee mock the dove!
That thou hast past thy marriage bliss,
To know a parent’s love.
The waves of fern may fade and burn,
The grasses may fall, the flowers and all,
And the pine-smells o’er the oak dells
Float on their drowsy and odorous wings,
But thou wilt do nothing but coo,
Brimming the nest with thy brooding breast,
’Midst that young throng of future song,
Round whom the Future sings!

Invitation to the country

Now ’tis Spring on wood and wold,
Early Spring that shivers with cold,
But gladdens, and gathers, day by day,

A lovelier hue, a warmer ray,
A sweeter song, a dearer ditty;
Ouzel and throstle, new-mated and gay,
Singing their bridals on every spray —
Oh, hear them, deep in the songless City!
Cast off the yoke of toil and smoke,
As Spring is casting winter's grey,
As serpents cast their skins away:
And come, for the Country awaits thee with pity
And longs to bathe thee in her delight,
And take a new joy in thy kindling sight;
And I no less, by day and night,
Long for thy coming, and watch for, and wait thee,
And wonder what duties can thus berate thee.

Dry-fruited firs are dropping their cones,
And vista'd avenues of pines
Take richer green, give fresher tones,
As morn after morn the glad sun shines.

Primrose tufts peep over the brooks,
Fair faces amid moist decay!
The rivulets run with the dead leaves at play,
The leafless elms are alive with the rooks.

Over the meadows the cowslips are springing,
The marshes are thick with king-cup gold,
Clear is the cry of the lambs in the fold,
The skylark is singing, and singing, and singing.

Page 4766

Soon comes the cuckoo when April is fair,
And her blue eye the brighter the more it may weep:
The frog and the butterfly wake from their sleep,
Each to its element, water and air.

Mist hangs still on every hill,
And curls up the valleys at eve; but noon
Is fullest of Spring; and at midnight the moon
Gives her westering throne to Orion’s bright zone,
As he slopes o’er the darkened world’s repose;
And a lustre in eastern Sirius glows.

Come, in the season of opening buds;
Come, and molest not the otter that whistles
Unlit by the moon, ’mid the wet winter bristles
Of willow, half-drowned in the fattening floods.
Let him catch his cold fish without fear of a gun,
And the stars shall shield him, and thou wilt shun!
And every little bird under the sun
Shall know that the bounty of Spring doth dwell
In the winds that blow, in the waters that run,
And in the breast of man as well.

The sweet O’ the year

Now the frog, all lean and weak,
Yawning from his famished sleep,
Water in the ditch doth seek,
Fast as he can stretch and leap:
Marshy king-cups burning near
Tell him ‘tis the sweet o’ the year.

Now the ant works up his mound
In the mouldered piny soil,
And above the busy ground
Takes the joy of earnest toil:
Dropping pine-cones, dry and sere,
Warn him ‘tis the sweet o’ the year.

Now the chrysalis on the wall
Cracks, and out the creature springs,
Raptures in his body small,
Wonders on his dusty wings:

Bells and cups, all shining clear,
Show him ‘tis the sweet o’ the year.

Now the brown bee, wild and wise,
Hums abroad, and roves and roams,
Storing in his wealthy thighs
Treasure for the golden combs:
Dewy buds and blossoms dear
Whisper ‘tis the sweet o’ the year.

Now the merry maids so fair
Weave the wreaths and choose the queen,
Blooming in the open air,
Like fresh flowers upon the green;
Spring, in every thought sincere,
Thrills them with the sweet o’ the year.

Now the lads, all quick and gay,
Whistle to the browsing herds,
Or in the twilight pastures grey
Learn the use of whispered words:
First a blush, and then a tear,
And then a smile, i’ the sweet o’ the year.

Now the May-fly and the fish
Play again from noon to night;
Every breeze begets a wish,
Every motion means delight:
Heaven high over heath and mere
Crowns with blue the sweet o’ the year.

Page 4767

Now all Nature is alive,
Bird and beetle, man and mole;
Bee-like goes the human hive,
Lark-like sings the soaring soul:
Hearty faith and honest cheer
Welcome in the sweet o’ the year.

Autumn even-song

The long cloud edged with streaming grey
Soars from the West;
The red leaf mounts with it away,
Showing the nest
A blot among the branches bare:
There is a cry of outcasts in the air.

Swift little breezes, darting chill,
Pant down the lake;
A crow flies from the yellow hill,
And in its wake
A baffled line of labouring rooks:
Steel-surfaced to the light the river looks.

Pale on the panes of the old hall
Gleams the lone space
Between the sunset and the squall;
And on its face
Mournfully glimmers to the last:
Great oaks grow mighty minstrels in the blast.

Pale the rain-rutted roadways shine
In the green light
Behind the cedar and the pine:
Come, thundering night!
Blacken broad earth with hoards of storm:
For me yon valley-cottage beckons warm.

The song of courtesy

I

When Sir Gawain was led to his bridal-bed,
By Arthur’s knights in scorn God-sped:-
How think you he felt?

O the bride within
Was yellow and dry as a snake's old skin;
Loathly as sin!
Scarcely faceable,
Quite unembraceable;
With a hog's bristle on a hag's chin! —
Gentle Gawain felt as should we,
Little of Love's soft fire knew he:
But he was the Knight of Courtesy.

II

When that evil lady he lay beside
Bade him turn to greet his bride,
What think you he did?
O, to spare her pain,
And let not his loathing her loathliness vain
Mirror too plain,
Sadly, sighingly,
Almost dyingly,
Turned he and kissed her once and again.
Like Sir Gawain, gentles, should we?
Silent, all! But for pattern agree
There's none like the Knight of Courtesy.

III

Sir Gawain sprang up amid laces and curls:
Kisses are not wasted pearls:-
What clung in his arms?
O, a maiden flower,
Burning with blushes the sweet bride-bower,
Beauty her dower!
Breathing perfumingly;
Shall I live bloomingly,
Said she, by day, or the bridal hour?
Thereat he clasped her, and whispered he,
Thine, rare bride, the choice shall be.
Said she, Twice blest is Courtesy!

IV

Page 4768

Of gentle Sir Gawain they had no sport,
When it was morning in Arthur’s court;
What think you they cried?
Now, life and eyes!
This bride is the very Saint’s dream of a prize,
Fresh from the skies!
See ye not, Courtesy
Is the true Alchemy,
Turning to gold all it touches and tries?
Like the true knight, so may we
Make the basest that there be
Beautiful by Courtesy!

The three maidens

There were three maidens met on the highway;
The sun was down, the night was late:
And two sang loud with the birds of May,
O the nightingale is merry with its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Why walk you there so still?
The land is dark, the night is late:
O, but the heart in my side is ill,
And the nightingale will languish for its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Of lovers there is store;
The moon mounts up, the night is late:
O, I shall look on man no more,
And the nightingale is dumb without its mate.

Said they to the youngest, Uncross your arms and sing;
The moon mounts high, the night is late:
O my dear lover can hear no thing,
And the nightingale sings only to its mate.

They slew him in revenge, and his true-love was his lure;
The moon is pale, the night is late:
His grave is shallow on the moor;
O the nightingale is dying for its mate.

His blood is on his breast, and the moss-roots at his hair;
The moon is chill, the night is late:
But I will lie beside him there:
O the nightingale is dying for its mate.

Over the hills

The old hound wags his shaggy tail,
And I know what he would say:
It’s over the hills we’ll bound, old hound,
Over the hills, and away.

There’s nought for us here save to count the clock,
And hang the head all day:
But over the hills we’ll bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

Here among men we’re like the deer
That yonder is our prey:
So, over the hills we’ll bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

The hypocrite is master here,
But he’s the cock of clay:
So, over the hills we’ll bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

The women, they shall sigh and smile,
And madden whom they may:
It’s over the hills we’ll bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

Let silly lads in couples run
To pleasure, a wicked fay:
’Tis ours on the heather to bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

The torrent glints under the rowan red,
And shakes the bracken spray:
What joy on the heather to bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

Page 4769

The sun bursts broad, and the heathery bed
Is purple, and orange, and gray:
Away, and away, we'll bound, old hound,
Over the hills and away.

Juggling Jerry

I

Pitch here the tent, while the old horse grazes:
By the old hedge-side we'll halt a stage.
It's nigh my last above the daisies:
My next leaf 'll be man's blank page.
Yes, my old girl! and it's no use crying:
Juggler, constable, king, must bow.
One that outjuggles all's been spying
Long to have me, and he has me now.

II

We've travelled times to this old common:
Often we've hung our pots in the gorse.
We've had a stirring life, old woman!
You, and I, and the old grey horse.
Races, and fairs, and royal occasions,
Found us coming to their call:
Now they'll miss us at our stations:
There's a Juggler outjuggles all!

III

Up goes the lark, as if all were jolly!
Over the duck-pond the willow shakes.
Easy to think that grieving's folly,
When the hand's firm as driven stakes!
Ay, when we're strong, and braced, and manful,
Life's a sweet fiddle: but we're a batch
Born to become the Great Juggler's han'ful:
Balls he shies up, and is safe to catch.

IV

Here's where the lads of the village cricket:
I was a lad not wide from here:

Couldn’t I whip off the bail from the wicket?
Like an old world those days appear!
Donkey, sheep, geese, and thatched ale-house —
I know them!
They are old friends of my halts, and seem,
Somehow, as if kind thanks I owe them:
Juggling don’t hinder the heart’s esteem.

V

Juggling’s no sin, for we must have victual:
Nature allows us to bait for the fool.
Holding one’s own makes us juggle no little;
But, to increase it, hard juggling’s the rule.
You that are sneering at my profession,
Haven’t you juggled a vast amount?
There’s the Prime Minister, in one Session,
Juggles more games than my sins ’ll count.

VI

I’ve murdered insects with mock thunder:
Conscience, for that, in men don’t quail.
I’ve made bread from the bump of wonder:
That’s my business, and there’s my tale.
Fashion and rank all praised the professor:
Ay! and I’ve had my smile from the Queen:
Bravo, Jerry! she meant: God bless her!
Ain’t this a sermon on that scene?

VII

Page 4770

I’ve studied men from my topsy-turvy
Close, and, I reckon, rather true.
Some are fine fellows: some, right scurvy:
Most, a dash between the two.
But it’s a woman, old girl, that makes me
Think more kindly of the race:
And it’s a woman, old girl, that shakes me
When the Great Juggler I must face.

VIII

We two were married, due and legal:
Honest we’ve lived since we’ve been one.
Lord! I could then jump like an eagle:
You danced bright as a bit o’ the sun.
Birds in a May-bush we were! right merry!
All night we kiss’d, we juggled all day.
Joy was the heart of Juggling Jerry!
Now from his old girl he’s juggled away.

IX

It’s past parsons to console us:
No, nor no doctor fetch for me:
I can die without my bolus;
Two of a trade, lass, never agree!
Parson and Doctor!—don’t they love rarely,
Fighting the devil in other men’s fields!
Stand up yourself and match him fairly:
Then see how the rascal yields!

X

I, lass, have lived no gipsy, flaunting
Finery while his poor helpmate grubs:
Coin I’ve stored, and you won’t be wanting:
You shan’t beg from the troughs and tubs.
Nobly you’ve stuck to me, though in his kitchen
Many a Marquis would hail you Cook!
Palaces you could have ruled and grown rich in,
But our old Jerry you never forsook.

XI

Hand up the chirper! ripe ale winks in it;
Let's have comfort and be at peace.
Once a stout draught made me light as a linnet.
Cheer up! the Lord must have his lease.
May be—for none see in that black hollow —
It's just a place where we're held in pawn,
And, when the Great Juggler makes as to swallow,
It's just the sword-trick—I ain't quite gone!

XII

Yonder came smells of the gorse, so nutty,
Gold-like and warm: it's the prime of May.
Better than mortar, brick and putty,
Is God's house on a blowing day.
Lean me more up the mound; now I feel it:
All the old heath-smells! Ain't it strange?
There's the world laughing, as if to conceal it,
But He's by us, juggling the change.

XIII

I mind it well, by the sea-beach lying,
Once—it's long gone—when two gulls we beheld,
Which, as the moon got up, were flying
Down a big wave that sparked and swelled.
Crack, went a gun: one fell: the second
Wheeled round him twice, and was off for new luck:
There in the dark her white wing beckon'd:-
Drop me a kiss—I'm the bird dead-struck!

The crown of love

Page 4771

O might I load my arms with thee,
Like that young lover of Romance
Who loved and gained so gloriously
The fair Princess of France!

Because he dared to love so high,
He, bearing her dear weight, shall speed
To where the mountain touched on sky:
So the proud king decreed.

Unhalting he must bear her on,
Nor pause a space to gather breath,
And on the height she will be won;
And she was won in death!

Red the far summit flames with morn,
While in the plain a glistening Court
Surrounds the king who practised scorn
Through such a mask of sport.

She leans into his arms; she lets
Her lovely shape be clasped: he fares.
God speed him whole! The knights make bets:
The ladies lift soft prayers.

O have you seen the deer at chase?
O have you seen the wounded kite?
So boundingly he runs the race,
So wavering grows his flight.

— My lover! linger here, and slake Thy thirst, or me thou wilt not win. — See'st thou the tumbled heavens? they break! They beckon us up and in.

— Ah, hero-love! unloose thy hold: O drop me like a cursed thing. — See'st thou the crowded swards of gold? They wave to us Rose and Ring.

— O death-white mouth! O cast me down! Thou diest? Then with thee I die. — See'st thou the angels with their Crown? We twain have reached the sky.

The head of Bran the blest

I

When the Head of Bran
Was firm on British shoulders,

God made a man!
Cried all beholders.

Steel could not resist
The weight his arm would rattle;
He, with naked fist,
Has brain'd a knight in battle.

He marched on the foe,
And never counted numbers;
Foreign widows know
The hosts he sent to slumbers.

As a street you scan,
That's towered by the steeple,
So the Head of Bran
Rose o'er his people.

II

'Death's my neighbour,'
Quoth Bran the Blest;
'Christian labour
Brings Christian rest.
From the trunk sever
The Head of Bran,
That which never
Has bent to man!
'That which never
To men has bowed
Shall live ever
To shame the shroud:
Shall live ever
To face the foe;
Sever it, sever,
And with one blow.

'Be it written,
That all I wrought
Was for Britain,
In deed and thought:
Be it written,
That while I die,
Glory to Britain!
Is my last cry.

’Glory to Britain!
Death echoes me round.
Glory to Britain!
The world shall resound.
Glory to Britain!
In ruin and fall,
Glory to Britain!
Is heard over all.’

Page 4772

IIII

Burn, Sun, down the sea!
Bran lies low with thee.

Burst, Morn, from the main!
Bran so shall rise again.

Blow, Wind, from the field!
Bran’s Head is the Briton’s shield.

Beam, Star, in the West!
Bright burns the Head of Bran the Blest.

IV

Crimson-footed, like the stork,
From great ruts of slaughter,
Warriors of the Golden Torque
Cross the lifting water.
Princes seven, enchaining hands,
Bear the live head homeward.
Lo! it speaks, and still commands:
Gazing out far foamward.

Fiery words of lightning sense
Down the hollows thunder;
Forest hostels know not whence
Comes the speech, and wonder.
City-Castles, on the steep,
Where the faithful Seven
House at midnight, hear, in sleep,
Laughter under heaven.

Lilies, swimming on the mere,
In the castle shadow,
Under draw their heads, and Fear
Walks the misty meadow.
Tremble not! it is not Death
Pledging dark espousal:
’Tis the Head of endless breath,
Challenging carousal!

Brim the horn! a health is drunk,
Now, that shall keep going:
Life is but the pebble sunk;
Deeds, the circle growing!
Fill, and pledge the Head of Bran!
While his lead they follow,
Long shall heads in Britain plan
Speech Death cannot swallow!

The meeting

The old coach-road through a common of furze,
With knolls of pine, ran white;
Berries of autumn, with thistles, and burrs,
And spider-threads, droop'd in the light.

The light in a thin blue veil peered sick;
The sheep grazed close and still;
The smoke of a farm by a yellow rick
Curled lazily under a hill.

No fly shook the round of the silver net;
No insect the swift bird chased;
Only two travellers moved and met
Across that hazy waste.

One was a girl with a babe that throve,
Her ruin and her bliss;
One was a youth with a lawless love,
Who clasped it the more for this.

The girl for her babe hummed prayerful speech;
The youth for his love did pray;
Each cast a wistful look on each,
And either went their way.

The beggar's soliloquy

I

Now, this, to my notion, is pleasant cheer,
To lie all alone on a ragged heath,
Where your nose isn't sniffing for bones or beer,
But a peat-fire smells like a garden beneath.
The cottagers bustle about the door,
And the girl at the window ties her strings.
She's a dish for a man who's a mind to be poor;
Lord! women are such expensive things.

Page 4773

II

We don’t marry beggars, says she: why, no:
It seems that to make ’em is what you do;
And as I can cook, and scour, and sew,
I needn’t pay half my victuals for you.
A man for himself should be able to scratch,
But tickling’s a luxury:- love, indeed!
Love burns as long as the lucifer match,
Wedlock’s the candle! Now, that’s my creed.

III

The church-bells sound water-like over the wheat;
And up the long path troop pair after pair.
The man’s well-brushed, and the woman looks neat:
It’s man and woman everywhere!
Unless, like me, you lie here flat,
With a donkey for friend, you must have a wife:
She pulls out your hair, but she brushes your hat.
Appearances make the best half of life.

IV

You nice little madam! you know you’re nice.
I remember hearing a parson say
You’re a plateful of vanity pepper’d with vice;
You chap at the gate thinks t’ other way.
On his waistcoat you read both his head and his heart:
There’s a whole week’s wages there figured in gold!
Yes! when you turn round you may well give a start:
It’s fun to a fellow who’s getting old.

V

Now, that’s a good craft, weaving waistcoats and flowers,
And selling of ribbons, and scenting of lard:
It gives you a house to get in from the showers,
And food when your appetite jockeys you hard.
You live a respectable man; but I ask
If it’s worth the trouble? You use your tools,
And spend your time, and what’s your task?
Why, to make a slide for a couple of fools.

VI

You can’t match the colour o’ these heath mounds,
Nor better that peat-fire’s agreeable smell.
I’m clothed-like with natural sights and sounds;
To myself I’m in tune: I hope you’re as well.
You jolly old cot! though you don’t own coal:
It’s a generous pot that’s boiled with peat.
Let the Lord Mayor o’ London roast oxen whole:
His smoke, at least, don’t smell so sweet.

VII

I’m not a low Radical, hating the laws,
Who’d the aristocracy rebuke.
I talk o’ the Lord Mayor o’ London because
I once was on intimate terms with his cook.
I served him a turn, and got pensioned on scraps,
And, Lord, Sir! didn’t I envy his place,
Till Death knock’d him down with the softest of taps,
And I knew what was meant by a tallowy face!

VIII

On the contrary, I’m Conservative quite;
There’s beggars in Scripture ’mongst Gentiles and Jews:
It’s nonsense, trying to set things right,
For if people will give, why, who’ll refuse?
That stopping old custom wakes my spleen:
The poor and the rich both in giving agree:
Your tight-fisted shopman’s the Radical mean:
There’s nothing in common ’twixt him and me.

Page 4774

IX

He says I’m no use! but I won’t reply.
You’re lucky not being of use to him!
On week-days he’s playing at Spider and Fly,
And on Sundays he sings about Cherubim!
Nailing shillings to counters is his chief work:
He nods now and then at the name on his door:
But judge of us two, at a bow and a smirk,
I think I’m his match: and I’m honest—that’s more.

X

No use! well, I mayn’t be. You ring a pig’s snout,
And then call the animal glutton! Now, he,
Mr. Shopman, he’s nought but a pipe and a spout
Who won’t let the goods o’ this world pass free.
This blazing blue weather all round the brown crop,
He can’t enjoy! all but cash he hates.
He’s only a snail that crawls under his shop;
Though he has got the ear o’ the magistrates.

XI

Now, giving and taking’s a proper exchange,
Like question and answer: you’re both content.
But buying and selling seems always strange;
You’re hostile, and that’s the thing that’s meant.
It’s man against man—you’re almost brutes;
There’s here no thanks, and there’s there no pride.
If Charity’s Christian, don’t blame my pursuits,
I carry a touchstone by which you’re tried.

XII

— ‘Take it,’ says she, ‘it’s all I’ve got’: I remember a girl in London streets: She stood by a coffee-stall, nice and hot, My belly was like a lamb that bleats. Says I to myself, as her shilling I seized, You haven’t a character here, my dear! But for making a rascal like me so pleased, I’ll give you one, in a better sphere!

XIII

And that’s where it is—she made me feel
I was a rascal: but people who scorn,

And tell a poor patch-breech he isn't genteel,
Why, they make him kick up—and he treads on a corn.
It isn't liking, it's curst ill-luck,
Drives half of us into the begging-trade:
If for taking to water you praise a duck,
For taking to beer why a man upbraid?

XIV

The sermon's over: they're out of the porch,
And it's time for me to move a leg;
But in general people who come from church,
And have called themselves sinners, hate chaps to beg.
I'll wager they'll all of 'em dine to-day!
I was easy half a minute ago.
If that isn't pig that's baking away,
May I perish!—we're never contented—heigho!

By the Rosanna—to F. M. STANZER Thal, Tyrol

The old grey Alp has caught the cloud,
And the torrent river sings aloud;
The glacier-green Rosanna sings
An organ song of its upper springs.
Foaming under the tiers of pine,
I see it dash down the dark ravine,

Page 4775

And it tumbles the rocks in boisterous play,
With an earnest will to find its way.
Sharp it throws out an emerald shoulder,
And, thundering ever of the mountain,
Slaps in sport some giant boulder,
And tops it in a silver fountain.
A chain of foam from end to end,
And a solitude so deep, my friend,
You may forget that man abides
Beyond the great mute mountain-sides.
Yet to me, in this high-walled solitude
Of river and rock and forest rude,
The roaring voice through the long white chain
Is the voice of the world of bubble and brain.

Phantasy

I

Within a Temple of the Toes,
Where twirled the passionate Wili,
I saw full many a market rose,
And sighed for my village lily.

II

With cynical Adrian then I took flight
To that old dead city whose carol
Bursts out like a reveller’s loud in the night,
As he sits astride his barrel.

III

We two were bound the Alps to scale,
Up the rock-reflecting river;
Old times blew thro’ me like a gale,
And kept my thoughts in a quiver.

IV

Hawking ruin, wood-slope, and vine
Reeled silver-laced under my vision,

And into me passed, with the green-eyed wine
Knocking hard at my head for admission.

V

I held the village lily cheap,
And the dream around her idle:
Lo, quietly as I lay to sleep,
The bells led me off to a bridal.

VI

My bride wore the hood of a Beguine,
And mine was the foot to falter;
Three cowled monks, rat-eyed, were seen;
The Cross was of bones o’er the altar.

VII

The Cross was of bones; the priest that read,
A spectacled necromancer:
But at the fourth word, the bride I led
Changed to an Opera dancer.

VIII

A young ballet-beauty, who perked in her place,
A darling of pink and spangles;
One fair foot level with her face,
And the hearts of men at her ankles.

IX

She whirled, she twirled, the mock-priest grinned,
And quickly his mask unriddled;
’Twas Adrian! loud his old laughter dinned;
Then he seized a fiddle, and fiddled.

X

He fiddled, he glowed with the bottomless fire,
Like Sathanas in feature:
All through me he fiddled a wolfish desire
To dance with that bright creature.

XI

And gathering courage I said to my soul,
Throttle the thing that hinders!
When the three cowled monks, from black as coal,
Waxed hot as furnace-cinders.

Page 4776

XII

They caught her up, twirling: they leapt between-whiles:
The fiddler flickered with laughter:
Profanely they flew down the awful aisles,
Where I went sliding after.

XIII

Down the awful aisles, by the fretted walls,
Beneath the Gothic arches:-
King Skull in the black confessionals
Sat rub-a-dub-dubbing his marches.

XIV

Then the silent cold stone warriors frowned,
The pictured saints strode forward:
A whirlwind swept them from holy ground;
A tempest puffed them nor’ward.

XV

They shot through the great cathedral door;
Like mallards they traversed ocean:
And gazing below, on its boiling floor,
I marked a horrid commotion.

XVI

Down a forest’s long alleys they spun like tops:
It seemed that for ages and ages,
Thro’ the Book of Life bereft of stops,
They waltzed continuous pages.

XVII

And ages after, scarce awake,
And my blood with the fever fretting,
I stood alone by a forest-lake,
Whose shadows the moon were netting.

XVIII

Lilies, golden and white, by the curls
Of their broad flat leaves hung swaying.
A wreath of languid twining girls
Streamed upward, long locks disarraying.

XIX

Their cheeks had the satin frost-glow of the moon;
Their eyes the fire of Sirius.
They circled, and droned a monotonous tune,
Abandoned to love delirious.

XX

Like lengths of convolvulus torn from the hedge,
And trailing the highway over,
The dreamy-eyed mistresses circled the sedge,
And called for a lover, a lover!

XXI

I sank, I rose through seas of eyes,
In odorous swathes delicious:
They fanned me with impetuous sighs,
They hit me with kisses vicious.

XXII

My ears were spelled, my neck was coiled,
And I with their fury was glowing,
When the marbly waters bubbled and boiled
At a watery noise of crowing.

XXIII

They dragged me low and low to the lake:
Their kisses more stormily showered;
On the emerald brink, in the white moon's wake,
An earthly damsel cowered.

XXIV

Fresh heart-sobs shook her knitted hands
Beneath a tiny suckling,
As one by one of the doleful bands
Dived like a fairy duckling.

XXV

And now my turn had come—O me!
What wisdom was mine that second!
I dropped on the adorer’s knee;
To that sweet figure I beckoned.

Page 4777

XXVI

Save me! save me! for now I know
The powers that Nature gave me,
And the value of honest love I know:-
My village lily! save me!

XXVII

Come ’twixt me and the sisterhood,
While the passion-born phantoms are fleeing!
Oh, he that is true to flesh and blood
Is true to his own being!

XXVIII

And he that is false to flesh and blood
Is false to the star within him:
And the mad and hungry sisterhood
All under the tides shall win him!

XXIX

My village lily! save me! save!
For strength is with the holy:-
Already I shuddered to feel the wave,
As I kept sinking slowly:-

XXX

I felt the cold wave and the under-tug
Of the Brides, when—starting and shrinking —
Lo, Adrian tilts the water-jug!
And Bruges with morn is blinking.

XXXI

Merrily sparkles sunny prime
On gabled peak and arbour:
Merrily rattles belfry-chime
The song of Sevilla’s Barber.

The old chartist

Whate'er I be, old England is my dam!
So there's my answer to the judges, clear.
I'm nothing of a fox, nor of a lamb;
I don't know how to bleat nor how to leer:
I'm for the nation!
That's why you see me by the wayside here,
Returning home from transportation.

II

It's Summer in her bath this morn, I think.
I'm fresh as dew, and chirpy as the birds:
And just for joy to see old England wink
Thro' leaves again, I could harangue the herds:
Isn't it something
To speak out like a man when you've got words,
And prove you're not a stupid dumb thing?

III

They shipp'd me of for it; I'm here again.
Old England is my dam, whate'er I be!
Says I, I'll tramp it home, and see the grain:
If you see well, you're king of what you see:
Eyesight is having,
If you're not given, I said, to gluttony.
Such talk to ignorance sounds as raving.

IV

You dear old brook, that from his Grace's park
Come bounding! on you run near my old town:
My lord can't lock the water; nor the lark,
Unless he kills him, can my lord keep down.
Up, is the song-note!
I've tried it, too:- for comfort and renown,
I rather pitch'd upon the wrong note.

V

I'm not ashamed: Not beaten's still my boast:
Again I'll rouse the people up to strike.
But home's where different politics jar most.
Respectability the women like.
This form, or that form, —
The Government may be hungry pike,
But don't you mount a Chartist platform!

Page 4778

VI

Well, well! Not beaten—spite of them, I shout;
And my estate is suffering for the Cause. —
No,—what is yon brown water-rat about,
Who washes his old poll with busy paws?
What does he mean by't?
It's like defying all our natural laws,
For him to hope that he'll get clean by't.

VII

His seat is on a mud-bank, and his trade
Is dirt:- he's quite contemptible; and yet
The fellow's all as anxious as a maid
To show a decent dress, and dry the wet.
Now it's his whisker,
And now his nose, and ear: he seems to get
Each moment at the motion brisker!

VIII

To see him squat like little chaps at school,
I could let fly a laugh with all my might.
He peers, hangs both his fore-paws:- bless that fool,
He's bobbing at his frill now!—what a sight!
Licking the dish up,
As if he thought to pass from black to white,
Like parson into lawny bishop.

IX

The elms and yellow reed-flags in the sun,
Look on quite grave:- the sunlight flecks his side;
And links of bindweed-flowers round him run,
And shine up doubled with him in the tide.
I'm nearly splitting,
But nature seems like seconding his pride,
And thinks that his behaviour's fitting.

X

That isle o' mud looks baking dry with gold.
His needle-muzzle still works out and in.

It really is a wonder to behold,
And makes me feel the bristles of my chin.
Judged by appearance,
I fancy of the two I'm nearer Sin,
And might as well commence a clearance.

XI

And that's what my fine daughter said:- she meant:
Pray, hold your tongue, and wear a Sunday face.
Her husband, the young linendraper, spent
Much argument thereon:- I'm their disgrace.
Bother the couple!
I feel superior to a chap whose place
Commands him to be neat and supple.

XII

But if I go and say to my old hen:
I'll mend the gentry's boots, and keep discreet,
Until they grow *too* violent,—why, then,
A warmer welcome I might chance to meet:
Warmer and better.
And if she fancies her old cock is beat,
And drops upon her knees—so let her!

XIII

She suffered for me:- women, you'll observe,
Don't suffer for a Cause, but for a man.
When I was in the dock she show'd her nerve:
I saw beneath her shawl my old tea-can
Trembling . . . she brought it
To screw me for my work: she loath'd my plan,
And therefore doubly kind I thought it.

XIV

Page 4779

I’ve never lost the taste of that same tea:
That liquor on my logic floats like oil,
When I state facts, and fellows disagree.
For human creatures all are in a coil;
All may want pardon.
I see a day when every pot will boil
Harmonious in one great Tea-garden!

XV

We wait the setting of the Dandy’s day,
Before that time!—He’s furbishing his dress, —
He *will* be ready for it!—and I say,
That yon old dandy rat amid the cress, —
Thanks to hard labour! —
If cleanliness is next to godliness,
The old fat fellow’s heaven’s neighbour!

XVI

You teach me a fine lesson, my old boy!
I’ve looked on my superiors far too long,
And small has been my profit as my joy.
You’ve done the right while I’ve denounced the wrong.
Prosper me later!
Like you I will despise the sniggering throng,
And please myself and my Creator.

XVII

I’ll bring the linendraper and his wife
Some day to see you; taking off my hat.
Should they ask why, I’ll answer: in my life
I never found so true a democrat.
Base occupation
Can’t rob you of your own esteem, old rat!
I’ll preach you to the British nation.

Song

Should thy love die;
O bury it not under ice-blue eyes!
And lips that deny,

With a scornful surprise,
The life it once lived in thy breast when it wore no disguise.

Should thy love die;
O bury it where the sweet wild-flowers blow!
And breezes go by,
With no whisper of woe;
And strange feet cannot guess of the anguish that slumbers below.

Should thy love die;
O wander once more to the haunt of the bee!
Where the foliaged sky
Is most sacred to see,
And thy being first felt its wild birth like a wind-wakened tree.

Should thy love die;
O dissemble it! smile! let the rose hide the thorn!
While the lark sings on high,
And no thing looks forlorn,
Bury it, bury it, bury it where it was born.

To Alex. Smith, the ‘Glasgow poet,’ on his sonnet to ‘fame’

Not vainly doth the earnest voice of man
Call for the thing that is his pure desire!
Fame is the birthright of the living lyre!
To noble impulse Nature puts no ban.
Nor vainly to the Sphinx thy voice was raised!
Tho’ all thy great emotions like a sea,
Against her stony immortality,
Shatter themselves unheeded and amazed.
Time moves behind her in a blind eclipse:
Yet if in her cold eyes the end of all
Be visible, as on her large closed lips
Hangs dumb the awful riddle of the earth; —
She sees, and she might speak, since that wild call,
The mighty warning of a Poet’s birth.

Page 4780

Grandfather Bridgeman

I

‘Heigh, boys!’ cried Grandfather Bridgeman, ’it’s time before dinner to-day.’ He lifted the crumpled letter, and thumped a surprising ‘Hurrah!’ Up jumped all the echoing young ones, but John, with the starch in his throat, Said, ’Father, before we make noises, let’s see the contents of the note.’ The old man glared at him harshly, and twinkling made answer: ’Too bad! John Bridgeman, I’m always the whisky, and you are the water, my lad!’

II

But soon it was known thro’ the house, and the house ran over for joy, That news, good news, great marvels, had come from the soldier boy; Young Tom, the luckless scapegrace, offshoot of Methodist John; His grandfather’s evening tale, whom the old man hailed as his son. And the old man’s shout of pride was a shout of his victory, too; For he called his affection a method: the neighbours’ opinions he knew.

III

Meantime, from the morning table removing the stout breakfast cheer, The drink of the three generations, the milk, the tea, and the beer (Alone in its generous reading of pints stood the Grandfather’s jug), The women for sight of the missive came pressing to coax and to hug. He scattered them quick, with a buss and a smack; thereupon he began Diversions with John’s little Sarah: on Sunday, the naughty old man!

IV

Then messengers sped to the maltster, the auctioneer, miller, and all The seven sons of the farmer who housed in the range of his call. Likewise the married daughters, three plentiful ladies, prime cooks, Who bowed to him while they condemned, in meek hope to stand high in his books. ‘John’s wife is a fool at a pudding,’ they said, and the light carts up hill Went merrily, flouting the Sabbath: for puddings well made mend a will.

V

The day was a van-bird of summer: the robin still piped, but the blue, As a warm and dreamy palace with voices of larks ringing thro’, Looked down as if wistfully eyeing the blossoms that fell from its lap: A day to sweeten the juices: a day to quicken the sap. All round the shadowy orchard sloped meadows in gold, and the dear Shy violets breathed their hearts out: the maiden breath of the year!

VI

Full time there was before dinner to bring fifteen of his blood, To sit at the old man's table: they found that the dinner was good. But who was she by the lilacs and pouring laburnums concealed, When under the blossoming apple the chair of the Grandfather wheeled? She heard one little child crying, 'Dear brave Cousin Tom!' as it leapt; Then murmured she: 'Let me spare them!' and passed round the walnuts, and wept.

VII

Page 4781

Yet not from sight had she slipped ere feminine eyes could detect The figure of Mary Charlworth. 'It's just what we all might expect,' Was uttered: and: 'Didn't I tell you?' Of Mary the rumour resounds, That she is now her own mistress, and mistress of five thousand pounds. 'Twas she, they say, who cruelly sent young Tom to the war. Miss Mary, we thank you now! If you knew what we're thanking you for!

VIII

But, 'Have her in: let her hear it,' called Grandfather Bridgeman, elate, While Mary's black-gloved fingers hung trembling with flight on the gate. Despite the women's remonstrance, two little ones, lighter than deer, Were loosed, and Mary, imprisoned, her whole face white as a tear, Came forward with culprit footsteps. Her punishment was to commence: The pity in her pale visage they read in a different sense.

IX

'You perhaps may remember a fellow, Miss Charlworth, a sort of black sheep,' The old man turned his tongue to ironical utterance deep: 'He came of a Methodist dad, so it wasn't his fault if he kicked. He earned a sad reputation, but Methodists are mortal strict. His name was Tom, and, dash me! but Bridgeman! I think you might add: Whatever he was, bear in mind that he came of a Methodist dad.'

X

This prelude dismally lengthened, till Mary, starting, exclaimed, 'A letter, Sir, from your grandson?' 'Tom Bridgeman that rascal is named,' The old man answered, and further, the words that sent Tom to the ranks Repeated as words of a person to whom they all owed mighty thanks. But Mary never blushed: with her eyes on the letter, she sate, And twice interrupting him faltered, 'The date, may I ask, Sir, the date?'

XI

'Why, that's what I never look at in a letter,' the farmer replied: 'Facts first! and now I'll be parson.' The Bridgeman women descried A quiver on Mary's eyebrows. One turned, and while shifting her comb, Said low to a sister: 'I'm certain she knows more than we about Tom. She wants him now he's a hero!' The same, resuming her place, Begged Mary to check them the moment she found it a tedious case.

XII

Then as a mastiff swallows the snarling noises of cats, The voice of the farmer opened. '"Three cheers, and off with your hats!" — That's Tom. "We've beaten them, Daddy, and tough work it was, to be sure! A regular stand-up combat: eight hours smelling powder and gore. I entered it Serjeant-Major,"—and now he commands a salute, And carries the flag of old England! Heigh! see him lift foes on his foot!

XIII

’—An officer! ay, Miss Charlworth, he is, or he is so to be; You’ll own war isn’t such humbug: and Glory means something, you see. “But don’t say a word,” he continues, “against the brave French any more.” — That stopt me: we’ll now march together. I couldn’t read further before. That “brave French” I couldn’t stomach. He can’t see their cunning to get Us Britons to fight their battles, while best half the winnings they net!’

XIV

Page 4782

The old man sneered, and read forward. It was of that desperate fight; — The Muscovite stole thro' the mist-wreaths that wrapped the chill Inkermann height, Where stood our silent outposts: old England was in them that day! O sharp worked his ruddy wrinkles, as if to the breath of the fray They moved! He sat bareheaded: his long hair over him slow Swung white as the silky bog-flowers in purple heath-hollows that grow.

XV

And louder at Tom's first person: acute and in thunder the 'I' Invaded the ear with a whinny of triumph, that seem'd to defy The hosts of the world. All heated, what wonder he little could brook To catch the sight of Mary's demure puritanical look? And still as he led the onslaught, his treacherous side-shots he sent At her who was fighting a battle as fierce, and who sat there unbent.

XVI

'"We stood in line, and like hedgehogs the Russians rolled under us thick. They frightened me there."—He's no coward; for when, Miss, they came at the quick, The sight, he swears, was a breakfast.—"My stomach felt tight: in a glimpse I saw you snoring at home with the dear cuddled-up little imps. And then like the winter brickfields at midnight, hot fire lengthened out. Our fellows were just leashed bloodhounds: no heart of the lot faced about.

XVII

'"And only that grumbler, Bob Harris, remarked that we stood one to ten: 'Ye fool,' says Mick Grady, 'just tell 'em they know to compliment men!' And I sang out your old words: 'If the opposite side isn't God's, Heigh! after you've counted a dozen, the pluckiest lads have the odds.' Ping-ping flew the enemies' pepper: the Colonel roared, Forward, and we Went at them. 'Twas first like a blanket: and then a long plunge in the sea.

XVIII

'"Well, now about me and the Frenchman: it happened I can't tell you how: And, Grandfather, hear, if you love me, and put aside prejudice now": He never says "Grandfather"—Tom don't—save it's a serious thing. "Well, there were some pits for the rifles, just dug on our French- leaning wing: And backwards, and forwards, and backwards we went, and at last I was vexed, And swore I would never surrender a foot when the Russians charged next.

XIX

'"I know that life's worth keeping."—Ay, so it is, lad; so it is! — "But my life belongs to a woman."—Does that mean Her Majesty, Miss? — "These Russians came lumping and grinning: they're fierce at it, though they are blocks. Our fellows were pretty well

pumped, and looked sharp for the little French cocks. Lord, didn't we pray for their crowing! when over us, on the hill- top, Behold the first line of them skipping, like kangaroos seen on the hop.

XX

Page 4783

'"That sent me into a passion, to think of them spying our flight!" Heigh, Tom! you've Bridgeman blood, boy! And, "'Face them!' I shouted: 'All right; Sure, Serjeant, we'll take their shot dacent, like gentlemen,' Grady replied. A ball in his mouth, and the noble old Irishman dropped by my side. Then there was just an instant to save myself, when a short wheeze Of bloody lungs under the smoke, and a red-coat crawled up on his knees.

XXI

'"'Twas Ensign Baynes of our parish."—Ah, ah, Miss Charlworth, the one Our Tom fought for a young lady? Come, now we've got into the fun! — "I shouldered him: he primed his pistol, and I trailed my musket, prepared." Why, that's a fine pick-a-back for ye, to make twenty Russians look scared! "They came—never mind how many: we couldn't have run very well, We fought back to back: 'face to face, our last time!' he said, smiling, and fell.

XXII

'"Then I strove wild for his body: the beggars saw glittering rings, Which I vowed to send to his mother. I got some hard knocks and sharp stings, But felt them no more than angel, or devil, except in the wind. I know that I swore at a Russian for showing his teeth, and he grinned The harder: quick, as from heaven, a man on a horse rode between, And fired, and swung his bright sabre: I can't write you more of the scene.

XXIII

'"But half in his arms, and half at his stirrup, he bore me right forth, And pitched me among my old comrades: before I could tell south from north, He caught my hand up, and kissed it! Don't ever let any man speak A word against Frenchmen, I near him! I can't find his name, tho' I seek. But French, and a General, surely he was, and, God bless him! thro' him I've learnt to love a whole nation."' The ancient man paused, winking dim.

XXIV

A curious look, half woeful, was seen on his face as he turned His eyes upon each of his children, like one who but faintly discerned His old self in an old mirror. Then gathering sense in his fist, He sounded it hard on his knee-cap. 'Your hand, Tom, the French fellow kissed! He kissed my boy's old pounder! I say he's a gentleman!' Straight The letter he tossed to one daughter; bade her the remainder relate.

XXV

Tom properly stated his praises in facts, but the lady preferred To deck the narration with brackets, and drop her additional word. What nobler Christian natures these

women could boast, who, ’twas known, Once spat at the name of their nephew, and now made his praises their own! The letter at last was finished, the hearers breathed freely, and sign Was given, ’Tom’s health!’—Quoth the farmer: ’Eh, Miss? are you weak in the spine?’

XXVI

Page 4784

For Mary had sunk, and her body was shaking, as if in a fit. Tom's letter she held, and her thumb-nail the month when the letter was writ Fast-dinted, while she hung sobbing: 'O, see, Sir, the letter is old! O, do not be too happy!'—'If I understand you, I'm bowled!' Said Grandfather Bridgeman, 'and down go my wickets!—not happy! when here, Here's Tom like to marry his General's daughter—or widow—I'll swear!

XXVII

'I wager he knows how to strut, too! It's all on the cards that the Queen Will ask him to Buckingham Palace, to say what he's done and he's seen. Victoria's fond of her soldiers: and she's got a nose for a fight. If Tom tells a cleverish story—there is such a thing as a knight! And don't he look roguish and handsome!—To see a girl snivelling there — By George, Miss, it's clear that you're jealous'—'I love him!' she answered his stare.

XXVIII

'Yes! now!' breathed the voice of a woman.—'Ah! now!' quiver'd low the reply. 'And "now"'s just a bit too late, so it's no use your piping your eye,' The farmer added bluffly: 'Old Lawyer Charlworth was rich; You followed his instructions in kicking Tom into the ditch. If you're such a dutiful daughter, that doesn't prove Tom is a fool. Forgive and forget's my motto! and here's my grog growing cool!'

XXIX

'But, Sir,' Mary faintly repeated: 'for four long weeks I have failed To come and cast on you my burden; such grief for you always prevailed! My heart has so bled for you!' The old man burst on her speech: 'You've chosen a likely time, Miss! a pretty occasion to preach!' And was it not outrageous, that now, of all times, one should come With incomprehensible pity! Far better had Mary been dumb.

XXX

But when again she stammered in this bewildering way, The farmer no longer could bear it, and begged her to go, or to stay, But not to be whimpering nonsense at such a time. Pricked by a goad, 'Twas you who sent him to glory:- you've come here to reap what you sowed. Is that it?' he asked; and the silence the elders preserved plainly said, On Mary's heaving bosom this begging-petition was read.

XXXI

And that it was scarcely a bargain that she who had driven him wild Should share now the fruits of his valour, the women expressed, as they smiled. The family pride of the Bridgemans was comforted; still, with contempt, They looked on a monied damsel of

modesty quite so exempt. ‘O give me force to tell them!’ cried Mary, and even as she spoke, A shout and a hush of the children: a vision on all of them broke.

XXXII

Wheeled, pale, in a chair, and shattered, the wreck of their hero was seen; The ghost of Tom drawn slow o’er the orchard’s shadowy green. Could this be the martial darling they joyed in a moment ago? ‘He knows it?’ to Mary Tom murmured, and closed his weak lids at her ‘No.’ ‘Beloved!’ she said, falling by him, ’I have been a coward: I thought You lay in the foreign country, and some strange good might be wrought.

XXXIII

Page 4785

’Each day I have come to tell him, and failed, with my hand on the gate. I bore the dreadful knowledge, and crushed my heart with its weight. The letter brought by your comrade—he has but just read it aloud! It only reached him this morning!’ Her head on his shoulder she bowed. Then Tom with pity’s tenderest lordliness patted her arm, And eyed the old white-head fondly, with something of doubt and alarm.

XXXIV

O, take to your fancy a sculptor whose fresh marble offspring appears Before him, shiningly perfect, the laurel-crown’d issue of years: Is heaven offended? for lightning behold from its bosom escape, And those are mocking fragments that made the harmonious shape! He cannot love the ruins, till, feeling that ruins alone Are left, he loves them threefold. So passed the old grandfather’s moan.

XXXV

John’s text for a sermon on Slaughter he heard, and he did not protest. All rigid as April snowdrifts, he stood, hard and feeble; his chest Just showing the swell of the fire as it melted him. Smiting a rib, ‘Heigh! what have we been about, Tom! Was this all a terrible fib?’ He cried, and the letter forth-trembled. Tom told what the cannon had done. Few present but ached to see falling those aged tears on his heart’s son!

XXXVI

Up lanes of the quiet village, and where the mill-waters rush red Thro’ browning summer meadows to catch the sun’s crimsoning head, You meet an old man and a maiden who has the soft ways of a wife With one whom they wheel, alternate; whose delicate flush of new life Is prized like the early primrose. Then shake his right hand, in the chair — The old man fails never to tell you: ’You’ve got the French General’s there!’

The promise in disturbance

How low when angels fall their black descent,
Our primal thunder tells: known is the pain
Of music, that nigh throning wisdom went,
And one false note cast wailful to the insane.
Now seems the language heard of Love as rain
To make a mire where fruitfulness was meant.
The golden harp gives out a jangled strain,
Too like revolt from heaven’s Omnipotent.
But listen in the thought; so may there come
Conception of a newly-added chord,
Commanding space beyond where ear has home.
In labour of the trouble at its fount,

Leads Life to an intelligible Lord
The rebel discords up the sacred mount.

Modern love

I

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
Stone-still, and the

Page 4786

long darkness flowed away
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep’s heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

II

It ended, and the morrow brought the task.
Her eyes were guilty gates, that let him in
By shutting all too zealous for their sin:
Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.
But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had!
He sickened as at breath of poison-flowers:
A languid humour stole among the hours,
And if their smiles encountered, he went mad,
And raged deep inward, till the light was brown
Before his vision, and the world, forgot,
Looked wicked as some old dull murder-spot.
A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown
The pit of infamy: and then again
He fainted on his vengefulness, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love,
And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain.

III

This was the woman; what now of the man?
But pass him. If he comes beneath a heel,
He shall be crushed until he cannot feel,
Or, being callous, haply till he can.
But he is nothing:- nothing? Only mark
The rich light striking out from her on him!
Ha! what a sense it is when her eyes swim
Across the man she singles, leaving dark
All else! Lord God, who mad’st the thing so fair,
See that I am drawn to her even now!
It cannot be such harm on her cool brow
To put a kiss? Yet if I meet him there!

But she is mine! Ah, no! I know too well
I claim a star whose light is overcast:
I claim a phantom-woman in the Past.
The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell!

IV

All other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip:
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old!

Page 4787

V

A message from her set his brain aflame.
A world of household matters filled her mind,
Wherein he saw hypocrisy designed:
She treated him as something that is tame,
And but at other provocation bites.
Familiar was her shoulder in the glass,
Through that dark rain: yet it may come to pass
That a changed eye finds such familiar sights
More keenly tempting than new loveliness.
The ‘What has been’ a moment seemed his own:
The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,
Nor less divine: Love’s inmost sacredness
Called to him, ’Come!’—In his restraining start,
Eyes nurtured to be looked at scarce could see
A wave of the great waves of Destiny
Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart.

VI

It chanced his lips did meet her forehead cool.
She had no blush, but slanted down her eye.
Shamed nature, then, confesses love can die:
And most she punishes the tender fool
Who will believe what honours her the most!
Dead! is it dead? She has a pulse, and flow
Of tears, the price of blood-drops, as I know,
For whom the midnight sobs around Love’s ghost,
Since then I heard her, and so will sob on.
The love is here; it has but changed its aim.
O bitter barren woman! what’s the name?
The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?
Behold me striking the world’s coward stroke!
That will I not do, though the sting is dire.
— Beneath the surface this, while by the fire
They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke.

VII

She issues radiant from her dressing-room, Like one prepared to scale an upper sphere: — By stirring up a lower, much I fear! How deftly that oiled barber lays his bloom! That long-shanked dapper Cupid with frisked curls Can make known women torturingly fair; The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair Awakes beneath his magic

whisks and twirls. His art can take the eyes from out my head, Until I see with eyes of other men; While deeper knowledge crouches in its den, And sends a spark up:- is it true we are wed? Yea! filthiness of body is most vile, But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse. The former, it were not so great a curse To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

VIII

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.
Poor twisting worm, so queenly beautiful!
Where came the cleft between us? whose the fault?
My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropped
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:
My breast will open for thee at a sign!
But, no: we are two reed-pipes, coarsely stopped:
The God once filled them with his mellow breath;

Page 4788

And they were music till he flung them down,
Used! used! Hear now the discord-loving clown
Puff his gross spirit in them, worse than death!
I do not know myself without thee more:
In this unholy battle I grow base:
If the same soul be under the same face,
Speak, and a taste of that old time restore!

IX

He felt the wild beast in him betweenwhiles
So masterfully rude, that he would grieve
To see the helpless delicate thing receive
His guardianship through certain dark defiles.
Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too?
But still he spared her. Once: 'Have you no fear?'
He said: 'twas dusk; she in his grasp; none near.
She laughed: 'No, surely; am I not with you?'
And uttering that soft starry 'you,' she leaned
Her gentle body near him, looking up;
And from her eyes, as from a poison-cup,
He drank until the flittering eyelids screened.
Devilish malignant witch! and oh, young beam
Of heaven's circle-glory! Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape —
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme.

X

But where began the change; and what's my crime?
The wretch condemned, who has not been arraigned,
Chafes at his sentence. Shall I, unsustained,
Drag on Love's nerveless body thro' all time?
I must have slept, since now I wake. Prepare,
You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods:
Not, like hard life, of laws. In Love's deep woods,
I dreamt of loyal Life:- the offence is there!
Love's jealous woods about the sun are curled;
At least, the sun far brighter there did beam. —
My crime is, that the puppet of a dream,
I plotted to be worthy of the world.
Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince

The facts of life, you still had seen me go
With hindward feather and with forward toe,
Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!

XI

Out in the yellow meadows, where the bee
Hums by us with the honey of the Spring,
And showers of sweet notes from the larks on wing
Are dropping like a noon-dew, wander we.
Or is it now? or was it then? for now,
As then, the larks from running rings pour showers:
The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.
What's this, when Nature swears there is no change
To challenge eyesight? Now, as then, the grace
Of heaven seems holding earth in its embrace.
Nor eyes, nor heart, has she to feel it strange?
Look, woman, in the West. There wilt thou see
An amber cradle near the sun's decline:
Within it, featured even in death divine,
Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.

Page 4789

XII

Not solely that the Future she destroys,
And the fair life which in the distance lies
For all men, beckoning out from dim rich skies:
Nor that the passing hour’s supporting joys
Have lost the keen-edged flavour, which begat
Distinction in old times, and still should breed
Sweet Memory, and Hope,—earth’s modest seed,
And heaven’s high-prompting: not that the world is flat
Since that soft-luring creature I embraced
Among the children of Illusion went:
Methinks with all this loss I were content,
If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,
Were firm, or might be blotted: but the whole
Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.

XIII

‘I play for Seasons; not Eternities!’
Says Nature, laughing on her way. ’So must
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!’
And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
She is full sure! Upon her dying rose
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag—there, an urn.
Pledged she herself to aught, ’twould mark her end!
This lesson of our only visible friend
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! yes!—but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love’s great bliss,
When the renewed for ever of a kiss
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair!

XIV

What soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings!

It seems there is another veering fit,
Since on a gold-haired lady's eyeballs pure
I looked with little prospect of a cure,
The while her mouth's red bow loosed shafts of wit.
Just heaven! can it be true that jealousy
Has decked the woman thus? and does her head
Swim somewhat for possessions forfeited?
Madam, you teach me many things that be.
I open an old book, and there I find
That 'Women still may love whom they deceive.'
Such love I prize not, madam: by your leave,
The game you play at is not to my mind.

XV

I think she sleeps: it must be sleep, when low
Hangs that abandoned arm toward the floor;
The face turned with it. Now make fast the door.
Sleep on: it is your husband, not your foe.
The Poet's black stage-lion of wronged love
Frights not our modern dames:- well if he did!
Now will I pour new

Page 4790

light upon that lid,
Full-sloping like the breasts beneath. 'Sweet dove,
Your sleep is pure. Nay, pardon: I disturb.
I do not? good!' Her waking infant-stare
Grows woman to the burden my hands bear:
Her own handwriting to me when no curb
Was left on Passion's tongue. She trembles through;
A woman's tremble—the whole instrument:-
I show another letter lately sent.
The words are very like: the name is new.

XVI

In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,
When in the firelight steadily aglow,
Joined slackly, we beheld the red chasm grow
Among the clicking coals. Our library-bower
That eve was left to us: and hushed we sat
As lovers to whom Time is whispering.
From sudden-opened doors we heard them sing:
The nodding elders mixed good wine with chat.
Well knew we that Life's greatest treasure lay
With us, and of it was our talk. 'Ah, yes!
Love dies!' I said: I never thought it less.
She yearned to me that sentence to unsay.
Then when the fire domed blackening, I found
Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift:-
Now am I haunted by that taste! that sound!

XVII

At dinner, she is hostess, I am host.
Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
The Topic over intellectual deeps
In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball:
It is in truth a most contagious game:
Hiding the skeleton, shall be its name.
Such play as this the devils might appal!
But here's the greater wonder; in that we,
Enamoured of an acting nought can tire,
Each other, like true hypocrites, admire;
Warm-lighted looks, Love's ephemerioe,

Shoot gaily o’er the dishes and the wine.
We waken envy of our happy lot.
Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage-knot.
Dear guests, you now have seen Love’s corpse-light shine.

XVIII

Here Jack and Tom are paired with Moll and Meg.
Curved open to the river-reach is seen
A country merry-making on the green.
Fair space for signal shakings of the leg.
That little screwy fiddler from his booth,
Whence flows one nut-brown stream, commands the joints
Of all who caper here at various points.
I have known rustic revels in my youth:
The May-fly pleasures of a mind at ease.
An early goddess was a country lass:
A charmed Amphion-oak she tripped the grass.
What life was that I lived? The life of these?
Heaven keep them happy! Nature they seem near.
They must, I think, be wiser than I am;
They have the secret of the bull and lamb.
’Tis true that when we trace its source, ’tis beer.

Page 4791

XIX

No state is enviable. To the luck alone
Of some few favoured men I would put claim.
I bleed, but her who wounds I will not blame.
Have I not felt her heart as 'twere my own
Beat thro' me? could I hurt her? heaven and hell!
But I could hurt her cruelly! Can I let
My Love's old time-piece to another set,
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell?
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart
Where goat-legged buyers throng. I see not plain:-
My meaning is, it must not be again.
Great God! the maddest gambler throws his heart.
If any state be enviable on earth,
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,
Still rubs his hands before him, like a fly,
In a queer sort of meditative mirth.

XX

I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wrecked,
I know the devil has sufficient weight
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.
Besides, he's damned. That man I do suspect
A coward, who would burden the poor deuce
With what ensues from his own slipperiness.
I have just found a wanton-scented tress
In an old desk, dusty for lack of use.
Of days and nights it is demonstrative,
That, like some aged star, gleam luridly.
If for those times I must ask charity,
Have I not any charity to give?

XXI

We three are on the cedar-shadowed lawn;
My friend being third. He who at love once laughed
Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft
Struck through, and tells his passion's bashful dawn

And radiant culmination, glorious crown,
When ‘this’ she said: went ‘thus’: most wondrous she.
Our eyes grow white, encountering: that we are three,
Forgetful; then together we look down.
But he demands our blessing; is convinced
That words of wedded lovers must bring good.
We question; if we dare! or if we should!
And pat him, with light laugh. We have not winced.
Next, she has fallen. Fainting points the sign
To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes,
She looks the star that thro’ the cedar shakes:
Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

XXII

What may the woman labour to confess?
There is about her mouth a nervous twitch.
’Tis something to be told, or hidden:- which?
I get a glimpse of hell in this mild guess.
She has desires of touch, as if to feel
That all the household things are things she knew.
She stops before the glass. What sight in view?

Page 4792

A face that seems the latest to reveal!
For she turns from it hastily, and tossed
Irresolute steals shadow-like to where
I stand; and wavering pale before me there,
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost.
She will not speak. I will not ask. We are
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.
You burly lovers on the village green,
Yours is a lower, and a happier star!

XXIII

'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get
An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door,
But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
Why did I come here in that dullard fit?
I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.
Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat:-
Come, Shame, burn to my soul! and Pride, and Pain —
Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!
Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.

XXIV

The misery is greater, as I live!
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,
That she does penance now for no offence,
Save against Love. The less can I forgive!
The less can I forgive, though I adore
That cruel lovely pallor which surrounds
Her footsteps; and the low vibrating sounds
That come on me, as from a magic shore.
Low are they, but most subtle to find out
The shrinking soul. Madam, 'tis understood
When women play upon their womanhood,

It means, a Season gone. And yet I doubt
But I am duped. That nun-like look waylays
My fancy. Oh! I do but wait a sign!
Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine!
Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!

XXV

You like not that French novel? Tell me why.
You think it quite unnatural. Let us see.
The actors are, it seems, the usual three:
Husband, and wife, and lover. She—but fie!
In England we'll not hear of it. Edmond,
The lover, her devout chagrin doth share;
Blanc-mange and absinthe are his penitent fare,
Till his pale aspect makes her over-fond:
So, to preclude fresh sin, he tries rosbif.
Meantime the husband is no more abused:
Auguste forgives her ere the tear is used.
Then hangeth all on one tremendous *if*:-
If she will choose between them. She does choose;
And takes her husband, like a proper wife.
Unnatural? My dear, these things are life:
And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse.

Page 4793

XXVI

Love ere he bleeds, an eagle in high skies,
Has earth beneath his wings: from reddened eve
He views the rosy dawn. In vain they weave
The fatal web below while far he flies.
But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change.
He moves but in the track of his spent pain,
Whose red drops are the links of a harsh chain,
Binding him to the ground, with narrow range.
A subtle serpent then has Love become.
I had the eagle in my bosom erst:
Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.
I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.
Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.
Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed:
But be no coward:- you that made Love bleed,
You must bear all the venom of his tooth!

XXVII

Distraction is the panacea, Sir!
I hear my oracle of Medicine say.
Doctor! that same specific yesterday
I tried, and the result will not deter
A second trial. Is the devil's line
Of golden hair, or raven black, composed?
And does a cheek, like any sea-shell rosed,
Or clear as widowed sky, seem most divine?
No matter, so I taste forgetfulness.
And if the devil snare me, body and mind,
Here gratefully I score:- he seemed kind,
When not a soul would comfort my distress!
O sweet new world, in which I rise new made!
O Lady, once I gave love: now I take!
Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst thou wake
The passion of a demon, be not afraid.

XXVIII

I must be flattered. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you the game of Sentiment,
And with you enter on paths perilous;

But if across your beauty I throw light,
To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
First secret; then avowed. For I must shine
Envied,—I, lessened in my proper sight!
Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear!
How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:
And men shall see me as a burning sphere;
And men shall mark you eyeing me, and groan
To be the God of such a grand sunflower!
I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
While you do homage unto me alone.

XXIX

Am I failing? For no longer can I cast
A glory round about this head of gold.
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould;
Not like the consecration of the Past!
Is my soul beggared? Something more than earth
I cry for still: I cannot be at peace
In having Love upon a mortal lease.
I cannot take the woman at her worth!
Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed

Page 4794

Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed?
A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave
Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
But, as you will! we'll sit contentedly,
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.

XXX

What are we first? First, animals; and next
Intelligences at a leap; on whom
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.
Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun:
Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.
We are the lords of life, and life is warm.
Intelligence and instinct now are one.
But nature says: 'My children most they seem
When they least know me: therefore I decree
That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee,
And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream.
Then if we study Nature we are wise.
Thus do the few who live but with the day:
The scientific animals are they. —
Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes.

XXXI

This golden head has wit in it. I live
Again, and a far higher life, near her.
Some women like a young philosopher;
Perchance because he is diminutive.
For woman's manly god must not exceed
Proportions of the natural nursing size.
Great poets and great sages draw no prize
With women: but the little lap-dog breed,
Who can be hugged, or on a mantel-piece
Perched up for adoration, these obtain
Her homage. And of this we men are vain?
Of this! 'Tis ordered for the world's increase!
Small flattery! Yet she has that rare gift

To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.
It is not half so nice as being loved,
And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift?

XXXII

Full faith I have she holds that rarest gift
To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie
With her fair visage an inverted sky
Bloom-covered, while the underlids uplift,
Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth
(Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address
The inner me that thirsts for her no less,
And has so long been languishing in drouth,
I feel that I am matched; that I am man!
One restless corner of my heart or head,
That holds a dying something never dead,
Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
It means, that woman is not, I opine,
Her sex's antidote. Who seeks the asp
For serpent's bites? 'Twould calm me could I clasp
Shrieking Bacchantes with their souls of wine!

XXXIII

Page 4795

’In Paris, at the Louvre, there have I seen
The sumptuously-feathered angel pierce
Prone Lucifer, descending. Looked he fierce,
Showing the fight a fair one? Too serene!
The young Pharsalians did not disarray
Less willingly their locks of floating silk:
That suckling mouth of his upon the milk
Of heaven might still be feasting through the fray.
Oh, Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,
They conquer not upon such easy terms.
Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms.
And does he grow half human, all is right.’
This to my Lady in a distant spot,
Upon the theme: *While mind is mastering clay*,
gross clay invades it. If the spy you play,
My wife, read this! Strange love talk, is it not?

XXXIV

Madam would speak with me. So, now it comes:
The Deluge or else Fire! She’s well; she thanks
My husbandship. Our chain on silence clanks.
Time leers between, above his twiddling thumbs.
Am I quite well? Most excellent in health!
The journals, too, I diligently peruse.
Vesuvius is expected to give news:
Niagara is no noisier. By stealth
Our eyes dart scrutinizing snakes. She’s glad
I’m happy, says her quivering under-lip.
‘And are not you?’ ‘How can I be?’ ’Take ship!
For happiness is somewhere to be had.’
‘Nowhere for me!’ Her voice is barely heard.
I am not melted, and make no pretence.
With commonplace I freeze her, tongue and sense.
Niagara or Vesuvius is deferred.

XXXV

It is no vulgar nature I have wived.
Secretive, sensitive, she takes a wound
Deep to her soul, as if the sense had swooned,
And not a thought of vengeance had survived.
No confidences has she: but relief
Must come to one whose suffering is acute.

O have a care of natures that are mute!
They punish you in acts: their steps are brief.
What is she doing? What does she demand
From Providence or me? She is not one
Long to endure this torpidly, and shun
The drugs that crowd about a woman’s hand.
At Forfeits during snow we played, and I
Must kiss her. ‘Well performed!’ I said: then she:
“Tis hardly worth the money, you agree?’
Save her? What for? To act this wedded lie!

XXXVI

My Lady unto Madam makes her bow.
The charm of women is, that even while
You’re probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.
The interview was gracious: they anoint
(To me aside) each other with fine praise:
Discriminating compliments they raise,

Page 4796

That hit with wondrous aim on the weak point:
My Lady's nose of Nature might complain.
It is not fashioned aptly to express
Her character of large-browed steadfastness.
But Madam says: Thereof she may be vain!
Now, Madam's faulty feature is a glazed
And inaccessible eye, that has soft fires,
Wide gates, at love-time, only. This admires
My Lady. At the two I stand amazed.

XXXVII

Along the garden terrace, under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropped the chariot) glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in prae-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Though here and there grey seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.
As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
Our tragedy, is it alive or dead?

XXXVIII

Give to imagination some pure light
In human form to fix it, or you shame
The devils with that hideous human game:-
Imagination urging appetite!
Thus fallen have earth's greatest Gogmagogs,
Who dazzle us, whom we can not revere:
Imagination is the charioteer
That, in default of better, drives the hogs.
So, therefore, my dear Lady, let me love!
My soul is arrowy to the light in you.
You know me that I never can renew

The bond that woman broke: what would you have?
’Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between,
Save petrifaction! What does Pity here?
She killed a thing, and now it’s dead, ’tis dear.
Oh, when you counsel me, think what you mean!

XXXIX

She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood
Has yielded: she, my golden-crowned rose!
The bride of every sense! more sweet than those
Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood.
O visage of still music in the sky!
Soft moon! I feel thy song, my fairest friend!
True harmony within can apprehend
Dumb harmony without. And hark! ’tis nigh!
Belief has struck the note of sound: a gleam
Of living silver shows me where she shook
Her long white fingers down the shadowy brook,
That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.
What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?
A man is one: the woman bears my name,
And honour. Their hands touch! Am I still tame?
God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon!

Page 4797

XL

I bade my Lady think what she might mean.
Know I my meaning, I? Can I love one,
And yet be jealous of another? None
Commits such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
The lightless seas of selfishness amain:
Seas that in a man's heart have no rain
To fall and still them. Peace can I achieve,
By turning to this fountain-source of woe,
This woman, who's to Love as fire to wood?
She breathed the violet breath of maidenhood
Against my kisses once! but I say, No!
The thing is mocked at! Helplessly afloat,
I know not what I do, whereto I strive.
The dread that my old love may be alive
Has seized my nursling new love by the throat.

XLI

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem!
We grasp at all the wealth it is to them;
And by reflected light its worth is found.
Yet for us still 'tis nothing! and that zeal
Of false appreciation quickly fades.
This truth is little known to human shades,
How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel!
They waste the soul with spurious desire,
That is not the ripe flame upon the bough.
We two have taken up a lifeless vow
To rob a living passion: dust for fire!
Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
Approaching midnight. We have struck despair
Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else?

XLII

I am to follow her. There is much grace
In woman when thus bent on martyrdom.
They think that dignity of soul may come,
Perchance, with dignity of body. Base!

But I was taken by that air of cold
And statuesque sedateness, when she said
‘I’m going’; lit a taper, bowed her head,
And went, as with the stride of Pallas bold.
Fleshly indifference horrible! The hands
Of Time now signal: O, she’s safe from me!
Within those secret walls what do I see?
Where first she set the taper down she stands:
Not Pallas: Hebe shamed! Thoughts black as death
Like a stirred pool in sunshine break. Her wrists
I catch: she faltering, as she half resists,
‘You love . . .? love . . .? love . . .?’ all on an indrawn breath.

XLIII

Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like
Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave!
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love’s grave;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:
In hearing of the ocean, and in sight
Of those ribbed wind-streaks

Page 4798

running into white.

If I the death of Love had deeply planned,
I never could have made it half so sure,
As by the unblest kisses which upbraid
The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade!
'Tis morning: but no morning can restore
What we have forfeited. I see no sin:
The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
We are betrayed by what is false within.

XLIV

They say, that Pity in Love's service dwells,
A porter at the rosy temple's gate.
I missed him going: but it is my fate
To come upon him now beside his wells;
Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,
And that the purple doors have closed behind.
Poor soul! if, in those early days unkind,
Thy power to sting had been but power to grieve,
We now might with an equal spirit meet,
And not be matched like innocence and vice.
She for the Temple's worship has paid price,
And takes the coin of Pity as a cheat.
She sees through simulation to the bone:
What's best in her impels her to the worst:
Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
Or foul hypocrisy for truth atone!

XLV

It is the season of the sweet wild rose,
My Lady's emblem in the heart of me!
So golden-crowned shines she gloriously,
And with that softest dream of blood she glows;
Mild as an evening heaven round Hesper bright!
I pluck the flower, and smell it, and revive
The time when in her eyes I stood alive.
I seem to look upon it out of Night.
Here's Madam, stepping hastily. Her whims
Bid her demand the flower, which I let drop.
As I proceed, I feel her sharply stop,
And crush it under heel with trembling limbs.

She joins me in a cat-like way, and talks
Of company, and even condescends
To utter laughing scandal of old friends.
These are the summer days, and these our walks.

XLVI

At last we parley: we so strangely dumb
In such a close communion! It befell
About the sounding of the Matin-bell,
And lo! her place was vacant, and the hum
Of loneliness was round me. Then I rose,
And my disordered brain did guide my foot
To that old wood where our first love-salute
Was interchanged: the source of many throes!
There did I see her, not alone. I moved
Toward her, and made proffer of my arm.
She took it simply, with no rude alarm;
And that disturbing shadow passed reproved.
I felt the pained speech coming, and declared
My firm belief in her, ere she could speak.
A ghastly morning came into her cheek,
While with a widening soul on me she stared.

Page 4799

XLVII

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
We had not to look back on summer joys,
Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband and my bride.
Love, that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth!
The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
Love, that had robbed us of immortal things,
This little moment mercifully gave,
Where I have seen across the twilight wave
The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

XLVIII

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are!
More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.
Behold! I looked for peace, and thought it near.
Our inmost hearts had opened, each to each.
We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.
Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
For when of my lost Lady came the word,
This woman, O this agony of flesh!
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird.
I do adore the nobleness! despise
The act! She has gone forth, I know not where.
Will the hard world my sentience of her share
I feel the truth; so let the world surmise.

XLIX

He found her by the ocean’s moaning verge,
Nor any wicked change in her discerned;
And she believed his old love had returned,
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.

She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.
She dared not say, ‘This is my breast: look in.’
But there’s a strength to help the desperate weak.
That night he learned how silence best can speak
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.
About the middle of the night her call
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.
‘Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!’ she said.
Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all.

L

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair!
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
But they fed not on

Page 4800

the advancing hours:
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life! —
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin fine upon the shore!

The patriot engineer

'Sirs! may I shake your hands?
My countrymen, I see!
I've lived in foreign lands
Till England's Heaven to me.
A hearty shake will do me good,
And freshen up my sluggish blood.'

Into his hard right hand we struck,
Gave the shake, and wish'd him luck.

'—From Austria I come, An English wife to win, And find an English home, And live and die therein. Great Lord! how many a year I've pined To drink old ale and speak my mind!'

Loud rang our laughter, and the shout
Hills round the Meuse-boat echoed about.

'—Ay, no offence: laugh on, Young gentlemen: I'll join. Had you to exile gone, Where free speech is base coin, You'd sigh to see the jolly nose Where Freedom's native liquor flows!'

He this time the laughter led,
Dabbling his oily bullet head.

'—Give me, to suit my moods, An ale-house on a heath, I'll hand the crags and woods To B'elzebub beneath. A fig for scenery! what scene Can beat a Jackass on a green?'

Gravely he seem'd, with gaze intense,
Putting the question to common sense.

’—Why, there’s the ale-house bench: The furze-flower shining round: And there’s my waiting-wench, As lissome as a hound. With “hail Britannia!” ere I drink, I’ll kiss her with an artful wink.’

Fair flash’d the foreign landscape while
We breath’d again our native Isle.

’—The geese may swim hard-by; They gabble, and you talk: You’re sure there’s not a spy To mark your name with chalk. My heart’s an oak, and it won’t grow In flower-pots, foreigners must know.’

Pensive he stood: then shook his head
Sadly; held out his fist, and said:

’—You’ve heard that Hungary’s floor’d? They’ve got her on the ground. A traitor broke her sword: Two despots held her bound. I’ve seen her gasping her last hope: I’ve seen her sons strung up b’ the rope.

’Nine gallant gentlemen
In Arad they strung up!
I work’d in peace till then:-
That poison’d all my cup.
A smell of corpses haunted me:
My nostril sniff’d like life for sea.

’Take money for my hire
From butchers?—not the man!
I’ve got some natural fire,
And don’t flash in the pan; —
A few ideas I reveal’d:-
’Twas well old England stood my shield!

Page 4801

’Said I, “The Lord of Hosts
Have mercy on your land!
I see those dangling ghosts, —
And you may keep command,
And hang, and shoot, and have your day:
They hold your bill, and you must pay.

’"You’ve sent them where they’re strong,
You carrion Double-Head!
I hear them sound a gong
In Heaven above!”—I said.
“My God, what feathers won’t you moult
For this!” says I: and then I bolt.

’The Bird’s a beastly Bird,
And what is more, a fool.
I shake hands with the herd
That flock beneath his rule.
They’re kindly; and their land is fine.
I thought it rarer once than mine.

’And rare would be its lot,
But that he baulks its powers:
It’s just an earthen pot
For hearts of oak like ours.
Think! Think!—four days from those frontiers,
And I’m a-head full fifty years.

’It tingles to your scalps,
To think of it, my boys!
Confusion on their Alps,
And all their baby toys!
The mountains Britain boasts are men:
And scale you them, my brethren!’

Cluck, went his tongue; his fingers, snap.
Britons were proved all heights to cap.

And we who worshipp’d crags,
Where purple splendours burn’d,
Our idol saw in rags,
And right about were turn’d.
Horizons rich with trembling spires
On violet twilights lost their fires.

And heights where morning wakes
With one cheek over snow; —
And iron-walled lakes
Where sits the white moon low; —
For us on youthful travel bent,
The robing picturesque was rent.

Wherever Beauty show'd
The wonders of her face,
This man his Jackass rode,
High despot of the place.

Fair dreams of our enchanted life
Fled fast from his shrill island fife.

And yet we liked him well;
We laugh'd with honest hearts:-
He shock'd some inner spell,
And rous'd discordant parts.
We echoed what we half abjured:
And hating, smilingly endured.

Moreover, could we be
To our dear land disloyal?
And were not also we
Of History's blood-Royal?
We glow'd to think how donkeys graze
In England, thrilling at their brays.

For there a man may view
An aspect more sublime
Than Alps against the blue:-
The morning eyes of Time!
The very Ass participates
The glory Freedom radiates!

Cassandra

I

Captive on a foreign shore,
Far from Ilion's hoary wave,
Agamemnon's bridal slave
Speaks Futurity no more:
Death is busy with her grave.

Page 4802

II

Thick as water, bursts remote
Round her ears the alien din,
While her little sullen chin
Fills the hollows of her throat:
Silent lie her slaughter’d kin.

III

Once to many a pealing shriek,
Lo, from Ilion’s topmost tower,
Ilion’s fierce prophetic flower
Cried the coming of the Greek!
Black in Hades sits the hour.

IV

Eyeing phantoms of the Past,
Folded like a prophet’s scroll,
In the deep’s long shoreward roll
Here she sees the anchor cast:
Backward moves her sunless soul.

V

Chieftains, brethren of her joy,
Shades, the white light in their eyes
Slanting to her lips, arise,
Crowding quick the plains of Troy:
Now they tell her not she lies.

VI

O the bliss upon the plains,
Where the joining heroes clashed
Shield and spear, and, unabashed,
Challenged with hot chariot-reins
Gods!—they glimmer ocean-washed.

VII

Alien voices round the ships,
Thick as water, shouting Home.
Argives, pale as midnight foam,

Wax before her awful lips:
White as stars that front the gloom.

VIII

Like a torch-flame that by day
Up the daylight twists, and, pale,
Catches air in leaps that fail,
Crushed by the inveterate ray,
Through her shines the Ten-Years' Tale.

IX

Once to many a pealing shriek,
Lo, from Ilion's topmost tower,
Ilion's fierce prophetic flower
Cried the coming of the Greek!
Black in Hades sits the hour.

X

Still upon her sunless soul
Gleams the narrow hidden space
Forward, where her fiery race
Falters on its ashen goal:
Still the Future strikes her face.

XI

See toward the conqueror's car
Step the purple Queen whose hate
Wraps red-armed her royal mate
With his Asian tempest-star:
Now Cassandra views her Fate.

XII

King of men! the blinded host
Shout:- she lifts her brooding chin:
Glad along the joyous din
Smiles the grand majestic ghost:
Clytemnestra leads him in.

XIII

Lo, their smoky limbs aloof,
Shadowing heaven and the seas,
Fates and Furies, tangling Threes,

Tear and mix above the roof:
Fates and fierce Eumenides.

XIV

Is the prophetess with rods
Beaten, that she writhes in air?
With the Gods who never spare,
Wrestling with the unsparing Gods,
Lone, her body struggles there.

Page 4803

XV

Like the snaky torch-flame white,
Levelled as aloft it twists,
She, her soaring arms, and wrists
Drooping, struggles with the light,
Helios, bright above all mists!

XVI

In his orb she sees the tower,
Dusk against its flaming rims,
Where of old her wretched limbs
Twisted with the stolen power:
Ilium all the lustre dims!

XVII

O the bliss upon the plains,
Where the joining heroes clashed
Shield and spear, and, unabashed,
Challenged with hot chariot-reins
Gods!—they glimmer ocean-washed.

XVIII

Thrice the Sun-god’s name she calls;
Shrieks the deed that shames the sky;
Like a fountain leaping high,
Falling as a fountain falls:
Lo, the blazing wheels go by!

XIX

Captive on a foreign shore,
Far from Ilion’s hoary wave,
Agamemnon’s bridal slave
Speaks Futurity no more:
Death is busy with her grave.

The young usurper

On my darling’s bosom
Has dropped a living rosy bud,
Fair as brilliant Hesper

Against the brimming flood.
She handles him,
She dandles him,
She fondles him and eyes him:
And if upon a tear he wakes,
With many a kiss she dries him:
She covets every move he makes,
And never enough can prize him.
Ah, the young Usurper!
I yield my golden throne:
Such angel bands attend his hands
To claim it for his own.

Margaret's bridal eve

I

The old grey mother she thrummed on her knee:
There is a rose that's ready;
And which of the handsome young men shall it be?
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

My daughter, come hither, come hither to me:
There is a rose that's ready;
Come, point me your finger on him that you see:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

O mother, my mother, it never can be:
There is a rose that's ready;
For I shall bring shame on the man marries me:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

Now let your tongue be deep as the sea:
There is a rose that's ready;
And the man'll jump for you, right briskly will he:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

Tall Margaret wept bitterly:
There is a rose that's ready;
And as her parent bade did she:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

O the handsome young man dropped down on his knee:
There is a rose that's ready;
Pale Margaret gave him her hand, woe's me!
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

Page 4804

II

O mother, my mother, this thing I must say:
There is a rose in the garden;
Ere he lies on the breast where that other lay:
And the bird sings over the roses.

Now, folly, my daughter, for men are men:
There is a rose in the garden;
You marry them blindfold, I tell you again:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O mother, but when he kisses me!
There is a rose in the garden;
My child, ’tis which shall sweetest be!
And the bird sings over the roses.

O mother, but when I awake in the morn!
There is a rose in the garden;
My child, you are his, and the ring is worn:
And the bird sings over the roses.

Tall Margaret sighed and loosened a tress:
There is a rose in the garden;
Poor comfort she had of her comeliness
And the bird sings over the roses.

My mother will sink if this thing be said:
There is a rose in the garden;
That my first betrothed came thrice to my bed;
And the bird sings over the roses.

He died on my shoulder the third cold night:
There is a rose in the garden;
I dragged his body all through the moonlight:
And the bird sings over the roses.

But when I came by my father’s door:
There is a rose in the garden;
I fell in a lump on the stiff dead floor:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O neither to heaven, nor yet to hell:
There is a rose in the garden;

Could I follow the lover I loved so well!
And the bird sings over the roses.

III

The bridesmaids slept in their chambers apart:
There is a rose that's ready;
Tall Margaret walked with her thumping heart:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

The frill of her nightgown below the left breast:
There is a rose that's ready;
Had fall'n like a cloud of the moonlighted West:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

But where the West-cloud breaks to a star:
There is a rose that's ready;
Pale Margaret's breast showed a winding scar:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

O few are the brides with such a sign!
There is a rose that's ready;
Though I went mad the fault was mine:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

I must speak to him under this roof to-night:
There is a rose that's ready;
I shall burn to death if I speak in the light:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

O my breast! I must strike you a bloodier wound:
There is a rose that's ready;
Than when I scored you red and swooned:
There's a rose that's ready for clipping.

Page 4805

I will stab my honour under his eye:
There is a rose that’s ready;
Though I bleed to the death, I shall let out the lie:
There’s a rose that’s ready for clipping.

O happy my bridesmaids! white sleep is with you!
There is a rose that’s ready;
Had he chosen among you he might sleep too!
There’s a rose that’s ready for clipping.

O happy my bridesmaids! your breasts are clean:
There is a rose that’s ready;
You carry no mark of what has been!
There’s a rose that’s ready for clipping.

IV

An hour before the chilly beam:
Red rose and white in the garden;
The bridegroom started out of a dream:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He went to the door, and there espied:
Red rose and white in the garden;
The figure of his silent bride:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He went to the door, and let her in:
Red rose and white in the garden;
Whiter looked she than a child of sin:
And the bird sings over the roses.

She looked so white, she looked so sweet:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She looked so pure he fell at her feet:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He fell at her feet with love and awe:
Red rose and white in the garden;
A stainless body of light he saw:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O Margaret, say you are not of the dead!
Red rose and white in the garden;

My bride! by the angels at night are you led?
And the bird sings over the roses.

I am not led by the angels about:
Red rose and white in the garden;
But I have a devil within to let out:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O Margaret! my bride and saint!
Red rose and white in the garden;
There is on you no earthly taint:
And the bird sings over the roses.

I am no saint, and no bride can I be:
Red rose and while in the garden;
Until I have opened my bosom to thee:
And the bird sings over the roses.

To catch at her heart she laid one hand:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She told the tale where she did stand:
And the bird sings over the roses.

She stood before him pale and tall:
Red rose and white in the garden;
Her eyes between his, she told him all:
And the bird sings over the roses.

She saw how her body grow freckled and foul:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She heard from the woods the hooting owl:
And the bird sings over the roses.

With never a quiver her mouth did speak:
Red rose and white in the garden;
O when she had done she stood so meek!
And the bird sings over the roses.

Page 4806

The bridegroom stamped and called her vile:
Red rose and white in the garden;
He did but waken a little smile:
And the bird sings over the roses.

The bridegroom raged and called her foul:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She heard from the woods the hooting owl:
And the bird sings over the roses.

He muttered a name full bitter and sore:
Red rose and white in the garden;
She fell in a lump on the still dead floor:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O great was the wonder, and loud the wail:
Red rose and white in the garden;
When through the household flew the tale:
And the bird sings over the roses.

The old grey mother she dressed the bier:
Red rose and white in the garden;
With a shivering chin and never a tear:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O had you but done as I bade you, my child!
Red rose and white in the garden;
You would not have died and been reviled:
And the bird sings over the roses.

The bridegroom he hung at midnight by the bier:
Red rose and white in the garden;
He eyed the white girl thro’ a dazzling tear:
And the bird sings over the roses.

O had you been false as the women who stray:
Red rose and white in the garden;
You would not be now with the Angels of Day!
And the bird sings over the roses.

Marian

I

She can be as wise as we,
And wiser when she wishes;
She can knit with cunning wit,
And dress the homely dishes.
She can flourish staff or pen,
And deal a wound that lingers;
She can talk the talk of men,
And touch with thrilling fingers.

II

Match her ye across the sea,
Natures fond and fiery;
Ye who zest the turtle's nest
With the eagle's eyrie.
Soft and loving is her soul,
Swift and lofty soaring;
Mixing with its dove-like dole
Passionate adoring.

III

Such a she who'll match with me?
In flying or pursuing,
Subtle wiles are in her smiles
To set the world a-wooing.
She is steadfast as a star,
And yet the maddest maiden:
She can wage a gallant war,
And give the peace of Eden.

By morning twilight

Night, like a dying mother,
Eyes her young offspring, Day.
The birds are dreamily piping.
And O, my love, my darling!
The night is life ebb'd away:
Away beyond our reach!
A sea that has cast us pale on the beach;
Weeds with the weeds and the pebbles
That hear the lone tamarisk rooted in sand
Sway
With the song of the sea to the land.

Page 4807

Unknown fair faces

Though I am faithful to my loves lived through,
And place them among Memory's great stars,
Where burns a face like Hesper: one like Mars:
Of visages I get a moment's view,
Sweet eyes that in the heaven of me, too,
Ascend, tho' virgin to my life they passed.
Lo, these within my destiny seem glassed
At times so bright, I wish that Hope were new.
A gracious freckled lady, tall and grave,
Went, in a shawl voluminous and white,
Last sunset by; and going sow'd a glance.
Earth is too poor to hold a second chance;
I will not ask for more than Fortune gave:
My heart she goes from—never from my sight!

Shemselnihar

O my lover! the night like a broad smooth wave
Bears us onward, and morn, a black rock, shines wet.
How I shuddered—I knew not that I was a slave,
Till I looked on thy face:- then I writhed in the net.
Then I felt like a thing caught by fire, that her star
Glowed dark on the bosom of Shemselnihar.

And he came, whose I am: O my lover! he came:
And his slave, still so envied of women, was I:
And I turned as a hissing leaf spits from the flame,
Yes, I shrivelled to dust from him, haggard and dry.
O forgive her:- she was but as dead lilies are:
The life of her heart fled from Shemselnihar.

Yet with thee like a full throbbing rose how I bloom!
Like a rose by the fountain whose showering we hear,
As we lie, O my lover! in this rich gloom,
Smelling faint the cool breath of the lemon-groves near.
As we lie gazing out on that glowing great star —
Ah! dark on the bosom of Shemselnihar.

Yet with thee am I not as an arm of the vine,
Firm to bind thee, to cherish thee, feed thee sweet?
Swear an oath on my lip to let none disentwine
The life that here fawns to give warmth to thy feet.

I on thine, thus! no more shall that jewelled Head jar
The music thou breathest on Shemselnihar.

Far away, far away, where the wandering scents
Of all flowers are sweetest, white mountains among,
There my kindred abide in their green and blue tents:
Bear me to them, my lover! they lost me so young.
Let us slip down the stream and leap steed till afar
None question thy claim upon Shemselnihar.

O that long note the bulbul gave out—meaning love!
O my lover, hark to him and think it my voice!
The blue night like a great bell-flower from above
Drooping low and gold-eyed: O, but hear him rejoice!
Can it be? 'twas a flash! that accurst scimiter
In thought even cuts thee from Shemselnihar.

Page 4808

Yes, I would that, less generous, he would oppress,
He would chain me, upbraid me, burn deep brands for hate,
Than with this mask of freedom and gorgeousness
Bespangle my slavery, mock my strange fate.
Would, would, would, O my lover, he knew—dared debar
Thy coming, and earn curse of Shemselnihar!

A roar through the tall twin elm-trees

A roar thro’ the tall twin elm-trees
The mustering storm betrayed:
The South-wind seized the willow
That over the water swayed.

Then fell the steady deluge
In which I strove to doze,
Hearing all night at my window
The knock of the winter rose.

The rainy rose of winter!
An outcast it must pine.
And from thy bosom outcast
Am I, dear lady mine.

When I would image

When I would image her features,
Comes up a shrouded head:
I touch the outlines, shrinking;
She seems of the wandering dead.

But when love asks for nothing,
And lies on his bed of snow,
The face slips under my eyelids,
All in its living glow.

Like a dark cathedral city,
Whose spires, and domes, and towers
Quiver in violet lightnings,
My soul basks on for hours.

The spirit of Shakespeare

Thy greatest knew thee, Mother Earth; unsoured
He knew thy sons. He probed from hell to hell

Of human passions, but of love deflowered
His wisdom was not, for he knew thee well.
Thence came the honeyed corner at his lips,
The conquering smile wherein his spirit sails
Calm as the God who the white sea-wave whips,
Yet full of speech and intershifting tales,
Close mirrors of us: thence had he the laugh
We feel is thine: broad as ten thousand beeves
At pasture! thence thy songs, that winnow chaff
From grain, bid sick Philosophy's last leaves
Whirl, if they have no response—they enforced
To fatten Earth when from her soul divorced.

Continued

How smiles he at a generation ranked
In gloomy noddings over life! They pass.
Not he to feed upon a breast unthanked,
Or eye a beauteous face in a cracked glass.
But he can spy that little twist of brain
Which moved some weighty leader of the blind,
Unwitting 'twas the goad of personal pain,
To view in curst eclipse our Mother's mind,
And show us of some rigid harridan
The wretched bondmen till the end of time.
O lived the Master now to paint us Man,
That little twist of brain would ring a chime
Of whence it came and what it caused, to start
Thunders of laughter, clearing air and heart.

Page 4809

Ode to the spirit of earth in autumn

Fair Mother Earth lay on her back last night,
To gaze her fill on Autumn’s sunset skies,
When at a waving of the fallen light
Sprang realms of rosy fruitage o’er her eyes.
A lustrous heavenly orchard hung the West,
Wherein the blood of Eden bloomed again:
Red were the myriad cherub-mouths that pressed,
Among the clusters, rich with song, full fain,
But dumb, because that overmastering spell
Of rapture held them dumb: then, here and there,
A golden harp lost strings; a crimson shell
Burnt grey; and sheaves of lustre fell to air.
The illimitable eagerness of hue
Bronzed, and the beamy winged bloom that flew
’Mid those bunched fruits and thronging figures failed.
A green-edged lake of saffron touched the blue,
With isles of fireless purple lying through:
And Fancy on that lake to seek lost treasures sailed.

Not long the silence followed:
The voice that issues from thy breast,
O glorious South-west,
Along the gloom-horizon holloa’d;
Warning the valleys with a mellow roar
Through flapping wings; then sharp the woodland bore
A shudder and a noise of hands:
A thousand horns from some far vale
In ambush sounding on the gale.
Forth from the cloven sky came bands
Of revel-gathering spirits; trooping down,
Some rode the tree-tops; some on torn cloud-strips
Burst screaming thro’ the lighted town:
And scudding seaward, some fell on big ships:
Or mounting the sea-horses blew
Bright foam-flakes on the black review
Of heaving hulls and burying beaks.

Still on the farthest line, with outpuffed cheeks,
’Twixt dark and utter dark, the great wind drew
From heaven that disenchanted harmony
To join earth’s laughter in the midnight blind:
Booming a distant chorus to the shrieks

Preluding him: then he,
His mantle streaming thunderingly behind,
Across the yellow realm of stiffened Day,
Shot thro' the woodland alleys signals three;
And with the pressure of a sea
Plunged broad upon the vale that under lay.

Night on the rolling foliage fell:
But I, who love old hymning night,
And know the Dryad voices well,
Discerned them as their leaves took flight,
Like souls to wander after death:
Great armies in imperial dyes,
And mad to tread the air and rise,
The savage freedom of the skies
To taste before they rot. And here,
Like frail white-bodied girls in fear,
The birches swung from shrieks to sighs;
The aspens, laughers at a breath,
In showering spray-falls mixed their cries,

Page 4810

Or raked a savage ocean-strand
With one incessant drowning screech.
Here stood a solitary beech,
That gave its gold with open hand,
And all its branches, toning chill,
Did seem to shut their teeth right fast,
To shriek more mercilessly shrill,
And match the fierceness of the blast.

But heard I a low swell that noised
Of far-off ocean, I was 'ware
Of pines upon their wide roots poised,
Whom never madness in the air
Can draw to more than loftier stress
Of mournfulness, not mournfulness
For melancholy, but Joy's excess,
That singing on the lap of sorrow faints:
And Peace, as in the hearts of saints
Who chant unto the Lord their God;
Deep Peace below upon the muffled sod,
The stillness of the sea's unswaying floor,
Could I be sole there not to see
The life within the life awake;
The spirit bursting from the tree,
And rising from the troubled lake?
Pour, let the wines of Heaven pour!
The Golden Harp is struck once more,
And all its music is for me!
Pour, let the wines of Heaven pour!
And, ho, for a night of Pagan glee!

There is a curtain o'er us.
For once, good souls, we'll not pretend
To be aught better than her who bore us,
And is our only visible friend.
Hark to her laughter! who laughs like this,
Can she be dead, or rooted in pain?
She has been slain by the narrow brain,
But for us who love her she lives again.
Can she die? O, take her kiss!

The crimson-footed nymph is panting up the glade, With the wine-jar at her arm-pit, and the drunken ivy-braid Round her forehead, breasts, and thighs: starts a Satyr, and they speed: Hear the crushing of the leaves: hear the cracking of the bough! And the whistling of the bramble, the piping of the weed!

But the bull-voiced oak is battling now:
The storm has seized him half-asleep,
And round him the wild woodland throngs
To hear the fury of his songs,
The uproar of an outraged deep.
He wakes to find a wrestling giant
Trunk to trunk and limb to limb,
And on his rooted force reliant
He laughs and grasps the broadened giant,
And twist and roll the Anakim;
And multitudes, acclaiming to the cloud,
Cry which is breaking, which is bowed.

Away, for the cymbals clash aloft
In the circles of pine, on the moss-floor soft.
The nymphs of the woodland are gathering there.
They huddle the leaves, and trample, and toss;
They swing in the branches, they roll in the moss,
They blow the seed on the air.
Back to back they stand and blow
The winged seed on the cradling air,
A fountain of leaves over bosom and back.

Page 4811

The pipe of the Faun comes on their track
And the weltering alleys overflow
With musical shrieks and wind-wedded hair.
The riotous companies melt to a pair.
Bless them, mother of kindness!

A star has nodded through
The depths of the flying blue.
Time only to plant the light
Of a memory in the blindness.
But time to show me the sight
Of my life thro' the curtain of night;
Shining a moment, and mixed
With the onward-hurrying stream,
Whose pressure is darkness to me;
Behind the curtain, fixed,
Beams with endless beam
That star on the changing sea.

Great Mother Nature! teach me, like thee,
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the mother who bore,
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets,
Great Mother! me inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire,
Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form.
In life, O keep me warm!
For, what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree,
And not the withered leaf.
Fixed am I and await the dark to-be
And O, green bounteous Earth!
Bacchante Mother! stern to those
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
Death shall I shrink from, loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose,
Shall I with shuddering fall?

Earth, the mother of all,
Moves on her stedfast way,

Gathering, flinging, sowing.
Mortals, we live in her day,
She in her children is growing.

She can lead us, only she,
Unto God’s footstool, whither she reaches:
Loved, enjoyed, her gifts must be,
Reverenced the truths she teaches,
Ere a man may hope that he
Ever can attain the glee
Of things without a destiny!

She knows not loss:
She feels but her need,
Who the winged seed
With the leaf doth toss.

And may not men to this attain?
That the joy of motion, the rapture of being,
Shall throw strong light when our season is fleeing,
Nor quicken aged blood in vain,
At the gates of the vault, on the verge of the plain?
Life thoroughly lived is a fact in the brain,
While eyes are left for seeing.
Behold, in yon stripped Autumn, shivering grey,
Earth knows no desolation.
She smells regeneration
In the moist breath of decay.

Prophetic of the coming joy and strife,
Like the wild western war-chief sinking
Calm to the end he eyes unblinking,
Her voice is jubilant in ebbing life.

Page 4812

He for his happy hunting-fields
Forgets the droning chant, and yields
His numbered breaths to exultation
In the proud anticipation:
Shouting the glories of his nation,
Shouting the grandeur of his race,
Shouting his own great deeds of daring:
And when at last death grasps his face,
And stiffened on the ground in peace
He lies with all his painted terrors glaring;
Hushed are the tribe to hear a threading cry:
Not from the dead man;
Not from the standers-by:
The spirit of the red man
Is welcomed by his fathers up on high.

MARTIN'S puzzle

I

There she goes up the street with her book in her hand,
And her Good morning, Martin! Ay, lass, how d'ye do?
Very well, thank you, Martin!—I can't understand!
I might just as well never have cobbled a shoe!
I can't understand it. She talks like a song;
Her voice takes your ear like the ring of a glass;
She seems to give gladness while limping along,
Yet sinner ne'er suffer'd like that little lass.

II

First, a fool of a boy ran her down with a cart.
Then, her fool of a father—a blacksmith by trade —
Why the deuce does he tell us it half broke his heart?
His heart!—where's the leg of the poor little maid!
Well, that's not enough; they must push her downstairs,
To make her go crooked: but why count the list?
If it's right to suppose that our human affairs
Are all order'd by heaven—there, bang goes my fist!

III

For if angels can look on such sights—never mind!
When you're next to blaspheming, it's best to be mum.

The parson declares that her woes weren't designed;
But, then, with the parson it's all kingdom-come.
Lose a leg, save a soul—a convenient text;
I call it Tea doctrine, not savouring of God.
When poor little Molly wants 'chastening,' why, next
The Archangel Michael might taste of the rod.

IV

But, to see the poor darling go limping for miles
To read books to sick people!—and just of an age
When girls learn the meaning of ribands and smiles!
Makes me feel like a squirrel that turns in a cage.
The more I push thinking the more I revolve:
I never get farther:- and as to her face,
It starts up when near on my puzzle I solve,
And says, 'This crush'd body seems such a sad case.'

V

Not that she's for complaining: she reads to earn pence;
And from those who can't pay, simple thanks are enough.
Does she leave lamentation for chaps without sense?
Howsoever, she's made up of wonderful stuff.
Ay, the soul in her body must be a stout cord;
She sings little hymns at the close of the day,
Though she has but three fingers to lift to the Lord,
And only one leg to kneel down with to pray.

Page 4813

VI

What I ask is, Why persecute such a poor dear,
If there's Law above all? Answer that if you can!
Irreligious I'm not; but I look on this sphere
As a place where a man should just think like a man.
It isn't fair dealing! But, contrariwise,
Do bullets in battle the wicked select?
Why, then it's all chance-work! And yet, in her eyes,
She holds a fixed something by which I am checked.

VII

Yonder riband of sunshine aslope on the wall,
If you eye it a minute 'll have the same look:
So kind! and so merciful! God of us all!
It's the very same lesson we get from the Book.
Then, is Life but a trial? Is that what is meant?
Some must toil, and some perish, for others below:
The injustice to each spreads a common content;
Ay! I've lost it again, for it can't be quite so.

VIII

She's the victim of fools: that seems nearer the mark.
On earth there are engines and numerous fools.
Why the Lord can permit them, we're still in the dark;
He does, and in some sort of way they're His tools.
It's a roundabout way, with respect let me add,
If Molly goes crippled that we may be taught:
But, perhaps, it's the only way, though it's so bad;
In that case we'll bow down our heads,—as we ought.

IX

But the worst of *me* is, that when I bow my head,
I perceive a thought wriggling away in the dust,
And I follow its tracks, quite forgetful, instead
Of humble acceptance: for, question I must!
Here's a creature made carefully—carefully made!
Put together with craft, and then stamped on, and why?
The answer seems nowhere: it's discord that's played.
The sky's a blue dish!—an implacable sky!

X

Stop a moment. I seize an idea from the pit.
They tell us that discord, though discord, alone,
Can be harmony when the notes properly fit:
Am I judging all things from a single false tone?
Is the Universe one immense Organ, that rolls
From devils to angels? I'm blind with the sight.
It pours such a splendour on heaps of poor souls!
I might try at kneeling with Molly to-night.

Poems by George Meredith — Volume 2

[This etext was prepared from the 1912 Times Book Club "Surrey" edition by David Price]

To J. M.

Let Fate or Insufficiency provide
Mean ends for men who what they are would be:
Penned in their narrow day no change they see
Save one which strikes the blow to brutes and pride.
Our faith is ours and comes not on a tide:
And whether Earth's great offspring, by decree,

Page 4814

Must rot if they abjure rapacity,
Not argument but effort shall decide.
They number many heads in that hard flock:
Trim swordsmen they push forth: yet try thy steel.
Thou, fighting for poor humankind, wilt feel
The strength of Roland in thy wrist to hew
A chasm sheer into the barrier rock,
And bring the army of the faithful through.

Lines to A friend visiting America

I

Now farewell to you! you are
One of my dearest, whom I trust:
Now follow you the Western star,
And cast the old world off as dust.

II

From many friends adieu! adieu!
The quick heart of the word therein.
Much that we hope for hangs with you:
We lose you, but we lose to win.

III

The beggar-king, November, frets:
His tatters rich with Indian dyes
Goes hugging: we our season’s debts
Pay calmly, of the Spring forewise.

IV

We send our worthiest; can no less,
If we would now be read aright, —
To that great people who may bless
Or curse mankind: they have the might.

V

The proudest seasons find their graves,
And we, who would not be wooed, must court.

We have let the blunderers and the waves
Divide us, and the devil had sport.

VI

The blunderers and the waves no more
Shall sever kindred sending forth
Their worthiest from shore to shore
For welcome, bent to prove their worth.

VII

Go you and such as you afloat,
Our lost kinsfellowship to revive.
The battle of the antidote
Is tough, though silent: may you thrive!

VIII

I, when in this North wind I see
The straining red woods blown awry,
Feel shuddering like the winter tree,
All vein and artery on cold sky.

IX

The leaf that clothed me is torn away;
My friend is as a flying seed.
Ay, true; to bring replenished day
Light ebbs, but I am bare, and bleed.

X

What husky habitations seem
These comfortable sayings! they fell,
In some rich year become a dream:-
So cries my heart, the infidel! . . .

XI

Oh! for the strenuous mind in quest,
Arabian visions could not vie
With those broad wonders of the West,
And would I bid you stay? Not I!

XII

The strange experimental land
Where men continually dare take
Niagara leaps;—unshattered stand
‘Twixt fall and fall;—for conscience’ sake,

XIII

Drive onward like a flood’s increase; —
Fresh rapids and abysms engage; —
(We live—we die) scorn fireside peace,
And, as a garment, put on rage,

Page 4815

XIV

Rather than bear God’s reprimand,
By rearing on a full fat soil
Concrete of sin and sloth;—this land,
You will observe it coil in coil.

XV

The land has been discover’d long,
The people we have yet to know;
Themselves they know not, save that strong
For good and evil still they grow.

XVI

Nor know they us. Yea, well enough
In that inveterate machine
Through which we speak the printed stuff
Daily, with voice most hugeous, mien

XVII

Tremendous:- as a lion’s show
The grand menagerie paintings hide:
Hear the drum beat, the trombones blow!
The poor old Lion lies inside! . . .

XVIII

It is not England that they hear,
But mighty Mammon’s pipers, trained
To trumpet out his moods, and stir
His sluggish soul: *Her* voice is chained:

XIX

Almost her spirit seems moribund!
O teach them, ’tis not she displays
The panic of a purse rotund,
Eternal dread of evil days, —

XX

That haunting spectre of success
Which shows a heart sunk low in the girths:
Not England answers nobleness, —
‘Live for thyself: thou art not earth’s.’

XXI

Not she, when struggling manhood tries
For freedom, air, a hopefuller fate,
Points out the planet, Compromise,
And shakes a mild reproving pate:

XXII

Says never: ’I am well at ease,
My sneers upon the weak I shed:
The strong have my cajoleries:
And those beneath my feet I tread.’

XXIII

Nay, but ’tis said for her, great Lord!
The misery’s there! The shameless one
Adjures mankind to sheathe the sword,
Herself not yielding what it won:-

XXIV

Her sermon at cock-crow doth preach,
On sweet Prosperity—or greed.
’Lo! as the beasts feed, each for each,
God’s blessings let us take, and feed!’

XXV

Ungrateful creatures crave a part —
She tells them firmly she is full;
Lost sheared sheep hurt her tender heart
With bleating, stops her ears with wool:-

XXVI

Seized sometimes by prodigious qualms
(Nightmares of bankruptcy and death), —
Showers down in lumps a load of alms,
Then pants as one who has lost a breath;

XXVII

Believes high heaven, whence favours flow,
Too kind to ask a sacrifice
For what it specially doth bestow; —
Gives *she*, 'tis generous, cheese to mice.

XXVIII

She saw the young Dominion strip
For battle with a grievous wrong,
And curled a noble Norman lip,
And looked with half an eye sidelong;

Page 4816

XXIX

And in stout Saxon wrote her sneers,
Denounced the waste of blood and coin,
Implored the combatants, with tears,
Never to think they could rejoin.

XXX

Oh! was it England that, alas!
Turned sharp the victor to cajole?
Behold her features in the glass:
A monstrous semblance mocks her soul!

XXXI

A false majority, by stealth,
Have got her fast, and sway the rod:
A headless tyrant built of wealth,
The hypocrite, the belly-God.

XXXII

To him the daily hymns they raise:
His tastes are sought: his will is done:
He sniffs the putrid steam of praise,
Place for true England here is none!

XXXIII

But can a distant race discern
The difference ’twixt her and him?
My friend, that will you bid them learn.
He shames and binds her, head and limb.

XXXIV

Old wood has blossoms of this sort.
Though sound at core, she is old wood.
If freemen hate her, one retort
She has; but one!—’You are my blood.’

XXXV

A poet, half a prophet, rose
In recent days, and called for power.
I love him; but his mountain prose —
His Alp and valley and wild flower —

XXXVI

Proclaimed our weakness, not its source.
What medicine for disease had he?
Whom summoned for a show of force?
Our titular aristocracy!

XXXVII

Why, these are great at City feasts;
From City riches mainly rise:
'Tis well to hear them, when the beasts
That die for us they eulogize!

XXXVIII

But these, of all the liveried crew
Obeisant in Mammon's walk,
Most deferent ply the facial screw,
The spinal bend, submissive talk.

XXXIX

Small fear that they will run to books
(At least the better form of seed)!
I, too, have hoped from their good looks,
And fables of their Northman breed; —

XL

Have hoped that they the land would head
In acts magnanimous; but, lo,
When fainting heroes beg for bread
They frown: where they are driven they go.

XLI

Good health, my friend! and may your lot
Be cheerful o'er the Western rounds.
This butter-woman's market-trot
Of verse is passing market-bounds.

XLII

Adieu! the sun sets; he is gone.
On banks of fog faint lines extend:
Adieu! bring back a braver dawn
To England, and to me my friend.

November 15th, 1867.

Time and sentiment

Page 4817

I see a fair young couple in a wood,
And as they go, one bends to take a flower,
That so may be embalmed their happy hour,
And in another day, a kindred mood,
Haply together, or in solitude,
Recovered what the teeth of Time devour,
The joy, the bloom, and the illusive power,
Wherewith by their young blood they are endued
To move all enviable, framed in May,
And of an aspect sisterly with Truth:
Yet seek they with Time's laughing things to wed:
Who will be prompted on some pallid day
To lift the hueless flower and show that dead,
Even such, and by this token, is their youth.

Lucifer in starlight

On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

The star Sirius

Bright Sirius! that when Orion pales
To dotlings under moonlight still art keen
With cheerful fervour of a warrior's mien
Who holds in his great heart the battle-scales:
Unquenched of flame though swift the flood assails,
Reducing many lustrous to the lean:
Be thou my star, and thou in me be seen
To show what source divine is, and prevails.
Long watches through, at one with godly night,
I mark thee planting joy in constant fire;

And thy quick beams, whose jets of life inspire
Life to the spirit, passion for the light,
Dark Earth since first she lost her lord from sight
Has viewed and felt them sweep her as a lyre.

Sense and spirit

The senses loving Earth or well or ill
Ravel yet more the riddle of our lot.
The mind is in their trammels, and lights not
By trimming fear-bred tales; nor does the will
To find in nature things which less may chill
An ardour that desires, unknowing what.
Till we conceive her living we go distraught,
At best but circle-windsails of a mill.
Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life
Creatively has given us blood and breath
For endless war and never wound unhealed,
The gloomy Wherefore of our battle-field
Solves in the Spirit, wrought of her through strife
To read her own and trust her down to death.

Page 4818

Earth’s secret

Not solitarily in fields we find
Earth’s secret open, though one page is there;
Her plainest, such as children spell, and share
With bird and beast; raised letters for the blind.
Not where the troubled passions toss the mind,
In turbid cities, can the key be bare.
It hangs for those who hither thither fare,
Close interthreading nature with our kind.
They, hearing History speak, of what men were,
And have become, are wise. The gain is great
In vision and solidity; it lives.
Yet at a thought of life apart from her,
Solidity and vision lose their state,
For Earth, that gives the milk, the spirit gives.

Internal harmony

Assured of worthiness we do not dread
Competitors; we rather give them hail
And greeting in the lists where we may fail:
Must, if we bear an aim beyond the head!
My betters are my masters: purely fed
By their sustainment I likewise shall scale
Some rocky steps between the mount and vale;
Meanwhile the mark I have and I will wed.
So that I draw the breath of finer air,
Station is nought, nor footways laurel-strewn,
Nor rivals tightly belted for the race.
Good speed to them! My place is here or there;
My pride is that among them I have place:
And thus I keep this instrument in tune.

Grace and love

Two flower-enfolding crystal vases she
I love fills daily, mindful but of one:
And close behind pale morn she, like the sun
Priming our world with light, pours, sweet to see,
Clear water in the cup, and into me
The image of herself: and that being done,
Choice of what blooms round her fair garden run
In climbers or in creepers or the tree

She ranges with unerring fingers fine,
To harmony so vivid that through sight
I hear, I have her heavenliness to fold
Beyond the senses, where such love as mine,
Such grace as hers, should the strange Fates withhold
Their starry more from her and me, unite.

Appreciation

Earth was not Earth before her sons appeared,
Nor Beauty Beauty ere young Love was born:
And thou when I lay hidden wast as morn
At city-windows, touching eyelids bleared;
To none by her fresh wingedness endeared;
Unwelcome unto revellers outworn.
I the last echoes of Diana's horn
In woodland heard, and saw thee come, and cheered.
No longer wast thou then mere light, fair soul!
And more than simple duty moved thy feet.
New colours rose in thee, from fear, from shame,
From hope, effused: though not less pure a scroll
May men read on the heart I taught to beat:
That change in thee, if not thyself, I claim.

Page 4819

The discipline of wisdom

Rich labour is the struggle to be wise,
While we make sure the struggle cannot cease.
Else better were it in some bower of peace
Slothful to swing, contending with the flies.
You point at Wisdom fixed on lofty skies,
As mid barbarian hordes a sculptured Greece:
She falls. To live and shine, she grows her fleece,
Is shorn, and rubs with follies and with lies.
So following her, your hewing may attain
The right to speak unto the mute, and shun
That sly temptation of the illumined brain,
Deliveries oracular, self-spun.
Who sweats not with the flock will seek in vain
To shed the words which are ripe fruit of sun.

The state of age

Rub thou thy battered lamp: nor claim nor beg
Honours from aught about thee. Light the young.
Thy frame is as a dusty mantle hung,
O grey one! pendant on a loosened peg.
Thou art for this our life an ancient egg,
Or a tough bird: thou hast a rudderless tongue,
Turning dead trifles, like the cock of dung,
Which runs, Time’s contrast to thy halting leg.
Nature, it is most sure, not thee admires.
But hast thou in thy season set her fires
To burn from Self to Spirit through the lash,
Honoured the sons of Earth shall hold thee high:
Yea, to spread light when thy proud letter I
Drops prone and void as any thoughtless dash.

Progress

In Progress you have little faith, say you:
Men will maintain dear interests, wreak base hates,
By force, and gentle women choose their mates
Most amorously from the gilded fighting crew:
The human heart Bellona’s mad halloo
Will ever fire to dicing with the Fates.
‘Now at this time,’ says History, ’those two States
Stood ready their past wrestling to renew.

They sharpened arms and showed them, like the brutes
Whose haunches quiver. But a yellow blight
Fell on their waxing harvests. They deferred
The bloody settlement of their disputes
Till God should bless them better.' They did right.
And naming Progress, both shall have the word.

The world's advance

Judge mildly the tasked world; and disincline
To brand it, for it bears a heavy pack.
You have perchance observed the inebriate's track
At night when he has quitted the inn-sign:
He plays diversions on the homeward line,
Still that way bent albeit his legs are slack:
A hedge may take him, but he turns not back,
Nor turns this burdened world, of curving spine.
'Spiral,' the memorable Lady terms
Our mind's ascent: our world's advance presents
That figure on a flat; the way of worms.
Cherish the promise of its good intents,
And warn it, not one instinct to efface
Ere Reason ripens for the vacant place.

Page 4820

A certain people

As Puritans they prominently wax,
And none more kindly gives and takes hard knocks.
Strong psalmic chanting, like to nasal cocks,
They join to thunderings of their hearty thwacks.
But naughtiness, with hoggery, not lacks
When Peace another door in them unlocks,
Where conscience shows the eyeing of an ox
Grown dully apprehensive of an Axe.
Graceless they are when gone to frivolousness,
Fearing the God they flout, the God they glut.
They need their pious exercises less
Than schooling in the Pleasures: fair belief
That these are devilish only to their thief,
Charged with an Axe nigh on the occiput.

The garden of Epicurus

That Garden of sedate Philosophy
Once flourished, fenced from passion and mishap,
A shining spot upon a shaggy map;
Where mind and body, in fair junction free,
Luted their joyful concord; like the tree
From root to flowering twigs a flowing sap.
Clear Wisdom found in tended Nature’s lap
Of gentlemen the happy nursery.
That Garden would on light supremest verge,
Were the long drawing of an equal breath
Healthful for Wisdom’s head, her heart, her aims.
Our world which for its Babels wants a scourge,
And for its wilds a husbandman, acclaims
The crucifix that came of Nazareth.

A later Alexandrian

An inspiration caught from dubious hues
Filled him, and mystic wrynesses he chased;
For they lead farther than the single-faced,
Wave subtler promise when desire pursues.
The moon of cloud discoloured was his Muse,
His pipe the reed of the old moaning waste.
Love was to him with anguish fast enlaced,
And Beauty where she walked blood-shot the dews.

Men railed at such a singer; women thrilled
Responsively: he sang not Nature's own
Divinest, but his lyric had a tone,
As 'twere a forest-echo of her voice:
What barrenly they yearn for seemed distilled
From what they dread, who do through tears rejoice.

An Orson of the muse

Her son, albeit the Muse's livery
And measured courtly paces rouse his taunts,
Naked and hairy in his savage haunts,
To Nature only will he bend the knee;
Spouting the founts of her distillery
Like rough rock-sources; and his woes and wants
Being Nature's, civil limitation daunts
His utterance never; the nymphs blush, not he.
Him, when he blows of Earth, and Man, and Fate,
The Muse will hearken to with graver ear
Than many of her train can waken: him
Would fain have taught what fruitful things and dear
Must sink beneath the tidewaves, of their weight,
If in no vessel built for sea they swim.

Page 4821

The point of taste

Unhappy poets of a sunken prime!
You to reviewers are as ball to bat.
They shadow you with Homer, knock you flat
With Shakespeare: bludgeons brainingly sublime
On you the excommunicates of Rhyme,
Because you sing not in the living Fat.
The wiry whizz of an intrusive gnat
Is verse that shuns their self-producing time.
Sound them their clocks, with loud alarum trump,
Or watches ticking temporal at their fobs,
You win their pleased attention. But, bright God
O' the lyre, what bully-drawlers they applaud!
Rather for us a tavern-catch, and bump
Chorus where Lumpkin with his Giles hobnobs.

CAMELUS SALTAT

What say you, critic, now you have become
An author and maternal?—in this trap
(To quote you) of poor hollow folk who rap
On instruments as like as drum to drum.
You snarled tut-tut for welcome to tum-tum,
So like the nose fly-teased in its noon's nap.
You scratched an insect-slaughtering thunder-clap
With that between the fingers and the thumb.
It seemeth mad to quit the Olympian couch,
Which bade our public gobble or reject.
O spectacle of Peter, shrewdly pecked,
Piper, by his own pepper from his pouch!
What of the sneer, the jeer, the voice austere,
You dealt?—the voice austere, the jeer, the sneer.

Continued

Oracle of the market! thence you drew
The taste which stamped you guide of the inept. —
A North-sea pilot, Hildebrand yclept,
A sturdy and a briny, once men knew.
He loved small beer, and for that copious brew,
To roll ingurgitation till he slept,
Rations exchanged with flavour for the adept:
And merrily plied him captain, mate and crew.

At last this dancer to the Polar star
Sank, washed out within, and overboard was pitched,
To drink the sea and pilot him to land.
O captain-critic! printed, neatly stitched,
Know while the pillory-eggs fly fast, they are
Not eggs, but the drowned soul of Hildebrand.

My theme

Of me and of my theme think what thou wilt:
The song of gladness one straight bolt can check.
But I have never stood at Fortune’s beck:
Were she and her light crew to run atilt
At my poor holding little would be spilt;
Small were the praise for singing o’er that wreck.
Who courts her dooms to strife his bended neck;
He grasps a blade, not always by the hilt.
Nathless she strikes at random, can be fell
With other than those votaries she deals
The black or brilliant from her thunder-rift.
I say but that this love of Earth reveals
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift.

Page 4822

Continued

’Tis true the wisdom that my mind exacts
Through contemplation from a heart unbent
By many tempests may be stained and rent:
The summer flies it mightily attracts.
Yet they seem choicer than your sons of facts,
Which scarce give breathing of the sty’s content
For their diurnal carnal nourishment:
Which treat with Nature in official pacts.
The deader body Nature could proclaim.
Much life have neither. Let the heavens of wrath
Rattle, then both scud scattering to froth.
But during calms the flies of idle aim
Less put the spirit out, less baffle thirst
For light than swinish grunters, blest or curst.

On the danger of war

Avert, High Wisdom, never vainly wooed,
This threat of War, that shows a land brain-sick.
When nations gain the pitch where rhetoric
Seems reason they are ripe for cannon’s food.
Dark looms the issue though the cause be good,
But with the doubt ’tis our old devil’s trick.
O now the down-slope of the lunatic
Illumine lest we redden of that brood.
For not since man in his first view of thee
Ascended to the heavens giving sign
Within him of deep sky and sounded sea,
Did he unforfeiting thy laws transgress;
In peril of his blood his ears incline
To drums whose loudness is their emptiness.

To cardinal manning

I, wakeful for the skylark voice in men,
Or straining for the angel of the light,
Rebuked am I by hungry ear and sight,
When I behold one lamp that through our fen
Goes hourly where most noisome; hear again
A tongue that loathsomeness will not affright
From speaking to the soul of us forthright
What things our craven senses keep from ken.

This is the doing of the Christ; the way
He went on earth; the service above guile
To prop a tyrant creed: it sings, it shines;
Cries to the Mammonites: Allay, allay
Such misery as by these present signs
Brings vengeance down; nor them who rouse revile.

To colonel Charles (dying general C.B.B.)

I

An English heart, my commandant,
A soldier’s eye you have, awake
To right and left; with looks askant
On bulwarks not of adamant,
Where white our Channel waters break.

II

Where Grisnez winks at Dungeness
Across the ruffled strip of salt,
You look, and like the prospect less.
On men and guns would you lay stress,
To bid the Island’s foemen halt.

III

While loud the Year is raising cry
At birth to know if it must bear
In history the bloody dye,
An English heart, a soldier’s eye,
For the old country first will care.

Page 4823

IV

And how stands she, artillerist,
Among the vapours waxing dense,
With cannon charged? ’Tis hist! and hist!
And now she screws a gouty fist,
And now she counts to clutch her pence.

V

With shudders chill as aconite,
The couchant chewer of the cud
Will start at times in pussy fright
Before the dogs, when reads her sprite
The streaks predicting streams of blood.

VI

She thinks they may mean something; thinks
They may mean nothing: haply both.
Where darkness all her daylight drinks,
She fain would find a leader lynx,
Not too much taxing mental sloth.

VII

Cleft like the fated house in twain,
One half is, Arm! and one, Retrench!
Gambetta’s word on dull MacMahon:
‘The cow that sees a passing train’:
So spies she Russian, German, French.

VIII

She? no, her weakness: she unbraced
Among those athletes fronting storms!
The muscles less of steel than paste,
Why, they of nature feel distaste
For flash, much more for push, of arms.

IX

The poet sings, and well know we,
That ‘iron draws men after it.’
But towering wealth may seem the tree

Which bears the fruit *indemnity*,
And draw as fast as battle's fit,

X

If feeble be the hand on guard,
Alas, alas! And nations are
Still the mad forces, though the scarred.
Should they once deem our emblem Pard
Wagger of tail for all save war; —

XI

Mechanically screwed to flail
His flanks by Presses conjuring fear; —
A money-bag with head and tail; —
Too late may valour then avail!
As you beheld, my cannonier,

XII

When with the staff of Benedek,
On the plateau of Koniggratz,
You saw below that wedgeing speck;
Foresaw proud Austria rammed to wreck,
Where Chlum drove deep in smoky jets.

February 1887.

To children: For tyrants

I

Strike not thy dog with a stick!
I did it yesterday:
Not to undo though I gained
The Paradise: heavy it rained
On Kobold's flanks, and he lay.

II

Little Bruno, our long-ear pup,
From his hunt had come back to my heel.
I heard a sharp worrying sound,
And Bruno foamed on the ground,
With Koby as making a meal.

III

I did what I could not undo
Were the gates of the Paradise shut
Behind me: I deemed it was just.
I left Koby crouched in the dust,
Some yards from the woodman’s hut.

Page 4824

IV

He bewhimpered his welting, and I
Scarce thought it enough for him: so,
By degrees, through the upper box-grove,
Within me an old story hove,
Of a man and a dog: you shall know.

V

The dog was of novel breed,
The Shannon retriever, untried:
His master, an old Irish lord,
In an oaken armchair snored
At midnight, whisky beside.

VI

Perched up a desolate tower,
Where the black storm-wind was a whip
To set it nigh spinning, these two
Were alone, like the last of a crew,
Outworn in a wave-beaten ship.

VII

The dog lifted muzzle, and sniffed;
He quitted his couch on the rug,
Nose to floor, nose aloft; whined, barked;
And, finding the signals unmarked,
Caught a hand in a death-grapple tug.

VIII

He pulled till his master jumped
For fury of wrath, and laid on
With the length of a tough knotted staff,
Fit to drive the life flying like chaff,
And leave a sheer carcase anon.

IX

That done, he sat, panted, and cursed
The vile cross of this brute: nevermore
Would he house it to rear such a cur!

The dog dragged his legs, pained to stir,
Eyed his master, dropped, barked at the door.

X

Then his master raised head too, and sniffed:
It struck him the dog had a sense
That honoured both dam and sire.
You have guessed how the tower was afire.
The Shannon retriever dates thence.

XI

I mused: saw the pup ease his heart
Of his instinct for chasing, and sink
Overwrought by excitement so new:
A scene that for Koby to view
Was the seizure of nerves in a link.

XII

And part sympathetic, and part
Imitatively, raged my poor brute;
And I, not thinking of ill,
Doing eviller: nerves are still
Our savage too quick at the root.

XIII

They spring us: I proved it, albeit
I played executioner then
For discipline, justice, the like.
Yon stick I had handy to strike
Should have warned of the tyrant in men.

XIV

You read in your History books,
How the Prince in his youth had a mind
For governing gently his land.
Ah, the use of that weapon at hand,
When the temper is other than kind!

XV

At home all was well; Koby's ribs
Not so sore as my thoughts: if, beguiled,
He forgives me, his criminal air

Throws a shade of Llewellyn’s despair
For the hound slain for saving his child.

Page 4825

The woods of Westermain

I

Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.
Nothing harms beneath the leaves
More than waves a swimmer cleaves.
Toss your heart up with the lark,
Foot at peace with mouse and worm,
Fair you fare.
Only at a dread of dark
Quaver, and they quit their form:
Thousand eyeballs under hoods
Have you by the hair.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.

II

Here the snake across your path
Stretches in his golden bath:
Mossy-footed squirrels leap
Soft as winnowing plumes of Sleep:
Yaffles on a chuckle skim
Low to laugh from branches dim:
Up the pine, where sits the star,
Rattles deep the moth-winged jar.
Each has business of his own;
But should you distrust a tone,
Then beware.
Shudder all the haunted roods,
All the eyeballs under hoods
Shroud you in their glare.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.

III

Open hither, open hence,
Scarce a bramble weaves a fence,
Where the strawberry runs red,
With white star-flower overhead;
Cumbered by dry twig and cone,

Shredded husks of seedlings flown,
Mine of mole and spotted flint:
Of dire wizardry no hint,
Save mayhap the print that shows
Hasty outward-tripping toes,
Heels to terror on the mould.
These, the woods of Westermain,
Are as others to behold,
Rich of wreathing sun and rain;
Foliage lustreful around
Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound.
Wavy tree-tops, yellow whins,
Shelter eager minikins,
Myriads, free to peck and pipe:
Would you better? would you worse?
You with them may gather ripe
Pleasures flowing not from purse.
Quick and far as Colour flies
Taking the delighted eyes,
You of any well that springs
May unfold the heaven of things;
Have it homely and within,
And thereof its likeness win,
Will you so in soul's desire:
This do sages grant t' the lyre.
This is being bird and more,
More than glad musician this;
Granaries you will have a store
Past the world of woe and bliss;
Sharing still its bliss and woe;
Harnessed to its hungers, no.
On the throne Success usurps,
You shall seat the joy you feel
Where a race of water chirps,
Twisting hues of flourished steel:
Or where light is caught in hoop
Up a clearing's leafy rise,
Where the crossing deerherds troop
Classic splendours, knightly dyes.
Or, where old-eyed oxen chew

Page 4826

Speculation with the cud,
Read their pool of vision through,
Back to hours when mind was mud;
Nigh the knot, which did untwine
Timelessly to drowsy suns;
Seeing Earth a slimy spine,
Heaven a space for winging tons.
Farther, deeper, may you read,
Have you sight for things afield,
Where peeps she, the Nurse of seed,
Cloaked, but in the peep revealed;
Showing a kind face and sweet:
Look you with the soul you see't.
Glory narrowing to grace,
Grace to glory magnified,
Following that will you embrace
Close in arms or aery wide.
Banished is the white Foam-born
Not from here, nor under ban
Phoebus lyrist, Phoebe's horn,
Pipings of the reedy Pan.
Loved of Earth of old they were,
Loving did interpret her;
And the sterner worship bars
None whom Song has made her stars.
You have seen the huntress moon
Radiantly facing dawn,
Dusky meads between them strewn
Glimmering like downy awn:
Argent Westward glows the hunt,
East the blush about to climb;
One another fair they front,
Transient, yet outshine the time;
Even as dewlight off the rose
In the mind a jewel sows.
Thus opposing grandeurs live
Here if Beauty be their dower:
Doth she of her spirit give,
Fleetingness will spare her flower.
This is in the tune we play,
Which no spring of strength would quell;

In subduing does not slay;
Guides the channel, guards the well:
Tempered holds the young blood-heat,
Yet through measured grave accord,
Hears the heart of wildness beat
Like a centaur’s hoof on sward.
Drink the sense the notes infuse,
You a larger self will find:
Sweetest fellowship ensues
With the creatures of your kind.
Ay, and Love, if Love it be
Flaming over I and *me*,
Love meet they who do not shove
Cravings in the van of Love.
Courtly dames are here to woo,
Knowing love if it be true.
Reverence the blossom-shoot
Fervently, they are the fruit.
Mark them stepping, hear them talk,
Goddess, is no myth inane,
You will say of those who walk
In the woods of Westermain.
Waters that from throat and thigh
Dart the sun his arrows back;
Leaves that on a woodland sigh
Chat of secret things no lack;
Shadowy branch-leaves, waters clear,
Bare or veiled they move sincere;
Not by slavish terrors tripped
Being anew in nature dipped,
Growths of what they step on, these;
With the roots the grace of trees.
Casket-breasts they give, nor hide,
For a tyrant’s

Page 4827

flattered pride,
Mind, which nourished not by light,
Lurks the shuffling trickster sprite:
Whereof are strange tales to tell;
Some in blood writ, tombed in bell.
Here the ancient battle ends,
Joining two astonished friends,
Who the kiss can give and take
With more warmth than in that world
Where the tiger claws the snake,
Snake her tiger clasps infurled,
And the issue of their fight
People lands in snarling plight.
Here her splendid beast she leads
Silken-leashed and decked with weeds
Wild as he, but breathing faint
Sweetness of unfelt constraint.
Love, the great volcano, flings
Fires of lower Earth to sky;
Love, the sole permitted, sings
Sovereignly of *me* and I.
Bowers he has of sacred shade,
Spaces of superb parade,
Voiceful . . . But bring you a note
Wrangling, howsoe'er remote,
Discords out of discord spin
Round and round derisive din:
Sudden will a pallor pant
Chill at screeches miscreant;
Owls or spectres, thick they flee;
Nightmare upon horror broods;
Hooded laughter, monkish glee,
Gaps the vital air.
Enter these enchanted woods
You who dare.

IV

You must love the light so well
That no darkness will seem fell.
Love it so you could accost
Fellowly a livid ghost.
Whish! the phantom wisps away,
Owns him smoke to cocks of day.

In your breast the light must burn
Fed of you, like corn in quern
Ever plumping while the wheel
Speeds the mill and drains the meal.
Light to light sees little strange,
Only features heavenly new;
Then you touch the nerve of Change,
Then of Earth you have the clue;
Then her two-sexed meanings melt
Through you, wed the thought and felt.
Sameness locks no scurfy pond
Here for Custom, crazy-fond:
Change is on the wing to bud
Rose in brain from rose in blood.
Wisdom throbbing shall you see
Central in complexity;
From her pasture ’mid the beasts
Rise to her ethereal feasts,
Not, though lightnings track your wit
Starward, scorning them you quit:
For be sure the bravest wing
Preens it in our common spring,
Thence along the vault to soar,
You with others, gathering more,
Glad of more, till you reject
Your proud title of elect,
Perilous even here while few
Roam the arched greenwood with you.
Heed that snare.
Muffled by his cavern-cowl
Squats the scaly Dragon-fowl,
Who was lord ere light you drank,
And lest blood of knightly rank
Stream, let not your

Page 4828

fair princess
Stray: he holds the leagues in stress,
Watches keenly there.
Oft has he been riven; slain
Is no force in Westermain.
Wait, and we shall forge him curbs,
Put his fangs to uses, tame,
Teach him, quick as cunning herbs,
How to cure him sick and lame.
Much restricted, much enringed,
Much he frets, the hooked and winged,
Never known to spare.
’Tis enough: the name of Sage
Hits no thing in nature, nought;
Man the least, save when grave Age
From yon Dragon guards his thought.
Eye him when you hearken dumb
To what words from Wisdom come.
When she says how few are by
Listening to her, eye his eye.
Self, his name declare.
Him shall Change, transforming late,
Wonderously renovate.
Hug himself the creature may:
What he hugs is loathed decay.
Crying, slip thy scales, and slough!
Change will strip his armour off;
Make of him who was all maw,
Inly only thrilling-shrewd,
Such a servant as none saw
Through his days of dragonhood.
Days when growling o’er his bone,
Sharpened he for mine and thine;
Sensitive within alone;
Scaly as the bark of pine.
Change, the strongest son of Life,
Has the Spirit here to wife.
Lo, their young of vivid breed,
Bear the lights that onward speed,
Threading thickets, mounting glades,
Up the verdurous colonnades,
Round the fluttered curves, and down,
Out of sight of Earth’s blue crown,

Whither, in her central space,
Spouts the Fount and Lure o’ the chase.
Fount unresting, Lure divine!
There meet all: too late look most.
Fire in water hued as wine,
Springs amid a shadowy host,
Circled: one close-headed mob,
Breathless, scanning divers heaps,
Where a Heart begins to throb,
Where it ceases, slow, with leaps.
And ’tis very strange, ’tis said,
How you spy in each of them
Semblance of that Dragon red,
As the oak in bracken-stem.
And, ’tis said, how each and each:
Which commences, which subsides:
First my Dragon! doth beseech
Her who food for all provides.
And she answers with no sign;
Utters neither yea nor nay;
Fires the water hued as wine;
Kneads another spark in clay.
Terror is about her hid;
Silence of the thunders locked;
Lightnings lining the shut lid;
Fixity on quaking rocked.
Lo, you look at Flow and Drought
Interflashed and interwrought:
Ended is begun, begun
Ended, quick as torrents run.
Young Impulsion spouts to sink;
Luridness and lustre

Page 4829

link;
’Tis your come and go of breath;
Mirrored pants the Life, the Death;
Each of either reaped and sown:
Rosiest rosy wanes to crone.
See you so? your senses drift;
’Tis a shuttle weaving swift.
Look with spirit past the sense,
Spirit shines in permanence.
That is She, the view of whom
Is the dust within the tomb,
Is the inner blush above,
Look to loathe, or look to love;
Think her Lump, or know her Flame;
Dread her scourge, or read her aim;
Shoot your hungers from their nerve;
Or, in her example, serve.
Some have found her sitting grave;
Laughing, some; or, browed with sweat,
Hurling dust of fool and knave
In a hissing smithy’s jet.
More it were not well to speak;
Burn to see, you need but seek.
Once beheld she gives the key
Airing every doorway, she.
Little can you stop or steer
Ere of her you are the seer.
On the surface she will witch,
Rendering Beauty yours, but gaze
Under, and the soul is rich
Past computing, past amaze.
Then is courage that endures
Even her awful tremble yours.
Then, the reflex of that Fount
Spied below, will Reason mount
Lordly and a quenchless force,
Lighting Pain to its mad source,
Scaring Fear till Fear escapes,
Shot through all its phantom shapes.
Then your spirit will perceive
Fleshly seed of fleshly sins;
Where the passions interweave,
How the serpent tangle spins

Of the sense of Earth misprised,
Brainlessly unrecognized;
She being Spirit in her clods,
Footway to the God of Gods.
Then for you are pleasures pure,
Sureties as the stars are sure:
Not the wanton beckoning flags
Which, of flattery and delight,
Wax to the grim Habit-Hags
Riding souls of men to night:
Pleasures that through blood run sane,
Quickening spirit from the brain.
Each of each in sequent birth,
Blood and brain and spirit, three,
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),
Join for true felicity.
Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing will be wrecked:
Separate hunting are they sped,
Scan the morsel coveted.
Earth that Triad is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union.
Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
You command a double realm;
Labouring here to pay your debt,
Till your little sun shall set;
Leaving her the future task:
Loving her too well to ask.
Eglantine that climbs the yew,
She her darkest wreathes for those

Page 4830

Knowing her the Ever-new,
And themselves the kin o’ the rose.
Life, the chisel, axe and sword,
Wield who have her depths explored:
Life, the dream, shall be their robe
Large as air about the globe;
Life, the question, hear its cry
Echoed with concordant Why;
Life, the small self-dragon ramped,
Thrill for service to be stamped.
Ay, and over every height
Life for them shall wave a wand:
That, the last, where sits affright,
Homely shows the stream beyond.
Love the light and be its lynx,
You will track her and attain;
Read her as no cruel Sphinx
In the woods of Westermain,
Daily fresh the woods are ranged;
Glooms which otherwhere appal,
Sounded: here, their worths exchanged
Urban joins with pastoral:
Little lost, save what may drop
Husk-like, and the mind preserves.
Natural overgrowths they lop,
Yet from nature neither swerves,
Trained or savage: for this cause:
Of our Earth they ply the laws,
Have in Earth their feeding root,
Mind of man and bent of brute.
Hear that song; both wild and ruled.
Hear it: is it wail or mirth?
Ordered, bubbled, quite unschooled?
None, and all: it springs of Earth.
O but hear it! ’tis the mind;
Mind that with deep Earth unites,
Round the solid trunk to wind
Rings of clasping parasites.
Music have you there to feed
Simplest and most soaring need.
Free to wind, and in desire

Winding, they to her attached
Feel the trunk a spring of fire,
And ascend to heights unmatched,
Whence the tidal world is viewed
As a sea of windy wheat,
Momently black, barren, rude;
Golden-brown, for harvest meet,
Dragon-reaped from folly-sown;
Bride-like to the sickle-blade:
Quick it varies, while the moan,
Moan of a sad creature strayed,
Chiefly is its voice. So flesh
Conjures tempest-flails to thresh
Good from worthless. Some clear lamps
Light it; more of dead marsh-damps.
Monster is it still, and blind,
Fit but to be led by Pain.
Glance we at the paths behind,
Fruitful sight has Westermain.
There we laboured, and in turn
Forward our blown lamps discern,
As you see on the dark deep
Far the loftier billows leap,
Foam for beacon bear.
Hither, hither, if you will,
Drink instruction, or instil,
Run the woods like vernal sap,
Crying, hail to luminousness!
But have care.
In yourself may lurk the trap:
On conditions they caress.
Here you meet the light invoked
Here is never secret

Page 4831

cloaked.
Doubt you with the monster’s fry
All his orbit may exclude;
Are you of the stiff, the dry,
Cursing the not understood;
Grasp you with the monster’s claws;
Govern with his truncheon-saws;
Hate, the shadow of a grain;
You are lost in Westermain:
Earthward swoops a vulture sun,
Nighted upon carrion:
Straightway venom wine-cups shout
Toasts to One whose eyes are out:
Flowers along the reeling floor
Drip henbane and hellebore:
Beauty, of her tresses shorn,
Shrieks as nature’s maniac:
Hideousness on hoof and horn
Tumbles, yapping in her track:
Haggard Wisdom, stately once,
Leers fantastical and trips:
Allegory drums the sconce,
Impiousness nibblenips.
Imp that dances, imp that flits,
Imp o’ the demon-growing girl,
Maddest! whirl with imp o’ the pits
Round you, and with them you whirl
Fast where pours the fountain-rout
Out of Him whose eyes are out:
Multitudes on multitudes,
Drenched in wallowing devilry:
And you ask where you may be,
In what reek of a lair
Given to bones and ogre-broods:
And they yell you Where.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.

A ballad of past meridian

I

Last night returning from my twilight walk
I met the grey mist Death, whose eyeless brow

Was bent on me, and from his hand of chalk
He reached me flowers as from a withered bough:
O Death, what bitter nosegays givest thou!

II

Death said, I gather, and pursued his way.
Another stood by me, a shape in stone,
Sword-hacked and iron-stained, with breasts of clay,
And metal veins that sometimes fiery shone:
O Life, how naked and how hard when known!

III

Life said, As thou hast carved me, such am I.
Then memory, like the nightjar on the pine,
And sightless hope, a woodlark in night sky,
Joined notes of Death and Life till night's decline
Of Death, of Life, those inwound notes are mine.

The day of the daughter of Hades

I

He who has looked upon Earth
Deeper than flower and fruit,
Losing some hue of his mirth,
As the tree striking rock at the root,
Unto him shall the marvellous tale
Of Callistes more humanly come
With the touch on his breast than a hail
From the markets that hum.

II

Now the youth footed swift to the dawn.
'Twas the season when wintertide,
In the higher rock-hollows updrawn,
Leaves meadows to bud, and he spied,
By light throwing shallow

Page 4832

shade,
Between the beam and the gloom,
Sicilian Enna, whose Maid
Such aspect wears in her bloom
Underneath since the Charioteer
Of Darkness whirled her away,
On a reaped afternoon of the year,
Nigh the poppy-droop of Day.
O and naked of her, all dust,
The majestic Mother and Nurse,
Ringing cries to the God, the Just,
Curled the land with the blight of her curse:
Recollected of this glad isle
Still quaking. But now more fair,
And momently fraying the while
The veil of the shadows there,
Soft Enna that prostrate grief
Sang through, and revealed round the vines,
Bronze-orange, the crisp young leaf,
The wheat-blades tripping in lines,
A hue unillumined by sun
Of the flowers flooding grass as from founts:
All the penetrable dun
Of the morn ere she mounts.

III

Nor had saffron and sapphire and red
Waved aloft to their sisters below,
When gaped by the rock-channel head
Of the lake, black, a cave at one blow,
Reverberant over the plain:
A sound oft fearfully swung
For the coming of wrathful rain:
And forth, like the dragon-tongue
Of a fire beaten flat by the gale,
But more as the smoke to behold,
A chariot burst. Then a wail
Quivered high of the love that would fold
Bliss immeasurable, bigger than heart,
Though a God's: and the wheels were stayed,
And the team of the chariot swart
Reared in marble, the six, dismayed,
Like hoofs that by night plashing sea

Curve and ramp from the vast swan-wave:
For, lo, the Great Mother, She!
And Callistes gazed, he gave
His eyeballs up to the sight:
The embrace of the Twain, of whom
To men are their day, their night,
Mellow fruits and the shearing tomb:
Our Lady of the Sheaves
And the Lily of Hades, the Sweet
Of Enna: he saw through leaves
The Mother and Daughter meet.
They stood by the chariot-wheel,
Embraced, very tall, most like
Fellow poplars, wind-taken, that reel
Down their shivering columns and strike
Head to head, crossing throats: and apart,
For the feast of the look, they drew,
Which Darkness no longer could thwart;
And they broke together anew,
Exulting to tears, flower and bud.
But the mate of the Rayless was grave:
She smiled like Sleep on its flood,
That washes of all we crave:
Like the trance of eyes awake
And the spirit enshrouded, she cast
The wan underworld on the lake.
They were so, and they passed.

IV

He tells it, who knew the law
Upon mortals: he stood alive
Declaring that this he saw:
He could see, and survive.

Page 4833

V

Now the youth was not ware of the beams
With the grasses intertwined,
For each thing seen, as in dreams,
Came stepping to rear through his mind,
Till it struck his remembered prayer
To be witness of this which had flown
Like a smoke melted thinner than air,
That the vacancy doth disown.
And viewing a maiden, he thought
It might now be morn, and afar
Within him the memory wrought
Of a something that slipped from the car
When those, the august, moved by:
Perchance a scarf, and perchance
This maiden. She did not fly,
Nor started at his advance:
She looked, as when infinite thirst
Pants pausing to bless the springs,
Refreshed, unsated. Then first
He trembled with awe of the things
He had seen; and he did transfer,
Divining and doubting in turn,
His reverence unto her;
Nor asked what he crouched to learn:
The whence of her, whither, and why
Her presence there, and her name,
Her parentage: under which sky
Her birth, and how hither she came,
So young, a virgin, alone,
Unfriended, having no fear,
As Oreads have; no moan,
Like the lost upon earth; no tear;
Not a sign of the torch in the blood,
Though her stature had reached the height
When mantles a tender rud
In maids that of youths have sight,
If maids of our seed they be:
For he said: A glad vision art thou!
And she answered him: Thou to me!
As men utter a vow.

VI

Then said she, quick as the cries
Of the rainy cranes: Light! light!
And Helios rose in her eyes,
That were full as the dew-balls bright,
Relucent to him as dews
Unshaded. Breathing, she sent
Her voice to the God of the Muse,
And along the vale it went,
Strange to hear: not thin, not shrill:
Sweet, but no young maid's throat:
The echo beyond the hill
Ran falling on half the note:
And under the shaken ground
Where the Hundred-headed groans
By the roots of great AEtna bound,
As of him were hollow tones
Of wondering roared: a tale
Repeated to sunless halls.
But now off the face of the vale
Shadows fled in a breath, and the walls
Of the lake's rock-head were gold,
And the breast of the lake, that swell
Of the crestless long wave rolled
To shore-bubble, pebble and shell.
A morning of radiant lids
O'er the dance of the earth opened wide:
The bees chose their flowers, the snub kids
Upon hindlegs went sportive, or plied,
Nosing, hard at the dugs to be filled:
There was milk, honey,

Page 4834

music to make:
Up their branches the little birds billed:
Chirrup, drone, bleat and buzz ringed the lake.
O shining in sunlight, chief
After water and water's caress,
Was the young bronze-orange leaf,
That clung to the tree as a tress,
Shooting lucid tendrils to wed
With the vine-hook tree or pole,
Like Arachne launched out on her thread.
Then the maiden her dusky stole
In the span of the black-starred zone,
Gathered up for her footing fleet.
As one that had toil of her own
She followed the lines of wheat
Tripping straight through the fields, green blades,
To the groves of olive grey,
Downy-grey, golden-tinged: and to glades
Where the pear-blossom thickens the spray
In a night, like the snow-packed storm:
Pear, apple, almond, plum:
Not wintry now: pushing, warm!
And she touched them with finger and thumb,
As the vine-hook closes: she smiled,
Recounting again and again,
Corn, wine, fruit, oil! like a child,
With the meaning known to men.
For hours in the track of the plough
And the pruning-knife she stepped,
And of how the seed works, and of how
Yields the soil, she seemed adept.
Then she murmured that name of the dearth,
The Beneficent, Hers, who bade
Our husbandmen sow for the birth
Of the grain making earth full glad.
She murmured that Other's: the dirge
Of life-light: for whose dark lap
Our locks are clipped on the verge
Of the realm where runs no sap.
She said: We have looked on both!
And her eyes had a wavering beam
Of various lights, like the froth
Of the storm-swollen ravine stream

In flame of the bolt. What links
Were these which had made him her friend?
He eyed her, as one who drinks,
And would drink to the end.

VII

Now the meadows with crocus besprent,
And the asphodel woodsides she left,
And the lake-slopes, the ravishing scent
Of narcissus, dark-sweet, for the cleft
That tutors the torrent-brook,
Delaying its forceful spleen
With many a wind and crook
Through rock to the broad ravine.
By the hyacinth-bells in the brakes,
And the shade-loved white windflower, half hid,
And the sun-loving lizards and snakes
On the cleft's barren ledges, that slid
Out of sight, smooth as waterdrops, all,
At a snap of twig or bark
In the track of the foreign foot-fall,
She climbed to the pineforest dark,
Overbrowing an emerald chine
Of the grass-billows. Thence, as a wreath,
Running poplar and cypress to pine,
The lake-banks are seen,

Page 4835

and beneath,
Vineyard, village, groves, rivers, towers, farms,
The citadel watching the bay,
The bay with the town in its arms,
The town shining white as the spray
Of the sapphire sea-wave on the rock,
Where the rock stars the girdle of sea,
White-ringed, as the midday flock,
Clipped by heat, rings the round of the tree.
That hour of the piercing shaft
Transfixes bough-shadows, confused
In veins of fire, and she laughed,
With her quiet mouth amused
To see the whole flock, adroop,
Asleep, hug the tree-stem as one,
Imperceptibly filling the loop
Of its shade at a slant of sun.
The pipes under pent of the crag,
Where the goatherds in piping recline,
Have whimsical stops, burst and flag
Uncorrected as outstretched swine:
For the fingers are slack and unsure,
And the wind issues querulous:- thorns
And snakes!—but she listened demure,
Comparing day’s music with morn’s.
Of the gentle spirit that slips
From the bark of the tree she discoursed,
And of her of the wells, whose lips
Are coolness enchanting, rock-sourced.
And much of the sacred loon,
The frolic, the Goatfoot God,
For stories of indolent noon
In the pineforest’s odorous nod,
She questioned, not knowing: he can
Be waspish, irascible, rude,
He is oftener friendly to man,
And ever to beasts and their brood.
For the which did she love him well,
She said, and his pipes of the reed,
His twitched lips puffing to tell
In music his tears and his need,
Against the sharp catch of his hurt.
Not as shepherds of Pan did she speak,

Nor spake as the schools, to divert,
But fondly, perceiving him weak
Before Gods, and to shepherds a fear,
A holiness, horn and heel.
All this she had learnt in her ear
From Callistes, and taught him to feel.
Yea, the solemn divinity flushed
Through the shaggy brown skin of the beast,
And the steeps where the cataract rushed,
And the wilds where the forest is priest,
Were his temple to clothe him in awe,
While she spake: 'twas a wonder: she read
The haunts of the beak and the claw
As plain as the land of bread,
But Cities and martial States,
Whither soon the youth veered his theme,
Were impervious barrier-gates
To her: and that ship, a trireme,
Nearing harbour, scarce wakened her glance,
Though he dwelt on the message it bore
Of sceptre and sword and lance
To the bee-swarms black on the shore,
Which were audible almost,
So black they were. It befel
That he called up the warrior host

Page 4836

Of the Song pouring hydromel
In thunder, the wide-winged Song.
And he named with his boyish pride
The heroes, the noble throng
Past Acheron now, foul tide!
With his joy of the godlike band
And the verse divine, he named
The chiefs pressing hot on the strand,
Seen of Gods, of Gods aided, and maimed.
The fleetfoot and ireful; the King;
Him, the prompter in stratagem,
Many-shifted and masterful: Sing,
O Muse! But she cried: Not of them
She breathed as if breath had failed,
And her eyes, while she bade him desist,
Held the lost-to-light ghosts grey-mailed,
As you see the grey river-mist
Hold shapes on the yonder bank.
A moment her body waned,
The light of her sprang and sank:
Then she looked at the sun, she regained
Clear feature, and she breathed deep.
She wore the wan smile he had seen,
As the flow of the river of Sleep,
On the mouth of the Shadow-Queen.
In sunlight she craved to bask,
Saying: Life! And who was she? who?
Of what issue? He dared not ask,
For that partly he knew.

VIII

A noise of the hollow ground
Turned the eye to the ear in debate:
Not the soft overflowing of sound
Of the pines, ranked, lofty, straight,
Barely swayed to some whispers remote,
Some swarming whispers above:
Not the pines with the faint airs afloat,
Hush-hushing the nested dove:
It was not the pines, or the rout
Oft heard from mid-forest in chase,

But the long muffled roar of a shout
Subterranean. Sharp grew her face.
She rose, yet not moved by affright;
’Twas rather good haste to use
Her holiday of delight
In the beams of the God of the Muse.
And the steeps of the forest she crossed,
On its dry red sheddings and cones
Up the paths by roots green-mossed,
Spotted amber, and old mossed stones.
Then out where the brook-torrent starts
To her leap, and from bend to curve
A hurrying elbow darts
For the instant-glancing swerve,
Decisive, with violent will
In the action formed, like hers,
The maiden’s, ascending; and still
Ascending, the bud of the furze,
The broom, and all blue-berried shoots
Of stubborn and prickly kind,
The juniper flat on its roots,
The dwarf rhododaphne, behind
She left, and the mountain sheep
Far behind, goat, herbage and flower.
The island was hers, and the deep,
All heaven, a golden hour.
Then with wonderful voice, that rang
Through air as the swan’s nigh death,
Of the glory of Light she sang,
She sang of the rapture

Page 4837

of Breath.
Nor ever, says he who heard,
Heard Earth in her boundaries broad,
From bosom of singer or bird
A sweetness thus rich of the God
Whose harmonies always are sane.
She sang of furrow and seed,
The burial, birth of the grain,
The growth, and the showers that feed,
And the green blades waxing mature
For the husbandman's armful brown.
O, the song in its burden ran pure,
And burden to song was a crown.
Callistes, a singer, skilled
In the gift he could measure and praise,
By a rival's art was thrilled,
Though she sang but a Song of Days,
Where the husbandman's toil and strife
Little varies to strife and toil:
But the milky kernel of life,
With her numbered: corn, wine, fruit, oil
The song did give him to eat:
Gave the first rapt vision of Good,
And the fresh young sense of Sweet
The grace of the battle for food,
With the issue Earth cannot refuse
When men to their labour are sworn.
'Twas a song of the God of the Muse
To the forehead of Morn.

IX

Him loved she. Lo, now was he veiled:
Over sea stood a swelled cloud-rack:
The fishing-boat heavenward sailed,
Bent abeam, with a whitened track,
Surprised, fast hauling the net,
As it flew: sea dashed, earth shook.
She said: Is it night? O not yet!
With a travail of thoughts in her look.
The mountain heaved up to its peak:
Sea darkened: earth gathered her fowl;
Of bird or of branch rose the shriek.
Night? but never so fell a scowl

Wore night, nor the sky since then
When ocean ran swallowing shore,
And the Gods looked down for men.
Broke tempest with that stern roar
Never yet, save when black on the whirl
Rode wrath of a sovereign Power.
Then the youth and the shuddering girl,
Dim as shades in the angry shower,
Joined hands and descended a maze
Of the paths that were racing alive
Round boulder and bush, cleaving ways,
Incessant, with sound of a hive.
The height was a fountain-urn
Pouring streams, and the whole solid height
Leaped, chasing at every turn
The pair in one spirit of flight
To the folding pineforest. Yet here,
Like the pause to things hunted, in doubt,
The stillness bred spectral fear
Of the awfulness ranging without,
And imminent. Downward they fled,
From under the haunted roof,
To the valley aquake with the tread
Of an iron-resounding hoof,
As of legions of thunderful horse
Broken loose and in line tramping hard.
For the rage of a hungry force
Roamed blind of its

Page 4838

mark over sward:
They saw it rush dense in the cloak
Of its travelling swathe of steam;
All the vale through a thin thread-smoke
Was thrown back to distance extreme:
And dull the full breast of it blinked,
Like a buckler of steel breathed o’er,
Diminished, in strangeness distinct,
Glowing cold, unearthly, hoar:
An Enna of fields beyond sun,
Out of light, in a lurid web;
And the traversing fury spun
Up and down with a wave’s flow and ebb;
As the wave breaks to grasp and to spurn,
Retire, and in ravenous greed,
Inveterate, swell its return.
Up and down, as if wringing from speed
Sights that made the unsighted appear,
Delude and dissolve, on it scoured.
Lo, a sea upon land held career
Through the plain of the vale half-devoured.
Callistes of home and escape
Muttered swiftly, unwitting of speech.
She gazed at the Void of shape,
She put her white hand to his reach,
Saying: Now have we looked on the Three.
And divided from day, from night,
From air that is breath, stood she,
Like the vale, out of light.

X

Then again in disorderly words
He muttered of home, and was mute,
With the heart of the cowering birds
Ere they burst off the fowler’s foot.
He gave her some redness that streamed
Through her limbs in a flitting glow.
The sigh of our life she seemed,
The bliss of it clothing in woe.
Frailer than flower when the round
Of the sickle encircles it: strong
To tell of the things profound,
Our inmost uttering song,

Unspoken. So stood she awhile
In the gloom of the terror afield,
And the silence about her smile
Said more than of tongue is revealed.
I have breathed: I have gazed: I have been:
It said: and not joylessly shone
The remembrance of light through the screen
Of a face that seemed shadow and stone.
She led the youth trembling, appalled,
To the lake-banks he saw sink and rise
Like a panic-struck breast. Then she called,
And the hurricane blackness had eyes.
It launched like the Thunderer’s bolt.
Pale she drooped, and the youth by her side
Would have clasped her and dared a revolt
Sacrilegious as ever defied
High Olympus, but vainly for strength
His compassionate heart shook a frame
Stricken rigid to ice all its length.
On amain the black traveller came.
Lo, a chariot, cleaving the storm,
Clove the fountaining lake with a plough,
And the lord of the steeds was in form
He, the God of implacable brow,
Darkness: he: he in person: he raged

Page 4839

Through the wave like a boar of the wilds
From the hunters and hounds disengaged,
And a name shouted hoarsely: his child's.
Horror melted in anguish to hear.
Lo, the wave hissed apart for the path
Of the terrible Charioteer,
With the foam and torn features of wrath,
Hurled aloft on each arm in a sheet;
And the steeds clove it, rushing at land
Like the teeth of the famished at meat.
Then he swept out his hand.

XI

This, no more, doth Callistes recall:
He saw, ere he dropped in swoon,
On the maiden the chariot fall,
As a thundercloud swings on the moon.
Forth, free of the deluge, one cry
From the vanishing gallop rose clear:
And: Skiegeneia! the sky
Rang; Skiegeneia! the sphere.
And she left him therewith, to rejoice,
Repine, yearn, and know not his aim,
The life of their day in her voice,
Left her life in her name.

XII

Now the valley in ruin of fields
And fair meadowland, showing at eve
Like the spear-pitted warrior's shields
After battle, bade men believe
That no other than wrathfullest God
Had been loose on her beautiful breast,
Where the flowery grass was clod,
Wheat and vine as a trailing nest.
The valley, discreet in grief,
Disclosed but the open truth,
And Enna had hope of the sheaf:
There was none for the desolate youth
Devoted to mourn and to crave.

Of the secret he had divined
Of his friend of a day would he rave:
How for light of our earth she pined:
For the olive, the vine and the wheat,
Burning through with inherited fire:
And when Mother went Mother to meet,
She was prompted by simple desire
In the day-destined car to have place
At the skirts of the Goddess, unseen,
And be drawn to the dear earth's face.
She was fire for the blue and the green
Of our earth, dark fire; athirst
As a seed of her bosom for dawn,
White air that had robed and nursed
Her mother. Now was she gone
With the Silent, the God without tear,
Like a bud peeping out of its sheath
To be sundered and stamped with the sere.
And Callistes to her beneath,
As she to our beams, extinct,
Strained arms: he was shade of her shade.
In division so were they linked.
But the song which had betrayed
Her flight to the cavernous ear
For its own keenly wakeful: that song
Of the sowing and reaping, and cheer
Of the husbandman's heart made strong
Through droughts and deluging rains
With his faith in the Great Mother's love:
O the joy of the breath

Page 4840

she sustains,
And the lyre of the light above,
And the first rapt vision of Good,
And the fresh young sense of Sweet:
That song the youth ever pursued
In the track of her footing fleet.
For men to be profited much
By her day upon earth did he sing:
Of her voice, and her steps, and her touch
On the blossoms of tender Spring,
Immortal: and how in her soul
She is with them, and tearless abides,
Folding grain of a love for one goal
In patience, past flowing of tides.
And if unto him she was tears,
He wept not: he wasted within:
Seeming sane in the song, to his peers,
Only crazed where the cravings begin.
Our Lady of Gifts prized he less
Than her issue in darkness: the dim
Lost Skiegencia’s caress
Of our earth made it richest for him.
And for that was a curse on him raised,
And he withered rathe, dry to his prime,
Though the bounteous Giver be praised
Through the island with rites of old time
Exceedingly fervent, and reaped
Veneration for teachings devout,
Pious hymns when the corn-sheaves are heaped
And the wine-presses ruddily spout,
And the olive and apple are juice
At a touch light as hers lost below.
Whatsoever to men is of use
Sprang his worship of them who bestow,
In a measure of songs unexcelled:
But that soul loving earth and the sun
From her home of the shadows he held
For his beacon where beam there is none:
And to join her, or have her brought back,
In his frenzy the singer would call,
Till he followed where never was track,
On the path trod of all.

The lark ascending

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
All intervolved and spreading wide,
Like water-dimples down a tide
Where ripple ripple overcurls
And eddy into eddy whirls;
A press of hurried notes that run
So fleet they scarce are more than one,
Yet changeingly the trills repeat
And linger ringing while they fleet,
Sweet to the quick o' the ear, and dear
To her beyond the handmaid ear,
Who sits beside our inner springs,
Too often dry for this he brings,
Which seems the very jet of earth
At sight of sun, her music's mirth,
As up he wings the spiral stair,
A song of light, and pierces air
With fountain ardour, fountain play,
To reach the shining tops of day,
And drink in everything discerned
An ecstasy to music turned,
Impelled by what his happy bill
Disperses; drinking,

Page 4841

showering still,
Unthinking save that he may give
His voice the outlet, there to live
Renewed in endless notes of glee,
So thirsty of his voice is he,
For all to hear and all to know
That he is joy, awake, aglow;
The tumult of the heart to hear
Through pureness filtered crystal-clear,
And know the pleasure sprinkled bright
By simple singing of delight;
Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained
Without a break, without a fall,
Sweet-silvery, sheer lyrical,
Perennial, quavering up the chord
Like myriad dews of sunny sward
That trembling into fulness shine,
And sparkle dropping argentine;
Such wooing as the ear receives
From zephyr caught in choric leaves
Of aspens when their chattering net
Is flushed to white with shivers wet;
And such the water-spirit's chime
On mountain heights in morning's prime,
Too freshly sweet to seem excess,
Too animate to need a stress;
But wider over many heads
The starry voice ascending spreads,
Awakening, as it waxes thin,
The best in us to him akin;
And every face to watch him raised,
Puts on the light of children praised;
So rich our human pleasure ripes
When sweetness on sincereness pipes,
Though nought be promised from the seas,
But only a soft-ruffling breeze
Sweep glittering on a still content,
Serenity in ravishment
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,

And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes:
The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,
He is, the hills, the human line,
The meadows green, the fallows brown,
The dreams of labour in the town;
He sings the sap, the quickened veins;
The wedding song of sun and rains
He is, the dance of children, thanks
Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks,
And eye of violets while they breathe;
All these the circling song will wreathe,
And you shall hear the herb and tree,
The better heart of men shall see,
Shall feel celestially, as long
As you crave nothing save the song.

Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way,
Like yonder voice aloft, and link
All hearers in the song they drink.
Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
Our passion is too full in flood,
We want the key of his wild note
Of truthful in a tuneful throat;
The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality,
So pure that it salutes the suns

Page 4842

The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.
Yet men have we, whom we revere,
Now names, and men still housing here,
Whose lives, by many a battle-dint
Defaced, and grinding wheels on flint,
Yield substance, though they sing not, sweet
For song our highest heaven to greet:
Whom heavenly singing gives us new,
Enspheres them brilliant in our blue,
From firmest base to farthest leap,
Because their love of Earth is deep,
And they are warriors in accord
With life to serve, and, pass reward,
So touching purest and so heard
In the brain's reflex of yon bird:
Wherefore their soul in me, or mine,
Through self-forgetfulness divine,
In them, that song aloft maintains,
To fill the sky and thrill the plains
With showerings drawn from human stores,
As he to silence nearer soars,
Extends the world at wings and dome,
More spacious making more our home,
Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

Phoebus with admetus

I

When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked,
Sentencing to exile the bright Sun-God,
Mindful were the ploughmen of who the steer had yoked,
Who: and what a track showed the upturned sod!
Mindful were the shepherds, as now the noon severe
Bent a burning eyebrow to brown evetide,
How the rustic flute drew the silver to the sphere,
Sister of his own, till her rays fell wide.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,

The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

II

Chirping none, the scarlet cicadas crouched in ranks:
Slack the thistle-head piled its down-silk grey:
Scarce the stony lizard sucked hollows in his flanks:
Thick on spots of umbrage our drowsed flocks lay.
Sudden bowed the chestnuts beneath a wind unheard,
Lengthened ran the grasses, the sky grew slate:
Then amid a swift flight of winged seed white as curd,
Clear of limb a Youth smote the master’s gate.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

III

Water, first of singers, o’er rocky mount and mead,
First of earthly singers, the sun-loved rill,
Sang of him, and flooded the ripples on the reed,
Seeking whom to waken and what ear fill.
Water, sweetest soother to kiss a wound and cool,
Sweetest and divinest, the sky-born brook,
Chuckled, with a whimper, and made a mirror-pool
Round the guest we welcomed, the strange hand shook.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

Page 4843

IV

Many swarms of wild bees descended on our fields:
Stately stood the wheatstalk with head bent high:
Big of heart we laboured at storing mighty yields,
Wool and corn, and clusters to make men cry!
Hand-like rushed the vintage; we strung the bellied skins
Plump, and at the sealing the Youth’s voice rose:
Maidens clung in circle, on little fists their chins;
Gentle beasties through pushed a cold long nose.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

V

Foot to fire in snowtime we trimmed the slender shaft:
Often down the pit spied the lean wolf’s teeth
Grin against his will, trapped by masterstrokes of craft;
Helpless in his froth-wrath as green logs seethe!
Safe the tender lambs tugged the teats, and winter sped
Whirled before the crocus, the year’s new gold.
Hung the hooky beak up aloft, the arrowhead
Reddened through his feathers for our dear fold.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

VI

Tales we drank of giants at war with Gods above:
Rocks were they to look on, and earth climbed air!
Tales of search for simples, and those who sought of love
Ease because the creature was all too fair.
Pleasant ran our thinking that while our work was good,
Sure as fruits for sweat would the praise come fast.
He that wrestled stoutest and tamed the billow-brood
Danced in rings with girls, like a sail-flapped mast.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

VII

Lo, the herb of healing, when once the herb is known,
Shines in shady woods bright as new-sprung flame.
Ere the string was tightened we heard the mellow tone,
After he had taught how the sweet sounds came
Stretched about his feet, labour done, ’twas as you see
Red pomegranates tumble and burst hard rind.
So began contention to give delight and be
Excellent in things aimed to make life kind.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

VIII

You with shelly horns, rams! and, promontory goats,
You whose browsing beards dip in coldest dew!
Bulls, that walk the pastures in kingly-flashing coats!
Laurel, ivy, vine, wreathed for feasts not few!
You that build the shade-roof, and you that court the rays,
You that leap besprinkling the rock stream-rent:
He has been our fellow, the morning of our days!
Us he chose for housemates, and this way went.
God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

Page 4844

Melampus

I

With love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck;
Or change their perch on a beat of quivering wings
From branch to branch, only restful to pipe and peck;
Or, bristled, curl at a touch their snouts in a ball;
Or cast their web between bramble and thorny hook;
The good physician Melampus, loving them all,
Among them walked, as a scholar who reads a book.

II

For him the woods were a home and gave him the key
Of knowledge, thirst for their treasures in herbs and flowers.
The secrets held by the creatures nearer than we
To earth he sought, and the link of their life with ours:
And where alike we are, unlike where, and the veined
Division, veined parallel, of a blood that flows
In them, in us, from the source by man unattained
Save marks he well what the mystical woods disclose.

III

And this he deemed might be boon of love to a breast
Embracing tenderly each little motive shape,
The prone, the flitting, who seek their food whither best
Their wits direct, whither best from their foes escape.
For closer drawn to our mother’s natural milk,
As babes they learn where her motherly help is great:
They know the juice for the honey, juice for the silk,
And need they medical antidotes, find them straight.

IV

Of earth and sun they are wise, they nourish their broods,
Weave, build, hive, burrow and battle, take joy and pain
Like swimmers varying billows: never in woods
Runs white insanity fleeing itself: all sane
The woods revolve: as the tree its shadowing limns
To some resemblance in motion, the rooted life

Restrains disorder: you hear the primitive hymns
Of earth in woods issue wild of the web of strife.

V

Now sleeping once on a day of marvellous fire,
A brood of snakes he had cherished in grave regret
That death his people had dealt their dam and their sire,
Through savage dread of them, crept to his neck, and set
Their tongues to lick him: the swift affectionate tongue
Of each ran licking the slumberer: then his ears
A forked red tongue tickled shrewdly: sudden upsprung,
He heard a voice piping: Ay, for he has no fears!

VI

A bird said that, in the notes of birds, and the speech
Of men, it seemed: and another renewed: He moves
To learn and not to pursue, he gathers to teach;
He feeds his young as do we, and as we love loves.
No fears have I of a man who goes with his head
To earth, chance looking aloft at us, kind of hand:
I feel to him as to earth of whom we are fed;
I pipe him much for his good could he understand.

Page 4845

VII

Melampus touched at his ears, laid finger on wrist
He was not dreaming, he sensibly felt and heard.
Above, through leaves, where the tree-twigs inter-twist,
He spied the birds and the bill of the speaking bird.
His cushion mosses in shades of various green,
The lumped, the antlered, he pressed, while the sunny snake
Slipped under: draughts he had drunk of clear Hippocrene,
It seemed, and sat with a gift of the Gods awake.

VIII

Divinely thrilled was the man, exultingly full,
As quick well-waters that come of the heart of earth,
Ere yet they dart in a brook are one bubble-pool
To light and sound, wedding both at the leap of birth.
The soul of light vivid shone, a stream within stream;
The soul of sound from a musical shell outflew;
Where others hear but a hum and see but a beam,
The tongue and eye of the fountain of life he knew.

IX

He knew the Hours: they were round him, laden with seed
Of hours bestrewn upon vapour, and one by one
They winged as ripened in fruit the burden decreed
For each to scatter; they flushed like the buds in sun,
Bequeathing seed to successive similar rings,
Their sisters, bearers to men of what men have earned:
He knew them, talked with the yet unreddened; the stings,
The sweets, they warmed at their bosoms divined, discerned.

X

Not unsolicited, sought by diligent feet,
By riddling fingers expanded, oft watched in growth
With brooding deep as the noon-ray’s quickening wheat,
Ere touch’d, the pendulous flower of the plants of sloth,
The plants of rigidness, answered question and squeeze,
Revealing wherefore it bloomed, uninviting, bent,
Yet making harmony breathe of life and disease,
The deeper chord of a wonderful instrument.

XI

So passed he luminous-eyed for earth and the fates
We arm to bruise or caress us: his ears were charged
With tones of love in a whirl of voluble hates,
With music wrought of distraction his heart enlarged.
Celestial-shining, though mortal, singer, though mute,
He drew the Master of harmonies, voiced or stilled,
To seek him; heard at the silent medicine-root
A song, beheld in fulfilment the unfulfilled.

XII

Him Phoebus, lending to darkness colour and form
Of light’s excess, many lessons and counsels gave,
Showed Wisdom lord of the human intricate swarm,
And whence prophetic it looks on the hives that rave,
And how acquired, of the zeal of love to acquire,
And where it stands, in the centre of life a sphere;
And Measure, mood of the lyre, the rapturous lyre,
He said was Wisdom, and struck him the notes to hear.

Page 4846

XIII

Sweet, sweet: ’twas glory of vision, honey, the breeze
In heat, the run of the river on root and stone,
All senses joined, as the sister Pierides
Are one, uplifting their chorus, the Nine, his own.
In stately order, evolved of sound into sight,
From sight to sound intershifting, the man descried
The growths of earth, his adored, like day out of night,
Ascend in song, seeing nature and song allied.

XIV

And there vitality, there, there solely in song,
Resides, where earth and her uses to men, their needs,
Their forceful cravings, the theme are: there is it strong,
The Master said: and the studious eye that reads,
(Yea, even as earth to the crown of Gods on the mount),
In links divine with the lyrical tongue is bound.
Pursue thy craft: it is music drawn of a fount
To spring perennial; well-spring is common ground.

XV

Melampus dwelt among men: physician and sage,
He served them, loving them, healing them; sick or maimed,
Or them that frenzied in some delirious rage
Outran the measure, his juice of the woods reclaimed.
He played on men, as his master, Phoebus, on strings
Melodious: as the God did he drive and check,
Through love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck.

Love in the valley

Under yonder beech-tree single on the greensward,
Couched with her arms behind her golden head,
Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly,
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade.
Had I the heart to slide an arm beneath her,
Press her parting lips as her waist I gather slow,
Waking in amazement she could not but embrace me:
Then would she hold me and never let me go?

* * *

Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,
Swift as the swallow along the river’s light
Circleting the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won!

* * *

When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,
Tying up her laces, looping up her hair,
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,
More love should I have, and much less care.
When her mother tends her before the lighted mirror,
Loosening her laces, combing down her curls,
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,
I should miss but one for the many boys and girls.

Page 4847

* * *

Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon.
No, she is athirst and drinking up her wonder:
Earth to her is young as the slip of the new moon.
Deals she an unkindness, ’tis but her rapid measure,
Even as in a dance; and her smile can heal no less:
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers with hailstones
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless.

* * *

Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.
Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
Brooding o’er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.
Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting:
So were it with me if forgetting could be willed.
Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled.

* * *

Stepping down the hill with her fair companions,
Arm in arm, all against the raying West,
Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches,
Brave in her shape, and sweeter unpossessed.
Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking
Whispered the world was; morning light is she.
Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless;
Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free.

* * *

Happy happy time, when the white star hovers
Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,
Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,
Threading it with colour, like yewberries the yew.
Thicker crowd the shades as the grave East deepens
Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.
Maiden still the morn is; and strange she is, and secret;
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.

* * *

Sunrays, leaning on our southern hills and lighting
Wild cloud-mountains that drag the hills along,
Oft ends the day of your shifting brilliant laughter
Chill as a dull face frowning on a song.
Ay, but shows the South-west a ripple-feathered bosom
Blown to silver while the clouds are shaken and ascend
Scaling the mid-heavens as they stream, there comes a sunset
Rich, deep like love in beauty without end.

* * *

When at dawn she sighs, and like an infant to the window
Turns grave eyes craving light, released from dreams,
Beautiful she looks, like a white water-lily
Bursting out of bud in havens of the streams.
When from bed she rises clothed from neck to ankle
In her long nightgown sweet as boughs of May,
Beautiful she looks, like a tall garden lily
Pure from the night, and splendid for the day.

Page 4848

* * *

Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,
Low-lidded twilight, o’er the valley’s brim,
Rounding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted skylark,
Clear as though the dewdrops had their voice in him.
Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless planet,
Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain-showers.
Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever
Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers.

* * *

All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose;
Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.
My sweet leads: she knows not why, but now she loiters,
Eyes bent anemones, and hangs her hands.
Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,
Coming the rose: and unaware a cry
Springs in her bosom for odours and for colour,
Covert and the nightingale; she knows not why.

* * *

Kerchiefed head and chin, she darts between her tulips,
Streaming like a willow grey in arrowy rain:
Some bend beaten cheek to gravel, and their angel
She will be; she lifts them, and on she speeds again.
Black the driving raincloud breasts the iron gate-way:
She is forth to cheer a neighbour lacking mirth.
So when sky and grass met rolling dumb for thunder,
Saw I once a white dove, sole light of earth.

* * *

Prim little scholars are the flowers of her garden,
Trained to stand in rows, and asking if they please.
I might love them well but for loving more the wild ones.
O my wild ones! they tell me more than these.
You, my wild one, you tell of honied field-rose,
Violet, blushing eglantine in life; and even as they,
They by the wayside are earnest of your goodness,
You are of life’s, on the banks that line the way.

* * *

Peering at her chamber the white crowns the red rose,
Jasmine winds the porch with stars two and three.
Parted is the window; she sleeps; the starry jasmine
Breathes a falling breath that carries thoughts of me.
Sweeter unpossessed, have I said of her my sweetest
Not while she sleeps: while she sleeps the jasmine breathes,
Luring her to love; she sleeps; the starry jasmine
Bears me to her pillow under white rose-wreaths.

* * *

Yellow with birdfoot-trefoil are the grass-glades;
Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew-grey leaf:
Yellow with stonecrop; the moss-mounds are yellow;
Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf.
Green-yellow, bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle;
Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine:
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
Thinking of the harvest: I look and think of mine.

Page 4849

* * *

This I may know: her dressing and undressing
Such a change of light shows as when the skies in sport
Shift from cloud to moonlight; or edging over thunder
Slips a ray of sun; or sweeping into port
White sails furl; or on the ocean borders
White sails lean along the waves leaping green.
Visions of her shower before me, but from eyesight
Guarded she would be like the sun were she seen.

* * *

Front door and back of the mossed old farmhouse
Open with the morn, and in a breezy link
Freshly sparkles garden to stripe-shadowed orchard,
Green across a rill where on sand the minnows wink.
Busy in the grass the early sun of summer
Swarms, and the blackbird's mellow fluting notes
Call my darling up with round and roguish challenge:
Quaintest, richest carol of all the singing throats!

* * *

Cool was the woodside; cool as her white dairy
Keeping sweet the cream-pan; and there the boys from school,
Cricketing below, rushed brown and red with sunshine;
O the dark translucence of the deep-eyed cool!
Spying from the farm, herself she fetched a pitcher
Full of milk, and tilted for each in turn the beak.
Then a little fellow, mouth up and on tiptoe,
Said, 'I will kiss you': she laughed and leaned her cheek.

* * *

Doves of the fir-wood walling high our red roof
Through the long noon coo, crooning through the coo.
Loose droop the leaves, and down the sleepy road-way
Sometimes pipes a chaffinch; loose droops the blue.
Cows flap a slow tail knee-deep in the river,
Breathless, given up to sun and gnat and fly.
Nowhere is she seen; and if I see her nowhere,
Lightning may come, straight rains and tiger sky.

* * *

O the golden sheaf, the rustling treasure-armful!
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!
O the treasure-tresses one another over
Nodding! O the girdle slack about the waist!
Slain are the poppies that shot their random scarlet
Quick amid the wheatears: wound about the waist,
Gathered, see these brides of earth one blush of ripeness!
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!

* * *

Large and smoky red the sun’s cold disk drops,
Clipped by naked hills, on violet shaded snow:
Eastward large and still lights up a bower of moon-rise,
Whence at her leisure steps the moon aglow.
Nightlong on black print-branches our beech-tree
Gazes in this whiteness: nightlong could I.
Here may life on death or death on life be painted.
Let me clasp her soul to know she cannot die!

* * *

Page 4850

Gossips count her faults; they scour a narrow chamber
Where there is no window, read not heaven or her.
‘When she was a tiny,’ one aged woman quavers,
Plucks at my heart and leads me by the ear.
Faults she had once as she learnt to run and tumbled:
Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete.
Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy
Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet.

* * *

Hither she comes; she comes to me; she lingers,
Deepens her brown eyebrows, while in new surprise
High rise the lashes in wonder of a stranger;
Yet am I the light and living of her eyes.
Something friends have told her fills her heart to brimming,
Nets her in her blushes, and wounds her, and tames. —
Sure of her haven, O like a dove alighting,
Arms up, she dropped: our souls were in our names.

* * *

Soon will she lie like a white-frost sunrise.
Yellow oats and brown wheat, barley pale as rye,
Long since your sheaves have yielded to the thresher,
Felt the girdle loosened, seen the tresses fly.
Soon will she lie like a blood-red sunset.
Swift with the to-morrow, green-winged Spring!
Sing from the South-west, bring her back the truants,
Nightingale and swallow, song and dipping wing.

* * *

Soft new beech-leaves, up to beamy April
Spreading bough on bough a primrose mountain, you
Lucid in the moon, raise lilies to the skyfields,
Youngest green transfused in silver shining through:
Fairer than the lily, than the wild white cherry:
Fair as in image my seraph love appears
Borne to me by dreams when dawn is at my eye-lids:
Fair as in the flesh she swims to me on tears.

* * *

Could I find a place to be alone with heaven,
I would speak my heart out: heaven is my need.
Every woodland tree is flushing like the dogwood,
Flashing like the whitebeam, swaying like the reed.
Flushing like the dogwood crimson in October;
Streaming like the flag-reed South-west blown;
Flashing as in gusts the sudden-lighted whitebeam:
All seem to know what is for heaven alone.

The three singers to young blood

Carols nature, counsel men.
Different notes as rook from wren
Hear we when our steps begin,
And the choice is cast within,
Where a robber raven's tale
Urges passion's nightingale.

Hark to the three. Chimed they in one,
Life were music of the sun.
Liquid first, and then the caw,
Then the cry that knows not law.

I

Page 4851

As the birds do, so do we,
Bill our mate, and choose our tree.
Swift to building work addressed,
Any straw will help a nest.
Mates are warm, and this is truth,
Glad the young that come of youth.
They have bloom i' the blood and sap
Chilling at no thunder-clap.
Man and woman on the thorn
Trust not Earth, and have her scorn.
They who in her lead confide,
Wither me if they spread not wide!
Look for aid to little things,
You will get them quick as wings,
Thick as feathers; would you feed,
Take the leap that springs the need.

II

Contemplate the rutted road:
Life is both a lure and goad.
Each to hold in measure just,
Trample appetite to dust.
Mark the fool and wanton spin:
Keep to harness as a skin.
Ere you follow nature's lead,
Of her powers in you have heed;
Else a shiverer you will find
You have challenged humankind.
Mates are chosen marketwise:
Coolest bargainer best buys.
Leap not, nor let leap the heart:
Trot your track, and drag your cart.
So your end may be in wool,
Honoured, and with manger full.

III

O the rosy light! it fleets,
Dearer dying than all sweets.
That is life: it waves and goes;
Solely in that cherished Rose
Palpitates, or else 'tis death.
Call it love with all thy breath.

Love! it lingers: Love! it nears:
Love! O Love! the Rose appears,
Blushful, magic, reddening air.
Now the choice is on thee: dare!
Mortal seems the touch, but makes
Immortal the hand that takes.
Feel what sea within thee shames
Of its force all other claims,
Drowns them. Clasp! the world will be
Heavenly Rose to swelling sea.

The orchard and the heath

I chanced upon an early walk to spy
A troop of children through an orchard gate:
The boughs hung low, the grass was high;
They had but to lift hands or wait
For fruits to fill them; fruits were all their sky.

They shouted, running on from tree to tree,
And played the game the wind plays, on and round.
’Twas visible invisible glee
Pursuing; and a fountain’s sound
Of laughter spouted, pattering fresh on me.

I could have watched them till the daylight fled,
Their pretty bower made such a light of day.
A small one tumbling sang, ‘Oh! head!’
The rest to comfort her straightway
Seized on a branch and thumped down apples red.

The tiny creature flashing through green grass,
And laughing with her feet and eyes among
Fresh apples, while a little lass
Over as o’er breeze-ripples hung:
That sight I saw, and passed as aliens pass.

Page 4852

My footpath left the pleasant farms and lanes,
Soft cottage-smoke, straight cocks a-crow, gay flowers;
Beyond the wheel-ruts of the wains,
Across a heath I walked for hours,
And met its rival tenants, rays and rains.

Still in my view mile-distant firs appeared,
When, under a patched channel-bank enriched
With foxglove whose late bells drooped seared,
Behold, a family had pitched
Their camp, and labouring the low tent upreared.

Here, too, were many children, quick to scan
A new thing coming; swarthy cheeks, white teeth:
In many-coloured rags they ran,
Like iron runlets of the heath.
Dispersed lay broth-pot, sticks, and drinking-can.

Three girls, with shoulders like a boat at sea
Tipped sideways by the wave (their clothing slid
From either ridge unequally),
Lean, swift and voluble, bestrid
A starting-point, unfrocked to the bent knee.

They raced; their brothers yelled them on, and broke
In act to follow, but as one they snuffed
Wood-fumes, and by the fire that spoke
Of provender, its pale flame puffed,
And rolled athwart dwarf furzes grey-blue smoke.

Soon on the dark edge of a ruddier gleam,
The mother-pot perusing, all, stretched flat,
Paused for its bubbling-up supreme:
A dog upright in circle sat,
And oft his nose went with the flying steam.

I turned and looked on heaven awhile, where now
The moor-faced sunset broadened with red light;
Threw high aloft a golden bough,
And seemed the desert of the night
Far down with mellow orchards to endow.

Earth and man

I

On her great venture, Man,
Earth gazes while her fingers dint the breast
Which is his well of strength, his home of rest,
And fair to scan.

II

More aid than that embrace,
That nourishment, she cannot give: his heart
Involves his fate; and she who urged the start
Abides the race.

III

For he is in the lists
Contentious with the elements, whose dower
First sprang him; for swift vultures to devour
If he desists.

IV

His breath of instant thirst
Is warning of a creature matched with strife,
To meet it as a bride, or let fall life
On life’s accursed.

V

No longer forth he bounds
The lusty animal, afield to roam,
But peering in Earth’s entrails, where the gnome
Strange themes propounds.

VI

By hunger sharply sped
To grasp at weapons ere he learns their use,
In each new ring he bears a giant’s thews,
An infant’s head.

Page 4853

VII

And ever that old task
Of reading what he is and whence he came,
Whither to go, finds wilder letters flame
Across her mask.

VIII

She hears his wailful prayer,
When now to the Invisible he raves
To rend him from her, now of his mother craves
Her calm, her care.

IX

The thing that shudders most
Within him is the burden of his cry.
Seen of his dread, she is to his blank eye
The eyeless Ghost.

X

Or sometimes she will seem
Heavenly, but her blush, soon wearing white,
Veils like a gorsebush in a web of blight,
With gold-buds dim.

XI

Once worshipped Prime of Powers,
She still was the Implacable: as a beast,
She struck him down and dragged him from the feast
She crowned with flowers.

XII

Her pomp of glorious hues,
Her revelries of ripeness, her kind smile,
Her songs, her peeping faces, lure awhile
With symbol-clues.

XIII

The mystery she holds
For him, inveterately he strains to see,
And sight of his obtuseness is the key
Among those folds.

XIV

He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she has never heed.
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,
Not his desire.

XV

She prompts him to rejoice,
Yet scares him on the threshold with the shroud.
He deems her cherishing of her best-endowed
A wanton's choice.

XVI

Albeit thereof he has found
Firm roadway between lustfulness and pain;
Has half transferred the battle to his brain,
From bloody ground;

XVII

He will not read her good,
Or wise, but with the passion Self obscures;
Through that old devil of the thousand lures,
Through that dense hood:

XVIII

Through terror, through distrust;
The greed to touch, to view, to have, to live:
Through all that makes of him a sensitive
Abhorring dust.

XIX

Behold his wormy home!
And he the wind-whipped, anywhither wave
Crazily tumbled on a shingle-grave
To waste in foam.

XX

Therefore the wretch inclined
Afresh to the Invisible, who, he saith,
Can raise him high: with vows of living faith
For little signs.

XXI

Some signs he must demand,
Some proofs of slaughtered nature; some prized few,
To satisfy the senses it is true,
And in his hand,

XXII

This miracle which saves
Himself, himself doth from extinction clutch,
By virtue of his worth, contrasting much
With brutes and knaves.

Page 4854

XXIII

From dust, of him abhorred,
He would be snatched by Grace discovering worth.
'Sever me from the hollowness of Earth!
Me take, dear Lord!'

XXIV

She hears him. Him she owes
For half her loveliness a love well won
By work that lights the shapeless and the dun,
Their common foes.

XXV

He builds the soaring spires,
That sing his soul in stone: of her he draws,
Though blind to her, by spelling at her laws,
Her purest fires.

XXVI

Through him hath she exchanged,
For the gold harvest-robes, the mural crown,
Her haggard quarry-features and thick frown
Where monsters ranged.

XXVII

And order, high discourse,
And decency, than which is life less dear,
She has of him: the lyre of language clear,
Love's tongue and source.

XXVIII

She hears him, and can hear
With glory in his gains by work achieved:
With grief for grief that is the unperceived
In her so near.

XXIX

If he aloft for aid
Imploring storms, her essence is the spur.
His cry to heaven is a cry to her
He would evade.

XXX

Not elsewhere can he tend.
Those are her rules which bid him wash foul sins;
Those her revulsions from the skull that grins
To ape his end.

XXXI

And her desires are those
For happiness, for lastingness, for light.
'Tis she who kindles in his haunting night
The hoped dawn-rose.

XXXII

Fair fountains of the dark
Daily she waves him, that his inner dream
May clasp amid the glooms a springing beam,
A quivering lark:

XXIII

This life and her to know
For Spirit: with awakenedness of glee
To feel stern joy her origin: not he
The child of woe.

XXXIV

But that the senses still
Usurp the station of their issue mind,
He would have burst the chrysalis of the blind:
As yet he will;

XXXV

As yet he will, she prays,
Yet will when his distempered devil of Self; —
The glutton for her fruits, the wily elf
In shifting rays; —

XXXVI

That captain of the scorned;
The coveter of life in soul and shell,
The fratricide, the thief, the infidel,
The hoofed and horned; —

XXXVII

He singularly doomed
To what he execrates and writhes to shun; —
When fire has passed him vapour to the sun,
And sun relumed,

XXXVIII

Page 4855

Then shall the horrid pall
Be lifted, and a spirit nigh divine,
‘Live in thy offspring as I live in mine,’
Will hear her call.

XXXIX

Whence looks he on a land
Whereon his labour is a carven page;
And forth from heritage to heritage
Nought writ on sand.

XL

His fables of the Above,
And his gapped readings of the crown and sword,
The hell detested and the heaven adored,
The hate, the love,

XLI

The bright wing, the black hoof,
He shall peruse, from Reason not disjoined,
And never unfaith clamouring to be coined
To faith by proof.

XLII

She her just Lord may view,
Not he, her creature, till his soul has yearned
With all her gifts to reach the light discerned
Her spirit through.

XLIIII

Then in him time shall run
As in the hour that to young sunlight crows;
And—’If thou hast good faith it can repose,’
She tells her son.

XLIV

Meanwhile on him, her chief
Expression, her great word of life, looks she;

Twi-minded of him, as the waxing tree,
Or dated leaf.

A ballad of fair ladies in revolt

I

See the sweet women, friend, that lean beneath
The ever-falling fountain of green leaves
Round the white bending stem, and like a wreath
Of our most blushful flower shine trembling through,
To teach philosophers the thirst of thieves:
Is one for me? is one for you?

II

— Fair sirs, we give you welcome, yield you place, And you shall choose among us which you will, Without the idle pastime of the chase, If to this treaty you can well agree: To wed our cause, and its high task fulfil. He who's for us, for him are we!

III

— Most gracious ladies, nigh when light has birth, A troop of maids, brown as burnt heather-bells, And rich with life as moss-roots breathe of earth In the first plucking of them, past us flew To labour, singing rustic ritornells: Had they a cause? are they of you?

IV

— Sirs, they are as unthinking armies are To thoughtful leaders, and our cause is theirs. When they know men they know the state of war: But now they dream like sunlight on a sea, And deem you hold the half of happy pairs. He who's for us, for him are we!

V

— Ladies, I listened to a ring of dames; Judicial in the robe and wig; secure As venerated portraits in their frames; And they denounced some insurrection new Against sound laws which keep you good and pure. Are you of them? are they of you?

VI

— Sirs, they are of us, as their dress denotes, And by as much: let them together chime: It is an ancient bell within their throats, Pulled by an aged ringer; with what glee Befits the yellow yesterdays of time. He who's for us, for him are we!

VII

Page 4856

— Sweet ladies, you with beauty, you with wit; Dowered of all favours and all blessed things Whereat the ruddy torch of Love is lit; Wherefore this vain and outworn strife renew, Which stays the tide no more than eddy-rings? Who is for love must be for you.

VIII

— The manners of the market, honest sirs, ’Tis hard to quit when you behold the wares. You flatter us, or perchance our milliners You flatter; so this vain and outworn She May still be the charmed snake to your soft airs! A higher lord than Love claim we.

IX

— One day, dear lady, missing the broad track, I came on a wood’s border, by a mead, Where golden May ran up to moted black: And there I saw Queen Beauty hold review, With Love before her throne in act to plead. Take him for me, take her for you.

X

— Ingenious gentleman, the tale is known. Love pleaded sweetly: Beauty would not melt: She would not melt: he turned in wrath: her throne The shadow of his back froze witheringly, And sobbing at his feet Queen Beauty knelt. O not such slaves of Love are we!

XI

— Love, lady, like the star above that lance Of radiance flung by sunset on ridged cloud, Sad as the last line of a brave romance! — Young Love hung dim, yet quivering round him threw Beams of fresh fire, while Beauty waned and bowed. Scorn Love, and dread the doom for you.

XII

— Called she not for her mirror, sir? Forth ran Her women: I am lost, she cried, when lo, Love in the form of an admiring man Once more in adoration bent the knee, And brought the faded Pagan to full blow: For which her throne she gave: not we!

XIII

— My version, madam, runs not to that end. A certain madness of an hour half past, Caught her like fever; her just lord no friend She fancied; aimed beyond beauty, and thence grew The prim acerbity, sweet Love’s outcast. Great heaven ward off that stroke from you!

XIV

— Your prayer to heaven, good sir, is generous: How generous likewise that you do not name Offended nature! She from all of us Couched idle underneath our showering tree, May quite withhold her most destructive flame; And then what woeful women we!

XV

— Quite, could not be, fair lady; yet your youth May run to drought in visionary schemes: And a late waking to perceive the truth, When day falls shrouding her supreme adieu, Shows darker wastes than unaccomplished dreams: And that may be in store for you.

XVI

— O sir, the truth, the truth! is’t in the skies, Or in the grass, or in this heart of ours? But O the truth, the truth! the many eyes That look on it! the diverse things they see, According to their thirst for fruit or flowers! Pass on: it is the truth seek we.

XVII

Page 4857

— Lady, there is a truth of settled laws That down the past burns like a great watch-fire. Let youth hail changeful mornings; but your cause, Whetting its edge to cut the race in two, Is felony: you forfeit the bright lyre, Much honour and much glory you!

XVIII

— Sir, was it glory, was it honour, pride, And not as cat and serpent and poor slave, Wherewith we walked in union by your side? Spare to false womanliness her delicacy, Or bid true manliness give ear, we crave: In our defence thus chained are we.

XIX

— Yours, madam, were the privileges of life Proper to man's ideal; you were the mark Of action, and the banner in the strife: Yea, of your very weakness once you drew The strength that sounds the wells, outflies the lark: Wrapped in a robe of flame were you!

XX

— Your friend looks thoughtful. Sir, when we were chill, You clothed us warmly; all in honour! when We starved you fed us; all in honour still: Oh, all in honour, ultra-honourably! Deep is the gratitude we owe to men, For privileged indeed were we!

XXI

— You cite exceptions, madam, that are sad, But come in the red struggle of our growth. Alas, that I should have to say it! bad Is two-sexed upon earth: this which you do, Shows animal impatience, mental sloth: Man monstrous! pining seraphs you!

XXII

— I fain would ask your friend . . . but I will ask You, sir, how if in place of numbers vague, Your sad exceptions were to break that mask They wear for your cool mind historically, And blaze like black lists of a *present* plague? But in that light behold them we.

XXIII

— Your spirit breathes a mist upon our world, Lady, and like a rain to pierce the roof And drench the bed where toil-tossed man lies curled In his hard-earned oblivion! You are few, Scattered, ill-counselled, blinded: for a proof, I have lived, and have known none like you.

XXIV

— We may be blind to men, sir: we embrace A future now beyond the fowler's nets. Though few, we hold a promise for the race That was not at our rising: you are free To win brave mates; you lose but marionnettes. He who's for us, for him are we.

XXV

— Ah! madam, were they puppets who withstood Youth's cravings for adventure to preserve The dedicated ways of womanhood? The light which leads us from the paths of rue, That light above us, never seen to swerve, Should be the home-lamp trimmed by you.

XXVI

— Ah! sir, our worshipped posture we perchance Shall not abandon, though we see not how, Being to that lamp-post fixed, we may advance Beside our lords in any real degree, Unless we move: and to advance is now A sovereign need, think more than we.

XXVII

Page 4858

— So push you out of harbour in small craft, With little seamanship; and comes a gale, The world will laugh, the world has often laughed, Lady, to see how bold when skies are blue, When black winds churn the deeps how panic-pale, How swift to the old nest fly you!

XXVIII

— What thinks your friend, kind sir? We have escaped But partly that old half-tamed wild beast's paw Whereunder woman, the weak thing, was shaped: Men, too, have known the cramping enemy In grim brute force, whom force of brain shall awe: Him our deliverer, await we!

XXIX

— Delusions are with eloquence endowed, And yours might pluck an angel from the spheres To play in this revolt whereto you are vowed, Deliverer, lady! but like summer dew O'er fields that crack for rain your friends drop tears, Who see the awakening for you.

XXX

— Is he our friend, there silent? he weeps not. O sir, delusion mounting like a sun On a mind blank as the white wife of Lot, Giving it warmth and movement! if this be Delusion, think of what thereby was won For men, and dream of what win we.

XXXI

— Lady, the destiny of minor powers, Who would recast us, is but to convulse: You enter on a strife that frets and sours; You can but win sick disappointment's hue; And simply an accelerated pulse, Some tonic you have drunk moves you.

XXXII

— Thinks your friend so? Good sir, your wit is bright; But wit that strives to speak the popular voice, Puts on its nightcap and puts out its light. Curfew, would seem your conqueror's decree To women likewise: and we have no choice Save darkness or rebellion, we!

XXXIII

— A plain safe intermediate way is cleft By reason foiling passion: you that rave Of mad alternatives to right and left Echo the tempter, madam: and 'tis due Unto your sex to shun it as the grave, This later apple offered you.

XXXIV

— This apple is not ripe, it is not sweet; Nor rosy, sir, nor golden: eye and mouth Are little wooed by it; yet we would eat. We are somewhat tired of Eden, is our plea. We have thirsted long; this apple suits our drouth: 'Tis good for men to halve, think we.

XXXV

— But say, what seek you, madam? 'Tis enough That you should have dominion o'er the springs Domestic and man's heart: those ways, how rough, How vile, outside the stately avenue Where you walk sheltered by your angel's wings, Are happily unknown to you.

XXXVI

— We hear women's shrieks on them. We like your phrase, Dominion domestic! And that roar, 'What seek you?' is of tyrants in all days. Sir, get you something of our purity And we will of your strength: we ask no more. That is the sum of what seek we.

XXXVII

Page 4859

— O for an image, madam, in one word, To show you as the lightning night reveals, Your error and your perils: you have erred In mind only, and the perils that ensue Swift heels may soften; wherefore to swift heels Address your hopes of safety you!

XXXVIII

— To err in mind, sir . . . your friend smiles: he may! To err in mind, if err in mind we can, Is grievous error you do well to stay. But O how different from reality Men's fiction is! how like you in the plan, Is woman, knew you her as we!

XXXIX

— Look, lady, where yon river winds its line Toward sunset, and receives on breast and face The splendour of fair life: to be divine, 'Tis nature bids you be to nature true, Flowing with beauty, lending earth your grace, Reflecting heaven in clearness you.

XL

— Sir, you speak well: your friend no word vouchsafes. To flow with beauty, breeding fools and worse, Cowards and worse: at such fair life she chafes, Who is not wholly of the nursery, Nor of your schools: we share the primal curse; Together shake it off, say we!

XLI

— Hear, then, my friend, madam! Tongue-restrained he stands Till words are thoughts, and thoughts, like swords enriched With traceries of the artificer's hands, Are fire-proved steel to cut, fair flowers to view. — Do I hear him? Oh, he is bewitched, bewitched! Heed him not! Traitress beauties you!

XLII

— We have won a champion, sisters, and a sage! — Ladies, you win a guest to a good feast! — Sir spokesman, sneers are weakness veiling rage. — Of weakness, and wise men, you have the key. — Then are there fresher mornings mounting East Than ever yet have dawned, sing we!

XLIII

— False ends as false began, madam, be sure! — What lure there is the pure cause purifies! — Who purifies the victim of the lure? — That soul which bids us our high light pursue. — Some heights are measured down: the wary wise Shun Reason in the masque with you!

XLIV

— Sir, for the friend you bring us, take our thanks. Yes, Beauty was of old this barren goal; A thing with claws; and brute-like in her pranks! But could she give more loyal guarantee Than wooing Wisdom, that in her a soul Has risen? Adieu: content are we!

XLV

Those ladies led their captive to the flood's
Green edge. He floating with them seemed the most
Fool-flushed old noddy ever crowned with buds.
Happier than I! Then, why not wiser too?
For he that lives with Beauty, he may boast
His comrade over me and you.

XLVI

Have women nursed some dream since Helen sailed
Over the sea of blood the blushing star,
That beauty, whom frail man as Goddess hailed,
When not possessing her (for such is he!),
Might in a wondering season seen afar,
Be tamed to say not 'I,' but 'we'?

Page 4860

XLVII

And shall they make of Beauty their estate,
The fortress and the weapon of their sex?
Shall she in her frost-brilliancy dictate,
More queenly than of old, how we must woo,
Ere she will melt? The halter's on our necks,
Kick as it likes us, I and you.

XLVIII

Certain it is, if Beauty has disdained
Her ancient conquests, with an aim thus high:
If this, if that, if more, the fight is gained.
But can she keep her followers without fee?
Yet ah! to hear anew those ladies cry,
He who's for us, for him are we!

The two masks

Melpomene among her livid people,
Ere stroke of lyre, upon Thaleia looks,
Warned by old contests that one museful ripple
Along those lips of rose with tendril hooks
Forebodes disturbance in the springs of pathos,
Perchance may change of masks midway demand,
Albeit the man rise mountainous as Athos,
The woman wild as Cape Leucadia stand.

II

For this the Comic Muse exacts of creatures
Appealing to the fount of tears: that they
Strive never to outleap our human features,
And do Right Reason's ordinance obey,
In peril of the hum to laughter nighest.
But prove they under stress of action's fire
Nobleness, to that test of Reason highest,
She bows: she waves them for the loftier lyre.

Archduchess Anne

1—I

In middle age an evil thing
Befell Archduchess Anne:
She looked outside her wedding-ring
Upon a princely man.

II

Count Louis was for horse and arms;
And if its beacon waved,
For love; but ladies had not charms
To match a danger braved.

III

On battlefields he was the bow
Bestrung to fly the shaft:
In idle hours his heart would flow
As winds on currents waft.

IV

His blood was of those warrior tribes
That streamed from morning's fire,
Whom now with traps and now with bribes
The wily Council wire.

V

Archduchess Anne the Council ruled,
Count Louis his great dame;
And woe to both when one had cooled!
Little was she to blame.

VI

Among her chiefs who spun their plots,
Old Kraken stood the sword:
As sharp his wits for cutting knots
Of babble he abhorred.

VII

He reverenced her name and line,
Nor other merit had
Save soldierwise to wait her sign,
And do the deed she bade.

VIII

He saw her hand jump at her side
Ere royally she smiled
On Louis and his fair young bride
Where courtly ranks defiled.

Page 4861

IX

That was a moment when a shock
Through the procession ran,
And thrilled the plumes, and stayed the clock,
Yet smiled Archduchess Anne.

X

No touch gave she to hound in leash,
No wink to sword in sheath:
She seemed a woman scarce of flesh;
Above it, or beneath.

XI

Old Kraken spied with kennelled snarl,
His Lady deemed disgraced.
He footed as on burning marl,
When out of Hall he paced.

XII

'Twas seen he hammered striding legs,
And stopped, and strode again.
Now Vengeance has a brood of eggs,
But Patience must be hen.

XIII

Too slow are they for wrath to hatch,
Too hot for time to rear.
Old Kraken kept unwinding watch;
He marked his day appear.

XIV

He neighed a laugh, though moods were rough
With standards in revolt:
His nostrils took the news for snuff,
His smacking lips for salt.

XV

Count Louis' wavy cock's plumes led
His troops of black-haired manes,
A rebel; and old Kraken sped
To front him on the plains.

XVI

Then camp opposed to camp did they
Fret earth with panther claws
For signal of a bloody day,
Each reading from the Laws.

XVII

'Forefend it, heaven!' Count Louis cried,
'And let the righteous plead:
My country is a willing bride,
Was never slave decreed.

XVIII

'Not we for thirst of blood appeal
To sword and slaughter curst;
We have God's blessing on our steel,
Do we our pleading first.'

XIX

Count Louis, soul of chivalry,
Put trust in plighted word;
By starlight on the broad brown lea,
To bar the strife he spurred.

XX

Across his breast a crimson spot,
That in a quiver glowed,
The ruddy crested camp-fires shot,
As he to darkness rode.

XXI

He rode while omens called, beware
Old Kraken's pledge of faith!
A smile and waving hand in air,
And outward flew the wraith.

XXII

Before pale morn had mixed with gold,
His army roared, and chilled,
As men who have a woe foretold,
And see it red fulfilled.

XXIII

Away and to his young wife speed,
And say that Honour’s dead!
Another word she will not need
To bow a widow’s head.

XXIV

Old Kraken roped his white moustache Right, left, for savage glee: — To swing him in his soldier’s sash Were kind for such as he!

XXV

Page 4862

Old Kraken’s look hard Winter wears
When sweeps the wild snow-blast:
He had the hug of Arctic bears
For captives he held fast.

2—I

Archduchess Anne sat carved in frost,
Shut off from priest and spouse.
Her lips were locked, her arms were crossed,
Her eyes were in her brows.

II

One hand enclosed a paper scroll,
Held as a strangled asp.
So may we see the woman’s soul
In her dire tempter’s grasp.

III

Along that scroll Count Louis’ doom
Throbbed till the letters flamed.
She saw him in his scornful bloom,
She saw him chained and shamed.

IV

Around that scroll Count Louis’ fate
Was acted to her stare,
And hate in love and love in hate
Fought fell to smite or spare.

V

Between the day that struck her old,
And this black star of days,
Her heart swung like a storm-bell tolled
Above a town ablaze.

VI

His beauty pressed to intercede, His beauty served him ill. — Not Vengeance, ’tis his rebel’s deed, ’Tis Justice, not our will!

VII

Yet who had sprung to life's full force
A breast that loveless dried?
But who had sapped it at the source,
With scarlet to her pride!

VIII

He brought her waning heart as 'twere
New message from the skies.
And he betrayed, and left on her
The burden of their sighs.

IX

In floods her tender memories poured;
They foamed with waves of spite:
She crushed them, high her heart outsoared,
To keep her mind alight.

X

— The crawling creature, called in scorn A woman!—with this pen We sign a paper that may warn His crowing fellowmen.

XI

— We read them lesson of a power They slight who do us wrong. That bitter hour this bitter hour Provokes; by turns the strong!

XII

— That we were woman once is known: That we are Justice now, Above our sex, above the throne, Men quaking shall avow.

XIII

Archduchess Anne ascending flew,
Her heart outsoared, but felt
The demon of her sex pursue,
Incensing or to melt.

XIV

Those counterfloods below at leap
Still in her breast blew storm,

And farther up the heavenly steep
Wrestled in angels' form.

XV

To disentangle one clear wish
Not of her sex, she sought;
And womanish to womanish
Discerned in lighted thought.

XVI

With Louis' chance it went not well
When at herself she raged;
A woman, of whom men might tell
She doted, crazed and aged.

Page 4863

XVII

Or else enamoured of a sweet
Withdrawn, a vengeful crone!
And say, what figure at her feet
Is this that utters moan?

XVIII

The Countess Louis from her head
Drew veil: 'Great Lady, hear!
My husband deems you Justice dread,
I know you Mercy dear.

XIX

'His error upon him may fall;
He will not breathe a nay.
I am his helpless mate in all,
Except for grace to pray.

XX

'Perchance on me his choice inclined,
To give his House an heir:
I had not marriage with his mind,
His counsel could not share.

XXI

'I brought no portion for his weal
But this one instinct true,
Which bids me in my weakness kneel,
Archduchess Anne, to you.'

XXII

The frowning Lady uttered, 'Forth!'
Her look forbade delay:
'It is not mine to weigh your worth;
Your husband's others weigh.

XXIII

‘Hence with the woman in your speech,’
For nothing it avails
In woman’s fashion to beseech
Where Justice holds the scales.’

XXIV

Then bent and went the lady wan,
Whose girlishness made grey
The thoughts that through Archduchess Anne
Shattered like stormy spray.

XXV

Long sat she there, as flame that strives To hold on beating wind: — His wife must be the fool of wives, Or cunningly designed!

XXVI

She sat until the tempest-pitch In her torn bosom fell; — His wife must be a subtle witch Or else God loves her well!

3—I

Old Kraken read a missive penned
By his great Lady’s hand.
Her condescension called him friend,
To raise the crest she fanned.

II

Swiftly to where he lay encamped
It flew, yet breathed aloof
From woman’s feeling, and he stamped
A heel more like a hoof.

III

She wrote of Mercy: ’She was loth
Too hard to goad a foe.’
He stamped, as when men drive an oath
Devils transcribe below.

IV

She wrote: ‘We have him half by theft.’
His wrinkles glistened keen:

And see the Winter storm-cloud cleft
To lurid skies between!

V

When read old Kraken: ‘Christ our Guide,’
His eyes were spikes of spar:
And see the white snow-storm divide
About an icy star!

VI

‘She trusted him to understand,’
She wrote, and further prayed
That policy might rule the land.
Old Kraken’s laughter neighed.

Page 4864

VII

Her words he took; her nods and winks
Treated as woman’s fog.
The man-dog for his mistress thinks,
Not less her faithful dog.

VIII

She hugged a cloak old Kraken ripped; Disguise to him he loathed. — Your mercy, madam, shows you stripped, While mine will keep you clothed.

IX

A rough ill-soldered scar in haste He rubbed on his cheek-bone. — Our policy the man shall taste; Our mercy shall be shown.

X

’Count Louis, honour to your race
Decrees the Council-hall:
You ’scape the rope by special grace,
And like a soldier fall.’

XI

— I am a man of many sins, Who for one virtue die, Count Louis said.—They play at shins, Who kick, was the reply.

XII

Uprose the day of crimson sight,
The day without a God.
At morn the hero said Good-night:
See there that stain on sod!

XIII

At morn the Countess Louis heard
Young light sing in the lark.
Ere eve it was that other bird,
Which brings the starless dark.

XIV

To heaven she vowed herself, and yearned
Beside her lord to lie.
Archduchess Anne on Kraken turned,
All white as a dead eye.

XV

If I could kill thee! shrieked her look:
If lightning sprang from Will!
An oaken head old Kraken shook,
And she might thank or kill.

XVI

The pride that fenced her heart in mail
By mortal pain was torn.
Forth from her bosom leaped a wail,
As of a babe new-born.

XVII

She clad herself in courtly use,
And one who heard them prate
Had said they differed upon views
Where statecraft raised debate.

XVIII

The wretch detested must she trust,
The servant master own:
Confide to godless cause so just,
And for God’s blessing moan.

XIX

Austerely she her heart kept down,
Her woman’s tongue was mute
When voice of People, voice of Crown,
In cannon held dispute.

XX

The Crown on seas of blood, like swine,
Swam forefoot at the throat:
It drank of its dear veins for wine,
Enough if it might float!

XXI

It sank with piteous yelp, resurged
Electrical with fear.
O had she on old Kraken urged
Her word of mercy clear!

XXII

O had they with Count Louis been
Accordant in his plea!
Cursed are the women vowed to screen
A heart that all can see!

XXIII

Page 4865

The godless drove unto a goal
Was worse than vile defeat.
Did vengeance prick Count Louis' soul
They dressed him luscious meat.

XXIV

Worms will the faithless find their lies
In the close treasure-chest.
Without a God no day can rise,
Though it should slay our best.

XXV

The Crown it furled a draggled flag,
It sheathed a broken blade.
Behold its triumph in the hag
That lives with looks decayed!

XXVI

And lo, the man of oaken head,
Of soldier's honour bare,
He fled his land, but most he fled
His Lady's frigid stare.

XXVII

Judged by the issue we discern
God's blessing, and the bane.
Count Louis' dust would fill an urn,
His deeds are waving grain.

XXVIII

And she that helped to slay, yet bade
To spare the fated man,
Great were her errors, but she had
Great heart, Archduchess Anne.

The song of THEODOLINDA

I

Queen Theodolind has built
In the earth a furnace-bed:
There the Traitor Nail that spilt
Blood of the anointed Head,
Red of heat, resolves in shame:
White of heat, awakes to flame.
Beat, beat! white of heat,
Red of heat, beat, beat!

II

Mark the skeleton of fire
Lightening from its thunder-roof:
So comes this that saw expire
Him we love, for our behoof!
Red of heat, O white of heat,
This from off the Cross we greet.

III

Brown-cowled hammermen around
Nerve their naked arms to strike
Death with Resurrection crowned,
Each upon that cruel spike.
Red of heat the furnace leaps,
White of heat transfigured sleeps.

IV

Hard against the furnace core
Holds the Queen her streaming eyes:
Lo! that thing of piteous gore
In the lap of radiance lies,
Red of heat, as when He takes,
White of heat, whom earth forsakes.

V

Forth with it, and crushing ring
Iron hymns, for men to hear
Echoes of the deeds that sting
Earth into its graves, and fear!
Red of heat, He maketh thus,
White of heat, a crown of us.

VI

This that killed Thee, kissed Thee, Lord!
Touched Thee, and we touch it: dear,
Dark it is; adored, abhorred:
Vilest, yet most sainted here.
Red of heat, O white of heat,
In it hell and heaven meet.

VII

I behold our morning day
When they chased Him out with rods
Up to where this traitor lay
Thirsting; and the blood was God's!
Red of heat, it shall be pressed,
White of heat, once on my breast!

Page 4866

VIII

Quick! the reptile in me shrieks,
Not the soul. Again; the Cross
Burn there. Oh! this pain it wreaks
Rapture is: pain is not loss.
Red of heat, the tooth of Death,
White of heat, has caught my breath.

IX

Brand me, bite me, bitter thing!
Thus He felt, and thus I am
One with Him in suffering,
One with Him in bliss, the Lamb.
Red of heat, O white of heat,
Thus is bitterness made sweet.

X

Now am I, who bear that stamp
Scorched in me, the living sign
Sole on earth—the lighted lamp
Of the dreadful Day divine.
White of heat, beat on it fast!
Red of heat, its shape has passed.

XI

Out in angry sparks they fly,
They that sentenced Him to bleed:
Pontius and his troop: they die,
Damned for ever for the deed!
White of heat in vain they soar:
Red of heat they strew the floor.

XII

Fury on it! have its debt!
Thunder on the Hill accurst,
Golgotha, be ye! and sweat
Blood, and thirst the Passion’s thirst.
Red of heat and white of heat,
Champ it like fierce teeth that eat.

XIII

Strike it as the ages crush
Towers! for while a shape is seen
I am rivalled. Quench its blush,
Devil! But it crowns me Queen,
Red of heat, as none before,
White of heat, the circlet wore.

XIV

Lowly I will be, and quail,
Crawling, with a beggar’s hand:
On my breast the branded Nail,
On my head the iron band.
Red of heat, are none so base!
White of heat, none know such grace!

XV

In their heaven the sainted hosts,
Robed in violet unflecked,
Gaze on humankind as ghosts:
I draw down a ray direct.
Red of heat, across my brow,
White of heat, I touch Him now.

XVI

Robed in violet, robed in gold,
Robed in pearl, they make our dawn.
What am I to them? Behold
What ye are to me, and fawn.
Red of heat, be humble, ye!
White of heat, O teach it me!

XVII

Martyrs! hungry peaks in air,
Rent with lightnings, clad with snow,
Crowned with stars! you strip me bare,
Pierce me, shame me, stretch me low,
Red of heat, but it may be,
White of heat, some envy me!

XVIII

O poor enviers! God's own gifts
Have a devil for the weak.
Yea, the very force that lifts
Finds the vessel's secret leak.
Red of heat, I rise o'er all:
White of heat, I faint, I fall.

Page 4867

XIX

Those old Martyrs sloughed their pride,
Taking humbleness like mirth.
I am to His Glory tied,
I that witness Him on earth!
Red of heat, my pride of dust,
White of heat, feeds fire in trust.

XX

Kindle me to constant fire,
Lest the nail be but a nail!
Give me wings of great desire,
Lest I look within, and fail!
Red of heat, the furnace light,
White of heat, fix on my sight.

XXI

Never for the Chosen peace!
Know, by me tormented know,
Never shall the wrestling cease
Till with our outlasting Foe,
Red of heat to white of heat,
Roll we to the Godhead’s feet!
Beat, beat! white of heat,
Red of heat, beat, beat!

A preaching from A Spanish ballad

I

Ladies who in chains of wedlock
Chafe at an unequal yoke,
Not to nightingales give hearing;
Better this, the raven’s croak.

II

Down the Prado strolled my seigneur,
Arm at lordly bow on hip,
Fingers trimming his moustachios,
Eyes for pirate fellowship.

III

Home sat she that owned him master;
Like the flower bent to ground
Rain-surcharged and sun-forsaken;
Heedless of her hair unbound.

IV

Sudden at her feet a lover
Palpitating knelt and wooed;
Seemed a very gift from heaven
To the starved of common food.

V

Love me? she his vows repeated:
Fiery vows oft sung and thrummed:
Wondered, as on earth a stranger;
Thirsted, trusted, and succumbed.

VI

O beloved youth! my lover!
Mine! my lover! take my life
Wholly: thine in soul and body,
By this oath of more than wife!

VII

Know me for no helpless woman;
Nay, nor coward, though I sink
Awed beside thee, like an infant
Learning shame ere it can think.

VIII

Swing me hence to do thee service,
Be thy succour, prove thy shield;
Heaven will hear!—in house thy handmaid,
Squire upon the battlefield.

IX

At my breasts I cool thy footsoles;
Wine I pour, I dress thy meats;
Humbly, when my lord it pleaseth,
Lie with him on perfumed sheets:

X

Pray for him, my blood’s dear fountain,
While he sleeps, and watch his yawn
In that wakening babelike moment,
Sweeter to my thought than dawn! —

XI

Thundered then her lord of thunders;
Burst the door, and, flashing sword,
Loud disgorged the woman’s title:
Condemnation in one word.

Page 4868

XII

Grand by righteous wrath transfigured,
Towers the husband who provides
In his person judge and witness,
Death’s black doorkeeper besides!

XIII

Round his head the ancient terrors,
Conjured of the stronger’s law,
Circle, to abash the creature
Daring twist beneath his paw.

XIV

How though he hath squandered Honour
High of Honour let him scold:
Gilding of the man’s possession,
’Tis the woman’s coin of gold.

XV

She inheriting from many
Bleeding mothers bleeding sense
Feels ’twixt her and sharp-fanged nature
Honour first did plant the fence.

XVI

Nature, that so shrieks for justice;
Honour’s thirst, that blood will slake;
These are women’s riddles, roughly
Mixed to write them saint or snake.

XVII

Never nature cherished woman:
She throughout the sexes’ war
Serves as temptress and betrayer,
Favouring man, the muscular.

XVIII

Lureful is she, bent for folly;
Doating on the child which crows:
Yours to teach him grace in fealty,
What the bloom is, what the rose.

XIX

Hard the task: your prison-chamber
Widens not for lifted latch
Till the giant thews and sinews
Meet their Godlike overmatch.

XX

Read that riddle, scorning pity's
Tears, of cockatrices shed:
When the heart is vowed for freedom,
Captaincy it yields to head.

XXI

Meanwhile you, freaked nature's martyrs,
Honour's army, flower and weed,
Gentle ladies, wedded ladies,
See for you this fair one bleed.

XXII

Sole stood her offence, she faltered;
Prayed her lord the youth to spare;
Prayed that in the orange garden
She might lie, and ceased her prayer.

XXIII

Then commanding to all women
Chastity, her breasts she laid
Bare unto the self-avenger.
Man in metal was the blade.

The young princess—A ballad of old laws of love

1—I

When the South sang like a nightingale
Above a bower in May,
The training of Love's vine of flame

Was writ in laws, for lord and dame
To say their yea and nay.

II

When the South sang like a nightingale
Across the flowering night,
And lord and dame held gentle sport,
There came a young princess to Court,
A frost of beauty white.

III

The South sang like a nightingale
To thaw her glittering dream:
No vine of Love her bosom gave,
She drank no wine of Love, but grave
She held them to Love’s theme.

Page 4869

IV

The South grew all a nightingale
Beneath a moon unmoved:
Like the banner of war she led them on;
She left them to lie, like the light that has gone
From wine-cups overproved.

V

When the South was a fervid nightingale,
And she a chilling moon,
’Twas pity to see on the garden swards,
Against Love’s laws, those rival lords
As willow-wands lie strewn.

VI

The South had throat of a nightingale
For her, the young princess:
She gave no vine of Love to rear,
Love’s wine drank not, yet bent her ear
To themes of Love no less.

2—I

The lords of the Court they sighed heart-sick,
Heart-free Lord Dusiote laughed:
I prize her no more than a fling o’ the dice,
But, or shame to my manhood, a lady of ice,
We master her by craft!

II

Heart-sick the lords of joyance yawned,
Lord Dusiote laughed heart-free:
I count her as much as a crack o’ my thumb,
But, or shame of my manhood, to me she shall come
Like the bird to roost in the tree!

III

At dead of night when the palace-guard
Had passed the measured rounds,
The young princess awoke to feel

A shudder of blood at the crackle of steel
Within the garden-bounds.

IV

It ceased, and she thought of whom was need,
The friar or the leech;
When lo, stood her tirewoman breathless by:
Lord Dusiote, madam, to death is nigh,
Of you he would have speech.

V

He prays you of your gentleness,
To light him to his dark end.
The princess rose, and forth she went,
For charity was her intent,
Devoutly to befriend.

VI

Lord Dusiote hung on his good squire's arm,
The priest beside him knelt:
A weeping handkerchief was pressed
To stay the red flood at his breast,
And bid cold ladies melt.

VII

O lady, though you are ice to men,
All pure to heaven as light
Within the dew within the flower,
Of you 'tis whispered that love has power
When secret is the night.

VIII

I have silenced the slanderers, peace to their souls!
Save one was too cunning for me.
I die, whose love is late avowed,
He lives, who boasts the lily has bowed
To the oath of a bended knee.

IX

Lord Dusiote drew breath with pain,
And she with pain drew breath:
On him she looked, on his like above;

She flew in the folds of a marvel of love
Revealed to pass to death.

Page 4870

X

You are dying, O great-hearted lord,
You are dying for me, she cried;
O take my hand, O take my kiss,
And take of your right for love like this,
The vow that plights me bride.

XI

She bade the priest recite his words
While hand in hand were they,
Lord Dusiote's soul to waft to bliss;
He had her hand, her vow, her kiss,
And his body was borne away.

3—I

Lord Dusiote sprang from priest and squire;
He gazed at her lighted room:
The laughter in his heart grew slack;
He knew not the force that pushed him back
From her and the morn in bloom.

II

Like a drowned man's length on the strong flood-tide,
Like the shade of a bird in the sun,
He fled from his lady whom he might claim
As ghost, and who made the daybeams flame
To scare what he had done.

III

There was grief at Court for one so gay,
Though he was a lord less keen
For training the vine than at vintage-press;
But in her soul the young princess
Believed that love had been.

IV

Lord Dusiote fled the Court and land,
He crossed the woeful seas,
Till his traitorous doing seemed clearer to burn,

And the lady beloved drew his heart for return,
Like the banner of war in the breeze.

V

He neared the palace, he spied the Court,
And music he heard, and they told
Of foreign lords arrived to bring
The nuptial gifts of a bridegroom king
To the princess grave and cold.

VI

The masque and the dance were cloud on wave,
And down the masque and the dance
Lord Dusiote stepped from dame to dame,
And to the young princess he came,
With a bow and a burning glance.

VII

Do you take a new husband to-morrow, lady?
She shrank as at prick of steel.
Must the first yield place to the second, he sighed.
Her eyes were like the grave that is wide
For the corpse from head to heel.

VIII

My lady, my love, that little hand
Has mine ringed fast in plight:
I bear for your lips a lawful thirst,
And as justly the second should follow the first,
I come to your door this night.

IX

If a ghost should come a ghost will go:
No more the lady said,
Save that ever when he in wrath began
To swear by the faith of a living man,
She answered him, You are dead.

4—I

The soft night-wind went laden to death
With smell of the orange in flower;
The light leaves prattled to neighbour ears;

The bird of the passion sang over his tears;
The night named hour by hour.

Page 4871

II

Sang loud, sang low the rapturous bird
Till the yellow hour was nigh,
Behind the folds of a darker cloud:
He chuckled, he sobbed, alow, aloud;
The voice between earth and sky.

III

O will you, will you, women are weak;
The proudest are yielding mates
For a forward foot and a tongue of fire:
So thought Lord Dusiote’s trusty squire,
At watch by the palace-gates.

IV

The song of the bird was wine in his blood,
And woman the odorous bloom:
His master’s great adventure stirred
Within him to mingle the bloom and bird,
And morn ere its coming illume.

V

Beside him strangely a piece of the dark
Had moved, and the undertones
Of a priest in prayer, like a cavernous wave,
He heard, as were there a soul to save
For urgency now in the groans.

VI

No priest was hired for the play this night:
And the squire tossed head like a deer
At sniff of the tainted wind; he gazed
Where cresset-lamps in a door were raised,
Belike on a passing bier.

VII

All cloaked and masked, with naked blades,
That flashed of a judgement done,
The lords of the Court, from the palace-door,

Came issuing silently, bearers four,
And flat on their shoulders one.

VIII

They marched the body to squire and priest,
They lowered it sad to earth:
The priest they gave the burial dole,
Bade wrestle hourly for his soul,
Who was a lord of worth.

IX

One said, farewell to a gallant knight!
And one, but a restless ghost!
'Tis a year and a day since in this place
He died, sped high by a lady of grace
To join the blissful host.

X

Not vainly on us she charged her cause,
The lady whom we revere
For faith in the mask of a love untrue
To the Love we honour, the Love her due,
The Love we have vowed to rear.

XI

A trap for the sweet tooth, lures for the light,
For the fortress defiant a mine:
Right well! But not in the South, princess,
Shall the lady snared of her nobleness
Ever shamed or a captive pine.

XII

When the South had voice of a nightingale
Above a Maying bower,
On the heights of Love walked radiant peers;
The bird of the passion sang over his tears
To the breeze and the orange-flower.

King Harald's trance

I

Sword in length a reaping-hook amain
Harald sheared his field, blood up to shank:
'Mid the swathes of slain,
First at moonrise drank.

Page 4872

II

Thereof hunger, as for meats the knife,
Pricked his ribs, in one sharp spur to reach
Home and his young wife,
Nigh the sea-ford beach.

III

After battle keen to feed was he:
Smoking flesh the thresher washed down fast,
Like an angry sea
Ships from keel to mast.

IV

Name us glory, singer, name us pride
Matching Harald’s in his deeds of strength;
Chiefs, wife, sword by side,
Foemen stretched their length!

V

Half a winter night the toasts hurrahed,
Crowned him, clothed him, trumpeted him high,
Till awink he bade
Wife to chamber fly.

VI

Twice the sun had mounted, twice had sunk,
Ere his ears took sound; he lay for dead;
Mountain on his trunk,
Ocean on his head.

VII

Clamped to couch, his fiery hearing sucked
Whispers that at heart made iron-clang:
Here fool-women clucked,
There men held harangue.

VIII

Burial to fit their lord of war
They decreed him: hailed the kingling: ha!
Hateful! but this Thor
Failed a weak lamb's baa.

IX

King they hailed a branchlet, shaped to fare,
Weighted so, like quaking shingle spume,
When his blood's own heir
Ripened in the womb!

X

Still he heard, and doglike, hoglike, ran
Nose of hearing till his blind sight saw:
Woman stood with man
Mouthing low, at paw.

XI

Woman, man, they mouthed; they spake a thing
Armed to split a mountain, sunder seas:
Still the frozen king
Lay and felt him freeze.

XII

Doglike, hoglike, horselike now he raced,
Riderless, in ghost across a ground
Flint of breast, blank-faced,
Past the fleshly bound.

XIII

Smell of brine his nostrils filled with might:
Nostrils quickened eyelids, eyelids hand:
Hand for sword at right
Groped, the great haft spanned.

XIV

Wonder struck to ice his people's eyes:
Him they saw, the prone upon the bier,
Sheer from backbone rise,
Sword uplifting peer.

XV

Sitting did he breathe against the blade,
Standing kiss it for that proof of life:
Strode, as netters wade,
Straightway to his wife.

XVI

Her he eyed: his judgement was one word,
Foulbed! and she fell: the blow clove two.
Fearful for the third,
All their breath indrew.

XVII

Morning danced along the waves to beach;
Dumb his chiefs fetched breath for what might hap:
Glassily on each
Stared the iron cap.

Page 4873

XVIII

Sudden, as it were a monster oak
Split to yield a limb by stress of heat,
Strained he, staggered, broke
Doubled at their feet.

Whimper of sympathy

Hawk or shrike has done this deed
Of downy feathers: rueful sight!
Sweet sentimentalist, invite
Your bosom's Power to intercede.

So hard it seems that one must bleed
Because another needs will bite!
All round we find cold Nature slight
The feelings of the totter-knee'd.

O it were pleasant with you
To fly from this tussle of foes,
The shambles, the charnel, the wrinkle!
To dwell in yon dribble of dew
On the cheek of your sovereign rose,
And live the young life of a twinkle.

Young Reynard

I

Gracefullest leaper, the dappled fox-cub
Curves over brambles with berries and buds,
Light as a bubble that flies from the tub,
Whisked by the laundry-wife out of her suds.
Wavy he comes, woolly, all at his ease,
Elegant, fashioned to foot with the deuce;
Nature's own prince of the dance: then he sees
Me, and retires as if making excuse.

II

Never closed minuet courtlier! Soon
Cub-hunting troops were abroad, and a yelp
Told of sure scent: ere the stroke upon noon
Reynard the younger lay far beyond help.

Wild, my poor friend, has the fate to be chased;
Civil will conquer: were ’t other ’twere worse;
Fair, by the flushed early morning embraced,
Haply you live a day longer in verse.

Manfred

I

Projected from the bilious Childe,
This clatterjaw his foot could set
On Alps, without a breast beguiled
To glow in shedding rascal sweat.
Somewhere about his grinder teeth,
He mouthed of thoughts that grilled beneath,
And summoned Nature to her feud
With bile and buskin Attitude.

II

Considerably was the world
Of spinsterdom and clergy racked
While he his hinted horrors hurled,
And she pictorially attacked.
A duel hugeous. Tragic? Ho!
The cities, not the mountains, blow
Such bladders; in their shapes confessed
An after-dinner’s indigest.

Hernani

Cistercians might crack their sides
With laughter, and exemption get,
At sight of heroes clasping brides,
And hearing—O the horn! the horn!
The horn of their obstructive debt!

But quit the stage, that note applies
For sermons cosmopolitan,
Hernani. Have we filched our prize,
Forgetting . . .? O the horn! the horn!
The horn of the Old Gentleman!

Page 4874

The nuptials of Attila

I

Flat as to an eagle’s eye,
Earth hung under Attila.
Sign for carnage gave he none.
In the peace of his disdain,
Sun and rain, and rain and sun,
Cherished men to wax again,
Crawl, and in their manner die.
On his people stood a frost.
Like the charger cut in stone,
Rearing stiff, the warrior host,
Which had life from him alone,
Craved the trumpet’s eager note,
As the bridled earth the Spring.
Rusty was the trumpet’s throat.
He let chief and prophet rave;
Venturous earth around him string
Threads of grass and slender rye,
Wave them, and untrampled wave.
O for the time when God did cry,
Eye and have, my Attila!

II

Scorn of conquest filled like sleep
Him that drank of havoc deep
When the Green Cat pawed the globe:
When the horsemen from his bow
Shot in sheaves and made the foe
Crimson fringes of a robe,
Trailed o’er towns and fields in woe;
When they streaked the rivers red,
When the saddle was the bed.
Attila, my Attila!

III

He breathed peace and pulled a flower.
Eye and have, my Attila!
This was the damsel Ildico,
Rich in bloom until that hour:

Shyer than the forest doe
Twinkling slim through branches green.
Yet the shyest shall be seen.
Make the bed for Attila!

IV

Seen of Attila, desired,
She was led to him straightway:
Radiantly was she attired;
Rifled lands were her array,
Jewels bled from weeping crowns,
Gold of woeful fields and towns.
She stood pallid in the light.
How she walked, how withered white,
From the blessing to the board,
She who would have proudly blushed,
Women whispered, asking why,
Hinting of a youth, and hushed.
Was it terror of her lord?
Was she childish? was she sly?
Was it the bright mantle's dye
Drained her blood to hues of grief
Like the ash that shoots the spark?
See the green tree all in leaf:
See the green tree stripped of bark! —
Make the bed for Attila!

V

Round the banquet-table's load
Scores of iron horsemen rode;
Chosen warriors, keen and hard;
Grain of threshing battle-dints;
Attila's fierce body-guard,
Smelling war like fire in flints.
Grant them peace be fugitive!
Iron-capped and iron-heeled,
Each against his fellow's shield
Smote the spear-head, shouting, Live,
Attila! my Attila!
Eagle, eagle of our breed,
Eagle, beak the lamb, and feed!
Have her, and unleash us! live,
Attila! my Attila!

Page 4875

VI

He was of the blood to shine
Bronze in joy, like skies that scorch.
Beaming with the goblet wine
In the wavering of the torch,
Looked he backward on his bride.
Eye and have, my Attila!
Fair in her wide robe was she:
Where the robe and vest divide,
Fair she seemed surpassingly:
Soft, yet vivid as the stream
Danube rolls in the moonbeam
Through rock-barriers: but she smiled
Never, she sat cold as salt:
Open-mouthed as a young child
Wondering with a mind at fault.
Make the bed for Attila!

VII

Under the thin hoop of gold
Whence in waves her hair outrolled,
’Twixt her brows the women saw
Shadows of a vulture’s claw
Gript in flight: strange knots that sped
Closing and dissolving aye:
Such as wicked dreams betray
When pale dawn creeps o’er the bed.
They might show the common pang
Known to virgins, in whom dread
Hunts their bliss like famished hounds;
While the chiefs with roaring rounds
Tossed her to her lord, and sang
Praise of him whose hand was large,
Cheers for beauty brought to yield,
Chirrups of the trot afield,
Hurrahs of the battle-charge.

VIII

Those rock-faces hung with weed
Reddened: their great days of speed,
Slaughter, triumph, flood and flame,

Like a jealous frenzy wrought,
Scoffed at them and did them shame,
Quaffing idle, conquering nought.
O for the time when God decreed
Earth the prey of Attila!
God called on thee in his wrath,
Trample it to mire! 'Twas done.
Swift as Danube clove our path
Down from East to Western sun.
Huns! behold your pasture, gaze,
Take, our king said: heel to flank
(Whisper it, the war-horse neighs!)
Forth we drove, and blood we drank
Fresh as dawn-dew: earth was ours:
Men were flocks we lashed and spurned:
Fast as windy flame devours,
Flame along the wind, we burned.
Arrow javelin, spear, and sword!
Here the snows and there the plains;
On! our signal: onward poured
Torrents of the tightened reins,
Foaming over vine and corn
Hot against the city-wall.
Whisper it, you sound a horn
To the grey beast in the stall!
Yea, he whinnies at a nod.
O for sound of the trumpet-notes!
O for the time when thunder-shod,
He that scarce can munch his oats,
Hung on the peaks, brooded aloof,
Champed the grain of the wrath of God,
Pressed a cloud on the cowering roof,
Snorted out of the blackness fire!
Scarlet broke the sky, and down,
Hammering West with print of his hoof,
He burst out of the bosom of ire
Sharp as eyelight under thy frown,
Attila, my Attila!

Page 4876

IX

Ravaged cities rolling smoke
Thick on cornfields dry and black,
Wave his banners, bear his yoke.
Track the lightning, and you track
Attila. They moan: 'tis he!
Bleed: 'tis he! Beneath his foot
Leagues are deserts charred and mute;
Where he passed, there passed a sea.
Attila, my Attila!

X

— Who breathed on the king cold breath? Said a voice amid the host, He is Death that weds a ghost, Else a ghost that weds with Death? Ildico's chill little hand Shuddering he beheld: austere Stared, as one who would command Sight of what has filled his ear: Plucked his thin beard, laughed disdain. Feast, ye Huns! His arm be raised, Like the warrior, battle-dazed, Joining to the fight amain. Make the bed for Attila!

XI

Silent Ildico stood up.
King and chief to pledge her well,
Shocked sword sword and cup on cup,
Clamouring like a brazen bell.
Silent stepped the queenly slave.
Fair, by heaven! she was to meet
On a midnight, near a grave,
Flapping wide the winding-sheet.

XII

Death and she walked through the crowd,
Out beyond the flush of light.
Ceremonious women bowed
Following her: 'twas middle night.
Then the warriors each on each
Spied, nor overloudly laughed;
Like the victims of the leech,
Who have drunk of a strange draught.

XIII

Attila remained. Even so
Frowned he when he struck the blow,
Brained his horse, that stumbled twice,
On a bloody day in Gaul,
Bellowing, Perish omens! All
Marvelled at the sacrifice,
But the battle, swinging dim,
Rang off that axe-blow for him.
Attila, my Attila!

XIV

Brightening over Danube wheeled
Star by star; and she, most fair,
Sweet as victory half-revealed,
Seized to make him glad and young;
She, O sweet as the dark sign
Given him oft in battles gone,
When the voice within said, Dare!
And the trumpet-notes were sprung
Rapturous for the charge in line:
She lay waiting: fair as dawn
Wrapped in folds of night she lay;
Secret, lustrous; flaglike there,
Waiting him to stream and ray,
With one loosening blush outflung,
Colours of his hordes of horse
Ranked for combat; still he hung
Like the fever dreading air,
Cursed of heat; and as a corse
Gathers vultures, in his brain
Images of her eyes and kiss
Plucked at the limbs that could remain
Loitering nigh the doors of bliss.
Make the bed for Attila!

XV

Page 4877

Passion on one hand, on one,
Destiny led forth the Hun.
Heard ye outcries of affright,
Voices that through many a fray,
In the press of flag and spear,
Warned the king of peril near?
Men were dumb, they gave him way,
Eager heads to left and right,
Like the bearded standard, thrust,
As in battle, for a nod
From their lord of battle-dust.
Attila, my Attila!
Slow between the lines he trod.
Saw ye not the sun drop slow
On this nuptial day, ere eve
Pierced him on the couch aglow?
Attila, my Attila!
Here and there his heart would cleave
Clotted memory for a space:
Some stout chief's familiar face,
Choicest of his fighting brood,
Touched him, as 'twere one to know
Ere he met his bride's embrace.
Attila, my Attila!
Twisting fingers in a beard
Scant as winter underwood,
With a narrowed eye he peered;
Like the sunset's graver red
Up old pine-stems. Grave he stood
Eyeing them on whom was shed
Burning light from him alone.
Attila, my Attila!
Red were they whose mouths recalled
Where the slaughter mounted high,
High on it, o'er earth appalled,
He; heaven's finger in their sight
Raising him on waves of dead,
Up to heaven his trumpets blown.
O for the time when God's delight
Crowned the head of Attila!
Hungry river of the crag
Stretching hands for earth he came:
Force and Speed astride his name

Pointed back to spear and flag.
He came out of miracle cloud,
Lightning-swift and spectre-lean.
Now those days are in a shroud:
Have him to his ghostly queen.
Make the bed for Attila!

XVI

One, with winecups overstrung,
Cried him farewell in Rome’s tongue.
Who? for the great king turned as though
Wrath to the shaft’s head strained the bow.
Nay, not wrath the king possessed,
But a radiance of the breast.
In that sound he had the key
Of his cunning malady.
Lo, where gleamed the sapphire lake,
Leo, with his Rome at stake,
Drew blank air to hues and forms;
Whereof Two that shone distinct,
Linked as orbed stars are linked,
Clear among the myriad swarms,
In a constellation, dashed
Full on horse and rider’s eyes
Sunless light, but light it was —
Light that blinded and abashed,
Froze his members, bade him pause,
Caught him mid-gallop, blazed him home.
Attila, my Attila!
What are streams that cease to flow?
What was Attila, rolled thence,
Cheated by a juggler’s show?
Like that lake of blue

Page 4878

intense,
Under tempest lashed to foam,
Lurid radiance, as he passed,
Filled him, and around was glassed,
When deep-voiced he uttered, Rome!

XVII

Rome! the word was: and like meat
Flung to dogs the word was torn.
Soon Rome’s magic priests shall bleat
Round their magic Pope forlorn!
Loud they swore the king had sworn
Vengeance on the Roman cheat,
Ere he passed, as, grave and still,
Danube through the shouting hill:
Sworn it by his naked life!
Eagle, snakes these women are:
Take them on the wing! but war,
Smoking war’s the warrior’s wife!
Then for plunder! then for brides
Won without a winking priest! —
Danube whirled his train of tides
Black toward the yellow East.
Make the bed for Attila!

XVIII

Chirrups of the trot afield,
Hurrahs of the battle-charge,
How they answered, how they pealed,
When the morning rose and drew
Bow and javelin, lance and targe,
In the nuptial casement’s view!
Attila, my Attila!
Down the hillspurs, out of tents
Glimmering in mid-forest, through
Mists of the cool morning scents,
Forth from city-alley, court,
Arch, the bounding horsemen flew,
Joined along the plains of dew,
Raced and gave the rein to sport,
Closed and streamed like curtain-rents
Fluttered by a wind, and flowed

Into squadrons: trumpets blew,
Chargers neighed, and trappings glowed
Brave as the bright Orient's.
Look on the seas that run to greet
Sunrise: look on the leagues of wheat:
Look on the lines and squares that fret
Leaping to level the lance blood-wet.
Tens of thousands, man and steed,
Tossing like field-flowers in Spring;
Ready to be hurled at need
Whither their great lord may sling.
Finger Romeward, Romeward, King!
Attila, my Attila!
Still the woman holds him fast
As a night-flag round the mast.

XIX

Nigh upon the fiery noon,
Out of ranks a roaring burst.
'Ware white women like the moon!
They are poison: they have thirst
First for love, and next for rule.
Jealous of the army, she?
Ho, the little wanton fool!
We were his before she squealed
Blind for mother's milk, and heeled
Kicking on her mother's knee.
His in life and death are we:
She but one flower of a field.
We have given him bliss tenfold
In an hour to match her night:
Attila, my Attila!
Still her arms the master hold,
As on wounds the scarf winds tight.

XX

Page 4879

Over Danube day no more,
Like the warrior’s planted spear,
Stood to hail the King: in fear
Western day knocked at his door.
Attila, my Attila!
Sudden in the army’s eyes
Rolled a blast of lights and cries:
Flashing through them: Dead are ye!
Dead, ye Huns, and torn piecemeal!
See the ordered army reel
Stricken through the ribs: and see,
Wild for speed to cheat despair,
Horsemen, clutching knee to chin,
Crouch and dart they know not where.
Attila, my Attila!
Faces covered, faces bare,
Light the palace-front like jets
Of a dreadful fire within.
Beating hands and driving hair
Start on roof and parapets.
Dust rolls up; the slaughter din.
— Death to them who call him dead!
Death to them who doubt the tale!
Choking in his dusty veil,
Sank the sun on his death-bed.
Make the bed for Attila!

XXI

’Tis the room where thunder sleeps.
Frenzy, as a wave to shore
Surging, burst the silent door,
And drew back to awful deeps
Breath beaten out, foam-white. Anew
Howled and pressed the ghastly crew,
Like storm-waters over rocks.
Attila, my Attila!
One long shaft of sunset red
Laid a finger on the bed.
Horror, with the snaky locks,
Shocked the surge to stiffened heaps,
Hoary as the glacier’s head
Faced to the moon. Insane they look.
God it is in heaven who weeps

Fallen from his hand the Scourge he shook.
Make the bed for Attila!

XXII

Square along the couch, and stark,
Like the sea-rejected thing
Sea-sucked white, behold their King.
Attila, my Attila!
Beams that panted black and bright,
Scornful lightnings danced their sight:
Him they see an oak in bud,
Him an oaklog stripped of bark:
Him, their lord of day and night,
White, and lifting up his blood
Dumb for vengeance. Name us that,
Huddled in the corner dark
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Teeth for lips!—'tis she! she stares,
Glittering through her bristled hairs.
Rend her! Pierce her to the hilt!
She is Murder: have her out!
What! this little fist, as big
As the southern summer fig!
She is Madness, none may doubt.
Death, who dares deny her guilt!
Death, who says his blood she spilt!
Make the bed for Attila!

XXIII

Torch and lamp and sunset-red
Fell three-fingered on the bed.
In the torch the beard-hair scant
With the great breast seemed to pant:
In the yellow lamp the limbs
Wavered, as the lake-flower swims:
In the sunset red the dead
Dead avowed him, dry blood-red.

Page 4880

XXIV

Hatred of that abject slave,
Earth, was in each chieftain’s heart.
Earth has got him, whom God gave,
Earth may sing, and earth shall smart!
Attila, my Attila!

XXV

Thus their prayer was raved and ceased.
Then had Vengeance of her feast
Scent in their quick pang to smite
Which they knew not, but huge pain
Urged them for some victim slain
Swift, and blotted from the sight.
Each at each, a crouching beast,
Glared, and quivered for the word.
Each at each, and all on that,
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Head-bound with its bridal-wreath.
Then the bitter chamber heard
Vengeance in a cauldron seethe.
Hurried counsel rage and craft
Yelped to hungry men, whose teeth
Hard the grey lip-ringlet gnawed,
Gleaming till their fury laughed.
With the steel-hilt in the clutch,
Eyes were shot on her that froze
In their blood-thirst overawed;
Burned to rend, yet feared to touch.
She that was his nuptial rose,
She was of his heart’s blood clad:
Oh! the last of him she had! —
Could a little fist as big
As the southern summer fig,
Push a dagger’s point to pierce
Ribs like those? Who else! They glared
Each at each. Suspicion fierce
Many a black remembrance bared.
Attila, my Attila!
Death, who dares deny her guilt!
Death, who says his blood she spilt!
Traitor he, who stands between!

Swift to hell, who harms the Queen!
She, the wild contention's cause,
Combed her hair with quiet paws.
Make the bed for Attila!

XXVI

Night was on the host in arms.
Night, as never night before,
Hearkened to an army's roar
Breaking up in snaky swarms:
Torch and steel and snorting steed,
Hunted by the cry of blood,
Cursed with blindness, mad for day.
Where the torches ran a flood,
Tales of him and of the deed
Showered like a torrent spray.
Fear of silence made them strive
Loud in warrior-hymns that grew
Hoarse for slaughter yet unwreaked.
Ghostly Night across the hive,
With a crimson finger drew
Letters on her breast and shrieked.
Night was on them like the mould
On the buried half alive.
Night, their bloody Queen, her fold
Wound on them and struck them through.
Make the bed for Attila!

XXVII

Earth has got him whom God gave,
Earth may sing, and earth shall smart!
None of earth shall know his grave.
They that dig with Death depart.
Attila, my Attila!

XXVIII

Page 4881

Thus their prayer was raved and passed:
Passed in peace their red sunset:
Hewn and earthed those men of sweat
Who had housed him in the vast,
Where no mortal might declare,
There lies he—his end was there!
Attila, my Attila!

XXIX

Kingless was the army left:
Of its head the race bereft.
Every fury of the pit
Tortured and dismembered it.
Lo, upon a silent hour,
When the pitch of frost subsides,
Danube with a shout of power
Loosens his imprisoned tides:
Wide around the frighted plains
Shake to hear his riven chains,
Dreadfuller than heaven in wrath,
As he makes himself a path:
High leap the ice-cracks, towering pile
Floes to bergs, and giant peers
Wrestle on a drifted isle;
Island on ice-island rears;
Dissolution battles fast:
Big the senseless Titans loom,
Through a mist of common doom
Striving which shall die the last:
Till a gentle-breathing morn
Frees the stream from bank to bank.
So the Empire built of scorn
Agonized, dissolved and sank.
Of the Queen no more was told
Than of leaf on Danube rolled.
Make the bed for Attila!

Aneurin’s harp

I

Prince of Bards was old Aneurin;
He the grand Gododin sang;

All his numbers threw such fire in,
Struck his harp so wild a twang; —
Still the wakeful Briton borrows
Wisdom from its ancient heat:
Still it haunts our source of sorrows,
Deep excess of liquor sweet!

II

Here the Briton, there the Saxon,
Face to face, three fields apart,
Thirst for light to lay their thwacks on
Each the other with good heart.
Dry the Saxon sits, 'mid dinful
Noise of iron knits his steel:
Fresh and roaring with a skinful,
Britons round the hirlas reel.

III

Yellow flamed the meady sunset;
Red runs up the flag of morn.
Signal for the British onset
Hiccups through the British horn.
Down these hillmen pour like cattle
Sniffing pasture: grim below,
Showing eager teeth of battle,
In his spear-heads lies the foe.

IV

— Monster of the sea! we drive him Back into his hungry brine. — You shall lodge him, feed him, wive him, Look on us; we stand in line. — Pale sea-monster! foul the waters Cast him; foul he leaves our land. — You shall yield us land and daughters: Stay the tongue, and try the hand.

V

Page 4882

Swift as torrent-streams our warriors,
Tossing torrent lights, find way;
Burst the ridges, crowd the barriers,
Pierce them where the spear-heads play;
Turn them as the clods in furrow,
Top them like the leaping foam;
Sorrow to the mother, sorrow,
Sorrow to the wife at home!

VI

Stags, they butted; bulls, they bellowed;
Hounds, we baited them; oh, brave!
Every second man, unfellowed,
Took the strokes of two, and gave.
Bare as hop-stakes in November’s
Mists they met our battle-flood:
Hoary-red as Winter’s embers
Lay their dead lines done in blood.

VII

Thou, my Bard, didst hang thy lyre in
Oak-leaves, and with crimson brand
Rhythmic fury spent, Aneurin;
Songs the churls could understand:
Thrumming on their Saxon sconces
Straight, the invariable blow,
Till they snorted true responses.
Ever thus the Bard they know!

VIII

But ere nightfall, harper lusty!
When the sun was like a ball
Dropping on the battle dusty,
What was yon discordant call?
Cambria’s old metheglin demon
Breathed against our rushing tide;
Clove us midst the threshing seamen:-
Gashed, we saw our ranks divide!

IX

Britain then with valedictory
Shriek veiled off her face and knelt.
Full of liquor, full of victory,
Chief on chief old vengeance dealt.
Backward swung their hurly-burly;
None but dead men kept the fight.
They that drink their cup too early,
Darkness they shall see ere night.

X

Loud we heard the yellow rover
Laugh to sleep, while we raged thick,
Thick as ants the ant-hill over,
Asking who has thrust the stick.
Lo, as frogs that Winter cumbers
Meet the Spring with stiffen'd yawn,
We from our hard night of slumbers
Marched into the bloody dawn.

XI

Day on day we fought, though shattered:
Pushed and met repulses sharp,
Till our Raven's plumes were scattered:
All, save old Aneurin's harp.
Hear it wailing like a mother
O'er the strings of children slain!
He in one tongue, in another,
Alien, I; one blood, yet twain.

XII

Old Aneurin! droop no longer.
That squat ocean-scum, we own,
Had fine stoutness, made us stronger,
Brought us much-required backbone:
Claimed of Power their dues, and granted
Dues to Power in turn, when rose
Mightier rovers; they that planted
Sovereign here the Norman nose.

XIII

Page 4883

Glorious men, with heads of eagles,
Chopping arms, and cupboard lips;
Warriors, hunters, keen as beagles,
Mounted aye on horse or ships.
Active, being hungry creatures;
Silent, having nought to say:
High they raised the lord of features,
Saxon-worshipped to this day.

XIV

Hear its deeds, the great recital!
Stout as bergs of Arctic ice
Once it led, and lived; a title
Now it is, and names its price.
This our Saxon brothers cherish:
This, when by the worth of wits
Lands are reared aloft, or perish,
Sole illumes their lucre-pits.

XV

Know we not our wrongs, unwritten
Though they be, Aneurin? Sword,
Song, and subtle mind, the Briton
Brings to market, all ignored.
'Gainst the Saxon's bone impinging,
Still is our Gododin played;
Shamed we see him humbly cringing
In a shadowy nose's shade.

XVI

Bitter is the weight that crushes
Low, my Bard, thy race of fire.
Here no fair young future blushes
Bridal to a man's desire.
Neither chief, nor aim, nor splendour
Dressing distance, we perceive.
Neither honour, nor the tender
Bloom of promise, morn or eve.

XVII

Joined we are; a tide of races
Rolled to meet a common fate;
England clasps in her embraces
Many: what is England's state?
England her distended middle
Thumps with pride as Mammon's wife;
Says that thus she reads thy riddle,
Heaven! 'tis heaven to plump her life.

XVIII

O my Bard! a yellow liquor,
Like to that we drank of old —
Gold is her metheglin beaker,
She destruction drinks in gold.
Warn her, Bard, that Power is pressing
Hotly for his dues this hour;
Tell her that no drunken blessing
Stops the onward march of Power.

XIX

Has she ears to take forewarnings
She will cleanse her of her stains,
Feed and speed for braver mornings
Valorously the growth of brains.
Power, the hard man knit for action,
Reads each nation on the brow.
Cripple, fool, and petrifaction
Fall to him—are falling now!

Men and man

I

Men the Angels eyed;
And here they were wild waves,
And there as marsh descried;
Men the Angels eyed,
And liked the picture best
Where they were greenly dressed
In brotherhood of graves.

II

Man the Angels marked:
He led a host through murk,
On fearful seas embarked;

Man the Angels marked;
To think without a nay,
That he was good as they,
And help him at his work.

Page 4884

III

Man and Angels, ye
A sluggish fen shall drain,
Shall quell a warring sea.
Man and Angels, ye,
Whom stain of strife befouls,
A light to kindle souls
Bear radiant in the stain.

The last contention

I

Young captain of a crazy bark!
O tameless heart in battered frame!
Thy sailing orders have a mark,
And hers is not the name.

II

For action all thine iron clanks
In cravings for a splendid prize;
Again to race or bump thy planks
With any flag that flies.

III

Consult them; they are eloquent
For senses not inebriate.
They trust thee on the star intent,
That leads to land their freight.

IV

And they have known thee high peruse
The heavens, and deep the earth, till thou
Didst into the flushed circle cruise
Where reason quits the brow.

V

Thou animatest ancient tales,
To prove our world of linear seed:

Thy very virtue now assails,
A tempter to mislead.

VI

But thou hast answer I am I;
My passion hallows, bids command:
And she is gracious, she is nigh:
One motion of the hand!

VII

It will suffice; a whirly tune
These winds will pipe, and thou perform
The nodded part of pantaloon
In thy created storm.

VIII

Admires thee Nature with much pride;
She clasps thee for a gift of morn,
Till thou art set against the tide,
And then beware her scorn.

IX

Sad issue, should that strife befall
Between thy mortal ship and thee!
It writes the melancholy scrawl
Of wreckage over sea.

X

This lady of the luting tongue,
The flash in darkness, billow's grace,
For thee the worship; for the young
In muscle the embrace.

XI

Soar on thy manhood clear from those
Whose toothless Winter claws at May,
And take her as the vein of rose
Athwart an evening grey.

Periander

I

How died Melissa none dares shape in words.
A woman who is wife despotic lords
Count faggot at the question, Shall she live!
Her son, because his brows were black of her,
Runs barking for his bread, a fugitive,
And Corinth frowns on them that feed the cur.

II

There is no Corinth save the whip and curb
Of Corinth, high Periander; the superb
In magnanimity, in rule severe.
Up on his marble fortress-tower he sits,
The city under him: a white yoked steer,
That bears his heart for pulse, his head for wits.

Page 4885

III

Bloom of the generous fires of his fair Spring
Still coloured him when men forbore to sting;
Admiring meekly where the ordered seeds
Of his good sovereignty showed gardens trim;
And owning that the hoe he struck at weeds
Was author of the flowers raised face to him.

IV

His Corinth, to each mood subservient
In homage, made he as an instrument
To yield him music with scarce touch of stops.
He breathed, it piped; he moved, it rose to fly:
At whiles a bloodhorse racing till it drops;
At whiles a crouching dog, on him all eye.

V

His wisdom men acknowledged; only one,
The creature, issue of him, Lycophron,
That rebel with his mother in his brows,
Contested: such an infamous would foul
Pirene! Little heed where he might house
The prince gave, hearing: so the fox, the owl!

VI

To prove the Gods benignant to his rule,
The years, which fasten rigid whom they cool,
Reviewing, saw him hold the seat of power.
A grey one asked: Who next? nor answer had:
One greyer pointed on the pallid hour
To come: a river dried of waters glad.

VII

For which of his male issue promised grip
To stride yon people, with the curb and whip?
This Lycophron! he sole, the father like,
Fired prospect of a line in one strong tide,
By right of mastery; stern will to strike;
Pride to support the stroke: yea, Godlike pride!

VIII

Himself the prince beheld a failing fount.
His line stretched back unto its holy mount:
The thirsty onward waved for him no sign.
Then stood before his vision that hard son.
The seizure of a passion for his line
Impelled him to the path of Lycophron.

IX

The youth was tossing pebbles in the sea;
A figure shunned along the busy quay,
Perforce of the harsh edict for who dared
Address him outcast. Naming it, he crossed
His father's look with look that proved them paired
For stiffness, and another pebble tossed.

X

An exile to the Island ere nightfall
He passed from sight, from the hushed mouths of all.
It had resemblance to a death: and on,
Against a coast where sapphire shattered white,
The seasons rolled like troops of billows blown
To spraymist. The prince gazed on capping night.

XI

Deaf Age spake in his ear with shouts: Thy son!
Deep from his heart Life raved of work not done.
He heard historic echoes moan his name,
As of the prince in whom the race had pause;
Till Tyranny paternity became,
And him he hated loved he for the cause.

Page 4886

XII

Not Lycophron the exile now appeared,
But young Periander, from the shadow cleared,
That haunted his rebellious brows. The prince
Grew bright for him; saw youth, if seeming loth,
Return: and of pure pardon to convince,
Despatched the messenger most dear with both.

XIII

His daughter, from the exile's Island home,
Wrote, as a flight of halcyons o'er the foam,
Sweet words: her brother to his father bowed;
Accepted his peace-offering, and rejoiced.
To bring him back a prince the father vowed,
Commanded man the oars, the white sails hoist.

XIV

He waved the fleet to strain its westward way
On to the sea-hued hills that crown the bay:
Soil of those hospitable islanders
Whom now his heart, for honour to his blood,
Thanked. They should learn what boons a prince confers
When happiness enjoins him gratitude!

XV

In watch upon the offing, worn with haste
To see his youth revived, and, close embraced,
Pardon who had subdued him, who had gained
Surely the stoutest battle between two
Since Titan pierced by young Apollo stained
Earth's breast, the prince looked forth, himself looked through.

XVI

Errors aforetime unperceived were bared,
To be by his young masterful repaired:
Renewed his great ideas gone to smoke;
His policy confirmed amid the surge
Of States and people fretting at his yoke.
And lo, the fleet brown-flocked on the sea-verge!

XVII

Oars pulled: they streamed in harbour; without cheer
For welcome shadowed round the heaving bier.
They, whose approach in such rare pomp and stress
Of numbers the free islanders dismayed
At Tyranny come masking to oppress,
Found Lycophron this breathless, this lone-laid.

XVIII

Who smote the man thrown open to young joy?
The image of the mother of his boy
Came forth from his unwary breast in wreaths,
With eyes. And shall a woman, that extinct,
Smite out of dust the Powerful who breathes?
Her loved the son; her served; they lay close-linked!

XIX

Dead was he, and demanding earth. Demand
Sharper for vengeance of an instant hand,
The Tyrant in the father heard him cry,
And raged a plague; to prove on free Hellenes
How prompt the Tyrant for the Persian dye;
How black his Gods behind their marble screens.

Solon

I

Page 4887

The Tyrant passed, and friendlier was his eye
On the great man of Athens, whom for foe
He knew, than on the sycophantic fry
That broke as waters round a galley's flow,
Bubbles at prow and foam along the wake.
Solidity the Thunderer could not shake,
Beneath an adverse wind still stripping bare,
His kinsman, of the light-in-cavern look,
From thought drew, and a countenance could wear
Not less at peace than fields in Attic air
Shorn, and shown fruitful by the reaper's hook.

II

Most enviable so; yet much insane
To deem of minds of men they grow! these sheep,
By fits wild horses, need the crook and rein;
Hot bulls by fits, pure wisdom hold they cheap,
My Lawgiver, when fiery is the mood.
For ones and twos and threes thy words are good;
For thine own government are pillars: mine
Stand acts to fit the herd; which has quick thirst,
Rejecting elegiacs, though they shine
On polished brass, and, worthy of the Nine,
In showering columns from their fountain burst.

III

Thus museful rode the Tyrant, princely plumed,
To his high seat upon the sacred rock:
And Solon, blank beside his rule, resumed
The meditation which that passing mock
Had buffeted awhile to sallowness.
He little loved the man, his office less,
Yet owned him for a flower of his kind.
Therefore the heavier curse on Athens he!
The people grew not in themselves, but, blind,
Accepted sight from him, to him resigned
Their hopes of stature, rootless as at sea.

IV

As under sea lay Solon's work, or seemed
By turbid shore-waves beaten day by day;

Defaced, half formless, like an image dreamed,
Or child that fashioned in another clay
Appears, by strangers' hands to home returned.
But shall the Present tyrannize us? earned
It was in some way, justly says the sage.
One sees not how, while husbanding regrets;
While tossing scorn abroad from righteous rage,
High vision is obscured; for this is age
When robbed—more infant than the babe it frets!

V

Yet see Athenians treading the black path
Laid by a prince's shadow! well content
To wait his pleasure, shivering at his wrath:
They bow to their accepted Orient
With offer of the all that renders bright:
Forgetful of the growth of men to light,
As creatures reared on Persian milk they bow.
Unripe! unripe! The times are overcast.
But still may they who sowed behind the plough
True seed fix in the mind an unborn *now*
To make the plagues afflicting us things past.

Page 4888

Bellerophon

I

Maimed, beggared, grey; seeking an alms; with nod
Of palsy doing task of thanks for bread;
Upon the stature of a God,
He whom the Gods have struck bends low his head.

II

Weak words he has, that slip the nerveless tongue
Deformed, like his great frame: a broken arc:
Once radiant as the javelin flung
Right at the centre breastplate of his mark.

III

Oft pausing on his white-eyed inward look,
Some undermountain narrative he tells,
As gapped by Lykian heat the brook
Cut from the source that in the upland swells.

IV

The cottagers who dole him fruit and crust
With patient inattention hear him prate:
And comes the snow, and comes the dust,
Comes the old wanderer, more bent of late.

V

A crazy beggar grateful for a meal
Has ever of himself a world to say.
For them he is an ancient wheel
Spinning a knotted thread the livelong day.

VI

He cannot, nor do they, the tale connect;
For never singer in the land had been
Who him for theme did not reject:
Spurned of the hoof that sprang the Hippocrene.

VII

Albeit a theme of flame to bring them straight
The snorting white-winged brother of the wave,
They hear him as a thing by fate
Cursed in unholy babble to his grave.

VIII

As men that spied the wings, that heard the snort,
Their sires have told; and of a martial prince
Bestriding him; and old report
Speaks of a monster slain by one long since.

IX

There is that story of the golden bit
By Goddess given to tame the lightning steed:
A mortal who could mount, and sit
Flying, and up Olympus midway speed.

X

He rose like the loosed fountain's utmost leap;
He played the star at span of heaven right o'er
Men's heads: they saw the snowy steep,
Saw the winged shoulders: him they saw not more.

XI

He fell: and says the shattered man, I fell:
And sweeps an arm the height an eagle wins;
And in his breast a mouthless well
Heaves the worn patches of his coat of skins.

XII

Lo, this is he in whom the surgent springs
Of recollections richer than our skies
To feed the flow of tuneful strings,
Show but a pool of scum for shooting flies.

Phaethon—attemptedin the galliambic measure

Page 4889

At the coming up of Phoebus the all-luminous charioteer, Double-visaged stand the mountains in imperial multitudes, And with shadows dappled men sing to him, Hail, O Beneficent! For they shudder chill, the earth-vales, at his clouding, shudder to black; In the light of him there is music thro' the poplar and river-sedge, Renovation, chirp of brooks, hum of the forest—an ocean-song. Never pearl from ocean-hollows by the diver exultingly, In his breathlessness, above thrust, is as earth to Helios. Who usurps his place there, rashest? Aphrodite's loved one it is! To his son the flaming Sun-God, to the tender youth, Phaethon, Rule of day this day surrenders as a thing hereditary, Having sworn by Styx tremendous, for the proof of his parentage, He would grant his son's petition, whatsoever the sign thereof. Then, rejoiced, the stripling answered: 'Rule of day give me; give it me, Give me place that men may see me how I blaze, and transcendingly I, divine, proclaim my birthright.' Darkened Helios, and his utterance Choked prophetic: 'O half mortal!' he exclaimed in an agony, 'O lost son of mine! lost son! No! put a prayer for another thing: Not for this: insane to wish it, and to crave the gift impious! Cannot other gifts my godhead shed upon thee? miraculous Mighty gifts to prove a blessing, that to earth thou shalt be a joy? Gifts of healing, wherewith men walk as the Gods beneficently; As a God to sway to concord hearts of men, reconciling them; Gifts of verse, the lyre, the laurel, therewithal that thine origin Shall be known even as when I strike on the string'd shell with melody, And the golden notes, like medicine, darting straight to the cavities, Fill them up, till hearts of men bound as the billows, the ships thereon.' Thus intently urged the Sun-God; but the force of his eloquence Was the pressing on of sea-waves scattered broad from the rocks away. What shall move a soul from madness? Lost, lost in delirium, Rock-fast, the adolescent to his father, irreverent, 'By the oath! the oath! thine oath!' cried. The effulgent foreseer then, Quivering in his loins parental, on the boy's beaming countenance Looked and moaned, and urged him for love's sake, for sweet life's sake, to yield the claim, To abandon his mad hunger, and avert the calamity. But he, vehement, passionate, called out: 'Let me show I am what I say, That the taunts I hear be silenced: I am stung with their whispering. Only, Thou, my Father, Thou tell how aloft the revolving wheels, How aloft the cleaving horse-crests I may guide peremptorily, Till I drink the shadows, fire-hot, like a flower celestial, And my fellows see me curbing the fierce steeds, the dear dew-drinkers: Yea, for this I gaze on life's light; throw for this any sacrifice.'

All the end foreseeing, Phoebus to his oath irrevocable Bowed obedient, deploring the insanity pitiless. Then the flame-outsnorting horses were led forth: it was so decreed. They were yoked before the glad youth by his sister-ancillaries.

Page 4890

Swift the ripple ripples follow'd, as of aureate Helicon, Down their flanks, while they impatient pawed desire of the distances, And the bit with fury champed. Oh! unimaginable delight! Unimagined speed and splendour in the circle of upper air! Glory grander than the armed host upon earth singing victory! Chafed the youth with their spirit surcharged, as when blossom is shaken by winds, Marked that labour by his sister Phaethontiades finished, quick On the slope of the car his forefoot set assured: and the morning rose: Seeing whom, and what a day dawned, stood the God, as in harvest fields, When the reaper grasps the full sheaf and the sickle that severs it: Hugged the withered head with one hand, with the other, to indicate (If this woe might be averted, this immeasurable evil), Laid the kindling course in view, told how the reins to manipulate: Named the horses fondly, fearful, caution'd urgently betweenwhiles: Their diverging tempers dwelt on, and their wantonness, wickedness, That the voice of Gods alone held in restraint; but the voice of Gods; None but Gods can curb. He spake: vain were the words: scarcely listening, Mounted Phaethon, swinging reins loose, and, 'Behold me, companions, It is I here, I!' he shouted, glancing down with supremacy; 'Not to any of you was this gift granted ever in annals of men; I alone what only Gods can, I alone am governing day!' Short the triumph, brief his rapture: see a hurricane suddenly Beat the lifting billow crestless, roll it broken this way and that; — At the leap on yielding ether, in despite of his reprimand, Swayed tumultuous the fire-steeds, plunging reckless hither and yon; Unto men a great amazement, all agaze at the Troubled East:- Pitifully for mastery striving in ascension, the charioteer, Reminiscent, drifts of counsel caught confused in his arid wits; The reins stiff ahind his shoulder madly pulled for the mastery, Till a thunder off the tense chords thro' his ears dinned horrible. Panic seized him: fled his vision of inviolability; Fled the dream that he of mortals rode mischances predominant; And he cried, 'Had I petitioned for a cup of chill aconite, My descent to awful Hades had been soft, for now must I go With the curse by father Zeus cast on ambition immoderate. Oh, my sisters! Thou, my Goddess, in whose love I was enviable, From whose arms I rushed befrenzied, what a wreck will this body be, That admired of thee stood rose-warm in the courts where thy mysteries Celebration had from me, me the most splendidly privileged! Never more shall I thy temple fill with incenses bewildering; Not again hear thy half-murmurs—I am lost!—never, never more. I am wrecked on seas of air, hurled to my death in a vessel of flame! Hither, sisters! Father, save me! Hither, succour me, Cypria!'

Now a wail of men to Zeus rang: from Olympus the Thunderer Saw the rage of the havoc wide-mouthed, the bright car superimpending Over Asia, Africa, low down; ruin flaming over

Page 4891

the vales; Light disastrous rising savage out of smoke inveterately; Beast-black, conflagration like a menacing shadow move With voracious roaring southward, where aslant, insufferable, The bright steeds careered their parched way down an arc of the firmament. For the day grew like to thick night, and the orb was its beacon- fire, And from hill to hill of darkness burst the day's apparition forth. Lo, a wrestler, not a God, stood in the chariot ever lowering: Lo, the shape of one who raced there to outstrip the legitimate hours: Lo, the ravish'd beams of Phoebus dragged in shame at the chariot-wheels: Light of days of happy pipings by the mead-singing rivulets! Lo, lo, increasing lustre, torrid breath to the nostrils; lo, Torrid brilliancies thro' the vapours lighten swifter, penetrate them, Fasten merciless, ruminant, hueless, on earth's frame crackling busily. He aloft, the frenzied driver, in the glow of the universe, Like the paling of the dawn-star withers visibly, he aloft: Bitter fury in his aspect, bitter death in the heart of him. Crouch the herds, contract the reptiles, crouch the lions under their paws. White as metal in the furnace are the faces of human-kind: Inarticulate creatures of earth dumb all await the ultimate shock. To the bolt he launched, 'Strike dead, thou,' uttered Zeus, very terrible; 'Perish folly, else 'tis man's fate'; and the bolt flew unerringly. Then the kindler stooped; from the torch-car down the measureless altitudes Leaned his rayless head, relinquished rein and footing, raised not a cry. Like the flower on the river's surface when expanding it vanishes, Gave his limbs to right and left, quenched: and so fell he precipitate, Seen of men as a glad rain-fall, sending coolness yet ere it comes: So he showered above them, shadowed o'er the blue archipelagoes, O'er the silken-shining pastures of the continents and the isles; So descending brought revival to the greenery of our earth.

Lither, noisy in the breezes now his sisters shivering weep, By the river flowing smooth out to the vexed sea of Adria, Where he fell, and where they suffered sudden change to the tremulous Ever-wailful trees bemoaning him, a bruised purple cyclamen.

Seed-time

I

Flowers of the willow-herb are wool;
Flowers of the briar berries red;
Speeding their seed as the breeze may rule,
Flowers of the thistle loosen the thread.
Flowers of the clematis drip in beard,
Slack from the fir-tree youngly climbed;
Chaplets in air, flies foliage seared;
Heeled upon earth, lie clusters rimed.

II

Where were skies of the mantle stained
Orange and scarlet, a coat of frieze
Travels from North till day has waned,
Tattered, soaked in the ditch’s dyes;
Tumbles the rook under grey or slate;
Else enfolding us, damps to the bone;
Narrows the world to my neighbour’s gate;
Paints me Life as a wheezy crone.

Page 4892

III

Now seems none but the spider lord;
Star in circle his web waits prey,
Silvering bush-mounds, blue brushing sward;
Slow runs the hour, swift flits the ray.
Now to his thread-shroud is he nigh,
Nigh to the tangle where wings are sealed,
He who frolicked the jewelled fly;
All is adroop on the down and the weald.

IV

Mists more lone for the sheep-bell enwrap
Nights that tardily let slip a morn
Paler than moons, and on noontide's lap
Flame dies cold, like the rose late born.
Rose born late, born withered in bud! —
I, even I, for a zenith of sun
Cry, to fulfil me, nourish my blood:
O for a day of the long light, one!

V

Master the blood, nor read by chills,
Earth admonishes: Hast thou ploughed,
Sown, reaped, harvested grain for the mills,
Thou hast the light over shadow of cloud.
Steadily eyeing, before that wail
Animal-infant, thy mind began,
Momently nearer me: should sight fail,
Plod in the track of the husbandman.

VI

Verily now is our season of seed,
Now in our Autumn; and Earth discerns
Them that have served her in them that can read,
Glassing, where under the surface she burns,
Quick at her wheel, while the fuel, decay,
Brightens the fire of renewal: and we?
Death is the word of a bovine day,
Know you the breast of the springing To-be.

Hard weather

Bursts from a rending East in flaws
The young green leaflet’s harrier, sworn
To strew the garden, strip the shaws,
And show our Spring with banner torn.
Was ever such virago morn?
The wind has teeth, the wind has claws.
All the wind’s wolves through woods are loose,
The wild wind’s falconry aloft.
Shrill underfoot the grassblade shrews,
At gallop, clumped, and down the croft
Bestrid by shadows, beaten, tossed;
It seems a scythe, it seems a rod.
The howl is up at the howl’s accost;
The shivers greet and the shivers nod.

Is the land ship? we are rolled, we drive
Tritonly, cleaving hiss and hum;
Whirl with the dead, or mount or dive,
Or down in dregs, or on in scum.
And drums the distant, pipes the near,
And vale and hill are grey in grey,
As when the surge is crumbling sheer,
And sea-mews wing the haze of spray.
Clouds—are they bony witches?—swarms,
Darting swift on the robber’s flight,
Hurry an infant sky in arms:
It peeps, it becks; ’tis day, ’tis night.
Black while over the loop of blue
The swathe is closed, like shroud on corse.
Lo, as if swift the Furies flew,
The Fates at heel at a cry to horse!

Page 4893

Interpret me the savage whirr:
And is it Nature scourged, or she,
Her offspring's executioner,
Reducing land to barren sea?
But is there meaning in a day
When this fierce angel of the air,
Intent to throw, and haply slay,
Can for what breath of life we bear,
Exact the wrestle?—Call to mind
The many meanings glistening up
When Nature to her nurslings kind,
Hands them the fruitage and the cup!
And seek we rich significance
Not otherwhere than with those tides
Of pleasure on the sunned expanse,
Whose flow deludes, whose ebb derides?

Look in the face of men who fare
Lock-mouthed, a match in lungs and thews
For this fierce angel of the air,
To twist with him and take his bruise.
That is the face beloved of old
Of Earth, young mother of her brood:
Nor broken for us shows the mould
When muscle is in mind renewed:
Though farther from her nature rude,
Yet nearer to her spirit's hold:
And though of gentler mood serene,
Still forceful of her fountain-jet.
So shall her blows be shrewdly met,
Be luminously read the scene
Where Life is at her grindstone set,
That she may give us edgeing keen,
String us for battle, till as play
The common strokes of fortune shower.
Such meaning in a dagger-day
Our wits may clasp to wax in power.
Yea, feel us warmer at her breast,
By spin of blood in lusty drill,
Than when her honeyed hands caressed,
And Pleasure, sapping, seemed to fill.

Behold the life at ease; it drifts.
The sharpened life commands its course.

She winnows, winnows roughly; sifts,
To dip her chosen in her source:
Contention is the vital force,
Whence pluck they brain, her prize of gifts,
Sky of the senses! on which height,
Not disconnected, yet released,
They see how spirit comes to light,
Through conquest of the inner beast,
Which Measure tames to movement sane,
In harmony with what is fair.
Never is Earth misread by brain:
That is the welling of her, there
The mirror: with one step beyond,
For likewise is it voice; and more,
Benignest kinship bids respond,
When wail the weak, and them restore
Whom days as fell as this may rive,
While Earth sits ebon in her gloom,
Us atomies of life alive
Unheeding, bent on life to come.
Her children of the labouring brain,
These are the champions of the race,
True parents, and the sole humane,
With understanding for their base.
Earth yields the milk, but all her mind
Is vowed to thresh for stouter stock.

Page 4894

Her passion for old giantkind,
That scaled the mount, uphurled the rock,
Devolves on them who read aright
Her meaning and devoutly serve;
Nor in her starlessness of night
Peruse her with the craven nerve:
But even as she from grass to corn,
To eagle high from grubbing mole,
Prove in strong brain her noblest born,
The station for the flight of soul.

The south-wester

Day of the cloud in fleets! O day
Of wedded white and blue, that sail
Immingled, with a footing ray
In shadow-sandals down our vale! —
And swift to ravish golden meads,
Swift up the run of turf it speeds,
Thy bright of head and dark of heel,
To where the hilltop flings on sky,
As hawk from wrist or dust from wheel,
The tiptoe sealers tossed to fly:-
Thee the last thunder’s caverned peal
Delivered from a wailful night:
All dusky round thy cradled light,
Those brine-born issues, now in bloom
Transfigured, wreathed as raven’s plume
And briony-leaf to watch thee lie:
Dark eyebrows o’er a dreamful eye
Nigh opening: till in the braid
Of purpled vapours thou wert rosed:
Till that new babe a Goddess maid
Appeared and vividly disclosed
Her beat of life: then crimson played
On edges of the plume and leaf:
Shape had they and fair feature brief,
The wings, the smiles: they flew the breast,
Earth’s milk. But what imperial march
Their standards led for earth, none guessed
Ere upward of a coloured arch,
An arrow straining eager head

Lightened, and high for zenith sped.
Fierier followed; followed Fire.
Name the young lord of Earth’s desire,
Whose look her wine is, and whose mouth
Her music! Beauteous was she seen
Beneath her midway West of South;
And sister was her quivered green
To sapphire of the Nereid eyes
On sea when sun is breeze; she winked
As they, and waved, heaved waterwise
Her flood of leaves and grasses linked:
A myriad lustrous butterflies
A moment in the fluttering sheen;
Becapped with the slate air that throws
The reindeer’s antlers black between
Low-frowning and wide-fallen snows,
A minute after; hooded, stoled
To suit a graveside Season’s dirge.
Lo, but the breaking of a surge,
And she is in her lover’s fold,
Illumined o’er a boundless range
Anew: and through quick morning hours
The Tropic-Arctic countercharge
Did seem to pant in beams and showers.

Page 4895

But noon beheld a larger heaven;
Beheld on our reflecting field
The Sower to the Bearer given,
And both their inner sweetest yield,
Fresh as when dews were grey or first
Received the flush of hues athirst.
Heard we the woodland, eyeing sun,
As harp and harper were they one.
A murky cloud a fair pursued,
Assailed, and felt the limbs elude:
He sat him down to pipe his woe,
And some strange beast of sky became:
A giant’s club withheld the blow;
A milky cloud went all to flame.
And there were groups where silvery springs
The ethereal forest showed begirt
By companies in choric rings,
Whom but to see made ear alert.
For music did each movement rouse,
And motion was a minstrel’s rage
To have our spirits out of house,
And bathe them on the open page.
This was a day that knew not age.
Since flew the vapoury twos and threes
From western pile to eastern rack;
As on from peaks of Pyrenees
To Graians; youngness ruled the track.
When songful beams were shut in caves,
And rainy drapery swept across;
When the ranked clouds were downy waves,
Breast of swan, eagle, albatross,
In ordered lines to screen the blue,
Youngest of light was nigh, we knew.
The silver finger of it laughed
Along the narrow rift: it shot,
Slew the huge gloom with golden shaft,
Then haled on high the volumed blot,
To build the hurling palace, cleave
The dazzling chasm; the flying nests,
The many glory-garlands weave,
Whose presence not our sight attests
Till wonder with the splendour blent,
And passion for the beauty flown,

Make evanescence permanent,
The thing at heart our endless own.

Only at gathered eve knew we
The marvels of the day: for then
Mount upon mountain out of sea
Arose, and to our spacious ken
Trebled sublime Olympus round
In towering amphitheatre.
Colossal on enormous mound,
Majestic gods we saw confer.
They wafted the Dream-messenger
From off the loftiest, the crowned:
That Lady of the hues of foam
In sun-rays: who, close under dome,
A figure on the foot's descent,
Irradiate to vapour went,
As one whose mission was resigned,
Dispieced, undraped, dissolved to threads;
Melting she passed into the mind,
Where immortal with mortal weds.

Whereby was known that we had viewed
The union of our earth and skies
Renewed: nor less alive renewed
Than when old bards, in nature wise,
Conceived pure beauty given to eyes,
And with undyingness imbued.

Page 4896

Pageant of man’s poetic brain,
His grand procession of the song,
It was; the Muses and their train;
Their God to lead the glittering throng:
At whiles a beat of forest gong;
At whiles a glimpse of Python slain.
Mostly divinest harmony,
The lyre, the dance. We could believe
A life in orb and brook and tree,
And cloud; and still holds Memory
A morning in the eyes of eve.

The thrush in February

I know him, February’s thrush,
And loud at eve he valentines
On sprays that paw the naked bush
Where soon will sprout the thorns and bines.

Now ere the foreign singer thrills
Our vale his plain-song pipe he pours,
A herald of the million bills;
And heed him not, the loss is yours.

My study, flanked with ivied fir
And budded beech with dry leaves curled,
Perched over yew and juniper,
He neighbours, piping to his world:-

The wooded pathways dank on brown,
The branches on grey cloud a web,
The long green roller of the down,
An image of the deluge-ebb:-

And farther, they may hear along
The stream beneath the poplar row.
By fits, like welling rocks, the song
Spouts of a blushful Spring in flow.

But most he loves to front the vale
When waves of warm South-western rains

Have left our heavens clear in pale,
With faintest beck of moist red veins:

Vermilion wings, by distance held
To pause aflight while fleeting swift:
And high aloft the pearl inshelled
Her lucid glow in glow will lift;

A little south of coloured sky;
Directing, gravely amorous,
The human of a tender eye
Through pure celestial on us:

Remote, not alien; still, not cold;
Unraying yet, more pearl than star;
She seems a while the vale to hold
In trance, and homelier makes the far.

Then Earth her sweet unscented breathes,
An orb of lustre quits the height;
And like blue iris-flags, in wreaths
The sky takes darkness, long ere quite.

His Island voice then shall you hear,
Nor ever after separate
From such a twilight of the year
Advancing to the vernal gate.

He sings me, out of Winter’s throat,
The young time with the life ahead;
And my young time his leaping note
Recalls to spirit-mirth from dead.

Imbedded in a land of greed,
Of mammon-quakings dire as Earth’s,
My care was but to soothe my need;
At peace among the littleworths.

To light and song my yearning aimed;
To that deep breast of song and light
Which men have barrenest proclaimed;
As ’tis to senses pricked with fright.

Page 4897

So mine are these new fruitings rich
The simple to the common brings;
I keep the youth of souls who pitch
Their joy in this old heart of things:

Who feel the Coming young as aye,
Thrice hopeful on the ground we plough;
Alive for life, awake to die;
One voice to cheer the seedling Now.

Full lasting is the song, though he,
The singer, passes: lasting too,
For souls not lent in usury,
The rapture of the forward view.

With that I bear my senses fraught
Till what I am fast shoreward drives.
They are the vessel of the Thought.
The vessel splits, the Thought survives.

Nought else are we when sailing brave,
Save husks to raise and bid it burn.
Glimpse of its livingness will wave
A light the senses can discern

Across the river of the death,
Their close. Meanwhile, O twilight bird
Of promise! bird of happy breath!
I hear, I would the City heard.

The City of the smoky fray;
A prodded ox, it drags and moans:
Its Morrow no man’s child; its Day
A vulture’s morsel beaked to bones.

It strives without a mark for strife;
It feasts beside a famished host:
The loose restraint of wanton life,
That threatened penance in the ghost!

Yet there our battle urges; there
Spring heroes many: issuing thence,
Names that should leave no vacant air
For fresh delight in confidence.

Life was to them the bag of grain,
And Death the weedy harrow's tooth.
Those warriors of the sighting brain
Give worn Humanity new youth.

Our song and star are they to lead
The tidal multitude and blind
From bestial to the higher breed
By fighting souls of love divined,

They scorned the ventral dream of peace,
Unknown in nature. This they knew:
That life begets with fair increase
Beyond the flesh, if life be true.

Just reason based on valiant blood,
The instinct bred afield would match
To pipe thereof a swelling flood,
Were men of Earth made wise in watch.

Though now the numbers count as drops
An urn might bear, they father Time.
She shapes anew her dusty crops;
Her quick in their own likeness climb.

Of their own force do they create;
They climb to light, in her their root.
Your brutish cry at muffled fate
She smites with pangs of worse than brute.

She, judged of shrinking nerves, appears
A Mother whom no cry can melt;
But read her past desires and fears,
The letters on her breast are spelt.

A slayer, yea, as when she pressed
Her savage to the slaughter-heaps,
To sacrifice she prompts her best:
She reaps them as the sower reaps.

Page 4898

But read her thought to speed the race,
And stars rush forth of blackest night:
You chill not at a cold embrace
To come, nor dread a dubious might.

Her double visage, double voice,
In oneness rise to quench the doubt.
This breath, her gift, has only choice
Of service, breathe we in or out.

Since Pain and Pleasure on each hand
Led our wild steps from slimy rock
To yonder sweeps of gardenland,
We breathe but to be sword or block.

The sighting brain her good decree
Accepts; obeys those guides, in faith,
By reason hourly fed, that she,
To some the clod, to some the wraith,

Is more, no mask; a flame, a stream.
Flame, stream, are we, in mid career
From torrent source, delirious dream,
To heaven-reflecting currents clear.

And why the sons of Strength have been
Her cherished offspring ever; how
The Spirit served by her is seen
Through Law; perusing love will show.

Love born of knowledge, love that gains
Vitality as Earth it mates,
The meaning of the Pleasures, Pains,
The Life, the Death, illuminates.

For love we Earth, then serve we all;
Her mystic secret then is ours:
We fall, or view our treasures fall,
Unclouded, as beholds her flowers

Earth, from a night of frosty wreck,
Enrobed in morning’s mounted fire,
When lowly, with a broken neck,
The crocus lays her cheek to mire.

The appeasement of Demeter

I

Demeter devastated our good land,
In blackness for her daughter snatched below.
Smoke-pillar or loose hillock was the sand,
Where soil had been to clasp warm seed and throw
The wheat, vine, olive, ripe to Summer’s ray.
Now whether night advancing, whether day,
Scarce did the baldness show:
The hand of man was a defeated hand.

II

Necessity, the primal goad to growth,
Stood shrunken; Youth and Age appeared as one;
Like Winter Summer; good as labour sloth;
Nor was there answer wherefore beamed the sun,
Or why men drew the breath to carry pain.
High reared the ploughshare, broken lay the wain,
Idly the flax-wheel spun
Unridered: starving lords were wasp and moth.

III

Lean grassblades losing green on their bent flags,
Sang chilly to themselves; lone honey-bees
Pursued the flowers that were not with dry bags;
Sole sound aloud the snap of sapless trees,
More sharp than slingstones on hard breastplates hurled.
Back to first chaos tumbled the stopped world,
Careless to lure or please.
A nature of gaunt ribs, an earth of crags.

Page 4899

IV

No smile Demeter cast: the gloom she saw,
Well draped her direful musing; for in gloom,
In thicker gloom, deep down the cavern-maw,
Her sweet had vanished; liker unto whom,
And whose pale place of habitation mute,
She and all seemed where Seasons, pledged for fruit
Anciently, gaped for bloom:
Where hand of man was as a plucked fowl’s claw.

V

The wrathful Queen descended on a vale,
That ere the ravished hour for richness heaved.
Iambe, maiden of the merry tale,
Beside her eyed the once red-cheeked, green-leaved.
It looked as if the Deluge had withdrawn.
Pity caught at her throat; her jests were gone.
More than for her who grieved,
She could for this waste home have piped the wail.

VI

Iambe, her dear mountain-rivulet
To waken laughter from cold stones, beheld
A riven wheatfield cracking for the wet,
And seed like infant’s teeth, that never swelled,
Apeep up flinty ridges, milkless round.
Teeth of the giants marked she where thin ground
Rocky in spikes rebelled
Against the hand here slack as rotted net.

VII

The valley people up the ashen scoop
She beckoned, aiming hopelessly to win
Her Mistress in compassion of yon group
So pinched and wizened; with their aged grin,
For lack of warmth to smile on mouths of woe,
White as in chalk outlining little O,
Dumb, from a falling chin;
Young, old, alike half-bent to make the hoop.

VIII

Their tongues of birds they wagged, weak-voiced as when
Dark underwaters the recesses choke;
With cluck and upper quiver of a hen
In grasp, past peeking: cry before the croak.
Relentlessly their gold-haired Heaven, their fount
Bountiful of old days, heard them recount
This and that cruel stroke:
Nor eye nor ear had she for piteous men.

IX

A figure of black rock by sunbeams crowned
Through stormclouds, where the volumed shades enfold
An earth in awe before the claps resound
And woods and dwellings are as billows rolled,
The barren Nourisher unmelted shed
Death from the looks that wandered with the dead
Out of the realms of gold,
In famine for her lost, her lost unfound.

X

Iambe from her Mistress tripped; she raised
The cattle-call above the moan of prayer;
And slowly out of fields their fancy grazed,
Among the droves, defiled a horse and mare:
The wrecks of horse and mare: such ribs as view
Seas that have struck brave ships ashore, while through
Shoots the swift foamspit: bare
They nodded, and Demeter on them gazed.

Page 4900

XI

Howbeit the season of the dancing blood,
Forgot was horse of mare, yea, mare of horse:
Reversed, each head at either's flank, they stood.
Whereat the Goddess, in a dim remorse,
Laid hand on them, and smacked; and her touch pricked.
Neighing within, at either's flank they licked;
Played on a moment's force
At courtship, withering to the crazy nod.

XII

The nod was that we gather for consent;
And mournfully amid the group a dame,
Interpreting the thing in nature meant,
Her hands held out like bearers of the flame,
And nodded for the negative sideways.
Keen at her Mistress glanced Iambe: rays
From the Great Mother came:
Her lips were opened wide; the curse was rent.

XIII

She laughed: since our first harvesting heard none
Like thunder of the song of heart: her face,
The dreadful darkness, shook to mounted sun,
And peal on peal across the hills held chase.
She laughed herself to water; laughed to fire;
Laughed the torrential laugh of dam and sire
Full of the marrowy race.
Her laughter, Gods! was flesh on skeleton.

XIV

The valley people huddled, broke, afraid,
Assured, and taking lightning in the veins,
They puffed, they leaped, linked hands, together swayed,
Unwitting happiness till golden rains
Of tears in laughter, laughter weeping, smote
Knowledge of milky mercy from that throat
Pouring to heal their pains:
And one bold youth set mouth at a shy maid.

XV

Iambe clapped to see the kindly lusts
Inspire the valley people, still on seas,
Like poplar-tops relieved from stress of gusts,
With rapture in their wonderment; but these,
Low homage being rendered, ran to plough,
Fed by the laugh, as by the mother cow
Calves at the teats they tease:
Soon drove they through the yielding furrow-crusts.

XVI

Uprose the blade in green, the leaf in red,
The tree of water and the tree of wood:
And soon among the branches overhead
Gave beauty juicy issue sweet for food.
O Laughter! beauty plumped and love had birth.
Laughter! O thou reviver of sick Earth!
Good for the spirit, good
For body, thou! to both art wine and bread!

Earth and A wedded woman

I

The shepherd, with his eye on hazy South,
Has told of rain upon the fall of day.
But promise is there none for Susan’s drouth,
That he will come, who keeps in dry delay.
The freshest of the village three years gone,
She hangs as the white field-rose hangs short-lived;
And she and Earth are one
In withering unrevived.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
And welcome waterspouts, had we sweet rain!

Page 4901

II

Ah, what is Marriage, says each pouting maid,
When she who wedded with the soldier hides
At home as good as widowed in the shade,
A lighthouse to the girls that would be brides:
Nor dares to give a lad an ogle, nor
To dream of dancing, but must hang and moan,
Her husband in the war,
And she to lie alone.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
And welcome waterspouts, had we sweet rain!

III

They have not known; they are not in the stream;
Light as the flying seed-ball is their play,
The silly maids! and happy souls they seem;
Yet Grief would not change fates with such as they.
They have not struck the roots which meet the fires
Beneath, and bind us fast with Earth, to know
The strength of her desires,
The sternness of her woe.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
And welcome waterspouts, had we sweet rain!

IV

Now, shepherd, see thy word, where without shower
A borderless low blotting Westward spreads.
The hall-clock holds the valley on the hour;
Across an inner chamber thunder treads:
The dead leaf trips, the tree-top swings, the floor
Of dust whirls, dropping lumped: near thunder speaks,
And drives the dames to door,
Their kerchiefs flapped at cheeks.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
And welcome waterspouts of blessed rain!

V

Through night, with bedroom window wide for air,
Lay Susan tranced to hear all heaven descend:
And gurgling voices came of Earth, and rare,

Past flowerful, breathings, deeper than life's end,
From her heaved breast of sacred common mould;
Whereby this lone-laid wife was moved to feel
Unworded things and old
To her pained heart appeal.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
And down in deluges of blessed rain!

VI

At morn she stood to live for ear and sight,
Love sky or cloud, or rose or grasses drenched.
A lureful devil, that in glow-worm light
Set languor writhing all its folds, she quenched.
But she would muse when neighbours praised her face,
Her services, and staunchness to her mate:
Knowing by some dim trace,
The change might bear a date.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
Thrice beauteous is our sunshine after rain!

Mother to babe

I

Fleck of sky you are,
Dropped through branches dark,
O my little one, mine!
Promise of the star,
Outpour of the lark;
Beam and song divine.

II

See this precious gift,
Steeping in new birth
All my being, for sign
Earth to heaven can lift,
Heaven descend on earth,
Both in one be mine!

Page 4902

III

Life in light you glass
When you peep and coo,
You, my little one, mine!
Brooklet chirps to grass,
Daisy looks in dew
Up to dear sunshine.

Woodland peace

Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden-sweet the ray.
No Paradise is lost for them
Who foot by branching root and stem,
And lightly with the woodland share
The change of night and day.

Here all say,
We serve her, even as I:
We brood, we strive to sky,
We gaze upon decay,
We wot of life through death,
How each feeds each we spy;
And is a tangle round,
Are patient; what is dumb
We question not, nor ask
The silent to give sound,
The hidden to unmask,
The distant to draw near.

And this the woodland saith:
I know not hope or fear;
I take whate’er may come;
I raise my head to aspects fair,
From foul I turn away.

Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden-sweet the ray.

The question whither

I

When we have thrown off this old suit,
So much in need of mending,
To sink among the naked mute,
Is that, think you, our ending?
We follow many, more we lead,
And you who sadly turf us,
Believe not that all living seed
Must flower above the surface.

II

Sensation is a gracious gift,
But were it cramped to station,
The prayer to have it cast adrift
Would spout from all sensation.
Enough if we have winked to sun,
Have sped the plough a season;
There is a soul for labour done,
Endureth fixed as reason.

III

Then let our trust be firm in Good,
Though we be of the fasting;
Our questions are a mortal brood,
Our work is everlasting.
We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And Whither vainer sounds than Whence,
For word with such wayfarers.

Outer and inner

I

From twig to twig the spider weaves
At noon his webbing fine.
So near to mute the zephyrs flute
That only leaflets dance.
The sun draws out of hazel leaves
A smell of woodland wine.
I wake a swarm to sudden storm
At any step’s advance.

II

Along my path is bugloss blue,
The star with fruit in moss;

The foxgloves drop from throat to top
A daily lesser bell.
The blackest shadow, nurse of dew,
Has orange skeins across;
And keenly red is one thin thread
That flashing seems to swell.

III

Page 4903

My world I note ere fancy comes,
Minutest hushed observe:
What busy bits of motioned wits
Through antlered mosswork strive.
But now so low the stillness hums,
My springs of seeing swerve,
For half a wink to thrill and think
The woods with nymphs alive.

IV

I neighbour the invisible
So close that my consent
Is only asked for spirits masked
To leap from trees and flowers.
And this because with them I dwell
In thought, while calmly bent
To read the lines dear Earth designs
Shall speak her life on ours.

V

Accept, she says; it is not hard
In woods; but she in towns
Repeats, accept; and have we wept,
And have we quailed with fears,
Or shrunk with horrors, sure reward
We have whom knowledge crowns;
Who see in mould the rose unfold,
The soul through blood and tears.

Nature and life

I

Leave the uproar: at a leap
Thou shalt strike a woodland path,
Enter silence, not of sleep,
Under shadows, not of wrath;
Breath which is the spirit’s bath
In the old Beginnings find,
And endow them with a mind,
Seed for seedling, swathe for swathe.

That gives Nature to us, this
Give we her, and so we kiss.

II

Fruitful is it so: but hear
How within the shell thou art,
Music sounds; nor other near
Can to such a tremor start.
Of the waves our life is part;
They our running harvests bear:
Back to them for manful air,
Laden with the woodland's heart!
That gives Battle to us, this
Give we it, and good the kiss.

Dirge in woods

A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so.

A faith on trial

On the morning of May,
Ere the children had entered my gate
With their wreaths and mechanical lay,
A metal ding-dong of the date!
I mounted our hill, bearing heart
That had little of life save its weight:
The crowned Shadow poising dart
Hung over her: she, my own,
My good companion, mate,
Pulse of me: she who had shown

Fortitude quiet as Earth's
At the shedding of leaves. And around

Page 4904

The sky was in garlands of cloud,
Winning scents from unnumbered new births,
Pointed buds, where the woods were browned
By a mouldered beechen shroud;
Or over our meads of the vale,
Such an answer to sun as he,
Brave in his gold; to a sound,
None sweeter, of woods flapping sail,
With the first full flood of our year,
For their voyage on lustreful sea:
Unto what curtained haven in chief,
Will be writ in the book of the sere.
But surely the crew are we,
Eager or stamped or bowed;
Counted thinner at fall of the leaf.
Grief heard them, and passed like a bier.
Due Summerward, lo, they were set,
In volumes of foliage proud,
On the heave of their favouring tides,
And their song broadened out to the cheer
When a neck of the ramping surf
Rattles thunder a boat overrides.
All smiles ran the highways wet;
The worm drew its links from the turf;
The bird of felicity loud
Spun high, and a South wind blew.
Weak out of sheath downy leaves
Of the beech quivered lucid as dew,
Their radiance asking, who grieves;
For nought of a sorrow they knew:
No space to the dread wrestle vowed,
No chamber in shadow of night.
At times as the steadier breeze
Flutter-huddled their twigs to a crowd,
The beam of them wafted my sight
To league-long sun upon seas:
The golden path we had crossed
Many years, till her birthland swung
Recovered to vision from lost,
A light in her filial glance.
And sweet was her voice with the tongue,

The speechful tongue of her France,
Soon at ripple about us, like rills
Ever busy with little: away
Through her Normandy, down where the mills
Dot at lengths a rivercourse, grey
As its bordering poplars bent
To gusts off the plains above.
Old stone chateau and farms,
Home of her birth and her love!
On the thread of the pasture you trace,
By the river, their milk, for miles,
Spotted once with the English tent,
In days of the tocsin’s alarms,
To tower of the tallest of piles,
The country’s surveyor breast-high.
Home of her birth and her love!
Home of a diligent race;
Thrifty, deft-handed to ply
Shuttle or needle, and woo
Sun to the roots of the pear
Frogging each mud-walled cot.
The elders had known her in arms.
There plucked we the bluet, her hue
Of the deeper forget-me-not;
Well wedding her ripe-wheat hair.

Page 4905

I saw, unsighting: her heart
I saw, and the home of her love
There printed, mournfully rent:
Her ebbing adieu, her adieu,
And the stride of the Shadow athwart.
For one of our Autumns there! . . .
Straight as the flight of a dove
We went, swift winging we went.
We trod solid ground, we breathed air,
The heavens were unbroken. Break they,
The word of the world is adieu:
Her word: and the torrents are round,
The jawed wolf-waters of prey.
We stand upon isles, who stand:
A Shadow before us, and back,
A phantom the habited land.
We may cry to the Sunderer, spare
That dearest! he loosens his pack.
Arrows we breathe, not air.
The memories tenderly bound
To us are a drifting crew,
Amid grey-gapped waters for ground.
Alone do we stand, each one,
Till rootless as they we strew
Those deeps of the corse-like stare
At a foreign and stony sun.

Eyes had I but for the scene
Of my circle, what neighbourly grew.
If haply no finger lay out
To the figures of days that had been,
I gathered my herb, and endured;
My old cloak wrapped me about.
Unfooted was ground-ivy blue,
Whose rustic shrewd odour allured
In Spring’s fresh of morning: unseen
Her favourite wood-sorrel bell
As yet, though the leaves’ green floor
Awaited their flower, that would tell
Of a red-veined moist yestreen,
With its droop and the hues it wore,
When we two stood overnight
One, in the dark van-glow

On our hill-top, seeing beneath
Our household's twinkle of light
Through spruce-boughs, gem of a wreath.

Budding, the service-tree, white
Almost as whitebeam, threw,
From the under of leaf upright,
Flecks like a showering snow
On the flame-shaped junipers green,
On the sombre mounds of the yew.
Like silvery tapers bright
By a solemn cathedral screen,
They glistened to closer view.
Turf for a rooks' revel striped
Pleased those devourers astute.
Chorister blackbird and thrush
Together or alternate piped;
A free-hearted harmony large,
With meaning for man, for brute,
When the primitive forces are brimmed.
Like featherings hither and yon
Of aery tree-twigs over marge,
To the comb of the winds, untrimmed,
Their measure is found in the vast.
Grief heard them, and stepped her way on.
She has but a narrow embrace.
Distrustful of hearing she passed.
They piped her young Earth's Bacchic rout;
The race, and the prize of the race;
Earth's lustihead pressing to sprout.

Page 4906

But sight holds a soberer space.
Colourless dogwood low
Curled up a twisted root,
Nigh yellow-green mosses, to flush
Redder than sun upon rocks,
When the creeper clematis-shoot
Shall climb, cap his branches, and show,
Beside veteran green of the box,
At close of the year’s maple blush,
A bleeding greybeard is he,
Now hale in the leafage lush.
Our parasites paint us. Hard by,
A wet yew-trunk flashed the peel
Of our naked forefathers in fight;
With stains of the fray sweating free;
And him came no parasite nigh:
Firm on the hard knotted knee,
He stood in the crown of his dun;
Earth’s toughest to stay her wheel:
Under whom the full day is night;
Whom the century-tempests call son,
Having striven to rend him in vain.

I walked to observe, not to feel,
Not to fancy, if simple of eye
One may be among images reaped
For a shift of the glance, as grain:
Profitless froth you espy
Ashore after billows have leaped.
I fled nothing, nothing pursued:
The changeful visible face
Of our Mother I sought for my food;
Crumbs by the way to sustain.
Her sentence I knew past grace.
Myself I had lost of us twain,
Once bound in mirroring thought.
She had flung me to dust in her wake;
And I, as your convict drags
His chain, by the scourge untaught,
Bore life for a goad, without aim.
I champed the sensations that make
Of a ruffled philosophy rags.
For them was no meaning too blunt,

Nor aspect too cutting of steel.
This Earth of the beautiful breasts,
Shining up in all colours aflame,
To them had visage of hags:
A Mother of aches and jests:
Soulless, heading a hunt
Aimless except for the meal.
Hope, with the star on her front;
Fear, with an eye in the heel;
Our links to a Mother of grace;
They were dead on the nerve, and dead
For the nature divided in three;
Gone out of heart, out of brain,
Out of soul: I had in their place
The calm of an empty room.
We were joined but by that thin thread,
My disciplined habit to see.
And those conjure images, those,
The puppets of loss or gain;
Not he who is bare to his doom;
For whom never semblance plays
To bewitch, overcloud, illume.
The dusty mote-images rose;
Sheer film of the surface awag:
They sank as they rose; their pain
Declaring them mine of old days.

Page 4907

Now gazed I where, sole upon gloom,
As flower-bush in sun-specked crag,
Up the spine of the double combe
With yew-boughs heavily cloaked,
A young apparition shone:
Known, yet wonderful, white
Surpassingly; doubtfully known,
For it struck as the birth of Light:
Even Day from the dark unyoked.
It waved like a pilgrim flag
O'er processional penitents flown
When of old they broke rounding yon spine:
O the pure wild-cherry in bloom!

For their Eastward march to the shrine
Of the footsore far-eyed Faith,
Was banner so brave, so fair,
So quick with celestial sign
Of victorious rays over death?
For a conquest of coward despair; —
Division of soul from wits,
And these made rulers;—full sure,
More starlike never did shine
To illumine the sinister field
Where our life's old night-bird flits.
I knew it: with her, my own,
Had hailed it pure of the pure;
Our beacon yearly: but strange
When it strikes to within is the known;
Richer than newness revealed.
There was needed darkness like mine.
Its beauty to vividness blown
Drew the life in me forward, chased,
From aloft on a pinnacle's range,
That hindward spidery line,
The length of the ways I had paced,
A footfarer out of the dawn,
To Youth's wild forest, where sprang,
For the morning of May long gone,
The forest's white virgin; she
Seen yonder; and sheltered me, sang;
She in me, I in her; what songs
The fawn-eared wood-hollows revive

To pour forth their tune-footed throngs;
Inspire to the dreaming of good
Illimitable to come:
She, the white wild cherry, a tree,
Earth-rooted, tangibly wood,
Yet a presence throbbing alive;
Nor she in our language dumb:
A spirit born of a tree;
Because earth-rooted alive:
Huntress of things worth pursuit
Of souls; in our naming, dreams.
And each unto other was lute,
By fits quick as breezy gleams.
My quiver of aims and desires
Had colour that she would have owned;
And if by humaner fires
Hued later, these held her enthroned:
My crescent of Earth; my blood
At the silvery early stir;
Hour of the thrill of the bud
About to burst, and by her
Directed, attuned, englobed:
My Goddess, the chaste, not chill;
Choir over choir white-robed;
White-bosomed fold within fold:
For so could I dream, breast-bare,
In my time of blooming; dream still
Through the maze, the mesh, and the wreck,
Despite, since manhood was bold,
The yoke of the flesh

Page 4908

on my neck.
She beckoned, I gazed, unaware
How a shaft of the blossoming tree
Was shot from the yew-wood's core.
I stood to the touch of a key
Turned in a fast-shut door.

They rounded my garden, content,
The small fry, clutching their fee,
Their fruit of the wreath and the pole;
And, chatter, hop, skip, they were sent,
In a buzz of young company glee,
Their natural music, swift shoal
To the next easy shedders of pence.
Why not? for they had me in tune
With the hungers of my kind.
Do readings of earth draw thence,
Then a concord deeper than cries
Of the Whither whose echo is Whence,
To jar unanswered, shall rise
As a fountain-jet in the mind
Bowed dark o'er the falling and strewn.

* * *

Unwitting where it might lead,
How it came, for the anguish to cease,
And the Questions that sow not nor spin,
This wisdom, rough-written, and black,
As of veins that from venom bleed,
I had with the peace within;
Or patience, mortal of peace,
Compressing the surgent strife
In a heart laid open, not mailed,
To the last blank hour of the rack,
When struck the dividing knife:
When the hand that never had failed
In its pressure to mine hung slack.

But this in myself did I know,
Not needing a studious brow,
Or trust in a governing star,
While my ears held the jangled shout
The children were lifting afar:

That natures at interflow
With all of their past and the now,
Are chords to the Nature without,
Orbs to the greater whole:
First then, nor utterly then
Till our lord of sensations at war,
The rebel, the heart, yields place
To brain, each prompting the soul.
Thus our dear Earth we embrace
For the milk, her strength to men.

And crave we her medical herb,
We have but to see and hear,
Though pierced by the cruel acerb,
The troops of the memories armed
Hostile to strike at the nest
That nourished and flew them warmed.
Not she gives the tear for the tear.
Weep, bleed, rave, writhe, be distraught,
She is moveless. Not of her breast
Are the symbols we conjure when Fear
Takes leaven of Hope. I caught,
With Death in me shrinking from Death,
As cold from cold, for a sign
Of the life beyond ashes: I cast,
Believing the vision divine,
Wings of that dream of my Youth
To the spirit beloved: 'twas unglassed
On her breast, in her depths austere:
A flash through the mist, mere breath,
Breath on a buckler of steel.
For the flesh in revolt

Page 4909

at her laws,
Neither song nor smile in ruth,
Nor promise of things to reveal,
Has she, nor a word she saith:
We are asking her wheels to pause.
Well knows she the cry of unfaith.
If we strain to the farther shore,
We are catching at comfort near.
Assurances, symbols, saws,
Revelations in legends, light
To eyes rolling darkness, these
Desired of the flesh in affright,
For the which it will swear to adore,
She yields not for prayers at her knees;
The woolly beast bleating will shear.
These are our sensual dreams;
Of the yearning to touch, to feel
The dark Impalpable sure,
And have the Unveiled appear;
Whereon ever black she beams,
Doth of her terrible deal,
She who dotes over ripeness at play,
Rosiness fondles and feeds,
Guides it with shepherding crook,
To her sports and her pastures alway.
Not she gives the tear for the tear:
Harsh wisdom gives Earth, no more;
In one the spur and the curb:
An answer to thoughts or deeds;
To the Legends an alien look;
To the Questions a figure of clay.
Yet we have but to see and hear,
Crave we her medical herb.
For the road to her soul is the Real:
The root of the growth of man:
And the senses must traverse it fresh
With a love that no scourge shall abate,
To reach the lone heights where we scan
In the mind’s rarer vision this flesh;
In the charge of the Mother our fate;
Her law as the one common weal.

We, whom the view benumbs,
We, quivering upward, each hour
Know battle in air and in ground
For the breath that goes as it comes,
For the choice between sweet and sour,
For the smallest grain of our worth:
And he who the reckoning sums
Finds nought in his hand save Earth.
Of Earth are we stripped or crowned.
The fleeting Present we crave,
Barter our best to wed,
In hope of a cushioned bower,
What is it but Future and Past
Like wind and tide at a wave!
Idea of the senses, bred
For the senses to snap and devour:
Thin as the shell of a sound
In delivery, withered in light.
Cry we for permanence fast,
Permanence hangs by the grave;
Sits on the grave green-grassed,
On the roll of the heaved grave-mound.
By Death, as by Life, are we fed:
The two are one spring; our bond
With the numbers; with whom to unite
Here feathers wings for beyond:
Only they can waft us in flight.
For they are Reality’s flower.
Of them, and the contact with them,
Issues Earth’s dearest daughter, the firm

Page 4910

In footing, the stately of stem;
Unshaken though elements lour;
A warrior heart unquelled;
Mirror of Earth, and guide
To the Holies from sense withheld:
Reason, man’s germinant fruit.
She wrestles with our old worm
Self in the narrow and wide:
Relentless quencher of lies,
With laughter she pierces the brute;
And hear we her laughter peal,
’Tis Light in us dancing to scour
The loathed recess of his dens;
Scatter his monstrous bed,
And hound him to harrow and plough.
She is the world’s one prize;
Our champion, rightfully head;
The vessel whose piloted prow,
Though Folly froth round, hiss and hoot,
Leaves legible print at the keel.
Nor least is the service she does,
That service to her may cleanse
The well of the Sorrows in us;
For a common delight will drain
The rank individual fens
Of a wound refusing to heal
While the old worm slavers its root.

I bowed as a leaf in rain;
As a tree when the leaf is shed
To winds in the season at wane:
And when from my soul I said,
May the worm be trampled: smite,
Sacred Reality! power
Filled me to front it aright.
I had come of my faith’s ordeal.

It is not to stand on a tower
And see the flat universe reel;
Our mortal sublimities drop
Like raiment by glisterlings worn,
At a sweep of the scythe for the crop.

Wisdom is won of its fight,
The combat incessant; and dries
To mummywrap perching a height.
It chews the contemplative cud
In peril of isolate scorn,
Unfed of the onward flood.
Nor view we a different morn
If we gaze with the deeper sight,
With the deeper thought forewise:
The world is the same, seen through;
The features of men are the same.
But let their historian new
In the language of nakedness write,
Rejoice we to know not shame,
Not a dread, not a doubt: to have done
With the tortures of thought in the throes,
Our animal tangle, and grasp
Very sap of the vital in this:
That from flesh unto spirit man grows
Even here on the sod under sun:
That she of the wanton's kiss,
Broken through with the bite of an asp,
Is Mother of simple truth,
Relentless quencher of lies;
Eternal in thought; discerned
In thought mid-ferry between
The Life and the Death, which are one,
As our breath in and out, joy or teen.
She gives the rich vision to youth,
If we will, of her prompting wise;
Or men by the lash made lean,
Who in harness the mind subserve,
Their title to read

Page 4911

her have earned;
Having mastered sensation—insane
At a stroke of the terrified nerve;
And out of the sensual hive
Grown to the flower of brain;
To know her a thing alive,
Whose aspects mutably swerve,
Whose laws immutably reign.
Our sentencer, clother in mist,
Her morn bends breast to her noon,
Noon to the hour dark-dyed,
If we will, of her promptings wise:
Her light is our own if we list.
The legends that sweep her aside,
Crying loud for an opiate boon,
To comfort the human want,
From the bosom of magical skies,
She smiles on, marking their source:
They read her with infant eyes.
Good ships of morality they,
For our crude developing force;
Granite the thought to stay,
That she is a thing alive
To the living, the falling and strewn.
But the Questions, the broods that haunt
Sensation insurgent, may drive,
The way of the channelling mole,
Head in a ground-vault gaunt
As your telescope’s skeleton moon.
Barren comfort to these will she dole;
Dead is her face to their cries.
Intelligence pushing to taste
A lesson from beasts might heed.
They scatter a voice in the waste,
Where any dry swish of a reed
By grey-glassy water replies.

’They see not above or below;
Farthest are they from my soul,’
Earth whispers: ’they scarce have the thirst,
Except to unriddle a rune;
And I spin none; only show,
Would humanity soar from its worst,

Winged above darkness and dole,
How flesh unto spirit must grow.
Spirit raves not for a goal.
Shapes in man’s likeness hewn
Desires not; neither desires
The sleep or the glory: it trusts;
Uses my gifts, yet aspires;
Dreams of a higher than it.
The dream is an atmosphere;
A scale still ascending to knit
The clear to the loftier Clear.
’Tis Reason herself, tiptoe
At the ultimate bound of her wit,
On the verges of Night and Day.
But is it a dream of the lusts,
To my dustiest ’tis decreed;
And them that so shuffle astray
I touch with no key of gold
For the wealth of the secret nook;
Though I dote over ripeness at play,
Rosiness fondle and feed,
Guide it with shepherding crook
To my sports and my pastures alway.
The key will shriek in the lock,
The door will rustily hinge,
Will open on features of mould,
To vanish corrupt at a glimpse,
And mock as the wild echoes mock,
Soulless in mimic, doth Greed
Or the passion for fruitage tinge
That dream, for your parricide imps
To wing through the

Page 4912

body of Time,
Yourselves in slaying him slay.
Much are you shots of your prime,
You men of the act and the dream:
And please you to fatten a weed
That perishes, pledged to decay,
’Tis dearth in your season of need,
Down the slopes of the shoreward way; —
Nigh on the misty stream,
Where Ferryman under his hood,
With a call to be ready to pay
The small coin, whitens red blood.
But the young ethereal seed
Shall bring you the bread no buyer
Can have for his craving supreme;
To my quenchless quick shall speed
The soul at her wrestle rude
With devil, with angel more dire;
With the flesh, with the Fates, enringed.
The dream of the blossom of Good
Is your banner of battle unrolled
In its waver and current and curve
(Choir over choir white-winged,
White-bosomed fold within fold):
Hopeful of victory most
When hard is the task to sustain
Assaults of the fearful sense
At a mind in desolate mood
With the Whither, whose echo is Whence;
And humanity’s clamour, lost, lost;
And its clasp of the staves that snap;
And evil abroad, as a main
Uproarious, bursting its dyke.
For back do you look, and lo,
Forward the harvest of grain! —
Numbers in council, awake
To love more than things of my lap,
Love me; and to let the types break,
Men be grass, rocks rivers, all flow;
All save the dream sink alike
To the source of my vital in sap:
Their battle, their loss, their ache,
For my pledge of vitality know.

The dream is the thought in the ghost;
The thought sent flying for food;
Eyeless, but sprung of an aim
Supernal of Reason, to find
The great Over-Reason we name
Beneficence: mind seeking Mind.
Dream of the blossom of Good,
In its waver and current and curve,
With the hopes of my offspring enscrolled!
Soon to be seen of a host
The flag of the Master I serve!
And life in them doubled on Life,
As flame upon flame, to behold,
High over Time-tumbled sea,
The bliss of his headship of strife,
Him through handmaiden me.'

Change in recurrence

I

I stood at the gate of the cot
Where my darling, with side-glance demure,
Would spy, on her trim garden-plot,
The busy wild things chase and lure.
For these with their ways were her feast;
They had surety no enemy lurked.
Their deftest of tricks to their least
She gathered in watch as she worked.

II

Page 4913

When berries were red on her ash,
The blackbird would rifle them rough,
Till the ground underneath looked a gash,
And her rogue grew the round of a chough.
The squirrel cocked ear o’er his hoop,
Up the spruce, quick as eye, trailing brush.
She knew any tit of the troop
All as well as the snail-tapping thrush.

III

I gazed: ’twas the scene of the frame,
With the face, the dear life for me, fled.
No window a lute to my name,
No watcher there plying the thread.
But the blackbird hung peeking at will;
The squirrel from cone hopped to cone;
The thrush had a snail in his bill,
And tap-tapped the shell hard on a stone.

Hymn to colour

I

With Life and Death I walked when Love appeared,
And made them on each side a shadow seem.
Through wooded vales the land of dawn we neared,
Where down smooth rapids whirls the helmless dream
To fall on daylight; and night puts away
Her darker veil for grey.

II

In that grey veil green grassblades brushed we by;
We came where woods breathed sharp, and overhead
Rocks raised clear horns on a transforming sky:
Around, save for those shapes, with him who led
And linked them, desert varied by no sign
Of other life than mine.

III

By this the dark-winged planet, raying wide,
From the mild pearl-glow to the rose upborne,

Drew in his fires, less faint than far descried,
Pure-fronted on a stronger wave of morn:
And those two shapes the splendour interweaved,
Hung web-like, sank and heaved.

IV

Love took my hand when hidden stood the sun
To fling his robe on shoulder-heights of snow.
Then said: There lie they, Life and Death in one.
Whichever is, the other is: but know,
It is thy craving self that thou dost see,
Not in them seeing me.

V

Shall man into the mystery of breath,
From his quick beating pulse a pathway spy?
Or learn the secret of the shrouded death,
By lifting up the lid of a white eye?
Cleave thou thy way with fathering desire
Of fire to reach to fire.

VI

Look now where Colour, the soul’s bridegroom, makes
The house of heaven splendid for the bride.
To him as leaps a fountain she awakes,
In knotting arms, yet boundless: him beside,
She holds the flower to heaven, and by his power
Brings heaven to the flower.

VII

He gives her homeliness in desert air,
And sovereignty in spaciousness; he leads
Through widening chambers of surprise to where
Throbs rapture near an end that aye recedes,
Because his touch is infinite and lends
A yonder to all ends.

Page 4914

VIII

Death begs of Life his blush; Life Death persuades
To keep long day with his caresses graced.
He is the heart of light, the wing of shades,
The crown of beauty: never soul embraced
Of him can harbour unfaith; soul of him
Possessed walks never dim.

IX

Love eyed his rosy memories: he sang:
O bloom of dawn, breathed up from the gold sheaf
Held springing beneath Orient! that dost hang
The space of dewdrops running over leaf;
Thy fleetingness is bigger in the ghost
Than Time with all his host!

X

Of thee to say behold, has said adieu:
But love remembers how the sky was green,
And how the grasses glimmered lightest blue;
How saint-like grey took fervour: how the screen
Of cloud grew violet; how thy moment came
Between a blush and flame.

XI

Love saw the emissary eglantine
Break wave round thy white feet above the gloom;
Lay finger on thy star; thy raiment line
With cherub wing and limb; wed thy soft bloom,
Gold-quivering like sunrays in thistle-down,
Earth under rolling brown.

XII

They do not look through love to look on thee,
Grave heavenliness! nor know they joy of sight,
Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
Its wrecking and last issue of delight.
Dead seasons quicken in one petal-spot
Of colour unforgot.

XIII

This way have men come out of brutishness
To spell the letters of the sky and read
A reflex upon earth else meaningless.
With thee, O fount of the Untimed! to lead,
Drink they of thee, thee eyeing, they unaged
Shall on through brave wars waged.

XIV

More gardens will they win than any lost;
The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain.
Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
To stature of the Gods will they attain.
They shall uplift their Earth to meet her Lord,
Themselves the attuning chord!

XV

The song had ceased; my vision with the song.
Then of those Shadows, which one made descent
Beside me I knew not: but Life ere long
Came on me in the public ways and bent
Eyes deeper than of old: Death met I too,
And saw the dawn glow through.

Meditation under stars

What links are ours with orbs that are
So resolutely far:
The solitary asks, and they
Give radiance as from a shield:
Still at the death of day,
The seen, the unrevealed.
Implacable they shine
To us who would of Life obtain
An answer for the life

Page 4915

we strain
To nourish with one sign.
Nor can imagination throw
The penetrative shaft: we pass
The breath of thought, who would divine
If haply they may grow
As Earth; have our desire to know;
If life comes there to grain from grass,
And flowers like ours of toil and pain;
Has passion to beat bar,
Win space from cleaving brain;
The mystic link attain,
Whereby star holds on star.

Those visible immortals beam
Allurement to the dream:
Ireful at human hungers brook
No question in the look.
For ever virgin to our sense,
Remote they wane to gaze intense:
Prolong it, and in ruthlessness they smite
The beating heart behind the ball of sight:
Till we conceive their heavens hoar,
Those lights they raise but sparkles frore,
And Earth, our blood-warm Earth, a shuddering prey
To that frigidity of brainless ray.

Yet space is given for breath of thought
Beyond our bounds when musing: more
When to that musing love is brought,
And love is asked of love’s wherefore.
’Tis Earth’s, her gift; else have we nought:
Her gift, her secret, here our tie.
And not with her and yonder sky?
Bethink you: were it Earth alone
Breeds love, would not her region be
The sole delight and throne
Of generous Deity?

To deeper than this ball of sight
Appeal the lustrous people of the night.
Fronting yon shoreless, sown with fiery sails,
It is our ravenous that quails,
Flesh by its craven thirsts and fears distraught.

The spirit leaps alight,
Doubts not in them is he,
The binder of his sheaves, the sane, the right:
Of magnitude to magnitude is wrought,
To feel it large of the great life they hold:
In them to come, or vaster intervolved,
The issues known in us, our unsolved solved:
That there with toil Life climbs the self-same Tree,
Whose roots enrichment have from ripeness dropped.
So may we read and little find them cold:
Let it but be the lord of Mind to guide
Our eyes; no branch of Reason's growing lopped;
Nor dreaming on a dream; but fortified
By day to penetrate black midnight; see,
Hear, feel, outside the senses; even that we,
The specks of dust upon a mound of mould,
We who reflect those rays, though low our place,
To them are lastingly allied.

So may we read, and little find them cold:
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.
The fire is in them whereof we are born;
The music of their motion may be ours.
Spirit shall deem them

Page 4916

beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.
Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.
Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face:
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

Woodman and echo

Close Echo hears the woodman’s axe,
To double on it, as in glee,
With clap of hands, and little lacks
Of meaning in her repartee.
For all shall fall,
As one has done,
The tree of me,
Of thee the tree;
And unto all
The fate we wait
Reveals the wheels
Whereon we run:
We tower to flower,
We spread the shade,
We drop for crop,
At length are laid;
Are rolled in mould,
From chop and lop:
And are we thick in woodland tracks,
Or tempting of our stature we,
The end is one, we do but wax
For service over land and sea.
So, strike! the like
Shall thus of us,
My brawny woodman, claim the tax.
Nor foe thy blow,
Though wood be good,
And shriekingly the timber cracks:
The ground we crowned

Shall speed the seed
Of younger into swelling sacks.

For use he hews,
To make awake
The spirit of what stuff we be:
Our earth of mirth
And tears he clears
For braver, let our minds agree;
And then will men
Within them win
An Echo clapping harmony.

The wisdom of Eld

We spend our lives in learning pilotage,
And grow good steersmen when the vessel's crank!
Gap-toothed he spake, and with a tottering shank
Sidled to gain the sunny bench of Age.
It is the sentence which completes that stage;
A testament of wisdom reading blank.
The seniors of the race, on their last plank,
Pass mumbling it as nature's final page.
These, bent by such experience, are the band
Who captain young enthusiasts to maintain
What things we view, and Earth's decree withstand,
Lest dreaded Change, long dammed by dull decay,
Should bring the world a vessel steered by brain,
And ancients musical at close of day.

Earth's preference

Earth loves her young: a preference manifest:
She prompts them to her fruits and flower-beds;
Their beauty with her choicest interthreads,
And makes her revel of their merry zest;
As in our East much were it in our West,
If men had risen to do the work of heads.

Page 4917

Her gabbling grey she eyes askant, nor treads
The ways they walk; by what they speak oppressed.
How wrought they in their zenith? ’Tis not writ;
Not all; yet she by one sure sign can read:
Have they but held her laws and nature dear,
They mouth no sentence of inverted wit.
More prizes she her beasts than this high breed
Wry in the shape she wastes her milk to rear.

Society

Historic be the survey of our kind,
And how their brave Society took shape.
Lion, wolf, vulture, fox, jackal and ape,
The strong of limb, the keen of nose, we find,
Who, with some jars in harmony, combined,
Their primal instincts taming, to escape
The brawl indecent, and hot passions drape.
Convenience pricked conscience, that the mind.
Thus entered they the field of milder beasts,
Which in some sort of civil order graze,
And do half-homage to the God of Laws.
But are they still for their old ravenous feasts,
Earth gives the edifice they build no base:
They spring another flood of fangs and claws.

Winter heavens

Sharp is the night, but stars with frost alive
Leap off the rim of earth across the dome.
It is a night to make the heavens our home
More than the nest whereto apace we strive.
Lengths down our road each fir-tree seems a hive,
In swarms outrushing from the golden comb.
They waken waves of thoughts that burst to foam:
The living throb in me, the dead revive.
Yon mantle clothes us: there, past mortal breath,
Life glistens on the river of the death.
It folds us, flesh and dust; and have we knelt,
Or never knelt, or eyed as kine the springs
Of radiance, the radiance enrings:
And this is the soul’s haven to have felt.

Poems by George Meredith—Volume 3

[This etext was prepared from the 1912 Times Book Club “Surrey” edition by David Price]

A stave of roving Tim
(addressed to certain friendly tramps.)

I

The wind is East, the wind is West,
Blows in and out of haven;
The wind that blows is the wind that’s best,
And croak, my jolly raven!
If here awhile we jigged and laughed,
The like we will do yonder;
For he’s the man who masters a craft,
And light as a lord can wander.
So, foot the measure, Roving Tim,
And croak, my jolly raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

II

You live in rows of snug abodes,
With gold, maybe, for counting;
And mine’s the beck of the rainy roads
Against the sun a-mounting.
I take the day as it

Page 4918

behaves,
Nor shiver when ’tis airy;
But comes a breeze, all you are on waves,
Sick chickens o’ Mother Carey!
So, now for next, cries Roving Tim,
And croak, my jolly raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

III

Sweet lass, you screw a lovely leer,
To make a man consider.
If you were up with the auctioneer,
I’d be a handsome bidder.
But wedlock clips the rover’s wing;
She tricks him fly to spider;
And when we get to fights in the Ring,
It’s trumps when you play outsider.
So, wrench and split, cries Roving Tim,
And croak, my jolly raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

IV

Along my winding way I know
A shady dell that’s winking;
The very corner for Self and Co
To do a world of thinking.
And shall I this? and shall I that?
Till Nature answers, ne’ther!
Strike match and light your pipe in your hat,
Rejoicing in sound shoe-leather!
So lead along, cries Roving Tim,
And croak, my jolly raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

V

A cunning hand ’ll hand you bread,
With freedom for your capers.
I’m not so sure of a cunning head;

It steers to pits or vapours.
But as for Life, we'll bear in sight
The lesson Nature teaches;
Regard it in a sailoring light,
And treat it like thirsty leeches.
So, fly your jib, cries Roving Tim,
And top your boom, old raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

VI

She'll take, to please her dame and dad,
The shopman nicely shaven.
She'll learn to think o' the marching lad
When perchers show they're craven.
You say the shopman piles a heap,
While I perhaps am fasting;
And bless your wits, it haunts him in sleep,
His tin-kettle chance of lasting!
So hail the road, cries Roving Tim,
And hail the rain, old raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

VII

He's half a wife, yon pecker bill;
A book and likewise preacher.
With any soul, in a game of skill,
He'll prove your over-reacher.
The reason is, his brains are bent
On doing things right single.
You'd wish for them when pitching your tent
At night in a whirly dingle!
So, off we go, cries Roving Tim,
And on we go, old raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

VIII

Page 4919

Lord, no, man’s lot is not for bliss;
To call it woe is blindness:
It’ll here a kick, and it’s there a kiss,
And here and there a kindness.
He starts a hare and calls her joy;
He runs her down to sorrow:
The dogs within him bother the boy,
But ’tis a new day to-morrow.
So, I at helm, cries Roving Tim,
And you at bow, old raven!
The wind according to its whim
Is in and out of haven.

Jump-to-glory Jane

I

A revelation came on Jane,
The widow of a labouring swain:
And first her body trembled sharp,
Then all the woman was a harp
With winds along the strings; she heard,
Though there was neither tone nor word.

II

For past our hearing was the air,
Beyond our speaking what it bare,
And she within herself had sight
Of heaven at work to cleanse outright,
To make of her a mansion fit
For angel hosts inside to sit.

III

They entered, and forthwith entranced,
Her body braced, her members danced;
Surprisingly the woman leapt;
And countenance composed she kept:
As gossip neighbours in the lane
Declared, who saw and pitied Jane.

IV

These knew she had been reading books,
The which was witnessed by her looks
Of late: she had a mania
For mad folk in America,
And said for sure they led the way,
But meat and beer were meant to stay.

V

That she had visited a fair,
Had seen a gauzy lady there,
Alive with tricks on legs alone,
As good as wings, was also known:
And longwhiles in a sullen mood,
Before her jumping, Jane would brood.

VI

A good knee's height, they say, she sprang;
Her arms and feet like those who hang:
As if afire the body sped,
And neither pair contributed.
She jumped in silence: she was thought
A corpse to resurrection caught.

VII

The villagers were mostly dazed;
They jeered, they wondered, and they praised.
'Twas guessed by some she was inspired,
And some would have it she had hired
An engine in her petticoats,
To turn their wits and win their votes.

VIII

Her first was Winny Earnes, a kind
Of woman not to dance inclined;
But she went up, entirely won,
Ere Jump-to-glory Jane had done;
And once a vixen wild for speech,
She found the better way to preach.

IX

No long time after, Jane was seen
Directing jumps at Daddy Green;
And that old man, to watch her fly,

Had eyebrows made of arches high;
Till homeward he likewise did hop,
Oft calling on himself to stop!

Page 4920

X

It was a scene when man and maid,
Abandoning all other trade,
And careless of the call to meals,
Went jumping at the woman’s heels.
By dozens they were counted soon,
Without a sound to tell their tune.

XI

Along the roads they came, and crossed
The fields, and o’er the hills were lost,
And in the evening reappeared;
Then short like hobbled horses reared,
And down upon the grass they plumped:
Alone their Jane to glory jumped.

XII

At morn they rose, to see her spring
All going as an engine thing;
And lighter than the gossamer
She led the bobbers following her,
Past old acquaintances, and where
They made the stranger stupid stare.

XIII

When turnips were a filling crop,
In scorn they jumped a butcher’s shop:
Or, spite of threats to flog and souse,
They jumped for shame a public-house:
And much their legs were seized with rage
If passing by the vicarage.

XIV

The tightness of a hempen rope
Their bodies got; but laundry soap
Not handsomer can rub the skin
For token of the washed within.
Occasionally coughers cast
A leg aloft and coughed their last.

XV

The weaker maids and some old men,
Requiring rafters for the pen
On rainy nights, were those who fell.
The rest were quite a miracle,
Refreshed as you may search all round
On Club-feast days and cry, Not found!

XVI

For these poor innocents, that slept
Against the sky, soft women wept:
For never did they any theft;
'Twas known when they their camping left,
And jumped the cold out of their rags;
In spirit rich as money-bags.

XVII

They jumped the question, jumped reply;
And whether to insist, deny,
Reprove, persuade, they jumped in ranks
Or singly, straight the arms to flanks,
And straight the legs, with just a knee
For bending in a mild degree.

XVIII

The villagers might call them mad;
An endless holiday they had,
Of pleasure in a serious work:
They taught by leaps where perils lurk,
And with the lambkins practised sports
For 'scaping Satan's pounds and quarts.

XIX

It really seemed on certain days,
When they bobbed up their Lord to praise,
And bobbing up they caught the glance
Of light, our secret is to dance,
And hold the tongue from hindering peace;
To dance out preacher and police.

XX

Page 4921

Those flies of boys disturbed them sore
On Sundays and when daylight wore:
With withies cut from hedge or copse,
They treated them as whipping-tops,
And flung big stones with cruel aim;
Yet all the flock jumped on the same.

XXI

For what could persecution do
To worry such a blessed crew,
On whom it was as wind to fire,
Which set them always jumping higher?
The parson and the lawyer tried,
By meek persistency defied.

XXII

But if they bore, they could pursue
As well, and this the Bishop too;
When inner warnings proved him plain
The chase for Jump-to-glory Jane.
She knew it by his being sent
To bless the feasting in the tent.

XXIII

Not less than fifty years on end,
The Squire had been the Bishop's friend:
And his poor tenants, harmless ones,
With souls to save! fed not on buns,
But angry meats: she took her place
Outside to show the way to grace.

XXIV

In apron suit the Bishop stood;
The crowding people kindly viewed.
A gaunt grey woman he saw rise
On air, with most beseeching eyes:
And evident as light in dark
It was, she set to him for mark.

XXV

Her highest leap had come: with ease
She jumped to reach the Bishop’s knees:
Compressing tight her arms and lips,
She sought to jump the Bishop’s hips:
Her aim flew at his apron-band,
That he might see and understand.

XXVI

The mild inquiry of his gaze
Was altered to a peaked amaze,
At sight of thirty in ascent,
To gain his notice clearly bent:
And greatly Jane at heart was vexed
By his ploughed look of mind perplexed.

XXVII

In jumps that said, Beware the pit!
More eloquent than speaking it —
That said, Avoid the boiled, the roast;
The heated nose on face of ghost,
Which comes of drinking: up and o’er
The flesh with me! did Jane implore.

XXVIII

She jumped him high as huntsmen go
Across the gate; she jumped him low,
To coax him to begin and feel
His infant steps returning, peel
His mortal pride, exposing fruit,
And off with hat and apron suit.

XXIX

We need much patience, well she knew,
And out and out, and through and through,
When we would gentlefolk address,
However we may seek to bless:
At times they hide them like the beasts
From sacred beams; and mostly priests.

XXX

Page 4922

He gave no sign of making bare,
Nor she of faintness or despair.
Inflamed with hope that she might win,
If she but coaxed him to begin,
She used all arts for making fain;
The mother with her babe was Jane.

XXXI

Now stamped the Squire, and knowing not
Her business, waved her from the spot.
Encircled by the men of might,
The head of Jane, like flickering light,
As in a charger, they beheld
Ere she was from the park expelled.

XXXII

Her grief, in jumps of earthly weight,
Did Jane around communicate:
For that the moment when began
The holy but mistaken man,
In view of light, to take his lift,
They cut him from her charm adrift!

XXXIII

And he was lost: a banished face
For ever from the ways of grace,
Unless pinched hard by dreams in fright.
They saw the Bishop’s wavering sprite
Within her look, at come and go,
Long after he had caused her woe.

XXXIV

Her greying eyes (until she sank
At Fredsham on the wayside bank,
Like cinder heaps that whitened lie
From coals that shot the flame to sky)
Had glassy vacancies, which yearned
For one in memory discerned.

XXXV

May those who ply the tongue that cheats,
And those who rush to beer and meats,
And those whose mean ambition aims
At palaces and titled names,
Depart in such a cheerful strain
As did our Jump-to-glory Jane!

XXXVI

Her end was beautiful: one sigh.
She jumped a foot when it was nigh.
A lily in a linen clout
She looked when they had laid her out.
It is a lily-light she bears
For England up the ladder-stairs.

The riddle for men

I

This Riddle rede or die,
Says History since our Flood,
To warn her sons of power:-
It can be truth, it can be lie;
Be parasite to twist awry;
The drouthy vampire for your blood;
The fountain of the silver flower;
A brand, a lure, a web, a crest;
Supple of wax or tempered steel;
The spur to honour, snake in nest:
'Tis as you will with it to deal;
To wear upon the breast,
Or trample under heel.

II

And rede you not aright,
Says Nature, still in red
Shall History's tale be writ!
For solely thus you lead to light
The trailing chapters she must write,
And pass my fiery test of dead
Or living through the furnace-pit:
Dislinked from who the softer hold
In grip of brute, and brute remain:
Of whom the woeful tale is told,
How for one short Sultanic reign,

Their bodies lapse to mould,
Their souls behowl the plain.

Page 4923

The sage enamoured and the honest lady

I

One fairest of the ripe unwedded left
Her shadow on the Sage’s path; he found,
By common signs, that she had done a theft.
He could have made the sovereign heights resound
With questions of the wherefore of her state:
He on far other but an hour before
Intent. And was it man, or was it mate,
That she disdained? or was there haply more?

About her mouth a placid humour slipped
The dimple, as you see smooth lakes at eve
Spread melting rings where late a swallow dipped.
The surface was attentive to receive,
The secret underneath enfolded fast.
She had the step of the unconquered, brave,
Not arrogant; and if the vessel’s mast
Waved liberty, no challenge did it wave.
Her eyes were the sweet world desired of souls,
With something of a wavering line unspelt.
They hold the look whose tenderness condoles
For what the sister in the look has dealt
Of fatal beyond healing; and her tones
A woman’s honeyed amorous outvied,
As when in a dropped viol the wood-throb moans
Among the sobbing strings, that plain and chide
Like infants for themselves, less deep to thrill
Than those rich mother-notes for them breathed round.
Those voices are not magic of the will
To strike love’s wound, but of love’s wound give sound,
Conveying it; the yearnings, pains and dreams.
They waft to the moist tropics after storm,
When out of passion spent thick incense steams,
And jewel-belted clouds the wreck transform.

Was never hand on brush or lyre to paint
Her gracious manners, where the nuptial ring
Of melody clasped motion in restraint:
The reed-blade with the breeze thereof may sing.
With such endowments armed was she and decked
To make her spoken thoughts eclipse her kind;

Surpassing many a giant intellect,
The marvel of that cradled infant mind.
It clenched the tiny fist, it curled the toe;
Cherubic laughed, enticed, dispensed, absorbed;
And promised in fair feminine to grow
A Sage's match and mate, more heavenly orbed.

II

Across his path the spouseless Lady cast
Her shadow, and the man that thing became.
His youth uprising called his age the Past.
This was the strong grey head of laurelled name,
And in his bosom an inverted Sage
Mistook for light of morn the light which sank.
But who while veins run blood shall know the page
Succeeding ere we turn upon our blank?
Comes Beauty with her tale of moon and cloud,
Her silvered rims of mystery pointing in
To hollows of the half-veiled

Page 4924

unavowed,
Where beats her secret life, grey heads will spin
Quick as the young, and spell those hieroglyphs
Of phosphorescent dusk, devoutly bent;
They drink a cup to whirl on dizzier cliffs
For their shamed fall, which asks, why was she sent!
Why, and of whom, and whence; and tell they truth,
The legends of her mission to beguile?

Hard likeness to the toilful apes of youth
He bore at times, and tempted the sly smile;
And not on her soft lips was it descried.
She stepped her way benevolently grave:
Nor sign that Beauty fed her worm of pride,
By tossing victim to the courtier knave,
Let peep, nor of the naughty pride gave sign.
Rather 'twas humbleness in being pursued,
As pilgrim to the temple of a shrine.
Had he not wits to pierce the mask he wooed?
All wisdom's armoury this man could wield;
And if the cynic in the Sage it pleased
Traverse her woman's curtain and poor shield,
For new example of a world diseased;
Showing her shrineless, not a temple, bare;
A curtain ripped to tatters by the blast;
Yet she most surely to this man stood fair:
He worshipped like the young enthusiast,
Named simpleton or poet. Did he read
Right through, and with the voice she held reserved
Amid her vacant ruins jointly plead?

Compassion for the man thus noble nerved
The pity for herself she felt in him,
To wreak a deed of sacrifice, and save;
At least, be worthy. That our soul may swim,
We sink our heart down bubbling under wave.
It bubbles till it drops among the wrecks.
But, ah! confession of a woman's breast:
She eminent, she honoured of her sex!
Truth speaks, and takes the spots of the confessed,
To veil them. None of women, save their vile,
Plays traitor to an army in the field.
The cries most vindicating most defile.
How shall a cause to Nature be appealed,

When, under pressure of their common foe,
Her sisters shun the Mother and disown,
On pain of his intolerable crow
Above the fiction, built for him, o’erthrown?
Irrational he is, irrational
Must they be, though not Reason’s light shall wane
In them with ever Nature at close call,
Behind the fiction torturing to sustain;
Who hear her in the milk, and sometimes make
A tongueless answer, shivered on a sigh:
Whereat men dread their lofty structure’s quake
Once more, and in their hosts for tocsin ply
The crazy roar of peril, leonine
For injured majesty. That sigh of dames
Is rare and soon suppressed. Not they combine
To shake the structure sheltering them, which tames
Their lustier if not

Page 4925

wilder: fixed are they,
In elegancy scarce denoting ease;
And do they breathe, it is not to betray
The martyr in the caryatides.
Yet here and there along the graceful row
Is one who fetches breath from deeps, who deems,
Moved by a desperate craving, their old foe
May yield a trustier friend than woman seems,
And aid to bear the sculptured floral weight
Massed upon heads not utterly of stone:
May stamp endurance by expounding fate.
She turned to him, and, This you seek is gone;
Look in, she said, as pants the furnace, brief,
Frost-white. She gave his hearing sight to view
The silent chamber of a brown curled leaf:
Thing that had throbbed ere shot black lightning through.
No further sign of heart could he discern:
The picture of her speech was winter sky;
A headless figure folding a cleft urn,
Where tears once at the overflow were dry.

III

So spake she her first utterance on the rack.
It softened torment, in the funeral hues
Round wan Romance at ebb, but drove her back
To listen to herself, herself accuse
Harshly as Love’s imperial cause allowed.
She meant to grovel, and her lover praised
So high o’er the condemnatory crowd,
That she perforce a fellow phoenix blazed.

The picture was of hand fast joined to hand,
Both pushed from angry skies, their grasp more pledged
Under the threatened flash of a bright brand
At arm’s length up, for severing action edged.
Why, then Love’s Court of Honour contemplate;
And two drowned shorecasts, who, for the life esteemed
Above their lost, invoke an advocate
In Passion’s purity, thereby redeemed.

Redeemed, uplifted, glimmering on a throne,
The woman stricken by an arrow falls.
His advocate she can be, not her own,

If, Traitress to thy sex! one sister calls.
Have we such scenes of drapery's mournfulness
On Beauty's revelations, witched we plant,
Over the fair shape humbled to confess,
An angel's buckler, with loud choiric chant.

IV

No knightly sword to serve, nor harp of bard,
The lady's hand in her physician's knew.
She had not hoped for them as her award,
When zig-zag on the tongue electric flew
Her charge of counter-motives, none impure:
But muteness whipped her skin. She could have said,
Her free confession was to work his cure,
Show proofs for why she could not love or wed.
Were they not shown? His muteness shook in thrall
Her body on the verge of that black pit
Sheer from the treacherous confessional,
Demanding further, while perusing it.

Page 4926

Slave is the open mouth beneath the closed.
She sank; she snatched at colours; they were peel
Of fruit past savour, in derision rosed.
For the dark downward then her soul did reel.
A press of hideous impulse urged to speak:
A novel dread of man enchained her dumb.
She felt the silence thicken, heard it shriek,
Heard Life subsiding on the eternal hum:
Welcome to women, when, between man's laws
And Nature's thirsts, they, soul from body torn,
Give suck at breast to a celestial cause,
Named by the mouth infernal, and forsworn.
Nathless her forehead twitched a sad content,
To think the cure so manifest, so frail
Her charm remaining. Was the curtain's rent
Too wide? he but a man of that herd male?
She saw him as that herd of the forked head
Butting the woman harrowed on her knees,
Clothed only in life's last devouring red.
Confession at her fearful instant sees
Judicial Silence write the devil fact
In letters of the skeleton: at once,
Swayed on the supplication of her act,
The rabble reading, roaring to denounce,
She joins. No longer colouring, with skips
At tangles, picture that for eyes in tears
Might swim the sequence, she addressed her lips
To do the scaffold's office at his ears.

Into the bitter judgement of that herd
On women, she, deeming it present, fell.
Her frenzy of abasement hugged the word
They stone with, and so pile their citadel
To launch at outcasts the foul levin bolt.
As had he flung it, in her breast it burned.
Face and reflect it did her hot revolt
From hardness, to the writhing rebel turned;
Because the golden buckler was withheld,
She to herself applies the powder-spark,
For joy of one wild demon burst ere quelled,
Perishing to astound the tyrant Dark.

She had the Scriptural word so scored on brain,
It rang through air to sky, and rocked a world

That danced down shades the scarlet dance profane;
Most women! see! by the man’s view dustward hurled,
Impenitent, submissive, torn in two.
They sink upon their nature, the unnamed,
And sops of nourishment may get some few,
In place of understanding, scourged and shamed.

Barely have seasoned women understood
The great Irrational, who thunders power,
Drives Nature to her primitive wild wood,
And courts her in the covert’s dewy hour;
Returning to his fortress nigh night’s end,
With execration of her daughters’ lures.
They help him the proud fortress to defend,
Nor see what front it wears, what life immures,
The murder it commits; nor that its base

Page 4927

Is shifty as a huckster’s opening deal
For bargain under smoothest market face,
While Gentleness bids frigid Justice feel,
Justice protests that Reason is her seat;
Elect Convenience, as Reason masked,
Hears calmly cramped Humanity entreat;
Until a sentient world is overtasked,
And rouses Reason’s fountain-self: she calls
On Nature; Nature answers: Share your guilt
In common when contention cracks the walls
Of the big house which not on me is built.

The Lady said as much as breath will bear;
To happier sisters inconceivable:
Contemptible to veterans of the fair,
Who show for a convolving pearly shell,
A treasure of the shore, their written book.
As much as woman’s breath will bear and live
Shaped she to words beneath a knotted look,
That held as if for grain the summing sieve.
Her judge now brightened without pause, as wakes
Our homely daylight after dread of spells.
Lips sugared to let loose the little snakes
Of slimy lustres ringing elfin bells
About a story of the naked flesh,
Intending but to put some garment on,
Should learn, that in the subject they enmesh,
A traitor lurks and will be known anon.
Delusion heating pricks the torpid doubt,
Stationed for index down an ancient track:
And ware of it was he while she poured out
A broken moon on forest-waters black.

Though past the stage where midway men are skilled
To scan their senses wriggling under plough,
When yet to the charmed seed of speech distilled,
Their hearts are fallow, he, and witless how,
Loathing, had yielded, like bruised limb to leech,
Not handsomely; but now beholding bleed
Soul of the woman in her prostrate speech,
The valour of that rawness he could read.
Thence flashed it, as the crimson currents ran

From senses up to thoughts, how she had read
Maternally the warm remainder man
Beneath his crust, and Nature's pity shed,
In shedding dearer than heart's blood to light
His vision of the path mild Wisdom walks.
Therewith he could espy Confession's fright;
Her need of him: these flowers grow on stalks;
They suck from soil, and have their urgencies
Beside and with the lovely face mid leaves.
Veins of divergencies, convergencies,
Our botanist in womankind perceives;
And if he hugs no wound, the man can prize
That splendid consummation and sure proof
Of more than heart in her, who might despise,
Who drowns herself, for pity up aloof
To soar and be like Nature's pity: she
Instinctive of what virtue in young days
Had served him for his pilot-star on sea,

Page 4928

To trouble him in haven. Thus his gaze
Came out of rust, and more than the schooled tongue
Was gifted to encourage and assure.
He gave her of the deep well she had sprung;
And name it gratitude, the word is poor.
But name it gratitude, is aught as rare
From sex to sex? And let it have survived
Their conflict, comes the peace between the pair,
Unknown to thousands husbanded and wived:
Unknown to Passion, generous for prey:
Unknown to Love, too blissful in a truce.
Their tenderest of self did each one slay;
His cloak of dignity, her fleur de luce;
Her lily flower, and his abolla cloak,
Things living, slew they, and no artery bled.
A moment of some sacrificial smoke
They passed, and were the dearer for their dead.

He learnt how much we gain who make no claims.
A nightcap on his flicker of grey fire
Was thought of her sharp shudder in the flames,
Confessing; and its conjured image dire,
Of love, the torrent on the valley dashed;
The whirlwind swathing tremulous peaks; young force,
Visioned to hold corrected and abashed
Our senile emulous; which rolls its course
Proud to the shattering end; with these few last
Hot quintessential drops of bryony juice,
Squeezed out in anguish: all of that once vast!
And still, though having skin for man’s abuse,
Though no more glorying in the beauteous wreath
Shot skyward from a blood at passionate jet,
Repenting but in words, that stand as teeth
Between the vivid lips; a vassal set;
And numb, of formal value. Are we true
In nature, never natural thing repents;
Albeit receiving punishment for due,
Among the group of this world’s penitents;
Albeit remorsefully regretting, oft
Cravenly, while the scourge no shudder spares.

Our world believes it stabler if the soft
Are whipped to show the face repentance wears.
Then hear it, in a moan of atheist gloom,
Deplore the weedy growth of hypocrites;
Count Nature devilish, and accept for doom
The chasm between our passions and our wits!

Affecting lunar whiteness, patent snows,
It trembles at betrayal of a sore.
Hers is the glacier-conscience, to expose
Impurities for clearness at the core.

She to her hungered thundering in breast,
ye shall not starve, not feebly designates
The world repressing as a life repressed,
Judged by the wasted martyrs it creates.
How Sin, amid the shades Cimmerian,
Repents, she points for sight: and she avers,
The hoofed half-angel in the Puritan
Nigh reads her when no brutish wrath deters.

Page 4929

Sin against immaturity, the sin
Of ravenous excess, what deed divides
Man from vitality; these bleed within;
Bleed in the crippled relic that abides.
Perpetually they bleed; a limb is lost,
A piece of life, the very spirit maimed.
But culprit who the law of man has crossed
With Nature's dubiously within is blamed;
Despite our cry at cutting of the whip,
Our shiver in the night when numbers frown,
We but bewail a broken fellowship,
A sting, an isolation, a fall'n crown.

Abject of sinners is that sensitive,
The flesh, amenable to stripes, miscalled
Incorrigible: such title do we give
To the poor shrinking stuff wherewith we are walled;
And, taking it for Nature, place in ban
Our Mother, as a Power wanton-willed,
The shame and baffler of the soul of man,
The recreant, reptilious. Do thou build
Thy mind on her foundations in earth's bed;
Behold man's mind the child of her keen rod,
For teaching how the wits and passions wed
To rear that temple of the credible God;
Sacred the letters of her laws, and plain,
Will shine, to guide thy feet and hold thee firm:
Then, as a pathway through a field of grain,
Man's laws appear the blind progressive worm,
That moves by touch, and thrust of linking rings
The which to endow with vision, lift from mud
To level of their nature's aims and springs,
Must those, the twain beside our vital flood,
Now on opposing banks, the twain at strife
(Whom the so rosy ferryman invites
To junction, and mid-channel over Life,
Unmasked to the ghostly, much asunder smites)
Instruct in deeper than Convenience,
In higher than the harvest of a year.
Only the rooted knowledge to high sense
Of heavenly can mount, and feel the spur
For fruitfullest advancement, eye a mark
Beyond the path with grain on either hand,

Help to the steering of our social Ark
Over the barbarous waters unto land.

For us the double conscience and its war,
The serving of two masters, false to both,
Until those twain, who spring the root and are
The knowledge in division, plight a troth
Of equal hands: nor longer circulate
A pious token for their current coin,
To growl at the exchange; they, mate and mate,
Fair feminine and masculine shall join
Upon an upper plane, still common mould,
Where stamped religion and reflective pace
A statelier measure, and the hoop of gold
Rounds to horizon for their soul’s embrace.
Then shall those noblest of the earth and sun
Inmix unlike to waves on savage sea.
But not till Nature’s laws and man’s are one,
Can marriage of the man and woman be.

Page 4930

V

He passed her through the sermon's dull defile.
Down under billowy vapour-gorges heaved
The city and the vale and mountain-pile.
She felt strange push of shuttle-threads that weaved.

A new land in an old beneath her lay;
And forth to meet it did her spirit rush,
As bride who without shame has come to say,
Husband, in his dear face that caused her blush.

A natural woman's heart, not more than clad
By station and bright raiment, gathers heat
From nakedness in trusted hands: she had
The joy of those who feel the world's heart beat,
After long doubt of it as fire or ice;
Because one man had helped her to breathe free;
Surprised to faith in something of a price
Past the old charity in chivalry:-
Our first wild step to right the loaded scales
Displaying women shamefully outweighed.
The wisdom of humaneness best avails
For serving justice till that fraud is brayed.
Her buried body fed the life she drank.
And not another stripping of her wound!
The startled thought on black delirium sank,
While with her gentle surgeon she communed,
And woman's prospect of the yoke repelled.
Her buried body gave her flowers and food;
The peace, the homely skies, the springs that welled;
Love, the large love that folds the multitude.
Soul's chastity in honesty, and this
With beauty, made the dower to men refused.
And little do they know the prize they miss;
Which is their happy fortune! Thus he mused

For him, the cynic in the Sage had play
A hazy moment, by a breath dispersed;
To think, of all alive most wedded they,
Whom time disjoined! He needed her quick thirst
For renovated earth: on earth she gazed,
With humble aim to foot beside the wise.

Lo, where the eyelashes of night are raised
Yet lowly over morning’s pure grey eyes.

‘Love is winged for two’

Love is winged for two,
In the worst he weathers,
When their hearts are tied;
But if they divide,
O too true!
Cracks a globe, and feathers, feathers,
Feathers all the ground bestrew.

I was breast of morning sea,
Rosy plume on forest dun,
I the laugh in rainy fleeces,
While with me
She made one.
Now must we pick up our pieces,
For that then so winged were we.

‘Ask, is love divine’

Ask, is Love divine,
Voices all are, ay.
Question for the sign,
There’s a common sigh.
Would we, through our years,
Love forego,
Quit of scars and tears?
Ah, but no, no, no!

‘Joy is fleet’

Page 4931

Joy is fleet,
Sorrow slow.
Love, so sweet,
Sorrow will sow.
Love, that has flown
Ere day's decline,
Love to have known,
Sorrow, be mine!

The lesson of grief

Not ere the bitter herb we taste,
Which ages thought of happy times,
To plant us in a weeping waste,
Rings with our fellows this one heart
Accordant chimes.

When I had shed my glad year's leaf,
I did believe I stood alone,
Till that great company of Grief
Taught me to know this craving heart
For not my own.

Wind on the lyre

That was the chirp of Ariel
You heard, as overhead it flew,
The farther going more to dwell,
And wing our green to wed our blue;
But whether note of joy or knell,
Not his own Father-singer knew;
Nor yet can any mortal tell,
Save only how it shivers through;
The breast of us a sounded shell,
The blood of us a lighted dew.

The youthful quest

His Lady queen of woods to meet,
He wanders day and night:
The leaves have whisperings discreet,
The mossy ways invite.

Across a lustrous ring of space,
By covert hoods and caves,
Is promise of her secret face
In film that onward waves.

For darkness is the light astrain,
Astrain for light the dark.
A grey moth down a larches' lane
Unwinds a ghostly spark.

Her lamp he sees, and young desire
Is fed while cloaked she flies.
She quivers shot of violet fire
To ash at look of eyes.

The empty purse—A sermon to our later prodigal son

Thou, run to the dry on this wayside bank,
Too plainly of all the propellers bereft!
Quenched youth, and is that thy purse?
Even such limp slough as the snake has left
Slack to the gale upon spikes of whin,
For cast-off coat of a life gone blank,
In its frame of a grin at the seeker, is thine;
And thine to crave and to curse
The sweet thing once within.
Accuse him: some devil committed the theft,
Which leaves of the portly a skin,
No more; of the weighty a whine.

Pursue him: and first, to be sure of his track,
Over devious ways that have led to this,
In the stream's consecutive line,
Let memory lead thee back
To where waves Morning her fleur-de-lys,
Unflushed at the front of the roseate door
Unopened yet: never shadow there
Of a Tartarus lighted by Dis
For souls whose cry is, alack!
An ivory cradle rocks, apeep
Through his eyelashes' laugh, a breathing pearl.
There the young chief

Page 4932

of the animals wore
A likeness to heavenly hosts, unaware
Of his love of himself; with the hours at leap.
In a dingle away from a rutted highroad,
Around him the earliest throstle and merle,
Our human smile between milk and sleep,
Effervescent of Nature he crowed.
Fair was that season; furl over furl
The banners of blossom; a dancing floor
This earth; very angels the clouds; and fair
Thou on the tablets of forehead and breast:
Careless, a centre of vigilant care.
Thy mother kisses an infant curl.
The room of the toys was a boundless nest,
A kingdom the field of the games,
Till entered the craving for more,
And the worshipped small body had aims.
A good little idol, as records attest,
When they tell of him lightly appeased in a scream
By sweets and caresses: he gave but sign
That the heir of a purse-plumped dominant race,
Accustomed to plenty, not dumb would pine.
Almost magician, his earliest dream
Was lord of the unpossessed
For a look; himself and his chase,
As on puffs of a wind at whirl,
Made one in the wink of a gleam.
She kisses a locket curl,
She conjures to vision a cherub face,
When her butterfly counted his day
All meadow and flowers, mishap
Derided, and taken for play
The fling of an urchin’s cap.
When her butterfly showed him an eaglet born,
For preying too heedlessly bred,
What a heart clapped in thee then!
With what fuller colours of morn!
And high to the uttermost heavens it flew,
Swift as on poet’s pen.
It flew to be wedded, to wed
The mystery scented around:
Issue of flower and dew,
Issue of light and sound:

Thinner than either; a thread
Spun of the dream they threw
To kindle, allure, evade.
It ran the sea-wave, the garden's dance,
To the forest's dark heart down a dappled glade;
Led on by a perishing glance,
By a twinkle's eternal waylaid.
Woman, the name was, when she took form;
Sheaf of the wonders of life. She fled,
Close imaged; she neared, far seen. How she made
Palpitate earth of the living and dead!
Did she not show thee the world designed
Solely for loveliness? Nested warm,
The day was the morrow in flight. And for thee,
She muted the discords, tuned, refined;
Drowned sharp edges beneath her cloak.
Eye of the waters, and throb of the tree,
Sliding on radiance, winging from shade,
With her witch-whisper o'er ruins, in reeds,
She sang low the song of her promise delayed;
Beckoned and died, as a finger of smoke
Astream over woodland. And was not she

Page 4933

History’s heroines white on storm?
Remember her summons to valorous deeds.
Shone she a lure of the honey-bag swarm,
Most was her beam on the knightly: she led
For the honours of manhood more than the prize;
Waved her magnetical yoke
Whither the warrior bled,
Ere to the bower of sighs.
And shy of her secrets she was; under deeps
Plunged at the breath of a thirst that woke
The dream in the cave where the Dreaded sleeps.

Away over heaven the young heart flew,
And caught many lustres, till some one said
(Or was it the thought into hearing grew?),
Not thou as commoner men!
Thy stature puffed and it swayed,
It stiffened to royal-erect;
A brassy trumpet brayed;
A whirling seized thy head;
The vision of beauty was flecked.
Note well the how and the when,
The thing that prompted and sped.
Thereanon the keen passions clapped wing,
Fixed eye, and the world was prey.
No simple world of thy greenblade Spring,
Nor world of thy flowerful prime
On the topmost Orient peak
Above a yet vaporous day.
Flesh was it, breast to beak:
A four-walled windowless world without ray,
Only darkening jets on a river of slime,
Where harsh over music as woodland jay,
A voice chants, Woe to the weak!
And along an insatiate feast,
Women and men are one
In the cup transforming to beast.
Magian worship they paid to their sun,
Lord of the Purse! Behold him climb.
Stalked ever such figure of fun
For monarch in great-grin pantomime?

See now the heart dwindle, the frame distend;
The soul to its anchorite cavern retreat,
From a life that reeks of the rotted end;
While he—is he pictureable? replete,
Gourd-like swells of the rank of the soil,
Hollow, more hollow at core.
And for him did the hundreds toil
Despised; in the cold and heat,
This image ridiculous bore
On their shoulders for morsels of meat!

Gross, with the fumes of incense full,
With parasites tickled, with slaves begirt,
He strutted, a cock, he bellowed, a bull,
He rolled him, a dog, in dirt.
And dog, bull, cook, was he, fanged, horned, plumed;
Original man, as philosophers vouch;
Carnivorous, cannibal; length-long exhumed,
Frightfully living and armed to devour;
The primitive weapons of prey in his pouch;
The bait, the line and the hook:
To feed on his fellows intent.
God of the Danae shower,
He had but to follow his bent.
He battened on fowl not safely hutched,
On sheep astray from the crook;
A lure for the foolish

Page 4934

in fold:
To carrion turning what flesh he touched.
And O the grace of his air,
As he at the goblet sips,
A centre of girdles loosed,
With their grisly label, Sold!
Credulous hears the fidelity swear,
Which has roving eyes over yielded lips:
To-morrow will fancy himself the seduced,
The stuck in a treacherous slough,
Because of his faith in a purchased pair,
False to a vinous vow.

In his glory of banquet strip him bare,
And what is the creature we view?
Our pursy Apollo Apollyon's tool;
A small one, still of the crew
By serpent Apollyon blest:
His plea in apology, blindfold Fool.
A fool surcharged, propelled, unwarned;
Not viler, you hear him protest:
Of a popular countenance not incorrect.
But deeds are the picture in essence, deeds
Paint him the hooved and homed,
Despite the poor pother he pleads,
And his look of a nation's elect.
We have him, our quarry confessed!
And scan him: the features inspect
Of that bestial multiform: cry,
Corroborate I, O Samian Sage!
The book of thy wisdom, proved
On me, its last hieroglyph page,
Alive in the horned and hooved?
Thou! will he make reply.

Thus has the plenary purse
Done often: to do will engage
Anew upon all of thy like, or worse.
And now is thy deepest regret
To be man, clean rescued from beast:
From the grip of the Sorcerer, Gold,
Celestially released.

But now from his cavernous hold,
Free may thy soul be set,
As a child of the Death and the Life, to learn,
Refreshed by some bodily sweat,
The meaning of either in turn,
What issue may come of the two:-
A morn beyond mornings, beyond all reach
Of emotional arms at the stretch to enfold:
A firmament passing our visible blue.
To those having nought to reflect it, 'tis nought;
To those who are misty, 'tis mist on the beach
From the billow withdrawing; to those who see
Earth, our mother, in thought,
Her spirit it is, our key.

Ay, the Life and the Death are her words to us here,
Of one significance, pricking the blind.
This is thy gain now the surface is clear:
To read with a soul in the mirror of mind
Is man's chief lesson.—Thou smilest! I preach!
Acid smiling, my friend, reveals
Abysses within; frigid preaching a street
Paved unconcernedly smooth
For the lecturer straight on his heels,
Up and down a policeman's beat;
Bearing tonics not labelled to soothe.
Thou hast a disgust of the sermon in rhyme.
It is not attractive

Page 4935

in being too chaste.
The popular tale of adventure and crime
Would equally sicken an overdone taste.
So, then, onward. Philosophy, thoughtless to soothe,
Lifts, if thou wilt, or there leaves thee supine.

Thy condition, good sooth, has no seeming of sweet;
It walks our first crags, it is flint for the tooth,
For the thirsts of our nature brine.
But manful has met it, manful will meet.
And think of thy privilege: supple with youth,
To have sight of the headlong swine,
Once fouling thee, jumping the dips!
As the coin of thy purse poured out:
An animal's holiday past:
And free of them thou, to begin a new bout;
To start a fresh hunt on a resolute blast:
No more an imp-ridden to bournes of eclipse:
Having knowledge to spur thee, a gift to compare;
Rubbing shoulder to shoulder, as only the book
Of the world can be read, by necessity urged.
For witness, what blinkers are they who look
From the state of the prince or the millionnaire!
They see but the fish they attract,
The hungers on them converged;
And never the thought in the shell of the act,
Nor ever life's fangless mirth.
But first, that the poisonous of thee be purged,
Go into thyself, strike Earth.
She is there, she is felt in a blow struck hard.
Thou findest a pugilist countering quick,
Cunning at drives where thy shutters are barred;
Not, after the studied professional trick,
Blue-sealing; she brightens the sight. Strike Earth,
Antaeus, young giant, whom fortune trips!
And thou com'st on a saving fact,
To nourish thy planted worth.

Be it clay, flint, mud, or the rubble of chips,
Thy roots have grasp in the stern-exact:
The redemption of sinners deluded! the last
Dry handful, that bruises and saves.
To the common big heart are we bound right fast,
When our Mother admonishing nips

At the nakedness bare of a clout,
And we crave what the commonest craves.

This wealth was a fortress-wall,
Under which grew our grim little beast-god stout;
Self-worshipped, the foe, in division from all;
With crowds of illogical Christians, no doubt;
Till the rescuing earthquake cracked.
Thus are we man made firm;
Made warm by the numbers compact.
We follow no longer a trumpet-snout,
At a trot where the hog is tracked,
Nor wriggle the way of the worm.

Thou wilt spare us the cynical pout
At humanity: sign of a nature bechurled.
No stenchy anathemas cast
Upon Providence, women, the world.
Distinguish thy tempers and trim thy wits.
The purchased are things of the mart, not classed
Among resonant types that have freely grown.

Page 4936

Thy knowledge of women might be surpassed:
As any sad dog's of sweet flesh when he quits
The wayside wandering bone!
No revilings of comrades as ingrates: thee
The tempter, misleader, and criminal (screened
By laws yet barbarous) own.

If some one performed Fiend's deputy,
He was for awhile the Fiend.
Still, nursing a passion to speak,
As the punch-bowl does, in the moral vein,
When the ladle has finished its leak,
And the vessel is loquent of nature's inane,
Hie where the demagogues roar
Like a Phalaris bull, with the victim's force:
Hurrah to their jolly attack
On a City that smokes of the Plain;
A city of sin's death-dyes,
Holding revel of worms in a corse;
A city of malady sore,
Over-ripe for the big doom's crack:
A city of hymnical snore;
Connubial truths and lies
Demanding an instant divorce,
Clean as the bright from the black.
It were well for thy system to sermonize.
There are giants to slay, and they call for their Jack.

Then up stand thou in the midst:
Thy good grain out of thee thresh,
Hand upon heart: relate
What things thou legally didst
For the Archseducer of flesh.
Omitting the murmurs of women and fate,
Confess thee an instrument armed
To be snare of our wanton, our weak,
Of all by the sensual charmed.
For once shall repentance be done by the tongue:
Speak, though execrate, speak
A word on grandmotherly Laws
Giving rivers of gold to our young,
In the days of their hungers impure;
To furnish them beak and claws,
And make them a banquet's lure.

Thou the example, saved
Miraculously by this poor skin!
Thereat let the Purse be waved:
The snake-slough sick of the snaky sin:
A devil, if devil as devil behaved
Ever, thou knowest, look thou but in,
Where he shivers, a culprit fettered and shaved;
O a bird stripped of feather, a fish clipped of fin!

And commend for a washing the torrents of wrath,
Which hurl at the foe of the dearest men prize
Rough-rolling boulders and froth.
Gigantical enginery they can command,
For the crushing of enemies not of great size:
But hold to thy desperate stand.
Men’s right of bequeathing their all to their own
(With little regard for the creatures they squeezed);
Their mill and mill-water and nether mill-stone
Tied fast to their infant; lo, this is the last
Of their hungers, by prudent devices appeased.
The law they decree is their ultimate slave;
Wherein we perceive old Voracity glassed.
It works from their

Page 4937

dust, and it reeks of their grave.
Point them to greener, though Journals be guns;
To brotherly fields under fatherly skies;
Where the savage still primitive learns of a debt
He has owed since he drummed on his belly for war;
And how for his giving, the more will he get;
For trusting his fellows, leave friends round his sons:
Till they see, with the gape of a startled surprise,
Their adored tyrant-monster a brute to abhor,
The sun of their system a father of flies!

So, for such good hope, take their scourge unashamed;
'Tis the portion of them who civilize,
Who speak the word novel and true:
How the brutish antique of our springs may be tamed,
Without loss of the strength that should push us to flower;
How the God of old time will act Satan of new,
If we keep him not straight at the higher God aimed;
For whose habitation within us we scour
This house of our life; where our bitterest pains
Are those to eject the Infernal, who heaps
Mire on the soul. Take stripes or chains;
Grip at thy standard reviled.
And what if our body be dashed from the steeps?
Our spoken in protest remains.
A young generation reaps.

The young generation! ah, there is the child
Of our souls down the Ages! to bleed for it, proof
That souls we have, with our senses filed,
Our shuttles at thread of the woof.
May it be braver than ours,
To encounter the rattle of hostile bolts,
To look on the rising of Stranger Powers.
May it know how the mind in expansion revolts
From a nursery Past with dead letters aloof,
And the piping to stupor of Precedents shun,
In a field where the forefather print of the hoof
Is not yet overgrassed by the watering hours,
And should prompt us to Change, as to promise of sun,
Till brain-rule splendidly towers.
For that large light we have laboured and tramped
Thorough forests and bogland, still to perceive

Our animate morning stamped
With the lines of a sombre eve.

A timorous thing ran the innocent hind,
When the wolf was the hypocrite fang under hood,
The snake a lithe lurker up sleeve,
And the lion effulgently ramped.
Then our forefather hoof did its work in the wood,
By right of the better in kind.
But now will it breed yon bestial brood
Three-fold thrice over, if bent to bind,
As the healthy in chains with the sick,
Unto despot usage our issuing mind.
It signifies battle or death’s dull knell.
Precedents icily written on high
Challenge the Tentatives hot to rebel.
Our Mother, who speeds her bloomful quick
For the march, reads

Page 4938

which the impediment well.
She smiles when of sapience is their boast.
O loose of the tug between blood run dry
And blood running flame may our offspring run!
May brain democratic be king of the host!
Less then shall the volumes of History tell
Of the stop in progression, the slip in relapse,
That counts us a sand-slack inch hard won
Beneath an oppressive incumbent perhaps.

Let the senile lords in a parchment sky,
And the generous turbulents drunken of morn,
Their battle of instincts put by,
A moment examine this field:
On a Roman street cast thoughtful eye,
Along to the mounts from the bog-forest weald.
It merits a glance at our history's maps,
To see across Britain's old shaggy unshorn,
Through the Parties in strife internecine, foot
The ruler's close-reckoned direct to the mark.
From the head ran the vanquisher's orderly route,
In the stride of his forts through the tangle and dark.
From the head runs the paved firm way for advance,
And we shoulder, we wrangle! The light on us shed
Shows dense beetle blackness in swarm, lurid Chance,
The Goddess of gamblers, above. From the head,
Then when it worked for the birth of a star
Fraternal with heaven's in beauty and ray,
Sprang the Acropolis. Ask what crown
Comes of our tides of the blood at war,
For men to bequeath generations down!
And ask what thou wast when the Purse was brimmed:
What high-bounding ball for the Gods at play:
A Conservative youth! who the cream-bowl skimmed,
Desiring affairs to be left as they are.

So, thou takest Youth's natural place in the fray,
As a Tentative, combating Peace,
Our lullaby word for decay. —
There will come an immediate decree
In thy mind for the opposite party's decease,
If he bends not an instant knee.
Expunge it: extinguishing counts poor gain.
And accept a mild word of police:-

Be mannerly, measured; refrain
From the puffings of him of the bagpipe cheeks.
Our political, even as the merchant main,
A temperate gale requires
For the ship that haven seeks;
Neither God of the winds nor his bellowsy squires.

Then observe the antagonist, con
His reasons for rocking the lullaby word.
You stand on a different stage of the stairs.
He fought certain battles, yon senile lord.
In the strength of thee, feel his bequest to his heirs.
We are now on his inches of ground hard won,
For a perch to a flight o’er his resting fence.

Page 4939

Does it knock too hard at thy head if I say,
That Time is both father and son?
Tough lesson, when senses are floods over sense! —
Discern the paternal of Now
As the Then of thy present tense.
You may pull as you will either way,
You can never be other than one.
So, be filial. Giants to slay
Demand knowing eyes in their Jack.

There are those whom we push from the path with respect.
Bow to that elder, though seeing him bow
To the backward as well, for a thunderous back
Upon thee. In his day he was not all wrong.
Unto some foundered zenith he strove, and was wrecked.
He scrambled to shore with a worship of shore.
The Future he sees as the slippery murk;
The Past as his doctrinal library lore.
He stands now the rock to the wave's wild wash.
Yet thy lumpish antagonist once did work
Heroical, one of our strong.
His gold to retain and his dross reject,
Engage him, but humour, not aiming to quash.
Detest the dead squat of the Turk,
And suffice it to move him along.
Drink of faith in the brains a full draught
Before the oration: beware
Lest rhetoric moonily waft
Whither horrid activities snare.
Rhetoric, juice for the mob
Despising more luminous grape,
Oft at its fount has it laughed
In the cataracts rolling for rape
Of a Reason left single to sob!

'Tis known how the permanent never is writ
In blood of the passions: mercurial they,
Shifty their issue: stir not that pit
To the game our brutes best play.

But with rhetoric loose, can we check man's brute?
Assemblies of men on their legs invoke
Excitement for wholesome diversion: there shoot
Electrical sparks between their dry thatch

And thy waved torch, more to kindle than light.
’Tis instant between you: the trick of a catch
(To match a Batrachian croak)
Will thump them a frenzy or fun in their veins.
Then may it be rather the well-worn joke
Thou repeatest, to stop conflagration, and write
Penance for rhetoric. Strange will it seem,
When thou readest that form of thy homage to brains!

For the secret why demagogues fail,
Though they carry hot mobs to the red extreme,
And knock out or knock in the nail
(We will rank them as flatly sincere,
Devoutly detesting a wrong,
Engines o’ercharged with our human steam),
Question thee, seething amid the throng.
And ask, whether Wisdom is born of blood-heat;
Or of other than Wisdom comes victory here; —
Aught more than the banquet and roundelay,
That is closed with a terrible terminal wail,

Page 4940

A retributive black ding-dong?
And ask of thyself: This furious Yea
Of a speech I thump to repeat,
In the cause I would have prevail,
For seed of a nourishing wheat,
is it accepted of song?
Does it sound to the mind through the ear,
Right sober, pure sane? has it disciplined feet?
Thou wilt find it a test severe;
Unerring whatever the theme.
Rings it for Reason a melody clear,
We have bidden old Chaos retreat;
We have called on Creation to hear;
All forces that make us are one full stream.
Simple islander! thus may the spirit in verse,
Showing its practical value and weight,
Pipe to thee clear from the Empty Purse,
Lead thee aloft to that high estate. —
The test is conclusive, I deem:
It embraces or mortally bites.
We have then the key-note for debate:
A Senate that sits on the heights
Over discords, to shape and amend.

And no singer is needed to serve
The musical God, my friend.
Needs only his law on a sensible nerve:
A law that to Measure invites,
Forbidding the passions contend.
Is it accepted of Song?
And if then the blunt answer be Nay,
Dislink thee sharp from the ramping horde,
Slaves of the Goddess of hoar-old sway,
The Queen of delirious rites,
Queen of those issueless mobs, that rend
For frenzy the strings of a fruitful accord,
Pursuing insensate, seething in throng,
Their wild idea to its ashen end.
Off to their Phrygia, shriek and gong,
Shorn from their fellows, behold them wend!

But thou, should the answer ring Ay,
Hast warrant of seed for thy word:
The musical God is nigh
To inspirit and temper, tune it, and steer
Through the shoals: is it worthy of Song,
There are souls all woman to hear,
Woman to bear and renew.
For he is the Master of Measure, and weighs,
Broad as the arms of his blue,
Fine as the web of his rays,
Justice, whose voice is a melody clear,
The one sure life for the numbered long,
From him are the brutal and vain,
The vile, the excessive, out-thrust:
He points to the God on the upmost throne:
He is the saver of grain,
The sifter of spirit from dust.
He, Harmony, tells how to Measure pertain
The virilities: Measure alone
Has votaries rich in the male:
Fathers embracing no cloud,
Sowing no harvestless main:
Alike by the flesh and the spirit endowed
To create, to perpetuate; woo, win, wed;
Send progeny streaming, have earth for their own,
Over-run the insensates, disperse with a puff
Simulacra, though solid they sail,
And seem such imperial stuff:
Yes, the living divide off the dead.

Page 4941

Then thou with thy furies outgrown,
Not as Cybele's beast will thy head lash tail
So praeter-determinedly thermonous,
Nor thy cause be an Attis far fled.
Thou under stress of the strife
Shalt hear for sustainment supreme
The cry of the conscience of Life:
Keep the young generations in hail,
and bequeath them no tumbled house!

There hast thou the sacred theme,
Therein the inveterate spur,
Of the Innermost. See her one blink
In vision past eyeballs. Not thee
She cares for, but us. Follow her.
Follow her, and thou wilt not sink.
With thy soul the Life espouse:
This Life of the visible, audible, ring
With thy love tight about; and no death will be;
The name be an empty thing,
And woe a forgotten old trick:
And battle will come as a challenge to drink;
As a warrior's wound each transient sting.
She leads to the Uppermost link by link;
Exacts but vision, desires not vows.
Above us the singular number to see;
The plural warm round us; ourself in the thick,
A dot or a stop: that is our task;
Her lesson in figured arithmetic,
For the letters of Life behind its mask;
Her flower-like look under fearful brows.

As for thy special case, O my friend, one must think
Massilia's victim, who held the carouse
For the length of a carnival year,
Knew worse: but the wretch had his opening choice.
For thee, by our law, no alternatives were:
Thy fall was assured ere thou camest to a voice.
He cancelled the ravaging Plague,
With the roll of his fat off the cliff.
Do thou with thy lean as the weapon of ink,
Though they call thee an angler who fishes the vague
And catches the not too pink,
Attack one as murderous, knowing thy cause

Is the cause of community. Iterate,
Iterate, iterate, harp on the trite:
Our preacher to win is the supple in stiff:
Yet always in measure, with bearing polite:
The manner of one that would expiate
His share in grandmotherly Laws,
Which do the dark thing to destroy,
Under aspect of water so guilelessly white
For the general use, by the devils befouled.

Enough, poor prodigal boy!
Thou hast listened with patience; another had howled.
Repentance is proved, forgiveness is earned.
And ’tis bony: denied thee thy succulent half
Of the parable’s blessing, to swineherd returned:
A Sermon thy slice of the Scriptural calf!
By my faith, there is feasting to come,
Not the less, when our Earth we have seen
Beneath and on surface, her deeds and designs:
Who gives us the man-loving

Page 4942

Nazarene,
The martyrs, the poets, the corn and the vines.
By my faith in the head, she has wonders in loom;
Revelations, delights. I can hear a faint crow
Of the cock of fresh mornings, far, far, yet distinct;
As down the new shafting of mines,
A cry of the metally gnome.
When our Earth we have seen, and have linked
With the home of the Spirit to whom we unfold,
Imprisoned humanity open will throw
Its fortress gates, and the rivers of gold
For the congregate friendliness flow.
Then the meaning of Earth in her children behold:
Glad eyes, frank hands, and a fellowship real:
And laughter on lips, as the birds' outburst
At the flooding of light. No robbery then
The feast, nor a robber's abode the home,
For a furnished model of our first den!
Nor Life as a stationed wheel;
Nor History written in blood or in foam,
For vendetta of Parties in cursing accursed.
The God in the conscience of multitudes feel,
And we feel deep to Earth at her heart,
We have her communion with men,
New ground, new skies for appeal.
Yield into harness thy best and thy worst;
Away on the trot of thy servitude start,
Through the rigours and joys and sustainments of air.
If courage should falter, 'tis wholesome to kneel.
Remember that well, for the secret with some,
Who pray for no gift, but have cleansing in prayer,
And free from impurities tower-like stand.
I promise not more, save that feasting will come
To a mind and a body no longer inversed:
The sense of large charity over the land,
Earth's wheaten of wisdom dispensed in the rough,
And a bell ringing thanks for a sustenance meal
Through the active machine: lean fare,
But it carries a sparkle! And now enough,
And part we as comrades part,
To meet again never or some day or soon.

Our season of drought is reminder rude:-
No later than yesternoon,
I looked on the horse of a cart,
By the wayside water-trough.
How at every draught of his bride of thirst
His nostrils widened! The sight was good:
Food for us, food, such as first
Drew our thoughts to earth’s lowly for food.

To the comic spirit

Sword of Common Sense! —
Our surest gift: the sacred chain
Of man to man: firm earth for trust
In structures vowed to permanence:-
Thou guardian issue of the harvest brain!
Implacable perforce of just;
With that good treasure in defence,
Which is our gold crushed out of joy and pain
Since first men planted foot and hand was king:
Bright, nimble of the marrow-nerve
To wield thy double

Page 4943

edge, retort
Or hold the deadlier reserve,
And through thy victim’s weapon sting:
Thine is the service, thine the sport
This shifty heart of ours to hunt
Across its webs and round the many a ring
Where fox it is, or snake, or mingled seeds
Occasion heats to shape, or the poor smoke
Struck from a puff-ball, or the troughster’s grunt; —
Once lion of our desert’s trodden weeds;
And but for thy straight finger at the yoke,
Again to be the lordly paw,
Naming his appetites his needs,
Behind a decorative cloak:
Thou, of the highest, the unwritten Law
We read upon that building’s architrave
In the mind’s firmament, by men upraised
With sweat of blood when they had quitted cave
For fellowship, and rearward looked amazed,
Where the prime motive gapes a lurid jaw,
Thou, soul of wakened heads, art armed to warn,
Restrain, lest we backslide on whence we sprang,
Scarce better than our dwarf beginning shoot,
Of every gathered pearl and blossom shorn;
Through thee, in novel wiles to win disguise,
Seen are the pits of the disruptor, seen
His rebel agitation at our root:
Thou hast him out of hawking eyes;
Nor ever morning of the clang
Young Echo sped on hill from horn
In forest blown when scent was keen
Off earthy dews besprinkling blades
Of covert grass more merrily rang
The yelp of chase down alleys green,
Forth of the headlong-pouring glades,
Over the dappled fallows wild away,
Than thy fine unaccented scorn
At sight of man’s old secret brute,
Devout for pasture on his prey,
Advancing, yawning to devour;
With step of deer, with voice of flute,
Haply with visage of the lily flower.

Let the cock crow and ruddy morn
His handmaiden appear! Youth claims his hour.
The generously ludicrous
Espouses it. But see we sons of day,
Off whom Life leans for guidance in our fight,
Accept the throb for lord of us;
For lord, for the main central light
That gives direction, not the eclipse;
Or dost thou look where niggard Age,
Demanding reverence for wrinkles, whips
A tumbled top to grind a wolf's worn tooth; —
Hoar despot on our final stage,
In dotage of a stunted Youth; —
Or it may be some venerable sage,
Not having thee awake in him, compact
Of wisdom else, the breast's old tempter trips;
Or see we ceremonial state,
Robing the gilded beast, exact
Abjection, while the crackskull name of Fate
Is used to stamp and hallow printed fact;
A cruel corner lengthens up thy lips;
These are thy game wherever men engage:

Page 4944

These and, majestic in a borrowed shape,
The major and the minor potentate,
Creative of their various ape; —
The tiptoe mortals triumphing to write
Upon a perishable page
An inch above their fellows' height; —
The criers of foregone wisdom, who impose
Its slough on live conditions, much for the greed
Of our first hungry figure wide agape; —
Call up thy hounds of laughter to their run.
These, that would have men still of men be foes,
Eternal fox to prowl and pike to feed;
Would keep our life the whirly pool
Of turbid stuff dishonouring History;
The herd the drover's herd, the fool the fool,
Ourself our slavish self's infernal sun:
These are the children of the heart untaught
By thy quick founts to beat abroad, by thee
Untamed to tone its passions under thought,
The rich humaneness reading in thy fun.
Of them a world of coltish heels for school
We have; a world with driving wrecks bestrewn.

'Tis written of the Gods of human mould,
Those Nectar Gods, of glorious stature hewn
To quicken hymns, that they did hear, incensed,
Satiric comments overbold,
From one whose part was by decree
The jester's; but they boiled to feel him bite.
Better for them had they with Reason fenced
Or smiled corrected! They in the great Gods' might
Their prober crushed, as fingers flea.
Crumbled Olympus when the sovereign sire
His fatal kick to Momus gave, albeit
Men could behold the sacred Mount aspire,
The Satirist pass by on limping feet.
Those Gods who saw the ejected laugh alight
Below had then their last of airy glee;
They in the cup sought Laughter's drowned sprite,
Fed to dire fatness off uncurbed conceit.
Eyes under saw them waddle on their Mount,

And drew them down; to flattest earth they rolled.
This know we veritable. O Sage of Mirth!
Can it be true, the story men recount
Of the fall'n plight of the great Gods on earth?
How they being deathless, though of human mould,
With human cravings, undecaying frames,
Must labour for subsistence; are a band
Whom a loose-cheeked, wide-lipped gay cripple leads
At haunts of holiday on summer sand:
And lightly he will hint to one that heeds
Names in pained designation of them, names
Ensphered on blue skies and on black, which twirl
Our hearing madly from our seeing dazed,
Add Bacchus unto both; and he entreats
(His baby dimples in maternal chaps
Running wild labyrinths of line and curl)
Compassion for his masterful Trombone,
Whose thunder is the brass of how he blazed
Of old: for him of the mountain-muscle feats,

Page 4945

Who guts a drum to fetch a snappish groan:
For his fierce bugler horning onset, whom
A truncheon-battered helmet caps . . .
The creature is of earnest mien
To plead a sorrow darker than the tomb.
His Harp and Triangle, in tone subdued,
He names; they are a rayless red and white;
The dawn-hued libertine, the gibbous prude.
And, if we recognize his Tambourine,
He asks; exhausted names her: she has become
A globe in cupolas; the blowziest queen
Of overflowing dome on dome;
Redundancy contending with the tight,
Leaping the dam! He fondly calls, his girl,
The buxom tripper with the goblet-smile,
Refreshful. O but now his brows are dun,
Bunched are his lips, as when distilling guile,
To drop his venomous: the Dame of dames,
Flower of the world, that honey one,
She of the earthly rose in the sea-pearl,
To whom the world ran ocean for her kiss;
He names her, as a worshipper he names,
And indicates with a contemptuous thumb.
The lady meanwhile lures the mob, alike
Ogles the bursters of the horn and drum.
Curtain her close! her open arms
Have suckers for beholders: she to this?
For that she could not, save in fury, hear
A sharp corrective utterance flick
Her idle manners, for the laugh to strike
Beauty so breeding beauty, without peer
Above the snows, among the flowers? She reaps
This mouldy garner of the fatal kick?
Gross with the sacrifice of Circe-swarms,
Astarte of vile sweets that slay, malign,
From Greek resplendent to Phoenician foul,
The trader in attractions sinks, all brine
To thoughts of taste; is ’t love?—bark, dog! hoot, owl!
And she is blushless: ancient worship weeps.
Suicide Graces dangle down the charms
Sprawling like gourds on outer garden-heaps.

She stands in her unholy oily leer
A statue losing feature, weather-sick
Mid draggled creepers of twined ivy sere.
The curtain cried for magnifies to see! —
We cannot quench our one corrupting glance:
The vision of the rumour will not flee.
Doth the Boy own such Mother?—shoot his dart
To bring her, countless as the crested deeps,
Her subjects of the uncorrected heart?
False is that vision, shrieks the devotee;
Incredible, we echo; and anew
Like a far growling lightning-cloud it leaps.
Low humourist this leader seems; perchance
Pitched from his University career,
Adept at classic fooling. Yet of mould
Human those Gods were: deathless too:
On high they not as meditatives paced:
Prodigiously they did the deeds of flesh:
Descending, they would touch the lowest here:

Page 4946

And she, that lighted form of blue and gold,
Whom the seas gave, all earth, all earth embraced;
Exulting in the great hauls of her mesh;
Desired and hated, desperately dear;
Most human of them was. No more pursue!
Enough that the black story can be told.
It preaches to the eminently placed:
For whom disastrous wreckage is nigh due,
Paints omen. Truly they our throbber had;
The passions plumping, passions playing leech,
Cunning to trick us for the day's good cheer.
Our uncorrected human heart will swell
To notions monstrous, doings mad
As billows on a foam-lashed beach;
Borne on the tides of alternating heats,
Will drug the brain, will doom the soul as well;
Call the closed mouth of that harsh final Power
To speak in judgement: Nemesis, the fell:
Of those bright Gods assembled, offspring sour;
The last surviving on the upper seats;
As with men Reason when their hearts rebel.

Ah, what a fruitless breeder is this heart,
Full of the mingled seeds, each eating each.
Not wiser of our mark than at the start,
It surges like the wrath-faced father Sea
To countering winds; a force blind-eyed,
On endless rounds of aimless reach;
Emotion for the source of pride,
The grounds of faith in fixity
Above our flesh; its cravings urging speech,
Inspiring prayer; by turns a lump
Swung on a time-piece, and by turns
A quivering energy to jump
For seats angelical: it shrinks, it yearns,
Loves, loathes; is flame or cinders; lastly cloud
Capping a sullen crater: and mankind
We see cloud-capped, an army of the dark,
Because of thy straight leadership declined;
At heels of this or that delusive spark:
Now when the multitudinous races press

Elbow to elbow hourly more,
A thickened host; when now we hear aloud
Life for the very life implore
A signal of a visioned mark;
Light of the mind, the mind's discourse,
The rational in graciousness,
Thee by acknowledgement enthroned,
To tame and lead that blind-eyed force
In harmony of harness with the crowd,
For payment of their dues; as yet disowned,
Save where some dutiful lone creature, vowed
To holy work, deems it the heart's intent;
Or where a silken circle views it cowled,
The seeming figure of concordance, bent
On satiating tyrant lust
Or barren fits of sentiment.

Thou wilt not have our paths befouled
By simulation; are we vile to view,
The heavens shall see us clean of our own dust,
Beneath thy breezy flitting wing:
They make their mirror upon faces true;
And where they win reflection,

Page 4947

lucid heave
The under tides of this hot heart seen through.
Beneficently wilt thou clip
All oversteppings of the plumed,
The puffed, and bid the masker strip,
And into the crowned windbag thrust,
Tearing the mortal from the vital thing,
A lightning o’er the half-illumed,
Who to base brute-dominion cleave,
Yet mark effects, and shun the flash,
Till their drowsed wits a beam conceive,
To spy a wound without a gash,
The magic in a turn of wrist,
And how are wedded heart and head regaled
When Wit o’er Folly blows the mort,
And their high note of union spreads
Wide from the timely word with conquest charged;
Victorious laughter, of no loud report,
If heard; derision as divinely veiled
As terrible Immortals in rose-mist,
Given to the vision of arrested men:
Whereat they feel within them weave
Community its closer threads,
And are to our fraternal state enlarged;
Like warm fresh blood is their enlivened ken:
They learn that thou art not of alien sort,
Speaking the tongue by vipers hissed,
Or of the frosty heights unsealed,
Or of the vain who simple speech distort,
Or of the vapours pointing on to nought
Along cold skies; though sharp and high thy pitch;
As when sole homeward the belated treads,
And hears aloft a clamour wailed,
That once had seemed the broomstick witch
Horridly violating cloud for drought:
He, from the rub of minds dispersing fears,
Hears migrants marshalling their midnight train;
Homeliest order in black sky appears,
Not less than in the lighted village steads.
So do those half-illumed wax clear to share
A cry that is our common voice; the note
Of fellowship upon a loftier plane,
Above embattled castle-wall and moat;

And toning drops as from pure heaven it sheds.
So thou for washing a phantasmal air,
For thy sweet singing keynote of the wise,
Laughter—the joy of Reason seeing fade
Obstruction into Earth's renewing beds,
Beneath the stroke of her good servant's blade —
Thenceforth art as their earth-star hailed;
Gain of the years, conjunction's prize.
The greater heart in thy appeal to heads
They see, thou Captain of our civil Fort!
By more elusive savages assailed
On each ascending stage; untired
Both inner foe and outer to cut short,
And blow to chaff pretenders void of grist:
Showing old tiger's claws, old crocodile's
Yard-grin of eager grinders, slim to sight,
Like forms in running water, oft when smiles,
When pearly tears, when fluent lips delight:
But never with the slayer's malice fired:

Page 4948

As little as informs an infant’s fist
Clenched at the sneeze! Thou wouldst but have us be
Good sons of mother soil, whereby to grow
Branching on fairer skies, one stately tree;
Broad of the tilth for flowering at the Court:
Which is the tree bound fast to wave its tress;
Of strength controlled sheer beauty to bestow.
Ambrosial heights of possible acquist,
Where souls of men with soul of man consort,
And all look higher to new loveliness
Begotten of the look: thy mark is there;
While on our temporal ground alive,
Rightly though fearfully thou wieldest sword
Of finer temper now a numbered learn
That they resisting thee themselves resist;
And not thy bigger joy to smite and drive,
Prompt the dense herd to butt, and set the snare
Witching them into pitfalls for hoarse shouts.
More now, and hourly more, and of the Lord
Thou lead’st to, doth this rebel heart discern,
When pinched ascetic and red sensualist
Alternately recurrent freeze or burn,
And of its old religions it has doubts.
It fears thee less when thou hast shown it bare;
Less hates, part understands, nor much resents,
When the prized objects it has raised for prayer,
For fitful prayer;—repentance dreading fire,
Impelled by aches; the blindness which repents
Like the poor trampled worm that writhes in mire; —
Are sounded by thee, and thou darest probe
Old institutions and establishments,
Once fortresses against the floods of sin,
For what their worth; and questioningly prod
For why they stand upon a racing globe,
Impeding blocks, less useful than the clod;
Their angel out of them, a demon in.

This half-enlightened heart, still doomed to fret,
To hurl at vanities, to drift in shame
Of gain or loss, bewailing the sure rod,
Shall of predestination wed thee yet.

Something it gathers of what things should drop
At entrance on new times; of how thrice broad
The world of minds communicative; how
A straggling Nature classed in school, and scored
With stripes admonishing, may yield to plough
Fruitfullest furrows, nor for waxing tame
Be feeble on an Earth whose gentler crop
Is its most living, in the mind that steers,
By Reason led, her way of tree and flame,
Beyond the genuflexions and the tears;
Upon an Earth that cannot stop,
Where upward is the visible aim,
And ever we espy the greater God,
For simple pointing at a good adored:
Proof of the closer neighbourhood. Head on,
Sword of the many, light of the few! untwist
Or cut our tangles till fair space is won
Beyond a briared wood

Page 4949

of austere brow,
Believed of discord by thy timely word
At intervals refreshing life: for thou
Art verify Keeper of the Muse's Key;
Thyself no vacant melodist;
On lower land elective even as she;
Holding, as she, all dissonance abhorred;
Advising to her measured steps in flow;
And teaching how for being subjected free
Past thought of freedom we may come to know
The music of the meaning of Accord.

Youth in memory

Days, when the ball of our vision
Had eagles that flew unabashed to sun;
When the grasp on the bow was decision,
And arrow and hand and eye were one;
When the Pleasures, like waves to a swimmer,
Came heaving for rapture ahead! —
Invoke them, they dwindle, they glimmer
As lights over mounds of the dead.

Behold the winged Olympus, off the mead,
With thunder of wide pinions, lightning speed,
Wafting the shepherd-boy through ether clear,
To bear the golden nectar-cup.
So flies desire at view of its delight,
When the young heart is tiptoe perched on sight.
We meanwhile who in hues of the sick year
The Spring-time paint to prick us for our lost,
Mount but the fatal half way up —
Whereon shut eyes! This is decreed,
For Age that would to youthful heavens ascend,
By passion for the arms' possession tossed,
It falls the way of sighs and hath their end;
A spark gone out to more sepulchral night.
Good if the arrowy eagle of the height
Be then the little bird that hops to feed.

Lame falls the cry to kindle days
Of radiant orb and daring gaze.
It does but clank our mortal chain.
For Earth reads through her felon old

The many-numbered of her fold,
Who forward tottering backward strain,
And would be thieves of treasure spent,
With their grey season soured.
She could write out their history in their thirst
To have again the much devoured,
And be the bud at burst;
In honey fancy join the flow,
Where Youth swims on as once they went,
All choiric for spontaneous glee
Of active eager lungs and thews;
They now bared roots beside the river bent;
Whose privilege themselves to see;
Their place in yonder tideway know;
The current glass peruse;
The depths intently sound;
And sapped by each returning flood
Accept for monitory nourishment
Those worn roped features under crust of mud,
Reflected in the silvery smooth around:
Not less the branching and high singing tree,
A home of nests, a landmark and a tent,
Until their hour for losing hold on ground.
Even such good harvest

Page 4950

of the things that flee
Earth offers her subjected, and they choose
Rather of Bacchic Youth one beam to drink,
And warm slow marrow with the sensual wink.
So block they at her source the Mother of the Muse.

Who cheerfully the little bird becomes,
Without a fall, and pipes for peck at crumbs,
May have her dolings to the lightest touch;
As where some cripple muses by his crutch,
Unwitting that the spirit in him sings:
'When I had legs, then had I wings,
As good as any born of eggs,
To feed on all aerial things,
When I had legs!'
And if not to embrace he sighs,
She gives him breath of Youth awhile,
Perspective of a breezy mile,
Companionable hedgeways, lifting skies;
Scenes where his nested dreams upon their hoard
Brooded, or up to empyrean soared:
Enough to link him with a dotted line.
But cravings for an eagle's flight,
To top white peaks and serve wild wine
Among the rosy undecayed,
Bring only flash of shade
From her full throbbing breast of day in night.
By what they crave are they betrayed:
And cavernous is that young dragon's jaw,
Crimson for all the fiery reptile saw
In time now coveted, for teeth to flay,
Once more consume, were Life recurrent May.
They to their moment of drawn breath,
Which is the life that makes the death,
The death that makes ethereal life would bind:
The death that breeds the spectre do they find.
Darkness is wedded and the waste regrets
Beating as dead leaves on a fitful gust,
By souls no longer dowered to climb
Beneath their pack of dust,
Whom envy of a lustrous prime,
Eclipsed while yet invoked, besets,
And dooms to sink and water sable flowers,

That never gladdened eye or loaded bee.
Strain we the arms for Memory’s hours,
We are the seized Persephone.
Responsive never to the soft desire
For one prized tune is this our chord of life.
’Tis clipped to deadness with a wanton knife,
In wishes that for ecstasies aspire.
Yet have we glad companionship of Youth,
Elysian meadows for the mind,
Dare we to face deeds done, and in our tomb
Filled with the parti-coloured bloom
Of loved and hated, grasp all human truth
Sowed by us down the mazy paths behind.
To feel that heaven must we that hell sound through:
Whence comes a line of continuity,
That brings our middle station into view,
Between those poles; a novel Earth we see,
In likeness of us, made of banned and blest;
The sower’s bed, but not the reaper’s rest:
An Earth alive with meanings, wherein meet
Buried, and breathing, and to be.
Then of the junction of the three,
Even as a heart in brain, full sweet
May sense of soul, the sum of music, beat.

Page 4951

Only the soul can walk the dusty track
Where hangs our flowering under vapours black,
And bear to see how these pervade, obscure,
Quench recollection of a spacious pure.
They take phantasmal forms, divide, convolve,
Hard at each other point and gape,
Horrible ghosts! in agony dissolve,
To reappear with one they drape
For criminal, and, Father! shrieking name,
Who such distorted issue did beget.
Accept them, them and him, though hiss thy sweat
Off brow on breast, whose furnace flame
Has eaten, and old Self consumes.
Out of the purification will they leap,
Thee renovating while new light illumes
The dusky web of evil, known as pain,
That heavily up healthward mounts the steep;
Our fleshly road to beacon-fire of brain:
Midway the tameless oceanic brute
Below, whose heave is topped with foam for fruit,
And the fair heaven reflecting inner peace
On righteous warfare, that asks not to cease.

Forth of such passage through black fire we win
Clear hearing of the simple lute,
Whereon, and not on other, Memory plays
For them who can in quietness receive
Her restorative airs: a ditty thin
As note of hedgerow bird in ear of eve,
Or wave at ebb, the shallow catching rays
On a transparent sheet, where curves a glass
To truer heavens than when the breaker neighs
Loud at the plunge for bubbly wreck in roar.
Solidity and bulk and martial brass,
Once tyrants of the senses, faintly score
A mark on pebbled sand or fluid slime,
While present in the spirit, vital there,
Are things that seemed the phantoms of their time;
Eternal as the recurrent cloud, as air
Imperative, refreshful as dawn-dew.
Some evanescent hand on vapour scrawled
Historic of the soul, and heats anew
Its coloured lines where deeds of flesh stand bald.

True of the man, and of mankind ’tis true,
Did we stout battle with the Shade, Despair,
Our cowardice, it blooms; or haply warred
Against the primal beast in us, and flung;
Or cleaving mists of Sorrow, left it starred
Above self-pity slain: or it was Prayer
First taken for Life’s cleanser; or the tongue
Spake for the world against this heart; or rings
Old laughter, from the founts of wisdom sprung;
Or clap of wing of joy, that was a throb
From breast of Earth, and did no creature rob:
These quickening live. But deepest at her springs,
Most filial, is an eye to love her young.
And had we it, to see with it, alive
Is our lost garden, flower, bird and hive.
Blood of her blood, aim of her aim, are then
The green-robed and

Page 4952

grey-crested sons of men:
She tributary to her aged restores
The living in the dead; she will inspire
Faith homelier than on the Yonder shores,
Abhorring these as mire,
Uncertain steps, in dimness gropes,
With mortal tremours pricking hopes,
And, by the final Bacchic of the lusts
Propelled, the Bacchic of the spirit trusts:
A fervour drunk from mystic hierophants;
Not utterly misled, though blindly led,
Led round fermenting eddies. Faith she plants
In her own firmness as our midway road:
Which rightly Youth has read, though blindly read;
Her essence reading in her toothsome goad;
Spur of bright dreams experience disenchants.
But love we well the young, her road midway
The darknesses runs consecrated clay.
Despite our feeble hold on this green home,
And the vast outer strangeness void of dome,
Shall we be with them, of them, taught to feel,
Up to the moment of our prostrate fall,
The life they deem voluptuously real
Is more than empty echo of a call,
Or shadow of a shade, or swing of tides;
As brooding upon age, when veins congeal,
Grey palsy nods to think. With us for guides,
Another step above the animal,
To views in Alpine thought are they helped on.
Good if so far we live in them when gone!

And there the arrowy eagle of the height
Becomes the little bird that hops to feed,
Glad of a crumb, for tempered appetite
To make it wholesome blood and fruitful seed.
Then Memory strikes on no slack string,
Nor sectional will varied Life appear:
Perforce of soul discerned in mind, we hear
Earth with her Onward chime, with Winter Spring.
And ours the mellow note, while sharing joys
No more subjecting mortals who have learnt
To build for happiness on equipoise,
The Pleasures read in sparks of substance burnt;

Know in our seasons an integral wheel,
That rolls us to a mark may yet be willed.
This, the truistic rubbish under heel
Of all the world, we peck at and are filled.

Penetration and trust

I

Sleek as a lizard at round of a stone,
The look of her heart slipped out and in.
Sweet on her lord her soft eyes shone,
As innocents clear of a shade of sin.

II

He laid a finger under her chin,
His arm for her girdle at waist was thrown:
Now, what will happen and who will win,
With me in the fight and my lady lone?

III

He clasped her, clasping a shape of stone;
Was fire on her eyes till they let him in.
Her breast to a God of the daybeams shone,
And never a corner for serpent sin.

Page 4953

IV

Tranced she stood, with a chattering chin;
Her shrunken form at his feet was thrown:
At home to the death my lord shall win,
When it is no tyrant who leaves me lone!

Night of frost in may

With splendour of a silver day,
A frosted night had opened May:
And on that plumed and armoured night,
As one close temple hove our wood,
Its border leafage virgin white.
Remote down air an owl hallooed.
The black twig dropped without a twirl;
The bud in jewelled grasp was nipped;
The brown leaf cracked a scorching curl;
A crystal off the green leaf slipped.
Across the tracks of rimy tan,
Some busy thread at whiles would shoot;
A limping minnow-rillet ran,
To hang upon an icy foot.

In this shrill hush of quietude,
The ear conceived a severing cry.
Almost it let the sound elude,
When chuckles three, a warble shy,
From hazels of the garden came,
Near by the crimson-windowed farm.
They laid the trance on breath and frame,
A prelude of the passion-charm.

Then soon was heard, not sooner heard
Than answered, doubled, trebled, more,
Voice of an Eden in the bird
Renewing with his pipe of four
The sob: a troubled Eden, rich
In throb of heart: unnumbered throats
Flung upward at a fountain’s pitch,
The fervour of the four long notes,
That on the fountain’s pool subside,
Exult and ruffle and upspring:
Endless the crossing multiplied

Of silver and of golden string.
There chimed a bubbled underbrew
With witch-wild spray of vocal dew.

It seemed a single harper swept
Our wild wood's inner chords and waked
A spirit that for yearning ached
Ere men desired and joyed or wept.
Or now a legion ravishing
Musician rivals did unite
In love of sweetness high to sing
The subtle song that rivals light;
From breast of earth to breast of sky:
And they were secret, they were nigh:
A hand the magic might disperse;
The magic swung my universe.

Yet sharpened breath forbade to dream,
Where all was visionary gleam;
Where Seasons, as with cymbals, clashed;
And feelings, passing joy and woe,
Churned, gurgled, spouted, interflashed,
Nor either was the one we know:
Nor pregnant of the heart contained
In us were they, that griefless plained,
That plaining soared; and through the heart
Struck to one note the wide apart:-
A passion surgent from despair;
A paining bliss in fervid cold;
Off the last vital edge of air,
Leap heavenward of the

Page 4954

lofty-souled,
For rapture of a wine of tears;
As had a star among the spheres
Caught up our earth to some mid-height
Of double life to ear and sight,
She giving voice to thought that shines
Keen-brilliant of her deepest mines;
While steely drips the rillet clinked,
And hoar with crust the cowslip swelled.

Then was the lyre of earth beheld,
Then heard by me: it holds me linked;
Across the years to dead-ebb shores
I stand on, my blood-thrill restores.
But would I conjure into me
Those issue notes, I must review
What serious breath the woodland drew;
The low throb of expectancy;
How the white mother-muteness pressed
On leaf and meadow-herb; how shook,
Nigh speech of mouth, the sparkle-crest
Seen spinning on the bracken-crook.

The teaching of the nude

I

A satyr spied a Goddess in her bath,
Unseen of her attendant nymphs; none knew.
Forthwith the creature to his fellows drew,
And looking backward on the curtained path,
He strove to tell; he could but heave a breast
Too full, and point to mouth, with failing leers:
Vainly he danced for speech, he giggled tears,
Made as if torn in two, as if tight pressed,
As if cast prone; then fetching whimpered tunes
For words, flung heel and set his hairy flight
Through forest-hollows, over rocky height.
The green leaves buried him three rounds of moons.
A senatorial Satyr named what herb
Had hurried him outrunning reason’s curb.

II

’Tis told how when that hieaway unchecked
To dell returned, he seemed of tempered mood:
Even as the valley of the torrent rude,
The torrent now a brook, the valley wrecked.
In him, to hale him high or hurl aheap,
Goddess and Goatfoot hourly wrestled sore;
Hourly the immortal prevailing more:
Till one hot noon saw Meliboeus peep
From thicket-sprays to where his full-blown dame,
In circle by the lusty friskers gripped,
Laughed the showered rose-leaves while her limbs were stripped.
She beckoned to our Satyr, and he came.
Then twirled she mounds of ripeness, wreath of arms.
His hoof kicked up the clothing for such charms.

Breath of the briar

I

O briar-scents, on yon wet wing
Of warm South-west wind brushing by,
You mind me of the sweetest thing
That ever mingled frank and shy:
When she and I, by love enticed,
Beneath the orchard-apples met,
In equal halves a ripe one sliced,
And smelt the juices ere we ate.

II

Page 4955

That apple of the briar-scent,
Among our lost in Britain now,
Was green of rind, and redolent
Of sweetness as a milking cow.
The briar gives it back, well nigh
The damsel with her teeth on it;
Her twinkle between frank and shy,
My thirst to bite where she had bit.

Empedocles

I

He leaped. With none to hinder,
Of Aetna's fiery scoriae
In the next vomit-shower, made he
A more peculiar cinder.
And this great Doctor, can it be,
He left no saner recipe
For men at issue with despair?
Admiring, even his poet owns,
While noting his fine lyric tones,
The last of him was heels in air!

II

Comes Reverence, her features
Amazed to see high Wisdom hear,
With glimmer of a faunish leer,
One mock her pride of creatures.
Shall such sad incident degrade
A stature casting sunniest shade?
O Reverence! let Reason swim;
Each life its critic deed reveals;
And him reads Reason at his heels,
If heels in air the last of him!

England before the storm

I

The day that is the night of days,
With cannon-fire for sun ablaze
We spy from any billow's lift;

And England still this tidal drift!
Would she to sainted forethought vow
A space before the thunders flood,
That martyr of its hour might now
Spare her the tears of blood.

II

Asleep upon her ancient deeds,
She hugs the vision plethora breeds,
And counts her manifold increase
Of treasure in the fruits of peace.
What curse on earth's improvident,
When the dread trumpet shatters rest,
Is wreaked, she knows, yet smiles content
As cradle rocked from breast.

III

She, impious to the Lord of Hosts,
The valour of her offspring boasts,
Mindless that now on land and main
His heeded prayer is active brain.
No more great heart may guard the home,
Save eyed and armed and skilled to cleave
Yon swallower wave with shroud of foam,
We see not distant heave.

IV

They stand to be her sacrifice,
The sons this mother flings like dice,
To face the odds and brave the Fates;
As in those days of starry dates,
When cannon cannon's counterblast
Awakened, muzzle muzzle bowled,
And high in swathe of smoke the mast
Its fighting rag outrolled.

1891.

Tardy spring

Now the North wind ceases,
The warm South-west awakes;
Swift fly the fleeces,
Thick the blossom-flakes.

Page 4956

Now hill to hill has made the stride,
And distance waves the without end:
Now in the breast a door flings wide;
Our farthest smiles, our next is friend.
And song of England’s rush of flowers
Is this full breeze with mellow stops,
That spins the lark for shine, for showers;
He drinks his hurried flight, and drops.
The stir in memory seem these things,
Which out of moistened turf and clay
Astrain for light push patient rings,
Or leap to find the waterway.
’Tis equal to a wonder done,
Whatever simple lives renew
Their tricks beneath the father sun,
As though they caught a broken clue;
So hard was earth an eyewink back:
But now the common life has come,
The blotting cloud a dappled pack,
The grasses one vast underhum.
A City clothed in snow and soot,
With lamps for day in ghostly rows,
Breaks to the scene of hosts afoot,
The river that reflective flows:
And there did fog down crypts of street
Play spectre upon eye and mouth:-
Their faces are a glass to greet
This magic of the whirl for South.
A burly joy each creature swells
With sound of its own hungry quest;
Earth has to fill her empty wells,
And speed the service of the nest;
The phantom of the snow-wreath melt,
That haunts the farmer’s look abroad,
Who sees what tomb a white night built,
Where flocks now bleat and sprouts the clod.
For iron Winter held her firm;
Across her sky he laid his hand;
And bird he starved, he stiffened worm;
A sightless heaven, a shaven land.
Her shivering Spring feigned fast asleep,
The bitten buds dared not unfold:

We raced on roads and ice to keep
Thought of the girl we love from cold.

But now the North wind ceases,
The warm South-west awakes,
The heavens are out in fleeces,
And earth's green banner shakes.

The labourer

For a Heracles in his fighting ire there is never the glory that follows When ashen he lies and the poets arise to sing of the work he has done. But to vision alive under shallows of sight, lo, the Labourer's crown is Apollo's, While stands he yet in his grime and sweat —to wrestle for fruits of the Sun.

Can an enemy wither his cheer? Not you, ye fair yellow-flowering ladies, Who join with your lords to jar the chords of a bosom heroic, and clog. 'Tis the faltering friend, an inanimate land, may drag a great soul to their Hades, And plunge him far from a beam of star till he hears the deep bay of the Dog.

Apparition is then of a monster-task, in a policy carving new fashions: The winninger course than the rule of force, and the springs

Page 4957

lured to run in a stream: He would bend tough oak, he would stiffen the reed, point Reason to swallow the passions, Bid Britons awake two steps to take where one is a trouble extreme!

Not the less is he nerved with the Labourer's resolute hope: that by him shall be written, To honour his race, this deed of grace, for the weak from the strong made just: That her sons over seas in a rally of praise may behold a thrice vitalised Britain, Ashine with the light of the doing of right: at the gates of the Future in trust.

Foresight and patience

Sprung of the father blood, the mother brain,
Are they who point our pathway and sustain.
They rarely meet; one soars, one walks retired.
When they do meet, it is our earth inspired.

To see Life's formless offspring and subdue
Desire of times unripe, we have these two,
Whose union is right reason: join they hands,
The world shall know itself and where it stands;
What cowering angel and what upright beast
Make man, behold, nor count the low the least,
Nor less the stars have round it than its flowers.
When these two meet, a point of time is ours.

As in a land of waterfalls, that flow
Smooth for the leap on their great voice below,
Some eddies near the brink borne swift along
Will capture hearing with the liquid song,
So, while the headlong world's imperious force
Resounded under, heard I these discourse.

First words, where down my woodland walk she led,
To her blind sister Patience, Foresight said:

— Your faith in me appals, to shake my own,
When still I find you in this mire alone.

— The few steps taken at a funeral pace
By men had slain me but for those you trace.

— Look I once back, a broken pinion I:
Black as the rebel angels rained from sky!

— Needs must you drink of me while here you live,
And make me rich in feeling I can give.

— A brave To-be is dawn upon my brow: Yet must I read my sister for the How. My daisy better knows her God of beams Than doth an eagle that to mount him seems. She hath the secret never fieriest reach Of wing shall master till men hear her teach.

— Liker the clod flaked by the driving plough, My semblance when I have you not as now. The quiet creatures who escape mishap Bear likeness to pure growths of the green sap: A picture of the settled peace desired By cowards shunning strife or strivers tired. I listen at their breasts: is there no jar Of wrestlings and of stranglings, dead they are, And such a picture as the piercing mind Ranks beneath vegetation. Not resigned Are my true pupils while the world is brute. What edict of the stronger keeps me mute, Stronger

Page 4958

impels the motion of my heart. I am not Resignation's counterpart. If that I teach, 'tis little the dry word, Content, but how to savour hope deferred. We come of earth, and rich of earth may be; Soon carrion if very earth are we!

The coursing veins, the constant breath, the use
Of sleep, declare that strife allows short truce;
Unless we clasp decay, accept defeat,
And pass despised; 'a-cold for lack of heat,'
Like other corpses, but without death's plea.

— My sister calls for battle; is it she?

— Rather a world of pressing men in arms, Than stagnant, where the sensual piper charms Each drowsy malady and coiling vice With dreams of ease whereof the soul pays price! No home is here for peace while evil breeds, While error governs, none; and must the seeds You sow, you that for long have reaped disdain, Lie barren at the doorway of the brain, Let stout contention drive deep furrows, blood Moisten, and make new channels of its flood!

— My sober little maid, when we meet first, Drinks of me ever with an eager thirst. So can I not of her till circumstance Drugs cravings. Here we see how men advance A doubtful foot, but circle if much stirred, Like dead weeds on whipped waters. Shout the word Prompting their hungers, and they grandly march, As to band-music under Victory's arch. Thus was it, and thus is it; save that then The beauty of frank animals had men.

— Observe them, and down rearward for a term, Gaze to the primal twistings of the worm. Thence look this way, across the fields that show Men's early form of speech for Yes and No.

My sister a bruised infant's utterance had;
And issuing stronger, to mankind 'twas mad.
I knew my home where I had choice to feel
The toad beneath a harrow or a heel.

— Speak of this Age.

— When you it shall discern
Bright as you are, to me the Age will turn.

— For neither of us has it any care;
Its learning is through Science to despair.

— Despair lies down and grovels, grapples not
With evil, casts the burden of its lot.
This Age climbs earth.

-To challenge heaven.

— Not less The lower deeps. It laughs at Happiness! That know I, though the echoes of it wail, For one step upward on the crags you scale. Brave is the Age wherein the word will rust, Which means our soul asleep or body's lust, Until from warmth of many breasts, that beat A temperate common music, sunlike heat The happiness not predatory sheds!

— But your fierce Yes and No of butting heads Now rages to outdo a horny Past. Shades of a wild Destroyer on the vast Are thrown by every novel light upraised. The world's whole round smokes ominously, amazed And trembling as its pregnant Aetna swells.

Page 4959

Combustibles on hot combustibles Run piling, for one spark to roll in fire The mountain-torrent of infernal ire And leave the track of devils where men built. Perceptive of a doom, the sinner's guilt Confesses in a cry for help shrill loud, If drops the chillness of a passing cloud, To conscience, reason, human love; in vain: None save they but the souls which them contain. No extramural God, the God within Alone gives aid to city charged with sin. A world that for the spur of fool and knave Sweats in its laboratory what shall save? But men who ply their wits in such a school Must pray the mercy of the knave and fool.

— Much have I studied hard Necessity! To know her Wisdom's mother, and that we May deem the harshness of her later cries In labour a sure goad to prick the wise, If men among the warnings which convulse Can gravely dread without the craven's pulse. Long ere the rising of this age of ours, The knave and fool were stamped as monstrous Powers. Of human lusts and lassitudes they spring, And are as lasting as the parent thing. Yet numbering locust hosts, bent they to drill, They might o'ermatch and have mankind at will. Behold such army gathering; ours the spur, No scattered foe to face, but Lucifer. Not fool or knave is now the enemy O'ershadowing men, 'tis Folly, Knavery! A sea; nor stays that sea the bastioned beach. Now must the brother soul alive in each His traitorous individual devildom Hold subject lest the grand destruction come. Dimly men see it menacing apace To overthrow, perchance uproot, the race. Within, without, they are a field of tares: Fruitfuller for them when the contest squares, And wherefore warrior service they must yield, Shines visible as life on either field. That is my comfort, following shock on shock, Which sets faith quaking on their firmest rock. Since with his weapons, all the arms of Night, Frail men have challenged Lucifer to fight, Have matched in hostile ranks, enrolled, erect, The human and Satanic intellect, Determined for their uses to control What forces on the earth and under roll, Their granite rock runs igneous; now they stand Pledged to the heavens for safety of their land. They cannot learn save grossly, gross that are: Through fear they learn whose aid is good in war.

— My sister, as I read them in my glass, Their field of tares they take for pasture grass. How waken them that have not any bent Save browsing—the concrete indifferent! Friend Lucifer supplies them solid stuff: They fear not for the race when full the trough. They have much fear of giving up the ghost; And these are of mankind the unnumbered host.

— If I could see with you, and did not faint In beating wing, the future I would paint. Those massed indifferents will learn to quake: Now meanwhile is another mass awake, Once denser than the grunters of the sty. If I could see with you! Could I but fly!

— The length of days that you with them have housed,
An outcast else, approves their cause espoused.

Page 4960

— O true, they have a cause, and woe for us, While still they have a cause too piteous! Yet, happy for us when, their cause defined, They walk no longer with a stumbler blind, And quicken in the virtue of their cause, To think me a poor mouther of old saws! I wait the issue of a battling Age; The toilers with your 'troughsters' now engage; Instructing them, through their acutest sense, How close the dangers of indifference! Already have my people shown their worth, More love they light, which folds the love of Earth. That love to love of labour leads: thence love Of humankind—earth's incense flung above.

— Admit some other features: Faithless, mean; Encased in matter; vowed to Gods obscene; Contemptuous of the impalpable, it swells On Doubt; for pastime swallows miracles; And if I bid it face what I observe, Declares me hoodwinked by my optic nerve!

— Oft has your prophet, for reward of toil, Seen nests of seeming cockatrices coil: Disowned them as the unholiest of Time, Which were his offspring, born of flame on slime. Nor him, their sire, have known the filial fry: As little as Time's earliest knew the sky. Perchance among them shoots a lustrous flame At intervals, in proof of whom they came. To strengthen our foundations is the task Of this tough Age; not in your beams to bask, Though, lighted by your beams, down mining caves The rock it blasts, the hoarded foulness braves. My sister sees no round beyond her mood; To hawk this Age has dressed her head in hood. Out of the course of ancient ruts and grooves, It moves: O much for me to say it moves! About his AEthiop Highlands Nile is Nile, Though not the stream of the paternal smile: And where his tide of nourishment he drives, An Abyssinian wantonness revives. Calm as his lotus-leaf to-day he swims; He is the yellow crops, the rounded limbs, The Past yet flowing, the fair time that fills; Breath of all mouths and grist of many mills. To-morrow, warning none with tempest-showers, He is the vast Insensate who devours His golden promise over leagues of seed, Then sits in a smooth lake upon the deed. The races which on barbarous force begin Inherit onward of their origin, And cancelled blessings will the current length Reveal till they know need of shaping strength. 'Tis not in men to recognize the need Before they clash in hosts, in hosts they bleed. Then may sharp suffering their nature grind; Of rabble passions grow the chieftain Mind. Yet mark where still broad Nile boasts thousands fed, For tens up the safe mountains at his head. Few would be fed, not far his course prolong, Save for the troublous blood which makes him strong. — That rings of truth! More do your people thrive; Your Many are more merrily alive Than erewhile when I gloried in the page Of radiant singer and anointed sage. Greece was my lamp: burnt out for lack of oil; Rome, Python Rome, prey of its robber spoil! All structures built upon a narrow space Must fall, from having

Page 4961

not your hosts for base. O thrice must one be you, to see them shift Along their desert flats, here dash, there drift; With faith, that of privations and spilt blood, Comes Reason armed to clear or bank the flood! And thrice must one be you, to wait release From duress in the swamp of their increase. At which oppressive scene, beyond arrest, A darkness not with stars of heaven dressed Philosophers behold; desponding view Your Many nourished, starved my brilliant few; Then flinging heels, as charioteers the reins, Dive down the fumy AEtna of their brains. Belated vessels on a rising sea, They seem: they pass!

— But not Philosophy!

— Ay, be we faithful to ourselves: despise Nought but the coward in us! That way lies The wisdom making passage through our slough. Am I not heard, my head to Earth shall bow; Like her, shall wait to see, and seeing wait. Philosophy is Life's one match for Fate. That photosphere of our high fountain One, Our spirit's Lord and Reason's fostering sun, Philosophy, shall light us in the shade, Warm in the frost, make Good our aim and aid. Companioned by the sweetest, ay renewed, Unconquerable, whose aim for aid is Good! Advantage to the Many: that we name God's voice; have there the surety in our aim. This thought unto my sister do I owe, And irony and satire off me throw. They crack a childish whip, drive puny herds, Where numbers crave their sustenance in words. Now let the perils thicken: clearer seen, Your Chieftain Mind mounts over them serene. Who never yet of scattered lamps was born To speed a world, a marching world to warn, But sunward from the vivid Many springs, Counts conquest but a step, and through disaster sings.

The warning

We have seen mighty men ballooning high,
And in another moment bump the ground.
He falls; and in his measurement is found
To count some inches o'er the common fry.
'Twas not enough to send him climbing sky,
Yet 'twas enough above his fellows crowned,
Had he less panted. Let his faithful hound
Bark at detractors. He may walk or lie.
Concerns it most ourselves, who with our gas —
This little Isle's insatiable greed
For Continents—filled to inflation burst.
So do ripe nations into squalor pass,
When, driven as herds by their old private thirst,
They scorn the brain's wild search for virtuous light.

Outside the crowd

To sit on History in an easy chair,
Still rivalling the wild hordes by whom ’twas writ!
Sure, this beseems a race of laggard wit,
Unwarned by those plain letters scrawled on air.
If more than hands’ and armsful be our share,
Snatch we for substance we see vapours flit.
Have we not heard derision infinite
When old men play the youth to chase the snare?
Let us be belted athletes,

Page 4962

matched for foes,
Or stand aloof, the great Benevolent,
The Lord of Lands no Robber-birds annex,
Where Justice holds the scales with pure intent;
Armed to support her sword;—lest we compose
That Chapter for the historic word on Wrecks.

Trafalgar day

He leads: we hear our Seaman’s call
In the roll of battles won;
For he is Britain’s Admiral
Till setting of her sun.

When Britain’s life was in her ships,
He kept the sea as his own right;
And saved us from more fell eclipse
Than drops on day from blackest night.
Again his battle spat the flame!
Again his victory flag men saw!
At sound of Nelson’s chieftain name,
A deeper breath did Freedom draw.

Each trusty captain knew his part:
They served as men, not marshalled kine:
The pulses they of his great heart,
With heads to work his main design.
Their Nelson’s word, to beat the foe,
And spare the fall’n, before them shone.
Good was the hour of blow for blow,
And clear their course while they fought on.

Behold the Envied vanward sweep! —
A day in mourning weeds adored!
Then Victory was wrought to weep;
Then sorrow crowned with laurel soared.

A breezeless flag above a shroud
All Britain was when wind and wave,
To make her, passing human, proud,
Brought his last gift from o’er the grave!

Uprose the soul of him a star
On that brave day of Ocean days:

It rolled the smoke from Trafalger
To darken Austerlitz ablaze.
Are we the men of old, its light
Will point us under every sky
The path he took; and must we fight,
Our Nelson be our battle-cry!

He leads: we hear our Seaman's call
In the roll of battles won;
For he is Britain's Admiral
Till setting of her sun.

The revolution

I

Not yet had History's Aetna smoked the skies,
And low the Gallic Giantess lay enchained,
While overhead in ordered set and rise
Her kingly crowns immutably defiled;
Effulgent on funereal piled
Across the vacant heavens, and distrained
Her body, mutely, even as earth, to bear;
Despoiled the tomb of hope, her mouth of air.

II

Through marching scores of winters racked she lay,
Beneath a hoar-frost's brilliant crust,
Whereon the jewelled flies that drained
Her breasts disported in a glistering spray;
She, the land's fount of fruits, enclosed with dust;
By good and evil angels fed, sustained
In part to curse, in part to pray,
Sucking the dubious rumours, till men saw
The throbs of her charged heart before the Just,
So worn the harrowed surface had become:
And still they deemed the dance above was Law,
Amort all passion in a rebel dumb.

Page 4963

III

Then, on the unanticipated day,
Earth heaved, and rose a veinous mound
To roar of the underfloods; and off it sprang,
Ravishing as red wine in woman's form,
A splendid Maenad, she of the delirious laugh,
Her body twisted flames with the smoke-cap crowned;
She of the Bacchic foot; the challenger to the fray,
Bewitchment for the embrace; who sang, who sang
Intoxication to her swarm,
Revolved them, hair, voice, feet, in her carmagnole,
As with a stroke she snapped the Royal staff,
Dealt the awaited blow on gilt decay
(O ripeness of the time! O Retribution sure,
If but our vital lamp illume us to endure!)
And, like a glad releasing of her soul,
Sent the word Liberty up to meet the midway blue,
Her bridegroom in descent to her; and they joined,
In the face of men they joined: attest it true,
The million witnesses, that she,
For ages lying beside the mole,
Was on the unanticipated miracle day
Upraised to midway heaven and, as to her goal,
Enfolded, ere the Immaculate knew
What Lucifer of the Mint had coined
His bride's adulterate currency
Of burning love corrupt of an infuriate hate;
She worthy, she unworthy; that one day his mate:
His mate for that one day of the unwritten deed.
Read backward on the hoar-frost's brilliant crust;
Beneath it read.
Athirst to kiss, athirst to slay, she stood,
A radiance fringed with grim affright;
For them that hungered, she was nourishing food,
For those who sparkled, Night.
Read in her heart, and how before the Just
Her doings, her misdoings, plead.

IV

Down on her leap for him the young Angelical broke
To husband a resurgent France:
From whom, with her dethroning stroke,

Dishonour passed; the dalliance,
That is occasion’s yea or nay,
In issues for the soul to pay,
Discarded; and the cleft ’twixt deed and word,
The sinuous lie which warbles the sweet bird,
Wherein we see old Darkness peer,
Cold Dissolution beck, she had flung hence;
And hence the talons and the beak of prey;
Hence all the lures to silken swine
Thronging the troughs of indolence;
With every sleek convolvement serpentine;
The pride in elfin arts to veil an evil leer,
And bid a goatfoot trip it like a fay.
He clasped in this revived, uprisen France,
A valorous dame, of countenance
The lightning’s upon cloud: unlit as yet
On brows and lips the lurid shine
Of seas in the night-wind’s whirl; unstirred
Her pouch of the centuries’ injuries compressed;
The shriek that tore the world as yet unheard:

Page 4964

Earth’s animate full flower she looked, intense
For worship, wholly given him, fair
Adoring or desiring; in her bright jet,
Earth’s crystal spring to sky: Earth’s warrior Best
To win Heaven’s Pure up that midway
We vision for new ground, where sense
And spirit are one for the further flight; breast-bare,
Bare-limbed; nor graceless gleamed her disarray
In scorn of the seductive insincere,
But martially nude for hot Bellona’s play,
And amorous of the loftiest in her view.

V

She sprang from dust to drink of earth’s cool dew,
The breath of swaying grasses share,
Mankind embrace, their weaklings rear,
At wrestle with the tyrannic strong;
Her forehead clear to her mate, virgin anew,
As immortals may be in the mortal sphere.
Read through her launching heart, who had lain long
With Earth and heard till it became her own
Our good Great Mother’s eve and matin song:
The humming burden of Earth’s toil to feed
Her creatures all, her task to speed their growth,
Her aim to lead them up her pathways, shown
Between the Pains and Pleasures; warned of both,
Of either aided on their hard ascent.
Now when she looked, with love’s benign delight
After great ecstasy, along the plains,
What foulest impregnation of her sight
Transformed the scene to multitudinous troops
Of human sketches, quaver-figures, bent,
As were they winter sedges, broken hoops,
Dry udder, vineless poles, worm-eaten posts,
With features like the flowers defaced by deluge rains?
Recked she that some perverting devil had limned
Earth’s proudest to spout scorn of the Maker’s hand,
Who could a day behold these deathly hosts,
And see, decked, graced, and delicately trimmed,
A ribanded and gemmed elected few,
Sanctioned, of milk and honey starve the land:-

Like melody in flesh, its pleasant game
Olympianwise perform, cloak but the shame:
Beautiful statures; hideous,
By Christian contrast; pranked with golden chains,
And flexile where is manhood straight;
Mortuaries where warm should beat
The brotherhood that keeps blood sweet:
Who dared in cantique impious
Proclaim the Just, to whom was due
Cathedral gratitude in the pomp of state,
For that on those lean outcasts hung the sucker Pains,
On these elect the swelling Pleasures grew.
Surely a devil’s land when that meant death for each!
Fresh from the breast of Earth, not thus,
With all the body’s life to plump the leech,
Is Nature’s way, she knew. The abominable scene
Spat at the skies; and through her veins,
To cloud celestially

Page 4965

sown,
Ran venom of what nourishment
Her dark sustainer subterrene
Supplied her, stretched supine on the rack,
Alive in the shrewd nerves, the seething brains,
Under derisive revels, prone
As one clamped fast, with the interminable senseless blent.

VI

Now was her face white waves in the tempest's sharp flame-blink;
Her skies shot black.
Now was it visioned infamy to drink
Of earth's cool dew, and through the vines
Frolic in pearly laughter with her young,
Watching the healthful, natural, happy signs
Where hands of lads and maids like tendrils clung,
After their sly shy ventures from the leaf,
And promised bunches. Now it seemed
The world was one malarious mire,
Crying for purification: chief
This land of France. It seemed
A duteous desire
To drink of life's hot flood, and the crimson streamed.

VII

She drank what makes man demon at the draught.
Her skies lowered black,
Her lover flew,
There swept a shudder over men.
Her heavenly lover fled her, and she laughed,
For laughter was her spirit's weapon then.
The Infernal rose uncalled, he with his crew.

VIII

As mighty thews burst manacles, she went mad:
Her heart a flaring torch usurped her wits.
Such enemies of her next-drawn breath she had!
To tread her down in her live grave beneath
Their dancing floor sunned blind by the Royal wreath,
They ringed her steps with crafty prison pits.
Without they girdled her, made nest within.

There ramped the lion, here entrailed the snake.
They forced the cup to her lips when she drank blood;
Believing it, in the mother's mind at strain,
In the mother's fears, and in young Liberty's wail
Alarmed, for her encompassed children's sake,
The sole sure way to save her priceless bud.
Wherewith, when power had gifted her to prevail,
Vengeance appeared as logically akin.
Insanely rational they; she rationally insane;
And in compute of sin, was hers the appealing sin.

IX

Amid the plash of scarlet mud
Stained at the mouth, drunk with our common air,
Not lack of love was her defect;
The Fury mourned and raged and bled for France
Breathing from exultation to despair
At every wild-winged hope struck by mischance
Soaring at each faint gleam o'er her abyss.
Heard still, to be heard while France shall stand erect,
The frontier march she piped her sons, for where
Her crouching outer enemy camped,
Attendant on the deadlier inner's hiss.
She piped her sons the frontier march, the wine

Page 4966

Of martial music, History's cherished tune;
And they, the saintliest labourers that aye
Dropped sweat on soil for bread, took arms and tramped;
High-breasted to match men or elements,
Or Fortune, harsh schoolmistress with the undrilled:
War's ragged pupils; many a wavering line,
Torn from the dear fat soil of champaigns hopefully tilled,
Torn from the motherly bowl, the homely spoon,
To jest at famine, ply
The novel scythe, and stand to it on the field;
Lie in the furrows, rain-clouds for their tents;
Fronting the red artillery straighten spine;
Buckle the shiver at sight of comrades strewn;
Over an empty platter affect the merrily filled;
Die, if the multiple hazards around said die;
Downward measure a foeman mightily sized;
Laugh at the legs that would run for a life despised;
Lyrical on into death's red roaring jaw-gape, steeled
Gaily to take of the foe his lesson, and give reply.
Cheerful apprentices, they shall be masters soon!

X

Lo, where hurricane flocks of the North-wind rattle their thunder Loud through a night, and at dawn comes change to the great South- west, Hounds are the hounded in clouds, waves, forests, inverted the race: Lo, in the day's young beams the colossal invading pursuers Burst upon rocks and were foam; Ridged up a torrent crest; Crumbled to ruin, still gazing a glacial wonder; Turned shamed feet toe to heel on their track at a panic pace. Yesterday's clarion cock scudded hen of the invalid comb; They, the triumphant tonant towering upper, were under; They, violators of home, dared hope an inviolate home; They that had stood for the stroke were the vigorous hewers; Quick as the trick of the wrist with the rapier, they the pursuers. Heavens and men amazed heard the arrogant crying for grace; Saw the once hearth-reek rabble the scourge of an army dispieced; Saw such a shift of the hunt as when Titan Olympus clomb. Fly! was the sportsman's word; and the note of the quarry rang, Chase!

XI

Banners from South, from East,
Sheaves of pale banners drooping hole and shred;
The captive brides of valour, Sabine Wives
Plucked from the foeman's blushful bed,

For glorious muted battle-tongues
Of deeds along the horizon’s red,
At cost of unreluctant lives;
Her toilful heroes homeward poured,
To give their fevered mother air of the lungs.
She breathed, and in the breathing craved.
Environed as she was, at bay,
Safety she kissed on her drawn sword,
And waved for victory, for fresh victory waved:
She craved for victory as her daily bread;
For victory as her daily banquet raved.

XII

Page 4967

Now had her glut of vengeance left her grey
Of blood, who in her entrails fiercely tore
To clutch and squeeze her snakes; herself the more
Devitalizing: red washer Auroral ray;
Desired if but to paint her pallid hue.
The passion for that young horizon red,
Which dowered her with the flags, the blazing fame,
Like dotage of the past-meridian dame
For some bright Sungod adolescent, swelled
Insatiate, to the voracious grew,
The glutton's inward raveners bred;
Till she, mankind's most dreaded, most abhorred,
Witless in her demands on Fortune, asked,
As by the weaving Fates impelled,
To have the thing most loathed, the iron lord,
Controller and chastiser, under Victory masked.

XIII

Banners from East, from South,
She hugged him in them, feared the scourge they meant,
Yet blindly hugged, and hungering built his throne.
So may you see the village innocent,
With curtsey of shut lids and open mouth,
In act to beg for sweets expect a loathly stone:
See furthermore the Just in his measures weigh
Her sufferings and her sins, dispense her meed.
False to her bridegroom lord of the miracle day,
She fell: from his ethereal home observed
Through love, grown alien love, not moved to plead
Against the season's fruit for deadly Seed,
But marking how she had aimed, and where she swerved,
Why suffered, with a sad consenting thought.
Nor would he shun her sullen look, nor monstrous hold
The doer of the monstrous; she aroused,
She, the long tortured, suddenly freed, distraught,
More strongly the divine in him than when
Joy of her as she sprang from mould
Drew him the midway heavens adown
To clasp her in his arms espoused
Before the sight of wondering men,
And put upon the day a deathless crown.
The veins and arteries of her, fold in fold,
His alien love laid open, to divide

The martyred creature from her crimes; he knew
What cowardice in her valour could reside;
What strength her weakness covered; what abased
Sublimity so illumining, and what raised
This wallower in old slime to noblest heights,
Up to the union on the midway blue:-
Day that the celestial grave Recorder hangs
Among dark History's nocturnal lights,
With vivid beams indicative to the quick
Of all who have felt the vaulted body's pangs
Beneath a mind in hopeless soaring sick.
She had forgot how, long enslaved, she yearned
To the one helping hand above;
Forgot her faith in the Great Undiscerned,
Whereof she sprang aloft to her Angelical love
That day: and he, the bright day's husband, still with love,

Page 4968

Though alien, though to an upper seat retired,
Behold a wrangling heart, as 'twere her soul
On eddies of wild waters cast;
In wilderness division; fired
For domination, freedom, lust,
The Pleasures; lo, a witch's snaky bowl
Set at her lips; the blood-drinker's madness fast
Upon her; and therewith mistrust,
Most of herself: a mouth of guile.
Compassionately could he smile,
To hear the mouth disclaiming God,
And clamouring for the Just!
Her thousand impulses, like torches, coursed
City and field; and pushed abroad
O'er hungry waves to thirsty sands,
Flaring at further; she had grown to be
The headless with the fearful hands;
To slaughter, else to suicide, enforced.
But he, remembering how his love began,
And of what creature, pitied when was plain
Another measure of captivity:
The need for strap and rod;
The penitential prayers again;
Again the bitter bowing down to dust;
The burden on the flesh for who disclaims the God,
The answer when is call upon the Just.
Whence her lost virtue had found refuge strode
Her master, saying, 'I only; I who can!'
And echoed round her army, now her chain.
So learns the nation, closing Anarch's reign,
That she had been in travail of a Man.

Napoleon

I

Cannon his name,
Cannon his voice, he came.
Who heard of him heard shaken hills,
An earth at quake, to quiet stamped;
Who looked on him beheld the will of wills,
The driver of wild flocks where lions ramped:

Beheld War’s liveries flee him, like lumped grass
Nid-nod to ground beneath the cuffing storm;
While laurelled over his Imperial form,
Forth from her bearded tube of lacquey brass,
Reverberant notes and long blew volant Fame.
Incarnate Victory, Power manifest,
Infernal or God-given to mankind,
On the quenched volcano’s cusp did he take stand,
A conquering army’s height above the land,
Which calls that army offspring of its breast,
And sees it mid the starry camps enshrined;
His eye the cannon’s flame,
The cannon’s cave his mind.

II

To weld the nation in a name of dread,
And scatter carrion flies off wounds unhealed,
The Necessitated came, as comes from out
Electric ebon lightning’s javelin-head,
Threatening agitation in the revealed
Founts of our being; terrible with doubt,
With radiance restorative. At one stride
Athwart the Law he stood for sovereign sway.
That Soliform made featureless beside
His brilliancy who neighboured: vapour they;
Vapour what postured

Page 4969

statues barred his tread.
On high in amphitheatre field on field,
Italian, Egyptian, Austrian,
Far heard and of the carnage discord clear,
Bells of his escalading triumphs pealed
In crashes on a choral chant severe,
Heraldic of the authentic Charlemagne,
Globe, sceptre, sword, to enfold, to rule, to smite,
Make unity of the mass,
Coherent or refractory, by his might.

Forth from her bearded tube of lacquey brass,
Fame blew, and tuned the jangles, bent the knees
Rebellious or submissive; his decrees
Were thunder in those heavens and compelled:
Such as disordered earth, eclipsed of stars,
Endures for sign of Order's calm return,
Whereunto she is vowed; and his wreckage-spars,
His harried ships, old riotous Ocean lifts alight,
Subdued to splendour in his delirant churn.
Glory suffused the accordant, quelled,
By magic of high sovereignty, revolt:
And he, the reader of men, himself unread;
The name of hope, the name of dread;
Bloom of the coming years or blight;
An arm to hurl the bolt
With aim Olympian; bore
Likeness to Godhead. Whither his flashes hied
Hosts fell; what he constructed held rock-fast.
So did earth's abjects deem of him that built and clove.
Torch on imagination, beams he cast,
Whereat they hailed him deified:
If less than an eagle-speeding Jove, than Vulcan more.
Or it might be a Vulcan-Jove,
Europe for smithy, Europe's floor
Lurid with sparks in evanescent showers,
Loud echo-clap of hammers at all hours,
Our skies the reflex of its furnace blast.

III

On him the long enchained, released
For bride of the miracle day up the midway blue;
She from her heavenly lover fallen to serve for feast

Of rancours and raw hungers; she, the untrue,
Yet pitiable, not despicable, gazed.
Fawning, her body bent, she gazed
With eyes the moonstone portals to her heart:
Eyes magnifying through hysteric tears
This apparition, ghostly for belief;
Demoniac or divine, but sole
Over earth’s mightiest written Chief;
Earth’s chosen, crowned, unchallengeable upstart:
The trumpet word to awake, transform, renew;
The arbiter of circumstance;
High above limitations, as the spheres.
Nor ever had heroical Romance,
Never ensanguined History’s lengthened scroll,
Shown fulminant to shoot the levin dart
Terrific as this man, by whom upraised,
Aggrandized and begemmed, she outstripped her peers;
Like midnight’s levying brazier-beacon blazed
Defiant to the world, a rally for her sons,
Day of the darkness; this man’s mate; by him,

Page 4970

Cannon his name,
Rescued from vivisectionist and knave,
Her body's dominators and her shame;
By him with the rivers of ranked battalions, brave
Past mortal, girt: a march of swords and guns
Incessant; his proved warriors; loaded dice
He flung on the crested board, where chilly Fears
Behold the Reaper's ground, Death sitting grim,
Awatch for his predestined ones,
Mid shrieks and torrent-hooves; but these,
Inebriate of his inevitable device,
Hail it their hero's wood of lustrous laurel-trees,
Blossom and fruit of fresh Hesperides,
The boiling life-blood in their cheers.
Unequalled since the world was man they pour
A spiky girdle round her; these, her sons,
His cataracts at smooth holiday, soon to roar
Obstruction shattered at his will or whim:
Kind to her ear as quiring Cherubim,
And trampling earth like scornful mastodons.

IV

The flood that swept her to be slave
Adoring, under thought of being his mate,
These were, and unto the visibly unexcelled,
As much of heart as abjects can she gave,
Or what of heart the body bears for freight
When Majesty apparent overawes;
By the flash of his ascending deeds upheld,
Which let not feminine pride in him have pause
To question where the nobler pride rebelled.
She read the hieroglyphic on his brow,
Felt his firm hand to wield the giant's mace;
Herself whirled upward in an eagle's claws,
Past recollection of her earthly place;
And if cold Reason pressed her, called him Fate;
Offering abashed the servile woman's vow.
Delirium was her virtue when the look
At fettered wrists and violated laws
Faith in a rectitude Supernal shook,
Till worship of him shone as her last rational state,

The slave’s apology for gemmed disgrace.
Far in her mind that leap from earth to the ghost
Midway on high; or felt as a troubled pool;
Or as a broken sleep that hunts a dream half lost,
Arrested and rebuked by the common school
Of daily things for truancy. She could rejoice
To know with wakeful eyeballs Violence
Her crowned possessor, and, on every sense
Incumbent, Fact, Imperial Fact, her choice,
In scorn of barren visions, aims at a glassy void.
Who sprang for Liberty once, found slavery sweet;
And Tyranny, on alert subservience buoyed,
Spurred a blood-mare immeasureably fleet
To shoot the transient leagues in a passing wink,
Prompt for the glorious bound at the fanged abyss’s brink.
Scarce felt she that she bled when battle scored
On riddled flags the further conjured line;
From off the meteor gleam of his waved sword

Page 4971

Reflected bright in permanence: she bled
As the Bacchante spills her challengeing wine
With whirl o' the cup before the kiss to lip;
And bade drudge History in his footprints tread,
For pride of sword-strokes o'er slow penmanship:
Each step of his a volume: his sharp word
The shower of steel and lead
Or pastoral sunshine.

V

Persistent through the brazen chorus round
His thunderous footsteps on the foeman's ground,
A broken carol of wild notes was heard,
As when an ailing infant wails a dream.
Strange in familiarity it rang:
And now along the dark blue vault might seem
Winged migratories having but heaven for home,
Now the lone sea-bird's cry down shocks of foam,
Beneath a ruthless paw the captive's pang.

It sang the gift that comes from God
To mind of man as air to lung.
So through her days of under sod
Her faith unto her heart had sung,
Like bedded seed by frozen clod,
With view of wide-armed heaven and buds at burst,
And midway up, Earth's fluttering little lyre.
Even for a glimpse, for even a hope in chained desire
The vision of it watered thirst.

VI

But whom those errant moans accused
As Liberty's murderous mother, cried accursed,
France blew to deafness: for a space she mused;
She smoothed a startled look, and sought,
From treasuries of the adoring slave,
Her surest way to strangle thought;
Picturing her dread lord decree advance
Into the enemy's land; artillery, bayonet, lance;
His ordering fingers point the dial's to time their ranks:

Himself the black storm-cloud, the tempest's bayonet-glaive.
Like foam-heads of a loosened freshet bursting banks,
By mount and fort they thread to swamp the sluggard plains.
Shines his gold-laurel sun, or cloak connivent rains.
They press to where the hosts in line and square throng mute;
He watchful of their form, the Audacious, the Astute;
Eagle to grip the field; to work his craftiest, fox.
From his brief signal, straight the stroke of the leveller falls;
From him those opal puffs, those arcs with the clouded balls:
He waves and the voluble scene is a quagmire shifting blocks;
They clash, they are knotted, and now 'tis the deed of the axe on the log;
Here away moves a spiky woodland, and yon away sweep
Rivers of horse torrent-mad to the shock, and the heap over heap
Right through the troughed black lines turned to bunches or shreds, or a fog
Rolling off sunlight's arrows. Not mightier Phoebus in ire,
Nor deadlier Jove's avengeing right hand, than he of the brain
Keen at an enemy's

Page 4972

mind to encircle and pierce and constrain,
Muffling his own for a fate-charged blow very Gods may admire.
Sure to behold are his eagles on high where the conflict raged.
Rightly, then, should France worship, and deafen the disaccord
Of those who dare withstand an irresistible sword
To thwart his predestined subjection of Europe. Let them submit!
She said it aloud, and heard in her breast, as a singer caged,
With the beat of wings at bars, Earth's fluttering little lyre.
No more at midway heaven, but liker midway to the pit:
Not singing the spirally upward of rapture, the downward of pain
Rather, the drop sheer downward from pressure of merciless weight.

Her strangled thought got breath, with her worship held debate;
To yield and sink, yet eye askant the mark she had missed.
Over the black-blue rollers of that broad Westerly main,
Steady to sky, the light of Liberty glowed
In a flaming pillar, that cast on the troubled waters a road
For Europe to cross, and see the thing lost subsist.
For there 'twas a shepherd led his people, no butcher of sheep;
Firmly there the banner he first upreared
Stands to rally; and nourishing grain do his children reap
From a father beloved in life, in his death revered.
Contemplating him and his work, shall a skyward glance
Clearer sight of our dreamed and abandoned obtain;
Nay, but as if seen in station above the Republic, France
Had view of her one-day's heavenly lover again;
Saw him amid the bright host looking down on her; knew she had erred,
Knew him her judge, knew yonder the spirit preferred;
Yonder the base of the summit she strove that day to ascend,
Ere cannon mastered her soul, and all dreams had end.

VII

Soon felt she in her shivered frame
A bodeful drain of blood illume
Her wits with frosty fire to read
The dazzling wizard who would have her bleed
On fruitless marsh and snows of spectral gloom
For victory that was victory scarce in name.
Husky his clarions laboured, and her sighs
O'er slaughtered sons were heavier than the prize;
Recalling how he stood by Frederic's tomb,
With Frederic's country underfoot and spurned:

There meditated; till her hope might guess,
Albeit his constant star prescribe success,
The savage strife would sink, the civil aim
To head a mannered world breathe zephyrous
Of morning after storm; whereunto she yearned;
And Labour’s lovely peace, and Beauty’s courtly bloom,
The mind in strenuous tasks hilarious.
At such great height, where hero hero topped,
Right sanely should the Grand Ascendant think
No further leaps at the fanged abyss’s brink
True Genius takes: be battle’s dice-box dropped!

Page 4973

She watched his desert features, hung to hear
The honey words desired, and veiled her face;
Hearing the Seaman's name recur
Wrathfully, thick with a meaning worse
Than call to the march: for that inveterate Purse
Could kindle the extinct, inform a vacant place,
Conjure a heart into the trebly felled.
It squeezed the globe, insufferably swelled
To feed insurgent Europe: rear and van
Were haunted by the amphibious curse;
Here flesh, there phantom, livelier after rout:
The Seaman piping aye to the rightabout,
Distracted Europe's Master, puffed remote
Those Indies of the swift Macedonian,
Whereon would Europe's Master somewhiles doat,
In dreamings on a docile universe
Beneath an immarcessible Charlemagne.

Nor marvel France should veil a seer's face,
And call on darkness as a blest retreat.
Magnanimously could her iron Emperor
Confront submission: hostile stirred to heat
All his vast enginery, allowed no halt
Up withered avenues of waste-blood war,
To the pitiless red mounts of fire afume,
As 'twere the world's arteries opened! Woe the race!
Ask wherefore Fortune's vile caprice should balk
His panther spring across the foaming salt,
From martial sands to the cliffs of pallid chalk!
There is no answer: seed of black defeat
She then did sow, and France nigh unto death foredoom.
See since that Seaman's epicycle sprite
Engirdle, lure and goad him to the chase
Along drear leagues of crimson spotting white
With mother's tears of France, that he may meet
Behind suborned battalions, ranked as wheat
Where peeps the weedy poppy, him of the sea;
Earth's power to baffle Ocean's power resume;
Victorious army crown o'er Victory's fleet;
And bearing low that Seaman upon knee,
Stay the vexed question of supremacy,
Obnoxious in the vault by Frederic's tomb.

VIII

Poured streams of Europe’s veins the flood
Full Rhine or Danube rolls off morning-tide
Through shadowed reaches into crimson-dyed:
And Rhine and Danube knew her gush of blood
Down the plucked roots the deepest in her breast.
He tossed her cordials, from his laurels pressed.
She drank for dryness thirstily, praised his gifts.
The blooded frame a powerful draught uplifts
Writhed the devotedness her voice rang wide
In cries ecstatic, as of the martyr-Blest,
Their spirits issuing forth of bodies racked,
And crazy chuckles, with life’s tears at feud;
While near her heart the sunken sentinel
Called Critic marked, and dumb in awe reviewed
This torture, this anointed, this untracked

Page 4974

To mortal source, this alien of his kind;
Creator, slayer, conjuror, Solon-Mars,
The cataract of the abyss, the star of stars;
Whose arts to lay the senses under spell
Aroused an insurrectionary mind.

IX

He, did he love her? France was his weapon, shrewd
At edge, a wind in onset: he loved well
His tempered weapon, with the which he hewed
Clean to the ground impediments, or hacked,
Sure of the blade that served the great man-miracle.
He raised her, robed her, gemmed her for his bride,
Did but her blood in blindness given exact.
Her blood she gave, was blind to him as guide:
She quivered at his word, and at his touch
Was hound or steed for any mark he espied.
He loved her more than little, less than much.
The fair subservient of Imperial Fact
Next to his consanguineous was placed
In ranked esteem; above the diurnal meal,
Vexatious carnal appetites above,
Above his hoards, while she Imperial Fact embraced,
And rose but at command from under heel.
The love devolvent, the ascension love,
Receptive or profuse, were fires he lacked,
Whose marrow had expelled their wasteful sparks;
Whose mind, the vast machine of endless haste,
Took up but solids for its glowing seal.
The hungry love, that fish-like creatures feel,
Impelled for prize of hooks, for prey of sharks,
His night's first quarter sicklied to distaste,
In warm enjoyment barely might distract.
A head that held an Europe half devoured
Taste in the blood's conceit of pleasure soured.
Nought save his rounding aim, the means he plied,
Death for his cause, to him could point appeal.
His mistress was the thing of uses tried.
Frigid the netting smile on whom he wooed,
But on his Policy his eye was lewd.
That sharp long zig-zag into distance brooked

No foot across; a shade his ire provoked.
The blunder or the cruelty of a deed
His Policy imperative could plead.
He deemed nought other precious, nor knew he
Legitimate outside his Policy.
Men’s lives and works were due, from their birth’s date,
To the State’s shield and sword, himself the State.
He thought for them in mass, as Titan may;
For their pronounced well-being bade obey;
O’er each obstructive thicket thunderclapped,
And straight their easy road to market mapped.
Watched Argus to survey the huge preserves
He held or coveted; Mars was armed alert
At sign of motion; yet his brows were murk,
His gorge would surge, to see the butcher’s work,
The Reaper’s field; a sensitive in nerves.
He rode not over men to do them hurt.
As one who claimed to have for paramour
Earth’s fairest form, he dealt the cancelling blow;
Impassioned, still impersonal; to ensure
Possession; free of rivals, not their foe.

Page 4975

The common Tyrant's frenzies, rancour, spites,
He knew as little as men's claim on rights.
A kindness for old servants, early friends,
Was constant in him while they served his ends;
And if irascible, 'twas the moment's reek
From fires diverted by some gusty freak.
His Policy the act which breeds the act
Prevised, in issues accurately summed
From reckonings of men's tempers, terrors, needs:-
That universal army, which he leads
Who builds Imperial on Imperious Fact.
Within his hot brain's hammering workshop hummed
A thousand furious wheels at whirr, untired
As Nature in her reproductive throes;
And did they grate, he spake, and cannon fired:
The cause being aye the incendiary foes
Proved by prostration culpable. His dispense
Of Justice made his active conscience;
His passive was of ceaseless labour formed.
So found this Tyrant sanction and repose;
Humanly just, inhumanly unwarmed.
Preventive fencings with the foul intent
Occult, by him observed and foiled betimes,
Let fool historians chronicle as crimes.
His blows were dealt to clear the way he went:
Too busy sword and mind for needless blows.
The mighty bird of sky minutest grains
On ground perceived; in heaven but rays or rains;
In humankind diversities of masks,
For rule of men the choice of bait or goads.
The statesman steered the despot to large tasks;
The despot drove the statesman on short roads.
For Order's cause he laboured, as inclined
A soldier's training and his Euclid mind.
His army unto men he could present
As model of the perfect instrument.
That creature, woman, was the sofa soft,
When warriors their dusty armour doffed,
And read their manuals for the making truce
With rosy frailties framed to reproduce.
He farmed his land, distillingly alive
For the utmost extract he might have and hive,
Wherewith to marshal force; and in like scheme,

Benign shone Hymen’s torch on young love’s dream.
Thus to be strong was he beneficent;
A fount of earth, likewise a firmament.

The disputant in words his eye dismayed:
Opinions blocked his passage. Rent
Were Councils with a gesture; brayed
By hoarse camp-phrase what argument
Dared interpose to waken spleen
In him whose vision grasped the unseen,
Whose counsellor was the ready blade,
Whose argument the cannonade.
He loathed his land’s divergent parties, loth
To grant them speech, they were such idle troops;
The friable and the grumous, dizzards both.
Men were good sticks his mastery wrought from hoops;
Some serviceable, none

Page 4976

credible on oath.
The silly preference they nursed to die
In beds he scorned, and led where they should lie.
If magic made them pliable for his use,
Magician he could be by planned surprise.
For do they see the deuce in human guise,
As men’s acknowledged head appears the deuce,
And they will toil with devilish craft and zeal.
Among them certain vagrant wits that had
Ideas buzzed; they were the feebly mad;
Pursuers of a film they hailed ideal;
But could be dangerous fire-flies for a brain
Subdued by fact, still amorous of the inane.
With a breath he blew them out, to beat their wings
The way of such transfeminated things,
And France had sense of vacancy in Light.

That is the soul’s dead darkness, making clutch
Wild hands for aid at muscles within touch;
Adding to slavery’s chain the stringent twist;
Even when it brings close surety that aright
She reads her Tyrant through his golden mist;
Perceives him fast to a harsher Tyrant bound;
Self-ridden, self-hunted, captive of his aim;
Material grandeur’s ape, the Infernal’s hound;
Enormous, with no infinite around;
No starred deep sky, no Muse, or lame
The dusty pattering pinions,
The voice as through the brazen tube of Fame.

X

Hugest of engines, a much limited man,
She saw the Lustrous, her great lord, appear
Through that smoked glass her last privation brought
To point her critic eye and spur her thought:
A heart but to propel Leviathan;
A spirit that breathed but in earth’s atmosphere.
Amid the plumed and sceptred ones
Irradiatingly Jovian,
The mountain tower capped by the floating cloud;
A nursery screamer where dialectics ruled:
Mannerless, graceless, laughterless, unlike
Herself in all, yet with such power to strike,

That she the various features she could scan
Dared not to sum, though seeing: and befooled
By power which beamed omnipotent, she bowed,
Subservient as roused echo round his guns.
Invulnerable Prince of Myrmidons,
He sparkled, by no sage Athene schooled.
Partly she read her riddle, stricken and pained;
But irony, her spirit's tongue, restrained.
The Critic, last of vital in the proud
Enslaved, when most detectively endowed,
Admired how irony's venom off him ran,
Like rain-drops down a statue cast in bronze:
Whereby of her keen rapier disarmed,
Again her chant of eulogy began,
Protesting, but with slavish senses charmed.

Page 4977

Her warrior, chief among the valorous great
In arms he was, dispelling shades of blame,
With radiance palpable in fruit and weight.
Heard she reproach, his victories blared response;
His victories bent the Critic to acclaim,
As with fresh blows upon a ringing sconce.
Or heard she from scarred ranks of jolly growls
His veterans dwarf their reverence and, like owls,
Laugh in the pitch of discord, to exalt
Their idol for some genial trick or fault,
She, too, became his marching veteran.
Again she took her breath from them who bore
His eagles through the tawny roar,
And murmured at a peaceful state,
That bred the title charlatan,
As missile from the mouth of hate,
For one the daemon fierily filled and hurled,
Cannon his name,
Shattering against a barrier world;
Her supreme player of man's primaeval game.

The daemon filled him, and he filled her sons;
Strung them to stature over human height,
As march the standards down the smoky fight;
Her cherubim, her towering mastodons!
Directed vault or breach, break through
Earth's toughest, seasons, elements, tame;
Dash at the bulk the sharpened few;
Count death the smallest of their debts:
Show that the will to do
Is masculine and begets!

These princes unto him the mother owed;
These jewels of manhood that rich hand bestowed.
What wonder, though with wits awake
To read her riddle, for these her offspring's sake; —
And she, before high heaven adulteress,
The lost to honour, in his glory clothed,
Else naked, shamed in sight of men, self-loathed; —
That she should quench her thought, nor worship less
Than ere she bled on sands or snows and knew
The slave's alternative, to worship or to rue!

XI

Bright from the shell of that much limited man,
Her hero, like the falchion out of sheath,
Like soul that quits the tumbled body, soared:
And France, impulsive, nuptial with his plan,
Albeit the Critic fretting her, adored
Once more. Exultingly her heart went forth,
Submissive to his mind and mood,
The way of those pent-eyebrows North;
For now was he to win the wreath
Surpassing sunniest in camp or Court;
Next, as the blessed harvest after years of blight,
Sit, the Great Emperor, to be known the Good!

Now had the Seaman's volvent sprite,
Lean from the chase that barked his contraband,
A beggared applicant at every port,
To strew the profitless deeps and rot beneath,
Slung northward, for a hunted beast's retort
On sovereign power; there his final stand,

Page 4978

Among the perjured Scythian’s shaggy horde,
The hydrocephalic aerolite
Had taken; flashing thence repellent teeth,
Though Europe’s Master Europe’s Rebel banned
To be earth’s outcast, ocean’s lord and sport.

Unmoved might seem the Master’s taunted sword.
Northward his dusky legions nightly slipped,
As on the map of that all-provident head;
He luting Peace the while, like morning’s cock
The quiet day to round the hours for bed;
No pastoral shepherd sweeter to his flock.
Then Europe first beheld her Titan stripped.
To what vast length of limb and mounds of thews,
How trained to scale the eminences, pluck
The hazards for new footing, how compel
Those timely incidents by men named luck,
Through forethought that defied the Fates to choose,
Her grovelling admiration had not yet
Imagined of the great man-miracle;
And France recounted with her comic smile
Duplicities of Court and Cabinet,
The silky female of his male in guile,
Wherewith her two-faced Master could amuse
A dupe he charmed in sunny beams to bask,
Before his feint for camisado struck
The lightning moment of the cast-off mask.

Splendours of earth repeating heaven’s at set
Of sun down mountain cloud in masses arched;
Since Asia upon Europe marched,
Unmatched the copious multitudes; unknown
To Gallia’s over-runner, Rome’s inveterate foe,
Such hosts; all one machine for overthrow,
Coruscant from the Master’s hand, compact
As reasoned thoughts in the Master’s head; were shown
Yon lightning moment when his acme might
Blazed o’er the stream that cuts the sandy tract
Borussian from Sarmatia’s famished flat;
The century’s flower; and off its pinnacled throne,
Rayed servitude on Europe’s ball of sight.

XII

Behind the Northern curtain-folds he passed.
There heard hushed France her muffled heart beat fast
Against the hollow ear-drum, where she sat
In expectation's darkness, until cracked
The straining curtain-seams: a scaly light
Was ghost above an army under shroud.
Imperious on Imperial Fact
Incestuously the incredible begat.
His veterans and auxiliaries,
The trained, the trustful, sanguine, proud,
Princely, scarce numerable to recite, —
Titanic of all Titan tragedies! —
That Northern curtain took them, as the seas
Gulp the great ships to give back shipmen white.

Alive in marble, she conceived in soul,
With barren eyes and mouth, the mother's loss;
The bolt from her abandoned heaven sped;
The snowy army rolling knoll on knoll
Beyond horizon, under no blest Cross:
By the vulture dotted and engarlanded.

Page 4979

Was it a necromancer lured
To weave his tense betraying spell?
A Titan whom our God endured
Till he of his foul hungers fell,
By all his craft and labour scourged?
A deluge Europe's liberated wave,
Paean to sky, leapt over that vast grave.
Its shadow-points against her sacred land converged.
And him, her yoke-fellow, her black lord, her fate,
In doubt, in fevered hope, in chills of hate,
That tore her old credulity to strips,
Then pressed the auspicious relics on her lips,
His withered slave for foregone miracles urged.
And he, whom now his ominous halo's round,
A three parts blank decrescent sickle, crowned,
Prodigious in catastrophe, could wear
The realm of Darkness with its Prince's air;
Assume in mien the resolute pretence
To satiate an hungered confidence,
Proved criminal by the sceptic seen to cower
Beside the generous face of that frail flower.

XIII

Desire and terror then had each of each:
His crown and sword were staked on the magic stroke;
Her blood she gave as one who loved her leech;
And both did barter under union's cloak.
An union in hot fever and fierce need
Of either's aid, distrust in trust did breed.
Their traffic instincts hooded their live wits
To issues. Never human fortune throve
On such alliance. Viewed by fits,
From Vulcan's forge a hovering Jove
Evolved. The slave he dragged the Tyrant drove.
Her awe of him his dread of her invoked:
His nature with her shivering faith ran yoked.
What wisdom counselled, Policy declined;
All perils dared he save the step behind.
Ahead his grand initiative becked:
One spark of radiance blurred, his orb was wrecked.
Stripped to the despot upstart, for success
He raged to clothe a perilous nakedness.
He would not fall, while falling; would not be taught,

While learning; would not relax his grasp on aught
He held in hand, while losing it; pressed advance,
Pricked for her lees the veins of wasted France;
Who, had he stayed to husband her, had spun
The strength he taxed unripened for his throw,
In vengeful casts calamitous,
On fields where palsying Pyrrhic laurels grow,
The luminous the ruinous.
An incalescent scorpion,
And fierier for the mounded cirque
That narrowed at him thick and murk,
This gambler with his genius
Flung lives in angry volleys, bloody lightnings, flung
His fortunes to the hosts he stung,
With victories clipped his eagle’s wings.
By the hands that built him up was he undone:
By the star aloft, which was his ram’s-head will

Page 4980

Within; by the toppling throne the soldier won;
By the yeasty ferment of what once had been,
To cloud a rational mind for present things;
By his own force, the suicide in his mill.
Needs never God of Vengeance intervene
When giants their last lesson have to learn.
Fighting against an end he could discern,
The chivalry whereof he had none
He called from his worn slave's abundant springs:
Not deigning spousally entreat
That ever blinded by his martial skill,
But harsh to have her worship counted out
In human coin, her vital rivers drained,
Her infant forests felled, commanded die
The decade thousand deaths for his Imperial seat,
Where throning he her faith in him maintained;
Bound Reason to believe delayed defeat
Was triumph; and what strength in her remained
To head against the ultimate foreseen rout,
Insensate taxed; of his impenitent will,
Servant and sycophant: without ally,
In Python's coils, the Master Craftsman still;
The smiter, panther springer, trapper sly,
The deadly wrestler at the crucial bout,
The penetrant, the tonant, tower of towers,
Striking from black disaster starry showers.
Her supreme player of man's primaeval game,
He won his harnessed victim's rapturous shout,
When every move was mortal to her frame,
Her prayer to life that stricken he might lie,
She to exchange his laurels for earth's flowers.

The innumerable whelmed him, and he fell:
A vessel in mid-ocean under storm.
Ere ceased the lullaby of his passing bell,
He sprang to sight, in human form
Revealed, from no celestial aids:
The shades enclosed him, and he fired the shades.

Cannon his name,
Cannon his voice, he came.
The fount of miracles from drought-dust arose,

Amazing even on his Imperial stage,
Where marvels lightened through the alternate hours
And winged o’er human earth’s heroical shone.
Into the press of cumulative foes,
Across the friendly fields of smoke and rage,
A broken structure bore his furious powers;
The man no more, the Warrior Chief the same;
Match for all rivals; in himself but flame
Of an outworn lamp, to illumine nought anon.
Yet loud as when he first showed War’s effete
Their Schoolman off his eagre mounted high,
And summoned to subject who dared compete,
The cannon in the name Napoleon
Discoursed of sulphur earth to curtained sky.
So through a tropic day a regnant sun,
Where armies of assailant vapours thronged,
His glory’s trappings laid on them: comes night,
Enwraps him in a bosom quick of heat
From his anterior splendours,

Page 4981

and shall seem
Day instant, Day's own lord in the furnace gleam,
The virulent quiver on ravished eyes prolonged,
When severed darkness, all flaminical bright,
Slips vivid eagles linked in rapid flight;
Which bring at whiles the lionly far roar,
As wrestled he with manacles and gags,
To speed across a cowering world once more,
Superb in ordered floods, his lordly flags.
His name on silence thundered, on the obscure
Lightened; it haunted morn and even-song:
Earth of her prodigy's extinction long,
With shudderings and with thrillings, hung unsure.

Snapped was the chord that made the resonant bow,
In France, abased and like a shrunken corse;
Amid the weakest weak, the lowest low,
From the highest fallen, stagnant off her source;
Condemned to hear the nations' hostile mirth;
See curtained heavens, and smell a sulphurous earth;
Which told how evermore shall tyrant Force
Beget the greater for its overthrow.
The song of Liberty in her hearing spoke
A foreign tongue; Earth's fluttering little lyre
Unlike, but like the raven's ravening croak.
Not till her breath of being could aspire
Anew, this loved and scourged of Angels found
Our common brotherhood in sight and sound:
When mellow rang the name Napoleon,
And dim aloft her young Angelical waved.
Between ethereal and gross to choose,
She swung; her soul desired, her senses craved.
They pricked her dreams, while oft her skies were dun
Behind o'ershadowing foemen: on a tide
They drew the nature having need of pride
Among her fellows for its vital dues:
He seen like some rare treasure-galleon,
Hull down, with masts against the Western hues.

France—December1870

I

We look for her that sunlike stood
Upon the forehead of our day,
An orb of nations, radiating food
For body and for mind alway.
Where is the Shape of glad array;
The nervous hands, the front of steel,
The clarion tongue? Where is the bold proud face?
We see a vacant place;
We hear an iron heel.

II

O she that made the brave appeal
For manhood when our time was dark,
And from our fetters drove the spark
Which was as lightning to reveal
New seasons, with the swifter play
Of pulses, and benigner day;
She that divinely shook the dead
From living man; that stretched ahead
Her resolute forefinger straight,
And marched toward the gloomy gate
Of earth’s Untried, gave note, and in
The good name of Humanity
Called forth the daring vision! she,
She likewise half corrupt

Page 4982

of sin,
Angel and Wanton! can it be?
Her star has foundered in eclipse,
The shriek of madness on her lips;
Shreds of her, and no more, we see.
There is horrible convulsion, smothered din,
As of one that in a grave-cloth struggles to be free.

III

Look not for spreading boughs
On the riven forest tree.
Look down where deep in blood and mire
Black thunder plants his feet and ploughs
The soil for ruin: that is France:
Still thrilling like a lyre,
Amazed to shivering discord from a fall
Sudden as that the lurid hosts recall
Who met in heaven the irreparable mischance.
O that is France!
The brilliant eyes to kindle bliss,
The shrewd quick lips to laugh and kiss,
Breasts that a sighing world inspire,
And laughter-dimpled countenance
Where soul and senses caught desire!

IV

Ever invoking fire from heaven, the fire
Has grasped her, unconsumable, but framed
For all the ecstasies of suffering dire.
Mother of Pride, her sanctuary shamed:
Mother of Delicacy, and made a mark
For outrage: Mother of Luxury, stripped stark:
Mother of Heroes, bondsmen: thro' the rains,
Across her boundaries, lo the league-long chains!
Fond Mother of her martial youth; they pass,
Are spectres in her sight, are mown as grass!
Mother of Honour, and dishonoured: Mother
Of Glory, she condemned to crown with bays
Her victor, and be fountain of his praise.
Is there another curse? There is another:
Compassionate her madness: is she not
Mother of Reason? she that sees them mown

Like grass, her young ones! Yea, in the low groan
And under the fixed thunder of this hour
Which holds the animate world in one foul blot
Tranced circumambient while relentless Power
Beaks at her heart and claws her limbs down-thrown,
She, with the plungeing lightnings overshot,
With madness for an armour against pain,
With milkless breasts for little ones athirst,
And round her all her noblest dying in vain,
Mother of Reason is she, trebly cursed,
To feel, to see, to justify the blow;
Chamber to chamber of her sequent brain
Gives answer of the cause of her great woe,
Inexorably echoing thro' the vaults,
''Tis thus they reap in blood, in blood who sow:
'This is the sum of self-absolved faults.'
Doubt not that thro' her grief, with sight supreme,
Thro' her delirium and despair's last dream,
Thro' pride, thro' bright illusion and the brood
Bewildering of her various Motherhood,
The high strong light within her, tho' she bleeds,
Traces the letters of

Page 4983

returned misdeeds.
She sees what seed long sown, ripened of late,
Bears this fierce crop; and she discerns her fate
From origin to agony, and on
As far as the wave washes long and wan
Off one disastrous impulse: for of waves
Our life is, and our deeds are pregnant graves
Blown rolling to the sunset from the dawn.

V

Ah, what a dawn of splendour, when her sowers
Went forth and bent the necks of populations
And of their terrors and humiliations
Wove her the starry wreath that earthward lowers
Now in the figure of a burning yoke!
Her legions traversed North and South and East,
Of triumph they enjoyed the glutton's feast:
They grafted the green sprig, they lopped the oak.
They caught by the beard the tempests, by the scalp
The icy precipices, and clove sheer through
The heart of horror of the pinnacled Alp,
Emerging not as men whom mortals knew.
They were the earthquake and the hurricane,
The lightnings and the locusts, plagues of blight,
Plagues of the revel: they were Deluge rain,
And dreaded Conflagration; lawless Might.
Death writes a reeling line along the snows,
Where under frozen mists they may be tracked,
Who men and elements provoked to foes,
And Gods: they were of god and beast compact:
Abhorred of all. Yet, how they sucked the teats
Of Carnage, thirsty issue of their dam,
Whose eagles, angrier than their oriflamme,
Flushed the vext earth with blood, green earth forgets.
The gay young generations mask her grief;
Where bled her children hangs the loaded sheaf.
Forgetful is green earth; the Gods alone
Remember everlastingly: they strike
Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
By their great memories the Gods are known.

VI

They are with her now, and in her ears, and known.
’Tis they that cast her to the dust for Strength,
Their slave, to feed on her fair body’s length,
That once the sweetest and the proudest shone;
Scoring for hideous dismemberment
Her limbs, as were the anguish-taking breath
Gone out of her in the insufferable descent
From her high chieftainship; as were she death,
Who hears a voice of justice, feels the knife
Of torture, drinks all ignominy of life.
They are with her, and the painful Gods might weep,
If ever rain of tears came out of heaven
To flatter Weakness and bid conscience sleep,
Viewing the woe of this Immortal, driven
For the soul’s life to drain the maddening cup
Of her own children’s blood implacably:
Unsparing even as they to furrow up
The yellow land to likeness of a sea:

Page 4984

The bountiful fair land of vine and grain,
Of wit and grace and ardour, and strong roots,
Fruits perishable, imperishable fruits;
Furrowed to likeness of the dim grey main
Behind the black obliterating cyclone.

VII

Behold, the Gods are with her, and are known.
Whom they abandon misery persecutes
No more: them half-eyed apathy may loan
The happiness of pitiable brutes.
Whom the just Gods abandon have no light,
No ruthless light of introspective eyes
That in the midst of misery scrutinize
The heart and its iniquities outright.
They rest, they smile and rest; have earned perchance
Of ancient service quiet for a term;
Quiet of old men dropping to the worm;
And so goes out the soul. But not of France.
She cries for grief, and to the Gods she cries,
For fearfully their loosened hands chastize,
And icily they watch the rod's caress
Ravage her flesh from scourges merciless,
But she, inveterate of brain, discerns
That Pity has as little place as Joy
Among their roll of gifts; for Strength she yearns.
For Strength, her idol once, too long her toy.
Lo, Strength is of the plain root-Virtues born:
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
It is the offspring of the modest years,
The gift of sire to son, thro' those firm laws
Which we name Gods; which are the righteous cause,
The cause of man, and manhood's ministers.
Could France accept the fables of her priests,
Who blest her banners in this game of beasts,
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede
To violate its laws in her sore need,
She would find comfort in their opiates:
Mother of Reason! can she cheat the Fates?

Would she, the champion of the open mind,
The Omnipotent's prime gift—the gift of growth —
Consent even for a night-time to be blind,
And sink her soul on the delusive sloth,
For fruits ethereal and material, both,
In peril of her place among mankind?
The Mother of the many Laughters might
Call one poor shade of laughter in the light
Of her unwavering lamp to mark what things
The world puts faith in, careless of the truth:
What silly puppet-bodies danced on strings,
Attached by credence, we appear in sooth,
Demanding intercession, direct aid,
When the whole tragic tale hangs on a broken blade!

She swung the sword for centuries; in a day
It slipped her, like a stream cut off from source.
She struck a feeble hand, and tried to pray,
Clamoured of treachery, and had recourse

Page 4985

To drunken outcries in her dream that Force
Needed but hear her shouting to obey.
Was she not formed to conquer? The bright plumes
Of crested vanity shed graceful nods:
Transcendent in her foundries, Arts and looms,
Had France to fear the vengeance of the Gods?
Her faith was on her battle-roll of names
Sheathed in the records of old war; with dance
And song she thrilled her warriors and her dames,
Embracing her Dishonour: gave him France
From head to foot, France present and to come,
So she might hear the trumpet and the drum —
Bellona and Bacchante! rushing forth
On yon stout marching Schoolmen of the North.

Inveterate of brain, well knows she why
Strength failed her, faithful to himself the first:
Her dream is done, and she can read the sky,
And she can take into her heart the worst
Calamity to drug the shameful thought
Of days that made her as the man she served
A name of terror, but a thing unnerved:
Buying the trickster, by the trickster bought,
She for dominion, he to patch a throne.

VIII

Henceforth of her the Gods are known,
Open to them her breast is laid.
Inveterate of brain, heart-valiant,
Never did fairer creature pant
Before the altar and the blade!

IX

Swift fall the blows, and men upbraid,
And friends give echo blunt and cold,
The echo of the forest to the axe.
Within her are the fires that wax
For resurrection from the mould.

X

She snatched at heaven's flame of old,
And kindled nations: she was weak:
Frail sister of her heroic prototype,
The Man; for sacrifice unripe,
She too must fill a Vulture's beak.
Deride the vanquished, and acclaim
The conqueror, who stains her fame,
Still the Gods love her, for that of high aim
Is this good France, the bleeding thing they stripe.

XI

She shall rise worthier of her prototype
Thro' her abasement deep; the pain that runs
From nerve to nerve some victory achieves.
They lie like circle-strewn soaked Autumn-leaves
Which stain the forest scarlet, her fair sons!
And of their death her life is: of their blood
From many streams now urging to a flood,
No more divided, France shall rise afresh.
Of them she learns the lesson of the flesh:-
The lesson writ in red since first Time ran,
A hunter hunting down the beast in man:
That till the chasing out of its last vice,
The flesh was fashioned but for sacrifice.

Page 4986

Immortal Mother of a mortal host!
Thou suffering of the wounds that will not slay,
Wounds that bring death but take not life away! —
Stand fast and hearken while thy victors boast:
Hearken, and loathe that music evermore.
Slip loose thy garments woven of pride and shame:
The torture lurks in them, with them the blame
Shall pass to leave thee purer than before.
Undo thy jewels, thinking whence they came,
For what, and of the abominable name
Of her who in imperial beauty wore.

O Mother of a fated fleeting host
Conceived in the past days of sin, and born
Heirs of disease and arrogance and scorn,
Surrender, yield the weight of thy great ghost,
Like wings on air, to what the heavens proclaim
With trumpets from the multitudinous mounds
Where peace has filled the hearing of thy sons:
Albeit a pang of dissolution rounds
Each new discernment of the undying ones,
Do thou stoop to these graves here scattered wide
Along thy fields, as sunless billows roll;
These ashes have the lesson for the soul.
'Die to thy Vanity, and strain thy Pride,
Strip off thy Luxury: that thou may'st live,
Die to thyself,' they say, 'as we have died
From dear existence and the foe forgive,
Nor pray for aught save in our little space
To warn good seed to greet the fair earth's face.'
O Mother! take their counsel, and so shall
The broader world breathe in on this thy home,
Light clear for thee the counter-changing dome,
Strength give thee, like an ocean's vast expanse
Off mountain cliffs, the generations all,
Not whirling in their narrow rings of foam,
But as a river forward. Soaring France!
Now is Humanity on trial in thee:
Now may'st thou gather humankind in fee:
Now prove that Reason is a quenchless scroll;
Make of calamity thine aureole,
And bleeding head us thro' the troubles of the sea.

Alsace-Lorraine

I

The sister Hours in circles linked,
Daughters of men, of men the mates,
Are gone on flow with the day that winked,
With the night that spanned at golden gates.
Mothers, they leave us, quickening seed;
They bear us grain or flower or weed,
As we have sown; is nought extinct
For them we fill to be our Fates.
Life of the breath is but the loan;
Passing death what we have sown.

Pearly are they till the pale inherited stain
Deepens in us, and the mirrors they form on their flow
Darken to feature and nature: a volumed chain,
Sequent of issue, in various eddies they show.
Theirs is the Book of the River of Life, to read

Page 4987

Leaf by leaf by reapers of long-sown seed:
There doth our shoot up to light from a spiriting sane
Stand as a tree whereon numberless clusters grow:
Legible there how the heart, with its one false move
Cast Eurydice pallor on all we love.

Our fervid heart has filled that Book in chief;
Our fitful heart a wild reflection views;
Our craving heart of passion suckling grief
Disowns the author’s work it must peruse;
Inconscient in its leap to wreak the deed,
A round of harvests red from crimson seed,
It marks the current Hours show leaf by leaf,
And rails at Destiny; nor traces clues;
Though sometimes it may think what novel light
Will strike their faces when the mind shall write.

II

Succourful daughters of men are the rosed and starred
Revolving Twelves in their fluent germinal rings,
Despite the burden to chasten, abase, depose.
Fallen on France, as the sweep of scythe over sward,
They breathed in her ear their voice of the crystal springs,
That run from a twilight rise, from a twilight close,
Through alternate beams and glooms, rejoicingly young.
Only to Earth’s best loved, at the breathless turns
Where Life in fold of the Shadow reclines unstrung,
And a ghostly lamp of their moment’s union burns,
Will such pure notes from the fountain-head be sung.

Voice of Earth’s very soul to the soul she would see renewed:
A song that sought no tears, that laid not a touch on the breast
Sobbing aswoon and, like last foxgloves’ bells upon ferns
In sandy alleys of woodland silence, shedding to bare.
Daughters of Earth and men, they piped of her natural brood;
Her patient helpful four-feet; wings on the flit or in nest;
Paws at our old-world task to scoop a defensive lair;
Snouts at hunt through the scented grasses; enhavened scuts
Flashing escape under show of a laugh nigh the mossed burrow-mouth.
Sack-like droop bronze pears on the nailed branch-frontage of huts,
To greet those wedded toilers from acres where sweat is a shower.

Snake, cicada, lizard, on lavender slopes up South,
Pant for joy of a sunlight driving the fielders to bower.
Sharpened in silver by one chance breeze is the olive’s grey;
A royal-mantle floats, a red fritillary hies;
The bee, for whom no flower of garden or wild has nay,
Noises, heard if but named, so hot is the trade he plies.
Processions beneath green arches of herbage, the long colonnades;
Laboured mounds that a foot or a wanton stick may subvert;
Homely are they for a lowly look on bedewed grass-blades,
On citied fir-droppings, on twisted wreaths of the worm in dirt.
Does nought so loosen

Page 4988

our sight from the despot heart, to receive
Balm of a sound Earth's primary heart at its active beat:
The motive, yet servant, of energy; simple as morn and eve;
Treasureless, fetterless; free of the bonds of a great conceit:
Unwounded even by cruel blows on a body that writhes;
Nor whimpering under misfortune; elusive of obstacles; prompt
To quit any threatened familiar domain seen doomed by the scythes;
Its day's hard business done, the score to the good accompt.
Creatures of forest and mead, Earth's essays in being, all kinds
Bound by the navel-knot to the Mother, never astray,
They in the ear upon ground will pour their intuitive minds,
Cut man's tangles for Earth's first broad rectilinear way:
Admonishing loftier reaches, the rich adventurous shoots,
Pushes of tentative curves, embryonic upwreathings in air;
Not always the sprouts of Earth's root-Laws preserving her brutes;
Oft but our primitive hungers licentious in fine and fair.

Yet the like aerial growths may chance be the delicate sprays,
Infant of Earth's most urgent in sap, her fierier zeal
For entry on Life's upper fields: and soul thus flourishing pays
The martyr's penance, mark for brutish in man to heel.

Her, from a nerveless well among stagnant pools of the dry,
Through her good aim at divine, shall commune with Earth remake;
Fraternal unto sororial, her, where abashed she may lie,
Divinest of man shall clasp; a world out of darkness awake,
As it were with the Resurrection's eyelids uplifted, to see
Honour in shame, in substance the spirit, in that dry fount
Jets of the songful ascending silvery-bright water-tree
Spout, with our Earth's unbaffled resurgent desire for the mount,
Though broken at intervals, clipped, and barren in seeming it be.
For this at our nature arises rejuvenescent from Earth,
However respersive the blow and nigh on infernal the fall,
The chastisement drawn down on us merited: are we of worth
Amid our satanic excrescences, this, for the less than a call,
Will Earth reprime, man cherish; the God who is in us and round,
Consenting, the God there seen. Impiety speaks despair;
Religion the virtue of serving as things of the furrowy ground,
Debtors for breath while breath with our fellows in service we
share.
Not such of the crowned discrowned
Can Earth or humanity spare;
Such not the God let die.

III

Eastward of Paris morn is high;
And darkness on that Eastward side
The heart of France beholds: a thorn
Is in her frame where shines the morn:
A rigid wave usurps her sky,
With eagle crest and eagle-eyed
To scan what wormy wrinkles

Page 4989

hint

Her forces gathering: she the thrown
From station, lopped of an arm, astounded, lone,
Reading late History as a foul misprint:
Imperial, Angelical,
At strife commingled in her frame convulsed;
Shame of her broken sword, a ravening gall;
Pain of the limb where once her warm blood pulsed;
These tortures to distract her underneath
Her whelmed Aurora’s shade. But in that space
When lay she dumb beside her trampled wreath,
Like an unburied body mid the tombs,
Feeling against her heart life’s bitter probe
For life, she saw how children of her race,
The many sober sons and daughters, plied,
By cottage lamplight through the water-globe,
By simmering stew-pots, by the serious looms,
Afield, in factories, with the birds astir,
Their nimble feet and fingers; not denied
Refreshful chatter, laughter, galliard songs.
So like Earth’s indestructible they were,
That wrestling with its anguish rose her pride,
To feel where in each breast the thought of her,
On whom the circle Hours laid leaded thongs,
Was constant; spoken sometimes in low tone
At lip or in a fluttered look,
A shortened breath: and they were her loved own;
Nor ever did they waste their strength with tears,
For pity of the weeper, nor rebuke,
Though mainly they were charged to pay her debt,
The Mother having conscience in arrears;
Ready to gush the flood of vain regret,
Else hearken to her weaponed children’s moan
Of stifled rage invoking vengeance: hell’s,
If heaven should fail the counter-wave that swells
In blood and brain for retribution swift.
Those helped not: wings to her soul were these who yet
Could welcome day for labour, night for rest,
Enrich her treasury, built of cheerful thrift,
Of honest heart, beyond all miracles;
And likened to Earth’s humblest were Earth’s best.

IV

Brooding on her deep fall, the many strings
Which formed her nature set a thought on Kings,
As aids that might the low-laid cripple lift;
And one among them hummed devoutly leal,
While passed the sighing breeze along her breast.
Of Kings by the festive vanquishers rammed down
Her gorge since fell the Chief, she knew their crown;
Upon her through long seasons was its grasp,
For neither soul's nor body's weal;
As much bestows the robber wasp,
That in the hanging apple makes a meal,
And carves a face of abscess where was fruit
Ripe ruddy. They would blot
Her radiant leap above the slopes acute,
Of summit to celestial; impute
The wanton's aim to her divinest shot;
Bid her walk History

Page 4990

backward over gaps;
Abhor the day of Phrygian caps;
Abjure her guerdon, execrate herself;
The Hapsburg, Hohenzollern, Guelph,
Admire repentant; reverently prostrate
Her person unto the belly-god; of whom
Is inward plenty and external bloom;
Enough of pomp and state
And carnival to quench
The breast's desires of an intemperate wench,
The head's ideas beyond legitimate.

She flung them: she was France: nor with far frown
Her lover from the embrace of her refrained:
But in her voice an interwoven wire,
The exultation of her gross renown,
Struck deafness at her heavens, and they waned
Over a look ill-gifted to aspire.
Wherefore, as an abandonment, irate,
The intemperate summoned up her trumpet days,
Her treasure-galleon's wondrous freight.
The cannon-name she sang and shrieked; transferred
Her soul's allegiance; o'er the Tyrant slurred,
Tranced with the zeal of her first fawning gaze,
To clasp his trophy flags and hail him Saint.

V

She hailed him Saint:
And her Jeanne unsainted, foully sung!
The virgin who conceived a France when funeral glooms
Across a land aquake with sharp disseverance hung:
Conceived, and under stress of battle brought her forth;
Crowned her in purification of feud and foeman's taint;
Taught her to feel her blood her being, know her worth,
Have joy of unity: the Jeanne bescreeched, bescoffed,
Who flamed to ashes, flew up wreaths of faggot fumes;
Through centuries a star in vapour-folds aloft.

For her people to hail her Saint,
Were no lifting of her, Earth's gem,
Earth's chosen, Earth's throb on divine:
In the ranks of the starred she is one,
While man has thought on our line:

No lifting of her, but for them,
Breath of the mountain, beam of the sun
Through mist, out of swamp-fires' lures release,
Youth on the forehead, the rough right way
Seen to be footed: for them the heart's peace,
By the mind's war won for a permanent miracle day.

Her arms below her sword-hilt crossed,
The heart of that high-hallowed Jeanne
Into the furnace-pit she tossed
Before her body knew the flame,
And sucked its essence: warmth for righteous work,
An undivided power to speed her aim.
She had no self but France: the sainted man
No France but self. Him warrior and clerk,
Free of his iron clutch; and him her young,
In whirled imagination mastodonized;
And him her penmen, him her poets; all
For the visioned treasure-galleon astrain;
Sent zenithward on bass and treble tongue,
Till solely through

Page 4991

his glory France was prized.
She who had her Jeanne;
The child of her industrious;
Earth’s truest, earth’s pure fount from the main;
And she who had her one day’s mate,
In the soul’s view illustrious
Past blazonry, her Immaculate,
Those hours of slavish Empire would recall;
Thrill to the rattling anchor-chain
She heard upon a day in ‘I who can’;
Start to the softened, tremulous bugle-blare
Of that Caesarean Italian
Across the storied fields of trampled grain,
As to a Vercingetorix of old Gaul
Blowing the rally against a Caesar’s reign.
Her soul’s protesting sobs she drowned to swear
Fidelity unto the sainted man,
Whose nimbus was her crown; and be again
The foreigner in Europe, known of none,
None knowing; sight to dazzle, voice to stun.
Rearward she stepped, with thirst for Europe’s van;
The dream she nursed a snare,
The flag she bore a pall.

VI

In Nature is no rearward step allowed.
Hard on the rock Reality do we dash
To be shattered, if the material dream propels.
The worship to departed splendour vowed
Conjured a simulacrum, wove her lash,
For the slow measure timed her peal of bells.

Thereof was the cannon-name a mockery round her hills;
For the will of wills,
Its flaccid ape,
Weak as the final echo off a giant’s bawl:
Napoleon for disdain,
His banner steeped in crape.
Thereof the barrier of Alsace-Lorraine;
The frozen billow crested to its fall;
Dismemberment; disfigurement;
Her history blotted; her proud mantle rent;
And ever that one word to reperuse,

With eyes behind a veil of fiery dews;
Knelling the spot where Gallic soil defiled
Showed her sons' valour as a frenzied child
In arms of the mailed man.
Word that her mind must bear, her heart put under ban,
Lest burst it: unto her eyes a ghost,
Incredible though manifest: a scene
Stamped with her new Saint's name: and all his host
A wattled flock the foeman's dogs between!

VII

Mark where a credible ghost pulls bridle to view that bare
Corpse of a field still reddening cloud, and alive in its throes
Beneath her Purgatorial Saint's evocative stare:
Brand on his name, the gulf of his glory, his Legend's close.
A lustreless Phosphor heading for daybeam Night's dead-born,
His underworld eyeballs grip the cast of the land for a fray
Expugnant; swift up the heights, with the Victor's instinctive scorn
Of the trapped below, he rides; he beholds, and a two-fold grey,
Even as the misty sun growing moon that a frost enrings,

Page 4992

Is shroud on the shrouded; he knows him there in the helmeted ranks.
The golden eagles flap lame wings,
The black double-headed are round their flanks.
He is there in midst of the pupils he harried to brains awake, trod into union; lo,
These are his Epic’s tutored Dardans, yon that Rhapsode’s Achaeans to know.
Nor is aught of an equipollent conflict seen, nor the weaker’s flashed device;
Headless is offered a breast to beaks deliberate, formal, assured, precise.
Ruled by the mathematician’s hand, they solve their problem, as on a slate.
This is the ground foremarked, and the day; their leader modestly hazarded date.
His helmeted ranks might be draggers of pools or reapers of plains for the warrior’s guile
Displayed; they haul, they rend, as in some orderly office mercantile.
And a timed artillery speaks full-mouthed on a stuttering feeble reduced to nought.
Can it be France, an army of France, tricked, netted, convulsive, all writhen caught?
Arterial blood of an army’s heart outpoured the Grey Observer sees:
A forest of France in thunder comes, like a landslide hurled off her Pyrenees.
Torrent and forest ramp, roll, sling on for a charge against iron, reason, Fate;
It is gapped through the mass midway, bare ribs and dust ere the helmeted feel its weight.
So the blue billow white-plumed is plunged upon shingle to screaming withdrawal, but snatched,
Waved is the laurel eternal yielded by Death o’er the waste of brave men outmatched.
The France of the fury was there, the thing he had wielded, whose honour was dearer than life;
The Prussia despised, the harried, the trodden, was here; his pupil, the scholar in strife.

He hated to heel, in a spasm of will,
From sleep or debate, a mannikin squire

With head of a merlin hawk and quill
Acrow on an ear. At him rained fire
From a blast of eyeballs hotter than speech,
To say what a deadly poison stuffed
The France here laid in her bloody ditch,
Through the Legend passing human puffed.

Credible ghost of the field which from him descends,
Each dark anniversary day will its father return,
Haling his shadow to spy where the Legend ends,
That penman trumpeter’s part in the wreck discern.

There, with the cup it presents at her lips, she stands,
France, with her future staked on the word it may pledge.
The vengeance urged of desire a reserve countermands;
The patience clasped totters hard on the precipice edge.
Lopped of an arm, mother love for her own springs quick,
To curdle the milk in

Page 4993

her breasts for the young they feed,
At thought of her single hand, and the lost so nigh.
Mother love for her own, who raised her when she lay sick
Nigh death, and would in like fountains fruitlessly bleed,
Withholds the fling of her heart on the further die.

Of love is wisdom. Is it great love, then wise
Will our wild heart be, though whipped unto madness more
By its mentor’s counselling voice than thoughtfully reined.
Desire of the wave for the shore,
Passion for one last agony under skies,
To make her heavens remorseful, she restrained

VIII

On her lost arm love bade her look;
On her one hand to meditate;
The tumult of her blood abate;
Disaster face, derision brook:
Forbade the page of her Historic Muse,
Until her demon his last hold forsook,
And smoothly, with no countenance of hate,
Her conqueror she could scan to measure. Thence
The strange new Winter stream of ruling sense,
Cold, comfortless, but braced to disabuse,
Ran through the mind of this most lowly laid;
From the top billow of victorious War,
Down in the flagless troughs at ebb and flow;
A wreck; her past, her future, both in shade.
She read the things that are;
Reality unaccepted read
For sign of the distraught, and took her blow
To brain; herself read through;
Wherefore her predatory Glory paid
Napoleon ransom knew.
Her nature’s many strings hot gusts did jar
Against the note of reason uttered low,
Ere passionate with duty she might wed,
Compel the bride’s embrace of her stern groom,
Joined at an altar liker to the tomb,
Nest of the Furies their first nuptial bed,
They not the less were mated and proclaimed
The rational their issue. Then she rose.

See how the rush of southern Springtide glows
Oceanic in the chariot-wheel's ascent,
Illuminated with one breath. The maimed,
Tom, tortured, winter-visaged, suddenly
Had stature; to the world's wonderment,
Fair features, grace of mien, nor least
The comic dimples round her April mouth,
Sprung of her intimate humanity.
She stood before mankind the very South
Rapt out of frost to flowery drapery;
Unshadowed save when somewhiles she looked East.

IX

Let but the rational prevail,
Our footing is on ground though all else fail:
Our kiss of Earth is then a plight
To walk within her Laws and have her light.
Choice of the life or death lies in ourselves;
There is no fate but when unreason lours.
This Land the cheerful toiler delves,
The thinker brightens with fine wit,

Page 4994

The lovelier grace as lyric flowers,
Those rosed and starred revolving Twelves
Shall nurse for effort infinite
While leashed to brain the heart of France the Fair
Beats tempered music and its lead subserves.
Washed from her eyes the Napoleonic glare,
Divinely raised by that in her divine,
Not the clear sight of Earth's blunt actual swerves
When her lost look, as on a wave of wine,
Rolls Eastward, and the mother-flag descries
Caress with folds and curves
The fortress over Rhine,
Beneath the one tall spire.
Despite her brooding thought, her nightlong sighs,
Her anguish in desire,
She sees, above the brutish paw
Alert on her still quivering limb —
As little in past time she saw,
Nor when dispieced as prey,
As victrix when abhorred —
A Grand Germania, stout on soil;
Audacious up the ethereal dim;
The forest's Infant; the strong hand for toil;
The patient brain in twilights when astray;
Shrewdest of heads to foil and counterfoil;
The sceptic and devout; the potent sword;
With will and armed to help in hewing way
For Europe's march; and of the most golden chord
Of the Heliconian lyre
Excellent mistress. Yea, she sees, and can admire;
Still seeing in what walks the Gallia leads;
And with what shield upon Alsace-Lorraine
Her wary sister's doubtful look misreads
A mother's throbs for her lost: so loved: so near:
Magnetic. Hard the course for her to steer,
The leap against the sharpened spikes restrain.
For the belted Overshadower hard the course,
On whom devolves the spirit's touchstone, Force:
Which is the strenuous arm, to strike inclined,
That too much adamantine makes the mind;
Forgets it coin of Nature's rich Exchange;

Contracts horizons within present sight:
Amalekite to-day, across its range
Indisputable; to-morrow Simeonite.

X

The mother who gave birth to Jeanne;
Who to her young Angelical sprang;
Who lay with Earth and heard the notes she sang,
And heard her truest sing them; she may reach
Heights yet unknown of nations; haply teach
A thirsting world to learn ’tis ‘she who can.’

She that in History’s Heliaea pleads
The nation flowering conscience o’er the beast;
With heart expurged of rancour, tame of greeds;
With the winged mind from fang and claw released; —
Will such a land be seen? It will be seen; —
Shall stand adjudged our foremost and Earth’s Queen.
Acknowledgement that she of God proceeds
The invisible makes visible, as his priest,
To her is yielded by a world reclaimed.
And stands she mutilated,

Page 4995

fancy-shamed,
Yet strong in arms, yet strong in self-control,
Known valiant, her maternal throbs repressed,
Discarding vengeance, Giant with a soul; —
My faith in her when she lay low
Was fountain; now as wave at flow
Beneath the lights, my faith in God is best; —
On France has come the test
Of what she holds within
Responsive to Life’s deeper springs.
She above the nations blest
In fruitful and in liveliest,
In all that servant earth to heavenly bidding brings,
The devotee of Glory, she may win
Glory despoiling none, enrich her kind,
Illume her land, and take the royal seat
Unto the strong self-conqueror assigned.
But ah, when speaks a loaded breath the double name,
Humanity’s old Foeman winks agrin.
Her constant Angel eyes her heart’s quick beat,
The thrill of shadow coursing through her frame.
Like wind among the ranks of amber wheat.
Our Europe, vowed to unity or torn,
Observes her face, as shepherds note the morn,
And in a ruddy beacon mark an end
That for the flock in their grave hearing rings.
Specked overhead the imminent vulture wings
At poise, one fatal movement indiscreet,
Sprung from the Aetna passions’ mad revolts,
Draws down; the midnight hovers to descend;
And dire as Indian noons of ulcer heat
Anticipating tempest and the bolts,
Hangs curtained terrors round her next day’s door,
Death’s emblems for the breast of Europe flings;
The breast that waits a spark to fire her store.
Shall, then, the great vitality, France,
Signal the backward step once more;
Again a Goddess Fortune trace
Amid the Deities, and pledge to chance
One whom we never could replace?
Now may she tune her nature’s many strings
To noble harmony, be seen, be known.

It was the foreign France, the unruly, feared;
Little for all her witcheries endeared;
Theatrical of arrogance, a sprite
With gaseous vapours overblown,
In her conceit of power ensphered,
Foredoomed to violate and atone;
Her the grim conqueror’s iron might
Avengeing clutched, distrusting rent;
Not that sharp intellect with fire endowed
To cleave our webs, run lightnings through our cloud;
Not virtual France, the France benevolent,
The chivalrous, the many-stringed, sublime
At intervals, and oft in sweetest chime;
Though perilously instrument,
A breast for any having godlike gleam.
This France could no antagonist disesteem,
To spurn at heel and confiscate her brood.
Albeit a waverer between heart and mind,
And laurels won from sky or plucked from blood,
Which wither all the

Page 4996

wreath when intertwined,
This cherishable France she may redeem.
Beloved of Earth, her heart should feel at length
How much unto Earth's offspring it doth owe.
Obstructions are for levelling, have we strength;
'Tis poverty of soul conceived a foe.
Rejected be the wrath that keeps unhealed
Her panting wound; to higher Courts appealed
The wrongs discerned of higher: Europe waits:
She chooses God or gambles with the Fates.
Shines the new Helen in Alsace-Lorraine,
A darker river severs Rhine and Rhone,
Is heard a deadlier Epic of the twain;
We see a Paris burn
Or France Napoleon.

For yet he breathes whom less her heart forswears
While trembles its desire to thwart her mind:
The Tyrant lives in Victory's return.
What figure with recurrent footstep fares
Around those memoried tracks of scarlet mud,
To sow her future from an ashen urn
By lantern-light, as dragons' teeth are sown?
Of bleeding pride the piercing seer is blind.
But, cleared her eyes of that ensanguined scud
Distorting her true features, to be shown
Benignly luminous, one who bears
Humanity at breast, and she might learn
How surely the excelling generous find
Renouncement is possession. Sure
As light enkindles light when heavenly earthly mates,
The flame of pure immits the flame of pure,
Magnanimous magnanimous creates.
So to majestic beauty stricken rears
Hard-visaged rock against the risen glow;
And men are in the secret with the spheres,
Whose glory is celestially to bestow.

Now nation looks to nation, that may live
Their common nurseling, like the torrent's flower,
Shaken by foul Destruction's fast-piled heap.
On France is laid the proud initiative
Of sacrifice in one self-mastering hour,
Whereby more than her lost one will she reap;

Perchance the very lost regain,
To count it less than her superb reward.
Our Europe, where is debtor each to each,
Pass measure of excess, and war is Cain,
Fraternal from the Seaman's beach,
From answering Rhine in grand accord,
From Neva beneath Northern cloud,
And from our Transatlantic Europe loud,
Will hail the rare example for their theme;
Give response, as rich foliage to the breeze;
In their entrusted nurseling know them one:
Like a brave vessel under press of steam,
Abreast the winds and tides, on angry seas,
Plucked by the heavens forlorn of present sun,
Will drive through darkness, and, with faith supreme,
Have sight of haven and the crowded quays.

The Cageing of Ares

[Iliad, v. V. 385—Dedicated to the Council at The Hague.]

Page 4997

How big of breast our Mother Gaea laughed
At sight of her boy Giants on the leap
Each over other as they neighboured home,
Fronting the day's descent across green slopes,
And up fired mountain crags their shadows danced.
Close with them in their fun, she scarce could guess,
Though these two billowy urchins reeked of craft,
It signalled some adventurous master-trick
To set Olympians buzzing in debate,
Lest it might be their godhead undermined,
The Tyranny menaced. Ephialtes high
On shoulders of his brother Otos waved
For the bull-bellowings given to grand good news,
Compact, complexioned in his gleeful roar
While Otos aped the prisoner's wrists and knees,
With doleful sniffs between recurrent howls;
Till Gaea's lap receiving them, they stretched,
And both upon her bosom shaken to speech,
Burst the hot story out of throats of both,
Like rocky head-founts, baffling in their glut
The hurried spout. And as when drifting storm
Disburdened loses clasp of here and yon
A peak, a forest mound, a valley's gleam
Of grass and the river's crooks and snaky coils,
Signification marvellous she caught,
Through gurglings of triumphant jollity,
Which now engulphed and now gave eye; at last
Subsided, and the serious naked deed,
With mountain-cloud of laughter banked around,
Stood in her sight confirmed: she could believe
That these, her sprouts of promise, her most prized,
These two made up of lion, bear and fox,
Her sportive, suckling mammoths, her young joy,
Still by the reckoning infants among men,
Had done the deed to strike the Titan host
In envy dumb, in envious heart elate:
These two combining strength and craft had snared,
Enmeshed, bound fast with thongs, discreetly caged
The blood-shedder, the terrible Lord of War;
Destroyer, ravager, superb in plumes;
The barren furrower of anointed fields;
The scarlet heel in towns, foul smoke to sky,
Her hated enemy, too long her scourge:

Great Ares. And they gagged his trumpet mouth
When they had seized on his implacable spear,
Hugged him to reedy helplessness despite
His godlike fury startled from amaze.
For he had eyed them nearing him in play,
The giant cubs, who gambolled and who snarled,
Unheeding his fell presence, by the mount
Ossa, beside a brushwood cavern; there
On Earth's original fisticuffs they called
For ease of sharp dispute: whereat the God,
Approving, deemed that sometime trained to arms,
Good servitors of Ares they would be,
And ply the pointed spear to dominate
Their rebel restless fellows, villain brood

Page 4998

Vowed to defy Immortals. So it chanced
Amusedly he watched them, and as one
The lusty twain were on him and they had him.
Breath to us, Powers of air, for laughter loud!
Cock of Olympus he, superb in plumes!
Bound like a wheaten sheaf by those two babes!
Because they knew our Mother Gaea loathed him,
Knew him the famine, pestilence and waste;
A desolating fire to blind the sight
With splendour built of fruitful things in ashes;
The gory chariot-wheel on cries for justice;
Her deepest planted and her liveliest voice,
Heard from the babe as from the broken crone.
Behold him in his vessel of bronze encased,
And tumbled down the cave. But rather look —
Ah, that the woman tattler had not sought,
Of all the Gods to let her secret fly,
Hermes, after the thirteen songful months!
Prompting the Dexterous to work his arts,
And shatter earth’s delirious holiday,
Then first, as where the fountain runs a stream,
Resolving to composure on its throbs.
But see her in the Seasons through that year;
That one glad year and the fair opening month.
Had never our Great Mother such sweet face!
War with her, gentle war with her, each day
Her sons and daughters urged; at eve were flung,
On the morrow stood to challenge; in their strength
Renewed, indomitable; whereof they won,
From hourly wrestlings up to shut of lids,
Her ready secret: the abounding life
Returned for valiant labour: she and they
Defeated and victorious turn by turn;
By loss enriched, by overthrow restored.
Exchange of powers of this conflict came;
Defacement none, nor ever squandered force.
Is battle nature’s mandate, here it reigned,
As music unto the hand that smote the strings;
And she the rosier from their showery brows,
They fruitful from her ploughed and harrowed breast.
Back to the primal rational of those

Who suck the teats of milky earth, and clasp
Stability in hatred of the insane,
Man stepped; with wits less fearful to pronounce
The mortal mind's concept of earth's divorced
Above; those beautiful, those masterful,
Those lawless. High they sit, and if descend,
Descend to reap, not sowing. Is it just?
Earth in her happy children asked that word,
Whereto within their breast was her reply.
Those beautiful, those masterful, those lawless,
Enjoy the life prolonged, outleap the years;
Yet they ('twas the Great Mother's voice inspired
The audacious thought), they, glorious over dust,
Outleap not her; disrooted from her soar,
To meet the certain fate of earth's divorced,
And clap lame wings

Page 4999

across a wintry haze,
Up to the farthest bourne: immortal still,
Thenceforth innocuous; lovelier than when ruled
The Tyranny. This her voice within them told,
When softly the Great Mother chid her sons
Not of the giant brood, who did create
Those lawless Gods, first offspring of our brain
Set moving by an abject blood, that waked
To wanton under elements more benign,
And planted aliens on Olympian heights; —
Imagination’s cradle poesy
Become a monstrous pressure upon men; —
Foes of good Gaea; until dispossessed
By light from her, born of the love of her,
Their lordship the illumined brain rejects
For earth’s beneficent, the sons of Law,
Her other name. So spake she in their heart,
Among the wheat-blades proud of stalk; beneath
Young vine-leaves pushing timid fingers forth,
Confidently to cling. And when brown corn
Swayed armied ranks with softened cricket song,
With gold necks bent for any zephyr’s kiss;
When vine-roots daily down a rubble soil
Drank fire of heaven athirst to swell the grape;
When swelled the grape, and in it held a ray,
Rich issue of the embrace of heaven and earth;
The very eye of passion drowsed by excess,
And yet a burning lion for the spring;
Then in that time of general cherishment,
Sweet breathing balm and flutes by cool wood-side,
He the harsh rouser of ire being absent, caged,
Then did good Gaea’s children gratefully
Lift hymns to Gods they judged, but praised for peace,
Delightful Peace, that answers Reason’s call
Harmoniously and images her Law;
Reflects, and though short-lived as then, revives,
In memories made present on the brain
By natural yearnings, all the happy scenes;
The picture of an earth allied to heaven;
Between them the known smile behind black masks;
Rightly their various moods interpreted;
And frolic because toilful children borne

With larger comprehension of Earth’s aim
At loftier, clearer, sweeter, by their aid.

The night-walk

Awakes for me and leaps from shroud
All radiantly the moon’s own night
Of folded showers in streamer cloud;
Our shadows down the highway white
Or deep in woodland woven-boughed,
With yon and yon a stem alight.

I see marauder runagates
Across us shoot their dusky wink;
I hear the parliament of chats
In haws beside the river’s brink;
And drops the vole off alder-banks,
To push his arrow through the stream.
These busy people had our thanks
For tickling sight and sound, but theme
They were not more than breath we drew
Delighted with our world’s

Page 5000

embrace:
The moss-root smell where beeches grew,
And watered grass in breezy space;
The silken heights, of ghostly bloom
Among their folds, by distance draped.
’Twas Youth, rapacious to consume,
That cried to have its chaos shaped:
Absorbing, little noting, still
Enriched, and thinking it bestowed;
With wistful looks on each far hill
For something hidden, something owed.
Unto his mantled sister, Day
Had given the secret things we sought
And she was grave and saintly gay;
At times she fluttered, spoke her thought;
She flew on it, then folded wings,
In meditation passing lone,
To breathe around the secret things,
Which have no word, and yet are known;
Of thirst for them are known, as air
Is health in blood: we gained enough
By this to feel it honest fare;
Impalpable, not barren, stuff.

A pride of legs in motion kept
Our spirits to their task meanwhile,
And what was deepest dreaming slept:
The posts that named the swallowed mile;
Beside the straight canal the hut
Abandoned; near the river’s source
Its infant chirp; the shortest cut;
The roadway missed; were our discourse;
At times dear poets, whom some view
Transcendent or subdued evoked
To speak the memorable, the true,
The luminous as a moon uncloaked;
For proof that there, among earth’s dumb,
A soul had passed and said our best.
Or it might be we chimed on some
Historic favourite’s astral crest,
With part to reverence in its gleam,
And part to rivalry the shout:
So royal, unuttered, is youth’s dream

Of power within to strike without.
But most the silences were sweet,
Like mothers' breasts, to bid it feel
It lived in such divine conceit
As envies aught we stamp for real.

To either then an untold tale
Was Life, and author, hero, we.
The chapters holding peaks to scale,
Or depths to fathom, made our glee;
For we were armed of inner fires,
Unbled in us the ripe desires;
And passion rolled a quiet sea,
Whereon was Love the phantom sail.

At the close

To Thee, dear God of Mercy, both appeal,
Who straightway sound the call to arms. Thou know'st;
And that black spot in each embattled host,
Spring of the blood-stream, later wilt reveal.
Now is it red artillery and white steel;
Till on a day will ring the victor's boast,
That 'tis Thy chosen towers uppermost,
Where Thy rejected grovels under heel.
So in all times of man's descent insane
To brute, did strength and craft combining strike,
Even as a God of Armies, his fell blow.
But at the close he entered Thy domain,
Dear God of Mercy, and if lion-like
He tore the fall'n, the Eternal was his Foe.

Page 5001

A garden Idyl

With sagest craft Arachne worked
Her web, and at a corner lurked,
Awaiting what should plump her soon,
To case it in the death-cocoon.
Sagaciously her home she chose
For visits that would never close;
Inside my chalet-porch her feast
Plucked all the winds but chill North-east.

The finished structure, bar on bar,
Had snatched from light to form a star,
And struck on sight, when quick with dews,
Like music of the very Muse.
Great artists pass our single sense;
We hear in seeing, strung to tense;
Then haply marvel, groan mayhap,
To think such beauty means a trap.
But Nature's genius, even man's
At best, is practical in plans;
Subservient to the needy thought,
However rare the weapon wrought.
As long as Nature holds it good
To urge her creatures' quest for food
Will beauty stamp the just intent
Of weapons upon service bent.
For beauty is a flower of roots
Embedded lower than our boots;
Out of the primal strata springs,
And shows for crown of useful things

Arachne's dream of prey to size
Aspired; so she could nigh despise
The puny specks the breezes round
Supplied, and let them shake unwound;
Assured of her fat fly to come;
Perhaps a blue, the spider's plum;
Who takes the fatal odds in fight,
And gives repast an appetite,
By plunging, whizzing, till his wings
Are webbed, and in the lists he swings,
A shrouded lump, for her to see
Her banquet in her victory.

This matron of the unnumbered threads,
One day of dandelions' heads
Distributing their gray perruques
Up every gust, I watched with looks
Discreet beside the chalet-door;
And gracefully a light wind bore,
Direct upon my webster's wall,
A monster in the form of ball;
The mildest captive ever snared,
That neither struggled nor despaired,
On half the net invading hung,
And plain as in her mother tongue,
While low the weaver cursed her lures,
Remarked, "You have me; I am yours."

Thrice magnified, in phantom shape,
Her dream of size she saw, agape.
Midway the vast round-raying beard
A desiccated midge appeared;
Whose body pricked the name of meal,
Whose hair had growth in earth's unreal;
Provocative of dread and wrath,
Contempt and horror, in one froth,
Inextricable, insensible,
His poison presence there would dwell,
Declaring him her dream fulfilled,
A catch to compliment the skilled;
And she reduced to beaky skin,
Disgraceful among kith and kin

Page 5002

Against her corner, humped and aged,
Arachne wrinkled, past enraged,
Beyond disgust or hope in guile.
Ridiculously volatile
He seemed to her last spark of mind;
And that in pallid ash declined
Beneath the blow by knowledge dealt,
Wherein throughout her frame she felt
That he, the light wind's libertine,
Without a scoff, without a grin,
And mannered like the courtly few,
Who merely danced when light winds blew,
Impervious to beak and claws,
Tradition's ruinous Whitebeard was;
Of whom, as actors in old scenes,
Had grannam weavers warned their weans,
With word, that less than feather-weight,
He smote the web like bolt of Fate.

This muted drama, hour by hour,
I watched amid a world in flower,
Ere yet Autumnal threads had laid
Their gray-blue o'er the grass's blade,
And still along the garden-run
The blindworm stretched him, drunk of sun.
Arachne crouched unmoved; perchance
Her visitor performed a dance;
She puckered thinner; he the same
As when on that light wind he came.

Next day was told what deeds of night
Were done; the web had vanished quite;
With it the strange opposing pair;
And listless waved on vacant air,
For her adieu to heart's content,
A solitary filament.

A reading of life—the vital choice

I

Or shall we run with Artemis
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;

Both give bliss;
Each can torture if divided;
Each claims worship undivided,
In her wake would have us wallow.

II

Youth must offer on bent knees
Homage unto one or other;
Earth, the mother,
This decrees;
And unto the pallid Scyther
Either points us shun we either
Shun or too devoutly follow.

A reading of life—with the huntress

Through the water-eye of night,
Midway between eve and dawn,
See the chase, the rout, the flight
In deep forest; oread, faun,
Goat-foot, antlers laid on neck;
Ravenous all the line for speed.
See yon wavy sparkle beck
Sign of the Virgin Lady's lead.
Down her course a serpent star
Coils and shatters at her heels;
Peals the horn exulting, peals
Plaintive, is it near or far.
Huntress, arrowy to pursue,
In and out of woody glen,
Under cliffs that tear the blue,
Over torrent, over fen,
She and forest, where she skims
Feathery, darken and relume:
Those are her white-lightning limbs
Cleaving loads of leafy gloom.
Mountains hear her and

Page 5003

call back,
Shrewd with night: a frosty wail
Distant: her the emerald vale
Folds, and wonders in her track.
Now her retinue is lean,
Many rearward; streams the chase
Eager forth of covert; seen
One hot tide the rapturous race.
Quiver-charged and crescent-crowned,
Up on a flash the lighted mound
Leaps she, bow to shoulder, shaft
Strung to barb with archer’s craft,
Legs like plaited lyre-chords, feet
Songs to see, past pitch of sweet.
Fearful swiftness they outrun,
Shaggy wildness, grey or dun,
Challenge, charge of tusks elude:
Theirs the dance to tame the rude;
Beast, and beast in manhood tame,
Follow we their silver flame.
Pride of flesh from bondage free,
Reaping vigour of its waste,
Marks her servitors, and she
Sanctifies the unembraced.
Nought of perilous she reeks;
Valour clothes her open breast;
Sweet beyond the thrill of sex;
Hallowed by the sex confessed.
Huntress arrowy to pursue,
Colder she than sunless dew,
She, that breath of upper air;
Ay, but never lyrist sang,
Draught of Bacchus never sprang
Blood the bliss of Gods to share,
High o’er sweep of eagle wings,
Like the run with her, when rings
Clear her rally, and her dart,
In the forest’s cavern heart,
Tells of her victorious aim.
Then is pause and chatter, cheer,
Laughter at some satyr lame,
Looks upon the fallen deer,
Measuring his noble crest;

Here a favourite in her train,
Foremost mid her nymphs, caressed;
All applauded. Shall she reign
Worshipped? O to be with her there!
She, that breath of nimble air,
Lifts the breast to giant power.
Maid and man, and man and maid,
Who each other would devour
Elsewhere, by the chase betrayed,
There are comrades, led by her,
Maid-preserver, man-maker.

A reading of life—with the persuader

Who murmurs, hither, hither: who
Where nought is audible so fills the ear?
Where nought is visible can make appear
A veil with eyes that waver through,
Like twilight’s pledge of blessed night to come,
Or day most golden? All unseen and dumb,
She breathes, she moves, inviting flees,
Is lost, and leaves the thrilled desire
To clasp and strike a slackened lyre,
Till over smiles of hyacinth seas,
Flame in a crystal vessel sails
Beneath a dome of jewelled spray,
For land that drops the rosy day
On nights of throbbing nightingales.

Page 5004

Landward did the wonder flit,
Or heart's desire of her, all earth in it.
We saw the heavens fling down their rose;
On rapturous waves we saw her glide;
The pearly sea-shell half enclose;
The shoal of sea-nymphs flush the tide;
And we, afire to kiss her feet, no more
Behold than tracks along a startled shore,
With brightened edges of dark leaves that feign
An ambush hoped, as heartless night remain.

More closely, warmly: hither, hither! she,
The very she called forth by ripened blood
For its next breath of being, murmurs; she,
Allurement; she, fulfilment; she,
The stream within us urged to flood;
Man's cry, earth's answer, heaven's consent; O she,
Maid, woman and divinity;
Our over-earthly, inner-earthly mate
Unmated; she, our hunger and our fruit
Untasted; she our written fate
Unread; Life's flowering, Life's root:
Unread, divined; unseen, beheld;
The evanescent, ever-present she,
Great Nature's stern necessity
In radiance clothed, to softness quelled;
With a sword's edge of sweetness keen to take
Our breath for bliss, our hearts for fulness break.

The murmur hushes down, the veil is rent.
Man's cry, earth's answer, heaven's consent,
Her form is given to pardoned sight,
And lets our mortal eyes receive
The sovereign loveliness of celestial white;
Adored by them who solitarily pace,
In dusk of the underworld's perpetual eve,
The paths among the meadow asphodel,
Remembering. Never there her face
Is planetary; reddens to shore sea-shell
Around such whiteness the enamoured air
Of noon that clothes her, never there.
Daughter of light, the joyful light,
She stands unveiled to nuptial sight,
Sweet in her disregard of aid

Divine to conquer or persuade.
A fountain jets from moss; a flower
Bends gently where her sunset tresses shower.
By guerdon of her brilliance may be seen
With eyelids unabashed the passion’s Queen.

Shorn of attendant Graces she can use
Her natural snares to make her will supreme.
A simple nymph it is, inclined to muse
Before the leader foot shall dip in stream:
One arm at curve along a rounded thigh;
Her firm new breasts each pointing its own way
A knee half bent to shade its fellow shy,
Where innocence, not nature, signals nay.
The bud of fresh virginity awaits
The wooer, and all roseate will she burst:
She touches on the hour of happy mates;
Still is she unaware she wakens thirst.

Page 5005

And while commanding blissful sight believe
It holds her as a body strained to breast,
Down on the underworld’s perpetual eve
She plunges the possessor dispossessed;
And bids believe that image, heaving warm,
Is lost to float like torch-smoke after flame;
The phantom any breeze blows out of form;
A thirst’s delusion, a defeated aim.

The rapture shed the torture weaves;
The direst blow on human heart she deals:
The pain to know the seen deceives;
Nought true but what insufferably feels.
And stabs of her delicious note,
That is as heavenly light to hearing, heard
Through shelter leaves, the laughter from her throat,
We answer as the midnight’s morning’s bird.

She laughs, she wakens gleeful cries;
In her delicious laughter part revealed;
Yet mother is she more of moans and sighs,
For longings unappeased and wounds unhealed.
Yet would she bless, it is her task to bless:
Yon folded couples, passing under shade,
Are her rich harvest; bidden caress, caress,
Consume the fruit in bloom; not disobeyed.
We dolorous complainers had a dream,
Wrought on the vacant air from inner fire,
We saw stand bare of her celestial beam
The glorious Goddess, and we dared desire.

Thereat are shown reproachful eyes, and lips
Of upward curl to meanings half obscure;
And glancing where a wood-nymph lightly skips
She nods: at once that creature wears her lure.
Blush of our being between birth and death:
Sob of our ripened blood for its next breath:
Her wily semblance nought of her denies;
Seems it the Goddess runs, the Goddess hies,
The generous Goddess yields. And she can arm
Her dwarfed and twisted with her secret charm;
Benevolent as Earth to feed her own.
Fully shall they be fed, if they beseech.
But scorn she has for them that walk alone;

Blanched men, starved women, whom no arts can pleach.
The men as chief of criminals she disdains,
And holds the reason in perceptive thought.
More pitiable, like rivers lacking rains,
Kissing cold stones, the women shrink for drought.
Those faceless discords, out of nature strayed,
Rank of the putrefaction ere decayed,
In impious singles bear the thorny wreaths:
Their lives are where harmonious Pleasure breathes
For couples crowned with flowers that burn in dew.
Comes there a tremor of night's forest horn
Across her garden from the insaner crew,
She darkens to malignity of scorn.
A shiver courses through her garden-grounds:
Grunt of the tusky boar, the baying hounds,
The hunter's shouts, are heard afar, and bring

Page 5006

Dead on her heart her crimsoned flower of Spring.
These, the irreverent of Life’s design,
Division between natural and divine
Would cast; these vaunting barrenness for best,
In veins of gathered strength Life’s tide arrest;
And these because the roses flood their cheeks,
Vow them in nature wise as when Love speaks.
With them is war; and well the Goddess knows
What undermines the race who mount the rose;
How the ripe moment, lodged in slumberous hours,
Enkindled by persuasion overpowers:
Why weak as are her frailer trailing weeds,
The strong when Beauty gleams o’er Nature’s needs,
And timely guile unguarded finds them lie.
They who her sway withstand a sea defy,
At every point of juncture must be proof;
Nor look for mercy from the incessant surge
Her forces mixed of craft and passion urge
For the one whelming wave to spring aloof.
She, tenderness, is pitiless to them
Resisting in her godhead nature’s truth.
No flower their face shall be, but writhen stem;
Their youth a frost, their age the dirge for youth.
These miserably disinclined,
The lamentably unembraced,
Insult the Pleasures Earth designed
To people and beflower the waste.
Wherefore the Pleasures pass them by:
For death they live, in life they die.

Her head the Goddess from them turns,
As from grey mounds of ashes in bronze urns.
She views her quivering couples unconsoled,
And of her beauty mirror they become,
Like orchard blossoms, apple, pear and plum,
Free of the cloud, beneath the flood of gold.
Crowned with wreaths that burn in dew,
Her couples whirl, sun-satiated,
Athirst for shade, they sigh, they wed,
They play the music made of two:
Oldest of earth, earth’s youngest till earth’s end:

Cunninger than the numbered strings,
For melodies, for harmonies,
For mastered discords, and the things
Not vocable, whose mysteries
Are inmost Love’s, Life’s reach of Life extend.

Is it an anguish overflowing shame
And the tongue’s pudency confides to her,
With eyes of embers, breath of incense myrrh,
The woman’s marrow in some dear youth’s name,
Then is the Goddess tenderness
Maternal, and she has a sister’s tones
Benign to soothe intemperate distress,
Divide despair from hope, and sighs from moans.
Her gentleness imparts exhaling ease
To those of her milk-bearer votaries
As warm of bosom-earth as she; of the source
Direct; erratic but in heart’s excess;
Being mortal and ill-matched for Love’s great force;
Like green leaves caught with flames by his impress.
And pray they under skies less overcast,
That swiftly may her star of eve descend,
Her lustrous morning star fly not too fast,
To lengthen blissful night will she befriend.

Page 5007

Unfailing her reply to woman's voice
In supplication instant. Is it man's,
She hears, approves his words, her garden scans,
And him: the flowers are various, he has choice.
Perchance his wound is deep; she listens long;
Enjoys what music fills the plaintive song;
And marks how he, who would be hawk at poise
Above the bird, his plaintive song enjoys.

She reads him when his humbled manhood weeps
To her invoked: distraction is implored.
A smile, and he is up on godlike leaps
Above, with his bright Goddess owned the adored.
His tales of her declare she condescends;
Can share his fires, not always goads and rends:
Moreover, quits a throne, and must enclose
A queenlier gem than woman's wayside rose.
She bends, he quickens; she breathes low, he springs
Enraptured; low she laughs, his woes disperse;
Aloud she laughs and sweeps his varied strings.
'Tis taught him how for touch of mournful verse
Rarely the music made of two ascends,
And Beauty's Queen some other way is won.
Or it may solve the riddle, that she lends
Herself to all, and yields herself to none,
Save heavenliest: though claims by men are raised
In hot assurance under shade of doubt:
And numerous are the images bepraised
As Beauty's Queen, should passion head the rout.

Be sure the ruddy hue is Love's: to woo
Love's Fountain we must mount the ruddy hue.
That is her garden's precept, seen where shines
Her blood-flower, and its unsought neighbour pines.
Daughter of light, the joyful light,
She bids her couples face full East,
Reflecting radiance, even when from her feast
Their outstretched arms brown deserts disunite,
The lion-haunted thickets hold apart.
In love the ruddy hue declares great heart;
High confidence in her whose aid is lent
To lovers lifting the tuned instrument,
Not one of rippled strings and funeral tone.
And doth the man pursue a tightened zone,

Then be it as the Laurel God he runs,
Confirmed to win, with countenance the Sun's.

Should pity bless the tremulous voice of woe
He lifts for pity, limp his offspring show.
For him requiring woman's arts to please
Infantile tastes with babe reluctances,
No race of giants! In the woman's veins
Persuasion ripely runs, through hers the pains.
Her choice of him, should kind occasion nod,
Aspiring blends the Titan with the God;
Yet unto dwarf and mortal, she, submiss
In her high Lady's mandate, yields the kiss;
And is it needed that Love's daintier brute
Be snared as hunter, she will tempt pursuit.
She is great Nature's

Page 5008

ever intimate
In breast, and doth as ready handmaid wait,
Until perverted by her senseless male,
She plays the winding snake, the shrinking snail,
The flying deer, all tricks of evil fame,
Elusive to allure, since he grew tame.

Hence has the Goddess, Nature's earliest Power,
And greatest and most present, with her dower
Of the transcendent beauty, gained repute
For meditated guile. She laughs to hear
A charge her garden's labyrinths scarce confute,
Her garden's histories tell of to all near.
Let it be said, But less upon her guile
Doth she rely for her immortal smile.
Still let the rumour spread, and terror screens
To push her conquests by the simplest means.
While man abjures not lustihead, nor swerves
From earth's good labours, Beauty's Queen he serves.

Her spacious garden and her garden's grant
She offers in reward for handsome cheer:
Choice of the nymphs whose looks will slant
The secret down a dewy leer
Of corner eyelids into haze:
Many a fair Aphrosyne
Like flower-bell to honey-bee:
And here they flicker round the maze
Bewildering him in heart and head:
And here they wear the close demure,
With subtle peeps to reassure:
Others parade where love has bled,
And of its crimson weave their mesh:
Others to snap of fingers leap,
As bearing breast with love asleep.
These are her laughters in the flesh.
Or would she fit a warrior mood,
She lights her seeming unsubdued,
And indicates the fortress-key.
Or is it heart for heart that craves,
She flecks along a run of waves
The one to promise deeper sea.

Bands of her limpid primitives,
Or patterned in the curious braid,
Are the blest man's; and whatsoever he gives,
For what he gives is he repaid.
Good is it if by him 'tis held
He wins the fairest ever welled
From Nature's founts: she whispers it: Even I
Not fairer! and forbids him to deny,
Else little is he lover. Those he clasps,
Intent as tempest, worshipful as prayer, —
And be they doves or be they asps, —
Must seem to him the sovereignty fair;
Else counts he soon among life's wholly tamed.
Him whom from utter savage she reclaimed,
Half savage must he stay, would he be crowned
The lover. Else, past ripeness, deathward bound,
He reasons; and the totterer Earth detests,
Love shuns, grim logic screws in grasp, is he.
Doth man divide divine Necessity
From Joy, between the Queen of Beauty's breasts
A sword is driven; for those most glorious twain
Present her; armed to bless and to constrain.

Page 5009

Of this he perishes; not she, the throned
On rocks that spout their springs to the sacred mounts.
A loftier Reason out of deeper founts
Earth's chosen Goddess bears: by none disowned
While red blood runs to swell the pulse, she boasts,
And Beauty, like her star, descends the sky;
Earth's answer, heaven's consent unto man's cry,
Uplifted by the innumerable hosts.

Quickened of Nature's eye and ear,
When the wild sap at high tide smites
Within us; or benignly clear
To vision; or as the iris lights
On fluctuant waters; she is ours
Till set of man: the dreamed, the seen;
Flushing the world with odorous flowers:
A soft compulsion on terrene
By heavenly: and the world is hers
While hunger after Beauty spurs.

So is it sung in any space
She fills, with laugh at shallow laws
Forbidding love's devised embrace,
The music Beauty from it draws.

A reading of life—the test of manhood

Like a flood river whirled at rocky banks,
An army issues out of wilderness,
With battle plucking round its ragged flanks;
Obstruction in the van; insane excess
Oft at the heart; yet hard the onward stress
Unto more spacious, where move ordered ranks,
And rise hushed temples built of shapely stone,
The work of hands not pledged to grind or slay.
They gave our earth a dress of flesh on bone;
A tongue to speak with answering heaven gave they.
Then was the gracious birth of man's new day;
Divided from the haunted night it shone.

That quiet dawn was Reverence; whereof sprang
Ethereal Beauty in full morningtide.

Another sun had risen to clasp his bride:
It was another earth unto him sang.

Came Reverence from the Huntress on her heights?
From the Persuader came it, in those vales
Whereunto she melodiously invites,
Her troops of eager servitors regales?
Not far those two great Powers of Nature speed
Disciple steps on earth when sole they lead;
Nor either points for us the way of flame.
From him predestined mightier it came;
His task to hold them both in breast, and yield
Their dues to each, and of their war be field.

The foes that in repulsion never ceased,
Must he, who once has been the goodly beast
Of one or other, at whose beck he ran,
Constrain to make him serviceable man;
Offending neither, nor the natural claim
Each pressed, denying, for his true man’s name.

Page 5010

Ah, what a sweat of anguish in that strife
To hold them fast conjoined within him still;
Submissive to his will
Along the road of life!
And marvel not he wavered if at whiles
The forward step met frowns, the backward smiles.
For Pleasure witched him her sweet cup to drain;
Repentance offered ecstasy in pain.
Delicious licence called it Nature’s cry;
Ascetic rigours crushed the fleshly sigh;
A tread on shingle timed his lame advance
Flung as the die of Bacchanalian Chance,
He of the troubled marching army leaned
On godhead visible, on godhead screened;
The radiant roseate, the curtained white;
Yet sharp his battle strained through day, through night.

He drank of fictions, till celestial aid
Might seem accorded when he fawned and prayed;
Sagely the generous Giver circumspect,
To choose for grants the egregious, his elect;
And ever that imagined succour slew
The soul of brotherhood whence Reverence drew.

In fellowship religion has its founts:
The solitary his own God reveres:
Ascend no sacred Mounts
Our hungers or our fears.
As only for the numbers Nature’s care
Is shown, and she the personal nothing heeds,
So to Divinity the spring of prayer
From brotherhood the one way upward leads.
Like the sustaining air
Are both for flowers and weeds.
But he who claims in spirit to be flower,
Will find them both an air that doth devour.

Whereby he smelt his treason, who implored
External gifts bestowed but on the sword;
Beheld himself, with less and less disguise,
Through those blood-cataracts which dimmed his eyes,
His army’s foe, condemned to strive and fail;
See a black adversary’s ghost prevail;

Never, though triumphs hailed him, hope to win
While still the conflict tore his breast within.

Out of that agony, misread for those
Imprisoned Powers warring unappeased,
The ghost of his black adversary rose,
To smother light, shut heaven, show earth diseased.
And long with him was wrestling ere emerged
A mind to read in him the reflex shade
Of its fierce torment; this way, that way urged;
By craven compromises hourly swayed.

Crouched as a nestling, still its wings untried,
The man’s mind opened under weight of cloud.
To penetrate the dark was it endowed;
Stood day before a vision shooting wide.
Whereat the spectral enemy lost form;
The traversed wilderness exposed its track.
He felt the far advance in looking back;
Thence trust in his foot forward through the storm.

Page 5011

Under the low-browed tempest’s eye of ire,
That ere it lightened smote a coward heart,
Earth nerved her chastened son to hail athwart
All ventures perilous his shrouded Sire;
A stranger still, religiously divined;
Not yet with understanding read aright.
But when the mind, the cherishable mind,
The multitude’s grave shepherd, took full flight,
Himself as mirror raised among his kind,
He saw, and first of brotherhood had sight:
Knew that his force to fly, his will to see,
His heart enlarged beyond its ribbed domain,
Had come of many a grip in mastery,
Which held conjoined the hostile rival twain,
And of his bosom made him lord, to keep
The starry roof of his unruffled frame
Awake to earth, to heaven, and plumb the deep
Below, above, aye with a wistful aim.

The mastering mind in him, by tempests blown,
By traitor inmates baited, upward burned;
Perforce of growth, the Master mind discerned,
The Great Unseen, nowise the Dark Unknown.
To whom unwittingly did he aspire
In wilderness, where bitter was his need:
To whom in blindness, as an earthy seed
For light and air, he struck through crimson mire.
But not ere he upheld a forehead lamp,
And viewed an army, once the seeming doomed,
All choral in its fruitful garden camp,
The spiritual the palpable illumed.

This gift of penetration and embrace,
His prize from tidal battles lost or won,
Reveals the scheme to animate his race:
How that it is a warfare but begun;
Unending; with no Power to interpose;
No prayer, save for strength to keep his ground,
Heard of the Highest; never battle’s close,
The victory complete and victor crowned:
Nor solace in defeat, save from that sense
Of strength well spent, which is the strength renewed.
In manhood must he find his competence;
In his clear mind the spiritual food:

God being there while he his fight maintains;
Throughout his mind the Master Mind being there,
While he rejects the suicide despair;
Accepts the spur of explicable pains;
Obedient to Nature, not her slave:
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows;
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave,
And bids the Passions on the Pleasures browse:-
Whence Evil in a world unread before;
That mystery to simple springs resolved.
His God the Known, diviner to adore,
Shows Nature’s savage riddles kindly solved.
Inconscient, insensitive, she reigns
In iron laws, though rapturous fair her face.
Back to the primal brute shall he retrace
His path, doth he permit to force her chains
A soft Persuader coursing through his veins,
An icy Huntress stringing to the chase:
What one the flash disdains;
What one so gives it grace.

Page 5012

But is he rightly manful in her eyes,
A splendid bloodless knight to gain the skies,
A blood-hot son of Earth by all her signs,
Desireing and desireable he shines;
As peaches, that have caught the sun's uprise
And kissed warm gold till noonday, even as vines.
Earth fills him with her juices, without fear
That she will cast him drunken down the steeps.
All woman is she to this man most dear;
He sows for bread, and she in spirit reaps:
She conscient, she sensitive, in him;
With him enwound, his brave ambition hers:
By him humaner made; by his keen spurs
Pricked to race past the pride in giant limb,
Her crazy adoration of big thews,
Proud in her primal sons, when crags they hurled,
Were thunder spitting lightnings on the world
In daily deeds, and she their evening Muse.

This man, this hero, works not to destroy;
This godlike—as the rock in ocean stands; —
He of the myriad eyes, the myriad hands
Creative; in his edifice has joy.
How strength may serve for purity is shown
When he himself can scourge to make it clean.
Withal his pitch of pride would not disown
A sober world that walks the balanced mean
Between its tempters, rarely overthrown:
And such at times his army's march has been.

Near is he to great Nature in the thought
Each changing Season intimately saith,
That nought save apparition knows the death;
To the God-lighted mind of man 'tis nought.
She counts not loss a word of any weight;
It may befal his passions and his greeds
To lose their treasures, like the vein that bleeds,
But life gone breathless will she reinstate.

Close on the heart of Earth his bosom beats,
When he the mandate lodged in it obeys,
Alive to breast a future wrapped in haze,
Strike camp, and onward, like the wind's cloud-fleets.
Unresting she, unresting he, from change

To change, as rain of cloud, as fruit of rain;
She feels her blood-tree throbbing in her grain,
Yet skyward branched, with loftier mark and range.

No miracle the sprout of wheat from clod,
She knows, nor growth of man in grisly brute;
But he, the flower at head and soil at root,
Is miracle, guides he the brute to God.
And that way seems he bound; that way the road,
With his dark-lantern mind, unled, alone,
Wearifully through forest-tracts unsown,
He travels, urged by some internal goad.

Dares he behold the thing he is, what thing
He would become is in his mind its child;
Astir, demanding birth to light and wing;
For battle prompt, by pleasure unbeguiled.
So moves he forth in

Page 5013

faith, if he has made
His mind God’s temple, dedicate to truth.
Earth’s nourishing delights, no more gainsaid,
He tastes, as doth the bridegroom rich in youth.
Then knows he Love, that beckons and controls;
The star of sky upon his footway cast;
Then match in him who holds his tempters fast,
The body’s love and mind’s, whereof the soul’s.
Then Earth her man for woman finds at last,
To speed the pair unto her goal of goals.

Or is’t the widowed’s dream of her new mate?
Seen has she virulent days of heat in flood;
The sly Persuader snaky in his blood;
With her the barren Huntress alternate;
His rough refractory off on kicking heels
To rear; the man dragged rearward, shamed, amazed;
And as a torrent stream where cattle grazed,
His tumbled world. What, then, the faith she feels?
May not his aspect, like her own so fair
Reflexively, the central force belie,
And he, the once wild ocean storming sky,
Be rebel at the core? What hope is there?

’Tis that in each recovery he preserves,
Between his upper and his nether wit,
Sense of his march ahead, more brightly lit;
He less the shaken thing of lusts and nerves;
With such a grasp upon his brute as tells
Of wisdom from that vile relapsing spun.
A Sun goes down in wasted fire, a Sun
Resplendent springs, to faith refreshed compels.

The hueless love

Unto that love must we through fire attain,
Which those two held as breath of common air;
The hands of whom were given in bond elsewhere;
Whom Honour was untroubled to restrain.

Midway the road of our life’s term they met,
And one another knew without surprise;
Nor cared that beauty stood in mutual eyes;
Nor at their tardy meeting nursed regret.

To them it was revealed how they had found
The kindred nature and the needed mind;
The mate by long conspiracy designed;
The flower to plant in sanctuary ground.

Avowed in vigilant solicitude
For either, what most lived within each breast
They let be seen: yet every human test
Demanding righteousness approved them good.

She leaned on a strong arm, and little feared
Abandonment to help if heaved or sank
Her heart at intervals while Love looked blank,
Life rosier were she but less revered.

An arm that never shook did not obscure
Her woman’s intuition of the bliss —
Their tempter’s moment o’er the black abyss,
Across the narrow plank—he could abjure.

Then came a day that clipped for him the thread,
And their first touch of lips, as he lay cold,
Was all of earthly in their love untold,
Beyond all earthly known to them who wed.

Page 5014

So has there come the gust at South-west flung
By sudden volt on eves of freezing mist,
When sister snowflake sister snowdrop kissed,
And one passed out, and one the bell-head hung.

Union in disseverance

Sunset worn to its last vermilion he;
She that star overhead in slow descent:
That white star with the front of angel she;
He undone in his rays of glory spent

Halo, fair as the bow-shot at his rise,
He casts round her, and knows his hour of rest
Incomplete, were the light for which he dies,
Less like joy of the dove that wings to nest.

Lustrous momently, near on earth she sinks;
Life’s full throb over breathless and abased:
Yet stand they, though impalpable the links,
One, more one than the bridally embraced.

Song in the songless

They have no song, the sedges dry,
And still they sing.
It is within my breast they sing,
As I pass by.
Within my breast they touch a string,
They wake a sigh.
There is but sound of sedges dry;
In me they sing.

The burden of strength

If that thou hast the gift of strength, then know
Thy part is to uplift the trodden low;
Else in a giant’s grasp until the end
A hopeless wrestler shall thy soul contend.

The main regret

[Written for the Charing Cross Album]

I

Seen, too clear and historic within us, our sins of omission
Frown when the Autumn days strike us all ruthlessly bare.
They of our mortal diseases find never healing physician;
Errors they of the soul, past the one hope to repair.

II

Sunshine might we have been unto seed under soil, or have scattered
Seed to ascendant suns brighter than any that shone.
Even the limp-legged beggar a sick desperado has flattered
Back to a half-sloughed life cheered by the mere human tone.

Alternation

Between the fountain and the rill
I passed, and saw the mighty will
To leap at sky; the careless run,
As earth would lead her little son.

Beneath them throbs an urgent well,
That here is play, and there is war.
I know not which had most to tell
Of whence we spring and what we are.

Forest history

I

Beneath the vans of doom did men pass in.
Heroic who came out; for round them hung
A wavering phantom's red volcano tongue,
With league-long lizard tail and fishy fin:

II

Old Earth's original Dragon; there retired
To his last fastness; overthrown by few.
Him a laborious thrust of roadway slew.
Then man to play devorant straight was fired.

Page 5015

III

More intimate became the forest fear
While pillared darkness hatched malicious life
At either elbow, wolf or gnome or knife
And wary slid the glance from ear to ear.

IV

In chillness, like a clouded lantern-ray,
The forest's heart of fog on mossed morass,
On purple pool and silky cotton-grass,
Revealed where lured the swallower byway.

V

Dead outlook, flattened back with hard rebound
Off walls of distance, left each mounted height.
It seemed a giant hag-fiend, churning spite
Of humble human being, held the ground.

VI

Through friendless wastes, through treacherous woodland, slow
The feet sustained by track of feet pursued
Pained steps, and found the common brotherhood
By sign of Heaven indifferent, Nature foe.

VII

Anon a mason's work amazed the sight,
And long-frocked men, called Brothers, there abode.
They pointed up, bowed head, and dug and sowed;
Whereof was shelter, loaf, and warm firelight.

VIII

What words they taught were nails to scratch the head.
Benignant works explained the chanting brood.
Their monastery lit black solitude,
As one might think a star that heavenward led.

IX

Uprose a fairer nest for weary feet,
Like some gold flower nightly inward curled,
Where gentle maidens fled a roaring world,
Or played with it, and had their white retreat.

X

Into big books of metal clasps they pored.
They governed, even as men; they welcomed lays.
The treasures women are whose aim is praise,
Was shown in them: the Garden half restored.

XI

A deluge billow scoured the land off seas,
With widened jaws, and slaughter was its foam.
For food, for clothing, ambush, refuge, home,
The lesser savage offered bogs and trees.

XII

Whence reverence round grey-haired story grew:
And inmost spots of ancient horror shone
As temples under beams of trials bygone;
For in them sang brave times with God in view.

XIII

Till now trim homesteads bordered spaces green,
Like night’s first little stars through clearing showers.
Was rumoured how a castle’s falcon towers
The wilderness commanded with fierce mien.

XIV

Therein a serious Baron stuck his lance;
For minstrel songs a beauteous Dame would pout.
Gay knights and sombre, felon or devout,
Pricked onward, bound for their unsung romance.

XV

It might be that two errant lords across
The block of each came edged, and at sharp cry
They charged forthwith, the better man to try.
One rode his way, one couched on quiet moss.

Page 5016

XVI

Perchance a lady sweet, whose lord lay slain,
The robbers into gruesome durance drew.
Swift should her hero come, like lightning’s blue!
She prayed for him, as crackling drought for rain.

XVII

As we, that ere the worst her hero haps,
Of Angels guided, nigh that loathly den:
A toady cave beside an ague fen,
Where long forlorn the lone dog whines and yaps.

XVIII

By daylight now the forest fear could read
Itself, and at new wonders chuckling went.
Straight for the roebuck’s neck the bowman spent
A dart that laughed at distance and at speed.

XIX

Right loud the bugle’s hallali elate
Rang forth of merry dingles round the tors;
And deftest hand was he from foreign wars,
But soon he hailed the home-bred yeoman mate.

XX

Before the blackbird pecked the turf they woke;
At dawn the deer’s wet nostrils blew their last.
To forest, haunt of runs and prime repast,
With paying blows, the yokel strained his yoke.

XXI

The city urchin mooned on forest air,
On grassy sweeps and flying arrows, thick
As swallows o’er smooth streams, and sighed him sick
For thinking that his dearer home was there.

XXII

Familiar, still unseized, the forest sprang
An old-world echo, like no mortal thing.
The hunter’s horn might wind a jocund ring,
But held in ear it had a chilly clang.

XXIII

Some shadow lurked aloof of ancient time;
Some warning haunted any sound prolonged,
As though the leagues of woodland held them wronged
To hear an axe and see a township climb.

XXIV

The forest’s erewhile emperor at eve
Had voice when lowered heavens drummed for gales.
At midnight a small people danced the dales,
So thin that they might dwindle through a sieve

XXV

Ringed mushrooms told of them, and in their throats,
Old wives that gathered herbs and knew too much.
The pensioned forester beside his crutch,
Struck showers from embers at those bodeful notes.

XXVI

Came then the one, all ear, all eye, all heart;
Devourer, and insensibly devoured;
In whom the city over forest flowered,
The forest wreathed the city’s drama-mart.

XXVII

There found he in new form that Dragon old,
From tangled solitudes expelled; and taught
How blindly each its antidote besought;
For either’s breath the needs of either told.

XXVIII

Now deep in woods, with song no sermon’s drone,
He showed what charm the human concourse works:
Amid the press of men, what virtue lurks
Where bubble sacred wells of wildness lone.

Page 5017

XXIX

Our conquest these: if haply we retain
The reverence that ne’er will overrun
Due boundaries of realms from Nature won,
Nor let the poet’s awe in rapture wane.

The invective of Achilles—Iliad, i. 149

“Heigh me! brazen of front, thou glutton for plunder, how can one,
Servant here to thy mandates, heed thee among our Achaians,
Either the mission hie on or stoutly do fight with the foemen?
I, not hither I fared on account of the spear-armed Trojans,
Pledged to the combat; they unto me have in nowise a harm done;
Never have they, of a truth, come lifting my horses or oxen;
Never in deep-soiled Phthia, the nurser of heroes, my harvests
Ravaged, they; for between us is numbered full many a darksome
Mountain, ay, therewith too the stretch of the windy sea-waters.
O hugely shameless! thee did we follow to hearten thee, justice
Pluck from the Dardans for him, Menelaos, thee too, thou dog-eyed!
Whereof little thy thought is, nought whatever thou reckest.
Worse, it is thou whose threat ’tis to ravish my prize from me,
portion
Won with much labour, the which my gift from the sons of Achaia.
Never, in sooth, have I known my prize equal thine when Achaians
Gave some flourishing populous Trojan town up to pillage.
Nay, sure, mine were the hands did most in the storm of the combat,
Yet when came peradventure share of the booty amongst us,
Bigger to thee went the prize, while I some small blessed thing bore
Off to the ships, my share of reward for my toil in the bloodshed!
So now go I to Phthia, for better by much it beseems me
Homeward go with my beaked ships now, and I hold not in prospect,
I being outraged, thou mayst gather here plunder and wealth-store.”

The invective of Achilles—Iliad, i. 225

“Bibber besotted, with scowl of a cur, having heart of a deer, thou! Never to join to thy warriors armed for the press of the conflict, Never for ambush forth with the princeliest sons of Achaia Dared thy soul, for to thee that thing would have looked as a death-stroke. Sooth, more easy it seems, down the lengthened array of Achaians, Snatch at the prize of the one whose voice has been lifted against thee. Ravening king of the folk, for that thou hast thy rule over abjects; Else, son of Atreus, now were this outrage on me thy last one. Nay, but I tell thee, and I do swear a big oath on it likewise: Yea, by the sceptre here, and it surely bears branches and leaf-buds Never again, since first it

was lopped from its trunk on the mountains, No more sprouting; for round it all clean has the sharp metal clipped off Leaves and the bark; ay, verify now do the sons of Achaia, Guardian hands of the counsels of Zeus, pronouncing the judgement,

Page 5018

Hold it aloft; so now unto thee shall the oath have its portent; Loud will the cry for Achilles burst from the sons of Achaia Throughout the army, and thou chafe powerless, though in an anguish, How to give succour when vast crops down under man-slaying Hector Tumble expiring; and thou deep in thee shalt tear at thy heart- strings, Rage-wrung, thou, that in nought thou didst honour the flower of Achaians."

Marshalling of the Achaians—Iliad, ii 455

Like as a terrible fire feeds fast on a forest enormous, Up on a mountain height, and the blaze of it radiates round far, So on the bright blest arms of the host in their march did the splendour Gleam wide round through the circle of air right up to the sky- vault. They, now, as when swarm thick in the air multitudinous winged flocks, Be it of geese or of cranes or the long-necked troops of the wild- swans, Off that Asian mead, by the flow of the waters of Kaistros; Hither and yon fly they, and rejoicing in pride of their pinions, Clamour, shaped to their ranks, and the mead all about them resoundeth; So those numerous tribes from their ships and their shelterings poured forth On that plain of Scamander, and horrible rumbled beneath them Earth to the quick-paced feet of the men and the tramp of the horse- hooves. Stopped they then on the fair-flower'd field of Scamander, their thousands Many as leaves and the blossoms born of the flowerful season. Even as countless hot-pressed flies in their multitudes traverse, Clouds of them, under some herdsman's wonning, where then are the milk-pails Also, full of their milk, in the bountiful season of spring-time; Even so thickly the long-haired sons of Achaia the plain held, Prompt for the dash at the Trojan host, with the passion to crush them. Those, likewise, as the goatherds, eyeing their vast flocks of goats, know Easily one from the other when all get mixed o'er the pasture, So did the chieftains rank them here there in their places for onslaught, Hard on the push of the fray; and among them King Agamemnon, He, for his eyes and his head, as when Zeus glows glad in his thunder, He with the girdle of Ares, he with the breast of Poseidon.

Agamemnon in the fight—Iliad, xi, 148

These, then, he left, and away where ranks were now clashing the thickest, Onward rushed, and with him rushed all of the bright-greaved Achaians. Foot then footmen slew, that were flying from direful compulsion, Horse at the horsemen (up from off under them mounted the dust- cloud, Up off the plain, raised up cloud-thick by the thundering horse- hooves) Hewed with the sword's sharp edge; and so meanwhile Lord Agamemnon Followed, chasing and slaughtering aye, on-urgeing the Argives.

Now, as when fire voracious catches the unclipped wood-land, This way bears it and that the great whirl of the wind, and the scrubwood Stretches uptorn, flung forward alength by the fire's fury rageing, So beneath Atreides

Page 5019

Agamemnon heads of the scattered Trojans fell; and in numbers amany the horses, neck-stiffened, Rattled their vacant cars down the roadway gaps of the war-field, Missing the blameless charioteers, but, for these, they were outstretched Flat upon earth, far dearer to vultures than to their home-mates.

Paris and diomedes—Iliad, xi, 378

So he, with a clear shout of laughter, Forth of his ambush leapt, and he vaunted him, uttering thiswise: “Hit thou art! not in vain flew the shaft; how by rights it had pierced thee Into the undermost gut, therewith to have rived thee of life-breath! Following that had the Trojans plucked a new breath from their direst, They all frighted of thee, as the goats bleat in flight from a lion.” Then unto him untroubled made answer stout Diomedes: “Bow-puller, jiber, thy bow for thy glorying, spyer at virgins! If that thou dared’st face me here out in the open with weapons, Nothing then would avail thee thy bow and thy thick shot of arrows. Now thou plumest thee vainly because of a graze of my footsole; Reck I as were that stroke from a woman or some pettish infant. Aye flies blunted the dart of the man that’s emasculate, noughtworth! Otherwise hits, forth flying from me, and but strikes it the slightest, My keen shaft, and it numbers a man of the dead fallen straightway. Torn, troth, then are the cheeks of the wife of that man fallen slaughtered, Orphans his babes, full surely he reddens the earth with his blood- drops, Rotting, round him the birds, more numerous they than the women.”

Hypnos on Ida—Iliad, xiv, 283

They then to fountain-abundant Ida, mother of wild beasts, Came, and they first left ocean to fare over mainland at Lektos, Where underneath of their feet waved loftiest growths of the woodland. There hung Hypnos fast, ere the vision of Zeus was observant, Mounted upon a tall pine-tree, tallest of pines that on Ida Lustily spring off soil for the shoot up aloft into aether. There did he sit well-cloaked by the wide-branched pine for concealment, That loud bird, in his form like, that perched high up in the mountains, Chalkis is named by the Gods, but of mortals known as Kymindis.

Clash in arms of the Achaians and Trojans—Iliad, xvii, 426

Not the sea-wave so bellows abroad when it bursts upon shingle,
Whipped from the sea’s deeps up by the terrible blast of the
Northwind;
Nay, nor is ever the roar of the fierce fire’s rush so arousing,
Down along mountain-glades, when it surges to kindle a woodland;
Nay, nor so tonant thunders the stress of the gale in the oak-trees’
Foliage-tresses high, when it rages to raveing its utmost;
As rose then stupendous the Trojan’s cry and Achaians’,
Dread upshouting as one when together they clashed in the conflict.

The horses of Achilles—Iliad, xvii, 426

Page 5020

So now the horses of Aiakides, off wide of the war-ground, Wept, since first they were ware of their charioteer overthrown there, Cast down low in the whirl of the dust under man-slaying Hector. Sooth, meanwhile, then did Automedon, brave son of Diores, Oft, on the one hand, urge them with flicks of the swift whip, and oft, too, Coax entreatingly, hurriedly; whiles did he angrily threaten. Vainly, for these would not to the ships, to the Hellespont spacious, Backward turn, nor be whipped to the battle among the Achaians. Nay, as a pillar remains immovable, fixed on the tombstone, Haply, of some dead man or it may be a woman there-under; Even like hard stood they there attached to the glorious war-car, Earthward bowed with their heads; and of them so lamenting incessant Ran the hot teardrops downward on to the earth from their eyelids, Mourning their charioteer; all their lustrous manes dusty-clotted, Right side and left of the yoke-ring tossed, to the breadth of the yoke-bow. Now when the issue of Kronos beheld that sorrow, his head shook Pitying them for their grief, these words then he spake in his bosom; “Why, ye hapless, gave we to Peleus you, to a mortal Master; ye that are ageless both, ye both of you deathless! Was it that ye among men most wretched should come to have heart- grief? ’Tis most true, than the race of these men is there wretcheder nowhere Aught over earth’s range found that is gifted with breath and has movement.”

The mares of the Camargue—From the ‘Mireio’ of Mistral

A hundred mares, all white! their manes
Like mace-reed of the marshy plains
Thick-tufted, wavy, free o’ the shears:
And when the fiery squadron rears
Bursting at speed, each mane appears
Even as the white scarf of a fay
Floating upon their necks along the heavens away.

O race of humankind, take shame!
For never yet a hand could tame,
Nor bitter spur that rips the flanks subdue
The mares of the Camargue. I have known,
By treason snared, some captives shown;
Expatriate from their native Rhone,
Led off, their saline pastures far from view:

And on a day, with prompt rebound,
They have flung their riders to the ground,
And at a single gallop, scouring free,
Wide-nostril’d to the wind, twice ten
Of long marsh-leagues devour’d, and then,
Back to the Vacares again,
After ten years of slavery just to breathe salt sea

For of this savage race unbent,
The ocean is the element.
Of old escaped from Neptune’s car, full sure,
Still with the white foam fleck’d are they,
And when the sea puffs black from grey,
And ships part cables, loudly neigh
The stallions of Camargue, all joyful in the roar;

Page 5021

And keen as a whip they lash and crack
Their tails that drag the dust, and back
Scratch up the earth, and feel, entering their flesh, where he,
The God, drives deep his trident teeth,
Who in one horror, above, beneath,
Bids storm and watery deluge seethe,
And shatters to their depths the abysses of the sea.

Cant. iv.

‘Atkins’

Yonder’s the man with his life in his hand,
Legs on the march for whatever the land,
Or to the slaughter, or to the maiming,
Getting the dole of a dog for pay.
Laurels he clasps in the words ‘duty done,’
England his heart under every sun:-
Exquisite humour! that gives him a naming
Base to the ear as an ass’s bray.

The voyage of the ‘Ophir’

Men of our race, we send you one
Round whom Victoria’s holy name
Is halo from the sunken sun
Of her grand Summer’s day aflame.
The heart of your loved Motherland,
To them she loves as her own blood,
This Flower of Ocean bears in hand,
Assured of gift as good.

Forth for our Southern shores the fleet
Which crowns a nation’s wisdom steams,
That there may Briton Briton greet,
And stamp as fact Imperial dreams.
Across the globe, from sea to sea,
The long smoke-pennon trails above,
Writes over sky how wise will be
The Power that trusts to love.

A love that springs from heart and brain
In union gives for ripest fruit
The concord Kings and States in vain

Have sought, who played the lofty brute,
And fondly deeming they possessed,
On force relied, and found it break:
That truth once scored on Britain’s breast
Now keeps her mind awake.

Australian, Canadian,
To tone old veins with streams of youth,
Our trust be on the best in man
Henceforth, and we shall prove that truth.
Prove to a world of brows down-bent
That in the Britain thus endowed,
Imperial means beneficent,
And strength to service vowed.

The crisis

Spirit of Russia, now has come
The day when thou canst not be dumb.
Around thee foams the torrent tide,
Above thee its fell fountain, Pride.
The senseless rock awaits thy word
To crumble; shall it be unheard?
Already, like a tempest-sun,
That shoots the flare and shuts to dun,
Thy land ’twixt flame and darkness heaves,
Showing the blade wherewith Fate cleaves,
If mortals in high courage fail
At the one breath before the gale.
Those rulers in all forms of lust,
Who trod thy children down to dust
On the red Sunday, know right well

Page 5022

What word for them thy voice would spell,
What quick perdition for them weave,
Did they in such a voice believe.
Not thine to raise the avenger’s shriek,
Nor turn to them a Tolstoi cheek;
Nor menace him, the waverer still,
Man of much heart and little will,
The criminal of his high seat,
Whose plea of Guiltless judges it.
For him thy voice shall bring to hand
Salvation, and to thy torn land,
Seen on the breakers. Now has come
The day when thou canst not be dumb,
Spirit of Russia:- those who bind
Thy limbs and iron-cap thy mind,
Take thee for quaking flesh, misdoubt
That thou art of the rabble rout
Which cries and flees, with whimpering lip,
From reckless gun and brutal whip;
But he who has at heart the deeds
Of thy heroic offspring reads
In them a soul; not given to shrink
From peril on the abyss’s brink;
With never dread of murderous power;
With view beyond the crimson hour;
Neither an instinct-driven might,
Nor visionary erudite;
A soul; that art thou. It remains
For thee to stay thy children’s veins,
The countertides of hate arrest,
Give to thy sons a breathing breast,
And Him resembling, in His sight,
Say to thy land, Let there be Light.

October 21, 1905

The hundred years have passed, and he
Whose name appeased a nation’s fears,
As with a hand laid over sea;
To thunder through the foeman’s ears
Defeat before his blast of fire;

Lives in the immortality
That poets dream and noblest souls desire.

Never did nation's need evoke
Hero like him for aid, the while
A Continent was cannon-smoke
Or peace in slavery: this one Isle
Reflecting Nature: this one man
Her sea-hound and her mortal stroke,
With war-worn body aye in battle's van.

And do we love him well, as well
As he his country, we may greet,
With hand on steel, our passing bell
Nigh on the swing, for prelude sweet
To the music heard when his last breath
Hung on its ebb beside the knell,
And *victory* in his ear sang gracious Death.

Ah, day of glory! day of tears!
Day of a people bowed as one!
Behold across those hundred years
The lion flash of gun at gun:
Our bitter pride; our love bereaved;
What pall of cloud o'ercame our sun
That day, to bear his wreath, the end achieved.

Joy that no more with murder's frown
The ancient rivals bark apart.
Now Nelson to brave France is shown
A hero after her own heart:
And he now scanning that quick race,
To whom through life his glove was thrown,
Would know a sister spirit to embrace.

Page 5023

The Centenary of Garibaldi

We who have seen Italia in the throes,
Half risen but to be hurled to ground, and now
Like a ripe field of wheat where once drove plough
All bounteous as she is fair, we think of those
Who blew the breath of life into her frame:
Cavour, Mazzini, Garibaldi: Three:
Her Brain, her Soul, her Sword; and set her free
From ruinous discords, with one lustrous aim.

That aim, albeit they were of minds diverse,
Conjoined them, not to strive without surcease;
For them could be no babblement of peace
While lay their country under Slavery's curse.

The set of torn Italia's glorious day
Was ever sunrise in each filial breast.
Of eagle beaks by righteousness unblest
They felt her pulsing body made the prey.

Wherefore they struck, and had to count their dead.
With bitter smile of resolution nerved
To try new issues, holding faith unswerved,
Promise they gathered from the rich blood shed.

In them Italia, visible to us then
As living, rose; for proof that huge brute Force
Has never being from celestial source,
And is the lord of cravens, not of men.

Now breaking up the crust of temporal strife,
Who reads their acts enshrined in History, sees
That Tyrants were the Revolutionaries,
The Rebels men heart-vowed to hallowed life.

Pure as the Archangel's cleaving Darkness thro',
The Sword he sees, the keen unwearied Sword,
A single blade against a circling horde,
And aye for Freedom and the trampled few.

The cry of Liberty from dungeon cell,
From exile, was his God's command to smite,

As for a swim in sea he joined the fight,
With radiant face, full sure that he did well.

Behold a warrior dealing mortal strokes,
Whose nature was a child's: amid his foes
A wary trickster: at the battle's close,
No gentler friend this leopard dashed with fox.

Down the long roll of History will run
The story of these deeds, and speed his race
Beneath defeat more hotly to embrace
The noble cause and trust to another sun.

And lo, that sun is in Italia's skies
This day, by grace of his good sword in part.
It beckons her to keep a warrior heart
For guard of beauty, all too sweet a prize.

Earth gave him: blessed be the Earth that gave.
Earth's Master crowned his honest work on earth:
Proudly Italia names his place of birth:
The bosom of Humanity his grave.

The wild rose

Page 5024

High climbs June’s wild rose,
Her bush all blooms in a swarm;
And swift from the bud she blows,
In a day when the wooer is warm;
Frank to receive and give,
Her bosom is open to bee and sun:
Pride she has none,
Nor shame she knows;
Happy to live.

Unlike those of the garden nigh,
Her queenly sisters enthroned by art;
Loosening petals one by one
To the fiery Passion’s dart
Superbly shy.
For them in some glory of hair,
Or nest of the heaving mounds to lie,
Or path of the bride bestrew.
Ever are they the theme for song.
But nought of that is her share.
Hardly from wayfarers tramping along,
A glance they care not to renew.

And she at a word of the claims of kin
Shrinks to the level of roads and meads:
She is only a plain princess of the weeds,
As an outcast witless of sin:
Much disregarded, save by the few
Who love her, that has not a spot of deceit,
No promise of sweet beyond sweet,
Often descending to sour.
On any fair breast she would die in an hour.
Praises she scarce could bear,
Were any wild poet to praise.
Her aim is to rise into light and air.
One of the darlings of Earth, no more,
And little it seems in the dusty ways,
Unless to the grasses nodding beneath;
The bird clapping wings to soar,
The clouds of an evetide’s wreath.

The call

Under what spell are we debased
By fears for our inviolate Isle,
Whose record is of dangers faced
And flung to heel with even smile?
Is it a vaster force, a subtler guile?

They say Exercitus designs
To match the famed Salsipotent
Where on her sceptre she reclines;
Awake: but were a slumber sent
By guilty gods, more fell his foul intent.

The subtler web, the vaster foe,
Well may we meet when drilled for deeds:
But in these days of wealth at flow,
A word of breezy warning breeds
The pained responses seen in lakeside reeds.

We fain would stand contemplative,
All innocent as meadow grass;
In human goodness fain believe,
Believe a cloud is formed to pass;
Its shadows chase with draughts of hippocras.

Others have gone; the way they went
Sweet sunny now, and safe our nest.
Humanity, enlightenment,
Against the warning hum protest:
Let the world hear that we know what is best.

So do the beatific speak;
Yet have they ears, and eyes as well;
And if not with a paler cheek,
They feel the shivers in them dwell,
That something of a dubious future tell.

Page 5025

For huge possessions render slack
The power we need to hold them fast;
Save when a quickened heart shall make
Our people one, to meet what blast
May blow from temporal heavens overcast.

Our people one! Nor they with strength
Dependent on a single arm:
Alert, and braced the whole land's length,
Rejoicing in their manhood's charm
For friend or foe; to succour, not to harm.

Has ever weakness won esteem?
Or counts it as a prized ally?
They who have read in History deem
It ranks among the slavish fry,
Whose claim to live justiciary Fates deny.

It can not be declared we are
A nation till from end to end
The land can show such front to war
As bids a crouching foe expend
His ire in air, and preferably be friend.

We dreading him, we do him wrong;
For fears discolour, fears invite.
Like him, our task is to be strong;
Unlike him, claiming not by might
To snatch an envied treasure as a right.

So may a stouter brotherhood
At home be signalled over sea
For righteous, and be understood,
Nay, welcomed, when 'tis shown that we
All duties have embraced in being free.

This Britain slumbering, she is rich;
Lies placid as a cradled child;
At times with an uneasy twitch,
That tells of dreams unduly wild.
Shall she be with a foreign drug defiled?

The grandeur of her deeds recall;
Look on her face so kindly fair:

This Britain! and were she to fall,
Mankind would breathe a harsher air,
The nations miss a light of leading rare.

On como

A rainless darkness drew o’er the lake
As we lay in our boat with oars unshipped.
It seemed neither cloud nor water awake,
And forth of the low black curtain slipped
Thunderless lightning. Scoff no more
At angels imagined in downward flight
For the daughters of earth as fabled of yore:
Here was beauty might well invite
Dark heavens to gleam with the fire of a sun
Resurgent; here the exchanged embrace
Worthy of heaven and earth made one.

And witness it, ye of the privileged space,
Said the flash; and the mountains, as from an abyss
For quivering seconds leaped up to attest
That given, received, renewed was the kiss;
The lips to lips and the breast to breast;
All in a glory of ecstasy, swift
As an eagle at prey, and pure as the prayer
Of an infant bidden joined hands uplift
To be guarded through darkness by spirits of air,
Ere setting the sails of sleep till day.
Slowly the low cloud swung, and far

Page 5026

It panted along its mirrored way;
Above loose threads one sanctioning star,
The wonder of what had been witnessed, sealed,
And with me still as in crystal glassed
Are the depths alight, the heavens revealed,
Where on to the Alps the muteness passed.

Milton—December9, 1608: December 9, 1908

What splendour of imperial station man,
The Tree of Life, may reach when, rooted fast,
His branching stem points way to upper air
And skyward still aspires, we see in him
Who sang for us the Archangelical host,
Made Morning, by old Darkness urged to the abyss;
A voice that down three centuries onward rolls;
Onward will roll while lives our English tongue,
In the devout of music unsurpassed
Since Piety won Heaven’s ear on Israel’s harp.

The face of Earth, the soul of Earth, her charm,
Her dread austerity; the quavering fate
Of mortals with blind hope by passion swayed,
His mind embraced, the while on trodden soil,
Defender of the Commonwealth, he joined
Our temporal fray, whereof is vital fruit,
And, choosing armoury of the Scholar, stood
Beside his peers to raise the voice for Freedom:
Nor has fair Liberty a champion armed
To meet on heights or plains the Sophister
Throughout the ages, equal to this man,
Whose spirit breathed high Heaven, and drew thence
The ethereal sword to smite.

Were England sunk
Beneath the shifting tides, her heart, her brain,
The smile she wears, the faith she holds, her best,
Would live full-toned in the grand delivery
Of his cathedral speech: an utterance
Almost divine, and such as Hellespont,
Crashing its breakers under Ida’s frown,
Inspired: yet worthier he, whose instrument

Was by comparison the coarse reed-pipe;
Whereof have come the marvellous harmonies,
Which, with his lofty theme, of infinite range,
Abash, entrance, exalt.

We need him now,
This latest Age in repetition cries:
For Belial, the adroit, is in our midst;
Mammon, more swoln to squeeze the slavish sweat
From hopeless toil: and overshadowingly
(Aggrandized, monstrous in his grinning mask
Of hypocritical Peace,) inveterate Moloch
Remains the great example.

Homage to him
His debtor band, innumerable as waves
Running all golden from an eastern sun,
Joyfully render, in deep reverence
Subscribe, and as they speak their Milton’s name,
Rays of his glory on their foreheads bear.

Ireland

Fire in her ashes Ireland

Page 5027

feels
And in her veins a glow of heat.
To her the lost old time, appeals
For resurrection, good to greet:
Not as a shape with spectral eyes,
But humanly maternal, young
In all that quickens pride, and wise
To speak the best her bards have sung.

You read her as a land distraught,
Where bitterest rebel passions seethe.
Look with a core of heart in thought,
For so is known the truth beneath.
She came to you a loathing bride,
And it has been no happy bed.
Believe in her as friend, allied
By bonds as close as those who wed.

Her speech is held for hatred’s cry;
Her silence tells of treason hid:
Were it her aim to burst the tie,
She sees what iron laws forbid.
Excess of heart obscures from view
A head as keen as yours to count.
Trust her, that she may prove her true
In links whereof is love the fount.

May she not call herself her own?
That is her cry, and thence her spits
Of fury, thence her graceless tone
At justice given in bits and bits.
The limbs once raw with gnawing chains
Will fret at silken when God’s beams
Of Freedom beckon o’er the plains
From mounts that show it more than dreams.

She, generous, craves your generous dole;
That will not rouse the crack of doom.
It ends the blundering past control
Simply to give her elbow-room.
Her offspring feels they are a race,
To be a nation is their claim;
Yet stronger bound in your embrace
Than when the tie was but a name.

A nation she, and formed to charm,
With heart for heart and hands all round.
No longer England's broken arm,
Would England know where strength is found.
And strength to-day is England's need;
To-morrow it may be for both
Salvation: heed the portents, heed
The warnings; free the mind from sloth.

Too long the pair have danced in mud,
With no advance from sun to sun.
Ah, what a bounding course of blood
Has England with an Ireland one!
Behold yon shadow cross the downs,
And off away to yeasty seas.
Lightly will fly old rancour's frowns
When solid with high heart stand these.

The years had worn their seasons' belt

The years had worn their seasons' belt,
From bud to rosy prime,
Since Nellie by the larch-pole knelt
And helped the hop to climb.

Most diligent of teachers then,
But now with all to learn,
She breathed beyond a thought of men,
Though formed to make men burn.

She dwelt where 'twixt low-beaten thorns
Two mill-blades, like a snail,
Enormous, with inquiring horns,
Looked down on half the vale.

Page 5028

You know the grey of dew on grass
Ere with the young sun fired,
And you know well the thirst one has
For the coming and desired.

Quick in our ring she leapt, and gave
Her hand to left, to right.
No claim on her had any, save
To feed the joy of sight.

For man and maid a laughing word
She tossed, in notes as clear
As when the February bird
Sings out that Spring is near.

Of what befell behind that scone,
Let none who knows reveal.
In ballad days she might have been
A heroine rousing steel.

On us did she bestow the hour,
And fixed it firm in thought;
Her spirit like a meadow flower
That gives, and asks for nought.

She seemed to make the sunlight stay
And show her in its pride.
O she was fair as a beech in May
With the sun on the yonder side.

There was more life than breath can give,
In the looks in her fair form;
For little can we say we live
Until the heart is warm.

Fragments

Open horizons round,
O mounting mind, to scenes unsung,
Wherein shall walk a lusty Time:
Our Earth is young;
Of measure without bound;
Infinite are the heights to climb,
The depths to sound.

A wilding little stubble flower
The sickle scorned which cut for wheat,
Such was our hope in that dark hour
When nought save uses held the street,
And daily pleasures, daily needs,
With barren vision, looked ahead.
And still the same result of seeds
Gave likeness ’twixt the live and dead.

From labours through the night, outworn,
Above the hills the front of morn
We see, whose eyes to heights are raised,
And the world’s wise may deem us crazed.
While yet her lord lies under seas,
She takes us as the wind the trees’
Delighted leafage; all in song
We mount to her, to her belong.

This love of nature, that allures to take
Irregularity for harmony
Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
The ills of life descend.

Il Y A cent ans

That march of the funereal Past behold;
How Glory sat on Bondage for its throne;
How men, like dazzled insects, through the mould
Still worked their way, and bled to keep their own.

We know them, as they strove and wrought and yearned;
Their hopes, their fears; what page of Life they wist:
At whiles their vision upon us was turned,
Baffled by shapes limmed loosely on thick mist.

Beneath the fortress bulk of Power they bent
Blunt heads, adoring or in shackled hate,
All save the rebel hymned him; and it meant
A world submitting to incarnate Fate.

Page 5029

From this he drew fresh appetite for sway,
And of it fell: whereat was chorus raised,
How surely shall a mad ambition pay
Dues to Humanity, erewhile amazed.

’Twas dreamed by some the deluge would ensue,
So trembling was the tension long constrained;
A spirit of faith was in the chosen few,
That steps to the millennium had been gained.

But mainly the rich business of the hour,
Their sight, made blind by urgency of blood,
Embraced; and facts, the passing sweet or sour,
To them were solid things that nought withstood.

Their facts are going headlong on the tides,
Like commas on a line of History’s page;
Nor that which once they took for Truth abides,
Save in the form of youth enlarged from age.

Meantime give ear to woodland notes around,
Look on our Earth full-breasted to our sun:
So was it when their poets heard the sound,
Beheld the scene: in them our days are one.

What figures will be shown the century hence?
What lands intact? We do but know that Power
From piety divorced, though seen immense,
Shall sink on envy of the humblest flower.

Our cry for cradled Peace, while men are still
The three-parts brute which smothers the divine,
Heaven answers: Guard it with forethoughtful will,
Or buy it; all your gains from War resign.

A land, not indefensibly alarmed,
May see, unwarned by hint of friendly gods,
Between a hermit crab at all points armed,
And one without a shell, decisive odds.

Youth in age

Once I was part of the music I heard
On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,

For joy of the beating of wings on high
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly,
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh.

To A friend lost (tom Taylor)

When I remember, friend, whom lost I call,
Because a man beloved is taken hence,
The tender humour and the fire of sense
In your good eyes; how full of heart for all,
And chiefly for the weaker by the wall,
You bore that lamp of sane benevolence;
Then see I round you Death his shadows dense
Divide, and at your feet his emblems fall.
For surely are you one with the white host,
Spirits, whose memory is our vital air,
Through the great love of Earth they had: lo, these,
Like beams that throw the path on tossing seas,
Can bid us feel we keep them in the ghost,
Partakers of a strife they joyed to share.

Page 5030

M. M.

Who call her Mother and who calls her Wife
Look on her grave and see not Death but Life.

The lady C. M.

To them that knew her, there is vital flame
In these the simple letters of her name.
To them that knew her not, be it but said,
So strong a spirit is not of the dead.

On the tombstone of James Christopher Wilson (d. April 11, 1884) in Headley churchyard, Surrey

Thou our beloved and light of Earth hast crossed
The sea of darkness to the yonder shore.
There dost thou shine a light transferred, not lost,
Through love to kindle in our souls the more.

Gordon of Khartoum

Of men he would have raised to light he fell:
In soul he conquered with those nerveless hands.
His country’s pride and her abasement knell
The Man of England circled by the sands.

J. C. M.

A fountain of our sweetest, quick to spring
In fellowship abounding, here subsides:
And never passage of a cloud on wing
To gladden blue forgets him; near he hides.

The emperor Frederick of our time

With Alfred and St. Louis he doth win
Grander than crowned head’s mortuary dome:
His gentle heroic manhood enters in
The ever-flowering common heart for home.

Islet the Dachs

Our Islet out of Helgoland, dismissed
From his quaint tenement, quits hates and loves.

There lived with us a wagging humourist
In that hound's arch dwarf-legged on boxing-gloves.

On hearing the news from Venice
(the death of Robert browning)

Now dumb is he who waked the world to speak,
And voiceless hangs the world beside his bier.
Our words are sobs, our cry of praise a tear:
We are the smitten mortal, we the weak.
We see a spirit on Earth's loftiest peak
Shine, and wing hence the way he makes more clear:
See a great Tree of Life that never sere
Dropped leaf for aught that age or storms might wreak.
Such ending is not Death: such living shows
What wide illumination brightness sheds
From one big heart, to conquer man's old foes:
The coward, and the tyrant, and the force
Of all those weedy monsters raising heads
When Song is murk from springs of turbid source.

December 13, 1889.

Hawarden

When comes the lighted day for men to read
Life's meaning, with the work before their hands
Till this good gift of breath from debt is freed,
Earth will not hear her children's wailful bands
Deplore the chieftain fall'n in sob and dirge;
Nor they look where is darkness, but on high.

Page 5031

The sun that dropped down our horizon's verge
Illumes his labours through the travelled sky,
Now seen in sum, most glorious; and 'tis known
By what our warrior wrought we hold him fast.
A splendid image built of man has flown;
His deeds inspired of God outstep a Past.
Ours the great privilege to have had one
Among us who celestial tasks has done.

At the funeral
February 2, 1901

Her sacred body bear: the tenement
Of that strong soul now ranked with God's Elect
Her heart upon her people's heart she spent;
Hence is she Royalty's lodestar to direct.

The peace is hers, of whom all lands have praised
Majestic virtues ere her day unseen.
Aloft the name of Womanhood she raised,
And gave new readings to the Title, Queen.

Angela Burdett-Coutts

Long with us, now she leaves us; she has rest
Beneath our sacred sod:
A woman vowed to Good, whom all attest,
The daylight gift of God.

The year's sheddings

The varied colours are a fitful heap:
They pass in constant service though they sleep;
The self gone out of them, therewith the pain:
Read that, who still to spell our earth remain.